

HERE . NOW

Orissa POST



In big league

Actor Alia Bhatt has been named as one of the presenters at 79th BAFTA

LEISURE | P2



Ukraine-Russia talks

Negotiators from Ukraine and Russia begin two days of US-mediated peace talks in Geneva Tuesday

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Markets rise for 2nd day

Stock markets close higher for the second straight session Tuesday, driven by gains in bank, IT and capital goods shares

BUSINESS | P11



Australia eliminated

Australia and Ireland get eliminated from the T20 WC after Zimbabwe's match against Ireland washed out due to rain

SPORTS | P12

12 PAGES | ₹5.00

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BHUBANESWAR | WEDNESDAY | FEBRUARY 18, 2026



UP IN FLAMES: Smoke and flames billow out of a coach of the New Delhi-Chennai Grand Trunk Express that caught fire while heading towards Sindi railway station in Wardha district of Maharashtra, Tuesday. PHOTO: PTI

₹1,113cr for biotech

Over 4 lakh to sit for Plus II exams

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Feb 17: In a significant move to position Odisha as a biotechnology hub, Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati announced a comprehensive plan to strengthen research, innovation and entrepreneurship in the biotechnology sector under which the state government will invest ₹1,113.50 crore in a period of five years.

The announcement, made during his inaugural address to the Assembly, outlines a five-year strategy aimed at accelerating scientific advancement and boosting the bio-economy.

The state government will invest ₹1,113.50 crore over five years under an umbrella scheme titled 'Development of Biotechnology'.

The ambitious programme, which will be implemented from 2025-26 to 2029-30, will have 17 sub-schemes. The initiative is designed to enhance research infrastructure, promote industry-academia collaboration, and foster biotechnol-



ogy-led enterprises across Odisha. As part of its focus on marine sciences, the state government launched the Odisha Marine Biotechnology Research and Innovation Corridor (OMBRIC) in August 2025.

To strengthen this initiative, memorandums of understanding (MoUs) have been signed with six state partner institutes, the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), Chennai, as the national knowledge partner, and James Cook University as the international knowledge partner.

Further advancing the state's bio-economy roadmap, the Governor said an agreement has also been signed with Indian Institute

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The ambitious programme 'Development of Biotechnology' that will be implemented from 2025-26 to 2029-30 comprises 17 sub-schemes
- Land acquisition is underway in Puri for the establishment of a regional centre of NIOT, which will house a marine coastal observatory

of Management Sambalpur to prepare Odisha's first Bio-Economy Report.

The report will assess the economic contribution of biotechnology-driven industries and chart a future growth strategy.

The authorities have set up 211 examination management hubs, 1,357 examination centres and seven sub-centres across the state for the smooth conduct of the examinations.

Elaborate security measures, including AI-enabled CCTVs, have been put in place to ensure fair and malpractice-free examinations.

16001/20/2526



Shri Narendra Modi
Prime Minister



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Shri Mohan Charan Majhi
Chief Minister, Odisha

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ARIES

You will experience a profound connection with the cosmos today. And you will be very grateful to the almighty for showering his grace on you. Your love for your kith and kin deepens today, says Ganesha, and you will spend extravagantly on them.

TAURUS

This is not one of those easy and carefree days. You are in for a lot of mental anguish. The mental pressure you feel, you will realise, is of your own making. Unless you make radical changes in your basic outlook, mental tensions are likely to become an everyday affair. You need to face and accept things as they are.

GEMINI

Your desire to go travelling with your family members will receive an impetus today and you will set out to schedule your itinerary. It is a good time for travel and you will be able to more satisfactorily execute your travel plans within your budget, says Ganesha.

CANCER

You think you are smart. You will be most certainly savouring the positive aspects of your life. Sometimes, it is quite possible that you find yourself at the end of your wits. You had better sit together with your spouse and thrash out personality clashes and private quarrels, suggests Ganesha.

LEO

Today may not be the best time to mess with you, considering the aura of invincibility that you possess. Be it a game, a competition, or an argument, you will have the edge over others in every sphere, says Ganesha. Also, you may come across people with whom you will have personal differences, and those who will try to change your fortunes.

VIRGO

Appreciate the things that people do and try your best to inspire them to achieve greater success, says Ganesha. Put on your thinking cap and contemplate seriously. Simply criticising others will only hurt you. Be as level-headed as you can and keep pegging on towards your targets.

LIBRA

Today is an important day for you, and you will learn a lot from your life partner. Even on the work front, business partners will extend their best possible cooperation to you. Your chances of winning in cut-throat competitions are very bright today, predicts Ganesha.

SCORPIO

Focus is the buzzword for you; your eyes should be set on the things you aim, advises Ganesha. You may even indulge into some kind of research work. Today, you may bump into an old pal with whom you relive those good old school days and rejuvenate yourself.

SAGITTARIUS

You will be your usual self today, frank and precise. You are all ears for what your life partner has to say. This will make them feel special! According to Ganesha, be patient and carry out your work gracefully.

CAPRICORN

Your grand orchestration may not come to fruition, and even your best-laid plans may go awry, says Ganesha. Squabbles with people over petty issues will add to your growing vexation; keep calm and you'll handle all of it just fine.

AQUARIUS

Today, you will want to expand your horizon of knowledge. You will give a tough fight to your opponents and come out triumphant, feels Ganesha. Troubles will not be able to trouble you as you will be able to turn them into your advantage. You are clever, talented and have all that it takes to fly high.

PISCES

Financial bearings will be at the forefront of your attention today, feels Ganesha. Bank accounts, stocks, loans and other such things will dominate your thoughts and words. Earning money will be your primary goal and you will focus on those methods that will be most profitable to you, today.



'BOYFRIEND BREAKFAST' BY GWYNETH PALTROW

Hollywood actress Gwyneth Paltrow loves her kitchen throughout the year. The *Marty Supreme* star shared the latest iteration of her "Boyfriend Breakfast". In the cooking clip, the actress bakes a gluten-free quiche. She wrote in the caption, "Valentine's #boyfriendbreakfast, gluten-free broccoli, onion, and sausage quiche. Extra love".

CARMEN ELECTRA'S RELATIONSHIP IDEALS

Hollywood actress Carmen Electra has opened up on her potential next date. The actress has shared that she wants to date an artiste. The 53-year-old is currently single but believes the key to a successful relationship is to enjoy being around a partner.



Mrunal on love's digital dilemma

Mumbai: Actress Mrunal Thakur, who is gearing up for the release of her upcoming film *Do Deewane Sehar Mein*, has said that love in modern times faces the biggest challenge of communication.

The actress said that the age of the Internet has led to exhaustion because of the endless options.

"The only problem today is communication. And as an actor, it gets even more difficult because sometimes if I am playing an actor who requires me to be in a mental state of mind, which is not really on a positive side, it might reflect on how I am with my partner or in that case, be my family and friends. But as an actor, I speak for myself, I try

not to bring my characters home," the actress said.

Do Deewane Seher Mein stars Siddhant Chaturvedi, Sandeepa Dhar, and Ayesha Raza. The film, produced by Zee Studios, Bhansali Productions, Sanjay Leela Bhansali, Prerna Singh, Umesh Kumar Bansal and Bharat Kumar Ranga in association with Ravi Udayawar Films. The film is set to release on February 20, 2026.



Alia joins 79th BAFTA as presenter

London: The British Academy Tuesday announced the full list of presenters at the upcoming BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) Awards 2026. While Alan Cumming will host the ceremony on Sunday, Alia Bhatt has been announced as one of the presenters, alongside Cillian Murphy and Kate Hudson.

Other names include Aaron Pierre, Aimee Lou Wood, Alicia Vikander, Bryan Cranston, David Jonsson, Delroy Lindo, Emily Watson, Erin Doherty, Ethan Hawke, Gillian Anderson, Glenn Close, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Mia McKenna-Bruce, Michael B. Jordan, Miles Caton, Monica Bellucci, Noah Jupe, Olivia Cooke, Patrick Dempsey, Regé-Jean Page, Riz Ahmed, Sadie Sink, Stellan Skarsgård, Stormzy and Warwick Davis.

Emma Baehr, Executive Director of Awards and Content, said, "It's especially exciting to have such an impressive line-up of presenters joining us on the night, representing the very best of film and the wider creative industries."

The Academy also announced a long list of nominees, including Jacob Elordi, Leonardo DiCaprio, Timothée Chalamet, Chloé Zhao, Teyana Taylor, Emma Stone, Jesse Plemons, Paul Thomas Anderson, and Rose Byrne. AGENCIES

Regena's bitter experience

Mumbai: Actor Regena Cassandra had more than a decade of experience working in Tamil and Telugu before she ventured into Bollywood with the 2019 film *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*.

However, the actor says that multiple times she has been made to feel foreign in the industry, just because she's from the South. "A lot of people treated me in a derogatory manner, not just with words, but with actions. It's sort of a derogatory outlook towards me. And, I mean, anyone would be able to tell that I was being put down in a certain way. I did feel it. So I did have some inhibitions in the North. But, having said that, it's not always the case, right?" she adds.

Given that Regena has done work like *Kesari Chapter 2*, *Rocket Boys*, *Farzi*, and *Jaat* over the years, how did she tackle this one? "I'm a very nurturing person, so when I'm around people, I feel like they see that side of me. Irrespective of the industry I'm in, I somehow make it feel like home," she explains. AGENCIES



'I'm a serial monogamist'

Mumbai: Fatima Sana Shaikh was recently seen getting candid about her approach to relationships and the realities of dating in the public eye. In a recent conversation with *Cosmopolitan India*, the actor described herself as a "serial monogamist," revealing that she has largely been in long-term relationships.

I'm a serial monogamist ('I've mostly been in very long-term relationships')," she said, offering a glimpse into her personal life. However, she also admitted that dating as a celebrity comes with its own set of challenges. Reflecting on her experiences over the past decade in the spotlight, Shaikh noted that fame can often complicate genuine connections. "You either have someone who has preconceived notions of what an actor is like or they are just too intimidated," she shared. According to the actress, navigating these perceptions has not always been easy.

Recalling a blind date from a few years ago, Shaikh described how the interaction quickly took an unexpected turn. "He was asking a lot of questions and it didn't feel like a conversation. At one point, I could hear myself giving diplomatic answers and that was the end of that date," she revealed.

The anecdote highlights the fine line public figures often walk between personal authenticity and guarded responses.

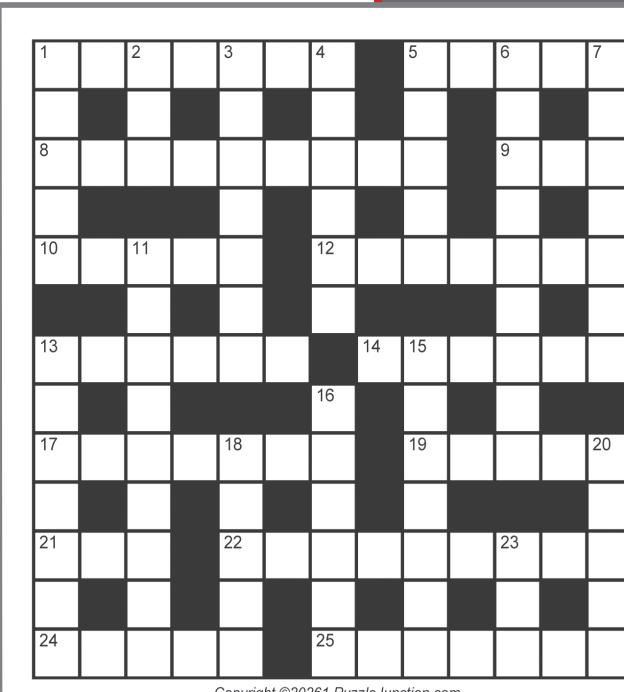
AGENCIES

SUDOKU

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

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

CROSSWORD



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Across

- 1 Some soccer players
- 5 Heroic tales
- 8 He was found in Hamelin (4,5)
- 9 Large snake
- 10 They're found on feet
- 12 Bookstore section
- 13 Motley fool
- 14 Rap session?
- 17 Fool around (4,3)

- 19 Refinement
- 21 French buddy (4,3)
- 22 It's usually overstuffed (4,5)
- 24 Part of an act
- 25 Nappies wearer
- 26 Stares
- 27 Wonderment
- 28 Stalemate
- 29 Top of the line

Down

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- 5 Take a powder
- 6 Rant and rave (2,7)
- 7 Kind of cat
- 11 Modify an auto, maybe
- 13 Large spotted felines of tropical America
- 15 Tempted
- 16 Kind of printer
- 18 Corpulent plus
- 20 Misuse
- 23 Feel flustered

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Odisha court orders seizure of ₹2.5cr assets of retired engineer

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Feb 17: Following the conviction of a retired executive engineer and his wife for amassing assets disproportionate to their known sources of income, a Special Vigilance Court in Bhubaneswar has ordered the confiscation of their properties worth over ₹2.5 crore.

