



**SERIOUS ALLEGATION**  
Actor Nayanthara reveals how she was once offered a pivotal role in a film in exchange of favours  
**LEISURE P2**



**NORTH KOREA WARNS US**  
North Korea says it is ready to counter US military moves with the 'most overwhelming nuclear force' over drills with South  
**INTERNATIONAL P10**



**INDIA FACE DENMARK**  
India look to save their place in Group I when they face Denmark in the Davis Cup play-off tie, starting today  
**SPORTS P12**

**SHORT TAKES**

**Ganjam man held by Surat police**

**Surat:** Dilip Pandi, hailing from Odisha's Ganjam district was arrested Thursday for allegedly placing benches on the tracks in a bid to derail the Pune-Ahmedabad Ahimsa Express in December 2017 in Gujarat, a Surat police official said. On Thursday, the incident occurred December 28, but a mishap was averted after the driver of the Ahimsa Express managed to apply brakes in time, police said. Since then Pandi had been on the run. Police said that Pandi is a known history-sheeter and has been involved in selling of narcotics in the AK Road slum area here. He was wanted in two other cases, but had been evading arrest. Police managed to nab him acting on a tip-off

**Journo Kappan finally walks out of prison**

**Lucknow:** Kerala journalist Siddique Kappan walked out of jail here Thursday at around 9.15am, a day after the sureties required for his bail were submitted in court. "I struggled," Kappan said minutes after he walked out to camera crews, a small curious crowd - and to his wife and teen son, waiting patiently, just as they had for the more than two years since he was imprisoned on his way to Hathras. "It has been 28 months. I am out after a lot of fight. I am happy," Kappan added.



**IN ADVENTURE MOOD:** Tourists brave the swirling waves of river Ganga in rafts at Rishikesh in Uttarakhand's Dehradun district Thursday

**BUDGET SESSION OF ODISHA ASSEMBLY TO COMMENCE FEB 21**

**POST NEWS NETWORK**  
**Bhubaneswar, Feb 2:** The Budget Session of the Odisha Assembly will commence February 21, an official notification said Thursday. The session will commence with the customary address by Governor Professor Ganeshi Lal on the opening day. It will continue till April 6 in two phases, the notification issued by the Odisha Legislative Assembly said. The Motion of Thanks on the Governor's speech will also be moved on the first day. Further, discussion on the Governor's address will be conducted over the next two days (February 22 & 23). Finance Minister Niranjan Pujari will present the annual budget for 2023-24 financial year in the House February 24, while the Appropriation Bill will be tabled March 31, the notification said. The general discussion on the budget will start from February 27, it added. "In exercise of the powers conferred on me by Clause (1) of Article 174 of the Constitution of India, I hereby summon the 12th Session of the 16th Odisha Legislative Assembly to meet at 11.00am on February 21," Governor Lal stated. **Contd... on P4**

**Oppn seeks Adani probe**

13 parties come together demanding JPC or SC-monitored investigation into allegations made by Hindenburg

**AGENCIES**  
**New Delhi, Feb 2:** Industrialist Gautam Adani has been successful in doing something which many other illustrious political leaders have failed to do in the recent past and that is to unite the Opposition. Adani, who has been under fire since the Hindenburg Research report, was the hot topic of discussion in both Houses of the Parliament on the third day of the Budget Session here Thursday. Parliament was adjourned for the day after the Opposition stalled proceedings in both the Houses, demanding a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) or a Supreme Court-monitored probe into the allegations of fraud and manipulation against billionaire Adani's companies that have triggered an unprecedented stock crash. A united Opposition, led by the Congress, raised the issue as soon as the Houses commenced for the day with their MPs giving adjournment notices for a discussion on the issue. The chair in both the Upper and Lower Houses rejected the notices, prompting Opposition leaders to question the presiding officers on procedures and asking what could be more serious than demanding a discussion involving hard-earned money of Indians in LIC and SBI invested in the Adani Group stocks. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla denied the request for discussion, asking members to 'not to make unsubstantiated claims' while Rajya Sabha Chairperson, Vice-



Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and representatives of other political parties talk to the media Thursday

**Market losses of Adani Group have gone up to approximately ₹8.5 lakh crore**  
**LIC has invested approximately ₹30K crore in Adani Group**  
**Govt-run banks have lent more than USD 9 billion (approx ₹74K crore) to 5 companies of Adani Group**  
of various parties giving notices under Rule 267 seeking suspension of the day's business to discuss the Adani-Hindenburg issue. In the Lok Sabha too, the Opposition MPs stormed the Well forcing adjournment within minutes of the House meeting and then again soon after lunch. Leaders of several parties including the Congress, DMK, TMC, SP, JD (U), Shiv Sena, CPI(M), CPI, NCP, IUML, NC, AAP and the Kerala Congress, earlier held a meeting in the morning in Kharge's chamber in the Parliament, where they strategised their plan. Kharge told reporters that the Opposition parties have also called for day-to-day reporting of the JPC or the SC-monitored probe into the issue as it concerned public money invested in Adani stocks which have taken a beating on the markets ever since the Hindenburg charges came out. "Keeping public interest in mind, we want a thorough probe into the Adani issue either by the JPC or the Supreme Court-monitored probe. There should also be day-to-day reporting of the investigation on the issue," Kharge later told reporters along with a host of representatives of other parties. The Opposition protest came a day after Adani Enterprises recalled its full-subscribed ₹20,000-crore Follow-on Public Offer (FPO) and said it will return the proceeds to investors. Opposition parties also targeted the government over the issue and asked why it was silent on the allegations and why no investigation has been ordered so far. **MORE P11**

**Odisha's allocation hiked by ₹3K crore**

**POST NEWS NETWORK**  
**New Delhi, Feb 2:** Odisha will receive ₹46,251 crore, an increase of ₹3,261 crore, as the share of Union Taxes and Duties for the year 2023-24. The Union government will distribute a total amount of ₹10.21 lakh crore to the states, says the section 'Receipt Budget, 2023-24'. There are various heads under which Odisha will receive the above mentioned amount. The state will receive ₹14,955 crore under central GST, ₹14,803 crore as Corporation Tax, ₹14,401 crore under Income Tax, ₹1,467 crore under Customs, ₹624 crore as Excise Duty and ₹9.28 crore as Service Tax. Odisha had received ₹42,989.33 crore for the year 2022-23 as per the revised estimates. According to the Union government, the distribution was planned as per the recommendation of the 15th Finance Commission which fixed the share of states at 41 per cent of the net proceeds of sharable Central Taxes. Accordingly, Odisha is entitled to receive 4.528 per cent of share of Union taxes. Uttar Pradesh will receive around 18 per cent of the shares of Union Taxes and duties which is the highest among all states and amounts to ₹1,83,237.59 crore. The second highest share has gone to Bihar which will receive ₹1,02,737 crore. **Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman tabled Wednesday the Budget for 2023-24 in the Lok Sabha. The Budget allocation to the Indian Railways always assumes significance. In the budget, the Finance Minister announced highest-ever outlay of ₹2.40 lakh crore for the Indian Railways. Such a huge outlay will help the Indian Railways roll out major projects, new 'Vande Bharat' trains and the electrification of new railway lines. Sources said that Odisha is all set to feature prominently in the allocation of the Railway Budget. With the Railway Minister from Odisha, the expectations are sky high. It should however, be stated that giving his reaction Wednesday to the Budget, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik had expressed concern at the reduction of funds for MGNREGS.**

**IRREGULAR by MANJUL**



I'm a loyal worker. I worked for the world's 3rd, 8th & 15th richest men - all in a week. But they were all the same persons!

**MARKET WATCH**

INDEX	VAIATION
SENSEX	59932.24 ↑ 224.16
NIFTY	17610.40 ↓ 5.90
DOLLAR	81.69 ↑ ₹0.15
EURO	89.53 ↓ ₹0.28
GOLD	₹57,950 ↓ ₹2
SILVER	₹71,527 ↑ ₹1686

**WEATHER**

	BHUB	CTK
TEMP MAX	32.2°C	30.8°C
TEMP MIN	16.5°C	16.6°C
Humidity	63%	60%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
Forecast	Dry weather likely	

**2 minors drown in Malkangiri**

**POST NEWS NETWORK**  
**Malkangiri, Feb 2:** Two minor girls met their watery grave Thursday as they fell into a water-filled pit at Dhepasahi under Chitrakonda police limits in this district. The deceased were identified as Subhadra Kamar (4) and Sumi Janam (3). Local residents pointed out that the pit had been constructed by a contractor. He used to store water there when his company was constructing a road in the locality. The two girls were playing near the pit when they accidentally slipped into it and fell. As there was no one nearby, their cries for help went unheeded. When the two girls did not return home, the family members started looking for them frantically. They discovered the two girls inside the pit. Villagers rushed to the spot and rescued the two girls in a critical condition. The two were rushed to a local hospital nearby, but doctors pronounced the two dead on arrival. A pall of gloom descended on the village as news of the demise of the two kids spread. Locals alleged that they had requested the contractor to fill up the pit once the construction of the road was over. They pointed that despite doing so, the pit had been left unattended. The villagers said that had the large hole full of water had been covered, tragedy could have been averted. They demanded stringent action against the contractor. On being informed, police reached the spot and launched a probe into the matter.

**NASA's electric plane set for take-off**

These flights will greatly reduce carbon emission and make the world a better place to breathe in

**AGENCIES**  
**Cambridge, Feb 2:** The experimental aircraft 'X-57', developed by Nasa, is due to fly for the first time within the next few months. It has an impressive 14 propellers along its wings and is powered entirely by electricity. This may be just the first step to finding an alternative to aviation fuels considering the fight against global warming and climate change. The demand for aviation is growing, but at the same time people are wanting to get rid of fossil fuels. The 'X-57' uses lithium batteries to run electric motors for its propellers. But the energy one gets from batteries, relative to their weight, is 50 times less than one can get from aviation fuel. The 'X-57' is a modified, four-seater, Italian-built 'Tecnam P2006T' aircraft. It relies on a combination of lots of propellers, small motors and many batteries spread out across an aircraft, known as 'distributed propulsion'. As of now however, using it in a commercial way is ruled out. However, what needs to be noted that it is the first step towards developing an aircraft that does not run on aviation fuel. What's different about the 'X-57' is that the wings are completely redesigned with propellers positioned to optimise air flow around them. When a propeller is not needed, its blades can be folded back to reduce drag. Propeller technology generally



The aircraft will have 14 propellers and a flight time of 1 hour  
The new aircraft can carry 10 passengers and travel 160km

and a flight time of about one hour, the 'X-57' is not expected to lead to a replacement technology for long-haul flying. Instead, short-hop flights with 10 or so passengers are a good and potentially possible target for early, battery-powered flights. An area of concern however, is the lithium-ion batteries. This is because they are heavy and are prone to catching fire easily. In such a situation it will be an important challenge for electric aircraft developers to overcome. There are advantages to using batteries. Their weight stays constant throughout the flight, meaning they don't need to be stored in the wings as aviation fuel traditionally has been. These aircraft might more resemble helicopters than aircraft, and might mean conventional airports with long runways and large terminals will be a thing of the past. However, who cares as long as carbon emission is prevented, researchers said. With a range of about 160km

# leisure



## FILMING HARRY POTTER WAS SUFFOCATING: RUPERT GRINT

Actor Rupert Grint was only 11 years old when he was cast in *Harry Potter* and was 22 years old by the time the film series ended. In a recent interview, Grint said taking on the role of Ron Weasley was not easy and that he found filming "suffocating."

## WILL SMITH SHOULD BE FORGIVEN FOR HIS OSCAR SLAP: SERENA

Tennis legend Serena Williams believes that Hollywood star Will Smith should be forgiven for the 'mistake' of slapping Chris Rock at the Oscars last year. Serena, whose rise to the top of the sporting world was documented in the film, regrets how the slap overshadowed Will's Oscar triumph.



### FORTUNE FORECAST

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**ARIES**  
You are an imaginative and enterprising person, and today you may taste success. Ganesh says that you are ambitious but warns you not to take on more work than you can handle. You are positive about your capabilities, so work sincerely and have faith in God.

**TAURUS**  
This is one of those days when not goes well, warns Ganesh. No matter how hard you try you may not be able to keep problems and difficulties at bay. You may not be pleased or comfortable doing what has been assigned, or required, and could simply sit sullenly, doing nothing.

**GEMINI**  
Your mind will be uneasy and anxious due to some reason today. You will be unable to express your anxieties. You will be able to secure the love of your partner by sharing your feelings. You need to let go of the past and strive to keep on moving forward with confidence, says Ganesh.

**CANCER**  
A restless or irritating mood is indicated. Keep you cool and be calm even in adverse circumstances, suggests Ganesh. If you do so, you will always succeed in life. It is difficult to wriggle out of adversity, if you have hot temper.

**LEO**  
You will seek the opinion of others in a lot of matters today. You need to patiently listen to others and keep your lips sealed during the course of conversations today. Your self-confidence may take a beating today, hence do not take any important decisions. It is time for a major change in your work or field of work, says Ganesh.

**VIRGO**  
You will remain engrossed in personal matters at the cost of professionalism. Solve your problems today by taking them head-on. Ganesh warns you not to let your emotions suppress your enterprising spirit, especially in the evening.

**LIBRA**  
Ganesh says you will showcase your ability and skills today in your work field and impress people. You will develop and express your inner love for art and artistic things and you will purchase a new work of art today. Ganesh showers you with all his blessings.

**SCORPIO**  
According to Ganesh, you will be soaked in your work today. During the day, you may be loaded with duties and responsibilities, however, evening has a different story to reveal. Exciting as ever, a get away with friends may be liberating and relaxing.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
A day to full of caution, warns Ganesh. There are chances that your heart will find its partner, forcing you to fall in love. You may be cupid's next prey. However, watch your steps, as the initial stages of a relationship may be fragile and need to be handled with care. Also, it's time to guard your reputation.

**CAPRICORN**  
Forced to some backbreaking work today, you will feel exhausted by the end of the day. It is a cut-throat competition when it comes to the business world. Your arch rivals are looking out for one small opportunity to damage your business and reputation. But, you are no less. You understand their moves. Ganesh predicts that you will be ready with the equally strong counter attack and fight back.

**AQUARIUS**  
Academically, you have performed exceptionally well, and Ganesh 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.

**PISCES**  
The day will be exceptional for working people as the planets seemed to be aligned perfectly, portends Ganesh. You will achieve all the expected results in the office and/or at work today. Those looking to pursue further studies in foreign countries will also make progress and come closer to fulfilling their dreams.

## CASTING COUCH

# Nayanthara's shocking revelation

**Mumbai:** Nayanthara is undoubtedly one of the prominent actresses of the Indian film industry. However, the actress has had her fair share of struggles in her career.

In a recent media interaction, she reportedly spoke about the casting couch in the Indian entertainment industry and revealed how she was once offered a pivotal role in a film in exchange of favours.

The Jawan actress reportedly said that she was brave and had directly rejected the offer to act in the film as she believes only in her acting skills.

Nayanthara's revelations about the casting couch may spark a fresh debate on this serious issue in the film industry and the Me Too movement. The revelation of the 'Lady Superstar' is a reminder that the 'casting couch' problem has existed in the film industry for a long time.

Nayanthara took a break from the film industry for months for her twin children. But the actor will soon join the shooting of *Jawaan* directed by Atlee starring Shah Rukh Khan. Jaawan will be Nayanthara's first Hindi film.



## When Priyanka felt 'utterly insignificant'

**Mumbai:** Actress Priyanka Chopra is one of the most famous Indian actors, who is known the world over. However, in an old interview, the actor had spoken about feeling 'utterly insignificant'.

"I was shooting at the Rohtang Pass near Manali recently. Around me was an expanse of land that seemed endless, a grandeur I'd never seen before. I looked below and saw a river. A

man was trying to cross it along with a child on a mule. The boy was coughing and sneezing, I guessed he was unwell. Next, I saw the old man take off his own woollen cape and wrap the child in it. It was freezing 3 degree Celsius but the man braved the cold just so he could keep the boy warm. Watching this scene made me feel utterly insignificant. At that point I felt I hadn't done enough for anyone in life," Priyanka told a film magazine.

She had further said, "We are such a small part of the universe and yet we like to play God. Also, we are constantly harping about I, me and myself. That's so sad. We need to really go out there and do our bit."

IANS

## NAT'L THEATRE FESTIVAL: DAY 2

# Yeh Hai Bombay Meri Jaan tickles viewers' funny bones



**Bhubaneswar:** Artistes of Mumbai-based theatre troupe Ekjute presented Hindi play *Yeh Hai Bombay Meri Jaan* here at Rabindra Mandap, Thursday, on the second day of Purva Ranga-2023.

The national theatre festival is being organised by Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi (OSNA) in collaboration with Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre (EZCC), Ministry of Culture, Kolkata and Odisha Natya Sangh (ONS), Bhubaneswar.

The 130 minutes drama directed by eminent theatre personality Nadira Zahir Babbar gave an insight into the numerous strugglers who are willing to sacrifice everything to achieve even an iota of their dreams in the 'Dream City' Mumbai.

Everyday thousands flock to the city to fulfill their dream. The city tests them, changes them, challenges them and absorbs them. No matter if people love or hate the city but at the end of the day they all feel - *Yeh Hai Bombay Meri Jaan*, said the director.

Sangram Shukla, Yudhvir Dahiya, Manav Pande, Rajiv Singh, Devesh, Debashree Ghosh, Manjari Mishra and Sushmita Rana were among the actors who performed on stage.

Dignitaries present on the occasion included I&PR Director Indramani Tripathy, dramatist Ramesh Panigrahi, poet Hrushikesh Mallik, OSNA president Aruna Mohanty and secretary Prabodh Rath.

## Susmita Das' Hum Agar Nahin tells the importance of wetlands

**Bhubaneswar:** Wetlands International, a global not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the conservation and restoration of wetlands, released a music video on World Wetlands Day, Thursday. Titled *Hum Agar Nahin*, the music video by Susmita Das in collaboration with Auromira Entertainment, sheds light on the importance of wetlands. The video has been shot in the wetlands around Chilika lake.

Directed by Dev Meher, composed by Abhijeet Mishra and sung by Das, the video serves as a reminder to protect critical ecosystems and take action to conserve and restore them.

The video features actors Dipanwit Dashmohapatra and Cookies Swain while the lines have been penned soulfully by Rajkumar Mahto. Pratap Rout is the director of photography.



Wetlands are facing numerous threats, including habitat destruction and degradation, and climate change, making their preservation crucial for the well-being of the environment and humanity, according to the makers.

"I like to focus on songs that are contemporary on social issues. The song and video aim to raise awareness about the importance of wetlands," said the Sangeet Natak Akademi winning singer.

