



Weather Forecast

HYDERABAD	VIJAYAWADA	TIRUPATHI
H 33° C L 25° C	H 35° C L 26° C	H 36° C L 26° C

Siddaramaiah and Somanna Clash Over Karnataka's Underperformance in Jal Jeevan Mission

TPN Correspondent

Karnataka, Feb 16

Karnataka's underperformance in the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) has sparked a war of words between Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and MoS V Somanna. Both leaders have blamed each other for the slow pace of the program, aimed at providing piped drinking water to rural households. Siddaramaiah accused the Central Government of failing to release adequate funds for the mission. He claimed that the Centre has only released Rs 11,760 crore out of its Rs 26,119 crore commitment, meeting just 45% of the pledged amount. In contrast, he said the Karnataka government has already disbursed Rs 20,442 crore, fulfilling 88.3% of its own commitment. Despite this, he argued, the Modi government continues to block Karnataka's rightful share of funds, which has hampered the state's progress in the mission.

Siddaramaiah further highlighted the financial discrepancies, stating that in the 2024-25 fiscal year, the Centre allocated Rs 3,804 crore but released only Rs 570 crore. On the other hand, Karnataka has released Rs 4,977 crore from its own budget against an allocation of Rs 7,652 crore. He criticized the Centre for not releasing further funds despite the state government's repeated requests. He also accused BJP leaders, including Somanna, of spreading misinformation about the mission.

In response, Somanna hit back by ques-



tioning the state's efficiency in executing the mission. He pointed to Karnataka's poor ranking, stating that the state is 22nd among 34 states and UTs in terms of JJM implementation. He claimed that Karnataka has achieved only 52.16% of its 2024-25 target, which is 15 lakh connections, while only managing 2,430 connections per day. To meet the target, Karnataka needs to achieve 9,744 connections daily, a gap Somanna pointed out as evidence of the state's inefficiency. Somanna argued that despite the allocation of substantial funds,



the pace of the program in Karnataka remains slow due to inefficiencies and delays in implementation. He urged the Siddaramaiah government to focus on accelerating the mission's progress.

The verbal exchange underscores the political divide in the state regarding the success of the Jal Jeevan Mission. Both leaders are at odds over the role of the Centre and the state government in ensuring timely execution of the scheme, which remains crucial for improving access to clean water in Karnataka's rural areas.



20,000 Reunited with Families Through Digital Lost and Found at Maha Kumbh

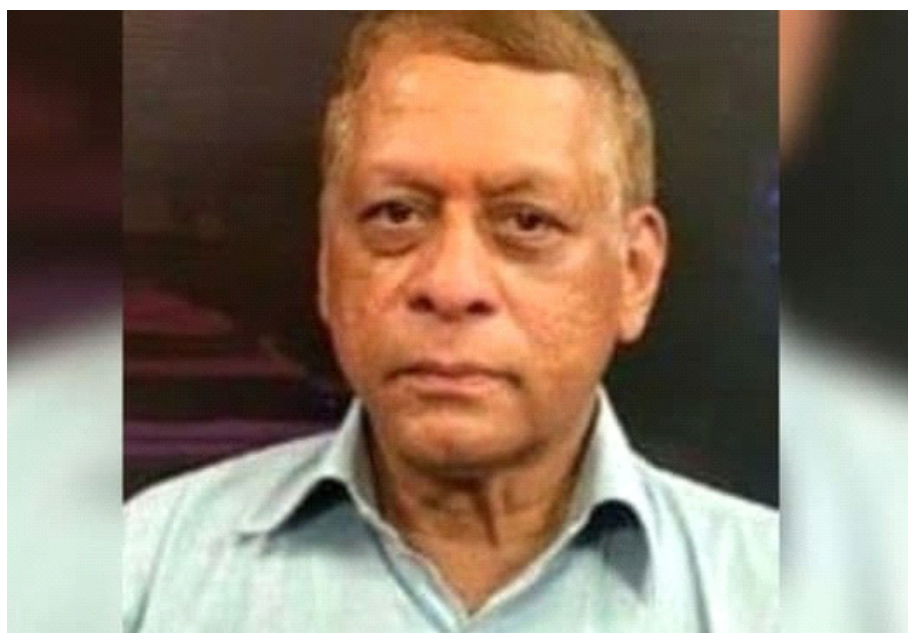
TPN Correspondent

Prayagraj, Feb 16

At the Maha Kumbh Mela in Uttar Pradesh, over 20,000 missing individuals were successfully reunited with their families through the state's Digital Lost and Found Centres, according to the Uttar Pradesh government. These centres, which feature advanced AI-based facial recognition, machine learning, and multilingual capabilities, played a vital role in helping pilgrims during the event. Notably, during the Mauni Amavasya bathing event, the centres helped

reunite 8,725 devotees with their families. Similarly, 598 devotees were traced and brought back to their families during the Markar Sankranti bathing event, while 813 pilgrims were reunited during Basant Panchami Amrit Snan. In addition to these major events, the centres have facilitated over 10,000 reunifications, with a significant portion involving women. Centres were inaugurated by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on December 7, 2024, to ensure smooth and hassle-free experiences for attendees.

Ex-Goa MLA Lavoo Mamledar Dies After Altercation with Auto Driver in Belagavi



TPN Correspondent

Belagavi, Feb 16

Former Goa MLA Lavoo Suryaji Mamledar, who represented the Ponda constituency from 2012 to 2017, tragically passed away after a physical altercation with an auto driver in Belagavi, Karnataka, on Saturday afternoon.

Mamledar, 69, was traveling to Belagavi and had checked into a hotel in Khade Bazar when the incident occurred. According to police, his car brushed against an autorickshaw while navigating a narrow curve. This led to a dispute with the auto driver, who demanded compensation for the damage. Mamledar refused to pay and proceeded towards his hotel.

However, the auto driver followed him to the hotel and allegedly attacked Mamledar outside his car. The former MLA collapsed shortly after the confrontation and was rushed to the government civil hospital, where he was declared dead. Belagavi City DCP Rohan Jagadeesh confirmed that the auto driver has been taken into custody, and authorities are investigating the

cause of Mamledar's death, including any potential underlying health conditions.

Lavoo Mamledar, a retired police officer, had served as an MLA from the Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party (MGP) in 2012 but lost his re-election bid in 2017. He was later expelled from MGP for anti-party activities and briefly joined the Trinamool Congress before switching to Congress in 2022. He contested the 2022 elections from the Marcain constituency but lost again. Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant expressed his sorrow on social media, remembering Mamledar for his dedicated service as both a police officer and a legislator. "The State administration is in close coordination with the local authorities in Belagavi to ensure a thorough investigation into the circumstances surrounding the incident," Sawant wrote.

Several political leaders, including Congress MLA Carlos Ferreira, also expressed condolences, describing Mamledar as a compassionate and empathetic individual, deeply respected by all who knew him.

US Plane Carrying 120 Indian Migrants to Land in Amritsar

A special flight carrying 120 illegal Indian immigrants, deported from the US, is scheduled to land in Amritsar around 10 pm on Saturday. This marks the second batch of deportees under the Trump administration's crackdown on illegal immigration.

Demographics of Deportees:

- Over 60 deportees are from Punjab.
- More than 30 hail from Haryana.
- The remaining deportees are from Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir.

A third flight, carrying 157 deportees, is expected to arrive in Amritsar on February 16, with 59 from Haryana, 52 from Punjab, and others from states like Gujarat.

Background on Deportation:

- The first deportation flight carrying 104 illegal Indian immigrants landed on February 5. Most of these individuals had entered the US illegally through risky routes and spent large amounts of money for their migration attempt.
- Many deportees expressed their desire for a better life for their families in the US, though they were caught at the border and faced restraints while being deported.



Political Reactions:

- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar clarified that the restraints on deportees were part of the US's standard operating procedures and that women and children were not restrained. He assured that India is engaging with the Trump administration to ensure deportees' proper treatment.
- Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann criticized the central government for choosing Amritsar as the

landing site for deported immigrants, while the BJP dismissed the issue as exaggerated.

■ Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the matter of illegal immigration and human trafficking, stating that those living illegally in the US would be returned to India. These deportations are stirring political controversy while drawing attention to the broader issues of illegal immigration and migration routes.

RBI Defends Credit Rating Firms' Access to Banking Data, Says No Consent Needed

TPN Correspondent

New Delhi, Feb 16

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has defended the practice of credit rating companies (CICs) collecting banking data, stating that these companies are legally empowered to access individuals' financial information for the purpose of creating credit scores. In a counter affidavit filed before the Supreme Court, the RBI argued that consent from borrowers is not necessary as per the Credit Information Companies (Regulation) Act, 2005 (CICR Act), which regulates such activities.



The case stemmed from a petition filed by Surya Prakash, a Bengaluru-based entrepreneur, who accused

CICs of illegally collecting financial data without proper consent. He further alleged that the collected data is sold to members of the CICs, violating privacy rights. Prakash's plea also claimed that the RBI and the Centre are involved in an "unholy alliance" with these firms, undermining citizens' rights. In response, the RBI asserted that the CICR Act was specifically enacted to prevent the accumulation of non-performing assets (NPAs) in the banking sector by enabling lenders to access credit information for informed decision-making.

Karnataka State Receives Rs 10.27 Lakh Crore in Investment Proposals at Investors' Summit

TPN Correspondent
Bengaluru, Feb 16

Karnataka has secured investment proposals worth Rs 10.27 lakh crore during the three-day **Invest Karnataka summit** held in Bengaluru. The state is aiming to convert at least 70% of these commitments into tangible projects over the next two years, which is expected to generate over six lakh jobs.

At the close of the summit, **MB Patil**, Karnataka's Minister for Large and Medium Scale Industries, announced that 45% of the total proposed investments are directed toward **North Karnataka**, aligning with the government's push for regional economic balance. Notably, nearly 75% of the proposals are aimed at areas outside Bengaluru, reinforcing the state's focus on decentralizing growth.

The total investment comprises Rs 4.03 lakh crore from publicly announced commitments and Rs 6.23 lakh crore from MoUs signed during the summit. A large portion of the investments is geared toward the **renewable energy sector**, which accounts for 41% of the



total proposals, followed by manufacturing at 25%. Other sectors include infrastructure, logistics, and startups. Some of the key investments announced include **JSW Group's** Rs 1.2 lakh crore in renewable energy, cement, and steel, and **Baldota Steel & Power Limited's** Rs 54,000 crore for an integrated steel plant. The **semiconductor industry** received a boost with **Lam Research's** Rs 10,000 crore commitment to manufacturing and R&D. In the **automotive sector**, **Volvo** announced a Rs 1,400 crore investment

in electric truck manufacturing, while **Honda** committed Rs 600 crore for electric two-wheeler production. **Samvardhana Motherson** and **Tata Advanced Systems Limited (TASL)** also made significant investments in manufacturing and assembly units.

The **renewable energy** sector saw further commitments, such as **Hero Future Energies' Rs 22,200 crore** for green energy and **Mahindra Susten's Rs 36,000 crore** for green energy and tourism. Additionally, **Suzlon Energy** pledged Rs 21,950 crore for wind power projects, and **Emmvee Energy** committed Rs 15,000 crore for solar photovoltaic manufacturing. **Logistics and industrial parks** also saw significant investments, with **ESR Advisers** planning a Rs 2,500 crore expansion and **TVS Motor Company** earmarking Rs 2,000 crore for R&D. The **food processing sector** received investments from **Balaji Wafers** and **Wings Vitera**, amounting to Rs 550 crore and Rs 350 crore, respectively.

These announcements signal a robust trajectory for Karnataka's economic development in the coming years.



