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Modi gov't's White Paper exposes UPA's 'corruption'

The Modi government's 'White Paper on Indian Economy', which was tabled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Lok Sabha on Thursday, has "exposed" the "fiscal mismanagement" **02**



T20 WC: 'Bumrah, Kohli and Rohit are gonna be key players for India', feels Vernon Philander

Former South African all-rounder Vernon Philander believes Jasprit Bumrah, Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma will be the key players. **12**



Tata AIA Life appoints Venkatachalam H. as Chief Executive officer and Managing Director

Tata AIA Life Insurance Company Limited, one of India's fastest growing life insurance companies, announced today... **07**



Govt to establish skill universities across Telangana : Governor

Hyderabad, Feb 8 (IANS) : Governor Dr. Tamilisai Soundararajan has informed that the State government will establish skill universities across the Telangana State. Addressing the joint session of Telangana Assembly and

Council here on Thursday, the Governor said that in pursuit of a brighter and more prosperous Telangana, the State government had recognised the pivotal role that employability and sports infrastructure play in shaping the future of youth.

Continued on pg 02

Remove TSPSC chairman Mahender Reddy: MLC Kavitha

Hyderabad, Feb.8 (IANS) : BRS party MLC Kalvakuntla Kavitha has demanded removal of TSPSC chairman M Mahender Reddy in the wake of allegations of corruption levelled against him. She said a judicial inquiry should be conducted into the allegations of corruption against Reddy.

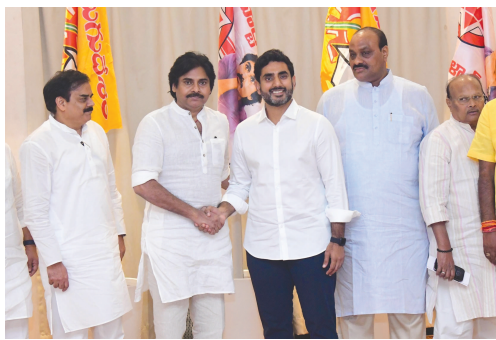
Continued on pg 02



YSRCP announces candidates for three Rajya Sabha seats

Amaravati, Feb 8 (IANS) : Golla Babu Rao, Meda Raghunatha Reddy, and Y. V. Subba Reddy are the candidates of YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) for the forthcoming Rajya Sabha elections, Andhra Pradesh's ruling party announced on Thursday. The trio met the party President and Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and thanked him at CM's office in the Assembly. The Rajya Sabha election is scheduled on

February 27. The Rajya Sabha terms of K. Ravindra Kumar (TDP), C.M. Ramesh (BJP) and V. Prabhakar Reddy (YSRCP) from Andhra Pradesh will end soon. They were elected six years ago. Ramesh was elected on TDP ticket but later defected to BJP.



TDP leader Lokesh to launch poll campaign on Feb 11

Amaravati, Feb 8 (IANS) : Telugu Desam Party (TDP) general secretary Nara Lokesh will launch the election campaign 'Shankharavam' on February 11. The first meeting as part of the campaign will be held at Ichchapuram of Srikakulam district, where Lokesh had concluded his padyatra last month. TDP's Andhra Pradesh unit president Kinjarapu Atchannaidu on Thursday announced the details of the 'Shankharavam' campaign, which will cover regions not touched by 'Yuvagalam' padyatra. He released a special video prepared for the Sankharavam campaign, which is aimed at creating awareness among people and the party cadres.

Continued on pg 02

CM Revanth terms KCR as Expired medicine

Hyderabad, Feb 8 (IANS) : Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has made serious remarks against former chief minister K Chandrashekar and termed him as an expired medicine.

In an informal chat with media persons in the Assembly on Thursday, the Chief Minister found fault with KCR for not attending the Assembly session and said that the BRS leader was unable to digest the loss of power in the recent Assembly elections.

"KCR has skipped the Assembly session as well as the meeting of the Business Advisory Committee (BAC). One can understand his sincerity and commitment as

the leader of the Opposition towards the people," Revanth Reddy said. Responding to the reports that BRS MLA Harish Rao has been denied to attend the BAC meeting, the Chief Minister said the BRS party has given the names of two MLAs- KCR and Kadiyam Srihari for attending the BAC meeting. However, only Srihari was allowed as KCR was absent. **Continued on pg 02**



Expansion of Telangana Cabinet soon: Rajagopal Reddy

Hyderabad, Feb.8 (IANS) : Congress MLA Komatireddy Rajagopal Reddy informed that there will be expansion of the Cabinet after the ongoing Assembly sessions. An informal chat with media persons on the premises of Assembly here on Thursday, Rajagopal Reddy said that he was assured by the Congress leadership that an opportunity will be given in the cabinet.

Govt wants to table vote-on-account budget in House: Kadiyam Srihari

Hyderabad, Feb 8 (IANS) : BRS party MLA Kadiyam Srihari today spoke to the media after the BAC meeting in the city. He said the government had said that the vote-on-account budget was going to be tabled in the ongoing assembly session. He said the session would be held for four days. Srihari said they asked the State gov-

ernment to hold the session for at least 12 days. He said the government had said they would conduct another BAC meeting again on February 13 if necessary to discuss the issue of the extension of the budget session. He said the State government hopes to approve the budget soon.



Assembly sessions to be continued till Feb 13

Hyderabad, Feb 8 (IANS) : Telangana Assembly sessions will be continued till February 13.

Soon after the joint budget session of Telangana State Legislative Assembly and Council, which was addressed by Governor Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan on Thursday, the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) meeting was held and the decision was taken on the schedule of Assembly sessions.

Govt's speech disappointed people: Harish Rao

Hyderabad, Feb 8 (IANS) : BRS party MLA T. Harish Rao today said the Governor's speech had disappointed the people who are waiting for the implementation of the six promises made by the State government. He said there was no clarity on



the implementation of election promises. He said the Governor's speech did not give confidence to the people about their future.



Congress has resorted to vendetta politics against us: Prashanth Reddy

Hyderabad, Feb 8 : BRS party MLA and former minister V. Prashanth Reddy today alleged that The ruling Congress government had resorted to vendetta politics against their party.

Deposit passport, report fortnightly to police station: SC to Anand Mohan Singh

New Delhi, Feb 8 (IANS) : Hearing a plea filed by the widow of slain IAS officer G Krishnaiah challenging the premature release of former Bihar MP Anand Mohan Singh, the Supreme Court on Thursday asked the gangster-turned-politician to immediately deposit his passport with the local police station and report there every fortnight. "Respondent No. 4 (Anand Mohan Singh) is directed to deposit his passport with the local police station and he shall record his presence in the said police station every fortnight," ordered a Bench presided over by Justice Surya Kant. Saying that it will give no fur-

ther opportunity, the Bench, also comprising Justice KV Viswanathan, asked the Union Government to file its affidavit, if so required, within one week. Appearing for the widow of the slain bureaucrat, senior advocate Siddharth Luthra opposed the Centre's request for more time of four weeks and said that the matter cannot be pushed back for one reason or another. Luthra added that the Union Government was issued a notice in May last year and a copy of the petition was served to the office of the Attorney General of India as well. The matter has been fixed for further hearing on February 27. In November last year, the top court had posted the matter for fur-



ther hearing on February 6, 2024. Anand Mohan Singh was released from the Saharsa Jail following an amendment in Bihar's prison rules. The petition, filed by the widow of the slain IAS officer, alleged that the Bihar government amended the 2012 Bihar Prison Manual with retrospective effect in order to ensure that Anand Mohan Singh was granted the benefit of remission. The Bihar Government has defended his release by saying that

the benefit of amended remission policy was extended in other cases as well, adding that the amendment sought to remove discrimination on the basis of status of a victim. In 1994, Krishnaiah, then District Magistrate of Gopalganj, was beaten to death by a mob when his vehicle tried to overtake the funeral procession of gangster Chhotan Shukla. The mob was instigated by Anand Mohan Singh.



AMC announces Rs 20 crore investment in Lotus Park

Ahmedabad, Feb 8 (IANS) : In a major stride towards urban development, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) has unveiled its fiscal year 2024-25 plan. The highlight of the budget, announced by the standing committee chairman, is the proposed Lotus Park which has been allocated Rs 20 crore. This innovative initiative aims to

showcase the floral heritage of each Indian state through a lotus-shaped complex. Advanced tablet technology will be employed to manage the environmental conditions within each petal, ensuring optimal growth and display of the flowers. Lotus Park will also house a floral museum, offering a global perspective on botanical varieties.

BPSC announces third phase of teachers' recruitment in Bihar

Patna Feb 8 (IANS) : The Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) on Thursday announced the third phase teachers' recruitment. Confirming the development, Atul Prasad, the Chairman of BPSC, said that some changes may be made in the third phase of recruitment, examinations for which will be held in March this year. "The aspirants can apply from February 10 to February 23 for classes 1 to 12. The exams are divided into four segments -- from classes 1 to 5, 6 to 8, 9 to 10 and 11 to 12 -- which will be held from March 7 to March 17," Prasad said. "The aspirants can apply for all four segments as BPSC will release multiple results. For example, if one candidate is applying for all four segments and passes in three of them, BPSC will issue results in all three segments."



Atomic North Private Ltd's complex inaugurated in J&K's Kathua

Jammu, Feb 8 (IANS) : A new office complex of the Atomic North Private Limited was inaugurated in Billawar area of Kathua district in Jammu on Thursday.

In 1st Phase, Atomic North will start BPO operation with 100 executives while more than 90 per cent will be local youth.

In the next phase, the company will build a data center, a Network Operations Center and a Security Operations Center which will provide employment to 1500 youth. The complex was inaugurated by J&K L-G.



100 FIRs registered against 15 landowners in Gurugram for illegally developing colonies

Gurugram, Feb 8 (IANS) : In a major action against illegal colony developers, the Department of Town and Country Planning (DTCP) Gurugram has registered 100 FIRs against 15 people. As per the complaint filed by the department, these colonies were being developed on nearly 110 acres, including six illegal colonies in Farrukhnagar, three in Pataudi, two in Sohna, and one each in Bhondsi, Sidhrawali, Bilaspur and Bohdakalan in Pataudi. The complaint mentions that these colonies were carved out on agricultural land which falls under Sector-7A of the Haryana

Development and Regulation of Urban Area Act without prior permission of the department. "We had issued show-cause notices on these landowners and did not get satisfactory answers. We issued orders that they remove the illegal structures themselves but they failed to do so, forcing us to carry out demolition drives. These demolished structures and thus we had to take action," Manish Yadav, DTCP (enforcement) said. He said that since the last six months, the department carried out more than 70 demolition drives and around 100 illegal colo-

nies spread over 500 acres have been razed. "The DTCP Department has given clear instructions to the Tehsildar concerned that registries should not be done in these colonies, if this is done then action will be taken against the Tehsildar concerned," he said. He said that we have also asked the people not to invest in these illegal colonies. "These illegal colonies come under section 7A of the Haryana Development and Regulation of Urban Areas Act. It is mandatory to take NOC from the Town and Country Planning Department before any activity," he said.

