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Mark Zuckerberg set to testify in watershed social media trial

P-11

Govt examining proposal to raise upper age limit for JKCE exam

The government today said the issue to enhance the upper age limit for candidates appearing in the Jammu & Kashmir Combined Competitive Examination (JKCE) was under examination.

In response to cut motion of MLA Sajad Gani Lone, the minister in-charge of General Administration Department said that issue was under examination to assess its feasibility in the light of the existing provisions of

Cont. on P9 >

5 HDFC Bank employees arrested for financial fraud

Five HDFC employees have been arrested in connection with an alleged financial fraud in Shopian district of the valley.

According to officials, the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the crime branch carried out searches in Shopian and Budgam districts on Wednesday in connection with the matter.

"Five HDFC bank employees have been arrested so far," officials

Cont. on P9 >

5 detained as manhunt for juvenile home escapee continues

At least five persons were detained for questioning amid intensified search for the gangster who remained at large after escaping a juvenile home, along with two Pakistani inmates, in the border R S Pura area of Jammu.

Both the Pakistani nationals were, however, arrested yesterday near Ambala railway station in Haryana while they were heading for Nepal.

Karajeet Singh alias Gugga of Dablehar, R S Pura, and Pak nationals - Mohammad Sanaullah

Cont. on P9 >

India beat Netherlands in T20 WC match

NEW DELHI, FEB 18: India rode on the batting heroics of Shivam Dube and the mystery spin of Varun Chakravarthy to edge out Netherlands by 17 runs in their final Group A match of the T20 World Cup 2026 in Ahmedabad on Monday.

Opting to bat first, India lost both openers in the powerplay, with Abhishek

Cont. on P9 >

Death-cum-retirement gratuity ceiling raised to Rs 25 lakh

Himalayan Mail News JAMMU, FEB 18

The government has clarified that the maximum limit of Death-cum-Retirement Gratuity (DCRG) for employees working in regular pay levels under the 7th Pay Commission has been enhanced from Rs 20 lakh to Rs 25 lakh, effective January 1, 2024, following the Dearness Allowance reaching 50 pc of basic pay.

In a clarification circular issued by the principal

Cont. on P9 >

## J&K's debt at Rs 1.37 lakh cr to be offset by increased GSDP: Omar

Himalayan Mail News JAMMU, FEB 18

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has said that Jammu and Kashmir's total debt in the financial year 2024-25 is estimated at Rs 1,37,067 cr, 48 pc of the Union Territory's GDP, which has expanded significantly to Rs 2,88,422 cr.

Defending his government's fiscal management strategy, he said the increase in the gross state domestic product (GSDP) has helped in reducing the debt-to-GSDP ratio to 48 per cent in the current fiscal from 51 per cent a year ago.

The chief minister detailed the trend of the Union Territory's debt-to-GSDP ratio for the past six years.

In 2019-20, liabilities stood at Rs 89,037 crore, which was 54 per cent of that year's GSDP of Rs 1,64,103 crore, he said in a written reply in the legislative assembly.

Liabilities increased to



Rs 98,244 crore in 2020-21, with the debt-to-GSDP ratio rising to 59 per cent, largely due to economic contraction during Covid pandemic, he said.

In 2021-22, liabilities rose to Rs 1,06,753 crore, but the debt-to-GSDP ratio declined to 53 per cent as economic recovery gained momentum, he added.

A year later in 2022-23, liabilities stood at Rs 1,09,825 crore, and the ratio further declined to 48 per cent, the chief minister said, adding, "In 2023-24,

Cont. on P9 >

liabilities increased to Rs 1,25,205 crore, with the ratio at 51 per cent."

Abdullah said that in the current fiscal year, liabilities were projected at Rs 1,37,067 crore, while GSDP had expanded significantly to Rs 2,88,422 crore, again bringing the debt-to-GSDP ratio down to 48 per cent.

