



Stern reply

Nora Fatehi opens up about how some actors use her name for PR campaigns to promote their songs

LEISURE | P2



Temple vandalised

A prominent Hindu temple in the US defaced with anti-India graffiti by unknown individuals, prompting a strong condemnation from India

NATIONAL | P9



No optimism

Foreign investors continue to pull back money from Indian equity market, withdrawing ₹24,753 crore in the first week of March

BUSINESS | P11



KIWG kicks off

Indian Army win 7 medals, including 2 gold, on Day 1 of Khelo India Winter Games

SPORTS | P12

10 illegal Bangladesh nationals held in City

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 9: A group of 10 Bangladesh nationals were arrested by the Special Task Force (STF) of Odisha police following their detention near Bhubaneswar railway station, Sunday evening.

The arrested individuals - including six male, three female, and one minor - had entered the country illegally without valid documents, said STF DIG Pinak Mishra.

The police recovered seven mobile phones, few Bangladeshi and Indian currency notes from the possession of the illegal immigrants.

Mishra identified the arrestees as Md Hasim, 46, Md Sojib 24, Allam Shaikh, 41, Md Azeem, 40, Dilara Shaikh Altaf, 45, Md Soha Talukdar, 36, Karima Begum, 25, Monira Begum, 30, Sahana Begum, 45, along with a 14-year-old minor.

Mishra said the foreigners had entered India without passport, visa or any travel documents and reached the City by hiding their identity and nationality. He said the interrogation of the accused revealed that they had illegally crossed the border near Dhubri, Assam, facilitated by a local agent. "They came to the City with an intention to settle down," Mishra said, adding they have been re-manded to judicial custody for 15 days.

Ex-minister Ananta Das passes away

Bhubaneswar/Balasore: Former state minister Ananta Das passed away here in the early hours of Sunday due to age-related ailments, his family said. He was 85. Das is survived by wife, three sons and a daughter. The former minister of higher education and industries was not keeping well for sometime, and died at his government residence in Bhubaneswar around 3.40 am, his son Biswajit Das said. President Droupadi Murmu, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and other leaders condoled the demise of the four-time MLA.



P5

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



I know only one language and it worked wonders for me in my career—the language of hate

India clinch Champions Trophy



ON TOP OF THE WORLD: Indian cricket team celebrates their win against New Zealand in the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 final match, in Dubai, UAE, Sunday. India won by 4 wickets to lift the trophy PTT/PHOTO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dubai, March 9: Skipper Rohit Sharma led from the front with an excellent half-century as a resolute India held their nerve to win an unprecedented third Champions Trophy title with a four-wicket victory over New Zealand in the final here, Sunday.

Bowling first after Rohit lost his 12th straight toss, India's spinners restricted New Zealand to 251 for seven in the allotted 50 overs, with Kuldeep Yadav (2/40) and Varun Chakaravarty (2/45) making significant contributions with the ball.

India completed the chase of 252 with six balls to spare after Rohit (76 off 83 balls) and Shreyas Iyer (48 off 62 balls) shone with the bat.

For New Zealand, Daryl Mitchell (63 off 101 balls), Michael Bracewell (53 not out off 40 balls), and Rachin Ravindra (37 off 29 balls) were the main contributors with the willow.

While chasing, India faced some anxious moments when they lost two wickets after being well paced at 183 for three after 38 years, but KL Rahul (34 not out off 33 balls) showed great composure to see his team through after Hardik Pandya's breezy 18-run knock.

India won the trophy without losing a match, reflecting their dominance. P12

CM lays foundation for ₹118cr projects in Keonjhar

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 9: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi inaugurated 16 projects worth ₹42 crore and laid the foundation for several other development projects at an estimated cost of ₹118 crore in the Anandapur sub-division of his native Keonjhar district, Sunday.

The Chief minister made the announcements while attending the 61st annual function of Anandapur College, his alma mater.

Majhi also announced a financial assistance of ₹7 crore for the infrastructure development of the college - construction of a multi-purpose hall, a seminar hall and development of the sports ground.

The CM announced a grant of ₹2 crore for the development of the Anandapur sub-divisional hospital and ₹20 crore for the complete revamp of the stadium at Anandapur.



"I feel blessed to have got the opportunity to study in such a great institution," he said. Majhi recalled his memories when he was studying plus-II (classes XI and XII) in 1987 at Anandapur College. He got emotional while talking about his old teachers and friends.

"Student life is always a struggle. This struggle will make you successful one day. Strong faith in your hard work and the blessings of teachers will take you to your destination," the Chief Minister said while addressing the students.

"We have implemented the New Education Policy 2020 with an aim to provide quality education to the youths in a good learning environment and enhance their skills to include them in the path for development of India," he said.

Hitting out at the previous BJD government, the CM said the policy was not implemented in Odisha 'due to political reasons'.

He said that the state has implemented the PM Usha Yojana at the college level to strengthen the higher education system.

The PM Usha Yojana aims to enhance the quality and accessibility of higher education across the country. "Our government has brought reforms in both education and examination fields in higher education. Along with improving the quality of education, we are working to ensure that students get employment on the basis of their merits," the CM said.

OVER 1,000 KILLED IN SYRIA VIOLENCE

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Beirut, March 9: The death toll from two days of clashes between Syrian security forces and loyalists of ousted President Bashar Assad and revenge killings that followed has risen to more than 1,000, a war monitoring group said Saturday, making it one of the deadliest acts of violence since Syria's conflict began 14 years ago.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said in addition to 745 civilians killed, mostly in shootings from close distance, 125 government security force members and 148 militants with armed groups affiliated with Assad were killed. It added that electricity and drinking water were cut off in large areas around the city of Latakia.

The clashes, which erupted Thursday, marked a major escalation in the challenge to the new government in Damascus, three months after insurgents

took authority after removing Assad from power.

The government has said that they were responding to attacks from remnants of Assad's forces and blamed 'individual actions' for the rampant violence.

The revenge killings that started Friday by Sunni Muslim gunmen loyal to the government against members of Assad's minority Alawite sect are a major blow to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the faction that led the overthrow of the former government. Alawites made up a large part of Assad's support base for decades.

On Saturday morning, the bodies of 31 people killed in revenge attacks the day before in the central village of Tuwaym were laid to rest in a mass grave, residents said. Those killed included nine children and four women, the residents said, sending the AP photos of the bodies draped in white cloth as they were lined in the mass grave. P10

Woman held for stealing baby girls

POST NEWS NETWORK

Baripada, March 9: A woman was caught red-handed while allegedly trying to steal two baby girls of a patient admitted to the Maternity and Paediatric Ward of Pandit Raghunath Murmu (PRM) Medical College and Hospital for delivery, here in Mayurbhanj district Sunday.

Locals nabbed the woman while she was trying to flee with the two girls, and handed her over to the police. Town police arrested the accused, identified as Sandhyarani Mohanta, 32, of Totapada village under Rasgobindpur police limits in Mayurbhanj district and registered a case in this connection.

According to reports, the wife of Sheikh Kamruddin, a resident of ward no-20 at Shunagadia in the town, was



admitted to the hospital's Maternity and Paediatric Ward on the sixth floor of the hospital Saturday for the birth of their third child. Kamruddin, along with their two daughters - aged around 18 months and 3 years - were seated near her hospital bed.

Late Saturday night, after Kamruddin briefly stepped out, he returned to find both the children missing. He immediately alerted his relatives and hospital security. A search led to the discovery of an unknown woman on the fifth floor, carrying the children.

The toddlers were safely rescued while the woman was handed over to the hospital outpost police. When contacted, IIC Karunakar Rout refused to comment, saying the investigations are underway.

GOLD: CERTAINLY NOT THE BEST BOND

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 9: Barely nine years after its grand launch in 2015, the Union government's Sovereign Gold Bond (SGB) scheme was abruptly discontinued in 2024, leaving many questions over its conception and diligence unanswered. The government has not issued any new tranches of the bond since February 2024, while there are talks of abandoning the scheme altogether due to high borrowing costs.

The government-backed scheme was meant to reduce gold imports under the Gold Monetisation Scheme, and a way to invest in gold without actually purchasing it. Essentially, investment in SGBs meant lending money to the

government, and in return, receiving bonds that represent a certain amount of gold.

Over the years, individuals and entities invested ₹72,274 crore in SGBs through 67 tranches, of which only six have reportedly been redeemed so far.

In response to a question on whether the SGB scheme was off the table for good, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, days before the presentation of the Union Budget 2025-26, said, "Yes, in a way." However, that still leaves the government with a liability that may exceed ₹1.12 lakh crore by 2032, a CNBC TV 18 report said.

Experts said the SGB experience, nevertheless, highlights the lack of farsightedness on part of the government in toy-



ing with ideas without taking into consideration market projections and backup plans.

"The government should either have hedged the deposits, or purchased real gold in order to avoid the situation," Prith-

viraj Kothari, acknowledged as the 'Bullion King' and a prominent promoter of RiddiSiddhi Bullion Limited (RSBL), told Orissa POST.

Terming the scheme as 'one of the best in my lifetime',

Kothari added that it offered people the best platform for investment. "This was because, it gave investors a unique opportunity to invest in gold with added benefits such as fixed interest income and capital gains tax exemption. Moreover, with the government's backing and the convenience of electronic form, SGBs offered an attractive investment option for both individual and institutional investors," he said.

He said market dynamics post Covid-19 coupled with falling rupee set doom for the scheme. "On an average, gold prices increase 4-5 per cent annually as the demand for the yellow metal remains moderate. This offers government the legroom to honour the promised returns in such a scheme

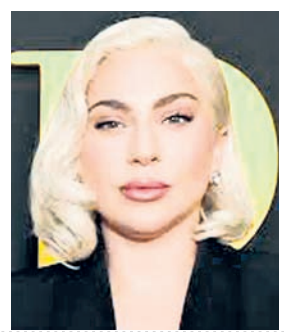
without strain," he said.

However, after Covid-19, people started investing in portfolios, such as mutual funds and physical gold in a major way. "Indians bought 10-12 tonnes of gold between 2016 and 2021. However, post Covid, there was a sudden rush for gold, and as much as 120 tonnes were purchased in subsequent years, signalling a shift to metal from paper," he said, adding, "This resulted in a sharp increase in the price of gold like never before."

Let's take the first batch of SGBs from 2015, which matured in 2023, as an example. The government raised ₹245 crore in this tranche when gold was priced at ₹2,684 per gram.

Contd... P4

leisure



LADY GAGA REVEALS HER 'DREAM COLLABORATOR'

Singer-actress Lady Gaga has shared that late Beatles star John Lennon would be her dream collaborator. Lennon was murdered in 1980 at the age of 40. At a fan-led press conference to celebrate the release of her new album *Mayhem*, Gaga said: "think it would have been John Lennon."

BLAKE SLAMMED FOR BEING A CRYBABY

When another moment of *Another Simple Favor* red carpet event went viral, social media went into overdrive with backlash for Blake Lively. The controversy arose because Lively reportedly disliked the bright yellow backdrop, which she did not think flattered her as it was lit.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
 You can make a difference to others' lives. Considerate and thoughtful, today, you will be treasured more than ever as a boss, colleague, parent or beloved. Utilise this exchange of energy to sort out difficult issues. Ganesha gives a thumbs up to mega projects.

TAURUS
 Things will tend to get very difficult and complicated, says Ganesha Be prepared for setbacks and challenges today. No matter how big the issue, your competence, your resourcefulness will see you through. Try to remain focused and alert.

GEMINI
 Today, you will have the required intentions and courage to propose your sweetheart. You will be dressed to kill, or rather to marry. You will make a favourable impression with the way you'll look tonight. You will be an open book to your future partner, which is likely to work in your favour.

CANCER
 Though your thoughts and views may be quite radical, you will be largely restrained while acting on them, portends Ganesha. You will have no problems starting a new venture or love affair, and taking the required action to keep them afloat. You'll be a Pied Piper to the women, or le belle dame sans merci (the beautiful young merciless woman) to the men.

LEO
 'One small drop at a time fills an ocean over time'. Remember this lesson, says Ganesha, and continue to concentrate your efforts on your goal without losing heart. There may be times when you sit back and think twice, but know that all it takes is a small effort and that is what shall enable you to reach the zenith.

VIRGO
 Cancerian though you are, you won't bite or pinch people. Instead, you are and will be flooded with empathy. But Ganesha says that you are a bit too rigid when it comes to performing your duties, not to mention extremely principled. On the home front, get more expressive and closer to your kin, advises Ganesha.

LIBRA
 You will be very unpredictable today, and your mercurial tendencies will remain till the evening. After that, be prepared to get a pleasant surprise. Just bear in mind that being prepared is always a good idea, since you never know when the perfect moment arrives.

SCORPIO
 Today, the sugar and spice of work and home are delicately balanced to bring out the best in you, says Ganesha. You may spend a lot of your time brainstorming at your desk. In the evening, however, mental exercises will be substituted for pleasure and fun with friends and family.

SAGITTARIUS
 The way you keep your interests alive will keep your mind occupied. Leisure activities and by-lines will by-pass the mundane routine today, foretells Ganesha. Pamper yourself by doing what you like, be it gardening, cooking or even plain old reading. Ganesha also sees a heavy meal with friends late in the day today.

CAPRICORN
 The day will be a maze of complex problems and situations, but you will find your way out in no time, says Ganesha. At work, you may love to play the leader, but that makes you accountable, for both the good as well as the poor performance of your subordinates.

AQUARIUS
 Today is an auspicious day, particularly for astrologers, healers, spiritual guides and gurus, says Ganesha. One will think twice before challenging you today. Greed is not a word in your dictionary, and today, you are even more inspired to work for humanity.

PISCES
 The focus is firmly on career advancement today. Business deals, which have been a long time in the making, will finally come through. Those pursuing a profession can expect pay rises or promotions. Make sure your skills are up to the mark to be able to tackle your new responsibilities satisfactorily, says Ganesha.

Nora's stern response

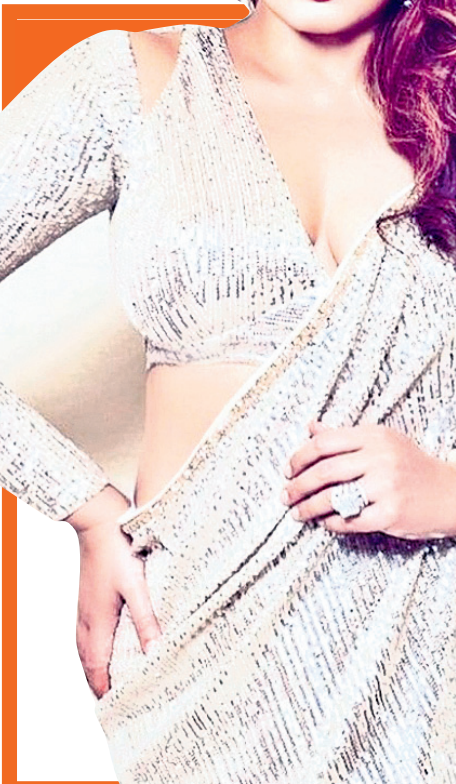
Mumbai: Nora Fatehi is gearing up to entertain audiences with her upcoming film *Be Happy*, alongside Abhishek Bachchan. In a recent interview, she revealed how some actors use PR agencies to market their songs by comparing them to her.

She believes that everyone should have the opportunity to both act and perform in songs, but it should be fair to all. She said, "My logic is that everyone should be allowed to do songs, and everyone should act. But it should be fair for everybody. When I see these songs, you know what I like about them? That girls are coming out, being confident, being sexy, and trying to perform."

The *Madgaon Express* actress further added how actors pay to PR agencies to use her name to market songs and said, "So when they want to market a song, they think, 'Let's compare it to Nora,' and I don't like that. All of the PR agencies are doing it. A new song is coming out? Cool, so they'll be like, 'Nora's career is over,' or 'She can eat 100 Noras for breakfast.' I know who's behind this, and I know how much you have to pay to



do that. I get a lot of PR packages convincing me to do the same, but I refuse. I won't compare myself to anyone or bring someone else down. If a song is going to work, it should be because people appreciate my talent, not because they're excited to replace someone else—that's just ridiculous."



Huma shares her work mantra

Mumbai: Actress Huma Qureshi has revealed her mantra she uses for work and she mentioned it is to remain "calm".

Huma took to Instagram stories, where she shared a picture from her balcony. The image shows she is surrounded by greenery.

For the caption, she wrote:

"Calm se Kaam".

Last month, Huma revealed that she has started working on the fourth season of *Maharani*. She shared a picture of her back towards the camera. The actress could be seen wearing a black sweatshirt which had "*Maharani* is back".

Huma captioned the post: "It is time for Season 4!! Team *Maharani* is backkk" Clicked by my producer sahiba. Thank you audience for all the love. Upwards and Onwards."

The political drama series had Huma playing the title role. Season 1 of the series is directed by Karan Sharma, Season 2 by Ravindra Gautam and Season 3 by Saurabh Bhavie. It also stars Sohum Shah, Amit Sial, Kani Kusruti and Inaamulhaq.

