



Shanaya on resilience

Shanaya Kapoor says shelved debut setbacks strengthened her resilience and helped her grow into a better performer

LEISURE | **P2**



Poverty grips Pak

Poverty in Pakistan increases over past six years, with latest estimates suggesting 28.8% of population living under poverty

INTERNATIONAL | **P10**

SENSEX
NIFTY

Weekly gains

Share benchmarks log weekly gains, helped by a tactical bounce Friday, as optimism around earnings recovery fueled rally

BUSINESS | **P11**



FIH Hobart leg

After home setback, India begin the FIH Pro League's overseas leg under new skipper Hardik Singh against Spain

SPORTS | **P12**

Farmers, women in focus

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi presents ₹3.10L-cr Budget



PNN & AGENCIES

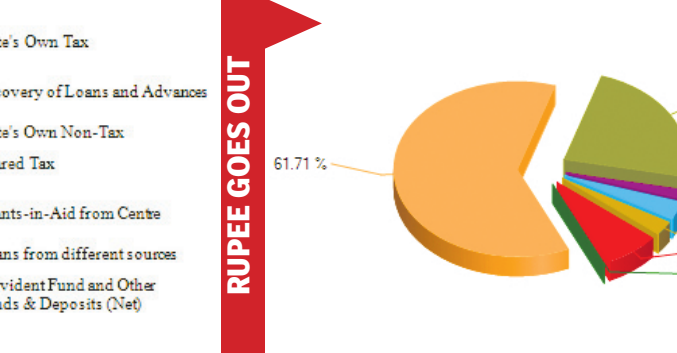
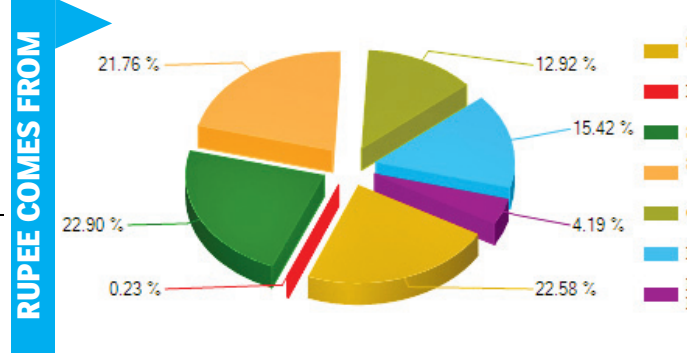
Bhubaneswar, Feb 20: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Friday presented a ₹3.10 lakh crore Budget for 2026-27, with focus on agriculture, rural development and women empowerment.

Out of the total outlay, ₹1,80,000 crore has been earmarked for programme expenditure, around 58 per cent of the total budget estimates. Presenting his government's third Budget, Majhi, who also holds the Finance portfolio, said administrative expenditure is proposed at ₹1,14,000 crore, while the outlay for Disaster Risk Management Funds is ₹5,375 crore. The capital outlay of ₹72,100 crore estimated in the budget is 6.5 per cent of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) and 23.3 per cent of the state budget, the CM said. The total outlay for the agriculture sector is ₹42,492 crore,

and ₹18,957 crore for women and child development initiatives. "One of the visions of our government under women empowerment is to see every girl child complete graduation," the CM said, announcing a new scheme 'Mukhyamantri Kanya Suman-gal Yojana'. As part of the scheme, a savings instrument of ₹20,000 will be created in the name of girls born in families belonging to the economically weaker section. They will be provided ₹1,00,001 on completion of graduation. Majhi also announced another scheme "Mission PoWaR (Power, Water and Road)" with a proposed provision of ₹1,000 crore to provide connectivity to unconnected habitations. A budgetary allocation of ₹800 crore has been made for a scheme for incomplete rural piped water supply projects to ensure that every rural household in Odisha has access to a safe, reliable and sustainable source of drinking water, the CM said. He proposed to transfer ₹3,056 crore on recommendations of the 16th Finance Commission,

MAJOR ALLOCATIONS	
₹42,492cr	Agriculture
₹42,565cr	Education
₹23,182cr	Healthcare
₹18,957cr	Women & child development
₹10,738cr	Urban development

and around ₹7,450 crore on recommendations of the 6th State Finance Commission, to rural and urban local bodies of Odisha. Majhi said his government will be able to generate a revenue surplus of about 3 per cent of GSDP, and the fiscal deficit will be limited to 3.5 per cent



RUPEE PLUMMETS 26 PAISE AGAINST DOLLAR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Feb 20: The rupee plunged 26 paise to settle at 90.94 against the US dollar Friday, tracking a strong American currency against major currencies and higher crude oil prices amid intensifying US-Iran tensions. Positive momentum in domestic equity markets failed to support the Indian, forex analysts said. They attributed the strengthening greenback and volatile crude prices to heightened tension between the US and Iran, with both countries signalling they are prepared for war if talks on Tehran's nuclear programme fizzle out. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 90.94 against the US dollar and touched the intraday low of 91.04 during the session. It ended the session at 90.94, registering a steep loss of 26 paise from the previous closing level. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.01 per cent at 97.86.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



He's a big advocate of democratisation - but only in the world of AI

COUPLE GETS DEATH FOR SEXUAL ABUSE OF 33 KIDS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 20: A special court in UP's Banda Friday sentenced a former junior engineer of the state's Irrigation department and his wife to death for the sexual exploitation of 33 minor boys - some as young as three - over a decade, officials said. The POCSO court termed the crimes as 'rarest of rare' and held Ram Bhawan and his wife Durgawati guilty of systematically abusing children between 2010 and 2020. The duo circulated over two lakh objectionable videos and photographs of the victims to nearly 47 countries via the internet. The couple was convicted under provisions of IPC and POCSO Act by Additional District and Sessions Judge (POCSO) Pradeep Kumar Mishra. They were found guilty of offences including aggra-

vated penetrative sexual assault, using a child for pornographic purposes, storage of pornographic material involving children, and abetment and criminal conspiracy, Special Public Prosecutor Saurabh Singh said. The court directed the UP government to pay ₹10 lakh in compensation to each of the 33 victims. "The court further ordered to distribute the cash amount seized from the house of the accused among the victims in equal proportion," the CBI said in a statement. During the probe, it was found that Ram Bhawan, a resident of Naraini town in Banda district, had been living in a rented room in Chitrakoot district where the offences were committed, with his wife allegedly assisting him, the agency said. The SPP said court records indicated that the couple lured and threatened the minors

over several years, subjecting them to physical and mental abuse. The objectionable material was allegedly used for blackmail and other criminal activities. The court termed the crimes as 'rarest of rare' based on 'unparalleled depravity and systemic nature of their crimes'. "Such offences not only destroy the lives of children but also shake the moral foundation of society. Any leniency in such cases would send a dangerous message," the court said. "The sheer scale of this victimisation across multiple districts, combined with the extreme moral turpitude of the convicts, marks this as a crime of such an exceptional and heinous nature that it leaves no room for reformation, necessitating the ultimate judicial deterrent to meet the ends of justice," it said.



SHIRTLESS PROTEST: In this image posted February 20, Indian Youth Congress workers stage a protest during the India AI Impact Summit 2026 at Bharat Mandapam, in New Delhi

Indians donate 45% to religious bodies, 42% to beggars

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 20: Over 45 per cent of individual donations in India are made to religious organisations while over 42 per cent go to beggars, according to the third edition of "How India gives" report. The Centre for Social Impact & Philanthropy (CSIP) at Ashoka University has come up with the report that maps the scale, patterns, and drivers of everyday household giving across India, underscoring that Indians are among the most generous globally. Based on 7,225 nationally representative surveys across 20 states and anchored to National Sample Survey (NSS) consumption data, the study was aimed



at providing detailed insights to date into how ordinary Indians contribute to social causes through cash, in-kind support and volunteering.

The report estimates that India's everyday household giving ecosystem is worth approximately ₹540 billion (₹54,000 crore) annually, underscoring

its significant but often under-recognised role within the country's broader philanthropic landscape alongside Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and institutional philanthropy. According to the report, a significant share of everyday contributions flows to religious organisations (45.9 per cent) and directly to individuals such as beggars (41.8 per cent), while only 14.9 per cent reaches non-religious organisations. "This distribution represents both a challenge and an opportunity, highlighting the potential to strengthen pathways that connect everyday donors to organised social sector initiatives," it said. Commenting on the report

launch, Jinny Uppal, Director and Head, CSIP, said, 'How India Gives 2025-26' brings visibility to a form of generosity that has always existed in India but is rarely measured. "Everyday giving - through in-kind support, cash contributions and volunteering - is foundational to India's development story. By anchoring our analysis to national consumption data and tracking patterns over time, we are able to understand not just how India gives, but how giving evolves as the country develops. The opportunity ahead lies in strengthening the bridges between everyday generosity and organised social impact," said Uppal. The report also revealed key

patterns in how Indians give. In-kind contributions account for the largest share of 46 per cent, slightly higher than cash donations of 44 per cent, while about 30 per cent of respondents reported volunteering, reflecting the relational and community-driven nature of giving. In terms of learning channels, in-person canvassing is considered the most effective mode of engagement i.e. 25 per cent, followed by social media at approximately 15 per cent across regions. This underscores the continued importance of trust, proximity, and relational credibility in shaping giving decisions, even as digital outreach gains traction.

leisure

FORTUNE FORECAST



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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181*

ARIES



Curl, massage, clip, tweeze, polish, gloss, condition... today, will you attempt to shed your old skin. A dream date may have you in jitters but Ganesha suggests that you take it easy. True relationships are not sealed by glossy kisses alone!

TAURUS



This all matters are likely to revolve around the opposite sex. Women are going to feature prominently and significantly in everything that you do. So says Ganesha. That is good. But you will be inclined to be lazy and laid back and may thus reduce the effect and impact of efforts. Keep your sluggishness away and you will find that everything that you have been striving for is falling in your lap.

GEMINI




You need to pay more attention to yourself today. Your kind and generous nature means you often think about others rather than about yourself. Now is the time to pay attention to your own needs. You need to spend more time with your family and friends as well, says Ganesha.

CANCER




You will secure your place with hard work in your job or business. Ties with partners will improve. Closeness with spouse is indicated. Melody and joy will mark domestic bliss. You will spend the evening with your beloved. Ganesha's blessings are with you.

LEO




The pressure at work will be high. Some person may try to tempt you with lucrative offers to go against your principles. However, you will be able to resist the lure of easy money. Your health may suffer today, so be on guard, says Ganesha.

VIRGO



You will stay calm and steady today, and there is hardly anything that can disturb your peace of mind. Your family and friends will back you fully and motivate you to overcome hurdles. You will work with devotion, says Ganesha. You may ask for work that others may find very difficult to do.

LIBRA



Ganesha says people will try to take advantage of your amiable nature and disposition. Small issues will crop up today making your nature a little tensed and enhance your anger too. You will be inspired to take chances in monetary matters. Ganesha says you need to keep your mind steady and regain your lost charm soon.

SCORPIO



Your imagination runs wild today. Though you do not travel geographically, your mind travels beyond boundaries. Think and act according to your will, advises Ganesha. However, practice caution before taking any major step.

SAGITTARIUS




You will be loaded with responsibilities at work today, fore sees Ganesha. But, you are pro challenges and will take it up sportingly. On personal front, the list of your friends is likely to get longer. All in all, Ganesha sees you in an active avatar today.

CAPRICORN



Don't let your emotions play a spoilsport while deciding about the future. Think practically, otherwise, your expectations and reality will not be on the same boat, guides Ganesha. Friendly and supportive, today you will spread happiness and win the love of one and all. Whenever you get confused about which path to take, take advice from the experienced people around you.

AQUARIUS



Set any target, take up any activity or accept any challenge; you will succeed in any of them with flying colours, foresees Ganesha. Your well-wishers will shower praises upon you for those hard earned achievements. Friends are like family to you, take them out and have a gala time before another busy day begins.

PISCES



You will be busy with romance throughout the day. While singles are likely to find the person of their dreams, those who are married will establish a new closeness in their relationship. Your attitude towards work will begin to change. You will become more serious about your career, and the fruits of this transformation will be reaped by you shortly in the near future, says Ganesha.



SHAKIRA TO PERFORM IN INDIA AFTER 19 YEARS

Shakira is all set to perform in India after 19 years. The Colombian superstar will perform in Mumbai April 10 and in Delhi April 15, marking the first time the concert will be hosted across two cities. Shakira last performed in India in 2007 during her *Oral Fixation Tour* in Mumbai

HAILEY FEELS FAME CAN BE EXHAUSTING

Hailey Bieber, the wife of singer-songwriter Justin Bieber, feels fame is not an easy path to tread. She has found fame to be “mentally exhausting”. The 29-year-old model shared that it’s easy to lose a sense of perspective when you’re in the spotlight, reports *Female First UK*



SHANAYA'S lessons from rejection

MUMBAI: Bollywood actor Shanaya Kapoor was initially set to make her debut with Dharma Productions’ *Bedhadak*, co-starring Lakshya and Gurfateh Pirzada. However, the project was eventually shelved. Looking back, Shanaya says she is grateful for how things unfolded, as the setbacks pushed her to grow as a performer.

In a recent interview, she shared that the experience of films being shelved and projects not materialising shaped her journey and encouraged her to work harder on her craft. During the time she wasn’t facing the camera, Shanaya focused on training

and self-improvement. She credited her father, Sanjay Kapoor, for guiding her to concentrate on what was within her control and continue honing her skills consistently.

Shanaya began her film career behind the scenes as an assistant director on *Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl*. She eventually made her acting debut opposite Vikrant Massey in *Aankhon Ki Gustaakhiyan*, though the film underperformed at the box office.

Her latest release, *Tu Yaa Main*, co-starring Adarsh Gourav and directed by Bejoy Nambiar, opened to mixed reviews and a modest box-office response.

AGENCIES



Mrunal champions old-school romance

preserving testing

When options love in the world, the told, “They at where we also, that’s we give up on each other. There is something so beautiful about our characters in the film, even if they’re born in the current era, they’re such old school people. They’re not giving up on each other, like how it is today.”

She further mentioned, “People are just giving up on each other very easily. I just want each and every teenager out there to believe that love exists. Please do not give up on love. It is beautiful. It is magical. If you are with the right person, just be patient enough to not jump onto any board, just be patient enough to wait for the right person to enter in your life, because the moment he or she does, life is easy”.

IAN S

15th Herbal Holi in City to promote safe celebrations



BHUBANESWAR: In an effort to promote a safe and eco-friendly Holi celebration, the 15th edition of Herbal Holi is set to be celebrated in the City. Like every year, the event aims to encourage people to enjoy the festival through natural and chemical-free means.

The event will be held March 2 at the Exhibition Ground from 4 pm to 10 pm. Participants will play Holi using herbal colors made from natural ingredients such as turmeric, sandalwood, multani mitti, neem, and beetroot, the organisers said at a press meet held at Kalinga Rail Museum here.

The programme is being organised by Swapna Pati Foundation in collaboration with Lavinswood Inter-

national Private Limited.

The celebration will also feature live performances by popular Bollywood and Ollywood artists including Shahzad Ali, Shabab Sabri, Ajaz Khan and Urfi Javed. DJ Ayush will add energy to the evening with his music. Around 1,000 participants, along with several prominent industrialists and guests, are expected to attend the event.

Tickets for the programme are available on BookMyShow.

Apart from organiser Swapna Pati, others who were present at the presser included actress Suryamayee Mohapatra, Priyanka, actor Subhashish Sharma, Odissi dance guru Gauri Shankar Das, producer Rajesh Mohanty, trustee Rakesh Mohanty, associate Satyajit Mohanty, comedian Rishi Pattnaik and choreographer Amit Nayak.

PNN

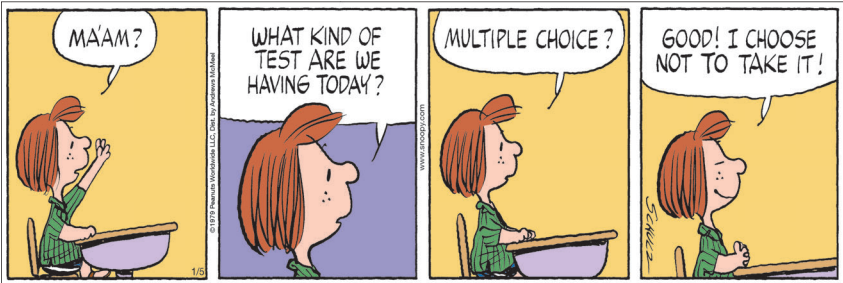
SATABDIRA KALAKARA'S MULTILINGUAL DRAMA FEST BEGINS



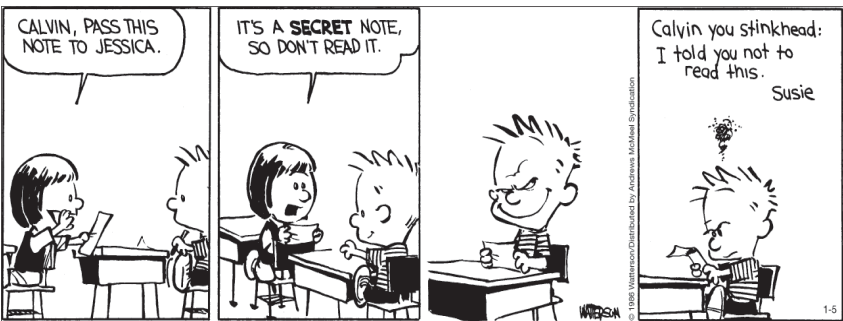
The host troupe presented Odia play *Mahasangramara Mahanayaka* on the first evening of the 5-day event at Rabindra Mandap, Friday. Written by Biswabhusan Harichandan, the play was directed by troupe's founder and secretary Dhira Mallik. The festival, titled National Kalinga Natya Mahotsav, marks the golden jubilee celebrations of the organisation.

