



Defining feminism

Kritika Kamra believes that actresses have a responsibility to support narratives that go beyond surface-level feminism

LEISURE | P2



No attacks in India

A UN report says terror group Islamic State was unable to mount large-scale attacks in India

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Exodus from equities

The exodus of FPIs from the Indian equity markets continues as they pulled out ₹21,272 crore in the first 2 weeks of this month

BUSINESS | P11



England beat eves

Indian women's hockey team fights back twice before going down 1-2 in shoot-out against England in their FIH Pro League match

SPORTS | P12



MAD RUSH: Passengers try to board a train, at the Varanasi railway station, Sunday. Several trains are running overcrowded amid ongoing Mahakumbh Mela

PTI PHOTO

New Delhi Railway Station stampede toll reaches 18

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 16: The death toll in the overnight stampede at the packed New Delhi railway station rose to 18 Sunday, with authorities saying confusion over almost identical train names after an announcement of the platform number for an arriving Prayagraj-bound special train sparked panic and a sudden rush.

The dead included 11 women, two men, one male teen and four children, according to a list put out by the Delhi Police. Three people were also grievously injured and 27 others received simple injuries, the Railway Ministry said in a statement, adding that out of them 11 were given treatment and released from a hospital.

As survivors recalled how people trampled over each other amid cries for help, the Delhi Police said it will analyse the CCTV footage to determine the exact sequence of events before chaos erupted at the station Saturday night. The station witnessed a surge of passengers waiting to board trains at platform number 14 and 15 for Prayagraj—where the Mahakumbh is underway. A preliminary probe revealed that the stampede occurred af-

Oppn guns for rail min's scalp

Opposition parties Sunday squarely blamed the government for "gross mismanagement" at New Delhi railway station that led to a stampede in which 18 people died and demanded Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw resign taking moral responsibility. Several opposition parties, including the Congress, the Left, Trinamool Congress and the Rashtriya Janata Dal, accused the government of failing to make elaborate arrangements and "covering up" the actual number of deaths. The BJP leaders, however, sought to defend the government by posting pictures on social media that showed the situation at the New Delhi railway station had turned normal.

ter some passengers slipped and fell on others while coming down from a foot overbridge.

The Railway Ministry ordered a high level inquiry by a two-member committee into the stampede which also triggered a political blame game.

President Droupadi Murmu and political leaders across the spectrum condoled the loss of lives in the stampede. The Delhi Police found in its initial probe that the stampede happened as passengers got confused between 'Prayagraj Express' and 'Prayagraj Special', and thought they might miss their train, police sources said.

DSP among 2 killed in Panikoili collision

PNN & AGENCIES

Jajpur, Feb 16: Two persons including a Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) were killed when their car was hit by a speeding truck in Jajpur district Sunday, police said.

The accident took place on National Highway 215 under Panikoili police limits Sunday afternoon. The deceased police officer has been identified as Balaram Nayak who was working as DSP in the Jajpur district police headquarters at Panikoili while the other deceased is his relative, identified as Purna Chandra Nayak.

According to reports, the DSP was returning to Panikoili from his native place at Ghatagaon in Keonjhar district when a speeding truck hit their car near Kripalu Rice Mill.

The local people rescued the two and sent them to Maharaj Jajati Keshari Medical College and Hospital (MJKMCH) in Jajpur Town in critical condition. However, both were declared dead on arrival by doctors.

The police have started an investigation to ascertain the cause of the accident.

After getting information about the mishap, Jajpur Superintendent of Police (SP) Yashpratap Shrimal visited the MJKMCH, enquired about the incident and sent the bodies for autopsy.

A manhunt is on to nab the driver of the truck, police said.

US DOGE cuts \$21mn 'turnout booster' aid

The US Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), led by Elon Musk, has announced the cancellation of a USD 21 million grant aimed at boosting voter turnout in India as part of a broader reduction of hundreds of millions of dollars in taxpayer-funded programmes. Other cuts include grants for political processes in several countries, including India's neighbours Bangladesh and Nepal, as well as various international initiatives such as gender equality and environmental projects. DOGE's actions are part of Musk's mandate to curb government waste. The cancellation of the 'voter turnout initiative' in India sparked controversy, with BJP leader Amit Malviya criticising it as "external interference" in India's elections, questioning who benefitted from the funding. These developments come shortly after Prime Minister Modi's visit to the US, during which he met Musk to discuss collaborative efforts in technology and governance.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New York, Feb 16: The US Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) led by billionaire Elon Musk has announced a series of expenditure cuts, including USD 21 million allo-



ated for voter turnout in India.

US President Donald Trump chose Musk to head DOGE last month. Tasked with improving governance and curbing wasteful expenditures, the DOGE in a post on X Saturday announced cancelling many programmes costing hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars.

The department said, "US taxpayer dollars were going to be spent on the following items, all (of) which have been cancelled." The list included USD 486 million in grants to the "Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening" including USD 21 million for voter turnout in India and USD 22 million for inclusive and participatory political process in Moldova. No further details on the funding were given in the post.

Reacting to the post, senior BJP leader Amit Malviya termed the grant as 'external interference' in India's elec-

tions. He questioned who the beneficiary was, asserting that it was 'not the ruling party for sure'.

"USD 21M for voter turnout. This definitely is external interference in India's electoral process. Who gains from this? Not the ruling party for sure!" the BJP's IT department head said on X.

He claimed that the now cancelled programme was a pointer to the previous Congress-led UPA government allegedly enabling infiltration of Indian institutions by forces opposed to the country's interests.

This comes days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's official visit to the US, during which he held talks with President Trump, as well as Musk. The SpaceX CEO met Modi with his family, including three children. The two discussed opportunities in space, mobility, technology, and energy and exchanged notes on efforts at good governance in India and the US.

In its post, the DOGE also cancelled USD 29 million allocated to strengthening political landscape in Bangladesh, as well as USD 20 million for fiscal federalism in Nepal and USD 19 million for biodiversity conversation in the Himalayan nation.

3rd planeload of deportees arrives

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, Feb 16: A US military aircraft carrying 112 illegal Indian immigrants landed at the Amritsar airport late Sunday evening, the third such plane bringing deportees amid a crackdown by the Donald Trump administration against illegal immigrants. The C-17 aircraft landed at the airport at 10.03pm, sources said.

Of the 112 deportees, 44 are from Haryana, 33 from Gujarat, 31 from Punjab, two from Uttar Pradesh and one each is from Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, they added. There are 19 women and 14 minors, including two infants, in the fresh batch of deportees, the sources said.

CM to present Budget today

Bhubaneswar: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi will table the annual state Budget Monday. This Budget comes eight months after formation of BJP government in state, and there is widespread anticipation regarding the fiscal strategies that will be unveiled by the Chief Minister. As per reports Odisha government would adopt a long-term strategy and increase allocations for key sectors like agriculture, health, education and infrastructure. The Budget will aim to bolster Odisha's economy by prioritising its traditionally strong mining sector, alongside agriculture, rural development, and tourism.

SGPC Sunday strongly condemned US authorities for allegedly not allowing Sikhs in 2nd batch to wear their turbans

The family members of some of the deportees were present at the airport when the plane landed. The third batch of deportees landed in Amritsar within 24 hours of another US military aircraft bringing the second such batch.

The deportees will be allowed to head home after the completion of all formalities, including immigration, verification and

background checks. Arrangements have been made for the transportation of the deportees to their respective destinations.

On February 5, a US military aircraft carrying the first batch of 104 illegal Indian immigrants landed in Amritsar. Of the deportees in the first batch, 33 each were from Haryana and Gujarat, and 30 from Punjab.

A second aircraft Saturday evening brought 116 deportees from the United States, amid questions raised by several political leaders, including Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, over the BJP-led Centre's move to allow planes carrying immigrants to land in Amritsar. Mann even accused the Centre of trying to defame Punjab as part of a conspiracy.

Rasulgarh murder: Key accused surrenders

Bhubaneswar: The prime suspect in the case of a ghastly murder of a youth at Rasulgarh area here last month surrendered at the Mancheswar Police station Sunday. Police subsequently arrested the accused, Rama Naik, of Kedarpalli slum under Capital police station limits. "Based on some significant evidence fetched during the investigation, we realised she (Rama) was also involved in the case and she must be arrested. As there is a conspiracy angle to the murder case, we will file the charge sheet after a careful and meticulous investigation in the case," said Pinak Mishra, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Bhubaneswar. P3

Gaurav may be trapped: Sarma

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, Feb 16: Appearing to soften his stand against Lok Sabha MP Gaurav Gogoi over the controversy surrounding the Congress leader's British wife, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma Sunday suggested that the opposition leader may have been trapped or blackmailed as part of a larger anti-India conspiracy.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an event, Sarma expressed sympathy for Gogoi, saying the matter had gone beyond politics with the emergence of new evidence and was now solely related to national security.

Earlier in the day, the BJP leader welcomed the Congress MP's planned legal case over the controversy related to his wife Elizabeth Colburn's alleged ISI links, saying the state government was also mulling a similar step.

"We started discussing this topic about a parliamentarian, but now it has escalated to a much higher level. It is no longer related to Gaurav Gogoi. Now, we have proof or information of an anti-India force actively working behind this. We will decide in today's cabinet," Sarma told reporters here.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



The nation wants to know... not about your vision, policies, or work... but the name of your dress designer, sir

Potential arms-for-minerals deal brings hope, doubt

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kirovohrad Region (Ukraine), Feb 16: The mineral ilmenite is extracted from mounds of sand deep in the earth and refined using a method that summons the force of gravity, resulting in a substance that glimmers like a moonlit sky.

Ukraine boasts vast reserves of ilmenite — a key element used to produce titanium — in the heavy mineral sands that stretch for miles along the country's embattled east.

Much of it, as with all of Ukraine's critical minerals industry, is underdeveloped because of war as well as onerous state policies.

That is poised to change if US President Donald Trump's administration agrees to a deal with Ukraine to exchange critical minerals for continued American military aid.

