

Defining success
Actor Rashmika Mandana opens up about different levels of success in an artiste's life
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Trump's Gaza video
US President Donald Trump shares an AI-generated video showing war-torn Gaza redeveloped into a riviera drawing severe backlash
INTERNATIONAL | P10

Nifty declines 14%
Equity benchmark indices are facing massive corrections, with the NSE Nifty declining over 14% from its lifetime high hit in Sept
BUSINESS | P11

Positive outcome
Indian men's and women's hockey teams open their respective campaigns in the FIH Hockey Pro League 2024-25 on home soil
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Kujang IIC held for illicit relation with home guard

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Feb 26: Odisha Police inspector Tapan Kumar Nahak was arrested Wednesday for allegedly cheating a woman home guard by indulging in a physical relationship with her on the pretext of marriage, officials said.

"We arrested Nahak and forwarded him to court. He was also suspended by the DGP," Jagatsinghpur SP Bhawani Sankar Udgata said. Nahak was arrested barely an hour after DGP Yogesh Bahadur Khurania suspended him to ensure a free and fair probe.

During his posting as the additional IIC of Jagatsinghpur PS around two months ago, Nahak allegedly entered into a physical relationship with the victim, who was also working in the same police station, after promising to marry her.

Subsequently, he was transferred as IIC of Kujang police station in the same district. Later, Nahak, who was already married, refused to fulfil his promise leading to a dispute between them, a police officer said.

On Monday, the home guard lodged a complaint against the officer in Jagatsinghpur police station. Nahak fled from Kujang Police station after learning that a case was registered against him. However, police arrested him from Khurda Tuesday, he said.

Notably in 2023, Nahak was placed under suspension when he was the IIC of Phiringia police station for negligence of duty.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



The person facing corruption charges will face an inquiry, not bulldozer justice—he's from our party!

Now, \$5mn 'gold card' route for US citizenship

REUTERS

Washington, Feb 26: US President Donald Trump Tuesday floated the idea of replacing a visa programme for foreign investors with a so-called "gold card" that could be bought for \$5 million as a route to American citizenship.

Trump told reporters he will replace the "EB-5" immigrant investor visa programme, which allows foreign investors of large sums of money that create or preserve US jobs to become permanent residents, with a so-called "gold card." The EB-5 programme grants "green cards" to foreigners promising to invest in US businesses.

"We are going to be selling a gold card," Trump said. "We are going to be putting a price on that card of about \$5 million," he added. "It's going to give you green card privileges plus it's going to be a route to (American) citizenship, and wealthy people would be com-



MAHAKUMBH ENDS: Sadhus take out a procession towards the Kashi Vishwanath temple to offer prayers on the occasion of Maha Shivratri, marking the concluding day of the Mahakumbh, in Varanasi, Wednesday

CONVICTED LAWMAKERS Centre against life ban

The Modi government has opposed a plea in the Supreme Court seeking a lifetime ban on convicted politicians, arguing that such a disqualification falls within Parliament's jurisdiction. Centre's affidavit states that the issue of imposing a lifetime ban is a legislative matter and not within judicial review. It emphasised that penalties under the Representation of the People Act, 1951, are time-bound (six years), and Parliament has the discretion to determine the duration of disqualification. It also highlighted that disqualifications are not permanent, citing Articles 102 and 191 of the Constitution, which allow Parliament to regulate disqualification grounds and duration

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: The Centre has opposed in the Supreme Court a plea seeking life ban on convicted politicians, saying imposing such a disqualification was solely within the domain of Parliament.

In an affidavit filed in court, the Centre said the prayer in a plea, seeking the same, amounted to re-writing of the statute or directing Parliament to frame a law in a particular manner which was wholly beyond the powers of judicial review.

The question whether a lifetime ban would be appropriate or not is a question that is solely within the domain of the parliament, the affidavit said.

By confining the operation of penalty to an appropriate length of time, deterrence was ensured while undue harshness was avoided, it added.

There was, said the Centre, nothing inherently unconstitutional in limiting the effect of penalties by time and it was a settled principle of law that penalties were limited either by time or by quantum.

In its affidavit, the Centre underlined the apex court had consistently held that the legislative choice over one option or the other couldn't be questioned in courts over its efficacy or otherwise.

Under Section 8 (1) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, the period of disqualification was six years from the date of conviction or in case of imprisonment, six years from

the date of release, it added. The disqualifications made under the impugned sections are limited by time as a matter of parliamentary policy and it would not be appropriate to substitute the petitioner's understanding of the issue and impose a lifetime ban, it said.

The Centre said as a matter of judicial review, the court could declare the provisions to be unconstitutional, however, the relief sought by the petitioner effectively sought to read life-long instead of six years in all sub-sections of Section 8 of the Act. It said lifetime disqualification was the maximum that could be imposed under the provisions and such discretion was certainly within the power of Parliament.

However, it is one thing to say that a power exists and another to say that it must necessarily be exercised in every case, the Centre argued.

Controversy over language omission puts CBSE in spot

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: The Punjab government Wednesday alleged that the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) had dropped Punjabi from the list of subjects for the Class X Board exams in the new draft norms while the board officials maintained that the list was only indicative and no subjects would be dropped.

The CBSE officials clarified that the draft norms do not mention 13 other languages and reiterated that they would continue to be offered.

The 13 other languages are Russian, Nepali, Limboo, Lepcha, Sindhi, Malayalam, Odia, Assamese, Kannada, Kokborok, Telugu, Arabic and Persian, they said. The CBSE Tuesday approved draft norms for conducting the Class X Board exams twice a year.

The draft norms 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.

Punjab Education Minister Harjot Singh Bains alleged that the new policy was attempting to drop Punjabi from the subjects' list and claimed that his government would not tolerate

any attack on the language. "We strongly object to the CBSE's new exam pattern scheme which attempts to erase Punjabi. Punjabi must be designated as the main language in Punjab and, further, be included as a regional language for the rest of the nation as it is spoken and read across multiple states. Any attack on Punjabi will not be tolerated," Bains said in a video shared on X.

CBSE Examination Controller Sanyam Bhardwaj, however, said there would be no change in the list of subjects.

There is no change in the list of subjects offered at present. The list in the draft policy is indicative. All subjects offered at present will continue in the Class X Board exams in both phases, he said.

Meanwhile, the Punjab government Wednesday said it has made Punjabi a mandatory subject in all schools across the state, regardless of their educational board affiliation.

Servitor falls from Lingaraj temple, injured

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Feb 26: A servitor at Shree Lingaraj temple here was injured after he fell while climbing the 11th-century Lord Shiva shrine Wednesday night, police said.

The incident took place around 10.40pm when the servitor was climbing the temple

top, holding a burning torch in one hand. He sustained injuries. Another servitor later took the 'Mahadeepa' and placed it at atop the shrine around 10.45pm, an official said.

Lighting the 'Mahadeepa' marked the end of the day-long fast being observed on the occasion of Maha Shivratri. Thousands of devotees had gathered to

witness the auspicious ritual of Lord Shiva. Though, it was earlier decided to take the Mahadeepa to the temple at 10pm, the process was delayed by around 40 minutes due to some rituals in the temple, the official said.

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and many other dignitaries visited Lingaraj temple during the day.

at the water's edge. "It was so magical and cute. I was so excited and happy when I discovered it," Guo said.

China's 'Puppy Mountain' turns overnight sensation

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Shanghai, Feb 26: When Shanghai-based designer Guo Qingshan posted a vacation photo on Valentine's Day and captioned it "Puppy Mountain," it became a sensation in China and even created a tourist destination.

Guo had gone on a hike while visiting his hometown of Yichang in central China's Hubei province in late January. When reviewing the photos, he saw something he hadn't noticed before—a mountain shaped like a dog's head rested on the ground next to the Yangtze river, its snout perched

the mountain. "Just stroke the puppy's head and then everything will be OK." Another social media user commented "We all need the eyes to see the beauty in this world."

The mountain is in Yichang's Zigui County, where it can be seen from an observation deck. The Yangtze river, the longest river in China and the third-longest river in the world, flows through the mountainous area. After Guo's photo went viral, many people shared photos of the view they previously had taken from the same deck, many saying they hadn't realised it looked like a dog.

leisure

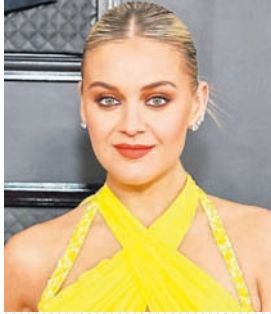


KATE HUDSON QUIT DATING AFTER MATT BELLAMY SPLIT

Almost Famous actress Kate Hudson quit dating on the advice of her therapist following the end of her engagement to Muse star Matt Bellamy in 2014. The 45-yr-old had a son, Ryder, with her first husband Chris Robinson - who she divorced in 2007.

KELSEA SCOLDS FANS DURING CONCERT

Singer Kelsea Ballerini halted a concert at the Hard Rock Live in Hollywood, Florida, to scold the audience for dissing her ex-husband Morgan Evans during a performance of her track *Penthouse*-believed to be about her 2022 split from Evans.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES

Today you will be perplexed by some inexplicable and fantastic event. Either that, or you may experience an unforeseen but favourable incident. It may not be earth-shaking, but it will definitely make you assess things. Besides, you could have difficulties meeting deadlines.

TAURUS

You will not lose your cool today despite the overwhelming odds, feels Ganesha. Rationale and reason will be the rhyme of your attitude as you diagnose the problems and uproot them successfully. Success beckons and you are ready to reach out and grab it by hook or by crook.

GEMINI

You will tend to be religiously inclined today, feels Ganesha. For this purpose, you may spend some time visiting a temple, mosque or church. You are also likely to go shopping, and chances are that this too is for a religious purpose. May God bless you, says Ganesha.

CANCER

Today, you will put your heart and soul into whatever task you take up. But the results may not be too forthcoming. However, that should not be a reason for you to get dejected or anxious. You will get your due sooner or later. Also, spending some time with your loved ones will be quite gratifying emotionally.

LEO

A mixed bag of fortunes, a bittersweet pill, call it what you will, but today brings with it a lot of things packed within its 24-hour period. Ganesha foresees a hectic morning, and an even more frantic afternoon. So, respite will be a luxury for you today.

VIRGO

Pay due attention to your innate feelings. A small tour may be in the offing. You will get along famously with people today, says Ganesha. Your loved ones will receive your sincere feelings and emotions. Work your magic to improve relationships more.

LIBRA

When you aim big, it is the small things that somehow manage to irritate you the most. Ganesha foresees you being troubled immensely by minute things today. But do not let this dampen your spirit, because today is also a day when you shall be receptive to new ideas.

SCORPIO

A cascade of let-downs will dent your confidence and shake your determination, says Ganesha. But don't let these failures affect you as they are temporary. At work, your subordinates may force you to take drastic measures.

SAGITTARIUS

A day full of cheer and joy is in store. You will probably enrol in a part-time course and sharpen your skills. But for those in police and legal professions, you will be the lions of the jungle! Roar and stamp your authority, says Ganesha.

CAPRICORN

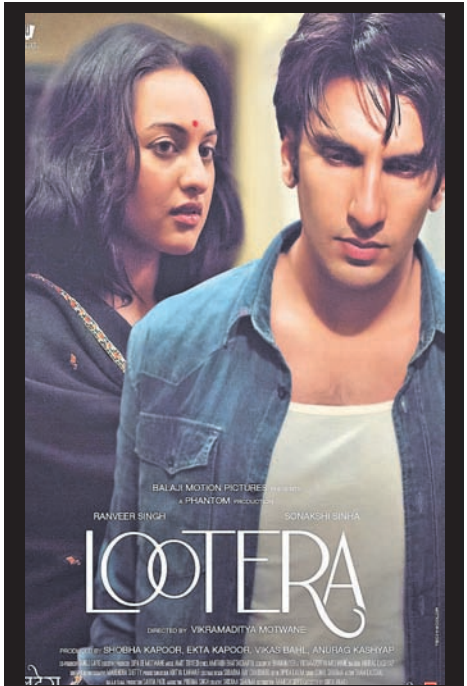
After running about helter-skelter for getting your work done, you will sit back and spend the day planning the course of future action. Sudden and unexpected profits are on the cards, but you will need to be mindful of how best you utilise it. You can expect a few good opportunities to knock at the door, but open the door before they turn to look for shelter elsewhere.

AQUARIUS

You may find your schedules running haywire today! Your workload may be daunting, especially if you're an administrator. However, Ganesha says your diligence and commitment will tide you through. And you are still ready to party in the evening. What energy!

PISCES

You are human enough to make mistakes, and humble enough to admit them, and it is this honesty that people admire in you. Your affectionate nature will see you excel at tending to the needs of your family members today, says Ganesha.



Lootera returns to theatres

Mumbai: Ranveer Singh and Sonakshi Sinha's *Lootera*, which first hit theatres in July 2013, will make its return on March 7, 2025. This re-release gives viewers another opportunity to experience the film's captivating love story, stunning cinematography, and emotional resonance. It is also part of a growing trend of bringing back critically acclaimed films for a second theatrical release.

Speaking about the re-release, Ms. Niharika Bijli, Lead Strategist, PVR INOX, shared her excitement and said, "*Lootera* isn't just a film; it's an emotional journey, an experience that lingers long after the screen fades to black. We are thrilled to bring this cinematic gem back to theatres."

Director Vikramaditya Motwane, reflecting on the film's legacy, expressed: "It's incredible to see it getting a second chance on the big screen—introducing it to an entirely new audience while also evoking nostalgia for those who experienced it when it first released. I can't wait to see how audiences react."

Adding to this, producer Ektaa R. Kapoor said, "*Lootera* is very close to my heart, and the film was an absolute passion project for us. Seeing the amount of love it gets, especially on social media, since its release is truly overwhelming and brings us immense joy." AGENCIES

Rashmika's idea of success

Mumbai: Rashmika Mandanna is currently the biggest pan-India actress in Indian cinema. In a recent interview, she shared what success means to her and it surely had to have her fans in it.

Rashmika revealed what success meant to her saying, "Success for me would be happy faces around. Success for me is my fans coming and saying 'We just saw your best performance to date'. That's success for me. Success for me is not having to worry about the bills you have to pay." "Success for me is when you're having a really hard day, and you wake up telling yourself, 'Okay, Let's just take it one step at a time, one day at a time'. You know, that's success for me. So it's different levels of success, but it's all success at the end of the day," Rashmika added.

Rashmika's film *Chhaava*

has crossed the Rs. 515.33 crore mark worldwide. She played the role of Yesubai in the film. The actress has an upcoming lineup that includes *Thama* with Ayushmann Khurrana, *Pushpa 3*, *Kubera* with Dhanush, and *Sikandar* with Salman Khan. She also has *Rainbow* and *The Girlfriend* in the pipeline.

AGENCIES



'I'm done being away from films'

Hyderabad: After a year-long break due to her battle with myositis, Samantha Ruth Prabhu made a strong comeback to the film industry. The *Citadel* actress recently shared her zeal to return to filming and stated that it is her first love.

