



## Sam's perspective

Actor Samantha Ruth Prabhu, known for her outspoken views, shares her perspective on what success truly means to her

LEISURE | P2



## Justice Varma transferred

Amid the cash row, Justice Yashwant Varma of the Delhi HC transferred to his parent Allahabad High Court Friday

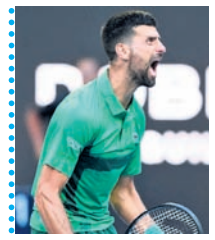
NATIONAL | P9



## Wealth rises in FY25

Dalal Street investors become richer by ₹25,90L-cr in FY 2024-25, with the BSE benchmark Sensex climbing over 5 per cent

BUSINESS | P11



## Djokovic's new feat

Djokovic becomes the oldest man to reach a Masters 1000 semi-final after Sebastian Korda in Miami Open

SPORTS | P12

# Quake rocks Myanmar, Thailand; over 150 dead

# 2,483 SC/ST atrocity cases in nine months

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Bangkok, March 28:** A powerful earthquake rocked Myanmar and neighbouring Thailand Friday, destroying buildings, bridges and a monastery. At least 144 people were killed in Myanmar, where photos and video from two hard-hit cities showed extensive damage. At least 10 died in the Thai capital, where a high-rise under construction collapsed.

The full extent of death, injury and destruction was not immediately clear — particularly in Myanmar, one of the world's poorest countries. It is embroiled in a civil war, and information is tightly controlled.

"The death toll and injuries are expected to rise," the head of Myanmar's military government, Senior Gen Min Aung Hlaing said as he announced on television that at least 144 people were killed and 730 others



**DEVASTATION:** People stand near the site of a collapsed building in Bangkok, Thailand, Friday

were injured in his country. In Thailand, Bangkok city authorities said 10 people were killed, 16 injured and 101 missing from three construction sites, including the

high-rise. The 7.7 magnitude quake struck at midday, with an epicentre near Mandalay, Myanmar's second-largest city. Aftershocks followed,

one of them measuring a strong 6.4 magnitude. In Mandalay, the earthquake reportedly brought down multiple buildings, including one of the city's

largest monasteries. Photos from the capital city of Naypyidaw showed rescue crews pulling victims from the rubble of multiple buildings used to house civil servants.

Myanmar's government said blood was in high demand in the hardest-hit areas. In a country where prior governments sometimes have been slow to accept foreign aid, Min Aung Hlaing said Myanmar was ready to accept assistance. The United Nations allocated USD 5 million to start relief efforts.

But amid images of buckled and cracked roads and reports of a collapsed bridge and a burst dam, there were concerns about how rescuers would even reach some areas in a country already enduring a humanitarian crisis.

"We fear it may be weeks before we understand the full extent of destruction caused by this earthquake," said Mohammed Riyas, the

International Rescue Committee's Myanmar director. Myanmar is in an active earthquake belt, though many of the tremors happen in sparsely populated areas, not cities like those affected Friday. The US Geological Survey, a government science agency, estimated that the death toll could top 1,000.

In Thailand, a 33-story building under construction crumpled into a cloud of dust near Bangkok's popular Chatuchak market, and onlookers could be seen screaming and running in a video posted on social media. Vehicles on a nearby freeway came to a stop.

"It's a great tragedy," Deputy Prime Minister Suriya Juangroongruangkit said after viewing the site, adding that there was hope that there were still survivors.

The city's elevated rapid transit system and subway shut down. **MORE P10**

Odisha continues to grapple with rising instances of atrocities against vulnerable tribal communities and caste-based violence, if the figures on atrocities against SC and ST members as disclosed in the Assembly by minister Nityananda Gond is any indication. In just nine months, the state has recorded a whopping 2,483 of such cases, with coastal districts reporting a majority of the incidents. Significantly, Odisha remains one of the five states that receive the majority of funds from the Centre to prevent atrocities against members of SCs and STs. Experts blame poor implementation of the Act and low conviction rate - 16.1% in case of SCs and 19.6% for STs - as reasons behind the rise of such cases

AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, March 28:** A total of 2,483 cases of atrocity on people in the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) categories have been recorded in various police stations of Odisha in the last nine months, a minister informed

the Assembly Friday. These cases were registered between June 2024 and February 2025 under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, said Nityananda Gond, Minister for ST and SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare in a written reply to a query from BJD MLA Sanjib Kumar Mallick. As per data provided by the minister, the majority of the cases of atrocity on SCs and STs were reported in Jajpur district. While 269 such cases were registered in Jajpur, 159 cases were recorded in Cuttack Rural police district and 157 in Jagatsinghpur district. Similarly, Bolangir district reported 156 cases, followed by Puri (153), Bhubaneswar Urban police district (138), Bhadrak (126), Kendrapara (125), and Mayurbhanj (100). The remaining police districts reported less than 100 cases each during the last nine months, he said. During the period, an average of 218 to 316 such cases were registered every month.

## 2% DA hike for Central government employees

**New Delhi:** The Union Cabinet Friday increased the Dearness Allowance (DA) by 2 percentage points effective from January 1 this year, benefitting nearly 1.15 crore Central government employees and pensioners. The Union Cabinet has approved the release of an additional instalment of DA to Central government employees and Dearness Relief to pensioners with effect from January 1, 2025.

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



No earthquake here. Those are just the venues where comedians used to perform

## Gold breaches ₹92K mark

**New Delhi, March 28:** Gold prices rallied by ₹1,100 to hit a fresh peak of ₹92,150 per 10 gm in the national capital Friday amid rise in precious metal rates in the overseas markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had finished at ₹91,050 per 10 gm Thursday.

In FY25, gold prices have increased by ₹23,730 or 35 per cent from ₹68,420 per 10 gm April 1 last year.

Continuing the momentum for the third straight session, gold of 99.5 per cent purity jumped by ₹1,100 to hit a lifetime high of ₹91,700 per 10 gm. It had concluded at ₹90,600 per 10 gm in the previous market close.

"Gold prices continues the bullish momentum and set a new record high Friday. The gold rise is being driven by the fear of an escalating global trade war and its implications for economic development," Saumil Gandhi,



Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

Silver prices surged by ₹1,300 to trade near a record high at ₹1,03,000 per kg against Thursday's closing level of ₹1,01,700 per kg.

On March 19, the white metal prices hit a record high of ₹1,03,500 per kg. Meanwhile, gold futures for April delivery appreciated by ₹542 to ₹88,926 per 10 grams on the Multi Commodity Exchange.

"Gold prices continued to trade higher in the spot market as tariff concerns persisted, keeping buying interest intact," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said.

## PK Jena appointed OERC chairperson

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, March 28:** The state government Friday appointed former chief secretary Pradeep Jena as chairperson of Odisha Electricity Regulatory Commission (OERC).

The Energy department in a notification said the appointment would be effective from the day Jena, a 1989-batch IAS officer, assumes office. The post of OERC chairperson has been vacant since November 2023 after SC Mohapatra, also a former chief secretary, resigned from the post after being appointed as chief adviser to the Chief Minister's Office (CMO).

Earlier, Jena served as secretary of the Energy department for over six years.

Jena served as a chief secretary from February 26, 2023, to June 30, 2024. Though he was slated to retire from service December 31, 2023, he got a six-month extension because of general and Assembly polls in the state in April-May 2024.

# Pig's head, decapitated rats: A new era of intimidation for Indonesia's journos

When a large box arrived at the office with her name on it, Indonesian investigative journalist Francisca Christy Rosana assumed a friend had sent her a package.

Instead, it contained a stinking, mutilated pig's head with its ears cut off. "I was shocked, I cried, and was immediately evacuated by some of my friends," said Francisca. "I was worried this terror would hurt my family."

The grisly gift was the first in a series of threats aimed at Tempo media in the past week, in what is being seen as a new low amid increasing intimidation of journalists in the country.

Days later, six decapitated rats wrapped in rose-adorned paper were sent to Tempo's Jakarta office.



Online, there was a steady stream of harassment. "Are there enough pig heads? If not I can send more," wrote one menacing user on Tempo's Instagram account.

The threats have led to criticism of the leadership of ex-special forces commander-turned-president, Prabowo Subianto. On the pig's head threat, presidential spokesperson Hasan Nasbi initially suggested

the Tempo journalist to 'just cook it'.

Tempo, one of Indonesia's most critical media outlets, is no stranger to threats. During the decades-long reign of former authoritarian ruler Suharto, its weekly magazine was twice banned.

"Bombs, doxing, hijacking of phone numbers. We've had so many threats in the past," said Bagja Hidayat, Tempo's deputy editor in chief. "For the first time, animals and organs have been used as messengers... It's very scary."

The attacks come weeks after Prabowo stated that some elements of the media had been infiltrated by 'foreign interests' intent on destroying the nation. Bagja says there is no clarity on who is behind the recent threats, but probe is on. In-

augurated in October, Prabowo is wary of the press.

During election campaign, he avoided all but a handful of interviews, and days before the vote was the only presidential candidate to skip an event where candidates pledged their commitment to uphold press freedom.

Ross Tapsell, an expert on Indonesian media at the Australian National University, said, "The incident is also important in the context of worsening attacks on female journalists in south-east Asia, where hyper-masculine, military-leaning leadership encourages more overt displays of misogyny."

The Committee to Protect Journalists described the threats as a 'dangerous and deliberate act of intimidation'.

AGENCIES

यत्किञ्च | OrissaPOST

# BUSINESS EMINENCE AWARDS

5th Edition

5 April 2025 Bhubaneswar

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# leisure



## MEGAN, MGK WELCOME THEIR FIRST CHILD TOGETHER

Megan Fox and ex-Machine Gun Kelly welcomed their first child together. MGK shared the news on social media with a video of their newborn daughter. Engaged in January 2022, the couple split in November, shortly after announcing the pregnancy.

## SMITH GETS A PHILADELPHIAN STREET NAMED AFTER HIM

Will Smith, *The Pursuit of Happyness* actor, gets the honour of having a street named after him in his hometown, Philadelphia. The portion of 2000 N. 59th Street is now to be called as the 'Will Smith Way.'



### FORTUNE FORECAST

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**ARIES**  
Today is a bright day, and the stars foretell success for you. If you find yourself in a creative mood, indulge in some activity that will satisfy the urge. But, Ganesha says, if you are driving alone, exercise a great deal of caution to be on the safe side.

**TAURUS**  
Ganesha is happy to say that you will acquit yourself well in whatever you do or undertake today. You will show outstanding caliber in handling the responsibilities given to you. If you are participating in a competition, you are likely to be way ahead of others.

**GEMINI**  
Maintaining the image you have created in the minds of people, as well as upholding your reputation in society will give you some anxious moments today. You will work hard to improve your social standing, and will get results by the end of the day. It is an auspicious and lucky day for you, says Ganesha.

**CANCER**  
Not a good day for you in terms of fortune and opportunities. You will constantly find yourself in unwanted tricky situations without any fault of yours. You, however, are likely to know what to do in such situations by now, for you have been in too many of those in the past.

**LEO**  
You will get good co-operation from your colleagues and subordinates. In your personal life also you will gain the support of your spouse and your friends. Other people will be accommodating of your problems and will try to solve them for you. Your expenses may increase, leading to some financial worries, says Ganesha.

**VIRGO**  
Today, your soul mate will both give and demand pleasant surprises, says Ganesha. Your business partners may bring in some good news. Take responsibility of your past mistakes and make plans for the days to come. Do not be shy of the advice of loved ones, as it will help you more than hinder.

**LIBRA**  
Sit back and think hard — think about what is it that you really want when it comes to your business enterprises, because there are many ways to go about things at work, and they all shall lead you somewhere different.

**SCORPIO**  
You are in a mood of introspection and analysis, says Ganesha. This is likely to give you a clear vision in the days to come. Your systematic approach towards work will provide you room to think out of the box. Your innovative ideas may bag applause from superiors and bosses.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
You become your own judge today. Through introspection, you try to find you the various causes that lead to troubles in your life. Though it may take time, eventually you achieve what you want and try to find reasonable solutions for the same.

**CAPRICORN**  
It's going to be a day of pleasant surprises. You will try your level best to help people around you, and will find it exceedingly frustrating when the results won't be as expected, says Ganesha. In fact, this may even dampen your spirit and shake your self-confidence.

**AQUARIUS**  
You will come out top in whatever you choose to do, and success will smell honeysuckle sweet! Naturally, recognition and rewards await you. Take your friends to that trendy café; you needn't wait for a reason to party, says Ganesha.

**PISCES**  
Take one cautious step at a time today, says Ganesha. You will discuss intimate matters at home and official matters at work but be careful about whom you trust and deception from someone close might lead to worry and stress in the future. Even though you are an emotional person, lay onus on working with your head over your heart today as people might try to take advantage of your nature and step on your shoulder, feels Ganesha.

