

Priyanka's fear

Actor Priyanka Chopra opens up on her fear and what she went through during her daughter's premature birth

LEISURE | P2



US-Iran tensions

US and Iran could reach deal if nuclear and non-nuclear issues are separated, says senior Iranian official

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Forex fraud

Yes Bank says it has detected unauthorised transactions worth ₹2.5 crore related to its multi-currency prepaid forex cards

BUSINESS | P11



SF hopes alive

India thrash Zimbabwe by 72 runs in their must-win Super 8 match to keep their semifinal (SF) hopes alive in the T20 World Cup

SPORTS | P12



FOR A CAUSE: Participants in loincloths wrestle in a mud field during Warabi Hadaka Matsuri (Warabi Naked Festival) in Yotsukaido, Chiba Prefecture, Japan. According to organisers, the festival, which has about 200 years of history, is held in hopes of a bountiful harvest

DGCA codifies ticketing norms

In what would bring cheer to air travellers, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has updated air ticket refund rules to simplify cancellations and changes. Passengers can now cancel or amend tickets within 48 hours of booking without extra charges. Similarly, airlines must process refunds within 14 working days and cannot charge for simple name corrections identified within 24 hours. Refund delays and confusion have long plagued passengers, especially for tickets booked far in advance or through agents. Under the new norms, the airline, not the travel agent, is responsible for refunds, reducing the chances of customers being bounced between parties. The change follows numerous complaints about delayed refunds. The issue became particularly apparent during the IndiGo operational crisis in December last year, when many flights were cancelled and refunds were delayed, highlighting the need for clearer, faster refund processes



directly through the airline's website. The revised norms would be applicable from March 26. "In case of purchase of ticket through travel agent/portal, onus of refund shall lie with the airlines as agents are their appointed representatives. The airlines shall ensure that the refund process is completed within 14 working days," the DGCA said. Besides, there are changes with respect to norms for ticket cancellations due to a medical emergency faced by the passenger. The amendments to the Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR) for 'Refund of Airline Tickets to Passengers of Public Transport Undertakings' come against the backdrop of the rising passenger complaints about not receiving refunds on time. The revised CAR was issued February 24. Now, the airlines have been asked to provide a 'Look-in option' for a period of 48 hours to passengers after booking tickets. "During this period, a passenger can cancel or amend the ticket without any additional charges, except for the normal prevailing fare for the revised flight for which the ticket is sought to be amended. This facility shall not be available for a flight whose departure is less than 7 days for domestic flight and 15 days for international flight from booking date when ticket is booked directly through airline website," it said, adding that beyond 48 hours of initial booking time, this option would not be available and the passenger would have to pay the relevant cancellation fees for amendment.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: Passengers can now cancel or change air tickets without paying an additional charge within 48 hours of making the bookings, subject to certain conditions, with DGCA revising the ticket refund norms for airlines. The option would not be available for domestic flight bookings where the departure date is less than seven days, and in the case of international bookings, the departure date should be not less than 15 days. Coming out with the amended norms that are more passenger-friendly, DGCA also said that airlines should not levy any additional charge for correction in the name of the same person when the error is pointed out by the passenger within 24 hours of making the booking, when the ticket is booked

Rajya Sabha: Sayanna files nomination

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 26: The Election Commission of India (ECI) Thursday formally issued a notification for the election to four Rajya Sabha seats in Odisha. Following this, Kante Sayanna from Hyderabad, Telangana, filed nomination as an independent candidate. According to a poll official, Sayanna's nomination will be cancelled during scrutiny as it does not have a proposer. Meanwhile, BJD's Sasmit Patra collected six nomination forms on behalf of his party.

According to the notification, the last date for filing nominations is March 5, while scrutiny of papers will be taken up March 6. Candidates are allowed to withdraw their nominations till March 9, it said. It said that the polling will be held March 16 from 9am to 4pm. The counting of votes will take place at 5pm on the same day. The ECI has stated that the entire election process will be completed by March 20. No political party has so far named any candidate for the four seats. The biennial election to the Upper House of the Parliament was necessitated as the tenure of Niranjan Bishi and Munna Khan of BJD and Sujeet Kumar and Mamata Mohanta of BJP ends April 2.

CM lays stone for new Odisha Bhawan in Delhi

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 26: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Thursday laid the foundation stone for a new Odisha Bhawan in New Delhi's Chanakyapuri area, an official statement said. The proposed building, to be constructed at an estimated cost of ₹93.27 crore, will reflect the state's rich history, art and culture. The previous structure was demolished as it had become old and unsafe, the statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said.

The new building will have three basements, a ground floor, and six storeys. It will house 45 suites equipped with modern facilities. An exhibition area will be set up on the first floor, while a conference hall with a seating capacity of around 70 will come up on the second floor. Majhi said the tender process for the project has been completed, and construction will begin soon. "The state government has been planning to build Odisha Bhawans in many cities of the country, including Aayodhya, Bengaluru, and Surat in the coming days. Land has been sought from the respective state governments for the purpose," the CM said, adding that the state government has operational Odisha Bhawans in Kolkata, Chennai, and Mumbai.



₹93.27 crore project

- The new building will have 3 basements, a ground floor, and six storeys
- It will house 45 suites equipped with modern facilities
- An exhibition area will be set up on the first floor, while a conference hall with a seating capacity of around 70 will come up on the second floor

There is also a proposal to construct another building in Mumbai for the convenience of people, Majhi said, adding that a special division will be created for the maintenance of these buildings and halls. Majhi said a shelter will be built near Master Canteen Square here for people coming to the City from different districts of the state for work, in which a three-day accommodation will be provided at a low cost. Union Minister for Tribal Affairs Jual Oram, state Works Minister Prithiviraj Harichandan, Bargarh MP Pradeep Purohit and Works department Principal Secretary Sanjay Kumar Singh attended the function in New Delhi.

Vijay, Rashmika tie the knot at Udaipur

Udaipur: Actors Vijay Deverakonda and Rashmika Mandanna Thursday tied the knot in a private ceremony attended by close family and friends at a luxury hotel at Udaipur. Rashmika donned a red sari with traditional gold jewellery and Vijay complemented her with an off-white dhoti and red shawl in the photos shared by the couple on their Instagram handles. P2

₹797cr green hydrogen jetty at Paradip Port

POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, Feb 26: The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) has approved the development of a dedicated jetty with allied facilities for handling green hydrogen, ammonia and other liquid cargo at Paradip Port at an estimated cost of ₹797.17 crore, official sources said Thursday. According to the MoPSW, the project will be implemented by Paradip Port Authority (PPA) on a build-operate-transfer basis. The proposed facility will have a handling capacity of 4.0 million tonnes per annum and is designed to strengthen

Paradip Port's role as a hub for green energy cargo. The infrastructure will include a dedicated jetty, storage systems and associated facilities. The jetty will have a centre-to-centre distance of 279 metres between extreme end dolphins and a dredged depth of 14.3 metres in front of the berth to enable safe handling of liquid cargo vessels. PPA will provide capital support equivalent to 20 per cent of the project cost, amounting to ₹159.43 crore, during the construction phase. The project is expected to be completed within 24 months.

Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal said the dedicated green hydrogen jetty will play a critical role in strengthening export logistics and integrating Odisha's emerging green hydrogen production clusters with global markets. The facility will also include provisions for handling other liquid cargo to ensure optimal utilisation during the initial growth phase of the green hydrogen sector and to diversify Paradip Port's cargo profile.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Laughing, holding hands, hugging are fine. But sitting on the same chair would be too much

Actor's fight to reclaim her face from Albania's 'AI minister'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Tirana, Feb 26: Albanian actor Anila Bisha is renowned for playing complex women on the stage and screen, skills honed over a 30-year career, but now she lives in the shadow of her AI avatar and a performance she never gave. Last September, Prime Minister Edi Rama announced with much fanfare he had appointed what he claimed was the first AI-generated minister, tasked with preventing corruption in public tenders. Within days, the 'minister' would deliver its inaugural parliamentary speech. "I am not here to replace people, but to help them," the bot, a digital doppelganger of Bisha in traditional Albanian dress, said in a video message that would

garner headlines around the world. But Bisha, 57, watching her familiar face deliver a speech she knew nothing about, in a role she never agreed to, was left reeling. "I couldn't believe it when I saw myself delivering a speech in parliament, when I heard my voice saying that I am a minister," she said. "I was in shock, I cried so much." In early 2025, Bisha agreed to lend her face and voice to a virtual assistant for an online government services portal -- aimed at helping people navigate bureaucracy. She was delighted at the time. Every movement of her mouth and every sound had to be recorded so the bot, dubbed 'Diella' or 'Sun' in Albanian, could respond naturally to user re-



quests. Within a few months, Diella had recorded nearly a million interactions and issued over 36,000 documents through the platform. "I received so many congratulations about Diella," Bisha said. In September, Rama suddenly 'promoted' the chatbot to be minister of public procurement. But with little public detail,



the announcement drew sharp criticism from the opposition and experts who raised constitutional and accountability issues in a country where graft is widespread. Bisha, too, said she was left in the dark and spent months reaching out to the government. "The use of my image and my voice for political purposes is

something very serious for me," Bisha said. She said she had signed a contract only for the use of her image on the e-services platform, and the agreement lapsed in December last year. The government ignored her messages and Rama pressed on. Diella was 'pregnant', he told a Berlin conference in October, and she would soon give birth to 83 children, one for each of his MPs. Bisha was disgusted. "People who don't like the prime minister hate me, and I feel so hurt." Rama continues to promote Diella abroad as part of his promise to root out corruption -- a key requirement for the country's EU ambitions. Bisha has abandoned her hopes of an amicable settlement with the government and

launched a legal fight against Diella earlier this month. On Monday, an attempt to have the use of her image suspended ahead of a full legal challenge was rejected by an administrative court. But her lawyer said they would lodge the main suit within days, including a claim for one million euros (\$1.17 million) in damages for a violation of her image rights. A government spokeswoman said the lawsuit was 'nonsense', adding, "But we welcome the opportunity to solve it once and for all in a court of law." Bisha said she would keep fighting until she reclaimed her identity -- even if it meant taking the case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

leisure



CHRISTINA APPLIGATE ON CHILDHOOD ABUSE

Actress Christina Applegate, known for *Hall Pass*, *Vacation* and *Bad Moms*, has revealed in her memoir *You With the Sad Eyes* that she was molested by a female babysitter as a child. She wrote the trauma left her feeling ashamed and uncomfortable with physical touch throughout her life

KELLY WELCOMES FIRST CHILD WITH WIDZISZEWSK

Actor Paul Anthony Kelly has embraced fatherhood. The *Love Story* star announced the birth of his first child with wife Syd Widziszewski-Kelly during an appearance on *The Kelly Clarkson Show*. Sharing the news in true movie-star style, Kelly surprised fans while celebrating his show's success



FORTUNE FORECAST

GaneshaSpeaks.com
accuracy • reliability • trust
FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181*

ARIES
The day may start with a dilemma, but that's exactly how your skills will come into play. As evening approaches, you will be applauded for your outstanding performance. If Ganesha is particularly generous today, you may sign new agreements.

TAURUS
Priorities and money matters will line up impatiently to knock on your door (and desk). Your financial constraints will get an outburst today. People may be taken by surprise with the way you get poignant. You will also enjoy the higher accountability reposed on you, predicts Ganesha.

GEMINI
Today, you will get an opportunity to rejuvenate yourself with seamless energy. How? Ganesha's guess is that you will find — or at least you will believe that you have found — your purpose in life. It will keep you excited throughout the day, and maybe even for days to come. You may spend lavishly to improve your personal appearance. Such expenditures are only an investment, feels Ganesha.

CANCER
Ganesha believes that today you may have to take certain financial decisions at home as well as at work. If you are in-charge of a certain project, you will trust the judgement of those working on it, mostly because they have been hand-picked by you.

LEO
You are blessed with a visionary's creative streak. Perhaps, that's why, you see things differently from others. Today, thanks to the stars, your creative side will surge forth with renewed vigour. You will generate ideas effortlessly and continuously as you reach your creative peak.

VIRGO
There will be dirt on your shoulder today, so dust it off, says Ganesha, because every time you fall you will get up stronger than before. Your logic and analytical skills will help you find the necessary precision to accomplish tasks at work. You may spend the evening with a close friend or your beloved, engrossed in a stimulating conversation.

LIBRA
There are many kinds of worries that you must equip yourself to deal with. To do this, you may have to learn and follow the basic steps of problem-analysing techniques. The steps involve obtaining facts, analysing them and then arriving at a decision based upon your observations.

SCORPIO
Ganesha feels a taxing and demanding day may be at hand today. Things might baffle you so much that you might lose your ability to think clearly. The battle is not lost because your power of resilience will be the silver lining. Address one problem at a time and take the slow and steady path, advises Ganesha.

SAGITTARIUS
You will discover a flair for flirting as you puppet words to your romantic will with ease and grace. Most of today will be spent in the company of a loved one, perhaps a picnic for two, or a day-long romantic date. Stay prepared for the worst as this may not necessarily blossom into a long-lasting relationship, warns Ganesha.

CAPRICORN
Like you weren't already overworked, new responsibilities will keep you occupied throughout the day, says Ganesha. The excitement with which you work every day will weaken, and eventually die by the end of the day. This is mainly because you will burn your energy and resources in helping others. But there is a good side to this too.

AQUARIUS
Academically, you have performed exceptionally well, and Ganesha congratulates you for that. You will inspire and motivate a number of people, and may create a fan following, too. This, however, doesn't mean that you throw your weight around. Keep a humane and humble approach towards others.

PISCES
Your energy and enthusiasm will know no bounds today, as everything seems to fall into place, seemingly on its own. You will blaze a new trail at the work-place. Certain tough calls may leave you off-balance momentarily, but you will come out of it with flying colours. For those who are in artistic professions, fame could come knocking on your door, says Ganesha.



BONDED FOR EVER: Top actors Rashmika Mandanna and Vijay Deverakonda during their wedding rituals at Udaipur, Rajasthan, Thursday.



Priyanka's traumatic experience

Mumbai: Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas welcomed their daughter, Malti Marie Chopra Jonas, via surrogacy in January 2022, but the journey was fraught with fear and uncertainty. Born prematurely at just 27 weeks, Malti spent nearly 110 days in the NICU. Speaking on a podcast, Priyanka described the experience as deeply traumatic, calling her daughter a "miracle baby" after a difficult path to motherhood. She recalled shutting down when doctors informed them of the early delivery. During the pandemic, the situation felt even more overwhelming. Malti weighed just 1 pound 11 ounces at birth and required multiple medical interventions, including six blood transfusions. Priyanka admitted feeling numb initially, but soon resolved to be strong for her daughter. The couple took turns staying in the NICU, focusing on skin-to-skin contact, while Nick sang to Malti and Priyanka played soft mantras beside her crib. Adding to their stress, they were compelled to publicly announce Malti's birth before they felt ready. Looking back, Priyanka said motherhood transformed her fear into fierce protectiveness. Bringing Malti home was an emotional milestone, marked by gratitude and relief as the family finally reunited under one roof.

Charikandha to hit screens today

Bhubaneswar: The much-acclaimed Odia short film *Charikandha*, produced under the banner of Ritupriya Production, is set to hit the big screen Friday.



The 36-minute film has participated in more than 46 national and international film festivals and has won over 22 awards. Notably, *Charikandha* was screened in the mid-length film category at the prestigious Hokkaido International Film Festival in Japan. Out of only eight films selected worldwide in the category, *Charikandha* was the sole Indian entry and went on to win accolades.

The film explores contemporary social realities and the loneliness associated with old age, presenting a deeply emotional and thought-provoking narrative. The story, screenplay and direction have been handled by Bishwanath Rath, while Atish Kumar Rout has produced the film. Supriya Rout and Akhil Rajurkar have served as co-producers.

Addressing the media, Producer Rout expressed confidence that when audiences watch *Charikandha* February 27, they will leave the theatres with tears in their eyes instead of applause, moved by the film's powerful storytelling and emotional depth. A special premium of the movie will be held at PVR in Utkal Kanika Galleria, Friday, he said.

Konkona bats for untold stories

Mumbai: Actress Konkona Sen Sharma, who is awaiting the release of her upcoming streaming movie *Accused*, has spoken up on the importance of shedding light on untold stories.

Accused follows the story of a woman, who has been alleged to have sexually harassed a victim. The actress spoke with this news agency during the promotions of the film, and shared how the film flips the script.

She told, "It's such an unusual kind of a premise where we usually never see women as the accused. We always see them as the accuser or the victim or survivor. We hardly ever see this. Of course, I think statistically,

it's usually men who are the perpetrators. Let's not forget. But it does happen with women as well".

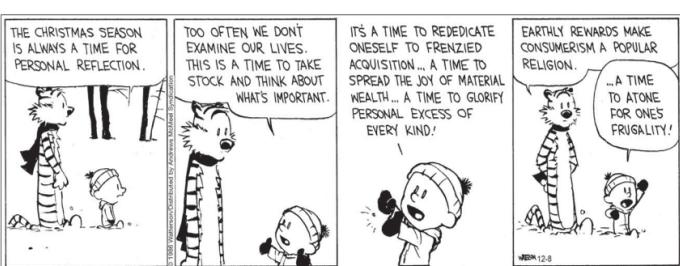
She further mentioned, "It's always nice to shine a light on untold stories because there's one narrative which is out there, which we're all aware of. But the flip side of the coin, we hardly ever examine. So it was very interesting for me to have that as the backdrop to examine power dynamics of women in the workplace, women in positions of power. The power dynamics between two women in a relationship, and how something like this affects them, and how their life kind of unravels".



PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

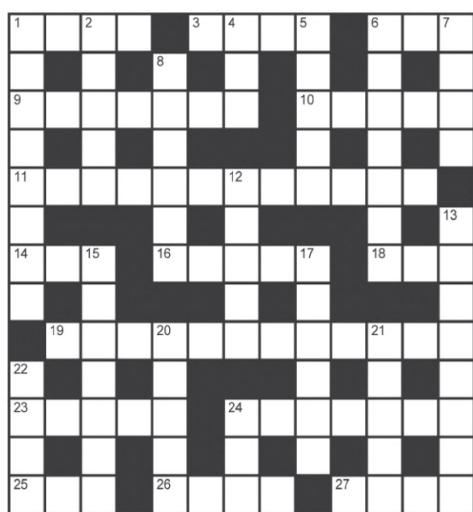


BREVITY



FUN POST

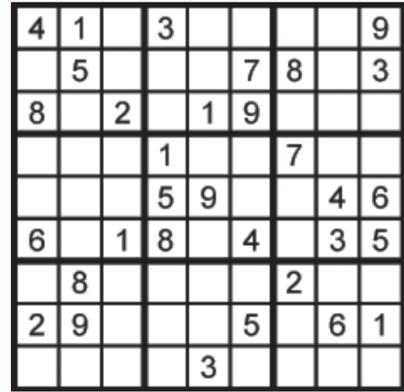
CROSSWORD



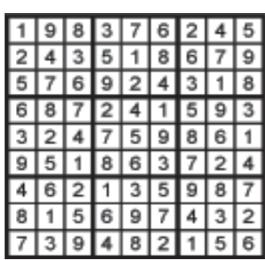
- Across**
- 1 Plummet
 - 3 Keats, for one
 - 6 Honey maker
 - 9 Captivate
 - 10 Euripides drama
 - 11 Go on a voyage (4,3,2,3)
 - 14 Missile's path
 - 16 Geneva's river
 - 18 Golf ball prop
 - 19 Now and then (4,2,1,5)
 - 23 Latin dance
 - 24 Breakfast breads
 - 25 German spa
 - 26 Whirlpool
 - 27 Matures
 - 6 Doctor's order (3,4)
 - 7 "Holy moly!"
 - 8 Relish
 - 12 Sticker
 - 13 Alcoves, e.g.
 - 15 Movie houses
 - 17 Former partner (2-4)
 - 20 Sidestep
 - 21 Cupcake topper
 - 22 Castaway's place
 - 24 Harebrained
- Down**
- 1 Possible race outcome (4,4)
 - 2 Port of ancient Rome
 - 4 Table scrap
 - 5 Beat

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.



SOLUTIONS



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

Canadian PM's 4-day India visit begins today



participate in separate business engagements, interact with top Indian and Canadian corporate leaders, financial experts and innovators.

Carney will arrive in New Delhi Sunday, and the two PMs will hold wide-ranging talks Monday.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said both leaders will review the progress achieved till date across diverse areas of the India-Canada Strategic Partnership, building on their earlier meetings in Kananaskis in June last and Johannesburg in November last.

