



Dream accomplished

Actor Sharvari has admitted that she is working on her dream role in upcoming movie Main Vaapas Aaunga

LEISURE | P2



China visit stalled

Trump postpones a highly anticipated trip to Beijing to meet with Xi Jinping as the war with Iran upends US foreign policy

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Markets rally for 2nd day

Sensex climbs 567 points and Nifty closes near 23,600 in their second consecutive day of gains, boosted by a rally in metal and auto shares

BUSINESS | P11



Teen reigns supreme

15-year-old prodigy Inaara Mehta secures top global rankings at FEI World Dressage Challenge 2025

SPORTS | P12

CROSS-VOTING AFTERSHOCKS Cong suspends 3 MLAs, seeks disqualification

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 17: Opposition Congress Tuesday suspended three of its MLAs for voting for BJP-backed Independent candidate Dilip Ray, helping him win the Rajya Sabha polls. These MLAs are: Ramesh Chandra Jena of Sana-khemundi, Dasarathi Gamango of Mohana and Sofia Firdous of Barabati-Cuttack.

Announcing their suspension, the state Congress in a social media post said, "Those who betray Congress are betraying the nation."

State Congress media cell chairperson Arabinda Das said the decision was taken after careful review of their actions, which were deemed detrimental to the party's interests.

He said the party's action will be intimidated to the Speaker for their disqualification from the Assembly. State Congress president Bhakta Charan Das said, "This act of betrayal was unexpected from these MLAs. We will ensure that they are disqualified from the Assembly under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution." Congress legislature party leader Rama Chandra Kadam, in a letter to Speaker Surama Padhy, sought the disqualification of the three MLAs.

BJD show-causes 6 MLAs

The BJD Tuesday issued show-cause notices to six lawmakers to explain their action of cross-voting, considered to be "breach of trust". BJD Chief Whip Pramila Mallik, in a letter to six BJD MLAs - Chakramani Kanhar (Baliguda), Naba Kishor Mallick (Jayadev), Souvic Biswal (Choudwar-Cuttack), Subasini Jena (Basta), Ramakanta Bhoi (Tirtol) and Devi Ranjan Tripathy (Banki), asked them to reply to the show cause notice by 5 pm March 20.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



How can we trust them to vote on Bills when they cannot even vote properly in Rajya Sabha elections?

344 elephant deaths in 4 yrs

Habitat fragmentation, infrastructure hazards, poaching, and human-elephant conflict continue to claim elephant lives despite the state government's claims of multiple protection measures. Rapid mining and industrialisation have severely fragmented natural habitats, leading to food scarcity and increased risks for these animals. Additionally, sagging and un-insulated live wires, along with poorly maintained power infrastructure in forested areas, remain a major cause of elephant deaths. Poaching also persists as a serious threat, with dozens of elephants killed for their tusks in recent years. Moreover, railway tracks passing through elephant corridors frequently result in fatal collisions, particularly at night or in areas with poor visibility

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 17: Forest, Environment and Climate Change Minister Ganesh Ram Singkhuntia Tuesday informed the Assembly that 344 wild elephants have died in the state due to various rea-

The minister told the House that the govt has set up anti-poaching camps, patrolling on foot is being conducted and the movement of wild animals and poachers is being monitored through artificial intelligence



TODDLER KILLED IN TUSKER ATTACK

Jaleswar: A two-year-old boy died when a wall collapsed on him after a tusker attacked a mud house at Kendukhunda-Jharanasahi under Raibania police limits in Balasore district late Monday night, officials said. The deceased was identified as Narayan Besra, son of Uddhab Besra. Reports said the elephant, which got separated from a herd, attacked the house around 1am when the family members were asleep. The child, with critical injuries, was rushed to Hatigarh CHC, where doctors declared him dead. Administration has assured the family of providing ₹10 lakh ex gratia, as per government norms.

various parts of Odisha during the current financial year (till March 10).

Informing the House about

MAJOR CASUALTIES

Dhenkanal	53
Keonjhar	42
Mayurbhanj	39
Angul	39
Cuttack	37
Sambalpur	25
Sundargarh	21

the measures taken for protecting the wild animal, the minister said the government has set up anti-poaching camps, patrolling on foot is being conducted and the movement of wild animals and poachers is being monitored through the use of artificial intelligence in different forest divisions.

Other measures such as deployment of anti-depredation/anti-poaching squads, provision of incentive for informers, formation of joint task force and coordination meetings with the railways, energy, and fisheries and animal resources departments, online distribution of compensation and widespread public awareness have been taken, he added.

Pak strikes on Afghan hosp kill 400, hurt 250

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Islamabad, March 17: Pakistan overnight carried out "precision airstrikes" targeting what it described as terrorists and their support infrastructure locations across Afghanistan, but the Afghan government accused Islamabad of bombing a rehabilitation hospital in Kabul, killing at least 400 people and injuring 250 others.

The latest strikes came as Operation Ghazab Lil Haq, launched February 26, continued, according to Pakistan's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Pakistan launched the operation in response to alleged attacks by the Afghan Taliban forces along the 2,600-km-long border.

"Pakistan's Armed Forces successfully carried out precision airstrikes on the night of 16 March as a part of Operation Ghazab Lil Haq, targeting Afghan Taliban regime terrorism sponsoring military installations in Kabul and Nangarhar," Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said in a post on X.

However, Deputy Spokesman



of the Afghan Taliban-led government, Hamdullah Fitrat, said Monday night's bombardment by Pakistan targeted a drug rehabilitation centre in the Afghan capital, resulting in the death of at least 400 people. He said 250 others were injured. In a post on X, Fitrat said the strike destroyed large sections of the hospital and rescue teams were trying to recover the bodies from the rubble.

The airstrike destroyed five blocks of the rehabilitation compound, where up to 3,000 patients were receiving treatment, it said.

Deputy Interior Minister Muhammad Nabi Omari, who visited the site, said that Pakistan "has undertaken a project to kill Afghans."

India condemns attack | P8

REVOLT AGAINST TRUMP

Top US official Kent resigns over Iran war

PTI & AP

Washington, March 17: Joe Kent, Director of National Counterterrorism Centre, US, announced his resignation Tuesday, saying he "cannot in good conscience" back the Trump administration's war in Iran. Kent said on social media Iran "posed no imminent threat to our nation, and it is clear that we started this war due to pressure from Israel and its powerful American lobby."

There was no immediate comment from the White House. Kent, a former political candidate with connections to right-wing extremists, was confirmed to his post last July on a 52-44 vote. As head of the National Counterterrorism Centre, he was in charge of an agency tasked with analysing and detecting terrorist threats.

Before entering President Donald Trump's administration, Kent ran two unsuccessful campaigns for Congress in Washington state. He also served in the military, seeing 11 deployments as a Green Beret, followed by work at the CIA.



Top Iranian security official killed: Israel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dubai, March 17: Israel's Defence Minister Tuesday said that the military killed top Iranian security official Ali Larjani in an overnight strike. The military also announced it killed Gen Gholam Reza Soleimani, the head of the Revolutionary Guard's all-volunteer Basij force.

However, Iranian state media did not immediately confirm either death. Also Tuesday, a drone attack in United Arab Emirates (UAE) sparked a fire at an oil tank farm in Fujairah, an emirate on the country's east coast with the Gulf of Oman that has been repeatedly targeted, the state-run WAM news agency reported. It said no one was injured in the blast.

The Israeli military also said it had launched new attacks across Tehran and Beirut.

40% GRADS CANNOT FIND JOBS: REPORT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 17: Eleven million out of 63 million graduates between the ages of 20 and 29 in India are unemployed, with only a small proportion securing stable salaried jobs within a year of graduation, according to a report by Azim Premji University.

The 'State of Working India' report found that only about 7 per cent of graduates can find permanent salaried employment within a year of reporting themselves as unemployed. Graduate unemployment remains high - nearly 40 per cent among those aged 15 to 25 and 20 per cent among the 25 to 29 age group, it said. "Only a small share secure stable salaried jobs within a year of graduation. The problem of graduate unemployment has been magnified in recent years owing to the growing size of the graduate

Why Sweden is preparing jails for young teens

The Rosersberg prison cells in North Stockholm are being refurbished to cater to the needs of young inmates, even as the Swedish government is preparing to implement a contentious juvenile judicial reform in July this year.

In January, the minority right-wing government announced that it would reduce the age of criminal responsibility from 15 to 13 for crimes punishable by at least four years in jail.

Its goal is to break a surge in children being recruited by criminal networks as hitmen to carry out bombings and shootings, knowing they would not face prison time if caught, according to a report by 'NDTV'.

Until now, minors who committed serious offences were placed in secure youth care homes (SiS-hem), but these homes have faced problems, including reports of them becoming recruitment grounds for gangs.

The legislation still needs a clearance from the Parliament, but Rosersberg is one of eight prisons preparing to house young offenders starting July 1, the report said.

"You have to keep in mind that it may be the first time they sleep away from home, and then it's here in an institution," Prison Director Gabriel Wessman told AFP during a

tour.

Preparations include transferring some adult inmates to other facilities, building classrooms and remodelling cells.

One unit has been emptied of its 51 adult inmates to make room for up to 24 minors.

The austere, concrete yards are being redone.

"It will be nicer, more green bushes, more sofas, more plac-

es to train, and of course, take away the cigarette boxes. They are not allowed to smoke," Wessman explained.

Each young person will be placed in a 10-sq-metre (108-sqft) single cell, previously shared by two adults. The cells are equipped with TVs, and the walls have been repainted green.

There will be six youths per corridor, with a shared shower and a dedicated yard. Each corridor will have its own classroom.

"The most important thing is compulsory schooling up to age 16," the director said.

The cafeteria in the adjacent building, located between the adult and youth sections, has been demolished to make way for a classroom.

The prison staff must be reinforced - twice as many guards will be deployed for each child as for adults, and the guards will have to take on new responsibilities.



FUN & FROLIC: Children participate in a sack race at Hiremagalur Government Primary School in Chikkamagaluru district of Karnataka, Tuesday

PTI PHOTO

leisure



JOJO SIWA : I FEEL LIKE TWO DIFFERENT PEOPLE

Reality star JoJo Siwa seems to be internally conflicted. The reality star has shared that she feels like "two different people." JoJo, whose full name is Joelle Joanie Siwa, insisted she is still trying to figure out exactly who Joelle actually is.

TEYANA TAYLOR: I DON'T TOLERATE DISRESPECT

One Battle After Another actress Teyana Taylor has broken her silence about being 'shoved' at the Oscars, insisting she "doesn't tolerate disrespect, especially when it's unwarranted and unprovoked." Taylor blasted a security guard for putting his hands on her at the Oscars.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
You probably have a big circle of friends, and though most of them may be casual friends, they may sometimes prove to be favourable. They may help you overcome some dejections. It will also help you figure out the importance of the role friends can play.

TAURUS
Ganesha sees you acting very possessive about people and things. You are, consequently, likely to feel suspicious, uncertain and insecure about everything, particularly people. It's even possible that you may even suspect the feelings and intentions of those who are close to you.

GEMINI
Ganesha sees you acting very possessive about people and things. You are, consequently, likely to feel suspicious, uncertain and insecure about everything, particularly people. It's even possible that you may even suspect the feelings and intentions of those who are close to you.

CANCER
Ganesha predicts an excellent and exceptional day for you at work. You are likely to need all your business acumen while negotiating deals. Your leadership skills are likely to come to the fore during the final stage of a deadline, be it about completing an order or launching new products and marketing them, says Ganesha.

LEO
Sometimes, it takes courage to be honest and admit to your failures. Doing so only goes a long way in establishing your credentials as a real person, feels Ganesha. So understand that, while it is only human to make mistakes, it takes more than that to accept them. Also, today is a good day to reconnect with old contacts.

VIRGO
A sudden bend in the journey of life is important to understand it better, says Ganesha. Excellence will drone on throughout the day today. Top on the list are money matters and your loved ones - not necessarily in that order! Much of your time may be spent in appeasing the Gods.

LIBRA
Good news! You will be a people's person today. Close friends, relatives and family - you seem to want to spend your time with all of them today, says Ganesha. Better news? Your romantic brilliance will be at its peak today as your fancy takes wings and creativity flows freely in manners that seem irresistible.

SCORPIO
Audacious. Adventurous. Aquarius. The three As will go hand-in-hand throughout the day, feels Ganesha. Entrepreneurs will joust with the idea of launching new products or will make daring business plans. At work, you will impress you colleagues and peers and win the trust of your boss with your convincing skills.

SAGITTARIUS
Unnecessary expenditure might clog your bill today, feels Ganesha. Organising and detailing will be a time-sink as you will spend hapless hours trying to discipline things. The vibrant evening will be a contrast to your hectic day as you kick back and relax while socialising.

CAPRICORN
You may not get as popular as Romeo did, but your exceedingly romantic nature will earn you quite a reputation, not to forget the hypnotic effect it will have on your sweetheart, says Ganesha. On the flip side, troubles will chase you everywhere; you are likely to face problems with your business rivals and health condition, but your mind will be on guard always, giving you an edge over your opponents.

AQUARIUS
Finally, you've decided to clean up the mess! And you will do a fine job, whether it's your workspace, your bills, your finances, or even your closet. And now that you're inspired, you might as well sort out your mental clutter too, chuckles Ganesha.

PISCES
Financially, you have bright prospects awaiting you today. You will be able to deal with the mind-numbing financial jugglery required to take stock of your monetary matters with precision. You might be dealing with people who secretly have an axe to grind against you, cautions Ganesha.

Sharvari's big leap

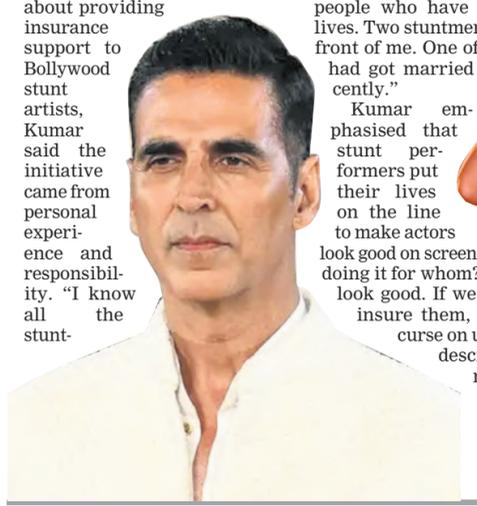
Mumbai: Actress Sharvari, who is gearing up for the release of her upcoming film *Main Vaapas Aaunga*, has admitted that she is working on her dream role. The film is helmed by Imtiaz Ali, whose work has often been defined by the depth and individuality of his women. With the film, Sharvari steps into that space with a performance that has already piqued interest. Sharvari said, "I think being an Imtiaz Ali heroine means stepping into a space where the lines between the character and your own heart begin to blur in the most beautiful way. Imtiaz sir has given us such incredible heroines that we have all loved for so many years. To be his choice as the leading lady in *Main Vaapas Aaunga* is truly a dream come true moment for me. That he sees me as a leading lady in his vision when actors like Alia, Deepika, Kareena, Anushka, and others have worked with him, is such a big validation of my work and my passion towards my craft and cinema". She went on to add, "His women

have never been just parts of a story, they are the story. To be part of his legacy is both humbling and deeply personal." *Main Vaapas Aaunga* is set to release in theatres on June 12, 2026.



'I consider myself a stuntman first'

Mumbai: Actor Akshay Kumar spoke passionately about his bond with stunt performers and addressed questions around his public image during a candid conversation with journalist Rajdeep Sardesai at an event. Responding to a question about providing insurance support to Bollywood stunt artists, Kumar said the initiative came from personal experience and responsibility. "I know all the stunt-



men. I know them by name. I consider myself a stuntman first and then an actor," he said. Highlighting the risks they face, he added, "Today when people get hurt, they don't even have the money to get their teeth fixed. I have seen such people who have lost their lives. Two stuntmen died in front of me. One of them had got married recently." Kumar emphasised that stunt performers put their lives on the line to make actors look good on screen. "They are doing it for whom? So that we look good. If we can't even insure them, then it's a curse on us," he said, describing the move as a way of "giving back" to the industry.

Sara's faith faces affidavit hurdle

Mumbai: Bollywood actress Sara Ali Khan has been asked to submit an affidavit if she wishes to seek blessings at the Badrinath and Kedarnath temples.

On Tuesday, Badri-Kedar Temple Committee Chairman Hemant Dwivedi spoke with the media, and said that all non-Hindus will be required to submit the affidavit if they wish to seek blessings at the temples, henceforth.

Dwivedi said that the submission of proof stating the devotees believe in Hinduism will be required from all non-Hindus.

He told the media, "If Sara Ali Khan expresses her devotion towards Sanatan Dharma and submits an affidavit, we will allow her to offer prayers".

Sara Ali Khan has maintained a consistent spiritual connection with Kedarnath Temple over the years, frequently visiting the shrine in the Himalayas. Her connection began during the filming of *Kedarnath* in 2017, which marked her debut in Hindi cinema. Since then, she has returned almost annually, often during the temple's open season between April and November.

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Nora-Sanjay's song to be out of all platforms

Mumbai: The controversy surrounding *Sarke Chumar Teri Sarke* from the upcoming film *KD: The Devil*, featuring Nora Fatehi and Sanjay Dutt, has escalated further as the Government has reportedly stepped in amid allegations that the track contains vulgar

and sexually suggestive lyrics and visuals.