BJP begins shortlisting candidates for RS polls

Lucknow, Feb 8 (IANS) : The BJP is all set to shortlist candidates for the upcoming biennial elections, due on February 27, keeping in mind the caste factors relevant in the Lok Sabha elections and also the organisational importance of candidates. The names will be shortlisted soon and then sent to the party's central leadership for final approval. In Uttar Pradesh, 10 Rajya Sabha seats are falling vacant in April and elections for these are being held this month.

Of the ten seats, the BJP holds nine and its retiring members include Anil Jain, Anil Agarwal, Ashok Bajpai, Kanta Kardam, Sakaldeep Rajbhar, GVL Narsimha Rao, Vijay Pal Singh Tomar, Sudhanshu Trivedi and Harnath Singh Yadav. Sources said that the BJP was likely to field some fresh faces for the Upper House this time and also accommodate some veterans.

Jaya Bachchan is the sole Samajwadi Party MP who will retire from the Upper House of Parliament. Given its strength in the Assembly, the BJP-led NDA is expected to win seven seats and the SP-RLD combine could win three seats.

The BJP will be backed by its three allies, the Apna Dal-S, Nishad Party and SBSP.

The BJP will also receive the support of Raja Bhaiya led Jansatta Dal (Loktantrik) which has been leaning in favour of the ruling party.

The SP-RLD combine will face the test of solidarity from the Congress which has two MLAs in Uttar Pradesh. These three parties are also the key constituents of the Opposition bloc INDIA.

This way, the strength of the NDA in the Rajya Sabha from Uttar Pradesh is expected to go down from 25 to 23 seats, while the strength of the Opposition bloc



will go up from three to five. At present, Uttar Pradesh has 31 MPs in the Rajya Sabha — 25 from the NDA, three from the SP, one each from BSP (Ramji Gautam) and RLD (Jayant Chaudhary), and one Independent Kapil Sibal. Both, BJP and SP, will try to make deft electoral moves while nominating candidates. Sources said there is a possibility of the BJP accommodating its allies in the Rajya Sabha to cement support from their voter base for the Lok Sabha elections. While the RLD and Congress will go with SP in these polls, the BSP's stand will be made clear by Mayawati after all candidates are announced.



BJP's Eshwarappa predicts end of Cong rule in K'taka post Lok Sabha polls

Shivomogga, (Karnataka) Feb 8 (IANS) : Former Deputy Chief Minister and senior BJP leader, KS Eshwarappa stated on Thursday that after the Lok Sabha elections, there won't be a Congress Government in Karnataka. Addressing the media in Shivomogga, Eshwarappa claimed, "The drama company led by CM Siddaramaiah is reaching New Delhi. Are you taking soldiers to wage a war? This is a desperate attempt to save the MLAs by taking them on a picnic." "The Congress can only control the MLAs until the Lok Sabha elections."

TN Police arrest gang of Nepali citizens in burglary case

Chennai, Feb 8 (IANS) : Greater Chennai Police on Thursday arrested a group of Nepali citizens on charges of burglary at the residence of a flower exporter in Chennai. The accused have been identified as Prakash Khadka (30), Manoj Massi (39) and Janak Prasad Joshi (25); all citizens of Nepal. Prakash Khadka has been residing in Chennai since over a decade. Police told IANS that the flower exporter, Brijesh Kumar Aggarwal and his wife Amrita Aggarwal were on a business trip

in Germany when their posh bungalow in East Coast Road (ECR), Chennai was burgled. The house maid had alerted the relatives of the couple on January 30 after finding the house door broken. A police complainant said that the jewelry and at least Rs 7 lakh were stolen from the house. Police said that it had formed three special teams to investigate the case and interrogated all those who were in close touch with the family and zeroed in on the temporary driver of the bungalow Prakash Khadka.



OPINIONmail



How big-ticket offenders are able to relocate, escape long arm of the law

It has been several years since high-profile economic offenders such as Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi made headlines by fleeing the country, leaving a trail of unpaid debts amounting to thousands of crores from Indian banks. Their departure thrust the nation into a web of financial challenges and raised poignant questions about the effectiveness of legal processes and probe agencies tracking their movement. It also triggered a broader conversation about accountability and the resilience of the financial system.

Sources say that a joint team of the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), and National Investigation Agency (NIA), is actively working to identify properties belonging to such financial fugitives in the UK and other countries. The goal is to seize the 'proceeds of crime' acquired by these financial fraudsters.

A joint team is also working on the extradition of arms dealer Sanjay Bhandari, who fled the country in 2016 amidst investigations into multiple defence deals. Bhandari, allegedly linked to Robert Vadra, husband of Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, is said to have acquired properties in London and Dubai, and transferred them to shell companies associated with Vadra's alleged aide.

Bhandari, Nirav Modi, and Mallya, all three declared fugitive economic offenders (FEOs) are expected to be extradited to India, but they still have pending appeals against their deportation.

The government has already attached their assets in India, with some properties sold to recover funds for outstanding bank dues. Under the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT), India and the UK are obligated to share information on criminal investigations related to economic offenders. "A three-agency team is set to hold bilateral discussions in London to facilitate the exchange of information, emphasising the importance of international cooperation," the sources say. While the Union Home Ministry typically handles MLAT, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has taken charge due to diplomatic engagements requiring all requests to be routed through the MEA.

Meanwhile, in a recent setback for Vijay Mallya, who fled from the country on March 2, 2016, the UK High Court ruled in favour of his extradition to India, dismissing his appeal. However, Mallya's legal team has obtained permission to appeal to the UK Supreme Court, further extending the extradition process.

In March last year, the CBI submitted an additional chargesheet in a bank fraud case related to Mallya in a Mumbai court.

The chargesheet stated that while Kingfisher Airlines faced a severe cash crunch in 2008, and lenders were still attempting to recover loans defaulted in 2015-16, Mallya acquired a property valued at Rs 80 crore in the UK and another worth Rs 250 crore in France. The CBI had said that evidence obtained from the UK, through a Letter Rogatory, indicated significant diversions to Mallya's motor-racing team, Force India Formula-1 Team Ltd (F1F1), from Kingfisher's account with HSBC Bank, London.

Information provided during the opening of Swiss bank accounts linked to Mallya in 2014-15 stated that he was neither a politician nor a member of any political party. The chargesheet also revealed that Mallya was slated to receive \$75 million (\$40 million upfront and the remainder in the form of \$7 million annually from 2017 to 2021) from Diageo PLC in exchange for stepping down from the position of Chairman of United Spirits Limited (USL) and refraining from competing with Diageo PLC in Asian liquor markets. The amount constituted an asset that Mallya was obligated not to alienate, as per the terms of the personal guarantee agreement dated December 21, 2010, executed by him in favour of the lenders, including IDBI Bank, for the loans obtained by Kingfisher. For Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi, accused in the Punjab National Bank (PNB) scam, their legal battles have also taken an international turn.

EDITORIAL

the indian mail

Soren's arrest revives memories of father's role in cash-for-votes, coal scams

Former Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on money laundering charges has revived the memories of his father Shibu Soren whose name emerged in the 1993 cash-for-votes scandal and later in a coal scam case.

Four Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) MPs, including party supremo Shibu Soren, were accused of taking bribes to save the Narasimha Rao government in 1993. It was alleged that Shibu Soren and three of his party's MPs - Shailendra Mahato, Simon Marandi and Suraj Mandal received kickbacks to ensure the survival of the then Rao-led Congress government during a no-confidence vote.

On July 28, 1993, BJP brought a no-confidence motion against Narasimha Rao and it was almost certain that the Congress government at the Centre would fall, but when voting took place in the Parliament, JMM MPs voted in Rao's favour saving the Congress government.

In 1995, BJP leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee made a sensational revelation. Vajpayee brought JMM MP Shailendra Mahato in front of the Parliament who admitted that his party MPs including Shibu Soren had taken a bribe of Rs 50 lakh each to save the Congress government in 1993.

Following the revelation, the CBI lodged a case and started an investigation.

The CBI in its charge sheet stated



that the money was brought in suitcases in a Maruti Gypsy and was distributed among JMM MPs at a party held at the farmhouse of Congress leader Satish Sharma. The Central probe agency further stated Congress leader Buta Singh had contacted four JMM MPs on July 26, 1993, to vote against the resolution brought against Rao. Singh also took the JMM MPs

Rao's official residence at 7 Race Course Road for a meeting.

However, the Supreme Court bench acquitted them, ruling that they had immunity for any acts committed inside the Parliament under Article 105(2) of the Constitution. In 2000, the court convicted only Rao and Buta Singh, but in 2002 they were also acquitted.



RAHUL GANDHI'S YATRA IS GETTING GOOD RESPONSE BEFORE LOK SABHA POLLS

Despite all sorts of statements against Congress and its leader Rahul Gandhi, the Congress party and the leader has got significant response by people during Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra so far. It makes PM Narendra Modi's concerns worse, since Congress candidates would be offering closer contests to BJP candidates in numerous seats, making political battle tougher and outcome uncertain. Congress was able to truncate BJP from power in Himachal Pradesh in 2022. BJP had won all 4 Lok Sabha seats from the state in Lok Sabha election 2019 and was able to bag 69.11 per cent of votes. Congress at that time could get only 27.30 per cent of votes. However, in the state elections, BJP's vote share was reduced to only 43 per cent while Congress's vote share surged to 43.90 per cent. The other state where Congress is in power after offering humiliating defeat to the BJP is Karnataka. Out of 28 Lok Sabha seats, BJP had won 25 seats from the state while Congress had won only 1 seat in 2019. There was huge difference in vote share. BJP was able to get 51.38 per cent of vote share, while the Congress could get only 31.88 per cent.



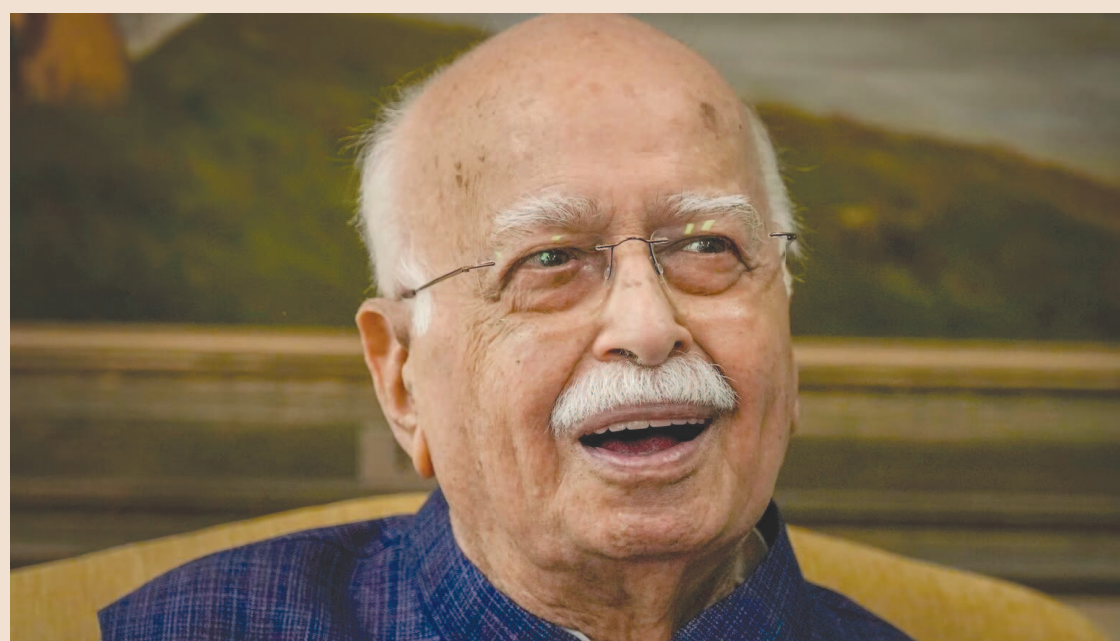
From Saradha & Rose Valley to cattle, coal & job scams, TMC's trail of graft

While each and every election in West Bengal since 2016 threw up the issue of corruption, never before has it left such a visible impact on the top leadership of the Trinamool Congress, including Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. This is particularly visible in the run up to the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls. Political observers say that never before have they seen the Chief Minister repeatedly vouching for her "personal honesty" the way she is doing now, while addressing political and administrative meetings. This is despite the fact that the state is no stranger to corruption.

