

# THE INDIAN MAIL

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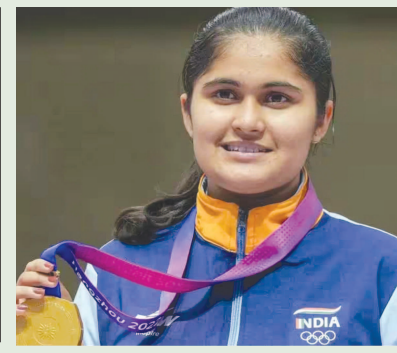
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Indian innovations across the spectrum are fantastic and are the key to solving problems in the field of health, agriculture...

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### Asian Games champ Palak wins gold on first day of Air Pistol trials

Reigning Asian Games champion Palak of Haryana, won the women's 10m air pistol T3 trial at the M.P. State Shooting Academy ranges here, as athletes took aim on the first day...

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## CM Revanth releases

### DSC notification for 11,062 teacher posts

Hyderabad, Feb 29 (NSS): It is a good news to the unemployed youth in Telangana as a mega DSC notification has been issued for filling up 11,062 teacher posts. The Chief Minister released a mega notification along with Minister for Roads and Buildings Komatireddy Venkat Reddy, Government Whip Beerla Ilaiah and other officials at his residence here

on Thursday. Of a total of 11,062 teacher posts, 6,508 posts are belonged to Secondary Grade Teacher (SGT) followed by School Assistant-2, 629 posts, Language Pandit-727, PETs-182, School Assistants 220 and SGTs 796 posts. As part of issuing the DSC notification, the State government issued an order on February 28, Wednesday, canceling

the previous DSC notification issued on September 6, 2023 with 5,089 posts. The new notification has been released adding new vacancies to the old posts. Meanwhile, the officials have informed that the old applications will be valid and those candidates who have applied for the previous notification, need not apply again.

### Avoid politics, take corrective measures on Kaleshwaram project : KTR tells govt

Hyderabad, Feb 29 (IANS) : The Congress government in Telangana should immediately take corrective measures with regards to the "defects" in the Medigadda barrage, part of Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project and release water rather than politicising the issue, BRS Working President KT Rama Rao said on Thursday. Speaking to reporters, he also said the state government is free to take action against anyone if there are lapses in the project.

"This (damage at barrages) may not be the first or the last. The first thing that the government should have done is to take corrective steps. They have been making allegations for the past 75 days over the issue. Elections are over. There is no need to politicise the issue," Rama Rao said. Rama Rao's comments came a day after state Irrigation Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy's remarks that it was extremely foolish and arrogant of BRS leaders to talk about giving a "Chalo Medigadda" call. Reddy insisted that ideally, former Chief Minister



K Chandrasekhar Rao, who also held irrigation portfolio, should visit the Kaleshwaram project himself and apologise to Telangana for the alleged lapses in the project.

### Dy CM urges BEML company to set up unit in Telangana

Hyderabad, Feb 29 (NSS): Deputy Chief Minister Batti Vikramarka has urged BEML (Bharat Earth Movers Limited) company to set up a unit in

Telangana. A delegation of BEML company led by CMD Shantanu Roy called on the Deputy Chief Minister at the Secretariat here on Thursday.



### TSRTC Adilabad region earns Rs 3.41 crore from Medaram jatara

Adilabad, Feb 29 (IANS) : The State-owned Telangana State Road Transport Corporation's (TSRTC) Adilabad region earned Rs

3.41 crore by operating special bus services to Medaram during the recently concluded biennial Sammakka-Saralamma jatara.

## BRS MP Ramulu quits party, joins BJP

New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) : The BRS party in Telangana has received a shock with its party MP P. Ramulu, quit the BRS and joined the BJP. On Thursday, the defector wore a saffron scarf in the presence of BJP leaders Union Minister G.Kishan Reddy, BJP's Telangana State affairs in-charge Tarun Chugh, Rajya Sabha MP

Laxman and BJP national vice-president DK Aruna on the occasion. Meanwhile, the differences between former Achampet MLA Guvvala Balaraju and Ramulu have intensified. It is learnt that Ramulu has left the BRS party as Balaraju was campaigning that he is the MP candidate of the party. Rajya Sabha MP Lakshman welcomed Ramulu's joining.



### Let's make Chalo Medigadda a success : Kadiyam Srihari

Hyderabad, Feb.29 (NSS):The BRS party has given a call to Chalo Medigadda program on March 1 to explain the facts to the people to counter the "venomous" propaganda being carried out by the ruling Congress party on Kaleswaram lift irrigation project. The party MPs, MLAs, MLCs, former ministers, former MLAs, ZP chairpersons, DCCB chairpersons, party leaders and public representatives left for Medigadda, an integral part of the Kaleswaram project

## Govt issues guidelines for Dharani portal

Hyderabad, Feb 29 (NSS): The State government on Thursday issued guidelines to resolve the problems in 'Dharani' portal. According to the guidelines, powers have been transferred to Tehsildars, RDOs, District Level Officers and CCLAs.

The guidelines have clearly mentioned that what powers an officer has at which level. Meanwhile, the revenue department has decided to organise a special drive from March 1 to 9 across the State in a bid to resolve Dharani related problems.



### I will make efforts for solving problems : Kishan Reddy

Hyderabad, Feb 29 (IANS) : Union Minister G Kishan Reddy today said that he would work towards solving the problems of the basti residents. In this regard, he toured in Nampally assembly constituency on Thursday. Power bores were inaugurated at Lakkidikapool, Asif Nagar, Kummariwadi, Mehdipatnam and Jibhabagh.

### Sirisilla Garment industry will avoid crisis and provide employment to workers



Rajanna Sirisilla, Feb 29 (TIM Bureau) : Telangana Powerloom Workers Union Assam Coordinating Committee CITU to support the workers who are unemployed or on the road due to the shutdown of the powerloom industry in Sirisilla garment industry in Rajanna Sirisilla district, former legislative council members Cherupalli Sitaramulu, CITU state secretary

Kurapathi Ramesh, Telangana Powerloom Workers Union state President Musham Ramesh, CITU District Secretary Kodam Ramana and a team of others presented the petition along with Handloom and Textile Minister Tummala Nageswara Rao. Sirisilla discussed the crisis of textile industry, workers' employment, welfare and other issues.



### Special focus of the state government on public health : Government Whip Adi Srinivas

- A special meeting with government doctors at an area hospital.
- The Government Whip congratulated the doctors who conducted the recent knee replacement surgery.

**Rajanna Sirisilla (Vemulawada) Feb 29 (TIM Bureau) :** Government Whip, Vemulawada MLA Adi Srinivas said that the state government has paid special attention to public health. On Thursday, a meeting was held by doctors at the area hospital in Vemulawada town. Appreciating the recent treatment of the knee in the hospital, they inquired about the health details of the victims. He said that it is a matter of pride for our hospital to conduct knee replacement surgery at Vemulawada Hospital. They have noticed that there is a shortage of medical staff in the hospital and they will appoint full staff soon. He said that all

the services needed by the people of this area will be made fully available. He said that those who come to the hospital should be warmly greeted and encouraged. He said that they are thinking of increasing the capacity of the hospital from 100 beds. Government hospitals always work hard to provide better treatment to the poor people, and reminded that Rajiv Arogyashri has increased 10 lakhs by providing them once again to avoid going to medical treatment in debt. Dr. Mahesh Rao, Aila Sivaramakrishna, Dr. Santhosh, Dr. Nishanth,

### Mental stress is a dispelling ray

**A dedicated helpline for all age groups 18004253333 set up in the Collectorate**

**Rajanna Sirisilla, Feb 29 (TIM Bureau) :** In Urukula's life, they are having a lot of trouble with work pressure in personal and duty management. Some are unable to bear the pressure and take their lives. In-charge District Medical Officer Dr. Rajitha said that a help line center has been set up in the complex of district integrated offices as per the orders of Rajanna Sirisilla District Collector Anurag Jayanthi to provide counseling to such people so that they do not become depressed. It is stated that the number 18004253333 has been made available to relieve the mental pressure of students, youth and all those suffering from mental problems. Program Officer Dr. Naeem Jaha (Psychologist) said that this help line center will work 24x7 and students and youth should not take any decisions under pressure.



### 500 Helmets distributed to Hyderabad Traffic Police Personnel's and their Children

**Hyderabad, Feb 29 (TIM Bureau) :** Today under the "Ride to Safety Campaign" ICICI Lombard General Insurance Company Ltd in association with Delhi Headquartered TRAXS. Society-A Road Safety NGO organised and distributed 500 helmets (250 child Helmets & 250 Adult Helmets) among Hyderabad Traffic Personnel's and their Children at Osmania University PG College, S.P.Road, Secunderabad. Mr. L. Subba Rayudu, IPS, DCP (Traffic) was the Chief Guest. S. Ranga Rao, Additional DCP-North Zone, G. Shankar Raju, ACP (North Zone), J Ravi Kumar, Principal, OU P.G. College, Aradhana Jain and Rajesh Neemkar from Trax

S Society along with other police officials were present at the occasion. At the beginning of the event Students Nishan Reddy, Soumya, Grihith Kumar expressed their views regarding importance of wearing helmets. After the workshop and distribution of the helmets everyone wore the helmet with enthusiasm and participated in the rally flagged off

by Chief Guest and other dignitaries This year ICICI General Insurance Company Ltd in association with TRAXS Society - A Road Safety NGO India have initiated specially designed helmets for Children under "Ride to Safety" awareness Campaign. More such programs will be organised in other schools.



### Giant leap for India Semiconductor Mission: Cabinet approves three more semiconductor units



**Hyderabad, Feb 29 (TIM Bureau) :** Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw, Hon'ble Minister of Railways, Communications, Electronic and Information Technology informed that, the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi approved the establishment of three semiconductor units under 'Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystems in India.

### Awareness Rally on Financial Literacy



**Rajanna Sirisilla, Feb 29 (TIM Bureau) :** Rajanna Sirisilla district education officer Ramesh Kumar said that there are chances of personal information going to others by charging the mobile in public places. "On Thursday, an awareness rally was organized by the Lead Bank from Dr. BR Ambedkar Square to Bathukamma Ghat in Sirisilla town as directed by the Reserve Bank of India. District Lead Bank Officer T.N. The District Education Officer along with Mallikarjuna Rao started by waving the flag. On this occasion they said that everyone should practice financial literacy. He said that awareness programs on financial literacy are conducted every year as per the instructions of Reserve Bank of India. He warned that every student should be aware of digital transactions.

### CHANGE OF NAME

In my Service records my daughter name was mentioned **SANGAM SAI SANHITHA** (Old Name), H.No.1-11-10, Weavers Colony, Jangaon Dist - 506 167, T.S., have changed my daughter name as **SANHITHA SANGAM** (New Name) D/o. **DAMODHAR KUMAR SANGAM**, Ex-Serviceman, ID No.TS-10-6903476, for all purposes.

**BANK OF BARODA, Charminar Branch, 22-7-294, 1st Floor, Nizambagh, Diwan Deodi, Hyderabad-500002. Ph: 7993316541, E-mail: charmi@bankofbaroda.co.in**

### ABRIDGED VEHICLE E-AUCTION NOTICE

In view of the default committed by the Borrowers mentioned below, Bank has repossessed/ seized the Hypothecated Motor Vehicle mentioned below in exercise of the powers conferred under Hypothecation Agreement executed by the parties and same is being auctioned on "AS IS WHERE IS & AS IS WHAT IS BASIS".