## Hrithik turns director



**Mumbai:** Actor Hrithik Roshan is set to turn director for the upcoming film *Krrish 4*, and take the baton from his father Rakesh Roshan for the franchise. The development of the fourth installment of India's biggest superhero franchise has been confirmed by Rakesh Roshan, who has helmed the earlier 3 parts of the franchise. The film is being produced by Yash Raj Films in association with Rakesh Roshan. The Indian superstar Hrithik Roshan will be swinging between the two departments of direction and acting for the film as he says the titular superhero in the franchise. The shooting

for the film is set to begin early next year. Confirming the development Rakesh Roshan said, "I'm passing the baton of the director of *Krrish 4* to my son, Hrithik Roshan, who has lived, breathed and dreamt about this franchise since its inception with me! Hrithik has a clear and a very ambitious vision of taking *Krrish's* journey forward with the audience for the next decades". He further mentioned, "I couldn't be more proud to see him wear the director's hat for a film that means the world to us as a family. 'Krrish' has entertained audiences the world over and Hrithik will now reveal the next chapters of this superhero saga and take the vision I created so many years ago to greater heights".

and

## SAMANTHA'S DEFINITION OF SUCCESS



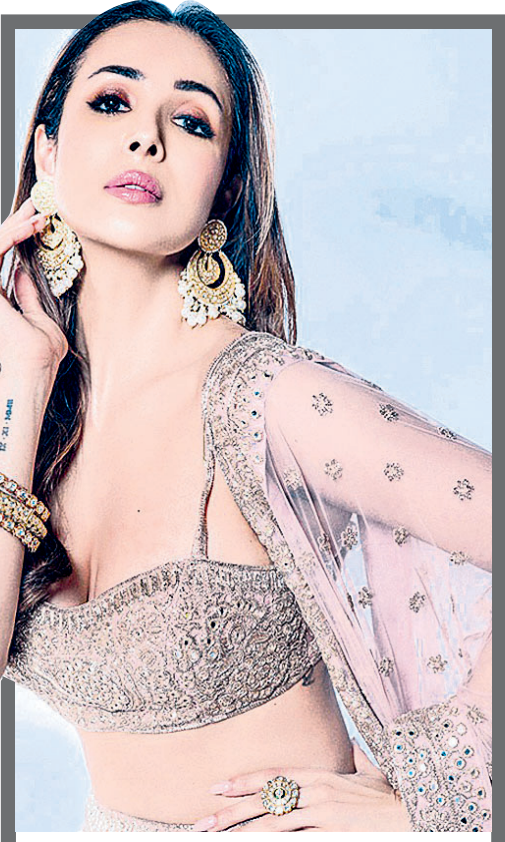
**Mumbai:** Actress Samantha Ruth Prabhu, known for her outspoken views, shared her perspective on what success truly means to her.

The actress, who recently headlined the curtain-raiser event for the 11th edition of the Indian Film Festival of Sydney (IFFS), emphasised that, for women, success is not just about achievements but about breaking free from stereotypes and societal boxes. Samantha highlighted the importance of embracing freedom, wearing multiple hats and challenging outdated notions of what women can or cannot do.

The *Kushi* actress shared, "I have said this before — success, for me, is freedom. I don't wait for others to tell me that I am successful. Success is waking up with the freedom to do what you are passionate about. It is about not being put in a box and not being told what women can or cannot do. It is about wearing multiple hats and doing it well."

Samantha also opened up about her personal and professional journey. The actress reflected on how she has navigated obstacles and continuously shaped her evolving career with determination and authenticity.

She further spoke about stepping into the role of a producer, which she described as an empowering move that gives her the opportunity to champion diverse and meaningful stories.



## Malaika on evolution of music industry

**Mumbai:** Actress-model Malaika Arora has opened up about the evolving dynamics of the music industry.

Addressing why many modern songs fail to leave a lasting impact, she highlighted how social media has significantly shaped today's music scene. She pointed out that while some songs continue to gain massive popularity and even surpass the fame of the films they are featured in, many tracks nowadays are designed with the goal of going viral, especially on platforms like Instagram Reels. Calling it a 'trend', the actress observed that despite this shift, there are still songs that manage to stand out purely because of their appeal — whether or not they contribute to a film's success.

Malaika told the news agency, "I believe that while there are many songs that become extremely popular and even outshine the films they're a part of, a lot of songs today are made with social media in mind. The focus is on creating songs that will go viral, especially through platforms like Instagram reels. It's a trend. But I do think there are still songs that become very popular, whether they help the film or not. It's a mixed bag, but the song itself sometimes becomes more significant than the movie."



## Sara once envied Alia's success

**Mumbai:** Sara Ali Khan recently admitted to feeling envious of Alia Bhatt's career and personal life. During an interview, the *Simmba* actress shared that she felt jealousy when Alia won the National Award and thought Alia's life was perfect, especially since she had a child too. However, Sara acknowledged that she initially "de-humanised" the *Raazi* actress, not considering the challenges

she might have faced to reach her achievements.

Reflecting on this, Sara said, "When Alia got the National Award, I thought, 'Her life is set.' But I didn't know what she went through to get that. We often feel envy without knowing the full story. Envy means blindness." She emphasised the importance of understanding someone's journey rather than just seeing their success.

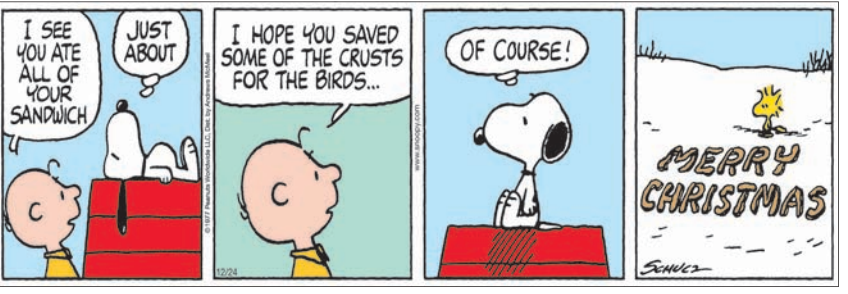
Alia married Ranbir Kapoor in April 2022, and they

welcomed their daughter Raaha Kapoor in November the same year. In October 2023, Alia received a National Award for her role in *Gangubai Kathiawadi*. She will next star in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Love and War* and Shiv Rawail's *Alpha*, set to release December 25.

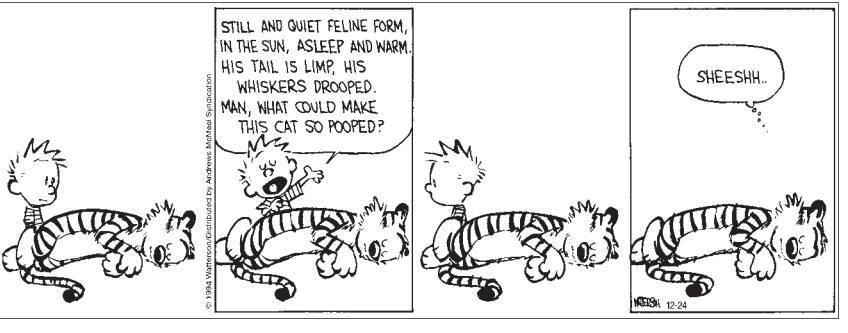
Sara was last seen in *Sky Force* with Akshay Kumar and will next appear in Anurag Basu's *Metro... In Dino*, an anthology film slated for a July 4 release, featuring an ensemble cast.



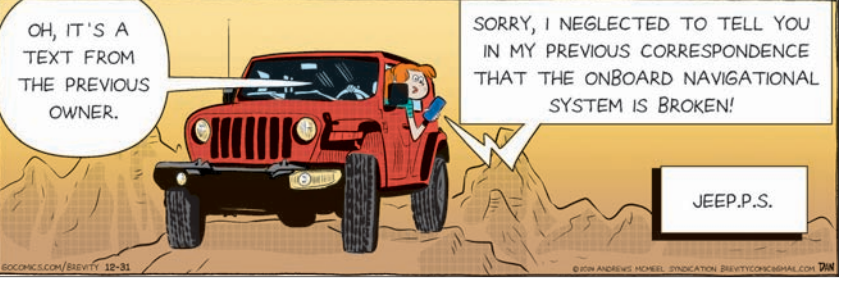
### PEANUTS



### CALVIN AND HOBBS

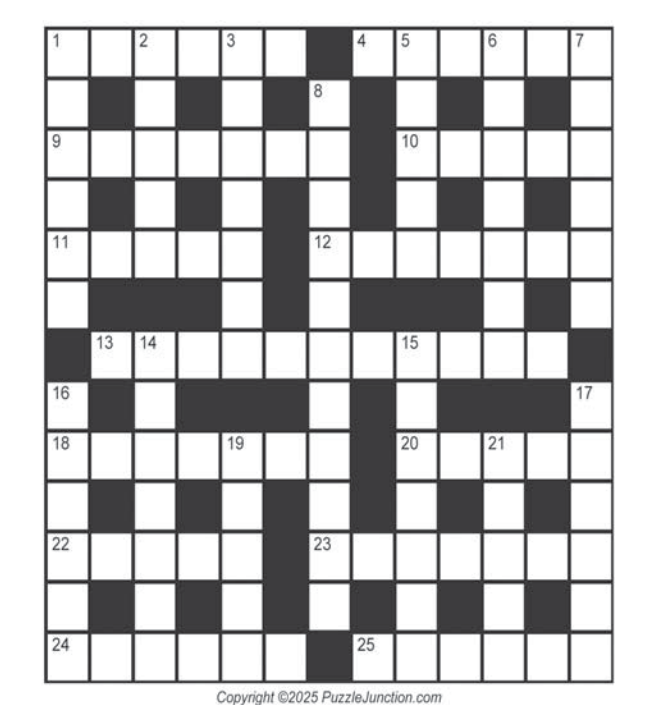


### BREVITY



### FUN POST

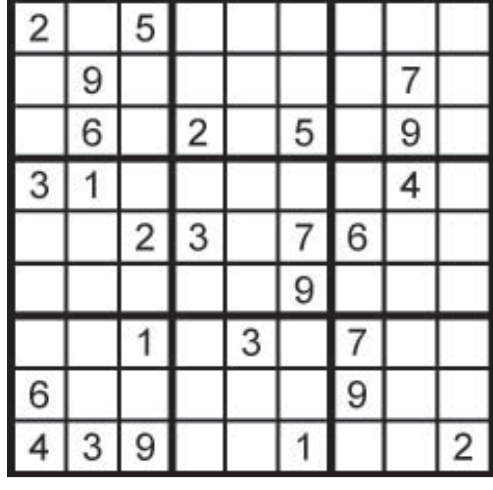
### CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Barbarous
  - 4 Sound property
  - 9 Germ
  - 10 It doesn't hold water
  - 11 Museum piece
  - 12 Repugnant
  - 13 Eyesight problem
  - 18 Antediluvian
  - 20 Furious
  - 22 Cut corners
  - 23 Kind of sale
  - 24 Harasses
  - 25 Bed linen
  - 7 English cathedral city
  - 8 Correctional institution
  - 14 Department
  - 15 Victory
  - 16 Medicinal shrub
  - 17 Alcove
  - 19 Drain
  - 21 Memorable saying
- Down**
- 1 Depressing
  - 2 Outspoken
  - 3 Italian dumpling
  - 5 Haven
  - 6 Ineffective

### 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

## downtown

## Govt to fill 10K teacher posts in high schools

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, March 28:** School and Mass Education Minister Nityananda Gond Friday informed the Assembly that the state government will fill 10,000 vacant teaching positions in the high schools across the state in near future.

Responding to a query raised by BJD MLA Byomkesh Ray, Gond said that a total of 6,025 teacher posts remain vacant out of 40,166 sanctioned posts in the high schools across the state.

This is part of the state government's broader initiative to enhance the quality of education by addressing the shortage of teachers in government schools.

The minister also highlighted that over 18,000 teachers have already been appointed since the BJP government assumed office, further bolstering the teaching workforce. The upcoming recruitment will include 1,375 Post Grad-



uate Teacher (PGT) positions in various government and upgraded higher secondary schools, along with 1,061 PGT posts in aided higher secondary schools.

On Chandabali Assembly constituency, Gond revealed that 163 teacher posts are vacant across 327 schools there. Efforts are underway to address these vacancies through new appointments and promotions.

In addition to teacher recruitment, the minister shared positive developments regarding the state's school dropout rates. He stated that in the past five

years, Odisha has made significant progress in reducing dropout rates. For the 2023-24 fiscal year, primary schools in the state reported a 0% dropout rate. Additionally, dropout rates in upper primary (2%) and secondary schools (12.8%) were considerably lower than national averages of 1.9%, 5.2%, and 14.1%, respectively.

On the issue of reopening of schools, particularly those closed under the previous government's merger scheme, the minister assured the House that the state government would evaluate district-level proposals and consider public demands before making any decisions. He clarified that these schools could be reopened if there are at least 20 children in scheduled areas and 40 children in non-scheduled areas. However, he emphasised that schools closed under the merger scheme would only reopen if the required number of students enrolled.

## CM, Naveen express concern as quake rocks Thailand, Myanmar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, March 28:** Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Naveen Patnaik Friday expressed concern over the devastating earthquake in Myanmar and Thailand.

A 7.7 magnitude earthquake rocked Thailand and Myanmar Friday. More than a dozen people were killed in Bangkok and several others were buried when a high-rise

building under construction collapsed, while Myanmar declared a widespread state of emergency.

The midday tremor with an epicentre near Mandalay, Myanmar's second-largest city, was followed by a strong 6.4 magnitude aftershock.

Taking to X, Majhi said, "Deeply concerned about the impact of the earthquake in Myanmar and Thailand. Praying for the safety of all those affected. #Odisha stands in solidarity with the people of

both nations and fully supports the Hon'ble PM Shri @narendramodi's assurance of assistance. @PMOIndia."

Opposition BJD president Naveen Patnaik in a social media post said: "Deeply concerned to know about the reports of devastation following the powerful #earthquake in #Myanmar and #Thailand. My prayers are with those who lost their loved ones and wishing speedy recovery of those who sustained injuries."

## MLAs demand hike in salary, pension

PNN &amp; AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, March 28:** Four days after the Union government notified about 24 per cent hike in salaries and pensions of MPs, state MLAs, cutting across party lines, Friday requested Speaker Surama Padhy to issue a ruling directing the government to raise their salaries and pensions.

The issue was raised during Zero Hour by Opposition Chief Whip Pramila Mallik, who highlighted the financial hardships faced by ex-MLAs due to inadequate pensions that do not align with inflation.

Calling for an urgent revision, Mallik stressed that the last salary revision for MLAs took place in 2017. Her demand was supported by members from both the Opposition and treasury benches.

Her party colleague Pratap Keshari Deb backed the demand, pointing out that the salaries and pensions of MPs have already been revised recently. He argued that Odisha MLAs should not hesitate to seek a similar revision, noting that the previous government had planned a hike, but its implementation was delayed due to the Model Code of Conduct for the 2024 elections.

Deb said the then Opposition chief whip and present CM Mohan Charan Majhi also

favoured raising the salary and pension of lawmakers.