The ruling reinforces Odisha's ongoing push to curb illicit wealth accumulation and strengthen transparency in public service.

The Confiscation Court (Authorised Officer, Special Court, Vigilance, Bhubaneswar) Tuesday ordered the seizure of disproportionate assets worth ₹2,50,44,029 belonging to Simadri Nay-

ak, a retired Executive Engineer of the RW Division, Umerkote in Nabarangapur district.

According to Vigilance sources, the seized assets include a multi-storeyed building in Rayagada, two buildings in Nabarangapur, and three land plots — one in Rayagada town and two in Nabarangapur town — along with bank deposits and gold ornaments.

Nayak and his spouse were charge-sheeted by the Vigilance department under Sections 13(2) read with 13(1)(e) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, along with Section 109 of the Indian Penal Code, for possessing assets disproportionate to their known sources of income.

TESTING TIMES: Students enter the exam hall at DAV Public School, Pokhariput in Bhubaneswar, as the CBSE examinations begin, Tuesday

Seized assets include a multi-storeyed building in Rayagada, two buildings in Nabarangapur, three land plots (one in Rayagada, two in Nabarangapur), along with bank deposits and gold ornaments



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 17: India AI Impact Expo 2026 was a powerful convergence of ideas, innovation and intent, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Tuesday.

PM Modi Monday inaugurated the Expo here featuring more than 600 high-potential startups and 13 country pavilions showcasing international collaboration in the AI ecosystem.

"India AI Impact Expo 2026 was a powerful convergence of ideas, innovation and intent. It showcased the extraordinary potential of Indian talent in shaping the future of Artificial Intelligence for global good," PM Modi wrote on X.

The PM also said that above all, the Expo reaffirmed India's commitment to harnessing AI responsibly, inclusively and at scale for human progress.

The Expo brings together global technology firms, startups, academia and research institutions, central and state governments and international partners. The Expo is hosting more than 300 curated exhibition pavilions and live demonstrations.

BRIDE-TO-BE KILLED IN ROAD MISHAP

Jharsuguda/Brajarajnagar: A young woman, set to be married next month, was killed in a road accident while returning from distributing her wedding invitations. Her brother sustained critical injuries and was shifted to Birla for advanced treatment. The deceased has been identified as Hirabati Rohidas of Bheulanmunda village, Sundargarh district, while her brother Niranjan Rohidas remains in serious condition. According to reports, the accident occurred Tuesday morning near Ghusuramunda in Jharsuguda Sadar block.

Chikiti PEO consumes poison, dies at hosp

POST NEWS NETWORK

Chhatrapur/Chikiti/Berhampur, Feb 17: Chikiti panchayat executive officer (PEO) Dandapani Patra, who had consumed poison after facing sexual harassment charges by additional tehsildar Saswati Sarangi, succumbed at MKCG Medical College and Hospital, Berhampur Tuesday.

Reports said a marathon was being organised from Surla Square to Jagapur Square on the inaugural day of Sunapar Beach Festival February 3. Both the officials - Patra and Sadangi - were assigned duties during the beach festival between February 3 and 5. However, the additional tehsildar filed a sexual harassment complaint (56/2026) at Golanthara police station against the PEO February 3 evening.

The Governor, who began his speech with the traditional greeting of 'Jai Jagannath', said Odisha will become the "growth engine" of a developed India.

"Odisha is no longer waiting to be recognised; it is ready to thrive, bloom and lead as the growth engine of 'Viksit Bharat'."

1ST DAY OF BUDGET SESSION

Oppn stages walkout

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



ODISHA IS NO LONGER WAITING TO BE RECOGNISED; IT IS READY TO THRIVE, BLOOM AND LEAD AS THE GROWTH ENGINE OF 'VIKSIT BHARAT'
HARI BABU KAMBHAMPATI | GOVERNOR

He said the Odisha government has prepared a comprehensive vision document for 2036, when the state turns 100; and 2047, marking a centenary of India's Independence.

"Prime Minister Nar-

endra Modi, June 20, 2025, unveiled a vision document, which targets transformation of Odisha into USD 500-billion economy by 2036 and USD 1.5-trillion economy by 2047, increasing the state's contribution to the country's GDP from 3 per cent to 5 per cent, with average growth rising from 7 per cent to 9.5 per cent through reforms," the Governor said. He also highlighted the government's commitment to building a 'Samruddha (prosperous) Odisha', with major infrastructure, industrial and welfare initiatives underway.

He credited Modi with ex-

tending significant central support and approving key projects for the state.

The Governor's speech highlighted a comprehensive development agenda focused on industrial growth, infrastructure modernisation, and technological advancement, reaffirming the state government's commitment to transforming Odisha into a major contributor to India's growth.

He said the state government is grateful to the Union government for approving two state-of-the-art semiconductor manufacturing units in the state under the India Semiconductor Mission, involving an investment of over ₹2,066 crore. "Infrastructure is a silent enabler of every dream of Samruddha Odisha, 2036," Kambhampati said.

He highlighted Odisha's strong position in the steel sector and said the state currently has 55 steel plants with an annual production capacity of approximately 45 million tonnes, accounting for nearly 23 per cent of the country's total steel production.

Rayagada: 3 killed as bike hits parked tanker

POST NEWS NETWORK

da. One was declared dead on arrival, while the other two were shifted to Rayagada district headquarters hospital (DHH), where they succumbed to their injuries Tuesday.

Tension prevailed in the village following the incident as residents staged a road blockade around 9 am, Tuesday, demanding compensation for the bereaved families.

The deceased were identified as Narendra Jhodia, 25, and two minors, Bipin Jhodia, 14, and Tunu Jhodia, 15, all from Mahatput Khurigaon village under Tikiri police limits.

According to officials, the trio was traveling from Tikiri toward Gorakhpur around 11pm Monday, when the rider allegedly lost control and hit the tanker.

Villagers also demanded strict action against the illegal parking of vehicles on roadsides. Police have registered a case and launched an investigation.

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Life Insurance

Premium stops.



Assembly polls for 4 states likely in April

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 17: Assembly elections in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and the Union Territory of Puducherry could be held on various dates in April for which the schedule is likely to be announced in the middle of March, officials said Tuesday.

The Election Commission (EC) would announce the dates of the Assembly polls together "sometime in middle of March" and elections could take place on different dates in April, they added.

The terms of the five Assemblies end on different dates in May and June.

While the five-year term of Puducherry ends June 15, the terms of Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal end May 20, 23, 10 and seven respectively.

The poll authority has already started touring the poll-bound states and is already in Assam to assess poll preparedness.

Last time, Assembly polls in West Bengal were

held in eight phases — by far the maximum. In Assam, elections were held in two phases, and in a singular phase in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry.

Of the poll-bound Assemblies, Puducherry was the first one to publish its final electoral roll February 14 as part of the ongoing special intensive revision of electoral rolls.

Tamil Nadu was set to publish its post-SIR final poll roll Tuesday, while Kerala will do so February 21.

West Bengal's final voters' list will be published February 28.

In Assam, where a 'special revision' of electoral rolls took place in place of SIR, the final list was published February 10.

Separately, in Guwahati, political parties of Assam Tuesday urged EC to hold the Assembly polls in either a single or a maximum of two phases.

The full bench of EC, led by CEC Gyanesh Kumar, is on a visit to Assam to review preparedness for the forthcoming elections in the northeastern state.

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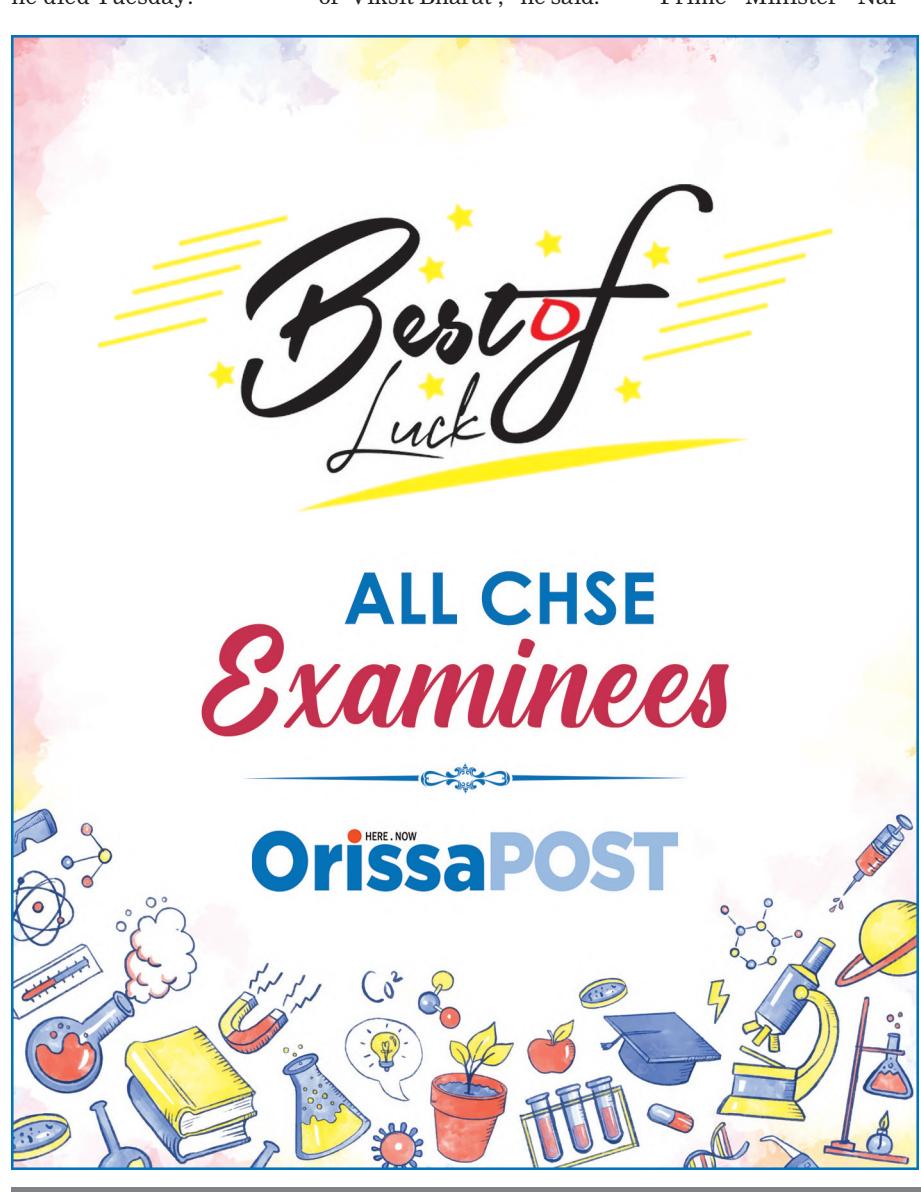
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'Labour codes simplify regulatory structure'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 17: Consolidation of multiple central labour laws into four codes simplifies the regulatory structure, enhances worker welfare, and supports ease of doing business and employment growth, said Ministry of Labour and Employment (ML&E) Union Secretary Vandana Gurnani at a two-day regional conference of Labour, Employment and Industry secretaries of states and Union Territories (UTs) here Tuesday.

Setting the context of the conference, Gurnani described the Labour Codes as historic reforms designed to align India's labour framework with evolving national and global economic dynamics.

The conference was inaugurated by Labour and Employees' State Insurance Minister of State (I/C) Ganesh Ram Singh Khuntia. Senior officials from participating states and UTs were present at the event.

In his inaugural address, Khuntia welcomed delegates from Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands, noting that the country stands at a crucial juncture with the Labour Codes having been brought into effect. He expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for ushering in transformative labour reforms aimed at strengthening labour governance.

Highlighting Odisha's preparedness, he said Odisha has taken proactive steps, including publishing draft rules for timely implementation of the codes. He also spoke about



welfare measures being implemented for construction workers, unorganised workers, and migrant labourers, which have received recognition from the Parliamentary Standing Committee.

Emphasising employment generation and social justice, he expressed hope that the deliberations would further strengthen workers' welfare.

Speaking on the occasion, Gurnani underlined key worker-centric provisions such as mandatory appointment letters, prohibition of discrimination and exploitation, universalisation of minimum wages, introduction of a statutory floor wage by the Central government, and expanded social security coverage.

She also highlighted compliance reforms, including compounding of offences and IT-enabled systems like single registration, single licence and single return.

Gurnani noted that the VV Giri National Labour Institute (VVGNI) is conducting capacity-building programmes under the codes and encouraged states

and UTs to nominate master trainers to strengthen training at the state level.

She urged states to expedite finalisation of rules, avoid overlap with Shops and Establishments Acts, actively utilise the PMVBRY dashboard, and enhance Centre-state coordination to expand ESIC coverage and medical infrastructure in convergence with state health systems and PMJAY.

She also called upon states to act as model employers by ensuring minimum wages, timely wage payments, and social security benefits to workers engaged in state establishments, including contractual employees.