Name & Address of the Borrower/Loan Account No.: Mrs. Alavelli Sai Jyothi, W/o Alavelli Kaili Charan, 7-1-277, 41/C, HUDA Park Road, Near B.K Guda Park, Sanjeev Reddy Nagar, Hyderabad-500038, A/c No.0939060003740. Amount Dues: Total Dues: Rs.12,40,795/- Together with further interest thereon at contractual rate due from 10.11.2023 + Legal and other expenses. (Less Recovery if any)

A/c Name: NEW INTERMEDIARY ACCOUNT; A/c No.09390015181219; IFSC Code: BARBOCHARM (Fifth letter- ZERO); Name of Bank & Branch: BANK OF BARODA, CHARMINAR BRANCH.

Vehicle Auction through Online mode: <https://bob.auctiontiger.net/> Date/Day/Time of E-Auction: 03.04.2024, Wednesday, 12.00 PM to 4.00 PM Last date of submission of BID: 02.04.2024, Tuesday, before 4.00 P.M. The intending purchasers/bidders may inspect the Vehicle on or before 23.03.2024 during the time 10.30 A.M. to 4.00 P.M. (At parking Yard: Bright Securities Management Services Pvt. Ltd., Plot No.484, Road No.5A, Gopal Nagar, Kukatapally, Hyderabad-500072). For online Auction process please contact the Authorized Officer on Tel No.7993316541.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF E-AUCTION SALE:- 1. Bank of Baroda reserves the right to accept/reject any or all of the offer(s) or Bid (s) so received without assigning any reason thereof. 2. Bank of Baroda reserves the right to accept/reject/Postpone/Cancel the E-auction without assigning any reason thereof. 3. To the best of knowledge and inform on of the Authorised Officer, there is no encumbrance on the vehicle. However, the intending bidders should make their own independent inquiries regarding the encumbrances, title of vehicle & to inspect & satisfy themselves. (FOR DETAILED TERM AND CONDITIONS PLEASE REFER TO <https://bob.auctiontiger.net/>)

Date: 29-02-2024, Place: Hyderabad Sd/- Authorised Officer, Bank of Baroda



### Himachal Assembly Speaker disqualifies six Cong rebel MLAs

**Shimla, Feb 29 (IANS) :** In a major political attempt to save the Congress government in Himachal Pradesh, Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania on Thursday declared that the six rebel legislators cease to be members of the Assembly with immediate effect,

saying "the MLAs defied party whip to vote in favour of government on Financial Bill." He clarified that all six MLAs, who contested on the Congress symbol, attracted provisions of anti-defection law against themselves. "I declare that the six people cease to be members of the Himachal Pradesh Assembly with immediate effect," he told the media here. The order was pronounced by the Speaker on the petition of Parliamentary Affairs Minister Harsh Vardhan Chauhan, who sought the disqualification of six MLAs under the anti-defection law. They also voted against the party to support BJP's lone candidate for the Rajya Sabha. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu called Congress MLAs for a breakfast meeting here. Four

MLAs, including Vikramaditya Singh, have not reached the CM's residence. After the cross-voting by nine members, comprising three Independents and six Congress, there is a question mark over the survival of the Sukhvinder Sukhu-led government. The BJP has won the lone Rajya Sabha seat in Himachal Pradesh after six Congress MLAs cross-voted in the polls. The six Congress MLAs who faced action are Sudhir Sharma (Dharamsala) and Rajinder Rana (Sujanpur), both ministerial aspirants; Inder Dutt Lakhnpal (Badsar); Ravi Thakur (Lahaul-Spiti); Chaitanya Sharma (Gagret); and Devender Bhutto (Kutlehar).



### The chairperson and members of the governing body congratulated the Sirisilla Municipal Commissioner

**Rajanna Sirisilla, Feb 29 (TIM Bureau) :** D. Lavanya, who took charge as the new Commissioner of Sirisilla Municipal Corporation of Rajanna Sirisilla District, was welcomed and congratulated by the members of the Municipal Corporation under the leadership of Municipal Corporation President Jindam Kala Chakrapani. On this occasion Municipal Corporation President Jindam Kala Chakrapani said. As part of the transfers undertaken in the municipal department, D. who came as the new commissioner on transfer to Sirisilla Municipal Corporation. He said that Lavanya was welcomed and wished on behalf of the members of the governing body of Sirisilla Municipal Corporation on Thursday.

### FORM IV

Statement about ownership and other Particulars about newspaper **THE INDIAN MAIL DAILY** to be Published in the first issue every year after the last day of February 2024.

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- Names and Address and Individuals who own the news papers or Share holders holding more than one Percent of the total capital. : **B. Vinayaka Rao**

I **B. VINAYAKA RAO** hereby declare that the Particulars given above are true to the best of my Knowledge and belief .

Date : 01.03.2024

Sd/-  
Signature of Publishers

## Praful Patel quits as Rajya Sabha member, to start new 6-year term

**Mumbai, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Senior Nationalist Congress Party leader Praful Patel on Thursday quit as member of the Rajya Sabha, nearly four years ahead of the expiry of his current term. He was elected unopposed to the upper house in the biennial elections from Maharashtra last week and will soon start a fresh six-year term in April. When he was made the surprise NCP nominee - despite being a sitting RS member - Patel had stated that he would be quitting his current seat, to which he was elected in July 2022, after getting elected this time. Patel had cited certain "technical issues" for the decision, pertain-

ing to the ongoing political imbroglio vis-a-vis the NCP-Sharad Pawar and a disqualification plea filed by it after the vertical split in July 2023. A RS notification said this evening: "Shri Praful Patel, an elected Member of the Council of States (Rajya Sabha), representing the State of Maharashtra, resigned his seat in the Rajya Sabha and his resignation has been accepted by the Chairman, Rajya Sabha, wef the 27th of February, 2024." NCP President and Maharashtra Deputy CM Ajit Pawar had said that the vacancy arising out of Patel's resignation would also go to his party.



## Three opposition MLAs sit with BJP members in Bihar Assembly

**Patna, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Three opposition MLAs in Bihar, including two from the Congress, went over and sat with the BJP members inside the Assembly on Thursday. The development came during the budget session of the Assembly when Congress MLAs Sidhartha Saurav and Murari Gautam and RJD MLA Sangeeta Kumar went over to the BJP camp during the house proceedings on Tuesday. To recall, three RJD MLAs -- Chetan Anand, Neelam Devi

and Prahalad Yadav -- had left the party and joined the BJP during the no-confidence motion on February 12. Sidhartha Saurav was the one who did not go to Hyderabad before the no-confidence motion was moved earlier this month. When asked about sitting in the BJP camp, Saurav said that he is inspired by the policies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "I am inspired by the policies of PM Narendra Modi. He is

doing a lot of work in the country. Hence, I have decided to join the BJP," Saurav said. Following the development, Congress Legislative Party (CLP) leader Shakeel Ahmed Khan said: "Our party will take legal action against the two MLAs. They are traitors." Vijay Kumar Sinha, the Deputy Chief Minister of Bihar, said: "The RJD started horse-trading in Bihar. This is just the beginning.



## Inter-state baby trafficking ring busted in Delhi, newborn girl rescued

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** With the arrest of eight persons, including five women, the Delhi Police on Thursday said that it has busted an alleged inter-state human trafficking racket and rescued a newly-born girl child, around 10-15 days old. Police said that the gang members indulged in buying and selling new-born babies in different states of north India and the newly-born baby, rescued from them, was purchased from Punjab for Rs 50,000. The arrests came after a police control room (PCR) call was received on February 20 at Begumpur police station regarding the illegal sale and purchase of newborn babies in the area. "The police team immediately reached the given address to verify the facts and discovered that two women in the house were in possession of a newborn girl child aged about 10-15 days," Deputy Commissioner of Police, Rohini, G.S. Sidhu said.

## Woman, two daughters run over by train in TN

**Chennai, Feb 29 (IANS) :** A 35-year-old woman and her two young daughters died when they were run over by a train in Tamil Nadu's Ranipet district on Thursday after leaving their home following a domestic spat, police said. The

tragic incident occurred at the Walajah Road railway station and the deceased were identified as A. Vennila, 35, and her two daughters A. Jenusri, 5, and A. Dharnika, 3. Police said that on Tuesday morning, the Antyodaya Express train, proceeding towards Chennai, was

near the Walajah railway station, a woman was seen walking across the track with her children. All three were hit and run over by the train. Railway police and passengers immediately rushed to the spot.



## BJP nominee Mahajan wins lone RS seat in Cong-ruled Himachal

**Shimla, Feb 29 (IANS) :** BJP's Harsh Mahajan, a Congress rebel who was once known for his proximity to Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Sukhu, got elected to the Rajya Sabha on Thursday by defeating Congress nominee Abhishek Manu Singhvi amid reports of cross-voting by at least six ruling party legislators. Both the candidates secured 34 votes each in the 68-member House, including three Independent legislators who are believed to have voted in favour of the BJP. Mahajan was eventually declared the winner through a draw of lots. Adding salt to Congress' wounds, BJP leader and former Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur has demanded

the resignation of Chief Minister Sukhu, claiming that the Congress has been reduced to minority following its defeat in the Rajya Sabha polls. Cross-voting haunted the Congress-ruled Himachal Pradesh after the main opposition BJP made the battle for the lone Rajya Sabha seat in the state challenging by fielding a Congress rebel, who for over a decade played a crucial role in strengthening the party's organisational base at the grassroots. The BJP had accused the Congress of putting pressure on its legislators by issuing a whip to vote for the party candidate, Abhishek Manu Singhvi, who was facing the outsider's tag.



## Home Ministry extends ban on Jamaat-e-Islami-J&K for five more years

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Thursday extended the ban on Jamaat-e-Islami (Jammu and Kashmir) for five more years. The extension of ban reiterates government's commitment to zero tolerance policy against terrorism and crackdown on separatist forces in the Kashmir Valley. Home Minister Amit Shah, taking to X, said that government has banned the outfit for five more years and asserted that anyone threatening the security of nation will face ruthless measures.



## Raj minister accuses Ashok Gehlot of playing politics over rape incident

**Jaipur, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Rajasthan Health Minister Gajendra Singh Khimsar on Thursday accused former Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot of playing politics over an alleged rape victim. The woman was allegedly raped last year during the Congress rule in the state, when Gehlot also held the home portfolio. The accused, who was put behind bars, was released on bail after only two months, following which he started threatening the victim to withdraw the case.

## Delhi court reserves order on charges against former WFI chief in sexual harassment case

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** A Delhi court on Thursday reserved its order on framing of charges against BJP MP and former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh in an alleged sexual harassment case by six women wrestlers. Earlier this month, he had sought to be discharged in the case, citing delay in reporting the alleged offence and contradictions in the complainants' statements. Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Priyanka Rajpoot of Rouse Avenue Court heard arguments presented by the complainants, Delhi Police, and the accused,

including Vinod Tomar, former Assistant Secretary of WFI. The court has posted the pronouncement of order on March 15. During the proceedings, the complainants and police said that there was ample evidence to proceed with the trial against the accused individuals. The Delhi Police refuted the accused's argument that certain incidents occurred overseas and thus fell outside the jurisdiction of Delhi courts, contending that the alleged acts of sexual harassment, attributed to Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, both abroad and in India, including Delhi.