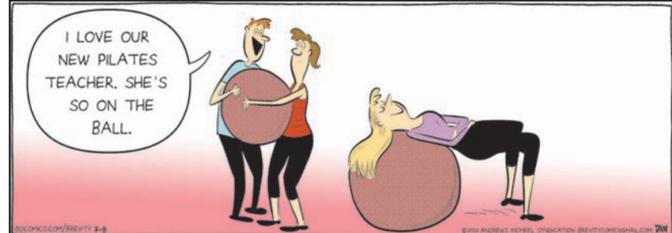
### PEANUTS



### CALVIN AND HOBBS

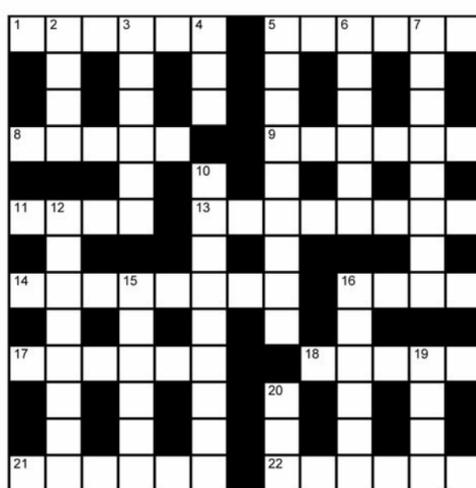


### BREVITY



## FUN post

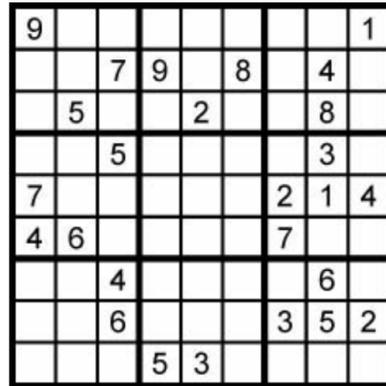
### CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 On the up and up
  - 5 Lacking personal depth
  - 8 Coastline
  - 9 Average
  - 11 Region or district
  - 13 Bath
  - 14 Peace officer or military man
  - 16 Airport feature
  - 17 Probability
  - 18 Goad (3,2)
  - 21 Dire emergency
  - 22 Avaricious
- Down**
- 2 Solemn promise
  - 3 Come to the surface
  - 4 Golf item
  - 5 Requirement of etiquette or custom
  - 6 Recognition for an act
  - 7 Idler
  - 10 Birds in a cage, usually
  - 12 Eavesdrop
  - 15 Mozart was one
  - 16 Foolish laugh
  - 19 Roman poet
  - 20 Run for exercise

### 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



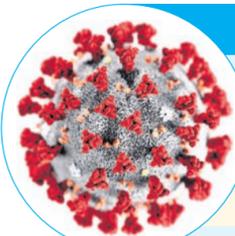
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

# downtown



## FOR A CAUSE

Veteran singer Anuradha Paudwal addressed a press meet on 'Screening and Diagnosis of Early Hearing Loss' at The Press Club of Odisha in Bhubaneswar, Thursday



## COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	67,55,83,121	64,79,24,317	67,65,923
India	4,46,83,023	4,41,50,519	5,30,741
Odisha	13,36,304	13,26,915	9,204

## FRESH ROW OVER AYUSHMAN BHARAT

# Budget exposes BJP's false propaganda: BJD

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) Thursday said that the Union budget has exposed the Bharatiya Janata Party's false propaganda and deception on Ayushman Bharat scheme.

Addressing mediapersons here, BJD spokesperson Shreemayee Mishra said that on a regular basis, Odisha BJP has been harping on how Ayushman Bharat Yojana is a better programme than the state government's Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana (BSKY).

However, Wednesday's Union Budget has exposed the Odisha BJP's false propaganda and deception on Ayushman Yojana, she said.

Under the outlay on major schemes in the Union Budget for the year 2023-24, the Centre has provided only ₹7,200 crore towards Ayushman Bharat.

"When we take into consideration India's 28 states and 8 Union territories, per state/UT, it comes to around ₹200 crore per annum for Ayushman Bharat Yojana," Mishra said.

On the other hand, she said, the BJD government spends about ₹6,000 crore under its BSKY which is on average about ₹200 crore per district per year in Odisha.

It means, ₹200 crore of Ayushman Bharat scheme per year would only cover one district of Odisha. Where would the rest 29 districts of Odisha go? What relief do the people of Odisha get?, she asked.

Another BJD leader Gautambuddha Das said a woman can only avail treatment of ₹5 lakh



BJD spokesperson Shreemayee Mishra addressing the media

The regional party draws a comparison between state govt's BSKY and Centre's Ayushman Bharat and explains how the former is more beneficial for the people of the state

The party says the Centre has provided only ₹7,200 crore towards Ayushman Bharat in this Union Budget which comes to around ₹200 crore per annum for each state, but the Odisha govt spends about ₹200 crore per district per year under BSKY on an average

The BJP says the recent misuse of BSKY cards by a private hospital in Cuttack clearly suggests that the scheme is riddled with corruption

under Ayushman Bharat while she can avail upto ₹10 lakh under the state scheme.

Similarly, under Ayushman Bharat, a patient requiring organ transplant cannot exceed the limit of ₹5 lakh but in BSKY, the beneficiary can benefit far exceeding the ₹5 lakh limit.

The BJD leaders urged the Odisha BJP leaders to stop misleading people.

On Wednesday, the Chief Minister had also drawn a similar comparison between the state and central schemes.

Reacting to this, state BJP president Samir Mohanty said that the recent misuse of BSKY cards by a private hospital in Cuttack clearly suggests that the scheme is riddled with corruption. He said the statement of BJD seems to be politically motivated.

On the remark of Patnaik, Mohanty said it is totally unacceptable from a person who has remained in power for the last 23 years.

## Prez Murmu to visit Odisha February 10

Bhubaneswar: President Droupadi Murmu is scheduled to undertake a two-day visit to the state February 10. She will attend the second convocation of Rama Devi Women's University in the state capital during her visit to the state. Sources said, it was the President herself, who had earlier evinced interest to attend the convocation of her alma mater and wrote to the Governor and Chancellor of the University, Ganeshi Lal, expressing her willingness for the same. As per the President's itinerary, she will reach Bhubaneswar at about 11:45am February 10 and attend a function marking the Foundation Day of Jananabha Mission. She is scheduled to attend 2nd Convocation of RD Women's University in the afternoon. Notably, Murmu had completed her graduation from RD Women's College in 1979.

## POLITICKLE by MANJUL



# MUKTA for urban poor gets global recognition

The programme was launched after Covid-19 to create mass employment opportunities for the urban poor and migrant labourers

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar Feb 2: Mukhyamantri Karma Tatpara Abhiyan (MUKTA), an urban livelihood promotion programme under 5T Initiative, bagged the World Resources Institute (WRI), Ross Centre Prize for cities for the year 2021-22, Thursday.

Housing and Urban Development (H&UD) principal secretary G Mathi Vathanan received the International Award in the event held at the Ford Foundation Centre for Social Justice in the New York

City. H&UD joint secretary Sarada Prasad Panda has accompanied Mathi Vathanan for the event.

MUKTA was selected as a winner among 260 applications from 155 cities in 65 countries.

Chief Minister Naven Patnaik congratulated the team and Housing and Urban Development department on their successful journey. In his twitter account Patnaik said, "Congratulations to H&UD department on winning WRI Ross Cities Ross Center Prize 2021-22 for cities for #MUKTA scheme. Glad to know that our effort to create mass employment opportunities for vulnerable people during COVID19 has been appreciated at global level."

The Prize for Cities, WRI's Urban Transformation Award recognises the leaders trying to create more sustainable and inclusive cities worldwide. The award acknowl-



edged MUKTA's innovative approach to respond uncertainty, disruption and crisis by creating mass employment opportunities for the urban poor and migrant labourers by engaging them in development work of cities to live at ease in times of turbulence.

Till date, 7 lakh urban poor and migrant workers across Odisha's 114 cities have got enrolled in 22,500 community-level development works worth ₹208 crore, which include paved roads, drains, rain-water harvesting, community cen-

tres, plantation, water bodies rejuvenation and public space development.

Also, 5,368 Mission Shakti groups and 438 slum dwellers' associations have been engaged as the implementation partners under MUKTA.

The scheme got appreciation for entrusting Mission Shakti Groups for their responsibilities in executing the scheme and associating Slum Dwellers Association instead of engaging contractors. The scheme also helps in creating community-level civic facilities in an equitable manner.

The Centre has appreciated and applauded the state's effort and recommended the model for other states. States like Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu have shown their interest in rolling out such plans for the urban poor.

## Legal system must continue to serve people: CJ Muralidhar



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: Orissa High Court Chief Justice S Muralidhar Thursday inaugurated the Gram Nyayalaya, Korukunda, at Malkangiri through videoconferencing in the presence of Justice MS Raman, the Administrative Judge of Malkangiri Judgeship and other judges of the High Court.

Justice Muralidhar said, "The opening of this Gram Nyayalaya is significant as it assures the people that judicial system works for

them." Congratulating the judicial officers and lawyers at Malkangiri, he said, "This court will introduce a section of population to the legal system, making it more inclusive."

He also encouraged them to acknowledge the problems faced by people and work to mitigate their miseries, adding, "The judicial institution is for people and must continue to serve the people, upholding the constitutional promises of equal and fair justice."

It is the 19th Gram Nyayalaya out of 24 notified by the state government. Among others, the district and sessions judge Ajanta Sarangi; Collector and DM Vishal Singh; Superintendent of Police Nitesh Wadhvani; District Bar Association president Prakash Chandra Mohanty and secretary Nrusingh Charan Mohanty were present at the function, through virtual mode.



BAMBOO CRAFT: An artisan busy preparing a replica of an elephant using bamboo flakes near Adivasi Ground in Bhubaneswar, Thursday

## 2,400-page chargesheet against Archana, hubby

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: A 2,400-page chargesheet has been filed against black-mailer Archana Nag and her husband Jagabandhu Chand in connection with the honeytrap case, by the Khandagiri police, Thursday. "We have attached many evidence such as eyewitness statements, forensic evidence and call record analysis and Whatsapp chats in the 2,400-page chargesheet which was submitted in the court today (Thursday)," said Dayanidhi Nayak, the Inspector In-Charge of Khandagiri police station.

According to Nayak, under Section 419 (cheating by impersonation) and 465 (forgery) of the IPC, the final chargesheet got sub-

mitted as per the investigation.

The chargesheet also contains digital and forensic evidence. The police failed to collect any evidence against Archana's business partner and co-accused Khageswar Patra.

The cops also found some suspicious financial transactions done by the blackmailer and her husband. Nayak revealed that cops had collected suspicious transaction details of more than ₹1 crore.

Archana's former associate Shradhanjali Behera had filed another complaint against the co-accused Jagabandhu and Khageswar, allegedly for black-mailing her to extort bigwigs. Reportedly, Khandagiri police had arrested Archana and Jagabandhu in the case in October 2022.

# Myo-Mission aims to develop therapies for rare diseases

About 95% of rare diseases do not have a treatment, and in most cases the patients have to live with extreme disability, often also leading to death

Researchers are working on a new platform that aims to develop several treatments, including gene and mRNA therapies, for three rare diseases which are estimated to affect about one million people in India.

The Myo-Mission anchored by Ashoka University, Sonipat in partnership with 18 institutions and 38 investigators across India, will enhance capabilities for carrying out future clinical trials for Duchene Muscular Dystrophy (DMD), GNE Myopathy and Limb-Girdle Muscular Dystrophy (LGMD).

All the three diseases either lead to muscular weakness or muscle wasting, and can cause permanent disability.

"In India, estimates suggest that the three diseases combined affect about one million people. The burden of these debilitating, often incurable diseases is made greater by the rarity and lack of diagnosis and treatment options in India," said Alok Bhattacharya, Professor of Biology at Ashoka University.

"Our goal is to develop patient cohorts, create a comprehensive database, and conduct research on disease progression to pave the way for clinical trials," Bhattacharya told PTL.

In its Phase 1, the mission plans to have five clinical centres in Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi and Anand in Gujarat that have been managing patients of these diseases.

The mission researchers plan on different aspects such as developing systems or technology platforms for therapeutic molecules for treatment, as well as developing animal and cellular models for testing purposes.

The clinical groups associated with the mission will also monitor the progression of the disease for the Indian patients, the researchers said.

Such models for diseases such as GNE myopathy and LGMD have not been done for Indian patients and are required for carrying out clinical studies and drug trials, ac-



ording to a statement.

The mission researchers, who have applied for funding from the government, are aiming at multiple types of treatments. This is because not all types of therapies are suitable for all patients as well as different diseases, the researchers said.

Availability of multiple therapies will help to provide clinical treatment to large fraction of patients, they said.

The platform being proposed are gene therapy, mRNA therapy, oligo-nucleotide-based therapies and small molecules that target

known or novel disease associated molecules.

These technologies once developed, will also be useful for developing drugs for other diseases, according to the researchers.

A substantial fraction of all rare diseases are genetic disorders that mainly get inherited from parents. Since human beings have about 25,000 genes, a mutation in a set of genes carries a disease risk.

Globally, it is estimated that there are about 7,000 types of rare diseases out of which about 80 per cent are likely to have a genetic

basis. The clinical methods of diagnosis for such diseases exist, however they are often not conclusive.

Usually, the final diagnosis can only take place through DNA sequencing of both parents and children. However, this method is expensive and not affordable for a large section of the population, especially in lower and middle income countries.

In India, about 500 rare diseases have been identified, Bhattacharya said. The number of individuals suf-

fering from one particular disease in the country may be small, but given the population size and number of such diseases, the overall burden is estimated to be quite large, approximately 7 crore individuals, he said.

These diseases often go undiagnosed in the country due to reasons such as high cost, lack of testing infrastructure even in urban centres, and insufficient awareness even among clinicians.

About 95 per cent of rare diseases do not have a treatment, and in most cases the patients have to live with extreme disability, often also leading to death beyond the age of around 20 years. For the 5 per cent of diseases that have a treatment, but not cure, the cost of treatment is extremely high.

Most drugs are made abroad and their cost ranges from lakhs to crores, leaving a large section of Indian population outside the ambit of adequate healthcare.

"We aim to improve awareness and access to drugs to ultimately improve the lives of millions affected," Bhattacharya said.

"We are awaiting for the government to make a decision about funding the mission," the scientist added.

## Dillip Parida takes charge as Med Supdt of City AIIMS

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: AIIMS Bhubaneswar Radiation Oncology department head Dillip Kumar Parida has been assigned additional charge of Medical Superintendent of the national institute.

Parida will be in-charge of the post till filling up of the post on regular basis or till further order. AIIMS Bhubaneswar Executive Director Ashutosh Biswas congratulated Parida for the new assignment.

It may be noted that Parida is having a vast experience in the field of medical service and was one of the founding faculties of AIIMS Bhubaneswar. Earlier, he had held many important posts at AIIMS Bhubaneswar including Medical Superintendent (in-charge) in 2016-17. Parida has worked in prestigious institutes like AIIMS Delhi and NEIGRIHMS, Shillong.



JUDICIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

# SC takes note of 'mismatch' between Centre, state data

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 2: The Supreme Court Thursday took note of a "mismatch" between the data of the Department of Justice in the Union Law Ministry and the Odisha government's communication to the ministry on the utilisation certificates (UCs) of the central assistance released to the state in 2018-19 and 2019-20 for judicial infrastructure.



balance of ₹22 crore for 2019-20 has not been submitted.

The court directed that a meeting be convened within two weeks between the Department of Justice, the law secretary of the Odisha government and others to ensure the reconciliation of the UCs that are stated to have been submitted by the state.

A bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud observed that the data made available before it by Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Aishwarya Bhati, who appeared in the court on behalf of the Centre, indicated that an amount of ₹35.69 crore was released to Odisha for 2019-20 and for 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23, no funds were released.

The bench, also comprising Justices PS Narasimha and J B Pardiwala, observed that according to a note from the Department of Justice, the UC for the unspent

communication of December 17 of the state government," the bench said.

It directed that in order to reconcile, a meeting be convened within two weeks between the Department of Justice, the Odisha law secretary and others, including the registrar general of the Orissa High Court.

"The purpose of the meeting shall be to ensure reconciliation of the utilisation certificates, which are stated to have been submitted by the state government," the bench said. It said the meeting may be fixed either physically or on an online platform.

In his report submitted to the SC, Hansaria, who is assisted by advocate Sneha Kalita in the matter, said even for the current financial year 2022-23, an amount of ₹60.4 crore has been allotted for which an action plan has also been submitted. However, the funds are yet to be released.

It said the High Court report states that proposals under the state sector scheme (SSS) for 2023-24 for ₹722.49 crore have been submitted to the Odisha government.

The bench asked the counsel representing the state in the matter regarding the proposal for ₹722 crore.



TAKING STOCK: ST Secretary VK Pandian reviewed various projects at Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT) in Bhubaneswar, Thursday

# De-addiction centre inmate succumbs following attack

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: The youth who was brutally injured at a drug de-addiction centre in the city few days back succumbed at Hi-Tech medical here Thursday during treatment. The deceased, Sarbeswar Behera was undergoing treatment at the ICU of the private medical college since January 30.

Wednesday, the Commissionerate Police arrested three persons including the owner of the centre, Anirudha Ray in the case (37/23) under sections 323 and 307 IPC. Sources claimed the section 307 earlier slapped against the accused trio has now been converted to 302(murder charges) following the death of Sarbeswar.

Sarbeswar used to earn his liv-

ing by working as a driver in the city. He is survived by his wife and three young children.

The victim, Sarbeswar who originally hails from Nayagarh district had been residing at Patharabandha Basti in Saheed Nagar area along with his family for the last several years. Urmila, wife of the deceased, had revealed that Sarbeswar was excessively addicted to liquor and psychoactive drugs.

The worried family members had admitted Sarbeswar to the de-addiction centre, "Sai Kripa" located in Mancheswar area January 27, 2023. Owner of the de-addiction centre, Anirudha, present during the admission assured the family members that the center would take good care of the addict and pro-

vide him all the facilities.

Anirudha also told the complainant that they would supply all the information regarding any problem caused by Sarbeswar at the center.

Urmila also deposited ₹7000 at the center for her husband's admission Tuesday. Meanwhile, when she came to know that her husband was brutally assaulted by the staffers, she rushed to the de-addiction center.

She found that her husband sustained severe injuries with wound marks on different parts of his body.

The victim was later admitted to Capital hospital from where the family later shifted him to Hi-tech medical college for advanced treatment.

# ED attaches ₹21.19cr of city-based infra firm

Bhubaneswar: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has provisionally attached movable and immovable assets worth ₹21.19 crore belonging to state-based infrastructure major ARSS and its directors under Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) in connection with a bank fraud case. The ED Thursday revealed that the above amount includes bank balances worth ₹9.37 crore and immovable assets worth ₹11.82 crore of M/s. ARSS Damoh Hirapur Tolls Pvt. Ltd. (M/s. ARSSDHT-PL), M/s. ARSS Infrastructure Projects Ltd. (M/s. ARSSIPL), M/s. Anil Contractors Pvt. Ltd. (M/s. ACPL) and their directors. The accused businessmen allegedly caused wrongful loss of ₹22.42 crore to the Central Bank of India, Bhubaneswar. "ED initiated the investigation under PMLA based on FIR filed by BSFB unit of CBI, Kolkata against M/s. ARSSDHTPL and others in connection with loan availed by M/s. ARSSDHTPL from Central Bank of India's Janpath Branch, Bhubaneswar in 2011.

# Apollo Hosp performs surgery on German referee

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: City Apollo Hospitals performed a surgery on 38-year-old German referee, Ben, who had sustained injury to right side of mid face due to direct hit by a hockey ball in the quarter final match January 25 in FIH World Cup 2023. He had severe bleeding from the part and for which he shifted to Apollo hospitals' emergency ward. After 3 DCT scan, it showed depressed fracture of anterior wall maxilla. The patient



was taken for surgery January 26 for elevation of depressed fracture and fixation with titanium mini plate and screws.