In the central region of Kirovohrad, the ilmenite open-pit mine is a canyon of precious deposits that its owner is keen to develop with US companies. But many unknowns stand in the way



of turning these riches into profit cost, licensing terms and whether such a deal will be underpinned by security guarantees.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Saturday at the Munich Security Conference that he did not permit his ministers to sign a mineral

resource agreement with the US because the current version is not "ready to protect us, our interests." Ukrainian businessmen with knowledge of the minerals industry also privately expressed scepticism about whether a deal is viable.

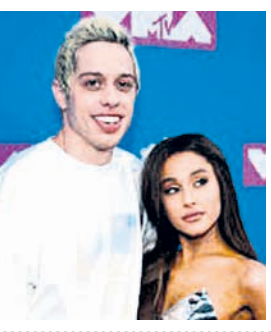
The capital-intensive industry is unlikely to yield results in years, if not decades, as geological data is either limited or classified. Many question what conditions American companies are willing to risk to build up the industry and whether existing Ukrainian policies

that have so far deterred local businessmen will accommodate foreign investors.

"The main thing we can gain is certain security guarantees obtained through economic means, so that someone stronger than us has an interest in protecting us," said Andriy Brodsky, CEO of Velta, a leading titanium mining company in Ukraine.

A deal, which would essentially barter one resource for another, could help strengthen Kyiv's relationship with the Trump administration.

leisure



PETE LENDS SUPPORT TO EX-FIANCÉE ARIANA

Comedian and actor Pete Davidson cheered for ex-fiancée Ariana Grande this awards season and said that he would like to see her win the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress. Ariana is nominated for playing Glinda in *Wicked*.

BENNY OPENS UP ABOUT HIS INSECURITIES WITH SELENA

Benny Blanco expressed fears about Selena Gomez possibly ending their relationship, despite their deep bond and her reassurances. The couple, engaged in December 2024, is set to release their first collaborative album, highlighting their supportive and loving dynamic.



FORTUNE FORECAST



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ARIES
 You may feel empty, and completely down-and-out today. Ganesha says that this may make you feel a bit more inclined to spirituality. Meditation and prayer will engage more of your attention. You will also make considerable material progress.

TAURUS
 In all probability, you will discuss certain sacred issues with your beloved today, predicts Ganesha. In the evening, you will be possibly visiting holy places. You had better make up for the lost time to finish pending work in the afternoon. Think twice before you act, warns Ganesha.

GEMINI
 A long and hectic day awaits you. You will be in the mood to finish off long-pending projects at work or at home. There is a chance that your personal life may get affected due to the extra attention you pay towards work. You need to guard against hurting the feelings of your family members, says Ganesha.

CANCER
 You have always been quite prudent when it comes to spending your hard-earned moolah, yet today you may feel stingier. And, you will rightly be so, for there may be unnecessary burdens and demands made on you by your near and dear ones. Although you will be aware of this, you will still be able to keep them happy, affirms Ganesha.

LEO
 You will not be able to reap the rewards of your hard work fully today. You will take all matters very seriously today. You will feel a sense of responsibility and will try to find lasting solutions to problems today. It is a good day to put to rest some worries that have been haunting you for some time now, says Ganesha.

VIRGO
 A heady mixture of work and partying is on the cards today. The parties may go on well into the night. You will make the right decisions today which will prove to be vital in putting you on the road to success. Ganesha says people will profit by engaging you in their work.

LIBRA
 Ganesha says that for people you may appear to be a miser but when it comes to your closed ones you will never hold back or hesitate to spend. Today is a good day to take your loved ones shopping. You may overspend your budget but the spending will give you a feeling of happiness and contentment.

SCORPIO
 Don't run from your troubles, learn to face the challenges and try to solve your problems. This piece of Ganesha's advice is going to help you today. And you very well know why. Take all the tips that come to you sportingly and try to implement it in your practical life.

SAGITTARIUS
 A fresh and renewed you, today all your focus is on your kith and kins. This includes sneaking some time off for your beloved as well! Romantic conversations and intimacy will add some spark to the day. After family, friends too come to take their share.

CAPRICORN
 Singles, you may meet the one of your dreams today and plan about a future together. You will feel and enjoy the exciting feeling of meeting your life partner and letting your heart open in front of somebody, says Ganesha. All of this will not be one sided.

AQUARIUS
 You will aim for the bull's eye today. Whatever you'll do today, will be done with your focus set firmly on your target, says Ganesha. You will not waste your resource on something unfruitful, and such an attitude will make your journey smoother and faster.

PISCES
 You are likely to find yourself as part of a team involved in tackling a difficult project or task today. The role you will play in this Endeavour will be noteworthy. Your efforts will yield excellent results. Everything you touch will turn to gold today, says Ganesha. Make the most of it.

Kritika on feminism

Mumbai: Kritika Kamra has consistently embraced bold choices across television, films and digital platforms. With *Saare Jahan Se Acha*, recently announced as part of Netflix's new slate, she continues to advocate for women-centric storytelling. In an industry still striving for meaningful female representation, Kritika believes actresses have a responsibility to support narratives that go beyond surface-level feminism.

In a latest interview, the actress said, "Feminism isn't just about social media posts; it requires real-world action. Armchair feminism doesn't work—you have to walk the talk. Sharing a hashtag isn't enough. We need to make conscious choices in our roles, speak up for the right causes and create spaces where women can thrive. It's about actively pushing for gender equality and making tangible contributions to women's empowerment. If you have the resources, use them to build something impactful. Feminism is a lifelong commitment, not a trend."

As discussions on

women's rights gain momentum in the entertainment industry, Kritika urges the industry to move beyond performative support for women. By calling out passive engagement with feminist ideals, she challenges both her peers and fans to take responsibility for fostering real change. The *Mitron* actress further emphasises that for her, choosing roles isn't just about screen time but meaningful representation. Speaking about *Saare Jahan Se Acha* and *Matka King*, she asserts, "These films put women at the forefront in a substantial way. Their journeys matter and that's the kind of storytelling I want to champion." AGENCIES



Biographical book on Anubhav Mohanty unveiled

BHUBANESWAR: A biographical book titled 'Blockbuster Ru Ballot Box', based on the life of Odia actor-politician Anubhav Mohanty was unveiled at a City hotel here recently. The book, published by Timepass Publications, is authored by Jagrati Shukla and co-authored by the late Astitwa. The Odia version of the book is written by Manas Padhiary. The book launch event saw participation from film personalities, literary figures, and political leaders. Joining the occasion as chief speaker, writer, poet and lyricist Devdas Chhotray lauded the book and called it "a testa-

ment of Anubhav Mohanty's perseverance, dedication, and an unbreakable bond with Odisha."

Speaking at the event, Mohanty expressed his gratitude and said, "This book is deeply personal. It reflects my father's teachings, my struggles, and my love for Odisha. I hope readers find inspiration in these pages."

The biography is now available in major bookstores in City and at online platforms, offering readers an insight into Mohanty's journey from cinema to politics and his commitment towards public service. PNN

Sam's cryptic post on love



Mumbai: Samantha Ruth Prabhu recently shared new photos from a shoot on Instagram, drawing attention not just for her stunning look but also for her intriguing caption. This comes amid dating speculations with *Honey Bunny* director Raj Nidimoru, following comments from her ex-husband Naga Chaitanya about her moving on.

Samantha posted lyrics from Selena Gomez's song *Scared of Loving You*. She wrote: "If I lose my shit, promise not to laugh. If I throw a fit and get photographed, would you take my side? Would you hold my hand? If they sell a lie, don't let them send me back (sic)." Expressing admiration for the singer, she added hashtags #lyricsforlife and #SelenaGomez.

In the photos, Samantha wore a white outfit with a long skirt featuring tassels, complemented by a broad green belt.

On the work front, the *Kushi* actress is set to appear in the action fantasy series *Rakt Brahmand: The Boody Kingdom*. The Raj & DK series also stars Aditya Roy Kapoor, Ali Fazal and Wamiqa Gabbi. AGENCIES



Kareena's stern instruction to paps

Mumbai: It seems the breach in privacy has scarred Kareena Kapoor Khan, as she asked the paparazzi to refrain from taking the pictures of her children.

The actress was seen paying a visit to her father Randhir Kapoor on his birthday Saturday. She was seen dressed in a white shirt and a pair of denims. This comes after the stabbing incident on the actress' husband, Saif Ali Khan.

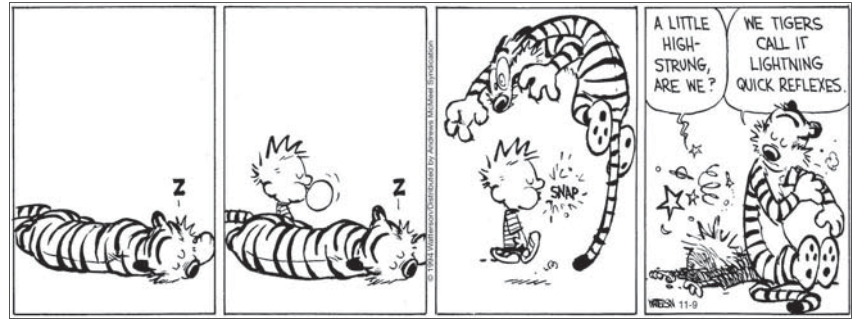
Earlier, Saif Ali Khan made his first public appearance after he returned to his home following the knife attack on him. The actor was seen at a five star property in the Juhu area of Mumbai for a Netflix event. The actor attended the trailer launch of his upcoming streaming title *Jewel Thief - The Heist Begins* in which he shares the screen with Jaideep Ahlawat.

