

Veteran singer Pranab Patnaik passes away

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BHUBANESWAR

VETERAN Odia playback singer Pranab Patnaik died at a private hospital here on Friday, family sources said. He was 88. Patnaik, who had ruled the Odia music and film industry for over five decades, suddenly fell ill and was rushed to a private hospital, where he died. He is survived by wife Kasturi Patnaik and two sons.

Some of his popular songs include ‘Majhi Re’, ‘Mun Keun Sahare’, ‘Tuma Gaon Mahumachhi’, ‘Chala Ame Palajiba Sahar’, ‘Prema Tini Jati’ and ‘Smruti Tor Phere’. Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, BJD president Naveen Patnaik and several other eminent personalities condoled his death.

In a post on X, Majhi said he was “deeply saddened” by the passing of the veteran vocalist, whose “soul-stirring voice” had enchanted Odisha. “This unparalleled musical maestro, adorned with numerous honours such as the Jayadev Award, the Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, and the State Film Award, has left an irreplaceable void in the world of Odia art and culture with his demise,” the Chief Minister said.



Majhi said Patnaik’s enchanting voice and timeless compositions would remain immortal in the hearts of Odias. “In this hour of grief, I extend my deepest condolences to the bereaved family members and countless admirers, while praying to Lord Sri Jagannath for the eternal peace of the departed soul. Om Shanti,” he said.

Naveen Patnaik said the veteran singer’s “sweet singing style” had made several Odia songs immortal in people’s hearts. “His contributions to enriching the music world will remain forever memorable. In this sorrowful time, I convey my deepest condolences to the bereaved family members

while praying for the eternal peace of the departed immortal soul,” the former chief minister said.

Senior politician Bijay Mohapatra also condoled Pranab Patnaik’s death and recalled his close association with the singer. Born on January 20, 1938, Pranab Patnaik drew inspiration from his father Lal Mohan Patnaik, a former Speaker of the Odisha Legislative Assembly. He received formal training in music under Guru Kunal Adinarayan before beginning his professional career.

Patnaik made his playback singing debut in 1958 with the Odia film ‘Maa’ and went on to lend his voice to more than 200 Odia films. He was

closely associated with the singing veterans and music directors such as Akshaya Mohanty, Shantanu Mahapatra, Balakrishna Das and Prafulla Kar.

Apart from playback singing, Patnaik contributed to Odissi music, folk, devotional and bhajan music, semi-classical compositions, traditional songs, Hindi geet and ghazals. He was also closely associated with All India Radio. He was honoured with several awards, including the Jayadev Puraskar, Balakrishna Das Memorial Award in 2023, Gangadhar Rath Memorial Award in 2017, Prafulla Kar Award in 2011, Big Odia Entertainment Award in 2010 and the Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for 1997-98.

He also sang a number of duets with renowned national singers including Vani Jairam, Hemlata, Usha Mangeshkar, Bhupinder Singh, S Janaki, P Susheela, Nirmal Mishra and Haimanti Shukla. He was honoured with the prestigious Jayadev Puraskar, Balakrishna Das Memorial Award (2023), Gangadhar Rath Memorial Award (2017), Prafulla Kar Award (2011), Big Odia Entertainment Award (2010) and the Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1997-98).

Odisha

Swami’s birthplace will become heritage village: CM

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BHUBANESWAR

ODISHA Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Friday launched a scathing attack on the previous Biju Janata Dal (BJD)-led State government over its alleged failure, negligence and appeasement politics in connection with the brutal killing of Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati in 2008, which had shocked the entire State. The Chief Minister made the remarks, while addressing a special programme held at Gurjang in Talcher area of Anugola district, on Friday to mark the birth centenary of Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati. In his address, Majhi also alleged, “the disappearance of the reports and files of the Justice Mahapatra Commission and Justice Naidu Commission, constituted to investigate Swamiji’s murder, from Lok Seva Bhavan was a deliberate conspiracy to shield the perpetrators.” The Chief Minister also gave a firm assurance to the four-and-a-half crore people of Odisha, saying that every drop of Swamiji’s blood would get justice and that the truth would certainly be brought to light.

