

## 10 passengers injured in stampede at New Delhi railway station

New Delhi, Feb 15 (UNI) At least 10 passengers were injured in a stampede at the New Delhi railway station on Saturday night, an official said. According to official sources, at around 10 pm, there was a stampede among a large number of passengers who had come to platform number 14 and 15 due to some reason, in which many passengers were injured.

The Delhi Police put the number of injured at 10.

It is reported that when the Prayagraj Express was standing on platform number 14, there were many people present on the platform. Swatantrata Senani Express and



Heavy rush of passengers to catch a train for Mahakumbh, at the New Delhi railway station. A stampede-like situation occurred at the station, injuring many.

Bhubaneswar Rajdhani were delayed, and

passengers of these trains were also present at

platforms 12, 13 and 14. According to Delhi

Police, 1,500 general tickets were sold by the railways every hour. That is why the crowd became uncontrollable. There were reports of stampede at platform number 14 and near escalators near platform number 16. According to sources, the Railway Protection Force and Delhi Police reached the spot as soon as the incident was reported and the injured were immediately taken to the hospital.

Sources said that in view of the sudden rush, the Railways has announced to run four special trains for Prayagraj Mahakumbh in a bid to reduce congestion.

## Counterfeit currency racket busted, five-member gang held

Kakinada, Feb 15(UNI) The East Godavari police have busted a counterfeit currency racket with the arrest of five members of a gang.

Police identified the accused as Chitturi Haribabu (34) Seelam Srinivas (35) Cheekatla Yedukondalu (40) Donepudi Madhu (27) and Karri Manikumar (40).

Sources said the accused were arrested after they gave counterfeit note of Rs.500 to a garage owner for repairing their car in Biccavolu on February 1. When the garage owner tried to buy grocery the notes were found fake. Immediately he lodged a complaint that led to the arrest of the accused.

The police teams formed by the SP arrested the accused and seized the counterfeit notes of Rs.500, Rs.200, and Rs.100 denominations worth Rs.1,02,80,000 from their possession. Police also seized a computer, CPU, laminator, pen drive, scanner, and SBI paper sheet bundles.



## India poised for 6-8% growth amid global uncertainty:

Bengaluru, Feb 15 (UNI) India is set to sustain a growth rate of 6-8% in the coming years while keeping inflation under control, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said, attributing the country's economic resilience to structural reforms and strong policymaking. (See on page 2)

## Kashi Tamil Sangamam to take tradition of thousands of years ...



## Govt organises Sant Sevalal Maharaj Jayanti celebrations

Hyderabad, Feb 15 (UNI) The Telangana government officially organized the grand Sant Sevalal Maharaj Jayanti celebrations at Banjara Bhavan in Banjara Hills on Saturday, marking the 286th birth anniversary of the revered deity of the Banjara tribes.

The event witnessed an overwhelming presence of tribal communities who gathered to pay homage to their spiritual leader.

Telangana Panchayati Raj, Rural Development, Women and Child Welfare Minister Dr Danasari Anasuya Seethakka attended the celebrations as the guest of honour, alongside Deputy Chief Minister Batti Vikramarka. The tribal attendees

warmly welcomed the dignitaries following the traditional Lambadi tribal customs.

The event commenced with a traditional worship program dedicated to Sant Sevalal Maharaj. Tribal leaders rang the sacred namgar, signifying the beginning of the rituals. Seethakka garlanded the statue of Sant Sevalal and paid her respects, reaffirming the government's commitment to preserving and promoting the rich cultural heritage of the Banjara community.

Adding to the festive spirit, Seethakka actively participated in a traditional dance with tribal women, highlighting the vibrant and dynamic cultural

traditions of the Lambadi people.

In her speech, Seethakka began by chanting, "Jai Sevalal Maharaj ki Jai." She expressed gratitude to Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy for his support in tribal development and for sanctioning the requested funds to celebrate Sant Sevalal Jayanti with grandeur.

"We should work with the devotion, faith, and trust that Sevalal embodied. We must pass on his legacy of service to future generations," she emphasized.

Wishing everyone a joyful Sevalal Jayanti, she stated, "There is no present without history,

and no tomorrow without today. Our nation is built on the foundations of history, and we must move forward with the teachings of peace, equality, and non-violence imparted by Sant Sevalal. Banjaras should strive for the harmony of the community as guided by him."

From the nomadic life of Banjaras to their significant contributions today, the event highlighted the community's journey and cultural pride.

Tribal associations honoured Minister Seethakka for her contributions, and she, in turn, recognized tribals who excelled in various fields.

Several prominent

leaders and government officials graced the occasion, including Government Advisor Vem Narender Reddy, MP Balaram Nayak, Whip Ramachandra Nayak, Agriculture Commission member Ramulu Nayak, former MPs Ravinder Nayak and V Hanumantha Rao, along with MLAs Balu Nayak, Revuri Prakash Reddy, Murali Nayak, Kumbham Anil Reddy, and Ramdas Nayak. Other notable attendees included Friends Sagar Rao, Tricar Chairman Bellaiah Nayak, Agriculture Commission Chairman Kodanda Reddy, and Seeds Corporation Chairman Anvesh Reddy.

## Union Minister Kishan Reddy slams BRS, and Congress

Nalgonda, Feb 15 (UNI) : Union Minister and Telangana BJP President G Kishan Reddy criticised the previous BRS government and the current Congress administration for neglecting the welfare of teachers and failing to address critical issues in the education sector. Speaking at the teachers' conference held at Nalgonda on Saturday, he emphasised the importance of the Legislative Council in safeguarding teachers' rights and called for electing representatives committed to social welfare rather than political affiliations.

Reddy highlighted that the Legislative Council was granted special powers to address the needs of certain communities and had once been a strong platform where teachers and graduates voiced their concerns. He recalled leaders like V Rama Rao, D Suryaprakash Reddy, Chalapathi Rao, Ranga Reddy, and Dr Rajeshwar Rao, who as MLCs had actively spoken about education-related issues.

However, he alleged that after BRS came to power, the council was weakened as

elected representatives from the teachers' and graduates' constituencies were absorbed into the party and rendered ineffective.

He lamented that recent years have seen a complete lack of discussion on teachers' problems in the council. According to Reddy, neither the BRS nor Congress have shown interest in resolving teachers' issues, which has discouraged many political parties from contesting these elections. However, he reaffirmed that the BJP is determined to fight for teachers' rights and is contesting two MLC seats for teachers, promising to amplify their voices in the council without yielding to pressure. Reddy accused the Congress of failing to fulfill its election promises, such as establishing international schools in every Mandal, implementing education assurance cards, allocating 15 percent of the budget to education, and releasing funds for universities.

He criticised the government for not recruiting teachers despite its pre-election promise to

provide two lakh jobs. He also pointed out that unemployed youth were promised Rs 4,000 per month, which has not been delivered, and five Dearness Allowances (DAs) are still pending for employees.

He further stated that 20,000 teachers continue to suffer under GO 317, with their grievances remaining unaddressed. He accused the Congress of following the same governance pattern as the previous BRS government, asserting that there has been no real change except for the KCR family being replaced by the Rahul Gandhi family.

Calling for a radical political shift in Telangana, Reddy urged voters to remember the sacrifices of Telangana activists and students and work towards forming a true people's government. He also highlighted the economic benefits brought by the BJP-led central government, stating that the tax exemption limit had increased from Rs 2.5 lakh to Rs 12.7 lakh under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, reducing the financial burden on employees.

## Qatar Amir to visit India Feb 17-18, hold talks with President, PM Modi

New Delhi, Feb 15 (UNI) The Amir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani is paying a State Visit to India on February 17-18 at the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Qatar Amir will be accompanied by a high-level delegation, including Ministers, senior officials and a business delegation, a statement said. This would be the second visit of the Amir of Qatar to India. He had earlier come to India on a State Visit in March 2015.

The Amir of Qatar will be accorded a ceremonial welcome at the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhawan on February 18. During his visit, the Amir will hold discussions with President Droupadi Murmu, who will also host a banquet in his honour. The Amir will hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi covering various aspects of the bilateral relations. India and Qatar have deep-rooted historical ties of friendship, trust and mutual respect. In recent years, the ties between the two countries including in the areas of trade, investment, energy, technology, culture and people-to-people ties have continued to strengthen. The Indian community residing in Qatar forms the largest expatriate community of Qatar, and is appreciated for its positive contribution in the progress and development of Qatar. The visit of the Amir will provide further momentum to our growing multifaceted partnership, the statement added.

The Amir of Qatar's visit comes days after EAM Jaishankar paid an official visit to Qatar from December 30-January 1, 2025, during which he met the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Qatar Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani.

Meanwhile, the first meeting of the India-Qatar Joint Business Council was held virtually on Thursday.

## Couple among five killed in two road accidents

Vijayawada Feb 16 (UNI) Five people, including a couple, were killed in two road accidents in Andhra Pradesh on Sunday.

Police said that three persons including a woman and his son were killed when the car in which they were travelling collided with a lorry at Nemalipuri village in Rajupalem Mandal in Palnadu district.

The deceased were

identified as Sheik Najima, Nurullah, and Habibullah. The accident took place when the deceased were going to Rajupalem village from Hyderabad. The police registered a case and shifted the bodies to the GGH in Narasaraopet for postmortem.

In another road accident, a couple was killed when the car in which they were travelling collided with a

lorry at Dodlavaramitta village in Pellakuru Mandal in Tirupati district.

The deceased were identified as Gannu Madhav Krishna (48) and Sarita Sumangal (43).

The accident took place when the deceased were going to Tirupati from Hyderabad. The police removed the vehicle from the road and cleared the traffic after the accident.

## India, Sri Lanka discuss cooperation in securing critical minerals

New Delhi, Feb 15 (UNI) Union Minister of State (MoS) for Coal and Mines Satish Chandra Dubey and Sri Lanka's Industry and Entrepreneurship Development Minister Sunil Handunnetti on Saturday discussed bilateral cooperation in mineral exploration and mining, particularly in securing critical minerals essential for economic and industrial growth.

"A key focus was placed on Sri Lanka's vast graphite and beach sand mineral resources, which hold immense potential in supporting the global shift towards clean energy, advanced battery technologies, and high-tech industries," an official statement said.

During the meeting, both leaders acknowledged the importance of strengthening collaboration in mineral

exploration and mining opportunities for Indian companies in Sri Lanka.

MoS Dubey emphasized during the meeting that India's National Critical Mineral Mission is aimed at securing a steady supply of essential raw materials like lithium, graphite, nickel, cobalt, and copper to meet the country's ambitious renewable energy target.

As per the statement, Dubey also stated that India is actively working towards granting mining rights for critical minerals, forging international partnerships, and encouraging Indian companies to acquire mineral assets globally.

"Both sides engaged in in-depth discussions on exploration opportunities, technological collaboration, and investment prospects in these sectors. The

possibility of mineral exploration on a Government-to-Government (G2G) basis was also discussed, with the Geological Survey of India (GSI) expressing its interest in conducting mineral assessments in Sri Lanka.

Additionally, Sri Lanka requested India to encourage Indian companies to participate in the exploration and development of its beach sand and graphite resources," the statement said.

