



Moving moments

Actor and global icon Priyanka Chopra Jonas turns emotional while addressing students at Harvard Business School

LEISURE | P2



‘Difficult’ peace talks end

The latest US-brokered talks between envoys from Moscow and Kyiv end with no sign of breakthrough

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Silver bounces back

Snapping a three-day losing streak, silver prices rebound by ₹1,000 to ₹2.46 lakh per kg in the national capital Wednesday

BUSINESS | P11



Racism hits UCL

Real Madrid's Vinicius Jr accuses Benfica's Prestianni of racially insulting him during their Champions League playoff game

SPORTS | P12

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Biennial RS polls to 37 seats set for March 16

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 18: The BJP is set to win at least half of the 37 Rajya Sabha seats, including four in Odisha, going to biennial polls March 16 and is likely to increase its strength in the Upper House, as it is in power or part of the ruling alliance in six of the 10 states where seats are falling vacant.

The seats will fall vacant April 2 and 9 following the retirement of several members, including Rajya Sabha deputy chairman Harivansh (JDU), NCP-SP MP Sharad Pawar (NCP-SP), former Lok Sabha deputy Speaker M Thambidurai (AIADMK) and Union ministers Ram Nath Thakur (JDU) and Ramdas Athawale (RPI-A).

According to the Election Commission, the seats are spread across Maharashtra (seven), Odisha (four), Telangana (two), Tamil Nadu (six), Chhattisgarh (two), West Bengal (five), Assam

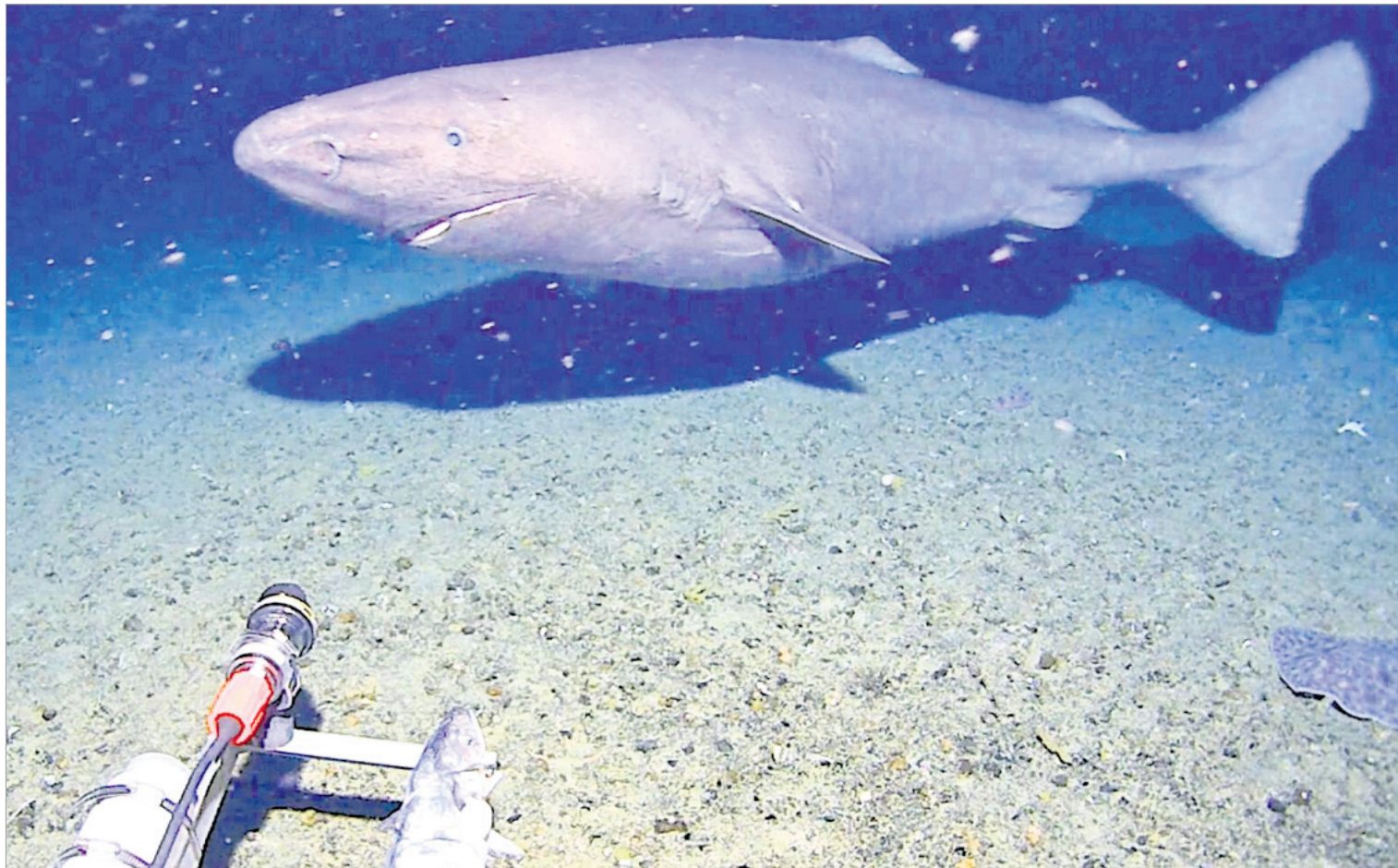
(three), Haryana (two), Himachal Pradesh (one) and Bihar (five).

Notifications for the polls will be issued February 26, and according to established practice, polling will be held between 9am and 4pm March 16, with counting scheduled from 5pm the same day.

Based on its legislative strength, the BJP is expected to win around 15 to 18 seats, while nine of its MPs are retiring next month.

The BJP has governments or is an alliance partner in Maharashtra, Odisha, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana and Assam. It will help the party gain numbers in the Upper House.

In Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and West Bengal, Opposition parties are in power. The Congress is likely to win four seats – one each in Telangana, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Haryana – on the basis of the strength of its MLAs in the respective state assemblies.



SERENDIPITY: This image taken from footage released by the University of Western Australia shows a sleeper shark swimming past a baited camera on the seafloor of the Southern Ocean off Antarctica in January 2025, marking the first ever recorded sighting of the species in frigid Antarctic waters (**Report P3**)

Matric exam begins today

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 18: The Board of Secondary Education, Odisha will conduct the Matriculation Examination 2026 from February 19 to March 2 across the state.

A total of 5,61,989 students will appear for the examination this year, including candidates under the State Open School Certificate stream.

To ensure smooth conduct of the examination, the board has set up 3,082 examination centres and 322 nodal centres across the state. Additionally, 50 centres have been designated for the evaluation of answer sheets.

All nodal and examination centres will remain under round-the-clock security cover and CCTV surveillance. Authorities have strictly prohibited mobile phones and other electronic devices inside examination centres.

School and Mass Education Minister Nityananda Gond said comprehensive arrangements have been made to ensure smooth and transparent conduct of the examinations.

MAN KILLS WIFE

Malkangiri: A man allegedly killed his wife by striking her head with a wooden plank following a minor domestic dispute in Luler village under Mathili block of Malkangiri district, police said Wednesday. The accused Guru Nayak had an argument with his wife, Khamari Nayak, over a family matter. Guru reportedly lost his temper and hit her on the head with a wooden plank. Khamari died on the spot.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Caught red-handed? Just say you support the govt and that your vision aligns with the PM's. You will be freed

Bhubaneswar, Feb 18: The second day of the Assembly's Budget Session Wednesday was washed out, as chaos reigned supreme with MLAs of the Opposition BJD and Congress demonstrated, alleging mismanagement in paddy procurement.

Amid the ruckus, Speaker Surama Padhy adjourned the Hosue twice before doing the same till Thursday.

As soon as the House assembled for the Question Hour, BJD members rushed to the Well and started a demonstration with placards.

Amid the sloganeering, BJD's Deogarh Romancha Ranjan Biswal, who came to the House dressed as a farmer, poured a bagful of paddy on the reporter's table.

Min: 8 milk, dairy product samples substandard

Eight samples of milk and dairy products have been found to be of substandard quality during checks in the state last year, Animal Resources Development Minister Gokulananda Mallik told the Assembly Wednesday. In a written reply to a query raised by BJP legislator Tankadhar Tripathy, Mallik said 22 companies, apart from Omfed, are selling milk products in the state. Of them, 10 are domestic companies, and 12 are from outside the state, he said. A total of 88 samples of various milk and milk products were sent to State Food Testing Laboratory in Bhubaneswar last year, and eight were found to be substandard, Mallik said. "The remaining 80 samples were found to be standard level, but not a single sample was found to be unsafe," he said.

The situation soon escalated with Congress MLAs joining the BJD members in the demonstration, calling the BJP government in the state 'anti-farmer'.

Speaker Surama Padhy's repeated appeal to the agitating members to return to their seats failed to yield any result, following which she first adjourned the proceedings till 11.30am.

When the House reassembled, similar scenes were witnessed, forcing the Speaker to adjourn the proceedings till 4pm. Finally, Padhy adjourned the House for the day till 10.30am Thursday as members of both Opposition parties refused to stop the agitation on the floor of the House.

The House could transact for nearly five minutes in the entire day due to the din over the alleged mismanagement in the paddy procurement across the state.

A day before commencement of the session, Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik had announced that the voice of farmers would "roar" in the Assembly as the government has ignored their pleas to procure their paddy at state-run mandis across Odisha.

Speaking to reporters outside the House, Congress legislature party leader Rama Chandra Kadam said they have no alternative but to agitate in the Assembly. "The government is not procuring paddy from farmers, for which they have to undertake distress sales. Though we have drawn the attention of the government to the issue several times, but there was no result," he alleged, noting that Congress MLAs will continue to protest until the problems being faced by farmers are resolved.

Opposition Chief Whip Pramila Mallik of BJD said, "Our party has drawn the attention to the government several times at different platforms. Our leader has written to the Chief Minister, and BJD leaders staged protests in all districts highlighting plights of farmers. But, the government keep on exploiting the farmers."

Asked how to bring back normalcy in the House, Mallik said they are ready to withdraw the agitation if the Chief Minister announces in the Assembly that the government will procure the entire surplus paddy from farmers and give them a suitable price.

New skywalk soon from Palasuni to Rasulgarh



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Feb 18: The National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) Wednesday said that it will build a 500-metre skywalk from Palasuni to Rasulgarh to ease the movement of pedestrians in the busy stretch on National Highway 16.

Frequent accidents were reported at the Palasuni section of National Highway 16 in recent months due to heavy traffic flow on the road, especially during the morning and evening hours. At least three major accidents have occurred at Palasuni in two months.

"In a major step toward safer roads in Bhubaneswar, the National Highways Authority of India will build a 500-metre skywalk from Palasuni to Rasulgarh at a cost of ₹20 crore," the NHAI's regional office in Odisha informed on X.

The skywalk will create a secure, well-lit, and convenient pathway for pedestrians while allowing traffic below to move more smoothly and efficiently, it said.

Galgotias varsity leaves AI Summit with robodog's tail between its legs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 18: The internet never forgets and the dog-eat-dog world of social media probably won't let you pass off a Chinese product as a Greater Noida innovation; private university Galgotias found out the hard way on being forced out of the AI Impact Summit Wednesday.

University representatives showcased a robotic dog named 'Orion' Tuesday, claiming it was developed by the Centre of Excellence at Galgotias, prompting social media users to highlight that it was a Unitree Go2, manufactured by China's Unitree Robotics and commonly used in research and education worldwide.

Bitten but not shy, the private university made a dogged attempt to brazen it out with bizarre justifications through Wednesday, such as one person's six could be another's nine, but issued an apology later in the evening after the organisers cut power supply to its stall at the event and asked the occupants to leave.



IT Secretary S Krishnan said the government did not want any exhibitor to showcase items that were not its own. "We do not want such exhibits to continue," he said, after the organisers asked Galgotias to vacate the stall.

In its apology, Galgotias University said the person "manning the pavilion was ill-informed".

"She was not aware of the technical origins of the products and in her enthusiasm of being on camera, gave factually incorrect information even though she was not authorised to speak to the press," the university said.

Stating that there was "no institutional intent to misrepresent this innovation", the university said it remained firmly committed to academic integrity, transparency and responsible representations of its work. It said it vacated the premises "understanding the organiser's sentiment".

Neha Singh, a professor of communications at the university's school of management, showed Orion to DD News Tuesday, saying that it "has been developed by the Centre of Excellence at Galgotias University". After social media users pointed out that the robot was actually a Unitree Go2, the episode invited widespread ridicule and drew political criticism Wednesday.

"Instead of leveraging India's talent and data, the AI summit is a disorganised PR spectacle - Indian data up for sale, Chinese products showcased," Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said in a post on X.

Amid the backlash, both Galgotias and Singh said the robot was not a university creation and that the institution had never claimed otherwise. "The controversy happened because things may not have been expressed clearly and the intent may not have been properly understood," professor Singh said.

"Your six can be my nine. Maybe what I wanted to say I was not able to say because of the scarcity of time, or the noise around us," she said.

SHORT TAKES

YOUTH GETS SHOT AT DURING FEAST, DIES

Cuttack: A man was allegedly shot dead from a close range during a feast here Wednesday, police said. A group of youth had assembled at Press Colony in Madhupatna police station area for a feast when a person opened fire at the man, identified as Soumyaranjan Jena. Jena suffered gunshot wound in the chest and was taken to SCB Medical College and Hospital, where doctors declared him brought dead.



ELEPHANT CALF'S CARCASS FOUND

Deogarh: A one-year-old elephant calf was found dead near the Rengali reservoir under the Thianala section of Barkote range in Deogarh district Wednesday morning, officials said. According to the officials, information about the death was received at around 8:30am near Kulsara village. Following the report, the DFO, ACF, range officials and other forest personnel rushed to the spot. Preliminary investigation suggests that the calf may have died due to drowning in the reservoir.



Best of Luck

ALL HSCE Examinees

OrissaPOST

Illustration of various school subjects and items like a microscope, books, and a globe.

leisure

FORTUNE FORECAST

GaneshaSpeaks.com
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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181*

ARIES
Friends, friends, and more friends – that’s what the day will be all about. Life seems to be one big party, even if all you’re doing is having tea together! But reserve the evening for that one special friend, suggests Ganesha.

TAURUS
Prepare yourself to handle ordinary situations in an extraordinary way, foretells Ganesha. Today, you will get a lesson in how people work. Before arriving at any crucial decision, explore the pros and cons with a balanced mind, says Ganesha.

GEMINI
Today, you will be at complete peace with yourself and your surroundings. So, it is rather unlikely that you will give in to provocations and lose your temper. Health of a family member may cause some anxiety, but more or less, you will remain unperturbed by the world.

CANCER
Your peers will be impressed by your professional efficiency today, forecasts Ganesha. You had better postpone auction bids or sealed tenders for some other day. You are likely to do well in interviews, says Ganesha.

LEO
It’s an early thanksgiving for you today, says Ganesha, as you feel full of the spirit of joy and blessing. Academically, this might push you towards developing a penchant for subjects like philosophy and metaphysics. Culturally, this translates into a desire to learn and hone your creative skills. Make the best of this fruitful day and remember to thank God for the mercies and magnanimity bestowed upon you.

VIRGO
Ganesha warns that anger will run riot today. You will probably blow hotter than a volcano. During the afternoon, you could draw out the plans for a big business project. You will gain the support of your colleagues. But Ganesha advises that during the evening try to do some meditation so that you can soothe those frayed nerves.

LIBRA
Think long and hard about all things past, present and future, says Ganesha, since there are chances that you may be in a pensive mood today. But do not be in a brooding frame of mind. You might have to manage balancing your personal and professional life. But your business will progress as expected. So relax, and look forward to an evening that promises to be a pleasant one, especially in the company of the opposite sex.

SCORPIO
Once in a while, it’s okay to enjoy the luxuries of life and pamper yourself. And if accompanied by your spouse, it adds a romantic touch to the entire experience. When it comes to work, people look up to you as an asset to the company. At times, even unknown people lend you a helping hand and contribute to your progress; appreciate them, says Ganeshi.

SAGITTARIUS
Success will knock your doors today and you may be in the limelight. The experience will be full of emotions for you. Romantic developments on cards today, predicts Ganesha.

CAPRICORN
You will do a commendable job solving complicated problems at work, says Ganesha. In keeping with the circumstances, you will be spontaneous in coming up with solutions to pressing issues; and so accurate you may be in your assumptions about a likely situation that in future, your peers and subordinates will blindly accept whatever proposal you table. A news from outside the country can double your joys.

AQUARIUS
Friends – the pillars of your life are going to be your constant companions for the day. Ganesha suggests you come out of your shell and tread new paths. Bring the vibrant side of your personality to the fore and see the difference you make in every one’s life.

PISCES
A conflict-ridden day awaits you. Avoid openly confronting people today, for petty issues could blow up into major disasters. Legal disputes may also hassle you. Meditative techniques will bring you peace of mind. Delay the start of important activities for a more opportune time, says Ganesha.



I HAVEN'T GONE TO UNIVERSITY: ROBBIE

Hollywood star Margot Robbie shared that she worried she was "dumb" after deciding against going to university. *The Wuthering Heights* actress, who grew up in Australia, discovered her love of acting when she was in high school so she decided to chase her dreams of stardom instead of enrolling in higher education.

BAZ LUHRMANN TO BRING ELVIS' LIFE TO STAGE SHOW

Filmmaker Baz Luhrmann is set to adapt Elvis Presley's story for the theatres in a new stage show. The Hollywood director brought his love of the King of Rock and Roll to the big screen in his 2022 biopic *Elvis*, reports *Female First UK*.



PeeCee turns emotional

Mumbai: Actor and global icon Priyanka Chopra Jonas aka PeeCee turned emotional while addressing students during an India Week session at Harvard Business School. She was invited to deliver a fireside keynote. The theme of the session was “The India We Imagine.”

Priyanka later shared her experience on social media, writing, “So, this is how my day started. I was supposed to give a fire-side keynote address to conclude India Week at the prestigious Harvard Business School.... no big deal, I thought. You can do this, Priyanka.”

The actress said her emotions shifted the moment she saw the audience dressed in sarees and kurtas, “But looking out into the audience today, I only had one thought, you are the India I imagined. Let me explain.”