During an interview with a news channel, the *Theri* actress shared her enthusiasm for upcoming projects. She shared about her debut as a producer in the upcoming film, *Bangaram*, and expressed her excitement about the series *Rakta Brahmand*, which is currently in the production phase.

She shared, "I need to finish and complete Raj-DK's series *Rakta Brahmand* and another film as well that will go on floors maybe in two months or so. So yes, it's a lot of work starting in a month or two."

She also mentioned her love for filming, stating, "I think I'm done being away from filming. It is my first true love."

Samantha Ruth Prabhu was last seen in *Citadel: Honey Bunny*, co-starring with Varun Dhawan, directed by Raj & DK.

During the interview, she also shared about her decision to keep her love life private.

"Samantha is single. I don't think that I will ever be discussing my love life ever again. That's a part of my life that I choose to keep extremely private, and I will not be talking about that again," she said.

AGENCIES



Krystle comes clean on money laundering case

Mumbai: Actress Krystle D'Souza for the first time addresses the sensational headlines surrounding her alleged involvement in a money laundering case. The actress, who was reportedly embroiled in a scandal involving a trading app, sets the record straight.

"When the ED news came out, I was shocked," Krystle recalls. "I thought, 'Where's the money?' I did my job, got paid, and had my bills to pay. I had nothing to

hide." She clarifies that the officials were not looking for her, but rather trying to identify the owner of the trading app. "They were not even looking for me. The news changed it into something else. The officials were trying to figure out who was the head of this trading app. They thought we might have met the owner. So, we were just called to ask if we had met him personally. They were trying to catch that guy," she adds.

Krystle admits that the controversy left her shaken. "I was scared that nobody would want to work with me for a while. But I'm glad to have clarified the truth," said the actress.

AGENCIES

PEANUTS



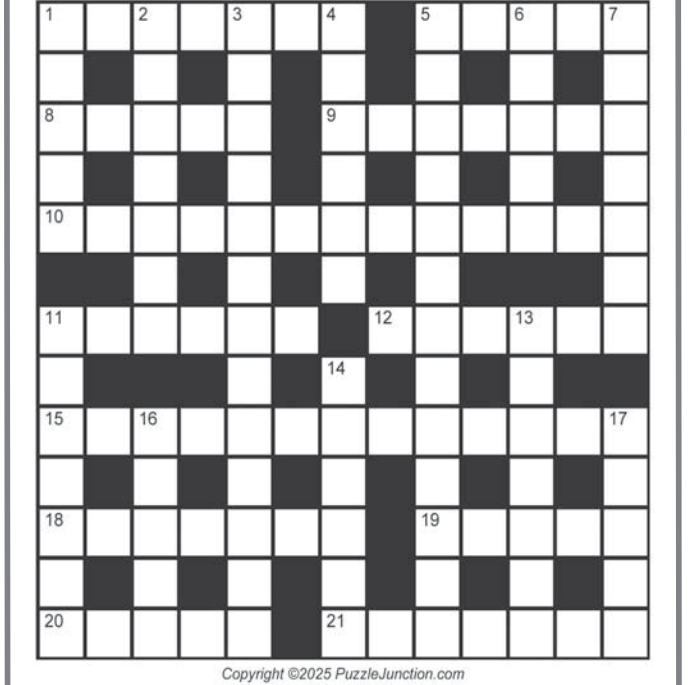
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



FUN POST CROSSWORD



- Copyright ©2025 PuzzleJunction.com
- Across**
- 1 Old salt (4-3)
 - 5 House coat
 - 8 Point of greatest despair
 - 9 Children's disease, usually
 - 10 Bold and daring
 - 11 Box
 - 12 Mauritania's home
 - 15 Outdoor game (9,4)
 - 18 Clothes
 - 19 Hopping mad
 - 20 Knight fights
 - 21 Complete disregard
 - 3 It comes before rex
 - 4 Hearsay
 - 5 Olive branch (5,8)
 - 6 Eskimo abode
 - 7 Mosaic tile
 - 11 Small car
 - 13 Set apart
 - 14 Irish capital
 - 16 Sherpa's home
 - 17 Armada
- Down**
- 1 Military takeover group
 - 2 Corpse

SUDOKU

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

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

SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD

W	A	A	Q	P	A
C	A	N	C	E	L
V	E	T	O	A	T
R	E	D	M	E	A
D	O	C	B	U	T
B	U	D	D	C	A
C	A	P	L	M	
M	A	N	T	I	L
T	I	A	N	T	O
B	O	W	O	U	T
R	N	E	E	L	G

SUDOKU

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

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

Children take part in a painting competition organised by Odisha Chitra Kala Academy in Cuttack, Wednesday



downtown

Lakhs throng shrines on Maha Shivaratri

NHRC seeks report on deaths in sewage tank

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Feb 26: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has asked the Cuttack District Magistrate to ensure necessary action and submit an action taken report (ATR) by April 3, 2025 in connection with the death of three workers in a sewage tank at an apartment in Trisulia area of the Silver City in September last year.

The apex rights body's directive came February 24 while hearing a petition filed by Sagar Jena of Kajala village in Kendrapara district.

Jena, in his complaint, alleged that three labourers died of asphyxiation when they entered the septic tank of an apartment in Trisulia area September 6, 2024 to remove centring from the roof of the tank.

The three workers were rescued with the help of Barang Fire Services personnel and the police and were rushed to SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack, where doctors declared them 'brought dead'.

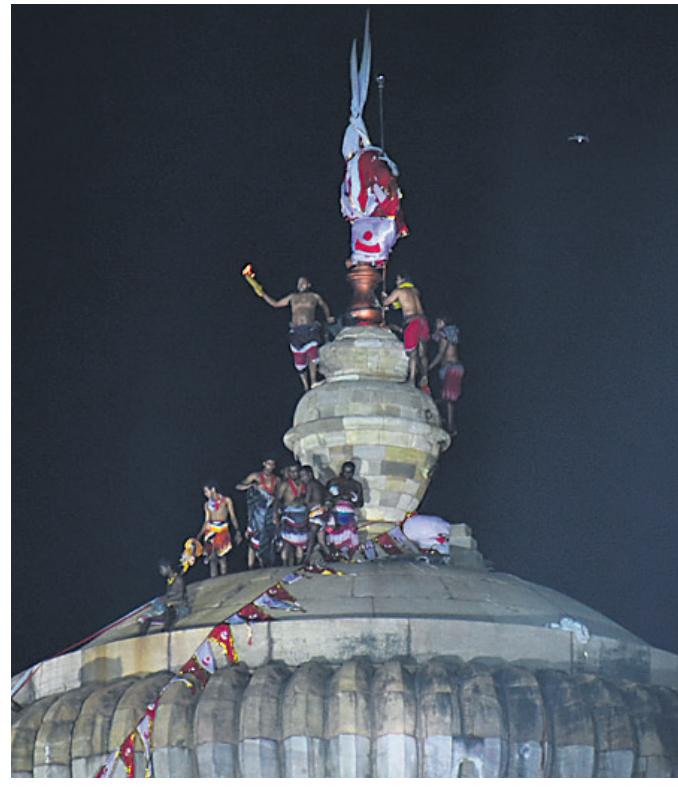
The deceased were identified as Abu Taheer Ali, 36, Almin Sheikh, 27, and Krishna Kishore Sarkar, 38, all from Nadia district in West Bengal.

Jena sought the intervention of the commission for compensation to the next of kin of the deceased and action against the officials responsible for the mishap.

The commission, via November 7, 2024 proceedings, transmitted a copy of the complaint to the District Magistrate of Cuttack, directing necessary action as per the Supreme Court's directives in sewer-related death cases and submission of an ATR within four weeks.

In response to the commission's directives, the Cuttack authorities reportedly forwarded a few letters. However, the requisite reports from the authorities were pending, it was learnt.

As a result, the commission has directed the Cuttack District Magistrate to ensure necessary action and submit an ATR by April 3, 2025.



A servitor holds 'Mahadeepa' atop Lingaraj temple and Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, along with other dignitaries, offers prayers on the occasion



PICT: BIKASH NAYAK

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Feb 26: Lakhs of devotees thronged Shiva temples across the state to offer prayers on the occasion of Maha Shivaratri Wednesday.

Since early morning, heavy rush of devotees was reported at major Shiva shrines like Lingaraj temple in Bhubaneswar, Dhableswar temple in Cuttack, Kapilash temple in Dhenkanal, Akhandalamani temple in Bhadrak, Chandaneswar in Balasore, Huma temple in Sambalpur, Loknath temple in Puri, Harishankar temple in Bolangir and Gupteswar in Koraput district.

The district administrations in these places have made elaborate security arrangements and set up barricades to ensure a smooth darshan for devotees.

A large number of people queued up at Lingaraj temple

since the wee hours of Wednesday to have a darshan of the Lord. The huge rush and fainting of a few devotees prompted Khurda Collector Chanchal Rana and Bhubaneswar DCP Pinak Mishra to reach the temple and take stock of the situation there.

According to Mishra, elaborate police arrangements have been made to ensure that the festival is held peacefully. "We have deployed around 40 platoons of police force, and mobilised 150 officers of different ranks. Special arrangements have been made for traffic and parking as well," the DCP said.

More than one lakh devotees have already visited the shrine since morning while a huge number of devotees are still in the queue for having a darshan of Lord Lingaraj, he stated.

The Khurda Collector said, "A large number of devotees are

at the temple. We have installed CCTVs at various points outside the temple to monitor the crowd. We hope that all will get a chance to have a darshan of Lord Lingaraj."

Meanwhile, devotees expressed concern about deployment of bouncers at Loknath temple in Puri.

Puri SP Vinit Agrawal said he will examine it. "Eleven platoons of police force including one additional SP and six DSP-rank officers and 15 inspectors have been deployed at the temple to manage the crowd," Agrawal said, adding that the police deployment was made late at night and smooth darshan is going on.

Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik extended Maha Shivaratri festival greetings to the people.

₹10 crore for Akhandalamani temple devtpt

The state government has sanctioned ₹10 crore for the development of Akhandalamani temple and its periphery, Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida said after offering prayers at the Shiva shrine in Bhadrak district Wednesday.

Odia Language, Literature and Culture Minister Suryabanshi Suraj and Bhadrak MLA Sitansu Sekhar Mohapatra also accompanied Parida.

Parida expressed her gratitude for having the opportunity to visit the temple. "The government has sanctioned ₹10 crore for development of Akhandalamani temple and its periphery. More funds will be allocated, if needed," Parida said.



Suraj thanked the Deputy CM for the announcement and assured that the state govern-

ment would take all necessary steps for the temple's upliftment.

Former dy hotel manager held for ₹24.17 lakh fraud

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 26: A former deputy manager of a hotel here was arrested by the twin city Commissionerate Police for misappropriation of ₹24.17 lakh, official sources said Wednesday.

The accused - Ayan Sen, 41, a native of Howrah in West Bengal - had been working as a deputy manager at Hotel Hindustan International (Bhubaneswar) since 2023, Kharvel Nagar IIC Rajanikanta Mishra said.



Quoting the complaint, Mishra said Sen, as a deputy manager, was supposed by disburse ₹30.38 lakh and ₹35.83 lakh as payments to vendors November 21 and 30 last year respectively. "Sen, however, diverted ₹24.17 lakh to his wife's account and remained incommunicado," the IIC said.

The incident came to the fore after the vendors complained that they have not received the payment. With no way out, the hotel authorities December 16 last year lodged a complaint with Kharvel Nagar police, who registered a case under Section 316(4) of the BNS and launched a probe.

A team of Kharvel Nagar police nabbed Sen from the City in the wee hours of Wednesday.

3 members of dacoity gang get 7-year RI

AGENCIES

Balasore, Feb 26: A local court has sentenced three members of a dacoity gang to seven years of rigorous imprisonment (RI) and imposed a penalty of ₹17,000 each.

In case of non-payment, they will have to serve an additional 17 months of imprisonment, Judge Biswajit Das ordered.

The verdict was based on the testimony of seven witnesses and 30 documents. This is the first conviction under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) in the district.

According to the prosecution, the town police, acting on credible intelligence inputs, raided an abandoned house near Balighat, where the accused were planning an armed dacoity and apprehended six armed criminals during a late-night raid August 23, 2024.

During the operation, the

police recovered deadly weapons, country-made bombs and six stolen motorcycles from the accused persons from the spot.

Police arrested three of the accused and upon interrogation, they confessed that they were hatching a dacoity plan in Barabati and using stolen motorcycles for their crimes. However, their plot was foiled by timely police intervention.

After a thorough investigation, 11 more stolen motorcycles were seized from the possession of accused persons. The motorcycles were handed over to the rightful owners after verifying their documents.

Later, the accused were arrested and forwarded to the court.

During the trial, the defence questioned the credibility of police witnesses, but the court upheld the prosecution's case based on strong evidence, including the seizure of incriminating materials.

INDIA SUCCESSFULLY TESTS NAVAL ANTI-SHIP MISSILE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Balasore, Feb 26: Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Indian Navy conducted successful flight trials of the first-of-its-kind naval anti-ship missile (NASM-SR) from Chandipur's Integrated Test Range (ITR), officials said Wednesday.

The trials, which were conducted Tuesday, demonstrated the missile's capability against ship targets while launched from an Indian Naval Sea King Helicopter, they added.

"The trials have proven the missile's 'man-in-loop' feature and scored a direct hit on a small ship target in sea-skimming mode at its maximum range. The missile uses an indigenous imaging infra-red seeker for terminal guidance. The mission also demonstrated the high bandwidth two-way data-link system, which is used to transmit the seeker's live images back to the pilot for in-flight retargeting," officials



added. "The missile uses an indigenous fiber optic gyroscope-based INS and radio altimeter for its mid-course guidance, an integrated avionics module, electro-mechanical actuators for aerodynamic and jet vane control, thermal batteries, and PCB warhead. It uses solid propulsion with an in-line ejectable booster and a long-burn sustainer. The trials have met all the mission objectives," they said.

The missile has been developed by different laboratories of DRDO, including Research Centre Imarat, Defence Research and Development Laboratory, High Energy Materials Research Laboratory, and Terminal Ballistics Research Laboratory.

These missiles are currently being produced by development-cum-production partners with the help of MSMEs, startups, and other production partners, officials said.

1 killed, 3 injured in clash over land dispute

AGENCIES

Bhadrak, Feb 26: A clash between two families over a land dispute claimed the life of a person and left three others critically injured in Bhadrak district Wednesday, police said.

The incident took place at Chhatrapada village under Pirahat police station limits in the district.

According to police, a verbal duel between the families of Abani Nayak and Amulya Nayak soon turned violent. "Abani allegedly died on the spot after being attacked by members of Amulya's family, while three members of Amulya's family sustained critical injuries in the fight," police said.

Following the incident, Abani's wife Sarojini lodged a complaint at Pirahat police station, alleging that Amulya's family members were responsible for her husband's death, said sub-inspector Champabati Mohanty, who is the investigation officer for the case.