The multi-seasons political series is partly inspired by events in Bihar in the 1990s when Lalu Prasad Yadav made his home-

8TH ASIM UTSAV -DAY I



A scene from Odia play *Saralara Chithi* staged at Bhanjakala Mandap, Bhubaneswar, Sunday. Adapted from a work by Amrita Pritam, the drama was designed and directed by Debadutta Pati. The three-day event is being organised by Asim Basu Foundation in the memory of noted actor, director and artist late Asim Basu in collaboration with Odia Language, Literature and Culture Department, Government of Odisha. OP PHOTO

Glamour world challenging: Manushi



Mumbai: Former beauty queen and actress Manushi Chhillar emphasises that "The world of glamour is a challenging field that requires genuine passion and commitment. You have to truly want to do it".

Manushi, who entered Bollywood without any connections, has shared genuine advice for newcomers to approach their career choices with careful planning.

"I would never recommend leaving everything behind without a plan. If you are not from this industry and are completely new to the world of entertainment, my suggestion would be to finish your education, or have a platform like I did before you start, because it is not going to be an easy journey" she said.

Manushi will next be seen in *Maalik* starring Rajkumar Rao. The action-thriller movie, in which Rajkumar will be seen in a gangster avatar for the first time, is all set to release June 20.

Maalik is directed by Pulkit, who has previously helmed *Dedh Beegha Zameen*, *Bose: Dead/Alive* and *Bhakhshak*.

She then has *Tehran* with John Abraham. Made under the direction of debutant Arun Gopalan, the project also stars Neeru Bajwa, Hadi Khanjanpour, Madhurima Tuli, Adam Karst and Allon Sylvain in key roles. IANS

PEANUTS



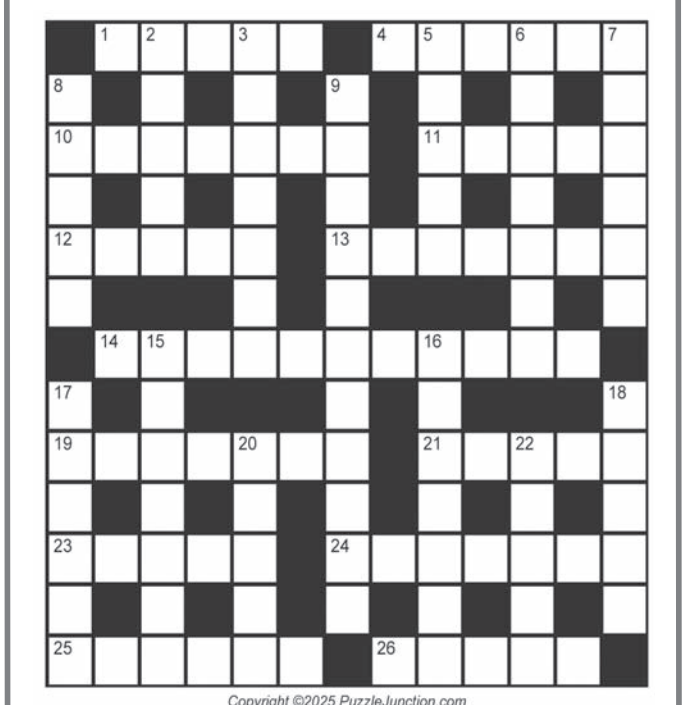
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



FUN POST CROSSWORD



- Copyright ©2025 PuzzleJunction.com
- Across**
- 1 Euphoric
 - 4 Business owner's aim
 - 10 Port city in France (2,5)
 - 11 Inuit lodge
 - 12 White heron
 - 13 Slippery
 - 14 Butterfly type
 - 19 Ignite, as passion
 - 21 Field game
 - 23 Garden bulb
 - 24 Idle fancy
 - 25 Big name in animation
 - 26 Waste conduit
 - Down**
 - 2 Loathe
 - 3 Crucial
 - 5 Spicy side dish
 - 6 *Juliet of the Spirits* director
 - 7 Mason's tool
 - 8 Visitor from afar?
 - 9 Kindness
 - 15 Breakfast choice
 - 16 Rotary engine
 - 17 Spurred
 - 18 Rock rabbit
 - 20 Orchard tree
 - 22 Honkers

SUDOKU

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, fill in the boxes in such a manner that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any.

		4	9	2				
								3
	5							
		2		6			3	8
			5		2			9
1		8	9			7		
	4				6			
		8	1	5	3			
		7	2					

SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD

B	R	I	D	G	E	S	O	H	O		
V	O	E	N	O	A	W					
A	L	O	O	F	D	E	S	T	I	N	Y
S	E	E	I		R	V					
E	E	L	C	O	N	S	T	A	B	L	E
I	T	G	E	R	R						
A	F	F	A	I	R	I	M	P	U	G	N
L	E	V	E	T	P	S					
M	E	S	M	E	R	I	S	E	H	I	P
O	T	G	R	A							
N	E	O	L	I	T	H	A	R	R	O	
D	R	N	T	T	O	N					
H	Y	M	N	S	I	E	S	T	A		

SUDOKU

1	9	8	4	3	6	2	5	7
2	4	6	5	9	7	1	8	3
7	5	3	2	1	8	9	4	6
8	3	9	1	7	5	4	6	2
5	6	1	3	4	2	8	7	9
4	2	7	6	8	9	5	3	1
9	1	4	7	5	3	6	2	8
3	8	2	9	6	4	7	1	5
6	7	5	8	2	1	3	9	4

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown

ATM fraudster injured in encounter; 2 more held

MODUS OPERANDI



When a customer punches the card and withdraws the money but not the card, owing to the adhesive, he or she calls the helpline number displayed by the accused.

When they call the helpline number, the gang would cunningly collect the password and bank details of the customer.

When a customer punches the card and withdraws the money but not the card, owing to the adhesive, he or she calls the helpline number displayed by the accused. When they call the helpline number, the gang would cunningly collect the password and bank details of the customer.

When the customer leaves the counter after being convinced that the issue would be resolved, they use a sharp knife to pull out the card from the slot and subsequently withdraw cash using it.

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 9: A 25-year-old Bihar man suffered bullet injuries following an encounter with Commissionerate Police when the former was allegedly planning to loot an ATM near Kesura, in the wee hours of Sunday.

The injured, identified as Deepak Kumar of Bihar's Nawada district, is presently undergoing treatment at City AIIMS, said Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Jagmohan Meena, adding that two of his associates have been arrested during the gunfight.

The DCP said, "A 7.65mm

semi-automatic pistol, one round live ammunition and two fired cartridges, one car, ₹12,000 cash, three mobile phones, quick fix adhesives, 12 ATM-cum-debit cards, one knife, and a few other incriminating materials were seized during the arrest."

Meena said the arrested have been identified as Deepak Kumar Pande, 24, and Abhisekh Kumar Singh, 32. Deepak is a native of Narhat block, while Abhisekh hails from Chatra district. The trio is member of an interstate ATM loot gang that has been booked by Jharkhand police, January 25 this year, for a similar crime

under Lalpur police station. Meena said, "Prior to the ATM loot in the City, the trio camped at a hotel in Puri, and hatched a plot for the ATM loot. Acting on a tip-off, the cops intercepted the trio near Bhubaneswar-Puri bypass around 3am Sunday. Instead of turning themselves in, the trio opened fire at the cops. In exchange, the police fire led Deepak to suffer bullet injuries in his left leg."

Elaborating the modus operandi of the gang, he said the men would apply adhesive on the card punching slot of the ATM and wait outside. Additionally, they would also paste a board displaying a mobile number at the ATM counter, identifying it as the helpline number of the bank concerned.

When a customer punches the card and withdraws the money but not the card, owing to the adhesive, he or she calls the helpline number displayed by the accused. When they call the helpline number, the gang would cunningly collect the password and bank details of the customer. When the customer leaves the counter after being convinced that the issue would be resolved, they use a sharp knife to pull out the card from the slot and subsequently withdraw cash using it, DCP Meena said.

The Commissionerate Police has booked the trio under Sections 109 (1), 132, and 3 (5) of BNS, producing them before a court for remand.

Srimandir servitor to develop ₹200cr resort

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 9: A priest of Puri Srimandir Sunday said he is setting up a 300-room luxury resort, at an investment of ₹200 crore, with a strong spiritual focus in the holy town, an official from his team said.

The beachside project would be a pure vegetarian and non-liquor retreat, aiming to offer a "satvik" experience to pilgrims and travellers seeking spiritual serenity with modern comforts, the priest said in a press conference here.

"Puri is not just a destination. It is a sacred abode where divinity meets the ocean. The resort will offer a blend of spiritual tranquillity and luxury hospitality," Sevayat Daitapati Bhabani Das said.

The construction cost of the 'Jagannatham' project is estimated at ₹110 crore, excluding land, he said.

The project, under Meridian Mist Hotel & Resort, is being built on a seven-acre beachfront plot along the Puri-Konark marine drive, about 8 km from the Jagannath Temple in Puri.

"I own the land and there is no conflict of interest with Jagannath Temple," he said.

Set to open in 14-16 months, before Rath Yatra of 2026, the resort is expected to redefine spiritual tourism in Puri, attracting both pilgrims and high-end travellers, Das said.

Das and his family own 100 per cent of the resort but are open to diluting equity based on the response to the project's membership programme.

The membership is priced at ₹3.5 lakh, ₹5 lakh, and ₹7 lakh, offers members a three-night stay per month for five years.

WOMEN'S DAY FETE

Guests light the ceremonial lamp for a programme organised by Mystery of Mother's and Commissionerate Police, as part of International Women's Day celebrations, at Regional Science Centre in Bhubaneswar Sunday



POLITICKLE by MANJUL



Rath Yatra soon in UNESCO's cultural heritage list: SJTA

SJTA is preparing the required documents to submit them to Sangeet Natak Akademi, the official agency that handles the nomination process

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 9: Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) has initiated the process to inscribe Rath Yatra in the list of intangible cultural heritage of humanity by UNESCO, said SJTA chief administrator Arabinda Kumar Padhee recently.

"The Chariot Festival, a cornerstone of our revered 12th-century shrine, embodies rich cultural heritage of India and deserves global recognition," Padhee added.

SJTA is preparing the required documents to submit to the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the official agency that handles the nomination process, he stated on social media platform X.

Taking to X, sand artiste Sudarsan Pattnaik said, "Jai Jagannath! Thank you, Sir! Kudos to SJTA Puri for tak-



ing steps to get the grandest chariot festival, Rath Yatra, recognised by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity. This will help spread Mahaprabhu Jagannath's culture globally."

Padhee, during his recent

visit to Delhi, met senior officials from the Union Ministry of Culture to discuss the nomination. The process involves gathering of detailed information and documents about the festival's traditions and cultural practices.

3RD ODISHA MINING AND INFRA INT'L EXPO 2025

Guv lauds state's commitment to responsible mining

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 9: Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati Sunday commended the state government's commitment to responsible mining, aligned with global sustainability goals. This was revealed during the third edition of Odisha Mining and Infrastructure International Expo 2025 concluded at Bara-munda Ground here.

Addressing the gathering as the chief guest, the Governor said, "Odisha, rich in minerals, has long relied on mining to drive employment, infrastructure, and industrial growth. The industry is evolving with sustainable practices, technology, and community responsibility. I commend Odisha's commitment to responsible mining, aligned with global sustainability goals. However, social responsibility remains crucial—ensuring mining-af-



affected community welfare, environmental conservation, while mine rehabilitation must be prioritised."

He also said that this conclave unites policymakers, experts, and stakeholders to address key challenges and shape a sustainable future for mining and infrastructure. "I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the organisers, participants and experts for their invaluable contribution to the event's grand success," the Governor added.

The expo's primary focus

was to empower businesses, encourage technology adoption, and drive sustainable growth within India's mining and infrastructure sectors. It brought together key industry leaders, innovators, and government representatives to collaborate on solutions and advancements for the future of mining and infrastructure.

The third edition of Odisha Mining and Infrastructure International Expo 2025 saw an impressive growth of up to 25 per cent insofar as business genera-

tion is concerned. This remarkable achievement was made possible due to the strong support of IPICOL and other leading mine owners for the expo.

The exhibition showcased state-of-the-art mining machinery, technology solutions, services, and supplies catering to the evolving needs of the mining and infrastructure industries. With the participation of over 250+ companies, the event offered a remarkable platform for attendees to explore the latest advancements shaping the future of these vital industries.

The closing event also featured Sustainable Mining Award, recognising outstanding contributions towards environmentally responsible practices in the mining sector. Building on the tremendous success of the expo, the organisers have formed an organising committee to elevate the expo to the next level.

SRC advisory over rise in mercury

BHUBANESWAR: The Special Relief Commissioner Sunday issued an advisory to all Collectors given IMD's forecast on rise in daytime temperature. In a weather bulletin, the IMD said daytime temperature would rise by 3 to 5 degrees Celsius during the next four to five days. The maximum temperature is expected to reach 40 degrees C and above in isolated places of Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Subarnapur, Boudh and Bolangir districts during the next five days, it said.

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LUNCH BREAK: A Royal Bengal Tiger takes rest under a tree at Nandankanan Zoological Park on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar Sunday

PHOTO: RAJ KISHORE MOHANTY

Journalists attacked in broad daylight

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 9: Exposing deteriorating law and order situation in the Capital City, a reporter and a cameraperson working in the digital edition of leading Odia daily **Dharitri** were attacked by two drunken miscreants in Jharpada area here in broad daylight as the former opposed them for blocking a road under Laxmisagar police station.

Reporter Devi Prasad Sahoo, in his complaint to the police, said the matter occurred a little past 1pm when two scooter-borne miscreants stopped in the middle of a jam-packed road near Jharpada. "When the duo refused to budge, I took a picture of their scooter number plate to produce them before traffic police. This enraged the duo. They then dragged me from the vehicle, and started assaulting me. When my cameraperson Pan-kaj Mohapatra opposed them, they smashed his camera, and attacked him, too."



Stating that their ordeal did not stop there, Sahoo said, "The miscreants then chased us with a stone to attack us. Later, they damaged our vehicle by pelting stones at it."

Laxmisagar inspector-in-charge (IC) P Shyam Sundar Rao said the cops have launched an investigation into the incident. "A case has been registered under Sections 126 (2), 115 (2), 296, 351 (2), 324 (2), and 3(5) of BNS. The CCTV footage of the nearby areas is being scanned for the early arrest of the miscreants," he added.

'Prolonged overwork can lead to burnout'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 9: Former WHO chief scientist and health ministry advisor Soumya Swaminathan has urged people to listen to their bodies and recognise when they need rest, warning that prolonged overwork can lead to burnout and reduced efficiency.

In an interview with PTI, Swaminathan emphasised that while intense work for short periods is possible, as seen during Covid-19, it is unsustainable in the long run. She highlighted that productivity is driven more by work quality than the number of hours spent at work.

Responding to a question on the health impact of excessive working hours, the former ICMR director general said, "Many people work very hard, but the body signals when it needs



rest. Ignoring these signs can lead to exhaustion. You can push yourself for a few months, like we all did during Covid, but could we have continued that pace for years? I don't think so."

Recalling the pandemic years, she noted that healthcare professionals worked round the clock, sacrificing sleep and battling stress. Many experienced burnout, and some even left the profession. "Short sprints of intense work are possible, but it's not a sustainable lifestyle," she said.

Swaminathan stressed that mental well-being and adequate rest are crucial for long-term

productivity. "The human body needs sleep. If you want to maintain high-quality thinking and decision-making, you also need mental breaks," she explained.

She pointed out that working excessive hours does not necessarily translate to better results. "You can sit at a desk for 12 hours, but after eight hours, the quality of work often declines. It's not just about time spent—it's about how effectively that time is used," she said.

Swaminathan's comments come amid a growing debate on long working hours in India. Earlier this year, Larsen & Toubro Chairman SN Subrahmanyam suggested that employees should work 90 hours a week, including Sundays, instead of staying at home. His remarks echoed Infosys Co-founder Narayana Murthy's call for a 70-hour workweek.



CRICKET FERVOUR: Fans enjoy the public screening of the ICC Champions Trophy final match between India and New Zealand near Keshari Talkies in Bhubaneswar, Sunday

Table with weather information: WEATHER, BBSR, CTC, Max Temp, Min Temp, Humidity, Rainfall, FORECAST.

Bakul library's 'blind date with books' event



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 9: The Bakul Foundation, known for promoting a library movement in Odisha, introduced a unique initiative—"Blind Date with Books"—at its Satyanagar library Sunday to rekindle interest in reading.

Participants were paired with a surprise book chosen by Bakul volunteers based on their reading preferences. To make it more engaging, they first had to complete a treasure hunt, solving four sets of clues before discovering their "book date," allowing them to explore the library's vast collection.

Founder of Bakul Foundation Sujit Mahapatra highlighted the event's purpose saying, "While our library is well known for children's books, we also have a rich collection for

young adults and grown-ups. We want to encourage more college students to explore and read."

Bakul has previously experimented with initiatives like Reading Marathons and Human Library to spark interest in reading. "We always say we create libraries for reluctant readers. If someone doesn't enjoy reading, they just haven't found the right book yet," Mahapatra added.

Over 50 readers participated, including well-known writer Panchami Manoo Ukil, who enjoyed the treasure hunt. 12-year-old Sidiksha Dixit, who attended with her father, said, "Solving clues, exploring the library, and finding my book—it was exhilarating."