Priyanka told the crowd that she felt immense pride seeing so many young Indian students and Desi allies filling the auditorium. She said the sight reminded her of how representation and belonging have evolved.

Expressing her pride further, she added, “To see an auditorium full of students, dressed in sarees and kurtas, at the campus of HBS (@harvard) in Boston, Massachusetts, where I grew up... to see so many people from my community at one of the best schools in the world, made my heart burst with pride. You are the future.”

AGENCIES

5-day nat'l drama fest from Jan 20

Bhubaneswar: Satabdira Kalakar, one of the oldest theatre troupes of the state, is celebrating its golden jubilee year here at Rabindra Mandap from Friday.

A five-day drama festival comprising six plays will be held to mark the occasion.

On the first evening, the host organisation will stage Odia play *Maha Sangramara Maha Nayaka*. Written by Biswabhusan Harichandan the play is directed by Dhira Mallik.

Other plays to be staged over the next four days of the festival are – Bengali play *Andha Yug* by Ebam Amra of West Bengal (Playwright – Dharamveer Bharati; Adaptation and direction – Kallol Bhattacharya) on 21.02.26, *Ab na banegi dehari*

SATABDIRA KALAKAR'S GOLDEN JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS



(Hindi) by Bharatendu Natya Academy of Lucknow (Novel – Padma Sachdev; dramatisation – Asif Ali; direction – Bipin Kumar) on 22.02.26, *Maya Mridung* (Bengali) by Dumdum Sabdomugdha Natya Kendra (

Playwright and direction – Rakesh Ghose) & *Sandhyatara* (Hindi) by Masoom Art Group of Jharkhand (Playwright and direction – Saikat Chattopadhyay) on 23.02.26; Odia play *Karna* by Uttar Purusha of Bhubaneswar (Playwright- Bijay Satpathy; Direction – Prasanna Mishra) on 24.02.26.

As many as 21 actors, directors, dance guru, music director, journalists and editors will be felicitated during the event, said group's Secretary Mallik.

Rakul channels her inner singer



Mumbai: Actress Rakul Preet Singh made the most of her time during her shoot amidst the wild in low temperatures. Rakul took to her official Instagram account and treated her InstaFam with a fun behind-the-scenes video from her recent shoot diaries.

The clip opened with her putting her face in a bowl of cold water. Next, Rakul shared a glimpse of herself walking barefoot on the grass in between shots.

The *De De Pyaar De* actress was also seen singing and dancing to the *Bahara Bahara* track from Imran Khan and Sonam Kapoor's *I Hate Luv Storys*. Channeling her inner singer further, she also crooned the *Andekhi Anjaani* song from the movie *Mujhse Dosti Karoge*, featuring Hrithik Roshan, Rani Mukerji, and Kareena Kapoor.

Rakul further confessed that the beauty of the place reminded her of the quintessential Bollywood romance.

“BTS ki full masti, some dramatic singing and lots of memorable moments, (sic)” she captioned the post.

Rakul keeps on sharing such entertaining glimpses from her professional life on social media.

IAN S

NEENA’S UNCOMFORTABLE MEMORY

Mumbai: Veteran actor Neena Gupta recently revisited an uncomfortable memory from the shoot of the popular song *Choli Ke Peeche*, reflecting on how her perspective has evolved over the years. Speaking on Shubhankar Mishra’s podcast, she spoke about filmmaker Subhash Ghai asking the costume designer to “make her appear fuller” for the sequence and suggesting that she wear a padded bra.

Recalling the moment, Neena said, “At that time, I felt very angry and thought it was inappropriate to say something like that. But now I feel he was just doing his job. He had a certain image in mind for the character in the song, and he expressed it plainly. I was new then — today I understand it differently.”

The actor explained that while the remark initially upset her, with time she has come to view it within

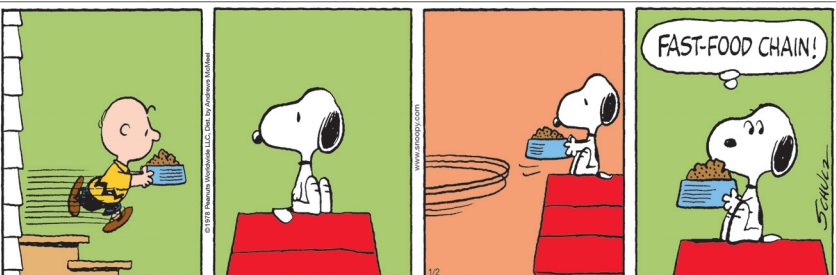


the context of filmmaking and character presentation. Her reflection offered insight into how her understanding of creative decisions and professional expectations has matured over the years.

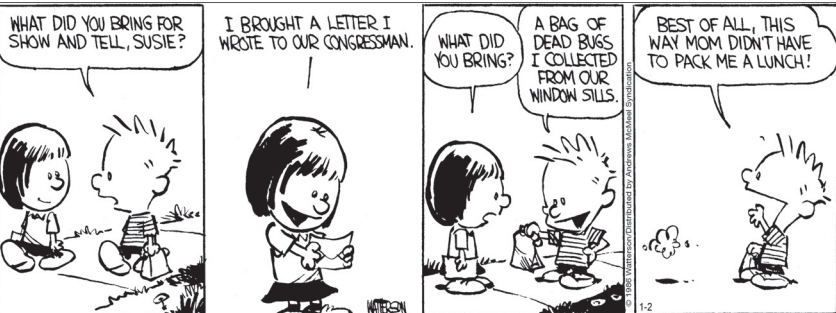
On the professional front, Neena is currently seen in *Vadh 2*, which released on February 6. The film co-stars Sanjay Mishra and is backed by filmmaker Luv Ranjan’s production banner.

AGENCIES

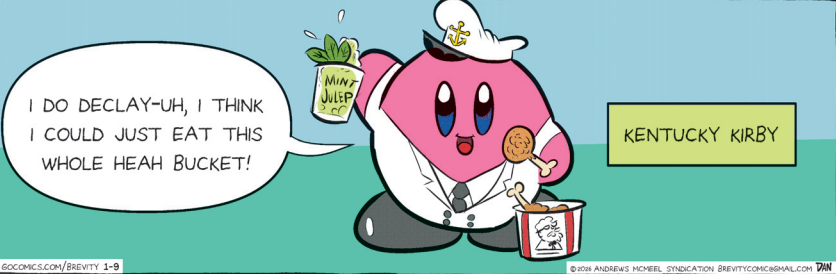
PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

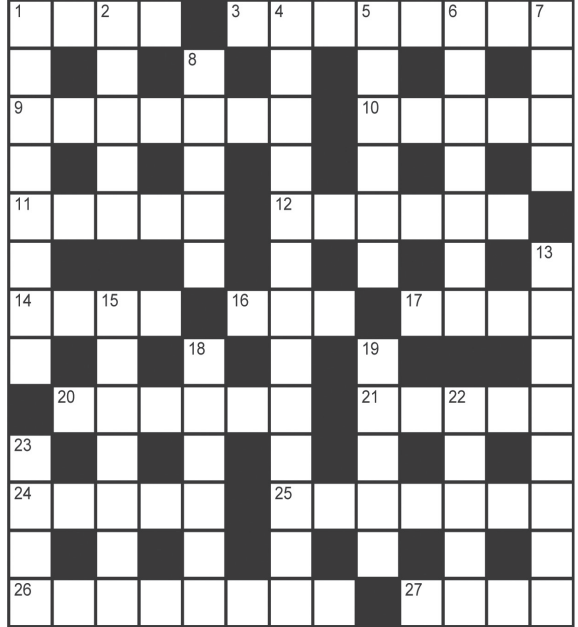


BREVITY



FUN post

CROSSWORD



- Across**

1 Bistro

3 Spectator

9 Seedless raisin

10 Prize money

11 Vast chasm

12 Plaid

14 Part of the foot

16 Barbary beast

17 Use acid

20 Collect

21 Shoestrings

24 The blabs
- Down**

25 Kind of farming

26 Kind of confinement

27 Wail

1 Shipwreck survivor

2 Foal’s kin

4 Permanent place (6,7)

5 Cash in one’s chips
- 6 Like many gardens

7 Marsh growth

8 Cucumberd’s place

13 Type of therapy

15 Harbour feature

18 Frugality

19 Set straight

22 Latin dance

23 Lawyers’ charges

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.

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

SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD

G	O	A	L	I	E	S		S	A	G	A	S	
A	W	M	U	C	O	I							
P	I	E	D	P	I	P	E	R	B	O	A		
E		A	E		A		A		A	M			
S	O	C	K	S		R	O	M	A	N	C	E	
U	S	B								A	S		
J	E	S	T	E	R		S	E	A	N	C	E	
A	T	O				N	A						
G	O	O	F	O	F		T	A	S	T	E		
U	M	B	F			I							
A	M	I	E	A	S		C	H	A	I	R		
R	S		S	E	E		I	O					
S	C	E	N	E			T	O	D	D	L	E	R

SUDOKU

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

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

MISSION SHAKTI BUILDING ON WATERBODY IN PURI

SC sets aside NGT’s demolition order

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 18: The Supreme Court Wednesday set aside an order of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) ordering demolition of a woman’s self-help group (SHG) building at a village in Puri district on the ground that it was constructed on a waterbody.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi was hearing the appeal of Gopinathpur Gram Panchayat Samiti challenging the Orissa High Court’s order of July 2022.

The high court had declined to pass any order against the NGT’s demolition order and instead directed the authorities to

take remedial action.

The bench noted that the structure was raised under the state government’s flagship scheme Mission Shakti which empowered women through SHGs.

“How can NGT direct the demolition of a government building?” the CJI said, underlining that it was a challenge to provide basic amenities to people.

The CJI said, “You want to stall all this by filing such petitions. There are enough ponds. If the local self-help group used this building, then there should be no issue.”

The counsel for the State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) then submitted that the matter concerned a water stream.

“I know how these state



pollution control boards function,” the CJI said, adding that it was expected for the NGT to take the help of an expert body in such matters.

The bench said the stream had been incorrectly described as a waterbody. “It cannot be overlooked that providing self-employment and sus-

tainability to rural women is a constitutional goal, and it has to be protected, including by judicial forums,” the CJI said.

The CJI said that action could only be taken if there was a “brazen violation of the laws”.

He said that the petitioner in the matter was a resident of the same area,

and he chose to raise a legal dispute only after the building was constructed.

“At no point in time was it pointed out that the building shall obstruct the flow of the stream. We find no justification for the NGT to entertain this plea after the building is constructed. Thus, the demolition order cannot be sustained, and the high court order and the tribunal’s order to that extent are set aside,” CJI Kant said.

He said that since it was allegedly a running stream, all stakeholders, including the SPCB, had to ensure there was no obstruction to its flow by devising a suitable mechanism through consultation with experts.

Meanwhile, the building had to remain intact, the CJI said.

Woman jumps into Mahanadi, dies

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sambalpur, Feb 18: A 22-year-old woman reportedly committed suicide after jumping into Mahanadi River from a bridge in Sambalpur Wednesday.

The deceased was identified as Anju Kumbhar, a native of Talabhatapada under Khetrajpur police limits in Sambalpur Town and a resident of Mahatab Nagar in Burla. However, the circumstances leading to her death remain unclear.

While initial reports

suggested suicide, her family denied the claim and termed the incident as an accident. Her mother Anjali Sahu lodged a complaint at Burla police station stating that her daughter accidentally fell off the bridge into the river.

Based on the complaint, Burla police registered a case (115/2026) of unnatural death and launched an investigation.

According to police and eyewitnesses, Anju had been staying in Mahatab Nagar area for the past

six months with a youth Mukesh Chhatrapal of Talabhatapada after being separated from her former husband.

The video of the incident, which occurred around 11am, went viral showing several passersby trying to stop the woman from jumping off the bridge along National Highway 53.

Police and Fire Services personnel reached the spot after being alerted by locals and recovered the body. The body was sent for postmortem.



AI TIE-UP: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Google CEO Sundar Pichai during a meeting, on the sidelines of AI Impact Summit 2026, in New Delhi, Wednesday

PTI PHOTO

Google unveils India-US subsea cable initiative

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 18: Betting big on India’s AI potential, Google CEO Sundar Pichai Wednesday announced a new subsea cable initiative to boost AI connectivity between India, the US and other locations, alongside partnerships for cloud infrastructure platform support to over 20 million public servants across 800 districts.

Pichai, who is here to attend the AI Impact Sum-

mit 2026, said the recently announced USD 15-billion AI hub at Vizag in Andhra Pradesh will house a gigawatt-scale compute facility and an international subsea cable gateway. When finished, it will bring jobs and benefits of cutting-edge AI to people and businesses across India, said the top boss of Google, the tech company behind foundational AI models such as Gemini and Gemma, which serve as the backbone for enhanced

search, cloud services, and enterprise-grade tools.

“I believe India is going to have an extraordinary trajectory with AI, and we want to be a partner,” he said at a media event held on the sidelines of the Summit.

Pichai highlighted India’s extraordinary potential in AI. “AI is the biggest platform shift of our lifetime...for countries like India, AI presents a chance to leapfrog age-old gaps and create new opportunities.”

Shark spotted in Antarctic waters

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Melbourne, Feb 18: An ungainly barrel of a shark cruising languidly over a barren seabed far too deep for the sun’s rays to illuminate was an unexpected sight.

Many experts had thought sharks didn’t exist in the frigid waters of Antarctica before this sleeper shark lumbered warily and briefly into the spotlight of a video camera, researcher Alan Jamieson said this week. The shark, filmed in January 2025, was a substantial specimen with an estimated length of between 3 and 4 metre (10 and 13 ft).

“We went down there not expecting to see sharks because there’s a general thumb rule that you don’t get sharks in Antarctica,” Jamieson said.

And it’s not even a little one either. It’s a hunk of a shark. These things are tanks, he added.

The camera operated by Minderoo-UWA Deep-Sea Research Centre, which investigates life in the deepest parts of the world’s



oceans, was positioned off the South Shetland Islands near the Antarctic Peninsula. That is well inside the boundaries of the Antarctic Ocean, also known as the Southern Ocean, which is defined as below the 60-degree south latitude line.

The research centre Wednesday gave ‘The Associated Press’ permission to publish the images.

The shark was 490 metre (1,608 feet) deep where the water temperature was a near-freezing 1.27 degrees Celsius (34.29 degrees Fahrenheit).

A skate appears in the seabed and seemingly unperturbed by the passing shark. The skate, a shark relative that looks like a stingray, was no surprise

since scientists already knew their range extended that far south.

Jamieson, who is the founding director of the University of Western Australia-based research centre, said he could find no record of another shark found in the Antarctic Ocean.

Peter Kyne, a Charles Darwin University conservation biologist independent of the research centre, agreed that a shark had never before been recorded so far south.

Climate change and warming oceans could potentially be driving sharks to the Southern Hemisphere’s colder waters, but there was limited data on range changes near Antarctica because of the region’s remoteness, Kyne said.

Youth succumbs to jumbo attack

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhuban, Feb 18: A 30-year-old man from Dhenkanal district who was critically injured in a tusker attack died Wednesday while undergoing treatment at SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack.

The deceased, Madan Behera of Basudevpur village under Bhuban police limits, was attacked by a tusk-

er early Tuesday morning when he had stepped out of his house. The elephant reportedly lifted and flung him with its trunk, causing severe internal injuries. He was rescued and rushed to hospital, where he succumbed to his injuries early Wednesday.

Bhuban ranger Rakesh Kumar Dalei assured that government assistance would be provided.

Man detained for strangling wife

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bolangir, Feb 18: A man was detained by police for allegedly strangling his wife to death with her saree at Jamapada village under Sindhekela police limits in Bolangir district Wednesday.

The deceased was identified as Pushpanjali Rana. Police said the accused, Krupa Rana, allegedly used the saree she was wearing to strangle her at their Jamapada-Khuntiapada residence.

According to police, the accused attempted to flee the scene after committing the crime. However, he was caught by a team of Sindhekela police. He has been brought to the police station and detained for questioning.

Police recovered the body and began an investigation. A scientific team also visited the scene to collect evidence.

Publications Division
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
Government of India

APPEAL

The Publications Division is undertaking a nationwide Archival and Digitization Initiative to preserve rare and historically significant books published by DPD from 1941 to 1990. Many of these works are now out of print, rare, or unavailable, and an effort is being made to trace and consolidate them for archival purposes.

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Fish production down

Bhubaneswar: Fish production in Chilika Lake went down by around 1,200 tonnes in 2024-25 in comparison to the figure in 2023-24, F&ARD Minister Gokulananda Mallik told the Assembly Wednesday. Responding to a question of Jatni MLA Bibhuti Bhusan Balabantaray, he said, “Chilika saw fish production of 20,947.42 tonnes in 2023-24. It registered 19,754.30 tonnes of fish production in 2024-25 – 1,193.12 tonnes less than previous year.”

CLASSIFIED
AFFIDAVIT

I hereto known as Suman Chandak, W/o. Rakshit Mundhra, R/o. House No. 1658, Sector - 7, Near Jan kalyan Mandir, Sector - 7, Faridabad, Haryana - 121006 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Suman Mundhra.

Rishikesh Ray, age - 20 years, S/o Srikanta Ray of Vill/PO - Ratalanga, PS : Bari, Dist. : Jajpur at Present M-III R/84 Madhuban, PO/PS : Paradeep, Dist. : Jagatsinghpur, Odisha do here by declare by virtue of this affidavit sworn before the Executive Magistrate, Jagatsinghpur dtd. 13.02.2026. I will be known as Rishikesh Ray, S/o ‘Srikant Ray’ or ‘Srikanta Ray’ for all Purposes.

By virtue of an affidavit sworn before Executive Magistrate, Jajpur, Odisha dated 16.02.2026. I Manoranjan Swain, S/o : Laxmidhar Swain, At/PO-Gopalpur, PS : Tritol, Dist : Jagatsinghpur, State : Odisha, PIN : 754104, declare that, I have changed my name from Manoranjan Swamy to Manoranjan Swain. Henceforth, I shall be known as Manoranjan Swain for all purpose.