PIC: BIKASH NAYAK

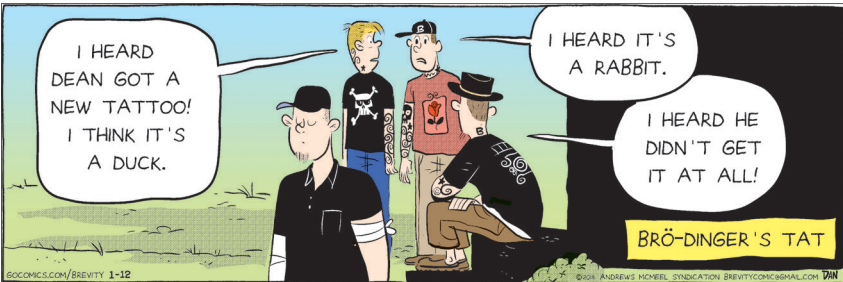
PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

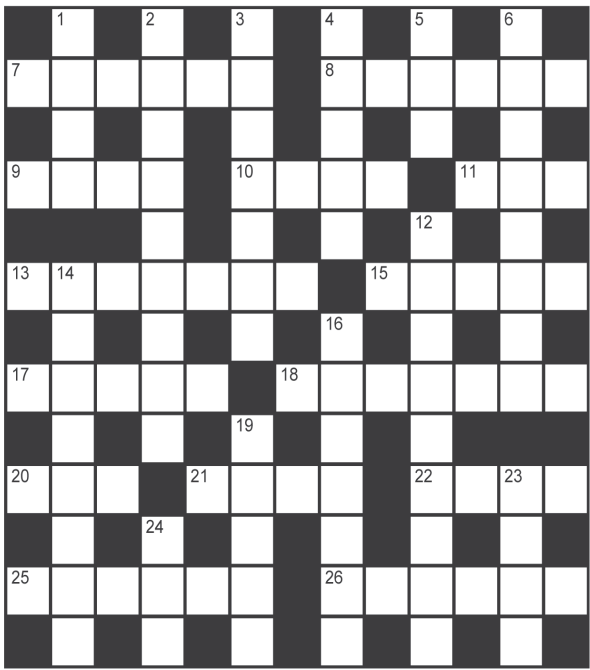


BREVITY



FUN post

CROSSWORD



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- Across

7 Seat of power

8 Odd

9 Terrarium plant

10 Highway exit

11 ___ de Triomphe

13 Tentacled creature

15 Japanese cartoon art

17 Manicurist's board

18 Cutting the roast

20 Slot machine symbol

21 Cattle member

22 Like hen's teeth

25 Land on Lake Victoria

26 Almost

Down

1 Loafer, e.g.

2 Cloudbursts

3 Afraid

4 Scrumptious

5 New Zealand parrot

6 Robin Hood's followers (5,3)

12 World-wide

14 Run for office

16 Voyaging

19 Kind of race

23 Film part

24 Pantry pest

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

SOLUTIONS

A	T	U	U	L	G
O	R	D	A	I	N
M	N	L	A	C	B
F	O	L	E	G	S
U	A	E	N	I	
T	R	A	I	P	S
N	H	C	S		
A	G	A	T	E	
L	R	B	U	L	
C	O	L	I	S	E
B	G	A	P	A	U
V	A	L	U	E	D
L	E	Y	E	I	E

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

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

Trump: Considering limited strikes on Iran

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Washington, Feb 20: President Donald Trump warned Friday that limited strikes against Iran are possible even as the country's top diplomat said Tehran expects to have a proposed deal ready in the next few days following nuclear talks with the US.

In response to a reporter's question on whether the US could take limited military action as the countries negotiate, Trump said, "I guess I can say I am considering that." Earlier, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in a TV interview that his country was planning to finalise a draft deal in "the next two to three days" to then send to Washington.

"I don't think it takes long, perhaps, in a matter of a week or so, we can start real, serious negotiations on the text and come to a conclusion," Araghchi said on MSNOW's 'Morning Joe' show.

The tensions between the longtime adversaries have ramped up as the Trump administration pushes for concessions from Iran and has built up the largest US military presence in the Middle East in decades, with more warships and aircraft on the way. Both countries have signalled that they are prepared for war if



talks on Tehran's nuclear programme fizzle out.

"We are prepared for war, and we are prepared for peace," Araghchi said Friday.

Trump said a day earlier that he believes 10 to 15 days is "enough time" for Iran to reach a deal following recent rounds of indirect negotiations, including this week in Geneva, that made little visible progress. But the talks have been deadlocked for years, and Iran has refused to discuss wider US and Israeli demands that it scale back its missile programme and sever ties to armed groups.

Araghchi also said Friday that his American counterparts have not asked for zero enrichment of uranium as part of the latest round of talks, which is in contradiction to what US officials have said. "What we are now talking about is how to make sure that Iran's nuclear programme, including enrichment, is peaceful and will remain peaceful forever," he said.

He added that in return Iran will implement some confidence-building measures in exchange for relief on economic sanctions. In response to Araghchi's claim, a White House official said Trump has been clear that Iran cannot have nuclear weapons or the capacity to build them and that it cannot enrich uranium.



FREESTYLE SKIING: Germany's Leonie Bachl-Staudinger, 20, competes during the women's ski cross qualifications at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Livigno, Italy, Friday AP/PTI

Deploy judges to end trust deficit: SC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 20: Dismayed over ongoing tussle between the West Bengal government and the Election Commission (EC), the Supreme Court Friday issued an "extraordinary" direction to deploy serving and former district judges to assist the poll panel in the controversy-ridden special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in the state.

Ruing the "unfortunate blame game" and the "trust deficit" between the EC and the "democratically elected" TMC government, a bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi passed a slew of fresh directions to ensure completion of the SIR process. The bench ordered deputa-tion of judicial officers for adjudication of claims and objections of the persons, who are put under the logical discrepancy lists and facing removal of their names from the electoral rolls.

Logical discrepancies in progeny linking with the 2002 voter list include instances of a mismatch in the parent's name and the age difference between a voter and their parent being less than 15 years or more than 50 years. The top court asked Calcutta High Court Chief Justice Sujoy Paul to spare some

WEST BENGAL SIR



The top court permitted the EC to publish a final list of voters in West Bengal by February 28

judicial officers and find former judges to assist in the SIR work as it took serious note of the state government not sparing enough grade 'A'0 officers for the revision exercise. Chief Justice Paul has been asked to convene a meeting Saturday and the same will be attended by Chief Secretary, DGP, official from the EC, Advocate General of the state. Additional Solicitor General of the Union and the Registrar General of the High Court on the issue of finalising modalities of deputing judicial officers in SIR process.

"In order to ensure fairness in the adjudication of the genuineness of the documents and consequential inclusion/exclusion in voters list, and as agreed to by both sides, we are left with hardly any other option but to request the Chief Justice of the Calcutta High

Court to spare serving judicial officers along with some former judicial officers in the rank of Additional District Judge and District Judges who can then be requested to revisit/dispose of the pending claims under the category of 'logical discrepancy'," the bench ordered.

Disregarding the vehement objections of the state government, the top court permitted the EC to publish a final list of voters in the state by February 28, the deadline fixed earlier. However, it also permitted the election commission to come out with supplementary lists later.

It noted that no prejudice will be caused to anyone if supplementary voter lists are issued after February 28 as names of electors can be included till the last date of filing of nomination papers for the elections.

Senior advocate Shyam Di-

van, appearing for Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, alleged that the orders passed by the electoral roll officers (EROs) are now being scrutinised by a "new species of officers" called the 'special roll officers'.

"The 'special roll officers' cannot trump EROs. How can they on a wholesale basis reject what ERO has done?" Divan asked. The EC refuted that claim and said that the SROs are there since inception. The bench agreed with the submissions of the poll panel. The bench further said that if there is non-cooperation then the court will deploy judicial officers or ask the EC to deploy the officials from other states.

Bengal govt counsel senior advocate Kapil Sibal said there might be a law and order problem, if the poll panel is permitted to publish the final voter list by February 28. In a bid to balance equity, the SC said such judicial officers/former judicial officers, while adjudicating the claims and objections, shall be assisted by poll panel's micro-observers and also by the officers of the state government.

"The circumstances being extraordinary, the entrustment of work to judicial officers and former judicial officers is also extraordinary," the bench said.

Core sectors growth slows down in Jan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 20: Production growth of India's eight key infrastructure sectors slowed down to a two-month low of 4 per cent in January, according to official data released Friday.

It was 5.1 per cent in January 2025 and 4.7 per cent in December 2025.

Crude oil and natural gas output recorded negative growth in January. Production of refinery products remained flat.

Production growth of coal and cement moderated to 3.1 per cent and 10.7 per cent during the month under review against 4.6 per cent and 14.3 per cent, respectively, in January 2025.

However, fertiliser, steel and electricity output recorded a positive growth during the month.

During the April-January period of this fiscal, growth of core sector industries was down to 2.8 per cent, compared with 4.5 per cent recorded during the corresponding period of the previous fiscal.

Commenting on the data, Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist, ICRA Ltd, said the slowdown was broad-based, with as many as seven of the 8 sectors witnessing a deterioration in their YoY growth performance.

Woman's body found; hubby dies in hospital

POST NEWS NETWORK

Brajarajnagar, Feb 20: A 55-year-old woman was found dead under suspicious circumstances at her residence here Friday, while her husband, who was also inside the house and fell unconscious when the door was opened, died at a hospital later in the day.

The deceased were identified as Rukmini Bhoi and Gobinda Bhoi, 61, a retired employee of Mahanadi Coalfields Ltd (MCL). Police suspect foul play in Rukmini's death, though the exact cause will be ascertained after the investigation.

The incident occurred in Sanajob Hanuman Mandir Pada under Orient police station.

According to police, the couple was staying alone in the house. The main door had reportedly remained locked from inside for nearly four days. Rukmini's younger sister, who lives nearby, had been trying to contact her over the phone but received no response. When she went to the house around 11am Friday and knocked on the door, Gobinda opened it. Upon entering, she found Rukmini's decomposed body inside and immediately alerted the police.

When police personnel ar-



When police personnel arrived and entered the house, Gobinda Bhoi reportedly fell unconscious. He was rushed to Mandaliya Hospital, where he died while undergoing treatment

rived and entered the house Gobinda reportedly fell unconscious. He was rushed to Mandaliya Hospital, where he died while undergoing treatment.

Police said Rukmini's death might have occurred about three days earlier. The bodies have been sent for postmortem, and further investigation is underway. Brajarajnagar SDPO Chintamani Pradhan visited the spot and supervised the inquiry.

'Interim trade pact likely to be operationalised in April'

New Delhi: An interim trade agreement between India and the US is likely to be signed in March and operationalised in April, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said Friday.

Earlier this month, India and US released a joint statement announcing a framework for an interim trade agreement. To finalise the text of the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement, the chief negotiators of the two countries will meet in Washington next week. The three-day meeting between the two teams will begin February 23. Goyal told reporters here that the pact is expected to be signed next month and may be implemented in April. US Trade Representative (USTR) Jamieson Greer is likely to visit India in March to sign the agreement. In an event at the AI Impact Summit here, US Ambassador Sergio Gor said that the India-US trade deal is set to be inked soon.

Sahara desert odyssey yields major dinosaur discovery

At a remote and barren Sahara desert site in Niger, scientists have unearthed fossils of a new species of Spinosaurus, among the biggest of the meat-eating dinosaurs, notable for its large blade-shaped head crest and jaws bearing interlocking teeth for snaring slippery fish.

It prowled a forested inland environment and strode into rivers to catch sizable fish like a modern-day wading bird - a 'hell heron', as one of the researchers put it, considering it was about 40 feet long and weighed 5-7 tonnes.

The dinosaur presented a striking profile on the Cretaceous Period landscape of Africa some 95 million years ago as it hunted large fish like coelacanths in the region's waterways. Its bony cranial crest,

about 20 inches tall, resembled a curved sword called a scimitar, and it had a large sail-like structure on its back and an elongated crocodile-like snout.

Along with the existing genus name Spinosaurus, meaning 'spine lizard', the researchers gave it the species name mirabilis, meaning 'astounding', referring to its crest. A genus is a group of closely related species bearing similar traits. For example, lions and tigers are the same genus but different species.

It is only the second known species of Spinosaurus, a dinosaur that has gained fame in popular culture for its depiction in the 'Jurassic Park' movies. The other one, Spinosaurus aegyptiacus, was named in 1915 based on fossils from Egypt.

Spinosaurus, the only known semiaquatic dinosaur predator,



joins Tyrannosaurus, Giganotosaurus and Carcharodontosaurus among the largest meat-eating dinosaurs.

The two Spinosaurus species, which were contemporaneous, shared the same general body plan including long dorsal spines forming the sail-like structure and a skull adapted

for hunting fish. The crest of Spinosaurus mirabilis is much larger compared to Spinosaurus aegyptiacus, and it has a more elongated snout, teeth more spread out from each other and longer hind limbs.

The researchers said its crest likely was for display, since it appears too fragile to have been used as a weapon, even though it was solid bone without the air sacs present in some other dinosaur crests. The crest, probably sheathed in keratin like a bull's horns, may have been vividly colored and instrumental in sexual or territorial competition or recognition between individuals.

"It's about love and life - attracting a mate, defending your hot feeding shallows," said University of Chicago paleontologist Paul Sereno, lead

author of the research published Thursday in the journal Science. "What else could be more important?"

The retracted location of its nostrils, farther back than usual, let it submerge most of its snout under water to stalk swimming prey for as long as necessary while breathing normally. In addition, its upper and lower rows of teeth fit neatly together during a bite, called interdigitation.

"Their large conical teeth without serrations that interdigitate form a 'fish trap' that is very good at piercing and trapping slippery fish in the jaws, preventing them from sliding," said paleontologist and study co-author Daniel Vidal of the University of Chicago and Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia in Spain.

Sereno called the Spinosaurus mirabilis discovery 'the coup de grace for the aquatic hypothesis'.

Jenguebi, where the fossils were discovered, is a remote Sahara locality, with fossil-rich sandstone outcrops surrounded by sand dunes. For their 2022 expedition, the researchers set out from the city of Agadez in a convoy and drove off-road through desert terrain for almost three days, often getting stuck in the sand.

The journey paid off, as they discovered parts of three Spinosaurus mirabilis skulls and other bones, along with fossils of other creatures.

Long overshadowed in the public imagination by T. rex, Spinosaurus is now having its time in the spotlight.

"It's a dino-happening," Sereno said.

REUTERS

ODISHA BUDGET 2026-27

AMBITIOUS VISION MEETS SKEPTICISM

Mohan Charan Majhi's mega Budget draws mixed reactions from citizens and leaders



ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, Feb 20: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Friday presented the Odisha Annual Budget for FY 2026-27 in the State Legislative Assembly, unveiling a massive budgetary outlay of Rs 3,10,000 crore. Branded as a roadmap for “Lokanka Unnati, Rajyara Pragati”, the budget is structured around six pillars; People First, Rural Empowerment, Prosperity for All, Our Legacy Our Pride, Technology Leading the Way, and People-Centric Governance, aimed at fostering inclusive growth, modernizing infrastructure, and strengthening social welfare.

Among the marquee proposals are the Rs 1,000 crore Jagannath Interpretation Centre in Puri and a World Tourism Center, designed to place Odisha on the global tourism map. The new Digital Hundi – SAMARPAN platform will modernize temple donations, making religious contributions more transparent and accessible. Social welfare schemes are prominent, with the expansion of the Madhubabu Pension Yojana to benefit six lakh additional citizens and the launch of the Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangal Yojana, which provides Rs 1,00,001 to girls from economically weaker families upon graduation.

