



**Fashionista Wamiqa**  
Actor Wamiqa Gabbi says fashion has always been a reflection of who she is

LEISURE | P2

**CAG revelation**  
The Delhi government suffered cumulative losses of over ₹2,000 crore due to the excise policy, as per a CAG report

NATIONAL | P9

**Credit boost**  
RBI lowers risk weights for bank finance to NBFCs and microfinance loans, a move that will unlock more funds and boost credit

BUSINESS | P11

**Pragg favourite**  
After bagging Tata Steel Masters, GM R Pragganandhaa starts as the favorite to win the Prague Masters

SPORTS | P12

## Life for Sajjan Kumar in 1984 anti-Sikh riots

**Press Trust of India**  
**New Delhi, Feb 25:** A Delhi court Tuesday awarded life-term imprisonment to former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar in a murder case related to the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.

Special judge Kaveri Baweja pronounced the judgement for the alleged killing of Jaswant Singh and his son Tarundeep Singh November 1, 1984.

The complainant, wife of Jaswant, and the prosecution had sought death penalty for Kumar. The offence of murder carried a maximum punishment of death penalty, while the minimum sentence was life imprisonment.

The court February 12 convicted Kumar for the offence and sought a report from Tihar Central Jail on his psychiatric and psychological evaluation in view of a Supreme Court order asking for such a report in cases attracting capital punishment. Kumar is currently lodged in Tihar jail.

## Kerala youth kills 5

**Press Trust of India**  
**Thiruvananthapuram, Feb 25:** Most horrific scenes unfolded as police entered the crime scenes in three locations in and around Venjaramoodu in Thiruvananthapuram district, where a 23-year-old man allegedly killed five people — his brother, grandmother, paternal uncle, aunt, and a young woman said to be his lover, Monday.

The deceased were identified as accused Afan's younger brother Afsan (13), his paternal uncle Latheef, his wife Sajitha, Afan's grandmother Salma Beevi (88) and Farsana, the girlfriend of the accused.

Investigating officials say that Afan was a drug abuser and have obtained evidence to support this.

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



## CLASS X GIRL DELIVERS BABY IN HOSTEL; HM SUSPENDED

**Press Trust of India**  
**Malkangiri, Feb 25:** A day after a Class X student gave birth to a premature baby in the hostel of a state-run residential school in Odisha's Malkangiri district, the authorities Tuesday suspended the headmaster of the institute, officials said.

Following an inquiry, the district administration of Malkangiri also disengaged hostel matron Suchitra Charchi with immediate effect and put an auxiliary nurse and midwife under suspension.

The student delivered a baby girl Monday after returning to the hostel after appearing in the board examination, police said Tuesday.

The headmaster of the school, run by the ST & SC Development, Minorities & Backward



**DRIBBLING TO GLORY:** A tense moment from India-England tie at Kalinga Stadium, Bhubaneswar, Tuesday (More on P12) PHOTO: BIKASH NAYAK

## Harmanpreet's brace hands India 2-1 win over England

**Press Trust of India**  
**Bhubaneswar Feb 25,** The Indian men's hockey team ended the Bhubaneswar leg of the FIH Hockey Pro League on a high, securing a hard-fought 2-1 victory over England after skipper Harmanpreet Singh's brace here on Tuesday.

Harmanpreet led from the front, scoring twice (26', 33') to propel India to a crucial win and lift them to third place in the standings.

England entered the contest with momentum following their thrilling 3-2 victory less than 24 hours earlier, but they struggled to create clear chances in the opening exchanges.

India, on the other hand, displayed early attacking intent but lacked precision in the final third during a cagey first quarter.

Five minutes into the second quarter, Abhishek showcased brilliant stickwork, dribbling past three defenders before delivering a fine cross. However, Sukhjeet Singh was unable to convert from close range.

Abhishek had another opportunity soon after but dragged his shot wide as Craig Fulton's men continued their search for the opener. In the 24th minute, India suffered a setback when Jugraj Singh received a yellow

# Stalin warns another language war

**Press Trust of India**  
*The perennial north-south linguistic divide which gathered impetus with the introduction of the National Education Policy, 2020 reached a flashpoint when Tamil Nadu chief minister MK Stalin issued a veiled warning that any attempt to undermine Tamil pride would be met with resistance. Stalin claimed that the Centre is again sowing the seeds of a language war under the guise of NEP implementation. The TN CM's statement comes exactly 60 years after about 70 people, mostly students, ended their lives by self-immolation, or by consuming poison, during anti-Hindi agitations in the southern state. The DMK which is currently in power in TN also led the protests then. The stir was postponed, not entirely withdrawn, but only after the then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri assured Tamils that English would continue to be used for Centre-state and intra-state communications*

**Chennai, Feb 25:** Amid the ongoing Hindi imposition row, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin Tuesday said the state was "ready" for "another language war."

Responding to a query if the Centre was "sowing the seeds for another language war," in light of the alleged Hindi imposition, Stalin replied, "yes, certainly. We are ready for it."

The ruling DMK has been opposed to the three language policy and has been insisting Tamil Nadu was content with Tamil and English, and has accused the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre of "imposing Hindi," a charge denied by the Union government.

The "language war" refers to the DMK's anti-Hindi agitation in 1965, when the Dravidian party successfully campaigned against the alleged imposition of the language on the Tamil people.

Addressing reporters after

## TN actor-politician quits saffron fold

**Chennai:** BJP's Tamil Nadu leader Ranjana Nachiyar Tuesday resigned from party's prime membership, citing concerns over Tamil identity and nationalism. Her exit comes amid the escalating three-language policy row, with Chief Minister MK Stalin opposing Hindi imposition while BJP pushes for it. In a social media post, she accused the BJP of using nationalism and religion for political gains while failing to respect Tamil identity. The DMK has maintained that Tamil Nadu will stick to its two-language policy of Tamil and English, rejecting any attempt to impose Hindi.

chairing a Cabinet meet at the Secretariat here, the CM also said it has been decided to convene an all-party meet March 5 to discuss the Lok Sabha delimitation issue. Tamil Nadu was facing the 'threat' of losing eight seats as the state has successfully implemented the family planning programme that led to population control, he said.

Political parties registered



with the Election Commission of India would be invited for the all-party meeting, he said and appealed for unity, overcoming political differences.

Asked if the meeting will discuss the three-language policy, a bone of contention between the NDA-led Centre and the Tamil Nadu government in light of the National Education Policy (NEP), Stalin said that to raise voice in the Parliament on

issues like NEP, central funds and NEET, adequate number of MPs was required.

"Because, in the name of delimitation, a sword is hanging over southern states," he said.

The state was leading in all development indices, but now faced the "threat" of losing out on the Lok Sabha seats post delimitation as the process would be based on the state's population.

"Tamil Nadu succeeded in population control through the family planning programme. Just because population is less, there is a situation of the Lok Sabha seats being cut down (in TN). We stand to lose 8 seats and as a result, we would be having only 31 MPs, and not the 39 (present number)," he added.

"Our representation (in Parliament) will reduce, Tamil Nadu's voice is being stifled. This is a matter of Tamil Nadu's rights. All leaders and political parties should jointly speak across party lines on the issue," the CM added.

**Two injured in City bus mishap**  
**Bhubaneswar, Feb 25:** A bus operated by the City's public transport service hit two people near the Master Canteen area here Tuesday morning, leaving them seriously injured.

The two have been identified as Ranjit Behera, in his 30s, and Hrudananda Nayak, a septuagenarian. Ranjit sustained injuries to his leg, while Hrudananda hurt his back and shoulders. Both are undergoing treatment at Capital Hospital.

Tensions flared at the mishap site, leading to an altercation between locals and officials from the Capital Region Urban Transport (CRUT). CRUT announced the immediate termination of both the driver and the conductor. Mo Bus is a public transport service run in the state.

The CRUT, a special purpose vehicle (SPV) formed under the Housing and Urban Development Department, operates a fleet of about 400 buses to and from the capital. P4

# Buried 3bn-year-old beach on Mars

**Press Trust of India**  
**Perth, Feb 25:** In the 1970s, images from the NASA Mariner 9 orbiter revealed water-sculpted shorelines billions of years old. The researchers claim to have found beach deposits from an ancient Martian ocean.

Named after a mythical god of fire, Zhurong, launched by Chinese National Space Administration in 2020 and remained active on Mars from 2021 to 2022, had its sights set on a very different body of water — the vestiges of an ancient ocean.

A new study published in PNAS Tuesday has made quite a splash. The study involved a team of Chinese and American scientists led by Jianhui Li from Guangzhou University in China, and was based on work done by the China National Space Administration's Mars rover Zhurong.

Data from Zhurong provide



located in the northern hemisphere of Mars. Zhurong landed within Utopia Planitia, a vast expanse and the largest impact basin on Mars which stretches some 3,300km in diameter.

The Zhurong rover used a technique called ground penetrating radar, which probed down to 100 metres below the surface. Rocks imaged along the transect contained many reflective layers that are visible by ground penetrating radar down to at least 30 metres. All the layers also

dip shallowly into the basin, away from the paleoshoreline. This geometry exactly reflects how sediments are deposited into oceans on Earth.

The ground penetrating radar also measured how much the rocks are affected by an electrical field. The results showed the rocks are more likely to be sedimentary and are not volcanic flows, which can also form layers.

The study compared Zhurong data gathered from Utopia Planitia with ground penetrating radar data for different sedimentary environments on Earth.

The result of the comparison is clear — the rocks Zhurong imaged are a match for coastal sediments deposited along the margin of an ocean.

Zhurong found a beach which is about three billion years old.

**TREMORS JOLT STATE**  
**Bhubaneswar:** An earthquake of 5.1 magnitude on the Richter scale struck the Bay of Bengal at 6:10 AM Tuesday, causing mild tremors in several parts of Odisha. The quake occurred at a depth of 91 km beneath the sea surface.

Tremors were felt in Bhubaneswar, Puri, Paradip, Baripada, Sambalpur, Angul, Kendrapara, Jagatsinghpur, and Balasore, leaving the residents of the regions panic-stricken.

According to seismic data, the earthquake's epicentre was located 286 km east of Puri, 286 km south of Haldia, 297 km east-southeast of Bhubaneswar, 340 km south of Kolkata, and 394 km east of Berhampur.

However, no casualties or damage to property have been reported so far.

Experts have assured that there is no tsunami threat following the seismic activity.

# leisure



## RACHEL ZEGLER ADDRESSES SNOW WHITE BACKLASH

Rachel Zegler says people's passion for the character is the reason for the backlash against her casting in the upcoming *Snow White* movie. Zegler stars as the beloved Disney princess in the film, which is the live-action remake of the 1937 animated classic.

## FOSTER STRUGGLES WITH SPOTLIGHT AS HER RELATIONSHIP GOES PUBLIC

Sutton Foster is struggling with the intense public scrutiny of her relationship with Hugh Jackman. The media attention and long-distance nature of their romance coupled with comments from Jackman's ex-wife are creating pressure on Foster, despite the couple's commitment to each other.



### FORTUNE FORECAST

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**ARIES**  
You have been too busy with work and social obligations. It is high time you took a break and did something for yourself. Your health may need attention. Ganesha says, everything else should take a backseat if you're stressed out.

**TAURUS**  
You will manage to achieve all short-term goals that you had set today and your focus will now shift to setting long-term ones. Work pressure will continue but you will make it a point to find some time to renew your leisure activities. Family and friends will also figure in your scheme of things, predicts Ganesha.

**GEMINI**  
Today will prove to be an emotional and engaging day for you, predicts Ganesha. Fortune will favour you, though your emotions may cloud your reasoning and slow down your progress. Your spare time will be spent on devising methods to make the best use of your knowledge.

**CANCER**  
You may get a gift from your life partner. Ties with business partners will be good and you will get a good news from them. Time to make new plans for the future with spouse. You will feel greater companionship with spouse, giving you joy.

**LEO**  
Maybe it is the weather, or just one of those days, but today, you are extremely prone to wild mood swings, says Ganesha. You must remember that nothing is permanent, except change. So go with the flow and do not get caught in the undercurrent of the changes that are taking place all around you. Take it as a warning that works to your advantage, says Ganesha.

**VIRGO**  
Mundane, everyday routine will get on your nerves today, warns Ganesha. Don't make a mountain out of a mole hill. All said and done, you won't let anything affect your zest to work. You will break new ground to win the hearts of others, feels Ganesha.

**LIBRA**  
Ganesha says that you will be able to see a huge change in your personal and social status. Ganesha says that this may be due to medium like television or due to your innovative ideas in your work place. People will be praising you and your work today.

**SCORPIO**  
You shall groom yourself all prim and proper today. The thought of how you look dominates your mind today. You are likely to capture the imagination of people - both at work and at social gathering. Cash will exit left, right and centre from your pockets on account of fun and entertainment.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Your temper is as hot as a fireball today, foresees Ganesha. Not for nothing they say that anger may destroy the world. Don't axe your own feet by your aggressive behaviour. Cool down and think before you act. There are chances that you may experience financial crunch, handle it carefully, advises Ganesha.

**CAPRICORN**  
Certain revelations about a relationship will draw your attention; you will find it intriguing and will spend a good amount of time trying to solve the mystery, says Ganesha. Besides, your impressive communication power will help dissolve conflicts that may have risen because of misinterpretation. There is nothing really to worry about, but keeping abreast of the activities of your rivals will help you stay ahead in competition.

**AQUARIUS**  
It is your lucky day today! Whatever you wish for, it will fall into your lap, be it name, fame, money or love. During the second half of the day, you will keep yourself occupied with your hobbies like reading, writing, playing active role in discussion groups or research, says Ganesha.

**PISCES**  
You are unlikely to be your calm and lucid self today. You will likely catch yourself worrying unnecessarily and putting in more efforts than required at work. However, some leisure time will come your way in the evening wherein you will regain your usual perspective, says Ganesha.

## John on being 'objectified'

**Mumbai:** John Abraham has been a part of the film industry for over two decades, impressing audiences with his extraordinary physique and body transformations. From *Jism* to *Pathaan*, his eight-pack abs and fitness have often been a major talking point. However, in a recent interview, John admitted to feeling objectified for his body and shared how he dealt with it by selecting well-written scripts.

He revealed, "I did feel objectified. I was often told, 'John, you are probably the only man who can be objectified by women.' Strangely, I took it as a compliment. But there's always a struggle where looks are prioritised over performance. The key is to balance it by choosing the right films." He cited *Madras Cafe*, *Kabul Express*, *Taxi No. 9211*, and *No Smoking* as examples of his effort to focus on strong storytelling.

Discussing his upcoming film, *The Diplomat*, John emphasised the importance of good writing. "For any film I do or produce, writing is crucial. While audiences still love seeing my physique, there's also a demand for strong content."

John will be seen next in *The Diplomat*, in which he plays the role of real-life Indian diplomat JP Singh. It releases in theatres March 7.

AGENCIES



## Wamiqa's dream come true moment

**Mumbai:** Actress Wamiqa Gabbi recently expressed her excitement about attending Milan Fashion Week, describing the experience as a surreal dream.

Sharing her thoughts, she said, "Fashion has always been a reflection of who I am, and attending Milan Fashion Week feels like stepping into a dream. It's a space where creativity knows no bounds, and I'm excited to soak it all in—styles, stories, and everything in between. It's amazing to be part of this ever-evolving art on such a big stage."

Talking about Wamiqa, the actress was recently seen alongside Varun Dhawan in *Baby John*. She will next be seen in the upcoming spy thriller *G2*, directed by debutant Vinay Kumar Sirigineedi. *G2* serves as the sequel to the 2018 hit *Goodachari*, which was written by and starred Adivi Sesh. In this new installment, Wamiqa stars opposite Adivi Sesh. She recently wrapped up the European shooting schedule for *G2* alongside Adivi. Actor Emraan Hashmi, who has a significant role in the film, is expected to bring his own intrigue to the plot. The star-studded cast also includes Murali Sharma, Supriya Yarlagadda, and Madhu Shalini.

Apart from this, Gabbi also has "Bhoot Bangla," with Akshay Kumar and Tabu in the lineup.

## Sushmita reveals her marriage plans

**Mumbai:** Sushmita Sen has always been open about her personal life, and during a recent Instagram Live session, she candidly shared her thoughts on marriage.

The former Miss Universe revealed that while she is open to the idea of marriage, she is looking for someone who is truly worthy of such a commitment. When one of the fans asked Sushmita about her wedding plans, the actress said in Hindi, "I also want to get married. There should be someone worthy of marriage, right? Marriage doesn't just happen like that. As they say in a very romantic way, it's a bond of the heart. The feeling should reach the heart, right? Then I'll get married too."

During the Q&A session,

the *Aarya* actress also mentioned that she had recently attended a wedding in Jaipur. Sushmita signed off by saying that her younger daughter is having her board exams and she needs to check on her.

In the caption of the video, Sushmita wrote: #livesession #sharing A special date with some super special people!! #24thfebruary Thank you for joining me LIVE!!! I love you guys!!! #duggadugga #yourstruly.

For the unversed, the 49-year-old actress was previously in a relationship with Lalit Modi, the founder and former chairman of the IPL.



## Govinda, Sunita on brink of split!

**Mumbai:** Govinda and his wife, Sunita Ahuja, have been making headlines amid reports of their separation after 37 years of marriage. While no official statement has been made, reports suggest they have been living separately for some time.

As per sources, Govinda's alleged relationship with a Marathi actress may have contributed to the



rift. Additionally, their differing lifestyle choices have created tensions.

Sunita recently spoke to *Pinkvilla Hindi Rush*, revealing that while they have two homes, she lives in their apart-

ment with their children, while Govinda stays in their bungalow. She explained that Govinda enjoys socialising late into the night, while she prefers a quieter lifestyle.

Amidst the rumours, *ETimes*

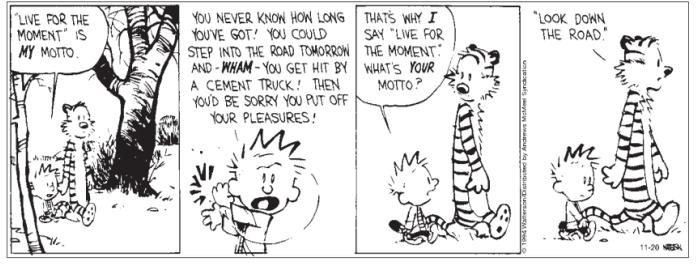
quoted a source claiming that Sunita had sent a separation notice months ago, though no further action has been taken. Govinda's manager, Shashi Sinha, acknowledged issues between the couple, attributing them to certain family statements. However, he emphasised that Govinda is focused on launching a new film and that meetings with artists have been misinterpreted.