Last month, Saif was attacked by an assailant who barged into his Bandra house through his youngest son, Jeh's room. As per media reports, doctors removed the 2.5 inches of knife from his wound. The actor was stabbed multiple times in an attempt to fight off the accused. The incident took place as the accused allegedly barged into their Bandra home, and attacked their house help. IANS

PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

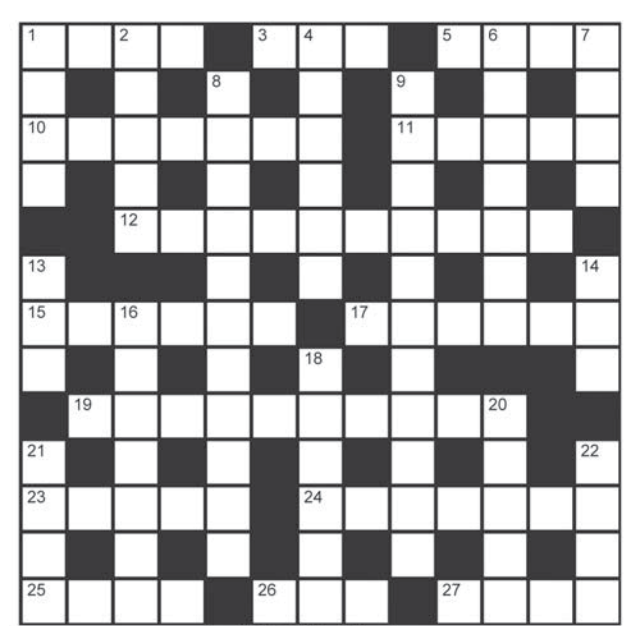


BREVITY



FUN POST

CROSSWORD



- Across**
 1 Spirited horse
 3 Swelling reducer
 5 Lyric poet
 10 Spartan
 11 Ancient Mexican
 12 Bubonic plague, e.g.
 15 Swiss metropolis
 17 Golden Gate, likely one
 19 Horn of plenty
 23 Himalayas sightings?
 24 City on the Elbe
 25 Glacial lake
 26 Car wash option
 27 Off-ramp
Down
 1 Sophocles tragedy
 2 Man of morals
 4 Type of card
 6 Dyspepsia reliever
 7 Pochard
 8 Mal de mer
 9 One with a friend in high places? (4-7)
 13 Israeli weapon
 14 Tasseled topper
 16 Nature's alarm clock
 18 Maine's National Park
 20 African antelope
 21 Skin problem
 22 Buzzing pest

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.

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

SOLUTIONS

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

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

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

Dignitaries unveil the annual magazine of Sriradharaman Foundation on the occasion of its foundation day celebrations, in Puri, Sunday



downtown

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



Govt to support IT sector in R&D efforts: Min

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 16: The Odisha government will be setting up dedicated Centres of Excellence to support R&D efforts in the fast growing IT sector in the state, Electronic and Information Technology (E&IT) Minister Mukesh Mahaling said.

Speaking at a joint discussion centre organised by the Electronics and Information Technology (E&IT) department with NASSCOM recently, Mahaling said, "Odisha's IT industry is rapidly growing, and the Government is committed to support this growth. Further, the Government wants to support the industry in its R&D ef-

orts, and will set-up dedicated Centres of Excellence (CoEs) as part of this endeavor."

The minister said a CoE with senior industry leaders and distinguished academics will also be set up to provide guidance to the government in its IT initiatives.

Vishal Dev, Principal Secretary, E&IT department, said the state government's objective is to build a future-ready IT industry in Odisha.

"The upcoming IT Policy provides a competitive and comprehensive set of incentives, and will strengthen Odisha's position in the digital economy. The policy encompasses a range of areas, from IT infrastructure and skill-devel-

opment to sustainability and R&D," Dev said.

A comprehensive presentation on the draft of the upcoming IT Policy was delivered during the event, highlighting its key features and proposed incentives.

This was followed by an interactive question and answer session where officials from the E&IT department provided responses to the queries raised by industry representatives.

Special Secretary of E&IT department Manas Panda and CEO Odisha Computer Application Centre (OCAC) Pradeep Raut attended the event along with representatives from NASSCOM and Odisha's IT industry.

NABARD pegs state's credit potential for FY26 at ₹2.52L-cr

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Feb 16: The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has projected Odisha's credit potential for 2025-26 fiscal at Rs 2,52,000 crore.

The projection was made in the bank's state focus paper for Odisha released here Saturday during a seminar.

The credit project for 2025-26 (Rs 2,51,952 crore) is about 20 per cent higher than the previous year's Rs 2,10,140 crore.

Inaugurating the seminar, Deputy Chief Minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo emphasised the need to increase bank credit for the state's priority sectors, saying the state government has also been supporting this effort through various schemes.

"The government has been investing in infrastructure and enabling growth in the



agriculture sector and banks should come forward and provide credit to ensure these economic benefits reach farmers," he said.

He also lauded NABARD's role in supporting self-help groups (SHGs) and its efforts to skill young women through grant-based entrepreneurship and skill development programmes.

The deputy chief minister stressed the importance of strengthening the Farmers

Producer Organisation (FPO) ecosystem for socio-economic development.

He also urged bankers to finance value chains and innovative and new-age projects to drive agricultural growth and enhance farmers' incomes.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja said that Odisha has been growing faster and better and banks have to improve the quality of lending. He advised all stakeholders that efforts have to be

put to achieve the current year targets.

"Start-ups also need credit and banks have to come forward," Ahuja said, adding that allied sectors such as dairy, goatery and fisheries have tremendous potential in the state, and banks have to increase the credit flow to the sector.

Sudhanshu KK Mishra, CGM NABARD said concerted effort is needed for increasing the credit flow to priority sector with focus on agriculture, and allied sector in particular.

Commissioner-cum-Cooperation Secretary Rajesh Prabhakar Patil said that the state government's focus is towards livelihood and cooperation sector which will increase multifold in coming months. He added that the credit flow from banks to the priority sector in Odisha needs lot of urgent improvement and attention.

Sibling duo held for woman's murder

POST NEWS NETWORK

Tihidi, Feb 16: More than a month after a woman was found hanging outside her lover's house at Gobindpur village in Bhadrak district, police Sunday arrested two siblings, including her lover, on murder charges.

Gayatri Das, a resident of Paitipur village under Pirhat police limits, went missing from her house January 3, only to be found hanging outside the house of her lover Amulya Das at Sapakatia village the next day.

The accused were identified as Amulya Das, the alleged lover, and his elder brother Bijay Das. The arrests were made after investigations revealed that the duo had strangled the woman to death before hanging her to pass it off as a suicide.

Shaadi, Utsav ya Tyohar... Lijjat Papad Ho Harbar...

Karram Kurram... Kurram Karram...

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SANKALP PADYATRA

New OPCC chief not to make any political speech



PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Feb 16: Newly appointed Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) president Bhakta Charan Das who will undertake a 'Sankalp Padyatra' from Bhubaneswar to Puri before assuming charge will not make any political speech until he has darshan of Lord Jagannath, a senior Congress leader said.

Addressing a press conference here Sunday, Chairman of the Sankalp Padyatra Committee and former MLA, Debashis Patnaik said, "The new OPCC president will not make any political speech until he has darshan of Lord Jagannath and sought his blessings. After returning from Jagannath temple, Das will address the

media."

Giving details of the padyatra, Patnaik said Das will undertake the 60 km-long padyatra from Bhubaneswar to Puri Tuesday.

It will start from Biju Patnaik International Airport (BPIA) here 10 am, and cover Shishu Bhavan, Rajmahal, Kalpana, Ravi Talkies Square before reaching Lingipura at 1 pm.

After a lunch break, the walk will start again from Lingipur and reach Pipili. The participants of the padyatra including Das will spend the night at Pipili and start the journey on the following day and reach Teisipur. After lunch, they will start again and spend the night in Chandanpur on the way to Puri.

The padyatra will start from Chandanpur February 20, and after having lunch at 'Bata Mangala' in the afternoon, the newly appointed OPCC president will have a darshan of Lord Sri Jagannath and seek his blessings, Patnaik said.

He said the objective of the padyatra is to establish the Congress as the number one political party in the state and to wish for the progress of Odisha along with the successful transformation of the state.

Key suspect in City murder case surrenders

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Feb 16: The prime suspect in the ghastly murder of a youth here last month surrendered at the Mancheswar Police station Sunday. The Police subsequently arrested the accused Rama Naik of Kedarpalli Slum, under Capital police station limits.

"Based on some significant evidence fetched during the investigation, we realised she (Rama) was also involved in the case and she must be arrested," said Pinak Mishra, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Bhubaneswar. He said that the family members of the victim, Sahadev Nayak, had mentioned Rama as the key conspirator in the FIR.

He also stated that the family members had earlier approached the cops seeking her arrest. During the course of the investigation, police also found that a conspiracy had been hatched to murder Sahadev, Mishra said.

The DCP said that seven persons, including Rama, have so far been arrested in the case. He revealed about the involvement of more persons in the murder conspiracy.

It is pertinent here to mention here that bike-borne miscreants had hacked Sahadev to death near the busy Rasulgarh Square area under Mancheswar Police limits January 8.

Sahadev, who lived in Kedarpalli slum under the Capital Police station area, was returning home after dropping her daughter at her school in VSS Nagar area in the morning when the miscreants assaulted him with sharp weapons. The police later initiated an investigation into the case, registering a case on the basis of a complaint lodged by the deceased's wife.

She alleged that some residents of the slum who are engaged in selling brown sugar killed her husband for protesting against the illegal trade of drugs in the locality.

IPL TROPHY TOURS SRIMANDIR



POST NEWS NETWORK

Puri, Feb 16: Ahead of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2025, the

tournament's trophy was taken to Srimandir here, Sunday.

According to reports, the trophy was brought by authorities of Kolk-

ata Knight Riders (KKR), the defending champions, to seek blessings of the presiding deities at Srimandir. This was part of the KKR's trophy tour ahead of the tournament in March this year.

Notably, Kolkata Knight Riders won the IPL trophy last year, and team members are optimistic about retaining the current trophy.