India and Sri Lanka are in the process of finalising a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on "Cooperation in the Field of Geology and Mineral Resources" to provide a strong framework for deepening collaboration in capacity building, mining exploration, and advanced mineral processing.

## Grace Cancer Foundation, Infosys Foundation enter into MoU for HPV vaccine drive

Hyderabad, Feb 15 (UNI) : Grace Cancer Foundation (GCF) and Infosys Foundation have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) here on Saturday for HPV Vaccine Drive to administer 500 vaccines free to underprivileged girls in the city. On the occasion of International Child Cancer day, the MoU was formally exchanged by Dr. Chinnababu Sunkavalli, Senior Consultant Robotic Surgical Oncologist and Vamshi Muthyapu, Project Manager of Infosys Ltd on behalf of Infosys Foundation in the presence of A. Kanthi Wesley, Director, Women Development & Child Welfare, Government of Telangana at a brief function held here.

Under this agreement, Infosys Foundation will support Grace Cancer Foundation to the extent of 500 beneficiaries.

On the whole, it will be 1000 doses as beneficiaries need to take two doses within six months. Speaking on the occasion, Kanthi said Telangana must become a cancer free state.

She appreciated both the foundations for this initiative which is the need of the hour. The Director of Women development and Child Welfare appealed to Vamshi Muthyapu, to consider 100 girls studying in the Orphanage run by the Department for the vaccine. Vamshi responded

positively and hundred beneficiaries of the Orphanage will be administered the HPV Vaccine on World Womens Day on March 8.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Chinnababu said cervical Cancer is 100% preventable with the HPV Vaccine. So that Cervical Cancer is no more a threat to humanity. It is the most affordable and indigenously made vaccine. Let us make Telangana a Cervical Free Cancer Day

Just the way Polio is eradicated from the world, so should be the Cancer particularly Cervical Cancer, which is the second most cancer prevalent in women should be eliminated from this world, said Vamshi.

We will finish 250 doses before the end of March this year and balance after that, he said.

The Project manager of Infosys wished other organisations to come forward to support this HPV Vaccination drive and the drive becomes from 500 doses to 5000 doses with their support.

The beneficiaries will be identified by Grace Cancer Foundation. They will be girls from underprivileged backgrounds in the age group of 9 to 14 years, from localities in and around Pocharam and Gachibowli, where Infosys Campuses are located in the city. We will also look for girls from Government schools and underprivileged backgrounds, Dr Chinnababu added.



Relatives wait outside the airport ahead of the second batch of the immigrants' arrival from the US, in Amritsar.

## Nandamuri Balakrishna inaugurates ultra-modern paediatric cancer ward at BIACH&RI

Hyderabad, Feb 15 (UNI) : On the eve of World Childhood Cancer Day, Basavatarakam Indo American Cancer Hospital & Research Institute (BIACH&RI) inaugurated an ultra-modern paediatric oncology ward and paediatric ICU to enhance cancer care for children.

The facilities were inaugurated by Nandamuri Balakrishna, Chairman of BIACH&RI, through traditional rituals, marking a significant step towards strengthening paediatric cancer treatment. As part of the event, BIACH&RI also launched a special cancer care fund to support underprivileged children battling cancer, ensuring they receive the necessary medical treatment.

Speaking at the inauguration, Balakrishna emphasised the need for better healthcare and

education for children. He highlighted how cancer impacts entire families and reiterated BIACH&RI's commitment to providing comprehensive treatment for paediatric cancer patients. He noted that the hospital's paediatric cancer ward, which initially started with 12 beds, has now expanded to a 120-bed facility, demonstrating its dedication to paediatric oncology. The hospital provides a range of treatments, from regular chemotherapy to advanced Bone Marrow Transplants (BMT).

He proudly announced that BIACH&RI has successfully completed over 200 BMT procedures exclusively for children, the highest in the country.

Acknowledging the increasing number of paediatric cancer cases, Sri Balakrishna outlined the hospital's plans to

expand its facilities, including the upcoming construction of a new centre in the Andhra Pradesh capital region.

He also stressed the importance of the special cancer care fund for children and urged donors to contribute, ensuring that no child is deprived of critical treatment due to financial constraints.

Dr Veerendra Patil, Paediatric Oncologist at BIACH&RI, spoke about the significance of World Childhood Cancer Day and its 2025 theme, "Inspiring Action." He highlighted the need for a collective effort to address the challenges faced by children fighting cancer. He assured that BIACH&RI's paediatric oncology team, comprising various specialists, is always ready to provide comprehensive care and that the newly

inaugurated facilities will further enhance the hospital's capacity to treat more children.

During the event, Balakrishna interacted with young cancer patients, distributed gifts, and posed for photographs with them and their families. He also took selfies with parents and enquired about their children's treatment, offering words of encouragement and support.

The event was attended by JSR Prasad, Trust Board Member, BIACH&RI, Dr K Krishniah, CEO, Dr TS Rao, Medical Director, Dr Phani Koteswara Rao, Medical Superintendent, Dr Senthil Rajappa, Head of Medical Oncology, Dr. Veerendra Patil, and several doctors, nursing staff, paramedics, young cancer patients, and their families.

## Govt ensures increased sand supply and tackles illegal transportation

Hyderabad, Feb 15 (UNI) The Telangana government has taken significant steps to enhance the supply of sand at affordable prices while curbing illegal transportation.

As part of these efforts, the extraction of sand at designated reaches has been increased, with 1 lakh metric tons (MTs) of sand uploaded on the Telangana State Mineral Development Corporation (TGMDC) portal, doubling the previous availability of 50,000 MTs. Strict action is also being taken against lorries found transporting sand without valid waybills or carrying overloads, an official statement said on Saturday.

To prevent illegal sand transportation to private stockyards in and around Hyderabad, authorities have intensified checks.

In response to numerous grievances from lorry associations and individual lorry owners, concerns were raised regarding inspections at private "addas" where sand

is transported from reaches and stored for resale in smaller quantities.

These complaints were formally submitted to the Principal Secretary, Mines and Geology, the Director of Mines and Geology, and the Vice Chairman and Managing Director (VCMD) of TGMDC.

Following a comprehensive review, the consolidated grievances were forwarded to the Commissioner, HYDRA, the Transport Department, and police officials for resolution. The concerned authorities responded promptly, taking necessary steps to address the issues and streamline operations.

After the issue was resolved, Rajender Reddy, President of the Telangana Lorry Owners Association, expressed his gratitude to the government and officials. He released a video message thanking them for their swift action in resolving the concerns of lorry owners and ensuring smooth operations in the sand supply chain, the statement added

## Left parties to hold statewide protests against union budget on Feb 18-19

Hyderabad, Feb 15 (UNI) : The Left parties have strongly criticised the Union Budget, accusing the Modi government of cutting allocations for essential public welfare while favouring the wealthy through increased subsidies.

Calling it a "huge betrayal of the common people," they have announced large-scale protests across the state on February 18 and 19 to oppose what they describe as an anti-people budget.

As part of the nationwide call by All India Left parties, state units will organize demonstrations in district, mandal, and urban centers, urging the government to adopt alternative proposals that prioritise public welfare over corporate benefits.

The Left leaders have pledged to mobilize people in support of these demands. They are calling for a 4 per cent wealth tax on India's top 200 billionaires and an increase in corporate tax to generate revenue for public welfare.

They are also demanding a legally guaranteed Minimum Support Price (MSP) for agricultural produce, withdrawal of 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the insurance sector, and a halt to public sector privatization.

Further, the parties are pressing for a 50 per cent increase in allocations for the Rural Employment Guarantee

Scheme (MGNREGS) and its extension to urban areas.

They seek an allocation of 3 per cent of GDP each for the health and education sectors, strengthening of the Public Distribution System (PDS) through higher food subsidies, and increased central allocations for SC, ST, women, and child welfare programs.

Additionally, they are demanding greater central contributions to the honorarium of scheme workers, increased fund transfers to states, abolition of cesses and surcharges on petroleum products, and the passage of the Finance Bill in Parliament incorporating these alternative proposals.

Prominent Left leaders, including John Wesley (CPI-M), Koonamneni Sambasiva Rao (CPI), Potu Ranga Rao (CPI-ML Massline), Gadagoni Ravi (MCPI-U), Sadineni Venkateswara Rao (CPI-ML New Democracy), JV Chalapathi Rao (CPI-ML New Democracy), Janaki Ramulu (RSP), CH Murahari (SUCI-C), Mamindla Rameshraj (CPI-ML Liberation), B Surender Reddy (Forward Bloc), and Prasadanna (CPI-ML), have jointly endorsed the protest movement, urging public participation to challenge the budget's policies.

## Hyd Green Pharma 'Future City' to implement IGBC's green and sustainable measures

Hyderabad, Feb 15 (UNI) : The Confederation of Indian Industry's (CII) Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) hosted the first edition of the Green Telangana Summit 2025 at HICC, Novotel, Hyderabad, on Saturday.

The summit, themed "Building a Sustainable Future Together - A People-Centric Approach," marked a significant step toward sustainable urban development in Telangana.

It brought together key government officials, developers, architects, and sustainability experts. Prominent dignitaries at the event included Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, Dr. E Vishnu Vardhan Reddy (IFS), Vice Chairman & Managing Director of Telangana

Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (TGIIIC), and C. Shekar Reddy, National Vice Chairman of IGBC, among others.

A key highlight of the event was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between TGIIIC and IGBC, committing to the implementation of green and sustainable measures in the upcoming Hyderabad Green Pharma City (Future City, Hyderabad) near Mucherla.

The Future City project, envisioned as India's first Net Zero Carbon City, will integrate green building principles across its planning and development.

Designed as a futuristic urban hub, the project will encompass key sectors such as artificial

intelligence, electronics, life sciences, data centers, and medical tourism. Additionally, it will feature metro rail connectivity, specialty hospitals, sports infrastructure, and a skill development university, reinforcing its role as a model for sustainable urban growth. Addressing the summit, Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka reaffirmed the Telangana government's commitment to sustainability, emphasising that the state is undergoing transformative growth with sustainability at its core. He highlighted the government's collaboration with CII-IGBC to integrate green practices across all sectors, ensuring an improved quality of life for citizens. The event also

celebrated a major milestone of 1,000 IGBC-registered Green and Net Zero Projects in Telangana, including landmark sites such as Rail Nilayam, Secunderabad Railway Station, Capgemini Hyderabad, and Rainbow Vistas Rock Garden.

As part of IGBC's Green Crusader 2025 initiative, 52 new projects covering 163 million square feet were registered under Green and Net Zero Ratings. These projects span diverse categories, including office buildings, schools, residential complexes, and industrial facilities, further solidifying Telangana's leadership in sustainable urban planning.

Dr Vishnu Vardhan Reddy highlighted Hyderabad's emergence as

a premier investment hub for IT, pharmaceuticals, and electronics. He emphasised that integrating green infrastructure and smart city policies would accelerate economic growth while promoting environmental sustainability.

The summit also featured insightful panel discussions on key topics such as Sustainable Urban Planning, Smart Cities, and Future Green Construction.

Experts shared perspectives on eco-friendly materials, energy-efficient designs, circular economy practices, and net-zero energy buildings. They underscored the importance of collaboration between government bodies, businesses, and investors to ensure

sustainable development amid rapid urbanization.