The Pandora's Box of graft in the state opened in 2012, first with the Saradha Ponzi scam coming to light and then with the Rose Valley chit fund crisis bursting to the fore. These scams not only led to the arrest of the

head of Ponzi entities like Sudipta Sen and Gautam Kundu, but also a number of heavyweight Trinamool Congress leaders like Madan Mitra, Sudip Bandyopadhyay, late Tapas Paul and Srinjay Basu among others. The two central agencies, namely the CBI and ED, started investigations following court orders.

However, the investigations into the Ponzi racket by central agencies were just court-ordered and not court-monitored ones as is the case with the investigations in the current cash-for-school jobs and cash-for-municipal jobs scams.



NOT OUT OF RESPECT: MODI HONoured ADVANI TAKING IN VIEW LS POLLS

Lal Krishna Advani, the ironman of the BJP who whose Ramjanmabhoomi movement turned the construction of Ram Mandir into the basic ideology of the saffron ecosystem, has been honoured with the prestigious gift of the Bharat Ratna.

Coming right after the inauguration of the Ram Temple, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to reward the once prominent old guard, after sidelining him for a decade, came at a crucial juncture when the country will be going to polls in April-May to elect a new government. It must be remembered that the

socialist stalwart Karpooori Thakur was honoured with Bharat Ratna at least 20 days ahead of conferring Advani with the nation's top civilian prize. No doubt it is the discretion of the rulers, who they should honour or reward keeping in mind their political relevance.

HOuthi PIRATES BRING GLOBAL TRADE THROUGH RED SEA TO A NEAR HALT

It is difficult to believe in the 21st century that some small groups of Yemeni Houthi pirates on the Red Sea can bring a \$1-trillion-plus annual global trade using the sea route almost to a halt, forcing shipowners and shippers divert the trade through a several times longer route via the Cape of Good Hope at the bottom of South Africa. Sea piracy is nothing new.

But few have shown such guts as Houthi pirates indiscriminately attacking cargo vessels passing through the trait with arms, ammunition, and anti-ship missiles.

They won't even spare US Navy destroyers. Cargoes are looted and captured seamen are often thrown into the sea. The escalating Red Sea crisis poses billions of dollars of risk for India. The world mood remains inexplicably defensive.



Kazakh president appoints Olzhas Bektenov as new PM

Astana, Feb 8 (IANS) : Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev appointed a new Prime Minister to the Republic of Kazakhstan, according to a presidential decree signed on Thursday. Kazakhstan's ruling Amanat Party proposed the candidacy of Olzhas Bektenov, who previously served as the head of the presidential administration, Xinhua news agency reported. Tokayev discussed Bektenov's candidacy with leaders of party factions during a plenary session of the Mazhilis, or lower house of Kazakhstan's parliament. Tokayev later appointed Bektenov as the country's new Prime Minister. Kazakhstan's government resigned on Thursday.

Lebanon: Army does not have capacity to deploy on Israel border in potential Hezbollah deal

Beirut, Feb 8 (IANS) : Lebanon's interim Foreign Minister Abdullah Bou Habib told the media on Thursday that the Lebanese army does not have the capacity to deploy on the border with Israel, the media reported. Bou Habib cites "a shortage of equipment" as reason for his opposition to the idea, which is reportedly part of the diplomatic solution the US is pushing to keep the fighting between Israel and Hezbollah from expanding into a full-blown war, The Times of Israel reported. The plan, according to Hebrew-media reports, would see Hezbollah withdraw 8-10 km from the border, and would have UN and Lebanese forces move into the area in greater numbers. Bou Habib says that he is against the withdrawal of Hezbollah to the Litani river, as Israel has demanded, "as this will lead to the renewal of war."



IMF tepid to Pak interim govt proposals

Islamabad, Feb 8 (IANS) : The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has not immediately endorsed Pakistan interim government's proposals to reduce industrial electricity prices, settle over one-fifth of the circular debt and make the Rs 268 billion debt of the Pakistan International Airline (PIA) part of the public debt, media reported. The IMF also asked as to why the interim government is showing haste when the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP)

has already barred it from taking any decisive action on the privatisation of PIA, according to government sources, Express Tribune reported. The global lender sought more details about the economic and legal viability of the three major proposals. The IMF held two back-to-back virtual meetings but their outcomes were below the expectations of the Pakistani authorities. The next round of discussions on these proposals would take place

after the Pakistani authorities provide additional information and the global lender reviews it internally. The IMF neither rejected nor accepted the three proposals. It emerged from these two meetings that the IMF would give more serious thoughts to them once an elected government takes charge, Express Tribune reported. The caretaker government is keen on getting the three proposals implemented before leaving the office.

Heavy downpour, floods batter California

Washington, Feb 8 (IANS) : The heavy downpour, flooding and power outages caused by the tail end of a powerful atmospheric river storm has disrupted life for hundreds of thousands of Southern California homes and businesses. The atmospheric disturbances deluged the state on Thursday with more heavy rain, mudslides, flooding and several feet of snow in the mountains, media reports said. The city of Hollywood, Los Angeles, bore the brunt of the storm's fury on Monday where some 1.4 million people live

and were faced with a flash flood warning -- including Hollywood's famous Beverly Hills, where filmstars reside. A local state of emergency was issued for the city of Los Angeles by Mayor Karen Bass on Thursday afternoon. Across Southern California, heavy winds that battered the region on Sunday were diminishing on Monday, but the National Weather Service warned that an unstable weather pattern could generate waterspouts or small tornadoes. "Flash floods is a much greater threat than any weak tornado that the storm may spawn," the weather service said, and danger-

ous flooding was likely across much of the region from the atmospheric river -- the likeness of a river in the sky that is responsible for extreme rain and snow in the West, USA TODAY reported on Thursday. Some additional rainfall totals of 5-8 inches were forecast in some areas, which would bring 48-hour totals as high as 14 inches for some locations, the weather service said. A state of emergency was declared in eight Southern California counties by the California Governor Gavin Newsom. "Life-threatening conditions may

evolve extremely fast in some communities," AccuWeather Senior Meteorologist Alex Sosnowski warned. A debris flow caused significant damage to about five homes in Beverly Hills on Thursday, the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) said. Although no one was trapped, about 10 people have been displaced, the LAFD added. The LAFD reported that 1,000 firefighters were responding to 49 mudslides and debris flows, 130 reports of flooding, half a dozen structure fires and other rescues of motorists stranded in vehicles. Los Angeles recorded more than



four inches of rain on Thursday, breaking the record for the day by more than an inch. It was the most rain in one day in more than 20 years, and surpassed the average for the month of February.

Officials have attributed three deaths to the storm. In Yuba City, 40 miles north of Sacramento, a man was killed when a redwood tree toppled on him in high winds, police said.

Indian-origin man charged with stealing donations from temples in Canada

Toronto, Feb 8 (IANS) : A 41-year-old Indo-Canadian man has been charged with breaking into temples and stealing cash from donation boxes. The accused has been identified as Jagdish Pandher from Brampton city. According to police, multiple break-and-enter incidents were reported in Peel Region comprising Brampton, Mississauga and Caledon between March and August 2023. Surveillance footage from three places of worship showed the suspect breaking into temples and stealing cash from donation boxes. Pandher was also caught on surveillance cameras breaking into other commercial locations and stealing money. Following a lengthy and coordinated investigation by police agencies across the Greater Toronto Area, Pandher of Brampton has been identified as the suspect. Pandher, who is already in custody for similar offences, has been charged with five more counts of breaking into temples and businesses and stealing money.



Man accused of stabbing Indian to death appears in NZ court

Wellington, Feb 8 (IANS) : A 33-year-old technician charged with stabbing a 28-year-old Indian to death appeared before a New Zealand court and has been remanded in custody without a plea. Appearing before Justice of the Peace, Helen Meiklejohn, at Dunedin District Court on Thursday, the man, who was arrested on the same day, was granted interim name suppression. He was ordered to appear at the High Court on February 27 in connection with the murder of Gurjit Singh, the New Zealand Herald newspaper reported. Police said they were called to a Dunedin address on January 29 after Gurjit's body was found outside his home covered in blood and glass. Hailing from Palam village in Ludhiana, newly-married Gurjit was working as a technician with the telecom com-

pany Chorus and was waiting for his wife to join him at the Hillary Street house that he had been renting. Detective Senior Sergeant Kallum Croudiss confirmed pathological findings indicate Gurjit died as a result of multiple stab wounds inflicted by a sharp instrument, the Herald reported. Croudiss confirmed a homicide investigation was continuing into his death. In a statement released on Monday, the New Zealand Police said that a team of 25 Dunedin-based investigators and Christchurch-based ESR scientists were tasked with investigating his death. In addition, they are assessing CCTV footage provided by the public and interviewing Gurjit's family, friends and colleagues to try to establish his movements before his death.



S.Korea's NSA meets Russian Deputy FM during Seoul visit : Sources

Seoul, Feb 8 (IANS) : South Korea's National Security Adviser Chang Ho-jin met with Russia Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko when he visited Seoul last week, sources said on Thursday, amid heightened tensions between Seoul and Moscow over North Korea. The meeting took place on Saturday, the sources said, as tensions have flared anew since Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova denounced South Korea President Yoon Suk Yeol's remarks on North Korea as "blatantly biased" on Thursday, Yonhap news agency reported. In response, Seoul's Foreign Ministry called in Russian Ambassador Georgy Zinoviev and lodged a protest. Observers say Chang and Rudenko's meeting likely reflects Seoul and Moscow's commitment to maintaining stable bilateral ties.

Indian-origin lawyer appointed Australia's Race Discrimination Commissioner

Melbourne, Feb 8 (IANS) : Indian-origin employment lawyer Giridharan Sivaraman has been appointed Race Discrimination Commissioner by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). Sivaraman is currently the Chair of Multicultural Australia, and a Principal Lawyer at Maurice Blackburn where he is head of the firm's Queensland Employment Law department. "I'm honoured to be appointed Commonwealth Race Discrimination Commissioner. And excited, and slightly terrified! But there is so much work to be done and I can't wait to work with the team at the @AusHumanRights," Sivaraman wrote in a post on X on Thursday.