On the occasion, the Chief Minister announced that the Swamiji’s native village of Gurjang, associ-



ated with his memory, will be developed as a ‘Heritage Village’, while the Gurjang panchayat will be developed as a ‘Model Panchayat’.

Addressing the gathering, the Chief Minister said, “Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati was not merely an individual, but an embodiment of a great ideal, a divine institution and a radiant guide of Sanatan Dharma. In this modern era, he (Swamiji) renounced worldly comforts and lived in the remote and dense forests of Kandhamala, dedicated his life to the service of helpless tribal people.” Majhi also added that Swamiji established the Chakrapad and Jalespata ashrams and a Kanya Gurukul there, empowering tribal girls through Sanskrit education and values.

“The seeds of culture sown by him have now grown into a mighty tree, while the awareness he initiated against religious conversion has emerged across the State as an awakened Sanatani resolve. Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati is the ‘Guru, Granth and Garima’ (Teacher, Sacred Text and Pride) of our society,” Majhi said.

The Chief Minister called upon the Gen Z to reconnect with their roots, education, culture, Vedas, Sanskrit, cow protection and Sanatani traditions, and participate in nation-building with patriotism and courage.

He said honouring Swamiji’s unparalleled sacrifice and service, the State government had taken several important decisions, including renaming the ‘Phulbani

Government Medical College’ as the ‘Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati Medical College’ and sanctioning Rs 13 crore from the ‘Chief Minister’s Special Assistance’ (CMSA) fund for the development and heritage conservation of Swamiji’s workplace, the Jalespata Ashram, Ashram School and Kanyashram.

Of this, Rs 5 crore will be spent on constructing a 300-seat hostel for girl students, while Rs 3 crore will be spent on conserving the heritage site. A Mega River Lift project will also be implemented to ensure drinking water supply. Among others, Odisha Assembly Speaker Surama Padhy and former Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan also attended the event and addressed the gathering.

Odisha flood situation eases



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THE flood situation in six districts of Odisha eased on Friday as water levels in all major rivers, including Subarnarekha in worst-hit Baleswar district, remained below the danger mark amid no significant rainfall in the last 48 hours, officials said.

The Subarnarekha, which inundated the densely populated Baliapal, Bhograi and Jaleswar blocks of Baleswar and affected around 2.1 lakh people, was flowing below the danger level, they said. “The water level is receding at Rajghat. It was recorded at 9.75 metres against the danger level of 10.36 metres. The peak flood was witnessed in the Subarnarekha on August 20 when the water level reached 11.82 metres,” an official at the district emergency office said.

According to officials, around one lakh people were affected in Baliapal block, while the Subarnarekha floods impacted around 70,000 people in Bhograi and another 40,000 in Jaleswar. The water levels in two other major rivers, Jalaka and Budhabalanga, which caused severe flooding in Baleswar Sadar, Basta and Remuna blocks, were also below the danger mark, ruling out the possibility of further flooding in the areas, officials said. The district administra-

tion has intensified relief and rescue operations as around 100 villages remained marooned in Baleswar district. The second spell of floods since August 14 has affected more than 13 lakh people in six districts, while around five lakh people have been evacuated as a large number of villages were inundated, officials said. According to the office of the Special Relief Commissioner (SRC), the flood situation in the five other affected districts – Jajpur, Bhadrak, Kendrapada, Mayurbhanj and Kendujhar – remained stable due to the absence of significant rainfall in the last 48 hours.

However, the water level in the Baitarani river was on a rising trend, posing a threat to parts of Kendrapada and Jajpur districts, officials said. The district administrations were engaged in relief operations in these five districts, an official said, adding that in view of the flood situation and severe waterlogging, local authorities in Bhadrak and Jajpur districts have ordered closure of educational institutions on Friday as a precautionary measure.