"The visit comes at an important juncture in normalisation of India-Canada bilateral relations," the ministry said.

"The two prime ministers have earlier agreed to pursue a constructive and balanced partnership grounded in mutual respect for each other's concerns and sensitivities, strong people-to-people ties, and growing economic complementarities. The forthcoming meeting between the leaders will provide an opportunity to reaffirm the positive momentum and shared vision of India and Canada in building a forward-looking partnership," the MEA said in a statement.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: India Thursday said the talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Canadian counterpart Mark Carney next week will provide an opportunity to advance a forward-looking partnership between the two nations. Carney will undertake a four-day visit to India beginning Friday, in his first trip to the country as the prime minister.

The visit is largely aimed at imparting a new momentum to the bilateral ties that came under severe strain following a diplomatic row over the killing of a Khalistani separatist in 2023.

The Canadian PM's first stop will be Mumbai, where he will



ON WARPATH: Cops detain Indian Youth Congress (IYC) members during a protest against the arrest of IYC president Uday Bhanu Chib in connection with the shirtless protest staged at the AI Impact Summit, in New Delhi, Thursday

Kerala HC puts 15-day stay on release of 'The Kerala Story 2'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kochi, Feb 26: The Kerala High Court Thursday granted an interim stay against the release of the film "The Kerala Story 2-Goes Beyond", saying that prima facie there is non-application of mind by the censor board while certifying the movie.

Justice Bechu Kurian Thomas passed the order of a stay of 15 days on two pleas challenging the release of the film. The film was scheduled to be released February 27.

The court in its order also said that the guidelines for ensuring a film does not disrupt social harmony appear not to have been adhered to by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).

"Prima facie, these guidelines do not seem to have been borne in mind by the CBFC while granting certification and there is a manifest disregard of the applicable law, necessitating this court to interfere," it said.

It also said that dissemination of content, which has a tendency to create discord, disturb law and order, even undermine social harmony cannot come within the gamut of freedom of speech and expression enshrined in Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India.

NCERT row: Miffed PM calls for accountability

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Feb 26: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed his displeasure over the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) Class VIII textbook chapter on 'corruption in judiciary' and has called for accountability, government sources said Thursday.

They said the PM has sought to identify the official responsible for overseeing the matter. "Who is looking after all this?" they quoted Modi as saying. "The PM also questioned how Class VIII students could be exposed to discussions on judicial corruption and said accountability should be fixed," the sources added.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court imposed a "complete blanket ban" on any further publication, reprinting or digital dissemination of the social science book as it contains "offending" contents on 'corruption in the judiciary', saying a gunshot had been fired and the institution is bleeding.

The government, on its part, expressed anguish over the inclusion of the controversial section in the book, with Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan promising to fix accountability



and take action against those involved in drafting it.

Observing that there appeared to be a "deep-rooted conspiracy" and a "calculated move" to undermine the institution and demean the dignity of judiciary, the SC directed that all copies of the book - physical and digital - currently in circulation be seized immediately and removed from public access without any delay.

A bench headed by CJI Surya Kant issued showcause notices to the NCERT director and the secretary of the department of school education, asking them to explain why action not be initiated against those found responsible for introducing the "offending" chapter.

"As an abundant precaution, a complete blanket ban is hereby imposed on any further publica-

tion, reprinting or digital dissemination of the book titled 'Exploring Society: India and Beyond' (Vol II)," the bench, which also comprised justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi, said.

Pradhan underlined that the government has full respect for the judiciary and has no intent of disrespecting the institution. "I am very sad at what has happened and express regret... There was no intention to insult the judiciary. An inquiry will be conducted and accountability fixed. Action will be taken against those involved in drafting the chapter. As soon as we got to know (about it), the circulation of the textbooks was put on hold," Pradhan told reporters in Jamshedpur.

The textbook in question states that corruption, a massive backlog of cases, and the lack of an adequate number of judges are among the challenges faced by the judicial system. "They have fired a gunshot. The judiciary is bleeding," a visibly irked CJI said during the hearing in a suo motu matter over the book.

"It is my duty as the head of the institution to find out who is responsible; heads must roll," the CJI said, adding, "We would like to have a deeper probe".

Hashish oil, ganja worth over ₹230 crore seized

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Feb 26: In one of the biggest anti-narcotics operations in the region, the Odisha Police achieved a major breakthrough with the seizure of hashish oil worth ₹225 crore and ganja valued at ₹5 crore in Koraput district.

According to police headquarters sources, a large quantity of contraband was recovered during a raid on a temporary manufacturing unit operating in the Jolapat forest area under Padua police station, near the Odisha-Andhra Pradesh border.

More than 180 litres of hashish oil, extracted from cannabis, were seized. The estimated market value of the confiscated oil stands at approximately ₹225 crore.

Acting on credible intelligence inputs, a special team was constituted under the direction of the DIG (Southern Range) and led by the Superintendent of Police (SP), Koraput. The well-coordinated operation resulted in the seizure of equipment and materials used for producing hashish oil.

However, the accused persons managed to flee the spot, and efforts are underway to apprehend them.

In a separate operation, police from Nandapur police station intercepted two Mahindra pickup vehicles and seized 1,143 kilograms of ganja worth around ₹5 crore. Four individuals were arrested in connection with the case. Preliminary investigations revealed that two of the accused belong to the Semiliguda area of Koraput district, while the other two are from Haryana. Further investigation is ongoing.

Police officials noted that intensified crackdowns on illegal cannabis cultivation and drug trafficking across the state have forced traffickers to alter their methods. Since ganja is bulky and difficult to transport discreetly, criminals are increasingly converting it into hashish oil, which is more compact and significantly higher in value.

The market price of one litre of hashish oil is estimated to be nearly 25 times higher than that of one kilogram of ganja, making it a lucrative alternative for traffickers.

2 Naxalites gunned down in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bijapur (Chhattisgarh), Feb 26: Two Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh Thursday, police said.

The exchange of fire broke out in a forest along the Indravati river in the morning when a joint team of security forces was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, a senior police official said. After guns fell silent, bodies of two Naxalites, clad in uniform, along with a Self-Loading Rifle, an Insas rifle and a 12-bore rifle were recovered from the spot, he said. Search operation was still underway, he added.

With this action, at least 25 Maoists have been killed in separate encounters in the state so far this year. Earlier, 14 Maoists were gunned down in two encounters January 3 in the Bastar region, which comprises seven districts, including Bijapur. Last year, 285 Maoists were killed in various encounters with security forces in Chhattisgarh.

The Centre has set a deadline of March 31 this year to eradicate Left-Wing Extremism from the country.

New GDP series to include data on GST, e-Vahan, household services

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: The new series of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with base year 2022-23 will include data of goods and services tax, e-Vahan and household services provided by cook, driver and domestic helps, to make economic data more accurate.

The GDP data for third quarter (October-December 2025) based on new series will be released Friday. According to FAQ on the new series by MoSPI, the base year is updated from time to time to reflect the changes that have happened in the economy over the years. The base year of the national accounts is being revised from 2011-12 to 2022-23.

Although Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) revises data series every five years, it could not be done earlier because of Covid pandemic and implemen-

tation of GST. It further said, back series data is expected to be released by December 2026.

In the new series, actual level estimates are being prepared using regular annual surveys such as Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprise (ASUSE) and Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). These surveys will measure the dynamism in the household sector more accurately and regularly. Data from GST will be used for allocation of all-India estimates for private corporate sector across states, and for cross-validation in annual accounts.

In the new series, single deflation has been completely eliminated. In fact, double deflation will be applied in sectors like manufacturing and agriculture. These changes are expected to improve the accuracy and reliability of GDP deflators in the new series.

DRESSED FOR SUCCESSION? Kim Jong Un, daughter wear matching coats, fuel speculation

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un donned matching jackets with his daughter at a military parade, state media photos showed Thursday, stoking speculation she is being groomed as Kim's heir.

Kim's teenage daughter Ju Ae featured prominently in state photos published to mark the closing stages of the ruling Workers' Party congress. The duo donned matching leather jackets as they stood side-by-side to watch over a vast military procession. Kim's wife, Ri Sol Ju, also appeared alongside the duo in a similar attire.

The Kim family has ruled North Korea with an iron grip for decades, and a cult of personality surrounding their 'Paektu bloodline' dominates daily life in the isolated country. Ju Ae has long been seen as the next in line, a perception stoked by a string of recent high-profile outings.



Analyst Lim Eul-chul said the jackets - a staple of leader Kim's wardrobe, especially during key public appearances - were more than a fashion statement.

"In North Korea's political symbolism, that look carries weight - it's tied to the image of the leader as the ultimate guarantor of national security and future prosperity," Lim said. "So when that same symbolic attire is put on his young daughter, it's hard to see it as accidental," Lim added.

Other photos from the parade showed Ju Ae striding a red carpet next to her father as he received salutes from North Korea's military top brass.

Ju Ae has been clearly 'designated as a successor', South Korea's national intelligence service said earlier this month. Korean affairs expert Leif Eric Easley said Ju Ae's latest appearance demonstrated her elevated status. "But she still appears in her capacity as the leader's daughter. She is prob-

ably not yet old enough to participate in the congress with an official party title," Easley said.

Ju Ae was publicly introduced to the world in 2022 when she accompanied her father to an intercontinental ballistic missile launch. Before then, the only confirmation of her existence had come from former NBA star Dennis Rodman, who visited the North in 2013.

Pyongyang has never confirmed Ju Ae's exact age, but analysts believe she is in her early teens.

Ju Ae has drawn attention for her taste in luxury fashion, appearing in Gucci sunglasses and wearing a Cartier watch. At other times, she has mirrored her father's distinctive style, wearing matching leather jackets and dark glasses.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

OWSSB clears long-pending employee welfare reforms



Promotional parity for engineers, ₹200 daily incentive for DLR workers and greater financial autonomy among key decisions

decision is expected to resolve long-standing career progression concerns, particularly among assistant project engineers, by ensuring structured and time-bound advancement opportunities.

Addressing the meeting, the minister said the reforms were aimed at restoring parity and dignity in service conditions. "Our engineers are the backbone of urban water and sewerage infrastructure. Ensuring fair promotional avenues is both an administrative correction and a commitment to institutional excellence," he said.

Further, deputy project engineers (DPEs) holding the rank of assistant executive engineer (AEE) will be redesignated as additional project engineers. The newly structured post will be filled through promotion from DPEs in the ratio of 40 per cent of the sanctioned strength, institutionalising a transparent and merit-based elevation system within the board.

Recognising the contribution of field-level personnel, the board approved a special incentive of ₹200 per day for Daily Labour Roll (DLR) workers engaged under OWSSB. In addition, DLR workers disen-

gaged on attaining 60 years of age will now be eligible for gratuity benefits, providing them with financial security after years of service.

The minister noted that frontline workers ensuring uninterrupted water supply deserve social protection and recognition, describing the move as part of an inclusive governance approach.

In a major step toward financial autonomy, the board resolved that funds and revenue generated from OWSSB's own sources will be utilised for implementation of its approved action plans. The decision is expected to enhance operational flexibility, improve project timelines and optimise resource utilisation.

To streamline governance, OWSSB Engineer-in-Chief (EIC), will now function as member secretary of the board, a move aimed at expediting decision-making and administrative coordination.

The board also approved the constitution of a permanent sub-committee comprising representatives from the General Administration, Finance, and Housing and Urban Development departments. The panel will examine complex technical and legal matters and facilitate timely resolution through structured review mechanisms.

With these resolutions, the board reaffirmed its commitment to professional excellence, employee welfare, financial prudence and improved delivery of urban water supply and sewerage services across Odisha.

Silver city gets special building regulations

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Feb 26: State government has notified special 'Planning and Building Standard Regulations' for the old city area of Cuttack, popularly known as the Silver City.

The move aims to make the historic core more liveable, resilient, and economically vibrant while preserving its unique character.

The Cuttack Development Authority (CDA) issued a Gazette notification Wednesday, bringing into force a dedicated regulatory framework exclusively for the old city wards.

The initiative recognises the distinctive urban form and long-standing developmental challenges of these organically grown neighbourhoods.

Unlike planned urban extensions, Cuttack's old areas are marked by narrow roads, limited plot access, congestion, fragmented landholdings,



and inadequate parking facilities. These constraints have historically made it difficult to implement the Odisha Development Authorities in their standard format.

With the new notification, the CDA has adopted a context-sensitive and practical planning approach tailored to the ground realities of the old city. The regulations aim to balance redevelopment needs with the preservation of Cut-

tack's rich historical and cultural heritage, ensuring that modernisation does not compromise its identity.

Aligned with the Odisha Development Authorities (Planning and Building Standards) Third Amendment notified earlier, the revised framework introduces calibrated relaxations.

The minimum access road width for small residential plots has been reduced to 4.5 metres, setback requirements

for non-high-rise buildings have been rationalised, and the permissible Floor Area Ratio (FAR) has been recalibrated in accordance with the existing density and built structure of the area.

These reforms are expected to unlock redevelopment potential in smaller and subdivided plots, improve accessibility promote organised parking solutions, ease congestion and streamline the approval and regularisation process for property owners.

By providing greater legal clarity and planning flexibility, the new framework seeks to encourage structured and compliant development within the historic precinct.

With the notification now in effect, the Cuttack Development Authority has taken a significant step toward harmonising heritage conservation with contemporary urban development needs.

Clash erupts during BMC's anti-encroachment drive



Bhubaneswar: A clash erupted between two groups of vendors in Unit 1 market complex here Thursday during Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) anti-encroachment drive, one accusing the other of setting their shops on fire last month. According to information, BMC officials approached to carry out to eviction drive of makeshift shops, erected in close proximity to the place which caught fire last month, destroying over 70 shops. The vendors opposed the civic body move and protested. One named Anuj Pradhan was allegedly recording video footage during the eviction drive and threatened the vendors to share the footage with BMC officials. This incident enraged the vendors and tension escalated between the two groups. The vendors also alleged Anuj being the primary accused for setting the vending zone on fire last month. "Anuj Pradhan was responsible for setting our shops on fire. Late night, we have also spotted Anuj roaming near our vending zone with a petrol bottle," said an agitated vendor. Later, the vendors staged protest and blocked the road demanding the arrest of Anuj.

STATE REMEMBERS FORMER CM HEMANANDA BISWAL 'Legacy of integrity, inclusive leadership'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 26: Hemananda Biswal dedicated his life to social justice and upliftment of marginalised communities. His legacy of integrity and inclusive leadership will continue to inspire us, Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee President Bhakta Charan Das said during the fourth death anniversary observation of Odisha's first tribal CM Hemananda Biswal at Soochana Bhanava here Thursday, organised by 'Hemananda Biswal Smruti Committee' (HBSC).

Addressing the attendees, former OPCC and HBSC chairman Jayadev Jena highlighted Biswal's contributions and said, "His work for the welfare of the underprivileged will be remembered for generations to come."

Amita Biswal—the former CM's daughter remembered her father as "a man of the people". "He always worked for the welfare of others, and



I strive to follow his example through my own work," she said.

The memorial event was attended by his family members, colleagues and friends. Other Congress leaders including Srikanta Jena, Niranjana Patnaik, Sarat Pattanayak and Panchanan Kanungo attended the event.

A veteran Congress leader—Hemananda Biswal served as Odisha CM two times—from December 7, 1989, to March 3, 1990, and again from December 6, 1999, to March 5, 2000. He also served as Deputy CM from March 15, 1995, to May 9, 1998, under JB Patnaik gover-

nance. Spanning over three-decade-long political career, Biswal held key portfolios including Housing, Health and Family Welfare, Panchayati Raj, Steel and Mines, Development of Scheduled Tribes and Schedules Castes, and Industries, earning a reputation for strong administrative capabilities.

Biswal was first elected to Assembly in 1974 from the Laikera (ST) constituency on a Congress ticket. He was also elected to Lok Sabha from Sundargarh Parliamentary Constituency in 2009. He passed away February 25, 2022, at the age of 82.

Physiotherapist from Assam found dead

Cuttack: A physiotherapist from Assam was found dead near his rented house in Cuttack Thursday, police said. The deceased was identified as Ruhana Kakati. After completing his physiotherapy studies in the Northeastern state, he moved to Olapatpur village in the district nearly four years ago to pursue an internship at the Swami Vivekanand National Institute of Rehabilitation Training and Research (SVNIRTAR), police said. After completing his internship, Ruhana continued to stay in Olapatpur in a rented three-storey house and practiced physiotherapy in the locality, they said. A resident of the same building found Kakati's body in the morning and alerted the local police, an officer of Olapatpur police station said. Preliminary investigation indicated that he fell from the third floor of the building. He was staying alone in the house, the officer added. Police have seized the body and sent it for post-mortem examination.

Orissa HC orders police training on furnishing written grounds of arrest

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Cuttack, Feb 26: The Orissa High Court has directed the state police and the Home department to ensure proper training of police personnel on the constitutional requirement of furnishing written grounds of arrest to every person taken into custody.

The order was passed last week by Justice Gourishankar Satapathy while hearing a bail plea in connection with the July 2, 2025, robbery at a nationalised bank in Mandhatapur in Nayagarh. The court granted bail to the three accused -- Pramod Nayak, Purna Chandra Prusty, and Shiba Dakua -- on a bond of ₹25,000 each with one solvent surety. During the hearing, the HC expressed concern over repeated violations of Article 22(1) of the Constitution and Section 47 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), which require that an arrested person must be informed of the grounds of arrest.

Justice Satapathy said this is a mandatory condition for a lawful arrest, and failure to follow it makes the remand invalid.

The HC stated that the grounds of arrest must be given in writing and in a language understood by the arrested person. If it is not possible to provide the written grounds immediately, they must be supplied within a reasonable time and at least two hours before the person is produced before a magistrate.

The HC further made it clear that non-compliance would make the arrest illegal and the accused would be entitled to bail. Noting that such lapses are being seen in many cases, the HC said strict steps are needed to stop the violations, which often allow offenders to secure bail on technical grounds.

The HC asked the DGP and the principal secretary of the home department to personally supervise structured training programmes for police officers so that the constitutional safeguards are properly followed.

Calcutta HC seeks 100 judicial officers from Odisha

AGENCIES

Kolkata, Feb 26: The Calcutta High Court Thursday, sought 200 judicial officers - 100 each from the High Courts of Odisha and Jharkhand -- to join the team of judicial officers already appointed for adjudication of voters' documents identified under the 'logical discrepancy' category.

The decision to seek these 200 judicial officers from the neighbouring states was taken at a high-level meeting chaired by Calcutta High Court Chief Justice Sujoy Paul.

The meeting was attended by

BENGAL SIR PROCESS



West Bengal (WB) Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Manoj Kumar Agarwal, WB Chief Secretary Nandini Chakraborty, acting police DG Peeyush Pandey,

Kolkata Police Commissioner Supratim Sarkar, and special roll observer for WB Subrata Gupta. It may be recalled that a division bench of the Supreme

Court, February 24, permitted judicial officers from the neighbouring High Courts of Jharkhand and Odisha to be deputed to WB to expedite the adjudication of voter claims and objections arising from the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in the poll-bound state.

At the meeting held Wednesday under the chairmanship of the Chief Justice, it was decided that the final number of 'logical discrepancy' cases, as determined at midnight February 21, would be treated as the final figure for adjudication purposes.

CLASSIFIED AFFIDAVIT

I, Debashis Sahoo, Village: Chhapada (Ganailo), P.O.: Rahadinga, P.S.: Tirtol, Dist.: Jagatsinghpur, Odisha declare my old age mother Pramilabala Sahoo instead of Pramila Sahoo in Army pension along with DOB 15.10.1949 through Mother's Aadhaar Card, according to affidavit in Executive Magistrate, Jagatsinghpur vide affidavit Sl. No. 682 and 683 dated 11.2.2026.

LOST

I, Sidharth Kumar Sahu, Takarada, S/o Sri Bhaskar Sahu, Resident Vill/ PO. Takarada, PS. Sheragada, Ganjam, declare through this affidavit bearing no. A/394-24.02.2026, that sale deed for land in Lunilathi (Khata 110/65, Plot 122, A1.375 Dec.) bought from Santosh Kumar Parida (Deed No.631064064, 27.07.2010) missing since 24.02.2026 at Sheragada Market. If found, contact nearby police station. Sd/- Sidharth Kumar Sahu

OIC disposes 12,928 cases in 10 months

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 26: Odisha Information Commission (OIC) has set a new benchmark in case disposal, clearing 12,928 cases over the past ten months and dramatically reducing its backlog from 22,611 to 9,688 cases.