Emphasis on Enforcing Child Protection Policy in Karnataka Schools

TPN Correspondent
Karnataka, Feb 16

Shekhargouda Ramatnal, a member of the **Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR)**, has issued a strong warning to officials regarding any lapses in the implementation of the **Right to Education (RTE) Act** of 2009 and the **Child Protection Policy**. Speaking at a review meeting in **Dharwad** on **February 13**, Ramatnal emphasized that such lapses would not be tolerated and that the Commission would take necessary action against any shortcomings in enforcing these policies. He underscored the importance of ensuring that the **Child Protection Policy** is fully implement-

ed in every school across the state to safeguard children's rights. The policy is designed to provide a safe and supportive environment for students, ensuring their well-being both inside and outside the classroom. Ramatnal's warning comes as part of the ongoing efforts to strengthen child protection measures in educational institutions. The **RTE Act** mandates free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14, while the **Child Protection Policy** aims to prevent abuse and exploitation in schools. The **KSCPCR** is committed to ensuring these laws are rigorously followed, and will take appropriate steps if schools fail to comply.

Indian Railways to Introduce Train Connectivity to Bengaluru Airport, Announces Ashwini Vaishnav

TPN Correspondent
Bengaluru, Feb 16

Railway Minister **Ashwini Vaishnav** announced on Saturday that Indian Railways will soon provide train connectivity to **Kempegowda International Airport**, Bengaluru, enhancing the city's already diverse travel options. The airport is currently accessible via metro rail, road, and the suburban railway project managed by the Rail Infrastructure Development Company (**K-RIDE**). Vaishnav highlighted that while the metro, road, and **K-RIDE** services are under development to improve urban rail connectivity, the addition of a dedicated train service to the airport will provide a much-needed alternative for travelers.

Addressing reporters, Vaishnav explained that while there are technical challenges to overcome—particularly the construction of a rail flyover—the Railway team is actively working on resolving them. During a previous visit to Bengaluru, Vaishnav experienced a 40-45 minute train ride from the airport to the city, which he described as comfortable. However, the need for infrastructure adjustments, including the flyover,



was noted as a hurdle. The **K-RIDE** project, a joint venture between the Center and the state, is focused on enhancing Bengaluru's urban rail network. With the new railway connectivity, Vaishnav said, travelers will soon have another convenient option to reach the airport, complementing the ongoing developments in metro and road transport.

Karnataka State Competes Globally for Investment, Says DK Shivakumar

- **Invest Karnataka 2025 reflects state's economic strength, says DK Shivakumar**
- **New industrial and tourism policies encourage regional investment**
- **Rs 10.27 lakh crore investments committed during the summit**



TPN Correspondent
Karnataka, Feb 16

At the conclusion of **Invest Karnataka 2025**, Deputy Chief Minister **DK Shivakumar** emphasized that Karnataka competes for global investment, not with other states in India. He made these remarks during the summit's award ceremony, highlighting the state's economic strength and its focus on attracting international businesses. "We are not competing with states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana, or Gujarat," Shivakumar stated. "Karnataka and Bengaluru are

competing on the global stage, which is our true strength." He emphasized the importance of investing in Karnataka for both businesses and the nation, noting the state's push for development in regions outside of Bengaluru, particularly in **aerospace** and **MSMEs** (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises). Shivakumar reflected on the historical industrial growth in Karnataka, citing industries established during **Jawaharlal Nehru's tenure** that have now become major global corporations. He further praised the state's new

industrial policies, which encourage investment across the state, not just in Bengaluru. The new **tourism policy**, aimed at developing 300 km of coastal zone and preserving historic sites, was also highlighted.

Karnataka's economic efforts were showcased with the announcement that the summit had secured investments worth **Rs 10.27 lakh crore**, with **Rs 4.3 lakh crore** confirmed and signed agreements for **Rs 6 lakh crore**. Shivakumar pointed out that the state's strong policies and business environment have attracted significant investments, including **Foxconn**, which will soon start operations in **Doddaballapur**, creating around 40,000 jobs.

The Deputy Chief Minister also discussed the state's leadership in **aerospace** and the **energy sector**, mentioning how policies like **One Nation One Grid** and **Karnataka's EV (Electric Vehicle) and energy policy** are serving as models for other states. He expressed confidence that these initiatives would continue to foster growth and attract global investors.

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RBI Defends Credit Rating Firms' Access to Banking Data, Says No Consent Needed

The RBI explained that the law permits CICs to collect, store, process, and share credit information without needing explicit consent from individuals. The RBI's counter affidavit also emphasized that four CICs — **TransUnion CIBIL**, **Experian**, **Equifax**, and **CRIF High Mark** — have been registered to collect and disseminate credit information. Furthermore, it highlighted safeguards in place to protect users' data. The RBI stated that CICs must maintain the confidentiality of the information, providing it only to authorized users. Any unauthorized disclosure could result in fines of up to Rs 1 crore. Another point raised by **Prakash's** petition was the retention period for credit data. The petitioner claimed that CICs were storing data beyond the legally mandated 7-year period, infringing on privacy rights. However, the RBI clarified that the 7-year retention is the minimum requirement, and there is no upper limit specified in the **CICR Act** for how long the data can be kept. On the issue of financial discrimination, where CICs generate credit scores and classify individuals as "creditworthy" or not, the RBI dismissed these concerns as baseless, stating that credit scores are not discriminatory but rather a tool to help lenders assess financial reliability. The case is slated for further hearing by the Supreme Court on February 17, with **K Parameswar** appointed as *amicus curiae* to assist in the matter.

Jayalalithaa's Multi-Crore Assets, Jewels Returned to Tamil Nadu Government

TPN Correspondent
Bengaluru, Feb 16

In a significant development, a special court in Bengaluru has ordered the handover of former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister **Jayalalithaa's** assets, including gold ornaments and properties worth thousands of crores, to the Tamil Nadu government. This comes after the Supreme Court upheld her conviction in the disproportionate assets case.

On February 15, 2025, Special Court Judge **H.A. Mohan** issued an order to return 1606 items belonging to **Jayalalithaa**, including a gold crown, gold sword, watches, and a gold dabu, along with 27 kilograms of gold and diamond jewelry. These valuables, along with old currency notes worth ₹2,20,384, bank fixed deposits worth ₹10.18 crore, and a luxury bus, were previously held



in custody by the Bengaluru court for decades. Under strict police security, the Home Department officials from Tamil Nadu transport-

ed the jewelry back to the state. In addition to the jewels, the court has directed that 1526 acres of land across sever-

al Tamil Nadu districts, including Chennai, Thanjavur, and Kanchipuram, be reserved for public use instead of auctioned off. These lands can either be distributed to the poor or sold in a public auction, with the proceeds earmarked for public welfare, including rural infrastructure, education, and healthcare. The court also ruled that the gold ornaments should be sold to the Reserve Bank of India, with the proceeds benefiting the people of Tamil Nadu. Moreover, the convicts, including **Sasikala**, paid a fine of ₹20 crore, of which ₹13 crore was allocated to the Karnataka government as litigation fees. This handover of assets marks the culmination of a lengthy legal process, with **Jayalalithaa's** once massive personal fortune now being repurposed for the public good in Tamil Nadu.

Karnataka Court Rejects Bail Plea of Haryana Man Accused in Telangana Businessman's Murder



TPN Correspondent
Bengaluru, Feb 16

A district court in Kodagu, Karnataka, has rejected the bail plea of Ankur Rana, a 32-year-old driver from Haryana, accused of conspiring to murder Telangana businessman Ramesh Kumar. Rana is alleged to have collaborated with Kumar's estranged wife and her boyfriend in the gruesome killing, which took place in October 2024. Rana, along with Panthalu Niharika alias Nikita, Kumar's 29-year-old estranged wife, and her boyfriend Mai Reddy Nikhil, 28, was arrested following the discovery of Kumar's semi-burnt body in a private coffee estate in Suntikoppa, Kodagu. Kumar's body was found on October 8, 2024, nearly 12 days after the crime. The investigation revealed that the murder was meticulously planned by Niharika, who sought to gain access to a property worth Rs 8 crore, which her husband had not shared with her. The police probe showed that Niharika and Rana,

who had met in prison in 2021, orchestrated the murder after Niharika lured Kumar to a meeting on October 4. Rana allegedly strangled Kumar in a car on the outskirts of Hyderabad before transporting the body over 850 km to Kodagu in a Mercedes Benz loaned to Kumar by a friend. During the investigation, Rana escaped from police custody in October but was later re-arrested in Jaipur, Rajasthan, in November 2024. The court cited his previous escape from custody as one of the reasons for denying bail. The court also emphasized the severity of the crime and Rana's apparent disregard for the law. The case has also uncovered Niharika's criminal past, including her involvement in honey-trapping schemes targeting software engineers in Bengaluru, further complicating the investigation. Rana's role in the crime, along with Niharika's actions, highlights the disturbing lengths to which the conspirators went to carry out the murder.



Bengaluru Cops Catch Elusive Thief Who 'Ghosted' Them for Years

TPN Correspondent
Bengaluru, Feb 16

In a gripping turn of events, Bengaluru police have finally caught a thief who had been eluding them for nearly six years, leaving only fingerprints behind at multiple crime scenes. The burglar, who operated between 2010 and 2016, successfully broke into houses and made off with valuables, particularly gold, in just 10-15 minutes. Despite repeated collection of his fingerprints, investigators couldn't make any headway, as the prints failed to match any known records. The breakthrough came in 2016, when a CCTV camera captured footage of the suspect entering a house in Bengaluru's Vinayanagar. The police, led by ACP S K Umesh, circulated the visuals among officers and informants, but the case went cold for another three months until a keen-eyed constable, Sadiq Pasha, spotted a man resembling the suspect. His quick thinking led to a chase, culminating in the suspect's capture while attempting

another theft. The thief, identified as Talapad Navaganbhai alias Shankar, hailed from Ode village in Gujarat's Anand district. Living in Bengaluru since 2007 with his second wife, Shankar had been melting and recasting stolen gold at a foundry he had set up in his residence. Investigators also uncovered his ties to Gujarat, prompting a team to travel there to recover the stolen goods. To their surprise, Shankar was treated as a respected elder in his village, where he had even built a temple for his father. Despite his community's reverence, Shankar's criminal activities caught up with him, revealing a man who lived a double life. His arrest marked the end of a years-long pursuit and was a testament to the dedication of Bengaluru's police officers, who refused to give up on a case that had seemed unsolvable. The case serves as a reminder of the persistence needed in solving complex crimes, no matter how elusive the criminal may seem.

Rapido to Launch Women-Only 'Pink' Bike Fleet in Karnataka, Empowering 25,000 Women



TPN Correspondent
Karnataka, Feb 16

Rapido, the popular ride-hailing platform, is set to introduce its 'Pink Rapido' fleet in Karnataka by the end of this year. This new initiative will offer women-driven bike taxi services, exclusively for women passengers. Co-founder Pavan Guntupalli unveiled the project at the 'Global Investment Summit' on Friday, emphasizing the company's commitment to empowering women within the mobility sector. Guntupalli explained that Rapido aims to create 25,000 job opportunities for women, empowering them as bike captains. "Our goal is to provide a secure and trustworthy transportation option for

women. If a woman can travel safely with a trusted driver and reach her destination without worry, that will be our true success," said Guntupalli. He also highlighted that the initiative offers more than just employment—it focuses on providing a safe and supportive work environment for women. The project aims to include women from across Karnataka, including those from smaller towns and cities, which make up 35% of the workforce. Rapido's 'Pink Rapido' fleet will focus on creating job opportunities for women with diverse skill sets, ensuring that even women without advanced education or professional experience can participate. Rapido's new venture not only strives to empower women but also aims to enhance safety and inclusivity in the local transportation sector.