Ever since the song was released, it has been facing backlash across social media for its obscene lyrics and visuals. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) issued a notice regarding the matter post which, the Hindi version of the song was removed from Youtube. Meanwhile, now, as per the latest update, the Government of India has also told the censor board to remove the song from all platforms.

According to sources, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has instructed the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) to take strict action if the claims are verified. The ministry has reportedly asked the board to ensure that the song is removed from all media platforms should the allegations prove to be true. The song has drawn criticism from several quarters. Critics argue that the song's lyrics, visuals and dance moves promote vulgarity and objectify women, sparking concerns about the possible influence such content may have on younger audiences.

PEANUTS



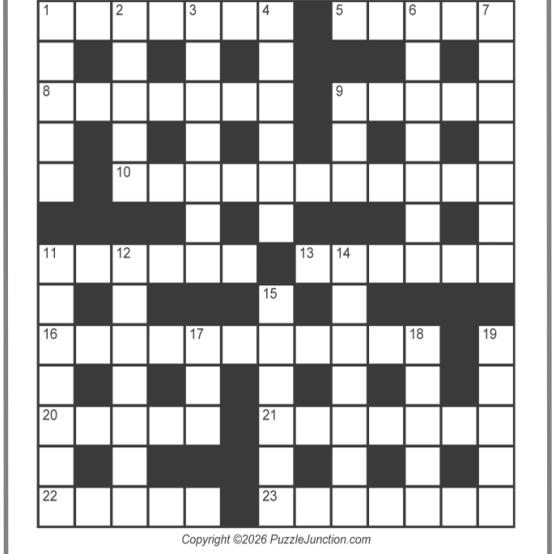
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



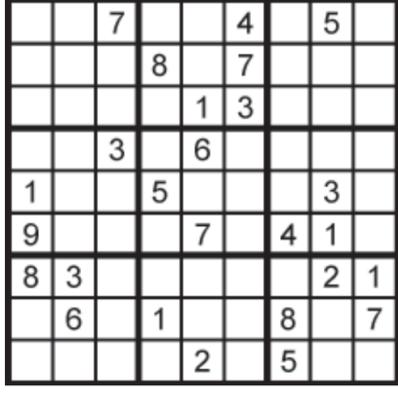
CROSSWORD



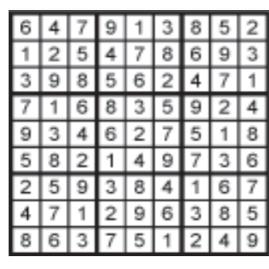
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- Across**
- 1 After social or rock
 - 5 Gymnastics apparatus
 - 8 Dogs
 - 9 Hopping mad
 - 10 Artist's medium (5-6)
 - 11 Songbird
 - 13 Harden
 - 16 It's allowed
 - 20 Flu symptoms
 - 21 Netherlands city
 - 22 Parachute material
 - 23 Pants, to some
 - Down**
 - 1 Coffee shops
 - 2 Acquired relative (2-3)
 - 3 Rocket type
 - 4 Vacation destination
 - 6 Pasta dish
 - 7 Long in the tooth
 - 9 Sign before Virgo
 - 11 Ship's officer
 - 12 Small Arctic swimmer
 - 14 Lena River locale
 - 15 Gave out
 - 17 Psyches
 - 18 Host
 - 19 Ballet skirts

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

Rupee slides 12p, settles at record low of 92.40

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 17: Rupee declined 12 paise to settle at an all-time low of 92.40 against the US dollar Tuesday, pressured by rising crude oil prices and sustained outflow of foreign funds amid the West Asia crisis.

A positive trend in domestic equity markets also helped the domestic currency at the lower level, even as investors remained watchful of the US Federal Reserve's interest rate decision, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 92.35 and hit the lowest intra-day level of 92.47 against the greenback. The unit finally ended at a new lifetime low of 92.40, registering a drop of 12 paise from the previous closing level.

Despite a marginal gain of 2 paise Monday, the local unit ended the session at a near record low of 92.28 against the dollar.

The rupee, Asia's worst-performing currency, touched its lowest intra-day level of 92.47 for the first time March 13, when it ended the session at 92.30 against the dollar.

Anuj Choudhary, Re-

search Analyst, Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said the rupee declined due to a surge in crude oil prices and continued FII outflows. However, a recovery in domestic markets and a softening US dollar prevented a sharp fall in the rupee.

He added that any hopes of reopening the Strait of Hormuz and intervention by the RBI may support the rupee at lower levels.

"Investors will also watch out for the FOMC, ECB, Bank of Japan and Bank of England's monetary policy this week. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 92.10 to Rs 92.75," Choudhary added.

Foreign institutional investors sold equities worth Rs 4,741.22 crore on a net basis on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.05 per cent higher at 99.52.

According to Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, the combination of strong dollar demand and rising energy costs is keeping the rupee under pressure.



IN NATURE'S LAP: A view of snow-capped mountains after fresh snowfall, in Chamoli, Uttarakhand, Tuesday

PTI PHOTO

Suspension of eight Oppn MPs revoked

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 17: The Lok Sabha Tuesday revoked with immediate effect the suspension of eight Opposition members who were barred from the House February 3 for "unruly" behaviour, with Speaker Om Birla stressing that there should be no display of placards, posters, photos or AI-generated images inside the House or in the Parliament complex.

Congress member K Suresh requested the House to revoke the suspension of eight Opposition members, saying the recent events in the House were regrettable and that his party was ready to cooperate for the smooth functioning of the House.

Following the submissions by several Opposition members, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said there was a need to draw a "Laxman Rekha" for the smooth functioning of the House, which both treasury and Opposition benches agreed to.

The Speaker said there is a need to ensure that no placards, posters, photos or AI-generated images are displayed in the House or inside the Parliament complex.

Birla said that everyone is of the opinion that proceedings in Parliament of the world's largest democracy should be smooth and everyone should cooperate.

Rijiju then moved a motion to remove the suspension of the MPs which was adopted by a voice vote. The suspended MPs were Gurjeet Singh Aujla, Hibi Eden, C Kiran Kumar Reddy, Amarinder Singh Raja Warring, Manickam Tagore, Prashant Padole and Dean Kuriakose of the Congress, and S Ventakesan of the CPI(M).

₹4,510cr investment proposals okayed

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 17: The State Level Single Window Clearance Authority (SLSWCA), headed by Chief Secretary Anu Garg, Tuesday approved 23 industrial investment proposals worth Rs 4,510.65 crore, a move expected to generate over 10,000 employment opportunities and strengthen Odisha's position as a leading industrial hub in eastern India.

In the forest and wood-based sector, Century Plyboards (India) Limited received approval to establish a manufacturing facility in Koraput with an investment of Rs 870.82 crore. The facility is expected to generate 1,000 employment opportunities and boost industrialisation in southern Odisha.

In the chemical and green industry sector, Pidilite Industries Limited received clearance from the SLSWCA to set up a manufacturing unit in Balasore with an investment of Rs 61 crore, creating 88 jobs. Paradeep Phosphates Limited will set up a sulphuric acid plant in Jagatsinghpur with an investment of Rs 425 crore, providing employment to 29 people.

In the apparel and technical textiles sector, Sonaselection India Limited will establish a garment manufacturing unit in Khurda with an investment of Rs 130 crore, generating 1,858



jobs. Similarly, Alphatex Private Limited will set up a technical textile unit in the district with an investment of Rs 180 crore, creating 1,050 employment opportunities.

In the pharmaceuticals and medical devices sector, Alteus Life Limited will establish a pharmaceutical unit in Cuttack with an investment of Rs 236.90 crore, generating 549 jobs. Likewise, Shreeji Imaging and Diagnostic Centre Private Limited has received approval to set up a specialised medical facility in Khurda. With an investment of Rs 53.55 crore, the facility will provide employment to 36 people.

In the manufacturing and engineering sector, Nipha Jagatsinghpur will establish an agricultural equipment manufacturing facility in Khurda with an investment of Rs 164 crore, generating 300 jobs.

In the aluminium downstream sector, Odisha Special Grade Alumina Ltd has been approved to set up a manufac-

turing unit in Koraput. With an investment of Rs 88.16 crore, the facility will generate 66 jobs.

In the steel and metal downstream sectors, key projects include Scan Steels Limited's plan to set up an MS pipe and galvanising unit in Sundargarh with an investment of Rs 255 crore, creating 350 jobs. Navprakriti Green Energies Private Limited will establish a metal extraction facility in Balasore with an investment of Rs 105 crore, generating 540 jobs.

In the food processing sector, Coastal Biotech Private Limited will set up an agro-processing unit in Kalahandi with an investment of Rs 350 crore, generating 500 employment opportunities.

Among others, PricewaterhouseCoopers Services LLP has received approval, in the IT and ITES sector, to establish a technology delivery centre in Khurda, with an investment of Rs 60 crore and the potential to create 640 high-skilled jobs.

SC: BRING LAW FOR PATERNITY LEAVE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 17: The Supreme Court Tuesday urged the Centre to come up with a law recognising paternity leave as a social security benefit, observing that parenthood is not a solitary function and while the mother is central to a child's development, it would be unjust to overlook the role of the father.

The SC's observations came while hearing a plea filed by advocate Hamsaanandini Nanduri, an adoptive mother of two children, challenging Section 60(4) of the Social Security Code 2020 that allows 12 weeks of maternity leave only if an adoptive mother adopts a child below three months of age.

Ruling that age-based classification under Section 60(4) of the Code was violative of Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution, a bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan held that an adoptive mother should be entitled to maternity leave of 12 weeks, irrespective of the age of the adopted child. Consequently, the provision limiting maternity leave to women adopting children below three months of age was struck down.

The bench also emphasised that a provision of paternity leave helps in dismantling

gendered roles, encourages fathers to take an active role in child care, fosters a balanced understanding of parenting, and promotes gender equality within family and workplace.

While the role of a mother is undeniably central to a child's emotional, physical, and psychological development, it would be incomplete and unjust to overlook the equally significant role of a father, the bench said.

It said parenthood is not a solitary function performed by one parent but rather a shared responsibility in which each parent contributes to the child's holistic development.

It said that although the father is present at the periphery of infancy, he is not present in the intimate and irreplaceable way that society has always presumed the mother must be.

"In light of the aforesaid discussion on the need of paternity leave, we urge the Union to come up with a provision recognising paternity leave as a social security benefit. We emphasise that the duration of such leave must be determined in a manner that is responsive to the needs of both the parent and the child," the bench said, adding that what a father offers to a child in those nascent days cannot be scheduled for a convenient time or compensated for later.

APEX COURT STRIKES DOWN LAW LIMITING MATERNITY LEAVE TO ADOPTION OF CHILDREN UNDER 3 MONTHS

Naveen demands Mahaling's scalp over SCB tragedy

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 17: Leader of Opposition (LoP) Naveen Patnaik Tuesday demanded the resignation of Health and Family Welfare Minister Mukesh Mahaling, holding him morally responsible for the tragic fire at SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack, which killed 12 patients and left several others seriously injured.

Raising the issue during the Zero Hour in the Assembly, Patnaik said, "Yesterday, I visited the site of the tragedy. What I witnessed was not just a tragic accident but a grim reminder of the deteriorating safety standards in our state's premier healthcare institution."

According to Patnaik, the deaths were the result of serious administrative negligence.

Demanding accountability, he called for the immediate resignation of Mahaling, saying the minister must take moral responsibility for "this grave lapse in safety arrangements".

The LoP also termed the compensation announced by the government as inadequate and demanded an ex gratia of Rs 50 lakh for the family of each deceased.

TMC to contest 291 of 294 seats in WB polls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 17: The ruling TMC Tuesday announced its list of candidates for the upcoming West Bengal (WB) Assembly elections, with party supremo and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee declaring that the party will contest 291 of the 294 seats in the state.

Addressing a press conference in Kolkata, Banerjee said the remaining three seats in the Darjeeling hills will be contested by Anit Thapa-led Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha (BGPM).

"We will contest 291 of the 294 seats. The remaining three seats will be contested by our ally, Anit Thapa-led BGPM, in the Darjeeling hills," Banerjee said, while announcing the names of candidates, flanked by the party's national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee and state president Subrata Bakshi.

Banerjee expressed confidence that the TMC would retain power with a comfortable majority in the 2026 Assembly elections.

"We will win more than 226 seats in the 2026 Assembly polls," she asserted.

Molten alien planet unveils toxic sulphur hellscape

REUTERS

Washington, March 17: Astronomers have spotted a planet orbiting a star in our neighbourhood of the Milky Way galaxy that presents a unique hellscape - covered with a perpetual ocean of magma and enveloped by a noxious and fiercely hot sulphur-rich atmosphere.

The molten planet's diameter is more than 60 per cent greater than Earth, though its density is only about 40 per cent that of our planet. It orbits a star smaller and dimmer than the sun located about 34 light-years from Earth in the constellation Volans.

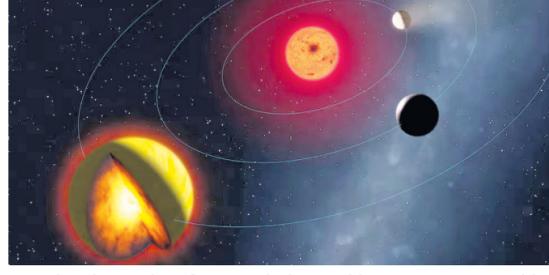
"The planet lacks distinct structure within its magma ocean, so there is no crust, upper mantle and lower mantle. The magma ocean is a single deep,

mushy layer," said Harrison Nicholls, a postdoctoral researcher at University of Cambridge Institute of Astronomy and lead author of the research published Monday in 'Nature Astronomy'.

Small crystals of solid rock may be trapped within the turbulent fluid magma comprising the mantle, Nicholls said.

The planet's metallic core appears to be relatively small, with the magma ocean comprising 70-90 per cent of the planetary interior radius - reaching a depth between 2,775 and 3,565 miles.

Its thick atmosphere is composed primarily of hydrogen, but has a very high sulphur content. About 10 per cent of the atmosphere is the toxic hydrogen sulphide. The atmosphere has caused a runaway greenhouse effect, trapping



An artist's impression of L 98-59 d, shown with a cutaway to reveal its interior, orbiting a red dwarf star

REUTERS

heat from the star, that keeps the planet's surface so hot that it remains molten.

"Your nose can smell hydrogen sulphide at concentrations of something like one part per billion, so this would be overwhelmingly stinky. But you

wouldn't survive long enough in this hot atmosphere to notice," said planetary scientist and study co-author Raymond Pierrehumbert of the University of Oxford and Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The atmosphere's composi-

tion suggests a high sulphur content in the planetary interior, the researchers said.

"We do not know the exact composition of the molten material but our interpretation of the observations suggests that the high sulphur content would likely mean a mineralogical composition different to our solar system's planets," Nicholls said.

The planet, named L 98-59 d, was discovered in 2019, then was observed by the James Webb Space Telescope in 2024 and by ground-based telescopes in 2025. The researchers used advanced computer simulations to reconstruct its history spanning nearly five billion years, making it somewhat older than Earth.

It orbits a common type of star called a red dwarf. The star's mass is just under 30 per cent

that of the sun and its luminosity about 1 per cent that of the sun. In terms of orbital distance, L 98-59 d is the third of five planets known to orbit this star.

More than 6,100 planets beyond our solar system, called exoplanets, have been discovered since the 1990s, though none quite like this one. Its unique combination of a magma ocean and a sulphur-laden atmosphere puts it in a class by itself, for now.

Other molten planets are known, some orbiting so close to their host stars that their surfaces are broiled. That is not the dynamic with L 98-59 d.

"A key point to recognise is that all planets - including Earth - start out molten, but this one has remained so because of a combination of factors," Nicholls said.

Australia, Odisha to strengthen ties in energy, industry & skills

Australian Consul General Bernard Lynch meets Dy CM Singh Deo and Minister Sampad Chandra Swain to discuss cooperation in energy, agriculture, skill development, and technical education



Bhubaneswar, March 17: Australian Consul General Bernard Lynch met Deputy Chief Minister and Minister of Agriculture & Farmers' Empowerment and Energy, KV Singh Deo, at Lok Seva Bhawan Tuesday.

During the meeting, both sides discussed ways to strengthen cooperation in renewable energy, agriculture, and technological innovation. Lynch lauded Odisha's progress in the energy and agricultural sectors, highlighting that the state has outpaced the national average growth rate in agriculture.

He also praised Odisha's efforts to modernise its power infrastructure with advanced technologies, which have significantly improved power generation and transmission capacity. Highlighting the state's achievements, he noted that Odisha has made considerable progress toward building a sustainable and secure energy future.

Singh Deo, in response, said the state government has recently launched several projects to boost renewable energy production and usage. He added that supportive policy frameworks have been established to effectively harness Odisha's

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The meeting with Minister Swain focused on boosting collaboration between Odisha and Australia in industry, skill development, and technical education

Both sides discussed ways to attract industrial investment and expand advanced technical training opportunities for youth

natural resources and accelerate the growth of clean energy.

On the agriculture front, the Deputy CM highlighted that Odisha is achieving record production levels, boosting farmer incomes and setting new benchmarks for the sector.

Both leaders expressed optimism that the meeting would further strengthen collaboration between Australia, India, and Odisha, particularly

in clean energy, agriculture, and technology. The partnership is expected to support the broader vision of a developed Odisha in line with India's overall growth goals.

Lynch also met Minister for Industries, Skill Development, and Technical Education Sampad Chandra Swain at his official residence here Tuesday.