Govinda and Sunita married in March 1987 but revealed their marriage only after their daughter Tina's birth in 1988. They later welcomed their son, Yashvardhan, in 1997.

### PEANUTS



### CALVIN AND HOBBS

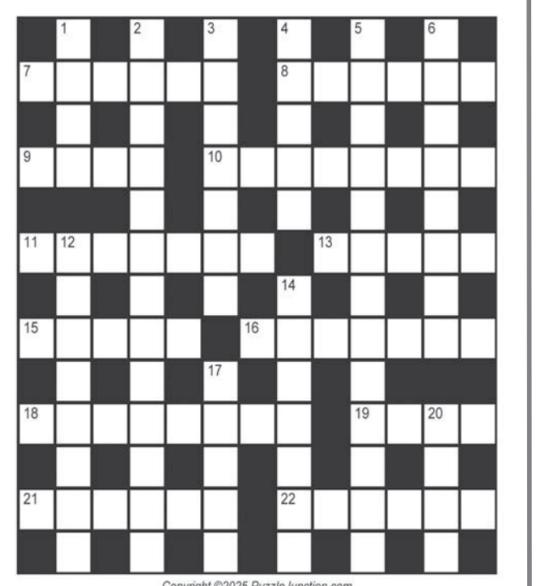


### BREVITY



### FUN POST

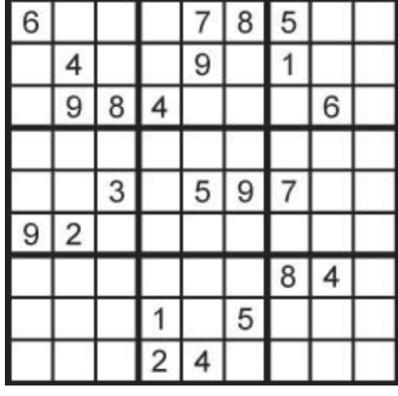
### CROSSWORD



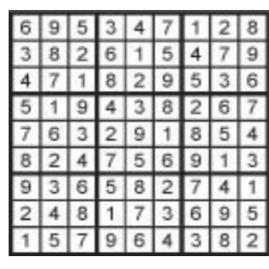
- Across**
- 7 Call off
  - 8 Agitation
  - 9 Prohibit by vote
  - 10 Connected
  - 11 Beef and venison, e.g. (3,4)
  - 13 Page number
  - 15 Chum
  - 16 Opaque gem (4,3)
  - 18 Short cape
  - 19 Other than
  - 21 Withdraw (3,3)
  - 22 Crevice
  - 3 Farmer's calendar
  - 4 Steps down
  - 5 Gold or silver, e.g. (8,5)
  - 6 Hardship
  - 12 Teacher
  - 14 Equilibrium
  - 17 Denture
  - 20 Musical composition
- Down**
- 1 Salary
  - 2 Cabin class

### 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

**BHUBANESWAR:** Senior OPS officer and litterateur Dr Chandra Sekhar Hota was appointed as the secretary of Odisha Sahitya Akademi Tuesday. Hota, currently serving as the officer on special duty at Odia Language, Literature and Culture (OLL&C) department, will also hold the charge of secretary of Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi till further orders, according to a notification issued by OLL&C department.



# downtown

## ODISHA TRAVEL BAZAAR CONCLAVE

# Parida: State eyes to become top adventure tourism destination



“Odisha is truly blessed, with untapped shoreline, dense forest cover, temples, waterfalls, RAMSAR sites, sanctuaries and many more. The state is engaged in a visioning exercise for 2036 and 2047, with tourism at the heart of the state's growth strategy,” Development Commissioner Anu Garg said.

To attract young tourists from different parts of India and abroad, the state government has decided to issue detailed guidelines for the establishment of adventure tourism spots in the state.

The proposed guidelines were discussed in detail during a workshop at Odisha Travel Bazaar conclave which is underway in the City.

Tourism department Director Samarth Verma presented the Draft Odisha Adventure Tourism Guidelines 2025, which set the foundation for discussions on regulatory frameworks, strategic pillars, adventure potential destinations, and best practices to promote safe and sustainable adventure tourism in the state.

“From hot air ballooning to bungee jumping, from kayaking to winch parasailing, Odisha has the right kind of destinations to accommodate every kind of adventure tourism,” Verma said.

The workshop saw active participation from more than 40 adventure tourism operators, travel experts, and enthusiasts from various genres like water sports, aero sports, terrestrial sports who shared their experiences and challenges in growing the sector.

General of the Ministry of Tourism, said that adventure tourism is not just about thrill -- it's about responsible travel, environmental stewardship, and economic opportunities for local communities.

“Odisha's vision aligns perfectly with India's push for diverse tourism experiences, and we are committed to supporting this journey,” she said.

She further said that the cultural and natural heritage of Odisha, along with its entrepreneurial spirit, is deeply embedded in its DNA, making it a unique and vibrant destination for adventure seekers.

“We are all set to unravel the best-kept secrets of Odisha. The state has truly become a magnet, bringing together all stakeholders for the 6th Odisha Travel Bazaar, making it a pivotal workshop for the future of tourism,” Sinha added.

Mugdha Sinha, Director

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 25:** The state government aims to lay the foundation for the growth of the state's tourism over the next 50 years so that it becomes the top destination for adventure and exploration, Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida said here Tuesday.

Addressing a workshop as part of the sixth edition of Odisha Travel Bazaar (OTB) conclave here, Parida, who is in-charge of the Tourism department, said Odisha stands as the premier destination for adventure sports, offering an array of breathtaking locations including beaches, dense forests, hills and waterfalls.

“We are committed to developing these sites, not just for today, but for future generations,” she said.

Mugdha Sinha, Director



**PREPARATORY MEET:** Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja presides over a high-level meeting with officials at Lok Seva Bhawan in Bhubaneswar, Tuesday, ahead of Puri Rath Yatra. DGP YB Khurania and ACS, Home Satyabrata Sahu are seen

## Govt summons 4 more KIIT officials

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 25:** Expediting its inquiry, the state government Tuesday summoned four more KIIT officials to depose before the high-level committee probing the alleged suicide of 20-year-old Nepalese BTech student Prakriti Lamsal and the subsequent unrest on the campus.

The Higher Education department summoned KIIT's chief proctor PK Patnaik, director Sanhita Mishra, internal committee chief Ipsita Satpathy and assistant director Smarika Pati.

They were asked to appear before the panel headed by Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Satyabrata Sahu February 27, separate notifications said.

Earlier, February 21, KIIT founder Achyuta Samanta and seven other top officials of the varsity had appeared before the panel and recorded their statements. They were asked as to why notices were issued only to Nepalese students to leave the hostel and why the institution failed to act on the harassment complaint filed by the deceased girl for over a month.

# Filing of I-T returns may not affect PDS beneficiaries

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 25:** Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare (FS&CW) Minister Krushna Chandra Patra Tuesday clarified that eligible ration card holders, who are filing I-T returns, will not be removed from the Public Distribution System (PDS) list.

Patra issued the clarification after receiving complaints from people whose ration cards have been cancelled as they have filed I-T returns. “I want to make it clear that ration cards of any eligible person will not be cancelled. We will conduct physical verification to check the income of the ration card holders who file I-T returns,” Patra told mediapersons here.

The FS&CW Minister said that he has asked the officers of his department to ensure door-to-door visit for physical verification of such ration card holders.

The list of such beneficiaries has been sent to the field-level officials, he added.



Senior BJD legislator Pratap Keshari Deb said, “First, the FS&CW Minister said ration card of all persons who file I-T returns will be cancelled. Now, he has changed his stand.” Before making any statement in the media, he should hold a discussion with the department officers and go deep into the issue so that the reputation of his position and department will not be hampered, the BJD leader said.

Congress MLA Pabitra Saunta said, “The double-engine government has eight types of policies. The statement of the FS&CW Minister varies from the statement of the secretary and other officers. It seems there is a lack of coordination among them.”

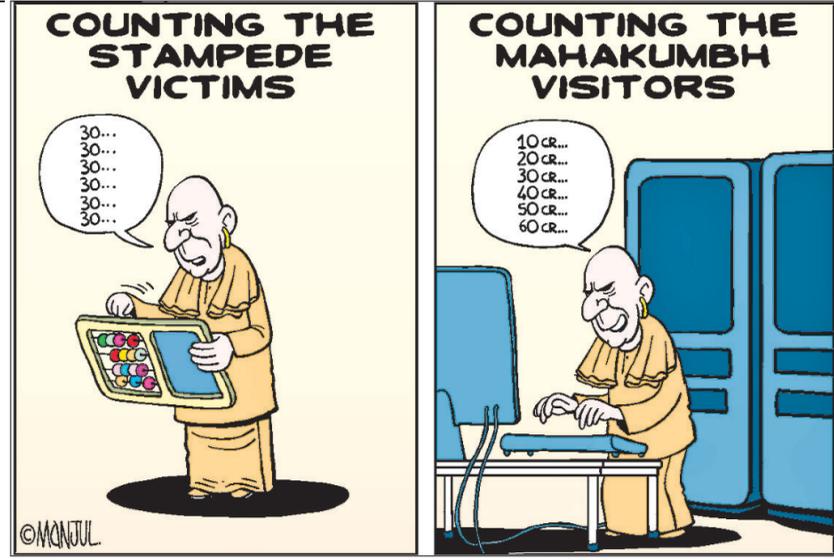
Patra had February 19 told the Assembly that 3,28,932 death cases had been identified and deleted from the ration card database during the ongoing e-KYC process. Similarly, 61,882 ineligible beneficiaries were identified through field verification and deleted from the database so far, he had said.

Families earning more than ₹10,000 per month in rural areas and over ₹15,000 per month in urban areas will not be included in the PDS.

“I want to assure you that the ration cards of poor people will not be cancelled. If someone's financial status has improved now or any rich person has grabbed a ration card will only be removed from the PDS list,” he further clarified.

Meanwhile, Opposition BJD and Congress slammed the FS&CW Minister for changing the norms frequently and creating confusion among the poor.

## POLITICKLE by MANJUL



## ISO 9001:2015 certification for state vaccine store

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 25:** In a first in India, the state vaccine store here has received the prestigious ISO 9001:2015 certification from United Accrediting Services Limited (UASL) for quality management under the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP), official sources said Tuesday.

“The certification has been awarded for adhering to key quality standards, including a well-structured storage system, efficient cold chain management, seamless supply chain operations, and digitised record-keeping through online software,” they said.

# Naveen likely to join anti-Polavaram protest Feb 28

## CONG NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE MALKANGIRI DEMONSTRATION

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 25:** The BJD has sought clarification from the BJP-led Central government and Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on the Polavaram dam project in Andhra Pradesh, and pledged support for a mass protest against it at Motu February 28 where party president Naveen Patnaik is likely to join.

According to BJD's coordination and activities committee chairman Debi Prasad Mishra, “The affected people of Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Andhra Pradesh have planned to launch a major agitation against the Polavaram project at Motu in Malkangiri district under the banner of the Polavaram Joint Coordination Committee and the BJD is a part of it.”

Mishra claimed that the project would affect the tribal communities of Odisha in Malkangiri, and also the inhabitants of Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh.

He said the committee invited BJD president and former chief minister Naveen Patnaik to attend the proposed rally at Motu

**The BJD has extended support to the agitation against Polavaram dam being undertaken by Andhra Pradesh, as the project is expected to have a severe impact on the people of Motu and Padia blocks in Malkangiri district**

February 28. “No decision has been taken yet on Patnaik's visit, but if he is unable to go, the BJD president will address the gathering virtually,” Mishra told PTI.

The BJD has extended support to the agitation against the Polavaram dam project being undertaken by Andhra Pradesh, as the project is expected to have a severe impact on the people of Motu and Padia blocks in Malkangiri district.

Party leaders alleged that as many as 12 gram panchayats in these areas would be submerged

in the backwaters of the project. Asked about BJD's stance, Mishra said, “Patnaik has been opposing the project since 2007 after learning that the dam's design was altered without considering the interests of the tribal communities. Now that the BJP government has sanctioned about ₹17,000 crore in two phases for the project's completion, the BJD is compelled to raise its voice against it.”

He questioned, “How can the project proceed despite violating multiple norms set by the Central Water Commission (CWC), the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MOEFCC), and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MOTA)?”

Clarifying BJD's position, Mishra said, “We are not opposed to the dam project itself, but to the changes made in its original design. The current construction is based on a water discharge capacity of 50 lakh cusecs, whereas the agreed capacity was 36 lakh cusecs.”

He also expressed surprise over the silence of the Odisha government and the 22 BJP MPs from

the state. BJD leader Bhruhu Baxipatra alleged that the BJP governments at the Centre and in Odisha were deliberately remaining silent on the project to appease Andhra Pradesh, as the ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP) is an NDA ally.

Meanwhile, the Congress, despite also opposing the project, has decided not to participate in the February 28 demonstration.

Congress Legislative Party leader Ramachandra Kadam said, “We are against the project and will stage protests on the streets, but not alongside the BJD. Naveen Patnaik did nothing to stop Polavaram during his 24-year tenure as chief minister. Now, after losing power, he is making meaningless noise.”

Kadam also demanded a response from Majhi, questioning his silence on the issue.

“We have a tribal chief minister, yet many tribal villages will be submerged by the Polavaram project. Majhi should publicly clarify whether he stands with Odisha's tribals or is following Modi's appeasement policy,” he said.

# Absconding fraudster nabbed in Ahmedabad

AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 25:** The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Odisha Police arrested a fraudster, who had absconded after jumping bail, from Ahmedabad in Gujarat after around four years, a senior EOW official said Tuesday.

A non-bailable warrant had been issued against the accused, Manoranjan Ray, by the designated court under the OPID Act at Cuttack in 2022.

Ray, a resident of Naugaon area in Jagatsinghpur district, was arrested by the police from Ahmedabad railway station February 22 in connection with a case registered with the EOW in 2016, the official added.

Ray, who was brought to Odisha on a transit remand, was produced before the court at Cuttack Tuesday.

The case in which Ray was arrested had been by one Laxmi Narayan Mohapatra of Talcher in Angul district.

As per the case details, Manoranjan Ray being the Manag-



ing Director of the companies - M/s Inter Ocean Videsh Limited, M/s Interoccean Retail (India) Limited, Realcon Limited, M/s Alpine Fincrop Limited and M/s Interoccean Realcon Limited - illegally collected deposits from investors promising high returns.

He also fraudulently issued bonds, certificates, agreements and money receipts to win the trust of the gullible investors.

The accused had allegedly duped 1,061 investors of ₹1,05,54,800 from 2010 to 2016.

The police during the course of investigation arrested the accused Ray from New Delhi October 20, 2019. Later, a

charge sheet was filed against the fraudster and his enterprises.

The trial in the case is currently going on in the Court of Presiding Officer in a designated court under OPID Act in Cuttack.

The accused Ray was granted bail by the Odisha High Court June 4, 2021 with the condition that he would deposit ₹10 lakh at the time of his release, and ₹40 lakh within a period of two months, and thereafter the rest amount of ₹59,00,500 within a period of six months subsequent to his release on bail.

As per the order, Ray had deposited only ₹10 lakh at the time of his release June 11, 2021.

"Subsequently, the accused/warrantee violated the bail conditions by not depositing any further amount within the time limit and absconded. Due to his non-compliance and non-appearance, the court was pleased to issue non-bailable warrant against him July 19, 2022," the EOW official added.

## Guv takes holy dip at Triveni Sangam

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 25:** Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati, along with First Lady Jayashree Kambhampati, took a holy dip at Triveni Sangam during the Mahakumbh in Prayagraj Tuesday.

Describing the experience as sacred, the Governor emphasised that the ritual symbolises faith, tradition, and spiritual unity. He praised the Uttar Pradesh government for its meticulous arrangements, ensuring a smooth and safe experience for millions of devotees.



Highlighting the cultural and spiritual significance of Mahakumbh, he remarked, "This is not just an event but a reflection of India's rich heritage and traditions. The devotion and harmony witnessed here strengthen our shared faith and remind us of our deep spiritual roots."

## XIM varsity awards ₹1.3cr in scholarships



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 25:** XIM University awarded scholarships to 108 students from 12 undergraduate programmes, with a total value of ₹1.30 crore, during its 5th Undergraduate Scholarship Awarding Ceremony here, Tuesday.

Director of Vigilance Yeshwant Kumar Jethwa joined as chief guest in the occasion. Esteemed guests included institution's vice-chancellor Fr Antony R Uvari, SJ, registrar Fr S Antony Raj, SJ, Chief finance officer Fr V Arokiyadass, SJ. UG scholarship committee chairperson, academic deans, faculty, and staff members of the university also joined the event.

Jethwa congratulated the meritorious students and emphasised the importance of goal setting, overcoming fear, and good char-

acter in achieving success.

Fr Antony R Uvari acknowledged that the institution had been consistently recognising and rewarding students' achievements for the past five years. He urged students to continue striving for excellence by setting targets, preparing a roadmap, and working tirelessly towards their goals. The ceremony concluded with a vote of thanks by Fr S Antony Raj, SJ, who expressed gratitude for the collective efforts and dedication of the university in fostering a supportive learning environment and ensuring equitable educational opportunities.

Notably, the undergraduate degree programme at the university offers a globally aligned curriculum, featuring a wide variety of courses that provide a strong foundation for students to pursue their career goals.

## Paddy procurement to conclude March 31

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 25:** The state government has announced that paddy procurement for the current season will conclude March 31, urging farmers to complete deliveries on time to avail the benefits of the scheme.

Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Minister Krushna Chandra Patra, addressing the media Tuesday, stated that the decision aligns with efforts to streamline procurement. He confirmed that around 6.5 lakh metric tonnes of paddy have already been procured, covering over 90 per cent of the targeted volume. To ensure smooth operations, the government has made necessary arrangements at procurement centers. However, concerns over irregularities remain. February 16, two officials were suspended for alleged negligence and malpractice at a mandi in Machhagaon, Jagatsinghpur district. Authorities have assured strict monitoring to curb discrepancies.



Farmers are advised to deliver their produce before the deadline, as any delay may lead to exclusion from the procurement process.

The government remains committed to fair and transparent procurement, ensuring that farmers receive timely payments while addressing operational challenges.

## TTEEx held for disaster mgmt



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 25:** A state level mock exercise on chemical and industrial disaster management, in collaboration with National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) will be organised February 28.