According to the AHRC, he has run numerous state and national race discrimination cases and led the pro bono compensation scheme for underpaid 7-eleven workers, many of whom came from migrant backgrounds. In addition, he provides advice and legal representation in all areas of employment law including workplace bullying, employment contracts, redundancy, restraint of trade, workplace discrimination, sexual harassment, adverse action, and unfair dismissal. Welcoming the appointment, AHRC President, Emeritus Professor Rosalind Croucher said that the fight for systemic equality and speaking truth to power have been at the heart of Sivaraman's work.



SAD opposes stamp duty on property transfer in Punjab

Chandigarh, Feb 8 (IANS) : Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on Thursday condemned the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in Punjab for increasing stamp duty on loans sanctioned by banks as well as imposing a two per cent stamp duty on property transfer through power of attorney. In a statement here, SAD leader Bikram Singh Majithia said the two measures would impose a burden of Rs 1,000 crore on the common man who was already reeling under increased value added tax (VAT) on petrol and diesel. Stating that the AAP government was "vigorously searching on an everyday basis to find new ways and means to tax the people," Majithia said the government had amended the Indian Stamp Act to impose a .25 per cent stamp duty on loans sanctioned by banks as well as loan crediting companies. He said it would make both vehicles and homes more



expensive. He said the government had also imposed two per cent stamp duty on property transfer through power of attorney. He said now the government would impose transfer fees on both general and special power of attorneys.

Jammu-Srinagar highway closed for maintenance

Srinagar, Feb 8 (IANS) : Due to damages caused by shooting stones/landslides in various sections, strategic Jammu-Srinagar national highway was closed for traffic on Thursday. Officials said that due to damages caused by shooting stones/landslides at different places, the Jammu-Srinagar national highway will remain closed for traffic on



Thursday. "The highway is under maintenance. No traffic movement will be allowed today from either Jammu or Srinagar side. "Travellers are advised not to undertake the journey today. "They must contact our control rooms in Srinagar and Jammu tomorrow (Wednesday) to know about the status of the highway before undertaking the journey."

Youth from J&K's Tral inspires local boys & girls to look for challenging careers

Srinagar, Feb 8 (IANS) : Known once for its young boys joining terrorist groups in large numbers, J&K's Tral town in Pulwama district is now hitting news headlines for the right reasons. A young man from Tral town, Raja Shahzaib Raza, is the first local to become a pilot for Air India. Shahzaib did his schooling from the reputed Tyndale Biscoe Memorial School in Srinagar. Family sources said he later obtained his B.Tech degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Kashmir. He got himself enrolled in Indira

Gandhi Rashtriya Udaan Academy in Amethi (Uttar Pradesh). Shahzaib applied for the pilot's position in Air India after completing his training. After undergoing all the tests and procedures, he was appointed as a pilot by the airlines. Locals in Tral town said that Shahzaib has made them proud because till the recent past, youth of the town were looked upon with suspicion for alleged militant links. "Shahzaib has proved that the youth of our area have finally chosen the right path. "He is a great inspiration for hundreds of our youth who want to excel in various fields to serve the



country and make an honourable living", said Sajad Ahmad Ganai, 56. The path breaking career choice made by Shahzaib has come as an enviable alternative to those locals trying to join the civil services. It carries the hopeful message to hundreds, who look forward to joining challenging careers in the country.

"The basic point is not whether you become an IAS/IPS officer or not. The basic point is that in a country like India, choices are umpteen provided you have the determination to work hard and with honesty and the right motivation," said Shahid, 22, a youth from Tral town.

Two women Maoists surrender in Odisha's Boudh

Bhubaneswar, Feb 8 (IANS) : Two hardcore women Maoist cadres of the banned CPI-Maoist surrendered before police in Odisha's Boudh district on Thursday, police said. The surrendered militants were identified as Manisha Thati, 21, member of 8th company and Champa Koram alias Sajanti, 22, member of Mahanadi Area Committee of Kalandi-Kandhamal-Boudh-Nayagarh (KKBN) division of the CPI-Maoist. Both the surrendered Maoist cadres who hail from Chhattisgarh surrendered before Inspector General of Police, Southern Range, Jay Narayan Pankaj. "Their task was to reactivate the North-South corridor from Jharkhand to Chhattisgarh through south-central Odisha. They were working in the CPI-Maoist organisation since 2018 and were involved in several violent incidents both in Chhattisgarh and Odisha. They have surrendered to live a normal life," an official source said. The surrendered ultras have reportedly told police that they were disturbed and frustrated by the continuous unethical activities in Maoist organisation like sexual harassment of female cadre, extortion of funds through intimidation, induction of young boys and girls in the organisation by false promise and propaganda.



NOC to be no longer required for land, property registration in Punjab

Chandigarh, Feb 8 (IANS) : In a big relief to residents of the state, the Punjab government has decided to do away with the clause of no objection certificate (NOC) for registration of any land and property. Divulging details, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann said the decision has been taken in larger public interest to ensure that people do not face any sort of inconvenience. He said the legal mechanism for this decision has already been worked out and details will be shared soon.

Mann said this decision has been taken in due consultation with the public and is aimed solely at ensuring their benefit. He said the people in both from urban and rural areas were facing problems due to non-availability of NOC. This resulted in non-execution of registration of land, thereby creating a lot of problems for the common man. Mann said now this problem will be solved as the requirement of NOC for the registration of land and property has been abolished by the government.



SC lists SNC Lavalin case involving Kerala CM for final hearing on May 1

New Delhi/Thiruvananthapuram, Feb 8 (IANS) : The Supreme Court on Thursday fixed May 1 for the final hearing of the controversial SNC Lavalin case involving Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. The matter has been adjourned 36 times since 2017. "On Thursday, there are 50-60 matters and the turn normally does not come in so many cases. One way is we admit this matter and list it on Wednesday," observed a Bench presided over by Justice Surya Kant. The Bench, also comprising Justice KV Viswanathan, granted a period of two weeks

for filing of fresh 'power of attorney' as a lawyer representing one of the respondents has been recently designated as senior advocate. "The matter has been adjourned 36 times since 2017 and the CBI is not interested to prosecute appeal," submitted one of the counsels appearing in the case. Responding to this, the counsel assisting Additional Solicitor General (ASG) SV Raju and representing the CBI said, "It is not the case that the CBI is not inclined to take up the matter. It has been on other grounds." "May I request for a short date. I want it a little early. May it be heard next month," added ASG Raju.



Kerala CPI-M legislator under ED scanner to take legal recourse

Thiruvananthapuram, Feb 8 (IANS) : Senior CPI-M legislator and former Kerala Cooperation Minister A.C. Moideen, who is under the Enforcement Directorate (ED) scanner in the Karuvannur Service Cooperative Bank loan scam, on Thursday said the agency is hounding him for

political reasons and hence he will be taking legal steps. On Thursday, news surfaced that the adjudicating authority in the Union Finance Ministry rejected his challenge to the freezing and seizure of Rs 40 lakh in six bank accounts of him and his wife. But Moideen said that, to the best of his knowledge, all what the ED

has done is freezing his bank accounts which has Rs 28 lakh in them and has not attached any of his assets. "The ED is hounding me for political reasons as they have been doing in other states. The ED is targeting the CPI-M and the properly-running Cooperative institutions.



CBI gets details on forgeries in Bengal school job case

Kolkata, Feb 8 (IANS) : The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probing the cash-for-school job case in West Bengal has got the details on how irregularities in the marks of candidates were done by scanning the OMR sheets used in the written examination. Sources said the CBI sleuths have already submitted the details relating to their findings at the Calcutta High Court's special division bench of Justice Debansu Basak and Justice Shabbir Rashidi, which is constituted to specially hear the matter related to the multi-crore cash-for-school-job cases in West Bengal following an instruction from the Supreme Court.

Police attaches property of drug peddler in Kashmir

Srinagar, Feb 8 (IANS) : Jammu and Kashmir Police in south Kashmir's Kulgam district attached property (two-storied residential house) belonging to a notorious drug peddler. He has been identified as Khursheed Ahmad Bhat, a resident of Sopat Devsar. "The notorious drug peddler is involved in several NDPS cases

including Case FIR No. 63/2019 under section 8/15, 20 NDPS Act, Case FIR No. 11/2021 under section 8/20, 29 NDPS Act and 31/2021 under section 8/20, 22 of NDPS Act of Police Station Devsar," police said. Police said that the property was identified as illegally acquired property during the course of investigation conducted by police.



Mallika Srinivasan resigns as independent director from Swiggy board

New Delhi, Feb 8 (IANS) : Online food delivery platform Swiggy said on Thursday that Mallika Srinivasan has stepped down from the company's Board as an Independent Director a year after joining. According to the company, Srinivasan stepped down due to increasing business commitments. "Reflecting on her experience with Swiggy, Mallika expressed that working with a young and dynamic team at Swiggy was truly enriching and enjoyable and wished the Board more milestones and success in the years ahead," Swiggy said in a statement to IANS. This comes at a time when

Swiggy is preparing to launch its initial public offering (IPO), which is likely slated for later this year. Srinivasan, Padma Shri awardee and Chairman and Managing Director of TAFE, along with Shailesh Haribhakti, Chairman of Shailesh Haribhakti & Associates, and Sahil Barua, Managing Director and CEO at Delhivery, was appointed to Swiggy's Board in February last year. In December last year, Swiggy had announced the appointment of Anand Kripalu as an Independent Director and the Chairperson of its Board of Directors.



Paytm app not impacted by directives, is free to partner with other banks, says RBI

New Delhi, Feb 8 (IANS) : The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has stated that Paytm app will not be impacted by the recent order issued against Paytm Payments Bank Limited (PPBL). "Just to clarify, the action is

against Paytm Payments Bank, not against the Paytm app. The app is not impacted by our action, delineating the scope of the RBI's directive," said RBI Deputy Governor Swaminathan J, in a Press briefing following the Monetary Policy Committee

(MPC) meeting. Swaminathan added that the banks' decision to partner with Paytm Payments Bank is a business decision, indicating the banks' autonomy in collaborating with PPBL.



Tata AIA Life appoints Venkatachalam H. as Chief Executive officer and Managing Director

Mumbai, Feb 8 (TIM Bureau) : Tata AIA Life Insurance Company Limited, one of India's fastest growing life insurance companies, announced today that its Board has appointed Venkatachalam H. as the new Chief Executive Officer & Managing Director, subject to regulatory approval from IRDAI. Venkatachalam H. will take over from current Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, Naveen Tahilyani who moves to another role in the Tata Group and has been elevated as a Non-Executive Director of Tata AIA Life Insurance Company Ltd.

Google pilots new programme to protect Android users from financial fraud

New Delhi, Feb 8 (IANS) : Google has started a new programme, 'enhanced fraud protection' with Google Play Protect to help better shield Android users from financial fraud attacks. The company will launch the pilot in Singapore in partnership with the Cyber Security Agency of Singapore (CSA) in the coming weeks. "As part of a continued strate-

gic partnership with the Cyber Security Agency of Singapore (CSA), we will launch this first pilot in Singapore in the coming weeks to help keep Android users safe from mobile financial fraud," Google said in a blogpost. According to the company, this enhanced fraud protection will analyse and automatically block the installation of apps that may use sensitive runtime permissions frequently abused for fi-

ancial fraud when the user attempts to install the app from an Internet-sideloaded source (web browsers, messaging apps or file managers). "This enhancement will inspect the permissions the app declared in real-time and specifically look for four runtime permission requests: RECEIVE_SMS, READ_SMS, BIND_Notifications, and Accessibility," the company said.



