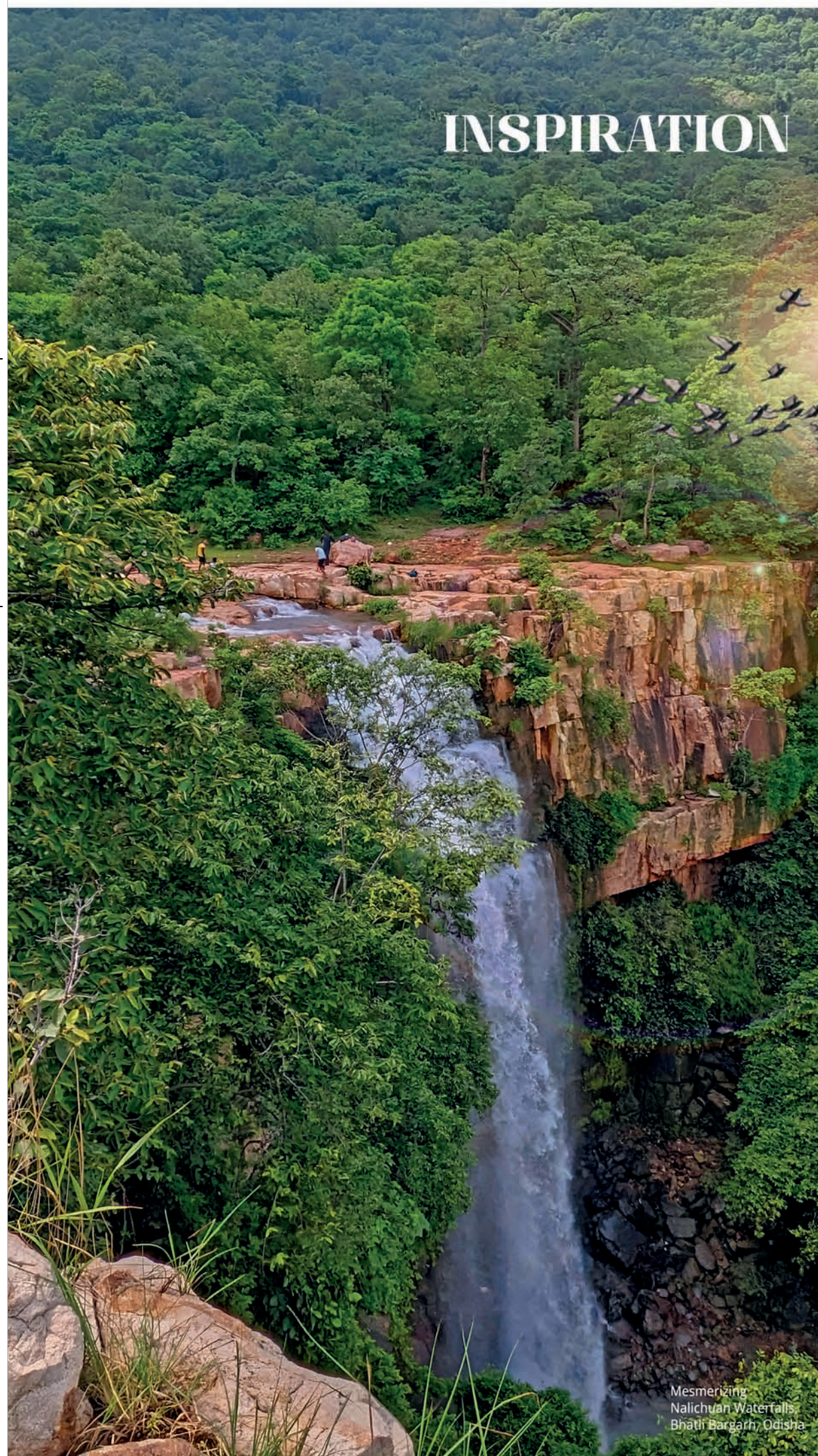




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### MEP Design & Structure

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### Proof Checking of Structure Design

IIT Roorkee

### Project Management Office

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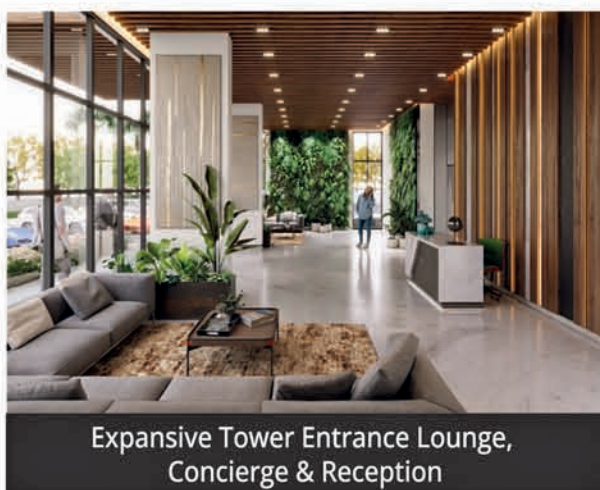
Gardens & Sit-Outs  
 A Serene retreat for senior residents



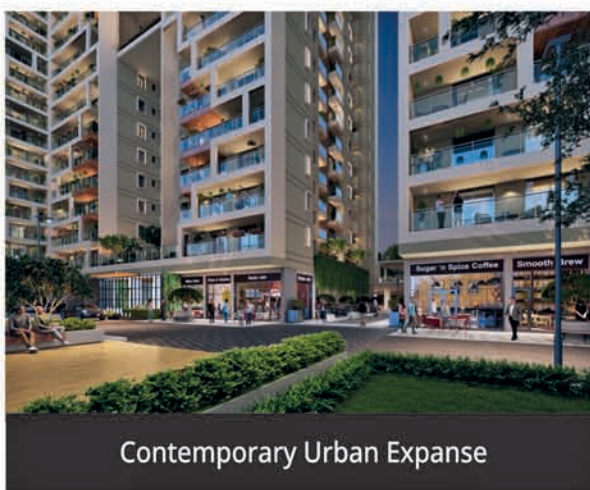
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## Taapsee's observation

Actor Taapsee Pannu believes it is a misconception that the world of movies is a fair place

LEISURE | P8

## Ceasefire honoured

Hamas frees six hostages from Gaza, the last living Israeli captives slated for release under the first phase of a fragile ceasefire

INTERNATIONAL | P7

## UPI's dominance

Amid a surge in digital payments, nearly four out of five payments in the country were conducted on the UPI in FY24

BUSINESS | P9

## Clash of arch rivals

India and Pakistan will lock horns in the ICC Champions Trophy Sunday with Rohit Sharma's men aiming to seal a semifinal spot

SPORTS | BACK PAGE

## Shaktikanta Das appointed Principal Secretary-2 to PM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 22: Former Reserve Bank of India governor Shaktikanta Das was Saturday appointed the second Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

P K Mishra, a retired IAS officer of the Gujarat cadre, is currently serving as the Principal Secretary to the prime minister.

According to an official order, the tenure of Das, a retired IAS officer of the Tamil Nadu cadre, will be 'co-terminus' with the term of the Prime Minister or until further orders, whichever is earlier.

This is the first time that two persons will simultaneously serve as principal secretaries to the Prime Minister. Both Mishra and Das are from Odisha.

"The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved the appointment of Shri Shaktikanta Das, IAS (Retired), as Principal Secretary-2 to Prime Minister with effect from the date he assumes the office. His appointment will be co-terminus with the term of the Prime Minister or until further orders, whichever is earlier," the order said.



Das played a key role when multiple indirect taxes were merged into one GST, which came into effect on July 1, 2017. Post-retirement, he was appointed as a member of the 15th Finance Commission and G20 Sherpa of India.

Das, the second longest serving governor of the RBI, was initially appointed for three years but his tenure was extended for a further period of three years in 2021. He demitted office in December 2024 when Sanjay Malhotra took charge.

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Why aren't we as powerful as the USA? Our leaders lie just as beautifully!



SAY CHEESE: Members of South Korean K-Pop group UNIS pose for photos during the D Awards at Korea University Hwajeong Gymnasium in Seoul, South Korea, Saturday

PTI PHOTO

## EIGHT TRAPPED IN TELANGANA TUNNEL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hyderabad, Feb 22: Eight persons were trapped inside after a section of roof collapsed in the under construction stretch in the tunnel of Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) project, Telangana Irrigation Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy said Saturday. Those trapped inside are two engineers, two machine operators and four workers.

The personnel were trapped 14 kms inside the tunnel. The seepage of water and soil began slowly and increased later prompting the workers to come out. They also heard a loud sound as they felt some 'geological disturbance' outside the tunnel, added Reddy.

Those working ahead of a boring machine inside the tunnel were stuck there, he said. "Our government is doing everything to save the lives. The personnel of state fire service, Disaster Response Force were also ready to join the effort, Reddy said.

# SC clears air on pension benefits

The Supreme Court has cleared the ambiguity over pension benefits for workers in 'work-charged' and 'job-contract' establishments in Odisha. Hearing a batch of petitions filed by the Odisha government, the top court said that under the Odisha Pension Rules, 1992, if the work-charged employees have worked in an establishment for a period of five years or more without interruption and are subsequently appointed to the same or another post in temporary or substantive capacity in a pensionable establishment, the period of service rendered by them shall qualify for pension. However, in case of a job-contract employee, after he/she is brought in to a pensionable establishment, only that much period as job contract service shall be added to regular service rendered by them shall be eligible for pension benefits. The apex court, however, rapped the state government for sitting over the petitions for a long time and directed the government to credit Rs 1.5 lakh to the accounts of each of the affected beneficiaries

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Feb 22: In a significant judgement, the Supreme Court has held that 'work-charged' employees are distinct from 'job-contractors' when it comes to pensionary entitlements under the Odisha Pension Rules, 1992.

The bench comprising Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and Ahsanuddin Amanullah was

hearing Friday the Odisha government's petitions against the Orissa High Court's division bench decision to dismiss their writ appeals as time-barred. In this case, the SC decided the long-standing dispute over pensionary benefits for employees who were initially hired as job contractors and later regularised in the state.

The moot question before the SC was whether only a portion of the service rendered by employees as job contractors should be counted for pensionary benefits after their regularisation or if the entire period of service as job contractors should be included in the calculation of their pension benefits.

The Odisha Administrative Tribunal held in employees' favour holding that the entire service rendered as job contractors would be counted for determining the pensionary benefits post regularisation. The HC upheld the tribunal's decision, prompting the state government to appeal to the division bench.

Following the bench's dismissal of the writ as time-barred filed after inordinate delay, the government moved SC.

Initially, the SC considered dismissing the petitions due to the state's inaction and substantial delays. However, recognising the significant financial implications for the state, the top court chose to address the petitions on their merits.

Explaining the distinction between the work-charged em-

ployee and employees working on a job contract, the Court observed: "There is a clear distinction between the employees who are in work-charged establishment vis-à-vis those who are in job contract establishment. The distinction becomes obvious from a bare perusal of sub-Rules 3 and 6 of Rule 18 of the Odisha Pension Rules, 1992 where it is given that work-charged employees who have worked in the establishment for a period of five years or more without interruption and are subsequently appointed to the same or another post in temporary or substantive capacity in a pensionable establishment, the period of service rendered by him/her in a work-charged establishment shall qualify for pension under the Odisha Pension Rules, 1992. Compare this with the provision relating to job contract establishment for whom it has been specifically stated that in case of a job contract employee, after he/she is brought in pensionable establishment, only that much period as job contract service shall be added to regular service as would make him qualify or eligible for pensionary benefits."

The apex court also reprimanded the state government for its careless and lethargic approach in pursuing litigation related to pensionary benefits for employees. Resultantly, it imposed costs of Rs 1.5 lakh per employee on the state for its inexcusable delays in filing appeals and special leave petitions.

## 'Nepalese students our children'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Feb 22: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Saturday asserted that Nepalese students studying in Odisha are children of the state and they will continue to pursue their education with full respect and dignity, an official release said.

Majhi made the assertion during a telephonic conversation with Nepal's Foreign Minister Dr Arzu Rana Deuba, the statement issued by the CM's office said. He assured Deuba that the state government will ensure strict action against those involved in the alleged suicide of a 20-year-old engineering student and subsequent attack on Nepalese pupils at Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT).

## \$21mn went to Modi: Trump

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New York/New Delhi, Feb 22: US President Donald Trump for the fourth time in recent days claimed that the Biden administration allocated USD 21 million funding to India for "voter turnout", evoking a sharp response from the Congress which urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to "talk to his friend" and strongly refute the allegation.

In Washington, speaking at a 'Governors Working Session,' Trump said: "Twenty-one million dollars going to my friend Prime Minister Modi in India for voter turnout. We're giving 21 million for voter turnout in India. What about us? I want voter turnout too."

A video clipping from the



"The state government is keeping a close watch on the developments (at KIIT) and all steps will be taken to restore hope and confidence of the students. The Nepal foreign minister thanked Majhi and expressed satisfaction over the steps taken by the state government," the release said. Majhi met Nepal Embassy officials Sanjeev Das Sharma and Naveen Raj Adhikari at

his chamber at Lok Seva Bhawan and informed them that 10 people have been arrested in connection with the incident of attack on the Nepalese students.

"Strict action will be taken against all those involved in the incident. All arrangements have been made by the government to restore the academic atmosphere on KIIT campus," Majhi told the embassy officials.

According to the CMO, the Nepalese officials said that the state government has taken prompt steps in this incident.

However, despite the assurance by the state government, the Nepal government insisted that the 'unruly' staffers who allegedly misbehaved with students from the country be removed permanently.

## Gaffe: Jana Gana Mana played ahead of Aus-Eng game in Pak

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Lahore, Feb 22: In a major blunder ahead of the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy match between Australia and England at the Gaddafi Stadium Saturday, the Indian national anthem Jana Gana Mana was played instead of Advance Australia Fair (Australia's national anthem).

As has been the case in ICC events, national anthems of both teams are played before the commencement of every match. After England's national anthem, God Save The King was played, it was supposed to be followed by Advance Australia Fair.

But to everyone's surprise at the venue, the Indian national anthem was played for two seconds, before the mistake was rectified immediately and Advance Australia Fair was played.

It led to a huge backlash from cricket enthusiasts on social media, who couldn't stop themselves from laughing over this big blunder.

Left red-faced over the issue, the Pakistan Cricket Board has blamed the ICC for the fiasco and demanded an explanation. "Since India is not playing in Pakistan, it is hard to understand how their anthem was played by mistake from the playlist," said a PCB official.

A source close to the ICC confirmed that the PCB had sent a letter to the governing body outlining the incident and demanding an explanation.

# New series on history of Marvel superheroes to hit stands

Each book in the series will primarily be narrative nonfiction prose while the text will be brought to life using curated artwork from the comics and reproduced materials from Marvel's digital archives

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 22: Bloomsbury and Marvel have announced a multi-year, multi-volume licensing agreement to develop and publish Marvel Age of Comics, a series of designed books exploring the

deep and rich history of more than 85 years of Marvel Comics.

The new series, which will launch with three books in November, aims to bring together a variety of talented writers, critics, pop culture experts, educators, and intellectuals to explore the expansive catalogue and characters from Marvel Comics history, it informed.