The exercise will be conducted at 24 identified industrial locations in 16 districts, namely Angul, Dhenkanal, Balasore, Bhadrak, Cuttack, Ganjam, Jagatsinghpur, Jajpur, Khurda, Koraput, Rayagada, Bolangir, Sambalpur, Jharsuguda, Sundergarh and Mayurbhanj.

As part of the event, a Table Top Exercise (TTEEx) was organised Tuesday in virtual mode at State Emergency Operation Centre (SEOC) here. District Administration of 16 districts and representatives of identified industries participated with an aim to assess the standard operating procedures (SOP) and availability of resources with different districts, industries and various

state and Central government organisations.

The objective of the mock exercise is to streamline emergency response, review disaster management plans and evolve SOPs, identify gap areas in resource management, planning, manpower and deployment, emergency communications, first response capabilities of government departments and generate public awareness.

TTEEx was jointly chaired by OSDMA executive director Kamal Lochan Mishra and additional special relief commissioner Padmanav Behera and was steered by NDMA commandant Aditya Kumar.

NDMA member Lt General Syed Ata Hassain addressed the participants through virtual mode from New Delhi.

Different scenarios, preparatory measures, and modalities for conducting the mock exercise on chemical and industrial disaster management were discussed in detail during the TTEEx.

## ODOP shines at Subhadra Shakti Mela

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 25:** The Subhadra Shakti Mela 2025, currently underway here at Janata Maidan continues to attract thousands of visitors, celebrating Odisha's rich cultural heritage and fostering women-led entrepreneurship. Featuring over 300 stalls, the event showcases an array of products crafted by self-help groups (SHGs) and producer groups (PGs) from across the state.

From traditional handicrafts and organic food products to processed foods, wellness items, home essentials, and accessories, the mela has emerged



as a hub for Odisha's artisans and small-scale entrepreneurs.

A major attraction on the fourth day was the One District One Product (ODOP) showcase, which featured locally sourced and handcrafted items unique to different districts. Popular attractions included Terracot-

ta from Angul, Silver Filigree from Cuttack, Pattachitra from Puri, Patta sarees from Sonepur, Dry Fish from Bhadrak, Sambalpur Handloom from Bargarh, and Golden Grass from Kendrapara.

Adding to the excitement, actor Sritam Das visited the

mela, engaging with artisans and appreciating the diverse range of handmade products. The cultural segment featured an enthralling Jodi Sankha dance performance, followed by a comedy show by popular artists Pragyan and Shankar. The evening concluded with a mesmerising Chhau dance performance, adding vibrancy to the festivities.

With an overwhelming response from the public, the footfall has reached 40,000, while cumulative sales have surpassed ₹1 crore, solidifying the mela's role in promoting Odisha's traditional arts, crafts, and women entrepreneurs.



**ANNIV DAY:** The Museum of Justice near Killa Fort in Cuttack illuminated with lights during the Foundation Day celebration, Tuesday. Acting Chief Justice of the Orissa High Court, Justice Arindam Sinha, along with companion judges, graced the occasion

## Vigyan Rath tours Odisha

RESHMI YADAV, OP

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 25:** In a bid to promote scientific awareness and innovation, CSIR-IMMT, Bhubaneswar launched the Vigyan Rath, a mobile science exhibition that toured various institutions across Odisha from February 19 to 22.

Organised under the One Week One Theme (OWOT) initiative, the event focused on Mining, Minerals, Metals, and Materials (4M)—key sectors driving technological advancements and industrial growth.

The Vigyan Rath visited premier institutions, including IOC Bhubaneswar, ABIT Cuttack, DRIEMS University, and various schools and colleges across Nayagarh, Khurda, Puri, and Cuttack. It received an enthusiastic response from students and the public, fostering interest in science and technology.

## WEATHER

BBSR	CTC
Max Temp 33.4°	31.2°
Min Temp 21.9°	21.5°
Humidity 90%	93%
Rainfall Nil	Nil

**FORECAST**  
Fog/mist in the morning and mainly clear sky later

## MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VARIATION
SENSEX 74,602.12	▲ 147.71
NIFTY 22,547.55	▼ 5.80
DOLLAR 87.02	▲ 0.32
EURO 91.16	▲ 0.29
GOLD ₹85,522	▼ ₹508
SILVER ₹94,338	▼ ₹975

## Health camp for journalists by City Manipal Hospitals

RESHMI YADAV, OP

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 25:** Manipal Hospitals, Bhubaneswar, in association with the Press Club of Odisha, organised a health camp and awareness session on urology and nephrology for media professionals Tuesday.

The initiative aimed to provide free medical consultations, expert advice, and raise awareness about kidney and urological health among journalists.

The event saw participation from 80 to 100 attendees, including leading specialists in the field. Senior Consultant Urologists Manas Ranjan Pradhan and Subodh Das, along with Senior Consultant Nephrologists Sai Prasad Sahoo and Sukanto Kishore Das, shared insights on preventive care and treatment options.

Hospital director Saktimaya Mahapatra emphasised the importance of preventive healthcare, stating, "Providing accessible medical care is our responsibility. This initiative reflects our commitment to community health, particularly in urology and nephrology."

Das highlighted the health risks media professionals face due to irregular lifestyles and diets. "Staying hydrated and undergoing regular check-ups can help in early detection of kidney-related issues," he advised.

The session covered key aspects of kidney disease prevention, lifestyle modifications, and advancements in urological care, reinforcing the commitment of Manipal Hospitals and the Press Club of Odisha to promoting healthcare awareness among journalists.

## AIKYAM 2025 Event to boost state's startup ecosystem

## Event to boost state's startup ecosystem

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 25:** Startup Odisha hosted a capacity-building programme 'AIKYAM 2025 - Strengthening Odisha's Incubation Ecosystem', designed for incubators and academic institutions at O-Hub, here Tuesday.

The initiative aims to foster collaboration, share global best practices, and strengthen state's growing startup ecosystem.

The all-day-long event brought together incubators, academicians, and leaders dedicated to shaping the future of entrepreneurship in the state.

Speaking on the occasion, MSME department joint secretary and Startup Odisha chief administrative officer Kamaljit Das highlighted the impor-



ance of active collaboration of incubators within the startup ecosystem and said, "AIKYAM 2025 is a crucial step towards strengthening the foundation of Odisha's startup ecosystem. I urge incubators and academic institutions to actively engage in sharing knowledge, and collaborate to foster a dynamic environment where innovation and entrepreneurship can thrive."

The event was conducted in the presence of the Startup Odisha chief financial officer Prafulla Mallick. IIT-Bhubaneswar Research and Entrepreneurship Park CEO and director Soobhanakar Pati led the first session, focused on creating an entrepreneurial culture within academic institutions through incubation. Next, a session on monitoring and measuring startup

success within incubators was conducted by former CEO of IIT Delhi Innovation and Incubation Centre Naresh Priyadarshi. Later, SSU Innovation Foundation CEO Barada P Panigrahy discussed designing sustainable revenue models for incubators.

The day concluded with an interactive Q and A session where participants engaged directly with experts.

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# Delays mar Joda-Bamebari road work

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Joda, Feb 25:** Administrative delays and negligence have stalled the repair and expansion of State Highway-2 connecting Joda and Bamebari in Keonjhar district, thereby leaving the stretch prone to accidents, while dust pollution is taking a toll on the commuters. According to reports, the government has designated the stretch as State Highway but lack of administrative commitment has left the project incomplete. The road is vital for connectivity between Joda town and key mining areas in the region. The road is used daily by residents of Banspani, Balada, Badakalimati, Pala-sha, Jajang, Jalahari, and Jurudi panchayats. Around 8,000 trucks ply on this route daily transporting minerals to vari-



ous railway sidings, factories, and ports across the country. The movement of heavy vehicles has further worsened the road conditions, leading to frequent accidents and prolonged traffic jams. Considering these facts, the state government announced to upgrade this road, which

was under Works department, to State Highway-2. The state government also sanctioned ₹57 crore from the District Mineral Foundation (DMF) in 2018 for its expansion into a four-lane highway. However, the project remains stalled due to bureaucratic apathy and hurdles.

Critical junctions starting from Banspani to Jurudi, Antaramantar Square, Heshabeda Square, Bamebari Bazaar, and Kalimati Square face severe congestion, while dilapidated and narrow bridges at Banspani, Jurudi, and Antaramantar remain in urgent need of reconstruction. Expressing their frustration over the issues, locals Surendra Mohanty, Pranab Mohanty, Madhu Sahu, Binod Karua, Shibu Sharma, and Chittaranjan Mohanty have urged the administration to expedite the road work. Works department sub-divisional officer Ramdas Marandi stated that funds sanctioned earlier have not been fully utilised, and a revised proposal is being prepared at the government level to complete the four-lane project.

# Chikiti hooch tragedy: Probe begins

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Chikiti, Feb 25:** Six months after five people died consuming spurious liquor in Jenapur and Karabalu villages under Chikiti notified area council (NAC) in Ganjam district, Excise Commissioner Narasingha Bhol visited the affected areas Tuesday and started an investigation. The commissioner met with the families of the deceased persons and discussed the incident in details. Excise Superintendent Prabin Kumar Pradhan, DSP Kumud Ranjan Kuhnka, Chikiti SDPO Biswamitra Harpal, K Nuagaon police station in-charge Kishore Kumar Samal, Chikiti excise SI Sanjay Kumar Gupta, inspector Sanjay Kumar Panda, and Excise SI R Lakshmi Devi also visited the areas. Although six months have elapsed to the incident, the affected families are yet to receive compensation from the govern-



ment. The tragedy had sparked intense debate in the Assembly, with both the ruling and Opposition members blaming each other over the issue. Allying that BJD's involvement in the incident, Chikiti MLA Manoranjan Dyan Samantara of BJP had accused senior BJD organiser Surendra Mandal for the issue. Meanwhile, All India Forward Bloc's Ganjam district committee president, Bibhendra Padhi, demanded a judicial inquiry into the tragedy. He claimed that despite submitting their demands to the chief minister, chief secretary, and excise commissioner, the government

had taken no action. He also alleged that the excise commissioner's visit was merely an attempt to cover up the incident. According to reports, 25 people fell ill after consuming hooch in Maundapur village under K Nuagaon police limits August 19, 2024. While 20 of them recovered after treatment, five succumbed. The deceased were identified as Jur Behera, Lokanath Behera, Pradeep Behera, Baya Sathy and Lakshman Behera from Jenapur and Karabalu villages. Following the tragedy, locals in Jenapur staged protests, demanding compensation and a complete ban on liquor sales in the area. They blocked roads, lifting the blockade only after assurances from the administration. However, six months later, neither has liquor sales been banned in the region nor have the victims' families received any financial assistance.

## 'POOR' LIVING CONDITIONS

# Students' night-long march in Baripada

PNN/AGENCIES

**Baripada, Feb 25:** Over 100 tribal students of a state-run residential school in Mayurbhanj district walked the whole night to reach the district headquarters town of Baripada to protest the "inhumane" conditions in which they were living. The students of Classes VIII and IX of Basipitha Government High School, run by the ST & SC Development, Minorities & Backward Class Welfare department, reached Baripada town, around 20 km away, in the morning. District Collector Hema Kanta Say immediately met them

after coming to know about the protest. The students alleged that they were being served poor quality food in their hostel, and teachers were indulging in physical assault at the school. The Collector went to the school and enquired into the allegations levelled by the students. Additional District Magistrate (ADM) Netrananda Mallick said that the students' demands were genuine and appropriate measures will be taken to address them. The district administration later arranged a bus for the return journey of the students.



**LONG MARCH:** A herd of elephants crossing a road in Joda mining region of Keonjhar district as over 77 elephants were found roaming in areas under Champua and Barbil forest ranges

## SHORT TAKES

### Man gets 20-yr RI for rape of minor

**Phulbani:** A special POCSCO court here Tuesday sentenced a 25-year-old man to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment (RI) for kidnapping and raping a minor girl on the pretext of marriage. Judge Rajesh Das also slapped a fine of ₹57,000 on the convict, with an additional 11 months of imprisonment in case of non-payment. The convict, identified as Badal Diga, 25, from Tikabali police limits, had met the minor girl at a feast in March 2020. Later, June 13, 2020, Badal went to the girl's house, in absence of the latter's family members and took her to his maternal uncle's house in Landruju village of Boudh district, where he sexually assaulted her. The girl's mother, June 20, filed a complaint with Tikabali police who arrested Badal and produced in court.

### Newborn stuffed in bag rescued

**Balasure:** Rupsa police Tuesday rescued a newborn baby stuffed in a bag near Dhari Bridge along National Highway-60 in this district. Sources said passersby heard the cries of the baby abandoned on the roadside in a bag and alerted the police. A team of Rupsa police, including ASI Pama Dei and Uttam Kumar Singh, reached the spot and took the infant to Rupsa community health centre for preliminary treatment. The baby was later admitted to the DHH under the supervision of District Child Welfare department.

### 13 people critical in honeybee attack

**Kalampur:** As many as 13 people sustained critical injuries after a swarm of honeybees attacked them at Bandhakana weekly market under this block in Kalahandi district Tuesday. The injured persons were identified as Subhash Chandra Panda, Ayu Majhi, Baleswar Sunani, Bicharpati Chalan, Jayshankar Chhatra, Praharaj Rout, Mohan Rout, Tikesar Rout, Dutibahan Patel, Hrudananda Sabar, Kanhu Sabar, Himanshu Rout, Sadashiv Naik, Prakash Nial, Abhishek Meher. The incident sparked panic in the area as people ran for cover. Some of the injured persons were admitted to Bandhakana sub-health centre while others were shifted to Kalampur community health centre. The incident occurred when people and traders has assembled at the weekly market for the daily business and the bees from a nearby tree attacked them.

### 1 killed, two critical as bike hits truck



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Chikiti, Feb 25:** A biker was charred to death while two others suffered severe burn injuries when their high-speed bike collided with a cargo-laden truck near a temple about 1.5 km from Nuagaon police station in Ganjam district Tuesday evening. The deceased biker was identified as E Lakshman and the injured pillion riders as C Lokanath and N Raju. All three of them were residents of Rajpur area near Ichhapur in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh. The KTM motorcycle was completely burnt in the mishap. The mishap occurred when the truck was on its way to Chikiti from Digapahandi and the two-wheeler heading towards Digapahandi via Chikiti from Rajpur. Locals rescued the two injured bikers and admitted them in Chikiti community health centre from where they were shifted to MKCG Medical College and Hospital in Berhampur when their condition deteriorated. On being informed, Nuagaon police reached the spot and started an investigation.

## ILLEGAL BLACK STONE MINING

# NGT: Investigate through ORSAC

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Jajpur, Feb 25:** National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the state government to conduct a survey through Odisha Remote Sensing Application Centre (ORSAC) and take appropriate steps to curb alleged illegal mining of black stone on forest lands of Jajpur and Dhenkanal districts. The disputed area covers approximately 400 acre, including Nischinta hill, Dankari hill, and the surrounding reserved forest (RF) land. According to the complaint filed by a social and voluntary outfit 'Youth United for Sustainable Environment Trust', illegal extraction of black stone from Nischinta and Dankari hills is fuelling operations of four stone crusher units in the forested areas. Acting on the complaint, the NGT registered a case (208/2024/EZ) and conducted a hearing. A tribunal bench comprising Justice B Amit Sthalekar and member Arun Kumar Verma directed the state government to conduct a survey through ORSAC and take necessary action in this regard. Additionally, within three weeks, the concerned authorities must submit a detailed response to



the allegations, listing the four stone crusher units—PRMM Crusher, Maa Chandi Stone Crusher, Aruni Stone Crusher, and Sri Sai Stone Crusher—as respondents in the case. The newly added respondents have been given four weeks time to file their counter affidavits. The complainant alleges that illegal mining in the border areas of Jajpur and Dhenkanal districts has resulted in plundering of a substantial amount of black stone. Reports indicate that over 20,000 tonne of black stone has been extracted and supplied illegally to these four crusher units using high-powered machinery. Illegal extraction of black stone is causing environmental damage and leading to significant revenue loss for the state government. Earlier, following a directive from the NGT, a joint committee was formed comprising the

District Collectors of Jajpur and Dhenkanal districts, regional officials from the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), the Director of Mines and Geology departments, and officials from the Odisha State Pollution Control Board (OSPCB). The committee's report, which was submitted to the tribunal, confirms that black stone is being illegally extracted from Nischinta and Dankari hills. Further findings indicate that multiple unauthorised quarries are operating in the leased foothill areas of Nischinta and Dankari hills, as well as in Barada and Malagoda areas. Additionally, three black stone quarries in the Aruha hills—BSQ-2 (19 acre), BSQ-1 (7 acre), and BSQ-35 (22 acre)—have reportedly seen illegal extraction worth over ₹200 crore. In light of these findings, leaseholder Trinath Jena has formally requested the Chief Secretary, the Jajpur District Collector, and the Deputy Director of Minor Minerals (Jajpur) to conduct a thorough investigation and take appropriate legal measures.

# NITR's AI model brings hope for diabetes mgmt

RAJESH MOHANTY, OP

**Rourkela, Feb 25:** At a time when effective management of diabetes has become a major challenge, a team of researchers at National Institute of Technology Rourkela (NITR) has developed an artificial intelligence (AI) model that significantly enhances the accuracy of blood glucose level prediction, helping individuals and healthcare providers make better and personalised treatment decisions. The team led by assistant professor of Biotechnology and Medical Engineering at NITR Mirza Khalid Baig focused on improving glucose forecasting using deep learning techniques. According to reports, use of AI offers a way to improve diabetes care and reduce costs.

However, these models, especially predictive AI models, have their own drawbacks as their predictions are difficult to comprehend. Furthermore, traditional models, such as statistical methods or basic neural networks, often fail to recognise long-term glucose fluctuations and require complex fine-tuning. The researchers have incorporated a specialised AI model that learns from past blood sugar trends and predicts future levels more accurately than existing methods. This model processes glucose data automatically, identifying key patterns and making precise predictions. Baig said, "Our core innovation allows the model to focus on the most relevant data points while ignoring unne-



sary noise. By combining precision with efficiency, we aim to provide a practical tool that can be integrated into digital health solutions, helping patients and doctors manage diabetes more effectively." The model developed by NITR Rourkela outperformed existing forecasting techniques by

providing more reliable blood sugar predictions which in turn helps make timely and personalised adjustments to future insulin doses, meals, and physical activity, he said. Moreover, the model is optimised to work efficiently on devices like smartphones and insulin pumps, making it more

accessible for everyday diabetes management. Currently, the researchers are planning on testing the technology through extensive clinical trials at hospitals, in collaboration with senior diabetologists in Odisha such as Jayanta Kumar Panda and his team. Co-authored by Baig and his research scholar Deepjyoti Kalita, the findings of this study have been published in the IEEE Journal of Biomedical and Health Informatics. With number of diabetes cases expected to reach 124.9 million by 2045, its effective management has remained a daunting task. Controlling blood sugar level requires regular glucose monitoring to prevent dangerous spikes (hyperglycemia) and drops (hypoglycemia) in blood sugar levels.