## Ministry sanctions Rs 718 cr for widening NH-59 in Odisha

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, said on Thursday that an allocation of Rs 718.26 crore has been sanctioned for the widening and strengthening of the Daringbadi Ghat section on National Highway 59 in Odisha, spanning Kandhamal and Ganjam districts.



## After 2 months in office, Maha's first woman DGP gets 2-year extension

**Mumbai, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Maharashtra's first woman Director General of Police Rashmi Shukla, who took charge on January 4, has

been granted a two-year extension of tenure till January 3, 2026, as per an official announcement here on Thursday.

## OPINIONmail



## FORMAL JOB GENERATION IN INDIA HIT HARD IN LAST 10 YEARS

The latest EPFO data released last week shows that formal job generation in India has been a casualty since 2018-19 when new EPF subscribers joining the EPF were 13.94 million but had fallen to 13.85 million in the year 2022-23. During this period there were great fluctuations showing that fewer decent jobs were created in informal sector and those created belonged to low category. If we look at the number of new members who joined and exited the EPF, it could be puzzling. In the year 2018-19 the number of workers exited from membership was 12.29 million since September 2017, while in 2022-23, this number was 13.36 million. This shows very large fluctuation in the formal job market of the country, and thereby the relatively more secure and covered under social security net were not so secure.

According to the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation's Net Payroll Data, the total number of EPF members were 13.85 million in the country while we have over 900 million people in working age population, out of whom only about 400 million are in actual jobs, which are counted as employed, and which included even those who had gotten 1 hour of paid jobs in a week. This presents a very frightening picture of the Indian job market. In 2022-23, a total of 77570 workers of less than 18 years of age became members of EPF, workers between the age of 18-21 were 3.2 million and between 22-25 were 3.6 million. It is to be noted that every year about 20 million people enter the job market. Obviously, the new job generation in formal sector is very unsatisfactory.

Moreover, the members of the EPFO are increasingly dissatisfied on account of their not getting enough financial security both in terms of their fund settlement claims, and the family pension they get. In 2022-23, EPFO rejected 34 per cent of the claims made by the subscribers, that is one in every three. It is a very high rate of rejection which has risen sharply from only 13 per cent in 2017-18. In 2018-19, EPFO rejected 18.2% of all final settlement claims made by its subscribers. This rose to 24.1% in 2019-20, 30.8% in 2020-21 and 35.2% in 2021-22.

It is a serious matter because EPFO is the largest state-run retirement fund with around 290 million workers under the scheme of which 68 million are active subscribers. In addition to this EPFO subscribers have issues with their pension fund also. It is only recently, the Union Ministry of Finance has turned down a request to increase the monthly minimum pension under the Employees Pension Scheme (EPS) from Rs 1000 to Rs 2000. The EPS is also handled under EPFO. There are only 7.55 million pensioners as per Annual Report 2022-23, which shows that only a fraction of India's workers are eligible under EPS, 3.64 per cent receiving pensions up to Rs 1000 per month, while 1.17 million receive Rs 1001-Rs 1500. Around 0.868 million pensioners receive pension between Rs 1501 and Rs 2000 per month and only 26,769 receive more than Rs 5000 per month. Department related Parliamentary standing committee had also found the pension amount too little.

All these show that apart from little new formal job generation, those who are in formal job under social security covers, are actually getting too little social security cover. Employment growth has been dismal as is also evident from a recent study by D TripathiRao of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Lucknow, prepared in collaboration with researchers from Birla Institute of Technology and Science, and Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare. It was aptly said in the paper that India's economy is witnessing a stagnating employment growth rate, weakening employment elasticity, slow structural transformation, and brewing structural problems in the country's labour market, such as low female labour force participation and rise in the unemployment rate.

The researchers have found after analysing the NSSO employment and unemployment survey, and Periodic Labour Force Survey of the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment that the economic growth, rather than creating more jobs, has resulted in the net labour displacement. The paper published in the Indian Journal of Labour Economics, asserted that the agricultural sector, though employing most youth, contributed low value-added to the overall economy, resulting in significant employment challenges.

(By Dr. Gyan Pathak)

EDITORIAL  
the indian mail

## Maryam Nawaz becomes Pakistan's first woman Chief Minister

Amid boycotts and delays, the Punjab Assembly on Monday elected PML-N's Maryam Nawaz as the first female Chief Minister of the province and Pakistan, media reported. "It is natural that when people are subject to victimisation the way I have been, they harbour hatred. I want to say today, that I do not seek revenge, nor do I have hatred for anyone," Maryam clarified. Maryam clinched an overwhelming victory with 220

votes against rival Rana Aftab Ahmed Khan of the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC), Dawn reported. In her an hour-and-a-half-long victory speech -- during which she held a frame of her late mother Kulsoom -- Maryam said that she was upset at the opposition boycott. "I wish they had been a part of the political and democratic process," she said. "If the opposition was present today, and if they had protested during my speech, I would have been happy," Maryam added. She thanked the opposition for "putting her through a struggle which has no

comparison," citing the numerous court cases, the imprisonment of her father and the death of her mother. "I want to give a message to the opposition: the doors of my chamber and heart will always remain open for them as they are for the members of my party," Maryam said. Initially, the SIC -- which is now home to the PTI-backed independent candidates who won the general election -- had nominated Mian Aslam Iqbal, an MPA-elect from Lahore, for the slot.



## SAUDI ARABIA IS SET FOR A TRANSFORMATION IN ITS ECONOMIC PROGRAMME

Saudi Arabia, a country in popular imagination of white caped sheikhs driving around in limousines in broad avenues lined with sky scraping condominiums is on the cusp of a change. It is grappling with the task of re-inventing its economy. It is going to be an uphill task. For the entire process involves steering it away from the dependence on oil that has been

part and parcel of its financial landscape. Re-inventing the economy includes the task of generating jobs for the youth two thirds of whom are under 35. Joblessness reached 15.4 per cent in the second half of 2020. The unemployment rate has declined but the concern persists. Saudis are taking low laid jobs which were once taken by the migrants but the higher end of the market still lacks opportunities for educated citizens. Its royal family and its fabulous landscape apart, what other unique selling point does Saudi Arabia possess? Attracting foreign firms and investors is of paramount importance in this regard.



## BOOSTER SHOT FOR KERALA LDF IN LOCAL BODY BYELECTIONS

The prophets of doom have ended up with egg on their faces. The Cassandras do not know where to rush for cover. Belying all dire predictions, the Left Democratic Front (LDF) has scored a morale-boosting victory in the local body byelections held in several dis-

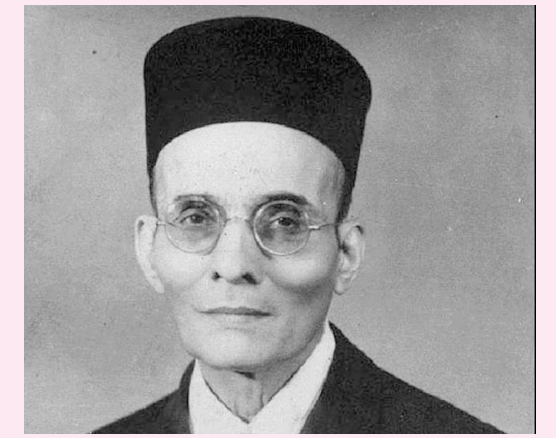
tricts on February 23. The victory must be particularly sweet and heart-warming for the LDF as it has come ahead of the upcoming and crucial Lok Sabha elections. In the by-elections held in 23 local body wards, both the LDF and the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) won 10 seats each.



## DONALD TRUMP FORGING AHEAD TO GET REPUBLICAN NOMINATION FOR NOVEMBER 5 PREZ POLL

On Saturday, former US President Donald Trump's win over his challenger, Nikki Haley, intensified the American presidential election race. With this win, Trump is moving toward a clear path to the Republican nomination. He

dominated the primaries so far, in which voters select a party's nominee who will compete in the presidential election scheduled in November this year. "On November 5, we'll get up here and say, 'Joe, you're fired! You're fired! Get out!'" Trump said after his South Carolina win. According to polls, the next presidential election on November 5 is expected to be close.



## V.D. Savarkar, an Independence era leader 'demonised' by Cong and 'eulogised' by BJP

February 26 marks the death anniversary of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a controversial and popular political figure of India's pre- and post-independence era. Often described as divisive and polarising figure of his time, by his detractors, Savarkar has earned a new-found prominence and relevance in Indian polity and the credit for this goes to Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

V.D. Savarkar has become a rallying point in today's politics, with both BJP and Congress training guns at each other over the former's Hindutva pitch in early 1990s and alleged capitulation before the Britishers.

## INDIA IS TOP GLOBALLY IN INTERNET SHUTDOWN OVERTAKING RUSSIA

For the past 10 days, Sonal Singh (name changed), a 20-year-old Engineering student from Ambala, located in the state of Haryana, India, has been overwhelmed with feelings of frustration and anxiety. She is anxiously waiting for news about the reinstatement of internet services in the northern part of India, which has experienced a shutdown ordered by the government of Haryana state due to the farmers' protest that is currently happening. Singh's lack of access to her Coursera or Engineering Converter App, an essential tool for Engineering students, has significantly hindered her exam preparation efforts. The government justifies the internet blackout as a measure to counter misinformation while tensions between farmers and police intensify, but experts and detractors are raising concerns that this widespread digital prohibition signals a disturbing move towards authoritarianism before the upcoming general election. Since February 13, farmers from Punjab and Haryana have persistently protested, demanding essential changes such as a statutory guarantee of minimum support prices (MSP) for their crops and alleviation from increasing agricultural debts.



## A quarter of Gaza's population one step away from famine : UN official

Tel Aviv, Feb 29 (IANS) : A senior aid official of a UN body has warned that a quarter of the population of the war-torn Gaza is one step away from an imminent famine. According to reports available from the United Nations' aid agencies in Gaza, Rajesh Rajasingham, director of coordination for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, has informed the UN Security Council on the danger awaiting the strip in the days to come. The senior UN aid official has informed the Security Council that nearly, 5,76,000 people in the Gaza Strip are facing hunger and famine. He has also warned that widespread famine could be almost inevitable if proper action was

not taken. He said that one in six children under 2 years of age in northern Gaza is suffering from acute malnutrition. The official added that all the 2.3 million people in the Palestinian enclave rely on "woefully inadequate" food aid to survive. The World Food Programme (WFP) Deputy Executive Director, Carl Skau, told the 15-member council that it was ready to swiftly expand and scale-up the operations if there is a ceasefire agreement. The WFP official has also informed that the risk of famine was being fueled by the inability to bring critical food supplies into Gaza in sufficient quantities.

## Turkish intelligence 'neutralises' senior member of Kurdish militia in Syria

Ankara, Feb 29 (IANS) : A senior member of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) was "neutralised" by Turkish intelligence in a cross-border raid in northern Syria, a media report said. The YPG, a militia group based in Syria, is seen by Turkey as a branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has waged a decades-long insurgency against Ankara and is designated as a terrorist group by Turkey, the US and the European Union, Xinhua news agency reported. Turkey's state-run TRT broadcaster identified the deceased militant as Emine Seyid Ahmed, also known as Azadi Derik, and said she was "neutralised" in the city of Qamishli without giving a date. It said she was in charge of missile supplies and attacks on Turkish forces and civilians in the region.