Excited servitors performed a special Puja for the trophy as a large crowd gathered at the temple to witness the event.

Later during the day, the trophy was put on display at the Nexus Esplanade mall in Rasulgarh where hundreds of fans jostled for selfies with the coveted cup.

Reports suggest that the trophy will be taken to several famous temples across the country for similar puja ceremonies.

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NCPCR orders inquiry into child marriage cases in Jajpur school



Among the affected students, three girls had been married off at a young age, with two of them becoming mothers before they were 14. These early pregnancies (and motherhood) have resulted in severe social and economic challenges for the young girls. Moreover, these underage mothers have been excluded from various government schemes, including food security entitlements, Das added.

Das alleged that despite being aware of the urgency of the situation, the district administration preferred to drag its feet over the issues which made him knock on the doors of the NCPCR, seeking direction for a detailed probe.

The Commission has also ordered necessary legal steps to be taken as per the provisions of the Child Protection Laws, he said.

According to a complaint filed by social worker Mantu Das with the NCPCR, there have been multiple allegations, including dropouts and child marriages, at the residential school. The Education department, however, has failed to take appropriate action to address these issues. As a result, students at the school have been absent for extended periods, Das alleged.



SOCCER TOURNEY: Players of United Sports of Jaldia and TCFC of Hamirpur fight for glory at the final match of 3rd Lazarus Lakra Memorial knock out football tournament organised by the Friends Club, Rourkela at Sector-6 ground in the City Sunday

Jajpur, Feb 16: Expressing concern over reports of child marriage incidents at Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), a residential school in Jajpur, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has directed the district Collectors of Jajpur and Keonjhar to submit a report on the issue within seven days.

Work on Kharla river bridge moves at snail's pace

Residents are forced to take a 5-km detour to reach Kuchinda town

Kuchinda, Feb 16: The sluggish construction pace of the bridge over Kharla river, connecting Kuchinda town in Sambalpur district, has raised apprehension among locals that it might take another year for works to be over. According to reports, the consultancy agency engaged for the construction of the bridge had signed an agreement with the Public Works Department to complete the project by May 25, this year. However, looking at the current status of work, meeting the deadline appears quite unlikely. Concerned locals said the work might be extended by over a year, and the bridge would be ready for use only by May 26, 2026. It is pertinent to mention here that earlier an iron bridge was originally built over the Kharla river in 1903 during the British era. The bridge was known as Jhulen Setu or Jhulen bridge as it was a suspension bridge. Over time, it weakened, and Sep-

tember 9, 2022, it collapsed after being hit by a heavy iron-laden truck. That had completely disrupting communication on the road. Although a bypass on the national highway was incomplete at that point of time, authorities made emergency arrangements to restore vehicular movement. Meanwhile, the public urged the district administration and government for the construction of a permanent bridge. Finally, a tender worth Rs 13.71 crore was approved for the bridge, and Monalisa Engineers, a consultancy agency, was awarded the contract. The construction began May 25, 2023. Over the years, while the foundation has been laid, work on the bridge pillar spans has only just begun. Locals alleged that a lack of accountability on part of the Works department, coupled with inefficiency of the consultancy firm, has slowed down the construction of the bridge significantly. They said although the initial deadline for completion was fixed for May 25, 2025, given the



current pace of work, finishing the project within the stipulated time remains uncertain. Meanwhile, the collapse of the bridge has left many families in distress, particularly those relying on businesses near Mandir Chhak and Pancharakhi Chhak in Kuchinda. Adding to the woes, they alleged, the main road now lies in a state of disrepair, making travel difficult. The bridge had been a crucial connection for residents of 31 panchayats, including 21 in Jamankira block, two in Kuchinda block, and eight in Tileibani block of neighbouring Deogarh

idents had once again demanded immediate action for the early completion of the bridge works. In response, Nayak had assured them that discussions with the relevant department were underway, and that steps would be taken to resolve the issue. Meanwhile, when contacted, Assistant Executive Engineer Sanjay Kumar Nayak, who assumed charge recently, said if the work is not completed within the set timeframe, higher authorities will be formally notified. Queried over the allegations, former Assistant Executive Engineer Nabin Bage said that the bridge works started following the laying of the foundation May 25, 2023. "However, the work had to be abandoned due to rains. It resumed only in December, 2023," he said. He said an anicut under the under-construction bridge has proved a stumbling block in the completion of the project as water level rises up to the level of the bridge. "This is only delaying the works which will not get completed within the deadline. The authorities will be urged to enhance the deadline after it expires," he added. During a public grievance hearing attended by state Panchayati Raj, Drinking Water and Rural Development Minister Rabinarayan Nayak, Kuchinda res-

Mass nesting of Olive Ridley turtles begins in Rushikulya

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Berhampur, Feb 16: Forest officials Sunday spotted the much-awaited mass nesting of Olive Ridley sea turtles near Rushikulya river mouth in Ganjam district. Over 11,000 turtles have laid eggs on the first day of the mass nesting in the 4-km-long stretch of the rookery, said Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Berhampur, Sunny Khokkar. The mass nesting will take place for a few more days, as several turtles are in the sea waiting for nesting, said forest officials, adding that the mass nesting will be followed by sporadic nesting in the area. Mass nesting of the turtles in Gahirmatha, however, was yet to start this year so far, the officials said. We are expecting this time, a record number of turtles to lay egg in this place, said Rabinadra Nath Sahu, secretary, Ganjam district sea turtle protection committee. According to Basudev Tripathy, senior scientist of the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), this was the ideal time for the mass nesting of Olive Ridley in the Rushikulya river mouth. Meanwhile, the forest de-



partment has taken measures to protect the eggs and engaged local volunteers to provide a safe environment for mass nesting by the turtles. The entire four-km long stretch of the beach was fenced to restrict the entry of visitors to the nesting site, said a forest officer, adding that this would continue for the next 50 days till the hatchling emerges from the eggs. The forest officials also requested the nearby civic bodies and industrial houses to switch off the street lights during the mass nesting period to facilitate the turtles for smooth nesting. The female turtles dug the pits in the beach and lay eggs. The pit is covered with sand by the turtles before they disappear into the sea. A female turtle lays around 100 to 150 eggs. The mother turtle, however, does not wait to see the baby turtles emerge from the eggs.

Two boys drown in Bhadrak village pond

Bhadrak, Feb 16: Two minor boys drowned in a village pond Sunday morning while playing near it at Guagaon village under Basudevpur Municipality limits in Bhadrak district. The incident happened around 10 am at Radhaballavpur village, under the jurisdiction of Basudevpur police station and municipality limits. Police identified the deceased as 13-year-old Jyotirmaya Behera, son of Satyaban Behera, and 17-year-old Rajendra Behera, son of Kanhu Behera. A pall of gloom and mourning descended in the village after reports of their deaths spread. According to police, the boys were playing near the



pond when they accidentally slipped and fell. Hearing their cries for help, locals rushed to rescue them. While one of the boys was pulled out from the pond by the locals, the other was retrieved by fire service officials. Both were taken to Basudevpur Hospital, where doctors declared them dead on arrival, said Lopamudra Nayak, inspector-in-charge (IIC) of Basudevpur police station. Police have sent the bodies to Bhadrak DHH for post mortem examination.

PDS rice black-marketing thrives in Paralakhemundi

Paralakhemundi, Feb 16: The illegal trade of government-subsidised rice has allegedly turned Gajapati district into a hotspot for black market dealings, with authorities struggling to rein in the illicit business. Sources said despite repeated media reports and public outcry, the Supply department has failed to take any effective action, thereby, allowing traders to continue their operations unchecked. According to reports, three locations within the Paralakhemundi constituency-Gumma, Ranipentha, and Kashinagar have emerged as the key hubs

for the black-marketing of Public Distribution System (PDS) rice. While such activities have occasionally come under administrative scrutiny, district officials seem indifferent to the ongoing violations. Insiders, like former MLA K Narayan Rao, alleged that whenever black-marketing traders are nabbed, they are discreetly released with administrative assistance, rather than facing legal consequences. This pattern has only emboldened those involved in the illicit trade, making it increasingly difficult to control the situation, he added. The issue cropped up again after a truck loaded with approximately 300 quintals of



PDS rice was discovered near a well-known rice trader's shop in Paralakhemundi February 9 night. The truck, bearing registration number AP-39T-5358, was intercepted by members of the local Truck Drivers' Association, which immediately alerted both the administration and the media.

Following the receipt of the alert, officials from the Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Department, along with police personnel, arrived at the scene. However, even twenty-four hours after the seizure, no concrete action had been taken. When queried over the same, Inspector Prashant Bhupati of Paralakhemundi police station admitted that while the truck had been brought to the police station at the request of the Supply department, no formal case had been registered. Despite repeated attempts to obtain comments, Supply department officials remained tight-lipped about the incident. G Rabi, president of Truck

Owners Association alleged that a particular rice trader in the area is repeatedly buying PDS rice and despatching the stock to Andhra Pradesh and other states. "He is refusing to abide by the norms and carrying out the trade in cahoots with local officials," Rabi alleged. The Truck Owners' Association has accused local authorities of indirectly supporting corrupt traders, despite the government's efforts to curb such black-marketing activities, under food security laws. Meanwhile, there is growing public demand for the district administration and higher authorities to intervene and put an end to this racket.