The state government had formed a committee, led by Udala BJP MLA Bhaskar Madhei, to review the demand for salary and pension hikes.

The panel has already submitted its report with recommendations. Khallikote MLA Purna Chandra Sethy (BJP) also supported the proposal, saying he understands the financial difficulties faced by ex-legislators.

He urged the Speaker to direct the government to implement the Madhei Committee's recommendations retroactively from June 2024. The salary of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha members was recently raised to Rs 1.24 lakh per month from Rs 1 lakh, whereas the daily allowance was increased to Rs 2,500 from Rs 2,000 earlier. Similarly, the pension of former MPs has been increased to Rs 31,000 per month from Rs 25,000 at present.

Odisha MLAs have a basic salary of Rs 35,000 and Rs 65,000 in allowances, excluding travel reimbursements and session attendance perks, while legislators in neighbouring Telangana earn a total of Rs 2.75 lakh per month. Maharashtra, Karnataka and Jharkhand also offer their legislators more than Rs 2 lakh per month, a sitting MLA said outside the House said.

## Jharsuguda hottest

**Bhubaneswar:** Heatwave conditions prevailed in several parts of the state Friday as 17 places recorded temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius with Jharsuguda town the hottest place in the state at 43 degrees Celsius. A bulletin issued by the Bhubaneswar Meteorological Centre said Sambalpur recorded a maximum temperature of 41.6 degrees Celsius while Hirakud, Bolangir, Titlagarh and Boudh registered temperature of 41.2 degrees Celsius each.

## Two arrested

**Bhubaneswar:** The twin city Commissionerate Police Friday arrested two persons on charges of looting Rs 4.10 lakh cash and valuables from a shop under Khandagiri police limits here March 20, official sources said. Khandagiri inspector in-charge Abhimanyu Das said the accused - Bharat Pandit, 45, and Shakti Prasad Karan, 24 - were earlier arrested by the twin city police for a similar case. "Rs 40,000 cash and an auto rickshaw were seized from their possession," Das said.

## MESMERISING SHOW

Artistes of Nrityadhara Dance Academy perform during an event organised by Central Sanskrit University in collaboration with Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts at IGNCIA in New Delhi



**TALENT FETED:** Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Science & Technology Minister Krushna Chandra Patra felicitates scientist Apramita Chand for her contributions to the field of science, during an event at Lok Seva Bhawan in Bhubaneswar, Friday

## Marine biotech research corridor soon: Majhi

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, March 28:** The state will soon have Odisha Marine Biotechnology Research & Innovation Corridor to strengthen its marine biotechnology sector, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi said Friday.

While attending the 'Scientist Felicitation and Award Ceremony 2023' organised by Odisha Bigyan Academy at Lok Seva Bhawan here, Majhi said Odisha, with its rich biodiversity of flora and fauna, has immense potential for biotechnology research, particularly in the fields of bio-resources and traditional medicine.

"Odisha Marine Biotechnology Research & Innovation Corridor will be a platform through which a roadmap will

be developed for harnessing the bio-potential of the Bay of Bengal along the eastern coast by bringing together various stakeholders, including researchers, philanthropists, entrepreneurs, and policy-makers," he said.

Majhi also announced plans to establish a network of planetariums and science centres to promote education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) across the state. The CM emphasised that scientific advancements should be leveraged to bring about lasting changes that benefit the common man.

He stressed that the primary objective is to position Odisha at the forefront of economic and scientific progress by fostering research at the grassroots and advancing science

and technology in the state.

"If we aspire to grow on the international stage, we must formulate long-term strategies to drive human development through scientific discoveries and innovations," Majhi said.

He highlighted the need to focus on advanced knowledge, skills, and equipment innovation in agriculture, healthcare, energy, education, and environmental sectors to enhance the efficiency of development initiatives.

The CM also acknowledged India's achievements in space science which have established the country as a leading scientific power globally.

Majhi noted that scientific research is evolving rapidly, with artificial intelligence playing a crucial role in advancing science and technology.

He stated that the state government is undertaking several initiatives to promote and develop science and technology.

"As part of our deep tech and frontier technology efforts, we are focusing on innovative fields such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, robotics, and quantum computing," Majhi added.

He congratulated the scientists present at the event, wishing them success in their future endeavours. Majhi expressed his belief that the next generation will revolutionise science, use it to serve the common man, and contribute to its widespread adoption.

On the occasion, the CM presented awards to several distinguished professors who have made significant contributions in the field of science.

## Women safety a 'joke' in Odisha: Khera

PNN &amp; AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, March 28:** Senior Congress leader Pawan Khera Friday claimed that women's safety has turned out to be a 'joke' in Odisha, alleging there is no end to the rise in the crimes against women in the state - both during the previous BJD and the current BJP regimes.

Addressing a presser here, Khera, the AICC Media & Publicity department chairman, and state Congress president Bhakta Charan Das attacked the BJP dispensation for not announcing a House Committee to inquire into the rise in the crimes against women in the state.

Congress MLAs had created a ruckus in the Assembly for the past few days demanding formation of a House Committee to inquire into the alleged rise in crime against women across



the state after the BJP came to power nine months ago. The Speaker suspended for seven days all 14 party legislators in two phases March 25 and 26.

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, however, told the Assembly two days ago that since the BJP came to power in June 2024, crime against women and children, in comparison with the corresponding period

of the previous year, has reduced significantly.

"Women's safety has turned out to be a big joke in Odisha as thousands of women and girls go missing for years together while the government claims to be promoting (Central scheme) Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao," Khera said ridiculing the BJP government at the Centre.

He wondered how women would fulfil their dreams if they fear to go outside their homes.

"Girls fear to go to schools because of the unsafe environment. A 6th standard girl in government school becomes pregnant and the skeleton of another girl of Kandhamal is found in a jungle. There are so many instances," he said.

As many as 44,000 women and girls had gone missing from Odisha when the state was ruled by BJD between 2000 and 2024, while 20,000 others were not found during the last eight

months after the BJP came to power in June last year, Khera claimed.

"It is not a small matter. It is a matter of great concern. Odisha now is among the top four/five states in terms of crimes against women," he asserted.

Khera also described the crimes against women are sins and not just crimes.

"The people of Odisha will punish the state government for the sins it committed. These sins are also being noticed by the God and Maa Subhadra whom we all worship," he said.

All 14 Congress MLAs were suspended from the Assembly for raising the issue of crime against women and demanding formation of a House Committee, Das said.

The party supporters were also beaten up when they held demonstrations Thursday seeking safety for women, claimed the state Congress chief.

## Das questions CM's silence over Gandhi Marg scuffle

AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, March 28:** Congress Friday raised questions on Chief Minister Mohan Majhi's silence over the clash between party supporters and the police, which left several people injured during the 'Vidhan Sabha Gherao' programme Thursday.



Addressing a presser here, state Congress president Bhakta Charan Das also accused DGP YB Khurania of making a political statement on the agitation which turned violent.

Das alleged that the "peaceful agitation" turned violent because of the BJP. Das, who was leading the protest, wondered why the CM, who is also in charge of the Home department, is silent on the issue. Claiming that 40 party workers were injured in the police action during the protest, Das said the state BJP president Thursday evening visited the hospital to enquire about the injured police personnel.

"However, the CM, who holds the Home department, neither visited them nor uttered a single word on the incident", he said.

The Congress leader alleged that the DGP has threatened the Congress party. It is clearly mentioned in the law book that the police can hit batons below the hips, but in this case, the Congress workers sustained serious head injuries, he said, while terming the police action a "serious offence".

Das appealed to the Human Rights Commission to intervene in the incident to give justice to the injured Congress workers.



**SUMMER TREAT:** As daytime temperature soars, a roadside vendor puts up head caps for sale in Cuttack, Friday

PHOTO: BAIKISHORE HOHANY





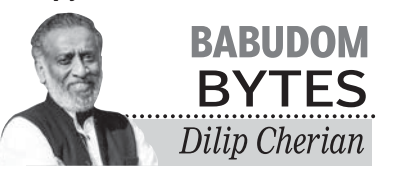


# Bureaucratic Aloofness

What a tangled web! The BJP holds the reins both at the Centre and in Delhi, and you'd think this alignment would make the bureaucratic machinery hum like a well-oiled machine, right? Well, not quite. Recently, Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta penned a letter to Chief Secretary Dharmendra, highlighting a rather curious issue: government officials are giving the cold shoulder to MLA communications. Calls go unanswered, letters unacknowledged, and messages left on read. It's as if Delhi's babus have activated their "Do Not Disturb" mode regarding elected representatives. Now, for the past decade, Delhi's administration has been the stage for a bureaucratic tug-of-war. The question of whether to follow the directives of the Delhi government or the Lieutenant Governor (LG) has been a perennial conundrum. This power struggle has often led to administrative delays, legal battles, and policy gridlocks, affecting governance and public service delivery in the capital. In May 2023, the Centre amended the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) Act of 1991, extending the LG's powers over bureaucratic appointments and transfers. This move was seen as an attempt to tighten the Centre's grip on Delhi's administration. Fast forward to today, and it seems the bureaucracy is still grappling with this new power dynamic. The habit of looking towards the LG for direction appears deeply ingrained, making the transition to a more MLA-responsive approach akin to teaching an old dog new tricks. This bureaucratic aloofness isn't just a matter of hurt egos. When officials sideline MLAs, they effectively sideline the voices of the people those MLAs represent. It's a classic case of the left hand not knowing (or ignoring) what the right hand is doing, leading to inefficiencies and a disconnect between policymaking and ground realities. It's evident that a cultural shift within the bureaucracy is needed—one that respects and acknowledges the role of elected representatives.

## Kerala's DGP race: Who will take the top job?

The stakes are high as the race to become Kerala's next Director General of Police (DGP) intensifies. The state government is searching through a list of senior IPS officers in an attempt to find the ideal candidate, as Shaik Darvesh Saheb is scheduled to retire in June. But as with any important appointment, qualifications and experience aren't the only factors involved. Nitin Agrawal, a 1990-batch officer who just returned from a stint as BSF chief, is the most senior member of the group. Next up is Ravada A Chandrasekhar, a member of the 1991 class who is presently employed with the Intelligence Bureau. Will he even be interested, though, given that he will be retiring next year? The younger generation is not far behind. Kerala's Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau is led by Yogesh Gupta (1993 batch), and the state's Law & Order chief, Manoj Abraham (1994 batch), is renowned for his tech-driven policing. Both 1995-batch officers S Suresh and MR Ajith Kumar are also involved; the latter may lose his chances due to corruption charges. Merit is important, but political factors are often as important. The UPSC will select three names from a shortlist submitted by the state government. The government will then make the final decision. Don't be shocked if political inclinations, prior connections, and personal ties to the ruling party play a role in the selection process, considering Kerala's history of DGP appointments. Speculation is rife in Thiruvananthapuram's power corridors as the final decision is anticipated in June. Who is going to win?



**BABUDOM BYTES**  
Dilip Cherian

## States are holding on to their best babus

There was a time when central deputation was the dream gig for IAS and IFS officers, a plush posting in Delhi, power corridors buzzing with influence, and a chance to shape national policy. But now, big states like Maharashtra and UP seem to be keeping their best officers in the state. Meanwhile, Odisha and AGMU cadre are more than happy to send theirs to the Centre. What gives? The reality is simple: states need talent more than ever. With growing governance challenges—from infrastructure overhauls to welfare schemes—losing top babus to Delhi feels like a self-inflicted wound. Why send your best players to the national team when your own squad is struggling? Then there's the career calculus. Central deputation once promised prestige, but states are now offering equally powerful roles, direct access to top politicians, and cushy post-retirement gigs. Many officers believe that it's better to be a kingmaker at home than deal with the turf wars of Delhi. And let's not forget the political angle. Many state governments don't exactly trust the Centre with their officers. The fear? Once they leave, they might return as Delhi loyalists, not state insiders. Given the Centre-state tensions in today's political climate, that's a real concern. So, while the Centre keeps nudging states to send more officers, states are digging in their heels. And if you're a babu with a choice, the question is clear: why go to Delhi when you can rule your own backyard?

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect

## WISDOM CORNER

- Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself. —GEORGE BERNARD SHAW
- A man must commit a crime at least once in his life-time. Only then will his virtue be recognized. —GIRISH KARNAD
- The worst enemy of truth and freedom in our society is the compact majority. —HENRIK IBSEN

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1461: Edward IV defeated Henry VI for the throne of England in the bloodiest battle of the York-Lancaster conflict known as the Wars of the Roses.
- 1807: German astronomer Wilhelm Olbers discovered the minor planet Vesta, the brightest asteroid in the sky.
- 1867: With the British North America Act, the British colonies of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Canada were united as the Dominion of Canada, and the province of Canada was separated into Quebec and Ontario.
- 1973: American troops evacuated Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) as the United States ended its involvement in the Vietnam War.

# STEM THE NATURE CRISIS

FOCUS CENTRAL BANKS



Nearly \$7 trillion of public and private finance per year supports activities that damage forests, pollute water sources, and destroy biodiversity – 35 times the amount of investment in nature-positive initiatives

The ten most expensive climate disasters of 2024 – the hottest year on record – cost more than \$229 billion, while extreme weather events have left fewer and fewer countries unscathed. Deadly floods in China, Germany, and Kenya, scorching heatwaves in India, prolonged droughts in Brazil, and, most recently, major wildfires in the United States and Ghana highlight the increasingly severe ripple effects of nature degradation and climate change on economies and societies.

The global economy depends on a stable climate and reliable ecosystem services, including the provision of freshwater, healthy air, erosion and flood control, pollination, climate regulation, and carbon sequestration. According to the European Central Bank, nearly 75% of all eurozone bank loans are provided to firms that are highly dependent on at least one of these ecosystem services.