Encouraged by the response, Mahapatra announced that Blind Date with Books will now be held every few months.

Continued from P1

SGB: Certainly...

Cut to 2023, gold prices jumped to ₹6,132 per gram, a massive 128 per cent increase. As a result, the RBI had to pay higher gold price to investors along with the interest earned. "Since SGBs began contributing to the government's debt, they become an unsustainable option," said noted market expert Mehroob J Irani.

Irani said the problem arose due to the unprecedented volatility of the yellow metal, of late. Even markets never anticipated this situation.

"Even though the government discontinued the scheme, the investor stands to lose nothing. They will be rewarded with the promised returns," Irani told Orissa POST.

But the last nail on SGB scheme's coffin was drilled in the 2024 Budget when the government reduced import duties on gold from 15 per cent to 6 per cent in an attempt to make physical gold more attractive. The policy shift made physical gold purchases more appealing to consumers, further diminishing the attractiveness of SGBs. Additionally, fluctuations in gold prices led to scenarios where investors faced losses upon redemption, as seen in August 2024, when a fall in gold prices resulted in losses for investors redeeming bonds issued in August 2016, reports said.

Heritage status for 20 iconic Cuttack eateries

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, March 9: Cuttack, the 'Silver City of India,' is not just famous for its exquisite filigree work and rich history but also for its vibrant food culture. From Dahi Bara to Thunka Puri, the city's traditional cuisine has fascinating stories attached to its origins. Small but lively food corners add to Cuttack's culinary glory, making it a paradise for food lovers.

Recognising this rich heritage, the Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage (INTACH) Cuttack Chapter recently honoured 20 of the city's most iconic eateries with heritage plaques. The ceremony was held at the Cuttack Tax Bar Association in Markatanagar.

The recognition followed a comprehensive survey conducted by Suman Prakash Swain, a



life member of INTACH, who documented 45 historic eateries that have significantly contributed to the city's culinary landscape. From this list, 20 establishments were selected to receive the prestigious 'Heritage Eateries of Cuttack' award. During the ceremony, INTACH Odisha state convener Amiya Bhusan Tripathy presented the plaques and commended the owners for their dedication to preserving the authenticity of these eateries. He encouraged them to continue upholding their heritage and dignity.

INTACH Cuttack chapter

convener Gopal Krishna Behera emphasised the importance of safeguarding Cuttack's food culture to ensure its legacy for future generations. Suman Prakash Swain also provided an in-depth explanation of the project and its significance.

The event was attended by dignitaries including Biswajit Mohanty and Raja Parija, who highlighted the cultural importance of this initiative. The programme was conducted by co-convener Dipak Samantara, while life member Prasant Routray delivered the vote of thanks.

OASME women's wing hosts 'HerStory 2025'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 9: The Women's Wing of the Odisha Assembly of Small and Medium Enterprises (OASME) celebrated 'HerStory 2025' Sunday, highlighting women's empowerment, leadership, and entrepreneurship.

Speaking at the event, OASME women's wing chairperson Jyotirmayee Mohanty

said, "HerStory 2025 is a landmark initiative that celebrates women who are breaking barriers and redefining success. With an inspiring lineup of speakers, entrepreneurs, and artists, the event promises to be a transformative experience, leaving attendees motivated, informed, and connected."

Echoing similar sentiments, OASME chairperson Anvesha Rout emphasised the organisa-

tion's dedication to fostering women's leadership and economic empowerment. "HerStory 2025 reflects our commitment to creating opportunities and supporting women in their entrepreneurial journeys," she said.

The event served as a vibrant platform for knowledge sharing, networking, and celebrating the achievements of women across various industries.

8th Puri Heritage Walks explores Markandeya Tirtha

POST NEWS NETWORK

Puri, March 9: The 8th edition of the Puri Heritage Walks (PHW) Sunday took participants to the revered Markandeya Tirtha, the foremost among Puri's Panch Tirthas. Known for its deep spiritual and historical significance, this sacred site remains an integral part of Odisha's heritage.

A total of 32 heritage enthusiasts joined the walk, engaging in detailed discussions on the temple's mythology and architectural uniqueness. Swami Subhananda provided a spiritual overview, while Pandit Siddhartha Acharya highlighted the temple's iconography and historical importance.

The temple is dedicated to Markandeswara Mahadev, named after Sage Markandeya, an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva. According to legend,

Markandeya's parents, Sage Murkundu and his wife, were given a divine choice—either a son with a long, ordinary life or one with a short but virtuous existence.

They chose the latter, and Markandeya was destined to live for only seven years. On the day of his predicted death, Yama, the god of death, arrived to claim him. In desperation, Markandeya clung to a Shiva Linga, praying for divine intervention.

When Yama cast his Jama Phasha (noose of death), it mistakenly ensnared the Linga, enraging Lord Shiva. Manifesting as Kalantaka, Shiva vanquished Yama, granting Markandeya eternal life and making him a Chiranjeevi (immortal).

During the Maha Pralaya (great cosmic dissolution), Markandeya is believed to have



been the only being to witness the event, further elevating the sanctity of this site. A key feature of this tirtha is its ho-

ly pond, believed to have been created by Lord Sudarshan Chakra.

This site holds immense religious significance as it plays a crucial role in several Jagannath rituals, including Kaliya Dalana, Ashoka Ashtami, and Lord Balabhadra's Birth Festival. It is also believed that on Rishi Panchami, Goddess Lakshmi visits this tirtha, further enhancing its divine aura.

Unlike most Shiva temples adorned with a Trishula (trident), Markandeya Tirtha is uniquely crowned with a Sudarshan Chakra—a rare feature in Shaivite shrines. The temple also venerates Lord Vishnu and Shakti, showcasing a fusion of different religious traditions. Dating back to the Bhaumakara dynasty, the temple has been a center of worship since the 8th century, when the idol of the Sapta Matrikas (Seven

Mother Goddesses) was introduced alongside Lord Shankara and Lord Ganesha, a tradition continued during the Somavamsi rule. Among its rarest treasures is an Ekaka Murti (singular idol) of Goddess Parvati. The site also houses the smallest known idol of Lord Surya (Sun God), a hidden gem in Odisha's spiritual landscape.

The surrounding Markandeswar Sahi has long been a thriving cultural hub, contributing significantly to Odia music and festivals. It is also home to Padma Shri Prafulla Kar, the legendary Odia film director whose contributions have left a lasting impact on Odia cinema.

The 8th Puri Heritage Walk offered participants a profound insight into the temple's historical and religious legacy, reinforcing its importance in Odisha's rich cultural landscape.

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Truck carrying 5 tonne beef seized; driver, helper escape

Baliapal/Kalipada, March 9: Singla police in Balasore district seized a mini-truck carrying more than 5 tonne beef near Putura Square on Basta-Baliapal main road, early Sunday morning. While the vehicle has been impounded at the police station, the driver and his helper managed to flee. Sources said that the vehicle bearing registration number (WB 25J 8076) was transporting beef from Bhadrak towards West Bengal late Saturday night. Acting on a tip-off, members of the Bajrang Dal tried to stop the vehicle by blocking the National Highway-60 near Gandhi Square under Basta police limits. However, the driver evaded the blockade and diverted the truck onto Baliapal road for its destination. Due to heavy fog, the driver

lost control on the wheel near Putura Square and collided with a roadside tree. Fearing retaliation, both the driver and the helper abandoned the vehicle and fled the scene. On being informed, Singla police arrived at the spot and seized the truck. A case was registered in this connection and further investigation was on. Local residents and Bajrang Dal activists, including Putura Sarpanch Radhakrushna Behera and activist Kalia Lenka, demanded strict action against those involved in the illegal cattle trade. They also called for an end to the continuous smuggling of cattle and beef through this route, alleging that hundreds of such vehicles pass through the route daily and the police have failed to curb the illegal activity.



RALLY FOR PROHIBITION: Members of 70 women Self-Help Groups take out an awareness rally calling for alcohol prohibition and drug prevention in Kalyani panchayat under Dhamnagar block of Bhadrak district, Sunday

Work for additional spillway at Hirakud Dam to start soon

Sambalpur, March 9: Work for construction of an additional spillway at Hirakud Dam in this district will commence soon, enhancing the flood water discharge capacity of the reservoir, officials said. A nine-member team comprising experts from the World Bank and Central Water Commission (CWC) visited the proposed site for construction at the left dyke of the Hirakud Dam, and the rehabilitation colony Saturday. The team also inspected the right dyke of the dam, power channel, its gates, and reviewed documents regarding additional spillway projects, they said. Chief Engineer of Upper Mananadi Basin, Sushil Kumar Behera, said tender for the additional spillway work will be floated soon after getting the administrative approval from the government. "We have already submitted the documents to the government and are waiting for the nod," he said. "If needed, the expert team will again visit the site for any further investigation," Behera said. The project will entail a cost



of around ₹884 crore. The length of the proposed additional spillway dam will be 91 metres with five sluice gates. The new spillway channel will originate from near the Gandhi Minar on the left dyke of the reservoir and meet Mahanadi river near the Jawahar Udyan, sources said. The CWC had recommended enhancing the flood water discharge capacity of the dam, following which an additional spillway was proposed. Factors including meteorological change, climate change and probable maximum flooding were looked into while the project was proposed, they said. At present, the dam has 98 gates, including 64 sluice gates and 34 crest gates, to release



flood water. After the construction of the additional spillway, the dam will be able to handle up to 25 lakh cusecs of water from 15 lakh cusecs in case of incessant rain and flash floods, the sources said. Earlier in 2019, two private companies had been entrusted to carry out the construction work of the additional spillway. However, in February 2020, the firms backed out of the project, citing delay by the government in handing over the site for the construction work.

Wildlife in danger as forest fires spread

Local residents are often reluctant to report fires immediately, as they have minimal engagement with forest officials. As a result, containment efforts are frequently delayed

Bhanjanagar, March 9: Forest fires continue to spread in the North Ghumusar forest division of Bhanjanagar in Ganjam district and are showing no sign of any let-up. Satellite data received Sunday afternoon indicated fires in two locations within the central forest area. However, during a field visit to Galeri and Mujagada range, this correspondent observed fires in four different locations. The fires have severely affected the region's wildlife, with many animals and birds perishing in the flames. A massive blaze was reported near Brahmanapadar in the Mujagad forest range, while a separate fire engulfed a private forest in Khurudugochha's reserve forest. Fires were detected Saturday along the Ganjam-Kandhamal districts' border, close to Khurudugochha reserve forest. In response, a fire prevention awareness meeting was held at Khurudugochha Sunday afternoon in the presence of Range Officer Bimbardhar Sahu. However, just three hours after the meeting, another fire broke out in the same area. The jungle near Galeri forest range office was also seen



burning intensely. Forest department officials arrived at the site around 5pm and attempted to contain the fire. Satellite reports are generated twice daily—once between noon and 2pm and again between midnight and 2am. However, not all fires are detected by the satellites. The flames get caught when they spread across hilltops. Some fires extinguish on their own, while in other cases, officials only respond after receiving satellite alerts.

A lack of coordination between villagers and the Forest department has further complicated firefighting efforts. Local residents are often reluctant to report fires immediately, as they have minimal engagement with forest officials. As a result, containment efforts are frequently delayed. Authorities must address this communication gap to ensure timely intervention. When contacted, Divisional Forest Officer Himanshu

Sekhar Mohanty stated that immediate action is being taken wherever fire incidents are reported. While some fires have spread on private land in Khurudugochha, officials are working to control them. The DFO emphasised that there has been no negligence in forest protection efforts. However, given the rising frequency of wildfires, authorities must strengthen preventive measures to safeguard both forests and wildlife.

Fishing cats of Bhitarkanika in peril

Kendrapara, March 9: The fishing cat, a rare and endangered species, has been spotted in Chilika and Bhitarkanika wetlands. While Chilika has seen a notable population of these elusive creatures, Bhitarkanika has seen an increase in their numbers over the past two years. However, poaching remains a suspected threat to their survival, prompting environmentalists to call for a dedicated conservation effort. Professor Kshitish Kumar Singh explained that the fishing cat, which is larger than a fox but smaller than a leopard, has a lifespan of about 12 years. It has webbed paws approximately four inches wide and is



capable of climbing trees when necessary. In the Hentha area, where the fishing cats have been spotted, the population is still low. During the 2019 animal census, only 20 fishing cats were recorded in Bhitarkanika. However, the 2022 report indicated that their population in Chilika had exceeded 130.

In response, the state Forest department launched a two-year conservation project in February 2020 to help increase their numbers. Environmentalist Hemanta Kumar Routray pointed out that the fishing cat is listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and in the IUCN Red Data List, yet it faces growing threats in

Bhitarkanika. The loss of natural water channels connecting the mangrove forests and the national park, alongside poaching for their valuable skins, is driving the decline of the species. Additionally, crocodiles in the region and chemicals from nearby shrimp gherries are contributing to their premature deaths. ACF Manas Das highlighted the fishing cat's ability to hunt aquatic and small terrestrial animals using its paws and mouth. Conservationists are using camera traps to track their movements, stressing the need for continued attention to their conservation and population growth.

Former minister Ananta Das passes away

Bhubaneswar/Bhograi, March 9: Former minister Ananta Das passed away in Bhubaneswar in the early hours of Sunday due to age-related ailments, his family said. He was 85. Das is survived by wife, three sons and a daughter. The former minister of higher education and industries was not keeping well for some time, and died at his government residence in Bhubaneswar at around 3.40am, his son Biswajit Das said. President Droupadi Murmu, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and other leaders condoled the demise of the four-time MLA. "Saddened to learn about the



passing of Shri Anant Das who served as minister in the Odisha government. He worked for the people of Odisha. My condolences to his family, friends and followers," Murmu wrote on X. In his condolence message, Majhi said Das was a popular leader and an able administrator. "The state has lost a dedicated and affable leader," he said. Expressing grief over the de-

mise of Das, BJD president and Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik said he would be remembered for his work as a people's representative over a long period. "I extend my condolences to the bereaved family in this hour of grief and pray for the eternal peace of his soul," Patnaik wrote on X. BJD leader and MLA of Bhograi Gautam Buddha Das said, "Bhograi has lost its stalwart leader. His contribution towards the all-round development of the area will be remembered forever." Das was elected to the state Assembly from the Bhograi constituency in Balasore district in 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019 from a BJD ticket. He was also the chief whip of the BJD in the Assembly.

Koraput emerges as popular film shooting destination

Beyond its natural beauty, Koraput offers a unique blend of cultural and geographical elements, making it a perfect setting for a variety of film genres

Koraput, March 9: Known for its scenic beauty and rich natural landscapes, Koraput district is quickly becoming a much sought-after location for filmmakers, particularly in the South Indian film industry. The latest addition to this list is the much-anticipated Telugu film SSMB29, directed by the renowned director SS Rajamouli, famous for his blockbusters Baahubali, RRR, and Magadheera. Filming for SSMB29 is currently underway in the picturesque Talamali hills of Semiliguda, with Rajamouli, Tollywood superstar Mahesh Babu setting up camp in the region. However,

Priyanka Chopra has yet to join the shoot. The film's production is being managed by Naga Praniith. A large crew of nearly 500 members has arrived, with filming scheduled to continue till March 28. The film will also feature sequences shot at Deomali, Odisha's highest peak, showcasing the district's stunning natural beauty. Koraput, with its dense forests, hills, and waterfalls, has already become a popular setting for over 17 South Indian films. In addition to SSMB29, previous projects like Anushka Shetty's Ghati and Allu Arjun's Pushpa 2 were filmed in nearby locations, including Malkangiri, a part of

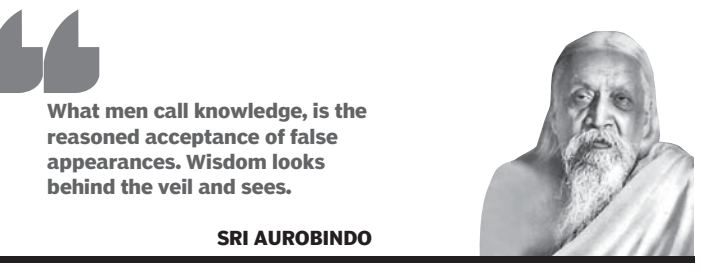


the undivided Koraput district. The district's growing reputation as a cinematic hub has attracted filmmakers due to its diverse landscapes, which provide a perfect backdrop for adventure and action films. The SSMB29 film,

which is expected to be a jungle adventure, has garnered attention for its exciting premise, with Mahesh Babu's role inspired by the mythological figure Hanuman. Koraput's appeal goes beyond its natural beauty—it offers a

unique blend of cultural and geographical elements, making it a perfect setting for a variety of film genres. The district administration, led by Collector V Keerthi Vasan, has been proactive in facilitating these shoots, granting necessary permissions and extending support to the production teams. This influx of film shoots is expected to boost local tourism and create employment opportunities for the community. With SSMB29 set to shine a spotlight on the region, Koraput's emergence as a prime film shooting destination is poised to inspire even more filmmakers to explore its stunning locations for future projects.