## Visegrad Group not to send troops to Ukraine : PMs

Prague, Feb 29 (IANS) : The Visegrad Group (V4) countries are not planning to send troops to Ukraine, their Prime Ministers (PMs) said here. Czech PM Petr Fiala, Poland's Donald Tusk, Slovakia's Robert Fico and Hungary's Viktor Orban made the statement on Thursday after a V4 leaders meeting, Xinhua news agency reported.

Despite their agreement on Ukraine's need for help, they are willing to offer assistance in different forms, Fiala said. According to Fiala, the Czech Republic and Poland are providing military aid to Ukraine, while Hungary and Slovakia are willing to offer humanitarian and financial aid. Fico called for an immediate

ceasefire and peace talks to solve the Ukraine crisis. Orban also called for peace talks as soon as possible. Moreover, while the V4 members agreed not to change EU founding treaties, they reached a consensus to adjust common agricultural policy to reduce bureaucracy and regulation, Fiala told reporters.

## Japan sees record population loss in 2023

Tokyo, Feb 29 (IANS) : Japan's population shrank with a record loss of 831,872 in 2023, as per preliminary data released by country's health ministry on Thursday. According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan, the number of newborns in Japan fell to a record low, down by 5.1 per cent to 758,631 in the reporting period, Xinhua news agency reported. The figure marked the eighth straight year of decline and has remained below the 800,000 mark since 2022.



## German Defence minister rules out sending troops to Ukraine

Vienna, Feb 29 (IANS) : German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius has ruled out sending German ground troops to Ukraine after French President Emmanuel Macron suggested a day before that European nations might do so. "Boots on the ground is not an option for the Federal Republic of Germany," Pistorius told a press conference after meeting with Austrian Defence Minister Klaudia Tanner in

Vienna on Thursday as quoted by Xinhua news agency report. Tanner also called Macron's remarks "a worrying signal". Macron said at a gathering of European leaders on Monday that while there was no official consensus among European leaders, the possibility of sending Western troops to Ukraine "should not be ruled out," adding that the West will do everything to ensure Russia does not win the ongoing war.



## Michigan voters go to polls for 2024 US presidential primary

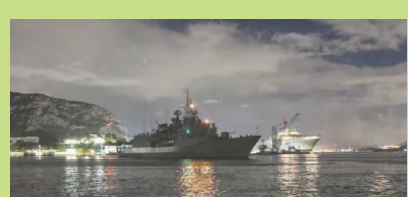
Washington, Feb 29 (IANS) : Voters went to the polls across Michigan, a battleground state, for the 2024 US presidential primary. In the Republican race, former US President Donald Trump, who remains undefeated so far this year, continues to be challenged by former US Ambassador to the United Nations and former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley, Xinhua news agency reported. Thursday's GOP primary will determine only a portion of how

Michigan's delegates will be awarded while the rest will be decided at a state party convention scheduled for Saturday. Trump has a clear lead over Haley in Michigan polls. US President Joe Biden does not have a major challenger in the Democratic primary, with Minnesota Congressman Dean Phillips polling only in single digits nationally, but some activists are urging Michigan Democrats to vote "uncommitted" in protest of the Biden administration's response to the conflict in Gaza. The economy is the top issue for

31 per cent of Michigan voters, followed by immigration, threats to democracy, healthcare, housing affordability, education, crime and abortion access, according to a new Emerson College Polling/The Hill survey. Trump narrowly flipped Michigan, also a Rust Belt state, in the 2016 presidential election, defeating Hillary Clinton by just 0.2 per cent. Four years later, Biden won by 2.8 per cent, bringing it back to the Democratic column.

## Pakistan court indicts Imran Khan, Bushra Bibi in graft case

Islamabad, Feb 29 (IANS) : An accountability court in Pakistan on Thursday indicted former prime minister and jailed PTI founder Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi in the Rs 50 million graft case. Accountability Court Judge Nasir Javed Rana, while framing charges against Imran Khan and his wife, asked them if they were guilty, which both of them denied.



## Greek frigate sails to join EU's Red Sea naval operation

Athens, Feb 29 (IANS) : A frigate of the Hellenic Navy was sailing as part of a European Union (EU) maritime security operation to protect free navigation in the Red Sea, the Greek government said. The vessel "Hydra" departed from the naval station of Salamina Island near Athens.



## Increasing med school admissions by 2,000 minimum necessary measure: South Korean President

Seoul, Feb 29 (IANS) : South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol on Thursday said the government's plan to raise the medical school enrollment quota by 2,000 is a "minimum necessary measure" aimed at addressing a shortage of doctors with no room for negotiation or compromise. Trainee doctors protesting the plan staged a mass walkout for an eighth day Tuesday, with around 9,000 resident and intern doctors leaving their workplaces as of Monday, accord-

ing to the government, Yonhap news agency reported. The vacuum left patients scrambling to find available hospitals, while one woman in her 80s died after no emergency room would take her for nearly an hour. "When the people are sick, if they are unable to receive timely and proper treatment, the state would not be fulfilling its constitutional duty," Yoon said during a meeting on cooperation between the central and local governments, held at the former presidential compound of Cheong Wa Dae. "Increasing the medical

school quota by 2,000 is a minimum necessary measure needed to fulfill that constitutional duty of the state," he said, citing a clause in the Constitution that stipulates the people's right to receive health protection from the state and the state's responsibility to provide it. "Our country currently faces a big shortage of doctors. In the near future, the situation will get more serious." Yoon said the medical reform policy is being pushed with an urgency that this is the last opportunity to save the people and local regions, referring to the government's argument that more doctors are needed to work in essential medical fields, such as high-risk surgeries, pediatrics, obstetrics and emergency medicine, as well as in rural areas. "This cannot and should not be a subject for negotiation or compromise," he said. Doctors' groups have fiercely objected to the plan, saying an increase in medical school admissions will only lower the quality of education without addressing the underlying issues of low compensation and high medical malpractice risks in the fields in question.



## SC directs NewsClick founder be examined by panel of AIIMS doctors

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** The Supreme Court on Thursday directed NewsClick founder Prabir Purkayastha be examined by a panel of doctors from AIIMS Delhi.

A bench, headed by Justice B.R. Gavai asked the Director, AIIMS to constitute a medical board and submit the report within a period of two weeks. The bench, also comprising Justice Sandeep Mehta, was hearing a special leave petition filed by Purkayastha against the decision of the Delhi High Court in October last year dismissing his plea challenging

arrest by Delhi Police and seeking quashing of FIR registered under the provisions of the UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act).

In an earlier hearing, the top court called for the report of the Medical Officer of the prison with regard to the health condition of Purkayastha.

However, senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the petitioner, doubted the correctness of the report given by prison authorities saying that it did not depict the true medical condition.



## Sandeshkhali crisis: AISF's Naushad Siddique released 8 hours after his arrest in Kolkata

**Kolkata, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Nearly eight hours after his arrest, Naushad Siddique, the lone All India Secular Front (AISF) legislator was released by Kolkata Police on Thursday evening.

Naushad Siddique was arrested on Tuesday morning as he tried to proceed towards trouble-ridden Sandeshkhali in North 24

Parganas district of West Bengal. After coming out of the police headquarters at Lalbazar in central Kolkata, he threatened to drag the city police authorities to court on charges of illegal arrest.

"The police's action was against my right to free movement, which is guaranteed by the Indian Constitution.

## CRPF, Haryana Police took away five-six legislators : Himachal CM

**Shimla, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Amid opposition BJP's assertion that the Congress government in Himachal Pradesh has lost majority in the House, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Sukhu claimed on Thursday that the CRPF and Haryana Police convoy took away five-six legislators.

"I can say that the people who have gone away are being contacted by their families... I urge them to contact their families. There is no need to worry," he told the media here. Chief Minister Sukhu said the manner in which the counting has begun with op-

position leaders threatening the polling officers again and again is not right for democracy.

"They had halted the counting for long. I urge the Himachal BJP unit's leaders to have patience, don't put pressure on people," Chief Minister Sukhu added.

Amid reports of cross-voting for the lone Rajya Sabha seat in the state, BJP's leader of opposition and former CM Jai Ram Thakur said, "The Budget will be passed on Wednesday. We will discuss the Budget and then we will see the situation. But I can see that the government has lost majority."

Asked if the state BJP will demand a floor test, Jai Ram Thakur



claimed that many Congress legislators are in touch with them. Media reports said that nine Congress MLAs may have cross-voted in favour of the BJP in the Rajya Sabha poll. Harsh Mahajan, BJP's Rajya Sabha candidate, said, "The statement of the Congress seems to show that they have lost their mind. Their government has failed, so

their MLAs and people are upset with them." The Congress has a comfortable majority of 40 in the 68-member House, while the BJP has 25 legislators. There are three Independent legislators, comprising two BJP rebels and one from the Congress, who have indicated support for the ruling party.



## Manipur assembly goes digital, all proceedings to be paperless

**Imphal, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh on Thursday launched the National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA) in the Manipur Assembly making the legislative activities paperless.

Speaking at the function, the Chief Minister said that one main objective for launching NeVA is to help (the Assembly) become more transparent, accessible, accountable and effective in promoting democracy.

"Now, legislatures have been transformed into Digital Houses. This will be beneficial to the economy and environment," he said. Singh said that the e-Assembly service is a prerequisite for

e-democracy, a stage where ICT (Information and Communication Technology) forms an integral part of democratic expression.

"It would be a big platform for the country's oneness by linking all legislatures of the country together in one platform," the Chief Minister said.

The Chief Minister said that the Indian government has identified 44 mission mode projects and that NeVA is one of the projects to facilitate paperless Assembly.

Singh also highlighted the Vahan Application of the Transport Department and Digitisation and e-Archiving of Manipur Gazette' which were launched on Monday. Addressing the function, Speaker

Thokchom Satyabrata Singh said that today we are living in a digital world and that NeVA aims at connecting legislatures of the Parliament and all Legislative Assemblies digitally.

The Speaker also spoke at length on the benefits of the House becoming paperless and the benefit it will have on the environment by minimising use of papers in the House. He added NeVA symbolises the nation's unwavering commitment to leverage technology for the enhancement of democracy and governance. "It is an end-to-end process-based platform, based on the principle One Nation, One Application," he said.

## HP: Congress has lost majority in House, says Jai Ram Thakur amid reports of cross-voting in RS poll

**Shimla, Feb 29 (IANS) :** The Congress government in Himachal Pradesh has lost the majority in the House, the Leader of Opposition (LoP) Jai Ram Thakur said on Thursday amid reports of cross-voting in the lone Rajya Sabha seat.

"The Budget will be passed on Thursday. We will discuss the Budget and then we will see the situation there. But I can see that the government has lost the majority," he said when asked if the state BJP will demand a Floor test. The LoP said that many Congress legislators are in touch with them. Media reports say nine Congress MLAs may have cross-voted in favour of the BJP in the Rajya Sabha poll.



## India, France army chiefs discuss ways to bolster bilateral cooperation

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** France's Chief of Army Staff General Pierre Schill on Thursday called on Indian Army chief General Manoj Pande and discussed ways to strengthen bilateral cooperation between the two armies. General Schill is on a three-day visit to India from February 27-29 to strengthen strategic collabo-

ration between the two nations across defence, security, and technology. "They exchanged ideas and held constructive discussions on various contemporary issues, including strengthening bilateral cooperation between the two armies," the Ministry of Defence said in a statement.