The meeting focused on enhancing collaboration between Odisha and Australia in key areas such as industry, skill development, and technical education. Both sides explored ways to attract industrial investment and expand advanced technical training opportunities for youth. Lynch praised Paradip Port's performance, noting its rise as a leading cargo-handling hub in India.

He also praised the Odisha government's welfare initiatives and its achievements in industrial growth and skill development over the past two years. Expressing optimism about future collaboration, the Consul General emphasised that closer ties between Odisha and Australia could significantly contribute to the state's economic growth while helping to develop a highly skilled workforce.

CM, Rajnath pay tribute to Debendra Pradhan

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 17: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh paid tribute to former Union Minister and senior BJP leader Debendra Pradhan on his first death anniversary at a ceremony held here Tuesday.

In his address, Singh described Pradhan as "a luminous pillar of Indian politics," highlighting his simplicity, humility, and rare ability to align words with action. He said that even during a brief period of working together, Pradhan left a lasting impression through his dedication, honesty, and unwavering commitment to public service. CM Majhi re-



FIRST DEATH ANNIVERSARY

called Pradhan as a "wise and visionary leader of Odisha" whose humility and warmth endeared him to all. He emphasised that Pradhan's unwavering dedication to the Bharatiya Janata Party's ideals and organisational growth in the state made him not only a respected politician but also a role model for generations.

The event also marked the release of "Doctor Babu", a biography of Pradhan written by Kailash Samal, which was jointly unveiled by the Chief Minister and the Union Defence Minister. Senior leaders, including Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and MP Manmohan Samal, along with other dignitaries from Odisha, attended the ceremony to honour Pradhan's legacy.

Govt to fast-track gas infra expansion

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 17: To boost energy security amid volatile global fuel markets, the state government has decided to fast-track expansion of city gas distribution (CGD) infrastructure across Odisha. A roadmap was discussed at a high-level meeting chaired by Chief Secretary Anu Garg at Lok Seva Bhawan Tuesday.

Senior officials, including Additional Chief Secretaries Hemant Sharma (Industries) and Usha Padhee (H&UD), and Food Supplies Principal Secretary Sanjay Kumar Singh attended. Representatives from GAIL, BPCL and Adani Total Gas were also present. The meeting focused on removing bottlenecks in gas infrastructure development and promoting Piped Natural Gas (PNG) and Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) as alternatives to LPG.

To meet the June 30 deadline, the state government has decided that all pending pipeline-laying approvals with municipal corporations and key departments will be cleared within 24 hours. Urban local bodies have been directed to waive road restoration and permission fees, while gas distribution companies will be allowed to carry out work round the clock. A state-level nodal officer will also be appointed to ensure effective coordination among departments.

Heatwave: Govt issues SOP for ULBs

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 17: Amid rising temperatures and erratic climatic conditions, the state government has issued a comprehensive Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for all urban local bodies (ULBs) to mitigate the impact of the impending heatwave.

Housing and Urban Development (H&UD) department noted that abnormal heat this summer is being driven by unusual rainfall patterns followed by fluctuating weather conditions. The problem is further aggravated in urban areas due to heat absorption by buildings, roads, and other infrastructure.

ULBs and Public Health Engineering Organisation (PHEO) have been directed to ensure uninterrupted drinking water supply across cities. Authorities must address pipeline complaints within 24 hours and deploy water tankers in scarcity-prone areas. Additional tankers may be hired if required.

All tube wells and hand pumps are to be kept operational, with spare parts readily available for quick repairs. Dedicated control rooms will be set up at city levels to handle water-related complaints. Officials have also been instructed to closely monitor heatwave alerts issued by the India Meteorological Department and coordinate with



emergency response systems when necessary.

To provide relief to the public, ULBs have been asked to increase the number of 'Paniya Jai Bitaran Kendras' (drinking water kiosks) at strategic locations such as roadsides, markets, bus stands, railway stations, and public offices. These kiosks must maintain hygiene standards and ensure potable water availability.

Authorities have been cautioned against allowing agencies that discontinue such services after initial publicity drives. The SOP mandates strict enforcement against burning of municipal solid waste and garden residues. Additionally, the use of coal and coal briquettes in urban eateries has been banned to reduce heat and air pollution.

Construction activities will also come under tighter scrutiny. Builders and households must cover construction sites, sprinkle water to control dust, and promptly clear debris. Ve-

hicles transporting construction materials must be covered with tarpaulin sheets and adhere to speed limits.

The government has urged citizens to place water pots outside their homes for birds and stray animals, promoting community participation in heat mitigation efforts.

Urban water bodies will be rejuvenated and restored to improve cooling effects and public accessibility. The SOP also calls for strict adherence to environmental norms and guidelines issued by agencies including the National Green Tribunal.

The state government emphasised that the measures are aimed at minimising heat stress, ensuring water security, and improving overall urban environmental conditions during the peak summer months.

Officials have been directed to implement the SOP rigorously to safeguard public health and maintain essential services during the heatwave period.

CEO Odisha warns of fake website impersonation

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 17: The Office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Odisha, has issued a public advisory cautioning citizens about a fraudulent website impersonating its official platform.

According to the press note, a fake website—www.ceoodisha.com has been created by unknown individuals and is falsely presenting itself as the official portal. Authorities clarified that the only authentic website is https://ceoodisha.nic.in, and any other platform claiming to represent the office should be treated as suspicious.

Preliminary findings indicate that the counterfeit website is designed to closely mimic the official portal and is circulating misleading and incorrect information, raising concerns about potential public confusion.

CSIR-IMMT scientists make bauxite waste eco-friendly

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 17: Bauxite mining waste—long a major environmental concern for causing air pollution and increasing acidity in nearby water bodies—may soon find a sustainable use. Scientists at CSIR-Institute of Minerals and Materials Technology have developed an innovative industrial product from this waste, offering a promising eco-friendly solution.

Globally, mining activities generate hundreds of billions of tonnes of waste each year, making it one of the largest waste streams. In India, the challenge is particularly acute in mineral-rich states such as Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Goa, where vast volumes of re-

sidual material are produced. Addressing this issue, researchers at CSIR-IMMT have successfully developed refractory bricks from bauxite mining waste. The innovation, led by C Eswaraiah and Satyashish Rout, demonstrates high heat resistance and durability, making the bricks suitable for a range of industrial refractory applications.

According to institute officials, the technology has the potential to improve production efficiency while offering a cost-effective and environmentally sustainable alternative.

To facilitate industrial adoption, CSIR-IMMT has signed a technology transfer agreement with Utkal Vanguard Engineering and Construction Pvt Ltd here Tuesday.

Damana, VSS Nagar haats to turn plastic-free: BMC

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 17: Following the successful declaration of Maa Kochilei Haat at Rasulgarh as a single-use plastic-free market, Damana Haat and VSS Nagar Haat in the City are now set to follow suit, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) informed Tuesday.

The market committees of both haats have expressed their willingness to transform their markets into single-use plas-



tic-free zones.

Representatives of the market committees, including the presidents and secretaries, met BMC Additional Commissioner

Kailash Chandra Das and Deputy Commissioners Priyanka Mallick and N Ganesh Babu to discuss the initiative. Following the meeting, BMC has begun the process to implement the plan.

Officials said all necessary steps will be taken to make Damana and VSS Nagar markets completely free from single-use plastic within the next 15 days.

As part of the initiative, traders in the markets will be sensitised during the first week through awareness programs

conducted with the help of voluntary organisations. In the following week, strict action will be taken against those found selling or using single-use plastic. BMC teams along with the designated agencies will regularly visit the markets to ensure compliance and provide support to traders so that the practice of avoiding single-use plastic continues in the long run. The market committees have also assured authorities that they will encourage traders and customers to strictly follow the ban.

OPERATION CYBER KAVACH

379 arrested, 39,714 mule accounts verified

Month-long operation, conducted from February 13 to March 12, targeted mule bank account networks and fake SIM rackets enabling online financial fraud



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 17: Odisha Police achieved a major breakthrough against cyber fraud networks under the special state-wide drive 'Operation Cyber Kavach,' officials said Tuesday. The month-long operation, carried out from February 13 to March 12, focused on dismantling mule bank account networks and fake SIM rackets that facilitate online financial fraud.

According to police, as many as 39,714 mule bank accounts

were verified across the state during the operation. Investigations covered 1,315 mule account cases, 36 ATM withdrawal cases, 47 cheque withdrawal cases, and 24 cases involving fake SIM or PoS verification.

Based on these probes, 379 accused persons were arrested, including 349 linked to mule account operations, nine involved in fake SIM networks, three connected to ATM withdrawals, and 18 in cheque withdrawal frauds. Police also issued notices to 7,549 suspected account

holders and facilitators.

The drive targeted cyber-crime networks across several districts, including Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Rourkela, Keonjhar, Sundargarh, Ganjam, Nuapada, Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Balasore, Bhadrak, Puri, Jajpur, and Dhenkanal.

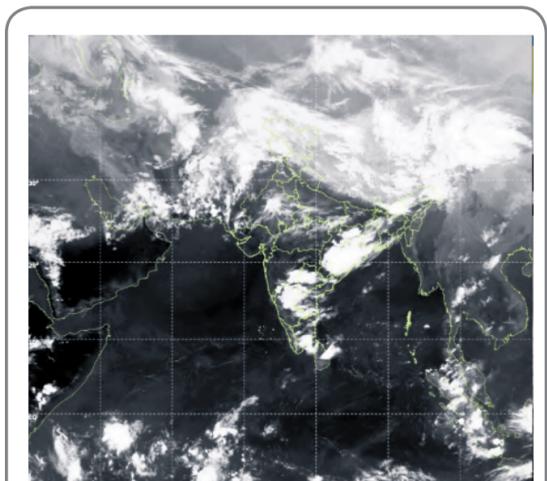
Police also busted several interstate gangs involved in mule accounts, online betting, and cryptocurrency-based frauds, seizing SIM cards, ATM cards, vehicles, and digital devices during the raids.

Notable cases included the arrest of an interstate mule account gang in Jharsuguda involved in fraud worth over ₹2.25 crore, while Sambalpur police exposed a network linked to transactions of ₹1.3 crore.

In Cuttack, police cracked a mule account racket involving ₹29.33 crore, while Bhubaneswar police dismantled a national syndicate running fake KYC and pre-activated SIM networks. The operation was launched under the chairmanship of DGP Yogesh Bahadur Khurania, with a coordinated strategy to curb organised cyber fraud. Acting on directives issued at the state level, district SPs carried out synchronised raids with support from the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre, banks, and telecom service providers.

The DGP congratulated police personnel and partner agencies for the successful execution of the drive and reiterated the force's commitment to making Odisha increasingly resilient against cybercrime.

MARKET WATCH					
CURRENCY		BOURSES		COMMODITIES	
INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR	92.45 ▲ 0.09	SENSEX	7670.84 ▲ 567.99	GOLD	₹155,799 ▲ ₹63
EURO	106.55 ▲ 0.33	NIFTY	23581.15 ▲ 172.35	SILVER	₹253,875 ▼ ₹2657



WEATHER			
	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	32.7°	32.4°	Light to Moderate rain or thunderstorm
Min Temp	22.6°	19.8°	
Humidity	62%	69%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	

Multi-vehicle pileup on NH-16 kills one, 4 critical

Bhadrak: A late-night series of collisions on National Highway 16 near Asura Chhak under Bhadrak Rural police limits left one person dead and four others critically injured late Monday night. The deceased has been identified as Surendra Nayak (35) of Kantapada in Balasore district. He was driving a liquor-laden pickup van and died on the spot after his vehicle ramed into the rear of a truck and got wedged underneath it. According to police, the incident took place around 3am when a bus travelling from Kolkata to Bhubaneswar first hit a parked truck from behind near Asura. Moments later, another truck (WB 29C 5268) collided with the bus from the rear. The pickup van then crashed into the second truck, triggering the multi-vehicle pile-up. Four passengers of the bus sustained critical injuries. They have been identified as Sanjay Bera (42) of Bilaspur, Ritik Sarango (27) of Jhargram, Pradeep Nayak (27) of Bankura, and Anand Bera (72) of Belpahari in Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal. Of them, Sanjay and Pradeep, who suffered severe head injuries, were shifted to SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack for advanced treatment. Fire services personnel took over four hours to extract the pickup driver's body from the mangled vehicle. Bhadrak Rural police seized the body and sent it for post-mortem examination. A case of unnatural death has been registered. Locals alleged that illegal parking of heavy vehicles along the highway may have led to the accident.

Man beats brother-in-law to death in Bargarh village

Bheden, March 17: A 28-year-old man was allegedly beaten to death by his brother-in-law in Bargarh district Tuesday, police said. The incident occurred in Chichinda High School locality under Bheden police limits. The deceased has been identified as Sudip Bag, a resident of the village. According to police, the accused, Shukadeb Mahananda, 50, of Salna village, allegedly attacked Bag with a wooden plank following a heated argument around 10am. Mahananda had been living with his in-laws in Chichinda for the past 11 years. Preliminary reports suggest



MURDER ACCUSED

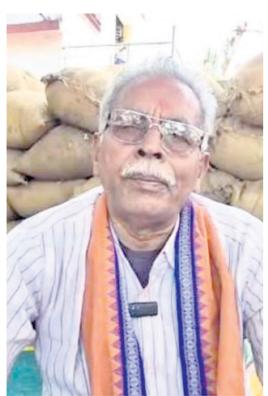
that other family members had gone to agricultural fields in the morning, leaving the two men at home. A dispute reportedly broke out between them, following which Mahananda, in a fit of rage, assaulted Bag. Bag sustained severe head injuries and died on the spot due to excessive bleeding. Bheden police arrested the accused and registered a murder case (65/26). An investigation is underway. Bargarh SDPO Padarabinda Tripathy, along with IIC Arup Ranjan Barei and a scientific team, visited the scene and initiated a probe. The body has been sent to Bargarh District Headquarters Hospital for post-mortem.

Fire breaks out at Bhadrakali temple

Bhadrak, March 17: A fire broke out at the Maa Bhadrakali temple in Bhadrak Tuesday evening, reportedly due to an electrical short circuit. The incident occurred shortly after the evening aarti, when a short circuit triggered a fire in a store room within the temple premises. Priests noticed thick smoke billowing from the room and rushed to unlock it, only to find flames engulfing items stored inside, including sarees and hair of the deity. With the help of local residents, the priests managed to bring the fire under control. However, several items used for the deity were partially damaged in the blaze. The incident left the temple premises filled with smoke, causing concern among devotees and locals. The fire has also sparked various speculations, with some viewing it as a possible bad omen.

Farmer pawns paddy as token delay hits wedding plans

Bargarh, March 17: A small farmer in Bargarh district was allegedly compelled to pawn his harvested paddy due to delays in receiving a procurement token, highlighting persistent gaps in the state's paddy procurement system. Prasanna Kumbhar from Nathpali village under Gaisilet block, has reportedly been unable to sell his paddy at the MSP. As a result, he was forced to pawn 15 bags of paddy for ₹15,000 to meet urgent financial needs. Kumbhar said he had cultivated paddy on around 3.5 acres during the Kharif season. The crop was grown on non-irrigated land using water from a deep borewell. However, frequent power cuts during the cultivation period affected the yield. Despite the reduced output, he applied on time for registration at the Dangbahal Primary Agricultural Cooperative Society (PACS) to sell his produce.



"I have not received the procurement token yet," he said, adding that he had approached local officials, including the sub-collector and the district collector, but to no avail.

"I will retrieve the paddy and sell it at the procurement centre once I receive the token, and repay the ₹15,000," he added. Dangbahal PACS secretary Sushil Sahu confirmed that Kumbhar had applied for registration and said several other farmers in the area were also facing similar delays in receiving procurement tokens. While farmer registration for the ongoing Rabi procurement season is underway, many cultivators in the district are yet to be registered for Kharif paddy sales. Despite submitting the required documents, several farmers have been left out of the registration process, depriving them of procurement tokens and preventing them from selling their produce at the government's minimum support price (MSP). The incident underscores the challenges faced by farmers in accessing timely procurement support, often forcing them into distress arrangements despite government assurances.

FMU hosts int'l conference on advanced materials

Balasure: Fakir Mohan University inaugurated the 4th International Conference on "Recent Trends on Prospective Applications of Advanced Materials," organised by its postgraduate chemistry department, drawing scientists and researchers from across the world. Vice-Chancellor Santosh Kumar Tripathy chaired the two-day event. Deepa Khushalani of Tata Institute of Fundamental Research attended as chief guest, while Bairagi Charan Mallick was guest of honour. Convener Pankaj Kumar Parhi delivered the welcome address, and organising secretary Jaykrushna Das outlined the theme. The conference features 65 papers across six technical sessions, with experts from the United States, Mauritius, Australia, Belgium, South Korea, Sweden and Japan joining virtually. It focuses on advances in nanomaterials, composites and biomaterials, with applications in energy, electronics, health care and sustainability.

Maha Baruni Snan draws over 50k devotees to Aska

Aska, March 17: The annual Maha Baruni Snan was observed Tuesday at Budatota, the confluence of the Rushikulya and Bada rivers near Pudukeswarapalli on the outskirts of Aska town in Ganjam. Devotees from across the district, as well as neighbouring Gajapati, Kandhamal and parts of Andhra Pradesh, participated in the ritual bath. The occasion coincided with the auspicious alignment of the Chaitra Krishna Trayodashi and Shatabhisha Nakshatra. More than 50,000 devotees were estimated to have taken part in the event, performing holy dips, immersing the ashes of ancestors, offering pind daan and engaging in charitable activities. Tuesday, a large crowd gathered at the confluence

from early morning. The local administration made extensive arrangements, including lighting, sanitation, law and order, and traffic management to ensure smooth conduct of the event. Various voluntary organisations provided drinking water, 'pana' and food to the devotees. Meanwhile, a huge rush of devotees was also witnessed at the shrine of Maa Khambeswari on the occasion of the second Tuesday of the Chaitra month. Many performed head tonsuring of children and offered prayers. Temple authorities had put in place adequate measures to facilitate orderly darshan. With the simultaneous observance of Maha Baruni Snan and Chaitra Mangalbar rituals, Aska town remained vibrant and festive throughout the day.