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Cycle of Violence

Three months after Islamist insurgents seized control of Syria, toppling the long-standing regime of Bashar al-Assad, terrible violence seems to have returned to haunt the West Asian country, this time the focus is against a particular minority group. The country has descended into one of its most lethal periods of conflict in years, with more than 1,000 deaths reported within just two days amid clashes between government security forces and loyalists of the deposed president. What started as a confrontation between security forces and pro-Assad fighters rapidly transformed into widespread sectarian violence, as Sunni militants launched revenge attacks against Alawite civilians.

The Alawites make up for about 12 per cent of Syria's population. They trace their roots to Shia Islam but have their unique beliefs and practices. The Assad family, (Hafez al-Assad ruled from 1971 until his death in 2000 and then his son, Bashar al-Assad ruled from 2000 to 2024) belongs to this minority sect.

According to Syrian security sources, at least two hundred of their personnel lost their lives in confrontations with former army soldiers loyal to Assad but now de-enlisted, following a series of coordinated attacks and ambushes on their forces on 6 March. The situation escalated into a spiral of revenge killings as thousands of armed supporters of Syria's new leadership from various regions converged on the coastal areas to bolster the struggling forces of the new administration.

On 8 March, the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that since the outbreak of fighting, 745 Alawite civilians have been killed by security forces and allied groups. The war monitor indicated that these individuals were executed by security personnel or pro-government fighters, who also engaged in the looting of homes and properties. Overall, the death toll since 6 March has risen to 1,018, which includes 125 security personnel and 148 fighters loyal to Assad.

The recent wave of revenge killings initiated by Sunni Muslim gunmen aligned with the government against members of Assad's minority Alawite sect represents a significant setback for Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the group that played a key role in toppling the previous regime. For decades, Alawites constituted a substantial chunk of Assad's support base, holding prominent positions within the military and security services. The new government has accused Assad's loyalists of carrying out attacks against the country's newly established security forces in recent weeks. HTS, which has its origins in extremist factions, has raised concerns since December about potential persecution of minorities by the Sunni Islamist political and paramilitary group. Nevertheless, its leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa, a designated terrorist in the US, has swiftly taken steps to project a new image for Damascus.

The fact is that the new government in Damascus is encountering its first significant challenge. It has already dealt with several smaller issues, including navigating relations with the Druze minority in southern Syria, managing interactions with the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA), and engaging in discussions with the US-supported Syrian Democratic Forces.

One thing remains the same in Syria and that is the endless cycle of violence and its victim also remains the same -- the average Syrian. The brutal regime of Bashar al-Assad and his father Hafez al-Assad that lasted almost half a century was infamous for the torture it inflicted on every dissenting voice in the country of multiple religions and ethnicities. Bashar, who followed in his father's footsteps, grew into an autocratic figure even as a civil war raged in the country since March 2011, claiming over 6,22,000 lives and displacing more than 14 million people. While the Syrians celebrated the ousting of the Assad regime on the streets of Damascus and Aleppo in December last year, little did they expect that violence would return to their lives so soon.

Anyone looking back at the history of this region of West Asia, the land that gave birth to Islam, Christianity and many other religions, might be able to somewhat understand the average citizens and their innate violent outlook on life. From a distance it seems, like no other place on this earth, the people living in this part of the world look and search for mindless violence. Therefore the Gods they had created offer them, the people, what they crave for.

WISDOM CORNER

Achievement of your happiness is the only moral purpose of your life, and that happiness, not pain or mindless self-indulgence, is the proof of your moral integrity, since it is the proof and the result of your loyalty to the achievement of your values.

AYAN RAND

Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you.

RUTH BADER GINSBURG

Be thankful for what you have; you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you will never, ever have enough.

OPRAH WINFREY

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1876:** The first telephone call is made. Alexander Graham Bell transmitted the words "Mr. Watson, come here -- I want to see you" to his assistant, Thomas A. Watson, who was in the next-door room.
- 1933:** Opening of the Nazis' first concentration camp. On this day in 1933, soon after Adolf Hitler became chancellor, the first concentration camp in Germany opened at Dachau, where at least 32,000 people would die from disease, malnutrition, physical oppression, and execution.
- 1945:** The most destructive bombing raid in history hits Tokyo. About 100,000 Tokyo citizens died in the fires caused by the US Airforce's incendiary bombs.
- 1959:** A revolt erupts in Lhasa, sparking the Tibetan uprising. Fearing the Dalai Lama's abduction by China, 300,000 Tibetans surrounded his palace.
- 2000:** The dotcom bubble bursts when the NASDAQ Composite stock market index peaks at 5408.60. The dotcom boom, which started in 1997, accompanied the advent of countless new Internet-based companies. When the speculative bubble burst, many small investors were affected.

LOL A CHESS PLAYER

A man went to visit a friend and was amazed to find him playing chess with his dog. He watched the game in astonishment for a while. "I can hardly believe my eyes!" he exclaimed. "That's the smartest dog I've ever seen."



"Nah, he's not so smart," the friend replied. "I've beaten him three games out of five."

FOCUS HUMAN RIGHTS

THE HUNGER ARTIST

In an age when freedom of expression is increasingly under threat, exemplary voices such as Boualem Sansal are needed more than ever. The 75-year-old Algerian novelist and essayist, who published his first book in 1999 and became a French citizen in early 2024, has long criticized authoritarianism and defended liberal values, speaking truth to power with a clarity that unnerves despots and inspires democrats. Today, Sansal urgently requires not only our attention, but also our solidarity.



It would not be the first time that the world has rallied behind an individual for their acts of defiance against an oppressive regime. In that sense, Boualem Sansal would join a long lineage of resistance, from Nelson Mandela to Liu Xiaobo



Jean-Michel Blanquer

EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN ARE NOT ENOUGH. WE MUST STAND UP FOR A MAN WHOSE FATE EMBODIES THE GLOBAL FIGHT FOR FREE EXPRESSION

On 16 November, Algerian authorities arrested Sansal at Algiers airport on unfounded charges. Since then, the cancer-stricken writer has been isolated from the outside world and denied proper medical care -- a violation of a fundamental human right. This arbitrary arrest is a calculated attempt to silence an individual who has consistently spoken out against Algeria's autocratic and corrupt regime.

While some prominent authors and European politicians have come to Sansal's defense, his unjust detention has largely met with indifference. In mid-December, an Algerian appeals court rejected a request for his release. This led Sansal to take desperate measures: in late February, he began a hunger strike, the ultimate act of resistance for those whom powerful governments seek to erase. It is above all an appeal to the world to recognize his plight. Each day that passes without action brings him closer to irreversible harm.

This is not merely a personal tragedy. Sansal is as much

a moral guide as a writer. Since the publication of his first novel, *Le serment des barbares* (The Barbarians' Oath), he has consistently challenged the political stagnation and religious extremism that has plagued Algeria in recent decades. His 2015 dystopian masterpiece, *2084: The End of the World*, warned of creeping authoritarianism under the guise of ideological purity -- a warning that has proved prescient in an era of besieged democracy.

Despite being censored, threatened, and ostracized, Sansal's commitment to the truth has never wavered. His words resonate far beyond Algeria and France because they touch on universal principles: the right to speak without fear, to question authority, and to envision a freer world. And his struggle represents more than

a diplomatic spat between two countries. It is emblematic of a broader global fight for intellectual freedom and democratic ideals.

Individual acts of defiance throughout history have come to symbolize larger struggles for liberty. Émile Zola's famous open letter "J'Accuse" exposed the injustice of the Dreyfus Affair. Václav Havel's Charter 77, a human-rights manifesto co-written with other Czech dissidents, became a lodestar for democratic resistance in Eastern Europe. Sansal follows in this tradition. His hunger strike is a reminder that silence in the face of oppression makes us complicit.

The international community must not remain indifferent. While Sansal's dual nationality has highlighted -- and intensified -- tensions

between France and Algeria, his detention is a test of our collective commitment to human rights and liberal values. More cultural and intellectual institutions and figures -- especially writers and journalists -- and civil-society organizations must speak out. Governments that claim to care about human freedom and dignity must use their influence to demand Sansal's immediate release and access to appropriate medical care.

Supporting Sansal demands action: diplomatic channels must be mobilized, petitions signed, and public campaigns launched. Expressions of concern are not enough. We must stand up for a man whose fate embodies the global fight for free expression. To protect the democratic ideals that Sansal has consistently upheld requires challenging the authoritarian practice of silencing dissent through arbitrary detention and deliberate neglect and mistreatment.

Time is running out for Sansal. Abandoning this courageous writer would be another blow to the principles that underpin open societies. It would not be the first time that the world has rallied behind an individual for their acts of defiance against an oppressive regime. In that sense, Sansal would join a long lineage of resistance, from Nelson Mandela to Liu Xiaobo. But we must defend his life and dignity before it is too late.

The writer, a former French minister of education, is Professor of Constitutional Law at Panthéon-Assas University Paris II. @PROJECT SYNDICATE

SPECTRUM HIGHER EDUCATION

A flawed accreditation system

Stock markets and finance institutions are infamous for manipulation, but few expected India's education sector to be just as tainted. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) bribery scandal has eroded trust in top-paid teachers and the very system meant to uphold higher education, shape national ethos, and drive economic growth. The moral foundation of education has been shaken. If corruption can infiltrate a system built on ethical principles, it risks undermining every sector -- leaving the economy, already struggling to regain its footing, even more vulnerable.



Shivaji Sarkar

IF CORRUPTION CAN INFILTRATE A SYSTEM BUILT ON ETHICAL PRINCIPLES, IT RISKS UNDERMINING EVERY SECTOR

Now widely known as the NAAC-Koneru Lakshmaiah Education Foundation (KLEF) bribery case, the scandal involves 14 top academicians, including a mastermind from the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). It exposes not just deep-rooted corruption but also its widespread prevalence in India's education system. As a direct fallout, NAAC has dismissed around 900 assessors -- senior professors earning Rs 3 lakh or more per month with numerous perks -- over the past few months. While the exact financial scope of the bribery network is yet to be assessed, estimates suggest it runs into billions. The CBI's investiga-

tion into the Andhra-based KLEF scandal alone yielded Rs 37 lakh in cash, six Leno-vo laptops, an iPhone 16 Pro, and incriminating documents. Raids across 20 locations in India are still ongoing.

Concerns about NAAC's credibility are not new. Two years ago, a private university in western Uttar Pradesh -- lacking even basic infrastructure -- was controversially awarded an 'A' grade, raising suspicions of systemic malpractice. NAAC itself now admits to large-scale illicit transactions in exchange for higher grades.

The total number of universities in India is 1,113. These include different kinds of universities, like central, state, deemed, and private universities. There are 56 central universities, 455 state private universities, and 15501 private colleges and other institutions. Since 1994, all higher education institutions have to seek NAAC accreditation. Many have gone for reassessments.

It is possibly one of the most corrupt systems, says Deepesh Divakaran, a Board member in leading institutions partnering with 300 academic institutions. He says the KLEF bribery case unfolds only the tip of the iceberg.

The NAAC is a public autonomous central government body that assesses and

accredits higher education institutions (HEIs). Its rankings decide the fee structure, official facilities and ratings that boost student intake. The NAAC rating was supposed to have transparency in realising the quality of different institutions, particularly in private sector. The present scandal has raised questions if there should at all be such a faulty system and whether the country should trust private educational institutions.

The recent findings are based on investigations that led to immediate arrest of 14 teachers from different parts of the country. One teacher is alleged to have demanded Rs 1.8 crore to approve the graduation of a private university at Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, though it is stated that the deal was struck at Rs 28 lakh.

The NAAC and National Board of Accreditation assessments are important for institutions. Unusual practices are common for getting the highest grade. The UGC and AICTE are unable to control this. While NAAC Peer Team selection is by computerized system, as stated earlier by NAAC, but in KLEF (may be in many others) case members were selected by NAAC officials. This is reportedly happening as Peer Team Members often know the faculty of the institutions they are visiting.

In many cases, publications are made in the name of the faculty members to get higher grading. Several institutions are known to fabricate research papers to boost their NAAC scores. Though most private organisations do not pay the faculty decent wages they squander away tonnes for subterfuge. They buy citations that provide fake indexed research, even get plagiarised research published in journals. It is said that publication of papers has evolved as a parallel industry. Despite crisis in recruitments, immaculate placement records and feedback records are presented.

The accreditation system, including its record keeping and other paraphernalia, has evolved into a parallel expensive system questioning the very process and need for accreditation. It is time for cleaning the system that is too elaborate, involving review of papers of five years, insisting on the "highest quality" of "research", not academic delivery. Most have evolved as degree mills and more so with online education. The Ministry of Education must take decisive action. Rather than persisting with a flawed accreditation system, it should focus on ensuring institutions prioritise academic integrity and genuine learning.

INFA

Letters TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa Post are most welcome to contribute letters (100 words), articles and columns (between 600-1000 words). Contributors are requested to send their contact numbers and full postal address/email ID. They may also send in their valuable comments, opinion and suggestions, preferably by email, to: edit@orissapost.com

OrissaPOST
B-15, Rasulgah Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

Ill-planned development

Sir, Lack of warning and disaster management systems have been the major reasons for the environmental degradation in the Himalayan region. But at the root of the disasters that often take place in the Himalayas, including the recent one in Uttarakhand where 23 workers got stuck following an avalanche, is the utter disregard for the "carrying capacity" of this fragile area's natural systems. The human-induced assault includes unregulated, unsafe and ill-planned infrastructure development that have happened without proper checks and balances. Flouting of rules has been rampant and with impunity, but the tragedies have shown that we cannot bribe nature. Since antiquity, humans and the Himalayan environment have had a close relationship. But sadly, in recent times we have sought to adapt the Himalayan environment to our whims and needs, thereby causing environmental devastation, which has exacerbated the natural process. This is a very serious issue with far-reaching implications for the future security of the Himalayan environment and its inhabitants.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, CHENNAI

Language again

Sir, Union Home Minister Amit Shah has dared Tamil Nadu CM, MK Stalin, to introduce Tamil in the state for engineering and medical courses. It may be recounted here that attempts to teach these specialised courses in Hindi (in MP) have failed simply because there are no takers for Hindi medium. There is no gainsaying the fact that English is the most practical and most convenient language for educational purposes, at any level, from LKG to PG. And no one knows this better than the Tamil Nadu CM. Stalin is therefore not going to fall for the Shah's dare. States in the south know better than to invite their own ruin by attempting to teach engineering/medical courses in their local languages. If the Central government really has the interest of students at heart, steps ought to be taken to convert all state-run schools to English medium so that students do not have to hone their English proficiency by attending "spoken English" classes whose ads one can see in the most unlikely places of all -- a public toilet!

Avinash Godbole, DEWAS (MP)

Seharkhwans keep Kashmir's Ramzan tradition alive

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, March 9: With Ramzan come the Seharkhwans -- the drum-beaters who wake up people for the pre-dawn meal 'Sehri' -- to the cities and towns of Kashmir.

Hundreds of these men who arrive from remote villages have kept the age-old tradition alive, despite the ubiquity of modern gadgets such as mobile phones and alarm clocks.

From time immemorial, their drum beats have woken up Kashmiris for that one meal that keeps them going as they fast during the day.



Mohammad Shafi Mir, a resident of Barzulla, said that Seharkhwans have an important role to play during the holy month. "Ramzan is not free of rigours. We finish the taraweeh

(long, late-night prayers) around 10.30 pm, and by the time we go to sleep, it is already midnight. To wake up again in four hours for the Sehri and the Fajr (early morning) prayers is

tedious. Unlike mobile or clock alarms, you cannot switch off their drum beats."

Each Seharkhwan takes up a 'territory' of one or two mohallas. For some, this is a source of livelihood. For others, an act of devotion. Many of them wait 11 months for Ramzan, as the earnings during this month provide for their families for an entire year.

"We are from a remote area and this is my livelihood. I work as a labourer for the rest of the year, but the earnings in those 11 months are still less than what I earn during Ramzan," Abdul Majeed Khan

from Kalaroos in Kupwara district said. Khan, who has been a drum-beater for 20 years, said his work starts at 3 am in the morning and ends at 5 am.

Mohammad Mehboob Khattana, who has been coming to Srinagar for 22 years every Ramzan, said while he makes a living for his family, he is also hopeful of getting a reward from the God Almighty for the good deed of waking up people for Sehri.

Ghulam Rasool Payar, a veteran of more than 50 years, is a familiar figure in the old city. He said the financial gains are a bonus, as his main aim is to serve people.

UP: AI-enabled handheld X-ray machines helping in early TB detection

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Gorakhpur, March 9: AI-enabled hand-held X-ray machines are emerging as game changers in the early detection of Tuberculosis enabling Uttar Pradesh to diagnose and notify 6.8 lakh patients -- the highest it has achieved in a calendar year, officials said.

Of the 6.8 lakh cases notified in 2024, 4.29 lakh of these patients were notified from the public sector, and 2.5 lakh from private sector.

These AI-enabled hand-held X-ray machines are helping in intensified screening under the ongoing pan India 100-Day Intensified Campaign to Eliminate TB aimed at accelerating efforts for the elimination of the disease from the country.