The sharp rise in disposal rate follows the appointment of State Chief Information Commissioner (SCIC) and three new Information Commissioners in April 2025.

Since then, the commission has prioritised expeditious hearings, minimised unnecessary adjournments, and ensured timely access to information for applicants under the RTI Act.

In a significant milestone, the Commission has cleared all pending cases from 2021 and 2022.

Only a limited number of cases from 2023 and 2024 remain, and hearings have already commenced for fresh cases filed in 2025 and 2026.

Beyond speedy disposal, the commission has issued several key directives to enhance transparency. The commission directed Odisha Public Service Commission to disclose interview marks of all candidates



and instructed the Odisha Staff Selection Commission to provide skill test and computer test marks to both successful and unsuccessful candidates.

In cases where Public Information Officers (PIOs) denied information citing 'non-availability', the commission has ordered departmental inquiries

by senior officials to fix accountability and initiate disciplinary action against erring officers.

The commission has also launched a special drive to identify habitual applicants misusing fake BPL cards to seek information free of cost and filing hundreds of applications on identical subjects, alleged-

Beyond speedy disposal, the commission has issued several key directives to enhance transparency

ly to clog the system. In one instance, an RTI applicant from Bolangir was referred to police after being accused of demanding a bribe from a PIO to withdraw an application.

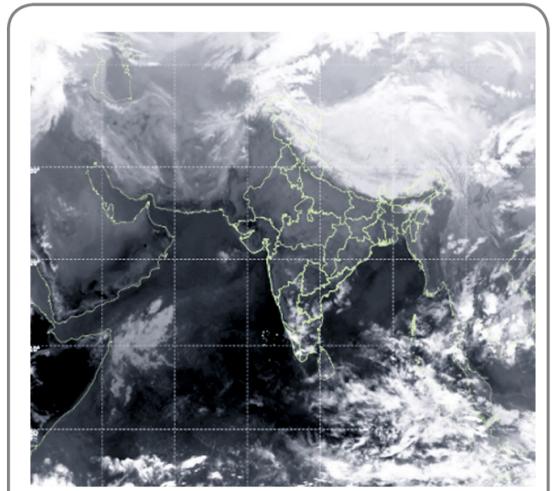
So far, the commission has imposed penalties amounting to ₹1,47,76,250 on officials for delays and unjustified denial of information. In a recent order, SCIC Manoj Parida levied a penalty of ₹25,000 on a police official in Ganjam district for violating provisions of the RTI Act.

To further streamline operations, the commission has begun rigorous screening to filter out frivolous and repetitive RTI applications. Despite staff shortages, it is disposing of nearly 1,500 cases every month while receiving around 500 new cases during the same period.

Additionally, a high-level committee has been constituted to monitor non-implementation of commission orders and escalate matters to the state government to ensure strict compliance.

Officials said the sustained push reflects the commission's renewed focus on transparency, accountability, and timely delivery of information to citizens across Odisha.

MARKET WATCH					
CURRENCY		BOURSES		COMMODITIES	
INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR	90.72 ↓ 0.41	SENSEX	82248.61 ↓ 27.46	GOLD	₹159,630 ↓ ₹1515
EURO	97.91 ↓ 0.09	NIFTY	25496.55 ↑ 14.05	SILVER	₹260,198 ↓ ₹8118



WEATHER			
	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	33.6°	31.4°	Dry weather very likely to prevail over the districts of Odisha
Min Temp	21.4°	19.2°	
Humidity	85%	88%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	

Farmer dies after 'harassment' in paddy procurement process

PNN & AGENCIES

Kendrapara, Feb 26: In a tragic incident that has raised serious questions about the paddy procurement system in state, a middle-aged farmer from Junagadi village under Rajnagar block in Kendrapara district reportedly died of cardiac arrest after facing prolonged harassment during the sale of his paddy.

The farmer, identified as Trilochan Nayak, had received a message January 16 asking him to sell his paddy at the local mandi.

What followed, according to his family, was nearly 40 days of repeated visits and procedural hurdles at the Dangamal Primary Agriculture Cooperative Society (PACS).

Despite complying with official instructions, Trilochan was allegedly directed to transport his produce to a designated rice mill. Carrying nine quintals of paddy, he reportedly waited at the mill for three days without proper food or water.

Family members alleged that



the miller deducted 6 kg per quintal as "katni chatni," in addition to taking three extra quintals of paddy and charging Rs 3,000 towards unloading expenses.

The farmer had already spent nearly Rs 18,000 on harvesting and transporting his crop. Distressed and financially strained by the alleged deductions and treatment, Trilochan returned home, where he later suffered a cardiac arrest.

His family has blamed both the rice miller and officials of the cooperative society for alleged negligence and harassment, holding them responsible for his death.

When contacted, Kendrapara

Collector Raghuram R Iyer said he has ordered a probe into the matter. Meanwhile, concerns persist across Kendrapara district, where thousands of paddy packets reportedly remain exposed in open mandis, and farmers continue to wait for extended periods to sell their produce.

Several farmers have alleged that millers frequently resort to the controversial practice of "katni chhatni," procuring only 80-90 per cent of the produce and rejecting the rest, causing financial losses.

However, Gobinda Chandra Jena, Secretary of the Dangamal PACS, dismissed the allegations as "false and fabricated."

He stated that a total of 38.90 quintals of paddy had been procured from Trilochan February 14 and that payment of Rs 92,154 was credited to his account February 19. According to Jena, the farmer died of cardiac arrest at his residence.

The incident has once again spotlighted the challenges faced by farmers navigating the procurement process in the state.

Locals dismantle Maoist monuments in Malkangiri

PNN & AGENCIES

Malkangiri, Feb 26: With about a month left for the Centre's target of a Naxal-free India, residents of Malkangiri district have voluntarily dismantled 'Naxal Smaraks', monuments erected by Maoists as symbols of terror, police said Thursday. The move reflects local exasperation over years of violence and disruptions to development caused by the Left-wing extremists.

"In what bears testimony to the fact that the district, once the hotbed of Red rebels' subversive activities, is heading towards a Naxal-free status, locals have dismantled a total of 20 memorials erected by cadres of the banned CPI (Maoist)



and are working to remove the remaining structures," said police officials.

The iron-like grip of Maoists over Swabhimana Anchal, formerly "cut-off area" encircled by water on three sides and mountains and forests on the fourth, has almost disintegrated

ed as the presence of Maoists along the mountainous terrains and the dense forest has become out and out negligible. "The locals mustering the courage to dismantle the memorials is symbolic of the fact that Naxal violence has now become a thing of the past in Malkangiri," said a police official.

The villagers, through collective discussions, made up their minds that these structures no longer represent their aspirations. They shared that years of extremist influence only brought fear, disruption of basic services, and stalled development.

Villagers have claimed that over the past few years, consistent efforts by the district police in coordination with the civil

administration, including area domination, community policing, civic action programmes, and welfare activities, have strengthened trust in previously affected areas, and the community now wishes to move forward in an atmosphere of peace and stability.

Given the backdrop of Malkangiri being declared Naxal-free, this development is further a positive indicator of changing ground realities. It underscores that people desire growth, peace, and opportunities over conflict and isolation. "Malkangiri police remain committed to maintaining peace, ensuring security, and supporting all initiatives that promote inclusive development," added the police officer.

SNIPPETS

Man killed in elephant attack

Odapada: A 45-year-old man was killed in an elephant attack late Wednesday night at Nagari village under Motanga police limits in Odapada block of Dhenkanal district. The deceased was identified as Kashtu Behera, 45. According to reports, Behera had stepped out of his house late at night when he encountered the elephant. The animal allegedly picked him with its trunk and thrashed him, leading to his death on the spot. On receiving information, Odapada forester Subhas Chandra Sahu reached the scene and shifted Behera to the district headquarters hospital in Dhenkanal, where doctors declared him dead. Dhenkanal MP Rudra Narayan Pany expressed condolences to the bereaved family. He also spoke to the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) over the phone and urged officials to provide immediate financial assistance and support to the victim's family.

Villagers, cops clash over mining project expansion

Rourkela: A scuffle broke out between a group of people and police personnel during a protest against a mining expansion work in Sundargarh district Wednesday, an officer said. The residents of areas near Lanjiberna have been opposing the expansion of dolomite and limestone mines owned by a private company, he said. Officials of a cement company, along with 10 platoons of police force and district administration, resumed the mining excavation work, which had come to a halt following stiff resistance from the locals last month. "Our main demands are proper discussions for land acquisition and expansion. Besides, the project needs to be approved by the gram sabha," said a protesting woman. "The land belongs to a person of our village. The land acquisition has proceeded without his approval," claimed Bival Topo, a leader of protesters. Earlier, the acquisition process had to stop following stiff resistance from locals. The protesters should hold a discussion with the district administration on their issues, said Abhimanyu Majhi, Additional District Magistrate (ADM) Sundargarh.

10 injured in cracker blast

Kendrapara: More than 10 people were injured in a fire-cracker explosion at Gulnagar village near Tinimuhani Square under Kendrapara Sadar police limits Thursday. The incident occurred during a religious procession organised for a Vish-washanti Mahayajna. As part of the rituals, a 108-kalash procession was heading to the Gobarri River in the morning. More than 300 women, men and children had participated in the event. While rituals were being performed on the riverbank to collect water, some participants set off firecrackers nearby in celebration. One of the firecrackers reportedly tilted from its position and exploded towards the crowd, injuring several people standing close by. Seven injured persons were undergoing treatment at the Kendrapara District Headquarters Hospital at the time of reporting. Others who sustained minor injuries were given primary treatment and discharged.

'Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament-2026' at FMU

Balasure: The district-level 'Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament-2026' will be held March 5 at Fakir Mohan University (FMU) in Balasure. The program will be conducted under the chairmanship of FMU Vice-Chancellor Prof Santosh Kumar Tripathy. A debate competition on the theme "50 Years of the Emergency: Lessons for Indian Democracy" will be a key highlight of the event. Participants may deliver their speeches in Odia, English or Hindi. Students and youths aged 18 to 25 from colleges and universities across Balasure district can register through the "MY Bharat" portal to participate. The district-level competition will accommodate 200 participants. Five outstanding participants will be selected to represent the district at the state level, and three from the state will advance to the national-level competition. The coordination committee includes Prof Amulya Kumar Acharya, coordinator, NSS Bureau; M Vignesh, youth officer, Nehru Yuva Kendra, Balasure; Pratima Pradhan, district NSS officer; Gauranga Panda, former district program officer, NSS; and Abhaya Nayak, program officer, NSS, FMU, along with program officers of affiliated colleges. Organisers said the event aims to encourage youth participation in nation-building and strengthen democratic values, awareness and leadership qualities.

	Regional Office : Cuttack 2 nd Floor, Chalachitra Bhawan, Buxibazar, Cuttack, Odisha-753001	POSSESSION NOTICE (For Immovable Property)	
(As per Appendix IV read with rule 8(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002)			
Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the BANK OF BARODA under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (Second) Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice calling upon the Borrower/Guarantor to repay the amount mentioned in the notice together with further interest thereon at the contractual rate plus all costs, charges and expenses till date of payment within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The Borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower/Guarantor and the public in general that the undersigned has taken POSSESSION of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under sub section (4) of Section 13 of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002 on the date mentioned below. The Borrower/Guarantor in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the BANK OF BARODA, Concerned Branches for an amount stated herein below plus further interest thereon at the contractual rate plus all costs, charges and expenses till date of payment. The Borrower's attention is invited to provision of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.			
BRANCH / Name & Address of Borrower/ Guarantors	Description of the Immovable Property	Demand/ Possession Notice Date	Outstanding Amount
BASANTAPUR BRANCH / Borrower: Mr. Balaram Barik, S/o: Late Hadibandhu Barik, At/PO: Pandapada, Keonjhar - 758014	All that part and parcel of the property consisting of Khata No.: 21, Plot No.: 241, Area: Ac. 0.26 Dec., Mouza: Pandapada, PS: Pandapada, Tahasil: Ghatagaon, Dist.: Keonjhar, in the name of Late Hadibandhu Barik, Kissam: Gharabari, Bounded by North: Plot No.: 205, South: Plot No.: 488, East: Plot No.: 242 & West: Kalia Behera	12.06.2015 / 26.02.2026	₹18,39,624.37 as on 25.02.2026 and with further interest thereon at the contractual rate plus cost, charges and expenses till date of payment
KEONJHAR BRANCH / Borrower: M/s. Vinayak Auto, Prop.: Mr. Abhinash Mishra, S/o: Ajay Kumar Mishra, Behind DN High School, Gramshree Colony, Keonjhar Town, Keonjhar, Odisha, PIN - 758001	Hypothecation of Stocks and Book Debts as per Hypothecation Agreement executed on 17.11.2022 by M/s. Vinayak Auto, Prop.: Mr. Abhinash Mishra and latest stock statement. Stock location: Khata No.: 80, Plot No.: 183, Infront of Nigam Motors, Naranpur, Keonjhar, Odisha-758014	01.12.2025 / 26.02.2026	₹52,38,912.75 as on 25.02.2026 and with further interest thereon at the contractual rate plus cost, charges and expenses till date of payment
KEONJHAR BRANCH / Borrower: M/s. Siddhivinayak Auto, Prop.: Mrs. Binal Patel, W/o: Abhinash Mishra, Behind DN High School, Gramshree Colony, Keonjhar Town, Keonjhar, Odisha, PIN - 758001	Hypothecation of Stocks and Book Debts as per Hypothecation Agreement executed on 30.05.2023 by M/s. Siddhivinayak Auto, Prop.: Mrs. Binal Patel and latest stock statement. Stock location: 1st Floor, House of Pradeep Kumar Pradhan & Raja Yadav, Plot No.: 144/1218, Khata No.: 102/828, Mouza: Jagannathpur, U.N. 17, Kendujhar Main Road, Near Laxmi Temple, Kendujhar, Odisha-758001	01.12.2025 / 26.02.2026	₹42,44,761.40 as on 25.02.2026 and with further interest thereon at the contractual rate plus cost, charges and expenses till date of payment
KEONJHAR BRANCH / Borrower: M/s. Sri Vinayak Auto, Prop.: Mrs. Binal Patel, W/o: Abhinash Mishra, Behind DN High School, Gramshree Colony, Keonjhar Town, Keonjhar, Odisha, PIN - 758001	Hypothecation of Stocks and Book Debts as per Hypothecation Agreement executed on 28.09.2023 by M/s. Sri Vinayak Auto, Prop.: Mrs. Binal Patel and latest stock statement. Stock location: Ground Floor, House of Anuradha Sahu, Plot No.: 152/475, Khata No.: 109/47, Near Kendujhar Radio Station, Mouza: Muktapur, Ghutur Kendujhar, Odisha-758001	01.12.2025 / 26.02.2026	₹64,07,921.28 as on 25.02.2026 and with further interest thereon at the contractual rate plus cost, charges and expenses till date of payment
Place: Cuttack, Date: 26.02.2026		Authorised Officer, Bank of Baroda	

	Bank of India Zonal Office : Star House, 1/1D, Jayadev Vihar, Nayapalli, Bhubaneswar-751015	POSSESSION NOTICE (Rule-8(1) of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules-2002)	
Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the Bank of India, Gopalpur Branch under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a Demand Notice calling upon the Borrower/Co-Borrower/Mortgagor in the loan account given below to repay the amount mentioned in the Notice plus interest & expenses thereon within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said Notice. The Borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower/Co-Borrower/Mortgagor and the public in general that the undersigned has taken POSSESSION of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules. The Borrower/Co-Borrower/Mortgagor in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the Bank of India, Gopalpur Branch for an amount mentioned below with interest & expenses thereon. The Borrower's attention is invited to provisions of Sub-Section (8) of Section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available to redeem the secured assets.			
GOPALPUR BRANCH/ Name & Address of Borrower/ Co-Borrower /Mortgagor	Liabilities due as per Notice	Date of Demand Notice/ Date of Possession	Description of the Immovable Property
Borrower: Mr. Narendra Lenka (Principal Borrower in home loan), S/o: Mr. Daitari Lenka / Co-Borrower: Mr. Suryanarayan Lenka (Co-Borrower in home loan), S/o: Mr. Narendra Lenka, Both are At: Patara Sahi, Bidanasi, Dist.: Cuttack-753014	₹ 10,06,416/- + interest & expenses thereon	23.12.2025 / 25.02.2026	All that part and parcel of Land and Building situated over Khata No.: 100/230, Plot No.: 35/272 Area: Ac. 0.060 Dec., Kissam: Homestead at Mouza: Cuttack Sahar Unit No.: 2 Baimundi Nagar, Thana: Bidanasi No.: 2, Tahasil: Cuttack No.: 205, Dist.: Cuttack, Standing in the name of Mr. Narendra Lenka , Bounded by North: Plot No.: 318, South: Plot No.: 273, East: Plot No.: 45, West: Road.
Place: Bhubaneswar, Date: 27.02.2026		Authorised Officer, Bank of India	

	Bank of India Zonal Office: Bhubaneswar Zone, 1/1D, Star House, Jayadev Vihar, Nayapalli, Bhubaneswar-751015, Mob.: 7008973027	E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE E-Auction Sale Notice Under Rule 8(6) of security interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.
(E-Auction) Sale of secured movable / immovable Assets under SARFAESI Act, 2002		
E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF MOVABLE / IMMOVABLE ASSETS UNDER THE SECURITISATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT, 2002 READ WITH PROVISO TO RULE 8(6) / 9(1) OF THE SECURITY INTEREST (ENFORCEMENT) RULES, 2002.		
Whereas, the Authorised Officer of Bank of India had taken possession of the following property/ies pursuant to the notice issued under Sec 13(2) of the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 in the following loan accounts with right to sell the same on " AS IS WHERE IS BASIS ", " AS IS WHAT IS BASIS " and " WITHOUT ANY RECOURSE BASIS " for realization of Bank's dues plus interest as detailed hereunder and whereas consequent upon failure to repay the dues, the undersigned in exercise of power conferred under section 13(4) of the said Act proposes to realize the Bank's dues by sale of the said property/ies. The Sale will be done by the undersigned through e-auction platform provided at the Website https://baanknet.com		