SPLENDID PERFORMANCE: Girls perform Odissi at the annual function of Biju Patnaik Women's Degree College at Sonepur in Subarnapur district

NCLP closure: Future of child labourers in limbo

Rourkela, Feb 16: The absence of a dedicated programme like the National Child Labour Project (NCLP) has left a significant gap in addressing the needs of child labourers in the Steel City. The NCLP, an important initiative to protect and educate children engaged in hazardous work, was discontinued in Sundargarh district three years ago. Sources said the project, which aimed to rehabilitate and reintegrate children working in hazardous conditions into society through education and vocational training, had been a significant effort to safeguard the future of these vulnerable children. Launched in 1988 by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, the NCLP aimed to provide education to children aged between 9 and 14 years

working in hazardous conditions. The project was implemented across 312 districts in India, with a focus on offering education, vocational training, midday meals, healthcare, and stipends. By 2007, over 1.2 million children had benefited from this programme. District project committees, under the leadership of local administrations, played a vital role in the execution of the project, collaborating with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In Rourkela, NCLP started in 2007, and was active until 2022 when it was absorbed into the larger "Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan" (Universal Education Campaign). According to reports, the abrupt closure of the project left many children who had benefited from the initiative without support. The children, especially school dropouts who had gained educational opportu-



nities, are now deprived of the services that once improved their lives, sources added. The NCLP operated in the most vulnerable areas of Rourkela, including Bandhamunda, Gopabandhupali, Sitalpada, Malgodam, Sector-6, Panposh basti, among others, where it ran education centres for child workers. These centres provided informal education, vocational training, midday meals, and health services. Volunteers were engaged to educate children and equip them with skills. However, with the discontinuation of the NCLP, these children are once again at risk, with no viable alternatives

in place to protect them, social workers said. Local social workers like Arun Parida have called for the revival of NCLP-like projects. "I urge the government to update the earlier model and include a more comprehensive curriculum for these children, especially those at risk of criminal activity and exploitation," he said. Gopal Chandra Mangaraj, a Child Welfare Officer, said, "While the project has been discontinued, further action will be taken if new directives are issued by the Central government to address the needs of these children." Meanwhile, despite the closure of NCLP, the struggle to combat child labour continues in Rourkela. According to reports, in 2022, eight child labourers were rescued, while in 2023 their figure stood at four. Last year, 10 of them had been rescued.



Higher always higher! Let us never be satisfied with what is accomplished.
THE MOTHER

Transatlantic D_Rift

A fissure seems to have appeared in the decades-old alliance between Europe and the United States. This drifting apart is visible if developments of the past week are any indication. During the three-day Munich Security Conference, which wrapped up on 16 February, US Vice President JD Vance delivered a harsh ideological critique of Europe. He accused its leaders of stifling free speech, neglecting to address illegal migration, and shying away from the genuine concerns of their constituents. In the aftermath, European leaders have been grappling with a more stringent stance from Washington on matters such as democracy and Ukraine's future, as the Trump administration disrupts long-standing transatlantic norms established since World War II.

In a scathing address on 14 February, Vance openly challenged the justification for US defence of contemporary European values, depicting a landscape of European politics marred by media censorship, cancelled elections, and political correctness. He contended that the real danger to Europe did not arise from external forces like Russia or China, but rather from the continent's own withdrawal from its "most fundamental values." Throughout his speech, he consistently questioned whether the US and Europe still shared a common agenda. "If you are afraid of the voices, the opinions and the conscience that guide your very own people ... If you're running in fear of your own voters, there is nothing America can do for you, nor for that matter is there anything you can do for the American people," Vance said.

Not only that, Vance held a meeting with Alice Weidel, the leader of Germany's Far-Right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party, in Munich. This meeting breaks a longstanding taboo in German politics, especially as the new administration in Washington seeks to engage with and support Far-Right populist parties throughout Europe. The timing of Vance's meeting with Weidel is particularly noteworthy, occurring just weeks before a German election where the anti-immigrant, anti-Moslem party is expected to secure a strong second-place finish amid rising anti-establishment sentiment.

US President Donald Trump's efforts for a swift resolution to the Ukraine conflict have raised concerns and uncertainty across Europe. Leaders of European countries were already aware of the potential challenges posed by a second Trump presidency and the strain it could place on transatlantic relations. However, the recent phone call between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin sent shockwaves through the European Union (EU) and in the capitals of nations who are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Following their conversation, Trump announced that he and Putin would likely meet soon to discuss a peace agreement for Ukraine, and he later reassured Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy that he would also be included in the discussions. Nevertheless, US officials have indicated that European nations would not participate in the peace process. This has sparked growing anxiety among Europeans about being completely excluded from the talks regarding Ukraine and possibly from the broader restructuring of the new international order.

Unsettled over the policy shift from Washington, French President Emmanuel Macron has called for an emergency meeting with European leaders, including UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, amid rising concerns about Trump's efforts to dominate the Ukraine peace process. The meeting, anticipated to take place on 17 February, is expected to address the US attempts to sideline European leaders in the negotiations, Europe's stance on Ukraine's potential NATO membership, and the provision of security guarantees for Ukraine, whether through NATO or a separate European armed force, as suggested by Zelenskyy.

The swiftness with which European leaders, including Starmer despite the UK having left the EU, are uniting shows the urgency of the matter and also the scare that has been put into the very hearts of those leaders. There are lessons that India too should learn from these moves by Trump. Undoubtedly, Europe, much more than Asia, is far more valuable for the US when matters of security and military preparedness are taken into account. It could probably be since most white Americans can trace their ancestry to different parts of Europe. Lesson in this is that a country like India better learn to stand up for itself and get ready for all eventualities.

WISDOM CORNER

It is change, continuing change, inevitable change, that is the dominant factor in society today. No sensible decision can be made any longer without taking into account not only the world as it is, but the world as it will be.
ISAAC ASIMOV

If time is not real, then the dividing line between this world and eternity, between suffering and bliss, between good and evil, is also an illusion.
HERMANN HESSE

The more in harmony with yourself you are, the more joyful you are and the more faithful you are. Faith is not to disconnect you from reality - it connects you to reality.
PAULO COELHO

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1801: Following a tie in the electoral college, the US House of Representatives elected Thomas Jefferson president.
- 1863: A precursor of the Red Cross and Red Crescent is founded. The "Committee for Relief to the Wounded" was created by a group of citizens in Geneva, Switzerland.
- 1904: Italian composer Giacomo Puccini's Madama Butterfly premiered at La Scala in Milan, and it became one of the most frequently performed operas.
- 1913: The "Armory Show" opens in New York. The art exhibition featured works by Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Vincent van Gogh and marked the advent of artistic modernism in the United States.
- 1979: Vietnam invaded by China. After the Vietnam War, Vietnam bolstered its ties with the Soviet Union rather than with China, and, following a series of anti-Chinese, pro-Soviet manoeuvres by Vietnam, China invaded its southern neighbour this day in 1979.

LOL I HAVE A DOLLAR

A man goes into a bar and seats himself on a stool. The bartender looks at him and says, "What'll it be buddy?" The man says, "Set me up with seven whiskey shots and make them doubles." The bartender does this and watches the man slug one down, then the next, then the next, and so on until all seven are gone almost as quickly as they were served. Staring in disbelief, the bartender asks why he's doing all this drinking. "You'd drink them this fast too if you had what I have." The bartender hastily asks, "What do you have pal?" The man quickly replies, "I have a dollar."

FOCUS GEOPOLITICS

AGE OF MULTIPOLARIZATION

It has become a truism of foreign-policy debates nowadays that the world is at the dawn of a multipolar era. Whether such an international order will ever fully emerge is debatable. But the process of "multipolarization" is already underway, as a larger number of states gain the ability to influence global developments.

But a more worrisome aspect of multipolarization is that these ongoing power shifts have been accompanied by deepening polarization within and between countries. Governments' incompatible visions for the new global order make it harder to compromise and find solutions to shared challenges.

These divisions are evident in the deepening bifurcation between democracies and autocracies, especially in policy fields such as human rights, global infrastructure, and development cooperation. Polarization is also visible in new power brokers pursuing their own visions for their respective regions. The Kremlin, for example, is clearly working toward a Russian-led order in Eurasia, while China, buttressed by its Belt and Road Initiative, is seeking to establish hegemony over East Asia. Global rules, principles, and structures of cooperation are being supplanted by multiple competing and conflicting orders.

Polarization has intensified within countries, too. In the United States, Donald Trump's return to the White House epitomizes the new power of divisive politics and is bound to strengthen illiberal forces in Europe and other countries where an "us versus them" mentality has taken hold.

The shift to multipolarity may well have played a part in spurring this domestic polarization. In many Western



Instead of enabling powerful countries to keep each other in check and ushering in a new era of relative peace and stability, multipolarity risks fueling instability. It looks set to trigger new arms races and trade wars and prolong existing intrastate conflicts, and could even sow the seeds of a great-power war

democracies, the shift of power to emerging countries has raised concerns about their own relative decline. The liberal international order, the thinking goes, has unfairly benefited not only global elites at home but also rising powers abroad - China most of all.

At the same time, by throwing governments into gridlock and leaving them very little room for maneuver, domestic polarization ties the hands of democratic leaders, rendering them unable to improve foreign relations and strengthen global cooperation. Illiberal populist leaders, for their part, have few incentives to help build consensus among countries, given that a divided international environment chimes with their narrative of "all against all."

Against this backdrop of

intensifying political polarization at both the national and international levels, the hopes and aspirations that many - particularly in the Global South - have for a more multipolar world will go unmet. The multipolar world that is now emerging will likely be driven by conflict in the absence of shared rules and institutions.

Instead of enabling powerful countries to keep each other in check and ushering in a new era of relative peace and stability, multipolarity risks fueling instability. It looks set to trigger new arms races and trade wars and prolong existing intrastate conflicts, and could even sow the seeds of a great-power war.

Moreover, rather than fostering more inclusive global governance, multipolarity may undermine cooperation:

a larger number of countries now wield enough influence to disrupt collective decision-making, while positive leadership is in short supply. And while some hope that this shift will strengthen international law by reducing Western countries' ability to apply its principles selectively, more governments may end up claiming special rights for themselves.

The world urgently needs to "depolarize" politics. But it is far from clear how this can be achieved - or who would even be willing to take up the effort. Some believe that the divisions associated with greater multipolarity could be overcome if global governance structures embraced the new power centers. But others fear that this will not be enough to build the consensus needed to strengthen common rules - let alone reform them or create new ones.