According to the National TB Prevalence Survey in India (2019-2021) by ICMR in collaboration with the Union Health Ministry, X-rays are a critical screening tool for Tuberculosis, as close to 42.6 per cent cases of the disease would be missed had they not been screened through an X-ray. Even when the patient is at a very early stage of the disease and does not have conventional symptoms of the disease, the machine can help diagnose the air borne disease, State Tuberculosis Officer Dr Shailendra Bhatnagar said.

"These X-ray machines are turning out to be game changers in early detection of tuber-



culosis," Dr Bhatnagar said. It is a simple X-ray machine with the advantage that the radiation which comes out of it is only 2-3 mA. Normal X-ray machines being used generally in hospitals and big institutions exude radiation of around 300 mA, Dr Bhatnagar said.

Around 100 patients can be screened using these machines in a day and these machines are being used in remote areas. Besides, these portable hand-held X-ray devices are also being deployed to detect tuberculosis among high-risk groups such as diabetics, smokers, alcoholics, those who are malnourished, people living with HIV, individuals with a history of TB or COVID, the elderly and household contacts of TB patients.

Both asymptomatic and symptomatic individuals are screened using both the X-ray devices, said Dr Rajat Chaurasia, the Chief medical Officer, Siddharth Nagar. Those having symptoms are subjected to X-ray as well as molecular testing which comprises sputum examination while the asymptomatic from the vulnerable group are made to undergo X-ray.

Interstate child trafficking gang busted in Ballia, 4 held

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ballia (UP), March 9: Police have busted an interstate gang involved in child trafficking with the arrest of four men, officials said Sunday.

Two missing girls have also been rescued from the gang, they said. According to the police, two teenage girls had gone missing from the Maniyar police station area within a month.

On December 24, 17-year-old Kalyatri Prajapati went to appear for a practical exam at Maniyar Inter College but did not return. Following a complaint from her mother, a case was registered on December 29 against unidentified persons. Similarly, January 13, Anjali Rajbhar (16), a Class 10 student, went to the same school

and disappeared. Based on her mother's complaint, a case was registered on January 22.

Superintendent of Police (SP) Omvir Singh said that during the investigation, police gathered crucial evidence and conducted raids, leading to the arrest of Ashok Kumar Kumawat (25) and Kishan Bhati from Pali district in Rajasthan, along with Mohan Yadav (24) from Gaura Bagahi (Gangapur) village in Maniyar, and a 17-year-old boy Saturday.

The police rescued both the missing girls, he said. During interrogation, the accused revealed details about their interstate trafficking network, which allegedly targets girls estranged from their families and sells them in other states for marriage and domestic work.



A vendor sells herbal coloured powder at his shop, ahead of Holi festival in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh PTI PHOTO

J&K: NMR marks 13.3-point drop

"The NMR has reached a single digit of 9.8 per 1,000 live births, a 13.3-point decrease, while the IMR has dipped to 16.3 with a decrease of 16.1 points. Sex ratio at birth also recorded a significant improvement, from 923 to 976," the report said

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, March 9: The neonatal mortality rate (NMR) has reached single digit at 9.8 per 1,000 live births in Jammu and Kashmir, recording a 13.3-point decrease, while the sex ratio at birth has recorded significant improvement from 923 to 976, official data showed.

The infant mortality rate (IMR) also dipped to 16.3, marking a drop of 16.1 points, according to the Economic Survey Report for 2024-25 tabled by the Jammu and Kashmir government in the Assembly March 6. The report said the government is continuing its efforts to enhance basic health infrastructure at all levels, including technical manpower and medical equipment to provide improved healthcare delivery with special focus on maternal and child health, communicable and non-communicable diseases, and to face the upcoming challenging ailments.

Jammu and Kashmir has moved forward from the category of 'performers' to 'front-runners', as per the SDG India Index 2023-24 released by the NITI Aayog, with the score of the health sector increasing from 70 to 78.



"The NMR has reached a single digit of 9.8 per 1,000 live births, a 13.3-point decrease, while the IMR has dipped to 16.3 with a decrease of 16.1 points. Sex ratio at birth also recorded a significant improvement, from 923 to 976," the report said. The percentage of fully-immunised children against preventable diseases has increased to 96.5 per cent, it said. Institutional births have increased from 85.6 per cent to 92.40 per cent, while life expectancy at birth in J&K has reached 74.3 years -- the highest in the country after Kerala and Delhi -- against a national average of 70 years, the report said.

Since its inception, 100 per cent families have registered and 86.12 lakh Ayushman

Golden cards have been issued under the AB-PMJAY - SEHAT scheme, it said, adding that this initiative has facilitated treatments worth ₹2,800 crore, benefiting 15 lakh individuals. As many as 489 ambulances have been geo-tagged and integrated with online 108/102 ambulatory services.

These efforts have enabled quick response times (average response time less than half-an-hour) and served more than 4.50 lakh beneficiaries since August 2020.

Over the past four years, J-K has significantly expanded its healthcare workforce, including hiring of 10,919 doctors and paramedical staff under the National Health Mission (NHM), alongside filling up of 36,274

regular positions in health and medical education, besides supporting 13,965 ASHA workers, the report said.

Infrastructural upgradation and consolidation of health institutions include two AIIMS, two state cancer institutes and two bone and joint hospitals, while 3,100 health and wellness centres have been operationalised by upgrading the existing public health centres and Ayush dispensaries, the report said. Also, bed capacity in hospitals has been increased to 21,966 while medical oxygen generation capacity has been extended from 14916 LPM to 1,27,901 LPM (almost nine times) since August 2020 through 177 operational oxygen generation plants (OGPs), it said.

There has been an unprecedented expansion in medical education with the establishment of new medical colleges, it added. Ten government medical colleges, including nine offering MBBS, one unani, one ayurvedic and one homeopathy courses have been started. The capacity of MBBS seats has been increased from 500 to 1,300, the report said, adding that more than 5,000 seats have been added in MBBS, DNB, post-graduate and nursing courses since 2019.

Kashmir received 13 pc of total tourist footfall in '21-24

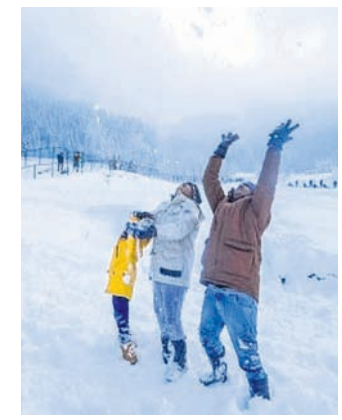
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, March 9: Kashmir has received almost 13 percent of the total tourists who visited the Union Territory in the last four years, with the bulk of the share going to the Jammu region, official data suggests.

According to the Economic Survey 2024-25, tabled by the Jammu and Kashmir government in the Legislative Assembly, the union territory received a total of 7,49,70,943 tourists from 2021 to 2024.

This figure includes religious tourists -- those visiting the Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine in Jammu and the Amarnath Cave Shrine in Kashmir. The data suggests that out of the 7.49 crore tourists, 6,49,77,187 visited Jammu, while only 99,93,756 visited the Kashmir Valley, with Jammu receiving a share of 86.66 per cent and Kashmir 13.33 per cent.

In 2021, J&K received a total of 1,13,16,534 tourists. Out of this, Jammu received 1,06,50,757, including domestic, foreign, and religious tourists, while Kashmir got 6,65,777 visitors. In 2022, the tourist footfall in J&K was 1,88,84,317, out of which 1,62,10,875 visited Jammu, while Kashmir received 26,73,442. Similarly, in 2023, out of a total of 2,11,80,011 tourists, 1,80,24,176 visited Jam-



mu and 31,55,835 visited Kashmir. In 2024, while 2,35,90,081 tourists visited J&K, Jammu received 2,00,91,379, and Kashmir 34,98,702. In 2024, 5,11,922 yatrins visited the Amarnath Cave Shrine in Kashmir, while 94,55,605 yatrins visited the Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine in Jammu.

The number of foreign tourists in J&K has risen manifold in the last four years -- from 1,650 in 2021 to 65,452 in 2024.

Participation in various national and international events and active digital and social media promotion has significantly increased tourist visits, it said. The survey also highlighted that the highest-ever number of yatrins in the last 10 years was recorded for the annual Amarnath Yatra in 2024.

UP: Transport dept staff to be trained in advanced tech

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, March 9: Top transport department officials and employees of Uttar Pradesh will now undergo an advanced technology training, the state government said in a statement Sunday.

The Institute of Driving Training and Research (IDTR) in Rae Bareilly is being developed as a Centre of Excellence to facilitate this, the statement said.

A dedicated training cell, headed by the additional transport commissioner, has been established to oversee the programmes, it said. Fariduddin, Divisional Transport Officer of Basti, has been appointed as the nodal officer.

Transport Commissioner Brajesh Narayan Singh said, "In line with the vision of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, there is a strong focus on reducing road accidents and equipping officers and employees with the latest technology. Comprehensive training will

A dedicated training cell, headed by the additional transport commissioner, has been established to oversee the programmes

Mahakumbh concludes, yet devotees continue to visit Sangam

The Mahakumbh Mela, which spanned 4,000 hectares from January 13 to February 26, witnessed an estimated 66 crore devotees taking a dip in the sacred waters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Prayagraj (UP), March 9: Devotees continue to visit the Sangam area here even after the Mahakumbh Mela has officially concluded. Some of the arrangements will be retained throughout the year, officials said.

Neeraj Kesariwani, a resident of Prayagraj's Colonelganj locality, who visited the Sangam area said, "We couldn't visit the Mahakumbh due to the massive crowd, which was a disappointment. However, the pleasant evening weather and the LED lights adorning the Sangam area make it feel like the fair is still going on."

Many people who refrained from visiting the Mahakumbh due to heavy crowds are now making their way to the Sangam area. Among them is Dr

Deeksha from Delhi who said "We hesitated to come earlier due to reports of overcrowding. Now, having taken a holy dip at the Sangam, I feel blessed. The only regret is that we missed the sight of Naga Sadhus."

She further praised the beautification efforts by the government, stating, "The entire city of Prayagraj looks splendid with its well-maintained and decorated surroundings." PTI correspondent toured the former Mahakumbh Mela site and observed a large number of workers dismantling the temporary structures across Triveni Sangam, Arail Ghat, and Jhuni.

Mela Officer Vijay Kiran Anand informed PTI that given the massive influx of devotees during the Mahakumbh, several facilities in the Sangam area will be retained year-round.



These include LED lighting, changing rooms, and well-maintained ghats. He added that within a fortnight,

all tents will be removed, while pontoon bridges will be partially retained for the Magh Mela, with the rest being redeployed to other districts.

Regarding the pontoon bridges, Anand stated that 30 such bridges, comprising 3,600 pontoons, were constructed across the fairgrounds. Superintending Engineer (Mahakumbh) Manoj Gupta said that to enhance the experience of devotees and tourists, 485 designer streetlights were installed at a cost of ₹8 crore across the Mela area.

Besides, over 40,000 rechargeable bulbs and approximately 48,000 LED lights were installed, ensuring uninterrupted illumination. To provide 24-hour electricity supply, 85 substations of 400 kV, 14 substations of 250 kV, and 128 substations of 100 kV

were set up, he said.

The Mahakumbh Mela, which spanned 4,000 hectares from January 13 to February 26, witnessed an estimated 66 crore devotees taking a dip in the sacred waters. Dignitaries including the President, Prime Minister, and foreign leaders were among the attendees.

Indian Railways invested around ₹5,000 crore for the event, constructing over 21 flyovers and underpasses while running 16,000 special trains to facilitate the travel of approximately 50 million passengers.

Similarly, the Uttar Pradesh Roadways operated 8,850 buses, setting a record. For sanitation, over 150,000 temporary toilets were maintained by a workforce of 15,000 sanitation workers, while approximately 2,000 Ganga Seva volunteers were deployed for ghat cleanliness.

be provided to achieve this, starting with the department's top officials." "The IDTR, Raebareilly will focus on building a permanent and modern training system for transport officers across Uttar Pradesh. The training will cover the latest technology, data-driven policy-making, enforcement strategies, and e-governance. Specialised programmes will be organised for officers at all levels. Refresher courses for existing staff, and training for new officers will also be conducted regularly," he said.

Singh said the training curriculum for transport officers would be designed to meet the specific needs of Uttar Pradesh, align with evolving trends in the national transport sector, and adhere to guidelines from the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. Additionally, it will incorporate the latest global developments in the transport sector, ensuring the officers stay informed about international best practices.



Now, Modi has changed the country's political culture by transforming anti-incumbency into pro-incumbency. Pro-incumbency means that people are happy and want Modi to win again and again

OVER 600 ILLEGAL BANNERS, HOARDINGS REMOVED IN LATUR

More than 600 illegal banners and hoardings were removed as part of a crackdown launched by the civic authorities in Maharashtra's Latur city Sunday, an official said.



of the day quote

For youths, a challenge is not a challenge if the government stands by them, they can prevail any challenge. The youths of Uttar Pradesh have worked to take themselves forward

Headquarters of many companies have moved out of Mumbai. How will the city benefit from this? Even in Jharkhand and Varanasi, people ask why new projects are going to Gujarat instead of other states

Every effort is being made to minimize inconvenience to the public during construction work

Shutdown hits normal life in Kuki areas of Manipur

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Imphal/Churachandpur, March 9: Normal life was affected in Kuki-dominated areas of Manipur Sunday as agitators enforced an indefinite shutdown called by Kuki-Zo groups against a "crackdown by security forces".

The situation in Kangpokpi district, where at least one person was killed and 40 others were injured in clashes between Kuki demonstrators and security forces on the previous day, remained tense but calm Sunday.

In other Kuki-dominated areas in Churachandpur and Tengnoupal districts as well, protesters burnt tyres and blocked roads with boulders, which the security forces were seen clearing. However, no fresh violence has been reported so far.

Business establishments remained closed and few vehicles were seen plying the roads in Kuki-dominated areas in the state.

Agitators were seen asking people to remain indoors. Additional security forces have been deployed in Ganghiphai and other parts of the district along the NH-2 (Imphal-Dimapur Road) and vehicular patrolling was being conducted to ensure law and order, a district official said.

A protester was killed while over 40 others, including women and policemen, were injured in clashes between Kuki demonstrators and security forces in different parts of Kangpokpi district Saturday, officials said. Clashes erupted between



- The order bore significance as unhindered travel throughout the state has remained affected since ethnic violence broke out between the two communities in May 2023
The violence left over 250 people killed and thousands homeless since then
The Centre had imposed President's rule in Manipur February 13, days after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned from his post leading to political uncertainty in the northeastern state

demonstrators and security forces in the Kuki-dominated district after police fired tear gas shells to disperse them, as they opposed Union Home Minister Amit Shah's directive allowing free movement across the state. Protesters clashed with security forces till late Saturday night as the agitators used catapults against the law enforcers, he said, adding windshields of at least five vehicles of the security forces were damaged.

The Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF), a Kuki-Zo

RG KAR CASE

Rallies in Kolkata seeking justice for murdered doctor

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 9: Two rallies were held in Kolkata Sunday, demanding justice for the doctor who was raped and murdered at the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital.

The rallies, organised by a section of the civil society to mark seven months of the heinous crime, also condemned the injury suffered by a student on the Jadavpur University campus after being allegedly hit by the vehicle of Education Minister Bratya Basu during a protest March 1. Both the rallies converged at Rabindra Sadan after starting from Hazra Crossing and Esplanade.

The participants in the rallies demanded that all those involved in the rape and murder of the post-graduate trainee doctor be brought to book by the CBI, which is investigating the crime on an order of the Calcutta High Court. Former civic volunteer Sanjay Roy has been sentenced to imprisonment till the end of his natural life by the Sealdah sessions court here after finding him guilty of the gruesome rape and murder of the doctor.

The central agency is, however, continuing its investigation into the matter.

The parents of the victim have claimed that there were others involved in the crime and demanded that all of those who may be directly or indirectly involved be brought to book. The BJP's youth wing also held a rally in the city, seeking steps for the restoration of peace at the Jadavpur University campus.

HAMPI RAPE

K'taka govt to step up security at tourist spots



AGENCIES

Bangalore, March 9: Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara Sunday assured that security measures at tourist destinations will be significantly strengthened in the wake of recent rape of a foreign national and a homestay owner at Hampi.

The Minister also said, moving forward, tourists visiting Karnataka will be briefed on the dos and don'ts to ensure their safety. "Definitely we are going to step up our security measures in places like Hampi and other tourist places," Parameshwara told reporters here. He further mentioned that the government will reassess the existing security measures.

The Minister also noted that the rape of two women, including an Israeli national, is likely to affect the tourism sector. "On the one hand we are trying to attract tourists from across the world while on the other incidents like this deter the tourists from visiting our country."

According to Parameshwara, on the night of March 6, two foreign nationals, including an Israeli citizen, along with two others, went out for stargazing on the banks of the Tungabhadra canal.

Third accused held

Karnataka Minister Shivaraj Tangadagi said Sunday that the third accused in the tourist rape case in Koppal district had been arrested. Tangadagi stated that three individuals were involved in the crime. While two were arrested March 8, the third accused was apprehended Sunday. "Three people were involved in this horrific crime, which should never have happened. Two were arrested yesterday, and the third was caught today," said Tangadagi, who is also the Koppal district in-charge minister. He added that he has instructed the police to enhance security for tourists to prevent such incidents in the future. According to police, the third accused was arrested in Tamil Nadu, where he had fled after the crime.