A team of doctors comprised Laxmi Kanta Mishra, Senior Consultant, Plastic and

Maxillofacial surgery S Panigrahy, Bikas Mishra, Neurologist, SK Pradhan, ENT surgeon, CK Deepa, Ophthalmologist and S Satpathy treated the patient. The patient has recovered and will be discharged February 3.

He expressed his gratitude to the hospital management and gave thanks to Alok Srivastava, COO and DMS, Apollo Hospitals, Bhubaneswar. Srivastava congratulated the medical team who treated a challenging case and conveyed best wishes to Ben.

# Budget session...

Continued from P1

There will be a gap of seven days from March 2 to 9 during the session. There will be no business on all second and fourth Saturdays and Sundays, March 30 (Shreeram Navami) and April 1 (Utkal Diwas), as per the schedule.

Last year, the Odisha government had presented a vote-on-account budget in view of the model code of conduct imposed for panchayat and urban polls in the state. Later, in July 2022, the government had presented the full-fledged budget for 2022-23 with a total outlay of ₹2 lakh crore.

This time, the state is likely to hike the total outlay of annual budget by 15 to 25 per cent than the previous year's budget.

# Wetlands provide cushion against climate hazards: CM

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: On the World Wetlands Day, Thursday, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik reminded people of the important role wetlands play in maintaining ecological balance and mitigating the effects of climate change while reiterating his pledge to protect the Ramsar sites of the state.

The CM said, "Wetlands are 'Kidneys of the Earth' and play critical role in ecosystem, climate mitigation and freshwater availability. On World Wetlands Day let's protect our wetlands which provide a cushion against climate hazards and pledge to preserve Ramsar convention sites of Odisha."

February 2 is celebrated as World Wetlands Day to raise awareness about the vitality of wetlands for people and planet. The day also marks the date of adoption of the Convention on Wetlands in 1971, in

# WORLD WETLANDS DAY



the Iranian city of Ramsar.

Six wetlands have so far received Ramsar recognition as wetlands of international importance in Odisha. Recently, Tampara Lake in Ganjam district, Hirakud Reservoir in Sambalpur and Anshupa Lake in Cuttack received the recognition. Earlier, Chilika and Bhitarkanika mangrove forests were accorded Ramsar site tag.

"Mangrove swamps are crucial in the removal of hazardous heavy metal-related coastal pollution and in preventing groundwater aquifers from combining with seawater. They also protect against natural

disasters like floods, storms, and tsunamis," said Soumya Ranjan Biswal, an environmentalist, on the occasion.

Across the state, several organisations held awareness programmes on the occasion. Mangrove plantation was conducted at the Kadua River Mouth Wetland in Puri with participation of many grassroots environmentalists such as members of Odisha Paryayaran Sanrakshan Abhiyaan (OPSA), in association with Billions Tree Organization and GenRe, in presence of local fishermen and environment lovers.

"Around 25 people gathered at the site and planted some 500 mangrove plants. These plants were organically grown at the well maintained nursery of OPSA. Because they can live in both salt and fresh water, mangrove trees dominate the wetland ecology," said a member of the organisation.

# University status for Vikram Deb College

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar Feb 2: Vikram Deb (autonomous) College, one of the oldest colleges in Odisha, was upgraded to the status of university, after the approval of Chief Minister, Thursday.

"In exercise of powers conferred by sub-section (1) and (2) of Section 32 of the Odisha University Act, 1989, the state government do hereby alter the territorial jurisdiction of Berhampur University by establishing a new university called the 'Vikram Deb' University at Jeypore, Koraput, Odisha with effect from the date of notification in the Odisha Gazette," states a notification issued by the Higher Education department, Thursday.

The college was established by the Maharaja of Jeypore, Vikram Deb IV in 1947 and was named after him. The institute will celebrate its 'Platinum Jubilee' from tomorrow, which will be inaugurated by the CMO.

# Sparsh celebrates its 16th foundation day



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: City based Sparsh Hospital, a NABH accredited healthcare provider known for the quality of its services in Odisha, observed its 16th 'Anniversary of Foundation' here at the Rail Kunja Auditorium Thursday.

'Mo College' chairperson and famous Odia film actor Aakash Das Nayak joined as the chief guest for this occasion while Sparsh chairman-cum-managing-director Priyabrata Dhir, medical oncology MD, DM, Ghanashyam Biswas accompanied him as guests.

In his address, Dhir said, "Needless to mention that 'Sparsh' has contributed significantly in bringing new innovations in treatment protocol to Odisha. It has carried out complex procedures in onco, spine, neuro and orthopedic surgery using technologies such as minimal invasive spine surgery, biportal endoscopic spine surgery, minimal invasive gastro surgery, advanced laparoscopic surgery, knee and hip replacement

surgery." Addressing the gathering, Biswas said, "Oncology being our specialty, Sparsh has been accredited by Times of India as no 1 in Odisha and no 3 rank in eastern India. The gynecology department has also been recognized as no 1 rank in state and pediatric department no 3."

Sparsh has already expanded its cloak by setting up another state-of-the-art 250 bedded multi-specialty hospital at Kantabada, Chandaka, Bhubaneswar in 2021 apart from its existing 100 bedded unit at Sahid Nagar, added Dhir.

"Our fight against spurious medicines endangering the lives has culminated in Sparsh Retail Pharmacy Chain. In this endeavor, three state-of-the-art Sparsh Pharmacy retail stores have been made operational in Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Baripada," informed finance director Bidhu Bhusan Nayak.

At the celebration event, Humane Sagar, and Odia film actors Sabyasachi Mishra and Archita Sahu entertained the audience.

# KIMS Hospital performs state's 1st hybrid surgery

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: Kalinga Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS) doctors claim to have performed the first hybrid surgery in Odisha, Thursday. The surgery was performed on Sushama Rana (50) of Ratagada of Banki block, Cuttack district, after she complained about the severe pain in her chest and back.

Following multiple consultations at various places, Sushama was not able to bear the pain and visited KIMS January 18. She consulted the cardiologists and had undergone a series of tests, which inferred an internal bleeding in aorta which supplies blood to



major organs.

The cardiology and cardiac surgery team at KIMS started the procedure after proper diagnosis. Cardio thoracic and vascular surgery (CTVS) surgeon, A Sharda and Chandan Kumar Ray Mohapatra carried out the bypass surgery and joined the aorta with the vessels.

problems as the blood gets stuck at the damaged portion of the aorta wall. The above mentioned situation triggers heart attack, brain damage, kidney damage and intestinal problems.

With the help of cardiac anesthesiologist Ashok Kumar Badmali, the surgery continued for more than five hours. "If the surgery was delayed, it could have resulted in multi-organ failure," the doctor stated.

As per sources, the hybrid surgery costs around ₹14 to 15 lakh outside Odisha, but at KIMS it was performed under ₹6.5 lakh only. Five days after the surgery, Sushama returned to her village and is doing well.

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## Tampara Lake wetland of int'l importance now

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Chhatrapur, Feb 2:** Tampara Lake in Ganjam district has received the Ramsar recognition as a wetland of international importance.

To celebrate this achievement, World Wetland Day was observed at Tampara lake, Thursday.

Several forest officials, students of Berhampur University and researchers attended this programme and discussed the importance of wetlands, modalities for their protection and need for conducting more research on them.

ACF's Rudra Prasad Ratha, A Madhavi Lata, Berhampur forest ranger Rajat Kumar Mishra, his counterparts Siddharth Shankar Sahu of Khallikote, Manoj Kumar Patra of Samantapalli and Kanhu Charan Pattanaik of Digapahandi, wildlife warden Rabindra Nath Sahu, Chhatrapur forest officer Girish Ray and Anjan Kumar Prusty, associate professor of environmental science in Berhampur University attended this programme.

Later, the participants conducted a cleaning of the lake and took out an awareness rally demanding conservation of the wetland and environment protection.

## NABA DAS ASSASSINATION POLICE YET TO REVEAL MOTIVE

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 2:** Even though four days have passed since the murder of Health Minister Naba Das, the police are yet to reveal the motive behind the brutal killing.

To recall, assistant sub-inspector Gopal Krishna Das had shot Naba Das in Jharsuguda district January 29. Later the same day, the minister had succumbed to his injuries.

Soon after the incident, Gopal Das was arrested and the Crime Branch took over the case. The Crime Branch officials have been interrogating Gopal Das and his family members since then. However, the police are yet to reveal the motive behind the murder.

In a press statement issued Thursday evening, the crime branch said that it has recovered one bullet which is a valuable piece of evidence.

Following the lead given by the ASI during interrogation, the crime

branch recovered some pieces of handwritten papers of the accused from the septic tank attached to the toilet of Airport police station in Jharsuguda.

The accused told the police about dumping handwritten papers, in which he had noted down in detail his motive behind the crime, in the toilet of the Airport police station.

The paper pieces will be sent to forensic and handwriting experts for reconstruction and examination, the Crime Branch said.

The preserved viscera of the deceased have been sent to the state forensic science laboratory (SFSL) in Bhubaneswar for examination, it said.

Similarly, another team of Crime Branch is verifying the medical treatment records and financial behaviour of Gopal Das, besides examining the near and dear ones of the accused. Earlier, the elder brother of the accused ASI was interrogated.



**MATTER OF FAITH:** People prostrate on a hill as part of rituals for Pahadi puja at the hilly abode of tribal deity Maa Satapatuli in Bangiriposhi block of Mayurbhanj district, Thursday

## Pollution grips Paradip air

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Paradip, Feb 2:** With the serious problem of air pollution in Paradip aggravating rapidly, things have come to such a pass that trees and plants in this port town are struggling for survival.

The port town is facing severe air pollution with iron, coal dust, gypsum dust and other pollutants getting diffused in the atmosphere. This has happened due to reckless handling of cargo like coking coal and thermal coal at the port as well as through transportation of gypsum by two fertilizer units in the area.

As a result, leaves and branches of the trees are found enveloped with a thick layer of black and grey coloured dust. The heavy pollution is untimely drying up the trees impacting their survival.

The annual declaration on pollution level in the cities by Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) is changing every year. In 2014-15, the borderline was 69.60



per cent and 70 per cent was stated as the danger zone. In 2017-18, the term was changed to 'critically polluted area' while in 2020-21, the term was again changed to 'highly polluted area'.

This year, the SPCB informed that pollution is declining in Paradip. However, the reality is that if a person goes around the port town for an hour in an open vehicle then the colour of his clothes will change for sure. The claim can be substantiated by examining the leaves of trees in the town.

Paradip is one among the four most polluted cities in Odisha while the other three are Ib Valley, Jharsuguda and Angul

These four cities in Odisha are in the list of 88 cities which have been declared as the most polluted by the government

The leaves instead of being green appear black or red in colour. The trees which are key to sustaining human life are now fighting for survival. An environmentalist Amaresh Naresh Samant alleged that the trees, with thick layers of black dust gathered on the leaves, fail to properly absorb carbon dioxide and give out oxygen for sustenance of the living. Environmentalists said dust particles are a potential source of air and water pollution.

The pollution in Paradip is of varied nature. In parts, it is related to use of chemicals while on the other hand, air pollution gets even worse due to reckless handling of cargo like coking coal and

thermal coal. Pollution also arises from the ash and smoke billowing out of the many industrial plants in the port town.

People residing in areas near industrial units of the town have become susceptible to respiratory disorders and skin diseases. Smoke and dust filled air has emerged as a major health hazard in these localities. However, allegedly no proper regulatory measure is being taken to contain the pollution.

When contacted, SPCB regional officer Pushkar Chandra Behera said that the parking of heavy vehicles in the port is responsible for the pollution to some extent. Iron and gypsum dust falls on the road as the heavy vehicles are parked on the road. Dust remains suspended in the ambient air and not only pollutes the air and water but also gather in houses in the adjoining areas where the vehicles have been parked in the port town. He said special programmes will be launched to clean dust from the month of April.

## MLA's son among 6 jailed over brawl

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bolangir, Feb 2:** Belpada police arrested Amit Singh Saluja alias Seji, the son of senior Congress leader and Kantabanji MLA Santosh Singh Saluja and five others in connection with a brawl at a cinema hall along Kantabanji-Belpada road. Later, police also seized 17 litre liquor and cash worth Rs 19 lakh from Amit's gym, Thursday.

The accused were identified as Amit Singh Saluja alias Seji, Ajay Agarwal, Bikash Agarwal, Bipul Maru, Dharambir Gupta, and Raja Patra. All the accused were produced in the court and remanded to the custody of Patnagarh sub-jail after their bail pleas were rejected. This was stated here by Patnagarh SDPO Jyotirmaya Bhukta to mediapersons, Thursday.

Seji Singh was arrested after an alleged brawl at Alishan cinema hall on Kantabanji-Belpada road of Bolangir district and even misbehaved with police, Wednesday.

Later, police conducted raids at his fitness centre and seized Rs 19 lakh in cash and 17 litres of Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) from his manager Raja Patra.

## The Cosmic Snapshot

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## Drunk youth falls into uncovered drain, dies

**Berhampur:** A drunk youth fell into an uncovered drain and died near Gandhinagar under Town police limits here, Thursday. The deceased was identified as D Nagu (35) of Bijipur, Bada Sahi area in the city. Police registered a case and sent the body for autopsy. Preliminary inquiry indicated that the youth might have been heavily drunk and died after falling into the drain. Locals however, alleged that the contractor after constructing the 20-feet deep drain had left it uncovered without putting slabs on it, due to which the youth died. The youth was reportedly returning home after attending the cremation of a relative at the local Nilakantha crematorium. It is suspected that he might have fallen into the drain and died.

## Woman gangraped, killed over house rent

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Padmapur, Feb 2:** A woman was allegedly gangraped and later murdered after she failed to pay the house rent at Majhi Sahi village under Eram panchayat of Basudevpur police limits in Bhadrak district, police said Thursday.

The deceased was identified as Mamata Mallik (25), wife of a fisherman Ramakant Mallik and native of Adhuan village under Basudevpur police limits in the district. She was staying along with her husband and two children at the house of Bhagirathi Majhi at Majhi Sahi village.

### BHADRAK SHOCKER



The house owner Bhagirathi and his associates allegedly gangraped her and later killed her after she failed to pay the house rent. The matter came to the fore after the deceased's mother Jhulani Mallik

lodged a complaint at the Basudevpur police station, Thursday. On being informed, Basudevpur IIC Sabitri Panda and other police officials rushed to the spot and launched an investigation. A scientific team

was also pressed into service.

Jhulani has alleged in her complaint that her son-in-law Ramakant being a fisherman often used to leave her family back at home and leave for the sea to catch fish. Bhagirathi used to hurl abuses at Mamata and had even assaulted her on many occasions when the family had failed to pay the house rent.

Jhulani discovered her daughter dead Thursday when she visited the rented house at Majhi Sahi village. She found Mamata lying dead inside the house with injury marks all over her body and alleged that her daughter was gangraped before being killed.

## Why not create National Elephant Conservation Authority: SC bench

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Feb 2:** The Supreme Court has sought reply from Centre on a 2010 'Gajah Report' recommendation on conferring statutory status to a proposed body National Elephant Conservation Authority (NECA) for the preservation of elephant corridors.

A bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud said, "In the recommendations submitted in Gajah report, there was a recommendation to the effect that 'Project Elephant' be converted into a statutory agency".

The top court was hearing a plea by activist Purna Singh Bindra, Wednesday.

According to the government, the elephant population has reached 29,964 (as per the census 2017) in India, the elephant habitats are being consolidated across India, and the Elephant Reserves' area has been increased.

The government emphasised that it is deeply committed to protect the safety of the elephants and continued to take various steps to prevent their death including electrocution. Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati represented the

SC FURTHER SUGGESTS TO THE CENTRE THAT AMENDMENTS CAN BE INTRODUCED TO EFFECTUATE THE CONFERMENT OF A STATUTORY STATUS ON THE AUTHORITY

THE APEX COURT HAS ALSO DIRECTED THE MOEFCC AND THE CENTRAL ELECTRICITY AUTHORITY TO FACILITATE AN INSPECTION OF THE PROTECTED AREAS TO AVOID ELECTROCUTION OF ELEPHANTS



Central government in the apex court. The bench, also comprising Justices PS Narasimha and JB Pardiwala, added that the task force has proposed that the new body may be termed as the 'National Elephant Conservation Authority' (NECA). It further suggested that amendments can be introduced to effectuate the conferment of a statutory status on the authority.

"Since the proposal would envisage requisite legislative amendments,

this is something of which would be appropriate for the Ministry of Environment and Forest and Climate Change to respond," it said.

During the hearing in the matter, the bench also sought a status report on setting up of the central project elephant monitoring committee for the purpose of monitoring and implementation of relevant directions and guidelines in connection with the protection of elephants.

In a written response, the Central

## The bench gave Centre four weeks' time to file a response in a PIL filed by activist Bindra

government said, "Continuous efforts have been made to minimise the human elephant conflict and also to ensure the welfare of captive elephants in India."

After hearing arguments, the apex court directed the Ministry and the Central Electricity Authority to facilitate an inspection of the protected areas to avoid electrocution of elephants. The bench gave Centre four weeks' time to file a response in a PIL filed by activist Bindra.

The petitioner had contended that the electrocution is one of the major reasons for deaths of elephants and sought a direction for insulation of high voltage power transmission lines passing through protected areas, elephant reserves, identified elephant corridors and known areas of elephant movement.

