



Greenpeace environmental activists protest in front of Germany's Federal Administrative Court before it decides whether German law provides a legal basis for cities to ban diesel cars to help reduce air pollution, in Leipzig, Germany — REUTERS

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Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee at an administrative meeting at Barasat in North 24 Parganas district Tuesday — Arjit Ganguly

Maldives declines India's invite for naval exercise

NEW DELHI, FEB 27 /- Maldives has declined India's invitation to participate in the eight-day-long mega naval exercise -- Milan -- beginning March 6, in an apparent snub to New Delhi which has been critical of the Yameen government in view of the emergency in the island nation. "Maldives was invited to join the Milan exercise but they have declined," Navy Chief Admiral Sunil Lamba told reporters, and indicated that the country may have taken the decision possibly due to the current situation there. "They have not given any reason," he said. Admiral Lamba was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an event. Ties between India and Maldives nosedived after Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen declared emergency on February 5 following an order by the country's Supreme Court to release a group of Opposition leaders, who had been convicted in widely criticised trials. On February 21, India had reacted strongly over the extension of emergency by a month, India will host during deliberations at the backdrop of China's growing military posturing in the Indo-Pacific region and officials indicated that the issue is likely to figure during deliberations at the event. Officials said China's military manoeuvres in the South China Sea may figure during discussions among navy chiefs of the participating countries at the event. "Milan" was first held in 1995 with the participation of just five navies. The aim of the initiative was to have an effective forum to discuss common concerns in the Indian Ocean Region and forge deeper cooperation among friendly navies. The exercise is being hosted by the Indian Navy under the aegis of the Andaman and Nicobar Command. (PTI)

AT A GLANCE

State CPI secy Prabodh Panda passes away

KOLKATA: Veteran CPI leader and West Bengal state secretary Prabodh Panda passed away following a massive heart attack today, a party leader said. "He suffered a massive heart attack in the morning when he was working at the party office," a senior CPI leader said. He was 72 and is survived by his wife, son and daughter-in-law. Panda was a three-time CPI MP from Midnapore Lok Sabha constituency since 2001 till 2014. Known for his organisational skills, Panda was elected as the state secretary of CPI in the last party conference. (PTI)

Mehbooba meets Rajnath

NEW DELHI: Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Mehbooba Mufti today met Home Minister Rajnath Singh and discussed the prevailing situation in the state, an official said. During the 20-minute meeting, the chief minister briefed the Union home minister on the security situation in the Valley as well as along the border with Pakistan, which has been witnessing heavy cross-border firing and continuous attempts of infiltration by militants. The two leaders also discussed the ongoing peace initiatives being undertaken by the Centre's representative Dineshwar Sharma, the home ministry official said.

Centre, state cross swords again on Khadya Sathi scheme

KOLKATA, FEB 27 /- The Centre and the state government today once again sparred on another issue. This time it is the popular Khadya sathi programme of the TMC government. The state government lashed at the Union ministry of food and public distribution which put the state government in the dock for alleged gross irregularities in the scheme. According to a letter from the union ministry to the state government majority of the people were debarred from availing the benefits of the scheme, and that officials who went for inspection of the scheme did not get due co-operation from the West Bengal government. The state government is now going to write back to the Union government that the Centre has taken an unconstitutional step by hiring a private agency to probe into the irregularities of a state fund scheme. "We have received a letter from the Union food and public distribution ministry alleging that their

Dubai PP closes Sridevi death case, attributes accidental drowning to loss of consciousness

Celebrities slam media for sensational reporting on tragedy

DUBAI/MUMBAI, FEB 27 /- Ending speculation over Bollywood diva Sridevi's sudden death, the Dubai Public Prosecutors Office today said she accidentally drowned following loss of consciousness and her body "released" to the family after a comprehensive probe. Three days after the actor was found dead in her room at the Jumeirah Emirates Towers hotel, the family was finally given custody of her body. Family members, including her filmmaker husband Boney Kapoor and stepson Arjun Kapoor, took the body from the morgue to get it embalmed before heading for the Dubai airport for her final journey home. The funeral is likely to be held in Mumbai on Wednesday. A private jet had flown in to Dubai from Mumbai on Sunday, a day after her untimely end, Dubai Media Office, the official Twitter handle of the media office of the government, said in a series of tweets that the case is now closed.



