



PeeCee's determination

Actor Priyanka Chopra admits leaving Hindi cinema for Hollywood was difficult, but determination and legacy-driven ambition kept her going

LEISURE | P2



Nuclear talks

Iran's foreign minister meets with the UN nuclear watchdog chief Monday, ahead of talks between Washington and Tehran

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Trade deficit widens

India's exports rise marginally by 0.61% to \$36.56 billion in January, while trade deficit widens to a three-month high of \$34.68 billion

BUSINESS | P11



Lanka in Super 8s

Sri Lanka beat Australia by 8 wickets to secure their place in the Super Eights

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BHUBANESWAR | TUESDAY | FEBRUARY 17, 2026

SC warns against pre-marital intimacy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 16: The Supreme Court Monday said a boy and a girl before marriage are "total strangers" and they should be cautious while indulging in pre-marital physical relationships.

A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan, which was hearing the bail plea of a man accused of rape on a false promise of marriage, questioned the woman why she travelled all the way to Dubai where they indulged in physical relationship.

Justice Nagarathna questioned the woman about what was the need for her to travel to Dubai and observed that it appears to be a case of consensual relationship.

"She should not have gone before marriage if she was so strict about it. We will send them to mediation. These are not cases which are to be tried and convicted when there is consensual relationship," the bench observed.

"Whatever may be the thick and thin of their relationship, we fail to understand how they can be

indulging in physical relationship before marriage. Maybe we are old-fashioned but you must be very careful, nobody should believe anybody before marriage," Justice Nagarathna said.

Counsel for the woman said they met on a matrimonial website in 2022 and he allegedly established physical relations with her on a false promise of marriage on multiple occasions in Delhi and later in Dubai.

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"She should not have gone before marriage if she was so strict about it. We will send them to mediation. These are not cases which are to be tried and convicted when there is consensual relationship," the bench observed.

"Whatever may be the thick and thin of their relationship, we fail to understand how they can be



AIRBORNE: Lucia Georgalli of New Zealand in action during Womens Snowboard Slopestyle Qualification at Winter Olympics 2026 in Italy

REUTERS

7 BURNT ALIVE IN CHEMICAL FACTORY FIRE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaipur, Feb 16: Seven people were burnt alive in an illegal firecracker-manufacturing factory in the Bhiwadi town of Rajasthan's Khairthal-Tijara district Monday, officials said.

"Seven persons have died in the incident. It was a garment factory but firecrackers were being manufactured inside it illegally," Sumitra Pareek, Additional District Magistrate, said. She said that two people were trapped in the factory.

The incident occurred in the Khushkhera-Karoli industrial area in Bhiwadi. "The premises was leased out in the name of a garment factory but as per the preliminary report, firecrackers were being manufactured illegally," she said.

She said that the police came to know about the incident during a routine patrol, following which a rescue operation was launched immediately.

PM inaugurates AI Impact Expo

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Monday inaugurated the India AI Impact Expo here featuring over 600 high-potential startups and 13 country pavilions showcasing international collaboration in the AI ecosystem. He also interacted with startups participating in the expo. The prime minister visited various stalls and spoke with the companies participating in the expo. He was seen asking questions from company representatives to better understand what they are showcasing. The PM spent several minutes at various stalls while interacting with the representatives.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



After your release, come and join our party immediately. Cooling off period is only for writing books

Unemployment rate rises to 5%

Despite the government's repeated claims of creating millions of new jobs, India's jobless rate has fluctuated in recent years. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), an independent think tank that produces economic and business databases for decision making and research, unemployment remains a concern, particularly among urban youth and graduates. In fact, in January 2026, the national unemployment rate edged up to 5.0 % from 4.8 % in December 2025, driven by rising joblessness in both rural (4.2 % vs. 3.9 %) and urban areas (7.0 % vs. 6.7 %), according to National Statistics Office which confirm CMIE's observations

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



Representational image

to a government survey released Monday.

The UR (unemployment rate) or joblessness recorded a marginal increase in January in both rural and urban areas, showed the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). The data also showed lower labour force participation rate (LFPR) as well as workers population ratio (WPR) across the rural and urban areas.

The National Statistics Office (NSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, said in a statement that the decline in LFPR and WPR, and rise in

UR in January was primarily rural-driven, with seasonal factors, post-harvest slack, and discouragement effects playing a key role.

"Many activities like construction, agriculture allied work, transport, small trade, etc. slowdown in winter. Urban areas remained stable," it explained.

The rural UR edged up from 3.9 per cent to 4.2 per cent, while the urban UR increased from 6.7 per cent to 7.0 per cent during December 2025 to January 2026.

Among males aged 15 years and above, the UR continued to remain stable in January 2026.

In contrast, unemployment among females in the same age group was higher in January 2026 than in December 2025.

It stated that the female UR remained within the range observed during the period April to December 2025, indicating a short-term increase rather than a significant weakening of female labour market conditions.

Raseswari Panigrahi passes away at 79



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Feb 16: Former Odisha MLA and popular doctor Raseswari Panigrahi, 79, died Monday at her residence in Sambalpur district, her doctor said.

Panigrahi was undergoing treatment due to neurological complications. "As Panigrahi did not want to be hospitalised she was under treatment in her home," the doctor said.

Panigrahi was elected to the state Assembly once from Sambalpur constituency in 2014 from BJD ticket. However, she resigned from the BJD in 2024 and decided to stay away from politics.

Panigrahi, a popular Gynaecologist of western Odisha, is known for her dedication and service to humanity. CM Mohan Charan Majhi, in an X post, said he was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Panigrahi while conveying condolences to the bereaved family.

Ratna Bhandar inventory to begin soon, says Majhi

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 16: The long-awaited inventory and valuation of gold ornaments and precious stones stored in the Ratna Bhandar of the Jagannath Temple will commence shortly, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi announced after chairing a high-level meeting at Lok Seva Bhawan Monday.

The CM held detailed discussions on the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to be adopted for the procedure.

Srimandir Chief Administrator Arabinda Padhee made a detailed presen-

tation before the CM, informing that all preliminary procedures have been completed. Restoration and conservation work of both the inner and outer Ratna Bhandar chambers has already been concluded by the Archaeological Survey of India. The conservation work was completed over a span of 95 days, involving 333 hours of structural and preservation measures.

Notably, the last inventory of the Ratna Bhandar was carried out in 1978. During the upcoming exercise, the valuables will be cross-verified with the 1978 records and a final updated list will

be prepared. The entire process will also include detailed photography and the preparation of a comprehensive digital catalogue of ornaments and precious items.

The meeting also reviewed preparations for this year's Rath Yatra. Considering the large requirement of phassi and sandalwood for the construction of the chariots, the CM directed officials to submit proposals for plantation of these species under forest development schemes. Senior ministers and top administrative officials were present at the meeting.

India among top six cropland emitters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 16: India is among six countries that together account for 61 per cent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions from croplands, a new study has estimated.

The study, published in the journal Nature Climate Change, breaks down agricultural emissions by crop and source, and creates the most precise map yet of hotspots, with pathways towards reducing hotspots, researchers said.

"This is an absolute global synthesis of all the information you need, by country, by production system, for calculating greenhouse gas emissions – it's been a significant undertaking,"



senior author Mario Herrero, professor of global development at Cornell University's college of agriculture and life sciences, said.

Regions producing a lot of food are often high emitters, with cultivation of rice alone contributing 43 per

cent of cropland emissions, the study found.

Four crops – rice, maize, oil palm and wheat – accounted for nearly three-quarters of cropland emissions, it said.

"It's all about rice. That's where the biggest sources

cropland emissions," the authors wrote.

"Some of the more nutritious foods, fruits and vegetables, have way lower footprints. I was surprised by the importance of peatland (vegetable matter) areas, too, which was much larger than expected," the senior author said.

Source of the emissions was found to differ depending on the crop – drained peatlands for palm oil production (35 per cent), flooded rice paddies (35 per cent) and synthetic fertilisers used in high-production areas (23 per cent).

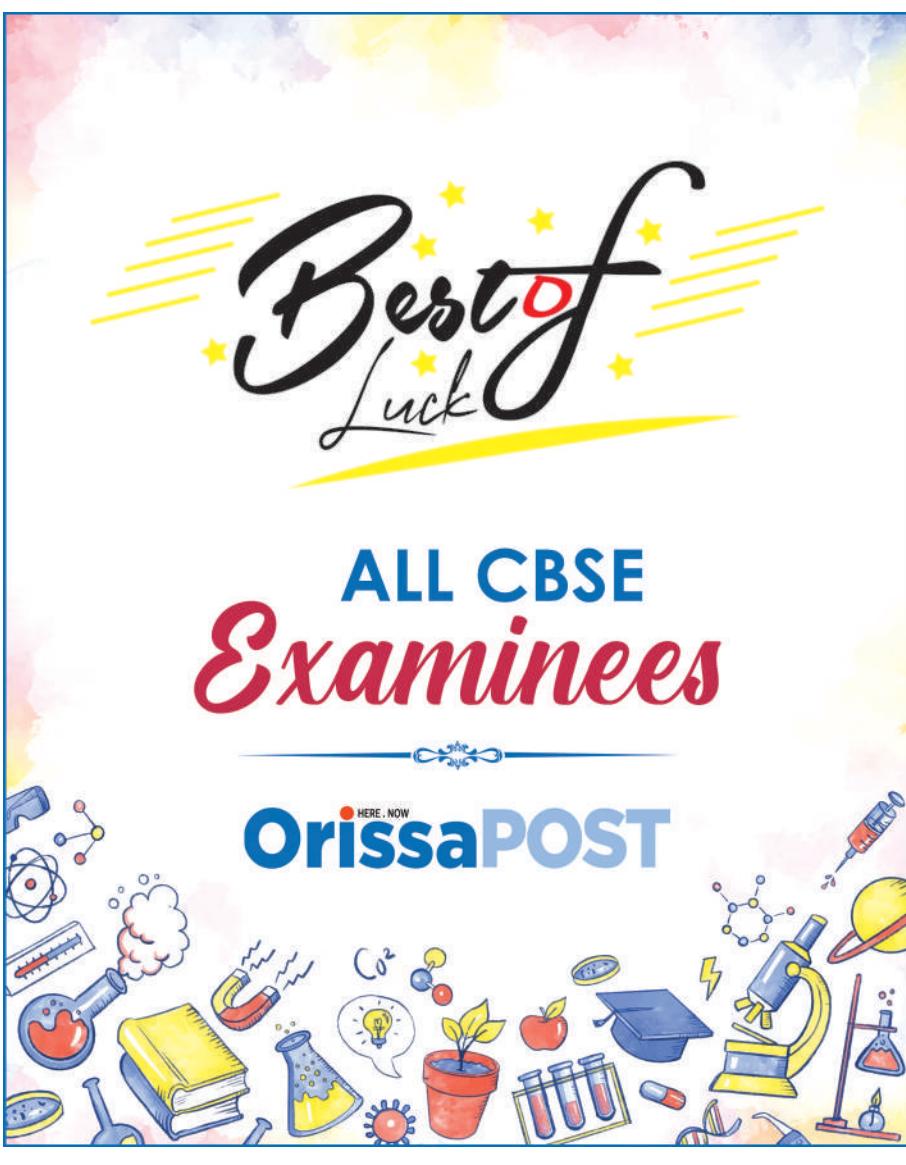
"The six highest-emitting countries, China, India, Indonesia, India, USA, Thailand and Brazil, collectively accounted for 61 per cent of global

cropland emissions," the authors wrote.

"Countries with high crop production levels, such as China, India, USA and Brazil, also emitted substantial (greenhouse gases) from synthetic fertiliser use," they said.

The team also estimated that croplands emitted the greenhouse gas equivalent of 2.5 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide in 2020, with East Asia and Pacific contributing about half of the total, followed by South Asia, Europe and Central Asia, which collectively contributed 30 per cent.

Emission mitigating strategies need to be tailored depending on the crop and emissions source, the researchers said.



ALL CBSE
Examinees

HERE . NOW
Orissa POST

CBSE: First board exam must for Class X students

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 16: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has said that it is mandatory for Class X students to appear in the first board exam, and those who do not attempt at least three subjects in the first edition will be placed in the 'essential repeat' category, officials said.

CBSE is starting with two board exams for Class X from 2026.

The clarification by the board comes after it received a few requests stating that Class X students who are not able to appear in the first board exam should be allowed to appear in the second board exam.

"It is mandatory for all the students to appear in the first board examination. All passed and eligible students will be allowed to improve their performance in any of the three subjects out of Science, Mathematics, Social Science and languages," CBSE Examination Controller Sanyam Bhardwaj said.

"If a student has not appeared in three or more subjects in the first examination, then he or she will not be allowed to appear in the second examination. Such students will be placed in the 'essential repeat' category

and can take the examination only in the main examinations in the month of February next year," he added.

Students with compartment in the first exam will be allowed to appear in the second exam under the 'compartment' category, Bhardwaj said.

"Additional subject will not be permitted after passing Class X, students will not be allowed in stand-alone subjects. Because of any reason if a student is not able to appear in three or more subjects in main examination, he or she cannot be permitted to appear in second board exams as per policy. Any request received by CBSE about this will not be responded to," Bhardwaj said.

Board exams for Class X and XII will begin Tuesday, with over 46 lakh students set to appear from India and abroad.

Under the new National Education Policy (NEP), several recommendations have been made with regard to board exams, including conducting them twice a year.

NEP 2020 said that the existing system of board and entrance exams shall be reformed to eliminate the need for undertaking coaching classes.

**CLASS
X & XII
EXAMS
BEGIN
TODAY**



TIGHT VIGIL: Security personnel deployed on the Assembly premises in Bhubaneswar, Monday, ahead of the Budget Session beginning Tuesday (REPORT P4)

OP PHOTO

Ol Chiki powerful symbol of Santhali identity: President

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 16: Describing the Ol Chiki script as a "powerful symbol" of Santhali identity, President Droupadi Murmu Monday said efforts should be made to preserve and promote this century-old script.

Addressing a gathering to commemorate the centenary of Ol Chiki script, Murmu also expressed happiness that the script is growing in the digital medium.

In 1925, Pandit Raghunath Murmu created Ol Chiki script. Since then, it has become a powerful symbol of the Santhali identity.

President Droupadi Murmu during the inauguration of the centenary celebrations of the Ol Chiki script

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 16: In a significant development, the Supreme Court Monday agreed to examine a batch of petitions challenging the constitutional validity of several provisions of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023.

The top court, however, refused to grant an interim stay on the impugned provisions, saying "by an interim order, it will not thwart a regime introduced by Parliament unless we hear the case".

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi issued a notice to the Centre on the pleas challenging certain provisions of the DPDP Act and the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules 2025 over their amendment of the provisions of the Right to Information Act.

The bench also referred three petitions, filed by Venkatesh Nayak on behalf of digital news platform 'The Reporters Collective', journalist Nitin Sethi and National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI), to a larger bench.

The pleas raised concerns over the "fiduciary" clauses, which allow the Union government to requisition data from any data fiduciary at its discretion.

The bench said the matter pertained to "complex and sensitive



President Droupadi Murmu during the inauguration of the centenary celebrations of the Ol Chiki script

It was included in the Constitution's Eighth Schedule in 2003. In her address, Murmu described India as a "garden of multiple languages", stressing the importance of using one's mother tongue in communication.

She also said efforts should be made to preserve and promote Ol Chiki script.