**Rail Wheel Plant/Bela**  
(Distt. - Saron, Bihar 841221)  
**E-Open Tender Notice No.-S/RWP/E/50/2022-23, Dated: 02.02.2023**  
Principal Chief Materials Manager/Rail Wheel Plant, Bela for and on behalf of the President of India invites online "e-Open Tender", through Indian Railways E-Procurement Website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) for supply of following Stores item at RWP/Bela. The closing time of all tenders is 14:00 hrs. SN.-1. Tender No.: 01231038, Short Description of item : Pouring Tube, Quantity : 422 Numbers., Date of Tender Closing/Opening : 15.03.2023 at 14:00 Hrs. 1. Website address, on which full tender details can be seen and downloaded from, is [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in). 2. The prospective firms/bidders submitting bid are advised to remain in touch with the above website for updates including Addendum/ Corrigendum/ Cancellation with respect to the above tender. However, this information will also be invariably published in the all concerned newspapers. PCMM/RWP/Bela RWP/CPRO/AdvT/2022-23/118

**EAST COAST RAILWAY**  
Tender No.: 58-KUR-TRD-OT-2022-23  
Name of the Work : PROVISION OF AUXILIARY TRANSFORMERS (AT) AND OHE MODIFICATION IN CONNECTION WITH AUTO SECTION IN JAKHAPUR-NERGUNDI, KHURDA ROAD-BHUSANDPUR AND GOLANTHRAPALASA SECTION OF KHURDA ROAD (KUR) DIVISION.  
Advertised Value : ₹ 8,73,75,494.80, EMD: ₹ 5,86,900/-, Period of Completion: 365 Days.  
Bidding start date : 08.02.2023, Tender closing date & time : at 1300 hrs. of 22.02.2023.  
Manual offers are not allowed against this tender and any such manual offer received shall be ignored.  
Complete details & tender documents will be available at [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)  
Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer (TRD), PR-964/N/22-23, Khurda Road

**राष्ट्रीय प्रौद्योगिकी संस्थान दिल्ली**  
**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY DELHI**  
(शिक्षा मंत्रालय, भारत सरकार के अधीन एक स्वायत्त संस्थान)  
(An Autonomous Institute under the aegis of Ministry of Education (Shiksha Mantralaya), Govt. of India)  
Plot No. FA7, Zone P1, GT Karnal Road, Delhi-110036, INDIA  
दूरभाष / Tele: +9111-33861000, 1001, 1005 फैक्स / Fax: +9111-27787503.  
वेबसाइट / Website: [www.nitdelhi.ac.in](http://www.nitdelhi.ac.in)  
NITD/01/Admn/438/2022-23 Dated: 30/01/2023  
Advt. No.: 04/2023  
**Recruitment of Non Teaching Positions**  
NIT Delhi is one of the 31 NITs established by the Government of India as an Institute of national importance enacted by an Act of Parliament. Online applications are invited from Indian Nationals for recruitment to various Non Teaching Posts. For details and other information, please visit institute website [www.nitdelhi.ac.in](http://www.nitdelhi.ac.in) Online application process will start from 03.02.2023 and submission link will be disabled on 24.02.2023 (23:59:59 hrs).  
CBC 21275/12/0003/2223 Registrar

**CENTRAL WAREHOUSING CORPORATION**  
(A Govt. of India Undertaking)  
Regional Office- Maurya Lok Complex, Block-A, 2nd Floor, Dakbungalow Road, Patna-800001  
Phone No.-0612-2225949 E-mail-rmpat@cewacor.nic.in  
NO. CWC/RO PAT/ENGG/PN/2022-23  
(E NIT RO-PAT/ENGG/22-23/11)  
**PRESS NOTICE**  
CWC invites on-line tenders from the contractors for the following work:  
SL. Name of Work Estimated Cost (Rs. Lakh) Last date of on-line submission  
1 Development of land for open area at CW-Berhampur (Odisha) 23.29 10.02.2023  
Detailed Tender Notice along with Conditions of Contract and Notice Inviting E-Tender may be seen and downloaded from the CWC's website [www.cewacor.nic.in](http://www.cewacor.nic.in) or e-tender website [www.cwccprocure.com](http://www.cwccprocure.com) or CPP Portal <http://eprocure.gov.in/epublish/app>. Further Corrigendum/Addendum to this Tender, if any, will be published on above websites only Press advertisement in Newspapers shall not be issued for the same. Executive Engineer

**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER**  
**BALASORE (ROADS & BUILDINGS) DIVISION-II**  
AT/PO-BHASKARGANJ, BALASORE  
CONTACT NO.06782-263149, E-Mail ID: [eeppwbls2@gmail.com](mailto:eeppwbls2@gmail.com)  
**SHORT TENDER CALL NOTICE**  
BID INVITATION NO.EE (R and B) BLS-II-53/2022-23  
No.B-1212: No.1046, Dt.31.01.2023  
1 The Executive Engineer, Balasore (R&B) Division-II, Balasore on behalf of the Governor of Odisha invites Percentage rate bids to be received in ONLINE MODE only for Roads & Buildings works.  
2 No. of Work : 8 Nos.  
3 Nature of Work : Building & Road Works of Balasore (R&B) Division-II  
4 Class of Contractor : "D", "C" & "B" Class of Contractor  
5 Approx. value of work : Rs.6.08 Lakhs to 24.05 Lakhs  
6 Tender Cost : Rs.4000.00 & Rs.6000.00 per work  
7 Availability of Bid documents in the website : From 10.00 Hours of dt.06.02.2023 to 16.00 hours of dt. 16.02.2023.  
8 Date of Opening of Bid : Dt.16.02.2023 at 16.30 Hours  
9 Other details can be seen in the Bidding documents from the website: <https://tendersorissa.gov.in>.  
Sd./- A.K. Ray (31.01.2023)  
OIPR-34155/11/0012/2223 Executive Engineer, Balasore (R&B) Division-II

FOCUS ECONOMY

# FISCAL CORRECTION IMPERATIVE



The Union budget 2023-24 has been conservative in fiscal correction and consolidation. This is where a bold step was required. It is sorely missing

The Union budget for 2023-24 came against a backdrop of economic recovery and optimism in the medium-term growth outlook despite persistent global recessionary winds. The budget speech of the Finance Minister recognised the constraints, saying this performance was about “resilience amidst multiple crises.” There are indeed a number of threats to macroeconomic stability, particularly that of inflation, and the hazards of a projected recession and high inflationary trends in most parts of the world. The International Monetary Fund in its update on the World Economic Outlook released on January 30 has mentioned “inflation picking-up amid low growth.” These global developments will pose a threat of “spill-overs” to Indian economic development in terms of lesser capital inflow, lower inward remittances, reduced exports and imported inflation.

However, India’s economy is relatively insulated from global threats when compared to other emerging market economies partly because of its large domestic market and relatively looser integration in global value chains and trade flows. In contrast to the pre-pandemic years of 2018-19 and 2019-20, there is evidence of a strengthening of balance sheets by Indian corporates and the financial sector which provides “a solid underpinning to growth.” Apart from this, “India’s public digital infrastructure expansion is leading to accelerated financial inclusion for low-income households, micro and small businesses and the economy’s rapid formalisation.” This is observed in the statement of fiscal policy released with the budget. Balance sheet strength and digital advancement are growth differentiators not only for 2023-24 but also in the years ahead.

Recognising that uncertainties in the world economy will continue this year, the budget has focussed on the domestic economy, particularly macroeconomic fundamentals. In this context there are seven priorities (or “Saptarshi”

as the budget puts it) which include Inclusive Development, Reaching the Last Mile, Infrastructure and Investment, Unleashing the Potential, Green Growth, Youth Power and the Financial Sector. These seven areas which complement each other are designed to enhance growth with the inclusion of the population at the bottom of the pyramid.

Amidst severe fiscal stress, the budget has still attempted fiscal correction and consolidation by reducing the fiscal deficit to 5.9% of GDP against 6.4% of GDP in 2022-23 and the revenue deficit is budgeted at 2.9% of GDP as compared with 4.1% of GDP in 2022-23. The correction in the revenue deficit has been budgeted with a reduction in all subsidies (fertiliser, food and petroleum) together amounting to Rs 3,74,707 crore from Rs 5,21,585 crore in the revised estimate for 2022-23, recording a decline of 39.2%. It is important to mention here that due to the unprecedented levels of borrowing during the pandemic (9.2% of GDP in 2020-21 and 6.7% of GDP in 2021-22), the interest payment has been projected higher at Rs 10,79,971 crore, recording an increase of 14.8% over 2022-23 revised estimates. At this level, the interest pay-

ment to GDP is budgeted at 3.6%. In view of this a sharper fiscal correction and quick return to a 3% fiscal deficit to GDP is desirable.

The budget has given priority to boost growth through capital investment (of Rs 10,00,961 crore) which has recorded a growth of 37.4% over the revised estimate of 2022-23. At this level, the capital expenditure is budgeted at 3.3% of GDP. This shows nearly 56% of the borrowings are budgeted to be spent on capital expenditure. A higher revenue deficit continues to be a drag on the budget in terms of providing growth induced expenditure. Sooner or later, the revenue deficit should be eliminated to ensure sound and prudent fiscal management.

With regards to the receipt side, the gross tax revenue is projected to grow at 10.4% in budget for 2023-24 over the 2022-23 revised estimates. The direct tax is budgeted to increase at 10.5% and indirect tax is budgeted to grow at 10.4%. The overall tax buoyancy is estimated at 0.99. GST has been a game changer and the GST buoyancy is estimated at 1.14 during 2023-24. It is important to note that the tax to GDP ratio is budgeted at 11.1% the same level of 2022-23 re-

vised estimates. Our tax to GDP ratio is low; this needs to go up at least by 2% with better tax compliance and an increase in the tax base. If this happens, a return to the 3% fiscal deficit to GDP will be quicker along with a sharper correction in revenue deficit.

Another important aspect is the selling of assets of public sector units. The entire move has been weak. This needs to be corrected.

To strengthen cooperative fiscal federalism, the budget has provided financial assistance to the states for capital expenditure to the tune of Rs 1.30 lakh crore representing an increase of 30% over allocations of the 2022-23 budget estimate and accounting to around 0.4% of GDP. Secondly, there has been a substantial increase in the share of states in the revised estimates of 2022-23 to Rs9.48 lakh crore from Rs 8.17 lakh crore in the budget estimate. However, the 15th finance commission recommendation was of providing 41% of tax devolution from the divisible pool of tax. The budget for 2023-24 has provided to the states Rs 10.21 lakh crore. Thirdly, there are transfers to states in terms of centrally sponsored schemes (CSS), finance commission grants and other loans and grants together (Rs 9,89,337 crore) accounting for 30% of total expenditure or 3.2% of GDP.

As mentioned in the government’s Economic Survey 2022-23, the Indian economy is poised for a potential growth of 7 to 8% in the medium term. The current growth rate at 7% is among the highest in the world. But to remain ahead and in a “bright” position, prudent and strong fiscal management in terms of 3% of the fiscal deficit to GDP is an essential prerequisite especially for attracting foreign direct investment. However, the Union budget 2023-24 has been conservative in fiscal correction and consolidation. This is where a bold step was required. It is sorely missing.

The writer is a former central banker. Views are personal. @THEBILLIONPRESS



RK Pattnaik

**A HIGHER REVENUE DEFICIT CONTINUES TO BE A DRAG ON THE BUDGET IN TERMS OF PROVIDING GROWTH INDUCED EXPENDITURE**



Arvind Subramanian

**Our social-media-driven news ecosystem is virtually drowning us in expert opinion, inundating us with so much verbiage that little room is left for thoughtful analysis and focused debate – the oxygen of healthy public discourse**

## The Age of Verbiage

The annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos used to be the premier destination for renowned academics and public figures to comment on the state of the world. But nowadays, the destination is just a click away. Our social-media-driven news ecosystem is virtually drowning us in expert opinion, inundating us with so much verbiage that little room is left for thoughtful analysis and focused debate – the oxygen of healthy public discourse.

Consider, for example, how quickly and how often the expert consensus shifted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. China did a far better job containing the spread of the virus than many liberal democracies, until its draconian zero-COVID strategy demonstrated the failure of autocracy. And, despite the surge of infections in the weeks since policymakers abruptly abandoned the strategy, it is still possible that China will have fewer excess COVID-related deaths than the United States. Others argued that polarised societies like the US would fare worse than countries with high levels of social trust, until Sweden became a cautionary tale. And India was considered to be performing relatively well until the catastrophic death toll of the Delta variant revealed the scale of the government’s mismanagement – and the latter, too, seems slightly less severe in hindsight, following the country’s successful vaccination drive.

Then there is the great US inflation debate. Initially, it seemed like Team Transitory – the inflation doves who predicted that prices would go down quickly – had it right. But then the persistence of high inflation vindicated the hawks who had called for the Federal Reserve to engineer a massive recession to restore price stability. Nowadays, the doves are flying high again, as inflation seems to be declining without the Fed having to inflict excessive pain on US labour markets.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, soaring inflation, and the escalating rivalry between the US and China have given us the term “polycrisis” – the Financial Times’ word of the year – to describe today’s confluence of calamities. But the global economy seems to have escaped the worst, at least for the moment, and the International Monetary Fund expects growth to pick up next year. The Economist now speaks of a “poly-recovery.” Similarly, the doom-and-gloom predictions that characterised the spring and summer of 2020, the height of the COVID crisis, did not materialise, and the world economy turned out to be more resilient than many had believed.

And remember the warnings of a “winter of discontent” in Europe and the looming threat of wartime energy rations? Instead, gas prices have been declining steadily since the summer. And many of the same analysts who predicted a few months ago that the Chinese economy was about to collapse were proclaiming that “China is back” just a few weeks later.

The current fickleness of expert consensus is rooted in a media environment that rewards instant theorising and glib generalisations as long as they are delivered with absolute certainty. When reality exposes the flaws in these hypotheses, the expert caravan simply moves on to the next topic without self-reflection or accountability, leaving viewers and readers dumbfounded.

To be sure, expert opinion is still valuable, despite its increasingly ephemeral nature. But experts inhabit the same world as everyone else, and thus are not immune to the cognitive effects of its frantic pace. Given that institutions like the IMF are tasked with providing real-time analyses and predictions in a rapidly-changing environment, getting things wrong or having to pivot on a dime is an occupational hazard. And arguably, the warnings and instant analyses might be responsible for policy actions that preempt worst-case scenarios. Howling like a wolf can sometimes keep the real wolf at bay.

Still, one cannot deny the fact that there are too many overconfident experts making too many predictions about too many issues too quickly these days. A basic economic principle is useful here: the 24-hour news cycle has created a huge need for expert opinion, and the market has simply created the supply to meet the growing demand.

But some correction is required. When he received the Nobel Prize in economics in 1974, Friedrich von Hayek famously suggested that his fellow laureates take an economist’s Hippocratic oath: avoid commenting publicly on matters beyond one’s immediate expertise. Winning such a prestigious prize, he said, should come with a certain responsibility. The same could be said of all current purveyors of elite opinion.

While voluntarily reducing one’s profile may not seem appealing to many experts and intellectuals, it is the only way to avoid debasing the public discourse. Without a modicum of self-restraint, the constant stream of hot takes might end up undermining the informed debate that undergirds all open societies. To paraphrase Ludwig Wittgenstein, whereof one cannot say anything of substance after considered reflection, thereof one must be silent.

The writer, a senior fellow at Brown University, is a distinguished non-resident fellow at the Center for Global Development. @PROJECTSYNDICATE

### WISDOM CORNER

- Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage. LAO TZU
- A wise man can learn more from a foolish question than a fool can learn from a wise answer. BRUCE LEE
- Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them humanity cannot survive. DALAI LAMA

### WORDSWORTH

#### Fogou

This has the melancholy distinction of being one of the very few words in English that derive from the Cornish language (which died out in the late eighteenth century, though enthusiasts have revived it). It is mainly a term in archaeology for a kind of man-made stone-lined underground passage found in Cornwall. Some are rather large, opening out from a narrow entrance to a long chamber that can sometimes hold a substantial group of people. They are of Iron Age date and seem always to have been built on the edge of settlements. Nobody knows what they were for. They can hardly have functioned as defensive structures, because they would have been a death trap for anybody sheltering inside (unlike underground structures elsewhere, which do seem to have been designed as hiding places); they are too big and too damp to be used for storage; they’re the wrong shape and their entrances are often too narrow for housing livestock. Some people believe that they are ritual structures, perhaps associated with an earth-mother religion or sun worship (some seem to be aligned with midsummer sunrise or sunset). The Cornish word from which their name comes originally meant a cave. They have also been known as vugs or vovs, from the related Cornish vooga for a cavern.

### SPECTRUM NATION

## Economic ills remain unaddressed



Santosh Kumar Mohapatra

**THE BUDGETARY OUTLAY OF INDIA AS A PERCENTAGE OF GDP IS SHRINKING AND MUCH LOWER THAN MANY COUNTRIES**

The budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for the 2023-24 fiscal is contractionary, regressive, pro-rich and anti-poor. It fails to address the grim problems of poverty, hunger, inequality, and unemployment that are inundating Indians. With the passage of each year, the size of the budget increases. It also increases in nominal terms simply due to inflation. Hence a budget should be evaluated as the percentage of nominal GDP or in real value taking inflation into account. The nominal GDP growth assumption for 2023-24 is one of the most crucial numbers in the budget as it determines estimates such as the fiscal deficit and the growth in tax collections. Nominal GDP for 2023-24 has been projected at Rs 301.75 lakh crore assuming 10.5% growth over the estimated nominal GDP of Rs 273.08 lakh crore, as per the first advance estimates of 2022-23.

The budget is contractionary in the sense that the budgeted total expenditure is projected to be Rs 45 lakh crore, only 7.39% higher than the revised estimate of the previous fiscal (Rs 41.9 lakh crore), which is not only lesser than the projected nominal GDP growth of 10.5% but amounts to slashing ex-

penditure in real terms (taking inflation into account).

Further, the budgetary outlay of India as a percentage of GDP is shrinking and much lower than many countries. What is worrying is that it has come down from 20% in 2020-21 to 15.93% in 2021-22 and 15.34% in 2022-23. It is estimated to decline to 14.91% in 2023-24. When the size of budget does not increase as percentage of GDP then when the government increases expenditure, it also reduces some other expenditure, affecting the poor.

The government has cut estimated spending on food, fertiliser and fuel subsidies which are indispensable for the uplift of farmers, labourers and other poor sections. The government has allocated just Rs 60,000 crore for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme for 2023-24, which is much lower than the revised estimate for 2022-23 at Rs 89,400 crore. The scheme was pivotal to the rural economy’s recovery during the pandemic, protecting the most vulnerable households against complete income loss. It continues to provide a safety net to a large section of the vulnerable rural population.

In her budget speech, the finance minister said that the gov-

ernment’s efforts since 2014 have ensured all citizens a better quality of living and a life of dignity. But, India was reported to have a per capita income of \$2170 in 2021 to be dubbed ignominiously as a lower-middle-income country. India ranked 142nd by GDP (nominal) and 128th by GDP (PPP).

The finance minister said during the pandemic, we ensured that no one went to bed hungry, with a scheme to supply free food grains to over 80 crore people for 28 months. This scheme has been extended for 2023. The government contradicts its own claim of development as 80 crore Indians are unable to have two square meals a day without government support.

The budget is a special occasion to address the economic ills plaguing a nation. India is home to the largest number of hungry and poor people in the world. Around 16.4% or 22.8 crore in India are multi-dimensionally poor. The budget has not addressed this problem. The unemployment problem has not been addressed too. Unemployment rate in India rose to 8.30% in December 2022, the highest in 16 months, according to data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy.

The finance minister says today Indians stand with their head held

high, and the world appreciates India’s achievements. But the reality is different. India’s position in Human Development Index is 132 out of 191 countries. In the recent report of the Global Hunger Index, India ranked 107 out of 121 countries with its child-wasting rate at 19.3%, the highest in the world.

The finance minister said that she has raised income tax exemption limits and changed the slab for the benefit of the middle class. Actually, this is very low if compared with the rise of inflation. In a progressive tax system, there should be more collection from direct taxes and less from indirect taxes. The direct tax rate should be increased with the rise in income. But the finance minister has reduced the surcharge rate for higher income tax category.

In the past, she has reduced the corporate tax rate too. India has no inheritance and wealth taxes while many countries have these. The finance minister has taken recourse to indirect taxes by burdening the poor and the middle class while allowing the rich to pay lesser tax. Hence the budget is pro-rich and anti-poor.

The writer is an Odisha-based columnist and economist. Views are personal.

### Protect wetlands

Sir, It is a well-known fact that wetlands are “the kidneys of the natural world.” In a process called phytoremediation, the soil and wetland plants (such as reeds and floating vegetation) take in harmful compounds from water and chemically transform them into non-toxic elements to clean the water in a manner akin to how kidneys purify blood. Wetlands are disappearing three times faster than forests and are earth’s most threatened ecosystem. In just 50 years since 1970, 35% of the world’s wetlands have been lost. Wetlands are crucial ecosystems that sustain biodiversity, climate mitigation and adaptation, freshwater supply, international economies, and more. The fundamental benefit of wetlands for both people and wildlife is frequently overlooked. Despite studies demonstrating the advantages of wetlands, there is little public understanding of these resources and their effects on the environment. To slow down the rapid loss of wetlands and promote conservation and restoration efforts, it is critical that we increase national and international awareness about wetlands. Wetland habitat protection and ethical usage are encouraged by an international treaty known as the Ramsar Convention. The goal of World Wetlands Day is to raise public awareness of the importance of wetlands for both people and ecosystems, and to encourage activities that will result in their conservation, responsible use, and restoration. The main message of World Wetlands Day is to urge increased financial, human, and political investment in order to prevent the wetlands from vanishing and to restore those that have already been damaged.