Mangaluru City Corporation Rewards SSLC Toppers, Kambala Organizers, and Promotes Yakshagana

TPN Correspondent
Mangaluru, Feb 16

The Mangaluru City Corporation (MCC) held a special ceremony on Saturday at the Mangala council hall to distribute incentives to various groups, including SSLC toppers, Kambala organizers, and a national-level athlete, as part of the initiatives announced in the 2024-25 MCC budget. Mayor Manoj Kumar presented checks to 45 SSLC students who scored over 90% marks, under the 'Jnana Siri Yojane.' A total of Rs 2.25 lakh was awarded to these students, recognizing their exceptional academic achievements, including Shrivya, who secured 92% in the Kannada medium. In line with the budget announcements, the Patla Foundation, which has been providing free Yakshagana training to government school students within the city limits, received an incentive of Rs 10 lakh under the "Yakshaganam-Vishwaganam" scheme. The initiative supports the preservation and promotion of this traditional art form. Ayush R Devadiga, a

national-level sprinter from Canara College, was also honored with an incentive of Rs 50,000 for his achievements in athletics. Additionally, Kambala organizers in the city were rewarded for their contributions to the traditional sport. Two Kambala events, Jaya-Vijaya Kambala at Jeppinamogaru and Sankupoonja-Devupoonja Jodukare Kambala at Thiruvail, each received Rs 2.5 lakh to further support the popular sport. Mayor Manoj Kumar also launched 'Sibandhi Kutumba Mithra,' a health insurance scheme offering coverage of up to Rs 5 lakh for MCC employees and their families. The initiative is aimed at providing comprehensive healthcare to employees, marking a significant step towards their welfare. Chief Whip Premananda Shetty highlighted that one percent of the revenue generated by the MCC is allocated towards public welfare, reinforcing the corporation's commitment to both infrastructure and people-friendly initiatives.

Cyber Threats Can Disrupt at Every Level, Warns Karnataka IT Director at 'CyberShield Mysuru' Launch

TPN Correspondent
Mysuru, Feb 16

Cybersecurity remains a critical concern at every level of society, and proactive measures are needed to safeguard against potential threats, emphasized H.V. Darshan, Director of the Department of Electronics, IT, BT, and Science & Technology, Karnataka government. Speaking at the launch of the 'Cyberthreat Report' during the CyberShield Mysuru event on Saturday, Darshan underscored the importance of investing in cybersecurity and building resilience. The event, organized by the Mysuru-based Cyberverse Foundation in partnership with the Data Security Council of India (DSCI) and the National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM), marked a significant step in advancing cybersecurity initiatives. Darshan stressed that achieving a secure digital ecosystem requires collaborative efforts from all stakeholders—government, industry, and individuals—working together to prioritize cybersecurity and promote a culture of awareness. "We need to focus on resilience and awareness at all levels—national, state, district, and individual—to mitigate cy-



ber risks," said Darshan. He highlighted that Karnataka's contributions to technological advancements and policies driving growth in the tech sector are crucial in ensuring the state remains a leader in technology while maintaining strong cybersecurity frameworks. Vinayak Godse, CEO of DSCI, emphasized the importance of partnerships in advancing cybersecurity, noting that the collaboration between Cyberverse Foundation and DSCI has been instrumental in boosting cyber awareness across the country. He praised Mysuru's

role in becoming a hub for cybersecurity initiatives and strengthening national resilience against cyber threats. The ceremony also saw the participation of Trishikha Kumari Wadiyar, Chairperson of Cyberverse Foundation, Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar, MP and Chairman of the Cyberverse Board of Advisors, and Vishal Salvi, CEO of Quick Heal Technologies, who collectively launched the Cyberthreat Report and underscored the significance of joint efforts in securing India's digital future.

Foreign Currency Smuggling Racket Exposed at Bengaluru Airport; Three Arrested

TPN Correspondent
Bengaluru, Feb 16

A major foreign currency smuggling racket was uncovered at Kempegowda International Airport when security personnel arrested three individuals attempting to smuggle currencies worth Rs 2.12 crore. The arrested suspects include two Sri Lankan nationals, **Vimalraj Thuraisingam** and **Thileepan Jayanthikumar**, as well as **Indian national Veera Kumar**. The discovery was made by a sharp-eyed officer from the **Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)**, Vishal Kumar, who was part of the Crime and Intelligence Wing at the airport. He noticed suspicious behavior from the three passengers, which led him to initiate an investigation. Upon searching the individuals, authorities found substantial amounts of foreign currencies in their possession.

These included **Euros, US Dollars, Rials**, and several other international denominations. The total value of the seized currencies amounted to **Rs 2.12 crore**, making it a significant operation. The three suspects were immediately detained, and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has taken over the investigation. The authorities suspect that the smuggled foreign currencies were intended to be illegally exported, bypassing official channels and regulations. This bust highlights the persistent issue of illegal currency smuggling at airports, with international networks often attempting to move large sums of money across borders without proper documentation. The CISF, in collaboration with other enforcement agencies, continues to monitor suspicious activities at the airport as part of its ongoing efforts to combat such crimes. The authorities are now investigating



whether this incident is part of a larger smuggling network and are working to trace the source and intended destination of the seized funds. As the investigation progresses, further arrests may be made. This is the latest in a series of similar incidents where customs and security personnel have intercepted large-scale smuggling operations at Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport, which serves as a key hub for both domestic and international flights.



Former MLA DC Gowrishankar Accuses BJP's Suresh Gowda of Threats and Defamation



TPN Correspondent
Karnataka, Feb 16

Former Tumkur MLA DC Gowrishankar has leveled serious allegations against BJP MLA Suresh Gowda, claiming that his life is in danger due to the latter's political actions. In a press conference on February 14, Gowrishankar expressed fears for his safety, stating that if anything were to happen to him, it would be because of Suresh Gowda. He stated he would seek protection from the Home Minister, condemning Gowda's conduct as politically motivated and warning that he would file a defamation case against him.

Gowrishankar criticized Gowda's arrogance and alleged that he had failed to deliver on promises made to his constituency.

He pointed out that the road from Hirehalli to Haralur had deteriorated, and no improvements had been made in

his area, despite Gowda's political influence. He accused Gowda of prioritizing political gains over the welfare of the people and called him "No. 1 in fixing politics."

Gowrishankar also dismissed Gowda's public attacks on Congress leaders, specifically Home Minister G. Parameshwar, claiming that without Rajanna's support, Gowda would not have won his election. He asserted that his own work would speak for itself, contrasting it with Gowda's alleged lack of integrity.

In a direct challenge to Gowda, Gowrishankar warned of a defamation lawsuit if the accusations about him and his father continued.

He accused Gowda of disrespecting various communities, including Dalits and Nayakas, and rejected his opponent's claims as baseless and ignorant. This public clash underscores the tensions within Karnataka's political landscape, particularly among local leaders vying for influence and control. The feud between the two leaders appears to be escalating, with Gowrishankar calling for accountability and action on promises made to his constituency, while also emphasizing his readiness to defend his honor in court.

Minister KN Rajanna Discusses Devaraja Urs' Unconventional Rise to Chief Minister



TPN Correspondent
Bengaluru, Feb 16

In a recent statement, Minister KN Rajanna shed light on the extraordinary circumstances surrounding D. Devaraja Urs' ascent to the Chief Minister's office in Karnataka.

Rajanna explained that when Urs became the Chief Minister in 1982, he was not even a member of the Legislative Assembly. According to Rajanna, Umashankar Dixit, an observer sent from Delhi to the party meeting, was present during the discussions.

At that time, several prominent leaders, including Siddaveerappa, Channaveerappa from Mysore, Aziz Sait, and KH Patil (father of H.K. Patil), were all considered po-

tential candidates for the Chief Minister's position. However, the tide turned when MLAs began showing their support for Devaraja Urs.

Rajanna further revealed that following this support, Dixit reached out to then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who was in Dhaka at the time, to inform her of the developments. As a result, Indira Gandhi made a public announcement, declaring that Devaraja Urs would assume the role of Chief Minister, despite not being an elected member of the assembly. This unique episode in Karnataka's political history highlights the influence of party dynamics and leadership decisions at the national level during that time.

Dy Speaker Rudrappa Lamani Falls While Playing Kabaddi,

TPN Correspondent
Bengaluru, Feb 16

In a light-hearted but alarming incident, Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly Rudrappa Lamani slipped and fell while participating in a kabaddi match. The incident occurred during the Valal Jayanthotsava event held at Suragandanakoppa in Nyamati taluk, Davangere district. Lamani, who had joined the kabaddi match to kick off the game, lost his balance during a raid

and stumbled to the ground. Onlookers, including players and spectators, rushed to his aid, helping him up immediately. Thankfully, Lamani did not sustain serious injuries, though it is reported that his leg was slightly hurt in the fall.

The event, which was meant to celebrate the Valal Jayanthotsava, continued after the brief interruption, with Lamani's fall adding an unexpected twist to the festivities.

Bengaluru Businessman Defrauded of Rs 25.5 Crore: Lookout Notice Issued Against Rahul Thomse

TPN Correspondent
Bengaluru, Feb 16

A **lookout notice** has been issued against **Rahul Thomse**, a key suspect in a case where a Bengaluru businessman, **Vivek Hegde**, was cheated of **Rs 25.5 crore**. The Basaveshwara Nagar police are seeking to trace Rahul, who is currently abroad. The fraud involved convincing Hegde to invest in a **casino** with promises of high returns.

An **FIR** has been filed against five individuals, including Rahul's father, **Ramakrishna Rao**, his mother, **Rajeshwari**, and other family members. Ramakrishna was arrested earlier but later granted bail by the High Court, which ruled he had no direct involvement. Rahul, however, remains at large, and the police are also searching

for his sister and brother-in-law, who are believed to be involved in the scam.

The case began in **February 2023** when **Vivek Hegde** and his associates were introduced to **Ramakrishna Rao** through mutual friends. They were persuaded that there were profitable business opportunities in **Sri Lanka** and **Dubai**. During discussions with Ramakrishna's family, promises were made to offer a **4% interest** on any money invested as a loan. However, this was a ploy to defraud Hegde, ultimately resulting in the loss of **Rs 25.5 crore**.

Authorities are actively investigating the case and working to locate the remaining suspects, including Rahul and his family members.

Deve Gowda Urges Political Unity for Mahadayi Water Dispute and State Development

TPN Correspondent
Karnataka, Feb 16

Former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda has called for a united effort from all political parties in Karnataka to secure the state's rightful share of the Mahadayi river water. Addressing a press conference in Bengaluru on Saturday, Gowda urged BJP, Congress, and JDS to set aside political differences and work together for the development of Karnataka.

The Mahadayi river dispute is currently in the court, with Goa objecting to the release of 3.5 TMC of water from the Kalasa-Bandur-

ri project. Despite the ongoing legal battle, Gowda stressed that Karnataka should make a strong case in court to secure the water it needs. He also highlighted that his time is limited, stating, "I have 4-5 more years to live and will fight till my last breath for the state's water rights."

In his appeal, Gowda mentioned his request to Prime Minister Modi for the release of 25 TMC of water for Karnataka and emphasized the importance of non-partisan cooperation. He also noted the progress of the Ettinhola project, which has received significant financial support.

Additionally, Gowda advocated for the interlinking of major rivers like Godavari, Krishna, and Kaveri to ensure a sustainable water supply for Karnataka. He called for the revival of key local industries like the Bhadravati Steel Factory and urged leaders to focus on the state's development, putting politics aside.

Gowda's message resonated with the need for a collective struggle, citing the united efforts of Tamil Nadu in similar battles. His call for unity aims to secure a better future for Karnataka's irrigation and overall progress.

KPCC President Change Faces Challenges Amid Party Factionalism and Leadership Struggles

TPN Correspondent
Karnataka, Feb 16

The battle for the position of Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) president is intensifying, with various party factions vying for influence. While the BJP in Karnataka has been vocal about leadership changes, the Congress is also seeing internal demand for a change in the KPCC president's post. Minister K.N. Rajanna has expressed his willingness to resign from his ministerial role to assume the KPCC president's position if given approval by the party's high command.

In a parallel move, Minister Satish Jarkiholi has directly requested the high command to appoint him as KPCC president, alongside retaining his ministerial position for a period of three years. Despite his plea, the high command remains hesitant to combine both roles, leading to further speculation on who will lead the party. Party leaders are awaiting discussions with key figures, including Rahul Gandhi, to finalize decisions.

The central challenge to changing the KPCC president lies in the immense influence of current president DK Shivakumar. Recognized as one of the most powerful leaders in Karnata-



ka, DK's replacement is not a simple matter. The Congress high command faces difficulty finding a leader with similar strength and appeal, particularly one who can balance caste dynamics and gain the approval of both Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy CM DK Shivakumar.