## NHRC notices Delhi chief secy after toddler mauled to death by stray dogs

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Days after a two-year-old girl died after a pack of stray dogs attacked her in the Dhobi Ghat area of New Delhi's Tughlaq Lane, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued notices to Delhi Chief Secretary, NDMC Commissioner and Police Commissioner, seeking action taken report within six weeks.

Taking cognizance of the media reports, the NHRC pointed out that the residents of the area have reportedly said that another child of the family had fallen victim to a similar attack a few months ago. They made several complaints to the authorities about the increasing number of stray dogs and incidents of attack on children but no action was taken.

## Temple woman accused of swindling funds in Mathura

**Mathura (UP), Feb 29 (IANS) :** The Mahant of the Thakur Radha Madhav Divya Desh, also known as Rangji temple, has lodged a complaint with the police that a woman allegedly misappropriated Rs 88 lakh of emergency fund.

An FIR on the matter was lodged in Vrindavan Kotwali on Thursday. The accused woman is associated with the temple trust. Mahant of the temple, Swami

Anantacharya, said in his complaint that he had made, Damayanti Ben Patel, the in-charge of the Krishna Bhakti Prachar Sangh linked to the temple located in Chaitanya Vihar, Vrindavan. All decisions regarding the Sangh were taken by Patel, he said in the FIR. Anantacharya has now accused the woman of defrauding him of Rs 88 lakh, which were deposited in a fixed deposit account in his and Patel's name.



12 Public Sector Banks of India



Valuations of PSU banks turning less attractive, says brokerage

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** The current benign credit environment has supported asset quality for PSU banks and early warning indicators give no reason to worry, Kotak Institutional Equities said in a report. Profitability has been further boosted by provision reversals and revenue recovery from bad loan resolutions. While these recoveries will likely hold up in FY2025E as well, a steady decline is inevitable thereby impacting profitability. Given the swift re-rating of valuation multiples, the brokerage has downgraded Canara Bank and PNB.

Bad loan recovery supporting revenues, but it will eventually decline, the report said. PSU banks currently carry a large pool of bad loans (Rs 10.6 trillion) across GNPA and technically written-off (TWO) accounts. This pool has served as a source of steady recoveries resulting in provision reversals as well as significant revenue contribution (across both interest income and non-interest income). While bad loan recoveries are unlikely to decline sharply in FY2025E, they will decline eventually as the pool of bad loans ages and declines.

CG Power and Industrial Solutions receives I-T demand of Rs 188 cr

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS):** CG Power and Industrial Solutions has received a demand for Rs 188.78 crore from the Income Tax Department in respect of the assessment year 2022-23. The company has received an assessment order dated February 27, 2024, received by the company on February 28, passed under 143(3) of the Income Tax Act, 1961, pertaining to the assessment year 2022-23. "The company is in the process of filing an appeal against the disallowances/additions made in the assessment order, and also file an application for rectification of the mistakes apparent in the assessment order. The company believes that it has a fair chance of succeeding in the appeal and the disallowances/additions made will be deleted," said CG Power and Industrial Solutions.



IndiaTech partners T9L to launch early-stage incubation programme for startups

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Leading startup incubator T9L and IndiaTech, which represents Indian startups and investors in the technology space, on Thursday announced the launch of an early-stage incubation programme for startups 'QUBE'. With an initial investment from several industry bodies and individuals, T9L QUBE plans to onboard 25 startups in its first cohort. "In collaboration with IndiaTech, T9L aims to utilise its proven methodologies and IndiaTech's extensive network and insights, offering critical support to startups during their most vulnerable stages," Fahad Moti Khan, CEO and co-founder, T9L, said in a statement. T9L QUBE leverages the startup studio model, where founders work hand-in-hand with a team of experts across product, growth, fundraising and technology, the company said.

The Startup Studio model is renowned for its playbook-based approach to generate and validate startup ideas, build them, and launch them into the market, it added. "The concept of incubation is fast undergoing a disruptive change in India and Incubator entrepreneurs are re-designing their offerings to not just merely nurture and support startups but also strive towards providing startup entrepreneurs," said Rameesh Kailasam, CEO, IndiaTech.

Airtel to lead tariff hikes for healthy valuations, UK award recognises India's rise : Sunil Mittal

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Sunil Bharti Mittal, who became the first Indian to be knighted by Britain's King Charles III, said on Thursday that Airtel will take the lead in raising telecom tariffs if market signals are perfect to keep valuations healthy, while ensuring better return on investments. Airtel Founder and Chairman said, "We have always said we need to go to Rs 300 ARPU (average revenue per user) from Rs 200 now." "Valuations need to be healthy.

The tariff needs to be suitable to give rewards to the shareholders and a decent return on capital," Mittal told NDTV Profit in an interview. "That has been woefully short." The company's ARPU grew 2.5 per cent sequentially to Rs 208 in the third quarter, with 7.4 million growth in its 4G subscribers. Airtel has spent about Rs 40,000 crore on the 5G spectrum and an equal amount on rolling out the network and more needs to be done, according to Mittal. He also said that Bharti Airtel-backed satellite internet company



OneWeb is aiming to reach remote regions and offer rates close to terrestrial telecom. "Our ground station is ready in Mehsana in

Gujarat and awaiting allocation of spectrum for satcom so that services can be launched".

PPBL demonstrates efficient resolution of customer issues within days

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** In the ever-evolving financial sector, Paytm Payments Bank Ltd. (PPBL) has shown a noteworthy commitment to customer satisfaction through the swift resolution of customer complaints. During the fiscal year that ended on March 31, 2023, PPBL encountered a notable increase in customer complaints, receiving 66,751 complaints compared to 26,692 the previous year. Despite the spike, the major-

ity of these complaints, particularly the 39,000 related to internet and mobile banking, along with 8,974 concerning account openings and operational issues, were efficiently resolved within a brief period of 5-6 days. This rapid response to customer grievances highlights PPBL's dedication to maintaining trust and reliability among its user base, without necessarily focusing on its vast scale of operations or its growth trajectory.



80% of Indian mid-market firms bullish on growth, create more jobs this year

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Driven by initiatives such as 'Make in India', ease of doing business and ongoing digital transformation, 80 per cent of Indian mid-market businesses maintain a positive economic outlook in the next 12 months -- up from 78 per cent in the first half of 2023 -- despite global economic sentiments showing signs of decline, a new report showed on Thursday. There is also a notable shift towards integrating advanced technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), with a staggering 72 per cent of Indian mid-market leaders foreseeing a surge in technology investments to leverage AI's potential, according to International Business Report (IBR), Grant Thornton's global survey of mid-market companies. "The bullish outlook extends beyond just profit expectations.

Indian innovation key to solving health, agriculture, climate issues : Bill Gates

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Indian innovations across the spectrum are fantastic and are the key to solving problems in the field of health, agriculture, gender and climate, Microsoft Co-founder and philanthropist, Bill Gates, said in the national Capital on Thursday. Gates, Co-Chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), who is on an India tour, was speaking at IIT-Delhi on innovations for public good. "I am looking at innovators in India that can help with all kinds of problems, starting with health, but also agriculture, gender and climate. "Indian innovation gets stronger all the time. It is a fascinating time and the need for innovation to deal with many different challenges is greater than ever.

But the pace of innovations is also rising to meet the challenge," he told the gathering. The tech mogul advised students to work towards "achieving social equality" along with making a financial impact in their future roles. "We have many problems in the world, and only by taking that point of view can we shape innovations to improve the world as much as possible," Gates said.



India's GDP growth surges to 8.4 per cent in Q3, 2023-24 growth rate pegged at robust 7.6 per cent

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** India's economy sprang a surprise with an 8.4 per cent surge in GDP growth during the third quarter (October-December), as a result of which the country's economic growth rate for the financial year 2023-24 is now estimated at a robust 7.6 per cent, figures released by the National Statistics Office on Thursday showed. The high growth rate of

8.4 per cent in the October-December quarter has been driven by a double-digit growth in manufacturing sector of 11.6 per cent, followed by a good growth rate of construction sector (9.5 per cent). "The Indian economy remained resilient with robust 7.6 per cent growth rate of GDP in FY 2023-24 over and above 7 per cent growth rate in FY 2022-23," the Ministry of Statistics said.



## Army inducts indigenously developed 46-metre long Modular Bridge

**New Delhi, 29 Feb (IANS) :** The Ministry of Defence on Thursday said that it has inducted indigenously developed 46-meter Modular Bridge into the army. The ministry said that the bridge is a mechanically launched single-span, fully decked 46-metre assault bridge. "The 46-metre long Modular Bridge has been indigenously designed and developed by DRDO. A total of 41 modular bridges at the cost of Rs 2,585 crore will be progressively inducted in the army over next four

years," the ministry said. On Thursday the bridging system was formally handed over to the Army in the presence of Chief of the Army Staff General Manoj Pande. The ministry said that each set of the 'Modular Bridge' consists of seven carrier vehicles based on 8x8 Heavy Mobility Vehicles and two launcher vehicles based on 10x10 Heavy Mobility Vehicles. "The bridge can be employed over various types of obstacles like canals and ditches with quick launching and retrieval capabilities.

The equipment is highly mobile, versatile, rugged and capable of keeping pace with wheeled and tracked mechanized vehicles," the ministry said. The modular bridges will replace the manually launched Medium Girder Bridges (MGB) which are currently being used by the army. The indigenously designed and manufactured Modular bridges shall have many advantages over the MGB such as increased span, less time for construction and mechanical launching with retrieval capability.



## GeM to end FY24 with sales of Rs 4 lakh cr to govt : Piyush Goyal

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** The Government e-Marketplace (GeM) is set to close the fiscal year ending March 2024 with sales of Rs 4 lakh crore to the government from the turnover of Rs 422 crore in its first year of operation, Union Minister of Commerce & Industry, Piyush Goyal, said on Thursday. Speaking at the 'Startup Mahakumbh' curtain-raiser event in the national capital, the Union minister said the GeM now has over 23,000 registered startups doing business with the government. GeM, created in

a record time of five months, facilitates online procurement of common use goods and services required by various government departments, organisations and PSUs. "The Government e-Marketplace is a startup itself. It started after 'Startup India'," the minister told the gathering. The government is geared up to organise the first-ever 'Startup Mahakumbh', a celebration of homegrown startups, at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi from March 18-20. The minister further said that youngsters coming out of colleges today are not job seekers but "want to be job creators". "This can-do spirit is what we will be reflecting at the 'Startup Mahakumbh'," Piyush Goyal mentioned to startup leaders and community at the event.

## TN Water Resources Minister lashes out against Andhra for allocating funds to build new check dam

**Chennai, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Tamil Nadu Water Resources Minister S. Duraimurugan on Thursday termed the allocation of funds by the Andhra Pradesh government for construction of a check dam across Palar river "anti-constitutional" and "against federal principles".

In a statement here, the senior DMK leader said that other than this, the act of the Andhra Pradesh government was disrespect of the Supreme Court as two suits were pending before the court regarding inter-state river dispute, and called on it not to move ahead with the proposal. The Andhra government had, in its budget for financial year 2024-25, allocated an amount of Rs 215 crore for the construction of a check dam across Palar river in its Kuppam district.

The farmers of northern Tamil Nadu had raised the issue before the Tamil Nadu government and asked it to immediately act to prevent the construction of the check dam as it would totally affect cultivation in the area.

Farmers of Vellore, Ranipet, and Tirupattur has raised the issue before the Tamil Nadu government.