An affidavit sworn before the Executive Magistrate, Bhawanipatna on 18.02.2026, I Sushree Sangita Panigrahi, D/o. Anil Kumar Panigrahi declare that after getting married on 23.04.2008 to Ajaya Kumar Panda, S/o. Banamali Panda of Shaktinagar Para, Bhawanipatna have changed my name from Sushree Sangita Panigrahi to Sangita Panda. Henceforth I shall be known and identified as Sangita Panda for all purposes.

By virtue of an affidavit sworn before the Executive Magistrate, Kundra, I, Shri Ambu Patra, resident of At- Khotalapadar, P.O.- Bhusangaguda, P.S.- Kundra, Dist.- Koraput declared by this affidavit No. 27, Dtd.-16.02.2026 that in my son’s actual name is “ANKUS KUMAR PATRA”, but in his school certificate has been wrongly mentioned as ANKUSH KUMAR PATRO. That now he wants to change his name from Ankus Kumar Patra for all purposes. So I swear that Ankus Kumar Patra and Ankush Kumar Patro is one and same person i.e. my son’s name only. Ambu Patra Deponent

CoE status for 22 ITIs



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 18: If things go well, 22 government Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) in Odisha will be upgraded into Centres of Excellence (CoEs) at a total cost of ₹779 crore, with the state government signing a pact with Tata Technologies in this regard Wednesday.

Four strategic MoUs were exchanged Wednesday in the presence of Industries and Skill Development & Technical Education (SD&TE) Minister Sampad Chandra Swain at World Skill Center here, marking a major step forward in the state’s efforts to transform its skilling ecosystem and align it closely with industry needs.

Addressing the gathering, Swain underscored that making Odisha’s youth industry-ready remains a central priority of the government. He observed that while infrastructure builds industries, it is skills that build the human capital necessary to sustain and grow them. “Skill development is not a peripheral welfare measure; it is a core economic strategy that will drive inclusive growth

Making youth industry-ready priority of government: SD&TE Minister Sampad Chandra Swain

₹779 CRORE PROJECT

- The state government will bear 14% of project cost, while Tata Technologies will contribute 86%
- The upgraded ITIs will be equipped with state-of-the-art laboratories and industry-grade equipment, bringing training infrastructure at par with modern industrial standards
- The CoEs will focus on high-growth and emerging sectors such as automobile
- Tata Technologies will extend comprehensive handholding support for five years

and global competitiveness,” he said, adding that empowering youth with relevant and future-ready skills is essential to achieving the state’s long-term development goals.

A key highlight of the ceremony was the partnership with Tata Technologies to upgrade 22 government ITIs across Odisha into CoEs at a total project cost of ₹779.00 crore.

As per the pact, the state government will bear 14 per cent of the project cost, while Tata

Technologies will contribute approximately 86 per cent. The upgraded ITIs will be equipped with state-of-the-art laboratories and industry-grade equipment, bringing training infrastructure at par with modern industrial standards.

The CoEs will focus on high-growth and emerging sectors such as automobile including electric vehicles, design and verification tools, 3D printing and additive manufacturing, Internet of Things (IoT), robotics and advanced manufacturing, advanced CNC and VMC machining, advanced plumbing technology, and process control and automation technology.

Tata Technologies will also extend comprehensive handholding support for five years, including deployment of trainers, maintenance of equipment, and facilitation of placements to ensure strong industry linkage and sustainable outcomes, it was learnt.

On the occasion, three other MoUs were also exchanged. “A collaboration with UNICEF will leverage the YouthHub platform to facilitate placement of over 2,000 girls through digital skilling and an outcome-based funding model. A partnership between the World Skill Center and Kawasaki Robotics India Pvt. Ltd. aims to strengthen capacity in robotics, automation, and Industry 4.0 technologies, preparing youth for advanced manufacturing ecosystems,” according to the Industries and SD&TE departments.

“Another MoU between the World Skill Center and Atreya Global Pvt. Ltd. will create structured overseas employment pathways in Germany and other European countries by integrating skilling, language training, placement facilitation, and post-placement support,” they said.

TRAINING PROG FOR NEW ASST EXE ENGINEERS
Harichandan for maintaining high construction standards

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 18: Making optimal use of modern technology and maintaining high construction standards are essential to realising the vision of a developed Odisha by 2036 and a developed India by 2047, Works Minister Prithiviraj Harichandan said Wednesday.

Addressing the inaugural session of the training programme here for newly appointed Assistant Executive Engineers under the Works department, Harichandan said under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the leadership of Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, Odisha is currently moving rapidly on the path of progress.

“While the state has set a goal of building a developed Odisha by 2036, the Central government has set a target of achieving a developed India by 2047. However, the dream of building a developed state and a developed nation cannot be realised without robust infrastructure. Therefore, by making full use of modern technology and emphasising quality in construction, we can achieve this goal,” Harichandan, who also holds the Law and Excise portfolios, said.

He said that the government has set a goal of constructing world-class roads in the state. “The state government is working to implement the best construction practices adopted in major cities in Odisha. As a result, in the coming days, traffic congestion on various roads

can be managed, and regular maintenance will ensure pothole-free roads,” Harichandan said.

He further stated that this is the era of modern technology and artificial intelligence. “Engineers have a crucial role in building advanced infrastructure. By gaining knowledge through in-depth study and this training programme, the newly appointed Assistant Executive Engineers can actively contribute to the state’s development journey,” the Works minister said and advised the new recruits to discharge their duties with integrity and punctuality.

Speaking on the occasion, Rural Development and Panchayati Raj & Drinking Water Minister Rabi Narayan Naik said that to achieve real development in the state, communication and connectivity systems

must be strengthened from rural areas to major cities.

“New techniques and knowledge must be extensively utilised in the construction of roads and bridges. The newly appointed assistant executive engineers possess considerable skills, and through this training programme, they can further sharpen their abilities and become key drivers of the state’s development,” he said.

Works department Engineer-in-Chief Satyabrata Behera delivered the welcome address, while Rural Development Engineer-in-Chief Pradeep Kumar Jena proposed the vote of thanks.

New techniques and knowledge must be extensively utilised in the construction of roads and bridges. The newly appointed assistant executive engineers possess considerable skills, and through this training programme, they can further sharpen their abilities and become key drivers of the state’s development

RABI NARAYAN NAIK I RURAL DEVELOPMENT MINISTER

HDFC Bank’s ‘Parivartan’ impacts 38.74L in Odisha

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 18: HDFC Bank’s CSR initiative— Parivartan has impacted over 38.74 lakh lives across Odisha since 2017, said bank’s CSR head Nusrat Pathan while addressing a press meet here Wednesday. Bank’s interventions are designed to address region-specific needs and promote inclusive growth at the grassroots level, Pathan added.

“We believe CSR is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Through Parivartan, we implement need-based interventions that respond to the unique challenges of each region. Our work in Odisha reflects this philosophy, from supporting farmers with sustainable agriculture to strengthening education and skilling. We remain committed to fostering inclusive growth and creating lasting impact,”

Pathan said.

The programme is currently active in 22 districts, including seven aspirational districts and six aspirational blocks. Under the initiative, the bank works across six focus areas — rural development, promotion of education, skill training and livelihood enhancement, healthcare and hygiene, financial literacy and inclusion, and natural resource management.

The holistic rural development programme has covered more than 230 villages in districts such as Bolangir, Kendrapara, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Nabarangpur, Nayagarh, Puri and Rayagada. Focused development programmes have also been implemented in Angul, Bargarh, Dhenkanal, Ganjam, Jagatsinghpur, Jajpur, Kalahandi, Kandhamal and Koraput, among others.

Class XII exams begin amid tight security

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Feb 18: The Class XII, or Plus II, final examinations being conducted by the Council of Higher Secondary Education (CHSE) began amid heavy security Wednesday, officials said.

A total of 4.01 lakh students are appearing for the exams across 1,364 centres, they said. The exams will continue till March 28, they added.

A total of 2.56 lakh students are enrolled in the Arts stream, 1.14 lakh in Science, and 24,621 in Commerce, CHSE’s Controller of Examinations Prasanta Kumar Parida said, adding that there are also 5,932 students of Vocational studies.

The exams began at 10am and concluded at 1pm for the day, he added. Parida said arrangement has been made for live-streaming from all examination centres. Altogether 211 question



paper hubs are being monitored using ‘AI technology’.

Special squads have been deployed to conduct surprise inspections to check any malpractices, he added.

The practical examinations were conducted between January 2 and 15.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi extend-

ed greetings to all the students appearing for the examination.

“My heartfelt wishes and blessings to all the students appearing for the Plus II examinations conducted by the Council of Higher Secondary Education (CHSE) for the 2025-26 academic year. Exams are a beautiful expression of your knowledge and hard work. There’s no need to

feel any fear or pressure about it. Remember, approaching exams with patience rather than stress will elevate your performance. Treat exams as a celebration, not a burden, and face the question papers with complete confidence. Your long-term hard work, dedication, and resolve will surely lead to success”, read his post on X.

20 women drivers set to join 'Ama Bus' fleet

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 18: 20 women drivers, holding valid Heavy Motor Vehicle (HMV) licences, successfully completed 14-day advanced training programme in Pune and all set to be inducted in Capital Region Urban Transport (CRUT) Ama Bus services.

The flagship public transport system of the state government—CRUT’s Ama Bus service aims to promote women-led urban mobility and gender-inclusive public transport roadmap.

Housing and Urban Development Additional Chief Sec-



retary Usha Padhee said that before formal induction, the trained drivers will undergo an additional 15-day local driving practice and route familiarisation programme. “Only

after successful completion of field practice and assessment, the drivers will be inducted as a dedicated women crew to operate Ama Bus services,” she said. “This is not just about

BOOST TO RAIL CONNECTIVITY IN W ODISHA

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 18: In a major step towards enhancing rail infrastructure in Western Odisha, the East Coast Railway (ECoR) has extended the Howrah-Titlagarh Ispat Express to Junagarh Road, providing a significant connectivity boost to the region.

According to ECoR sources, the extension is expected to improve accessibility and create new opportunities for

residents of Bolangir and Kalahandi districts.

The inaugural run of the extended stretch between Junagarh Road and Titlagarh is scheduled for February 19, marking an important milestone in regional rail services.

“Train No-12871 (Howrah-Titlagarh Express) will now operate up to Junagarh Road starting February 21, departing from Howrah. Similarly, Train No-12872 (Titlagarh-Howrah Express) will originate from Ju-

nagarh Road beginning February 22. Between Titlagarh and Junagarh Road, the extended service will halt at Kesinga, Lanjigarh Road, and Bhawanipatna,” ECoR sources said.

All existing stoppages and timings between Howrah and Titlagarh will remain unchanged. The train will continue to run as a superfast express between Howrah and Titlagarh and operate as a mail/express service on the Titlagarh-Junagarh Road section, it said.

GARG SETS MARCH DEADLINE FOR KEY WATER PROJECTS

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 18: Chief Secretary Anu Garg Wednesday directed officers to ensure completion of all single-village and solar-powered drinking water projects across the state within March 2026.

The Chief Secretary held a comprehensive review meeting with Collectors of all districts to assess the progress of major development schemes and government programmes being implemented at the grassroots level.

Garg reviewed the progress and fund utilisation under key schemes such as the MLA Local Area Development Fund (MLALADF), MP Local Area Development Scheme (MP-LADS), and the Chief Minister’s Special Assistance. She directed officers to ensure the timely completion of pending projects and to expedite works that are yet to commence.

Issues relating to the management of minor minerals were also discussed in the presence of senior officers from the Mines department. Emphasising the importance of the District Survey Report (DSR) for effective identification and regulation of mineral resources, Garg instructed districts that have not yet submitted their reports to do so at the earliest.

The status of mega drinking water projects was reviewed in detail. Officers were directed to strengthen inter-departmental coordination, resolve land acquisition bottlenecks, and ensure timely electricity connections to accelerate project implementation.

Garg set a deadline of March 2026 for completion of all single-village and solar-powered drinking water projects across the state.

MARKET WATCH							
CURRENCY			BOURSES		COMMODITIES		
INDEX	VARIATION		INDEX	VARIATION		INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR	90.71	▲ 0.05	SENSEX	83734.25	▲ 283.29	GOLD	₹155,500 ▲ ₹4082
EURO	107.40	▼ 0.11	NIFTY	25819.35	▲ 93.95	SILVER	₹242,448 ▲ ₹13702

WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	33.0°	30.2°	Dry weather likely to prevail
Min Temp	16.1°	15.6°	
Humidity	68%	80%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	

Woman found dead near tracks; kin allege murder

POST NEWS NETWORK

POST NEWS NETWORK

AGENCIES

S. E. RAILWAY – TENDER

Tender Notice No. CKP-SOUTH-25-26-21. Divisional Railway Manager/ Engg., Chakracharpur acting For & On behalf of The President of India invites E-Tenders against Open Tenders

Manual offers are not allowed against this tender, and any such manual offer received shall be ignored. **Name of work :** Balance work of Soft upgradation of BARBIL Railway station over Chakracharpur Division under Sr. DEN (South). **Tender Value :** ₹ 3,16,64,868.31. **EMD :** ₹ 3,08,300/-

Cost of Tender form : ₹ 0. **Date of opening :** 12.03.2026. The tender can be viewed at Website <http://www.ireps.gov.in> The tenderer/ bidders must have Class-III Digital Signature Certificate & must be registered under on IREPS Portal. Only registered tenderer/ bidder can participate on e-tendering. All relevant paper must be uploaded at the time of participating in e-tendering. **Note :** e-Tender Forms shall be issued free of cost to all tenderers. (Authority-Rly. Bd.'s letter No. 2020/CE-I/CT/3E/GCC/Polcy dt. 16.07.2020)

(PR-1207)

POST NEWS NETWORK

Karunakar allegedly reached his in-laws' house Tuesday night, and picked


Further investigation is underway.

NOT JUST ROADS, BUILDING A NATION

“

All problems of existence are essentially problems of Harmony.

SRI AUROBINDO



Widening Rift

As soon as US Secretary of State Marco Rubio rose to address this year’s Munich Security Conference, it was evident that the Trump administration intended to change its rhetoric toward America’s longstanding European allies. While Vice President JD Vance used his remarks last year to hector and insult European leaders, Rubio seemed eager to flatter. After paying homage to European history and culture – highlighting various achievements, from the Sistine Chapel to the Beatles – he acknowledged that the United States is itself a child of Europe.

It all sounded very nice to European ears after a year that had horrified everyone committed to the transatlantic relationship. Not only has the administration Rubio represents accused Europe of inviting “civilizational erasure.” It has even threatened to seize Greenland, the sovereign territory of a fellow NATO member (Denmark). Was Rubio signaling a change?

On the contrary, after the applause died down, it soon became obvious that the Trump administration’s basic message remains the same. Both in its substance and its perspective on the world, Rubio’s speech revealed a deep gulf between the Trump administration and the Europeans in the room. Notably, Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine was mentioned only in passing, and with nary a hint of criticism of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Yet with casualties around 1.2 million, a front line stretching 1,200 kilometers (746 miles), and more than 400 Russian attack drones targeting Ukrainian infrastructure and civilian centers the previous week, one would think the horror show playing out on NATO’s eastern flank would merit some mention.

The threat that Russia poses is a dominant concern for Europeans, because they recognize that the defense of Ukraine today is vital to European security tomorrow. For the Trump administration, however, the issue does not even bear mentioning. In terms of basic threat perceptions, the gulf between the US and Europe could hardly be wider.

Before praising European culture and history, Rubio outlined the MAGA, fun-house-mirror version of events leading up to the present moment. The decades since the end of the Cold War were based on a “dangerous delusion” and a “dogmatic vision of free and unfettered trade,” he argued. The “rules-based global order” is “an overused term” that ignores the lessons from 5,000 years of human history and has driven too many societies to “appease a climate cult.”

It is no secret that the “rules-based order” is a MAGA boogeyman. Another member of the Trump administration in attendance, Elbridge Colby, the grandson of Richard Nixon’s CIA director, William Colby, noted with satisfaction that he had heard the term mentioned only once at a recent NATO ministerial meeting.

Obviously, no European outside of the continent’s most extreme political fringes shares this attitude. We understand that the rules-based global order was never perfect, and that anyone who is inclined to list its failures and shortcomings can do so easily. But we also know that its achievements following the last bloody conflict between great powers have been close to miraculous.

During the decades-long period of relative peace and stability following World War II, the global population tripled, life expectancy doubled, and the world economy grew 15-fold. It was the longest period without a war between great powers since the end of the Roman Empire. There simply is no denying that networks of global rules, norms, and agreements were a key factor in making this possible.

Nor is there any doubt that the rules-based order is under severe threat. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was a blatant violation of one of its most fundamental rules: respect for territorial integrity. Similarly, China has ignored international judgments concerning its territorial claims in the South China Sea, and the Trump administration has violated rules and norms with gleeful abandon. In addition to disparaging the United Nations and launching a trade war against the entire world, it has broken numerous international agreements and withdrawn the US from international bodies that oversee everything from global health to climate change.

By contrast, Europeans believe that what remains of the rules-based order is worth preserving. In fact, they are taking pains to strengthen many of its core pillars. That is what the European Union’s new free-trade agreements with South America’s Mercosur bloc (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay) and India are about. Moreover, Europeans are joining with others to maintain global progress on combating climate change and mitigating health threats.

Europe has no interest in a world subject to the capricious whims of the mighty, where rights have no meaning because the vulnerable can always be thrown to the wolves. Rubio’s remarks didn’t go quite that far, but statements from others in the Trump administration have. America’s top diplomat may have offered a kinder, gentler presentation than his master would have given, but the message was the same. The transatlantic divide has become massive, and it is still widening.

The writer is a former prime minister and foreign minister of Sweden.

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WISDOM CORNER

“There is frequently more to be learned from the unexpected questions of a child than the discourses of men.

JOHN LOCKE

“The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible.

ARTHUR C. CLARKE

“The greatest happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved; loved for ourselves, or rather, loved in spite of ourselves.

VICTOR HUGO

FOCUS INDIA

HOPE & DISAPPOINTMENT

Last month, I travelled across India, listening, observing, and taking stock. While the journey was energising and often inspiring, it left me with an open question: Where is the world’s most populous country headed?