Krishna Kumar Vepakomma, HYDERABAD

### Terror strikes

Sir, The recent suicide bombing at a mosque in Peshawar that killed at least 100 people, including dozens of police officers, is the worst terrorist attack in Pakistan in years. The blast signals a growing wave of Taliban-fuelled militancy targeting Pakistan. Distressingly, the bombing comes even as Pakistan is contending with political and economic crises from a disputed election and from unprecedented floods last summer. Over the past few months, the situation in Pakistan has worsened, with terrorist groups like the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) executing attacks with near impunity. It is time the ruling federal government and the opposition close ranks and put up a united front, working with the security forces to plan and execute a result-oriented counter-terrorism strategy.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, CHENNAI

## Letters

### TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa POST are most welcome to contribute letters (200 words), articles and columns (between 750-1250 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](mailto:edit@orissapost.com)

Orissa POST  
B-15, Rasulgari Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

# national

of the day quote

Because of the unconstitutional power given to the LG by the central government of BJP, the Delhi government is not able to send its teachers for training abroad. If the teachers have to be sent abroad for training, then the consent of the LG is not required, but due to the unconstitutional amendments made in GNCTD Act by the Central Government, the LG is stalling everything

MANISH SISODIA | DELHI DEPUTY CM

The Centre presented a development-centric Budget Wednesday. Along with the aim of making our country 'aatmanirbhar' (self-reliant), this Budget reflects PM Narendra Modi's roadmap to make India a developed country

BHUPENDRA PATEL | GUJARAT CHIEF MINISTER

India's Indus Water Commissioner issued a notice January 25 for the modification of the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 to his Pakistani counterpart

ARINDAM BAGCHI | EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTRY SPOKESPERSON

## SHORT TAKES

### 3 hurt as DTC bus rams into subway

**New Delhi:** Three people were injured when a DTC bus hit a car before ramming into a subway crossing in west Delhi's Naraina Thursday, police said. A senior official said the Delhi Transport Corporation has ordered an inquiry into the accident. The driver, conductor and the marshal of the bus suffered injuries.

### CDS Chauhan visits Kashmir

**Srinagar:** Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan Thursday visited forward areas and hinterland formations in Kashmir where he was briefed about the security situation. "CDS Gen Anil Chauhan visits #Kashmir. Accompanied by #ArmyCdrNC & #ChinarCorps Cdr, he visited forward area & hinterland formations. Briefed on prevalent security situation, Op preparedness & soldier-citizen connect," Army's Srinagar-based Chinar Corps tweeted.

### India has over 94.50cr voters

**New Delhi:** India has more than 94.50 crore voters, the government said Thursday citing data provided by the Election Commission. In a written reply in Rajya Sabha, Law Minister Kiren Rijiju said, "According to the Election Commission of India, with regard to persons enrolled on Voter ID database as per the final publication of electoral roll as January 1, 2023, the total number of persons enrolled were 94,50,25,694."



Assam Govt is firm in its resolve to end the menace of child marriage in the state. I request all to cooperate

HIMANTA BISWA SARMA | ASSAM CHIEF MINISTER

# No action against hate speeches, SC laments

The Supreme Court orally observed that it has passed many orders in connection with hate speeches at events yet nobody was taking action, while agreeing to examine a plea against an alleged hate speech event scheduled February 5 in Mumbai

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, Feb 2:** The Supreme Court Thursday lamented that nobody was taking action against hate speeches despite its orders, and observed that the top court will be left "embarrassed again and again" if it is asked to give further directions to curb such statements.

The court's strong observations were made by a bench comprising Justice K M Joseph, Justice Aniruddha Bose and Justice Hrishikesh Roy when a plea seeking to prohibit an event scheduled to be



held February 5 by the Hindu Jan Akrosh Morcha in Mumbai was mentioned for an urgent hearing.

The bench agreed to hear the plea Friday subject to instructions and approval from Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud on the administrative side. "We are with you on this, but understand that the Supreme Court cannot be triggered every time there is a rally notified. We have already passed an order which is clear enough. Just imagine rallies happening all across the country. Every time there will be an application before the Supreme Court. How can that be feasible?"

"You ask us to be embarrassed again and again by getting an order. We have passed so many orders yet nobody is taking action. The Supreme Court should not be asked to pass an order on an event to

event basis," it observed. The observation came after a lawyer mentioned the matter, saying the issue needs urgent hearing against holding of the Mumbai rally. She submitted that a similar rally was organised a few days ago in which 10,000 people participated and allegedly gave a call to boycott Muslim communities economically and socially. On continuous persistence of the lawyer, the court asked her to serve a copy of the application to the counsel for Maharashtra.

"Serve a copy on the State, we will list it tomorrow subject to orders of the CJI. Only this case, not the entire batch," the bench said. Holding that the Constitution of India envisages a secular nation, the top court October 21 last year directed the Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand governments to come down hard on hate speeches, promptly registering criminal cases against the culprits without waiting for a complaint to be filed.

It had also warned that any delay on the part of the administration in taking action on this "very serious issue" would invite the court's contempt.

## Pregnant lady, husband die as car catches fire

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kannur (Ker), Feb 2:** In a tragic incident, a pregnant woman and her husband were charred to death when the car in which they were travelling caught fire near the district government hospital here on Thursday, police said. The victims have been identified as Prijith (35) and his wife Reesha (26), hailing from Kuttittattor in the district.



The incident occurred when the car was proceeding to the hospital with Reesha who complained of labour pain, they said. Immediately after getting the information, the fire and rescue officials rushed to the spot and extinguished the fire completely and pulled out Prijith and Reesha, but they were already dead. Six people were travelling in the car and four of them including a child who were sitting in the rear seat escaped when the vehicle caught fire.

## SC rejects plea against candidates contesting polls more than one seat



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 2:** The Supreme Court Thursday dismissed a plea seeking to bar persons from contesting elections from more than one seat, saying it is ultimately the Parliament's will as to whether the political democracy in the country is furthered by granting a choice.

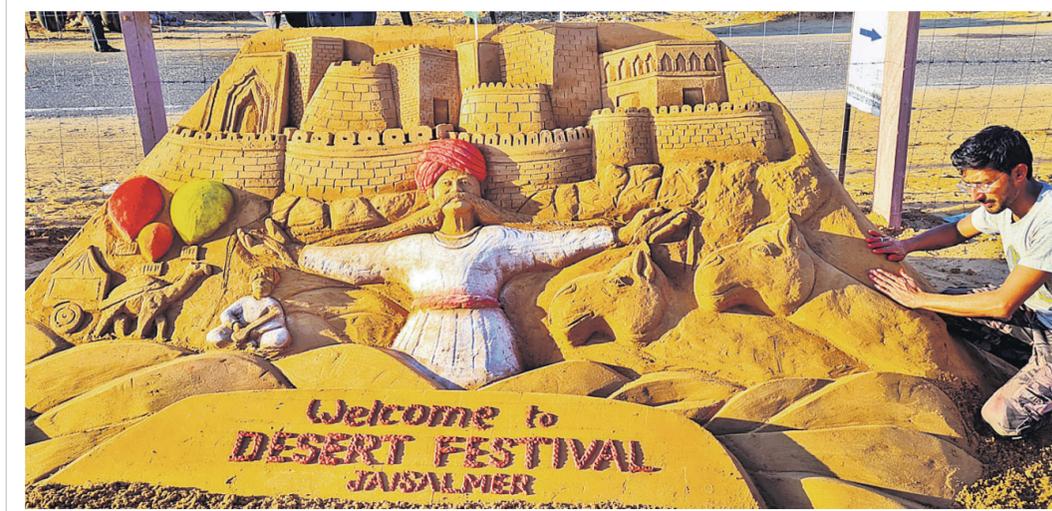
The bench, also comprising justices PS Narasimha and J B Pardiwala, was dealing with a petition filed by advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay, who had sought to declare as invalid and ultra vires to the Constitution section 33(7) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, which allows a person to contest a general election or a group of by-polls or biennial elections from two constituencies.

"Permitting a candidate to contest from more than one seat... is a matter of legislative policy since it is ultimately the Parliament's will as to whether the political democracy in the country is furthered by granting such a choice," it said.

The top court observed that in the absence of any manifest arbitrariness in section 33(7) of the 1951 Act, it would not be possible for it to strike down the provision. During the arguments, senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, who appeared on behalf of Upadhyay, submitted that if a candidate contests an election from two seats and gets elected from both, he or she has to vacate one seat, which will lead to an additional financial burden on the exchequer.

He said prior to a 1996 amendment, there was no bar on the number of seats a candidate could contest in an election. The amendment restricted that number to two. The bench observed that it is for Parliament to decide whether a candidate can contest an election from more than one seat.

"When you contest from two seats, you do not know from where you will get elected. What is wrong about it? This is part of electoral democracy," it said. The bench said Parliament can certainly step in, as it did in 1996, and say it is limiting it to one constituency. "At the relevant time, if Parliament thinks necessary, it can do it. There is no question of inaction."



Artist Ajay Rawat creates a sand art for the upcoming Jaisalmer Desert Festival 2023 in Pushkar, Rajasthan

# NHRC NOTICES TO CENTRE, STATES

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Feb 2:** The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has taken suo motu cognizance of a newspaper article that according to the Ministry of Labour & Employment's Directorate General Factory Advice Service and Labour Institutes (DG-FASLI) data revealing that three people died and 11 were injured daily on an average between 2017 and 2022, due to accident in the registered factories of the country.

The Commission said that the gravity of the matter as highlighted in the newspaper article raises serious concerns about the human rights of the workers in var-

ious business enterprises including factories. Human rights risk can be mitigated at the stage of structuring contracts or other agreements between employers and employees within the purview of law giving due importance to the concept of Business and Human Rights.

Accordingly, the Commission has issued notices to all the Chief Secretaries, Principal Secretaries, Department of Labour of all the states and Union Territories to provide detailed reports with respect to the death, incapacity of workers and employees due to accidents in the factories in their jurisdictions and the compensation paid to the injured, next of kin of



the deceased, prosecution initiated against the factory owners and the number of safety officers employed as per Section 40B of the Factories Act, 1948.

"The reports must contain year-wise reports of the Chief Inspector

of Factories taking measures against defaulting factory owners including prosecution for the period from 2017 to 2022 in a tabulated form. Measures taken by the states for effective implementation of the various provisions of the

Factories Act, 1948, must also be part of the reports, said NHRC. A notice has also been issued to the Secretary, Union Ministry of Labour & Employment to submit an action taken report with regard to the implementation of the occupational Safety Health and Working Conditions Code and the measures taken or to be taken for improving the human rights conditions in respect of the factory workers across the country.

Reportedly, as many as 3331 deaths were recorded between 2018 and 2020 but only 14 people were imprisoned for offences under the Factories Act, 1948. The NHRC has sought the response within six weeks.

## Morbi bridge collapse: Seven accused seek bail

AGENCIES

**Morbi, Feb 2:** Seven persons arrested in connection with the collapse of a suspension bridge in Morbi town of Gujarat, which killed 135 persons, approached the sessions court on Thursday for regular bail.



The British-era suspension bridge on Machchhu river collapsed October 30, 2022. Some days after it was reopened post repairs by a private firm. After hearing both the sides, Morbi principal district and sessions judge PC Joshi reserved his order till February 4.

The Morbi police had last week filed a chargesheet in the case, in which ten persons have been arrested so far, including Jaysukh Patel, the managing director of Oveva Group that operated the bridge and had carried out repairs to the British-era structure.

The other nine arrested persons comprise two managers of the firm, two ticket-booking clerks, three security guards and two subcontractors who were engaged for the repair works by Oveva Group.

**DEVIKA BRIDGE UNSAFE:** Authorities in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur district on Thursday declared the Devika bridge here unsafe and urged people to refrain from using it, an official spokesperson said. The bridge constructed over two decades ago to facilitate the movement of people at the cremation ghat was declared "unsafe for pedestrians" by the District Road Safety Committee, Udhampur, the official said.

# Limiting global warming to 1.5°C not plausible: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi/Berlin, Feb 2:** Limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius is currently not plausible, according to a new report.

Climate policy, protests, and the Ukraine crisis - The participating researchers systematically assessed to what extent social changes are already underway, while also analyzing certain physical processes frequently discussed as tipping points.

The interdisciplinary team of researchers addressed ten important drivers of social change, the report said. "Actually, when it comes to climate protection, some things have now been set in motion. But if you look at the development of social processes in detail, keeping global warming

under 1.5 degrees still isn't plausible," says CLICCS Speaker Anita Engels.

According to the Hamburg Climate Futures Outlook, especially consumption patterns and corporate responses are slowing urgently needed climate protection measures. Other key factors like UN climate policy, legislation, climate protests and divestment from the fossil fuels are supporting efforts to meet the climate goals.

As the analysis showed, however, this positive dynamic alone won't suffice to stay within the 1.5-degree limit.

In addition, the research team assessed certain physical processes that are frequently discussed as tipping points, such as the loss of the Arctic sea ice and melting ice sheets, which are se-



rious developments as are regional climate changes. But they will have very little influence on the global temperature until 2050,

they said. In this regard, a thawing permafrost, weakened Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), and the loss

THE RESEARCHERS CONCLUDED THAT SOCIAL CHANGE IS ESSENTIAL TO MEETING THE TEMPERATURE GOALS SET IN PARIS

ACCORDINGLY, CLIMATE ADAPTATION WILL ALSO HAVE TO BE APPROACHED FROM A NEW ANGLE

THE CENTRAL REPORT WAS RELEASED BY UNIVERSITÄT HAMBURG'S CLUSTER OF EXCELLENCE "CLIMATE, CLIMATIC CHANGE, AND SOCIETY" (CLICCS)

of the Amazon Forest are more important factors, albeit only moderately, the report said.

"The fact is that these feared tipping points could drastically change the conditions for life on

Earth - but they're largely irrelevant for reaching the Paris Agreement temperature goals," said CLICCS Co-Speaker Jochem Marotzke from the Max Planck Institute for Meteorology, Germany.

The report also covered COVID-19 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Economic reconstruction programs have reinforced dependence on fossil fuels, which means the necessary changes are now less plausible than previously assumed, the report said.

In contrast, whether efforts to safeguard Europe's power supply and the international community's attempts to become independent of Russian gas will undermine or accelerate the phasing out of fossil fuels in the long run remains unclear, the report said.

# Confusion in AIADMK camps as BJP delays decision on support

THE OPPOSITION AIADMK'S DISCOMFITURE IS LIKELY TO WORK IN FAVOUR OF THE RULING DMK-BACKED CONGRESS CANDIDATE IN THE BYPOLL



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Chennai, Feb 2:** Confusion continues to prevail among the AIADMK factions on whom the BJP would support in the February 27 Erode East bypoll.

Though the BJP could have ended the suspense much earlier, its decision to wait till the AIADMK factions arrive at a consensus had only spilt the faction war to an all time low with both K Palaniswami and O Panneerselvam announcing their respective candidates - KS Thennarasu and Senthil

Murugan - Wednesday. Both the factions are contending for the party's Two Leaves symbol now.

Asked if both the AIADMK camps were attempting to pressure the BJP to support their respective candidate, Panneerselvam said there was time till February 7, the last date for filing of nominations, for the BJP to respond.

"You can't force a party to support. We didn't get the official confirmation yet from the BJP leaders," Panneerselvam said.

The rival AIADMK camp under Palaniswami too attempted to exert

pressure on the BJP by putting up a banner at its election office proclaiming itself as National Democratic Progressive Alliance (NDPA) and retracting its decision rectifying the words on the banner as National Democratic Alliance (NDA) on the same day Wednesday.

"You should ask them why the NDPA changed to NDA in the banner within six hours," BJP State chief K Annamalai said late Wednesday night. "Our alliance is NDA. This is clear. Senior leaders from the AIADMK had called me and clarified that there has been a printing mistake," Annamalai said, when asked about the alliance issue figuring on AIADMK's official banner.

The opposition AIADMK's discomfiture is likely to work in favour of the ruling DMK-backed Congress candidate, EVKS Elangovan, in the byelection.

Meanwhile, Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam leader TTV Dhinakaran, whom Palaniswami and Panneerselvam expelled from the AIADMK, is hectorically campaigning for his party candidate Shiva Prasanth, who is contesting on the Pressure Cooker symbol.

## Petition filed to prevent traders of other faiths on temple premises

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Tumakuru (Karnataka), Feb 2:** The Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal have submitted a petition to the Deputy Commissioner of Tumakuru city in Karnataka asking the authorities to prevent traders of other faiths to carry out business within the premises of a historical temple during the celebration of a festival.

The three-day festival began at the historical Gosala Gubbi Channabasaveshwara temple Thursday.

To avoid any untoward incident, authorities have already beefed up the security in the area.

In their petition, the two Hindu groups warned of a response if such traders are allowed to carry out business directly or indirectly in the premises of the temple or in a 100-metre surrounding.

They have also requested the police department to ensure implementation of clauses of the law in the Muzrai department in this regard.

"The clause is very clear that there is no scope for persons of other religions to carry out business on the premises of temples and at religious fairs. This law should be enforced," VHP president GK Srinivas said.

The boycotting trend which seemed to have settled down in Karnataka comes to the fore again with the latest development.

# Cooum river in Chennai most polluted in country: CPCB report

The number of polluted rivers in Tamil Nadu has increased in the past four years

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Chennai, Feb 2:** The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) in a recent report has termed the Cooum in Chennai the 'most polluted' river in the country.

According to the report, Biomedical Oxygen Demand (BOD) in the river between Avadi to Sathya Nagar was 345 mg per litre which is the highest among the 603 rivers of the country. Interestingly, the Sabarmati river in Gujarat with a BOD of 292 mg per litre and Bahela in Uttar Pradesh with a BOD value of 287 mg per litre are second and third most polluted rivers respectively.

The report also states that the number of polluted rivers in Tamil Nadu has increased in the past four years. The CPCBA report titled, 'Polluted River Stretches for Restoration of Water Quality, 2022' states that the water quality of 12 rivers in Tamil Nadu was monitored at 73 locations during the period between 2019 to 2021. BOD in 53 locations of 10 rivers was not found complying with the prescribed water quality criteria, the report said.

The 10 rivers where BOD was not found complying with the prescribed criteria are Adyar,



Amaravati, Bhavani, Cauvery, Cooum, Palar, Sarabanga, Tamarabarani, Vasishtha and Tirumanimuthar in Tamil Nadu.

Notably, Tamarabarani and Cooum rivers have been highly polluted for the past few years with environmentalists and social workers relentlessly campaigning against the unabated pollution.

Even as the Cooum river has become the most polluted river in the country, steps have been taken by the present government to clean it. Almost 80 per cent of en-

croachments along the river banks have been removed and three treatment plants have been set up at Langs Garden in Egmore, Nungambakkam and in Chetpet. The authorities are now focusing on preventing the flow of untreated sewage into it.

The polluted water will be biologically treated and after that, it undergoes sedimentation and filtration to enhance its quality. After this, the water is chlorinated for disinfection and ready for non-potable purposes like gardening.

## Amicus curiae appointed for PIL on illegal religious structures

A division bench of Karnataka HC took cognisance of the case after a Supreme Court direction to remove all unauthorised religious structures from public properties

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bangalore, Feb 2:** The High Court of Karnataka has appointed senior advocate Vikram Huilgol as amicus curiae in the public interest litigation (PIL) it has initiated against illegal religious structures on public land.