Sl. No.	BRANCH / Name & Address of Borrowers / Mortgagor / Total Dues	Description of the Properties	Reserve Price / EMD / Bid Increment Amount
1.	ARB, CUTTACK, PH.: 8249067773 / 7008973027 / Borrowers: 1) M/s. Shreen Industries, Prop.: Mr. Sandip Das Mohapatra, At: IID Centre, Somanathpur, PS.: Remuna (Thana No.: 130), Dist.: Balasure, 2) Mr. Sandip Das Mohapatra, S/o: Dr. Banabihari Mohapatra, At: Ranipatna, Daraji Pokhari, P.O.: Nayabazar, PS.: Sahadevkhunta, Dist.: Balasure / Total Dues: ₹1,04,06,000/- + interest, costs and expenses, less any part amount repaid.	Equitable mortgage of IDCO Lease Hold Factory Land & Building located at Mouza: Telgadia, P.S.: Remuna (Thana No.: 130), Tahasil: Remuna, Dist.: Balasure, Kissam: Karakhana, Leased by IDCO & Mortgaged by M/s. Shreen Industries, Prop.: Mr. Sandip Das Mohapatra, Khata No.: 1, Plot No.: 41, Area: Ac. 0.11 Dec., Plot No.: 46, Area: Ac. 0.02 Dec., Plot No.: 49, Area: Ac. 0.04 Dec. & Plot No.: 50, Area: Ac. 0.08 Dec., Total Area: Ac. 0.25 Dec. i.e. 10,890 Sqft., Bounded by East: Plot No.: D/43, West: Plot No.: D/41, North: IDCO Road, South: Plot No.: D/15	₹42,24,000/- (excluding GST & other statutory dues) / ₹4,22,400/- / ₹ 50,000/-
2.	ARB, CUTTACK, PH.: 8249067773 / 7008973027 / Borrowers: 1) M/s. Shreen Industries, Prop.: Mr. Sandip Das Mohapatra, At: IID Centre, Somanathpur, PS.: Remuna (Thana No.: 130), Dist.: Balasure, 2) Mr. Sandip Das Mohapatra, S/o: Dr. Banabihari Mohapatra, At: Ranipatna, Daraji Pokhari, P.O.: Nayabazar, PS.: Sahadevkhunta, Dist.: Balasure / Total Dues: ₹1,04,06,000/- + interest, costs and expenses, less any part amount repaid.	All that part & parcel of Machine and Equipments i.e.: 1) CUP Manufacturing Machinery, 2) Automatic Paper Cup Forming Machine, 3) Ancillary Machine and Hydraulic Double Die Machine, Situated over Khata No.: 1, Plot No.: 41, 46, 49, 50, Mouza: Telgadia, P.S.: Remuna (Thana No.: 130), Tahasil: Remuna, Dist.: Balasure, owned & Hypothecated by M/s. Shreen Industries, Prop.: Mr. Sandip Das Mohapatra	₹2,16,000/- (excluding GST & other statutory dues) / ₹21,600/- / ₹ 20,000/-
Date & Time of E-Auction: 30.03.2026 From 11.00 A.M. to 5.00 P.M. with unlimited extension of 10 (Ten) minutes each.			
Last Date and Time for submission of EMD and Documents in their wallet by 30.03.2026 i.e. Before E-Auction Date & Time in the Portal.			
Inspection will be provided to the prospective bidders on any working day before 27.03.2026 with prior appointment of the authorised officer			
*Successful Bidder to deposit 25% of the bid amount by next working day which includes EMD money. The balance amount to be paid on or before 15th Day of confirmation of sale.			
TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1) For detailed terms and conditions of the sale please refer to the link: https://baanknet.com . Prospective bidders may also contact the Authorised Officers / Branch as mentioned in above list. 2) This is a statutory 30 days sale notice to the above mentioned borrower/guarantor/mortgagor under Rule 8(6) of the SARFAESI Act, 2002. 3) This is a 30 days notice to the borrower / guarantor / mortgagor of the above said loan about holding of this sale on the above mentioned date. 4) All expenses relating the stamp duty and registration of Sale Certificate/conveyance, if any, shall be borne by the successful bidder. 5) The Authorized Officer will not be held responsible for any charge, lien, encumbrance, property tax or any other dues to the Government or anybody in respect of the property under sale. 6) The Authorized Officer has the absolute right to accept or reject any bid or adjourn/postpone/cancel the sale without assigning any reason thereof. It may be noted that nothing in this notice constitute or deemed to constitute any commitment or representation on the part of the bank to sell the property.			
STATUTORY 30 DAYS SALE NOTICE UNDER RULE 8(6) OF THE SECURITY INTEREST (ENFORCEMENT) RULES, 2002.			
Borrowers/Mortgagors are hereby notified to pay the total dues along with up to date interest and ancillary expenses before the date of E-Auction, failing which the property will be auctioned/ sold and balance dues, if any, will be recovered with interest & cost.			
Place: Bhubaneswar Date: 27.02.2026		Authorised Officer Bank of India	

	E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE					
CIRCLE OFFICE : SAMD, BHUBANESWAR A/32, FIRST FLOOR, UNIT-III, KHARVEL NAGAR, BHUBANESWAR - 751001, EMAIL ID: cobbssrsamd@pnb.bank.in, CONTACT THE NODAL OFFICER, CONTACT NUMBER - 8880889990						
SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF MOVABLE/IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES						
E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Movable/Immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 9(1) & 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable properties mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the constructive/physical/symbolic possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Bank/Secured Creditor, will be sold on " AS IS WHERE IS " " AS IS WHAT IS " and " WHATEVER THERE IS " basis on the date as mentioned in the table herein below, for recovery of its dues due to the Bank/ Secured Creditor from the respective borrower(s) and guarantor(s). The reserve price and the earnest money deposit will be as mentioned in the table below against the respective properties.						
SCHEDULE OF THE SECURED ASSETS						
Sl. No.	Name of the Branch	Description of Immovable Property Mortgaged / Owner's Name (mortgagors of Property/ies)/Property ID	A) Date of Demand Notice u/s 13(2) of SARFAESI ACT 2002	A) Reserve Price	Date & Time of E-Auction	Details of Encumbrances Known to the Secured Creditors
1.	MARKET CHHAK PURI (024120)/ Borrower: Sh. Pabitra Panda, S/o: Mr. Prafulla Kumar Panda, At/PO: Gopa, PS.: Brahmagiri, Dist.: Brahmagiri, (Thana No.: 175), Puri - 752013	EM of IP situated at Khata No.: 90, Plot No.: 257, Area: Ac. 0.110 Dec., Mouza: Alarpur, Tahasil/SRO: Brahmagiri, PS.: Brahmagiri, (Thana No.: 175), Dist.: Puri, Status: Sthitiban, Kissam: Homestead, in the name of Sh. Pabitra Panda , S/o: Mr. Prafulla Kumar Panda as per Deed No.: 11491501232, Bounded by North: Road, South: Road, East: Rabi Narayan Panda, West: Basu Panda / Property ID: PUNB0024120003	A) 26.07.2021	₹35,72,000/-	17.03.2026 at 12.00 Noon to 4.00 P.M.	Nil as per our Record
			B) ₹26,45,656/- + unapplied interest & expenses thereon	₹3,57,200/-		
2.	SAHEEDNAGAR BRANCH, BHUBANESWAR (407700) / Borrower: Rich Engineers and Developers, Prop: Sri Rohan Pinayak Mohanty, S/o.: Sri Debidutta Mohanty, At: Plot No.: 248, Sahid Nagar, Bhubaneswar 751007 / Mortgagors/ Guarantors: 1) Smt. Charulata Mohanty, W/o.: Debidutta Mohanty, 2) Sri Debidutta Mohanty, S/o.: Late Purna Chandra Mohanty, Both are At: Chandura, P.O./Dist.: Jagatsinghpur, PIN - 754103.	Residential Land at Mouza: Taradapada, Dist.: Jagatsinghpur, Khata No.: 1119/167, Plot No.: 128, Area: Ac.1.520 Dec., Plot No.: 156, Area: Ac.1.200 Dec., Total Area: Ac.2.720 Dec , in the name of Sri Debidutta Mohanty / Property ID: PUNB40770006	A) 12.04.2019	₹1,20,00,000/-	17.03.2026 at 12.00 Noon to 4.00 P.M.	Nil as per our Record
			B) ₹1,49,32,522/- + unapplied interest & expenses thereon	₹12,00,000/-		
			C) 16.11.2019	₹1,00,000/-		
			D) Symbolic			
TERMS AND CONDITIONS : The sale shall be subject to the Terms & Conditions prescribed in the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002 and to the following further conditions: 1. The properties are being sold on " AS IS WHERE IS BASIS " and " AS IS WHAT IS BASIS " and " WHATEVER THERE IS BASIS ". 2. All the above properties are under Symbolic Possession and Physical Possession shall be handed over on the receipt of order from the competent authority. 3. The particulars of Secured Assets specified in the Schedule here-in-above have been stated to the best of the information of the Authorised Officer, but the Authorised Officer shall not be answerable for any error, misstatement or omission in this proclamation. 4. The Sale will be done by the undersigned through e-auction platform provided at the Website https://baanknet.com on 17.03.2026 at 12.00 Noon. 5. For detailed term and conditions of the sale, please refer www.pnbindia.in						
Place: Bhubaneswar Date: 26.02.2026			Sd/- Authorised Officer Punjab National Bank (Secured Creditor)			

What the soul sees and has experienced, that it knows; the rest is appearance, prejudice and opinion.

SRI AUROBINDO



Hard Power

This year's Munich Security Conference brought plenty of talk about geopolitics, spheres of influence, the future of NATO, and defense budgets. But as much as these debates matter, they no longer define the full spectrum of power. In today's fractured world, security is not just about tanks and treaties. It also depends on strong and trusted partnerships, resilient systems, and functioning institutions. These are what equip societies to withstand shocks.

Understood in these terms, international development is not just a form of "soft power" (exerting influence through persuasion and attraction). It is hard power – and our most effective preemptive strike against future threats.

Too many leaders fail to recognize that development is foundational to security itself. They regard development assistance as charity, a luxury compared to the necessity of "real" defense work. But this mindset undermines stability by blinding policymakers to the many drivers of conflict. The longer we ignore the root causes of violence, the more we will pay in lives, taxes, and foregone prosperity.

It costs far less to prevent crises than to manage their consequences. If we elevate fighter jets as "strategic" assets but dismiss a functioning education system as "mere aid," and if we always find money for missiles but not for water or electricity, we are not protecting our societies. We are weakening them.

Yes, defense spending matters, and increased military investment is a legitimate policy response in today's world. But without parallel investment in development, it is only half a security strategy. Even if you are more concerned with realpolitik than with human welfare, the data make this clear. A recent analysis by ONE finds that every dollar invested in development and conflict prevention could save up to \$103 in future crisis-related costs – from military operations to humanitarian responses to the effects of economic disruption. That is not soft power. It is the highest return you will find in any global security portfolio, and thus the most rational investment choice that governments can make.

Whether it is military intervention, economic fallout, or emergency relief, we always pay for what we failed to prevent. Airstrikes and sanctions are not a solution to violent extremism, irregular migration, or state collapse. Such problems are best contained – and ultimately prevented – when those on the front lines have a future they can look forward to. That means education for their children, reliable electricity, basic services, and a job that pays enough to escape poverty.

If development remains an afterthought in our security doctrine, we will keep losing. We must stop pretending that drones can solve every problem and acknowledge the limits of traditional military force. Consider the Lake Chad Basin, where years of armed interventions failed to stop extremist violence. Military means achieved little, because the jobless remained jobless, services remained broken, and the state remained absent. The brush was cleared but the soil remained uncultivated. Not until development efforts accelerated could the region's thousands of displaced people return to their homes and rebuild their livelihoods.

Similarly, in parts of Iraq once gutted by war, millions of people have returned, not just because the bullets stopped, but because the electricity came back on and schools and hospitals reopened. Societies begin to heal when development efforts do not merely manage displacement, but give people a reason to stay.

Likewise, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Western investment in democratic institutions, infrastructure, and economic resilience helped rebuild post-communist societies and laid the foundations for a new era of prosperity. What mattered was not speed, but sequencing: institutions must come before liberalization, social-safety nets must accompany markets, and political inclusion must come alongside economic reform. Where that balance was respected, stability followed. Where it was ignored, vulnerability filled the gap.

These lessons are as relevant as ever. Security policies that prioritize military force over governance and development do not prevent or shorten conflicts; they encourage and prolong them, usually by creating a vacuum that extremist groups, smugglers, and hostile powers are quick to exploit. Development is the ultimate expression of hard power, allowing us to prevent crises that we would otherwise need to respond to. It is our global community's first line of defense. Violence becomes far less likely when states can deliver basic services, when young people have economic prospects, and when institutions are seen as legitimate.

Development does not follow from security. It produces it, because lasting security demands long-term horizons. In a world defined by constant urgency, the temptation is to focus only on immediate threats. But if short-term pressure to respond to crises precludes sustained investment in institutions, opportunities, and governance, instability becomes structural.

Hard power is not just the capacity to react. It is the capacity to prevent. Integrating development into the geopolitical debate is not idealism. It is strategic, budget-conscious realism. We can pay up front for development, or we can keep paying the bill later, with interest, in a more unstable and insecure world.

The writer, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, is a former prime minister of Belgium.

@PROJECT SYNDICATE

WISDOM CORNER

No legacy is so rich as honesty.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Facts are many, but the truth is one.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Freedom lies in being bold.

ROBERT FROST

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1815: Napoleon, who had been banished to the island of Elba by a coalition of European powers the previous year, escaped exile and attempted to make a comeback.

1914: The Britannic was launched at a shipyard in Belfast less than two years after the sinking of its sister ship, the Titanic.

SHIRTLESS, NOT SHAMELESS

FOCUS DEMOCRACY

The 'shirtless' Youth Congress protest at the AI summit in Delhi has produced the kind of reactions that now arrive almost by reflex. Outrage. Mockery. Moral grandstanding. Within minutes, social media and hyper-ventilating prime time shows playing the visuals in a loop had delivered its verdict: the protest was "misguided," "embarrassing," even a "national shame."

Let's begin with what should be obvious. It is perfectly legitimate to question the protest. One may see the choice of venue as odd, the symbolism as over-the-top, the politics as theatrical. Personally, I saw the protest as 'poor form' in the context of a major global AI summit that has little to do with any political angst over an as yet unsigned Indo-US trade deal. But democratic debate is built on precisely such disagreement. Not every protest is wise. Not every slogan is persuasive. Often, as most likely in this case, the protest is designed purely to capture eyeballs in a manic attention deficit media eco-system that prioritises sensation over sense.

The 'drama' may seem inappropriate, even reckless. But there is a distinction that often gets lost in the noise: disliking a protest is not the same as delegitimising the right to peacefully protest. So when the Delhi police cracked down on the non-violent protesters by arresting them and the Youth Congress president under non-bailable legal provisions, even accusing them of 'conspiracy against the nation', it was designed to have a chilling effect on all protests. Interestingly, the Delhi police is only following a playbook perfected in Gujarat where Section 144 has been routinely invoked to prevent any public gatherings. In a 2025 order, the Gujarat High Court ruled that the Ahmedabad Police's re-



Democracies, history reminds us, are diminished far more by the silencing of voices than by the spectacle of protests

peated and continuous imposition of Section 144 amounted to 'unjustified, non-transparent and constitutionally impermissible restrictions on citizens' rights.'

In a sense, the Modi-Shah Gujarat model of coercive state power has gone national, now borrowed by several state governments across parties who brazenly use the local police as a weapon to harass and intimidate their political opponents. This 'normalisation' of punitive measures against any expression of dissent is ominous.

The shrinking of democratic spaces in public life are apparent. The Leader of the Opposition is heckled and not allowed to speak in Parliament on contentious issues. Parliament itself has become a notice board for government legislation to be rammed through. The mainstream media is mostly chained, unable or unwilling to raise inconvenient questions that will challenge the party in power. University campuses are now strictly policed: any expression of an alternate viewpoint is instantly branded 'anti-national'. From You Tubers to stand-up comedians, the fear factor can be overwhelming for many.

Democracy is not a system where only the sensible are allowed to speak. It is a system that protects the freedom to be noisy, inconvenient, excessive – even wrong. The real test of democratic maturity is not how

we treat protests we agree with, but how we respond to those we find irritating or absurd.

India's own history offers enough warnings. The Jayaprakash Narayan movement in the 1970s was dismissed by critics as chaotic and irresponsible. The state's heavy-handed reaction in declaring an Emergency is what ultimately defined the moment. Democracies rarely gain strength by confusing dissent with disorder.

We've seen versions of this story play out repeatedly. Anti-corruption protests, citizenship law demonstrations, farmers' agitations – each drew sharp criticism, sometimes justified. But the legitimacy of democracy required that the right to assemble and dissent remain intact. Democracies do not weaken because protests are flawed. They weaken when the space for protest shrinks.

Which brings us to the other favourite phrase of the week: "national shame."

A shirtless protest, we were told by none other than Prime Minister Modi, had somehow diminished India's dignity. This is rhetorical inflation at its most dramatic. Democracies have always been the theatres of symbolism. Black armbands, hunger strikes, silent marches, street plays – protest is rarely tidy or aesthetically pleasing. That is its nature. Recall how in 2004, 12 Manipur women disrobed in

front of the Assam Rifles headquarters in Imphal against the killing of Manorama Thangjam who was also allegedly raped. That one act shook India to the gravity of the crisis in Manipur at the time.

In this instance, 'Shirtless (and pot-bellied) men running around on a global stage maybe seen as juvenile, even as a political self-goal. But to elevate them into national humiliation is to stretch the phrase beyond meaning. The Indian Republic is not so fragile that its honour will collapse at the sight of political theatre.

More importantly, what truly constitutes national shame? Not spectacle, surely, but systemic failure. A preventable tragedy that claims lives. A custodial death that raises questions about the rule of law. Corruption that corrodes public trust. Communal violence that scars social harmony. Institutional breakdowns that deny justice.

In the end, the Youth Congress episode is less about one protest and more about democratic temperament. A republic secure in its freedoms does not feel threatened by theatrical dissent. It debates it, mocks it, ignores it – and moves on. Democracies, history reminds us, are diminished far more by the silencing of voices than by the spectacle of protest. India's great strength lies in its diversity of opinion, not in the creeping authoritarian streak of a police-state.

Post-script: Since 'national shame' has been repeatedly invoked in the last week, let me suggest what should really shame our Republic. This week, a Manipur BJP MLA, Vungzai Valte, who was grievously attacked during the ethnic clashes of 2023 passed away, never fully recovering from his injuries. The mob who attacked him is still roaming free.

The writer is a senior journalist and author.

SPECTRUM ENVIRONMENT

Ridleys reloaded: Rewriting the conservation narrative

Every winter, there are three 'tsunamis' that hit the east coast of India. The most striking is the remarkable arribada or mass nesting of Olive Ridley turtles in Odisha, when tens or hundreds of thousands of female turtles nest simultaneously within a few days at Rushikulya or Gahirmatha. At the same time, many thousands of turtles also wash up dead, mostly from being caught in trawl fishing nets. The third 'tsunami' is the media attention to these dead turtles, wave after wave of hysteria about the impending decline of this population, accompanied by passionate cries for protection by conservation activists.

But this is not new: it has been going for over a quarter of a century. In the 1990s, the number of turtles dying of asphyxiation in trawl nets went up dramatically, to over 10,000 in some years. This was accompanied by a media attention, national committees and many new regulations. However, it also resulted in a deep rift between fishers and conservation, that even led to the deaths of some fishermen and forest guards.

But what is the reality?

Are these turtles on the brink of extinction? Is our current approach to conservation appropriate?

Major mass nesting beaches for Olive Ridley turtles occur at Gahirmatha and Rushikulya in Odisha on the east coast of India, and on the Pacific coast of central America. Overall, Olive Ridges are widespread and abundant, and doing well at a global scale. With the support of the Forest Department, the Indian Institute of Science and Dakshin Foundation, Bangalore have been monitoring the mass nesting beach at Rushikulya since 2007. This nearly two-decade long dataset shows an increasing nesting trend, suggesting that the population here is growing. In 2025, Rushikulya saw two arribadas – the first was the largest ever recorded here, with over 500,000 nests. With two large arribadas in Rushikulya, and one in Gahirmatha, there were about 1 million nests in Odisha last year.

However, the sizes of these arribadas and the total nests in a season is bound to vary because these sea turtles do not nest annually. Hence, the failure of the arribada does not mean that the population

is declining or that protection agencies such as the Forest Department are not doing their job. Perhaps fewer turtles migrated during that year or their nesting was more dispersed. This is why long-term monitoring is invaluable.

Efforts by the Forest Department and Coast Guard have helped reduce bycatch over the last decade. While turtle deaths in fishing nets still occur, this does not seem to be affecting the population trends. In fact, the increase in sea turtle deaths can simply derive from their larger population size, which results in higher densities in nearshore waters.

Though the mortality might not be affecting the population size, conservationists can still seek to reduce it. As many studies have shown, Olive Ridley turtles are typically found within 4 to 5 km of the coast during the breeding season. Odisha has marine fishing regulations that ban fishing by large mechanised boats within these nearshore waters. All that is required is the implementation of these laws in all states.

It should be noted that many of these laws were passed in the 1980s to protect these

nearshore habitats from bottom trawling and to safeguard the livelihoods of traditional and artisanal fishermen. Thus, the implementation of these laws can protect ecosystems, marine resources and the livelihoods of small-scale fishing communities. As a side effect, sea turtles will also be protected. Thus, we can go from "incidental catch" to "incidental conservation". In fact, restricting access to fishing grounds for small-scale fishers and affecting their livelihoods is unnecessary. They can be made partners in the conservation of sea turtles and nearshore ecosystems which they rely on.

While Olive Ridley turtles on the Odisha coast are not immediately in danger, many important challenges such as climate change, coastal development and pollution remain, these need to be tackled keeping in mind the larger picture of healthy ecosystems and communities.

The writer is faculty at the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore and Trustee, Dakshin Foundation.

He has worked on sea turtle biology and conservation for 35 years.