Education receives a significant push with four new universities planned in Kendrapada, Jagatsinghpur, Bhadrak, and Jharsuguda, alongside specialized colleges for engineering, agriculture, veterinary, fisheries, Ayurvedic, and homeopathy disciplines. Skill

Among the marquee proposals are the ₹1,000 crore Jagannath Interpretation Centre in Puri and a World Tourism Centre, designed to place Odisha on the global tourism map

development and innovation will be advanced through initiatives like the Dakshyata Vikas Yojana, the Rare Earth Corridor, and the Odisha AI Mission. Urban and rural development will be promoted through the Mukhyamantri Smart City Mission, Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission, and the Samrudhha Anganwadi Yojana. Connectivity projects include three major expressways—Berhampur-Jeypore Road, NaMo Expressway, and Atal Expressway—linking East-West and North-South corridors. Bhubaneswar itself will see a transformation with new government buildings, a state-of-the-art museum, the Odisha Mandap Convention Centre, and a Police Memorial.

Educator Naba Kishore Pujari praised the Rs 42,565 crore allocation for education, highlighting the potential of new universities and specialized colleges, but cautioned that while technology is a budgetary pillar, the Rs 23 crore AI Mission and Rs 100 crore Smart City funds are relatively small compared to traditional infra-

structure. He noted that efficient execution would be critical, as Odisha has historically faced challenges in fund utilization. Social activist Narayan Prusty welcomed the online temple donation platform and the financial support for girls, calling the Rs 20,000 grant at birth for girls from poor families “the most welcome step.”

Youth activist Sunil Kumar Mishra acknowledged the focus on infrastructure, agriculture, and women’s welfare but flagged concerns over unemployment, stating that there is no clear roadmap for large-scale government recruitment or job security. While skill development is encouraging, he warned that without stable employment, growth may not translate into real livelihoods.

Senior BJD leader Arun Sahoo added that the government had launched so many schemes that even their own MLAs and ministers would struggle to remember them, calling it “an elephant-like budget, but spending like ants.”

Despite criticism, the ruling government highlighted the budget’s long-term potential in education, tourism, infrastructure, and social welfare. Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said, “The ‘Developed Odisha’ Budget 2026-27 is a transformative and welfare-oriented roadmap reflecting our commitment to inclusive growth and social justice. Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, this historic Rs 3.10 lakh crore budget will accelerate progress in education, skill development, agriculture, industry, and infrastructure. It prioritizes the poor, farmers, women, youth, SCs, STs, and marginalized communities, ensuring development reaches every village and household.”

The Odisha Budget 2026-27 presents an ambitious vision for inclusive development, technological adoption, and global positioning. While citizens and experts largely welcome the social welfare and educational initiatives, skepticism remains regarding fund utilization, employment generation, and execution. The coming year will reveal whether this Rs 3.10 lakh crore blueprint translates into tangible growth and prosperity for Odisha’s people.

Care Hospitals marks 10th anniversary in City

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 20: Care Hospitals celebrated its 10th anniversary Friday with a grand event at the Lumbini Convention Centre in Bhubaneswar. The festivities began with a captivating Odissi dance performance, setting a vibrant and celebratory tone for the occasion.

Kislay Anand, Zonal Chief Operating Officer of Care Hospitals, welcomed the guests and reflected on the hospital’s journey. He highlighted how Aditya Care Hospital began a decade ago with just 80 beds and has since grown into a multi-specialty institution, providing advanced medical care at affordable costs. Originally focused on cardiac care, the hospital has expanded its services to include several specialties. Looking ahead, Anand announced that a 160-bed state-of-the-art independent oncology unit will be inaugurated by January 2027 to further enhance patient care.

The event was graced by Tathagata Satpathy, Editor of Dharitri and Orissa Post as the Chief Guest, and Adyasha Satpathy, CEO of Dharitri and Orissa Post as the Guest of Honour. Both felicitated employees who have made outstanding contributions across



HOLISTIC APPROACH: Dharitri and OrissaPOST Editor Tathagata Satpathy and Chief Executive Adyasha Satpathy grace the 10th Annual Day celebration of Care Hospitals in Bhubaneswar, Friday

various hospital departments.

Sharing his personal experience, Tathagata praised the cordial behaviour of the doctors, nurses, and healthcare staff. He noted that while corporate hospitals are often accused of exploiting patients, he had never faced such issues at Care Hospitals and wished good health to everyone present.

In her address, Adyasha emphasised the importance of ethical conduct among profes-

sionals. She stated that whether in media organisations or healthcare institutions, upholding high ethical standards is essential for all employees.

Mahendra Prasad Tripathy, Head of Cardiology and Clinical Director, reminisced about his 10-year association with the hospital, reflecting on its remarkable growth and achievements. Lokanath Dash, Associate Vice President of Corporate Communi-

cations, reaffirmed the hospital’s commitment to delivering quality patient care.

From its modest beginnings in a small rented facility, Care Hospitals has expanded significantly, introducing modern treatment services, including AI-assisted and robotic surgeries. With the upcoming oncology unit, the hospital aims to further accelerate its services and meet the growing healthcare demands of the community.

A full menu in an empty kitchen: Naveen on Budget

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Feb 20: Leader of Opposition and Biju Janata Dal (BJD) Supremo Naveen Patnaik Friday strongly criticized the Odisha Budget 2026-27 presented in the Assembly by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, likening it to “a full menu in an empty kitchen.” In a statement issued here, Patnaik expressed deep disappointment, alleging that the so-called “double engine government” is steering the state in the reverse direction despite promising transformative development for the people of Odisha.

Patnaik remarked that under the present government, every newborn child in Odisha would effectively carry a per-capita loan burden of nearly Rs.30,000. He warned that the state’s total debt is expected to soon reach Rs.1,30,000 crore, a development he said could severely strain Odisha’s finances and derail its development momentum as well as welfare initiatives.

Recalling his tenure, the former Chief Minister stated



that when the BJD government assumed office, much of the state’s revenue was used to repay loans and service debts, leaving limited funds for development. However, through years of meticulous planning and fiscal prudence, his government significantly reduced the loan burden.

Patnaik accused the BJP government of pushing Odisha toward financial instability. He further pointed out that people had hoped the “Double Engine” model would bring double benefits, particularly increased

grant-in-aid from the Centre. Instead, he claimed, central remittances to Odisha have been shrinking year after year, especially over the past two years.

While welcoming the Chief Minister’s tribute to farmers in his budget speech, Patnaik argued that the financial proposals fall short of addressing the real challenges faced by the farming community.

Describing the budget as filled with grand promises but lacking concrete measures for sustainable development, he concluded, “It is like a full menu in an empty kitchen.”

Meanwhile, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has described the Budget as a welfare-oriented and forward-looking blueprint aimed at building a “Developed Odisha.” The budget, presented in the State Assembly by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, outlines a comprehensive development strategy focusing on inclusive growth, infrastructure expansion, and sectoral advancement across the state, he stated.

NCTB-2026 inaugurated at RD Women’s University

Bhubaneswar: The two-day conference titled “National Conference on Translational Biotechnology (NCTB-2026): Innovation for Societal Impact” was formally inaugurated Friday at Rama Devi Women’s University by the Department of Biotechnology. The inaugural ceremony was attended by eminent academicians and researchers from across the country. The chief guest of the opening session was Deepashikha Chakraborty from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc). In her keynote address, she underscored the importance of translating laboratory research into practical solutions that can directly benefit society. The session was presided over by the Vice-Chancellor Chandi Charan Rath, who reaffirmed the University’s commitment to fostering innovative and socially impactful research. Raj Kumar Joshi, Head of the Department of Biotechnology and Convener of the conference, delivered the welcome address.

Vigilance unearths massive assets during raid on Kalahandi forester

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhawanipatna, Feb 20: Officials of Odisha Vigilance Friday uncovered substantial assets during simultaneous house searches linked to Forester Bhagbat Bhusan Behera. The searches were conducted following allegations that Behera, serving as forester of Bhatangpadar forest section under Bhawanipatna forest range in Kalahandi district, possessed assets disproportionate to his known sources of income.

According to Vigilance sources, the raids were carried out at three locations in Kalahandi



district on the strength of search warrants issued by the Special Judge, Vigilance, Bhawanipatna. During the searches, officials reportedly discovered a triple-storeyed residential building measuring approximately 5,300 sq ft at Hill Town, Bhawanipatna, constructed between 2022 and 2024, one four-wheeler (Toyota Urban Cruiser) and one two-wheeler, two Kubota

harvester machines, four tractors and one Bolero vehicle, allegedly held benami.

In addition, Behera was found to be in possession of nine valuable plots in and around Bhawanipatna town. The Vigilance Technical Wing is currently conducting measurement and valuation of the building and plots.

Officials also recovered approximately 210 grams of gold ornaments. Details regarding bank deposits, postal savings, and other financial investments are being ascertained.

Behera had entered government service August 20, 2000, as a forest guard in the office

of the Divisional Forest Officer (North), Kalahandi, with an initial salary of Rs 3,000 per month. The investigation is ongoing, and further details are awaited.

MARKET WATCH								
CURRENCY			BOURSES		COMMODITIES			
INDEX	VARIATION		INDEX	VARIATION		INDEX	VARIATION	
DOLLAR	90.97	▲ 0.26	SENSEX	82814.71	▲ 316.57	GOLD	₹156,674	▲ ₹1855
EURO	107.10	▼ 0.3	NIFTY	25571.25	▲ 116.90	SILVER	₹253,008	▲ ₹11,615

CLASSIFIED AFFIDAVIT

Sri Sania Sabar, S/o. Late Ikana Sabar declare by this affidavit No. 8, dated 17.02.2026, sworn before the Executive Magistrate, Gudari, that now onwards I want to correction my Daughter's name from Gitanjali Sabar to Ritanjali Sabar bearing Aadhaar Card No. XXXX XXXX 9426 of Village At: Talakhariguda, P.O.: Khariguda, P.S.: Gudari, Dist.: Rayagada for all future purposes.

By virtue of an affidavit sworn before Executive Magistrate, Rayagada . I, Umesh Majhi, S/o.Din Bandhu Majhi, Address At/Po-Kucheipadar, PS-Doraguda, Dist-Rayagada, Pin Code -765015, Odisha, declared that I have changed my name from Jalendra Das to Umesh Majhi by this affidavit no. 5400, dt. 05.04.2025. Henceforth, I will be known as Umesh Majhi for all purposes. Umesh Majhi

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 20: The 40th Foundation Day of Hotel and Restaurant Association of Odisha (HRAO) will be celebrated March 1 in Puri, in which Deputy Chief Minister Pravatī Parida, Puri MP Sambit Patra and MLA Sunil Mohanty are likely to be present, informed the organizing committee during a presser here Friday.

The event will bring together industry leaders, policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and members of hospitality fraternity to reflect on past achievements and chart the roadmap for the future.

Established in 1986 with only six members, today, the outfit



has a strong membership base of 388 hoteliers. HRAO continues to grow as a vibrant and unified platform for the hospitality industry in state with the primary objectives to facilitate sharing of important industry information, exchange inno-

vative management ideas, and encourage professional collaboration among members. At the same time, HRAO remains committed in promoting the immense tourism potential of Odisha jointly with the positive support and cooperation

from the state government to position Odisha as one of the leading tourist destinations in the country.

“Through collective efforts and close cooperation with Tourism department, government of Odisha and stakeholders, we aim to strengthen the hospitality ecosystem and contribute meaningfully to the growth of Odisha’s tourism economy,” said HRAO chairman JK Mohanty.

“We are happy that the Tourism department has also introduced the State Tourism Advisory Council (STAC) under the chairmanship of tourism minister to review growth and speed up implementation of projects once in a year,” HRAO members said.

WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	35.4°	32.4°	Dry weather likely to prevail
Min Temp	16.0°	15.6°	
Humidity	57%	72%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	

Student unrest erupts in CUO

7-day ultimatum

POST NEWS NETWORK

The Vice-Chancellor in-charge assured students that issues would be resolved within seven days. Agitating students, however, issued a clear warning: if no concrete action is taken, protests will intensify and classes will be boycotted indefinitely.



राष्ट्रीय संस्कृत विश्वविद्यालय, तिरुपति

NATIONAL SANSKRIT UNIVERSITY, TIRUPATI

(A Central University established by an Act of Parliament)

भर्ती अधिसूचना / RECRUITMENT NOTIFICATION

Teaching Posts (Direct Recruitment)

(Advt. No. NSKTU/Admn./T/2025/04 dated 18.02.2026)

National Sanskrit University, Tirupati invites online applications from Indian Nationals for the Direct Recruitment of Teaching positions.


S. No.	Name of the Post	No. of Posts Vacant	No. of Posts & Reserved Categories							Academic Pay Level (7 th CPC)
			SC	ST	OBC	PwBD	EWS	UR		
1.	Associate Professor in Yoga Vijnana	01	-	-	01*	-	-	-	13A	
2.	Associate Professor in Agama	01	-	-	-	-	-	01	13A	

* Backlog vacancies

The last date for submission of online applications for teaching positions is 15-03-2026. For details of posts, educational qualification, experience and other criteria, please visit the University website <http://www.nsktu.ac.in>.

cbc 21364/12/0004/2526
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E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE

Date of e-auction : 25.03.2026, Time of e-auction : 12.00 NOON - 2.00 PM Last date of EMD : 24.03.2026, Time upto 04.00 PM Place of Sale: https://www.baanknet.com					
Sl. No.	a) Name of Branch b) Name of Borrower / Guarantor with Address	Description of the Immovable Properties Mortgaged / Owner's Name	QR Code for Property Image and Details	a) Date of 13(2) Notice b) Date of 13 (4) Notice c) Demand Notice Amount	a) Reserve Price b) EMD c) Bid Increase Amount
Authorised Officer Name : Sh. Nafe Singh, Phone No. 99533 12185, Details of NEFT/RTGS for EMD : IFSC : PSIB0000719, A/c. 07195040070003					
1.	a) ARB, Kolkata b) Borrowers : 1. M/s. Jagwani Projects Pvt. Ltd. 2. M/s. Laaj Led Lights Pvt. Ltd. 3. M/s. Transhimalayan Logistics Pvt. Ltd. Guarantors : 1. Mr. Gowardhan Das Jagwani 2. Mr. Anil Kumar Jagwani, 3. Mrs. Lajwanti Jagwani 4. Shri Sunil Kumar Jagwani, 5. Mrs. Savitri Jagwani 6. Mrs. Jyoti Jagwani	Equitable Mortgage of Flat No. 1C measuring 650 Sq. Ft. at first floor at Village - Sundara, Unit No. 13, Khata No. 145/87, Plot No. 339/947. Kissam - Gharbari-II, Tahasil + P. S. + Sub Registrar - Barbil, District - Keonjhar. (Property under Symbolic Possession)		a) 30.06.2016 b) 05.10.2020 c) Rs. 14,39,11,008.51 as per 13(2) notice plus interest and other applicable charges thereon	a) Rs. 14.06 Lakh b) Rs. 1.41 Lakh c) Rs. 10,00,000
Date & Time of Inspection : 19.03.2026 to 20.03.2026 (between 10.00 A.M. to 04.00 P.M.)					
1. TERMS & CONDITIONS : 1. The e-Auction is being held on "AS IS WHERE IS" and "AS IS WHAT IS BASIS". 2. To the best of knowledge and information of the Authorized Officer, there is no encumbrance on any property except as mentioned above. However, the intending bidders should make their own independent inquiries regarding the encumbrances, title of property/ies put on auction and claims/rights/dues/affecting the property prior to submitting their bid. The e-Auction advertisement does not constitute and will not be deemed to constitute any commitment or any representation of the bank. The property is being sold with all the existing and future encumbrances whether known or unknown to the bank. The Authorized Officer/Secured Creditor shall not be responsible in any way for any third party claims/rights/dues. 3. It shall be the responsibility of the bidders to inspect and satisfy themselves about the asset and specification before submitting the bid. 4. Only Buyers holding user id/password and confirmed payment of EMD through NEFT/RTGS shall be eligible for participating in the e-auction process. 5. The Interested Bidders, who have submitted their EMD not below the 10% pf reserve price through online mode before 24.03.2026 for the auction held upto 04.00 pm shall be eligible for participating in the bidding process. The e-auction of the above properties would be conducted exactly on the scheduled date and time as mentioned against each property by way of inter-se bidding amongst the bidders. The bidder shall improve their offer in multiple of the amount mentioned under the column "Bid increase amount" against each property. In case bid is placed in the last 5 minutes of the closing time of the e-Auction. The closing time will automatically get extended for 5 minutes (Subject to maximum of unlimited extensions of 5 minutes each). The bidder who submits the highest bid amount (Not below the reserve price) on closure of e-auction shall be declared as successful bidder and a communication to that effect will be issued through electronic mode which shall be subject to approval by the Authorized Officer/Secured Creditor. 6. The Prospective qualified bidders may avail online training on e-Auction from https://www.baanknet.com prior to the date of e-Auction. Neither the Authorized Officer/Bank nor https://www.baanknet.com shall be liable for any internet Network Problem and the interested bidders to ensure that they are technically well equipped for participating in the e-Auction event. 7. The purchaser shall bear the applicable stamp duties/additional stamp duty /transfer chargers, fee etc. and also all the Statutory/non-statutory dues, taxes retes assessment charge, fees etc. owing to anybody prior and future. 8. The Authorized Officer is not bound to accept the highest offer and the Authorized Officer has the absolute right to accept or reject any or all offer(s) or adjourn/cancel the e-Auction without assigning any reason thereof. 9. The bidders are advised to go through the detailed Terms & Conditions of e-Auction available on the Website: https://www.baanknet.com before submitting their bids and taking part in the e-Auction. 10. 25% of sale price is to be paid immediately i.e. on the same day or not later than next working day including earnest money already deposited from the acceptance of bid price by the Authorised Officer in case of default property shall the sold again. 11. Balance 75% of the said price is to be paid on or before 15 Day of the confirmation of sale of the movable/immovable property. In default of payment within the period mentioned above, the deposited shall be forfeited and property shall be resold and defaulting purchaser shall forfeit all claim to the property or to any part of the sum for which it may be subsequently sold.					
Date : 21.02.2026 Place : Kolkata		Authorised Officer Punjab & Sind Bank			
For details visit our website: http://www.punjabandsindbank.co.in					

FOCUS

INDO-FRENCH TIES

RISING SYNERGY



If India can leverage its demography, democracy and diversity, then India’s growth into a world power is unstoppable. Macron realizes it, appreciates and endorses it. But does Indian leadership realize its own strength and seek to preserve and build on it?