"Like many others, I grew up with Marvel Comics, and it's a thrill to be working with Marvel on a series that will tell the stories behind the comics. Marvel Age of Comics will feature a broad range of writers who are fans, im-



mersed in the world of comics and eager to tell readers what Marvel stories mean to them, as well as to popular culture. "Bloomsbury is passionate about inspiring,

educating, and entertaining readers of all ages and we're excited to bring our expertise and vision to one of the biggest cultural influences of our

time," Haaris Naqvi, director of publishing at Bloomsbury USA, said in a statement.

Marvel counts among its characters well-known superheroes as Spider-Man, Iron Man, Captain America, Thor, Doctor Strange, Hulk, Daredevil, Wolverine, Black Panther, and Captain Marvel, as well as popular superhero teams such as the Avengers, X-Men, Fantastic Four, and Guardians of the Galaxy.

The three new titles, slated to release on November 13, 2025, include Doctor Strange: A Decade of Dark Magic by Stuart Moore, The Mighty Avengers

vs the 1970s by Paul Cornell and Daredevil: Born Again by Chris Ryall. Another title, Spider-Man: Miles Morales by Ytasha L Womack, is expected to be published in May 2026.

While each book in the series will primarily be narrative nonfiction prose, the text will be brought to life using curated artwork from the comics and reproduced materials from Marvel's digital archives creating a program that is perfect for both dedicated and new comic book fans alike. The books will be available in paperback, hardback and audio.



## 'Odisha to formulate new wedding tourism policy'



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 22:** The Odisha government is going to formulate a policy to develop the state as the preferred wedding destination in the country, Deputy Chief Minister Pravatī Parida said here Saturday.

Addressing media persons here, Parida, who is in charge of Tourism department, said Odisha has beautiful beaches, hills, mountains, temples, coastline and many more to offer to tourists.

The government is now making efforts to promote the sites as destination wedding venues, which will boost the economy of the people and the state, she said.

Parida said that the state will very soon roll out Odisha wedding destination policy with the motto 'Wed in Odisha'. Necessary infrastructure

**Tourism department, in collaboration with FICCI, will organise 6th edition of the Odisha Travel Bazaar from February 24 to 27**

including hotels will be created to promote destination weddings, she added.

"Odisha has beautiful temples, which can be converted as destination weddings because many youths, nowadays, are planning to conduct their wedding in temples. So, we will identify the possible temples which can be promoted for destination weddings," the Deputy CM said.

The government plans to roll out a homestay policy and an adventure sports policy, both of which will create numerous entrepreneurial opportunities

in the state, she said.

Parida said that the state Tourism department in collaboration with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) will organise the 6th edition of the Odisha Travel Bazaar from February 24 to 27 here.

The primary objective of Odisha Travel Bazaar 2025 is to aggressively promote Odisha's tourist destinations to domestic and international markets.

Approximately 100 domestic tour operators from over 30 cities across India and more than 30 foreign tour operators from 17 countries, including Australia, the UK, Germany, Belgium, South Africa, Spain, and Singapore, will participate in the event, Parida said.

The event is a flagship buyer-seller meet, which will bring together national and international travel and tour operators, destination management companies (DMCs), and sellers from Odisha, said Tourism secretary Balwant Singh.

The event will focus on B2B meetings between 70 sellers from Odisha's tourism sector and domestic tour operators (DTOs) and foreign tour operators (FTOs), followed by familiarisation trips to key tourism destinations such as Bhitarkanika, Raghurajpur, Puri-Konark, and the diamond triangle, he said.

## CM UNVEILS SUBHADRA SHAKTI MELA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 22:** Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Saturday inaugurated the Subhadra Shakti Mela here to promote the spirit of entrepreneurship among women.

The nine-day event will witness the participation of members of 700 self-help groups (SHGs), showcasing over 200 products prepared by women at 300 stalls.

The products include millet, organic food, spice products, terracotta and bamboo crafts.

"This is not an ordinary fair. It is a success story of mothers, sisters and daughters of Odisha. It is a demonstration of their talent, skill and effort. For our government, women empowerment is not just a slogan, it is a movement," the CM said.

He said efforts are on so that every woman, whether at the individual level or at the group level, can become a skilled entrepreneur and achieve financial independence.

The state government is making efforts to create 25 lakh 'Lakshpati didis' in the next three years, the CM said.

"Our aim is that mothers of SHGs earn at least ₹1 lakh annually," he said. Outlining various initiatives for SHGs, Majhi said that this year, the state government has doubled the amount of Revolving Fund given to about 5.8 lakh SHGs.

The subsidy has been increased from ₹15,000 to ₹30,000



and the Community Investment Fund provided to Gram Panchayat Level Federations (GPLFs) has been increased from ₹35 lakh to ₹60 lakh.

This will strengthen these institutions financially and women will benefit more from it in the future, the CM said.

Majhi said arrangements have been made for interest waiver for SHGs in the state so that they get more help in earning a living and invest more capital to take their business forward.

The state government has made arrangements for interest refund on bank loans of up to ₹10 lakh to SHGs. He also announced that interest refund of ₹300 crore will be made to more

than 3 lakh SHGs in the financial year 2024-25.

Noting that Subhadra Yojana is the biggest scheme in the history of Odisha, Majhi said so far, more than 98 lakh women have received over ₹4,900 crore as assistance.

On the occasion of International Women's Day, March 8, mothers will be given another ₹5,000 in the second instalment.

"Think about it, when one crore mothers take this money as capital and start a business, what impact will it have on the economy," he said.

The CM said that Subhadra Yojana is like the backbone of women empowerment.

"We will also start many

more schemes for our mothers, sisters and daughters on the Subhadra platform. Many new steps will be taken like Kishori (adolescent) Subhadra, Subhadra Sanchay (saving), Subhadra Sakhi (friend), Subhadra Yatri, Subhadra Sangh or Club, Subhadra Call Centre, Subhadra Associates, Subhadra Pandit and Sujogya (able) Subhadra," he said.

An allocation of ₹10,145 crore has been made under Subhadra Yojana in the coming financial year, Majhi said.

Accompanied by Deputy Chief Minister Pravatī Parida, Majhi visited several stalls and appreciated the products.

## ODM launches state's 1st coding & AI programme



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 22:** ODM Educational Group Saturday partnered with UK-based Cyber Square to introduce a coding and artificial intelligence (AI) curriculum across its schools, starting from Grade 1.

This initiative makes ODM the first educational group in Odisha to implement such an advanced programme.

The partnership, formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), aims to replace traditional computer literacy courses with a modern technological curriculum, equipping students with essential future-ready skills.

"We believe early exposure to technology will prepare our students for the future," said ODM Educational Group COO Swoyan Satyendu. "Coding and AI are no longer optional—they are essential for professional

success," he added.

ODM Educational Group chairman Satyabrata Minaketaan emphasised the need for students to become creators and innovators in an increasingly tech-driven society. Echoing this, Cyber Square CEO NP Haris said, "Integrating coding and AI from early years will foster innovation and critical thinking, keeping ODM ahead in the digital age."

Students have also welcomed the initiative. "Coding teaches logic, problem-solving, and creativity. This programme makes learning exciting," said Shruti Acharya, a student at ODM Global School.

Developed after three months of evaluation, the curriculum will be delivered through an interactive platform integrating coding and AI concepts. Cyber Square, a Guinness World Record holder in digital education, will lead its implementation.

## OSWAS in all ULBs by April 1

*Statewide digital transformation to enhance efficiency, streamline administration, and ensure faster service delivery*

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 22:** The Odisha government has directed all urban local bodies (ULBs), including municipal corporations, to adopt the Odisha State Workflow Automation System (OSWAS) by April 1, 2025.

The initiative, led by the Housing and Urban Development department, aims to enhance efficiency, transparency, and accountability in urban governance.

The Odisha Computer Application Centre (OCAC) has been tasked with overseeing the transition and providing necessary technical support.

To ensure seamless implementation, municipalities have been instructed to equip offices with desktops, laptops, scanners, and LAN connections. Each system must have Windows 10, antivirus software, and a stable network connection to support digital operations.



The OSWAS project management unit (PMU) and TCS team will work closely with municipal data management staff to facilitate training and troubleshooting.

Additionally, municipalities must submit proposals for additional bandwidth funding while developing their network infrastructure with existing resources.

OSWAS, already operational in the state secretariat and department headquarters, is now being expanded to field offices. The system eliminates paperwork by enabling digital file movement and enforcing specific time limits for approvals. If officials delay file processing, the system will automatically escalate it to higher authorities, ensuring accountability and faster decision-making.

The implementation of OSWAS across all ULBs is ex-

**The Odisha Computer Application Centre has been tasked with overseeing the transition and providing necessary technical support**

pected to streamline administrative processes, reduce bureaucratic delays, and improve service delivery to citizens.

Municipal bodies have been urged to expedite preparations and fully cooperate with the transition to meet the deadline. This move aligns with Odisha's broader digital governance initiatives, reinforcing the state's commitment to modernising administration and enhancing public service efficiency.

## Odissi legend Mayadhar Raut passes away at 92

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 22:** Renowned Odissi dancer and Padma Shri awardee Mayadhar Raut passed away Saturday at his Delhi home at the age of 92, his son Manoj Raut confirmed. "He had breakfast with family and was in good health. He passed away due to old age," he said. His last rites were performed at Lodhi Road crematorium.

Born July 6, 1933, in Odisha, Raut was instrumental in reviving Odissi in the 1950s with Shastra-based knowledge. Beginning his training at seven in the 'Gotipua' dance tradition, he was the first to present it on stage in 1944. He later worked to codify and redefine Odissi, helping it gain recognition as a classical dance form.

Raut co-founded Kala Vikas Kendra in Cuttack (1952), India's first institute to formally teach Odissi. He also helped establish the Jayantika Association in 1959 to structure Odissi with classical frameworks, introducing 'Sanchari Bhava', 'Mudra Vinyoga', and 'Rasa Theatre'.

From 1970 to 1995, he led the Odissi department at Shri Ram Bharatiya Kala Kendra. His choreography of Gitagovinda



**Raut, the father of Odissi dance, steered the revival of Odissi in 1950s with Shastra-based knowledge**

Ashtapadis inaugurated Delhi's Kamani Auditorium in 1971.

His disciples include Ramani Ranjan Jena, Aloka Panikar, and Geeta Mahalik. Among his many accolades are the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1985) and Tagore Akademi Ratna (2011).

He is survived by daughter and Odissi dancer Madhumita Raut and sons Manoj and Manmath Raut.

## CLASSIFIED LOST

I, Md Hanif Habib Patel, aged about - 35 years S/o - Hazi Abdul Habib Ahamed Patel, resident of village - Kotpad, PS - Kotpad, I lost my registration document sale deed No. - 160/2004, Khata No. - 598, Plot No. - 978 of mouza Damayanti Nagar, Kotpad. All the stated above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief and no part of it is false & I concerned nothing.

## Liver transplantation clinic opens at City AIIMS

**Enhancing liver care with a dedicated facility for patient evaluation, transplantation planning, and comprehensive pre-operative support**

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 22:** A dedicated liver transplantation clinic has been inaugurated at AIIMS Bhubaneswar to provide advanced liver care to patients.

The clinic was inaugurat-



ed by AIIMS Bhubaneswar president Shailesh Kumar, in presence of institute's executive director Ashutosh Biswas and medical superintendent Dillip Kumar Parida, the institute said in a state-

ment Saturday.

This specialised clinic aims to streamline the evaluation, listing, and pre-operative optimisation of patients requiring liver transplantation, ensuring a structured and

multidisciplinary approach to liver care, it said.

"With AIIMS Bhubaneswar gearing up to commence liver transplantation services, the need for a dedicated clinic to evaluate and list patients suffering from End-Stage Liver Disease (ESLD) is paramount. This initiative will bridge the gap in liver care and offer a ray of hope to countless patients," said Biswas.

The clinic will be jointly managed by the departments of Surgical Gastroenterology, Gastroenterology, Pediatric Surgery, and Pediatrics. A dedicated liver transplant coordinator and nutritionist will also be integral to the clinic, ensuring holistic

care for patients and their families, officials said.

The clinic will cater to patients from Odisha and neighbouring states, offering comprehensive assessment and treatment. Its primary functions include evaluating ESLD patients for liver transplantation, listing patients for transplantation, pre-operative optimisation for both donors and recipients, nutritional and transplant counselling, and providing information on the risks and benefits of liver transplantation, they said.

The clinic will operate every Tuesday from 2:30pm to 4:30pm at the Gastro OPD Complex in the medical college.

## Man gets 12-year RI

**Bhubaneswar:** A POCSO court Saturday sentenced a man to 12 years of rigorous imprisonment (RI) following his conviction for sexually assaulting his minor daughter in June 2021. The incident occurred within the limits of Mahila police station, said Special Public Prosecutor (SPP) Rajji Sasmal. The court convicted Bikram Behara under Sections 376 (2) and (3) of IPC, along with 6 of POCSO Act. He is also slapped with a penalty of ₹5,000.

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Max Temp	32.4°	31.2°
Min Temp	21.2°	19.5°
Humidity	86%	90%
Rainfall	6.8 mm	5.2 mm
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# 32 months on, probe begins into paddy procurement scam

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Jajpur, Feb 22:** A scam involving fraudulent vendor receipts in paddy procurement, amounting to over ₹4 crore, was uncovered in 11 Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies (PACS) in Jajpur district.

The State Enforcement Squad first exposed the fraud, regarding which a detailed report was published in a premier vernacular daily June 16, 2022.

Following the squad's findings, the Registrar of Cooperative Societies (RCS) directed the Assistant Registrar of Cooperative Societies (ARCS) in Jajpur May 16, 2022, to submit an action taken report (ATR) within 15 days. However, no action was taken. Consequently, another directive was issued November 18, 2022, for compliance.

Despite the passage of two years and eight months, no concrete step was taken, and the case was seemingly suppressed.

However, Sukinda MLA and state Cooperation Minister Pradeep Bal Samanta directed the RCS for an immediate investigation and appropriate action July 24, 2024.

After another seven months of inaction, the RCS, through Letter No. 2954 dated February 17, 2025, directed the senior ARCS to submit an ATR within three days. However, no ATR has yet been filed owing to the ongoing paddy procurement works, senior ARCS Amulya Kumar Sethy said.

The delay in exchanging official communications and the prolonged inaction have raised suspicion over involvement of high-ranking officials of the department in the scam.

According to the investigation report, the State Enforcement Squad visited Jajpur dis-



trict March 3, 2022, and investigated the paddy procurement activities. The district's supply department had enlisted 151 PACSs and SHGs as handling agents for the 2021-22 paddy procurement process. By March 2, 2022, a total of 13,92,091.25 quintals of paddy had been collected through 10 millers.

During the verification, officials conducted a detailed inquiry into paddy collection, dispatch, and stock records. In Dasarathpur block's Gramanandipur PACS, 28,941.70 quintals of paddy had been procured, while only 25,438.45 quintals had been dispatched to mills, indicating discrepancies.

The case continues to raise concerns over administrative accountability and corruption in the cooperative sector.

A vendor receipt was issued for 3,065.25 quintals of paddy, but the actual amount procured from farmers did not match this quantity. Similar irregularities were found in various locations - 3,753.04 quintals in the Chasakhanda PACS of Dasarathpur block, 1,790.30 quintals in Bairi PACS, 816.16 quintals in Samiya PACS of Barchana block, and 1,183.73 quintals in Am-

athapur PACS of Bari block.