Kartik Shanker

WHILE TURTLE DEATHS IN FISHING NETS STILL OCCUR, THIS DOES NOT SEEM TO BE AFFECTING THE POPULATION TRENDS

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, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

Science empowers

Sir, There could not have been a more relevant theme than "Women in Science: Catalysing Viksit Bharat" for the National Day of Science (NDS) on February 28 because science and technology for sustainable development, with women empowerment, is critical. NDS is observed in India to honour the discovery of "Raman effect" on light scattering by the famous Sir CV Raman in 1928. Inculcating scientific temperament and honing careers in science are principal aims of NDS. Science is always true whether or not one believes in it. Youngsters, who chase desires, must know that today's science is tomorrow's technology. Additionally, research is science's backbone, questions need to be asked and answers be sought. On NDS, India's scientific achievements should be highlighted and celebrated because science knows no country and knowledge belongs to the humanity.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

Automation nightmare

Sir, The recent breakthrough by Anthropic in automating COBOL modernisation has sent a profound signal through the global IT services industry. For decades, the stewardship of legacy systems formed the economic backbone of firms such as IBM, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, and Wipro. With AI now capable of analysing, refactoring, and modernising complex codebases at scale, investor anxiety has been swift and visible. Market volatility reflects not merely financial recalibration, but a deeper strategic uncertainty about the future relevance of traditional service models built around legacy maintenance. COBOL has long functioned as the invisible infrastructure underpinning global finance, public administration, and enterprise systems. The prospect of AI diminishing the complexity and mystique of its upkeep represents more than technological progress; it signals a structural inflection point. For India's IT sector in particular, whose global stature has been closely tied to managing and sustaining such systems, this shift challenges a long-standing narrative of indispensability. Recent market reactions are therefore not solely about potential revenue compression, but about the redefinition of value within the IT services ecosystem.

Amarjeet Kumar, HAZARIBAGH

DPS challenges 'mammoth' fee committee setup in HC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: Constitution of a school-level fee regulation committee (SLFRC) is a "mammoth exercise" which cannot be concluded within 10 days for the upcoming academic session starting April 1, the Delhi Public School (DPS) Society Thursday told the Delhi High Court.

A bench of Chief Justice DK Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia was hearing petitions by several schools' associations challenging a February 1 notification by the Delhi government asking schools to set up the SLFRC within 10 days.

Seeking a stay, senior counsel Puneet Mittal, appearing for DPS Society, contended that as per the Delhi School Education (Transparency in Fixation and Regulation of Fees) Act after the Supreme Court raised questions over its new fee fixation law.

"25,000 students in Delhi is what we have.. So it's a mammoth exercise. It is not an exercise at the click of a button. It is not desired to be like that. It is not designed to be like that. It is an exercise involving a lot of resources, and surely this can wait," he argued.

Mittal also emphasized that while the SLFRC must include at least one member belonging to scheduled castes, scheduled



The Delhi government issued a gazette notification February 1 to 'smoothen' the implementation of the Delhi School Education (Transparency in Fixation and Regulation of Fees) Act after the Supreme Court raised questions over its new fee fixation law

According to the notification, every school was directed to constitute a SLFRC within 10 days of the publication of the order

tribes or socially and educationally backwards classes, the schools had no such data with them as there was no mandate on them to maintain such a record.

"In school, from elementary education to higher secondary education, there is not even a question asked at any stage on which religion or caste you belong to. We have admission in Delhi only on point-based system," he explained.

The counsel said that the schools even had children of other nationalities and collection of data on caste of students could not be done in a short span of time. "All this is to be done in terms of the notification of February 1 within 10 days. Is it possible? Is it not a mammoth exercise? What was the urgency?" he asked.

The court will hear the matter next February 27.

The Delhi government earlier told the court that private schools cannot collect fees from April 1 for the new academic session unless it is determined and approved as per the new fee regulation law.

In its response filed to the petitions, the Directorate of Education has said if the Act was not allowed to be implemented from April 1, it would defeat the object of the Act, i.e. to prevent profiteering and have regulated fees from the beginning of the academic year 2026-27.

Rahul lays foundation stone for 100 houses

The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha assured the affected families that he and his family would always stand with those who had lost everything in the tragedy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Wayanad (Kerala), Feb 26: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi Thursday laid the foundation stone for 100 houses to be constructed by the party for victims of the 2024 landslide here.

Congress is constructing 100 houses, each measuring 1,100 sq ft and 8 cents of land. The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha assured the affected families that he and his family would always stand with those who had lost everything in the tragedy.

He recalled witnessing two major landslides and how people responded to them.

"You have lost a lot, but you have not lost your spirit. You never lost your courage. Most importantly, you did not lose your compassion," Gandhi said.

Rahul said that Priyanka Gandhi Vadra had pointed out alleged delays in the process of constructing houses for the



victims.

"There were complexities related to permissions, land and other issues. Now, I hope it will be completed soon," he said.

He described the ceremony as a "symbol and a message" to the affected families.

"In this process of recovery and healing, we are with you. We will stand with you whenever you need us," he said.

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said she had witnessed the hardship of people who lost everything, including their families.

She mentioned Anyan and Hanni, who lost their farms

and family members in the landslide.

"We have tried our best to raise your voice in Parliament again and again. All our MPs met the Home Minister to demand that it be declared a national disaster. We wrote to the Prime Minister and held protests outside Parliament," she said.

She said what struck her most after the tragedy was the courage of the people.

"The way you all stood together, no matter what religion or section you belong to, you gave love and courage when it

mattered most," she said.

She said she was not the MP when the tragedy struck, but had since become a daughter, sister and part of the family.

Vadra said all political parties had contributed to the rehabilitation process.

As the people's struggle continues, the party would stand with them to overcome it, she added.

Both leaders also distributed Rs 5 lakh each to 40 people who lost their shops in the landslide. Senior Congress and UDF leaders were present at the event.

Kochi gears up for 'GraphIN 2026'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kochi, Feb 26: The first edition of the international conference and expo on Graphene and 2D Materials, 'GraphIN 2026', will be held here from March 9 to 12.

The four-day event is being positioned as a flagship platform for experts, industry leaders and researchers to discuss the theme, "Pushing the Materials Beyond the Limits," according to a release here Thursday.

The conference aims to help place India at the forefront of next-generation materials research, especially in graphene and other advanced 2D materials, it said. Kerala has already taken a lead in this sector. It became the first state in the country to launch a dedicated Graphene Policy, with the goal of developing a strong innovation ecosystem and emerging as a global technology hub.

The conference is jointly organised by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India, through the Centre for Materials for Electronics Technology (C-MET), in collaboration with the PHANTOM Foundation, Spain, and the University of Manchester, UK, a global pioneer in graphene research.

The event is also supported by the India Innovation Centre for Graphene (ICG) and the Centre of Excellence in Intelligent IoT Sensors initiatives.

Police chief eyes making Delhi drug-free

DELHI POLICE COMMISSIONER SATISH GOLCHHA TELLS OFFICERS TO FRAME ACTION PLAN WITH FOCUS ON SLUMS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: The Delhi police chief has set his sights on making the national capital drug-free, with a special focus on curbing narcotics abuse in JJ clusters that are considered vulnerable to drug trafficking and consumption, an official said Thursday.

At the first crime review meeting of 2026 held in January, Delhi Police Commissioner Satish Golchha made it clear that eliminating the drug menace would be among the top priorities of the force for the year.

Golchha has directed all deputy commissioners of police (DCPs) to submit detailed action plans aimed at eradicating the supply and consumption of narcotics in slums under their jurisdictions, a senior police officer told PTI.

"The commissioner has given clear instructions that we must not allow drugs



to destroy the future of our youth. JJ clusters are particularly vulnerable and need focused intervention," the officer said.

According to the officer, DCPs have been asked to identify active drug dealers and peddlers operating in these areas and review their criminal status -- whether they have been arrested, are on bail, or are absconding.

Where legally feasible, steps such as externment proceedings and preventive detention under the Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (PITNDPS) Act, 1988, are being examined.

"The emphasis is not mere-

ly on arresting street-level peddlers. We have been told to dismantle the entire supply chain by working on both backward and forward linkages - from source to distribution network," the officer said.

Police units have also been instructed to coordinate closely with specialised anti-narcotics teams and enhance surveillance in identified hotspots. Data analysis, informer networks and technical intelligence are being leveraged to track repeat offenders and interstate suppliers.

In addition to enforcement measures, the commissioner has stressed the need for preventive outreach. Districts have been asked to organise

Districts have been asked to organise awareness campaigns in JJ clusters, schools and community centres to sensitise teenagers and young adults about the harmful effects of drug abuse

awareness campaigns in JJ clusters, schools and community centres to sensitise teenagers and young adults about the harmful effects of drug abuse.

"Our approach is two-pronged - strict action against traffickers and sustained community engagement to prevent addiction. The ultimate goal is to make Delhi free of drugs," the officer added. Periodic reviews will be conducted to monitor progress and ensure accountability at the district level.

On the occasion of the 79th Raising Day of the force February 16, the police chief stated that in 2025, the Delhi Police seized 6,144 kg of narcotic substances and attached 44 properties linked to drug trafficking. Of these, 29 properties were demolished following due legal process.

Veena George gets relief from neck injury pain: Medical College

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kannur (Kerala), Feb 26: Kerala Health Minister Veena George has shown some relief from the treatment she is undergoing at the Government Medical College here for a neck injury she allegedly sustained during a protest by activists of the Congress student wing, KSU, a day ago, a medical bulletin said Thursday.

The bulletin said the 13-member VIP medical board constituted to examine the minister assessed her during the day and found that she had experienced some relief from the "severe radicular pain" in her right arm and the back of her head due to the alleged injury.

The minister's high blood pressure is being controlled with medication, and her pain is being treated according to the protocol of pain specialist Dr Bindu M, the bulletin said.

The medical board also assessed the MRI scan and MR angiogram reports of the minister, it added. According to the MRI report, the severe pain George is experiencing is due to pressure on the cervical exiting nerve roots at two points on the discs between the vertebrae in her neck, the bulletin said.

However, there is no need for emergency surgery at present, the medical board said. As the minister requires constant

monitoring, the board decided that her treatment should continue in the ICU.

Furthermore, as she is not permitted to travel in her current physical condition, it was decided to continue her treatment in the ICU of the Kannur Government Medical College Hospital, the bulletin said.

Leader of the Opposition in the Kerala Assembly, VD Sathesnan, earlier in the day termed as "pure lies" the claims by CPI(M) leaders and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan that Kerala Students Union (KSU) activists attacked George a day ago in Kannur.

Sathesnan alleged that based on these "lies", the CPI(M) unleashed widespread violence against Congress workers and offices across the state.

On the other hand, CPI(M) leader MV Jayarajan claimed that a "suicide attacker" had attempted to murder the minister, who allegedly suffered injuries during the KSU protest at Kannur railway station.

According to the FIR lodged against the KSU activists, based on a complaint by the minister's gunman, she was attacked with a weapon by the protesters.

EAST COAST RAILWAY
Tender Notice No. ST-OT-CAR-FESTIVAL-546, Dt. 20.02.2026
NAME OF WORK : TELECOM RELATED WORKS FOR "RATH YATRA 2026".
Tender Value in (₹) : 75,00,201.17.
EMD (₹) : 1,50,000.00
Bidding Start Date : 02.03.2026.
Date and Time of Closing of Tender : At 11:00 Hrs. of 16.03.2026.
No manual offers sent by Post / Courier / Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration.
Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-Tender is available in website : <https://www.irps.gov.in>
Note : The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website 15 (Fifteen) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes / Corrigendum issued for this tender.
Divisional Railway Manager (S&T) / Khurda Road
PR-1168/Q/25-26

EAST COAST RAILWAY
INDICATIVE EMPLOYMENT NOTICE
OPEN MARKET RECRUITMENT IN EAST COAST RAILWAY FOR THE YEAR 2025-26 AGAINST CULTURAL QUOTA
Employment Notice No. ECoR/Pers/Cultural/2025-26, Date: 26.02.2026
Opening date of online Application : 27.02.2026
Closing date of online Application : 13.03.2026
ONLINE APPLICATIONS ARE INVITED FOR RECRUITMENT AGAINST CULTURAL QUOTA IN EAST COAST RAILWAY FOR THE YEAR 2025-2026 FULFILLING THE PRESCRIBED ELIGIBILITY CONDITIONS APPLICABLE FOR THE POST. RECRUITMENT WILL BE CONDUCTED AGAINST TWO LEVEL-2 POSTS - 01 (ONE) (SINGER (HINDUSTANI LIGHT VOCAL (FEMALE))) AND ONE TABLA. TENTATIVELY WRITTEN EXAMINATION WILL BE HELD ON 3RD WEEK OF MARCH 2026.
FOR DETAILED NOTIFICATION AND ONLINE APPLICATION CANDIDATES MAY VISIT TO RAILWAY RECRUITMENT CELL (RRC) EAST COAST RAILWAY, BHUBANESWAR'S WEBSITE : www.rccbbs.org.in
PR-1170/Q/25-26 Dy. Chief Personnel Officer (Rec't.)/Bhubaneswar

GOVT. OF ODISHA No.25001/262/2526
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER RURAL WORKS DIVISION-I, KEONJHAR
Tel. 06766-258094(O). Mail : eenw1_kir@yahoo.com
e-Procurement Notice for Road works
Identification No Online NCB - 18/2025-26
1. Name of the Work : 2. No. Road Work, 2. Total Number of Work : 2 No., 3. Estimated Cost : Rs.30.00 Lakhs to Rs.48.00 Lakhs, 4. Class of Contractor : 'C' & 'B' Class, 5. Period of Completion : As per annexure of e-Procurement Notice No.20 of 2025-26, 6. Other Details :
Procurement officer Bid Identification No. Availability of tender online for bidding Last Date & Time of seeking Tender Clarification Date & Time of Opening of Tender in O/o S.E., R.W. Division, Keonjhar
1 2 3 4 5 6
Superintending Engineer, Rural Works Division-I, Keonjhar Road Online NCB No.20 21.06.2026 at 11.00 A.M. Dt.05.03.2026 up to 5.00 P.M. Dt.06.03.2026 at 11.00 A.M.
Further details can be seen from the website www.tenderorissa.gov.in Sd./ Superintending Engineer R.W. Division-I, Keonjhar
OIPR-25001/25110/1/25-26/0034

After two decades, Delhi zoo welcomes otter pup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: More than two decades after the species vanished from its enclosures, the National Zoological Park here has witnessed the birth of an otter, with officials welcoming the event as a long-awaited success of conservation breeding in the capital zoo.

The pup was born in January to a pair of smooth-coated otters that were brought to the Delhi zoo from Surat last year under an animal exchange programme, officials said.

This marks the first otter birth at the zoo since 2004, when the last otter housed at the facility died, with the species absent from the capital zoo.

According to an official, the adult otters were sourced from Kamla Nehru Zoological Park, Surat, and were kept under quarantine and close observation after their arrival. During this period, they were not placed on public display as part of protocol to allow the animals to adapt to their new surroundings.

BREEDING MILESTONE

The pup was born in January to a pair of smooth-coated otters that were brought to the Delhi zoo from Surat last year under an animal exchange programme



"Soon after they were brought here, the female otter was found to be pregnant. Since then, the pair has been kept under continuous monitoring by our veterinary and animal care teams," the official said, adding that the zoo deliberately delayed putting the animals in the inventory to ensure a stress-free environment during pregnancy and early nurturing.

Another official said the adult otters are around three to four years old. However, the male adult otter had been hospitalised as it was said to be suffering from

a health condition. He said female otters are known to be highly protective during the feeding phase and often do not allow the male to approach while nursing the pups.

"Thus, the male otter did not feed properly for some time and had to be hospitalised," the official said, adding that it is yet to be disclosed whether it has recovered. However, zoo authorities said the male otter is likely to be put on public display first, possibly by next month, once weather conditions become favourable.

"We are waiting for winter to fully pass, as otters require a suitable climate. The female and the pup will be introduced to the viewing enclosure afterwards," the official said.

He also mentioned that once otters adapt to local conditions, they tend to breed successfully, raising hopes for reviving the zoo's otter population in the future.

The return of otters to Delhi zoo after more than two decades is being seen as a success to its conservation efforts. Their arrival has increased the zoo's total species count to over 96, further enriching the biodiversity on display.

"In 2004, we lost our last otter and since then several attempts to procure the species did not materialise. This successful exchange and now the otter birth is a big step for us," the official said.

Officials further said the latest development underlines the importance of coordinated animal exchange programmes and sustained monitoring in conservation and breeding efforts.



At the same time, I don't think there was any conspiracy behind this incident. Ajit Pawar was so strong that no one would try such a thing, and moreover he had no enmity (with anyone)

RAMDAS ATHAWALE | UNION MINISTER

NINE RAILWAY DIVISIONS SIGN PACTS WITH ARMY

Nine out of 70 railway divisions in the country have signed memorandums of understanding with Army organisations to recruit ex-servicemen as point-men, the Railway Ministry said Thursday.



of the day quote

While Gujarat is a dry state like Bihar, the policy there is considered more flexible due to its established permit system and certain special economic exemptions

PRASHANT KISHOR | JAN SURAJI PARTY FOUNDER

Agartala, being a Smart City, can use AI for city management, including traffic, power, health-care, waste management, and property mapping.

MANIK SAHA | TRIPURA CM

Not just your name, but if you are repeatedly emailing back and forth and are clearly aware of this person's activities, if you have been engaging in conversations and meetings, and if you are a minister, you have a moral responsibility towards the people of your country

PRIYANKA GANDHI VADRA | CONGRESS MP

TEXTBOOK ROW

NCERT probes judgement lapse

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: Following the ire of Supreme Court, the NCERT is ascertaining the process of making textbooks which led to the error in judgement about inclusion of a chapter on "judicial corruption", sources said.

The Council is also identifying the persons responsible for inclusion of the text. "The NCERT is ascertaining the process of making textbooks which has led to this error of judgement and also identify the persons responsible for the same. This would also ensure that this kind of inappropriateness is completely avoided in future.

Earlier in the day, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan expressed anguish over the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) coming up with a chapter on judicial corruption in its Class 8 textbook, while promising to fix account-



ability and take action against those involved in drafting the controversial portion.

His remarks came on a day the Supreme Court observed that there appeared to be a "well-orchestrated conspiracy" to defame the judiciary. It imposed a "complete blanket ban" on the Class 8 NCERT book and ordered that all copies, physical and digital, be seized.

The NCERT's Social Science textbook for Class VIII states that corruption, a massive

backlog of cases and the lack of an adequate number of judges are among the challenges faced by the judicial system.

After stern words by the Supreme Court that it will not allow "anyone on earth" to tarnish the judiciary's integrity, the NCERT pulled the textbook from its website, with sources saying the government was livid with the controversial references in the curriculum.

The NCERT Wednesday also apologised for "inappropri-

ate content" after facing the Supreme Court's ire over the chapter and said the book will be rewritten in consultation with appropriate authorities.

Education Ministry writes to I&B ministry, MeitY

New Delhi: The Union Ministry of Education Thursday wrote to the ministries of information and broadcasting, and electronics, asking them to stop the dissemination of a controversial NCERT textbook through digital platforms and electronic media, officials said.

BARAMATI PLANE CRASH

CID investigates sabotage, criminal negligence angle

Nationalist Congress Party (SP) MLA Rohit Pawar, who has been questioning the circumstance surrounding the incident and demanding an FIR against the company which operated the aircraft for alleged negligence, gave a statement to the CID which is investigating the January 28 crash



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Pune/Mumbai, Feb 26: The Maharashtra Crime Investigation Department (CID) Thursday said the focus of its probe into the Baramati plane crash that killed then deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar was to ascertain if sabotage or criminal negligence led to the tragedy.

Nationalist Congress Party (SP) MLA Rohit Pawar, who has been questioning the circumstance surrounding the incident and demanding an FIR against the company which operated the aircraft for alleged negligence, gave a statement to the CID which is investigating the January 28 crash.

Speaking at a press conference, Sunil Ramanand, Additional Director General of Police (CID), said the investigation was being conducted in a detailed and professional manner. "The purpose of the CID probe is to determine whether there was any foul play in the plane crash. It will also examine whether there was any criminal negligence. Thirdly, the probe will ascertain whether any criminal act,

including illegal omission, led to the crash," he said.

Once the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) submits its report, the findings will be included in the CID investigation, the ADG said, adding that the CID has collected several pieces of evidence

If any criminal angle, including negligence or sabotage, is established, the CID will register a case, said Ramanand. Rohit Pawar, who is Ajit Pawar's nephew, visited the CID headquarters in Pune and met officials. He gave them a statement under section 180 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), he told reporters later.

Under this section, an investigation officer can record the statement of any person "supposed to be acquainted with the facts and circumstances of the case." Pawar said that after the Mumbai as well as Baramati police did not register a First Information Report, he met CID officials and sought registration of an FIR against VSR Ventures.