America to Pakistan. The collaboration between France and India is not limited to export of arms. Keeping the importance of emerging technologies in strategic thinking, France and India have constituted a Joint Advanced Technology Group which will co-develop emerging technologies, secure military supply chains, and maintain the competitive strategic advantage. This Group also included critical minerals, collaboration on AI, digital technology, aerospace and innovation. This initiative falls under the broader framework of 2026 India-France Year of Innovation.

The partnership is evolving innovatively. Prime Minister and President Macron jointly inaugurated the India-France Innovation Forum in Mumbai on 17 February, calling it a reflection of the deepening strategic partnership, shared democratic values, and expanding collaboration in innovation and technology. This will open up scope for work for scientists, researchers, traders, and entrepreneurs from both countries. France and India are becoming active in the fields of AI, space, and aviation.

The AI World Conference, currently in progress in India was initiated jointly by France and India. Both countries are working for democratization of AI which should be used for

common good. Both leaders inaugurated the Franco-Indian Centre for AI in health, jointly led by AIIMS, Sorbonne University and the Paris Brain Institute. Prime Minister Modi dreams of taking India into the top three AI powers in the world. In this journey, India would need the support of developed countries like France.

As France is perceived to be the voice of the European Union, the deepening of partnership will be good for India’s expanding relationship with the other 26 European countries. The recently concluded FTA with the European Union is one sign of such corollary dividends. Also, France is seeking to recalibrate its profile in Africa and is intending to draw India into Africa in a triangular collaboration. The French bases in the Indian Ocean and India-Pacific have lent strategic support to India. India-France friendship has yielded tangible results so far and one can be optimistic that the elevation of ties to Special Global Strategic Partnership will manifestly shine in many parts of the world.

Finally, Macron’s strong endorsement of the UPI system puts India into a league of its own. Macron said, “India builds something no other country in the world can.... a digital identity for 1.4 billion people, a payment system that now processes 20 billion transactions every month, a health infrastructure that has issued 500 million digital health IDs.”

The sheer size of coverage of any new technical initiative is unparalleled in India which is the most populous democratic country in the world. So, if India can leverage its demography, democracy and diversity, then India’s growth into a world power is unstoppable. Macron realizes it, appreciates and endorses it. But does Indian leadership realize its own strength and seek to preserve and build on it?

The writer is Professor of Practice, NIIS Group of Institutions INFA



DK Giri

THE MAIN DRIVER FOR THIS GROWING PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN INDIAN AND FRANCE IS THE ADHERENCE TO STRATEGIC AUTONOMY IN THE FOREIGN POLICIES OF BOTH COUNTRIES

The jogging by Emmanuel Macron, the President of France in the streets of Mumbai is not only a story of routine physical exercise, it is also a sign of the fast-growing friendship between two countries. The bilateralism between France and India is deepening by leaps and bounds. The elevation of the ties into a Special Global Strategic Partnership indicates how the relationship is becoming comprehensive and multi-dimensional. The partnership has stood the test of time.

French President Emmanuel Macron is currently on a three-day visit to India, which began on February 17, 2026. His visit aimed at strengthening bilateral ties focusing on areas like trade, defence, innovation and technology. The highlights of the visit include the launching of India-France year of innovation, the elevation of partnership, AI Impact Summit, and defence cooperation, mainly the procurement of 114 Rafael fighter jets and joint production of helicopters. The visit reflected the growing strategic convergence between India and France with shared interests in the Indo-Pacific and global stability.

The main driver for this growing partnership is the adherence to strategic autonomy in the foreign policies of both countries. Let us recall that during the Cold War, as the West overlooked India for its Non-Aligned approach, France was more accommodative to India than its fellow-member countries in NATO. This was because France did not succumb to American pressure and refused to completely toe its line. In 1998, when India carried out the nuclear test, France was the only western power that did not impose economic sanctions on New Delhi.

France has been the first country in the world that recognizes India as an independent power centre, a credible democracy, offering economic opportunities for the world. There has been a consensus in French politics that if European Union has to carve out



Bhagirathi Jena

ACCORDING TO UNESCO, ON AVERAGE, A LANGUAGE DIES OUT EVERY OTHER WEEK

Somewhere in the world today, in a rural hinterland, on the foothills of a jungle, or on a mountainous terrain in a tiny hamlet, an elderly woman is whispering a story to her grandchild. A mother is singing a lullaby to make her child sleep. The language they use is one she inherited through a legacy that only the clan to which they belong can truly understand. It is a fragile, beautiful moment, but it is also a somber countdown; in two weeks, that voice may be silenced forever.

According to UNESCO, every 14 days, a language dies. This is the stark reality we confront as we gather for International Mother Language Day 2026 under the theme, “Youth Voices on Multilingual Education.”

This day is not merely a celebration of linguistic diversity; it is a stand against the systematic loss of identity.

When a language fades, we lose entire universes. We lose indigenous knowledge that could cure diseases, agricultural practices perfectly adapted to local

ecosystems, and philosophical concepts that offer alternative worldviews. Yet, 40% of the global population still lacks access to education in a language they speak or understand. When we treat a mother tongue as a “barrier” rather than a foundation, we tell a child that their ancestors have nothing to contribute to the modern world. This exclusion is the root of systemic unfairness, silencing human potential before primary school even ends.

This is where the theme of 2026—“Youth Voices on Multilingual Education”—becomes our most powerful weapon. Language preservation is not an exercise in nostalgia; it is a matter of justice and equity. It requires fostering the political will to develop strategies that recognise the rights of all indigenous peoples. Fortunately, a tectonic shift is underway. Technology is emerging as a powerful tool for revitalisation, but the true power lies in the hands that wield it.

Enter the youth of 2026: the “Digital Fire-Keepers.” They

are the generation taking languages once whispered in secret and shouting them across social media. They are using AI tools to translate under-resourced dialects, building digital archives for oral histories, and turning the digital desert into a vibrant forest of many voices. They understand that multilingual education is not about choosing between the global and the local, but about embracing both.

Praiseworthy initiatives are lighting the way. The National Education Policy 2020’s advocacy for mother tongue-based instruction is a landmark shift. In Odisha, the “Aame Padhiba Aama Bhasare” initiative will bring education to tribal children in their own languages, proving that a child learns best when rooted in their own culture. Institutions like KISS (Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences), have championed Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education. Kerala’s ‘Namath Basai’ similarly demonstrates the transformative power of vernacular instruction in tribal

areas wherein, it has succeeded in retaining hundreds of tribal children in their online classes using their mother tongue as language of instruction.

To the youth of today, we say: Your voice is the most sophisticated technology on Earth. Every time you speak your mother tongue, you are keeping a universe alive. Every time you teach it to the next generation, you are passing on a gift that transcends borders and time. By remaining rooted in the language of your blood while mastering the languages of the future, you are the living bridge between the elderly woman whispering her story and the generations yet to come.

You ensure that her story doesn’t end in two weeks. You ensure that it echoes for the next thousand years as a vital, irreplaceable part of our planet’s priceless linguistic heritage. Your voice is not just an echo of the past; it is the first word of the future.

The writer is a Senior Officer at the Parliament of India.

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, Rasulgardi Industrial Estate,
Bhubaneswar-751010



“

That which we call the Hindu religion is really the Eternal religion because it embraces all others.

SRI AUROBINDO

Art of Delay

It’s telling that Punjab is still kicking the can down the road on appointing a regular Director General of Police, even after the Supreme Court flagged the “acting DGP” culture as a serious institutional flaw.

For over three years now, Gaurav Yadav, technically an “acting” DGP, has been calling the shots in Punjab Police. That’s longer than most bureaucrats stay at a single desk in New Delhi. And yes, that very arrangement drew the apex court’s ire, precisely because it goes against the spirit (if not the letter) of the Prakash Singh judgment, which sought to insulate police leadership from political expediency.

The state government’s official line seems to be that it’s waiting on the UPSC to communicate next steps, an argument that feels more like a stall tactic than a strategy. After all, the court’s directive clearly empowers the UPSC to push for compliance, not to act as a go-between.

What’s striking is how this delay feeds into a deeper problem: the public perception, and sometimes reality, that police leadership can be held in suspended animation for years, with all the institutional uncertainty that invites. Police forces thrive on stable command, continuity of strategy, and clarity of authority. The longer a state dithers on “acting” arrangements, the more it undermines that very foundation.

It can be argued that Punjab isn’t alone. Several states have flirted with acting chiefs rather than regular appointments. But that doesn’t absolve any of them, particularly when the Supreme Court has signalled that this shouldn’t be normal administrative practice.

If Punjab wants to credibly claim it takes rule-based governance seriously, it should walk the talk: forward a proper panel of candidates, let the UPSC do its job, and install a full-time DGP. Anything less is just bureaucratic inertia dressed up as prudence.

63 lateral entries and 3,000 empty chairs

For years now, we’ve been told that India’s bureaucracy is being “reimagined.” More agile. More specialised. More fit for a complex, 21st-century economy.

The numbers tell a different story. As informed in the Rajya Sabha, nearly 3,000 posts across the IAS, IPS and IFS are vacant. The IAS alone is short by over 1,300 officers. The IFS, the face of India abroad, is functioning with a deficit that would make any corporate HR head break into a cold sweat. This isn’t a minor staffing glitch. It’s structural.

Now enter lateral entry. This reform was supposed to disrupt the cosy generalist club. Since its launch in 2018, just 63 appointments have been made across ministries. Seven years, 63 people. That’s not disruption; that’s a rounding error. Which raises a fair question: was lateral entry meant to fix a talent deficit or merely signal reform?

Because if the goal was to infuse domain expertise into policy-making, the scale simply doesn’t match the rhetoric. If the goal was to compensate for a shrinking intake through the UPSC pipeline, it clearly hasn’t.

Meanwhile, governance doesn’t pause for recruitment bottlenecks. Trade negotiations, climate diplomacy, cyber security, and financial regulation don’t wait for files to be filled. An understaffed babudom doesn’t just stretch officers thin; it stretches institutional capacity.

The larger worry isn’t vacancies per se. Governments can and do recalibrate cadre strength. The concern is drift, a gap between ambition and execution.

A small circular, a big signal

Delhi’s babu grapevine has delivered a small but delicious irony. The Centre has apparently told senior officials to “promptly dispose” of letters from Members of Parliament. So far, so routine. But here’s the kicker: they are to do so without leaning on that sacred relic, known as the pre-printed, copy-paste reply. Yes, that one where the template begins with “I am directed to refer to your letter...” and ends with something so non-committal it could run for office!

A fresh note now solemnly reminds officials that elected representatives “occupy a very important place in our democratic set-up.” One imagines this line was typed with the straightest of faces. After all, MPs are not exactly pen pals looking for polite acknowledgements; they are supposed to represent millions of citizens. Their letters are not spam. Or at least, not all of them.

What triggered this bureaucratic awakening? No one is saying. But it doesn’t take Sherlock Holmes to suspect that some MPs may have grown tired of receiving replies that felt... recyclable. Change the name, tweak a line, press send. Governance, by template.

To be fair, standardisation has its uses. It keeps files moving and language uniform. But when every response reads as a mildly bored algorithm assembled it, it signals something deeper: disengagement. A mechanical state talking back to a human mandate.

The real test, of course, is not whether the templates disappear. It’s whether the replies begin to show signs of thought, specificity, accountability, or even a timeline.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@twitter.com. Let’s multiply the effect

WISDOM CORNER

“Creating is one thing; telling the story is one thing. I see myself more as a storyteller than a story creator.”

S S RAJAMOULI

“If you set your goals ridiculously high and it’s a failure, you will fail above everyone else’s success.”

JAMES CAMERON

“Movie directors, or should I say people who create things, are very greedy and they can never be satisfied”

AKIRA KUROSAWA

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1916: The Battle of Verdun, one of the most devastating engagements of World War I, began.
- 1925: The American weekly magazine The New Yorker began publication under Harold W. Ross.
- 1965: Black revolutionary leader Malcolm X was assassinated while giving a speech in Manhattan. A profound and charismatic leader of the American civil rights movement, Malcolm disagreed with Martin Luther King, Jr.’s messages of nonviolence; his ideologies centered on Black power and the right to self-defense—views that made him many enemies.
- 1972: On this day US President Richard Nixon became the first sitting U.S. president to visit China. The visit took advantage of the rift that had begun to form between China and the Soviet Union to strengthen US-China relations.



of the day quote

Cleaning Yamuna was a legacy problem. When we took over, it was evident that the previous government did not pay much attention to river. We started revamping the existing infrastructure, including the planned construction of 12 new STPs

Democracy is truly strengthened when both the ruling and opposition parties work in tandem and always keep in mind the letter and spirit of our Constitution

When there is no correct data, we could not prepare an effective action plan or future strategy. Earlier, our approach was problem-to-solution. Now we are working towards universal and long-term solutions based on data

SHORT TAKES

Delhi HC grants bail to Thar driver

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court has granted bail to the driver of a speeding Thar who allegedly mowed down two persons in Chanakyapuri in August last year. Justice Manoj Jain directed that Ashish Bachchas be released on bail considering his young age, absence of previous antecedents and “overall facts of the case”. The car of the 26-year-old accused allegedly ran down two persons around 6.30 am August 10, last year near Gate Number 3 of Talkatora Stadium.

Shah launches part 2 of VVP

Nathanpur (Assam): Union Home Minister Amit Shah Friday launched the second phase of the Vibrant Village Programme (VVP) from Assam and inspected a stretch of the Indo-Bangladesh border. During the first of his two-day visit to the poll-bound state, he also accused the Congress of allowing infiltration and not initiating development during its rule. Shah launched the second phase of the VVP across the country from here in Assam’s Cachar district, and asserted that the project would help stop migration from border areas and prevent infiltration.

SC rejects plea to bar Babur names

New Delhi: The Supreme Court Friday refused to entertain a plea seeking a direction to restrain the construction, establishment or naming of any mosque or religious structure in the name of Mughal emperor Babur or Babri Masjid. After a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta showed its disinclination in entertaining the plea, the counsel appearing for the petitioner withdrew it. “Dismissed as withdrawn,” the bench said.

Activist arrested over fake KAS defamation

Bangalore: Social activist Snehamayi Krishna was arrested for allegedly creating fake documents and uploading a fabricated audio clip on social media to defame a senior KAS officer, police said Friday. Krishna, a resident of Mysuru, was taken into custody by the Central Crime Branch, they said.



If money continues to be distributed unchecked, how will democracy survive? This amounts to the murder of democracy

ASHOK GEHLOT | FORMER CHIEF MINISTER, RAJASTHAN

TVK FIRM ON NO ALLIANCE WITH BJP

Actor-politician Vijay-led TVK on Friday asserted that the party would not forge an alliance with the BJP, despite what it described as mounting pressure from the saffron party



NH toll plazas may go cashless from April 1

NHAI proposes only FASTag, UPI payments

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 20: Highways authority NHAI is considering discontinuing cash payments at highway toll plazas from April 1, 2026, in order to develop a fully digital National Highway tolling ecosystem.