The economic implications of this dependence are profound. In the United Kingdom, environmental degradation could cause a 12% contraction in GDP – worse than the hit caused by COVID-19 – if left unaddressed. An analysis of nature-related risks in Hungary found that in the absence of adequate mitigation strategies, severe drought could double the volume of non-performing loans, increase sovereign debt, and reduce economic output by 4-7% in a single year. It turns out that a stable financial system is highly dependent on nature, and nature is increasingly in crisis.

Although these risks are increasingly well understood by central banks, businesses and financial institutions are not required or incentivized to invest in protecting nature. Central banks and financial supervisors are well placed to change this trajectory and chart a new course toward a

more resilient global economy. These authorities must start adapting their risk assessments and transition plans to the new climate reality and use their ability to influence the financial system through monetary policy, supervision, and regulation. The science is increasingly clear that failure to do so will lead to an increase in food insecurity, forced displacement, and overlapping shocks. These outcomes are already a daily reality in many parts of the world.

A recent report from NatureFinance (of which I am CEO), the ECB, the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, and the University of Minnesota shows that focusing only on climate policies heightens both economic and environmental risks. For example, large-scale, land-based carbon-sequestration measures, such as monoculture afforestation projects, can lead to lower species diversity and significant biodiversity loss. The subsequent loss of pollinators can then affect crop yields, undermining the long-term sustainability of global food production for

both farmers and consumers. Ultimately, this means that well-intentioned but narrowly conceived policies to reduce carbon emissions can inadvertently undermine biodiversity and ultimately worsen rather than mitigate the climate crisis.

Integrating climate and nature policies, alternatively, can help stabilize the agriculture sector, curb biodiversity loss, and limit temperature increases. Though far from a silver bullet, such an approach would go a long way toward breaking what has become a vicious cycle of nature loss and accelerated climate impacts.

Unfortunately, the growing body of evidence concerning how nature degradation and climate change are linked to price stability and the financial system is at odds with the current political zeitgeist. Donald Trump's return to the White House has further accelerated an already growing backlash against environmental, social, and governance (ESG) efforts in the US and Europe. The Federal Reserve recently withdrew from the Network for Greening the

Financial System, a group of more than 100 central banks and supervisors working to improve climate-risk management in the financial sector. Ahead of Trump's inauguration, major commercial banks and asset managers quit climate-action networks, while Texas and other states sued prominent money managers, arguing that they conspired against coal markets by integrating environmental risk into their investment strategies.

The rise of climate denialism on both sides of the Atlantic has pushed ambitious action to protect the financial system from nature- and climate-related shocks off the agenda for now. But central banks and supervisors still have many powerful tools at their disposal to guard against the devastating consequences of environmental disruption. They can require commercial banks and insurers to assess, report on, and stress-test their portfolios for nature- and climate-related risks and dependencies. They can set limits on investment exposure to assets or sectors that are particularly vulnerable to such risks. And they can give preferential treatment to more resilient and adaptive green assets and sectoral strategies in their collateralization frameworks and targeted refinancing operations.

Even as business, financial, and political leaders willfully ignore the overwhelming scientific and economic consensus in their decision-making, central banks can still move us toward an economy that is better protected against the mounting shocks of the nature and climate crisis. All they need to do is fulfill their financial-stability mandate.

The writer is CEO of NatureFinance. ©PROJECT SYNDICATE

## SPECTRUM NATION

# Language row and federal spirit

The imposition of Hindi through the three-language formula in the southern states has sparked a debate, with Tamil Nadu leading the protest due to the withholding of central funds. The protest is quite justified, as these states are quite different from what we understand as Hindi culture. India is a diverse country, and to protect the federal structure, different languages and cultures have to be given their due importance and place.

Tamil Nadu's opposition to Hindi is also consistent with the spirit of the Constitution. Until 1976, education was a state subject, but it was shifted to the Concurrent List during the Emergency. Experts have called this an arbitrary act, which is now being invoked by the Union government, threatening to withdraw funds to the state unless it follows the Centre's directive of teaching Hindi as a third subject.

However, the language row must also be viewed in the context of the state Assembly elections due next year. The ruling DMK faces an anti-in-cumbency factor, and perhaps

whipping up emotions against Hindi may help woo the electorate. Meanwhile, the BJP, both at the centre and state levels, is going all out to explain that it is not imposing any language and does want to make a credible entry. Undoubtedly, the row is going to heat up this season.

For about half a century, from 1965 till 2014, the Union government did not promote Hindi in the non-Hindi speaking states, which was undoubtedly a judicious decision. It now seems strange that the RSS chief, Mohan Bhagwat, has been asking Hindus to shun English, which is an established link language in the country. This can only be described as narrow-minded and parochial at a time when India is advancing in the global arena. One cannot deny the fact that English is recognized as the language of professional advancement and a window to the developed Western world.

Not just Tamil Nadu, but southern states like Karnataka, Kerala, and others take pride in their local languages

and are receptive to suggestions that the North is imposing itself further. Tamil Nadu has been following a two-language policy—Tamil and English—rooted in the state's Dravidian ethos. Its historical resistance to Hindi dates back to the anti-Hindi agitation of the 1960s.

It may be recalled that when the three-language formula was introduced in 1968, Tamil Nadu rejected it, viewing it as an imposition of Hindi. Under Chief Minister CN Annadurai, the state adopted a two-language formula, which has continued.

Though the BJP has been trying to impose Hindi in the country, ostensibly because it feels that promoting the language would further the cause of Hinduism, the RSS joint general secretary, CR Mukund, recently backed a three-language formula without Hindi. According to his formula, it would include learning the mother tongue, regional language, and English, with no reference to Hindi. This timely observation was aimed at countering the DMK's Hindi imposition alle-

gations against the BJP.

This indeed may be the correct approach, as it is necessary to honor the progress and development of the southern states. They have shown the way in promoting education for girls and spreading higher education in rural areas. Comparable data paints a poor picture of school education in the northern states, with dropout rates being far higher than in the southern states.

One cannot deny the fact that English is recognized as the language of professional advancement and a window to the developed Western world. As India moves ahead, there will be a need to give more emphasis to English, which is the dominant language in the world. Thus, keeping this in view, it would be advisable for the Centre to take a judicious decision and resolve the current standoff with the Tamil Nadu government and other southern states amicably, so as not to disturb the culture and traditional values of the South. This would be politically beneficial for the ruling party and help keep the federal spirit intact. INFA



Dhurjati Mukherjee

NOT JUST TAMIL NADU, BUT SOUTHERN STATES LIKE KARNATAKA, KERALA, AND OTHERS TAKE PRIDE IN THEIR LOCAL LANGUAGES

## Judiciary under scanner

Sir, We have only heard of Bhogi as a festival in our state of Tamil Nadu, where we burn undesirable evil things. On the contrary, it pains to see that the discovery of cash bundles in the official residence of a Delhi High Court judge on the day of Holi was burnt in a fire, and yet the smoke is still lingering more than a fortnight later. Justice Yashwant Varma, though he claims to be innocent like many others in similar situations, cannot be taken at face value. One thing is evident: the system of selecting judges by the collegium has long been under controversy. The fate of the National Judicial Appointments Committee Act cannot be set aside, and the common man's faith rests on the transparency of the legal system. In its absence, we cannot prevent judges like Varma from getting involved in murky affairs, and the state of Tamil Nadu might start claiming Holi as Bhogi in the future. There is no smoke without fire, and the apex court must take a prudent decision to keep Justice Varma away from his regular court sittings so that justice can be properly served in this case.

## Don't dare to be funny

Sir, Kunal Kamra's brush with Mumbai's politicians shows that they have an ultra-thin skin. Writer Mary P Poole once said, "He who laughs, lasts." However, with our SS (Shiv Sainiks) going about with the clinical precision of Hitler's most dreaded SS (Schutzstaffel, German for 'Protection Squadron'), one wonders if Kamra will last in his chosen field as a stand-up comic. The violent retaliation following his comments clearly indicates that those in power do not have the stomach for Kamra's comic act. There is a long list of past political leaders who enjoyed jokes at their own expense. Our present leaders, however, seem to lack funny bones. I fervently appeal to all of them to assure us, via your 'Vachan Patras' (manifestos), that you will not bulldoze humour from our lives, the way you bulldoze people's homes.

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, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

AP Thiruvadi, CHENNAI

Avinash Godbole, DEWAS (MP)

# Bengal Congress at crossroads

THE CONGRESS IN BENGAL HAS BEEN GRAPPLING WITH A WEAKENED ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE DUE TO THE EXODUS OF ITS LEADERS TO THE TMC AND BJP, AS WELL AS PERSISTENT INFIGHTING

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kolkata, March 28:** Amidst an existential crisis and a declining presence in Bengal, the Congress remains divided over its strategy for the 2026 Assembly elections with three factions emerging: one advocating an alliance with the TMC, another favouring continued adjustment with the Left Front, and a third pushing for a solo contest to revive the party's fortunes.

The Congress in Bengal has been grappling with a weakened organisational structure due to the exodus of its leaders to the TMC and BJP, as well as persistent infighting.

Its last significant electoral success came in 2011, when, in alliance with the TMC, it helped end the Left Front's 34-year rule.

Congress's vote share, which stood at 14 per cent in 2011, plummeted to 3 per cent in the 2021 state polls, and it currently has no seats in the Assembly.

One faction within Congress believes that historical alliances have only weakened the party.

This group blamed the TMC-Congress alliance in the 2009 Lok Sabha and 2011 Assembly elections, arguing that it weakened the grand old party as many of its leaders defected to Mamata Banerjee's camp.

Similarly, it criticised the Congress-Left alliance formed in 2016 for prioritising seat-sharing over rebuilding



**Congress's vote share, which stood at 14 per cent in 2011, plummeted to 3 per cent in the 2021 state polls, and it currently has no seats in the Assembly**

ing the Congress's grassroots support.

Pradip Bhattacharya, former state Congress president, commented on the current divide, saying, "It is true that we are facing a political existential crisis in Bengal. The state unit is now divided on three opinions — whether to continue with the Left, align with the TMC, or contest alone. However, I believe we would benefit from continuing with the Left for a respective alliance."

In contrast, another faction argued that Congress, given its current weak presence in the

state, cannot afford to contest the 2026 Assembly elections alone. They view Mamata Banerjee's TMC as the only viable option for a seat-sharing arrangement.

State Congress president Shuvankar Sarkar is pushing for strengthening the party's base before any decision is made on alliances.

He stressed, "The Congress has suffered for years because alliances have helped the other partners, not us. My task is to increase the party's presence and visibility across the state. Only then can we

discuss alliances or going solo in the polls."

He questioned the rationale behind aligning with the TMC, which, he argued, has "ruined" the party in Bengal, or with the Left, which he claimed has not been supportive beyond seat-sharing arrangements.

While all three parties — Congress, the Left and TMC — are part of the national opposition INDIA bloc, the Congress-Left alliance in West Bengal opposes both the TMC and the BJP.

Congress's presence has steadily declined between 2011-2021, when nearly 70 MLAs and one MP defected to the TMC.

In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the party's vote share further dwindled from 5.6 per cent in 2019 to 4.6 per cent, and the party secured just one seat.

Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, a prominent Congress leader and former state president, has been a strong advocate for maintaining the Left-Congress alliance. He pointed out that the Congress-Left coalition did well in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, with Congress leading in 12 Assembly segments, even surpassing both TMC and BJP in terms of votes in those areas.

The top three Congress leaders in Bengal, despite having differing views on how to revive the party, which ruled the state until 1977 except for a brief period of the United Front government, agree on the need to challenge the communal divide created by the TMC and BJP.

## AHEAD OF NAVRATRI

# AI cameras, drones, security personnel boost safety in Katra

Chaitra (spring) Navratra will commence March 30 and authorities are anticipating a large crowd of devotees thronging the cave shrine during the nine-day festival

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



**Jammu, March 28:** Heavy security arrangements, including AI-enabled CCTV cameras and drones, are being put in place to avert any untoward incident at Mata Vaishno Devi shrine during the Navratra festival.

Chaitra (spring) Navratra will commence March 30 and authorities are anticipating a large crowd of devotees thronging the cave shrine during the nine-day festival.

These measures become all the more crucial following a fierce encounter with suspected Pakistani terrorists in the Kathua district, resulting in the killing of three terrorists and four policemen. The operation began early Thursday and was ongoing at the time of the latest reports.

Conducting a security audit of Katra, the base camp of the cave shrine, Reasi SSP Paramvir Singh said, "Security has been significantly strengthened... (we) assure all devotees arriving from various parts of the country that they will be provided with adequate security."

"We have conducted security

checks at several locations in Katra town and are planning additional deployments at strategic locations," he added.

Further, joint teams of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and police, along with quick reaction teams, have been deployed and remain vigilant, the SSP informed.

Deputy Inspector General of Police Rayees Mohd Bhat said thorough security arrangements have been made, including the deployment of drones, as part of the security measures.

Moreover, the track leading to the shrine is being closely watched by the CRPF.

Officials said that over 500-600 CCTV cameras equipped with advanced AI capabilities have been installed along the pilgrimage route.

The cave shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi is already witnessing increased footfall.

"In the past few days, there has been a significant rise in the number of pilgrims. Nearly 40,000 pilgrims visit the Mata Vaishno Devi temple daily,

with numbers rising even further on weekends," said Anshul Garg, chief executive officer (CEO), SMVDSB.

He further said that the number is expected to only rise in the coming days.

On its part, the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board (SMVDSB) has built new infrastructure and arranged more facilities for the pilgrims during the festival from March 30 to April 7.

An all-weather covered resting area for 1,500 pilgrims at Ardhuwari has been set up. The area will feature a water ATM, prasad kiosk, refreshment unit and live telecast of 'garbhjoon aarti'.

Additionally, the renovated 'Darshani Deodi' with a double-storey queue complex is ready to welcome pilgrims this Chaitra Navratra, the Board said.

In view of recent terror incidents and the upcoming Eid and Navratra festivals, security has also been beefed up in Jammu city and along the highways, with increased vehicle checks and frisking of people.