completed. As per the forensic report, the death of the Indian actress occurred due to accidental drowning following loss of consciousness. The case has now been closed. The 54-year-old actor, known as Indian cinema's first woman superstar, leaves behind her husband Boney and their two daughters Jhanvi and Khushi. The Consulate General of India in Dubai also confirmed on Twitter that Dubai Police had given permission to take the body for embalming. In Dubai, embalming is routinely done in cases where the body has to be transported, Gulf News reported. Arjun Kapoor reached Dubai this morning to be with his father. "Arjun has gone to Dubai this morning to be with his father at the hotel while the formalities are being wrapped up and to oversee the return journey, said an official statement from the family in Mumbai.

The Dubai Police said on its Twitter handle on Monday that Sridevi drowned in her bathtub after she lost consciousness. The case was transferred to the Dubai Public Prosecution, which carried

out further investigation and procedures followed in such cases, it said. "Following the completion of post-mortem analysis, Dubai police headquarters today stated that the death of the Indian actress Sridevi occurred due to drowning in her hotel apartment's bathtub following loss of consciousness," it said. Meanwhile, TV media's frantic reporting over the death of veteran actor Sridevi has angered Bollywood celebrities and her fans, who have called the coverage "graceless" and "insensitive".

Celebrities such as Vidya Balan and Farhan Akhtar criticised the TV channels for suggesting various conspiracy theories on the cause of her death. Farhan posted a cryptic tweet where he wrote, "There's no bottom in the barrel of the graceless." Balan, who posted a photo of the late actor, said, "May they rest in peace..." Megastar Amitabh Bachchan wrote, "Get back to love... it is the only sustainable!" Fashion designer Masaba Mantena appealed people to switch off their television. Actor Rohit Roy, tweeted, "It is very very sad the way certain news channels are treating the passing of a lady, a daughter, a wife and most importantly a mother of 2 young girls... agreed, she was an actor and the people want to know details, but this? Sridevi ji sorry but they won't let you even rest in peace."

PNB finds fraud amount could be Rs 1,323 cr more

ED moves court for NBW against Nirav, Cong asks PM to shift from "maun Modi to bol Modi"

NEW DELHI, FEB 27 /- Amid the multi-agency probe into the PNB scam, the state-run bank today said the amount of fraudulent transactions could be Rs 1,300 crore more than the current estimate of about Rs 11,400 crore. The latest announcement from the public sector lender assumes significance against the backdrop of the probe going on into the Rs 11,400 crore scam, which is already one of the biggest in the Indian banking sector. On February 14, the bank had detected the fraud wherein billionaire jeweller Nirav Modi and associates had allegedly acquired fraudulent letters of undertaking (LoUs) from one of the branches of the PNB for overseas credit from other Indian lenders. In a filing to the BSE late on Monday, the bank said the amount of unauthorised transactions could go up by more than Rs 1,300 crore. "We have to inform that quantum of reported unauthorised transactions can increase by USD 204.25 million (approximately)," the filing said. At the current exchange rate, the amount comes to around Rs 1,323 crore.

The bank also referred to its filing made on February 14 when it first disclosed the fraud and at that time, the "fraudulent and unauthorised transactions" was estimated at USD 1.77 billion (about Rs 11,400 crore). The scam was perpetrated by the way of fraudulent Letters of Undertaking (LoUs) generated in the name of Punjab National Bank. Meanwhile, The Enforcement Directorate (ED) today moved a special court here, seeking issuance of a non-bailable warrant (NBW) against diamond trader Nirav Modi, a key accused in the over Rs 11,000-crore PNB



scam, and advised him to "turn maun (silent) Modi to bol (speaking) Modi". The party said while the "bank fraud" was getting bigger, the Prime Minister was quiet. "Why is it that the bank fraud keeps getting bigger? On February 14, 2018, when PNB did its filing with the National Stock Exchange, he admitted that their exposure is USD 1771.69 million," Congress Communications in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala said. "Last evening they did a second filing admitting that their exposure has now further gone up by USD 204.25 million," he told newsmen here in poll-bound Karnataka. This means that the total scam has gone up to USD 2 billion (Rs 12,717 crore), according to the documents released by Punjab National Bank, he said.