Upon receiving information, a police team reached the village and launched a probe.

Iron mineral reason for Mars' red colour, study suggests

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: The red colour of Mars could be due to the presence of an iron-containing mineral, which requires cool water to form, suggesting that the planet may have been habitable in the past, according to a new study.

Dust on the Red Planet is known to be a mixture of various minerals, including iron oxides, one of which -- ferrihydrite -- could be the reason for the planet's colour, the study published in the journal Nature Communications suggested.

"We're not the first to consider ferrihydrite as the reason for why Mars is red, but we can now better test this using ob-

servational data and novel laboratory methods to essentially make Martian dust in the lab," said lead author Adam Valantinas, a postdoctoral fellow at Brown University, US.

"From our analysis, we believe ferrihydrite is everywhere in the dust and also probably in the rock formations as well," Valantinas added.

However, because ferrihydrite forms in the presence of cool water and at lower temperatures than minerals previously thought to render the red colour, such as hematite, the findings suggest that Mars may have had an environment capable of sustaining liquid water.

Mars' environment is be-



lieved to have transitioned from wet to dry billions of years ago when its atmosphere was stripped away by solar winds.

The planet had a weak magnetic field (due to a cooling core), which failed to protect it from the solar winds, leaving Mars

What we know from this study is that the evidence points to ferrihydrite forming, and for that to happen, there must have been conditions where oxygen from the air or other sources and water could react with iron

ADAM VALANTINAS | POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW AT BROWN UNIVERSITY IN US

dry and cold.

The study analysed data gathered from multiple missions to Mars conducted by space agencies, including NASA and the European Space Agency. The team then compared the results with those from lab experiments, where they tested how light interacts with ferrihydrite particles and other minerals under simulated Martian conditions.

Analysis of samples from Mars, currently being collected by NASA's Perseverance rover, will reveal whether the team's findings -- proposed as a theory for Mars's formation -- are definitively correct. The rover was launched in July 2020 and landed on Mars in Febru-

ary 2021.

The researchers aim to understand Mars's ancient climate and its chemical processes to better determine if the planet was once habitable.

"To understand that, you need to understand the conditions during the time of this mineral's formation. Those conditions were very different from today's dry, cold environment," Valantinas said.

"What we know from this study is that the evidence points to ferrihydrite forming, and for that to happen, there must have been conditions where oxygen from the air or other sources and water could react with iron," the lead author explained.

'Land cannot be held indefinitely'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: The Supreme Court has ruled that a landowner cannot be denied the right to use their land indefinitely due to prolonged government inaction. The apex court emphasised that statutory restrictions on land use must not be open-ended, ensuring that landowners are not left in limbo for years without any resolution.

A bench comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan made this observation while overturning an order passed by the Bombay High Court. The court underscored that once restrictions are imposed on a landowner regarding land usage, such limitations cannot remain unresolved indefinitely. "The landowner cannot be deprived of the use of the land for years together. Once an embargo has been put on a landowner not to use the land in a particular manner, the said restriction cannot be kept open-ended for an indefinite period," the bench remarked.



Referring to Section 127 of the Maharashtra Regional and Town Planning Act, 1966, the court criticised the prolonged reservation of land in a development plan for over three decades.

The Supreme Court pointed out that not only were the original owners unable to utilize the land, but the authorities were also preventing subsequent purchasers from making use of it.

The bench highlighted the legal framework governing land acquisition, stating, "The statute has provided a period of ten years to acquire the land under Section 126 of the Maharashtra

Regional and Town Planning Act, 1966. An additional one-year period is granted to the landowner to serve a notice for land acquisition, prior to the amendment introduced by Maharashtra Act 42 of 2015. Such timelines are sacrosanct and must be adhered to by the state or its authorities."

The court was hearing a case concerning the owners of a 2.47-hectare vacant plot, who had submitted a Land Development Plan for its utilization. While the initial development plan was sanctioned, a revised plan in 1993 reserved a portion of the land for a private school. However, from 1993 to 2006, Maharashtra authorities failed to take any concrete steps to acquire the property, leading to prolonged uncertainty for the landowners.

With this ruling, the Supreme Court has reinforced the necessity for state authorities to act within legal timeframes and prevent unnecessary hardships for landowners by indefinitely delaying land acquisition processes.

Visitors discover Odisha's wonders

RESHMI YADAV, OP

Bhubaneswar, Feb 26: As part of the 6th Odisha Travel Bazaar, a familiarisation tour for foreign tour operators (FTOs) has been organised to highlight Odisha's rich cultural, historical, and natural heritage. The event, jointly hosted by the Tourism department and FICCI, aims to position the state as a top global travel destination.

The tour covered key sites, including Lalitgiri, a major Buddhist site in Odisha's Diamond Triangle, and Bhitarkanika National Park, known for its mangrove forests and crocodile habitats.



Operators also visited Penth Beach, Udayagiri and Khandagiri Caves, Kala Bhoomi Craft Museum, and the UNESCO-listed Konark Sun Temple.

WEATHER	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	33.0°	30.6°
Min Temp	21.8°	20.3°
Humidity	85%	92%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
FORECAST	Moderate Fog	

Man held for sexual assault on minor girl

Accused breaks into minor's home, threatens her after assault

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 26: The Infocity police Wednesday arrested a 46-year-old man Wednesday for allegedly attempting to coerce a minor girl into sexual advances in Sikharchandi Nagar.

The incident occurred Monday (February 24) afternoon when the minor was alone at home, as her parents and elder sister were away at work.

According to Inspector-in-Charge (IIC) Mahendra Kumar Sahu, the accused, Rajesh Behera, a resident of Goudasahi village in Ganjam district, lived in the same neighborhood as the victim's family.

The police reported that Rajesh entered the house while the minor was asleep and attempted to force himself on her. When the girl resisted, he fled the scene after threatening to kill her if she revealed the incident. Upon returning home, the victim informed her parents, who immediately filed a complaint at the Infocity police station.

Rajesh has been charged under multiple sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), including Sections 333, 296, 115 (2), 75 (2), and 351 (2), as well as Section 6 of the Protection of



Rajesh has been charged under multiple sections of the Indian Penal Code, including Sections 333, 296, 115 (2), 75 (2), and 351 (2), as well as Section 6 of the (POCSO) Act

Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. He was produced before a local court Wednesday, where the police sought further remand for investigation.

The case has sparked outrage in the community, with locals demanding stricter action against such crimes. IIC Sahu assured that the police are conducting a thorough investigation to ensure justice for the victim. The incident highlights the vulnerability of minors in the absence of parental supervision and the need for heightened vigilance in residential areas.



SERVICE TO SOCIETY: On the occasion of Maha Shivaratri, volunteers from the Indian Red Cross Society, Odisha Branch, set up a medical camp outside Lingaraj Temple in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday

Subhadra Shakti Mela draws massive crowd

Maha Shivaratri added cultural vibrancy to the mela with Barnali Hota's soulful music and a mesmerising Gotipua dance by Guru Gangadhar Gotipua Gurukul

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 26: The Subhadra Shakti Mela 2025 at Janata Maidan continues to witness an overwhelming response, with thousands flocking to explore a wide array of handcrafted SHG products. The bustling food court remains a major attraction, offering millet-based



delicacies, organic produce, and traditional Odia cuisines that are in high demand.

Coinciding with Maha Shivaratri, the mela saw a surge in cultural vibrancy. Renowned artist Barnali Hota captivated

the audience with her soulful renditions, while the Guru Gangadhar Gotipua Gurukul showcased a mesmerising Gotipua dance performance, celebrating Odisha's rich heritage. A key highlight of the fifth day

was the visit of former Union Minister of State for Tribal Affairs and Jal Shakti, Biswaswar Tudu. He engaged with SHG members, applauding their entrepreneurial efforts and reaffirming the government's support for tribal artisans and women-led enterprises.

The festival's enthusiasm translated into impressive footfall and a cumulative sales turnover of Rs 1.64 crore by the fifth day. The strong participation from buyers and business enthusiasts is opening new avenues for Mission Shakti SHGs, expanding their market reach. With four days remaining, the mela promises more cultural extravaganzas, greater business prospects, and enhanced opportunities for SHG members.

OPF opposes CBSE's biannual board exams

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 26: The Odisha Parents Federation (OPF) has raised objections to the Central Board of Secondary Education's (CBSE) proposal to conduct Class X board exams twice a year, calling it a reversal of stress-free education principles.

According to reports, the new framework is open for public review, allowing stakeholders to submit suggestions and feedback until March 9. The final policy will be formulated after considering the received inputs. The OPF pointed out that under the National Education Policy (NEP), it was initially decided that board exams would not be mandatory until Class XII to ensure a stress-free learning environment. However, introducing a biannual exam system for Class X contradicts this objective and may reintroduce pressure on students.

Activists urge river cleanup

Push for steps to restore waterways, tackle pollution, and safeguard biodiversity

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 26: A delegation of environmental activists, including members of the Mahanadi Bachao Andolan (MBA) and Odisha Environmental Society (OES), met Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi to raise concerns over rising pollution levels in the Gangua, Daya, and Mahanadi rivers, as well as Chilika Lake. The delegation also submitted an eight-point charter of demands at the CM's residence Wednesday.

The activists highlighted that pollution in the Daya river has reached hazardous levels, leading to multiple cholera outbreaks in the Kanas area of Puri district, resulting in seven deaths. They urged the government to take immediate action to decontaminate the river, which serves as a crucial source of drinking wa-



ter for nearby residents.

The delegation also demanded that the Gandhabati river, now reduced to the polluted Gangua nullah, be officially recognised as a river.

Additionally, they called for the involvement of river experts, environmentalists, and local committees in the revival of the Gangua nullah, rather than limiting the project to the Water Resources department.

Further demands included making Chilika Lake pollution-free and restructuring

the Chilika Development Authority (CDA) by incorporating experts, environmentalists, and representatives from fishermen's organisations. They also opposed the proposed National Highway route near Chilika, citing potential damage to the lake's delicate ecosystem.

The delegation comprised Krishna Chandra Jagdev, Jaya Krishna Panigrahi, Sachchikant Pradhan, Bijooy Kumar Pradhan, Prasanna Bisoi, and Mahanadi Bachao Andolan convener Sudarsan Das.

Food waste boosts concrete strength: IIT Indore

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Indore have discovered an innovative way to enhance the strength of concrete by incorporating food waste and a special type of bacteria.

This breakthrough not only improves construction durability but also contributes to reducing carbon emissions, offering a sustainable solution for the construction industry.

According to Professor Sandeep Chaudhary from IIT Indore's Department of Civil Engineering, the process involves mixing food waste with non-pathogenic bacteria (a variety of E. Coli).

When food waste decomposes, it releases carbon dioxide,



which, when combined with calcium ions in concrete, forms calcium carbonate crystals. These crystals effectively fill cracks and voids, reinforcing the concrete without significantly increasing its weight.

"We experimented by mixing non-pathogenic bacteria with food waste, such as rotten fruit pulp and peels, in concrete. The result was remarkable—our

RESEARCHERS FOUND THAT MIXING FOOD WASTE AND BACTERIA IN CONCRETE DOUBLES ITS STRENGTH WHILE REDUCING CARBON EMISSIONS

THE METHOD REPLACES COSTLY SYNTHETIC CHEMICALS WITH BIODEGRADABLE WASTE, MAKING CONSTRUCTION MORE DURABLE AND ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY

tests showed that the strength of the concrete nearly doubled," Chaudhary explained.

One of the key advantages of this method is that the bacteria stop growing once the cracks and holes are completely filled, ensuring long-term durability without any structural damage.

The research focused on commonly discarded domestic food waste, including cauliflower stalks, potato peels, fenugreek stems, orange peels, and spoiled fruit like rotten papaya pulp.

To effectively integrate food waste into concrete, researchers categorized it based on moisture content. Low-moisture waste was processed into a powder and mixed with water to create a uniform liquid, while high-moisture waste was turned into pulp before being added to the mixture.

Professor Hemchandra Jha from IIT Indore's Department of Biosciences and Biomedical Engineering, who also contributed to the study, pointed out that previous attempts to use bacteria in concrete in-

involved synthetic chemicals, making the process costly and less eco-friendly. By replacing synthetic chemicals with food waste, IIT Indore has made this technique both more affordable and sustainable.

"The food waste dissolves easily in water along with the bacteria, making it an efficient additive for concrete. This method not only strengthens structures but also provides a practical way to manage food waste and reduce environmental impact," Jha added.

This research has the potential to revolutionize construction practices, promoting eco-friendly solutions while ensuring stronger, longer-lasting buildings.

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Vacancies hit studies at Maa Manikeswari Univ



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhawaniapatna, Feb 26: Studies at Maa Manikeswari University here has taken a beating as 91 out of the 112 sanctioned teaching posts are lying vacant, according to reports.

The Kalahandi University was officially renamed as Maa Manikeswari University in 2023. However, the educational institution continues to face a severe staff shortage, evoking sharp reactions from students, academicians and intellectuals of the district.

According to data tabled in the Assembly, the university has a total of 112 sanctioned posts for professors, assistant professors and associate professors. However, only 21 of these positions are currently occupied, leaving 91 of them vacant.

Shortage of faculty has crippled various departments, if a department-wise break-up of vacant posts are any indication.

VITAL STATS

- O**nly 21 of 112 sanctioned positions at Maa Manikeswari University are filled
- A**ll 90 non-teaching positions in various categories remain vacant
- O**ut of ₹47.32 crore sanctioned for infrastructure development at the university, ₹36.66 crore has been disbursed

Nuapada districts. Recently, Dharamgarh MLA Sudhir Ranjan Pattjoshi raised questions in the Assembly regarding the amount spent on the infrastructure development of the university and the number of vacant faculty and staff positions February 21, 2025. He also sought to know whether the state government has taken steps to provide independent grants for the institution.

In response, Higher Education Minister Suryabanshi Suraj provided information about the vacant positions and the grants allocated for the university's development. He acknowledged that shortage of staff has affected operations and stated that the state government takes necessary steps each year to fill vacant positions.

Additionally, funds are allocated as required for the university's infrastructure, and legal issues are being addressed through appropriate government measures, he added.



SHOW OF COMPASSION: A man feeding grams to pigeons near the Collectorate in Sambalpur Wednesday

OP PHOTO

FUND EMBEZZLEMENT

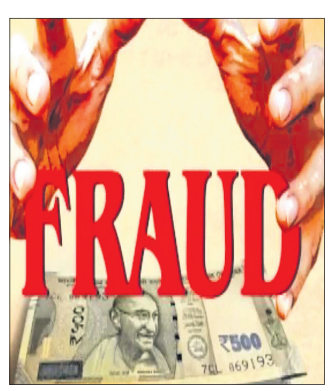
DRCS: Action soon against Mareigaon Coop Society secy

POST NEWS NETWORK

Hatadihi, Feb 26: Close on the heels of an audit report exposing misappropriation of more than ₹82.42 lakh in society funds at Mareigaon Services Cooperative Society in this block of Keonjhar district, the administration has assured of action against the society secretary. Deputy Registrar of Cooperative Societies (DRCS), Keonjhar Subhrakanti Tung said that action will soon be taken against the society secretary Sarat Kumar Sathy and the management committee, reports said Wednesday.