# Winged guests say 'goodbye' to Bhitarkanika National Park

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kendrapara, Feb 25:** The sudden rise in temperature in the state has prompted migratory birds to undertake their homeward journey from Bhitarkanika National Park after staying for around two months in the winter season, officials said Tuesday. Migratory birds thronged the water bodies of Bhitarkanika, known as the second largest mangrove forest in India after Sundarbans, in December last week to avoid the extremely cold weather conditions in far-off places beyond the Himalayas. "The sudden rise in temperature and the advent of early summer this year has led the winged guests to depart early.

In the past years, they used to depart in March or April, said Manas Das, the Assistant Conservator of Forest (ACF), Rajnagar Mangrove (wildlife) Forest Division. The birds, which flew into Bhitarkanika water bodies from places like Siberia, have been leaving in batches almost every day, he said. "Normally, they migrate from Bhitarkanika to their places by the middle of March, but due to unusual rise in temperatures in February, these avian visitors are leaving early this year," the forest officer said. More than 1.51 lakh migratory birds belonging to 118 species made Bhitarkanika their temporary home this year, he added.

FOCUS POLITICS

# RELEVANCE LOST



**The SPD's electoral disaster is reminiscent of the Democrats' defeat in the 2024 US presidential election. Both parties failed to formulate an effective response to migration concerns, win over working-class voters, and adopt major progressive economic reforms**

Germany's Social Democrats are one of the West's oldest political parties, with a legacy of advocating parliamentary democracy, opposing Nazism, and leading the modernization of postwar Germany. In addition to the many notable labor, economic, and human-rights reforms that the party has implemented over the years, former SPD leader and West German Chancellor Willy Brandt's 'Ostpolitik' in the 1970s laid the groundwork for Germany's reunification in 1990. But today's SPD is a shadow of its former self: the party won only 16.4 per cent of the vote in Sunday's federal election, putting it behind both the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). It is worth considering how this defeat came about, and what it means for the future of Western social-democratic forces.

partner to the CDU/CSU – its main competitor – under Germany's "Iron Chancellor," Angela Merkel. When Merkel retired in 2021, the SPD won that year's election with one-quarter of German votes. But SPD leader and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz had to form a "traffic-light coalition" (so named for the parties' colours), with the Greens and the liberal, market-oriented Free Democrats. This led his government to pursue conflicting goals: advancing social justice and lowering taxes; constructing social housing and boosting support for entrepreneurs; combating climate change and protecting Germany's automotive industry. Such a wide-ranging agenda did little to win back the trust of workers, especially with fear of globalisation on the rise.

In the lead-up to the recent election, neither Scholz nor his party seemed to gauge German voters' primary concerns accurately. According to Infratest dimap's ARD-DeutschlandTREND survey, 37 per cent of Germans consider immigration to be the most important problem facing the country – an issue on which the SPD has been ambivalent and indecisive. The party tac-

itly supported Merkel's "open-door policy" in 2015, when Germany accepted more than one million asylum-seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, and other countries in the Middle East and North Africa. And yet, Scholz has advocated deporting "serious criminals" to Syria and Afghanistan following terror attacks. Instead of winning over voters, this muddled approach to migration and security has bolstered the anti-immigration AfD's claim that it was right all along about the "Muslim threat."

The second most important issue for voters, according to the Infratest dimap survey, is the economy, with 34 per cent of respondents agreeing that it should be the government's top priority. As an article about Scholz in Der Spiegel recently pointed out, the German economy contracted for the second consecutive year in 2024, the number of unemployed people is rising, industry is cutting jobs, and consumer confidence has tanked. The fact that this occurred on Scholz's watch undermined his image as a successful economic steward, burnished during Merkel's term. This resulted in a devastating loss

of working-class support for the SPD. According to Infratest dimap's exit poll, the AfD won 38 per cent of workers' votes, compared to just 12 per cent for the SPD. Scholz fell short in other areas, too. The much-heralded turning point (Zeitenwende) in foreign policy and national security after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has not materialised. Germany barely met NATO's 2 per cent defence-spending target and has not honored its commitments to Ukraine. As Benjamin Tallis concluded in his report titled "The End of the Zeitenwende" for the German Council on Foreign Relations, Scholz's project has been a failure.

The SPD's electoral disaster is reminiscent of the Democrats' defeat in the 2024 US presidential election. Both parties failed to formulate an effective response to migration concerns, win over working-class voters, and adopt major progressive economic reforms. Instead, they chose to emphasise cultural liberalism, which appealed to the winners of globalisation – people who do not fear for their future. But fear of being left behind economically and socially proved to be potent fuel for both Donald Trump and the AfD. So long as social democrats fail to address this fear, the far right will continue to exploit it. If center-left parties want to regain their relevance, they must confront and analyse their electoral failures and declining support while finding new ways to make inroads with workers and shield them from the effects of deindustrialisation, automation, and artificial intelligence.

*The writer is an assistant professor of political science at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw.*

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## Rebuilding Gaza

An unusual level of secrecy surrounds the high-level meeting of Arab leaders who got together in the wake of US President Donald Trump's suggestion to move all Palestinians out of the Gaza Strip and let realtors do business on that strip of land. This was to be in the name of rebuilding the settlement destroyed by Israeli bombing for the past 15 months. There was no final communiqué, Presser or details of when the meeting started or ended. Instead, only a single photo showing the leaders standing shoulder to shoulder was released. This, however, shows how sensitive these talks are for Saudi Arabia's crown prince, leaders from other Gulf states, Egypt's President and Jordan's king, who all attended. What is at stake is whether they can reach a consensus and unite around an Egyptian plan for Gaza that is starkly different to the one laid out by President Trump in recent weeks. Absolute silence could also imply that none of the leaders was willing to accept the horde of Gazans polluting their respective societies. Palestinians are the single source of immense unrest and trouble for that region.

In fact, Arab states are scrambling to address Trump's vision for Gaza, in which he says the US should take ownership of the territory, displace all its 2 million Palestinians permanently to countries like Egypt and Jordan and turn this sliver of beach front territory into a real estate project. Such a settlement proposal is contrary to all canons of diplomacy being followed by nations for the past eight decades. The plan poses a threat to an already shaky ceasefire in Gaza. Israeli airstrikes have decimated the territory and killed at least 48,000 people, most of them women and children as the men use them as shield while they themselves keep busy in terror activities. The war erupted when Hamas militants attacked an Israeli music concert dedicated, interestingly, to peace and killing around 1,200 people there and taking hostages back in October 2023.

Arab countries are keen to strengthen their ties with President Trump. But, that desire has not prevented them from verbally rejecting the displacement of Palestinians from Gaza while not directly condemning Trump's idea. Egypt and Jordan view the plan as destabilizing to their own security. The UAE, which has close ties with Israel and opposes Hamas in Gaza, has insisted that reconstruction of Gaza must be linked to the establishment of a Palestinian state. Hamas and many Palestinians have called Trump's plan "ethnic cleansing," but Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu has hailed it.

Whatever Trump or Netanyahu think, the undeniable fact is that any post-war reconstruction of Gaza will also require Arab support to help shoulder the cost of rebuilding and the possible deployment of troops for security. While Egypt's plan has not been made public, the state-run Al-Ahram newspaper in Cairo reported it includes carving out "safe areas" for Palestinians in Gaza to reside in as Egyptian and international companies remove rubble and rebuild infrastructure. There are also reports that the multiphase plan includes Hamas giving up governance of Gaza, though Hamas wants to have the right to maintain arms against Israel.

There is also speculation whether the plan goes far enough in addressing the concerns of Gulf Arab states which are unlikely to invest billions into rebuilding Gaza so long as the spectre of violence looms indefinitely and Israeli airstrikes remain a threat. The Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank also has its own vision of Gaza that will be presented in early March at a wider Arab League summit in Cairo.

Meanwhile, what causes concern is the fact that there is a little over a week left in the current ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas, while negotiations have not yet begun for the more complex second phase of the deal that includes full Israeli troop withdrawal from Gaza, the release of all remaining Israeli hostages and a permanent end to the war. Far-Right ministers in Israel's government want a return to war, saying Hamas has not been eliminated.

According to an assessment last week by the UN, World Bank and European Union, Gaza and the occupied-West Bank need at least \$53 billion for reconstruction and recovery over the next decade. A UN report says 95 per cent of Gaza's schools have been damaged or destroyed, 90 per cent homes and most hospitals, roads, water systems and agriculture land damaged during Israel's military actions since October 2023.

Undoubtedly both Trump and Arab leaders need to find a common meeting ground so that a new plan of settlement brings peace in the Middle East instead of pushing it again into an unending spiral of bloodshed and destruction of life but the main thing to watch is the high level of reluctance amongst all neighboring Moslem Arab countries towards accepting resettlement of primarily Moslem Gazans in their countries. The dislike for that bunch of people is very palpable.

### WISDOM CORNER

**A man can be himself only so long as he is alone, and if he does not love solitude, he will not love freedom, for it is only when he is alone that he is really free.**

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

**A man may imagine things that are false, but he can only understand things that are true, for if the things be false, the apprehension of them is not understanding.**

ISAAC NEWTON

**To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.**

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

### THIS DAY IN HISTORY

**1802:** Victor Hugo, a poet, novelist, and dramatist who was the most important of the French Romantic writers, was born.

**1814:** Napoleon's escape from Elba. Forced to abdicate as French emperor in 1814, Napoleon escaped from exile on the island of Elba this day in 1815 and, gathering support en route, retook power on his return to Paris on March 20, ushering in the Hundred Days.

**1885:** The Berlin West Africa Conference concluded, the major European countries having staked claims to their colonial expansions in Central Africa.

**1917:** The world's first jazz record is created. The "Original Dixieland Jass Band" recorded "Livery Stable Blues" for the Victor Talking Machine Company in New York.

**1919:** The U.S. Congress established Grand Canyon National Park in northwestern Arizona.

**1993:** The World Trade Center in New York City was bombed in an act of terrorism, and Islamic radicals were later convicted for the crime.



Bartosz M. Rydinski

**IN THE LEAD-UP TO THE RECENT ELECTION, NEITHER SCHOLZ NOR HIS PARTY SEEMED TO GAUGE GERMAN VOTERS' PRIMARY CONCERNS ACCURATELY**

### IN JEST THIS

## India home to many mental calculators

Both my parents were maths teachers, so it may not surprise you to learn that maths appealed to me as a school kid as much as swimming appeals to butterflies. It was one of my least favourite subjects, even if I had two people at home who could help me with my homework (using a ruler, if need be).

Nowadays I'm able to do basic arithmetic, but please don't ask me to solve any equations or add four-digit numbers in my head. I'm not a member of the Global Mental Calculators Association (GMCA). If I tried to join, they'd all have a big laugh and refer me to another GMCA (Global Mental Crackpot Association).

I had never heard of GMCA (the first kind) until I read an article about 14-year-old Aaryan Shukla of Maharashtra, who is a founding board member of the association. Aaryan is "officially amazing," according to Guinness World Records, and it's impossible for me to disagree, considering that Aaryan can add numbers

in his head faster than I can add them using a calculator.

Aaryan recently set six world records during a Guinness World Records event in Dubai. He is now the fastest human to mentally add 100 four-digit numbers (he did it in 30.9 seconds); add 200 four-digit numbers (1 min, 9.68 seconds); add 50 five-digit numbers (18.71 seconds); divide a 20-digit number by a ten-digit number (set of 10 in 5 min, 42 seconds); multiply two five-digit numbers (set of 10 in 51.69 seconds); and multiply two eight-digit numbers (set of 10 in 2 min, 35.41 seconds).

Of course, he's not just the fastest human to perform these calculations, he's also the fastest of any species, though we probably shouldn't make assumptions about rabbits. I've heard that they're really good at multiplying.

Aaryan is amazing partly because he practices hard. "Daily practice is one of the important aspects to prepare for competitions, so I practice for about five or six hours dai-

ly," he told Guinness World Records. That's a talent in itself – being able to practice calculations for five or six hours daily. If I tried to do that, I'd have a brain cramp.

Aaryan's parents realized they had a prodigy when he was just 2. While watching an India-Australia Test match with his dad, he blurted out, "Virat's batting average is now 48.672."

No, that didn't really happen, but his special ability was still clear to his parents very early. You might think that he inherited his ability, but his family is quite "normal," according to his father. "Aaryan is a one-in-a-billion kind of person, but I don't think that we are a family of mental calculators," he said.

Aaryan is certainly extraordinary, but it's worth noting that there are countless kids in India who possess an amazing ability to mentally calculate. Where can you find these kids? At your local market, selling you vegetables and other items.

Abhijit Banerjee and Es-

ther Duflo, MIT economists and Nobel Prize laureates, recently co-authored a study that compares the arithmetic skills of "market kids" with "school kids" in India. They found that market kids can do a lot of mental calculations, but struggle with school-type maths problems. School kids, in turn, struggle with the type of calculations done in a market.

Market kids, the researchers found, have certain tricks that help them calculate quickly. For example, if they have to multiply 43 by 11, they first multiply 43 by 10 and then add 43, which gives them the answer: 473.

"The market kids are able to exploit base 10, so they do better on base 10 problems," Duflo told MIT News. "The school kids have no idea. It makes no difference to them. The market kids may have additional tricks of this sort that we did not see."

Aaryan has plenty of tricks too, I'm sure. That's what makes him a magician with numbers.

## 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](mailto:edit@orissapost.com)

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### Correction phase

Sir, The ongoing correction is just a phase in the stock market cycle of rallies followed by declines. Such declines are needed to drain out the speculative froth created by the preceding bull run. The ostensible reasons for the ongoing correction are foreign investors pulling money out of India due to slowing corporate profitability, weakness in the rupee and the negative impact of US President Donald Trump's policies on India. India is among the worst performing stock markets this year because of institutional investors selling stocks to book profits made since 2020. The rally over the last two years has been led by the seven crore individual investors, who entered the stock market during or after the pandemic. New investors should heed the perils of chasing high-risk stocks. The stock market regulator, stock exchanges and other intermediaries should increase investor awareness outreach over the coming months, educating them about the way stock markets evolve, and the wisdom in long-term investing. It would be a pity if retail investors who entered stock market after COVID move away from equity investing due to this correction. The regulator should not respond in any knee-jerk fashion by increasing trading margins, collateral requirements or surveillance. It is best to let this correction run its course.

N Sathasiva Reddy, BANGALORE

### Classic Kohli

Sir, Indian batting's mainstay for long, Virat Kohli has beautifully turned things around from almost a point of no return. His unbeaten 100 in the Champions Trophy game against Pakistan in Dubai was a masterpiece. Kohli's knock, coming under intense pressure, was special, and his fans must have heaved a sigh of relief. After all, form is temporary but class is permanent. One of India's greatest batsmen ever, the 36-year-old has an uncanny knack for delivering in crunch situations. What sets him apart from others is the ease with which he finds gaps. From the 'carefree' Delhi boy, as Kohli was when he debuted for India, his evolution as a legend has been a culmination of unbridled talent and unwavering diligence.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

# New rules for Kota hostels

Key features of new guidelines include the elimination of security and caution money in all the 4,000 hostels in the city



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kota (Rajasthan) Feb 25:** Ahead of the upcoming academic session 2025-26, the district administration has released new guidelines for coaching centres and hostels under the Kota Cares Campaign, officials said Tuesday.

The aim of the campaign is to reduce the cost of living for the students coming to Kota to prepare for the competitive exams.

The key features of the new guidelines include the elimination of security and caution money in all the 4,000 hostels in the city. Earlier, the hostels would charge the amount and refund it by the end of the year.

Following a meeting with the stakeholders of the coaching industry, Kota District Collector Dr Ravindra Goswami announced that hostels can charge of maintenance fee of

Rs 2,000. They will also be provided with anti-suicide ceiling fans and mandatory gatekeeper training for hostel staff

The students will be provided free entry to Chambal Riverfront and Oxygen Zone Park on a one-time pass basis

A Kota Cares helpdesk will be set up at the railway station and bus stand, and functional CCTV and biometric systems will be installed in the hostels

The students will be provided free entry to Chambal Riverfront and Oxygen Zone Park on a one-time pass basis. A Kota Cares helpdesk will be set up at the railway station and bus stand, and functional

CCTV and biometric systems will be installed in the hostels, the statement read. The hostel staff will be required to maintain manual attendance at night. The accommodation will have recreation areas and parents will be provided with receipts of all payments.

Dr Goswami said, "Under the Kota Cares campaign, efforts are being made to provide students with better facilities and an improved environment. With the growing number of students in Kota, excellent infrastructure has been developed. Better accommodations and care facilities can now be offered to students in different areas of the city, and issues that previously existed have been resolved. We are confident that students in Kota will receive the best coaching along with excellent housing and an ideal environment."

This comes as the number of students coming to Kota for the preparation of competitive exams saw a sharp decline from over 2 lakh to over 1.24 lakh in 2024-25. This caused a revenue loss of around 50 per cent, leaving many hostels with less than 40 per cent occupancy.

Vishwanath Sharma, Sunil Agarwal and Naveen Mittal from the Hostel Association said, "Hostels and PGs will now establish new standards for student care. We will ensure that all required standards are met, and we will work in collaboration with the district administration and coaching institutes."



Devotees take part in a religious procession on the eve of Maha Shivratri festival, in Amritsar, Tuesday

PTI PHOTO

# Punjab Assembly condemns Ambedkar's portrait removal

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Chandigarh, Feb 25:** The Punjab Assembly Tuesday unanimously passed a censure motion condemning the removal of pictures of Babasaheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar and Shaheed Bhagat Singh by the BJP's Delhi government after assuming office.

The motion, moved by Cabinet Minister Aman Arora, came down heavily on the BJP government for insulting the national heroes.

Earlier, raising the issue in the Assembly during the Zero Hour, Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema called the house to pass a resolution condemn-

ing the actions of the BJP government in Delhi and to send it to the President.