Earlier, a military band welcomed Murmu at the venue—the Bhim Hall of the Dr Ambedkar International Centre. It first played the national song 'Vande Mataram', followed by the national anthem 'Jana Gana Mana'.

A group of folk artists sang songs in Santhali, followed by a performance by a troupe of Santhali dancers on a theme that celebrated nature and the cultural diversity of India.

A short film on the genesis and evolution of the Ol Chiki script was also screened on the occasion. A special postage stamp and a commemorative Rs 100 coin, along with a souvenir on Ol Chiki script, were also released at the event.

Ol Chiki is the official script of the Santhali language, one of India's prominent tribal languages spoken widely across Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Assam, and Bihar.



THE PETITIONERS HAVE CHALLENGED SECTION 44(3) OF DIGITAL PERSONAL DATA PROTECTION ACT, WHICH AMENDS SECTION 8(1) (J) OF RTI ACT, GIVING A BLANKET EXEMPTION TO THE DISCLOSURE OF PERSONAL INFORMATION

issues", and it involved balancing two competing sets of fundamental rights, the Right to Information and the Right to Privacy.

"This is about balancing competing interests. We have to iron out the creases and lay down what constitutes personal information," the CJI said.

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The bench said the matter pertained to "complex and sensitive

but the court proceeded to issue notice to ensure a comprehensive response from the Centre.

The top court has scheduled the matter for a hearing in March. Senior advocate Vrinda Grover, appearing in the matter, contended that the legislation has taken an excessive approach.

"Instead of using a chisel, it has used a hammer and has thus rendered a body blow," she submitted, arguing that the amendments effectively undermine transparency safeguards.

The petitioners have essentially challenged Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act, which amends Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act, giving a blanket exemption to the disclosure of personal information.

Before the amendment, personal information could have been disclosed if there was an overriding public interest.

One of the pleas said that the new provision undermines citizens' right to information and transparency in public administration. It said that journalists and transparency activists frequently rely on access to personal information in limited, public-interest contexts to expose wrongdoing, corruption, or conflicts of interest.

By eliminating the public interest override, the amended provision allegedly tilts the balance decisively in favour of privacy at the cost of accountability.

A SHOW. THIS IS A STATEMENT." read the caption.

The rap star's debut India concert is part of his 2026 world tour and will be presented by White Fox, Plush Entertainment, and Wizcraft International.

The announcement ends years of speculation around a possible India concert. While Ye has visited the country previously—including a reported 2009 stay at an ashram and a 2012 visit linked to his fashion ventures—he has never performed here. His debut will take place at the 60,000-capacity JNS Stadium, which has become a key stop for

international tours since its re-development ahead of the 2010 Commonwealth Games.

In October last year, Travis Scott headlined the venue, delivering one of the capital's

Man dies in mishap, 2 days before wedding

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rayagada, Feb 16: A 24-year-old man, who was set to tie nuptial knot Wednesday, was killed in a road mishap in this district late Sunday night, according to police.

The deceased was identified as Siddhanta Ganta, a resident of Baising village under Seshkhali police limits of Rayagada block.

According to police and family members, Siddhanta had gone to Rayagada town Sunday for some work. However, his motorcycle hit a culvert near his village around 10pm when he was returning home, killing him on the spot.

Throughout the night, his family members left no stone unturned in searching for Siddhanta, but to no avail.

It was Monday morning when some villagers spotted Siddhanta's lifeless body lying in a farmland, and informed his family members and sarpanch of Baising gram panchayat.

On being informed, Sheshkhali police reached the spot, seized the body and the motorcycle and began an investigation.

JEE-Main 2026: Odisha boy among 12 with perfect 100

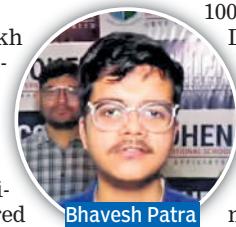
PTI & AGENCIES

New Delhi/Bhubaneswar, Feb 16: Twelve candidates, including one from Odisha, have bagged the perfect 100 score in JEE-Main 2026, the National Testing Agency (NTA) announced Monday.

More than 13.04 lakh candidates had appeared for the first edition of the crucial engineering entrance exam.

Among the candidates who have secured an NTA score of 100, three are from Rajasthan, two from Andhra Pradesh and one each is from Delhi, Bihar, Odisha, Haryana, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Telangana.

"NTA scores are normalised scores across multi-shift papers and are based on the relative performance of all those who appeared for the examination in one shift. The marks obtained are transformed into a scale ranging from 100 to 0 for each shift of examinees. The NTA score is not the same as the percentage of marks obtained," a senior official explained.



Mishra from Delhi, Shubham Kumar from Bihar, Bhavesh Patra from Odisha, Anay Jain from Haryana, Madhav Viradaya from Maharashtra, Purohit Nimay from Gujarat and Vivian Sharad Mahiswari from Telangana secured an NTA score of 100," according to the Livemint.

According to officials, the NTA score is not the same as the percentage of marks obtained but normalised scores.

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Rourkela: AI cameras help save 4 jumbos

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, Feb 16: Artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled cameras helped avert a possible tragedy and saved the lives of four elephants near Rourkela, a Forest official said.

The incident occurred in the Mahipani forest between Bhalulata and Jareikela railway stations under Chakradharpur railway division of South Eastern Railway. Rourkela DFO

Jashobant Sethi said AI-based 360-degree cameras detected elephant movement near Mahipani railway tracks under Bisra block at 1:33am Sunday.

Upon reviewing the footage, officials confirmed that four elephants were moving close to the tracks. The railway control room was immediately alerted, and train speeds were reduced in the affected section. Railway authorities delayed a goods train by about

RAPPER KANYE WEST CONFIRMS FIRST INDIA SHOW

AGENCIES

California, Feb 16: Rapper Ye, formerly Kanye West, will bring his live show to India for the first time March 29, 2026, headlining a stadium date at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, New Delhi. TICKETS DROP 18.02 - 4 PM @districtupdates. THIS IS NOT

Tickets will be available from Wednesday. The event is organised by White Fox, Wizcraft & Plush Entertainment.

"IT'S TIME. YE LIVE. 29 MARCH | JAWAHARLAL NEHRU STADIUM, NEW DELHI. TICKETS DROP 18.02 - 4 PM @districtupdates. THIS IS NOT



largest hip-hop concerts to date. Ye's booking continues that momentum, reinforcing New Delhi's position on the global stadium touring circuit.

Organisers say the show will mirror the format of Ye's recent headline runs, with large-format visual, expansive staging and a setlist expected to span his catalogue, from early 2000s releases to later-era material.

The India date follows early 2026 shows in Mexico City and precedes Ye's one-off European stop at Vitesse Arnhem's GelreDome stadium in the Netherlands June 6 with an

other performance scheduled later in Italy.

The "Heartless" singer's recent touring history has been closely watched. His 2016 Saint Pablo Tour was cut short and canceled amid erratic performances and a subsequent hospitalisation, and a scheduled 2025 concert in South Korea was canceled amid widespread controversy over his actions and statements.

A series of antisemitic remarks beginning in 2022 also led to the termination of his lucrative Yeezy partnership with Adidas and the loss of other business relationships.

BUDGET SESSION

House to get noisy with farmers' 'distress', Mahanadi water dispute

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Feb 16: The Assembly is likely to witness noisy scenes in the Budget session that will commence from Tuesday, as the Opposition BJD and Congress will raise a host of issues, such as alleged mismanagement of paddy procurement and Mahanadi water dispute, in the House.

Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik, while addressing BJD legislators Monday, alleged that the current 'double-engine' government remained "busy with slogans and photo-opportunities, while our farmers are spending nights under the open sky at mandis, guarding their produce".

"If the farmers' voice is not heard in the state-run mandis, it must roar in the Assembly," he said.

The BJD, at its legislature party meeting, decided to raise issues, like alleged mismanagement of paddy procurement, Mahanadi water dispute with Chhattisgarh, "deteriorating" law and order and the government's "inability" to utilise Budget allocations, in the session. Patnaik informed BJD lawmakers that the reports received



from district units were clear that the anger of farmers was at a "boiling point".

The former chief minister came down heavily on the BJP government, claiming that the "Budget expenditure till December was roughly 47 per cent".

"This government has failed on all fronts, except false publicity. We should fight aggressively in the Budget session of the Assembly to safeguard the interests of our farmers, women, students and Odia Asmita," Patnaik said in the meeting.

Congress Legislature Party leader Rama Chandra Kadam said the party will raise "farmers' plights, Mahanadi and Polavaram issues and highlight atrocities on scheduled castes,

scheduled tribes, OBCs and minorities".

OPCC president Bhakta Charan Das said the Congress, as a responsible opposition party, is committed to presenting the problems of the people and ensuring the accountability of the government.

The ruling BJP, at its legislature party meeting under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, prepared for a healthy discussion in the House.

"We are ready to discuss all the issues that will be raised by the opposition party. We will present all the aspects of the 19-month BJP government before the people," said Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mukesh Mahaling.

KIIT honours global leaders on 22nd foundation day

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 16: The Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) Deemed to be University celebrated its 22nd Foundation Day with a special commemorative lecture and the presentation of the KIIT Lifetime Achievement Award to four distinguished global leaders.

The awardees this year were John Oppenheimer, Founder and Chairman of Columbia Hospitality (USA); Kirinde Assaji Nayaka Thero, Chief Incumbent of Gangaramaya Temple, Colombo; KN Shanth Kumar, Director of The Printers (Mysore) Pvt Ltd and Director on the Board of Press Trust of India; and Gyetrul Jigme Rinpoche, Master of Tibetan Buddhism and Spiritual Director of Ripa International Center, Switzerland.

In his address, John Oppenheimer expressed deep admiration for the institution.



Calling the campus "beyond imagination," he said his visit left him profoundly moved. Encouraging students, he remarked, "Don't underestimate the contributions you are making to society. You have the opportunity to serve your communities, your country and the world in a significant way."

Kumar described KIIT as "more than a story of institutions; it is a story of vision." Drawing from over four decades in journalism, he emphasized that while the media landscape has evolved rapidly, the core principles of truth, credibility, verification and ethical storytelling remain unchanged. "Virtue belongs to those who combine technology with integrity," he said, adding that journalism in a democracy must keep public debate informed and free from manipulation. He encouraged students to practice responsible citizen journalism and to "stay curious, value credibility and build resilience."

Rinpoche reflected on humility and compassion as the essence of true success. "Many reach success, but very few remain humble. To me, that is true success," he said. Speaking on practical compassion, he emphasized that it does not require complex philosophical or academic learning, but simply the ability to feel for others. Recalling his grandmother's words, he added, "By giving, you never become poor. Those who do not give remain perpetually poor. Poverty is in the mind."

KIIT and KISS founder Achyuta Samanta reflected on KIIT's journey, which began with quiet determination and a bold dream. He credited the institution's achievements to the collective efforts of its staff and students across KIIT, KISS and KIMS, stating, "Whatever we have achieved belongs to them. This is their success."

Padma Shri Prafulla Kar's statue unveiled

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar: Feb 16: The statue of eminent musician Prafulla Kar was unveiled on his birth anniversary Monday at Rabindra Mandap under the auspices of the Odia Language, Literature and Culture department.

Minister for Odia Language, Literature and Culture, Suryabansi Suraj, unveiled the statue and paid floral tributes to the legendary music maestro.

Addressing the gathering, the minister said, "The music of legendary composer Prafulla Kar remains eternally cherished among listeners across Odisha. Through his exceptional music direction, he carved a distinct place for himself and significantly enriched the Odia music industry. The timeless talent and melodious life journey of Padma Shri Prafulla Kar serve as an inspiration to the younger generation. His musical compositions will undoubtedly continue to motivate young musicians."



The event was attended by Bijay Ketan Upadhyaya, Secretary of the department of Odia Language, Literature and Culture; Deb Prasad Dash, Special Secretary; Deputy Director Debayani Bhuyan, and members of Prafulla Kar's family, among others.

120 bottles of illegal cough syrup seized; 3 arrested



POST NEWS NETWORK

Khurda, Feb 16: The mobile unit of the Khurda Excise department seized 20.4 kg of illegal cough syrup packed in 120 bottles at Palla village under Khurda model police station limits here Monday. Three persons, including a woman, were arrested in this connection, officials said.

The arrested persons were identified as Monalisa Sahoo (29), Trinath Sahoo (40), and Bijay Sahoo — members of the same family and residents of the village. However, another accused, Ranjit Kumar Sahoo, remains absconding.

According to the Excise department, officials received a tip-off about the smuggling of illegal cough syrup in the district. Acting on the input, the mobile unit conducted a raid in the village and seized 120 bottles of codeine phosphate and triprolidine hydrochloride-based cough syrup branded ESKUF.

During the raid, police

EXCISE MOBILE UNIT RAIDED 120 BOTTLES OF CODEINE PHOSPHATE AND TRIPROLIDINE HYDROCHLORIDE-BASED SYRUP BRANDED ES KUF

THREE PERSONS WERE ARRESTED DURING THE OPERATION, OFFICIALS SAID

A MOTORCYCLE AND ₹1,000 IN CASH WERE ALSO RECOVERED FROM THE ACCUSED

arrested three persons and seized a motorcycle along with ₹1,000 in cash from their possession.

"The raid was part of the Excise department's special drive. The accused belong to the same family, and we have launched a manhunt to nab the absconding individual. The accused have been forwarded to court. Further investigation is underway to ascertain the involvement of others in the illegal cough syrup trade," said Khurda Excise SP Sumati Tripathy.

MARKET WATCH

CURRENCY		BOURSES		COMMODITIES	
INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR	90.72 ▲ 0.02	SENSEX	83277.15 ▲ 650.39	GOLD	₹154,728 ₹116
EURO	107.75 ▲ 0.13	NIFTY	25682.75 ▲ 211.65	SILVER	₹238,300 ₹606

Ganjam dist achieves 88 pc paddy procurement target



highlighted in the media were also promptly resolved to ensure smooth operations.

The district administration maintained close coordination with PACS and allied agencies to streamline mandi management and simplify farmer registration procedures. The Collector expressed confidence that the remaining target would be achieved shortly and reiterated the administration's commitment to ensuring that every eligible farmer benefits from the procurement drive.

Block-wise data indicated that Digapahandi has recorded the highest procurement at 95.06 per cent of its target, followed closely by Patrapur at 94.93 per cent, Dharakote (92.81%), Budge (92.00%), and Sheragada (91.99%) also reported strong performances. Several other blocks, including Kukudhankandi, Bellaguntha, Surada, Chikiti and Sanakhemundi, have crossed the 90 per cent mark.

Based on further intelligence inputs, police conducted raid and apprehended Sumitra.

During questioning, she admitted to supplying brown sugar to Kartik and Laxmi.

After completing all the legal formalities Sumitra was booked under relevant sections of NDPC Act and forwarded to the court along with two arrested accused.

Puri on specified dates to cater to passenger demand. These services are expected to significantly ease congestion on regular trains and ensure convenient travel during the peak Holi period.

Railway authorities indicated that more Holi Special Trains may be introduced depending on passenger demand and operational feasibility. Passengers are advised to check detailed schedules, halts and booking availability through authorized railway enquiry systems and the IRCTC platform for the latest updates.

Passengers are advised to check detailed schedules, halts and seat availability through authorized railway enquiry systems and the IRCTC platform for the latest updates.

ECoR announces Holi special trains this season

dah and Malatipatpur.