Senior officials of the Union food and public distribution department said earlier that a team of officials of that private agency went to some of the ration shops and after speaking with the officers, they came to know that around 30 per cent people have not received subsidised rice and when officers went for inspection at ration shops, they were not allowed to enter the shops by the officials of the state government. Jyotipriyo Mullick, minister in charge of state food supplies department said, "We have not co-operated with the officials of the Centre as it does not provide financial assistance for the scheme, and it's unconstitutional to deputate a private agency for probing a state-run scheme."

Indian, Pak troops trade heavy fire

JAMMU, FEB 27 /- Heavy firing exchanges started on Tuesday between Indian and Pakistani troops along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch and Rajouri districts, according to the defence ministry. Using small arms, automatics and mortars, Pakistani troops started firing at around 8.45 am, ministry sources said. The Pakistani Army targeted defence and civilian facilities in the border area of Poonch and in Rajouri's Balakote, Manjokote, Lambi Bari and Naika Panjgrian areas, they added. Several students were trapped inside a school building in Rajouri as heavy firing and shelling continued outside. They have now been evacuated to safety, an official said. "Our troops retaliated effectively and strongly," ministry sources said. All schools in the affected areas have been shut down until further orders, the administration said.



Members of AISA (All India Students Association) shouting slogans during their march to Rashtrapati Bhawan to press their various demands, at Central Secretariat Metro Station, in New Delhi on Tuesday.

By-polls a rehearsal; ensure all 80 in 2019: Adityanath tells BJP workers in Gorakhpur

GORAKHPUR, FEB 27 /- Terming the by-polls to the Gorakhpur and Pilibutur Lok Sabha seats a "rehearsal" for the 2019 general elections, Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath today asked party workers to work in a manner that the BJP wins all 80 seats next year. Speaking at a public meeting in Pipraich, Adityanath said: "The by-polls are a rehearsal for the 2019 Parliamentary election. Work for the present election and also work for 2019 and win all 80 seats of the state for the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi." On the second day of his visit here, the UP chief minister addressed party workers at Pipraich and Sahjanwa and appealed to people to vote for the BJP. "We are not working for the development of a particular caste, creed, family or area, but we are working for the entire society. The entire state is progressing, all districts are progressing and Gorakhpur is also progressing... In the short span of BJP rule in the state, a fertilizer plant, AIIMS, polytechnic colleges, four-lane connectivity and many more things came to Gorakhpur. All this was possible because there is BJP government at the Centre and the state," he said. Adityanath made a fervent appeal to the people to elect BJP candidate Upendra Shukla. "Select a responsible public representative... Gorakhpur parliamentary constituency is quite big and it is not possible for a person to reach each and every household, so you all have to work for Upendra Shukla and make him win with huge margin as you all had worked for me and my vote percentage continued to increase election after election," the UP chief minister said. Adityanath, who had earlier been the Gorakhpur MP, said: "When I came to Gorakhpur, I had no identity but with hard work and dedication, I made my identity and also won the faith of people." In Sahjanwa area also Adityanath canvassed for the party candidate.

MHA rules out presence of IS in Kashmir

NEW DELHI, FEB 27 /- The Union government today sought to downplay the issue of presence of dreaded terrorist group IS in Jammu and Kashmir saying it has no existence in the Valley. There is no physical infrastructure or manpower of the IS in the Valley. It does not exist in the Valley, a home ministry spokesperson said here. The government's assertion came after the terrorist group claimed responsibility for the killing of a policeman, Farooq Ahmad Yatoo, in Jammu. Another official said Pakistan-based terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba could be behind the attack on the policeman, and Esha Fazali, a local militant who first joined the Hizbul Mujahideen and later shifted his allegiance to Lashkar-e-Taiba, has emerged as the prime suspect. However, Jammu and Kashmir DGP SP Vaid has said in Srinagar that it was now clear that ISIS had carried out the attack and it is "indeed a worrying sign".

In November 2017, there were reports that the global terrorist organisation was involved in an encounter with security forces in Srinagar where a terrorist, identified as Mugees, was killed and a sub-inspector, Imran Tak, lost his life. Amaq, which is the official news agency of ISIS, has claimed responsibility for that attack. Pictures of Mugees with the ISIS flag in the background surfaced on social media. Even his body was wrapped in the flag of the banned terrorist group during funeral.