VSR Ventures operated the Learjet 45 aircraft which crashed January 28 with Ajit Pawar and four others on board. He expected that the CID would call him to record his statement as he possesses a lot of details about the case, but the probe agency did not call him, the NCP (SP) MLA said.

HC issues notice to Assam CM on PILs against 'hate speech'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, Feb 26: Observing that there was a "fissiparous tendency", the Gauhati High Court Thursday issued a notice to Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma in connection with a bunch of PILs that accused him of giving "hate speech".

A division bench of Chief Justice Ashutosh Kumar and Justice Arun Dev Choudhury also issued notices to the Centre, the state government and the Director General of Police (DGP) in connection with three different petitions on the matter.

The court fixed April 21 as the next date of hearing. The Assembly elections in the state are expected to be held in March-April. Senior advocates Abhishek Manu Singhvi, Chander Uday Singh and Meenakshi Arora appeared for the petitioners, while no counsel was present for the government or the CM.

"Each and every statement, they don't co-locate with the earlier statement. What 'vote chori', why we call it 'chori', we want to steal votes -- these appear to be blusters... There is a fissiparous tendency, it appears, from what you are showing. Let us see what they have to say," Chief Justice Kumar observed after the counsels for the petitioners read some statement allegedly made by the CM.

However, the court declined to issue notice to the BJP at this stage, stating that the matter would be considered later.



PRASHANT KISHOR | JAN SURAJI PARTY FOUNDER

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



POLL EXPENDITURE CEILING PLEA

SC seeks responses from Centre, EC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: The Supreme Court Thursday sought responses from the Centre and the Election Commission on a plea seeking directions to impose ceiling on the expenditure by political parties for election purposes.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi issued notice to the Centre and the poll authority seeking their responses on the petition. "Issue notice, returnable April 27," the bench said.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan appeared for the petitioner NGOs Common Cause and Centre For Public Interest Litiga-



tion. The plea sought the absence of any expenditure limit on political parties, despite strict limits on individual candidates under section 77(1) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, creates an "unlevel playing field" in electoral contests, violating the right to equality under Article 14 of the Constitution.

"Explanation 1(a) to Section 77(1) of the Representation of

the People Act, 1951 creates a legal fiction by excluding from account the massive expenditure incurred by political parties in connection with the election of a candidate, even when the expenses serve the same electoral purpose," it said.

The plea said Section 77(1) of the Act introduced limits on the expenditure incurred by individual candidates during elections. It also sought a direction to declare Explanation 1(a) to Section 77(1) of the Act as unconstitutional, being violative of Articles 14 and 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.

The plea said free and fair elections form the bedrock of any democracy, and more so in a constitutional democracy like India.

"This court has time and again held that democracy, free and fair elections and the Rule of Law are basic features of the Constitution, meaning thereby that they cannot be dispensed with even by way of a constitutional amendment," it said.

The plea said one of the most important aspects of a free and fair election in a constitutional democracy is an electoral system free of corruption.

It claimed that by fixing a ceiling on the expenditure only in respect of the expense incurred or authorised by individual candidates alone, and not on the political party, the spirit of the provision has been allowed to meet its "slow and inevitable death".

Congress slams PM's address to Israeli Parl

NEW DELHI: The Congress Thursday described Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the Israeli Parliament as an "unabashed defence of his host" premier Benjamin Netanyahu and one that "diminished India's moral standing". Hitting out at Modi, the opposition party also recalled India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru's July 1947 reply to Albert Einstein's letter to him on the subject of the creation of Israel.

SC orders states, UTs to develop protocol for open prisons

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: In a bid to ensure that open prisons function as meaningful and effective institutions of reformation and rehabilitation, the Supreme Court Thursday directed all states and Union territories to develop a time-bound protocol for filling up existing vacancies in Open Correctional Institutions (OCI) and open barracks.

Semi-open or open prisons allow convicts to work outside the premises during the day to earn a livelihood and return in the evening. The concept was introduced to assimilate convicts with society and reduce psychological pressure as they faced difficulties in leading normal lives outside.

Issuing a slew of directions, the top court said prisons are institutions of correction, where dignity, self-respect and social reinte-

gration are not aspirational ideals but constitutional necessities. A bench of Justice Vikram Nath and Justice Sandeep Mehra directed the states and Union territories (UTs) to submit the protocol to their respective monitoring committees within a period of three months.

It said all states and UTs shall ensure that OCIs do not function merely as labour camps or spaces of custodial convenience.

"Ensure that the identified vacancies are filled within a further period of two months thereafter, subject to eligibility and security considerations. The compliance report shall be placed before the Monitoring Committee within one month thereafter," the bench said.

The court also took note of under-representation of women prisoners from OCIs and directed all states and UTs to develop protocol for restructuring exist-



ing OCIs to allocate adequate capacity for female prisoners.

The directions came on a PIL regarding overcrowding in prisons and the functioning of OCIs. Recognising the absence of uniformity in governance, eligibility norms, rehabilitation facilities and management of OCIs, the apex court constituted a high-powered committee

for reform and governance of Open Correctional Institutions with former Supreme Court judge Justice S Ravindra Bhat as executive chairperson.

The objective of the committee is formulation of common minimum standards for the governance, administration and management of OCIs, including eligibility

criteria, living conditions, etc, the bench said.

The court said the directions were being issued to ensure that equality, non-discrimination and the right to live with dignity, as guaranteed under articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution, is meaningfully realised in the administration of prisons across the country.

The enduring strength of a constitutional democracy lies not in the severity of punishments, but in its commitment to restore dignity, hope and opportunity even to those who have transgressed

the law, the court said.

The top court directed that all states and UTs to take proactive and time-bound steps to expand open correctional infrastructure by establishing new OCIs, and creating open and semi-open barracks within existing closed prisons.

For effective compliance and monitoring, the top court directed all the high courts to register a suo motu writ petition for monitoring the compliance with the present judgment within their respective jurisdictions.

SUPREME COURT DIRECTS STATES AND UTs TO DEVELOP A TIME-BOUND PROTOCOL FOR FILLING VACANCIES IN OPEN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS (OCIS). THE COURT EMPHASISES THAT OPEN PRISONS SHOULD NOT FUNCTION MERELY AS LABOR CAMPS BUT AS INSTITUTIONS FOR REHABILITATION AND SOCIAL REINTEGRATION. STATES AND UTs ARE INSTRUCTED TO ASSESS AND RESTRUCTURE OCIS TO ENSURE ADEQUATE CAPACITY FOR FEMALE PRISONERS.

national



When I spoke to the PM, he said intra-river linking, interlinking all the rivers in your (Andhra) state, then finally, it will be easy to link at the national level. We are working with that spirit
N CHANDRABABU NAIDU | ANDHRA PRADESH CM

SC ADJOURNS PLEA CHALLENGING SONAM WANGCHUK'S DETENTION

The Supreme Court Thursday adjourned to March 10 the hearing on a plea filed by Gitanjali J Angmo, the wife of jailed climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, challenging his detention under the National Security Act (NSA)



of the day quote

Development requires the oxygen of peace. My government's primary objective is to provide you with a transparent, democratic, and stable environment
OMAR ABDULLAH | J&K CM

Nyokum Yullo is not just a festival but a reflection of the Nyishi community's deep spiritual bond with nature, unity, and ancestral faith
CHOWNA MEIN | ARUNACHAL PRADESH CM

Davos is a very serious business. In the last few years, we have succeeded in creating a good buzz about Maharashtra. Foreign investors expect us to come to Davos
DEVENDRA FADNAVIS | MAHARASHTRA CM



Indian Army personnel demonstrate combat manoeuvres during an operational demonstration showcasing the Western Command's capabilities at Dhyanchand Stadium, in Pathankot, Punjab
PTI PHOTO

SHIRTLESS PROTEST

Delhi court sends 3 IYC workers to police custody

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: A Delhi court Thursday sent three accused brought to the capital after a dramatic 24-hour standoff with the Shimla police following their arrest in the hill state over the shirtless protest at the AI Impact Summit here last week to three-day police custody.

THE COURT ALSO EXTENDED THE POLICE REMAND BY THREE DAYS OF TWO OTHER ACCUSED, AJAY KUMAR AND RAJA GUJAR, ARRESTED EARLIER AND PRODUCED IN COURT THURSDAY ON COMPLETION OF THEIR THREE-DAY POLICE CUSTODY

THE ARRESTS SPARKED A HIGH-VOLTAGE STANDOFF BETWEEN POLICE TEAMS OF DELHI AND SHIMLA, WHICH ENDED AFTER A DRAMATIC 24 HOURS THURSDAY MORNING

Chief Judicial Magistrate Mridul Gupta passed the order on Delhi Police's plea seeking five-day custodial interrogation of the three accused Youth Congress activists.

The magistrate said the accused trio needs to be produced in court on completion of their police remand March 1.

the conspiracy, confront them with the co-accused, effect recovery, find the names of others involved," the prosecutor said.

The counsel for the accused claimed Delhi Police had engaged in "witch-hunting" by arresting those carrying out a peaceful protest.

The accused were produced in the court amid heavy security arrangements.

During the proceedings, the public prosecutor said that Saurabh and Arbaz Khan from Uttar Pradesh, and Sidharth Avdhut of Madhya Pradesh were "hiding in Himachal Pradesh", and that they were arrested from a resort around 6:40 am Wednesday.

"No recovery has been effected, there is non-compliance with rules. If you see the FIR, it mentions the same sentence as in the JNU case: 'Tukke-Tukke'. What kind of precedent are we setting?" the advocate asked.

The prosecutor said the trio was produced before a magistrate in Shimla around 1:40 pm the same day, who allowed Delhi Police's plea seeking transit remand, and directed their production in the Delhi court concerned within 18 hours.

He also claimed that "political targeting of certain people belonging to the main opposition party." "They are trying to set an example for political parties," the counsel said.

He said that while Sidharth designed the T-shirt displayed by the Youth Congress workers at the Summit venue February 20, Saurabh created a WhatsApp group. Saurabh and Arbaz were present during the protest, he said.

The court also extended the police remand by three days of two other accused, Ajay Kumar and Raja Gujar, arrested earlier and produced in court Thursday on completion of their three-day police custody.

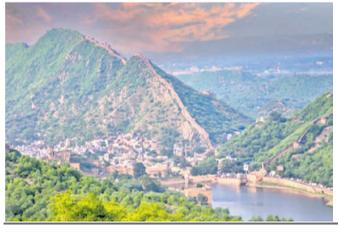
More than one lakh T-shirts were printed. We need to find the printing source, ascertain the origin and mechanism of

The arrests sparked a high-voltage standoff between police teams of Delhi and Shimla, which ended after a dramatic 24 hours Thursday morning, when the Delhi Police team was finally cleared to head back to the capital along with the three accused. In the stalemate, the Delhi Police team was "detained" for about five hours even after procuring transit remand from the ACJM.

SC to constitute expert panel to define Aravalli

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: The Supreme Court Thursday asked the environment ministry and other stakeholders to suggest names of domain experts for the panel which would define the Aravalli hills and ranges, and observed that only lawful mining would be allowed in the region.



The top court, December 29, took note of the outcry over the new definition of the Aravallis and kept in abeyance its November 20 directions that accepted a uniform definition of these hills and ranges. It had also stalled all mining activities

The top court, December 29, took note of the outcry over the new definition of the Aravallis and kept in abeyance its November 20 directions that accepted a uniform definition of these hills and ranges. It had also stalled all mining activities.

to mine after a protracted battle, and now, because of the order of this court, the same has been stalled. "We will allow lawful mining only... let the experts tell us (the definition). We will cross all bridges and reach the right destination," the CJI said.

halt. "However, such a status quo will have to be maintained for the time being till some preliminary issues are answered in a phased manner. Post this matter for the constitution of the committee," the CJI said. The top court bench also asked the stakeholders to submit their written notes by March 10 after the amicus curiae submitted his suggestions to the bench on the aspect of definitions of the Aravalli hills and ranges. The bench said it will set up the panel of experts and frame issues to be decided on the next date of hearing.

It remarked that there was a need to resolve "critical ambiguities", including whether the criteria of 100-metre elevation and the 500-metre gap between hills would strip a significant portion of the range of environmental protection.

The bench also asked lawyer Jay Cheema to assist in the hearing of the case. Senior advocate K Parmeswar is already assisting the bench as an amicus curiae. "We request the ministry (Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change) to suggest a panel of domain experts along with their profiles. Senior counsels are also requested to give profiles of some eminent domain experts for the purpose of constituting the committee, as was observed by this court," the bench said. The bench said it was conscious of the fact that all activities, especially mining by licensed firms, have also come to a

Earlier, the bench said it seemed prima facie that the earlier report of a committee and the verdict had "omitted to expressly clarify certain critical issues" and there is a "dire need to further probe" to prevent any regulatory gaps that might undermine the ecological integrity of the Aravalli region.

On Thursday, a top court bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant and Justices Joyymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Panchohi extended its earlier stay order for the time being.

During the hearing, senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for a litigant, said the company has a valid mining license, and it had won the right

ED grills Anil Ambani for 9 hrs; calls him again today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate Thursday grilled Reliance Group chairman Anil Ambani for more than nine hours during the second round of questioning in connection with an alleged bank fraud-linked money laundering case related to his group company RCOM, officials said. He has been called again for questioning Friday in a separate case linked to an alleged loan fraud against the Yes Bank, they said. The 66-year-old industrialist entered the federal probe agency's office in central Delhi around 10:30 am and left around 8:20 pm. Officials in the agency said they have recorded Ambani's statement under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The probe pertains to an alleged over Rs 40,000 crore worth bank fraud by Reliance Communications (RCOM). Ambani was first questioned by the ED in August 2025 in the alleged loan fraud against the Yes Bank. The ED arrested former RCOM president Punit Garg as part of its investigation in January.

ED wants speedy trial against Chidambaram

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: The Enforcement Directorate Thursday said it wants an expeditious trial against Congress leader P Chidambaram in two money laundering cases. Aircel-Maxis deal and INX Media, as it has submitted the required sanction for prosecution against the former Union finance minister before a designated court.

PMLA CASES

at the special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Delhi (Rouse Avenue) and the court took their separate cognisance in 2021.

Code (CrPC). Subsequent to this judgement, many accused charged under PMLA challenged the proceedings in multiple legal forums, leading to a delay in the trial including in these cases against P Chidambaram.

The agency said it sought the sanction for prosecution of Chidambaram from the competent authority which was obtained February 10 along with a required order under section 197 of CrPC (Section 218 of Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita) for prosecuting the former Union minister in the two money laundering cases.

The federal probe agency had filed a chargesheet in the Aircel-Maxis case in 2018 and in the INX Media case in 2020

However, in November 2024, the Supreme Court directed (in the ED vs Bibhu Prasad Acharya case) that sanction for prosecution is mandatory in a PMLA chargesheet, similar to such an approval furnished while filing a chargesheet under the Criminal Procedure

"To counter such delay and to comply with the judgement of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, ED has swiftly initiated remedial actions by seeking prosecution sanctions in all such prosecution complaints involving public servants," the ED said in a statement.

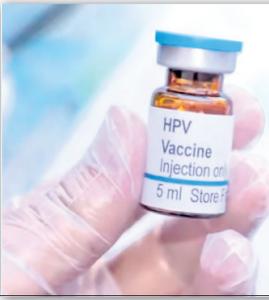
"The prosecution sanction order has been placed before the Hon'ble Special Court, Rouse Avenue by ED to expedite the trial in the case," the agency said.

HPV vaccines against cervical cancer safe, effective: Experts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: The Centre's decision to launch the HPV vaccination campaign will be a critical step toward achieving the WHO cervical cancer elimination target, experts said Thursday, while underscoring the vaccine's safety and efficacy.

will be administered during the campaign. A single dose of quadrivalent HPV vaccine (eg, Gardasil 4 or Cervavac) offers substantial benefits for a 14-year-old Indian girl, Dr Mukurdipi Ray, professor of Surgical Oncology in All India Institute of Medical Science, Delhi, said.



PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI WILL LAUNCH THE NATIONWIDE HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV) VACCINATION CAMPAIGN FOR GIRLS AGED 14 YEARS FEBRUARY 28 FROM RAJASTHAN'S AJMER

SINGLE-SHOT GARDASIL 4, A QUADRIVALENT VACCINE THAT PROTECTS AGAINST HPV TYPES 16 AND 18, WHICH CAUSE CERVICAL CANCER, AS WELL AS TYPES 6 AND 11, WILL BE ADMINISTERED DURING THE CAMPAIGN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch the nationwide Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination campaign for girls aged 14 years February 28 from Rajasthan's Ajmer.

Single-shot Gardasil 4, a quadrivalent vaccine that protects against HPV types 16 and 18, which cause cervical cancer, as well as types 6 and 11,

The initiative aligns with India's 2026 national rollout targeting this age group to curb cervical cancer, the second most common cancer among women here, claiming 75,000 lives yearly, Ray told PTI.

ally, dropping incidence below the World Health Organisation's elimination threshold in all states, Ray added.

The move will reduce screening needs, avert treatment burdens, and support

cervical cancer elimination by 2030, he said.

Dr Abhishek Shankar of AIIMS, Delhi, said that cervical cancer is one of the few cancers that can be largely prevented through vaccination.

However, the misinformation spreading online and in communities continues to deter many from protecting themselves or their children.

Large clinical trials and population studies involving millions of people demonstrated that HPV vaccines prevent 90-100 per cent of infections with the high-risk type causing cervical cancer, Shankar said.

that links HPV vaccines to infertility or other long-term health issues.

According to him, the vaccines dramatically reduce the incidence of pre-cancerous lesions and cervical cancer when given before exposure to the virus.

Explaining the side effects of the vaccine, he said, they are rare, and there is no evidence

Australia is on track to become the first nation to eliminate cervical cancer, buoyed by early and high vaccine uptake and robust screening, while global initiatives under the World Health Organisation's 90-70-90 framework seek to vaccinate 90 per cent of girls by age 15 and improve access to screening and treatment.

The WHO's framework aims to vaccinate 90 per cent of girls against HPV, screen 70 per cent of women with a high-performance test, and provide the appropriate treatment for 90 per cent of those who test positive by 2030.

POST OF THE DAY

The problem isn't criticism of India. The problem is how we treat Mother Earth - polluted rivers, abused environment, indifference to the vulnerable. We do all the wrong things... but God forbid anyone says anything negative. So it's fine to act badly, just don't talk about it? That's backwards logic.
@sabeer

SHORT TAKES

CBI secures return of fugitive from UAE

New Delhi: A wanted criminal facing Interpol Red Notice was extradited from the UAE Thursday in an operation coordinated by the CBI, officials said. "Anil Kumar Reddy Yeddula is wanted by the Andhra Pradesh Police in a number of cases registered against him on the allegations of cheating, criminal breach of trust and criminal intimidation," the CBI said in a statement here. Escorted by a team of Dubai Police, Yeddula arrived at Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, Hyderabad from Dubai Thursday where he was arrested by the Andhra Pradesh Police.

Justice Varma probe panel reconstituted

New Delhi: Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has reconstituted a three-member committee set up to probe the grounds for the removal of Justice Yashwant Varma after burnt wads of cash were recovered from his residence here in March last year. The committee has also been granted a three-month extension beginning February 26, a Lok Sabha secretariat official said Thursday. The speaker had constituted the committee August 12 last year after admitting a multi-party notice for the removal of the Allahabad High Court judge, setting in motion the process of his impeachment.

Four arrested for beating man to death

Thane: The crime branch of Navi Mumbai police has arrested four persons for allegedly beating a 31-year-old man to death on suspicion of theft, officials said Thursday. Sandeep Laxmikant Vishwakarma, a resident of Mankhurd in Mumbai, was reported missing February 15 and his body was found the next day within the jurisdiction of Rabale MIDC police station, said a press release. Autopsy report said that Vishwakarma had died due to injuries sustained in an assault.

international



The continued loss of life on migration routes is a global failure we cannot accept as normal
AMY POPE | IOM DIRECTOR GENERAL

SK RELAUNCHES TRUTH COMMISSION

South Korea has relaunched a fact-finding commission into its past human rights violations, with a key focus on the extensive fraud and malfeasance that corrupted the nation's historic foreign adoption programme. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the third in the country's history, began accepting new cases Thursday



of the day quote

The Scandinavian country will hold a parliamentary election on March 24
METTE FREDERIKSEN | PRIME MINISTER, DENMARK

I can tell you how toxic and personally damaging for me and for my family these past days, weeks and months have been
FRANCESCA ALBANESE | UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR

We will thoroughly work through the prosperity package: mechanisms for economic support and recovery of Ukraine, instruments for attracting investment, and frameworks for long-term cooperation
RUSTEM UMEROV | HEAD OF UKRAINE'S NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENCE COUNCIL

SHORT TAKES

CEO of World Economic Forum quits

Zurich: The president and CEO of the World Economic Forum, Borge Brende, said he was stepping down Thursday, a few weeks after the forum launched an independent investigation into his relationship with late US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Brende, who became president of the WEF in 2017, announced his decision in a statement following disclosures from the US Justice Department that showed the Norwegian had three business dinners with Epstein and had also communicated with the disgraced financier via email and text message.