Compounding the issue, DK Shivakumar met with CM Siddaramaiah recently, sparking curiosity regarding the discussion, particularly around the ongoing demands for leadership

changes. Additionally, despite opposition from some ministers, the Congress high command has now approved a Dalit conference, signaling the Dalit ministers' strength within the party.

As the party continues to navigate these internal struggles, the future of the KPCC president remains uncertain, with party leaders focusing on resolving factional disputes while preparing for key conferences later this year.



Four Arrested for Brutal Murder of Notorious Criminal Bhagappa Harijan in Karnataka

TPN Correspondent
Karnataka, Feb 16

Karnataka police have arrested four men in connection with the brutal murder of notorious criminal **Bhagappa Huchappa Harijan**, who was killed outside his residence in **Madeena Nagar, Vijayapura**, on **February 11, 2025**.

According to **Superintendent of Police Laxman Nimbargi**, Bhagappa was **shot** and then viciously attacked with **axes** and **machetes**, resulting in his immediate death.

The police investigation led to the arrest of **Prakash alias Pintu Laxman Melinakeri (26)**, **Rahul Bheemashankar Talakeri (20)**, **Sudeep Renuka Kamble (20)**, and **Manikantha**

alias **Gadigeppa Shankarappa Benakopp**.

Bhagappa's daughter, **Gangubai**, filed a complaint naming **Prakash** as the prime suspect in the murder.

The motive for the killing is believed to be linked to a **previous murder** involving **Ravi Melinakeri**, a relative and former business associate of Bhagappa, who was allegedly murdered by Bhagappa's associates.

Bhagappa had a long criminal history, with involvement in over **ten criminal cases**, including **six murders**. The police continue to investigate the case thoroughly as they gather more details about the motive behind this brutal attack.

Bangalore Development Authority Forces Panchayat to Withdraw Occupancy Certificate for 86 Villas

TPN , Correspondent

Bengaluru, Feb 16 : In a significant development, the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) has compelled the Bettahalur panchayat to withdraw the Occupancy Certificate (OC) issued for 86 villas in the ultra-luxurious villa project 'After The Rain' located in Bengaluru North. The issue arose when the builder, Total Environment Building Systems Private Limited, after two failed attempts to secure the OC from the BDA, obtained it from the local panchayat, which did not have the authority to issue such a certificate.

After learning of the unauthorized OC issuance, BDA officials ordered the panchayat to retract the certificate, which was subsequently withdrawn on February 14, 2024. The panchayat had issued the OC on January 10, 2024, despite the project falling under BDA's jurisdiction, which is the authorized body for granting such approvals.

The builder had been granted multiple extensions to complete the 240-villa project, originally due for completion by June 30, 2019. With three extensions, the final deadline was set for April 30, 2022. Correspondence obtained by The New Indian Express reveals that the panchayat was informed by BDA about its jurisdiction over the project area, thus requiring the OC to be withdrawn.



A BDA official emphasized that the OC is an essential document for property ownership and securing bank loans. He noted that while partial OCs were issued earlier, the

panchayat had no authority to issue a full OC. The decision to withdraw the certificate follows complaints from homebuyers about the irregularity.

BBMP to Spend Rs 4.30 Crore to Vaccinate 1.84 Lakh Stray Dogs

TPN , Correspondent

Bengaluru, Feb 16 : Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) will spend Rs 4.30 crore to vaccinate 1.84 lakh stray dogs in 2025-2026 as part of a newly introduced 'combined vaccine' programme, announced BBMP Chief Commissioner Tushar Girinath. This marks the first time the corporation will administer a multi-disease vaccine for stray dogs. Speaking at the programme's launch at the BBMP head office on Friday, Girinath explained that the total budget for the initiative is Rs 4.98 crore, with Rs 4.40 crore allocated for vaccinations and the remainder for cold storage facilities. The programme aims to curb deadly



infectious diseases in stray dogs. BBMP's Animal Husbandry Department has already been successfully running the Animal Birth Control (ABC) and anti-rabies vaccination (ARV) programmes. However, Girinath emphasized that the combined vaccine programme is essential to provide broader protection. As per the 2023 survey, over 50% of the 2.79 lakh stray dogs in BBMP limits are already undergoing the combined vaccination.

Karnataka Police Announce ₹5 Lakh Reward for Bidar ATM Heist



TPN , Correspondent

Bengaluru, Feb 16 : Karnataka Police have announced a cash reward of ₹5 lakh for anyone providing information leading to the arrest of Aman Kumar and Alok Kumar, the two suspects involved in the Bidar ATM cash van heist and Hyderabad's Afzalgunj shooting.

The accused, residents of Vaishali district in Bihar, are wanted for a daring daylight robbery on January 16. They shot dead 40-year-old ATM guard Giri Venkatesh and critically injured another guard while

stealing ₹93 lakh from an ATM cash van outside the State Bank of India (SBI) Main Branch in Bidar. Before firing at the guards, the robbers threw chili powder to disorient them. Despite attempts by locals to stop them, the duo escaped on motorcycles.

The suspects later traveled to Hyderabad, where they abandoned their bike at Mahatma Gandhi Bus Station and attempted to book tickets to Raipur at Roshan Travels. The travel agency manager, Jahangir, became suspicious of their ner-

vous behavior and insisted on checking their bags, which contained stolen cash. When questioned, one of the suspects shot Jahangir with a country-made pistol before fleeing with the money.

Karnataka and Hyderabad police are working together to track down the fugitives. Informants can contact DIGP Kalaburagi (+91 9480800030), SP Bidar (+91 9480803401), or DSP Bidar (+91 9480803420). The police have assured that the identities of informants will remain confidential.

Nirdiganta Utsava to Showcase Theatre, Discussions, and Workshops in Mangaluru



TPN , Correspondent

Mangaluru, Feb 16 :

The 'Nirdiganta Utsava,' a four-day theatre festival, will be held from February 28 to March 3 at St Aloysius Deemed to be University in Mangaluru. The event, organized by Nirdiganta, a theatre incubation centre founded by actor Prakash Raj, will feature plays, discussions, and workshops focused on the theme "Sauhaddada Bali: Namma Karavali." Actor Prakash Raj shared that the festival will include performances by various theatre troupes, alongside

engaging sessions by writers. The festival will be inaugurated by St Aloysius' Vice Chancellor Rev Dr Praveen Martis, with Dr Purushothama Bilimale, Chairman of the Kannada Development Authority, delivering the keynote address. The first day will feature the play For a Bite of Food by Aamata, Dharwad, followed by a session on languages in Coastal Karnataka. Subsequent days will include plays in Konkani, discussions on local histories, and performances by local artists like Irene Rebello and Sharada G Bangera.

Mangaluru City Corporation Rewards SSLC Toppers, Kambala Organisers, and Launches New Initiatives

TPN , Correspondent

Mangaluru, Feb 16 :

Mangaluru City Corporation (MCC) honoured 45 SSLC toppers who scored over 90% marks, as part of the 'Jnana Siri Yojane'. The Mayor, Manoj Kumar, handed over cheques to students, including Shrayya, who secured 92% in Kannada medium. The initiative was part of the 2024-25 MCC budget. Additionally, the Mayor launched 'Sibandhi Kutumba Mithra', a health insurance scheme that provides Rs 5 lakh coverage for MCC employees, ranging from D group to officers and their families. In another highlight, the Patla Foundation, known for providing free Yakshagana training in government schools, received a Rs 10 lakh incentive under the 'Yakshaganam-Vi' scheme. To support Kambala, the budget also announced Rs 2.5 lakh each for two prominent events: the Jaya-Vijaya Kambala at Jeppinamogaru and the Sankupoonja-Devupoonja Jodukare Kambala at Thiruvail.



Illegal Dumping of Sewage and Fish Waste in Mangaluru: Tankers Fined

TPN , Correspondent

Mangaluru, Feb 16 :

Mangaluru City Corporation (MCC) officials have seized three tankers for illegally dumping sewage and waste into the Nethravathi River and wet wells in Mangaluru. The MCC team uncovered an illegal network transporting sewage from Kerala, via Talapady, into Mangaluru. Two of the tankers were fined for carrying sewage, while a third tanker was penalized for disposing of fish waste in the city.

MCC had authorized 20 suction tankers to transport septage from septic tanks to designated wet wells for treatment, and these vehicles are monitored using GPS and geofencing to track their movement. Following complaints about illegal dumping, MCC officials conducted a raid on February 7 and intercepted a tanker entering Mangaluru through Talapady. Further investigations revealed the ongoing illegal disposal activities, leading to penalties being imposed on the responsible tankers.



A Forgotten Crisis? Nagaland's Peace Process Drags On For Years But Sees No Solution

The Naga peace process has been dragging on for decades, with little to show for the significant efforts made by both the Indian government and insurgent groups. Despite multiple agreements, the situation remains unresolved, leaving Nagaland in a state of turmoil. On February 12, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) or NSCN (I-M) clarified that the 2015 Framework Agreement with the Indian government should not be seen as the final peace deal. Instead, it emphasized that the agreement was just a starting point for future negotiations and should not be confused with the Agreed Position signed with the Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) in 2017.

The NSCN (I-M) has been in talks with New Delhi since 1997, with the 2015 Framework Agreement initially hailed as a historic step. However, internal disagreements and key demands, such as the call for a separate Naga constitution and flag, have kept the peace process from reaching a resolution. The Indian government has been firm in rejecting these demands, fearing that granting such concessions would encourage separatism, as seen in Jammu and Kashmir.

Recently, 21 opposition parliamentarians raised concerns about the stalled peace process, pointing out the absence of a full-time interlocutor since 2021. They also criticized the lack of



transparency in the negotiations. However, the MPs overlooked the Agreed Position signed by the NNPGs, sidelining a crucial part of the peace process. This omission undermines the role of the NNPGs, who represent a significant portion of the Naga population and have worked alongside the NSCN (I-M) to resolve the issue.

Additionally, the former interlocutor, N Ravi, caused confusion by claiming that the talks had concluded in 2019. If the talks were indeed completed, why is the peace process still

at an impasse? This raises questions about whether the NSCN (I-M) has been stalling the process by refusing to compromise. The demand for a separate constitution and flag remains a major obstacle. The Indian government cannot afford to grant such provisions, as they would set a dangerous precedent for separatism. For peace to prevail, all parties must engage in constructive dialogue and work together to find a lasting solution that addresses the aspirations of all Naga tribes.



What India Needs to Do in the Indian Ocean

The Indian Ocean has become a vital arena for global geopolitics, with the "Indo-Pacific" discourse at the forefront of international discussions. India, with its strategic location in the heart of this region, must prioritize its maritime interests and take proactive measures to ensure peace, security, and economic growth in the Indian Ocean.

India's historical relationship with the Indian Ocean dates back thousands of years. From ancient trade routes to the influence of dynasties like the Pallavas and Cholas, India has long been a seafaring nation. However, post-independence, India focused more on land-based security, neglecting its maritime potential. Over the past few decades, India has begun to realize the immense importance of the Indian Ocean to its economy, security, and global positioning. The Indian Ocean is a critical maritime corridor, with nearly 70% of the world's container traffic passing through it and 80% of India's external trade traversing its waters. Ad-

ditionally, 90% of India's energy imports rely on this region, making it essential for the country's economic stability. Recognizing this, India has strengthened its diplomatic and military engagement with countries in the region, including Oman and Singapore, and has been instrumental in hosting initiatives like the Indian Ocean Conference (IOC).

However, the region faces numerous challenges, including piracy, terrorism, and environmental threats like rising sea levels. External powers, particularly China, have ramped up their influence through infrastructure investments and military presence in strategic locations. China's Belt and Road Initiative and its growing naval presence add complexity to the regional security dynamics. India must respond by enhancing its naval capabilities and asserting its influence in the region.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "SAGAR" (Security and Growth for All in the Region) initiative launched in 2015 emphasized India's commitment

to regional peace and cooperation. India must now focus on enhancing its blue-water navy, capable of projecting power across the vast Indian Ocean. Strengthening alliances with regional powers, addressing piracy and transnational crimes, and ensuring safe maritime routes are crucial for India's strategy.

