



Inspiring encounter

Actor Priyanka Chopra shares how she got inspired by a woman guava seller on her way to airport

LEISURE | P2



Farmer leaders detained

Punjab Police detains more than a dozen farmer leaders including Sarwan Singh Pandher and Jagjit Singh Dallewal

NATIONAL | P9



Cars to get dearer

Hyundai Motor India and Honda Cars India join list of automakers planning to hike prices of vehicles from April, second time this year

BUSINESS | P11



Chhetri strikes again

The talismanic Sunil Chhetri scores on his international comeback to lead India to a commanding 3-0 victory over Maldives

SPORTS | P12

Sunita finally back on Earth

Cape Canaveral, March 19: Stuck in space no more, NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Sunita Williams returned to Earth Tuesday, hitching a different ride home to close out a saga that began with a bungled test flight more than nine months ago.

Their SpaceX capsule parachuted into the Gulf of Mexico in the early evening, just hours after departing the ISS. Splashdown occurred off the coast of Tallahassee in the Florida Panhandle, bringing their unplanned odyssey to an end. Within an hour, the astronauts were out of their capsule, waving and smiling at the cameras while being hustled away in reclining stretchers for routine medical checks. **P10**

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Nine months? Sunita Williams has an Indian connection! We Indians can wait for decades for things

DOGGED EFFORTS



Emergency teams rescue a dog from flooded areas after heavy rains in Malaga, Spain

AP/PTI PHOTO

MORNING CLASSES IN SCHOOLS FROM APR 2

BHUBANESWAR: The state government Wednesday announced morning classes in all schools from April 2 in view of the heatwave conditions. Speaking to reporters, Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari said the on-going examinations in schools will end March 27, and after that, classes will start April 2. Anganwadi centres will also function from 7am to 9am during the summer, he said. Pujari said the temperatures have already started rising in many places across the state, a month ahead of the usual. The collectors have been empowered to take required steps as per the local needs without waiting for approval from the government, he added.

SHAH'S ODISHA TOUR CANCELLED ABRUPTLY

BHUBANESWAR: Union Home Minister Amit Shah's visit to state, scheduled to commence March 21, was unexpectedly cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances, according to sources. The three-day itinerary included events across Puri, Bhubaneswar, and Sambalpur. He was set to visit the Samaleswari temple March 22 and lay foundation stones for several projects, followed by a public address. The next day, his itinerary included visits to Puri and Jatni. However, no new dates have been announced yet.

Consider lifer Dara Singh's remission plea: SC to state

2-judge bench asks state govt to take a decision within 6 weeks and apprise the court

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 19: The Supreme Court Monday asked the state government to decide the remission plea of a repenting Ravindra Pal alias Dara Singh, who is serving life sentence for the murders of Australian missionary Graham Stuart Staines and his two minor sons in Keonjhar district in 1999.

A bench of Justices Manoj Misra and KV Viswanathan asked advocate Shibashish Misra, appearing for the Odisha government, to take a decision in six weeks and apprise the court.

The top court July 9, last year, had issued notice to the Odisha government on the plea for Singh's premature release.

Singh said he believes in the Karmic philosophy, and in order to cure the effects of bad Karma he has gained through his actions, he prayed for an opportunity to reform his character. In

his plea, filed through advocate Vishnu Shankar Jain, Singh said he had spent over 24 years in incarceration and repented the consequences of his action taken in a fit of youthful rage.

Seeking court's mercy, Singh assured to give back to the society through service-oriented actions. He sought a direction to the state government to consider his case for the relief in accordance with the guidelines for premature release of life convicts issued in 2022 in the three cases in which he was convicted.

Singh, 61, said he had undergone more than the qualified period of sentence of 14 years under the April 19, 2022 policy and spent 24 years of actual imprisonment without remission.

It is noteworthy that the petitioner has never been released on parole and even when his mother passed away, he could

not perform her last rites as he was not allowed to be released on parole, he submitted.

Singh said the appropriate authorities were under the legal obligation to consider his case for premature release under the Guideline for Premature Release 2022 passed by the Odisha government.

The authorities, he said, failed to act in accordance with the rules due to which his right to liberty, as enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution, was jeopardised.

The petitioner acknowledges and deeply regrets the transgressions perpetrated more than two decades ago. In the fervour of youth, fueled by impassioned reactions to the brutal history of India, the petitioner's psyche momentarily lost restraint, his plea said.

The plea went on, it is imperative for the court to scru-

tinise not merely the actions but the underlying intent, noting that there was no personal animosity harboured towards any victim.

A mob led by Singh attacked Staines and his two sons—11-year-old Philip and 8-year-old Timothy—while they slept in their station wagon and then set the vehicle on fire in Manoharpur village of Keonjhar district on the intervening night of January 22-23, 1999.

Singh, the main accused in the triple murder, was convicted and sentenced to death by a CBI court in 2003. The Orissa High Court commuted his death sentence to life imprisonment in 2005 and it was upheld by the Supreme Court in 2011.

Mehendra Hembram, an accomplice of Dara Singh, is also serving life imprisonment in the case, while 11 other accused were acquitted by the high court due to lack of evidence.

Majhi assures justice in meet with Naba's kin

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 19: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Wednesday said the real culprit in minister Naba Kishore Das' murder will be caught and given exemplary punishment.

Majhi gave the assurance to the minister's wife Minati Das, who along with her son Bishal and daughter Dipali, met the Chief Minister at the Lok Seva Bhavan here. The family's meeting with the CM came a day after the Crime Branch opened a fresh investigation into the murder case.

Majhi told them that a proper investigation would be conducted in the murder case, according to a statement issued by the CMO. The meeting, which was also attended by DGP YB Khurania and DG (Crime Branch) Vinaytosh Mishra, discussed the progress of the investigation so far.

Das's daughter Dipali, who is a former BJD MLA, said they have urged the chief minister to order a CBI probe into the murder. "We have also sought security for our family," she told reporters.

Merchant navy officer killed by wife, her lover

Dismembered body sealed in cement-filled drum

AGENCIES

Meerut (UP), March 19: A merchant navy officer was allegedly stabbed to death by his wife and her lover, his body dismembered and sealed inside a drum with cement, police said.

His remains have been recovered and the two accused arrested. The incident took place in the Indira Nagar area here, police said Tuesday.

The victim, Saurabh Rajput (29) from Brahmपुरi's Indira Nagar Phase 2, went missing March 4 and an investigation was launched after receiving information about the matter, Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Ayush Vikram Singh said. On the basis of suspicion, police detained Rajput's wife Muskan (27) and her lover Sahil (25), he said.

During interrogation, the two confessed to having stabbed Rajput to death March 4 after Muskan mixed sleeping pills into his food. The two then chopped up his body into 15 pieces, put



the remains inside a drum and sealed it with cement. They have been arrested, he added.

The remains have been sent for post-mortem and a case has been registered based on a complaint lodged by Rajput's family, police said.

According to Rajput's family, Muskan attempted to mislead them by sending messages from his phone. After committing the crime, Muskan and Sahil went on a vacation to a hill station, the ASP said. Police said Rajput and Muskan, from Gauripur, had a love marriage in 2016.

Meanwhile, the parents of Muskan said they got her arrested and want her to be hanged till death. They stressed that they are firmly with Saurabh's family in their fight for justice.

Trump releases JFK assassination files

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump released material related to the 1963 assassination of President John F Kennedy Tuesday, seeking to honour his campaign promise to provide more transparency about the shock event in Texas. An initial tranche of electronic copies of papers flooded into the National Archives website in the evening with a total of more than 80,000 expected to be published after Justice Department lawyers spent hours scouring them. The digital documents, including PDFs of previously classified memos, offers a window into the climate of fear at the time surrounding US relations with the Soviet Union shortly after the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 nearly led to a nuclear war. **P10**

Ash scatterings help California salmon fleet stay afloat

California's sport and commercial fishermen have been walloped by two years of salmon closures and are bracing for a potential third. But a growing Hindu and Buddhist population in Bay Area comes to their rescue

ASSOCIATED PRESS

San Francisco, March 19: William Smith has long fished the California coast for salmon, taking avid anglers out on his boat in hopes they'll get to wrestle with and reel in the prized catch. But not anymore.

Smith, known as "Capt. Smitty," now spends time on the seas with aspiring whale watchers, or scattering the ashes of the deceased — whatever it takes to stay afloat since salmon fishing was barred in

California two years ago due to dwindling stocks. Smith said a rise in the Bay Area's Hindu and Buddhist communities has made sea burials more popular, and he now does more than 200 a year — and that's helping him pay off his \$250,000 boat engine.

"The bills keep going, whether I've got a fishery or not," said Smith, who runs Riptide Sportfishing in Half Moon Bay, California. "There's no season on when people die."

California's sport and commercial fishermen have been



walloped by two years of salmon closures and are bracing for a potential third, which they blame on a years-earlier drought and state and federal water management policies

they say have made it tough for the species to thrive. The closures have taken a toll on people's livelihoods in coastal communities where salmon, fishermen say, is a special fish.

Salmon must swim upstream to lay their eggs, and young fish make their way out to the ocean through California's waterways — something done more easily when cool water flows are abundant. The fishery has long been strained and the Pacific Fishery Management Council, which manages West Coast fisheries, said there will be very limited salmon fishing this year in California, if at all. A decision is due in April.

The dim outlook comes as President Donald Trump has ordered officials to find ways to put "people over fish" and route more water to farmers in California's crop-rich Central Valley and residents of its densely-populated cities. Trump

has professed his love for farmers and contends too much heed is paid to the tiny delta smelt, a federally-threatened species seen as an indicator of the health of California's Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. But salmon depend on this same water system for their survival. And some in the fishing community are wondering if fishermen aren't people, too. "We are people that are hard-working and it's our jobs on the line," said Sarah Bates, a commercial fishing captain in San Francisco. She said local markets have been devastated by the salmon closures and Bay Area restaurants aren't snapping up halibut or other catch as they did salmon.

leisure



LIZZO FUMES OVER LAZY CRITICISM OF NEW MUSIC

Singer-songwriter Lizzo is lashing out at the criticism of her new music, as she tagged the negative reviews of her song *Still Bad* as lazy. She declared she's fuming over accusations the track is too optimistic.

'ROMANCE WITH BRAD PITT WAS LIKE DATING PRINCE WILLIAM'

Oscar-winning actress Gwyneth Paltrow shared that she feels her romance with Hollywood star Brad Pitt in the 1990s was "like dating Prince William." She told *Vanity Fair*: "Brad is a very intriguing character. It's like having dated, I don't know, Prince William or something."



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
You are deeply interested in the occult and the paranormal and today, you may indulge in something to do with it. So, you may buy a full colour 15x10 glossy on shamanic rites or the tantra! Ganesha suggests using such knowledge for peaceful ends.

TAURUS
You are likely to get extra passionate and fervent today, predicts Ganesha. If your logic prevails over your heart, things will probably change for better during the course of the day. It is high time that you set into motion the poignant side of your character, suggests Ganesha.

GEMINI
Today, you will decide to become a bit more conscious about your health. You may or may not join a gym or measure your calories, but you will definitely sit up and take notice of your lifestyle and unhealthy food habits, predicts Ganesha. A new job is also likely, which will pen a completely new chapter in your life.

CANCER
You are likely start the day in the best of spirits today. Your enthusiasm and cheerfulness will be infectious, and you will be able to lift the mood wherever you go. However, your enthusiasm can be short-lived and pummeled under the weight of some bad news, leaving you distraught.

LEO
Always dependable, that is what you are. And today, you will just underline this fact in bold strokes through your fine display of commitment to work, and your dedication to your family, says Ganesha. Your company may never find a better person for the job that you are assigned to do. Even at home, your credentials as the perfect family man will shoot right off the charts.

VIRGO
Ganesha sees you keeping away from a joint venture. You are capable enough to handle big projects yourself. You are most likely to lead and coordinate large teams and extract work from them as you will.

LIBRA
"Every man has specific natural abilities", said Aristotle. This seems to be true for you today. Your natural talents will be acknowledged and documented at work. This might prompt your equals to hold you up above the rest, and for your seniors to positively encourage you to scale greater heights. But as always, be careful to make sure that success does not make you heady with arrogance, cautions Ganesha.

SCORPIO
The crown jewel of your character will be your supreme confidence today. Try to pick up tasks that require herculean efforts, and you shall come close to achieving them, predicts Ganesha. Your nerves and buoyant nature will be infective and also leave people awestruck.

SAGITTARIUS
You are like a new hope for your company and you are assigned with many challenging projects, today. And your hard work and efforts are appreciated when you handle the projects successfully. If you are fortunate enough, you may also gain incentives very soon, predicts Ganesha.

CAPRICORN
Creativity is your innate trait. But how creative can you get when dealing with day-to-day issues? You will not only answer this question with utmost modesty, but will make a great display of your creative skills by cleverly sorting out problems with your siblings, says Ganesha. You will derive pleasure by delving into knotty problems and solving them with ease.

AQUARIUS
Money is on your mind today! If you want to sort out financial matters, today is the day. You may have a good time with friends in the evening. You will also realise how much your friends value you and the respect you command in your wider social circle. Ganesha says maintaining it is important.

PISCES
Today, you will find yourself partitioning your time equally, and more importantly, excelling, at work as well as at home. So, while you will prove to be the right man for the job assigned to you at the office, at home you will establish yourself as the perfect family man, says Ganesha.

Raashii finds joy in 'food coma'

Mumbai: Actress Raashii Khanna, who was recently seen in *The Sabarmati Report*, is day-dreaming with good food by her side.

As the actress captivates audiences with her stellar performances, beyond the screen, she is a self-proclaimed foodie who never shies away from indulging in delicious flavors. Whether she's on set, traveling, or enjoying a cozy meal at home, good food remains a constant in her life. Fans love how she shares these candid food moments, making everyone crave a bite too.

In her latest post, Raashii gave fans a glimpse of her foodie adventures on set. From savoring authentic South Indian delicacies to exploring global cuisines, she embraces every flavor with

joy. She wrote in the caption, "Daydreaming with a side of food coma".

On the work front, Raashii has some exciting projects lined up this year, though details remain under wraps. Adding to the buzz, she was recently spotted at Excel Entertainment's office, sparking curiosity among fans.

Whether she's winning hearts with her performances or sharing her love for food, Raashii Khanna continues to shine in every role she plays, both on and off the screen.



Taapsee surprised at Kirti's claim

stating that she was unaware of any discontent at the time and respects Kirti's perspective.

Reacting to Kirti's remarks, Taapsee told an entertainment portal, "How would I know? She has the full right to feel the way she does. I would be the last person to tell someone what you are feeling is wrong. If someone has felt a certain way, I'm sure there's a reason."

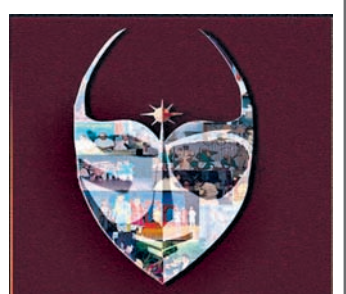
She admitted that she had no knowledge of Kirti feeling sidelined during the promotions of *Pink*.

"Had I known that she felt sidelined in any way, I would have liked to speak to her at that point and ask if there was something I could do to make it better. Unfortunately, I did not know there was an issue at that point. So, I don't know what to do with it. I can't discard her feelings," Taapsee added.

Mumbai: Bollywood actress Taapsee Pannu has addressed recent comments made by her *Pink* co-star Kirti Kulhari, who claimed she felt 'sidelined' during the film's promotional campaign. In a candid interview with a portal, Taapsee expressed surprise at Kirti's



5-day National Kalinga Natya Mahotsav from March 22



Bhubaneswar: Satabdira Kalkar, one of the oldest theatre troupes in the state, will organise the National Kalinga Natya Mahotsav, a five-day multi-lingual theatre festival, here at Rabindra Mandap from March 22.

Five plays—*Maha Sangramara Maha Nayak* (Odia), *Dronacharya* (Assamese), *Sadhana* (Sambalpuri), *Karnagatha* (Hindi), and *Dhara* (Odia)—will be staged during the event, said the host troupe's General Secretary, Dharendra Nath Mallick.