Indian company Dynamatic Technologies awarded contract by Airbus for A220 family plane doors

New Delhi, Feb 8 (IANS) : Airbus has awarded a contract to Dynamatic Technologies, an Indian company, for the manufacturing of doors for the A220 family of planes. The contract was confirmed during a press conference here in Delhi, where representatives from

Airbus highlighted the magnitude of this partnership, and said that it represents the largest contract of its kind in India. This announcement marks a milestone as Dynamatic Technologies will be responsible for producing all door variants for the next-generation Airbus A220 aircraft. The decision

to award this contract to Dynamatic Technologies comes following a meeting between Jyotiraditya Scindia, Minister for Civil Aviation, and Airbus Global CEO Guillaume Faury on January 26.



realme dominates mid-end market with value-driven premium products

New Delhi, Feb 8 (IANS) : The month of January witnessed the launch of numerous premium devices, especially in the mid-premium segment. Among these, realme stood out, leading the pack in first-day online sales for the first month of 2024. This achievement underscores realme's success in aligning with consumer preferences and delivering high-quality, feature-packed devices that appeal to the modern user. The cornerstone of realme's success is its devotion to innovative practices.



Jindal Law School's interdisciplinary research outshines faculty publications by top 4 NLUs

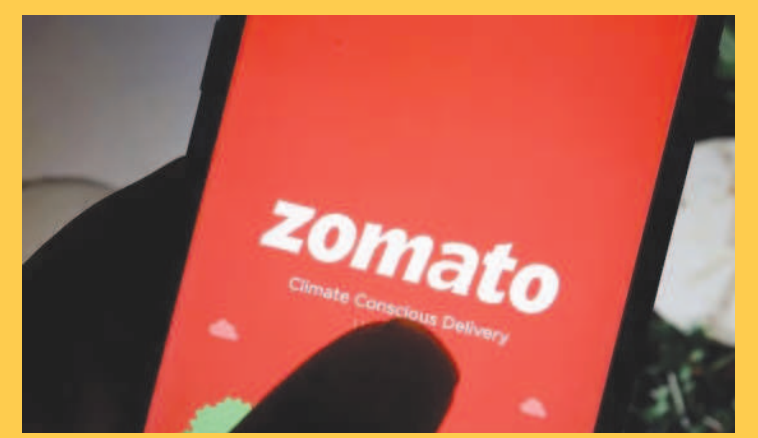
Sonipat, Feb 8 (IANS) : Jindal Global Law School (JGLS) of the O. P. Jindal Global University (JGU) continues its knowledge production with a shifting focus on interdisciplinarity. JGLS researchers published over 175+ publications in a variety of Scopus-indexed sources in 2023, representing an increase of over 25 per cent over the previous year and has surpassed the to-

tal number of similar publications from the top 4 National Law Schools in the country by over 60 per cent. The research has been published in some of top ranking and renowned journals globally.

Zomato registers Rs 125 cr profit in Q3 FY24, revenue up 53%

New Delhi, Feb 8 (IANS) : Food delivery platform Zomato on Thursday said it registered Rs 125 crore in profit in the third quarter (Q3) of the current financial year - an improvement by Rs 390 crore as compared to the same quarter last year. Consolidated adjusted revenue grew 53 per cent year-on-year to Rs 3,609 crore in Q3 FY24 for the company. Gross order value (GOV) across its B2C businesses grew 47 per cent YoY to Rs 12,886 crore. On an annualised basis, Zomato crossed Rs 50,000 crore of GOV in its B2C businesses. "Our consolidated topline (adjusted revenue) continues to grow meaningfully above our stated expectation of 40 per cent+ YoY. In fact, at this point, we expect the topline to continue growing at 50 per

cent+ YoY," said Deepinder Goyal, Zomato co-founder and CEO. Zomato shares closed at Rs 142 at the end of trading on the BSE. "Annualised adjusted EBITDA profit is now Rs 1,000+ crore. We expect both margin expansion and GOV growth to drive further improvement in absolute profits," he added. Goyal said that Blinkit's GOV growth at 103 per cent continues unabated. "Losses continue to decline and we are on track to meet our guidance of adjusted EBITDA break-even on or before Q1FY25," he added. The cash balance increased by Rs 254 crore in the quarter. "This was the third consecutive quarter of increase in our cash balance," said Akshant Goyal, Zomato CFO.



Trump up against a 'make-or-break' week of legal cases

Washington, Feb 8 (IANS) : Former US President Donald Trump is up against a "make or break" this week as he faces several cases down the road starting with the New York Attorney General's tax fraud case where a judicial opinion could send him spinning into a great financial ruin and other issues that could spiral out of control and undermine his defence against election subversion charges. Trump is staring down a \$370 million penalty in a tax fraud settlement that could plunge him into financial ruin with his business licences in New York being cancelled and a judicial opinion that could undermine his defence against criminal charges re-

lated to election interference and a Supreme Court case that could keep him off the ballot come November. There's a great chance that all three cases could run parallel causing a major headache for Trump and much tension as the legal dramas gain momentum this week within days of each other keeping him off the campaign trail, media reports said. New York's Judge Arthur Engoron, presiding over Trump's civil fraud trial, allowed a self-imposed January 31 deadline to slip, though a ruling is expected imminently that would finalize damages incurred when Trump reportedly committed fraud by inflating his net worth to obtain favourable treatment from banks and insurers. He's alleged to have

secured loans violating legal norms based on inflated valuations from Deutsche Bank (from \$3.5 billion to \$6.5 billion). As the New York judgement is projected to go into early to mid-February, according to a court spokesman, Judge Engoron has pushed his ruling timing closer to the date the High Court considers Trump's ballot status. Of pivotal importance to Engoron's ruling is a federal appeals court could expedite its judgement on a Trump plea that he enjoyed executive immunity as President and so would not be obliged to testify. Any decision on presidential immunity could either upend the former president's several criminal cases or undercut his principal defence in them, media reports said.



The reasons for Judge Engoron's delayed decision are not clearly known, though he had given a summary judgment penalising Trump with fines and ordering the cancellation of his business licences but kept them in abeyance waiting for the appeals court to decide pleas of presidential immunity. In any case, the stakes are very high for both the prosecutor – New York AG Letitia James and

her predecessor Cyrus Vance – and Trump's legal team. New York AG Letitia James is seeking a staggering \$370 million penalty from Trump. The ruling will also determine whether Trump is barred from participating in New York's real estate industry or running any company in the state – a potentially blistering decision that could effectively eviscerate the business

empire he built over decades, which ultimately propelled the real estate mogul to the world's most powerful political position, a USA TODAY commentator observed. The long-running civil fraud case has been a source of intense frustration for the likely Republican presidential nominee, who is certain to appeal Engoron's decision in the Supreme Court. As he did with the Colorado's SC's decision that kept him off the ballot in the state invoking the 14th amendment on insurrection charges with his inciting attacks by supporters on Capitol Hill on January 06, 2021. Notably, the pending judgement comes in the wake of a jury ordering Trump to pay \$83.3 million in damages for defaming writer E. Jean Carroll.



Wall Street worried about another US regional banking crisis

New York, Feb 8 (IANS) : US banks hold about \$2.7 trillion in commercial real-estate loans. The majority of that, about 80 per cent, according to Goldman Sachs economists, is held by smaller, regional banks -- the ones that the US government hasn't classified as "too big to fail", CNN reported. Much of that debt is about to mature, and, in a troubled market, regional banks might have problems collecting on those loans. More than \$2.2 trillion will come due between now and the end of 2027, according to data firm Trepp. Fears were exacerbated last week when New York Community Bancorp reported a surprise loss of \$252 million last quarter compared to a \$172 million profit in the fourth quarter of 2022. The company also reported \$552 million in loan losses, a significant increase from \$62 million recorded in the prior quarter. The increase was driven partly by expected losses on commercial real-estate loans, it said, CNN reported.

Shares of the bank have plummeted nearly 50 per cent over the past five trading sessions. The US Regional Bank index dropped by about 7 per cent over the same period, CNN reported. It's been nearly a year since the collapse of three US regional lenders that left financial institutions and regulators scrambling to prevent the spread of a banking crisis. Today, investors are worried they're back on familiar territory. But while the last crisis was all about interest rate risk, this one revolves around the \$20 trillion commercial real-estate market. After decades of growth bolstered by low interest rates and easy credit, commercial real-estate has hit a wall. Office and retail property valuations have been falling since the pandemic changed where people live and work and how they shop. The US Fed's efforts to fight inflation by raising interest rates have also hurt the credit-dependent industry, CNN reported.

Drug smuggler held in Bihar's West Champaran with charas haul

Patna, Feb 8 (IANS) : A drug smuggler was arrested in Bagaha area of Bihar's West Champaran district on Thursday and 35 kg charas seized from his possession, police said. SP, Bagaha, Sushant Kumar Saroj said that the accused, identified as Retesh Patel, a native of Sikta block in Bettiah, smuggled the contraband from Nepal and was on the way to Gorakhpur in neighbouring UP to deliver it. "The SHO of Dhanha police station received an input about a person travelling on the bus with contraband. Accordingly, he intercepted the bus and arrested the accused," he said. "The accused Ritesh Patel had concealed the charas in a special jacket with big pockets which he was wearing. The value of seized charas is over Rs 7 crore in the international market. During brief interrogation, the accused also revealed the identities of his handlers."



Israel's Mossad 'studying' Hamas reply on ceasefire deal

Jerusalem, Feb 8 (IANS) : Israel's Mossad intelligence agency has said in a statement that it received Hamas' reply to a Qatari proposal for a ceasefire deal in Gaza and was studying it. "Hamas' answer was forwarded by the Qatari mediator to the Mossad and its details are studied in depth by all the parties involved in the negotiations," the statement issued on Thursday read. Earlier on Thursday, Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani said during a press conference that Hamas has officially replied to the suggested framework for a hostage exchange deal involving individuals still held in Gaza in exchange for a prolonged ceasefire,



Xinhua news agency reported. The reply "includes some comments, but in general, it is positive", Al Thani said. "We are optimistic and we have delivered the response to the Israeli party," he said, adding that due to the sensitivity of the circumstances, no fur-

ther details would be provided at this stage. More than 27,000 Palestinians have been killed from the Israeli attacks on Gaza, which were triggered by a surprise Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, that Israel said killed about 1,200 people.



AMMK to demand 4 to 6 seats in TN from BJP to join NDA

Chennai, Feb 8 (IANS) : The AMMK has demanded 4 to 6 seats from the BJP for joining the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in Tamil Nadu, party sources said. Sources in the AMMK told IANS that party founder and General Secretary T.T.V. Dhinakaran, who is also the nephew of the AIADMK's former interim General Secretary V.K. Shashikala is adamant that his party will contest from the Thevar community strongholds in south Tamil Nadu. The AMMK is a breakaway group of AIADMK with strong backing of the powerful Thevar community of south Tamil Nadu. After the BJP split its ties with Dravidian major AIADMK, it has been trying to align itself with parties of the state that have influence in certain pockets and have zeroed in on parties like the AMMK

which has garnered around 8.6 per cent of vote share in 2019 general elections. The party has done extremely well in southern Tamil Nadu Lok Sabha seats like Theni, Virudhunagar, Ramanathapuram, and Sivaganga garnering more than 1 lakh votes in each of these constituencies. The AMMK will, in addition to these four seats, will also demand Madurai and Tirunelveli seats also from the BJP. Veteran leader and former Chief Minister O.Pannarselvam, who was ousted from the AIADMK, is also a powerful force in south Tamil Nadu and also belongs to the Thevar community. In the 2019 general elections, the AIADMK could win only one seat - Theni out of the 39 seats in Tamil Nadu, with OPS's son O. Raveendranathan emerging the victor.