India must also take a leadership role in shaping the security architecture of the Indian Ocean to ensure that it remains a region of peace and cooperation, not one dominated by external powers. Through greater diplomatic engagement and military cooperation, India can promote regional stability and economic growth, reinforcing its position as a key player in the Indo-Pacific.

In conclusion, India must prioritize its maritime strategy, leveraging its historical influence, expanding naval power, and building partnerships to ensure a secure, prosperous Indian Ocean. By doing so, India will solidify its role as a global maritime power in the 21st century.



Deals, Dil, And A Terrorist: PM Modi's US Visit

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to the United States marked a significant advancement in the Indo-US relationship, focusing on defence, artificial intelligence (AI), trade, and counterterrorism. The trip, characterized by the warm personal rapport between Modi and President Trump, underscored the growing strategic convergence between the two nations.

A key takeaway was the agreement to enhance defence cooperation, including discussions on the purchase of F-35 fighter jets. While the procurement process for such sophisticated equipment will take years, this agreement signals a move toward a more advanced defence partnership. The process involves detailed discussions, technology transfers, and logistical planning, highlighting the commitment to strengthening security ties.

AI also featured prominently in the discussions. While India stands to gain from AI collaboration, the partnership appears to be more beneficial to the US, which views AI as a strategic asset. India must ensure that its AI ecosystem remains independent and does not become reliant on foreign interests, especially given that the US seeks to maintain technological supremacy. India's role should be more than just a supplier of resources to global AI engines; it should strive to harness AI for public good.

Trade was another critical issue. Both sides set a target to double bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030. However, the negotiations were influenced by Trump's transactional approach to diplomacy, using tariffs as leverage. In contrast, the Biden administration has focused on defence and technology cooperation, sidestepping contentious trade issues that could disrupt the relationship.

A landmark development during Modi's visit was the approval for the extradition of Tahawwur Rana, a suspect in the 2008 Mumbai attacks. This marked a significant step in counterterrorism cooperation between the two countries. While this is a positive development, a more comprehensive counterterrorism strategy should target financial networks that sustain terrorist organizations. Strengthening intelligence-sharing and financial tracking should be prioritized.

Overall, Modi's visit to the US strengthened Indo-US ties, particularly in defence, AI, and counterterrorism. While challenges remain in the implementation of agreements, the trajectory of the relationship is positive, with Modi's leadership adeptly navigating the evolving diplomatic landscape.



Naxals Are Indian Citizens: Ruthless Force Is Not the Solution

The Naxal issue in India is one of internal rebellion, where the government faces its own citizens, primarily tribals, fighting due to deep-seated grievances. While the government rightly uses force against foreign terrorists, the Naxal issue requires a different, more nuanced approach. The Naxals are not external enemies but citizens who, for various reasons, joined the movement after feeling marginalized and oppressed by the state.

The Naxals' grievances are real. Historical reports, such as one from the Ministry of Rural Development in 2006, highlighted how tribals were deprived of their land, pushed out of forests, and displaced for industrialization. This alienation led to frustration, and many joined the Naxal movement, which over time adopted a Maoist ideology. However, for many, the core issue was not Marxism but a struggle against perceived injustice by the state. This makes the situation complex, as force cannot be the only solution.

While security forces are necessary for tackling violent uprisings, a more constructive and compassionate approach could yield better results. A ceasefire, even for a short period, could encourage the Naxals to come forward and surrender. The government could promise rehabilitation, address individual cases, and ensure justice for those who have grievances. Such an approach would not only prevent further bloodshed but would also offer a chance for reconciliation.

In contrast, the current strategy of relentless force and the ongoing "war on Naxals" has resulted in heavy casualties on both sides. Reports of killings in Chhattisgarh and other Naxal-affected regions only add to the cycle of violence. The government's current rhetoric of eradicating Naxalism by 2026 is concerning because it risks alienating the very people who need to be brought into the fold.

A broader strategy must include political initiatives, land reforms, and socio-economic inclusion for the tribals who have been left behind. The state must stop viewing the Naxals as a simple enemy to be defeated and instead address the root causes of their discontent. A balanced approach, combining firmness with empathy, could lead to long-lasting peace.

The Naxal issue cannot be solved on a strict timeline. Past home ministers, such as P Chidambaram and Rajnath Singh, set deadlines that proved unrealistic. Instead, the government should focus on genuine engagement with the people and recalibrate its approach to foster peace and stability without resorting to endless violence.

PM Modi to Inaugurate New Pamban Bridge in Tamil Nadu on February 28

- India's first vertical lift bridge.
- Boosts connectivity and tourism.

PM MODI TO INAUGURATE NEW PAMBAN BRIDGE



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to visit Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu on February 28 for the grand inauguration of the new Pamban Bridge. The bridge, which spans 2.1 kilometers, is a vital railway link connecting mainland India to Pamban Island. This new infrastructure project, worth Rs 550 crore, replaces the old Pamban Bridge, which had become unusable due to severe corrosion.

The new bridge, which took six years to complete, is expected to significantly enhance connectivity between the island and the rest of Tamil Nadu. It will play a crucial role in improving transportation and the economic development of the region by facilitating faster and more reliable rail services. The upgraded infrastructure is seen as a major step toward boosting tourism and trade in the area.

The inauguration ceremony is expected to be a significant event, lasting for about three hours, and will be attended

by various dignitaries. The new Pamban Bridge is equipped with modern features designed to ensure safety and durability, and it is anticipated to reduce travel time between Rameswaram and the mainland.

The bridge is also a part of the Indian government's broader initiative to improve transportation infrastructure across the country, especially in regions that have been historically underdeveloped. The project showcases the government's commitment to improving connectivity and promoting regional growth.

Rameswaram, a popular pilgrimage destination, will benefit from the new bridge, which will make it more accessible to tourists and devotees. The old Pamban Bridge, built during British rule in the 19th century, had long been an iconic structure but was rendered obsolete due to corrosion and wear over time. The new bridge, however, promises to serve as a modern marvel, reinforcing the region's position as a key link in India's transportation network.

Akhilesh Yadav Urges Extension of Maha Kumbh Amid Overwhelming Crowds



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav has called on the Uttar Pradesh government to extend the duration of the Maha Kumbh, citing the immense number of devotees still hoping to attend the spiritual gathering. Yadav pointed out that in previous years, the Maha Kumbh and Kumbh Mela lasted for 75 days, while this year's schedule is notably shorter.

"Even now, many people want to go to Maha Kumbh but cannot. In such a situation, the government should extend the time limit of Maha Kumbh," Yadav said.

Reports and visuals on social media have highlighted the heavy congestion on roads and trains, with massive crowds making their way to the Maha Kumbh. Earlier this week, roads leading to the event saw severe traffic jams that stretched for miles. The Prayagraj Sangam railway station had to temporarily shut down due to the overwhelming influx of people.

Yadav also accused the state government of hiding the true number of casualties caused by a stampede at the Maha Kumbh last month, adding to the concerns surrounding the gathering.

The Maha Kumbh, the world's largest spiritual gathering, commenced on January 13 and is scheduled to conclude on February 26, coinciding with Maha Shivaratri. As of Friday evening, state government reports show that over 50 crore people have participated in the holy dip at the Sangam, which is more than the combined population of Russia and the United States.

With large crowds continuing to make their way to the event, Yadav's plea for an extension underscores the challenges faced by both the attendees and the authorities in managing the largest religious congregation in the world.

Kiren Rijju Confirms Statehood Restoration for J&K in Due Course

TPN Correspondent | Srinagar

Union Minister Kiren Rijju stated on Saturday that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah have made it clear that Jammu and Kashmir will regain its statehood in due course, though he refrained from giving a specific timeline. Rijju, who oversees the parliamentary affairs and minority affairs portfolios, said the central government has always indicated that statehood will be restored and that the powers and functions in the region will be clearly defined.

"The Prime Minister and Home Minister have made clear indications in the past that statehood will be restored to Jammu and Kashmir in due course of time," Rijju told reporters, adding that the specific timeline for the restoration of statehood or the division of powers between the lieutenant governor and the elected chief minister was not for him to comment on at this moment.

Rijju, who represents Arunachal West in the Lok Sabha, was in Kashmir for the Union Budget-related events and emphasized that his visit was focused solely on financial matters. "At this time, Jammu and Kashmir is a Union Territory, with the lieutenant governor serving as the administrative head. However, we have a functioning and



elected government," he added, highlighting the recent election victory.

On the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, Rijju assured that the legislation aims to bring transparency to the management of properties for the benefit of Muslims, emphasizing that no one would be able to seize the properties. He also noted that several political leaders, including Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, have supported the bill, as have several Muslim MPs.



Law says everyone innocent until proven guilty: J&K CM Criticizes Dismissals

TPN Correspondent | Jammu

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah raised concerns on Saturday over the dismissal of government employees accused of terror links by the Lt Governor, questioning the legal process behind such actions. He highlighted that the law presumes innocence until proven guilty and emphasized that dismissals without clear proof or a fair hearing could undermine this principle.

Lt Governor Manoj Sinha invoked Article 311 (2) (c) of the Constitution on Saturday to terminate the services of three government employees after investigations by law enforcement and intelligence agencies allegedly linked them to terror activities. This follows a series of similar dismissals over the past few years, bringing the total number of government employees dismissed on similar grounds to over 70.

While reacting to the latest dismissals, Abdullah raised concerns about

the lack of a fair trial, pointing out that every accused individual is entitled to a hearing and an opportunity to prove their innocence. "If there is proof against them and they are given an opportunity to clear the allegations but fail, then such steps could be justified," Abdullah said. He also emphasized that the law presumes all accused are innocent until proven guilty.

Furthermore, Abdullah responded to questions regarding Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's remarks about the government choosing Amritsar as the landing site for Indian deportees from the United States. Abdullah stated that Mann, as the CM of Punjab, had a vested interest in the issue and would naturally express his concerns regarding such decisions.

The ongoing issue of dismissals based on terror links has sparked significant debate, with critics calling for more transparency and fairness in the process, particularly regarding the protection of employees' rights.



Fadnavis and Shinde Hold Separate Kumbh Mela Review Meetings in Nashik

TPN Correspondent | Mumbai

Two days after skipping a review meeting chaired by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis regarding the Kumbh Mela in 2027, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde visited Nashik on Friday to hold a separate review meeting for the event. His actions have sparked rumors about a potential rift within the ruling alliance, raising questions about the coordination between the Shiv Sena and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Shinde, however, quickly addressed the speculations, asserting that his decision to hold a separate review meeting was due to his visit to Nashik for a party rally. He emphasized that there was no conflict or tension between the alliance partners and sought to quell the rumors.

During his visit, Shinde also commented on the issue of the guardian minister's post for Nashik and Raigad districts, revealing that the matter would be resolved soon.

Punjab CM Criticizes Centre's Deportation Flights to Amritsar, Calls It a Conspiracy

TPN Correspondent | Punjab

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann has vehemently opposed the Centre's decision to land deportation flights carrying Indians back from the US at Amritsar airport, accusing the BJP-led Union government of orchestrating a conspiracy to tarnish Punjab's image.

Addressing the media, Mann strongly criticized the government's actions, claiming that despite Punjab's vital contributions to the country as the "food bowl" and "sword arm," the Cen-

tre is attempting to defame the state. He questioned the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) for choosing Amritsar airport as the destination for deportation flights, given that several other airports across the country were available.

"I have already raised this issue with the MEA and the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), but I haven't received a satisfactory response," Mann said. He highlighted that a deportation flight had landed a few days ago and expressed concerns over the arrival of two more flights carrying deported



individuals to Amritsar without clear justification.

Mann further accused the BJP of targeting Punjabis unfairly, stating, "The Prime Minister and his party dislike Punjabis, despite the fact that more than 90% of those martyred, jailed, or exiled during India's freedom struggle were from Punjab." He went on to suggest that the Centre's actions are part of a broader smear campaign against the people of Punjab, noting that the state has consistently been at the forefront of the nation's struggles and contributions.