Cheema expressed his concerns over the actions of the BJP government in Delhi. He said the capital of the nation has witnessed a grave insult to Babasaheb Ambedkar and the Dalit community since the BJP assumed office.

The removal of Babasaheb Ambedkar's pictures by the BJP government "serves as a blatant affront to the Dalits of the country", he asserted. He also highlighted the "alarming increase in atrocities" against Dalits since the BJP came to power at Centre. He said the instances of rape and blatant

attempts to tinker with the Constitution have become distressingly frequent, further fueling concerns about the BJP's intentions to alter the very fabric of the nation's constitution.

The Finance Minister said this apprehension was substantiated by the disrespect shown to Dr Ambedkar by Home Minister Amit Shah in the Parliament, which further vitiated the atmosphere and led to the desecration of Dr Ambedkar's statue in Amritsar. Drawing attention to a recent attempt to desecrate the statue of Ambedkar, Cheema expressed his gratitude to Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann for swiftly apprehending the accused.

He said it reflected the government's commitment to upholding justice and protecting the dignity of Babasaheb Ambedkar's legacy. In stark contrast, he claimed that if the BJP were in power in Punjab, the accused would have been shielded from accountability.

Thanking the Leader of the Opposition Partap Singh Bajwa for supporting the cause, the Finance Minister stressed the importance of standing united against any such attempts to erode the rights and dignity of marginalised communities and preserving the values of justice and equality that Ambedkar fought for.

## 'WAR ON DRUGS'

# TWO PROPERTIES OF DRUG SMUGGLERS DEMOLISHED

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Ludhiana, Feb 25:** In a major crackdown on the drug mafia, police here have demolished illegal constructions linked to two narcotic dealers, with an official saying that 78 such properties have been identified and those will be razed following legal procedures.

While one illegally built house was demolished Monday night in village Talwandi, another property was razed in the Bhai Himmat Singh Nagar area of Dugri the next day.

The illegal properties belonging to Sonu of Talwandi village and Rahul Hans from Street Number six in Bhai Himmat Singh Nagar, near Dugri, were razed by the Ludhiana Commissionerate police team, an official statement said.

According to the statement, the accused Sonu and his family are involved in six cases of drug trafficking.

Rahul was arrested by Dugri police in 2024 after recovery of more than 41,000 tablets and Rs 2.15 lakh drug money, the statement said.

Police Commissioner Kuldeep Singh Chahal said that both accused have previous cases related to drug smuggling, and these properties were constructed using money obtained from drug sales.



Ludhiana's Additional Commissioner of Police Gurdev Singh, who was supervising the operation, said the action was taken under the Punjab government's 'War on Drugs' campaign.

Chahal said that 78 more properties have been identified and added that the Ludhiana Commissionerate police have written to the Ludhiana Municipal Corporation, emphasising that all such properties which are either illegal or have been built using drug money will be demolished as per the procedure in the coming days.

The vehicles purchased using the same money will also be impounded by the police, he said.

About razing the property of Sonu, the officer said, "We had his property frozen some time ago. Yesterday, the police took the action in coordination with civil authorities."

# Punjab Police raids over 1,200 immigration firms

The massive operation against illegal travel agents was carried out on the directions of Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav, simultaneously in all the 28 police districts Monday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Chandigarh, Feb 25:** Punjab Police conducted raids and search operations at 1,274 immigration firms across the state to protect the youth aspiring to settle abroad from falling prey to unscrupulous travel agents, officials said Tuesday.

The massive operation against illegal travel agents was carried out on the directions of Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav, simultaneously in all the 28 police districts Monday, they said.

The development came amid the ongoing crackdown against illegal travel agents across the state in the wake of the recent deportation of illegal Indian immigrants by the US.

Many of the deportees from Punjab and Haryana have alleged that they were duped by the travel agents. They claimed despite taking huge sums of money from them and promising legal entry to the US, they were taken to the US through the "donkey route"- illegal and risky pathway used by migrants to enter America.

Meanwhile, Special DGP (Law and Order), Punjab, Arpit Shukla, who was person-



ally monitoring the daylong state-level operation Monday, said that police teams have registered at least 24 FIRs against unscrupulous travel agents and arrested seven of them.

He said that all the police commissioners and senior superintendents of police were asked to constitute special police teams under the supervision of gazetted officers to carry out searches at all the immigration and travel agent firms in their respective jurisdictions.

"All the CPs/SSPs were directed to ensure strict action against those travel agents, who were found violating the mandatory provisions and procedures of the Punjab Travel Professionals' Regulation Act,

2012 or defrauded innocent people with false promises of facilitating entry into foreign countries," said the special DGP.

According to an official statement, as per the provisions of The Punjab Travel Professionals' Regulation Act 2012, all the travel agents are mandated to obtain a licence from the Deputy Commissioner's office, which is valid for five years and renewable for subsequent five-year periods.

Licensed agents are also required to display their licence prominently, maintain records of clients and services, and inform authorities prior to advertising or holding seminars. Additionally, agents are prohibited from engaging in activities beyond their licensed services. Non-compliance can result in suspension or cancellation of the licence and legal action.

## Punjab rejects Centre's agricultural draft

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Chandigarh, Feb 25:** Amidst the absence of BJP's two legislators in the 117-member house, the Punjab Assembly Tuesday unanimously passed a resolution against the Centre's draft National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing, terming it an "attempt to bring back the three farm laws repealed by the Centre in 2021 following widespread farmer protests".

The resolution, moved by Agriculture Minister Gurmeet Singh Khudian and supported by the main Opposition Congress, said "This House rejects the draft National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing. The House feels that this draft policy is an attempt to bring back the contentious provisions of the three farm laws repealed in 2021 by the government of India after a long protest by farmers."

# Over ₹1,400 cr transferred to 72L farmers in Rajasthan

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Jaipur, Feb 24:** Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma reaffirmed the state government's commitment to farmer welfare during the national-level programme, Kisan Samman Samaroh, held at the State Agricultural Management Institute in Jaipur.

Participating virtually, he emphasised that his government is dedicated to ensuring the service, progress, and prosperity of farmers and livestock keepers. He assured that all efforts will be made to fulfil the Prime Minister's vision of farmer upliftment.

Congratulating the beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme, he announced that over Rs 1,400 crore had been transferred as the 19th instalment to more than 72 lakh farmers across Rajasthan. He stated that this initiative re-



flects the Prime Minister's commitment to making farmers prosperous, reinforcing the nation's trust in his leadership.

He highlighted multiple budgetary provisions aimed at fostering agricultural growth and ensuring financial security for farmers.

To further support farmers, he announced an increase in the Kisan Samman Nidhi amount to Rs 9,000 per farmer. So far,

more than Rs 1,355 crore has been disbursed to over 70 lakh farmers under this scheme. Additionally, the government has provided short-term crop loans exceeding Rs 25,000 crore to over 46 lakh farmers.

Under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, insurance claims worth Rs 3,100 crore have been settled, ensuring financial security for farmers affected by crop loss.

He said that Rajasthan ranks first in the country for Shri Ann Millet production, significantly benefiting farmers due to the Prime Minister's initiatives. To further boost millet-based agriculture, the state government plans to establish Shri Ann-based product outlets in every district.

During the ceremony, the Chief Minister distributed cheques to farmers under various welfare schemes. He also inaugurated an agricultural exhibition organised by the Agriculture Department, exploring stalls and exhibits set up by different agricultural bodies.

The event was attended by Agriculture Minister Kirodi Lal Meena, Minister of State for Co-operation Gautam Kumar Dak, MP Manju Sharma, Cooperation Secretary Manju Rajpal, Agriculture Secretary Rajan Vishal, along with several officials and a large gathering of farmers.

**Government of Odisha** No. O-1530:  
**Office of the Superintending Engineer**  
**Rural Works Division, Jharsuguda**  
Email: eerw\_jharsuguda@yahoo.co.in, Tel: 06645-271643  
Bid Identification No. Online-SEJSG-22 of 2024-25  
**NOTICE INVITING TENDER FOR ROAD WORK IN ODISHA**  
**NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING THROUGH e-Procurement**

- Name of the Work : Road Work as per DTCN available in the www.tendersorissa.gov.in.
- Total No. of Work : 01 (One) No.
- Estimated Cost : Rs 59.68 Lakh
- Period of Completion : 06 (Six) Calendar Months.
- Period and Time of availability of bid document in the portal : Dt. 27.02.2025 at 11.00 AM to 13.03.2025 upto 05.00 P.M. for bidding
- Date and Time of bid opening : Dt. 17.03.2025 at 11.00 A.M.
- Name and Address of the Officer Inviting Bid : S.E., R.W. Division, Jharsuguda.

(1) Other details can be seen from Detailed notice Inviting Tenders, available in website www.tendersorissa.gov.in.  
(2) Corrigendum if any shall only be published in the above website.

**Sd./ Superintending Engineer,**  
**R.W. Division, Jharsuguda**  
OIPR-25104/11/0026/2425

**GOVT. OF ODISHA** No. O-1543  
**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, RURAL WORKS DIVISION No.-II, KEONJHAR**  
Email: eerw\_kjr2@yahoo.com  
**Notice of Procurement Notice**  
**Identification No. Online NCB - 10/2024-25**

- Name of the Work : 20 Nos. Roads & 11 Nos. Building Works
- Total Number of Work : 31 Nos.
- Estimated Cost : Upto Rs. 2.00 Lakhs (Approx.)
- Class of Contractor : 'D' & 'C' Class
- Period of Completion : As per Annexure of Procurement Notice No. 10/2024-25
- Other Details :

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Tender Online for Bidding		Last Date & time of seeking tender clarification	Date & time of Opening of Tender in O/o. S.E., R.W. Division-II, Keonjhar
		From	To		
Executive Engineer, Rural Works Division-II, Keonjhar	Road & Building Online NCB No. 10	Dt. 27.02.25 at 11.30 A.M.	Dt. 01.03.25 upto 4.00 P.M.	Dt. 28.02.25 upto 5.00 P.M.	Dt. 03.03.2025 at 11.30 P.M.

Further details can be seen from the website www.tendersorissa.gov.in  
OIPR-25093/11/0012/2425 **Sd./ Executive Engineer, R.W. Divn. No.-II, Keonjhar**

**PANCHAYAT RAJ & DRINKING WATER DEPARTMENT**  
**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**OFFICE OF THE PANCHAYAT SAMITI, DABUGAM**  
**INVITATION FOR BIDS** Dated: 21.02.2025  
No. 03/2024-25  
No. I-512: The Panchayat Samiti, Dabugam on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites Percentage Rate bid through e-procurement in single cover system according to norm of e-procurement system in online mode.

- Name of Works : As mentioned in Table "A" which includes construction of GPLF Building at Medena, Ghodakhunta, Borigam, Junapani and Dongriguda of Dabugam Block in the Nabarangpur District.
- No. of Works : 5 (Five) Nos. (Detailed in Tender Call Notice available in the website)
- Estimated Cost: : As mentioned in Table "A"
- Tender Paper Cost : Rs. 6000/- per each work
- Class of Contractor : B & C Class
- Period of Completion : 180 Days
- Critical Dates : \* Further details can be seen in the bidding documents, which is available in the e-procurement portal https://www.tendersodisha.gov.in.  
\* Subsequent corrigendum if required shall be appeared in the website.  
\* Authority reserves the right to reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason thereof.

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Tender Online for Bidding	Last date of Seeking tender Clarification	Date of Opening of Bid
Block Development Officer, Panchayat Samiti, Dabugam	03/2024-25 Panchayat Samiti, Dabugam	28.02.2025 From To	17.03.2025	18.03.2025

**Sd./ Block Development Officer, Panchayat Samiti, Dabugam**  
By E-Mail: ori-dabugaon@nic.in  
OIPR-19329/11/0001/2425



Even now, many people are searching for their loved ones – brothers, children and parents (lost in Maha Kumbh stampede last month). Some are still missing. Is the Chief Minister calling these grieving families vultures? This is the height of insensitivity from someone holding a constitutional position

AKHILESH YADAV | SP CHIEF

## BUS SERVICES SUSPENDED BETWEEN K'TAKA, MAHA

Bus services between Maharashtra and Karnataka have been suspended following attacks on buses and their crew on either side, amid an intensifying border row between the two states revolving around Belagavi



## of the day quote

Ten years ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had presented a vision before the country's youth and 130 crore people to make India a developed nation by 2047 and third largest economy in the world. Madhya Pradesh, and this GIS will play a major role in fulfilling this resolve

AMIT SHAH | UNION HOME MINISTER

Apart from semiconductors, Assam will soon have manufacturing units for mobile phones and electronics, further boosting the state's industrial landscape

ASHWINI VAISHNAW | UNION MINISTER

It would be my demand to the UP government, to UP CM Yogi Adityanath that since they have announced ex gratia for the families of those killed in Kumbh Mela, they must immediately release the amounts to them

MAMATA BANERJEE | BENGAL CM

## SHORT TAKES

### Six killed in road accident

Rajkot: Six persons, including a child and two women, were killed when a truck coming from the wrong side collided with an auto-rickshaw on a national highway near Rajkot Tuesday evening, police said. The auto-rickshaw driver was seriously injured in the incident. A police officer said the truck driver fled after the accident. "The deceased, including a seven-year-old child, two women, and three men, were travelling in the auto-rickshaw when a truck collided with it on the national highway connecting Rajkot to Ahmedabad near Maliyasani village," said Assistant Commissioner of Police RS Baria.

### Two killed in elephant attacks

Bidar (Karnataka): Two people have died in elephant attacks in Karnataka in two days, following which Minister for Forest, Ecology and Environment Eshwar Khandre Tuesday appealed to the public to follow the safety precautions issued by the department. A youth in Belur taluk of Hassan district died Monday after being attacked by a jumbo, while a woman succumbed to an attack in Kamasamudra of Kolar district Tuesday, the Minister's office said. Expressing grief over the deaths, Khandre said the state government stands with the families of the victims.

### 3 of family killed in road accident

Unnao: Three members of a family, including two young children, died when their car lost control and collided head-on with a tempo on the Agra-Lucknow Expressway in Uttar Pradesh's Unnao district Tuesday, police said. The accident occurred at the 229-kilometer mark in the Bangarhau Kotwali area early morning when the Santro car lost control, crossed the divider, and collided head-on with a tempo traveller coming from the opposite direction, they said.

### India, Japan kickstart 2-week mega wargame

New Delhi: Armies of India and Japan have kickstarted a mega two-week wargame at a Japanese military base in the foothills of Mount Fuji in line with the overall aim to bolster bilateral defence ties. The sixth edition of the 'Dharma Guardian' exercise that began Monday is set to include an "expanded" range of activities that will reflect the growing defence cooperation between India and Japan, the Indian Army said.

# 35% schools enrol less than 50 students: Analysis

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 25: At least 35 per cent of schools across India enrol fifty or fewer students and have just one or two teachers, according to an analysis by think-tank PRS Legislative Research.

As per NITI Aayog, 36 per cent of government schools in India had fewer than 50 students and nearly 10 per cent had fewer than 20.

"These schools had just one or two teachers. Smaller schools, which usually have few teachers, present several issues. According to the NEP (2020), this leads to teachers teaching multiple grades and



subjects, including those subjects they may not be adequately qualified in," said the analysis report released Tuesday.

"Moreover, teachers spend a large portion of their time attending to administrative tasks, which affect teaching

As per NITI Aayog, 36 per cent of government schools in India had fewer than 50 students and nearly 10 per cent had fewer than 20

hours. The NEP adds that smaller and isolated schools are difficult to manage. They also lack infrastructure such as labs and libraries," it added. As of 2022-23, 16 per cent of teaching posts for grades 1-8 were vacant. Vacancies were significantly higher in-

Jharkhand (40 per cent), Bihar (32 per cent), Mizoram (30 per cent) and Tripura (26 per cent).

The Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports (2023) highlighted the need to expedite teacher recruitment by states and recommended states to form an Autonomous Teacher Recruitment Board to ensure transparency in recruitment.

"As of 2023-24, around 12 per cent of teachers from primary to higher secondary levels lacked professional teaching qualification. According to the Ministry of Education (2023-24), 48 per cent of teachers at the pre-primary level were unqualified," the report said.

## CRYPTO SCAM CBI conducts searches at 60 places

The searches were spread across multiple cities including Delhi NCR, Pune, Chandigarh, Nanded, Kolhapur and Bangalore, targeting premises allegedly linked to key accused individuals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 25: The CBI Tuesday conducted countrywide coordinated searches at 60 locations as part of its probe into ₹6,600 crore GainBitcoin cryptocurrency scam, officials said. The searches were spread across multiple cities including Delhi NCR, Pune, Chandigarh, Nanded, Kolhapur and Bengaluru, targeting premises allegedly linked to key accused individuals, a CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

The ponzi scam perpetrated through a web of platforms, including flagship site www.gainbitcoin.com, was allegedly masterminded by Amit Bhardwaj (now deceased) and his brother Ajay Bhardwaj, the officials said.

Launched in 2015, the illicit operation was camouflaged under the facade of Variable-tech Pte. Ltd, they said. The scheme lured the investors offering extraordinary returns of 10 per cent per month in Bitcoin over an 18-month period urging them to purchase the digital currency from external exchanges and deposit it with GainBitcoin through "cloud mining" contracts, the



The ponzi scam perpetrated through a web of platforms, including flagship site www.gainbitcoin.com, was allegedly masterminded by Amit Bhardwaj (now deceased) and his brother Ajay Bhardwaj

central agency said. "The model followed a multi-level marketing (MLM) structure, commonly associated with pyramid structured ponzi schemes, where payouts were dependent on bringing in new investors," the spokesperson said. In its early days, investors received payouts in Bitcoin, fuelling the illusion of a lucrative venture. However, as the influx of new

capital dwindled by 2017, the charade began to crumble.

"In an attempt to cover up the losses, GainBitcoin unilaterally switched payouts to their alleged in-house cryptocurrency called MCAP, which had significantly less value than Bitcoin, further misleading investors," the statement said.

The sheer scale and complexity of the scam resulted in registration of multiple FIRs filed across India, from Jammu and Kashmir to Maharashtra and from Delhi to West Bengal.

The Supreme Court handed over the investigation to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), due to the expansive nature of the operation and the international ramifications it entailed.

The agency has launched a probe to unravel the full extent of the fraudulent activities, identify all implicated parties, and trace the misappropriated funds, including those that may have crossed borders.

"During searches, few crypto wallets, incriminating digital evidences and digital devices have been seized. The evidences present in emails/clouds have also been seized," the agency said.

