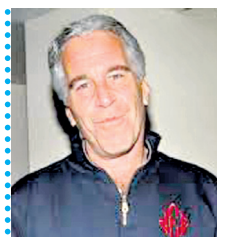
HERE . NOW

OrissaPOST

Rashmika's gesture

Actor Rashmika Mandanna wins millions of hearts by giving hug to a lens man at an airport

LEISURE | P2



Epstein saga

US Justice Department releases a large batch of files related to its investigation into financier Jeffrey Epstein

INTERNATIONAL | P10

Budget today

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present her ninth straight Budget Sunday, which is expected to unveil measures to sustain growth momentum

BUSINESS | P11

Kishan's maiden ton

Ishan Kishan slams 103 while Arshdeep returns 5 for 51 as India beat NZ by 46 runs in the final game to bag the series 4-1

SPORTS | P12

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Sunetra Pawar takes oath as first woman Deputy CM of Maha

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Jan 31: Sunetra Pawar, wife of deceased NCP president Ajit Pawar, was Saturday sworn in as the first woman Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra.

The 62-year-old Pawar, who has resigned as Rajya Sabha MP, was administered the oath of office and secrecy by Governor Acharya Devvrat at a brief ceremony at the Lok Bhavan here.

Earlier in the day, she was elected as the state NCP legislature party leader. Ajit Pawar, who held the Deputy Chief Minister's post as well as the finance portfolio in the BJP-Shiv Sena-NCP 'Mahayuti' government, died in an air crash in Baramati January 28.

Slogans like "Ajit dada Amar Rahe" (Ajit dada is immortal) were raised as Sunetra Pawar rose to take the oath.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, NCP leaders Praful Patel, Sunil Tatkare and Chhagan Bhujbal, among others, were present at the ceremony. Sunetra Pawar's younger son Jay Pawar and his wife were also present.

She is not a member of either house of the state legislature, and is expected to contest the byelection to the Baramati Assembly constituency represented by her late husband.

Coming from a political family, the low-profile Sunetra Pawar made her electoral debut in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, facing off against her sister-in-law and incumbent NCP (SP) MP Supriya Sule, in Baramati, the home turf of the Pawar family.

After losing to Sule, she was elected to the Rajya Sabha. She now faces an uphill task of holding the NCP together and managing coalition politics while working with the BJP and Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena.

TENNIS TRIUMPH: Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina poses with the trophy after defeating World No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus in Australian Open women's singles final at Melbourne Park REUTERS

DIARRHOEA CLAIMS CLASS IV GIRL; OVER 100 SCHOOLKIDS ILL

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bissamcuttack, Jan 31: Panic gripped Nalini Vidya Mandir, a residential school in Bissamcuttack block of Rayagada district, after a Class IV girl student died during treatment following an outbreak of diarrhoea and vomiting which affected more than 100 students, sources said Saturday.

Over 40 affected students were admitted to the Bissamcuttack Community Health Centre (CHC), while six critically ill were shifted by ambulance for advanced medical care. Around 50 to 60 students were provided emergency treatment on the school premises by local doctors.

Preliminary reports suggest that the outbreak may have been caused by contaminated food or drinking water. A special medical team from the Rayagada district Health department rushed to the spot and began treatment and assessment. Samples of food and drinking water from the school have been collected and sent for laboratory examination. Following the incident, tension and anxiety prevailed in the area, with concerned parents gathering at the school and health facilities.

Nod to VGF for 2 int'l routes

CABINET OKAYS ₹17,250-CRORE NEW AGE MANUFACTURING COMPLEX IN DHENKANAL

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Jan 31: The state Cabinet Saturday approved 12 proposals, including continuance of the state Viability Gap Funding (VGF) support for select international air routes from Bhubaneswar and setting up an integrated new-age manufacturing complex at an investment of ₹17,250 crore in the state.

The proposals were approved at the Cabinet meeting here under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi.

The Cabinet cleared a proposal of the Commerce and Transport department to continue and rationalise VGF support for international flight operations currently run by IndiGo, connecting Bhubaneswar with Dubai and Singapore, Chief Secretary Anu Garg told reporters after the meeting.

Stating that these routes were launched earlier with state VGF support to bridge initial commercial viability gaps, the Chief Secretary said that the move comes in view of a decline in passenger load factor following the withdrawal of earlier support, raising concerns over the possible discontinuation of the route.

Apart from the Bhubaneswar-Dubai route, the Bhubaneswar-Singapore route will also get VGF support for a six-month period. The step is aimed at optimising public resources while stabilising priority international routes, she said.

The total VGF support proposed for the two routes over the six-month period is estimated at approximately ₹26.87 crore. The expenditure will be met from the approved allocation under the B-MAAN scheme, the Chief Secretary said, adding that any further continuation, modification, or expansion of international routes will be decided at the level of the Chief Minister, based on periodic performance reviews of route viability and passenger demand.

However, the Cabinet did not take any decision on providing VGF support for the Bangkok and Abu Dhabi routes.

The Cabinet also approved an industrial investment proposal by Kalyani Group to set up an integrated new-age manufacturing complex at Gajamara in Dhenkanal district. The project will be developed over around 1,100 acres and is expected to significantly strengthen the state's presence in advanced manufacturing, particularly in the automotive, aerospace, and defence sectors, Garg said.

The proposed integrated complex will include multiple production units, such as a speciality steel project by Kalyani Steels Limited, a super-alloy manufacturing unit by Saarloha Advanced Materials Private Limited and an industrial components casting and forging facility by Bharat Forge and its subsidiaries. The project has been approved under special provisions of Odisha's Industrial Policy Resolution (IPR) 2022, she said.

As estimated, the total proposed investment for the integrated complex stands at approximately ₹17,250 crore. The project is expected to generate more than 4,800 direct jobs and around 5,500 indirect jobs during the construction and initial operational phases. Total employment, including jobs created through vendor parks and ancillary units, is projected to exceed 20,000 in the coming years, an official said.

The Chief Secretary said the project will begin with a speciality steel plant and later expand into a super alloy facility. The focus is on value-added manufacturing within the state. The integrated automotive, aerospace and defence equipment manufacturing complex will produce components locally, reflecting Odisha's push towards high-value manufacturing. The project is expected to generate over 12,000 high-value jobs, she said. MORE P3

5 killed as speeding truck hits, drags bikes for 200m

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar/Berhampur, Jan 31: At least five persons died and three others were critically injured when a speeding truck ran over three two-wheelers in Ganjam district Saturday, police said.

The accident took place at Haldiapadar on National Highway-16 that passes through Berhampur city. "All five accident victims were received dead," MKCG Medical College and Hospital superintendent Durga Madhab Satapathy said.

Initially police had said six persons were injured in the accident, but it was later found that three were injured and all of them pedestrians, police said.

Southern Range IG Niti Sekhar said that the truck was travelling on wrong side of the highway when it ploughed through the motorcycles. The accident was so severe that the bodies of the deceased were found scattered on the NH, he said. Traffic on NH-16 was halted for several hours following the accident.

Berhampur SP Saravana Vivek M said the truck has been seized and its driver detained.

CM Majhi condoles fatalities, announces ₹4L ex gratia

The bodies of the deceased were handed over to their families after post-mortem examination, he said. The deceased have been identified as Suray Narayan Panda (41) of Ayodhya Nagar, Sibaram Jena (35) of Gunthubandh, Jaga Nahak (20) and Rakesh Nahak (22) of Phulta and Satya Narayan Bej of Khariaguda near Jarada, police said.

Taking to X, CMO Odisha said, "Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi has expressed grief after learning about the loss of lives in a tragic road accident at Haldiapadar near Berhampur in Ganjam district." Majhi also announced a compensation of ₹4 lakh each for the families of the deceased from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF), CMO added.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL

She can't come out to meet you, sir. She's also busy preparing for the budget

SHORT TAKES

K Murugesan new PCCF; 3 IAS officers promoted

Bhubaneswar: The state government Saturday appointed senior IFS officer K Murugesan as the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF). The government also promoted four IAS officers to the rank of additional chief secretary. According to a notification issued by the General Administration and Public Grievances department, 1994-batch Indian Forest Service officer Murugesan has been appointed as the PCCF. He would now look after the state's forest administration. Similarly, another notification said that three IAS officers of the 1996 batch -- Saswata Mishra, Vishal Kumar Dev and Usha Padhee -- have been elevated to the rank of ACS and will continue in their present postings on an in-situ basis. Vir Vikram Yadav, who is currently on central deputation, has been granted proforma promotion.

Pak PM gets candid on loan humiliation

Islamabad: Seeking foreign loan had forced Pakistan to bow its head and make compromises at the cost of self-respect, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has said in a candid admission about the humiliation involved in approaching friendly countries for financial aid. Addressing a ceremony held in honour of the country's eminent businessmen and exporters here Friday, Sharif recalled the difficult period when Pakistan faced fears of bankruptcy and was described by some as being on the verge of technical default. "When we assumed office, the economic situation was extremely fragile, and the common man faced severe hardships," he said. The prime minister referred to his meeting with the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Paris in 2023. P10

India's wealthy embrace new luxury symbol: Water

REUTERS

New Delhi, Jan 31: At an Indian gourmet food store, Avanti Mehta is organising a blind tasting of drinks sourced from France, Italy and India. No, this isn't wine, it's water.

Participants use tiny shot glasses to check the minerality, carbonation and salinity in samples of Evian from the French Alps, Perrier from southern France, San Pellegrino from Italy and India's Aava from the foothills of the Aravalli mountains.

"They will all taste different ... you should be choosing a water that can give you some sort of nutritional value," said Mehta, who is 32 and calls herself India's youngest water sommelier, a term usually associated with premium wine. Her family owns the Aava mineral water brand.

Premium water is a $400 million business in the world's most populous nation and is growing bigger as its wealthy see it as a new status symbol that fits in with a spreading wellness craze.

- Tap water in India not fit for human consumption
- India is among the world's fastest growing bottled water markets
- Wealthy opt for premium water as wellness craze boosts industry
- Tata expanding offerings, hunting for natural water springs
- Premium water now accounts for 8% of Indian market

Premium Indian mineral water costs around $1 for a one-litre bottle, while imported brands are upwards of $3, or 15 times the price of the country's lowest-priced basic bottled water.

Clean water is a privilege in the country of 1.4 billion people where researchers say 70% of the groundwater is contaminated. Tap water remains unfit to drink, and 16 people died in Indore city after consuming contaminated tap water in December.

Many in India see bottled water as a necessity and standard 20 US-cent bottles are available widely at convenience stores, restaurants and hotels. The market is worth nearly $5 billion annually and is set to grow 24% a year - among the fastest in the world. Bottled water demand in United States or China is driven by convenience, making it a $30 billion-plus market in each country which will grow just 4-5% each year, Euromonitor says.

In India, the premium water segment is leading the surge in demand, accounting for 8% of the bottled water market last year compared to just 1% in 2021, Euromonitor said.

"Distrust of municipal water in some areas has escalated the demand for bottled water. Now, people understand how mineral water has more health benefits. It's expensive, but the category will boom," said Amulya Pandit, a senior consultant at Euromonitor specialising in the drinks market.

The popular 20-cent plastic bottled water is mainly made by Pepsi, Coca-Cola and Indian market leader Bisleri. In addition, Indians who can afford it, install purifiers in their homes which clean the water but also remove most minerals.

Imported and local premium waters are luring wealthy consumers and businesses alike.

Most Indians prefer still water, and the sparkling variant remains niche. Tata said it plans to launch a sparkling Himalayan water, and is also scouting for natural springs for expanding its other offerings.

leisure

CATHERINE O'HARA PASSES AWAY AT 71

Catherine O'Hara, the acclaimed actress known for *Home Alone* and Schitt's Creek, passed away at 71 January 30, 2026, with news reports circulating on January 31, 2026. She reportedly died following a brief illness.

KIM DONATES TO NATIONAL IMMIGRATION LAW CENTER

Kim Kardashian has voiced her support for the National Immigration Law Center. The 45-year-old star has taken to social media to declare her support for the organisation, which advances and defends the rights and opportunities of low-income immigrants in the US.

FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES

You can make a difference to others' lives. Considerate and thoughtful, today, you will be treasured more than ever as a boss, colleague, parent or beloved. Utilise this exchange of energy to sort out difficult issues. Ganesha gives a thumbs up to mega projects.

TAURUS

Things will tend to get very difficult and complicated, says Ganesha Be prepared for setbacks and challenges today. No matter how big the issue, your competence, your resourcefulness will see you through. Try to remain focused and alert. Be cautious and circumspect. Act coolly and sensibly. That is all that you need.

GEMINI

Today, you will have the required intentions and courage to propose your sweetheart. You will be dressed to kill, or rather to marry. You will make a favourable impression with the way you'll look tonight. You will be an open book to your future partner, which is likely to work in your favour.

CANCER

Though your thoughts and views may be quite radical, you will be largely restrained while acting on them, portends Ganesha. You will have no problems starting a new venture or love affair, and taking the required action to keep them afloat.

LEO

'One small drop at a time fills an ocean over time'. Remember this lesson, says Ganesha, and continue to concentrate your efforts on your goal without losing heart. There may be times when you sit back and think twice, but know that all it takes is a small effort and that is what shall enable you to reach the zenith.

VIRGO

Though you won't bite or pinch people, you are and will be flooded with empathy. But Ganesha says that you are a bit too rigid when it comes to performing your duties, not to mention extremely principled. On the home front, get more expressive and closer to your kin, advises Ganesha.

LIBRA

You will be very unpredictable today, and your mercurial tendencies will remain till the evening. After that, be prepared to get a pleasant surprise. Just bear in mind that being prepared is always a good idea, since you never know when the perfect moment arrives.

SCORPIO

Today, the sugar and spice of work and home are delicately balanced to bring out the best in you, says Ganesha. You may spend a lot of your time brainstorming at your desk. In the evening, however, mental exercises will be substituted for pleasure and fun with friends and family.

SAGITTARIUS

The way you keep your interests alive will keep your mind occupied. Leisure activities and by-lines will by-pass the mundane routine today, foretells Ganesha. Pamper yourself by doing what you like, be it gardening, cooking or even plain old reading. Ganesha also sees a heavy meal with friends late in the day today.

CAPRICORN

The day will be a maze of complex problems and situations, but you will find your way out in no time, says Ganesha. At work, you may love to play the leader, but that makes you accountable, for both the good as well as the poor performance of your subordinates. In all likelihood, you may be held responsible for the poor performance of your team members.

AQUARIUS

Today is an auspicious day, particularly for astrologers, healers, spiritual guides and gurus, says Ganesha. One will think twice before challenging you today. Greed is not a word in your dictionary, and today, you are even more inspired to work for humanity.

PISCES

The focus is firmly on career advancement today. Business deals, which have been a long time in the making, will finally come through. Those pursuing a profession can expect pay rises or promotions. Make sure your skills are up to the mark to be able to tackle your new responsibilities satisfactorily, says Ganesha.

Rashmika spreads warmth

Mumbai: Rashmika Mandanna recently shared a wholesome moment with a paparazzi during her visit to the airport. During her visit, one photographer said it was another cameraman's birthday. The birthday boy himself said, "It's my birthday." Rashmika Mandanna heard this and stopped for a moment to interact with him.

In a video shared by Indian Telly on their Instagram handle, as soon as she heard about the birthday, Rashmika Mandanna opened her arms and said, "Come here, give me a hug." The photographer came forward and hugged her. Rashmika then softly said, "God bless you." After that, she asked him, "How old are you now?" When he replied that he was 24, Rashmika reacted with a cute face and said, "Aiyo!" This small and loving moment made the photographer very happy.

Many fans praised Rashmika Mandanna for her behavior. One user wrote, "Defination of Kindness called Rashmika Mandanna!" Another comment said, "I have never seen an Actress this much Kind and Down to Earth ever! Rashmika Mandanna!" One more user wrote, "What a pure energy," while another add-

Uorfi's confession

Mumbai: Actress and social media personality Uorfi Javed has finally reacted strongly to news circulating online about her religion and identity, stating that she does not follow any religion.

The clarification from Uorfi has come after social media influencer Faizan Ansari claimed that Muslims had decided to remove Uorfi Javed from Islam and changed her name to Geeta Bharadwaj.

Responding to these claims in an exclusive conversation with IANS, Uorfi dismissed the reports as baseless and made her stance very clear. She said, "I myself left the religion long ago. Who is making these things up now?"

Reacting to news of her name being changed to Geeta Bharadwaj, Uorfi told IANS, "Who said this? There is no such report. They are making it up on their own. I don't follow any religion. I am an atheist. So where will you get me out of? How would you get somebody out of a place they don't exist in the first place!"

Earlier today, social media influencer Faizan Ansari stated has been "expelled" from Islam and will now be called as Geeta Bhardwaj. The influencer made the strong claim through a video shared on his social media, where he alleged that a decision had been taken by 'Muslims' to disassociate Javed from the community following her constant insult to the community. IANS

Sharvari's double shift survival pack

Mumbai: Hustling through long work hours, Bollywood actress Sharvari shared a glimpse of her "double-shift survival pack", hinting at the hard work powering her busy day.

Sharvari took to her Instagram stories, where she shared a collage of pictures featuring her, a tiffin box, a coffee mug and her crew members.

She captioned: "A smile, protein laddoo, strong coffee and best team. Double shift survival pack."

The actress is currently busy shooting for filmmaker Imtiaz Ali's next with Diljit Dosanjh, Vedang Raina, Sharvari, and Naseeruddin Shah. It is slated to hit the screens on June 12.

Unveiling the release date on social media, the makers on January 29 wrote, "Imtiaz Ali's next, a charming story of love and longing to release in cinemas on 12th June, 2026. Applause Entertainment Presents, A Window Seat Films Production. Starring: Diljit Dosanjh, Vedang Raina, Sharvari, Naseeruddin Shah Directed by Imtiaz Ali Music by A.R. Rahman Lyrics by Irshad Kamil Produced by: Applause Entertainment, Window Seat Films, Mohit Choudhary. (sic)."

Backed by Applause Entertainment, Window Seat Films, and Mohit Choudhary, the project enjoys a contemporary and witty narrative that explores the depth of human connection.

The film also brings back the legendary trio of A.R. Rahman, Irshad Kamil, and Imtiaz Ali. IANS

Neelam played cupid in SRK-Gauri love story!

Mumbai: Gracing the stage of *Indian Idol* during its special 'Season of Love' celebrations, Bollywood diva Neelam Kothari left everyone stunned with her candid confession. The actress disclosed a little-known secret behind Bollywood's most iconic love story, Shah Rukh Khan and Gauri Khan , revealing how she was the reason behind their romance.

As seen in the latest promo, Neelam revealed, "A few months back Shah Rukh was telling me, 'You know Neelam, one of the reasons Gauri and I got married is because of you.'"

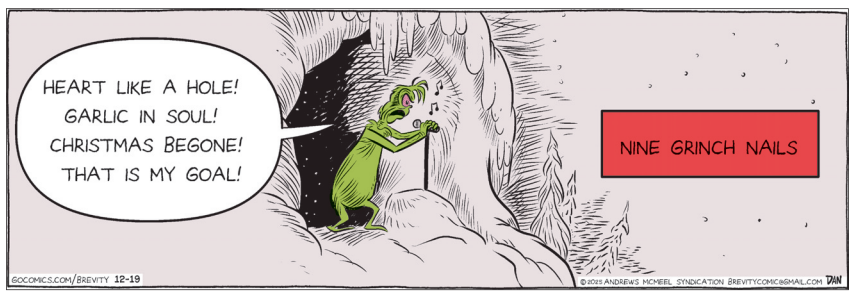
King Khan further explained the beautiful backstory to her, "He was telling me that when I was doing films, he was a big fan, and Gauri was also a big fan. So both of them used to watch my films together. So that's how the romance started. They went to watch Neelam's film together, and I did not know that."

She added, "So one of the reasons Shah Rukh and Gauri are together is because of me," Neelam further smiled and admitted that she had no idea her films played cupid in the most iconic real life love story of Indian cinema. IANS

PEANUTS

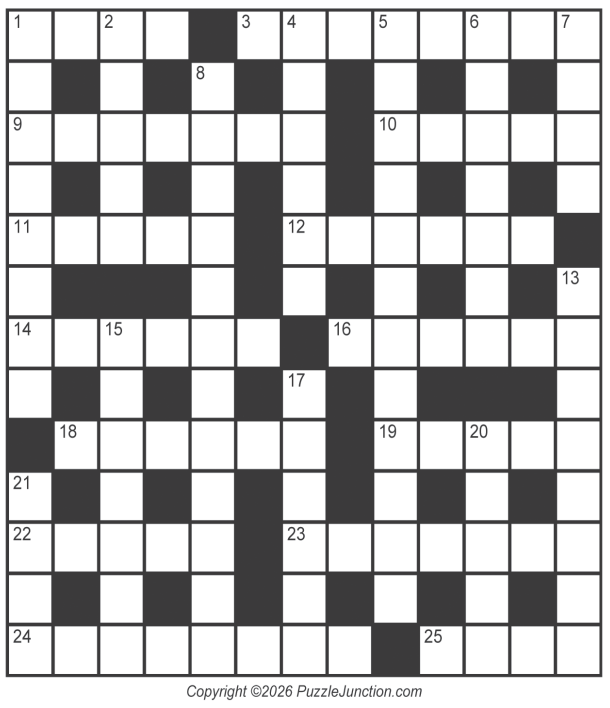
CALVIN AND HOBBES

BREVITY



FUN post

CROSSWORD



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Across
1 Very dark
3 Indistinct
9 Forsakes
10 Rocket type
11 Original
12 Free of charge
14 Mother ___
16 Woodland
18 Eurasian finch
19 Crosswise, on deck
22 Young hooter
23 Crude producer (3,4)
24 Statue holder
25 Regarded

Down
1 Close at hand
2 Mariinsky Ballet, once
4 Banner
5 Not justified
6 Writer's first draft
7 In a minute
8 They can be inline or quad (6,6)
13 Faltered
15 Revolved
17 Neighbor of Zambia
20 Hostile force
21 Hen housing

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

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.