PM Modi's Meeting with Trump Called a "Masterclass" by US Media

- US media calls Modi-Trump meeting a "masterclass."
- Modi secures key trade and defense deals.
- CNN praises Modi's negotiation skills.

TPN Correspondent | Washington

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to the United States has drawn widespread praise from the American media, especially for the way he handled his meeting with US President Donald Trump. Journalists have described Modi's approach as a "masterclass" in diplomacy, setting an example for world leaders on how to navigate high-stakes negotiations.

PM Modi, one of the first world leaders to engage with Trump in a bilateral meeting, arrived in Washington on the



same day that Trump announced reciprocal tariffs on US allies and competitors, a move that had already caused tensions. Despite the timing, Modi was able to turn what could have been a difficult situation into an opportunity for strengthening bilateral ties. President Trump, who had pre-

viously criticized India for its tariffs, took a different tone during the meeting, calling Modi a "great leader" and expressing excitement about future trade deals between India and the United States. "We're going to make some wonderful trade deals for India and the US," Trump said. By the end of

their discussions, the two countries secured key agreements covering a wide range of areas, including trade, energy, defense, security, manufacturing, and technology. This outcome, despite the tariff tensions, was seen as a diplomatic win for Modi and a demonstration of effective leadership.

US and Ukraine Signal Urgency for Peace Deal Amid Ongoing War with Russia



TPN Correspondent | Ukraine

At the Munich Security Conference on February 14, US Vice President JD Vance and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky emphasized the pressing need for a peace deal with Russia, as the war between Ukraine and Russia approaches its third year.

During a meeting at the conference, Vance reaffirmed Washington's commitment to securing a "lasting peace," stressing that the goal was to prevent future conflict in Eastern Europe. "We want to achieve a durable, lasting peace, not the kind of peace that's going to have Eastern Europe in conflict just a couple of years down the road," Vance stated as he wrapped up discussions with Zelensky.

Vance also indicated that more talks would follow in the coming weeks and months, focused on how peace could be reached. This comes as US President Donald Trump made headlines with his own announcement of plans for a truce with Russian President Vladimir Putin. While Trump's stance added uncertainty, Zelensky remained committed to seeking peace, expressing optimism that their meeting was "our first meeting, not last." Zelensky also emphasized the urgency of peace talks, stating, "We are ready to move as quickly as possible towards a real and guaranteed peace," and mentioned that a US envoy would visit Kyiv soon.

In an interview, Zelensky also underscored Ukraine's dependence on US support, stating, "We will have low, low chance to survive without support of the United States." Despite concerns about Trump's recent moves, Zelensky reassured that Trump had shared his personal number with him during past conversations.



Protests In New York As 'Transgender', 'Queer' Scrubbed From Rights Website

TPN Correspondent | New York

The National Park Service (NPS) has removed references to transgender and queer individuals from its website dedicated to the Stonewall National Monument, a key site in the LGBTQ rights movement. The monument, located at the historic Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, commemorates the 1969 Stonewall riots, which were pivotal in the fight for LGBTQ rights.

The website, which previously included the acronym "LGBTQ" (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer), now only uses "LGB," erasing mentions of transgender and non-binary individuals who do not identify strictly as male or female. This change has sparked protests in New York City, with hundreds of activists gathering to express their outrage. Slogans like "Silence = Death" and "There's no Stonewall without the T" were displayed during the demonstration, calling for the recognition of transgender people's vital contributions to the movement.

The controversy comes amid broader political shifts, as President Donald Trump has advocated for a return to a binary definition of gender. This stance has been reflected in various executive orders, such as one that restricts gender recognition to male and female, excluding non-binary and transgender individuals.



Donald Trump Fires 'Disease Detectives' As Bird Flu Fears Rise

TPN Correspondent | Washington

In a significant move that has raised concerns within the public health community, the Trump administration dismissed nearly half of the elite Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) program officers, widely known as "disease detectives." The decision, which affects about 30 officers from two graduating classes, comes at a time when fears of a potential bird flu pandemic are growing, as well as growing concerns over future health crises.

The cuts, as part of the broader downsizing efforts by Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, are particularly controversial because the affected individuals had been integral to the CDC's ability to respond to outbreaks. The EIS program, established in 1951, has been a critical part of the CDC's efforts in investigating and containing health threats such as Ebola and Covid-19. Former officers, who have helped eliminate smallpox globally, have expressed deep concern over the cuts.

"I'm so angry," said a senior epidemiologist from the CDC, who supervises several of the dismissed employees. "We're on the verge of potentially another pandemic and we're firing the people who have probably more expertise than anyone else in the country collectively." The decision affects the class of 2024 and leaves the class of 2023 in uncertain status, though some officers remain protected due to their hiring through different mechanisms under the US Public Health Service.

With approximately 1,300 CDC employees dismissed in total, the EIS program's elimination is seen as a direct threat to national health security. Experts like infectious disease physician Amesh Adalja have voiced strong opposition to this move, emphasizing the program's importance to the nation's health infrastructure.



Yunus and Musk in talks for Starlink satellite service in Bangladesh

TPN Correspondent | Bangladesh

Bangladesh's Chief Adviser, Professor Muhammad Yunus, revealed on Friday that he has held discussions with Tesla CEO Elon Musk about the possibility of launching Starlink satellite internet services in Bangladesh.

In a post on X (formerly Twitter), Yunus shared details of his meeting with Musk, stating, "Had great meeting with Mr @elonmusk. We agreed to work together. Hoping to launch Starlink in Bangladesh soon together with him."

The conversation took place following a video call on Thursday, where Yunus and Musk explored potential collaborations, specifically to introduce Starlink, a satellite internet service developed by Musk's company SpaceX. The service, which aims to provide high-speed internet access in underserved areas, could significantly improve connectivity in Bangladesh, where internet access remains a challenge in rural and remote areas.

Yunus also extended an invitation to Musk to visit Bangladesh for the potential launch of the service. Musk responded positively to the invitation, underscoring the importance of the initiative for Bangladesh's development.

The collaboration is expected to play a pivotal role in enhancing internet accessibility across Bangladesh, offering a solution to the country's digital infrastructure challenges. If successful, the Starlink service would help bridge the connectivity gap, providing high-speed internet to more people and businesses, contributing to the country's growth.

Hamas Releases 3 Israeli Hostages In Exchange For 369 Palestinian Prisoners

TPN Correspondent | Hamas

On Saturday, Hamas released three Israeli hostages—Israeli-Argentine Yair Horn, Israeli-American Sagui Dekel-Chen, and Israeli-Russian Sasha Troufanov—following successful mediation efforts by Egyptian and Qatari officials. The hostages had been seized by Hamas militants during an attack on October 7, 2023. The release, part of a broader prisoner swap agreement, saw 369 Palestinian prisoners freed in exchange for the Israeli captives. The hostages were handed over to the International Committee of the Red Cross in Gaza's southern city of Khan Yunis before being transported to

Israeli forces. The Israeli military confirmed that the freed hostages have returned to Israel and are reportedly in good health. The hostages were seen holding gift bags and certificates marking the end of their captivity.

This release is part of ongoing efforts to maintain a fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. However, tensions remain high in the region. The Israeli military has been accused of obstructing aid shipments to Gaza, worsening the already dire humanitarian crisis. Hamas has warned that it may suspend further hostage releases if Israel does not meet its aid obligations.



India's Merchandise Exports Projected to Reach \$446.5 Billion in FY25



India's total merchandise exports for the financial year 2024-25 are expected to reach \$446.5 billion, marking a 2.2% increase from the previous fiscal year, according to the Export-Import Bank of India. In the fourth quarter of FY25, goods exports are forecasted to hit \$124.8 billion, reflecting a 3.64% year-on-year growth. The positive growth trend is anticipated to continue into the first quarter of FY26, although challenges such as trade policy uncertainty and geopolitical tensions remain risks to the outlook.

The bank attributes the projected growth to several favorable factors. A strong agricultural harvest, recovery in manufacturing activity, and improving demand prospects from trading partners are expected to support the growth in India's exports. The government and industry stakeholders are optimistic that these factors will contribute to a resilient export performance despite the challenges posed by global economic uncertainties.

Non-oil exports are projected to reach \$382 billion for FY25, contributing significantly to the overall

export growth. Meanwhile, non-oil and non-gems and jewellery exports are expected to total \$350 billion, further highlighting the diversification of India's export base. The outlook reflects continued resilience in sectors like agriculture, textiles, and engineering goods, which have shown robust performance in recent quarters.

However, the Export-Import Bank of India also cautioned that factors such as geopolitical tensions, global trade disruptions, and policy shifts in major economies could impact export growth in the upcoming year. Despite these risks, the overall export trajectory remains positive, supported by strong fundamentals in key sectors.

As India continues to expand its presence in global markets, the focus on diversification and strengthening trade relations with partners will be crucial in sustaining export growth and mitigating external risks. The government and industry leaders are expected to continue efforts to boost competitiveness and navigate challenges in the global trade landscape.



India cuts customs duty on bourbon whiskey to 50%

India has reduced the import duty on bourbon whiskey to 50% in a move seen as a step toward strengthening trade relations with the United States. The decision, which was officially notified on February 13, comes just ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's high-level talks with US President Donald Trump.

This reduction in customs duty on bourbon whiskey is part of India's broader efforts to negotiate a significant trade deal with the US. The move is expected to benefit American distillers, particularly those producing bourbon whiskey, a product that has seen growing demand in India. In the 2023-24 financial year, India imported bourbon whiskey worth \$2.5 million, indicating a rising consumer preference for the popular American spirit.

The duty cut is seen as a gesture of goodwill in anticipation of ongoing trade discussions aimed at resolving trade imbalances and addressing various trade barriers between the two nations. India's decision to lower the tax

on imported bourbon aligns with its broader trade agenda to boost economic ties with the US, which is one of India's largest trading partners.

The move also comes at a time when India and the US are working towards improving their trade relationship, with both sides keen on addressing concerns related to tariffs, market access, and intellectual property rights. As both nations continue to explore opportunities for deeper economic cooperation, this reduction in import duty signals India's willingness to engage in meaningful trade discussions.

Experts believe that the duty reduction on bourbon whiskey will not only benefit American exporters but also provide Indian consumers with greater access to premium international products. The decision is expected to contribute to the growing demand for global beverages in India, a market that is increasingly becoming an important destination for foreign goods.

India's Forex Reserves Grow for Third Consecutive Week, Adding \$7.65 Billion



India's foreign exchange reserves have increased for the third consecutive week, following a period of nearly four months of decline. As of the week ending February 7, the reserves rose by \$7.65 billion, reaching a total of \$638.261 billion, according to data from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). This marks a significant rebound after a prolonged downward trend that saw reserves drop in 15 of the previous 16 weeks, hitting an 11-month low.

The decline in India's forex reserves began after they peaked at an all-time high of \$704.89 billion in September. As of now, reserves are approximately 10% lower than their peak. The decrease in reserves is widely attributed to the RBI's interventions aimed at curbing a sharp depreciation of the Indian Rupee. The Rupee is currently near its historic low against the US dollar, prompting the central bank to take action to stabilize the currency.

The latest RBI data reveals that India's foreign currency assets (FCA), which make up the largest portion of the country's forex reserves, stand at \$544.106 billion. Additionally, gold reserves are valued at \$72.208 billion.

India's forex reserves are considered sufficient to cover approximately 11 months of projected imports. In 2023, India's foreign exchange reserves increased by around \$58 billion, a contrast to the \$71 billion decline in 2022. In 2024, reserves have grown by just over \$20 billion.

Foreign exchange reserves are crucial for a nation's economic stability, as they provide a buffer against external shocks, such as currency volatility or global market fluctuations. The RBI frequently manages liquidity by buying or selling foreign currencies, including dollars, to prevent excessive fluctuations in the exchange rate. The strategic purchase of dollars strengthens the Rupee, while selling dollars helps mitigate depreciation pressures.