IGBC's National Vice Chairman, C Shekar Reddy, noted that India is undergoing one of the largest urbanization waves in history, and Telangana has the potential to emerge as a model state for sustainable development.

He emphasised that the state's commitment to green infrastructure could serve as an example for how cities can balance growth with environmental responsibility. The Green Telangana Summit 2025 concluded with the recognition of IGBC Green Crusaders for their dedication to sustainable construction, further reinforcing Telangana's vision for a greener, cleaner, and more resilient future.

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comprehensive review, the consolidated grievances were forwarded to the Commissioner, HYDRA, the Transport Department, and police officials for resolution. The concerned authorities responded promptly, taking necessary steps to address the issues and streamline operations.

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## EAM meets with counterparts from Austria, Romania, Denmark, Argentina in Munich

Munich/New Delhi, Feb 15 (UNI) ; External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met with the Federal Chancellor and Foreign Minister of Austria Alexander Schallenberg, FM Emil Hurezeanu of Romania, FM Lars Rasmussen of Denmark, FM Gerardo Werthein of Argentina and Norwegian Finance Minister Jens Stoltenberg, on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference. In posts on X, the EAM posted:

"Delighted to meet with Federal Chancellor and FM @a\_schallenberg Alexander Schallenberg of Austria. "His insights on the region are always valuable."

The Austrian FM Schallenberg posted on X: "Always a delight to meet my dear colleague @DrSJaishankar and discuss how to jointly tackle global challenges. Proud to see Austrian-Indian relations at an all-time high!"

The EAM posted on his meeting with the Foreign Minister of Romania:

"Welcomed the meeting with FM @emilhurezeanu Emil Hurezeanu of Romania.

"Discussed advancing our bilateral cooperation in trade, connectivity, and mobility."

During his meeting with the FM of Denmark, the two discussed the challenges of European security.

"Glad to catch up with FM @larsloekke Lars Løkke Rasmussen of Denmark.

"Discussed the complex challenges of European security."

On his meeting with the FM of Argentina, he posted: "A good meeting with Foreign and Trade Minister Gerardo Werthein of Argentina.

"Discussed further expansion in our trade and investment. Shared perspectives on global affairs."

He met with Jens Stoltenberg, Norwegian Finance Minister and incoming chair of the Munich Security Conference:

"Started the day today meeting Norwegian Finance Minister and incoming chair of @MunSecConf @jensstoltenberg Jens Stoltenberg.

"A useful exchange on the evolving global security architecture."



In this image posted by @KirenRijiju via X, Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs and Minority Affairs Kiren Rijiju during his visit to the Dargah Hazratbal Shrine, in Srinagar.

## India poised for 6-8% growth amid global uncertainty: Vaishnaw

Bengaluru, Feb 15 (UNI) : India is set to sustain a growth rate of 6-8% in the coming years while keeping inflation under control, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said, attributing the country's economic resilience to structural reforms and strong policymaking.

Speaking on reporters here on Saturday, Vaishnaw stressed on India's economic trajectory, highlighting how the country has transformed from being part of the Fragile Five a decade ago to becoming the world's fastest-growing major economy today.

Vaishnaw noted that

between 2004 and 2014, India's economy had deteriorated, with investors losing confidence in its financial stability. However, since 2014, the government has focused on rebuilding institutions, strengthening the banking sector, and driving large-scale infrastructure development.

He pointed out that the banking sector, which was in distress a decade ago, is now among the strongest globally, thanks to reforms such as the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) that have addressed non-performing assets and improved financial discipline. Infrastructure

growth has played a critical role in sustaining economic expansion. Vaishnaw said that highway construction has more than doubled, railway modernisation has gained momentum, and new airports are being built at an unprecedented pace. He added that these developments have not only boosted connectivity but also created employment opportunities and enhanced the ease of doing business.

The digital revolution has further strengthened India's economic position. The minister recalled how, a decade ago, call drops were a major issue and getting a mobile

connection was a challenge. Today, India has one of the world's best 5G networks, with data rates lower than those in Europe and the United States. The fintech sector has also witnessed extraordinary growth, with the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) handling record transaction volumes, making India a global leader in digital payments. Addressing social welfare initiatives, Vaishnaw said that the government's policies have focused on ensuring economic benefits reach all sections of society. He highlighted the impact of the PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi, which has tripled

Minimum Support Price (MSP) payouts for farmers, helping to reduce agrarian distress. He also noted that the number of IITs, IIMs, and AIIMS institutions has doubled, strengthening India's education and healthcare systems. The MSME sector, a crucial component of the economy, has received better credit access and protection from delayed payments by large corporations, ensuring financial stability and business growth.

Despite global headwinds such as geopolitical tensions and supply chain disruptions, India remains well-

positioned to sustain its economic momentum. Vaishnaw asserted that with inflation under control, strong policy measures in place, and a focus on inclusive growth, the country is on track to maintain its high growth trajectory. He added that rising foreign investments, booming stock markets, and rapid advancements in digital and manufacturing sectors indicate a bright future for India's economy.

The minister concluded by stating that the upcoming budget would further strengthen this foundation, ensuring long-term economic stability and inclusive development.

## India, Chad discuss trade, investment, health and pharma during FOC

New Delhi, Feb 15 (UNI) India and Chad held the first round of Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) on Thursday in N'Djamena, Chad, during which they discussed bilateral relations, including trade, investment, health and pharmaceuticals, defence, Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).

The FOC was Co-Chaired by Sevala Naik Mude, Additional Secretary (Central and West Africa), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India and Fatime Aldjineh Garfa, Minister delegate for Foreign Affairs, Republic of Chad, a statement said.

During the FOC, both sides undertook a comprehensive review of the entire gamut of India-Chad relations encompassing key areas of bilateral cooperation including trade, investment, health & pharmaceuticals, education, capacity building, defence, Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), Agriculture, people-to-people and cultural exchanges. Both sides agreed to further deepen bilateral ties in key areas to enhance cooperation in the

multilateral fora.

The two sides also held in-depth discussions and exchanged perspectives on key issues of regional and global importance. Fatime Aldjineh Garfa, Minister delegate for Foreign Affairs expressed deep appreciation for India's efforts in making the African Union a permanent member of the G20 and recognized that membership of the G20 for the Africa Union will reinforce the Global South's standing at the forum.

During the visit, Mude also called on Chadian Prime Minister and Head of Government Ambassador Allah Maye Halina; Minister of Public Health Abdelmadjid Abdelkerim; Minister of Telecommunication, Digital Economy and Digitization Boukar Michel; Minister of Agricultural Production and Industrialisation Kedha Balla; Ministers of Commerce and Industry Guibolo Fanga Mathieu; and Minister of Mines, Petroleum and Geology Ndolenodji Alix Naimbai.

India and Chad have warm and cordial relations based on mutual respect and shared values. Over the years, both the countries have regular

interactions at various levels. Both sides have identified new areas for cooperation including agriculture, pharmaceuticals including pharmacopeia, oil, renewable energy, and defence.

Bilateral trade had peaked in 2018-19 to USD 513.59 million, but it has decreased to USD 83.48 million due to decline in import of crude oil by India. There are about 45 Indian companies in Chad working mostly in oil projects, international organizations, and many are engaged in trade in Chad. Bharati Airtel, which is the largest mobile network provider in the country has so far invested over USD 1.5 billion.

Chad has also been an active participant at Minister level in all three editions of Voice of Global South Summits (VoGSS) hosted by India, and also other multilateral Summits held from time to time. Chad is a member of the International Solar Alliance.

The FOC was held in a cordial and friendly atmosphere. Both sides agreed to hold the next round of Foreign Office Consultations in New Delhi at a mutually convenient date.

## Youth Congress protest against BJP govt

Pune, Feb 15 (UNI) The activists of Youth Congress staged a protest here on Saturday against the BJP-led government, both at the Centre and in the state, for not being serious about tackling growing unemployment in the country.

Addressing a press

conference at the party office, Youth Congress president Saurabh Amrale alleged that due to inaction by the central and state governments, unemployment in the country and mainly in Maharashtra, was rising.

He further alleged

that various types of narcotic drugs are being sold openly in Maharashtra, mainly in Pune.

Due to rising inflation, unemployment, addiction and uncertainty of the future, many youths are turning to crime, and many families are being destroyed, he added.

## Centre provides 'Y' category security for TVK Founder-actor Vijay, AIADMK, BJP reacts

Chennai, Feb 15 (UNI) : In a surprise development, the BJP-led Government at the Centre headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has accorded 'Y' category security to actor-politician and Founder of the nascent Tamilaga

Vetri Kazhagam (TVK) Vijay, triggering mixed reactions from the AIADMK and the BJP. Orders to this effect were issued by the Union Home Ministry yesterday, reports received here said.

The security cover with a Central Reserve Police Force component would mean that the 50-year-old actor-turned-politician would have personal security officials guarding him round-the-clock, along with an armed guard at his residence and place of stay, police sources said.

The Centre according 'Y' category security to the Kollywood youth icon, who had termed BJP as his party's 'ideological enemy' and the ruling DMK as 'political enemy', has raised political hackles in Tamil Nadu, with the main

Opposition AIADMK terming it as a possible 'bait' to rope TVK into the NDA fold, ahead of the 2026 Assembly polls.

However, the BJP dismissed it and said there was nothing political in it as Vijay, who had ventured into public life was provided the security by the Centre considering that there could be threat perception to him.

Reacting to the Centre's move, former Minister and AIADMK Deputy General Secretary

KP Munusamy, talking to reporters on the sidelines of a function at Krishnagiri district last evening, said it was not clear on what basis the Modi government has accorded the 'Y' category security to Vijay.

It could be justified considering his popularity. But if one goes by the BJP's history, it could be an attempt to rope him into the NDA fold.

"If it is in view of Vijay being a hugely popular actor and crowds swarming him wherever he goes, it can be seen justified. If not, it could be a bait to get him onboard in the NDA", the senior leader of the AIADMK, which had severed its ties with the BJP, walked out of the NDA and vowed not to have any truck with the saffron party in future polls, said.

Meanwhile, BJP State President K Annamalai told reporters here on Saturday that based on reports that there was some threat perception, the Centre has accorded 'Y' category security to the actor-politician as he had ventured into public life.

Mr Annamalai also said that in the past similar security status has been provided to leaders like Mr M Karunanidhi, Mr M K Stalin--now Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK President--while they were in the opposition.

"Now a similar security has been provided to the Leader of the Opposition and AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami", Mr

Annamalai reasoned.

"Like other political party leaders, Vijay was also accorded 'Y' category security", he added.

Questioning as to why the State government has not provided security to Vijay, the BJP State Chief said the Centre would provide adequate security cover if there is any threat perception to those involved in public life. "There is no politics in it", he asserted.

It may be noted that Vijay, while addressing TVK's maiden political conference recently, had launched a blistering attack on the 'corrupt' and 'dynastic' DMK rule in the State and the 'fascist' BJP, while remaining silent on AIADMK, which has been working to cobble up a strong alliance to unseat the DMK and return to power in the 2026 polls.