Few of today's leading governments have shown a genuine interest in devising a great-power agreement that would benefit the broader international community. Instead, many seem intent on exploiting the deepening polarization of global politics to achieve domestic and geopolitical goals. Multipolarity and the polarization of both national and international politics are thus deeply intertwined. A better future depends on whether a world with more poles can find ways to mitigate dangerous divisions. What is clear is that such efforts must start at home.

Tobias Bunde is Director of Research and Policy at the Munich Security Conference. Sophie Eisentraut is Head of Research and Publications at the Munich Security Conference.
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SPECTRUM CYBERCRIME

Safeguarding digital payments

Payments through digital mode have now become mainstream. We now make payments of various kind of bills viz. Mobile phone bills, landline phone bills, electricity bills, credit card bills etc sitting anywhere anytime through our smart phones. Online shopping is done and payments thereof made digitally through the smart phones. Funds can also be transferred likewise. To facilitate all this, mobile wallets have emerged as another medium of digital payments. First you have to transfer money from your bank account to mobile wallets for spending from it thereafter. Digital payments can be made even without mobile wallets directly on service provider's app with your debit/credit card or internet banking. It has become very convenient. However, with the proliferation of digital payments, online frauds have also mushroomed scaring people away from the digital.

Recently a family member of mine has been duped by way

of two debits of Rs 49,999 and Rs 49,000 from her account by online fraudsters. The modus operandi adopted will be worth narrating for the benefit of stakeholders. An SMS was received purportedly from a reputed mobile wallet company warning that the funds in the wallet will be blocked unless a call was made on a given mobile number for sorting out KYC related issue. The unsuspecting user called that number. The person on the other side, pretending to be the representative of the reputed mobile wallet company asks the caller to download an app 'Quick Support'. My relative not only downloads the app as directed but also tells the code number to the 'representative' of mobile wallet company. By doing so, my relative unknowingly gave remote access of her mobile to the online fraudster. She was further directed to transfer Rs 100 from her bank account to her mobile wallet. Her compliance enabled the fraudster to capture her debit card credentials. Now that

the fraudster had the debit card credentials and remote access to my relative's mobile phone for viewing OTPs, two quick debits of Rs 49,999 and Rs 49,000 rupees happened in her bank account. The OTP SMSes on my relative's phone, which by virtue of remote access the fraudster could also see and apply, alerted my relative. She got a sense of what was happening and switched off her phone immediately and rushed to the bank to get her debit card blocked. Further damage was averted.

Online frauds are cyber crimes in which the victims and perpetrators can be hundreds or even thousands of miles apart. It should not be difficult for agencies and banks to trace the money. After all, money has travelled through the banking channel only. The recipient account and account holder can be identified. There was an SMS, meant to trigger this chain of transactions, which mentioned a mobile number also. SMS and mobile numbers cannot be anonymous.

However, the possibility of being easily traced does not deter tricksters from making easy money. It may lead to the inference that the culprits have been escaping the clutches of law.

A pan India specialist agency should be created to prevent/ detect such sort of crimes lest people lose faith in digital payments. Not only should the siphoned money be recovered, the culprits also be nabbed to face the law.

One more issue, which is discouraging use of digital payments, needs to be mentioned. When you offer to swipe your debit/ credit card for making payment to shopkeepers, many of them insist for 2% extra, especially in case of shopping for durable goods. Issues like these need to be sorted out so that unsuspecting public does not become prey to frauds/ extra payments. People will become wary of digital payments unless online frauds are stemmed effectively.

The writer is a retired banker.



PEOPLE WILL BECOME WARY OF DIGITAL PAYMENTS UNLESS ONLINE FRAUDS ARE STEMMED EFFECTIVELY

Letters TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa Post are most welcome to contribute letters (100 words), articles and columns (between 600-1000 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

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

Lapse monitoring

Sir, This refers to "Child marriages go unabated," Orissa Post, February 16. The news is no doubt disturbing and speaks volumes of deficiencies on the part of state administration to eradicate child marriages. I think in order to stop child marriages much stress has to be given on child education, which falls far short of expectations. Besides, the economic condition of parents needs to be drastically improved so that they can provide education to their children. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 has to be strictly enforced in its letter and spirit. The ground reality is that in the absence of proper monitoring, the law remains in statute book.
Arun Gupta, KOLKATA

Trade & tariffs

Sir, US President Donald Trump's announcement of reciprocal tariffs has significant implications for India. The policy of reciprocal tariffs means that the US will impose the same level of tariffs on imports from other countries as those countries impose on US exports. The goal is to create a "level playing field" in international trade. India, which has historically imposed high tariffs on US goods, is expected to be significantly affected by this policy. For example, India's weighted average tariff rate on US imports is around 9.5%, compared to the 3% tariff rate that the US imposes on Indian goods. This disparity has made India a prime target for Trump's reciprocal tariff strategy. The sectors most vulnerable to increased US tariffs include agriculture, transportation, textiles, pharmaceuticals, and automobiles. Analysts have warned that these reciprocal tariffs could lead to economic uncertainty and strained trade relations between the two countries. To mitigate the impact, India is considering various measures, such as reducing tariffs on certain products and increasing imports of US defence and energy goods. However, the full extent of the impact will depend on the final details of the tariff policy and how it is implemented. Overall, India's trade relationship with the US faces significant challenges due to the introduction of reciprocal tariffs. The policy's potential to disrupt key sectors and create economic uncertainty underscores the importance of strategic adjustments and diplomatic efforts.
Amarjeet Kumar, HAZARIBAGH



Siddaramaiah is our Chief Minister, he is our leader, we want him for all the polls. We want him for zilla panchayat, taluk panchayat, assembly and parliament polls. He is our leader
D K SHIVAKUMAR | K TAKA DEPUTY CM

TN RANKS 3 IN PANCHAYAT DEVOLUTION INDEX: GOVT

In the Panchayat Devolution Index (PDI), Tamil Nadu has been ranked third in the overall category and it is in the first place in the functional devolution dimension and it evidences the continuous efforts to empower village panchayats for grassroots democracy and local self governance, the state government said Sunday



of the day quote

Recently, a GBS outbreak was reported in the Khadakwasla dam area (in Pune). While some linked it to water contamination, others speculated it was caused by chicken consumption. After a detailed review, it has been concluded that there is no need to cull poultry



The Madhya Pradesh Logistics Policy 2025 will also prove to be important in the direction of the overall economic development. It will take the state economy to new heights in coming years



It was an unfortunate incident. Authorities will take steps to ensure such incidents don't happen in future



Senior's admonition at workplace not criminal offence: SC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 16: Senior's admonition at the workplace does not amount to an "intentional insult" requiring criminal proceedings, the Supreme Court has held.

The top court said allowing criminal charges to be pressed against individuals in such cases may lead to disastrous consequences, crippling the entire disciplinary atmosphere required in the workplace. A bench of Justices Sanjay Karol and Sandeep Mehta said that mere abuse, discourtesy, rudeness or insolence do not amount

to an intentional insult within the meaning of Section 504 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Section 504 of the IPC deals with intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace. The offence, punishable with jail term of up to two years, has now been replaced with Section 352 under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) effective from July 2024.

The top court's judgement came while quashing a 2022 criminal case against the officiating director of the National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, who was accused of insulting an assistant profes-



sor. The complainant had alleged that the director scolded and reprimand her in front of other employees for submitting complaints against him to the higher authorities.

The top court said allowing criminal charges to be pressed against individuals in such cases may lead to disastrous consequences, crippling the entire disciplinary atmosphere required in the workplace

It was also alleged that the director failed to provide and maintain adequate PPE kits in the institute, which posed a great risk of spreading infectious diseases such as Covid-19. The apex court said from the bare perusal of the chargesheet and documents relied therein, the allegations

seem to be purely conjectural, and by no stretch of imagination they can be considered sufficient to constitute the ingredients of the offences under Sections 269 (negligent acts that could spread a dangerous disease) and 270 (malicious act of spreading a life-threatening disease) of the IPC.

"Therefore, in our opinion, senior's admonition cannot be reasonably attributed to mean an 'intentional insult' within the intent to provoke' within the means of Section 504, IPC provided that the admonition relates to the matters incidental to the workplace covering discipline and the discharge of duties therein," the bench said.

"It is a reasonable expectation on the part of a person who caters to the affairs at the helm that his juniors should attend to their professional duties with utmost sincerity and dedication," the judgment, delivered February 10, said.

DELHI STAMPEDE

Oppn blames govt for gross mismanagement



The stampede occurred Saturday night after some passengers slipped and fell on others while coming down from a foot overbridge, a senior railway official said

More than a dozen people were also injured in the incident at the railway station which witnessed a surge of passengers waiting to board trains for Prayagraj -- where the Maha Kumbh is underway -- on platform number 14 and 15 of the station

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said it was extremely shameful and condemnable that the Narendra Modi government was attempting to "hide the truth" about the deaths

said it was extremely shameful and condemnable that the Narendra Modi government was attempting to "hide the truth" about the deaths.

In a post on X, the party said, "The railway minister should resign, apologize to the country." Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi said better arrangements should have been made at the station in view of the large number of devotees going to Prayagraj for the Maha Kumbh. "This incident once again highlights the failure of the Railways and the insensitivity of the government," he said in a post on X.

Party spokesperson Supriya Shrinatne demanded Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw's resignation taking moral responsibility for the stampede. If the minister does not resign, he should be sacked for the "mismanagement" at the railway station, she said.

Former Railway minister and senior Congress leader Pawan Kumar Bansal said the ultimate responsibility of the tragedy lies with the minister and he cannot escape it. The former Railway minister said the government has "utterly failed" to anticipate the rush of pilgrims and make arrangements accordingly.

RJD supreme and former Railway minister Lalu Prasad said the stampede episode is very disturbing and it has exposed the inadequate arrangements made by the Central government.

"The railway minister must resign after this incident. It is a complete failure on part of the Railways," he asserted.