My trip began in West Bengal’s Purulia district, a relatively poor region marked by beautiful landscapes of lakes and rolling hills, some crowned with small, ancient temples. Purulia’s population is a mosaic of cultures and tribal communities. Among them are the Santhals, an Adivasi community whose ancestors arrived in the subcontinent thousands of years ago, long before the Indo-Aryan migrations around 1600 BCE reshaped its social order.

In the midst of this stark terrain stands something remarkable: the Filix School. Founded in 2014 by two women, it has grown into a state-of-the-art English-language institution, drawing students from villages near and far. I was there to teach during the school’s week-long Discover the World of Economics course, an annual programme – now in its second year – that invites upper-secondary students from across India. A select group joins local village students for five days of lectures and field trips.

This year’s speakers included Mahan Mj, a monk and renowned mathematician; Prabhat Patnaik, a celebrated Marxist economist from Delhi; and economists from leading universities and the World Bank. Watching young Hindus, Muslims, and Christians from the surrounding villages sit alongside students from Bangalore, Mumbai, and Pune – listening intently to lectures on economics, history, and mathematics, and occasionally challenging the speakers – was deeply heartening. By cultivating such intellectual curiosity, India could



India’s promise is undeniable and its talent abundant, yet politics and empty rhetoric continue to undermine its prospects

unlock its full potential.

My optimism deepened in Bangalore, where I attended the Infosys Science Foundation’s annual ceremony honouring six prize winners in computer science, economics, mathematics, life sciences, physical sciences, and the humanities and social sciences. Laureates spoke about their research and its wider implications, while the keynote address was delivered by the American cell biologist Randy Schekman, winner of the 2013 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. The packed auditorium conveyed attendees’ deep confidence in scientific scholarship.

From Bangalore, I travelled to Pune, a three-hour drive from Mumbai, to visit Symbiosis and FLAME universities. These institutions serve India’s more affluent classes, and their campuses rival those of leading European and American universities. At the annual conference of the Indian Society of Labour Economics, which was held at Symbiosis, scholars from around the world gathered to debate the impact of technological change and shrinking labour demand. The discussions were rigorous and unsparing.

After weeks of intense discussions with students, researchers, bureaucrats, and

policymakers, I spent the final leg of my trip in Delhi. There, poring over the latest economic data and listening to political leaders respond to mounting challenges with familiar slogans, my optimism began to fade. India’s promise is undeniable and its talent abundant, yet politics and empty rhetoric continue to undermine its prospects.

Compounding the problem is the lack of reliable statistics. India was once known for the transparency and credibility of its data. But the quality of official statistics has eroded, and there appears to be a growing reluctance to release figures that reveal any economic weakness. This, in turn, implies that necessary corrective measures are not taken.

This trend is not confined to statistics. India was once a leader among emerging economies in engineering, science, and higher education. The establishment of the Indian Institutes of Technology in the early 1950s, along with major investments in science and mathematics, positioned the country as a research hub for the Global South. That standing, too, has weakened in recent years.

One telling measure is patent activity. After overtaking

the US as the world’s leading patent filer, China had roughly five million patents in force in 2023, compared with America’s 3.5 million. India’s total, by contrast, was just 188,785, despite five consecutive years of double-digit growth.

To be fair, this problem is not new. When I was advising the Indian government around 2009, I argued that far greater attention needed to be paid to intellectual-property rights. In today’s increasingly competitive global economy, that imperative has only become more urgent.

In my view, however, the biggest challenge casting a shadow over India’s future is pollution. Over the past decade, air quality in Delhi and much of northern India has reached intolerable levels. If left unchecked, it will deter foreign investors, dampen tourism, and jeopardize long-term growth.

What should be done? First, the central government must acknowledge the severity of the problem and stop shifting blame to state and local authorities. Air pollution does not respect state boundaries; it requires coordinated national action. To this end, the government should urgently convene the country’s leading scientists and policymakers to craft and implement a coherent, time-bound national strategy.

China offers a useful model. Through binding targets, tighter emissions standards, and strict enforcement, it managed to cut air pollution dramatically, showing what determined policy can achieve in just a few years.

The writer, a former chief economist of the World Bank and chief economic adviser to the Government of India, is Professor of Economics at Cornell University.

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SPECTRUM ODISHA

Gender budget: Big numbers, bigger questions

Since centuries, the contribution of women (care economy) has been ignored in national accounts. It is specifically predominant in India and especially in Odisha due to the orthodox socio-cultural customs and traditions. The patriarchal society deeply ingrains the conviction that women will take care of the family without remuneration. This belief largely widens gender inequality. However, recently the state government has tried to reduce gender inequality through macroeconomic policies, especially annual budgets.

Odisha’s engagement with gender budgeting predates many states. The Gender Budget Statement, introduced in 2012-13, became a routine part of the state’s fiscal architecture. In recent past, Odisha has emerged as one of the most consistent practitioners of gender budgeting. The State’s gender budget has expanded steadily in scale, institutional coverage and political visibility. In budget 2025-26, the government allocated Rs 89,861.77 crore under gender budget (an increase of 18.85% from Rs 75,611.58 crore in 2024-25). Yet, behind the impressive numbers lies a more complex question: has gender budgeting moved from fiscal commitment to real capability-building for women?

COVID-19 pandemic exposed

the disproportionate burden borne by women - loss of livelihoods, increased unpaid care work, health risks and rising vulnerability. This forced gender budgeting to shift from a technical exercise to a policy necessity. In 2020-21, women-specific schemes accounted for less than 2% of total state expenditure, while women-related components in composite schemes formed roughly one-third of the budget.

The post-pandemic years saw a clear fiscal expansion. By 2022-23, the total gender budget crossed Rs 56,000 crore, accounting for nearly 45% of total state expenditure and over 10% of GSDP. These ratios place Odisha among top States nationally in terms of gender-responsive fiscal effort. Two shifts stand out during this period. First, women-specific allocations grew sharply, particularly after the strengthening of Mission Shakti as a dedicated department. Allocations for women’s livelihoods, SHGs, nutrition and safety more than doubled between 2020-21 and 2022-23, signalling a strong political commitment to women’s economic empowerment. Second, the bulk of gender-responsive spending continued to flow through gender-sensitive schemes - those where at least 30% of allocations benefit women. For instance, the Subhadra Yojana, a major women-centric initiative (2024-2029), has a total

estimated budget allocation of Rs 55,825 crore to provide financial assistance of Rs 50,000 to eligible women over five years. The 2024-25 Budget Estimate (BE) specifically allocated Rs 10,000 crore for this scheme.

The sharp rise in female labour force participation (LFPR) in Odisha since 2020 coincides with a significant expansion in the state’s Gender Budget allocations. Between 2020-21 and 2022-23, women-specific expenditures nearly doubled. During the same period, rural female LFPR rose from 34.7% to 52.6% by 2023-24, while overall female participation increased from 32.9% to 49.4%. This parallel movement suggests that expanded gender-responsive fiscal interventions may have contributed to easing women’s entry and re-entry into the workforce.

However, this structure also reveals a limitation. Gender budgeting in Odisha remains heavily concentrated within a few social sector departments. Women and Child Development, Mission Shakti and Health and Family Welfare dominate women-specific spending year after year. While this ensures administrative focus, it risks reinforcing the idea that gender is the responsibility of a handful of departments rather than a cross-cutting concern. Infrastructure, transport, energy and urban development sectors

that deeply influence women’s mobility, safety and employment remain peripheral to the gender budgeting narrative.

Another concern is that Odisha’s gender budget remains largely input-driven. Budget documents meticulously track allocations and departmental shares but offer limited evidence on outcomes. The next phase of gender budgeting in Odisha must therefore focus on depth rather than scale. First, allocations need to be explicitly linked to outcomes - employment, health, education and safety; rather than only scheme-wise expenditure. Second, departments outside the traditional social sector must be systematically integrated into the gender budgeting framework. Third, greater transparency and public engagement are needed so that gender budgeting becomes a tool of democratic accountability, not just fiscal reporting.

Odisha’s experience shows that gender budgeting is no longer about whether the state spends on women. The real challenge now is how effectively that spending reshapes women’s economic opportunities and everyday lives.

Sourav Mohanty is Assistant Professor of Economics at Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune. Dillip Kumar Muduli is Lecturer in Economics at SVM Autonomous College, Jagatsinghpur.

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

OrissaPOST
B-15, Rasulgari Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

Beyond jets & missiles

Sir, India and France have unveiled a wide-ranging set of initiatives that further deepen their already robust strategic partnership following the summit in Mumbai between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Emmanuel Macron. At a time when global politics is marked by disorder and uncertainty, the announcements spanning defence, technology and supply chains underline how the Indo-French relationship can function as a stabilising force. The decision to establish an Indian assembly line for Airbus’s H125 utility helicopter in Kolar and to manufacture French HAMMER missiles domestically signals strong confidence in India’s defence-industrial ambitions. Beyond security, both leaders agreed to deepen cooperation on securing critical and rare-earth minerals vital for future technologies and economic competitiveness. France’s steadfast support for India since the 1998 nuclear tests has reinforced Paris’s credibility as a reliable partner. From civilian nuclear cooperation to advanced defence platforms, mutual trust has expanded steadily. Both leaders also advocate a rules-based international order and maintain complicated equations with Donald Trump. Yet, the partnership must move beyond jets and missiles.

N Sadhasiva Reddy, BANGALORE

Encouraging move

Sir, It is encouraging to note that former cricketing greats, including World Cup-winning captains Kapil Dev, Clive Lloyd and Steve Waugh have issued a joint statement, expressing their concern for former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan’s health inside prison. In their statement, these legendary cricketers have addressed the alarming reports on Imran Khan’s deteriorating health, particularly issues related to his vision while in custody. The cricketers’ appeal to the Pakistan government, calls for comprehensive medical care, transparent legal proceedings and humane conditions for the 73-year-old cricket star-turned-politician. Khan is in detention with a sentence for 14 years imprisonment over charges of corruption and sharing state secrets. It is important that he must be treated with humanity and dignity, and be provided with all basic needs inside the cell, which reportedly lacks natural light and even adequate ventilation.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, CHENNAI



Branded witch, woman burnt alive with baby in arms

The incident has once again highlighted the persistent menace of witch-hunting in certain rural pockets, despite stringent legal provisions against such practices

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Chaibasa (Jharkhand), Feb 18: In a gruesome incident that has sent shockwaves across Jharkhand, a woman and her minor son were burnt alive by a group of villagers on suspicion of practising witchcraft in West

Singbhum district, officials said Wednesday.

The incident occurred late Tuesday night under the Kumardungi police station limits.

According to police, the accused allegedly barged into the family's house, poured petrol on the woman and her child,



and set them ablaze. Both died on the spot. The woman's husband also sustained severe burn injuries while attempting to save them and has been admitted to a nearby hospital, where his condition is stated to be critical.

Preliminary investigations suggest that rumours had been

circulating in the village for several days linking the family to certain illnesses and other incidents. The woman was allegedly branded a "witch" by some villagers, which ultimately led to the brutal attack.

Police said that around 12 villagers allegedly conspired to execute the crime. In a dramatic turn, all 12 accused appeared at the Kumardungi police station on Wednesday morning and surrendered. They have since been taken into custody and are being interrogated.

Senior police officials rushed

to the spot to assess the situation, and additional forces have been deployed in the village to prevent any further unrest. A forensic team has also been pressed into service to collect evidence from the crime scene.

An FIR is being registered under relevant sections pertaining to murder, attempt to murder, criminal conspiracy, and other serious offences.

Authorities said a detailed investigation is underway to ascertain the exact sequence of events and identify any additional persons involved.

99.998TH PERCENTILE

Kota twins shock with identical JEE Main score

The twins from Bhubaneswar, students of Allen Career Institute here, appeared for the JEE Main 2026 in the same shift at the same centre

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kota, Feb 18: Competitiveness ended at home for identical twins Mahroof Ahmed Khan and Masroor Ahmed Khan, as they both scored an identical 285 in their JEE Main, hitting the 99.998th percentile.

The twins from Bhubaneswar, students of Allen Career Institute here, appeared for the JEE Main 2026 in the same shift at the same centre.

The exam result was declared Monday.

Born May 7, 2008, the brothers studied together throughout, from school to coaching classes.

According to their coaching institute, their mother, Dr Zeenat Begum, had been a gynaecologist working with the Odisha government since the 1990s, before she resigned to move to Kota with them in 2023. "We shifted to Kota in 2023,

initially for Olympiad preparation after both brothers qualified for the International Science Olympiad. They later decided to pursue JEE coaching," Begum said.

She said the brothers have been high achievers all along with Mahroof scoring 95.2 per cent and Masroor 97.2 per cent in Class 10. They have also won nearly 40 medals (each) in national and international Olympiads, she said.

The twins followed similar study strategies and timetables, often competing against each other in tests. If one scored lower, they motivated and helped each other analyse mistakes to improve in subsequent exams.

"They had an interest in maths from the beginning, so they chose to go for engineering rather than medicine. They aspire to pursue BTech in Computer Science at IIT Bombay. Their priority is computer science," she said.

Beyond academics, karate held both brothers' interest in their childhood, Begum said.

The twins are now preparing for JEE Advanced. Their father is also a doctor, and is currently working in Odisha.



Rajasthan JJM scam back in spotlight

Jaipur: The alleged Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) scam in Rajasthan has once again come into focus, with state minister Kirodi Lal Meena reiterating his claim of large-scale irregularities worth Rs 20,000 crore. Recent arrests of senior officials including chief engineer (administration), in connection with the case have revived political debate and intensified scrutiny of the investigation. The controversy dates back to June 2023, when Meena staged a two-day sit-in protest outside the Ashok Nagar police station in Jaipur, demanding registration of an FIR over alleged irregularities in JJM tenders. At that time, the Congress government led by Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot was in power. Kirodi Lal Meena has alleged that serious irregularities occurred in the tendering process under the Jal Jeevan Mission, claiming violations of the Rajasthan Transparency in Public Procurement Act, 2012. He stated that violations under the Act can attract punishment ranging from six months to five years in prison. During his 2023 protest, Meena questioned the state government's claim that FIRs were being registered on every complaint.

Tribal hostel food purchases under probe in Rajasthan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaipur, Feb 18: Rajasthan Assembly Speaker Vasudev Devnani Wednesday directed a thorough probe into alleged irregularities in the purchase of food items in tribal residential hostels following heated exchanges between the ruling party and the Opposition in the House.

The direction came after opposition MLAs expressed dissatisfaction with Tribal Area Development Department Minister Babulal Kharadi's reply to a question raised by Congress MLA Arjun Singh Bamaniya during Question Hour.

Kharadi informed the House that a committee has been constituted to inquire into the alleged irregularities. The panel comprises the financial advisor, additional district education officer, accounts officer and assistant accounts officer.

He said the department had earlier directed hostels to procure food items from cooperative consumer stores. However, when the stores expressed an inability to supply the ration within two months, the hostels purchased supplies from the open market.

"Action will be taken as per rules against officials found guilty," the minister assured the House. Kharadi informed the House that the fee had been paid to the Ashram Hostel at Sallopat in Banswara, which is also under scrutiny.

'CONSULTATION FEE' FROM STUDENTS

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Jaipur, Feb 18: The Rajasthan Assembly witnessed heated exchanges and uproar on Wednesday over the collection of a "consultation fee" of Rs 1,000 allegedly being charged from students in state universities and colleges, with Opposition members accusing the government of irregularities and lack of transparency.

Congress MLA from Shahpura, Manish Yadav, raised the issue in the House and accused the government of allowing unauthorised and arbitrary fee collection from students over several years. During Question Hour, he questioned the legality and purpose of the so-called "discussion fee", alleging that it had been collected by universities since the 2016-17 academic session in violation of established rules and without statutory backing.

He cited Rajrishi Bhartrihari Matsya University, Mohanlal Sukhadia University and Rajasthan University, alleging that former vice-chancellors had imposed the fee without proper authorisation and in contravention of existing provisions governing university finances.

Responding to the question, Higher Education Minister Prem Chand Bairwa informed the House that the fee had been collected by Rajrishi Bhartrihari Matsya University amounting to Rs 22.16 crore between 2018-19 and 2024-25,

Ruckus hits Raj Assembly



RAJASTHAN GOVERNMENT FLAYED FOR COLLECTION OF RS 1,000 FEE FROM UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

OPPN ALLEGES THAT AROUND RS 223CR WAS RAISED FROM NEARLY 22.5L STUDENTS WITHOUT JUSTIFICATION

Mohanlal Sukhadia University collected Rs 43.16 crore between 2020-21 and 2024-25, and Rajasthan University collected Rs 156.18 crore between 2017-18 and 2024-25. In total, around Rs 223 crore was collected from approximately 22.5 lakh students, which, according to the minister, was utilised for examination-related purposes and associated academic activities.

Manish Yadav strongly objected to the explanation and questioned how the fee could be used for examination purposes when separate examination fees were already being collected from students. He demanded full transparency and accountability regarding the utilisation of the funds. "How many counselling centres were set up? How many

students received guidance or counselling? Where exactly was this money spent? A detailed account must be presented in the House," he said.

He also alleged that there was no provision under the University Act to charge such a fee, particularly from private students, and accused the government of failing to provide clarity on the utilisation and legal basis of the collected funds.

Leader of Opposition Tika Ram Jully also accused the government of misleading the Assembly and providing inconsistent responses on the issue.

"You are reading an order, not the Act. Under which law are you charging this fee? The government's replies to earlier questions have been contradic-

tory," Jully said, questioning the legality of the fee collection. Both Jully and Yadav demanded that the fee be discontinued immediately and that the amount collected from students be refunded.

Calling the fee collection a "robbery of students' pockets", Manish Yadav alleged that there was no evidence to show that the Rs 223 crore collected had been used for academic discussions or student counselling services. He termed the matter a serious violation of financial norms and demanded intervention by the Governor, a probe into the alleged irregularities, immediate discontinuation of the fee, and refund of the collected amount to students.

Jully further accused Minister Prem Chand Bairwa of violating the privilege of the House by providing contradictory answers on the same issue. He alleged that the minister's responses regarding the "discussion fee" were inconsistent and misleading, further escalating tensions in the Assembly.

