

THE INDIAN MAIL

ENGLISH DAILY

SATURDAY, 17 February 2024

VOLUME : 14 ISSUE : 171 PAGES : 12 ₹ 4

PUBLISHED FROM HYDERABAD, VIJAYAWADA



Assembly adjourned to tomorrow

The Telangana Legislative Assembly was adjourned to Saturday by Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar. The Assembly session will begin at 10 AM and the State government will release a white.. **02**



Williamson's ton powers NZ to first Test series victory over SA

Riding on the back of Kane Williamson's fourth-inning century New Zealand secured their first Test series win on Day 4 of the second Test against South Africa, completing a 2-0 sweep... **12**



LIC of India introduced new plan "LIC's Amritbaal (Plan 874)"

LIC of India launched a new product LIC's Amritbaal at the hands of Dr. Vivek Joshi, Secretary, Dept of Financial Services, MOF, GOI. The Plan will be available for sale from 17.02.2024. **07**



Those who said Ram was imaginary now chanting Jai Siya Ram : PM Modi

Rewari, Feb 16 (IANS) : Taking a dig at the Congress, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said those who used to think that Lord Ram was imaginary and never wanted the temple to be built in Ayodhya, have also started chanting 'Jai Siya Ram'.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said this while addressing a public meeting in Haryana's Rewari after inaugurating, dedicating to the nation and laying the foundation stone of multiple development projects worth more than Rs 9,750 crore. Amid a huge gathering from four districts located in

south-western Haryana, the Prime Minister, who was accompanied by Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar and Governor Bandaru Dattatraya, in his almost half an hour speech in Hindi said he knew that the people of Rewari "love him very much".

Govt introduces caste census resolution in Assembly

Hyderabad, Feb 16 (IANS) : Minister for BC Welfare Ponnambalam Prabhakar on Friday introduced a resolution in the Assembly for taking up a comprehensive

door-to-door household survey (Socio, Economic, Educational, Employment, Political and Caste Survey-Kula Ganana) of the entire Telangana. **Continued on pg 02**



Will give legal guarantees on MSP if Cong forms govt : Rahul

Patna, Feb 16 (IANS) : Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday promised to give legal guarantees on Minimum Support Price (MSP) to farmers if his party comes back to power at the Centre after the Lok Sabha elections. "Whenever farmers have demanded anything from the Congress government, we have fulfilled it, be it waiver of loans or MSP. We have always protected the interests of farmers. We will do it again if given a chance," Rahul Gandhi said. He said that land snatching from farmers is currently underway in the country and the government has not given adequate compensation to them.

BRS party MPs, MLAs, are in touch with us : Bandi Sanjay

Hyderabad, Feb 16 (IANS) : BJP national general secretary and Karimnagar MP Bandi Sanjay today said that eight BRS MLAs and five sitting MPs of the BRS party were in touch with them. He held a chat with the media on Friday. Speaking on the occasion, he said There would be no alliance of the BJP with the BRS party under any circumstances. He said that In Telangana, they would win 17 out of 17 MP seats. "We are confident of

winning 400 MP seats across the country. The BRS party is unlikely to win a single MP one. The BRS does not have MP candidates and those who are there are looking at it sideways. KCR is begging the candidates to contest for the MP seats," he said. He said that they would welcome all those leaders, who opposes former CM KCR's corruption and joins the BJP, including Harish Rao, would be invited into their party.



KCR's rule engaged in scams, corruption, : Jupalli

Hyderabad, Feb 16 (IANS) : Minister for Excise and Tourism Jupalli Krishna Rao said that the Congress party's allegations of corruption, illegalities and misappropriation of funds against the previous BRS government during the recent Assembly election cam-

paign have become facts with the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report which was tabled in the Telangana Assembly, exposing undue benefits and several lapses during the execution of the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project.

Money bags are going to Delhi from Telangana : Kishan Reddy

Hyderabad, Feb 16 (IANS) : BJP state president and Union Minister G. Kishan Reddy alleged that that the Congress party was carrying money suitcases to Delhi from Hyderabad while ignoring the implementation of promises made to the people.



Tummala inaugurates agricultural drones at Agritech South 2024

Hyderabad, Feb 16 (IANS) : Minister for Agriculture Tummala Nageswara Rao in-

augurated Marut's AG365 drones at Agritech South 2024, a premier agricultural technology, here on

Friday. The event was organised by Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University (PJTSAU), Hyderabad and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). With this initiative, Marut Drones is part of the Telangana government and PJTSAU's commitment towards harnessing innovative technologies to empower women, youth, and farmers in the State. The PJTSAU has acquired two cutting-edge drones from Marut Drones - India's leading agricultural drone technology manufacturer.

Govt's decision to conduct caste census remains in history : Batti

Hyderabad, Feb 16 : Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka said the Telangana government's decision to conduct a caste census would remain in the his-

tory of India. Reminding Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's statement that the country's wealth and power should be reached to all sections of the people according to their population.



BCs will suffer due to caste census : Gangula

Hyderabad, Feb.16 (NSS): Former minister Gangula Kamalakar today said that BCs would suffer due to the caste census and added that the percentage of BCs would be proved only if SCs, STs and minorities were counted. He asked for clarity on whether a survey of all the communities would be done.

BRS party will always fight for people : Harish Rao

Hyderabad, Feb.16 (NSS): Former minister Harish Rao said that the BRS party had once again proved that whether it was in power or in the opposition.



Prajavani program scheduled to be held on Feb 19 cancelled : Ronald Rose

Hyderabad, Feb 16 (IANS) : GHMC Commissioner Ronald Rose today said in a statement that the Public Radio program to be held at GHMC headquarters on 19th of this month at 10:30 am had been cancelled. In a statement, Commissioner said that on the 19th of this month at 10 am in the GHMC head office, there would be a general body meeting and added there would be no Prajavani program.

Panel Discussion on "Implications & Remedies of Delayed Payments to MSMEs"

Hyderabad, Feb 16 (IANS) : The Federation of Telangana Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FTCCI) organizing a Panel Discussion on "Implications & Remedies of Delayed Payments to MSMEs" on Friday at FTCCI Surana Auditorium, Federation House, Red Hills. Giving his opening remarks, Chief Guest Meela Jayadev, President of FTCCI said MSME entities constitute a large segment of the Indian economy and most business organizations deal with MSME entities throughout the year. To promote timely payments to Micro and Small Enterprises, the Government inserted a new provision clause (h) of Section 43B of the Income Tax Act with effect from 01st April 2023 vide Finance Act, 2023.

A great honor to Jayant Kumar, President of Sirisilla Press Club



Rajanna Sirisilla, Feb 16 (TIM Bureau) : Rajanna Sirisilla District "As Akula Jayant Kumar won the second term as the President of Sirisilla Press Club, Sirisilla Munnuru Kapu Adahak Com-

mittee Convener Ojjala Agg Ramulu and Honorary President Neeli Shankar honored Jayant Kumar in the function hall on Friday. He mentioned that the journalist is the negotiator of the government to the people and that the

journalist plays a major role to bring good to get rid of the evil in the society. Councilor Kalluri Raju, Bhimavaram Srinivas, Nandi Shankar, Dumala Ravi, Boppa Devaiah, Erakula Surya Prakash, Kodimyla Venu, Bandari Venkatesham, Parusaramulu, Goka Lakshmirajam, Narasiah, Erram Mallaiah, Dandu Srinivas Bhagaiah, Neeli Srinivas, Kusa Narayana were unveiled in this event. , Bhumesh Balyala Janardhan, Battula Ramesh, Balyala Srikanth, Dumala Ramanath and others participated.

CAN FIN HOMES LTD. DEMAND NOTICE. Under Section 13 (2) of "The Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (No. 54 of 2002)". To, 1) Mr. P. Lakshmana (Borrower) S/o. P. Lakshmi Narayana, Flat No.404, Jai Bharathi Towers, Dwarakapuram Colony, Dilukh Nagar, Hyderabad Telangana - 500060 2) Mrs. Puvvada Saraswathi (Co-Borrower) W/o P. Lakshmana Flat No.404, Jai Bharathi Towers, Dwarakapuram Colony, Dilukh Nagar, Hyderabad, Telangana - 500060 3) Mr. A. Narendara S/o. A. Anjaiah (Guarantor) H.No.30-76 Bharath Nagar, Old Sahlguda, ECIL Post Hyderabad, Telangana -500057

ROSAAR BRANCH: # 3-5-922/5, 1st Floor, Hyderguda Main Road, Hyderguda, Hyderabad-500029

E-AUCTION - SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES. E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 6 (2) & 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

NAME AND ADDRESS OF BORROWER'S/GUARANTOR'S AND MORTGAGOR/S: 1) M/s. MLN Industries Pvt. Ltd., 6-3-456/17, 1st Floor, Dwarakapuri Colony, Punjagutta, Hyderabad, Telangana-500082 2) Mr. Dagilla Nagar Prashanth Rao (Guarantor), Plot No.65, Women Co-op Society, Sri Krishna Nagar Main Road, Yusufguda, Khairatabad, Hyderabad-500045 3) Mr. Madanu Balaswamy (Guarantor), 2-83, Kamma Gudem, Alair Mandal, Bahadurpet, Alair, Nalgonda, Telangana-508101 4) Mr. Madanu Joseph (Guarantor), 2-83/1, Kamma Gudem, Alair Mandal, Bahadurpet, Alair, Nalgonda, Telangana-508101

Total dues to the Bank: Rs.3,51,10,502.65 (Rupees Three Crore Fifty One Lakhs Ten Thousand Five Hundred Two and Paise Sixty Five Only) as on 10.02.2024 plus other charges and further interest, costs, charges & expenses thereon from 11.02.2024 as per details given below.

Description of the Immovable Property: Schedule of the Property:- 1) All the Land Adm. Ac 0.25 gals or 3025 Sq.yds. in Sy.No.118/E/2/1 situated at Bahadurpet Village, Alair Mandal, Yadadri Bhongir District @ Bhuvanagiri, inclusive of any proposed constructions their allied appurtenances, connected rights, privileges etc., belonging to Sri Madanu Joseph, S/o. Sri Madanulnaiah alias Madani Joseph, S/o. Sri Madanulnaiah. Boundaries: North: Hyderabad to Warangal National Highway (NH-163), South: Land of Madani Philip @ Madanu Philip, East: Land of Polishetty Chinniah and Brothers, West: Land of Madani Balaswamy @ Madanu Balaswamy.

Schedule of the Property:- 1) All the Land Adm. Ac 0.25 gals or 3025 Sq.yds in Sy.No.118/E/3/2, situated at Bahadurpet Village, Alair Mandal, Yadadri Bhongir District @ Bhuvanagiri, inclusive of any proposed constructions their allied appurtenances, connected rights, privileges etc., belonging to Sri Madanu Balaswamy, S/o. Sri Madanulnaiah alias Madani Balaswamy, S/o. Sri Madanulnaiah. Boundaries: North: Hyderabad to Warangal National Highway (NH-163), South: Land of Madani Philip @ Madanu Philip, East: Land of Madani Joseph @ Madanu Joseph, West: Land of Madani Philip @ Madanu Philip.

Type of Possession: Physical Known Encumbrances: NIL Scheduled Property - I belongs to Sri. Madanu Joseph Reserve Price: Rs.2,48,05,000/- (Rupees Two Crore Forty Eight Lakhs Five Thousand Only) Earnest Money Deposit: Rs.24,80,500/- (Rupees Twenty Four Lakhs Eighty Thousand and Five Hundred Only) Bid Incremental Amount: Rs.25,000/- (Rupees Twenty Five Thousand Only) Scheduled Property - II belongs to Sri. Madanu Balaswamy Reserve Price: Rs.2,48,05,000/- (Rupees Two Crore Forty Eight Lakhs Five Thousand Only) Earnest Money Deposit: Rs.24,80,500/- (Rupees Twenty Four Lakhs Eighty Thousand and Five Hundred Only) Bid Incremental Amount: Rs.25,000/- (Rupees Twenty Five Thousand Only) Date & time of auction: 21-02-2024 From 02.00 PM to 06.00 PM

ASSET RECOVERY BRANCH #249/3RT, 1st Floor, Main Road, S.R.Nagar, Hyderabad-500038. NOTICE TO THE BORROWER INFORMING ABOUT SALE (30 DAYS NOTICE) RULE 6(2) / 8(6) OF SECURITY INTEREST (ENFORCEMENT) RULES 2002. Borrower: M/s. V R Constructions, Proprietor: Mr. K. Venkata Ramana, S/o K. Purna Chandra Rao, Flat No. 102, Plot No. 249 & 250, Sardar Patel Nagar, Near Chaitanya Techno School, Kukatapally, Hyderabad-500072. Guarantor/Mortgagor: Legal Heirs of Mr. Padamata Rangarao: 2) Mrs. P. Veera Raghavamma, W/o Late Mr. P. Rangarao, H.No.8-262, R.S.No.586/3 & 4, Block No.8, Katuru Road, Vuyyuru Village & Mandal, Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh - 521165 3) Mr. Siva Sankara Rao, S/o Late Mr. P. Rangarao, H.No.8-262, R.S.No.586/3 & 4, Block No.8, Katuru Road, Vuyyuru Village & Mandal, Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh - 521165 4) Mrs. K. Rangamma, D/o Late Mr. P. Rangarao, W/o Mr. K. Venkata Ramana, H.No.8-262, R.S.No.586/3 & 4, Block No.8, Katuru Road, Vuyyuru Village & Mandal, Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh - 521165 5) Mr. M. Ramadurga Prasad, S/o M. Jagannatha Rao, Plot No. 180/A, Subhash Nagar, Near Ganesh Ground, IDA, Jeedimetla, Hyderabad, Telangana - 500555.