The proposed measure is aimed at consolidating the gains achieved in Electronic Toll Collection and strengthening the efficiency & reliability of National Highway fee plaza operations, it said.

The transition will help to enhance ‘Ease of Commuting’ for National Highway users by improving lane throughput, reducing congestion at fee plazas and bringing greater consistency and transparency in toll transactions.

In the past few years, over 98 per cent penetration of FASTag has significantly transformed

continuing cash transactions at the National Highway fee plazas across the country from April 1, 2026, in order to develop a fully digital National Highway tolling ecosystem.

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In the past few years, over 98 per cent penetration of FASTag has significantly transformed



toll collection practices in the country. At present, an overwhelming proportion of toll transactions are processed electronically through RFID-enabled FASTag affixed to vehicles, facilitating seamless and contactless movement across toll plazas. In addition, UPI payment facilities have been operationalized at the National Highway toll plazas, ensur-

ing availability of instant and accessible digital payment options for National Highway commuters nationwide.

As per National Highway fee rules, vehicles entering a fee plaza without a valid, functional FASTag are charged twice the applicable user fee, if the fee payment is made in cash. Whereas National Highway users who opt to pay via

India AI Summit draws \$250bn infra commitments

70 nations back Delhi declaration, more expected

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 20: India’s AI Impact Summit has secured investment commitments of over \$250 billion in infrastructure and already garnered support from 70 countries for the proposed Delhi Declaration, Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said Friday, calling the event a “grand success.”

Vaishnaw said the summit saw participation from over 5 lakh visitors, reflecting strong domestic and global engagement with India’s AI push.

He added that the number of countries signing the Delhi Declaration is expected to cross 80 by the time the summit concludes Saturday. While the Minister did not provide details of the Summit, slated to be unveiled Saturday, sources said the US is also on board.

Vaishnaw said the summit saw strong global backing, with 70 countries already signing on to the proposed Delhi Declaration. The number of signatories is expected to cross 80 by the time the event concludes on Saturday, he added.

“There is a huge consensus on the declaration, we just want



to maximise the numbers, given the size of the Summit that has happened,” he said.

The minister said full details of the Delhi Declaration would be shared transparently after the summit ends.

He also criticised the opposition, saying whatever little effort was made by the Congress to disrupt the summit was rejected by India’s youth, asserting that the event had overwhelming public support.

The India AI Impact Summit brought together global policymakers, industry leaders and technology experts, positioning India as a key player in shaping international AI governance and infrastructure development.

“More than five lakh visitors participated in the exhibition,

learnt a lot, and interacted with many experts from around the world. We had practically every major AI player in the world participating in large numbers. We had so many start-ups getting the opportunity to showcase their work. Overall the quality of discussion was phenomenal,” he said.

Be it the ministerial dialog, the leaders plenary, the main inauguration function, or the Summit overall, the quality of participation and dialog was phenomenal, vaishnaw pointed out.

“Everybody felt happy that we have brought the discussion about responsible and ethical AI to the forefront,” he said.

The investment pledged has crossed \$250 billion for infra-related investments and about \$20 billion for the VC/deep tech investments, which have been committed by investors. Vaishnaw said noting that the numbers are important, but what is important also is the world has confidence in India’s role in the new AI age.

The last action summit had 60 signatories in the final declaration, the India AI Impact Summit has already surpassed the 70 milestone.

US leads AI brain race; India at 6th spot: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 20: The United States has bagged the first rank followed by China and Singapore while India has been ranked at the sixth spot, according to Global AI Brain Race Report 2026.

The study, published by es-sayhumaniser.io, evaluates over 100 countries using a weighted framework combining artificial intelligence (AI) R&D, economic integration, infrastructure, talent readiness, governance, responsible AI, public opinion and academic strength.

The United States ranks first with a final score of 82 out of

100, leading in AI R&D (19.15 out of 27.78), economic integration (22.22 out of 22.22) and infrastructure (16.21 out of 16.67).

China ranks second with a final score of 59 out of 100, supported by the world’s largest AI education base with 107 top AI universities and strong R&D (17.22 out of 27.78).

Singapore ranks third with a score of 37 out of 100, despite having only two AI universities, due to exceptional academic quality with an average subject score of 90.50 and a global score of 82.00, combined with strong talent readiness (9.31 out of 16.67).

At the fourth and fifth spots are South Korea and the UK.

Tension prevails in MP town after communal clash; 49 held

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jabalpur, Feb 20: Tension gripped Sihora town in Madhya Pradesh’s Jabalpur district after a clash between Hindu and Muslim groups led to stone-pelting and vandalism, prompting police to lob teargas shells, officials said Friday. They said 49 people had been arrested so far and efforts are on to nab others involved in the unrest.

The violence erupted around 10 PM Thursday near Azad Chowk, an area where a Durga temple and a mosque are located in close proximity.

While officials stated the situation is now under control and no injuries were reported, a



heavy police presence remains on the ground, and most local shops remained closed Friday.

Hindu organisations alleged that some miscreants broke the iron gate of the temple while an ‘aarti’ was being performed and also hurled stones while local Muslim residents said the clash

erupted when the special Ramzan prayer and temple aarti were taking place simultaneously.

Superintendent of Police Sampat Upadhyay said that after initial attempts to use ‘mild force’ failed to disperse the crowd, police had to resort to firing eight to ten teargas shells

Fresh tension in Karnataka’s Bagalkote

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bagalkote (Karnataka), Feb 20: A tense situation prevailed in Bagalkote Friday as several people took to the streets and allegedly hurled stones at meat shops despite prohibitory orders being in place, prompting police to resort to a mild lathi-charge, police sources said.

Superintendent of Police Siddharth Goyal said the procession had begun from the old town at about 3.30 pm and was nearing completion when the stone-pelting incident occurred around 9:30 pm Thursday near a mosque at Kila Oni in Nava-nagar area.

“There was a shoe rack in mosque and two stones were kept beneath it to support it. One of those stones was used and it fell on our police personnel. No one sustained serious injuries,” he said.

According to the senior official, Tanzeer has been named as the prime accused.

“In the video footage, he is clearly seen pelting two stones. I am making it very clear that only one person pelted stones. No sticks or weapons were used,” Goyal said.

Seven others were arrested for allegedly obstructing police personnel while they were discharging their duty.

The police have registered an FIR on its own under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), including sections for unlawful assembly, rioting, attempt to murder, assault or criminal force to deter a public servant from discharge of duty, and for intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace.

“We have arrested eight people including Tanzeer,” the SP said. “After this incident, the procession continued very peacefully. Leaders from both communities cooperated with us. As a preventive measure, we have clamped prohibitory orders. The situation is under control,” he added. The accused were identified based on video evidence and strict action has been initiated.

Adequate security arrangements have been made and the situation remains under control, he added.

Prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita have been imposed in parts of Bagalkote from midnight of February 19 to midnight of February 24.

Wedding called off in UP after clash over bride’s pet dog; 5 hurt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kanpur, Feb 20: A wedding ceremony in Uttar Pradesh’s Fatehpur district was called off after a dispute over the bride’s pet dog spiralled into a violent clash between the two families, leaving at least five people injured, police said Friday.

The incident occurred early Thursday at a guest house in the Khaga area, where Sumit Kesarwani, 25, a local jeweller, was to marry Tanu Kesarwani, 19, from Prayagraj.

The couple had been in a relationship for nearly two years and were entering into a love marriage with the consent of

their families, police said.

Trouble began while wedding rituals were underway. The bride’s pet dog, which had been brought along by her family and tied some distance from the venue, started barking.

Members of the groom’s side allegedly tried to silence the animal, and one of them is accused of beating it. This triggered a heated argument that quickly escalated into a physical altercation.

Eyewitnesses said chairs and sticks were used during the scuffle.

Three members of the bride’s family -- Rishabh Kesarwani, Shubham Gupta



and Sangeeta Devi -- allegedly suffered head injuries, while another person sustained a fractured hand. Some mem-

bers of the groom’s side also received minor injuries.

Police reached the spot after being alerted and took both par-

ties to the Khaga police station. The injured were treated at a community health centre.

Police attempted to mediate between the families Thursday morning, but the bride refused to go ahead with the marriage. The two sides later agreed to call off the wedding and return the gifts and valuables exchanged during the preparations, Station House Officer (Khaga) RK Patel told reporters.

“The matter was settled amicably. No formal complaint has been filed so far. Action will be taken if a written complaint is received,” the SHO said.

Members of the bride’s fam-

ily alleged that the groom had concealed information about a prior marriage, an accusation he denied. They also claimed some members of the groom’s party were under the influence of alcohol, which aggravated the situation.

An official, requesting anonymity, said the couple had earlier solemnised their marriage at an Arya Samaj temple in Kanpur and had initiated court marriage registration proceedings.

The formal ceremony scheduled for February 18 was meant to be a social celebration, but ended abruptly following the clash, he added.

of the day **quote**

In this election, it is very clear that the AIAD-MK-BJP alliance will be rejected by the people. They will come in third place. (Actually) we are talking about two parties that are not even in the race

MANICKAM TAGORE | CONGRESS MP

Arunachal's geographical location reinforces national security while serving as a gateway to Southeast Asia. Rich in hydropower potential, forests and biodiversity, the state is poised to become a hub of energy self-reliance and sustainable growth

KT PARNAIK | GOVERNOR, ARUNACHAL PRADESH

From an open space to a world-class gateway in just a few years. This transformation reflects a clear vision for a more connected and confident Assam

HIMANTA BISWA SARMA | CHIEF MINISTER, ASSAM

X POST OF THE DAY

We need to recalibrate the meaning of hate. Hate is subconsciously wishing ill on someone. Never wish ill on anyone because of their skin color, religion, social status, or country of birth. Twisting someone's words to manipulate others is evil. Wronging society for personal gain is evil.

@sabeer

SHORT TAKES

Manipur journalists hold protest in Imphal

Imphal: Journalists in Manipur staged a sit-in here Friday to protest against the assault of the senior editor of a local newspaper by armed men. During the protest, jointly organised by All Manipur Working Journalists Union (AMWJU) and Editors' Guild Manipur (EGM) at Keisampat Leimajam Leikai, the scribes raised slogans and held placards with "we oppose attack on media persons" and "stop intimidating media persons" written on them. Armed men intercepted the car of Khoirom Loyalakpa, the editor of Manipuri daily Naharolgi Thoudang, near Hattta Cemetery, around 10 pm Wednesday, police said.

128 fishermen from Gujarat in Pak jails

Gandhinagar: A total of 128 fishermen from Gujarat are currently languishing in Pakistani jails, the state assembly was informed Friday. State Fisheries Minister Jitu Vaghani shared this information while responding to a query raised by Aam Aadmi Party MLA Gopal Italia during Question Hour of the ongoing Budget Session. Vaghani said 128 fishermen are still behind bars in Pakistan as January 20.

3 of family held for 'murdering' trans

Ballia (UP): Days after a man died by suicide and the body of a 65-year-old transgender was found in the same house here, police have arrested his parents and wife on charges of murdering the latter, officials said Friday. Circle Officer (Bairia) Mohammad Faheem Qureshi said that three accused, Vijay Kumar Gupta, his wife Rita Devi, and his daughter-in-law Mona Kumari, were arrested Thursday.

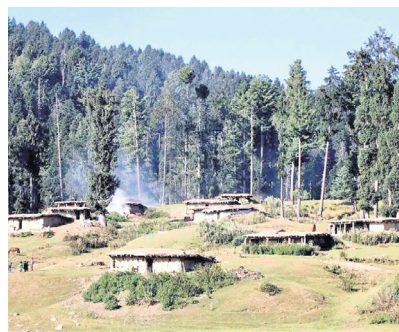


The situation in Bihar is extremely unfortunate. Our CM appears unconscious and unconcerned about ground realities. The BJP is using him like a puppet

TEJASHWI YADAV | LEADER OF OPPOSITION, BIHAR

OVER 41,900 FOREST RIGHTS CLAIMS IN J&K UNDER FRA

A total of 41,944 claims have been received across Jammu and Kashmir under the Forest Rights Act, with 28,925 individual forest rights claims and 13,019 community forest rights claims, the Union Territory government informed the Assembly Friday



DEFAMATION CASE

Rahul says case filed out of political malice

UP court fixes March 9 as next date of hearing

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Sultanpur (UP), Feb 20: Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi Friday appeared before an MP-MLA court in Uttar Pradesh's Sultanpur and recorded his statement in a 2018 defamation case related to his remarks against Union Home Minister Amit Shah. Gandhi told the court of Special Judge Shubham Verma that the allegations against him were made out of political malice and with an aim of destroying his image and that of his party, the Congress leader's advocate Kashi Prasad Shukla told PTI.

The court fixed March 9 as the next date of hearing on which the Lok Sabha MP from Raebareli has been asked to furnish evidence in his defence, the lawyer said.

Elaborating about the statement given by the Congress leader in the court, his lawyer said Gandhi denied all allegations levelled against him.

"The allegations are baseless and unfounded. I have never used derogatory words against anyone, nor have I used such language with the intention of

defaming anyone. A false complaint has been filed by distorting my statement," Shukla quoted Gandhi as saying.

"The allegations have been made against me out of political malice with the aim of destroying my image and that of my party. I have never used derogatory words against anyone, nor have I used such language with the intention of defaming anyone," Gandhi told the court.

As the Congress leader emerged from the court after recording his statement, party supporters raised slogans hailing him. Gandhi smiled and waved at the crowd before leaving.

Gandhi entered the Sultanpur court around 10.40 am and left after recording statements around 11.15 am.

Ahead of the court hearing, some local Congress leaders had put up posters in Sultanpur that read 'Satyamev Jayate' (truth always triumphs).

The case dates back to 2018 when local BJP leader and former chairman of the District Cooperative Bank Vijay Mishra had filed a defamation complaint against Gandhi.

India joins US-led 'Pax Silica' alliance

US Under Secretary for Economic Affairs Jacob Helberg, welcoming India to the coalition, flagged challenges arising out of 'massively over-concentrated' supply chains for critical minerals and threats of economic coercion and blackmail'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 20: India Friday joined the US-led strategic alliance called 'Pax Silica' that aims to build a resilient supply chain for critical minerals and artificial intelligence with both sides projecting it as an initiative to cut over-dependence on one country, seen as an oblique apparent reference to China.

US Under Secretary for Economic Affairs Jacob Helberg, welcoming India to the coalition, flagged challenges arising out of "massively over-concentrated" supply chains for critical minerals and "threats of economic coercion and blackmail".

Though Helberg didn't name any country, it was almost clear that his remarks were directed at China's export controls on rare earth minerals and related products.

China has been controlling the flow of rare earth minerals which have a wide range of applications including in electronics, clean energy, aerospace, automotive, and defence sectors.

US Ambassador Sergio Gor, welcoming India to Pax-Silica, said the country brings strength to the coalition.

"Policies that will reinforce US-India tech cooperation will power AI innovation and adoption for years to come. We can



share trusted AI technology with the world and especially with partners like India," he said.

"And critically, India brings strength. Peace doesn't come from hoping adversaries will play fair. We all know they won't. Peace comes through strength. India understands this. India understands strong borders," he said.

"India understands this part of the world. That strength, that sovereignty is exactly what Pax-Silica amplifies. Because here's the truth, strength multiplies when it's connected."

India signed a pact to formally join the Pax Silica at a ceremony held at the AI Impact summit. It was attended by

Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw, Helberg and Gor.

In his address, Vaishnaw framed the moment as one that transcends a ceremonial signing.

"We are not just holding a summit; we are building the future," he said, emphasising that new foundations and new opportunities are being created for the younger generation.

He underscored India's growing semiconductor capabilities, stating, "Today, India's talented engineers are designing the world's most advanced two-nanometer chips. The semiconductor industry will require

Cong takes dig at PM over UPI



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 20: A day after French President Emmanuel Macron lauded India's UPI architecture, the Congress Friday said its initial conception happened under the UPA government in 2012-2013 and likened Prime Minister Narendra Modi to a student in a group project who doesn't work, but shows up to take all the credit.

The Opposition party said that bereft of the capacity to come up with groundbreaking ideas, Modi is happy cutting ribbons, "blabbering ludicrous acronyms", cursing the Congress and "stealing credit".

Speaking at the India AI Impact Summit Thursday, Macron began his address by lauding India's journey in the digital space.

"Ten years ago, a street vendor in Mumbai could not open a bank account. No address, no papers, no access. And today, the same vendor accepts payments on his phone, instantly. Instantly, for free, from anyone in the country," he said.

"That is not just a tech story, that is a civilisation story. And India built something that no

other country in the world has built, a digital identity for 1.4 billion people. A payment system that now processes 20 billion transactions every month," Macron had said.

Modi Thursday emphasised that the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) ensured seamless online transactions even in difficult circumstances and played a major role in bridging the digital divide.