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

SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD

SUDOKU

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

downtown

PREPAREDNESS

Fire Services personnel carry out a mock drill in Baramunda area of Bhubaneswar, Saturday

'Viksit Bharat' journey rests on youth: Guv

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 31: Emphasising the pivotal role of youth in nation-building, Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati Saturday said that India's journey towards 'Viksit Bharat' depends not merely on policies and plans, but also on the character, competence, and commitment of its young citizens.

The Governor was speaking at 'At Home' programme hosted for the National Cadet Corps (NCC) contingent that participated in the 77th Republic Day Parade in New Delhi. The programme was held at New Abhishek Hall in Lok Bhavan.

Welcoming the cadets, Kambhampati expressed pride in hosting them at Lok Bhavan and said the occasion reflected the spirit of patriotism, unity and youthful determination. "You are not merely cadets. You are torchbearers of India's pride and the living promise of our nation's future," he said.

Referring to their participation in the Republic Day Parade, the Governor said it symbolised the cadets' dedication, discipline and commitment to national service. Their smart turnout, flawless drill and unwavering spirit, he noted, showcased not only individual excellence but also the enduring values of the NCC. "You have demonstrated what disciplined youth, united in purpose, can achieve for the nation," he added.

"India's journey towards 'Viksit Bharat' depends not merely on policies and plans, but also on the character, competence, and commitment of its young citizens," he said.

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, Deputy CM Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo, R&DM Minister Suresh Pujari, S&ME Minister Nityananda Gond, Chief Secretary Anu Garg, Development Commissioner Deoranjan Kumar Singh and Principal Secretary to CM Saswata Mishra unveil reference books for Class XI Science students in Odia language, at Lok Seva Bhawan in Bhubaneswar, Saturday OP PHOTO

Woman gets life term for killing roommate in City

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Jan 31: A court here has awarded life imprisonment to a woman for murdering her female friend in the City in 2019.

3rd Additional District and Sessions Judge Himanshu Sekhar Mallick held Anisha Mitra guilty of the murder of her roommate Alakananda Das.

The court delivered the judgment Friday based on the statements of 10 witnesses and other documents along with scientific evidence, an official said.

According to the prosecution, the murder took place at a rented house in Gouri Nagar under Lingaraj police station area in the City January 19, 2019.

Das and Mitra had been staying together for a long time. Mitra slit Das's throat with the help of a kitchen knife.

During investigation, it was found that Mitra was strongly opposed to Das's marriage and had insisted that she cancel it. The convict feared that their friendship would break if Das got married. The incident had sparked statewide outrage.

CABINET APPROVES NEW COOPERATION POLICY

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Jan 31: The state Cabinet, headed by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, Saturday approved the much-awaited State Cooperation Policy 2026, which aims to transform the cooperative sector into a technology-driven, efficient and member-centric system, contributing to inclusive development in Odisha.

The policy seeks to strengthen Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies (PACS), Large Area Multi-Purpose Societies (LAMPS), cooperative banks, and cooperative marketing and processing societies to enhance service delivery and last-mile impact, according to the Cooperation department.

The State Cooperation Policy 2026 will provide a permanent and supportive legal, regulatory and financial framework for the sustainable growth of cooperative institutions. It will modernise and professionalise the cooperative structure to ensure transparency, accountability and good governance, the department said.

KEY APPROVALS

Diversion Weir Improvement scheme to be implemented from 2025-26 to 2027-28 with an allocation of ₹362 crore	State Council on Science and Technology scheme to be implemented from 2025-26 to 2029-30 with an allocation of ₹254.85 crore	Framing of Odisha Uniformed Services Staff Selection Commission (Method of Recruitment and Conditions of Service of the Chairman and Members) Rules, 2026

"The policy will also strengthen PACS as multi-service centres for agriculture, credit, marketing, processing and agri-business. Along with enhancing member participation, financial inclusion and digital service delivery, the policy will help build the capacities of cooperative members, CEOs and boards through systematic training and skilling," the department said, adding that it will promote value addition, supply chain infrastructure and market linkages through cooperatives.

"The State Cooperation Policy 2026 is expected to give Odisha's cooperative movement renewed direction and momentum, enabling it to emerge as a key driver of rural livelihood enhancement and economic empowerment," the department said, adding that the policy has been designed in complete alignment with the vision of 'Viksit Odisha 2036' and 'Viksit Bharat 2047'.

The Cabinet also approved 11 other proposals. The state Cabinet cleared the framing of the Odisha Uniformed Services Staff Selection Commission (Method of Recruitment and Conditions of Service of the Chairman and Members) Rules, 2026. The commission will now conduct centralised, transparent, technology-driven recruitment for Odisha Police, Excise, Forest & Environment, and Commerce & Transport departments.

In a bid to strengthen irrigation infrastructure across Odisha, the Cabinet approved the Rs 362 crore Diversion Weir Improvement scheme from the state's own funds for its implementation over the next three financial years, from 2025-26 to 2027-28.

The Cabinet approved the State Council on Science and Technology scheme to be implemented over five years from 2025-26 to 2029-30 with an estimated budgetary allocation of Rs 254.85 crore. The scheme aims to promote science, technology, and innovation for socio-economic development.

The state Cabinet approved the amendment to Orissa Superior Judicial Service and Orissa Judicial Service Rules 2007. "The amendment will help make the Rules more meaningful and give more opportunities to differently-abled candidates," the Law department said.

Among others, the state Cabinet approved the proposal for framing of Odisha Employees' State Insurance Scheme Nursing Service (Methods of Recruitment and Conditions of Service) Rules, 2025.

6 held for HC ASO exam irregularities

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Cuttack, Jan 31: Six people were arrested Saturday for their alleged involvement in leaking model answers and using unfair means during the ASO (Assistant Section Officer) Examination-2024 of the Orissa High Court (HC), police said.

In a statement, police said that a case was registered at Lalbag police station here following a complaint regarding discrepancies detected in the conduct of the examination by an outsourcing agency July 13, 2025.

"Examination of answer scripts revealed verbatim reproduction of model answers and unusually high scores by some of the candidates," the police said, adding that technical investigation, including phone record analysis, uncovered suspicious communication links between agency officials, intermediaries, and candidates.

"Based on documentary, digital, and technical evidence, six accused persons have been arrested. Prima facie, involvement of the other five accused persons, who are already in judicial custody for their involvement in SI and Special OTET irregularities, has been revealed," the police said, adding that they will be remanded in this case during the course of investigation.

The acts of all the accused persons constitute a large-scale organised crime and criminal conspiracy, police said.

The arrested accused persons were identified as Himansu Sekhar Dash, Sridhara Mantri and Alok Sahoo (all three from Bhubaneswar), Nirmalaya Kumar Das (Balasore), Gangadhara Jena (Cuttack) and Joytirmayee Sahoo (Ganjam).

They are arrested under different Sections of BNS, including 318(4) (cheating and dishonesty), 316(2) (criminal breach of trust), 316(5) (criminal breach of trust), 111 (organised crime), 61(2) (criminal conspiracy) and 3(5) (common intention).

Further investigation is in progress to trace the financial trail, identify other accused persons, and uncover the wider conspiracy, police said.

Earlier, the HC had cancelled the ASO examination of July 13, 2025 and conducted a fresh mains written examination December 7, 2025. The examination was conducted for 147 vacancies.

Khadi and Village Industries Commission Chairman Manoj Kumar inaugurates 'Khadi Mahotsav' at Exhibition Ground in Bhubaneswar, Saturday PIC: BIKASH NAYAK

Elephant death: ACF suspended

BHUBANESWAR: The state government has suspended Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF) Suryakant Behera of Balliguda Forest Division in connection with the shocking elephant death case. The ACF has been placed under suspension with immediate effect by the Forest, Environment and Climate Change department pending disciplinary proceedings. The suspension was based on a report submitted by the RCCF, Berhampur Circle, January 24, 2026. As per the order, Behera has been placed under suspension with immediate effect pending disciplinary proceedings under Rule 12(1)(a) of the OCS (CCA) Rules, 1962. Behera's headquarters during the suspension will be fixed at the office of the PCCF & HoFF, Odisha. He cannot leave headquarters without prior permission from the competent authority. He will be entitled to subsistence allowance as per Rule-90 of the Orissa Service Code.

Odisha BJP leaders to campaign in WB polls

AGENCIES

CHIEF MINISTER MOHAN CHARAN MAJHI AND BJP STATE PRESIDENT MANMOHAN SAMAL WILL ALSO CAMPAIGN IN THE POLLS

Bhubaneswar, Jan 31: With the West Bengal Assembly elections approaching, the Odisha unit of the BJP has prepared a roadmap to play an active role in campaigning across six southern districts of the neighbouring state, a senior party leader said Saturday.

Odisha BJP OBC Morcha president Surath Biswal said the party has already identified leaders from Balasore, Bhadrak, Mayurbhanj, and Keonjhar districts to campaign for candidates in the West Bengal elections. He added that MLAs, MPs, and panchayat-level leaders from Kendrapara and Jajpur districts have also been identified to participate in the campaign.

"I have been assigned to campaign in the Gopiballavpur area of Jhargram district in West Bengal, located on the banks of the Subarnarekha river near the Odisha and Jharkhand borders. I have friends and relatives in that area," BJP MLA Bhaskar Madehi from Udala Assembly segment in Mayurbhanj district said.

Madehi said he would soon visit Gopiballavpur and stay there for a few days to campaign for the party.

Biswal said a team of BJP MLAs led by the state's Higher Education Minister Suryabanshi Suraj, who is also an MLA from Bhadrak district, attended a meeting in Kolkata Friday.

The team included MLAs Santosh Khatua and senior BJP leader Goutam Ray from Jajpur district. "The ministers, MLAs and MPs selected to campaign in West Bengal elections are fluent in Bengali and have relatives working in Kolkata and other towns of West Bengal," one of the MLAs said.

Odisha BJP leaders will mainly campaign in Kolkata, South and North 24 Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly, and East and West Midnapore districts, party sources said, adding that at least two dozen MLAs have been identified for the purpose.

The party plans to replicate the campaign strategy adopted during the recent Nuapada bypolls, where leaders from neighbouring Chhattisgarh were deployed in designated areas, leading to the BJP's victory, the sources said.

Of the 28 MLAs from the four north Odisha districts of Balasore, Bhadrak, Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar, the BJP has 18 members. The party also holds all four Lok Sabha seats in the region.

This apart, the Odisha BJP has also prepared roadmaps for campaigning in Kolkata, where a large number of Odias live.

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi (Keonjhar) and BJP state president Manmohan Samal (Bhadrak), who hail from northern region of Odisha, having borders with West Bengal, will also campaign in the polls, a leader said.

"The West Bengal poll is a prestige fight for us. We will put all efforts and inform people what the BJP's double engine government in Odisha has achieved. We will highlight Odisha's Subhadra Yojana under which the women in the age group of 21 to 60 get financial assistance of Rs 50,000 in five years," a senior BJP leader said, adding that the state government's Rs 800 financial assistance per quintal of paddy will also be highlighted in the Bengal elections.

BMC to launch drive against polythene-covered shops

MANOJ KUMAR JENA, OP

Repeated warnings issued to vendors at Unit-I and Unit-II markets against using plastic at shops

Despite this, several shops at Unit-II and some at Unit-I still use plastic sheet coverings

BMC to take strict action against vendors using polythene sheets and encroaching on roads, causing congestion, says Additional Commissioner Sahoo

Bhubaneswar, Jan 31: Following a series of fire incidents at Unit-I Market that raised concerns over fire safety in the city's market areas, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) is set to launch an enforcement drive against shops and kiosks using polythene sheets as covers or for constructing makeshift structures across the City.

According to officials, the fire that broke out at Unit-I Market January 20, in which around 70 shops were gutted, was largely attributed to the use of plastic materials and sheets by vendors, which helped the fire spread rapidly. Both the BMC Mayor and Commissioner had cited plastic usage as a major contributing factor.

The civic body said repeated warnings had been issued to vendors at Unit-I and Unit-II markets prohibiting the use of plastic at shops. However, even after the recent incident, several shops and kiosks at Unit-II Market and a few at Unit-I continue to use plastic sheet coverings.

"We have no other option to cover our shops. These materials are weather-resistant and easily available in the market, while other fire-resistant materials are too expensive. Plastic sheets help us a lot," said a vendor at Unit-II Market.

Unit-II Market president Manas Kumar Baliarsingh said the government was not providing adequate support to poor vendors, forcing them to run makeshift shops for survival. "They use polythene sheets to construct their shops. The BMC is not consistently carrying out enforcement drives here. We also want alternative materials to replace polythene, but they are quite expensive," Baliarsingh said.

Baliarsingh urged authorities to assist vendors by providing fire-resistant materials for their shops. BMC Additional Commissioner Ratnakar Sahoo said preparations are underway for an enforcement drive against vendors using plastic sheets and covers, and appropriate action will be taken.

"Despite repeated warning and awareness drives, vendors continue to use polythene sheets. The recent fire incident is a stark reminder of their hazards. We will soon launch an enforcement drive across the City and take strict action against vendors using polythene sheets and covers to prevent such incidents in the future," Sahoo said.

He added, "Polythene sheets have also enabled makeshift vendors to encroach on roads, causing congestion. This drive will address that issue as well."

CULTURAL CELEBRATION: Artistes showcase traditional dance on the second day of Mayurbhanj Utsav at Utkal Mandap, in Bhubaneswar, Saturday PIC:BIKASH NAYAK

Coordination meet reviews Maha Shivratri prep

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 31: A coordination committee meeting was held Saturday at the Circuit House here to review preparations for the upcoming Maha Shivratri festival of Lord Lingaraj. The meeting was chaired by Khurda District Collector Amrit Ruturaj.

It was attended by Bhubaneswar–Ekamra MLA Babu Singh, BMC Mayor Sulochana Das, temple servitors, officials of the Lingaraj Temple Administration, representatives of

various voluntary organisations, and senior district and civic authorities.

At the outset, Additional District Magistrate (Bhubaneswar) Ramesh Chandra Jena welcomed the participants and presented the draft proposals. It was informed that Jagar Yatra will be observed on February 15, with the Lingaraj Temple opening at 3 am for essential rituals. Servitors were urged to cooperate to ensure timely completion of rituals as per the fixed schedule.

For the convenience of devotees within the temple premises, barricading and beautification work have been entrusted to the Archaeological Survey Department. The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) will handle illumination of the temple surroundings, cleaning of Mauni Ghat, setting up of primary medical centres, deployment of ambulances, installation of signage, and construction of temporary toilets.

The meeting also reviewed arrangements for devotee sheds, power supply, drinking water, police deployment, traffic management, law and order, fire safety, information centres, health and sanitation services, emergency medical units, and deployment of Red Cross and other voluntary organisations.

1st village-level meet on TP Scheme–1 in Baranga block

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, Jan 31: The Cuttack Development Authority (CDA) Saturday held its first village-level stakeholder public meeting on the proposed Town Planning Scheme–1 at the Baranga Block Office. The meeting saw active participation from landowners of Ratagarh-Lenkasahi and Chandiprasad villages, reflecting strong public engagement in the planning process.

The meeting was chaired by CDA Vice-Chairman Kirandeep Kaur Sahota and attended by Secretary Sweta Kumar Dash, Assistant Town Planner-cum-Nodal Officer of the TP Scheme Bishnu Prasad Sahoo, Administrative Officer Janak Kumar Nayak, and other senior CDA officials.

The meeting aimed to discuss issues related to land, planning proposals, development provisions and the allotment policy under Town Planning Scheme–1. Sahoo outlined the salient features of the scheme, including planned infrastructure development, improved road connectivity, provision of public amenities and orderly urban growth. Landowners were encouraged to share their views, suggestions and concerns during the interactive session.

Addressing the gathering, Sahota emphasised CDA's commitment to transparent governance and inclusive planning, stating that public participation is vital to the successful implementation of town planning schemes. Officials assured landowners that their feedback would be duly considered during the formulation and execution of the scheme.

DRIEMS CONVOCATION

'True success lies in integrity & service'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 31: Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati Saturday said that true success in life is defined not by position, power or wealth, but by integrity, compassion, humility and service, adding that being a good human being is the highest achievement.

Addressing the second Convocation Ceremony of DRIEMS University in Cuttack, the Governor urged graduating students to accord equal importance to character and academic excellence. He said knowledge without values is incomplete and stressed that honesty, empathy and responsibility should guide their personal and professional lives.

Congratulating the graduating students, Kambhampati described the convocation as a moment of achievement, reflection and new beginnings. He said the ceremony marked the transition from guided learning to independent responsibility and from student life to professional and civic life.

The Governor expressed his pleasure at sharing the platform with the chief guest, Lalit Mansingh, former Foreign Secretary of India, and lauded his distinguished contribution to India's foreign policy and global standing. He also congratulated Padma Shri awardees Tulasi Munda and Damayanti Beshra on receiving honorary degrees, describing them as inspiring symbols of service, education, social reform, and the preservation of tribal culture and identity.

Referring to rapid global changes driven by technology, artificial intelligence, climate change and evolving social structures, the Governor said the future belongs to those who learn continuously, adapt quickly and act responsibly.

In this context, he highlighted the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 as a visionary initiative to prepare youth for 21st-century challenges through multidisciplinary education, skill development, ethics and holistic growth.

Commending DRIEMS University for embracing the spirit of NEP 2020, the Governor lauded its journey from a single engineering programme to a reputed multidisciplinary university.

He urged graduates to pursue lifelong learning, face failures with courage, treat success with humility, and use their skills for the larger good, contributing to the vision of a Viksit Odisha and Viksit Bharat.

Mansingh also addressed the occasion, while university VC Prakash Kumar Hota delivered the welcome address.

TMCC, RCM hosts Speak Fest 2026

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 31: Toastmasters Community Club, Bhubaneswar (TMCC), in collaboration with Regional College of Management, Bhubaneswar (RCM), hosted its annual flagship event, 'Speak Fest 2026' at RCM campus here. Focused on spreading awareness on public speaking, the event was a vibrant convergence of learning, networking, and interactive activities for the Bhubaneswar community.

The event was graced by eminent dignitaries including Orissa High Court Senior Advocate Mrinalini Padhi, RCM Group Director Pritam Pal, Bakul Foundation head Sujit Mohapatra and Ashwini Group Director (Finance) Suma Devi Dash. Members from leading organisations such as TCS, Tata Steel, Microsoft, Cognizant, and Sun Pharma, along with students from premier institutions including XIM, KIIT, ITER, and Utkal University, also participated. The dignitaries highlighted the importance of communication skills during a spirited panel discussion and applauded the model of Toastmasters as a friendly, economic, and effective platform that can create proficient speakers and leaders.

This edition of Speak Fest witnessed more than 200 participants ranging from students to corporate employees to entrepreneurs with a shared need to understand the nuances of public speaking and advance their communication and leadership skills in an empowering environment.

OHPC & UBI sign MoU for staff salary accounts

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 31: Odisha Hydro Power Corporation Limited (OHPC) Saturday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Union Bank of India (UBI) at Lok Seva Bhawan to introduce a customised Union Super Salary Account for OHPC employees. The MoU signing ceremony was held in the presence of Agriculture & Farmers' Empowerment Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Energy Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo.

Among other dignitaries present were Energy department Principal Secretary Vishal Kumar Dev; Additional Secretary, Energy department, Saidutta Biplab Keshari Pradhan; OHPC Directors Pranab Kumar Mohanty (Finance), Sandeep Patnaik (HR) and Amiya Kumar Mohanty (Operation); and, General Manager and Zonal Head, UBI Hare Krishna Das, along with other senior officials of OHPC and UBI.

On behalf of OHPC, Gagan Bihari Moharana, SGM (Finance), and N Barik, DGM, representing UBI, signed the MoU.

As per the MoU provisions, each OHPC employee will receive personal accident insurance cover of ₹1.20 crore, along with an additional term life insurance cover of ₹20 lakh and an annual hospital cash benefit of ₹30,000. Employees will also be issued a zero-balance savings bank account with a RuPay Select debit card, offering additional accidental insurance cover of ₹15 lakh. The card includes annual lifestyle benefits worth ₹75,000 at no extra cost, such as free airport lounge access, quarterly health check-ups and free transactions.

Singh Deo and Vishal Kumar Dev appreciated the steps taken by OHPC in association with the bank for the welfare of OHPC employees.

WOMEN-LED URBAN MOBILITY

20 drivers leave for EV bus training in Pune

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 31: In a significant move to promote women-led urban mobility, the Capital Region Urban Transport (CRUT)—Odisha government's flagship and most reliable public transport system—has begun inducting women drivers for its Ama Bus services, aiming to enhance inclusivity and empower women in the public transport sector.

As part of the first phase of this pioneering initiative, 20 women drivers with valid Heavy Motor Vehicle (HMV) licences have been selected for advanced professional training in Pune. The trainees departed for Pune by flight Saturday to undergo specialised training designed to enhance their skills in modern city bus operations, including safe driving practices, passenger management,

and handling technologically equipped buses, marking a key step in strengthening women's participation in urban public transport.

Prior to their departure, the women drivers were felicitated by Housing & Urban Development Minister Krushna Chandra Mahapatra and the department's Principal Secretary Usha Padhee, who extended their best wishes and encouraged them to complete the training successfully and emerge as role models in public transport services.

The 14-day advanced training programme, scheduled from February 2 to February 15, will be held at the OEM EKKA Mobility plant in Pune, with sponsorship and technical support from GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit).