The Aam Aadmi Party accused the government of trying

to cover up the incident. Its Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, citing witnesses, alleged an announcement of platform change for trains was the reason behind the stampede. AAP's Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha said the stampede shook all, and called it a glaring example of "gross mismanagement" and lack of crowd control measures. He demanded that those responsible for the stampede be held accountable.

Expressing condolences over the deaths, AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi demanded an independent, judicially-monitored special investigation team to investigate the tragedy. In a post on X, the Hyderabad Lok Sabha MP also sought an independent inquiry into the systemic failures of the Indian Railways.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee expressed grief over the loss of lives in a stampede at New Delhi railway station and stressed the need for careful planning and management for the safety of people.

TMC Rajya Sabha deputy leader Sagarika Ghose accused the government of "callously playing with the lives of Indian citizens" and called it "tragic beyond words".

The CPI(M), in a post on X, said, "Make the government accountable." The CPI (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, claimed the stampede at the New Delhi station was triggered by delays in multiple train services during the Maha Kumbh rush and is a "direct indictment of the Central government's callous mismanagement of India's Railways".



An aerial view of boats at Sangam amid the ongoing 'Maha Kumbh Mela' festival, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh PTI PHOTO

Cooperative bank's general manager sent to police custody

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Feb 16: A court here Sunday remanded Hitesh Mehta, the general manager and head of accounts of the New India Cooperative Bank, and co-accused Dharmesh Paun in police custody till February 21 in a case of alleged misappropriation of ₹122 crore from the bank.

The police's Economic Offences Wing (EOW) produced Mehta and Paun before a holiday court here. Police told court Mehta has confessed to the crime in front of the Reserve Bank of India and probe was needed to find out about involvement of more persons.

The involvement of Mehta in the crime has been established, police said. Paun was in possession of ₹70 crore and his involvement in the crime too has been confirmed, police told court while seeking remand of the duo. As per the police, Devarshi Ghosh, the bank's acting chief executive officer, lodged a complaint against Mehta and others at Dadar police station in central Mumbai on Friday for alleged misappropriation of the bank's funds. Based on the complaint, the police registered a case in the early hours of Saturday, and the probe was transferred to the Economic Offences Wing of Mumbai police.

The complainant alleged Mehta and his associates hatched a conspiracy and embezzled ₹122 crore from the safes of the Prabhadevi and Goregaon offices of the bank.

Rana visited north, south India before 26/11: Officials

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 16: Tahawwur Hussain Rana's possible extradition from the US in connection with the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks could provide important leads into his travels in parts of north and south India days before the carnage in 2008, officials have said.

The 64-year-old Rana, a Pakistan-born Canadian national and a close associate of Pakistani-American terrorist and one of the main conspirators David Coleman Headley, is serving supervised detention at a metropolitan detention centre in Los Angeles after completing a 14-year sentence in 2023.

US President Donald Trump announced Thursday that his administration has approved Rana's extradition to India, referring to him as "one of the plotters and very evil people of the world." Once extradited, Rana would be the third person to be sent on trial in India in the case after Ajmal Kasab and Zabiuddin Ansari alias Abu Jundal. In November 2012, Kasab, the lone surviving Pakistan terrorist, was hanged to death in Pune's Yerawada Jail.

Trump announced Thursday that his administration has approved Rana's extradition to India, referring to him as "one of the plotters and very evil people of the world"

Arrested by the FBI October 27, 2009, Rana was chargesheeted by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in 2011 under various sections of the Indian Penal Code and Section 6(2) of the SAARC Convention on Suppression of Terrorism.

While tracking Headley's footsteps in India, the central security officials had found that Rana had visited Hapur, Delhi, Agra, Kochi, Ahmedabad, and Mumbai with his wife Samraz Rana Akhtar between November 13 and November 21, 2008. Rana had submitted business sponsor letters from 'Immigrant Law Center' and property Tax payment notice from the Cook County as his address proof.



SHORT TAKES

Two labourers from MP killed in blast

Nagpur: Two labourers died and three others were injured in a blast at a firecracker unit in Maharashtra's Nagpur district Sunday, a senior police official said. The explosion took place at 1:30pm at Asian Fireworks under Kalmeshwar police station limits in Katol tehsil, some 50 kilometres from the district headquarters, Nagpur Rural Superintendent of Police Harsh Poddar said. "The two deceased labourers hailed from Seoni and Mandla in Madhya Pradesh. Three persons were injured," the SP told reporters.

Two students found dead

Sonapat: Two students of Ashoka University here were found dead in separate incidents, police said Sunday. The two incidents occurred Friday night, police said. In one incident, a 21-year-old student from Bengaluru is suspected to have died after jumping from an upper floor of the hostel building, Station House Officer of Rai police station, Sub-Inspector Kuldeep said over the phone. While police suspects suicide further investigations in the matter are underway, the officer said.

Four killed in road accident

Barabanki (UP): Four people, including a woman, were killed, and six others were injured after the tempo-traveller they were travelling in collided with a bus from behind on the Purvanchal Expressway in Barabanki district Sunday, police said. The bus, coming from Chhatisgarh and the tempo-traveller, coming from Maharashtra, were both headed to Ayodhya. The deceased have been identified as Deepak, Sunil, Anusuiya and Jaishree, all aged between 35 and 55, and residents of Maharashtra, police said.

Two women killed as fire breaks out

Mumbai: Two women were killed and two other persons suffered from suffocation after a fire broke out in an 11-floor building in Mumbai Sunday morning, a fire official said. The blaze erupted at 6.11 am in Panna Ali Mansion building, located in Masjid Bandar area of south Mumbai, he said. The fire was confined to the electric wiring and installations at a common meter box place and electric wiring in the common passage on the ground floor of the building, the official said.

Over 29,500 registered drones in India: Official data

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 16: More than 29,500 drones are registered in India, with the national capital having the maximum number at 4,882, according to official data.

After the national capital, the highest numbers of registered drones are in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra at 4,588 and 4,132, respectively. The data from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) updated till January 29 showed that there were 29,501 registered drones. Other states that have a high

number of registered drones include Haryana (3,689), Karnataka (2,516), Telangana (1,928), Gujarat (1,338) and Kerala (1,318), as per the data shared by the civil aviation ministry with the Rajya Sabha this week. So far, the regulator has issued 96 Type Certificates to different Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) models or drones, and out of them, 65 models are for agriculture purpose.

Each registered drone is issued a Unique Identification Number (UIN) from the Digital Sky Platform, which is operated by the DGCA. DGCA-authorized



Remote Pilot Training Organisations (RPTOs) have issued 22,466 Remote Pilot Certificates (RPCs).

Sharing the data as part of a written reply, Minister of State for Civil Aviation Murlidhar Mohol also said

After the national capital, the highest numbers of registered drones are in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra at 4,588 and 4,132, respectively

The data from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) updated till January 29 showed that there were 29,501 registered drones

the central government has taken various steps to increase the usage of drone technology across various sectors. Among other measures, the ministry amended norms in August last year whereby the requirement of passport for the registration

and de-registration/transfer of a drone was scrapped.

Since then, voter ID, ration card or driving licence can be used for registration and de-registration or transfer of drones. There is a drone airspace map, which is divided into three zones - green, yellow and red. There is no need for prior permission to operate drones in the green zone while the Air Traffic Control (ATC) concerned has to approve operations of drones in the yellow zone. For flying drones in the red zone, permission has to be granted by the central government.

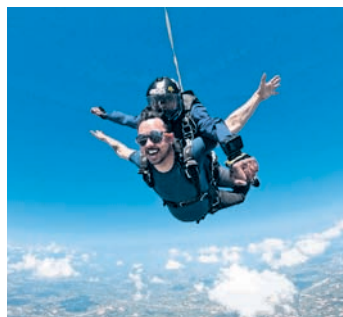


The tragic loss of 18 lives in the Delhi stampede is deeply heart-breaking. This painful incident highlights the importance of careful planning and management, especially when it comes to the safety of citizens

MAMATA BANERJEE | WEST BENGAL CM

FIRST-EVER SKYDIVING FESTIVAL BEGINS IN JAMSHEDPUR

An eight-day skydiving festival, under the aegis of the Jharkhand Tourism Department, was inaugurated in Jamshedpur Sunday. On the first day, at least nine enthusiasts took part in skydiving from an altitude of 10,000 feet, an official said



of the day quote

Had a great time in participating in the musical event organised for thalassemia patients by 'NTR memorial trust' headed by Madam Nara Bhuvaneshwari garu. And my wholehearted thanks to Hon. Cm @ncbn garu and @naralokesh garu for making me a part in this event. My best wishes to @MusicThaman and his team for their entertaining and energetic performance

PAWAN KALYAN | ANDHRA DEPUTY CM

Certainly, 100 per cent. I came (was appointed) to fill the time gap. I came for two or three months. But it (appointment of new chief) is getting postponed for several reasons. As soon as possible, a new president will come

G KISHAN REDDY | UNION MINISTER

Recently, 'Ashtalakshmi Mahotsav' was organised to promote the potential of the north-eastern states. As many as 150 beneficiaries from Tripura attended it

RAJIB BHATTACHARJEE | BJP'S TRIPURA UNIT PRESIDENT

Oman, India strengthen ties

Jaishankar, who is in the Omani capital here to attend the 8th Indian Ocean Conference, also met foreign ministers of several other nations, including Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Brunei on the sidelines of the event and discussed issues related to bilateral ties and regional cooperation



badralbusaidi of Oman this morning. Appreciate his personal efforts in successfully hosting the 8th Indian Ocean Conference," Jaishankar posted on X. "Held wide-ranging discussions on our cooperation in trade, investment and energy security," he said. The two leaders jointly released the logo celebrating the 70th anniversary of the diplomatic relations. They also jointly released a book titled 'Mandvi to Muscat: Indian Community and the Shared History of India and Oman'. Later, Jaishankar also met his Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi. "Good to meet FM @araghchi of Iran this afternoon. Spoke about our bilateral ties and developments in the region," he said in a post on X.