Over the five days, eleven eminent theatre personalities and journalists will be felicitated. Similarly, the Sumitra Samman, Rabindranath Das Natyakar Award, Gayadhar Samman, Pramilla Prativa Samman, and Lifetime Achievement honours will be conferred on seven theatre persons for their outstanding contributions to Odia theatre, added Mallick at a press conference.

Priyanka's inspiring encounter

Mumbai: Global head-turner Priyanka Chopra had a very inspiring day on Wednesday after she met a woman selling guavas on the road.

From her post, it appears that the woman is a resident of Koraput district in Odisha.

Narrating the entire story on her Instagram post, the actress said: "So, I don't do this very often but I was very inspired today. I was driving to Visakhapatnam airport on my way to Mumbai on my way to New York and I saw this woman selling guavas."

"I love kaccha (raw) guavas so I stopped her and I asked her how much all the guavas are for and she said 'Rs. 150' so I gave her Rs 200 and she was trying to give me change and I said 'no, please keep it'."

Priyanka added: "She obviously sold guavas for a living so she went away for a little while and before the red light changed to green she came back and she gave me two more guavas. A working woman, she did not want charity. Really moved me."

She also shared the pictures of guavas she bought along with some glimpses from the sets, drive to the airport and a picture of a signboard which "Talamali".

On the work front, Priyanka was busy working on her long-awaited project, *SSMB29*, shooting of which was unat Talamali area of Koraput district in Odisha.

Made under the direction of SS Rajamouli, the Rs project will star Mahesh Babu in the lead.



LABANYA NATYA MAHOTSAV CONCLUDES



Artists of Labanya Theatre of Bhubaneswar performed Odia play *Kulachandrama* on the third and final evening of the event at Bhanjakala Mandap, Bhubaneswar, Wednesday. Written by Lingaraj Nahak, the play was directed by Satya Jena (Tunu).

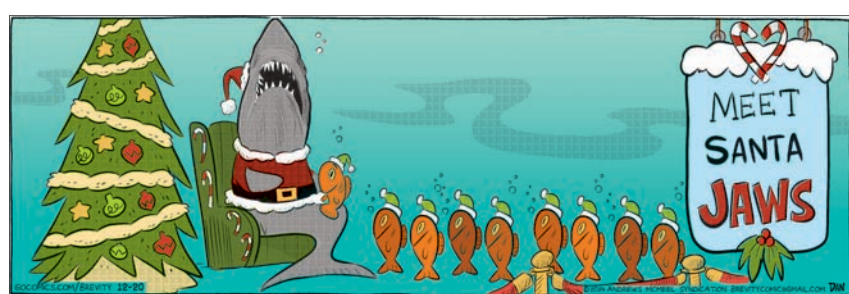
PEANUTS



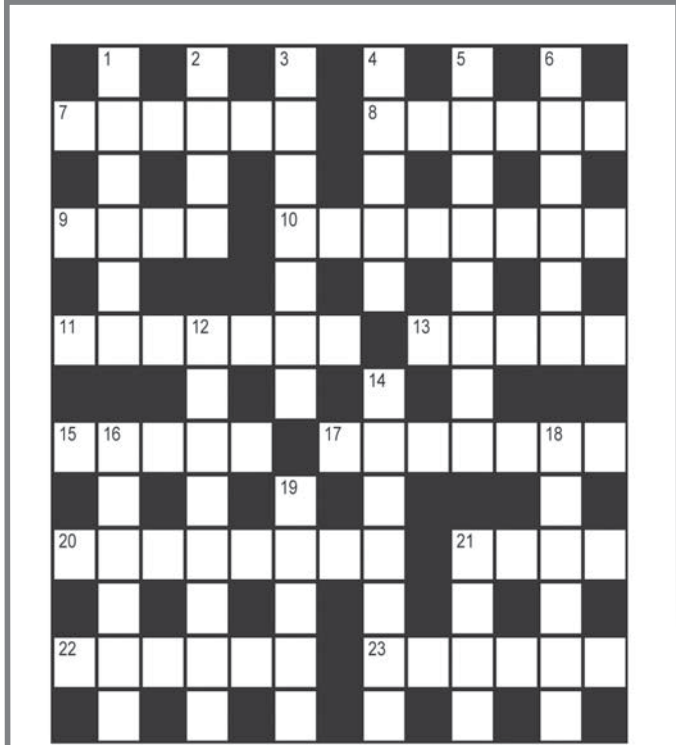
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



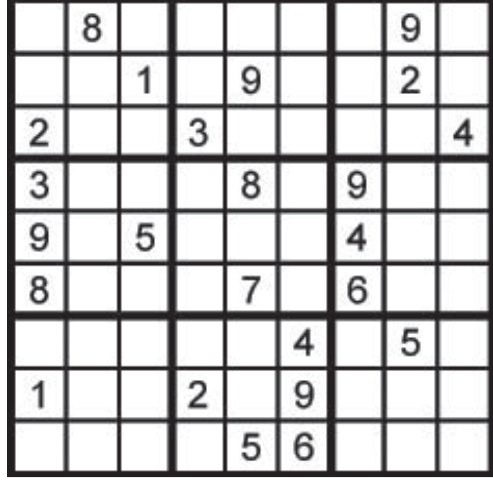
CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 7 Shiny decoration
 - 8 Consequence
 - 9 Vaulted recess
 - 10 Financial support, e.g.
 - 11 Bakery offering
 - 13 Shorttail weasel
 - 15 Mannerism
 - 17 Onslaught
 - 20 Atmosphere
 - 21 Cordon bleu
 - 22 Persian Gulf seaport
 - 23 Private
 - 3 Lawlessness
 - 4 Charter
 - 5 All excited
 - 6 Flame tree
 - 12 Master copy
 - 14 Decathlon event
 - 16 Hearsay
 - 18 Avaricious
 - 19 Combine
 - 21 Hurl
- Down**
- 1 Seasoning
 - 2 Dominate

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.



SOLUTIONS



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

President Droupadi Murmu will undertake a two-day visit to Odisha from March 24, an official statement said Wednesday. During the visit, Murmu will participate in the foundation day celebrations of the Bharatiya Bishwabasu Sabar Samaj at Kaliapalli in Nayagarh. She will arrive in Bhubaneswar March 24 from Raipur, and travel to Kantilo in Nayagarh by helicopter. She will visit the Kantilo Nilamadhab Temple, and then take part in the function at Kaliapalli as the chief guest. She will return to Bhubaneswar in the evening and stay at Raj Bhavan. She will leave for New Delhi March 25, the statement said. Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja chaired a meeting to review the preparations for the President's visit. The district collectors and police officers of Khurda and Nayagarh attended the meeting virtually, the statement said.

downtown

Rooftop solar projects on 1,232 public bldgs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 19: The Odisha government has installed rooftop solar projects with a total capacity of 17,705 kilowatt (KW) on 1,232 public buildings across the state, Deputy Chief Minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo informed the Assembly Wednesday.

In a statement, Singh Deo said the Odisha Renewable Energy Development Agency (OREDA) has installed rooftop solar units with a total capacity of 8,317.69 KW on 825 government offices and with a combined capacity of 5,387 KW on 342 educational institutes across the state in the last five years. The Green Energy Development Corporation of Odisha Limited (GEDCOL) has installed solar plants on the rooftops of 65 government offices, educational institutions and hospital buildings in Cuttack and Bhubaneswar, with a total installed capacity of 4,000.55 KW, he said.

In another reply, Singh Deo, who is in charge of the Energy department, informed the House that altogether 2,740 people of Odisha have benefited from the PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana (PMSG: MBY) and the Central government as-

The Energy department has set a target of generating 10,960 MW from renewable energy sources by 2030, which will be around 57 per cent of the total energy mix. Under the Odisha Renewable Energy Policy, 2022, the state government provides incentives to promote the adoption of renewable energy by individuals, businesses and industries.

4.95L dead, ineligible beneficiaries removed from ration card list: Min

The state government has removed a total of 4,95,951 dead and ineligible beneficiaries from the public distribution system (PDS) during the ongoing e-KYC (electronic know your customer) verification process, Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare (FS&CW) Minister Krushna Chandra Patra told the Assembly Wednesday.

While replying to a query by Congress MLA Sofia Firdous, Patra said the e-KYC verification drive commenced across the state in August-September 2024. A total of 4,08,107 death cases have been detected from the commencement of the drive till March 12 this year. "Those names have been deleted from the ration card da-

base," he said. Similarly, a total number of 23,138 ineligible ration cards - comprising 87,844 members - have been identified through field verification across Odisha, based on 10 exclusion criteria notified in the Odisha State Food Security (Targeted) Rules, 2020 and excluded from the database, Patra said. The officials conducting field verification in the blocks and ULBs (urban local bodies) have been instructed to strictly follow the beneficiaries' eligibility criteria notified in the rules, the FS&CW minister said. "The state government is committed to ensuring ration cards to all eligible beneficiaries," he added.

In another written statement, Patra said out of 3.30 crore beneficiaries, 3.01 crore (91 per cent) have completed their e-KYC verification, while a massive awareness drive is being undertaken at the district levels for e-KYC verification of the remaining 29,16,866 beneficiaries by March 31, 2025. Till March 12 this year, the government has received 6,80,673 applications for inclusion of 13,77,675 members in the PDS and the field-level verification of the applicants is going on at block and ULB levels, Patra informed the House. After completion of the verification process, steps will be taken to include the eligible people in the food security scheme, he added.

State gears up to tackle forestfire

The state government has undertaken a host of measures to protect forests from fire, Forest, Environment and Climate Change Minister Ganesh Ram Singkhuntia informed the Assembly Wednesday.

Highlighting the measures, the minister said fire awareness meetings and training along with mock drills have been completed in all blocks. "New fire lines have been

created and old fire lines are being maintained for forest fire prevention and control. Vehicles have been deployed with fire prevention forces in all forest blocks," he said. While a 24x7 control room has been functioning for forest fire prevention and control, artificial intelligence (AI) cameras have been installed in Similipal for effective monitoring of forest fire, he pointed out.

The total installed capacity of renewable energy in the state (contracted by GRIDCO), as of the last fiscal, was 595 MW, excluding large hydroelectric projects.

stance of ₹13.75 crore has been distributed to the beneficiaries. The state government has made a budgetary provision of ₹1,800 crore for execution of the scheme for three financial years (2024-25 to 2026-27), he



Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi inaugurates the 19th Toshali National Crafts Mela at Janata Maidan in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday. Handlooms, Textiles and Handicrafts (HT&H) Minister Pradeep Bal Samanta, HT&H department Commissioner-cum-Secretary Guha Poonam Tapas Kumar and IAS officer Prem Chandra Choudhary are seen

800 senior citizens go on pilgrimage



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 19: Altogether 800 senior citizens from six districts of Odisha boarded a special train here Wednesday to visit Ayodhya and Varanasi as part of state government's

Baristha Nagarika Tirtha Yatra Yojana, an official said. Deputy Chief Minister Pravatiparida flagged off the special train under the pilgrimage scheme from Bhubaneswar railway station. Uttar Pradesh Tourism Min-

ister Jaiveer Singh, Odisha Law Minister Prithiviraj Harichandan and Industries Minister Sampad Chandra Swain were also present on the occasion. In the seventh phase of Baristha Nagarika Tirtha Yatra Yojana, 800 pilgrims from Puri, Khurda, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Dhenkanal and Kendrapara began their journey in the special train to the two destinations to seek the blessings of Lord Ram Lalla, Parida said. She said 25 Odisha government officials also accompanied the pilgrims. Singh appreciated the efforts of the state government for the cultural exchange programme between Odisha and Uttar Pradesh. With faith and devotion, many devotees from Odisha took a holy dip in the Mahakumbh recently held in Uttar Pradesh, Singh said.



MUSICAL EVENT: Noted singer Sangeeta Rath performs during a programme organised by Bhakti Naivedya, a cultural outfit of Paralakhemundi, at Soochana Bhawan in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday

Subhadra: Over 1L didn't receive second instalment

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 19: More than one lakh women have not received the second instalment of financial assistance under the state government's Subhadra Yojana due to surrender of their ration cards and other reasons, Deputy Chief Minister Pravatiparida said Wednesday. The state government has covered over one crore beneficiaries under the women-centric scheme and distributed the first instalment of ₹5,000 in five phases. Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi had released the second instalment on International Women's Day - March 8 this year. "More than one lakh women, who received the first instalment, could not receive the second one. We are concerned



A field-level survey will be conducted after March 31, 2025 and those found eligible will get two instalments (Rs 10,000) on Raksha Bandhan

The state government has covered over one crore beneficiaries under the women-centric scheme and distributed the first instalment of ₹5,000 in five phases

about them. They did not get benefits because many of them have surrendered their ration cards in between the release of first and second instalments as their income has increased,"

she said. The Deputy CM also said that some women have sold paddy cultivated on more than five acres of land and bought vehicles, which come under the exclusion criteria. After completion of the deadline for applying for Subhadra Yojana March 31, a field-level survey will be conducted and those who are found eligible will get two instalments (Rs 10,000) on Raksha Bandhan, she added. The scheme was launched in Odisha by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his birthday September 17, 2024. Women within the age group of 21 to 60 are eligible for the Subhadra Yojana, which envisages providing financial assistance of ₹50,000 over five years (2024-25 to 2028-29) to make them financially independent and self-reliant.

EOW takes Raja on three-day remand

POST NEWS NETWORK

Balasore, March 19: Days after arresting BJD leader Soumyashankar Chakra alias Raja Chakra in connection with a large-scale fund embezzlement case at Gandhamardan Loading Agency and Transport Cooperative Limited in Keonjhar district affiliated to Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC), the Economic Offence Wing (EOW) of the Crime Branch took him on three-day remand from the Odisha Protection of Interests of Depositors (OPID) court in Balasore Wednesday. The EOW apprehended Chakra last Thursday and presented him before Balasore OPID court Friday. The court had sent him to judicial custody until March 19. The EOW requested a five-day remand for further interrogation. However, the court approved a three-day remand from March 20 to March 22. Chakra's legal counsel will be allowed to be present during questioning. On the other hand, Chakra's bail petition is still pending in the High Court. Earlier, former cooperative society chairman Manas Ranjan Barik and secretary Utkal Das were arrested and are currently facing trial. Investigators alleged that Chakra, along with Barik and Das, misappropriated crores of rupees through fraudulent transactions. The cooperative reportedly generated a profit of ₹185 crore between 2017-18 and March 2024. However, no audits were conducted since 2012-13. The cooperative society claimed to have spent ₹34 crore on local development projects, while investigators found evidence suggesting otherwise. In one instance, instead of using the cooperative's vehicles, Chakra allegedly used his personal vehicles for transporting minerals. Furthermore, ₹9.1 crore was paid to Maa Kali Petrol Pump from the cooperative's funds towards refueling of his own vehicles. Additionally, the agency allegedly distributed ₹33 crore over four years to gain public support and silence the local residents.

Decline in house sparrow population sparks concern

POST NEWS NETWORK

Khandapada, March 19: Village landscapes have transformed dramatically over the years. Dusty trails have given way to concrete roads, and traditional thatched-roof homes have largely disappeared, replaced by modern structures. Amidst these swift changes, house sparrows, which were earlier a familiar presence, have now dwindled in numbers. In earlier times, these grey-feathered small birds thrived in rural settings, nesting in the crevices of thatched roofs or nearby shrubs. Known for their industrious nature, they gathered twigs to craft nests, laying two to three eggs per clutch. Beyond their charm, sparrows played a vital role in maintaining ecological harmony. Their lively chirps once

filled village courtyards, and watching them dust-bathe or peck at grains was a common joy. Today, however, their presence has significantly declined due to habitat loss, decreasing food sources, and rising pollution. The shift from rustic homes to urban-style buildings has stripped them of nesting sites, while modern human habits have further strained their survival. The bond between humans and wildlife is a cornerstone of nature, yet growing interference has endangered numerous species, including the house sparrows. Where empathy for animals once prevailed, deforestation and urban sprawl now dominate, leaving many creatures without homes. Climate change, heavy pesticide use in farming, and electromagnetic waves from mobile towers have compounded the problem, driving away not just



sparrows but also cuckoos, beneficial insects, and other birds whose calls once echoed through villages. House sparrows are more than nostalgic relics—they support agriculture by eating pests and safeguarding crops. Their group dust-bathing was once a quirky predictor of rain,



and their presence in homes was seen as a sign of good fortune. But with thatched roofs gone and green spaces shrinking, their survival hangs in the balance. Pesticides have slashed their food supply, while vehicle-related air and noise pollution have added to their woes. Without swift

action, these birds may soon exist only in storybooks. Globally, efforts to save house sparrows are gaining traction. In 2010, Mohammed Dilawar, a bird conservationist from Nashik, Maharashtra, launched 'World Sparrow Day', celebrated March 20 every year. Closer to home in Khan-

'Odisha recognised as a leader in skill devtpt'



CAPITAL'S NET ZERO ROADMAP

Bhubaneswar, March 19: Odisha has positioned itself as a frontrunner in skill development, pioneering world-class training centers, forging strategic industry partnerships, and implementing innovative programmes to create employment opportunities, said Skill Development and Technical Education Minister Sampad Chandra Swain here Wednesday.