The misappropriation was uncovered in the audit report for financial year 2021-22. Following this, directors of the society's management committee appeared before Keonjhar DRCS office February 12 this year. They also later submitted relevant documents to the DRCS which said that upon further review, an additional ₹10 lakh in misappropriated funds was identified. The authorities are also intending to recover this amount.

Investigations revealed that the secretary withdrew ₹3 lakh for construction of the society building and repairs several months ago but questions were raised about the utilization of



the funds as he did not submit the utilisation certificate (UC). When pressure mounted, Sathy reportedly deposited ₹3 lakh back into the bank in lieu of missing fertilisers.

Sources said the DRCS had earlier issued an order December 7, 2024 directing disciplinary action against Sathy. A show-cause notice was also issued to the management committee. The matter has since reached the offices of the Chief Minister and the Chief Secretary, with a formal complaint lodged January 30.

It has also come to the fore that pressure is mounting on the society's directors and the secretary after the DRCS made the announcement. It is alleged that the office bearers are seeking political intervention to suppress the matter and ward off any action on them.

Suicide bid by Soro murder accused

POST NEWS NETWORK

Basudevpur/Soro, Feb 26: A man accused of murdering his girlfriend over a failed love affair tried to end his life by consuming poison after spotting police officers who had come to arrest him at Chudamani village under Basudevpur police limits in Bhadrak district Wednesday.

The accused, Biswaranjan Puhan, had killed his estranged girlfriend Jyotirmayee Rana by slitting her throat at Lingapada village in Soro of Balasore district three days ago. He had been on the run since then.

Soro police formed a special team and, with assistance from Basudevpur police, arrested him from Chudamani village Wednesday morning.

As police attempted to take him into custody, Biswaranjan reportedly tried to escape. Finding no way out, he consumed poison and jumped into a nearby pond. Authorities rescued him in critical condition and shifted him to Basudevpur Hospital before transferring him to Balasore for further treatment.

Biswaranjan had brutally murdered Jyotirmayee in broad daylight at Lingapada Monday. He had been harassing her after she refused his marriage proposal.

Jyotirmayee had filed a complaint at Soro police station two days ago against Biswaranjan for harassing her.

Dry Mahendratanya leaves farmers in a fix

POST NEWS NETWORK

Paralakhemundi, Feb 26: The once perennial Mahendratanya river is now drying up, causing water scarcity even before the onset of summer. Farmers of Gosani and Rayagada blocks, who rely on the river for irrigation, are increasingly worried about their crops.

According to reports, farmers of these two blocks have cultivated vegetables on thousands hectares of farmlands. However, the depleting water level of Mahendratanya has left them in distress as irrigating their farmlands has become an arduous task.

Last year's insufficient rainfall and a decline in natural spring sources led to complete



drying up of the river. Farmers said the river has started drying up earlier than expected this year. This has severely impacted the farmers of Agarakhandi, Kerandi, Upalada, Kharasanda, Madhusudanpur, Baghasala, and

by the release of water to the upstream from the anicut near Siripur. Water has been diverted from the lift irrigation projects. Additionally, the surplus water from the anicut is flowing into Andhra Pradesh, further worsening the crisis.

Concerned about the situation, farmers and local representatives had informed Zilla Parishad chairman G Tirupati Rao. In response, Rao and Paralakhemundi MLA Rupesh Panigrahi held discussions with District Collector Bijay Kumar Das while appraising him about the development.

After hearing their concerns, the Collector assured them that a solution to the water crisis would be worked out as soon as possible.

Koel Nagar park work marred by fund crunch

RAJESH MOHANTY, OP

Rourkela, Feb 26: Construction of a huge park funded by Rourkela Smart City Limited (RMCL) at Koel Nagar here has hit roadblocks due to shortage of funds, according to reports.

The construction work is being taken up by Forest Corporation of Odisha (FCO) under the supervision of its divisional manager.

The foundation stone for the recreational facility with an initial investment of ₹15.33 crore was laid in March 2021. The project is being built on 34 acre of land on the bank of River Koel - between the intake well and 'D' block at Koel Nagar. The park was supposed to be inaugurated by then chief minister Naveen Patnaik in November 2023. However, the work has been delayed.

In the initial phase, ₹10 crore was granted while another ₹12 crore was pumped in to finish the construction later, signalling a cost overrun. When this was brought to the notice of the ADM, Commissioner of Rourkela Municipal Corporation (RMC) and CEO of RMCL Ashutosh Kulkarni said, "The work for



the park is being taken up on war-footing and the same will be completed by next month. Total project cost of the park will be between ₹32-35 crore as per the revised estimate."

However, it is learnt from reliable sources that funds for the park have dried up and FCO has stopped the construction work. Meanwhile, several attempts by this correspondent to speak to the FCO divisional manager Shivrajit Rout failed.

When asked, Rourkela MLA Sarada Nayak said, "This is complete apathy of the state government that projects started by us are completely neglected or delayed. And Rourkela is at the receiving end."

The park spread over 34 acres, if completed, will have three marriage pandals, two large ponds, food court, yoga court, walking track among other facilities for the public.

Missing boy found dead in Deogarh forest

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Feb 26: The body of a 17-year-old boy, who went missing February 24, was found under a tree in a forest area of Deogarh district Wednesday, a police officer said.

The deceased has been identified as Amit Munda, a resident of Tungamal village in the district.

The body was covered with dry leaves so that it cannot be detected easily, the officer said.

MURDER SUSPECTED

While passing by the area, someone from the village saw the body and informed the police.

"The body has a severe injury mark on the head and the boy was tied up with a rope. We suspect it is a murder case. We have detained two of his classmates for questioning," the officer said.

Munda's body will be handed over to his family members after post-mortem, police said.

Ketaki prices soar amid Maha Shivaratri rush

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar/Berhampur, Feb 26: As thousands of devotees across Odisha make a beeline to temples on the auspicious occasion of Maha Shivratri, demand for Ketaki, or screw pine flower, has soared.

The thorny flower was selling between ₹600 and ₹1,000 near Loknath Temple in Puri and for ₹600 to ₹800 near Lingaraj Temple in Bhubaneswar Wednesday.

The demand for Ketaki stems from the fact that it is offered to Mahadev only on Maha Shivratri.

Ketaki is a variety of the 'Kewra' and its botanical name is Pandanus fascicularis. The

flower blooms only during this period. While 'Kewra' is abundantly grown in six coastal blocks of Ganjam district, Ketaki is rarely found in the area, said Sushant Kumar Nayak of Golanthara in Ganjam district.

High demand and rare availability are the main reasons behind the steep price of the flower, said Ketaki seller B Simadri of Tulu. "Last year, I collected around 25 pieces, but this year, I could gather only a dozen," he added.

Farmers in Ganjam district export this rare flower to several towns across the state, including Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Puri, Sambalpur, and Koraput, said Bhagaban Behera, a flower seller.

Many flower sellers from



these towns placed their orders well ahead of Shivratri, he added.

Devotees believe that offering Ketaki flowers to Lord Shiva on Maha Shivratri helps them get the blessings of the Lord and fulfill their wishes.

Mythology says Ketaki was once cursed by Lord Shiva and prohibited from being used in rituals. However, the deity later allowed its offering on just one day—Maha Shivratri, explained Ashok Kumar Padhy, a priest. Bala Krushna Pradhan, a resident of Shakti Nagar in Berhampur, said he has been offering Ketaki to the Lord Shiva for several years.

"I bought the flower for ₹400 this year, whereas last year, I got it for ₹300," he added.

YOUTH KILLED IN MISHAP

Rourkela: A youth died when he lost control over his motorcycle that hit the road divider near TISCO Chowk at Chhend here. According to sources, Satya Ranjan Das, a resident of Chhend, was killed as his bike broke the boundary of a nearby house before landing on the asbestos roof of the house. The accident took place around 9pm Tuesday. Soon, locals informed Chhend police and Das was shifted to Rourkela Government Hospital where he was declared dead. Police have registered a case of unnatural death and started an investigation.

EAST COAST RAILWAY

File No. DRM/Engg/KUR/24-25/
E-Tender/109, Dt. 18.02.2025

(1) Tender No. e-tender-CENTKUR-323-2024, Dtd.: 13.02.2025

DESCRIPTION : PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION OF BRIDGE NO. 32A-1, (1 X 4.00 X 2.15 MTR RCC BOX) FOR CROSSING OF GURUDIHATIA DISTRIBUTARY AT RD 3825 MTR BRANCH CANAL OF RENGALI RIGHT IRRIGATION PROJECT AT KM. 417.073 (417/1-3) IN BETWEEN STATIONS GURUDIHATIA-MACHAPUR ON NERUGUDI TALCHER BRANCH LINE IN KHURDA ROAD DIVISION BY BOX PUSHING METHOD (UNDER DEPOSIT SCHEME).

Approx. Cost of the Work ₹ 363.36 Lakh, EMD : ₹ 3,31,700/-

(2) Tender No. eTender-CenKUR-326-2024, Dtd.: 13.02.2025

DESCRIPTION : RENEWAL OF EXISTING DAMAGED PSC FAN SHAPED LAYOUTS AT DIFFERENT YARDS UNDER ASSISTANT DIVISIONAL ENGINEER/BHUBANESWAR SECTION OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION BY BOX PUSHING METHOD (UNDER DEPOSIT SCHEME).

Approx. Cost of the Work ₹ 103.77 Lakh, EMD : ₹ 2,02,900/-

(3) Tender No. e-tender-eastkur-328-2024, Dtd.: 14.02.2025

DESCRIPTION : CONSTRUCTION OF 15 BEDDED RPF BARRACK AT PARADEEP (PRDP) STATION OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION.

Approx. Cost of the Work ₹ 105.70 Lakh, EMD : ₹ 105,70,000/-

Completion Period : 15 (Fifteen) Months (for Sl. No.1), 12 (Twelve) Months (for Sl. No.2) and 10 (Ten) Months (for Sl. No.3).

Tender Closing Date and Time : AT 1500 Hrs. of 07.03.2025 (for all the Tenders).

No manual offers sent by Post / Courier/ Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration.

Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website : www.irops.gov.in

Note : The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website 15 (Fifteen) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes / corrigendum issued for this tender.

Divisional Railway Manager (Engg) / Khurda Road

EAST COAST RAILWAY

Tender Notice No. 29-SBP-TRD-OT-2024-25,
Date : 19.02.2025

NAME OF WORK : TRD RELATED WORK IN CONNECTION WITH THE WORK OF PWAY AND OTHER ALLIED WORKS IN CONNECTION WITH REMOVAL OF PSR ON CURVE NO. 23 UP AT K.M. 46/27-47/13 AND CURVE NO. 24 DN AT K.M. 46/28-47/24 IN JIJOMURA - KEREJANGA SECTION OF SAMBALPUR DIVISION.

Approximate Cost (₹) : 56,06,480.31, EMD (₹) : 1,12,100.00, Completion Period : 12 Months.

Tender Closing Date and Time : At 1530 Hrs. of 13.03.2025

No manual offers sent by Post / Courier/ Fax or in person accepted against such e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration.

Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website : <http://www.irops.gov.in>

Note : The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website 15 (Fifteen) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes / corrigendum issued for this tender.

Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer (TRD), Sambalpur PR-1021/P/24-25



If you can always smile at life,
life will always smile at you

THE MOTHER

Financial Agenda

The United Nations Conferences on Financing for Development have been great occasions for building consensus on global financing issues. The next meeting, set for mid-2025 in Spain, will continue the progress made previously in Monterrey (2002), Doha (2008), and Addis Ababa (2015), and preparations are already underway with the launch of two major background documents. While a "Zero Draft" will serve as the basis for the negotiations, delegates also will consider a set of proposals from an international commission of experts that I had the honor of coordinating. Both reflect the ambition to build on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

The central objective of this process is to support developing countries' growth strategies. The commission of experts emphasized the need to restore and strengthen the transformative role of the state, envisioning it as a key driver of development and structural transformation. That means emphasizing the quality as well as the quantity of resources that are mobilized, and replacing a short-term project-focused agenda with one geared toward collectively defined longer-term goals. Each task calls for strengthening the currently weakened multilateral system and creating new regional platforms.

A crucial issue is public-sector over-indebtedness, which affects about one-third of developing countries, while several others face high debt levels and interest costs. This problem stems from the large fiscal imbalances during the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise in interest rates in recent years. Managing it will require an ambitious short-term renegotiation instrument, which can build on the G20's 2020 Common Framework for Debt Treatments. This time, however, the renegotiation process must be faster, and access should be extended to middle-income countries. In the long term, we need a permanent mechanism for sovereign debt restructuring, which could be housed either in the UN or the International Monetary Fund, provided, in the latter case, that it remains independent of the IMF Board.



José Antonio Ocampo

We need to prevent multinationals from shifting their profits to low-tax jurisdictions and tax havens, and ensure adequate tax payments by the wealthy

Another urgent objective is to reinvigorate development financing. An estimated \$4 trillion more is needed annually to fund the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Mobilizing these resources will require official development assistance on the scale that high-income countries committed to decades ago: "0.7% of gross national income to developing countries and 0.15-0.20% of GNI to least developed countries." Most developed countries have failed to hit these targets, and the funds directed to low-income countries have actually decreased in recent years.

A second priority in this area is to increase the financing available from multilateral development banks (MDBs) and support the expansion of national development banks' activities (or the creation of such institutions in the developing countries lacking them). Such efforts must include more financing in local currencies to mitigate the risks of debt escalation from exchange-rate depreciation, and support for the development of domestic bond markets in these countries. Beyond traditional lending, these institutions also should support developing countries' efforts to provide international public goods such as pandemic preparedness and prevention, climate-change mitigation and adaptation, and biodiversity protection.

Increasing environmentally sustainable financing is crucial. While the recent Conferences of the Parties on climate change and biodiversity agreed to more financing, their targets remain insufficient. This is particularly worrying now that biodiversity losses are mounting and global warming has already begun to exceed the 1.5o Celsius threshold set by the Paris climate agreement. In these areas, and in development financing in general, greater private-sector involvement should be mobilized with the help of credits for environmental investments or complementary mechanisms such as loan guarantees from development banks.

Building adequate, progressive tax bases is also essential. We need to prevent multinationals from shifting their profits to low-tax jurisdictions and tax havens, and ensure adequate tax payments by the wealthy. The first of these objectives requires adopting the principle of "significant economic presence," according to which multinationals pay a fair share of taxes in all countries where they operate, including through cross-border services. For rich individuals, a global asset registry based on beneficial ownership is essential.

The UN Tax Convention that is currently being negotiated could foster the international cooperation that these efforts require. But we also will need a coordinating institution, which could be created by transforming the current UN expert committee into an intergovernmental organ.