The comprehensive programme will focus on Electric Vehicle (EV) bus handling, advanced driving techniques, safety protocols, and operational excellence, equipping the trainees with the skills required to efficiently operate modern city buses.

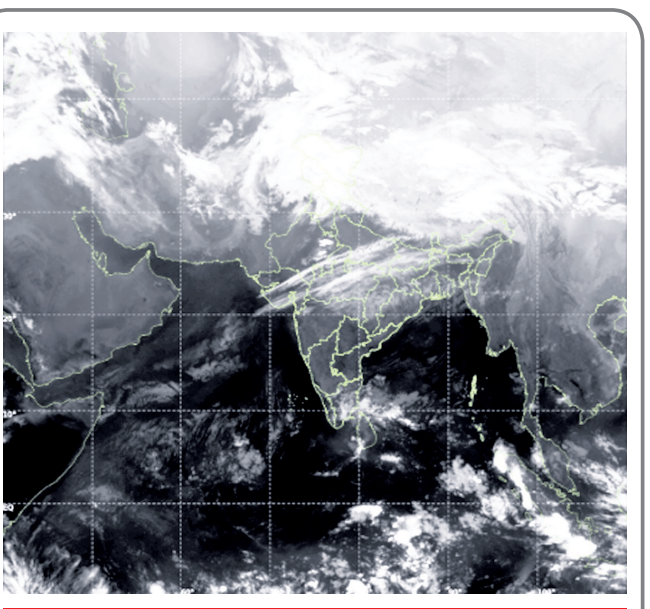
The women drivers are expected to return February 17, ready to contribute to a more inclusive and technologically advanced public transport system. CRUT Managing Director Sanjay Biswal and General Manager Sahadev Samadhia, along with other officials and dignitaries, were present at the felicitation ceremony held in the third-floor conference hall of Kharavela Bhawan.

They encouraged the trainees and reaffirmed CRUT's commitment to skill development, gender inclusion, and the continued strengthening of urban public transport services across the Capital Region.

CLASSIFIED

AFFIDAVIT

I Smt. Kalyani Pradhan, W/o-Pabitra Kumar Nayak, At/PO-Sikrida, Via-Nuagaon, Dist.-Nayagarh, Odisha, PIN-752083 declare by this Affidavit No.-9135 dated-05.05.2024 that now onward I shall be known as Kalyani Pradhan for all future purposes.



WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	29.6°	27.6°
Min Temp	16.8°	15.4°
Humidity	87%	89%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

FORECAST

Dry weather likely to prevail over the districts of Odisha

413 missing minors, women rescued in 'Op Anweshan'

POST NEWS NETWORK

As many as 349 women, 58 girls and 6 boys were rescued in 10 days during the drive

Chhatrapur, Jan 31: Ganjam police district rescued 413 missing minors and women in its special search and rescue operation drive under the flagship 'Operation Anweshan'.

As per reports, as many as 349 women, 58 girls and 6 boys were rescued in 10 days during the drive. All police stations across the police district actively engaged when the Superintendent of Police Suvendu Kumar Patra launched the operation 21st January. Kabisuryanagar police traced the highest number of missing cases, rescuing 44 women and children, including one minor boy whereas their Chhatrapur counterparts rescued 41 females, including 3 minor girls. Bhanjanagar and Purushottampur PS traced and rescued 31 and 28 women and children respectively. Similarly, Hinjilicut PS have rescued 29 females, including minor girls while Tarasing rescued 25 missing women and minors, Polasara and Khallikote police found 24 each missing women and children. One of the minor boy from Khallikote, was rescued from Kerala after he went missing in 2015.

The Ganjam police said that the operation was meticulously coordinated between all the police stations that have resulted in successful implementation and execution of the special drive. The police further said that all the missing and found minors and women were safely reunited with their families and the search & rescuing of missing persons will be conducted in future as well.

Class IX student stabbed by senior over love affair

POST NEWS NETWORK

Balasore/Remuna, Jan 31: A Class IX student was seriously injured after he was allegedly attacked with a sharp weapon by a Class X student inside the premises of Remuna High School in Balasore district Saturday, reportedly over a love-related dispute, police said.

The incident took place during the PM SHRI programme celebrations, when most teachers were engaged in festival arrangements. Taking advantage of the situation, the accused allegedly brought a sharp weapon to the school through a classmate and, with the help of five to six other students, lured the victim to the rear side of the campus.

Police said the victim was taken to a toilet behind the western block of classrooms, where the accused attacked him, causing injuries to his head and hand. The injured student managed to escape and alerted a teacher, following which the school authorities immediately shifted him to Fakir Mohan Medical College and Hospital. Doctors said his condition is stable.

Preliminary investigation revealed that the accused was upset after a Class IX girl student, with whom he had earlier been in a relationship, became close to the victim. The accused allegedly carried out the attack in a fit of rage.

The accused student later surrendered at the police station and admitted his involvement. Police have seized the weapon and registered a case. Written complaints were filed by the acting headmistress and the victim's family. Senior revenue and education officials visited the school to review the incident.

Admin outreach to Kotia promises development and community trust

NARENDRA RAUT, OP

Koraput, Jan 31: In a continued effort to strengthen inclusive development and ensure effective delivery of welfare schemes in border areas, the Odisha government conducted an administrative field visit to several villages in the Kotia region. The outreach programme was aimed at reviewing developmental initiatives, interacting with local residents, and reinforcing trust in governance in this strategically important border belt.

The visit was led by Block Development Officer Ramakrushna Nayak, Tahasildar of Pottangi Debendra Dharua, Officer on Special Duty (OSD) Saurabh Dash, along with Kotia Gram Panchayat Sarpanch Liu Gemel. Officials visited villages including Neridivalsa, Dhulipadar and Upper Sembi to assess ground-level implementation of government programmes.

During the visit, the newly constructed community hall at Neridivalsa was formally inaugurated by the Sarpanch. The facility is expected to play a significant role in hosting social, cultural and developmental activities, thereby strengthening community participation and cohesion in the remote border village.

The administrative team also interacted with students of local schools and children enrolled in Anganwadi centres. Discussions focused on education, nutrition, health care and overall child development. Special attention was given to the challenges faced by children and service providers in tribal and border habitations. Officials appreciated the dedication of teachers and Anganwadi workers who continue to serve under difficult geographical conditions.

Such regular engagements are expected to ensure government benefits reach the grassroots while fostering confidence, unity and a sense of belongingness among residents of the Kotia border villages.

Four arrested with 6gm brown sugar

Jharsuguda: Jharsuguda police seized 6.36 grams of brown sugar and arrested four persons during a special drive under Operation Netra, officials said Saturday. Acting on a tip-off, Town police conducted a raid in the Bijunagar area, where the accused were allegedly involved in selling brown sugar. Two of the arrested persons were identified as Anurag Singh alias Manjay (35) from Ara village of Bhojpur district in Bihar, and Avinash Kumar alias Jitu (33) from Ghoshganj village of the same district. The other two accused are Mantu Dash of Purunabasti area in Jharsuguda town and Ananta Panda (52) of Maharudrapur village in Balasore district. Police said the two accused from Bihar had been staying in the area for a long time and were involved in the illegal narcotics trade, with assistance from the local accused. The four were caught while they were allegedly selling brown sugar in Jharsuguda town Friday. A case has been registered, and all four accused were produced before court.

Police bust interstate cell phone racket; 21 held

DWARKA PRASAD PATNAIK, OP

Chhatrapur/Bhanjanagar, Jan 31: The Bhanjanagar police in Ganjam busted an interstate mobile phone theft racket apprehending 21 Bengali speaking persons in Bhanjanagar.

As informed by the Additional Superintendent of Police Ranjan Kumar Dey Saturday, about 1066 mobile phones, 1275 batteries, 425 cellphone motherboards, 5 tablets, imitation jewelries and ₹10000 cash were seized during raid conducted by the Bhanjanagar team.

The culprits, all of them residents of West Bengal, were forwarded to the court for further proceedings. Police have registered a case no. 92/2026, launching a probe looking for clues on international links between them and also to investigate further into the case.

SDPO Deepak Kumar Mishra said, suspicion arose among the locals who found a strange pattern in their lifestyle that did not match with their earnings. Police, on being informed, conducted raids and nabbed all of them. The culprits failed to provide any satisfactory response on the possessed valuables which then prompted the police officials arresting them instantly.

Mishra also warned the public through the press conference not to sell off their broken mobile phones to unknown people as parts of these phones that could well be used for illegal activities. He added that cellphone users should destroy their phones once they find it unfit instead of selling them to unknown people.

Centre clears ₹33cr for Bhanjanagar KV building

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhanjanagar, Jan 31: The Union government has approved ₹33.11 crore for building a new campus of Kendriya Vidyalaya in Bhanjanagar under Ganjam district. The money has been allotted to the Central Public Works department to develop the new premises. Tender will reportedly be finalised by the end of March this year and the construction will commence soon.

Parents and guardians have expressed gratitude to Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, Bhanjanagar MLA Pradyumna Kumar Nayak, Bhanjanagar Sub Collector-cum-president of the school Uma Shankar Behera and principal of the school Pradeep Kamanu.

Notably, Kendriya Vidyalaya, Bhanjanagar started running from an unused hostel building of the Upendra Bhanja College in 2010 with the efforts of the then MLA Bikram Keshari Arukha after approaching the UPA government at the Centre. Later, demand grew to shift the school to its own premises. Various plots were identified by the state government for construction of the school building but they were rejected by the central team describing them unsuitable.

However, a new plot near Bhanjanagar Regional Transport Office was given a final nod by the Central team to set up the new premises. The plot was handed over to the central school authorities after completing the land record formalities about three years ago. The project is expected to be completed before the commencement of new academic year in 2028 with an aim to accommodate eleventh and twelfth classes as well.

Unidentified charred body found in Ganjam

Sheragada: Police recovered a charred body from a vacant plot near Jagannath Bidyapitha at Bandhaguda under Sheragada block in Ganjam district Friday night. While the identity of the body has not been ascertained yet, preliminary investigation suggests he was murdered, allegedly by having his throat slit, before the body was doused in petrol and set on fire. Sheragada IIC Barendra Sial and Aska SDPO Santosh Jena visited the spot and seized the body. A scientific team, led by senior officer Nitesh Mishra, examined the site and collected forensic evidence. The body was sent to MKCG Medical College and Hospital in Berhampur, for post-mortem. Authorities said the exact cause of death and the identity of the deceased will be determined after forensic and post-mortem reports. A case has been registered, and further investigation is ongoing.

Minor girl ends life over morphed photo threat

POST NEWS NETWORK

Dasamantapur, Jan 31: A 17-year-old college girl allegedly died by suicide after being mentally harassed by a group of youths who threatened to circulate morphed photographs linking her with a male friend, police said.

The incident was reported from Bageipadar village under Gadiaguda panchayat in Dasamantapur block of Koraput district. According to the family, four youths allegedly threatened the girl that they will circulate her purportedly fabricated photographs and spread false rumours making those go viral in the village, which reportedly caused her severe mental distress.

Unable to cope with the pressure, the girl allegedly ended her life by hanging at her residence Friday morning. Her family lodged a written complaint at Dasamantapur police station, citing call records as evidence and seeking strict action against all the accused.

Police seized the body and sent it to Koraput district headquarters hospital (DHH) for post-mortem. An unnatural death case has been registered. Further investigation is underway, and the exact cause of death will be confirmed after receipt of the post-mortem report, police said.

Utkal University of Culture wins UTSAH–2026

Balasore: As the 39th AIU Inter-University East Zone Youth Festival concluded, the grand valedictory ceremony UTSAH–2026 title was won by Utkal University of Culture, Bhubaneswar. The event was hosted by Fakir Mohan University, marking the successful end of a vibrant celebration of youth talent and cultural unity. Presiding over the ceremony, Vice-Chancellor Santosh Kumar Tripathy praised the discipline, creativity and artistic excellence displayed by students, underlining the role of youth festivals in fostering cultural values, leadership and national integration. Chief guest Suryawanshi Mayur Vikash, collector and district magistrate of Balasore, congratulated the organisers and participants, highlighting the importance of cultural platforms in shaping socially responsible and creative citizens. Guest of honour Shiv Malviya, sub-collector, Balasore, lauded the energetic performances and the festival's reflection of India's cultural diversity. AIU observer Manish Jangra and technical observer Deepak Mishra commended the transparent evaluation process and efficient management. Chairman, PG Council Bhaskar Behera, and registrar Kukumina Das also addressed the gathering. While the championship trophy was won by Utkal University of Culture, it was followed by Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee University, Ranchi, and Vinoba Bhave University, Hazaribag as the first and second runners up respectively. The festival saw participation from 19 universities across Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal, with 776 students competing across cultural disciplines.

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED

See Section 84 BNSS

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person **Bijaya Manjhi @ Birju S/o Hidinga Manjhi R/o Village Mirada, P.S. Gudari, Distt. Raygada, Orissa** has Committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case **FIR No. 122/2019 U/s 20/25/29 NDPS Act, P.S. Crime Branch, Delhi** and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused **Bijaya Manjhi @ Birju** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused **Bijaya Manjhi @ Birju** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused **Bijaya Manjhi @ Birju** of case **FIR No. 122/2019 U/s 20/25/29 NDPS Act, P.S. Crime Branch, Delhi** is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before **10.03.2026.**

By Order
Sh. Virender Singh
Additional Session Judge (NDPS)
Central District
Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi

DP/1251/Crime/2026 (Court Matter)

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT, SDH, BHANJANAGAR

Walk-in-interview for the post of Medical Officer, ART centre, SDH, Bhanjanagar (Ganjam)

Date & Time of walk in interview : 26.02.2026 (Thursday) at 12 noon
Venue : O/o Superintendent, SDH, Bhanjanagar, Ganjam
Document Verification : 10.00 A.M. onwards
For detail information visit to the website www.osacs.nic.in

Sd./- Superintendent, SDH, Bhanjanagar

केनरा बैंक Canara Bank
भारत सरकार का उपक्रम A Government of India Undertaking
सिंडिकेट Syndicate

Regional Office : Cuttack
Shreeji Complex, Plot No.: 840/858 & 840/859, Cuttack Town, Unit No.-17 Machhua Bazar, Cuttack-753001

DEMAND NOTICE

Notice issued under Section 13(2) of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002

Demand Notice u/s. 13(2) of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 issued by the CANARA BANK as Secured Creditor against the Borrower(s) & Guarantor(s) of its SME Cuttack Branch details of which are mentioned in the table below.

You, the below mentioned Borrower(s)/Guarantor(s)/Mortgagor(s) have committed default in repayment of loan as mentioned in above table with further interest at the agreed rate availed from our branch as mentioned below. The bank had issued notice under the said Act to you to repay the outstanding amount in the below mentioned table. Due to irregularity in repayment of outstanding dues, the debt has been classified as Non-Performing Asset. By this notice you are hereby called upon to discharge the entire liabilities as on date with future interest thereon in the above account to us as secured creditor, within **60 days** from the date of this notice, falling which we shall be constrained to exercise all or any of our rights conferred under section 13(4) and other provision of the above Security Interest Act.-2002. You are required to note that in terms of Sec. 13(13) of the said Security Interest Act, you shall not, after receipt of this notice, transfer by way of sale, lease or otherwise, any of the secured assets mentioned below referred to without prior written consent of our Bank. You are also put on notice that any contravention of the injuction/restraint as provided under the said Security Interest Act-2002 is an offence. This notice is issued without prejudice to any other rights available to our Bank under the above Security Interest Act-2002 and/or any other law in force. This is without Prejudice to any other rights available to us under the Act and/or other law in force. Please comply with the demand under this notice and avoid all unpleasantness. In case of Non-compliance, further needful action will be resorted to, holding you liable for all costs and consequence. In case the Borrower(s)/Guarantor(s)/Mortgagor(s) fails to discharge liability in full within the period specified in sub-section (2), the secured creditor may take recourse to one or more of the following measures to recover his secured debt, namely. a) Take possession of the secured assets of the borrower including the right to transfer by way to lease, assignment or sale for realizing the secured asset. b) Take over the management of the business of the borrower including the right to transfer by way of lease, assignment or sale for realizing the secured asset: Provided that the right to transfer by way of lease, assignment or sale shall be exercised only where the substantial part of the business of the borrower is held as security for the debt. Provided further that where the management of whole of the business of part of the business is severable, that secured creditor shall take over the management of such business of the borrower which is relatable to the security for the debt and under other applicable provisions of the said Act.

SME CUTTACK BRANCH / Name & Address of the Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s) / Mortgagor(s) / A/c. No.	(A) Loan/Limit Sanctioned (B) Date of NPA/Recall Notice (C) Date of Demand Notice	Total Liabilities due on specified date	Description of the property/ies mortgaged to the Bank
Borrower: M/s Ambika Store, Prop.: Shri Ranjan Sahoo, At: Holding No. 32, Ward No. 24, Malgodown, Cuttack, Odisha, PIN-753003 / **Borrower & Mortgagor: Shri Ranjan Sahoo,** S/o- Daitari Sahoo, At: Anantavihar, Cuttack Sadar, Kanheipur, Cuttack, Odisha, PIN-753004 / **A/c. No.: 80251400000747, 170001109469 & 181038266180.**	(A) (SOD SyndMSE) ₹50,00,000/- / GECL 1.0 (Extension) ₹4,00,000/- / (KCCS-KRISHI MITRA) ₹50,000/- (B) 25.01.2026 (C) 30.01.2026	₹53,26,306.03 as on 30.01.2026 plus interest & costs thereon	All that part & parcel of the property consisting of Plot No.: 1131(P) and Plot No.: 1132(P) at Hal Khata No.: 256, corresponding to Mutation Khata No.: 631/207, Plot No.: 1131/3262, Area: Ac.0.023dec. and Plot No.: 1132/3263, Area: Ac.0.023dec., **Total Area: Ac.0.046dec.,** Tahasil: Cuttack Sadar, PS: Cuttack Sadar, Thana No.: 41, Mouza: Urali, Kissam: Homestead within the Registration Sub-District: Cuttack and Dist.: Cuttack, standing in the name of **Shri Ranjan Sahoo.** Bounded by- North: Sub Plot No. 3641/2 & 3641/3, South: Road, East: Sub Plot No. 3646/4, West: Sub Plot No. 3646/2.

Place: Cuttack, Date: 31.01.2026
Authorised Officer, Canara Bank

बैंक ऑफ़ बड़ौदा Bank of Baroda

REGIONAL OFFICE:CUTTACK
2nd Floor, Chalachitra Bhawan,Buxibazar,Cuttack-753001,
Tel.- 8093047218, E-mail: legal.cuttack@bankofbaroda.com

DEMAND NOTICE
(Under Sub Section (2) of Section 13 of the SARFAESI Act 2002)

Demand Notice u/s.13(2) of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 is issued by **Bank of Baroda** as Secured Creditor against the following Borrowers of the Branch.

PARADEEP BRANCH / Name & Address of Borrower/Guarantor	NPA Date / 13(2) Date / Notice Return Reason	Facility / Limit (₹)	Rate of Interest	Total Dues
Borrower: M/s. Abhishek Motors, Prop.: Smt. Jhili Gochhayat, At: Talpada, Rahama, Dist.: Jagatsinghpur, PIN-754140, Odisha / **Guarantor: Mr. Tanmaya Kumar Senapati,** At: Talpada, Rahama, Dist.: Jagatsinghpur, PIN-754140, Odisha	14.10.2025 / 05.01.2026 / Addressee Refused to Accept/ Addressee not found	Cash Credit / ₹24,50,000/-	11.35%	₹ 25,48,198.43 as on 05.01.2025 (inclusive of interest upto 30.09.2025

Description of Mortgaged property: Equitable Mortgage of Land & Building situated over Plot No.: 2179, Khata No.: 234, Area: Ac.0.02dec and Plot No.: 2179/3, Khata No.: 234/104, Area: Ac.0.04dec., aggregating Total Area: Ac.0.06dec. at Mouza: Talapada, P.O: Rahama, Tahasil: Kujanga, Dist.: Jagatsinghpur, in the name of **Mr. Tanmaya Kumar Senapati (Guarantor),** Bounded by East: Maheswar Senapati, West: Subhakar Senapati, North: Minu Senapati, South: Govt. Land

You have committed default in repayment of loan mentioned above with further interest at the agreed rate availed from our Branch as mentioned above. The bank has issued notice under the said Act to you to repay the outstanding amount in the above mentioned table. The Demand Notice sent to you by registered post but it has been returned with the reason mentioned above. Again you have committed default in payment. You are called upon to pay the dues together with interest within **60 days** from the date of this notice failing which Bank will be constrained to exercise Right of Enforcement of Security Interest as against the secured asset given in the schedule of Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002. We hereby give you a notice that in terms of sub-section (13) of section 13 of the said Act, you are barred from transferring the secured asset mentioned above by way of sale, lease or otherwise other than in the ordinary course of business without prior written consent of the Bank. We further invite your attention to sub section (8) of section 13 of the said Act in terms of which you may redeem the secured assets, if the amount of dues together with all costs, charges and expenses incurred by the Bank is tendered by you, at any time before the date of publication of notice for public auction / inviting quotations / tender / private treaty. Please note that after publication of the notice as above, your right to redeem the secured assets will not be available. This Notice is without prejudice to any other right remedy available to the Bank including initiation of legal action.

Place: Cuttack
Date: 31.01.2026
Authorised Officer
Bank of Baroda

To listen to some devout people, one would imagine that God never laughs

SRI AUROBINDO

Lawless Law

As a democratic society, it is expected that India's authorities follow the rule of law. This includes the assumption that governance will not be arbitrary, especially when it comes to criminal law. This element is important because criminal law has the power to destroy lives as a judge recently reminded a group of college students who had participated in a protest meet.