The Meteorological Centre, Bhubaneswar, said the State recorded an average rainfall of 2.1 mm in the 24 hours till 8.30 am on Friday, against the normal rainfall of 10.4 mm for August 21.

Gajapati youth missing in Malaysia



SUNIL MOHAN PATNAIK
BRAHMAPUR

A 24-year-old youth from Gajapati district, who went to Malaysia in search of employment in March 2022, has been missing for two years since September 7, 2024, prompting Paralkhemundi MLA Rupesh Kumar Panigrahi to seek urgent intervention from External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar for tracing him.

Godani Rama Rao, son of Godani Venkata Rao of Madhusudanpur village under Gurandi police station, travelled to Malaysia on March 1, 2022, for employment after obtaining a visa from the passport issuing authority in Bhubaneswar.

According to his family, all communication with him stopped on September 7, 2024, and repeated efforts to ascertain his whereabouts have failed. Rama Rao’s last call from Malaysia was received by family members on September 7, 2024 through contact number 601176161796.

Concerned over the prolonged uncertainty surrounding the youth, MLA Panigrahi has written to the External Affairs Minister seeking an immediate inquiry through the Indian High Commission in Kuala Lumpur and the Ministry of External Affairs.

Tahsildar intercepted with Rs 5 lakh illicit cash

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CONTINUING its crack-down on corrupt government officials, Odisha Vigilance sleuths on Thursday unearthed suspected ill gotten cash amounting to Rs 5 lakh after intercepting the vehicle of the Tahsildar cum Sub Registrar of Lathikata in Sundargarh district.

Acting on reliable information about the accused, Muralidhar Urmal, Tahsildar cum Sub Registrar of Lathikata, collecting large sums of cash from various sources, a Vigilance department team closely monitored his movements and activities.

On Thursday, a Vigilance team intercepted Urmal near Rajabasa Chhak in Lathikata while he was travelling in a hired official Scorpio vehicle from his office to his residence in Rourkela.

“During the interception, cash amounting to Rs 5 lakh was found in Urmal’s possession, for which he could not provide a satisfactory explanation. The entire amount, along with the Scorpio vehicle, has been seized,” Vigilance officials said.

Following the interception, officials launched simultaneous searches at three locations, including Urmal’s residential building in Rourkela, his ancestral house at Karamdih under Sundargarh Sadar police limits, and his office



chamber at the Lathikata Tahasil office in Sundargarh district. Police detained the accused for further interrogation.

In a separate case, Vigilance on Thursday apprehended Manoj Ranjan Nayak, Block Programme Manager (NHM) of Kujang Community Health Centre (CHC) in Jagatsinghpur district, for demanding and accepting a bribe of Rs 20,000 from a health staffer (Ashakarmi) working under the CHC by threatening to prepone her retirement based on her age as per Aadhaar card.

Based on the date of birth in her School Leaving Certificate (17.05.1966) submitted during her appointment, the ASHA worker had two more years of service left. However, citing a discrepancy in an Aadhaar

card issued later, Nayak allegedly threatened to terminate her services if she failed to pay the bribe.

Finding no other alternative, the complainant approached Vigilance authorities to report the harassment.

Acting on the complaint, a Vigilance team laid a trap on Thursday and caught Nayak red handed while accepting a bribe of Rs 20,000 from the complainant.

The team recovered and seized the entire tainted money from his possession. Following the trap, simultaneous searches were launched at Nayak’s residential house at Gopalpur (Rajnagarpatna) under Sadar police limits in Cuttack district and his office room at Kujang CHC in Jagatsinghpur district. The accused has been arrested.

Vande Mataram not a political bargaining chip: Majhi

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ODISHA Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Thursday said Vande Mataram was not a “political bargaining chip” but the “soul of Bharat’s freedom struggle”, amid an ongoing row over the national song. Taking to social media, Majhi said the Congress Working Committee’s decision to limit the singing of Vande Mataram to only two stanzas was “deeply disappointing”.