Lavanya, Municipal Commissioner of Sirisilla met the Collector and Additional Collector

Rajanna Sirisilla, Feb 16 (TIM Bureau) : Lavanya, who has been appointed as Sirisilla Municipal Commissioner, met Collector Anurag Jayanthi as a courtesy call on Friday. Collector Anurag Jayanthi and Additional Collector

(Local Bodies) Pujari Gautami presented the bouquet to Commissioner Lavanya in the chamber in the District Integrated Office Complex. Lavanya came from

Assistant Estate Officer of Hyderabad GHMC as Municipal Commissioner of Sirisilla, while Commissioner Ayaz went on transfer to Jammikunta.



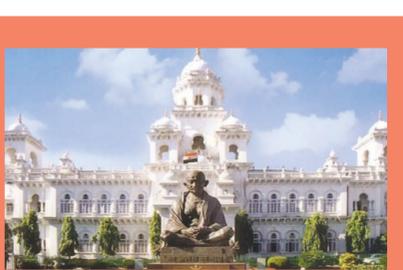
SC to consider listing PIL seeking CBI probe in Sandeshkhali sexual assault cases

New Delhi, Feb 16 (IANS) : The Supreme Court on Friday said that it will consider urgent listing of the Public Interest Litigation (PIL) seeking a probe by the CBI or a Special Investigation Team (SIT) into the alleged sexual assault of women in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali area.

"I will examine this in the afternoon," a Bench presided over by Chief Justice of India, DY Chandrachud told advocate Alakh Alok Srivastava, the petitioner-in-person, who sought directions for urgent listing of the PIL. The plea filed by Srivastava seeks formation of a committee of retired High Court Judges to enquire into the nature of violence against women in the instant case in line with the committee formed by the apex court in cases of atrocities against women in Manipur. Further, the PIL demands grant of compensation to the victims under the relevant Victim Compensation schemes and deployment of central paramilitary forces for protection of victims and witnesses in the case.

Govt introduces caste census resolution in Assembly

Continued From pg 01 The Minister said the resolution was introduced as per the decision of Council of Ministers on February 4, 2024 so as to plan and implement various socio, economic, educational, employment and political opportunities for the amelioration of backward classes.



Assembly adjourned to tomorrow

Hyderabad, Feb 16 (IANS) : The Telangana Legislative Assembly was adjourned to Saturday by Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar. The Assembly session will begin at 10 AM and the State government will release a white paper on the irrigation department in the House. Later, the discussion will be held on the subject. In fact, the Secretary to State Legislature released a list of business on the seventh day of Assembly, stating that a short discussion would be held on 'Telangana State Irrigation Sector-White paper'.

GANDHINAGAR BRANCH #1-4-979/42/6/A/1, Opp. Surya Residency, St.No.8, Gandhinagar, Secunderabad. POSSESSION NOTICE (for Immovable property) Rule 8(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. Whereas the undersigned being the Authorized Officer of Bank of Baroda under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (Enforcement) Act, 2002 (54 of 2002) and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a Demand Notice Dated 02.12.2023 calling upon the borrowers 1. Mr. Aerpula Yadagiri and 2. Mrs. Aerpula Sanjana to repay the amount mentioned in the notice aggregating Rs.3,34,000/- (Rupees Three lakh thirty four thousand) + Int from 01.12.2023+ Outstanding amount Rs.77,38,950/- + other Charges within 60 days from the date of the receipt of said notice. The Partners Having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower / guarantors and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic Possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him / her under Sub-Section (4) of Section 13 of the Act read with rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 on this the 15th Day of February of the year 2024.

SHRIRAM FINANCE LIMITED Registered Office: Sri Towers, Plot No.14A, South Phase, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai-600032 Administrative office: 6th Floor (level 2), Building No.02, Aarum Q parc, Gen 4/1, TTC, Thane Belapur Road, Ghansoli, Navi Mumbai-400710. POSSESSION NOTICE. Where as, the undersigned being the authorised officer of Shriram Finance Limited, (Shriram City Union Finance Limited, amalgamated with Shriram Transport Finance Company Limited, subsequently Shriram Transport Finance Company Limited name Changed as Shriram Finance Limited, by its Incorporation Certificate dt.13-11-2022) a corporate body registered and incorporated as a company under the Indian companies Act 1956, is doing Non-Banking financial activities, having its Registered Office: Sri Towers, Plot No.14A, South Phase, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032 and having its administrative office at 6th Floor (level 2), Building No.02, Aarum Q Parc, Gen 4/1, TTC, Thane Belapur Road, Ghansoli, Navi Mumbai-400710, under the provisions of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (said Act) and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) of the said Act read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 (said Rules) issued demand notices to the Borrowers details of which are mentioned in the table below to repay the amount mentioned in the said demand notices. The Borrowers having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrowers and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with rule 8 of the said Rules, on this 15th February, 2024.

NutriAIDE MobileApp launched

Hyderabad, Feb.16 (IANS) : NutriAIDE, an innovative and comprehensive MobileApp designed to empower the users for a healthy and sustainable nutrition has been launched today by Dr Hemalatha R, Director, ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition and Prof. Markus Keck, Chair of Urban Climate Resilience at Augsburg University, Germany, many, in the presence of the entire team of scientists and professors working on transformation of urban food environments. After almost two years of development and testing, the beta-version of the NutriAIDE app has been launched yesterday. NutriAIDE® is not just another calorie-counting app. It is rather a tool that helps users to reflect on their own eating habits and enables them to transform their personal behaviour and food environment. It also involves an AI based photo recognition tool that can identify the likely foods one is consuming by just clicking a picture of the food for intake assessment. In addition, the app enables to keep track of micro and macronutrient content and also dynamically calculates the carbon footprint of food choices of an individual. The app is developed as part of a collaborative project by Institutes of global repute from India and Germany.

Lift the social, economic, political blockade of Punjab: Akali Dal

Chandigarh, Feb 16 (IANS) : Expressing solidarity with farmers, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on Friday demanded the lifting of the "social, economic and political blockade of Punjab" and the restoration of the fundamental rights and democratic freedom of the farmers and other Punjabis. "The ongoing blockade is destroying the social and economic fabric of the already beleaguered state," said party's senior Vice-President Daljit Singh Cheema while talking to media here. The party demanded that all commitments made to the farmers by the Centre as well the Bhagwant Mann government in the past be fulfilled without any further delay. "The Punjab CM had promised that he would implement the MSP within five minutes of forming the government. He

had also promised full compensation for the losses suffered by farmers as well as for allied professions like poultry, dairy, etc," Cheema said. The SAD also held Punjab Chief Minister Mann of "colluding with the governments of Haryana and the Centre in a deep-rooted conspiracy to wreak vengeance and inflict repression against the innocent and peacefully protesting farmers". He said the party condemned the repression on farmers, including the use of bullets of different varieties. The Akali leader said: "Chief Minister Mann must explain why he has not booked the guilty Haryana officers so far for invading Punjab territory to attack the peaceful farmers demanding nothing more than the fulfillment of the promises made to them, and that too on Punjab soil?"



Yogi govt resolves to eradicate filariasis in UP by 2026

Lucknow, Feb 16 (IANS) : The Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh has set an ambitious target to eradicate filariasis from the state by 2026, aligning with the Central government's goal to achieve nationwide elimination by 2027. Globally, the target for eliminating this disease has been set for 2030. The state government has initiated a door-to-door administration of anti-filarial medications across several districts as part of the Mass Drug Administration (MDA) campaign. The initiative aims to reach every household in the state in the battle against the debilitating disease. As a result of effective monitoring by Chief Minister

Adityanath, within the first four days of the door-to-door campaign itself, about 20 per cent of people have taken the medicine. This campaign will run until February 28, an official statement noted. Simultaneously, identified patients receive specialised training and support through the Morbidity Management and Disability Prevention (MMDP) programme. Those with mild infections benefit from a regimen of regular medication and exercise, facilitating their continuous recovery. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has urged the healthcare teams not only to distribute the medication, but also to educate the populace, emphasising the importance of awareness in achieving the campaign's goals. Since he assumed office in 2017, Yogi

Adityanath has embarked on a crusade against numerous serious diseases prevalent in the state. His proactive stance has led to a significant turnaround, with Uttar Pradesh being now free from many diseases that once afflicted its populace, the statement added. In various districts across the state, alongside receiving anti-filarial medication, people are actively seeking to enhance their understanding of this disease. Communities in areas such as Amethi, Azamgarh, Ballia, and Barabanki have displayed keen interest in learning about the potential side effects of the medication. According to the statement, the health teams are assuring the populace that the anti-filarial medication is entirely safe, despite occasional symptoms like headache, body pain, fever, vomiting, rashes, and itching, which typically subside on their own. They emphasise the importance of consuming the medication after a meal to maximize its effectiveness and minimise any discomfort. In areas like Lucknow, Unnao, Shahjahanpur, Bareilly, and Hamirpur, initial hesitancy towards taking the medication has been observed among some individuals.



TN govt to consider extending reservation to Muslim converts of backward classes

Chennai, Feb 16 (IANS) : Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin said on Friday that the state government will consider a request to extend reservation to Backward Class, Most Backward Class and denotified communities who have converted to Islam. Stalin was responding to a request by MMK leader M.H. Jawaharullah on the floor of the Assembly on Friday. The Chief Minister said that the state government would consult legal experts and do the needful in this matter. Earlier, Jawaharullah had flagged the denial of reservation to the members of the Backward Class, Most Backward Class and notified communities who have converted to Islam. The Chief Minister said the DMK government would consider the request, just like the measures it has taken to uplift the social, economic and educational status of the Adi Dravidar, Backward Class, Most Backward Class and denotified communities to protect their interests.

'One Nation, One Election' offers multiple benefits

New Delhi, Feb 16 (IANS) : With the Tamil Nadu Assembly having adopted the resolution against the Central government's proposed 'One Nation, One Election' policy, the spotlight is once again on the debate over the feasibility of this 'critical reform' that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led regime is keen to go ahead with. While the resolution moved by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin highlights various points of 'objections' to the move, it 'conveniently' chooses to ignore the benefits that the proposed electoral

exercise offers. 'One Nation, One Election' refers to the idea of simultaneously holding the general and state elections. A high-level committee (HLC), headed by former President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, is already in the process of exploring the possibility of 'One Nation, One Election'. The panel constituted by the Modi government has so far consulted a galaxy of constitutional and legal luminaries of the country as part of the exercise. The panel has held fresh consultations with the state election commissions this week in a bid to expedite the process. The parties opposed to this reform

agenda of the Modi government have not yet offered any substantial ground to punch holes in this plan. They appear to be deliberately trying to shift the public focus away from the positive sides of this endeavour that the government has so far showcased. One of the most important benefits that the Tamil Nadu Assembly seems to have overlooked while passing the resolution against 'One Nation, One Election' is that synchronising the Lok Sabha and Assembly election cycles will help the government fast-track the development schemes and the programmes aimed at augmentation of financial system of the



country and the states. These are the two major areas which happen to suffer the most in the existing system of scattered polls, which is what the Modi gov-

ernment aims to do away with. Secondly, holding general and state elections together will also result in toning up of the governance efficacy that gets affected

badly due to poll processes taking place throughout the year, either in one state or another. Who is going to benefit the most if the efficiency level of the governments is ramped up? Who is going to be the main beneficiary if the cost on polls gets reduced? Obviously, it is the common people of the country. There is no denying that holding an election is an expensive exercise, given the huge cost that every single poll, be it that of Lok Sabha or Assembly, puts on the state exchequer. The huge amount of money spent on holding elections in a scattered manner can be used for greater development and better governance.

Gurugram RERA issues advisory to banks to monitor withdrawals of funds from its accounts

Gurugram, Feb 16 (IANS) : The Haryana Real Estate Regulatory Authority (HARERA), Gurugram, has issued an advisory directing the city-based banks to comply with the provisions of the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016. It has come to the notice of the Authority that real-estate promoters are not complying with the provisions of the Act in terms of withdrawal of funds from RERA accounts. As per Section 4 (2) (I) (D) of the RERA Act, promoters are required to maintain a separate bank account for every project in which 70 per cent amount collected from the allottees are to be deposited. Funds deposited can only be utilised for the land cost and construction cost of the project. This clause ensure that the funds are not diverted and are utilised for that project only. The amount in a separate bank account can be withdrawn only

after obtaining a certificate from an engineer, architect, and practising chartered accountant certifying that the amount withdrawn is in proportion with the construction of the project. The Authority said it has come to know that still, banks are allowing withdrawal of funds from RERA accounts by real-estate promoters in non-compliance with the provisions laid down under the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016, which is a clear violation of RERA provisions. Therefore, the banks are also liable and accountable for such offences of non-compliance with the provisions of the Act, the Authority said. The Authority also said that in case of non-compliance by the real-estate promoters under Section 4 of the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, a penalty of up to 5 per cent of the project cost can be imposed.