Amid the heated exchanges, the Speaker ruled that the matter could not be taken up for detailed discussion during Question Hour.

The issue led to prolonged disruption in the Assembly, reflecting sharp differences between the ruling government and the Opposition over the legality and utilisation of funds collected from students by state universities.

TOURIST ATTRACTION

Jamshedpur zoo gets pair of African lions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jamshedpur, Feb 18: A pair of African lions were brought to the Jamshedpur zoo in Jharkhand from the Nehru Zoological Park in Hyderabad as part of an animal exchange programme, a statement said.

The lion pair, named Manohar and Sridevi, is set to be a major attraction at the Tata Steel Zoological Park, it said.

Under the exchange programme, two male mandrill monkeys were transferred to the Hyderabad zoo, the statement issued by Tata Steel said.

Manohar and Sridevi are approximately nine years old and are in their prime breeding age, it said. A team from the zoo here departed for Hyderabad February 11 in two specially-designed vehicles for the safe and comfortable transport of the animals.

After completing all necessary documentation and health formalities, the team commenced the return journey and safely brought the lions to Jamshedpur around Monday midnight, the statement said.

At present, the zoo here houses three African lions -- two males, Jumbo and Edd, and one female, Zoya -- all approximately 14.5 years old.



A view of the city from Isarlat Sargasooli on a rainy day, in Jaipur, Wednesday

Ramgarh gets cafe run by transgender persons

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ramgarh, Feb 18: In a first-of-its-kind initiative in Jharkhand, a cafe has been set up in Ramgarh district that will be run exclusively by members of the transgender community. Deputy Commissioner (DC) Faiz Aq Ahmed Mumtaz inaugurated 'TransCafe' at the district collectorate park Tuesday.

An initiative of the district administration, the cafe will be managed by a group of 10 transgender persons.

"For far too long, members of the transgender community have faced social exclusion and economic marginalisation, and it is time we correct these historic injustices through concrete action," Mumtaz said after inaugurating the cafe.

"Our initiative aims to integrate them into the mainstream



while respecting their identity and rights. We are committed to creating an inclusive Ramgarh where everyone can live with respect, safety, and opportunity," he said.

The DC said dedicated OPD services are being provided to the transgender community at the district hospital every Saturday afternoon.

"Three dedicated toilets have

For far too long, members of the transgender community have faced social exclusion and economic marginalisation, and it is time we correct these historic injustices through concrete action

FAIZ AQ AHMED MUMTAZ | DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

been opened for them recently at different public places. We have also employed two members of the community, one in the DC office and another in Sadar Hospital, through outsourcing," he added. A self-help group has been formed, and it will run the cafe, the DC said.

SHG president Himanshi Pradhan said the initiative would help transgender persons to lead a respectful life.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA, "e"-PROCUREMENT NOTICE OFFICE OF THE NOTIFIED AREA COUNCIL, DASPALLA

3rd Corrigendum on Tender Call Notice No.66 Dt.08.01.2026
Bid Identification No. NAC-Daspalla-(SAN)-2025-26

No.516 Dt.12.02.2026
No.13001/278/2526 : Corrigendum hereby issued for Tender Call Notice No.66/Dt.08.01.2026 for Sanitation Work of Daspalla NAC regarding extension of date opening of Financial Bid due to unavoidable circumstances.

1. Date & time of opening of Financial Bid : Dt.20.02.2026 at 11.00 A.M.
*All other terms & conditions remain unaltered.

Sd./- Executive Officer
Notified Area Council, Daspalla

OIPR-13001/13141/1/25-26/0003

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF DISTRICT MEDICAL & PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER, BHADRAK (SUB STORE, DNH, BHADRAK)

Email : substorebhadrak@gmail.com
Open Tender Notice No. : 1817/SUB-STORE/Bhadrak/Dated. 18.02.2026

No. 10001/68/2526 : Sealed tenders are invited by the CDM & PHO, Bhadrak from register firms / agencies / companies / authorized dealers / suppliers / authorized distributors / Manufacturers for supply of Medicines, Consumables, Chemicals, Reagents, EIF & BCL and other items. The tender proposal in the prescribed format, along with all supporting documents must reach the Office of the CDM & PHO, Bhadrak on or before 17.03.2026 up to 5:00 P.M. through registered post, speed post, courier only. The technical bid will be opened on 18.03.2026 at 11:30 A.M. at the Conference Hall of the Office of the CDM & PHO, Bhadrak. The detailed tender documents, terms and conditions and other relevant information can be downloaded from the official district website <https://bhadrak.odisha.gov.in>

The undersigned reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason thereof.

Sd./- (Dr. P.K. Praharaj)
Chief District Medical & Public Health Officer, Bhadrak

OIPR-10001/101231/1/25-26/0001

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, KENDRAPARA-JAJPUR

Letter No.757
1st Corrigendum Notice
The changes as detailed below are hereby made in the above N.I.T. :-
1 Cluse no-06 of NIT modified below :-

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Tender online for bidding		Last Date & Time of seeking tender Clarification		Date & Time of opening of Tender			
		Previously fixed on	Presently Modified on	Previously fixed on	Presently Modified on	Technical Bid	Financial Bid	Previously fixed on	Presently Modified on
Chief Construction Engineer, Rural Works Circle, Kendrapara, Jajpur	Tender RCK-03/26	From 09.02.2026 at 11:00 A.M. to 26.02.2026 upto 05.00 P.M.	From 09.02.2026 at 11:00 A.M. to 05.03.2026 upto 05.00 P.M.	26.02.2026 upto 02.00 P.M.	05.03.2026 upto 02.00 P.M.	27.02.2026 at 11.00 A.M.	06.03.2026 at 11.00 A.M.	Will be initiated later	Will be initiated later

All other conditions of NIT remain unaltered.
OIPR-25001/25129/1/25-26/0024

Sd./- Chief Construction Engineer
Rural Works Circle, Kendrapara-Jajpur

of the day
Quote

A substantial portion of funds has been channelled into capital expenditure, infrastructure development, power sector reforms and asset creation, strengthening long-term growth potential



The Congress indulged in vote bank politics in Assam. They had no policy, intention and capability to run the state. But the BJP has all three qualities and we are working with the people



NITIN NABIN | BJP NATIONAL PRESIDENT

Alliance politics has only harmed the BSP in the past. Therefore, party workers are fully committed to contesting the 2027 Assembly elections alone with full dedication



MAYAWATI | BSP PRESIDENT

SHORT TAKES

11 Bangladeshis held

Pune: The Pune police Wednesday detained 11 Bangladeshi women staying illegally in the city, officials said. These women were found in possession of fake Aadhaar cards and other residential documents, they said. Based on the tip-off, a search operation was carried out in the city's Budhwar Peth, a "red light area", Deputy Commissioner of Police Krushikesh Rawale said. "We detained 22 women, out of whom 11 were found to be Bangladeshi nationals and staying illegally in our city for the past few months. We are investigating the matter further," he said.

Case against Blinkit

New Delhi: Delhi Police has registered a case against instant delivery platform, Blinkit, for allegedly selling knives that violate government-prescribed specifications after it was found that people involved in crimes had got them delivered online, an official said Wednesday. Police found such knives listed for sale on Blinkit while looking for online platforms that sold such items. As per existing rules, knives with a blade length exceeding 7.62 cm and width beyond 1.72 cm fall are prohibited.

Bomb scare at courts

Hyderabad: Panic gripped two court complexes in Telangana Wednesday after separate bomb threats triggered security alerts, police said. The CBI court in Hyderabad's Nampally received an email claiming that RDX IEDs had been planted in the judge's chamber and court premises and would detonate when individuals carrying remote controls approached the office. Bomb detection and disposal teams were deployed, and a thorough search was conducted before officials declared the threat a hoax.

Sarpanch shot dead

Amritsar: An Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) sarpanch was shot dead by unidentified assailants during a marriage function in Tarn Taran district of Punjab Wednesday, police said. The incident comes nearly a month after another sarpanch and AAP leader, Jharmal Singh of Vaitoha village in Amritsar district, was shot dead during a marriage function. Harpinder Singh, sarpanch of Thathian Mehta village, had gone to attend a wedding at a marriage palace when three armed men opened fire on him from close range.



Proud to share that the United Nations has recognised our initiative yet again. The Food and Agriculture Organization of UN has awarded internationally valued certificate to us for our community initiatives in our innovative 'Matir Srishti' programme

MAMATA BANERJEE | WEST BENGAL CM

GRAP II RESTRICTIONS REVOKED IN DELHI-NCR

The Commission for Air Quality Management Wednesday revoked GRAP Stage-II restrictions in Delhi-NCR after an improvement in air quality levels amid changing weather conditions, according to officials



SC: Groping, untying pant attempt to rape

PRESS TRUT OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 18: The Supreme Court has ruled that grabbing of breasts and pulling the pyjama string amount to "attempt to rape", setting aside a controversial Allahabad High Court order which said these were only "preparation to commit rape".

A bench of Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and N V Anjaria said the impugned order was liable to be set aside on account of the "patently erroneous application of the settled principles of criminal jurisprudence".

The court passed the order February 10 on a suo motu plea in which it had taken cognisance of the Allahabad High Court order, which stated that mere grabbing of the breasts and pulling the string of a pyjama did not amount to the offence of rape.

While setting aside the HC judgement, the top court restored the original stringent charge of attempt to rape against two accused under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

"The facts alleged being so, we cannot agree with the finding of the High Court that the allegations only amount to preparation, but not an attempt, towards the commission of the offence of rape."

The apex court said a bare perusal of these allegations leaves no "modicum of doubt" that the case sought to be made out is that the accused persons proceeded with a pre-determined intent to commit an offence under Section 376 (rape) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)."

"The impugned judgement dated March 17, 2025, is set aside, and the original summons order dated June 23, 2023, passed by the Special Judge



In its order dated March 17, 2025, the HC ruled that mere grabbing of breasts and pulling the pyjama string did not amount to the offence of rape

The order was passed by Justice Ram Manohar Narayan Mishra on a revision petition filed by two persons who moved the court, challenging the order of a special judge of Kasganj by which the court had summoned them under Section 376 of the IPC, apart from other sections

(POCSO), Kasganj, is restored."

"It goes without saying that the observations made by this Court through this judgement are only from a prima facie perspective on the case made by the complainant, and they shall not be taken to be any opinion on the guilt of the accused persons, which is the subject matter of the ongoing trial," the bench said.

In its order dated March 17, 2025, the HC ruled that mere grabbing of breasts and pulling the pyjama string did not amount to the offence of rape, but it did fall under the ambit of assault or use of criminal

force against a woman with the intent to disrobe or compel her to be naked.

The order was passed by Justice Ram Manohar Narayan Mishra on a revision petition filed by two persons who moved the court, challenging the order of a special judge of Kasganj by which the court had summoned them under Section 376 of the IPC, apart from other sections.

According to facts of the case, an application was moved before the court of Special Judge, POCSO Act, alleging that November 10, 2021, she (informant) was returning from the home of her sister-in-law along with her 14-year-old daughter.

The accused -- Pawan, Akash and Ashok -- were from her village and met her on the way. They offered a lift to her daughter.

It was alleged that the accused stopped their motorcycle on the way to the village and started groping the minor. Akash allegedly dragged her and tried to take her beneath the culvert and pulled the string of her pyjama. Two persons reached the spot on hearing the cries of the girl, causing the accused to flee.

Can't say when I will return to India: Mallya tells Bombay HC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Feb 18: Fugitive businessman Vijay Mallya informed the Bombay High Court Wednesday that he is unable to provide a definite timeline for his return to India, citing the revocation of his passport and also being legally barred from leaving the UK.

A statement from Mallya was submitted by his counsel Amit Desai in response to a mandate from a bench comprising Chief Justice Shree Chandrashekhhar and Justice Gautam Ankhad, which had last week signalled that it would refuse to hear Mallya's petitions against his "fugitive economic offender" status unless he clarified his intent to return to face trial.

Based in the UK since 2016, Mallya has filed two petitions in the high court -- one challenging an order declaring him a fugitive economic offender and the other questioning the constitutional validity of the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act.

Mallya's legal team argued that his absence is a consequence of international legal constraints rather than choice, noting that his Indian passport was revoked in 2016 and that the orders of courts in England and Wales prohibit him from leaving the country. The businessman said in his statement that he cannot give a definite date of return to India as he did not have an active passport after it was revoked by the Indian government in 2016, and also because there are orders of courts in England and Wales that prohibit him from leaving the country.

"Mallya is not permitted to leave or attempt to leave England and Wales or apply for or be in possession of any international travel document. In any event, the petitioner is unable to precisely state when he will return to India," Desai read out the statement in the court.

ED issues biggest-ever attachment in PACL case



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 18: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) Wednesday said it has issued its biggest-ever single attachment order clamping down on 247 immovable assets worth more than ₹10,000 crore as part of its money laundering investigation against Chandigarh-based PACL (Pearls Group).

The group is accused of orchestrating a ₹48,000-crore Ponzi scheme. The properties that have been attached provisionally under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) are located in SAS Nagar (Mohali), Rupnagar and Zirakpur in Punjab, the federal probe agency said in a statement.

The attached 247 properties have been identified as having been acquired from investor funds, constituting proceeds of crime. They have been valued at ₹10,021.46 crore, it said. This is probably the highest single attachment order in terms of value and number of properties issued by the agency, ED officials said. There have been instances when more assets

with higher value have been attached in money laundering cases but they are linked instances and not a single case, they said.

The ED probe stems from a February 2014 CBI case against PACL Ltd, its late promoter Nirmal Singh Bhangoo and some others.

Bhangoo died in August 2024. The accused entities and individuals of PACL operated an "illegal" collective investment scheme, fraudulently mobilising more than ₹48,000 crore from lakhs of investors across India under the guise of sale and development of agricultural land, according to the ED. Investors were induced to invest through cash down payment and installment payment plans and were made to sign "misleading" documents, including agreements, powers of attorney and other instruments, it said. Four chargesheets have been filed by the ED till now as part of this case registered in 2016. With the fresh order, the ED has so far attached movable and immovable properties worth ₹17,610 crore including some assets located abroad.

The group is accused of orchestrating a ₹48,000-crore Ponzi scheme

MP unveils 'rolling Budget' focussing on women, farmers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhopal, Feb 18: Madhya Pradesh Finance Minister Jagdish Devda Wednesday unveiled the state's Budget for the financial year 2026-27 -- probably the first rolling budget of the country -- with an outlay of ₹4.38 lakh crore and a six-pronged development framework focusing on the women, poor and farmers.

The third Budget of Chief Minister Mohan Yadav-led state government was presented in the Assembly amid slogan shouting by the Opposition Congress members, who marched into the well of the House to protest against the government's failure to raise the MLA Local Area Development (LAD) fund. Unfazed by the Opposition protests and constant interruptions, Devda spoke for nearly 90 minutes, centred on what he called the 'GYANI' model of development -- the poor (Gareeb), youth (Yuva), farmers (Annadata), women (Nari), infrastructure, and industrialisation.



Drummer Gino Banks, Mridangam maestro Sridar Parthasarathy, Tabla player Ojas Adhiya and other artists rehearse at the Marine Drive ahead of the Mumbai Drum Day 2026, in Maharashtra

PTI PHOTO

CA murders pregnant wife, spins robbery-kidnap tale

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jhajjar (Haryana), Feb 18: A chartered accountant has been arrested for allegedly killing his pregnant wife by slitting her throat with a pair of scissors and trying to pass it off as a robbery attempt, police said Wednesday.

According to police, Anshul Dhawan (31) got married to Mehak (27) in September last year. Both worked in Gurugram. Police received a call Sunday night reporting that some unidentified people tried to rob Anshul, took his car and kidnapped his wife, SHO Badli,



Inspector Suresh said. When police reached the



spot, they found the woman's body near a dry canal with in-

jury marks on her neck, he said.

Suspecting inconsistencies in Anshul's version of events, police took him into custody for inter-rogation. He confessed that he had killed Mehak with a pair of scissors, wearing gloves, over suspicions about her character, SHO said.

The accused initially claimed a robbery and kidnapping, but police found inconsistencies in his story. The man confessed to slitting his wife's throat with scissors due to suspicions about her character. The victim's sister stated the family suspected the husband and seeks justice for the murder of her sister and unborn child. Police investigation revealed the murder was pre-planned, and the accused is now in custody.

"During his questioning, it came to light that he had pre-planned the murder. His wife worked in a private bank in Gurugram. He had doubts that she talked to her friends, and he did not like it," SHO added. Following the confession,

Anshul was arrested Monday. Further investigation into the matter is underway, police said. Mehak's sister, Shruti, told the reporters that the family had doubts that Anshul was involved in the murder. She said, "We want justice; the killer should be hanged. He did not even think that his wife was two months pregnant." She said February 15, Anshul came to their house and stayed only for ten minutes and left with Mehak for Gurugram. Shruti alleged that Anshul had pre-planned the murder.

of the day
QUOTE

Energy, sustainability and renewable energy are our strengths, and we want to focus on that

REVANTH REDDY | TELANGANA CM

Behave yourself, else we will take strict action under Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA). We will dump garbage in front of the houses of those BJP MLAs and leaders who obstruct garbage disposal

D K SHIVAKUMAR | KARNATAKA DY CM

In the light of India's expanding trade architecture, including agreements with European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the EU, the UK and the US, the Union Finance Minister highlighted the conditions in India that provide a durable framework for trade, industrial collaboration and long-term investments

NIRMALA SITHARAMAN | FINANCE MINISTER

X POST OF THE DAY

The Lavanya Suicide case. The Animal fat in tirupati laddu case. The Udupi Karnataka girls hostel voyeurism case. These are the few examples of how BJP actively seeks to create communal disharmony for electoral gains. Pathetic.

@blurt2kc

SHORT TAKES

Tribal outfit calls 3-day Kolhan bandh

Jamshedpur (Jharkhand): A tribal organisation has called a three-day bandh from February 21 in Jharkhand's Kolhan region to protest the upcoming civic elections in areas under the Fifth Schedule, alleging that it violates Constitutional provisions. Kolhan region comprises East Singhbhum, West Singhbhum and Seraikela-Kharsawan districts where municipal polls will be held February 23.