Jaishankar also held "warm" talks with Dato Erywan Pehin Yusof, Foreign Minister of Brunei. "A warm conversation with Brunei FM Dato Erywan Pehin Yusof this morning. Followed up on PM @narendramodi's September 2024 Brunei visit outcomes. Appreciate his insights on the region and support for India-ASEAN partnership," he said in a post on X. Jaishankar met his Bhutanese counterpart D N Dhungyel and held talks about strengthening the bilateral partnership. "A pleasure talking with @FMBhutan D. N. Dhungyel in Muscat today. Our discussion focused on advancing our bilateral and regional cooperation. Underlined the dynamism of our unique and time-tested partnership," he posted on X.

Yamuna cleaning begins in Delhi



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 16: Days ahead of the formation of BJP government in Delhi, the cleaning of Yamuna started on Sunday based on a four-pronged strategy to free the river from heavy pollution in three years. Raj Niwas officials said that the work on cleaning the Yamuna has begun with trash skimmers, weed harvesters and a dredger. Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the BJP's victory celebration at party headquarters on February 8 promised to make every effort for pollution-free Yamuna.

fall of treating about 400 MGD of sewer. "Execution of this ambitious plan that targets cleaning the river in about three years, will require seamless coordination between various agencies and departments including Municipal Corporation of Delhi, Delhi Jal Board, I&FC, environment department, public works department and Delhi Development Authority," said an official at the LG office. "Monitoring of these works will be done in a weekly basis at the highest level. Besides, the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) has been directed to keep strict vigil on discharge of untreated effluent into the drains by industrial units," he said. Earlier, an extensive project for Yamuna rejuvenation was taken up in mission mode in January 2023 under the National Green Tribunal (NGT) mandated high-level committee chaired by the LG. The committee, however after five meetings stopped functioning as the then AAP government in Delhi approached the Supreme Court challenging its formation. The top court stayed the NGT order for formation of the committee July 10, 2023. For a brief period when the committee was in existence, the chemical oxygen demand (COD) and biological oxygen demand (BOD) had started improving slightly on a month-on-month basis.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the BJP's victory celebration at party headquarters February 8 promised to make every effort for pollution-free Yamuna

AGENCIES

Muscat, Feb 16: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar Sunday held wide-ranging discussions with his Omani counterpart Badr Albusaidi on bilateral cooperation in trade, investment and energy security. Jaishankar, who is in the Omani capital here to attend the 8th Indian Ocean Conference, also met foreign ministers of several other nations, including Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Brunei on the sidelines of the event and discussed issues related to bilateral ties and regional cooperation. "Delighted to meet FM @

Brief exchange of fire along LoC in J&K's Poonch

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, Feb 16: A brief exchange of fire took place along the Line of Control (LoC) in the Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir Sunday, security officials said. They said an Indian Army post came under fire from a forested area across the LoC around 11.30 am in Gulpur sector. They said soldiers retaliated and the exchange of fire lasted for a very brief period. There was no damage on the Indian side, the officials said. They said it was not immediately clear whether the Pakistan army was behind the firing, or it was terrorists hiding in the forests and waiting for an opportunity to sneak in. There were a few cross-border incidents last week, including an IED explosion that killed two army personnel including a captain. Two other soldiers were injured in cross-border firing in violation of ceasefire. Indian troops retaliated befittingly, inflicting "heavy casualties" on the Pakistani side. The ceasefire violation along the borders in J&K have become few and far between since India and Pakistan renewed the ceasefire agreement February 25, 2021.



Delhi Police personnel march past during their Raising Day Parade, in New Delhi

PTI PHOTO

like situation ANI at 12:00 AM The stampede incident happened ANI at 12:30 AM The stampede took 15 lives MOST SHAMELESS MEDIA CHANNEL. @Amockx2022

POST OF THE DAY

HYPOCRISY EXPOSED ANI at 11:00 PM There is no such stampede ANI at 11:30 PM There is stampede

like situation ANI at 12:00 AM The stampede incident happened ANI at 12:30 AM The stampede took 15 lives MOST SHAMELESS MEDIA CHANNEL.

SHORT TAKES

Teacher jumps to death from Atal Setu

Mumbai: A 50-year-old school teacher, who was allegedly being troubled over a loan, jumped to his death from the Atal Setu, the country's longest sea bridge between south Mumbai and Navi Mumbai, an official said Sunday. The man, a resident of Alibag in Maharashtra's Raigad district, died by suicide near Ulwe, close to the Nhava Sheva end of the sea bridge, Friday morning, the official said.

MP: 2 held in kidnapping case

Morena (MP): Police have arrested two persons accused of kidnapping a businessman's six-year-old son in Gwalior after a brief gunfight in Madhya Pradesh's Morena district, an official said Sunday. The duo have told the police that they carried out the abduction for a ransom of ₹1 crore, the official said. Two motorcycle-borne men kidnapped the child after throwing chilli powder into his mother's eyes in the Morar area of neighbouring Gwalior Thursday morning.

Elephant found dead

Medininagar (Jharkhand): An elephant was found dead in Jharkhand's Palamu Tiger Reserve (PTR) Sunday, an official said. The forest department suspects that the jumbo was killed in a fight with another elephant Saturday night in the Garu forest division of PTR. PTR deputy director Kumar Ashish said that blood stains were found at the incident site and a tree near the site was also found uprooted.

Manipur MLAs receive 'fake' calls

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Imphal, Feb 16: The Manipur Police undertook an investigation and legal action as well after fraudulent telephone calls were received by some MLAs attempting to influence and mislead the legislators by exploiting the ongoing political situation in the state, officials said Sunday. A senior police official said that the Manipur Police have received complaints about fraudulent calls from unknown persons attempting to influence and mislead MLAs of the state by exploiting the present political situation in the state. "An FIR has been registered in Imphal police station Saturday and necessary legal action is underway. It is hereby warned that those involved in such fraudulent activities would face strict and strong legal consequences," the official told the media. He said that an intensive investigation is underway in full swing. Manipur Chief Secretary Prashant Kumar Singh last week in an appeal said that the government urges all citizens to remain calm and not fall prey to unverified news, rumours, or misinformation that may cause unnecessary panic or disrupt peace and harmony in the state. In recent times, misleading information has been circulated through various channels, causing confusion and unrest. It has also come to the notice of the government that certain unscrupulous individuals and groups may deliberately attempt to incite unrest, disrupt harmony, and spread fear among the public using false information, inflammatory content, or fabricated narratives, Singh said.

India, Japan to hold joint military exercise

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 16: The sixth edition of Joint Military Exercise Dharma Guardian, between India and Japan, is scheduled at Mount Fuji, Japan from February 25 to March 9, the Indian Army said Sunday. The exercise aims to enhance interoperability between the two forces while undertaking joint urban warfare and counter-terrorism operations under UN mandate, said the Additional Directorate General of Public Information, IHQ of MoD (Army) in a social media post. "Building on the momentum of the Chief of the Army Staff's (COAS) successful visit to Japan from October 14 to 17, 2024, Exercise Dharma Guardian 2025 will further strengthen the bilateral defence cooperation between India and Japan," it said. Earlier February 11, special forces of India and Egypt commenced the 'Cyclone III' exercise at Mahajan Field Firing Ranges in Rajasthan. An official said that the exercise would conclude February 23. "Exercise 'Cyclone' is an annual event conducted alternatively in India and Egypt. The



last edition of the same exercise was conducted in Egypt in January 2024," said the official. The Indian contingent comprising 25 personnel is represented by troops from two Special Forces Battalions. Egypt contingent also comprising 25 personnel will be represented by the Special Forces Group and Task Force of Egyptian Special Forces.

Young advocates must volunteer to assist poor litigants: SC

Expressing appreciation for a young advocate who rendered legal aid to a party-in-person, a bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma said lawyers should render best legal assistance to the litigant without any expectation in return for their professional services

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 16: Young advocates must volunteer to assist the litigants who cannot engage the services of a counsel due to lack of means or awareness, the Supreme Court has said. Expressing appreciation for a young advocate who rendered legal aid to a party-in-person, a bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma said lawyers should render best legal assistance to the litigant without any expectation in return for their professional services. "Young advocates joining the bar must volunteer to assist the litigants who cannot engage the

services of a counsel due to lack of means or awareness whenever an opportunity presents itself. Moreover, they should render the best legal assistance to the litigant without any expectation in return for their professional services." "By these gestures of volunteering to represent indigent litigants, advocates can collectively make a statement to the society at large that the legal profession stands for the right to have access to justice and equality before law, not just in theory but in practice too," the bench said. The top court said such efforts of advocates, though in an individual capacity but acting



towards a common objective of bringing an amicable quietus to the litigation, would send out a message that counsels are not hinderances in the process of parties reaching a mutually agreeable settlement, particularly in labour and matrimonial matters.

"They can also effectively play their parts in helping the parties end their disputes, and add positively to the alternate dispute mechanisms like mediation and conciliation." "These are opportunities to make meaningful contributions to the society, and as a

result the legal profession as a whole would gain the goodwill of the society in general and indigent litigants in particular," the bench said. Referring to the case, the bench said the counsel, advocate Sanchar Anand, appeared 14 times before this court to represent the petitioner in two years. The petitioner, admittedly being a man of limited means, has not been able to pay a penny to the counsel for his services, it said. "The counsel is not even an advocate on the panel of the Supreme Court Legal Services Committee, so as to receive some reasonable remuneration for his time and expenses. Yet, the counsel ded-

icatedly appeared before this court during these two years to not just represent the petitioner, but also to assist this court in reaching a just and proper conclusion to this case," the bench said. The apex court said access to justice before the highest court of the country is not bound by the shackles of lack of financial resources. The bench said persons from all classes, etc., who wish to approach this court with their grievance, must be provided with necessary assistance by the responsible members of the bar, without increasing the cost of litigation for the party or unnecessarily delaying the process.