Marking a significant step towards implementation of four Labour Codes across the country, the regional meet is the fourth in a series of five conferences being organised by the ML&E. It aims to deliberate on key issues relating to the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC), the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), and the Pradhan Mantri Vikas Bharat Rozgar Yojana (PMVBRY).

Ensure SEBC, OBC reservation in local bodies: Jena to govt

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 17: Senior Congress leader Srikant Jena has written to Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, urging the state government to ensure reservation for SEBC and OBC communities in local body elections. The move comes ahead of the elections in newly formed Notified Area Councils (NACs) and municipalities.

In his letter, Jena highlighted that while SC and ST communities already benefit from reservations, SEBC and OBC communities — which sums up 54 per cent of Odisha's population — remain unrepresented.



resented in local bodies. He called for the timely introduction and passage of the necessary bill or amendments in the ongoing Assembly session to create a legally sustainable framework for proportionate reservation.

"Timely action in this regard will reaffirm the state's commitment to social justice and strengthen grassroots democracy by enabling fair and representative participation for all sections of society," Jena stated.

The leader emphasised that such a legislative move would not only affect the upcoming NAC and municipality elections but also set a precedent for the next cycle of local body polls across the state.

MISSING MERCHANT NAVY CADET CASE

Family alleges non-cooperation from company operating vessel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Feb 17: The family of the merchant navy cadet, Sarthak Mohapatra, Tuesday alleged non-cooperation by officials of the company operating the vessel from which he went missing mid-sea off the Mauritius coast February 3.

Sarthak's mother Rashmita Mohapatra and uncle Santosh Sahu had travelled to Singapore to oversee efforts by authorities to trace him after the vessel docked at a port there.

Anglo-Eastern, the company that operates the vessel — EA Jersey, denied the allegations and claimed that it had fully cooperated with the family during their visit.

Speaking to reporters at the Bhubaneswar airport on their return, Sahu said they were able to board the vessel in Singapore with assistance from the Indian High Commission and the Director General of Shipping (DGS).

However, officials of the company operating the vessel did not cooperate with us during the visit. Whenever I tried to speak to Sarthak's colleagues or



other officers on board, company representatives interrupted and prevented me from asking questions," he alleged.

Around 15 company officials were present on the vessel and closely accompanied the family members during their visit, he claimed.

Sahu further alleged that the family was restricted from accessing most parts of the ship and was allowed to visit only Sarthak's personal cabin.

"We requested an in-depth search of the vessel, but the company officials had no clear response. Instead, they repeatedly tried to obtain our signa-

tures on certain documents," he alleged.

Sahu said that when the family met the Indian High Commissioner in Singapore, they were informed that a request for a proper investigation is pending with the Maritime and Port Authority (MPA) of Singapore.

"The MPA is currently investigating the case. If required, they will involve the Singapore Police," he added.

Responding to PTI's queries, an Anglo-Eastern spokesperson said, "The cadet's next of kin, mother and uncle, visited the vessel and were fully supported throughout, in coordination with authorities and the company. Their visit was conducted in accordance with all regulatory, safety, and investigative protocols."

"Anglo Eastern and the Owners continue to cooperate fully with all authorities and the ongoing independent investigation. We remain committed to supporting the crew and maintaining close contact with the cadet's family during this difficult time," the spokesperson said in a statement.

30-HR OPERATION

Missing boy found with multiple wounds

MANOJ KUMAR JENA, OP



Bhubaneswar, Feb 17: After more than 30 hours of operation, a 14-year-old boy who went missing Monday morning from Botanda area under Airfield Police Station jurisdiction was found with multiple wounds in his body Tuesday evening near Hi-Tech Square, local cops said.

The boy identified as Mitra Bhanu Patnaik (14) is currently undergoing treatment at Capital Hospital here. The boy is studying in Class IX.

According to the missing complaint filed by the parents, Mitra went out of his home around 8 am Monday. As he did not return for prolonged hours, his father Mahendra Patnaik, a local business man got worried and started searching for him.

Unable to trace him, the parents went ahead and lodged a missing complaint at Airfield Police Station.

The police initiated a probe immediately. After intensified search and reviewing CCTV footages, the cops found the boy near Hi-Tech Square with multiple wounds on his body. He was immediately rushed to Capital Hospital.

According to police sources, Mitra sustained injuries on his hands and legs and is not in a condition to speak. Cops have initiated further probe into the matter.

Pact inked to boost AI-driven agri-food innovation

POST NEWS NETWORK



Bhubaneswar, Feb 17: In a significant step towards integrating cutting-edge technology with agriculture, Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT), Bhubaneswar, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Odisha State Open University (OSOU) during a two-day workshop on 'Artificial Intelligence Applications for Transforming Agri-food System'.

The workshop, held at OUAT, brought together academicians, researchers, students, and industry experts to deliberate on the transformative potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in strengthening the agri-food ecosystem.

The MoU aims to promote collaborative initiatives in AI, including academic exchange, joint research projects, student engagement programmes, and

the development of AI-based applications tailored to benefit farmers and the broader agri-food sector. The partnership is expected to accelerate innovation in smart farming, data-driven decision-making, and digital advisory services.

Gracing the occasion as chief guest, OSOU VC Shyam Sundar Pattanaik underscored the growing relevance of AI across multiple sectors. He emphasised the need for individuals to acquire knowledge of AI and ensure its responsible and effective utilisation.

From agriculture and education to commerce and technical domains, he noted, AI is playing a pivotal role in societal advancement.

He added that AI is bridging the gap between digital intelligence and tangible physical development, enabling inclusive and accessible services for all sections of society.

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The MoU marks a new chapter in academic collaboration, positioning both institutions at the forefront of AI-led transformation in Odisha's agri-food sector.

On the occasion, winners of

INDIA AI IMPACT SUMMIT

Odisha pavilion showcases AI-to-impact push

Collaboration with Sarvam AI advances sovereign, Odia-language AI at scale while building next-generation infrastructure and compute capacity, positioning the state as a rising eastern AI hub

POST NEWS NETWORK



New Delhi, Feb 17: The Odisha government is showcasing its growing leadership in Artificial Intelligence (AI) through a dedicated Odisha Pavilion at the India AI Impact Summit 2026, being held February 16 to 20 at Bharat Mandapam in the national capital.

Positioned around the theme 'Odisha - From AI to Impact', the pavilion showcases how Odisha is moving beyond pilot initiatives to large-scale, real-world AI deployments — spanning governance, healthcare, agriculture, education, disaster management, and urban infrastructure — with a focus on measurable public impact.

The showcase highlights how Odisha is advancing a structured implementation model, strengthening institutional capacity, and prioritising scalable, measurable outcomes across its AI initiatives. A key highlight of Odisha's participation is its strategic collaboration with Sarvam AI, underscoring the state's push to build sovereign AI capabilities. The partnership is aimed at enabling population-scale Odia-language AI applications while creating the foundation

for advanced AI infrastructure and compute capacity — positioning Odisha as a rising AI hub in eastern India.

The pavilion is hosting over 10 innovation-driven startups and ecosystem partners — spanning applied AI ventures, research institutions, technology collaborators, and government-linked initiatives — showcasing the breadth of Odisha's innovation ecosystem. Together, they demonstrate real-world use cases that highlight the state's growing innovation pipeline and its push to democratise access to AI technologies and resources.

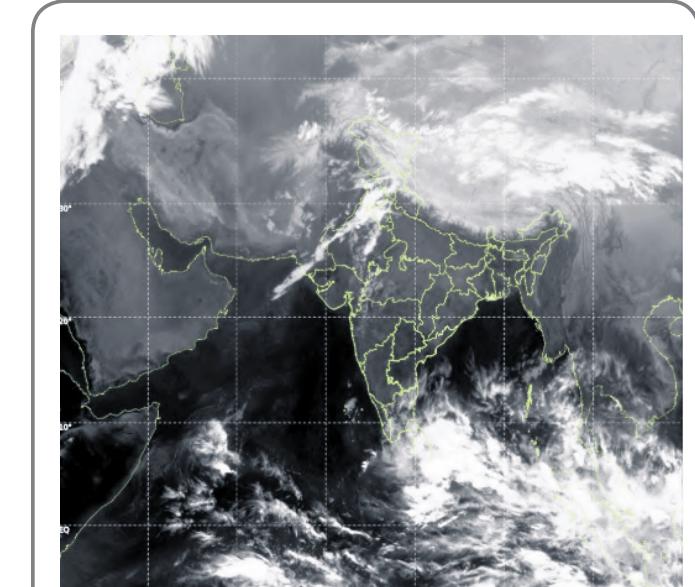
Visitors to Hall No. 5, First Floor at Bharat Mandapam can explore live demonstrations, collaborative models, and scalable AI solutions aligned with the state's long-term digital transformation roadmap.

The Odisha government is also expected to make a detailed announcement February 18 during pavilion engagements, offering deeper insights into showcased use cases, ecosystem partnerships, and emerging investment opportunities — signalling the next phase of its AI roadmap.

Through its participation at the India AI Impact Summit 2026, the state aims to reinforce its message that strategically deployed AI can move beyond innovation pilots to deliver inclusive, population-scale impact.

Electronics and Information

CURRENCY		BOURSES		COMMODITIES	
INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR	90.71 ▾ 0.01	SENSEX	83450.96 ▲ 173.81	GOLD	₹151,804 ▾ ₹2956
EURO	107.52 ▾ 0.20	NIFTY	25725.40 ▲ 42.65	SILVER	₹230,190 ▾ ₹9701



WEATHER

Max Temp	32.8°	CTC	29.6°
Min Temp	18.4°	FORECAST	Dry weather likely to prevail
Humidity	94%		
Rainfall	Nil		Nil





Our life should be governed by the love for the Truth and the thirst for Light.

THE MOTHER



Hopeless Hong Kong

The last nail into the coffin of whatever freedom is believed to be there in Hong Kong, a unique territory in the Chinese world, was driven, when the judges appointed by authorities loyal to Beijing pronounced an exceptionally harsh sentence of 20 years in prison for pro-democracy activist and former media mogul Jimmy Lai. It was a foregone conclusion during the two years of his trial that he would be convicted. There was not a shadow of doubt that the National Security Law, imposed over five years ago to quell dissent against the harsh Beijing overlordship, would be used to make him an example for the fate that would befall anyone else not toeing China's line. Lai was one of the first arrested in August 2020, just a month after this new repressive legal order came into force.

Lai became a symbol of resistance to Chinese autocratic rule. He never sought to apologize for his criticism of the regime or for his contacts with Taiwanese democrats and American officials standing by Taiwan. But his 20-year sentence, at the age of 78, is the bitterest pill for the citizens of Hong Kong who find the space of their political freedom shrinking by the day. Its press has already declined in quality, its most independent bookstores have closed and university professors are reportedly in a fix about what they can say in the classroom. The national security law has completely transformed life in Hong Kong, an international financial hub that was promised its civil liberties would be preserved for 50 years after the 1997 handover of the former British colony to China. Most of the city's pro-democracy figures have either been imprisoned or left politics, while some of them, who are lucky enough, have moved out abroad. Last year, Hong Kong ranked 140th out of 180 countries and territories in Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index. This is a massive and alarming fall as it had been placed 18th in 2002.

The sentence on Lai, which effectively consigns him to prison for life, shows how ruthless and devoid of humanism Chinese rule could be, however much the authorities in Hong Kong claim or pretend that mainland China was not involved. The record says it all. Human rights lawyer Xu Zhiyong was sentenced to 14 years in prison in 2023, Uyghur intellectual Ilham Tohti to life imprisonment in 2014 and citizen journalist Zhang Zhan, who dared to publish videos from Wuhan at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, to two consecutive four-year terms. Since Chinese President Xi Jinping imposed the National Security Law, critics have either fled to London or Taiwan fearing reprisals from Beijing.

Both the UK and the US are so busy with their respective geopolitical calculations centering round China that they appear to have forsaken Lai at this critical juncture. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who had travelled to Beijing and Shanghai at the end of January, only sheepishly told the media he had raised the issue before Xi. US President Donald Trump is scheduled to visit China in April and his Secretary of State Marco Rubio mouthed the pious platitude that Lai's sentence "shows the world that Beijing will go to extraordinary lengths" to silence its critics. Trying to be diplomatically correct he urged the authorities to grant Lai humanitarian parole.

China today is the most sought after global power after Trump's mindless trade war directed against both his friends and foes. As such no accusing finger can be raised against Beijing for its design on Hong Kong and the superpowers seem to have decided to merrily go on consolidating and annexing, wherever possible, their respective spheres of influence.

WISDOM CORNER

Once conform, once do what other people do because they do it, and a lethargy steals over all the finer nerves and faculties of the soul. She becomes all outer show and inward emptiness; dull, callous, and indifferent.

VIRGINIA WOOLF

Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul - and sings the tunes without the words - and never stops at all.

EMILY DICKINSON

Achievement of your happiness is the only moral purpose of your life, and that happiness, not pain or mindless self-indulgence, is the proof of your moral integrity, since it is the proof and the result of your loyalty to the achievement of your values.