Vijay's announcement in the conference that his party was open for alliance and was also ready to share power--a concept never seen in Tamil Nadu political history--has triggered a debate in the political circles.

The Centre's move comes a couple of days after Vijay and TVK senior leaders holding discussions with renowned poll strategist Prashant Kishor to devise the strategy for the 2026 polls, which the TVK was keen to win by a massive mandate with the support of the people and unseat the DMK.

During the two-day meeting, Prashant Kishor was believed to have given a detailed report

stating that the TVK could garner a vote share of 15 to 20 per cent and the

The TVK is eyeing to win by a massive mandate in its maiden electoral venture by banking on its ideology unveiled by Vijay at its maiden political conference recently. During the meeting with Vijay and also with TVK General Secretary N Anand, Party's newly appointed General Secretary for Election Campaign Management Aadhav

Arjuna and TVK Election Campaign Strategist John Arokiasamy, Prashant Kishor in his report gave inputs on how to approach the Assembly polls and the alliance strategy to be adopted by identifying potential allies. Prashant, who also discussed the prevailing political situation in Tamil Nadu and the existing vote share gained by leading political parties, was believed to have told the

TVK leaders that the party could garner 15 to 20 per cent vote share and also seems to have told them on how to increase this vote share, the possible voter group who could favour TVK in the polls, those who would not, the age group to be targeted to maximise the vote share during the elections.

Though no formal agreement was signed between them to engage him as the key poll strategist, reports indicated that Prashant could act as a political advisor to TVK.

## Former teachers of IGNOU, Jamia criticise police action

New Delhi, Feb 15 (UNI) : Former Pro Vice-Chancellor of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) Prof Basir Ahmad Khan and former Registrar of Jamia Millia Islamia Hasib Ahmad have criticised the police action in Jamia Millia Islamia and detention of students' activists. In a joint statement issued here on Saturday, Prof Khan and Prof Ahmad took a strong exception to the earlier issued notification of Jamia authorities stating that no protests, dharnas and raising slogans against constitutional dignitaries shall be allowed on any part of the university campus and warning of disciplinary action given to students.

## EAST COAST RAILWAY

(1) Notice No.: eT-North-WAT-01-2025  
Dt. 07.02.2025

NAME OF THE WORK :  
CONSTRUCTION OF LIMITED HEIGHT  
SUBWAY IN LEVEL OF LEVEL  
CROSSING AT RV-267 AT KM.369/11-13  
AND AT RV-267 AT KM.369/17-19  
BETWEEN KUNERU-GUMADA  
SECTION ON RAIPUR-VIZIANAGARAM  
LINE UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF  
ASSISTANT DIVISIONAL ENGINEER/  
RAYAGADA OF WALTAIR DIVISION.

Approx. Cost of the Work :  
₹ 8,74,08,926.96, EMD : ₹ 5,87,100/-

(2) Notice No.: eT-North-WAT-02-2025  
Dt. 07.02.2025

NAME OF THE WORK : REPAIRS TO  
SIDE DRAINS AND RAISING OF DRAIN  
WALL BETWEEN SINGAPUR ROAD-  
DONKINAVALASA SECTION UNDER  
THE JURISDICTION OF ASSISTANT  
DIVISIONAL ENGINEER/RAYAGADA  
OF WALTAIR DIVISION.

Approx. Cost of the Work :  
₹ 1,65,33,070.33, Bid Security : ₹ 2,32,700/-

Completion Period of the Work : 12  
(Twelve) Months (for both SI. Nos.)

Tender Closing Date and Time :  
04.03.2025 at 1500 Hrs. (for both Tenders)

No manual offers sent by Post / Courier / Fax or in person accepted against such e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration.

Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website :  
www.ireps.gov.in

Note : The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website 15 (fifteen) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes / corrigendum issued for this tender.

Divisional Railway Manager (Engg.),  
PR-979/P/24-25 Waltair

## STANDARD POST

## Maternal paracetamol use may raise ADHD risk in kids by age 10

Children, especially females, born to women who took acetaminophen (paracetamol) during pregnancy may be at a higher risk of developing childhood attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) by the time they age 10, claimed a study.

The study, published in the journal *Nature Mental Health*, showed that children whose mothers had biomarkers of acetaminophen present in their plasma had a 3.15 times higher likelihood of an ADHD diagnosis.

The findings showed that the link was stronger among females than males. Girls of APAP-exposed mothers showed a 6.16 times higher likelihood of ADHD. However, the association was found to be weaker and nonsignificant in males.

Paracetamol is widely used during pregnancy, accounting for an estimated 70 per cent of pregnant individuals in the US, Europe, and Asia.

Even though paracetamol has been classified as a low-risk medication by regulatory agencies such as the US Food and Drug Administration and the European Medicines Agency, evidence is mounting to suggest that it can potentially increase the risk of adverse neurodevelopmental outcomes, including ADHD and autism spectrum disorder.

For the new study, researchers from the University of Washington, US, analysed plasma biomarkers of acetaminophen (APAP) exposure in a cohort of 307 African American mother-child pairs.

Detection of APAP in second-trimester maternal blood samples correlated with increased odds of ADHD diagnosis in children by age 8-10, they said in the paper. In the study, APAP metabolites were detected in 20.2 per cent of maternal plasma samples. Placental gene expression analysis of a subset of 174 participants indicated sex-specific transcriptional changes. In females, APAP exposure was associated with upregulation of immune-related pathways, including increased expression of immunoglobulin heavy constant gamma 1 (IGHG1). Increased IGHG1 expression was statistically linked to ADHD diagnoses, with mediation analysis suggesting that APAP's effect on ADHD was partly mediated through this gene's placental expression, the researchers said. The findings align with prior epidemiological studies and experimental animal research linking prenatal APAP exposure to neurodevelopmental disruptions. The current study eliminated the bias concerns raised in previous studies where APAP use was self-reported by using objective biomarker measurements, they said, while calling for further studies.

# The Bangkok Art Biennale 2024's Challenge to Address Our Fragile Planet by Prabuddha Ghosh

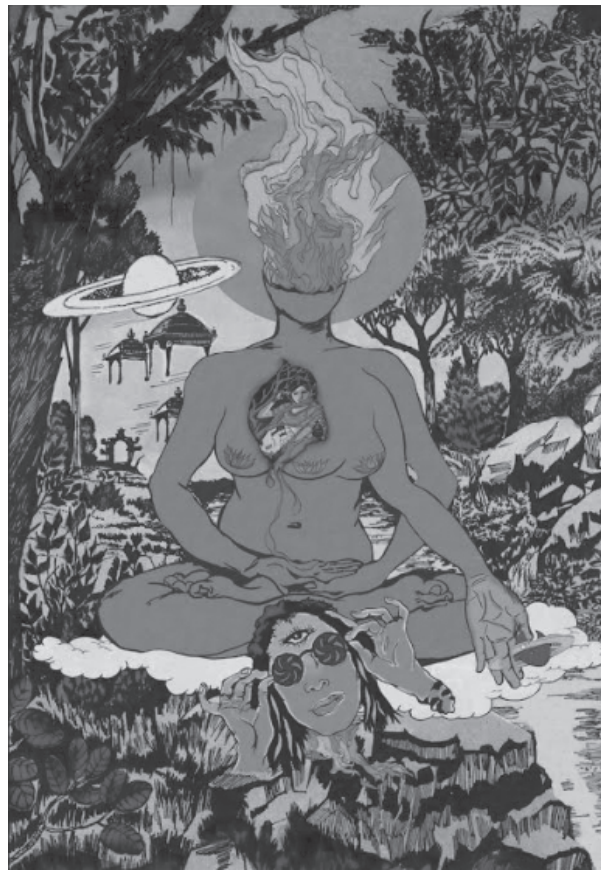
(By Prabuddha Ghosh)

The fourth edition of the Bangkok Art Biennale (BAB) is running across Bangkok from now until February 25th, 2025, under the theme "Nurture Gaia" or "Raksa Gaya" in Thai, which emphasizes Mother Earth as a nurturing life force. Drawing on the concept that Earth functions as a living organism supporting life through organic and inorganic matter, this Biennale focuses on the urgent challenges humanity faces, including climate change, pandemics, war, and environmental degradation, emphasizing our role in addressing these crises.

This year's BAB features 76 prominent artists from 39 countries, with exhibits spread across 11 venues along two primary routes: the River Route and the City Route. The River Route includes historical and cultural sites such as Wat Arun (Temple of Dawn), Wat Pho (Temple of the Reclining Buddha), Wat Prayoon, Wat Bowonniwetwiharn, Museum Siam, the National Gallery of Thailand, and more. The City Route encompasses venues like the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (BACC), One Bangkok, Queen Sirikit National Convention Center, and CentralWorld.

The Biennale showcases a wide range of art forms, including performance art, photography, installations, and sculptures. Themes addressed span from ethnic identity, societal marginalization, and labor conditions, to human adaptation, motherhood, and the human psyche. These works explore the tensions between contemporary art and traditional practices, offering new perspectives on vanishing knowledge and cultural heritage.

Professor Dr. Apinan Poshyananda, the Chief Executive and Artistic Director of BAB, explains that this year's theme,



"Nurture Gaia," is inspired by the Greek goddess Gaia, representing healing and care, aligning with the previous Biennale's theme of "Chaos Calm." Highlights include Siwamokkaphiman Hall, where approximately 100 artifacts from Thailand's National Museum are exhibited alongside international contemporary works, thanks to collaboration with the Department of Fine Arts.

Prominent artists featured include Joseph Beuys, whose works are displayed at the National Gallery with Ban Chiang-era artifacts, providing a connection between historical and contemporary art. The gallery also features Agnes Arellano, Chitra Ganesh, Guerreiro do Divino Amor, and Indian sculptor Ravinder Reddy, who will present his reinterpreted sculpture that was



damaged during political unrest in 2010.

New to this year's Biennale is the venue One Bangkok, which will permanently house a Tony Cragg stainless-steel sculpture. The Biennale also features a focus on artists exploring environmental issues, curated by Irish curator Brian Curtin and Thai curator Paramaporn Sirikulchayanont. These curators bring attention to

artists like Som Supaparinya, whose work examines how politics and business transform landscapes.

BAB 2024 promotes accessibility and inclusivity, with events such as Amanda Coogan's performance for the hearing impaired and Mutmee Pimdao Panichsamai's art collaboration with children with Down Syndrome. The Biennale invites audiences to engage deeply with its

diverse exhibits, encouraging repeated visits and personal reflections.

The Biennale also serves as a platform for exploring Asian LGBTQ+ art, addressing gender and social challenges through creative expressions that highlight third and fourth genders and challenge conventional norms. Interactive installations and performances encourage fresh perspectives on gender identity and social norms, fostering dialogue on identity, rebellion, and liberation.