To support developing countries, IMF credit facilities should be improved, and their conditionalities should be revised. But we also need two new Fund instruments: an international swap facility and a fund that can intervene in international markets for emerging and developing countries' bonds during downturns. These changes should be complemented by more frequent and strategically timed issuances of special drawing rights (SDRs, the IMF's reserve asset), with the funds flowing into various mechanisms (including those within MDBs) to finance development or environmental goals while preserving their character as reserve assets.

In institutional terms, the most urgent priority is to promote regional monetary arrangements in the developing world. This, one hopes, would lead to a denser system of global and regional institutions, like what one finds with the MDBs.

In trade, the crucial issues are the need to uphold existing tariff commitments made at the World Trade Organization, and negotiating a new agreement to set the limits of industrial policies, but with special and differential treatment for developing countries. It is also essential to include exceptions for intellectual property rights related to health and environmental technologies. And to ensure fairness in the functioning of commodity markets, we must promote greater use of international and national buffer stocks.

One issue that past Conferences on Financing for Development have not touched is international financial regulation. Still, several important matters rest on this year's agenda, including how to design or strengthen regulation of digital financial assets, international credit rating agencies, and international commodity futures markets. A new global investment agreement is also desirable, and existing investment-protection agreements should be revisited to avoid demands against national provisions that protect social and environmental standards.

Finally, several institutional reforms warrant attention. In addition to establishing adequate institutions to manage renegotiation of sovereign debt, oversee international tax cooperation, and bolster international financial cooperation, the world must heed the developing world's long-standing demand for greater "voice and participation" in the Bretton Woods institutions. That means establishing a fair allocation of capital shares, increasing these countries' basic votes, and creating more open, inclusive processes for selecting each body's leadership.

The writer is a former United Nations under-secretary-general and a former minister of finance and public credit of Colombia.

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FOCUS POLICYMAKING

WOOING THE MIDDLE CLASS

Most governments have been favouring the middle class, and the present dispensation too has done so in the recent budget. However, it needs to be pointed out that this class is heterogeneous, classified by different occupations, education and income levels. The most important thing that needs to be understood is that the middle class cannot be considered as one unit as there is a wide difference in the income levels of the upper section and the lower section of this group.



Dhurjati Mukherjee

THE WIDE VARIATION OF INCOME WITHIN INDIA'S MIDDLE CLASS YIELDS A SUBSTANTIAL DIVERSITY IN SPENDING PATTERNS

It is believed that the middle class represents a sizable consumer market for both domestic and global businesses. The economic potential of the middle class only became a major phenomenon in the 21st century when it started to attract attention for its potential to drive global consumption. India's contemporary middle class is more multi-dimensional with economic growth since the 2000s spawning the formation of multiple middle classes -- an 'old' or established middle class and an emerging 'new' middle class, a section of which is very much near to the rich.

A section of this class also faces challenges such as increasing joblessness, under-employment, business failures and potential social unrest. Delving into the past, India's middle class first emerged in the early 19th century, when the British policies gave rise to a small group of educated, upper caste, English-speaking Indian elite.

According to rough estimates, just 6.6 crore Indians are middle class today. Most Indians earning \$3-10 dollars a day may fit this broad profile. Economist Thomas Piketty and his Indian collaborators



The middle class cannot be considered as one unit as there is a wide difference in the income levels of the upper section and the lower section of this group

recently labelled this group as the middle 40 per cent, those between the top 10 per cent and the bottom 50 per cent in income terms. But the 40 per cent may be divided by the upper middle class constituting around 12 per cent and the rest belonging to the lower middle class.

The wide variation of income within India's middle class yields a substantial diversity in spending patterns. The lower rungs of the middle class spend much of their income on private healthcare and education, essential consumables but very few have money left for purchase of assets such as motorbikes and basic household appliances. However, it is only the upper rung that can afford to spend a part of their income not only on private healthcare and quality education but also discretionary spending. The upper middle class is more likely to own assets such as cars, computers and air conditioners.

The recent justification of raising the income tax relief limit to ₹12 lakh from the next financial year -- which, in effect, comes to ₹12.75 lakh (Rs

75,000 being standard deduction) -- to enhance consumption expenditure may not, however, be applicable to the whole group but to only the upper middle-income sections. A section of economists is of the opinion that this measure may not help in invigorating the economy as the reduced tax collection may hamper developmental expenditure, which could have improved the conditions of the lower echelons of society.

Favouring the middle class has been a tenet with political parties and leaders. Keeping in view the total middle class, there is a tendency to ensure all sorts of favour to this section. Though it would not benefit a big number, the 8th Pay Commission would further increase the pay scales of Central government employees and put pressure on the state governments to revise the pay structure of their employees.

This widens the income inequality between the urban and the rural populations -- government employees, on the one hand and unorganised sector workers, farmers and small shop-owners, on the other. Economists have predicted

that farmers in agri-based economies like India have for long been subsidising the urban middle class.

Note that in different parts of Central India, soybeans are presently selling at ₹3800-Rs 4000 per quintal, way below its minimum support price of ₹4892 per quintal, pushing farmers' incomes significantly down. In fact, soybean prices are what they were in 2014 whereas the salary of a middle-class salaried person has increased by around 25 per cent at the least. No wonder then that outstanding crop loan of farmers stood at nearly ₹35 lakh crore as of March 2024 with Maharashtra leading with over ₹7 lakh crore.

In view of the policies of pampering the middle-income sections, the low-income groups are being left behind. Even with rising costs, a big percentage of the middle class whose annual income is around ₹5-6 lakh a year also do not benefit in any way.

If infrastructure development needs to be intensified, resource generation must be geared in a bigger way. It is strange why the government does not want to impose a one per cent tax on the super-rich, say for funding rural schools and health centres, which are in a dilapidated condition, and transferring the entire amount to say 40 to 50 schools and health centres in every state. Added to this, the incomes of professionals like doctors, engineers and architects, not to speak of developers and builders should be strictly monitored and, if necessary, a special cell should be created in the I-T department. A clearer picture would help the government to make an informed decision and refrain from going all out to woo the voter.

INFA

SPECTRUM SOCIETY

Balancing work and childcare

Balancing work and childcare is a significant challenge for working mothers, which we have been witnessing in both rural and urban areas. Managing professional responsibilities or work while ensuring a child's well-being often leads to stress and exhaustion. This struggle is especially pronounced in nuclear families, where the absence of extended support places the entire burden on parents. The lack of accessible, affordable, and reliable childcare options in the localities especially in rural areas forces many women to either leave their jobs or compromise their career growth.



Shoumyakant Joshi

A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF WOMEN IN INDIA ARE COMPELLED TO LEAVE THEIR JOBS OR DON'T SHOW AN INTEREST IN EMPLOYMENT DUE TO THE LACK OF RELIABLE CHILDCARE OPTIONS AT THE DOORSTEP

A significant number of women in India are compelled to leave their jobs or don't show an interest in employment due to the lack of reliable childcare options at the doorstep. According to a 2020 study conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), approximately 30 per cent of working women either quit or reduce their working hours because of inadequate childcare facilities or being overburdened with childcare. Additionally, more than 75 per cent of urban

families rely on unpaid caregivers, often leading to women shouldering the majority of domestic duties. Urban families with low income have to pay 10 to 15 per cent of their income if they prefer for the childcare centre. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2021-22 further highlights that 44.5 per cent of women cited childcare and personal commitments as primary reasons for not participating in the labour force. It has been observed that the shift towards nuclear family structures has intensified the childcare burden on parents, especially mothers. In nuclear families, the absence of extended family support means that working women often struggle to balance professional work and childcare simultaneously. This dual responsibility often leads to stress, fatigue, and, in many cases, the decision to quit work.

Transforming Anganwadi centres into full-fledged day care facilities can provide much-needed support to working women, enabling women to continue working without sacrificing their children's care. Strengthening such initiatives is crucial for enhanc-

ing women's participation in work and ensuring a more gender-equitable work-life balance. The transformation will help in the following ways; many women, especially in the informal sector (like domestic workers, street vendors, and construction laborers), do not have safe spaces to leave their children or don't get permission to carry their children to the workplace. Women in the formal sector also struggle with childcare, leading to career breaks or reduced productivity. The availability of day-care at the doorstep can help women re-enter the workforce and sustain employment. Anganwadis already provide meals and health check-ups, which can be enhanced for longer hours in full-fledged day-care centres. Structured early childhood education and play-based learning will help in better school readiness. Women bear a disproportionate burden of childcare in a family. Since every village and urban ward has an Anganwadi centre, access to free or affordable and accessible day-care services allows shared responsibility and reduces pressure on women.

There are several requirements for transforming Anganwadi centres into fully operational day-care centres. Anganwadis already possess basic facilities, trained workers, and nutrition programmes. With some enhancements—such as improved staffing, extended hours, and additional play materials—they can evolve into comprehensive day-care centres. This approach is cost-effective compared to establishing new infrastructure from the ground up. Extended working hours should align with women's work shifts, and trained staff are essential to ensure quality childcare and learning. Additionally, safe and child-friendly infrastructure is crucial, along with community involvement to promote sustainability. By converting Anganwadi centres into day-care facilities, we empower women, enhance child development, and strengthen the workforce, thereby contributing to overall social and economic development.

The writer works as a monitoring and evaluation professional in the social development sector.

Cyber scams

Sir, It is alarming that cyber fraud has reached unprecedented levels in 2024, with scammers using AI-driven tactics like deepfake technology, AI-generated voices, and phishing schemes on platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and Instagram. India alone has suffered financial losses exceeding ₹11,000 crore in just six months, with an average daily loss of ₹60 crore. Fraudulent investment schemes, fake job offers, and deceptive e-commerce platforms continue to exploit unsuspecting individuals. In response, the Indian government, in collaboration with tech giants like Google and Meta, has intensified efforts by shutting down scam-related domains, banning illegal digital lending apps, and strengthening intelligence sharing with banks and law enforcement agencies. To combat this growing menace, users must stay vigilant by verifying unknown callers, cross-checking job offers, enabling two-factor authentication, and reporting suspicious activities on platforms like the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal. The Citizen Financial Cyber Frauds Reporting and Management System has successfully recovered billions, emphasising the importance of swift action. As online threats evolve, a collective effort—through public awareness, stricter regulations, and enhanced industry-government collaboration—is crucial to safeguarding digital security.

Krishna Kumar Vepakomma, HYDERABAD

Evolution of aviation

Sir, The skies have always captured the human imagination, inspiring dreams of flight and exploration. But long before humans took to the skies, birds had already mastered the art and science of flight. Long have humans gazed at birds with a mix of envy and awe. It was these feathered fliers that first inspired us to take to the air in flying machines. Throughout history, and even today, new advancements in aerospace can be traced back to bird anatomy, which has served as a wealth of inspiration for engineers and designers, shaping the evolution of the aviation industry. From the graceful soaring of eagles to the precise hovering of hummingbirds, each aspect of bird flight has provided valuable insights into aerodynamics. Even though everything about aviation appears to have been invented right from the time of the Wright brothers -- Wilbur and Orville -- in 1903, even today much of how birds are able to move across the skies at staggering heights with such grace remains largely mysterious.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, CHENNAI

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

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Jobs boost for disabled youths

Maharashtra govt to ink MoU with social group to provide jobs to youth with disabilities

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Feb 26: The Maharashtra government will soon sign an MoU with a social organisation to provide employment opportunities to youth with disabilities with an aim to empower them financially, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said Wednesday.

The state government is committed to providing training and employment opportunities to differently abled youth, ensuring their economic self-reliance, Fadnavis said in a statement.

In this regard, registered individuals will be provided with a Unique Disability ID (UDID) over the next five years, facilitating their access to employment and self-employment opportunities, he said.

The government is effectively implementing schemes for the disabled, while voluntary organizations are also stepping forward for their development, according to the statement.

The government will soon sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the 'Youth for Jobs' organization. Initially, the organization



will assist state authorities in Vidarbha and North Maharashtra in creating employment and self-employment opportunities with plans to expand this initiative across the state in the future, the CM said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has launched several important schemes and taken a slew of decisions to realize the vision of a 'developed India'. To generate employment opportunities through skill-based education, the Skill Development Department has been established. In line with this, the state government is also taking significant deci-

The government is always keen on ensuring that individuals with disabilities, caused naturally or due to accidents, receive their rightful benefits and full access to announced schemes

DEVENDRA FADNAVIS | CM, MAHARASHTRA

sions for the welfare of the youth, Fadnavis averred.

The 'Youth for Jobs' organization, founded and chaired by social entrepreneur Meera Shenoy, has successfully worked with the Centre and

the Gadchiroli district administration in Maharashtra to enhance employment opportunities for youth with disabilities, said the statement.

Training is provided based on the type of disability, and job fairs are organized to connect trained individuals with industry demands.

Self-employment opportunities are being created for those unable to work in jobs, integrating them into the mainstream society. This model will be implemented across all districts in Maharashtra to generate employment opportunities for the disabled, Fadnavis informed.

To ensure that all disabled individuals benefit from government schemes, an updated database is being prepared. A registration drive is being conducted, and such individuals are being issued a UDID, he noted.

In the first phase, 'Youth for Jobs' will work in Vidarbha and North Maharashtra in collaboration with the government. The state authorities and local district administrations will provide full support for this initiative, Fadnavis maintained.

Savarkar's composition selected for 1st Sambhaji Maharaj song award

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Feb 26: Maharashtra Cultural Affairs Minister Ashish Shelar Tuesday announced the establishment of an award for inspirational songs in the memory of Maratha king Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and said the inaugural honour will go to a composition penned by Hindutva icon VD Savarkar.

Shelar announced the establishment of 'Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj Rajya Prerna Geet' Award during his visit to the Port of Marseilles, France, a place linked to Savarkar.

The award, which includes a cash prize of ₹2 lakh and a commemorative memento, is inspired by Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and will recognize outstanding inspirational songs annually, Shelar said.

The inaugural award will honour Savarkar's song, 'Anadi Me, Anant Me' for its profound impact and patriotism, said the minister.

Besides being a warrior, Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj was also a Sanskrit scholar and writer, having penned a book named 'Budhbhushana' and other literary works. The award pays tribute to his literary legacy and the inspirational power of poetry during challenging times, he noted.



Devotees offer prayers to a statue of 'Nandi', a sacred bull in Hinduism that serves as the mount, or 'vahana', of Lord Shiva, at a temple on the occasion of 'Mahashivratri' festival, in Kolkata, West Bengal, Wednesday

India's first 24-hour ham radio learning marathon held in WB

From the small town of Uttarpara in West Bengal, ham radio operators successfully communicated with global operators, including those in the US, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and beyond

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: India's first 24-hour ham radio learning marathon, EtherNite, held in West Bengal, saw the participation of 155 enthusiasts who designed and built antennas for communicating with amateur radio networks across

the world.

Held February 22-23 at Uttarpara, the marathon session aimed at expanding the footprint of the amateur radio community.