Further investigations revealed additional discrepancies of 1801.05 quintals at Narahari PACS under Binjharpur block, 383.58 quintals in Abhayapur PACS under Dharmasala block, 4,581.28 quintals in Dudhujuri PACS under Sukinda block, 1, 279.50 quintals in Gobardhanpur PACS under Danagadi block, 1,008.24 quintals in Mahavir Shakti SHG and 1,035.21 quintals in Markandapur PACS under Jajpur block.

In total, 20,697.34 quintals of paddy was fraudulently procured using fake vendor receipts. At the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of ₹1,960 per quintal, this amounts to over ₹4 crores.

Based on the investigation, Basanta Kumar Panda, an investigating officer and a civil supplies officer from the state headquarters of the Odisha Civil Supply Corporation in his report recommended the district collector to take legal action against the responsible officials. Additionally, he proposed barring the nine involved millers and officials from mandi (procurement centre) operations. However, these recommendations were ultimately suppressed.

# Kidnapping of mineral firm official: 7 arrested

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Keonjhar/Barbil, Feb 22:** Police cracked the kidnapping case of Nimananda Pradhan, vice president of Grewal Minerals and Metals LLP, in Barbil under Keonjhar district and arrested seven persons including his driver in this connection Saturday.

The abduction was orchestrated by Pradhan's driver in collaboration with the notorious Sadab gang of neighbouring Jharkhand.

The accused were identified as the driver Md Firoz, 50, from Barbil; Sarfaraz Ansari alias Babu, 45, from Tulsi Square area under Doranda police limits in Jharkhand; Budhendranath Singh, 55, from Lake Garden area in Kolkata; Rajendra Paswan, 53, from Barsha village under Chand police limits; Jamil Akhtar, 48, from Hindpuri village under Hindpuri police limits; Farha Parveen, 50, from Kanke village under Kanke police limits, and Sadab Nabahar, 46, from Banglatanda village under Chakradharpur police station in Jharkhand.

Cash worth ₹50.90 lakh, fire-



arms, a diary mentioning the crime blueprints, a bike (JH 01 AQ 0584), eight mobile phones, one Renault Duster car (OD 33K 7223) and various identity cards were seized from the possession of the accused persons.

This was stated here by Rourkela IG Brijesh Kumar Rai in the presence of other senior police officials including Keonjhar SP Nitin Kusalkar at a presser held at the district police headquarters Saturday. The senior police officials confirmed the arrests of seven individuals in connection with the case.

According to the police, Pradhan left his office in a car and

headed to his residence in Barbil February 12. However, he and his driver soon went missing. Concerned over their disappearance, Pradhan's family members lodged a written complaint at Barbil police station February 13 (Thursday), suspecting the driver's involvement.

All the accused were produced in the court Saturday. However, police are yet to reveal whether the abduction was due to business rivalry or for some other reasons.

DIG (Western Range) and Keonjhar SP immediately reached Barbil and launched a six-day investigation. They

operated from the Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC) guest house at Barbil and directly monitored an investigation spanning over six days. Twelve police teams were dispatched which probed the case from various angles while some went to Jharkhand for CCTV footage analysis and other leads.

The case took a critical turn when Firoz returned safely with Pradhan. However, inconsistencies in their accounts raised suspicion. Under interrogation, Firoz admitted to collaborating with the Sk. Sadab gang of Jharkhand in orchestrating the kidnapping for extortion.

Further investigation is underway to determine the source of the seized cash and find any additional links to the crime. The other accused will be arrested soon, the IG said.

Pradhan was threatened at gunpoint and forced to remain silent. After Pradhan's family paid a ransom of ₹60 lakh for his release, police intensified their investigation, leading to the arrests of several suspects.

# 6 awarded life term for murder

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bissamcuttack, Feb 22:** A district court here Saturday sentenced six individuals to life imprisonment for burning a man alive on suspicion of witchcraft. Additional District Judge (ADJ) Siddharth Sahu delivered the verdict against Singana Kalaka, Rabi Kalaka, Ghana Kumurika, Dhania Taika, Sukuru Kalaka, and Nathuram Kalaka.

Additionally, three minors involved in the incident have been sent to a juvenile correctional facility. Another accused reportedly passed away during the trial period.

According to case records, the incident took place at Kanagaon village under Sahada panchayat of Bissamcuttack police station limits in Rayagada district July 12, 2015. Jagabandhu Kalaka, a tribal youth, was returning home after grazing cattle when the accused, suspecting him of practising witchcraft, attacked and burned him alive.

Following the incident, a case was registered at Bissamcuttack police station, leading to the arrest of all the accused. Public Prosecutor Prashant Kumar Rath represented the case in court.

# 8 held for fishing inside Gahirmatha

**Kendrapara:** The Forest personnel of Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary arrested eight fishermen in the wee hours of Saturday on the charges of catching fish inside the 'No Fishing Zone' of the sanctuary. Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF), in-charge of Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary, Manas Kumar Das, said the Forest personnel intercepted a trawler and arrested the fishermen. They seized three VHF sets, one GPS set, one fish finder, 10 trawling nets along with five quintals of mixed marine fish catch from the arrested fishermen. All the arrested fishermen were booked under Sections 27, 29, 31 of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and Section 51 of the said Act.

# FMU holds nat'l seminar on Social Justice

**Balasore:** Fakir Mohan University here hosted a national seminar on "Re-defining Social Justice: A Constitutional Mandate." The seminar's inaugural session was chaired by Vice Chancellor Santosh Kumar Tripathy and featured esteemed guests, including Orissa High Court Justice BP Routray as the chief guest, Bhaskar Behera, chairman of the PG Council at FMU, as the seminar's patron, and Dr Pinki Sharma of the University of Delhi's Faculty of Law as the keynote speaker.

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Branch/Cadre	Vacancies*	Gender
Executive Branch {GS (X)/Hydro Cadre}	60 (including 08 Hydro)	Men and Women (maximum of 10 vacancies in GS (X) and 02 vacancy in Hydro for women)
Pilot	26	Men and Women (maximum of 05 vacancies for women)
Naval Air Operations Officer (Observers)	22	Men and Women (maximum of 05 vacancies for women)
Air Traffic Controller(ATC)	18	Men and Women
Logistics	28	Men and Women (maximum of 06 vacancies for women)
Education	15	Men and Women
Engineering Branch (General Service)	38	Men and Women (maximum of 08 vacancies for women)
Electrical Branch (General Service)	45	Men and Women (maximum of 09 vacancies for women)
Naval Constructor	18	Men and Women
<b>Total</b>	<b>270</b>	

\* These vacancies are tentative and may be changed depending on availability of training slots.

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FOCUS POLITICS

# LAST-CHANCE ELECTION



**There is no question that the AfD is capitalising on widespread anger, with its approval rising above 20% – a record for a party that German authorities suspect of extremism**

(AfD). Whether this strategy has worked or merely legitimised far-right talking points is a matter of debate. But there is no question that the AfD is capitalising on widespread anger, with its approval rising above 20% – a record for a party that German authorities suspect of extremism. Meanwhile, Chancellor Olaf Scholz's party, the SPD, has been polling at just 16%, which would represent its worst election result in more than a century. The SPD is only narrowly ahead of the Greens, who poll around 14%. Owing to Germany's 5% parliamentary threshold, the fate of several smaller parties hangs in the balance. The far-left Die Linke, the pro-business FDP, and the new left-wing populist Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW) are all polling close to this critical level. Depending on their performance – including their ability to secure direct mandates from select constituencies – the next German parliament could include as few as four or as many as seven parties. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this level of unpredictability has invited disconcerting comparisons to the notoriously unstable interwar Weimar Republic.

In terms of political mandates, the next parliament could either represent a historically low proportion of voters, or it could be deeply fragmented, featuring an unprecedented number of potential coalition partners. With all the major parties continuing to rule out cooperation with the AfD, the most likely scenario is either a CDU-led coalition with the SPD or a CDU-led coalition with the SPD and the Greens. But a minority CDU government is also possible as a last resort, though this would represent a dramatic shift away from political normalcy. German pundits interpret each of these options as a prudent continuation of the "fire-wall" against the anti-democratic far right. But with voter discontent so widespread, fragmentation and polarisation carry their own risks. Lacking acceptable partners on the right, Merz, if he wins, will have to cobble together a coalition across deep ideological divides, somehow translating a public mandate for conservative policies into a coherent agenda with partners from the left. Certainly, the chancellor is the one who determines policy. But junior coalition partners in Germany have a

track record of influencing coalition agreements far beyond what their numerical strength would suggest. The Greens' role in the last government was a case in point. The next government therefore may struggle to be the decisive agent of change that many Germans hope for. While any coalition is likely to agree on reforming Germany's restrictive "debt brake" to allow for much-needed investments, reaching a sustainable consensus on other key issues – from energy and immigration to social security and gender policies – will be far more challenging. Yet the stakes could not be higher. In the past year, the AfD secured an election victory in one of Germany's 16 states, finished second in two others, and made strong gains in the European elections. In eastern Germany, the party has firmly established itself as the strongest political force. With US Vice President JD Vance and Elon Musk openly supporting the party, AfD's leaders justifiably feel like they have the wind at their back. Germany's mainstream parties have consistently failed to convince voters to reject the far right, and this election could be their last chance to turn the tide. Democratic forces must find a way to address the country's economic stagnation, unresolved immigration challenges, and growing voter disaffection. Voters will be won back only with convincing solutions, not with rhetoric or scare tactics. If Germany's "establishment" parties fail to deliver this time, they may not be the establishment for much longer.

*The writer, the author, most recently, of Vom Ende der Freiheit (Dietz, 2021), serves on the Basic Values Commission of Germany's Social Democratic Party.*  
©PROJECT SYNDICATE



**IF GERMANY'S "ESTABLISHMENT" PARTIES FAIL TO DELIVER THIS TIME, THEY MAY NOT BE THE ESTABLISHMENT FOR MUCH LONGER**

After years of economic stagnation, high levels of irregular immigration, and a series of violent attacks by illegal immigrants, opinion polls reflect growing and widespread discontent. The public's top concerns have shifted from issues such as climate change to the economy, security, and immigration. Voters clearly want comprehensive change; but will they get it? Voter enthusiasm has been notably absent. Never before have the leading candidates been so unpopular. And the discontent is not confined to politicians' popularity ratings. Studies also show growing disillusionment with political institutions across the board. This may partly explain why so many voters remain undecided – with as many as one-third having not made up their minds just a few days before the election. Given such widespread uncertainty, a surprise outcome is a distinct possibility. The frontrunner and favourite for the chancellorship, with 30% approval, is Friedrich Merz of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). Since former Chancellor Angela Merkel's departure from politics, Merz has steered Germany's main center-right party further rightward in an effort to win back voters who had defected to the far-right Alternative for Germany

SPECTRUM CONSERVATION

## River hunter on brink of extinction



**NESTING AREAS OF INDIAN SKIMMERS ARE UNDER THREAT FROM NATURAL PREDATORS AS WELL AS ANTHROPOGENIC ACTIVITIES**

The Indian skimmer chosen as the mascot for the International Bird Festival conducted at Mahakumbh 2025 in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh highlights the importance of its conservation and protection. Indian skimmers are habitat specialists, and they serve as an indicator of river health which plays a crucial role in maintaining the ecological balance.

This rare riverine bird has got its name from its unique style of feeding, flying low over the water surface and 'skimming' to catch fish. It is recognisable by black and white plumage with a bright orange beak and typical "kyap kyap" call. Indian skimmer is known to be crepuscular and nocturnal. In Odisha, local people call it "pani chiri" meaning which cuts or tears water.

These birds are found in flocks on low-land rivers, lakes, marshes, coasts, and estuaries. In India, nesting colonies exist on rivers Chambal, Mahanadi, Ganga, Son, and Beas. They usually

breed in the summer (March to June) when the water level in rivers goes down and sandbars emerge. The nests are unique which resemble as scoops in sand, with eggs laid directly on the sand during April. They breed in colonies of up to 40 pairs with other birds like river terns. The parental care is beautifully done by both the parents. While the female guards the eggs, the males transport water in their wings to keep them moist. The eggs of Indian skimmer hatch in 22 days and they begin to fly in about a month and the birds depart the colony by August. It is found that the nesting success is very low and only 30 per cent of chicks survive due to very high rates of egg and chick mortality. Nesting areas of Indian skimmers are under threat from natural predators as well as anthropogenic activities. The rampant movement of fishing boats and sand mining have long-term effects on nesting. When the water level is too low, the sandbars get connected with riverbanks

which results in nest predation by dogs and trampling by grazing cattle. In Odisha, there are reports of egg collection for consumption. The decreasing population of the Indian skimmer has led it to being classed as Endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature in 2020 and it is therefore considered to be facing very high risk of extinction. Once widely distributed across Southeast Asia, the bird is now confined only to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar. It is considered extinct in China, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Indian skimmer is now completely restricted to India as a breeding bird. In Odisha, the Indian skimmers are known to breed on the sandbars of Mahanadi river belt like Satkosia, Mundali and Kakhadi. According to the latest estimates of BirdLife International, the total number of Indian skimmers left in the world is 2,500-3,000. Sufficient data is not available to show the population trends for this species.

The fourth Indian skimmer count, held in January 2024 by the Bombay Natural History Society and Bird Count India estimated a total count of 1,812 Indian skimmers from 41 locations in India and Bangladesh. In Odisha, a total count of 356 Indian skimmers has been reported in this estimate. The Indian skimmer's population is suffering a continuing decline of more than 20 per cent over the past 11 years which is just two generations of this bird. If this species is not protected now, it is estimated that 46 per cent of the remaining Indian skimmers could be lost in 17 years which is the next three generations of the bird. To protect this endangered bird from extinction there is an urgent need of conservation strategies with community involvement. Through collaborative efforts, we can save this exceptional bird which is on the verge of extinction.

*The writer is a Deputy Conservator of Forests and Deputy Director of Inquiry, Lokayukta Odisha.*



## Forgotten Census

The Union government says that the "Indian Census is the largest single source of various statistical information on various characteristics of the people of India. With a history of more than 130 years, this reliable, time-tested exercise is bringing in a real insight into the data every 10 years, beginning in the year 1872 when the first census was conducted non-synchronously in different parts of India." And that the "Census has been an attractive source of data for scholars and researchers in demography, economics, anthropology, sociology, statistics and many other disciplines."

The last census India conducted was in 2011, and after this we do not have good data on many things and not just the strength of our population. The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living. The United Nations assesses the health dimension by life expectancy at birth, the education dimension is measured by mean of years of schooling and expected years of schooling for children of school entering age. The standard of living dimension is measured by national income per person per year. The UN says HDI can be used to question national policy choices, asking how two countries with the same level of GNI per capita can end up with different human development outcomes. These contrasts, the UN says, can stimulate debate about government policy priorities.

India's 0.644 score on the HDI puts it below Iraq (0.673), Botswana (0.708) and Bangladesh (0.670) and significantly lower than the world average of 0.739. But Kerala's score of 0.775 clubs it with Mexico (0.781), Cuba (0.764) and China (0.788) while the 30 crore people of Uttar Pradesh (0.592) and Bihar (0.551) can be grouped with Zimbabwe (0.550) and Pakistan (0.540).

If they were in separate places Tamil Nadu (0.738) would be ranked more than 50 places above Bihar. The story is similar in the rest of our region. Within Pakistan also there exist considerable differences between provinces. An internal Pakistani survey not comparable to the global one ranked Punjab's HDI at 0.732, while Balochistan was 0.421 and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was at only 0.216.