China's Parl removes 9 senior military officials

Beijing: The standing committee of China's parliament Thursday removed nine suspended military officials from its list of deputies endorsing action against them by the ruling Communist Party headed by President Xi Jinping. Their removals came ahead of the commencement of the annual two sessions, the National People's Congress, (NPC), which is the main legislature, and the advisory body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), early next month. The Standing Committee of the NPC has finalised the agenda for the meeting. The two sessions were set to begin March 4.

Almost 8,000 died on migration routes

Brussels: Almost 8,000 people died or went missing last year on perilous migration routes such as across the Mediterranean and Horn of Africa, but the real toll is likely far higher as cuts in funding have hit humanitarian access and tracking of deaths, a UN agency said. Legal pathways for migration are shrinking, pushing more people into the hands of smugglers, the International Organization for Migration said, as Europe, the U.S. and other regions ramp up enforcement and invest heavily in deterrence. "The continued loss of life on migration routes is a global failure we cannot accept as normal," IOM Director General Amy Pope said in a statement published Thursday.

Greece's ex-finance minister charged

Athens: Greece's former finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, a self-declared "erratic" Marxist, has been charged with promoting drug use after he publicly admitted to having popped an ecstasy pill nearly four decades ago, his party said.

Iran to US: Decouple N-talks to secure deal

US and Iran could reach deal if nuclear and non-nuclear issues are separated, says senior Iranian official

REUTERS

Geneva, Feb 26: The United States and Iran could reach a framework for a deal if Washington separates "nuclear and non-nuclear issues", a senior Iranian official told Reuters, adding that remaining gaps need to be narrowed during a third round of talks in Geneva.

The negotiations have been intense and serious, said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson said Tehran's right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes must be recognised and sanctions should be lifted. Iran and the United States are holding indirect talks in Geneva over their long-running nuclear dispute, to avert a conflict after US President Donald Trump ordered a huge military build-up in the region.

Washington, which says Iran is seeking the capability to make a nuclear bomb, has long sought to link the talks to other issues including Iran's arsenal of missiles and its support for armed groups in the region. Tehran, which says its nuclear programme is peaceful, has agreed in principle to accept curbs to its nuclear activities in return for the lifting of sanctions but rejects tying the talks to other issues.

Mediator Oman held out hope that Iran and the United States would make more progress at talks on Thursday



- US military buildup has raised fears of regional conflict
- Khamenei faces internal pressure due to economy, protests
- Iran has indicated it could make concessions
- Tehran will show flexibility, ministry spokesperson says
- Talks in Geneva pause, set to resume later Thursday

after exchanging "positive and creative ideas", despite US concerns about Tehran's ballistic missile programme.

Reuters reported Sunday that Tehran was offering undefined new concessions in return for removal of sanctions and recognition of its right to enrich uranium. Iran had said earlier Thursday it would show flexibility at the talks.

Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Albusaidi said negotiators had taken a pause af-

ter the third round of talks got under way Thursday morning, and that the negotiations would resume later in the day.

"We've been exchanging creative and positive ideas in Geneva today, and now both US and Iranian negotiators have adjourned for a break. We'll resume later today. We hope to make more progress," he posted on X, without giving details.

BALLISTIC MISSILES A 'BIG PROBLEM'

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Wednesday Iran's refusal to discuss its ballistic missile programme was a "big problem" that would have to be addressed eventually, as the missiles were "designed solely to strike America" and pose a threat to regional stability.

"If you can't even make progress on the nuclear programme, it's going to be hard to make progress on the ballistic missiles as well," Rubio told reporters in Saint Kitts.

North Korea warns Seoul of destruction; invites US talks

Kim in recent years has sharpened his rhetoric toward Seoul and underscored his rejection of inter-Korean diplomacy



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Seoul, Feb 26: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un claimed his nuclear-armed country could "completely destroy" South Korea if its security were threatened, reiterating his refusal to engage with Seoul, state media said Thursday.

However, he left the door open to dialogue with Washington as he concluded a ruling party congress outlining his policy goals for the next five years.

Kim in recent years has sharpened his rhetoric toward Seoul and underscored his rejection of inter-Kore-

an diplomacy.

Experts say that most likely doesn't presage military clashes, but is intended to advance a broader effort to assert a more forceful regional role backed by Kim's nuclear arsenal and ties with Moscow and Beijing.

The official Korean Central News Agency said that Kim also called for developing new weapons systems to bolster his nuclear-armed military, including intercontinental ballistic missiles that could be launched from underwater and an expanded arsenal of tactical nuclear weapons, such as artillery and short-range missiles, targeting South Korea.

He said the accelerated development of his nuclear and missile program in recent years "permanently cemented" the country's status as a nuclear weapons state, and called for the United States to discard what he perceives as "hostile" policies toward the North if it wants to resume long-stalled dialogue.

B'desh court requests Interpol red notice for UK lawmaker Siddiq



REUTERS

Dhaka, Feb 26: A court in Bangladesh ordered authorities to seek an Interpol red notice against British lawmaker and former minister Tulip Siddiq Thursday over alleged corruption linked to a private real estate project in the capital.

The court issued the order after the Anti-Corruption Commission filed a petition seeking international assistance for her arrest. The ACC alleges that Siddiq used her close family ties to former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to influence the allocation of government land to a private company.

Siddiq, who is Hasina's niece, has repeatedly denied the allegations, describing earlier verdicts against her as "flawed and farcical". She has also said she is a British citizen, not a Bangladeshi national.

She did not immediately respond to email requests for comment, and there was no immediate reaction from her following the latest court order.

Bangladesh courts have already sentenced Siddiq to a total of six years in prison in three separate corruption cases, all related to alleged abuse of influence during Hasina's time in office. Siddiq resigned in January last year from her role as economic secretary to the Treasury under Prime Minister Keir Starmer, citing mounting political pressure over her links to Hasina, though she insisted she had been cleared of wrongdoing.

FTA SEAL EXPECTED SOON

India, Israel ink strategic pact

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jerusalem, Feb 26: India and Israel Thursday elevated their "time-tested" relationship to a special strategic partnership and agreed to fast-track a long-awaited free trade deal even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi backed the Gaza peace initiative, asserting that humanity must never become a victim of conflict.

In his media statement after holding wide-ranging talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Modi said India's security interests are directly linked to peace and stability in the Middle East and that New Delhi has been pitching for a peaceful solution to the conflict in Gaza.

Following the meeting between the two prime ministers, India and Israel inked a total of 17 agreements and documents that will provide for deeper cooperation in artificial intelligence, trade, investment, education, manufacturing, culture, maritime heritage, agriculture and a plethora of other areas.

The two sides also vowed to expand their already close defence partnership by working towards joint development and joint production of military hardware under the framework of the transfer of technologies.

The US-Iran standoff and other issues in the region figured in the talks and PM Modi mentioned India's firm belief in the value of dialogue and reiterated New Delhi's readiness to offer support, if required, toward achieving a peaceful solution,



according to Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri.

In his media statement, PM Modi elaborated on the upward trajectory of India-Israel ties and said the relationship is built on a strong foundation of deep trust, shared democratic values, and human compassion.

"Our relationship has stood the test of time. Today, we took the historic decision to elevate our time-tested partnership to 'Special Strategic Partnership.' This decision reflects the aspirations of the people of both countries," he said.

The relationship was upgraded to a strategic partnership in 2017.

"Our economic cooperation remains an engine of growth, innovation, and shared prosperity. Last year, we signed a bilateral investment agreement to promote mutual investment. We will also soon finalise a mutually beneficial Free Trade Agreement (FTA)," Modi said.

The prime minister also talked about the joint resolve of India and Israel in combating terrorism.

"India and Israel are absolutely clear that terrorism has no place in the world. Terrorism in any form, in any manifestation, cannot be tolerated," Modi, who landed in Israel Wednesday on a two-day visit, said.



A polar bear snow sculpture in front of the Manhattan skyline at sunset in Central Park in New York City, US

REUTERS

Over 10k foreign fighters from 75 nations fighting for Ukraine

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Moscow, Feb 26: More than 10,000 foreign volunteers from 75 countries serve in the Ukrainian ground forces and around 600 new persons enlist every month to join them, Russia's state-run TASS said Thursday, quoting an official publication from Kyiv.

A similar claim was made by a US government funded Prague-based Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Donbas Realii (Donbas Reality).

"Currently, more than 10,000 foreign volunteers from 75 countries serve in the Ukrainian Ground Forces. Every month, around 600 new volunteers enlist and join the ranks of the Ukrainian armed forces," TASS claimed after

reviewing publications of one of the Ukrainian armed forces' Foreign Recruitment Centres (FRC).

TASS said it also learned which units are most in need of foreign mercenaries and cited several brigades' names.

In September 2025, Russian security agencies reported that about 20,000 foreign mercenaries were fighting on the side of the Ukrainian armed forces, it said.

As the Russian Defence Ministry previously reported, mercenaries from various countries have been fighting for the Ukrainian armed forces. They are used by the Kiev regime as "cannon fodder," and no one in the Ukrainian military command spares their lives, TASS said.



Donbas Realii quoted Kostiantyn Milevskiy, Deputy Head of the Department for Coordination of Military Service for Foreigners in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, as

not leaving as much. We can subtract up to 50 people from those 600. As it gets warmer, there will be a little more. But we're talking about the average," Milevskiy was quoted as saying by the Donbas Realii, the radio banned in Russia.

In total, the number of foreign volunteers who have served or continue to serve in the units of the Ground Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine at one time or another is more than 10,000.

"We're not trying to recruit more people into the Ukrainian Armed Forces than we'll give them. What does that mean? It's training, combat coherence, and providing them with weapons and uniforms. We could, of course, increase the number to a 1,000, or 1,500, or even 10,000,

but if there's no one to care for them, there won't be any results," Milevskiy explained to the Donbas Realii.

In February 2022, after the start of a full-scale Russian invasion, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced the formation of a separate territorial defence unit "the International Legion" for foreigners wishing to "join the defence of security in Europe and the world."

Moscow too had invited thousands of North Korean troops to repeal Ukrainian incursion and occupation (from August 2024 - March 2025) of parts of its western Kursk region and now North Korean sappers are involved in mine-clearing operations in these parts of the region.



CBAM is not against anyone. Once you introduce carbon pricing, you need to have some kind of protection

JOCHEN FLASBARTH
 STATE SECRETARY,
 GERMAN FEDERAL MINISTRY

APPLE PAY SERVICE SOON IN INDIA

Apple is in talks with several Indian banks and global card networks as it prepares to launch its Apple Pay service in India, Bloomberg News reported Thursday, citing people familiar with the matter. The iPhone maker is in talks with ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank and Axis Bank, as it aims to introduce its payment service in India around the middle of 2026, the report said



of the day note

As India seeks to expand manufacturing, and support MSME, digital entrepreneurs and startups, customs procedures must actively enable the exporters to access global markets, with speed and certainty

ARVIND SHRIVASTAVA | REVENUE SECRETARY

We are facing this challenge not only in our country, but also globally as well -- the kind of false narrative through the influencers on processed food. Processed food means not good -- such narrative is being set. I don't know the intention behind it. But this is being done

CHIRAG PASWAN | FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES MINISTER

India's energy demand is accelerating and meeting it strategically and securely will require decisive choices and long-term vision

MALLIKA ISHWARAN | CHIEF ECONOMIST, SHELL

SHORT TAKES

IRFC OFS fails to get full subscription

New Delhi: The government's 2 per cent share sale offer in Indian Railway Finance Corporation Ltd (IRFC) failed to get full subscription on its final day of offer, with both retail and institutional investors giving a lacklustre response to the OFS. On February 24, the government proposed to sell over 26.13 crore shares or a 2 per cent stake in IRFC at a floor price of ₹104 per share, along with a green shoe option of an equal number in the two-day OFS. Of the 23.52 crore shares reserved for institutional investors, bids came in for 22.34 crore IRFC shares Wednesday. The bids were 94.98 per cent of the shares offered to such investors. After market hours Wednesday, the government decided not to exercise the green-shoe option. Of the over 3.79 crore shares offered to retail investors Thursday, bids came in for about 5.9 lakh shares.

InvIT investors get return of ₹5,565cr

New Delhi: Listed Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs) have collectively distributed a return of ₹5,565 crore to around 4 lakh unitholders during the third quarter of FY26, marking another quarter of steady growth. The sector comprising 26 business trusts gave a return of ₹4,287 crore to its unitholders in the second quarter of the ongoing financial year. Distribution represents the overall return paid out to unitholders and comprises multiple components such as interest, dividends, repayment of capital, and other income streams. Dividend is one of the elements within the total distribution and reflects the portion of returns generated. During the third quarter, two new InvITs started distributions, reflecting the continued growth of the sector.

Swiggy, IRCTC expand 'Food on Train' service

Mumbai: Food delivery and quick commerce firm Swiggy Thursday said it has expanded its 'Food on Train' service, in collaboration with IRCTC, to 152 stations across India in 12-month period, up from 70 stations a year-ago, driven by a rising nation-wide demand for diverse culinary options. The company also said it plans to focus on diversity by doubling down on transit hubs across India, from major junctions to regional stops like Itarsi (Madhya Pradesh), Tirunelveli (Tamil Nadu) and Kharagpur (West Bengal). Swiggy also announced the launch of Holi special food menu for travellers from February 28 to March 8 and said that it also has expanded its 'Train Friendly Dishes' menu, a segment engineered for high-speed convenience.

DATA BREACH

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Feb 26: Yes Bank Thursday said it has detected unauthorised transactions worth \$280,000 (Rs 2.5 crore) related to its multi-currency prepaid forex cards.

Unauthorised transactions were carried out by Yes Bank's Multi-Currency Prepaid Forex Card, which were issued in partnership with BookMyForex.

These unauthorised transactions were attempted on specific BIN numbers only and these fraudulent transactions were carried out on 15 merchants that are based out of a Latin American country, in the early hours of February 24, 2026, Yes Bank said in a regulatory filing.



"The internal investigation by the bank has revealed that during the incident period transactions approximately equivalent of \$0.28 million (about ₹2.5 crore) have been approved on behalf of 5,000 customers," it said.

Due to the bank's monitoring and control mechanisms, 688 unauthorised transaction attempts were declined, which led to safeguarding of approximately \$100,000. The bank is working with card network to raise charge-

Fraudulent transactions worth more than ₹2.5cr were approved on behalf of 5K customers

The bank said it blocked 688 attempted transactions, preventing losses of around ₹90L

The payments were routed through 15 merchants in a Latin American country that does not mandate two-factor authentication for e-commerce transactions.

back to ensure that the impacted customers do not face any financial loss.

As a security measure, it said, the bank has subsequently restricted e-commerce trans-

Bullions crash amid weak global trends

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 26: Silver prices declined by ₹7,400 to ₹2.70 lakh per kg while gold dropped by ₹1,300 to ₹1.62 lakh per 10 grams in the national capital Thursday due to weak global trends and profit-booking by traders.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, silver fell by ₹7,400, or nearly 3 per cent, to ₹2,70,500 per kg (inclusive of all taxes) from the previous closing level of ₹2,77,900 per kg. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity depreciated by ₹1,300, or nearly 1 per cent, to ₹1,62,900 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes). It had settled at ₹1,64,200 per 10 grams in the previous market session.

Traders said the decline was largely driven by weak trends in the international markets and mild profit-booking after prices touched three-week highs earlier in the week. A firm US dollar further dampened the investor appetite for bullion. In the international market, spot silver decreased \$1.91, or 2.15 per cent, to \$87.28 per ounce, while gold was trading marginally higher at \$5,176.21 per ounce.

Silver dips by ₹7,400, gold falls by ₹1,300

SEBI revamps MFs rulebook

REUTERS

New Delhi, Feb 26: India's markets regulator Thursday overhauled rules for mutual funds (MFs), introducing new categories of schemes, curbing portfolio overlaps and allowing more exposure to gold and silver.

The move is part of the regulator's efforts to tighten mutual fund rules through clearer classifications and standardized disclosures, strengthening investor protection in India's rapidly growing \$900 billion industry.

Equity mutual funds have drawn inflows of ₹12.02 trillion (\$132.24 billion) in the last five years, cushioning volatile foreign flows and supporting the domestic markets.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India introduced newer fund categories, including life-cycle funds - meant for long-term investing - and sectoral debt funds, expanding the total number of mutual fund groups to 40 from 36.

For existing categories, SEBI is enforcing stricter rules to ensure schemes remain "true-to-label" so that portfolios align with their defined asset class and stay within risk parameters.

The regulator will also limit it overlaps in the portfolios of sectoral, value and contra in-



- SEBI EXPANDS MUTUAL FUND CATEGORIES TO 40 FROM 36
- INTRODUCE NEW CATEGORIES INCLUDING LIFE CYCLE FUNDS
- STRICTER "TRUE-TO-LABEL" REGIME TO CURB PORTFOLIO OVERLAP
- SOME CATEGORIES OF SCHEMES ALLOWED HIGHER INVESTMENT IN GOLD, SILVER

vestment funds.

Asset managers may continue to offer both value and contra schemes, but the overlap between portfolios cannot exceed 50%. For thematic equity schemes, no more than 50% of a portfolio can overlap with other thematic or equity categories, except large-cap schemes.

Thematic funds have three years to comply with the new rules, while other schemes have six months.

Asset managers must also publish monthly category-wise overlap disclosures on their websites. SEBI discontinued solution-oriented schemes with immediate effect, instructing existing schemes to stop subscriptions and merge into similar schemes with comparable asset allocation and risk

profiles, subject to regulatory approval.

These 200-year-old tea leaves could help scientists protect one of the world's most consumed beverages from the toll of climate change.

The framework also continued a minimum 80% equity allocation for dividend yield, value and contra funds.

INCREASED EXPOSURE TO GOLD, SILVER

The new rules permit mutual funds to allocate a "residual portion" of equity schemes to gold and silver instruments and allow hybrid schemes to invest in gold and silver exchange traded funds (ETF).

The residual portion refers to the share of a scheme's corpus that remains after it has

actions from the specific Latin American country.

The bank said it came to light following unusual increase in transaction decline by the bank's fraud monitoring system during early hours of February 24. This is the first major issue being faced by Yes Bank following Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation (SMBC) of Japan acquisition of a 24.9 per cent stake in it for about ₹16,000 crore.

Following the acquisition, SMBC became the largest shareholder of private sector lender Yes Bank. SMBC appointed Shinichiro Nishino and Rajeev Veeravalli Kannan as non-executive and non-independent directors with effect from September 18.

FIIs post highest inflows in markets since Sept 2024

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Mumbai, Feb 26: Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) logged their highest inflow in 17 months in the month of February, recording net inflows of about \$2.44 billion, as per exchange data Thursday.

FIIs bought nearly \$2.14 billion in secondary markets and \$299 million in primary markets in February, posting the largest monthly net purchase since September 2024.

Primary market buying by FIIs has been steady since October 2023 but between January 2024 and December 2025, cumulative secondary market outflows by FIIs crossed over \$46 billion. The net buying by FIIs in February came despite heavy selling of \$1.21 billion worth of IT stocks seen earlier in the month.

Analysts cautioned that the February inflows are modest compared to the scale of prior selling and could thus represent only a pause rather than a structural reversal in trend. Further, some argued that continued selling in IT could trigger renewed outflows, but maintained that the case for fresh aggressive selling appears less compelling as valuations in Indian equities have moderated.

In the last one month, the Sensex has gained 1.08 per cent, while Nifty added 2.05 per cent. Nifty midcap 100 and SmallCap 250 Index gained about 4.72 per cent and 5.10 per cent, respectively. Early signs of revival are emerging in Indian markets, with the Nifty projected to reach 27,958 over the next 12 months under a base case scenario, another recent report said.

"India's growth narrative is entering a decisive phase as policy clarity, landmark trade agreements and a sustained in-frastructure push converge to lay the foundation for the next leg of expansion," it said.