The division bench of Chief Justice Prasanna B Varale and Justice Ashok S Kinagi heard the PIL Wednesday. It took cognisance of the case after a Supreme Court direction to remove all unauthorised religious structures from public properties.

The state had submitted an affidavit before the court stating that 1,563 unauthorised religious structures have been removed so far. Another 457 have been retained and 48 of them have been relocated. Only 17 structures have been regularised.

The HC noted that a large number of interim applications have been filed in the PIL and each one had to be studied. It directed the amicus curiae to prepare a new list of the unauthorised structures taking into account the structures that the State has dropped from its initial list. The state was directed to

provide all relevant documents to the Amicus Curiae and the matter was adjourned by three weeks. The Supreme Court through an order on September 29, 2009 directed removal of all unauthorised religious structures from public places.

Following this, the HC in its order September 5, 2019 directed the state to submit its action-taken-report on the SC order. The state has been submitting updated reports at regular intervals.



Delegates participating in the G20 Education Working Group meeting 2023, dance with artistes during a visit to a tourist site in Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu.

PTI PHOTO

## TN prepares for synchronised vulture survey

With the vultures flying long distances, the survey has to be conducted in the three states -- Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka - at the same time and using the same methodology



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Chennai, Feb 2:** The Tamil Nadu forest department has sought the support of Kerala and Karnataka forest departments for a synchronised vulture survey to be held in March.

The forest department of Tamil Nadu has planned a survey of vultures after a few numbers were spotted at Madhumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR) in Nilgiris which is a tri-junction of forest areas spread across Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. With the vultures flying long distances, the survey has to be conducted in all three states at the same time and using the same methodology.

The Chief Wildlife Warden of Tamil Nadu, K. Sreenivasa Rao has already written a letter to the wildlife

wardens of both Karnataka and Kerala. Speaking to media persons, Rao said that he had personally communicated to the wildlife wardens of both states to include vulture conservationists in the survey.

The Animal husbandry department of Tamil Nadu is also joining hands with the Forest department of the state for the conservation of these birds. The chief wildlife warden also said that the department is creating awareness among cattle farmers to regulate the use of painkillers on cattle. It may be noted that the carcass of cattle is the main fodder for the vultures.

The Forest department has used the services of Arulgam, an NGO

that is into Vulture studies and conservation. Wildlife Institute of India and Bombay Natural History Society are also associating with the Tamil Nadu forest department to create awareness among farmers to reduce the usage of painkillers among cattle as it would be dangerous to the survival of vultures.

The conservationists are creating awareness among cattle farmers not to rear cattle without drugs and have selected 20 hotspot villages in each state to create awareness among farmers.

Even as the Tamil Nadu government restricted the use of anti-inflammatory drugs ketoprofen and flunixin, considering the adverse

impact they cause to predatory birds, the Egyptian vulture population in the state is on the decline.

According to Arulgam, there is no authentic breeding record in the state except for one in Krishnagiri district a few years back. The main reason for dwindling vulture population, according to conservationists, is the lack of food for these vultures and the presence of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs like diclofenac in the bodies of their prey.

Most of the farmers bury their cattle even after the local bodies, health department and state forest department have conducted awareness campaigns to leave the dead cattle in areas with less population as predatory birds depend on these carcasses. Deworming drugs, rodenticide poisoning and chemicals released by tanneries are also reasons for the decline in the population of Egyptian vultures.

Farmers poison rats which are eaten by the vultures, leading to these chemicals entering the food chain and turning fatal for the birds. With the volume of tanning increasing, the industry which earlier used plant-based materials turned to chemical tanning, including ammonia and sodium, leading to the death of vultures that feed from tanneries.

## SDPI to contest 100 seats in Karnataka Assembly polls

The party is going to contest in seven Assembly seats in Dakshina Kannada

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Bangalore, Feb 2:** The Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) has stated that it will contest 100 out of total 224 Assembly constituencies in Karnataka.

"SDPI will go to elections before people with an agenda of parallel politics," said Afsar Kodlipet, state General Secretary of SDPI.

Speaking to reporters, Afsar Kodlipet said that the party had already announced the names of 54 constituencies from where they are going to contest, and candidates have been declared for 10 seats. The party is going to contest in seven Assembly seats in Dakshina Kannada district. The second list of candidates would be released soon and names of rest of the seats will also be announced soon, he said. Kodlipet condemned the statement on revenge killing by

Hindu activists. He mentioned about Mohammad Fazil who was hacked to death July 28, 2022 to avenge the murder of BJP activist Praveen Kumar Nettare.

"Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Sharan Pumpwell had defended the murder of Mohammad Fazil. It seems his role is there behind all murders that had taken place in Dakshina Kannada dis-

trict. He should be arrested immediately," he stated.

"Sharan had defended Fazil's killing publicly in Tumakuru and Ullal. No case has been lodged against him yet. Do the police not have any sense? Those who are involved in murders directly and indirectly in the murders should be brought to books," Kodlipet demanded.



of the day quote

Guru Ravidass gave the message of welfare of entire humanity, equality of all the sections of society, creating a society based on egalitarian values

The transformation of government schools is becoming a benchmark for the nation. This school in Janakpuri will focus on engineering, medicine, humanities and 21st century skills like IT and artificial intelligence.

The share market witnessed a massive crash after the Union budget was presented... Telephone calls were made to some people asking them to pump in several thousand crores of rupees

SHORT TAKES

51 IEDs recovered in Jharkhand

Chaibasa: Fifty-one IEDs were found in a search operation in Jharkhand's West Singhbhum district Thursday after three para-military jawans were injured, police said.

Assam: Cops seize drugs worth ₹7cr

Guwahati: In two separate operations, police have seized contrabands worth ₹6-7 crore from Karbi Anglong district of Assam, officials said Thursday.

Major fire in warehouse

Hyderabad: A massive fire broke out at a warehouse in Hyderabad's Baghlingampally area Thursday. There was no loss of life reported.

CRPF sets up camp in Maoist stronghold after 17 years

The CRPF said that with this camp, the administration would be able to decisively restore the trade route and pave the way for the economic development of the area

New Delhi, Feb 2: A forward operating base housing armed troops has been created in one of the remotest and high-Maoist violence-affected district of Chhattisgarh that has led to the re-opening of a Tamarind trade route after 17 years, the CRPF said Thursday.

NGT: Joshimath disaster warning for Mussoorie

The tribunal was hearing a matter where it had initiated suo motu proceedings in view of a media report that the recent Joshimath disaster was a warning for Mussoorie where unplanned constructions continued

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Feb 2: The National Green Tribunal has issued directions to conduct a specific study of the hill station of Mussoorie and formed a nine-member committee to suggest remedial measures for preventing environmental damage.

A bench comprising Chairperson Justice AK Goel said a holistic study of the carrying capacity of eco-sensitive areas in the Himalayan regions was imperative for protection of the environment.

The bench, also comprising Judicial Member Justice Sudhir Agarwal and Expert Members A Senthil Vel and Afroz Ahmad, said, "Without undermining the need for study in all eco-sensitive areas... We direct specific study for Mussoorie..."

"Such study may cover as to how much constructions can be allowed and with what safeguards, what safeguards be used for ex-



isting buildings and all other relevant and associated aspects including vehicular traffic, sanitation management, maintaining ecological integrity in terms of soil stability and flora/fauna," the bench said.

Other committee members include the Central Pollution Control Board, ACS Environment, Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology,

296 families shifted to safer places: Govt

NEW DELHI: The Uttarakhand government has shifted 995 members of 296 families from subsidence-hit Joshimath to safer places, Earth Sciences Minister Jitendra Singh told Rajya Sabha Thursday.

assistance from any other experts or institutions and has to meet within two weeks.



Indian Coast Guard personnel during a demonstration, on the occasion of the 47th Raising Day of Indian Coast Guard, off Mangalore coast

BJP to contest 20 of 60 seats jointly with NDPP

The BJP had contested on 47 seats in the 2018 assembly polls and had won two

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 2: The BJP will contest on all 60 seats of the Meghalaya Assembly and fight the Nagaland elections in an alliance with the state's ruling Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP), contesting on 20 of 60 seats.

BJP secretary and its northeast co-incharge Rituraj Sinha told reporters Thursday that the party will fight the Meghalaya polls under the campaign tagline of "M-Power" (Modi power), asserting that people of the state have trust in Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

They believe Modi is the only person who can ensure a corruption-free government and fast track development, he said, noting that this is the first time the BJP will field candidates on all seats of the Meghalaya Assembly. Nagaland

Table with 2 columns: Constituency, Candidate Name, Party. Lists candidates for Meghalaya and Nagaland assembly elections.

NAGALAND ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

and Meghalaya BJP chief Temjen Imna Along and Ernest Mawrie, respectively also named party candidates approved by the party's central election committee.

led National People's Party is in power in Meghalaya. Though the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is a part of his government, the relations between the two parties have long been far from smooth.

The Prime Minister has converted the 'Look East' policy into 'act policy'. The central government has worked to execute the HIRA (highways, internet connectivity, roadways and airport) model in the region which has also witnessed an era of peace, Sinha said.

Nain Kohli, BJP's in-charge for Nagaland, said, "We believe Modi's work, focus on development and peace are the critical factors which will drive Nagaland's voters" Both the states will go to polls on February 27 and counting of votes is due for March 2.

NOBLE DEED

The family of a 50-year-old man who was declared brain dead at AIIMS in New Delhi, donated his organs, offering fresh lease of life to four patients.



'LeT terrorist held as police crack several blast cases'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, Feb 2: A government school teacher-turned Lashkar-e-Taiba-terrorist was arrested for allegedly carrying out multiple blasts, including one in a bus carrying Vaishno Devi pilgrims with the intention to damage communal harmony and revive terrorism in the Jammu region, Jammu and Kashmir Director General of Police Dilbag Singh said Thursday.

The Jammu and Kashmir police chief said this was the first time that such type of a bomb was recovered in the Union Territory. A special team of experts is inspecting the device, which could have been activated by pressing the spray button, Singh added.

Arif was allegedly working at the behest of his Pakistani handlers and admitted to his involvement in bombing the bus carrying Vaishno Devi pilgrims that killed four people and injured 24 others last May, Singh said. He also accepted his role in an IED explosion in Jammu's Shastri Nagar



The arrest of Arif, a resident of Reasi district, follows investigations in the recent twin blast case at Narwal in Jammu

area in February 2022 besides the twin explosions at Narwal on January 21 that left nine people injured. "All the (ready-to-use) IEDs have come from across the border. He had received the drone-dropped consignment of three IEDs in the last days of December and used two of these at Narwal," Singh said.

Journalist Kappan walks out of UP jail

Siddique Kappan was arrested while on his way to Uttar Pradesh's Hathras to report on the alleged gangrape and death of a 20-year-old Dalit woman, which triggered nationwide outrage



Journalist Siddique Kappan poses for photos following his release

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, Feb 2: Kerala journalist Siddique Kappan walked out of jail on bail Thursday, over two years after he was arrested for allegedly trying to instigate violence after the death of a woman in Uttar Pradesh's Hathras.

The release came almost six weeks after Allahabad High Court granted him bail in a money laundering case filed by the Enforcement Directorate. In September, the Supreme Court granted him bail in another case under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). Kappan was released from jail around 9.15 am, Lucknow district prison jailor Rajendra Singh told PTI.

A day earlier, his lawyer submitted two sureties of ₹1 lakh each at the special PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act) court here, fulfilling a bail condition. "I struggled," Kappan said minutes after he walked out to camera crews, a small curious crowd - and to his wife and teen son, waiting patiently. "It has been 28 months. I am out after a lot of fight. I am happy," he said. Speaking to PTI, the jour-

nalist added, "I am coming to Delhi. I have to stay there for six weeks." The Supreme Court bench headed by then Chief Justice Uday Umesh Lalit had directed Kappan to remain in Delhi for six weeks after his release from prison.

Kappan and three others were arrested in October 2020 while they were going to Hathras where a Dalit woman died allegedly after being raped.

Asked about the purpose of his visit to Hathras, Kappan told the assembled reporters that he had gone there for "reporting". About those who had accompanied him, he said they were students. Questioned on recoveries made from him, Kappan told the media, "Nothing... I had only a laptop and mobile." Asked about reports that some objectionable materials were also found on him, he said, "Two pens and a notepad." Police had alleged that Kappan had links with the now-banned Popular Front of India and charged him under the UAPA and sections of the Indian Penal Code. During his two and a half years in jail, his mother died.

"Her name was Kadajah. She is not there to see Kappan coming home," his wife Raihana told PTI. "The Supreme Court granted bail in the UAPA case and his innocence was revealed. Two and a half years is not a short time. We have experienced a lot of pain and suffering. But I am happy that justice, though belated, has been served," she said.

"I repeat that Kappan is a media person," Raihana said. The couple has three children - Muzammil (19), Zidhan (14) and Mehnaz (nine).



established some other FOBs sometime back in this remote Naxal violence-affected district, more than 400 kms from state capital Raipur,

like Kunder and Silger (at a distance of about 5 kms each) and Jagargunda (around 10 kms away). Around 14-15 FOBs have been

established by the force over the last three years in Chhattisgarh. The FOBs houses a small but strong and armed contingent of CRPF personnel who work to cut the supply chain of Maoists in remote and hardcore extremism-affected areas by not only undertaking quality operations but also by interacting with civilians, officials have said in the past.

The Central Reserve Police Force is the lead anti-Naxal operations force of the country and it has deployed close to one lakh personnel for this task in various LWE violence affected districts including that in Chhattisgarh.

The Union government informed the Parliament in December, 2022, that the geographical spread of the LWE has significantly reduced

and only 191 police stations of 46 districts reported LWE-related violence in 2021 as compared to a high of 465 police stations of 96 districts in 2010.

The decline in geographical spread is also reflected in the reduced number of districts covered under SRE (security related expenditure) scheme and the number of these districts reduced from 126 to 90 in April, 2018 and further to 70 in July, 2021, data provided by Union minister of state for home Nityanand Rai had said.

The number of districts contributing approximately 90 per cent of the LWE violence, categorised as most LWE affected districts, also came down to 30 from 35 in 2018 and further to 25 in 2021, he said.

AGUSTAWESTLAND SCAM SC to hear bail pleas of Michel James Feb 7

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 2: The Supreme Court Thursday said it would hear February 7 the bail pleas of Christian Michel James, an alleged middleman in the AgustaWestland chopper scam in which the CBI and the ED have lodged two separate cases. The ₹3,600-crore alleged scam relates to the purchase of 12 VVIP helicopters from AgustaWestland.

In May last year, the apex court had sought the responses of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on the bail pleas of James. During an earlier hearing, the counsel for the accused had said the case was covered under section 436A of the CrPC (maximum period for which an under trial prisoner can be detained) and James had served 50 per cent of the sentence for the offence allegedly committed by him.

The accused was extradited from Dubai in December 2018 and has been in custody since then, his counsel had said, adding that the probe against him was yet to be concluded.

The lawyer had said the petitioner's case is that under sections 8 and 9 of the Prevention of Corruption Act, the maximum sentence is five years in jail and he has spent nearly four years in prison.

Appearing in the court on behalf of the probe agencies, Additional Solicitor General SV Raju had earlier said with great difficulty, the agencies got the custody of the accused and section 436A of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) would not apply to ED proceedings. He had said James was a resident of the United Kingdom and was extradited from Dubai. James has challenged the March 11, 2022 order of the Delhi High Court that dismissed his bail plea.

# international

## of the day quote

Sweden, don't even bother! As long as you allow my holy book, the Quran, to be burned and torn, and you do so together with your security forces, we will not say yes to your entry into NATO

Any deliveries of long-range weapons to Ukraine by Western countries will not change our military objectives in Ukraine or change fighting on the battlefield

I am taking action today to impose additional visa restrictions on certain current or former Taliban members believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, repressing women and girls in Afghanistan



Good to be back in Kyiv, my 4th time since Russia's invasion. We are here together to show that the EU stands by Ukraine as firmly as ever. And to deepen further our support and cooperation

### 5TH ELECTION IN 2 YEARS

Bulgaria's president dissolved the National Assembly Thursday and called early parliamentary elections for April 2, its fifth in two years, in hopes of resolving the country's bid to settle the European Union and NATO member's prolonged political impasse



## HOW AN INFLUENCER ALLEGEDLY TURNED WOMEN INTO SLAVES

IN 2022, ANDREW TATE WAS THE WORLD'S EIGHTH-MOST GOOGLED PERSON AND THE ALLEGATIONS PUT INTENSE FOCUS ON A SELF-DESCRIBED MISOGYNIST WHO HAS BUILT AN ONLINE FANBASE, PARTICULARLY AMONG YOUNG MEN, BY PROMOTING A LAVISH, HYPER-MACHO IMAGE OF DRIVING FAST CARS AND DATING BEAUTIFUL WOMEN

**Bucharest, Feb 2:** The woman from Moldova thought it was love. Internet celebrity Andrew Tate had offered her a new life. They'd even discussed marriage. He asked for only one thing: absolute loyalty. "You must understand that once you are mine, you will be mine forever," Tate told her February 4 last year in one of dozens of WhatsApp messages cited by Romanian prosecutors who allege he trafficked and sexually exploited several women. Tate, an influencer with millions of online followers, urged the Moldovan woman to join him in Romania. "Nothing bad will happen," he reassured her February 9. "But you have to be on my side." The following month, Romanian

prosecutors say, Tate raped the woman twice in the country while seeking to enlist her in a human-trafficking operation focused on making pornography for the online platform OnlyFans, a site that allows people to sell explicit videos of themselves. The allegations and messages are included in a previously unpublished court document, dated December 30 and reviewed by Reuters, which paints the most detailed picture yet of the illicit business allegedly run by Tate, a former kickboxing world champion, and his brother Tristan. They came to light following the arrest of the brothers December 29 on charges of forming a criminal gang to sexually exploit women. The brothers used deception and intimidation to bring six women under their control and



"transform them into slaves", prosecutors said in the document. The 61-page file, produced by Bucharest court officials, comprises minutes of a hearing when a judge extended the Tates' detention plus evidence submitted by the prosecution. Attorney Vidineac said the brothers' alleged victims weren't mistreated, but "lived off the backs of the famous Tates", according to the court document. "They were joyful and nobody was forcing them to do these things," he added. Vidineac acknowledged in the document that Andrew Tate and the

Moldovan woman had sex but he said it was consensual and accused her of fabricating the rape claims. Two of the women told Romanian TV station Antena3 January 11 that they're not victims and the Tates are innocent. The station identified them only by first names, Beatrice and Iasmina. "You cannot list me as a victim if I say I am not one," Beatrice told the station. The four other women, including the Moldovan woman, haven't publicly commented. **ONLYFANS** Prosecutors say the Tates controlled the victims' OnlyFans accounts and earnings amounting to tens of thousands of euros, underlining concerns among some human rights groups about the potential for the exploitation of women on such platforms. UK-based OnlyFans has 150 mil-

lion users who pay "creators" monthly fees of varying amounts for their content, much of it erotic or pornographic, but also in areas such as fitness training and music. **EXPLOITATION** The detention of the Tates, along with two Romanian women accused of working for them, has been extended to February 27. Their appeal against that detention was rejected by a court Wednesday. The suspected accomplices, Georgiana Naghel and Luana Radu, controlled the six victims' OnlyFans and TikTok accounts on behalf of the Tates, skimming off half the revenue and fining women for being late or sniffing on camera, said prosecutors. The pair threatened to beat the women up if they did not do their job, according to the court document.