Addressing a visiting UK Skills and Chartered Bodies delegation, he expressed pride in the state's progress. "Today, Odisha is recognised as a leader in skill development. We are at the forefront of creating a workforce that is not only highly skilled but also globally competitive," he said.

A delegation of UK Skills and Chartered Bodies is on a three-day visit to Odisha from March 18 to 20 to explore opportunities for collaboration in vocational training, workforce development, and skill enhancement. The delegation consists of representatives from four UK chartered bodies and three global awarding organisations, who have been touring India to strengthen bilateral cooperation in technical education and training. However, Odisha, with its ambitious skilling initiatives, captured their special attention.

During their visit to Bhubaneswar, the delegation held discussions with officials from the Skill Development

and Technical Education department and the World Skill Center (WSC). The focus was on transforming vocational education by integrating UK-style apprenticeships, strengthening industry-driven skilling initiatives, and identifying key sectors for collaboration.

British Deputy High Commissioner to East and North-East India, Andrew Fleming, commended Odisha's commitment to skill development. "Since my first visit in November 2023, I have been consistently impressed by the dedication of this state in preparing its youth for a sustainable livelihood. On my eighth visit, I am delighted to bring key global players in the skills sector to Bhubaneswar, facilitating deeper collaborations between UK institutions and Odisha's skilling ecosystem," he said.

Sir Steve Smith, the UK's International Education Champion, echoed this enthusiasm. "The DBT Skills and Chartered Bodies mission to India has been a great success. The UK and India have made tremendous progress in fostering educational partnerships. It is inspiring to see both nations working together to develop a workforce that is adaptable, globally skilled, and future-ready," he remarked.

Beyond workforce development, the visit also highlighted a broader agenda: sustainability. Both Odisha and the UK are actively working together on sustainability-driven skill initiatives, reinforcing their commitment to environmental and economic resilience.

erations in technical education and training. However, Odisha, with its ambitious skilling initiatives, captured their special attention.

During their visit to Bhubaneswar, the delegation held discussions with officials from the Skill Development

Workshop on R&D in mineral & metal sector

Bhubaneswar, March 19: The Ministry of Mines, Government of India, in collaboration with CSIR-Institute of Minerals and Materials Technology (CSIR-IMMT), organised here a national workshop on "Strengthening R&D in Indian Mineral and Metal Sector - Policy Framework for Sustainable Growth, 2025" at CSIR-IMMT Wednesday.

The workshop brought together experts, policymakers, and industry leaders to discuss strategies for advancing geology, mining, and mineral processing research across Indian academic and R&D institutions. The discussions focused on innovation, sustainable growth, and policy development for the mineral and metal sector. Economic Advisor, Ministry of Mines Shakil Alam, the chief guest, stressed the importance of integrating geology, mining, mineral processing, and extractive metallurgy into academic curricula while leveraging AI and ML for critical minerals research.

Nalco donates ₹10.10cr to SLN Medical College

Koraput/Bhubaneswar, March 19: National Aluminium Company Limited (Nalco) extended financial assistance of ₹10.10 crore to Saheed Laxman Nayak (SLN) Medical College & Hospital in Koraput Wednesday.

The cheque was presented by the company's executive director (M&R) Niranjan Samal to, Collector & District Magistrate of Koraput V Keerthi Vasan in the presence of Nalco executive director (H & A) Asutosh Rath and Superintendent-cum-Dean and Principal of SLN Medical College & Hospital Susanta Kumar Sahu.

The funds will be used to



procure advanced medical instruments, equipment, and essential resources to improve patient care across various departments. The institute plays a crucial role in healthcare services, especially for marginalised tribal communities.

Nalco's contribution is expected to enhance the hospital's capacity and improve healthcare accessibility for vulnerable populations facing geographical and resource constraints.



NOJMECS women protest against restructuring

Protesters demand job security, allowances, and withdrawal of restructuring plan

NOJMECS state president Jayanta Das said that EC members are the backbone of Mission Shakti, and the proposed restructuring would impact lakhs of women

Bhubaneswar, March 19: Braving the scorching heat, thousands of Nihkhila Odisha Jeebika Mission EC Sangha (NOJMECS) members staged a massive protest at Lower PMG

government, calling for urgent action. They demanded the withdrawal of the restructuring plan, permanent appointment of EC members under Odisha Jeebika Mission and Mission Shakti, a ₹1,000 monthly allowance for every self-help group (SHG) member, and permanent appointment of community support staff (CSS) members.

Das highlighted that EC members are the backbone of Mission Shakti, and the proposed restructuring would impact lakhs of women.

He also pointed out that community resource persons (CRPs) and MBKs would be affected, contradicting the state's women empowerment narrative. He urged the government to refrain from implementing the restructuring plan, warning that it would weaken the mission's objective of economic independence for women.

Credai Odisha to host home & decor expo

Bhubaneswar, March 19: Credai Odisha is set to host the home & decor expo 2025, the state's largest property exhibition, from April 18 to 27, at Janata Maidan, Bhubaneswar.

The announcement was made at a press meet Wednesday, attended by Credai chairman DS Tripathy, president Swadesh Kumar Routray, vice president Umesh Khandelwal, and other expo committee members.

Tripathy highlighted that the expo will bring together homebuyers, developers, investors, interior designers, and building material companies under one roof.

Odias gear up for Pakhala Dibasa

Bhubaneswar, March 19: As Pakhala Dibasa approaches March 20, Odias across the state and beyond are preparing to celebrate their beloved summer staple—Pakhala Bhata. More than just a dish, this fermented rice meal is deeply rooted in Odisha's culture, offering both tradition and health benefits during the sweltering summer months.

Food vlogger Lalita Bhanja highlights Pakhala's nutritional advantages, noting its short-chain fatty acids that boost gut health and immunity. The fermentation process introduces probiotics, aiding digestion and overall well-being. Additionally, Pakhala acts as a natural coolant, helping regulate body temperature, prevent heat-related ailments, and ensure hydration.



To mark the occasion, restaurants across Bhubaneswar, including Nimantran, run by the Odisha Tourism Development Corporation (OTDC), are curating special menus featuring various Pakhala variations paired with classic side dishes like Baigana Bharta, Aloo Bharta, Saga Bhaja, Ambula Rai, Macha Bhaja, and Badi Chura. The celebrations extend beyond Odisha, with Odias worldwide embracing the festival as a way to reconnect with their culinary heritage.

The OTDC, in collaboration with the department of Tourism, will host a state-level Pakhala Dibasa event at Pantha Nivas, Bhubaneswar, where Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida will be the chief guest.

For many, Pakhala is more than just food—it is an emotion and a symbol of cultural identity. Sangeeta Sahoo, a homemaker from Bhubaneswar, reflects, "We eat Pakhala every day at home. It's not just a dish, but a tradition that keeps us connected to our roots."

The state government's initiative to promote Pakhala globally underscores its cultural significance and its potential to gain international recognition. From health experts and restaurateurs to food bloggers and the Odia diaspora, the enthusiasm surrounding Pakhala Dibasa highlights the dish's enduring legacy and universal appeal, making it not just a meal, but a celebration of tradition and heritage.

Experts call for better dental care in Odisha

Experts stress the need for better hygiene practices, regular check-ups, and increased awareness, especially in rural Odisha, to prevent serious health complications

Bhubaneswar, March 19: With 3.5 billion people worldwide suffering from oral diseases, dental health remains a critical yet often neglected aspect of overall well-being.

On World Oral Health Day, which is observed March 20, experts stress the need for greater awareness and improved oral hygiene, particularly in rural Odisha, where access to dental care remains limited.

Subasish Behera, Associate Professor, department of Conservative Dentistry and Endodontics at SCB Dental College and Hospital, emphasised the strong connection between oral health and overall systemic health, warning

WORLD ORAL HEALTH DAY



EXPERTS HIGHLIGHT THE LINK BETWEEN POOR ORAL HYGIENE AND SERIOUS HEALTH RISKS LIKE HEART DISEASE, DIABETES, AND RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS

RURAL ODISHA FACES CHALLENGES IN DENTAL CARE DUE TO LACK OF AWARENESS, ACCESSIBILITY, AND RELUCTANCE TO SEEK TREATMENT

that poor dental hygiene can lead to serious complications like heart disease, diabetes, and respiratory infections.

He urged people to adopt preventive measures such as regular brushing, flossing, and routine dental check-ups to avoid these health risks.

This year's theme, "A Happy Mouth is a Happy Mind," highlights the psychological and social impact of good oral health. Confidence, social interactions, and general well-being are closely tied to a healthy smile.

However, in Odisha, the perception of dental hygiene varies between urban and rural populations. While city dwellers show increasing awareness about dental care, many in rural areas struggle

with affordability, accessibility, and a lack of awareness.

Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon, Assistant Professor at IDS & SUM Hospital, Stiti Pragnya, expressed concern over low dental treatment acceptance rates. "I attend to

over 1,500 patients a month, yet nearly 70 per cent refuse further treatment. Many rural residents still rely on traditional remedies and only visit a dentist in emergencies," he explained.

He pointed out that poor dietary habits, tobacco consumption, and a shortage of dental professionals in rural areas are worsening the oral health crisis. "In Odisha, with a population exceeding four crore, more than half are either partially or completely edentulous," he added.

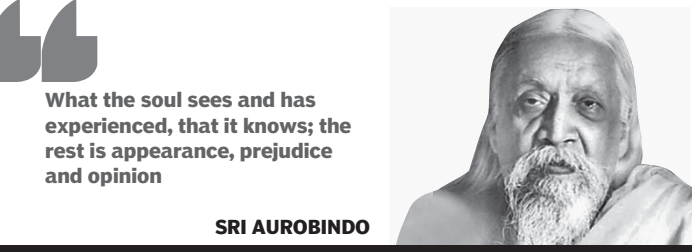
With experts advocating for simple daily habits like brushing twice a day, flossing, and regular dental check-ups, they remain hopeful that greater awareness will lead to lasting improvements. "A healthy smile is a reflection of a healthy body. Take care of your teeth, and they will take care of you," Pragnya advised.

WEATHER		
	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	34.2°	34.5°
Min Temp	25.2°	24.5°
Humidity	85%	85%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
FORECAST Partly cloudy sky.		

MARKET WATCH		
INDEX		VARIATION
SENSEX	75449.05	▲ 147.79
NIFTY	22907.60	▲ 73.30
DOLLAR	86.44	▼ 0.03
EURO	94.25	▼ 0.57
GOLD	₹88,524	▼ ₹136
SILVER	₹100030	▼ ₹1135

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Universal Energy Access

Our planet and its inhabitants are in trouble. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that to meet the targets of the 2015 Paris agreement and keep global warming below 2° Celsius (relative to preindustrial levels), renewable energy must supply 70-85 per cent of the world's electricity by 2050. In other words, renewable capacity must triple by 2030 to avert a climate catastrophe.

Yet, despite the existential threat posed by climate change, a joint report released by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), World Bank, World Health Organization, International Energy Agency, and the United Nations Statistics Division paints a grim picture: the world is not on track to achieve UN Sustainable Development Goal 7, which aims to "ensure affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all." As of 2022, 685 million people still lived without access to electricity, and 2.1 billion relied on polluting and hazardous cooking fuels.

The problem is particularly pronounced in Africa, where 600 million people currently lack energy access. Electrification has not kept pace with population growth, and centralised power grids have consistently failed to reach those most in need. Consequently, many Sub-Saharan communities depend on expensive diesel generators. These carbon-intensive systems account for an estimated 360 gigawatts of electricity generation in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), with annual fuel costs exceeding \$40 billion.

Fortunately, it is not too late to change course. Distributed renewable energy (DRE) solutions, which include mini, metro, and mesh grids, as well as small-scale household systems like photovoltaic (PV) solar panels and battery storage, are the key to ensuring electricity for all while meeting the world's climate goals.

Mini-grids, which often rely on renewable-energy sources like solar PV, are small-scale generators connected to localised distribution networks that can operate independently or link to main grids when available. Their scalability makes them well-suited for rural populations and enterprises such as farms, small factories, and schools, as well as for bolstering urban networks. According to IRENA, more than 150 million people were served by off-grid renewable energy systems in 2023.

Scaling DRE systems in LMICs is crucial to expanding energy access and decarbonising power grids. With their unmatched flexibility, these technologies are ideal for electrifying underserved communities, boosting small-business productivity, and strengthening national energy resilience and security. At scale, DRE has the potential to deliver electricity to an additional 500 million people and reduce carbon emissions by 1.2 gigatons by 2030.

To accelerate the green transition and help close the energy access gap by 2030, IRENA, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, and the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet (GEAPP) are committed to deploying DRE technologies such as mini-grids and standalone solar home systems in LMICs.

Projects across the developing world have shown that DRE is more cost-effective than fossil fuels and better suited to decentralised energy distribution. A prime example is Energising Development (EnDev), a multi-donor partnership led by GIZ and the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO). Over the past 20 years, EnDev has provided energy access to more than 31.6 million people across Africa, Asia, and Latin America at an average cost of just 12.2 (\$13.3) per person. Its success can be attributed largely to market-based support tailored to local needs, as well as to results-based financing.

Given the systemic barriers preventing clean-energy companies from accessing adequate financing, GET.invest – which connects projects and companies with suitable financiers and is part of the Global Energy Transformation Programme – has mobilized 1.6 billion in funding for more than 130 DRE initiatives. One such initiative, OnePower Lesotho, has raised approximately 9 million to bring electricity to 30,000 people in remote mountainous regions.

In Mauritius, IRENA has financed the installation of 10,000 standalone rooftop solar systems, adding combined capacity of ten megawatts of clean electricity. This program has already delivered tangible benefits, reducing beneficiaries' electricity bills by 50 per cent, cutting up to 15,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions annually, and saving \$400,000 on diesel imports.

Similarly, Nigeria's inter-connected, GEAPP-backed Toto mini-grid has benefited customers, developers, and companies alike. Since its launch in May 2023, electricity consumption and customer connections have increased by over 400 per cent, according to data from the mini-grid developer PowerGen Renewable Energy. The average revenue per user is now three times higher than that of remote mini-grids – a promising sign in a market where generating sufficient revenue remains a significant challenge.

Although DRE is the most sustainable and cost-effective way to electrify off-grid communities, additional support and investments are urgently needed to achieve universal energy access by 2030. As global temperatures hit record highs, electricity access is one of the most urgent challenges of our time.

With renewable-energy technologies maturing and component costs steadily declining, DRE has the potential to replace a significant share of existing diesel generators and prevent new ones from being installed. If deployed at scale, DRE could reduce poverty, drive economic development in LMICs, accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels, and bring us closer to achieving SDG7.

But realizing this vision will require greater cooperation between governments, multilateral development banks, private companies, and philanthropic organizations to secure grants and concessional financing for clean-energy projects. Initiatives like the Accelerated Partnership for Renewables in Africa and Mission 300 – a joint effort by the World Bank and the African Development Bank to bring energy access to 300 million Africans by 2030 – are steps in the right direction.

By fostering public-private partnerships and harnessing the transformative potential of DRE technologies, we can make universal energy access a reality and build a greener, more equitable future for all.