Why individuals attending a protest should be charged with a crime in the first place is a separate issue, but that is how things are here. The casual application of criminal law by the state and then the individual's struggle to fight for an extended period of time is just assumed by Indians to be the way things are. This is special to us: It cannot be natural that in the mother of democracy, citizens are afraid of the police and the courts and the state in general. There is nothing new in this and 'police ka chakkar' is a term cinema has used for as long as one can remember.

What I wanted to discuss was something different, which has taken root and is now a part of India's democracy. Two headlines from this week will illustrate what is meant. The first is: 'Allahabad HC criticises Uttar Pradesh Police for practice of shooting accused persons in legs'. The subhead reads: 'Such conduct is wholly impermissible, as the power to punish lies exclusively within the domain of the courts', the bench said.'

Aakar Patel

It cannot be natural that in the mother of democracy, citizens are afraid of the police and the courts and the state in general. There is nothing new in this and 'police ka chakkar' is a term cinema has used for as long as one can remember

The second headline is 'Cases under Uttarakhand's conversion law fall in court: 7 years, 5 full trials, all 5 acquittals'.

In the matter of the first, the UP government put out the numbers in July last year. It had shot 9,467 people in the leg since 2017. That is to say about three people daily for nine years have been shot in the leg in UP by the police.

The court made the following observations: That people were being shot to please superior officers or to punish individuals without process. The court said this was encroachment into the judicial domain and could not be accepted. On the recording of the statement, and on the investigation, the court noted that the police had not been following the Supreme Court's guidelines. The court was concerned about police officers pressuring judges, particularly chief judicial magistrates, to pass specific orders.

The judge said the court could not allow Uttar Pradesh to become a police state.

A state that kills people in custody, that maims those in custody, that destroys private property without due process and by overruling the justice system, including the Supreme Court, is apparently not already a police state.

The second report was headlined: 'Cases under Uttarakhand's conversion law fall in court: 7 years, 5 full trials, all 5 acquittals'. The reference is to Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2018, the first of several state laws introduced and legislated by the BJP after the conspiracy theory of 'love jihad' began to be circulated.

It criminalises marriages between Muslims and Hindus if one of the partners converts, but says that 'if any person comes back to his ancestral religion' then this shall not be deemed conversion, without defining what 'ancestral religion' means. Its meaning is that conversions to Hinduism will not be counted as conversion.

Once a complaint of love jihad marriage has been filed, a district magistrate will then conduct an inquiry through the police 'with regard to real intention, purpose and cause of that proposed religion conversion'.

Those who change their faith without applying to the government 'in the prescribed proforma' and without the consent of the government after the police inquiry face a year in jail.

The law has been in place for seven years. In this time, five cases have completed trial, and in all of them the accused were acquitted. Seven more were dismissed during trial.

The report said that 'it is clear from court records that evidentiary standards have often not been met, consensual relationships criminalised, and there are procedural lapses in investigation and prosecution.'

The newspaper reporting this editorialised its findings under the grand headline 'In Uttarakhand, judiciary protects citizens from executive overreach'. This is absurd, because the punishment they have been put through it real. As youngsters are wont to say, the word 'protects' is doing a lot of work here.

What are we to conclude from what we are seeing happening around us in our time? Two things. First that authorities across India are deliberately violating the law to align themselves with what the BJP governments want. They are doing so with confidence in the knowledge that there will be no accountability and indeed, they may well be rewarded for doing so as the UP court has observed.

The second thing is to return to where we started and ask what happens when a democratic society's authorities deliberately violate rule of law, particularly criminal law? There are short term and long term consequences of this and both are inevitable.

The short term consequences are those we read about: lives ruined by the actions of government. The long term ones are those which affect the nation and society as a whole. A nation that lies to itself about being a rule of law democracy will not end up where rule of law is intended to take societies.

WISDOM CORNER

I dream of painting and then I paint my dream

VINCENT VAN GOGH

I am like a folk painter. Paint and move ahead

MF HUSAIN

As a well-spent day brings happy sleep, so a life well spent brings happy death

LEONARDO DA VINCI

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- **1923:** The private army of Blackshirts that had helped Benito Mussolini come to power in Italy was officially transformed into a national militia, the Voluntary Fascist Militia for National Security.
- **1946:** Politician and diplomat Trygve Lie was elected the first secretary-general of the United Nations.
- **1979:** The spacecraft Voyager 1 photographed Jupiter from a distance of 20.3 million miles (32.7 million km). Voyager 1, along with its companion Voyager 2, helped to document details about the gas giants and their moons.

FOCUS MAHARASHTRA

SHIFTING SANDS

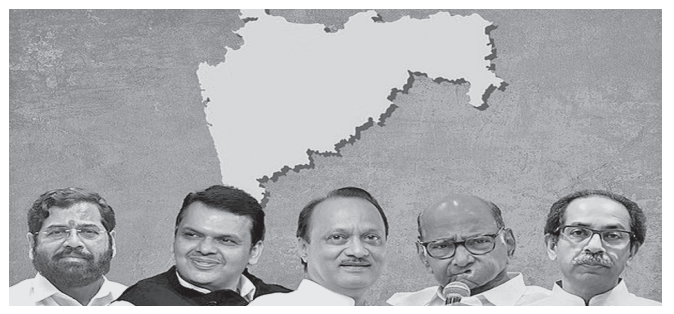
Lekha Rattanani

THE SUDDEN DEATH OF AJIT PAWAR COMPLICATES THE POLITICAL PICTURE IN MAHARASHTRA IN INNUMERABLE WAYS

A sudden death of a top politician in an air crash naturally causes deep distress and brings big uncertainties in the political arena, particularly when the politician is in the saddle but placed uncomfortably in a difficult political alliance in a key state. This is the broad picture that stares Maharashtra with the death of Ajit Pawar in an air crash this week in Baramati, the home ground of his uncle and senior leader Sharad Pawar. There is much speculation on the circumstances leading to the crash, but it is best not to fall prey to surmises, conjectures and quick conclusions. Investigations must be allowed to take their course and brought to their logical conclusions.

All sides must be investigated, including whether the correct and timely weather data and concomitant advisories on landing or diverting the flight were given to the flight crew of the ill-fated Learjet45.

That said, the sudden death of Ajit Pawar complicates the political picture in Maharashtra in innumerable ways. There is of course the immediate question of how Ajit Pawar's flock of 41 MLAs and many other supporters would lean with his passing. Will they for sheer emotional reasons turn back to Sharad Pawar, from whose Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) they broke off in the first place in their quest for power and new frontiers with the BJP? The BJP surely would want to keep the government running with NCP support, but what are the implications of winning this support if it is not forthcoming for any reason and given the speculation that Ajit Pawar was open to returning to his uncle's fold sooner rather than later.



There is the immediate question of how Ajit Pawar's flock of 41 MLAs and many other supporters would lean with his passing. Will they for sheer emotional reasons turn back to Sharad Pawar?

Without making any comments on the politics of Ajit Pawar, the pressures that would have forced him to break up with his uncle were already in some ways playing in the reverse in recent months. It is said that a mix of family pressures and pragmatic calculations to return to the fold were already in the air. Recently, when 29 civic bodies went to the polls in Maharashtra, the Pawars contested the Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad elections together, giving rise to speculation about the two factions re-uniting. The Pawars draw much of their political strength from Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad. Pune district is their home turf. Elections to 12 Zilla Parishad and 125 Panchayat Samitis are due. Campaigning for the polls to be held on February 05 was what brought Ajit Pawar to Baramati, which falls in Pune district and is a prominent agrarian, industrial and educational hub some 100 Km from Pune city.

Though the NCP (as also the Shiv Sena) was split in the clear light of the machinations of the BJP, affection in the family for Ajit Pawar and respect for Sharad Pawar was untouched by this ugly split. Supriya Sule, Sharad Pawar's daughter and Lok Sabha MP, continued to persevere and worked to keep the family intact even if political realities dictated otherwise.

Since the 2019 Assembly polls, the state has seen changes in government that did not involve elections. In 2023, after he broke away taking a faction of the NCP with him, Ajit Pawar returned to the fold. He then split again, this time engaging in a controversial, extremely brief swearing in. After the November 2024 Assembly elections, he retained his place as deputy Chief Minister, sharing it with Eknath Shinde, who was relegated to deputy Chief Minister. It is well known that an unhappy Shinde, who earlier served as Chief Minister after dramatically splitting the Shiv Sena and breaking away from Uddhav Thackeray, has been potential trouble for Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. The CM has had to play a delicate balancing act between all the associates of his BJP-led Mahayuti alliance.

Matters are further complicated now because if the NCP MLAs break base, the BJP will not like it, the Pawars will be watching, and more importantly, whatever happens here will influence the way the breakaway Shiv Sena of Eknath Shinde takes its course of action for the medium and longer term. Terms between the Uddhav Thackeray Shiv Sena and the Eknath Shinde Shiv Sena are not cordial. There is bitterness here, but who is to say what will transpire if dynamics change and new realities emerge in the arena for power play that Maharashtra has become. This is the price the State pays for becoming a bitter battleground that saw the alarming and unprecedented games of the powers that be engineering a split, taking MLAs away to Surat and then to Assam as it conjured up plans to form a government in the State, and then taking the new alignments into the polls. This is one State that many will be watching for signals on what it means to run governments with breakaway factions and engineer new alliances.

The writer is the Managing Editor of The Billion Press

SPECTRUM THE DURAND LINE

Axis of security crisis in South Asia

Piotr Opali ski

PAKISTANI-AFGHAN BORDER REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST UNSTABLE AREAS IN SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA

Relations between Pakistan and Taliban-ruled Afghanistan are currently among the most unstable elements of South Asia's security architecture. Increasing border incidents, escalating political tensions, and growing activity of extremist groups indicate that the Islamabad-Kabul conflict has transcended the framework of incidental crises and taken on the character of a chronic regional threat. The beginning of 2026 confirmed this trend, bringing further militarization of the border, continued trade blockades, and a deepening diplomatic impasse.

The consequences of the crisis extend beyond bilateral relations, affecting the interests of China, Iran, Russia, India, and Central Asian states, as well as the security of regional trade routes. Its axis is defined by the Durand Line – the border drawn in the 19th century between Afghanistan and British India, and since 1947, Pakistan. It divides ethnically Pashtun lands and has never been formally recognised by Afghan governments, thus failing to serve a stabilising function. It has become a permanent arena of political, military, and narrative rivalry, where state, tribal, and ideological interests intersect, as well as Islamabad's strategic aspirations and the Taliban's need to consolidate power.

Islamabad treats securing the border not only as an element of protecting internal security but also as an instrument for managing escalation with Kabul, particularly in the context of the growing activity of the Pakistani Taliban movement (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan – TTP). In turn, the Afghan Taliban are using the dispute with Pakistan to strengthen their internal legitimacy and social mobilisation, although their ability to effectively control the border remains limited by the fragmentation of the power apparatus and the autonomy of local tribal structures.

Armed clashes regularly occur along the border, particularly in Chaman, Spin Boldak, Kurram, and Angoor Adda regions. Tensions stem from three overlapping factors: Kabul's questioning of the border's legitimacy, tightening of Pakistani control, and use of these areas by the TTP as an operational base.

The border has also become an arena for narrative rivalry. Kabul portrays Pakistan's actions as an attempt to impose a colonial order, while Islamabad interprets the Taliban's stance as indirectly tolerating terrorist threats. The escalation was deepened by Pakistani airstrikes in Paktika and Khost provinces after the Peshawar attack in November 2025, as well as subsequent ground and air operations in Afghanistan, resulting in losses among TTP fighters, civilian casualties, and the temporary closure of border crossings.

In 2024–2025, the crisis also encompassed economic and demographic dimensions. Pakistan introduced restrictive visa regulations, transit restrictions, and mass deportations of Afghans without valid identity documents – over 1.5 million people. For Islamabad, this was part of a strategy of conditionality and deterrence, justified by security concerns and the activities of the TTP (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan). Beginning 2026, the pressure continued, and the prolonged closure of the main border crossings – Torkham and Spin Boldak – paralyzed legal trade.

The most persistent source of the crisis remains the activity of the TTP and Kabul's limited ability to neutralize it. The TTP operates in a decentralized, tribal environment, often beyond the real reach of the state apparatus. Between 2023 and 2025, the group evolved from a loose coalition into a more coordinated cross-border network, focusing on military targets and testing Pakistan's deterrence capabilities.

In December 2025, TTP leadership council, the Rahbari Shura, approved a new administrative and operational structure for 2026. This includes, among other things:establishment of two new management zones, so-called shadow provinces – the Western Zone (Balochistan) and the Central Zone, each with its own military commander-in-chief. New units were also brought under TTP control, including the Kashmir province, and Gilgit was divided.

Four scenarios are possible in the next two years. One, continuation of controlled escalation – maintaining pressure at the border, deportations, limited goods and passenger transit; Two, Multilateral mediation – temporary freezing of escalation with the support of Qatar, Turkey, China, Russia, and selective involvement of the US; implementation of monitoring and crisis communication mechanisms; Three, Technical de-escalation – limiting TTP activity through operational and intelligence actions, without full normalization of bilateral relations and four, regionalization of the crisis – involvement of external actors, further fragmentation of trade routes, and deepening of cross-border instability.

Indeed, the Pakistani-Afghan confrontation is structural and long-term. The lack of credible dialogue formats and effective escalation control mechanisms means that the Pakistani-Afghan border remains one of the most unstable areas in South and Central Asia. Any international mediation will be hampered by asymmetrical expectations and limited capacity to enforce agreements. The risks are systemic and extend beyond the regional dimension, indirectly affecting the security of the wider Eurasian region.

The writer is expert, Centre for International Relations, Poland

INFA

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa Post are most welcome to contribute letters (100 words), articles and columns (between 600-1000 words). Contributors are requested to send their contact numbers and full postal address/email ID. They may also send in their valuable comments, opinion and suggestions, preferably by email, to:
edit@orissapost.com

OrissaPOST HERE . NOW
B-15, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

Digital restraint

Sir, The recently published Economic Survey's push for age-based access to the social media at the centre of public policy is timely. Unchecked screen exposure is rapidly emerging as a public health challenge, undermining mental health, academic performance and workplace productivity. By formally recognising digital addiction, the Survey shifts the debate from moral panic to evidence-based intervention. Its proposals—age-appropriate access limits, stronger platform accountability for age verification, simpler devices for children and reduced dependence on online classes—mirror a growing global consensus that technology must serve well-being, not merely engagement. For India, where smartphone penetration is accelerating and a vast young population is coming online early, digital restraint is no longer optional but necessary. The harder task lies ahead. Effective age verification, credible enforcement and safeguards against exclusion will test administrative capacity, particularly for poorer families that rely on shared devices and public connectivity. Even so, the Survey offers a balanced and forward-looking framework. It deserves national support..

N Sadhasiva Reddy, BANGALORE

Menopause clinics

Sir, Although menopause is a natural physical phenomenon for every woman it can drain her. Reduced hormonal levels can induce a host of physical, psychological and emotional changes besides curtailing her social interactions. From hot flashes to night sweats to severe mood swings, women in menopause experience diverse but difficult symptoms. Bone and heart issues can be long--term challenges. 'Menopause clinics' are not common to India. According to official reports, Maharashtra has setup menopause clinics in some government hospitals to exclusively offer physical treatment and emotional support to women in menopause. That various experts have been roped--in for consultation, counselling and screening for common menopausal health disorders is highly appreciable and emulatable. This model warrants immediate nationwide adoption to address the medical neglect and social stigma surrounding women's aging health.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

MCD razes encroaching structures in Anand Vihar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 31: The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) Saturday demolished several allegedly encroaching structures in the Anand Vihar area.

The move came at a Delhi High Court order, which called for the removal of encroachments from the multi-modal transit point.

January 22, the court ordered the removal of all encroachments at Anand Vihar transport hub, bringing to a close a long-running dispute over street vending and use of public space in one of the capital's busiest transit points.

Badal Kumar, MCD Deputy Commissioner, Shahdara South Zone, told PTI that at least 300 vendors encroaching upon public spaces were removed from the area.

"We will be keeping a vigilant eye on this area for the next few days so that it's not encroached upon again," he said.

He said that the civic body deployed three excavators, a towing truck, and at least 50 workers for the drive.

"Only 105 recognised vendors who hold provisional certificates of vending will be allowed. The court order will be implemented in a regulated manner, with mobile carts or temporary stalls at designated locations without blocking public spaces," Badal Kumar said.

According to officials, the case dates back to 2016, when the Mahila Hawkers Welfare Association approached the court seeking protection for 114 vendors operating near the Anand Vihar bus stand.

The court then granted interim relief, directing the MCD not to take coercive action against listed vendors pending a survey. Over the years, the scope of protection was narrowed through a series of clarifications.

In 2017, the court excluded vending on major roads, service roads, footpaths and the foot-over bridge, citing air pollution concerns and public safety. Similar protection was later extended to 72 members of the National Hawkers Association, subject to the same restrictions.

By 2026, the issue had escalated, and the MCD informed the court that the Town Vending Committee (TVC) survey found only 105 vendors eligible and that they were issued provisional certificates.

Officials said that the survey revealed the emergence of permanent structures, leading to congestion, blocked pathways and violations of civic design norms at the inter-state bus terminal, which serves lakhs of passengers daily through buses, Indian Railways, and the Delhi Metro. In its final order January 22, 2026, the court directed the MCD to remove all unauthorised structures after an eight-day notice period ending January 30.

The court also asked the MCD to prepare a comprehensive beautification and redevelopment plan for the area and submit it by March 10 for court review.

A pair of monkeys indulge in a playful banter, in New Delhi, Saturday

PTI PHOTO

DTTDC plans central Delhi facelift

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 31: The Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation (DTTDC) has drawn up a beautification plan for three prominent roundabouts in central Delhi, focusing on plantation, artistic features and modern lighting, officials said Saturday.

DTTDC has floated a tender worth about Rs 9.89 crore for carrying out the revamp at Filmistan Chowk, Jhandewalan Shakti Chowk and Vir Chandra Garhwal Chowk, with a three-month timeframe to complete the works. The plan will include development of landscaped lawns, planting of ornamental trees, shrubs and seasonal flowering plants, along with long-term maintenance of the green spaces.

The plan also features installation of signage and name plaques, decorative bollards, benches and waste bins to improve usability and visual appeal.

DTTDC has also proposed the creation of central iconic elements at the roundabouts, including sculptures or art installations placed on specially designed pedestals, with stone cladding and architectural finishes to give the sites a distinct identity. According to the DTTDC, hard landscaping works such as granite or sandstone paving, decorative concrete flooring, kerb stone installation and the construction of raised planter walls will also form a key part of the makeover.

The corporation has further planned to introduce water management systems, including drip irrigation lines, sprinklers and, where required, underground or overhead water storage tanks to support the landscaped areas.

DTTDC has also emphasised enhanced illumination and safety, with provisions for decorative LED pole lights, in-ground lighting for trees and sculptures, high-mast lighting systems, underground electrical cabling and proper earthing across the sites.

In addition, the agency has included road safety elements such as reflective markers, thermoplastic road markings and protective railings wherever necessary to improve traffic movement around the roundabouts.

Civic infra projects launched in Mehrauli

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 31: Chief Minister Rekha Gupta Saturday inaugurated development projects worth over Rs 135 crore in Mehrauli Assembly constituency as part of the Delhi governments civic infrastructure push in the historic locality.

The launch of projects marks a significant step towards comprehensive rejuvenation of the region and addressing long-pending basic infrastructure needs, Gupta said.

She reiterated that, for the first time, the Delhi government has ensured there is no shortage of funds for development works, enabling timely and comprehensive implementation of projects across all assemblies.

The projects include reconstruction and repair of roads, renovation of dilapidated 'chaupals' and community buildings, construction of public toilets, beautification of parks, installation of swings for children, and provision of new open gyms.

The chief minister said the government has sanctioned over Rs 235 crore for development works in the constituency. Under this allocation, Public Works department, Irrigation and Flood Control department, Delhi Jal Board and DUSIB are implementing the projects in a coordinated manner.

Jaipur discom earns ₹104cr revenue from scrap material

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaipur, Jan 31: Jaipur discom has earned a record revenue of over Rs 104 crore so far in the current financial year by disposing of unusable and scrap material.

The amount generated through auctions of scrap material at 13 circle stores of the discom is the highest in five years, officials claimed. The unusable items include old transformers, wooden boxes, obsolete VCBs, meters, damaged oil, scrap vehicles, old cables and iron drums. Such scrap material from sub-division and division offices is deposited at assistant store controller offices and disposed of through monthly auctions. Officials said auctions were often delayed in the past due to routine workload which led to deterioration of material and loss of revenue.

To address this, the discom management directed the Chief Engineer (Material Management) and Superintending Engineer (Inspection and Stores) to expedite disposal of scrap.

The headquarters' inspection and stores wing coordinated with circle offices to prepare survey reports of auction-worthy scrap lying in the field and closely monitored the auction process. In 2023-24, as many as 115 auctions were conducted across all circles while 185 auctions were conducted in 2024-25. A total of 221 auctions have already been held till January in the 2025-26 financial year and the number is expected to rise in the remaining two months of the current fiscal year.

The officials said several store offices had vehicles lying unused for over 15 years. After coordinating with the transport department to obtain pending tax and registration details, 48 old vehicles were identified for auction, of which 34 were disposed of.

"The discom has earned Rs 104.39 crore through auctions so far this financial year and this is expected to reach Rs 125 crore by year-end," the official said. He claimed that this is the highest revenue generated from scrap disposal in the last five years.

Revenue collection from scrap auctions was Rs 30.85 crore in 2020-21, Rs 94.84 crore in 2021-22, Rs 86.84 crore in 2022-23, Rs 61.29 crore in 2023-24 and Rs 55.76 crore in 2024-25.

Delhi Aerocity metro station to integrate with Golden Line

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 31: The Delhi Aerocity metro station on the Airport Express Line is set to become a major interchange hub of the city's metro network following its planned integration with the Tughlakabad-Aerocity Golden Line corridor under Phase 4, the DMRC said Saturday.