Polish tourist killed in mishap

Faridabad: A Polish tourist and a taxi driver were killed after a dumper truck hit them from behind on the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) Expressway Wednesday morning, police said. According to a complaint filed by a truck driver, Manjesh, the accident occurred around 4 am when his vehicle's axle was coming off. He told the police that he had gotten out of his truck and was waving at the vehicle coming from behind. He saw a taxi coming from Manesar and tried to alert the driver, but was hit by it, even though the driver slowed down the car. At the same time, a speeding truck came from behind, hit the car, and it was crushed between two trucks.

Security forces launch anti-Naxal op 'KGH 2'

New Delhi: Security forces led by the CRPF have launched an extensive operation named 'KGH 2' along the Chhattisgarh-Telangana border to eliminate some senior Naxal commanders, officials said Wednesday. The forces are specifically looking for two CPI(Maoist) leaders, central committee member Devji alias Chetan and junior cadre Kesa Sodhi, they said. About 2,000 troops from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Chhattisgarh Police are part of the operation launched Tuesday, officials said.



According to the law, it is mandatory that electoral rolls revisions are held before elections, and as such, SIR (special intensive revision) was conducted in 12 states while SR was held in Assam

GYANESH KUMAR | CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER

RAJ THACKERAY, SHINDE MEET

MNS president Raj Thackeray met Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde at the latter's official residence Wednesday, their first in-person interaction after the Mumbai civic body polls last month



Oppn targets govt for Chinese robot

AI SUMMIT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

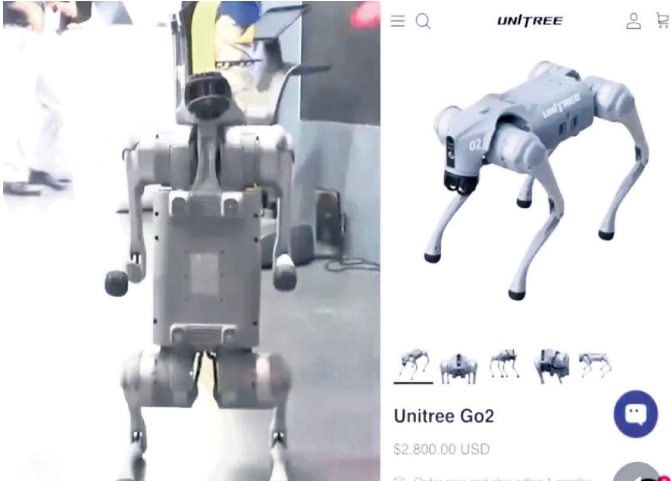
New Delhi, Feb 18: The Opposition leaders Wednesday said the display of a commercially available Chinese robot as an in-house innovation by an Indian university at the AI Summit was "shameful" and slammed IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw for sharing the image on a social media platform.

They also questioned the links between the university and BJP leaders.

In an X post, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) Rajya Sabha MP John Brittas alleged that the Galgotias University, a private university located in Delhi's satellite town Greater Noida, enjoyed the "patronage and support of prominent BJP leaders". "Galgotias University has enjoyed the patronage and support of prominent BJP leaders, with Dr Sambit Patra to Union Minister Piyush Goyal having graced various university programmes. It is no surprise that the institution frequently emphasizes the 'Viksit Bharat' slogan," Brittas said.

"This close association was evident when the university blatantly showcased a commercially available Chinese robotic dog as an in-house invention, branding it as 'Orion' at the AI Summit, which was promoted in a tweet by none other than the IT minister! Whether ousted from the event or not, Galgotias University is set to remain firmly in the BJP's orbit," he said.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Priyanka Chaturvedi called the event a "shame" and said the damage it has caused is huge. "Galgotias University passing off Chinese robot as own invention at the AI Summit is a shame. Chinese media having a field day over it makes it



Galgotias University has been asked to vacate its pavilion at the AI Summit at Bharat Mandapam after it emerged that they have displayed a made-in-China robot as own innovation

worse. All this could have been avoided if before allotting the pavilions a thorough credibility check was done of companies, universities, start-ups and others," Chaturvedi said.

"The damage this has caused for India and the Summit is big. Asking the university to vacate their pavilion was a good step. I feel some strict penalty must also be imposed on them," she said.

Trinamool Congress MP Saket Gokhale questioned IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw's silence over the issue, and questioned if he had any information about it.

"A private university called Galgotias tried to pass off a Go2 Chinese robot as their own invention at the India AI Summit. But here's the real shameful part: Government-run DD News did an entire feature promoting them. Today, DD News and BJP

are the same. The channel runs as a propaganda outlet for the BJP," Gokhale said.

"Both the Ministry for Information Technology, which organised the AI Summit, and the Ministry for Information and Broadcasting, which controls DD News, are headed by the same minister. Was this fraud perpetrated with the full knowledge of Modi's minister Ashwini Vaishnaw for cheap PR?" Gokhale asked.

"Did the BJP receive anything in return from this private university for being given a platform at the summit by a government channel? This incident has become a global embarrassment. Is the purpose of the India AI Summit merely to promote Modi even through fraudulent means?" the TMC leader asked.

"Why has there been pin

Rahul: Irreparable damage caused to country's image

New Delhi: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi Wednesday dubbed the ongoing AI Summit a "disorganised PR spectacle" and alleged that Chinese products are being showcased there. Gandhi's remarks came amid a controversy over Galgotias University allegedly showcasing a robotic dog labelled "Orion" at the AI Summit Expo that critics said was actually a Chinese-made Unitree Go2 and not an in-house innovation. "Instead of leveraging India's talent and data, the AI summit is a disorganised PR spectacle - Indian data up for sale, Chinese products showcased," the former Congress president said in a post on X."

drop silence from Ashwini Vaishnaw and the government on this shameful incident?" he asked. Galgotias University has been asked to vacate its pavilion at the AI Summit at Bharat Mandapam after it emerged that they have displayed a made-in-China robot as own innovation.

Neha Singh, a professor of communications at the university, was featured showcasing the robotic dog 'Orion' in DD News Tuesday. She said it "has been developed by the Centre of Excellence at Galgotias University." As the video went viral, social media users highlighted that the robot was actually a Unitree Go2, manufactured by China's Unitree Robotics and commonly used in research and education worldwide.

After the incident snowballed into a controversy, IT Secretary S Krishnan said the government does not want any exhibitor to showcase items that are not their own.



Workers carry vermicelli for sale amid 'Ramadan' festivities, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh

PTI PHOTO

Maha govt scraps 5% Muslim quota in jobs, education

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Feb 18: The BJP-led Maharashtra government has formally nullified the 5 per cent quota provided to Muslims in jobs and education, introduced by the erstwhile Congress-NCP dispensation

in 2014 through an ordinance, but which never became a law, putting an end to the legal limbo. The move evoked sharp

reactions from the Opposition, which flayed the government for its "anti-minority" mindset, and questioned the logic behind withdrawing an ordinance that had lapsed years ago.

The latest decision also brought to the spotlight the legal battle that once defined the policy.

The reservation was initially introduced under the Special Backward Class-A (SBC-A) cat-

AI Impact Summit: PM welcomes world leaders



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 18: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Wednesday welcomed world leaders, including UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva, for the ongoing AI Impact Summit here and held nine bilaterals with heads of state and CEOs.

The world leaders, including Sri Lanka President Anura Kumara Disanayaka and Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, were welcomed to an ensemble of traditional musical instruments, including drums, nadaswaram and tanpura, with the prime minister greeting them with a warm handshake and exchange of pleasantries.

Mauritius Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Croatia Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, Serbia President Aleksandar Vucic, Seychelles Vice President Sebastien Pillay, Estonia President Alar Karis, and Finland Prime Minister Petteri Orpo were among those welcomed by Modi at the brightly decorated Bharat Mandapam.

Greece Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Guyana Vice President Bharrat Jagdeo were also among the leaders welcomed by the prime minister. Modi held seven bilateral meetings with world leaders and two with global CEOs

and discussed issues of mutual interest with them.

The leaders with whom Modi held bilaterals included Bhutan's Tobgay, Spain President Pedro Sanchez, and Croatia's Plenkovic, among others. The prime minister held two separate meetings with the CEO of Google, Sundar Pichai, and the cofounder of Sun Microsystems and the founder of Khosla Ventures, Vinod Khosla.

In another post after meeting the Estonian president, Modi said, "Had an excellent meeting with President Alar Karis of Estonia, a nation which has made remarkable strides in tech and AI. Discussed how to add further vigour to our economic partnership, particularly in the context of the India-EU FTA, which is a historical agreement."

The AI Impact Summit is being held from February 16-20 at the Bharat Mandapam, in which more than 500 global AI leaders, 150 academicians and researchers, and 400 chief technology officers, vice-presidents, and philanthropists are taking part.

On Thursday, Modi will address the Summit, which aims to position the country as a leader in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) and envisions a future where technology advances humanity and fosters inclusive growth.

DELHI SUV CASE

Fresh video shows minor SUV driver, sister blaming biker

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 18: A fresh video purportedly showing the immediate aftermath of the fatal SUV crash in Dwarka that killed a 23-year-old biker has surfaced on social media, in which the accused driver and his sister can be seen attempting to shift the blame onto the victim when confronted by locals.

The video, claimed to have been recorded by a passerby moments after the February 3 crash, shows victim Sahil Dhaneshra lying motionless on the roadside, while the SUV involved in the accident can be seen nearby after ramming into a taxi following the collision.

In the clip, a large crowd can be seen gathered near the victim's body, while his damaged motorcycle lies mangled in the middle of the road with broken parts scattered across the stretch.

The taxi, which the SUV hit after colliding with the motorcycle, can be seen in a severely damaged state.

The clip also shows locals confronting the accused 17-year-old driver and his sister. At one point, bystanders can be seen attempting to stop the duo from leaving the scene, with one shouting that the driver was trying to escape after killing a man.

The video also captures an argument between the bystanders and the accused's sister, in which she can be heard defending her brother by claiming that the motorcyclist was speeding.

Some locals question how the taxi suffered such heavy damage if it was not driven at a high speed, according to the clip. The accused can be seen attempting to blame the victim for the crash.

Police sources said the video is being examined to verify its authenticity. Sahil, a final semester BBA student who had discontinued his studies due to financial constraints, was on his way to work when the Mahindra Scorpio N, allegedly driven by the 17-year-old boy, collided head-on with his bike near the Lal Bahadur Shastri College in Dwarka.

Punjab wedding: ₹10cr cash shower sparks viral frenzy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, Feb 18: A video of a wedding in Punjab's Tarn Taran has gone viral across social media platforms, showing the groom and several guests showering a bride with notes worth crores of rupees until the dance floor is buried under a carpet of cash.

The video clip has fueled wild claims online, with some users alleging a staggering amount of Rs 10 crore was showered

during the wedding. However, a DJ owner at the event dismissed the social media speculation as a gross exaggeration.

The ceremony, solemnised February 14 in Patti area, caught the attention of thousands of social media users as the groom was filmed pulling wads of cash from a bag and tossing them into the air. Several guests joined in the gesture, a practice commonly seen at Punjabi weddings, leaving the entire




dance floor covered in notes. Singh, the DJ owner, junked

the claims of multi-crore showerers as false. "Some people are

of the day

quote

We will have a totally independent and universal scientific body (that will be) able to tell the world at each moment where are we in relation to AI?



ANTONIO GUTERRES | UN SECRETARY GENERAL

We have our relations with Cuba, and we value these relations very much. And we intend to further develop them - of course, during difficult times, by providing appropriate assistance to our friends



DMITRY PESKOV | KREMLIN SPOKESMAN

Politicians often avoid announcing their plans early so they wouldn't be the target of attacks



SARA DUTERTE | PHILIPPINE VICE PRESIDENT

SHORT TAKES

B'desh PM holds first cabinet meet

Dhaka: Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman Wednesday chaired the first meeting of his newly formed cabinet, which set a 180-day priority plan with a focus on controlling commodity prices, maintaining law and order and stabilising supply chains. Rahman, the 60-year-old chief of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), was sworn in as the 11th prime minister on Tuesday after leading his party to a forceful victory in the 13th Parliamentary polls held on February 12. The first meeting of the new cabinet was held at the Cabinet Division in the Secretariat. Briefing reporters after the meeting, Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed said it is customary for a newly formed government to hold a session on its first day in office. The government has set a 180-day priority plan, with initial focus on controlling commodity prices, maintaining law and order, stabilising supply chains, and ensuring uninterrupted gas and electricity supply, Ahmed was quoted as saying by The Daily Star newspaper.

11 held for murder of far-right activist

Paris: French police investigating the beating of a far-right activist who died of brain injuries have arrested 11 people, prosecutors said Wednesday, in a case adding fuel to long-standing divides in French politics ahead of presidential elections in 2027. Quentin Deranque, a 23-year-old student described as a fervent nationalist, died in a hospital Saturday. He was beaten two days earlier by a group of people in the city of Lyon, in fighting that erupted between far-left and far-right supporters on the margins of a student meeting where a far-left lawmaker, Rima Hassan, was a keynote speaker. An autopsy found that Deranque suffered a fractured skull and fatal brain injuries, according to Lyon's prosecutor, Thierry Dran. He launched the police investigation for homicide and other potential criminal charges. Dran's office said police detained a man and a woman on Wednesday morning, with nine other people taken into custody on Tuesday night. Hassan, a French-Palestinian who was born in a Syrian refugee camp, is a European Parliament lawmaker for the far-left France Unbowed party. In a post on X after the attack on Deranque but before he died of his injuries, Hassan expressed "horror" over the violence and condemned it.

Indonesia tightens control on nickel as US, China scramble

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Hanoi, Feb 18: Indonesia is tightening state control over the world's largest nickel supply after years of betting the metal would anchor a home-grown electric-vehicle industry, and just as global demand begins shifting away from heavy reliance on nickel.

The move could still ripple through global EV supply chains as the United States and China compete for critical minerals. Indonesia sits at the centre of the nickel market: its share of global supply jumped to about 60 per cent in 2024 from 31.5 per cent in 2020, according to S&P Global Market Intelligence, after former President Joko Widodo banned raw ore exports, drawing a surge of Chinese-backed investment into refining.

Jakarta hoped that control over nickel would underpin a fully domestic EV industry, from mining and batteries to finished cars. Experts say that

promise was used to justify forest clearing and mining expansion in the name of the energy transition, even as climate risks deepened.

In 2025, Indonesia cracked down on what it called illegal exploitation of natural resources, saying many mining and plantation licenses were tainted by bribery or never properly approved. Authorities say they have seized more than 4 million hectares (9.8 million acres) of mines, palm oil plantations and processing sites, levied USD 1.7 billion in fines, and could seize another 4.5 million hectares this year.

But analysts warn the crack-down is coming just as nickel's payoff is starting to fade, with many Chinese EVs shifting to battery chemistries that use far less of the metal, relying instead on iron-based designs.

"The forests have been exploited to the brim," said Putra Adhiguna of the Jakarta-based Energy Shift Institute. "But you never got the electric-vehicle



value chain."

China plays the leading role in Indonesia's nickel sector, using the metal to underpin its stainless steel and clean-energy industries.

The world's largest nickel reserves are concentrated on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, which accounts for more than half of global nickel mine production, according to the US-based Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis or IEEFA.

China has sourced nickel

from Indonesia for decades, but the relationship deepened after Jakarta banned raw ore exports in 2020, drawing a surge of Chinese investment into smelters.

Nickel shipments to China jumped, with imports of nickel matte - a semiprocessed material used in battery chemicals and alloys - rising nearly 28-fold between 2020 and 2023, more than 90 per cent of it from Indonesia, according to trade data.

Over the same period, North and South America's combined share of global nickel output

Fallout from Epstein puts Britain's House of Lords under scrutiny

ASSOCIATED PRESS

London, Feb 18: Fallout from the Jeffrey Epstein files has landed on the gilded wood and plush red benches of Britain's House of Lords.

Parliament's upper chamber is in the spotlight after former UK ambassador to Washington Peter Mandelson was forced to resign as a member of the Lords because of his friendship with the late sex offender.

The episode has emboldened critics who say the unelected house is antiquated, undemocratic and far too slow at punishing bad behaviour by its members. Supporters say the chamber of more than 850 members-for-life who sport the titles of "Lord" or "Lady" is an unwieldy but essential part of parliamentary democracy.

Almost everyone agrees it needs reform, but that task has eluded successive governments. "It's a mess," said Jenny Jones, one of two Green Party members of the Lords. "In spite of our being supposedly a

modern democracy, we have a semi-feudal system."

For most of its 700-year history, the House of Lords was composed of noblemen - not women - who inherited their seats, alongside a smattering of bishops. In the 1950s, these were joined by "life peers" - retired politicians, civic leaders and other notables appointed by the government, among them the first female members of the Lords.

In 1999, the Labour government of then-Prime Minister Tony Blair evicted most of the more than 750 hereditary peers, though to avoid an aristocrats' rebellion, 92 were allowed to remain temporarily.

A quarter century on, Prime Minister Keir Starmer's current Labour government finally introduced legislation to oust the remaining "hereditaries," calling them an indefensible relic of the past.

The lords have put up a fight, forcing a compromise that will see some hereditary members allowed to stay by being "recycled" into life peers.

'Difficult' Ukraine peace talks end

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Geneva, Feb 18: The latest US-brokered talks between envoys from Moscow and Kyiv over Russia's all-out invasion of Ukraine ended Wednesday with no sign of a breakthrough and with both sides saying the talks were "difficult," as the war's fourth anniversary approaches next week.

The negotiations in Switzerland were the third round of direct talks organised by the US, after meetings earlier this year in Abu Dhabi that officials described as constructive but which also made no major headway.

Expectations for significant progress in Geneva were low.

"The negotiations were not easy," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said after the talks broke up and he spoke briefly by phone from Kyiv with his negotiating team.

He earlier accused Russia of "trying to drag out negotiations" while it presses on with its invasion - an accusation he and European leaders have repeatedly made in the past.

Despite that, some progress was made on military issues although political differences remain deep, including over the future of land in eastern Ukraine that is occupied by the Russian army and that Russian President Vladimir Putin wants to keep, Zelenskyy said.