Ingrid-Gabriela Hoven is Managing Director of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. Francesco La Camera is Director-General of the International Renewable Energy Agency.

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WISDOM CORNER

It is through gratitude for the present moment that the spiritual dimension of life opens up

ECKHART TOLLE

One is never afraid of the unknown; one is afraid of the known coming to an end

JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI

I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it

PABLO PICASSO

20 YRS OF RIGHT TO WORK

FOCUS NREGA

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of a landmark statutory right established by Parliament. This is the right to work, or right to employment. Such a right is envisaged in Article 41 of the Constitution that directs all states to secure a right to work, for all citizens. This law was created as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act which was passed in Parliament on 23 August, 2005. It gave the right to a hundred days of unskilled manual work at a specified daily wage, for one member of every rural household that asked for it. One third of these jobs created were to be reserved for women. Employment is to be given within 5 kilometers of the residence of the applicant. And if the government is unable to create such employment, then it has to give some allowance in lieu of wages. This is the biggest social security and public works programme in the world. Despite early skepticism it is now universally hailed as a stellar programme of development even by the World Bank.



NREGS IS THE BIGGEST SOCIAL SECURITY AND PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME IN THE WORLD

The provision of rural jobs on demand is a proxy for unemployment insurance. In developed countries, an unemployed person goes and registers himself or herself at the employment exchange, and while looking for a job, gets an unemployment dole. India does not have such a system, since the labour market is not as well organised. Instead, we have the NREGA scheme (also sometimes called NREGS), which covers the rural population. The NREGS employment demand spikes up during droughts and that is why it is an "insurance" programme de facto. The demand for NREGS falls when labour market conditions improve and there is plenty of work available for farm labour. If NREGS demand falls it is a good sign. If the programme becomes redundant that would mean that rural India has reached full employment conditions. But we are far from that situation. Most recently during the pandemic,



If NREGS demand falls it is a good sign. If the programme becomes redundant that would mean that rural India has reached full employment conditions. But we are far from that situation

the demand for NREGS rose steeply, and the total expenditure in FY21 was double of what was budgeted, reaching almost ₹1.2 lakh crore, and generating 300 crore person days of work.

The benefits of NREGS are as follows. It provides employment during distress. The wages are linked to minimum wages, ensuring that it acts as an anti-poverty measure. Women's participation is high, empowering them politically and giving them autonomy. Many work sites provide for creche services, to help women with young children to also participate. The public works programmes created to provide MNREGS work builds public assets such as irrigation reservoirs, ponds, canals, rural roads, afforestation, and so on. In some states, the programme also includes building rural housing or private assets. The availability of work in rural areas reduces the stress of urban migration on cities. During the pandemic there was large scale reverse migration to the villages, where people were provided work under NREGS. Since workers' rights are enshrined in the law, they have a much better chance of securing those rights. Thanks to Aadhaar linkage, the payment of wages is directly deposited into bank accounts reducing leakage.

What about the negatives? Firstly, since it is a labour market intervention providing a wage floor and alternative option, the landlords and

those who seek labourers are upset. They have often complained about the shortage of workers, or that NREGS is making workers "lazy." Since the wages are minimum wages under NREGS, the alternative work needs to offer higher wage to lure workers away. Secondly, despite controls and biometric tools, there are still alleged leakages of funds that include methods like phantom muster of workers which help in siphoning out money. These leakages can be prevented only by permitting social audits by the villagers or non-government organisations. Some states like Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh which had good social audits, had much less leakage. A third drawback is due to biometric requirements. The thumbprint or retina reader might not work, or failure of electricity or the machine and then the worker is denied wages. Even if there is 2 per cent error rate, it could result in 10 or 20 million workers being denied. This is a serious lapse and needs some fallback measures in case biometric does not work. A fourth drawback and a recent worrying trend is the delay in payments. Since these are daily wage workers, any delay beyond one or two weeks in payment can be very distressing. Recent data as per government sources, show an aggregate of ₹975 crore in payments has been seriously delayed.

There are many features of

NREGS that can be tweaked and reformed to make it even more effective. It is different from Universal Basic Income (UBI) which is unconditional money transfer and was introduced as a concept in the Economic Survey of 2017. By contrast, NREGS is for self-selected individuals and has a requirement of hard manual labour. Presumably, this filters out the fake and fraudulent claimants, if the system works properly. One measure of success of NREGS is that there is often a demand for an urban equivalent too. Many state governments have considered introducing an urban employment guarantee scheme too.

NREGA was the culmination of public works programmes, experiments and pilot projects which started as early as the 1960's, with some degree of success. Maharashtra's Employment Guarantee Scheme was launched in 1973 with the backdrop of a severe multi-year drought. It was financed by the state itself by imposing a profession tax on those employed in cities. It ran well and was an inspiration to the national law. Until the time that India has a full-fledged formal unemployment insurance with extensive registration and tracking of the employed and the unemployed workers, and a payroll tax collected from employers to pay for this, a scheme like NREGS will be essential. The additional impact of free foodgrains (5 kilo per person per month) and various direct benefit transfer schemes like PM Kisan or the Ladki Bahin Yojana, is such that NREGS need will decline somewhat. Not to forget that NREGS due to its work requirement creates durable rural assets which also add to productivity and public welfare. It also acts as an indirect vehicle for women's empowerment. Hence wishing NREGA the best on its twentieth anniversary and hope it becomes more effective in coming years. It is a role model for the whole world.

The writer is a noted economist.
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SPECTRUM INTERNATIONAL DAY OF HAPPINESS

Happiness is your natural state

If you look deep within, you will find that happiness is your natural state. You need some reason to be miserable, some hook to latch your misery onto but you don't need any reason to be happy. When you want nothing, then the state you are in can be called happiness. You don't have to do much to find out whether you are happy or not. You simply need to look in the mirror. See how big your smile is, how calm you are, how collected you are.

Often we let the smallest things steal our happiness. Imagine you have baked a magnificent cake, and everyone enjoys it. But you as the baker are sulking because you forgot to put some cherries on it. The guests have eaten, relished, and left, but your mind is stuck on the missing cherry! Such is the nature of the mind-it amplifies the trivial and overlooks the happiness that is already present.

This is where the wisdom of

yoga comes in. Happiness and contentment are not accidents; they are practices. Just as physical hygiene is necessary for health, mental hygiene is essential for a happy life, where you spend just a few minutes every day taking care of the mind because at the end of the day the state of your mind determines the quality of your life. Meditation, breathing techniques, and cultivating awareness are tools to cleanse the mind and get established in your very nature which is happiness.

However, happiness is not just about an individual being joyful. It is a collective and contagious trait. In a family, if only one person is happy while others are miserable, that happiness is fragile. The well-being of those around us influences our own joy. This is why in our ancient prayers we always wished for collective happiness—"Sarve bhavantu sukhinah"—may all be happy.

But does this mean that if people around you are unhap-

py, you must also drown in sorrow? No. If there is illness in the family, at least one person must remain strong to take care of others. Similarly, if people around you are troubled, your inner stability can be a source of support for them. Your happiness does not have to be dependent on others, but it can uplift those around you.

Ultimately, nobody can give you happiness or misery. Each person experiences life according to their own karma. You may turn the world upside down trying to make someone happy, yet they may still remain miserable. Have you not seen this? You do everything possible, yet some people continue to complain. Their state of mind is their own doing; just as yours is your responsibility.

Sometimes, the greatest obstacle to happiness is our own intellect. One simple way to go beyond this hurdle is to become stupid for a while. When the mind chatters endlessly, and nothing seems to bring peace,

just agree to be stupid. This realisation itself can bring a sense of relaxation. Happiness dawns when we transcend the intellect—when we are in love, in awe, or when we let go of the need to appear intelligent all the time.

Desire, awareness, and action are all manifestations of the same energy. At any point, any one of the three is dominant. When you have many desires, self-awareness will be at its lowest. When desire dominates, you live in an imaginary world that result in stress and sorrow result. When action dominates, unawareness, restlessness and fatigue follow. When the awareness is dominant, then happiness naturally arises.

So, if you find yourself unhappy, do not look outside for a reason. Instead, turn inward. Happiness is not in the cake, nor in the missing cherry—it is in your ability to share the cake with joy, to celebrate life with all its opposites.



HAPPINESS IS NOT IN THE CAKE, NOR IN THE MISSING CHERRY—IT IS IN YOUR ABILITY TO SHARE THE CAKE WITH JOY, TO CELEBRATE LIFE WITH ALL ITS OPPOSITES

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, Rasulgari Industrial Estate,
Bhubaneswar-751010

Symbol of courage

Sir, Sunita Williams' safe return to Earth after an unexpected nine-month stay on the International Space Station (ISS) is a testament to her resilience, professionalism, and adaptability. Originally set for a short test flight, she and fellow astronaut Barry "Butch" Wilmore faced extended challenges due to technical issues with Boeing's Starliner. Despite the uncertainty, their dedication to research and maintenance work aboard the ISS showcases the unwavering spirit of space explorers who push the boundaries of human endurance and scientific discovery. Sunita Williams' focus and determination during her extended mission are remarkable. Her experience highlights the challenges of space travel and the vital role of astronaut training. The insights gained from her mission will help the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) improve future long-duration space missions. Her return has sparked celebrations worldwide, especially in India, where she is seen as an inspiration to aspiring astronauts and scientists. The mission underscores the unpredictability of space travel and the need for continuous advancements in technology and contingency planning. Sunita Williams remains a role model, proving that perseverance and dedication can overcome even the most unexpected challenges.

Krishna Kumar Vepakomma, HYDERABAD

Auto-pen gambit

Sir, US President Donald Trump's reported move to void his predecessor Joe Biden's pardons over their use of an auto-pen (a device that mechanically signs documents) is legally dubious and politically explosive. While the US Constitution grants the president broad clemency powers, it does not specify how a pardon must be signed. Courts have upheld auto-pen usage for official acts, making a blanket reversal legally frail. If attempted, it could trigger lawsuits, constitutional debates, and chaos for those granted clemency. Politically, the move would set a dangerous precedent where successors nullify past pardons, undermining the executive authority. The move could also fuel partisan warfare and erode faith in the entire justice system. However, unless the Congress or the courts intervene, the fight could drag on unresolved.

Gopalaswamy J, CHENNAI

Devgad 'hapus' mangoes go hi-tech to protect authenticity



EACH GI-REGISTERED FARMER FROM DEVGAD WILL RECEIVE TP SEAL UIDS BASED ON THE NUMBER OF TREES THEY OWN AND PRODUCTION CAPACITY...

The move aims to eliminate mislabelled mangoes that have infiltrated the market being sold as genuine Devgad Alphonso

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Pune, March 19: To counter other varieties being passed off as Maharashtra's popular Devgad 'hapus' (Alphonso) mangoes...

According to a cooperative society of these agro-producers, every authentic Devgad Alphonso mango must carry a TP seal sticker...

The Devgad Taluka Mango Growers Cooperative Society said that as the registered proprietor of the Alphonso GI (Geographical Indication)...

The move aims to eliminate mislabelled mangoes that have infiltrated the market being sold as genuine Devgad Alphonso...

Over 8 per cent of mangoes currently sold as Devgad Alphonso are fake, depriving genuine farmers of their rightful earnings...

The Devgad Alphonso mango, grown in Devgad Taluka of Sindhudurg district, has enjoyed a premium reputation for over a century due to its unique aroma and taste...

He said the society has partnered with a Mumbai-based company specialising in patented UID technology to implement a stringent identification system.

Each GI-registered farmer from Devgad will receive TP seal UIDs based on the number of trees they own and production capacity.

The farmers would then apply the unique stickers to every mango before sending them to the market, he explained.

According to Sapre, each sticker contains an alphanumeric code split into one visible and the other underneath the sticker. Consumers can verify the authenticity of the mangoes via WhatsApp by sending a photograph of the sticker to 9167668999.

The system will prompt the user to input the second hidden code (revealed upon peeling the sticker) for verification. Upon a successful match, the system will provide details such as the farmer's or vendor's name, village of origin, and GI registration number, he said.

"This robust authentication mechanism is expected to enhance consumer confidence and protect the globally recognised reputation of Devgad Alphonso mangoes," he said.

The society has warned of legal action against the sale of other varieties of mangoes under the Devgad Alphonso name.

SUNITA WILLIAMS RETURNS

Astronaut's ancestral village in Gujarat over the moon

As soon as a SpaceX capsule carrying Williams and astronaut Butch Wilmore splashed down near the Florida coast in the US after their nine-month stay at the International Space Station, the villagers erupted in joy, bursting firecrackers, dancing and chanting 'Har Har Mahadev'



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mehsana, March 19: Residents of NASA astronaut Sunita Williams' ancestral village Jhulasan in Gujarat's Mehsana district Wednesday celebrated her safe return by bursting firecrackers, distributing sweets, dancing and offering prayers to the local deity.

Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel also extended congratulations through X to "our very own Sunita Williams" and said people in India take immense pride in her connection to "our" land, celebrating her as a "shining example of our shared heritage and aspirations".

As soon as a SpaceX capsule carrying Williams and astronaut Butch Wilmore splashed down near the Florida coast in the US after their nine-month stay at the International Space Station (ISS), the villagers erupted in joy, bursting firecrackers, dancing and chanting

"Har Har Mahadev".

The villagers had organised a 'yagna' praying for Williams' safe return. They said their happiness knew no end and hoped to see Williams visit her ancestral village soon and inspire school students who are already filled with curiosity and follow in her footsteps.

Students of the local government school gathered to celebrate the occasion by performing garba, a traditional Gujarati folk dance, and took out a procession with Williams' photo to the nearby temple of goddess Dola Mata.

As the procession made its way from the school premises to the temple of goddess Dola Mata, the students danced and sang and distributed sweets on their way.

School teachers and locals said the goddess heard their prayers and brought Williams home safely. The procession, and the prayer that followed at

the temple, was a way to thank her for her blessings, they said. Principal of the primary school, Vishal Panchal, said that the entire village is ecstatic and filled with pride upon Williams' return.

"The daughter of our village is the pride of the world. She stayed in space for such a long time and came back safe. We performed garba, burst firecrackers and distributed sweets. Our happiness knows no end," he said.

When Sunita Williams left for ISS June 5 last year and her mission was delayed, the villagers came together to light up an 'Akhand Jyot' here June 27 and took out a procession carrying the eternal flame to the temple of Dola Mata, praying for her safety, said a local resident.

"We are very proud and happy that she is back on earth. We are from the same family. Sunita is a great inspiration for the children, who all want to become like her," he said.

Villagers chanted prayers by placing Williams' photo near the temple goddess and distributed sweets as 'prasad', the offering to the goddess.

As Williams' landing neared in the early hours of Wednesday, all eyes were on her, with Jhulasan residents gathering at one place to view the event live on a television screen.

Soon after the splashdown, residents celebrated the moment by bursting firecrackers, dancing and chanting "Har Har Mahadev".

Aurangzeb's tomb turns 'no drone' zone



Demonstrations have been held across the state seeking the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb at Khultabad town, about 25 km from the district headquarters, with many politicians echoing the call

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, March 19: Amid calls for the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb at Khultabad in Maharashtra's Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district, the administration has declared the grave of the Mughal ruler a "no drone" zone, an official said Wednesday.

On the social media sphere, police are busy tracking "objectionable" posts over the matter and getting them deleted, another official said. Over 500 such online posts have been deleted so far, he said.

Demonstrations have been held across the state seeking the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb at Khultabad town, about 25 km from the district headquarters, with many politicians echoing the call. Such a protest sparked violence in Nagpur Monday.

The district administration has made the area a "no drone" zone, an official said, adding that a state reserve police force company and 50 other personnel have been deployed in the town to main-

tain law and order.

District Collector Dilip Swami, who visited the Archaeological Society of Indian-protected site Tuesday, told reporters, "No one should believe in rumours and people should contact the administration or the police if they have any information concerning the matter."

Meanwhile, a team of ten police personnel and officials is working round the clock in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar city to track provocative posts on social media platforms and get those removed, he said.

Cyber Police Inspector Shivcharan Pandhare told PTI, "The hashtag (#) Alamgir and Aurangzeb are trending. We are using these hashtags to check such posts and the offensive comments tied to them."