Santosh Suman disagrees with father Manjhi's demand for two ministerial berths

Patna, Feb 8 (IANS) : Bihar IT and SC/ST Minister Santosh Kumar Suman on Thursday disagreed with his father and HAM-S supremo Jitan Ram Manjhi's demand for two ministerial berths for his party in the Nitish Kumar-led NDA government. He also expressed satisfaction over the departments given to him. Taking charge of his ministries, Suman said that he has no complaints about the ministries given to him by Nitish Kumar. "If I had any doubt about the ministries given to me, I would not be sitting here. Everything is fine here and I am happy with the departments given to me. Hence, I took charge of the departments and will perform according to my capacity," he said. Asked about Manjhi not being pleased about one cabinet minister and that the ministry allocated to him in the past was given to his son as well, Suman said: "It may be his personal opinion."



Iran waives visa requirement for Indian tourists

New Delhi, Feb 8 (IANS) : Indian tourists do not need a visa for visiting Iran with a new policy coming into effect from February 4, according to a statement issued by the Embassy of Iran here on Thursday.

"Individuals holding ordinary passports will be allowed to enter Iran without a visa once every six months, with a maximum stay of 15 days," the Embassy said in a statement. It is important to note that the 15-day period cannot be

extended, the statement clarified. The visa-free entry applies only to individuals entering Iran for tourism purposes. Indians who visit Iran for business or educational purposes would have to apply for visa under the respective categories. Those who want to visit Iran more than once within the six-month time span will have to obtain a visa. The statement also made it clear that the visa-free entry would be applicable only to those Indian tourists who arrive in Iran by air. Those coming to Iran via the land route through Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan or any neighbouring nation would not be allowed to enter without a prior visa.



'Congress working hard to consolidate Muslim, Dalit votes in UP'

Lucknow, Feb 8 (IANS) : Uttar Pradesh Congress Minority Cell Head Shah Nawaz Alam on Thursday said that the party is working hard to consolidate the Muslim and Dalit votes in the state to touch the 'Target 41'. The Uttar Pradesh sends the highest numbers of MPs -- 80 -- to the parliament and consists of 20 per cent Muslims and 21 per cent Dalits. Alam said that more than two hundred Maulanas in every district of the state and about 10,000 Maulanas in the entire state have been contacted. He said that the party has urged them to improve social relations with the Dalit community so that a bond can develop between the two communities. "We are trying to convince both of the dangers looming over the Constitution."

Bengal govt utilised FC funds for paying power bills : Suwendu Adhikari to FM

Kolkata, Feb 8 (IANS) : The leader of opposition in West Bengal Assembly, Suwendu Adhikari, wrote to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday alleging that the state government has utilised funds allotted under the 15th Finance Commission (FC) for paying electricity bills.

"I had a meeting with the Union Finance Minister on Monday during which I informed her about such irregularities. She asked me to submit the complaint in writing. Today, I sent the details to the Finance Minister through email," Adhikari said.

According to him, the total value of the electricity bills paid by the state government from the allotted funds under the 16th Finance Commission amounts to Rs 330.35 crore. "This is yet another major irregularity, considering that the funds allotted under the Finance Commission are supposed to be spent for development projects like rural road construction and development of sewerage systems, among others."



Siddaramaiah silent over farmer suicides in K'taka : BJP

Bengaluru, Feb 8 (IANS) : Karnataka unit BJP General Secretary P. Rajeev on Thursday said that the Chief Minister has remained silent on the farmer deaths in the state.

"More than 850 farmers have committed suicide in the state and the Chief Minister has remained silent over these deaths. Minister Shivanand Patil has in an uncivilized manner said that farmers are ending their lives to get compensation for their families," Rajeev said during a protest at the Freedom Park in Bengaluru.

The protesting BJP workers had also brought cows to the protest-

ing site against the alleged failure of the government to release the subsidy of Rs 715 crore on milk from July 2023 to Jan 2024.

"Did you stop the milk subsidy so that farmers commit suicide?" Rajeev asked.

He said that the Chief Minister travels in a chartered plane with Minister Zameer Ahmad Khan to New Delhi but does not have the humanity to release the subsidy on milk for farmers.

"Even the livestock are against the government. The veterinary hospitals of Bengaluru city and Bengaluru Rural have also been transferred to other districts. The government seems to be pursuing

the policy that there should not be any cows or the farmers who rear them," Rajeev said.

He said that the government is pursuing an anti-cow policy. "Rs 4,000 subsidy given by former Chief Minister Yediyurappa has also been stopped. The funds given for the diesel to farmers has also been stopped. The Vidya Siri programme scholarship for the children of farmers has also been stopped," Rajeev said.

State President of Raitha Morcha A. S. Nadahalli said that the Congress government has stopped all pro-farmers programmes launched by the previous BJP government.

Tripura govt announces health insurance scheme for all

Agartala, Feb 8 (IANS) : The Tripura government on Thursday announced to launch the Mukhya Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana in line with the Center's Ayushman Bharat Pradhanmantri Jan Arogya Yojana, offering cashless medical treatment of up to Rs 5 lakh per family per year.

Announcing the health insurance

policy, Food and Civil Supplies Minister Sushanta Chowdhury said the scheme would be launched aiming at promoting accessible and affordable healthcare to all, irrespective of annual income.

He said that poor people to affluent persons, including senior government officials.



12 B'desies who entered into India illegally repatriated after over a year

Agartala, Feb 8 (IANS) : Twelve Bangladeshi nationals, including six women, were repatriated to their country on Thursday, a year after they entered into India illegally 'in search of jobs', officials said.

Agartala-based Bangladesh Assistant High Commission (AHC) coordinated with the Indian officials to repatriate the 12 Bangladeshis, who entered into Tripura separately between 2022 and 2023 in search of jobs.

Bangladesh Assistant High Commissioner Arif Mohammad said that one of the 12 Bangladeshi nationals is a minor girl, who was brought by their relatives to Tripura to perform domestic

work six years ago. "The girl was tortured by her relatives in Tripura before she escaped from her employers' home and went to the police seeking help. The girl was in a government home before Tuesday's repatriation," he told the media after the repatriation of the 12 Bangladeshis through the Agartala-Akhaura check-post.

He said the 11 adult persons entered Tripura illegally in search of jobs. After completing the legal and diplomatic formalities, they were handed over to the Bangladeshi officials and family members on Thursday.

Indian and Bangladeshi officials, including Border Security Force (BSF) and Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) officials, were present at the Agartala-Akhaura check-post during the



repatriation process. Many Bangladeshi nationals, including women, children and mentally challenged individuals, are often apprehended by the BSF and other security forces after they inadvertently cross the international border. After medical treatment, they are handed over to their families in their country.

In the past two to three years, around 20 Bangladeshi citizens,

including women, who had accidentally crossed the international border into India in a mentally sick condition, were handed over their families after completion of medical treatment and a lengthy legal and diplomatic process. Tripura, which is surrounded by Bangladesh on almost all four sides, shares an 856 km international border with the neighbouring country.

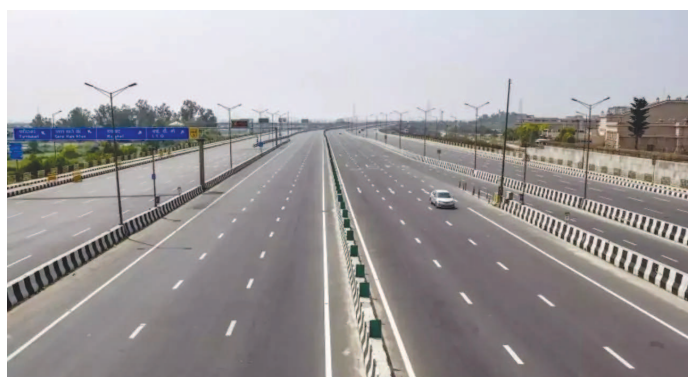
Gadkari directs NHAI to open Dwarka Expressway's Gurugram portion

Gurugram, Jan 8 (IANS) : Road and Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday directed the officials of the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) to open the Gurugram sections on the Dwarka Expressway for traffic. Minister and Gurugram MP Rao Inderjit Singh held a meeting with the Road and Transport Minister and demanded the opening of the Dwarka Expressway in the Gurugram section.

Rao told the Minister that work on the Gurugram portion of Dwarka Expressway has been completed and it should be opened for traffic.

He said that it may take another four-five months to complete the work on the Delhi portion, in such a situation, the people of Gurugram should be given relief by opening the Gurugram portion.

While discussing with Gadkari about making an elevated road from Hero Honda Chowk to Umang Bhardwaj Chowk in Gurugram, the Minister said that as per the notification of 2017, Hero Honda Chowk to Umang Bhardwaj Chowk was a part of NHAI but despite that, the authorities had decided not to make it elevated.



2020 Odisha minor rape-murder: Accused sentenced to 20 yrs imprisonment

Bhubaneswar, Feb 8 (IANS) : A special court in Odisha's Nayagarh district on Thursday sentenced, to 20 years rigorous imprisonment, the convict in the sensational rape and murder case of 5-year-old girl that had triggered huge uproar in the state in 2020. The state government had also come under attack by the opposition following the self-immolation bid of the deceased's parents before the Assembly on November 24, 2020, alleging police apathy. Following the controversy, the state government constituted a Special Investigation Team led by IGP, Crime Branch-CID Arun Bothra to investigate the case.

"The court held the accused guilty and convicted him under Sections 363, 376AB, 302, 201 of the IPC and Section 6 of the Pco Act.



Amid objection from NE states, Centre to fence entire 1,643 km stretch of India-Myanmar border

New Delhi/Aizawl, Feb 8 (IANS) : Amid objection from different northeastern states, including Mizoram and Nagaland, and many other organisations, the Centre on Thursday reiterated that the Indian government is committed to fence the entire 1,643 km-long India-Myanmar border.

Commenting on the development, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Tuesday, "It has been decided to construct a fence along the entire 1,643 km

India-Myanmar border. To facilitate better surveillance, a patrol track along the border will also be paved." Shah also said the Narendra Modi government is committed to building impenetrable borders. "Out of the total border length, a 10 km stretch in Moreh, Manipur, has already been fenced. Also, two pilot projects of fencing through a Hybrid Surveillance System (HSS) are under execution. "They will fence a stretch of 1 km each in Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. Additionally, fence

works covering approx 20 km in Manipur have also been approved, the work for which will start soon," Shah said. After the Mizoram government, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) has also opposed the Centre's move to fence the India-Myanmar border and scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) between the two countries.

The FMR allowed citizens residing close to both sides of the border to move 16 km into each other's territory without passport or visa.