# 'Sundarban Tramjatra' begins to promote heritage, conservation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kolkata, March 28:** A tram adorned with cutouts of mangrove trees, images of crisscrossing rivulets and pictures of the Royal Bengal Tiger rolled through northern and southern parts of the city Friday, marking the beginning of the four-day 'Sundarban Tramjatra' festival.

Organised by the Calcutta Tram Users Association (CUTA), a group of tram enthusiasts working to revive Kolkata's heritage transport, the special tram offered free rides to the public from 10:30 AM to 5:30 PM, running along two active routes—Gariahat to Esplanade and Shyambazar to Esplanade, a spokesperson said on behalf of the organisers.

CUTA member Aditya Banerjee explained the dual purpose behind the initiative.

"The journey has been initiated for two reasons—to revive tram routes, most of which have become defunct, and to raise awareness about protecting the rich biodiversi-



ty of the Sundarbans. In an era of global warming and carbon emissions, when the government itself is promoting green energy-driven transport such as electric buses, trams remain an environmentally friendly alternative," Banerjee said.

The festival is supported by the Australian Government under the Maitri Cultural Grant and RMIT University.

It includes discussions and workshops aimed at engaging local communities in environmental conservation.

From March 28 to 30, the Esplanade Tram Depot will host workshops and live performances featuring eminent personalities, including filmmaker Ashoke Viswanathan.

A Citizens' Assembly will take place at the ICCR Rabin-dratanath Tagore Centre March

31, where experts and citizens will discuss ways to protect Kolkata's green spaces and the Sundarbans.

Melbourne tram conductor Roberto D'Andrea, attending the event, emphasised the need to preserve trams.

"We are united in our love for trams, and this event sends a strong message about their importance in reducing air pollution," he said.

Festival co-curator and RMIT University associate professor Mick Douglas echoed this sentiment. "The more we engage in participatory dialogues, the more we build momentum to save our greens, our heritage, and ecosystems like the Sundarbans."

Trams first began operating in Kolkata in 1873 with horse-drawn carriages, later transitioning to steam and electric trams by 1902.

While the city had 257 tram cars in 2023, only 25 trams are currently operational on a rotational basis across three routes, according to a state transport official.



Muslims offer prayers on the occasion of 'Jam'at ul Vida', the last Friday of the holy month of 'Ramzan', at Dargah Hazratbal, on the outskirts of Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, Friday

PTI PHOTO

## J&K ENCOUNTER

# Constable Singh's sacrifice upholds legacy of valour

According to the local residents of Chib's native village -- Kanna Chak -- the family is venerated for its history of sacrifices and patriotism

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kanna Chak (Kathua), March 28:** As three brave police personnel lost their lives battling infiltrating Pakistani terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district, Balwinder Singh Chib's sacrifice carries forward a legacy of courage that has endured for three generations.

With his death, the Chib family has lost four members across three generations in the line of duty. According to the local residents of Chib's native village -- Kanna Chak -- the family is venerated for its history of sacrifices and patriotism.

Four police personnel, including Chib, have been killed in an ongoing encounter in Kathua district. The operation started early Thursday and

was continuing when the last reports were received.

Former Sarpanch of Chak Hariya village, Deewan Singh, said, "The Chib family is known for its sacrifices and patriotism. The village of Chak Hariya takes immense pride in its sons who have given their lives for the country". Kanna Chak is a part of Chak Hariya.

Recalling the Chib family's long history of sacrifice, he said, "During World War I, Balwinder's great grandfather, Prakash Singh Chib, was awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery before attaining martyrdom. Prakash Singh Chib's brother, Shankar Singh Chib, also laid down his life, earning honourable recognition."

Balwinder's uncle, Pritam Singh Chib, who served in the Border Security Force, was martyred in the line of duty.

"Now, Balwinder has lost his life becoming the fourth martyr from the family. It is an unparalleled legacy of courage and sacrifice," he said.

Three suspected Pakistani terrorists of the proscribed Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM)



outfit and an equal number of policemen were killed after a day-long gunfight Thursday. Another policeman was found dead Friday.

Balwinder bravely fought against the terrorists before making the ultimate sacrifice, Deewan Singh said.

Villagers remembered Balwinder as a kind-hearted, disciplined, and selfless man.

"He was a very good person

of his death, said, "This pain is unbearable... I wish I had died instead of him."

According to his relatives, Balwinder joined the police force in 2000 during a special border recruitment drive launched by then SSP RR Swain, who later became Director General of Police (DGP).

One of his uncles, an ex-serviceman, said, "He sacrificed his life for the nation. Today, our family stands tall with pride. Bharat Mata Ki Jai! His sacrifice has made the country proud."

Balwinder's friends said he was passionate about cricket since childhood and recalled that he led a disciplined life and respected everyone.

"His commitment to duty remained unwavering until his last breath. His sacrifice has helped save many lives from terrorists," one of his friends said. Meanwhile, the local residents of Kanna Chak have urged the government to recognise Balwinder's sacrifice and extend support to his bereaved family.

They said honouring his bravery will serve as an inspiration for future generations.

## J&K BYE-ELECTIONS

# ECI announces voter list revision for Nagrota, Budgam

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Jammu, March 28:** The Election Commission of India has announced a special summary revision of voter lists in Jammu and Kashmir's Nagrota and Budgam Assembly constituencies ahead of the upcoming bye-elections.

As per the schedule, the rationalization of polling stations will take place April 4, 2025 followed by the publication of the integrated draft electoral roll April 8, 2025.

The voters will be able to file claims and objections between April 8 and April 24, 2025, it said. The final resolution of claims and objections is scheduled for May 2, while the final electoral roll will be published May 5.

The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) for each constituency will be responsible for ensuring that all eligible citizens are included in the voter list while preventing the inclusion of ineligible individuals.

The Election Commission of India has released the schedule for the Special Summary Revision (SSR) of electoral rolls in Nagrota and Budgam Assembly Constituencies ahead of the upcoming bye-elections.

As per the schedule, the rationalization of polling stations will take place April 4, 2025 followed by the publication of the integrated draft electoral roll April 8, 2025.

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The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) for each constituency will be responsible for ensuring that all eligible citizens are included in the voter list while preventing the inclusion of ineligible individuals.



Across India our youth are falling prey to drugs. India has 2.3 crore opioid and almost 1 crore inhalant users -- more than the entire population of Haryana

RAHUL GANDHI | LOP IN LS

**CLERIC DEEMS SALMAN WEARING 'RAM EDITION' WATCH 'HARAM'**

Barelvi cleric and All India Muslim Jamaat president Maulana Shahabuddin Razvi has declared Bollywood actor Salman Khan wearing a 'Ram Edition' watch, which intends to promote the Ram Mandir, as "haram" (forbidden in Islam)



of the day **note**

It is good they (BJP) are giving gifts to Muslims but at least they should not break their (Muslims) houses



DIGVIJAYA SINGH | SENIOR CONG LEADER

The present state government has adopted a decisive goal to transform Assam, where crime is minimal and citizens can actively contribute to the state's progress



HIMANTA BISWA SARMA | ASSAM CM

The Economic Survey is a technical document that provides financial clarity. It has been presented in the Assembly for decades, but this time, the BJP government did not table it



ATISHI | FORMER DELHI CM

## 'Restaurants can't levy mandatory service charge on food bills'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 28:** Restaurants cannot mandatorily levy service charge on food bills in a "camouflaged and coercive" manner as it is against public interest and amounts to unfair trade practice, the Delhi High Court on Friday held.

The high court said collection of service charge was proving to be a "double whammy" for consumers who were forced to pay Goods and Services Tax on top of the service tax. "Service charge or TIP as is colloquially referred to, is a voluntary payment by the customer. It cannot be compulsory or mandatory. The practice undertaken by

restaurant establishments of collecting service charge that too on a mandatory basis, in a coercive manner, would be contrary to consumer interest and is violative of consumer rights (sic)," Justice Prathiba M Singh said in a 131-page judgment.

The high court, therefore, dismissed the petitions of the restaurant bodies challenging the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) guidelines prohibiting hotels and restaurants from mandatorily levying service charge on food bills. The court upheld the guidelines and imposed ₹1 lakh cost each on the petitioners to be deposited with the CCPA towards consumer welfare. It



said the mandatory levy of service charge by the restaurant establishments was against public interest and undermined the economic and social fabric of consumers as a class.

The verdict added, "Furthermore, such a charge creates an unfair pricing structure which lacks transparency and is therefore contrary to public interest."

Federation of Hotels and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) and National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) had moved the court in 2022 filing two separate petitions. According to the NRAI, it has 7,000 restaurants in India and 2,500 member outlets in Delhi NCR. FHRAI claimed to represent the interests of 55,000 hotels and 5,00,000 restaurants across the country. The court, while referring to consumer complaints and restaurant bills, said it was convinced that the service charge was being arbitrarily collected and coercively enforced and in such a situation it couldn't "be a mute spectator".

## MoD signs ₹62,700cr contracts with HAL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 28:** The defence ministry Friday firm up procurement of 156 light combat helicopter 'Prachand' from Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) at a cost of ₹62,700 crore, shortly after the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi cleared the acquisition to bolster the combat capability of the military.

Light Combat Helicopter (LCH) Prachand is India's first indigenously designed and developed combat helicopter having a capability of operating at an altitude of over 5000 metres. Following the decision by the CCS, the defence ministry signed two contracts with the HAL for the procurement. The CCS approved the proposal to buy 156 LCH 'Prachand' worth over ₹62,500 crore from HAL, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said.

"This decision marks a major boost to India's combat capabilities and self reliance in defence," he said on X. Capable of operating from high altitude terrain and carrying out precision strikes at high altitude targets, 'Prachand' is a powerful machine, he said.

"The Cabinet's decision taken today will create more than 8500 jobs. This is indeed a proud moment for India's Make in India journey. I thank PM Narendra Modi for taking this important decision," he said.

The defence ministry said the first contract it signed with HAL is for supply of 66 Prachand helicopters to the Indian Air Force (IAF) while the second one is for buying 90 choppers for the Indian Army.

"The Ministry of Defence March 28 signed two contracts with HAL for supply of 156 Light Combat Helicopters (LCH), Prachand, along with training and other associated equipment worth ₹62,700 crore, excluding taxes," the ministry said in a statement.

## SC upholds free speech, junks FIR against Cong MP

The verdict said, "Free expression of thoughts by individuals or groups of individuals is an integral part of healthy and civilised society. Without freedom of expression of thoughts and views, it is impossible to lead a dignified life guaranteed under Article 21 of the constitution."



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 28:** Advocating the protection of freedom of speech and expression, the Supreme Court Friday quashed an FIR against Congress MP Imran Pratapgarhi for allegedly posting a clip of a poem alleged to be provocative.

The video carried the recitation of a poem uploaded on X by the Congress MP and it was alleged to carry words that pitted communities against one another aside from hurting religious sentiments. In a 54-page verdict, a bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan held no prima facie case against Pratapgarhi and said the FIR appeared to be a "very mechanical exercise" and a "clear abuse of the process of law".

The verdict said, "Free expression of thoughts by individuals or groups of individuals is an integral part of healthy and civilised society. Without freedom of expression of thoughts and views, it is impossible to lead a dignified life guaranteed under Article 21 of the constitution."

The court highlighted that in a healthy democracy, views,

thoughts and opinions must be countered with a different view. "Even if a large number of persons dislike the views expressed by others, the right of person to express views must be respected and protected," it added.

The bench opined literature, including poetry, drama, films, satire and art, made the life of human beings more meaningful. "Courts are duty-bound to protect and uphold fundamental rights of citizens. Sometimes we the judges may not like the spoken or written words, but still, it is our duty to uphold the fundamental rights under Article 19(1). We judges are also under an obligation to uphold the Constitution and the respective ideals. It is the duty of the court to step in and to protect the fundamental rights," it added.

Constitutional courts, the bench said, must be at the forefront to "zealously protect" the fundamental rights of the citizens. "It is the bounden duty of the court to ensure that the Constitution and ideals of the Constitution are not trampled upon," the bench said.

The top court said the police machinery was a part of the state and its officers must abide by the constitution and respect its ideals. "Moreover, the police officers being citizens, are bound to abide by the constitution. They are bound to honour and uphold freedom of speech and expression conferred on all citizens," it said.

The Congress MP was booked by Gujarat Police in the case January 3.

## Woman's body found in suitcase: Suspect hubby attempts suicide

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bangalore/Pune, March 28:** The husband of a 32 year-old woman, whose body was found stuffed in a suitcase in Bangalore, has emerged as the main suspect in the case and was now undergoing treatment in Pune in Maharashtra after alleged suicide attempt, police said Friday.

The body of Gauri Khedekar, a native of Maharashtra, was found Thursday with severe injury marks and packed inside a suitcase. Her husband Rakesh Rajendera Khedekar, who works as a project manager in an IT firm in the Karnataka capital, fled to Pune, around 875km from Bangalore, after the crime and allegedly attempted suicide by consuming poison, the Bangalore police said.

However, a police official in western Maharashtra's Satara district, where Rakesh Khedekar was found, said the man told them he had killed his wife. He was found lying unconscious on a road under jurisdiction of the Shirwal police station in Satara district.



Rakesh Khedekar was rushed to a hospital in Shirwal before being shifted to a private medical facility in Pune, Satara police officials said.

"We found the man lying on a road in an unconscious state Thursday night. When he regained consciousness, he told us he had killed his wife. By the time we informed our seniors, the news about the murder in Bangalore had surfaced," said Yashwant Nalawade, senior inspector, Shirwal police station. He has been detained in connection with the murder and is currently undergoing treatment, according to the

Bangalore police. Addressing a press conference, Bangalore City Police Commissioner B Dayananda said the police have registered a case in this regard and it seems the woman's husband is the main suspect. Rakesh Khedekar had flown out of the Karnataka capital earlier, he said.

According to the commissioner, a Bangalore Police team has gone to Pune, and as and when he is discharged from the hospital, he will be brought to the southern city for interrogation. Marital dispute is said to be the reason behind the gruesome murder. According to the Bengaluru police, the murder came to light when the owner of the house, where the couple lived, alerted the police control room at around 5:30 pm Thursday.