The official said they have got 506 posts removed from various social media platforms so far and warned over 80 individuals to desist from posting incendiary content online. "But from now onwards, we will register offences against those behind objectionable posts," he added.



Devotees with their coloured bullocks arrive to participate in the Bagad Rath Yatra festival at Bavdhan village in Satara district, Wednesday. During the festival the sacred Bagad or chariot of God with stone wheels is pulled by eight bullocks out of hundreds brought from various parts of Maharashtra. The festival that attracts thousands of visitors is noted for devotees who stay in the temple and fast for five days before they dangle from the highest hook on the chariot in gratitude for wish-fulfilment

PTI PHOTO

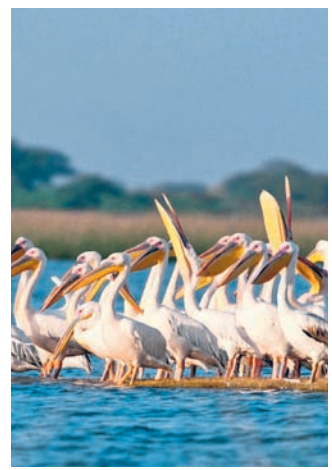
Guj, Nayara Energy to restore bird sanctuary in Jamnagar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Gandhinagar, March 19: The Gujarat government Tuesday signed two agreements with Nayara Energy for the conservation and restoration of Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary, a Ramsar site, in Jamnagar district.

These MoUs were signed with the state Forest department in the presence of Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel. As per the agreements, Nayara Energy will financially support the conservation and restoration project of the Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary in Jamnagar district.

This project, having a total allocation of Rs 12 crore and run for three years, will focus on improving the environmental conditions of wetlands, enhancing local biodiversity, and



encouraging the participation of local stakeholders in the management of wetlands and related activities, said the release. Furthermore, the project will enhance the ecological and hy-

drological health of wetlands in the sanctuary area, benefiting the local community and reducing pressure on biodiversity.

The project primarily includes promoting eco-tourism, wetland restoration, conservation infrastructure development, and capacity building.

Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary, a Ramsar site (an internationally important wetland area), is home to various species.

It includes 185 types of plants, 23 species of butterflies, 21 types of dragonflies, various types of reptiles, 9 species of fish and amphibians, 321 species of birds (including 125 waterbirds) and 9 mammal species.

Nayara Energy signed another agreement with the Vidya Samiksha Kendra of the State Government's Education Department.

Under this MoU, reading activities will be undertaken in 1,300 government schools and Anganwadis of Jamnagar and Devbhumi Dwarka districts.

For this purpose, Nayara Energy will undertake the project from the upcoming academic year, starting April 2025 till March 2028.

Over 150 books in English and Gujarati will be provided per school in government schools across Jamnagar and Devbhumi Dwarka. Moreover, 90 books will be provided to 1,900 Anganwadis in a language that a child can understand to develop early literacy skills in children. In total, approximately 3,75,000 books will be distributed to establish a strong foundation for reading and improved learning through this project.

NAGPUR VIOLENCE: ONE WAS TO BOARD TRAIN, OTHER WENT FOR MILK

Kin wonder how they landed in hospital

Violence erupted in central Nagpur's Mahal area Monday around 7.30 pm, with stones hurled at police amid rumours that the holy book of a community was burnt during a VHP's agitation seeking the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb located in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



I am train to Itarsi from the Nagpur railway station, an area that was heavily affected by violence, triggered by VHP's protest for the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb, situated in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district.

The family received a call from the Indira Gandhi Government Medical College & Hospital (IGGMCH), informing them

that Irfan had been admitted following an accident.

Imran told PTI Tuesday that his brother suffered severe head wounds, and a fractured leg, and is currently in the ICU, receiving oxygen.

Despite the severity of the situation, the family has yet to file a police complaint as they remain focused on Irfan's treatment and remain unaware

of what transpired during his journey to the station.

In a similar case, 17-year-old Raza Younas Khan, a 12th-grade commerce student, is fighting for his life at a private hospital.

Khan, a resident of Guard Line near Mominpura, was sent by his mother around 10:30 pm to buy milk and curd for the morning sehri. She later

received a call at around 11:30 pm from IGGMCH, informing her that her son had been admitted to the hospital in critical condition.

His mother told PTI that her son had gone to purchase milk at nearby Hansapuri, also affected by violence. She received a phone call at around 11:30 am from IGGMCH that Khan was admitted to the hospital.

Khan was subsequently transferred to a private hospital, where he remains on a ventilator. His family is also unaware of the violent situation in their locality and is at a loss as to how their son sustained such serious injuries.

She said a Lakadganj police station official recorded his statement.

Violence erupted in central Nagpur's Mahal area Monday around 7.30 pm, with stones hurled at police amid rumours that the holy book of a community was burnt during a VHP's agitation seeking the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb located in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district.

Gujarat extends deadline for public suggestions on Uniform Civil Code

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Gandhinagar, March 19: Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Committee Chairperson, Justice Ranjana Desai, has urged the residents of Gujarat to submit their suggestions and opinions regarding the proposed UCC in the state.

The deadline for submissions, initially set for March 24, 2025, has now been extended to April 15, 2025, allowing more time for public participation in the state.

The Gujarat government formed the UCC Committee to assess the necessity of implementing the UCC in the state.

As part of its mandate, the committee is reviewing existing personal laws governing civil matters of Gujarat's residents.

Based on its findings, it will propose a legal framework for the implementation of UCC.

To ensure a comprehensive evaluation of all related issues, the committee has invited suggestions from Gujarat's residents, government agencies, non-governmental organisations, social groups, religious institutions, and political parties.



Citizens and organisations can submit their views through the official web portal https://uccgujarat.in/, via email at ucc@gujarat.gov.in, or by sending written submissions to Block No. 1, A-Wing, Sixth Floor, Karmayogi Bhavan, Sector-10A, Gandhinagar by April 15, 2025.

The UCC aims to establish a common set of civil laws for all citizens, irrespective of religion, caste, or gender, covering matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption.



Those against OBC recruitment have moved court, thereby blocking the recruitments. Yesterday, there was a hearing at the Supreme Court and it was good. I think the matter will be sorted out soon
MAMATA BANERJEE | WEST BENGAL CM

LALU APPEARS BEFORE ED

The Enforcement Department (ED) Wednesday grilled RJD president Lalu Prasad for nearly four hours in connection with the land-for-jobs case, officials said. The ailing septuagenarian reached the ED's Bank Road office in Patna at 10.30 am and left the premises around 2.30 pm, they added



of the day quote

Those responsible for the murder of the retired police sub-inspector, Zakhir Hussein would be brought to justice
M K STALIN | TN CM

Negligence in public welfare works would not be tolerated
YOGI ADITYANATH | UP CM

We are not merely responding to the climate crisis but we are shaping the global agenda with decisive action and innovative policies
KIRTI VARDHAN SINGH | UNION MINISTER

SC questions legitimacy of state claims on poverty



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 19: Observing that ration cards have become a "popularity card", the Supreme Court Wednesday wondered if the benefits meant for the poor percolated to undeserving persons.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh said the benefit of subsidies should reach the genuine beneficiaries. "Our concern is... are benefits meant for the genuinely poor persons percolating to those pockets who do not deserve it? Ration card has become a popularity card now," said Justice Surya Kant.

The judge went on, "These states just say we have issued these many cards. There are some states who when they have to show their development they say our per capita income is growing. And then when we talk of BPL, they say 75 per cent of the population is BPL. How can these facts be reconciled? The conflict is inherent. We have to ensure that benefits reach the genuine beneficiaries."

The top court observed that states showed a high per capita growth when asked to highlight the development index but claimed 75 per cent of the population was below poverty line when it came to subsidies.

The bench was hearing a plea in a suo motu case initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic to address the miseries of migrant labourers

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for some intervenors, said the anomaly stemmed from the inequalities in the income of people.

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The poor migrant workers, who are registered in the e-shram portal of the government, need to be given free ration and the figure was around eight crore people, Bhushan said.

Justice Surya Kant said, "We hope that in the issuance of ration cards, there are no political elements involved. I have not lost my roots. I always want to know the plight of the poor. There are families who continue to be poor."

Bhushan said the Centre did not conduct the 2021 Census and was continuing to rely on data from the 2011 Census as a result around 10 crore people, requiring free ration, remained out of the BPL categories. Additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for the Centre said the government was giving

free ration to around 81.35 crore people under the National Food Security Act and another 11 crore people were covered by another similar scheme.

The bench adjourned the matter and asked the Centre to file its response on the status of free ration distributed to the poor. Last year December 9 the top court frowned upon the freebie culture and stressed on the need to create job opportunities and capacity building for migrant workers. It was surprised when the Centre informed the court that 81 crore people were being given free or subsidised ration under the National Food Security Act of 2013.

Bhushan had contended that directions were issued by the top court from time to time to all states and union territories to issue ration cards to migrant workers for availing free ration provided by the Centre.

Last year November 26 the top court flagged the difficulties surrounding the distribution of freebies and said Covid times were different when distressed migrant workers were provided the relief.

In a judgment June 29, 2021, and subsequent orders, the top court passed a slew of directions to the authorities asking them to undertake welfare measures, including giving ration cards to all migrant workers, who were in distress during the COVID-19 pandemic, registered with the e-shram portal.

The portal is a comprehensive national database of unorganised workers launched by the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment with the primary aim of facilitating the delivery of welfare benefits and social security measures to the country's unorganised sector workers.

Last year September 2 the top court asked the Centre to file an affidavit giving details about compliance with its 2021 judgement and subsequent directions on providing ration cards and other welfare measures to migrant workers.



Tourists take boat ride at the Naini Lake in Nainital

PTI PHOTO

INFILTRATION BIDS

NIA raids 12 places in Jammu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 19: The National Investigation Agency Wednesday conducted searches at 12 locations across Jammu, including premises of terrorist sympathisers, as part of its probe into infiltration by terrorists from across the border.

Among the premises which were raided include the homes of overground workers (OGWs) linked to the newly-formed offshoots and affiliates of banned terrorist organisations such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), the NIA said in a statement.

The infiltration case is linked to the series of attacks carried out by terrorists on security forces and civilians some months ago as part of a larger criminal conspiracy by terror organisations to wage a war against the government of India, said the statement. A total of 12 locations in Jammu district of Jammu and Kashmir were searched as part of the operation, and several incriminatory materials link-

ing the terrorists with OGWs were seized, it said, adding that the NIA teams are examining them to unravel the terror conspiracy.

"Premises of sympathisers and cadres of these outfits were also searched as part of the action taken by the anti-terror agency in the case," the NIA said. The action followed information received by the NIA regarding infiltration of LeT and JeM terrorists into India through the International Border (IB) and Line of Control (LoC).

Reports suggested that the terrorists were facilitated by OGWs and terror associates living in border areas. Besides providing logistical support, food, shelter and money, the suspects were involved in guiding the terrorists through the difficult terrains of Jammu province to ensure their safe passage, the probe agency said.

The terrorists were then believed to have made their way to the hinterland districts of Kathua, Udhampur, Doda, Kishtwar, Reasi, Rajouri, Poonch, and also to the Kashmir valley, it added.

The infiltration case is linked to the series of attacks carried out by terrorists on security forces and civilians some months ago

Cabinet approves ₹1,500cr incentive for BHIM-UPI Transactions



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 19: The government Wednesday approved a ₹1,500 crore incentive for the promotion of small-value BHIM-UPI (P2M) transactions up to ₹2,000, a move aimed at benefiting common people and small merchants.

The Incentive Scheme for promotion of low-value BHIM-UPI transactions Person to Merchant (P2M) for the financial year 2024-25 was approved by the Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnav told reporters here. In a post on social media platform X, the Prime Minister said, "The incentive scheme on promoting low-value UPI transactions, which has been approved by the Cabinet today will encourage digital payments and further 'Ease of Living'."

The scheme will cover 55 per cent of the total merchant transactions, an official release said. An incentive at the rate of 0.15 per cent per transaction value will be provided for transactions up to ₹2,000 pertaining to the category of small merchants.

SHORT TAKES

RSS condemns Nagpur violence

Bangalore: The RSS Wednesday condemned the recent violence in Nagpur, saying any form of violence is detrimental to the society's well-being and described the 17th-century Mughal emperor Aurangzeb as "irrelevant". The remarks were made by RSS chief spokesperson Sunil Ambekar during a press meet on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's upcoming three-day national meet. The meet of Akhil Bharatiya Pratidinhi Sabha (ABPS) is scheduled for March 21-23 here.

Ruckus erupts inside MCD house

New Delhi: Chaos erupted in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) House Wednesday as councillors from the AAP and BJP engaged in heated exchanges, drawing the mayor's rebuke. AAP and BJP councillors stood on tables and chairs and raised slogans against each other. AAP members chanted "Gundagardi Nahi Chalega," while BJP councillors responded with "Arvind Kejriwal Sharm Karo, Mayor Sharm Karo." Meanwhile, Congress councillors displayed a banner that read, "Samvidhan Humari Pehchan Hai, Samvidhan Ki Hatya Band Karo." Meanwhile, Congress councillors displayed a banner that read, "Samvidhan Humari Pehchan Hai, Samvidhan Ki Hatya Band Karo."

SP accused of harassing junior

Varanasi: A deputy jailer's daughter here has filed a complaint against the district jail superintendent alleging harassment of her mother. Neha Shah, daughter of deputy jailer Meena Kanojia, claimed that she filed the complaint against Varanasi District Jail Superintendent Umesh Kumar Singh at the Lalpur Pandeypur Police Station. "Police have assured me that they will consult senior officers and take a decision on registering an FIR within a day," she said.

Fresh clashes in Churachandpur

Churachandpur/Imphal: Hours after a fresh shutdown was imposed by a student body in Manipur's curfew-bound Churachandpur district following clashes between Hmar and Zomi people, a group of MLAs and tribal organisations separately appealed for peace Wednesday. Educational institutions remained closed and most shops and markets downed shutters throughout the day. Private vehicles also stayed off the roads, as tensions continued to grip the district.

Jharkhand's Abua Budget 2025-26

POST NEWS NETWORK

Ranchi, March 19: The Jharkhand government, led by Chief Minister Hemant Soren, presented its first Budget for the financial year 2025-26.

Key highlights include a focus on education, employment, pensions, agriculture, and industry, with a total outlay of ₹1,45,400 crore. The Budget presented by Finance Minister Radhakrishna Kishore has made a provision of ₹13,363.35 crore for the ambitious Jharkhand Mukhyamantri Maiya Samman Yojana (JMMSY) to provide financial assistance to women. The Budget also focuses on seed conservation and better agricultural management. The government claims the Budget will strength-



en the states' economy. The Budget also focuses on seed conservation and better agricultural management.

Key highlights of the Budget include the launch of the Student Research and Innovation Policy 2025 to promote higher education, support for MSMEs and tourism as key industries, and the revival of the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) with the creation of a pension fund.

India expresses concern over situation in Gaza

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 19: India Wednesday said it is concerned over the situation in Gaza and called for supply of humanitarian assistance to the affected people as Israel resumed bombing in conflict-hit Palestinian territory shattering its fragile ceasefire with Hamas.

New Delhi also underlined the need to release all hostages held by Hamas. "We are concerned at the situation in Gaza. It is important that all hostages are released," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

"We also call for the supply of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza to be sustained," it said in a statement. India's comments came as Israel pound-



ed Hamas targets in Gaza on Tuesday, triggering uncertainty over the ceasefire that came into effect January 19.

According to the Hamas-run health ministry, over 400 people were killed in the Israeli bombing. The Israeli action came

after Israel and Hamas failed to agree on how to take forward the ceasefire deal from the initial phase. The deal comprised three stages. The negotiations on the second phase of the ceasefire pact were to start around six weeks back. But the two sides could not

Zero tolerance towards terrorism: Defence Secy

New Delhi: India remains steadfast in its "zero-tolerance" policy towards terrorism and robust domestic mechanisms and strong regional cooperation are needed to effectively combat the menace, Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh said Wednesday. Singh was speaking at the inaugural session of a two-day conclave of 10-nation ASEAN grouping and some of its dialogue partners, hosted by India in the national capital.

hold the talks. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said his country will not "relent" until it achieves all "vital goals". "In the past two weeks, Israel did not initiate any military action in the hope that Hamas would change course. Well, that didn't happen," he said in a statement Tuesday.