K'taka: Bill mandating prominence to Kannada on sign boards passed

Bengaluru, Feb 16 (IANS) : The Kannada Language Comprehensive Development (Amendment) Bill, 2024, mandating use of Kannada on 60 per cent space of signboards of all business and commercial establishments was passed by the Karnataka Assembly on Friday. Minister for Kannada and Culture Shivaraj Tangadagi moved the Bill in the house and announced that the state government has been framing rules to enforce a law towards giving prominence to local language in the state. He also promised strict implementation and action against violations. "The task force would be formed to ensure implementation of the law in every district, in addition to the enforcement wing. The problem of giving prominence to Kannada on sign boards is mostly in the state capital, Bengaluru. To deal with the situation, an app will be developed to receive complaints and committees will be formed at zonal



levels in Bengaluru," he said. The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has started issuing notice to shops, malls, and commercial establishments in Bengaluru, instructing them to prominently display Kannada language on signboards by February 28. Earlier, 53 people were arrested for their alleged involvement in the violence and vandalism during a protest in Bengaluru on December 27 that saw the removal and tearing down of English signboards from commercial outlets with a demand to give prominence to Kannada language.

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has started issuing notice to shops, malls, and commercial establishments in Bengaluru, instructing them to prominently display Kannada language on signboards by February 28. Earlier, 53 people were arrested for their alleged involvement in the violence and vandalism during a protest in Bengaluru on December 27 that saw the removal and tearing down of English signboards from commercial outlets with a demand to give prominence to Kannada language.



Robbers decamp with valuables from jeweller's house in Bihar

Patna, Feb 16 (IANS) : Around six armed men struck at the house of a gold merchant in Bihar's Madhubani district and looted around 200 gm gold, 5 kg silver and Rs 85,000 in cash, the police said on Friday. The incident took place at Shukki village under Khajauli police station in the district in the wee hours of Thursday. The robbers carrying firearms and sticks attacked the house of jeweller Sharawan Kumar. "The robbers looted cash, gold and silver jewellery from the house. When Shrawan's son resisted, he along with other family members, including Sharawan Kumar and his wife, were brutally assaulted," said the SHO of Khajauli police station, Praveen Kumar Singh. The injured persons have been admitted to a private hospital.

OPINIONmail



WHAT IS SUPREME COURT DOING IN RELATION TO ITS VERDICT ON ELECTORAL BOND?

Why is Supreme Court is totally silent in coming out with its order on the legality of the controversial electoral bond scheme for more than three months? After a number of hearings, the Supreme Court concluded the same on November 2, 2023. Now more than three months have passed but there is no sign from the office of the Registrar that the verdict is being given soon. Whatever be the order, approving the bonds or nullifying the order is crucial for the political parties at the present moment as the country is heading for general elections in April/ May this year and the ruling party BJP is taking full advantage of the Supreme Court delay in enriching itself with more than 80 per cent of the amount of the electoral bonds which have been issued so far. Electoral bonds worth more than Rs 570 crores have been sold in the latest phase of the electoral bond sale that lasted from January 2 to January 11, 2024. This was the second batch of electoral bonds sold since the Supreme Court began hearings for the four petitions challenging the legality of the electoral bond scheme announced by the Narendra Modi government in 2018. So far, 30 tranches have been sold and the biggest beneficiary has been the BJP which is the ruling party. Since the corporates are the main buyers of the bonds, they donate to the BJP mostly to carry favour with the ruling regime. The original electoral bonds scheme 2017 was challenged in the Supreme Court by many petitioners since its implementation beginning 2018 but only in April last year, the CJI Dr. D Y Chandrachud indicated that he would decide about the setting up of a five member Constitution bench to hear the petitions.

After that, hearings were concluded on November 2 last year. In the case of the 25th tranche of the electoral bonds, the Narendra Modi government violated propriety by amending in a hurry the rules of the electoral bonds scheme on November 7 2022 to allow the sale for extra fifteen days during the year when the elections were due in states and union territories. As per the rules, the bonds are available for purchase for a period of 10 days in the months of January, April, July and October. An additional 30 days window is allowed in the years of general elections. And now through the latest amendment, the centre allowed another tranche in November 2022 before the assembly polls in Himachal and Gujarat last year. In the last six years since the electoral bonds sale started in January 2018, the BJP has spent thousands of crores of rupees in destabilising state governments in Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and bought MLAs to form governments in Goa and Manipur. In Maharashtra, it was clear as daylight that huge funds – were mobilised to ensure the defection of the Eknath Shinde group from the Shiv Sena led by Uddhav Thackeray in July 2022. The BJP tried to encourage defections in Jharkhand assembly before the recent floor test, but it failed. The funding from the bonds or the poll trusts is all one way to BJP as the companies who donate do not want to antagonise the ruling party at the Centre and invite action through IT Dept, the CBI or the ED. It was apparent when the Bajaj family scion Rajeev Bajaj was apprehensive of attacks by the central agencies after his interaction with Rahul Gandhi last in 2022. This fear among the Indian corporates is so overwhelming that even the young scions of the industrial families who are forward looking and do not like the BJP, keep silent as they are not ready to risk the future of their companies just for the sake of some liberal personal thinking. The net result is that there is no level playing field in the elections. The BJP is in a position to spend more than ten times money compared to the Opposition parties. It has a huge war chest to engineer defections when that is needed. And now, the party will be spending huge amount for the Lok Sabha elections. Another tranche will be due in the first week of April and as per rules, the sale can be open for more than a month since it is on the eve of general elections. That will give the BJP another chance to garner huge amount for its coffers to spend in the Lok Sabha elections.

(By Nitya Chakraborty)

EDITORIAL
the indian mail



AS RJD'S 'PEOPLES' MAN', TEJASHVI YADAV DAZZLES IN BIHAR ASSEMBLY

In his political career spanning half a century, Bihar CM Nitish Kumar, must not have on any other occasion looked like a dwarf, as he was made to appear by the political youngster in the RJD leader Tejavshi Yadav. The Nitish-sponsored confidence motion in Bihar assembly on Monday was also testimony to the emergence of a more

articulate politician in Tejavshi. Though his speech was laced with pungent jibes at Nitish, which often made him look towards his legs while sitting on the treasury benches, Tejavshi was not at all aggressive or not composed. While he adulated Nitish, he continued to be unsparing. His every second sentence was loaded and directed towards exposing Kumar's political deceit. While requesting Nitish with folded hands to tell the house why he was angry with him, Tejavshi changed his gear and told the BJP members: "What is the guarantee he won't swap sides again. Modi has the habit of giving guarantee."
(IPA Service)

INDIAN NAVY CONDUCTING ITS LARGEST EVER EXERCISE IN GULF OF EDEN

The Indian Navy is currently conducting its largest-ever deployment in the Gulf of Aden and Western Arabian Sea. This mission operates independently of the US-UK military campaign against Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen. An unprecedentedly large Indian Navy fleet of 12 warships is now operating in the region, with two advanced vessels in the Gulf of Aden and the remaining 10 in the Northern and Western Arabian Sea. This deployment is much larger and more powerful than those in the past. In contrast to its previous focus on defence and localized operations, the Indian Navy has been deployed with significantly enhanced resources and a wider mission scope amid the present regional challenges. The Indian Navy's primary focus is to stop piracy and hijacking in the region. The navy has also deployed a substantial special operations force to support this mission.

FRANCE'S FAR RIGHT IS GAINING IN WORKING CLASS AREAS AT THE COST OF LEFT

For decades, France's left was dominated by the French Communist Party (PCF), an organization that built up strong networks of support in working-class France over the twentieth century. Yet from the 1980s onward this mighty organization declined, leaving a vacuum to be filled. The Front National — the far-right party, led by Marine Le Pen, which became the Rassemblement National (RN) in 2018 — was a major beneficiary. The PCF's decline is closely bound up with the destruction of the social and organizational conditions that had long sustained workers' participation in French political life. This shift gave social and activist groups far removed from the working class the opportunity to speak politically on its behalf. Le Pen's

Rassemblement National has no real activist base in working-class areas or on the shop floor. But today it can present itself as the "party of workers." Founded as a workers' party in the interwar years, from 1945 through the 1970s the Communist Party was the main activist and electoral force on the French left. The PCF's organization was rooted in working-class France — and was usually headed by leaders hailing from such backgrounds. Its political weight was all the greater because of the relative social cohesion of these same classes. Skilled metalworkers and those employed in public firms with protected status (on the railways or in gas and electricity) played a key role in PCF ranks. Close connections between the sites of labour and residential areas also meant that workplace-level political involvement easily extended into the local context. Blue-collar union activists



joined forces with the likes of teachers to challenge social elites' power over municipal office. But the industrial crisis of the late 1970s hurt the upper layers of the working classes, from which most Communist leaders were recruited. The restructuring of large industrial concerns dealt a heavy blow to the PCF's organizational networks among workers. The growing precariousness of working-class employment and the lasting effects of mass unemployment led to a downturn in social struggles and undermined the transmission of a class-based culture. Workers were henceforth increasingly employed in small establishments or in isolated ter-

tiary-sector jobs (drivers, handlers, warehouse operatives) ever further from where they lived. At the same time, the number of service workers (home help, cashiers, etc.) soared. However, in such subaltern employment conditions, the distinction between the employees and the boss did not take the same form as on the factory floor — and union organizing was more difficult. So, transformations in production and in working-class conditions surely worked against the PCF. But the policies pursued by its leaders also fed disaffection with the party.
(IPA Service)



DONALD TRUMP'S STRICTURE TO NATO HAS PUT THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN SECURITY IN QUESTION

Donald Trump as the United States President had people — countries — on both sides of the Atlantic concerned in their cocoons during his first term. Then in 2020, the so-called Jan 6 insurrection happened. Today, a poor array of conservative hopefuls for the Republican ticket, combined with his tremendous popularity, has made it easier for

Trump to vie for the Republican presidential nomination, which is his for the taking as of today. Two Indian origin Americans also tried their luck. Including Trump's United States UN Ambassador pick Nikki Haley, who is facing her final test on February 24 in South Carolina, her home state of which she was twice Governor. The bad news is Trump leads Haley by 30 points and Nikki is not budging an inch from her stubborn and relentless intransigence — and this person was America's No.1 UN diplomat. That being said, the likelihood of another Donald Trump term is giving NATO — the North American Treaty Organization — the creeps.

INDIA IS NOW A KEY CENTRE FOR ILLEGAL DRUG TRADE AND TRAFFICKING

According to the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), supported by the United Nations (UN), India has emerged as a key centre for illegal drug trade and trafficking, contributing significantly to the global drug trade, valued at over \$650 billion. The World Drug Report, 2022, by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) highlighted that around 11.2 million people across the globe were using injectable drugs. The report identified India as one of the largest markets for opiates, with trafficking expanding southwards and westwards along the traditional Balkan route. The potential impacts include a wider spread of drug use, a rise in trafficking activities and the growth of organized crime associated with these activities.



Putin plans to double troops along NATO border

Washington, Feb 16 (IANS) : Estonia Foreign Intelligence Service on Friday said that Russian President Vladimir Putin plans to double his military deployment along the NATO border with the Baltic states and Finland as part of Moscow's potential assault on a long term basis after Ukraine is over, media reports said. The intelligence agency said that Putin still harbors an appetite for conflict and represents an unpredictable threat nearly two years after the invasion of Ukraine. Estonia gained its independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991. It became a

NATO member in 2004. The intelligence agency said that Russia could double the 19,000 troops positioned near Estonia. "Russia's troop presence near Finland, with whom it shares an 830-mile border, has so far been fairly small," the intelligence report said. The report said that this scenario is going to change now because Finland recently became a NATO member. The report said that Russia's new military formation will be built around at least two or three maneuver units with around a dozen fire support and combat support units. Western officials said Putin's veiled threats to attack NATO countries could turn out to be real. Under NATO's



Article 5, an attack on one NATO member is deemed an attack on all. Estonia Foreign Spying Director General Kaupo Rosin said that Russia has chosen a path with long-term confrontation. "Russia is highly unlikely to attack a NATO country in the short term," Rosin has said. He said that the Russians in their own thinking are calculating that military conflict with NATO is

possible in the next decade. "Russians are planning to increase the military force along the Baltic states' border but also the Finnish border. We will highly likely see an increase of manpower, about doubling perhaps. We will see an increase in armed personnel carriers, tanks, and artillery systems over the coming years," he said.



1 in 9 adults in US experience Long Covid : CDC

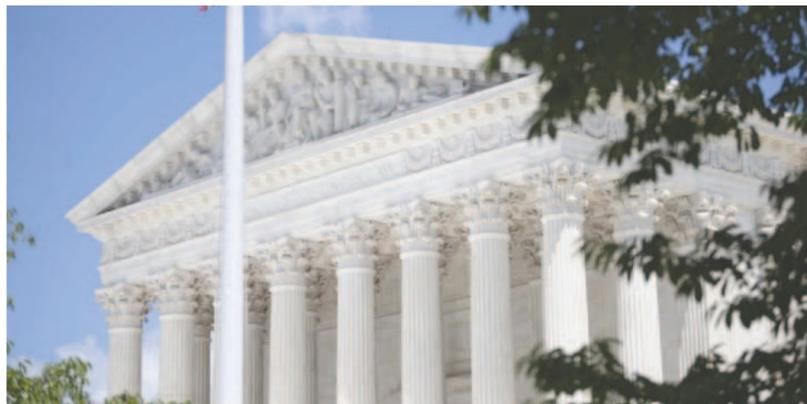
Los Angeles, Feb 16 (IANS) : About one in nine adults in the US who have ever had Covid-19 continue to experience Long Covid with a wide range of symptoms, according to new data of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). To bolster Long Covid research efforts, the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) announced on Friday that it is investing an additional \$515 million over the next four years into the Researching Covid to Enhance Recovery (RECOVER) Initiative, a nationwide research program to

fully understand, diagnose and treat Long Covid. Nearly 90,000 adults and children are participating in RECOVER observational studies through more than 300 clinical research sites across the country, Xinhua news agency reported, citing NIH. RECOVER findings, including the identification of major symptom clusters, are helping clinical researchers broaden the identification of Long Covid in their patients and ultimately helping to inform diagnosis, treatment and care for all those suffering from Long Covid, said NIH.