Three youths approached the group and asked for directions to a petrol pump. When the tourists expressed their unawareness, the youths robbed them. One of the tourists had a verbal altercation with the strangers, and in a fit of anger, the men pushed the tourists into the canal. While three of the tourists managed to escape, the fourth went missing, and her body was later found.

SHORT TAKES

Five killed in road accident in K'taka

Chitradurga (Karnataka): Five people were killed in a head-on collision between a car and a truck on the outskirts of the district headquarter town of Chitradurga Sunday. According to police, the tragedy occurred at Sibar village in Chitradurga Taluk. All the five people in the car were killed.

2 dead as building collapses in Belur

Hassan (Karnataka): At least two people were killed, and several others are feared trapped after a dilapidated shop collapsed in Belur Sunday afternoon, police said. Customers were inside the shop when the structure gave way, they said. Upon receiving information, police and fire and emergency services personnel rushed to the scene and launched a rescue operation.

Two workers electrocuted

Bahraich (UP): Two workers died due to electrocution at a house here, police said Sunday. Mohammad Ahmed (35) and Afzal (40), both residents of Gonda district, had been working for several days at the house of a man named Sajjan in Harchanda village. On Saturday afternoon, the duo was carrying an iron ladder to the terrace when it accidentally came in contact with an overhead electric wire near the house.

Man stabbed to death

Gorakhpur (UP): A 24-year-old man was stabbed to death, police said Sunday as they have launched a probe and registered an FIR against seven people. According to a complaint filed by the victim's family, Satyam (24) left home Friday night. His body was found near a government tubewell the next day, they said. Police suspect that he was ambushed, assaulted and then stabbed to death. Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Jitendra Kumar said that on the basis of the complaint, seven people have been named in the case and efforts are on to arrest them.

Farmer shot dead

Budaun (UP): A 32-year-old farmer was shot dead by unidentified men while he was sleeping at a poultry farm in Uttar Pradesh's Budaun district, police said Sunday. The incident took place Saturday night in the Bilsa area when Rampal (32) was asleep at the farm.

Kathua killings: J&K LG orders investigation



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, March 9: Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha Sunday ordered a thorough probe into the killing of three civilians in Kathua district even as Union minister Jitendra Singh called it a terror act.

A team has been formed to investigate the case, a senior police officer said. The bodies of Varun Singh (15), his paternal uncle Yogesh Singh (32) and maternal uncle Darshan Singh (40) were recovered from the Ishu nullah in the remote Malhar area Saturday. The trio had gone missing March 5 during a wedding function.

"I have ordered a thorough and transparent investigation, and all the necessary support to the families will be provided," the LG said in a post on X. He said he was shocked and saddened at the brutal killing of the three persons.

"I assure the people that the perpetrators will be brought to book at the earliest. Justice will be ensured and accountability will be fixed," Sinha said. Earlier, Union minister Jitendra Singh, who represents Udhampur constituency that covers Kathua, said the three civilians were killed by terrorists and asserted that there is a "deep conspiracy" to spoil the atmosphere in the area.

The killings have sparked protest in the district. "The brutal killing of 3 youth by terrorists in Bani area of district Kathua is extremely sad as well as a matter of great concern. There appears to be a deep conspiracy behind spoiling the atmosphere in this peaceful area," the minister said on X.



Women in traditional attire participate in a bike rally to celebrate the International Women's Day, in Nagpur

Climate change more robust now: Scientists

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 9: Climate change is growing stronger and more robust, and the cooling, counter effects of La Nina may not be effective in a warmer future, climate scientists said, assessing current heat trends seen in large parts of the country.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted an early summer this year, with above normal temperatures and intense, long heatwave spells. The country experienced its warmest February since 1901, with the fifth lowest rainfall since 2001, it said.

While human-caused climate change is increasingly driving a 'new normal' marked by a warmer winter and shorter spring, scientists also draw attention to the yearly changes in weather patterns, termed

'year-to-year variability'. "For example, updates from the IMD this year suggest that it was an unusually dry winter," Arpita Mondal, associate professor at the centre for climate studies at IIT Bombay, told PTL. She explained that rain is a natural cooling process helping bring temperatures down.

Raghu Murtugudde, an earth system scientist and professor at IIT Bombay, said, "I see a global wave of warm and cold temperature anomalies during Dec-Feb that are related to the swings of jet streams." Jet streams are strong winds blowing in the upper levels of the atmosphere and influence weather by shifting north and south.

A northward shift in these winds during pre-monsoon is directly linked with heatwave character, such as its duration and temperature, Mondal said.



Further, El Nino and La Nina -- phases of the 'ENSO' natural climate driver -- also contribute to the overall trends, Vimal Mishra, chair professor of civil engineering at IIT Gandhinagar, said. Much of the world's

weather is significantly influenced by the 'El Nino-Southern Oscillation' (ENSO), involving changes in temperatures and atmospheric pressures in the Pacific Ocean. An ENSO cycle oscillates between the 'El Ni-

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted an early summer this year, with above normal temperatures and intense, long heatwave spells

The country experienced its warmest February since 1901, with the fifth lowest rainfall since 2001, it said

no' -- warm phase linked with warmer ocean temperatures -- and its counterpart 'La Nina', transitioning each time via a neutral phase. A cycle typically lasts between 2-7 years.

This week, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) notified that the "weak" La Nina that emerged in December 2024 "is likely to be short-lived". The UN agency had predicted the La Nina a 60 per cent chance of emerging during July-September, following ENSO-neutral

conditions that began in May 2024. Murtugudde said, "It's not really a La Nina at all. It has some cold waters in the tropical Pacific (Ocean), but in the critical eastern Pacific, some warm anomalies have persisted. And this only emerged at the end of the year, as opposed to peaking during December-February."

The 2023-24 El Nino, one of the strongest five on record, is said to have fuelled rising temperatures and extreme weather events around the world in the period.

India experienced 536 heatwave days during summer 2024, the highest in 14 years, with the northwestern region seeing the warmest June since 1901, according to the IMD.

In its update this week, the WMO also predicted a 60 per cent chance of ENSO-neutral conditions during March-May 2025.



The Finance Minister has declared that GST rates will be reduced soon. The Indian National Congress reiterates that any changes in GST must be more comprehensive than a mere rate reduction

JAIRAM RAMESH | CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY IN-CHARGE COMMUNICATIONS

HP BUDGET SESSION BEGINS TODAY

Ahead of the onset of the 16-day Himachal Pradesh Budget session, with the laying of the Budget March 17, Assembly Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania on Sunday called an all-party meeting to seek cooperation in the proceedings of the House. Leader of Opposition Jai Ram Thakur and Chief Whip Sukhram Chaudhary participated in the meeting on behalf of the BJP



of the day uote

The relevance of today's subject is that type-2 diabetes mellitus in India is spreading like an epidemic, and so also obesity. So, these all metabolic disorders... every third Indian has a fatty liver

JITENDRA SINGH | UNION MINISTER



If anyone says Jai Shri Ram, do not let the person leave without making sure that he says Jai Shivaji and Jai Bhavani

UDDHAV THACKERAY | SHIV SENA (UBT) CHIEF



The people from Mithilanchal and Bihar who have settled in Gujarat have contributed significantly to its growth

AMIT SHAH | UNION MINISTER



India condemns vandalism at Hindu temple in Calif.

Hindu American Foundation, a non-profit advocacy group in the US, said the vandalism at the largest Hindu temple in California occurred Saturday and demanded the FBI and its Director Kash Patel to probe the matter



AGENCIES

New York/New Delhi, March 9: A prominent Hindu temple in the United States was defaced with anti-India graffiti by unknown individuals, prompting a strong condemnation from India and a demand for "stringent action" against those involved in the incident.

Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) said that its Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Chino Hills city of San Bernardino County faced desecration. Chino Hills borders Los Angeles County.

"In the face of another Mandir desecration, this time in Chino Hills, CA, the Hindu community stands steadfast against hate. Together with the community in Chino Hills and Southern California, we will never let hate take root," the BAPS Public Affairs posted on X.

"Our common humanity and faith will ensure that peace and compassion prevail," it said, without providing details of the incident. India Sunday strongly condemned the incident and called for adequate security to the places of worship in view of the incident.

"We have seen reports regarding the vandalism at a Hindu temple in Chino Hills, California. We condemn such despicable acts in the strongest terms," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal in New Delhi while responding to media queries on the incident. "We call upon the local law enforcement authorities to take stringent action against those responsible for these acts, and also ensure adequate security to places of worship," he said.

The Opposition Congress party also condemned the incident, saying such acts of hatred and intolerance were utterly unacceptable. "The Indian National Congress condemns in the strongest possible terms, the vandalism of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Chino Hills, California," Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khara said in a post on X.

"Such acts of hatred and intolerance are utterly unacceptable and have no place in any civilized society," he said and demanded action against the desecrators. Patanjali Ayurved's co-founder Ramdev condemned vandalism at the temple and said India should

take the initiative in finding a way to curb "religious terrorism".

Hindu American Foundation, a non-profit advocacy group in the US, said the vandalism at the largest Hindu temple in California occurred Saturday and demanded the FBI and its Director Kash Patel to probe the matter. "We ask @ChinoHills_PD, @FBI @FBIDirector-Kash @DNIGabbard to investigate this latest in a string of anti-Hindu hate crimes on our sacred spaces," it said.

The Coalition of Hindus of North America (CoHNA), an advocacy group dedicated to improving the understanding of Hinduism in North America, drew attention to past such cases and demanded a thorough investigation.

"Another Hindu Temple vandalised - this time the iconic BAPS temple in Chino Hills, CA. It's just another day in a world where media and academics will insist there is no anti-Hindu hate and that #Hinduphobia is just a construct of our imagination," it said on X.

"Not surprising this happens as the day for a so-called 'Khalistan referendum' in LA (Los Angeles) draws close," it said. CoHNA gave a list of 10 temples that have been vandalised or burglarised in the last few years.

In September, the BAPS Hindu temple in California's Sacramento amid indications of an 'EPIC' showdown between the government and the Opposition which is planning to raise issues such as the alleged manipulation of electoral rolls, the fresh bout of violence in Manipur and India's handling of the



Malayalam film actor Jayaram performs 'Pancharimelam' during the Attukal Pongala festival, in Thiruvananthapuram

Tunnel collapse: 1 body recovered



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Nagarkurnool (Telangana), March 9: Rescue teams working to extricate the eight trapped men under the partially collapsed SLBC tunnel here for over two weeks Sunday retrieved the body of one of them from under 10 ft of silt.

The body has been sent to the Nagarkurnool civil hospital for post mortem and to follow other procedures, a senior of-

ficial told PTL. The body could be extricated following "very careful" digging and other efforts for more than 48 hours, he said. It was buried under silt at a depth of about 10 feet.

Efforts were on to ascertain the identity of the deceased, a police official said. The rescue officials appreciated the role of personnel of NDRF, state-run miner Singareni Collieries Ltd and rat miners in the operation.

The search for the remaining workers continues as it is, the official added. Earlier, the state government deployed cadaver dogs of Kerala police to look for human presence and the rescue personnel carried out digging at the spots suggested by the canines.

Eight persons -- engineers and labourers -- remained trapped in the Srisaillam Left Bank Canal (SLBC) project tunnel since February 22 and experts from the NDRF, Indian Army, Navy and other agencies are making relentless efforts to pull them out to safety.

Four workers die from suffocation inside water tank



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 9: Four labourers died of suffocation Sunday while cleaning a water tank in an under-construction building in south Mumbai, officials said.

They had put the death toll at five earlier. "The incident occurred at Bismillah Space building located on Dintimkar Road in the Nagpada area around 12.30 pm. Five persons entered the tank and fell unconscious. They were rescued by fire brigade personnel and rushed to JJ Hospital, where doctors declared four dead on arrival," a civic official said.

He identified the deceased as Hasipal Shaikh (19), Raja Shaikh (20), Jiaulla Shaikh (36) and Imandu Shaikh (38), while the fifth person, Purhan Shaikh (31) is recuperating.

X POST OF THE DAY



Most people did not bother about gold pre 2020. In 2025, everyone (including me) wants to own some.

As you study different asset classes: you realize fairly quickly -- that every asset class is cyclical. Right from India stocks to US Stocks to Gold to Real Estate. The goal of investing should be to: time this cycle.

Now: many would say-- oh but, Mr Buffett said: don't time the markets.

Okay: look what he is doing now? sitting on his highest ever cash positions.

Why is he hoarding so much cash? because he also times the market. It is just that the entire money managers have brainwashed you to keep giving them money every month (irrespective of anything). Don't trust anyone (including me). No one cares about your money (the way you do).

So learn how to manage it better. And, become an independent thinker.

@Akshat_World

LUDHIANA BUILDING COLLAPSE

Death toll rises to two; rescue efforts continue

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ludhiana (Punjab), March 9: One more worker died in the factory building collapse here while the rescue operation was still on as another worker was stated to be trapped under the debris, officials said Sunday.

The worker's body was brought out from under the debris Sunday, taking the death toll in the incident to two, they said. On Saturday evening, a worker was killed after the building of a textile factory collapsed in the Focal Point area here.

Two teams of National Disaster Response Force, along with police, fire brigade and the municipal corporation, were undertaking the rescue operation, the officials said.

Budget session set for 'EPIC' showdown

The focus of the government will be on getting Parliament nod for the demands for grants, completion of the budgetary process, seeking approval for the Manipur budget and passage of the Waqf Amendment Bill

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 9: Parliament's Budget session resumes Monday amid indications of an 'EPIC' showdown between the government and the Opposition which is planning to raise issues such as the alleged manipulation of electoral rolls, the fresh bout of violence in Manipur and India's handling of the



Trump administration. The focus of the government will be on getting Parliament nod for the demands for grants, completion of the budgetary process, seeking approval for the Manipur budget and passage of the Waqf Amendment Bill.

Home Minister Amit Shah is expected to move a statutory resolution seeking Parliament approval for the proclamation of President's Rule in Manipur.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is also scheduled to table the budget for Manipur Monday. Manipur has been under President's Rule since February 13 after the resignation of Chief Minister N Biren Singh.

The Opposition said it is set to corner the government over the issue of duplicate Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) numbers. The Trinamool Congress has taken the lead in

flagging the issue, following which the Election Commission declared that it would take corrective measures within the next three months.

The Election Commission had rejected the Trinamool Congress claim that the voter lists were manipulated to allow voters from other states to exercise their franchise in West Bengal.

The poll body also made it clear that while the EPIC numbers of some voters "may be identical", other details such as demographic information, Assembly constituency and polling booth are different. Trinamool Congress leaders are meeting the Election Commission Monday and have also rallied other Opposition parties, including the Congress, DMK, Shiv Sena-UBT, to raise the issue in both Houses of Parliament during the second part of the Budget session.

For the government, the

early passage of the Waqf Amendment Bill is a priority. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said at the India Today Conclave last week that the government is keen on the early passage of the Waqf Amendment Bill as it will solve many issues of the Muslim community.

A Joint Committee of Parliament submitted its report on the bill in the Lok Sabha amid vociferous protests by the opposition. Issues such as the fresh violence in Manipur, the threat of reciprocal tariffs by US President Donald Trump, the political furore over the delimitation of parliamentary constituencies are also expected to find an echo in Parliament.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh has said the Opposition INDIA bloc leaders will hold "extensive consultation" to jointly oppose the Waqf Bill.

Man lynched in Jharkhand

Latehar (Jharkhand): A 40-year-old labourer from Madhya Pradesh suspected of stealing goats was lynched allegedly by a group of people in Jharkhand's Latehar district, a police officer said Sunday. The incident happened at Goa village under the jurisdiction of Sadar police station around 11 pm Saturday, he said. The deceased, identified as Salim Khan, was a resident of Datia district in Madhya Pradesh. He has been working as a labourer at a brick kiln for the past three months, the officer-in-charge of Sadar police station, Dular Chowde, said. Six people have been detained for interrogation in connection to the case.

Mahakumbh water fit for bathing: New CPCB report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 9: A new report by the Central Pollution Control Board submitted to the National Green Tribunal has said that as per statistical analysis, the water quality during the recently-concluded Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj was fit for bathing.

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) report said the statistical analysis was necessitated because of "variability of data" in the samples collected from the same locations across different dates and on different locations on the same day, because of which these did not reflect the "overall river water quality through-

out the river stretch".

The report dated February 28 and uploaded on the tribunal's website March 7 said the board had conducted water monitoring twice a week from January 12 onwards, including on auspicious bathing days, at five locations on Ganga river and two locations on Yamuna river.

"There is a significant variability in the values on various parameters, viz pH, dissolved oxygen (DO), biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) and fecal coliform count (FC) for the samples taken from the same location on different dates. The values of the aforementioned parameters also vary at different locations for the samples collected on the same

day," the report said.

The DO or the amount of oxygen in water, BOD, which measures the amount of oxygen needed to break down organic matter in water, and FC, a marker of sewage contamination, are key indicators of water quality.