The event featured a series of hands-on sessions, live demonstrations, and expert-led workshops covering

crucial topics such as antenna analysis, field operations, digital modes, emergency communication, and signal optimization, the organizers, OSCAR India, said in a statement.

Three high-frequency (HF) stations were installed at the venue, and a dedicated team of Young Ladies (YLS) from OSCAR India set up an HF station, managing all operations. These young learners engaged in practical sessions, gained hands-on experience with equipment, and interacted



with seasoned operators who shared their knowledge and experiences, inspiring them

to pursue this field further, the organizers said.

From the small town of Ut-

tarpara in West Bengal, ham radio operators successfully communicated with global operators, including those in the US, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and beyond.

"This achievement not only highlighted the technical prowess of the participants but also underscored the significance of EtherNite as a platform for fostering international connections and showcasing India's growing expertise in amateur radio," Nilkantha Chatterjee, Convener of OSCAR India, said.

Iran warships on goodwill, training visit to Mumbai

OVER THE YEARS, COOPERATION BETWEEN INDIA AND IRAN HAS GROWN IN VARIOUS DEFENCE-RELATED FIELDS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Feb 26: Two Iranian warships are currently on a goodwill and training visit to Mumbai, in a step towards enhanced cooperation in the maritime domain and strengthening mutual friendship, the Indian Navy said Wednesday.

On Tuesday, the Mission Commander and the Commanding Officers of the two ships, IRIS Boushehr and IRIS Lavan, called on Rear Admiral Vidyadhar Harke, Chief Staff Officer (Operations) at Headquarters Western Naval Command.

Their discussions focused on mutual interests and the training curricula of both navies.

The flotilla, carrying nearly 220 officer cadets, is on a training mission in the Indian Ocean. The ships were accorded a warm welcome by the Indian Navy with band in attendance.

The deployment is led by Captain Mohammad Saberi as Mission Commander, with Senior Captain Seyed Ali Madani commanding the Lavan and Commander Hamed Bahramian commanding the



Boushehr, the Indian Navy said.

"The Iranian Navy's training flotilla, comprising IRIS Boushehr and IRIS Lavan, is on a goodwill and training visit to Mumbai from February 25 to 28, 2025," it said.

Several activities have been planned to strengthen

Navy-to-Navy interactions, including sports and training visits to the Naval Dockyard for officer cadets.

Reflecting the strong diplomatic ties between the two countries, the Indian Navy recently undertook medical evacuation of a trainee officer from the IRIS Boushehr

at sea. At around 3 am February 20, a request for medical assistance was received and swiftly acted upon by the Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard.

The officer cadet was evacuated from IRIS Boushehr, admitted to INHS Asvini, provided prompt medical care,

and discharged to the Iranian ship upon its arrival at the port on Tuesday, the Navy said.

The visit by the Iranian ships further strengthens mutual friendship and is a significant step towards enhanced Navy-to-Navy cooperation in the maritime domain, the Navy said.

Countering salinity: SHGs implement rainwater harvesting in Sundarbans

Called Ridge and Furrow, the project helped many farming couples in the area in the last few years

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Feb 26: Members of various self-help groups (SHGs) across several villages in Pathar Pratima block of West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district are harvesting rainwater to cultivate crops on farmland where groundwater salinity is high due to the proximity of the sea.

This area lies within the Sundarbans delta region, where the Hooghly River meets the Bay of Bengal.

Shefali Bera, a resident of Kishore Nagar village and a member of an SHG, is optimistic about profiting from her agricultural yield as cultivating crops with harvested rainwater is becoming the norm across various villages in the block.

Talking to PTI in Kishore Nagar, Bera said a significant portion of 127.9 hectares of land has been affected by saline water.

"Now, under the guidance and support of a non-government organisation (NGO), the villagers are trying to convert their single crop land into multi-crop land by storing rainwater in newly dug up ponds," she said.

Bera is among the 530 women of multiple SHGs in Pathar Pratima block who have come under the initiative of the global NGO Water for People, which is encouraging villagers to opt for rainwater harvesting.

"It is true that the salinity level in the groundwater is still abnormally high, but with the digging of new ponds and waterbodies, to store rainwater having no salinity, and the desalination of existing ponds, the saline water will wash away through adjacent channels and fresh water will accumulate in two years facilitating farming of several vegetable



We want to empower the women in this way so they can shoulder the responsibilities in equal measure and be stakeholders of the projects with the government's support

MARK DUVE | CEO, WATER FOR PEOPLE

crops and even paddy and also pisciculture," a representative of the NGO said.

Called Ridge and Furrow, the project helped many farming couples in the area in the last few years.

The model is a climate-resilient technique designed to improve water retention, enhance soil moisture, and support sustainable agriculture in water-scarce regions, the NGO said in a statement.

Another farmer Subrata Bera, who has dug a pond for rainwater harvesting, said that he spent ₹85,000 for digging it.

He bore 20 per cent of the cost, while 80 per cent of the money was given by the NGO. Bera has dug up a 55 feet by 45 feet pond to store rainwater.

"We need continuous rain for 11-12 hours to drive out the saline contents from the soil and reach the permissible limit. Currently, it is several notches above the bar," he said. "We moot a Five-Square model where a pond has to be 55/55 feet in shape, which

is ideal for rainwater harvesting and improved crop practices. This model aims to reduce salinity, prevent waterlogging and enhance agricultural productivity by integrating rice cultivation on higher levels of land nearby and vegetable farming," a representative of the NGO said.

The Five-Square model is a community-driven solution that includes land shaping, rainwater harvesting, and improved crop practices.

This model aims to reduce salinity, prevent water logging, and enhance agricultural productivity by integrating SRI rice cultivation and vegetable farming. Additionally, fish farming in water harvesting tanks offers extra income.

In West Bengal, Water for People is also extending technical support to the rural sanitation cell, West Bengal State Rural Livelihoods Mission, and the Public Health Engineering department in South 24 Parganas and Birbhum districts.

KMC show-causes official for altering school holiday list

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Feb 26: Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) authorities Wednesday show-caused an official of its education department for cancelling the Vishwakarma Puja holiday in its Hindi medium schools and increasing the Eid ul Fitr holiday to two days from one for this year.

Following a show-cause by the KMC municipal commissioner, the chief manager of the civic body's education department cancelled the memorandum through a corrigendum, stating "inadvertent typographical mistakes" had occurred in it.

The notice, dated February 25, was signed in the name of the chief manager of the KMC's education department.

Criticising the earlier memorandum on change of holiday, opposition BJP alleged it was an example of appeasement for political gains by the ruling Trinamool Congress in the state.

In a media note, the municipal commissioner stated that the "memorandum regarding holiday list for Hindi medium KMCP schools was issued with-

It is not believable that the municipal authority was unaware of such a decision to stop Vishwakarma Puja holiday and increase Eid ul Fitr holiday

JAGANNATH CHATTOPADHYAY | GENERAL SECRETARY, BJP WEST BENGAL

out obtaining any concurrence from the competent authority of KMC." Maintaining that the matter has been taken seriously, the note said necessary action was being initiated against the officer responsible for the lapse.

Stating that the notice was issued without permission from the KMC, it said that the memorandum "stands cancelled."

"A revised and accurate order will be issued in due course maintaining the state government's holiday list as per extant norm," the note said.

The BJP claimed that it was only after they had taken up the issue, the KMC cancelled the memorandum of February 25.

He said earlier this year, it was following an order of Calcutta High Court that Saraswati puja had to be held with police security in a south Kolkata college.



The saint community has played a major role in removing social evils from the society by raising voice against them, and ensured a respectable place for women in the society

URSULA'S 2-DAY INDIA VISIT BEGINS THURSDAY

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen will begin a two-day trip to India Thursday to expand two-way co-operation in areas of trade, investment and clean energy amid increasing global concerns over US President Donald Trump's economic policies



Woman raped inside state-run bus in Pune

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Pune, Feb 26: A history-sheeter out on bail since 2019 allegedly raped a 26-year old woman inside a stationary state transport bus at the bus Swargate bus station in Pune city, police said Wednesday.

As the shocking incident in the heart of the city caused an uproar and triggered a protest by the Opposition Shiv Sena (UBT), police formed multiple teams to track down the accused, Dattatraya Ramdas Gade (36).

While the Opposition targeted the Home Department held by Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis over the crime which took place on early Tuesday morning, the government ordered that all private security guards at the bus station be replaced.

A separate departmental inquiry has also been ordered by the transport ministry.

Gade has half a dozen cases of theft, robbery and chain-snatching registered against him in Pune and adjoining Ahilyanagar district, said a Swargate police station official, adding he was out on bail since 2019 in one of the offences.

Swargate in Pune city is one of the largest bus depots of the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC).

According to the woman, as she was waiting for a bus for Phaltan in adjoining Satara district at one of the platforms at around 5.45 am, a man approached and engaged her in conversation, calling her 'didi' (sister), and said the bus for Satara had arrived at another platform.

He took her to an empty 'Shiv Shahi' AC bus parked elsewhere on the sprawling station premises. As the lights inside the bus were not on, she hesitated to get in at first, but the man convinced her that it was the right vehicle. He then followed her inside and raped her before fleeing, the woman, who works in the private medical field, told police.

Ahilyanagar district. During investigation, it came to light that he was released on bail in a robbery case in 2019, another official told PTI.

In 2024, a theft case was lodged in Pune against Gade who was summoned to the police station, the official said.

Australia unveils roadmap to boost trade ties with India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: Australia Wednesday unveiled an ambitious roadmap to deepen its trade and investment ties with India, with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese describing it as an attempt to find paths towards a better future for both sides.

The roadmap identified four "superhighways of growth" -- clean energy, education and skills, agribusiness, and tourism -- with a broader aim of seizing the enormous trade and investment opportunities arising out of India's economic rise.

There is no greater time to engage economically with India than now, Albanese said while launching the 'Roadmap for Australia's Economic Engagement with India' at an event at Deakin University in Melbourne.

Describing India as a "giant" on the world stage, he said the country continues to grow in stature.

India is on track to be the third largest economy by the end of this decade and it is growing in ways that are complementary to Australia's own economy, he said.

Albanese called the roadmap a "guide to seizing the enormous trade and investment opportunities of India's economic rise, one that is shaped and in-



ANTHONY ALBANESE | PRIME MINISTER, AUSTRALIAN

formed by the knowledge and experience gathered from 400 consultations in every state and territory, as well as in India.

"What the roadmap does is give us detailed directions to the greater realisation of the potential of the Australia-India relationship. Successfully tapping that potential will be good for Australian business

Guide to seizing the enormous trade and investment opportunities of India's economic rise, one that is shaped and informed by the knowledge and experience gathered from 400 consultations in every state and territory, as well as in India

ANTHONY ALBANESE | PRIME MINISTER, AUSTRALIAN

and Australian consumers," he said.

"It will help secure our supply chains in an uncertain world. And it will create jobs and growth," he noted.

The roadmap comes over two years after India and Australia firmed up the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement

(ECTA). Both sides are now working towards a mutually beneficial Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA).

The roadmap also identifies nearly 50 specific opportunities to focus and accelerate Australia's engagement with India in several areas such as defence industries, sports, culture, space, and technology.

Kickstarting the implementation of the roadmap, Canberra announced investing \$16 million in an Australia-India Trade and Investment Accelerator Fund, which will help Australian businesses unlock new commercial opportunities in India.

AHEAD OF ASSEMBLY POLLS

Nitish inducts 7 new ministers, all from BJP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Patna, Feb 26: With less than a year left for Assembly polls, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar Wednesday inducted seven new faces into his council of ministers, all from alliance partner BJP.

The expansion, which could be the last before the elections are announced, raises the total number of ministers to 36, the maximum permissible in the state with a 243-strong Assembly.

Governor Arif Mohammad Khan administered the oath of office to the new ministers who all are members of the Assembly. The state also has a legislative council.

The development took place on a day state BJP president Dilip Jaiswal, the former minister for revenue and landforms, gave up his cabinet berth citing the party's policy of "one person, one post". The new ministers include Jibesh Kumar, who was a member of the state Cabinet till August 2022, when the chief minister abruptly quit the NDA, accusing the BJP of trying to "break" his JD(U).

Jibesh Kumar, who returns to the state cabinet with just two days left for the commencement of the budget session, told reporters, "I am ready to discharge the responsibility to



the best of my ability".

Other inductees are Sanjay Saraogi, a fifth-term MLA from Darbhanga, and Sunil Kumar, who represents Bihar Sharif, in the CM's pocket borough Nalanda, for as many times, thrice on a JD(U) ticket before crossing over to the BJP in 2015.

"I look forward to discharging the new responsibility. Earlier, I used to pose questions to the government. Now, I shall be expected to reply to queries from fellow members," said Saraogi. Another former JD(U) face was Raju Kumar Singh, the MLA from Sahebganj in Muzaffarpur, who had won the seat in 2020 on a ticket of Vikassheel

Insan Party (VIP), floated by former Bollywood set designer Mukesh Sahnii. The VIP had won altogether three seats but all the MLAs joined BJP two years ago after Sahnii burnt his bridges with the saffron party, losing his cabinet berth in the bargain.

T'GANA TUNNEL COLLAPSE

Govt says rescue ops to conclude in 2 days

Uttam Kumar Reddy explained that alternate access routes to reach the Tunnel Boring Machine which was stuck in the muck are also being explored to mitigate risk and improve the speed of the rescue mission

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Nagarkurnool (Telangana), Feb 26: The Telangana government has made a concrete plan of action that includes exploring alternate access routes and using advanced machinery to intensify dewatering, and hoped to conclude the SLBC tunnel rescue work in two days, said Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the fate of the eight trapped miners remained unknown on the fourth day since the tragedy.

Addressing a press conference, Reddy said it has been decided that the rescuers will go into the silt in the tunnel in search of the trapped men and acknowledged that the rescue operation slowed down Tuesday keeping in view the safety of the lives of the rescuers.

Reddy also said that alternate access routes to reach the tunnel boring machine (TBM), which was stuck in the muck are also being explored to mitigate risk and improve the speed of the rescue mission.

"The whole operation has been reviewed with all the officials, including from NDRF, Army, SDRF, District Collector, and superintendent of police... we have made a concrete plan of action today that we will go ahead into the silt (in the tunnel). Now we are hoping that we can complete the whole operation in two days. We have decided a plan of action and decided a timeframe, and now we will go forward," he said.

One of the biggest challenges in the rescue effort has been the massive accumulation of muddy water obstructing access to the TBM and to tackle this, the



Eight personnel working on the Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel project were trapped after a portion of the tunnel collapsed February 22

state government has intensified dewatering operations using advanced machinery, ensuring water removal progresses rapidly, he added.

Reddy noted that real-time monitoring of tunnel conditions was being carried out using advanced imaging systems. Experts were continuously assessing the structural stability of the tunnel, ensuring that rescue teams could proceed safely without any risks to either the trapped workers or the responders.

The TBM that is struck inside will be cut into pieces by using gas cutters and removed. After this, the Army, Navy, Rat Miners and NDRF teams will make another serious effort to rescue the eight persons who are missing, without compromising their own safety, the minister explained.