Nine arrested for holding Indian citizens hostage in Kathmandu



Kathmandu, Feb 16 (IANS) : Nine people -- including eight from India and another from Nepal -- have been arrested on the charges of holding 11 Indian nationals hostage and extorting money on the pretext of sending them to the US via Mexico. The Indian nationals, who were held hostage for a month, were rescued on Friday by the Kathmandu Police from Ratopul area. Addressing a press conference, Bhupendra Khatrai, SSP, District Police Range, Kathmandu, said: "Of the 11 hostages, eight were from Punjab and three from Haryana. The kidnapers used to force the Indian nationals to make a video call to their family members in India and ask for additional money, the SSP added.



Democrats eyeing workaround as House Speaker blocks vote on Ukraine aid bill

Washington, Feb 16 (IANS) : House Democrats are working hard to force a vote on the \$95 billion foreign aid bill despite fierce opposition from House Speaker Mike Johnson to the legislation. The bill was passed in the Senate on Friday. Democrats are planning to use the rare procedural move known as a discharge petition, which would require at least 218 signatures -- including at least some Republicans -- to bring the legislation up for a vote, media reports said. The aid package, to help Ukraine and Israel with military aid and humanitarian help for Palestinians trapped in the conflict zone in Gaza, would appropriate \$60 billion to support Ukraine, which has been battling Russia since February 2022. It would also send \$14 billion in military assistance to Israel, \$9 billion in humanitarian assistance to Gaza and elsewhere, and nearly \$5 billion to defend Taiwan. House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries sent a letter

to his fellow Democrats on Tuesday saying the caucus would "use every available legislative tool" to advance the bill and called upon "traditional Republicans" to come to the aid of the party. The Democratic leader told a press conference that he is convinced there are at least 300 votes in the House to pass the foreign aid bill, including an "overwhelming majority" of Democrats. "It's not too much to ask in America's national security that we get an up or down vote and let the House of Representatives actually work its will," Jeffries said.

Putin says Biden presidency better for Russia than Trump

Washington, Feb 16 (IANS) : Russian President Vladimir Putin, under fire from US President Joe Biden and NATO allies for Ukraine invasion, shocked the world, saying "A Biden Presidency in the US is better for Russia". "A Joe Biden presidency would be better for Russia than a

Donald Trump one, Russian President Vladimir Putin told pro-Kremlin journalist Pavel Zarubin in an on-camera interview Wednesday, CNN reported. Putin said Biden would be better for Russia "because he is a more experienced person, he is predictable, he is a politician of an old formation."



Yemen's Houthis claim missile attack on British ship

Sanaa, Feb 16 (IANS) : Yemen's Houthi group has claimed responsibility for attacking a British ship in the Gulf of Aden with several missiles. "We carried out a military operation against a British ship, Lycavitos, while it was sailing in the Gulf of Aden," Yahya Sarea, the Houthi military spokesman, said in a statement aired by the group's al-Masirah satellite TV channel on Friday. The Houthis launched several missiles that hit the ship "directly and accurately", Xinhua news agency reported, citing Sarea. The Barbados-flagged ship Lycavitos was sailing in the Indian Ocean to the east of Aden when it was hit by a missile strike, said a Yemeni government coast guard official who required anonymity. Preliminary information indicated the vessel sustained minor damage from a fragment that struck the diesel generator's pipe, causing a diesel leak, the official said.



As world faces hunger crisis, India decries primacy of open markets in foodgrains

United Nations, Feb 16 (IANS) : India has decried the primacy of open markets in foodgrains amid warnings from Secretary-General Antonio Guterres of a looming "hellscape of hunger" for the world's poorest. "Open Markets must not become an argument to perpetuate inequity and promote discrimination" in the availability of foodgrain, India's Permanent Representative Ruchira Kamboj told the Security Council on Friday. It is "necessary for all of us to adequately appreciate the importance of equity, affordability and accessibility when it comes to foodgrains", she said at the meeting on the impact of climate change and food insecurity on international peace. "Addressing global food insecurity should begin by

choosing peace, cooperation and multilateralism, and working together to find common solutions through dialogue and diplomacy", she said. At the height of the foodgrain crisis resulting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the blockade of the Black Sea by Moscow, for example, India faced pressures to lift its restrictions on foodgrains and let them flow into the open markets where developed nations can corral supplies, while New Delhi was following a policy of selectively sending them to



countries of the Global South in need. "India had provided food aid to several countries, including in our neighbourhood and Africa to

strengthen food security", Kamboj noted. "We've also extended assistance to the people of Afghanistan, Myanmar and Palestine".



Haryana man sentenced for stealing \$150k from elderly woman in US

New York, Feb 16 (IANS) : An Indian national hailing from Haryana has been sentenced to more than four years in prison for his role in stealing \$150,000 from an elderly woman in the US state of Montana. Sukhdev Vaid, 24, admitted targeting elderly Americans via an international com-

puter-hacking scheme that resulted in more than \$1.2 million in total losses, US Attorney Jesse Laslovich said on Friday. The court ordered that upon his release from custody, Vaid will be remanded to the Bureau of Customs and Immigration Enforcement for deportation, and asked

him to pay \$1,236,470 restitution. "It has become all too common for people outside of our country to victimise Montanans, especially as it relates to wire fraud, and get away with it. But not this time. Vaid is going to federal prison," Attorney Laslovich said.



Varanasi court to hear plea against puja in Gyanvapi mosque on Feb 28

Varanasi (UP), Feb 16 (IANS) : A Varanasi court on Friday fixed February 28 as the date for hearing the Gyanvapi masjid committee's plea against puja in a cellar of the mosque, the Hindu side's counsel said. The Varanasi district court had on January 31 ruled that a priest can perform prayers before the idols in the southern cellar of the

Gyanvapi mosque. The mosque committee moved the court challenging the verdict. Advocate MM Yadav said Additional District Judge (I) Anil Kumar has fixed February 28 for the hearing. The mosque committee has also moved a petition in the Allahabad High Court against the district court's verdict.

Why no FIR against teacher who abused Lord Ram, asks K'taka BJP

Bengaluru, Feb 16 (IANS) : Karnataka BJP has pulled up the Congress government in the state over the filing of FIRs against two BJP MLAs from Dakshina Kannada district in connection with a protest against a private school for alleged humiliation of Hindu gods. The matter was raised during the Zero Hour of the Assembly by Y. Bharath Shetty, the BJP MLA from Mangaluru North, who said, "Why didn't the police register a complaint against the teacher who abused Lord Ram? She used derogatory words against Lord Ram in the classroom. I was not present on the spot during the protest, yet an FIR has been filed against me. The police have even imposed non-bailable sections. "The parents of the students have complained

to me that a teacher while taking class for seventh standard students had made humiliating statements against Lord Ram. I had urged the Deputy Director of Public Instruction (DDPI) to take action in the matter. Party MLA Vedavyas Kamath had gone to the school with the parents to stage a protest. They had raised 'Jai Sri Ram' slogans. I had gone to the airport at that time." Another BJP MLA, Arvind Bellad, said that this is a serious matter. "What is the exact position of the government in this matter? Don't we have the right to raise 'Jai Sri Ram' slogans," he asked. BJP's leader of opposition R. Ashoka said, "When MLA Bharat Shetty was not even present on the spot, how can an FIR be lodged against him? This government lacks common sense. Who put pressure on the police department



to book a case? The concerned inspector must be suspended and his call details should be retrieved." Meanwhile, Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Dinesh Gundu Rao, claimed that no instruction was given to anyone in connection with the case. "The BJP has only one agenda in the Mangaluru region, which is to stoke communal tension. The legislators made provocative statements in the presence of the students," Rao claimed, even as BJP legislators objected to the remark. Earlier on Friday, Karnataka Police filed an FIR against two BJP MLAs from Mangaluru City in

connection with a protest staged to condemn the alleged incident of "humiliation of Hindu gods" at a private school in Dakshina Kannada district. The case has been lodged against Mangaluru City South MLA D. Vedavyas Kamath and Mangaluru City North MLA Y. Bharat Shetty. The police have also booked VHP leader Sharan Pumpwell, and Hindu activists Sandeep Garodi and Bharat Kumar in connection with the case. The initial complaint was filed by a person named Anil Gerald Lobo.

Congress targets Centre over electoral bonds, claims 'party fought this battle for 7 yrs'

New Delhi, Feb 16 (IANS) : The Congress on Friday welcomed the revocation of the contentious electoral bonds by the Supreme Court and said that today's judgment vindicates their long fight against the 'unconstitutional and unlawful' scheme which the NDA government brought and 'misused to fill its coffers for electoral gains'. Congress in a press statement asserted about its seven year long battle against the 'coercive and corporatised' scheme, inside and outside the Parliament and said that it was the first party to condemn the

bonds scheme, in clear and unequivocal terms. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi took to his X account to denounce the bonds scheme as Modi government's 'ploy' to gain political mileage over rivals by 'monopolising' the electoral funding by big players. "Electoral bond is yet another evidence of Modi government's corrupt practices. The BJP made the electoral bonds a medium for taking bribes and commission," he tweeted. Jairam Ramesh, the Congress Communications In-charge, also lashed out at the BJP and said that the Supreme Court's verdict will now 'reinforce the power of votes

over notes'. "The Supreme Court has held the much-touted electoral bonds scheme of the Modi Sarkar as violative of both laws passed by Parliament as well as the Constitution of India. The long-awaited verdict is hugely welcome and will reinforce the power of votes over notes," Ramesh said. Congress further said when bonds scheme was notified on January 2, 2018, the grand old party had called a press conference and raised three specific concerns, besides red-flagging its many other 'damaging' aspects. The three specific contentions of Congress party raised in 2018 were: a. Electoral bonds would be-

come the most significant enabler of what are known as quid pro-quo deals. b. With the removal of the cap on political funding from corporates, electoral bonds would allow for dubious funding to thrive. c. The argument of anonymity was deliberately designed to mislead. The Congress added that it was now "looking forward to SBI disclosing all the details of political funding received by all political parties and also the Election Commission publishing the same" in compliance with apex court's directions. It claimed that BJP is the biggest beneficiary of the electoral bonds, having collated more than



95 per cent of funding 'in garb of anonymous donations'. It also shared concerns over Centre's integrity in following the Supreme Court's orders. "The question that arises is; will

the Modi government comply or will it issue another ordinance to try and circumvent the directions of the Supreme Court?," Congress asked in an official statement.



Maharashtra opposition MVA hails SC judgement on electoral bonds, slams BJP

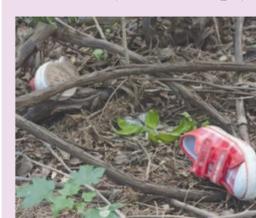
Mumbai, Feb 16 (IANS) : The Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) on Friday welcomed the Supreme Court judgement on electoral bonds and slammed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for introducing this mode of political funding in the country. Top leaders of MVA allies -- Congress-Shiv Sena (UBT)-Nationalist Congress Party (SP)-CPI-M -- said that the apex court verdict will pave the way for a future of openness, fairness and accountability in matters of political funding. "Wholeheartedly welcome the decision to strike down the opaque scheme of electoral bonds. An unconstitutional scheme has been struck down by the Supreme Court! Next, Maharashtra hopes the unconstitutional regime is struck down," said SS-UBT leader and MLA Aditya U. Thackeray. NCP-SP Working President Supriye Sule, MP said that the Supreme Court's decision is laudable and it reinforces the importance of transparency and ac-

countability in our democratic system. Maharashtra unit Congress president Nana Patole also lauded the Supreme Court verdict and said it was the "visionary Rahul Gandhi who had first opposed the electoral bonds in 2019 which have now been struck down by the country's top court". SS-UBT MP Priyanka Chaturvedi said that all the corporate houses that indulged this government and which became a party to the corruption of electoral practices, will be worried now. CPI-M Maharashtra leaders like Dr. Ashok Dhawale endorsed the verdict and said it was the only party which had challenged the policy that legalised political corruption in the SC. Sule said that the landmark ruling the anonymity provided by the electoral bonds infringes upon the fundamental Right To Information enshrined in the Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, which is crucial for informed voting and holding

political parties accountable. "The electoral bonds scheme institutionalised influenced policy making and legitimised potential corruption under the curtain of anonymity, and yet or rather therefore, was railroaded by the BJP government in the Parliament," said Sule, the Baramati MP. Chaturvedi added that "one of the most corrupt tools in the BJP's kitty" is rightfully struck down by the SC, and said "only if governments formed through corrupt and unconstitutional practices could also be struck down". Sule pointed out that the verdict is a victory for transparency in political parties and elections and comes at a time when it was most necessary, and urged all to commit themselves to a future of openness, fairness and accountability. Thackeray expressed hope that "transparency is ensured and every word of the order is followed, in time".