An approval has recently been granted for extending the Golden Line corridor from Aerocity to the Terminal 1 Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport station, covering a stretch of about 2.26 km. The move aims to improve airport connectivity for commuters from south Delhi, according to the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC).

The corporation further said the Aerocity station has also been planned as a future triple interchange, as the National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC) is proposing interchange facilities there for its upcoming corridor to Alwar.

According to the DMRC, the new Aerocity interchange will feature platform-to-platform connectivity on one side and concourse-to-concourse paid area connectivity between the Airport Express Line and the Golden Line, with the platforms expected to be located at a depth of around 22 metres.

It said the Golden Line station at Aerocity will be significantly longer -- about 290 metres -- to accommodate interchange requirements, compared to the usual interchange station length of around 260 metres.

The DMRC also said that as per the planned alignment, the Golden Line and the proposed NCRTC corridor will cross each other diagonally, and necessary structural provisions will be incorporated in the station design to allow future integration of the NCRTC platform.

Highlighting the impact on commuters, the DMRC said the new interchange facility will provide a major connectivity boost to several areas in south Delhi, including Tughlakabad, Ambedkar Nagar and Khanpur, offering quicker access to all terminals of the IGI Airport.

With the approval of the Golden Line extension up to Terminal 1 IGI Airport station on the Magenta Line, it said passengers from many parts of south Delhi will get direct access to Terminal 1, while travellers from Terminal 1D will also be able to reach the Airport Express Line at Aerocity using the Golden Line.

Scientific study on dams aims to tackle pollution, boost eco-tourism

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaipur, Jan 31: A detailed scientific study is being conducted on Jaipur's three major dams -- Kanota, Chandlai and Nevta -- to address water pollution and assess their long-term conservation and development potential, officials said.

The study is being carried out by experts from an agency authorised by the central government, and a detailed project report (DPR) will be submitted to the state government soon.

"The study is expected to be completed within a month. Based on the report, a detailed plan for the conservation of these dams will be prepared so that the sites can be developed," Water Resources Minister Suresh Rawat told PTI.

He said the study focuses on improving water quality, identifying sources of pollution, GIS-based mapping, biodiversity conservation, use of modern water treatment technologies, and exploring opportunities for local livelihood generation and eco-tourism.

The report will detail the causes of water pollution in the dams, including the sources, volume and nature of polluted water inflow. It will also recommend preventive measures, options for disposal of polluted water and a long-term development plan.

"The study will also assess tourism development potential at the dams, including proposals such as boating facilities, development of green areas and promotion of day and night tourism," the minister said.

Rawat said Rajasthan is emerging as a strong and exemplary model in the field of water and environmental conservation under the Bhajanlal government, and the initiative aligns with the state's broader vision.

Kanota, Chandlai and Nevta dams, located within a short driving distance of Jaipur, were constructed decades ago primarily for irrigation and water storage. Over the years, pollution, encroachment and limited maintenance reduced their significance. However, their location, natural surroundings and ecological value have renewed interest in their revival as potential eco-tourism hubs.

An official said that the sites are suitable for tourism activities such as boating, nature walks and bird watching, and have the potential to emerge as a weekend destination for both tourists and city residents.

Kanota Dam, situated along the Jaipur-Agra Highway, is surrounded by open landscapes and seasonal greenery. Chandlai Dam, near the Jaipur-Kota highway, plays a significant role in irrigating agricultural land across several villages and attracts migratory birds during the winter season.

"With regulated development and conservation measures, Chandlai can support eco-tourism and educational visits while maintaining its primary function as a water source," an official said. Nevta Dam near Sanganer, one of the oldest reservoirs in the region, lies close to Jaipur's expanding urban edge. Spread across a large catchment area, the dam is considered suitable for developing green zones, walking tracks and recreational facilities.

"The government aims to balance the needs of a growing tourism economy with protection of natural resources," the official said.

Rajasthan to experience rain, hailstorms

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaipur, Dec 31: Several parts of Rajasthan are likely to experience cloudy weather and rainfall from Saturday due to the impact of a new western disturbance, the Meteorological department said.

A cyclonic circulation has been formed over the state. As a result, light to moderate rain with occasional lightning is expected in Jaipur, Bharatpur, Kota, Ajmer and Udaipur divisions, along with the Shekhawati belt, January 31 and February 1. Hailstorms may also occur at isolated places, the department said.

बैंक ऑफ़ इंडिया
Bank of India BOI

Bank of India
Zonal Office: Bhubaneswar Zone, 1/1D, Star House, Jaydev Vihar, Nayapalli, Bhubaneswar-751015, Ph.: 7008973027

Gold Auction Notice

It is hereby brought to the notice of the following gold loan borrowers, their legal heirs, person engaged in the business of gold ornaments and general public that in spite of repeated notices by the Bank, the following borrowers are not repaying their dues to the Bank. Notice is hereby published that if they fail to deposit all their dues in their respective gold loan accounts (including Up-to-date interest and all costs, charges/ expenses) by **15.02.2026,** their pledged gold ornaments will be auctioned at **Concerned Branch Premises** and **Online** on **16.02.2026 at 11.00 AM.** For this Bank shall not be held responsible for any inconvenience or damage caused to the concerned borrowers and no allegations or representations will be entertained from any borrowers in this regard. Bank reserves the right to cancel the auction without assigning any reason in case, the bidding price so arrived at is observed to be low or inadequate. Further, if needed be Bank reserves the right to change the date and time of the above scheduled auction or cancel the same without assigning any reasons thereon. Purity and net weight and reserve price of gold ornaments/ coins etc. will be available to intersted bidders on auction date and auction venue/auction portal.

BANK OF INDIA, SAHID NAGAR BRANCH, A/123, SAHID NAGAR, PO: SAHID NAGAR, BHUBANESWAR, PIN-751007, MOB.: 7008269259, 8895551343

Sl. No.	A/c. No.	Name & Address of the Borrower(s)	Gross Wt. in Gram	Net Wt. in Gram	Total Dues as on 31.01.2026 (excluding unapplied interest Charges, Cost & Expenses)
1.	555177610000841	**Sunkar Mahesh,** Ganesh Market, Jatni, Dist.: Khurda, Odisha, PIN-752050.	55.380	49.500	₹2,26,939.70

Place: Bhubaneswar, Date: 31.01.2026 **Zonal Manager, Bank of India**

The hard work of farmers, their crops and their future cannot be compromised under any circumstances. The Centre has moved decisively towards strict and punitive action against elements causing losses to farmers through fake seeds, spurious fertilisers and counterfeit pesticides

SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN | UNION MINISTER

YOGI RENAMES VILLAGES IN FIROZABAD, HARDOI

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath Saturday decided to rename one village each in Firozabad and Hardoi district, the CMO said. According to this decision, the village "Urmura Kirar" in Firozabad district will now be renamed "Harinagar," and the village "Hajipur" in Hardoi district will be renamed "Siyaramnagar"

Quote of the day

This is the same Abujhmad where movement was extremely difficult earlier, but today thousands of people have gathered here, reflecting the return of normalcy and confidence

VISHNU DEO SAI | CHIEF MINISTER, CHHATTISGARH

The initiative answers a long-standing question of why structured training academies existed for judges but not for lawyers. This academy will be very important to fill the gap between legal education and actual court work and to strengthen court craft among young lawyers

DEVENDRA FADNAVIS | CHIEF MINISTER, MAHARASHTRA

Sovereignty lies with the people and their support strengthens the party. Continuous organisational work helps the BJP expand. Prime Minister Narendra Modi believes that when the poor and villages grow stronger, the BJP becomes stronger, ultimately strengthening the nation and the state

NITIN NABIN | BJP PRESIDENT

NEET ASPIRANT DEATH

Bihar recommends CBI probe

The parents of the NEET aspirant Saturday alleged that police were trying to hush up the matter by denying any sexual assault of the woman and claiming that it was a case of suicide

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Patna, Jan 31: The Bihar government has recommended a CBI probe into the recent death of a female NEET aspirant in Patna, Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary said Saturday.

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) of Bihar Police is investigating the case.

The NEET aspirant, hailing from Jehanabad, was found unconscious in Shambhu Girls' hostel in Patna's Chitragupt Nagar earlier this month.

She died at a private hospital January 11 after remaining in a coma for several days. Her family had alleged that she was sexually assaulted, accusing authorities of attempting a cover-up.

"Chief Minister Nitish Kumar Jee has urged the Government of India to hand over the investigation of the NEET student's murder case in Patna (Case No- 14/26) to the CBI. The incident must be thoroughly uncovered in a transparent and just manner," Choudhary said in a post on X.

The deputy CM also holds the home portfolio.

The state home department also issued a notification recommending a CBI probe into the case under the provisions of the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, which governs the functioning of the country's premier investigation agency.

The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) of the central government will issue a notification, which is a mandatory requirement for initiating a CBI probe in a state-related case, in this regard.

According to rules, prior approval of the state and the DoPT is required to investigate a crime outside the agency's jurisdiction, as law and order is a state subject.

The parents of the NEET aspirant Saturday alleged that police were trying to hush up the matter by denying any sexual assault of the woman and claiming that it was a case of suicide.

Her post-mortem examination report did not exclude the possibility of sexual violence, and this finding contrasts with police's initial claim that medical reports and CCTV footage had ruled out sexual assault. One person, an employee of her hostel, was arrested in connection with the case.

"The CBI may now register a separate case on the basis of the FIR registered by Patna Police. The agency sleuths will collect all evidence obtained by police and will also record the statements of suspects, the arrested person, hospital staff, family members and policemen, who had initially investigated the case and concluded it a case of suicide," according to an official.

Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition Tejashwi Yadav alleged that the decision to transfer the case to CBI reflects the failure of the "loud-mouthed NDA government" that "boasts day and night" about catching criminals from the depths of the earth and the skies.

"Instead of exposing the rape and murder of a NEET student, the Bihar government has once again proved that its administrative machinery is corrupt, incompetent, inefficient, and unprofessional, incapable of even solving a case of rape and murder," Yadav posted on X.

He highlighted that in many cases like the Navruna incident, the CBI "closed the investigations" after "failing to apprehend the accused for 12-13 years", adding that "the same is likely to happen in this case as well."

Bomb threats to Jalandhar schools ahead of PM's visit

Nothing suspicious was found during extensive security checks at the schools, which were closed on account of a holiday related to Guru Ravidas Jayanti

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, Jan 31: Emails threatening bomb blasts at the Dera Sachkhand Ballan and five schools in Jalandhar were received Saturday, a day ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to the headquarters of the sect.

Nothing suspicious was found during extensive security checks at the schools, which were closed on account of a holiday related to Guru Ravidas Jayanti, officials said, adding that Dera premises are already under tight security due to PM Modi's visit.

The emails were sent to the schools, threatening to blow them up and Dera Ballan. The messages also said that PM Modi was "an enemy of Khalistanis", according to officials.

"Upon receipt of the bomb threat emails by at least five schools, police authorities initiated security checks at the school premises and called in bomb squads" a senior police official said. "Nothing suspicious was found at the school premises following the anti-sabotage checks," he said.

The bomb threat emails were apparently aimed at creating panic ahead of Prime Minister Modi's visit to Jalandhar, and the matter is currently under investigation, he said.

Schools in Jalandhar were closed Saturday in the wake of the Shobha Yatra taken out ahead of Guru Ravidas Jayanti.

The incident comes close on the heels of similar threats received by several schools Wednesday in Chandigarh, where nothing suspicious was found. Such bomb hoaxes have earlier been reported in Amritsar, Jalandhar and Patiala in Punjab and Ambala in Haryana.

Meanwhile, tight security arrangements have been made in Jalandhar in the wake of PM Modi's visit.

Modi will visit Dera Ballan on the occasion of the 649th Guru Ravidas Jayanti Sunday. He will inaugurate the civil terminal of the Halwara airport in Punjab. He will visit Adampur airport, where he will unveil its new name -- Sri Guru Ravidas Ji Airport.

SHORT TAKES

NIA begins probe into Beldanga violence

Kolkata: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) Saturday began its probe into the violence that erupted in West Bengal's Beldanga in Murshidabad, following the news of death of a migrant worker in Jharkhand earlier this month, an officer said. An NIA team reached Beldanga police station in the morning and talked to the officials earlier involved in the probe, and sought documents from them. Following the directions of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the central agency had registered a fresh case.

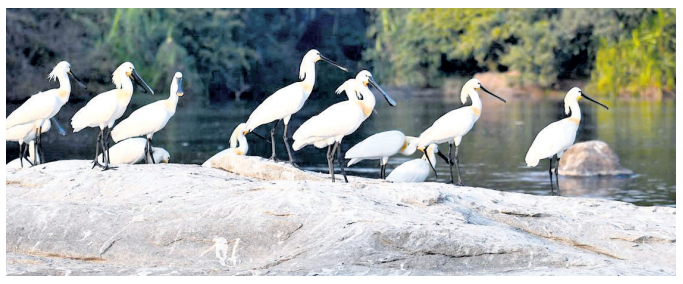
Prohibitory orders clamped in J'khand

Ranchi: Prohibitory orders have been clamped in five villages of Jharkhand's Gumla district to protect people from elephant attack, an official said Saturday. A herd of 18 elephants have been roaming in the area covering those five villages. The prohibitory orders under the BNS section 163 issued by the Gumla sub-divisional officer will be in effect from January 30 till February 15 in Supa, Malgaon, Morgaon, Budipat and Mahuatoli under Bharno police station limits of the district, he said. "People are making large gatherings around the herd, which raised the concern of man-elephant conflict. Despite our efforts to stop people from going around the jumbos, onlookers continue to chase the herd. We urged the administration to clamp prohibitory orders, which came into effect from Friday," Gumla Divisional Forest Officer Ahmad Belal told PTI.

8 MBBS students suspended

Jabalpur: Eight MBBS students of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Medical College in Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh were suspended for six months for allegedly ragging a first-year student, a senior official said Saturday. The incident took place two days ago in hostel number 1 where the victim was staying, Dean Dr Navneet Saxena told PTI. "After the victim lodged a complaint, the college's anti-ragging committee conducted an inquiry and found the allegations to be correct. Based on the committee's findings and in accordance with National Medical Commission norms, the college management initiated disciplinary action against the students," Dr Saxena said.

Two more wetlands in UP, Guj get Ramsar tag



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 31: The wetlands in Kutch in Gujarat and Etah in Uttar Pradesh have been recognised as Ramsar sites, marking the unique ecosystems for conservation under a global framework.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated the local population and those passionate about wetland conservation for the designation of Patna Bird Sanctuary in Etah and Chhari-Dhand in Kutch as Ramsar sites.

"Delighted that the Patna Bird Sanctuary in Etah (Uttar Pradesh) and Chhari-Dhand in Kutch (Gujarat) are Ramsar sites. Congratulations to the local population there as well as all those passionate about wetland conservation," Modi said in a post on X.

The designation of these two sites under the Ramsar Convention takes the total number of such wetlands in India to 98.

The prime minister said these recognitions reaffirm the government's commitment to preserving biodiversity and protecting vital ecosystems.

"May these wetlands continue to thrive as safe habitats for countless migratory and native species," Modi said.

Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav congratulated Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat, and the wetland community, on the two new additions.

Hundreds of migratory and resident avian species find their home in the two wetlands, apart from being the habitat of chinkara, wolves, caracal, desert cats and desert foxes, besides endangered birds, Yadav said.

"Under the visionary leadership of PM Shri Narendra Modi ji, the Indian Ramsar network has seen an expansion of over 276 per cent - climbing from 26 in 2014 to 98 now," the minister said.

Another accused identified by eyewitness

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, Jan 31: After JKLF chief Yasin Malik, his close confidant Shoukat Bakshi was identified by an eyewitness before a special court here Saturday as one of the shooters involved in the January 1990 terror attack on a group of Indian Air Force (IAF) personnel in Srinagar.

In January 2024, Malik was identified as the main shooter by former IAF corporal Rajwar Umeshwar Singh, who survived the terror attack in which four IAF personnel were killed, in the special CBI court.

Besides the four men, including squadron leader Ravi Khanna, who were killed, 40 people were injured in the incident

1990 IAF ATTACK

January 25, 1990, in Rawalpora on the outskirts of Srinagar. The IAF employees were waiting for their pickup to travel to the old Srinagar airfield for duty when they came under fire from terrorists.

A charge sheet was filed August 31, 1990, against Malik and five others, including Bakshi, in the designated TADA court here.

The others accused in the killing of the IAF personnel are JKLF operatives Ali Mohammed Mir, Manzoor Ahmed Sofi alias Mustafa, Javed Ahmed Mir alias 'Nalka', Javed Ahmed Zargar and Saleem alias Nanaji.

Bakshi was identified by the prosecution witness, an IAF employee and one of the survivors, Senior Additional Advocate General Monika Kohli, said.

Elderly women hold a large banner as they take part in 'Save Manipur' rally, organised by COCOMI, an umbrella body of several Meitei civil society organisations, in Imphal, Manipur, Saturday. Thousands of people asserted their stand that the territorial and administrative integrity of the state cannot be divided at any cost PTI PHOTO

Sonam taken to AIIMS after complaining of stomach pain

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jodhpur, Jan 31: Activist and scientist Sonam Wangchuk, who has been lodged in the Jodhpur Central Jail since September 27, 2025, was taken to AIIMS Jodhpur for medical examination early Saturday morning, officials said.

He spent approximately an hour and a half in the hospital's gastroenterology department before being escorted back to prison.

According to AIIMS sources, Wangchuk has been having stomach-related issues and visited the hospital Friday as well for tests.

The Supreme Court, which is currently hearing a petition filed by his wife, has requested Wangchuk's medical report by February 2. Following the Supreme Court's orders, police transported Wangchuk from Jodhpur Central Jail to the emergency department of AIIMS Hospital Saturday morning, a police official said.

Wangchuk has been voicing concerns about his declining health in jail for some time now. Recognising his worsening condition, the Supreme Court ordered the Jodhpur jail administration Thursday to arrange for him to be examined by a specialist.

From political sidelines to power: Sunetra's rise to Dy CM post

The 62-year-old Rajya Sabha MP's elevation to the number 2 position in the BJP-led state cabinet will also mark the beginning of a new chapter for the NCP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Jan 31: Thrust into the spotlight from the shadows of one of the most powerful political families in Maharashtra, Sunetra Pawar Saturday became the first woman deputy Chief Minister of the state as she faces the Herculean task of leading the Nationalist Congress Party after the tragic death of her husband Ajit Pawar.

The 62-year-old Rajya Sabha MP's elevation to the number 2 position in the BJP-led state cabinet will also mark the beginning of a new chapter for the NCP.

Following NCP president and deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar's death in an air crash in Baramati January 28, Sunetra Pawar was earlier Saturday elected as the leader of the NCP Legislature Party. She took oath as deputy CM in the evening.

Hailing from Tera village in Dharashiv (formerly known as Osmanabad) in the Marathwada region, Sunetra Pawar comes from a political family, but wasn't actively involved in politics herself for much of her life. Padamsinh Patil, her brother, is a senior NCP leader.

Her father Bajirao Patil was involved in the Marathwada liberation struggle which preceded the merger of the Hyderabad state into the Indian union.

A commerce graduate, she is said to have interest in painting, music, photography and agriculture. After her marriage, she actively took up farming at Katewadi village.

The NCP, founded by Sharad Pawar in 1999, split after his nephew Ajit Pawar joined the Mahayuti government of the BJP and Shiv Sena in July 2023. He was appointed as deputy CM, and continued to hold

the same post in the subsequent Devendra Fadnavis-led government that came to power after the Mahayuti alliance won a landslide victory in the November 2024 assembly polls.

Described on her website as a passionate environmentalist and social entrepreneur, Sunetra Pawar made her electoral debut in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, facing off against her sister-in-law and incumbent NCP (SP) MP Supriya Sule, in Baramati, the home turf of the Pawar family.

After losing to Sule, she was elected to the Rajya Sabha.

Her elder son, Parth Pawar, has remained on the sidelines after unsuccessfully contesting the 2019 Lok Sabha elections from Maval. Jay, the younger son, is an entrepreneur.

While Ajit Pawar entered politics in the early 1980s, Sunetra Pawar largely stayed away from the political limelight until the 2024 general election.

In 2010, she founded the Environment Forum of India (EFOI), a non-governmental organisation dedicated to raising environmental awareness and fostering eco-conscious communities.

Under her leadership, EFOI pioneered the eco-village model in India, an innovative approach that integrates ecological practices into rural development. She has also led campaigns for biodiversity conservation, protection of endangered species, water resource management and drought mitigation, as per her website.

Sunetra Pawar is also a trustee of the Vidya Pratishthan, an educational institution set up by Sharad Pawar. She has represented India in international discussions on sustainability and social innovation as a member of a think-tank of the World Entrepreneurship Forum based in France.

She has led a self-help group movement in 86 villages of Maharashtra under the Nirmal Gram campaign, transforming Katewadi, a hamlet in Baramati, into an eco-village, promoting sanitation, health, community livestock management and solid waste management.

Sunetra Pawar is also the chairperson of the Baramati hi-tech textile park, a multi-modal garment manufacturing facility that employs over 15,000 rural women. The hitherto silent member of the Pawar family now faces an uphill task of holding the NCP together and negotiating coalition dynamics while working with the BJP and Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena. But her immediate challenge will be to decide whether to go ahead with the much-anticipated merger of the two NCP factions.

national

Will this Budget offer real solutions to the multiple economic indicators that are now in free fall?