A defining catalyst for the next growth cycle has been India's accelerated progress on trade diplomacy, it said highlighting the India-EU Free Trade Agreement. Sectorally, banks and diversified financials are positioned to benefit from credit growth normalisation toward 13-14 per cent and stable asset quality. Capital goods and engineering companies are likely to ride the infrastructure and defence wave, the firm noted.

Instagram tightens teen suicide search monitoring

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Washington, Feb 26: Instagram said Thursday it will start alerting parents if their kids repeatedly search for terms clearly associated with suicide or self-harm. The alerts will only go to parents who are enrolled in Instagram's parental supervision programme.

Instagram says it already blocks such content from showing up in teen accounts' search results and directs people to help lines instead.

The announcement comes as Meta is in the midst of two trials over harms to children. A trial underway in Los Angeles questions whether Meta's platforms

deliberately addict and harm minors. Another, in New Mexico, seeks to determine whether Meta failed to protect kids from sexual exploitation on its platforms.

Thousands of families - along with school districts and government entities - have sued Meta and other social media companies claiming they deliberately design their platforms to be addictive and fail to protect kids from content that can lead to depression, eating disorders and suicide.

The alerts will be sent via email, text or WhatsApp, depending on the parent's contact information available, as well as a notification through the parent's Instagram account.

CHOPPY SESSION: BENCHMARKS END FLAT

HDFC Bank counters PSU banks, pharma gains

REUTERS

Mumbai, Feb 26: Indian stock benchmarks ended little changed in a choppy session Thursday subdued risk appetite, missing out on broad gains in global markets from Japan to Europe, where the benchmark index hit a record high.

The Nifty 50 edged up 0.06% to 25,496.55 and the BSE Sensex shed 0.03% to 82,248.61.

Both the benchmarks swung between gains of 0.4% and equivalent-sized losses over the course of Thursday's session. They had added about 0.9% each



intraday in the previous session as well, but surrendered most of those gains to finish only marginally higher Wednesday.

Fourteen of the 16 major sectors advanced on the day.

Public sector banks added 1%, led by a 0.8% rise in the country's largest lender State Bank of India after CLSA reiterated its "outperform" rating,

Nvidia results boost Seoul stocks rally

South Korean stocks soared more than 3 per cent to close at a fresh record high of over 6,300 Thursday as investors were buoyed by artificial intelligence (AI) prospects following Nvidia's better-than-expected earnings report. The local currency gained slightly against the US dollar. The benchmark Korea Composite Stock Price Index (KOSPI) earned 223.41 points, or 3.67 percent, to finish at a record high of 6,307.27. The index has risen for the six consecutive day, reports Yonhap news agency. The KOSPI has continued its bullish mode since the beginning of the year, surpassing the 4,500-point line for the first time January 6 and crossing the 5,000-point mark January 27. It took less than one month to pierce the 6,000-point line Wednesday. Overnight, Nvidia reported its fourth-quarter revenue of \$68.13 billion to beat analyst estimates, renewing optimism over AI technology's potential benefits.

citing an industry-leading liquidity coverage ratio, robust growth and profitability.

The pharma index gained 1.1% on the day, taking its five-session rise to 3.9%, with analysts attributing the uptick to sector rotation.

The highest-weighted stock in India's stock benchmarks,

private-sector lender HDFC Bank dropped 1%, offsetting the broader rise.

The IT index, which had declined about 20% in February as of Wednesday's close on fears of AI-linked disruption, rose about 2% in intraday trade, but pared most of the gains to settle 0.1% higher.

GDP growth projected at 6.8-7.2% in FY27: EY report

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 26: India's economy is projected to expand between 6.8 per cent and 7.2 per cent in FY27 as bilateral trade agreements with major economies are expected, along with the government's economic reforms, to counter the global uncertainties created by the US tariff turmoil, according to the latest EY Economy Watch report.

"In the background of India's extensive bilateral trade agreements with other major economies or economic groups, India's medium-term prospects have brightened up," EY India chief policy advisor DK Srivastava said.

The analysis noted that achieving the government's long-term Viksit Bharat 2047 vision would require a sustained rise in the tax-to-GDP ratio, primarily through stronger compliance rather than fresh structural overhauls, since most major tax reforms have already been implemented.

The EY Economy Watch report noted that major tax reforms were undertaken in the current fiscal, particularly relating to personal income tax and the GST framework. Both these reforms involved a considerable amount of revenue forgone aimed at increasing household disposable incomes so that private consumption demand could be supported.



These tax reforms involved considerable sacrifice of the Centre's gross tax revenues, which were expected to fall short of the budget estimates for FY26. In spite of the appre-

hension of this revenue shortfall, the government was widely expected to adhere to its budgeted fiscal deficit target for FY26, the report said.

Finance Minister Nirmala

In the background of India's extensive bilateral trade agreements with other major economies or economic groups, India's medium-term prospects have brightened up

DK SRIVASTAVA | CHIEF POLICY ADVISOR, EY INDIA

Sitharaman has projected a further reduction in the fiscal deficit to 4.3 per cent of GDP for 2026-27 as the government continues on the path of fiscal consolidation to ensure economic growth with stability.

In her budget speech February 1, she said that the government had fulfilled its commit-

ment to reduce the fiscal deficit to 4.4 per cent in the Budget for 2025-26 and would now reduce it further to 4.3 per cent as it continues on the fiscal prudence path.

She said that the target reflects a balance between supporting economic momentum and keeping public finances stable. The fiscal deficit represents the gap between the government's total expenditure and its total revenue.

The Finance Minister said that the government would go for net borrowing of ₹11.7 lakh crore in FY27 from dated securities to fund its fiscal deficit, while the gross market borrowing is pegged at ₹17.2 lakh crore.

T20
WORLD CUP

Men in Blue stay in semis race

SHORT TAKES

Sujeet clinches gold at UWW Ranking Series



Tirana: U23 world champion Sujeet Kalkal clinched the gold medal in the men's 65kg freestyle category at the Muhamet Malo 2026 wrestling tournament. He topped the podium with four straight wins on technical superiority. The 23-year-old Indian dominated Azerbaijan's Rashid Babazade 10-0 in the final. He had a convincing 11-0 win over USA's two-time Pan American champion Joseph McKenna in the semifinal after beating Nika Zakashvili of Georgia 10-0 in the quarter-finals and starting his campaign with a 16-4 victory over Endrio Avdyli of Albania. This is his second straight gold medal in the 2026 UWW Ranking Series, following his Zagreb Open victory in Croatia earlier this month. Sujeet warmed up with a 16-4 victory over Endrio Avdyli, who tossed the Indian for a four at the start of the bout. Nika Zakashvili (Georgia) fell next, 10-0, before Sujeet defeated Joseph McKenna (USA), 11-0, the same scoreline as the one in the semifinals of the Zagreb Open. Rashid, who pulled off an incredible buzzer-beating four-pointer in the semifinals against Vitali Arujau (USA) to win 16-13, failed to put up a fight in the final. Sujeet laced him to win 10-0 to capture a second straight Ranking Series gold medal. Overall, this was Sujeet's fourth gold medal in the UWW circuit, having clinched the top spot at the 2022 Zouhaier Sghaier and the 2025 Polyak Imre & Varga Janos Memorial.

ABHISHEK, HARDIK HELP INDIA PULVERISE ZIMBABWE BY 72 RUNS



SA HAMMER WI, SEAL SEMIS SPOT

Ahmedabad: A clinical South Africa outclassed West Indies by nine wickets in their Super 8 clash to extend their unbeaten run and secured a semifinal berth following India's emphatic win over Zimbabwe in the T20 World Cup Thursday. A dominating show by the Proteas pacer was followed by authoritative batting. Yet again, South Africa executed their plans perfectly to further their cause, racking up their sixth win on the trot and halting West Indies' unbeaten run in the tournament. While South Africa took two vital points off the West Indies, hosts India recorded a 72-run victory over Zimbabwe in Chennai later in the day, a result that kept their own semifinal hopes alive and confirmed the Proteas' passage to the last four. The loss hurt the Caribbean side's net run rate that came down to 1.791 from a healthy 5.350. First it was South Africa pacers that rocked the West Indies' batting line-up before a lower-order fightback from Romario Shepherd (52 not out) and Jason Holder (49) lifted the two-time champions to 176 for eight. Then skipper Aiden Markram (82 not out), Quinton De Kock (47) and Ryan Rickelton (45 not out) batted with authority as the Proteas overhauled the target in 16.1 overs. By collecting 69 runs from the six Powerplay overs, the South Africans had demoralised the Windies attack. Except for a few hit-and-miss shots, the two openers controlled the proceedings.

India posted an imposing 256 for four - their highest ever total in T20 World Cups, and also the highest in this edition of the ICC showpiece

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, Feb 26: Abhishek Sharma rediscovered his form with a blazing fifty, Hardik Pandya bludgeoned a half-century and Tilak Varma allayed strike-rate worries in India's massive 72-run victory over Zimbabwe, keeping them alive in the race to the T20 World Cup semifinals here Thursday.

Along with that ticking of several boxes in their must-win Super Eight match here, India posted an imposing 256 for four - their highest ever total in T20 World Cups, and also the highest in this edition of the ICC showpiece.

In the tournament's scenario, India's win ensured South Africa's (4 points) entry into the last four from Group 1, leaving the hosts and the West Indies locked in a virtual knockout match at Kolkata on March 1. Both India and West Indies now have two points, going into their last group stage encounter.

But all of it could not have happened without contributions from Abhishek (55, 30b, 4x4, 4x6), Pandya (50 not out, 23b, 2x4, 4x6) and Tilak Varma (44 not out, 16b, 3x4, 4x6), which shaped India's recovery from a debilitating 76-run defeat to the Proteas in the previous match.

In reply, Zimbabwe could only garner 184 for six. Opener Brian Bennett, who clobbered Shivam Dube for 26 runs in an over, offered lone resistance with an unbeaten 59-ball 97, a

significance of its own, but the lead act was Abhishek.

ABHI-SHAKES OFF RUST

Since returning from a stomach bug, the Punjab batter looked a distant shadow of his dominating self, registering three ducks in a row. But on a smooth Chepauk pitch the left-hander found his bearings, also easing the worries of the Indian team management over the sudden slump in his form.

The 25-year-old was involved in two excellent partnerships - a 48 for the opening wicket with Sanju Samson and then a 72 off 42 balls with Ishan Kishan (38) for the following wicket - that gave the hosts a strong platform.

previous matches, in this game, putting his feet into better use.

However, the relief did not last long as India's middle-order batters, who were struggling to force pace on slower surfaces in earlier matches, rediscovered their range in the mixed soil surface at the MA Chidambaram Stadium.

Brief scores:

India 256 for 4 in 20 overs (Abhishek Sharma 55, Tilak Varma 44 not out, Hardik Pandya 50 not out; Sikandar Raza 1/29) beat **Zimbabwe** 184 for 6 in 20 overs (Brian Bennett 97 not out; Arshdeep Singh 3/24) by 72 runs

SUPER 8s STANDINGS							
Group-A							
TEAMS	M	W	L	N/R	PT	NRR	
South Africa	2	2	0	0	4	+2.89	
West Indies	2	1	1	0	2	+1.79	
India	2	1	1	0	2	-0.10	
Zimbabwe	2	0	2	0	0	-4.47	
Group-B							
TEAMS	M	W	L	N/R	PT	NRR	
England	2	2	0	0	4	+1.49	
New Zealand	2	1	0	1	3	+3.05	
Pakistan	2	0	1	1	1	-0.46	
Sri Lanka	2	0	2	0	0	-2.80	

well conceptualised knock but destined to be a mere footnote.

Cutting back to India's innings each of those three aforementioned knocks carried a

Nabi puts J&K in commanding position

The pace sensation's triple blow puts Jammu and Kashmir on top before Mayank's unbeaten ton



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hubballi, Feb 26: Jammu and Kashmir pacer Azuqib Nabi produced an excellent opening spell to dismantle Karnataka's top-order as his side stayed within sniffing distance of a historic Ranji Trophy title, re-

ducing the hosts to 220 for five here Thursday.

J&K posted 584 in their first innings and were all out on the third day.

The 29-year-old tore through the Karnataka top-order with figures of 3 for 32 in 14 overs, bowling nine overs on the trot

in a relentless first spell that rattled some of the well-known names of Indian cricket.

Nabi drew first blood removing KL Rahul.

He then struck twice in two balls to put Karnataka in bigger trouble. First, he removed India international Karun Nair with

an unplayable delivery that angled in and darted away after pitching to knock the top of off stump, and then, dismissed the in-form Smaran Ravichandran in the very next delivery.

Veteran Mayank Agarwal (130 batting; 207 balls) consolidated in the final session with resolute defensive technique to keep Jammu and Kashmir waiting. He also rode his luck, surviving a chance when he was dropped on 124.

Despite his resistance, Karnataka were still trailing by 364 runs at stumps and need another 165 runs to avoid a follow-on.

Having made their Ranji Trophy debut in 1959-60, Jammu and Kashmir reached their maiden semifinal and have continued their dream run in the final.

Nabi has been their stand-out performer throughout the campaign, and the day's haul took his season's tally to 58 wickets, just one shy of Uttarakhand spinner Mayank Mishra's 59 scalps.

Gukesh draws with Niemann in Prague International Chess



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Prague, Feb 26: World champion D Gukesh survived some anxious moments in the early middle game before finally drawing with Hans Moke Niemann of the United States in the first round of the masters section of the Prague International Chess Festival here.

The Berlin defense that went wrong for white could be a perfect heading for the encounter between the world champion and Niemann, who is walking his way to the elite chess circles after being indirectly accused of foul play.

It may be recalled that the American infamously won a game against world number

one Magnus Carlsen, which will now be documented in a forthcoming Netflix series.

Niemann came all guns blazing and sacrificed a piece with black piece as early as on move 13 to put Gukesh on the back foot despite having the white pieces.

The Indian was down but not out which he proved as the game progressed, and even though, black seemed like pushing for more with his extra pawns in exchange for the sacrificed knight, Gukesh ensured that he stayed in the game.

The eventual outcome was a draw, the lone one in the 10-player, nine round tournament that saw everyone with white pieces triumph in contrasting styles.

ISL: Dejan strike gives FC Goa three points

Fatorda: Dejan Drazic's first half strike proved decisive as FC Goa edged past Sporting Club Delhi 1-0 to register their second consecutive victory in the Indian Super League, here Thursday. The Gaurs provisionally climbed to the top of the table with seven points from three matches, while SC Delhi remain at the bottom. Dejan was adjudged the Player of the Match. Both sides enjoyed spells of pressure in the opposition half, but clear-cut openings were at a premium as neither attack was able to break down resolute defending for long stretches by either side. Sandesh Jhingam came closest for the hosts when he glanced a header narrowly wide of the target. At the other end, Matija Babovic tried his luck from distance, forcing Hrithik Tiwari to palm the effort away before Abdul Hudu also tested the goalkeeper. FC Goa broke the deadlock two minutes before half-time through a well-taken strike from Dejan. Left-back Akash Sangwan delivered a curling cross from the left wing to the far post, where Dejan timed his run to perfection and finished clinically past the goalkeeper, scoring his third goal of the season.



SNIPPETS

Blitzer joins bidding war for IPL teams

London: Billionaire David Blitzer is eyeing a majority stake in an Indian Premier League cricket team and is holding talks with two franchises, two sources said, stoking a bidding war against Manchester United co-chairman Avram Glazer and Indian tycoons. US-based Blitzer, co-founder of Harris Blitzer Sports & Entertainment and an executive at asset manager Blackstone Group, is conducting due diligence on Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Rajasthan Royals, two people with direct knowledge of the discussions said. The talks value Royal Challengers Bengaluru, last year's IPL champions, at around \$1.8 billion, three sources said. A stake in the IPL would further diversify Blitzer's global sports portfolio, which includes stakes in the major North American professional sports leagues. The growing interest in IPL franchises is driven by rising team revenues and the Twenty20 league's record valuation, which investment bank Houlihan Lokey put at \$18.5 billion last year.



Ronaldo acquires 25% stake in Almeria

Washington: Cristiano Ronaldo has acquired a 25% stake in Spanish second-tier side Almeria, the club said Thursday. The Portuguese forward, who spent nine years at Real Madrid and is the club's all-time top goalscorer, invested in Almeria through his company CR7 Sports. Almeria, who were relegated from LaLiga in 2023-24 and were taken over by Saudi-based SMC Group in 2025, did not disclose the financial terms of the deal. "The agreement is part of the international expansion of the club driven by president Mohamed Al Keriji through his business holding SMC Group," Almeria said in a statement. Ronaldo, 41, has been playing for Saudi Arabian top-flight club Al-Nassr since 2023. "UD Almeria is a Spanish club with a strong foundation and clear growth potential. I wish to work with the team leading the club to support it in its new phase of growth," Ronaldo said in a statement shared by Almeria.



Last laugh for Vinicius as Real Madrid knock Benfica out

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Madrid, Feb 26: With the winning goal and another corner-flag dance, Vinicius Junior fittingly had the final say in an emotionally charged rematch with Benfica to guide Real Madrid into the round of 16 of the Champions League Wednesday.

Defending champion Paris Saint-Germain also advanced out of the playoffs - but only after narrowly getting past Monaco - while Atalanta pulled off a remarkable comeback against Borussia Dortmund with a dramatic last-second goal to maintain Italian involvement in the competition.

Juventus fell short of completing its own stunning second-leg recovery, though, eliminated by Galatasaray after extra time.

Vinicius jeered by Benfica fans

Playing a week after being the target of alleged racial abuse in the first leg against Benfica, Vinicius wrapped up Madrid's 2-1 win over the Portuguese team - and a 3-1 victory on aggregate - with his team's second goal in the 80th minute at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. The Brazil star slotted a low

finish into the corner and celebrated his goal like he did last week, by dancing beside the corner flag.

Vinicius was loudly booed by Benfica fans nearly every time he touched the ball, a hangover from the first leg when he accused Benfica player Gianluca Prestianni of calling him a "monkey".

Prestianni has denied racially insulting Vinicius while confronting him with his jersey over his mouth, but did not play Wednesday's game after being provisionally banned for one match by UEFA. Benfica coach Jose Mourinho, who previously led Madrid, was also suspended for the game so didn't take his place in the dugout.

Benfica opened the scoring in the 14th minute through Rafa Silva to briefly bring the score level at 1-1 on aggregate, only for Aurelien Tchouameni to equalize two minutes later for Madrid.

Madrid maintained its record of playing in the round of 16 every year this century and will

play either Manchester City or Sporting Lisbon next.

PSG keeps title defense alive

PSG also survived an early scare in the second leg to advance out of the playoffs for a second straight season.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE



Protecting a 3-2 lead from last week, the titleholder went behind to Maghnes Akliouches's 45th-minute goal but was then boosted by a red card to Monaco's Mamadou Coulibaly in the 58th. Goals by Marquinhos and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia put PSG in front in the game. Jordan Teze's stoppage-time equalizer came too late for Monaco.

PSG's reward is a meeting with either Barcelona or Chelsea.

PSG right back Achraf Hakimi played a day after being ordered to stand trial in a rape case.

Juve comeback stamped out by Galatasaray

Juventus almost pulled off one of the great Champions League recoveries.

Trailing 5-2 from the first leg, Juve went ahead against Galatasaray when Manuel Locatelli converted a penalty before halftime and overcame a defender Lloyd Kelly by scoring more goals through Federico Gatti and Weston McKennie to take the game to extra time.

It could have been worse for Galatasaray, with Kenan Yildiz also hitting the post for Juventus in regulation.

Galatasaray fought back in the added 30 minutes with an extra man, scoring through Victor Osimhen and Baris Yilmaz as Juve won 3-2 on the night but lost 7-5 on aggregate.

Atalanta the only Italian team standing after wild finish

With Juventus out, Italy's record of having at least one team in the round of 16 since that stage was reintroduced to the Champions League in 2003-04 was only maintained thanks to Atalanta's remarkable fightback against Dortmund.

Atalanta substitute Lazar Samardzic converted a penalty with the last kick of the game in the eighth minute of stoppage time following a video review to seal a 4-1 win on the night and a 4-3 victory on aggregate.

Extra time was looming when a mistake by Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel allowed Atalanta to launch one last attack, after the allotted three minutes of stoppage time had been played. Bodav/Glint, Atletico Madrid, Newcastle and Bayer Leverkusen all advanced from the playoffs Tuesday.