The head of the Russian delegation, Putin adviser Vladimir Medinsky, told reporters that the two days of talks in Geneva "were difficult but businesslike."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that it's "too early" to speak about the



outcome of the talks. Putin has been receiving reports about progress in Geneva, he said.

Both sides said a new round of talks is set to take place.

Zelenskyy described the military discussions as "constructive," adding that the armed forces of both countries considered how any future ceasefire might be monitored.

"Monitoring will definitely be carried out with participation of the American side," he said in a voice message shared in a media group chat on WhatsApp.

US President Donald Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, said on social media that Washington's push for peace in Ukraine over the past year has "brought about meaningful progress," without elaborating.

The two armies remain locked in battle on the roughly 1,250-kilometre front line, while Russia bombards civilian areas of Ukraine daily.

Hours after the first day of talks ended on Tuesday, Russian drones killed a woman and injured a six-year-old girl and 18-month-old toddler in the southern Ukraine city of Zaporizhzhia, officials said.

Overnight, Russia launched one ballistic missile and 126 long-range drones at Ukraine, according to the Ukrainian air

force.

Zelenskyy said that the Ukrainian and American envoys in Geneva met with representatives from the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland.

Europe's participation in the process is "indispensable," Zelenskyy said.

European leaders, mindful of Putin's wider ambitions, say their own security is at stake in Ukraine and have insisted on being consulted in peace efforts.

Russia and Ukraine appear to still be far apart on their demands for a settlement.

Zelenskyy has offered a ceasefire and a face-to-face meeting with Putin. But Moscow wants a comprehensive agreement before committing to a truce.

Putin's key goals remain what he declared when Russia invaded its neighbour on February 24, 2022: Ukraine must renounce joining NATO, sharply reduce the size of its army and protect Russian language and culture to keep the country in Moscow's orbit.

Additionally, Putin wants Kyiv to withdraw its forces from the four eastern regions Moscow has occupied but doesn't fully control.

CHINA BUILDING SUBMARINES FASTER THAN US: REPORT

China has ramped up its production of nuclear-powered submarines over the past five years to the point where it is launching subs faster than the US, threatening to negate a sea-power advantage that has long belonged to Washington, the International Institute for Strategic Studies said. The build-up in the People's Liberation Army Navy's nuclear-powered sub force includes both ballistic-missile and attack subs



Polish army bans Chinese vehicles from military premises

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Warsaw, Feb 18: The Polish army has banned Chinese cars from entering military facilities, hoping to prevent the collection of sensitive data by technologically advanced automobiles.

Modern vehicles equipped with cutting edge sensors and communication systems are capable of "uncontrolled acquisition and use of data," the Polish army wrote in a statement justifying the ban.

Vehicles are now able to collect video, sound and location and there is a fear that Chinese producers might share some of this potentially sensitive data with their authorities.

All cars capable of recording location, video and sound will be banned from secure military areas unless those functions are switched off, the Polish army said, meaning that the new restrictions do not apply to Chinese products alone.

It is also prohibited to connect official army phones to infotainment systems in any vehicle produced in China.

The measures introduced are preventative, the army said, and are consistent with practices used by other NATO countries.

The army also said it was looking into technical solutions to enable producers of cars with such advanced functions to ask for security clearance, which could potentially be used in the future instead of a blanket ban.

The presence of Chinese vehicles on the Polish market has expanded significantly in the last years, with Chinese models representing over 8 per cent of newly registered cars in Poland last year, according to Warsaw-based market research firm IBRM Samar.

At the same time, the US and its European partners have been making efforts to protect sensitive technology and information from foreign snooping, including by China.

Responding to earlier reports that Poland might be preparing such a ban, Guo Jiakun, a spokesman for China's foreign ministry, told reporters in January that China was following the developments and that the abuse of the concept of national security must be stopped.



Kaori Sakamoto of Japan competes during the women's short programme figure skating at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Milan, Italy

Gisele Pelicot's memoir launches, turning horror into hope

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Paris, Feb 18: Gisele Pelicot's memoir was released Tuesday in 22 languages worldwide, sharing details of the horror she went through and sending a powerful message of hope and support to victims of sexual abuse.

"I wanted my story to help others," Pelicot told French national channel France 5 last week ahead of the release of her book, "A Hymn to Life, Shame has to Change Sides."

Pelicot recounted her story of survival in the book and in her first series of interviews since the landmark 2024 trial that turned her into a global icon against sexual violence and imprisoned her husband, who drugged her so other men

could assault her.

"Today I'm doing better, and this book allowed me to engage in self-reflection, to take stock of my life," she said. "I had to try to rebuild myself on this field of ruins. Today I am a woman standing strong."

Pelicot said her book is meant to deliver "a message of hope to all the women who are going through a very complicated period in their lives."

The shocking case - and Pelicot's decision to waive her anonymity and speak publicly - prompted a reckoning over rape culture in France and beyond, as her dignity and strength impressed many across the world.

Gymnastic superstar and Olympic gold medallist Simone Biles, herself a survivor



of sexual abuse, paid tribute to Pelicot in a message broadcast by the BBC.

"Gisele has demonstrated to the world that it's not for victims of sexual abuse to feel shame - it's the perpetrators," Biles said. "By waiving her anonymity and refusing to

feel shame, Gisele paves the way for other victims to come forward."

At the "Des Femmes" ("Women's") bookstore in Paris, several readers were eager to buy Pelicot's book on the day of its release.

"I want to read it," said Ce-

cile Megueulle, who admires Pelicot. "But I tell myself that reading it will be a little scary. The fact of not being in her shoes but being able to see the other side of the mirror, how she experienced it and how she managed - I don't know if we can say that - to get through it."

Selma Memic, a lawyer from Geneva, Switzerland, said: "The case was known as the Pelicot case" and now we're going to hear about Gisele'. So, that's maybe what I'm looking for. Who is Gisele? What are her feelings? How does she look back at it (the trial)?"

In December 2024, Pelicot's ex-husband, Dominique Pelicot, and 50 other men were convicted of sexually assaulting her between 2011 and 2020

while she was under chemical submission. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison, while the other defendants received sentences ranging from three to 15 years.

An appeals court later increased the sentence handed to Husametdin Dogan, a construction worker who was the only defendant who challenged his conviction.

Dominique Pelicot, whom Gisele Pelicot had been married to for nearly 50 years, acknowledged that for years he mixed sedatives into her food and drink so he could rape her and invite other men to do the same.

The unprecedented trial exposed how online pornography, chat rooms and distorted notions of consent can fuel sexual violence.

of the day

quote

AI has transitioned from a buzzword to a crucial peg in India's broader economic and infrastructure growth story



ANSHUMAN MAGAZINE | CHAIRMAN & CEO - INDIA, SOUTH-EAST ASIA, AND MEA, CBRE

India has one of the most advanced digital payment systems in the world that operates at population scale where trust, resilience, and performance are fundamental



VISHAL DHUPAR | MD, ASIA SOUTH, NVIDIA

Fresher hiring intent has risen to 73 per cent this half-year, reflecting cautious but clear employer confidence in entry-level talent



SHANTANU ROJI | FOUNDER AND CEO, TEAMLEASE EDETECH

SHORT TAKES

Oilmeals exports fall 42% in January

New Delhi: India's oilmeal exports declined 42 per cent year-on-year to 2,60,123 tonne in January as shipments of soyabean meal and rapeseed meal plunged, as per the data of the Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA). In January 2025, oilmeals exports stood at 4,52,352 tonne. During April-January 2025-26, oilmeal exports fell to 3.2 million tonne from 3.6 million tonne in the same period a year ago. Oilmeals are used as animal feed. Soyabean meal exports declined to 132,440 tonne in January 2026 from 286,287 tonnes a year earlier, while rapeseed meal shipments fell to 64,782 tonnes from 131,641 tonnes. Groundnut meal exports also slipped to 1,067 tonnes from 2,636 tonnes. Ricebran extraction bucked the trend, surging to 35,367 tonnes from just 63 tonnes in January 2025. SEA attributed the rapeseed meal decline to reduced crushing activity as processors waited for fresh crop supplies expected in February and March. Indian rapeseed meal was quoted at ₹20,300 per tonne at Kandla, up from ₹18,500 in November-December 2025, though below the January peak of ₹21,617. In dollar terms, Indian rapeseed meal was priced at \$235 per tonne at Kandla, compared with \$276 per tonne for European Union-origin meal at Hamburg. China, South Korea, Bangladesh and Germany are the main buyers of Indian oilmeals.

BPCL commissions 71 MW solar plant

New Delhi: State-owned Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) has inaugurated a 71 MW solar power plant in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, strengthening its renewable energy portfolio as part of its transition to cleaner energy. The plant has an installed capacity of 71 MWp (DC) / 52 MW (AC) and is expected to generate about 103.61 million units of green electricity annually, the firm said in a statement. The plant is estimated to reduce carbon emissions by 75,150 tonnes per year, equivalent to planting nearly 1.25 crore trees. Spread across 210 acres, the facility has been developed with 1.29 lakh solar modules, 1,324 metric tonnes of structural steel and around 294 kilometres of cabling. It is connected to the grid through a 132 kV transmission line. The green power generated will be supplied to BPCL's refineries in Mumbai, Bina and Kochi, supporting cleaner operations and lowering carbon intensity.



India is going to add \$2 trillion of market cap using technology in the next decade

PRAYANK SWAROOP | PARTNER, ACCEL

INDIA, CANADA FTA SOON

India and Canada are expected to finalise terms of reference for initiating talks for a free trade agreement (FTA) during the visit of Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney to India next month, an official said. The terms of reference (ToR) outline the scope and modalities of a proposed trade pact



India's Russian oil binge ends

Russian share of India's January oil imports lowest since late 2022 after US pressure

REUTERS

New Delhi, Feb 18: Russian crude shipments in January made up the smallest portion of India's oil imports since late 2022, according to data from industry sources, while Middle Eastern supplies rose to their highest share over the same period.

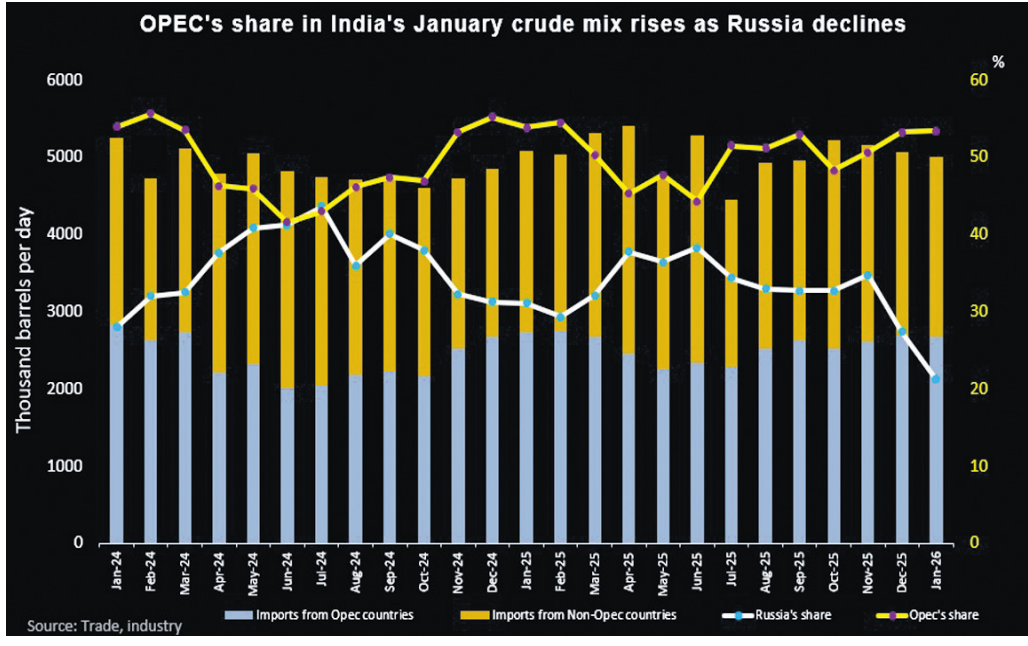
India, the world's third-biggest oil importer and consumer, ramped up purchases of discounted Russian oil shunned by some Western nations in the wake of Moscow's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, with volumes topping 2 million barrels per day in some months.

However, Western sanctions over the war and pressure to clinch a trade deal with the US have forced New Delhi to scale back Russian oil purchases, the data showed. And China has, since November, replaced India as Russia's top buyer of seaborne crude.

India imported about 1.1 million barrels per day of Russian crude last month, the lowest since November 2022, with Moscow's share in overall oil imports declining to 21.2%, the smallest share since October 2022, according to the data.

January imports from Russia fell by 23.5% from December and by about a third compared to a year earlier, the data showed.

Import levels are likely to fall



February month-to-date data already shows Saudi Arabia regaining its position as India's top supplier, with imports tracking at a new all-time high

SUMIT RITOLA | LEAD RESEARCH ANALYST, KPILER

- INDIA HAD BEEN TOP BUYER OF RUSSIAN SEABORNE CRUDE
- PRESSURE FROM SANCTIONS, US PUSHED IT TO REDUCE RUSSIAN IMPORTS
- OIL FROM MIDDLE EAST, SOUTH AMERICA REPLACING RUSSIAN IMPORTS

further to an average of 1 million to 1.2 million bpd in February and around 800,000 bpd in March, said Sumit Ritola, lead research analyst, refining and modelling at Kpler.

"February numbers may appear slightly lower due to timing, as some end-month cargoes discharge in the following month," he said, adding that Kpler expects Russian flows to India to gradually decline in the medium term rather than stop

completely.

To make up for the lower Russian oil volumes, Indian refiners tapped alternative grades from the Middle East, South American countries and Western nations, the data showed.

Middle Eastern oil accounted for about 55% of India's overall imports in January while the share of Latin American grades rose to a 12-month high of about 10%, the data showed.

BIZ BUZZ

PM Surya Ghar Yojana, TPNODL bring relief to consumers

Balasore: The government's PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana is providing much-needed relief to consumers from escalating electricity bill worries, particularly with the approaching summer season. By installing solar panels on their rooftops, consumers have significantly reduced their electricity bills under this scheme. The Utility Led Aggregation (ULA) model of PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana has gained significant traction, with TP Northern Odisha Distribution Limited (TPNODL) accelerating rooftop solar panel installations in the region. The initiative aims to provide clean, reliable, and affordable electricity to domestic consumers with 1-kilowatt connections, ensuring high-quality and safe solar panels. As a result, 4,651 consumers in Balasore, Mayurbhanj, Bhadrak, Keonjhar, and Jaipur districts have installed rooftop solar panels, with 461 households receiving zero-unit monthly electricity bills. Majority of the remaining consumers have witnessed substantial bill reductions as well. Under the PM Surya Ghar scheme, consumers with solar panels up to 3 kilowatts have achieved substantial bill reductions. In five TPNODL districts, 6849 consumers have installed solar panels, with 2812 receiving zero-unit monthly bills. The majority of remaining consumers have also reported a considerable decrease in their electricity bills. Gajanan Kale, Chief - Odisha Distribution Business and CEO, TPNODL, stated that TPNODL has consistently worked towards providing reliable and quality electricity services to consumers in the region. Under the government's PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana and ULA model, consumers can now access clean, reliable, and affordable electricity. TPNODL is very much committed and proactive in its efforts in this direction, he added.



Canara Bank organises Exporters & Importers Meet



Bhubaneswar: Canara Bank organised an Exporters & Importers Meet at Raptani Bhawan, Nayapalli here Wednesday, bringing together key stakeholders from the trade and industry ecosystem to discuss opportunities, challenges, and banking support for foreign trade. The programme commenced with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp and floral tributes to the founder, setting a respectful and purposeful tone for the event. Suman Chakraborty, Circle Head, Bhubaneswar, delivered the welcome address and highlighted Canara Bank's commitment towards strengthening export-import financing and providing customised solutions to the trade community. The inaugural address was delivered by R Krishna Prasad, GM, GTPC, followed by the presidential address by Sanjay Mishra, OAS (Director, EPM). Both speakers emphasised the importance of collaborative engagement between banks, trade bodies, and exporters/importers to enhance India's foreign trade performance and to promote responsible, compliant trade practices. Industry perspectives were shared by Sanjeev Mohapatra, Secretary, UCCI, and Prabodh Mohanty, President, UCCI, who underlined the evolving needs of exporters and importers, infrastructure requirements, and the role of banks in facilitating smoother trade transactions. Kamal Kant Sahoo, Head, FIEO, spoke on policy support and the role of export promotion councils in enabling global market access for MSMEs and exporters from the region. The keynote address by Purshottam Chand, CGM, ITW, Head Office, provided strategic insights into Canara Bank's foreign exchange offerings, trade finance solutions, digital initiatives, and risk management framework aimed at supporting sustainable growth in international trade.

Financials, metals help benchmarks end higher

Nifty rose 0.37% to 25,819.35 and Sensex added 0.34% to 83,734.25, their third straight day of gains

REUTERS

Mumbai, Feb 18: India's equity benchmarks shook off a sluggish start to close higher Wednesday, with financials and metal stocks leading the advance, while IT lagged on persistent uncertainty around AI and kept a lid on broader gains.

The Nifty 50 rose 0.37% to 25,819.35 and the BSE Sensex added 0.34% to 83,734.25, their third straight day of gains.

Both benchmarks opened flat and edged 0.2% lower in the early session, before staging a recovery in the final two hours of trade. Fifteen of the 16 major sectors rose. State-owned lenders added 1.3% after advancing 2.1% in the previous session. The heaviest-weighted financials rose 0.6%.