According to Reddy, the state government has roped in the best experts who have experience in building tunnels at border areas, retired army officials and people who participated in the rescue operations wherever tunnel accidents happened and sought their opinion.

The minister also said the Indian Marine Commando Force (MARCOS) and the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) have been brought in for the rescue operations. Eight personnel working on the Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel project were trapped after a portion of the tunnel collapsed on February 22.

SHORT TAKES

Criminal with Rs 1L bounty killed in UP

Lucknow: A murder accused carrying a Rs 1 lakh bounty was killed in a police encounter in the Mundali area of Uttar Pradesh's Meerut district early Wednesday, a senior police officer said. Jitendra alias Jeetu of Haryana's Jhajjar district was wanted in a 2023 murder case in Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad. The police had declared a cash reward of Rs 1 lakh for information leading to his arrest.

Manipur: 87 more firearms surrendered

Imphal: A total of 87 firearms and ammunitions were surrendered before the security forces in seven districts of restive Manipur, police said Wednesday. The highest number of weapons were surrendered in the Imphal West district. Among them were 12 carbine machine guns with magazines, two .303 rifles with magazines, two SLR rifles with magazines, four 12-bore single-barrel guns and an IED. In the Jiribam district, among the weapons surrendered were five 12-bore double-barrel guns, one 9 mm carbine with magazine, and a grenade.

4,000 kg 'adulterated' ghee seized in Gujarat

Palanpur: Authorities have seized 4,000 kg of suspected adulterated ghee valued at Rs 17.5 lakh from the premises of a firm selling dairy products in an industrial area at Deesa in Gujarat's Banaskantha district, officials said Wednesday. The contaminated clarified butter was to be sent to neighbouring Rajasthan for sale during festivals, they informed. When the administration carried out a surprise inspection at the firm's premises in Deesa town Tuesday, it found it was producing ghee despite cancellation of its licence, the FDCA said in a statement.

Five killed as SUV collides with truck

Ambikapur: Five Shiv devotees, including three minors, were killed and five others injured when their SUV (sports utility vehicle) collided with a truck in Chhattisgarh's Surguja district Wednesday, police said. Locals set the truck on fire after the driver fled the spot leaving behind the vehicle.

STRENGTHENING TRADE AND INVESTMENT TIES

UK MINISTERS SECURE 17 DEALS ON INDIA VISIT

The UK has the third largest technology economy in the world, and a number of UK technology companies have also announced expansion into India, accelerating their growth journey

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: The UK Wednesday said its Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds and Investment Minister Poppy Gustafsson announced 17 new export and investment deals during their visits to India this week.

It also said that New Delhi's recent Union budget drives

more opportunity for British insurance companies to expand their presence in India.

British insurance companies in particular have gained more potential to expand in India following the recent Indian budget, which increased the amount of foreign direct investment (FDI) permitted in the insurance sector from 74 per cent to 100 per cent, a readout by the UK said.

The UK has the third largest technology economy in the world, and a number of UK technology companies have also announced expansion into India, accelerating their growth journey, it noted.

"The UK's Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds and Investment Minister Poppy Gustafsson have announced 17 new export and investment



deals during visits to India this week," it said.

However, details of the export and investment deals are not immediately known.

Business and Trade Secretary Reynolds said technology and life sciences are two "huge" growth sectors for the UK economy. "I'm proud that govern-

ment support has helped some of our finest businesses in these sectors to expand into the exciting Indian market," he said.

"It's great to see them going for growth, and their successes will amount to tens of millions of pounds for the UK economy," he added. There are already over 950 Indian-owned companies operating in the UK and over 650 UK companies operating in India, cumulatively supporting over 600,000 jobs across both economies, the readout noted.

It said the recent Indian investments in the UK valued at over 100 million pounds in total are expected to create hundreds of new jobs over the next three years in a range of sectors including AI, professional services and textiles.

These investments are proof of global investor confidence

of doing business in the UK, it said. The trend of strong Indian investment into the UK in recent years is evident, with the last year-on-year change showing the value of inward FDI stock from India having increased 28 per cent at the end of 2023, the readout said.

India has remained the second largest investor in terms of number of projects into the UK for five consecutive years. Minister for Investment Gustafsson said, "The new Indian investment proves that the government's Plan for Change is giving Indian businesses the confidence they need to continue investing in Britain."

"Now the UK will strive to be more ambitious and collaborative than ever before as we show the world why the UK is the best place to invest."

international



The reason why I declared martial law was because of desperation as I could no longer neglect a do-or-die crisis facing this country
YOON SUK YEOL | IMPEACHED PRESIDENT, SOUTH KOREA

VENEZUELA'S FIRST SAINT
A man revered by millions as the "doctor of the poor" will be the first saint from Venezuela after Pope Francis approved a decree Tuesday. A date for the canonisation of Dr José Gregorio Hernández, who died in 1919, has not been set



of the day quote

We will firmly grasp the right to dominate and take the initiative in cross-strait relations, and unswervingly push forward the cause of reunification of the motherland
WANG HUNING | COMMUNIST PARTY'S FOURTH RANKED LEADER, CHINA

Moving forward, the White House press pool will be determined by the White House press team. A select group of DC-based journalists should no longer have a monopoly of press access at the White House
KAROLINE LEAVITT | PRESS SECRETARY, WHITE HOUSE

Just as Syria has liberated itself by itself, it is appropriate for it to build itself by itself
AHMAD AL-SHARAA | INTERIM PRESIDENT, SYRIA

SHORT TAKES

Act of defiance: US staffers resign

Washington: More than 20 civil service employees resigned Tuesday from billionaire Trump adviser Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, saying they were refusing to use their technical expertise to "dismantle critical public services". "We swore to serve the American people and uphold our oath to the Constitution across presidential administrations," the 21 staffers wrote in a joint resignation letter, a copy of which was obtained by The Associated Press. "However, it has become clear that we can no longer honour those commitments." The mass resignation of engineers, data scientists and product managers is a temporary setback for Musk and the Republican president's tech-driven purge of the federal workforce. It comes amid a flurry of court challenges that have sought to stall, stop or unwind their efforts to fire or coerce thousands of government workers out of jobs.

Five PIO sentenced, canned over brawl

Singapore: Five Indian-origin men were sentenced to jail terms between two and three years and caning for being part of a riot that led to the death of a former bouncer at a Singapore hotel. Sridharan Elangovan was given 36 months in jail and six strokes of the cane; Manojkumar Velayanatham was given 30 months in jail and four strokes; Sashikumar Pakirsamy was given 24 months in jail and two strokes; Puthenvilla Keith Peter was given 26 months' jail and three strokes; and Raja Rishi was given 30 months' jail and four strokes. Each of them pleaded guilty to a charge of rioting at Singapore's Concorde Hotel and Shopping Mall in 2023, a Channel News report said.

Plane crash kills 46

Cairo: The death toll from a Sudanese military plane crash in the city of Omdurman increased to at least 46 people, officials said Wednesday. The Khartoum Media Office said the crash also injured 10 others. The Antonov aircraft crashed Tuesday while taking off from the Wadi Sayidna air base north of Omdurman, the military said in a statement. Omdurman is the sister city of the capital, Khartoum. The military said that armed forces personnel and civilians were killed in the crash. It didn't say what caused the crash. Sudan has been in a state of civil war since 2023 when tensions between the military and a notorious paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces, exploded into open warfare.

Breakthrough in Gaza hostage deal

Israelis bid farewell to Shiri Bibas and her 2 young sons killed in captivity in Gaza

REUTERS



Kfir was the youngest of about 30 children taken hostage
Standoff over prisoner release resolved
Hamas says final four hostage bodies to be returned

Cairo, Feb 26: Hamas agreed to release the last hostage bodies included in phase one of the Gaza ceasefire deal, in a breakthrough announced as Israelis mourned a family seen as a symbol of the trauma suffered by Israel in the attack October 7, 2023. The end of a days-long standoff over the exchange of hostages for Palestinian prisoners was announced Wednesday as Israel prepared for the funeral of the Bibas family following the handover of the bodies of nine-month-old Kfir Bibas, his four year-old brother Ariel and their mother Shiri last week.

The youngest hostages seized during the attack on Israel by gunmen from the Palestinian militant group Hamas October 7, 2023 were abducted into Gaza. Yarden Bibas, the father of the boys, who was captured separately from his family, was released during an exchange of hostages and prisoners earlier this month. Hamas says the boys and their mother were killed in an Israeli airstrike but Israel says it has intelligence and forensic evidence that shows they were killed by their captors using their bare hands.

Thousands of people, some in tears, carrying blue and white Israeli flags or photographs of the family, walked in procession or waited as a convoy bearing the coffins passed on their way to the funeral. Many were carrying orange balloons, a new symbol of mourning for the hostages, matching the red hair of the two Bibas boys. For Israelis, the family has become an emblem of the trauma that has haunted their country since the Hamas-led attack on communities in southern Israel in which 1,200 people were killed and 251 were taken back to Gaza as hostages. Under the deal, Hamas agreed to hand over 33 Israeli hostages in exchange for some 2,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from some of their positions in Gaza as well as a massive influx of aid. On Wednesday, Egyptian mediators confirmed they had secured a breakthrough that should allow the handover of the final four hostage bodies due in the first phase this week

after a days-long standoff. Hamas confirmed that an agreement had been reached for the exchange of hostages for prisoners, but said the date of their release would be announced "at the right time" under a new mechanism. Israel had refused to release more than 600 Palestinian prisoners and detainees on Saturday after accusing Hamas of breaching the ceasefire deal by staging what it considered an offensive public handover of hostages in Gaza. With the 42-day truce due

to expire Saturday, it also remains unclear whether an extension will be agreed or whether negotiations can begin on a second stage of the deal, which would see the release of the final 59 hostages left in Gaza. Despite numerous hiccups, the ceasefire deal has so far held up. But moving to a second phase would require agreements on issues that have proved impossible to bridge in the past, including the postwar future of Gaza and Hamas, which Israel has vowed to eliminate as a governing force.

TRUMP POSTS AI-GENERATED VIDEO OF 'TRUMP GAZA', DRAWS BACKLASH

NEW YORK: US President Donald Trump shared an AI-generated video on social media showing war-torn Gaza redeveloped into a riviera town where the American leader is seen vacationing with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, drawing severe criticism and backlash. Trump shared the video on his social media handles, including Truth Social and Instagram. The video has been watched by millions of people. The video begins with a montage of a devastated Gaza in 2025 and asks the question "What's Next"? It leads into a song "Donald Trump will set you free ... no more tunnels, no more fear. Trump Gaza is finally here. "Trump Gaza shining bright... The deal is done... Trump Gaza number one," the song goes. The video shows Gaza as a riviera town and features AI-generated images of Space X CEO Elon Musk enjoying meals in the new town. It also shows belly dancers, party scenes, luxurious cars driving down Gaza's roads and little children trying to catch dollars falling from the sky as well as shirtless Trump and Netanyahu on beach chairs. At one point, it shows a little kid holding a golden balloon in the shape of Trump's head and a tall golden statue of the American leader in the town.



The post was received with backlash and criticism, with many users commenting that they voted for Trump to take care of the American economy and not for this. "I voted for Donald Trump. I did NOT vote for this. Neither did anyone else I know. The lack of humanity, decency, respect has made me regret my vote," one social media user said. Another user added, "I can't believe that this is the US President account. Where is the respect" and the seriousness? Earlier this month, during a joint press conference in the White House with Netanyahu, Trump in a surprising announcement, said that the US "will take over the Gaza Strip", "own it" and undertake economic development there that will create "unlimited numbers of jobs and housing".

- AI video shows 'Trump Gaza' with beaches, yachts, gold statue
- Footage also features AI rendition of Musk, Israel's Netanyahu
- Post receives negative comments for being 'insensitive'

TENSIONS WITH US RATCHET UP

Iran's near-bomb-grade uranium stock grows

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Vienna, Feb 26: Iran has accelerated its production of near weapons-grade uranium as tensions between Tehran and Washington rise after the election of US President Donald Trump, a report by the United Nations' nuclear watchdog seen by The Associated Press on Wednesday showed.

The report by the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency said that as of February 8, Iran has 274.8 kilograms (605.8 pounds) of uranium enriched up to 60 per cent. That's an increase of 92.5 kilograms (203.9 pounds) since the IAEA's last report in November.

That material is a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90 per cent.

A report in November 2024 put the stockpile at 182.3 kilograms (401.9 pounds). It had 164.7 kilograms (363.1 pounds) last August.

"The significantly increased production and accumulation of high enriched uranium by Iran, the only non-nuclear weapon State to produce such



nuclear material, is of serious concern," the confidential report stated.

According to the IAEA, approximately 42 kilograms of 60 per cent enriched uranium is theoretically enough to produce one atomic bomb, if enriched further to 90 per cent.

The IAEA also estimated in its quarterly report that as of February 8, Iran's overall stockpile of enriched uranium stands at 8,294.4 kilograms (18,286 pounds), which represents an increase of 1,690.0 kilograms (3,725.8 pounds) since the last report in November. During his first presidential

term, Trump unilaterally withdrew the US from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers and reimposed sanctions on Iran. He also ordered the 2020 killing of Qassem Soleimani, who led the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force.

N-WEAPONS FEAR RISKS

Iran has maintained its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes only, but the IAEA chief, Rafael Mariano Grossi, has previously warned that Tehran has enough uranium enriched to near-weapons-grade levels to make "several" nuclear bombs if it chose to do so. Ira-

President Trump has put the Iran Regime on notice by reimposing Maximum Pressure and is committed to ensuring the regime never gets a nuclear weapon
BRIAN HUGHES | NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL SPOKESPERSON, US

nian officials have increasingly suggested Tehran could pursue an atomic bomb. US intelligence agencies assess that Iran has yet to begin a weapons programme, but has "undertaken activities that better position it to produce a nuclear device, if it chooses to do so."

Iran's accelerated production of near weapons-grade uranium puts more pressure on Trump as he's repeatedly said he's open to negotiations with the Islamic Republic while also increasingly targeting Iran's oil sales with sanctions as part of his reimposed "maximum pressure" policy.

Even Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has final say on all state matters, in a speech in August opened the door to talks with the US, saying there is "no harm" in engaging with the "enemy."

HK to slash 10K civil service jobs, push AI in bid to reverse deficit

REUTERS

Hong Kong, Feb 26: Hong Kong aims to cut spending by slashing 10,000 civil service jobs in an effort to rein in a rising deficit, and plans a big AI push as it navigates headwinds from global economic uncertainty, geopolitical tensions and a weak property market.

"It gives us a clear pathway towards the goal of restoring fiscal balance in the operating account, in a planned and progressive manner," said the city's Financial Secretary Paul Chan in announcing the financial hub's annual budget.

Chan said 10,000 civil servant jobs would be cut by April 2027, representing a reduction of 2% of the civil service in each of the coming two years. Public sector salaries will also be frozen this year.