Atmospheric CO2 levels reach 8,00,000 year-high in 2023: WMO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 19: Atmospheric carbon dioxide levels reached 420 parts per million in 2023, the highest in the last 8,00,000 years, according to the World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) State of the Climate report published Wednesday.

The report said long-term global warming is currently estimated to be between 1.34 and 1.41 degrees Celsius compared to the 1850-1900 baseline. It said that tropical cyclones, floods, droughts and other disasters in 2024 led to the highest number of new displacements recorded in the past 16 years. These events also worsened food crises and caused massive economic losses.

Carbon dioxide levels in 2023 (the latest year with complete global data) were 420.0 ± 0.1 parts per million (ppm), 2.3 ppm higher than in 2022 and 151 per cent of the pre-industrial level (1750).

The WMO said 420 ppm corresponds to 3,276 gigatonnes (or 3.276 trillion tonnes) of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

The report said the past 10 years (2015-2024) were the warmest on record, with each of the last eight years setting new highs for ocean heat content.

Around 90 per cent of the extra heat trapped by greenhouse gases is absorbed by the ocean, warming it and affecting marine life, weather patterns and sea levels.

In 2024, global mean sea lev-



■ The report said long-term global warming is currently estimated to be between 1.34 and 1.41 degrees Celsius compared to the 1850-1900 baseline

■ It said that tropical cyclones, floods, droughts and other disasters in 2024 led to the highest number of new displacements recorded in the past 16 years

■ These events also worsened food crises and caused massive economic losses

el was the highest since satellite records began in 1993. The rate of sea level rise from 2015-2024 was double that of 1993-2002, increasing from 2.1 mm per year to 4.7 mm per year, the UN weather and climate agency said.

It said that the period 2022-2024 recorded the most negative three-year glacier mass balance. Seven of the ten worst years for glacier loss since 1950 have occurred since 2016. "Our planet is issuing more distress signals - but this report shows

that limiting long-term global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius is still possible. Leaders must step up to make it happen - seizing the benefits of cheap, clean renewables for their people and economies - with new national climate plans due this

year," said United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. Earlier this year, the WMO confirmed that 2024 was the hottest year on record and the first with a global average temperature 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

"While a single year above 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming does not indicate that the long-term temperature goals of the Paris Agreement are out of reach, it is a wake-up call that we are increasing the risks to our lives, economies and to the planet," said WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo. The record global temperatures seen in 2023 and broken again in 2024 were mainly due to rising greenhouse gas emissions and the 2023-24 El Nino event.

national



The world today makes business decisions factoring in national security in a manner in which it did not do so before, especially in the digital era

SATYENDAR JAIN BOOKED

The Delhi government's Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) has registered a case against former PWD minister and senior AAP leader Satyendar Jain over alleged corruption in a Rs 571-crore CCTV project, an official said Wednesday



of the day quote

Bihar is craving for change. The youngsters of Bihar want employment, the people of Bihar are waiting with hope for real social justice

As soon as I reached the area, my vehicle was attacked. Had I not been inside, my head would have been shattered

Welcome Home, Sunita Williams! Immense happiness and pride as Indian-origin astronaut Sunita Williams returns safely to Earth after her inspiring mission aboard the ISS!

Gates meets PM Modi



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 19: Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates Wednesday said he is impressed by how innovation in India is driving "progress locally -- and globally", as he met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and discussed a host of subjects including technology, innovation and sustainability.

the sidelines of the Raisina Dialogue. "Discussed development challenges, the promise of innovation and the relevance of India," Jaishankar posted on X. Gates also had a meeting with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and they discussed leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) and predictive analytics to improve service delivery in the fields of healthcare, education, agriculture, and employment generation.



Buffaloes take dip in the polluted water of a drain that merges into the Yamuna river near the Taj Mahal, in Agra. The Supreme Court has directed that the discharge of dirty drains into the river be stopped immediately

Farmer leaders detained

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, March 19: Several farmer leaders including Sarwan Singh Pandher and Jagjit Singh Dallewal were detained in Mohali while returning from a meeting with a central delegation, as Punjab Police evicted farmers from Shambhu and Khanauri protest sites and began clearing the roads, which were blocked for more than a year.



The detention sparked a protest at the Khanauri border point where farmers raised slogans against the Punjab government and parked their tractor-trolleys on the road to "prevent police from evicting them"

The farmers were detained in Mohali as they were returning from a meeting here with a Central delegation led by Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan

Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, urging him to remove the barricades put up by the security personnel. He said it will take two to three days for its removal and thereafter, the road will be opened from the Haryana side.

They have been protesting in support of various demands including a legal guarantee to MSP for crops. In Chandigarh, the talks between farmer leaders and a central delegation to discuss various demands of farmers remained inconclusive.

POST OF THE DAY

Aurangzeb died in March, 1707 Maratha Empire ended in 1818 Aurangzeb's grave wasn't destroyed by Marathas despite ruling for 111 more years. If you still think it's about Aurangzeb, you're a fool.

SHORT TAKES

Four employees charred to death

Pune: Four employees of a graphics designing firm were charred to death and six others injured as a company minibus caught fire near Pune city Wednesday morning, police said.

MP boat capsizes: Bodies recovered

Shivpuri (MP): The authorities Wednesday recovered the bodies of all seven persons, including four children, who drowned after a boat carrying them capsized in Matatila dam in Madhya Pradesh's Shivpuri district a day ago, police said.

Court to decide Rashid's bail plea tomorrow

New Delhi: A Delhi court would March 21 pass its order on the bail plea of jailed J&K MP Engineer Rashid in a terror funding case. Additional sessions judge Chander Jit Singh, who was scheduled to pass order Wednesday, deferred the pronouncement.

Prez, PM and others celebrate Sunita's return to Earth

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 19: President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi joined celebrities, politicians, scientists and others Wednesday to celebrate the return of NASA astronaut Sunita Williams to Earth after nine months, terming her an inspiration for generations to come and lauding her determination.

NASA astronauts Williams, Nick Hague and Butch Wilmore and Roscosmos cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbunov returned early Wednesday on board SpaceX's Dragon spacecraft, which splashed down in the sea off the coast of Tallahassee, Florida.

The president said in a post on X that India's daughter and her fellow astronauts have inspired everyone with their perseverance, dedication and never-say-die spirit. The Prime Minister said in his post that it had been a test of grit, courage and the boundless human spirit for the astronauts.

NAGPUR VIOLENCE

Oppn attacks Maha govt over law & order



Nagpur Crime Branch detains six suspects

Will dig out accused from graves: Fadnavis

NAGPUR: Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis Wednesday said attackers of police during Nagpur violence will be "dug out from their graves", even as the RSS condemned the violence and described the 17th-century Mughal emperor Aurangzeb as "irrelevant".

Speaking on budgetary demands of the home department, Wadetiwar wondered why no action was being taken against a state minister despite his provocative statements. "Why is he not asked to resign?" the Congress leader sought to know.

Govt boosts milk production with ₹6,190 crore schemes

Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the Revised National Program for Dairy Development and the Revised Rashtriya Gokul Mission, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnav told reporters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 19: The government Wednesday revised two schemes - National Program for Dairy Development and Rashtriya Gokul Mission, raising the outlay by Rs 2,000 crore to Rs 6,190 crore to boost milk production, procurement level, processing capacity,

lab testing facilities and other related infrastructure. Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the Revised National Program for Dairy Development (NPDD) and the Revised Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM), Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnav told reporters.



ister Modi said the approval for the revised National Programme for Dairy Development will contribute to the sector's transformation, ensuring better pricing for farmers, job creation and more.

done with an additional outlay of Rs 1,000 crore, that is total outlay of Rs 3,400 crore during 15th Finance Commission cycle from 2021-22 to 2025-26," the statement said.

heifers; (b) encourage farmers to purchase high genetic merit (HGM) IVF heifers to provide 3 per cent interest subvention on loan taken by the farmer from milk unions/financial institutions/ banks. This will help in systemic induction of high-yielding breeds.

strengthening of Central Cattle Breeding Farms. The NPDD scheme consists of two key components -- the first one is dedicated to improving essential dairy infrastructure, such as milk chilling plants, advanced milk testing laboratories, and certification systems.

international



I do not comment on US domestic policy changes. But as for the media you mentioned, their bad records in reporting on China are not a secret
MAO NING | FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESPERSON, CHINA

PAK-AFGHAN TORKHAM BORDER CROSSING REOPENS

The Torkham border crossing between Pakistan and Afghanistan reopened Wednesday after 27 days of closure following talks between jirga members from both sides, according to a media report. The cross-border movement was suspended February 21 after Islamabad shut it down over a dispute concerning the construction of a border post by the Afghan government



of the day quote

Pakistani officials should immediately stop coercing Afghans to return home and give those facing expulsion the opportunity to seek protection

ELAINE PEARSON | ASIA DIRECTOR, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

The F-35 is a vital component of our national defence capability, and the cooperation and dialogue with the United States continues to support the development and use of this high-end platform

ANDREAS FLÅM | STATE SECRETARY, NORWAY

No, we do not want the Awami League to participate in the elections

NAHID ISLAM | NCP'S CONVENOR, BANGLADESH

SHORT TAKES

Sri Lanka's police chief surrenders

Colombo: Deshabandu Tennakoon, the suspended inspector general of police, surrendered to the court Wednesday after evading arrest for over two weeks in a case related to a shooting incident in 2023. Tennakoon, who had been on a run since February 28, turned himself in at the magistrate's court at the southern town of Matara. The court sent him to remand prison for a day. The police chief had two days ago lost his appeal at the Court of Appeal to prevent his arrest. The Appeal Court refused his plea without a hearing.

Researcher sentenced to death for espionage

Beijing: A Chinese engineer from a research institute has been sentenced to death for selling classified material to foreign spy agencies, China's Ministry of State Security said Wednesday. The engineer, identified as Liu, from the research institute was working with a "carefully designed plan" to sell intelligence to foreign agencies, the official media here reported, citing the ministry's article. China's national security officials have uncovered the espionage case in which Liu illegally copied and sold state secrets to foreign spy agencies.

Peru declares emergency

Lima, Peru: Peru's president declared a state of emergency in the capital Monday and ordered the deployment of soldiers to help police address a surge of violence, amid widespread outcry a day after the killing of a popular singer. President Dina Boluarte's government published a decree saying that the state of emergency will last 30 days, and authorities will restrict some rights, including the freedom of assembly and movement. That means the police and the army would be able to detain people without a judicial order.

WB approves \$102mn for Pak

Islamabad: The World Bank has approved \$102 million for cash-strapped Pakistan for a project that aims to enhance access to microcredit and support the resilience of the microfinance sector and its borrowers, particularly in the face of climate-related shocks. The financing under the 'Resilient and Accessible Microfinance (RAM) project' was approved by the World Bank board of directors Tuesday, according to a statement issued by the World Bank.

Trump releases JFK assassination files

REUTERS

Washington, March 18: US President Donald Trump released material related to the 1963 assassination of President John F Kennedy Tuesday, seeking to honor his campaign promise to provide more transparency about the shock event in Texas.

An initial tranche of electronic copies of papers flooded into the National Archives website in the evening with a total of more than 80,000 expected to be published after Justice Department lawyers spent hours scouring them.

The digital documents, including PDFs of previously classified memos, offers a window into the climate of fear at the time surrounding US relations with the Soviet Union shortly after the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 nearly led to a nuclear war.

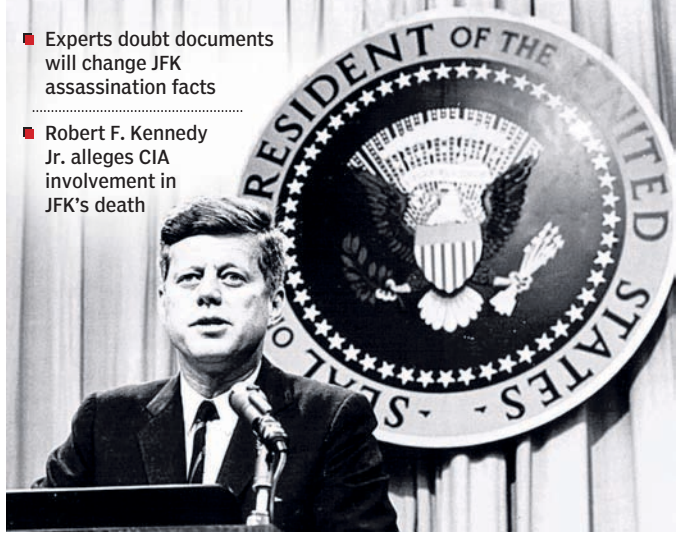
The release is nonetheless likely to intrigue people who have long been fascinated with a dramatic period in history, with the assassination and with Kennedy himself.

Many of the documents reflected the work by investigators to learn more about assassin Lee Harvey Oswald's time in the Soviet Union and track his movements in the months leading up to Kennedy's assassination in Dallas Nov 22, 1963.

An initial review of the papers did not show deviations from the central narrative.

Trump's secretary of health and human services, Robert F Kennedy Jr, a son of Robert Kennedy and nephew of John F Kennedy, has said he believes

- Experts doubt documents will change JFK assassination facts
- Robert F. Kennedy Jr. alleges CIA involvement in JFK's death



the Central Intelligence Agency was involved in his uncle's death, an allegation the agency has described as baseless.

Jack Schlossberg, JFK's grandson, said on X Tuesday, "The Trump administration did not give anyone in President Kennedy's family 'a heads up' about the release."

Fredrik Logevall, a Harvard history professor whose books include "JFK: Coming of Age in the American Century 1917-56," said in an email the new documents may help fill in the picture.

One document with the heading "secret" was a typed account with handwritten notes of a 1964 interview by a Warren Commission researcher who questioned Lee Wigren, a CIA employee, about inconsistencies in material provided to the commission by the State Department and the CIA about marriages between Soviet women and

American men.

Oswald was married to a Soviet woman, Marina Oswald, at the time of the shooting.

Department of Defense documents from 1963 covered the Cold War of the early 1960s and the US involvement in Latin America, trying to thwart Cuban leader Fidel Castro's support of communist forces in other countries.

The documents suggest that Castro would not go so far as to provoke a war with the United States or escalate to the point "that would seriously and immediately endanger the Castro regime."

One document released from January 1962 reveals details of a top secret project called "Operation Mongoose," or simply "the Cuban Project," which was a CIA-led campaign of covert operations and sabotage against Cuba, authorized by Kennedy in 1961, aimed at removing the Castro regime.

Putin wants Trump to recognise all land Russia has taken in Ukraine

REUTERS

Moscow, March 19: President Vladimir Putin wants US President Donald Trump to formally recognise all four Ukrainian regions that Moscow has claimed as its own in addition to Crimea, Russia's Kommersant daily reported.

Citing unnamed sources who attended a private business event with Putin on Tuesday, Kommersant said that Putin wanted the US to formally recognise the four regions - Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson - as part of Russia along with Crimea, which Moscow seized and annexed in 2014.

Russia, though advancing on the battlefield, does not fully control any of the four regions.

In return for recognition and if it happened "in the near future", Kommersant said Putin would undertake not to lay claim to the Ukrainian port city of Odesa and other Ukrainian territory.



Asked about the Kommersant report Wednesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Putin and Trump had not discussed the idea on their call Tuesday. But he confirmed, without elaborating, that Putin had discussed the conflict in Ukraine at Tuesday's closed door meeting with members of Russia's business elite.

Peskov did not confirm, however, whether Putin had floated the idea of the US recognising the four regions in addition to Crimea at the meeting.

Israeli strikes kill 20 Palestinians



REUTERS

Cairo, March 19: Israeli strikes killed at least 20 Palestinians in Gaza Wednesday, local health workers said, as the Israeli military unleashed more bombardments of the enclave and ordered residents to evacuate combat zones.

The United Nations said a foreign staffer was killed and five other workers were wounded in an Israeli airstrike on the site of a UN headquarters in central Gaza City.