## N Korea warns of N-force to deter US

North Korea for decades has described the US' combined military exercises with South Korea as rehearsals for a potential invasion, although the allies have described those drills as defensive

**Seoul, Feb 2:** North Korea said Thursday it's prepared to counter US military moves with the "most overwhelming nuclear force" as it warned that the expansion of the United States' military exercises with rival South Korea is pushing tensions to an "extreme red line." The statement by Pyongyang's Foreign Ministry came in response to comments by US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who said Tuesday in Seoul that the United States would increase its deployment of advanced military assets to the Korean Peninsula, including fighter jets and aircraft carriers, as it strengthens joint training and operational planning with South Korea. South Korea's security jitters have risen since North Korea test-fired dozens of missiles in 2022, including potentially nuclear-capable ones designed to strike targets in South Korea and the US. In a statement attributed to an unidentified spokesperson of its Foreign Ministry, North Korea said the expansion of the allies' drills is threatening to turn the Korean Peninsula into a "huge war arsenal and a more critical war zone."



- NK says no interest in talking if US remains hostile
- Statement warns of response to any military moves by US
- US, S Korean warplanes conducted drills Wednesday

with South Korean fighters above South Korea's western waters. The United States and South Korea are also planning to a joint simulation this month aimed at sharpening their response if North Korea uses nuclear weapons. The North Korean statement portends another provocative run in weapons demonstrations in 2023, similar to how the North ramped up its own weapons launches in 2022 as the allies resumed their large-scale training. North Korea's actions included a slew of missile and artillery launches that it described as simulated nuclear attacks on South Korean and US targets. "DPRK will take the toughest reaction to any military attempt of the US on the principle of nuke for nuke and an all-out confrontation for an all-out confrontation!" the North Korean spokesperson said, invoking the country's formal name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. "If the US continues to introduce strategic assets into the Korean Peninsula and its surrounding area, the DPRK will make clearer its deterring activities without fail according to their nature," the spokesperson said. Nuclear negotiations between the US and North Korea stopped in 2019 because of disagreements over a relaxation of US-led economic sanctions against the North in exchange for steps by North Korea to wind down its nuclear weapons and missiles programs.

### SHORT TAKES

#### No UK monarchs on Oz bank notes

**Canberra:** King Charles III won't feature on Australia's new \$5 bill, the nation's central bank announced Thursday, signaling a phasing out of the British monarchy from Australian bank notes, although he is still expected to feature on coins. A new Indigenous design will replace the previous portrait of the late Queen Elizabeth II, Australia's Reserve Bank said, a move which honors "the culture and history of the First Australians." The \$5 bill is Australia's only bank note to feature the monarch.

#### Thai air pollution past safe levels

**Bangkok:** Air pollution in Bangkok and neighbouring Thai provinces spiked past safe levels Thursday, prompting authorities to urge people to stay indoors and avoid strenuous outdoor activity. The concentration of small and hazardous airborne particles known as PM2.5 in the capital was at 14 times the level recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO), making it the sixth-worst in the world, according to IQAir, a Swiss air quality tracking platform. The country's pollution control department said "stagnant weather conditions" were exacerbating vehicle emissions and seasonal fires on agricultural lands.

#### Iran blames Israel for drone attack

**Dubai:** Iran Thursday blamed Israel for a drone attack that targeted a military workshop in its central city of Isfahan over the weekend, warning it "reserves its legitimate and inherent right" to retaliate. Iran's mission to the United Nations, in a letter it published on its website, attributed the attack late Saturday to Israel.

#### US, Philippines push military ties

**Manila:** The United States and the Philippines Thursday announced plans to expand America's military presence in the Southeast Asian nation, with access to four more bases as they seek to deter China's increasingly aggressive actions toward Taiwan and in the disputed South China Sea. The agreement was reached as US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin was in the country for talks about deploying US forces and weapons in more Philippine military camps. In a joint announcement by the Philippines and the US, the two said they had decided to accelerate the full implementation of their so-called Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, which aims to support combined training, exercises and interoperability.



OVERWHELMING RESPONSE: Pope Francis visits the Stade des Martyrs stadium to address young people who came out in thousands during his apostolic journey, in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo

### DOCUSERIES ON MODI

#### UK defends BBC independence

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**London, Feb 2:** The UK government has defended the BBC as a media outlet "independent in its output" in the wake of widespread Indian diaspora protests against the controversial documentary on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Addressing reporters at Downing Street Wednesday, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's spokesperson echoed a statement issued by Foreign Secretary James Cleverly in Parliament earlier this week to add that the government continues to invest in its relationship with India. "The BBC is independent in its output and we would stress that we continue to regard India as an incredibly important international partner," the spokesperson said in response to a question about India's condemnation of the documentary 'India: The Modi Question' questioning the then chief minister's role in the 2002 Godhra riots. "We will be investing heavily in our relationship with India over the coming decades and we're confident it will only go from strength to strength," the spokesperson said.



We recognise how this portrayal of the Indian government has played out in India. I made it clear that the BBC is independent in its output, that the UK regards India as an incredibly important international partner and that we will be investing heavily in that relationship in the coming decades

JAMES CLEVERLY | FOREIGN SECRETARY

It followed a similar response by Cleverly in the House of Commons Tuesday, when he responded to a question from a Conservative Party colleague on the assurances the UK government had given to India in the wake of coordinated diaspora protests against the BBC over the weekend.

#### CANADA MOVES TO TAKE IN 10,000 UYGHUR REFUGEES

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

**Ottawa, Feb 2:** Canada's parliament Wednesday unanimously passed a motion to take in 10,000 Uyghur refugees who fled China but are now facing pressure to return. The move builds on a February 2021 move by Canadian lawmakers to label Beijing's treatment of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in its northwestern Xinjiang territory as genocide. Rights groups believe at least one million Uyghurs and other mostly Muslim minorities have been incarcerated in internment camps in the region, where China is also accused of forcibly sterilizing women and imposing forced labor. Tens of thousands have fled. And according to backbench MP Sameer Zuberi, who sponsored the motion, at least 1,600 have been detained in other countries at China's behest or forcibly repatriated. At a news conference Zuberi noted that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his cabinet voted in support of the motion, signaling the government's "intent to make this happen" even though it is nonbinding. "It is a clear signal that we do not accept human rights violations against the Uyghur people," he said, adding that "what is happening to the Uyghurs is unacceptable." Mehmet Tohti, executive director of the Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project, told reporters it is a strong message that "will resonate not only in China and in Canada, but around the world." The motion says Uyghurs who "fled to third countries face pressure and intimidation by the Chinese state to return to China" and accuses Beijing of also applying diplomatic and economic pressure on countries to detain and deport them, "leaving them without a safe haven in the world." It proposes resettling 10,000 Uyghurs in Canada over two years, starting in 2024. China has defended its Uyghur camps in Xinjiang, saying they are crucial to battling terrorism and providing vocational training to minorities.

### WORLD'S BIGGEST WELCOME

## Hong Kong says 'hello' to woo back visitors

HONG KONG HAS UNVEILED A PROMOTION CAMPAIGN THAT WILL INCLUDE 500,000 FREE FLIGHTS TO LURE VISITORS, BUSINESSES AND INVESTORS BACK TO THE FINANCIAL HUB AFTER MORE THAN THREE YEARS OF TOUGH COVID-19 CURBS

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

**Hong Kong, Feb 2:** Hong Kong is ready to welcome the world back, its leader said Thursday, pledging more than half a million free flights and positive publicity to resurrect the once-vibrant global hub after three years of Covid-enforced isolation. The government's rebranding campaign, "Hello, Hong Kong", bills itself as an effort to tell "good stories" about the southern Chinese city, where years of political repression, coupled with pandemic curbs, have tarnished its business-friendly reputation. Promising "no isolation, no quarantine and no restrictions" during a speech to business and tourism heavyweights, Chief Executive



John Lee announced 500,000 free air tickets for visitors to experience the city's "hustle and bustle". The giveaway will open in March, and mainly be distributed by local airlines Cathay Pacific, HK Express and Hong Kong Airlines. Another 80,000 tickets will be offered to residents in the sum-

mer, with the carriers yet to announce destinations. "This, ladies and gentlemen, is probably the world's biggest welcome ever," Lee said. Adherence to Beijing's zero-Covid doctrine of quarantine, closed borders and face masks kept Hong Kong largely virus-free until

a deadly Omicron outbreak at the start of 2022. But it also contributed to an economic recession and the exodus of more than 2.5 percent of the population. Even as business leaders warned Hong Kong would need a full Covid exit plan before any meaningful reboot, officials insisted on gradually rolling back restrictions. The controls closed off what was previously one of Asia's most connected cities. Hong Kong welcomed just 600,000 visitors in 2022, less than one percent of 2018's figure. More than 130 international companies have shuttered their Hong Kong offices over the past three years, while a recent survey of 253 Japanese firms showed se-

curing quality workers was their top concern. More than a quarter of the surveyed companies worried about brain drain due to the national security law Beijing imposed in 2020 to quell huge and often violent protests. According to official figures, more than 140,000 people left Hong Kong's labour force last year, when the economy contracted by 3.5 percent. The top US diplomat in Hong Kong, Greg May, said last week that the city's reputation as a financial centre will hinge on its ability to uphold human rights. "Our view continues to be that Beijing's actions could further force many of the city's best and brightest to flee," he said.

## of the day quote

India is on the cusp of returning to a high growth trajectory and voiced confidence that the country will become the world's third-largest economy by 2027-28

ARVIND PANAGARIYA | EMINENT ECONOMIST

Monthly GST collection is expected to average around Rs 1.50 lakh crore and it will be the new normal in FY24

VIVEK JOHRI | CBIC CHIEF

So my sense is that this (Budget) will certainly give a lot of support and help to the startup ecosystem so that it flourishes in the years to come

PIYUSH GOYAL | COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER

## SHORT TAKES

### BYJU'S further cuts 1K from workforce

**New Delhi:** Edtech major BYJU'S has laid off further 15 per cent or more than 1,000 workers of its employees from its engineering teams, as the company continues phased layoffs to remain growth-oriented in global economic meltdown. It last year decided to lay off as many as 2,500 employees or 5 per cent of its workforce in order to achieve profitability by March 2023. In India, more than 21,000 employees have been laid off by more than 70 startups, including from unicorns like BYJU'S, Ola, MPL, Innovaccer, Unacademy, Vedantu, Cars24, OYO, Meesho, Udaan and many more.

### Govt likely to sell some stake in HZL

**New Delhi:** The government is likely to sell a part of its residual stake in Hindustan Zinc Ltd by next month to help it achieve the revised sell-off target of Rs 50,000 crore for the current fiscal, DIPAM Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey said Thursday. For the coming fiscal, the government has lined up strategic stake sales in companies like HLL Lifecare, PDIL, Shipping Corporation and BEML to meet the similar divestment target set in the 2023-24 Budget. The government currently holds a 29.54 per cent stake in Hindustan Zinc or HZL. In 2002, it sold 26 per cent of HZL to the mining billionaire Anil Agarwal-led group.

### 8.88L tonne wheat sold via e-auction

**New Delhi:** State-owned Food Corporation of India (FCI) has sold 8.88 lakh tonne of wheat to bulk consumers like flour millers on the first day of e-auction conducted in 22 states, the food ministry said Thursday. FCI commenced e-auction of wheat February 1 under Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS) for bulk users in order to improve domestic availability and check wheat prices. On the first day, it offered for sale about 22 lakh tonne of wheat against the earmarked 25 lakh tonne under OMSS.

### MEML merges with parent company

**New Delhi:** Mahindra and Mahindra Thursday said its electric vehicle unit has merged with it. Mahindra Electric Mobility Ltd (MEML) is now officially merged into the parent company, Mahindra and Mahindra Ltd (M&M), the auto major said in a statement. The company's Board had undertaken that MEML would merge into M&M with effect from April 1, 2021, to synergise EV development, manufacturing and sales operations, it said.



Given the scenarios and given our relatively better GDP growth, we expect rupee to be far less under pressure than it was in 2022

V ANANTHA NAGESWARAN | CHIEF ECONOMIC ADVISOR

## GALAXY S23 TO BE INDIGENOUSLY MADE

Korean smart devices maker Samsung Thursday said it will manufacture its premium Galaxy S23 smartphones in India to cater to local market requirements. The launch price of Galaxy S23 series in India is in the range of Rs 75,000 to Rs 1.55 lakh per piece



## MARKET ROUT

# ADANI LOSES OVER ₹8.76L-CR

ADANI GROUP CONTINUED TO LOSE ON THE STOCK MARKET, WITH THE CUMULATIVE ROUT NOW NEARING \$108 BILLION IN A WEEK -- ONE OF THE BIGGEST WIPEOUTS IN INDIA'S HISTORY

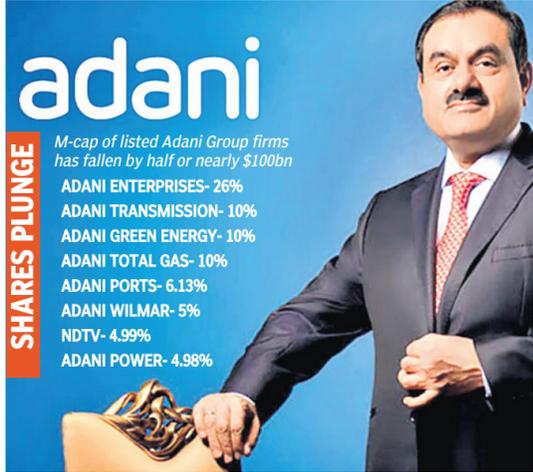
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 2:** Shares of Adani Enterprises tumbled over 26 per cent Thursday, a day after the firm said it has decided not to go ahead with its Rs 20,000-crore Follow-on Public Offer (FPO) and will return the proceeds to investors.

The stock tanked 26.50 per cent to settle at Rs 1,564.70 on the BSE. During the day, it tumbled 28.88 per cent to Rs 1,513.90 -- its 52-week low. Most of the other group firms also declined for the sixth day in a row. The 10 listed Adani Group firms have faced a combined erosion of over Rs 8.76 lakh crore in 6 days.

Shares of Adani Transmission fell 10 per cent Thursday, Adani Green Energy tumbled 10 per cent, Adani Total Gas 10 per cent, Adani Ports 6.13 per cent, Adani Wilmar 5 per cent, NDTV 4.99 per cent and Adani Power lost 4.98 per cent.

Many of the group firms also hit their lower circuit limits dur-



ing the morning trade. However, shares of Ambuja Cements jumped 5.33 per cent and

ACC inched up 0.05 per cent.

Adani Group stocks have taken a beating on the bourses after US-based Hindenburg Research made a litany of allegations in a report, including fraudulent transactions and share price manipulation at the Gautam Adani-led group.

Adani Group has dismissed the charges as lies, saying it complies with all laws and disclosure requirements.

"The Board of Adani Enterprises Ltd, (AEL) decided not to go ahead with the fully subscribed FPO. Given the unprecedented situation and the current market volatility, the company aims to protect the interest of its investing community by returning the FPO pro-

### RBI seeks details of banks' exposure to Adani Group

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has sought details about lenders' exposures to the Adani Group, banking sources said, a day after the conglomerate withdrew the Rs 20,000-crore follow on public offer (FPO) of its flagship firm Adani Enterprises amid the steep fall in its stock prices. On Wednesday, Swiss lender Credit Suisse stopped accepting bonds by Adani group companies as collaterals for margin lending. The RBI gets access to banks' large corporate borrowers on a regular basis as part of the central repository of information on large credits (CRILC) data base, the banking sources said. Many a time bank lending happens against pledged securities and a massive fall in the price of the equity shares of the Adani group's 10 listed entities could have accordingly lowered the value of the pledged securities.

ceeds and withdraws the completed transaction," the company said in a statement late Wednesday.

While the Adani Group has total gross debt of Rs 2.2 trillion (\$26.86 billion), top banks have said their credit exposures to the group are small. Shares of the firm are closely held, mutual funds have low exposure too.

### Adani speaks for 1st time since turmoil

Embattled billionaire Gautam Adani Thursday spoke publicly for the first time since his ports-to-energy conglomerate publicly battled a short seller's accusation of stock manipulation and accounting fraud, saying the abrupt move to withdraw a fully-subscribed share sale at his flagship firm was due to market volatility. "After a fully subscribed follow-on public offering (of Adani Enterprises Ltd), yesterday's decision of its withdrawal would have surprised many. But considering the volatility of the market seen yesterday, the board strongly felt that it would not be morally correct to proceed with the FPO," Adani said in a video message to investors. The company decided to refund the money to investors. "In my humble journey of over 4 decades as an entrepreneur I have been blessed to receive overwhelming support from all stakeholders, particularly the investor community... For me, the interest of my investors is paramount and everything is secondary. Hence to insulate the investors from potential losses, we have withdrawn the FPO," Adani said.

## BIZ BUZZ

### CREDAI Prez reacts to Budget 2023-24

**Bhubaneswar:** Swadesh Kumar Routray, CREDAI Odisha's President, praised the Union budget 2023 - 24, and said that the government continues to focus on the empowerment of youth, women, OBCs & farmers. "With a keen focus on the future of the country with a growth-oriented budget, we applaud the FM's vision of enabling an inclusive and sustainable development growth chart for infrastructure. An increased capital outlay for a third year in a row to Rs 10 lakh crore amounting to 3.3% of the GDP, a hike of 66% to over 79,000 crore for PM Awas Yojana and the 9000 crore Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSMEs, will have a positive multiplier effect on economic growth and help realize the PM's vision for Housing for All," he said.



### Central Bank celebrates Pensioner's Day

**Sambalpur:** Central Bank of India, Sambalpur Region organised a Samman Divas across all 46 branches of the region where more than 500 pensioners & ex-staffers were honored for their long association and reposting trust and confidence in the bank February 2. Pensioners were also briefed about the various schemes and digital products to make their life easy and were informed about deposit products like Cent Non-Callable Fixed Deposit and Cent Super Fixed Deposit for 444 days at higher rate of interest of @ 8.60% & 7.85% per annum respectively, which is one of the highest interest rate provided by the bank in the industry. Pensioners and retired staffs also appreciated the efforts taken by the bank. Regional Head Suresh Kumar Jha, Chief Manager BK Swain & Amit Kumar Jha from Regional Office, Sambalpur also visited various branches to honor the pensioners & ex-staffers.

### FMCG consumption continues to decline

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 2:** The country's Fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry witnessed a consumption slowdown in the December quarter, with an overall "negative" volume growth, as consumers continue to reel under inflationary pressure, says a report.

According to the report released by data analytics firm NielsenIQ Thursday, in October-December, the FMCG industry grew 7.6 per cent in terms of value but its volume growth was (-) 0.3 per cent.

The rural markets declined 2.8 per cent registering the sixth consecutive quarter with negative volume growth, while the urban market maintained stable positive growth of 1.6 per cent.

In the retail space, Modern Trade channels maintained a double-digit value growth of 23.3 per cent and volume growth of 12.6 per cent on a year-on-year basis.

While the FMCG sales from traditional trade channels such as Kirana stores "witnessed continuous negative consumption growth (- 1.5 per cent) for the fifth consecutive quarter".