In July 2023, India's Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation posted state-wise data on per person income. Telangana, at 3.08 lakh/year or ₹25,000/month was double that of Madhya Pradesh at ₹1.4 lakh, four times that of UP (₹70,000 in 2022) and six times that of Bihar in (₹49,000 in 2022). Pakistan's per capita was ₹1.2 lakh (also in INR) and Bangladesh's was 2.1 lakh. If there is something essential about religion or national culture, it does not appear to show in this data, else UP and Bihar would not be poorer than Pakistan. Punjabis are more than half of Pakistani's population. In material terms they are closer to Indian Punjab (per capita income of ₹1.7 lakh) than their compatriots.

In his book "South vs North," Nilakantan RS records the differences in human development of Indians purely based on the circumstance of where one is born. We have not had a census in a decade and a half, but based on available data, he reports that someone born in Madhya Pradesh can expect to live eight years fewer than someone born in Uttarakhand, at 64 years versus 72. The number of deaths per 1000 births is six times higher in Uttar Pradesh than it is in Kerala. The rate of women dying in childbirth is four times higher in Assam than in Maharashtra. The number of children who are stunted (low height for age) is a quarter of all children in Punjab but half of all children in Bihar. An Anganwadi (a rural creche and child care centre) in Haryana is 10 times more likely to be in a pucca building than one in West Bengal. Karnataka has 10 times the number of hospital beds per lakh people than Bihar and Maharashtra has eight times the number of doctors per lakh people than Odisha. Himachalis are twice as likely to be enrolled in higher education than Gujaratis and Punjabis are three times more likely to be educated in English than Gujaratis (I have personal experience of the situation this has created).

Nilakantan points out that in MP, agriculture's share of economic output is five times that of Tamil Nadu's while in Gujarat manufacturing's share of GDP is three times that of Andhra Pradesh's. The participation of women in the labour force is 12 times higher in Himachal Pradesh than in Bihar and three times higher in Chhattisgarh than in UP.

The Indian state itself manifests differently for citizens depending on where one is. The Manipuri complainant to police is six times less likely to have her complaint resulting in a chargesheet than someone in Andhra Pradesh. The rate of chargesheeting, marking the beginning of prosecution, is 92 per cent in AP but only 14 per cent in Manipur and this is from the government's data for 2021, before the current troubles began. The rate of crimes registered in Kerala is 12 times higher per lakh population than in Karnataka (1075 versus 71). Is it the case that there are that many times more crimes in one neighbouring state over another? What is more likely is that the registering of cases is done with more willingness in Kerala than in other states. Kerala records the lowest rate of murders in India, at 0.9 incidents per lakh population, half of Andhra Pradesh (1.8) and lower than Gujarat (1.4), Odisha (3.0) and Jharkhand (4.0).

It will be interesting to see what shifts have been recorded in the last decade and a half – from the effects of demonetisation and COVID's second wave to the drop in fertility and increase in farm workers – but we will only know this if and when the census is conducted.

### WISDOM CORNER

- By all means let's be open-minded, but not so open-minded that our brains drop out. RICHARD DAWKINS
- The ego is nothing other than the focus of conscious attention. ALAN WATTS
- Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal. HENRY FORD

### 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



### Restore water quality

Sir, The Kumbh Mela is one of the largest religious gatherings in the world, drawing millions of pilgrims, saints, and tourists. While the festival is deeply rooted in spiritual traditions, it also brings significant environmental challenges, particularly in maintaining the sanctity and cleanliness of the river. The recent findings by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) underscore the urgent need for improved sewage treatment infrastructure and better waste management strategies to prevent contaminations in future. The Ganga's smaller streams in Prayagraj have reportedly not been fully and effectively cleaned despite the authorities knowing well that millions would bathe in the holy river during the month-long festival. Exposure to faecal coliform-contaminated water poses severe health risks, including gastrointestinal diseases, skin infections, and other waterborne illnesses. With the National Green Tribunal pushing for greater accountability, the coming weeks will be crucial in determining the course of action that the state and Central authorities will take to restore the Ganga's water quality and protect the health of millions who revere and rely on its sacred waters.  
Ranganathan Sivakumar, CHENNAI

### Gender discrimination

Sir, The suicide of a few mothers of only daughters in Haryana lays bare the deep-rooted gender bias despite the government's attempts to eradicate the social evil. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao programme was launched to deal with gender discrimination. Unable to stand the weight of expectations for a male child, mothers of only daughters yield to societal pressure. Despite the government's Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, the disproportionate sex ratio is giving a serious cause for concern. Despite several sensitising programmes, people's ingrained attitude towards girl children has never changed. The sufferings are not limited to only mothers. Newborn girls are neglected and abandoned, and their value is judged by outdated standards. Unless and until society changes, no government programme to stop gender discrimination will be successful. There is an urgent need for a radical social transformation. All government programmes to eradicate gender bias must reach all sections of society. Unless girls are valued, no society will progress.  
Venu GS, KOLLAM





**In present circumstances, the Leftists have to fight both the TMC and the BJP**  
PRAKASH KARAT | CPI(M) LEADER

## EU LEADERSHIP'S VISIT WILL ENHANCE TIES: MEA

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's visit to India next week will pave the way for further strengthening growing convergence in key areas, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said Saturday



### of the day quote

Nobody has done as much as Lalu ji for the down-trodden  
TEJASHWI YADAV | RID LEADER

Your blessings brought the Mahayuti to power, leading to the formation of the BJP-Shiv Sena-NCP government. By giving a historic mandate, the people of Maharashtra also delivered a clear verdict on which Shiv Sena and which NCP are genuine  
AMIT SHAH | UNION HOME MINISTER

The Global Investors Summit is going to create a new record and in future, these dates will prove to be historic in terms of investment for the state  
MOHAN YADAV | MP CM

# Army plans to boost air defence with new guns, radars

**New Delhi, Feb 22:** With drones and other disruptive technologies impacting the dynamics of warfare as demonstrated in recent conflicts, the Army Air Defence has drawn a roadmap to boost its capabilities through replacement of two of its old platforms, induction of new fragmentation ammunition for existing air defence guns, and deployment of more potent radars.

Besides, the army is also hoping to place a contract for the indigenously developed Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile (QR-SAM) system within 4-5 months, a top official said Friday. The Corps of Army Air Defence holds a large variety of missile systems and guns in its inventory such as the L70, Zu-23mm, Schilka, Tanguska and Osa-AK missile system. "The fashion of guns is back. The army sustained them for good reason and these guns can be effective-



ly used with fragmentation ammunition." Director General of Army Air Defence (AAD), Lt Gen Sumer Ivan D'Cunha, said. Asserting the need for modernisation with an emphasis on 'Aatmanirbhar

Bharat', Lt Gen D'Cunha also cautioned that the Indian industry must offer "reduced timelines" when it comes to delivery. The AAD, initially part of the Territorial Army, was later separated from the Artillery in 1994 as a separate corps that looks after destruction of air threat "before it manifests", officials said. The army is planning to replace the L70 and ZU-23mm with "successor" platforms. However, as of now, it is not looking to

import, as far as guns are concerned, they said. The first trials of the indigenous successor platform to replace the old L70 guns is likely to be carried out in July, the officials said, adding that an RFP (request for proposal) is already out for the procurement of 220 such guns. The L70 guns were originally manufactured by Swedish defence firm Bofors AB in 1950s, and India started inducting over 1,000 of them in the 1960s. On QR-SAM, the AAD DG

said, "We are hoping to place a contract within 4-5 months. And once it is done, the First of Prototype Model (FoPM) will be there over a period of several months." In September 2022, the defence ministry in a statement said that the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Indian Army had successfully completed six flight-tests of the QR-SAM system from the Integrated Test Range (ITR) in Chandipur off the Odisha coast.

# 'Centre must accept problem of inflation'

*Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh cited a media report, which said the average inflation rate has come down due to the fall in the prices of vegetables, but the prices of some food items are constantly increasing, especially those of pulses*



## KC Venugopal slams Centre over electoral integrity concerns

The Congress Saturday asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to heed to his friend, US President Donald Trump, for using paper ballots and not machines for voting to address the concerns of the entire country on the integrity of India's electoral process. Congress general secretary, organisation, K C Venugopal wondered why the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is feigning ignorance to what the entire world is saying and why is its government running away from transparency. "Will PM Modi pay heed to his best friend Donald Trump's message on ballot papers and same day voting, and address the concerns of the whole nation about the integrity of our electoral process?" Venugopal asked in a post on X.

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, Feb 22:** Slamming the Centre over the rising prices of certain food items, the Congress on Saturday said if the Narendra Modi government cares even a little about people, it should first accept the problem of inflation and take necessary steps to provide relief to them. Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh cited a media report, which said the average inflation rate has come down due to the fall in the prices of vegeta-

bles, but the prices of some food items are constantly increasing, especially those of pulses. "The people of the country are troubled by the inflation under the Modi government. It is becoming difficult for the poor to even arrange two meals a day. Inflation is skyrocketing in everything," Ramesh said in a post in Hindi on X. "No matter how much the Modi government denies the talk of inflation and unemployment, its own reports are bringing out the truth from time to time," he said. Now, the

monthly report of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has expressed the fear of the "thali" becoming expensive, the Congress leader said. "The prices of pulses are increasing continuously. The price of tur eaten in common households has reached ₹141 per kg. E-commerce companies are selling tur dal up to ₹200 per kg. Compared to 2023, the price of tomatoes

has also increased significantly in the last two years. The price of tomatoes sold at the rate of ₹20 per kg in 2023 has increased by three to four times," he said. According to the RBI report, the prices of edible oils have been increasing continuously since October last year, Ramesh said. "There is also an increase in the prices of grains. Wheat, rice and coarse grains are also not

spared from the blow of inflation," he added. "If the Modi government cares even a little about the public, then it should first accept the problem of inflation and take necessary steps to provide relief to people," Ramesh said. The Congress has been attacking the government over its handling of the economy and raising concerns over increasing unemployment and price rise.



A man rides a bullock cart on a foggy day, in Nadia PTTI PHOTO

### SHORT TAKES

#### TN CM launches APPA App

**Cuddalore (Tamil Nadu):** Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin Saturday launched the APPA App designed to bridge the communication gap between parents, teachers, and administration, thereby improving the overall educational experience. The Anaithu Palli Parent Teachers Association (APPA) App was developed by the Tamil Nadu Parent-Teacher Association. The platform, launched in the presence of School Education Minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi, facilitates the sharing of information and updates on government news related to the school education department including access to Government Orders pertaining to the department.

#### Student jumps from school

**Hyderabad:** A Class VIII student of a private school died by suicide Saturday by jumping from the school building after being "reprimanded" and "slapped" by a teacher, police said.

# Punjab minister held charge of non-existent dept for 21 months

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Chandigarh, Feb 22:** The AAP government in Punjab came under attack from the opposition parties Saturday after it came to light that Cabinet Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal had been for 21 months holding charge of the administrative reforms department that did not exist. A government notification issued Friday said the administrative reforms department, earlier allocated to Dhaliwal, is not in existence now. Dhaliwal now is in charge of the NRI Affairs department only. Seeking to downplay the



issue, Dhaliwal said his aim is to serve Punjab and not to be in charge of any department. "We are into saving Punjab and putting the state back on track. Departments have no meaning for me. It is up to the chief minister to get us done whatever work he wants," he told reporters in Jalandhar. Sources said no staffer was given to the minister for the administrative re-

forms department and no meeting related to it was held. The government notification read, "In partial modification of Punjab Government Notification No. 21/1/2022-2 Cabinet/2230 dated 23.09.24, regarding allocation of portfolios among ministers, the Department of Administrative Reforms earlier allocated to Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal, Cabinet Minister, is not in existence as on date." Therefore, on the advice of the chief minister, the governor is pleased to make the amendment effective from February 2, 2025, it said.

## KOLKATA 'MURDERS' Husbands of two deceased women likely to be held

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kolkata, Feb 22:** The husbands of the two women whose bodies along with that of a girl were found in their Kolkata residence are likely to be arrested, a senior officer said. One of the two, Pranay Dey, was shifted to a state-run hospital Saturday evening from a private health-care facility where they had been undergoing treatment since the car they were travelling in rammed into a Metro railway pillar, an official said. The decision to apprehend the husbands, who are siblings, was taken after post-mortem reports suggested that the two women and the girl were murdered, dismissing speculations that the three died by suicide.

# Shivraj meets farmer leaders



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Chandigarh, Feb 22:** Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan Saturday said the meeting with farmer leaders was held in a cordial atmosphere and the next round of talks will take place in Chandigarh March 19. A fresh round of talks between the protesting farmers and a central team led by Chouhan to discuss the farmers' various demands, including a legal guarantee for MSP on crops, was held here on Saturday evening. Union ministers Pralhad Joshi and Piyush Goyal also attended the meeting on Centre's behalf. Speaking to the media after the meeting, Chouhan said the discussions with the farmers took place in a cordial atmosphere.

The central team placed the farmers' welfare programme, which is the priority of the Narendra Modi government, before the farmers during the meeting, Chouhan said. "We heard the views of farmer leaders Jagjit Singh Dallewal and Sarwan Singh Pandher. A very good discussion took place. The discussions would continue and the next meeting will be held in Chandigarh on March 19," the minister said after the meeting that lasted for nearly three hours. However, Chouhan did not take any questions from the media. Chouhan along with Joshi earlier reached the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Public Administration - the meeting venue - at 6:05 pm to meet the 28-member farmers' delegation.

## MANIPUR CRISIS

# More weapons surrendered after Guv's call to disarm

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Imphal, Feb 22:** In the wake of Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla's appeal, the return of looted arms and ammunition continued in the state with 16 sophisticated weapons and a large cache of ammunition being returned at Tuibong village in the state's tribal-dominated Churachandpur district Saturday, officials said. A defence spokesman said that after the Governor's appeal, the Assam Rifles, along with the Manipur Police, the CRPF, state intelligence agencies, and civil administration, engaged with local Kuki-Zo community leaders and addressed their security concerns, provided assurances of safety, and emphasised the positive impact of the region's de-weaponization.



The spokesman said that they voluntarily surrendered looted and illegal weapons and ammunition including an M-16 rifle, a 7.62 mm SLR, two AK series rifles, three INSAS rifles, two M-79 40mm Under Barrel Grenade Launcher (UBGL), a 9mm Carbine Machine Gun, a 51 mm mortar, three .303 rifles, and two single-barrel rifles. Among the ammunition returned were 64 gelatine sticks, 10 rounds of 60 mm pumpi (improvised mortar) ammunition, 17 rounds of AK ammunition, 40 rounds of 5.56 mm rifle ammunition, and three rounds of 9 mm ammunition. Top Assam Rifles, CRPF, civil administration, police and state intelligence agencies officials were present in the arms return ceremony in Churachandpur district. The defence spokesman said that allround efforts

were meticulously undertaken by joint Central and state forces and they would motivate other groups to return arms and ammunition as well to further take forward the peace process. The joint forces would inspire youths to surrender arms and work towards a better future for the overall development of the region thereby enabling the peace process to bring a halt to the ongoing conflict, he said. Governor Bhalla Thursday appealed to members of all communities to surrender arms looted from police armouries as well as illegally held arms within seven days. He said if the weapons were not surrendered, strict action would follow for possession of arms.