AYN RAND

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1943: The Gestapo arrests German resistance fighter Sophie Scholl and other White Rose activists. 21-year-old student Scholl and her fellow campaigners were executed for having distributed flyers criticizing the Nazi regime.

1836: Hindu religious leader Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who founded a school of thought that united diverse mystical traditions into a single belief system, was born in Hooghly, Bengal State, India.

1848: Louis Comfort Tiffany—an American designer internationally recognized as one of the greatest proponents of Art Nouveau, particularly in the art of glassmaking—was born.

1930: Pluto discovered by Clyde Tombaugh. Using a 13-inch (33-cm) telescope at the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona, Clyde W. Tombaugh, a 24-year-old American with no formal training in astronomy, discovered the dwarf planet Pluto this day in 1930.

1977: The Space Shuttle takes off on its maiden flight. The "Enterprise" was mounted on a Boeing 747 Shuttle Carrier Aircraft; the first free flight took place on August 12, 1977.

1978: Hawaii hosts the first Ironman Triathlon. Contestants have to swim 2.4 miles (3.86 km), bike 112 miles (180.25 km) and complete a marathon run measuring 26.2 miles (42.2 km).

LOL

DEALING WITH CRIMINALS

A local policeman had just finished his shift one cold November evening and was at home with his wife. "You just won't believe what happened this evening, in all my years on the force I've never seen anything like it."

"Oh yes dear, what happened?"

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battery acid and the other was eating fireworks."

"Drinking battery acid and eating fireworks!! What did you do with them?"

"Oh that was easy, I charged one and let the other off."

power post

FOCUS POLITICS

THE FAR-RIGHT BRAND

U.S. President Donald Trump, whose life has revolved around turning himself into a global brand, now seems intent on destroying what he has created. In his first year back in office, Trump has sown chaos in American cities and bullied allies and adversaries alike, undermining the attractiveness of the radical right-wing political movement he leads.

Consider a recent poll conducted in Greenland following Trump's pressure campaign to acquire the island: 85% of respondents opposed joining the United States. Locals express fear, not excitement, at the prospect of becoming Americans. So much for America's supposed "unmatched cultural influence," as touted by the US National Security Strategy. Opposition remained overwhelming even after US officials floated the idea of generous lump-sum payments for Greenlanders.

Greenlanders' resistance is certainly not driven by affection for Denmark, a former colonial power with a deeply troubling record. It is America's lurch toward authoritarianism that turns them off, and it's not hard to understand why when we compare MAGA-era America to other right-wing authoritarian regimes.

It is America's lurch toward authoritarianism that turns them off, and it's not hard to understand why when we compare MAGA-era America to other right-wing authoritarian regimes. While Russian President Vladimir Putin, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban have been effective critics of liberal democracy, their records of governance have been consistently dismal.

Young people emigrate from Russia, Turkey, and Hungary in large numbers because right-wing autocrats reliably dismantle the institutional features that make democratic societies prosperous and livable. Electoral manipulation produces an unaccountable and arrogant ruling class. Erosion of the rule of law undermines investment and risk-taking. Rejection of expertise leads to costly policy failures.

At a deeper level, the governance failures of right-wing



Just as Brexit ultimately strengthened support for the EU, Trump's America may serve as a cautionary example, weakening the appeal of authoritarianism in other democracies

authoritarianism stem from the core of its promise: the replacement of a social order grounded in equality and justice with one that embraces hierarchy and domination as the natural basis of political power. In recent decades, that vision has appeared attractive to a startling number of voters.

It promised a simpler world, where traditional social structures would be restored, and groups that agitated for equal rights, from immigrants and minorities to women and LGBTQ communities, would be stifled.

In practice, however, people living under such systems are discovering that hierarchical societies are far less appealing than advertised. Right-wing voters underestimated how often ordinary citizens depend on liberal rights and institutions for protection. Rather than guaranteeing dominance, hierarchy usually means finding oneself among the dominated.

Britain offered an early warning. In 2016, the radical right persuaded a narrow majority of voters to support the country's withdrawal from the European Union. But Brexit resulted in economic stagnation, weakened public services, and heightened social tensions, while none of the promised benefits materialized. The negative consequences were so profound that most radical right-wing parties

across the continent no longer advocate leaving the EU.

While Brexit has come under intense scrutiny, the broader right-wing authoritarian project has not received as much attention. Western commentators frequently dismissed Russia, Hungary, Turkey, and other long-standing illiberal regimes as peripheral or culturally exceptional. But the US under Trump's second administration has changed everything. With its unparalleled global visibility, America offers an unavoidable case study of radical right-wing governance in action.

Even conservatives in smaller and midsize countries must now confront the fact that in a world stripped of liberal, rules-based constraints, they are quite literally "on the menu." This realization likely contributed to the electoral success and booming popularity of the Liberal Party under Mark Carney in Canada. It also helps explain why far-right leaders in Britain and France criticized Trump's Greenland rhetoric—and why even Moscow showed little enthusiasm for the gravest NATO crisis since the alliance's founding. Putin, like other autocrats, has long been a free rider on the international system, undermining it while assuming that others would continue to play by the rules. That is no

longer possible if the law of the jungle is the norm.

Voters around the world must also consider whether the far right truly offers dignity to the forgotten and neglected people it claims to champion. It has become conventional wisdom that liberal condescension fueled the resurgence of right-wing populism. Yet it is difficult to recall any liberal leader who denigrated the ultimate sacrifice of allied veterans—a core conservative constituency across the West—by falsely suggesting, as Trump recently did, that those who fought in Afghanistan had remained safely behind the front lines. The far right's relentless pursuit of dominance offers not dignity, but symbolic humiliation of a kind that no liberal elite ever inflicted.

Domestically, the spectacle of American governance under Trump is proving equally sobering. Observers across the West will inevitably ask whether this chaos is truly preferable to the liberal status quo, with all its imperfections and frustrations. In the US itself, many Trump voters are finding that they got a raw deal: farmers hurt by tariffs, rural residents cut off from health insurance, and Latinos affected by immigration crackdowns.

This may not be enough to save US democracy. Comparative experience suggests grim prospects for a free and fair presidential election in 2028 or a peaceful transfer of power. But if liberal politicians and media outlets amplify the reality of life under Trump, they can generate a powerful "Trump effect" abroad. Just as Brexit ultimately strengthened support for the EU, Trump's America may serve as a cautionary example, weakening the appeal of authoritarianism in other democracies.

Maciej Kisilowski is Associate Professor of Law and Strategy at Central European University. Anna Wojciuk is Associate Professor of International Relations at University of Warsaw.

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IN JEST THIS

Too many fights breaking out on flights



Melvin Durai

THE CHANCES OF SOMEONE GETTING A PUNCH ON A PLANE ARE GREATER THAN THE CHANCES OF SOMEONE GETTING LUNCH ON A PLANE

I do not fly often, but next time I take a flight with my family, I'm going to carry a pair of boxing gloves with me — just in case a fight breaks out.

I believe in non-violence, but if punches are being thrown aboard a plane, I'll grab the boxing gloves from my carry-on bag, put them on my wife's hands and say, "Protect the family please!"

In case you think that it's a man's duty to protect his family, let me remind you that two-thirds of India's Olympic boxing medals have been won by women.

But the main point I'm trying to make is that it's important to protect ourselves when we're flying. That's because the chances of someone getting a punch on a plane are greater than the chances of someone getting lunch on a plane.

I don't know the actual statistics, but in recent years, I've come across more stories about fights on planes than about fights on buses and trains.

The latest brawl occurred on a Jet2 flight from Antalya, Tur-

key, to Manchester, England. A video shared widely on social media shows men and women of all ages pushing, shoving and punching each other. One man has another man in a headlock, having watched one too many mixed martial arts (MMA) fights.

The fight, which occurred about three hours into the five-hour flight, caused the pilot to divert the flight to Brussels, Belgium, whereupon police boarded the plane to remove two unruly passengers.

"They were both offloaded by police in Brussels and the flight continued to Manchester," the British budget airline said in the statement. "We can confirm that the two disruptive passengers will be banned from flying with us for life, and we will also vigorously pursue them to recover the costs that we incurred as a result of this diversion."

Instead of diverting the plane, it would have been far less costly and less disruptive to simply eject the two unruly passengers in midair. (Give them a parachute, of course. Let them fight over it on the

way down.) One eyewitness, speaking to the Sun newspaper, blamed the fight on a passenger who had been drinking on the plane and was making racist comments about the Pakistani passengers around him. He was also upset that he couldn't buy cigarettes on the plane. The only reasonable solution would have been to move this passenger to the back of the plane, preferably into a seat equipped with an ejection system.

This is hardly the first time that a fight has broken out on a Jet2 flight. Back in 2022, the airline asked a pair of brothers to pay more than £50,000 after their "aggressive and violent behaviour" caused a flight to be diverted. Five years earlier, a couple going on a holiday turned on each other, using abusive language and throwing punches. The brothers and the couple were banned for life, joining more than 100 other passengers who have received lifetime bans from Jet2 and are now probably flying on Jet3.

In 2025, the Federal Aviation Administration in the United States received 1,621 reports of unruly passengers. The figure is probably much higher worldwide. Not all unruly behaviour results in punches being thrown. Sometimes it's curse words being thrown around, other times it's food. Indeed, just last month, an unruly man on a Southwest Airlines flight in the US threw a container of food at another passenger who was recording him on a cellphone. The unruly man had lost his cool after suspecting that another man was flirting with his wife. (Flirting on planes is never a good idea. If you must flirt, do it at the airport, just in case you need to run away.)

When people are in close quarters, it's not surprising that they sometimes get on each other's nerves. It doesn't help that some passengers have been drinking. Perhaps Jet2 and other airlines should consider limiting the amount of alcohol they serve. No one ever blamed a fight on a passenger who had been drinking too much Fanta.

In 2025, the Federal Aviation

Fragile ecosystem

Sir, The National Green Tribunal has cleared the Great Nicobar infrastructure project with stringent environmental safeguards, reflecting the government's strategic and developmental priorities. The Centre aims to transform Great Nicobar Island into a key maritime and logistics hub through a trans-shipment port, airport, power plant and township. Situated near the busy Malacca Strait, the project is intended to strengthen India's presence in the eastern Indian Ocean, counter growing Chinese influence, and enhance trade connectivity under the Indo-Pacific vision. However, the island's fragile ecosystem, dense forests, seismic vulnerability, and protection of indigenous tribes raise environmental and humanitarian concerns. Balancing strategic ambitions with ecological sustainability will determine the project's long-term success.

RS Narula, PATIALA

Demographic distress Growing burden

Sir, The news report, "Unemployment rate rises to 5%," is deeply disquieting. Behind this sterile percentage lies a silent emergency. A five percent rate in a youthful nation is not a statistic; it is a verdict on policy paralysis. While governments celebrate growth narratives, jobless graduates wander with fading hope. Skill missions without industry linkage, investment without labour absorption, and rhetoric without reform have worsened the malaise. Employment must become the central metric of governance. Otherwise, demographic dividend may degenerate into demographic distress.

Sidhartha Kar Mohapatra, BARIPADA

Sir, The rising incidence of cancer worldwide has become a major public health concern, with nearly 20 million new cases and about 10 million deaths reported every year. Experts warn that if present trends continue, the annual number of cases could exceed 35 million by 2050, driven largely by population growth and ageing. A significant proportion of cancers are linked to preventable lifestyle and environmental factors. In India, cancer poses a serious challenge, with over 1.5 million new cases diagnosed annually. Strengthening preventive measures, promoting healthy lifestyles, expanding screening programmes, and ensuring equitable access to healthcare are essential.

Krishna Kumar Vepakomma, HYDERABAD

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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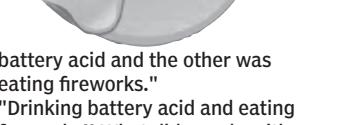
LOL

DEALING WITH CRIMINALS

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LOL

DEALING WITH CRIMINALS

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BJP gears up for West Bengal 'Paribartan Yatra'



BJP seeks to sharpen anti-incumbency pitch against TMC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Feb 17: With Assembly elections just two months away, the West Bengal BJP is gearing up to launch its Paribartan Yatra, a statewide mobilisation campaign aimed at consolidating anti-incumbency sentiment against the TMC and rebuilding the momentum it had generated before the 2021 polls but failed to translate into power.

Addressing a press conference, state BJP chief Samik Bhattacharya termed the initiative as the next phase of the party's political struggle against what he described as the declining relevance of the TMC government.

Drawing a line from the end of Left Front rule to the present, Bhattacharya argued that voters who once backed the TMC to end cadre-based politics now find themselves disappointed amid allegations of corruption and shrinking democratic space.

"After 34 years of Left rule, people wanted democracy and development. Fifteen years later, there is a growing demand to reassess what was actually delivered," he said, claiming that rural voters and marginalised communities were increasingly dissatisfied.