# Windfall profit tax to go on; mop-up at ₹25K-cr this FY

India first imposed windfall profit taxes July 1, joining a growing number of nations that tax super normal profits of energy companies



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 2:** The seven-month-old windfall profit tax on domestically produced crude oil and export of fuel is likely to give about Rs 25,000 crore in the current fiscal ending March 31 and the levy will continue for now as international oil prices are up again, top government officials said.

"As of now, crude prices are again on the rise. So, for time being windfall tax will continue," CBIC chairman Vivek Johri told PTI here. Separately, Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra said the budget has estimated collection from windfall tax at Rs 25,000 crore in the current fiscal.

As the geopolitical situation continues to be volatile, Johri said it would be "difficult to predict how long the windfall taxes will continue".

India first imposed windfall profit taxes July 1, joining a growing number of nations that tax super normal profits of energy companies. At that time, export duties of Rs 6 per litre (\$12 per barrel) each were levied on petrol and ATF, and Rs 13 a litre (\$26 a barrel) on diesel.

A Rs 23,250 per tonne (\$40 per barrel) windfall profit tax on domestic crude production was also levied. The levy is reviewed every fortnight and rates are moderated based on international oil prices. The windfall tax on crude oil produced by companies, such as Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), is currently Rs 1,900 per tonne.

Crude oil pumped out of the ground and from below the seabed is refined and converted into fuel like petrol, diesel and aviation turbine fuel (ATF).

The tax on the export of diesel is Rs 5 per litre and that on overseas shipments of ATF is Rs 3.5 a litre.

The export tax on petrol was scrapped in the very first review.

The government levies tax on windfall profits made by oil producers on any price they get above a threshold of \$75 per barrel.

The levy on fuel exports is based on cracks or margins that refiners earn on overseas shipments. These margins are primarily a difference between the international oil price realised and the cost.

## 10TH TIME IN A ROW

# BoE raises interest rates

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**London, Feb 2:** The Bank of England Thursday raised interest rates by another half percentage to hit 4 per cent, the tenth consecutive rate hike in the central bank's battle to curb soaring inflation even as it forecast a shallower recession this year than previously feared.

In an accompanying monetary report, the Bank hinted that there is a chance this week's might be the last interest rate hike for some time, saying that it would only raise rates further "if there were to be evidence of more persistent (inflationary) pressures" than in it expects.

The Bank has alongside upgraded its forecast for the British economy, with inflation having "peaked" and expected to come down gradually this year.

"The Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) sets monetary policy to meet the 2 per cent inflation target, and in a way that helps to sustain growth and employment," the Bank said in a statement.

"At its meeting ending on 1



### ECB outpaces US Fed

The European Central Bank has chugged ahead with another outsized interest rate increase, underlining its drive to subdue high inflation even as the European economy slows and the US Federal Reserve eases its pace of hikes. The Bank raised its key benchmarks by half a percentage point Thursday and vowed a similar move in March. The Frankfurt-based policymakers are moving aggressively to get on top of price spikes that have slowed but are still hurting households in the 20 countries that use the euro currency.

February 2023, the MPC voted by a majority of 7-2 to increase Bank Rate by 0.5 percentage points, to 4 per cent. Global consumer price inflation remains high, although it is likely to have peaked across many advanced economies, in-

cluding in the United Kingdom," it said.

While it notes that inflation has begun to fall, in December 2022 prices were still 10.5 per cent higher than a year ago -- the highest inflation figure in decades.

# Renault-Nissan plan India reboot in test of reshaped alliance

Unlike Nissan, Renault does not have a significant presence in major markets like China, the United States and Japan, raising the stakes for its success in India

REUTERS

**New Delhi, Feb 2:** A revamped alliance between Renault and Nissan will face an early test in India, where the automakers plan new investment in a bid to close the gap on rivals, people with knowledge of the plans told Reuters.

The automakers reached a deal in principle Monday to restructure their two-decade partnership by putting both companies on an equal footing in terms of shareholding and with Nissan investing in Renault's new electric vehicle (EV) unit.

The French and Japanese companies announced they had identified key projects on which they would deepen collaboration in India, Latin America and Europe, without elaborating.

In India, the world's fastest-growing car market, the new invest-

ment will be led by Nissan, and the companies are evaluating vehicles they could launch from 2025, two of the people told Reuters. That could include a reboot for Renault's popular Duster sport-utility vehicle, they said.

Renault-Nissan also plan to return to a strategy of sharing and cross-badging vehicles in India, aiming to increase plant utilisation rates and reduce costs, the people said. The Duster SUV, for instance, is being considered for launch under both the Nissan and Renault brands, they said.

The sources asked not to be identified because the companies have not announced details of the new strategy, which could be made public as early as next week.

The new collaboration underscores the pressure automakers face as they invest in EVs, au-



tomation and other software services even as demand for gasoline cars greatly outstrips that for EVs, especially in up-and-coming markets like India.

It also points to the rising potential for sales in India, which last year overtook Japan to become the world's third-largest car market. Industry-wide sales in India surged 23% last year to 4.4 million, according to S&P Global Mobility, while other major markets faced supply constraints.

### COMPLEX CROSSOVER

The first test for the new Renault-Nissan approach could be the Renault Triber, a seven-seat car that the companies have discussed selling in India under the Nissan brand, one of the people said. Those talks were put on hold while they negotiated the broader partnership, he said.

Renault is considering an electric version of its mass-market Kwid small car for India, Reuters reported last month. Two of the peo-

- INDIA KEY MKT IN RENAULT-NISSAN ALLIANCE OVERHAUL
- COMPANIES TO SHARE, CROSS-BADGE CARS IN INDIA
- EVALUATING RENAULT'S DUSTER SUV FOR RE-LAUNCH
- NISSAN JOINS RENAULT'S SMALL EV STUDY IN INDIA

ple said Nissan has joined that review.

The carmakers also plan to bring an existing alliance platform to India that will allow them to build bigger models like the Duster, the people said. Renault-Nissan already share an alliance platform in India for its small cars.

Renault and Nissan together had around 3% of the Indian market in 2022.

In India, the two automakers have a complex crossover of interests, with joint ownership of a car plant and a research and development centre in the southern

city of Chennai.

The plant can produce about 500,000 cars a year but is only running at about a third of that capacity, industry data show. Nissan owns 70% of the plant, but its sales in India lag Renault's. Nissan sold just 35,000 vehicles in India in 2022 - 60% below Renault's 87,000.

Renault has a bigger stake in the research centre, which focuses on localising vehicles for India and global markets.

Cross-badging carries the risk that a Nissan version of a vehicle could cannibalise sales for the Renault equivalent or vice-versa. That was one reason the companies previously scrapped the approach.

But rivals like Japan's Toyota Motor and partner Suzuki Motor have had success with the strategy in India.

In Latin America, Renault and Nissan are studying the shared use of low-cost vehicle platforms, a person with knowledge of the plan there said. The alliance has plants in Mexico and Argentina.

DAVIS CUP: INDIA MAKE SMART SELECTION CHOICES AS TEAM PREPARE TO NEGATE RUNE'S PRESENCE IN PLAY-OFF TIE

# Herculean task awaits India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Hillerod (Denmark), Feb 2:** It will be a Herculean task for the Indian Davis Cup team to save their place in World Group I when they clash with the Holger Rune-led Denmark in the Davis Cup Play-off tie, starting Friday.

India does not have even one player inside the top-300 while World No.9 Rune will make the hosts firm favourites to stay in World Group I. The tie will be played indoors on hard courts.

India had blanked Denmark 4-0 in Delhi in March 2022 but the presence of 19-year-old Rune, who reached the fourth round at the Australian Open last month and won three ATP titles in 2022, makes it a very different proposition.

However, India have come out with a nice strategy to counter Rune's presence and are targeting lower-ranked players in the Denmark camp - August Holmgren (ranked 484) and Elmer Moeller (ranked 718) - to emerge victorious.

The team has decided to field Yuki Bhambri on day one as the country's second-highest ranked player so that Sumit Nagal can go in as the number one player and strive to eke out a win on the opening day.

Holmgren might be ranked low but he is a tough nut to crack. He has been an NCAA champion in the past and will pose a strong challenge to the Indian team.

The doubles match will assume significance and seasoned Rohan Bopanna will have to use his experience to lead the side.

Ever since the new format was introduced in 2019, the Indian team has managed to stay in World Group I but the team will have to work hard to keep its place.

There are three singles players in the playing squad - Prajnesh Gunneswaran (306), Ramkumar Ramanathan (412) and Sumit Nagal (509) - while Sasi Kumar Mukund has been left out.

But it's not a surprise that captain Rohit Rajpal has decided to play Bhambri. He has quit the singles format on the ATP Tour but still is such a good player on indoor courts (where external factors like wind do not count) that it is difficult to ignore him. Yuki will open the tie with the match against Rune while Nagal will play against



Yuki Bhambri will open the tie against Denmark when he face Holger Rune (inset)

Holmgren.

The newly-laid indoor court is a bit slow and is offering waist-height bounce. According to captain Rajpal and coach Zeeshan Ali, Nagal is looking the sharpest on the Indian side.

Nagal also looked in good form in Pune where he went down fighting. "The waist-height bounce won't help us like the grass courts, the lower it is, better it is for us. But still it is better than those high-bounce courts. It suits them more and that's why they have prepared such

court where the home players can strike big," captain Rajpal told this agency.

"This tie we have 50-50 chance and I am looking for at least a 1-1 score on day one. Hope Yuki can produce something special."

Coach Zeeshan explained the strategy. "We wanted Sumit to play as our number one player so that he can play Denmark's second singles player on day one. The rankings of our players are such that it was possible only if Yuki or Rohan played as the second singles player,

so it was Yuki," he said.

"We have played defensive in previous ties where we played against top players and it did not work. We had to do something different."

The team management admitted that the side is feeling the pressure going into the tie without having a single top-300 player. On day two, Bopanna and Yuki will play the doubles against Johannes Ingildsen and Christen Sigsgaard. However the hosts can also field Rune if required on day two.

# It was near-perfect game: Gill

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Ahmedabad, Feb 2:** Young opener Shubman Gill said his unbeaten 63-ball 126 was "tactically and technically" a near-perfect game as it set up India's massive series-clinching 168-run win in the third T20I against New Zealand.

Gill smashed 12 boundaries and seven maximums in his scintillating maiden century in the shortest format to power India to a mammoth 234 for 4 in the final T20I. The hosts then bundled out New Zealand for 66 in 12.1 overs to not only win the match but also secure a 2-1 series win.

"To be able to play how I play, I have to be mentally clear," Gill said during an interaction with skipper Hardik Pandya, a video of which was posted on BCCI.TV.

"This is what you (Hardik) told me. Every time I hit a six, he came and told me - hold your shape in the next ball, you don't have to do anything extra, just do what you are doing and don't try to go too hard. Every ball he kept reminding me and that helped.

"In the last over of (Mitchell) Santner, I was in the zone and I was hitting. So, I thought I will go after him but you asked me to hold myself back and target other bowlers because he (Santner) is bowling well in the entire T20 series. So, tactically and technically it was a near-perfect game for me."

"Player of the series" Pandya snapped four wickets as he bowled with the new ball to dismiss Finn Allen and Glenn Phillips. He later returned to take two more wickets to demolish the Kiwis.

"Four wickets, to be honest, are just part and parcel of the sport but I think I bowled at 145 (kmph) if I am not wrong and that kind of gave me the happiness and the smile you can see. So, I told him (Gill) today that it is my last game and I am going on a break," said Hardik, who will play his next game in about two months' time.

"So, today (Wednesday) gonna be full all guns blazing and I am going to bowl as fast as possible and, to be honest, the kind of start we got, it made our life very easy."

Hardik 'ok' to play MSD role  
Pandya feels he has developed the ability to absorb pressure and doesn't mind playing the anchor role that the great MS Dhoni played for the team.

The 29-year-old has always been known for his batting pyrotech-



Shubman Gill and Hardik Pandya during their partnership against New Zealand in the third T20I, Wednesday

ics but says he has now learnt to take the back seat and anchor the innings, something which master chaser Dhoni did in the fag end of his international career.

"See, to be honest, I've always enjoyed hitting sixes, but I have to evolve and that is life," the stand-in T20 skipper said during the post-match press conference.

"I have to take the other part where I've always believed in partnerships. I want to give my team and the other person more calmness and the assurance that at least I'm there.

"I've played more games than any of those guys out there. So, I've known the experience and more than the experience part, it's where I've batted, and I've learnt how to accept pressure and I've learnt how to kind of swallow the pressure and kind of make sure the team and everything is calm," Hardik added.

Dhoni is known for his calm demeanour and Hardik feels now it is his responsibility to step into the legendary wicketkeeper's shoes as a batter and he is ready to sacrifice his strike-rate to play that role.

"In that way, maybe I have to get my strike rate down or...taking new opportunities or taking new roles is (something) I've always looked forward to. I don't mind coming in and playing the role which somewhere down the line Maahi (Dhoni) used to play," he said.

Hardik has scored 1271 runs at a strike-rate of 142.17 in 87 T20Is. "I think at that time, I was young, and I was hitting all around the park, but now since he has gone, all of a sudden that responsibility. It has just naturally come to me, and I don't mind (doing it). We're getting the result we want and it's okay."

# Barca reach 50-point mark with Betis win

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Madrid, Feb 2:** With another goal by Robert Lewandowski and yet another victory, Barcelona reached the 50-point mark and continued to show their strength going into the second half of the Spanish league.

Lewandowski ended his scoring drought in the league to help Barcelona defeat Real Betis 2-1 and increase their lead over Real Madrid Wednesday.

Lewandowski sealed Barcelona's sixth straight victory in all competitions with his first league goal since October. He is the league's leading scorer with 14 goals. The Poland striker was making his return from a three-game suspension for disrespecting a referee in a match last year.

Raphinha opened the scoring for Barcelona, which now is eight points in front of second-place Madrid ahead of the rival's home match against Valencia Thursday.

Barcelona won the league four times after reaching 50 points or more through 19 rounds. They only failed to lift the trophy in that situation in 2013-14.

Both midweek games involving Barcelona and Madrid were postponed from January because of the teams' participation in the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia. Barcelona defeated Betis in a penalty shootout in the semifinals before eventually winning the final against Madrid.

It was Betis' sixth straight league loss at home against Barcelona, which has won eight straight if counting the shootout win over Betis in the Super Cup.

Betis stayed in sixth place in the league, 19 points behind Barcelona. It is three points behind fourth-place Atletico Madrid in the final Champions League place. Manuel Pellegrini's team has won one of its last five games in all competitions.

Raphinha put Barcelona ahead with a touch from close range after a low cross by Alejandro Balde from left-flank in the 65th minute.

Lewandowski added to the lead with a shot from inside the area in the 80th, and Betis got on the board with an own-goal by Barcelona defender Jules Koundé in the 85th. Lewandowski has five goals in his last five matches in all tournaments.

# Caldas, Aikman in fray for India coach job



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 2:** Argentine Max Caldas and Dutchman Siegfried Aikman are in contention to replace Graham Reid as Indian men's hockey team head coach after the recent World Cup debacle, sources in Hockey India said. According to a HI source, the

federation is in talks with a two to three prospective foreign names after the position fell vacant following Australian Reid's resignation post joint ninth place finish.

"We expected the team to raise its performance after the Tokyo Olympics bronze medal win but it all went downhill. Reid has done a remarkable job and helped India

win an Olympic medal but of late, the performance of the team dipped alarmingly," the source told this agency on conditions of anonymity. "We are in talks with 2-3 candidates but rest assured we will bring the best who can take India to the next level."

It has been learnt that apart from Caldas, Dutchman Aikman,

who has not been paid for the last 10 months by Pakistan Hockey Federation is a serious contender to take up India job.

When queried if any Indian name will be considered for the post, he replied, "Please tell me who do you think is the best coach in India currently. If you give us names, we will definitely consider."

"The Asian Games is scheduled this year and the Paris Olympics is next year so whoever comes will have to deliver in both the events. We want the team to be at its best in both the tournaments," he added.

Australian Reid, who joined the national team in April 2019, was part of the Indian team that won a historic bronze medal at the Tokyo Olympics and silver medal at the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

But he had to quit after the host nation failed to qualify for the quarterfinals of the World Cup, which concluded last month in Odisha. Reid's term was till next year's Paris Olympics, subject to review after the World Cup.

Not just Reid, his support staff - analytical coach Greg Clarke and scientific advisor Mitchell David Pemberton too resigned along with him.

# Sai Praneeth in quarterfinals at Thailand Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bangkok, Feb 2:** India's B Sai Praneeth defeated Korean qualifier Hyeok Jin Jeon in a tough three-game contest to enter the quarterfinals of the Thailand Open Super 300 badminton tournament here Thursday.

Praneeth beat his Korean opponent 24-22, 7-21, 22-20 in the men's singles second round match. He will next face sixth seed Li Shi Feng of China in the last eight round.

Earlier in the day, Kiran George went down 22-20 15-21, 20-22 to third seed Lee Cheuk Yiu of Hong Kong in men's singles, while Ashmita Chaliha lost 21-19, 13-21, 27-29 to sixth seeded Den Hojmark Kjaersfeldt of Denmark in a gruelling women's singles round of 16 match.

Eighth seeds Tanisha Crasto and Ishaan Bhatnagar suffered a 19-21, 16-21 loss to Indonesia's Akbar Bintang Cahyono and Marshella Gischa Islami in mixed doubles. N Sikki Reddy and Rohan Kapoor also couldn't cross the second round, losing 11-21, 10-21 to sixth seeded Chinese Feng Yan Zhe and Huang Dong Ping.



Robert Lewandowski reacts after his goal against Real Betis, Wednesday

# Messi on target, Mbappe injured in PSG victory

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Paris, Feb 2:** World Cup winner Lionel Messi scored and Kylian Mbappe missed a twice-taken penalty before getting injured as PSG won 3-1 at Montpellier to move five points clear at the top of the French league (Ligue 1).

Mbappe went down clutching his leg just under the right knee and limped off in the 21st minute - having earlier missed a twice-taken penalty and blazed the rebound over an open goal on his second effort.

It was unclear exactly what his injury was. Television cameras also caught him rubbing the back of his left thigh as he walked to the dressing room.

PSG coach Christophe Galtier told broadcaster Canal Plus "he

took a blow behind the knee," and then said at his news conference the injury does not appear serious.

The Argentina star Messi tucked home PSG's second goal with a typically neat finish in the 72nd after being set up by Fabian Ruiz, who put PSG ahead in the 55th.

Striker Arnaud Nordin pulled one back in the 89th and, with the home team pushing forward, 16-year-old substitute Warren Zaire-Emery drove the ball home for 3-1 in stoppage time with his first goal for the club.

Defending champion PSG is five points ahead of Marseille. PSG visit both Monaco and Marseille this month and are at Marseille in the French Cup, as well as take on Bayern Munich in the first leg of their round of 16 encounter in the Champions League February 14.



Lionel Messi scores past Montpellier goalie in their French league match

# Varane bids adieu

**PARIS:** France defender Raphael Varane announced his retirement from the national team Thursday. The 29-year-old Varane made his debut 10 years ago and played 93 times. He was arguably the tournament's standout defender when France won the 2018 World Cup in Russia. "Representing our magnificent country for a decade has been one of the greatest honours in my life. Every time I wore the blue jersey I felt an immense pride," Varane wrote on his Instagram page. "The duty of giving everything, playing with my heart and winning every time I stepped onto the field. I've been thinking about this for a few months and I've decided it's the right time for me to take my international retirement."