Minor girl's body found in Gurugram forest

Gurugram, Feb 16 (IANS) : The body of a 16-year-old girl was recovered on Friday from a forest area in Gurugram under the Badshahpur police station jurisdiction area, the police said. A police team led by Inspector Satish Deshwal, Station House Officer of Badshahpur police station, rushed to the spot on being informed by locals, who recovered the body of the girl. The police added that the deceased's identity is yet to be established. "The victim was ill for the past few months. Prima facie it appeared that her death was natural because we did not find anything suspicious. However, the actual cause of death would be known only after an autopsy," Deshwal said. The body has been kept in the mortuary for an autopsy.



SC allows withdrawal of pleas challenging constitutionality of UAPA

New Delhi, Feb 16 (IANS) : The Supreme Court on Friday allowed the withdrawal of the petitions challenging the constitutionality of the provisions of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). A Bench presided over by Justice Bela M. Trivedi dismissed as withdrawn the entire batch of petitions, including the plea filed by a journalist and two advocates challenging the FIR lodged under the UAPA provisions by Tripura Police in connection with a tweet about the alleged 2021 communal violence in the state. Justice Trivedi observed: "Normally, we would have not entertained such petitions filed directly under Article 32 of the Constitution, nor would we have granted any interim order." Asking the petitioners to approach the concerned High Court, the bench, also comprising Justice Pankaj Mithal, said that though it is not inclined to

extend the interim order but will request the Tripura government to not take any coercive action for a period of two weeks. When asked for liberty to appear virtually before the Tripura High Court, the Bench said: "We cannot micromanage everything. Let the High Court take a call whether appearance through video conferencing should be permitted or not." "It is needless to say that the petitioners shall be at liberty to file appropriate proceedings before the appropriate forum as permissible under the law," said the apex court in its order. In November 2021, the Supreme Court had directed Tripura Police not to take any coercive action against the petitioners in connection with the FIRs lodged under the UAPA provisions for alleged inflammatory tweets depicting violence and vandalism of places of religious worship during communal violence in the state.

Into the Future of Iron Ore Processing

Hyderabad, Feb 16 (TIM Bureau) : The Mining Engineers' Association of India, Hyderabad Chapter in collaboration with the largest iron ore producer of India - NMDC is organizing a National Seminar in Hyderabad during 16-17 February 2024. Aimed at enabling knowledge sharing on the theme - 'Advanced Iron Ore Beneficiation and Sustainable Low Grade Iron Ore Utilization', the Seminar is set to make meaningful strides towards the sustainable growth of the industry. At its inaugural function

MEAI and NMDC host National Seminar

on Friday, Chief Guest Shri Dilip Kumar Mohanty, Director (Production) NMDC said, "Beneficiation and utilization of low grade iron ore are making game changing interventions in maximizing the recovery of this valuable mineral. Advancement in beneficiation technology and low grade iron ore utilization are critical tenets in building mineral security and self-sufficiency. A crucial step in the iron and steel supply chain, they also play a defin-

ing role in augmenting production and efficiency, while empowering a sustainable tomorrow." Shri S.N. Mathur, President MEAI; Shri V.S. Rao, Former Executive Director TATA Steel; Shri S.K. Agarwal, Former CMD (I/c), NMDC; Dr P.V. Rao, Editor MEAI Journal; and Shri Dhananjaya G Reddy, COO ERM Group were Guests of Honour at the event.



realme's 12 Pro Series breaks records with 150K units sold during the 1st sale

New Delhi, Feb 16 (IANS) : Global technology brand realme on Friday said that its recently-launched realme 12 Pro Series received an overwhelming response, with 150,000 units being sold during the inaugural sale which started on 6th February 2024. realme recently unveiled the realme 12 Pro Series, the latest entrant in its upscale number series. "Despite the crowded Indian smartphone market, realme has consistently remained a top player due to its innovative, quality, and value-driven products," the company said in a statement. In 2023, realme ranked fifth in the Indian smartphone market for the Rs 20,000-Rs 30,000 price range, holding a 12 per cent share. The realme 12 Pro Series 5G has made a strong start in the mid-premium segment priced between Rs 25,000-Rs 35,000, with over 150,000 pre-bookings across all platforms.

RECORD-BREAKING

150K



Domestic equities gain for fourth straight session

Mumbai, Feb 16 (IANS) : Domestic equities gained for the fourth consecutive day on Friday, recovering more than 500 points or 2.3 per cent, said Siddhartha Khemka, Head of Retail Research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services. While Nifty surged by 0.59 per cent (130 points) and closed at 22,040.70, Sensex closed moderately higher by 0.52 per cent (376 points) at 72,426.64. All sectors ended in green, barring oil & gas as Indian markets showed resilience despite volatility. The Q3 earnings season has ended on a buoyant note with Nifty delivering a strong beat with a 17 per cent YoY PAT

growth versus an estimate of 11 per cent. "We expect market sentiment to strengthen further as the prospect of a pre-election rally is quite strong. Nifty is hovering near all-time zones and is all set to make new highs next week," Khemka said. Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said the Indian market continued its broad-based recovery on Friday, aided by positive global cues. Further, narrowing India's trade deficit, led by softening commodity prices and a manufacturing push by the government, attracted investors to capital goods, metals, and industrial stocks.

Nifty, small and midcap indices in overheated zone: Report

New Delhi, Feb 16 (IANS) : Over the past year, the key benchmark indices Nifty 50, Nifty Midcap 100 and Nifty Smallcap 100 have delivered returns of 22 per cent, 56 per cent and 66 per cent, respectively. HDFC Securities said in a report that all three above-mentioned indices seem overvalued at the aggregate level advocating bottom-up stock picking for future returns from here as further expansion of multiples is unlikely. The report said the extent of overvaluation relative to his-

tory is the highest in smallcaps while on an absolute basis, the midcap index is the most overvalued. Another aspect of this rally is that it's been very broad-based, which is evident in the fact that 70 per cent of stocks in each of the indices are trading above their long-term (12 years) average valuations. This level of overvaluation and breadth has been seen only a few times in the past 20 years (in 2007 when 75 per cent of Nifty constituents were overvalued relative to history) and to a lesser extent in FY15-17 (44 per cent of midcap constituents overvalued) and



FY21-22 (46 per cent of midcap constituents overvalued), the report said. In FY07, the overvaluation was corrected through a sharp fall in 2008 across indices. Interestingly, in the last decade, this level of overvaluation in mid and smallcap indices has not always resulted in a sharp index correction in subsequent 1-2 years, but it surely leads to a subdued/mod-

est return in the next few years and the rally tends to get less broad-based, the report said. "Thus, we believe it's time for investors to get more selective and bottom-up across all market-cap indices as the phase of easy and broad-based returns might not repeat in FY25-26," the report said.



भारतीय जीवन बीमा निगम
LIFE INSURANCE CORPORATION OF INDIA

LIC of India introduced new plan "LIC's Amritbaal (Plan 874)"

Hyderabad, Feb 16 (TIM Bureau) : LIC of India launched a new product LIC's Amritbaal at the hands of Dr. Vivek Joshi, Secretary, Dept of Financial Services, MOF, GOI. The Plan will be available for sale from 17.02.2024.

The Unique Identification Number (UIN) for LIC's Amritbaal is UIN: 512N365V01. LIC's Amritbaal is an Individual Savings, Life Insurance Plan. The plan is specifically designed to have an adequate corpus to meet the higher education and other needs of

the child. It facilitates accumulation of corpus through Guaranteed additions at the rate of Rs 80 per thousand basic sum assured at the end of each policy year from the inception till the end of Policy term provided policy is in force.

- Minimum Age at Entry is 0 years (30 days completed). Maximum Age at Entry is 13 years (last birthday).
- Minimum Age at maturity is 18 years (last birthday) and Maximum Age at maturity is 25 years (last birthday)
- Short Premium payment Term of 5, 6 or 7 years available.
- Minimum Policy Term for Limited Premium Payment-10 years and Single Premium Payment-5 years
- Maximum Policy Term for Limited /Single Premium Payment is 25 years

- and for policies procured through POSP-LI/CPSC-SPV is 20 years.
- Minimum Sum Assured is Rs. 2,00,000/- and no limit for Maximum Basic Sum Assured (subject to conditions).
- On date of Maturity, Sum Assured on maturity along with Guaranteed additions will be payable for In-force policy. Maturity Amount can also be received through settlement options in installments over 5, 10 or 15 years.
- The Proposer shall have an option to choose "Sum Assured on Death" as per the two options available under each of Single Premium and Limited Premium Payment.
- During risk cover period, for

- In-force policy death benefit payable will be "Sum Assured on Death" along with accrued Guaranteed additions.
- LIC's Premium Waiver Benefit Rider is available by paying additional premium subject to the eligibility conditions.
- There is Rebate for High Basic Sum Assured as well as for proposal completed under online Sale.
- Loan shall be available during the policy term subject to the conditions.
- The Plan is a Non-Linked, Non-Participating Plan.



India's wearable market rises 34% in 2023 to 134mn units: Report

New Delhi, Feb 16 (IANS) : India's wearable device market registered 34 per cent growth in 2023 to a record 134.2 million units, a new report said on Friday. According to the International Data Corporation (IDC), the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2023 (October-December) saw 28.4 million units, growing 12.7 per cent (year-over-year).



RBI extends last date for Paytm Payments Bank to stop accepting deposits to March 15

Mumbai, Feb 16 (IANS) : The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has extended by 15 days to March 15 the deadline after which Paytm Payments Bank Ltd is barred from accepting deposits. The last date fixed earlier was February

29. The RBI said that the extension has been given keeping in view the interest of customers (including merchants) of PPBL who may require a little more time to make alternative arrangements and the larger public interest.



SpiceJet and Busy Bee Airways bid jointly for GoFirst

New Delhi, Feb 16 (IANS) : The Chairman and Managing Director of SpiceJet, and Busy Bee Airways Private Limited, have jointly submitted a bid for the cash-strapped GoFirst. A

SpiceJet airline official said that the bid has been submitted by Chairman and Managing Director Ajay Singh, in his personal capacity, along with Busy Bee Airways Private Limited.

263 lakh ton of subsidised fertilisers provided to Punjab farmers in last 6 years: Govt data

New Delhi, Feb 16 (IANS) : Although the farmers' protest continues in Punjab, official figures showed that the Central government provided substantial aid to the farmers in the state in the last six years. More than 400 lakh ton of subsidised fertilisers were made available to farmers in Punjab and Haryana by the Centre in the last six years, the data showed.

According to the data, Punjab has received substantial aid from the Central government, with key initiatives aimed at bolstering the state's agricultural sector which include fertiliser subsidies, infrastructure development, direct financial assistance and mechanisms to enhance agricultural mechanisation and residue management. Additionally, the procurement of essential crops such as

paddy and wheat at Minimum Support Price (MSP) has seen significant increase, ensuring fair remuneration for farmers and stabilising agricultural markets. In the last six years (upto January 2024), 62 lakh farmers in Punjab received 263 lakh ton of subsidised fertilisers with total subsidy of nearly Rs 55,154 crore, the data showed.

Under Agriculture Infrastructure Fund scheme, since its launch in 2020, 9,775 projects have been sanctioned and a loan amount of Rs 2,740 crore has been disbursed in Punjab which attracted investments worth Rs 4,586 crore. Similarly, under the PM KISAN scheme, Rs 4,758.37 crore has been disbursed to 23,36,836 beneficiaries so far. The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Maandhan Yojana (PMKMY), since its inception in 2019, has seen 14,604 farmers' registration in the state. Since inception in 2014-15, the

Sub Mission on Agricultural Mechanisation (SMAM) scheme has released Rs 102.68 crore, distributed 12,666 number of machines to individual farmers and established 1,256 number of custom hiring centres/hi-tech hubs/farm machinery banks in the state. During the period from 2018-19 to 2023-24, the funds amounting to Rs 1,531.45 crore have been released, 1,37,407 machines were distributed to individual farmers and 25,417 number of custom hiring centres established in the state, the official figures showed.

"Since 2014-15, Rs 240.55 crore has been released to the state under Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH), brought an additional area of 19152 hectare and three Centre of Excellence (CoE) sanctioned under Indo-Israel Action Plan and two CoE sanctioned under Indo-Dutch Cooperation," the data showed. Also, according to the



data, the number of crop loan accounts has increased from 28.72 lakh in 2018-19 to 37 lakh in 2022-23 at a CAGR of 6.54.

"During the same period, the crop loan amount disbursed increased from 54,022.87 to 66,833.51 crore at a CAGR of 5.46 per cent. Also, the total agricultural loan accounts increased from 34.78 to 43.92 lakh during the same period with a CAGR of 6.01 per cent. The total agricultural loan amount increased from Rs 77,456.45 to

Rs.90,798.48 crore with a CAGR of 4.05 per cent," the data showed. Meanwhile over the past six years, a staggering 188.19 lakh ton of subsidised fertilisers has been also provided to the farmers in Haryana, with a total subsidy amounting to nearly Rs 40,058 crore. In a bid to directly assist farmers, Rs 5,058.38 crore has been disbursed to 19,74,612 beneficiaries in Haryana, providing crucial financial relief to enhance agricultural operations.

"Since 2016, claims worth Rs 8,138 crore have been paid to the state farmers under Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna (PMFBY), significantly mitigating risks associated with crop loss due to unforeseen circumstances. With 2,374 projects sanctioned and a loan amount of Rs 2,000 crore have been disbursed under Agriculture Infrastructure fund," the official figures noted.