Youth arrested for minor's rape

Joda: A 10-year old girl was allegedly raped by a youth in the absence of her parents at her shop here in Keonjhar district, police said Tuesday. The matter came to the fore after police arrested a mechanic on the charge of rape of the minor Tuesday. The accused, identified as Laden Khan alias Md Laden (22), is a resident of Harhans village under Hussainganj police limits in the Siwan district of Bihar. Police said, Khan had been working as a mechanic at a local tyre repairing shop in Joda for the past four years. The incident occurred Monday at an eatery owned by the girl's father opposite the tyre repairing shop where Khan worked. The accused often visited the eatery to have snacks. Police reports indicate that Khan entered the shop while the girl was alone Monday. He allegedly raped the girl finding her alone. Investigators say Khan fled the scene after some customers arrived at the eatery, but not before allegedly threatening the victim of "dire consequences" if she discloses the matter to her parents. The survivor informed her parents of the assault nonetheless, prompting the family to file a formal written complaint at Joda police station, IIC Prashant Kumar Samal said.

Government of Odisha Corrigendum to Bid Identification No. CCE.Ctc.(R&B) 17/2025-26 Tender Reference No. CCE.Ctc.(R&B) 17/2025-26

Mukta Swadhyaaya Peetham (Institute of Open and Distance Education) Central Sanskrit University

REGIONAL OFFICE: 108 - B, Unit-VII, Surya Nagar, Gopabandhu Square, Bhubaneswar-751003, Ph.: 0674-2397551, 2397199

LOST It is notified to all, that my client, Hemanta Kumar Sahoo, aged about 45 years, S/o. Dinabandhu Sahoo, resident At. Pratapasana, Basantapadi (Kadamba Rasula), Baliaanta, Khurda, PIN No. - 752100, Mobile No. 9777118307, Odisha has missed his previous link deeds as follows

Extension of last date of bid submission for E Tender With reference to E-tender [Advertisement No.: BHUBANESWAR RO / ESTB / BHADRAK BO / INTERIOR CIVIL & ELECTRICAL WORK/550801] issued by this dept. on 16.02.2026, all prospective Bidders are hereby informed that the Dept. has extended the last date of bid submission for E Tender as follows:

ODISHA FORESTRY SECTOR DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY SFTRI Campus, At/P.O.: Ghatikia, Bhubaneswar - 751029 Ph.: 0674-2386016, Website: http://www.ofsdp.org

SKILL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING PROGRAMS ORGANISED BY MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TRAINING CENTRE, BHUBANESWAR Khadi & Village Industries Commission, Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises, Govt. of India. Empower yourself through skill development training conducted by MDTC, KVIC, Bhubaneswar under various Khadi and Gramodyog schemes.

EAST COAST RAILWAY E-AUCTION OF PARKING STAND AND PAY & USE TOILET (1) Auction Catalogue No.: SDCM-KUR-PKNG

NOTIFICATION No. SERP-CKP/EP/Safety Counselors/Re-engagement/2026 dated : 16.03.2026 Chakradharpur Division, South Eastern Railway has issued Notification of even no. dated: 16.03.2026 for re-engagement of retired Railway employees for 03 Posts of Safety Counselors from Mechanical, Electrical and Engineering departments to be posted at ART locations at Tatanagar, Dangoaposi and Jharsuguda (MFD Tool Van). 01 post of Safety Counselor from Mechanical, 01 post of Safety Counselor from Electrical and 01 post of Safety Counselor from Engineering department over Chakradharpur Division for 01 year or attaining the age of 65 years or joining of regular candidate for RRB/RRC whichever is earlier, on monthly remuneration basis. Maximum age is 65 years as on 16.03.2026. Applications are invited in offline or online mode. For details please visit https://ser.indianrailways.gov.in/Offline application shall be sent to Sr. DPO/DRM office, Chakradharpur, Jharkhand-833102 or Online in mail-rectctckp122@gmail.com on or before last date 01.04.2026.

FOCUS GEOPOLITICS

TRUMP'S IRAN QUAGMIRE



It should have been obvious that the Iranian regime would not collapse immediately, even if its top leadership was decapitated. And it was all too foreseeable that Iran's retaliation would aim to destabilize the region and push up oil prices. Everyone has always known that the Strait of Hormuz is the regime's trump card

power, especially when an intervention lacks a coherent justification. During the Cold War, the US at least had the overarching objective of stopping the spread of communism, which was a real threat.

Even worse for a country's soft power is an ill-planned campaign that shows utter disregard for the lives of those affected. That is what we are now witnessing in the Middle East. Trump's impulsive war is sure to bring US soft power to an all-time low, and no one in his administration cares about trying to rebuild what has been lost.

True, the Iranian regime has been singularly vicious and repressive. Most Iranians have no love for the new supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei (the previous supreme leader's son), or the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. But that doesn't mean the regime will collapse, much less imply that US intervention will bring peace and stability to the region.

The most remarkable thing about this war is how poorly planned it was - even compared to some of the CIA's most disastrous interventions during the Cold War.

of an AI bubble - energy-market turmoil and deepening global uncertainty could spell trouble. The sharp increase in oil prices will slow investment and economic growth, as well as pushing up prices. The resulting higher unemployment and inflation will be costly for incumbent governments, including those in Europe facing challenges from right-wing populist outsiders (even though most European leaders oppose the war, flatly rebuffing Trump's appeal to send warships to help the US reopen the strait).

At home, it stands to reason that Trump should pay a steep political price for his war in November's midterm elections. But Trump is the supposed anti-establishment leader, and if his diehard supporters blame the establishment, rather than him, for a deteriorating economy, that could further polarize the country and weaken its institutions.

Trump himself is likely to throw oil on this fire by trying to polarize Republicans and Democrats - and perhaps by pursuing even more incendiary domestic actions. After all, US institutions are already weak, with many of the norms and checks that are supposed to constrain presidential power having ceased to function.

It remains to be seen how much more damage US democracy and soft power will suffer because of this ill-conceived foreign adventure. But one thing seems likely: It is Americans who will pay the toll, and it will be greater than we can fully comprehend. The threat to US democracy, social stability, and economic resilience is now greater than at any time in living memory.

The writer is a 2024 Nobel laureate in economics and Institute Professor of Economics at MIT.

PROJECT SYNDICATE



Daron Acemoglu

THE US AND ISRAELI MILITARIES HAD PLENTY OF WELL-SCOPED TARGETS AND PRECISION BOMBS BUT NO APPARENT EXIT STRATEGY

Under President Donald Trump, US foreign policy has reached a new low. His administration's war on Iran, coming just after its kidnapping of Venezuela's dictator, will damage the United States and change how the rest of the world views American power.

Of course, this is not the first time the US has pursued an ill-fated, poorly planned intervention abroad. One of the most significant, given the current context, was the CIA's toppling of Iran's popularly elected prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, in 1953, following his nationalization of the country's British-owned oil industry.

That is why so many segments of the Iranian population - including communists, conservatives, and liberals - initially supported the overthrow of the Shah. Tragically, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was anything but a consensus leader. He quickly turned on his erstwhile allies and established the hugely repressive theocratic regime that remains in power today.

The lesson is that US interventions tend to have many unforeseen consequences. Not only do they create long-lasting resentments. They also shape the soft power (the power of persuasion and attraction) that America has always used to hold together its global alliance network and convince others that its hegemony is benign, contributing to international stability and predictability.

This matters, because most people will naturally object when the hegemon behaves like a bully. Frequent, gratuitous displays of hard power have a way of eroding soft

IN JEST THIS

When rent is too high, roommates can help

A recent headline in The New York Times caught my eye. It said: "How to Afford Housing in London: Multiple Roommates, No Living Room."

I have no plans to move to London, but if I did, I would very much like a living room (sitting room). I do not like to do all my living in the bedroom. Then again, if I had eight roommates, the living room would get a little crowded and I'd have to live in my bedroom.

Eight roommates (or housemates) may seem like a lot, but it's the only way I'd be able to afford rent in London. Like in many cities around the world, rent in London has been rising faster than wages and salaries. Having an apartment to yourself is truly a luxury, even if the apartment is so tiny that you can open the front door without getting out of bed.

According to The Times, a growing proportion of adults aged 35 and older in Britain are living with roommates to afford the high rents. In many rental properties, living rooms

have been eliminated to create an extra bedroom.

Dan Darragh, a 36-year-old contractor in the finance industry, pays 900 pounds in rent monthly to share a six-bedroom house with five roommates. Having roommates is "a lot more the norm now," Darragh said. "I know very few people that actually live alone."

As rents soar around the world, many people have been forced to share apartments and houses with roommates. But this isn't necessarily a bad thing. There are significant advantages to having roommates, as well as some disadvantages.

The biggest advantage, of course, is being able to split costs, not just rent but also various other costs you will encounter as a tenant, including electricity, gas and internet. You may even be able to split the cost of hiring a lawyer to sue the landlord for adding an extra shower in the apartment, rather than fixing the hole in the roof.

Roommates can also give you company. If it's good company, you won't feel lonely again. If it's bad company, you may yearn for loneliness.

Having roommates in a cosmopolitan city like London can expose you to different cultures (this is a good thing), different races (this is a good thing), and different bathing habits (not always a good thing).

Sometimes a roommate who takes infrequent baths or showers may actually be preferable to a roommate who lives in the bathroom. It depends, of course, on how infrequent they are. Once every three days may be tolerable; once every three years, not so much.

It's not just bathing habits that might create conflict - it's also cooking and cleaning habits. You may want your roommate to wash a pot soon after cooking with it, but your roommate might prefer to hit you over the head with the pot.

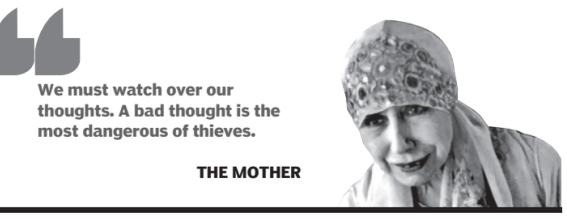
Thankfully, most roommates don't resort to violence over simple requests. Most

roommates learn to compromise. If you expect a pot to be washed right away, but your roommate feels no urgency whatsoever, your roommate might suggest a compromise: "I promise I will wash it before any mold starts growing."

The biggest disadvantage of sharing a home is that you might find yourself living with the roommate from hell. The roommate from hell will make you dread coming home from work. You might even be tempted to sleep under your desk.

The roommate from hell is not necessarily a stranger whom you didn't thoroughly investigate before agreeing to share an apartment. The roommate from hell might be a good friend who has not yet learned to live with other humans.

So how do you save yourself from the roommate from hell? Well, the best thing you can do is make sure that the lease or rental agreement allows you to escape, perhaps through a subleasing clause that allows you to find someone else to take over your woes.



We must watch over our thoughts. A bad thought is the most dangerous of thieves.

THE MOTHER

Ladakh Protests Again

Protests by thousands of pro-democracy activists in Leh and Kargil districts on 16 March demanding, among other things, statehood for Ladakh and the Sixth Schedule status soon after the release of the face of the movement - Sonam Wangchuk - show people's legitimate aspirations cannot be suppressed by repression and use of laws that are wrongful and anti people. Leaders of the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) took to the streets mobilizing tens of thousands of people after a pause of six months when their agitation had been stopped with an iron hand.

The last major round of protests in September 2025 had turned violent, leading to clashes with security forces. Four people were killed when security personnel had opened fire on unarmed citizens. Wangchuk had been arrested under the draconian NSA after being charged with exhorting the agitators to wage war against the State. Both Wangchuk and his wife Gitanjali J Angmo denied the allegation and called into question the evidence adduced against him. The Supreme Court was to watch on 17 March the purported videos of his speech used by the prosecution to incarcerate him. But the Centre revoked the charge under NSA and set him free before the hearing. This only lent credence to the plea taken by Wangchuk and his supporters that the evidence was doctored. This backtracking by the Central government also showed chinks in the armour of the Establishment which has, of late, become unprepared to face deep scrutiny.

While lifting the NSA against Wangchuk, the Union Home Ministry iterated that it remained committed to providing "all necessary safeguards" for Ladakh. But it failed to convince the agitators about its sincerity to "resolve" their grievances through constructive engagement and dialogue, "including through the High-Powered Committee and other appropriate platforms."

The agitation for Ladakh's statehood is in a sense unique since Moslems and Buddhists residing in the region joined hands to realise their demands for statehood, better livelihood opportunities and government jobs. They have come to the conclusion that as long as Ladakh remains a Union Territory, their aspirations will not be met and they will be denied proper representation in legislative matters. Ladakh became a separate Union Territory in August 2019, following the abrogation of Article 370 and the bifurcation of the former state of Jammu and Kashmir. While the move initially drew support in Leh, including from Wangchuk, residents soon voiced concerns over what they described as a political vacuum under the Lt Governor's arbitrary administration.

This discontent led to a series of protests and hunger strikes, prompting political and religious groups from Buddhist-majority Leh and Moslem-majority Kargil to form a rare joint front - the LAB and the KDA. The Centre set up a high-level committee to examine Ladakh's demands and multiple rounds of talks were held that remained inconclusive. Fed up with the government's dilatory tactic and buoyed over the release of Wangchuk, the two outfits resumed their protests to press the government to restart meaningful talks so that the democratic and constitutional rights of people of Ladakh are restored.

It appears the Centre had a myopic vision when it scrapped Article 370 and bifurcated the former state of Jammu & Kashmir. In order to fulfil the ruling BJP's old core political agenda of removing the former state's special status, it has complicated matters. Despite its promise it is still dillydallying with granting statehood to the Union Territory of J&K, whereas it is faced with the statehood demand of the people of Ladakh - a consequence of the abrogation of Article 370 the government apparently did not foresee. This is a prime case that shows how the old beliefs of the BJP are, in reality, not actionable and impractical.

The agitators have made it clear that their commitment to peaceful resolution of the problems is beyond question. At the same time they are not prepared to forgo their right to protest and resort to peaceful democratic movements to realise their justified demands. The new Lt Governor VK Saxena is wrong to assert that there is "no space for agitation and violence." The two outfits spearheading the agitation said they would not shun the democratic path of peaceful protest, indirectly rejecting Saxena's comment.

The BJP's gamble over abrogation of Article 370 has not paid off as it had calculated. It has failed to win the election in J&K and is delaying granting promised statehood to it. It is now faced with the problem of the demand for a new state for Ladakh. It would do well to stop prevaricating and listen to the voice of the people.

WISDOM CORNER

Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.

CARL JUNG

Ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge: it is those who know little, and not those who know much, who so positively assert that this or that problem will never be solved by science.

CHARLES DARWIN

It's not the daily increase but daily decrease. Hack away at the unessential.

BRUCE LEE

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1662: Blaise Pascal's transit service begins running in Paris. On this day in 1662, Blaise Pascal's public transit system began operating in Paris. It involved horse-drawn carriages that would transport people around the city; they would charge a small fee and arrive at "stops" at fixed intervals. The coaches ran across five different routes, and each one seated eight passengers. Though Pascal's service was popular with wealthier Parisians, many residents could not afford the fares, leading to carriages being vandalized. The service officially shut down in 1667 - it had been ahead of its time, but pickpockets and overcrowding contributed to its demise.
1871: The Commune of Paris, an insurrection of Parisians against the French government, began, lasting until May 28.
1906: The first monoplane, constructed by the Romanian inventor Trajan Vuia, made a flight of 12 metres (40 feet).
1965: Soviet cosmonaut Aleksei Leonov, after passing through an air lock on the spacecraft Voskhod 2, became the first man to walk in space.
1974: Seven member countries of OPEC lifted a five-month oil embargo against the United States.
1990: In what was considered the world's biggest art heist, two men pretending to be police officers stole 13 works, including paintings by Rembrandt and Johannes Vermeer, from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston; the stolen art was never recovered.
1990: East Germany holds its first and only free parliamentary elections. The election was held between the peaceful revolution leading to the demise of the German Democratic Republic in 1989 and the German reunification in 1990.