The report said that an expert committee examined the issue of "variability in data" and said that "the data represents a snapshot of water quality at a specific location and time and may vary significantly depending upon factors such as upstream anthropogenic activities (human actions), rate of flow, depth of sampling, time of sampling, river current and mixing of currents, sam-



pling location and such other multiple factors".

"As a result, these values reflect water quality parameters at the exact time and place from where these water

samples were collected, and may not fully represent the overall characteristics of the river, therefore, not necessarily reflecting the overall river water quality throughout the

river stretch," it said.

The report also said that because of the variability, a statistical analysis of water quality data of various monitoring locations for the key parameters was undertaken from January 12 to February 22 at 10 locations of "mass bathing" and that 20 rounds of monitoring were done.

According to the report, the median value for FC was 1,400 as compared to the permissible limit of 2,500 units per 100 ml, while the DO was 8.7 vis-a-vis the stipulated norm of being greater than 5 milligram per litre, and the BOD was 2.56 against the stipulated limit of less than or equal to 3 mg per litre.

international



“The insistence of some bullying governments on negotiations is not to resolve issues. Talks for them is a pathway to have new demands, it is not only about Iran’s nuclear issue. Iran will definitely not accept their expectations”
 AYATOLLAH ALI KHAMENEI | SUPREME LEADER, IRAN

‘BLOODY SUNDAY’ 60TH ANNIV

Alabama this weekend is marking the 60th anniversary of the clash that became known as Bloody Sunday. The attack shocked the nation and galvanized support for the US Voting Rights Act of 1965. The annual commemoration pays homage to those who fought to secure voting rights for Black Americans and each year brings calls to recommit to the fight for equality



of the day quote

As the food is cut, they will get less nutritious food, which may lead to a lack of nutrition. There will be social and mental pressure created amongst the Rohingya people in their community. They will have to look for an alternative for the food



SHAMSUD DOUZA | ADDITIONAL REFUGEE RELIEF AND REPATRIATION COMMISSIONER, BANGLADESH

The Chinese military faces tough challenges in safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity



WU QIAN | DEFENCE SPOKESPERSON, CHINA

This is how cities like London, New York or Shanghai become great centres of culture and prosperity. They attract enterprising and adventurous people from all over the world to live and work there.



LEE HSIEN LOONG | SINGAPORE MINISTER

SHOCK OFFENSIVE

Russian forces creep inside gas pipeline to attack Ukraine

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kyiv, March 9: Russian special forces walked kilometers (miles) inside of a gas pipeline to strike Ukrainian units from the rear in the Kursk region, Ukraine’s military and Russian war bloggers reported, as Moscow moves to recapture parts of its border province that Kyiv seized in a shock offensive.

Ukraine launched a daring cross-border incursion into Kursk in August, in what marked the largest attack on Russian territory since World War II.

Within days, Ukrainian units had captured 1,000 square kilometers (386 square miles) of territory, including the strategic border town of Sudzha, and taken hundreds of Russian prisoners of war.

According to Kyiv, the operation aimed to gain a bargaining chip in future peace talks, and force Russia to divert troops away from its grinding offensive in eastern Ukraine.

But months after Ukraine’s thunder run, its soldiers in Kursk are weary and bloodied by relentless assaults of more than 50,000 troops, including some from Russia’s ally North Korea.

Tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers run the risk of being encircled, open source maps of the battlefield show.

According to Telegram posts by a Ukrainian-born, pro-Kremlin blogger, Russian operatives walked about 15 kilometers (9 miles) inside the pipeline, which Moscow had until recently used to send gas to Europe. Some Russian troops had spent several days in the pipe before striking Ukrainian units from the rear near the town of Sudzha, blogger Yuri Podolyaka claimed.

The town had some 5,000 residents before the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, and houses major gas transfer and measuring stations along the pipeline, once a major outlet for Russian natural gas exports through Ukrainian territory.

Syria hit by deadliest violence in years

The clashes, which erupted Thursday, marked a major escalation in the challenge to the new government in Damascus, three months after insurgents took authority after removing Assad from power

AGENCIES



GROWING INSURGENCY

After months of relative calm following the ouster of Assad, violence spiralled this week as forces linked to the new Islamist rulers began a crackdown on a growing insurgency from Assad’s Alawite sect in the Mediterranean provinces of Latakia and Tartous

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a British-based war monitor, said Saturday more than 1,000 people had been killed in the two days of fighting. It said 745 were civilians, 125 members of the Syrian security forces and 148 fighters loyal to Assad

people, including hundreds of Alawites, as power dynamics in Syria shift violently.

According to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), 745 civilians—mostly shot at close range—were among the dead. Another 125 government security

personnel and 148 militants linked to Assad-affiliated armed groups were also killed. The fighting has left large parts of Latakia without electricity and drinking water.

SOHR reported that Syrian security forces executed at least 162 Alawites in “field ex-

We have to preserve national unity and domestic peace, we can live together. Rest assured about Syria, this country has the characteristics for survival ... What is currently happening in Syria is within the expected challenges

AHMED SHARAA | INTERIM PRESIDENT, SYRIA

ecutions” in Latakia province, a stronghold of Assad, who belongs to the sect. The Syrian Interior Ministry acknowledged “individual violations” along the coast and vowed to take action.

WHO ARE THE ALAWITES?

The Alawites are a religious minority in Syria, constituting about 12 per cent of the population. Originating from Shia Islam, they have distinct beliefs and rituals. Historically, the Alawites have been concentrated in Syria’s coastal regions, especially in Latakia and Tartus provinces.

The Assad family, which ruled Syria for over five decades until December 2024, belongs to the Alawite sect. During their rule, Alawites held significant positions in the military and government,

leading to perceptions of preferential treatment.

WHY ARE THEY BEING KILLED?

After Assad’s ousting, armed Sunni factions, reportedly loyal to the new government, launched revenge killings against Alawites, further deepening Syria’s sectarian divide. This escalation threatens the authority of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the hardline Sunni faction that played a central role in removing Assad from power.

For decades, Alawites formed the backbone of Assad’s support base. Now, they are facing deadly reprisals. Eyewitnesses described harrowing scenes in Alawite villages, where gunmen executed civilians, most of them men, either in the streets or at their doorsteps. Homes were looted and torched, forcing thousands to flee to the nearby mountains.

Baniyas, one of the worst-hit towns, has witnessed some of the most brutal attacks. Residents reported seeing bodies strewn on the streets and abandoned on rooftops. In some cases, gunmen prevented locals from collecting the bodies of their neighbours for hours.

SHORT TAKE

France to tap Russian assets

Paris: France will use interest from Russian assets to fund another 195 million euros (\$211 million) in arms for Ukraine, Armed Forces Minister Sebastien Lecornu said a newspaper interview. France also plans to hand over some of its older armoured fighting vehicles, such as its AMX-10RC and personnel carriers, Lecornu told La Tribune weekend newspaper. “Thanks to interest from frozen Russian assets, we will also tap new funds worth 195 million euros,” Lecornu said, adding that it would be used for 155-mm artillery shells and glide bombs for Mirage 2000 fighter jets France has given Ukraine. The Group of Seven powers agreed last year to provide Ukraine with \$50 billion via a series of bilateral loans that Kyiv could pay off using windfall profits from \$300 billion of frozen Russian state assets.

Forced to scam: Thousands detained

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Mae Sot, March 9: Thousands of sick, exhausted and terrified young men and women, from countries all over the world squat in rows, packed shoulder to shoulder, surgical masks covering their mouths and eyes.

Their nightmare was supposed to be over.

Last month, a dramatic and highly publicized operation by Thai, Chinese and Myanmar authorities led to the release of more than 7,000 people from locked compounds in Myanmar where they were forced to trick Americans and others out of their life savings.

But survivors have found themselves trapped once again, this time in overcrowded facilities with no medical care, limited food and no idea when they’ll be sent home.



One young man from India said about 800 people were being held in the same facility as him, sharing 10 dirty toilets. He said many of the people there were feverish and coughing. Like all former enslaved scammers who talked to The Associated Press, he spoke on condition of anonymity out of concern for his safety.

“If we die here with health issues, who is responsible for

that?” he asked. The armed groups who are holding the survivors, as well as Thai officials across the border, say they are awaiting action from the detainees’ home governments.

It’s one of the largest potential rescues of forced labourers in modern history, but advocates say the first major effort to crack down on the cyber scam industry has turned into a growing humanitarian crisis.

The people released are just a small fraction of what could be 300,000 people working in similar scam operations across the region, according to an estimate from the United States Institute of Peace.

Human rights groups and analysts add that the networks that run these illegal scams will continue to operate unless much broader action is taken against them.

NO ELECTRICITY

Israel turns Gaza dark

AGENCIES

Jerusalem, March 9: Israel says it is cutting off its electricity supply to Gaza. The full effects of that are not immediately clear, but the territory’s desalination plants receive power for producing drinking water.

Sunday’s announcement comes a week after Israel cut off all supplies of goods to the territory to over 2 million people. It has sought to press Hamas to accept an extension of the first phase of their ceasefire. That phase ended last weekend. Israel wants Hamas to release half of the remaining hostages in return for a promise to negotiate a lasting truce.

Hamas has pressed to start negotiations on the ceasefire’s more difficult second phase instead. The militant group



Sunday said it wrapped up the latest round of ceasefire talks with Egyptian mediators without changes to its position, calling for an immediate start of the ceasefire’s second phase.

The new letter from Israel’s energy minister to the Israel Electric Corporation tells it to stop selling power to Gaza.

Gaza has been largely devastated by the war, and generators and solar panels are used for some of the power supply.



The moon shines over the dome of St Peter’s Basilica, as Pope Francis continues his hospitalization, at the Vatican, March 3 REUTERS

WEEK’S BEST PICS



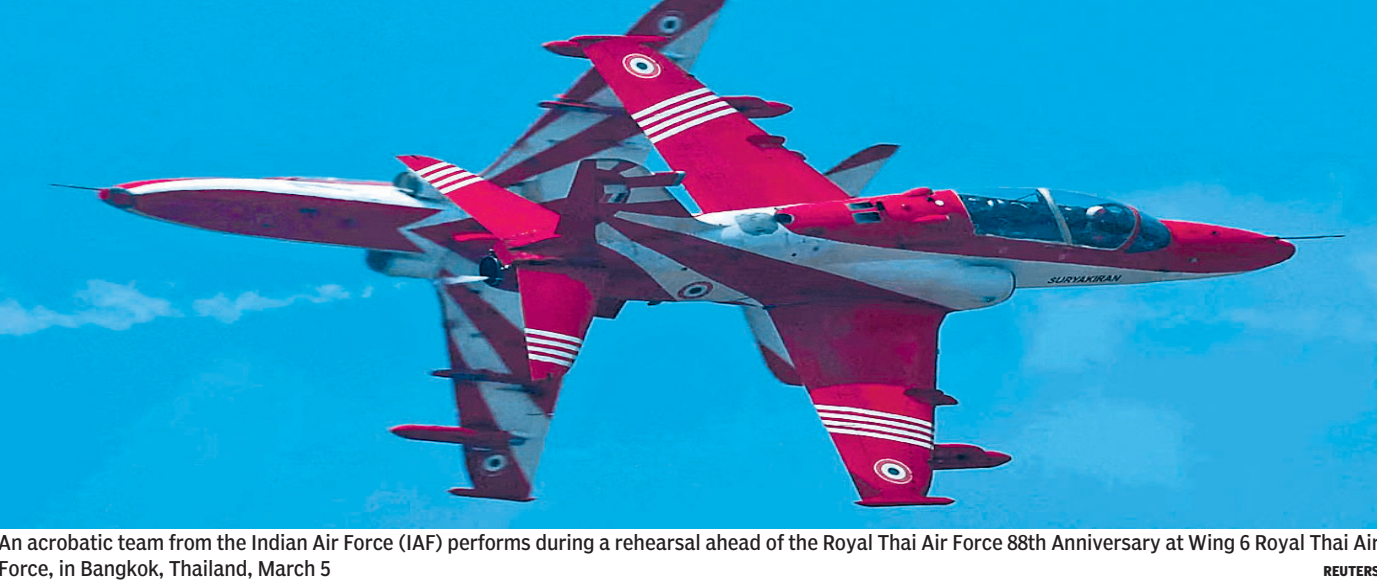
A Manguera samba school reveller performs at the Sambadrome during Carnival in Rio de Janeiro, March 3 REUTERS



A nubian ibex chews from a snack pack in Israel’s Ramon crater, in Mitzpe Ramon, Israel March 6 REUTERS



Demonstrators hold up signs during a march to commemorate International Women’s Day Saturday PFI PHOTO



An acrobatic team from the Indian Air Force (IAF) performs during a rehearsal ahead of the Royal Thai Air Force 88th Anniversary at Wing 6 Royal Thai Air Force, in Bangkok, Thailand, March 5 REUTERS

Business



We (India and Italy) want to renew not only the friendship but also consolidation of reciprocal trade relations
FRANCESCO LOLLOBRIGIDA | AGRICULTURE MINISTER, ITALY

PEPSICO TO DOUBLE REVENUE

PepsiCo aims to double its revenue in India over the next five years, viewing the country as a 'key anchor market' where it is making "aggressive" investments to expand its capacity, its India & South Asia CEO Jagrut Kotecha said



of the day quote

India fears that EU's climate policies could act as disguised trade barriers, limiting its ability to export to Europe. One of the biggest hurdles in the negotiations is the EU's aggressive environmental regulations

AJAY SRIVASTAVA | FOUNDER, GTRI

Rapido clocks about 33 lakh rides per day, however, if you compare it to the opportunity as to what India has to offer, we have barely scratched the surface

PAVAN GUNTUPALLI | CO-FOUNDER, RAPIDO

We are in discussions from a larger investment point of view in the order of the \$70-100 million that is meant to scale across product portfolio expansion, geographic expansion and growth

NARAYAN SUBRAMANIAM | CEO & CO-FOUNDER, ULTRAVIOLETTE

GLOBAL UNCERTAINTIES

Spooked FPIs pull out ₹24,753 crore in March

This also marks the 13th consecutive week of net outflows. Since Dec 13, 2024, foreign investors have offloaded equity shares to the tune of \$17.1bn

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 9: Foreign investors continue to pull back money from the Indian equity market, withdrawing Rs 24,753 crore (about \$2.8 billion) in the first week of March amid escalating global trade tensions and lacklustre corporate earnings. This came following an outflow of Rs 34,574 crore from equities in February and Rs 78,027 crore in January.

The total outflow by FPIs has reached Rs 1.37 lakh crore in 2025 so far, data with the depositories showed. According to the data with the depositories, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) offloaded shares worth Rs 24,753 crore from Indian equities this month (till March 7). This also marks the 13th consecutive week of net outflows. Since December 13, 2024, FPIs have offloaded equity shares to the tune of \$17.1 billion.

The sustained selling by overseas investors is chiefly due to a combination of global and domestic factors. A major catalyst continues to be the escalation in global trade tensions, which significantly weigh on investor sentiment. Imposition of higher tariffs by the US on countries like Mexico, Canada and China, along with reciprocal tariffs on several countries, including India, has dented market sentiments, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar Investment, said.

On the domestic front, lacklustre corporate earnings added to the negative sentiment as it failed to meet investor expectations, thereby reinforcing FPIs to exercise caution toward Indian equities, he added. Vaibhav Porwal, co-founder of Dezerv, pointed out that the depreciation of the rupee has eroded returns for FPIs, while India's tax structure, with 12.5 per cent tax on long-term capital gains and 20 per cent on short-term gains, contrasts with alternative markets offering lower or zero tax environments. Moreover, VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, highlighted the growing interest in Chinese stocks, driven by attractive valuations and the Chinese government's recent positive initiatives for large businesses.

This has contributed to a remarkable rally in Chinese stocks, with the Hang Seng Index posting a year-to-date return of 23.48 per cent, compared to a negative 5 per cent

ESCAPING EQUITIES



Equities see outflow of ₹34,574cr in Feb and ₹78,027cr in Jan
The total outflow by FPIs has reached ₹1.37L-cr in 2025 so far

This uncertainty has been compounded by a weaker rupee, which has also diminished the appeal of Indian assets

return for India's Nifty. However, he cautioned that this could be a short-term cyclical trade, as Chinese corporate earnings have consistently underperformed since 2008. Adding another layer of complexity, the recent decline in the dollar index is expected to limit fund flows into the US, further shifting investor focus. Given the growing uncertainty, investors are increasingly gravitating towards domestic consumption-driven sectors such as financials, telecom, hotels, and aviation while moving away from externally linked sectors. On the other hand, they invested Rs 2,405 crore in the debt general limit and withdrew Rs 377 crore from the debt voluntary retention route. The overall trend indicates a cautious approach by foreign investors, who scaled back investments in Indian equities significantly in 2024, with net inflows of just Rs 427 crore. This contrasts sharply with the extraordinary Rs 1.71 lakh crore net inflows in 2023, driven by optimism over India's strong economic fundamentals. In comparison, 2022 saw a net outflow of Rs 1.21 lakh crore amid aggressive rate hikes by global central banks.