MALLIKARJUN KHARGE | CONGRESS PRESIDENT

ICG TO OBSERVE 50TH RAISING DAY

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG), established in 1977 with just seven surface platforms, has evolved into a "formidable maritime force" comprising 155 ships and 80 aircraft, officials said Saturday. The ICG will observe its 50th Raising Day with an event here Sunday, marking five decades of dedicated, selfless service to the nation

Quote of the day

The first ever International Museum of Goddess in the country is set to come up in Katra. I believe Katra, and indeed the entire nation, will take pride in this museum

MANOJ SINHA | LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR, J&K

What is this 'Natun Bor Asom'? What does it mean? For us, Bor Asom was established 600 years ago by Swargadeo Chaolung Siu-Ka-Pha (the founder of the Ahom dynasty)

HIMANTA BISWA SARMA | CHIEF MINISTER, ASSAM

Leaders like Shah are nothing but "tourists" who visit the state every month when polls are round the corner, make tall claims and false promises and then forget everything

ABHISHEK BANERJEE | SENIOR TRINAMOOL CONGRESS LEADER

X POST OF THE DAY

RTI Act under attack AGAIN. Economic survey with ZERO evidence or data calls for a re-examination of the law by expanding scope & nature of exemptions. Suggests allowing ministers a veto power to deny info & shielding deliberations from public scrutiny! Democracy dies in darkness

@AnjaliB_

SHORT TAKES

Realtor 'suicide': Kerala parties demand probe

Thiruvananthapuram: With the alleged suicide of a Bengaluru-based real estate tycoon having its ripple effects in neighbouring Kerala, a police SIT was formed Saturday to probe the high profile death of CJ Roy, with the family alleging "pressure" from the I-T which was probing him. With both the ruling and opposition blocs in Kerala seeking a comprehensive probe into Roy's death, and hours after Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara directed police to investigate the circumstances leading to the Confident Group Chairman allegedly shooting himself to death, the Bengaluru Police announced the formation of the SIT.

Palaniswami takes a dig at DMK campaign

Chennai: AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami took a dig at the ruling DMK's "Tamil Nadu Thalai Kuniyadhu" (TN will not bow down) campaign, Saturday, saying the increasing crimes in the state present a different story. The DMK's public outreach programme to be launched tomorrow is meant to highlight the achievements of the state government and expose BJP's "deceit" the party had said. Palaniswami claimed that during the last 56 months of DMK rule, Chief Minister MK Stalin converted the police department into his "own department."

Robbers open fire at Kerala businessman

Hyderabad: Two armed robbers fired at a businessman from Kerala here Saturday morning, injuring him in the leg, and fled away with about Rs 6 lakh kept in a bag, police said. The victim, Rinshad P V (26) went to an ATM to deposit money at Koti when the robbers fired at him with a firearm. He fell on the ground and the offenders snatched his bag containing cash and left the place on his bike, they added. Rinshad was admitted to a hospital and his condition is out of danger.

India calls for zero-tolerance on terrorism as global norm

The issues figured at the second India-Arab foreign ministers' meeting in New Delhi that saw participation of 19 member nations of the Arab League, considered as an influential grouping

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 31: India Saturday conveyed to Arab League member nations that "zero-tolerance" for terrorism must be an "uncompromising universal norm" as the two sides deliberated on the shared priority of advancing the Gaza peace plan and ways to navigate the current geopolitical environment.

The issues figured at the second India-Arab foreign ministers' meeting in New Delhi that saw participation of 19 member nations of the Arab League, considered as an influential grouping.

The participants including several foreign ministers called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi before the start of the meeting. "The Arab world is a part of India's extended neighbourhood, linked by deep civilisational bonds, vibrant people-to-people connections and enduring brotherly ties, as well as a shared commitment to peace, progress and stability," Modi said.

"Confident that enhanced cooperation in technology, energy, trade and innovation will unlock new opportunities and take the partnership to new heights," he said on social media.

In his inaugural address at the foreign ministerial meeting, Jaishankar said that taking forward the comprehensive peace plan to end the Gaza conflict, based on the UN Security Council Resolution 2803, is a widely shared priority.

"Various countries have made policy declarations on the peace plan, individually or collectively. This is the larger context in which we deliberate on the region's challenges and prospects," he said.

The external affairs minister said multiple developments, each of considerable consequence, have taken place in the Middle East over the last few years and many of them have reverberated well beyond the region.

Contemplating this multitude of challenges, our shared interest warrants strengthening forces of stability, peace and prosperity, he said.

In his remarks, Jaishankar flagged serious concerns over the challenges posed by terrorism and called for concerted global efforts to combat it.

"A common threat in both our regions to these objectives is that of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations," he said. "Cross-border terrorism is particularly unacceptable because it violates the basic principles of international relations and diplomacy," he said in remarks seen as an apparent reference to Pakistan.

"Societies targeted by terrorism have the right to defend themselves and will understandably exercise it," he said.

Jaishankar said it is essential that we strengthen international cooperation to combat what is a "global scourge".

"Zero-tolerance for terrorism must be an uncompromising universal norm," he said.

Jaishankar said India has strong partnerships with all Arab League members and the region has some of India's largest expatriate communities, key energy sources, major trade relationships and emerging technology and connectivity initiatives.

India bins reference to PM in Epstein investigative files

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 31: India Saturday strongly rejected a reference to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the investigative files related to Jeffrey Epstein, describing it as "little more than trashy ruminations by a convicted criminal" that deserves to be dismissed with the "utmost contempt".

The latest files relating to the convicted sex trafficker were released by US authorities.

"We have seen reports of an email message from the so-called Epstein files that has a reference to the prime minister and his visit to Israel," External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in a statement.

"Beyond the fact of the prime minister's official visit to Israel in July 2017, the rest of the allusions in the email are little more than trashy ruminations by a convicted criminal, which deserve to be dismissed with the utmost contempt," he said.

The email is among investigative files released by the US Justice Department Friday. The department released 3.5 million pages and 2,000 videos in line with an American law that was passed by the US Congress.

TMC rule a national security threat: Shah

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Barrackpore/Siliguri (WB), Jan 31: Union Home Minister Amit Shah Saturday mounted an all-out attack on the TMC government, accusing it of shielding infiltrators, fuelling social strife and deliberately weakening border security for electoral gains.

Asserting that no other administration in the country was "as corrupt" as the TMC regime, Shah called on party workers to uproot the ruling dispensation and establish what he described as a "government of patriots and nationalists" in West Bengal. "The year 2026 is the year to say 'tata, bye-bye' to the TMC," he said.

Projecting the upcoming assembly polls as more than a routine political contest, Shah, addressing BJP workers' meetings in south and north Bengal, cast the battle as a referendum on national security, governance and Bengali asmita, as the BJP sharpened its pitch to dislodge the ruling party amid heightened focus on infiltration, electoral rolls revision and alleged scams.

Shah alleged that illegal migration through the India-Bangladesh border had spiralled under the TMC due to "vote-bank politics".

"The way infiltration is taking place in West Bengal, it has become a security issue for the entire country. Even after court orders, the TMC government is not giving land to the BSF for border fencing because infiltrators are its vote bank," he said at a workers' meeting in Barrackpore.

He claimed illegal migrants were being allowed to move freely, with the "administration and police looking the other way".

Shah said the Calcutta High Court had noted that the chief minister was not cooperating in providing land required for border fencing.

"But I want to assure you whether Mamata Banerjee gives land by March 31 as directed by the High Court or not, in April a BJP chief minister within 45 days of forming the government will hand over land to the BSF," he said.

On the ongoing SIR of electoral rolls, Shah accused the TMC of obstructing the Election Commission and alleged non-cooperation by the state administration.

Kishtwar anti-terror op narrows down

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, Jan 31: A search operation, which has been underway to neutralise three holed-up Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar, has been narrowed down to a specific area following an encounter Saturday morning, officials said.

The gunfight began when army troops re-established contact with the terrorists in Kishtwar district early Saturday, according to officials.

Kishtwar has seen six encounters in the past seven months as forces continue their crackdown on Pakistan-based terrorists operating in the region, which shares borders with Doda and Udhampur districts.

Northern Army Commander Lt Gen Pratik Sharma visited Kishtwar district to review the counter-terrorism grid and commended the troops for their unwavering resolve in the ongoing efforts.

"During the ongoing joint Operation Trashi-I, contact with terrorists was re-established in the early hours of January 31 in the general area of Dolgam by troops of the White Knight Corps, Jammu and Kashmir Police, and CRPF," the White Knight Corps said on X.

The army noted that intelligence inputs from various sources were coordinated to plan and execute the operation on the ground. "A cordon has been established, and operations are in progress," it said.

According to reports, the joint operation team sighted three JeM terrorists in the snowbound high-altitude area of Dolgam, resulting in an exchange of fire.

One terrorist is believed to have been injured, the reports indicate, adding that drone surveillance purportedly shows bloodstains from the injured terrorists. This marks the fourth time in the past two weeks that contact has been established with terrorists in the area.

The ongoing anti-terror operation in the snowbound Chatroo-Dolgam-Dichhar belt to track down and neutralise a group of three holed-up Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorists has been underway for the past few days.

People take part in a tug of war competition, organised as part of a winter sports event, in Pulwama district, Jammu and Kashmir, Saturday

PTI PHOTO

Yoga Olympiad Training Programme concludes successfully at Patanjali

AGENCIES

Haridwar, Jan 31: A nine-day Yoga Olympiad Orientation and Training Program was successfully organised at Patanjali Research Institute & Wellness, Haridwar, from January 22 to 30. The program focused on Yogic philosophy, psychology and spirituality, offering participants a path towards inner peace and spiritual contemplation.

Representatives from the Education Department of the Government of Sikkim participated in the program. The primary objective was to promote development, equality and the wider dissemination of yoga, particularly in rural areas. The program commenced with meditation, conch blowing and sacred havan rituals.

Presiding over the program, renowned Ayurveda expert Acharya Balkrishna said that yoga is a holistic physical, mental and spiritual discipline rooted in ancient India. He stated that yoga aims to establish harmony between the mind, body and soul, enabling self-realisation, mental peace and liberation. Yoga enhances overall health, reduces stress and supports a disciplined lifestyle.

On the occasion, Yog Rishi Swami Ramdev said that naturopathy is a drug-free system of treatment that activates the body's natural healing capacity. It addresses the root causes of diseases through balanced diet, herbs, water and mud therapy, yoga, pranayama, fasting, sun therapy and acupuncture. He emphasised that while naturopathy is an effective complementary therapy, expert medical advice is essential in serious illnesses. He also highlighted the vast potential of collaborative initiatives between Patanjali and the Government of Sikkim.

Speaking on Patanjali Wellness, Dr. Vinita said that adopting Ayurveda and a natural lifestyle is key to maintaining physical and mental well-being. Treatment methods are determined based on the nature of the disease, the patient's condition and expert guidance.

Rashtrapati Bhavan's Amrit Udyan to open for public Tuesday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 31: 'Bheem', 'Arjun' and 'Mother Teresa' are among the 145 varieties of roses that visitors can see during their visit to Rashtrapati Bhavan's Amrit Udyan, which opens for the public Tuesday.

Booking and entry to the garden is free of cost. The Amrit Udyan will be open for public viewing from February 3 to March 31, said Navika Gupta, deputy press secretary to President Droupadi Murmu.

People can visit the garden six days a week between 10 am and 6 pm, with last entry at 5 pm.

Apart from tulips and different types of roses, this year, visitors can also see the 'Babbling Brook' -- a water stream with cascades -- and the landscaped banyan garden with reflexology paths, she said during a media preview of the pristine garden.

Avneesh Banswal, in-charge of garden upkeep, said this year 85 species of flowers have been selected for the Amrit Udyan.

There are 145 varieties of roses including 'Bheem', 'Arjun' and 'Mother Teresa' for visitors to see, he said.

The garden will remain closed Mondays for maintenance and March 4 on account of Holi.

This year, no on-the-spot booking facility will be available. Therefore, visitors are advised to book their slots online well in advance, Gupta said.

Booking can be made at https://visit.rashtrapatibhavan.gov.in/.Booking for the particular day will close at 10 am on the previous day.

Entry and exit for all visitors will be from Gate 35 of the President's Estate, located near the intersection of North Avenue and Rashtrapati Bhavan.

For convenience of visitors, shuttle bus service from Central Secretariat metro station to Gate 35 will be available every 30 minutes between 9.30 am and 6 pm. The last shuttle bus from the metro station will depart at 4 pm, the official said.

The route for visitors will be Bal Vatika - Plumeria Garden Banyan Garden - Bonsai Garden Babbling Brook - Central Lawn - Long Garden - Circular Garden.

Visitors can carry mobile phones, electronic keys, purses/handbags, water bottles and milk bottles for infants.

Provision for drinking water, toilets, and first aid/medical facilities will be made at various points along the public route.

The Amrit Udyan will be open for special categories March 3 (for defence personnel), March 5 (for senior citizens), March 10 (for women and tribal women's self help groups) and March 13 (for 'divyangjan').

Apart from the Amrit Udyan, people can also visit the Rashtrapati Bhavan and Rashtrapati Bhavan Museum six days a week (from Tuesday to Sunday). They can also witness the change-of-guard ceremony every Saturday, Gupta said.

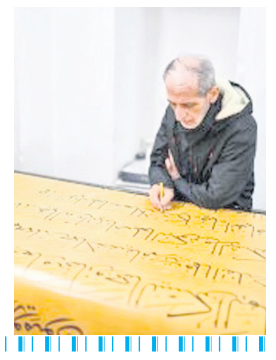
international

Trump, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Europeans rode on our problems, provoked, and were seeking — and still seek — to fragment society

MASOUD PEZESHKIAN | PRESIDENT, IRAN

HANDWRITTEN QURAN

Iraqi calligrapher Ali Zaman gazes with pride at his masterpiece - a colossal, handwritten manuscript of the Quran that has taken six years of craft and devotion to complete. The finished work consists of 302 double-sided scrolls, each measuring 4 metres (13 feet) in length and 1.5 metres in width. The sheets, resembling heavy parchment, were custom-made for Zaman with a blend of traditional materials including eggs, corn starch and alum



Quote of the day

The regime's repressive apparatus is brutal and has responded to the numerous criminal forces that answer to this regime, and it is all that remains. When repression disappears and fear is lost, it will be the end of tyranny

MARIA CORINA MACHADO | OPPOSITION LEADER AND NOBEL PEACE PRIZE LAUREATE, VENEZUELA

We are bringing stability, clarity and a long-term strategy to how we engage with China, so we can bring home the benefits for businesses and for working people

KEIR STARMER | PRIME MINISTER, UK

In this dangerous and uncertain world Canadians must stand united so we can stand on our own two feet. United and strong Canadians will bow before no nation anywhere on earth

PIERRE POILIEVRE | MEMBERS OF CANADA'S CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION PARTY

SHORT TAKES

US govt shuts down

Washington: The US government entered what is expected to be a brief shutdown Saturday after Congress failed to approve a deal to keep a wide swath of operations funded ahead of a midnight deadline. After hours of delay, the Senate passed the spending package by a bipartisan vote of 71 to 29. But the House of Representatives is out of town and not expected to take up the measure until Monday, according to a Republican leadership aide who spoke on condition of anonymity. That partial shutdown took effect at 12:01 a.m. Eastern time (0501 GMT). The shutdown is likely to be brief. Lawmakers from both parties have been working to ensure a debate over immigration enforcement does not disrupt other government operations. This is a marked contrast from last fall, when Republicans and Democrats dug into their positions in a dispute over healthcare, prompting a shutdown that lasted a record 43 days and cost the U.S. economy an estimated $11 billion.

Ukraine, Moldova in dark

Kyiv: Emergency power cuts swept across several Ukrainian cities as well as neighbouring Moldova Saturday, officials said, amid a commitment from the Kremlin to US President Donald Trump to pause strikes on Kyiv as Ukraine battles one of its bleakest winters in years. Ukraine's Energy Minister Denys Shmyhal said that the outages had been caused by a technical malfunction affecting power lines linking Ukraine and Moldova. The failure "caused a cascading outage in Ukraine's power grid," triggering automatic protection systems, he said. Blackouts were reported in Kyiv, as well as Zhytomyr and Kharkiv regions, in the centre and northeast of the country respectively.

70 terrorists killed

Karachi: At least 70 terrorists, some of them from the BLA, were killed after they carried out attacks on security forces, law enforcement agencies and civilians at 12 different locations in Pakistan's Balochistan province, officials said Saturday. Sources in the security forces put the number of terrorists killed to 108, however, Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfaraz Bugti, in a tweet, said 70 terrorists have been killed so far and the operations that started on Friday night are still ongoing on Saturday evening.

STRAIT OF HORMUZ

Iran plans live drills near US warships

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dubai, Jan 31: The Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf, again has become a focus of tensions as Iran prepares to launch a military drill that could see fire into a lane crucial for global shipping.

Iran has warned ships that it will conduct a live fire drill Sunday and Monday in the strait, which sees a fifth of all oil traded pass through the tight corridor between the Islamic Republic and Oman.

The US military's Central Command issued its own warning early Saturday, telling Tehran that any "unsafe and unprofessional behaviour near US forces, regional partners or commercial vessels increases risks of collision, escalation and destabilisation."

The Strait of Hormuz resembles a bend looking down from space. Its narrowest point is just 33 kilometres (21 miles) wide. It flows from the Persian Gulf into the Gulf of Oman. From there, ships can then travel to the rest of the world.

While Iran and Oman have their territorial waters in the strait, it's viewed as an international waterway where all ships can ply. The United Arab Emirates, home to the skyscraper-studded city of Dubai, also sits near the waterway.

A notice to mariners sent Thursday by radio warned that Iran planned to conduct "naval shooting" in the Strait of Hormuz on Sunday and Monday. The coordinates provided by the message put the drill potentially going into what is known as the Traffic Separation Scheme - a 3.2-kilometre (2-mile) wide, two-lane system in which ships coming into the Persian Gulf go north and ships exiting onto the Gulf of Oman go south.

That northern lane is within the coordinates of the drill. While Iran has provided no other public details about the drills, it will likely involve the country's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard. The Guard operates a fleet of small fast-attack vessels in the strait that routinely have tense encounters with the US Navy.

US ISSUES WARNING

Early Saturday, the US military's Central Command issued a strongly worded warning to Iran and the Revolutionary Guard over the drill. While acknowledging Iran's "right to operate professionally in international airspace and waters," it warned against interfering with or threatening American warships or passing commercial vessels.

The command, which oversees the US Navy's Bahrain-based 5th Fleet, said it "will not tolerate unsafe (Guard) actions" that could include its aircraft or vessels getting too close to American warships or pointing weapons toward them. The command added that "the US military has the most highly trained and lethal force in the world."

TENSIONS HIGH

US President Donald Trump has threatened to launch a military strike against Iran after its bloody crackdown on nationwide protests. He has laid down two red lines - the killing of peaceful protesters and Iran launching a wave of mass executions of those held. In recent days, he's also included the fate of Iran's nuclear programme.

Iran port blast leaves one dead

At least one person was killed and 14 injured in an explosion in the southern Iranian port of Bandar Abbas Saturday, a local official told Iranian news agencies, but the cause of the blast was not known. The semi-official Tasnim news agency said that social media reports alleging that a Revolutionary Guard navy commander had been targeted in the explosion were "completely false". Iranian media said the blast was under investigation but provided no further information. Iranian authorities could not immediately be contacted for comment. Separately, four people were killed after a gas explosion in the city of Ahvaz near the Iraqi border, according to state-run Tehran Times. Two Israeli officials told Reuters that Israel was not involved in Saturday's blasts, which come amid heightened tensions between Tehran and Washington over Iran's crackdown on nationwide protests and over the country's nuclear programme.

Adani, nephew agree to receive legal notice in US civil fraud case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New York, Jan 31: Billionaire Gautam Adani and his nephew, Sagar Adani, have agreed to receive a legal notice from the US Securities and Exchange Commission in a civil fraud lawsuit alleging they misled investors about a bribery scheme, according to a court filing.

The stipulation is subject to court approval.

In a filing in a federal court in Brooklyn, New York, seen by PTI, the SEC and US-based lawyers for Gautam and Sagar Adani said the lawyers had agreed to accept service of the regulator's legal papers, removing the need for a judge to rule on how the defendants should be served.

The joint application (or stipulation) has been submitted for approval from the concerned Court. This is a standard procedural step in US legal proceedings that allows for the orderly resolution of cases.

If agreed by the judge, the joint application will allow the SEC matter to progress while giving time to the Adanis to either file their motion to dismiss or their defence within 90 days. The SEC thereafter can file their opposition within a further period of 60 days. The Defendants can file their replies to such opposition within 45 days.

The SEC had filed a lawsuit in November 2024 alleging that the two violated US securities laws by making false and misleading representations about Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL).

In addition to the SEC's civil complaint, federal prosecutors in Brooklyn, New York, have charged the Adanis and others with allegedly helping to drive a $265 million bribery scheme in India to secure solar power contracts.

The Adani Group has repeatedly denied all accusations made against it or the founder family.

Israeli strikes kill 30 as truce inches forward

ASSOCIATED PRESS

- Children among fatalities in Gaza airstrikes, WAFA reports
- Israeli source says strikes are retaliation for Hamas truce violation
- Truce violations continue amid US pressure for ceasefire progress

Deir Al-Balah, Jan 31: Hospitals in Gaza said Israeli strikes killed at least 30 Palestinians including several children Saturday, one of the highest tolls since the October ceasefire, a day after Israel accused Hamas of new truce violations.

The strikes hit locations throughout Gaza, including an apartment building in Gaza City and a tent camp in Khan Younis, said officials at hospitals that received the bodies.

The casualties included two women and six children from two different families. Another airstrike hit a police station in Gaza City, killing at least 14 and wounding others, Shifa Hospital director Mohamed Abu Selmiya said.

The strikes came a day before the Rafah crossing along the border with Egypt is set to open in Gaza's southernmost city. All of the territory's border crossings - the rest are with Israel - have been closed throughout almost the entire war. Palestinians see Rafah as a lifeline for tens of thousands needing treatment outside the territory, where the majority of medical infrastructure has been destroyed.