Gold and Silver Prices Soar Amid Heavy Buying, Silver Hits Rs 1 Lakh Mark

Gold prices surged to a new all-time high of Rs 89,400 per 10 grams on Friday, witnessing a sharp increase of Rs 1,300, driven by heavy buying from jewellers and retailers. This rise follows a closing price of Rs 88,100 per 10 grams the previous day, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

Gold of 99.5% purity also saw a similar climb, increasing by Rs 1,300 to hit Rs 89,000 per 10 grams, compared to its previous close of Rs 87,700 per 10 grams. The relentless demand from the retail sector, particularly due to festival-related purchases and a favorable sentiment in the global market, has contributed to this steep price hike.

In addition to gold, silver prices also witnessed a significant rally, rising by Rs 2,000 to touch Rs 1 lakh per kilogram. The metal had closed at Rs 98,000 per kilogram on Thursday. This sharp rise marks silver's highest price in four months, and it comes as



a result of a combination of factors including investor interest and heightened buying activity in the retail market.

Futures trading on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) also showed an upward trend for gold. Gold contracts for April delivery rose by Rs 184, bringing the price to Rs 85,993 per 10 grams, reflecting market optimism and expectations of continued demand. Experts believe that the upward momentum in gold and silver prices could persist due to factors such as geopolitical tensions, inflation fears, and a weaker dollar, all of which tend to drive investor interest toward safe-haven assets like precious metals.

As demand for both gold and silver remains high, particularly in the jewellery sector, consumers and investors are keeping a close watch on price fluctuations in the coming weeks.

FM Sitharaman Calls for SOP to Handle International Arbitration Cases

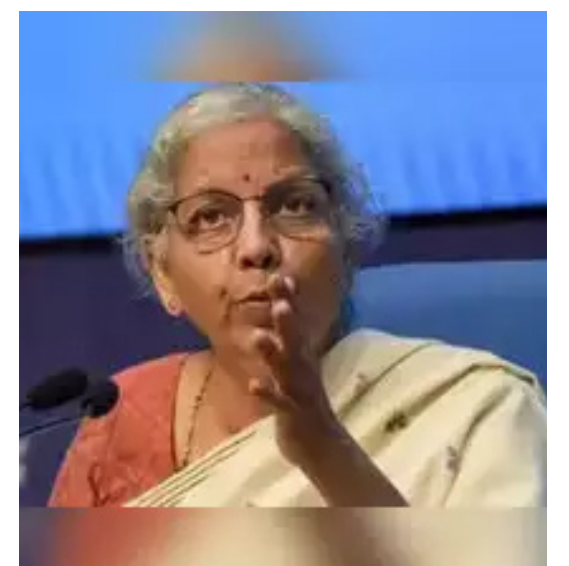
Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday emphasized the need for a structured approach to handle international arbitration cases arising under bilateral investment treaties (BITs). She highlighted the absence of a formal standard operating procedure (SOP) in India for dealing with such cases and stressed the importance of establishing one at an early stage to effectively manage the growing number of disputes.

Sitharaman, addressing a gathering, pointed out that the increasing number of international arbitration cases related to BITs requires a more organized and timely response. At present, India lacks a well-defined official mechanism to handle these cases, which could lead to delays and inefficiencies in managing disputes between investors and the state. The need for an SOP has become more urgent as India continues to engage in BITs with multiple countries, facilitating foreign investment

but also increasing the possibility of legal disputes.

She suggested that having a well-organized SOP would help streamline the process of addressing arbitration cases, ensuring transparency and consistency in the handling of such matters. It would also contribute to building investor confidence in India's legal and regulatory framework, which is crucial for sustaining foreign investment and fostering economic growth. Sitharaman's call for a structured mechanism comes amid growing concern about the rise in disputes related to investment protection agreements. India has been involved in several international arbitration cases in recent years, and the lack of a clear process to handle such disputes has raised concerns among legal experts and foreign investors.

By implementing a standard procedure, the government could improve its responsiveness to international arbitration



claims, reduce legal risks, and provide more clarity to investors. Sitharaman's statement underscores the government's commitment to improving the investment climate in India by ensuring fair and efficient dispute resolution mechanisms.

Swiggy Breaks Valentine's Day Sales Records With 581 Chocolate Orders Per Minute

This Valentine's Day, Swiggy Instamart experienced a remarkable surge in orders as people flocked to the platform to celebrate love, despite rising costs. The platform recorded impressive sales, with chocolates and roses being the top choices for customers looking to express their affection.

Swiggy's co-founder Phani Kishan shared data revealing that during peak hours, the platform saw a staggering 581 orders of chocolates and 324 orders of roses per minute. He humorously compared the rush to a "bull run" in the stock market, emphasizing the overwhelming demand. This spike in orders mirrored the record-breaking sales witnessed by Swiggy Instamart during New Year's Eve, highlighting a consistent trend of high demand during significant celebrations.

Kishan further detailed the day's sales, sharing that in just 24 orders, 174 chocolates were delivered, amounting to Rs 29,844 in total. By 10:53 AM



on Valentine's Day, Swiggy Instamart had already delivered twice as many chocolates as it did on the same day last year. The platform also reported a five-fold increase in orders compared to a typical Friday. Sharing the data on X, Kishan wrote, "Someone in Delhi is taking 'Tohfa sabke liye' very, very seriously. Love (and chocolates) are in the air." The surge in orders was particularly noticeable in cities like Ludhiana, Rajkot, and Kanpur, which saw higher-than-usual demand, while Bhubaneswar and Mangaluru were among the busiest.

In addition to chocolates and roses, chips, soft drinks, and grapes were in high demand. In some locations, grapes ran out of stock due to the overwhelming orders. Interestingly, cities like Chennai, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad also experienced heightened demand for items such as ice, reflecting a celebratory spirit across the country.

Valentine's Day proved to be a record-breaking day for Swiggy Instamart, with customers indulging in sweet surprises to make the occasion even more special.

NASA Shares Stunning Aerial View of Mount Everest from Space



Astronauts aboard the International Space Station (ISS) have captured a breathtaking image of Mount Everest, providing a unique aerial view of the world's highest peak and its surrounding glaciers. Unlike the traditional ground-level perspective, this photo showcases the iconic mountain from orbit, blending seamlessly with the landscape around it.

NASA posted the image on its official website, offering a rare perspective of Everest, which rises to an elevation of 29,028 feet (8,848 meters). The view is strikingly different from what one might expect from the ground, where the mountain's sheer size dominates the horizon. From space, however, the

peak appears as part of a larger landscape, nestled near a V-shaped valley with multiple glaciers surrounding it.

The photo, taken during the STS-80 mission on November 30, 1996, aboard the Space Shuttle Columbia, provides a fascinating aerial look at Everest and its glaciers. NASA's caption reads, "This view from the space shuttle Columbia shows Mount Everest, along with many glaciers. Mount Everest is to the left of the V-shaped valley." The image was part of the shuttle's final flight of the year, which also involved the deployment and retrieval of two research spacecraft.

Astronauts on the ISS regularly capture stunning images

of Earth, documenting some of the planet's most recognizable landmarks, including the Great Wall of China and the Pyramids of Egypt. These photographs not only offer a new perspective but also serve as invaluable tools for scientists to analyze natural landscapes from a fresh angle.

NASA continues to share these awe-inspiring views, showcasing the beauty of Earth from space. In addition, the agency is closely monitoring asteroid 2025 CR, which will pass Earth safely at a distance of 3.09 million miles. The asteroid, measuring 93 feet across, is being tracked by NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

Zepto Delivering Skoda Kylaq In 10 Minutes? Here's The Truth

A recent claim circulating on social media suggested that Zepto, the quick-commerce platform, had partnered with Skoda India to deliver cars to customers within 10 minutes. The post, shared by a user on X (formerly Twitter), read: "Big news! Skoda and Zepto are partnering to deliver cars in just 10 minutes." However, PTI Fact Check has debunked the claim, finding it to be false.

Zepto clarified that the campaign was not about delivering full-scale vehicles but was focused on generating interest in Skoda Kushaq test drives. The campaign, which launched in early February, was designed to create curiosity around Skoda's latest offerings, particularly the Kushaq, and was not related to any 10-minute car delivery service.

To investigate the claim, the PTI Fact Check Desk traced the viral image using Google Lens and found that several social media users had shared the same post, which led to confusion. A closer look at Zepto's official Instagram account revealed a post from February 4, which included a teaser about a collaboration with Skoda India.



The caption stated, "Humare pass mixer hai, phone hai, tablet hai, aur abb...Coming soon on 8th Feb!" This post was shared by both Zepto and Skoda India, teasing an upcoming announcement but not about car deliveries. Zepto's partnership with Skoda was aimed at promoting the test-driving experience, not facilitating quick car deliveries.

The post created curiosity, leading to a misunderstanding about the nature of the campaign.

Thus, the viral claim of Zepto offering 10-minute car deliveries is not true. Instead, the focus was on a promotional campaign designed to generate buzz around Skoda's test drives, not vehicle deliveries.

Is Gurugram Vendor Using Body Scrub Powder for Coffee? Viral Video Sparks Debate

A viral video showing a Gurugram street vendor seemingly using body scrub powder to make coffee has left social media users divided. The video, shared by content creator Himanshu Jatana, shows the vendor at a roadside juice stall, which also sells cold coffee. During his visit, Jatana noticed a jar labeled as body scrub but containing what appeared to be coffee powder.

The video has gained nearly 1.5 million views, with many users sharing their opinions in the comments. While some believed the vendor was merely using the body scrub container as a storage jar for coffee powder, others humorously joked about consuming body scrub. One user quipped, "Coffee is cheaper than that body scrub," while another added, "It's an inner gut scrub. Healthy and healing."

However, some users attempted to explain the situation more logically, suggesting that the vendor was simply reusing the body scrub container, which likely held coffee powder. "The scrub from that brand is more expensive



than the coffee itself," one user explained, asserting that the vendor wouldn't use it for coffee due to the high cost and that the scrub likely only contained waste coffee.

Despite the explanations, the incident has raised questions about hygiene and safety, with some commenters expressing concern over the potential risks of using a body scrub container for food items. "This

probably has silicon beads and harmful effects," one person cautioned.

The video has stirred both humor and skepticism, with viewers debating whether the vendor's actions were harmless or concerning. As the debate continues, the clip has sparked a larger conversation about food safety, hygiene, and the creative ways vendors store ingredients.

AI-Powered Virtual Boyfriends Make Entrepreneur Yao Runhao a Billionaire in China

In China, a dating simulation game called *Love and Deepspace* has taken the digital world by storm, revolutionizing the concept of romantic relationships. The game, which features AI-powered virtual boyfriends, has grown immensely popular, allowing users to interact with their ideal partners without the frustrations typically associated with real-life relationships.