According to the BJP's roadmap, nine Paribartan Yatras will begin March 1 and 2 from politically significant locations including Cooch Behar, Krishnanagar, Garbeta, Raydighi, Kulti, Islampur, Sandeshkhali, and Amta.

The programme will pause briefly during Dol Yatra before resuming March 5, covering more than 5,000 km across all Assembly constituencies.

The campaign is designed as a rolling political exercise

featuring tableaux, roadside meetings and local outreach events, culminating in a major rally at Kolkata's Brigade Parade Ground later in March, which the party hopes will be addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Senior national leaders, including Union ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, and JP Nadda, are expected to participate in different phases, signalling the importance the party's central leadership is attaching to Bengal.

Even as internal discussions reportedly touched upon convoy-style campaign vehicles, state leaders stressed that the initiative should not be interpreted as a Rath Yatra, a format that has historically triggered legal and political controversy in Bengal. Bhattacharya said the Paribartan Yatra was distinct from traditional Rath Yatras, even as the term inevitably evokes memories of earlier BJP mobilisations, particularly LK Advani's 1990 Rath Yatra, widely regarded as a turning point in national politics, and subsequent state-level journeys that helped the party expand its organisational footprint across India.

The timing of the campaign reflects a wider churn in Bengal's political landscape. The BJP believes that controversies surrounding corruption cases, rural grievances and migration issues have created fresh openings, while the TMC continues to rely on welfare schemes and grassroots networks to retain its dominance.

The BJP's narrative also seeks to counter the TMC's charge that its outreach among minorities and migrant workers is selective or politically motivated.

The TMC, however, has dismissed the yatra plans as election-time optics, arguing that the BJP remains overly dependent on central leaders rather than local faces.

Bengal's Yuva Sathi scheme turns welfare drive into pre-poll theatre

Announced in the interim Budget earlier this month, the scheme promises ₹1,500 per month to unemployed youths aged between 21 and 40 for up to five years or until they secure employment

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Feb 17: Even before enrolment camps opened, queues were seen outside school gates and community halls across West Bengal, with men and women clutching certificates and bank details as the state rolled out the Yuva Sathi cash allowance scheme for unemployed youth.

As the government began implementing the scheme, the state has witnessed a striking political image: educated job seekers lining up for ₹1,500 a month under a welfare programme rapidly emerging as a key plank in the run-up to the 2026 Assembly elections likely to be held in the next two months.

From Master's degree holders in physics and mathematics, engineering graduates and students of computer science and chemistry to class 10 passouts, thousands of unemployed youths queued up across the state this week to register for the scheme.

Announced in the interim Budget earlier this month, the scheme promises ₹1,500 per month to unemployed youths aged between 21 and 40 for up to five years or until they secure employment.

Though initially slated to begin in August, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee advanced the rollout to April 1, a move widely viewed as politically significant as election season approaches.

With camps set up across all 294 Assembly constituencies and online applications now open, the initiative has triggered a statewide rush, turning local community halls and school grounds into centres of both aspiration and debate.

At a camp on the southern fringes of Kolkata, 28-year-old Subir Mitra, a commerce graduate preparing for competitive exams, said the allowance would not transform his life but might ease daily anxieties.

CASH, QUEUES, CAMPAIGN WINDS



"It won't solve everything, but at least I won't have to depend on my parents for every small expense while preparing for jobs," he said.

Nearby stood Ritika Halder, a postgraduate in chemistry who has remained unemployed for nearly three years. She said the monthly assistance could help cover examination fees and travel costs for interviews.

"People assume educated youths won't stand in line for this amount. But when there's no steady income, every bit counts," she said.

At a camp in coastal Kakdwip, a young mother, Mousumi Jana, waited with her toddler in tow. Married soon after school, Jana said she had resumed studies recently.

"This will help me buy books and continue studying without adding pressure on my family," she said.

Officials across districts described the turnout as unprecedented, with lakhs registering within the first days of the drive.

For the ruling camp, the lines reflect public trust and outreach. For the opposition, they reveal a deepening employment crisis.

The TMC argues the cash support is a safety net for youths navigating a sluggish job market, while the opposition BJP has labelled it an election-time "dole."

Leader of Opposition Suvenu Adhikari questioned

the need for physical camps instead of a fully digital application process, alleging that the "exercise was geared more towards political mobilisation than helping the unemployed youths."

"It also reflects that the TMC government despite being in power for the last 15 years, has failed to generate employment," he said.

The state government rejected the charge.

Finance Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya said welfare schemes would continue despite fiscal constraints and accused the Centre of withholding dues.

Political observers noted that the camps have also acted as organisational exercises for the ruling party's grassroots network.

Local councillors and booth-level workers were visible at several sites assisting applicants, a reminder of how welfare delivery and electoral mobilisation often overlap in Bengal's political culture.

Political analyst Biswanath Chakraborty said the optics were significant.

"In Bengal, welfare programmes carry political messaging. The government is signalling empathy with unemployed youth while demonstrating administrative reach ahead of polls," he said.

Not everyone standing in line was convinced.

At a camp in North 24 Parganas, Sabyasachi Dey, a B.Ed

graduate, said he registered reluctantly.

"What can ₹1,500 do today? We want jobs, not token support. But when opportunities are scarce, you take whatever help you can get," he said.

An elderly woman collecting forms for her son, who now works outside the state, echoed a common sentiment.

"Any support helps, but every parent still wants their child to come home with a real job," she said, reflecting the deeper social reality of persistent unemployment among educated youths.

The ₹5,000-crore allocation for Yuva Sathi adds to a portfolio of welfare schemes that has defined the Banerjee government's governance model, from women-focused cash transfers to farmer assistance programmes. The expansion of direct benefit transfers has helped the ruling party build strong voter linkages, particularly among economically vulnerable sections.

Critics, however, argue that recurring cash transfers risk obscuring structural concerns such as industrial stagnation and migration of skilled workers.

For many youths themselves, politics feels secondary.

As 24-year-old aspirant Debayan Sarkar said while adjusting his folder of documents, "People can call this politics or welfare. For us, it simply means a little support until work finally comes."

Civic body signs pact with TCS for smart lighting solutions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Feb 17: The Kolkata Municipal Corporation has signed an agreement with an IT services major TCS for the modernisation and upgradation of the city's public lighting infrastructure, a KMC official said Tuesday.

Under the agreement, the civic body will collaborate with the Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) for the installation of energy-efficient LED streetlights and the implementation of smart lighting solutions across different boroughs of the city.

"The project with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) will help in cutting down power costs and ensure better maintenance through technology-driven monitoring systems," the official said.

The project would involve phased replacement of conventional streetlights with LED fixtures and the introduction of a centralised control and monitoring system for real-time tracking of faults and energy usage.

The KMC official said the project is expected to be rolled out in phases, covering major thoroughfares, residential areas and other public spaces.



The civic body believes the initiative will significantly reduce carbon emissions and operational costs in the long run, the official said.

As of now a pilot project will be rolled out in Kalighat and Alipore areas of the city.

Further details regarding the financial outlay and timeline of execution of the entire project will be announced after the completion of initial surveys, the official said.

"The system will involve automated scheduling of switching off and switching on of street lights, dimming and brightening of lights based on sensors, and a centralised control through intelligent urban exchange platform," KMC MIC (Electrical) Sandip Ranjan Bakshi.

Himachal's first trout hub to be set up in Kangra's Boh Valley



Located about 25 kilometres north of Shahpur, the valley renowned for its breathtaking natural beauty is now poised to emerge as a centre for trout production alongside tourism promotion

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dharamshala (HP), Feb 17: The picturesque Boh Valley in Himachal Pradesh's Kangra district is set to gain a new identity as the state's first dedicated trout fish hub is being developed here.

Located about 25 kilometres north of Shahpur, the valley renowned for its breathtaking natural beauty is now poised to emerge as a centre for trout production alongside tourism promotion.

Trout -- a cold water, freshwater fish -- thrives in the clear, fast-flowing rivers and streams of the Himalayas. In Himachal Pradesh, rainbow and brown trout -- introduced from Europe -- are found in Pabbar, Beas, Tirthan, Uhl and Baspa rivers.

These waters provide the low temperatures and high oxygen levels essential for trout growth and reproduction. The fish is prized for angling, cui-

sine and aquaculture. Shahpur MLA and Deputy Chief Whip Kewal Singh Pathania Tuesday said the announcement to establish a trout hub in Kangra was made in the first budget of the current Congress government.

An amount of ₹3.03 crore was approved for the project, he said, adding that most of the work has been completed, including the construction of a trout hatchery in Boh. The trout hub would not only strengthen the local economy but also give a significant boost to tourism in the region, Pathania said.

The residents have been encouraged to adopt trout farming as an eco-friendly enterprise. To support their marketing, five motorcycles equipped with ice boxes have been provided and one more is set to be added shortly. Moreover, two

fish kiosks would be set up in Shahpur and Dharamshala to facilitate better sales.

Rakesh Kumar, Assistant Director, Fisheries Department, Palampur, said the Dharakundi valley holds immense potential for trout cultivation. Currently, 15 to 20 farmers have already established ponds and started trout production. Out of the total ₹3.03 crore project, works worth ₹2.11 crore have been sanctioned, including 34 trout raceways, six motorcycles with ice boxes and two fish kiosks.

Trout fishing in Himachal Pradesh is regulated, and anglers require licences to fish in designated waters. The fisheries department has also imposed a four-month ban on trout fishing in rivers and streams from November 1 to February 28 to promote breeding and conserve the resource.

Describing the issue as "extremely serious" and one demanding immediate attention, Speaker Pathania directed Kalia to submit the names of such officials to the Assembly Secretariat so that action could be taken against them.

In response to a query from the Congress MLA from the Gagret assembly seat, Rakesh Kalia, during Question Hour in the assembly, Sukhu said the government will investigate cases of anonymous land purchases and alleged commissions paid during the process at the two locations.

He said if anyone has made 'benami' transactions, their land will be confiscated and no compensation will be provided. If any such case comes to light during the investigation, strict action will be taken against those involved, he added.

"The state government is taking strict action against corruption and will also take action against irregularities in the purchase and sale of land at Gaggal Airport and Gagret," he asserted, adding that an outsider is permitted to purchase land in the state only under Section 118 of Himachal Pradesh Tenancy and Land Reforms Act.

In a supplementary question, Kalia made allegations against a former Uttarakhand government official, alleging that he was involved in an alleged attempt to overthrow the Himachal Pradesh government last year. The MLA further alleged that the official was exploiting local people and "importing" the culture of Uttar

Pradesh into the state. A complaint of a ₹8-lakh fraud had been filed against the said persons, but the investigation is stalled, Kalia said.

In response to a question from the BJP MLA from the Barsar assembly seat, Inder Dutt Lakhampal, Sukhu said underground ducts being constructed in Shimla for electricity and telecom cables and water pipelines are completely safe and will not cause any harm to the city.

He said once these ducts are complete, the problem of overhead wires in the state capital -- a prime tourist destination -- would be resolved, augmenting the beauty of the city as there would be no further digging of roads to lay electric telephone wires and water pipes.

The ducts stretching from Chota Shimla, through Scandal Point, up to Chaura Maidan are being constructed at a cost of ₹150 crore and there would be no compromise on the quality, Sukhu said.

SIT to probe 'Benami' land purchases: CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Shimla, Feb 17: Himachal Pradesh Assembly Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania Tuesday took cognisance of officials increasingly avoiding the telephone calls of elected representatives.

Terming the behaviour as arbitrary and serious, he asked the MLAs to submit the names of such officials, so that action can be initiated against them under the Assembly rules.

The matter was raised by Congress MLA from Gagret, Rakesh Kalia, during the Question Hour.

Neither do some officials answer MLAs' calls to enquire about public work, nor do they call back, Kalia said.

The opposition and ruling party legislators alike have raised the issue of officials' high-handedness and failure to answer calls, he said. The Gagret MLA requested the government to stop telephone allowance given to officials who do not answer calls of elected representatives, and threatened to stir up protests outside the offices of such officials if the government did not curb this practice immediately.

The issue raised by Kalia was backed by both the ruling and opposition MLAs, who thumped their tables in support.

Describing the issue as "extremely serious" and one demanding immediate attention, Speaker Pathania directed Kalia to submit the names of such officials to the Assembly Secretariat so that action could be taken against them.

In response to a query from the original query, Sukhu said over ₹1,460 crore has been distributed to 4,649 people so far under the

proposed land acquisition for the expansion of Gaggal Airport in Kangra. This amount has been transferred to affected people's bank accounts as per the provisions of the Land Acquisition Act.