## INDIAN OIL CORPORATION LIMITED

(Marketing Division)

Advertisement No IOCL/MKTG/HO/REC/2025

All India Open Recruitment of Experienced Personnel in Non-Executive category & Special Recruitment Drive [SRD] for Persons with Benchmark Disabilities [PwBD] in Non-Executive category

Extension of date for submission of Application

Attention is invited to the advertisement issued in this newspaper on 3rd February, 2025 through which applications (in online mode) from eligible candidates were invited for the following posts:-

A) For All India Open Recruitment of Experienced Personnel in Non-Executive category:

Post Code	Grade	Name of Post	Total no. of Positions
101 to 123	Gd.-I	Junior Operator	215

B) Special Recruitment Drive [SRD] only for Persons with Benchmark Disabilities [PwBD] in Non-Executive category:

SRD - Posts Reserved only for PwBD			
Post Code	Grade	Name of Post	Total no. of Positions
201 to 204	Gd.-I	Junior Attendant	23
205 to 208	Gd.-III	Junior Business Assistant	08

The last date for submission for online application for the above posts has been extended till 23.55 hours of 28th February 2025.

To refer to the detailed advertisement and to apply online, visit website www.iocl.com, then go to 'IndianOil For You' > click on 'IndianOil For Careers' > 'Latest Job Opening' > 'Job Opening' > 'Recruitment of Non-Executive Personnel in Marketing Division-2025'.

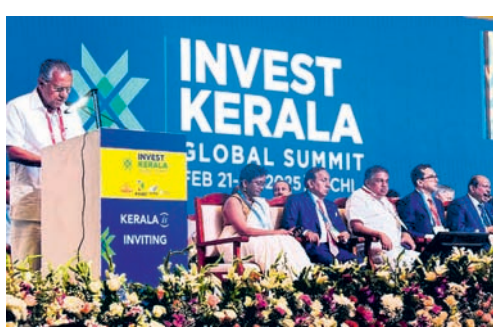




India is not just experimenting with AI. We are not just talking about AI or researching it. We are actually implementing it at scale and across various sectors

KERALA GETS EOIS FOR INVESTMENTS

Kerala received Expressions of Interest (Eois) for investments worth ₹1.53 lakh crore at the two-day investor summit that ended Saturday.



of the day quote

Permitting students to discontinue studies is akin to asking them not to study

Opposition parties conspired to ruin the entire system by distorting the process. The BC fraternity should take this seriously

The financial position of the government of Karnataka is in a very precarious state. However, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah tries to evade the pertinent questions....He has borrowed more than the budget allocation.

DIGITAL CONTENT: GOVT EXAMINING NEED FOR NEW LAW

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 22: The Information and Broadcasting Ministry is examining the existing statutory provisions and the need for a new legal framework to regulate "harmful" content on digital platforms...



The ministry issued an advisory to over-the-top (OTT) platforms and self-regulatory bodies, asking them to strictly adhere to the Code of Ethics prescribed under the IT Rules-2021 while publishing content

It also asked the self-regulatory bodies of OTT platforms to take appropriate proactive action in case of violation of the Code of Ethics by the platforms

In its reply to a parliamentary panel's communication over the issue, the ministry said there is a growing concern in the society that the constitutional right of "freedom of expression is being misused to showcase obscene and violent content on digital platforms".

It told the Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology headed by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey that while certain provisions exist under the current laws, there is a growing demand for a stricter and effective legal framework to regulate such harmful content.

Criminal cases have been registered against him, and his apology has done little to damp down the controversy. While the Supreme Court granted him protection from arrest, it also made very critical observations at his comments, deeming them vulgar and a product of "dirty mind" which has "shamed" the society.

Hyderabad, Feb 22: Rescue efforts were on to save eight persons trapped in an under-construction tunnel after a portion of its roof collapsed in Telangana's Nagarkurnool district Saturday.

At least two workers were injured and eight others were trapped when a portion of the tunnel being dug as part of the Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) collapsed near

Balrampur (UP): Three students were killed after they were hit by a speeding truck while they were on their way to check the location of their examination centre Saturday, police said.

Terrorist hideout busted in Reasi

Jammu: A terrorist hideout was busted in a remote area in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district Saturday, leading to the seizure of arms and ammunition, officials said.

Shivraj slams Air India over broken seat

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhopal/Mumbai, Feb 22: Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan Saturday slammed Tata Group-owned Air India (AI) for allotting him a "broken and sunk" seat, prompting his ministerial colleague K Rammoan Naidu to instruct the airline to take "necessary action".



minister wrote on X. When he confronted the crew over the allotment of a defective seat, he was told that the management had been apprised about the condition of the seat, which shouldn't be sold to passengers. The Union Minister claimed several seats on the flight were in a similar condition.

Chouhan said he assumed Air India's service would have improved after being taken over by the Tata management, but he was mistaken. Chouhan further asked whether Air India management would take steps to ensure that no passenger faces such discomfort in the future, "or will it continue to exploit passengers' urgency to reach their destination?"

Chouhan said he assumed Air India's service would have improved after being taken over by the Tata management, but he was mistaken. Chouhan further asked whether Air India management would take steps to ensure that no passenger faces such discomfort in the future, "or will it continue to exploit passengers' urgency to reach their destination?"

Separately, Air India apologised for the incident and ordered a "thorough probe" while the DGCA sought a report from the airline in the matter

after due deliberations. The committee had asked the ministry on February 13 regarding the amendments needed in the existing laws to clamp down on controversial content in the wake of the emergence of new technology and media platforms.

Unlike the conventional print and electronic content, which are covered under specific laws, new media services powered by internet such as OTT platforms or YouTube have no specific regulatory legal framework, triggering demands for amending the laws.

While there is a view in some quarters that authorities may use new provisions to censor content for extraneous reasons, frequent outrage triggered by episodes like the one involving Allahbadia have given rise to the demand for strengthening the legal framework through amendments in the existing laws or by enacting new ones.

Separately, Air India apologised for the incident and ordered a "thorough probe" while the DGCA sought a report from the airline in the matter

6 members of banned outfit held in Manipur

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Imphal, Feb 22: Six cadres of a banned outfit were arrested from Manipur's Imphal West district, and two members of a group were apprehended for allegedly being involved in extortion in Imphal East, police said Saturday.

Six members of the proscribed Kangleipak Communist Party (Ibungo Ngangom) were apprehended from Koutruk Makha Leikai Church in Imphal West Friday, a senior officer said.

The police also arrested two members of G5 Organisation from Achanbigei Maning Leikai in Imphal East district for allegedly being involved in extortion from sand-laden trucks in Sekmai, Irilbung, Koirengai and Patsoi areas. They were also allegedly involved in incidents of snatching keys from truck drivers in Sekmai area.

They have been identified as Ningthoujam Yamba Singh (43) and Usham Netaji Singh (35), the officer added.

Arms and ammunition were also surrendered in Chura-chandpur district on Saturday after joint efforts in public awareness by the local police, Assam Rifles and CRPF, another officer said.

PM Modi on 3-day visit to MP, Bihar, Assam from today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 22: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be on a three-day visit to Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Assam from Sunday to attend several development initiatives, including the global investors summit in Bhopal and the release of 19th instalment of cash assistance to farmers in Bhagalpur.

In Madhya Pradesh on Sunday, Modi will lay the foundation stone of Bageshwar Dham Medical and Science Research Institute in Chhatarpur and inaugurate the investors summit Monday, a statement said.

He will release the 19th instalment of 'PM KISAN' scheme at an event in Bhagalpur on Monday and also inaugurate various development projects in Bihar before travelling to Assam.

Modi will inaugurate Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit in Guwahati Tuesday.

The PMO said the two-day Global Investors Summit (GIS) in Bhopal will serve as an important platform to establish Madhya Pradesh as a global investment hub and will include departmental summits, specialised sessions on pharma and medical devices, transport and logistics, industry, skill development, tourism and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) among others.



A parrot perches on a 'Palas' flower in Bastar

All eyes on Telangana tunnel rescue operation

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Domalapenta. A total of 50 persons were working on the left-side tunnel when the roof collapsed for three meters. The accident occurred at the 14th km point.

While 42 workers came out of the tunnel, the remaining eight were trapped. Those trapped include two engineers and two machine operators. Police, fire services personnel, and officials of the Irrigation Department rushed to the spot and

launched rescue operations. Teams of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) joined the rescue operation in the evening.

The trapped men are from Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir. State Ministers Uttam Kumar Reddy and Jupally Krishna Reddy rushed to the spot at the direction of Chief Minister A Revanath Reddy and

were monitoring the rescue operations.

The Chief Minister expressed shock over the incident. He asked all departments concerned to actively participate in the rescue operation and directed officials to ensure the best treatment for the injured.

He assured that the government would extend all possible help to the families of the victims.

The state government had

recently resumed the construction work on the tunnel to complete the project. The construction firm had started work four days ago and on Saturday morning 50 workers entered the tunnel for the work. Irrigation Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy said the work was started on the tunnel after a survey by the Geological Survey of India. He told the media that the company which was hired for the work has a good record in digging tunnels.

AI-based surveillance to boost safety of pilgrims: Officials

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Prayagraj, Feb 22: A unique application of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based surveillance system at the Maha Kumbh, implemented for the first time by the Yogi Adityanath administration on a mammoth scale, would help avert congregation accidents in the years ahead and avoid repetition of a tragedy like this year, Mela authorities said.

At least 30 people were killed and over 90 others were injured in a stampede January 29 at the ongoing Mahakumbh congregation at Prayagraj, which has already witnessed a footfall of record 60 crore pilgrims.

Some 2,750 close-circuit cameras monitoring the 4000-acre Mela ground, about 250 of which are AI-enabled, feeding



information to the Integrated Control and Command Center (ICCC) of the Mela have empowered the authorities with unique and real-time insights into crowd density per metre

square at the bathing ghats, people flow into the Mela premises per minute, parking status of vehicles, crowd accumulation at key junctions and the need to issue alerts based on pre-set danger thresholds, officials said.

At least 30 people were killed and over 90 others were injured in a stampede January 29 at the ongoing Mahakumbh congregation at Prayagraj, which has already witnessed a footfall of record 60 crore pilgrims

"We will analyse the data of the Mela provided by the AI system once the congregation gets over. We will hopefully be able

to revise those thresholds for more effective organisation of events of such a scale next time onwards and be better equipped to avert a repetition of a tragedy like this time," said Amit Kumar, SP and in-charge of ICCC.

Officials said that four units of the ICCC, two of which are temporary set-ups at the Mela premises, operated as the central hub for traffic management, crowd control, security and emergency response, sanitation, healthcare and public communication during the Kumbh Mela. A sneak peek into the command centre headquarters revealed multiple teams of policemen, comprising nearly 400 personnel, monitoring round-the-clock the CCTV feed from all 25 sectors of the giant mela ground.

There are giant screens shar-

ing real-time information based on preset algorithms, flash colour-coded data and graphical charts that are interpreted and passed on to parallel operating radio teams spread over 13 grids.

They, in turn, pass on the interpreted information to ground teams for necessary action, Kumar explained. Officials confirmed that the standard operation procedures (SOP) were revamped following the stampede, and have, so far, paid off in controlling the swelling crowd at what is arguably the world's largest religious congregation.

The 2025 edition of the Maha Kumbh will officially draw to a close February 26 following the holy dip at the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers on the auspicious hours of Maha Shivratri.





**We haven't been given a reason as to why they're here in this configuration with this set of ships, with these different set of capabilities, and we don't really have a sense of, you know, we haven't been told where they're going and why**

**CHRISTOPHER LUXON**  
PRIME MINISTER, NEW ZEALAND

## EU CHIEF TO VISIT INDIA

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen and the College of Commissioners will visit India February 27 and 28, the government and Commission announced. The visit comes early in the Commission's new term, which began in December last year



## of the day quote

**I will explain to him that between allies, you don't make each other suffer with tariffs**

**EMMANUEL MACRON**  
PRESIDENT, FRANCE



**We anticipate reducing the Department's civilian workforce by 5-8% to produce efficiencies and refocus the Department on the President's priorities and restoring readiness in the force**

**DARIN SELNICK**  
UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, US



**We consistently believe there is no other way to stop the bloodshed and achieve lasting peace in Ukraine except with the support of the United States**

**ANDRZEJ DUDA**  
PRESIDENT, POLAND



# Hamas frees 6 hostages

REUTERS

**Jerusalem, Feb 22:** Hamas freed six hostages from Gaza Saturday, the last living Israeli captives slated for release under the first phase of a fragile ceasefire accord, in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and detainees.

Eliya Cohen, 27, Omer Shem Tov, 22, and Omer Wenkert, 23, all seized from the site of the Nova music festival in Hamas' October 7, 2023 attack on southern Israel, were handed over to the Red Cross in Nuseirat, central Gaza, to be transported to Israeli forces.

Dozens of militants stood guard in a crowd that had gathered to watch the handover, as masked Hamas men armed with automatic rifles stood on each side of the three men, who appeared thin and pale, as they were made to wave from the stage.

Tal Shoham, 40 and Avera Mengistu, 39, were earlier released in Rafah in southern Gaza. The Hamas-directed releases, which have included public ceremonies in which



**H**amas hands over six hostages held in Gaza

**B**ody returned Friday confirmed as Shiri Bibas

captives are taken on stage and some made to speak, have faced mounting criticism, including from the United Nations, which denounced the "parading of hostages". Hamas rejected the criticism Saturday, describing the events as a solemn show of Palestinian unity. It later handed over a sixth hostage, Hisham Al-Sayed, 36, to the Red Cross

**H**amas releases body after misidentification of Shiri Bibas

**C**easefire holds despite accusations of violations

in Gaza City with no public ceremony.

Al-Sayed and Mengistu have been held by Hamas since they entered Gaza of their own accord around a decade ago. Shoham was abducted from Kibbutz Be'eri along with his wife and two children, who were freed in a brief truce in November 2023.

# Reciprocal tariffs 'soon' for India, China: Trump



*Trump was speaking at the swearing-in of Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick Friday when he made the announcement, reiterating what he told Prime Minister Narendra Modi last week during the latter's visit to the US capital*

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New York, Feb 22:** US President Donald Trump has said that his administration will "soon" impose reciprocal tariffs on countries such as India and China, reiterating what he had said during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to the US capital.

Trump was speaking at the swearing-in of Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick Friday when he made the announcement, reiterating what he told Prime Minister Narendra Modi last week during the latter's visit to the US capital.

"We'll soon impose reciprocal tariffs because that means, they charge us, we charge them. It's very simple. Whatever a company or a country, such as let's say India or China or any of them, whatever they charge, we want to be fair so recipro-

cal. Reciprocal meaning, 'they charge us, we charge them,'" Trump said in Washington.

"We haven't done that, we have never done that. We are getting ready to do it," he added. Earlier Tuesday, Fox News aired a joint television interview with Trump and billionaire Elon Musk when the president said that he made it clear to Prime Minister Modi that India will not be spared from Washington's reciprocal tariffs and emphasised that "nobody can argue with me" on tariff structure.

During the interview, Trump reiterated his stance on existing tariff structures between the US and its partners, including India. "I told Prime Minister Modi yesterday - he was here - I said, 'Here's what we're going to do: reciprocal. Whatever you charge, I'm charging,'" Trump said.

Hours before his bilateral meeting with Modi, Trump announced that the US will impose reciprocal tariffs on trading partners.

Trump praised the newly sworn-in Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick Friday, and said, "Howard understands something about business."

President Trump also said how before Covid hit, the US had "the greatest economy in the history of the world," and added, "But tariffing is going to be very interesting and Howard's going to be in-charge of it."