As per the schedule, the Bhubaneswar-Yesvantpur and Yesvantpur-Bhubaneswar Specials will operate weekly between February 28 and March 30. Bhubaneswar-Dhanbad and Dhanbad-Bhubaneswar Specials will run daily from early March to the end of the month. Similarly, Sambalpur-Erode and Erode-Sambalpur Specials will operate on designated days in March. Several special services have also been arranged between Visakhapatnam and Shalimar, Tirupati, Charlapalli, and SMVB Bengaluru on different days of the week throughout March 2026.

In addition, some other special trains will run between Puri and Patna, Sealdah and Malatipatpur, and Patna and

Puri on specified dates to cater to passenger demand. These services are expected to significantly ease congestion on regular trains and ensure convenient travel during the peak Holi period.

Railway authorities indicated that more Holi Special Trains may be introduced depending on passenger demand and operational feasibility. Passengers are advised to check detailed schedules, halts and booking availability through authorized railway enquiry systems and the IRCTC platform for the latest updates.

Passengers are advised to check detailed schedules, halts and seat availability through authorized railway enquiry systems and the IRCTC platform for the latest updates.

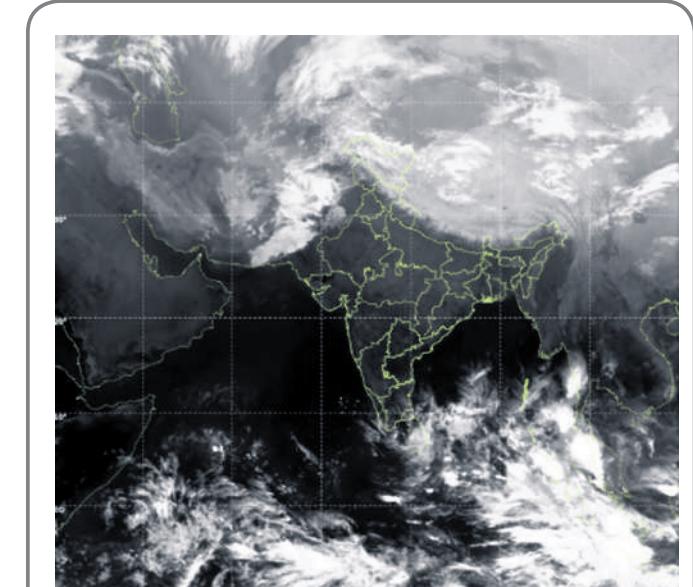


Passengers are advised to check detailed schedules, halts and seat availability through authorized railway enquiry systems and the IRCTC platform for the latest updates.

Utkal University organises Employee Relations meet

Bhubaneswar: The department of Personnel Management and Industrial Relations (PM&IR) at Utkal University recently hosted a national conference on "Employee Relations: Context, Content and Emerging Paradigms" at the MKCG Auditorium, marking a notable academic milestone in management education.

Vice-Chancellor Jagneesh Dandapat graced the occasion as chief patron. Fakir Mohan University Vice-Chancellor Santosh Kumar Tripathy attended as chief guest. Director (HR) of National Aluminium Company Limited, Tapas Kumar Pattanayak, joined as guest of honour, while Ashutosh Muduli of Pandit Deendayal Energy University delivered the keynote address. Following the inaugural session, a panel discussion on the newly reformed labour codes drew strong engagement from participants. The session was chaired by B B Mohanty and featured distinguished panelists including, head (HR) at AMNS India Debabrata Dash; former Welfare and Cess Commissioner, Government of India, Tapas Kumar Panda; and All India Trade Union Congress secretary Ramakrushna Panda. The discussion saw spirited debate and diverse perspectives on India's evolving labour reform landscape.



WEATHER

Max Temp	33.6°	CTC	30.6°
Min Temp	22.0°	19.0°	
Humidity	85%	95%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	

FORECAST

Dry weather likely to prevail



Teacher's assault on students in SSD hostel triggers outrage

POST NEWS NETWORK

Patnagarh, Feb 16: Seven students of Baneimunda Government Ashram High School under Patnagarh block in Bolangir district allegedly fled their hostel Saturday night after being assaulted and threatened by a teacher, with one student sustaining serious injuries in the incident. The incident has led to widespread outrage in the district.

As per the allegations, the students ran away fearing further physical assault after the teacher reportedly beat them with a bamboo stick. One of the students suffered severe swelling in his leg and is said to be unable to walk.

The incident came to light after a guardian spotted the boys and brought them back to the hostel. Family members have since leveled serious allegations against the teacher, claiming that he beat the students mercilessly.

The students were reportedly playing outside the hostel premises Friday after school hours. The teacher allegedly summoned the seven students, verbally abused them for playing outside and assaulted them with a bamboo stick. He also allegedly warned them that they would be beaten again in the classroom Saturday.

Fearing further assault, the students reportedly jumped over the boundary wall of the hostel Friday night and fled. They spent the night on the veranda of a shop in Barapadar village and boarded a private bus the following morning to Bolangir bus stand. While heading towards the railway station, they were spotted by the guardian of one of the students, who questioned them and learned about the alleged abuse. The students were later brought back to the hostel by an auto-rickshaw.



7 students fled hostel after assault by teacher; one of the students, said to have a swollen leg following the corporal punishment, is unable to walk

The case has triggered widespread outrage and drawn the attention of both district officials and tribal welfare organisations, setting the stage for possible administrative action and grassroots mobilisation

After returning, the students were said to be traumatised and remained indoors. Subsequently, one of them developed severe swelling in his leg and was unable to walk. His mother reached the hostel Sunday and took him to Bolangir for treatment. The student is currently undergoing treatment at home on medical advice. She told local media that hostel authorities would be held accountable if her son's condition worsens, urging the district administration to intervene.

The ashram school, run by the Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste Development (SSD) department, provides education from Class I to X. Guardians have alleged that despite several irregularities in the hostel, instead of addressing the issues, teachers have been subjecting students to harassment and physical abuse.

The injured student's uncle,

Babul Dharua, has demanded stringent action against the teacher responsible for the alleged assault.

When contacted, Headmistress Gyana Manjari Shika, who is in charge of the hostel, acknowledged the incident. She said corporal punishment was unacceptable and assured that action would be taken against the concerned teacher.

There is a growing demand among locals for senior departmental officials to intervene and take appropriate measures in the matter.

District Welfare Officer Pratap Chandra Mohanty confirmed that a team will be formed to conduct a detailed probe. He assured that disciplinary action would be taken against the teacher found responsible.

Meanwhile, credible sources suggest that hostel authorities attempted to suppress the incident by intimidating the affected students into silence.

The District Tribal Welfare Association, led by joint secretary Giriraj Bhoi, visited the hostel and warned that if no action is taken, they would stage a protest at the hostel gate.

During the inspection, association members interacted directly with the students, who confirmed the allegations of inhumane treatment. The association has demanded exemplary punishment for the teacher, cautioning that failure to act would lead to a wider agitation.

Police arrest 4 in 'fake' Maoist surrender plot

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rayagada, Feb 16: Police in Rayagada have arrested four individuals, including a web journalist, for allegedly orchestrating a ploy involving fake Maoist posters and a fabricated Maoist surrender plan aimed at misappropriating government funds and other benefits.

Superintendent of Police Swathy S Kumar told reporters Monday that journalist Anubrata Bara, also known as Ranju, was the mastermind behind the operation. He was arrested Sunday along with



associate Bali Majhi. Further investigation led to the arrest of two more suspects, Simanchal Kutra and Apana Mandangi, also known as Mandika.

According to police, Maoist posters were discovered last Friday in several locations, including Dhumaguda under She-

sakhali police station, Paikpada under Chandili police station, and near Kumbaraguda under Kalyansinghpur police station. The posters were seized, and inquiries revealed Bara's involvement.

Investigators said Bara had been holding meetings in hotels across Rayagada to plan a staged surrender of supposed hardcore Maoists from neighbouring Chhattisgarh.

The blueprint was intended to secure government rehabilitation funds. However, individuals initially recruited to pose as Maoists later backed out, police added.

One of the arrested suspects had earlier placed fake Maoist banners in Muniguda's Telen-gapadar area January 20. Police believe the group sought to exploit lingering fears of Maoist activity in the district, despite the insurgency having largely subsided.

Authorities said the arrests have reassured local residents, who had grown concerned about a possible resurgence of Maoist influence. The accused have been remanded to court custody as investigations continue.

CASTE ROW ENDS

Kids return to Anganwadi centre, have food cooked by Dalit helper

PNN & AGENCIES



voicing concern over caste discrimination in the workplace.

On Monday, Kendrapara Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) Dipali Mishra and Rajnagar MLA Dhruba Charan Sahoo were present at the Anganwadi centre to welcome the children.

"I served ragi ladoos to the children. Later, I cooked rice and 'dalma' (vegetable curry) and served the children. Seeing them eat the meals made me overjoyed. They also played with toys, bringing back life to the centre, which was left deserted for around three months," Sethy said.

"I hope caste discrimination will not lurk its ugly head in the village anymore," she added.

CDPO Mishra said the children, flanked by their guardians, had joyous moments at

the centre.

"The centre functioned sans the children for almost three months due to some villagers' disagreement over the appointment of Sharmistha Sethy as the helper. Now, the vibrancy is back," Mishra said.

On the absentees, the CDPO said they could not join as they are not well.

"We hope the absentee children will come to the centre Tuesday as the dispute has been resolved. People have decided to relegate the differences to the background. This is heartening," she added.

Rajnagar MLA Dhruba Charan Sahoo said, "The issue is now a thing of the past. I hope the camaraderie among the villagers will remain intact."

State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR) member Sujata Nayak hailed the children's return to the centre and said the commission will launch an awareness drive aimed at safeguarding the rights of the children. Kendrapara Sub-Collector Arun Nayak had earlier said the matter was resolved in the presence of stakeholders.

5 leprosy patients undergo reconstructive surgeries

POST NEWS NETWORK

operation theater at the medical college.

Reconstructive surgeon and additional director (Leprosy) Dr LK Karmi supervised and performed the surgeries. He was assisted by Dr Muktikanta

Khatua and district leprosy consultant Dr Rakesh Chandra Kaita.

Dr Karmi said each patient who underwent surgery will receive ₹12,000 in financial assistance in accordance with government norms, along with ₹1,500 toward



transportation expenses for treatment, provided by the state Health department.

He added that efforts have been intensified to make Koraput district completely leprosy-free.

Medical College Superintendent Dr Sushant Kumar Sahu, staff of the orthopaedics department and physiotherapy manager A Anil Kumar of the Leprosy Society also assisted in the surgical procedures.

Migratory birds start return journey from Bhitarkanika

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

this year due to the late onset of winter, he said.

"Several batches of birds had already flown from Bhitarkanika, while others are preparing to leave. The birds, which flew into the water bodies and the serene environment of the mangrove forest of the national park from places as far off as the Himalayan region and central Europe, have been leaving the Bhitarkanika almost every day," the forest officer said.

The avian species found a calm environment in the park due to improvements made to their habitats, he said.

"In Satabhaya wetland areas, a large number of winged species gathered this winter as the forest officials guarded the birds from poachers. We are very much hopeful that more will arrive before the advent of next winter," the forest officer said.

Every year, birds fly thousands of miles to Bhitarkanika to escape the severe cold conditions in northern Asia and some central European countries.

The first batch of migratory birds usually comes to Bhitarkanika in the second week of November, but their arrival got delayed by a couple of weeks

The avian species found a calm environment in the park due to improvements made to their habitats, he said.

Jharsuguda SP completes Hirakud Int'l Half Marathon



POST NEWS NETWORK

Gundala Reddy Raghavendra set an inspiring example Sunday by completing the 21-km run in the MCL Hirakud International Half Marathon 2026, held atop the historic Hirakud dam.

Raghavendra crossed the finish line to receive a medal from Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. He had earlier qualified and won a medal in the 21km event at the Rourkela Half Marathon.

His participation has been widely praised as a demonstration of endurance and commitment beyond policing duties.

Elderly man killed in elephant attack

Rourkela/Bondamunda: A 60-year-old man was killed in an elephant attack in Mahipani village under Bisra block of Sundargarh district, police said Monday. The deceased was identified as Kaushal Mahato. Police from Jariakela recovered the body and sent for post-mortem examination. According to officials, Mahato had gone to a nearby forest Sunday morning to collect dry leaves but did not return home by evening. On Monday, family members and villagers launched a search and found his body lying in the Mahipani forest. Injury marks were found on different parts of his body. Elephant footprints were also spotted near the scene, leading officials to suspect that he was killed in an elephant attack. Personnel from the Bisra forest range and Jariakela police station visited the spot and launched an investigation.

Youth rolls 4 km to temple in prayer for girlfriend

POST NEWS NETWORK

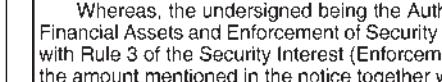


He covered the distance as part of penance undertaken to complete the vow to win over her love.

Dangari, an educated youth who works as an operator at a company in Chennai, is said to be in love with a young woman. To see his relationship culminate successfully, he resolved to perform the ritual, according to local sources.

He began the prostration at about 3am, placing a cloth on the road and rolling forward along the route. It took him nearly eight hours to complete the journey and offer prayers at the temple.

His parents and relatives were seen assisting him during the ritual by spreading cloth on the road as he rolled forward.



Regional Office (Sambalpur Region)
1st Floor, At: Christian Para, G.M.
College Chowk, Dist: Sambalpur,
Odisha, PIN - 768001

POSSESSION NOTICE
(For Immovable Property)

(As per Appendix IV read with rule 8(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002)

Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the **BANK OF BARODA** under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (Second) Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice calling upon the Borrower/Co-Borrower to repay the amount mentioned in the notice together with further interest thereon at the contractual rate plus all costs, charges and expenses till the date of payment within **60 days** from the date of receipt of the said notice. The Borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower/Co-Borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken **POSSESSION** of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/ her under sub section (4) of Section 13 of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002 on the date mentioned below. The Borrower/Co-Borrower in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the **BANK OF BARODA**, Kantiapashi Branch for an amount stated herein below plus further interest thereon at the contractual rate plus all costs, charges and expenses till date of payment. The Borrower's attention is invited to provision of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

KANTIAPASHI BRANCH / Name & Address of Borrower/Guarantor
Borrower: M/s. Jagannath Mudhi Kala, Prop: Mr. Ratha Matiary, At: Barakalapala, PS: Khamar, Tahasil: Pallahara, Dist: Angul, Odisha, PIN-759100
Area: Ac. 0.19 dec., Kissam: Gharabari, ii) Plot No.: 171, Area: Ac. 0.04 dec., Kissam: Gharabari, Total
Area: Ac. 0.23 dec., standing in the name of Mr. Ratha Matiary, S/o- Kunja Matiary, Bounded by North: Nabakishore Matiary & Kuhuru Matiary, Place: Sambalpur, Date: 16.02.2026

Description of the Immovable Property

Demand/ Possession Notice Date

11.11.2025 / 11.02.2026

as on 09.02.2026 and with further interest thereon from 10.02.2026 at the contractual rate plus cost, charges and expenses till date of payment

Authorised Officer, Bank of Baroda



What is God after all? An eternal child playing an eternal game in an eternal garden.