Jorge Moreira da Silva, Executive Director of the UN office for Project Services, said, "Israel knew that this was a UN premises, that people were living, staying and working there, it is a compound. It is a very well-known place."

An explosive device was dropped or fired on the premises, he told a press conference in Brussels.

"This was not an accident," he said. "What's happening in Gaza is unconscionable."

The Israeli military denied it had struck the UN compound in Deir al-Balah. It said it had hit a Hamas site in northern Gaza where it had detected preparations for fir-

ing into Israeli territory. The renewed bloodshed followed one of the deadliest days so far in the Israeli assault on the Palestinian territory, with Israeli airstrikes killing more than 400 people Tuesday, according to Palestinian health authorities.

The fighting ended weeks of relative calm since a ceasefire in January largely paused the war between Israeli forces and Hamas and other militants. Israel said the onslaught was "just the beginning".

Israel and Hamas accuse each other of breaching the truce, which had offered a respite for Gaza's 2.3 million residents after 17 months of war that has reduced the enclave to rubble and forced most of its population to evacuate multiple times.

The Israeli campaign has killed more than 49,000 people in Gaza, Palestinian health authorities say, and caused a humanitarian crisis with shortages of food, fuel and water.

Israel has accused Hamas of using Palestinian civilians as human shields. Hamas denies this and accuses Israel of indiscriminate bombings.

SNIPPETS

Student-led NCP doesn't want B'desh Awami League's participation in polls

Dhaka: The student-led National Citizen Party (NCP) said that they don't want the party of deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Bangladesh Awami League to participate in the elections. "No, we do not want the Awami League to participate in the elections," NCP's convenor Nahid Islam told the US-based international current affairs magazine for the Asia-Pacific region The Diplomat in an interview published late Tuesday. He said, without elaboration, that those within the Awami League "are responsible for wrongdoing must be put on trial" at first. "We aim to establish the Second Republic through the setting up of a Constituent Assembly, through which we seek to introduce a new Constitution and restructure the country's power dynamics," Islam said as asked to explain the NCP's plan. Asked what kind of second republic NCP envisaged, he said their primary demand for the Second Republic was a new constitution, which would be "rooted in the spirit of the 1971 Liberation War and the July Uprising".

Turkey detains Istanbul mayor in what opposition calls 'coup'

Istanbul: Turkey detained Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, the main rival of President Tayyip Erdogan, on charges of corruption and aiding a terrorist group in what the main opposition party Wednesday called "a coup against our next president". The move against the popular two-term mayor caps a months-long legal crackdown on opposition figures across the country which has been criticised as a politicised attempt to hurt their electoral prospects and silence dissent. Turkey's lira currency crashed as much as 12% to an all-time low, opens new tab of 42 to the dollar in response, underscoring worries over the eroding rule of law in the major emerging market and NATO member country that Erdogan has run for 22 years. Imamoglu, 54, who leads Erdogan in some opinion polls, was to be named his Republican People's Party's (CHP) official presidential candidate within days. He now faces two separate investigations that also include charges of leading a crime organisation, bribery and tender rigging. Justice Minister Yilmaz Tunc warned against linking Erdogan to Imamoglu's detention or other legal processes, using words like "coup" to describe it, and also against street protests.

Butch, Sunita finally back on Earth

REUTERS

Washington, March 19: NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Sunita Williams returned to Earth in a SpaceX capsule Tuesday with a soft splashdown off Florida's coast, nine months after their faulty Boeing Starliner craft upended what was to be a week-long stay on the International Space Station.

Their return caps a protracted space mission that was fraught with uncertainty and technical troubles, turning a rare instance of NASA's contingency planning - and the latest failures of Starliner - into a global and political spectacle.

Wilmore and Williams two veteran NASA astronauts and retired US Navy test pilots, had launched into space as Starliner's first crew in June for what was expected to be an eight-day test mission. But issues with Starliner's propulsion system led to cascading delays to their return home, culminating in a NASA decision to fold them



into its crew rotation schedule and return them on a SpaceX craft this year.

Wilmore and Williams strapped inside their Crew Dragon spacecraft Tuesday morning, along with two other astronauts and undocked from the ISS at 1.05 am to embark on a 17-hour trip to Earth. The four-person crew, formal-

ly part of NASA's Crew-9 astronaut rotation mission, plunged through Earth's atmosphere, using its heatshield and two sets of parachutes to slow its orbital speed of 17,000 mph (27,359 kph) to a soft 17 mph at splashdown, which occurred at 5:57 pm some 50 miles off Florida's Gulf Coast under clear skies.

"What a ride," NASA astro-

naut Nick Hague, the Crew-9 mission commander inside the Dragon capsule, told mission control moments after splashing down. "I see a capsule full of grins, ear to ear."

The astronauts will be flown on a NASA plane to their crew quarters at the space agency's Johnson Space Center in Houston for a few days of routine health checks before NASA flight surgeons say they can go home to their families.

"They will get some well-deserved time off, well-deserved time with their families," NASA's Commercial Crew Program chief Steve Stich told reporters after the splashdown. "It's been a long time for them."

286 DAYS IN SPACE
The pair logged 286 days in space on the mission - longer than the average six-month ISS mission length, but far short of US record holder Frank Rubio, whose 371 days in space ending in 2023 were the unexpected result of a coolant leak on a Russian spacecraft.

From France comes call for Trump's America to return Lady Liberty

Hey, America: Give the Statue of Liberty back to France.

So says a French politician who is making headlines in his country for suggesting that the US is no longer worthy of the monument, which was a gift from France nearly 140 years ago. Raphael Glucksmann, as a member of the European Parliament and co-president of a small left-wing party in France, can't claim to speak for all of his compatriots.

But his assertion in a speech this weekend that some Americans "have chosen to switch to the side of the tyrants" reflects the broad shockwaves that US President Donald Trump's seismic shifts in foreign and domestic policy are triggering in France and elsewhere in Europe. "Give us back the Statue of Liberty," Glucksmann told supporters of his Public Place

party, who applauded and whistled, Sunday.

"It was our gift to you. But apparently you despise her. So she will be happy here with us," Glucksmann said.

The White House brushed back on the comments Monday, saying France instead should still be "grateful" for US support during World War I and World War II. Glucksmann, in turn, then shot back that French gratitude for Americans' wartime sacrifices is "eternal," but added, "If the free world no longer interests your government, then we will take up the torch, here in Europe."

"No one, of course, will come and steal the Statue of Liberty," he wrote in X posts. "The statue is yours. But what it embodies belongs to everyone."

CAN FRANCE CLAIM IT BACK?
Dream on.



UNESCO, the United Nations' cultural arm that has the statue on its list of World Heritage treasures, notes that the iconic monument is US government property.

It was initially envisaged as a monumental gesture of French-American friendship to mark the 100th anniversary

of the July 4, 1776, Declaration of Independence.

But a war that erupted in 1870 between France and German states led by Prussia diverted the energies of the monument's designer, French sculptor Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi. The gift also took time to be funded, with a decision made

that the French would pay for the statue and Americans would cover the costs of its pedestal.

Transported in 350 pieces from France, the statue was officially unveiled Oct 28, 1886.

IS FRANCE'S GOVERNMENT OFFERING ASYLUM TO LADY LIBERTY?

No French-US relations would have to drop off a cliff before Glucksmann found support from French President Emmanuel Macron's government.

Glucksmann's party has been even more critical, posting accusations on its website that Trump is wielding power in an "authoritarian" manner and is "preparing to deliver Ukraine on a silver platter" to Russia.

In his speech, Glucksmann referenced New York poet Emma Lazarus' words about the statue, the "mighty woman

with a torch" who promised a home for the "huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

"Today, this land is ceasing to be what it was," Glucksmann said.

WHAT IS THE WHITE HOUSE SAYING?

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt, when asked about Glucksmann's comments, responded that the US would "absolutely not" be parting with the landmark in New York Harbour.

Leavitt is one of three administration officials named in a lawsuit by The Associated Press on First and Fifth Amendment grounds. The AP says the three are punishing the news agency for editorial decisions they oppose. The White House says the AP is not following an executive order to refer to the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America.

Business



Within six months, the cost of electric vehicles will be equivalent to the cost of petrol vehicles

NITIN GADKARI | UNION ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS MINISTER

ONLINE GAMING SECTOR TO SHINE

The online gaming sector in India is expected to grow by over two-fold to \$9.1 billion by 2029, largely dominated by real money games, a joint report by real money gaming platform WinZO Games and IEIC said Wednesday



of the day quote

This year, Malaysia is the chair of ASEAN and the coordinator of the ASEAN-India trade agreement. We are hoping that our aspirations of concluding the trade agreement review by the end of this year will be realized

YB LIEW CHIN TONG | DEPUTY MINISTER OF INVESTMENT, TRADE AND INDUSTRY, MALAYSIA

We expect a modest recovery in volume as moderating food inflation, easing interest rates and tax relief measures announced in the Union Budget for the next fiscal encourage urban demand. Rural demand will grow steadily given continuing allocation to welfare schemes and a hike in minimum support prices

ANUJ SETHI | SENIOR DIRECTOR, CRISIL RATINGS

With India hosting over 55 per cent of the world's GCCs and projected to reach a market size of USD 110 billion by 2030, these centres have become critical nodes for organisations seeking agility, cost efficiency, and access to a vast talent pool

SACHIN ALUG | CEO, NLB SERVICES

SHORT TAKES

Dollar sales boost ₹

Mumbai: The Indian rupee strengthened Wednesday, touching a near two-month high, supported by dollar sales from foreign banks and seasonal inflows even as its regional peers dipped ahead of the US Federal Reserve's policy decision. The rupee ended the session at 86.4425 against the US dollar, slightly higher than Tuesday's close at 86.57. Earlier in the day, the currency hit 86.4250, a peak since January 27. While the rupee has been on a winning run this week, traders have also pointed to likely passive absorption of dollar inflows by the central bank, probably to replenish the forex reserves expended on supporting the rupee over the past few months. The inflows also likely helped the rupee weather a pickup in dollar strength on Wednesday. The greenback was up about 0.3% against major peers, while Asian currencies were mostly lower with the Indonesian rupiah down 0.3% and leading losses.

Jewellery exports fall

Mumbai: India's gems and jewellery exports declined by 23.49 per cent in February at \$2,422.9 million (Rs 21,085,030 crore) compared to the same month of last year following a continued dip in demand in the US and China, the Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) said Wednesday. The overall exports of gems and jewellery stood at \$3,166.66 million (Rs 26,268.6 crore) in the corresponding period of 2024. Gems and jewellery exports from April 2024 till February 2025, showed a dip of 13.43 per cent at \$25,732.72 million (Rs 2,17,148.26 crore) compared to \$29,724.13 million (Rs 2,46,105.96 crore) for the same period previous year.

IHL takes over RCAP

New Delhi: IndusInd International Holdings Ltd (IHL) Wednesday took control of Reliance Capital (RCAP), completing a three-year resolution process after paying off the debt-ridden firm's lenders. IHL has taken over the board of the RCAP and its subsidiaries, and the first meeting of the new board was held Wednesday, sources said.

Relentless outflow

Foreign investors pull \$29bn from Indian stocks since Oct as growth fathers and China beckons

Mumbai, March 19: Global investors are deserting India's stock market, selling shares at a record pace to buy Chinese stocks instead, in a dramatic reversal of fortunes for the Asian giants over the last six months. A hit to earnings from high inflation and interest rates have chipped 13% off Indian stocks from September's record high, wiping out \$1 trillion in market value, while China's promise of stimulative policies lures investor interest.

When China gets flows, India doesn't

JITANIA KANDHARI | DEPUTY CHIEF INVESTMENT OFFICER, MORGAN STANLEY INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT

Foreigners have pulled nearly \$29 billion out of Indian stocks since October, the most in any six-month period, as they turn their backs on a market most investors had embraced for a couple of years. That money has fled to China, where Hong Kong's benchmark Hang Seng Index, home to many major Chinese companies, is up 36% since late September, drawn by bets on artificial intelligence spurred by Chinese startup DeepSeek. For the first time in two years, China has a larger weight than India in the portfolio of Britain's Aubrey Capital Management, which focuses on consumer companies. Profits have been locked in from the last couple of years of strong performance by Indian stocks, said its portfolio manager, Rob Brewis, adding, "Some of that has gone to China, some to Southeast Asia



Note: Percentage change since late-September 2024, all values rebased to zero. Source: LSEG

and elsewhere." While asset managers such as Morgan Stanley and Fidelity International remain overweight on India, they have trimmed exposure over the last few months to add to bets in China.

Nitin Mathur, associate investment director at Fidelity International, said the firm has been more cautious on India than in the past, reducing its exposure "a little bit". China's stock market has proved an unlikely sanctuary from the trade war unleashed by US President Donald Trump, as it is relatively cheap and seen poised on the cusp of an economic recovery.

'PRICED FOR PERFECTION' Before the steep selloff in Indian stocks over the past six months, investors had scrambling to keep up with the strong performance that carried its valuation to eye-watering levels. But slowing corporate earnings and an economy seen

growing in the current financial year at the slowest pace in four have hurt sentiment, investors say.

Earnings of companies in the blue-chip Nifty 50 index grew 5% in the quarter to December, which represented a third straight quarter of single-digit increases after two years of double-digit jumps, brokerage data show.

India's equity market was "priced for perfection", so a little bit of a wobble on earnings had set off a slide, said Anwiti Bahuguna, chief investment officer of global asset allocation at Chicago-based Northern Trust Asset Management. Even after the selloff, India's BSE Sensex is priced at 20 times its projected 12-month earnings, a common valuation metric, versus 7 times for the Hang Seng Index, LSEG data shows. "There is still room for money to come out of India," said.

Over \$1tn wiped from Indian benchmark since September high

Indices rise for third straight session

Mumbai, March 19: Stock markets closed higher for the third straight day Wednesday driven by fresh FII buying and gains in consumer durables, capital goods and realty shares ahead of the key US Fed policy to be announced later in the day. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 147.79 points or 0.20 per cent to settle at 75,449.05. During the day, it advanced 267.12 points or 0.35 per cent to 75,568.38. In three days, the BSE benchmark gauge has jumped 1,620.14 points or 2.19 per cent.

Investors' wealth soars ₹13.82 lakh crore as markets end in green

The NSE Nifty rose 73.30 points or 0.32 per cent to 22,907.60. From the Sensex pack, Tata Steel, Zomato, Power Grid, UltraTech Cement, IndusInd Bank, Larsen & Toubro, Adani Ports, NTPC, State Bank of India and Reliance Industries were among the major gainers. On the other hand, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, ITC, Infosys, Sun

Pharma, Maruti, HCL Tech, and Nestle were among the laggards. As many as 3,018 stocks advanced while 1,033 declined and 115 remained unchanged on the BSE. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers Tuesday as they bought equities worth Rs 694.57 crore, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DII) also bought equities worth Rs 2,534.75 crore. On Tuesday, the Sensex jumped 1,131.31 points or 1.53 per cent to settle at 75,301.26. The Nifty surged 325.55 points or 1.45 per cent to 22,834.30.

Hyundai, Honda to hike vehicle prices from April

The move comes after Maruti Suzuki, Kia and Tata Motors also announced hiking vehicle prices from next month

New Delhi, March 19: Hyundai Motor India and Honda Cars India Wednesday joined the list of automakers planning to hike prices of vehicles from April, second time this year, to partially offset the impact of rising input costs and higher operational expenses. In a statement Hyundai Motor India Ltd (HMIL) said it will hike prices of its vehicles by up to 3 per cent effective in April 2025. The quantum of price increase will vary based on the variants and models. The price increase is due to rising input costs, increased commodity prices and higher operational expenses, amongst other reasons, it added. "At Hyundai Motor India Ltd, we strive to absorb rising costs to the extent possible, ensuring minimal impact on



our customers. However, with the sustained increase in operational expenses, it has now become imperative to pass on a part of this cost escalation through a minor price adjustment," HMIL Whole-time Director and Chief Operating Officer Tarun Garg said. The price increase will be effective in April 2025, he said, adding, "We remain committed to making consistent internal efforts to minimise any future impact on our valued customers." The company had, in January, hiked prices of its vehicles by up to Rs 25,000 across its model range due to an increase in input costs, adverse exchange rate and rise in logistics costs.