Among the Indian-origin artists featured are Anish Kapoor, Chitra Ganesh, and Ravinder Reddy. Anish Kapoor's "S-Curve," displayed at One Bangkok's Plaza, captivates viewers with its reflective stainless-steel surface, creating dynamic optical illusions and transforming public art engagement. Chitra Ganesh's work explores fragmentation, power dynamics, and female agency using mythological motifs. Her "She the Question: Head in Flames" provokes reflection on contemporary conflicts and is on display at the National Gallery. Ravinder Reddy's "Parvati," a striking gold-and-blue sculpture, symbolizes strength, confidence, and future-oriented vision, embodying Reddy's signature style and commitment to cultural narratives. Overall, the Bangkok Art Biennale 2024 provides a transformative and thought-provoking experience through a diverse array of artworks addressing global issues such as climate change, social justice, and LGBTQIA+ representation. By centering the theme "Nurture Gaia," the Biennale encourages viewers to reflect on humanity's connection to nature and society, fostering a space for dialogue, creativity, and inclusivity across diverse cultural and artistic perspectives.

## Massive fire ravages Arunachal's Tenga market, relief efforts in full swing

Itanagar, Feb 15 (UNI) : A devastating fire broke out at Tenga Market in Arunachal Pradesh's West Kameng district in the early hours of Saturday, reducing around 47 shops and about a dozen houses to ashes.

The inferno caused widespread destruction, leaving numerous families displaced. Though there were no reports of any casualties, some individuals sustained minor injuries in the process of firefighting and were provided immediate medical assistance.

Assessing the severity of the fire, West Kameng Deputy Commissioner Akriti Sagar immediately arranged additional water tankers from the Indian Army to aid in firefighting efforts.

After relentless efforts, the District Fire Brigade, with support from the

Indian Army, successfully brought the blaze under control.

Singchung ADC Murnya Kalki and District Disaster Management Officer (DDMO) in-charge Phuntso Tashi also rushed to the site to personally oversee the firefighting efforts.

In immediate response, the District Administration, along with essential departments, set up a relief camp at the Upper Primary School, Tenga, to provide shelter, food, and medical assistance to those affected.

The district Agriculture Department donated vegetables and essential items to support the victims. The DC also visited the affected families and assured them of full support and assistance from the government.

Thrizino-Buragaon

MLA Tenzin Nima Glow visited the site and extended generous support to the victims, assuring them of all possible help in their rehabilitation.

Additionally, the members of the Tenga Market Association, and the Bomdila Taxi Association also came forward extending their helping hands to the fire victims, officials said.

The Indian Army played a crucial role in controlling the fire. Troops reached the scene swiftly, assisting in firefighting operations and providing urgent relief, medical aid, and humanitarian assistance to the affected families.

"Their swift response and coordinated efforts not only contained the fire but also provided immediate humanitarian support to the distressed residents," a Defence official said.

## Bihar, troubled by duopoly between Modi & Nitish: Cong president

Patna, Feb 15 (UNI) Bihar Congress President Akhilesh Prasad Singh alleged on Saturday that the state is suffering due to the duopoly between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. Singh told news persons here that the aspirations of people become high when Nitish enters into an alliance with BJP, but they are disappointed as they did not get any benefit, whether it is special status or special package.

Commenting upon the proposed visit of the Prime Minister to Bihar, Singh remarked that he would again deceive the people of the state. He said all opposition parties, including Congress, were demanding special packages and special state category to Bihar but the Centre ignored.

## Manipur Governor presents citations to security personnel

Imphal, Feb 15 (UNI) Annual Investiture Ceremony for the Governor's Unit Citation 2025 was held on Saturday at the Durbar Hall of Raj Bhavan, Imphal.

Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Balla distributed Governor's Citations to the outstanding Army, Assam Rifles, CRPF, BSF Units, and District Police Units Manipur who have contributed exemplary services to the state.

Speaking at the ceremony, the Governor appreciated the services rendered by the brave men and women in uniform in protecting security, maintaining peace, and ensuring the safety of the citizens.

He said the event serves as a tribute to the unwavering dedication, courage, and exemplary service displayed by the units of forces in their duty to the nation and the people of Manipur.

Governor continued that forces have played a great role in safeguarding sovereignty, maintaining peace and harmony, and ensuring the security of citizens. Their valour, professionalism, and commitment to duty have earned them the admiration and gratitude of the people.

Governor continued that we recognize and honour those units that have demonstrated outstanding bravery, selfless service, and unwavering resolve in the face of adversity. Whether it is counter-insurgency operations, humanitarian efforts, disaster response, or ensuring internal security, these units have displayed exceptional dedication and commitment to their duty. As we present the Governor's Unit Citation today, let it be a symbol of our deep appreciation and recognition of the sacrifices made by our forces, he added.

## Death toll from heavy rains rises to 28 in Bolivia

La Paz, Feb 15 (UNI) The death toll due to intense rains in Bolivia since November last year has risen to 28, said Juan Carlos Calvimontes, vice civil defense minister, on Friday. The rains have affected eight of the country's nine departments. "We are talking about 83 municipalities affected and I am sure that within a week many of them will declare themselves in disaster," the official told a press conference.

So far, 27 municipalities have declared themselves in a state of emergency, of which 22 belong to La Paz, the department hardest hit by the climate.

The deaths were caused by floods in the departments of Chuquisaca (south), La Paz (west), Tarija (south), Cochabamba (center), Santa Cruz (east) and Potosi (southwest), according to the government.

In addition, four people remain missing, three of them in the north of La Paz and one in the department of Chuquisaca.

The National Meteorology and Hydrology Service predicted that the rains will persist in the coming weeks, with the possibility of extending until March and April.

## Mpox cases rise to 41

Nairobi, Feb 15 (UNI) Kenya has confirmed 41 cases of mpox across 12 counties, with one fatality reported since the outbreak began in July 2024, a government official confirmed on Friday. Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Health Mary Muthoni said a total of 271 contacts of the 41 cases have been identified, with half of the confirmed cases having a travel history to mpox-affected countries, including Uganda and Rwanda. The ministry, in collaboration with county governments and partners, has intensified surveillance efforts in all high-risk counties to sustain the spread of the mpox virus, Muthoni said in a statement issued in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya.

"Rapid response teams have been deployed to conduct active case searches, contact tracing, and case management, including mental health and psychosocial support for those affected," she said.

The official noted that over 3.3 million travelers have been screened at the points of entry and 419 samples from suspected cases have undergone testing at the National Public Health Laboratory and partner laboratories. She said the ministry has been working closely with the Ministry of Education to strengthen infection prevention, control, and other public health measures to prevent the spread of cases in learning institutions. Muthoni revealed that other threats have also emerged, posing significant risks to public health and safety. In December 2024, Rwanda announced the end of the Marburg virus outbreak, initially declared in September 2024, but in January 2025, Tanzania declared a new Marburg virus outbreak, which has already claimed 10 lives.

"Given our proximity and frequent cross-border movement, Kenya remains at high risk of importation, requiring urgent and coordinated action to mitigate the spread of these diseases," Muthoni said. She urged the public to remain vigilant and adhere to recommended public health guidelines, noting that all travelers shall observe routine hand hygiene practices, including regular handwashing and the use of alcohol-based sanitizers.

## 29 arrested in eastern Myanmar for illegal online gambling, fraud

Yangon, Feb 15 (UNI) Authorities arrested 29 suspects in eastern Myanmar's Tachileik township for illegal online gambling and financial fraud on Feb. 12 and Feb. 13, according to a statement from the State Administration Council's Information Team late Friday.

The group included seven Thai nationals and 22 Myanmar nationals. Along with the suspects, officials seized 440 computers, 390 mobile phones, two undocumented vehicles, and drug-related items, the statement said.

According to the suspects, the Thai nationals had entered Myanmar via the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge No. 1 for work and travel. They were later recruited by individuals involved in illegal online gambling and financial fraud, it said. Authorities are taking necessary security measures to quickly apprehend other suspects involved. The arrested individuals will be prosecuted according to the law, it added.

## Iran targets 2 bln USD in annual free trade zone exports

Tehran, Feb. 15 (UNI) : Iran plans to increase exports from its free trade zones to 2 billion U.S. dollars by March 2026, a senior Iranian economic official said on Saturday. Secretary of Iran's Free Zones High Council, Reza Masrou, made the remarks at a press conference in the Iranian capital Tehran while elaborating on the plans drawn up by the government and council to boost exports from the county's free zones in the next Iranian calendar year, which will start on March 21, 2025. He put the value of exports from the Iranian free zones during the past 10 months at nearly 1 billion dollars, noting that this came as overseas sales from the country's special economic zones reached 10 billion dollars in the same period.

To further boost exports, the government has introduced new incentives for production units in free zones and is working on establishing export management companies in these areas, he said.

The foreign investments stood at 125 and 131 million euros (about 131 and 137 million dollars) in the country's free zones and special economic zones respectively during the past 10 months, said Masrou, emphasizing that regulatory reforms and new investment incentives are being prioritized to attract more foreign capital in the next Iranian calendar year.

## Senior UN peacekeeping officer injured, vehicles torched in Beirut

Beirut, Feb 15 (UNI) A senior officer from the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was injured and three UN vehicles were set on fire on Friday during clashes near Beirut's airport road, local media and officials said.

Violence broke out when a group of young men attacked a UN-marked vehicle, assaulted its occupants, and torched three UNIFIL cars, Lebanon's National News Agency reported. The Lebanese army intervened.

Hezbollah-affiliated Al-Manar TV said masked individuals carried out "suspicious movements" to provoke unrest.

UNIFIL said its deputy commander was injured and demanded a "full investigation" by Lebanese authorities.

Acting Army Commander Major Hassan Odeh told the UNIFIL commander the army opposed any attack on peacekeepers and vowed to arrest those responsible. Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam condemned the "criminal attack" and expressed Lebanon's appreciation for UNIFIL's role.

Lebanese aviation authorities barred on Thursday an Iranian passenger flight from landing at Beirut's Rafic Hariri International Airport, the only operational international airport in Lebanon, following an Israeli claim that Iran had been using the airport to "smuggle funds to Hezbollah."

Iran slammed the claim, accusing Israel of continuing its "flagrant and constant violations" of international principles and regulations and Lebanon's national sovereignty. Iran also said it would not allow Lebanese flights to land until its flights were cleared to land in Beirut. Lebanon's Public Works Ministry stated it was coordinating with Middle East Airlines and foreign counterparts to resolve the issue.

## Moscow welcomes release of Russian citizen Trufanov from Gaza Strip : Kremlin

Moscow, Feb 15 (UNI) Moscow welcomes the release of Russian citizen Alexander Trufanov, who had been held hostage in the Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023, and expresses its gratitude to the leadership of Palestinian movement Hamas for the decision to free him, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Saturday.

Earlier in the day, dual Russian-Israeli citizen Trufanov and two other Israeli hostages were released after 500 days in captivity in the Gaza Strip. Russian Ambassador to Israel Anatoly Viktorov welcomed the release of the hostages and said that the issue of releasing Trufanov was a priority for Russian diplomats.

# 3 Israeli hostages released in Gaza arrive in Israel

Jerusalem, Feb. 15 (UNI)

: Three Israeli hostages previously held by the Palestinian groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad were transferred to Israeli authorities and crossed the border into Israel on Saturday as part of an ongoing ceasefire exchange, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced.

The freed hostages -- Alexandre Sasha Troufanov, a 29-year-old Israeli-Russian citizen; Sagui Dekel-Chen, a 36-year-old Israeli-American citizen; and Iair Horn, a 46-year-old Israeli-Argentine citizen -- were kidnapped in the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023.