Duraimurugan, in the statement, said that the Supreme Court, in its verdict dated February 16, 2018 on the Cauvery water dispute, had overtly stated that no structure should be constructed across an inter state river without the consent of the lower riparian states.

He said that the SC order had clearly said that the two inter state river agreements of 1892 and 1924 had neither any political arrangements nor touched any facet of sovereignty of the country. The minister also said that the government of Andhra Pradesh had violated the 1982 agreement and the Supreme Court's verdict. The Tamil Nadu government had filed a case in the Supreme Court against the Andhra Pradesh government on



February 6, 2006 when the latter attempted to build a reservoir without the consent of the lower riparian states, he added. He also said that another civil suit was filed against the Andhra government for increasing the height of the check dams in 2016.

Duraimurugan said that even after the two civil suits were pending before the Supreme Court, the Andhra government unilaterally tried to build a check dam across the Palar river and allocated funds for the project. He said that this would amount to contempt of court and not good for healthy relationships between the neighbouring states, and called upon the AP government to refrain from such activities in future.

## UP govt set to boost IT sector

**Lucknow, Feb 29 (IANS) :** With the aim to bring Uttar Pradesh at par with Bengaluru and Hyderabad in the field of technology, the Yogi Adityanath government is set to significantly invest in the IT sector, especially in the Data Centre Park and Artificial Intelligence. A government official said that several tech giants, such as NIDP Developers, Tata Technologies, STT Global Data Center, and Jackson Limited, have started to channel their investments in the state.

He said that through GBC 4.0, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had launched projects worth more than Rs 90,000 crores in the IT and electronics sector of the state as well. "This constitutes over 8 per cent of the total projects worth Rs 10 lakh crores implemented through the Ground Breaking Ceremony," the official said. He said that Yotta Data Services, under the prestigious Hiranandani Group, is investing Rs 30,000 crore to establish a high-capital data centre park, expected to generate employment for 2160 individuals.



## Higher educational institutions to conduct voter awareness activities : Edu Minister

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said on Thursday that all the higher educational institutions (HEIs) in the country will conduct voter awareness activities on their campuses from February 28 to March 6. "In pursuance of PM Narendra Modi's appeal, I have directed all the higher educational institutions to conduct comprehensive voter awareness activities on their campuses from February 28 to March 6," minister Pradhan said.

He said that PM Modi has given a clarion call to "our youth and first-time voters to exercise their franchise in large numbers". He added that these activities will "galvanise our Yuva Shakti, emphasise upon them the value of voting, making informed choices and participating in electoral processes for a more representative democracy". "I am sure the spirit of 'Mera Pehla Vote Desh Ke Liye' will motivate our first-time voters and youth to vote with pride," the minister said.



## BJP will do anything to win elections : Akhilesh

**Lucknow, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav, on Thursday, said that BJP can use all the tactics to win elections. "BJP will do everything possible for victory. Some of our leaders who want personal gains can go to the BJP," he said reacting to some SP MLAs having crossed voted in favour of BJP candidates.

## Universities in MP will not suffer due to lack of funds: CM Mohan Yadav

**Bhopal, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Thursday said improving higher education in Madhya Pradesh would be his government's top priority. Speaking at the inaugural session of a two-day seminar on India's New Education Policy-2020, organised at Bhopal, Yadav said the universities in Madhya Pradesh would not suffer due to lack of funds.

"If we register growth in all sectors, but fail to give quality education to our children, everything will be vain. Therefore, education is my top priority. I will make sure that not a single university in Madhya Pradesh suffers due to lack of funds," Yadav said. He added that high level research should be encouraged and there should be competition among the universities. "A healthy competition in research on different

subjects will encourage our students to compete with top universities of the country. I would suggest that we include private institutions as well," he added. Notably, before becoming Chief

Minister, Mohan Yadav served as higher education minister in his predecessor Shivraj Singh Chouhan's Cabinet and had made enormous reforms in the sector.







## UN to hold World Social Summit in 2025

**United Nations, Feb 29 (IANS) :** The UN General Assembly has adopted a resolution that decides to convene the World Social Summit in 2025. The summit aims to address the gaps and recommit to the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Program of Action and give

momentum to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, Xinhua news agency reported, citing the resolution which was adopted on Thursday. It requests the UN General Assembly president to appoint two co-facilitators -- one from a developing country and one from a developed country -- to facilitate the intergovernmental preparatory process leading up to the

summit, consisting of its modalities and outcome, which should be a short political declaration adopted by consensus. The resolution also requests the UN secretary-general to provide adequate support within existing resources to the intergovernmental preparatory process of the summit.

## Leaders from 180 nations gather in Nairobi for UN Environment Assembly

**Nairobi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Ministers of environment and other leaders from more than 180 nations convened in Nairobi on Thursday for the start of the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6), to be held till March 1. More than 7,000 delegates from 182 UN member states and more than 170 ministers have registered for UNEA-6, taking place under the theme 'effective, inclusive and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution'.



## Indian-origin banker quits high-paying job to serve as volunteer at UAE temple

**Dubai, Feb 29 (IANS) :** A 43-year-old Indian-origin investment banker quit his high-paying job in Dubai last year to serve as a full-time volunteer at the BAPS Abu Dhabi temple, which was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi earlier this month. Vishal Patel, a second-generation expat from Gujarat who was brought up in London, was working with the Dubai International Financial Centre and has previously held positions at prominent investment banks and hedge

funds, The Khaleej Times reported on Thursday. Vishal spoke of his close association with the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha since childhood, adding that their Mandir in London has been a guiding light in his life. "Supporting this (Abu Dhabi) Mandir allowed me to make a meaningful impact on society and engage in endeavours that contribute to the greater good. This opportunity was too significant to pass up," Vishal, who has been living in the UAE since 2016, told the daily.



## Hungarian Parliament approves Sweden's NATO bid

**Budapest, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Hungary's lawmakers have approved a bill on Sweden's bid to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Out of the 199 members of parliament (MP), 194 participated in the voting on Thursday, with 188 votes in favour and six against. The Hungarian Parliament voted on the bill on the first day of the spring session on Thursday, Xinhua news agency reported. "The Swedish-Hungarian military cooperation and Sweden's NATO accession strengthen Hungary's security," Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban said before the agenda of the Parliament. Elod Novak of the Opposition party Our Homeland was one of the six MPs who voted against it. "Let's veto Sweden's NATO accession," he said before the vote, urging the MPs to "veto the path that

leads to World War III". With Thursday's ratification, Hungary became the last of the 31 NATO member countries that approved Sweden's bid to join the military alliance, following the green light from the Turkish Parliament on January 23. Sweden will officially become the 32nd member of the alliance at its next summit in Washington DC in July. The bill still needs to be signed by the newly elected President of Hungary Tamas Sulyok to become law. The Hungarian Parliament's ratification was welcomed by Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson. Calling it "a historic day", Kristersson wrote on social media platform X that Sweden stands ready to shoulder its responsibility for Euro-Atlantic security.

## Hindu vote becomes a factor in US elections

**Washington, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Niraj Antani, a Republican running for US Congress, is aggressively projecting his Hindu faith. Bhavini Patel, a Democrat running for Congress, is battling allegations of courting Hindu nationalist donors. And Indian-descent donors are pressing the Biden-Harris campaign for a "Hindu page" in its 2024 campaign manifesto. The "Hindu Vote" appears to have become a factor in US politics. There is no rock solid count of Hindus in the US because

the US Census does not record religious affiliation in its surveys. But there are several estimates. Pew Research Center said 0.7 per cent of Americans were Hindu in 2015 and that their number is projected to grow to 4.8 million by 2050. Harvard Divinity School estimated their number to be 2.5 million in 2018. And some Hindu Americans put the number generously at 5 million, which, they concede, includes Sikhs and Jains. As crucial as their number is US politics, so is their ability to write big donation checks. Niraj Antani, an Ohio state law-

maker who is running in the Republican primary for a congressional seat, has frequently described himself as Hindu and posted this message on X, to mark the inauguration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya: "As the 1st Hindu American State Senator in Ohio history, today it was my privilege to do Darshan to Lord Ram at @BAPS Cincinnati Mandir to mark the opening of his Mandir in Ayodhya. As we celebrate this occasion, let us stand for religious freedom around the world. Jai Shri Ram!" His pinned post on X is an endorsement from the Hindu



American PAC. Bhavini Patel, a Democrat who is seeking to unseat the incumbent Democrat in a congressional race in Pennsylvania, is being attacked by her opponent for courting Hindu nationalist donors, as also for her unstinting support for Israel.

## UN wants strengthened, empowered Palestinian govt: Spokesman

**United Nations, Feb 29 (IANS) :** The United Nations (UN) wants to see a strengthened and empowered Palestinian government, a spokesman of the world body has said in response to the resignation of the government led by Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres takes note of Thursday's an-

nouncement by Shtayyeh that he handed his government's resignation to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, said Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for the UN chief. "A strengthened, empowered Palestinian government that can administer the whole of the occupied Palestinian territory is critical as part of a path to achieving the establishment of a fully independent, democratic,



contiguous, sovereign and viable Palestinian state, on the basis of the 1967 lines, of which Gaza is an integral part, which remains the only way to achieve a lasting peace," the spokesman was quoted as saying by Xinhua news agency.

## Mexican Foreign Minister urges US to regularise migrants' legal status

**Mexico City, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Highlighting the importance of Mexican migrant workers to the US economy, Mexican Foreign Minister Alicia Barcena has again urged Washington to regularise their legal status. Addressing a press conference, Alicia Barcena said Mexicans working in the US contribute over \$324 billion annually to the nation's economy in such essential sectors as agriculture, services and construction, Xinhua news agency reported. "The regularisation of Mexicans is not unprecedented. In 1986, 3 million Mexicans were regularised," she said. Mexico is requesting the US to make "a similar and fair gesture" to regularise undocumented Mexicans who have worked there for more than five years.



## India defends subsidies for poor fishermen at WTO talks

**Abu Dhabi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** India reiterated its long-held positions at the World Trade Organization (WTO) negotia-

tions on Thursday that responsible and sustainable fisheries is a practice ingrained in the ethos and practices of the country's large

and varied fishing community. India drove home the point that any comprehensive agreement on fisheries subsidies under the WTO ministerial negotiations should keep in mind the interests and welfare of the fishing community that depends on the marine resources for their livelihood and sustenance. India stressed that historically, while subsidies to the fisheries sector has led to over exploitation, subsidies are also vital for the developing countries and small economies to develop and diversify their fisheries sector as well as to protect the food security and livelihood security of their fishermen. India also pointed out that this negotiation is linked to the concept of sustainability and as such, any comprehensive agreement on fisheries subsidies should be built on the

principles of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC). It should also incorporate the provisions of the Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT) appropriately, as is the case for all WTO agreements. At the same time, for such an agreement to be effective and forceful in advancing the sustainability objectives, there is an urgent case for capturing non-specific fuel subsidies and transfer of fishing rights to corporate fishing under Government to Government (G2G) payments within the ambit of the disciplines. Equally important is the need to discipline subsidies given by the Distant Water Fishing Nations as proposed by India. India urged the members to introduce a moratorium on subsidies by Distant Water Fish-

ing Nations for fishing or fishing-related activities beyond their EEZs for a period of at least 25 years. India said the members should not lose sight of the harmful effects of subsidies for large-scale fishing on sustainable fishing and management of marine resources. India also explained that the current approaches for addressing Over Capacity and Over Fishing (OCOF) is deeply flawed. Since the members had agreed to using the affirmative determination approach for negotiating disciplines on the Overfished Pillar, there is no reason why the members should not use the same approach in relation to the OCOF Pillar.