In a supplementary question, Kalia made allegations against a former Uttarakhand government official, alleging that he was involved in an alleged attempt to overthrow the Himachal Pradesh government last year. The MLA further alleged that the official was exploiting local people and "importing" the culture of Uttar

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national

of the day quote

I was assured by the home minister that these places will be reopened and orders for the same have now been issued. I am thankful to the home minister for that. The local people have borne losses (due to closure). Now, I hope people will visit these beautiful places

OMAR ABDULLAH | J&K CM

Cooperative federalism requires predictability, fairness, and respect for constitutional roles. States must have the fiscal capacity to fulfill the responsibilities entrusted to them, particularly in areas such as health, education, social protection, and infrastructure

PINARAYI VIJAYAN | KERALA CM

Kabir has managed 50 per cent of funding for his mosque in Murshidabad's Beldannga from Bangladeshi donors, forces associated with outfits like Jamaat. He is covertly helping the TMC to counter the anti-Mamata Banerjee wave among minorities

SUVENDU ADHIKARI | BJP LEADER

SHORT TAKES

22 Naxalites surrender

Sukma: As many as 22 Naxalites surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district Tuesday, police said. The cadres, including a woman, turned themselves in before senior police and CRPF officials here under the 'Poona Margem' (New Dawn) rehabilitation scheme of the government, Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan said.

Bihar NEET aspirant's family gets threats

Jehanabad: The family of a NEET aspirant in Bihar, whose death after alleged sexual assault is being probed by the CBI, has claimed that they have received a threat that their son would meet the same fate as their deceased daughter, police said Tuesday. The family has alleged in a complaint that a piece of paper was thrown inside their house, on which it was written "you have lost your daughter and if you do not relent you will lose your son as well", said Rahul Kumar, the SHO of Shakurabad police station in Jehanabad district.

Woman drowns 4-year-old niece in water tank

Muzaffarnagar (UP): A woman was arrested Tuesday for allegedly killing her four-year-old niece by throwing her into a water tank and stabbing her sister-in-law, who apparently opposed her relationship with a neighbour, police here said Tuesday. In the incident that took place around 2.30 am in Basikila village under Shahpur police station limits, Firdosh (40) and her three other children sustained stab injuries, while her four-year-old daughter was killed after she was thrown into the water tank of the house, police said.

Cong leaders, workers clash with police

Lucknow: Congress leaders and workers clashed with police Tuesday as they tried to march to the Uttar Pradesh Vidhan Sabha during the budget session to protest against issues such as replacing of rural employment scheme MGNREGA and misgovernance. The clash led to several detentions and alleged lathicharge.



What we promise, we deliver. We have been working at a rapid pace to fulfill our promises

NAYAN SINGH SAINI | HARYANA CM

TINA AMBANI SKIPS ED SUMMONS FOR 2ND TIME

Reliance Group chairperson Anil Ambani's wife Tina Ambani Tuesday skipped the Enforcement Directorate (ED) summons for the second time Tuesday



NGT nod to Great Nicobar project unfortunate: Environmentalists

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 17: The National Green Tribunal's nod to the Great Nicobar project is disappointing and unfortunate and may have disastrous ecological impacts, according to environment enthusiasts.

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) Monday cleared the proposed International Container Transhipment Terminal in the Great Nicobar Island, saying adequate safeguards had been provided in the environmental clearance (EC) conditions.

The eastern zonal bench of Kolkata, headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Prakash Srivastava, passed the order Monday while hearing the objections to the proposed terminal, township, area develop-

ment and a 450 MVA gas and solar-based power plant.

Congress MP and former environment minister Jairam Ramesh, who has been vocal against the project, termed the decision "disappointing".

"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," Ramesh said in a post on X.

Debi Goenka, executive trustee at Conservation Action Trust, a Mumbai-based non-profit organisation, termed the NGT nod "unfortunate". Conservation Action Trust is one of the entities to challenge the project in court. "The decision is unfortunate. Our appeal against an earlier

NGT ruling is pending in the Calcutta High Court. We are hopeful that it will be taken up expeditiously," Goenka said.

Former Rajya Sabha MP and bureaucrat Jawahar Sircar said, "This is unbelievable, unacceptable!"

National Green Tribunal clears the massacre of irre-

placeable flora and fauna of Great Nicobar for a port (surely to be bagged by a crony to profiteer) and naval outpost! A whole tribe will be wiped out, and the project will endanger a

very ecologically fragile zone," he said on X.

Seventy scholars, former bureaucrats, activists, lawyers and environmentalists had previously written an open letter responding to Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav's defence of the proposed Rs 92,000 crore Great Nicobar Island mega infrastructure project, urging the minister to "set aside political considerations" and focus on the project's "grave and irreversible negative implications".

The signatories included historian Ramachandra Guha, wildlife conservationist Romulus Whitaker,

wildlife biologist Ravi Chellam, nature conservationist Asad Rahmani, scientist Sharachchandra Lele, and former Gujarat principal chief conservator of forests Ashok Kumar Sharma, among others.

Earlier, a batch of petitions challenged the clearances granted for the project, claiming violations of the Island Coastal Regulation Zone (ICRZ) notification.

This was the second round of litigation concerning the project. In April 2023, the tribunal largely upheld the EC while constituting a high-powered committee (HPC) to examine specific concerns. The tribunal also noted that the shoreline of the island will be protected, ensuring no loss of sandy beaches, as these provide nesting sites for turtles and birds, apart from protecting the island.



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India-France elevate ties to special strategic partnership

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi/Mumbai, Feb 17: India and France Tuesday elevated their relations to a "special global strategic partnership" and vowed to boost cooperation in key sectors of defence, trade and critical minerals with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron describing the bilateral ties as a "force for global stability" in the face of increasing geopolitical turbulence.

The two leaders, following their talks in Mumbai, also virtually inaugurated an Assembly line in Karnataka's Vemagai to build Airbus H125 helicopters that is expected to enhance India's aerospace manufacturing capabilities.

The two sides inked a total of 21 agreements and documents providing for deepening of cooperation in an array of areas including critical minerals, defence, high technology, renewable energy, and health.

The pacts included one on defence cooperation and another on a joint venture between Bharat Electronics Ltd and French defence giant Safran to produce Hammer missiles in India.

A separate pact was inked for reciprocal deployment of officers at Indian Army and French Land Forces establishments. Modi hosted Macron for the talks hours after the French leader landed in Mumbai on a three-day India visit.

"The world is going through a period of uncertainty. In such an environment, the India-France partnership is a force for global stability. We are combining France's expertise and India's scale," Modi



INDIA AND FRANCE ELEVATE
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INDIA AND FRANCE ARE
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said in his media statement. The prime minister said the two countries share a "very special relationship" and that France is one of India's oldest strategic partners.

"And together with President Macron, we have given this strategic partnership unprecedented depth and energy. Based on this trust and shared vision, today we are establishing our relationship as a 'special global strategic partnership,'" Modi said.

"This partnership is not just strategic. In today's turbulent era, it is a partnership of global stability and global progress," he said. Modi also made a ref-

erence to the H-125 helicopter assembly line. "Today's inauguration of the helicopter assembly line in India is another shining example of this deep trust. We are proud that India and France will jointly manufacture the world's only helicopter capable of flying to the heights of Mount Everest. And we will also export it to the entire world," he said.

The prime minister, referring to Russia-Ukraine conflict, situation in West Asia and the Indo-Pacific, said both India and France believe in democratic values, the rule of law, and a multipolar world.

"It is our shared commitment to eradicate terrorism in all its forms and manifestations," Modi said. The prime minister also noted that the year 2026 is a "turning point" in India-EU relations as he cited the India-EU free trade deal.

"Just a few days ago, we signed the largest and most ambitious free trade agreement in India's history with the European Union. This free trade agreement will also bring unprecedented momentum to India-France relations," he said.

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international



Based on the transformational achievements... during the Eighth period, the Ninth Congress of the party will set a grander goal of restoration and creation

KIM JONG UN | LEADER, NORTH KOREA

MUMBAI TO HOST EARTHSHOT 2026

Mumbai will play host to the Earthshot Prize 2026, the world's leading environmental award founded by Britain's Prince William, Kensington Palace in London announced Tuesday. Describing India as one of the world's most important forces for climate and nature, the heir to the British throne said the country's scale had the power to inspire progress in the field of climate action



of the day quote

India became an extremely important leader in the discussions on all aspects of the activities of the UN, in peace and security, sustainable development, where I remember the G20 presided by India, the very important decisions that were taken there

ANTONIO GUTERRES | SECRETARY GENERAL

Bangladesh is no longer a country with a submissive foreign policy or dependent on the instructions and advice of other countries

MUHAMMAD YUNUS | OUTGOING INTERIM GOVERNMENT CHIEF

The more this evil comes from Russia, the harder it will be for everyone to reach any agreements with them. Partners must understand this. First and foremost, this concerns the United States

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY | PRESIDENT, UKRAINE

SHORT TAKES

Jesse Jackson dies at 84

Washington: Charismatic US civil rights leader Jesse Jackson, an eloquent Baptist minister raised in the segregated South who became a close associate of Martin Luther King Jr and twice ran for the Democratic presidential nomination, has died at age 84, his family said in a statement Tuesday. "Our father was a servant leader - not only to our family, but to the oppressed, the voiceless, and the overlooked around the world," the Jackson family said. Veteran American civil rights activist Reverend Jesse Jackson receives Legion of Honour in Paris

11 security personnel, 1 child killed in attack

Peshawar: Militants rammed a vehicle filled with explosives into an army checkpoint in northwestern Pakistan, killing 11 security personnel and a child, the military said Tuesday, as the South Asian nation battles a surge in violence. Women and children were among seven wounded in Monday's attack in Bajur district, which lies along the border with Afghanistan, the military said. The militants drove into the wall of a checkpoint after security forces blocked their attempt to enter a residential compound for soldiers, the military said, adding 12 attackers were killed as they attempted to flee the scene.

Taliban frees three Pakistani soldiers

Kabul: Afghanistan's Taliban government said Tuesday it had released three Pakistani soldiers captured during border clashes in October, in a move mediated by Saudi Arabia amid strained ties and a prolonged frontier closure between the two neighbours. The release comes months after the worst cross-border fighting since the Taliban returned to power in 2021.

Sannazaro theatre destroyed in blaze

Naples: A fire gutted the interior of the historic wood-framed Teatro Sannazaro in a wealthy neighbourhood of the Italian city of Naples Tuesday, officials said. The fire is believed to have started in an apartment block in the Chiaia district, but spread rapidly to the nearby 19th-century theatre, bringing its domed roof crashing to the ground and devastating the plush stalls and tiers of gilded boxes. "Very little of the theatre remains," Naples fire commander Giuseppe Paduano told reporters.

Rahman faces political stability, economic recovery challenges



Tarique Rahman sworn in as Bangladesh's PM after landslide election victory

REUTERS

Dhaka, Feb 17: Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader Tarique Rahman was sworn in as prime minister Tuesday, marking an important political shift in the South Asian nation following a period of turmoil.

Rahman, 60, son of former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and assassinated President Ziaur Rahman, takes office after his party's sweeping parliamentary election victory. BNP secures two-thirds majority, Jamaat wins 68 seats

Jamaat and NCP boycott swearing-in ceremony in protest

Hasina's Awami League party was banned from contesting after its registration was revoked by the Election Commission.

JAMAAT, NCP BOYCOTT EVENT

Jamaat and the NCP did not attend the ceremony in protest after Rahman's party rejected the interim government's request for its lawmakers to take an additional oath under the proposed 'Constitution Reform Council'. The council intends to amend the constitution following the referendum held alongside the national election.

Rahman's elevation caps a long and turbulent political journey. He returned to Bangladesh last year after 17 years of self-imposed exile in London, arriving shortly before his mother's death.

Rivals have long criticised his political record, pointing to corruption allegations he denies, but his return energised party supporters and reshaped the BNP's campaign.

In his first remarks after the election, Rahman urged calm and restraint, saying, "Peace, law and order must be maintained at any cost... We will not tolerate any kind of chaos."

Governments and regulators around the world are cracking down on sexually explicit content generated by Elon Musk's XAI chatbot Grok on X, launching probes, imposing bans and demanding safeguards in a growing global push to curb illegal material.

Here are some reactions from governments and regulators since the start of January:

EUROPE

The European Commission January 26 opened an investigation into whether Grok disseminates illegal content such as manipulated sexualised images in the EU. The probe will examine whether X properly assessed and mitigated risks as required under the bloc's digital rules.

The Commission had January 8 extended an order sent to X last year to retain and preserve all internal documents and data related to Grok until the end of 2026.

Paris prosecutor's cyber-crime unit raided X's office in Paris February 3 and ordered

REUTERS

Geneva, Feb 17: Negotiators from Ukraine and Russia began two days of US-mediated peace talks in Geneva Tuesday that will focus on the main sticking point of land, with US President Donald Trump pressing Kyiv to act fast to reach a deal.

Trump is urging Moscow and Kyiv to reach a deal to end Europe's biggest war since 1945, though Zelenskiy has complained that his country is facing the greatest pressure to make concessions.

Lead Ukrainian negotiator Rustem Umerov said "security and humanitarian issues" would be on the agenda.

"We are working constructively, focused and without excessive expectations," he posted on X. "Our task is to maximally advance those solutions that can bring sustainable peace closer."