Melvin Durai

EIGHT ROOMMATES (OR HOUSEMATES) MAY SEEM LIKE A LOT, BUT IT'S THE ONLY WAY I'D BE ABLE TO AFFORD RENT IN LONDON

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



Political heat

Sir, Election temperature is bound to soar in April. As usual, of course, West Bengal and its Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee are set to hog the limelight. Mamata began her election preparation months ahead; her confrontation with the Election Commission and doling out sops are pointers. Aiming for an astounding fourth term, a win for the Trinamool Congress Party (TMC) would perhaps sound the death knell for the BJP in West Bengal. Tamil Nadu, which has almost always seen change of governments every five years, except in 1984 and 2016, is expected to return MK Stalin as a fighting AIADMK appears slightly on the back foot although actor Vijay is predicted to cut into DMK votes but it is highly unlikely that the TVK leader will romp home in his debut election.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

New tools of war

Sir, The ongoing tensions involving Iran and the United States and Israel combine illustrate how AI is rapidly moving from research labs to the battlefield. AI systems are increasingly used to process massive streams of intelligence, identify potential targets, and optimise military logistics. As in earlier technological turning points from radar in World War II to satellite surveillance during the Cold War conflict is accelerating experimentation with new tools of war. Yet the scale and speed of AI-driven decision-making make it imperative to establish clear limits on how such systems are deployed in lethal operations. A key risk lies in the data that fuels these systems. AI models operate on probabilistic analysis, meaning their accuracy depends entirely on the quality and verification of the data they ingest. Even when AI is not directly responsible for tragic incidents such as recent strikes on civilian locations in Iran the episode highlights the need for rigorous oversight of how machine-assisted targeting decisions are generated and validated. Another concern is the growing psychological reliance on algorithmic recommendations. Modern battlefields produce more information than human analysts can realistically process, encouraging commanders to lean heavily on AI-generated assessments.

Amarjeet Kumar, HAZARIBAGH

Panel submits report on UCC to Gujarat CM



Panel suggests common legal framework for all religions on marriage, divorce in final UCC report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Gandhinagar, March 17: A committee constituted by the Gujarat government submitted its final report on the Uniform Civil Code to Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel Tuesday, suggesting a common legal framework for all religions and communities regarding marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption.

Priority has been given to equal rights and protection of women, according to a release. The state government is likely to table a draft bill on the UCC in the legislative assembly during the ongoing budget session.

The government had formed the panel under Supreme Court Justice Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai (retired) in February last year to explore various aspects related to the implementation of the UCC and prepare a draft bill for the same.

During a presentation made at the submission of the report to the chief minister, the panel's chairperson said the report has recommended a common legal framework for all religions and communities on issues like mar-

riage, divorce, inheritance and adoption, a government release stated.

In particular, equal rights and protection of women have been given priority, it said.

Retired senior IAS officer CL Meena, senior advocate RC Kondekar, former Vice Chancellor of Veer Narmad South Gujarat University Dr Dakshesh Thakar, and social worker Gita Shroff are other members of the committee.

Sources said the state government may introduce the draft bill on the UCC in the assembly March 25, the last day of the ongoing budget session.

At the time of the formation of the committee, the chief minister had said the state government was committed to fulfilling Prime Minister Narendra Modi's resolve of implementing UCC across the country. Patel had said the committee would examine various aspects related to UCC and take into account the views of people from different walks of life to prepare its report.

Initially, the panel was expected to submit its report in 45 days after examining various aspects. Later, the committee was given extensions.

In August last year, the state

government stated that the panel had held meetings with 38 Muslim organisations to understand their opinions on the UCC.

The committee members travelled to all the districts of Gujarat and collected feedback from political and religious leaders, the state government had said.

People also expressed their opinions regarding UCC on a website created specifically for this reason, and nearly 19

lakh suggestions were received by the panel, according to the government.

Despite the government's assurance, members of the Muslim community had protested against the proposed UCC by forming human chains in Ahmedabad and Vadodara city of Gujarat in April 2025.

In December last year, the Gujarat High Court rejected a plea challenging the constitution of the committee by the state government to assess the need for a UCC.

While rejecting the appeal filed by Surat-based petitioner Abdul Vahab Sopariwala, the HC held that the court cannot interfere in the executive functions as laid down under Article 162 of the Constitution.

The state government is likely to table a draft bill on the UCC in the legislative assembly during the ongoing budget session

Rajasthan to vaccinate 2cr cattle heads against foot-and-mouth disease

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaipur, March 17: The Rajasthan government will vaccinate more than two crore cattle heads under the seventh phase of its foot-and-mouth disease control programme, officials said Tuesday.

The seventh phase of the statewide campaign, which was launched by Animal Husbandry Minister Joram Kumawat from the Ramdev Gaushala in Bagru near Jaipur, aims to vaccinate 2.32 crore cows and buffaloes across all districts, officials said.

Foot-and-mouth (FMD) is a contagious viral disease affecting livestock, including cattle, pigs, sheep, and goats, characterised by fever and blister-like sores on the mouth, tongue and hooves.

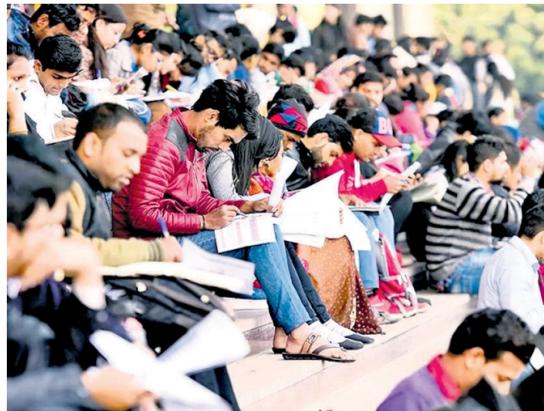
Kumawat appealed to the livestock owners to ensure vaccination of all cattle heads to protect them from the infectious disease. "This will improve animal health and help increase the income of farmers," he said.



According to an official statement, the minister directed the concerned officials and veterinarians to complete the vaccination drive in a time-bound manner to achieve the target of making the state free from the disease by 2030. Director in the animal husbandry department, Suresh Meena, said FMD is a highly infectious disease that affects the productivity of livestock and causes financial losses to farmers.

The officials said teams from the animal husbandry department will carry out door-to-door vaccination drives in the villages and monitor the process continuously to ensure maximum coverage.

No govt job through employment offices in 5 yrs in Rajasthan: RTI



The data, provided by the Directorate of Employment, shows that as of January 14, a total of 22,21,317 candidates were registered as job seekers in district employment offices across the state

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaipur, March 17: More than 22 lakh unemployed youth are currently registered with employment offices across Rajasthan, according to information obtained under the RTI Act.

It was further revealed that no candidate was recruited in the government sector through the employment offices in the past five years.

The data, provided by the Directorate of Employment, shows that as of January 14, a total of 22,21,317 candidates were registered as job seekers in district employment offices across the state. Of these, over 13.08 lakh were male, 9.12 lakh female, and 989 fell under the 'other' category.

Among districts, Jaipur recorded the highest number of registered unemployed people at 2.51 lakh, followed by Alwar (1.53 lakh), Nagaur (1.34 lakh),

Jhunjhunu (1.22 lakh) and Jodhpur (86,320). In contrast, Jaisalmer (12,031) and Pratapgarh (14,047) reported the lowest number of registered candidates.

The category-wise data indicates that candidates from the Other Backward Classes (OBC) form the largest share among registered job seekers, followed by general, Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and other categories.

The data further revealed the limited placements in the private sector during the past five years. According to the information provided, 86 candidates were placed in 2021, 825 in 2022, three in 2023, 23 in 2024 and 71 in 2025 through employment office initiatives, including job fairs and coordination with private companies.

"The private sector has seen high growth in the last two de-

cadec. Investment in crores, but the jobs provided by the directorate are minuscule. Permanent and temporary jobs in the government sector through the directorate seem to have completely stopped. There is a need to activate employment offices and refer candidates," Right to Information (RTI) applicant Chandra Shekhar Gaur said.

The RTI application had also sought details of employment generated through investor summits held in the state over the past two years. However, the department clarified that such information is not related to it.

It also replied to a query saying that the employment offices did not provide jobs in government sector in the past five years.

A senior officer of the Directorate of Employment said the department publishes 'Rojgar Sandesh' fortnightly to keep job seekers aware of various government vacancies.

He said various activities like fairs are also organised from time to time.

The official website of the Department of Skills, Employment and Entrepreneurship in Rajasthan notes that the Department of Employment has been catering to the needs of the job seekers through various activities and schemes. For better coordination and speedy execution of programmes, 'Department of Skills, Development and Entrepreneurship' was established in May 2015.

Providing vocational guidance about various courses and training facilities to job seekers, submission of job seekers' list to employers, registration of unemployed youth, organising Rozgar Melas, and assisting job seekers of weaker sections of the society under special schemes are listed as some of the department's functions.

Banni grasslands revitalized for potential cheetah move



The Banni grasslands spread, across around 2,000 square kilometres, are considered the largest grassland ecosystem in Asia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Gandhinagar, March 17: The Gujarat government is preparing the vast Banni grasslands in Kutch district as a potential habitat for cheetahs, with ₹14.70 crore already spent on ecosystem development, state Forest and Environment Minister Arjun Modhwadia said in the assembly Monday.

Cheetahs, which went extinct in India several decades ago, were brought in from Africa and housed in Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh starting September 2022 as part of an ambitious reintroduction project. Speaking on the budgetary demands for his department, Modhwadia said cheetahs were present in India and Gujarat before 1947 but disappeared later, making it necessary to create ecosystems where the species can be reintroduced.

"Efforts to prepare the Banni grasslands in Kutch for the species gathered momentum after Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Gir National Park in March 2025. The PM stayed overnight at Sasan, undertook a safari and chaired key wildlife-related meetings there, including those of International Big Cat Alliance and National Board for Wildlife," he said in the House.

"During these discussions, a special mention was made

that an ecosystem for cheetahs could be developed in the Banni grasslands of Kutch. Following this, preparations were initiated to create the required habitat," Modhwadia said.

He said funds from Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) were utilised to begin ecological restoration and infrastructure development in the region, adding that ₹14.70 crore has been spent so far to develop an ecosystem for cheetahs inside the Banni grasslands.

He expressed confidence that once cheetahs are introduced in the future, the region could emerge as a major wildlife tourism destination similar to Sasan Gir.

"In the coming days, when cheetahs arrive, just like Sasan is buzzing with tourists, Kutch will also become a popular destination. The Banni grasslands spread, across around 2,000 square kilometres, are considered the largest grassland ecosystem in Asia. The landscape is unique due to its geographical features. The region lies between desert terrain on one side and wetlands on the other, with expansive grasslands in between," he said.

The state government has been working on ecological restoration of the grasslands, which had been affected by the spread of the invasive plant species Prosopis juliflora, locally known as "gando baval".

It has affected the natural grassland ecosystem and the livelihoods of Maldhari pastoral communities who traditionally depended on the area, Modhwadia said.

"Between 2014-15 and 2025-26, authorities removed Prosopis juliflora from about 6,300 hectares of land in the Banni region. The government now plans to expand restoration efforts further. Grass plantation has been planned across an additional 5,000 hectares in the coming period, keeping in mind the Centre's proposed cheetah conservation project," the minister told the House.



People wait to collect household cylinders of liquefied natural gas from an authorized dealer in Ahmedabad, India

West Asia conflict hits export of Bundi Basmati

The Iran-Israel war has resulted in a halt to the export of around 3,75,000 quintals of rice worth ₹300 crore, which is stuck at seaports and storage, in the past 15 days

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kota, March 17: The rice industry in Bundi and Kota is facing a production halt, putting around 10,000 workers at risk, as the ongoing West Asia conflict has stalled export shipments to the region and Basmati rice worth ₹300 crore is stuck at seaports and storage, millers said Monday.

Ramandeep Sharma, a rice miller and President of Bundi District Laghu Udyog Bharti, said that at least 25,000 quintals of rice is processed per day across nearly 35 rice industries in Bundi and Kota, and 80 per cent of this rice is exported to the UAE, Iran, and Iraq.

The Iran-Israel war has resulted in a halt to the export of around 3,75,000 quintals of rice worth ₹300 crore, which is stuck at seaports and storage, in the past 15 days, he added.

Meanwhile, the threat of



unemployment looms large over nearly 10,000 workers - 60 per cent of them from Bihar - working in rice industries in Bundi and Kota, as unit owners are considering stopping production due to the unavailability of extra storage space, millers said.

Besides, shipping companies

Till today, the rice market rate has crashed by nearly 10 per cent, he added.

If war conditions do not normalise and exports are not resumed in the next few days, production will have to be stopped in rice processing units, he added.

Sharma urged the state government to grant special concessions for rice millers and the labourers working there.

Gourav Nuwal, Secretary of Bundi Rice Mill Association, said the West Asia conflict has adversely hit Bundi Basmati rice exports. Ship containers loaded with rice have been put on hold due to the war, and nearly 4 lakh tonnes of rice are presently stuck at Kandla Port.

The rice export price is down to ₹700-800 per quintal. Bundi rice millers are also overloaded with rice stored in their godowns and storages, he added.

without interruption.

At the IIMA campus in Ahmedabad, these students would continue their course through in-person classes until the situation in Dubai stabilises, the source said.

Dubai Crown Prince Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum inaugurated the IIMA's first overseas campus in the UAE city in the presence of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan in September 2025.

The IIMA expanded its global presence in management education, with the new campus aiming to deliver world-class learning opportunities to aspiring leaders across the Middle East and neighbouring regions, while fostering rich cross-cultural exchange and academic collaboration.

MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

IIMA SHIFTS DUBAI CAMPUS STUDENTS TO AHMEDABAD

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ahmedabad, March 17: All 35 students of the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad's Dubai campus have been shifted to the main campus here in view of the ongoing West Asia conflict, IIMA sources said Tuesday.

These students, pursuing the one-year MBA programme launched in September last year, were in Spain doing an internship when the war broke out.

"Due to escalating tensions in the Middle East, the institute authorities decided to move the students directly to the institute's Ahmedabad campus rather than take them back to Dubai," a source said.

The decision was taken to ensure that the academic schedule of the students continued



There are immense possibilities for eco-tourism in Jharkhand, which is naturally beautiful and attractive

GOVERNMENT WORKING ON INTEGRATED FARMING MODELS

The government is working on having integrated farming models that will also be beneficial for small farmers, Union minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said Tuesday



of the day quote

We aim to transform the heart of Aizawl into a beautiful area, a pleasant area for children, a great spot for the youth, and a convenient place for the elderly to enjoy the outdoors



There are politicians who are thick-skinned. But I am a common man like you. If someone says that Kejriwal is a dishonest person then I feel bad. I had decided that I will keep quiet till the court gives the verdict



If the government truly wanted to curb wasteful expenditure, this decision should have been taken immediately after the court had removed the Chief Parliamentary Secretaries in November 2024



Woman killed as bridge declared unsafe collapses

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 17: A 60-foot iron bridge, declared unsafe yet used daily by hundreds of school students to cross a drain in north Delhi, collapsed Tuesday morning, killing a woman.



The 33-year-old bridge served as the main access to at least seven government and private schools

Hundreds of students on their way to school had crossed the bridge in Roop Nagar shortly before it collapsed around 9.30 am, locals said

Had it been earlier, many more could have been killed, they added

multiple teams and fire tenders to retrieve the body.

Dheeraj Goyal, a local shopkeeper, said the bridge had been in a dilapidated condition for a long time.

He added that the structure had weakened significantly over time.

He said the bridge was partially closed around seven to eight months ago due to safety concerns, but a section was later reopened for pedestrians after protests by local residents.

He also flagged the heavy footfall due to nearby schools. Zoya, a Class VIII student, said the bridge had been in a visibly dangerous condition for some time.

Several locals alleged that despite repeated complaints about the deteriorating condition of the bridge, no effective steps were taken to completely restrict access.

Some residents confronted political leaders who visited the site following the incident, questioning the lack of preventive action.

was registered under BNS section 106 (1) (causing death by negligence) against unknown persons, police said.

They said a PCR call about the incident was received at 9.28 am, following which emergency teams rushed to the spot. The bridge had caved into the drain below. During search operations, the body of the woman, believed to be around 50 years old and suspected to be a beggar, was recovered from the drain. Locals said she used to sit near one end of the bridge.

Personnel from the Delhi Fire Service, National Disaster Response Force and Delhi Police carried out a coordinated rescue operation, deploying

The 33-year-old bridge served as the main access to at least seven government and private schools

Hundreds of students on their way to school had crossed the bridge in Roop Nagar shortly before it collapsed around 9.30 am, locals said. Had it been earlier, many more could have been killed.

"At the time of the incident, most students had already crossed the bridge, which likely averted a major tragedy," a local said and pointed out that the structure sees heavy footfall between 7 am and 8.30 am.

Authorities said the bridge had already been declared unsafe and closed for public movement. Despite barricades, the bridge continued to be used regularly due to the lack of a convenient alternative route, according to residents.

It connected Gur Mandi and Roop Nagar, and served as a crucial shortcut, reducing travel time by nearly 30 minutes as well as the distance by at least one kilometre for students heading to the nearby schools.

The bridge was widely used by locals to access the nearby markets, they said, adding that not even a single guard was deputed there who could stop people from using the structure.

Following the collapse, a case

India slams Pak for Afghanistan attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 17: India Tuesday "unequivocally" condemned Pakistan's "barbaric" airstrike on a drug treatment centre in Kabul and described it as a "blatant assault" on Afghanistan's sovereignty and a threat to regional peace and stability.

In a strong reaction to the last night's attack that reportedly killed over 400 people, New Delhi accused Pakistan of trying to "dress up a massacre as a military operation."

It said the strike reflects Islamabad's persistent pattern of "reckless behavior" and its repeated attempts to "externalise internal failures." Afghan media reported that over 400 people were killed and more than

250 others injured in the Pakistani airstrikes on the Omid Addiction Treatment hospital.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said India "unequivocally condemns Pakistan's barbaric airstrike" on the hospital in Kabul.

"This is a cowardly and unconscionable act of violence that has claimed the lives of a large number of civilians in a facility which can by no means be justified as a military target" it said.

The MEA said Pakistan is now trying to "dress up a massacre as a military operation"

"This heinous act of aggression by Pakistan is also a blatant assault on Afghanistan's sovereignty and a direct threat to regional peace and stability," it said in a statement.