### 'Unity, not victory our priority,' says Kumaraswamy on RS polls

**Bengaluru, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Former Karnataka Chief Minister and JD (S) State President H.D. Kumaraswamy on Thursday said that not winning the election but his party's top priority is to maintain unity among its cadre. "We need to show that our party cadre is united. Victory does not matter at this stage. We need to show unity over victory. The candidates have been fielded on these basis. Let us see who wins," the former Chief Minister said. BJP and JD-S fielded Kupendra Reddy as the fifth candidate even as the election is being held for four seats only. BJP and JD (S) claimed that they would get the votes of independent MLAs and some of the Congress party legislators as well. Sources said that the 222 MLAs out of 223 have cast their votes for the Rajya Sabha elections. BJP MLA from Yellapur seat Shivaram Hebbar had not turned out for the polling when this report was being filed. The BJP which already witnessed the cross voting by MLA S.T. Somashekar is crossing its fingers over the move by MLA Hebbar. Sources said that MLA Hebbar has maintained distance from the party for a long time.

### First state-wide estimation by Odisha govt puts tiger population at 30

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 29 (IANS) :** The number of tigers in the forests of Odisha has increased to 30, along with eight cubs, as per the first All Odisha Tiger Estimation (AOTE) 2023-2024 report, which also confirmed locating the cubs. Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik praised the sustained efforts of the state forest department resulting in a rise in the population of the tigers in the state. "Glad to share that the first All Odisha Tiger Estimation report has established the presence of 30 tigers and 8 cubs in the forests of #Odisha, up from 20 reported during 2022. #Similipal Tiger Reserve is now home to 27 tigers. Commend @ForestDeptt for its sustained effort to create a hospitable habitat for our national animal to flourish," CM Patnaik posted on his X account on Thursday. Expressing stern discontent over the figures depicted in the All-India Tiger Estimation (AITE) 2022 report, the state government had announced to hold an annual survey for tiger estimation in the state last year. "As per the All India Tiger Estimation (AITE) report of 2022, minimum 17 tigers were camera trapped in Odisha, which was largely confined to the Similipal Tiger Reserve.



### Pay old age pension even without Aadhaar cards: Allahabad HC

**Lucknow, Feb 29 (IANS) :** The Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court has directed the state government to pay old age pension to those petitioners who do not have Aadhaar cards and mobile phones, after verifying their genuineness through bank records. The order was passed by a division bench of Chief Justice Arun Bhansali and Justice A.R. Masoodi on a PIL petition filed by one Mohana and other elderly persons last year, seeking directives to restart their old age pension. "The available petitioners

would appear before the District Social Welfare Officer, Unnao on 29.02.2024 along with their Pass Books, accounts numbers whereof have been indicated or any other material to indicate that they were being paid the old age pension prior to its alleged stoppage. The officer may satisfy himself about the genuineness of the petitioners, however, he would not insist on production of mobile numbers/Aadhaar Cards and in case he comes to the conclusion about the genuineness of the petitioners and that they are not being paid old age pension, the same would be paid to them," the court said in its order on Thursday.

The petitioners claimed that they are not in possession of mobiles or Aadhaar cards on account of their financial status. Their counsel submitted that they are prepared to subject themselves to any kind of verification other than the said two requirements. Opposing the plea, the state counsel contended that no material had been produced to indicate that the old age pension was ever started. "Therefore, the petitioners have to establish that they were being paid pension which has been stopped," the state counsel added.



### Veteran Gujarat Congress leader Naran Rathwa and son join BJP

**Ahmedabad, Feb 29 (IANS) :** The Gujarat Congress suffered a setback on Thursday as its senior leader Naran Rathwa and his son Sangram Rathwa, joined the BJP along with a group of supporters. The political landscape is poised for further change as Kwanta Taluka panchayat chief, Pintu Rathwa, is also contemplating rejoining the BJP after being suspended by it earlier. On Thursday, the Rathwas visited the BJP's state headquarters, Shri Kamalam, where they engaged in discussions with Gordhan Zadafia, the Central Gujarat

incharge, before switching to the ruling party. Naran Rathwa, a prominent tribal leader with a tenure spanning several decades, has been a crucial figure for the Congress. His political journey includes being elected to the Lok Sabha five times from the tribal-dominated constituency of Chhota Udepur in 1989, 1991, 1996, 1998, and 2004, showcasing his deep-rooted influence and popularity in the region. Following his unsuccessful bids in subsequent elections, the Congress party nominated him to the Rajya Sabha in 2018, a term set to conclude in

April this year. His son, Sangram Rathwa, who has held the position of President of the Chhota Udepur municipality, also resigned from the primary membership of the Congress and chose to follow in his father's footsteps and join the BJP. This move comes at a critical juncture, just days ahead of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's anticipated visit to Gujarat's tribal belt with his 'Nyay Yatra', indicating potential strategic implications for the Congress party's influence in the region.



### 'Black day for Congress', Assam minister lashes out at grand old party for its stance on Muslim Marriage Act

**Guwahati, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Assam Cabinet minister Pijush Hazarika on Thursday criticised the Congress party over the debate on repealing Muslim Marriage Act in the state on the floor of the Assembly. According to Hazarika, "this was a black day for the Congress" as it opposed a government move to end child marriages in the state. Taking to his X handle, the minister wrote: "Today is a black day for the Congress in the Assam Assembly, they opposed a bill that prevented Qazis from registering

any marriage with underage girls. "A party - that prided itself on being 'liberal' - has been reduced to backing child marriages for its survival!" he added. Earlier on Thursday, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma asserted that the menace of child marriage will be eradicated from the state in the next two years. He said: "I will not let child marriage happen in the state. Till Himanta Biswa Sarma is alive here, child marriages can not happen in Assam."

### Singhvi 'thanks' Congress cross-voters after defeat in Himachal RS poll

**Shimla, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Congress candidate from Himachal Pradesh, Abhishek Manu Singhvi, who lost the Rajya Sabha poll to his BJP rival and Congress turncoat Harsh Mahajan on Thursday, owing to cross-voting, said that he would like to thank the nine MLAs responsible because they have taught him a lot about human nature. "They (the cross-voters) supped with us. So, I think we are bad judges of human character, they are obviously better judges of human character," he told the media here.

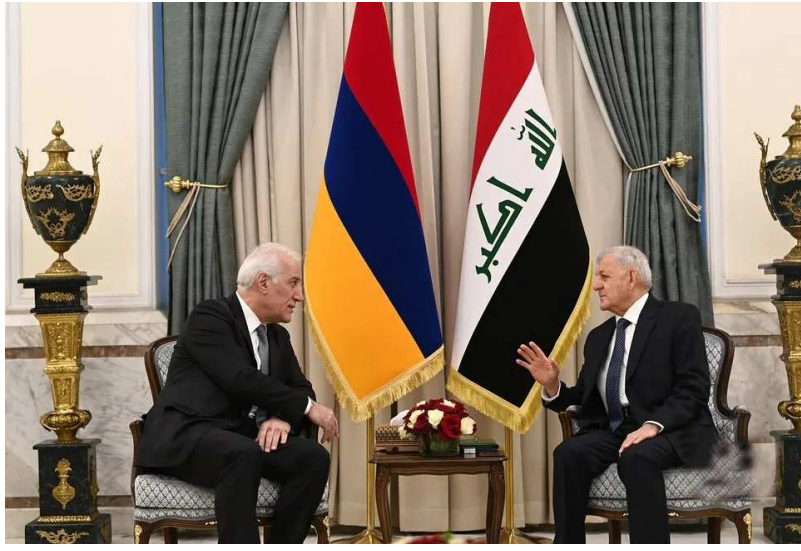


### Rising use of intravenous drug injection among students, youths matter of concern: Tripura CM

**Agartala, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Thursday expressed concern over the rising use of intravenous drug injections among students and youths with around 1,100 of them identified as IV drug users and HIV-positive in the state. Inaugurating the maternal and child health wing at Gomati District Hospital in southern Tripura, he said that after

Assam, the maximum drugs were seized and destroyed in Tripura. Reiterating the state government's mission to make Tripura as "drug free state", Saha, who also holds the Home, Health and Family Welfare portfolios, said that the state government has decided to set up eight drug de-addiction centres in eight districts to facilitate addicted youths becoming free from the menace. "Drugs smuggled from Myanmar are coming to Tripura

through Mizoram and Assam and going to Bangladesh through clandestine routes. Our security forces are always alert to curb the illegal drugs peddling," he said. Saha claimed that during the 35-year old regime of the Left parties, illicit cultivation of ganja (marijuana) flourished tremendously and earlier, they were not aware about the ganja cultivation in such a vast areas.



## Iraqi, Armenian presidents hold talks in Baghdad to boost ties

**Baghdad, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid and his Armenian counterpart Vahagn Khachaturyan met in Baghdad and discussed means to enhance bilateral ties in various aspects. A statement by the media office of the Iraqi presidency said on Thursday that the two leaders discussed ways to enhance bilateral relations and cooperation in various fields, including the economy, trade and investment, Xinhua news agency reported. During the meeting, Rashid stressed the importance of intensifying international efforts to "continue combating the threat of terrorist organisations and extrem-

ist ideology that target the security and lives of everyone without exception," the statement said. Rashid also commented on the tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan, stressing Iraq's position calling for dialogue and adopting political solutions to settle their differences. Later on Tuesday, the two Presidents held a joint conference, during which Rashid welcomed Khachaturyan and expressed his readiness to "work with his Armenian counterpart to make this visit an essential milestone in improving relations between the two countries".

## Thailand to see intense heat, less rainfall in summer

**Bangkok, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Thailand is set to brace for intense heat with projected rainfall 20 per cent below normal throughout the summer this year due to the El Nino weather pattern, according to the Thai Meteorological Department (TMD). The Southeast Asian country officially entered its hot season last week, which will continue until mid-May. Average daytime temperatures are expected to be 2 degrees Celsius higher than last year, while mercury in the north-eastern and northern regions could soar to a blistering

44.5 degrees, according to data recently released by the TMD. The kingdom's capital Bangkok reported alarming levels of heat index in some districts on Thursday, with the reading projected to reach dangerously high levels of up to 43.6 degrees Celsius on Wednesday before jumping to 47.5 degrees on Thursday, the TMD said in a statement as quoted by Xinhua news agency report. Governor Chadchart Sittipunt said the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) has taken preventive steps, including warning the public against rising temperatures, particularly the risk of heat stroke among vulnerable groups. "The main cause of heat stroke is



not just the high temperature but also the heat index. When the temperature is high and the humidity is also high, sweat does not evaporate from the body, leading to a state of dehydration and a high body temperature," Chadchart told a news briefing on Tuesday. He also noted the importance of

educating children about heat stroke prevention, and of putting up warning signs in schools about the heat and humidity. The BMA will also implement these measures in communities, especially for the sake of bedridden patients and the elderly.