India top source mkt for London's 'Growth Plan'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London, March 9: The UK's capital city has unveiled an ambitious new 'Growth Plan' to provide an estimated 27 billion pounds extra tax revenue to fund vital public services in London and across the country, with India pegged as its number one source market in terms of foreign direct investment. The plan, unveiled recently by Mayor of London Sadiq Khan along with growth agency London & Partners, aims to restore productivity growth to

an average of 2 per cent a year in the next decade, which is hoped would make London's economy 107 billion pounds larger by 2035. India has been on a growth curve for the last three years, overtaking the US as London's single-largest FDI source market in 2022-23 and continuing through 2023-24. "Foreign direct investment from India has been the fastest growing and has been our number one market for the last two years," said Laura Citron, CEO of London & Partners.

US tariff imposition to hit pharma segment

Auto sector likely to face minimal impact

ASSOCIATED PRESS

New Delhi, March 9: Enhanced tariffs on pharma imports in the US can severely impact Indian drug manufacturers as it would lead to higher production costs, making shipments less competitive against products from other countries. Smaller drug firms operating on thin margins can face severe pressure potentially forcing consolidation or closure. The automobile sector, on the other hand, is expected to have



a very minimal impact owing to the US being a small export market. Terming India as a very high tariff nation, US President Donald Trump has said that reciprocal tariffs on countries that impose levies on American goods will kick in April 2. India currently levies around 10 per cent import duty on American drugs, while the US

A sudden tariff increase could significantly raise the cost of medicines manufactured in and exported from India to the US, making them less competitive against products from other countries

ARVIND SHARMA | PARTNER, SHARDUL AMARCHAND MANGALDAS & CO

doesn't charge any import duty on Indian drugs. Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co Partner Arvind Sharma said as of recent history, the US has been a net importer of pharmaceutical products to meet its domestic demand. "In the event the US decides

to impose substantial tariffs on pharmaceutical imports from India, the impact could send noticeable ripples through the Indian pharma sector and simultaneously disrupt its own domestic consumption," he noted. Indian pharmaceutical companies supply a substantial proportion of drugs to US residents, with four out of ten of all prescriptions filled in the US in 2022 being supplied by Indian companies. As per industry sources, overall, medicines from Indian companies provided \$219 billion in savings to the US healthcare system in 2022 and a total of \$1.3 trillion between 2013 and 2022.

Five years on, economic impact of Covid-19 lingers

REUTERS

Washington, March 9: Five years after the World Health Organization first described the Covid-19 coronavirus outbreak as a pandemic, its effects are still being felt on the global economy. Covid-19 and efforts to contain it triggered record government debt, hit labour markets and shifted consumer behaviour. Inequality has increased, while remote work, digital payments and changes in travel patterns have endured.

Fuelled by post-lockdown spending, government stimulus packages and shortages of labour and raw materials, inflation peaked in many countries in 2022. To offset rising prices, central banks raised interest rates, though the intensity of their interventions varied widely. Sovereign credit ratings, which reflect a country's ability to pay back its debts, were driven lower as economies were shuttered and governments took on huge amounts of extra debt to fill the holes left in public finances.

Data from Fitch Ratings shows the average global sovereign credit score remains a quarter of a notch lower than it was when the pandemic started, reflecting financial challenges made worse by the pandemic, inflation and stricter financial conditions. For less wealthy emerging market countries, the average remains roughly half a notch lower. Lower credit ratings generally translate into higher borrowing costs on international capital markets.



LABOUR AND TRAVEL SHIFTS

The pandemic caused millions of job losses, with poorer households and women hit hardest, according to the World Bank. As lockdowns eased, employment regained momentum but with a considerable shift towards sectors such as hospitality and logistics due to the growing retail delivery sector. Women's participation in the workforce fell in 2020, mostly due to female over-representation in hard-hit sectors like accommodation, food services and manufacturing, and the burden of caring for children staying home from school. However, the gender employment gap has slightly decreased since, data shows.

Travel and leisure habits also changed. While people travel and eat out as much as they did in 2019, an increase of work-from-home has reduced commuting in major cities such as London. In London, use of both tubes and buses remains at around a million fewer journeys a day than pre-pandemic. The airline sector was one of those hit worst by the pandemic, recording industry-wide losses of \$175 billion in 2020, according to the global airlines body IATA. Vaccination campaigns eventually resulted in the lifting of travel restrictions, allowing people back on planes. For 2025, IATA expects an industry-wide

net profit of \$36.6 billion and a record 5.2 billion passengers. But travellers must contend with prices of hotel rooms which in many regions have outpaced inflation and remain well above 2019 levels. In the first half of 2023, Oceania, the continent in the southern hemisphere that includes Australia and smaller nations like Tonga and Fiji, saw the highest price increases from the same period of 2019, followed by North America, Latin America and Europe, according to data from Lighthouse Platform. Despite minor fluctuations, there is little indication that global hotel prices will return to pre-pandemic norms. Office vacancy rates are also at record highs in many countries, the result of more remote and flexible work. In the US, central business districts had the largest rise in vacancies, which are still evident today. **USHERING IN DIGITAL WORLD**

New consumer trends developed during global lockdowns, as home-bound consumers often had no other option than to shop online. This caused an up-

tick in online purchases from 2020 that has since stabilised. Analysts say that in Europe the rise in online sales has been coupled with an increase in selling space, as retailers invest in physical shops to stimulate both online and offline sales. The space, measured in square metres, edged up almost 1% from 2022 to 2023, an increase that should extend to 2.7% by 2028, data from market research company Euromonitor shows. Shares in digital and delivery firms led gains during the pandemic, alongside those of vaccine-making pharmaceutical companies. Five years on, some pandemic-era gainers have lost most of their appeal, but others have enjoyed lasting gains as new markets enabled by the digital shift have opened up. Despite the bursting of some bubbles and the collapse of crypto exchange FTX, which left the industry reeling, the value of Bitcoin has increased by 1,233% since December 2019, as people looked at new investment opportunities to cut the risk of market volatility.

IPO frenzy falters

No main-bourse listings in last three weeks



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 9: After heightened activity in 2024, there has been a slowdown in new listings, with no main-bourse IPOs hitting the market in the past three weeks due to a correction in the secondary market. Quality Power Electrical Equipment Ltd was the recent IPO which opened for three-day bidding on February 14. However, the trend of slower activity is evident as at least three companies - Advanced Sys-tek, SFC Environmental Technologies, and Viney Corporation - withdrew IPO plans by pulling their draft papers in January and February.

This shift follows a remarkable 2024 in which 91 maiden public issues collectively raised Rs 1.6 lakh crore, driven by robust retail participation, a resilient economy, and booming private capital expenditure. Bhavesh Shah, Managing Director and Head of Investment Banking at Equirus, told PTI that the slowdown is largely a result of the secondary market correction, especially in January and February, which negatively impacted the share prices of several listed companies. As a result, investors have shifted focus to their existing portfolios rather than exploring new listings. Shah emphasized that the di-

To sustain investor interest amid this volatility, the companies may do some adjustments in the IPO pricing, potentially offering more attractive valuations

V PRASHANT RAO | DIRECTOR AND HEAD OF ECM INVESTMENT BANKING, ANAND RATHI ADVISORS

minished investor attention on new IPOs has contributed to the slowdown in market activity.

Despite this caution, V Prashant Rao, Director and Head of ECM Investment Banking at Anand Rathi Advisors, pointed out that the longer-term outlook remains positive, with a strong IPO pipeline. "We are seeing an impressive number of documents getting filed and waiting for market conditions to stabilize. Currently, 45 companies with Sebi approval are looking to raise over Rs 67,000 crore and 69 companies are awaiting Sebi-approval, aiming to raise over Rs 1.15 lakh crore. Notably, out of the 69 companies, 45 companies filed DRHPs in the last couple of months," he said. In the last two months alone, close to 30 companies have filed preliminary IPO papers with Sebi, and in addition, Knowledge Realty Trust- sponsored by Sattva Group and Blackstone- last week filed documents to launch its maiden REIT public issue to raise more than Rs 6,200 crore.

THIS SLOWDOWN IN IPO ACTIVITY IS REFLECTED IN THE NUMBERS, AS ONLY FIVE COMPANIES WENT PUBLIC IN JANUARY AND FOUR IN FEBRUARY, COMPARED TO 16 LISTINGS IN DECEMBER 2024

SHORT TAKES

Ather Energy likely to launch IPO in April

New Delhi: Electric two-wheeler maker Ather Energy Ltd has taken a significant step toward its much-anticipated initial public offering (IPO) by converting its outstanding compulsory convertible preference shares (CCPS) into equity. The move is part of the company's preparation for its IPO, expected to be launched in April, according to merchant banking sources. According to a Registrar of Companies (RoC) filing accessed by PTI, the company's board passed a resolution March 8, 2025, approving the conversion of over 1.73 crore outstanding CCPS into 24.04 crore fully paid-up equity shares. The shares, with a face value of Rs 1 each, will rank pari passu with the existing equity shares.

India, EU to hold next round of FTA talks

New Delhi: India and the 27-nation European Union (EU) bloc will start the tenth round of negotiations for a proposed free trade agreement from Monday in Brussels amid Trump tariff threats, according to an official. The talks are expected to focus on resolving remaining issues so that the agreement can be finalised by the end of this year. During the recent visit of EU Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security Maros Sefcovic, the two sides have discussed ways to accelerate efforts towards a balanced and mutually beneficial trade pact. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen last month agreed to conclude the ambitious India-EU free trade deal by this year amid fears of the Trump administration's threat of higher tariffs.

OPal eyes local mkt

New Delhi: ONGC PetroAdditions Ltd, a subsidiary of the state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), has relinquished its 'only-for-export' unit status as it aims to tap into the booming local petrochemical market to drive a turnaround. In a stock exchange filing, ONGC said OPal has received the final approval for its exit from the Dahej Special Economic Zone (SEZ). "Accordingly, OPal shall operate as a Domestic Tariff Area (DTA) unit with effect from March 8, 2025," ONGC said.



INDOMITABLE INDIA

Rohit, Rahul shape India's third Champions Trophy title triumph

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dubai, March 9: India sealed an unprecedented third Champions Trophy triumph with an unblemished record as Rohit Sharma combined his inherent freedom with steely resolve to inspire his side to a four-wicket win in a closely-fought final against New Zealand, here Sunday.

India won the trophy without losing a match, reflecting their dominance in the tournament which they won back in 2002 and 2013.

No other team has won the event thrice.

Well-timed fifties by Daryl Mitchell (63) and Michael Bracewell (53) steered the Kiwis to 251 for seven after Indian spinners led by Kuldeep Yadav applied the squeeze for a large part of their innings.

Indian batters needed to capitalise on that fine effort of the bowlers, and Rohit, who many believe was featuring in his last ODI match for India, led from the front, slipping into his turbocharged version almost immediately.

The chase of 252 grew tight in the business end while the Blackcaps spinners were operating on a sluggish pitch, but skipper Rohit's ebullient 83-ball 76 had already given them the cushion to overhaul the target in 49 overs. KL Rahul with his 34 not out, there was no dramatic twist to the tale, leading the side past the finish line after India lost well-settled batters.

Pacer Nathan Smith, who replaced injured Matt Henry in the line-up, felt the heat as the 37-year-old Rohit hammered him for two sixes and as many fours in the beginning of the chase.

At the other end Shubman Gill (31), who helped Rohit to raise 105 runs for the opening wicket, was more subdued and the lone spark in his innings was a maximum off spinner Rachin Ravindra.

But a stunning

catch by Glenn Phillips off left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner ended his stay, and opened a creek for the Kiwis.

Virat Kohli came to the middle accompanied by loud cheers but his stay lasted just two balls, an effort to turn Michael Bracewell off his pads saw the master batter getting trapped plumb in front.

By now, Rohit had decided to knuckle down after racing 49 in the Power Play segment.

In the next 16 overs the Mumbai man added only 27 runs more to his score, as he tried to play a rather forgotten role of innings building.

His belief in his own defence too seemed to have come back as he smothered Santner and Bracewell quite effectively.

It ended when his charge against Ravindra resulted in a stumping by Tom Latham. India were 130 runs away from a win at that juncture.

India were 122 for three then and needed some consolidation, Shreyas Iyer (48) and Axar Patel (29) gave them precisely that during a 61 runs stand for the fourth wicket.

They carried India closer to the shore but Shreyas, who was dropped on 44 by Kyle Jamieson off

Phillips, fell four runs later to Santner and Axar too perished to Bracewell.

But those dismissals only created artificial excitement as a focused KL Rahul (34 not out) helmed India's march home.

But the Indian spinners also can rightfully claim a good chunk of credit for this victory.

Kuldeep (2/40) and Varun Chakravarty (2/45) were excellent alongside Axar and Ravindra Jadeja as the quartet conceded only 144 runs in the 38 overs bowled between them.

However, the start made by New Zealand did not justify the total that they eventually managed. They raced to 69 for 1 in 10 overs despite losing Will Young to Chakravarty, who came in the sixth over. But the introduction of Kuldeep 11th over changed the complexion of the game.

With his first ball, Kuldeep

summed Ravindra, who failed to read a wonderfully con-

cealed googly that disturbed his stumps. It also ended a good 57-run opening stand, in which Ravindra, who punished Hardik Pandya for a six and two fours in row, was dropped on 28 by Mohammed Shami off his own bowling.

In the very next over, Kane Williamson's forward prod off the left-arm wrist spinner eventuated in a return catch as the Kiwis slipped to 75 for three in 12.2 overs.

The four-pronged Indian spin attack assumed control of the proceedings from

"What a game and what a final! The Champions Trophy comes home. Outstanding captaincy by hitman @ImRo45, who led from the front all through the tournament - he is blessed with the Midas touch when it comes to ICC white-ball tournaments!"

"Successful games for @ShreyasIyer15, @ShubmanGill,



that point, and New Zealand could not find a boundary for the next 81 balls.

Kuldeep and Varun found an appreciable turn off the deck. Axar and Jadeja, however, relied more on quickness to cramp Kiwis batters for space, and both the methods were equally effective on the day. Chakravarty also mixed his endless ensemble of tricks and accounted for Phillips to end a promising 57-run alliance for the fifth wicket

Brief scores:

New Zealand: 251/7 in 50 overs (Daryl Mitchell 63, Michael Bracewell 53 not out, Rachin Ravindra 37; Kuldeep Yadav 2/40, Varun Chakravarty 2/45 lost to **India:** 254/6 in 49 overs (Rohit Sharma 76, Shreyas Iyer 48; Mitchell Santner 2/46, Michael Bracewell 2/28).



Cricketing greats hail victory

Modi lauds team

India sealed their third title in the 2025 Champions Trophy with an authoritative victory over New Zealand in the final, going through the campaign without losing a single game. Cricketing greats have hailed Rohit Sharma and co for their relentless and consistent performance in recent ICC tournaments.

Former India all-rounder Yuvraj Singh suggested that the skipper may have been blessed with the 'Midas touch' in ICC white-ball tournaments.

"What a game and what a final! The Champions Trophy comes home. Outstanding captaincy by hitman @ImRo45, who led from the front all through the tournament - he is blessed with the Midas touch when it comes to ICC white-ball tournaments!"

@krahul, @hardikpandya7, who stepped up when needed and showed nerves of steel under pressure. @imjadeja @imkuldeep18 @akshar2026 #VarunChakaravarty spun magic all thru the tournament and @MdShami11 was relentless with the ball! Tough luck, @BLACKCAPS you had us on the edge till the very end. But this was our tournament!" posted Yuvraj on X.

"Superb effort by India... What a performance in world tournaments over the last 2 yrs! so much depth in the squad- congratulations to all...Rohit Sharma captain marvellous...@bcci," posted former India head coach Sourav Ganguly.

This was India's fourth appearance in the finals of ICC events in two years under Rohit's captaincy and their second victory after lifting the 2024 T20

World Cup. It is also India's third Champions Trophy title after previously lifting the title in 2002 (shared with Sri Lanka) and 2013.

The 2025 Champions Trophy was Pakistan's first home tournament in 29 years but the hosts were embarrassingly eliminated in the group stage after defeats against India and New Zealand. The legends of the host country also took the time to acknowledge India's dominance in the tournament.

"The best team of the tournament has won the Champions Trophy. That too without dropping a single match!" read the caption by Shoaib Akhtar. "Many congratulations to India on winning the Champions Trophy. Very well deserved as they have been the most consistent team throughout the tournament," posted former Pakistan cricketer Shoaib Malik.

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday hailed the Indian cricket team for winning the ICC Champions Trophy and said they have played wonderfully through the tournament. Skipper Rohit Sharma led from the front with an excellent half-century as a resolute India held their nerve to win an unprecedented third Champions Trophy title with a four-wicket victory over New Zealand in the final in Dubai. "An exceptional game and an exceptional result! Proud of our cricket team for bringing home the ICC Champions Trophy," Modi said in a post on X. "They've played wonderfully through the tournament. Congratulations to our team for the splendid all round display," the prime minister said.

CELEBRATIONS ALL THE WAY



Cricket fans celebrate with fire crackers after India won the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 final match, in Bardhaman, West Bengal



Fireworks explode above Dubai International Stadium after India's win against New Zealand



Cricket fans celebrate India's win against New Zealand in Moradabad



Cricket fans celebrate Team India's victory in ICC Champions Trophy finals, in Meerut

PTI PHOTO