SRI AUROBINDO



Raw Deal

India's recent trade agreement with the United States is being celebrated by the government at the Centre as a significant milestone in its economic diplomacy. Beyond the headlines, a closer scrutiny makes the deal appear rather dicey right from the very outset. Four days after US President Donald Trump announced the deal on social media on 2 February, a joint statement was issued by both governments on 6 February at 5 AM Indian Standard Time. It is clearly known that in diplomacy, timing is messaging. This particular statement was pushed out at a time when Indians were asleep, making it look obvious New Delhi was a party that simply signed on but had no role in shaping the deal. Perhaps this explains why India agreed to reduce its tariffs on American industrial and agricultural goods to ZERO per cent while Indian exporters still face 18 per cent US tariffs. The publicity claiming US tariffs came down from 50% to 18% is completely misleading. 25% tariff was slapped on India for purchasing oil from Russia. That was removed once the assurance was given by India that no more petroleum would be purchased from Russia. Any claim of 'strategic autonomy' is therefore meaningless.

In financial year 2024-25, bilateral trade between India and the US was worth over \$131 billion, with Indian exports at around \$86.5 billion and imports about \$45.3 billion. That left India with a trade surplus of roughly \$40-41 billion, up from \$35.3 billion the previous year. At first glance, this surplus might seem comforting, but there's a deeper imbalance in the trade structure. For, our exports are heavily focused on sectors like pharmaceuticals, telecom equipment, precious stones, gold jewellery, and textiles. Even with growth, these industries work on slim profit margins in highly competitive global markets. On the flip side, imports from the US are heavily tilted towards fuels, machinery, electrical equipment, and aircraft parts. India doesn't have strong domestic capabilities in these sectors.

In the interim trade framework agreed by both countries, India has indicated its intent to import \$500 billion worth of American goods in five years. In other words, it would imply importing US\$ 100 billion only American goods annually. Critics point out that achieving this target would mean India becoming the largest buyer of US goods, taking in imports far beyond what current economic conditions allow. Economists have cautioned that this could diminish India's carefully nurtured trade surplus with America.

For Indian farmers and small manufacturers, the stakes are particularly high. Agriculture contributes about 17 per cent of India's GDP while employing over 40% of the labour force, supporting millions of rural households. Yet, the deal's push for greater imports risks overwhelming local markets with subsidized US agricultural products, which could hurt domestic prices and farmer incomes. Farmers' organisations that took part in a nationwide protest on 12 February continue to strongly criticise the trade agreement, warning of serious consequences for Indian agriculture. The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), one of the country's largest farmer unions, has termed the deal a "total surrender" to US interests. A major concern is the proposed import of farm products at zero or low tariffs, along with two animal feeds from the US, distillers dried grains (DDGS) and red sorghum, which farmers claim may contain genetically modified (GM) components which could, over time, creep into human body. Farmers are apprehensive that these imports could undercut Indian produce such as apples, cotton and soybean, while also opening the door for GM material to enter the domestic market through cattle feed. SKM has questioned why such animal feeds are being imported at all, arguing that farmers have never demanded them. It has also flagged concerns over the possible presence of non-vegetarian components in the feeds. DDGS imported from the US is largely derived from GM corn and GM soy. Also, with American apples and dry fruits expected to enter India duty-free or at reduced tariffs, farmers in Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir are already bracing for a potential fall in prices of domestic produce.

Lower to zero tariffs on industrial goods could hurt Indian MSMEs, the backbone of the country's job market, in sectors such as machinery, auto components, electrical goods and chemicals. Once Indian markets are flooded by cheaper yet better branded American goods, many MSMEs, especially those operating on thin margins, will find it difficult to survive.

Coming to the textile sector, a vital source of employment for millions, Indian exporters face an 18 per cent tariff in the US market, while competitors like Bangladesh and others enjoy a zero per cent tariff, giving them an immediate price edge. Bangladesh's preferential access to the US market, a result of Dhaka's successful negotiations with Washington, threatens to shift orders away from Indian producers.

Even more concerning is the opacity clouding the trade agreement. A deal with such significant ramifications for job creation, rural incomes, and India's industrial future deserves thorough parliamentary debate and independent economic impact assessments, which are missing.

In its eagerness to secure a headline-grabbing trade agreement with Washington after being punished with 50 per cent tariffs on India's exports to the US for about six months, the government seems to have panicked and overlooked the country's long-term economic interests and neglected safeguards for vulnerable sectors such as agriculture and MSMEs.

Given the prevailing economic conditions in the country – rising cost of living, a falling rupee, widening inequality, massive unemployment, stagnant wages and rural distress – a trade deal negotiated from a position of strength, not concession, would have benefited Indians. Sadly the nation has been failed once again.

WISDOM CORNER

Love many things, for therein lies the true strength, and whosoever loves much performs much, and can accomplish much, and what is done in love is done well.

VINCENT VAN GOGH

Things are as they are. Looking out into it the universe at night, we make no comparisons between right and wrong stars, nor between well and badly arranged constellations.

ALAN WATTS

Acceptance looks like a passive state, but in reality it brings something entirely new into this world. That peace, a subtle energy vibration, is consciousness.

ECKHART TOLLE

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1863: A precursor of the Red Cross and Red Crescent is founded. The "Committee for Relief to the Wounded" was created by a group of citizens in Geneva, Switzerland.

1864: During the American Civil War, the Confederate Hunley became the first submarine to sink an enemy ship when it successfully attacked the USS Housatonic in the waters off Charleston, South Carolina.

FOCUS 16TH FINANCE COMMISSION

PROTECT FEDERALISM

India's fiscal federalism runs on a deceptively simple bargain: the Union collects most broad-based taxes, while the States carry the frontline responsibility for essential public services—schools, hospitals, policing, local roads, water supply, and much else. The tax revenues and spending duties do not match. Indeed, States have two-third expenditure obligations, but have control over only one-third of revenues. Hence the Constitution created a neutral referee—the Finance Commission (FC)—to periodically recommend how the "divisible pool" of Central taxes should be shared between the Union and States (vertical devolution) and among States (horizontal devolution).

The Commission is reconstituted every five years, so that the division formula can adapt to changing realities rather than be frozen forever. The core job of the Commission follows from Article 280 and the implementation of recommendations from Article 281. In practice, FC awards become the financial "operating system" of Indian federalism. They affect the monthly cash that States receive, their budget space for welfare and capital spending, and even their ability to borrow. With the Sixteenth Finance Commission (FC-16) report now accepted by the Union government and placed before Parliament, the new formula will shape Centre-State fiscal relations for 2026-31. The key question is not just "who gets how much," but what incentives the system creates—especially in a federation where prosperity and political power are unevenly distributed.

FC-16 has retained the States' share at 41% of the divisible pool, like the previous FCs. There was a demand from 22 States to increase the States' share to 50%. Partly this was due to their grievance concerning the trend of the Union's rising reliance on cesses and surcharges, which typically sit outside the divisible pool and therefore are not shared. As per the FC-16 report, since the total size of the divisible pool will



The most striking innovation of FC-16 is on the horizontal side: it introduces 'contribution to national GDP' as a criterion with 10% weight

nearly double from ₹55 trillion to ₹90 trillion during FC-16 period, States will have considerably more resources. But if Union continues to expand non-shareable levies, the "41%" can feel smaller in effect than in headline.

The most striking innovation of FC-16 is on the horizontal side: it introduces "contribution to national GDP" as a criterion with 10% weight. It does this by reducing weights elsewhere—cutting per capita income distance and demographic performance by 2.5 percentage points each, trimming area by 5 percentage points, and removing the (small) tax effort weight used by FC-15. It is as if the Commission now seeks a balance between its central role of "gap filling" of shortfall in resources, with a new reward for efficiency signal. A reward for States that contribute more to the national output.

Why is this a big deal? Because it shifts the moral language of transfers. For decades, the dominant logic was: help States provide comparable basic services, despite differences in income and capacity, and offset structural disadvantages. Economists call this "equalisation." The new GDP-contribution criterion says, in effect: performance and contribution also matter. This is not really contrary to the spirit of the Constitution, but the change in emphasis is path-breaking. Constitutionally, the Commission is to recommend a fair distribution of shareable taxes so that

different levels of government can discharge responsibilities assigned in the Constitution. The FC has always used a mix of criteria—some anchored in equity (income distance, population, area, forest) and some trying to recognise efficiency.

So adding "contribution to GDP" is not automatically unconstitutional. The deeper question is normative: what should be the dominant objective of tax devolution? Introducing GDP contribution can conflict with the revenue-disability logic. Besides States are not on a level playing field. A rich State often has better infrastructure and institutions that make it easier to respond to "performance incentives," while a poorer State may not be able to do so quickly even if it wants to. The divergence may worsen. Some so-called backward States are incentivised to keep their forest cover, and slowing the pace of urbanisation, thereby causing slower GDP growth. So, rewarding "contribution" can harden advantages, unless compensated by investment in capacity and human capital in lagging States.

The FC-16 report emphasises that equalisation remains the "centre of gravity," with per capita income distance still dominant. But incentives matter because they influence political narratives and administrative choices. There are three possible behavioural effects. Firstly, high-performing States will feel less penalised. This may reduce

resentment in parts of the South and West, where the argument has been: "We contribute more, yet our share keeps shrinking." Secondly, lagging States may face weaker "gap-filling" comfort. If they fear that future FCs will steadily raise the "performance" component, they may push harder for other compensations—special packages, centrally sponsored schemes, or discretionary grants. Thirdly, the conversation may shift from "need" to "merit." This is politically potent and risky for cooperative federalism, since poorer regions will believe that the system doesn't provide safety nets anymore. Whether the so-called North-South tension will ease will depend on other political and demographic factors. As such the political centre-of-gravity is in the North and East, whereas the economic weight is more in the South. This structural imbalance cannot be addressed by the FC-16 alone.

FC-16 is a "continuity with a twist" award: stability on the vertical share, but a meaningful signal on the horizontal formula. It nudges India's fiscal federalism away from a pure "gap-filling" narrative towards a mixed model that also acknowledges contribution and growth. To some extent it prevents fiscal bargaining between the Union and States from becoming a permanent tug-of-war in the political arena. But its legitimacy depends on fair and transparent rules and certainly not encouraging stealth through non-shareable levies. India needs both, a credible equalisation system so every citizen can access minimum quality public services regardless of birthplace, and a governance culture that rewards growth, reforms, and revenue effort without locking poorer States into permanent dependence. If that balance fails, we will not just argue about percentages—we will argue about the very idea of cooperative federalism.

The writer is a noted economist.

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**REWARDING
CONTRIBUTION
CAN HARDEN
ADVANTAGES,
UNLESS
COMPENSATED
BY INVESTMENT
IN CAPACITY
AND HUMAN
CAPITAL IN
LAGGING
STATES**

Ajit Ranade

SPECTRUM INNOVATION

Penicillin & American wartime power



Paolo Surico

**TRUE SECURITY
DEPENDS AS
MUCH ON
FOSTERING
INNOVATION AS
ON WEAPONRY**

When we think about wartime innovation, we usually imagine dramatic breakthroughs: Alan Turing's cracking of the Nazi Enigma code, the invention of radar, the Manhattan Project's development of the atomic bomb. But a less visible biological innovation—the mass production of penicillin—was just as transformative. Although Alexander Fleming identified penicillin's antibacterial properties in 1928, it remained fragile, unstable, and almost impossible to produce in meaningful quantities for more than a decade. It was only during WWII that penicillin was turned into a treatment that could be produced, distributed, and widely used.

The stakes could not have been higher. Estimates from military records indicate that during WWI, roughly 12-15% of soldiers wounded in battle died from bacterial infections. For some injuries—most notoriously femur fractures—mortality rates reached 80%, almost entirely due to post-wound complications. By the final years of WWII, once the Allies began mass-producing penicillin, medical outcomes changed dramatically. Military records show infection recovery rates

of around 95%, far surpassing the efficacy of earlier antiseptics and sulfa drugs. Mortality from comparable wound infections fell to roughly 3-4%, and penicillin is estimated to have prevented tens of thousands of amputations that previously would have been necessary to stop the spread of gangrene. Mass production of penicillin was as consequential to the Allied war effort as any breakthrough in cryptography or nuclear physics. Despite its formidable scientific capacity, Germany failed to do so. Research efforts began late, remained confined to a handful of university labs, and stalled at the experimental stage, as Nazi scientists lacked access to high-yield strains, advanced fermentation methods, and the institutional coordination necessary for large-scale production.

The Allied experience was markedly different. From 1941 onward, the US mobilized its scientific and industrial infrastructure through Vannevar Bush's Office of Scientific Research and Development, funding parallel research projects across universities, public laboratories, and private firms while absorbing the financial and scientific risks. By adapting deep-tank fermenta-

tion techniques—originally developed for food processing and industrial chemistry—21 American companies were able to produce millions of penicillin doses in time for D-Day.

Three features of American innovation system proved decisive. First, penicillin manufacturing could be scaled only because of sustained investment in civilian technologies developed long before the war, such as fermentation, and in microbiology and industrial engineering. Germany, despite its strength in synthetic chemistry, lacked the diversified industrial ecosystem needed to manufacture antibiotics at scale. Second, the US innovation environment was shaped by a government willing to take risks. Through the Office of Scientific Research and Development, it financed a wide range of exploratory efforts, fully expecting many to fail. In doing so, it allowed the most promising approaches to emerge and scale. Germany's more centralized research system, by contrast, emphasized immediate military payoff and discouraged open-ended experimentation. Third, the US built an innovation system that, though dispersed, was highly integrated,

linking public investment, academic discovery, and industrial execution. This division of labour gave the Allies a technological advantage that Nazi Germany, constrained by institutional rigidity, could not replicate.

Penicillin, initially justified as a defence investment, ultimately had as great an impact on the war as any weapon, and it transformed civilian medicine and global health. In this sense, America's most powerful wartime asset was not a particular technology but the system that made such breakthroughs possible.

That system did not emerge by accident. It was the product of deliberate policy decisions that aligned academic research, industrial capacity, and institutional development—a nexus that Donald Trump's administration is jeopardizing by axing funding for basic research and targeted investment, especially for health (NIH) and science (NSF). Today's policymakers need to recall the lesson of penicillin's wartime development: true security depends as much on fostering innovation as on weaponry.

The writer is Professor of Economics at London Business School. ©PROJECT SYNDICATE

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 their valuable comments, opinion and suggestions, preferably by email, to: edit@orissapost.com

OrissaPOST

B-15, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

Reckless drivers

Sir, "Speed thrills, but kills" is one of the common plaques seen on highways to discourage drivers from over-speeding. Young, inexperienced and more, often than not, immature and "licence less" boys and girls run amok on roads. In India, the legal age for driving light motor vehicles (LMV) vehicles with gear is 18 years. A spate of major accidents in cities is attributed to rash and negligent driving by underage drivers. Addiction to reckless driving, unhindered access to vehicles, poor parental guidance and supervision are attributed to the surge in minors taking to wheels. Parents and the police cannot play the blame game to suit their own ends. Both need to pull up their socks and take stock of the situation before it spirals out of control and leads to make Indian roads even more unsafe.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

Sports nationalism

Sir, The comprehensive win by Team India against Pakistan at Colombo, reinforces their dominance over the arch-rival in T20 world cups, extending their head-to-head record to 8-1. With a combination of explosive batting and incisive bowling, the Indian team proved too strong for Pakistan on a high-stakes stage, making a statement of intent for the remainder of the tournament. India has consistently outperformed Pakistan in recent years, with the game's experts calling the rivalry lopsided and suggesting that past wins by Pakistan were rare exceptions. Meanwhile, India's authoritative win at Colombo reignites an important question: is this cricket rivalry overhyped, popped up by slogans like "war minus the shooting" – a phrase George Orwell coined in 1945 to criticize excessive nationalism in sports? As for the continuation of the "no handshake" policy by Indian players against their Pakistan counterparts, it only reflects how political and emotional tensions have begun to overshadow the true spirit of the game.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, CHENNAI

ALAN WATTS

ECKHART TOLLE

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1863: A precursor of the Red Cross and Red Crescent is founded. The "Committee for Relief to the Wounded" was created by a group of citizens in Geneva, Switzerland.