President Droupadi Murmu offers food to a girl during an event to commemorate five billion meals of the Akshaya Patra Foundation, at the Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre, in New Delhi

Climate change to increase physical inactivity by 2050: Study

Rising temperatures could alone undermine a substantial share of the World Health Organization's (WHO) target of cutting physical inactivity across the globe by 15 per cent by 2030

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 17: High temperatures caused by climate change could drive millions around the world into physical inactivity by 2050 and be linked to up to 7,00,000 additional premature deaths yearly and \$3.68 billion in productivity losses, suggests a study published in The Lancet Global Health journal.

Rising temperatures could alone undermine a substantial share of the World Health Organization's (WHO) target of cutting physical inactivity across the globe by 15 per cent by 2030, researchers from Latin America, including the Pontifical Catholic University of Ar-

gentina, said.

India is projected to see a mortality rate attributable to physical inactivity of 10.62 deaths per 1,00,000 population by 2050 under the three future scenarios analysed -- low emissions, historical trends continuing unchanged and rapid fossil-fuelled development.

Climate change is making the world hotter and the growing heat can impact one's ability to be physically active.

A study recently published in the journal Environmental Research Health suggested that in some parts of the tropics and subtropics, hot and humid conditions during the hottest hours of a year limit safe physical activity for both younger



and older adults to sitting and lying down.

Physical inactivity is already a major global health problem, with about one in three adults failing to meet WHO guidelines for weekly exercise, the

researchers said.

The WHO recommends adults aged 18-64 engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity physical activity per week.

Wangchuk seeks talks with Centre

Wangchuk described the government's move to release him as an "extending of hand to build trust and to facilitate meaningful, constructive dialogue"

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



New Delhi, March 17: In his first public remarks after being released from jail, activist Sonam Wangchuk Tuesday said he wanted to see the development in a "positive light" and hoped it would lead to a "meaningful dialogue" on the demands of agitating bodies in Ladakh.

Addressing a press conference here along with his wife and HIAL co-founder Gitanjali J Angmo, Wangchuk said the protests in Ladakh have been aimed solely at initiating a constructive dialogue process.

He also said that talks are a "give and take process" and both sides will have to make "certain accommodations."

"We were sure of a victory in the court, but a win was not enough. I wanted a win-win," he said.

Wangchuk described the government's move to release him as an "extending of hand to build trust and to facilitate meaningful, constructive dialogue"

"They have offered a constructive, meaningful dialogue. This is what we have wanted, and we had to struggle so much, walk to Delhi, sit on 'anshan' (fast). All movements in Ladakh are for starting the dialogue process," he said.

He hoped it would not just be a dialogue, but "meaningful, effective talks, which lead us to something good".

Talking about the incidents in Ladakh, he said many "meaningless arrests" occurred. "Even people who were going to donate blood got arrested and got an FIR. Such things have happened," he claimed.

He said it should be examined how the violence started. "There are also voices among people that ask -- where did it start? How did this violence start? Actually, that must be examined."

"There are voices that ask how come so many people died with injuries in the chest? But I think all this could be undone. People can take back their suspicions and doubts and the government can take back their cases," he said.

Asked about his next step, Wangchuk said he would travel to Ladakh and consult with leaders of the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), which have been spearheading the agitation over the past five years for statehood and extension of the Sixth Schedule to Ladakh.

On whether he would return to agitation, he said, "I have always said I don't want to sit on hunger strike; I am forced to do it. Now that the government is extending its hand, we hope a good example is set."

HPV campaign: 3L girls vaccinated in fortnight

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 17: Nearly three lakh 14-year-old girls have been vaccinated within a fortnight of the launch of the HPV vaccination campaign, marking an encouraging start to the critical public health initiative.

Health ministry officials said Tuesday that several states, including Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Odisha, and Mizoram, are leading from the front in the nationwide HPV vaccination campaign. The Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine plays a vital role in preventing cervical cancer, one of the most common cancers affecting women.

"The campaign has been strategically rolled out during the academic period, and while examinations are currently underway in many regions, the response has remained strong," an official said.



India does not even have a fully signed deal with the US like Malaysia. Yet the government has offered no clarity on the fate of this anti-India trade deal - only rumours floated through anonymous 'sources'

PARL PANEL BACKS AI TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT FOR DELHI ROADS

A parliamentary panel has recommended the adoption of AI-based traffic systems to improve Delhi's traffic flow and road safety, while urging authorities to earmark part of the fines collected from violators for road safety initiatives



of the day uote

The surge in the number of pilgrims visiting religious sites in Uttar Pradesh reflects both improved infrastructure and deepening public faith, even as it presents challenges for the government

Chhattisgarh's progress was halted when the Congress was in power and highlighted his government's commitment to a development push and serving "Chhattisgarh Mahtari (mother)"

India's approach to green transition is based on an integrated strategy combining technological innovation, economic growth, and environmental sustainability

RS polls: Cong MLAs face action after cross-voting

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 17: Allegations of "horse trading" of MLAs erupted as Rajya Sabha elections saw cross-voting in Bihar, Odisha and Haryana, with the Opposition Congress suspending three of its legislators in Odisha and warning some of its MLAs of strict action in Haryana.

Overall, the ruling NDA alliance bagged 22 of the 37 seats of the Rajya Sabha that are falling vacant April 2, which will help increase its tally to its maximum. While nine of BJP's MPs are retiring next month, the party by itself has won 14 seats.

In the late-night counting for two seats in Haryana that went past midnight, BJP's Sanjay Bhatia and Karamvir Singh Boudh of the Congress were elected to the Rajya Sabha, amid allegations of violation of vote secrecy by both sides.

It was a narrow win for Boudh over Independent candidate Satish Nandal (63), as cross-voting dented the otherwise comfortable position of the Congress for securing an easy victory.

Bhatia won the first seat comfortably, polling 39 first-preference votes. In the fight for the second seat, Boudh polled 28 votes, while Independent candidate Nandal got 16.

Five votes were later declared invalid -- four of the Congress and one of the BJP, officials said. INLD leaders Abhay Singh Chautala and Aditya Devi Lal said the party



Rajya Sabha elections in Bihar, Odisha, and Haryana face allegations of cross-voting, raising concerns about political integrity

The controversy surrounding the Rajya Sabha elections has prompted calls for re-examining the anti-defection law to prevent political instability and maintain democratic principles

decided to abstain keeping in mind people's sentiments.

Taking strict note of reports of cross-voting by its MLAs, the Congress said it will take action against such legislators.

Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini said, "Satish Nandal lost by just one vote (referring to the narrow difference). Five Congress MLAs cross-voted. Four of their votes were rejected."

State Congress chief Rao Narendar Singh told reporters, "Those who betrayed the Congress will face strict action."

The leader of opposition in the Haryana Assembly, Bhupinder Singh Hooda, told reporters that while he will not take names (of those who cross-voted), "people have understood".

In Delhi, party MP Deepend-

er Hooda accused the BJP of indulging in "vote chori" in the Rajya Sabha polls in Haryana. Under the cover of darkness at night, the BJP "tried to murder democracy" and indulge in "vote chori", he alleged.

Rejecting Opposition's allegations of "horse-trading" in Rajya Sabha polls in Bihar, the BJP and its alliance partners said the Opposition failed to manage its legislators and did not follow standard procedures of issuing a whip during voting.

RJD MP Sudhakar Singh alleged that the NDA

Hitting back, BJP MP from Bihar's Paschim Champaran, Sanjay Jaiswal, said, "The Congress party did not issue a three-line whip, which is a standard practice during voting. Rahul Gandhi was holidaying in Cambodia, Tejashwi Yadav was vacationing in Europe --so their leaders were busy elsewhere as well. They could not even issue a whip, and now they are questioning who voted for whom."

JD(U) leader and Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lalan Singh said that Tejashwi Yadav should introspect instead of levelling allegations.

Bihar's longest-serving chief minister Nitish Kumar and new BJP president Kumar Nabin were among those elected to the Rajya Sabha from Bihar Monday

NCP (SP) supremo Sharad Pawar and Union minister Ramdas Athawale were among the 26 candidates elected unopposed March 9 after the withdrawal of nominations.

6 UKRAINIANS DETAINED Ukraine lodges protest with India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 17: Ukraine has lodged a protest with India over the "detention" of six Ukrainian nationals on charges of entering Mizoram without authorisation and for alleged unlawful activities.

Ukraine's ambassador Oleksandr Polishchuk met Secretary (West) in the External Affairs Ministry, Sibi George, and sought consular access to the Ukrainian nationals and their immediate release, according to a readout by the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry Tuesday.

The Ukrainian nationals and one American were reportedly detained by Indian law enforcement authorities on charges of unlawful activities.

When asked about the detention of the American national, a US embassy spokesperson said: "We are aware of the situation. For privacy reasons, we cannot comment on cases involving US citizens." It is not immediately clear why the foreign nationals were in Mizoram.

There is no word yet from Indian officials on the case. The readout by the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry said the case involves the unauthorised presence of the Ukrainian nationals in Mizoram, adding a special permit is required for foreign nationals to travel to the state.

It said the case is also linked to the "alleged illegal crossing of the state border between India and Myanmar". Ambassador of Ukraine Polishchuk met with Secretary (West) in the Ministry of External Affairs Sibi George, during which he handed over an "official note of



The Ukrainian nationals and one American were reportedly detained by Indian law enforcement authorities on charges of unlawful activities

protest demanding the immediate release of the Ukrainian citizens and access to them", it said. Kyiv said the six citizens have been provided with legal aid and a defence counsel during the court proceedings.

"On March 16, a court hearing took place, which was also attended by representatives of the Embassy of Ukraine; however, they were not granted the opportunity to communicate directly with the detainees," it said. Following the hearing, the court decided to extend their detention until March 27, it said without mentioning where the court proceedings took place.

"We draw attention to the fact that there are certain restricted-access zones in India for foreign nationals, entry to which is possible only with special permits," the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry said.

AIADMK MP sparks row over Nayanthara remark against Stalin

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, March 17: AIADMK MP C Ve Shanmugam stoked a controversy Tuesday by referring to actress Nayanthara while ridiculing Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin's initiative of "Tell us your dream", resulting in a backlash from various sections.

While participating in the party's protest against the DMK dispensation in Villupuram, about 150 km from here, Shanmugam, a former minister remarked, "I want Nayanthara, will you fulfill? Will the Chief Minister fulfill someone's dream to marry Nayanthara?"

Taking a dig at the CM for launching the scheme at the fag end of the rule, to obtain feedback on development initiatives from the public, Shanmugam wondered what Stalin had done all through the five years of his tenure. Later, the former state law minister expressed regret and clarified that his remarks pertaining to the actress were uttered by "mistake" and that there was no "malicious intent." A spokesperson from the party, however, distanced the AIADMK from the derogatory and inappropriate remark.

KC Tyagi quits JD(U), says will decide further course of action soon



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 17: Senior JD(U) leader K C Tyagi Tuesday said that he has left the party and will decide his further course of action soon.

Tyagi was associated with the JD(U) since it came into existence in October 2003 with the merger of the Samata Party and the Janata Dal. He served the JD(U) in various capacities including its chief general secretary, chief spokesperson and political adviser. "Yes, I have left the party," Tyagi told PTI, when asked.

In a statement, the former Rajya Sabha member said, "The membership campaign of the party has ended. This time I've not renewed the membership of the party." He, however, asserted that his commitment to the "larger and wider ideological points" concerning the interests of downtrodden, peasants and agriculturalists including the deprived sections of society "remains as firm as ever".

"Few of my friends political friends, sympathisers and activists are organising a meet of like minded persons 22nd March 2026 to discuss the political situation of the country at Mavlanakar Hall, Rafi Marg," he said in the statement.

POST OF THE DAY



RS 19,000 crore. That is what Banks collected in last 3 years just for not maintaining 'Minimum Account Balance.' Not from the rich. Not from big borrowers. From the poorest accounts in the system. Their crime? They didn't have enough money. A farmer misses the minimum balance - Penalty. A pensioner withdraws money for medicine - Penalty. A daily wage worker falls short by a few hundred rupees - Penalty. The poor keep money in banks for safety. Not to be quietly fined for being poor. Financial inclusion should protect small savings, not punish small balances. In Parliament today I proposed ending minimum balance penalties so the banking system stops charging people for their poverty.

@raghav_chadha

SHORT TAKES

TN poll: MDMK unveils manifesto

Chennai: The MDMK, an ally of the ruling DMK, released its manifesto for the upcoming Assembly elections Tuesday. The manifesto addresses several regional and social issues, including state's autonomy, fishermen's welfare, abolition of Governor's post, permanent closure of Sterlite copper plant, total abolition of child marriage, prohibition among many others.

Hooch claimed 354 lives in Bihar

Patna: Altogether 354 people have died due to consumption of spurious liquor in Bihar since the prohibition law was implemented in 2016, a senior police officer said here Tuesday. There has been an 18 per cent increase in the average monthly seizure of hooch till February this year over 2025. Talking to reporters here, ADG (Prohibition and State Narcotics Control Bureau) Amit Kumar Jain said, "Ever since the prohibition was imposed, 354 people have died due to consumption of spurious liquor in Bihar."

6-yr-old boy dies after falling into open drain

Nagpur: A six-year-old boy died after falling into an open sewage gutter in Wathoda area of Nagpur city Tuesday afternoon, police said. Danish Fayyaz Ansari was playing near his house in Sharda Nagar when he fell into the gutter, allegedly dug by a neighbour, around 3.30 pm. Family members rescued him and rushed him to hospital, but he could not be saved, said an official of Wathoda police station.

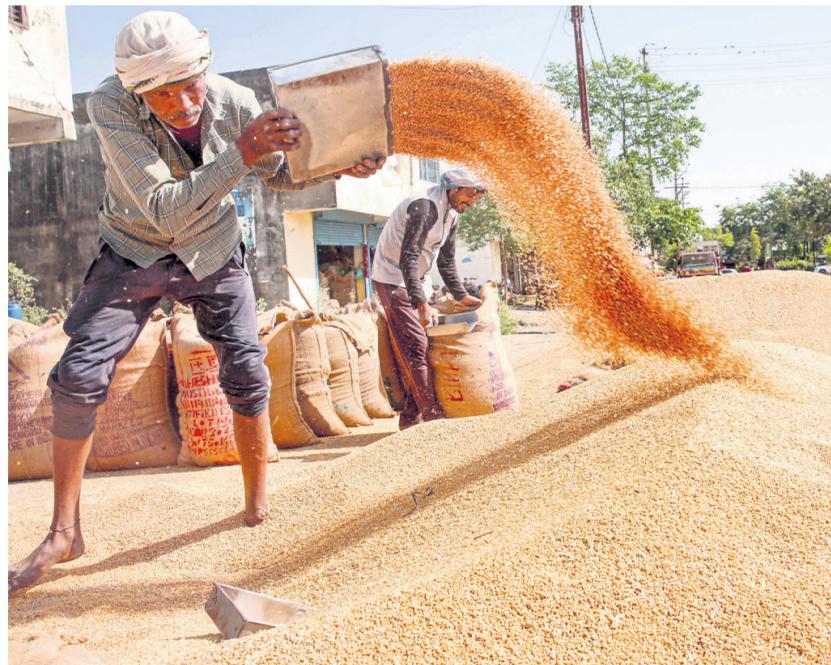
SNIPPETS

14 held in Varanasi for eating biryani on Ganga

Varanasi (UP): Fourteen people have been arrested on charges of defiling a place of worship and hurting religious feelings after a video purportedly showing them eating chicken biryani during an Iftar party hosted on a boat in the Ganga river here was widely shared on social media, officials said Tuesday. The action was taken on a written complaint filed Monday by the BJP Yuva Morcha's city unit chief Rajat Jaiswal. The case was registered at the Kotwali police station. Jaiswal alleged that an Iftar party was organised on a boat in the Ganga, during which chicken biryani was consumed.

HPCL double murder case: Bulldozer action in Budaun

Budaun (UP): The district administration in Uttar Pradesh's Budaun Tuesday demolished shops belonging to the prime accused in the murder of two Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) officials, citing that the establishments were built on government land. Later in the evening, the police arrested two more people for their alleged involvement in the case. On March 12, two officials of an HPCL plant in Sejni village -- Assistant General Manager Harshit Mishra (34) and General Manager Sudhir Kumar Gupta (58) -- were shot dead allegedly by Ajay Pratap Singh alias Ramu, a local who was earlier a vendor at the plant.



Workers sort and pack wheat grains at a wholesale grain market, in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

PTI PHOTO

LPG CRUNCH CONTINUES

Govt pushes states to clear city gas projects

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 17: With the LPG supply squeeze impacting hotels, businesses and household consumers through longer waiting periods and panic bookings, the Centre has asked states to expedite approvals for piped gas projects to enable faster rollout and ease pressure on cooking gas availability.

As the war in West Asia, which blocked India's access to almost 60 per cent of its LPG, continues with no end in sight, the government is now pushing for the use of alternative cooking mediums like induction cookers. "Situation remains a matter of concern, but we are provid-

ing supplies as before to the domestic consumers," said Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. This was made possible as refineries were asked to ramp up domestic output, which was then prioritised for household kitchens. Commercial use of LPG, such as in hotels and restaurants, was initially curtailed, but later restored to a fifth of their normal output.

"We have to look at alternatives," she said at a media briefing.