The crossing's opening, limited at first, will mark the first major step in the second phase of the US-brokered ceasefire that took effect on October 10. Other challenging issues include demilitarizing the strip after nearly two decades of Hamas rule and installing a new government to oversee reconstruction. Egypt, one of the ceasefire mediators, in a statement condemned the Israeli strikes in the "strongest terms" and warned that they represent "a direct threat to the political course" of the truce.

Nasser Hospital said the strike on the tent camp in Khan Younis caused a fire, killing seven, including a father, his three children and three grandchildren.

Shifa Hospital said the strike on the police station killed at least 14 including four policewomen, civilians and inmates. The hospital also said a man was killed in a strike on the eastern side of Jabaliya refugee camp. Hamas called Saturday's strikes "a renewed flagrant violation" and urged the United States and other mediating countries to push Israel to stop them.

The number reported killed Saturday was several times higher than the daily average since the ceasefire began. As of Friday, Gaza's Health Ministry had recorded at least 520 Palestinians killed by Israeli fire since the start of the ceasefire.

Over 200 killed in coltan mine mishap in east Congo

REUTERS

Congo, Jan 31: More than 200 people were killed this week in a collapse at the Rubaya coltan mine in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, Lumumba Kambere Muyisa, spokesperson for the rebel-appointed governor of the province where the mine is located, told Reuters Friday.

Rubaya produces around 15% of the world's coltan, which is processed into tantalum, a heat-resistant metal that is in high demand by makers of mobile phones, computers, aerospace components and gas turbines. The site, where locals dig manually for a few dollars per day, has been under the control of the AFC/M23 rebel group since 2024.

The collapse occurred Wednesday and the precise toll was still unclear as of Friday evening.

"More than 200 people were victims of this landslide, including miners, children and market women. Some people were rescued just in time and have serious injuries," Muyisa said, adding that about 20 injured people were being treated in health facilities.

Pak PM addresses foreign loan humiliation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Islamabad, Jan 31: Seeking foreign loan had forced Pakistan to "bow" its head and make compromises at the "cost of self-respect", Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has said in a candid admission about the humiliation involved in approaching "friendly countries" for financial aid.

Addressing a ceremony held in honour of the country's eminent businessmen and exporters here Friday, Sharif recalled the difficult period when Pakistan faced fears of bankruptcy and was described by some as being on the verge of technical default.

"When we assumed office, the economic situation was extremely fragile, and the common man faced severe hardships," he said.

The prime minister referred to his meeting with the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Paris in 2023, after which the global lender approved an economic programme that helped stabilise the country's economy.

Sharif said friendly countries had fully supported Pakistan during difficult times and that, together with the Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Forces, Field Marshal Asim Munir, he had met leaders of several countries to seek loans worth billions of dollars.

However, he said, "How should I tell the way we requested friendly countries for loans? The friendly countries didn't disappoint us. But the one who goes to seek a loan, his head is bowed down."

The prime minister said loans also create obligations that have to be fulfilled.

"When you go seeking loans, you have to pay the price at the cost of your self-respect. You have to compromise... Sometimes, undue demand may come up, and you have to implement it even when there is no reason to fulfil it," he said. Pakistan heavily relies on financial aid from several countries, including China, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar, to manage its foreign exchange reserves and debt. These nations, along with the IMF, provide regular loans and rollovers to the cash-strapped nation.

Abusers 'remain hidden': Epstein survivors after latest files release

US govt released more than three million pages of documents, as well as over 2,000 videos and 180,000 images

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Washington, Jan 31: Survivors of Jeffrey Epstein said their alleged abusers "remain hidden and protected" after the US government released millions of new pages from files related to the convicted sex offender Friday, adding fuel to the case that has dogged President Donald Trump.

Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche said the White House played no role in the Justice Department's review of the extensive files on Epstein, a former friend of Trump.

"They did not tell this department how to do our review, what to look for, what to redact, what to not redact," Blanche told a news conference.

More than three million documents were released on Friday that included mention of numerous powerful figures, including 79-year-old Trump, Elon Musk, Bill Gates and former prince Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor.

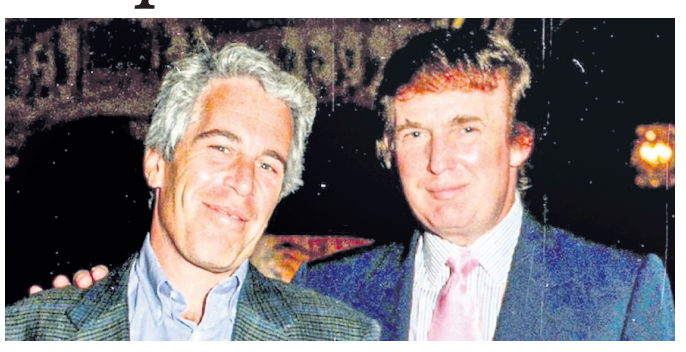
The Justice Department said some of the documents contained "untrue and sensationalist claims" about Trump that were submitted to the FBI before the 2020 presidential election.

Blanche, formerly Trump's personal lawyer, denied suggestions that embarrassing material about the president had been redacted from the newly released files, which included at least 180,000 images and 2,000 videos.

"We did not protect President Trump," he said.

Blanche said all images of girls and women had been redacted aside from those of Ghislaine Maxwell, who was convicted of trafficking underage girls for Epstein and is serving a 20-year prison sentence.

However, a statement from survivors of Epstein's alleged abuses claimed identifying information about them still remained in the files, "while the men who abused us remain hidden and protected."



BILL GATES CAUGHT STD AFTER SEX WITH RUSSIAN GIRLS, CLAIMS EPSTEIN FILES

NAME OF MIRA NAIR, MOTHER OF NYC MAYOR MAMDANI, APPEARS IN EMAIL

The letter was signed by 19 people, some using aliases or initials, and demanded "the full release of the Epstein files" and that Attorney General Pam Bondi directly address the matter when she testifies before Congress next month.

Executives, politicians, celebrities

A wealthy US financier, Epstein died in a New York prison cell in 2019 while awaiting trial for sex trafficking of underage girls. His death was ruled a suicide. Previous document releases have shed light on Epstein's ties to top business executives such as Microsoft's Gates, celebrities such as filmmaker Woody Allen, academics and politicians, including Trump and former president Bill Clinton.

Among the newly released documents are draft emails that appear to have been written by Epstein and focus on Gates. The emails include claims accusing Gates of attempting to conceal an STD from his then-wife, Melinda French Gates, following alleged sexual encounters with women described as "Russian girls." The Gates Foundation has denied the allegations in a statement to The New York Times.

Indian filmmaker Mira Nair had attended an "after party" for a film at the townhouse of convicted sex trafficker Ghislaine Maxwell, according to the latest Epstein files released by the US Justice Department.

Nair, the mother of New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, is mentioned in one of the emails as part of additional files of investigation related to millionaire sex offender Jeffrey Epstein put out in public domain by the Department of Justice Friday.

Another document showed an email exchange between Musk and Epstein in 2012 in which Musk asked: "What day/night will be the wildest party on your island?"

Musk said in a post on his X platform Saturday he was aware that the email correspondence could be "misinterpreted and used by detractors to smear my name." He called for the prosecution of "those who committed serious crimes with Epstein."

In other emails, Epstein connected Steve Tisch, 76, producer of the movie "Forrest Gump" and the co-owner of the New York Giants football team, with multiple women.

In one exchange with Tisch, Epstein describes a woman as "russian, and rarely tells the full truth, but fun."

Former prince Andrew, who was stripped of his royal titles over his ties to Epstein, is mentioned in one document inviting Epstein to Buckingham Palace in 2010 after Epstein proposed introducing Andrew to a Russian woman.

The Epstein Files Transparency Act called for all the documents held by the Justice Department to be published by December 19. Blanche said Friday's release "marks the end of a very comprehensive document identification and review process". He blamed the delay on work on redactions to protect the identities of Epstein's more than 1,000 alleged victims.

business

Technology will enhance the audit, but only character can protect its credibility

TUHIN KANTA PANDEY | CHAIRMAN, SEBI

SPECIAL TRADING SESSION ON BUDGET DAY

India's stock exchanges will hold a regular live trading session on the Union Budget 2026-27 on February 1, despite being a Sunday. The National Stock Exchange said in a circular that "On account of the presentation of the Union Budget, members are requested to note that Exchange shall be conducting a live trading session on February 1, 2026, as per the standard market timings (9:15 am-3:30 pm)"

Quote of the day

The India-EU Free Trade Agreement, which provides for zero per cent import duty in the EU for the footwear and leather sector, will open up new opportunities for exporters and help achieve our envisaged export target of $14 billion by 2030

R SELVAM | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COUNCIL FOR LEATHER EXPORTS

India's way forward is exciting, which is to leverage our engineering strength to create affordable, human-centric AI that solves local challenges first, then scales globally. This positions us not just as participants, but as leaders in the next wave of meaningful innovation

CP GURNANI | CO-FOUNDER AND VICE CHAIRMAN, AIONOS

The increasing complexity of modern governance systems, which have seen the rise of digital technologies and the shift towards minimum government and maximum governance, has ushered in a new understanding of accountability - one that emphasises transparency, public participation and real time scrutiny

K SANJAY MURTHY | CAG

Q3 RESULTS

IDFC First Bank profit rises 48%

New Delhi: IDFC First Bank Saturday reported a 48 per cent increase in net profit to Rs 503 crore for the third quarter ended December 2025. The private sector lender had earned a net profit of Rs 339 crore in the same quarter a year ago. Total income increased to Rs 12,542 crore during the quarter from Rs 11,123 crore in the same period a year ago, IDFC First Bank said in a regulatory filing. Interest income increased to Rs 10,417 crore from Rs 9,343 crore in the same quarter a year ago.

Sun Pharma net up 16% at Rs 3,369cr

New Delhi: Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Saturday posted a 16 per cent increase in its consolidated net profit to Rs 3,369 crore for the third quarter ended December 31, 2025, led by growth across business segments. The Mumbai-based drug major reported a net profit of Rs 2,903 crore for the October-December quarter of last fiscal. Total revenue from operations rose to Rs 15,520 crore for the third quarter as against Rs 136,75 crore in the year-ago period.

Powergrid profit grows to ₹4,185cr

New Delhi: Powergrid Corporation of India Ltd (Powergrid) has reported an 8 per cent year-on-year rise in consolidated net profit to Rs 4,185 crore in the December 2025 quarter on account of higher income. The company's total income was Rs 12,599 crore, 7 per cent higher compared to the year-ago period. In a statement Friday, Powergrid said its board of directors has also approved a second interim dividend of Rs 3.25 per equity share with a face value of Rs 10 for FY26. This is in addition to interim dividend Rs 4.50 per equity share for the FY 2025-26.

Birla Corporation revenue dips 4.33%

New Delhi: MP Birla Group firm Birla Corporation Ltd Saturday reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 52.76 crore in the December quarter of FY'26 compared to the year-ago period, helped by cost optimisation. It had posted a net profit of Rs 31.19 crore for the October-December period a year ago, according to a regulatory filing from Birla Corporation.

BUDGET FY27

FM may unveil measures to steady growth

Balancing welfare spending with fiscal prudence will be a delicate task, especially amid calls for higher rural support and targeted subsidies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 31: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will February 1 present her ninth straight Budget, which is expected to unveil measures to sustain growth momentum, maintain fiscal discipline, and contain reforms that could buffer the economy from global trade frictions, including US tariffs.

The presentation of the Budget for April 2026 to March 2027 fiscal (2026-27) will be Sunday, a first in independent India's history.

Sitharaman's sweeping income tax and GST cuts, together with spending on infrastructure and the RBI's interest rate reductions, have so far helped the Indian economy withstand the punitive 50 per cent tariff US President Donald Trump has imposed on Indian goods. But now, she has to come up with measures to sustain the momentum.

The FY27 Budget comes against a complex backdrop. While domestic demand has held up and inflation has moderated from recent highs, global uncertainties - including geopolitical tensions, volatile commodity prices and uneven monetary easing by major central banks - continue to cloud the outlook. At home, the government faces pressure to boost consumption, accelerate job creation and step up capital spending, while keeping the fiscal deficit on a downward path.

However, the tax cuts have nibbled into government revenue, limiting her options to support the economy in the new Budget.

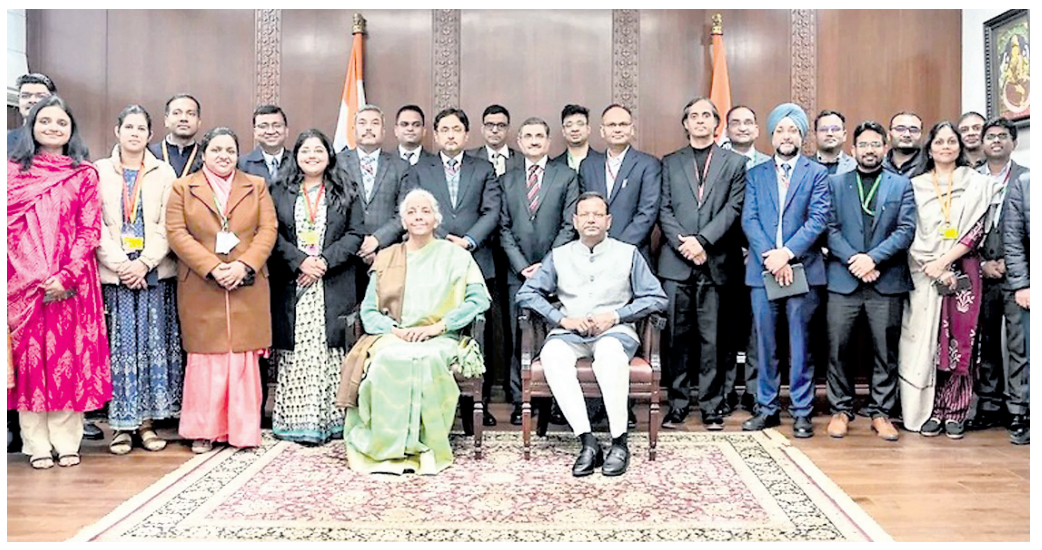
Her biggest challenge will be to find a new growth driver, particularly against the backdrop of a global economy ravaged by heightened uncertainty and fragmentation, financial markets on a precipice, and global commodity prices on a continued uptrend.

Sitharaman, economists said, also faces the difficult task of restoring investor confidence in the near term, as uncertainty over India's trade talks with the US has unsettled financial markets, with foreign investors continuing to sell Indian equities and pushing the rupee to a record low.

Some believe she may use the proven cash cow - petrol and diesel - to shore up revenues. Availing of a limited window available before international oil prices boil, the minister may raise excise duty on the two auto fuels. The duty hike is expected not to be passed on to consumers, but adjusted against the retail price cut that was warranted when global oil prices fell last year.

She may focus on simplifying regulations and pushing structural reforms to attract domestic and foreign investment.

Despite the tight purse strings, she is not expected to cut spending and may include new measures for the poll-bound states -- West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Assam. Some schemes may be re-packaged.



CAPEX PUSH LIKELY TO CONTINUE

Capital expenditure is expected to remain the central pillar of the budget. Over the past few years, the government has sharply increased spending on roads, railways, defence manufacturing, urban infrastructure and logistics to crowd in private investment.

For FY27, economists expect another meaningful rise in capex, though at a more measured pace compared to the post-pandemic surge. Railways, renewable energy, power transmission, defence and urban transport are seen as priority areas, with continued support for state-level infrastructure through interest-free loans.

TAX STABILITY OVER BIG GIVEAWAYS

On the tax front, major changes are considered unlikely. The government has repeatedly signalled a preference for stability and predictability, especially in direct taxes. Any tweaks to personal income tax are expected to be incremental, potentially aimed at easing the burden on the middle class to support consumption.

Corporate tax rates are also likely to remain unchanged, with the focus instead on improving compliance and widening the tax base through digitisation and data-driven enforcement.

JOBS, MANUFACTURING & MSME

Job creation is expected to feature prominently, with possible incentives linked to labour-intensive manufacturing, skilling and apprenticeships.

Schemes supporting micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which have faced margin pressures from high input costs and tight credit conditions, could see enhanced allocations or credit-guarantee support.

There may also be refinements to production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes as the government assesses their impact on manufacturing capacity, exports and employment.

GREEN TRANSITION & ENERGY SECURITY

With India pushing ahead on its energy-transition goals, the FY27 Budget is expected to strengthen support for renewable energy, green hydrogen, battery storage and electric mobility. Measures to enhance domestic manufacturing of clean-energy equipment and reduce import dependence are also likely.

At the same time, allocations for oil and gas infrastructure and strategic reserves could be maintained to address energy-security concerns amid global volatility.

GLOBAL SELLOFF

Silver crashes 19% to ₹3.12 lakh per kg

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 31: Silver prices collapsed 19 per cent to Rs 3.12 lakh per kg in the national capital Saturday, while gold plunged 2 per cent to Rs 1.65 lakh per 10 grams, as investors booked profits amid a global selloff triggered by a stronger US dollar.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, silver nosedived Rs 72,500, or 18.85 per cent, to Rs 3,12,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes), marking a second straight day of heavy losses, wiping out much of this week's record gains.

The white metal had touched a record of Rs 4,04,500 per kg Thursday before plummeting 5 per cent in the previous session.

Silver prices, however, closed January with sharp gains, soaring Rs 73,000, or 30.5 per cent, from Rs 2,39,000 per kilogram recorded on December 31, 2025, despite a steep fall in two consecutive sessions to Saturday.

Gold prices also lost sheen, sliding Rs 3,500, or 2.07 per cent, to Rs 1,65,500 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes). The metal of 99.9 per cent purity plunged 7.6 per cent to Rs 1,69,000 per 10 grams in the previous trade after hitting a record of Rs 1,83,000 per 10 grams Thursday.

In January, gold prices rose by Rs 27,800, or 20.2 per cent, from Rs 1,37,700 per 10 grams recorded at the end of last year.

The dollar index rose 0.9 per cent to close at 97.15. Analysts said the sell-off was driven by a rebound in the dollar, which weighed on gold and silver prices.

BUYING PATTERN SHIFT

iPhone 16 dominates sales chart in 2025

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Mumbai, Jan 31: Indian consumers' smartphone buying patterns showed a marked shift moving away from the traditional budget-segment dominance, as Apple Inc's iPhone 16 base variant emerged as the top-selling smartphone model in 2025, a report has said.

Counterpoint Research report said that India recorded about 154 million smartphone shipments in 2025, of which the iPhone 16 base model accounted for roughly 6.16 million units, representing about 4 per cent of the overall market by volume.

The iPhone 16, launched in September 2024, is priced at around Rs 71,000 for the base variant.

Around 60 per cent of premium smartphones in India are now purchased on equated monthly instalment (EMI) plans, Counterpoint Research found

Kevan Parekh, Apple's CFO, said iPhone revenue was $85.3 billion, up 23 per cent year-over-year, driven by the iPhone 17 family.

'SIN GOODS'

Cigarettes, pan masala to be costlier from today as new excise duty kicks in

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 31: From February 1, the government is bringing a new tax structure for cigarettes, tobacco products and pan masala, aiming to tighten regulation and keep tax levels high on these so-called 'sin goods'.

An additional excise duty will now be charged on cigarettes and tobacco products, along with a new health and national security cess on pan masala.

These new levies will replace the earlier system under which these products were taxed at 28 per cent GST along with a compensation cess that has been in place since the launch of GST in July 2017. The government is also introducing a new MRP-based valuation system for several tobacco products such as chewing tobacco, filter khaini, jarda scented tobacco and gutkha.

Under this system, GST will be calculated based on the retail price printed on the packet, instead of factory value.

This move is expected to reduce tax evasion and improve revenue collection. Pan masala manufacturers will now have to take fresh registration under the new health and national security cess law starting February 1.

They will also be required to install CCTV cameras that cover all packing machines and store the video recordings for at least two years.

In addition, companies must inform excise authorities about the number of machines in their factories and their production capacity.

Even after the new changes, the government has ensured that the overall tax burden on pan masala, including 40 per cent GST, will remain around the current level of 88 per cent.

Chandi Bhandar unveils Bhairav Collection

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 31: Every year, Shivratri is observed as a sacred night of reflection and protection. Honoured as the most auspicious night of Lord Shiva, Shivratri stands for stillness, resilience, and the courage to transcend fear.

Marking this sacred occasion, Chandi Bhandar unveils its newest spiritual offering—the Bhairav Collection, inspired by the fierce yet protective form of Lord Bhairav.

Crafted in pure 92.5 sterling silver, the Bhairav Collection brings together devotion, design, and intention. At the heart of the launch is the iconic Nandi Pendant—a timeless symbol of devotion, loyalty and unwavering faith.

Complementing the collection is the Astro Beads Bracelet range for men and women, crafted to be worn as a contemporary talisman paired with sterling silver accents. The men's designs features tones such as Black Onyx, Howlite, Pyrite, Green Aventurine, Zebra Agate, and Clear Crystal, while the women's bracelets include Lapis Lazuli, Grey Moonstone, Picasso Jasper, Clear Crystal, and Rose Quartz.

Each bead is aligned with different chakras of the body, symbolising a spectrum of energies that support balance, clarity, grounding, courage, and overall spiritual well-being.

To make this Shivratri even more special, Chandi Bhandar introduces its festive campaign, "Gift a Payal." This season, customers can choose from a wide range of Payals from Chandi Bhandar's extensive collection, offering a thoughtful and meaningful gifting option, as gifting silver on Shivratri is traditionally considered auspicious, symbolizing blessings, protection, and good fortune for loved ones.

Chandi Bhandar also announced a limited-time flat 10% off from January 30 to February 15, making it the perfect moment to explore the fresh collections.