## Congress targets govt over US aid to Pakistan's F-16 fleet maintenance

Congress leader Pawan Khera said the recent decision by President Trump to allocate USD 397 million for Pakistan's F-16 fleet maintenance raises critical questions about the Modi government's diplomatic efficacy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 25: In the wake of US President Donald Trump reportedly allocating \$397 million for Pakistan's F-16 fleet maintenance, the Congress Tuesday questioned the Modi government's diplomatic strategy and called for a reassessment of India's foreign policy priorities to safeguard national interests.

There was no immediate reaction from the government or the ruling BJP on the matter. Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khera said the recent decision by President Trump to allocate \$397 million for Pakistan's F-16 fleet maintenance raises critical



questions about the Modi government's diplomatic efficacy.

This move, reminiscent of the 2022 Biden administration's \$450 million package for the same purpose, highlights a pattern of US military support to Pakistan, he said in a post on X.

Such actions potentially compromise India's security interests, especially given the historical use of F-16s by Pakistan against India, Khera said in a statement.

During the UPA years (2004-2014), India and the United States significantly deepened their strategic and defence co-operation across multiple domains, including military modernisation, technology transfer, nuclear energy, and counter-terrorism, he pointed out. The robust diplomatic and strategic initiatives taken during the UPA years deepened India-US relations, strengthening India's defense capabilities and global influence, Khera asserted.

## No early hearing DeepSeek ban: HC



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 25: The Delhi High Court Tuesday refused to grant an early hearing on a plea for blocking access to DeepSeek, an AI chatbot developed by Chinese entities, in all forms in India.

A bench of Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela said there was no urgency in the PIL and it did

not deserve a priority hearing.

After the petitioner's counsel said it was a sensitive matter, the court asked him not to use the platform if it was so harmful. "These kinds of platforms have been available in India for a long time. Not only DeepSeek but there are several such platforms available. Don't use it if it's so harmful. There is no ground for early hearing," the bench said. The court further held, "No case for an early hearing is made out. The application is rejected".

Many things were available on the Internet for the entire world to access, but a person was not required to use everything, the court added.

# Welcome verdict, but want death: Riots survivors, kin

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 25: While victims, kin of slain persons and members of the community welcomed the life-term in jail awarded to Sajjan Kumar in a murder case related to 1984 anti-Sikh riots Tuesday, they advocated capital punishment for the former legislator.

A special court while rejecting the plea for the crime falling in "rarest of rare" category handed out the life term to Kumar for the murders of Jaswant Singh and his son Tarundeep Singh November 1, 1984 during the anti-Sikh riots.

Jaswant's wife, who is the complainant in the case, and the state had sought death penalty for Kumar. The offence of mur-

der entails a minimum of life term in jail and death sentence as the maximum punishment.

Jagdeep Singh Kalon, general secretary of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, expressed gratitude toward Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the judges for ensuring justice.

"The Saraswati Vihar case was reopened multiple times, giving us hope that one day justice would be served. Finally, today, the hearing was conducted with fairness, and the culprits responsible for the killings of Jaswant Singh and Tarundeep Singh have been punished," Singh said.

He added, "Although we demanded the death penalty for Sajjan Kumar, we accept the



AAP and BJP councillors protest during a meeting of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), in New Delhi, PTI PHOTO

## SAJJAN'S LIFE TERM



court's verdict." Kujjeet Kaur, a survivor of the anti-Sikh riots, recalled her ordeal.

"We can never forget how our fathers and brothers were killed before our eyes. Kumar was al-

Kumar was awarded life imprisonment by the high court in a case over the killings of five Sikhs in Raj Nagar Part-I area in Palam Colony of southwest Delhi November 1 and 2, 1984 and burning down of a Gurudwara in Raj Nagar Part-II

ready serving a life sentence in the Palam case, and this time, we wanted the death penalty for

## India, EU to review FTA negotiations



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 25: India and the European Union will this week take stock of their negotiations for an ambitious free trade deal and broadly firm up a new strategic agenda at a time Europe is looking at de-risking its relations with China.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, accompanied by the European Union College of Commissioners, is paying a two-day visit to India from Thursday to hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and senior Indian ministers. The visit is aimed at finalising the broad contours of a new strategic agenda that is expected to be unveiled at the next India-EU summit scheduled to be held in the second half of this year in India.

India and the EU are currently negotiating a free trade agreement, an investment protection pact and a geographical indications agreement.

President Leyen and Prime Minister Modi will be taking stock of where we are on the negotiations and how we can push them forward, a senior EU official said.

The EU is looking at an "ambitious" as well as a "commercially meaningful" free trade agreement that addresses tariffs and non tariff barriers, he said. The official indicated that there have been issues between the two sides in terms of tariffs for wine as well as agricultural products.

For us, speed is less important than substance, he said declining to give a timeline for finalisation of the free trade pact.

## SP leader Abdullah Azam Khan walks out of jail

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hardoi (UP), Feb 25: Samajwadi Party leader Abdullah Azam Khan walked out of the Hardoi jail in Uttar Pradesh Tuesday on bail after spending 17 months behind bars, with his party's leaders and supporters flocking outside the prison to welcome him.

Abdullah Khan is a former MLA from the Suar constituency in Rampur and the son of incarcerated veteran SP leader and former state cabinet minister Azam Khan.

Around noon, Abdullah, wearing a white kurta-pyjama with a dark-coloured sleeveless waistcoat and sporting a neatly made ponytail, was escorted out of the prison complex by security personnel.

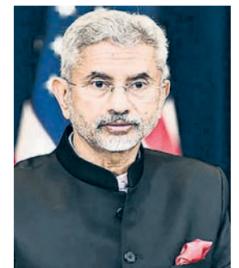
While Abdullah Khan did not speak to the media, his lawyer, Satnam Singh Nattu, said, "As the entire country knows, Mohammad Azam Khan and his family were persecuted and imprisoned. Today, we thank God, Allah and Waheguru for paving the way for Abdullah Bhai's release. He will finally walk free and return home today."

him," she said. Gurlad Singh, who was leading the protest outside the Rouse Avenue district courts premises before the verdict, urged the government to challenge the order before a higher court to enhance the punishment to death sentence.

"We will not accept anything less than the death penalty. We are not happy with the verdict of the court. We will appeal to the govt to go to a higher court and announce death penalty for Sajjan Kumar," Singh said, terming the offence a "pre-planned genocide".

Another riots' survivor, speaking to PTI, said while they accept the court's judgment and appreciate the judiciary for delivering justice after 40 years, their fight was not over.

# national



There is a clear and urgent need for a multilateral system that reflects contemporary global realities, one that is better equipped to respond to modern challenges, and, in essence, one that is fit for purpose

## COVID SHOT SIDE EFFECT: SC SEEKS REPLY ON FRAMING POLICY

The Supreme Court Tuesday asked the Centre to respond on the possibility of framing a policy over the adverse effects, including deaths, of COVID-19 vaccination after being informed about the absence of any such scheme on compensation



### of the day uote

We are giving our word to the people through you, Mr Speaker. No matter how many challenges arise between us, we will overcome them, earn the people's trust, and ensure that the NDA government rules the state for 15 years

Maha Kumbh has shattered all previous records, making it the largest congregation in human history

Currently, we are investing in three projects at IIT-Guwahati. We also have two 5G labs functioning at IIT-Guwahati and NIT Silchar. Today, I am announcing that the third lab will start at Gauhati University

### POST OF THE DAY

Delimitation isn't just about Tamil Nadu—it affects all of South India. A democratic process should not penalise states that have successfully managed population growth, led in development, and made significant contributions to national progress. We need a fair, transparent, and equitable approach that upholds true federalism.

### SHORT TAKES

#### Shyam Bhartia denies sexual assault charges

New Delhi: Jubilant Bhartia Group Chairman Shyam S Bhartia has denied allegations of sexual assault, saying he will cooperate with the investigating agency, a regulatory filing said Tuesday. Terming the allegations in the FIR as "baseless, false and disparaging", Jubilant FoodWorks Ltd (JFL) filing, quoting Bhartia, said it was made with a "clear malafide intent against him".

#### FIR against Godrej, Berkeley

New Delhi: The CBI has registered an FIR against Berkeley Realtech Ltd and Godrej Estate Developers for alleged cheating and corruption in developing their projects in Chandigarh in alleged violation of wildlife laws, officials said Tuesday. The CBI acted on the conclusions arrived in a preliminary enquiry registered in 2023 on a complaint from an under secretary at Punjab Raj Bhawan. The CBI has alleged that Berkeley Square, developed by Berkeley Realtech Ltd (now known as RSA Motors Pvt Ltd), and Godrej Eternia, developed by Godrej Estate Developers in Chandigarh's Industrial Area, had allegedly violated environmental laws.

#### SC dismisses HDK's plea

New Delhi: The Supreme Court dismissed a plea of former Karnataka chief minister H D Kumaraswamy seeking quashing of the proceedings in a corruption case relating to de-notification of two plots of land. A bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Rajesh Bindal refused to entertain the plea of HDK, now the Union minister, against an October 9, 2020 order of the Karnataka High Court.

## DELHI LIQUOR POLICY

# CAG report sparks fresh BJP-AAP row

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 25: The Delhi government suffered cumulative losses of over ₹2,000 crore due to the 2021-2022 excise policy for reasons ranging from weak policy framework to deficient implementation, according to a CAG report tabled in the assembly Tuesday, sparking a fresh showdown between the BJP and the AAP.



The report, one of 14 on the previous Aam Aadmi Party government's performance, was tabled by the new Chief Minister Rekha Gupta of the BJP on the very second day of the first session of the newly elected Delhi Assembly. The 208-page report including annexures flagged violations in the process of issuing licences and pointed out that recommendations of an expert panel, formed to suggest changes for the formation of the now scrapped policy, were ignored by then deputy chief minister and excise minister Manish Sisodia. Sisodia, AAP chief and former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and another senior party leader Sanjay Singh were arrested in the cases registered in connection with the alleged liquor policy scam, a hot button issue in the run-up to the recent Delhi Assembly elections which saw the BJP returning to power after more than 27 years. The three leaders are currently out on bail. Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta said the document will be referred to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the House, that is yet to be formed, for looking into it and submit a report. The report also highlighted how the policy spawned a cocktail of brand pushing and monopolies. The 2021-22 Delhi excise policy created risks of monopolies and brand pushing by an "exclusive arrangement" between a few wholesalers and manufacturers, allowing the distributors to dominate the liquor supply chain with just three of the wholesalers controlling over 71 per cent of total liquor supply chain in the city, it said.

The report stated that the estimated cumulative revenue loss of ₹2,002.68 crore to the government included losses due to opening of liquor vents in non-conforming municipal wards (Rs 941.53 crore), failure to re-tender, surrendered licences (Rs 890 crore), Covid-linked waiver to retail licensees (Rs 144 crore) and failure to properly collect security deposit (Rs 27 crore). Senior AAP leader Atishi, who is the Leader of Opposition, defended the now-scrapped excise policy. At a news conference, the former chief minister claimed that its previous version according to the CAG report was marred by "corruption and smuggling". All the 21 AAP MLAs including Atishi were absent from the House when the report was tabled. They were earlier suspended by the Speaker for shouting slogans during LG VK Saxena's first address to the newly constituted Assembly. Atishi alleged that the BJP-appointed LG, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) obstructed implementation of the liquor policy, causing an annual revenue loss of ₹8,900 crore to Delhi. She said seven out of the eight chapters in the CAG report highlight the shortcomings of the old excise policy, while only one focuses on the new policy. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva alleged that Arvind Kejriwal acted as a "middleman for the liquor lobby". There was no immediate reaction from the AAP. The report was also taken up for discussion in the Assembly during which the BJP accused the AAP of suppressing the CAG findings to cover up alleged corruption. The Speaker while opening the debate for the House members, cited various observations of the High Court regarding the alleged delay on part of the previous government to table the report in the Assembly.

## Top court reinstates Sunil Kumar Singh as Bihar MLC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi/Patna, Feb 25: The Supreme Court Tuesday ordered "immediate" reinstatement of an RJD MLC who was expelled last year for misbehaving inside the House with Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

A Division Bench comprising Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh passed the order on the petition of Sunil Kumar Singh who had challenged his expulsion from the Bihar Legislative Council in June last year on the basis of a report submitted by the Ethics Committee. The RJD leader described the apex court order as "victory of democracy".

Legislative Council chairman Awadhesh Narayan Singh said he would take appropriate action after receiving a copy of the order. In a judgement running into nearly 50 pages, the court held that even though the conduct of Singh inside the House was "abhorrent and unbefitting of a member of the legislature", the punishment meted out to him was "excessive and disproportionate to the nature of the misconduct".

"The petitioner is directed to be reinstated as a member of the Bihar Legislative Council with immediate effect", said the court, while quashing the Election Commission order for by-election to the seat that had fallen vacant upon Singh's expulsion. Notably, JD(U) leader Lalan Prasad had filed his nomination papers last month for the by-poll which was scheduled January 23 but put on hold because of a stay on declaration of results ordered by the apex court. Responding to the development, senior BJP leader and Chairman of the legislative council Awadhesh Narayan Singh said "appropriate action will be taken upon receipt of the order which, as per information available so far, has called for reinstatement of Sunil Kumar Singh".

# Ex-CJI Lalit tells Parl panel ONOE good idea: Sources

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 25: Former Chief Justice of India U U Lalit suggested Tuesday that simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls should be rolled out in not one go but in a phased manner as he shared his views with the Joint Committee of Parliament studying the two bills for 'one nation one election' (ONOE), sources said.

They added that Lalit in his remarks said the concept of simultaneous Lok Sabha and assembly elections was a good idea but noted that the law, as envisaged by the bills, could be challenged in the apex court, and proposed some changes.

Former Law Commission of India Ritu Raj Awasthi told the 39-member committee headed by BJP MP P P Chaudhary that the proposed law does not violate the basic structure doctrine on federalism and is not against the democratic principles of the Constitution. Justice Awasthi, who is now the judicial member of anti-corruption ombudsman Lok Pal, said the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill had all the ingredients to hold simultaneous polls in the country.

Opposition members criticised the concept, with Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra claiming 'one nation one election' will weaken democracy by tinkering with tenure of legislatures and will impinge on people's rights, the sources said.

A BJP ally wondered if a gap of five years between two elections will weaken elected representatives' accountability to people, they added. An opposition questioned the neutrality of the Election Commission, which is constitution-



ally tasked with the conduct of elections. Some members of both the ruling BJP as well as opposition parties, which have slammed the idea of 'one nation one election' (ONOE) as unconstitutional, interpreted the overall thrust of Lalit's lengthy remarks as favouring their respective stand more. However, a senior parliamentarian said the former CJI laid out the constitutional philosophy guiding India's democratic spirit and holding of polls and its evolution through several judgements of the apex court since Independence to reflect dispassionately on the concept. As an expert, Lalit dwelt on the both sides of the argument and at times offered his views, the MP said, noting that he advised against implementing simultaneous Lok Sabha and assembly elections in one go. While the jurist said that dissolution of several state assemblies before their term, in several cases when more than half of their tenure should remain can be legally challenged, he also noted that once the law comes into force favouring it, then political parties as well as voters will know the period for which the new House will be elected.

### SNIPPETS

#### Man jumps onto safety net in Mantralaya

MUMBAI: A high drama unfolded at the Maharashtra secretariat here Tuesday afternoon when a 41-year-old male protester jumped onto a safety net of the high-security building from the seventh floor, officials said. The potentially tragic event was averted due to the safety net installed on the second floor of the Mantralaya building, which was designed to prevent suicides. The man, identified as Vijay Sashte, sustained injuries to his back. He was immediately rescued by police personnel stationed at Mantralaya and subsequently admitted to the state-run St. George's Hospital in south Mumbai, officials said. According to Sashte's application, he had come to Mantralaya from Pune to submit a petition at the Chief Minister's Office concerning a long-standing grievance over the alleged illegal sale of grazing land in Pune.

#### Adani Group to invest ₹50K-cr in Assam

GUWAHATI: Adani Group chief Gautam Adani Tuesday said his company will invest ₹ 50,000 crore across various sectors in Assam. The investment will be made in airports, aero cities, city gas distribution, transmission, cement and road projects, he added. Addressing the inaugural function of the Advantage Assam summit here, Adani said the group is committed to investing for the development of the state and the northeastern region. "We are eager to be a part of Assam's progress story. We will invest ₹ 50,000 crore in Assam," he said. The investment will span across areas such as development of airports, aero cities, city gas distribution network, power transmission, cement and road construction, he said.

#### Delhi court summons Lalu, family members

NEW DELHI: A Delhi court Tuesday summoned former rail minister Lalu Prasad and some of his family members, including his wife, two sons and two daughters, in connection with the land-for-jobs 'scam'. Special Judge Vishal Gogne summoned the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) supreme's wife and former Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi, two sons -- ex-Bihar deputy chief minister Tejashwi Prasad Yadav and former state minister Tej Pratap Yadav -- and daughters Misha Bharti, a member of Parliament, and Hema Yadav, in connection with the case. The accused have been directed to appear before the court March 11.

## TELANGANA TUNNEL COLLAPSE

Addressing media persons, Irrigation Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy cited experts, who described this as the most complex and difficult tunnel rescue operation in the world or at least in India as there is only one entry or exit to the SLBC tunnel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Nagarkurnool (Telangana), Feb 25: Top experts from the Indian Army, Navy, NDRF, GSI and other agencies made relentless efforts Tuesday to find a breakthrough in the collapsed SLBC tunnel rescue

# Rescuers racking brains to achieve breakthrough

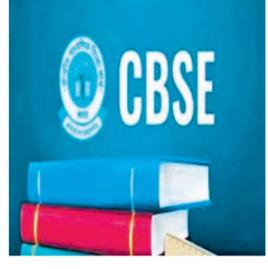
work amidst threat to the lives of rescuers' with the continuous flow of silt and water. Addressing media persons, Irrigation Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy cited experts, who described this as the most complex and difficult tunnel rescue operation in the world or at least in India as there is only one entry or exit to the SLBC tunnel. He opined that the collapse might have taken place due to a slight tectonic shift and as some geological fault lines have given way. It is the fourth day since eight persons have been trapped in the partially collapsed tunnel of the Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) project. The political slugfest over the accident continued as BRS Working President K T Rama

# CBSE's Class-X board exams twice a year

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 25: From 2026, Class X students will be able to take CBSE board exams twice in an academic session or choose between the two editions—one in February and another in May, officials said.