Troufanov was kidnapped along with his mother, grandmother, and partner, and the three women were released in a previous hostage deal in November 2023. His father was killed on the day of the



kidnapping. Dekel-Chen, a father of three, had a daughter born after his abduction. Horn's brother, Eitan, remains in captivity in Gaza.

"Thanks to the concentration of our forces in and around the Gaza Strip, and thanks to the clear and unequivocal statement of U.S. President Donald Trump, Hamas has withdrawn and the release of the hostages continues,"

said a statement from the office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Trump warned on Monday that if "all of the hostages" in Gaza were not freed by noon on Saturday, the truce would be called off, and he would "let hell break out."

Hamas had initially intended to delay the scheduled hostage release, citing Israeli violations of

the agreement. However, by Thursday, the group confirmed it would proceed with the swap of Palestinian prisoners for Israeli hostages. The three were the sixth group of hostages freed as part of a swap deal between Palestinian militants and Israel under the first phase of the ceasefire agreement, with Israel expected to begin releasing 369 Palestinian prisoners later on Saturday.

# Flood warnings issued after tropical cyclone hits northwest Australia

Sydney, Feb 15 (UNI) Flood warnings have been issued for northwest Australia after a tropical cyclone made landfall on Friday, bringing intense rainfall and strong winds.

Tropical cyclone Zelia crossed the coast of Western Australia (WA) near the small town of De Grey in the state's northwest Pilbara region as a category four storm shortly after midday local time on Friday, hours earlier than expected. It was

forecast to reach the coast in the evening as a category five storm.

Wind gusts of up to 220 km per hour and over 500 millimeters of rain were recorded in De Grey before the storm quickly weakened.

Authorities on Saturday morning downgraded it to an ex-tropical cyclone but warned that heavy rain is expected to persist and could lead to flash flooding.

Angus Hines from the

Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) said that record rainfall has been reported across parts of the Pilbara coast. "There will be significant flooding impacts for the next several days and widespread road closures are expected to continue for the next several days as the clean-up continues," he told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

The strong winds downed trees across the region but as of Saturday

morning no major damage or injuries had been reported.

Some towns have been isolated after roads were cut off.

Hines said that significant road closures should be expected as water levels rise.

The WA Department of Fire and Emergency Services has urged Pilbara residents to exercise caution around damaged buildings, floodwaters and fallen powerlines and trees.

# Russian drone attack hits Chernobyl nuclear plant: Reports

Moscow, Feb 15 (UNI) : Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that a Russian drone struck the former nuclear power plant at Chernobyl in an attack overnight into Friday, media reports said on Saturday.

A strike hit a concrete shelter covering the plant's destroyed fourth power unit, igniting a fire that was later extinguished, he said. Chernobyl was the site of the 1986 disaster that spread radioactivity across parts of the Soviet Union and Europe, the CNN reported. According to the media reports, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN's nuclear watchdog, said that its team at the site heard a large explosion shortly before 2 a.m. local time Friday (7 p.m. ET Thursday). The IAEA said

its team responded to the explosion within minutes and that no casualties were reported.

Ukraine's military reported that Russia launched 133 drones across the country in its overnight attack, 73 of which were shot down and 58 of which did not reach their target. The numbers are broadly in line with the recent average of drone attacks, the report said. The military said drones were shot down in 11 regions, covering much of the country.

The incident came hours before the beginning of the high-level Munich Security Conference, where Vance is set to meet with Zelensky, the report said.

Zelensky and Ukraine's State Emergency Service maintain that radiation levels in the area remain within normal limits, despite

significant damage to the shelter. Chernobyl's chief engineer, Oleksandr Tytarchuk, on Friday said that the shelter's function has been compromised due to the damage, according to Ukrainian state media Ukrinform.

"There is a potential risk of radioactive substances being released due to certain actions that may occur at the old shelter facility," the CNN quoted Tytarchuk. While Tytarchuk also emphasised that the situation is currently under control, he added that repairs may require significant time and effort.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Friday that Moscow was not behind the attack.

"Most likely, this is yet another provocation," Peskov told reporters. "This is exactly the kind of

thing the Kyiv regime is known for and sometimes does not hesitate to do."

According to reports, Russia has repeatedly been accused by Ukrainian and IAEA officials of risking a major nuclear incident during the conflict. During intense fighting near the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) in early 2022, IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi said "every principle of nuclear safety" had been "violated."

Friday's reported attack comes two days after Russian President Vladimir Putin and US counterpart Donald Trump held what Trump described as a "lengthy and highly productive" telephone call ahead of potential peace talks aimed at bringing Moscow's invasion of Ukraine to an end after nearly three years of

## Quake measuring 6.4 hits Altai region

Viladivostok, Feb 15 (UNI) A 6.4 magnitude earthquake struck Russia's southern region of Altai early Saturday morning, said local authorities, adding that there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

The quake was recorded at 04:48 a.m. local time (0148 GMT). The epicenter is located approximately 282 km southeast of the capital of the Altai Republic, about 28 km west of the village of Kosh-Agach, according to the Russian Academy of Sciences.

The Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations in the Altai Republic noted that the quake was felt throughout the Altai Republic.

## Bridge collapse leaves at least 2 dead in Peru

Lima, Feb 15 (UNI) : At least two people died and more than 30 were injured following the collapse of a bridge on the north Pan-American highway in the western Peruvian region of Lima, said the National Institute of Civil Defence (Indeci) on Friday.

Luis Sotomayor, the head of Indeci's decentralized directorate, told the private radio station Radio Programas del Peru that the accident around midnight on Thursday was apparently due to a structural failure and not as a result of the rains.

Sotomayor specified that a private car with two people inside fell into the tributary of the Chancay River and was carried away by strong currents when the accident occurred.

gruelling war.

According to reports, Unit 4 at Chernobyl near Ukraine's border with Belarus exploded in 1986, sparking a radioactive disaster. The reactor was later encased in a concrete and steel sarcophagus.

The sarcophagus was the work of an international coalition and took decades to build. It was finally finished in 2017 and weighs 35,000 tonnes. Andriy Yermak, Zelensky's chief of staff, noted that the US "invested a lot of money and effort" in the sarcophagus, which was completed during Trump's first term. Trump's unexpected phone call with Putin on Wednesday also sparked fears in Europe of a "dirty deal" being struck to end the war in Ukraine on terms favourable to Moscow without Kyiv's involvement.

effect on Jan. 19. As part of the deal, Israel is set to release 369 Palestinian detainees on Saturday, according to the Hamas-linked Prisoners' Information Office. The office confirmed that among those to be freed are 36 individuals serving life sentences and 333 Gazan detainees taken into Israeli custody after Oct. 7, 2023.

# Palestinian armed groups prepare for Israeli hostage handover

Gaza, Feb 15 (UNI) : Armed members of al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, and al-Quds Brigades, the armed wing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) movement, were deployed Saturday in the city of Khan Younis in southern Gaza Strip in preparation to hand over three Israeli hostages.

The Palestinian militants from Hamas and the PIJ were expected to deliver the Israeli hostages to the International Committee of Red Cross in Khan Younis, Xinhua correspondent in Gaza learned.

The hostage handover came in the sixth batch of the first phase of the ceasefire, which took

## Food&Kids

# Hot wedding Food trends

Culinary trends take a sophisticated turn at the Great Indian Wedding with tasting stations, vegan, sushi platters and push pops for dessert.

Alavish spread is a thing of the past. This season, you'll dig into larger dessert stations, sit in for a family-style dining experience, or get your culinary fix from food trucks to sushi carts and personalised cocktails at weddings. Modern couples and experimental chefs are coming together to make wedding food fare the most exciting part of D-Day. Here are a few ideas for your nuptials that'll get everyone talking about your wedding day.

### GET BRUNCHY

Brunch spreads are perfect for morning weddings. Wedding planner Sonali Thakore says, "Earlier, morning weddings began with breakfast and moved to lunch. These days, brunches are taking over. They are classier, have far more options and are economical since you are cutting one meal out." From pancakes to egg stations, truffle burgers to pancakes, omelette stations to croissants, there's a bevy of options to choose from. And these foods can be enjoyed at any time of the day.

### FAMILY STYLE DINING

Buffet is out. Classy family-style dining is in. Cosy, comfortable and more intimate, this dining style echoes a more inclusive atmosphere. No more queues. Your guests have a sit-down comfortable meal.

Says chef Michael Swamy, "Fine dining

plating is when a prominent chef's menu is created and exclusively used for the family dinner at weddings. Usually caterers want to put all cuisines on the menu and make a mess of everything. But this season, less is more classy."

### TASTING STATIONS

Tasting stations are perfect for creative couples who want to give a different food experience to their guests. A popsicle cocktail station instantly cools you down at a summer wedding. You can have a tandoori tasting station, cheese on

wheels, or a soup shooter station.

### THINK FRESH

Farm-to-table is the new slogan. If you haven't gone totally regional and organic, you haven't got it right. The menus include bajra, ragi and jowar and makki-ki-roti served with brown rice and rajma. Says chef Michael Swamy, "You can win the guests' hearts instantly by putting light and 'good-for-stomach' options on the menu, like a green salad or dal-rice. With more people choosing vegan and gluten-free options, wedding food fares are also becoming health-conscious affairs. No more popping antacids before attending a wedding.

### SHRINK IT DOWN

Miniature is the buzzword. Mini versions of your favourite meals are making a huge statement. A single meatball topped with spaghetti, a bite-sized pizza or a bite of Amritsari fish, dipped in chutney, are just some of the one-bite options that guests are being served. Says chef Bharat, "Indian weddings now have one or two classy dishes being served rather than 10 usual dishes that people anticipate."

### DIM SUM, SUSHI DELIGHTS

Dim sum allows guests to sample different fillings without filling up. Carts of dumplings and sushi can be wheeled around from one corner to the other. Ask your caterer to pair the dim sums with mini sake shots. Food blogger Nikhil Merchant says, "Gone are the days of flash stirfrys and curries. Now, we have steamed

disappointed anyone. Invite a dessert chef to whip up flambe to impress everyone. There's also an option to tell the caterers to create a 'tea party' room, where different flavours of tea (ange pekoe, black tea or green tea) can be served with lemon cakes. Chef Bharat says, "Coffee and tea spaces are getting priority at weddings. Right now, we see top coffee chains of the country put up their stalls at big weddings."

That apart, you can also see a line-up of top dhabas, say from Delhi to Amritsar, created with the same ambience to give an authentic experience. So, you have dancers, the traditional chulha, charpais etc.

### GOING RUSTIC

The food served here is usually family style, depending on the region the couple belongs to.

If the bride and the groom belong to different regions, the wedding is the perfect occasion to display their culinary heritage with aplomb. From homemade jams and honey to tribal food, the humble regional dishes get a classy make-over and the guests get a lesson in India's rich history of food.



dumplings and molecular gastronomy.

Asian techniques such as steaming and hand-pulled noodles could be the next big thing," he predicts. "And don't be surprised if there is more smoke created by a nitrogen machine for that frozen ice-cream or cocktail than the wedding pyre."