In a post on X Friday, Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Kherra said, "We all remember that one classmate in a group project - does no work, but shows up to take all the credit. That is Narendra Modi."

"Look at the UPI architecture in India that was appreciated by Emmanuel Macron -- the initial conception of UPI happened in 2012-2013, under a group led by Nandan Nilekani, then chairman of Unique Identification Authority of India," Kherra said.

A UPA government-appointed committee recommended a mobile-based digital payments infrastructure in December 2013, he pointed out.

"The Immediate Payment Service, developed by National Payments Corporation of India in 2010, laid the technical backbone. NPCI began designing the core architecture that would become UPI in 2013-2014," Kherra said.

"Bereft of the capacity to think of groundbreaking ideas, Modi is happy with cutting ribbons, blabbering ludicrous acronyms, cursing Congress and stealing credit," the Congress leader said.



People offer prayers on the first Friday of Ramzan at Jama Masjid, in New Delhi, Friday

PTI PHOTO

Cong appoints Vinod Jakhar as NSUI nat'l prez

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi/Jaipur, Feb 20: The Congress Friday appointed Vinod Jakhar as the national president of its student wing, the National Students' Union of India, with immediate effect, an official statement said.

According to the statement issued by the All India Congress Committee (AICC), the decision to make Jakhar, currently serving as the head of the NSUI's Rajasthan unit, as its national presi-



dent was taken by party chief Mallikarjun Kharge.

The Congress also acknowledged the contributions of the outgoing NSUI chief, Varun Choudhary, appreciating his

work and leadership.

Jakar, a Dalit leader who previously served as the president of the Rajasthan University Student Union, takes charge at a time when student politics is set to gain momentum with university elections approaching, including the Delhi University Students' Union (DUSU) polls.

Jakhar drew attention in September last year, when he was arrested and sent to jail on charges of vandalism at an RSS 'Shastra Pujan' event at the Rajasthan University.

Post SIR, voter base shrinks in Gujarat, Lakshdweep, Puducherry

In Gujarat, while the electorate before the SIR stood at 5.08 crore, it shrunk to 4.40 crore -- a net change of 68.12 lakh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 20: The electorate in Gujarat, Lakshadweep and Puducherry shrunk by nearly 69 lakh after the completion of the special intensive revision of voters' list, data shared by the Election Commission Friday shows.

Gujarat, Lakshadweep and Puducherry recently published their respective final electoral rolls as part of the poll roll cleanup exercise.

Before SIR was announced October 27 last year, the combined electorate of Gujarat and the two Union territories stood



at 5.19 crore. After publication of final rolls, their total voter base came down to 4.50 crore -- a net change of 68.9 lakh.

In Gujarat, while the electorate before the SIR stood at 5.08 crore, it shrunk to 4.40 crore -- a net change of 68.12 lakh. In

percentage terms, a net change of 13.40 per cent.

In Lakshadweep, before the poll roll cleanup exercise, the voter base stood at 57,813. But after the publication of the final electoral rolls, it went down to 57,607 -- a net change of 206 electors. In percentage terms, a net change of 0.36 per cent.

In poll-bound Puducherry, the total number of electors before SIR commenced was over 10.21 lakh. It shrunk to 9.44 lakh when the final rolls were published -- a net change of 7.57 per cent in percentage terms.

While the exercise, which kept the EC in the news, was

completed in Bihar, it is ongoing in 12 states and Union territories with nearly 60 crore electors.

The remaining 40 crore electors will be covered in these 17 states and five Union territories.

In Assam, a 'special revision', instead of SIR, was completed February 10. Due to a variety of reasons, SIR in the nine states and three Union territories have seen frequent tweaking in schedules.

Like Bihar, political parties have approached the Supreme Court challenging SIR in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

India supports 2-state solution to Palestine issue

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 20: India Friday reaffirmed its support for a two-state solution to the Palestine issue and said it had joined more than 100 countries and international organisations in a statement condemning Israel's attempts to expand unlawful settlements in the West Bank.

India did not figure in the initial statement that was endorsed by around 80 countries and organisations. Palestine's UN envoy Riyad Mansour released it Tuesday.

A fresh statement saw India and around 20 countries and organisations back it.

Asked why India was not part of the initial statement, External Affairs ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing that the document had not been negotiated by the countries and organisations as has been the norm.

"Our position on this particular issue was most recently expressed in the India-Arab League ministerial joint statement," he said.

In their meeting held in New Delhi January 31, India and the Arab League pitched for a sovereign and viable Palestine state living side-by-side with Israel.

of the day

quote

The UK and our E5 partners are stepping up - investing together in the next generation of air defence and autonomous systems to strengthen NATO's shield

LUKE POLLARD | BRITAIN'S MINISTER FOR DEFENSE READINESS AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear co-operation can be a positive mechanism for upholding nonproliferation norms and increasing transparency, but the devil is in the details

KELSEY DAVENPORT | DIRECTOR FOR NONPROLIFERATION POLICY AT THE WASHINGTON-BASED ARMS CONTROL ASSOCIATION

These mines are one of the most important elements of the defence structure we are constructing on the eastern flank of NATO, in Poland, on the border with Russia in the north and with Belarus in the east

PAWEŁ ZALEWSKI | DEPUTY DEFENCE MINISTER, POLAND

SHORT TAKES

SK's Yoon apologises after life sentence

Seoul: Former South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol apologised Friday for his short-lived declaration of martial law in December 2024, a day after a Seoul court sentenced him to life in prison for masterminding an insurrection. In a statement released by his lawyers, Yoon said that while he was sorry for the "frustration and hardship" brought upon the people by his martial law decree, he stood behind the "sincerity and purpose" behind his actions. The Seoul Central District Court's decision to hand him a life sentence Thursday was "predetermined," he said, adding that the verdict against him was political retaliation. "Forces that seek to smear a decision made to save the nation as an 'insurrection' and to use it beyond political attacks as an opportunity to purge and eliminate their opponents will only grow more rampant going forward," he said.

7 Chinese tourists drown in Russian lake

Moscow: Seven Chinese tourists and a bus driver are feared dead after a tourist bus driving across a frozen stretch of Lake Baikal in Russia's Siberia plunged into the water when the ice broke beneath it, local governor, Igor Kobzev, said Friday via his channel in Telegram. One tourist managed to escape, and the search for the others continues, he said. The world's deepest lake, located north of Mongolia, is a popular destination for tourists. The Irkutsk region prosecutor's office said that a criminal case had been opened and the circumstances were being investigated. Chinese tourism in Russia has soared in the past years amid political rapprochement between the two neighbours and "no limits" strategic partnership declared last year, while mutual visa free travel regime has been introduced.

Gunmen kill 33

Abuja: At least 33 people have been killed after Islamic militants launched simultaneous attacks on a district in northwest Nigeria, according to the police. The attack took place on Wednesday in the Biu community of Kebbi state, police spokesman Bashir Usman said in a statement late Thursday night. The assailants crossed from Sokoto state, parts of which are occupied by the Lakurawa insurgent group, Usman said.

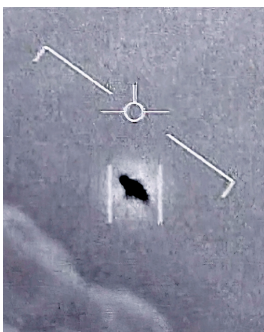


Our party is faced with heavy and urgent historic tasks of boosting economic construction and the people's standard of living and transforming all realms of state and social life as early as possible

KIM JONG UN | LEADER, NORTH KOREA

US ALIEN FILES INCOMING

President Donald Trump said he would direct federal agencies to begin releasing government files related to aliens and unidentified flying objects, pointing to what he described as strong public interest in the issue. In a social media post, Trump said he would order Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth and other agencies to release the information, calling the matter "extremely interesting and important"



TRUMP TARIFFS

SC brings relief to nations

President Donald Trump paid a price for going it alone on tariffs - with the Supreme Court delivering a rare rebuke by ruling he lacked the power to declare an economic emergency and launch sweeping new taxes on imports

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New York, Feb 20: The nation's highest court struck down some of US President Donald Trump's most sweeping tariffs Friday, in a 6-3 decision ruling that he overstepped his authority when using an emergency powers law to justify new taxes on goods from nearly every country in the world.

Trump has launched a barrage of new tariffs over the last year. Despite Friday's ruling, many sectoral levies remain in place - and the president still has plenty of other options to keep taxing imports aggressively. But the Supreme Court decision upends a core set of tariffs that Trump imposed using the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act, or IEEPA.

IEEPA authorises the president to broadly regulate commerce after declaring a national emergency. Over the years, presidents have turned to this law dozens of times, often to impose sanctions on other countries. But Trump was the first to use it to implement tariffs.

Here's a look at what tariffs Trump imposed using IEEPA - and other that levies still stand today.

Reciprocal Tariffs				
Country		US Tariff	US Exemption	US Exemption
Albania	10%	10%	10%	10%
Algeria	10%	10%	10%	10%
Andorra	10%	10%	10%	10%
Angola	10%	10%	10%	10%
Antigua and Barbuda	10%	10%	10%	10%
Argentina	10%	10%	10%	10%
Armenia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Australia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Austria	10%	10%	10%	10%
Azerbaijan	10%	10%	10%	10%
Bahamas	10%	10%	10%	10%
Bahrain	10%	10%	10%	10%
Bangladesh	10%	10%	10%	10%
Barbados	10%	10%	10%	10%
Belarus	10%	10%	10%	10%
Belgium	10%	10%	10%	10%
Belize	10%	10%	10%	10%
Benin	10%	10%	10%	10%
Bhutan	10%	10%	10%	10%
Bolivia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	10%	10%	10%	10%
Brazil	10%	10%	10%	10%
Bulgaria	10%	10%	10%	10%
Burkina Faso	10%	10%	10%	10%
Burundi	10%	10%	10%	10%
Cambodia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Cameroon	10%	10%	10%	10%
Canada	10%	10%	10%	10%
Cape Verde	10%	10%	10%	10%
Casakhstan	10%	10%	10%	10%
Cayman Islands	10%	10%	10%	10%
Central African Republic	10%	10%	10%	10%
Chad	10%	10%	10%	10%
Chile	10%	10%	10%	10%
China	10%	10%	10%	10%
Colombia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Costa Rica	10%	10%	10%	10%
Cote d'Ivoire	10%	10%	10%	10%
Croatia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Cuba	10%	10%	10%	10%
Cyprus	10%	10%	10%	10%
Czechia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Dominica	10%	10%	10%	10%
Dominican Republic	10%	10%	10%	10%
DRC	10%	10%	10%	10%
Ecuador	10%	10%	10%	10%
Egypt	10%	10%	10%	10%
El Salvador	10%	10%	10%	10%
Equatorial Guinea	10%	10%	10%	10%
Eritrea	10%	10%	10%	10%
Estonia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Ethiopia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Fiji	10%	10%	10%	10%
Finland	10%	10%	10%	10%
France	10%	10%	10%	10%
Gabon	10%	10%	10%	10%
Gambia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Georgia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Germany	10%	10%	10%	10%
Ghana	10%	10%	10%	10%
Greece	10%	10%	10%	10%
Grenada	10%	10%	10%	10%
Guatemala	10%	10%	10%	10%
Guinea	10%	10%	10%	10%
Guinea-Bissau	10%	10%	10%	10%
Haiti	10%	10%	10%	10%
Honduras	10%	10%	10%	10%
Hungary	10%	10%	10%	10%
Iceland	10%	10%	10%	10%
India	10%	10%	10%	10%
Indonesia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Iran	10%	10%	10%	10%
Ireland	10%	10%	10%	10%
Israel	10%	10%	10%	10%
Italy	10%	10%	10%	10%
Jamaica	10%	10%	10%	10%
Japan	10%	10%	10%	10%
Jordan	10%	10%	10%	10%
Kazakhstan	10%	10%	10%	10%
Kenya	10%	10%	10%	10%
Kiribati	10%	10%	10%	10%
Korea	10%	10%	10%	10%
Kosovo	10%	10%	10%	10%
Kuwait	10%	10%	10%	10%
Kyrgyzstan	10%	10%	10%	10%
Laos	10%	10%	10%	10%
Lao	10%	10%	10%	10%
Latvia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Lebanon	10%	10%	10%	10%
Lesotho	10%	10%	10%	10%
Liberia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Liechtenstein	10%	10%	10%	10%
Lithuania	10%	10%	10%	10%
Luxembourg	10%	10%	10%	10%
Madagascar	10%	10%	10%	10%
Macao	10%	10%	10%	10%
Macedonia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Malawi	10%	10%	10%	10%
Malaysia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Maldives	10%	10%	10%	10%
Mali	10%	10%	10%	10%
Malta	10%	10%	10%	10%
Marshall Islands	10%	10%	10%	10%
Martinique	10%	10%	10%	10%
Mauritania	10%	10%	10%	10%
Mauritius	10%	10%	10%	10%
Mexico	10%	10%	10%	10%
Moldova	10%	10%	10%	10%
Monaco	10%	10%	10%	10%
Mongolia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Montenegro	10%	10%	10%	10%
Morocco	10%	10%	10%	10%
Mozambique	10%	10%	10%	10%
Myanmar	10%	10%	10%	10%
Namibia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Nepal	10%	10%	10%	10%
Netherlands	10%	10%	10%	10%
New Zealand	10%	10%	10%	10%
Nicaragua	10%	10%	10%	10%
Niger	10%	10%	10%	10%
Nigeria	10%	10%	10%	10%
North Macedonia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Norway	10%	10%	10%	10%
Oman	10%	10%	10%	10%
Pakistan	10%	10%	10%	10%
Palestine	10%	10%	10%	10%
Panama	10%	10%	10%	10%
Papua New Guinea	10%	10%	10%	10%
Paraguay	10%	10%	10%	10%
Peru	10%	10%	10%	10%
Philippines	10%	10%	10%	10%
Pitcairn Islands	10%	10%	10%	10%
Poland	10%	10%	10%	10%
Portugal	10%	10%	10%	10%
Romania	10%	10%	10%	10%
Russia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Rwanda	10%	10%	10%	10%
Saint Kitts and Nevis	10%	10%	10%	10%
Saint Lucia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	10%	10%	10%	10%
Saudi Arabia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Senegal	10%	10%	10%	10%
Sierra Leone	10%	10%	10%	10%
Singapore	10%	10%	10%	10%
Slovakia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Slovenia	10%	10%	10%	10%
South Africa	10%	10%	10%	10%
South Korea	10%	10%	10%	10%
Spain	10%	10%	10%	10%
Sri Lanka	10%	10%	10%	10%
Suriname	10%	10%	10%	10%
Sweden	10%	10%	10%	10%
Switzerland	10%	10%	10%	10%
Taiwan	10%	10%	10%	10%
Tajikistan	10%	10%	10%	10%
Tanzania	10%	10%	10%	10%
Togo	10%	10%	10%	10%
Tonga	10%	10%	10%	10%
Tunisia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Turkey	10%	10%	10%	10%
Turkmenistan	10%	10%	10%	10%
Uganda	10%	10%	10%	10%
Ukraine	10%	10%	10%	10%
United Arab Emirates	10%	10%	10%	10%
United Kingdom	10%	10%	10%	10%
United States	10%	10%	10%	10%
Uruguay	10%	10%	10%	10%
Uzbekistan	10%	10%	10%	10%
Venezuela	10%	10%	10%	10%
Vietnam	10%	10%	10%	10%
Yemen	10%	10%	10%	10%
Zambia	10%	10%	10%	10%
Zimbabwe	10%	10%	10%	10%

Liberation Day' tariffs

Trump used IEEPA to slap import taxes on nearly every country in the world last spring. On April 2, which Trump called Liberation Day, he imposed "reciprocal" tariffs of up to 50 per cent on goods from dozens of countries - and a baseline 10 per cent tariff on just about everyone else.

The 10 per cent tax kicked in early April. But the bulk of Liberation Day's higher levies got delayed by several months, and many rates were revised over time (in some cases after new "framework" agreements). Most went into effect August 7.

The national emergency underlying these tariffs, Trump argued at the time, was the long-running gap between what the US sells and what it

buys from the rest of the world. Still, goods from countries with which the US runs a trade surplus also faced taxes.

Major trading partners impacted by Liberation Day tariffs include South Korea, Japan and the European Union - which combined export a range of products to the US, like electronics, cars and car parts and pharmaceuticals. Following trade talks, Trump's rates on most goods stood at 15 per cent for the EU, Japan and South Korea ahead of Friday. But just last month, Trump threatened to hike levies on certain South Korean products to 25 per cent - and countries worldwide still face sector-specific, non-IEEPA tariffs.