**'Encouragement money':
Bihar govt will provide
Rs 10k to engineering
students, says Nitish Kumar**

Patna, Feb 8 (IANS) : Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday said that the government will provide Rs 10,000 as "encouragement money" to the engineering students of the state. "In a bid to encourage the engineering students, the government will give Rs 10,000 as encouragement money to them," the Chief Minister said after chairing the second Cabinet meeting in which 14 proposals were passed. Four proposals were passed during the first cabinet meeting after the formation of the NDA government in Bihar.



**Mahant Swami Maharaj reaches Abu Dhabi
for inauguration of UAE's first Hindu temple**

New Delhi, Feb 8 (IANS) : Mahant Swami Maharaj, the spiritual guru of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, reached Abu Dhabi on Thursday for the grand inauguration of the first Hindu temple in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The spiritual leader will preside over the historic inauguration of the first Hindu temple in the Gulf nation. Prime Minister Narendra

Modi will inaugurate the temple on February 14, days after the 'Pran Pratishtha' of the grand Ram Temple in Ayodhya. Mahant Swami Maharaj was received as a state guest by UAE Minister of Tolerance, Sheikh Nahayan Mubarak Al Nahyan. Extending warm welcome to the spiritual guru, the minister said, "Welcome to the UAE. Our nation is blessed with your presence. We are touched by your kindness and

we feel your prayers." As the BAPS spiritual guru arrived in Abu Dhabi, a large number of Swaminarayan Sanstha members and devotees also turned up to greet him.

Prime Minister Modi is set to inaugurate the temple on February 14 in the presence of saints, swamis and thousands of devotees. A wave of religious fervour and festive atmosphere has already set in, with thousands of devotees visiting the large complex.

Modi is also set to address the Indian diaspora at the grandiose Sheikh Zayed Sports Stadium in Abu Dhabi. The event titled 'Ahlan Modi' is likely to see the presence of more than 50,000 people.

'Ahlan Modi', which means 'Hello Modi', is being billed as the 'largest community reception to Prime Minister' on foreign soil.

Notably, the BAPS Mandir is the first Hindu temple constructed in the Middle East. Ever since the construction work began in 2019, it drew attention and interest of the Hindu community from across the world.

Situated in the Abu Mureikhah area, the majestic complex will reflect the spirit of Indian culture and will also be a testament to the growing friendship between India and the UAE.

The foundation stone for the temple was laid on April 20, 2019. Lots of volunteers from the Hindu community participated in the construction of the state-of-the-art complex, made using white marble and limestone only. For the unversed, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, had donated 13.5 acres of land in 2015 for the construction of the temple.



**Police register FIR after video of
groom's father firing bullets at
wedding celebration goes viral in Delhi**

New Delhi, Feb 8 (IANS) : Delhi Police registered a case after a video of a man firing bullets in the air during a wedding celebration on February 4, went viral on social media, an official said on Thursday. The incident reportedly took place in East Delhi's Gharoli Village. In the video, the man, who is the father of the groom, is seen brandishing a pistol and recklessly firing bullets in the air during the marriage function. "A video of firing in a marriage in Kumhar Basti, Gharoli Village, Gazipur was posted on X. The marriage of one Nikki was to be solemnised on February 4," said a senior police officer. According to police, the celebratory gun fire took place when the baraat was about to leave for Baraut in Uttar Pradesh. "The person seen in the video firing the weapon was identified as one Satpal (50), the father of the groom," said the officer. "A case under Sections 25(9) Arms Act and 336 of the IPC has been registered against him. The accused has a valid pistol licence," the officer added.



**Kerala : CPI Minister
not 'happy' with state budget**

Thiruvananthapuram, Feb 8 (IANS) : Kerala State Food and Civil Supplies Minister G.R. Anil is not "happy" with the state budget presented by the Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal. Anil, who is from the CPI the second biggest ally of the coalition government in the state, also did not have the customary handshake with Balagopal, which is a norm after the budget is tabled. Sources said that other three CPI Ministers handling Animal Husbandry, Revenue and Agriculture are also not "happy" with the budget. On Thursday, Anil -- while talking to media persons in New Delhi -- indirectly admitted that the budget overlooked the felt needs of his department. The CPI ministers are likely to meet Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and Balagopal to express their concerns.

**'Sapne Nahin Haqeeqat Bunte Hain....':
BJP's poll blitzkrieg in 8 languages**

New Delhi, Feb 8 (IANS) : The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Thursday launched an aggressive social media campaign to impress upon the public about the flagship schemes of the Modi government while boasting about their popularity and acceptance among the public. A feature film highlighting various popular and ground-breaking schemes of the Modi

government launched during the last 10 years has been released by the BJP's social media handles. The video was also shared on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's personal X handle. The film has been made in eight languages -- Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Assamese, Odia, Bangla and Hindi -- and aims to cater to people in the Hindi heartland and also down South.



**HC directs Delhi Govt to make efforts to pay
more damages to kin of manual scavenging victims**

New Delhi, Feb 8 (IANS) : The Delhi High Court on Thursday directed the Delhi Government to make efforts to pay additional compensation amounting to Rs 20 lakh each, to the families of manual scavenging victims. Justice Subramonium Prasad's direction came in accordance with a ruling by the Supreme Court last year. The judge stressed the importance of the State's proactive measures to disburse the remaining compensation to all eligible individuals, rather than requiring them to individually petition the court. Justice Prasad stressed the principle that once a court declares a law in favour of an individual, the State is expected to extend the same benefit to all similarly situated persons. "It is well settled that when a person approaches a court and gets a declaration of law in his

favour, it is expected that the State shall extend the same benefit to all the similarly situated persons without forcing those persons to approach the court of law," the court said. The court was hearing a plea filed by various widows seeking the Delhi Government's obligation to fulfill the Supreme Court's ruling by paying them Rs. 20 lakh each. The Supreme Court had mandated an increase in compensation for sewer deaths to Rs. 30 lakh and for permanent disability arising from sewer operations to Rs. 20 lakh, with no less than Rs. 10 lakh for other forms of disablement. The widows argued that while the Delhi Government had provided Rs. 10 lakh, they were entitled to the balance payment as per the top court's directive.

**Prosperous, flourishing K'taka has
been PM Modi's priority : Vijayendra**

Bengaluru, Feb 8 (IANS) : BJP Karnataka unit President B.Y. Vijayendra on Thursday said that a prosperous and flourishing Karnataka has been Prime Minister Narendra Modi's priority. "The Chief Minister is frustrated as he is unable to implement promised guarantees. We are staring at bankruptcy due to his inept handling of state finances. The Congress government has resorted to an unfair campaign against the Central government under the false pretence of pending tax dues."



**Doctor murder: Kerala HC denies
bail to accused patient, refuses CBI probe**

Kochi, Feb 8 (IANS) : The Kerala High Court on Thursday rejected the bail plea of Sandeep, accused of murdering 23-year-old house surgeon, Dr. Vandana Das, during a medical examination. He stabbed Das to death while she was medically examining

him after he was brought to the hospital by the police. The court also rejected a plea by the doctor's parents for a CBI probe in the case as they were not happy with the police probe. They pointed out that the attack on her daughter took place while the police officials were present as it was

they who bought the accused for the medical examination. The gruesome incident took place early on May 10 last year at the state run clinic at Kottarakara in Kollam district.



**Rajasthan : Pak spy nabbed
in Pokhran's Army Cantt area**

Jaipur, Feb 8 (IANS) : A Pakistani spy has been nabbed from Army Cantt in Pokhran, Jaisalmer area which borders Pakistan, officials said. Jaisalmer Kotwali police station officer Satyaprakash Vishnoi said that the accused -- Manu Bhil (24) -- was working as a laborer at the fuel depot in the Army Cantt area -- a sensitive area -- since January 2024. "He is a resident of Bahawalpur in Punjab province of Pakistan. He came to India along with his family in 2014 on a long term visa," Vishnoi said.



Palestinian death toll in Gaza rises to 27,478: Official

Gaza, Feb 8 (IANS) : The death toll of Palestinians killed from Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip has risen to 27,478, the Hamas-run Health Ministry has said. The ministry in a press statement on Thursday said that during the past 24 hours, at least 113 Palestinians were killed by Israeli attacks in various places in the Gaza Strip, raising the total number of deaths to 27,478, Xinhua news agency reported. The ministry added that with heavy Israeli bombardment and the lack of civil defence and ambulance crews, some victims are still under the rubble. Meanwhile, the number of wounded people has also risen to 66,835 since the Israel-Hamas conflict broke out on October 7, 2023, the ministry said.

Indian-American presidential candidate Haley seeks Secret Service protection : Report

Washington, Feb 8 (IANS) : Indian-American Republican Presidential candidate Nikki Haley, the lone challenger left against former US President Donald Trump, has formally requested Secret Service protection citing "multiple issues," the BBC reported. The former South Carolina Governor and United Nations ambassador discussed the request for protection in an interview with The Wall Street Journal on Thursday. "We've had multiple issues. It's not going to stop me from doing what I need to do," she said after a campaign event in Aiken, South Carolina. "When you do something like this, you get threats. It's just the reality. That's not going to deter me. Does it mean we have to put a few more bod-



ies around this? Yes, that's fine," she told the paper. Haley, who has been urged by the former President Trump and his backers to exit the race and unify the party against Democrat Joe Biden, currently uses personal security while campaigning. In addition, protesters have shown up at her campaign events to slam her support for Israel and Ukraine. "At the end of the day, we're going to go out there and touch every hand, we're going to answer every question, we're going to make sure that we are there and doing everything that we need to," she said. The White House hopeful has been a target of "swatting" attempts with the recent one on New Year's Day when a hoax call was made to law enforcement agencies, saying Haley's daughter had been shot and was lying in a pool of blood. Days before, her Kiawah Island home was also swatted when a man called the police and claimed to have shot a woman. While Haley was not at home, her parents were there along with a caregiver. Calling it an "awful situation," she had said: "It put the law enforcement officers in danger, it put my family in danger... That's what happens when you run for president." Secret Service protection is granted to "major" candidates under federal law, usually when they look certain to become their party's nominee, the BBC said. A call on providing Haley with Secret Service support would be taken by the US Secretary of Homeland Security, who would first confer with a Joint Congressional Committee. As former President, Trump who enjoys a large double-digit lead over Haley, gets Secret Service protection for life. Despite lagging behind her former boss in the two primaries held so far, Haley raised a massive \$16.5 million in January alone.