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) Tuesday approved draft norms which will now be put in the public domain and the stakeholders can submit their feedback by March 9 following which the policy will be finalised, they said. Candidates will also have the option to appear for both examinations if they wish. Additionally, students will be allowed to skip specific subjects in the second attempt if they are already satisfied with the scores they have achieved in the first examination as well as particular subjects in the first attempt as well. As per the draft norms, the first phase of the ex-



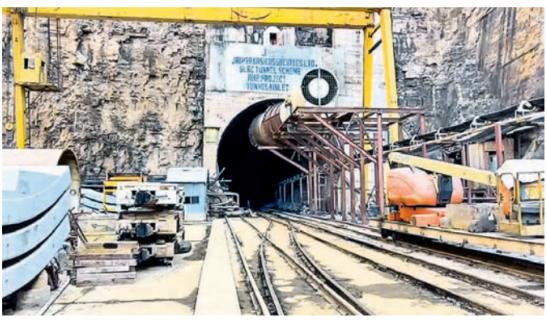
ams will be held from February 17 to March 6, while the second phase will be conducted from May 5 to 20. "Both the examinations will be conducted on full syllabus and the candidates will be allotted the same examination centres in the two editions. Exam fees will be enhanced and collected for both exams at the time of application filing," a senior board official said. "The first and second editions of the board exams will also act as supplementary exams, and

no special exams will be conducted in any circumstances," the official added. The new National Education Policy (NEP) recommended that to eliminate the "high stakes" aspect of the board exams, all students will be allowed to take the exams on up to two occasions during any given school year.

The Board has clarified that no separate supplementary exams will be conducted under this system. Instead, the second session of the Board examination will serve as the supplementary exam for those who wish to improve their scores. "The list of candidates (LOC) will be finalised in September of the preceding year. This means that for the February 2026 exam, the list will be finalised by September 2025. No new candidates will be allowed to register for the May 2026 exam if they were not part of the September 2025 list," the official said. "Once the LOC is finalised, candidates will not be

permitted to change their subjects. However, there is some flexibility in subject selection. If a candidate wishes to modify their subject choices, they can skip a subject in the first examination (February-March) and opt for a different subject in the second examination (May). However, if a candidate completes all subjects in the first exam, they will have to take the same set of subjects in the second exam if they choose to reappear," the official added.

The Board has also decided that for practical and internal assessments, the evaluation will be conducted only once per academic year. No separate certificates will be issued after the completion of the first examination in February-March. The new exam framework categorises subjects into seven groups: Language 1, Language 2, Elective 1, Elective 2, Elective 3, Regional and Foreign Languages, and Remaining Subjects.



Rao sought a judicial probe into the incident, while Congress Lok Sabha member Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy dismissed the demand, stating that this is not the time for politics and that the focus should be on rescuing those trapped inside the tunnel. Minister Reddy noted

that experts from 11 agencies such as Indian Army, the Marine Commando Force (MAR-COS) of Navy, NDRF, SDRF, GSI, Rat Miners and Singareni Collieries Company Ltd are working round the clock to save the eight lives. To explore alternative approaches, Reddy

said experts are assessing the feasibility of drilling from the top and side of the tunnel while ensuring all necessary safety precautions.

Reddy said he held discussions with Border Security Force General Harpal Singh over phone to brief him on the SLBC incident and seek his expertise.

The General acknowledged the complexity of the situation and assured his full support in providing technical expertise and assistance, he said.

Uttam Kumar Reddy further said a unified command control has been set up which is constantly being monitored by Special Chief Secretary Arvind Kumar. There was no contact with the trapped persons though oxygen is being pumped into the tunnel continuously.

Reddy said the state government is dedicated to saving the lives of the trapped persons and has been using the best possible talent in India and anywhere in the world.

Reacting to BRS' criticism that Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, who has visited Delhi 36 times, does not have the time to visit those trapped in the SLBC tunnel even after 72 hours, Uttam Reddy termed it as "disgraceful politics".

Recalling that eight people died during a fire accident at SLB power plant and seven were killed at Kaleshwaram Project when BRS was in power, the minister said they never criticised the then government. Deputy CM Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka and Tourism Minister Jupally Krishna Rao also visited the accident site.

# international



Human rights are being "suffocated" around the world, lashing out at voices of division and anger who see them as a barrier to their quest for power and profit

ANTONIO GUTERRES | UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

## SYRIA'S NATIONAL DIALOGUE CONFERENCE BEGINS

Syria's new rulers kicked off a long-awaited national dialogue conference Tuesday as a "rare historical opportunity" to rebuild the country after the fall of former President Bashar Assad and nearly 14 years of civil war



## B'desh interim govt's key adviser resigns, likely to lead new party

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dhaka, Feb 25: Bangladesh interim government's Information Adviser and one of the key leaders of the students movement, Nahid Islam, Tuesday resigned from the cabinet, ahead of the launch of a new political party by the July uprising activists.

"Given the current situation in the country, the rise of a new political force is necessary. I have resigned from the advisory council to remain on the streets to consolidate the mass uprising," Islam said in a media briefing after submitting his resignation letter to Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus.

One of the key coordinators of the July uprising that toppled the Awami League regime led by Sheikh Hasina, Nahid said his role on the street appeared more important than staying in government.

He said he wanted to work for people's aspirations for a democratic change and thus resigned as an adviser, effectively a minister with two portfolios of Information & Broadcasting and Post and Telecommunications.

Anti-Discrimination Student Movement led a mass uprising that toppled longtime prime minister Sheikh Hasina's government August 5 last year. Three days later, Yunus took charge of the interim government.

Islam was one of the three representatives of the Movement, who were inducted into the council of advisers.

He resigned as the platform and its ally Jatiya Nagorik Committee or "national citizens committee", also led by students, earlier this month said they were set to form a new political party Friday but did not announce its name.

Islam is likely to join the new political party as its top leader.

His resignation came amid criticisms from former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and several groups against forming a party with their representatives staying in state power.

## Exploration firm restarts search for Malaysia's MH370 flight

The plane's disappearance has long been the subject of theories—ranging from the credible to the outlandish—including that veteran pilot Zaharie Ahmad Shah had gone rogue

launched more than a decade after the plane went missing in one of aviation's greatest enduring mysteries.

Maritime exploration firm Ocean Infinity has resumed the hunt for the missing plane, Malaysian transport minister Anthony Loke said Tuesday.

Loke told reporters contract details between Malaysia and the firm were still being finalised but welcomed the "the proactiveness of Ocean Infinity to deploy their ships" to begin the search for the plane which went missing in March 2014.

Loke added that details on

11 YEARS ON



kicked off its hunt.

The Malaysian government in December had said it had agreed to launch a new search for MH370, which disappeared more than a decade ago.

The Boeing 777 carrying 239 people disappeared from radar screens March 8, 2014 while en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. Despite the largest search in aviation history, the plane has never been found.

"They (Ocean Infinity) have convinced us that they are ready," said Loke. "That's why the Malaysian government is proceeding with this," he added.

AGENCIES

Kuala Lumpur, Feb 25: A fresh search for Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 has been

## Trump backs Musk

The Republican president said Musk's Department of Government Efficiency has found 'hundreds of billions of dollars in fraud' as he suggested that federal paychecks are going to nonexistent employees

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Washington, Feb 25: President Donald Trump backed Elon Musk's demand that federal employees explain their recent accomplishments by the end of Monday or risk getting fired, even as government agency officials were told that compliance with Musk's edict was voluntary.

Confusion and anger over the situation spawned new litigation and added to turmoil within the federal workforce.

"What he's doing is saying, 'Are you actually working?'" Trump said in the Oval Office during a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron. "And then, if you don't answer, like, you're sort of semi-fired or you're fired, because a lot of people aren't answering because they don't even exist."

The Republican president said Musk's Department of Government Efficiency has found "hundreds of billions of dollars in fraud" as he suggested that federal paychecks are going to non-



existent employees. He did not present evidence for his claims.

Even as Trump and Musk pressed their case, the Office of Personnel Management informed agency leaders that their workers were not required to respond by the deadline of 11:59 p.m. Monday, according to a person with knowledge of the conversation who requested anonymity to discuss internal matters.

The conflicting directives led to varying advice for fed-

eral employees, depending on where they work. Some were told to answer the request for a list of five things that they did last week, others were informed it was optional, and others were directed not to answer at all.

Musk bristled at resistance, saying federal workers "hate even the tiniest amount of accountability." He continued to threaten firings hours after employees were told that they didn't need to comply with his demands.

### SHORT TAKES

#### 4 killed in SK bridge collapse

Seoul: Elevated parts of a highway under construction collapsed in South Korea Tuesday, killing four workers and injuring six others, officials said. Ten people were working on the site near the city of Cheonan, about 90 kilometers (55 miles) south of Seoul. They fell when it collapsed and were trapped in the rubble, the National Fire Agency said. One was found dead in the rubble. Eight injured workers were sent to hospitals before two of them were declared dead there later. The 10th worker who was missing for hours was eventually discovered dead, according to fire agency officials.

#### Unknown illness kills 50 people in Congo

Kinshasa (Congo): An unknown illness has killed over 50 people in northwestern Congo, according to doctors on the ground and the World Health Organisation Monday. The interval between the onset of symptoms and death has been 48 hours in the majority of cases, and "that's what's really worrying", Serge Ngalebato, medical director of Bikoro Hospital, a regional monitoring centre, told The Associated Press. The latest disease outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo began January 21, and 419 cases have been recorded including 53 deaths. According to the WHO's Africa office, the first outbreak in the town of Boloko began after three children ate a bat and died within 48 hours following hemorrhagic fever symptoms.

#### Waker-uz-Zaman | Army Chief, Bangladesh

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# Business

## of the day quote

The government is committed to creating a favourable investment climate by ensuring regulatory stability and enhancing ease of doing business



PIYUSH GOYAL | COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER

India's energy landscape is undergoing a historic transformation, driven by the urgent need for sustainability and self-reliance. As a homegrown conglomerate committed to nation-building, we are strengthening the country's power infrastructure with high-capacity transmission solutions



RAGHAVENDRA MIRJI | EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, GODREJ ENTERPRISES GROUP

With India set to add approximately 450 million middle-class consumers by 2030, the market for room ACs is at its inflection point and is poised to grow exponentially over the next few years. Positive trends such as the expansion of the housing sector, increased adoption of renewable energy, and growth in the rural economy are also expected to shape the industry's future



B. THIAGARAJAN | BLUE STAR LTD. MANAGING DIRECTOR

## SHORT TAKES

### India's Russian oil imports: €49bn

**New Delhi:** India, the world's third largest oil consuming and importing nation, bought crude oil worth 49 billion euros from Russia in the third year of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, a global think tank said. India, which has traditionally sourced its oil from the Middle East, began importing a large volume of oil from Russia soon after the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This is primarily because Russian oil was available at a significant discount to other international benchmarks due to western sanctions and some European countries shunning purchases. This led to India's imports of Russian oil seeing a dramatic rise, growing from less than 1 per cent of its total crude oil imports to a staggering 40 per cent in a short period. "Russia's stronghold over new markets has solidified in the third year of the invasion. The three biggest buyers, China (EUR 78 billion), India (EUR 49 billion) and Turkey (EUR 34 billion) were responsible for 74 per cent of Russia's total revenues from fossil fuels in the third year of the invasion," Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air said in its latest report.

### Cappgemini CEO for 47.5-hr work week

**Mumbai:** Joining the debate on working hours, IT services company Cappgemini India's chief executive Ashwin Yardi Tuesday advocated 47.5 hours work per week, and was against sending e-mails to employees on weekends. He was speaking at Nasscom Technology and Leadership Forum (NTLF) here. "Forty seven and half hours. We have about nine hours a day and five days a week," Yardi said replying to a question on the ideal time to be put in by an employee per week. "My guiding principle for the last four years is don't send an e-mail on a weekend even if it is an escalation unless you know you can solve it on a weekend," he added. Acknowledging that sometimes he does work on weekends, Yardi said he desists from sending e-mails to employees, as there is no point just to give "grief" to an employee knowing well that the work cannot be done on a weekend.

# RBI lowers risk weight on bank finance to NBFCs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Feb 25:** The Reserve Bank on Tuesday lowered risk weights for bank finance to NBFCs and microfinance loans, a move that will unlock more funds and boost credit.

A lower risk weight means that lenders need to set aside less funds as a safety net for consumer loans, implying an increase in their lending capacity.

Both NBFCs and microfinance institutions have witnessed a slowdown in their lending after the central bank tightened lending norms by raising the risk weight in November 2023.

The risk weight on the exposures of commercial banks to NBFCs was increased by 25 percentage points (over and above the risk weight associated with the given external rating) in all cases where the extant risk weight as per external rating of NBFCs was below 100 per cent.

"On a review, it has been decided to restore the risk weights applicable to such exposures..." the RBI said in a circular.

In another circular, the RBI said it has reviewed risk weights on microfinance loans.

In November 2023, the risk weights on consumer credit, including personal loans, but excluding housing loans, education loans, vehicle loans and loans secured by gold and gold jewellery, too was increased to 125 per cent.

"On a review, it has been decided that microfinance loans



in the nature of consumer credit shall also be excluded from the applicability of higher risk weights specified in the circular ibid and shall accordingly, be subject to a risk weight of 100 per cent," RBI said in another circular.

The central bank further clarified that microfinance loans which are not in the nature of consumer credit and fulfil certain criteria may be classified under regulatory retail portfolio (RRP) provided that the banks put in place appropriate policies and standard operating procedures to ensure fulfilment of the qualifying criteria.

Also, microfinance loans extended by regional rural banks (RRBs) and local area banks (LABs) shall attract a risk weight of 100 per cent, the RBI said.

As per the MFIN data for the third quarter of the fiscal, the portfolio has declined by 3.53 per cent on year on year basis, amounting to ₹3,85,348 crore.

"It is a welcome move in view of the current headwinds

It is absolutely unfortunate that certain messages out there from large companies are mainly driven by political motivations, less about companies going back on their core cultures



SINDHU GANGADHARAN | NASSCOM CHAIRPERSON

## GOLD JUMPS ₹250 TO ₹89,350

Gold prices jumped by ₹250 to ₹89,350 per 10 grams Tuesday extending gains for the second day amid depreciation in rupee, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The gold of 99.5 per cent purity rose by ₹250 to ₹88,950 per 10 grams from the previous close of ₹88,700 per 10 grams.



## India has lower exposure to US tariffs: Moody's

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 25:** Moody's Ratings Tuesday said India has a lower overall exposure to the US relative to others in the APAC region, although certain sectors such as food, textiles and pharmaceutical products face risks.

Moody's said most companies in its rated portfolio are domestic-focused with limited exposure to the US market.

To mitigate pressure from reciprocal tariffs, the US and India are reportedly engaged in talks to lower import tariffs on select US products, increase market access for US farm products and increase US energy purchases, while seeking to initiate a trade deal by the fall of 2025.

Across APAC, developing countries like India, Vietnam and Thailand have among the widest rate differentials relative to the US, Moody's said.

It said electronics, motor vehicles, food and textiles are the most exposed sectors. In addition to the hit from lower export demand, a key risk facing emerging economies in the region is that those aiming to nurture an export-led growth model similar to China and other advanced APAC economies will find it difficult to compete in an increasingly interventionist trade environment.

US President Donald Trump has announced he will impose reciprocal tariffs on its trading partners, including India.

The new US administration has already enacted additional 10 per cent tariffs on imports from China and 25 per cent tariffs on steel and aluminium.

## Rupee plummets 47 paise to end at 87.19 against \$



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Feb 25:** The rupee fell sharply by 47 paise to settle at 87.19 against the US dollar Tuesday due to month-end dollar demand by importers amid uncertainty over US trade tariffs.

Elevated greenback against major crosses and sustained FII outflows also contributed to the decline in the domestic unit, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened weak at 86.83 and kept losing ground through the day before settling at 87.19, lower by 47 paise over its previous close.

The local unit had settled at 86.72 Monday.

Currency markets will remain closed Wednesday for Mahashivratri.

"The rupee fell sharply against the US dollar amid uncertainty over US trade tariffs and demand from importers towards the end of the month. Covering of short positions due to the expiry of the futures contract, too, weighed on the rupee. We expect the rupee to trade negative on the back of overall weakness in the domestic markets and persistent FII outflows.

Any recovery in the US dollar may also weigh on the rupee. However, any intervention by the RBI and weakness in crude oil prices may support the rupee at lower levels," Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said.

Meanwhile, at the domestic equity markets, Sensex climbed 147.71 points to settle at 74,602.12 to end a five-session losing run. However, Nifty continued the downward streak, falling 5.80 points to 22,547.55.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, rose 0.04 per cent to 106.64.

"The dollar clawed back some losses after falling to its lowest in 2 months buoyed by safe-haven flows after the US president said that tariffs on Mexico and Canada would go ahead as planned," Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director, Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, said.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.12 per cent to 74.69 per barrel in futures trade.

The USD/INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of ₹86.85 to ₹87.40, Choudhary said.

# SENSEX SNAPS 5-DAY LOSING STREAK

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Feb 25:** Benchmark BSE Sensex recovered 147 points in a range-bound trade Tuesday, ending its five-day slide on the back of buying in financial and FMCG shares.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex climbed 147.71 points or 0.20 per cent to settle at 74,602.12 with 17 of its constituents ending higher and 13 with losses. During the day, it rallied 330.67 points or 0.44 per cent to 74,785.08.

The broader Nifty of NSE, however, fell for the sixth day, slipping by 5.80 points or 0.03 per cent to finish at 22,547.55 due to fag-end selling in pharma, metal and IT shares.

Weak Asian and US markets along with foreign fund outflows made investors risk-averse, analysts said. The BSE midcap gauge declined 0.57 per cent and smallcap index dipped 0.45 per cent. Among Sensex shares, Mahindra & Mahindra was the biggest gainer, rising by 2.61 per cent. Bharti Airtel rose by 2.55 per cent after it an-



nounced a partnership with Ericsson to deploy 5G Core technology to drive 5G evolution.

Bajaj Finance, Zomato, Nestle, Bajaj Finserv, Maruti and Titan were among the gainers.

Sun Pharma, Power Grid, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Asian Paints and Tata Motors were among the laggards. In the last five trading sessions, the BSE barometer lost 1,542.45 points or 2 per cent.