## Salman Rushdie stabbing trial: Man found guilty

**Mayville:** A New Jersey man was convicted Friday of attempted murder for stabbing author Salman Rushdie multiple times on a New York lecture stage in 2022. Jurors, who deliberated for less than two hours, also found Hadi Matar, 27, guilty of assault for wounding a man who was on stage with Rushdie at the time. Matar ran onto the stage at the Chautauqua Institution where Rushdie was about to speak August 12, 2022, and stabbed him more than a dozen times before a live audience. The attack left the 77-year-old prizewinning novelist blind in one eye. Rushdie was the key witness during seven days of testimony, describing in graphic detail his life-threatening injuries and long and painful recovery. Matar, sitting at the defence table, looked down but had no obvious reaction when the jury delivered the verdict. As he was led out of the courtroom in handcuffs, he quietly uttered, "Free Palestine," echoing comments he has frequently made while entering and leaving the trial. The judge set sentencing for April 23. Matar could receive up to 25 years in prison.



SNIPPET

## Trump fires chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff

**Washington:** President Donald Trump abruptly fired Air Force Gen CQ Brown Jr as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Friday, sidelining a history-making fighter pilot and respected officer as part of a campaign led by his defence secretary to rid the military of leaders who support diversity and equity in the ranks. The ouster of Brown, only the second Black general to serve as chairman, is sure to send shock waves through the Pentagon. His 16 months in the job had been consumed with the war in Ukraine and the expanded conflict in the Middle East. "I want to thank General Charles CQ' Brown for his over 40 years of service to our country, including as our current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He is a fine gentleman and an outstanding leader, and I wish a great future for him and his family," Trump posted on social media. Brown's public support of Black Lives Matter after the police killing of George Floyd had made him fodder for the administration's wars against "wokeism" in the military.



## WEEK'S BEST PICS



A person lies down during an anti-government protest called 'Indonesia Gelap' (Dark Indonesia), against the recent budget cuts and other policies, near the presidential palace in Jakarta, Indonesia, February 21



Elon Musk holds up a chainsaw onstage during the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in National Harbor, Maryland, February 20



A farmer stands near pumpkins on display on the side of a road near Sanaa, Yemen February 18



Jarrett Zeigler and his son Jaxon Zeigler attend a candlelight vigil for victims of Hurricane Helene in Green Mountain, North Carolina, February 15

REUTERS

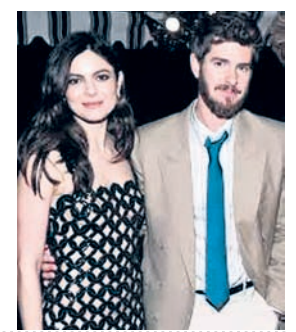


# leisure



**ISAACS REVEALS WHY HE FOUND IT 'BORING' TO MAKE HARRY POTTER**  
Hollywood actor Jason Isaacs, who played Lucius Malfoy in *Harry Potter*, admitted he found making the films "quite boring" due to the focus on special effects. Despite this, he finds the franchise's legacy moving and appreciates its impact on fans.

**GARFIELD, BARBARO SPARK DATING RUMOURS**  
Andrew Garfield and Monica Barbaro appear to be in a relationship. According to a report, the two actors have been spotted together multiple times by their fans. They have not officially confirmed their relationship, continuing Garfield's practice of keeping his personal life private.



## FORTUNE FORECAST

GaneshaSpeaks.com  
accuracy • reliability • trust  
FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181\*

**ARIES**  
You will pay attention to the voice of your inner self today. This will help you implement all your plans perfectly. You will not only be jovial, but you will also not let disappointments cow you down. Ganesha says not only today, but you can summon this quality whenever you like.

**TAURUS**  
Ganesha sees you happily engaged in attending to day to day affairs. The day will turn out to be a hectic one. Do not expect too many time outs or even small breaks. Fortunately you will not be too uncomfortable with your tight schedule and will feel as fresh and easy at cease work as you had been at the beginning of the day.

**GEMINI**  
Along with your house, family and business matters, you will also be busy with your social obligations today. You will be afforded the co-operation of those around you. New ways of thinking will flourish within you. Make full use of the opportunities you get today, says Ganesha.

**CANCER**  
Ganesha says that this is good day to buy new house or car. It is likely that you shift to a new house shortly. So be prepared for a ceremony like housewarming. You will achieve tranquil mind through yoga and meditation. It will radiate a new energy, enthusiasm and optimism in you.

**LEO**  
A lucky day is in the offing. You will taste success in all your endeavours. You will be extremely creative. You will contribute a lot of new ideas in meetings. You will be able to talk about your love without any hesitation today, says Ganesha.

**VIRGO**  
Today is a mixed bag of values and pragmatism, says Ganesha, and if there were to be a competition for the most humanitarian person, you would be likely to win hands down. You would do well to make plans to increase your productivity. Ganesha advises you to look at the big picture, which should not be so difficult for you as you already have a broad perspective.

**LIBRA**  
Ganesha says today you will wish to spend more time with your beloved instead of your friends. This is a good day to express your innermost feelings and get varied opportunities. This is a good time to propose to your beloved and give them a happy surprise. Ganesha showers you with his blessings always

**SCORPIO**  
The grey strands on your head is not just a colour, but speaks about your experiences. Your wisdom will make you take appropriate decisions at work. Ganeshji warns you to stay away from courtrooms and legal issues, or the trap may leave a deep scar.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Beauty therapies or a new hair do, pick one; makeover and personal grooming is on your mind. Once you decide to shop, nothing in the world can stop you. You have decided to de-stress yourself with shopping. Clothes and jewellery is what your wardrobe is awaiting for, says Ganesha.

**CAPRICORN**  
Your investments, inheritance, receipts, etc. will keep your packets filled with cash. No sooner you try to put them in safe; there will be more than one reason for some expenditure. Keeping a watch on incomes and expenses both will help you avoid any monetary problems, advises Ganesha. Your maturity, practicality and experience will come to your rescue today. Also, you may have to work your socks off today, but eventually all the hard work will be paid off.

**AQUARIUS**  
Planning to buy a house or vehicle? Then today's the day to make the booking. However, don't buy anything in haste. Deliberate, says Ganesha, especially when it involves a huge sum of money. You may even shift residence, or change a job, and it's very likely you will enjoy the whole process.

**PISCES**  
Controversy and differences circle overhead, almost waiting for a chance to corner you. Even though you are a happy go lucky person, you may feel a little run down and disgruntled today. But don't lose heart, says Ganesha, because as the day progresses you will find bigger and better reasons to smile.

**Mumbai:** Bhumi Pednekar recently addressed the issue of gender pay disparity in Hindi film industry, highlighting that it's a widespread problem across industries, not just in cinema. In a recent interview, the *Bheed* actress shared her experiences with pay inequality, pointing out that even in corporate sectors; women often earn less than their male counterparts, despite holding similar positions. She emphasised that the gender pay gap in the film industry is significant, with male actors typically earning more due to their perceived ability to draw larger audiences.

Recalling her own experience, Bhumi mentioned times when she was paid less than male co-stars, despite having similar levels of success and achievement. She admitted, "Many times we say that the actor who brings in more business... and that's absolutely right. This isn't about seniority. I've been at places where I have achieved as much as a male co-star and yet I have been paid way less." She acknowledged that the business side of cinema often factors in box office earnings, but noted that this should not justify the pay disparity.

However, she also expressed optimism, stating that as more producers who genuinely believe in equality enter the industry, the gap is gradually closing. "I can see the gap bridging," she said, encouraging change.

Currently, the actress is seen in *Mere Husband Ki Biwi*, a romantic comedy directed by Mudassar Aziz, starring Arjun Kapoor and Rakul Preet Singh.

## Bhumi on gender pay disparity



## Taapsee's tips to new actors



**Mumbai:** Hard work alone does not guarantee success in the film industry, says actor-producer Taapsee Pannu as she believes it is a common misconception that the world of movies is a fair place.

During an interview, the 37-year-old actress shared her thoughts on the harsh realities of the film industry. "The idealistic thing is that with hard work you will achieve everything that isn't the case. Not everything is fair in the film industry. If you expect that things will be fair and square then that won't happen. It will be unfair. You will get to hear a lot of things, so keep your ego aside, otherwise, you will be disappointed, besides get used to hearing bad things. It's not about Bollywood. I'm not a victim of the industry," Pannu said.

She advised aspiring talents to have a backup plan in case their efforts don't lead to success. "I had option B. I had done engineering, had a job and I could do that. I wanted to do an MBA, so I had kept all the options ready," Pannu said.

Pannu said that actors who are "outsiders" will often find that their success depends not just on talent but largely on audience reception of their work.

"Our stature depends on the audience. If they prefer watching hero-centric films, then how will we succeed? It's not that the industry kicks us out of the industry, they rather give us opportunities."



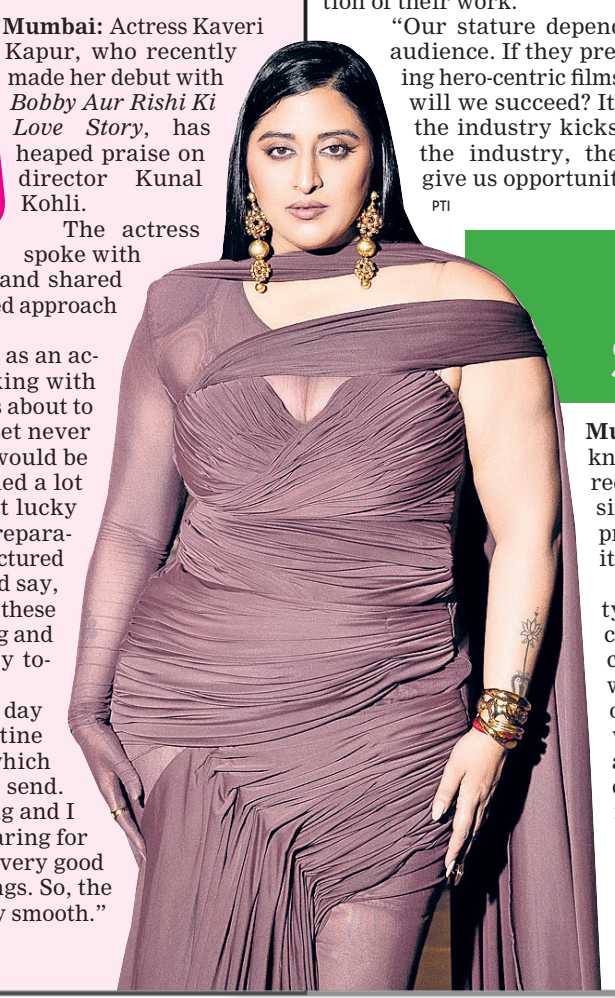
## Kaveri reveals what made her debut effortless

**Mumbai:** Actress Kaveri Kapoor, who recently made her debut with *Bobby Aur Rishi Ki Love Story*, has heaped praise on director Kunal Kohli.

The actress spoke with news agency and shared that Kunal follows a very structured approach to making films.

"This is my first experience as an actor. So, given that I was working with Kunal and the fact that I was about to step on to my first movie set never having anticipated that I would be an actor in my life, I needed a lot of preparation. And we got lucky because even with what type of preparation to do, he guided us in a very structured manner. Because every day he would say, 'Okay Kaveri, today I need you to do these scenes, I need you all to do a reading and I need you all to send it to me by tonight'", Kapoor said.

She further mentioned, "Every day we had kind of a structured routine of what scenes we had to learn, which ones we had to read, record and send. I knew nothing about acting and I knew nothing about preparing for acting. So, luckily I had a very good teacher on both those things. So, the preparation was made very smooth."



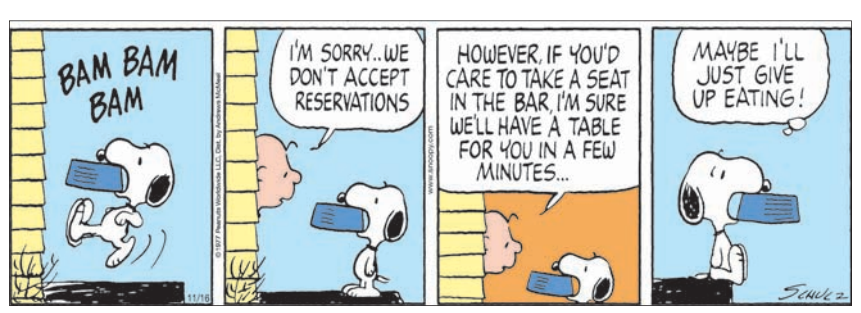
## Raja Kumari's spiritual calling

**Mumbai:** Singer-songwriter Raja Kumari, who is known for *City Clums*, *Jawan Title Track* and others, recently released her album *Kashi to Kailash*. The singer described it as a deeply personal and spiritual project inspired by Lord Shiva. She also shared that it was Bholenath who led her to spirituality.

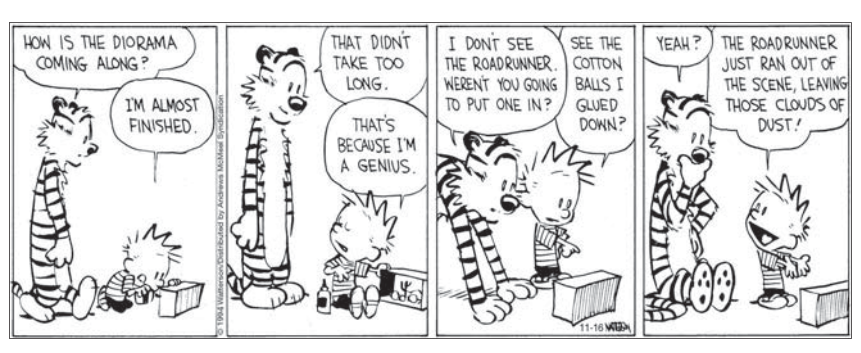
Talking about how she was drawn to spirituality, she said, "This album is something that I was called to make. Certain events in my life, like the cancellation of my tour two years ago, led me towards spirituality. After that, I kept getting visions of Kedarnath Temple, so I didn't waste time and visited the shrine. As I stood before Lord Shiva, I asked what I should do next, and the answer was clear—surrender. Since then, I knew this was the first project I had to create."

Timed with Maha Shivratri, the album reflects her journey of faith, devotion, and transformation. Her classical roots play a significant role in the album, especially in *The Destroyer*.