1864: During the American Civil War, the Confederate Hunley became the first submarine to sink an enemy ship when it successfully attacked the USS Housatonic in the waters off Charleston, South Carolina.

VINCENT VAN GOGH

ECKHART TOLLE

ALAN WATTS

ECKHART TOLLE



Despite Cong flak, Aiyar sticks to claim of Vijayan's return

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thiruvananthapuram, Feb 16: Unfazed by Congress leadership's criticism, Mani Shankar Aiyar reiterated his claim that the Pinarayi Vijayan-led LDF will retain power in Kerala, drawing a sharp rebuke from senior leader Ramesh Chennithala, who dismissed Aiyar's remarks as "unwarranted".

"As a Congressman, I want the UDF to win. As a Gandhian, I am obliged to tell the truth, irrespective of what I wish. I am not a voter in Kerala, but I think he is going to get another term," Aiyar, a senior Congress leader, told PTI Videos, referring to Chief Minister Vijayan.

Attacking Aiyar, Chennithala said, "AICC has clarified that he is no longer in the Congress. He can say anything."

His comments on the Kerala government were unwarranted, the Congress Working Committee member said.

Aiyar's remarks come a day after he drew sharp flak from the Congress leadership for predicting Vijayan's return as Chief Minister. Kerala is set to go to the polls in the next couple of months.

Although the former Union Minister said his remarks were blown out of proportion by the media, Aiyar reiterated his view that the LDF government would return to power as it was doing outstanding work.

"I made the speech after hearing Mary Joseph, who is the Principal Secretary of the Planning Board. She listed the achievements. I made the speech after hearing VK Ramachandran (Planning Com-



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MANI SHANKAR AIYAR | FORMER MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ OF INDIA

mission Deputy Chairman), who reinforced everything that Mary Joseph said," he said.

Referring to his interaction with Local Self Government Minister MB Rajesh, Aiyar said he was told that Kerala was the only state in the country to have eliminated extreme poverty, achieved through the Panchayati Raj system.

He also said Rajesh spoke about plans to address climate change, which poses a threat to Kerala.

"The fact of the matter is that they have been an outstanding government and the people of Kerala are so intelligent. I cannot see them voting for anyone but the LDF," he said.

Aiyar said that except for the last Assembly election, govern-

ments had changed in every poll in the state.

"If they lose two elections in a row, I won't be surprised," he said. He also said that apart from himself, the only Congress leader he respects is Leader of Opposition VD Satheesan.

"He (Satheesan) and I are the only secular socialists in the Congress party. I am not speaking of the higher level but at the ordinary level. We don't compromise on secularism and socialism," he said.

Asked about UDF leaders claiming that the front would return to power with over 100 seats in the Assembly, Aiyar said he is not from Kerala and is not a voter in the state.

"Why are you asking me about Ramesh Chennithala's estimation of himself? He has twice lost elections. I don't think he has the right," he said.

He also said it was not for Chennithala to expel him from the party.

"It is for Mallikarjun Kharge to throw me out of the party. The Congress President has not sent me a letter of expulsion," he said.

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national



ASHOK GEHLOT | EX RAJASTHAN CM

The main objective of this corporation was to ensure that thousands of people working through placement agencies receive their full remuneration along with social security benefits such as EPF and ESI

of the day quote

Last year, the Punjab police seized 2,000 kg of drugs, destroyed the properties of drug dealers, and arrested significant smugglers, which led to the people starting to believe that the AAP government is not scared of anything

ARVIND KEJRIWAL | AAP NATIONAL CONVENER

The BJP is spewing venom in connection with my statement. I want to humbly and with equal pride tell them in clear words here that they do not need to teach us about Shivaji Maharaj

HARSHWARDHAN SAPKAL | MAHA CONGRESS CHIEF

Launched Rakta Rice, a premium organic indigenous red rice from Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh

PEMA KHANDU | ARUNACHAL CM

SHORT TAKES

Parents of dead Indian student want to visit US

Bangalore: The family of a 22-year-old Indian postgraduate student, who was found dead in the US days after he went missing, is still struggling to come to terms with the fact he is no more. They want to visit Berkeley personally to collect the body of Saketh Sreenivasai and urge the authorities to speed up the probe. Saketh Sreenivasai, a student at the University of California, Berkeley, hailing from Karnataka, had been missing since February 9.

PM Modi to visit Israel Feb 25-26

Jerusalem: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will travel to Israel on a two-day visit from February 25 to 26, sources said Monday. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu first broke news of Modi's visit while addressing the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations Sunday. "Parliament address on the anvil. Who's coming here next week? Narendra Modi," Netanyahu told the gathering. "Tremendous alliance between Israel and India, and we are going to discuss all sorts of cooperation. Now, you know, India is not a small country. India is enormously powerful, enormously popular," he stressed.

Punjab Police busts child trafficking gang

Ludhiana: The Punjab Police Monday busted a gang allegedly involved in child trafficking and the sale of a newborn female child with the arrest of five women, police said. Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police Sameer Verma said police arrested five women, including the mother, a nurse, a doctor, and the buyer, while three others are still on the run. The baby, born February 13, was reportedly sold for ₹2.10 lakh to a childless couple from the Nangal village in Moga district, he said. According to the police, the child's mother allegedly agreed to sell the newborn due to financial constraints and pressure from her husband, who is a labourer and hails from Uttar Pradesh, and they already have four daughters.

Mann discharged from hospital

Chandigarh: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann was discharged from Fortis hospital in Mohali Monday, a day after he was hospitalised after he experienced exhaustion. Before he was discharged, Mann in a post on X said, "A massive rally is being held today by the Aam Aadmi Party at Killi Chahlan village near Moga... See you there, friends."

Sabarimala women's entry row resurfaces

The issue gained fresh attention after the Supreme Court Monday reopened the case, announcing that a nine-judge bench would begin final hearings on a batch of petitions on discrimination against women in religions and places of worship, including the Sabarimala temple

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



KERALA POLL BATTLE

sation to immediately submit a revised affidavit to the Supreme Court.

Clarifying the government's stand, state Law Minister P Rajeev said it was not a matter to be reduced to a "yes or no" answer and even the Apex Court made it clear that it would take the review petitions only after addressing seven constitutional questions.

"This is not a situation where a simple 'yes or no' can be stated. Several constitutional complications are involved in it. All aspects need to be considered," he told reporters, adding that the state government has enough time to inform its stand.

He, however, said the government is here to protect the faith of believers and it would stand by them cutting across belief.

He said faith and social reform must go hand in hand and reiterated that this had been the government's position in its affidavit before the court.

Rajeev said the state government, in its earlier affidavit, had suggested constituting a commission of scholars having deep knowledge of Hindu beliefs and having record in social reformation to study the

women's entry issue, but the apex court didn't consider it.

However, the government stands by its suggestions, he added. The minister maintained that the government had earlier acted in accordance with the SC verdict on the issue.

"It was not a government order but the supreme court verdict is naturally binding. The same supreme court had later decided to review it. Even then, the earlier verdict has not been stayed," Rajeev said.

The government did not take any adamant stand after that, the minister said, referring to the issue that triggered massive protests by Hindu outfits and opposition parties in 2018 after the Left government attempted to implement the Supreme Court verdict allowing the entry of women of menstrual age into the revered Lord Ayyappa shrine at Sabarimala.

However, the major opposition parties—the Congress and BJP urged the CPI(M)-led government to make its stand clear on the matter, with the grand old party calling on it to file a revised affidavit in the top court on the matter.

ED slaps ₹184 crore FEMA penalty on NewsClick, editor

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 16: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) Monday said it has imposed a ₹184-crore FEMA penalty against news portal NewsClick and its founder and editor-in-chief, Prabir Purkayastha, who came under the scanner of the probe agencies on allegations of peddling "pro-China propaganda" through its stories.

PPK NEWSCLICK Studio Private Limited, the company that owns NewsClick, has been penalised for an amount of ₹120 crore while Purkayastha has been imposed with the same order for ₹64 crore under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), the federal agency said in a statement.

The order has been issued by the Adjudicating Authority of FEMA (a special director rank officer of the ED) after completing the adjudication process (end of investigation) against the two entities related to "violations" of foreign direct investment (FDI) and foreign inward remittances.

"The Adjudicating Authority observed that the contraventions were substantial, deliberate, and systemic in nature, involving large-scale foreign exchange transactions and breach of statutory declarations furnished to regulatory authorities," it said.

There was no immediate response from NewsClick on the development.

The agency said the penalty was imposed after the ED carried out a detailed examination of records, evidence and submissions made by the notices (PPK NEWSCLICK Studio and Purkayastha).

The ED has a separate money laundering case registered against the portal and had first raided the premises of NewsClick located in the Saidulajab

EC SUSPENDS SEVEN WB ELECTORAL OFFICIALS

Using its powers under the electoral law, the Election Commission has suspended seven officials, deployed as assistant electoral registration officers (AEROS) in West Bengal, with immediate effect for serious misconduct, dereliction of duty and misuse of statutory powers in connection with the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) process in the state



Death penalty for three in Hampi rape, murder case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Koppal (Karnataka), Feb 16: A court in Karnataka Monday sentenced three people to death for sexually assaulting an Israeli tourist and murdering a youth in this district last year.

The Gangavathi Civil Court sentenced the convicts -- Mallesh alias Handi Malla, Sharababasa and Chaitanya Sai -- to death. The court had February 7 found them guilty and reserved the order for February 16.

On Monday, the court pronounced the quantum of punishment. According to the prosecution, the heinous crime took place near Sanaupur March 6, 2025.

The Israeli-origin woman was subjected to inhuman sexual assault. The incident had made international headlines and cast a shadow over the district's tourism. Public Prosecutor Nagalakshmi told reporters that the homestay owner had taken tourists Pankaj from Maharashtra, and Bibhas from Odisha, Daniel from the US and an Israeli woman for stargazing at Sanapur near Tungabhadra canal under Gangavathi rural police station limits at about 10.30 pm.

The news article had stated the portal was part of a global network that received funding from American billionaire Neville Roy Singham, who allegedly works closely with the Chinese government media machine.

The ED said its probe

found that FDI of ₹9.59 crore

was received

by the company

during the 2018-19 fiscal by "misrepresenting" the nature of business activity in statutory filings, thereby bypassing prescribed sectoral conditions and entry route requirements under FEMA.

It was also detected that

foreign inward remittances of ₹82.63 crore, purportedly received between 2018-19 to 2023-24 financial years, for export of services, were found to be in "contravention" of FEMA provisions due to "misclassification" of exports and "failure" to comply with mandatory reporting requirements, including submission of SOFTEX (used for software or information technology exports) forms.

With an intention to rape these women, the convicts pushed the three men into the canal. To ensure that they do not come out, they threw stones on them. Later, they gang raped the home-stay owner and the Israeli national, the Public Prosecutor said. "Bibhas Kumar died due to drowning in the canal. Pankaj did not know how to swim but Daniel saved him," Nagalakshmi said.

She added that after raping the women, the accused decamped with their mobile phones, cash and a camera.

SC rejects plea against Himanta over viral video

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 16: The Supreme Court Monday refused to entertain petitions seeking action against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma over a viral video purportedly showing him taking aim and firing with a rifle at members of a particular community.

Expressing strong disapproval of the trend of parties directly approaching the top court, a bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi asked the petitioners to approach the Gauhati High Court with their grievances.

The top court also asked the chief justice of the Gauhati High Court to expedite the hearing in the matter.

"Why haven't you gone to the Gauhati High Court? Don't undermine its authority. We will ask parties to use restraint and remain within the boundaries of constitutional morality, but this is becoming a trend just before the polls."

As the hearing commenced, CJI Kant observed, "Wherever the elections come, this court becomes a political battleground."

Political parties should fight elections based on "mutual respect and self-restraint", he said. Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the petitioners, submitted that Sarma is a habitual and repeat offender, as he urged the court to entertain the matter.

Singhvi said the case should be entertained under Article 32, as the high court may not be an appropriate remedy since the petitioners are seeking an SIT investigation against the Assam chief minister.

The senior lawyer argued that Sarma made objectionable statements not only in Assam, but in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh as well, and hence it was a pan-Indian case.



Folk artists take part in the 'Brahma Rathotsava' religious procession near Kadu Malleshwara Swamy Temple, Mallewaram, Bangalore



The direction has been issued to the governments of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, with complementary efforts expected from the governments of Delhi and Rajasthan

and elimination of crop residue burning and directed them to draw up detailed state-specific action plans based on the major contours of the framework," the official added.

As per the standard protocol

developed by the Indian Space

Research Organisation (ISRO)

and the Indian Agricultural

Research Institute (IARI), the

numbers of fire events recorded

during the wheat-harvesting

season (April 1 to May 31,

34 schools get bomb threat emails



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Nainital, Uttarakhand district courts receive bomb threats

Nainital: District courts in Uttarakhand's Nainital and Uttarkashi Monday received bomb threat, prompting authorities to evacuate the premises and search operations, police said. A bomb threat sent to the official email of the Nainital district judge sparked panic Monday, prompting a search operation at the court premises in Nainital as well as Haldwani and Ramnagar, police said. Officials said no suspicious objects have been found so far, but the search operation by the police team, bomb and dog squads will continue for security reasons.

they said. Around 17 schools in Ahmedabad received bomb threat emails, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) (SOG) Rahul Tripathi said. "It turned out to be a hoax mail. BDDS and SOG teams carried out thorough checking in the campuses of these schools, and nothing suspicious was found," he said.

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preparedness. Satellite-based

monitoring during the wheat-harvesting

season (April 1 to May 31,

2025) in Punjab, Haryana, and

NCR districts of Uttar Pradesh were 10,207, 1,832, and 259 respectively.

States have been asked to establish a robust and continuous supply chain of wheat straw in various forms for ex-situ (after its removal from the farm) applications, including its use as fodder. A district-level supply chain management plan will be formulated for each district, considering demand and supply throughout the year, according to the official.

"States have been asked to form a dedicated Parali Protection Force (PPF) at the district or block level comprising of police officers, officers of the agriculture department, administrative officers, nodal and cluster officers and officials from other stakeholder departments, to closely monitor, oversee and guard against any incidence of open wheat stubble burning," the official added.