More N.Koreans negative about leader Kim Jong-un, hereditary power succession: Report

Seoul, Feb 8 (IANS) : A growing number of North Koreans have negatively assessed Kim Jong-un as a political leader and harboured doubts about whether the Kim family's hereditary power succession is legitimate, a report showed on Thursday. Seoul's Unification Ministry released the 280-page report on North Korea's economic and social situation for the first

time on Thursday. The report is based on in-depth interviews with 6,351 North Korean defectors conducted between 2013 and 2022, Yonhap news agency reported. It showed 43.8 per cent of the North Korea's defectors said they thought Kim Jong-un taking power was inappropriate when they lived in North Korea. For those who fled North Korea between 2016 and 2020, some 56.3

per cent gave a negative assessment of Kim as a leader. "Negative public sentiments toward the 'Paektu bloodline'-based leadership system have been increasing and this perception appears to be gaining traction since Kim Jong-un assumed power (in late 2011)," the report showed. North Korean propaganda has idolised the ruling family as the "Paektu bloodline," claiming that Kim's late father, former leader

Kim Jong-il, was born on Mount Paektu, the highest peak on the Korean Peninsula, despite the fact that he was born in the far eastern Russian city of Khabarovsk. Nearly 55 per cent of the North Korea's defectors who fled the North Korea between 2016 and 2020 said they had a negative opinion of the Kim family's power succession. Some 42.6 per cent held such a view among those who escaped the country between 2011 and 2015. Kim Jong-un has brought his teen daughter, Ju-ae, to public events since late 2022 in an apparent bid to demonstrate his commitment to the third hereditary power succession. The National Intelligence Service, Seoul's spy agency, said it sees Ju-ae as the "most likely successor".

Amid a sluggish economy, more North Koreans have been doing various activities in the "private" economy, including selling goods at markets, cultivating unauthorised lands, smuggling and engaging in housing construction projects.

Markets are playing a critical role in the livelihoods of North Koreans, as the food rationing system has collapsed. Around 91 per cent of the North Korea's defectors said life was not sustainable without markets, and for those who fled the North Korea after 2012, some 68.1 per cent of their income came from "non-official" income sources. "The influence of markets has been expanding to healthcare, education, transportation and information infrastructure from the necessities of life, such as food, clothing and shelter, as well as energy, water and sewage," it said.

North Korea has been suffering from a chronic food shortage amid prolonged UN sanctions on Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programmes. The North Korean economy probably contracted 0.2 per cent on-year in 2022, marking the third straight year of falls, according to data from the Bank of Korea.

Fresh US-British airstrikes hit Yemen

Sanaa, Feb 8 (IANS) : The US-British coalition launched three airstrikes on Yemen's northern province of Saada before dawn on Thursday, media reported. The strikes targeted sites in the eastern part of the province's capital city, which bears the same name, the Houthi-run al-Masirah TV said without elaborating. The fresh airstrikes occurred following a reported missile attack towards the Red Sea, Xinhua news agency reported. The US Central Command confirmed that the US military struck two Houthi explosive uncrewed surface vehicles in Yemen. The command said in a statement that the strikes were launched at nearly 3:30 p.m. Sanaa time, and the targets were deemed "an imminent threat to US Navy ships and merchant vessels in the region". The airstrikes are part of an ongoing military response by Washington and London since January 12, targeting Houthi-controlled areas of Sanaa and other northern provinces.



Democratic forces gaining ground against junta, says Myanmar envoy at UN

United Nations, Feb 8 (IANS) : The democratic forces are gaining ground and the military junta is "losing", Myanmar's Permanent Representative Kyaw Moe Tun, who represents the democratically-elected government overthrown in a coup three years ago, has said while appealing for effective UN Security Council action against the dictatorship. "We the people of Myanmar are unified in opposition to the military dictatorship. And if

we wish to live in a free, peaceful, inclusive, just and democratic society," he told reporters on Monday before a closed Council meeting on the situation in that nation. "Democratic forces are gaining ground and the military junta is losing every day," he said. "But we need help from the international community, coordinated concrete actions, both from the Security Council and individual member states."



GEF Council allocates \$916 million for biodiversity, pollution control

New Delhi, Feb 8 (IANS) : The Global Environment Facility (GEF)'s 186 member governments have allocated \$916 million for international action on biodiversity, climate change, nature renewal, and pollution control, and advanced five Integrated Programs designed to tackle complex challenges in their entirety. The GEF Council, in a meeting in Washington on Thursday, approved funding for 45 projects and programs, including four blended finance initiatives involving the private sector. The support will directly help more than 12 million people, including indigenous peoples and local communities. The work program -- the sec-

ond-largest in the GEF's history -- includes \$530 million for Integrated Programs for the ocean, food systems, transportation infrastructure, wildlife conservation, and critical forest biomes that have been designed to break down silos and advance holistic action across sectors and borders.

"To achieve impact that lasts, we need to work in an integrated and inclusive way," said Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, GEF CEO and Chairperson. "The GEF is moving quickly and efficiently to target donor contributions to urgent needs. We also recognize that financing alone cannot reverse environmental degradation for the long term. This work program therefore stands out not only for its size but also for its focus on a whole-of-society approach to phasing out harmful practices."



The GEF Trust Fund work program is set to mobilize \$7.5 billion in co-financing, including from bilateral governments and multilateral development banks. It spans 77 countries, including 22 Least Developed Countries and 14 Small Island Developing States, with the largest regional shares of the funding package going to Africa and Asia. The total GEF Family of Funds financing package is expected to exceed \$1 billion this week when the Council considers another

\$203 million from the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF). The new Global Biodiversity Framework Fund Council will also meet for the first time this week. The GEF Trust Fund programming will contribute to global environment benefits across the board, with boosts for protected areas, landscape management, greenhouse gas emissions reduction, and terrestrial and marine ecosystems.

T20 WC: 'Bumrah, Kohli and Rohit are gonna be key players for India', feels Vernon Philander

Johannesburg, Feb 8 (IANS) : Former South African all-rounder Vernon Philander believes Jasprit Bumrah, Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma will be the key players for India in the ICC T20 World Cup 2024, scheduled to begin on June 1. The showpiece event will be played in the West Indies and the USA, with 20 teams taking part in it. It will be interesting to see the team Indian selectors pick for the tournament.

Speaking exclusively to IANS, Philander showered praise on Indian pacer Bumrah and added, "They (Bumrah, Kohli, Rohit) are always big match players. They live for those moments, they are gonna be key players. "Having Bumrah is always a positive. You get a tricky surface in the Caribbean, hopefully they are big match players and they will play a part in India's success." Asked about this favourite team, the former cricketer said: "Tough one to pick a team. But surprises

would be there, you might see some young guns. Like I said Christian Stubbs might be there. Platform (SA20) is being created and many young players would come from South Africa. On his prediction for the semi-finalists at the mega event, Philander shared: "India will be up there. Australia... this particular South Africa team, how they perform in 50 over World Cup, I don't think many people thought of. I certainly feel they would take a lot of confidence."



Shelton downs compatriot Mmoh in Dallas debut; Duckworth, Giron score upset win

Dallas (US), Feb 8 (IANS) : Ben Shelton made a grand debut at the Dallas Open with an aggressive all-court game to beat fellow American Michael Mmoh 6-3, 6-3 and earned his sixth tour-level quarterfinal appearance and his second on home soil after his electric run to the 2023 US Open semi-final. In his first match since a third-round defeat to Adrian Mannarino at the Australian Open, the third-seeded Shelton lost just three points on serve and ripped 23 winners in an ef-

ficient 63-minute victory on Wednesday night. "I think the biggest thing for me is my movement. I think a year and a half ago I had two left feet. I couldn't move on the court. Probably there's a lot of people in the stands right now who were moving on the tennis court better than me. But I feel like that's the part of my game that improved the most and I'm moving at a pretty high level right now," Shelton said after the match.



'The game is too long': Aaron Finch feels ODI format should change to 40 overs

New Delhi, Feb 8 (IANS) : Former Australian captain Aaron Finch has suggested trimming the One Day International (ODI) game to 40 overs amid concerns of dwindling crowd interest and sluggish over rates.

Wade sees room for himself and Inglis in Australia's playing XI in T20Is

Hobart, Feb 8 (IANS) : Veteran wicketkeeper-batter Matthew Wade sees room for himself and Josh Inglis to feature in Australia's playing eleven for the T20I series against the West Indies, starting on Friday. The three-game series sees Australia and West Indies switch into preparation mode for the Men's T20 World Cup, to be held in the USA and West Indies from June 1-29. Both Wade and Inglis are wicketkeeper-batters, with the former excelling in a finishing

role and latter being flexible in batting anywhere in the line-up. "I've been batting seven when I've been playing in a specialist role. I'm obviously a left-hander as well, (which) towards the back end (of the innings) is something that we're quite happy with. Myself, (Tim) David and (Marcus) Stoinis have been through that middle-order over the last few years so we're pretty confident and happy with how we line up there. "But I think 'Ingo's' pushing hard for spot, he's batted terrifically well in every game he's played in



white-ball cricket as well and he was good in India. So whether that be the top of the order or he finds a spot through the middle, he's definitely there putting his hand up to get picked in the first XI as a batter," said Wade to reporters.



India beat England to win the title in first-ever International Para Cricket Tournament

Ahmedabad, Feb 8 (IANS) : The Indian Physical Disability Cricket Team secured a 4-1 series victory over England during the country's first-ever International Physically Disabled five-match T20 series organised by the Differently Abled Cricket Council of India (DCCI). The five matches in the T20 se-

ries took place in Ahmedabad and were hosted by the Gujarat Cricket Association, under the patronage of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). It featured intense matchups between the Indian and English physically challenged cricket teams during which India emerged victorious in four of them, securing a 4-1 series win

against England. The international physically disabled T20 cricket series marked a significant milestone for differently-abled cricket in India, providing a stage for talented para cricketers to showcase their skills and compete at an international level. Sharing his thoughts on the series victory, Secretary General of the Differently

abled Cricket Council of India (DCCI), Ravi Kant Chauhan said, "The continuous support from Svayam not only motivates us but also aids us in elevating differently abled cricket to new heights. The hosting of the International Physically Disabled T20 Cricket Series marks a significant milestone for differently abled cricket in India.



I feel CSK will come in top four in IPL 2024 : Sunil Gavaskar

New Delhi, Feb 8 (IANS) : Former India cricketer Sunil Gavaskar expressed his unwavering confidence in the Chennai Super Kings (CSK) ability to once again storm into the playoffs of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024. CSK made it to the playoffs twelve times in fourteen seasons, which solidifies their status as a consistent challenger for the IPL trophy. With five titles each, the MS Dhoni-led side share the record for most title victories in the tournament's history with the Mumbai Indians (MI). Daryl Mitchell, Rachin Ravindra, and Mustafizur Rahman were

CSK's overseas picks at the mini-auction held last December and Shardul Thakur, Sameer Rizvi, and Avanish Rao Aravelly in their Indian contingent. Gavaskar dissected CSK's prospects for the upcoming season, highlighting their astute moves in the auction to address key areas of concern. "If you see the purchases they did at the auction table, the aspects they had to strengthen, it seemed like they lacked a little in bowling last year and in batting also they had to strengthen the middle order slightly after Ambati Rayudu's retirement, they have done all that.



Tournaments like IPL and TLT20 help players get selected in national squads : Tom Moody

New Delhi, Feb 8 (IANS) : As the cricket world gears up for the highly anticipated T20 World Cup scheduled for June in the West Indies and the United States.

Chris Gayle to lead Telangana Tigers in inaugural Indian Veteran Premier League

Dehradun, Feb 8 (IANS) : Former West Indian batter Chris Gayle will captain Telangana Tigers in the inaugural edition of the Indian Veteran Premier League (IVPL), slated from February 23 to March 3 here at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium. Joining Gayle in the Telangana Ti-



gers lineup are former Indian cricketers Sudip Tyagi and Manpreet Goni, along with former West Indies batter Ricardo Powell.