The woman and her husband, who works as a project manager in an IT firm in the southern city, moved to Bangalore last month and were living in a flat at Doddakammanahalli village in Hulimayy police station limits.

### SHORT TAKES

#### FIR lodged against Arvind Kejriwal

**New Delhi:** A Delhi court was Friday informed by police that an FIR was filed against former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and others for allegedly misusing public money by putting up large hoardings in the national capital in 2019. Delhi Police made the submission in its compliance report filed before additional chief judicial magistrate Neha Mittal. "Copy of FIR has been filed in compliance of order dated March 11, 2025. A copy of FIR and status report have been supplied to the counsel for the complainant (Shiv Kumar Saxena)," the judge noted.

#### 4 of family found dead

**Kodagu (Karnataka):** Four members of a family were found dead at their home in Ponnampet taluk of this district Friday, police said. The deceased have been identified as Nagi (32), her seven-year-old daughter Cauvery, and Nagi's parents, Kariya (75) and Gauri (70), police added. Police suspect Nagi's husband, Girish (35), to be behind the killings, as he is currently absconding. The incident, according to police, came to light when Nagi and Girish's co-workers from a coffee estate went looking for them after they failed to report for work.

#### Porsche crash: 2 police in soup

**Pune:** Two Maharashtra Police officers are likely to face dismissal for alleged negligence in the investigation of last year's fatal Porsche crash, where a drunk minor driver killed two tech professionals, a top official said. Pune Police Commissioner Amitesh Kumar said a proposal was sent to the Maharashtra Home department Thursday "seeking dismissal of these two suspended cops."

#### Boiler blast at paper mill kills 3

**Ghaziabad (UP):** Three labourers were killed in a boiler explosion at a paper mill in the Bhojpur police station area here Friday, police said. The incident occurred around 6 am when the workers were on duty at the Nordstern Rubber and Rolls Private Limited in Datedi village, they said. "All of a sudden the boiler blasted due to which the three labourers flung in the air and fell 50 feet away," a police source said.



Water cannons being used to disperse activists of the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) during 'Uttar Kanya Abhiyan' as they protest against unemployment in the state, Siliguri, West Bengal

## War of words follows disruption of Mamata's speech at Oxford

The TMC asserted that the disruption was a slur on the country as a whole and that people would "respond to the attack with interest", while CPI(M)'s student wing SFI stated that the "CM has no escape from tough questions from the enraged student community wherever she goes"

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kolkata, March 28:** Political reactions flew thick and fast back home in the aftermath of protestors, allegedly by Left-leaning youths, disrupting West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's speech on social development and women's empowerment at Kellogg College under the University of Oxford.

The Trinamool Congress asserted that the disruption was a slur on the country as a whole

and that people would "respond to the attack with interest", while CPI(M)'s student wing SFI stated that the "chief minister has no escape from tough questions from the enraged student community wherever she goes". Midway through Banerjee's speech, a section of the audience, who had come with posters, tried to interrupt her address by questioning her on a range of issues, from the RG Kar hospital medic's rape and murder to the flight of capital from the state, including the



Tata Motors' exit from Singur. A composed Banerjee tried to placate the protestors by offering to send them "chocolates" and wishing them a "good night's sleep over their agendas". She announced that such

resistance has only encouraged her more, strengthened her resolve and offered to visit Oxford twice a year, should she be invited to speak. "This same show can get repeated when your leaders come to

visit," Banerjee warned the protestors, adding, "My Left and ultra-Left friends, this is not the proper way to behave." Taking to his social media handle, TMC spokesperson and part of Banerjee's entourage to the UK, Kunal Ghosh wrote, "A motley band of Left supporters brought disrepute to the state and country by their actions. They have forgotten about everything that happened in Bengal during the Left rule. Confronted by the audience, they fled the scene. Instead of raising questions during the question and answer session, these people displayed their culture." The party's IT cell chief Debangshu Bhattacharya questioned the identity of the protestors.

Education Minister Bratya Basu, who himself was at the receiving end of students'

disgruntlement at Jadavpur University recently, called the protest "a reflection of collective hopelessness among the red and saffron camps".

"It has become a norm for elements like these to attack our leaders in the midst of an ongoing function. Mamata Banerjee was representing the state and the country and this wasn't a political platform. I would like to repeat after my leader that these people should, instead, come back to the country and strengthen their party to fight communal forces," Basu said. The SFI, though, maintained that the CM cannot hope to get away with "her back-to-back lies about Bengal" on foreign soil. The SFI will question her wherever she goes, he said adding that Banerjee may choose to escape or answer them but she will not have a respite.



national



It is important for us to grow that tourism potential. PRIYANKA GANDHI VADRA | CONG GENERAL SECY

ASARAM GETS INTERIM BAIL

The Gujarat High Court Friday granted three months of temporary bail to self-proclaimed godman Asaram Bapu in a rape case. The bail was granted on medical grounds



of the day quote

Necessary changes would be made in the policy as the focus is on tourism promotion in the state and as strict compliance might not be possible for heritage buildings, ways to provide fire safety measures from the outside would also be explored

The entire system of the country is run by these three pillars. When all three work together, it helps in achieving the goal of good governance

Along with the incident that happened in Agra, the SP chief should also remember the Lucknow State Guest House incident June 2, 1995, when there was a murderous attack on me by this party during its government and should also repent for it

Madras HC grants interim anticipatory bail to Kamra



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, March 28: The Madras High Court Friday granted interim anticipatory bail to comedian Kunal Kamra, who is facing the heat over his jokes on Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. The court granted Kamra the relief on the condition that he should execute a bond to the satisfaction of the judicial magistrate at Vanur in Villupuram district in Tamil Nadu.

The judge noted the petitioner, who is residing in Villupuram district, apprehends arrest in the case registered on the file of R-2 against him. Counsel for the petitioner submitted that the allegation against the petitioner was that he made certain remarks in a standup comedy on Deputy Chief Minister, called "Naya Bharath." According to the prosecution it harmed the reputation of the deputy CM. Counsel further submitted that the allegation does not warrant custodial interrogation. He was unable to seek anticipatory bail in Maharashtra. Counsel for the petitioner submitted that a life threat was made against him by partymen and the Ministers. He sought anticipatory bail to enable him to approach court in Maharashtra. Citing a judgment of the Supreme Court, the judge said the petitioner prima facie satisfied as to why he was unable to approach a court in Maharashtra immediately.



Devotees offer 'namaz' on the occasion of 'Jumal ul Vida', the last Friday of the holy month of 'Ramzan', at Palayam Juma Masjid, in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

Cash row: Justice Varma transferred to Allahabad HC

AGENCIES

New Delhi/Prayagraj, March 28: The government Friday notified the transfer of Delhi High Court judge Yashwant Varma to his parent Allahabad High Court, the order coming amid a row over alleged discovery of a huge amount of cash from his official residence here.



SC rejects plea for FIR Calling it "premature", the Supreme Court Friday rejected a PIL seeking Delhi Police to register an FIR over the alleged discovery of burnt wads of cash from the official residence of Delhi High Court Judge Yashwant Varma. A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said an in-house inquiry was in progress and there would be several options open to the chief justice of India after the probe's conclusion. The bench, therefore, refused to examine the plea of advocate Mathews J Nedumpara and three others.

report by Chief Justice Upadhya, and constituted the three-member committee to conduct an in-house inquiry. Two days later, the Supreme Court Collegium formally recommended to the Centre Justice Varma's transfer. "The Supreme Court Collegium in its meetings held March 20 and 24, 2025 has recommended the repatriation of Justice Yashwant Varma, Judge, High Court of Delhi, to the High Court of Judicature at Allahabad," an SC resolution on that day read. The next day, the three-member SC committee visited Justice Varma's residence, commencing its inquiry into the matter. Justice Varma has denounced any insinuation and said no cash was ever placed at the site either by him or any of his family members. Earlier today, the top court rejected a PIL seeking Delhi Police to register an FIR over the alleged discovery of burnt wads of cash from his official residence, calling the petition "premature".

The law ministry issued the notification announcing his transfer. Recommending his repatriation to the government Monday, the Supreme Court Collegium had asserted the move was separate from an in-house probe ordered by the top court over the alleged discovery of cash from Justice Varma's residence after a fire incident around 11.35 on the night of Holi, March 14. Following the incident, Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna had directed the Delhi High Court to withdraw judicial work from the judge. On Friday, the Supreme Court said the chief justice of the Allahabad High Court was asked not to assign any judicial work for now to Justice Varma upon assuming charge there. "The chief justice of Allahabad High Court for the time being has been asked not to assign any judicial work to Justice Yashwant Varma, when he assumes charge as a judge of the Allahabad High Court," an apex court press release said. In a related development, the Bar Association president in Prayagraj Friday strongly criticised the transfer of Justice Varma to the Allahabad High

Court and called it the "darkest day for India's judiciary" and announced that the association's members will boycott the swearing-in ceremony. The Supreme Court March 21 said Delhi High Court Chief Justice D K Upadhya had initiated an in-house inquiry against Justice Varma and there was a separate proposal to transfer the judge. Justice Upadhya was stated to have commenced the inquiry prior to a meeting of the apex court Collegium March 20. The CJJ March 22 uploaded on the SC website the inquiry

Kathua encounter enters day 2; bodies of 3 cops recovered

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, March 28: The bodies of three of the 28 Jammu and Kashmir Police personnel killed in an encounter with Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) terrorists were retrieved Friday as the fierce gunfight between security forces and the ultras entered its second day in the remote forested region of Jammu's Kathua, officials said here.

Director General of Police (DGP), Jammu and Kashmir, Nalin Prabhat confirmed that this was the same group of terrorists that was intercepted in Saniyal village in the Hiranagar sector March 23, but managed to escape, while resolving that his force will not sleep or take rest till all terror groups are appropriately dealt with. The operation, centred near Jakhole village in the Ghati Juthana area of Rajbagh, began Thursday morning following intensified police operations against recently-infiltrated terrorists from across the International Border in the Hiranagar sector.

The encounter has resulted in the deaths of four police personnel and two JeM terrorists, while seven security personnel, including a deputy superintendent of police (DSP), have sustained injuries. The DGP clarified that only two Pakistani terrorists have so far been killed. The body of the fourth police personnel, who was reported missing Thursday evening, was located Friday morning by the search parties with the help of drones, but the efforts to retrieve it are yet to succeed as two terrorists are still holed up at a height and firing at the search teams, the officials said.

Cabinet clears Electronics Component Mfg Scheme

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 28: The government Friday approved a ₹22,919 crore scheme to make India self-reliant in electronics component manufacturing, attract large investments in the segment and create jobs.

It is the first such scheme that focuses on promoting the manufacturing of passive electronic components. The Union Cabinet approved the 'Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme' with an aim to develop a robust supply chain by attracting large global as well as domestic investments in the electronics component manufacturing ecosystem. The initiative is also expected to increase domestic value addition (DVA) by developing capacity and capabilities, and integrating Indian companies with Global Value Chains (GVCs). The domestic production of electronic goods has risen from ₹1.90 lakh crore in FY 2014-15 to ₹9.52 lakh crore in FY 2023-24, reflecting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of over 17 per cent.

Giving details about the Cabinet decision, Electronics and IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said the scheme will create direct employment for 91,600 people and attract investment of around ₹59,350 crore. The minister said that that segment will serve the requirements of several sectors, including telecom, consumer electronics, automobile, medical devices, power sector etc. He said that the scheme is expected to lead to production of ₹4.56 lakh crore. The tenure of the scheme is six years with a



Cabinet nod to non-urea subsidy

NEW DELHI: The Union Cabinet Friday approved a ₹37,216 crore subsidy on phosphatic and potassic (P&K) fertilisers for the Kharif (summer-sown) season this year as part of its efforts to provide soil nutrients to farmers at a reasonable rate. The Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved a proposal to fix the Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS) rates for Kharif season 2025 (from April 1, 2025, to September 30, 2025) on Phosphatic and Potassic (P&K) fertilisers. The budgetary requirement for the Kharif season will be ₹37,216.15 crore. Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnav told reporters here.

one-year gestation period. Meanwhile, an official release said that the Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme provides differentiated incentives to Indian manufacturers tailored to overcome specific disabilities for various categories of components and sub-assemblies so that they can acquire technological capabilities and achieve economies of scale. The target segments include sub-assemblies (display module and camera module), and bare components (Non-Surface Mount Devices, electro-mechanicals, multi-layer Printed Circuit Board (PCB), Li-ion cells, and enclosures for mobile, IT hardware products & related devices), which will receive turn-over-linked incentives.

POST OF THE DAY

Congress MP Imran Pratapgarhi reached Parliament. Today, Supreme Court quashed FIR filed by Gujarat Police against him for his poem "Ae khoon ke pyase, baat suno..." Victory of Constitution. Defeat for Sanghis

SHORT TAKES

PM to travel to Thailand, Lanka

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will embark on a two-nation tour of Thailand and Sri Lanka next week with a broad focus on boosting regional cooperation under India's newly announced 'MAHASAGAR policy' and vision for a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific. In the first leg of the tour, Modi will visit Bangkok from April 3 to 4 to participate in the sixth BIMSTEC Summit being hosted by Thailand. It will be the prime minister's third visit to Thailand, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said Friday. From Thailand, Modi will travel to Sri Lanka for a three-day trip to hold talks with top leadership of the island nation.

Mild tremors felt in Kolkata, Imphal

Kolkata/Imphal/Shillong: Mild tremors were felt in Kolkata, Imphal and Meghalaya's East Garo Hills district Friday after a powerful 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck Thai capital Bangkok. The epicentre was in central Myanmar, about 50 km east of the city of Myonywa. Tremors were reported from Kolkata and its adjoining areas. However, according to official sources, there were no reports of damage to property or loss of life in the city due to the tremor.

Two trampled to death by elephants

Simdega (Jharkhand): Two persons were trampled to death by wild elephants in separate incidents in Jharkhand's Simdega district Friday, a forest officer said. A 28-year-old man, identified as Vikas Ohdar, was trampled to death by an elephant when he was sleeping outside his house in Buriurgi Debatoli village under the jurisdiction of Mahabuang police station around 1 am Friday, the officer said.

HUMAN-ANIMAL CONFLICT

'No plans to amend Wildlife Act to give more power to states'

In response to a question by CPI-M Rajya Sabha member V Sivadasan, Union Minister of State for Environment Kirti Vardhan Singh said that the protection of wildlife, including human-wildlife conflict management, is primarily the responsibility of state and Union Territory governments under the Act

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Mar 28: The Centre is not considering any amendment to the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, to give states more power to deal with wild animal attacks, the government has informed Parliament. In response to a question by CPI-M Rajya Sabha member V Sivadasan, Union Minister of State for Environment Kirti Vardhan Singh said that the protection of wildlife, including human-wildlife conflict man-

agement, is primarily the responsibility of state and Union Territory governments under the Act. The minister said Section 11(1)(a) of the Act empowers the chief wildlife warden to grant permits for the hunting of animals listed in Schedule I if they become dangerous to human life or are incurably diseased. Section 11(1)(b) allows the chief wildlife warden or any authorised officer to grant permits for hunting wild animals listed in Schedule II, III, or IV if they become dangerous to human



WILD LIFE PROTECTION ACT, 1972

life or property or are disabled or diseased beyond recovery. Sivadasan had sought details of requests made by states to amend the Act and its rules. Asked if the Union government intended to amend the Act to give states more autonomy in handling wild animal attacks, the minister said, "Currently, no amendment in the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 Act has been proposed." Sivadasan represents Kerala,

which has repeatedly requested the Centre to declare wild pigs as "vermin" in the state. The Kerala government argues that damage to crops and human-wildlife conflict have been rising due to wild boars. An estimated 344 people lost their lives in incidents of human-wildlife conflict in Kerala between 2021 and 2025, Environment and Forest Minister Bhupendra Yadav informed the Rajya Sabha Thursday. Replying to supplementaries during the Question Hour, he said 180 deaths were due to snake bites, 103 due to elephants and 35 due to wild pigs. The ministry has advised the Kerala government to use the provisions under Section 11 of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. Section 11(1)(a) and Section 11(1)(b) empower the state chief wildlife warden to allow selec-

tive hunting. This is different from declaring an animal as "vermin" under Section 62 by the central government. Once declared "vermin", the species loses all legal protection, allowing unrestricted hunting, unlike the case-by-case permission granted under Section 11. In 2021, the Centre had said that declaring wild boars as "vermin" in Kerala would do more harm than good. The Kerala government later issued an order allowing farmers to kill wild boars using licensed guns in the presence of a forest guard. This special order was extended for another year from May 17, 2022. Last year, the Kerala Assembly passed a resolution urging the Centre to declare wild boars as "vermin" and amend the Act to reduce human-animal conflict.



It can look surprising only at first glance and it would be wrong to believe that this is some sort of extravagant talk by the current US administration. It's obvious that the United States will continue to systematically advance its geostrategic, military-political and economic interests in the Arctic

VLADIMIR PUTIN | PRESIDENT, RUSSIA

## AUSTRALIA TO GO TO POLLS MAY 3

Australians will go to the polls May 3 for general elections with high costs of living and a shortage of housing likely weighing against the government as Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's centre-left Labour Party seeks a second three-year term



### of the day quote

And I want to be frank, there will be consequences for adventurism. There will be consequences for aggressive actions. It would be a very bad day for the Venezuelan regime if they were to attack Guyana or attack ExxonMobil or anything like it

MARCO RUBIO | US SECRETARY OF STATE

It is clear that the United States is no longer a reliable partner. It is possible that, with comprehensive negotiations, we will be able to restore some trust, but there will be no turning back

MARK CARNEY | PRIME MINISTER, CANADA

Antisemitism is a disease carried by barbarians in "all civilised societies"

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU | PRIME MINISTER, ISRAEL

### SHORT TAKES

#### Israel strikes Beirut

**Beirut (Lebanon):** Israel Friday launched an attack on the Lebanese capital, Beirut, for the first time since a ceasefire ended the latest Israel-Hezbollah war in November. Associated Press reporters in Beirut heard a loud boom and witnessed smoke rising from the area in Beirut's southern suburbs that Israel's military had vowed to strike. The attack was the first strike on Beirut since a ceasefire took hold November 27, 2024 between Israel and the Hezbollah militant group, although Israel has struck targets in southern Lebanon almost daily since then.

#### Pak repays loan worth \$1bn to Chinese bank

**Islamabad:** Pakistan has repaid a \$1 billion commercial loan to the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) with the understanding of getting it refinanced soon, according to a media report. This repayment has temporarily pulled down the country's already thin foreign exchange reserves to a six-month low of \$10.6 billion, the report added. The loan was originally provided by ICBC two years ago at a floating interest rate of approximately 7.5 per cent, reported The Express Tribune. The repayment was made in two equal tranches this month, according to Pakistani authorities.

#### More journalists detained by Turkiye

**Istanbul:** Two journalists were detained in dawn raids in Istanbul early Friday as part of a crackdown on media workers covering Turkey's largest protests in more than a decade, their outlets reported. Elif Bayburt, who works for the Etkin News Agency, and Nisa Suda Demirel, from the Evrensel news website, were the latest to be arrested in early morning sweeps that have targeted political activists and trades' unionists as well as journalists.

#### US, Japan, Philippines stage navy drills

**South China Sea:** The United States, Japan and the Philippines Friday staged joint naval drills to boost crisis readiness off a disputed South China Sea shoal as a Chinese military ship kept watch from a distance. The Chinese frigate attempted to get closer to the waters, where the warships and aircraft from the three allied countries were undertaking maneuvers off the Scarborough Shoal in an unsettling moment, but it was warned by a Philippine frigate by radio and kept away.

# QUAKE RATTLES MYANMAR, THAILAND

The 7.7 magnitude quake, with an epicentre near Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest city, struck at midday and was followed by a strong 6.4 magnitude aftershock

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Bangkok, March 28:** A powerful earthquake rocked Myanmar and neighbouring Thailand Friday, destroying buildings, a bridge and a dam. At least 144 people were killed in Myanmar, where photos and video from two hard-hit cities showed extensive damage.

At least eight died in the Thai capital, where a high-rise under construction collapsed.

The 7.7 magnitude quake, with an epicentre near Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest city, struck at midday and was followed by a strong 6.4 magnitude aftershock.

The full extent of death, injury and destruction was not immediately clear — particularly in Myanmar, one of the world's poorest countries. It is embroiled in a civil war and information is tightly controlled.

The head of Myanmar's military government said in a televised speech Friday evening that at least 144 people were killed and 730 others were injured. "The death toll and injuries are expected to rise," Senior Gen Min Aung Hlaing said.

Photos from the capital of Naypyidaw showed multiple buildings used to house civil servants destroyed by the quake, and rescue crews pulling victims from the rubble.

Myanmar's government said blood was in high demand in the hardest-hit areas. Images of



buckled and cracked roads in Mandalay and damaged highways as well as the collapse of a bridge and dam raised further concerns about how rescuers would even reach some areas in a country already enduring a widespread humanitarian crisis. Near Bangkok's popular Chatuchak market, a 33-story building under construction, with a crane on top, crumpled into a cloud of dust, and onlookers could be seen screaming and running in a video posted on social media. The sound of sirens echoed throughout central Bangkok and vehicles filled the streets, leaving some of the city's already congested streets grid-locked. The elevated rapid transit system and subway shut down.

While the area where the quake struck is prone to earthquakes, they are usually not so big and it is rare for them to be felt in the Thai capital, which sits on a river delta and is at moderate risk for quakes.

April Kanichawanakul, who works in an office building in

- More than 140 dead in Myanmar, state media says
- Earthquake was of 7.7 magnitude, USGS reports
- Skyscraper toppled in Bangkok
- Buildings and bridges in Myanmar collapse

Bangkok, initially didn't even realise it was an earthquake, the first she'd ever experienced. "I just thought I was dizzy," she said. She and her colleagues ran downstairs from the 10th floor of their building and waited outside for a signal that it was safe to go back in.

#### CRANE-TOPPED BUILDING COLLAPSED IN A CLOUD OF DUST

In Bangkok, at least three people were killed in the building collapse and 90 were missing, according to Defence Minister Phumtham Wechayachai. He offered no more details about the ongoing rescue efforts but first responders said

## Army called out in Kathmandu

### 2 killed, 30 hurt as monarchists clash with cops

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kathmandu, March 28:** The Army was called out and a curfew imposed on parts of Kathmandu Friday after two people were killed and 30 injured as pro-monarchy protesters pelted stones, attacked the office of a political party, set fire to vehicles and looted shops.

District authorities said the curfew will be in force for about five hours, up to 10 pm. Nobody was allowed to move about in certain areas.

Sabin Maharjan, 29, from Kathmandu, died at a hospital after sustaining a bullet injury during the clash, authorities said. Suresh Rajak, a photojournalist with Avenues Television, died while shooting a video of the protest from a building in the Tinkune area, the site where monarchists clashed with security personnel and tried to break through security barriers.

Rajak was on the top of the building when demonstrators set it ablaze after accusing police of launching tear gas from

#### PRO-MONARCHY PROTEST



inside the structure, sources at the television channel said.

Later, police discovered a severely burned body, suspected to be of Rajak, on the fourth floor of the building. The official identification of the body is yet to be done, police said. About half of the people injured were police personnel, authorities said. During the clash, the protesters burnt a house, torched eight vehicles, attacked the office of CPN-Unified Socialists in Baneshwor, looted the Bhatbhateni Supermarket in Chabahil and vandalised the offices of Kantipur Television and Annapurna Post newspaper.

The Kathmandu district administration announced the curfew between Shantinagar Bridge and Manohara River Bridge, including Koteshwor, Tinkune, the airport area, Baneshwor Chowk, and Gaushala.

# CHINA, B'DESH EXPAND TIES

China, Bangladesh sign nine agreements after key meeting between Xi, Yunus

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Beijing/Dhaka, March 28:** China and Bangladesh Friday signed nine agreements after Muhammad Yunus' meeting with President Xi Jinping during which the Bangladesh Chief Advisor highlighted student protests that led to regime change in Dhaka and urged Beijing to play a "greater role" in establishing peace and stability.

After his talks with Xi, the two countries signed nine agreements enhancing economic and technical cooperation between the two governments and cooperation in the areas of development, translation and publication of classical literary work, exchange and cooperation on cultural heritage, news exchange and media, and health sector, Bangladesh's official news agency BSS reported.

As the two leaders discussed issues related to bilateral interest, Yunus urged China to play a greater role in establishing peace, prosperity and stability for both nations, the Bangla-



desh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) report said.

Yunus' China visit is keenly watched as he is scheduled next week to attend the BIMSTEC Summit in Bangkok, where he has sought a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. India is yet to confirm the meeting. Xi, on his part, spoke about the long-standing history of "friendly exchanges" between the two countries and said China maintained a high degree of stability and continuity in ties with Bangladesh

and Beijing continues to be a trustworthy neighbour, friend and partner of Dhaka, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of China-Bangladesh diplomatic ties, and 2025 is also the year of people-to-people exchanges between the two countries, Xi said, expressing his willingness to take the ties to a new level.

Since the Yunus government took over, China has been hosting a number of Bangladesh delegations including Bangladesh's Ad-

# 58mn face hunger crisis after huge shortfall in aid: UN

The Rome-based agency said it faced a 40% slump in donations in 2025 compared to last year, adding that the shortfall threatened feeding programmes for in 28 crisis zones around the world, including Gaza, Sudan, Syria and Congo

REUTERS

**Rome, March 28:** The UN World Food Programme warned Friday that 58 million people were at risk of extreme hunger or starvation unless urgent funding for food aid is

secured, after drastic shortfalls from donors so far this year, including the United States.

The Rome-based agency said it faced a 40% slump in donations in 2025 compared to last year, adding that the shortfall threatened feeding programmes for in 28 crisis zones around the world, including Gaza, Sudan, Syria and Congo. "WFP is prioritising the worst-affected regions and stretching food rations to maximize impact. But make no mistake, we are approaching a funding cliff with life-threatening consequences," said Rania Dagash-Kamara, WFP Assistant Executive Director for Partnerships and Innovation.

WFP, which describes itself as the world's largest human-



itarian organisation, said 343 million people globally were experiencing severe food insecurity, driven by conflict, economic instability, and climate

change.

It aims to assist 123 million of them in 2025, nearly half of whom face an imminent loss of food support, it said.

According to WFP's website, the UN agency had received just \$1.57 billion in funding up until March 24. For the whole of 2024, WFP received \$9.75 billion, well below the \$21.1 billion it had sought. WFP did not point the finger at specific countries for cutting contributions, but a breakdown on its website showed the United States, long the biggest donor, had so far contributed just under 10% of the \$4.45 billion it gave for the full year 2024.

US President Donald Trump's administration is reviewing its foreign aid programmes and has largely shut down the foreign aid agency USAID.

US donations to WFP of food purchased from American farmers were briefly suspend-

ed by the Trump administration but resumed in February under a waiver authorising emergency food aid.

Other countries are also falling short of commitments from previous years, the WFP website showed, including Britain, which has said it will slash foreign aid this year to fund a defence buildup. Anti-poverty group Caritas Europa has said a number of European countries are also looking to cut foreign aid budgets.

WFP said it required \$2.49 billion to sustain emergency relief efforts in the coming months in Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Myanmar, Haiti, Sahel and Lake Chad Basin.

Analysts here say that Beijing at the same is carefully watching the unfolding chaotic situation in Dhaka and the pressure mounting on 84-year-old Yunus to hold elections without making any major commitments.

Besides the nine agreements, Bangladesh and China have agreed to strengthen cooperation in such areas as hydrological forecasting, flood prevention and disaster reduction, river dredging, integrated management of water resources, water resources development and related technology sharing, BSS reported.

The two sides spoke positively about the signing of the Implementation Plan of the MoU on Exchange of Hydrological Information of the Yarlung Zangbo and Jamuna River. The Brahmaputra river is called Yarlung Zangbo in Tibet and Jamuna in Bangladesh.

Analysts here say that Beijing at the same is carefully watching the unfolding chaotic situation in Dhaka and the pressure mounting on 84-year-old Yunus to hold elections without making any major commitments.



Ensuring greater inclusion in technology access is critical in today's digital age  
S KRISHNAN | SECRETARY, MEITY

## HYUNDAI MOTOR DEBUTS IN NIFTY NEXT 50, NIFTY 100, NIFTY 500

Hyundai Motor India Ltd (HMIL) Friday announced share inclusion in Nifty Next 50, Nifty 100, Nifty 500 and other key capital market indices. Hyundai Motor India commenced trading on the Indian stock markets after its listing on October 22, 2024



### of the day note

The government is cognizant of the increasing frequency and sophistication of cyber-attacks in the country. The government has taken several legal, technical, and administrative policy measures for addressing cyber security challenges in the country



ASHWINI VAISHNAW | ELECTRONICS AND IT MINISTER

India's express logistics market is going through a major shift, driven by growing digital adoption and consumers becoming more comfortable with e-commerce



MRIGANIK GUTURIA | PARTNER, REDSEER STRATEGY CONSULTANTS

We aim to carry 30 million passengers in 2025-26, higher than 20 million passengers in the current financial year ending March 2025



ALOKE SINGH | MD, AIR INDIA EXPRESS

# Investors' wealth swells by ₹25.90L-crore in FY25

After a stellar show in 2023-24 fiscal, stock markets had a roller coaster ride in 2024-25 financial year

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 28: Dalal Street investors became richer by ₹25.90 lakh crore in the entire 2024-25 financial year, with the BSE benchmark Sensex climbing over 5 per cent, amid an overall optimistic trend in equities.

In the 2024-25 fiscal, the BSE bellwether gauge jumped 3,763.57 points or 5.10 per cent, and the NSE Nifty climbed 1,192.45 points or 5.34 per cent. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms surged by ₹25,90,546.73 crore to ₹4,12,87,646.50 crore (\$4.82 trillion) in FY25.

**BSE JUMPED 3,763.57 POINTS OR 5.10%**  
**NIFTY CLIMBED 1,192.45 POINTS OR 5.34%**

"FY25 proved to be an eye-opener for new market participants, marking a departure from the continuous bull run they were accustomed to. While robust retail participation and domestic inflow drove a rally in the equity markets, FIIs turned cautious, selling off positions as valuations elevated due to the strong bull run and global uncertainties. Lower-than-expected corporate earnings particularly in the second half of FY25 further compounded the pressure on valuations. At the fiscal year end, policy actions by the new Trump administration added another layer of volatility which intensified market corrections," Palka Arora Chopra, Director, Master Capital Services Ltd, said. The Sensex hit its all-time high of 85,978.25 September 27, last year.



After rallying ~17% in the first half of fiscal year, markets recorded 5 consecutive monthly declines from Oct-Feb 2025 – a record not seen in the last 29 years – on disappointing earnings, sharp devaluation and foreign exodus

SATISH CHANDRA ALURI | ANALYST, LEMONN MARKETS DESK

Stock markets came under bear attack from October onwards amid worries over foreign investors fleeing the domestic market and stretched valuations of the equities.

In October 2024 alone, the BSE benchmark slumped 4,910.72 points or 5.82 per cent. But, heavy retail investors' participation played a significant role in the overall market's positive trend this fiscal.

Also, a number of main-board Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) and listing of shares imparted optimism in the equity markets.

On the last trading day of the 2024-25 fiscal Friday, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 191.51 points or 0.25 per cent to settle at 77,414.92 in a volatile trading session. The Nifty dropped 72.60 points or

0.31 per cent to 23,519.35. In 2023-24 fiscal, the Sensex climbed 14,659.83 points or 24.85 per cent. The market cap of BSE-listed companies had soared by ₹128,77,203.77 crore to ₹3,86,97,099.77 crore in FY24.

According to experts, FY25 also saw widespread euphoria in the IPO markets.

Reliance Industries is the country's most valued firm with a market valuation of ₹17,25,377.54 crore, followed by HDFC Bank (Rs 13,99,208.73 crore), TCS (Rs 13,04,121.56 crore), Bharti Airtel (Rs 9,87,005.92 crore) and ICICI Bank (Rs 9,52,768.61 crore) in the top five order.

However, global uncertainty continued to rise with trade wars and shifting geopolitical headwinds from the Middle East to Europe, they said.

## Services exports drop for 2nd month in row

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 28: India's services exports declined for the second month in row in February to \$31.62 billion while imports dropped to \$14.5 billion, showed Reserve Bank data released Friday.

Services exports stood at \$34.72 billion in January against \$36.96 billion in December 2024. Imports were worth \$16.7 billion in January.

On annual basis, services exports rose by 11.6 per cent in February compared to the same month of the last year. Imports contracted by 4.8 per cent on year-on-year basis.



Meanwhile, in a release on India's International Investment Position for end-December 2024, the RBI said net claims of non-residents on India increased by \$11 billion during Q3:2024-25 and stood at \$364.5 billion in December 2024.

Further, foreign assets of Indian residents declined by \$40.1 billion and the claims of non-residents in India also declined by \$29.1 billion, resulting in increase in the India net foreign liabilities.

"The decline in Indian residents' foreign assets during October-December 2024 was mainly on account of the decrease of \$70.1 billion in reserve assets," the RBI said.

Reserve assets, however, recorded an increase of \$13.2 billion over December 2023. The fall in India's foreign liabilities was due to the decline in inward direct and portfolio investments during the quarter, though trade credit, loans and currency and deposits recorded an increase, the central bank said.

## Key infra sectors growth slows in Feb

New Delhi: The output of eight key infrastructure sectors slowed down to a five-month low of 2.9 per cent in February, as against 7.1 per cent growth registered a year ago, according to official data released Friday. On a monthly basis, the growth rate in the production of these sectors was lower than the 5.1 per cent expansion recorded in January. The previous low level of growth at 2.4 per cent was recorded in September. In February, production of crude oil and natural gas recorded a negative growth. The production growth of coal, refinery products, steel and electricity moderated to 1.7 per cent, 0.8 per cent, 5.6 per cent, and 2.8 per cent, respectively, against 11.6 per cent, 2.6 per cent, 9.4 per cent and 7.6 per cent in February last year.

# CAD widens to \$11.5bn in Q3

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 28: India's current account deficit (CAD) inched up to \$11.5 billion, or 1.1 per cent of GDP, in the December quarter from \$10.4 billion (1.1 per cent of GDP) in the year-ago period, mainly due to higher trade deficit, according to RBI data released Friday.

However, the CAD in the December quarter of 2024-25 has moderated from \$16.7 billion (1.8 per cent of GDP) in the preceding quarter of the fiscal year.

India's current account deficit (CAD) increased to \$11.5 billion (1.1 per cent of GDP) in Q3:2024-25 from \$10.4 billion (1.1 per cent of GDP) in Q3:2023-24 but moderated from \$16.7 billion (1.8 per cent of GDP) in Q2:2024-25.2, said the RBI's data on Developments in India's Balance of Payments.

Merchandise trade deficit increased to \$79.2 billion in the October-December period of 2024-25 from \$71.6 billion in year-ago period.

The CAD widened to \$37 billion (1.3 per cent of GDP) during April-December 2024 from \$30.6 billion (1.1 per cent of GDP) during the corresponding period of last year, primarily on account of a higher merchandise trade deficit, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said.

In the third quarter, net services receipts increased to \$51.2 billion from \$45 billion a year ago. Services exports have risen on a year-on-year basis across major categories



We expect the current account to witness a surplus of about \$4-6 billion in the fourth quarter of FY25, aided by a seasonal uptick in merchandise exports and the resulting moderation in the merchandise trade deficit, as well as healthy services surpluses

ADITI NAYAR | CHIEF ECONOMIST, ICRA

puter services, transportation services, and travel services.

Net outgo on the primary income account, primarily reflecting payments of investment income, increased to \$16.7 billion in Q3:2024-25 from \$13.1 billion in Q3:2023-24.

Personal transfer receipts, mainly representing remittances by Indians employed overseas, rose to \$35.1 billion in Q3 2024-25 from \$30.6 billion in Q3:2023-24.

In the financial account, foreign direct investment recorded a net outflow of \$2.8 billion in Q3:2024-25 as against an inflow of \$4 billion in the corresponding period of 2023-24, the RBI said, adding that foreign portfolio investment recorded a net outflow of \$11.4 billion in October-December 2025 as against an inflow of \$12 billion in the



Can you tell us about your early life and what inspired you to enter the pharmaceutical industry?

Our family has been in the medicine business for a long time, and we continue to carry that legacy forward. My father was a traditional healer who travelled from village to village providing medical care at a time when hospitals were scarce. He had experience in both homeopathy and allopathic treatments, particularly in administering injections, and people relied on his knowledge. To expand his work, he moved to Bhubaneswar in 1962, where we obtained our first pharmacy license. We opened our first medical store at Rajmahal Square, and from there, we continued to grow, ensuring access to essential medicines for the people.

What do you think is the most important aspect of running a pharmacy

business?

For us, the pharmacy business is not just about selling medicines—it is about serving people. There is no fixed working time in this profession. A pharmacist must be available even at night to provide emergency medicines, administer injections, and offer guidance on prescriptions. Back when Bhubaneswar had barely 10 to 15 pharmacies, we were known for our commitment to helping patients at any hour. We see our work as a judicial responsibility, ensuring that people receive the right medication without prioritising profit.

Do you think the Indian healthcare system is struggling? If so, what are the biggest challenges, and how can they be addressed?

Yes, the healthcare system in India faces numerous challenges. One of the major problems is the focus on brand names rather than the composition of medicines. If doctors and pharmacists prioritised the actual composition instead of trade names, we would see more uniformity and efficiency in healthcare. Another issue is the overwhelming number of pharmaceutical brands—there are 30,000 to 50,000 different brand names in the market, leading to duplication and confusion. Some medicines that are widely sold in India are banned in other countries due to health risks. For instance, Nimesulide

is commonly available in India without a prescription, whereas it is banned in several nations. Our regulatory system needs to align with international standards to ensure patient safety.

How has your journey been so far, and do you have any expansion plans? Our journey has had its share of ups and downs, but we have never allowed challenges to weaken our resolve. We have always prioritised patient welfare. Today, we have four branches in Bhubaneswar and one in Jharsuguda, and we are expanding wherever opportunities arise. Our expansion plans are in progress, but good things take time, and we want to ensure that we grow in a way that maintains our core values.

As an entrepreneur, what advice would you give to newcomers in the pharmaceutical industry? Many young entrepreneurs are entering the pharmaceutical sector. My advice to them is work hard and have a genuine intent to help people. Understanding how to improve people's health should be a priority. Conducting workshops and learning about medical practices before starting a business will provide the right foundation. The key to success is not just selling medicines but making a positive impact on people's lives.

# Right medication over profit, says Senapati

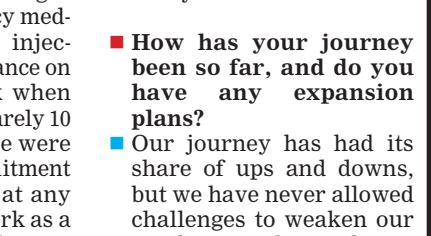
Sailendra Narayan Senapati, Managing Director of Rabintra Lifeline Pvt Ltd, has been a driving force in Odisha's pharmaceutical industry, championing ethical healthcare practices and patient welfare. Continuing his family's legacy in medicine by expanding a trusted pharmacy network, his journey is marked by dedication and responsibility. Being in the business for past 24 years, the dedicated pharmacy is the most sought-after location for patients in Bhubaneswar. In an exclusive conversation with Orissa POST, Senapati shares insights on the challenges faced by India's healthcare system, the importance of ethical pharmacy practices, and his vision for the future. Excerpts...



### BIZ BUZZ

#### Malabar opens third showroom in City

Bhubaneswar: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one of the leading jewellery retailers, inaugurated its third showroom in Soubhagyanagar, Bhubaneswar Friday. The new showroom aims to enhance the brand's presence in Odisha, offering customers a premium shopping experience with a wide range of gold, diamond, platinum, and gemstone jewellery. Ollywood actor and brand ambassador Sabyasachi Mishra and Bhubaneswar Mayor Sulochana Das inaugurated the showroom in the presence of company executives, customers, and well-wishers. "We are thrilled to launch our newest showroom at Soubhagyanagar, Bhubaneswar, continuing our journey of offering world-class jewellery to communities across India," said MP Ahammed, Chairman of Malabar Group. "Our commitment to craftsmanship, ethical sourcing, and exceptional service remains our top priority." With a global presence spanning 13 countries and over 380 showrooms, Malabar Gold & Diamonds is expanding its footprint further with 12 new outlets across India this March.



#### BoB unveils renovated Mangalpur branch

Bhubaneswar: The Bank of Baroda's Mangalpur branch in Bhubaneswar region reopened in a newly renovated avatar Friday. The inauguration ceremony was led by Swapna Bhandopadhyaya, General Manager & Zonal Head, Bhubaneswar Zone, in the presence of VMNS Saibabu, Deputy General Manager & Regional Head, Bhubaneswar Region, Rajeev Kumar Sinha, Assistant General Manager & Deputy Regional Head, Bhubaneswar Region, and Branch Head Santosh Kumar Behera, along with other senior officials and staff members. Speaking at the event, Bhandopadhyaya emphasised the bank's commitment to enhancing customer service. "The renovated branch is a step towards providing better banking services to the people in and around Mangalpur. We are offering a variety of financial products with attractive interest rates on deposits and loans," she said.