Refunds could be 'a mess'

The Treasury had collected more than \$133 billion from the import taxes the president has imposed under the emergency powers law as of December, federal data shows. But the Supreme Court did not address whether the companies and individuals who paid those tariffs could be refunded. Many companies, including the big-box warehouse chain Costco, have already lined up to demand refunds in lower courts. Brett Kavanaugh, who dissented from Friday's decision, noted the process could be complicated. "The Court says nothing today about whether, and if so how, the Government should go about returning the billions of dollars that it has collected from importers. But that process is likely to be a mess," as was acknowledged at oral argument," Kavanaugh wrote.

Tariffs on India linked to Russian oil

India has faced additional IEEPA tariffs, too. After Liberation Day, Trump slapped a 25 per cent levy on Indian imports - and later added another 25 per cent for the country's purchases of Russian oil, while also citing the emergency powers law, bringing the total to 50 per cent.

But earlier this month, the US and India reached a trade framework deal. Trump said Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed to stop buying Russian oil, and that he planned to lower US tariffs on its ally to 18 per cent.

Europe's main military powers to make low-cost air-defence systems

REUTERS

Krakow, Feb 20: Europe's five biggest defence powers are teaming up on a multi-million euro project to bring low-cost air-defence systems like autonomous drones or missiles into production within 12 months, ministers meeting in the Polish city of Krakow said on Friday.

The war in Ukraine has shown how autonomous interceptor drones can provide an effective alternative to costly air-defence missiles, and Kyiv's European allies are keen to learn from its experience.

The European Group of Five Defence Ministers, which brings together top military spenders France, Germany, Italy, Poland and Britain, met as European leaders work to boost defence capabilities amid increased European doubts about Washington's commitment to protecting the continent.

"It's a multi-million pound, multi-million euro commitment ... to step up this technology," Britain's Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry Luke Pollard said. "We're really hopeful that this will produce an effector that... will be in production within 12 months."

In military terminology, "effectors" are the components of a system that produce a physical effect,



This is the challenge of our times - technologies are changing... and we must respond very quickly

WLADYSŁAW KOSINIĄK-KAMYSZ | DEFENCE MINISTER, POLAND

while "autonomous platforms" are unmanned systems capable of independent decision-making. The 'Low-Cost Effectors and Autonomous Platforms' initiative, known as LEAP, involves the development of advanced low-cost air-defence systems - such as autonomous drones or missiles - the first project of which will be delivered by 2027, the UK government said in a separate statement.

"We have just signed a very important commitment on the joint development of drone-based strike capabilities, low-cost, joint production, and joint procurement of low-cost drone effectors and payloads," Polish Defence Minister Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz said.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Islamabad, Feb 20: Poverty in Pakistan has increased over the past six years, with the latest estimates suggesting that 28.8 per cent of the population is living in the clutches of poverty, a media report said Friday.

It was stated in the findings of a government committee, led by former Joint Director of Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) Dr GM Arif, which studied poverty estimates in the country.

Though the findings have not been officially launched, English-language daily The News reported, quoting sources, that poverty increased in the last six years.

It reported that poverty, which stood at 21.9 per cent in 2018-19, rose by almost 6.9 per cent to reach 28.8 per cent in 2024-25, showing an increase in all provinces.

"Owing to various factors - including three IMF stabilisation programmes over the past six years, the effects of Covid-19, commodity super-cycles, soaring inflation, lower GDP growth rates, two super floods and abandonment of wheat support prices - poverty levels in Pakistan have surged," the paper quoted a top official as saying.

The paper reported that the increase was more marked in Punjab, Sindh and Khyber-Pa-



Poverty, which stood at 21.9% in 2018-19, rose by almost 6.9% to reach 28.8 per cent in 2024-25, showing an increase in all provinces

Percentage of people living below the poverty line had shown a declining trend from 50.4% in 2005-06 to 21.9% in 2018-19

khtunkhwa as compared to Balochistan, but no data has been provided about the province-wise rise in poverty.

The increase has reversed gains in the past, as the percentage of people living below the poverty line had shown a declining trend from 50.4 per cent in 2005-06 to 21.9 per cent in 2018-19.

When contacted, Chairman of the Poverty Estimation

Meanwhile, India said it would "eliminate or reduce tariffs" on all US industrial goods and a range of agricultural products.

Indian's top exports to the US include pharmaceuticals, precious stones, clothing and textiles.

Trafficking tariffs' on Canada, China, Mexico

At the start of his second term, Trump used IEEPA to impose new tariffs on America's three biggest trading partners: Mexico, Canada and China.

To justify these tariffs, Trump declared a national emergency ostensibly over undocumented immigration and the trafficking of drugs like fentanyl and the chemicals made to use it. The levies were first announced at the start of February 2025, but went into effect over time - and were at times delayed, reduced or heightened through further retaliation.

Ahead of Friday's decision, "trafficking tariffs" on Canadian and Mexican imports were 35 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively, for goods that don't comply with the 2020 United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement. China, meanwhile, faced a 10 per cent fentanyl-related tariff. That's down from 20 per cent imposed by Trump earlier last year.

Spain's top court rejects father's appeal to halt daughter's euthanasia

REUTERS

Madrid, Feb 20: Spain's Constitutional Court has rejected an appeal by the father of a 25-year-old paraplegic woman who opposes her access to euthanasia, the court said in a statement Friday.

In 2021, Spain became the fourth European Union country to legalise euthanasia and assisted suicide for people with incurable or severely debilitating conditions who wish to end their lives. In 2024, 426 people received assistance in dying, according to government data.

According to legal rulings, the woman, who is suffering from a psychiatric illness, attempted suicide several times by overdosing on medication before jumping from a fifth-floor window in October 2022, an act that left her paraplegic and in chronic pain.

In July 2024, a specialised expert committee in her region, Catalonia, approved her request for euthanasia. The procedure was scheduled for August 2, 2024, but her father has blocked it ever since.

Medical case reports state that the patient is suffering from severe, chronic and incapacitating pain from her injury, with no possibility of improvement.

The father, supported by the ultra-conservative advocacy group Abogados Cristianos ("Christian Lawyers"), argued that his

of the day

quote

One of the largest data consumption per user in mobile devices in the world is in India, the whole internet is mobile

CRISTIANO AMON | PRESIDENT AND CEO, QUALCOMM

We have been very committed to the entry EVs, because this is where 65 per cent of the demand lies

SHAILESH CHANDRA | MD AND CEO, TATA MOTORS PASSENGER VEHICLES

India's crude strategy is evolving from opportunistic discount capture to a more structured approach to managing geopolitical risk

ARNAB NATH | ASSOCIATE PROJECT MANAGER OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH, GLOBALDATA

SHORT TAKES

Forex kitty jumps to record \$725.72bn

Mumbai: India's forex reserves jumped \$8.663 billion to hit a new all-time high of \$725.727 billion in the week ended February 13, the RBI said Friday. The overall forex reserves dropped \$6.711 billion to \$717.064 billion in the previous reporting week ended February 6. The previous all-time high of \$723.774 billion was touched in January. For the week ended February 13, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased by \$3.55 billion to \$573.603 billion, the data released by the central bank showed. Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effects of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units, such as the euro, pound, and yen, held in the foreign exchange reserves. Value of the gold reserves surged by \$4.99 billion to \$128.466 billion during the week, the RBI said. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were up by \$103 million to \$18.924 billion, the apex bank added. India's reserve position with the IMF was also up by \$19 million to \$4.734 billion in the reporting week, according to data.

Novartis AG to offload stake in Indian unit

New Delhi: Swiss company Novartis Friday said it has inked a pact with ChrysCapital group to sell entire 70.68 per cent stake in its Indian arm, Novartis India Ltd, in a deal valued at around Rs 1,446 crore. The divestment follows a strategic review announced and conducted by Novartis AG starting in February 2024, the Swiss drug major said in a statement. The closing of the transaction is subject to the satisfaction of certain conditions and is expected to close in the third quarter of 2026, it added. The transaction has also triggered a mandatory open offer for public shareholders to tender up to 26 per cent of Novartis India's equity. The acquirers have made a mandatory open offer to the public shareholders to acquire up to 64,19,608 shares constituting 26 per cent stake at Rs 860.64 per share aggregating to Rs 552.49 crore.

SpiceJet plans to expand fleet

New Delhi: SpiceJet Friday said it is working to ramp up its fleet to around 60 planes through a mix of wet and damp leases as well as bring grounded aircraft back into service. The airline's domestic market share rose to 4.3 per cent in December from 1.9 per cent in September last year due to a 56 per cent expansion in capacity during the December quarter, a release said. According to the release, the carrier plans to more than double its capacity, targeting 220 crore Available Seat Kilometres by Winter 2026.



At Cars24, we are deeply confident about the quality of the cars we sell. That confidence is what allows us to offer a Lifetime Warranty and stand by the most critical systems of the car for a much longer part of the ownership journey

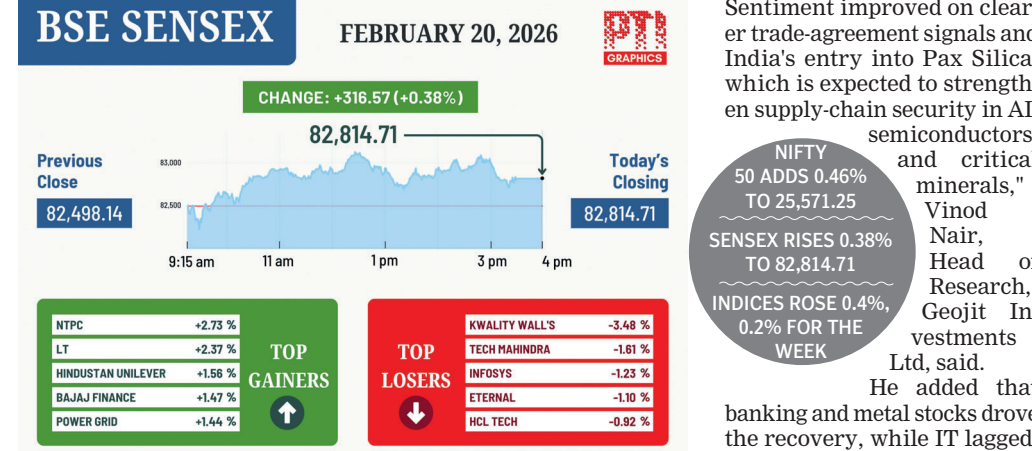
HIMANSU RATNOO | CEO INDIA, CARS24

14 PLI SCHEMES: RS 28,748CR DISBURSED

The government has disbursed Rs 28,748 crore under PLI schemes for 14 sectors, including electronics and pharma, since the launch of the support measure to boost domestic manufacturing, the government on Friday said. In 2021, the government announced Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes for 14 sectors with an outlay of Rs 1.97 lakh crore



SHARES LOG WEEKLY GAINS



Pressure on ₹: RBI sells \$10.02 billion

Mumbai, Feb 20: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) net sold \$10.02 billion in December due to high volatility in the Indian rupee amid geopolitical tensions and uncertainties over US tariffs. December becomes the seventh consecutive month of net dollar sales by the central bank in the spot currency market. According to the RBI's monthly bulletin data, the central bank net sold \$9.710 billion in November, \$11.877 billion in October, \$7.910 billion in September, \$7.695 billion in August, \$2.540 billion in July, and \$3.661 billion in June. The central bank had bought \$1.764 billion from the spot currency market in May. Indian rupee remained in extreme stress in most months of 2025 and in January 2026, due to various issues, such as foreign portfolio flows turning intermittent. Persistent merchandise trade deficits, coupled with periods of capital outflows, have weighed on the currency. The central bank had to intervene in the market to reduce the undue volatility and stabilise the currency. However, de-



DECEMBER BECOMES THE SEVENTH CONSECUTIVE MONTH OF NET DOLLAR SALES BY THE CENTRAL BANK IN THE SPOT CURRENCY MARKET

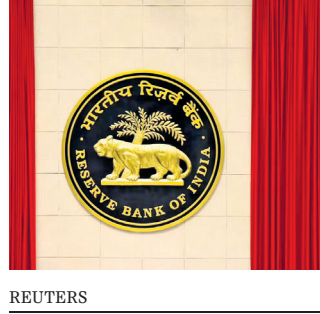
RBI NET SOLD \$9.710BN IN NOV, \$11.877BN IN OCT, \$7.910BN IN SEPT, \$7.695BN IN AUGUST, \$2.540BN IN JULY, AND \$3.661BN IN JUNE

spite heavy intervention by the RBI, the currency touched its historic low level of 92 against the US dollar. Post this, the gradual appreciation was seen in the currency, and major appreciation came after the announcement of the interim trade deal between India and the US, which reversed the flows of the foreign investors in the country. "Foreign portfolio investments and Indian rupee staged a comeback with investor sentiments turning around following the India-EU free trade agreement and the interim India-US trade deal," the RBI said in a bulletin.

could weigh in the near term, said Sunil Singhania, founder of Abakkus AMC. India VIX - a measure of the market's expected volatility for the next 30 days - spiked this week to 14.36, just shy of an eight-month high hit on the day of the federal budget February 1. The IT index fell 2.1%, marking a fifth consecutive week of losses, in its longest losing streak in six months on AI disruption fears. "Indian equities rebounded after yesterday's sharp correction, led by strong buying in large caps as investors favoured their better risk-reward over premium-valued midcaps.

Sentiment improved on clearer trade-agreement signals and India's entry into Pax Silica, which is expected to strengthen supply-chain security in AI, semiconductors, and critical minerals," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said. He added that banking and metal stocks drove the recovery, while IT lagged. Volatility stayed elevated, with the India VIX spiking even as geopolitical tensions still linger. "Softer inflation data from Japan supported expectations of accommodative global policy. Structurally, markets remain constructive, though near-term moves are likely to stay flow-driven amid global uncertainties," Nair said. In European markets, Germany's DAX, Paris' CAC 40 and London's FTSE 100 were trading nearly 1 per cent higher in mid-session deals Friday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 880.49 crore on Thursday, while domestic institutional investors were also the net sellers of stocks worth Rs 596.28 crore.

Most of rate panel sees little room for rate cuts



Mumbai, Feb 20: A majority of members of India's interest-rate setting panel view current policy rates as suitable for the economy, according to minutes from the February meeting released Friday, though two members indicated potential for future rate cuts. Members also await the roll-out of a new GDP data series later this month for a clearer read on the economy. India's six-member monetary policy committee left the key repo rate unchanged earlier this month, buoyed by a positive economic outlook and trade deals with the US and EU. Economists and swap markets have signalled an end to the rate-cutting cycle. "Growth prospects are looking up while inflation outlook remains broadly unchanged," Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra said in

the minutes, adding that recent developments on the external front have "provided room for greater optimism". "Given the present state of the economy and its outlook - buoyant growth and benign inflation - I feel the current policy rate is appropriate," Malhotra said. RBI Deputy Governor Poonam Gupta said that after 125 basis points of rate cuts over the last year, "another rate cut does not seem warranted at this point in time." The new economic data series could change the reading on the economy, she said. India continues to grow at a rapid clip with the economy expected to expand 6.8%-7.2% in the financial year beginning April 1. GDP data for October-December, due to be released next week, will make significant changes including a new base year. Despite strong growth, inflation in the Asian economy remains low. Retail inflation stood at 2.75% in January in data under a new series. The central bank has forecast inflation at 4% and 4.2% in the first and second quarters of next fiscal. The RBI is mandated to maintain inflation near 4% and within a tolerance band of 2%-6%.



Maruti Suzuki NEXA launches its first all-electric SUV, the all-new e-VITARA at Narayani Motors in Bhubaneswar Friday. The ceremony was attended by Prasant Kumar, DGM, SBI; Anil Mishra, RM, SBI; Gaurav Dave, Regional manager, Maruti Suzuki; Saurab Yadu, TSM, Maruti Suzuki; Purushotam Budhbraja, Dealer Principal, Managing Director, Narayani Motors and Bibhudatta Panda, GM, Narayani Motors

Strong mfg growth lifts private sector

Bangalore, Feb 20: India's private sector accelerated in February led by robust demand for goods even as services growth was broadly steady, according to a survey that also showed intensifying inflationary pressures. HSBC's flash India Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), compiled by S&P Global,

rose to 59.3 in February from January's 58.4 - the strongest in three months and above a Reuters poll median forecast of 59.0. The 50-mark separates expansion from contraction. The improvement was supported by robust total new orders which rose at the quickest pace since November. Business-ess attributed gains to strong demand, local tourism and

marketing efforts. International sales also increased at the fastest pace in five months, bolstering overall demand. While the preliminary headline reading for manufacturing PMI rose to 57.5 from 55.4, the services PMI was little changed at 58.4 versus 58.5 in January. Better sales supported hiring at a faster pace and optimism about year-ahead activity im-

proved to its strongest in a year. The survey also showed higher price pressures with input costs rising at their fastest rate in 15 months and pushing overall output charge inflation to a six-month high. Services firms faced the steepest rise in input price inflation in two-and-a-half years, while factory input price inflation remained unchanged from January.