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national



You have joined the service at the time of profound global transformation. Digital trade, sustainability requirements, and new global rules are reshaping how nations interact. You stand at a unique intersection: where law meets enterprise, negotiation meets strategy, and where your decisions can shape India's economic trajectory for decades to come

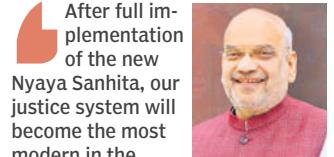
DROUPADI MURMU | PRESIDENT

ZUBEEN DEATH CASE: WIFE, PP UPSET OVER SLOW COURT PROGRESS

Garima Saikia Garg, wife of Assam's popular singer Zubeen Garg, and Public Prosecutor Ziaul Kamar Monday expressed dissatisfaction over the slow pace of his death case being heard by the Kamrup Metropolitan District and Sessions Court



of the day quote



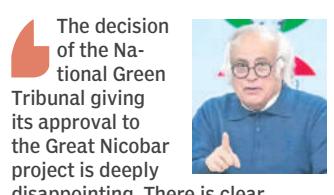
After full implementation of the new Nyaya Sanhita, our justice system will become the most modern in the world. It will reduce delays in the justice system and will also help in increasing the conviction rate

AMIT SHAH | UNION HOME MINISTER



The state government had announced a substantial relief package for cultivators who had suffered losses due to unseasonal rains last year, disbursing Rs 9,610 crore to more than 33 lakh affected farmers

ACHARYA DEVVRAT | GUJARAT GOVERNOR



The decision of the National Green Tribunal giving its approval to the Great Nicobar project is deeply disappointing. There is clear evidence that the project will have disastrous ecological impacts

JAIRAM RAMESH | CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY IN-CHARGE COMMUNICATIONS



Dedicated ₹283 Cr worth of development projects at Kottayam Govt. Medical College today. This includes a ₹257 Cr state-of-the-art Surgical Block funded by KIIFB. With ₹1,200 Cr invested over the last decade, we have transformed this MCH into a global centre of excellence. From the state's 2nd Skin Bank to a modern Cath Lab and Neonatal Care units, these world-class facilities ensure quality healthcare for all.

@pinarayivijayan

SHORT TAKES

Indore water tragedy: Din in MP Assembly

Bhopal: The Opposition Monday created a ruckus in the MP legislative assembly over the Indore contaminated drinking water tragedy and objected to the "clean water" commitment mentioned in the state governor's customary address on the first day of the Budget session. Amid slogan shouting, the Speaker adjourned the proceedings for Tuesday after the listed business for the day ended. Earlier, when Governor Mangubhai Patel mentioned the state government's resolve to provide clean water to people, opposition leader Umang Singh raised an objection. Soon, other Congress MLAs joined Singh.

HP Guv concludes address in 2 minutes

Shimla: In an unusual move, Himachal Pradesh Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla Monday concluded his address to the Assembly on the opening day of the Budget Session in just 2 minutes and 10 seconds, skipping a portion of the speech he termed "comments on a constitutional institution". The incident was the latest in a series of standoffs between the governor and non-BJP state governments -- in Tamil Nadu prepared text.

Tina Ambani may appear before ED today

New Delhi: Tina Ambani, former actor and wife of Reliance Group chairman Anil Ambani, is expected to appear before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) Tuesday for questioning in a money-laundering case. This is the second summons issued to 69-year-old Tina Ambani. She was issued the first summons to depose before the federal probe agency here February 10 but she had skipped it.

JOLT FOR ASSAM CONGRESS

Bhupen quits, MLA joins Rajoij Dal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



Guwahati, Feb 16: The Congress in Assam received a rude jolt Monday, as former state unit chief Bhupen Borah resigned ahead of the Assembly polls in the state, but later sought time to reconsider his decision after the high command rejected it.

Besides, three-time sitting MLA Abdur Rashid Mandal also left the Congress and joined another Opposition constituent Rajoij Dal.

Borah's resignation letter, claiming he was "ignored" by the leadership, triggered a political storm in the state, with the party's high command claiming that he has withdrawn it, while the leader requested time to reconsider it. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma extended an open invitation to him to join the BJP. Later in the day, Mandal, representing Goalpara West constituency, joined the Rajoij Dal in presence of its chief Akhil Gogoi.

"I am happy to join the growing Rajoij Dal under Gogoi. I am looking forward to strengthening his hands as a simple worker," Mandal said at the joining function.

An Assam Congress spokesperson, however, told PTI that Mandal has not submitted a resignation letter to the party. Regarding Bora who is also the party's election campaign committee chairman, AICC state in-charge Jitendra Singh claimed that he has withdrawn his resignation letter following intervention by the party brass, including president Mallikarjun Kharge and senior leader Rahul Gandhi.

"The party leadership has

discussed the matter with Borah. Rahul Gandhi also spoke to him for 15 minutes," Singh told reporters here outside Borah's house. "This is our internal matter; we discussed in detail about the issues bothering him, and I thank him for agreeing to withdraw his resignation," he said. Emerging from his residence, Borah, however, said he has sought time from the high command to reconsider his decision. "My old colleagues and the party's central leadership came to my house, and I re-

spect them. I have sought time till tomorrow morning so that I can talk to my family and take a decision in this regard," the 55-year-old leader said.

Besides Singh, Assam unit chief Gaurav Gogoi, MP Pradyut Bordoloi, leader of the Opposition in the Assembly Debabrata Saikia and other party MLAs, met Borah at his residence, after he sent a letter to the party high command, announcing his resignation.

Gogoi said Borah was a "pillar of strength" for the party, and he has always raised his voice against the negative forces active in the state.

Borah is a "true Congressman, a courageous leader with Assamese culture, civilisation and the party ideology of taking everyone together to move ahead deeply embedded in his DNA", he said.

Gogoi said he apologised to him "as a younger brother" if he felt hurt due to certain issues in the party. "This is a complex matter for us. We are also learning one step at a time, and hope that in future, he will guide us so that not only the

Congress, but the Opposition parties, too, are strengthened," the deputy leader of the opposition in Lok Sabha said.

In his resignation letter to Kharje, Borah claimed that he was being "ignored" by the party leadership and not being accorded his due in the state unit.

Chief Minister Sarma said the BJP's doors are open for Borah, and promised to help him get elected from a "safe seat" if he joined.

Sarma said Borah was the "last Hindu leader" in the Congress without a family background -- father or mother not occupying a ministerial post or being an MLA.

"His resignation carries the symbolic message that in the Congress, no one from a normal family can prosper. The Congress does not give recognition to people from ordinary families, but I hail from an ordinary middle-class family, and the BJP has made me a chief minister. We stay opposite to the politics of blue blood," he told reporters here outside the Assembly.

Sarma said he will go to Borah's residence tomorrow evening, and discuss his plans for the future.

"Borah has not contacted me or the BJP till now, and at present, we are not in direct or indirect touch," the CM said.

"If he wants to join the BJP, we will welcome him, but even if he does not want to do so, we extend our best wishes to him", he said.

Borah was the president of the Assam Congress unit from 2021 to 2025, and was replaced by Gaurav Gogoi last year. He has been a two-time legislator from Bihupuria in Assam.

India seizes Iran-linked US-sanctioned tankers



REUTERS

involving a tanker in India's exclusive economic zone. The post was later deleted, but the source now confirmed that the vessels had been escorted to Mumbai for further investigation.

The Indian Coast Guard has since deployed about 55 ships and 10 to 12 aircraft for round-the-clock surveillance in its maritime zones, according to the source.

The US Office of Foreign Assets Control, opens new tab last year sanctioned the vessels Global Peace, Chil 1, and Glory Star 1 with IMO numbers identical to the ships captured by India.

Two of the three tankers are linked to Iran, with Al Jafzia having carried fuel oil from Iran to Djibouti in 2025 and Stellar Ruby flagged in Iran, according to LSEG data.

The Asphalt Star mostly operated on voyages around China, the data show. Sanctioned oil and fuel are often sold at deep discounts due to the risks involved, with intermediaries moving cargo through complex ownership structures, false documentation and mid-sea transfers that complicate enforcement.

ROHIT SHETTY FIRING

Shooter among seven held from UP, Haryana

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Feb 16: In a major breakthrough, the Mumbai police have arrested seven persons, including the alleged shooter who fired five rounds at filmmaker Rohit Shetty's house, from Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, officials said Monday.

The city police's anti-extortion cell, with the help of the special task forces (STF) from the Uttar Pradesh and Haryana police, apprehended the alleged shooter, Deepak Rameshchandra Sharma, a resident of Agra, and six others involved in the February 1 firing, Sunday in a multi-state operation, an official said.

The police had earlier stated that the accused were nabbed from Haryana and Rajasthan.

The accused were brought to the city and produced before a court, which has sent them to police custody till February 25, he said.

With the latest arrests, the Mumbai police have nabbed 12 persons in connection with the case, while the main accused, Shubham Lonkar, remains at large, a senior police official said.

The accused persons were working on the directions of Shubham Lonkar, a member of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang, who had taken responsibility for the firing in a social media post, he said.

According to police, the accused had reced the "Singham" director's house on three occasions before the firing and some of them had consumed alcohol in a nearby area before the alleged shooter headed out to execute their plan.

At least five rounds were fired at the first floor of filmmaker Rohit Shetty's nine-storey building in the Juhu area at 12.45 am February 1. One bullet struck the glass of a gym inside the building.

Besides the alleged shooter, the police have apprehended Sunny Thakur, Sonu, Ritik Yadav, Jatin Bharadwaj, Vishnu Thakur and Vishnu Kushwah, the official said, adding that the accused were in the age group of 20 to 25 years.



Firefighters at the site after a fire broke out at the Jaya Chemical Factory, Mohandi village, Rajnandgaon, Chattisgarh



"You must educate the people. Play out the recordings on TV and radio on how these cyber criminals conduct themselves. They target mostly elderly and they should be made aware of the modus operandi. They have lost not lakhs but crores of hard-earned money," the bench said.

Sanjay said these cyber criminals are very confident and smart and that he himself had almost fallen victim to them once. The ASG told the bench that the government has come out with the "Sanchar Saathi" app where people can report about any cybercrime or stolen mobile phones or stolen identity.

Justice Nagarathna said, "Show the people how these scammers operate and how these frauds are carried out. You educate the people that this is the nature of talks which will

confidence by training them to deal with these situations.

The bench granted bail to Kharb, who was in custody since March 2024, after noting that other co-accused in the case have been granted the relief.

It directed him to deposit his passport, if any, before the trial court and report at the jurisdictional police station on the first Monday of every month.

Sanjay vehemently opposed the bail plea, saying the accused was booked in a number of states for cybercrimes and was part of a larger network of cyber criminals who dupe innocent citizens.

Appearing in the matter on behalf of the Delhi government, the ASG further said that Kharb's role in the instant case is significant and that he has not disclosed the fact that there are other criminal cases

SC asks govt to protect, compensate vulnerable cyber victims

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 16: The Supreme Court Monday said the government must make aware, compensate and try to protect vulnerable people who have lost their hard-earned money in cyber scams.

A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan made the remarks while granting bail to one Paramjit Kharb, accused of creating mule bank accounts and selling those to alleged cyber criminals for parking money extorted from online-scams victims.

Justice Nagarathna told Additional Solicitor General S D Sanjay that the government and police must take steps to compensate and protect the vulnerable victims, especially elderly persons, who have lost their hard-earned money in such scams.

"You must educate the people. Play out the recordings on TV and radio on how these cyber criminals conduct themselves. They target mostly elderly and they should be made aware of the modus operandi. They have lost not lakhs but crores of hard-earned money," the bench said.

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international



I will accept a proposal made by the nation's largest remaining rebel group to allow an independent commission to investigate the group's alleged links to the drug trade

GUSTAVO PETRO | PRESIDENT, COLOMBIA

CARNEY TO VISIT INDIA

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney will visit New Delhi in early March to work with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the framework for a comprehensive economic partnership agreement, Canadian official Victor Fedeli said Monday



N-talks: Iran Foreign Min meets IAEA chief

REUTERS



Dubai/Budapest, Feb 16: Iran's foreign minister met with the UN nuclear watchdog chief Monday, ahead of talks between Washington and Tehran aimed at resolving a nuclear dispute, with few clear signs of compromise from either side and the threat of US military action looming.

Washington, which joined Israel in a wave of air strikes on Iran in June, has ordered a second aircraft carrier group to the Middle East in the latest standoff with Tehran, in addition to other US warships and aircraft that have already been deployed.

Adding to the tension, Iran began a military drill Monday in the Strait of Hormuz, a vital international waterway and oil export route from Gulf Arab states, who have been appealing for diplomacy to end the dispute.

The US and Iran renewed negotiations earlier this month hoping to tackle their decades-long dispute over Tehran's nuclear program, which Washington, other Western states and Israel all believe is aimed at building nuclear arms. Tehran denies this.

Oil prices were little changed Monday, with investors weighing the market implications of upcoming US-Iran talks aimed at de-escalating frictions against a backdrop of expected OPEC+ supply increases

SCOPE OF TALKS EXPANDS TO MISSILE STOCKPILE

However, Washington has sought to expand the scope of talks to non-nuclear issues such as Iran's missile stockpile. Tehran says it is only willing

Iran conducts drill in Strait of Hormuz in case of a military threat
Iran seeks sanctions relief in exchange for nuclear curbs
US deploys warships, prepares for possible military campaign
IAEA demands Iran account for missing enriched uranium

to discuss curbs on its nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief and won't accept zero uranium enrichment. It says its missile capabilities are off the table.

Speaking during a visit to Hungary Monday, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said reaching a deal with Tehran would be hard.

"I think that there's an opportunity here to diplomatically reach an agreement that addresses the things we're concerned about. We'll be very open and welcoming to that. But I don't want to overstate it either. It's going to be hard. It's been very difficult for anyone to do real deals with Iran, because we're dealing with radical Shia clerics who are making theological

ical decisions, not geopolitical ones."

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said he was in Geneva to "achieve a fair and equitable deal".

"What is not on the table: submission before threats," Araghchi said on X.

Iran has repeatedly threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz in retaliation against any attack, which would choke a fifth of global oil flows and send crude prices sharply higher.

The waterway connects the biggest Gulf oil producers, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq and the United Arab Emirates, with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards have conducted a drill named "Smart Control of the Strait of Hormuz", to test the readiness of the guards' naval units to protect the waterway, the semi-official Tasnim news agency said Monday.

"Intelligently utilizing the geopolitical advantages of the Islamic Republic in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman are among the main objectives of this exercise," Tasnim said.

SHORT TAKES

Fireworks store explosion kills 8

Beijing: An explosion and fire at a fireworks shop in eastern China has killed eight people and left two others with minor burns ahead of the Lunar New Year, authorities said. The Sunday afternoon blast in a village in Jiangsu province was caused by a resident setting off fireworks improperly near the store, the Donghai county government said in a statement. It did not provide further details on what happened. Setting off firecrackers at midnight on the Lunar New Year is a tradition in China, but many places have banned fireworks in recent years, at least in part because of air pollution.

25 Indian fishermen apprehended by SL

Colombo: The Sri Lanka Navy Monday apprehended 25 Indian fishermen for allegedly poaching in the island nation's territorial waters. The fishermen were apprehended and their two trawlers were seized in Sri Lankan waters off Kankesanthurai, Jaffna, the Navy said in a statement. The fishermen will be handed over to the Fisheries Inspector of Myliddy, Jaffna, for further legal proceedings. The fishermen issue is a contentious one in the ties between India and Sri Lanka, with the Sri Lankan Navy personnel sometimes even firing at Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait and seizing their boats for illegally entering Sri Lanka's territorial waters.

Improvement in Khan's eyesight

Islamabad: A team of doctors Monday reported an improvement in the eyesight of jailed former Pakistani premier Imran Khan, as well as the condition of his eye, after examining him. The examination was done by two doctors Sunday, following the Supreme Court's order to allow a detailed medical check-up of the 73-year-old former cricketer-turned-politician's eyes.

CURBS ON AI CHATBOTS

REUTERS

London, Feb 16: Britain could bring in an Australian-style ban on social media for children under 16 as early as this year and close a loophole that left some AI chatbots outside safety rules, as part of government efforts to respond more quickly to digital risks.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government last month launched a consultation on a social media ban for children under 16 and is now working to change legislation so it could bring in any changes within months of the consultation concluding.