Giving statistics, she said panic bookings for a refill LPG cylinder peaked to 87.7 lakh on March 13, but have since eased, with about 70 lakh bookings being done on Monday. This compares to

about 55 lakh bookings in pre-war days.

LPG deliveries have kept pace. "We delivered 62.5 lakh cylinders on March 13, 60 lakh on March 14... this compares to 50 lakh deliveries in pre-conflict times", she said. There is still panic booking happening despite assurances that there are enough LPG supplies to meet household needs, she said, adding that domestic production of LPG has increased by 38 per cent compared to March 5 levels.

To ease pressure on LPG, the government is promoting commercial and household LPG users to switch to piped natural gas. City gas companies are offering incentives and faster connections.

Bank of India POSSESSION NOTICE. Bank of India BOI. Zonal Office : Star House, 1/1-D, Jayadev Vihar, Nayapalli Bhubaneswar, Odisha, PIN-751015. [Rule-8 (1) & (2)] of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules-2002. Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the Bank of India under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under Section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a Demand Notice calling upon the Borrower(s)/Co-Borrower(s)/Guarantor(s)/Mortgagor(s) in the loan account given below to repay the amount mentioned in the Notice plus interest & expenses thereon within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said Notice. The Borrower(s) having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to Borrower(s)/Co-Borrower(s)/Guarantor(s)/Mortgagor(s) and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic Possession of the property described here-in below in exercise of the powers conferred on him / her under sub-section (4) of section 13 of the Act read with Rule-8 of the Security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002. Borrower(s)/Co-Borrower(s)/Guarantor(s)/Mortgagor(s) in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property & any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the Bank of India, Concerned Branches, for the amount stated below with interest thereon. The Borrower's attention is invited to provisions of Sub-section (8) of the Section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available to them, to redeem the secured assets.

international



We are not party to the conflict and therefore France will never take part in operations to open or liberate the Strait of Hormuz in the current context

EMMANUEL MACRON | PRESIDENT, FRANCE

CHINA COAST GUARD EXPELS JAPANESE FISHING BOAT

China's coast guard Monday warned and drove away a Japanese fishing boat that "intruded" into waters near the Diaoyu Islands, it said Tuesday



of the day quote

Drones, electronic warfare and rapid battlefield innovation are now central to national and economic security, and that has only been further magnified by the conflict in the Middle East

Turkey is ready to host the next round of negotiations between Russia and Ukraine

The Ukrainians have welcomed and accepted this offer. European experts are available immediately

Iran rejects de-escalation offers

The Strait of Hormuz remains largely closed off and US allies have rebuffed US President Donald Trump's calls for them to help to reopen the vital waterway, through which about 20% of global oil and liquefied natural gas flows

REUTERS

Dubai/Jerusalem, March 17: Israel claimed Tuesday to have killed Iran's security chief, while a senior Iranian official said the new supreme leader had rejected de-escalation offers conveyed by intermediaries, demanding Israel and the US first be "brought to their knees".

The senior official, who asked not to be identified, said two intermediary countries had conveyed proposals to Iran's Foreign Ministry for "reducing tensions or ceasefire with the United States". The official did not give further details.

Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, who had held his first foreign policy session since being named supreme leader, had responded that it was not "the right time for peace until the United States and Israel are brought to their knees, accept defeat, and pay compensation", the official said.

He did not clarify whether Khamenei, who has not yet been pictured since being named last week to replace his slain father, had attended the meeting in person or remotely.

The US-Israeli war on Iran is now in its third week, with at least 2,000 people killed and no end in sight.

The Strait of Hormuz remains largely closed off and US allies have rebuffed US President Donald Trump's calls for them to help to reopen the vital waterway, through which about 20% of global oil and liquefied natural gas flows.

Oil prices rose about 2% Tuesday as Iran renewed its strikes on oil facilities in the United Arab Emirates, and are up around 45% since the start



of the war, raising concerns of a renewed spike in global inflation.

Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz said Israeli forces had killed Iran's security chief Ali Larjani, as well as Gholamreza Soleimani who led the volunteer Basij militia, which plays a major role in domestic security.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel was weakening Iran's leadership to give its people the opportunity to rise up and topple the government.

AIR RAID SIRENS SOUND IN ISRAEL

There was no let-up in attacks by both sides Tuesday. In Israel, where Iranian missile attacks have killed 12 people, air raid sirens sounded throughout the day in the commercial hub Tel Aviv and surrounding cities as loud blasts of interceptions were heard as far away as Jerusalem.

The barrage underscores Tehran's capacity to carry out long-range strikes despite more than two weeks of pounding by US and Israeli weapons.

Iran's army said in a statement it had targeted cyber technology centres in Israel with drones, as well as weapons manufacturing centres of Israeli arms manufacturer Rafael.

The Israeli military said it was targeting "Iranian regime infrastructure" with a new wave of strikes across Tehran, as well as Hezbollah sites in Beirut.

Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said Israel "had, in effect already won the war", but gave no timeline for when the war might end in a press conference in Jerusalem.

FUJAIRAH PORT DISRUPTED IN THIRD ATTACK

Iran has responded by wide-ranging attacks on its Gulf

neighbours. Gulf Arab states, including the UAE, have faced more than 2,000 missile and drone attacks on US diplomatic missions and military bases as well as oil infrastructure, ports, airports, ships and residential and commercial buildings.

Oil loading at the UAE port of Fujairah was at least partly halted Tuesday after a third attack in four days caused a fire at the export terminal. Fujairah lies on the far side of the Strait of Hormuz from the Gulf, making it one of the few ports from which the region's oil can be shipped without passing through the blockaded waterway.

The disruptions threaten to completely sever the OPEC producer's remaining crude export outlet from global markets.

UAE authorities said debris from an intercepted ballistic missile also fell in Abu Dhabi's Bani Yas area, killing one Pakistani national, while a fire caused by a drone attack was being fought at Abu Dhabi's Shah gas field.

TRUMP SAYS NATO'S REFUSAL TO HELP ON IRAN IS 'VERY FOOLISH MISTAKE'

President Donald Trump Tuesday said the United States had been informed by most of its NATO allies that they did not want to get involved with the country's military operation in Iran, a move he described as a "very foolish mistake."

But Trump gave no indication that he plans to punish NATO allies for their stances, as he took questions from reporters in the Oval Office during the St. Patrick's Day visit of Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin.

Trump said NATO countries were supportive of the joint US-Israeli war, which has now entered its third week, even as they did not want to get involved.

TRUMP HALTS VISIT TO BEIJING



REUTERS

Washington, March 17: President Donald Trump Tuesday said he was postponing a highly anticipated trip to Beijing to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping as the war with Iran upends US foreign policy and delays an effort to ease tensions between the world's two biggest economies.

"We are resetting the meeting... We're working with China. They were fine with it," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office.

Trump had been set to travel to Beijing from March 31-April 2 for the first trip there of his 14-month-old second term. The trip will now take place in about five or six weeks, Trump said.

China's embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The postponed visit heightens uncertainty for markets and diplomacy alike, as the war with Iran has driven oil prices higher, threatened shipping through the Strait of Hormuz and sharpened investor focus on energy security.

The delay will also sideline talks to ease trade frictions between Washington and Beijing over Taiwan, tariffs, computer chips, illegal drugs, rare earths and agriculture -- each an issue of sometimes bitter tensions.

Trump's campaign in Iran has unleashed a wave of military and economic consequences and commanded attention from across his administration.

LAVISH STATE VISIT AT ODDS WITH US ECONOMIC STRUGGLES

The image of Trump on a lavish state visit was increasingly seen at odds with a struggling US economy and the return of American service members killed in the Middle East, said a person briefed on planning for the Beijing meetings.

Iran has responded to joint US-Israeli attacks by threatening to fire on vessels moving through the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump's request for assistance from allies so far has largely been rebuffed. China which imported around 12 million barrels of oil daily in the first two months of 2026, most in the world, has not directly responded to his request.

China to provide humanitarian aid to Iran, Lebanon, other West Asian nations

BEIJING: China Tuesday said it will provide emergency humanitarian assistance to Iran, Lebanon and two other West Asian countries hit hard by the ongoing conflict in the region. Speaking at a media briefing, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said that Beijing has decided to provide emergency humanitarian aid to Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq in the hope of easing the humanitarian plight faced by local people. "The ongoing conflict has inflicted excruciating humanitarian disasters on (the) people of Iran and other regional countries. China deeply sympathises with people in relevant countries", Lin said. Iran has suffered many innocent civilian casualties; about 800,000 people in Lebanon have been displaced; Jordan, Iraq and other countries have also been affected, Lin said. China will continue to make every effort to promote peace and end the fighting, facilitating the early restoration of regional peace and stability and preventing the further spread of the humanitarian crisis, he added.

1,600 Indians travel to India on 5 Qatar Airways flights amid airspace curbs

DOHA: Around 1,600 Indian nationals travelled to India on five Qatar Airways flights Tuesday, even as the airline continues to operate limited services due to restrictions on Qatar's airspace, the Indian Embassy here said. The flights included two services to Delhi and one each to Mumbai, Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram, the embassy said in a social media post. "In total, about 1600 Indian nationals travelled on Qatar Airways flights today," it said. The mission noted that Qatar's airspace remains largely closed and Qatar Airways is currently operating only limited, non-scheduled flights. The airline has announced services to nine Indian destinations starting Wednesday, and passengers can make bookings through the Qatar Airways website, mobile application or authorised travel agents. The embassy said it continues to facilitate temporary Saudi transit visas for stranded Indian nationals wishing to travel to India via Saudi Arabia by crossing the Salwa land border.

Pakistan-bound oil tanker passes through Hormuz Strait

KARACHI: Ship-tracking data shows a Pakistan-bound oil tanker passing through the Strait of Hormuz over the weekend, indicating that some countries are able to negotiate safe passage for their vessels despite the US-Israeli war on Iran. The Kpler data provider MarineTraffic said the Karachi was "the first non-Iranian cargo to transit the chokepoint while broadcasting its AIS signal, suggesting that select shipments may be receiving negotiated safe passage" in a post on X. The Aframax tanker Karachi, operated by Pakistan National Shipping Corporation transited the strait around March 15 after loading crude at Das Island in Abu Dhabi, and is expected to arrive at Karachi March 17, according to LSEG vessel-tracking data. The data shows the vessel sailing along the Iranian side of the strait before turning east toward Pakistan. Pakistan relies heavily on imported crude and refined fuels from Gulf producers, most of which come through the Strait of Hormuz.

US leader escalates rhetoric against Cuba

REUTERS

Havana, March 17: US President Donald Trump escalated his rhetoric against Cuba Monday, saying he expected to have the "honor" of "taking Cuba in some form" and that "I can do anything I want" with the neighboring country.

The threatening statements come even as Cuba and the United States have opened talks aimed at improving their largely adverse relations, which have reached one of their most contentious moments in the 67 years since Fidel Castro overthrew what had been a close US ally.

"I do believe I'll be ... having the honor of taking Cuba. That's a big honor. Taking Cuba in some form," Trump told reporters as the island faces an unprecedented economic crisis, exacerbated by an oil blockade the US imposed after capturing former Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

"I mean, whether I free it, take it. Think I can do anything I want with it. You want to know the truth," Trump told reporters at a signing event in the Oval Office.



the talks, the Times said the Americans have signaled to Cuban negotiators that Diaz-Canel must go but are leaving the next steps up to the Cubans.

Cuba has traditionally rejected any interference in its internal affairs and has considered any proposals on that front a deal-breaker for any agreement.

Diaz-Canel, 65, who succeeded the late Fidel Castro and his brother Raul Castro as president in 2018, said Friday he expected talks with the United States to take place "under the principles of equality and respect for the political systems of both countries, sovereignty and self-determination."

But Trump, after removing Maduro from power and joining Israel in attacking Iran, has openly mused that Cuba would be "next." He stepped up pressure by halting all Venezuelan oil shipments to Cuba and threatening to slap tariffs on any country that sells oil to Cuba.

SYRIAN AUTHORITIES BAN ALCOHOL IN DAMASCUS

REUTERS

Damascus, March 17: Syrian authorities have banned alcohol from restaurants and bars in Damascus, one of the clearest moves yet by the Islamist-led government towards enforcing conservative ways since Ahmed al-Sharaa toppled Bashar al-Assad 15 months ago.

The decree, issued by the Damascus governorate Monday evening, requires that nightclub and bar licences be converted into cafe licences and restricts the sale of alcohol to sealed bottles for takeaway and only in predominantly Christian areas.

Any outlet selling alcohol must be located at least 75 metres (yards) away from places of worship and schools, and at least 20 metres (yards) from security facilities, according to the decree. It grants bar owners three months to comply.

OWNER SAYS HE WILL CLOSE HIS BAR

One Damascus bar owner said he would close his establishment, saying he had been expecting such a decree for some time, noting a sharp decline in customers since the Islamist-led government seized power.

The bar owner, who declined to be identified for fear he could face harassment, said he saw no point in converting his establishment into a dry restaurant or cafe, adding that people



didn't come there for pizza or shisha.

Many restaurants had already changed the way they served alcohol or stopped doing so altogether after rebels led by Sharaa, a former al-Qaeda commander, defeated Assad in December 2024, after 13 years of civil war.

Some took beer and wine off the menu, or began serving alcoholic drinks in tea glasses.

WOMAN ARRESTED FOR FAILING TO OBSERVE RAMADAN FAST

Sharaa has sought to assure Syrians that their rights and freedoms would be protected. In his address to the UN General Assembly last September, Sharaa pledged that Syria was now "building the institutions of a state governed by the rule

of law, guaranteeing rights and freedoms." Mohammad al-Abdullah, director of the Washington-based Syria Justice and Accountability Center, disputed the legal basis of the move against alcohol sales, saying existing Syrian laws didn't ban the consumption or sale of alcoholic beverages.

The decision, he added, contradicts Article 12 of Syria's Constitutional Declaration approved by Sharaa last year. This adopted all human rights treaties signed by Syria, several of which protect the right to consume alcohol, Abdullah said.

Reflecting tighter application of religious conservatism, authorities have acted to enforce fasting during the Islamic fast-month of Ramadan.

Xi's books burnt in Nepal college; China lodges protest

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kathmandu, March 17: Multiple copies of a book by Chinese President Xi Jinping were burnt at a college in Nepal, leading to the Chinese mission here issuing a diplomatic note to the Home Ministry, officials said Tuesday.

According to media reports, old books were burnt at the Manmohan Technical Institute in Koshi province's Morang district Saturday to make space in the college library.

These included several copies of "The Governance of China" written by Xi, the reports said, quoting the college administration.

"We have heard through social media that some books, including one 'The Governance of China' written by Xi, were burnt in the Manmohan Technical Institute, and the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu expressed concern over the incident through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs," Home Ministry spokesperson Ananda Kale told PTI. "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a letter to the Home Ministry along with a diplomatic note issued by the Chinese Embassy drawing the attention of the Nepal government to the matter," reads a statement issued by the Home Ministry.

Following this, the ministry initiated the process to take action against those involved in the incident.



We have decided to use municipal waste in road construction so we do not have to use natural resources to arrange aggregates

NITIN GADKARI | UNION MINISTER

SILVER JUMPS ₹6,000

Precious metal prices rebounded by up to 2 per cent, with silver gaining by Rs 6,000 to Rs 2.62 lakh per kilogram, and gold rose to Rs 1.61 lakh per 10 grams in the national capital Tuesday, according to the All India Sarafa Association.



of the day **QUOTE**

While penetration remains low, the government is actively bridging this gap through targeted reforms and affordability measures. Health insurance is now a clear priority with GST exemption on individual premiums, expansion of coverage and strong regulatory push driving the momentum



NIRMALA SITHARAMAN | FINANCE MINISTER

The share of SUVs within the Indian passenger vehicle market has been growing rapidly. Maruti Suzuki is expanding its product offerings in the SUV segment to secure market share



HISASHI TAKEUCHI | MD & CEO MARUTI SUZUKI INDIA

Harness the power of AI, no matter which country you are from, wherever you are, because our digital footprint today is beyond just one single device. The way that we use social media, the way that we have more and more services digitally, it is increasing the attack surface



ADRIAN HIA | MD, KASPERSKY (APAC)

Stock markets rally for 2nd day



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 17: Benchmark Sensex climbed 567 points and Nifty closed near 23,600 in their second consecutive day of gains Tuesday, boosted by a rally in metal and auto shares and a positive trend in global markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 567.99 points or 0.75 per cent to settle at 76,070.84. During the day, it surged 801.41 points or 1.06 per cent to 76,304.26. The 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 172.35 points or 0.74 per cent to end at 23,581.15.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Eternal surged the most by 5.70 per cent. Tata Steel, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bharat Electronics, Larsen & Toubro, Bharti Airtel and Maruti were also among the major gainers. Infosys, Bajaj Finance, ITC, Tata Consultancy Services and HCL Tech were among the biggest laggards.

"The market extended its gains, driven largely by bargain hunting by domestic investors. Cyclical sectors such as autos, metals, and financials continued to be leaders rebounding after being among the worst affected during the sell-off. However, it is premature to conclude that this reversal is sustainable

in the short term, as war-related uncertainties persist," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said.

The BSE MidCap Select Index jumped 0.86 per cent and SmallCap Select Index climbed 0.67 per cent. Among sectoral indices, metal surged 2.81 per cent, followed by auto (2.05 per cent), realty (1.79 per cent), commodities (1.69 per cent), consumer discretionary (1.54 per cent), industrials (1.54 per cent), capital goods (1.40 per cent), telecommunication (1.24 per cent) and Bankex (0.90 per cent).