"Being one of the first in the market to bring a collection like this, designing the Bhairav Collection has brought me immense joy. Inspired by the fearless avatar of Shivji that resides within each of us, sharing it with our customers this Shivratri makes it even more special." said Lipsa Hans, Founder, Chandi Bhandar.

Record gold prices push Italian jewellers to make leaner designs

REUTERS

Washington, Jan 31: In Italy's storied gold-making hubs, jewellers are reworking their designs to trim gold content as they race to blunt the impact of record prices and appeal to shoppers watching their budgets.

Gold prices hit a record high Thursday, surging near $5,600 an ounce, more than double a year ago as geopolitical concerns and jitters over trade pushed investors towards the safe-haven asset.

The rally is putting undue pressure on small artisans as they face mounting demands from clients including international brands to produce cheaper items, from signature pieces to wedding rings, according to interviews with four independent jewellers in Italy's main jewellery-making hubs.

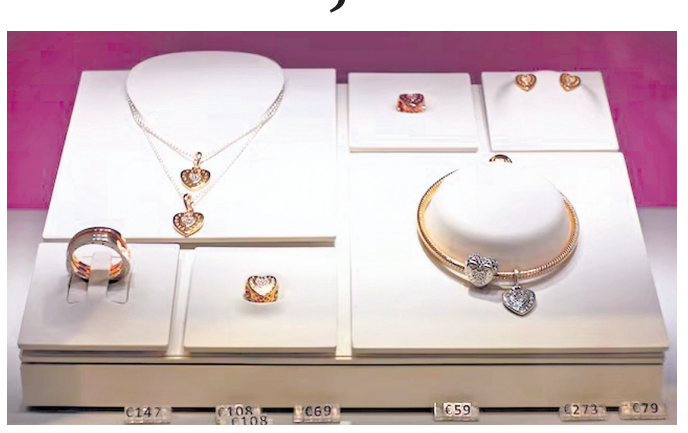
"The main question that I've heard in the last months is if I can produce something lighter while having the same appearance," said Massimo Lucchetta, owner of Lucchetta 1953, an independent jeweller which makes items for department stores in Bassano del Grappa, near Italy's premier gold-crafting hub of Vicenza in the country's northeast.

CUTTING THE WEIGHT BUT KEEPING THE SHAPE

Vicenza, known as one of Italy's three "cities of gold" alongside Arezzo in Tuscany and the Golden Valley of Valenza in Piedmont, hosts twice a year the Vicenzaoro fair, a global event for jewellery and watchmaking.

In Arezzo, several jewellery makers have stepped up the use of machinery that keeps a piece's shape while cutting its metal content, said Giordana Giordini, owner of independent jewellery brand Giordini.

That could, for instance, keep the size of a pendant unchanged but cut its weight in half: "The person is still buying the same idea of what it is," she said from her workshop in Arezzo.



Giordini supplies wholesalers and some retail stores, with nine out of 10 of its products shipped to international markets.

Italy in 2024 accounted for 11.2% of the $130 billion global jewellery market, according to a recent study by bank Mediobanca. Over 6,800 companies operate in the gold, silver and jewellery industry in Italy, employing almost 34,000 people, the study says.

SMALLER JEWELLERS TAKE A HIT, BIG NAMES ARE NOT IMMUNE

Cecile Cabanis, finance chief at luxury behemoth LVMH said Tuesday the price of gold had a negative impact on the performance of its watches and jewellery business, which includes high-end jewellery brands like Bulgari and Tiffany.

Italian jewellers adapt designs to reduce gold content

Small jewellers face most acute challenges

Big brands like LVMH also affected

Wedding rings highlight price sensitivity

That comes even though the French conglomerate, which has its flagship gold manufacturing site in Valenza, has implemented hedging measures, including the use of financial derivatives and negotiating the forecast price of future precious metals deliveries, according to its yearly report.

The pressure on smaller workshops is, however, more acute. They are unable to hedge, due to the expense and the risks of trading in financial derivatives.

Sharp day-to-day swings in the price of gold and silver have a direct effect on retail prices as raw material costs are directly passed on to customers, said Giordini. A gold necklace that cost 300 euros ($358) some months ago may now be priced at 500 euros, she said.

Giordini said fluctuations in the price of gold can affect the costs facing businesses like hers by tens of thousands of euros, as they pay for raw materials upfront.

Valenza jeweller Alessia Crivelli, who is also the vice president of trade group Confindustria Federorafi, said another option for producers is to recover and reuse scrap metals from their own production lines. Using recycled or resold gold is, however, close to impossible because it can be difficult to certify its origin.

Rybakina, queen of Melbourne

The 26-year-old Kazakh overpowers world No 1 Sabalenka to win first Australian Open title, avenging her loss to the Belarusian in the 2023 final

REUTERS

Melbourne, Jan 31: Elena Rybakina produced a thunderous display to dismantle Aryna Sabalenka 6-4 4-6 6-4 Saturday and capture a maiden Australian Open title, turning the tables on the world number one in their Melbourne Park final rematch from three years ago.

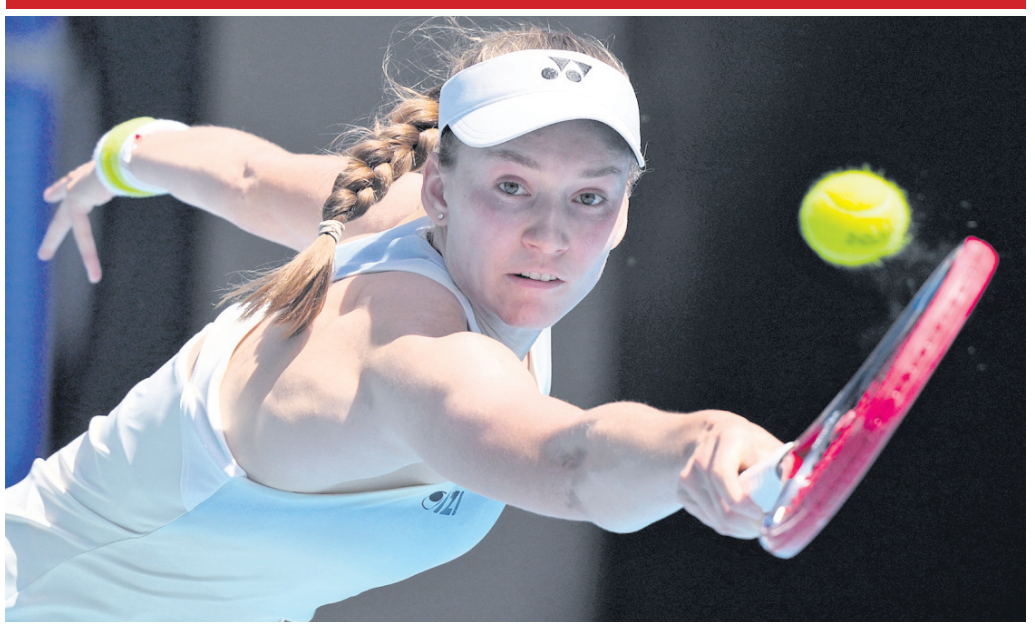
Rybakina returned to the site of her heartbreak in 2023 to complete an impressive victory and earn her second major trophy after Wimbledon 2022, underlining her credentials as the player best equipped to puncture Sabalenka's hardcourt aura.

The 26-year-old capped a fortnight of relentless efficiency while largely flying under the radar, adding the Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup to a resume that also includes the 2025 WTA Finals crown where she downed Sabalenka.

"It's hard to find words now but I want to congratulate Aryna for her amazing results in the last couple of years. I hope we're going to play many more finals together," Kazakh Rybakina said.

In the first Grand Slam final since 2008 featuring players yet to drop a set, it was top seed Sabalenka who blinked first under the Rod Laver Arena roof as Rybakina came out all guns blazing to break in the opening game and wrest control.

AUSTRALIAN OPEN



The fifth seed's huge ball-striking caused all sorts of problems for twice champion Sabalenka as she comfortably got to set point in the 10th game and finished it off to send alarm bells ringing in her opponent's dugout.

Having arrived with 46 hardcourt Grand Slam match wins from the last 48, four-times major winner Sabalenka found her groove and started the second set more positively, but Rybakina saved three breakpoints to hold for 1-1. A wayward forehand from Rybakina handed Sabalenka the chance to level at one set apiece, and the Belarusian gleefully took it to turn the final set into a shootout destined to be decided by whichever player held their nerves.

Having beaten Rybakina from a similar situation in the 2023 title clash, Sabalenka unleashed a flurry of winners to go ahead 3-0, but the Kazakh erased the deficit and broke for 4-3 before securing victory to add to her All England club triumph.

The knockout blow was a huge ace, after which the typically restrained Rybakina walked forward, smiled and pumped her fist before celebrating with her team.

Sabalenka, denied an Australian Open "three-peat" by American outsider Madison Keys in last year's final, endured heartbreak again as she retreated to her chair and draped a white towel over her head to conceal her anguish.

"I'm really speechless right now," she said, before turning to her victorious opponent and the fans. "I want to congratulate you on an incredible run and incredible tennis. Such an incredible achievement. I love being here, love playing in front of you all. You guys are incredible support. Let's hope next year is going to be a better year."

> **I want to say thank you to you guys (fans). Thank you so much to Kazakhstan. I felt the support from that corner a lot. It's really a Happy Slam and I always enjoy coming here and playing in front of you guys**
>
> ELENA RYBAKINA

HISTORIC CLASH TODAY:
Novak Djokovic and Carlos Alcaraz meet in Sunday's Australian Open final with history in the balance, as the Serbian great chases a record 25th Grand Slam title and the Spanish dynamo bids to become the youngest man to win all four majors

Harrison, Skupski win doubles title in first major together

Sixth seeds Neal Skupski and Christian Harrison defeated Australia's wildcard pairing of Jason Kubler and Marc Polmans 7-6(4) 6-4 to capture the Australian Open men's doubles title Saturday in their first Grand Slam event as a team. The British-American duo's victory at Rod Laver Arena gave Harrison his first Grand Slam title and marked Skupski's fourth in doubles and mixed doubles, though his first outside Wimbledon. The partnership is remarkably fresh, as the pair started playing together only two weeks ago in Adelaide after training for a week together in Baton Rouge in December. "We obviously started playing together in Adelaide two weeks ago now," Skupski said. "We didn't know obviously how it would go. It seems to be going pretty well so far!" The victory brings another Grand Slam trophy into the Harrison household after his elder brother Ryan, also his coach, won the French Open doubles title in 2017. "My parents are back home, and I remember I was with them when I watched my brother win the French Open on TV and they were emotional wrecks. So I know they're probably doing the same right now," Harrison said.

Mertens, Zhang clinch first Grand Slam trophy as duo

Fourth seeds Elise Mertens and Zhang Shuai won the Australian Open women's doubles title Saturday with a 7-6(4) 6-4 victory over Anna Danilina and Aleksandra Krunic, claiming their first Grand Slam trophy as a duo. The victory handed Mertens her sixth Grand Slam title while Zhang won her third but the triumph almost never happened, with the Belgian-Chinese pair forced to save three match points in the second round against teenagers Iva Jovic and Victoria Mboko. "It's been quite a week so far," said Mertens, who is set to move up to world number one in the doubles rankings. "I'm lost for words. In the second round of doubles, we had three match points against us. We kept on fighting, we kept on believing and we really grew as a team. Today, in the final, I'm happy that I served it out eventually. "It's the first week that we've actually played together and what a result. It's been amazing."

SHORT TAKES

U-19 WC: India eye revenge against Pak

Bulawayo: Five-time champions India will look to avenge their humiliating Asia Cup final loss against arch-rivals Pakistan when the two teams lock horns in a Super Six match of the ICC Men's U-19 World Cup here Sunday. India lost to Pakistan by 191 runs in the Under-19 Asia Cup final in Dubai last December after winning the group match of the same tournament against the arch-rivals by 90 runs. India are also likely to continue with their 'no handshake' policy with Pakistan in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack and the ensuing Operation Sindoor carried out by the country's armed forces. The Indian Under-19 team avoided the post-match handshake with Pakistan in the final of the U-19 Asia Cup. The Indians had skipped the gesture during the two sides' group stage match of that tournament as well.

Aus T20 WC squad: Cummins ruled out

Sydney: Australia's pace spearhead Pat Cummins has been ruled out of the T20 World Cup due to injury as Cricket Australia made two changes to the provisional squad to finalise their 15-member team for the mega T20 spectacle, commencing February 7. Cummins, along with Josh Hazlewood and Tim David, had initially been named in Australia's provisional squad, pending fitness. Mitchell Marsh captains the team as Australia named a spin-heavy group, with Adam Zampa joined by Matthew Kuhnemann, Cooper Connolly and all-rounders Glenn Maxwell and Matt Renshaw. Mitchell Owen is the most notable omission from the 15-man squad.

ASMITA RUGBY LEAGUE

Odisha secure semi-final spots

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 31: The inaugural edition of the ASMITA Rugby League - National got off to an exciting start at the Kalinga Stadium here Saturday, with a full slate of poolstage matches across the Sub-Junior (U15), Junior (U18) and Senior Women categories.

The opening day saw strong performances across the board, with Bihar, Odisha, Maharashtra and Rajasthan securing semi-final qualification across multiple categories.

In the Sub-Junior Girls (U15) category, Bihar, Rajasthan, Odisha and Maharashtra; advanced to the semi-finals on the back of strong performances. Bihar, who were also winners of the recently concluded Sub-Junior National Rugby 7s Championship, finished atop Pool E with notable wins against Rajasthan, DNHDD and Chandigarh.

In Pool F, Odisha progressed with a series of convincing results, including a 47-0 win over Karnataka, while Maharashtra confirmed their semi-final place with wins over Karnataka and West Bengal.

The Junior Girls (U18) category saw the same quartet stamp their authority once again. In Pool D was led by Odisha, who produced emphatic scorelines, including a 57-0 win over West Bengal and a 35-0 victory against Kerala.

In the Senior Women's category, experienced teams delivered a series of high-intensity encounters. Pool B was controlled by Odisha, who impressed with commanding performances throughout, registering wins such as 40-5 against Maharashtra and 45-0 over Karnataka.

The Senior Women's semi-final line-up also include players who have represented India at the international level, reflecting the standard of rugby on display.

The tournament will conclude February 1, with all ranking matches, as well as the semifinals and finals across all categories, promising another day of competitive rugby action at the Kalinga Stadium.

SEMI-FINAL FIXTURES:

Sub-Junior Girls (U15)
10:30 am - Bihar vs Maharashtra
10:50 am - Rajasthan vs Odisha

Junior Girls (U18)
11:10 am - Bihar vs Maharashtra
11:30 am - Rajasthan vs Odisha

Senior Women
11:50 am - Bihar vs Maharashtra
12:10 pm - West Bengal vs Odisha

Dominant India seal 4-1 series win

Kishan's maiden T20I ton, Arshdeep's fifer headline India's 46-run victory over NZ

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thiruvananthapuram, Jan 31: Ishan Kishan's thrill-a-second maiden T20I hundred compensated for Sanju Samson's familiar failure, and the knock in conjunction with Arshdeep Singh's fifer scripted India's 46-run romp over New Zealand in the fifth and final match here Saturday.

India thus sealed the series 4-1, and wrapped up their preparations to defend the T20 World Cup title on a highly satisfactory note.

Once India made a humongous 271 for five, riding on Kishan's (103, 43 balls, 6x4, 10x6) and skipper Suryakumar Yadav's (63, 30b, 4x4, 6x6), only the margin of victory was needed to be known.

The Kiwis fought gamely in pockets, but eventually finished with 225 all out. For India, pacer Arshdeep regrouped from his early travails to take a delightful five-wicket haul (5/51). He had conceded 40 runs in his first two overs for the wicket of Tim Seifert, but then took four wickets in the next three overs for a mere 11 runs.

Fin Allen (80, 38b) played a powerful innings upfront but the target was always outside the Kiwis' grasp.

Allen, the top-scorer in the recently concluded Big Bash League, carried that form to the Greenfield Stadium.

The right-hander put pacer Arshdeep through the shredder, collecting two fours and a six in the opening over of the Kiwis' innings.

Soon, Allen clubbed the Indian pacer for 4, 4, 6, 4, 4 in his second over to make 23 runs in total.

Allen, who reached his sixth T20I fifty in 22 balls, fell to returning left-arm spinner Axar Patel (3/33), ending a second wicket alliance of 100 runs with Rachin Ravindra (30, 17b).

In fact, both the spinners -- Axar and Varun Chakravarthy (1/36) -- did a commendable job in reining in New Zealand after the Power Play.

There was no real life in New Zealand's chase once Allen went back with wickets falling at regular intervals.

Brief Scores
India: 271 for 5 in 20 overs (Ishan Kishan 103, Suryakumar Yadav 63; Lockie Ferguson 2/41) beat **New Zealand:** 225 allout in 19.4 overs (Finn Allen 80; Arshdeep Singh 5/51) by 46 runs

SUSPENSE LINGERS

PCB cancels T20 WC kit unveiling

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Mumbai, Jan 31: The uncertainty over Pakistan's participation in the upcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup increased as the country's cricket board Saturday cancelled the unveiling of team's kit for the mega event, a news report has claimed.

The kit was to be unveiled before the second T20I against Australia in Lahore Saturday but the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has now cancelled the event with no clarity over when it will be done, Telecom Asia Sport said in a report.

"Pakistan team's kit for the upcoming T20 World Cup was due to be unveiled after the toss of the second Twenty20 international against Australia at the Gaddafi Stadium but it has been cancelled due to unavoidable circumstances," sources told www.telecomasia.net. This further enhanced the doubts over team's participation in the T20 World Cup to be jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka as a protest over Bangladesh's expulsion from the event.

THAILAND MASTERS

Devika enters maiden Super 300 final

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangkok, Jan 31: Young Indian shuttler Devika Sihag stormed into her maiden BWF Super 300 final with a straight-game win over world No 35 Huang Yu-Hsun at the USD 250,000 Thailand Masters here Saturday.

The 20-year-old unseeded Indian, who claimed her maiden BWF International Challenge title at the Malaysia International last year, registered a 22-20, 21-13 win over the fifth-seeded Huang in the women's singles semifinal.

Seemingly down and out at 15-20 in the opening game, Devika rose like a phoenix, saving five game points to seal the opener and continued the momentum in the second to prevail over Huang, who drowned in a cesspool of unforced errors.

The world No 63 will face Malaysia's Goh Jin Wei in the summit clash.

The two shuttlers fought early, moving to 7-7 at one stage. Huang then surged ahead, slowly building a substantial lead.

The Indian was guilty of handing her opponent opportunities to quickly finish the points as Huang led 18-14.

Aided by a service error from Devika and a straight smash, Huang grabbed five game points. Huang next found the net as it became 18-20.

When Huang smashed wide, the Indian brought it level at 20-20. She sealed the game after the Taiwanese once again smashed wide.

The second game started with Huang allowing Devika to take an 11-5 lead at the break. Devika tried to engage her opponent in long rallies, moving to 14-8. She used her overhead drops and forehand flat drives to go 17-9 up.

Huang again smashed into the net to see Devika reach 19-12. An on-the-line return on the backline gave seven match points to the Indian and she sealed it with a smash.

Devika's rise on the circuit has been steady and consistent. The youngster claimed her maiden international title at the Malaysia International in August 2025 and later contributed to India's mixed team bronze at the 2025 World University Games.

SAFF U19 C'SHIP

Young Tigresses start with win

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Pokhara (Nepal), Jan 31: India began their SAFF U19 Women's Championship 2026 campaign with a 1-0 win against hosts Nepal at the Pokhara Rangasala Stadium here Saturday.

Pearl Fernandes (49') scored the only goal of the game right after the resumption in the second half. Although this is an U19 tournament, India have travelled to Pokhara with an U17 squad that is preparing for the AFC U17 Asian Cup, later this year.

Head coach Pamela Conti, who was appointed earlier this month, had her first game in charge, where she handed out junior India debuts to Redima Devi Chingkhamayum and Alva Devi Senjam, both of whom started the game.

Earlier in the day, Bangladesh defeated Bhutan 12-0. The Young Tigresses trail Bangladesh only on goal difference. India will face Bangladesh in their next match February 2.

The top two teams at the end of the league stage will progress to a one-off final.

Odisha build commanding 221-run lead vs Jharkhand

RANJI TROPHY

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jamshedpur, Jan 31: Odisha tightened their grip on the Ranji Trophy contest against Jharkhand with a commanding all-round performance that put them firmly in control by the end of Day 3 at the Keenan Stadium, Jamshedpur. Showing patience, discipline and depth, Odisha built pressure across all three days to surge ahead with a lead of 221 runs against Jharkhand.

After being bowled out for 282 in their first innings, Odisha's bowlers responded with intent. Sayed Tufayal Ahmad led the charge with a probing spell, picking up four wickets as Jharkhand were dismissed for 263, despite a fluent 80 from Shikhar Mohan. Govinda Poddar provided excellent support, ensuring Odisha secured a crucial first-innings advantage.

In the second innings, Odisha's batters displayed resilience on a wearing surface. Subhranshu Senapati anchored the innings with a gritty 73 off 145 balls, absorbing pressure and blunting the Jharkhand attack. Anil Parida's 28 further added stability as Odisha reached 202 for 8 in 76.5 overs before stumps, stretching their lead beyond Jharkhand's comfort zone.

Earlier in the match, Odisha had laid the foundation through solid contributions from Swastik Samal and Govinda Poddar, whose half-centuries on Day 1 and Day 2 ensured the team never lost momentum. The bowlers then capitalised, maintaining discipline and control across sessions.

With a sizeable lead and time on their side, Odisha will head into the final phase of the match brimming with confidence. Jharkhand face an uphill task, while Odisha remain well placed.

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