Spain, Greece and Slovenia have also said they are working on bans after Australia became the first country in the world to block access to under 16s.

NK opens new housing district for families of Ukraine war dead

ASSOCIATED PRESS

potential public discontent.

Kim in recent months has sent thousands of troops and large quantities of military equipment, including artillery and missiles, to fuel Russian President Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine, as the leaders align in the face of their separate confrontations with Washington.

South Korea's National Intelligence Service told lawmakers last week it estimates that about 6,000 North Korean troops were killed or wounded during their deployment in the war, but did not provide a breakdown of fatalities. The agency said last year it believed roughly 600 had died.

The spy agency believes North Korean forces are benefiting from the war by gaining modern combat experience and Russian technical support that could improve the performance of their weapons systems, according to lawmakers who attended last week's closed-door briefing.

Scrutiny has since intensified further after Elon Musk's flagship AI chatbot Grok was found to be generating nonconsensual sexualised images.

GLOBAL PRESSURE GROWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Britain's 2023 Online Safety Act is one of the world's strictest safety regimes, but it does not cover one-to-one interactions with AI chatbots unless they share information with other users, a loophole technology minister Liz Kendall said would soon be closed.

Britain cannot allow regulatory gaps to persist after the act took nearly eight years to pass and come into force, she said.

"I am concerned about these AI chatbots... as is the prime minister, about the impact that's having on children and young people," Kendall told



Revellers attend the annual block party "Pena de Pavao de Krishna" during the Carnival festivities in Belo Horizonte, Brazil

REUTERS

UK eyes rapid ban on social media for under 16s



Times Radio, saying some children were forming one-to-one relationships with AI systems that were not designed with child safety in mind.

She said the government would set out its proposals before June.

Speaking to British media Monday, Kendall said tech

firms would be responsible for ensuring their systems complied with British law.

The government would also consult on changes to bring in automatic data-preservation orders when a child dies, allowing investigators to secure key online evidence - a measure long sought by bereaved

- Government proposal due before June, Kendall says
- Consultation to examine curbs on 'stranger pairing' in gaming
- Automatic data-preservation orders planned for child death investigations

families. The consultation would also consider powers to curb "stranger pairing" on gaming consoles and to block the sending or receiving of nude images.

The new measures will be introduced as an amendment to existing crime and child-protection legislation being considered by parliament.

While aimed at shielding children, such measures often have knock-on implications for adults' privacy and ability to access services, and have led to tension with the US over limits on free speech and regulatory reach.

Some major pornography sites have blocked British users rather than carry out age checks, but those blocks can be circumvented by using readily available virtual private networks, which the government is considering restricting for minors.

Many parents and safety advocates back a social media ban for children, but Kendall said some child-protection groups worry it could push harmful activity into less regulated spaces or create a sharp "cliff edge" at 16. She added that the government still needs to define legally what counts as social media before any ban can take effect.

Hindus among four elected to B'desh Parl

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dhaka, Feb 16: Four candidates from minority communities, including two Hindus, won in the recent general elections in Bangladesh, with all being nominees of the BNP, which is set to form the government Tuesday.

Goyeshwar Chandra Roy and Nitai Roy Chowdhury are the two Hindu candidates who won on a Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) ticket. They won from a Dhaka seat and western Magura constituency defeating their rivals fielded by the Jamaat-e-Islami.

Roy is a member of the BNP's highest policy-making standing committee while Chowdhury is one of prominent vice presidents of the party as well as a senior advisor and strategist for its top leadership.

The third minority MP-elect is Saching Prus, a senior BNP leader and follower of Buddhist faith, representing Marma ethnic community in southeastern hill district of Bandarban, from where he was elected.

The fourth minority candidate, Dipen Dewan, belongs to the Buddhist majority Chakma ethnic minority group, who won from a constituency in southeastern Rangamati hill district. However, his religious identity is obscure with many describing him as a Hindu.

Hindus make up about eight per cent of the population in the Muslim-majority country of 170 million people.

Dewan defeated an independent Chakma candidate as his nearest rival while Prus defeated a nominee of the student-led National Citizen Party, which was formed last year by the Students Against Discrimination, which led the mass protests against ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024.

Tarique Rahman to take oath as Bangladesh's new PM Tuesday

Breaking with a long-standing tradition, the swearing-in ceremony of the 60-year-old BNP chairman would be held at the South Plaza of the Parliament Complex instead of Bangabhaban

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dhaka, Feb 16: Tarique Rahman will take oath as the new Prime Minister of Bangladesh Tuesday after leading his party to a forceful victory in the crucial general elections.

Rahman's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has bagged 209 out of 297 seats, while right-wing Jamaat-e-Islami secured 68 seats in the 13th Parliamentary elections. Deposed premier Sheikh Hasina's Awami League was barred from contesting polls.

As the leader of the majority party, our party chairman, Tarique Rahman, will be held at the South Plaza of the Parliament Complex instead of Bangabhaban. President Mohammed Shahabuddin will administer the oath to the new cabinet members at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Tuesday afternoon, state-run BSS news agency reported Monday.

"The Parliament Secretariat is set to hold the oath-taking ceremony of the new cabinet members at 4:00 pm tomorrow," Secretary of the Jatiya Sangsad Secretariat Kaniz Mousa said.

Earlier Tuesday, Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin would administer the oath to all newly elected members of the parliament.

All 297 newly elected law-makers of the 13th Jatiya Sangsad (JS) will "first take oath as the members of parliament

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla will represent India at the swearing-in ceremony of Rahman. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Secretary-General of Lok Sabha Utpal Kumar Singh are also likely to accompany Birla. Rahman would become the prime minister for the first time. He will replace the interim government chief Muhammad Yunus, under whose tenure Dhaka's relations with New Delhi witnessed a significant downturn.

Election campaigning formally kicks off across Nepal for March 5 polls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kathmandu, Feb 16: Political parties in Nepal Monday officially began campaigning for the March 5 general elections.

As restrictions imposed by the Election Commission (EC) on the launch of the election campaign ended Sunday night, candidates started door-to-door visits, public meetings and rallies. The EC designated February 16 to March 2 as days for formal campaign activities, including public meetings, rallies, processions, corner meetings and the use of loudspeakers. All types of campaigning must stop from midnight March 2, 48 hours before the general election.

There are a total of 18,903,689 eligible voters for the election, including 915,119 newly registered ones, compared to the last parliamentary election in 2022.

The Lower House of Parliament has 275 lawmakers, of which 165 are elected through the first past the post (FPTP) system or direct voting while 110 are elected through proportionate voting.

Some major pornography sites have blocked British users rather than carry out age checks, but those blocks can be circumvented by using readily available virtual private networks, which the government is considering restricting for minors.

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of the
day quoteIndia's retail
is an inspiring
story -- the
sector is poised
to expand into a
nearly Rs 200 lakh
crore opportunity
over the next decade

ABHEEK SINGH | MD & SENIOR PARTNER, BCG

Real estate
is where
national
ambition becomes
real, through
homes that anchor
dignity, workplac-
es that power productivity and
infrastructure that enables mobility
and opportunity. In that sense, the
sector is not only shaping assets,
but also outcomes

PARVEEN JAIN | PRESIDENT, NAREDCO

As we are
preparing
for the next
phase, we have
created a five-year
plan. The five-year
plan talks about
growing volumes to about
3 lakh units

ANURAG MEHROTRA | MD, JSW MG MOTOR

SHORT TAKES**Violating standards:**
Snapdeal fined ₹5L

New Delhi: The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has imposed a penalty of Rs 5 lakh on e-commerce platform Snapdeal for selling toys that do not comply with mandatory Bureau of Indian Standards certification, violating the Toys (Quality Control) Order, 2020. A final order against Snapdeal (Ace Vector Limited) has been issued after taking suo-moto cognizance of the matter, CCPA Chief Commissioner Nidhi Khare told PTI. The CCPA has also issued notices to other e-commerce entities including Amazon and Flipkart, along with sellers such as Stallion Trading Company and Electronics Bazar Store, she said.

**Torrent Power to
buy L&T coal plant**

Mumbai: India's Torrent Power said Monday it will buy a coal-fired power plant operator in northern India from Larsen & Toubro for Rs 68.89 billion (\$759.48 million) including debt as it seeks to build capacity in the region. Larsen & Toubro, whose unit L&T Power Development will execute the deal, will receive Rs 36.61 billion for the sale of plant operator Nabha Power, it said in a separate statement. Nabha operates a 1,400-megawatt coal-fired plant in India's northern Punjab state and supplies all its electricity to the state power corporation under a 25-year contract.

3-MONTH HIGH

Trade deficit widens

Higher gold, silver
shipments drive imports
to highest so far this fiscal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 16: The country's exports rose marginally by 0.61 per cent to \$36.56 billion in January, while trade deficit widened to a three-month high of \$34.68 billion, government data showed Monday.

Imports rose 19.2 per cent - the highest so far this fiscal - to a three-month high of \$71.24 billion in January, driven by a sharp rise in inbound shipments of gold and silver due to higher prices.

Gold imports surged 349.22 per cent to \$12 billion during the month under review, while silver imports jumped by 127 per cent to \$2 billion.

India mainly imports the yellow metal from Switzerland, from where the inbound shipments have climbed 836.85 per cent to \$3.95 billion in January.

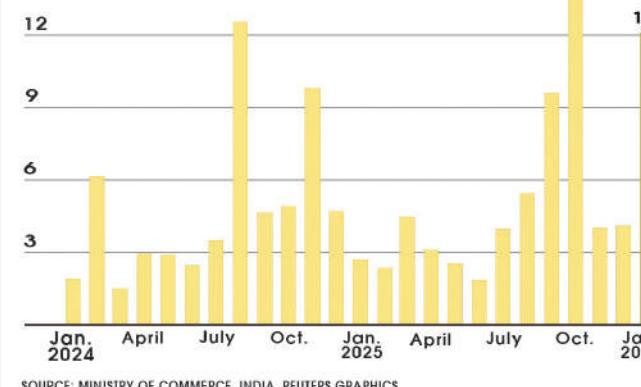
Oil imports, however, dipped 0.24 per cent to \$13.4 billion in January.

Cumulatively during April-January 2025-26 fiscal, the country's exports rose by 2.22 per cent to \$366.63 billion.

Imports grew 7.21 per cent to \$649.86 billion, leaving a trade deficit of \$283.23 billion during the nine-month period of 2025-26. The gap was \$247.38 billion in April-January 2024-25.

During April-January this fiscal, the total exports are estimated at \$720.76 billion as against \$679.02 billion recorded

Value of gold imports shot up in January on account of higher global prices
\$15 billion



SOURCE: MINISTRY OF COMMERCE, INDIA, REUTERS GRAPHICS

TRADE DEFICIT:
\$34.68 billion
IMPORTS (19.2%▲):
\$71.24 billion
EXPORTS (0.61%▲):
\$36.56 billion

RAJESH AGRAWAL | COMMERCE SECRETARY

in the same period of the previous fiscal.

The global trade has been disrupted due to tariffs imposed by the US. On India, the Trump administration has levied a steep 50 per cent tariffs from August. This is impacting the country's outbound shipments from the labour-intensive sectors, such as apparel.

The US has removed a 25 per cent tariff on Indian goods from February 7. It will cut the remaining 25 per cent reciprocal

The country's exports remain northwards both in goods and services... We expect to be in the vicinity of \$860 billion overall exports in the current fiscal. And in services we expect to be over \$410 billion

RAJESH AGRAWAL | COMMERCE SECRETARY

tariffs to 18 per cent once a trade agreement is finalised between the two countries.

At the exports front, key sectors such as petroleum, engineering, electronics, iron ore, marine and coffee have recorded positive growth in January.

However, shipments of tea, rice, spices, leather and leather products, gems and jewellery, chemicals, ready-made garments of all textiles, and plastics have recorded negative growth.

X suffers global outage

Elon Musk-run X Corp suffered a global outage, including in India, as well as several other countries like the US and the UK, Monday evening, with users unable to access their accounts properly, and posts unable to load on the platform. According to the outage detecting portal Down Detector, the number of outage reports surged to over 25,000. While 53 per cent of X app users were unable to log into their accounts, 16 per cent of website users reported issues



WPI inflation surges for 3rd month on trot



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

6.78 per cent in January as against deflation of 3.50 per cent in December.

In the case of manufactured products, WPI inflation inched up to 2.86 per cent, as against 1.82 per cent in December.

Non-food articles category inflation spiked to 7.58 per cent in January, against 2.95 per cent in December.

Negative inflation, or deflation, continued in the fuel and power sectors, at 4.01 per cent in January, as against 2.31 per cent in December.

The country's retail inflation inched up to 2.75 per cent in January, data released last week showed.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has reduced policy interest rates by 1.25 percentage points in the current fiscal year as inflation remained low.

The RBI mainly tracks retail inflation for deciding on benchmark interest rates. Earlier this month, the RBI retained key policy interest rates at 5.25 per cent.

New Delhi, Feb 16: Wholesale price inflation extended upward momentum for the third straight month, at 1.81 per cent in January, driven by an uptick in prices of food, non-food articles, and manufactured items on a month-on-month basis, government data showed Monday.

PowerGrid emerged as the top gainer in the Sensex pack, rising 4.45 per cent, followed by HDFC Bank, Axis Bank, NTPC, ITC, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finserv, Bharti Airtel, Adani Ports, Tata Steel, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Reliance Industries and State Bank of India.

On the other hand, Tech Mahindra, Maruti Suzuki India, Bajaj Finance, Trent, Mahindra & Mahindra, Titan, Infosys, ICICI Bank, and UltraTech Cement were the laggards. BSE Midcap Select Index rose 0.95 per cent, while Smallcap Select Index slipped 0.16 per cent.

On the other hand, Consumer Discretionary and Auto were the only laggards.

In vegetables, inflation was

Silver crashes 2%; gold advances

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 16: Silver prices declined by 2 per cent to Rs 2.5 lakh per kilogram, while gold increased by Rs 700 per 10 grams in the national capital Monday.

According to the All India Sarafha Association, the white metal depreciated by Rs 5,000, or 1.96 per cent, to Rs 2,50,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes) from Rs 2,55,000 per kg Friday.

However, gold of 99.9 per cent purity advanced by Rs 700 to Rs 1,59,200 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes) from the previous close of Rs 1,58,500 per 10 grams.

"Silver began the week on a softer note, as investors booked profits after the weekend's rally. However, ongoing central bank purchases, heightened safe-haven demand amid the correction in tech and AI stocks, and a weaker dollar index have helped cushion the downside," Gaurav Garg, Research Analyst, Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

In the global market, spot silver fell nearly 1 per cent to \$76.94 per ounce, while gold slipped \$40.10, or 1 per cent, to \$5,003.01 per ounce.

MCL Hirakud Int'l Half Marathon marks participation of over 10,000 athletes

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sambalpur, Feb 16: Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL) in collaboration with Sambalpur district administration organised the MCL Hirakud International Half Marathon.

The historic event took place at the iconic Hirakud Dam in Sambalpur, Odisha, with a total prize purse of Rs 55 lakh, drawing over 10,000 enthusiastic participants from across the globe, including professional marathon runners, fitness enthusiasts, young and old.

Participants from around 20 states of the country and international athletes from Kenya, Nigeria, Bhutan, Nepal and others participated in this historic marathon.