### FOOD WITH DRAMA

A little bit of flamboyance has never

**As the temperature steadily escalates in Nashik and across India, one of the few delightful consolations of this season is the arrival of the king of fruits — mango.**

## Mango obsession has just begun

From a mango flavoured drink to the modest aamras prepared at home — Nashik is already drooling over the mangoes available in the market. Here's a lowdown on what can be done with this royal fruit.

### Mango Silk

Mango silk is a unique dessert and has recently been discovered by Nashikites. It

is an impeccable combination of condensed milk, cream and mangoes with a topping of melted chocolate. Doesn't this sound mouth-watering?

### Mango Mastani

The mastani is a famous drink available in the city during summers. Pallavi Pandit, a housewife, said, "I was mesmerised with the dessert-drink because I had never imagined of having something so delicious made up of mangoes. It is so filling that we generally skip our dinner after having it and it is also heavenly to relish the taste before going to bed. I even prepare the same at home with a topping of cashews, cream and strawberry pieces."

### Mango Milkshake

Mango milkshake is one of the most sought after milkshake recipe in India. When you are looking to beat the summer heat, mango milkshake with lots of ice is the best anyone can offer you.

### Mango Mousse

Mango mousse is made using a quick recipe of mangoes and cream blended together to give a creamy, light and airy texture to it. Mousse can be served with freshly cut pieces of mango to make a delightful dessert using this king of fruits.

### Ice-cream

Dig into a scoop of mango ice-cream to regularise your body temperature in the scorching heat of summer. Though mango ice-cream is available throughout the year but it is the most relished during this season.

### Aamras

The most famous and mouth-watering delicacy of mangoes is aamras, prepared entirely with mango pulps and with no preservatives so as to improve on the taste. Indulge in the most loved combination of aamras and pooris this summers to take your taste buds on a delightful journey. Tina Pavan Narang, a homemaker, says "This is quintessentially the most desired delicacy that our guests love. So when summers arrive, this is a must-have item on our food menu."

### Panna `10 per glass

Panna is a refreshing raw mango drink renowned for its heat resistant properties. It has a wonderful balance of flavours - sweet, sour and savoury. Poonam Saraf, an architect from the city, says, "It is one of the most delicious drinks I relish during summer. With a dash of cardamom powder, it has the most extraordinary taste. Panna should be served chilled as its coolness adds on to its rich flavour."

### Ambadi

Ambadi is a mango barfi that is easily available in city markets. It can also be prepared at home with mangoes and coconut to attain the most desirable taste of it.

### Mango cakes `450

Mango flavoured cakes are a big hit in the summer season and are easily available now. The subtle taste of this cake is what makes people obsess over this dessert in these hot months.

### Mango Kulfi `30

Kulfi in Nashik is not all about malai and gulkand. Come summer and the markets are flooded with the all-time favourite mango kulfi. All the goodness of the juicy alphonso mangoes in a sinfully rich and creamy kulfi gives your taste buds a treat. Shops even add nuts to give it a fancy look.

### Mango Flavoured Drink

This drink, manufactured in Nashik, is made of mango. It is as refreshing as it gets. From being a thirst quenching drink on a summery afternoon to the ideal sipper in parties, the drink has many takers.

### Amrakhand

A popular variation of the mango flavoured shrikhand is the amrakhand. It is one of the easiest mango desserts that can be prepared in no time. It is thick, creamy soft, supple, delicious and a total melt-in-your-mouth delicacy.

### Mango Juice

Home-made mango juice prepared from organic alphonso mangoes tastes incredibly good. It is most preferred over mango pieces because it naturally gives the factual taste of mangoes.

## 3 must-try burger recipes

Easy burger recipes you must try!

### PESTO BURGER

Ingredients  
- Ground meat - 1 kilo  
- Salt - ½ tsp  
- Pepper - ½ tsp  
- Mozzarella cheese - 3 slices  
- Pesto - ½ cup  
- Lettuce - few crispy leaves  
- Roasted red peppers - ½ cup  
- Burger buns - 4

### Method

Pound the meat, season with salt and pepper and shape it into rounds. Fry them in hot oil until each side cooks really well. Take a bun add the burger to it, along with a leaf, the cheese. Spread some pesto onto it. Add it to the hot pan and simmer for a minute until the meat is reheated and the cheese gets melted.

### Pizza burger

Ingredients  
- Ground meat - ½ kilo  
- Pizza puree - 2 cups  
- Onion - ½, diced  
- Capsicum - ½, diced  
- Mozzarella cheese - ¼ cup  
- Mushrooms, roasted - ½ cup  
- Oregano - 1 tsp  
- Lettuce - few crispy leaves  
- Buns - 4

### Method

Heat a skillet and add some oil to it. Cook the meat till it is well done. Add the pizza puree and cook. Add the oregano as well. Also stir fry the

peppers and onion and add it to the meat mixture. Take a bun, add the lettuce leaves to it as well as the cooked meat mixture.

### RED BEAN BURGER

Ingredients  
- Red beans (rajma), cooked - 1 cup  
- Ground zeera - 1 ½ tsp  
- Garam masala - a pinch  
- Onions - 1, sliced  
- Mayonnaise - 3 tbsps  
- Dry bread crumbs - ½ cup  
- Oregano - ½ tsp  
- Pepper - ½ tsp  
- Mint leaves - a few, chopped  
- Vegetable oil - 2 tbsps  
- Buns - 4

### Method

Heat oil and saute the onion. Add the garam masala and zeera to it. Add the boiled rajma beans to this and saute. Now blend together the bread crumbs, mayonnaise, pepper and oregano to it. Spoon the mixture into the buns and place the burgers in a skillet. Serve with salsa sauce.



## Niki Prasad stars as DCW edge past MIW in thriller

Vadodara, Feb 15 (UNI) : Niki Prasad emerged as the match-winner for Delhi Capitals Women (DCW), guiding her side to a thrilling two-wicket victory over Mumbai Indians Women (MIW) in their Women's Premier League (WPL) encounter here on Saturday.

Niki's composed 35 off 33 balls, combined with a crucial 33-run stand with Alice Capsey, proved vital in DCW's successful chase of 165.

Chasing what appeared to be a par total, DCW got off to a blazing start, compiling 60 runs in the powerplay. Shafali Verma single-handedly mauled the Mumbai bowlers during her explosive 18-ball 43, which included seven fours and two sixes.

However, her dismissal on the final ball of the powerplay, followed by



skipper Meg Lanning who scored 15 off 19, tilted the momentum in MIW's favour. The next two overs saw Delhi losing Jemimah Rodrigues (2) and Annabel Sutherland (13) cheaply, reducing them to 76/4. The sudden collapse saw DCW add only 23 runs for the loss of three wickets in the

four overs after the powerplay.

With pressure mounting, Niki and Capsey steadied the innings with their crucial partnership, ensuring Delhi remained in the hunt. Sarah Bryce's quickfire 21 off 10 balls and Radha Yadav's late blitz of 9 off 4 balls added to the

drama in the final overs, setting up a nerve-wracking finish. DCW ultimately got over the line with just two wickets in hand, sealing a remarkable victory.

Earlier, Nat Sciver-Brunt's fighting unbeaten 80 off 59 balls was the lone bright spot in an otherwise underwhelming batting

display by MIW, who were bowled out for 164 in 19.1 overs.

Sciver-Brunt anchored the innings with 13 crisp boundaries, keeping MIW afloat as wickets tumbled around her. Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur's brisk 42 off 22 balls injected much-needed momentum, but her dismissal proved to be the turning point, as the lower order failed to capitalise on the platform.

DCW's bowlers seized control at the right moments, with Sutherland (3/34) recovering from an expensive start to claim key scalps, while the ever-reliable Shikha Pandey (2/14) applied the brakes with precision.

The victory cements DCW's position as one of the strongest sides in the tournament, while MIW will have to reassess their batting approach.

## Scheffler & McIlroy in contention in San Diego

San Diego, Feb 15 (UNI) : World number one Scottie Scheffler and Northern Ireland's Rory McIlroy are in touch with leader Davis Thompson at the halfway stage of the Genesis International here.

American Scheffler hit a five-under 67 to lie one shot behind Thompson, who birdied the final hole as he signed for a 66 to set the pace on eight under.

McIlroy also shot a 67, with five birdies in eight holes from the third moving him into contention at Torrey Pines, the BBC reported.

But the Northern Irishman followed that with bogeys at the 12th and 14th before picking up shots at the 15th and the 17th. He was unable to take advantage of the par-five 18th and is three shots off the lead.

"I hit a lot of really good shots. I played well for the most part. I scrambled well," said the 35-year-old.

"I just didn't take advantage of the par fives. I made up for it in other places, which was nice. But I know going into the weekend I'm going to have to play the par fives better."

Scheffler, who won last year's Masters, hit only five fairways on Friday and also knows he will have to do better to challenge over the weekend.

"I'm definitely going to try to be in the fairway a bit more," he said.

"I felt I survived without driving the ball very well and I'm going to need to drive it better over the last couple of days."

Thompson, 25, claimed his first PGA Tour win last year and had six birdies in his first 13 holes before dropping shots at his next two holes.

However, he recovered with a birdie at 16 and then a short-range putt at the last ensured he finished on a high.

The Genesis is usually held at Riviera Country Club but was relocated to Torrey Pines because of the Los Angeles wildfires.

## World number one Sinner banned for three months

Rome, Feb 15 (UNI) World number one Jannik Sinner has accepted an immediate three-month ban from tennis after reaching a settlement with the World Anti-Doping Agency over his two positive drugs test last year. The 23-year-old Italian, who last month won the Australian Open, is suspended from February 9 until May 4, the BBC reported.

He will be eligible to play in the year's next Grand Slam event, the French Open, which starts on May 19. Wada had launched an appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (Cas) over the 2024 decision by the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) not to suspend Sinner.

Wada wanted a ban of up to two years but on Saturday said it accepts his explanation that he was inadvertently contaminated with the banned substance clostebol by his physiotherapist, and the case will now not take place.

The body explained it accepts the three-time Grand Slam champion "did not intend to cheat", that the drug "did not provide

any performance-enhancing benefit" and this happened "without his knowledge as the result of negligence of members of his entourage".

It added: "However, under the code and by virtue of Cas precedent, an athlete bears responsibility for the entourage's negligence. Based on the unique set of facts of this case, a three-month suspension is deemed to be an appropriate outcome."

In a statement released by his lawyers, Sinner said: "This case had been hanging over me for nearly a year and the process still had a long time to run with a decision maybe only at the end of the year.

"I have always accepted that I am responsible for my team and realise Wada's strict rules are an important protection for the sport I love. On that basis I have accepted Wada's offer to resolve these proceedings on the basis of a three-month sanction."

Tennis has seen some high-profile doping cases over the past six months, with leading female player

Iga Swiatek accepting a one-month suspension in November after testing positive for a banned substance when she was world number one.

Sinner had previously been cleared of any wrongdoing by an independent panel after testing positive for clostebol in March 2024.

It had accepted that he had been inadvertently contaminated by his physiotherapist, who was treating a cut on his hand with an over-the-counter spray, which was later found to contain the banned substance.

The ITIA said in August that the panel found Sinner bore "no fault or negligence" for testing positive for low levels of a metabolite of clostebol - a steroid that can be used to build muscle mass.