HEAVY AIRSTRIKES ON UKRAINE OVERNIGHT

Ahead of the talks, Russia carried out heavy airstrikes overnight across swathes of Ukraine, inflicting severe damage to the power network in the southern port city of Odesa, which Ukrainian President

UKRAINE, RUSSIA BEGIN GENEVA TALKS

Trump piles new pressure on Kyiv



US-mediated talks in Geneva follow two rounds in Abu Dhabi

and remains the key sticking point in the talks

Hopes are low for any major breakthrough

Talks come ahead of fourth anniversary of Russian invasion

Volodymyr Zelenskiy said left tens of thousands without heat and water.

Zelenskiy called for Kyiv's allies to increase pressure on

Russia to reach a "real and just" peace deal via tougher sanctions and weapons supplies to Ukraine.

Trump pointed to Ukraine when asked by reporters what he was expecting from the talks in Geneva, which were following a morning of negotiations between US and Iranian officials at a different venue in the Swiss lakeside city.

"Well, we have big talks,"

Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One. "It's going to be very easy. I mean, look, so far, Ukraine better come to the table fast. That's all I'm telling you."

Russia is demanding that Ukraine cede the remaining 20% of the eastern region of Donetsk that Moscow has failed to capture - something Kyiv refuses to do.

"This time, the idea is to discuss a broader range of issues, including, in fact, the main ones. The main issues concern both the territories and everything else related to the demands we have put forward," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Monday.

NEGOTIATING TWO CRIES AT ONCE

The venue has switched to Geneva after Abu Dhabi hosted two rounds of talks that both sides described as constructive but which failed to reach any major breakthrough.

US envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner were representing the Trump administration at the talks, a source told Reuters.

In a rare attempt to negotiate two major global crises simultaneously, they attended the morning indirect negotiations with Iranian officials in Geneva before crossing town to mediate the talks between Ukraine and Russia.

SA's Hindu, Muslim groups unite over burial law concerns

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Johannesburg, Feb 17: South Africa's Hindu and Muslim organisations have united in objecting to a proposed law which could delay cremations and burials for several days, requiring the obtainment of electronic death certificates before it.

Traditionally, cremations and burials are done on the same day of the death or as soon as possible thereafter in these religions. The proposed law will require organisations and individuals to first obtain electronic death certificates from the Department of Home Affairs before proceeding with cremations or burials.

Officials from various organisations said this would become impractical when the department was closed for weekends and sometimes for up to four days at a time for public holidays, such as during the Easter weekend.

In a letter to the department, the Hindu Coordinating Council (HCC) explained the Hindu cycle of 'Samsara', consisting of birth, death, and rebirth.

Badal added that the HCC

was also concerned about the potential impact on rural areas with limited internet connectivity and the possible infringement on the rights of those who may not have access to digital technology.

Progress made in N-talks with US: Iran Foreign Min

REUTERS

Geneva, Feb 17: Iran and the United States reached an understanding Tuesday on main "guiding principles" in talks aimed at resolving their longstanding nuclear dispute, but that does not mean a deal is imminent, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said.

Oil futures fell and the benchmark Brent crude contract tumbled more than 1% after Araghchi's comments, which helped ease fears of conflict in the region, where the US has deployed a battle force to press Tehran for concessions.

"Different ideas have been presented, these ideas have been seriously discussed, ultimately we've been able to reach a general agreement on some guiding principles," Araghchi told Iranian media after the talks concluded in Geneva.

BOTH SIDES HAVE 'CLEAR NEXT STEPS'

The indirect discussions between US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff and US President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, alongside Araghchi, were mediated by Oman. The White House did not respond to emailed questions about the meeting.

Oman's Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi said in a post

on X "much work is yet to be done" but Iran and the US were leaving with "clear next steps".

Just as talks began Tuesday, Iranian state media said Iran would temporarily shut part of the Strait of Hormuz, a vital global oil supply route, due to "security precautions" while Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards conducted military drills there.

Tehran has in the past threatened to shut down the strait to commercial shipping if it is attacked, a move that would choke off a fifth of global oil flows and drive up crude prices.

Responding to comments by Trump that "regime change" in Iran might be the best course,

the country's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, 86, warned that any US attempts to depose his government would fail.

"The US President says their army is the world's strongest, but the strongest army in the world can sometimes be slapped so hard it cannot get up," he said, in comments published by Iranian media.

Speaking at a disarmament conference in Geneva after the talks, Araghchi said that a "new window of opportunity" had opened and that he hoped discussions would lead to a "sustainable" solution that ensured the full recognition of Iran's legitimate rights.

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Our message to the IT industry is to go whole hog on reskilling and upskilling the workforce, upskilling the talent

ASHWINI VAISHNAV | IT MINISTER

RUPEE ENDS 2 PAISE HIGHER

The rupee gained 2 paise to settle at 90.72 against the US dollar Tuesday, backed by positive domestic equity markets and lower crude prices overseas. A firm American currency, however, weighed on the Indian currency and capped its gains, forex traders said. In the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 90.72 against the US dollar and moved in a tight range, touching a high of 90.64 and a low of 90.78 in intraday deals



of the day quote



We are moving towards an integrated AI-enabled healthcare system, where intelligent systems support clinicians and nurses to make faster, better decisions

ROY JAKOBS | ROYAL PHILIPS CEO



Each technology transition has had implications, but this time, it's a fundamental change in the way businesses operate. Customer journeys, operating models, talent - everything has to change

NANDAN NILEKANI | INFOSYS CO-FOUNDER



We are going to be fighting regional competition, we are going to be investing in e-commerce, yes, that will require more funds. We are committed to invest that. We believe that the opportunity for us to drive topline better is definitely there

RAKSHIT HARGAVE | BRITANNIA INDUSTRIES MD & CEO

SHORT TAKES

Infosys unveils AI-first framework

Bangalore: Infosys Tuesday unveiled its AI First Value Framework, positioning itself to capture an estimated USD 300-400 billion incremental AI services opportunity by 2030, as global enterprises accelerate adoption of generative and agentic AI. The company, in a statement, said the framework, powered by its Infosys Topaz suite, will help enterprises unlock AI value at scale and move from experimentation to enterprise-wide AI operating models. Citing a Nasscom-McKinsey report, Infosys described the shift as opening a new frontier in IT services. Infosys' AI strategy rests on two pillars: capturing new demand across six AI value pools and embedding AI across its existing services to expand wallet share. The six value pools include AI Strategy & Engineering, Data for AI, Process AI, Agentic Legacy Modernization, Physical AI, and AI Trust - spanning enterprise architecture design, AI-ready data platforms, workflow transformation, modernization of legacy estates, intelligent product engineering, and governance frameworks for responsible AI deployment.

Air India, Lufthansa plan joint biz ties

New Delhi: Air India and the Lufthansa Group plan to enter into a joint business agreement wherein the two sides will collaborate on multiple strategic areas, including coordinated route planning and flight schedules in specific markets. On Tuesday, both sides entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to establish a framework for a joint business agreement, which will cover Air India, Air India Express, as well as Lufthansa Group carriers and subsidiaries. Those include Austrian Airlines, Brussels Airlines, ITA Airways, Lufthansa, Swiss International Air Lines (SWISS) and other affiliated airlines. The proposed deeper collaboration with Germany's Lufthansa Group is also aimed at tapping opportunities from the India-European Union Free Trade Agreement that was finalised in January. The MoU would initially focus on increasing passenger traffic flows between India and Lufthansa Group's core home market region, encompassing Germany, Austria, Belgium, Italy, and Switzerland.

However, for the third quarter ended Dec. 31, Nifty 50 companies posted a 7.5% year-on-year profit growth, up from 1.9% in the previous quarter. Growth was broader across the market, with BSE 500 companies reporting 16% profit expansion, led by energy and consumer discretionary companies. Information technology stocks lagged.

Even so, Nifty profit-after-tax growth stayed in single digits for a seventh straight quarter. Analysts led by Seshadri Sen at Emkay Global said headline earnings growth would have been closer to 14% after adjusting for the labour-code impact.

The new codes mandate basic salaries account for at least 50% of cost-to-company, increasing

gratuity liabilities. Emkay estimated a roughly 5% hit to aggregate December-quarter profit after tax.

Brokerages flagged early

signs of a recovery in consumption and said an interim framework for an India-U.S. deal could mark a turning point for markets.

Valuations have moderated after underperformance, while supportive fiscal and monetary policy, signs of consumption revival and progress in trade talks with the European Union and the U.S. have improved the forward earnings outlook, analysts said.

"Strong festive and rural demand, a stable interest-rate environment, a pickup in credit growth and lower input costs drove a broad-based earnings recovery," said J.P. Morgan analysts Rajiv Batra and Rishi Mehta, adding that mid-caps and small-caps posted earnings growth of 12% and 21%, respectively, in the third quarter.

Motilal Oswal said five Nifty 50 stocks, State Bank of India,

Tata Steel, HDFC Bank, Tata Consultancy Services, and Bharti Airtel accounted for 78% of incremental earnings growth.

Against stabilising profits, the brokerage said markets were better positioned for improved performance in 2026, with the US and EU trade deals seen as key catalysts.

J.P. Morgan and Motilal Oswal cautioned that AI-led disruption in IT services and spillover risks to other sectors remained a key overhang, heightening job-security concerns in urban areas.

India's IT index has fallen about 12% so far in 2026 after dropping 12.6% in 2025, while the Nifty 50 is down 1.8% year to date.

Stock markets rise for 2nd day on gains in bank, IT stocks

Commodities, Energy, and Realty were the only laggards.

A total of 2,447 stocks advanced, while 1,756 declined and 149 remained unchanged.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms increased by Rs 1,52,688.24 crore to Rs 4,70,11,313.57 crore (USD 5.18 trillion).

IT stocks extended gains for the second consecutive session after the recent sharp correction. The sentiment in the sector improved after Infosys announced a strategic partnership with Anthropic, easing concerns around AI-led disruption. Defence stocks gained 1.3 per cent ahead of the meeting between French President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as expectations rose around potential discussions on the acquisition of additional Rafale fighter jets," Siddhartha Khemka - Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

On the downside, metal stocks came under pressure tracking weakness in precious metal prices, dragging the Nifty Metal index down 1 per cent. Overall, we expect markets to remain firm with a positive bias, tracking global cues and developments on the domestic sectoral front, he added.

In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225 index settled 0.47 per cent lower, while markets in China, Hong Kong and South Korea remained closed for the Lunar New Year holidays.

Foreign institutional investors sold equities worth Rs 972.13 crore Monday, while domestic institutional investors purchased stocks worth Rs 1,666.98 crore, according to the exchange data.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.79 per cent to USD 68.13 per barrel.

On the other hand, Metal,

Broader indices also traded firm, with the BSE Smallcap Select Index rising 0.49 per cent, and Midcap Select Index gained 0.26 per cent. Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments, said, "Domestic markets traded in a range-bound manner. The IT sector, following a sharp correction, witnessed selective bottom-fishing, aided by announcements of strategic collaborations with global AI partners."

Among sectoral indices, PSU Bank rose by 2.36 per cent, followed by IT by 1.15 per cent, Industrials by 1.13 per cent, Services by 0.98 per cent, Focussed IT by 0.94 per cent, FMCG by 0.87 per cent, Consumer Durables by 0.85 per cent, and Capital Goods by 0.76 per cent.

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market rates to be contained and overnight rates to trade close to repo rate.

Since January 2025, the bond yields remained volatile due to various reasons such as geopolitical situations leading to rising crude oil prices, anticipation of end of rate cut cycle, and finally due to higher than expected gross borrowing numbers announced by the government for FY27 in the Union Budget.

The 10-year benchmark bond yield moved in the range of 6.30-6.70 per cent between January 2025, and February 2026.

The government has planned to borrow Rs 17.2 lakh crore for FY27 significantly higher than the market projection of Rs 16.5-17 lakh crore, leading to sharp rise in yields on government securities.

However, on the other hand, the net borrowing by the government was Rs 11.73 lakh crore, from 11.53 lakh crore, a jump of Rs 20,000 crore.

Adani Group commits \$100bn for AI-ready energy-compute backbone

New Delhi: The Adani Group Tuesday unveiled a USD 100-billion investment to develop renewable-energy-powered, hyperscale AI-ready data centres by 2035 -- one of the world's largest integrated energy-compute commitments. The initiative is expected to catalyse an additional USD 150 billion across server manufacturing, cloud platforms, and supporting industries, creating a projected USD 250 billion AI infrastructure ecosystem in India, Adani Enterprises, the group's flagship firm, said in a statement. "The world is entering an intelligence revolution more profound than any previous industrial revolution," said Gautam Adani, Chairman of the Adani Group. "Nations that master the symmetry between energy and compute will shape the next decade." India, he said, is uniquely positioned to lead. "At Adani, we are building on our foundation in data centres and green energy to expand into the complete five-layer AI stack focused on India's technological sovereignty. India will not be a mere consumer in the AI age. We will be the creators, the builders and the exporters of intelligence, and we are proud to be able to participate in that future," he said.