## PEANUTS



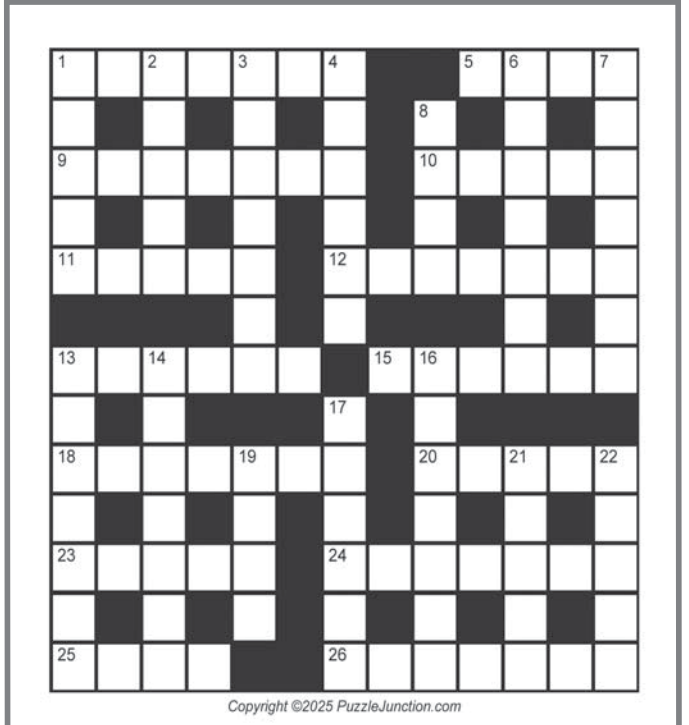
## CALVIN AND HOBBS



## BREVITY



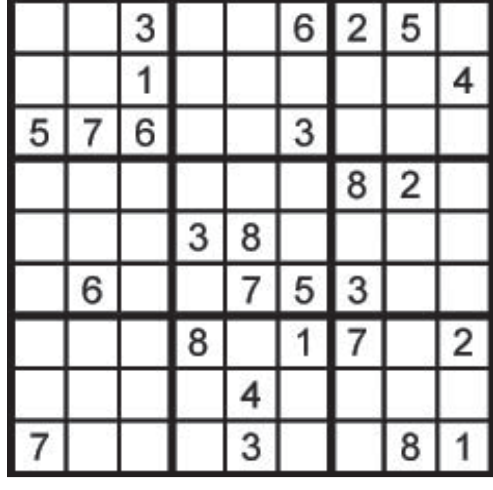
## CROSSWORD



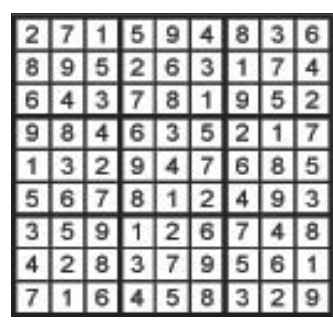
- Across**
- 1 Wounds
  - 5 Infirmity area
  - 9 Seafood entree
  - 10 Rich tapestry
  - 11 Weasel relative
  - 12 Exposes, as a crook
  - 13 Oddball
  - 15 Spheres
  - 18 Slope
  - 20 Perch
  - 23 Bamboo forest denizen
  - 24 Decanter
  - 25 Pastoral pipe
  - 26 She can be grand, at times
  - 4 After alfalfa or bean
  - 6 Deodorant type
  - 7 Abstains
  - 8 Corozo, for one
  - 13 Speak softly
  - 14 Joss stick
  - 16 Unpredictable
  - 17 Piled
  - 19 Lut Desert locale
  - 21 Earthy colour
  - 22 Conditions
- Down**
- 1 Block house?
  - 2 Shirt ruffle
  - 3 Left the workforce for good

## SUDOKU

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



## SOLUTIONS



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW



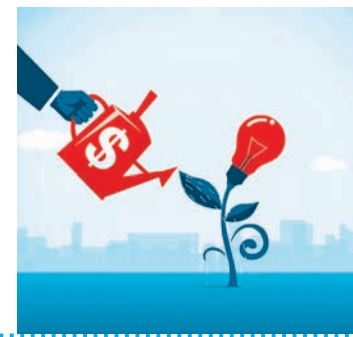


India is a major maritime nation with a rich seafaring heritage. I look forward to engaging with India's maritime leaders and community on how we can work together to upskill and strengthen the global maritime workforce, unlock green growth and jobs, and make shipping more sustainable for all

ARSENIO DOMINGUEZ | SECRETARY GENERAL, IMO

## STARTUPS RAISE OVER \$184M

At least 22 Indian startups raised more than \$184 million in funding this week, which included 10 growth-stage deals and 12 early-stage rounds. Early-stage startups also attracted investor interest with raising a total of \$33.4 million. The average startup funding over the past eight weeks has remained at around \$308.3 million with 26 deals per week



## of the day quote

I think the FM, the PM must say that we are going to have a dialogue with state governments and we need a code of conduct, just as we have had centre-state collaboration on GST, FRBM to have code of conduct on freebies



D SUBBARAO | FORMER GOVERNOR, RBI

We aim to enhance our factory capacities under the Make in India initiative, addressing both local and global needs for power generation, transmission, distribution, and rail transportation



MATTHIAS REBELLIOUS | MEMBER OF THE MANAGING BOARD OF SIEMENS AG

The future of power in India is good... in this journey we need to increase production in an innovative way... advance power electronics, efficient transformer, power converters, smart grid solutions are needed to be developed to take benefit of renewable energy



MANOHAR LAL | UNION POWER MINISTER

## SHORT TAKES

### RBI fines Citibank for violation of norms

**Mumbai:** The Reserve Bank Friday said it has imposed a penalty of ₹39 lakh on Citibank NA for non-compliance with directions pertaining to large exposures framework and delay in furnishing of credit information to CICs. In a statement, the RBI said the statutory inspection for Supervisory Evaluation of the bank was conducted with reference to its financial position as March 31, 2023. Based on supervisory findings of non-compliance with RBI directions and related correspondence in that regard, a notice was issued to Citibank NA advising it to show cause as to why penalty should not be imposed on it for its failure to comply with the said RBI directions.

### Jio Financial, Zomato to enter Nifty 50 soon

**New Delhi:** Jio Financial Services Ltd and Zomato Ltd will enter the National Stock Exchange's benchmark Nifty 50 index from March 28. As per the revisions, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (BPCL) and Britannia Industries Ltd will be excluded from the index, according to a release from NSE Indices. The Index Maintenance Sub-Committee of NSE Indices Ltd has announced changes to the Nifty 50 index as part of its semi-annual review, effective from March 28, 2025. These changes are in line with the periodic assessment of the index to ensure it accurately reflects market trends and maintains its relevance to investors.

### Swiggy's valuation dips 50% from peak

**New Delhi:** Swiggy, one of India's leading food-tech companies, is facing a sharp decline in its market valuation which has plunged nearly 50 per cent from its peak. The online food aggregator's valuation, which soared past \$16 billion or nearly ₹1,32,800 crore in December 2024, has dropped to \$9.82 billion or ₹81,527 crore on the National Stock Exchange (NSE). This is also a fall of over 30 per cent from its \$12.7 billion listing valuation. So far in 2025, Swiggy's investors have lost Rs 40,250 crore due to the dip.

## Mallya pursues annulment against UK bankruptcy order

The judge heard a set of complicated arguments involving a consortium of banks led by the SBI seeking repayment of an estimated judgment debt of around GBP 1.05bn owed by the 69-year-old businessman's now-defunct Kingfisher Airlines

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**London, Feb 22:** Embattled businessman Vijay Mallya has instructed his lawyers in the UK to pursue an annulment application against his bankruptcy order, with his legal team set to argue that Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's statement in Parliament in December last year gives the order an "unreal quality".

It comes after Justice Antho-

ny Mann reserved judgment, to be handed down at a later date, after hearings of three interlinked appeals related to Mallya's bankruptcy order concluded at the High Court in London this week.

The judge heard a set of complicated arguments involving a consortium of banks led by the State Bank of India (SBI) seeking repayment of an estimated judgment debt of around GBP 1.05 billion owed by the 69-year-



Evidence has now come to light that shows that the banks' debt has not only been paid but, moreover, the banks have recovered in excess of what was due from Dr Mallya

LEIGH CRESTOHL | MANAGING PARTNER OF ZAIWALLA AND CO

old businessman's now-defunct Kingfisher Airlines. Mallya is wanted in India on fraud and money laundering charges.

"From Mallya's perspective, these English bankruptcy proceedings have an unreal quality," Leigh Crestohl, Managing Partner of Zaiwalla and Co-Mal-

lya's new lawyers, told PTI.

"Evidence has now come to light that shows that the banks' debt has not only been paid but, moreover, the banks have recovered in excess of what was due from Dr Mallya," Crestohl said, citing Sitharaman's statement in the Parliament Decem-

## Indices consolidate amid uncertainties

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Mumbai, Feb 22:** Indian stock markets remained in a consolidation phase this week, with benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty slipped over half a per cent amid weak global cues and trade war concerns.

Sensex and Nifty started the week on a positive note with a gain in a range-bound session. Buying interest in pharma, metal, and energy stocks helped indices recover from their longest losing streak in two years February 17.

The broader sentiment was cautious as investors reacted to renewed tariff threats from the US which led to profit-taking in large-cap stocks.

Midcap and smallcap indices outperformed as witnessed buying interest in select counters as both the indices closed the week higher with a gain up to 2 per cent. The market volatility comes at a time when concerns over reciprocal tariffs and global economic stability are influencing investor sentiment.

Looking ahead, the markets are expected to remain volatile in the upcoming holiday-shortened week due to the monthly expiry of derivatives contracts, according to reports.

A consolidation or earnings-driven growth could reset valuations and make Indian equities more attractive.

Foreign institutional inves-



The US President Donald Trump's announcement of reciprocal tariffs hit export-oriented industries hard, particularly the pharmaceutical sector, which saw significant underperformance

VINOD NAIR | CHIEF, GEOJIT FINANCIAL SERVICES

tors (FIIs) flows could return to India in the next 3-6 months, as the economy and macro factors in the long term are favourable, said Vaibhav Porwal, Co-Founder, Dezerv.

"Strong domestic demand, digital transformation, and infrastructure push are long-term drivers that are likely to bolster corporate earnings and sustain growth," he noted.

The Indian stock markets ended lower Friday as the Sensex declined by 424.90 points to close at 75,311.06, while the Nifty slipped 117.25 points to settle at 22,795.90.

## Govt may tweak EV policy

In India's nascent EV market, many buyers have shied away from making purchases due to lack of fast chargers

REUTERS

**New Delhi, Feb 22:** India's EV policy, which offers import tax cuts for foreign automakers investing in the country, will restrict them from using funds spent on charging infrastructure for such relief, increasing their car manufacturing, a government document shows.

India last year announced a policy aimed at attracting Tesla to manufacture EVs in the country and let such foreign carmakers import cars at a 15% tariff, from around 100% now, but only if they invest at least \$500 million for a factory.

But the policy will mandate that automakers can count only 5% of their total EV investment as coming from creation of charging infrastructure, even if they spend much more on the power network, according to government document detailing draft rules which is not public but was seen by Reuters.

The government's plan comes just as Tesla gets closer to entering India with imported cars, having finalised two locations for showrooms. The restriction could upset those automakers who may want to invest a bigger chunk of their planned India investments into creating charging networks, which remain far and few in India.

An industry source privy to



TESLA ENTRY LOOMS

discussions with the government said the call is being taken as New Delhi wants companies to prioritise manufacturing, and not just charging networks.

"Expenditure incurred on charging infrastructure would be considered up to (a) maximum 5% of the committed investment," the 47-page draft document from January 2025 stated.

The government is holding consultations with carmakers and other stakeholders on the draft rules and will finalise them by next month, said a source.

Tesla in a job advert last week said it is also looking for a "charging developer" who would "develop and manage pipeline of new charging" sites, and select locations for deployment.

The EV giant's chief Elon Musk put on hold his manu-

ber 17 last year. Sitharaman in her statement to the Parliament "confirmed that a sum of ₹14,131.6 crore has been collected and restored to the banks", he said.

Crestohl said that "it must be presumed" that the public sector banks will accept the accuracy of the minister's statement made in Parliament.

Mallya took to social media a day after Sitharaman's Lok Sabha statement to claim he was "entitled to relief" in the matter.

In a post on X December 18 last year, he said: "Unless the ED (Enforcement Directorate) and banks can legally justify how they have taken more than two times the debt, I am entitled to the relief which I will pursue."

## BOOST FOR BORROWERS

### RBI plans to eliminate foreclosure charges on all floating rate loans

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Feb 22:** The RBI Friday proposed to do away with foreclosure charges or pre-payment penalties charged by banks and other lenders on all floating rate loans, including for business purposes, availed by individuals as well as micro and small enterprises (MSEs).

In terms of the extant norms, certain categories of regulated entities (REs) are not permitted to levy foreclosure charges/pre-payment penalties on the floating rate term loans sanctioned, for purposes other than business, to individual borrowers with or without co-obligant(s).

"REs, other than Tier 1 and Tier 2 Primary (Urban) Co-operative Banks and Base Layer NBFs, shall not levy any charges/ penalties in case of foreclosure/ prepayment of floating rate loans granted to individuals and MSE borrowers, with or without co-obligant(s), for business purpose," an RBI's draft circular said.

However, in case of MSE borrowers, these instructions shall be applicable up to the aggregate sanctioned limit of ₹7.50 crore per borrower, said the draft on "Responsible Lending Conduct - Levy of Foreclosure Charges/ Pre-payment Penalties on Loans".

Reserve Bank's supervisory reviews have indicated divergent practices amongst REs with regard to levy of foreclosure charges/ pre-payment penalties in case of loans sanctioned to MSEs which lead to customer grievances and disputes.

Further, certain REs have been found to include restrictive clauses in loan contracts, agreements to deter borrowers from switching over to another lender, either for availing lower rates of interest or better terms of service.

The draft circular further said REs should permit foreclosure/ pre-payment of loans without stipulating any minimum lock-in period.

Lenders regulated by the RBI should also not levy any charges retrospectively at the time of foreclosure/ prepayment of loans, which were waived off by the REs/ not disclosed in advance to the borrowers, under any circumstances, the draft said.

## UPI now drives 84% of digital transactions

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Feb 22:** Amid a surge in digital payments where nearly four out of five payments in the country were conducted on the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) in FY24, UPI has emerged as the dominant force driving financial inclusion, merchant adoption and cross-border transactions.

According to a new industry report, UPI now drives 84 per cent of all digital transac-



tions in India.

The report by fintech consulting and advisory firm The Digital

With UPI handling 16 billion transactions a month and projected to grow 3x by the end of 2030, the role of robust, high-resilience switching infrastructure becomes paramount

SAMEER SINGH JAINI | FOUNDER AND CEO, THE DIGITAL FIFTH

UPI transactions surged 4 times from 2021 to 2024, reaching 172 billion transactions annually

The volume of UPI transactions increased from 375 crore in 2018 to 17,221 crore in 2024

The total value of transactions surged from ₹5.86 lakh crore in 2018 to ₹246.83 lakh crore in 2024

Fifth, UPI represents more than just a payment system — it's an entire financial ecosystem shaping India's digital-first economy.

UPI transactions surged 4 times from 2021 to 2024, reaching 172 billion transactions annually. It now dominates digital

payments, far outpacing card-based and wallet transactions.

With 30 million+ merchants onboarded on UPI, the merchant-to-consumer (P2M) segment is growing at 67 per cent on-year, outpacing peer-to-peer (P2P) transactions and signalling UPI's transition into the primary retail payment system.

According to the RBI, digital payments across India recorded a double-digit jump of 11.1 per cent year-on-year (YoY) as September 2024. The share of the UPI in the country's digital payments has surged from 34 per cent in 2019 to an impressive over 83 per cent in 2024, with a remarkable CAGR of 74 per cent over the last five years.

## Rich in cash, Toyota builds city to test futuristic mobility

The \$10bn Woven City's construction began in 2021 and the name honours Toyota's beginnings as a maker of automatic textile looms

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Susono, Feb 22:** Woven City near Mount Fuji is where Japanese automaker Toyota plans to test everyday living with robotics, artificial intelligence and autonomous zero-emissions transportation.