“Vande Mataram is not a political bargaining chip. It is the soul of Bharat’s freedom struggle. The Congress Working Committee’s decision to limit the singing of Vande Mataram to only two stanzas is deeply disappointing. Vande Mataram belongs

to the history and spirit of Bharat.” He added that Vande Mataram is not Congress’ political property to edit, dilute or bargain with.

A song that inspired generations of freedom fighters cannot be reduced to vote-bank calculations or political convenience, Majhi said, adding that Vande Mataram will always remain the voice of Bharat. “The nation remembers. The nation has learnt. And the nation will not allow Congress to repeat the same politics again,” he said.

The CWC on Wednesday decided to abide by the 1937 resolution of its highest decision-making body on Vande Mataram, saying only two stanzas of the national song would be sung at all party events henceforth.

History-sheeter booked under NSA in Koraput

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KORAPUT

POLICE in Koraput district have booked a history-sheeter under the National Security Act (NSA), an officer said on Thursday. Invoking provisions under Section 3(2) of the National Security Act, the police booked Sanjay Suna, who has 25 criminal cases registered against him over the past 15 years across several police stations in the district, the officer said. Suna has cases registered against him for offences including attempt to murder, extortion, dacoity, robbery,

illegal use of firearms under the Arms Act and violations under the NDPS Act.

The cases have been registered in Jeypore Town, Jeypore Sadar, Borigumma, B Singhpur, Kotpad, Koraput Sadar and Nabarangpur police stations. SDPO Jeypore Archita Mittal said the preventive action was taken to prevent Suna from indulging in further criminal activities and ensure the safety and security of the public.

“Considering his criminal antecedents and his repeated involvement in serious offences

High-level panel formed to examine Satkosia relocation process

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THE Odisha government on Thursday constituted a high-level inquiry committee to examine various allegations surrounding the village relocation process in the Satkosia Tiger Reserve located in Anugola district.

Acting on a February 9 directive from the Odisha Human Rights Commission (OHRC), the State government formed a five-member panel chaired by Arabinda Kumar Padhee, the Additional Chief Secretary of

Odisha Revenue and Disaster Management department.

As per a notification issued by the Forest, Environment and Climate Change department on August 17, the committee also includes Principal Secretary of Forest, Environment & Climate Change department Bhaskar Jyoti Sarma, Principal Secretary of Law department Papitra Mohan Samal, Commissioner-cum-Secretary to Odisha government for ST & SC Development, and Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare department B Parameswaran.

In accordance with the OHRC order, the State government also selected retired IPS officer Anup Nayak, former member secretary of National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) as an independent expert having knowledge of wildlife law, the Forest Rights Act, 2006, and rehabilitation policy. The committee has been entrusted with examining the entire village-wise relocation process relating to the Satkosia Tiger Reserve, except Raiguda village.

As part of its terms of reference, it will examine



and verify compliance with applicable statutory provisions, including the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the Forest Rights Act, 2006, and

relevant guidelines of the National Tiger Conservation Authority. The committee will also identify cases of wrongful inclusion or exclu-

sion of beneficiaries in the relocation process and assess the adequacy of compensation and rehabilitation provided to affected families.

As part of its terms of reference, it will also recommend appropriate corrective measures, including payment of differential compensation, restoration of rights and livelihood support, wherever warranted. The committee will also identify officers responsible for any procedural irregularities or violations and recommend appropriate departmental and criminal action, wherever necessary.

The committee has been directed to complete the inquiry and submit its detailed report to the State government within six weeks from the date of its constitution.

In its order delivered on February 9, the commission said that the relocation from a core or critical tiger habitat is governed by Section 38V of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, as amended, and the guidelines issued by the NTCA. The OHRC also noted that the relocation requires strict legal compliance, habitat assessment, settlement of rights under

the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, and informed consent of Gram Sabha. Relocation must be genuinely voluntary and based on a mutually agreed rehabilitation package.

However, the commission during the course of inquiry, found that the procedures and protocols prescribed by the NTCA, which are required to be followed in addition to the benefits offered by the State government for relocation of villages outside core and critical tiger habitats, were not followed in letter and spirit.