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Ahmedabad demands runs from Abhishek's bat as India look to improve spin play

Men in Blue await Dutch

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ahmedabad, Feb 17: A peerless India will be hoping that Abhishek Sharma returns to his destructive ways and the other batters up their game against spin when the side takes the field for its final T20 World Cup league fixture against the Netherlands here Wednesday.

Having established himself as one of the most dangerous batters in the game over the last 18 months, Abhishek is yet to go ballistic in the ICC event at home thus far.

After a nought in the opener, a stomach infection forced him out of the game against Namibia. He returned for the high stakes Pakistan contest but failed to get a run for the second time in as many matches.

But with Ishan Kishan showing imperious form at the other end, the lack of runs from Abhishek's bat have not impacted the team's cause.

To be fair to the 25-year-old, his high-risk play has resulted in multiple wins for India and perhaps it is only a matter of time before he makes the best of bowlers look ordinary again.

However, four ducks in his last six innings do suggest that he may need to review his plans in the powerplay.

Considering his intimidating credentials, it is clear that teams have spent extra time in preparation to tackle the India opener. With India already through to the next stage of the tournament, the Netherlands game presents an ideal opportunity for him to get back among the runs.

India managed to make short work of Pakistan, thanks to a sublime effort from Kishan and the bowlers. However, for the second game in a row, the batters did not show the conviction displayed by Kishan.

After Namibia captain Gerhard Erasmus was able to trouble the Indian batters with his round arm and behind the



Zim enter Super 8s; Aus, Ire eliminated

Pallekele: Zimbabwe entered the Super 8 stage of the T20 World Cup Tuesday after their crucial Group B match against Ireland was washed out due to rain, a result that also eliminated former champions Australia and Ireland from the tournament. Both teams were awarded one point each. The shared points took Zimbabwe to five, enough to secure a Super 8 berth. They will face India in their opening Super 8 match February 26 in Chennai. Zimbabwe became the seventh team to get a ticket to the Super 8s, completing group G1 also comprising India, South Africa and West Indies. Zimbabwe will play their final group match against co-hosts Sri Lanka February 19. With table-toppers Sri Lanka (6) having already qualified for the Super 8s, the contest held significant importance for Zimbabwe and Ireland, who had come into the game with four and two points respectively.

New Zealand beat Canada by 8 wickets

Chennai: New Zealand's top-order batters Rachin Ravindra and Glenn Phillips scored unbeaten half-centuries to guide their team to an eight-wicket win over Canada in a T20 World Cup Group D match here Tuesday. After young Canadian opener Yuvraj Samra played a defiant 110 off 65 balls, featuring 11 boundaries and six sixes to help his side post a challenging 173 for 4, New Zealand's experienced batters made chasing the target look easy. They overhauled it in 15.1 overs, with Ravindra scoring an unbeaten 59 runs off 39 balls and Phillips contributing 77 not out off 36 balls. Their partnership yielded 146 runs for the third wicket.

Nepal snap 12-year winless run in T20WC

Mumbai: Kushal Bhurtel's early fireworks and Dipendra Singh Airee's unbeaten fifty helped Nepal end their 12-year-long winless run in T20 World Cup with a seven-wicket triumph against Scotland in an inconsequential Group C match here Tuesday. Nepal had gone winless since 2014 when they beat Afghanistan and the Netherlands on T20 World Cup debut, but the Rhinos signed off from this edition with a memorable victory in front of more than 19,000 fans at the Wankhede Stadium here. Chasing 171, Nepal responded with 171/3 in 19.2 overs with Airee's quickfire 50 not out off 23 balls. Earlier, Michael Jones' brisk 71 steered Scotland to a competitive 170 for 7. Both the teams were out of reckoning for the Super Eights with the West Indies and England advancing to the next round from the group.

stumps variations, another unorthodox spinner, Usman Tariq, was able to keep them quiet in the Pakistan clash.

With due respect to the Netherlands attack, their quality of spinners are not in the same league even though Aryan Dutt and Roelof van der Merwe have been around for a while.

On the bowling front, India have the option to rest a few bowlers before the Super 8s and that includes pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah. After picking Kuldeep Yadav over Arshdeep Singh as the extra spin option in Colombo, the team management is expected to go back to the two specialist pacers combination.

If Bumrah is rested, Mohammed Siraj and Arshdeep are expected to start. The two likely spinners will be Varun Chakaravarthy and Axar Patel. Ahmedabad has produced the highest total of the games played in India thus far -- 213/4 that South Africa scored in their opener against Canada -- but in the last two games, teams batting first have not managed to cross the 200-run mark.

Even with the Indian involvement, it would be a challenge to pack the world's largest cricket stadium on a pleasant Wednesday evening.

TODAY'S CLASHES

LA LIGA

Yamal misses penalty as Barca collapse to Girona

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



100th in all competitions this season and made it the second club in Europe's big five domestic leagues to hit the century after Bayern Munich.

A win would have taken it above its archrival but, instead, a crisis brewed for coach Hansi Flick, whose side lost to Atletico Madrid 4-0 in the Copa del Rey last week. The second loss came even though Barcelona took the lead early in the second half.

Yamal hit the post with his spot kick on the stroke of half-time but 14 minutes into the second period Pau Cubarsi met Jules Kounde's cross from the right and placed his header perfectly into the top corner.

The goal was Barcelona's

100th in all competitions this season and made it the second club in Europe's big five domestic leagues to hit the century after Bayern Munich.

However, Girona roared back into the game just three minutes later. Barcelona's Joan Garcia was already the busier of the two goalkeepers but he could not stop Thomas Lemar side-footing home from close range after nice work from Vladislav Vanat on the left wing.

Both sides pushed for a decisive second and it was Girona who executed with three minutes remaining, substitute Fran Beltran scoring with a low shot from just inside the box.

For India, who will host the next WPA Grand Prix at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi, it was important for their athletes to open the season with confidence, and they did it exactly that way at the Dubai Club for People of Determination grounds.

Two-time Paralympic champion Sumit Antil returned to one of his favourite grounds with the gold in men's javelin

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Dubai, Feb 17: India delivered a commanding performance at the opening Dubai 2026 Grand Prix- Fazza International Athletics Championships, finishing on top of the medals table with an overall 43 medals, laced by 16 gold, 13 silver and 14 bronze.

Colombia and Kenya followed with 11 and 6 gold from their 20 medals each, while the hosts UAE finished fourth with 6 gold out of 31 medals at the first World Para Athletics Grand Prix of the season.

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Two-time Paralympic champion Sumit Antil returned to one of his favourite grounds with the gold in men's javelin

F64, while his fellow throwers and Paris 2024 gold medallists Navdeep (men's javelin F41) and Dharambir Nain (men's club throw F51) also began the season on a winning note in Dubai. They were joined by Paris 2024 double bronze medallist Preeti Pal who claimed gold and bronze in women's 100m and 200m T35 events, respectively.

Her medal in Dubai reaffirmed her consistency after the Paris

FIH PRO LEAGUE

Hardik to lead India in Hobart

Men in Blue will be aiming to seek redemption after losing all four matches at home, including a shocking 0-8 drubbing at the hands of Argentina

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 17: Mid-fielder Hardik Singh was Tuesday named captain of the embattled Indian men's hockey team for its FIH Pro League matches in Hobart from February 20 to 25 after regular skipper Harmanpreet Singh opted out due to "personal reasons."

The upcoming leg of the tournament will feature India alongside Spain and hosts Australia at the Tasmania Hockey Centre in Hobart.

The side lost all its four matches in the just-concluded Rourkela leg, which included a shocking 0-8 drubbing at the hands of Argentina.

"After a disappointing four matches in Rourkela, where the results didn't go our way, we've learned some good lessons and made some notable improvements," India coach Craig Fulton said.

New captain Hardik is a two-time Olympic bronze-medallist. The team will also feature youngsters including Amandeep Lakra and Manmeet Singh, who made their debut appearances for the senior team during the Rourkela leg.

"Harmanpreet Singh will not be part of the squad due to personal reasons," Hockey India said in a statement.

A source close to the player said that the seasoned campaigner would be missing the games to welcome his second child with wife Amandeep Kaur.

Suraj Karkera and Mohith Honnenahalli Shashikumar will share the goalkeeping responsibilities. Pawan, who was there in the Rourkela leg, makes way for Mohith in the



"Going into the Hobart leg, we're aiming for improved performances and looking to finalise our squad for the World Cup and the Asian Games," Fulton said.

India's squad

Goalkeepers: Suraj Karkera, Mohith Honnenahalli Shashikumar

Defenders: Amit Rohidas, Harmanpreet Singh, Jugraj Singh, Sanjay, Sumit, Amandeep Lakra, Yashdeep Siwach, and Poovana Chandura Boby.

Midfielders: Rajinder Singh, Manmeet Singh, Vivek Prasad and Raj Kumar Pal will anchor the mid-field alongside Rajinder Singh, Manmeet Singh, Moirangthem Rabichandra Singh and Vishnu Kanti Singh, Raj Kumar Pal.

Forwards: Abhishek, Shilanand Lakra, Mandeep Singh, Aranjeet Singh Hundal, Aditya Arjun Lalage, Angad Bir Singh, Maninder Singh.

DUBAI GP - FAZZA PARA ATHLETICS

India finish on top with 43 medals



Other gold medallists were: New Delhi 2025 world champion Rinku Hooda (men's javelin F46), Rio 2016 bronze medallist Varun Singh Bhati (high jump men T42), Hangzhou 2022 gold Asian Para Games medallist Dilip Mahadu Gavit (men's 400m T46), Sahil Salim Sayyad (men's discus wheelchair men F54/55). Silver medals came through Sunil Kumar, Pranav Soorma, and Gurubaskarase Sakkappan, while bronze medallists Ranjit Chanda, Poonma Ram, Fatima Khatoon, Dipesh Kumar among others.

The Fazza Championships have long been a key stop on the World Para Athletics circuit, and topping the table in Dubai sends a powerful message ahead of upcoming global competitions. Dubai was not just about standing on the podium. It was about proving that Indian Para athletics now carries depth – not just a few stars, but an entire squad capable of delivering under pressure.

"My goal is to improve my personal best and win as many gold medals as possible for India. This is just the beginning. I want to achieve more for India," she said. Among others, Bhagyashri M Jadhav pulled off an emotional victory in the women's shot put and javelin F34 category, as it marked a powerful comeback.



I come back, I will stand out from my thoughts and continue the dominance I had before. All my matches were straight games. None went to a crucial stage. That shows my mindset," he said.

The SL3 class is for standing players with significant lower limb impairment.

Bhagat defeated Indonesia's Muhammad Al Imran 21-12, 21-18 in the final to claim the title.

His title also made him the most decorated men's singles world champion in badminton history, surpassing Chinese Lin Dan's five world crowns in able-bodied badminton.

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PRAMOD BHAGAT

restored, Bhagat has already turned his focus to the future.

"Our next target is the Asian Games in Japan and then the Paralympics in Los Angeles," he said.

"We will prepare well for both. We will discuss new techniques, experiment with some new strokes and keep improving."

He believes India's standing categories are entering a golden phase.

So how will Bhagat celebrate? Well, not with parties.

"This time, I will go to my village. I will go to my family, and all the villagers," he said.

"They were very upset about this ban. They had big hopes for Paris. I want to regain their hope and trust."

"I will try to move forward. And in 2028, I will try to live up to their trust," he signed off.

Bhagat sets eye on Asian Games, LA 2028

After being handed 18-month ban, the para-badminton star redeemed himself by clinching his sixth SL3 singles gold, scripting his comeback run

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 17: From missing 2024 Paralympics due to suspension handed by the BWF to a triumphant return to rewrite his history, Pramod Bhagat's recent world title was less about the success but more about reclaiming a life, career and lost trust.

Returning to action after being handed 18-month ban for violating the BWF's anti-doping whereabouts clause, Bhagat

redeemed himself by clinching his sixth SL3 singles gold at the Para World Championships. The victory delivered Bhagat his fourth consecutive singles world title, but its emotional weight far outweighed the numbers.

"I was banned for one and a half years. I missed my Paralympics. After that, I came back and became world champion again. So this medal is very close to me because I have seen a lot of difficult situations in this phase of my life," Bhagat told PTI during an interview.

The 37-year-old had watched helplessly as 2024 Paris Paralympics slipped away, a crushing blow for a player who had dominated his category for more than a decade. For many, it could have been the end. But for Bhagat, it became a starting point.

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I come back, I will stand out from my thoughts and continue the dominance I had before. All my matches were straight games. None went to a crucial stage. That shows my mindset," he said.

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stone was secondary to proving himself again.

Bhagat later added a second gold, pairing with Sukant Kadamb to win the men's doubles SL3-SL4 title, completing a golden double that underlined the completeness of his comeback.

Behind the medals lies months of quiet rebuilding in Paris under former Olympian Nikhil Kanetkar, focusing on rhythm, basics and mental strength. With his status