Daisuke Toyoda, an executive in charge of the project from the automaker's founding family, stressed it's not "a smart city."

"We're making a test course for mobility so that's a little bit different. We're not a real estate developer," he said Saturday during a tour of the facility, where the first phase of construction was completed.

The Associated Press was the first foreign media to get a preview of the \$10 billion Woven City. The first phase spans 47,000 square metres, roughly the size of about five baseball fields. When completed, it will be 2,94,000 square metres.

Built on the grounds of a shuttered Toyota Motor Corp auto plant, it's meant to be a place where researchers and startups come together to share ideas, according to Toyoda.

Ambitious plans for futuristic cities have spluttered or are unfinished, including one proposed by Google's parent company Alphabet in Toronto;



"Neom" in Saudi Arabia; a project near San Francisco, spearheaded by a former Goldman Sachs trader, and Masdar City next to Abu Dhabi's airport.

Woven City's construction began in 2021. All the buildings are connected by underground passageways, where autonomous vehicles will scuttle

around collecting garbage and making deliveries.

No one is living there yet. The first residents will total just 100 people. Called "weavers," they're workers at Toyota and partner companies, including instant noodle maker Nissin and Daikin, which manufactures air-conditioners. Coffee maker UCC was serving hot drinks from an autonomous-drive bus, parked in a square surrounded by still-empty apartment complexes.

The city's name honours Toyota's beginnings as a maker of automatic textile looms. Sakichi Toyoda, Daisuke Toyoda's great-great-grandfather, just wanted to make life easier for

his mother, who toiled on a manual loom.

There was little talk of using electric vehicles, an area where Toyota has lagged. While Tesla and BYD emerged as big EV players, Toyota has been pushing hydrogen, the energy of choice in Woven City.

Toyota officials acknowledged it doesn't expect to make money from Woven City, at least not for years.

Keisuke Konishi, auto analyst at Quick Corporate Valuation Research Centre, believes Toyota wants to work on robotic rides to rival Google's Waymo — even if it means building an entire complex.



# THE GREATEST RIVALRY!

## Day before Pakistan clash, Kohli focuses on spin play

Men in Blue aim for semifinal as arch-rivals Pakistan eye survival in marquee clash. With history, form, and stakes at play, Sunday's match promises to be another thrilling chapter in the India-Pakistan cricket saga

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Dubai, Feb 22:** Hyped as a marquee showdown but mostly lopsided on the field, India and Pakistan lock horns in the ICC Champions Trophy here Sunday with Rohit Sharma's men aiming to seal a semifinal spot and Mohammad Rizwan's team desperate to avoid early elimination from the tournament.

While India are on a high after claiming a measured six-wicket win over a sprightly Bangladesh, Pakistan are evidently tense after the 60-run loss in the tournament-opener against New Zealand.

The sub-continental rivals' last Champion Trophy clash was the 2017 final in which Pakistan walked away with the win and the trophy. Rizwan and Co would look to draw inspiration from that triumph in London but would also need to scale up their performance in every department.

Though the buzz surrounding the match is nowhere close to being what it used to be at the peak of diplomatic tensions between the two countries, there is an air of quiet anticipation for the Group A clash at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium.

India will have a distinct advantage in every aspect. The side has settled in nicely while Pakistan have flown in a couple of days ago after the drubbing handed by the Black Caps in Karachi.

More often than not, an India-Pakistan clash is as much a battle of nerves as cricketing abilities and India would be in a much better space on both counts come Sunday afternoon.

For starters, skipper Rohit, whose form was a major concern in the run-up to the tournament, seems to be getting



**Kohli's focus hasn't looked the same for a while but he does have the knack of coming up with special efforts against Pak**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Dubai, Feb 22:** Indian superstar Virat Kohli meant business a day before the marquee clash against Pakistan in the Champions Trophy as he arrived at the ICC Academy two hours before scheduled practice time to iron out his issues against spin.

Kohli, who was troubled by the ball outside off-stump from the pacers on the Test tour of Australia, has been found vulnerable against spin in the recent ODIs he has played.

The 36-year-old fell to leg-spinner Rishad Hossain in India's opening Champions Trophy game against Bangladesh Thursday, his sixth dismissal in a row against spinners in ODIs.

He was caught at backward point while trying to cut Hossain. In the preceding series against England at home, leg spinner Adil Rashid had got the better of Kohli.

The former India captain will have to deal with the likes of Abrar Ahmed when India takes on Pakistan at the Dubai International Stadium Sunday. Irrespective of his form, Kohli's commitment to the game remains unquestionable, and his exemplary work ethic was on full display as he arrived for training well before his teammates, who also showed up an hour earlier than the scheduled time, and was the last to leave.

It was not a surprise that the majority of the net bowlers he faced were spinners, including



a couple of leg-break bowlers, as many off-spinners and a left-arm spinner.

Pakistan have a part time left-arm spinner in Khushdil Shah, while Salman Agha bowls off-spin.

With due respect to the opposition, Indian batters would be fancying themselves against the Pakistan spin attack. The main challenge for them will come from the pace trio of Shaheen Afridi, Haris Rauf and Naseem Shah who all are under pressure after an underwhelming opening game against New Zealand.

While India are sitting comfortably after the win over Bangladesh, Pakistan find themselves in a must-win situation.

The wicket is expected to be on the slower side, bringing a battery of Indian spinners into the game.

### HEAD-TO-HEAD CLASH

In their long-standing ODI rivalry, Pakistan hold a slight edge, having won 73 out of the 135 encounters, while India have claimed victory in 57. Five matches have ended without a result

However, India's dominance has been clear in recent years. Since 2010, they have won 12 out of 17 ODIs against Pakistan, with only four losses and one no-result

Pakistan, however, have a marginal lead in Champions Trophy history, with a 3-2 head-to-head advantage. Their biggest triumph came in the 2017 final, where they crushed India by 180 runs

back to his best if the lucid stroke-making against Bangladesh was anything to go by. His 41-run cameo was a crucial contribution in the tricky chase of 229 which was masterfully anchored by Shubman Gill with his eighth ODI hundred.

In contrast, Pakistan would be fretting over the form and

approach of their biggest star Babar Azam. The 90-ball 64 against New Zealand in a chase of 320 has been roundly criticised for being too slow. Azam's inability to accelerate even when the asking rate kept climbing has come under scrutiny and he would be under tremendous pressure against India.

Adding to their woes is the injury-forced ouster of game-changing opener Fakhar Zaman from the squad. Imam ul Haq has replaced him in the side and has joined the squad here.

Pakistan would also be hoping to prove a point by getting the better of India, who refused to travel across the border for the tournament which is otherwise wholly scheduled in Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi.

However, in the larger scheme of things, it could well boil down to key defining moments from the bowlers and here too Pakistan have lots to ponder after the hammering that the Shaheen Afridi-led attack took from the Kiwis.

On the other hand, India have a fit-again and in-form Moham-

med Shami, who is being brilliantly backed up by Harshit Rana. Shami's fifer against Bangladesh ensured that India did not miss injured talisman Jasprit Bumrah just yet.

All-rounder Hardik Pandya has always turned up with his best against Pakistan in major ICC tournaments. He will be hoping to make up for the 2017 Champions Trophy final disappointment where he fought as a lone warrior for India but failed to take his team over the line.

India are likely to continue with their winning combination and remain unchanged.

The spin trio of Kuldeep Yadav, Ravindra Jadeja, and Axar Patel will be included once again on the tweaker-friendly surface to exploit the conditions.

## Odisha campaign ends at National Kabaddi C'ships

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Cuttack, Feb 22:** The knock-out stages of the 71st Senior National Kabaddi Championships kicked off Saturday with four compelling Round-of-16 clashes here, setting up two mouth-watering quarter-final matches.

Host state Odisha's campaign came to an end as they fell to Maharashtra 26-43. Despite vocal home support, Maharashtra had guidance from the likes of Akash Shinde, Ajit Chouhan and Pankaj Mohite as they steadily built their lead before securing a comfortable win.

Defending champions Haryana, who were guided by star PKL players like defender Yogesh Kathuniya and raider Ashu Malik, were pushed hard by Tamil Nadu in what proved to be the most competitive fixture of the day. Despite Tamil Nadu's spirited resistance, Haryana's superior raiding unit helped them secure a 48-41 victory in a high-scoring contest.

The results have set up two intriguing quarter-final matchups. Haryana will face Services in what promises to be a tactical battle between two disciplined units, while Maharashtra will look to continue their impressive form against Punjab.

## 38TH NATIONAL GAMES Odisha felicitates medalists



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 22:** The Sports and Youth Services Department today felicitated the medalists from Odisha for their achievements in the 38th National Games. A felicitation ceremony was organized at the Kalinga Stadium Tennis Centre, where the athletes were honoured with cash awards and certificates.

Gold medalists received a cash award of Rs 6 lakh, silver medalists Rs 4 lakh and bronze medalists Rs 3 lakh.

Odisha's Sports Minister, Suryabanshi Suraj, attended the event as the chief guest. In his address, he praised the athletes for their remarkable achievements, stating that Odisha secured the 12th position among the top 15 states in the country in 38th National Games.

**Our athletes are our pride. The essence of sports lies in celebrating victories and using defeats as motivation to achieve greater success. This achievement at the National Games will inspire many young athletes in Odisha**

SURYABANSHI SURAJ | SPORTS MINISTER, ODISHA

Principal Secretary Bhaskar Jyoti Sharma, Director Deepankar Mahapatra, Additional Secretary Bijay Kumar Swain, Additional Secretary Ashok Kumar Panda, senior officials and representatives from various sports association were present in the event today.

Medal-winning athletes expressed their gratitude for the government's support, stating that the felicitation ceremony would further motivate them to strive for excellence.

## Eves turn the tables against Germans

Deepika's goal hands India 1-0 win over Germany after 0-4 loss Friday in women's FIH Pro League

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 22:** Star drag-flicker Deepika scored the all-important goal from a set piece to hand India a crucial 1-0 victory over Germany in a return-leg women's FIH Pro League match here Saturday.

Deepika sounded the board with a thunderous flick from a penalty corner in the 12th minute, which proved to be decisive.

The win came after India's 0-4 loss against the same opponents here Friday. India will next play Netherlands here February 24.

After suffering a heavy defeat Friday, the Indian women did turn the tables around with a gritty performance.

The Indians started on a bright note and pressed hard on the German defence from the onset. Soon after the start, skipper Salima Tete took a snap shot after good work from Sunelita Toppo down the left but it didn't bother Finja Starck one bit in the German goal.

India were by far the more attacking side on display and took the lead in the 12th minute through their first penalty corner, created by Neha with her brilliant dribbling skills. Deepika made no mistake



this time, scoring her 26th international goal with a fierce darg-flick.

The Indians continued their high press hockey, not allowing Germany to get out of their own half. Deepika was at her best in the first two quarters Saturday as India went into the breather with a slender one goal lead.

The Indians kept up the momentum and secured another penalty corner in the 31st minute but Deepika's effort hit the right post.

Thereafter, it was all Germany as they pressed forward in search of the equaliser. The Germans secured two

## Men thrash Ireland, bag 2nd straight win

India continued their domination over Ireland, defeating the visitors 4-0 in their return leg men's FIH Pro League match Saturday. It was India's second consecutive win over Ireland in the Pro League, having defeated the same opponents 3-1 in the first-leg here Friday. The Indians dominated the proceedings from start to finish, scoring through Nilam Sanjeev Xess (14th minute), Mandep Singh (24th), Abhishek (28th) and Shamsheer Singh (34th). It was Ireland who started on a bright note, earning a penalty corner as early as in the ninth minute but they wasted the chance. India will next take on England here February 24.

back-to-back penalty corners just at the end of the third quarter but wasted both.

A minute into the fourth and final quarter, Germany secured another set piece but failed to get past Bichu Devi Kharibam in front of Indian goal. Devi made two brilliant saves.

The Germans were relentless in the final quarter, attacking in numbers with India content to sit back and defend.

In the 53rd minute, the Germans had their last scoring opportunity in the form of another penalty corner but Lena Micheel shot wide.

## Higher allowance awaits TOPS athletes this Olympic cycle

The core group of TOPS has been trimmed from 179 to 94 and the developmental list stood at 112 after the revamp

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 22:** Athletes picked for the sports ministry's Target Olympic Podium Scheme will be entitled to increased allowance during training and competitions abroad but will have to undergo "physical and psychological tests" every six months as part of their evaluation process.

The core group of TOPS has been trimmed from 179 to 94 and the developmental list stood at 112 after the revamp. It was a fairly routine rejig after

the completion of an Olympic cycle but grabbed attention as some sports like swimming, squash, golf and tennis did not find representation in the core list.

Only 42 of those selected in the core group are able-bodied with para-athletes occupying 52 spots, an acknowledgement of their sparkling performance in the Paris Paralympics where they fetched 29 medals, including seven gold.

Those who have made the cut will be getting USD 25 per day in addition to the monthly stipend of Rs 50,000 (core group) and Rs 25,000 (developmental group) whenever they travel abroad for training and competition.

"The core group is for the short term goal of the next Olympics, in this case Los An-



geles 2028. The developmental group is for hopefuls for the Olympics after that (2032) and perhaps even the one after that (2036)," a member of the Sports Authority of India's Mission Olympic Cell (MOC) told PTI.

"This pruned list is a reflection of that goal. And those who have got in will get additional allowance of \$25 per day over and above the stipend and oth-

er perks they are entitled to at present. Athletes who have been picked will have no reason to complain and regular evaluation will ensure timely intervention if things are not going as planned," he added.

And this is where a half-yearly test of "physical and psychological parameters" will come in handy. The MOC has already decided to make the overall per-

**The new core group is a truthful, transparent and realistic reflection of potential based on demonstrated performances**

NS JOHAL | CEO, TOPS

formance evaluation an annual instead of biennial, which was the norm in the previous cycle.

In the revamped core group no male boxer has made the cut, only three names from athletics have got in (27 less than the previous list), and seasoned but under-performing badminton players such as K Srikanth and Ashwini Ponappa have also missed out along with India's top-ranked men's singles tennis player Sumit Nagal.

A rather surprising retention in the core group is recurve archer Deepika Kumari, who has flattered to deceive in mul-

tipole Olympics and once again crumbled under pressure in the Paris Games.

Another name that might raise a few eyebrows is weightlifter Mirabai Chanu, who finished fourth in Paris after a silver in Tokyo 2020. Both are 30 and while Deepika's fortitude in the Olympics is under scanner, Chanu's struggle with injuries is a matter of concern.

However, it is also to be noted that it's a dynamic selection where many names will be added as the Olympic qualification cycle kicks off.

The list is also a reflection of sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya and sports secretary Sujata Chaturvedi's push for a more performance-oriented policy towards athletes while ensuring that assistance reaches everyone who needs it.

## Gulveer scripts history

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 22 :** India's Asian Games bronze medalist Gulveer Singh smashed the Asian Indoor 5000m record while also qualifying for the World Athletics Championships to be held later this year when he finished fourth in an indoor event in Boston, USA. Gulveer clocked 12 minutes and 59.77 seconds to finish fourth at the Terrier DMR Challenge indoor competition in Boston on Friday and become the first Indian to run 5000m in sub 13 minutes.

His performance on the Boston University track eclipsed the earlier Asian indoor 5000m record of 13:08.41s set by Thailand's Kieran Tuntivate in 2022. The entry standard for the 2025 World Championships (September 13 to 21) in Tokyo is 13.01.00.