## Israeli warplanes strike Hezbollah site in Lebanon after rocket barrage

**Jerusalem, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Israeli warplanes carried out a strike on a Hezbollah military site in Lebanon on Thursday, responding to a barrage of rockets launched by the armed group earlier in the day. The Israeli army confirmed that approximately 35 rockets were detected crossing the border from Lebanon into the vicinity of Mount Meron, northern Israel, targeting a military Aerial Control Unit. No injuries or damage have been reported, Xinhua news agency reported. In a subsequent operation, Israeli fighter jets struck multiple military sites and infrastructure in Hanniyeh, Jibchit, Baisariyeh, and Mansouri in southern Lebanon. Additionally, artillery fire was directed at the area of Yaroun to neutralize the source of the rocket attack, as stated in the official statement.



## Japanese man, who died after confession, confirmed as 1970s bombing fugitive

**Tokyo, Feb 29 (IANS) :** A Japanese man, who confessed to be a fugitive linked to a series of terrorist bombings in Japan during the 1970s before he died last month, was confirmed the suspect, local media reported on Thursday. Results from DNA tests run by Japanese law enforcement identified the dead man as the alleged bomber Satoshi Kirishima, national news agency Kyodo reported, citing an investigative source. The individual, identified as the alleged bomber Satoshi Kirishima, aged 70, disclosed his affiliation with the extremist group East Asia Anti-Japan Armed Front shortly before succumbing to illness in a hospital, Xinhua news agency reported. Suspecting Kirishima's involvement in four additional bombing incidents that occurred in 1975, police referred all five cases to prosecutors Tuesday on alleged violation of the explosives control act and suspicion of attempted murder, the report said. DNA tests conducted on the man and his relatives have also corroborated their familial relationship. Kirishima had long been wanted on suspicion that he planted and detonated a homemade bomb in a building in Tokyo's Ginza district on April 19, 1975. He was



placed on a nationwide wanted list the following month. Under the false name Hiroshi Uchida, he had worked for approximately four decades as an employee at a construction company in Fujisawa, Kanagawa Prefecture, near Tokyo, and had evaded law enforcement for 49 years as a fugitive, prompting ongoing investigations into his methods of evasion and potential assistance from others. Kirishima denied his connection to the specific incident that landed him on the wanted list but hinted at involvement in other bombings targeting a construction firm, Kyodo reported citing police interviews at the hospital.



## 120 patients need evacuation from Nasser Hospital in Gaza's Khan Younis: Ministry

**Gaza, Feb 29 (IANS) :** At least 120 patients needed to be evacuated from the Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Younis city in the southern Gaza Strip, the Gaza-based Health Ministry said. In a statement sent to Xinhua news agency, the Min-

istry said on Thursday, "We need to evacuate more than 120 patients from Nasser Medical Complex to other hospitals to receive medical care," citing the shutdown of various medical equipment due to Israeli strikes.

## Greece supports efforts for peace treaty between Armenia-Azerbaijan: PM

**Athens, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Greece supports all diplomatic efforts for a viable peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said here. "We always stand with international law, we are committed to respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity

of all countries. We believe in the strength of dialogue to resolve differences," he said on Thursday in a joint statement with his visiting Armenian counterpart, Nikol Pashinyan, after talks. "We hope that progress steps may be achieved during an upcoming meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the two countries."



## Egypt to establish new refugee camp, field hospital in Gaza : Media

**Cairo, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Egypt is setting up a third refugee camp in the Gaza Strip and preparing a field hospital for Palestinians displaced by Israeli attacks, media reported.

The camp will be in northern Deir el-Balah province in central Gaza, a Egyptian TV channel said on Thursday, citing a security source. It said Egypt had already finished its second camp in Khan Younis in southern Gaza, with 400 tents, toilets, water and electricity for up to 4,000 people, Xinhua news agency reported. Egypt aims to help thousands of Palestinians who fled their homes amid Israeli air strikes and artillery fire, the source said. Israel launched a major offensive against Hamas, the Islamist group that rules Gaza.

## Man shot dead in Australia, probe launched

**Sydney, Feb 29 (IANS) :** A man was shot dead on Thursday near Sydney's central business district after which a probe has been initiated. Emergency services were called to Stella Street in Fairfield Heights just after 8.30 a.m. local

time, New South Wales Police Force said in a statement. After reaching the spot, officers located a man unresponsive on the footpath, who was confirmed dead by paramedics, Xinhua news agency reported.



## PTI to stage nationwide protests against poll rigging in Pak

**Rawalpindi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Thursday announced staging country-wide protests with participation from other political parties on March 2 against the alleged rigging in the Pakistan general elections held on February 8, a media report said. PTI Secretary General Omar Ayub, who is also the party's

candidate for the Prime Minister's post, made the announcement after meeting PTI founder Imran Khan at Adiala jail, The News reported. Addressing a press conference in Rawalpindi, the politician lamented "large-scale" rigging in the polls, saying the PTI would stage country-wide protests against the "rigging" in polls alongside other



political parties, the report said. "Our seats were stolen with just a stroke of pen. The people gave the mandate to the former PTI chairman. Nation's mandate and our seats have been attacked," Ayub said. Ayub added that the party leaders have met the PTI founder, who is incarcerated at the prison, and he is "confident" of PTT's stance.



## Asian Games champ Palak wins gold on first day of Air Pistol trials

**Bhopal, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Reigning Asian Games champion Palak of Haryana, won the women's 10m air pistol T3 trial at the M.P. State Shooting Academy ranges here, as athletes took aim on the first day of the Air Pistol trials. Rajasthan shooter Amit Sharma, who had won the team silver at the ISSF Junior World Championships in Changwon, South Korea, last year, emerged victorious in the men's air pistol T3 event. Palak overcame a challenge from Maharashtra's Shital Preetam Desai, who had earlier topped qualification with a score of 581.

Palak shot 242 while Shital was second with 240.6. Stamatate Suruchi came third. Amit on the other hand shot 242.6 in the final to pip Army's Sharvan Kumar, who was 0.4 behind in the second spot with a score of 242.2. Olympian Gurpreet Singh, also from the Army, came third with 221.7. Sharvan was the best shooter in qualifying, tied with Haryana's Aditya Malra at 586. But, with 27x vis-a-vis Aditya's 20x was pipped for the top spot. Amit Sharma scored 584 and was placed third after the qualification.

## KL Rahul ruled out of Dharamshala Test; Bumrah returns : BCCI

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** India wicketkeeper batter KL Rahul, whose participation in the final Test was subject to fitness, has been ruled out of the fifth Test against England in Dharamshala, the BCCI said on Thursday. Rahul hasn't played after the first Test against England at Hyderabad. Ahead of the second Test at

Visakhapatnam, the BCCI had said in a statement that Rahul would be missing the match due to complaining of pain in right quadriceps. "The BCCI Medical Team is closely monitoring him and coordinating with specialists in London for further management of his issue," it said in a statement.



## 'Kuldeep Yadav deserves Grade A contract, but...,' says his childhood coach Kapil Dev Pandey

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Indian spinner Kuldeep Yadav's childhood coach, Kapil Dev Pandey, feels the Chinaman bowler deserves a Grade A annual contract considering his consistent performance on the international stage. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Wednesday unveiled the Annual Player Contracts for Team India (Senior Men) for

the 2023-24 season. Despite expectations of a significant raise for Kuldeep, he was only promoted to Grade B from Grade C. Kuldeep showcased his prowess during the 2023 World Cup in India, securing 15 wickets in 11 matches with an impressive economy rate of 4.45. Additionally, in 2023, he displayed his skills in nine T20Is, claiming 14 wickets. Speaking to IANS, his childhood coach Kapil said, "Kuldeep is perhaps one of the best in the world, at the moment. He should have been promoted to Grade A. He has been performing consistently well, but I am sure he will achieve that place soon." "Whatever, opportunity he is getting currently, he is delivering tremendously. I spoke to him a few days back and told him to keep up the spirit.



## Football : France's 2018 World Cup winner Paul Pogba banned for four years for doping

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** France's World Cup winner and current Juventus midfielder Paul Pogba has been banned from football for four years after failing a dope test that was conducted in August last year. The punishment was confirmed on Thursday by the Italian National Anti-Doping Tribunal. Pogba, a former Manchester United player, had failed a random dope test after playing an Italian Serie A match for Juventus. He tested positive for DHEA, a banned sub-

stance that boosts endogenous testosterone. His 'B' Sample was then counter-analysed, which also returned a positive result. Former general secretary of the All-India Football Federation (AIFF), Shaji Prabhakaran shared the news on X. "Paul Pogba has been suspended from football for four years after a failed anti-doping test. Pogba was initially handed a provisional suspension by NADO (the Italian Anti-Doping Organisation) in September after the failed test, which followed his side Juventus's 3-0 win at Udinese on August 20," he wrote. Soon after being provisionally sus-



## Germany beat Netherlands to qualify for Paris Olympics in women's football

**The Hague, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Germany secured a place at the 2024 Paris Olympics women's football event with a 2-0 win over the Netherlands in the UEFA Nations League's third-place play-off. Klara Buhl and Lea Schuller struck second-half goals to give Germany victory in Heerenveen and, with it, the bronze medal and Europe's third berth in the Olympic women's football tournament alongside Spain and hosts France. The third-place play-off in the Nations League was the last chance for the two teams to qualify for Paris 2024. Spain captured a ticket last Friday by defeating the Netherlands 3-0 in Seville in the semifinals of the tournament, while France, already assured an Olympic spot as the host, beat Germany 2-1. Following this win, Germany joins Spain, who clinched the Nations League title by defeating France 2-0, and the host nation France, as the three European representatives in the Olympic women's football tournament.

## 'If trials are only in the hands of WFI, and govt can't do anything then we won't participate in it', says Bajrang Punia

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Olympic bronze medallist Bajrang Punia on Thursday made it clear that they -- Vinesh Phogat, retired Sakshi Malik and other protesting wrestlers -- will not take part in the national trials announced by the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), till

the government intervene in the matter and provide a "proper solution". On Monday, the WFI has invited the protesting grapplers to participate in the trials in March to select the teams for two top Asian competitions, including the 2024 Paris Games Qualifiers in Kyrgyzstan. Speaking exclusively to IANS, Bajrang said, "We don't

know what is happening. Why is the government not doing anything? WFI is holding state elections, using government money, and holding trials despite getting suspended by the sports ministry. This is really disheartening. If trials are only in the hands of WFI (Wrestling Federation of India) and the government won't do any-

thing, then we will not go for the trials too." "He (Sanjay Singh) is making a mockery of all the rules and the government is not doing anything. This is bizarre. We need a proper solution to this." Earlier this month, the United World Wrestling (UWW) lifted the suspension of the Indian wrestling body with a condition that the three grapplers would be given fair chance and not be discriminated against for protesting against former national federation chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh.



## Tennis : Boulter upsets Haddad Maia; Pegula beats qualifier Niemeier to reach San Diego Open quarters

**San Diego (US), Feb 29 (IANS) :** British No.1 Katie Boulter stormed back from a set down to hand second seed Brazilian Beatriz Haddad Maia to advance to the quarterfinals at the San Diego Open. The Brit registered a 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 win over Maia Haddad

at the Barnes Tennis Center on Wednesday to reach her first quarterfinal at the WTA 500 level. The victory was world no 49 Boulter's second Top 20 win of the season, having defeated Pegula at the United Cup.

## 'Seniors' words helped me calm my nerves', says Indian women's hockey midfielder Sunelita Toppo

**New Delhi, Feb 29 (IANS) :** Sundergarh, the hockey hotbed in Odisha, has produced another fabulous player named Sunelita Toppo. The 16-year-old made her debut for the Indian women's team on February 3 against China in the FIH Hockey Pro League 2023/24.