Has Farooq Abdullah finally brought down curtains on PAGD in J&K?

Srinagar, Feb 16 (IANS) : Former J&K Chief Minister and National Conference (NC) President Farooq Abdullah's statement on Friday that his party will not enter into any pre-poll alliance before the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections has far-reaching consequences on J&K's politics. The octogenarian leader is a wily old politician, who is known for his political acumen that most of his rivals envy. Farooq Abdullah is the senior-most politician in J&K and the NC is the oldest political party in the UT. If anyone among the J&K poli-

ticians knows that there are no permanent friends and enemies in politics, it is Farooq Abdullah, who has used this strategy in practice. In the past, the NC has shared power in J&K with both the Congress and the BJP, two extremes of national politics in the country. NC's alliance with the Congress dates back to 1975, when NC founder late Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah became the Chief Minister with the NC just having one seat in the Legislative Assembly (that of the Sheikh Abdullah himself). Sheikh Abdullah was made the leader of the House by the majority Congress without the former

even joining the Congress. His father's example was followed by Farooq Abdullah who used his proximity to the Nehru-Gandhi family and ruled J&K as the Chief Minister four times. However, once out of power at the Centre, the NC dumped the Congress in J&K.

His son Omar Abdullah was made the Union Minister of State for External affairs in Atal Bihari Vajpayee's NDA government in 2001-2002. Thus bringing down curtains on alliances and political friendships is nothing new to the NC. With his categorical announcement on Thursday that the NC will not enter into any pre-poll alliance, either for the Lok Sabha or the Assembly polls, Farooq Abdullah has brought down curtains on the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) in J&K, which he heads. PAGD was formed on October 20, 2020. Its objective was stated to be the restoration of Articles 370 and 35A, plus the restoration of statehood for J&K. The major constituents of the PAGD are NC, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) headed by Mehbooba Mufti, CPI-M, and the Awami National Conference (ANC) headed by Farooq Abdullah's elder sister, Khalida Shah.

All along its existence, the PAGD constituent parties have been claiming their readiness to sacrifice political objectives for the "greater cause of J&K". With the NC deciding to go solo in the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls, has the PAGD reached the end of its road? The PDP will now have to field candidates against the NC and other parties in both the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. Once the so-called 'greater cause' is sacrificed at the altar of political expediency, irrelevance of the PAGD would become obvious.



SFI can come to talk, hit me or attack me... I'm ready : Kerala Gov

Kochi, Feb 16 (IANS) : The tiff between Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan and the SFI, the student wing of the CPI-M, resurfaced on Friday after the former's trip to Thrissur was black flagged at five different locations.

At Irinjalakuda in the evening, Khan even stopped his vehicle and stepped out, but the CRPF personnel, who took over his security on January 27, advised him to get inside the car which he did.

"They (SFI activists) needn't wave black flags... I will come out and face them. If the SFI wishes to talk to me, if they want to hit me or even if they want to attack me, I am ready. It's the Chief Minister who is behind this. On one hand he sends the SFI against me, and on the other hand he sends the police to arrest them," Khan told the media.

ED summons Mahua Moitra in FEMA case

Kolkata, Feb 16 (IANS) : The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday issued a summons to Trinamool Congress leader Mahua Moitra for questioning in connection with a Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) violation case.

Sources in the know of things said that Moitra, who was expelled from the Lok Sabha over the "cash-for-query" matter, has been asked to be present at ED's headquarters in Delhi on February 19.

There was, however, no official reaction or response from Moitra on the matter till the time of filing the report.



Cattle smuggling case: ED summons actor-turned-Trinamool MP Dev to Delhi for questioning

Kolkata, Feb 16 (IANS) : The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday summoned actor-turned-politician and Trinamool Congress Lok Sabha MP Dipak Adhikari alias Dev to the central agency's headquarters in Delhi on February 21 for questioning in connection with a case related to money laundering, an ED official said. Sources said the Trinamool MP has been summoned for questioning in connection with the multi-crore cattle smuggling case

in West Bengal. If Dev appears before the ED office, it will be the second time that the popular actor will be questioned by a central agency. In February 2022, he was questioned for five hours by the officers of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which is conducting a parallel probe into the cattle smuggling case. It was said that Dev was questioned for allegedly having links with Enamul Haque, a key accused in the cattle smuggling case.



Nude body of suspected rape and murder victim triggers tension in Malda

Kolkata, Feb 16 (IANS) : Amid continuing tension in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali over protests by local women alleging sexual harassment, similar tension was triggered at Mothabari in Madla district on Friday after the recovery of a nude body of a suspected rape and murder victim from a corn field there. Initial investigation suggests that the woman was first raped and then hacked to death after which her body was dumped in the corn field. The exact cause of death will be ascertained after the post-mortem report comes, which will also confirm if she was raped. The victim's father works as a sharecropper. Her family members said that she was missing since late Wednesday evening. "We started looking for her and continued the search till late in the night night. On Friday morning, as we were about to file a missing person's complaint with the local police, we were informed about the recovery of her body from a corn field. We have registered complaints with the local police in the matter," said the victim's brother. Meanwhile, BJP's IT cell chief and observer for West Ben-



gal, Amit Malviya, has launched a scathing attack against the state government and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee over the incident.

"West Bengal under Mamata Banerjee has become hell for women... Not a day goes when a woman is not raped or murdered. The brutality of the crime is often so spine-chilling that one can't sleep for days. "But nothing affects Mamata Banerjee, as long as she keeps getting votes... No criminal is ever prosecuted because they are almost always affiliated to the ruling TMC," Malviya tweeted. "Bengal is witnessing anarchy. The Chief Minister and her criminal police force have not only failed to provide any sense of security to women, but are also actively working to deny justice to the victims.

Metal pipe from Delhi Metro Station falls on scooter; woman injured

New Delhi, Feb 16 (IANS) : A 26-year-old woman sustained injuries after a heavy metal pipe from a Delhi Metro station fell onto her scooter in west Delhi, an official said on Friday.

The incident occurred at Delhi Metro's Subhash Nagar Station.

In a video of the incident, being circulated on social media, some persons could be seen lifting a white coloured pipe which probably fell from the Metro Station on a two-wheeler. Deputy Commissioner of Police (West) Vichitra Veer said that the incident occurred late Wednesday evening.

UP man who attempted suicide in police custody, dies in hospital

Aligarh, Feb 16 (IANS) : A man, who attempted suicide in police custody alleging torture, died on Friday in Uttar Pradesh's Aligarh. A police inspector and an Inquiry Officer (IO) have been suspended in connection with the case. The deceased Gaurav was accused of eloping with a girl from his village. The allegations were levied by Veerpal, the father of the girl, along with his associate, Sadhu Shyam Singh Suman, the head of the Devri village, who had abducted the victim from his house on February 3. Gaurav's mother and sister said that he was assaulted by the village head, along with five others. Later, as he was sent to police custody, he was physically assaulted for nearly seven days by the police, Gaurav's family said. Gaurav attempted suicide at the police station on February 9 and was rushed to a hospital.



Goondaism comment on BJP: CM Siddaramaiah must apologise, says Karnataka LoP

Bengaluru, Feb 16 (IANS) : Kota Srinivas Poojari, Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Legislative Council on Friday demanded an apology from Chief Minister Siddaramaiah for addressing BJP leaders as hooligans in the council. Speaking to reporters, Poojari stated, "CM Siddaramaiah has called Opposition leaders goondas, he should apologise. People will give him an appropriate answer for these comments." "CM Siddaramaiah while answering a question which could have been answered in

four to five minutes had criticised the Centre for hours and it was objected to. Instead of answering, he called all the Opposition members goondas," he stated. "I have not seen a Chief Minister using the word 'goonda' in a session in history. We have demanded that he should take back his words and apologise. Condemning the statements by the CM, BJP and JD-S members walked out of the session," Poojari explained. The trouble began when Siddaramaiah was answering a question by Congress member UB Venkatesh on devolution of taxes. Siddaramaiah claimed that

Karnataka was in the second position in terms of tax collection in the country, but in turn, the state's share from the Centre was decreasing. "Though the size of the Union Budget doubled, the share of Karnataka has not increased," he said. The BJP MLAs began raising objections to his comments. Siddaramaiah asked the BJP members to speak once he completed his speech, however, when they continued making their objections, he stated, "I won't fear goondaism.



Govt should find solution to farmers' demands : Hooda

Chandigarh, Feb 16 (IANS) : Former Haryana Chief Minister and Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda on Friday said the government should find a solution to demands of agitating farmers by holding talks. Hooda said the government should accept demands of the farmers. He said that when the Congress government is formed in the state, the responsibility of crop insurance will be handed over to government companies, and farmers will also be guaranteed minimum support price (MSP). Leader of Opposition Hooda reached Sonapat town to inaugurate the Girls Model School established by Tikaram Shikshan Sansthan where he was given a warm welcome. The two-time chief minister ap-

preciated the work done by the organisation in the field of education. Police have erected several layers of barricades on the Punjab-Haryana borders with tense situations and the traffic is affected. In the last three days, the police used tear gas on demonstrators in a bid to stop farmers' protests from reaching the national capital. Scores of policemen and farmers got injuries in stone pelting that ensued between them. The farmers -- representing over 200 farmer unions -- are adamant on heading to the national capital to lodge their protest over unfulfilled demands, including legal guarantee of minimum support prices (MSP) of crops, waiver of farm loans and criminal cases against those protesting farm laws be dropped.

Surya Namaskar brings good thoughts to mind, says Raj Education Minister

Jaipur, Feb 16 (IANS) : Rajasthan Education Minister Madan Dilawar said on Friday that practising 'Surya Namaskar' keeps the human body and mind healthy as well as helps a person develop good positive thoughts and keep away from bad habits. The students of private and government schools participated in a Surya Namaskar programme which started here in Rajasthan on Friday. "Practice of Surya Namaskar keeps the body and mind healthy. Good thoughts come

and vices run away. When good thoughts originate in the mind, there is no room for vices. This will not lead to any kind of deficiency in life and we will keep moving forward," said the Minister at the Chaugan stadium in Jaipur. He was addressing the state programme as the chief guest. In the programme, many dignitaries, including Dilawar himself and State Director of Secondary Education Ashish Modi, collectively did 'Surya Namaskar' among the students. Dilawar said, "There has never

been any opposition regarding this practice in the state. Now Surya Namaskar will be done in schools every day." Regarding the opposition to Surya Namaskar, the Education Minister said, "When I was coming to attend this programme, I got calls from many Muslim brothers and they congratulated me for this historic programme." Everyone is welcoming this decision together, he added. The Minister said: "Prime Minister Narendra Modi has promoted yoga at the global level. On his initiative, June 21 is celebrated

every year as the International Yoga Day by the United Nations. Thanks to this, more than 100 countries of the world have adopted yoga." A few petitions were filed by Muslim organisations which claimed that the decision to make Surya Namaskar mandatory is "unconstitutional and violates Article 25 of the Constitution" which guarantees the freedom to profess, practice and propagate religion to all citizens. The High Court rejected one of the petitions, saying the Muslim Forum, which filed the petition, is



6 held for looting arms from Manipur Rifles armoury

Imphal, Feb 16 (IANS) : Manipur Police have arrested six persons and recovered a large cache of arms and ammunition from their possession which were allegedly looted from the 5th Battalion Manipur Rifles armoury at Chingarel in Imphal East district, officials said on Friday.

Nationalist Congress Party belongs to Ajit Pawar, rules Maha Speaker

Mumbai, Feb 16 (IANS) : Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar on Friday ruled that the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) led by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar is the 'real NCP', and also said the legislators from both the NCP factions are "not disqualified". Delivering his verdict on the disqualification petitions filed by both rival NCP factions after the party split in June 2023, the Speaker said that a majority -- 41 MLAs are with Ajit Pawar, compared with 14 with the Sharad Pawar group. Narwekar considered the majority in the legislature as the criteria and ruled that

the Ajit Pawar group had the maximum number of MLAs compared with the Sharad Pawar group, hence the former (Ajit Pawar) group was the 'real NCP'. While the Ajit Pawar group had 41 of the total 53 MLAs, which was rejected by the Sharad Pawar side

both sides claimed that the election to the party president post was not as per its Constitution, there was no challenge to Sharad Pawar's presidentship till June 29, 2023, but the next day (June 30, 2023) there were two presidents, observed the Speaker.



JD-S to field fifth candidate in K'taka for RS, cross-voting fear haunts Cong

Bengaluru, Feb 16 (IANS) : Former Chief Minister and JD-S state President HD Kumaraswamy announced on Friday that a fifth candidate would be fielded for the Rajya Sabha elections from Karnataka by the BJP-JD-S alliance. The elections are being held for the four seats of the Rajya Sabha from Karnataka. The fielding of the fifth candidates indicates a close fight between the ruling Congress and

Opposition BJP and JD-S. Speaking to reporters at Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru, Kumaraswamy stated that senior JD-S leader Kupendra Reddy would file his nomination seeking election to the Rajya Sabha from the state. It has been decided to field Kupendra Reddy as the NDA candidate as per the suggestions of the national and state leadership of the BJP. "There are additional votes in the BJP. Those votes should not be



laid to waste. We have decided to transfer additional votes to Kupendra Reddy," he stated. The BJP has announced the candidature of Narayansa Bhandage for the Rajya Sabha as its candidate.