But Wada lodged an appeal with Cas last September, stating at the time that the finding of "no fault or negligence" was not correct under the applicable rules. It sought a ban of between one and two years, with a hearing scheduled for April 16-17.

## East Bengal FC square off against Mohammedan SC

Kolkata, Feb 15 (UNI) East Bengal FC will play Mohammedan SC at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan (VYBK) in the Indian Super League (ISL) match here on Sunday.

East Bengal FC are currently placed 11th with 18 points from 19 games, having won once and lost thrice in their previous five matches. However, four goalless games in their last five fixtures has dented their progress and the Red & Gold Brigade would want to regain their scoring touch and solidify their position with 15 points still to play for them in the league.

At the bottom of the standings, Mohammedan SC have gone through a difficult debut campaign in the ISL, earning 11 points from 19 encounters. The team has scored just nine goals in the competition, conceding 34 and are coming into this game on the back of a three-game-long losing streak.

In the earlier fixture between these two sides in November, both sides had

settled for a goalless draw.

As of now, East Bengal FC are 13 points behind sixth-placed Mumbai City FC (31). Bridging that gap and entering the playoffs might be slightly difficult, but it is in their hands to continue to push for a strong finish to the season. After parting ways with Carles Cuadrat, the team went through a slight transition and their cause has not been bettered with a dry patch upfront, scoring the second-least goals (18) in the competition.

The star striking duo of Cleiton Silva and Dimitrios Diamantakos, who netted a combined total of 21 goals for their respective teams in ISL 2023-24, have scored just thrice so far - all of them coming from Diamantakos as Silva is yet to open his account for the campaign.

For both these sides, the key is to sign off positively from this season. With 19 games gone, each of them must have secured important takeaways that can enable them to ensure a better finish in the

standings. East Bengal FC have arguably consciously devised a strategy to catch opponents offside, having done so 51 times this season, which is the most by any side. This disrupts the other team's offensive patterns and gives the Red & Gold Brigade a stronger base to build their attacking moves from.

The Jordanian centre-back has been a powerhouse for East Bengal FC, making 17 blocks, winning 32 duels, rounding off 54 recoveries, 63 clearances, and also finding the back of the net twice in 13 appearances this season.

Mohammedan SC's defensive frailties have been palpable, since they have given away multiple goals in each of their last four games. This marks the second-longest such stretch by any team in their debut ISL season, only behind Hyderabad FC's six-game run between December 2019 and January 2020. Their goal difference of -25 is the worst in the

league. Mohammedan SC's attacking problems have been down to their inefficiency upfront, as they have converted just six of their 29 big chances this season. They have the lowest conversion rate (20.7%) among all teams. East Bengal FC (28) are the only team to have created fewer big chances than Mohammedan SC this season.

East Bengal FC head coach Oscar Bruzon said that his team has worked hard towards recovering their lost form.

"This was a long week. It was a week where we worked towards bringing our performances back to the level that we have displayed earlier against good and quality teams," he said. Mohammedan SC's assistant coach Mehrajuddin Wadoo expressed that his side understands the magnitude of this match.

"We know the importance of this game. We are going to play with all our heart and make sure

## Ugandan defender Nankya joins NWSL side Washington Spirit in US

Kampala, Feb 15 (UNI) : Uganda Crested Cranes' defender Shadia Nankya has joined the National Women's Super League side in the United States, Washington Spirit FC.

Nankya who also played for the Uganda Crested Cranes at the TotalEnergies CAF Women's Africa Cup of Nations (WAFCON) 2023 in Morocco, confirmed the development on Friday.

The versatile defender joined Washington Spirit on a two-year contract from Egypt Women's Premier

League side, FC Masar.

"I am very happy that finally, I have joined a big team in the top League in the world. I am ready to work hard and help my team achieve its goals," Nankya said. The 24-year-old defender who featured in all matches for her former Egyptian team last season previously played for Uganda Christian University's Lady Cardinals in the Uganda Women's Premier League.

"Playing at the highest level in women's football at the Washington Spirit will

also serve as an inspiration to thousands of girls in primary and secondary schools in Uganda and the wider East African region," she added. Edgar Watson Suubi, the Chief Executive Officer of the Federation of Uganda Football Associations (FUFA), said that Nankya's move to the United States is a big achievement because it is the biggest Women's League in the world.

"Nankya's move will also open more doors for Ugandan players in the USA," added Suubi.

## Chennaiyin FC edge past Punjab FC 2-1 in ISL

Chennai, Feb 15 (UNI) Chennaiyin FC registered their first home win in five games as they edged past Punjab FC by 2-1 at the Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium here in the Indian Super League (ISL) match on Saturday evening.

Coming off a morale-boosting win against East Bengal FC, Chennaiyin FC struck first with Wilmar Jordan Gil converting from the spot. Punjab FC retaliated early in the second half with Luka Majcen slotting home the equaliser.

However, the hosts left it late when Daniel Chima Chukwu scored the winner in the 84th minute to bag the maximum points.

Despite this win, the Marina Machans, with 24 points from 21 games, are seven behind sixth-placed Mumbai City FC, who have 31 points from 20 games.

Punjab FC started the game with more momentum in their attacks. The visitors were moving the ball with more intensity in the final third. Asmir Suljic got the first opportunity of the match but his eventual effort was wayward as he failed to keep it in target from close range.

A couple of minutes later, Punjab FC had their best opportunity following Chennaiyin FC's throw-in. Ravi Kumar gathered the

ball and found Petros Giakoumakis with a long ball. The Greek forward held the ball up and released Mrzljak through on goal from the right flank.

The Croatian had a clear look on goal but his shot was not vicious enough to beat Mohammed Nawaz, who was alert to the danger.

However, the missed opportunities came back to bite them when Melroy Assisi handled the ball in the penalty box, awarding a spot-kick for the hosts. Wilmar Jordan Gil stepped up to the spot and hammered it past Ravi in goal to hand Chennaiyin FC the lead in the 19th minute.

In the 37th minute, Punjab FC had a decent chance to get back into the game when Ricky Shabong stole possession from Lalrinliana Hnamte in the final third and played it to the Croatian. Mrzljak had a couple of options but he decided to go on his own, though the chance fizzled out as he failed to hit the target.

A minute later, Panagiotis Dilmeris decided to take a more attacking approach with a couple of changes as things were not working in his team's favour. He introduced Muhammad Suhail and

Luka Majcen replacing

Asish Pradhan and Mrzljak. The latter was also struggling with a knock near his hamstring.

Chennaiyin FC had a great chance to double their lead when Wilmar glided a header towards Irfan Yadwad in space and the winger made a surging run into the box. However, his eventual shot was brilliantly kept out by Ravi. Moments later, Punjab FC almost had an opening when Suhail delivered a telling cross across goal but none of his teammates attacked the ball in the box.

Just like the first half, Punjab FC started the second half strong with Suhail coming close to scoring. He just missed the target by a whisker. However, Majcen repaid his coach's faith when he found the equaliser in the 48th minute. It was a brilliant give-and-go between Ezequiel Vidal and Suljic in the penalty box before the Argentine passed it to Majcen, who made no mistake in registering his eighth goal of the campaign. In the 70th minute, Giakoumakis had a brilliant opportunity to put his team ahead in the game when Khaiminthang Lhungdim found the Greek forward in the box. However, Giakoumakis failed to control his header as it flew over the bar.

## Cerundolo shocks Zverev to reach Argentina Open last four

Buenos Aires, Feb 15 (UNI) Local favorite Francisco Cerundolo recovered from a set down to beat German top seed Alexander Zverev and advance to the semifinals of the ATP 250 Argentina Open. Fifth-seed Cerundolo made 71% of his first serves and saved five of seven break points to prevail 3-6, 6-3, 6-2 on the outdoor clay of the Buenos Aires Lawn Tennis Club on Friday.

"To be able to beat him here in Buenos Aires, in my hometown, with my home crowd is amazing. It's probably one of the best feelings I've ever had," the 26-year-old said. The result made Cerundolo the first Argentine to beat a top-two player since Diego Schwartzman overcame Rafael Nadal at the 2020 Masters 1000 event in Rome.

The world No. 28 will face Spain's Pedro Martinez for a place in the final.

In other matches on Friday, Brazil's Joao Fonseca outlasted Argentine Mariano Navone 3-6, 6-4, 7-5 and Serb Laslo Djere defeated Thiago Wild, also of Brazil, 7-6 (3), 6-

Printed, Published and Owned by  
Mohammed Shafi

Printed at Haritha Printers  
Plot No : 70, Opposite Petrol Pump, VUDA  
Colony, Gopalapatnam, Visakhapatnam-530 027.  
Published from # 39-22-82/1/4,  
Near Vuda Quarters, Kalinga Nagar,  
Madhavadhara, Visakhapatnam - 530 007.

Editor: Mohammed Shafi  
R.N.I.No. : APENG/2013/52180

Cell : 9849881368, Tel : 040 - 23232705  
Email : standardpostvizag@gmail.com

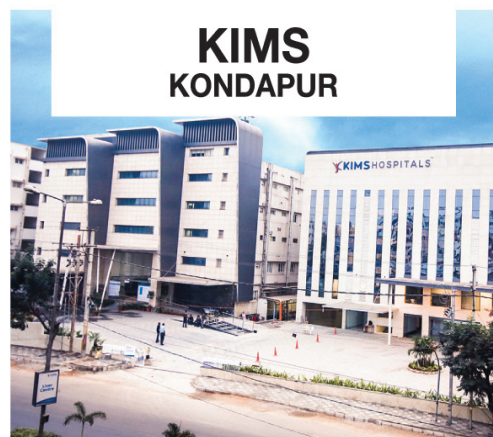
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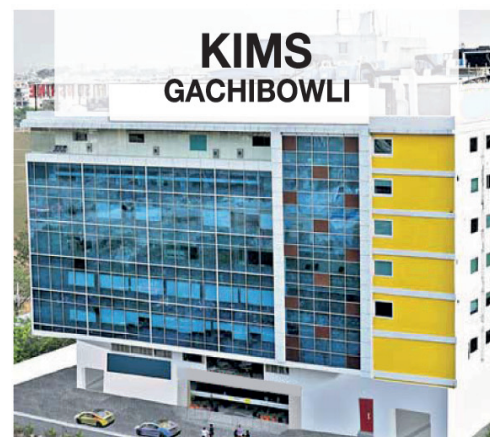
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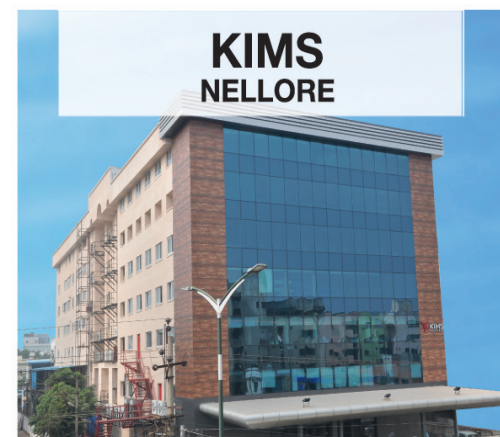
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