The chief minister highlighted that fiscal sustainability had improved over the years, with economic growth helping to moder

Cont. on P9 >

### 13 demands moved in LA

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah today moved 13 demands and 19 supplementary demands in the legislative assembly which were subsequently presented before the House for discussion by Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather.

"I move that a sum not exceeding the aggregate amount mentioned in Demand No 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 14, 19, 20, 24, 31 and 33 be granted to government to defray the charges which will come in course of payment during the year ending March 31, 2027 in respect of Heads indicated in the List of Business against each demand," he said.

These Demands for Grants pertain to General Administration Department, Planning, Monitoring and Development, Information, Power, Finance, Parliamentary Affairs, Law &

Cont. on P9 >

## India major global talent hub, says EAM Jaishankar



NEW DELHI, FEB 18: At a time of economic realignment and de-risking across supply chains, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar today asserted that India was becoming a major contributor to global talent pools.

"The concept of a global workforce is now a reality shaped by AI, demographic shifts and technological change. The initiative aims to provide a transparent and legal pathway connecting Indian talent with European opportunity," he said while speaking at the European Legal Gateway Office

launch here.

Jaishankar emphasised that India and the EU view each other as natural and preferred partners with strong strategic convergence.

He cited progress on the India EU Free Trade Agreement, defence ties and the 2030 Joint Strategic

Agenda as milestones shaping a new chapter. The message was clear: India is not just participating in global transitions - it is defining them.

"The opening of the first European Legal Gateway Office in India is not just a facilitation for entry into Europe but also a bridge between the societies in both regions as well as an expression of trust and investment in a shared global workforce that is skilled, mobile and resilient," the EAM said.

He highlighted the broader context of global

Cont. on P9 >

### PM meets Google CEO, discusses AI collaborations



NEW DELHI, FEB 18: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday had a meeting with Sundar Pichai, CEO of Google and its parent company Alphabet Inc, and discussed the work India is doing in artificial intelligence and how the technology giant can work with Indian students and professionals in this field.

Pichai is here to attend the

Cont. on P9 >

### House hails J&K's historic entry into Ranji Trophy finals

Himalayan Mail News JAMMU, FEB 18

Legislative Assembly Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather, together with other MLAs, today congratulated the J&K cricket team for scripting history in the prestigious Ranji Trophy 2026 by securing a berth in the final for the first time.

In a thrilling semi-final encounter, J&K defeated West Bengal cricket team to book their place in the summit clash, marking a landmark moment in the cricketing history of the J&K.

Cont. on P9 >

### India focused on practical applications of AI: Vaishnav



NEW DELHI, FEB 18: IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnav on Wednesday said India is focused on practical applications of AI, including enterprise productivity, and solutions for population-scale challenges such as healthcare, agriculture, and climate change.

Speaking at a research symposium at the AI Im

Cont. on P9 >

## ECI sets Mar 16 date for biennial RS polls to 37 seats

NEW DELHI, FEB 18: The Election Commission (EC) on Wednesday announced that biennial elections to fill 37 Rajya Sabha seats falling vacant across 10 states on different dates in April would be held on March 16, with counting scheduled for later the same day.

Polling will take place between 9 am and 4 pm, and vote counting will begin at 5 pm, the commission said. The vacancies arise as the terms of 37 members of the Upper House end in April 2026.

Prominent MPs retiring this cycle include Upendra

Kushwaha, Priyanka Chaturvedi, Tiruchi Siva, Saket Gokhale, Ramdas Athawale, Abhishek Manu Singhvi, Sharad Pawar, Bhagwat Karad, Mamata Mohanta, Rameswar Teli, Indu Basu Goswami, K.T.S.

To ensure transparency, the commission will deploy observers in each state to oversee the election process.

It also directed that only integrated violet sketch pens supplied by the respective Returning Officers be used for marking preferences on ballot papers,

Cont. on P9 >

## Ukraine peace talks end in Geneva without breakthrough

limited convergence after intensive discussions.