"Benchmark indices ended mixed in a lacklustre trading

session as weak Asian cues further cautioned investors. Investors continued to stay risk averse as global uncertainty coupled with strong FII selling kept the mood sluggish ahead of expiry this week," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

"The domestic market experienced a range-bound trading session in anticipation of key economic data releases this week, alongside the monthly expiry. Concerns over high

valuations led to continued declines in small and midcap stocks. Market sentiment is expected to remain cautious in the near term due to persistent pressure on the INR, ongoing FII outflows, and tariff-related developments," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

Key macroeconomic indicators, including the US Core PCE and GDP data for both the US and India, will be instrumental in shaping expectations for the central bank's future monetary policy, Nair added.

Among BSE sectoral indices, telecommunication climbed 0.66 per cent, while auto (0.43 per cent), consumer durables (0.37 per cent) and FMCG (0.26 per cent) closed higher. Metal dropped 1.69 per cent, oil & gas (1.34 per cent), realty (1.27 per cent), energy (1.10 per cent) BSE commodities (0.98 per cent) and services (0.92 per cent).

FII's offloaded equities worth ₹6,286.70 crore Monday, while DIIs bought equities worth ₹5,185.65 crore, according to exchange data.

# Crypto trading booms in smaller cities as job growth disappoints

REUTERS

**Nagpur, Feb 25:** Like thousands of his countrymen in far-flung places, flower-shop owner Ashish Nagose has been learning about trading cryptocurrencies by attending classes every weekday for the past two months in his home city of Nagpur in western India.

Nagose bought and sold stock options earlier but is now venturing into cryptocurrencies as regulators have made it harder to trade equity derivatives in India. The 28-year-old believes the red-hot crypto asset class can help shield his family-owned flower shop during downturns.

"I want to run my family shop, and hope that trading can provide a steady income when business slows down, like in the month after (the Hindu festival of) Diwali," he said, seated at the storefront surrounded by bunches of red roses and orange marigolds.

Newfound crypto enthusiasts

in India such as Nagose have helped grow cumulative trading volumes of bitcoin, ethereum, dogecoin and other cryptocurrencies on four of its largest exchanges more than two-fold quarter-on-quarter to \$1.9 billion in the October-December quarter, according to data from aggregator CoinGecko.

Many young Indians are dabbling in crypto trading to supplement their regular income in the world's most populous country where jobs and pay increases have lagged world-beating economic growth. Nearly two-thirds of its 1.4 billion people are below the age of 35, according to a government report.

From stocks and derivatives, they are now gravitating towards crypto assets whose prices have soared after US President Donald Trump's election victory in November promised a looser regulatory regime for the asset.

"There is a lot of curiosity at the ground level ... especially with Trump becoming the US



president and the entire flavour of crypto changing world over," said Edul Patel, co-founder of Mudrex, an Indian crypto exchange.

Overall, India's crypto market is expected to grow to more than \$15 billion in 2035 from \$2.5 billion last year at a compound annual growth rate of 18.5%, said Kush Wadhwa, partner at consulting firm Grant Thornton Bharat.

Retail traders have driven the bulk of the interest in the asset, according to exchange executives, even as ETFs and institutions have pushed up

crypto prices globally.

Out of the top 10 centres that propelled crypto activity in India in 2024, seven were lower-tiered cities, such as Jaipur, Lucknow and Pune, according to CoinSwitch, one of India's largest crypto platforms.

"Growth is now being driven by non-metro cities. That's true for the stock world and it's true for crypto," said Balaji Srihari, vice president at CoinSwitch which has 20 million users.

The surging interest may challenge Indian authorities who have discouraged trading in cryptocurrencies by

levying steep taxes and have warned against their risks and volatility.

But that has not stopped 25-year-old Sagar Neware, a Nagpur-based mechanical engineer, from spending his nights trading them.

"My father had to shut down his plastic packaging business a few years back so my first dream is to restart it with the money I can earn from trading," said Neware, who earns 25,000 rupees (\$288) a month from working at the local transport office.

To hone their crypto trading skills, Neware and about two dozen others gather at the Thoughts Magic Trading Academy in Nagpur each weekday.

Yash Jaiswal, an equity options trader who runs the classes in a shop room, says he has tutored about 1,500 people over the last two years.

"You're just one trade away from your dream life," says a poster on the wall of the classroom.

## MACROECONOMIC RISK

Who has regulatory oversight of cryptocurrencies in India is unclear.

While the 30% tax it levies on crypto trading gains is among the most stringent globally, the country, unlike most G-20 nations, has neither introduced new norms to govern crypto, nor folded it under existing securities rules. It has also not imposed an outright ban on it.

Reuters reported last year that India's market regulator has signaled it is open to oversight of crypto trade, but the government is still to take a view.

The central bank, though, has continued to warn against it. "Widespread usage of crypto assets and stablecoins has consequences for macroeconomic and financial stability," it said in its Financial Stability Report in December 2024.

India's federal finance ministry, the central bank and the market regulator did not respond to emails seeking comment.

FIH PRO LEAGUE

# India stun Netherlands in shootout

Eves beat World No 1 in penalty after the two sides were locked 2-2 in regulation time

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 25:** The Indian women's hockey team Tuesday stunned reigning Olympic champions and world No 1 Netherlands in shootout after the two sides were locked 2-2 in regulation time to end their home leg of the FIH Pro League on a winning note here.

Pien Sanders (17th minute) and Fay van der Elst (28th) had given the Netherlands a 2-0 lead at half time but India made a strong comeback to restore parity through stunning goals from Deepika (35th) and Baljeet Kaur (43rd).

In the shootout, Deepika and Mumtaz Khan found the target for India while Marijn Veen was the lone scorer for the Netherlands, who are also the defending champions.

Veteran India goalkeeper Savita Punia made four crucial saves to play a major role in the team's victory.

The home team had lost to the same opponents 2-4 in the first leg Monday.

In the eight matches played in the home leg from February 15, India won three, including Tuesday's, and lost five, including one in shootout.

With a bonus point from the shootout win, the Indian team is currently at the fifth spot in the FIH Pro League table with 12 points from seven matches, with England at the top with 16 points from seven games.

The Dutch were dominant in the first quarter both in terms of possession and attempts on goal. The visiting team won the first penalty corner of the evening in the fifth minute. Matla Frederique took a powerful shot but Savita made a breath-taking save.



The Netherlands won three back-to-back corners in the remaining minutes but India's tight defence denied them.

The Dutch continued to pile on the pressure in the second quarter and found the opening goal in the 17th minute courtesy of a penalty corner. The Netherlands played out a variation perfectly as captain Sanders received the ball on the baseline and found the net from a tight angle to give her side the lead.

The Netherlands won their sixth penalty corner in the 23rd minute and tried to play the same variation as before but this time, Sanders' shot was blocked by an Indian defender.

In the 28th minute, Lahremsami made a brilliant individual run with the ball from the left flank and pierced into the cir-

**Following the incredible upset victory, Hockey India announced a cash award of ₹1 lakh to each Indian player and ₹50,000 to each member of the support staff in addition to their existing policy of rewarding ₹50,000 for every victory**

cle, but unfortunately, couldn't make an attempt on goal.

With two minutes left in the first half, the Netherlands extended their lead. Luna Fokke

received a lofted pass on the baseline and played it across perfectly to Elst in front of goal, who made a diving finish into the net.

India improved on the attacking front in the third quarter as they found two crucial goals to get back on level terms. In the 35th minute, Deepika dribbled down the left flank brilliantly as she went around the Netherlands' backline, kissed the baseline, and found the net with a perfect finish.

The Dutch maintained pressure on Indian defence as they continued with their relentless attacks. In the 39th minute, the Oranje won yet another penalty corner but Savita ensured the scores remained the same.

India created another scoring opportunity as Deepika held the ball in the circle and passed it

on to Salima Tete on the far post but the Indian captain failed to connect and squandered the chance.

India scored the much-needed equaliser in the 43rd minute courtesy of a brilliant finish from Baljeet. Sharmila Devi dribbled down the right wing and found Baljeet whose first-time finish towards the near post sneaked into the net past the Dutch keeper.

With all to play for in the final quarter, both teams went hammer and tongs for the winner. The Netherlands piled on multiple attacks but were wasteful in front of the goal.

In the 53rd minute, India launched a counterattack as Salima paced down the middle into the shooting circle, but the Dutch were quick to fall back and fend off the attack.

# Kuldeep tops India's go-to death overs bowler



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bengaluru, Feb 25:** Kuldeep Yadav's art of left-arm wrist spin is subtle. It's not endearingly garish as it was in the world of Shane Warne or Abdul Qadir.

His magic is well-concealed by layers of plainness and courage. A rewind to India's Champions Trophy match against Pakistan last Sunday will validate that impression.

Pakistan still had some life in their innings at 200 for five with eight overs to spare, and an in-form Salman Agha was at the crease with Khushdil Shah. Skipper Rohit Sharma pressed Kuldeep into service.

Immediately, Agha saw a scoring opportunity but his shimmy at Kuldeep's stock delivery ended in the hands of Ravindra Jadeja.

In the very next ball, Kuldeep slid in a fast one to trap Shaheen Shah Afridi in front for a first-ball duck, and Pakistan were reduced to 200 for seven.

It's this variety and quick assessment of batters that make Kuldeep a real threat at any stage of the match, now even at the final 10 overs.

"There might be some tenderness as he is coming off an injury lay-off. But he has done well so far. There is the right amount of hip pivot and body weight behind his delivery arm, and it has kept him accurate, very rare for a wrist spinner," a former India spinner told PTI.

That accuracy has made his captains toss the ball to him

**I was able to become the first choice in bowling the last 10 overs. Even the captain felt that it's very difficult to hit spinners when you have variations**

**KULDEEP YADAV | BOWLER, INDIA**

even in the death overs, as he had done against Pakistan in Dubai.

In fact, ESPNcricinfo statistics show that Kuldeep has taken 25 wickets in 43 innings when he bowled between overs 40 and 45 since 2015, the point when five fielders were allowed in the outfield in the final 10 overs.

In terms of wickets taken in the 40-45 overs phase, those numbers place him behind fellow wrist-spinners Rashid Khan (36) and Adam Zampa (29), while on par with England leg-spinner Adil Rashid (25).

Kuldeep said he relished the challenge of bowling at death overs, a task that requires bravery and variety in equal measure in this age of range-hitting.

"The wicket (in Dubai) was slow, and it was good for me. I was trying to mix with the pace and wrong ones or top-spin," he said.

Then he entered into the specifics of his modus operandi, describing the dismissals of Agha and Afridi off successive balls in the 43rd over. He sounded so casual but it revealed the deep thought that goes behind his craft.

SHORT TAKES

## Rain leads to no result in Rawalpindi

**Rawalpindi:** The Champions Trophy match between Australia and South Africa was abandoned here Tuesday due to persistent rain. The weather did not allow even the toss to be completed. With the conditions not getting any better, the match officials called off the game a little more than three hours after the scheduled start time. Both teams had won their opening game in Group B. After the no result, South Africa and Australia share one point each and it means that Wednesday's contest between England and Afghanistan has turned into a virtual knockout with the loser becoming the third team to be eliminated from the ICC event.

## Asmita rowing league all set for historic start

**Hyderabad:** The Hussain Sagar Lake here will stage the country's first-ever city-based rowing league -- ASMITA Rowing League -- from February 26 in what could be a huge fillip to the sport. Backed by the Government of India's Khelo India mission, the league will see participation by eight teams -- Bhopal Waves Queen, Chennai Ranis, Cochin Queens, Cuttack Rowing, Deccan Queen Pune, Hyderabad Queen, Kolkata R-Oars and Ludhiana Team Rowing -- and 250 girls in U-19 and U-23 age groups and five different events. Organised in collaboration with the Rowing Federation of India, the tournament will also reward the top-6 finishers in each event -- Single Sculls (W1X), Double Sculls (W2X), Quadruple Sculls (W4X), Coxless Pairs (W2) and Coxless Fours (W4) -- with attractive cash incentives.

## Mbappé to play Copa despite tooth problem

**Madrid:** Kylian Mbappé missed practice because of a tooth problem but will be available to play for Real Madrid in the Copa del Rey semifinal against Real Sociedad, coach Carlo Ancelotti said Tuesday. Madrid, seeking its second Copa final in three seasons, will play the first leg of the semifinals at Sociedad Wednesday. Spanish media said Mbappé had a tooth removed. Mbappé was scoreless in Madrid's 2-0 win against Girona in the Spanish league Sunday.

PRAGUE MASTERS

# Praggnanadhaa hot favourite to win

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Prague, Feb 25:** Fresh off his nail-biting victory at the Tata Steel Masters, Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa will start as the hot favourite to win the Prague Masters, which gets underway here Wednesday.

It was a gruelling first-place finish at the Tata Steel Masters, where Praggnanandhaa overcame world champion D Gukesh in a nerve-wracking tiebreak battle and the Indian will now look to carry that momentum forward in this tournament.

Grandmaster Aravindh Chithambaram makes his debut in elite chess, thanks to his consistent rise in both performance and rating throughout last year.

Having elevated himself to 2730 points in live ratings, Aravindh is knocking on the door of the top 20 in the world rankings and is currently ranked fifth in the country, behind Gukesh, Arjun Erigaisi, Praggnanandhaa, and five-time world



champion Viswanathan Anand.

The field, as usual, is an interesting mix. Chinese Grandmaster Wei Yi starts as the top seed, with Praggnanandhaa in second place based on ratings released February 1. Le Quang Liem of Vietnam is seeded third, ahead of Vincent Keymer of Germany, while Aravindh is seeded fourth in the 10-player, 9-round all-play-all event.

Dutch Grandmaster Anish Giri could draw attention here, thanks to his vast theoretical preparation, which might prove useful. The best Czech player, David Navara, along with Nguyen Thai Dai Van, Sam Shankland of the United States, and young talent Edil Gurez, complete the lineup.

# MAKING OF A BOXING MESS

BFI internal wars revealed amid IOA crackdown

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 25:** Stripped of its administrative powers by IOA for allegedly failing to conduct elections on time, accusations and counter-accusations are flying thick and fast within the Boxing Federation of India on what is to be blamed for the mess that has been in the making for several months.

Abuse of power, financial misconduct, and the never-ending turf wars are now coming to light as officials jostle to escape blame for the shocking turn of events.

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) formed a five-member ad-hoc committee Monday to oversee the sport's affairs, citing the federation's failure to conduct elections on time.

The panel is headed by former Athletics Federation of India (AFI) treasurer Madhukant Pathak, and comprises long-serving boxing federation officials such as Rajesh Bhandari (vice-chairman), DP Bhatt, Virendra Singh Thakur and former Asian champion Shiva Thapa as the sole players' representative.



The sport's fortunes have been on the decline for a while now but the internal tug of war had so far been under wraps. With the IOA's crackdown, it is now out in the open.

## Allegations of financial misconduct

The BFI received a complaint December 28, a copy of which is in PTT's possession, accusing key officials, including Secretary General Hemanta Kalita and Treasurer Digvijay Singh, of "unauthorised fund withdrawals, fraudulent billing, and abuse of power".

They were also accused of tender process violations and

it was claimed that contracts for the Multinational Training Camp in Rohtak and the Guwahati Talent Hunt were awarded without following the proper procedure.

It was also alleged that non-boxing individuals were appointed as Technical Officials (NTOs) and there was unauthorised withdrawal of foreign currency and misuse of federation funds for personal expenses, among others.

During the Executive Council meeting January 12 attended by both the secretary and treasurer, it was decided that an inquiry will be conducted.

To avoid conflict of interest, former Delhi High Court judge, Sudhir Kumar Jain was appointed by the BFI to lead the investigation January 21. Since then Jain has conducted several sittings.

## Election delays and internal rift

The current office-bearers' tenure ended February 3. However, the date of elections are yet to be announced. During the National Games in Uttarakhand earlier this month, 24 state associations wrote to the BFI President, demanding elections to be held March 9.

However, many of these associations, including those from Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh, later withdrew their demand, instead expressing support for Singh to decide the election's date and venue.

BFI also informed the Sports Ministry about the delay.

In a letter dated February 3, the federation stated that a Special General Body Meeting (SGM) was scheduled for Tuesday, and assured the ministry that the election will be conducted by mid-March.

However, the meeting was not held.

# Russian soccer to give up seat on UEFA executive committee

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Geneva, Feb 25:** Russia will no longer have a seat on the influential UEFA executive committee after the European soccer body's elections in six weeks.

Also, Norwegian official Lise Klaveness is the only candidate for a new quota place for women, UEFA said on Monday, and soccer great Andrii Shevchenko stands for the first time effectively to replace his ousted predecessor as Ukraine soccer federation president, Andriy Pavelko.

Alexander Dyukov, the chief executive of Russian oil firm Gazprom Neft, was not on the list of candidates published by UEFA for its election meeting on April



3 in the Serbian capital Belgrade.

Dyukov was first elected to UEFA's ruling committee in 2021 and said in an interview two years ago he would seek another four-year mandate. His absence from the UEFA candidate list was unexpected three weeks after he was re-elected president of the Russian soccer federation he has led since 2019.

UEFA said Dyukov did not apply to retain his executive committee seat and had not

been ruled ineligible. All candidates for elections in Europe to the ruling committees of UEFA and FIFA must pass mandatory checks by governance experts.

Dyukov continued to attend UEFA meetings and games around Europe while on a British government sanctions list and during a ban on Russian teams from international competitions after the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

FIFA and UEFA successfully argued at the Court of Arbitration for Sport in the early weeks of the war that including those teams would invite chaos in their competitions when some countries in Europe refused to play opponents from Russia.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Istanbul, Feb 25:** Galatasaray plans to start criminal proceedings against Jose Mourinho and file complaints with soccer's governing body after accusing the Fenerbahce coach of making racist comments after a Turkish league game.

The league leaders issued a statement after Monday's 0-0 draw with Fenerbahce announcing the action against Mourinho, the 62-year-old Portuguese coach who moved to Turkey from Roma last year after stints at high-profile clubs including Chelsea, Manchester United, Real Madrid and Inter Milan.

# Mourinho slammed for making racist comments

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



Fenerbahce rejected the accusation Tuesday, saying the remarks had nothing to do with racism and were "deliberately taken entirely out of context and distorted in a misleading manner."

Mourinho was fined and suspended earlier in the season for a tirade against local match officials and the league.

# PCB takes note of security breach

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Rawalpindi, Feb 24:** The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has taken note of a security breach that occurred when a spectator entered the field of play during the New Zealand-Bangladesh match in the ICC Champions Trophy at the Rawalpindi Stadium.

The board said in a statement that ensuring the safety of players and officials remains the top priority of the hosts.

"As a responsible organisation, we have engaged with local security agencies, who have committed to increasing security personnel around the field of play at all venues and strengthening access control measures," the statement said.