Tamil superstar Kamal Haasan to contest Lok Sabha polls

Chennai, Feb 16 (IANS) : Tamil Superstar Kamal Haasan, who is also President of Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM), will be contesting the upcoming Lok Sabha polls either from Coimbatore or Chennai. Kamal Haasan's political party, MNM has recently been sanctioned with the sym-

bol of a battery torch. The veteran superstar who involved himself for the cause of the downtrodden has already entered an electoral alliance with the ruling DMK and will be part of the I.N.D.I.A bloc for the 2024 general elections. Coimbatore seat is currently represented by CPI-M, while Chennai North, South and Central seats were represented by Dr Kalanidhi

Veeraswamy, Dr Thamizhachi Thangapandian and Dayanidhi Maran respectively. All three are from the DMK. For the veteran actor contesting from Coimbatore, a seat of the alliance partner CPI-M, the DMK will require several rounds of discussions with the CPI-M leadership as also with other coalition partners but if the seat is either

Chennai (North, Central or South), it can easily allocate the seat from its own kitty. While the three Chennai seats are represented by the DMK, all three are heavy weight candidates from known political families of DMK. While Dayanidhi Maran (Chennai Central MP) is the cousin of party supremo and Chief Minister, M.K. Stalin, Dr Kalanidhi Veeraswamy



(Chennai North MP) is the son of former minister and powerful leader Arcot N.Veeraswami. The DMK MP from Chennai South is Dr Thamizhachi Thangapandian whose father was a former Tamil Nadu's minister Thangam Thenarasu. However, Kamal Haasan has an advantage in Coimbatore as he had contested the 2021 assembly elections from Coimbatore South.



Tripura govt launches universal health insurance scheme

Agartala, Feb 16 (IANS) : Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Friday launched a universal health insurance scheme -- Mukhya Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (MMJAY) -- under which 4.15 lakh families in the state are expected to be benefited by cashless medical treatment of up to Rs 5 lakh per family per year. The MMJAY, launched in line with the Centre's Ayushman Bharat Pradhanmantri Jan Arogya Yojana, would cover 4.15 lakh families, including government employees, who are not covered under PMJAY. "Many helpless people who are not covered under PMJAY seek financial assistance from us to meet their medical expenditure. While it is not possible to help all these people, an alternative health insurance scheme has been

launched for those who need financial aid for medical treatment," the Chief Minister said after launching the MMJAY. He said the scheme is designed in such a way that the patient's family would get free medicines for 15 days even after discharge from government or private hospitals, and the entire process would be cashless. Basant Garg, additional chief executive officer of the National Health Authority, claimed that Tripura is the first northeastern state to introduce universal health insurance coverage for all. Chief Secretary J.K. Sinha termed the rollout of MMJAY as a "historic and brave" move for the welfare of the people, adding that the scheme would ensure all the families in the state get health insurance benefits.



SC stays trial in Bengal post-poll violence cases on plea filed by CBI seeking transfer of cases

New Delhi, Feb 16 (IANS) : In an interim direction, the Supreme Court has stayed the trial proceedings in the post-poll violence cases pending at various courts in West Bengal. The direction was passed by a bench of Justice Sanjay Karol on a plea filed by the CBI seeking transfer of these cases to any other place outside the state. It may be recalled that following the order of the Calcutta High Court, the central investigating agency had lodged several FIRs in cases related to post-poll violence in West Bengal. Additional Solicitor General (ASG) S.V. Raju, appearing for the CBI, submitted that the course of

justice is being impeded by openly threatening and intimidating officials, advocates and witnesses. ASG Raju added that no action at the ground level appears to have been taken despite the issue having been brought to the notice of the state authorities. He referred to the 2021 report prepared by the National Human Rights Commission, which had recommended trial of all cases investigated by the CBI to be held outside West Bengal. Perusing the material placed on record, the apex court issued notice to each one of the respondents returnable on March 11.

Delhi HC denies extension of parole to realtor avoiding 182-yr sentence for duping buyers

New Delhi, Feb 16 (IANS) : The Delhi High Court has said that parole is a privilege, not a right, as it dismissed the plea of a realtor, Rakesh Kumar of Tirupati Associates, seeking an extension of his parole for six months. Kumar, facing a staggering 182-year sentence for duping homebuyers, had been released on parole in 2019, but repeatedly failed to comply with the legal proceedings and settle the claims. Justice Anoop Kumar Mendiratta noted that parole cannot be endlessly extended, especially when efforts to settle cases are not diligently pursued within

the framework of the Delhi Prison Rules, 2018. The court firmly said that the automatic extension of parole via writ petitions, spanning over four years in this case, cannot become a routine practice. Kumar's counsel argued that he intended to settle the claims with funds from compensation for land acquired by the Ghaziabad Development Authority. However, the court maintained that parole extensions must be granted only in exceptional circumstances, and not as a matter of routine. The realtor's predicament stemmed from a 1998 case where 344 complaints were lodged



against his firm. Despite directives from the consumer forum, Kumar failed to comply, resulting in his sentencing under the Consumer Protection Act. His sentence includes one year of imprisonment for 20 cases and six months for 324 others, with consecutive terms. The court said that its ju-

risdiction is limited to matters of parole extension, not judging the merits of the consumer forum's orders. Therefore, Kumar's plea for further parole extension was dismissed, citing the principle that parole is a privilege subject to stringent rules, and not a right to be extended routinely.



Odisha: Transport department official in Vigilance net

Bhubaneswar, Feb 16 (IANS) : The Odisha Vigilance department officials on Friday unearthed properties worth crores following simultaneous raids at different places linked to Regional Transport Officer (RTO), Boudh over the alleged accumulation of assets disproportionate to his known sources of income. The RTO, Basanta Kumar Mohapatra, was found in possession of two flats in Bhubaneswar worth Rs 1 crore each and two commercial shopping outlets at Utkal Kanika Galleria Mall at Gautam Nagar, Bhubaneswar worth Rs 2 crore.



Gujarat Congress reinforces ranks; Rajesh Gohil appointed OBC dept chairman

Gandhinagar, Feb 16 (IANS) : The Gujarat unit of Congress on Friday announced the appointment of Rajesh Gohil as the new Chairman of the Other Backward Class (OBC) department. This appointment comes after the former OBC depart-

ment chairman's recent defection to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) along with several supporters, marking a reshuffle within the party ranks. In addition to this key appointment, the Gujarat Congress, under the directive of the party's national president, has also revealed a comprehensive list of new city and district unit presi-

dents across Gujarat. The appointments, aimed at revitalising the party's presence and fortifying its grassroots engagement, include Manoj Kathiria for Jamnagar district, Manoj Joshi for Junagadh city, Naushad Solanki for Surendranagar, Kishor Chikhaliya for Morbi, Hitesh Vyas for Bhavnagar city, Has Mukh Chaudhary for Mehsana, Ashok Patel for Sabarkantha, Rajendrasinh Rana for Bharuch, Dhansukh Rajput for Surat city, Atul Rajani for Rajkot city, Amarsinh Solanki for Ahmedabad district, Gulabsinh Chauhan for Mahisagar and Gemar Rabari for Patan. These appointments are seen as a critical step towards consolidating the Congress party's influence in Gujarat, especially in recent political shifts.

Louise Khurshid appears before ED in money laundering case

Lucknow, Feb 16 (IANS) : Louise Khurshid, wife of Congress leader Salman Khurshid, appeared before the Enforcement Directorate on Friday for questioning in a money-laundering investigation linked to alleged misuse of government funds in distribution of artificial limbs and equipment by a trust headed by her. According to ED sources, Louise Khurshid was questioned on a number of issues related to charges against her. She was asked to depose at the ED zonal office in Lucknow for recording her statement under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). Last

week, an MP-MLA court in Bareilly had issued an arrest warrant against Louise Khurshid and another accused in this case and fixed February 16 as the next date of hearing. The ED case of money laundering stems from the state police's FIR of 2017. Special Public Prosecutor Achintya Dwivedi had said that during 2009-10, a programme for distribution of artificial limbs and equipment was organised by Dr Zakir Hussain Memorial Trust for Disabled Persons, run by Dr Zakir Hussain Memorial Trust of Louise Khurshid in Bhojipura area of the district. The government got the matter investigated after receiving allegations of discrepancies.



It was found that government funds were misused by using fake seals and signatures in the programme, he said. There were three main accused in the case, including project manager of the trust Louise Khurshid, the trust's representative Pratyush Shukla and its secretary Athar Farooqui. Shukla died a few years ago.

According to the sources, the ED has recorded the statement of Shukla's wife and some others and has now asked Louise Khurshid to join the probe. The court had issued summons to the accused several times but they neither appeared nor got bail in the case.

Delhi's poor air quality spikes respiratory, cardiac problems: Doctors

New Delhi, Feb 16 (IANS) : Even as the national Capital's air quality continues to dip, doctors on Friday reported a rise in respiratory and cardiac issues. As per data by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Delhi's overall Air Quality Index (AQI) showed no sign of improvement as it was recorded at 294 on Friday at 9 am. The AQI was 341 on Friday and 342 a day earlier. "We have noticed a significant increase in the

number of patients seeking medical attention for various health issues, ranging from respiratory problems to cardiac conditions. Many individuals are experiencing worsened symptoms of respiratory ailments such as asthma, persistent cough, colds, and viral infections, including cases of H1N1," Dr. Sushila Kataria, Senior Director, Internal Medicine, Medanta, Gurugram, told IANS. "The primary contributing factor to these health issues is the presence of smog, which directly irri-

tates the lungs and throat, particularly affecting those with pre-existing respiratory conditions," she explained. A recent analysis done by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) showed that Delhi was ranked first on the list of the country's most polluted cities in January. Of the 254 cities, Delhi's pollution levels were recorded at the highest with the average PM2.5 concentration at 206 micrograms per cubic metre. The city exceeded the National Ambient Air Quality



Standards (NAAQS) every day of the month. "In the face of escalating air pollution, especially evident in cities like Delhi, the impact on respiratory health, is significant. People suffering from asthma as well as COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary disease) -

- both chronic respiratory ailments -- experience considerable aggravation due to air pollutants, resulting in symptoms like shortness of breath and exacerbations. Therefore taking precautionary measures becomes paramount," said Dr Anshum Aneja Arora, a

Gurgaon-based pulmonologist. Dr. Puneet Khanna, HOD and Consultant Respiratory Medicine, Manipal Hospital, Dwarka told IANS that children are also getting mild respiratory tract infections, and are also coming with lots of complaints of coughing, sneezing, and cold. "The major complaints are upper airway conditions, nose blockage, coughing, wheezing, breathlessness, and a sore throat. Sometimes it is accompanied by chest pain and fever, but most of these symptoms are mild and self-limiting, and usually they recover after three to five days of medication," he said.

Israel pulls out of peace talks in Cairo over 'delusional' Hamas demands

Washington, Feb 16 (IANS) : Israel has pulled out of the middle east peace talks in Cairo dealing a serious blow to the on-going truce negotiations to end the war, blaming Hamas' "delusional demands" and a lack of new proposals. The talks aimed at ending fighting in the conflict zone in Gaza and freeing more than 100 remaining hostages did not yield the expected breakthrough but were extended for three more days before Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu opted to recall his negotiating team, Israeli media outlets reported Friday. "Israel did not receive in Cairo any new proposal from Hamas on the release of our

hostages," Netanyahu's office said in a statement. "A change in Hamas' positions will allow the negotiations to advance," he said. Netanyahu also released a video statement saying "strong military pressure and firm negotiations" are the keys to getting the captives released, the Times of Israel reported. Senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan blamed Netanyahu, telling a leading news media in the US that Israel's proposal veered away from agreements the parties had previously reached. Families of the hostages called Netanyahu's decision a "death sentence" for their loved ones, who have been held by militants in Gaza for more than 130 days. Issues which the media says is preventing a deal is

Israel's pledge to crush Hamas and remain in charge of security in Gaza after the war and Hamas' demands of a permanent cease-fire and the withdrawal of all Israeli troops from the war-torn territory, USA TODAY said.

The latest developments in the Middle East :

The State Department has confirmed the death of 17-year-old Palestinian American Mohammad Ahmad Khdour in the West Bank and called for an investigation. The Washington Post reported he was shot in the head. He's the second US citizen, both teenagers, to be killed in the occupied territory since the war started.

US forces carried out an airstrike on an anti-cruise missile in a part of Yemen controlled by the



Houthi, the rebel group that for months has launched attacks on commercial and Navy ships in the Red Sea, according to US Central Command. Family members of hostages held in Gaza as well as former captives were in the Netherlands on Friday to file a legal complaint seeking the International Criminal Court to arrest and prosecute the leaders of Hamas. More

than 28,500 people, mostly women and children, are claimed to have been killed in Gaza since October 7, when Hamas launched an attack on Israel, killing about 1,200 people and taking more than 240 hostages, triggering the war. The Israeli military said on X it "located and struck" Hamas infrastructure, including tunnel shafts, but did not say where. At least 10 militants

were killed, the Israel Defence Forces said.

Thousands of Palestinians protected from US deportation: About 6,000 Palestinians living in the US will avoid deportation for 18 months, thanks to a programme President Joe Biden invoked Wednesday, the New York Times reported.

The programme, called Deferred Enforced Departure, allows citizens of countries in crisis to remain and work in the US. The Times cited a memo in which Biden said many Palestinian civilians are in danger because of the war in Gaza, so he granted authority for some who are in the US to stay. Biden recently sent a group of top advisers to Michigan, a battleground state with the second-largest number of Arab Americans in the nation, to mend fences with members of that community embittered by his handling of the war.