Vodafone Idea rolls out 5G

New Delhi, March 19: Vodafone Idea Wednesday launched its 5G services in India, starting from Mumbai with five more cities up next, as the telco bets on the new offering to arrest subscriber churn and place it on a firm footing against larger rivals in the world's second-largest telecom market. For now, Vodafone Idea's 5G services will be offered as an unlimited add-on for plans starting at Rs 299 though the duration of this 'introductory offer' has not been specified. The launch assumes significance as the troubled telco looks to regain ground in the Indian telecom market, where 5G networks were announced in October 2022. Today, VIL's larger rivals Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel dominate the market with a significant 5G base - Jio had 170 million 5G subscribers as of December 2024, and Bharti Airtel's user count stood at 120 million. VIL said it is eyeing a 100 cities/town rollout across 17 circles over the next three years and has sufficient capital to forge ahead with its expansion blueprint. "Following the launch in Mumbai, we will expand our 5G

services to Delhi, Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Patna and Mysore by April. Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kerala and Chennai will be included in the next phase of our rollout," Jagbir Singh, Chief Technology Officer (CTO) of Vodafone Idea, told PTI. VIL will continue to cover additional cities based on penetration of 5G devices and service demand, he added. Singh, however, did not divulge the extent of coverage and users it is targeting in the first year of the 5G launch.



We are keen to get existing and potential 5G device consumers to experience our launch offering, and with millions of consumers today on the Rs 299 and above data plans we would want this cohort of consumers to experience our worry-free 5G offering

JAGBIR SINGH | CTO, VODAFONE IDEA

Gold rallies ₹700 to hit fresh record high of ₹91,950/10 grams

New Delhi, March 19: Gold prices advanced Rs 700 to reach a new lifetime high of Rs 91,950 per 10 grams in the national capital Wednesday on the back of continued buying by jewellers ahead of wedding season, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Besides, increased tensions in the Middle East and concerns about the US economic slowdown have kept the demand for safe-haven assets intact. The precious metal prices of 99.9 per cent purity soared by Rs 700 to hit a fresh all-time high of Rs 91,950 per 10 grams. It had concluded at Rs 91,250 per 10 grams Tuesday. Gold prices of 99.5 per cent purity also rallied by Rs 700 to hit a record high of Rs 91,500 per 10 grams. Trading saw increased buying by local jewellers to meet festive and wedding season demand and a firm trend in the overseas markets mainly lifted gold prices to this year's highest level. In futures trade, gold futures for April delivery rose by Rs 19 to Rs 88,745 per 10 grams. In the morning trade, it climbed Rs 288 to breach the psychological level of Rs 89,000 per 10 grams.

Tennis 'cartel' in soup

Players group founded by Novak Djokovic files an antitrust suit against tennis organizers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Miami Gardens, March 19: Calling the groups in charge of professional tennis "a cartel," the players' association co-founded by Novak Djokovic filed an antitrust lawsuit against the women's and men's tours, the International Tennis Federation and the sport's integrity agency in federal court in New York.

The suit by the Professional Tennis Players' Association says the organizations that run the sport hold "complete control over the players' pay and working conditions" and their setup constitutes "textbook violations of state and federal law" that "immunize professional tennis from ordinary market forces and deny professional tennis players and other industry participants their right to fair competition."

The lawsuit seeks a jury trial and wants players to gain access to more earnings, arguing that the governing bodies that oversee the four Grand Slam tournaments — Wimbledon, the U.S. Open, the French Open and the Australian Open — and other professional events "cap the prize money tournaments award and limit players' ability to earn money off the court."

On top of the case in U.S. District Court, the PTPA made filings with the European Commission in Brussels and the Competition Markets Authority in London.

"There is a complete and utter lack of competition that exists in professional tennis, and we believe by filing these actions, we will ultimately inject the kind of competition that will be fair to the players, to the fans and actually to the people



(who) operate the system," said Jim Quinn, a lawyer working with the PTPA.

"It's going to require a restructuring," Quinn said.

The WTA Tour and ATP Tour issued separate statements Tuesday saying they would "vigorously" defend themselves.

The WTA said it has "committed to a \$400 million increase in player compensation" in recent years and labeled the PTPA action a "baseless legal case" that is "regrettable and misguided." The ATP touted a "major increase in player compensation" that created a jump of "\$70 million in the past five years," and called the PTPA's case "entirely without merit."

"The PTPA has consistently chosen division and distraction through misinformation over progress," the ATP's statement

said. "Five years on from its inception in 2020, the PTPA has struggled to establish a meaningful role in tennis, making its decision to pursue legal action at this juncture unsurprising."

The International Tennis Integrity Agency — which investigates and adjudicates doping and corruption — said it noted the PTPA's action but did not offer any direct reaction to the case itself.

A spokesman said the ITF "will take the appropriate time to consider our response."

The PTPA was founded by 24-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic and Vasek Pospisil in August 2020, aiming to offer representation for players who are independent contractors in a largely individual sport. One of the goals made clear along the way was to become a sort

of full-fledged union that negotiates collective bargaining agreements like those that exist in team sports.

"Beyond just the economics, we see ... player welfare is completely disregarded in everything, from the tour schedule to anti-competitive practices, to abusing our rights around name, image, likeness, Pospisil said.

He is one of the players listed as a plaintiff; Djokovic is not. Players whose names are attached to the U.S. lawsuit include 2022 Wimbledon runner-up Nick Kyrgios, Sorana Cirstea, Varvara Gracheva, Reilly Opelka, Tennyis Sandgren and Nicole Melichar-Martinez.

PTPA executive director Ahmad Nassar said Djokovic is "certainly very involved, very up to speed.

Assam boxers being stopped from competing in Nationals: BFI chief

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 19: Boxing Federation of India President Ajay Singh Wednesday alleged that Assam boxers, including Olympic bronze-winner Lovlina Borgohain, are being stopped from participating in the National Championships by suspended BFI secretary general Hemanta Kalita, who refuted the charge.

In an "emergency press conference" here, Singh said that the Tokyo Games medallist in the 69kg category is keen to participate in the marquee domestic event starting Thursday in Greater Noida but has been asked to withdraw by Kalita.

Kalita, who has been found guilty of financial mismanagement in an inquiry conducted by former Delhi High Court judge Sudhir Kumar Jain, holds the secretary's position in the Assam body.

"Assam is discouraging players from participating in the women's Nationals," Singh said.

"Lovlina has recorded a video of support. But officers have received a call that she has been asked by Hemanta Kalita not to participate. Because she owes a lot to Assam boxing, she is reconsidering her participation.

"We have been hearing that a lot of tickets are being cancelled (both) train and air," Singh added. However, Kalita said the charges were baseless and the dispute was over the dates of the tournament.

"This is all being done to malign me. I have done no such thing. Since the beginning, state units were unhappy with the dates of the women's nationals. Several states had written to BFI as well," Kalita told PTI.

The BFI has received entries from 22 states but it remains to be seen how many boxers turn



We have been hearing that a lot of tickets are being cancelled (both) train and air

AJAY SINGH | PRESIDENT, BFI

up for the National Championships, being held after close to two years. Talking about his suspension, Kalita maintained his innocence and said he will be contesting the decision.

"I will be challenging this. If any misappropriation of funds has occurred, the president should be held guilty, as he is the one who signs all the cheques.

"Additionally, it was agreed during the Executive Committee meeting that the Ethics Committee would investigate the matter. Why, then, was a judge appointed for the task?" he questioned.

Singh, however, insisted that he was well within his rights to call for an investigation.

"When I was asked by the SAI (Sports Authority of India) to look into the complaint, I took the matter to the Executive Committee and said we need to have a proper investi-

gation and they (secretary and treasurer) agreed. They were part of the meeting and agreed.

"The minutes of the EC meeting are available and there was no request for the inquiry to go to the Ethics Commission," Singh said.

Kalita was among the four candidates for the president's post in the soon-to-be-held BFI polls but his nomination was rejected on the grounds that he needs to undergo a cooling off period after serving two terms, in different roles, in the body.

In another development, the Delhi High Court stayed BFI's order allowing only elected members of its affiliated states to represent their respective units in the polls. Singh said BFI will appeal against the decision.

Former sports minister Anurag Thakur had been deemed ineligible to contest for the presidential election because of the the March 7 notice. Thakur's name was brought into reckoning by the Himachal Pradesh body but it was rejected as he was not an elected member, according to the March 7 order.

SWISS OPEN

Srikanth beats Prannoy, Isharani upsets Aakarshi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Basel, Mar 19: Kidambi Srikanth beat compatriot HS Prannoy in two hard-fought games to enter the men's singles second round of the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament here Wednesday.

The world No 49 Srikanth, who won 23-21 23-21, was better at crucial points against world No 28 Prannoy in both games as the contest lasted 48 minutes.

Srikanth now enjoys a 7-3 head-to-head record against Prannoy in international competitions.

In another men's singles match, world No 64 Shankar Subramanian beat Magnus Johansson 21-5 21-16 in just 38 minutes.

In another all-India affair at the St Jakobshalle Indoor arena, unfancied Isharani Barua, ranked 78th in BWF list, upset fellow Indian Aakarshi Kashyap in a first-round women's singles match that lasted 68 minutes.

Isharani won 18-21 21-17 22-20 to enter the second round of the USD 250,000 event.

Chhetri scores as India beat Maldives 3-0 in friendly

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Shillong, March 19: The talismanic Sunil Chhetri scored on his international comeback to lead India to a commanding 3-0 victory over Maldives in a football friendly here Wednesday, helping the home side snap their 12-match winless streak that started in November 2023.

Rahul Bheke gave India the lead in the 35th minute before Liston Colaco made it 2-0 in the 66th minute.

The 40-year-old Chhetri, who returned to the national team after hanging his boots in May last year, made it a memorable day as he scored India's third with a glancing header in the 77th minute for his 95th international goal.

Captain Chhetri, who was denied by the Maldives goalkeeper in the 47th minute, was substituted in the 82nd minute.

This was India's first win in 16 months and also first under Manolo Marquez who was made the head coach in July last year. India's last win was against Kuwait (1-0) in their 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifying round match in Kuwait City on November 16, 2023.



Before Wednesday, India under Marquez lost once and drew thrice.

The match served as a dress rehearsal for the all-important AFC Asian Cup qualifier against Bangladesh at the same venue on March 25.

Chhetri came out of his international retirement earlier this month to help the team successfully navigate the qualifiers for the AFC Asian Cup, starting with the March 25 clash.

Maldives are ranked 162 in the world, 36 places below India (126).

This is also Shillong's first international match.

BCCI contemplates lifting saliva ban in IPL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 19: In a move that could have global impact, the BCCI is considering lifting the ban on applying saliva on the ball in the Indian Premier League beginning March 22.

The proposal has been discussed at length internally within the BCCI and will be floated to captains of all IPL teams in a meeting in Mumbai Thursday.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) had banned the age-old practice of applying saliva to shine the ball as a precautionary measure during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, the ICC made the ban permanent.

The IPL too included the ICC ban in its playing conditions in the aftermath of the pandemic but its guidelines are outside the purview of the sport's governing body.

"Using saliva on the ball was part of the essence of the game until COVID hit. Now that we don't have that threat anymore, we feel there is no harm in lifting the ban on saliva in the IPL.

"We understand that it makes a bigger impact in red ball cricket but even if it can help



DRS to be extended to height and off-side wides

The IPL is set to approve the use of DRS for height wides and wides outside the off-stump. "Hawk eye and ball tracking will be used to decide on the height wides and wides outside the off-stump. The team would be allowed to review if the on-field umpire has given a wide ball for height. If that team thinks it was not high enough for a wide, they can take the DRS," the official added.

bowlers a bit in the white ball game, it should be allowed in the IPL, which is a trend setting tournament. Let's see what the captains decide tomorrow," a top BCCI official told PTI.

If the ban is revoked in the IPL,

the ICC too might be forced to review its stance on the subject.

On the sidelines of the ICC Champions Trophy, senior India pacer Mohammed Shami had spoken about the need to use saliva on the ball in what

has become a predominantly batters' game.

The likes of Vernon Philander and Tim Southree had backed Shami's call.

"We keep appealing that we should be allowed to use saliva so that we can bring reverse swing back into the game and it becomes interesting," Shami had said during the 50-over event in Dubai, where India emerged victorious.

As per the existing rules, if it is a first instance of applying saliva on the ball, the fielding team's captain is summoned and issued a first warning.

"If it is the second instance during an innings, summon the captain of the fielding side and issue a second and final warning to the captain of the fielding side that any further such offence by any member of the team during the innings shall result in that member of the team being fined by BCCI.

"If it is the third or subsequent instance inform the player who has applied saliva to the ball on that occasion that he is subject to a fine, payable to BCCI, of the lesser of 10 lakh or 25% of his match fee," states last year's IPL playing conditions.

Kabaddi world cup in UK 'illegal'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 19: The International Kabaddi Federation (IKF) Wednesday declared that the World Cup being held in London is not an "authorised" event and asked the sport's Indian apex body to act against the team that had gone to take part in the tournament.

Kabaddi World Cup 2025 is being held in the West Midlands from March 17 to 23. The tournament is being hosted by the England Kabaddi Association and the British Kabaddi League (BKL) under the aegis of World Kabaddi Federation, a parallel international governing body of the sport.

"The ongoing so-called Kabaddi World Cup 2025 in the UK conducted under the aegis of the so-called World Kabaddi Federation has not been authorized by the International Kabaddi Federation, that is the international governing body



for the sport of Kabaddi as recognized by the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA)," the IKF said in a statement.

"The OCA, the IKF, and the Asian Kabaddi Federation (AKF) also oversee and supervise the conduct of the medal competition of kabaddi for men and women at the Asian Games

since 1990, and other international kabaddi tournaments."

A similar incident happened in 2020 when an 'Indian team' had visited Pakistan to take part in a Kabaddi World Cup even as the Amateur Kabaddi Federation of India (AKFI) and the sports ministry said that they had not cleared any team

for the tournament.

Interestingly, the AKFI was suspended by the IKF in 2024 as the Indian federation was not having an elected body since 2018. A court-appointed administrator, (retired) Justice SP Garg, has been overseeing the organisation for more than five years now.

Recently, the Supreme Court had asked Garg to hand over the AKFI administration to an elected body.

The IKF is headed by India's Vinod Kumar Tiwari who was elected in 2022 for a four-year term. The IKF said that the Indian team that had gone for the Kabaddi World Cup in the United Kingdom was not sent by the AKFI, the national body of the sport.

"The OCA, IKF, AKF, and the Amateur Kabaddi Federation of India (AKFI) have no dealings or engagement with the so-called World Kabaddi Federation or any of its activities."

Odisha to host Kho Kho Sr Nationals

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Puri, March 19: The 57th Senior National Kho Kho Championship is set to take place from March 31 to April 5 here at the District Sports Complex, under the aegis of the Kho Kho Federation of India (KKFI).

The championship will feature 74 teams in total, including teams from 30 states and key institutional teams such as Airport Authority, Railways, BSF, Maharashtra Police and CISF.

Sudhanshu Mittal, president of the Kho Kho Federation of India, highlighted the federation's commitment to elevating Kho Kho to international prominence. He stated, "Our vision extends beyond national boundaries; we are dedicated to transforming Kho Kho into a global sport. The upcoming championship in Puri is a testament to our ongoing efforts to modernise the game and showcase its dynamic appeal."



Odisha has been making steady progress in promoting Kho Kho. A Kho Kho Academy and High-Performance Center have been operational in Puri for the past ten months, providing specialised training to emerging players. Additionally, a proposal to build a dedicated Kho Kho stadium at Kalinga Stadium, Bhubaneswar is awaiting final approval.

Pradyumna Mishra, general secretary, Odisha Kho Kho As-

sociation said, "We are excited to host the 57th Senior National Kho Kho Championship in Puri, a city with a growing sporting culture. This event will showcase top-tier talent and further elevate the popularity of Kho Kho in India."

With the championship set to bring together the best Kho Kho talent in the country, the event is expected to be a major step in further developing the sport in Odisha and beyond.