From 'buy America' to 'bye America', Wall Street exodus gathers pace

THE S&P 500 TRADES AT ROUGHLY 21.8 TIMES THE EXPECTED EARNINGS OF ITS COMPONENTS, WHILE STOCKS IN EUROPE TRADE AT ROUGHLY 15 TIMES' FORWARD EARNINGS AND THOSE IN JAPAN AND CHINA TRADE AT 17 AND 13.5 TIMES RESPECTIVELY

London, Feb 20: US investors are pulling money out of their own stock market at the fastest pace in at least 16 years as Big Tech returns fade and better-performing overseas markets look more attractive. In the last six months, US-domiciled investors have pulled some \$75 billion from US equity products, with \$52 billion flowing out since the start of 2026 alone, the most in the first eight weeks of the year since at least 2010, according to LSEG/Lipper data. The shift comes despite a weakening of the dollar against other currencies, which makes buying overseas assets more expensive for US investors. It's a compelling sign that the diversification away from US assets by some international investors in the past year is gaining trac-

tion among US investors. Since the global financial crisis ended in 2009, the "buy America" trade has rewarded investors at home and abroad thanks to a strong economy and earnings growth and dominance in the tech sector leading to outsized gains in US stocks. More recently, the AI boom pushed the S&P 500 index record highs last year, a strong buffer from US President Donald Trump's unpredictable approach to trade policy and diplomacy, as well as his attempts to undermine Federal Reserve independence. **LOOKING FURTHER AFIELD** But as concerns have grown about the possible risks from AI, as well as the costs involved, the lure of Wall Street stocks has ebbed. The surge in value in the US megacap tech stocks that have led gains until now are making investors



US INVESTORS SHIFT TO EMERGING MARKETS, EUROPE, AND JAPAN

WEAKER DOLLAR BOOSTS ATTRACTIVENESS OF FOREIGN MARKETS FOR US INVESTORS

AI STOCK RALLY SLOWS, PROMPTING SHIFT TO INDUSTRIAL AND DEFENSIVE STOCKS

pickier and many are spotting more attractive opportunities elsewhere. Bank of America's February fund manager survey showed investors switched from US equities to emerging market equities at the fastest rate in five years. "I've had lots of conversations with our wealth business

in the US this year," said UBS's head of European equity strategy and global derivatives strategy Gerry Fowler. "They're all talking about investing more offshore because at the end of the year, they looked

at the performance of foreign markets in dollars and they're like, wow, I'm missing out." US investors have poured some \$26 billion into emerging-market equities so far this year, with South Korea the largest single country destination, with an inflow of \$2.8 billion, followed by Brazil, with \$1.2 billion, LSEG/Lipper data shows. One of the clear results of Trump's policies has been the 10% decline in the dollar against a basket of currencies since last January. While that is a disadvantage for U.S. investors hunting for opportunities abroad, dividends in dollar terms from better performing overseas markets will also be pumped up. In the last 12 months, the S&P 500 has risen around 14%. In dollar terms, Tokyo's Nikkei is up 43%, Europe's STOXX 600 has surged 26%, Shanghai's CSI 300 has returned 23% and Seoul's KOSPI has doubled in value. European banking stocks, one example of cyclical stocks that typically benefit when economic growth picks up, surged 67% last year and are up a further 4% so far in 2026. LSEG/Lipper data shows that since Trump's inauguration in January last year, U.S.-domiciled investors have poured nearly \$7 billion into European equity products, compared with an outflow of roughly \$17 billion during the four years of Trump's first term from 2017 to 2021.

SUPER 8s SHOWDOWN

Heavyweights collide

T20 World Cup 2026 enters decisive phase

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 20: The 10th edition of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup now shifts gears into its most compelling chapter – the Super 8s. After weeks of high-voltage contests, narrow escapes and headline-grabbing upsets, the 20-team spectacle has been trimmed to eight contenders.

From February 21 to March 1, the race for semi-final berths will intensify in a single round-robin battle across two fiercely competitive groups.

Pakistan will take on New Zealand in the opening match of the Super Eights phase of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup in Colombo, while reigning champions India face South Africa in a rematch of the thrilling 2024 title decider.

Seven of the eight pre-seeded sides have justified their rankings by progressing, but the stage also features one stirring underdog story; Zimbabwe, who forced their way into the elite bracket with a fearless campaign.

Group 1: Group toppers' clash

Co-hosts India headline Group 1 and will lock horns with two other group toppers, the ever-dangerous West Indies cricket team and the resurgent South Africa national cricket team.

Underdogs Zimbabwe replaced pre-tournament favourites Australia to complete the quartet. Zimbabwe have emerged as the surprise package of the tournament, riding momentum and belief into the Super 8s. Their fearless brand of cricket now faces its sternest examination.

India's clash with South Africa February 22 in Ahmedabad promises early fireworks, while their March 1 showdown against the West Indies in Kolkata could well determine semi-final destiny.

Group 2: Old rivals, new stakes

If Group 1 is about power and unpredictability, Group 2 is



- Defending champions India, 2024 runner-ups South Africa, two-time champions West Indies and Zimbabwe are in Group A
- While the 2009 champions, Pakistan, the 2014 champions, Sri Lanka, two-time winners England, and New Zealand are in Group B
- All teams will play three matches against other teams in their group, with the top 2 teams from each group advancing to semi-finals

TODAY'S CLASH

New Zealand vs Pakistan

Time- 7:00 pm

steeped in rivalry and pedigree. The mercurial Pakistan national cricket team shares space with two-time champions (2010 & 2022) England, perennial dark horses New Zealand and a rejuvenated Sri Lanka.

Opening the Super 8s February 21, New Zealand and Pakistan will set the tone in Colombo. England and Sri Lanka renew hostilities a day later in Kandy, while the England-Pakistan encounter February 24 looms as a blockbuster in what could be the group's defining fixture.

The Format: No second chances

Each group will play in a single round-robin format, meaning every side gets three matches. Only the top two teams from

each group will advance to the semi-finals, leaving little margin for error.

Momentum, net run rate and temperament under pressure will be decisive. With just a week of action separating ambition from elimination, every over could tilt the tournament narrative.

AUS END CAMPAIGN ON WINNING NOTE

Pallekele: Already out of Super Eights contention, Australia beat Oman by nine wickets in their inconsequential final group clash of the T20 World Cup here Friday. Captain Mitchell Marsh remained unbeaten on 64 off 33 balls while his opening partner Travis Head made 32 as Australia chased down the modest target of 105 with 62 balls to spare, reaching 108 for one in 9.4 overs. Earlier, Australia's bowlers underlined their experience with a disciplined display, strangling Oman's batting line-up and dismissing them for a modest 104. Pace Xavier Bartlett (2/27) and spinner Adam Zampa (4/21) showed their class after captain Mitchell Marsh won the toss and opted to field. For Oman, Wasim Ali was the highest scorer with 32 runs.



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hobart, Feb 20: Outplayed at home, the Indian men's hockey team would be eager to bounce back and make a fresh start under new skipper Hardik Singh when it begins the FIH Pro League's overseas leg with a game against Spain here Saturday.

The Hobart leg of the series, which also features hosts Australia, will be held till February 25 at the Tasmania Hockey Centre.

The recent Rourkela leg proved to be a painful learning curve for the Indians with losses to Argentina and Belgium. Regular skipper Harmanpreet Singh has taken a break to welcome his second child from the upcoming clutch of matches.

The team views these fixtures as a vital opportunity to test combinations, refine structure, and build momentum ahead of the upcoming FIH World Cup and the subsequent Asian Games.

After the campaign-opener against Spain, a high-octane clash against Australia is lined up for Sunday.

They will face Spain again February 24 before concluding the leg with a final match

FIH PRO LEAGUE: HOBART LEG



against the formidable Australian side February 25.

India and Spain have been evenly-matched in their last 10 encounters, claiming four regulation wins each, alongside two draws that India went on to win in shootouts.

Against Australia, high-scoring drama has been a constant. The hosts hold the statistical edge in their last 10 meetings with six wins to India's two (and two draws).

Two-time Olympic bronze medallist Hardik will lead the

As a team, we have reviewed our recent matches, learned our lessons, and are entering Hobart with a highly positive and aggressive mindset

HARDIK SINGH

side that also features young players like Amandeep Lakra and Manmeet Singh, both of whom are looking to build on their recent senior debuts.

"It is a tremendous honour to lead the national team in a

3RD WOMEN'S T20I

Women in Blue aim historic series triumph Down Under

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Adelaide, Feb 20: India will need their batting big guns to fire collectively against an experienced Australian bowling group in the third and final women's T20 International to seal a historic maiden series triumph Down Under, here Saturday.

Despite registering a few victories in the past, the Indian women are yet to score a bilateral series win in Australia across all three formats.

To change that script, India need a better batting effort here and it starts from openers Smriti Mandhana and Shafali Verma.

Both Smriti and Shafali got



starts but failed to kick on, impeding India's relatively easy-looking chase of 164 in the second match.

The veteran Aussie trio of Kim Garth, Annabel Sutherland and Sophie Molineux exploited that opening, getting rid

ADCA T20I ASIA CUP

India register dominant win over Nepal

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, Feb 20: India delivered a commanding all-round performance to defeat Nepal by 10 wickets in their ADCA T20I Asia Cup encounter at the Barabati Stadium here Friday.

After winning the toss, Nepal opted to bat first but struggled against disciplined Indian bowling and were bowled out for 57 runs in 17.4 overs. The Indian bowlers maintained tight lines and lengths throughout, never allowing Nepal to build partnerships.

Nepal's innings saw Krishna Dhami emerge as the top scorer with 19 runs off 15 balls, including four boundaries. Abhishekh Kumar Mishra contributed 11 runs, while the rest of the batting line-up failed to cope with the sustained pressure applied by the Indian attack.

The standout performance of the match came from Ji-



gar Thakkar, who produced a sensational spell of bowling, claiming 5 wickets for 13 runs in 4 overs, dismantling the Nepal batting order. He was well supported by Akash Saini, who returned figures of 1 for 9 in 3 overs, and Sanith Shetty, who

picked up 1 for 12 in 4 overs.

Chasing a modest target without loss in just 5.2 overs, Deepak Lamba led the charge with an unbeaten 28 off 13 balls, striking four boundaries and a six, while Sanith Shetty played a composed knock of 25 not

out from 19 deliveries, which included two fours and a six. The opening pair ensured there were no alarms in the chase.

Nepal's bowlers tried to contain the run flow, with Baidhanath Chaudhary conceding 21 runs in 2 overs and Mohammad Sabir giving away 20 runs, but the target proved too small to defend.

For his match-winning five-wicket haul, Jigar Thakkar was adjudged Player of the Match.

The match was played in the presence of distinguished guests, including Subrat Kumar Behera, CEO of the Odisha Cricket Association (OCA); Sumit Jain, President of the Asian Deaf Cricket Association (ADCA) and Indian Deaf Cricket Association (IDCA), and Sagarkanta Senapati, General Secretary of the Odisha Deaf Cricket Association (ODCA), adding prestige to the occasion.

New blood headlines Blue Tigresses' campaign

FIVE UNCAPPED PLAYERS IN INDIA'S 26-MEMBER SQUAD FOR AFC WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP NEXT MONTH

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 20: India Friday named six uncapped players in a 26-member squad for next month's AFC Women's Asian Cup football tournament in Australia, with hopes of reaching the quarterfinals by punching above its weight.

A quarterfinals berth will allow the team to have a shot at FIFA World Cup qualification for the first time.

Among the 26 players in the squad, eight were part of the

last Asian Cup that was hosted by India in 2022 -- Sweetie Devi Ngangbam, Shilky Devi Hemam, Sanju, Anju Tamang, Pyari Xaxa, Grace Dangmei, Manisha Kalyan and Sowmiya Narayanasamy.

India withdrew from the tournament after just one game due to a COVID outbreak despite staying inside a bio-secure bubble in Mumbai.

Defenders Sarita Yumnam and Sushmita Lepcha, midfielders Jasoda Munda, Sanfida Nongrum and Aveka Singh,



A quarterfinals berth will allow the team to have a shot at FIFA World Cup qualification for the first time

and forward Kaviya Pakkirisamy are the uncapped players named in the squad.

Placed in Group C, India will

begin their campaign against Vietnam March 4 in Perth, followed by a match against Japan March 7 at the same venue. The

THE SQUAD:

Goalkeepers: Panthoi Chanu Elangbam, Shreya Hooda, Sowmiya Narayanasamy.

Defenders: Astam Oraon, Juli Kishan, Martina Thokchom, Nirmala Devi Phanjoubam, Sanju, Sarita Yumnam, Shilky Devi Hemam, Sushmita Lepcha, Sweetie Devi Ngangbam.

Midfielders: Anju Tamang, Aveka Singh, Babina Devi Lisham, Jasoda Munda, Sanfida Nongrum, Sangita Basfore.

Forwards: Grace Dangmei, Kaviya Pakkirisamy, Lynda Kom Serto, Malavika P, Manisha Kalyan, Pyari Xaxa, Rimpa Haldar, Soumya Guguloth.

last group stage match will be against Chinese Taipei March 10 in Sydney.

The top two sides from each group, along with the two best

third-placed teams, will progress to the quarter-finals. The four quarter-final winners will qualify for the 2027 FIFA Women's World Cup in Brazil.

The losing quarter-finalists will contest the play-offs for the two remaining direct spots allocated to the AFC for the World Cup. The two play-off losers will have another chance of qualifying for Brazil via the play-off tournament.

Grace Dangmei is the highest-capped player and top-scorer in India's squad with 23 goals in 91 appearances. Anju Tamang is the senior-most player at 30 years of age. Just like in the 2022 edition squad, the 20-year-old Shilky Devi Hemam is the youngest in the Indian squad.

prestigious tournament like the Pro League. While we will certainly miss Harmanpreet's presence on the pitch, his absence provides a valuable opportunity for the rest of the group to step up and take charge," said Hardik.

"As a team, we have reviewed our recent matches, learned our lessons, and are entering Hobart with a highly positive and aggressive mindset," asserted the mid-field mainstay.

Rising stars such as Angabir Singh, Arajjeet Singh Hundal, and Aditya Arjun Lalage will also be eager to prove their mettle in the forward line.

Sharing his thoughts on the young additions to the squad, Hardik said, "I am incredibly excited about the new faces joining us for this tour. Youngsters bring very fresh, fearless energy to our attacking lineup.

"They have worked exceptionally hard to earn their spots, and playing against top-tier teams like Australia and Spain is the perfect platform for them to express themselves.

"The entire group is motivated to support them, execute our plans, and play the brand of hockey India is known for."

AUSTRALIA TOUR FIASCO

Pak govt revokes Butt's 2-year ban

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lahore, Feb 20: The Pakistan government Friday revoked national hockey team skipper Aamdad Shakeel Butt's two-year ban imposed by the national federation (PHF), terming the step as "illegal and unconstitutional".

Just before resigning from his position as Pakistan Hockey Federation president Thursday, Tariq Bugti banned Butt for two years for his criticism of the PHF following the skipper's outburst against the mismanagement during the recent Australia tour.

But patron-in-chief, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif-appointed interim president of the PHF Muhuydin Ahmed Wani reversed the decision, stating it was an "illegal and unconstitutional step" by Bugti.

Bugti had resigned Thursday in the wake of a huge fall out after the national side's return from Australia, where they faced logistical nightmares and had to stay in Airbnb residences despite the state-run Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) releasing 10 million rupees to the PHF for five-star hotel accommodation of the team during its FIH Pro League matches in Canberra.

A senior official of the Inter-Provincial Coordination Ministry (which looks after all sports related issues) confirmed that Prime Minister Sharif had immediately accepted Bugti's resignation and appointed Wani as ad-hoc president of PHF and Brig Musaratullah as Director-General.

ISL 2025-26

FC Goa edge past Mohammedan SC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Feb 20: FC Goa registered a comfortable 2-0 victory over Mohammedan Sporting Club to secure their first win of Indian Super League 2025-26 season at the Kishore Bharti Krirangan here Friday.

The victory provisionally lifted FC Goa to the top of the table with four points from two matches, while Mohammedan are yet to score their first goal after two games. Pol Moreno opened the scoring in the fourth minute, and their advantage was doubled in the 32nd through a Dejan Drazic penalty as The Gaurs went into half-time with a 2-0 lead.

Pol Moreno was adjudged the Player of the Match. FC Goa struck early, as Moreno powered a header past Subhajit Bhattacharjee, leaving the Mohammedan goalkeeper with no chance. The Gaurs scored their second just before the water break by winning a penalty. Drazic stepped up and calmly dispatched the resulting penalty.

Both sides made threatening moves in the closing stages, but could not apply the finishing touches to convert those chances.