Officials familiar with the talks said the focus remained on core issues such as ceasefire conditions, security guarantees, territorial control and the sequencing of any future negotiations. However, none of these areas saw sufficient alignment to allow for a joint statement or a concrete roadmap, BBC and CNN reported on Wednesday.

From an analytical standpoint, the brevity of the final session highlights

the entrenched nature of the conflict and the constraints facing diplomacy at this stage of the war.

Russia is understood to have reiterated its long-standing demands around territorial realities and security arrangements, positions that Ukraine continues to reject as incompatible with its sovereignty. Kyiv, backed by Washington, has maintained that any durable settlement must be anchored in a full withdrawal of Russian forces and credible

Speaking at a research symposium at the AI Im

Cont. on P9 >

### Navya Naveli Nanda Talks About How There Was No 'Pressure' To Join Bollywood

P-10

## Foundation stone of Shankaracharya temple laid SMVDSB enhancing puja samagri procurement from SHGs to Rs 12 cr: LG

Himalayan Mail News JAMMU, FEB 18



around 1,500 women from

villages in Reasi, Udhampur and Jammu districts,"

borne by the board.

The LG announced that the board would also construct 50 commercial shops within the temple complex, which would be allotted to the landowners who had donated it for the sacred cause.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between SMVDSB and the concerned landowners was executed in 2025, wherein the landowners consented to donate 41 kanals for the sacred cause.

"In the years ahead, Sri Shankaracharya Temple will serve as a spiritual anchor for millions of devotees," he said.

Cont. on P9 >

## Union Budget

### Allocations for women, children jump 11.55 pc to Rs 5.01 trn

NEW DELHI, FEB 18:

Allocation for women and girls under various schemes has increased by 11.55 per cent to Rs 5.01 lakh crore in 2026-27, up from Rs 4.49 lakh crore in the previous financial year, as per the Gender Budget Statement (GBS) released by the government.

The allocations were announced as part of the Union Budget 2026-27, which was presented in Parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1.

A total of 53 ministries/departments

and five Union territories have reported allocations in the gender budget this year -- compared to 49 ministries/departments and five UTs in the previous fiscal.

Of the total allocation, Rs 1,07,688.42 crore (21.50 per cent) has been reported by nine ministries and one UT under Part A of the GBS, which includes schemes that are 100 per cent women-specific.

Under Part B, covering schemes with 30-99 per cent allocation for women,

Cont. on P9 >

## Indian Navy vigilant in safeguarding maritime interests: Murmu

VISAKHAPATNAM,

FEB 18: President

Droupadi Murmu today said that the Indian Navy is

vigilant in safeguarding the country's maritime interests and has been contributing to stability across wider maritime commerce.

"Indian Navy is deployed in the region to serve as a credible instrument of deterrence and defence against threats and challenges arising in the sea," she said in his address while presiding over the International Fleet Review (IFR) off Vizag coast aboard an Indian Naval

Cont. on P9 >

warship in the Bay of Bengal.

"Indian Navy is vigilant in safeguarding India's maritime interests and is contributing to stability

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## AI emerging as key enabler of inclusive growth: Kavinder

NEW DELHI, FEB 18:

Ladakh LG Kavinder Gupta today said as India advances decisively on the path of becoming a global technology leader, Artificial Intelligence is emerging as a key enabler of inclusive growth, good governance and sustainable development.

"The hosting of the India AI Summit, with participation from over 20 countries, stands as a testament to India's growing stature as a trusted global partner in shaping the future of responsible, ethical and human-centric artificial intel-

ligence," he said after his visit to the India AI Summit being held at Bharat Mandapam here.

Ladakh's IT commissioner Shashanka Ala also accompanied the LG.

The LG visited several technology pavilions and in-

Cont. on P9 >



teracted with representatives of leading global and Indian companies, including Google, Meta, Amazon, Airtel, CoRover and other IT firms actively working in the field of artificial intelligence.

He appreciated the inno-

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