Metals gained 1.3%, reversing previous session's losses, after media reports, opens new tab quoted

STRONG GLOBAL TRENDS

Silver rebounds ₹1K to ₹2.46L/kg

Gold of 99.9 per cent purity fell by ₹300 to ₹1,56,700 per 10 grams

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

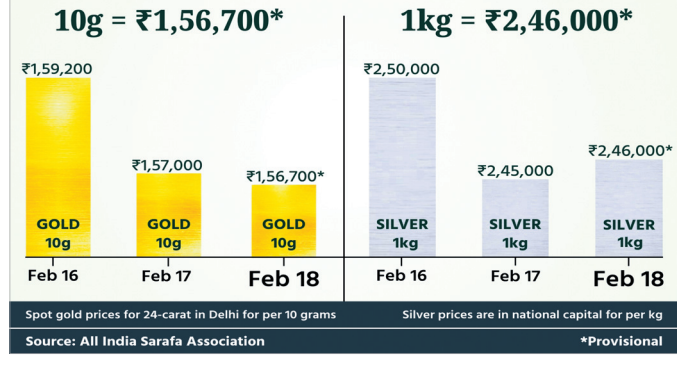
New Delhi, Feb 18: Snapping a three-day losing streak, silver prices rebounded by ₹1,000 to ₹2.46 lakh per kg in the national capital Wednesday, tracking strong trends in the international markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

Gold of 99.9 per cent purity, however, fell by ₹300 to ₹1,56,700 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes).

"Silver traded with mild gains on Wednesday, stabilising after recent sharp declines as bargain buying emerged at lower levels," Gaurav Garg, Research Analyst at Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

He noted that near-term sentiment remains cautious amid a firm US dollar and uncertainty

GOLD & SILVER



RBI mandates UTI for all OTC derivatives trades from Jan 1

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Feb 18: Unique Transaction Identifier (UTI) will become mandatory for all direct private trades in rupee interest rate and foreign currency derivatives from January 1, 2027, the Reserve Bank said Wednesday.

The UTI has been conceived as one of the key data elements identified globally for reporting over-the-counter (OTC) derivative transactions with a view to enabling policymakers to obtain a comprehensive view of the OTC derivatives market.

At present, all transactions in over-the-counter (OTC) markets for rupee interest rate derivatives, forward contracts in government securities, foreign currency derivatives, and credit derivatives are reported to the trade repository managed by Clearing Corporation of India Limited (CCIL-TR).

"It has now been decided to mandate UTI for all such transactions," the RBI said in a circular.

The directions will come into effect from January 1, 2027.

Big Food rebrands as obesity drugs reshape US demand

Companies pouring millions in protein-forward, better-for-you snacks

REUTERS

Washington, Feb 18: Global food and beverage companies from PepsiCo to Coca-Cola are focusing on shorter ingredient lists and smaller pack sizes in 2026 as more people take appetite-suppressing GLP-1 drugs for weight loss.

Companies that previously took a wait-and-see attitude now see GLP-1s as here to stay. So far this year, nearly three dozen companies outside the healthcare industry have mentioned GLP-1 drugs or weight loss on their earnings conference calls, up from 14 for the same period a year ago, and

just five two years earlier, according to LSEG data.

Diet changes linked to GLP-1 drug use could mean up to \$12 billion in snack sales lost over the next decade, according to EY-Parthenon estimates. Adoption of GLP-1 drugs, which suppress appetite and are mainly prescribed for diabetics and weight loss, more than doubled in the 12 months to December, with about 20% of US households now including at least one user, according to a PwC analysis.

Peter ter Kulve, CEO of Magnum Ice Cream, said GLP-1 users continue to eat treats, but they exhibit "a stark reduction of mindless munching and binge eating."

Coca-Cola's incoming top boss urged faster innovation on his first analyst call as CEO-elect last week, while Kraft Heinz's new chief halted a planned split of the company and instead announced



\$600 million in investments this year to revive long-neglected staples such as its meat and cold cuts business Oscar Mayer.

GLP-1s REWRITE DEMAND

Capital expenditure is expected to rise for most big food companies this year,

jumping as much as 23% for General Mills, according to LSEG data.

PepsiCo has launched a line called "Simply NKD" to reformulate its snacks, such as Lay's and Gatorade, by removing artificial colors and flavors

- GLP-1 drugs impact \$12 billion in snacking sales in US
- GLP-1 users on average consume 40% fewer calories
- Dietary shifts include fewer calories, fresh produce

while also embracing smaller portion sizes. "I think there are more opportunities than threats, but there are both," said PepsiCo's CEO Ramon Laguarta on a post-earnings call last week.

Coca-Cola ramped up production to meet growing demand for its protein-infused Fairlife milk late last year. General Mills launched higher protein Cheerios cereal in December 2024

We're just starting to scratch the surface on the ripple effects of this type of physiological disruption

ALI FURMAN | US CONSUMER MARKETS LEADER, PWC

as it grapples with competition for breakfast foods.

"We expect GLP-1 and other anti-obesity drugs to have a lasting influence in the food and nutrition landscape, nudging some consumers towards smaller portions and more nutrient-dense protein and fiber-forward foods," the company's CEO Jeffrey Harmening said at the Consumer Analyst Group of New York (CAGNY) conference Tuesday.

GLP-1 users on average consume 40% fewer calories, according to PwC's analysis of data from consumer insights firm Numerator. Dessert consumption is down 84%, and alcohol use is down by 33%, while fresh produce intake is up by more than 70%. Family grocery baskets are 4% to 6% smaller, according to the data, while single-person households have experienced declines of up to 9%.

Men in Blue remain unbeaten

T20 World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ahmedabad, Feb 18: Shivam Dube played a momentum changing knock before Varun Chakravarthy produced another incisive spell to set up India's convincing 17-run victory over the Netherlands in their final league fixture of the T20 World Cup here Wednesday.

Despite the top-order struggles against off-spinner Aryan Dutt, India managed to make a challenging 193 for six courtesy the fireworks from Shivam Dube (66 off 31) in the second half of the innings.

The Netherlands were always behind in the chase and doors on them were shut by Chakravarthy (3/14 in 3 overs), who did the damage in the powerplay as well as in the middle overs.

Staying true to his strength, the mystery spinner relentlessly attacked the stumps, removing Colin Ackermann and Aryan Dutt in successive balls in the 13th over to leave the Netherlands at 94 for four.

Overwhelming title favourites India now head into their opening Super 8 game against South Africa here as the only unbeaten team from Group A. However, they still have work to do against the spinners.

Opting to bat, India were hoping for Abhishek Sharma's return to form ahead of the Super 8, but the left-hander had to endure his third consecutive duck in the tournament. In the form of his life not so long ago, he is yet to score a run in his maiden ICC event.

It was the turn of Indian-origin offie Dutt to shine against a star studded home team at the world's largest cricket stadium.

Dutt, who is used to opening the bowling, was employed for three overs in the powerplay to

Dube, Varun star as India end league stage with 17-run win over the Netherlands



TODAY'S CLASHES		
	West Indies vs Italy Time- 11:00 am	
	Sri Lanka vs Zimbabwe Time- 3:00 pm	
	Afghanistan vs Canada Time- 7:00 pm	

ball from Dutt only to see his stumps disturbed.

The in-form Kishan was quick to get off the blocks before falling to Dutt in a bizarre fashion. Trying to dispatch Dutt on the leg-side, Kishan played on to his stumps with the ball ricocheting from his thigh and elbow.

India would have been four down inside 10 overs had Michael Levitt not dropped a sitter off van Beek when Suryakumar Yadav (31 off 27) was on 13.

Having stuttered to 74/3 in 10 overs, Dube gave the innings the much-needed steam with half a dozen sixes, most of them in the cow corner region. He shared a 76-run stand with Hardik (30 off 21) to provide the push in the last five overs that yielded 75 runs.

BRIEF SCORES

India 193/6 in 20 overs (Shivam Dube 66; Aryan Dutt 2/19) beat Netherlands 176/7 in 20 overs (Bas de Leede 33; Varun Chakravarthy 3/14, Shivam Dube 2/35) by 17 runs

Maiden Deaf Cricket Asia Cup kicks off at Barabati Stadium

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, Feb 18: The ADCA T20I Asia Cup 2026, organised by the Asian Deaf Cricket Association (ADCA) in collaboration with the Indian Deaf Cricket Association (IDCA) and supported by the Odisha Deaf Cricket Association, will be held from February 19-25, 2026, at the iconic Barabati Stadium here.

The tournament will feature three competing nations — India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal — showcasing seasoned deaf cricket talent from across Asia. India will be led by Virender Singh, while Sri Lanka will be captained by A Kalep, and Nepal will be captained by Baidhanath Chaudhary.

The opening ceremony will commence at 10:00 AM February 19 setting the stage for an exciting week of international cricket and inclusion. Sumit Jain, President, ADCA, said, "This championship marks a milestone in ADCA's journey of nurturing diversity and promoting world-class deaf cricket. We thank our partners for believing in our vision and supporting



the 'Dare to Dream' movement to mainstream deaf cricket talent across Asia. Special thanks to all our partners for their support for this maiden tournament. We thank OCA & ODCA for their immense support."

Roma Balwani, CEO, IDCA and Director, ADCA, added: "Playing in Cuttack, one of India's most iconic cricket venues, is truly inspiring for our athletes. At IDCA, we believe in enabling inclusion through disability sport, especially cricket. We deeply appreciate the belief of our partners, state associations, and supporters. We

salute every athlete here for their passion, resilience, and excellence on and off the field."

She added, "IDCA has played a pivotal role in facilitating the ADCA tournament arrangements, with the visiting teams expressing gratitude for the support extended in IDCA hosting the championship in Cuttack. Special thanks to IDCA, Vice President & General Secretary Sagarkanta Senapati & CEO, ODCA, Sharmila Subramanian making this a memorable tournament for our visiting teams from Sri Lanka & Nepal."

Pak hockey captain lashes out at PHF

Karachi: Pakistan hockey captain Shakeel Ammad Butt has lashed out the national federation after returning from a tumultuous tour of Australia during which his side didn't just have to roam the streets for lack of accommodation but also "wash dishes before going to play a match". Butt told the media at the Lahore Airport early this morning that the Pakistan Hockey Federation had been telling them lies and "enough was enough". "We can't work with this current management of the federation. When players have to clean the kitchen and wash dishes before going to play a match what result do you expect from us?" a livid Butt asked angrily. The PHF has drawn severe criticism after the state-run Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) confirmed it had given them more than 10 million rupees to arrange hotel accommodation of the national team in Australia. More disturbing reports came in when the team checked into its hotel ahead of the FIH Pro League matches. The players were told that they had no bookings since no advance payment was made to the hotel management. The players had to wait for hours and roamed the streets before an accommodation was arranged for them.

‘WASHED DISHES’

J&K reach historic first-ever Ranji final

Auqib Nabi's stunning nine-wicket match haul and their IPL star Abdul Samad's fearless strokeplay ensured that the side once labelled "perennial underachievers" now stands one step away from the title

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kalyani (West Bengal), Feb 18: Sixty seven years after their maiden appearance, Jammu and Kashmir stormed into the Ranji Trophy finals for the first time Wednesday, upstaging two-time former champions Bengal by six wickets in the semifinals here to add another historic chapter to a fairytale season so far. Auqib Nabi's stunning



nine-wicket match haul and their IPL star Abdul Samad's fearless strokeplay ensured that the side once labelled "perennial underachievers" now stands one step away from the title.

Chasing a modest 126 at the Bengal Cricket Academy ground, J&K rode on Samad's unbeaten 30 off 27 balls (3x6, 1x4) and rookie Vanshaj Sharma's composed 43 not out off 83 ball (4x4) as the pair stitched an

unbroken 55-run stand for the fourth wicket to seal history on the fourth and penultimate day of the semifinal.

In a heartwarming gesture, Samad, who had done the bulk of the damage, allowed the 22-year-old Vanshaj to finish it in style and the youngster launched Mukesh Kumar over long-on for six to spark wild celebrations in the visiting camp.

From strugglers to history-makers

Jammu and Kashmir had played 334 Ranji matches before this season, winning only 45. It took them 44 years to register their first victory, against Services in 1982-83.

Knockout appearances were rare. A breakthrough came in 2013-14 when they edged Goa on net run rate to reach the quarterfinals, and in 2015-16 they stunned Mumbai at the Wankhede Stadium under state icon Parveez Rasool.

But consistency eluded them for decades as this season, under coach Ajay Sharma and captain Paras Dogra, they transformed belief into results.

With four India internationals in Mohammed Shami, Akash Deep, Mukesh Kumar and Shahbaz Ahmed, and India A star batter Abhimanyu Easwaran along with home advantage to boot, this was Bengal's game to lose.

SUPER EIGHT GROUPS		SUPER 8s SCHEDULE	
Group 1 1. India 2. South Africa 3. West Indies 4. Zimbabwe	Feb 21-	New Zealand vs Pakistan – Colombo	
	Feb 22 -	England vs Sri Lanka – Pallekele; India vs South Africa – Ahmedabad	
	Feb 23 -	Zimbabwe vs West Indies – Mumbai	
	Feb 24 -	England vs Pakistan – Pallekele	
Group 2 1. England 2. New Zealand 3. Pakistan 4. Sri Lanka	Feb 25 -	New Zealand vs Sri Lanka – Colombo	
	Feb 26 -	West Indies vs South Africa – Ahmedabad; India vs Zimbabwe – Chennai	
	Feb 27 -	England vs New Zealand – Colombo	
	Feb 28 -	Pakistan vs Sri Lanka – Pallekele	
	March 1 -	Zimbabwe vs South Africa – Delhi; India vs West Indies – Kolkata	

Farhan's ton takes Pak to Super 8s

Colombo: Opener Sahibzada Farhan smashed an unbeaten hundred before Usman Tariq snared four wickets as Pakistan defeated Namibia by 102 runs in their must-win Group A match to book their place in the Super 8s of the T20 World Cup here Wednesday. Farhan blasted 11 fours and four sixes on way to an unbeaten 100 off 58 balls as Pakistan scored 199 for three. Salman Agha made 23-ball 38, while Shadab Khan also chipped in with 36 off 22 balls. In reply, Namibia folded for 97 in 17.3 overs with Louren Steenkamp (23) and Alexander Volschenk (20) managing double digit scores. Shadab Khan (3/19) and Usman Tariq (4/16) shared seven wickets.



South Africa beat UAE by six wickets

New Delhi: South Africa, riding on Ryan Rickelton and Dewald Brevis' fiery knocks, beat UAE by six wickets in a low-scoring Group D match here Wednesday. Chasing UAE's 122 for 6, built largely on young top-order batter Alishan Sharafu's gritty 45, the Proteas overhauled the target in 13.2 overs. Rickelton smashed a 16-ball 30 while Brevis scored 36 off 25 balls as South Africa won with 40 balls to spare. The Proteas and New Zealand have already qualified for the Super 8s from the group.



UCL DRAMA

Vinicius scores screamer, faces racism

In another chaotic CL night between the two sides, the Brazilian winger earns Real 1-0 win at Benfica in match marred by racism row

REUTERS

Lisbon, Feb 18: Vinicius Jr scored a sublime second-half winner as Real Madrid beat Benfica 1-0 in their Champions League playoff first leg Tuesday, a night overshadowed by the Brazilian accusing Benfica's Gianluca Prestianni of directing a racist slur at him.

The alleged incident occurred moments after Vinicius had curled Real ahead five minutes into the second half at the Estadio da Luz, before referee Francois Letexier halted the match for 11 minutes under FIFA's anti-racism protocol.

Television pictures showed the Argentine winger covering his mouth with his shirt before making a comment that Vinicius and nearby teammates interpreted as a racial slur against the 25-year-old, who has repeatedly suffered racism in Spain during matches.

The atmosphere turned hostile after the match resumed, with Benfica manager Jose Mourinho sent off in the 85th minute after two bookings as Real secured a slender advantage to take back to Madrid for the return leg.

"It is unbelievable that, with dozens of cameras in the stadium that none could have caught (Prestianni's) racial slur, but if you cover your mouth to say something, that says a lot," Real captain Federico Valverde told Movistar Plus.

"According to my teammates who were close, they heard something very ugly. Many people have been fighting against racism in football, Vinicius is one of them. I'm proud of him and his great game."

Benfica began on the front foot but the visitors gradually assumed control, while the hosts appeared content to counter-attack, with goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois producing a stunning one-handed save to keep out a 25th-minute strike from Fredrik Aursnes.

Ukrainian athlete Vladyslav Heraskevych has criticized the decision to allow Russia and Belarus to send athletes to next month's Milano Cortina Paralympics. Real finished the first half strongly and only goalkeeper Anatoliy Trubin's brilliance kept the score goalless at the break, as he produced stunning saves to deny Kylian Mbappe and Arda Guler.

UEFA REVIEWING INCIDENT

Prestianni denied the accusation and said the Brazilian misheard him.



Vinicius accuses Prestianni of racism, match halted for 11 minutes

Real's captain Valverde supports Vinicius, criticises lack of camera evidence

Mourinho sent off after demanding second booking for Vinicius

"I was never racist with anyone and I regret the threats I received from Real Madrid players," he wrote on his Instagram account.

UEFA said they are reviewing the incident.

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UNSTOPPABLE CURLER

The breakthrough came five minutes after the restart. Mbappe burst forward and fed Vinicius on the left. The Brazilian cut diagonally towards

QATAR OPEN

Alcaraz beats Arthur for 150th hard-court win



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Doha, Feb 18: In his first outing since becoming the youngest man to complete the Career Grand Slam at the Australian Open, Carlos Alcaraz battled past Arthur Rinderknech 6-4, 7-6 (5) in Qatar Open. The 22-year-old saved two set points on serve in a tense second set before prevailing in the tie-break to secure his 150th tour-level hard-court win and extending his flawless start to the 2026 season to 8-0, ATP reports. Alcaraz is aiming to improve on last year's debut result in Doha, where he fell to Jiri Lehecka in the quarter-finals. The No 1 player in the ATP Rankings will next meet Frenchman Valentin Royer.

Alcaraz can only meet second seed Sinner in the championship match, which would be the 17th chapter of their thrilling rivalry. Before that, the Spaniard could face a quarter-final showdown with Karen Khachanov. The 2024 winner Khachanov battled past lucky loser Shintaro Mochizuki 6-1, 3-6, 6-4. The seventh-seeded Khachanov meets Marton Fucsovics in the second round.

Defending champion Andrey Rublev later shook off a sluggish start before powering to a 6-4, 6-3 win over Jesper de Jong in his opening match. The fifth seed, who also lifted the Doha trophy in 2020 when it was an ATP 250, will next meet Fabian Marozsan, who dispatched Ugo Humbert 6-3, 6-1.