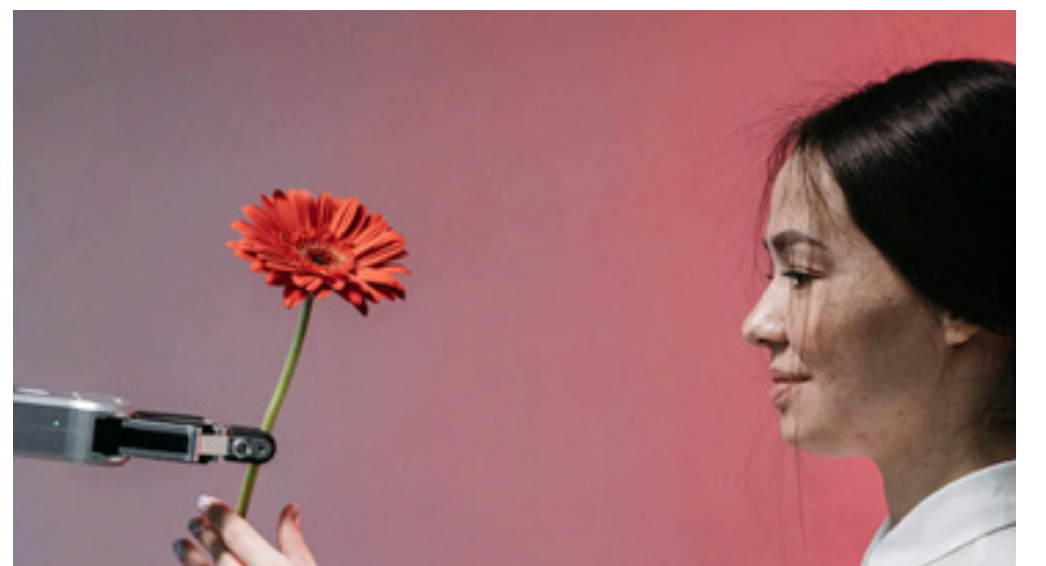
The game's success has turned its creator, Yao Runhao, into a billionaire. *Love and Deepspace*, launched in January 2024 by Paper Games, allows players to engage with AI-driven male characters who are designed to

be attentive, responsive, and supportive, providing the perfect solution to common relationship woes. Users, such as 32-year-old Alicia Wang, a Shanghai-based editor, have fallen for the game's virtual characters like Zayne, a 27-year-old surgeon, who always answers texts promptly, listens attentively, and maintains a calm demeanor. The catch? Zayne is entirely fictional, residing only in the digital realm.

The game's appeal lies in its ability to provide an idealized version of companionship, one that removes common relationship challenges such as delayed replies, missed calls, or

indifference. According to reports, there are now over six million active monthly players, with the game available in multiple languages, including Chinese, English, Japanese, and Korean.

Yao Runhao, the mastermind behind this innovation, has seen his net worth soar to an estimated \$1.3 billion, primarily due to his majority stake in Paper Games. The success of *Love and Deepspace* highlights the growing demand for virtual relationships, driven by the convenience and perfection these AI boyfriends provide, without the complications of real-life human connections.



Gulveer Singh Breaks National 3000m Indoor Record, Aims for Worlds Qualification



Indian distance runner Gulveer Singh started 2025 with a bang, breaking the national 3000m indoor record at the 2025 BU David Hemery Valentine Invitational in Boston. The 26-year-old, who won bronze in the 10,000m at the Hangzhou Asian Games, clocked 7:38.26 seconds, surpassing Surender Singh's 2008 record of 7:49.47. Gulveer's impressive performance has boosted his confidence, and he is now targeting the automatic qualification mark of 27:00.00 in the men's 10,000m for the 2025 World Athletics Championships in Japan. He has also set national records in both the 5000m and 10,000m outdoor events. Gulveer is currently training in Colorado Springs under coach Scott Simmons as he prepares for future challenges.

SWOT Analysis: Australia and South Africa Favoured to Reach Semis in Group B



Australia and South Africa are the favourites to progress to the Champions Trophy semifinals from Group B, although they will face stiff competition from England and Afghanistan. Australia boasts a strong batting line-up with stars like Steve Smith and Glenn Maxwell, but will miss key pacers like Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc. England's powerful batting squad, led by Jos Buttler

and Joe Root, faces challenges against spin. South Africa, with a balanced attack and a strong top order, aims to overcome past failures and add an ICC trophy to their collection. Afghanistan's experienced spinners and knowledge of subcontinent conditions could cause upsets, despite their lack of recent ODI match practice.

Gukesh Finishes Last at Freestyle Chess Grand Slam, Loses to Firouzja



World champion D Gukesh ended his campaign at the Freestyle Chess Grand Slam in disappointing fashion, finishing last after a loss to Iranian-French grandmaster Alireza Firouzja in the seventh-place playoff match. Despite a drawn battle on

the first day, Gukesh lost in just 30 moves after a mid-game mistake cost him his queen, allowing Firouzja to secure victory. Gukesh concluded the tournament in Weissenhaus without a single win. Vincent Keymer emerged as the surprise winner, defeat-

ing Fabiano Caruana. Magnus Carlsen took third place, while Hikaru Nakamura finished fifth. The event's success signals growing interest in Chess 960 and Freestyle Chess, despite FIDE's reluctance to endorse these formats.

Gujarat Stallions Defeat Hyderabad Falcons 84-73 in InBL Pro U25



The Gujarat Stallions delivered an impressive performance to defeat the Hyderabad Falcons

84-73 at the Thyagraj Indoor Stadium in the InBL Pro U25. From the outset, the Stallions asserted dominance, allowing the Falcons to lead for less than a minute. Trendon Hankerson led the charge with 21 points, while Jock Perry, named MVP of the game, posted a double-double with 17 points and 14 rebounds.

The Stallions established a 30-15 lead in the first quarter, with Perry's buzzer-beating three-pointer setting the tone. The Falcons responded in the second quarter, cutting the deficit to five, but Gujarat's offence led by Hankerson and Perry remained strong. In the third quarter, Perry's timely shots and Nate Roberts' alley-oop helped keep the Falcons at bay. Despite a late surge from Hyderabad, Gujarat held their ground with strong defence and rebounding, sealing the victory with crucial contributions from Hankerson and Roberts.

Punjab FC Concede Late Goal, Lose 1-2 to Chennaiyin FC in ISL



Punjab FC suffered a 1-2 defeat against Chennaiyin FC after conceding a late goal in an In-

dian Super League match at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium. The match saw an early penalty for

Chennaiyin, with Wilmar Jordan Gil converting in the 25th minute. Punjab responded in the second half with Luka Majcen scoring the equalizer in the 48th minute. However, despite creating multiple chances, including three set up by substitute Muhammad Suhail, Punjab failed to capitalize. Chennaiyin struck in the 84th minute through Daniel Chima Chukwu, with a precise assist from Lukas Brambilla. Despite late pressure from Punjab, including two crucial saves by Chennaiyin goalkeeper Mohammad Nawaz and a goal-line clearance, the visitors held on for the win. Punjab remains ninth on the table with 24 points from 20 matches, while Chennaiyin sits one place below with the same points from 21 matches.

India Triumph 3-2 Over England in FIH Women's Pro League Opener

The Indian women's hockey team kicked off their FIH Women's Pro League campaign with a thrilling 3-2 victory over England at Kalinga Stadium on Saturday. India took an early lead in the 6th minute through Vaishnavi Vitthal Phallke's deflection from a penalty corner. England equalized in the 12th minute when Darcy Bourne capitalized on a rebound. India regained the lead in the 25th minute, with Deepika converting a penalty corner on her 50th international appearance. The match saw intense action, with England mounting pressure in the final quarter. They equalized in the 58th minute through Fiona Crackles. However, India responded quickly, and in the 59th minute, Vice Captain Navneet Kaur netted the decisive winner. Two of India's goals came from penalty corners, reflecting an improvement in this area. The victory gave India a perfect start, earning them three crucial points.



Major League Cricket: Head, Miller, Cummins Not Retained Ahead of Season 3 Draft

Several star players have been released ahead of the Major League Cricket (MLC) season 3 draft, including Australia's Travis Head and Pat Cummins, and South Africa's Kagiso Rabada and David Miller, as reported by ESPNcricinfo. Defending champions Washington Freedom retained 15 players, the most by any team, but let go of Head, their joint-highest run-scorer last season with 336 runs. The team also released bowlers Ake-

al Hosein and Andrew Tye. San Francisco Unicorns kept key players like Finn Allen and Jake Fraser-McGurk but released Cummins, Matt Henry, and Josh Inglis. Other teams like Seattle Orcas, LA Knight Riders, MI New York, and Texas Super Kings also made significant changes, with notable players such as Quinton de Kock, Shakib Al Hasan, and Tim David not retained. The season 3 draft will take place on February 19.





Rajkummar Rao's Maalik Gangster Drama to Release on June 20, 2025



Rajkummar Rao's upcoming action-packed gangster drama *Maalik* is set to release in theatres on June 20, 2025. The official announcement was made by Tips Films on Instagram, promising an intense performance from Rajkummar as he portrays *Maalik*, a ruthless gangster. Directed by Pulkit, known for his work in thrillers and dramas, the film is currently in post-production. Rajkummar had earlier teased his look for the film on Instagram, sharing his excitement about the project. His last release, *Stree 2*, was a box office hit, and fans are eagerly anticipating *Maalik*.

'Thandell' Nears ₹100 Crore Mark with Massive Box Office Success



The film *Thandell*, starring Allu Aravind and presented by Buny Vas, the movie's music by Rockstar Devi Sri Prasad has been a huge hit, elevating the film further. The chemistry between Sai Pallavi and Chaitanya has resonated deeply with audiences, particularly in their roles as Bujjitalu and Raju. The emotional core of the film, especially in the Pakistan episode, has added depth to the narrative, making it a huge success. Produced by big Tollywood produc-

er Allu Aravind and presented by Buny Vas, the movie's music by Rockstar Devi Sri Prasad has been a huge hit, elevating the film further. The chemistry between Sai Pallavi and Chaitanya has resonated deeply with audiences, particularly in their roles as Bujjitalu and Raju. The emotional core of the film, especially in the Pakistan episode, has added depth to the narrative, making it a huge success. Produced by big Tollywood produc-

Mega Hero Sai Dharam Tej to Play Guest Role in Vishwambhara



The highly anticipated film *Vishwambhara*, starring Megastar Chiranjeevi and directed by young filmmaker Vashisth, is creating a buzz with the latest update that another mega hero, Sai Dharam Tej, will appear in a guest role. The film, produced by UV Creations, is a socio-fantasy story, and Sai Dharam Tej will shoot for his part over three days. He began filming on the first day, marking his

contribution to the project.

This film adds to the list of mega family members who have appeared in Chiranjeevi's films, including stars like Allu Arjun. While the shoot is almost complete, with just two songs and minor patchwork left, the film's significant CGI work may delay its release. The movie, initially slated for a May release, may now come out later.

John Abraham's The Diplomat Trailer: A Mission to Save "Bharat Ki Beti"

The trailer for John Abraham's upcoming film *The Diplomat* reveals him portraying the real-life Indian diplomat, JP Singh. The film centers on a high-stakes mission involving a woman, Uzma Ahmeed, seeking refuge at the Indian Embassy after a dangerous journey from Pakistan. As John's character investigates, tensions rise over her true identity and the humanitarian angle of her case. The trailer hints at suspense, twists, and emotional depth, with strong performances from John and Revathi. Directed by Shivam Nair, the film releases on March 7, 2025. John's last project was *Vedaa*.



Kangana Ranaut Opens Cafe in Himachal's Manali on Valentine's Day



Bollywood actress and Member of Parliament, Kangana Ranaut, has launched a café named 'The Mountain Story' in Manali, Himachal Pradesh, on Valentine's Day. Sharing the news on social media, Kangana described the café as the realization of a childhood dream. She expressed her gratitude to everyone who supported her in making this

dream a reality. The café, set amidst the serene beauty of the Himalayas, aims to offer a peaceful and unique experience for visitors. Fans and netizens congratulated Kangana, with many wishing her success. Kangana's tweet resonated with those who admired her journey from Bollywood to entrepreneurship in the tranquil hills of Him-

Rashmika Mandanna Resumes Shoot for Sikandar, Shares Excitement About Actor's Chaotic Life



Rashmika Mandanna has returned to the sets of her much-awaited film *Sikandar*, starring Salman Khan in the lead role. The actress took to her Instagram stories on Friday to share a glimpse of her night shoot, expressing her excitement about diving back into the "chaotic life of an actor." She shared a picture making a heart gesture for the camera, captioning it, "PS - *Sikandar* night shoot. I guess finally we are back to this chaotic life of an actor."

• *Sikandar**, directed by AR Muru-

gadoss, marks Salman Khan's return to the big screen after his appearance in *Tiger 3*. The film reunites him with producer Sajid Nadiadwala, following their successful collaboration on *Kick* (2014).

In addition to *Sikandar*, Rashmika's latest release, *Chhaava*, has been creating a buzz. The film, based on Shivaji Sawant's Marathi novel *Chhava*, sees her portraying Maharani Yesubai alongside Vicky Kaushal as Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj.