



Janhvi's reflection

Actor Janhvi Kapoor reflects on internet culture, social media criticism and the way narratives are shaped online

LEISURE | P2



China seeks de-escalation

China calls on all countries to stop military operations in West Asia in response to Trump's appeal over Strait of Hormuz

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Trade gap shrinks

India's trade deficit narrows to \$27.1 billion compared to the previous month

BUSINESS | P11



Maiden glory

In a thrilling finale, Jannik Sinner and Aryna Sabalenka each claim their first prestigious titles at the Indian Wells

SPORTS | P12

10 dead in SCB blaze

People visit hospitals to seek healing, not harm. Nothing could be more tragic—or ironic—than patients losing their lives due to an accidental fire in a place meant to save them. The deaths of 10 patients in the early morning fire at SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack add yet another grim chapter to the growing list of hospital fire incidents in the country. While most of such tragedies in the past have occurred in private healthcare facilities, this incident in one of the largest government-run hospitals in the state has come as a rude shock to many. SCB, often regarded as a premier referral centre by doctors from even neighbouring states, is widely trusted for critical care. The loss of lives in such a reputed institution raises serious concerns about safety standards and preparedness in healthcare facilities



as Ramesh Chandra Parida (45) from Chowdwar, Madhusudan Dalai (56), Balasore, Krushnachandra Biswal (75) from Jajpur, Rabindra Das (30) from Kendrapara, Cheru Parida (100) from Angul, Menaka Rout (70) from Kendrapara, Abdul Satar (80) from West Bengal, Gouranga Charan Barik (40) from Mahanga, Mohd Nayum (35) from Bhubaneswar and Dasru Munda (65) from Keonjhar.

Majhi, who rushed to the hospital, said that around 11 hospital staff members suffered burn injuries while rescuing patients to safety. He said that the fire probably

originated from a short circuit. Noting that there were 23 patients at the Trauma Care ICU and an adjacent ICU and ward, the CM said seven patients died in the fire, while three others succumbed to burns or suffocation during evacuation.

Majhi also announced a judicial probe into the incident.

The fire broke out between 2.30 am and 3 am. Fire service personnel rushed to the hospital and doused the flames, an official said.

Condoling the death, PM Narendra Modi said on X, "The mishap at a hospital in Cuttack, Odisha, is deeply painful. Condolences to those who

NO LESSONS LEARNT

AMRI HOSPITAL, KOLKATA : More than 90 people were choked to death December 9, 2011.

IMS AND SUM HOSPITAL, BHUBANESWAR: At least 20 patients died after an accidental fire occurred October 17, 2016.

DREAMS MALL, MUMBAI: The fire claimed nine lives March 25, 2021 at the facility which housed a Covid-designated hospital.

VIJAY VALLABH HOSPITAL, MAHARASHTRA: Fifteen COVID-19 patients died after a fire broke out at the ICU of the hospital at Virar in the Palghar district April 23, 2021.

PATEL WELFARE HOSPITAL, BHARUCH: Eighteen persons, including 16 COVID-19 patients and two trainee nurses, died during a fire in Gujarat May 1, 2021.

have lost their loved ones. I pray for the speedy recovery of the injured. An ex gratia of ₹2 lakh from PMNRF would be given to the next of kin of each deceased. The injured would be given ₹50,000."

The PM also spoke to Majhi over the phone and took stock of the situation. The CM announced ₹25 lakh ex gratia for the next of kin of each deceased person. **MORE P4**

RS: Manmohan, Sujeet, Santrupt and Dilip win



Manmohan Samal

Sujeet Kumar

Santrupt Misra

Dilip Ray

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 16: The ruling BJP Monday won two of the four Rajya Sabha seats from Odisha, while the opposition BJD and a saffron party-backed Independent candidate bagged one seat each in the biennial polls held here, officials said.

Returning Officer and Odisha Assembly secretary Satyabrata Rout handed over certificates to the four newly elected members. BJP's Odisha unit president Manmohan Samal and the party's MP Sujeet Kumar secured 35 votes each to win the elections. BJD's official candidate Santrupt Misra won the polls by securing 31 votes.

BJP-backed Independent candidate and former Union minister Dilip Ray won the fourth

seat through second-preference votes, defeating opposition-backed nominee Dattaswar Hota, who was supported by the BJD, Congress and CPI(M).

Both Ray and Hota were tied by securing 23 first preference votes each. Later, Ray was elected as the winner after counting of the second preference votes, the official said. All 147 members of the Assembly exercised their franchise in the elections. The elections witnessed cross-voting, with several opposition MLAs allegedly supporting BJP candidates and the BJP-backed Independent.

While the number of BJP and its supported Independent MLAs was 82 in the 147-member House, the saffron party candidates secured 93 first preference votes, which was 11 more than its strength in the Assembly.

These 11 votes came from BJD (8) and Congress (3) MLAs, the official said.

In the Assembly, the BJP has 79 MLAs and the support of three Independents, while the BJD has 48 legislators after the suspension of two members. The Congress has 14 MLAs and the CPI(M) one.

The 2026 Rajya Sabha election results were also seen as reminiscent of the 2002 polls, when Dilip Ray, contesting as an Independent candidate, had won the seat amid large-scale cross-voting.

Another notable feature of the polls was the return of BJP state president Manmohan Samal to the Upper House after a gap of 22 years. He had earlier served as a Rajya Sabha member from 2000 to 2004. Samal, however, had lost the 2024 Assembly elections from Chandbali constituency. **MORE P3&8**

3 killed in accident on City outskirts



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 16: At least three people were killed and one person was injured when a speeding car hit morning walkers and fell into a roadside pit on the outskirts of the City Monday, police said.

The incident took place near Uttara area under the jurisdiction of Pipili police station when the vehicle was going towards Puri through NH-316, a police officer said.

The car, which fell into the pit after hitting the two women from behind, was completely damaged. The two women and the driver, and a passenger were taken to the hospital.

The two women and the driver were declared dead in the hospital, while the passenger is undergoing treatment, he added. The deceased women have been identified as Bablata Sahu and Dipanjali Rout of the area while the identity of the driver is yet to be confirmed.

Inspector-in-Charge of Pipili Police Station, Soumendu Sekhar Tripathy, said the accident involved a black Kia Seltos.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



If there was no shortage of LPG, as you claimed, why do you want credit for restoring the supply?



SNOW SNARL: Vehicles stuck in a traffic jam during snowfall near Atal Tunnel, in Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh, Monday

PFI PHOTO

EC removes top brass in Bengal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata/New Delhi, March 16: The Election Commission has removed the West Bengal Chief Secretary, Home Secretary, Director General of Police, and Kolkata police commissioner, among others, in an unprecedented administrative shake-up in the state ahead of the high-stakes assembly polls.

The EC's action, which came hours after it announced the poll schedule Sunday, triggered a sharp reaction from state Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who branded the poll panel and the ruling BJP as "anti-women and anti-Bengal" and called the move a "panic reaction by a party that realises it cannot win elections through democratic means."

However, EC officials maintained that the transfers aligned with Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar's assurance to hold free and fair polls in the state.

Although the commission has previously ordered pre-poll transfers of top bureaucrats and police officers, it has never transferred the state's bureaucratic and police top brass - the most crucial officers forming the crux of state administration-all at once, and also forbade them from taking part in election-related activities. **P8**

Iran's conditions to India for Hormuz safe passage

REUTERS

New Delhi, March 16: Iran has asked India to release three tankers seized in February as part of talks seeking the safe passage of Indian flagged or India bound vessels out of the Gulf via the Strait of Hormuz, sources with knowledge of the matter told Reuters.

Indian authorities seized the three Iran linked tankers near Indian waters alleging they had concealed or altered their identities and were involved in illegal ship to ship transfers at sea. Tehran has also sought supplies of certain medicines and medical equipment, according



to one of the sources, an Iranian official. Iran's ambassador to New Delhi met Indian foreign ministry officials Monday to discuss the issue, the source said. The sources declined to be named due to the sensitivity of the matter. India's foreign ministry, the Iranian embassy in New Delhi, and Iran's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to Reuters' requests for comment. **P9**

AGENCIES

Los Angeles, March 16: Paul Thomas Anderson's time-hopping revolutionary drama 'One Battle After Another' was the big winner at the 98th Academy Awards, taking home a total of six Oscars, including Best Picture.

Anderson was awarded Best Director and Best Adapted Screenplay. Sean Penn was named Best Supporting Actor. The film also won Best Editing and the first-ever Oscar for Best Casting.

Ryan Coogler's 'Sinners' was another major standout, winning four categories. Michael B. Jordan was named Best Actor for his dual performance as

'One Battle After Another' sweeps Oscars



twins Smoke and Stack. For her work on the film, Autumn Durald Arkapaw became

the first woman ever to win Best Cinematography. 'Sinners' also won Best Original Screen-

play and Best Score.

In other major categories, Jessie Buckley completed her awards-season sweep with an Oscar for Best Actress for her performance in 'Hamnet', Amy Madigan was named Best Supporting Actress for her harrowing role in 'Weapons', and KPop Demon Hunters gave the kids something to celebrate by winning Oscars for Best Animated Feature Film and Best Original Song.

One of the biggest surprises of the night came in the Best Live Action Short Film category, when 'The Singers' and 'Two People Exchanging Saliva' were named dual winners. It was only the seventh tie in Oscars history. **MORE P2**

leisure



KANYE WEST POSTPONES NEW DELHI CONCERT

Kanye West has postponed his New Delhi concert to May 2026, citing rising geopolitical and regional tensions. The rapper shared the update on Instagram, informing fans about the change in schedule. He also reassured ticket holders that all previously purchased tickets will remain valid for the rescheduled show.

ZENDAYA'S RING STACK TRIGGERS SECRET MARRIAGE RUMOURS

Zendaya sparked fresh speculation about a secret marriage to Tom Holland after flaunting a striking ring stack at the Academy Awards. While presenting at the ceremony, the actress' jewellery, especially a gold band, caught attention, fuelling rumours that the couple may have quietly tied the knot.



FORTUNE FORECAST

GaneshSpeaks.com
accuracy • reliability • trust
FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

ARIES

If you are a gadget freak, today you will have enough opportunity to flaunt your knowledge and impress everyone else. Students with a scientific bent of mind will excel in studies. Ganesh advises housewives to experiment with their own recipes, and not to worry about the oven – it will not burst.

TAURUS

This day, you need to watch out against your selfish and possessive tendencies. Ganesh advises you not to be too determined or demanding. Try to not be self centred. Do not impose your need and wishes on anyone. You should act generous and large hearted towards one and all; particularly towards your spouse.

GEMINI

You will be more inclined towards religious teachings and rituals today. You will probably visit a place of worship and spend some time there and this will bring you mental peace and calm. However, you still need to do justice to your duties, says Ganesh.

CANCER

It is high time you paid attention to your family. You have been so lost in work and in making money that you have almost forgotten the very people you have been slogging for. Your spouse has been trying hard to improve the relationship. Ganesh feels it is time you respond to your partner's needs.

LEO

If you are wondering whether you'll get the carrot or the stick today, then Ganesh has some good news for you: the day promises to bring only rewards for you. This will be especially true for your workplace, where your innate talents get recognised today. Expect positive support from your colleagues, and oodles of inspiring tips from your superiors. Just be careful not to get carried away by your success. What goes up must come down, cautions Ganesh.

VIRGO

Ganesh feels that today may be an important turning point in your life. You will look to secure the money much required for your bright future. Relationship matters will top your priorities during the afternoon today. You may also feel the need for spirituality, so try your hand at meditation and yoga.

LIBRA

Get a bigger wallet, since it is very likely that today shall prove to be a money-making day for you. It might be through some sort of a partnership deal that this may happen, predicts Ganesh. Destiny lends you a helping hand and guides you in your goals. But it is your sentiments that may darken your thoughts today.

SCORPIO

You are quite vocal about your ambitious plans, says Ganesh. But, being too harsh on yourself or others for that matter may spoil your relationships with many people. Stay away from lengthy discussions to avoid any conflicts.

SAGITTARIUS

You nearly become a superhero in the eyes of your near and dear ones, says Ganesh. And what more? You loving your new avatar. Good news is on its way as promotion or increment is on the cards.

CAPRICORN

Paradise is where patience leads you, success is the other terminus, says Ganesh. Keeping your cool will benefit you in more ways than you would have imagined, so think twice before you unleash your vengeance on your foes. You are also likely to have a heart-to-heart conversation with your beloved and make him/her feel wanted. Colleagues will appreciate the amiable and amusing side of you.

AQUARIUS

Today, you will understand the value of your job. You decide to do away with everything that has been hampering your work till now. You realise you need to set some long-term goals in your career. Grab the opportunity while the intention lasts, says Ganesh.

PISCES

Today you will feel generous and calm. You will shower those in the family who are younger than you with this generosity and as a result be the object of their fondness. With a clear perspective you will be able to see things for what they are. The only downside of the day is that your expenses might take a toll on your wallet, says Ganesh.

98TH ACADEMY AWARDS

Warner Bros. dominates with 11 wins



Michael B. Jordan was honoured with Best Actor award for *Sinners*, whereas, Jessie Buckley took home the Best Actress trophy for *Hamnet*

Los Angeles: The 98th edition of the Academy Awards turned into a landmark night for Warner Bros., which secured a record 11 Oscars, tying the all-time record for the most wins by a single studio. The achievement places the studio alongside historic winners such as Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer for *Ben-Hur*, Paramount Pictures for *Titanic*, and New Line Cinema for *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the*



King in 2003. New Line Cinema was later absorbed into Warner Bros., making the milestone even more significant for the studio. Warner Bros. entered the ceremony with a remarkable 30 nominations, surpassing its previous record of 28 nominations set in 1943 when *Casablanca* won Best Picture. Most of the studio's nominations came from two major contenders: *Sinners*, which received 16 nominations, and *One Battle After Another*, which earned 13. The final nomination came from *Weapons* for Amy Madigan in the supporting actress category.

In the final tally, *One Battle After Another* emerged with six Oscars, while *Sinners* secured four awards. *Weapons* added one more win, completing the studio's record haul. The night also marked a major career milestone for Michael B. Jordan, who won the Best Actor award for his performance in *Sinners*. It was the first Oscar of his career, recognising a performance widely praised for its emotional intensity and layered portrayal of a character wrestling with moral conflict and personal redemption. Jordan first gained widespread recognition through the television series *Friday Night Lights* before building a strong film career with projects such as *Fruitvale Station*, *Creed* and *Black Panther*.

Priyanka returns as presenter

Actress Priyanka Chopra took to the stage along with actor Javier Bardem to present the International Feature Film Oscar at the 98th edition of the Academy Awards Monday. The duo presented the award to Norway's *Sentimental Value*, directed by Joachim Trier. The film explores the strained relationship between a father and his two daughters as they confront unresolved family history and artistic legacy. The film is set in Norway, and follows a once-acclaimed filmmaker attempting to reconnect with his family while preparing a new film project. For the occasion, Priyanka opted for a custom gown by Dior. The outfit followed a classic Hollywood aesthetic with modern detailing.



THOSE WHO TOOK HOME TROPHIES

- Best Picture: *One Battle After Another*
- Best Director: Paul Thomas Anderson -- *One Battle After Another*
- Best Actor: Michael B. Jordan -- *Sinners*
- Best Actress: Jessie Buckley -- *Hamnet*
- Best Supporting Actor: Sean Penn -- *One Battle After Another*
- Best Supporting Actress: Amy Madigan -- *Weapons*
- Best International Feature Film: *Sentimental Value*
- Best Documentary Feature: *Mr. Nobody Against Putin*
- Best Animated Feature: *KPop Demon Hunters*
- Best Visual Effects: *Avatar: Fire and Ash*

on grief and resilience following the loss of their son. Critics praised her ability to convey emotional depth with subtlety, anchoring much of the film's emotional power.

Janhvi on internet culture



Mumbai: Actor Janhvi Kapoor recently opened up about internet culture, social media criticism and the way narratives are shaped online. Reflecting on the nature of digital conversations, she said that social media often prioritises visibility and engagement over accuracy. According to her, public figures frequently become easy targets as creators chase virality and views. She noted that many people use celebrity names

to gain traction online. "From what I understand about social media culture, everyone wants prominence, views and virality. If they are making content about you, you're just a scapegoat, they use your name for clickbait or rage bait to boost engagement," she said. The *Dhadak* actress explained that understanding this dynamic helps her create emotional distance from criticism. Once the intention behind such content becomes clear, she believes it becomes easier not to take it personally.



Shilpa's secret to staying calm

Mumbai: Bollywood actress and fitness enthusiast Shilpa Shetty shared a glimpse of how she keeps herself calm before stepping into work mode. Taking to her social media account, the actress wrote, "My secret to keeping my calm, just before the kaam #Pra-

nayamaForTheWin." In the video, the *Baazigar* actress can be seen practicing pranayama as she gives up for a professional stint. Dressed in a shimmering gold halter-neck outfit with delicate embellishments the actress is seen sitting outdoor and calmly performing the breathing exercise. Talking about Shilpa, the actress has long been known as a yoga enthusiast and has constantly advocated the benefits of the generations-old practice of yoga along with healthy and clean eating. The actress has been seen often emphasising on the importance of balance in lifestyle and fitness.

PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

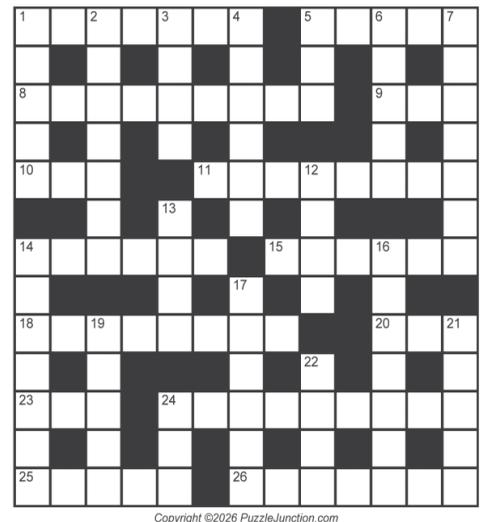


BREVITY



FUN POST

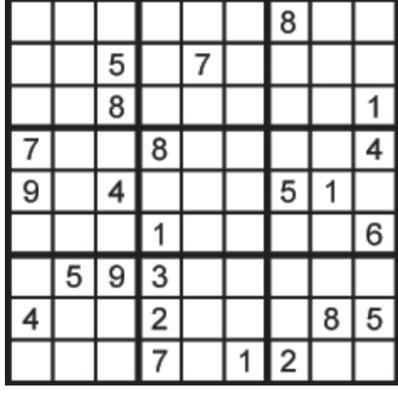
CROSSWORD



- Across
- 1 Bygone Greek money
 - 5 Fastener
 - 8 Bankrupt
 - 9 Charged particle
 - 10 Relations
 - 11 Decrease
 - 14 Kind of clock
 - 15 War horses
 - 18 Large boa of tropical South America
 - 20 Sidekick
 - 23 Harbour craft
 - 24 Airline ticket type (5,4)
 - 25 High point
 - 26 Liberate (3,4)
 - 6 Cover story?
 - 7 Mulls over
 - 12 Letter after theta
 - 13 Famous London district
 - 14 Helter-skelter
 - 16 Kind of penguin
 - 17 Smells
 - 19 Bicker
 - 21 Oversight
 - 22 Blue-pencil
 - 24 Balderdash
- Down
- 1 Imbibe
 - 2 Poisonous chemical element
 - 3 Nimbus
 - 4 Vinegary
 - 5 Director's cry

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

Man beaten to death

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nabarangpur, March 16: An elderly man was beaten to death by a group of people in Khandiguda area under Nabarangpur police limits on suspicion of being a child lifter Sunday evening, police said Monday.

According to police, the elderly man, whose identity is yet to be ascertained, was seen roaming in Khandiguda area at around 8 pm Sunday. "Suspecting him to be a child lifter, dozens of residents from Khandiguda and nearby villages gathered and surrounded him before assaulting him severely," an official said.

After receiving information, police from Nabarangpur reached the spot, rescued the profusely bleeding man and rushed him to the district headquarters hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

SDPO Krushnachandra Bhadra said a murder case (94/26) has been registered at Nabarangpur police station and an investigation is underway. He added that efforts are being made to identify and arrest those involved in the incident at the earliest.

As the deceased remains unidentified, the body has been kept at the hospital mortuary. Police said the body will be preserved for four days, and if any claimant comes forward during this period, it will be handed over to them.



WORTH A CAPTURE: A couple takes a selfie at Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden after it opened to visitors, in Srinagar, Monday

PTI PHOTO

Akademi honour for 'Padapurana'

POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi/Bhubaneswar, March 16: Girijakumar Baliyar Singh's Odia poetry collection 'Padapurana' has won the Sahitya Akademi Award 2025, official sources said Monday.

The Akademi announced its annual awards for 2025 Monday, recognising outstanding literary works across 24 Indian languages.

In total, eight poetry collections, four novels, six short story collections, two essay works, one literary criticism book, one autobiography and two memoirs received awards this year.

Singh's 'Padapurana', a collection of poems comprising 150 sonnets, was selected by a jury of eminent literary figures, marking a significant milestone for contemporary Odia poetry.

Congratulating the poet, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi said the achievement has brought national recognition to Odia literature.

Each award carries a cash prize of Rs 1,00,000. The awards will be formally presented at a ceremony scheduled to be held in New Delhi March 31, 2026.

US panel recommends sanctions on R&AW, RSS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New York, March 16: A US federal government commission has flagged the alleged worsening of religious freedom in India and called for it to be designated as a "country of particular concern", while recommending for targeted sanctions on entities like Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

There were no immediate comments from India on the report issued by the US Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). In the past few years, India rejected the USCIRF reports as "biased and politically motivated".

In its annual report, the USCIRF asked that targeted sanctions be imposed on individuals and entities, such as R&AW and RSS, for their "responsibility and tolerance of severe violations of religious freedom by freezing those individuals' or entities' assets and/or barring their entry into the United States".

It recommended to the US government that India be designated as a "country of particular concern", or CPC, for "engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations".

The report said that in 2025, religious freedom conditions in India continued to deteriorate as the government introduced and enforced new legislation targeting religious minority communi-



ties and their houses of worship. "Several states undertook efforts to introduce or strengthen anti-conversion laws to include harsher prison sentences. Indian authorities also facilitated widespread detention and illegal expulsion of citizens and religious refugees and tolerated vigilante attacks against religious minority communities," it said.

The report also noted the April 22, 2025 Pahalgam terror attack against tourists in Jammu and Kashmir. On the attack, the report said, "three gunmen" attacked a group of "predominantly Hindu tourists in the Muslim-majority territory of Kashmir", killing 26 people.

"The perpetrators reportedly asked the victims to recite the Kalma, an Islamic verse, and killed those who were unable to do so. The attack sparked a five-day conflict between India and Pakistan and intensi-

fied anti-Muslim sentiment in India, including targeted attacks," it said.

The terror attack was carried out by the Resistance Front, a front for Pakistan-based terror organisation, Lashkar-e-Taiba.

The report said that future US security assistance and bilateral trade policies with India be linked to improvements in religious freedom.

USCIRF said the US Congress should reintroduce and pass the Transnational Repression Reporting Act of 2024 to "require the annual reporting of acts of transnational repression by the Indian government targeting religious minorities in the United States".

In a statement, USCIRF Chair Vicky Hartzler said, "China arrests underground church members, mob violence is on the rise in India and Pakistan leading to attacks on religious minorities and the destruction of their homes, Burma's military bombs houses of worship, and Tajikistan denies parents the right to teach their children about faith."

"As USCIRF's Annual Report shows, far too many people in key nations are denied religious freedom through unjust laws, discrimination, harassment, violence, and even crimes against humanity. The US government must continue to advance religious freedom abroad to make a difference for those facing religious persecution."

Dilip wins RS race as 11 cross-vote

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 16: Cross-voting by 11 legislators in the election to four Rajya Sabha seats from Odisha Monday has triggered intense political debate in the state.

Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) president Bhakta Charan Das alleged that three Congress MLAs — Ramesh Jena, Dasharathi Gamang and Sofia Firdous — cross-voted in the election.

Similarly, BJD election agent and MLA Pratap Keshari Deb claimed that eight legislators from the regional party also cross-voted. According to Deb, BJD MLAs Chakramani Kanhar, Naba Kishore Mallick, Ramakanta Bhoi, Souvic Biswal, Debi Ranjan Tripathy and Subasini Jena voted against the party whip. He further alleged that suspended MLAs Sanatan Mahakud and Arvind Mohapatra ignored the whip and voted in favour of BJP-backed independent candidate Dilip Ray.

As a result of cross-voting by 11 MLAs, Ray managed to secure an easy victory in the election. The cross-voting by suspended MLAs Mahakud and Mohapatra had been widely anticipated. Meanwhile, Kanhar and Mallick had reportedly been out of contact with the party for the past three days. After casting his vote, Kanhar avoided media queries about whom he supported and hurried away from reporters.

Despite repeated attempts by the party leadership to persuade him, Biswal also did not attend party meetings until the end. The BJD had therefore anticipated that his vote might not go in



favour of the party-backed common candidate Datteswar Hota.

The manner in which three BJD legislators — Debi Ranjan Tripathy, Subasini Jena and Ramakanta Bhoi — cross-voted in the election became a major point of curiosity.

Till just before the voting, the three MLAs had been visiting Naveen Niwas like other party members and remained in touch with the party leadership. On Sunday, they even touched the sacred 'nakachana' brought from Srimandir to Naveen Niwas and pledged to vote for the party's official candidate.

However, after casting their votes, all three legislators came out having given their first-preference votes to Ray.

Speaking to media later, Debi Ranjan said he had voted for Ray according to his conscience and in support of leaders who had spearheaded the anti-Congress movement. He alleged that an "unethical understanding" had been reached with the Congress without consulting him, which prompted him to support Ray.

Meanwhile, Biswal, son of former MLA Pravat Biswal, also criticised the BJD after casting his vote, raising several issues including the alleged move to expel his father from the party.

Congress MLA Ramesh Jena had also remained out of sight for the past three days, but the party did not comment on its inability to contact him. However, repeated concerns were raised over the absence of Gamang.

Both Gamang and Jena arrived near Room No- 54 of the Assembly around the same time to cast their votes. When the two MLAs showed their ballots supporting Ray, the OPCC president, who was acting as the Congress agent, objected. He demanded that their votes be rejected.

However, Chief Electoral Officer RS Gopalan clarified that there was no party whip applicable in Rajya Sabha election and allowed both MLAs to cast their votes.

After voting, Gamang and Jena told reporters that they had voted according to the commitment they had made and in

line with the party's direction, before leaving the venue.

Later, when MLA Firdous cast her vote in favour of Ray, Bhakta Das again raised objections. Subsequently, Das lashed out at the three legislators and said legal steps would be taken to seek the cancellation of their Assembly membership.

Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik also addressed the media, alleging that those who cross-voted had family members with criminal records who had served jail terms. He said the allegations of "horse-trading" by the BJP had now been proved. According to Patnaik, the BJP had resorted to unethical means to win the support of opposition MLAs.

Despite the combined numerical strength of the BJD, Congress, and CPI(M), joint candidate Hota was defeated.

According to official reports, the cross-voting by 11 MLAs directly resulted in the victory of Ray. While the Opposition technically held the majority on paper, the internal defections flipped the final outcome in favour of the BJP-backed candidate.

'Battle of Galwan' retitled amid Sino-Indian thaw

AGENCIES

Mumbai, March 16: As Salman Khan fans wait with bated breath for his much-anticipated film 'Battle of Galwan', the makers have decided to retitle the project.

The makers, Salman Khan Films, officially announced Monday the new title of their drama, which will be called 'Maatrubhumi: May War Rest in Peace' from now on.

The announcement was accompanied by a striking new poster, sharing the title change. It further revealed a message that carries deep relevance in today's world — 'May War Rest in Peace'.

The poster showed Salman peeking from behind a bloodied

wooden log laced with a spiked chain.

While the film is inspired by the historic Galwan Valley events, the message behind the title goes beyond the battlefield. The announcement has already sparked conversation across social media, with many praising the powerful sentiment behind the title and the bold stance it represents, es-



pecially in the present political environment.

Made under the direction of Apoorva Lakhia, the drama is a cinematic adaptation of

the real life events of June 15, 2020, when our Indian soldiers clashed with Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley. The drama will revolve around Colonel

Santosh Babu (played by Salman Khan) and the 16 Bihar Regiment, who were tasked with enforcing a disengagement agreement along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

With Salman, the core cast of the project also includes Chitrangda Singh as the leading lady, along with Abhilash Chaudhary and Ankur Bhatia playing crucial roles.

Himesh Reshamiya has been roped in as the music composer for 'Maatrubhumi: May War Rest in Peace'. In the first look poster for the movie, Salman was seen with a mustache for his role as a soldier. He looked absolutely fierce in his rugged battle avatar with a bloodied face and intense determination in his eyes.

Fears of global energy crisis rise

PTI/AP

Beirut, March 16: Fears of a global energy crisis rose Monday as the war in the Middle East raged on, with more US-Israeli strikes on the Iranian capital and Israel's bombardment of Lebanon. An Iranian drone strike temporarily shut Dubai's airport, a crucial global travel hub, underscoring the threats to the world economy.

Since the United States and Israel attacked Iran more than two weeks ago, Tehran has regularly fired on Israel, American bases in the region, and Gulf Arab countries' energy infrastructure with drones and missiles.

Iranian strikes on commercial ships in and around the Strait of Hormuz and even just

the threat of those attacks have also effectively stopped shipping traffic in the vital waterway, through which a fifth of the world's oil is transported. That has dramatically increased the price of oil and put pressure on Washington to do something to ease the pain for consumers.

Brent crude remained stubbornly over USD 100 a barrel Monday. It was at USD 104 in early trading, up nearly 45 per cent since the US and Israel attacked Iran February 28. It has spiked as high as about USD 120 during the conflict.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi called claims that his country may be seeking a negotiated end to the war "delusional", saying in a social media post early Monday that Iran was seeking neither "truce nor talks".

SCBMCH
HORROR

Hope turns to despair for patients' kin

Khurda-Vijayawada Corridor plan reviewed



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 16: A high-level meeting on the proposed Khurda-Tangi-Vijayawada expressway and high-speed corridor was held at Lok Seva Bhavan here Monday. The meeting was chaired by Works department Principal Secretary Sanjay Kumar Singh.

During the meeting, officials discussed proposed plans for the new six-lane greenfield high-speed corridor passing through Odisha. Discussions included district-level routes, connectivity with economic zones and cities, land acquisition, and other implementation details.

The corridor will stretch a total of 522 km within Odisha, connecting 27 cities across nine districts: Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Dhenkanal, Cuttack, Nayagarh, Ganjam, Gajapati, Rayagada, and Koraput. The project aims to enhance connectivity to mineral-rich and industrial regions, facilitate better access to ports and coastal economic zones, and provide a major boost to the state's development.

The new corridor is part of a 1,102 km route spanning Odisha, West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Andhra Pradesh, with 522 km being newly constructed within Odisha. District-wise road lengths within Odisha will include: Ganjam - 97 km, Dhenkanal - 88 km, Mayurbhanj & Keonjhar - 86 km each, and Rayagada - 53 km.

This corridor is expected to significantly enhance regional connectivity, promote industrial growth, and support Odisha's economic development trajectory.



past midnight and no person was allowed inside the ICU, when news of the fire spread on the premises, panicking the kin who scrambled to search for their loved ones.

They woke up to cries, running footsteps and confusion in the corridors. Many ran towards the ICU. However, security personnel restricted their entry into the ICU as the blaze spread inside the closed air-conditioned unit.

Many hoped their relatives had been rescued on time. Instead, several found their dear

ones lying dead with burns. The devastating fire at the hospital was one of the worst tragedies in the city in recent times.

"Relatives and attendants of patients had joined hands with the medical staffers to rescue the patients," an eyewitness said.

Another man said he broke the window glass and poured water in an attempt to douse the fire before any assistance arrived. "Under the guidance of a nurse, I switched off some electrical equipment and the rescued seven patients from the

ICU, who were in a very serious condition," he said.

The family members of the patients accused the hospital authorities of delay in calling the fire services, and also alleged that the fire brigade was slow to respond. They claimed that the automatic fire detection and suppression system also did not function.

Fire Services Director General Sudhanshu Sarangi, however, said the fire brigade received information about the blaze at 2:58am and the personnel reached the spot within



two minutes.

For the families outside the ICU, the tragedy unfolded not through official updates, but through desperate searching, unanswered questions, and the unbearable discovery of their loved ones' deaths.

"My brother was on ventila-

tor support but he was recovering. Doctors had informed me that he would be brought out of ventilation in one or two days. But, today, when I was searching for him following the fire incident, I found his body lying on a stretcher in the medicine department," the younger brother of Ramesh Chandra Parida, who died in the incident, said.

The shock was perhaps deepest for those who had gone to sleep holding on to the reassurances from doctors of recovery of their kin. Krushna Ballav Das of Balasore had admitted his 27-year-old son to the trauma care unit after a road accident that left him with a head injury Sunday.

"He was doing well... He was recovering. When I woke up and heard about the fire, I rushed to the hospital, where a staffer told me that my son had died," Das said, weeping.

The fire is suspected to have been caused by an electrical short circuit, one of the most common causes of hospital fires in India.

GOVT ORDERS JUDICIAL PROBE

Bhubaneswar: The state government Monday ordered a judicial inquiry into the tragic fire at the Trauma Care ICU of SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack that claimed 10 lives in the wee hours of the day. According to a notification issued by the Home (Special Section) department, the state government has appointed retired District Judge Laxmidhar Biswal to head the Judicial Commission of Inquiry under the provisions of the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952. The inquiry will also assess the preparedness of the hospital and other agencies in handling such emergencies and examine whether the steps taken before and after the fire were adequate and effective in saving the lives of patients and others. The commission has been directed to submit its report to the state government within 60 days from the date of publication of the notification in the Odisha Gazette. Earlier, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi rushed to the hospital following the incident. "I have directed the Director General of Fire Services to personally visit SCB Medical College and Hospital and ensure fire compliance. If anyone is found guilty after the judicial probe, strict action will be taken," the CM said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi Monday spoke to the Chief Minister over the telephone to discuss the unfortunate incident. During the conversation, Majhi briefed the Prime Minister on the emergency measures taken for the affected persons, including their relocation and the special medical care being provided to them. He also informed the Prime Minister about the high-level judicial inquiry ordered by the state government to probe the incident. Meanwhile, condolences poured in for the bereaved families of the victims. President Droupadi Murmu and Vice President CP Radhakrishnan expressed grief over the loss of lives in the fire and prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured. Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati, Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, and Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik also mourned the death of patients in the incident and wished a quick recovery for those injured.



Experts, farmers discuss climate-smart farming

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 16: A state-level consultation on "Climate Smart Agriculture: Strategies for Resilient Farming" was held Monday at the Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Odissi Research Centre, Bhubaneswar.

The workshop was organised by Passing Gifts, a subsidiary of Heifer International, bringing together farmers, experts, development practitioners, NGO representatives, and academicians to discuss solutions for climate-resilient agriculture in Odisha. The consultation saw participation from over 106 stakeholders, including progressive farmers, researchers, practitioners, and representatives from academic and development institutions. Participants deliberated on practical strategies to help smallholder farmers adapt to climate change while improving agricultural productivity.

During the technical session, Sushanta Kumar Jata, Technical Officer at ICAR - Central Tuber Crops Research Institute (CTCRI) highlighted the importance of climate-resilient tuber crops such as cassava, yam, taro, elephant foot yam, and arrowroot.

"These crops are drought and flood-resistant, require relatively low investment, and can provide good yields with fewer disease risks. They are also nutritionally rich and were once an important part of our staple diet," he said, adding that improved harvesting and storage systems could further enhance their benefits for farmers.

Agriculture expert Ambika Nanda stressed the importance of diversified farming systems. "Climate change is affecting every sector, and integrated farming is one of the most effective ways to build resilience and ensure sustainable livelihoods for farmers," he noted. Deputy Director of Extension at Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT) Subash Sahoo highlighted the urgent need to restore soil health. "Excessive use of chemical fertilisers has gradually degraded soil fertility. Promoting chemical-free and sustainable farming practices is essential to protect agricultural productivity for future generations," he said.

CPET application deadline extended till March 18

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 16: The deadline for submitting applications for the Common PG Entrance Test (CPET) has been extended. The last date to apply for the examination is now March 18, 2026.

Students aspiring to appear for CPET can fill up their Common Application Form (CAF) through the SAMS portal till March 18, 11:45 pm.

Earlier, as per the scheduled timeline, March 15 was the last date for submitting applications for the CPET examination. However, keeping in view the larger interest and future prospects of students, the Higher Education department has decided to extend the application deadline.

It is noteworthy that students seeking admission into postgraduate courses for the academic session 2026-27 will have to appear for the Common PG Entrance Test (CPET).

The CPET entrance examinations for various postgraduate subjects will be conducted from April 27 to May 10. Selection of students for postgraduate courses will be made on the basis of marks secured in the CPET.

The Higher Education department has also set a target to commence postgraduate courses in all universities and colleges by July 10, 2026. This will help ensure timely completion of academic sessions, examinations and declaration of results, thereby benefiting students across Odisha.

Nita Ambani gets KISS Humanitarian Award

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 16: Founder and Chairperson of Reliance Foundation Nita M. Ambani was conferred the KISS Humanitarian Award 2025 at the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) campus here Monday.

The award was presented by Nobel Laureate from Sri Lanka, Mohan Munasinghe in the presence of KIIT, KISS and KIMS founder Achyuta Samanta. Senior functionaries of the institutions and a large number of students and dignitaries attended the function.

The award recognised Ambani's humanitarian initiatives and her significant contributions to social development through education, healthcare, rural transformation, women empowerment and sports pro-



motion through the Reliance Foundation.

In her acceptance speech, Nita said that Samanta has built two modern temples of education - KIIT and KISS. These two institutions are a matter of pride for our country. She said that she feels proud to receive the prestigious award and added that the honour is not hers alone, but belongs to the entire team of Reliance Foundation.

Addressing the 40,000 students of KISS, she said, "I will never forget the love and affection you have given me here." She further said that it was truly a privilege for her to visit the two remarkable institutions, KIIT and KISS.

She expressed that she was overwhelmed to come to the pious land of Lord Jagannath. She also added that Odisha has a rich culture, traditions and

values, and that the people of Odisha share a deep and strong connection with nature.

She said that there is no difference between boys and girls and that whatever boys can do, girls can do as well. Advising the students, she said, "This is just the beginning, not your final goal. You should dream big, and to achieve those dreams, you must work hard with dedication," she added.

She further advised the students never to leave the path of righteousness. "I see the future of India here in KISS. After seeing the children here, I am confident that the future of India is bright," she added.

In his welcome speech, Samanta said, "Success does not mean achieving things only for oneself. True success lies in bringing light into the lives of others."

Village keeping Odisha's puppetry alive

POST NEWS NETWORK

Dhenkanal, March 16: In the quaint village of Raidihi, the flickering shadows of Kandhei Nacha (puppet dance) tell a poignant story of cultural resilience amid growing neglect. During the 35th Dhenkanal Heritage Walks (DHW) held Sunday, around 30 participants, led by DHW convener Suresh Prasad Mishra, visited the secluded hamlet—now regarded as one of the last strongholds of the folk art form teetering on the edge of oblivion.

Raidihi's puppetry tradition dates back to 1952, when two villagers, Shatrughana Jena and Banshidhar Dhal, encountered puppeteers during a visit to Ganjam district. Inspired, they brought the craft back and adapted it to local traditions, gradually turning Raidihi into a vibrant centre of puppetry.

The art soon became part of the village's social fabric. Traditionally, a father gifted a Kandhei Nacha puppet set to his daughter at marriage—not just as a keepsake, but as a means of livelihood for her new family.

India is home to four major



forms of puppetry: Suta (string puppets), Gopa (rod puppets), Chhaya (shadow puppets), and Hastada (glove puppets). Notably, Odisha is the only state where all four forms continue to survive. Among them, Suta Kandhei—the string puppet tradition—finds its strongest base in Raidihi.

Today, the village has 17 active puppet troupes, making it one of the most concentrated communities of traditional puppeteers in the region. Many of these groups still travel across the state, bringing wooden characters to life through intricate finger movements,

traditional songs, and dramatic storytelling. Each troupe typically requires eight to ten performers to stage a full nataka (theatrical performance).

Despite its rich legacy, the art form faces an existential crisis driven by two major factors. First is economic instability. With declining patronage and the overwhelming rise of digital entertainment, the livelihood of traditional puppeteers has become increasingly precarious.

The second challenge is a growing generational disconnect. During a seminar held at the village hall as part of the

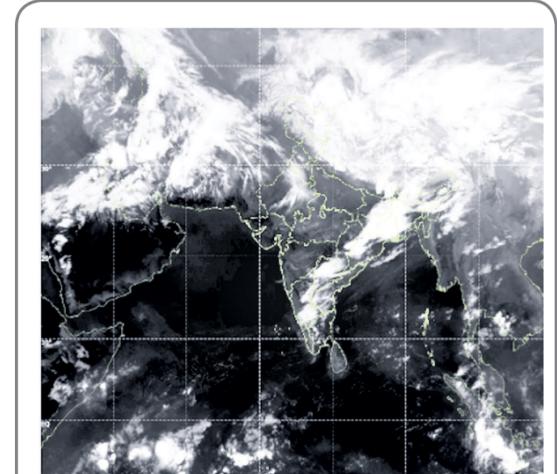
- Raidihi's puppetry tradition began in 1952 when villagers Shatrughana Jena and Banshidhar Dhal encountered puppeteers during a visit to Ganjam district
- Inspired, they introduced the craft in their village and adapted it to local traditions, gradually turning Raidihi into a vibrant centre of puppetry

heritage walk, local artists expressed concern that younger generations, seeking more stable and modern careers, are reluctant to continue the demanding craft.

Recognising Raidihi's unique contribution to India's cultural heritage, DHW organisers and local residents have urged authorities to officially designate the village as a "Heritage Puppet Village." Such recognition could bring institutional support, boost cultural tourism, and enable access to government grants to help sustain the tradition.

As the sun set on the Dhenkanal Heritage Walks, one message rang clear: Raidihi is not merely a village but a living museum. If the strings of puppetry fall silent here, an irreplaceable chapter of Odisha's cultural soul may fade into history.

MARKET WATCH					
CURRENCY		BOURSES		COMMODITIES	
INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR	92.37 ↓ 0.06	SENSEX	75502.85 ↑ 938.93	GOLD	₹155,463 ↑ ₹3,003
EURO	106.21 ↑ 0.11	NIFTY	23408.80 ↑ 257.70	SILVER	₹255,700 ↓ ₹3,735



WEATHER			
	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	32.2°	31.2°	Light to Moderate rain or thunderstorm very likely
Min Temp	22.6°	19.0°	
Humidity	80%	87%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	

Jackfruit Mission goes haywire amid lack of market, processing

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nandapur, March 16: A state initiative to promote jackfruit processing and marketing in southern Odisha appears to have faltered in Koraput district, where the absence of organised markets, processing units and official support has left farmers dependent on middlemen who buy the fruit at low prices and transport it to other states.

Tender jackfruit grown in villages and forest areas across the district is in high demand outside Odisha. Traders are purchasing the fruit from farmers for about ₹30-35 per piece and shipping truckloads to Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Kerala, according to officials and local traders.

Koraput's wild jackfruit is valued for its nutritional content, including vitamins A, B6 and C, as well as calcium, potassium, iron, folic acid, thiamine and niacin. Despite this demand, the lack of structured marketing systems and food-processing units has prevented farmers from receiving better returns, sources said.

Data from the district Horticulture and Forest departments show that jackfruit cultivation spans about 988 hectares across Koraput, with an estimated annual production of more than 25,000 metric tonnes.

Among the blocks, Lamtaput accounts for about 101 hectares producing roughly 2,299 metric tonnes, followed by Nandapur with 99 hectares yielding about 2,023 metric tonnes. Semiliguda produces around 2,196 metric tonnes from 91 hectares, while Pottangi grows about 2,295 metric tonnes across 94 hectares. Narayanpatna records about 2,103 metric tonnes from 89 hectares.



Other producing blocks include Boipariguda with about 2,090 metric tonnes from 89 hectares; Koraput block with about 1,596 metric tonnes from 65 hectares; Dasmantpur with about 1,510 metric tonnes from 76 hectares; Laxmipur with about 1,429 metric tonnes from 71 hectares; and Borigungma producing about 1,245 metric tonnes from 55 hectares.

Smaller production areas include Kundura with about 1,065 metric tonnes from 49 hectares, Kotpad with about 959 metric tonnes from 42 hectares, Bandhugaon with about 896 metric tonnes from 35 hectares and Jeypore with about 689 metric tonnes from 32 hectares.

Farmers say the fruit's economic potential remains largely untapped because there is little government support for procurement, processing or value addition. Agencies such as Mission Shakti, the Odisha Rural Development and Marketing Society (ORMAS), the Tribal Development Cooperative Corporation of Odisha Ltd. (TDCCOL), the State Livelihood Mission and the Regulated Market Committee operate in the district, but growers say forest and agriculture produce like jackfruit receive limited attention.

The state government had

launched a Jackfruit Mission several years ago to promote products such as chips, pickles, cooked dishes and flour made from jackfruit seeds. However, farmers say there has been little follow-through locally. Discontent has also surfaced after jackfruit promotion was reportedly absent during the 29th district cultural festival, 'Parab'.

Wild jackfruit plays a crucial role in the livelihoods of tribal communities in the district. Farmers allege that middlemen often buy rights to jackfruit-bearing trees well before harvest, limiting growers' profits. Although the fruit begins ripening between December and January, it largely disappears from local markets by March.

More than 1,785 women's self-help groups operate in Nandapur block alone under Mission Shakti, while the district has over 30,000 such groups. Local stakeholders say these groups could support small processing units to produce jackfruit-based foods and create jobs.

Community leaders and farmers have urged the state government and district administration to strengthen the Jackfruit Mission and create sustainable livelihood opportunities by promoting the processing and marketing of locally grown jackfruit.

RUSHIKULYA ROOKERY 2nd day of arribada records huge surge

POST NEWS NETWORK

Chhatrapur, March 16: Nearly 70,000 Olive Ridley sea turtles climbed ashore to nest at the Rushikulya rookery along the Odisha coast, forest officials said Monday, raising hopes for another strong nesting season.

About 69,900 turtles emerged from the Bay of Bengal for mass nesting, known as arribada, pushing the total number of nesting females recorded so far this season to around 80,120, officials said. Nearly 10,220 turtles were recorded on the first day of the annual mass nesting phenomenon.

Although the arribada began later than expected this year, forest officials said the sharp rise in the number of turtles indicates that more may arrive in the coming days.



Officials attributed the favourable nesting activity to suitable weather conditions around the rookery, including southerly winds, optimal sea temperature and suitable sand conditions along the beach.

To ensure protection of the nesting site, forest authorities have cordoned off the area with high fencing and imposed strict restrictions on trespassing.

After laying eggs, the female turtles return to the sea, leaving the nests buried in the sand. The hatchlings typically emerge after about 45 to 50 days and make their way to the sea, officials said.

BEO office accountant arrested for bribery

POST NEWS NETWORK

Barpali, March 16: A junior clerk-cum-accountant at the Barpali Block Education Officer's office in Bargarh district was arrested by Odisha Vigilance on charge of demanding and accepting a bribe from an official to process pending salary and bill documents.

The accused, Rajanikanta Kar, was caught red-handed while accepting ₹6,000 as a bribe from Additional Block Education Officer (ABEO) Ratna Kumar Bhoi. According to Vigilance officials, Kar had initially demanded ₹10,000 to prepare and process the pending salary and bill documents of Bhoi.

Sources said Bhoi had already paid ₹4,000 earlier, but Kar allegedly continued to demand the remaining ₹6,000. Frustrated by the repeated demands, Bhoi lodged a complaint with Odisha Vigilance authorities.

Acting on the complaint, a Vigilance team laid a trap and apprehended Kar while he was accepting the remaining ₹6,000 from Bhoi. The entire tainted bribe amount was recovered from Kar's possession and seized.



The trap operation was conducted by a team led by Vigilance DSPs Sulastri Chhatririya (Bolangir) and Sushama Tirkey (Bargarh), along with inspectors Tushar Kanta Mohapatra (Bargarh), Sukanta Pradhan (Bargarh) and Dilip Pradhan (Sambalpur).

Officials said simultaneous searches are being conducted at two locations linked to Kar from the disproportionate assets (DA) angle.

In connection with the case, Sambalpur Vigilance Police Station Case No. 02 dated March 15, 2026, has been registered against Kar under Section 7 of the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018. Further investigation is underway.

Class IX student critical in assault by home guard

POST NEWS NETWORK

Dhenkanal, March 16: A Class IX student was critically injured after allegedly being assaulted by a police home guard at Baulpur village under the Jharagadia police outpost of Sadar police station in Dhenkanal district Saturday.

The injured student, Animesh Mallik, 14, of Sri Sri Jagannath High School, is undergoing treatment at the district head quarters hospital in Dhenkanal. Two other students of the same school - Bighna Mallik, 14, and Kupendra Mallik, 14 - were also injured but were treated at the hospital and later discharged.

According to the complaint, Animesh, son of Antaryami Mallik, had gone to a shop outside the school gate after completing an examination. Home guard Manas Behera, 26, allegedly attacked him with an iron rod and a digging bar and issued death threats. Police have registered cases and launched an investigation.

Animesh sustained a fractured left hand. The matter is under investigation, and appropriate action will be taken after the probe, police said.

GRP nabs 3 from Rajasthan for looting gold ornaments

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Berhampur, March 16: The Government Railway Police (GRP) Monday arrested three persons from Rajasthan for allegedly looting gold ornaments from a trader near Berhampur Railway Station while posing as CBI officers.

Gold ornaments weighing 88 gm, valued at around ₹14.80 lakh, were seized from their possession, an officer said.

At least two unidentified persons intercepted the victim, Husmukh Jain (43) of Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh, when he and another man were leaving Berhampur Railway Station after deboarding the Konark Express around 9.30pm February 25, the officer said.

"We have identified some more accused persons involved in the loot. They are from outside the state and will be arrested soon," said Jagannath Mallick, Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO), GRP (Khurda).

The accused allegedly posed as CBI officers and forcibly took away his bag on the pretext of an enquiry.

The bag contained two mobile phones, 33 gold ornaments weighing around 862.5 gm, among other items, the officer said. Based on the trader's complaint, a case was registered at GRP Berhampur February 26.

A joint team of GRP and Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel conducted raids at multiple locations in Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan during the investigation, leading to the arrest of three persons, Mallick said.

Plastic push drives out siali leaf plates; tribals on receiving end



POST NEWS NETWORK

Korukonda, March 16: The once-thriving tradition of making plates and bowls from siali leaves is fading fast in parts of Malkangiri district, leaving many tribal families struggling to sustain their livelihoods.

For decades, siali leaf plates and bowls were an integral part of feasts and social gatherings in Korukonda block and nearby areas, including Balimela town. Locally made and eco-friendly, these items were widely used during festivals, community events and village functions.

However, the growing preference for cheap plastic and thermocol plates, bowls and cups has sharply reduced the demand for the traditional products. As a result, the age-old craft that once supported many tribal households is

slowly disappearing.

Earlier, villagers used to collect siali leaves from nearby forests and stitch them together using thin bamboo sticks to make plates and bowls. The finished products were sold in local markets, providing families with a steady source of income.

With the market now flooded with modern disposable items, many tribal households have stopped collecting leaves or making the traditional utensils. The decline in demand has directly affected the earnings of tribal communities who once depended on this craft for survival.

Despite the downturn, some women in Colony No. 5 village under Chintapalli panchayat of Korukonda block are trying to keep the tradition alive. They still collect siali leaves from nearby forests and sit to-

gether under a tree in the village to stitch plates and bowls.

Siali fibre is also traditionally used to make ropes and other household items, but the use of such products is also declining due to lack of promotion and market support.

Locals and intellectuals warn that if timely steps are not taken, the craft may disappear completely, depriving tribal families of a traditional source of livelihood. They have urged the government to provide training, financial assistance and market support to craftsmen engaged in making siali leaf products.

Residents have also demanded that the district administration intervene to revive and promote the eco-friendly craft, which once formed the backbone of the rural tribal economy.

Rly staffer's body fished out of well

POST NEWS NETWORK

Chhatrapur, March 16: A railway employee was found dead inside a well near National Highway 16 at Laxmipur village under Ganjam police limits Monday, police said.

The deceased was identified as Arabinda Behera, a resident of Hillpatna under Gosaninuaagaon police limits in Berhampur.

According to police, locals spotted the body floating inside a dug well near the highway and alerted authorities.

Inspector-In-Charge Sumitra Patra of Ganjam police station, along with an assistant sub-inspector, fire service personnel from Chhatrapur and forensic team members, reached the spot and recovered the body. Police said Behera was working as a senior education extension officer in Bhubaneswar.

A case has been registered at Ganjam police station and an investigation has been launched to determine the exact cause of death, Patra said.

Officials said the incident is suspected to be a case of murder, though the exact circumstances will be known only after completion of the investigation. The body was later sent to MKCG Medical College and Hospital in Berhampur for post-mortem examination in the presence of the deceased's family members. After the post-mortem, the body was handed over to the family for last rites, police said.

Elderly man trampled to death by elephant

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhanjanagar, March 16: A 77-year-old man was trampled to death by an elephant in a forest under Mujagad forest range under the Ghumusar North forest division in Ganjam district, officials said Monday.

The deceased was identified as Krupasindhu Swain of Baidali Nuasahi village. According to reports, Swain had gone into the nearby forest Sunday evening to bring back his cattle. During that time, he was allegedly attacked and trampled by an elephant, family members said in a police complaint.

The incident came to light Monday morning. Swain reportedly sustained severe injuries on his right leg, leading to his death.

Police seized the body and sent it to Bhanjanagar hospital for post-mortem. Officials from the Forest department, including the Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF) and the local forest ranger, reached the spot and launched an investigation.

Notably, an elephant was also found dead near Kadlriga in the Tarsing forest range of the same forest division a day earlier. The animal had reportedly died about five days back but

With all Gaja Sathis relieved from duty in Feb and elephant squad personnel protesting, inadequate manpower has led to increased risk for both humans and elephants

forest officials came to know about the incident Sunday. The incidents have raised concerns among officials regarding the safety of wildlife and people living near forest areas.

To prevent elephant intrusions and protect crops and human lives, the state government appoints Gaja Sathis during the paddy harvesting season. They are given a monthly incentive of ₹5,000 and usually work from October to February.

However, all Gaja Sathis were relieved from duty February 28 this year. Meanwhile, personnel from elephant squad are also staging protests in Bhubaneswar over various demands. Officials fear that in the absence of adequate field staff, forests, wildlife and local residents could face increased risks.

EAST COAST RAILWAY
Tender Notice No. ST-OT-QUAD-CABLE-KUR-549, Dt: 10.03.2026
NAME OF WORK: REPLACEMENT OF 6 QUAD CABLES AGAINST FAULTY PATCHES OF VARIOUS SECTIONS OVER KHURDA ROAD DIVISION.
Tender Value: ₹ 3,21,12,194.00, EMD: ₹ 3,10,600/-
Bidding Start Date: 18.03.2026.
Tender Closing Date and Time: At 1100 Hrs. of 01.04.2026.
No manual offers sent by Post/ Courier/ Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration.
Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website: www.ireps.gov.in
Note: The prospective tenderers are advised to visit the website 15 days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes / corrigendum issued for this tender.
Sr. Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer, PR-1231/Q/25-26, Khurda Road

OFFICE OF THE PANCHAYAT SAMITI, SADAR, DHENKANAL
No.898, Date: 13.3.26
"e" Procurement Notice
BID Identification No. DSB 03/2025-26
No.19001/85/2526: Bid Documents consisting of Work, Estimated Cost, Cost of Tender Paper, EMD, Time of Completion, Class of Contractors and the set of terms and conditions of contract and other necessary documents can be seen in Government website i.e. www.tendersodisha.gov.in.
1. Name of the work : Construction work as mentioned in DTCN.
2. No. of works : 18 Nos.
3. Estimated Cost : As per Annexure
4. Period of Completion : 180 days
5. Date & Time of availability of Bid documents in the : 17.03.26 at 10.00 A.M. to 30.03.26 upto 5.00 P.M. Portal
6. Last date & time for receipt : 30.03.26 upto 05.00 P.M. of bids in the portal
7. Bids received online shall : 31.03.26 at 11.00 A.M. be opened on
8. Name and address of the : Block Development Officer, officer inviting Bid Sadar, Dhenkanal
Further details can be seen from the procurement portal i.e. www.tendersodisha.gov.in.
OIPR-19001/19433/1/25-26/0002 Sd./- Block Development Officer Sadar Block, Dhenkanal

E-AUCTION NOTICE FOR VARIOUS ASSETS OVER CHAKRADHARPUR DIVISION
For and on behalf of the President of India, Union of India, the Senior Divisional Commercial Manager, Chakradharpur Division, South Eastern Railway invites e-auction for the following assets categories over Chakradharpur Division, which is notified in the <https://www.ireps.gov.in/website>. Sl. No, Category, Catalogue No. Date of Auction, Auction Start Time and Auction Closing Time are as follows : ● Pay & Use, PnU-CKP-LOUNGE3, 18.03.2026, 12:00 hrs. & 12:30 hrs. ● Miscellaneous, Hybrid-TSV-3-26, 18.03.2026, 12:00 hrs. & 12:30 hrs. ● Advertisement, ADVT-LOCO-TATA, 20.03.2026, 12:30 hrs. & 13:00 hrs. ● Miscellaneous, MSS-TATA-SIPod, 24.03.2026, 11:15 hrs. & 11:45 hrs. ● Miscellaneous, MobStoreTata-26, 25.03.2026, 12:00 hrs. & 12:30 hrs. ● Miscellaneous, MSS-DigiL-JSG26, 26.03.2026, 11:30 hrs. & 12:00 hrs. ● Miscellaneous, MSS-MobkioskROU, 28.03.2026, 11:30 hrs. & 12:00 hrs. ● Miscellaneous, MSS-MobkioskCKP, 30.03.2026, 11:30 hrs. & 12:00 hrs. Interested parties to take note of this and go through the website as mentioned above for details of the site and related information about the e-Auction notice. For enquiries/clarifications, if any, please contact the office of the undersigned.
(PR-1309) Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager, Chakradharpur South Eastern Railway We serve with a smile

Fake cop arrested, forwarded to court

POST NEWS NETWORK

Attabira, March 16: A man accused of impersonating a police officer and intimidating people in the Hirakud reservoir area under Attabira police station limits in Bargarh district was arrested by police and forwarded to court Monday.

The accused has been identified as Bikram Behera, 33, of Ghulipali under Bargarh Town police station. Police have reg-

istered a case (106/2026) against him at Attabira police station.

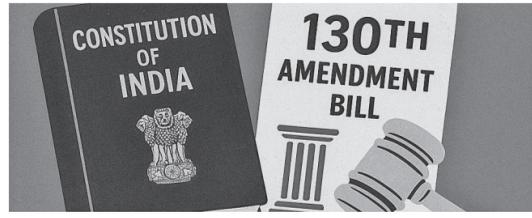
According to police, Behera was moving around in the Dhurukushum area near the Hirakud reservoir wearing a uniform bearing the words "Odisha Police" and allegedly threatening local residents. Suspicious of his activities, some villagers recorded videos of him and informed the Attabira police.

Acting on the information, police reached the spot and apprehended the accused before bringing him to the police station for questioning. After preliminary investigation, he was arrested and later forwarded to court Monday. Police said Behera was accompanied by another person on a motorcycle at the time of the incident. However, the associate managed to flee from the spot. Efforts are underway to trace and apprehend him.

Advertisement No. 02/2026
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56-57, Institutional Area, Janakpuri, New Delhi-110058, Website: www.sanskrit.nic.in
RECRUITMENT NOTIFICATION
The Central Sanskrit University, Delhi invites applications from Indian Nationals for recruitment to various Non-Teaching Posts [Registrar-01, Assistant Registrar-02, System Analyst-03, Section Officer-11, Nursing Officer-03, Assistant-10, Guest House Manager-03, Junior Engineer-03, Personal Assistant-03, Professional Assistant-04, Technical Assistant (Shikshashastra/Education Lab.)-03, Technical Assistant (Computer Lab.)-04, Stenographer-08, Upper Division Clerk-16, Library Assistant-01, Lower Division Clerk-35, Driver-01, Multi-Tasking Staff-22, Library Attendant-08 & Medical Attendant/Dresser-03]. Detailed information regarding eligibility criteria, qualifications, age limit, recruitment process, distribution of vacancies, application procedure, scheme of examination, selection process and other essential requirements will be available in the detailed advertisement No. 02/2026, available on 16.03.2026 at CSU's website www.sanskrit.nic.in under recruitment/notification head. All interested candidates are strictly advised to go through the detailed advertisement before filing the application.
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FOCUS 130TH AMENDMENT

WHEN LAW IS WEAPONISED



A democracy cannot be held hostage either to the criminalisation of politics, or to laws that can be weaponised for political ends

In late February 2026, a Delhi court discharged all 23 accused in the excise policy case, ruling there was “no overarching conspiracy or criminal intent” in the policy at issue. One of the accused had spent 530 days in jail before being cleared. The Enforcement Directorate, which drove much of the prosecution, has registered 193 cases against politicians over the last decade. The total number of convictions has been two, which is barely 1%.

Now consider, that the proportion of MPs who have declared pending criminal cases on their self-sworn affidavits has risen from 24% in 2004 to 46% in 2024. Among sitting MLAs across the country, 45% face criminal charges of which 29% face serious charges including murder, attempt to murder, kidnapping and crimes against women. This criminalisation of politics is real, worsening, and corrosive to democratic life.

This defines the central dilemma of the Constitution (130th Amendment) Bill, 2025, currently before a Joint Parliamentary Committee. The Bill mandates the automatic cessation of ministerial office for PMs, CMs and Cabinet Ministers, if they are arrested and detained for 30 consecutive days on charges punishable by five years or more. The intention is to end governance from jail. The mechanism is however deeply flawed. Remember that a case pending in court is not a police FIR, not a noting in a history-sheeter's file, not a complaint lodged by a political rival. Charges are framed only after a full investigation is complete, after a court has taken cognisance of the offence, and after a judge independently determines that a prima facie case exists. This involves the judicial application of mind. An ordinary citizen with any such criminal blemish on their record cannot get government employment. And yet politicians across

party lines routinely argue that all such cases against them are fabricated or politically motivated. How can this be even in the case of heinous offences such as rape, murder, kidnapping and extortion?

The Bill's problem is that it uses arrest, an executive action as the trigger for removal from office, rather than the framing of charges by a court. Investigative agencies can arrest and detain without a conviction or even a formal trial. Under the PMLA, bail conditions are near-insurmountable. Section 45 imposes twin conditions for release and Section 24 reverses the burden of proof onto the accused. Under UAPA, the difficulty is even greater. Securing bail within 30 days is near impossible.

This creates a structural vulnerability that any government can exploit against its opponents. Arrest rival ministers and hold them under a bail-resistant law for 30 days, and evict, even before any court has examined the merits. The Bill contains no safeguard against such misuse. The 244th Law Commission Report had explicitly recommended that disqualification be triggered at the stage of the framing of charges by a competent court i.e. the first point at which genuine judicial scrutiny occurs.

However, there is one counter-argument. The NCRB data reveals that conviction rates in Indian lower courts are, in many jurisdictions, alarmingly

low. In Pune's lower judiciary the conviction rate in 2023 was only 8.8%. If this pattern holds more widely, then any law that bars persons with pending court cases from public office would, in practice, be wrongly disqualifying the overwhelming majority who are innocent. This is not a trivial objection. It cuts to the heart of what a pending case actually signifies in the Indian judicial context. Does it reflect genuine criminality, or a broken system of prosecution and investigation? The answer quite often, appears to be the latter.

But the correct response to this paradox is not to abandon the project of keeping tainted candidates out of public life. It is to fix what is broken. Trials against sitting legislators must be fast-tracked as the Supreme Court directed in 2014 and again in 2017. The government's power to withdraw cases against powerful politicians under Section 321 of the CrPC must be curbed. And investigative agencies must be held to genuine standards of evidence before courts, not used as instruments of pre-trial political pressure.

The Bill also fails on its own stated logic. Re-appointment to ministerial office upon release from custody is expressly permitted under the proposed provisos to Articles 75(5A) and 164(4A). A minister removed after 30 days in jail can return to the same post on bail while the identical charges remain

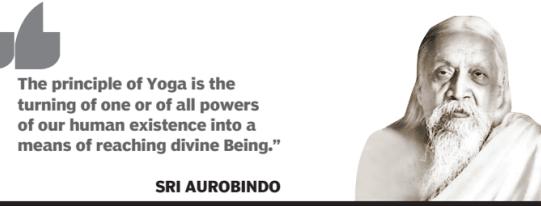
pending. Nothing has changed except a brief interruption. The Bill applies only to ministers, leaving untouched the hundreds of MPs and MLAs with serious charges framed against them who continue to legislate and govern. And it does nothing to prevent tainted candidates from entering the electoral arena in the first place.

For over 25 years, the solutions have been documented and ignored. The Vohra Committee (1993), the 170th and 244th Law Commission Reports, the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution, and the SC in its 2018 judgment in Public Interest Foundation v. Union of India, all have urged Parliament to disqualify candidates at the stage of framing of charges by a competent court, for offences punishable by five years or more, in cases filed at least six months before the relevant election. Upon conviction for heinous crimes, the disqualification should be permanent.

The ADR's proposed reformulation of the 130th Amendment says that any Minister, PM, CM, MP or MLA against whom charges have been framed by a court for offences under Section 8(1), (2) and (3) of the Representation of the People Act, or for offences carrying a minimum five-year sentence, should be automatically relieved of their position. This is the judicial standard. This is what the Law Commission has repeatedly recommended. This is also what the SC, unable to act itself in 2018, expressly asked Parliament to do.

A democracy cannot be held hostage either to the criminalisation of politics, or to laws that can be weaponised for political ends. The 130th Amendment, as drafted, risks being both ineffective against the first problem and dangerously enabling of the second.

The writer is a noted economist.
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The principle of Yoga is the turning of one or of all powers of our human existence into a means of reaching divine Being.”

SRI AUROBINDO

Windfall For Russia

The ongoing war between the US-Israel combine and Iran has unexpectedly turned out to be a windfall for Russia. In just about a fortnight after the war began, oil and gas prices have become volatile and the lone beneficiary from this global crisis and uncertainty is Russia. It must have been music to the ears of President Vladimir Putin when the US authorised India on 4 March to buy oil from Russia. Recent reports indicate Russia has announced it will hike oil price for India since this country stopped buying oil from it after Trump ordered it to halt purchases.

The war situation appeared so grim, notwithstanding the US' exaggerated claims about “obliterating” Iran's top leadership and vital infrastructure, that the following day US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent even said he was considering the possibility of further lifting sanctions on Russian crude oil “to bring relief to the market” for the duration of the conflict. This is not only nervousness on the part of the US, but also a recognition, as an elated Russian spokesperson said immediately after the decision, that the world cannot “do without Russian oil.”

In fact, the measures could not come at a more opportune time for Russia. The international sanctions imposed on Russia after its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 have forced Putin to sell its oil at severely reduced rates. In January, its revenues from hydrocarbon sales reportedly fell to their lowest point in five years, further weakening its economy and eroding to a considerable extent its ability to fund the protracted war it has thrust on Kyiv.

The US' position after daring and effective counterattacks by Iran, especially the super successful blocking of the Strait of Hormuz, has become so precarious that it appeared to have glossed over the reports claiming that Moscow was providing Iran with intelligence it could use to target US forces. A major US daily divulged it, though US Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth downplayed it. What was even more surprising is that this information did not stop US President Donald Trump from making a phone call to Putin on 9 March, which Trump described as “very good” and “positive.”

Things were not going well for Russia since the abrupt fall of the regime of the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad. Thereafter the US military abducted Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in Caracas on 3 January which deprived Russia of an important foothold in the Caribbean. What is even worse, the neo-imperial ambitions of Trump have grown so much that he has embarked on a policy in the Americas that threatens another ally of the erstwhile Soviet Union and now Russia – the island of Cuba.

The joint offensive of the US and Israel on Iran since 28 February has shown the helplessness of Moscow and its inability to support Iran. This is indeed a setback for Russia as Iran's drone warfare experience has been crucial in the war it has waged against Ukraine. Despite Putin's assurance of support to the new Iranian supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, it is doubtful whether Russia would be able to provide the military muscle that Iran needs now.

In such a situation, the US' decision to withdraw for the time being its sanctions of buying Russian oil has come as a great boon for the Russian economy which is plagued by troubles after four years of war with Ukraine. Over the past two months, Russian social media platforms have been flooded with concerns for rising prices and high interest rates and even came close to bankruptcy. To address the country's rising budget deficit, which is expected to exceed 3.5 per cent (or slightly higher) of its GDP in 2026, Moscow has been forced to adopt new measures. Its defence budget now eats up 40 per cent of all public spending. Meanwhile, revenue from oil and gas sales, the traditional backbone of the Russian economy, has virtually collapsed due to falling global prices and sanctions, which have forced Russia to sell its resources at a discount.

Trump is surely aware of these facts and Russia is likely to lap up the opportunity to sell its fuel and gas at higher prices. This will help the US' war strategy for Iran which has succeeded in withstanding the US-Israel war machine by weaponizing the global oil economy. Trump's war may end up benefiting Russia and boosting Iran's confidence that it can challenge American might with its drones and missiles and without dependence on any nuclear weapons. Apart from this disruption in energy supply, Iran is also trying to push oil trade in the Chinese Yuan. It has announced free passage to ships that have bought oil in the Chinese currency. This is a clear effort to take oil out of the Petro Dollar economic stranglehold of the US and the West. This is something most countries dare not do.



Ajit Ranade

THE GOVERNMENT'S POWER TO WITHDRAW CASES AGAINST POWERFUL POLITICIANS UNDER SECTION 321 OF THE CRPC MUST BE CURBED

SPECTRUM PUBLIC HEALTH

Preparing for AI-enabled bioweapons

We don't know when the next epidemic or pandemic will hit, or where the next infectious threat will emerge. But we do know that the nature of the threat is constantly evolving. One of the most sobering takeaways from this year's Munich Security Conference was that AI-enabled gene editing has radically lowered the barrier to developing genetically engineered bioweapons. We must prepare to live with even deeper uncertainty about whether emerging infectious threats are natural or man-made, and whether they have been accidentally or deliberately released.

Of course, from a public-health perspective, it may ultimately be irrelevant whether an infectious pathogen is man-made or deliberately released. What matters most for those of us concerned with saving lives and protecting health is that we are ready and able to detect and respond to infectious threats wherever – and however – they emerge.

Fortunately, there has been some progress since COVID-19 toward strengthening our collective defenses against infectious threats. Just under a year ago, WHO member states voted to adopt the WHO Pandemic

Agreement, and although negotiations on finer details continue, we at least know that there is still demand – if not a consensus – for multilateral co-operation on this critical issue.

Moreover, Gavi and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations have both evolved since COVID-19. Our organizations now work hand-in-hand to help protect the world from infectious threats. CEPI's experts scan the horizon for potential risks and provide the right mix of incentives to translate ideas and research into safe and effective new vaccines and therapeutics. And at Gavi, we help make vaccines accessible to everyone who needs them, acting as a custodian of emergency stockpiles, a provider of surge financing, and a catalytic investor for regional vaccine manufacturing.

Yet at a time when those threats have never been greater, the funding model that sustains these critical functions is collapsing as donors slash spending on official development assistance (ODA) in favour of investments in traditional defense capabilities. These cuts put us all at risk. If anything, we need significantly more funding to tackle emergent and re-emerging infections and

bioterrorism threats, including through interventions that can, and should, be taken now to strengthen our preparedness.

Our preparations must encompass everything from emergency supply chains, logistics, and stockpile management to international borders and trade.

A second immediate need is for a formal, regularly tested joint-planning mechanism for researchers, funders, regulators, and manufacturers. We must ensure not only that medical countermeasures are developed rapidly, but that they are tested, approved, accessible, and scalable on short notice. All this work requires specific financing mechanisms. Without the right incentives, investments in medical countermeasures against low-risk, high-consequence infectious threats will not reach the necessary scale.

Third, we urgently need to add new competencies to the global health system to cultivate AI bio-resilience. By using AI for detection and prediction, we can harness the technology's potential to counteract the threat it will pose in the hands of malign actors.

Likewise, we must remain focused on ensuring the availability

of surge financing for large-scale epidemics and pandemics. To that end, Gavi recently established a new instrument – the First Response Fund – to provide rapid financing in the event of an outbreak or emergency. This instrument already played a key role in the rapid deployment of vaccines against Mpox in Africa.

But we still need a predictable mechanism to provide further liquidity for the type of large-scale deployment of medical countermeasures that would be required in response to an engineered infectious threat with pandemic potential. The question of how we fund these capabilities is part of a larger debate about the role of ODA in a changing world. We will need to start thinking about ODA in two ways: as a tool for poverty reduction and economic development, and as a means of financing public goods and building global resilience. Collective health defense calls for collective responsibility. That means improving our coordination and establishing a model for predictable, sustainable, and reliable funding. Anything less invites disaster.

The writer is CEO of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.
©PROJECT SYNDICATE

WISDOM CORNER

Our incomes are like our shoes; if too small, they gall and pinch us; but if too large, they cause us to stumble and to trip.

JOHN LOCKE

Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma - which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition.

STEVE JOBS

What we have once enjoyed we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes a part of us.

HELEN KELLER

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

180: Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, who became a symbol in the West of the Golden Age of the Roman Empire, died at the age of 58.

1861: In Turin, Italy, after more than 10 years of revolution led by such figures as Giuseppe Garibaldi, a parliament assembled and officially proclaimed the unified Kingdom of Italy.

1941: National Gallery of Art opens in Washington, D.C.. On this day in 1941, the National Gallery of Art opened in Washington, D.C. Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt gave a dedication speech to about 6,000 guests, praising Andrew Mellon, who had donated the entirety of his art collection, funds for building construction, and a hefty endowment. The museum boasts an extensive collection of Western artwork, including pieces by Pablo Picasso, Paul Cezanne, and Claude Monet. The National Gallery also features the only Leonardo da Vinci piece on display in the Americas.

1969: Golda Meir becomes Israel's first female Prime Minister. In her country, Meir was known as the “Iron Lady” long before British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher rose to power.

1992: Nearly 69 per cent of white South African voters backed F.W. de Klerk's reforms—which included the repeal of racially discriminatory laws—and effectively endorsed the dismantling of apartheid.

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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

False farewell

Sir, This refers to “Netanyahu laughs off death rumour,” March 16, **Orissa POST**. Rumours of the death of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently raced across social media with the speed of a breaking apocalypse. Commentators speculated, analysts analysed, and conspiracy theorists celebrated their moment of relevance. Yet, in a plot twist that would embarrass even the most imaginative scriptwriter, the supposedly “departed” leader casually appeared sipping coffee at a roadside mini market somewhere in Israel. The scene looked less like a geopolitical thriller and more like a comedy sketch. While the internet mourned dramatically, Netanyahu seemed busy deciding whether the coffee needed more sugar. Perhaps the real casualty here was the credibility of viral news. In an age where a rumour can travel faster than diplomacy, the episode is a reminder that social media obituaries should come with a disclaimer: “Subject may reappear shortly, possibly with a cup of coffee.”

N Sadhasiva Reddy, BANGALORE

Planet Trump

Sir, US President Donald Trump seems to have developed a rather unusual hobby on the global stage—collecting territories in speeches if not in reality. From suggesting the US could buy Greenland, to floating ideas about influence over Canada, Mexico, and Venezuela, the list keeps growing. The latest entrant is Kharg Island, Iran's crucial oil export hub in the Persian Gulf, where US strikes recently targeted military sites during the ongoing conflict. Trump says he might strike the island again “just for fun,” adding a touch of theatre to the already tense geopolitics. Yet, despite bold declarations, winning hearts and minds of people in these places has proved far harder than renaming water bodies (such as the Gulf of Mexico as Gulf of America) or launching airstrikes. Territorial ambitions may make headlines, but consent of the governed remains stubbornly absent. If this trend continues, one might in lighter vein expect the ultimate rebranding someday—from Planet Earth to Planet Trump. Fortunately, geography, unlike politics, still requires more than a press conference to change.

RS Narula, PATIALA

Rana's kin prepare to say final goodbye

The 31-year-old is the first person in India to be allowed passive euthanasia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ghaziabad, March 16: Meditative chants in the background, a loving hand on his forehead and the calm of words telling him 'theek hai'... with that, the family of Harish Rana, in a coma for more than 12 years, prepared for his final journey from their home in Ghaziabad to a Delhi hospital where he will breathe his last.

The 31-year-old is the first person in India to be allowed passive euthanasia. In its landmark judgment last week, the Supreme Court also directed AIIMS-Delhi to ensure that life support is withdrawn with a tailored plan so that dignity is maintained.

"The process generally involves withholding or withdrawing the nutritional support gradually while ensuring adequate pain relief. The patient is given palliative sedation so that he or she is not in distress. Life support measures such as artificial nutrition, oxygen and medications are slowly withdrawn. The aim is not to prolong nor hasten death," Dr Sushma Bhatnagar, former head of the department of onco-anaesthe-



Though the exact details of when and how the process will pan out are still unclear, Rana's family is getting ready to say adieu to the young man who fell from a fourth floor balcony in 2013 and suffered severe head injuries. He has been in a coma since

sia, pain and palliative care, AIIMS-Delhi. In Harish's case, sources said the entire process could take two to three weeks to complete. Rana's family is getting ready to say adieu to the young man who fell from a fourth floor balcony in 2013 and suffered severe head injuries. He has been in a coma since.

A video from the Rana home in Ghaziabad shows relatives offering prayers as a member of the

Brahma Kumaris puts a 'tilak' on Harish's forehead and says softly, "Sabko maaf karte hue, sabse maafi mangte hue, so jaao. theek hai... (Forgiving everyone and asking forgiveness from everyone). Now sleep. It's ok."

The Brahma Kumari in the heartbreaking video is Sister Lovely from the Mohan Nagar Seva Kendra in Ghaziabad, Komal, a member of the Brahma Kumaris based at Mount

Abu, told PTI over phone. "She is following a ritual with the words that mean he (Harish) leave the world in a happy state, seeking and giving forgiveness... it is part of a meditative chant that comforts the soul and eases the entire process of the soul merging with the sublime," Komal said.

She added that the family has been deeply spiritually inclined, which helped them endure the difficult 13-year period of caring for Harish. "Although the couple has another son, advancing age had begun to worry them about who would look after Harish in the future once they were no longer able to," he said, adding that members of the organisation counselled the family during this phase. The family is reluctant to talk. Harish's father Ashok Rana could not be reached for comment.

According to Komal, alongside medical consultations, the family also sought spiritual guidance as they prepared for the inevitable in accordance with the Supreme Court's directions.

The Supreme Court allowed withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment after medical boards concluded his condition was irreversible and continued clinical intervention would not restore neurological function.

Ashok Rana, who had approached the apex court seeking permission for passive euthanasia, said after the verdict that the decision is extremely painful but necessary.

"No parent would ever want to see their son in such a condition," he said, adding that the

decision was taken in his son's best interests.

"We believe that in the larger public interest the decision could help families of many people who may be in a condition like Harish," Ashok Rana told reporters outside his residence.

The Supreme Court in its judgement Wednesday clarified that the order does not amount to active euthanasia but involves withdrawal of the feeding tube and continuation of palliative care so that the natural process of death may take place with dignity.

Following the judgment, Ghaziabad District Magistrate Ravindra Kumar Madar and Municipal Commissioner Vikramaditya Malik visited their residence and assured them of assistance.

Officials said the state government has approved financial assistance of Rs 10 lakh for the family from the chief minister's discretionary relief fund. The administration also announced that a shop will be allotted to the family free of cost to help ensure a stable livelihood.

According to officials, an initial sum of Rs 2.5 lakh had already been provided through public contributions, and the administration is also facilitating the family's access to various welfare schemes.

The prolonged medical care had placed severe financial strain on the household. Neighbours said Ashok Rana and his wife Nirmala had earlier sold their house in Delhi to fund their son's treatment.

K'taka facing shortage of land even to provide for burial grounds: Min



Minority communities are angry with the government for not providing sufficient space for cemeteries, Gowda said, as he highlighted difficulties faced in allocating land for schools and playgrounds

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore, March 16: Karnataka Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda told the Legislative Assembly Monday that the government faces a land shortage, even for burial grounds and is forced to purchase land for this purpose in some cases.

Minority communities are angry with the government for not providing sufficient space for cemeteries, he said, as he highlighted difficulties faced in allocating land for schools and playgrounds.

The minister was replying to a question by Aurd BJP MLA Prabhu Chavan during Question Hour.

"Over the last 10 years, all governments have tried to ensure that all villages have burial grounds based on their needs. Even the High Court has pursued this. Still, we have not been able to provide space in some places," Gowda said.

He said that after providing all available land to farmers and for various other purposes, the government is now left with no land for burial grounds.

"For burial grounds, the government had to purchase land at a cost of Rs 58 crore in

the last three years. By giving lands for various purposes, we have now reached a situation where we must purchase land for burials," he added.

Having given away lands for various purposes, the administration has to go around with a "begging bowl", asking for land, the minister further said. Among Hindus, some bury and some burn the dead. In areas surrounding Bangalore, those who used to bury have started to burn the dead because there is no space for burial.

"But, in the two minority communities (Muslims and Christians) there is no opportunity to burn the dead bodies. We have to give them land. They are now angry with us for not providing land. Nobody understands when we say there's no land. How long can we provide?" he said.

Gowda, however, asserted that the department would work towards reserving space for public amenities like schools and burial grounds.

"In villages, we must provide youngsters with playgrounds, parks, and schools," he added.

Earlier, intervening, Leader of the Opposition R Ashoka said that after giving away lands for various purposes all these years, the government has today reached a position where it has to "beg".

Stating that people are not ready to give even one acre for schools and hospitals, let alone burial grounds, he said that when he was revenue minister during the BJP government, he had asked district deputy commissioners to reserve space for schools, anganwadis and burial grounds before granting lands.

"This is important keeping the next generation and the next 25-30 years in mind," he said.

Zebra population at Bannerghatta Biological Park increases to 10

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore, March 16: Bannerghatta Biological Park Monday announced that the total number of zebras in the zoo has steadily increased to 10 with the addition of two foals.

Zebra Kokila, aged two-and-a-half years, gave birth to a foal January 17, 2026, and Zebra Kaveri, aged 12 years, gave birth to a foal January 28, 2026, they said.

In a statement, Bannerghatta Biological Park (BBP) said both the foals were identified as females.

"The newborns are housed along with the other zebras and are under constant observation by the veterinary team and animal keepers," it said.

With the addition of the foals, the total number of zebras in the zoo has steadily increased to 10.



Women dressed in traditional attire hold swords during a procession as part of the 'Matri Sanskar Samagam' organised by the Vishwamangalya Sabha, in Varanasi, Monday

PTI PHOTO

VIBRANT VILLAGE PROGRAMME II

47 villages sharing borders with Nepal to be developed



The programme aims at infrastructure development, border specific outreach activities and generation of better livelihood opportunities through promotion of tourism, cultural heritage and skill development, besides strengthening the local self-help groups, co-operative societies, youth and women

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lakhimpur Kheri (UP), March 16: As many as 47 villages in the Lakhimpur Kheri district sharing borders with Nepal would be developed as the first villages on the border under the Centre-sponsored Vibrant Village Programme II (VVP II) with all-weather road and telecommunication connectivity.

Kheri District Magistrate Durga Shakti Nagpal told PTI, "Border security and border development must go hand in hand. Through the VVP II, we are strengthening the infrastructure and livelihood opportunities in these 47 villages, so as to elevate their living standards and to make our frontier communities strong, prosperous, and firmly rooted."

The programme aims at infrastructure development, border specific outreach activities and generation of better livelihood opportunities through promotion of tourism, cultural heritage and skill development, besides strengthening the local self-help groups, co-operative societies, youth and women, she said.

District Statistics Officer (DS-TO) Arvind Verma told PTI that among the 47 border villages included 18 villages of the Palla tehsil and 29 villages of the Nighasan tehsil.

"The planning department in UP would coordinate the implementation of the VVP II, which covers all border villages of Balrampur, Shravasti, Maharajganj, Pilibhit, Bahraich and Kheri adjoining Nepal. A district-level committee headed by the Kheri district magistrate had been formed to ensure proper implementation of the programme," Verma said.

Meanwhile, a video conference meeting with the district authorities concerned was organised by the UP planning department a couple of days back to discuss the projects for the implementation of the VVP II in the state, officials said.

West Asia tension hits Agra's marble handicrafts export

Inspired by Mughal-era architecture, Pachikari, primarily practiced in Uttar Pradesh's Agra, involves delicate inlay work of semi-precious stones into white marble

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Agra (UP), March 16: The ongoing conflict between US-Israel and Iran has cast a shadow over Agra's marble handicrafts industry, renowned for its Pachikari artwork, which traders say is on the verge of coming to a standstill.

Artisans say assignment have dwindled in the wake of geopolitical tensions in West Asia, causing handicraft units to shut down, and leaving them without work.

Inspired by Mughal-era architecture, Pachikari, primarily practiced in Uttar Pradesh's Agra, involves delicate inlay work of semi-precious stones into white marble.

Adnan Sheikh, a marble handicrafts trader said the pri-



SEVERAL MAJOR TRADERS SIN THE GULF NATIONS WHO REGULARLY PROCURE MARBLE INLAY ITEMS FROM AGRA HAVE ALSO TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED THEIR OPERATIONS

mary patrons of this intricate marble inlay work are from West Asia.

The US-Israel and Iran conflict has affected the countries in West Asia. As a result, the flow of orders from these countries has virtually stopped. Even some pending orders

have been put on hold at the customers' request, Sheikh said.

Several major traders in the Gulf nations who regularly procure marble inlay items from Agra have also temporarily suspended their operations. Ayush Gupta, president of

the Taj Mahal Eastern Gate Trade Association said approximately 35,000 artisans in Agra are associated with the marble inlay industry.

Since the construction of Taj Mahal, the intricate Pachikari inlay work has been practiced in Agra, passed down from generation to generation over the centuries through traditional methods.

Gupta said there are numerous families whose lineage has been dedicated to this craft for generations now. Every year, goods worth crores are exported from handicraft units in Agra, with Gulf nations accounting for the largest share of these exports.

However, the prevailing conflict situation has significantly affected the trade, he said.

While factories have closed down amid the prevailing uncertainty, artisans practicing the craft as a family trade are unable to secure assignments. Consequently, a livelihood crisis looms over these artisans, Gupta said, expressing apprehension that as long as the conflict persists, the Pachikari export is expected to remain suspended.

Pointing towards the scale of the affected trade, Gupta said last year, handicraft items worth around Rs 700 crore were exported.



Over the past decade, India has emerged as a vibrant hub of innovation in the defence and security ecosystem. Guided by the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat, our approach seeks to build self reliance while remaining globally connected

EC TRANSFERS SSPs OF FIVE ASSAM DISTRICTS

The Election Commission Monday transferred Senior Superintendents of Police (SSPs) of five districts of Assam, a day after the announcement of the Assembly poll schedule. The SSPs of Majuli, South Salmara, Sadiya, Chirang and Dhemaji districts have been transferred with immediate effect, an official notification said



of the day quote

The struggle initiated by Harichand Thakur was for the protection of people's self-respect and fundamental rights. Today, with great pain, I see the BJP government trying to tarnish that sacred struggle



MAMATA BANERJEE | WEST BENGAL CM

India is boasting of being the President of BRICS+ in 2026. But till now it has not summoned up the inclination or the courage to put out a collective statement on the US-Israel air offensives on and targeted assassinations in Iran, as well as on Iran's subsequent attacks on non-military targets in the GCC countries, and the shocking action of the US Navy in the Indian Ocean close to both Sri Lanka and India



JAIRAM RAMESH | CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY IN-CHARGE COMMUNICATIONS

This year's Ram Navami in Patna will be historic. The scale will be at par with the Durga Puja in West Bengal and Ganesh Chaturthi in Maharashtra



NITIN NABIN | BJP NATIONAL PRESIDENT

SHORT TAKES

School van gutted on school premises

Thane: An empty school van was gutted in a fire in the parking area of a private school in Thane district Monday, officials said, adding that nobody was injured in the incident. The school is located on the Diva-Agasan Road. After receiving information about a blaze, firefighters rushed to the spot with a rescue vehicle. The blaze was brought under control and completely extinguished at 5:45 PM, an official said.

3 gangsters nabbed after brief gunfight

Ranchi: Three gangsters were nabbed after a brief gunfight with the police in Jharkhand's Dhanbad Monday, with two of them sustaining gunshot wounds in their legs, officers said. Acting on a tip-off, a police team comprising officers and personnel from Ranchi and Dhanbad Police, conducted a raid in Bhagabandh area this morning to nab the gangsters, they said.

Ladakh agitation: Rallies in Leh, Kargil

Leh: Two days after the release of activist Sonam Wangchuk, rallies were held in Leh and Kargil towns Monday on a call given by agitating groups to press the Centre for early resumption of talks on their demands for statehood and extension of the Sixth Schedule to Ladakh. Kargil and adjoining Drass also observed a complete shutdown, even as security was tightened across the Union Territory in view of the protest call given by Leh Apex Body (LAB) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) -- the two groups that are spearheading the agitation over the past five years.

Boom barrier comes down at Parl gate

New Delhi: A technical glitch, apparently caused by strong wind, led to a boom barrier falling down at an entry gate of the Parliament which activated the security alarm and a quick reaction team (QRT) being mobilised Monday. Senior officials of the Central Industrial Security Force, which is responsible for the protection of the Parliament House complex, rushed to the spot and assessed the situation and was found that there was no security threat, sources said.

EC removes top administrative

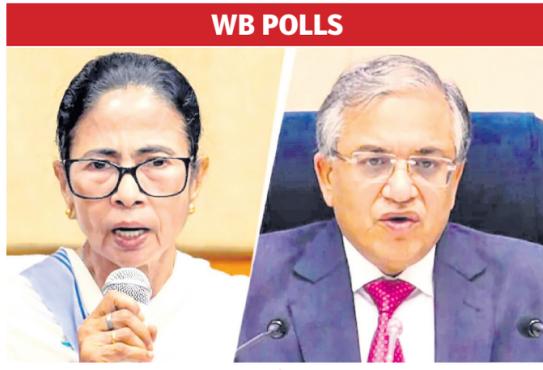
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata/New Delhi, March 16: The Election Commission has removed the West Bengal Chief Secretary, Home Secretary, Director General of Police, and Kolkata police commissioner, among others, in an unprecedented administrative shake-up in the state ahead of the high-stakes Assembly polls.

The EC's action, which came hours after it announced the poll schedule Sunday, triggered a sharp reaction from state Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who branded the poll panel and the ruling BJP as "anti-women and anti-Bengal" and called the move a "panic reaction by a party that realises it cannot win elections through democratic means."

However, EC officials maintained that the transfers aligned with Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar's assurance to hold free and fair polls in the state. Although the commission has previously ordered pre-poll transfers of top bureaucrats and police officers, it has never transferred the state's bureaucratic and police top brass - the most crucial officers forming the crux of state administration - all at once, and also forbade them from taking part in election-related activities.

The polls for the 294-member state Assembly will be held April 23 and 29, and votes will be counted May 4. While the commission's first order, issued late Sunday evening, instructed the removal of the state's two top bureaucrats - Chief Sec-



WB POLLS

retary Nandini Chakravorty and Home Secretary Jagdish Prasad Meena - a subsequent order, dated March 16, removed the state's DGP Peeyush Pandey and Kolkata CP Supratim Sarkar, who were among four top IPS officers in Bengal replaced ahead of the elections.

Significantly, immediately after the EC directive, the West Bengal government issued a notification Monday, transferring and posting several senior IPS officers, including Pandey and Sarkar, with immediate effect. While Pandey has been posted as director (security), Sarkar has been appointed additional director general (ADG), CID, with additional charge of ADG, Intelligence Branch, Kolkata, according to the notification issued by the state's Home and Hill Affairs Department. The EC appointed Dushyant Nariala, an IAS officer of the 1993 batch and additional chief secretary of the state's North Bengal Development department, as the state's chief sec-

Political slugfest erupts in Delhi

New Delhi: The Election Commission's move to transfer West Bengal's chief secretary and DGP soon after the announcement of the Assembly poll dates triggered a political slugfest Monday. While the Opposition parties accused the poll panel of acting at the behest of the BJP at the Centre, the saffron party hit back, alleging that the opposition was attempting to malign constitutional institutions. Speaking to reporters inside the Parliament House complex, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav alleged that officers are routinely removed in states where the BJP is not in power.

retary. Sanghamitra Ghosh, a 1997-batch IAS officer and secretary of the Women and Child Development department, was appointed as state home secretary. It also appointed senior

WB polls: BJP first list fields Suvendu from Mamata's Bhabanipur



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi/Kolkata, March 16: Setting the stage for the electoral battle, the BJP Monday released its first list of 144 candidates for the West Bengal Assembly polls, fielding Leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari from both Nandigram and Bhabanipur, a constituency held by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, in a direct challenge to the TMC supremo.

The announcement made in New Delhi signals the BJP's attempt to sharpen the electoral narrative around Banerjee versus Adhikari while largely retaining its sitting legislators and inducting candidates from diverse professional backgrounds to broaden its social outreach ahead of the two-phase polls April 23 and 29.

Adhikari's candidature from both Nandigram and Bhabanipur is widely seen as the party's most high-stakes decision in the first list, underscoring his role as the BJP's principal field commander in Bengal. While Nandigram carries deep political symbolism

as the epicentre of the 2007 anti-land acquisition movement that propelled Banerjee's rise to power, it also became the stage for one of the most dramatic electoral battles in recent years when Adhikari defeated the chief minister there in 2021 by a slender margin of around 1,900 votes.

Bhabanipur, in contrast, is considered Banerjee's political stronghold.

"I will win both the seats and defeat Mamata Banerjee again," Adhikari said after the announcement, projecting confidence that the BJP could challenge the ruling TMC even in its perceived strongholds.

Political observers say the decision also signals the BJP's reliance on Adhikari's organisational network across coastal Bengal and the Jungle Mahal region, where he retains significant influence.

"The BJP is clearly trying to personalise the election around a Mamata versus Suvendu narrative. By fielding him in Bhabanipur, the party is seeking to symbolically challenge the chief minister on her home turf," said a Kolkata-based political analyst.

The first list also indicates the BJP's preference for continuity, with the party renominating 41 of its sitting legislators. Among those repeated are Agnimitra Paul from Asansol South, Chandana Bauri from Saltora and Shikha Chatterjee from Dabgram-Phulbari.

IYC protests India-US trade deal, 90 detained

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 16: The Indian Youth Congress Monday held a 'Sansad Gherao' at Jantar Mantar here to oppose the India-US trade deal, alleging that the agreement could adversely affect farmers, workers, and small businesses.

At least 90 protesters were detained as they attempted to march towards Parliament, a senior police officer said, adding that they would be released later.

In a video circulated on social media, a group of Youth Congress members claimed that after they were detained, a bus carrying them ran out of CNG midway.

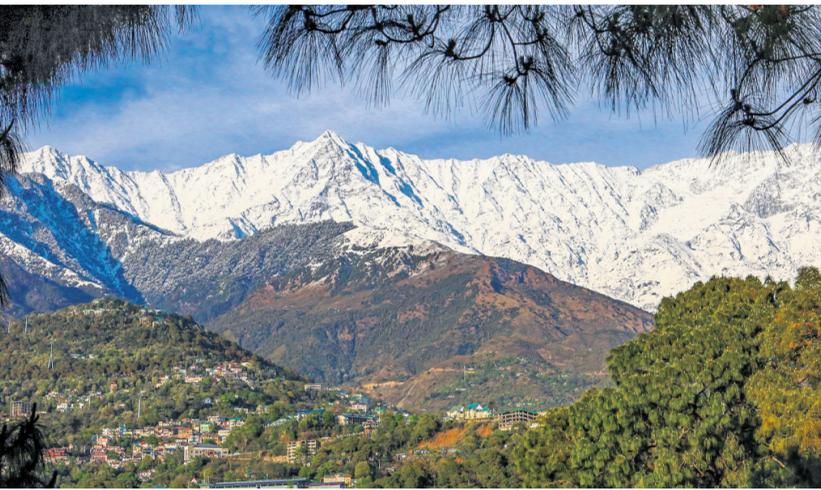
"The police detained us and put us in a bus. But while we were being taken away, the bus ran out of CNG, and the police had to leave us midway near the Patel Nagar metro station. This shows how severe the shortage of gas is in the country," one of the members can

be heard saying in the video posted on the X account of the Indian Youth Congress (IYC).

Led by IYC national president Uday Bhanu Chib, hundreds of Youth Congress workers from several states gathered at the protest site, raising slogans against the Centre and demanding that the government scrap the trade arrangement.

Addressing the gathering, Chib alleged that the trade arrangement could have serious implications for farmers and small businesses, and demanded that the government reconsider the agreement. "The government must clarify whether this deal

was signed keeping in mind the interests of farmers and young people of the country. We demand that the Centre scrap the agreement if it harms India's agricultural sector and domestic industries," Chib said. Protesters raised slogans against the Centre and displayed placards demanding the scrapping of the trade agreement.



The Dhauladhar range covered with fresh snow is seen after the weather cleared, in Dharamshala

PTI PHOTO

Parliament to revoke MPs' suspension today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 16: The suspension of eight Opposition MPs from the Lok Sabha is likely to be revoked Tuesday, sources said, citing a decision taken at a meeting convened by Speaker Om Birla.

Seven Congress and a CPI(M) MP were suspended February 3 for unruly behaviour, following a resolution passed by the Lok Sabha in the first part of

the Budget session. While the eight MPs were suspended for the entire session that is scheduled to conclude April 2, Opposition parties have been urging the speaker to revoke the suspensions during one of the sittings of the Lok Sabha.

When Congress members had urged Birla to revoke the suspensions, he had said such action is taken when someone climbs on the tables. The

suspended members are Gurjeet Singh Aujla, Hibi Eden, C Kiran Kumar Reddy, Amarinder Singh Raja Warring, Manickam Tagore, Prashant Padole and Dean Kuriakose (all Congress) and S Ventakasan [(CPI(M))].

The revocation of suspension of the eight MPs has been a key demand of the Opposition since the second leg of the Budget session commenced March 9.

Global fraud cost hits \$442bn in 2025: Interpol

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 16: Over USD 442 billion has been siphoned off from the global economy in 2025 through financial fraud, Interpol said in its global financial fraud threat assessment for 2026, released Monday.

The report kept the overall global risk related to financial fraud at "high". Scammers are leveraging agentic artificial intelligence (AI), which can "autonomously plan and execute complete fraud campaigns -- from reconnaissance to ransom demands", the Lyon-based global police cooperation body said.

The second edition of the report, released Monday, warned that AI-enhanced fraud is 4.5 times more profitable than traditional methods, as agentic AI systems are now capable of autonomously planning and executing complete fraud cam-

paigns -- from reconnaissance to ransom demands, making them a force multiplier.

From harvesting victim credentials to generating psychologically tailored ransom notes, fraudsters have used "deepfake audio" to mimic the voices of corporate executives during real-time phone calls to authorise fraudulent wire transfers in the Asia-Pacific region, it stated.

Titled 'INTERPOL Global Financial Fraud Threat Assessment', the report presents a grim anatomy of a "global fraud crisis", describing the frauds as a "polycriminal milieu" where traditional crimes like drug trafficking now cross paths with highly sophisticated, tech-enabled scams orchestrated through the Internet.

The report warned that "fraud-as-a-service" platforms and generative AI have demolished "barriers to entry", al-



Scammers are leveraging agentic artificial intelligence, which can "autonomously plan and execute complete fraud campaigns -- from reconnaissance to ransom demands"

REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

lowing even low-skill individuals to execute hyper-realistic campaigns. The spread of cyber

slavery and scam compounds, which were once prevalent in Southeast Asian countries, is

being detected in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, aiding the expansion of global financial fraud syndicates, according to the assessment.

The labyrinthine compounds house hundreds of thousands of people from nearly 80 nationalities, trafficked and forced to perpetrate online scams in the name of lucrative jobs, it added.

Global law enforcement agencies are also trying to collaborate more effectively, the report noted. "Since 2024, the number of fraud-related Interpol Notices and Diffusions has increased by 54 per cent. Over the same period, Interpol supported member countries in more than 1,500 transnational fraud cases in lost assets valued at \$ 1.1 billion," it said.

The report further said the scam centres are growing in number and scale, targeting ever more victims.

CBSE warns board exam evaluators on social media leaks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 16: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) Monday warned Class X and XII board exam evaluators of legal action for sharing confidential information on social media, officials said.

"It has come to the notice of the board that certain individuals engaged in the evaluation process of Class X and XII examinations are posting comments, opinions and experiences on social media platforms. Many of these posts are misleading, factually incorrect and have the potential to create confusion and spread rumours among stakeholders," said CBSE Examination Controller Sanyam Bhardwaj.

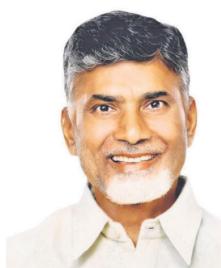
"It has come to the notice of the board that certain individuals engaged in the evaluation process of Class X and XII examinations are posting comments, opinions and experiences on social media platforms. Many of these posts are misleading, factually incorrect and have the potential to create confusion and spread rumours among stakeholders," he added.

The top official explained that the board's evaluation process is confidential and governed by strict protocols.

"Sharing any misleading information, experiences or opinions related to evaluation on public platforms is strictly prohibited. Any attempt to spread rumours or misrepresent facts on social media is a violation of professional conduct and may invite disciplinary action."

"Teachers are advised to exercise restraint and uphold the integrity of the examination system. The board expects all evaluators to maintain confidentiality, dignity and professionalism in the discharge of their duties," he said.





The NDA coalition government is committed to minority welfare and development. We are working to ensure Muslims move forward economically and politically in Andhra Pradesh

N CHANDRABABU NAIDU | AP CM

DELHI OFFERS FREE BUS RIDES TO TRANSGENDER PASSENGERS

The Delhi government has approved a proposal to include transgender passengers in its free bus travel scheme, a statement from the chief minister's office said Monday



Oppn raises LPG issue in Parliament

The Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge, said that the government had claimed that the LPG supply was not affected by the Iran-US-Israel conflict but the ground reality was different



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi/Mumbai, March 16: Authorities in multiple states initiated a crackdown Monday against hoarding and black marketing of LPG cylinders, even as the issue of the West Asia crisis affecting the cooking gas supply was raised in Parliament, where opposition and ruling BJP members attacked each other.

The Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge, said that the government had claimed that the LPG supply was not affected by the Iran-US-Israel conflict but the ground reality was different. "The LPG crisis has caused widespread panic across the entire nation. Its impact is severely affecting the poor and vulnerable sections, the middle class, ordinary households, restaurants, hostels, and commercial users," he said during the Zero Hour.

This evoked a sharp counter from Union Minister JP Nadda, who accused opposition parties, especially Congress, of not standing with the people but of instigating them.

Nadda said the current West Asia conflict is not due to India and further claimed that a Congress leader has been caught hoarding LPG cylinders.

While the political slugfest was underway in the Parliament, a protest march was taken out in Kolkata against the cooking gas crisis in West Bengal, where Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee claimed the problem was "artificially created".

Meanwhile, to check illegal stockpiling of domestic gas cylinders, raids were conducted across multiple states.

As many as 84 illegally stored LPG cylinders valued at Rs 2.22 lakh were seized from a private premises in Bhiwandi town of Maharashtra's Thane district, leading to the registration of a case against three individuals under the Essential Commodities Act.

An official said out of 84 cylinders, 34 were filled, and the remaining were empty.

Giving details about the Maharashtra government's crackdown on hoarding and illicit trading of gas cylinders, Food and Civil Supplies Minister Chhagan Bhujuwal said 23 cases have been registered and 18 people arrested.

Replying to the issue raised by Congress's Abhijit Wanjari in the Maharashtra legislative council, Bhujuwal listed steps undertaken by the state government to keep the prices under control amid the West Asia crisis. In Jammu, the administration conducted inspections at

multiple LPG outlets amid panic buying and complaints of delivery failures of gas cylinders. Some gas cylinder dealers faced action who were allegedly found violating norms.

Officials insisted there was no shortage of fuel and urged people not to fall prey to rumours; however, long queues were reported at several LPG outlets in Jammu over the past few days.

Though the central government said that there are adequate crude oil and LPG supplies, Jharkhand's minister said that the state is facing a shortage of both domestic and commercial LPG, while Karnataka's food and civil supplies minister urged

hotels to switch to electric stoves temporarily and expressed hope that the situation would improve soon, as additional shipments are expected.

Meanwhile, a senior petroleum ministry official in Delhi said that city gas distribution companies have rolled out incentives to encourage consumers to shift from LPG to piped cooking gas (PNG) to ease pressure on LPG supplies.

RAJYA SABHA POLLS Counting of votes delayed in Haryana

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, March 16: Counting of votes for elections to two Rajya Sabha seats in Haryana was delayed Monday after the BJP and the Congress filed complaints alleging violation of vote secrecy.

The counting was to begin at 5 pm after voting ended at 4 pm. Before the voting ended, minister Krishan Kumar Bedi told reporters that the BJP has complained to the Election Commission pertaining to "violation of vote secrecy" of two Congress MLAs- Bharat Singh Beniwal from Ellenabad and Paramvir Singh from Tohana.

"Two Congress MLAs did not have their ballot folded as it should have been and violated the secrecy of their vote. We have complained to the Election Commission," Bedi said.

However, Congress leader Ashok Arora said no complaint was filed at the time these legislators voted, claiming that it was deliberately filed after 4 pm.

He further said the Congress too filed a complaint against senior BJP leader and minister Anil Vij, accusing him of violating vote secrecy. Congress MLA Bhupinder Singh Hooda said the counting of votes will begin after the permission of the Election Commission comes.

Asked how confident he was about the polls, Hooda said the Congress will win one seat and the BJP will win the other.

Earlier, voting was held for the two seats on Monday, with Indian National Lok Dal, which has two legislators, abstaining from polling.

Bihar RS polls: NDA wins all five seats

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Patna, March 16: Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and BJP national president Nitin Nabin got elected to the Rajya Sabha Monday when the ruling NDA made a clean sweep, clinching all five seats to which biennial polls were held.

Besides Kumar, who heads the JD(U), and Nabin, who is currently a member of the state Assembly, the other winning candidates were Union minister Ram Nath Thakur (JDU), who made a hat-trick in the Upper House, the BJP's Shivesh Kumar, whose debut would make up for the party's lack of a Dalit face in Parliament from the state, and Rashtriya Lok Morcha president Upendra Kushwaha, who got elected for a second consecutive term.

Senior JD(U) leader and minister Shrawan Kumar, who had turned up at the assembly premises when the results were announced by Returning Officer Khyati Singh, told PTI Video: "All five candidates have won. Four of them got elected through first preference votes. One was declared the winner, taking into account second preference votes".

The minister, who stood beside MLC Sanjay Kumar alias Gandhi ji, a close aide of the chief minister, who posed before cameras carrying the certificate of the JD(U) president's election, however, did not specify which of the five candidates got elected based on second preference



votes. The JD(U) supremo had filed his nomination papers in a surprise development, stating that it had been his wish to get elected to the Rajya Sabha, having been earlier a member of both houses of the state legislature and the Lok Sabha. The sudden move will necessitate a change of guard after Kumar, the longest-serving chief minister, steps down.

Nabin, who will now have to give up the Bankipur Assembly seat, which had elected him for a fifth consecutive term a few months ago, also reached the Assembly, flanked by party colleagues and Deputy CMs Samrat Choudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha.

Addressing journalists on the occasion, Nabin said, "We owe our victory to the unity that is the hallmark of the NDA. I thank Prime Minister Narendra Modi for giving me the opportunity to represent my home state in Parliament".

Jaishankar meets top EU leadership

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Brussels, March 16: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar Monday met top European Union leadership and foreign ministers in Brussels and discussed implementation of recent India EU agreements and key global issues.

Jaishankar, who is on a two-day visit to the capital of Belgium, attended a meeting of the EU's Foreign Affairs Council at

the invitation of EU High Representative and Vice President Kaja Kallas.

"Delighted to meet my fellow Foreign Ministers from the European Union today in Brussels," Jaishankar said in a social media post, thanking Kallas for inviting him to the gathering.

He said a "new chapter" in India EU ties has opened in 2026 and the foreign ministers discussed translating various agreements between the two

sides into concrete outcomes. "Our conversation today therefore covered trade, investment, technology, mobility and defence in particular," Jaishankar said.

The discussions also reflected "stronger convergence between India and the EU in a multipolar world", he said, adding that the leaders exchanged views on the West Asia conflict, the Ukraine situation and the Indo-Pacific.

of the day uote

I strongly feel that Congress parliamentarians, led by the Leader of Opposition, have provoked far too many disruptions inside Parliament and in its premises

HD DEVE GOWDA | RAJYA SABHA MP

The time of debating the failures of the previous BRS government was over, and the ruling Congress should now prioritise its own vision

A REVANTH REDDY | T'GANA CM

Telangana's per capita income has reached Rs 4,18,931. At the same time, the state government has maintained price stability, with inflation contained at 0.2 per cent

SHIV PRATAP SHUKLA | T'GANA GOVERNOR

POST OF THE DAY

93% of Gen Z have already taken a step toward starting a business. The generation everyone called

lazy is the most entrepreneurial generation we've ever seen. People confuse their environment with their effort.

@rajshamani

SHORT TAKES

AI's NY-Delhi flight diverted to Ireland

New Delhi: An Air India A350 aircraft, carrying around 300 people from New York to Delhi, was diverted to Shannon due to a technical issue Monday, and the plane is grounded in the Irish town for extensive technical checks. There were around 300 people on board the plane, which was airborne for nearly six hours before getting diverted to Shannon, according to sources.

Meghalaya extends tenure of GHADC

Shillong: Amid violence in the Garo Hills region over the participation of non-tribals in tribal council polls, the Meghalaya government on Monday extended the tenure of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) by six months, Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong said. The decision was approved by the state Cabinet in a virtual meeting chaired by Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma. Addressing reporters after the meeting, Tynsong said the Cabinet met with a single-agenda focus relating to the extension of the current GHADC House.

Arunachal: Four killed in landslide

Itanagar: Four labourers died and three others were injured Monday, after a wall collapsed during a landslide at Niti Vihar in Itanagar, police said. The landslide, triggered by heavy rain, buried seven people working at the site under debris, Itanagar Capital Region (ICR) SP Jummar Basar said. The incident occurred around 4 pm when the wall collapsed following continuous rainfall, causing mud and debris to slide down and trap the workers. Rescue teams later managed to pull out the seven labourers from the debris, but four of them were declared dead by doctors, he said.

TN: Officials remove banners, posters as MCC comes into force

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, March 16: Officials removed the posters, banners and wall advertisements of political parties in Chennai and other parts of Tamil Nadu Monday as the MCC came into effect following the announcement of the schedule for the 2026 Assembly election.

As many as 178 polling locations and 785 polling booths with a history of repolling or law and order problems in Chennai district have been identified by officials to deploy central forces for the April 23 Assembly election, Greater Chennai Corporation Commissioner J Kumaragurubaran said. Chennai has 16 Assembly constituencies with a total electorate strength of 28.30 lakh, with 14.64 lakh women outnumbering

men, who comprise 13.65 lakh. There are 829 third gender voters in the district, which has 4,079 polling stations in 978 locations.

Meanwhile, following an instruction from the ECI, the state government has transferred D N Hari Kiran Prasad, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Greater Chennai Police, and posted him as Superintendent of Police, Karur district, D V Kiran Shruthi, SP, Anti Terrorism Squad, Chennai, has been transferred to Erode district in the same capacity, Sujit Kumar, DCP, Traffic West, Greater Chennai Police, is posted as SP Nagapattinam district, and N Shreenatha, DCP, Cyber Crime Cell, Greater Chennai Police, has been shifted to Virudhunagar district and posted as SP.



Hockey trainees practice during a training session, in Amritsar, Punjab

PTI PHOTO

Iran's conditions to India for Hormuz safe passage

REUTERS

New Delhi, March 16: Iran has asked India to release three tankers seized in February as part of talks seeking the safe passage of Indian-flagged or India-bound vessels out of the Gulf via the Strait of Hormuz, three sources with knowledge of the matter told Reuters.

Indian authorities seized the three Iran-linked tankers near Indian waters alleging they had concealed or altered their identities and were involved in illegal ship to ship transfers at sea.

Get the latest news from India and how it matters to the world with the Reuters India File newsletter. Sign up here.

Tehran has also sought supplies of certain medicines and medical equipment, according to one of the sources, an Irani-

an official.

Iran's ambassador to New Delhi met Indian foreign ministry officials Monday to discuss the issue, the source said. The sources declined to be named due to the sensitivity of the matter. India's foreign ministry, the Iranian embassy in New Delhi, and Iran's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to Reuters' requests for comment.

Iran recently allowed two Indian liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) tankers to pass through the strait, according to Indian officials, and one of them returned to western India on Monday. Traffic has ground to a near standstill on either side of the strait since the beginning of the war in Iran.

Asked about negotiations to ensure passage for Indi-



an vessels, foreign ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said Monday that recent movements reflected a "history of engagement, of dealing with each other". He told a daily news briefing that nothing was being exchanged.

Since the start of US and Israeli attacks on Iran in late February, Tehran has responded with attacks across the region including on ships attempting to transit the Strait of Hormuz, killing three Indian sailors and leaving one missing.

AT LEAST 22 INDIAN-FLAGGED VESSELS REMAIN IN THE GULF -INDIAN OFFICIALS

INDIA SEIZED 3 IRANIAN-LINKED TANKERS IN FEBRUARY

IRAN NEGOTIATING RELEASE OF TANKERS, SUPPLIES OF MEDICINE -SOURCES

India said Monday that at least 22 Indian-flagged vessels and 611 Indian seafarers remained in the Gulf. An Indian source said six of the vessels were loaded with LPG and the country was keen for their passage first to ease a shortage of the cooking fuel. About 90% of India's total LPG imports come from the Gulf.

IRANIAN-LINKED TANKERS ANCHORED OFF MUMBAI

Indian authorities seized the

tankers Asphalt Star, Al Jafzia and Stellar Ruby alleging they had concealed or altered their identity and movements, and were involved in illegal ship to ship transfers.

Stellar Ruby is Iranian-flagged, while the other two vessels are flagged to Nicaragua and Mali.

A police complaint filed by the Indian Coast Guard on February 15, and seen by Reuters, said Asphalt Star was involved in the smuggling of heavy fuel oil that was transferred to Al Jafzia and bitumen to Stellar Ruby. All three are currently docked off Mumbai. Around the time of the seizure, Iranian state media cited the National Iranian Oil Company as saying that the three tankers seized had no connection to the company.



It is in our interest to keep the Strait of Hormuz open, and that's why we are also discussing what we can do in this regard from the European side

KAJA KALLAS | EU'S FOREIGN POLICY CHIEF

JAPAN'S CHERRY BLOSSOM SEASON BEGINS

Cherry blossom spotters from the Japanese government announced Monday the first blooming of the country's favourite flower in three cities, marking the official start of the season.



of the day quote

We will only get security for the Strait of Hormuz, if there is a negotiated solution



JOHANN WADEPULH | FOREIGN MINISTER, GERMANY

All parties have the responsibility to ensure stable and unimpeded energy supply and that China would strengthen communication with relevant parties for de-escalation



LIU PENGYU | CHINA'S EMBASSY TO THE US

If Trump doesn't like your coverage of the war, his FCC will pull your broadcast license. That is flagrantly unconstitutional



GAVIN NEWSOM | GOVERNOR, CALIFORNIA

SHORT TAKES

Sri Lanka announces 4-day working week

Colombo: Sri Lanka Monday announced a four-day working week with every Wednesday a public holiday as a contingency measure for possible fuel shortages in view of the war in West Asia.

Ex-French prez Sarkozy appeals conviction

Paris: Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy returned to court Monday for an appeal hearing in Paris over his conviction linked to the alleged illegal campaign financing of his 2007 presidential campaign by Libya, a case that led him to spend 20 days in prison last year.

Veeraswamy restaurant marks 100 years

London: Veeraswamy, one of the world's oldest Indian restaurants, Monday marks 100 years since it first opened its doors at Victory House on London's Regent Street in March 1926.

STRAIT OF HORMUZ CRISIS

Stop military ops immediately: China

The effective closure of the vital waterway by Iran in retaliation for airstrikes by the US and Israel has proved catastrophic for global energy and trade flows, causing the largest oil supply disruption and soaring global oil prices

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, March 16: China Monday called on all countries to immediately stop military operations in West Asia in response to US President Donald Trump's appeal to help keep the Strait of Hormuz open for international transport, ruling out Beijing joining any international naval force risking its close ties with Iran.



The effective closure of the vital waterway by Iran in retaliation for airstrikes by the US and Israel has proved catastrophic for global energy and trade flows, causing the largest oil supply disruption and soaring global oil prices.

China also said it is in talks with the US about Trump's planned visit to Beijing later this month, amid the US President's assertion that he may delay his China trip due to the Iran war.

About Trump's call to China and other countries to join, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian virtually ruled out Beijing's participation in the naval armada to ensure safe passage of ships out of the Strait of Hormuz.

"The recent tense situation in the Strait of Hormuz and waters nearby has impacted

the route for international goods and energy trade, disrupting peace and stability in the region and beyond," Lin told a media briefing while answering questions on Trump's appeal.

Instead, he said, "China once again calls on parties to immediately stop military operations, avoid further escalation of the tense situation and prevent regional turmoil from further impacting the global economy".

He, however, said China is in "communication with relevant parties to work for the de-escalation of the situation".

On Trump's comment that he may delay his visit to China at the end of the month, appar-

ently linking his visit to Beijing's response to his appeal to help keep the Strait of Hormuz open, Lin said both Beijing and Washington are in talks about the US President's visit.

China and the United States are in communication with each other regarding Trump's visit to China, Lin said, adding that the head-of-state diplomacy plays an irreplaceable strategic leading role in China-US relations.

His comments came as top trade officials of both countries held talks in Paris ahead of Trump's planned visit to Beijing from Mar 31 to April 4.

The talks are being held between Vice Premier He Lifeng and US Treasury Secretary

Scott Bessent. The talks, which began March 14, were scheduled to go on till March 17.

On the progress of the talks, state-run Xinhua news agency quoted a senior Chinese official as saying in Paris Monday that China and the US have agreed that stable bilateral economic and trade relations are beneficial to both countries and the world.

In an interview with the Financial Times Sunday, Trump said China's reliance on oil from West Asia means it has to help with a new coalition he is trying to put together to get oil tanker traffic moving through the strait after Iran's threats have throttled global flows of oil.

"We'd like to know before the trip whether Beijing will help. We may delay," Trump said in the interview.

In a recent social media post, Trump urged countries including China, the UK, France and Japan to deploy warships to keep the strait "open and safe."

China, a close ally of Iran and recipient of Iranian oil supplies at a cheaper rate, has condemned the US-Israeli attacks on Iran and criticised the assassination of Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei in American airstrikes.

Israel says it has plans for 3 weeks of war as airstrikes pound Iran



REUTERS

Tel Aviv/Dubai, March 16: Israel said Monday it has detailed plans for at least three more weeks of war as its military pounded sites across Iran overnight, while Iranian drone attacks temporarily shut Dubai airport and hit a key oil facility in the United Arab Emirates.

The US-Israeli war on Iran is now entering its third week, with no clear end in sight, shutting down the Strait of Hormuz through which 20% of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas flow, pushing up oil prices and raising fears of a renewed spike in global inflation.

US President Donald Trump Sunday called for a coalition of nations to help reopen the vital shipping route and warned that the NATO alliance faces a "very bad" future if its members fail to come to Washington's aid.

His call drew a wary response from allies, who voiced support for diplomatic efforts to reopen the route but signalled caution about the possibility of military action.

Israeli military spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nadav Shoshani told reporters there are detailed operational plans for the war with Iran for the next three weeks, along with additional plans extending further ahead.

The military has framed its aims as limited to weakening Iran's capacity to threaten Israel by striking ballistic missile infrastructure, nuclear facilities, and the security apparatus.

"We want to make sure that they are as weak as possible, this regime, and that we degrade all their capabilities, all parts and all wings of their security establishment," Shoshani said.

The military has said it still has thousands of targets to hit inside Iran.

HEAVY STRIKES REPORTED ACROSS IRAN

Iran's Mehr news agency reported five people were killed and seven wounded in overnight strikes hitting Markazi province in central Iran. The news agency said a residential area on the outskirts of Arak city was attacked as well as a residential building in the Mahallat county.

In Khomein city, also in Markazi province, a boys' school was targeted, causing some damage to the surrounding area. No casualties were reported.

The Israeli military said Monday it was carrying out air strikes on Tehran, Shiraz and Tabriz against what it described as infrastructure of the "Iranian terror regime".

Rescue workers in Tehran worked to pull people from the mangled wreckage of a building in what an Iranian Red Crescent aid worker said was an entirely residential alleyway.

Hamas holds talks with Trump-led board as Iran war strains Gaza plan

CAIRO/JERUSALEM: Envoys from US President Donald Trump's "Board of Peace" have met representatives of Hamas in Cairo in an effort to safeguard the Gaza ceasefire, under serious strain since the United States and Israel began bombing Iran, three sources told Reuters.



The weekend meeting is the first publicly reported since the start of the Iran war between the Palestinian militant group and the board, a new international body personally headed by Trump, which has been tasked with overseeing post-war Gaza. Following the meeting, Israel announced Sunday that it would soon reopen the sole crossing for pedestrians between Gaza and Egypt, shut since the Iran bombing campaign began. One of the sources said he believed the Israeli announcement was a direct result of the meeting between Hamas and the board.

Starmer resists being drawn into wider Iran war, offers help on strait

LONDON: Prime Minister Keir Starmer said Monday Britain would not be drawn into a wider war in Iran but would work with allies on a "viable" plan to reopen the key Strait of Hormuz, a task he said would be "difficult" without de-escalation in the Middle East.



At a press conference aimed at easing public concern over rising energy costs, Starmer again justified his decision not to take part in the initial US-Israeli strikes on Iran, a move US President Donald Trump has criticised, going as far as calling the British leader "no Churchill".

Starmer did not rule out any action to reopen the strait after Trump said at the weekend that Britain, China, France, Japan and South Korea should send warships to the region to help unblock it. But the British leader said any move would need to be agreed by as "many partners as possible".

Japan, Australia have both said they would not send naval vessels to the strait. Greece and Germany also ruled out joining any military operations there, with Berlin adding it was not a job for the NATO alliance.

Myanmar Parl convenes as army prepares for new era of rule



REUTERS

Naypyitaw, March 16: Myanmar's parliament convened Monday for the first time since a coup five years ago, in one of the final steps in a nominal return to democracy where its powerful military retains tight control.

The gathering of the new parliament comes after a recent phased election dominated by the army-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party amid low voter turnout and no viable opposition. USDP chairman and retired brigadier-general Khin Yi was elected lower house speaker Monday. Reuters had earlier reported Khin Yi had been touted for the role, which is seen by some analysts as pivotal for the military in advancing its agenda.

LAWMAKERS MEET AFTER LOPSIDED ELECTION WON BY ARMY-BACKED PARTY. LEADER OF ARMY-BACKED PARTY CHOSEN AS HOUSE SPEAKER. LEGISLATURE CERTAIN TO BE UNDER MILITARY'S CONTROL, ANALYST SAYS

Aung San Suu Kyi, just as it was preparing for a second five-year term in office following a landslide election win. Many Western countries have dismissed the latest election as a sham designed to entrench military rule and earn the generals legitimacy after five years as pariahs tainted by sanctions and barred from top international summits.

MILITARY-DOMINATED LEGISLATURE The USDP, created by the military in 2010, won 81% of available seats and will be joined in the bicameral parliament by scores of military officers hand-picked by the armed forces, which under the constitution is allocated a quarter of legislative seats. The military's big representation and its influence over the USDP effectively puts the legislature under its control, giving the top brass the power to determine the presidency, with junta chief and coup leader Min Aung Hlaing widely expected to take the post himself.

Ukraine wants money, technology in return for Middle East drone help

REUTERS

Kyiv, March 16: Ukraine wants money and technology in return for helping Middle Eastern nations that have sought its expertise as they defend against Iranian kamikaze drones, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, after Kyiv sent specialists to the region.

Zelenskyy told reporters that three teams were sent to the Middle East to conduct expert assessments and demonstrate how drone defences should operate. Earlier this week he said teams were sent to Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, as well as a US military base in Jordan.

"This is not about being involved in operations. We are not at war with Iran," Zelenskyy said.

He said that more fundamental, long-term drone deals could be negotiated with Gulf countries and what Ukraine will get in return for the assistance still needed to be discussed. "For us today, both the technology and the funding are important," Zelenskyy said. Gulf states have expended large quantities of air-defence missiles to counter Iran's Shihad-17 drones. Kyiv downed Russian drones every night using an array of weaponry including cheaper, smaller drones or jamming equipment. Zelenskyy has said that the



US as well as countries from Europe, the Middle East and Africa has sought help from Ukraine on how to counter these attacks.

However, US President Donald Trump has said the US does not need Ukraine's help with downing drones. Zelenskyy said that he did not know why Washington had not signed a major drone deal which Kyiv has pushed for months, and that he was unsure whether it would be agreed at all. "I wanted to sign a deal worth about 35-50 billion dollars," he said. He also hit out at some Ukrainian companies and foreign governments, which he did not name, who he said

had sought to do deals for anti-drone equipment without approval from Kyiv.

PEACE TALKS AFFECTED Zelenskyy raised concerns about the effect of a protracted Middle Eastern conflict on Ukraine's own supplies of air defence missiles. "We would very much not like the United States to step away from the issue of Ukraine because of the Middle East," he told reporters. The latest round of peace talks between Moscow, Kyiv and Washington, which had been due to take place in the UAE, was postponed after US and Israeli airstrikes on Iran triggered a war in the region two weeks ago.

Philippines rejects Beijing's claim to sovereignty over entire South China Sea

REUTERS

Manila, March 16: The Philippines said Monday it rejected Beijing's assertion of sovereignty over the entire South China Sea, disputing a claim by China's embassy that a Filipino diplomat had once conceded the disputed Scarborough Shoal was not part of Philippine territory.

"China must be reminded that maritime and territorial claims are subject to established international legal procedures and dispute settlement mechanisms, not through unilateral proclamations or social media posts," Philippine foreign ministry spokesperson Rogelio Villanueva told a briefing.

Villanueva said the Philippines had "invisible, incontrovertible and longstanding sovereignty" over Scarborough Shoal and the islands Manila holds in the Spratly archipelago.

The remarks are the latest in a war of words between Philippine officials and the Chinese embassy in Manila over disputes in the South China Sea. China's embassy did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The Philippines and China both lay claim to the Scarborough Shoal, which is effectively under Beijing's control through continuous deployment of its coast guard. Sovereignty over the atoll has never been formally established.



India will be able to do physical shipments of more than 8,00,000 tonne, including to Asian and Gulf countries
PRAFUL VITHALANI | CHAIRMAN, AISTA

TATA CARS TO GET DEARER

Tata Motors Monday said it will increase the prices of its commercial vehicle range by up to 1.5 per cent from April 1. The price increase is being undertaken to partially offset the impact of rising commodity prices and other input costs, the company said in a regulatory filing. The increase will vary, depending on the model and variant, it added



of the day **quote**

Workers shifted to small gas-enabled burners for cooking purposes as usage of wood was discouraged due to air pollution. Now, with LPG cylinder shortage, they are finding it difficult to cook at home, and also some of the factory canteens are shut, forcing them to leave for their native places



VINNIE MEHTA | DIRECTOR GENERAL, ACMA

With studies done by Niti Aayog and others, this scheme is being redrafted and sooner the Cabinet will be given a proposal with which we will launch a new scheme to continue with this Stand-Up which benefitted SC/ST and women all over the country



NIRMALA SITHARAMAN | FINANCE MINISTER

Higher energy prices and mounting inflationary pressures have lowered expectations that the US Federal Reserve and other major central banks will cut interest rates, posing a headwind for non-yielding precious metals



JIGAR TRIVEDI | SENIOR RESEARCH ANALYST, INDUSIND SECURITIES

IPO BUZZ

CMPDIL ₹1,842-cr IPO to open March 20

New Delhi: Central Mine Planning and Design Institute (CMPDIL), an arm of state-owned Coal India, Monday said its ₹1,842-crore initial public offering (IPO) will open for subscription March 20. The price band has been fixed at ₹163 to ₹172 per share, valuing the company at around ₹12,280 crore at the higher end, the company announced. The issue will be entirely an offer for sale (OFS) of 10.71 crore shares, worth ₹1,842.12 crore at the upper end, by Coal India, with no fresh issue component. The company's maiden public offering will conclude on March 24. Bidding for anchor investors will take place March 18. The state-owned firm will make its stock market debut March 30. CMPDIL was incorporated in 1975 as a wholly-owned subsidiary of Coal India. It offers consultancy and support services for the entire spectrum of coal and mineral exploration, as well as mine planning and design services.

PhonePe pauses public offering

Mumbai: Walmart-backed fintech firm PhonePe has temporarily paused plans for an initial public offering, citing geopolitical tensions and volatility in global capital markets, the company said Monday. PhonePe, which runs India's most popular digital payments app, plans to resume its listing process once stability returns to the markets, it said in a statement. It aims to list at a valuation between \$9 billion and \$10.5 billion. Reuters reported this month. Walmart will trim its stake in PhonePe by about 12% in the IPO, while Tiger Global and Microsoft plan to exit, the IPO filing shows. The three firms will sell about 50.7 million shares in the offering, and PhonePe will not issue any new shares.

3 offerings soon

New Delhi: Three companies -- travel technology firm Travelstack Tech, Learnfluence Education, which operates the 'Lakshya' coaching centres, and tea cafe chain Tea Post -- have received approval from Sebi to raise funds through Initial Public Offerings (IPOs), according to an update from the market regulator Monday. So far this year, 12 companies have tapped the IPO market to raise funds. One issue is currently underway, while few others are expected to hit the market later this month.

Trade deficit narrows

The impact of the West Asia crisis will be known in the data for the month of March, as the war began February 28

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 16: The country's merchandise exports dropped marginally by 0.81 per cent year-on-year to \$36.61 billion in February, and the trade deficit narrowed to \$27.1 billion compared to the previous month.

Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agarwal said exports in March will see a "southward" trend due to the logistical challenges amid geopolitical tensions.

The joint attack launched by the US and Israel on Iran has disrupted the movement of consignments in international waters. It has led to a significant jump in oil prices, due to which air and ocean freight have risen sharply.

Imports in February increased by 24.11 per cent to \$63.71 billion due to a jump in gold and silver imports. In-bound shipments of gold rose 218.55 per cent to \$7.44 billion, while silver imports were up by 285.23 per cent to \$1.66 billion.

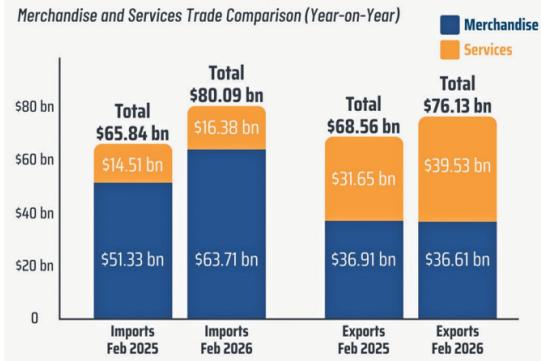
India mainly imports the yellow metal from Switzerland, from where the inbound shipments have climbed 719.3 per cent to \$2.71 billion in February.

Oil imports were up 9 per cent to \$12.97 billion during the month.

The trade deficit has narrowed when compared to the previous month, when it was \$34.68 billion. However, the gap has widened year-on-year from \$14.05 billion recorded in February 2025.

Briefing the media on the trade data, Agrawal said that the country's exports are doing well despite global economic

India Trade Data (Feb 2026)



Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry *Latest data for the services sector is for Jan 2026. Data for Feb 2026 is an estimation.

There are logistical challenges. Movement of ships...even air cargo also must face certain challenges because of some disruption in flights. So, it will have some impact. Indian exports to that region will suffer, and their imports from India will also suffer because they are also dependent on India for multiple product categories

RAJESH AGARWAL | COMMERCE SECRETARY

challenges. He said that the country's exports during the April-February period of FY26 went up 1.84 per cent to \$402.93 billion. Imports rose 8.53 per cent to \$713.53 billion during the period.

Merchandise trade deficit during the 11-month period of 2025-26 has increased to \$310.60 billion as compared to \$261.80

TARIFF PAIN: EXPORTS TO US DROP 13%

Trade gap with China tops \$100bn

India's exports to the US dipped 12.88 per cent year-on-year to \$6.88 billion in February due to high tariffs in America, while the trade deficit with China crossed \$100 billion during the 11-month period of this fiscal, according to the commerce ministry data. Exports contracted in September, October, December last year and January this year also. However, it rose 22.61 per cent in November. Indian goods were attracting a sweeping 50 per cent levies in the US. But after US Supreme Court struck down the Trump tariffs, US President Donald Trump imposed 10 per cent duty on all countries from February 24 for 150 days. So now the impact of the lower tariffs is likely to be reflected in the data for the month of March, which will be released in mid-May. Imports, on the other hand, from the US grew 36.53 per cent to \$4.48 billion in February, data showed. During the April-February period of this fiscal year, the country's exports to the US increased 3.84 per cent to \$79.29 billion, while imports rose 15.65 per cent to \$48.4 billion. The country's exports to China rose 32.37 per cent to \$1.67 billion, while imports surged 30.49 per cent to \$11.95 billion. During the 11-month period of this fiscal year, the country's exports to China increased 37.66 per cent to \$17.54 billion, while imports rose 15.21 per cent to \$119.55 billion. Trade deficit has reached \$102.01 billion. India's exports to Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Nepal, France, Brazil, Spain, Belgium, Malaysia and Vietnam saw growth during the month under review. However, exports to the UK, the Netherlands, the UK, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Singapore, Australia, and South Africa contracted. On the imports front, shipments in February declined from the UAE, Russia, Germany, Thailand and Qatar. However, imports rose from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Switzerland, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea and Indonesia.

"At least there will be some impact on the potential exports...Overall export numbers that you are seeing, we have been holding that combined goods and services, we will be around 860 billion dollars... I am sure we will remain in positive territory," he told reporters.

When asked about India's imports from Russia, the secretary said: "We are buying Russian oil also... there has been an increased buying from Russian oil al-

marine products, gems and jewellery, pharma, chemicals, engineering, and electronics have recorded positive growth.

As per the commerce ministry data, services exports are estimated at \$39.53 billion as compared to \$31.65 billion in January 2025. The imports are estimated at \$16.38 billion as compared to \$14.51 billion in the same month last year.

Speaking about the progress

so, in the current month also, because of challenges we are facing." At the exports front, key sectors such as petroleum, plastics, textiles, leather goods, iron ore, spices, cashew, oil meals, oil seeds, and tea recorded negative growth in February. However, shipments of rice,

on the India-US trade deal, the commerce secretary said that the actual signing of the pact will be done when the new architecture of tariffs is in place. "We are talking right now on the details with the US," Agrawal said. Last month, both the US and India agreed on a framework for a trade deal.

LPG SUPPLY WORRIES

City gas firms push piped cooking gas with incentives

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 16: City gas distribution companies have rolled out incentives to encourage consumers to shift from LPG to piped cooking gas (PNG) as part of the government plan to ease pressure on LPG supplies, a senior petroleum ministry official said Monday.

Indraprastha Gas Ltd (IGL) - the CNG and piped cooking gas (PNG) retailer in Delhi and adjoining cities - is offering domestic consumers free gas worth ₹500 if they take a PNG connection and start using it before March 31, while Mumbai-retailer Mahanagar Gas Ltd has announced incentives, including waiver of ₹500 registration charge for domestic household consumers and ₹1.5 lakh security deposit for commercial users. Similar promotional measures have also been introduced by GAIL and BPCL, said Sujata Shar-



ma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG).

"The current situation is worrying. But LPG is being supplied to our domestic LPG consumers to meet all their requirements. There are no reports of dry-outs at any LPG distributorship," the official said. LPG refill bookings have declined to about pre-war levels of 50-55 lakh March 15 from about 77 lakh Saturday and a peak of 88.8 lakh March 13, she said, but hastened to add that it remains to be seen if this was

a permanent trend or a one-off decline primarily due to March 15 being a Sunday.

The share of online LPG bookings has risen to about 90 per cent from 87 per cent, with the government continuing to promise the use of digital modes of bookings rather than queuing up at LPG dealerships for panic purchases.

She said the current situation was "worrying", but stressed that domestic consumers were continuing to receive supplies and there were no reports of dry-outs at LPG distributorships.

To ease pressure on LPG supplies, consumers are being encouraged to adopt piped natural gas (PNG). The sector regulator, Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB), has also advised city gas distribution (CGD) companies to deploy additional resources and step up outreach to provide connections to consumers wherever networks are available.

Banks write off loans worth ₹9.75L-cr in last 11 financial yrs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 16: Banks have written off loans worth ₹9.75 lakh crore in the last 11 financial years, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said Monday.

The write off peaked in FY20 at ₹1.59 lakh crore, and since then it has been declining to ₹47,568 crore in FY25.

Banks have written off ₹31,723 crore in FY15, ₹40,416 crore in FY16, ₹68,308 crore in FY 17, and ₹99,132 crore in FY18, he said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha.

In 2018-19, he said, the write off of loans crossed ₹1 lakh crore to ₹1.59 lakh crore.

The borrowers continue to be liable for repayment, and banks continue to pursue recovery actions initiated in these accounts, he added.

The recovery in written-off loans is an ongoing process, and banks continue pursuing their recovery actions initiated against borrowers under various recovery mechanisms available to them, he noted.

Union Bank of India signs MoU with TPSODL



BERHAMPUR: A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed between Union Bank of India and TPSODL to facilitate the opening of salary accounts for the company's employees with the bank. Hare Krishna Das, General Manager, Union Bank of India Bhubaneswar Zone, L Sangita Kujur, Regional Head, Regional Office, Berhampur, Sri Khuntia, Assistant General Manager, K Sunil Kumar, Senior Manager and other bank officials were present on this occasion. The event was witnessed by TPSODL chief executive officer Amit Kumar Garg, CFO Bijaya Mohanty, General Manager Laxmidhar Upadhyay, Deputy General Manager Dillip Kumar Mishra (Finance) and other executives of TPSODL. The main attraction of this salary package is TPSODL employees will get benefit of Personal Accident Insurance cover of ₹1 crore 20 lakh, Term Life Insurance cover of ₹20 lakh and hospi-cash benefit up to ₹90,000.

'Loan Mela' by OGB, SELCO Foundation



BHUBANESWAR: In a significant move toward sustainable rural development, Odisha Grameen Bank (OGB), in collaboration with SELCO Foundation and SPANDAN, organised a specialized Loan Mela for Decentralized Renewable Energy (DRE) solutions. The event focused on integrating solar-powered technologies into the traditional livelihoods of local potters to enhance efficiency and economic resilience. During the event, 20 potter entrepreneurs were sanctioned loans by Odisha Grameen Bank under the Silpi Unnati Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana. The programme was attended by Soumya Darshan Kar, Regional Manager, Pipli, Odisha Grameen Bank, Prabhu Prasad Mishra, Senior Advisor (Financial Inclusion), SELCO Foundation, Saswat Mohapatra, Director, SPANDAN, along with Branch Managers of Odisha Grameen Bank and the beneficiary potters.

SILVER TUMBLES ₹9K, GOLD DECLINES ₹2,950

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 16: Silver prices tumbled by ₹9,000 to ₹2.56 lakh per kg while gold prices dropped by ₹2,950 to ₹1.60 lakh per 10 grams in the national capital Monday, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

Weak global trends and a stronger US dollar hit the precious metals, analysts said.

Silver dropped by ₹9,000, or 3.4 per cent, to ₹2,56,500 per kg (inclusive of all taxes) from Friday's closing level of ₹2,65,500 per kg.

Gold of 99.9 per cent purity extended the losses for the third straight day, depreciat-

ing by ₹2,950, or 1.81 per cent, to ₹1,60,250 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes).

Traders attributed the fall in bullion prices to profit-booking and a shift in safe-haven demand toward the US dollar and bonds, as crude oil prices surged amid geopolitical tensions in West Asia.

In the international market, bullion prices also traded lower, reflecting similar trends, with spot gold slipping below the \$5,000 per ounce level, while silver fell beneath the \$80 per ounce. The yellow metal fell by \$20.94, or 0.42 per cent, to trade at \$4,998.31 per ounce, while silver fell \$1.81, or 2.25 per cent, to \$78.76 per ounce.

According to WPI data, infla-

Wholesale price inflation rises to 11-month high

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 16: Wholesale price inflation rose to a 11-month high of 2.13 per cent in February, driven by an uptick in prices of food and non-food articles, even though vegetable prices eased on a month-on-month basis, government data showed Monday.

This is the fourth straight month of rise in Wholesale Price Index (WPI)-based inflation. It was 1.81 per cent in January and 2.45 per cent in February last year.

Economists said the WPI inflation is likely to pick up pace further if the oil price rise persists, and spills over to other goods (fertilisers, aluminium) given it tracks international prices more closely relative to the CPI basket.

According to WPI data, infla-

Monthly WPI-Based Inflation Trend (Feb 2025-Feb 2026)



Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry *Provisional

tion in food articles was 2.19 per cent in February, as against 1.55 per cent in the previous month.

Although in vegetables, inflation eased to 4.73 per cent in February against 6.78 per cent in January, pulses, potato and egg, meat and fish saw an uptick in inflation in February.

"Positive rate of inflation in February 2026 is primarily due to an increase in prices of other manufacturing, manufacture of basic metals, non-food articles, food articles and textiles, etc," the Industry ministry said in a statement.

Negative inflation, or defla-

D-St jumps on bargain buying after 3-day fall

REUTERS

Mumbai, March 16: Benchmark indexes rose Monday as value buying in heavyweight stocks and a partial rebound in auto shares after last week's steep drop countered concerns over higher crude prices from the Middle East war.

The Nifty 50 rose 1.11% to 23,408.80, while the BSE Sensex added 1.26% to 75,502.85, snapping a three-session losing streak.

The Nifty traded in a range of 547 points, the highest in about six weeks, signalling elevated volatility in Monday's session.

The benchmark indexes confirmed a technical correction last week, a 10% drop at close from record high levels, due to the US-Israeli war on Iran.

Top private lender HDFC Bank rose 2.9%, while other index heavyweights such as Reliance Industries and ICICI Bank added 1% each. They had lost 4.7%, 1.7% and 4.5%, respectively, last week.

Auto stocks, which lost 10.6% last week to post their worst performance in six years, gained 1.7% on the day.

On the day, nine of the 16 major sectors advanced, while the broader mid-caps and small-caps fell 0.3% and 0.5%, respectively. Among other stocks, BPCL, HPCL and Indian Oil lost 4%-5%, after HSBC downgraded the oil marketing companies to "hold" from "buy".

While equities rebounded on the day, Brent crude hovered around \$104 a barrel, even as the US President Donald Trump urged other countries to help secure the Strait of Hormuz.

tion, in the fuel and power basket narrowed to 3.78 per cent in February, vis-a-vis 4.01 per cent in January. Global oil prices averaged USD 68/bbl in February from USD 63/bbl in January.

Barclays in a research note said the passthrough of the rise in crude oil prices from the Middle East conflict will reflect more in WPI inflation vs retail CPI inflation, as retail fuel prices are unchanged in the latter.

As per WPI data for February, inflation in manufactured products inched up to 2.92 per cent in February, from 2.86 per cent in the preceding month.

Non-food articles category inflation spiked to 8.80 per cent in February, from 7.58 per cent in January.

As per data released last week, India's retail inflation rose to 3.2 per cent in February, from 2.75 per cent in January.

INDIAN WELLS OPEN

Sinner, Sabalenka special

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Indian Wells (US), March 16: Jannik Sinner beat Daniil Medvedev in the Indian Wells final 7-6 (6), 7-6 (4), winning seven straight points to rally from a 4-0 deficit in the second-set tie-break and claim the title without dropping a single set.

The No 2-ranked Italian beat Medvedev for the ninth time in their last 10 matches to claim his first title at the California desert tournament. Medvedev handed top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz his first loss of the year in the semifinals of the BNP Paribas Open.

The Italian was imperious throughout, finishing with 28 winners, 10 aces and a perfect eight out of eight net points.

He is now only the third player in history to win all six ATP Masters 1000 hard-court titles, joining Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer.

Furthermore, with his first title of the year, he became the first player since 1990 to win consecutive Masters 1000 titles without dropping a set and extended his winning streak in this category to 11 matches, dating back to his Paris title last November.

Sinner congratulated fellow Italian Kimi Antonelli, who won Formula One's Chinese Grand Prix earlier Sunday.

World No 1 Aryna Sabalenka beat Elena Rybakina 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (6) in the women's final Sunday for her first Indian Wells title. Sabalenka, a runner-up in 2023 and '25, finished off the win with a big

I think the whole idea going into this match was to be mentally strong, to stay strong, no matter what, to show with the body language that I'm here, I'm fighting. You have to get a win with incredible tennis and that was the whole idea going into this one. I'm happy that it really worked

ARYNA SABALENKA

Aryna Sabalenka overcomes ghosts of the past to win the title for the first time defeating Elena Rybakina

This marked the 16th time the two players have met, with Sabalenka now holding a 9-7 advantage

serve that Rybakina hit long. It was a sweltering afternoon on the court as the temperatures soared into the 90s. The 27-year-old Sabalenka had a chance to close out the third set but was broken at 5-4. Rybakina found herself with a championship point in the tiebreaker, only to have Sabalenka hit a backhand winner.

It's been quite a stretch for Sabalenka. First, a puppy and then an engagement ring from Brazilian businessman Georgios Frangulis.

Now, a title in the desert.

bakina of Kazakhstan beat Sabalenka at the 2025 WTA Finals championship and the Australian Open two months ago.

Sinner beat Medvedev for the ninth time in their last 10 matches to claim his first title at the California desert tournament

The Italian is now only the third player in history to win all six ATP Masters 1000 hard-court titles, joining Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer



It hasn't anything to do with tennis, but it has been a special day for Italy. Because I'm a huge Formula One fan and having a very, very young Italian, Kimi, bringing Italy back home at the top, it's amazing. So, thanks, Kimi, thanks Formula One, and see you next year

JANNIK SINNER

She also edged Sabalenka in the finals at Indian Wells in 2023.

"It was a very difficult match," Rybakina said after the match as she congratulated Sabalenka.

There's not much time to cel-

ebate for Sabalenka, who was to leave Sunday night for the Miami Open, where she's the defending champion.

"Probably will have a couple drinks on the plane and that's it," Sabalenka said.

RELIEF FOR RCB FANS

Chinnaswamy Stadium gets nod for IPL matches

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore, March 16: The Karnataka government Monday gave formal approval to the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) and Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) to host the 2026 Indian Premier League matches at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, ending months of uncertainty following the stampede after the team's maiden title win.

The 19th edition of the world's biggest T20 league begins March 28 with defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru set to face Sunrisers Hyderabad in their first match here at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in the tournament opener, as per the schedule.

The formal approval comes after a meeting chaired by Karnataka home minister Parameashwar with the Expert Committee, which was constituted by the state government, and representatives from the KSCA, RCB and their event management firm DNA.

"During the meeting, the Expert Committee presented its report outlining the preparedness and compliance measures undertaken at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium," KSCA's official spokesperson Vinay Mruthunjaya informed in a statement.

"Based on the recommenda-

tions of the Expert Committee and after reviewing the arrangements in detail, the Hon'ble Home Minister has formally accorded approval for the conduct of the upcoming IPL matches at the iconic M Chinnaswamy Stadium, Bangalore."

"The Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) placed on record its sincere gratitude to the Hon'ble Home Minister G Parameashwar, for his leadership, guidance and support in facilitating this approval," he added.

Apart from the opening fixture of the upcoming season, the M Chinnaswamy Stadium is also slated to host the RCB Unboxing event as well as the tournament's opening ceremony.

RCB had earlier announced that it would play five of their seven home matches in Bangalore, while two will be played at Raipur's Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh International Cricket Stadium.

The KSCA also expressed its gratitude towards the members of the Expert Committee.

At least 11 people were killed and more than 30 injured in a stampede near the M Chinnaswamy Stadium June 4, 2025 during Royal Challengers Bengaluru's IPL victory celebrations, raising serious concerns over crowd management.



YOUTH NATIONAL VOLLEYBALL C'SHIP

Odisha march on



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 16: The second day of the 26th Youth National Volleyball Championship 2025-26 (Men & Women) witnessed exciting matches at the Biju Patnaik Multipurpose Indoor Stadium, KIIT Deemed to be University, where the Odisha Men's Team delivered an impressive performance with two consecutive victories.

In a thrilling encounter, the Odisha Men's Team defeated Haryana 3-2 sets after a hard-fought five-set battle. Odisha started strong by winning the

first two sets but Haryana fought back to level the match, forcing a decisive fifth set. Displaying remarkable determination and composure, Odisha secured victory in the final set.

Earlier in the tournament, the Odisha Men's Team had also recorded a convincing 3-0 victory over Uttarakhand, showcasing their strong form and teamwork in the championship.

In the Women's Section, the Odisha Women's Team also performed impressively, defeating Chhattisgarh 3-0 sets to begin their campaign on a confident note.

OCA League witnesses thrilling clashes

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 16: The OCA Club League - 2026 witnessed four exciting matches filled with brilliant batting, sharp bowling, and nail-biting finishes across different grounds.

At Barabati Stadium, Union Sporting Club posted a strong total of 270 in 49.4 overs after winning the toss. Shivam Chaudhary played a magnificent knock of 123 runs off 120 balls, anchoring the innings. For LIC Sports Club, Malay K Jena and Soubhagya Rout picked up three wickets each.

In reply, LIC Sports Club fought hard, with Santosh K Yadav scoring 67 off 83 balls, but tight bowling from Omkar Mohanty, who took 4/40, restricted them to 248/9. Union Sporting Club secured a 22-run victory. Shivam Chaudhary was named Player of the Match. Guests present included Santosh Kumar Jena and Ashok Kumar Das.

At Ravenshaw-I Ground,



Sunrise Club scored 252/8 in 50 overs, with Karan Mohapatra contributing 41 runs. Sobhan-

deb Behera impressed with the ball for Jagatpur Athletic Association, claiming 3/44. Chasing

SHORT TAKES

Eves chase Nations Cup

Lausanne: The Indian women's team will feature in the FIH Hockey Nations Cup to be held in Auckland, New Zealand from June 15 to 21. The Hockey Nations Cup was launched in 2021 to offer a top-level competition to the best-ranked teams not participating in the Hockey Pro League, and give the winning team an option to be promoted in it the following season. The Indian women's hockey team was relegated from the Pro League 2024-25 after finishing at the bottom of the nine-team standings. Apart from India, hosts New Zealand, USA, Japan, Korea, Chile, Scotland and France, who were promoted via the Hockey Nations Cup 2, will take part in the event.

Chelsea fined \$14.3mn

London: Chelsea has been handed fines totaling 10.75 million pounds (\$14.3 million) and a suspended one-year ban from signing players for breaking financial rules during its previous ownership under Roman Abramovich, the Premier League said Monday.

LA LIGA

Raphinha's hat-trick takes Barca 4 points clear on top

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Barcelona, March 16: Raphinha scored a hat trick, including two goals from the penalty spot, as Barcelona reclaimed its four-point lead over Real Madrid at the top of the Spanish league.

Barcelona routed Sevilla 5-2 for its fourth straight league win and boosted its confidence ahead of the second leg of its Champions League last 16 match against Newcastle Wednesday. Barcelona needed Lamine Yamal's penalty with the last kick of the game to rescue a 1-1 draw at Newcastle in the first leg.

Madrid beat Elche 4-1 Saturday to temporarily cut Barcelona's lead to one point.

After Portugal defender Joao Cancelo was fouled in the box, Raphinha put the Catalan

side ahead in the ninth minute with a little dink of a shot known as a "Panenka," which fooled goalkeeper Odysseas Vlachodimos.

Cancelo, who returned to Barcelona this winter on loan from Saudi Arabia club Al-Hilal, earned another penalty in the 18th minute as Raphinha again con-



verted. Vlachodimos read the shot well and managed to touch the ball but could not stop it. Dani Olmo made it 3-0 in the 38th minute from Marc Bernal's cross.

Oso pulled one back for Sevilla before halftime and Raphinha completed his hat trick after the interval with a shot that took a deflection and went over the 'keeper. Cancelo then added more luster to the win, with Djibril Sow reducing the gap in added time.

Barcelona midfielder Gavi returned to action after more than 200 days on the sidelines because of a right knee meniscus operation.

Gavi came on in the 82nd minute as a replacement for Raphinha to huge cheers. He was then applauded every time he touched the ball.

Prodigy Yamal vs GOAT Messi battle cancelled

The match between Argentina and Spain in Qatar called off after widening of Middle East war

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Nyon (Switzerland), March 16: UEFA said that the game between Argentina and Spain known as Finalissima that was supposed to be held in Qatar has been canceled after the widening Middle East war.

The game between South American champion Argentina and European champion Spain was scheduled to be held in Doha March 27. It was going to be a marquee matchup between the teams led by Lionel Messi and Lamine Yamal before this summer's World Cup in North America.

But the security of the game was put into serious doubt when Iran intensified its attacks on neighboring countries in retaliation to the aerial attacks by United States and Israel that are now in their third week.

"After much discussion between UEFA and the organizing authorities in Qatar, it is announced today that due to the current political situation in the region, the Finalissima between UEFA EURO 2024 win-



ners Spain and CONMEBOL Copa America 2024 champions Argentina cannot be played as hoped in Qatar on 27 March," UEFA said in a statement.

Argentina and Spain were to play at Lusail Stadium, which staged the epic 2022 World Cup final. Argentina won a penalty shootout against France after Messi scored twice and Kylian Mbappe got a hat trick in a thrilling 3-3 draw.

Other venues had reportedly been considered as alternatives

South American soccer body Conmebol said in a statement Sunday that Argentina's soccer federation (AFA) received an offer from UEFA to play the match in Italy March 27, but the defending World Cup and Copa America champions countered that the game take place March 31.

"Regrettably, UEFA said the match taking place on the 31st only four days after their original offer was not possible, and so the Finalissima was cancelled," the South American confederation said. "CONMEBOL and AFA regret deeply that, despite all the efforts and the manifested interest in playing the match in a neutral ground since the first moment, it was not possible."

Argentina won the inaugural edition of the Finalissima in 2022 with a 3-0 victory over Italy at Wembley Stadium in London. The violence in the Middle East, where Iran is hitting the Gulf Arab states with drone and missile attacks, has stranded travelers, upset economic markets and sent oil prices soaring.