Chan said the "reinforced" fiscal consolidation programme would see a cumulative reduction in public expenditure by 7% from now till fiscal year ending March 31, 2028. The spending cut would lay a "sustainable fiscal foundation for future development", he said, after a sharp fall in rev-



10,000 civil service jobs to be cut before 2027, public sector pay freeze

Government aims for 7% expenditure cut by 2027-28

GDP forecast to grow 2-3 percent this year

Geopolitics to "bring challenges" to HK economy

enue from land sales left the deficit at HK\$87.2 billion, nearly double the previous forecast of HK\$48.1 billion.

Separately, in line with China's growing push to develop self-reliance in AI and other high technology sectors including robotics, Chan said Hong Kong would "leverage its strength as an international platform for stepping up the development of the AI industry".

Absences, disputes mar G20 meet on global poverty

REUTERS

Cape Town, Feb 26: South Africa sought to salvage international talks on tackling global poverty Wednesday as finance chiefs of several leading economies skipped a gathering of Group of 20 nations in Cape Town held against a backdrop of foreign aid cuts.

The two-day meeting comes after the Trump administration announced plans to gut its USAID arm and Britain slashed its aid budget by 40% to divert funds towards defence spending.

Disputes over trade, the Ukraine war and how to tackle climate change have long made it hard for the G20 grouping to make serious progress on glob-

al challenges, but the latest no-shows risk further undermining its credibility.

After US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent confirmed he would not attend, finance ministers from Japan, India and Canada also pulled out. Others cut short their presence and the European Union's top economic official chose to stay away.

"It is now more important than ever that the members of the G20 work together," South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said in opening remarks appealing for multilateral cooperation.

The high-profile absences further reduce chances of agreement on a meaningful communique at the end of the meeting.



It is vital to ensuring that the rights and interests of the vulnerable are not trampled beneath the ambitions of the powerful
CYRIL RAMAPHOSA | PRESIDENT, SOUTH AFRICA

There also seemed little hope of major progress on issues that Ramaphosa as host wanted to target: scant climate finance

from rich nations and reform of a financial system that penalises poor countries, as well as widening inequalities.

US, China, Japan, India, Canada finance ministers absent
Discussions also overshadowed by sharp disagreements
Climate finance, financial reform, inequality in focus

South Africa's central bank governor, Lesetja Kganyago, noted that a number of recent G20 meetings had finished without agreement on a communique and that the fact that some countries were being represented by deputy ministers was not a problem.

"There is no one in the room then saying ... I'm going to make this point, but I think I am too junior so they might ignore it," he told Reuters.

British finance minister Rachel Reeves defended her country's diversion of foreign aid funds towards greater defence spending.

"It's clear we are facing a more dangerous world, and I will not hide from this reality," she said in a statement, adding that investment, free trade and reforms were the best ways of achieving sustainable growth.

Alex van den Heever, political scientist at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, said the absence of the United States from G20 talks - it also declined to send its top diplomat to a meeting of G20 foreign ministers last week - "makes it very difficult to see how people will move forward".



As we execute our broader strategy to strengthen and extend our international network, we are steadily advancing towards our vision of becoming a global player by 2030, firmly rooted in India and driven by continuous expansion
PIETER ELBERS | CEO, INDIGO

DTH MERGER TALKS

Leading telecom services provider Bharti Airtel Wednesday said it is in talks with Tata Group for the merger of its loss-making Direct-To-Home (DTH) business. Airtel is holding discussions with the salt-to-software conglomerate for the merger of Bharti Telemedia, which offers cable and satellite TV services, with Tata Play, according to a regulatory filing from Sunil Bharti Mittal-led firm.



of the day quote

India is a principal key market for us, and this successful bond issuance underscores our unwavering long-term commitment to the country. The financing of VAH showcases our capacity to find innovative financing solutions
JOSE ANTONIO LABARRA | CEO, ROADIS



We are putting ₹100 crore. It will be used for incubation as well as acquiring minority stake in 5-6 startups at an early stage so that we do not dictate them. We don't want to get into the valuation game as it becomes too onerous for a startup but we want them to innovate in a more frugal manner
RONNIE SCREVVALA | FOUNDER AND CEO, UPGRAD



We are excited to join hands with Actis to accelerate the deployment of smart metering infrastructure in India
FEDERICO D'AMICO | CEO, EDF



SHORT TAKES

Govt inks pact with Paytm

New Delhi: The government has inked an agreement with Paytm (One97 Communications Ltd) under which the company would provide mentorship, infrastructure support, market access, and funding opportunities to startups, an official statement said Wednesday. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) with Paytm to foster innovation and accelerate the growth of manufacturing and fintech startups in India, the commerce and industry ministry said. "As part of this collaboration, Paytm will provide mentorship, infrastructure support, market access, and funding opportunities to startups, helping them scale and innovate," it added.

SpiceJet posts ₹26cr profit

New Delhi: Budget airline SpiceJet Wednesday reported a profit after tax of ₹26 crore for the three months ended December 2024, helped by overall improved performance. The carrier had posted a loss of ₹300 crore in the year-ago period. "Total revenue surged by 35 per cent to ₹1,651 crore, driven by strong passenger demand, improved yields and enhanced operational efficiency. Passenger Load Factor (PLF) stood at an impressive 87 per cent," the airline said in a release. Its total revenue stood at ₹1,077 crore in the 2024 September quarter. However, compared to ₹2,149 crore reported for the three months ended December 2023, the total revenue is lower in the latest December quarter.

Micromax forays into RE space

New Delhi: Home-grown consumer electronics brand Micromax Informatics Wednesday announced its foray into renewable energy segment with the launch of Startup Energy. This new venture aims to revolutionize solar panel manufacturing in India, driving the widespread adoption of sustainable energy and supporting the country's ambitious clean energy mission, a company statement said. As the world accelerates its transition to clean energy, Startup Energy is poised to play a pivotal role in India's renewable energy revolution, it added.

Nifty tanks over 14% from record peak on FIIs exodus

Total foreign fund outflows have gone past ₹1 lakh crore so far in 2025

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: Equity benchmark indices are facing massive corrections, with the NSE Nifty declining over 14 per cent from its lifetime high hit in September last year due to several negative triggers like stretched valuations, foreign fund exodus, disappointing quarterly earnings and rising global trade tensions dragging markets lower.

The BSE benchmark Sensex hit its record peak of 85,978.25 September 27 last year, and the Nifty also reached a lifetime high of 26,277.35 on the same day.

The Nifty tumbled 3,729.8 points or 14.19 per cent from its all-time high level. The BSE bellwether index Sensex is down 11,376.13 points or 13.23 per cent from its record peak.

Equity markets came under bear attack from last October onwards after smashing many record high levels.

"A correction of this magnitude is usually triggered by a combination of factors. Investor sentiment was tempered when a number of large corporations reported lower-than-expected Q3 results. Furthermore, the Indian stock market faced a difficult environment due to Trump's tariff threats and worries about India's slowing economic growth, which caused international investors to keep selling. The Sensex witnessed a sharp decline of over 13 per cent from its peak, driven by heavy FII outflows, negative technical indicators, weak corporate earnings and global economic concerns," Puneet Singhania, Director of Master Trust Group, said.

MICRO-CREDIT FLOW DECLINES 35.8% IN Q3

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Feb 26: Disbursement of microfinance loans has declined 35.8 per cent to ₹22,091 crore during the third quarter ending December 2024 as compared to the similar previous corresponding period, Microfinance Institution Network (MFIN), an umbrella body of the microfinance institutions (MFIs), said in its report.

Assets under management (AUM) of the MFIs at the end of December 2024 stood at ₹1,42,695 crore, showing a decrease of 0.1 per cent against the same period ending December 2023. The average loan amount disbursed per account during the third quarter was ₹51,691 crore, registering an increase of 15.2 per cent in comparison to the same quarter of the previous fiscal.



The total foreign fund outflows have gone past ₹1 lakh crore so far in 2025.

"The weakness in the Indian rupee, along with heightened global uncertainties and expensive equity valuations, is fueling the outflows. FIIs have been moving their money to markets with more appealing valuations, such as China. Another factor contributing to this exodus is the US president's trade policies and their effects on emerging markets," he added.

Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said, "FIIs showing no signs of putting brakes on their India exit strategy continue to weigh heavily on markets, with expensive valuations driving investors to curb their equity bets here."

The Sensex has dropped 3,536.89 points or 4.52 per cent so far this year, and the Nifty lost 1,097.25 points or 4.64 per cent.

On FIIs' exodus, Akhil Puri, Partner, Financial Advisory, Forvis Mazars in India, said, "Rising US bond yields, a strengthening dollar, weakening Indian rupee, and stretched valuations in Indian equities have diminished the appeal of Indian stocks for foreign investors, triggering significant outflows."

Adding to investor concerns, earnings reports from key Indian sectors, including consumer staples, automobiles, and building materials, have fallen short of expectations, raising doubts about corporate profitability, he added.

On the road ahead for the domestic equity markets, Singhania said, "A recovery is feasible if corporate profits increase, the global economy stabilises, and the Indian government keeps enacting policies that are beneficial. But if global inflation stays high, a recession hits, or FPI outflows persist, more corrections could also happen."

Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said, "The market's mood remains cautious, with pessimistic sentiments likely to linger until there is a marked improvement in corporate earnings and a conducive environment with easy global liquidity and stabilised currency."

EU to ask India to cut tariffs on cars, wine

REUTERS

New Delhi, Feb 26: The European Union plans to urge India to lower its high tariffs on cars and wine to boost trade, as it seeks to reduce its reliance on China, a senior official from the bloc said, ahead of a visit by the European Commission president to New Delhi.

Echoing US President Donald Trump's threat of reciprocal tariffs, the official said the EU would press India to cut tariffs on some goods and broaden market access for its products, while offering flexibility on agriculture issues to expedite free trade agreement talks.

"The Indian market is relatively closed, especially to key products of commercial interest to the European Union and our member states' industries, including cars, wines and spirits," said the official, who requested anonymity due to the confidential nature of the discussions.

EC President Ursula von

der Leyen's two-day visit from Thursday, accompanied by leaders of EU member nations, coincides with escalating geopolitical tensions, with Brussels and New Delhi set to outline key areas for deeper cooperation under their strategic partnership.

Leyen will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi Friday, followed by discussions with trade minister Piyush Goyal.

The next trade negotiations round is scheduled for March 10-14 in Brussels.

The EU's call for lower tariffs comes amid Trump's threats to impose reciprocal tariffs from early April, which has caused anxiety for India's exporters. Analysts from Citi Research estimate potential losses of about \$7 billion annually.

The EU is India's largest trading partner in goods, with trade nearing \$126 billion in 2024, marking an increase of about 90% over the past decade.

REDUCING RELIANCE ON CHINA

India must double RE capacity additions to meet 2030 targets



REUTERS

New Delhi, Feb 26: India must double its annual solar and wind capacity additions over the next five years to meet its 2030 clean-energy targets, despite record additions in 2024, Global Energy Monitor (GEM) said in a report Wednesday.

India added nearly 28 gigawatts (GW) of solar and wind capacity in 2024, with solar power additions accounting for 70% of total additions, according to the country's renewable energy ministry.

The country has set a target to achieve at least 500 GW of non-fossil power capacity by 2030, up from its current 165 GW. However, India is still falling short of its previously set target to add 175 GW by 2022.

"The pace of renewables deployment needs to accelerate dramatically to reverse the rise in fossil generation and meet India's ambitious targets," said GEM, a US-based research group that tracks global energy projects.

Despite a strong pipeline of renewable projects, fossil fuels accounted for more than two-thirds of the total increase in power generation

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in 2024, according to the report.

"A significant uptick in renewables deployment is required for renewable sources to expand upon their current one-fifth share of total generation and to eat into coal's dominance," GEM said, adding that renewables tend to generate power less readily than fossil sources.

India also plans to raise its coal-fired capacity by 80 GW by 2031-32, increasing the total from the current 220 GW, to ensure a reliable base load of power to meet growing domestic electricity demand.

The expansion of renewables will require navigating several challenges, including inadequate electricity transmission infrastructure, limited energy storage capacity, and higher financing costs, according to GEM.



As part of its "de-risking" strategy, the EU aims to strengthen economic and security ties with India, diversify supply chains, and reduce reliance on key products from China.

The EU also views India as a vital ally in addressing security challenges, the official said, including cyber threats and tensions in the South China

Sea and Indo-Pacific. Leyen is also expected to seek India's support for a "peaceful and just deal" for Ukraine's security, the official said.

The EU and India could sign an agreement to share classified security information to tackle common threats such as cyber attacks and terrorism, while exploring defence equipment trade.

Despite these potential benefits, trade analysts said the visit may not yield tangible results.

For substantial cooperation, the EU should acknowledge India as a data-secure country, said Ajay Srivastava, founder of the Delhi-based think-tank Global Trade Initiative, and India's former negotiator on trade talks with the EU.

"While both parties have concerns about China, neither sees it as a top priority," Srivastava said adding India is focused on border tensions with China, while the EU is more concerned with the Ukraine-Russia conflict and NATO matters.

Trump asks Apple to end DEI policies after shareholders vote in favour

Big US companies, including Meta and Alphabet have dropped DEI initiatives as Trump's returned to the presidency

REUTERS

Washington, Feb 26: US President Donald Trump Wednesday urged Apple to scrap its diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies, a day after the iPhone maker's shareholders voted overwhelmingly to keep them in the face of growing pushback from conservative groups.

Big US companies, including Meta and Alphabet have dropped DEI initiatives as Trump's returned to the presidency.

He has called them discriminatory and suggested the Department of Justice could investigate if such efforts violate the law.

"Apple should get rid of DEI rules, not just make adjustments to them. DEI was a hoax that has been very bad for our country. DEI is gone!!!" Trump wrote in a post on Truth Social that was in uppercase.

Apple did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Tuesday's vote at the iPhone



maker's annual meeting was seen as a test of shareholder views on DEI programs, which many companies added or beefed up starting in 2020 amid the Black Lives Matter movement.

Supporters of the policies say they address longstanding bias, inequity and discrimination. But proponents of the proposal against Apple's DEI had argued recent legal changes could result in an increase in discrimi-

nation cases if Apple continued such policies.

Trump issued an executive order in January to end DEI initiatives in the federal government and private sector, saying such efforts discriminates against other Americans, including white people and men and weakens the importance of merit in job hiring or promotion.

Apple has said it had an active oversight effort to avoid legal risks and that the proposal inappropriately restricted management.

The company reports workforce diversity data but sets no targets or quotas, focusing its DEI efforts on programs such as a racial justice initiative that supports historically

Black colleges and universities in the US.

Apple's "strength has always come from hiring the very best people and then providing a culture of collaboration, one where people with diverse backgrounds and perspectives come together to innovate", CEO Tim Cook said at Tuesday's meeting.

But he also signaled the company may make some adjustments in response to new developments.

"As the legal landscape around these issues evolves, we may need to make some changes to comply, but our North Star of dignity and respect for everyone and our work to that end will never waver," Cook said.