Dharmendra Pradhan, Union Minister of Education along with Suresh Pujari, Revenue Minister; Rab Narayan Naik, Minister of Panchayati Raj, Rural Development and Drinking Water; Suryabansi Suraj, Minister of Sports & Youth Services, Government of Odisha; MPs, MLAs flagged off the half



marathon.

Dignitaries from Coal India limited, Uday Anant Kaole, CMD MCL; Functional Directors of MCL, IG- Northern Region Odisha, District Collector Sambalpur; Superintendent of Police, Sambalpur; senior officers from various districts of Odisha and Padma Shri awardees Krishna Patel and Jitendra Haripal were present on this occasion.

Participants showcased the sportsmanlike spirit, endurance and determination in the race featuring the 21km half marathon, 10km run and 5km run, making it competitive and

fun for both seasoned athletes and newcomers, transforming the scenic landscape of Hirakud into a vibrant celebration of health, fitness and athletic excellence.

Sonika and Panchanan Bera stood as the overall winners and bagged the top prize of Rs 5 lakh of the half marathon in female and male categories respectively. International athletes Nganga George from Nigeria and Saron Molla Yigzaw delivered stellar performances securing positions among the top five finishers in the respective categories. The dignitaries awarded the winners across the various categories.

In the global market, spot silver fell nearly 1 per cent to \$76.94 per ounce, while gold slipped \$40.10, or 1 per cent, to \$5,003.01 per ounce.

AM/NS India expands value-added steel portfolio

POST NEWS NETWORK

that includes Optigal®, Magnelis®, Optigal® Prime, Optigal® Pinnacle, and others – each validated for consistency, efficiency, and durability across diverse applications.

Ranjan Dhar, Director and Vice President – Sales & Marketing said, "The addition of AM/NS Vibrance and AM/NS Optima is a significant step in expanding our branded steel portfolio to support OEMs productivity and value creation. These two coated steel offerings strengthen our position as preferred solution provider with innovative, high-quality steel solutions in line with our brand promise – 'Smarter Steels, Brighter Futures'. By making world-class value-added steels available domestically, we are contributing to the 'Make in India' vision, while enabling our customers to build differentiated products with confidence and gain competitive advantage domestically and globally."

REUTERS



Banks' reluctance to lend and states' hesitance to promote the schemes could derail India's efforts to transition away from coal

SHREYA JAI | LEAD ENERGY ANALYST, CLIMATE TRENDS

- Loan delays and limited state support hinder solar roll out
- State utilities fear revenue loss from rooftop solar adoption
- About 60% of rooftop solar applications not approved yet

newable energy ministry pointed to accelerating installations which have benefited over 3 million households, and said the scheme enables state-owned utilities to reduce subsidy payouts to keep residential power bills in check. "The loan rejection rate varies across states," the statement said.

Under PM Surya Ghar, consumers apply and select a vendor who handles paperwork and arranges bank financing for solar panels. After loan approval and installation, the vendor submits proof, after which the government subsidy is credited to the bank.

BANK DELAYS

However, banks have been rejecting or delaying loans for

numerous reasons including lack of documentation, which they say is necessary to protect public funds.

"We are working with the government to push for some standard documentation, because it is necessary to avoid bad loans. Currently if loans go bad, banks can take away these panels but what will we do with these panels?" said a senior official.

Chamrul Mishra, a solar vendor in the eastern Indian state of Odisha, said applications are often rejected because the customer has missed electricity payments or because land records are still in the name of deceased relatives.

Residents there dispute the claims that they have missed payments, which they attribute to administrative errors after a change in utility ownership decades prior. State-owned utilities are also not promoting rooftop solar as much, as they are concerned about the loss of revenue as sales move off the electric grid.

These two branded coated offerings now form part of a value added product portfolio

REUTERS

But residential installations at 2.36 million are well below the ministry's target of 4 million by March, according to data from the programme's website.

Roughly three in five rooftop solar applications filed on the

scheme's website are yet to be approved while about 7% have been rejected, according to government data on the programme, known as the PM Surya Ghar.

In a statement to Reuters about the pending applications, the re-

Nissanka's ton takes SL into Super 8s

The opener scripts history, becoming only the second Sri Lankan batter to score a century in the tournament

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Pallekele (Sri Lanka), Feb 16: Opener Pathum Nissanka Monday turned a tricky chase into a walk in the park, his belligerent 52-ball 100 powering Sri Lanka to an eight-wicket win over Australia and securing their place in the Super Eights here.

Set a record target of 182 at this venue, Sri Lanka rode on Nissanka's unbeaten knock and Kusal Mendis's 38-ball 51 to complete the task in 18 overs and leave Australia's qualification hopes hanging by a thread.

Pavan Rathnayake remained not out on 28 off 15 balls.

Nissanka smashed 10 fours and five sixes during his match-winning knock.

Australia will now need to win by a massive margin against Oman in their final match and rely on both Sri Lanka and Ireland to beat Zimbabwe to have any sort of outside chance whatsoever. In fact if Zimbabwe manage to beat Ireland on Thursday, then Australia will be knocked out even before meeting Oman in their last group league game.

Earlier, Mitchell Marsh and Travis Head blazed away to explosive fifties before Sri Lanka rallied to bowl out Australia for 181.

Coming back into the playing XI after missing the team's first two matches of the tournament due to an injury, Marsh got into the act straightaway, clobbering 54 in 27 balls.

Head was equally brutal during his 29-ball 56, as the opening duo added 104 runs in



T20 WORLD CUP

less than nine overs to set Australia up for a 200-plus total.

But the Sri Lankans did much better in the back 10, with leg-spinner Dushan Hemantha (3/37 in 4 overs) emerging as the most successful bowler for the home team. The last four wickets fell for only six runs.

In the chase, Sri Lanka coped an early blow when Kusal Perera failed to connect properly with a Marcus Stoinis ball and ended up slicing it to the deep backward point fielder.

With 89 needed from 60 balls and with nine wickets in hand, Sri Lanka fancied their chances of overhauling the target.

Earlier, the move to field first backfired on the Sri Lankans as Australia got off to a rolicking start with Marsh and Head marking their reunion with a flurry of fours and sixes.

Following their 23-run defeat to Zimbabwe, Australia began the game in earnest, collecting as many as 16 runs in the very

England seal Super Eights berth

Kolkata: Will Jacks delivered a fiery all-round performance as England overcame a spirited Italian fightback to beat them by 24 runs and seal their Super Eights berth, in their T20 World Cup Group C clash at Eden Gardens, here Monday. Opting to bat, England rode on Jacks' scintillating unbeaten 53 off just 22 balls (4x6, 3x4) to pile up 202 for 7 -- their first 200-plus total of this edition. In reply, debutants Italy put up a spirited display and threatened twice in the chase through Ben Manenti's breathtaking assault (60; 25b) and a late flourish from Grant Stewart (45; 23b). But Jacks' maiden T20 World Cup fifty and his timely breakthrough ensured the two-time champions stayed in control when it mattered and bowled out their European rivals for 178 in 20 overs.

Omarzai powers Afghanistan to first win of 2026 T20 WC

New Delhi: Azmatullah Omarzai produced an all-round show to power Afghanistan to their first win of the 2026 T20 World Cup through a five-wicket victory over United Arab Emirates here Monday. Omarzai first returned with figures of 4/15 to help restrict UAE to 160 for 9. He then played a match-winning cameo of 40 not out after Ibrahim Zadran scored 53 to take Afghanistan to their first win in the ongoing edition. For UAE, Sohaib Khan scored his second consecutive fifty, smashing 68 off 48 balls while Alishan Sharafu contributed 31-ball 40.

I was just waiting for the ball to come and play to my strengths and I'm happy that I got several of those balls to those strengths and then was able to get those boundaries

PATHUM NISSANKA | OPENER, SL

first over by Dushmantha Chameera.

If the early onslaught by Head and Marsh was not enough, Sri Lanka suffered a massive blow in the third over when Matheesa Pathirana, the 23-year-old slinger, hobbled off the field after suffering a hamstring injury, leaving Dasun Shanaka to complete the over.

However, Australia lost a cluster of wickets thereafter and from 104 for no loss, they slipped to 130 for four and never recovered from that.

Brief Scores

Australia 181 all out in 20 overs (Mitchell Marsh 54, Travis Head 56, Dushan Hemantha 3/37) lost to **Sri Lanka** 184/2 in 18 overs by 8 wickets (Pathum Nissanka 100 not out, Kusal Mendis 51)



Off-colour Babar, Shaheen to be dropped: Pak team source

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Madrid: With Kylian Mbappe back in the squad, Real Madrid returns to Portugal looking for some payback against Jose Mourinho's Benfica in the Champions League. Three weeks after Mourinho's team stunned his former club in a 4-2 win that allowed Benfica to qualify and kept the Spanish giant from automatically reaching the round of 16, the two teams will meet again at the Stadium of Light in the first round of the knockout stage. Benfica got the goal it needed to qualify thanks to a last-minute header by goalkeeper Anatoliy Trubin against Madrid, allowing it to grab the 24th - and final - spot for the knockout stage on goal difference. Mbappe, who already has 38 goals for Madrid this season, will be available again after he missed the Spanish league match against Real Sociedad at the weekend because of discomfort on his knee.

Nervous PSG to take on Monaco

Paris: PSG dropped out of the top eight that automatically qualified for the last-16 after a 1-1 home draw against Newcastle in the last round of the league phase, dropping it to 11th place. Paris Saint-Germain is under pressure for the first time this season and tensions have started appearing. After failing to qualify, last year's winner faces a playoff against Ligue 1 rival Monaco. PSG heads to Monaco for Tuesday's first leg on the back of a 3-1 defeat at Rennes, which allowed Lens to reclaim top spot in Ligue 1. PSG is also out of the French Cup and has lost six games overall this season. The Rennes defeat prompted PSG's Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele to question the attitude of his teammates. Without giving names, he suggested some players are putting themselves first.

Dembele's comments led coach Luis Enrique to issue a stern reminder about keeping a united front. Luis Enrique's strong man-management has helped PSG become a far more unified team. He made it clear that, unlike previous seasons, there will be no pampered players.



and told them that they had not played to their full potential.

"Late night the management think tank decided enough was enough and it was to bench Babar and Shaheen and try out Salman Mirza/Naseem Shah and Fakhar Zaman against Namibia on Wednesday," he said.

The source said that if the changes prove to be successful, Babar and Shaheen's World Cup would be over as the management is also keen to try out young Kha-ya Nafay in the middle order.

Pakistan cannot afford any slip-up against Namibia if they want to qualify for the super eight phase of the tournament. The team defeated lower-ranked USA and the Netherlands before the heavy loss to India.

The source said head coach Mike Hesson also spoke to the players in the dressing room

ODISHA BOY MAKES SENIOR INDIA DEBUT ON HOME SOIL

Rosan's dream turns into reality

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, Feb 16: As the Indian Men's Hockey Team took the field against Argentina in the FIH Men's Pro League 2025-26 Rourkela Leg here Sunday, local midfielder Rosan Kujur made his milestone moment. After impressive performances in the junior ranks, the young talent made his senior India debut today on his home turf, realizing a dream he has nurtured since his days at the Panposh hostels.

For Rosan, wearing the India jersey for the first time in front of his own people is a special feeling.

"For me, it is a proud moment to have the chance to be in the Senior team in my own state. Playing in front of the home crowd, the people who saw me grow up in the hostel will see how far I have reached. It inspires the younger boys watching; they feel that if I can do it, they can do it too."

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ROSAN KUJUR

Rosan's journey to this debut has been steady and determined. He first got noticed in the Sub-Junior Nationals in 2019. Later, during his time at the Odisha Naval Tata High Performance Centre, his coaches saw his natural speed and ball control.

They transitioned him from a defensive role to an attacking midfielder—a change that fast-tracked his growth through the junior ranks.

His recent experience in the Hero Hockey India League with the champion Vedanta Kalinga Lancers also played a massive role in his readiness. Playing alongside international stars taught him how to handle pressure and improved his tactical understanding.

Coming off a Bronze medal win at the Junior World Cup and a strong Hero HIL season, Rosan knows the senior level is a step up. He credits senior players like Manpreet Singh and PR Sreejesh for helping him understand the high standards required.

"I was told that performing well here is the final step. If I don't seize this, I would have to go back and climb two or three steps again. That motivation drives me to match the intensity of the experienced players and prove I belong here," Rosan added.

Curling controversy widens as Britain joins Canada

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Cortina D'ampezzo (Italy), Feb 16: The curling controversy at the Winter Olympics widened as increased surveillance of the matches resulted in the removal of a stone thrown by the British men's team for the same alleged violation that burned the Canadians two days in a row.

In the ninth end of Britain's round-robin game against Germany, officials said Scottish curler Bobby Lammie had touched a stone after releasing it down the ice. Such "double-touching" is against the rules. Britain won the match 9-4. Until Sunday, the allega-

tions had been limited to Canadian curlers, who represent one of the world's most fervent fan bases.

The controversy began Friday night with an allegation against the Canadian men by their Swedish opponents; a day later, a stone was removed from the Canadian women's match against Switzerland. Videos circulating on social media appeared to show both Canadian curlers double-touching the rocks but both teams denied wrongdoing.

On Saturday, World Curling directed two umpires to move between the four matches during each round, monitoring play. That policy was in place



when violations were called on Lammie and Canada's Rachel Homan.

But the federation backed off on Sunday night, announcing that it would keep the two umpires who had been monitoring the games available at teams' request - but that they would not be sent to monitor games by default.

Some curlers said the double-touching infraction had never been called out with this level of intensity in past competitions and it can be difficult to tell if someone is guilty of it. World Curling does not use video replays for reviewing penalties during games.

Curlers are split over introducing video replays.

Olympic curlers had varying opinions on whether umpires - like those in other sports - should begin using video replays to adjudicate disputes or

verify calls.

"If they bring that in, I think it probably disrupts the speed of play," said Johanna Hedin, the alternate for the Swedish women's team. "We've always been a game that tries to play by the rules and have that high sportsmanship level, so hopefully we can figure that back out."

U.S. women's curlers had a different view. Tara Peterson said she'd "absolutely" support video replay.

"There's instances where an instant replay would be huge," she said.

"I feel like there's a lot of other sports that do it," said her sister, skip Tabitha Peterson.

INDIAN SUPER LEAGUE

East Bengal crush NorthEast United



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kolkata, Feb 16: A brace of goals within six minutes in the second half by Youssef Ezzejari and an injury-time strike by Miguel Ferreira guided East Bengal FC to a 3-0 win against NorthEast United FC in Match 6 of the Indian Super League (ISL) 2025-26 season, played at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan in Kolkata Monday.

Oscar Bruzon started Jeackson Singh alongside Anwar Ali in the centre of the defence, with Lalchungnunga shifted to the right-back position and Jay Gupta starting on the left flank.

Juan Pedro Benali gave a start to Parthib Gogoi to lead the attack for NorthEast United, with Jithin M.S. and Jairo Samperio supporting the youngster.

East Bengal were quick off the blocks and put some early pressure on the NorthEast backline, pressing them high up the pitch, which led to some misplaced passes in the midfield.

The wingbacks of East Bengal pushed up high up the pitch to provide support for Bipin Singh and Nandha Kumar on either wing.

The hosts, with all their possessions and energy, could not create any genuine scoring chances to trouble Gurmeet in goal. On the other end, the Highlanders were trying to use the pace of Jithin and Parthib to break the hosts' high-line of defence, but the perfect ball was lacking from the midfield.

After the half-time break, Miguel Zabaco almost scored an own goal while trying to in-