Elderly Indian-American motel owner shot dead after altercation over room rental

New York, Feb 16 (IANS) : A 76-year-old Indian-origin motel owner has been shot dead in the US state of Alabama following a confrontation over room rental.

Pravin Raojibhai Patel, the owner of the Hillcrest Motel in Sheffield, was gunned down last week after which police arrested 34-year-old William Jeremy Moore, Alabama-based news outlet al.com reported.

Moore was arrested shortly after the incident as he was trying to break into an abandoned house on 13th Avenue, Sheffield Police Chief Ricky Terry said. According to investigators, Moore wanted to rent a room at the motel when an altercation with Patel took place on February 8, following which the former pulled a handgun and shot the elderly man.

"When searching Moore, the murder weapon was found in his possession," Terry said. The police chief added that Moore is currently being held in the Sheffield City Jail until a warrant is issued after which he will be transported to the Colbert County Jail.

Jemeriz Owens, who works as

a barber across the street from Patel's motel, told WAAY 31 news channel that he heard three gunshots go off back-to-back.

"He (Patel) was outside. He was just trying to get somebody to leave, and they didn't want to leave and they shot him," Owens said. Patel's body was transported to the Alabama Forensics Lab for an autopsy and a funeral service was held for him at Morrison Funeral Home in Tuscumbia on February 12, according to his obituary. Calling the incident a "senseless act of violence", the Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA) said on Friday that the country's hotel owners are "deeply saddened, shocked, and outraged". "Senseless acts of violence have no place in our communities, and our hearts are breaking for Pravin's family, including his wife, children, and grandchildren," said AAHOA Chairman Bharat Patel. "No family should have to endure what Pravin's family is going through, and we send our condolences to everyone who knew and loved him."

Hoping that authorities will help the Patel family find justice, AAHOA Alabama Regional Director Sanjay M Patel said the motel owner spent more than four decades in the town of Sheffield,



owning and operating the same business.

"He was a very family-oriented person, jolly, and a keen businessman. Everyone in town knew him as a familiar face in the community after being there for 40-plus years, and the family was well-known in the community for being genuine and caring," Sanjay Patel said. Beginning this year, a series of unfortunate incidents involving the Indian community in the US have been reported. On Monday, an Indian-American couple hailing from Kerala and their four-year-old twins were found dead inside their \$2.1 million mansion in San Mateo, California.

Anand Sujith Henry, 42, and his wife Alice Priyanka, 40, were found inside a bathroom with gunshot wounds, while their two sons were found in the bedroom with no signs of trauma on their bodies, according to the police.



Man who ran child abuse sites along with British-Indian jailed in UK

London, Feb 16 (IANS) : A mechanic who created and moderated sites dedicated to child sexual abuse on the dark web with an Indian-origin doctor and several others working for him, has been jailed for 16 years in the UK.

Nathan Bake, 28, from Cheshire, was one of three UK-based moderators of a site called 'The Annex', and worked with around 30 staff members to enforce the site's rules and ensure it continued to run smoothly.

He was sentenced on Friday at Chester Crown Court to 16 years imprisonment, placed on the Sex Offenders Register for life, and

given a lifetime Sexual Harm Prevention Order.

As the head moderator, Bake was second in command of The Annex, which is no longer active, and had around 90,000 global members who used it to share and discuss some of the most extreme kinds of abuse material, involving 'hurtcore' and the sexual abuse of babies and toddlers.

Kabir Garg, a 33-year-old Indian-origin psychiatrist from London, was one of the staff members and sat just below Bake in the site's hierarchy as one of the moderators.

He was jailed for six years last year after pleading guilty to eight

charges, including facilitating the sexual exploitation of children, three counts each of making and distributing indecent images of children, and possession of prohibited images.

New users of The Annex would first be held in the 'gateway' where they would have to impress and gain the trust of the site's administrators by posting a certain amount of abuse material, before being granted access to the wider site. Bake, Garg, and other moderators would advise members on techniques to evade law enforcement detection and encourage them to keep the site busy by sharing links to child abuse content.



Most NATO states will cross the threshold of 2% of GDP in defence expenditure

Washington, Feb 16 (IANS) : Outgoing NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has said that 18 of NATO's 31 member alliance are expected to spend at least 2 per cent of their GDP on defence this year. "That is another record number and a six-fold increase from 2014 when only three allies met their target," Stoltenberg said on Friday ahead of a meeting between the alliance's defense ministers in Brussels to be followed by a Security

Alliance meeting in Munich in Germany. US Vice President Kamala Harris and Secretary of State Antony Blinken are attending both of the NATOS meeting to assuage the feelings of members seriously concerned over US role since 2024 frontrunner in GOP primaries former US President Donald Trump brought up renewed scrutiny to the issue of defense spending among NATO members last weekend.

Judge sets date for Trump's New York trial; Atlanta case clouded by tawdry allegations against prosecutor

New York, Feb 16 (IANS) : A state judge has ordered former President Donald Trump's criminal trial on alleged hush money payments to start on March 25 -- in the middle of the Republican Party primaries -- while in Atlanta, uncertainty over the prosecutor's conduct clouded the timeline of a case charging him with election interference. Justice Juan Merchan of the New York State Supreme Court on Friday dismissed Trump's attempts to have the charges thrown out and denied requests to have the trial start later.

Trump faces 34 charges, including that he falsified business records to cover up payments to porn star Stormy Daniels to silence her after she

alleged that she had an affair with him. The trial is scheduled to start a week before the primary elections in New York and four other states with 17 more to follow and Trump's lawyer asserted that it amounted to "election interference" because he would be spending time preparing for the case instead of campaigning.

Outside the courtroom, Trump said, "They want to keep me nice and busy so I can't campaign so hard". With less than nine months to the presidential elections, Trump is snared in a web of local and federal cases involving about 90 charges including attempts to overthrow the 2020 election result, election interference, defamation, fraud and violation of official secrets laws. Meanwhile, he has to face primaries and caucuses, the intraparty elections to



pick the Republican Party nominee for president, before the party's convention in mid-July that will formalise the nomination which he is assured of, despite a continuing challenge from Nikki Haley, a one-time member of his cabinet. On Friday in Georgia state's Atlanta, a tawdry courtroom scene unfolded over allegations that the local prosecutor who brought charges of election interference against Trump was involved in a romantic relationship with one of the lawyers she hired to prosecute the case. If it is established that the prosecutor Fani Willis was involved

with the lawyer, Nathan Wade, who had received payments of about \$650,000 for the case before he was hired, it could amount to a conflict of interest and lead to her being ordered off the case. If that happens, another prosecutor would have to take up the case, delaying the trial.

The allegations against Willis were brought up by a lawyer for one of Trump's co-defendants in the election interference case charging him and others with trying to overturn the state's election result.



3rd Test: Ashwin becomes second Indian bowler to pick 500 Test wickets

Rajkot, Feb 16 (IANS) : Veteran off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has become just the second Indian bowler and ninth overall to pick 500 wickets in Test cricket. Ashwin achieved the milestone during the ongoing third Test match against England at the Niranjan Shah Stadium in Rajkot on Friday. The off-spinner was on 499 scalps at the end of the second Test in Visakhapatnam and completed his 500th scalp with the wicket of Zak Crawley, who top edged a sweep to short fine leg, ending an 89-run opening partnership, on day two of the third Test. Ashwin was then swarmed by his team-mates to congratulate him on achieving the monumental feat. "From Chennai to the cricketing cosmos, @ashwinravi99's journey to 500 Test wickets is a saga of grit, guile, and unrivaled skill.



Fifth edition of Lanka Premier League to kick off on July 1

Colombo, Feb 16 (IANS) : The fifth edition of the highly anticipated Lanka Premier League (LPL) is set to be held from July 1 to July 31 this year, the Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) board announced on Friday. However, the scheduling overlap with Major League Cricket (MLC) and The Hundred poses a potential challenge for LPL 2024. With the MLC's second season commencing on July 4 and The Hundred slated to run from July 23 to August 18, the LPL faces the daunting task of attracting top-tier international talent amid rival leagues vying for player participation. Despite facing a similar scheduling clash last year, which impacted its ability to secure foreign players, the LPL has managed to captivate local audiences with its thrilling cricketing ac-

tion. The LPL's rich history is underscored by the dominance of a single team bearing a different name. Jaffna Stallions won the first season and Jaffna Kings clinched victory in the second and third editions, all under the leadership of Thisara Perera. However, the 2023 season witnessed a new champion emerge in the form of B-Love Kandy, captained by Wanindu Hasaranga, marking a shift in the league's competitive landscape. The 2024 season promises to deliver another exhilarating spectacle, featuring five teams competing in 24 matches spread across the month-long tournament. Following the league stage consisting of 20 matches, the playoffs will mirror the format of the prestigious Indian Premier League (IPL), with a qualifier, eliminator, second eliminator, and final showdown.



3rd Test: Duckett's 88-ball whirlwind ton leads England's thrilling reply after India's innings ends at 445

Rajkot, Feb 16 (IANS) : Left-handed opener Ben Duckett smashed the fastest Test century by an England batter in India to take the visitors to 207/2 in 35 overs at stumps on Day Two of the third Test at the Niranjan Shah Stadium on Friday. England trail India by 238 runs after bowling out the hosts for 445 on an engrossing day of Test cricket, thanks to Duckett's attacking display with the bat, which left the

hosts with no answers to counter his whirlwind knock. Duckett got his century in 88 balls and ended the day at 133 not out off 118 balls, laced with 21 fours and two sixes to leave India on the back-foot. Duckett was severe on anything short and dealt it with disdain. If it was a full-length ball, it was driven easily through cover or down the ground. If balls were needed to sweep or reverse-sweep, it was greeted with utmost precision from Duckett's willow. England were 6/0 even before a legal ball was sent down: five runs came from the penalty which came after Indian batters ran in the danger area of the pitch while batting, with the one run coming from Jasprit Bumrah bowling a no-ball. Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj, who was fine to bowl after suffering from a blow on the right knee during India's batting innings, found a bit of movement with the new ball to beat Duckett and Crawley. Duckett showed his intentions quickly -- severe with his cut, drives and punches to be unbeaten on 19 off 22 balls at tea. Post tea, Duckett continued his onslaught on the Indian bowlers, sweeping firmly against Kuldeep Yadav twice, followed by driving and slamming Mohammed Siraj for two fours.



Squash: Saurav Ghosal reaches QF of Fire Open in Washington

Washington, Feb 16 (IANS) : Saurav Ghosal moved into the quarterfinals of the Squash Fire Open with a hard-fought 4-11, 11-8, 11-4, 13-11 win over Spencer Lovejoy (US) in a match that stretched to almost an hour. The Indian world No 26, who is the sixth seed and received a first-round bye at the \$51,500 PSA World Tour Bronze event, will meet French world No 11 and top seed Victor Crouin in the quarterfinals.



FIH Hockey Pro League : Indian women prepped to take on Australia, USA

Rourkela, Feb 16 (IANS) : The Indian Women's Hockey Team will play their final two games of the Rourkela leg of the FIH Hockey Pro League 2023-24 on February 17 and 18 when they take on Australia and the United States of America respectively at the Birsra Munda Hockey Stadium, Rourkela. India has had a tough outing so far at the FIH Hockey Pro League 2023/24, having lost four of their five matches. After suffering a 1-2 defeat in their first match against China, India went on to lose 1-3 to the Netherlands and 0-3 to Australia before beating the United States 3-1 in their final match of the Bhubaneswar leg.



PKL 10: U.P Yoddhas look to turn the tables against Gujarat Giants in new venue

Panchkula, Feb 16 (IANS) : With revenge on their mind, U.P Yoddhas will lock horns in their reverse fixture with Gujarat Giants on Saturday in Match 125 of the Pro Kabaddi League Season 10, which will be played here at the Tau Devilal Indoor Stadium. Earlier in the season, the Yoddhas missed out on victory against the Giants, going down 30-38, and will look to turn the tables with a win this time.

Williamson's ton powers NZ to first Test series victory over SA

Hamilton, Feb 16 (IANS) : Riding on the back of Kane Williamson's fourth-inning century New Zealand secured their first Test series win on Day 4 of the second Test against South Africa, completing a 2-0 sweep with a record chase here at Seddon Park. Williamson's unbeaten 133 guided New Zealand to the highest successful chase at Hamilton's Seddon Park to complete their first Test series win over South Africa. With his 32nd test century, Williamson drew level with

Australian counterpart Steve Smith for the most Test centuries by any current player to ensure the Kiwis chased down their victory target with ease. The 2-0 series sweep sees New Zealand extend their lead at the top of the World Test Championship standings with a 75 percent win-loss percentage. While South Africa showed some much better signs than in the first Test at Mount Maunganui, the loss sees them fall to eighth on the World Test Championship standings and below England with a 25 percent win-loss percentage.

Partnering with Will Young, who contributed a solid 60 not out, Williamson orchestrated a pivotal 152-run partnership for the fourth wicket, ensuring New Zealand's triumph with seven wickets in hand. Facing the early challenge of South Africa's bowling attack, New Zealand encountered setbacks with the early dismissal of Tom Latham. However, Williamson's steadfast presence nullified any potential threats as he meticulously crafted his innings, showcasing his proficiency in handling both spin and pace.