IT, FMCG and BSE Focused IT were the laggards. A total of 2,362 stocks advanced, while 1,892 declined and 157 remained unchanged on the BSE.

"Indian equities extended their recovery for a second consecutive session, supported by easing volatility and selective sectoral strength, although underlying caution continues to shape market behaviour. A key positive was the sharp decline in India VIX, which dropped 8 per cent to sub-20 levels," Hariprasad K, Research Analyst and Founder, Livelong Wealth, said.

Sectorally, the rebound was led by the automobile space, with the Nifty Auto index gaining 2 per cent, he added.

3 lakh tonne LPG stranded at Strait of Hormuz: Govt

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, March 17: Nearly 3 lakh tonne of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) is currently stranded at the Strait of Hormuz, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary in the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, said Tuesday.

During a key briefing, the senior government official said that multiple vessels carrying LPG are unable to move due to the situation in the crucial shipping route.

He explained that six ships are currently stuck in the Strait of Hormuz, with each vessel carrying around 45,000 metric tonnes of LPG.

"Six ships are currently stuck in the Strait of Hormuz, with each vessel carrying around 45,000 metric tonnes of LPG," Sinha mentioned.

Together, this accounts for roughly 3 lakh metric tonnes of fuel that is yet to reach its destination.

The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most important maritime routes for energy supplies, connecting the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea.

Any disruption in this narrow passage has a direct impact on global energy trade and supply chains.

Meanwhile, the second Indian flagged LPG tanker 'Nanda Devi' arrived at Vadinar Port in Gujarat during first half Tuesday.

A day back Monday, the first Indian-flagged 'Shivalik' docked at Mundra Port in Gujarat.

Officials said that the LPG carrier Shivalik arrived at the Mundra Port, carrying a total cargo of about 46,000 metric tonnes (MT) of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), with 20,000 MT set to be un-



Fuel retailers seek advance payments from dealers

NEW DELHI: Indian state-owned fuel retailers are seeking advance payments for gasoline and gasoil supplied to fuel pumps nationwide, dealers said, as the companies are suffering significant revenue losses from retail sales. About 90% of the country's 101,470 retail fuel stations are linked to state refiners and retailer Indian Oil Corp, Bharat Petroleum Corp and Hindustan Petroleum Corp. Indian refiners, hit hard by a declining rupee, are facing revenue losses from retail sales as cracks for gasoline and gasoil surged to multi-year highs. India has not raised the retail prices of gasoline and gasoil to shield consumers despite a surge in global oil prices to over \$100 per barrel as the supplies through the Strait of Hormuz are disrupted by the US-Israeli war on Iran. The three fuel retailers did not respond to Reuters email seeking comments. The state refiners were previously giving a five-day credit to the dealers for the sale of gasoline and gasoil, dealers said. "Dealers are very upset because we also run our business on credit, and some dealers sell fuel to the clients, such as government departments and transporters, on a credit basis," said Ajay Bansal, President of All India Petroleum Dealers Association, which represents about 92,000 fuel stations in the country.

loaded at Mundra and the remaining 26,000 MT to be discharged at Mangaluru.

Both vessels were transporting critical LPG supplies to India following an unusually hazardous passage through the Strait of Hormuz, where maritime traffic has been dis-

rupted by the ongoing conflict involving Iran, the US and Israel.

However, While Nanda Devi and Shivalik have arrived, another ship, 'Jag Laadki', carrying nearly 81,000 tonnes of crude oil from the UAE, is en route to India.

VRR auction: RBI injects ₹48,014cr in banking system

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 17: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Tuesday injected Rs 48,014 crore in transient liquidity into the banking system through a seven-day variable rate repo (VRR) auction.

These funds were infused at a cut-off rate and weighted average rate of 5.26 per cent, according to the RBI's release.

The liquidity injected was much lower than the notified amount of Rs 1.50 lakh crore, despite the sharp drop in the surplus liquidity in the banking system on account of advance tax payments.

Under the VRR auction, the central bank auctions funds at variable interest rates for a short period, allowing banks to bid for a certain amount.

Liquidity in the banking system is expected to tighten further after the outflows towards payment of goods and services tax (GST), scheduled later this week.

Currently, liquidity in the banking system is estimated to be in a surplus of around Rs 75,483.63 crore as of March 16, which is sharply down from Rs 2.08 lakh crore as of March 15, before the advance tax payouts.

RBI has infused Rs 3.50 lakh crore of durable liquidity into the banking system through open market purchase (OMO) of government securities since January 2026.

In the last few months, the RBI has been infusing liquidity into the banking system to keep overnight rates under control.

This has led overnight rates to hover sharply below the repo rate.

Hard Rock Cafe shuts 10 outlets as India operator says 'we remain open'

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 17: Hard Rock International has terminated its agreements with JSM Corporation and related entities, bringing an end to the operation of Hard Rock Cafes and Rock Shops in India with immediate effect.

The development will lead to the closure of 10 cafe outlets across cities including Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, New Delhi and Pune.

JSM Group, the Indian partner of Hard Rock International, Tuesday termed as 'unilateral and illegal' the step by Florida-based hospitality giant to terminate franchise agreements and the closure of ten Hard Rock Cafes in India.

The Hard Rock Group's unilateral claims in this regard are outside of the contractual framework and unsupported by a court order and Hard Rock Cafes in India will continue to operate as usual pending any binding order of a court of appropriate jurisdiction to the contrary, JSM Group said in a statement.

Expressing "deep shock", the group - Hard Rock Cafe International SPC (Inc)'s Indian partner of over 22 years - termed as "unilateral, illegal and entirely misconceived", the "announcement made across news platforms regarding alleged closure of Hard Rock Cafes in India".

Vedanta Aluminium scores big at safety awards



Bhubaneswar: Vedanta Aluminium, India's largest producer of aluminium, has reinforced its safety leadership at the Annual Mines Safety Fortnight (AMSF) Awards held in Sambalpur. Jamkhani Coal Mines secured the Overall Best Mine Award and also won first prize in the Contractor (MDO) category. Additionally, it bagged first place in the Safety Management Plan and Mine Lighting and Illumination Scheme categories.

Organised under the aegis of the Directorate General of Mines Safety (DGMS), the awards recognise excellence and commitment to the highest standards of mine safety across the region. The awards were received by Vivek Uplanchiwar, Chief Operating Officer, Jamkhani Coal Mines, Vedanta Aluminium, along with the Jamkhani team and the MDO partner.

A key highlight was the comprehensive safety inspection conducted by an

external AMSF team comprising ten subject experts, including an Internal Safety Organisation (ISO) observer and senior officials from Mahanadi Coalfields Limited. The evaluation assessed safety systems, operational practices, and workforce engagement across multiple parameters.

Commenting on the achievement, Rajiv Kumar, CEO, Vedanta Aluminium, said, "I congratulate the Jamkhani Coal Mine team and the MDO partner for securing these prestigious recognitions at the Annual Mines Safety Fortnight Awards. Safety is a core value at Vedanta Aluminium, and our Zero Harm philosophy is about instilling behavioural change and empowering every individual to make safety a personal responsibility. These awards reflect the team's strong commitment to disciplined operations, proactive safety practices, and continuous improvement."

CII to host first edition of OMCE 2026



Bhubaneswar: The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) is set to organise the first edition of the Odisha Mining and Construction Equipment Expo (OMCE) 2026, a dedicated industry platform for the mining and construction equipment sectors in Eastern India. The three-day event will be held from 19-21 March 2026 at Biju Patnaik Ground, Baramunda, Bhubaneswar.

OMCE 2026 aims to bring together leading manufacturers, technology providers, contractors, infrastructure developers, policymakers, and key industry stakeholders to showcase the latest innovations and technological advancements shaping the mining and infrastructure ecosystem.

The event is being organised with the support of the Government of Odisha as the host state, while the Indian Construction Equipment Manufacturers'

Association (ICEMA) serves as the Sector Partner. The Expo is also supported by prominent industry bodies including the Eastern Zone Mining Association, Mining Engineers' Association of India, Builders Association of India, and the CII Mining and Construction Equipment Division.

In addition, Odisha Metal Expo 2026 will be held as a co-located show alongside OMCE 2026, further strengthening the platform by bringing together stakeholders from the metals and allied industries, and enabling greater cross-sector collaboration across mining, metals, and infrastructure value chains. OMCE 2026 will feature an impressive line-up of global and Indian equipment manufacturers presenting cutting-edge machinery, technologies, and solutions designed for modern mining and infrastructure development.

India's services sector likely to grow to \$6 trillion by 2035

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, March 17: India's services sector, now contributing about \$2.2 trillion to gross domestic product (GDP), is expected to grow to about \$6 trillion by 2035, implying a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of about 10.6 per cent, a report said Tuesday.

The huge surge will increase services' share of GDP to nearly 60 per cent while it currently accounts for about 55 per cent of GDP, the report from Omnisense Capital said.

The report highlighted the growing dominance of India's

services sector "as the country progresses toward becoming a \$10 trillion economy by 2035, translating into a roughly \$6 trillion economic opportunity."

The report highlighted the services sector as the largest and fastest-growing component of India's Gross Value Added, delivering a 10-year CAGR of over 10 per cent and 3-year CAGR of 13.5 per cent, higher than other economic segments.

Within services, financial, real estate and business services led growth with a 10 year CAGR of 11.3 per cent and three year growth of 14 per cent. Similarly, public administration,



defence and other services have maintained consistent double-digit growth, reflecting sustained government spending.

India's Services PMI has shifted into a higher expansionary range, rising from roughly 50-55 between 2015-2020 to about 55-60 in recent years, indicating stronger and sustained growth in service activity.

India's share of global services exports rose from 1.9 per cent in 2005 to 4.3 per cent in 2023.

The firm highlighted banks funding India's capex cycle,

logistics scaling toward a roughly \$1 trillion opportunity by 2035, IT services retaining long-term structural strength despite near-term pressures, as well as professional and commercial services benefiting from rising formalisation and digitalisation of business services.

India's listed universe offers a broad and diversified opportunity set across services industries, with over 470 listed services companies above market-cap more than Rs 800 crore with a combined market capitalisation of nearly Rs 197 trillion, it noted.

Teen Inaara makes waves in global Dressage

15-year-old prodigy secures top global rankings at FEI World Dressage Challenge 2025

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Mumbai, March 17: The Federation Equestre Internationale (FEI) has officially declared its rankings for the FEI World Dressage Challenge (WDC) 2025, with India's young equestrian talent, Inaara Mehta Luthria, delivering an exceptional performance on the global stage.

Representing the Amateur Riders' Club, Mumbai, the 15-year-old rider competed astride her horse, Dasha Deluxe, achieving an impressive score of 69.875% in the Youth Category (12-16 years). Inaara secured the No 1 rank in India, No 1 in FEI Zone 9 (comprising India, Singapore, Philippines, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and China), and an outstanding No

6 rank in the world. Inaara was also selected to represent Team India alongside Gaurav Pundir, Miraya R Dadabhoj, and Samanna Everaa T. The team delivered a commendable performance, securing the No 1 position in FEI Zone 9 and ranking No 7 globally.

The FEI World Dressage Challenge is a unique global initiative designed to promote dressage worldwide.

Under this format, international judges travel across participating countries throughout the year to evaluate riders locally, ensuring a fair and consistent standard of judging while eliminating the need for horses and riders to travel internationally. In 2024, India was judged by Natalia Rubashko from Belarus.

Inaara Mehta Luthria is a student of Hillspring International School. Reflecting on her achievement, she said, "I am extremely grateful to my parents and my coach, Hriday Chheda, who have continuously supported me and helped me through this journey. My



horse, Dasha Deluxe and I have formed a strong bond which

truly enriched my experience and made it successful."

Inaara secured the No 1 rank in India, No 1 in FEI Zone 9 (comprising India, Singapore, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and China), and an outstanding No 6 rank in the world

This remarkable achievement highlights the growing prominence of Indian equestrian talent on the global stage and underscores the country's continued progress in the sport.

Established in 1942, The Amateur Riders' Club (ARC) is one of the oldest and largest private civilian horse-riding clubs in Mahalaxmi Race Course, Mumbai, India, offering riding throughout the year to members as well as non-members.

Batting fireworks in OCA League

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 17: The OCA League day 2 witnessed an exciting round of matches, with teams delivering strong performances and closely fought contests across venues in Odisha.

Sahid Sporting Club secured a convincing 97-run victory over Union Sporting Club at Ravenshaw-I Ground. They posted a solid total of 270 in 50 overs, powered by Apoorv V Wankhede's 76 and Om T Munde's 72. In reply, Union Sporting Club were bowled out for 173 in 31 overs despite Akshat Pandey's aggressive 80. Om T Munde's all-round performance earned him the Player of the Match award.

At Driems Ground, Jagatpur Athletic Association chased down a challenging target of 290 against LIC Sports Club in a thrilling finish. Jogeswar Bagled the charge with an unbeaten 59,



supported by Shaikh Ajaruddin (55) and Aditya Chaudhary (52), sealing a three-wicket win. Bag was named Player of the Match for his all-round contribution.

Biswa Bharati Cricket Club defeated Amateur Club by six wickets, comfortably chasing 140 after restricting their opponents to 139, with Deepanshu Singh starring with the ball. In another match, Sunshine Club dominated Rovers Athletic Club, scoring 322/6 and winning by 69 runs, thanks to Debabrata Pradhan's 127.

The matches highlighted strong batting displays, disciplined bowling, and emerging talent in the tournament.

Odisha gears up for Nat'l Para Athletics

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 17: The Paralympic Committee of India, in collaboration with the Sports & Youth Services Department, Government of Odisha, and the Para Sports Association of Odisha, announced the 24th National Para Athletics Championship 2026 will be held at the Kalinga Stadium here, from March 18 to 21.

This prestigious championship reflects the state's unwavering commitment to promoting a strong and inclusive sports culture.

The grand opening ceremony will commence March 18 at 4:00 PM at the Kalinga Stadium. Minister for Sports and Youth Services, Shri Suryabanshi Suraj will inaugurate the championship.

Mr Satyanarayana, Chairman, Para Athletics, PCI, stated that the championship will witness participation from approximately 1,460 para-athletes representing 28 states in a total of 145 medal events, along with teams from the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Services Sports Control Board (SSCB). The Events will be conducted in both morning and evening sessions. The competition will be held from March 19 to 21, with morning sessions scheduled from 9 am to 11 am and evening sessions from 4 pm to 8 pm.

A strong contingent of 40 athletes from the host state of Odisha will be participating in the Championship, which is led by Ms Suchitra Parida, National record holder in the P55 Javelin throw event. Haryana is the largest contingent in this championship. They are the defending champions of the 23rd National Para Athletics Championship held in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.



The event will feature several distinguished Paralympic medallists, Arjuna Awardees, Asian Games medallists, and World Championship medallists, including Mariyappan Thangavelu (Gold - Rio 2016, Silver - Tokyo 2020, Bronze - Paris 2024), Sumit Antil (F64) (Tokyo 2020, Paris 2024), Navdeep Singh (F41)(Gold Medallist - Paris 2024 Paralympic Games), Praveen Kumar (T64) (Silver - Tokyo 2020, Gold - Paris 2024), Preethi Pal, Praveen Kumar, Shailesh Kumar, Rakeshbhai Bhatt, Rohit Kumar, Devendra Singh Gurjar, Poonam, Lakshmi, Jayanti Behera (Asian Para Games Medallist), Yogesh Kathuniya, Dharambir (Gold Medallist), and Pranav Soorma and others.

The Government of Odisha has extended maximum logistical and financial support in organising the championship. The championship will serve as a platform for elite performers, emerging talents, and promising young athletes, celebrating determination, perseverance, and sporting excellence. It will also play a crucial role in selecting probable's for the upcoming Asian Para Games (Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, October 18-24, 2026 and various international Competitions.

Speaking on the occasion, he emphasised that this Championship is focused on identifying and nurturing rural talents and

promoting para sports in the country, preparing them for top podium finishes at national and international competitions. National Coaching camps will be conducted for focused training and development of the athletes who are probable's for qualifying for the upcoming Asian Games and Commonwealth Games.

Para sports in India have witnessed remarkable growth—from a single medal at the London 2012 Paralympics to an impressive haul of 29 medals at the Paris 2024 Paralympics. "Para sports are growing at an unprecedented pace, and our athletes are determined to strengthen India's global standing," he said. He credited this progress to the continued support of the Government of India and the Sports Authority of India. The long-term vision includes preparing athletes for the LA 2028 Paralympics and the 2030 Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad, ensuring sustained excellence on the global stage.

The press conference was attended by B K Swain, OAS, Additional Secretary of the Sports and Youth Services Department, Odisha; Kamala Kanta Ratha, President, Para Sports Association of Odisha; Satyanarayana, Chairman of Para Athletics, PCI; Jayanti Behera, Para Asian Games medalist; and Markanda Reddy, Paralympian.

ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIPS

Meenakshi shocks Panghal, seals India spot

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 17: Overcoming "self doubts", Meenakshi Goyat shocked Antim Panghal to book her place in the Indian women's team for the next month's Asian Championships, handing the two-time World Championship medallist a rare defeat at home.

Having lost to Antim three times in the trials before, Meenakshi put up a display of solid defence, eking out an impressive 'win by fall' after leading 6-2 against the Asian Games bronze medal winner, who has literally owned the 53kg weight category since departure of iconic Vinesh Phogat.

Meenakshi dominated Antim



Panghal with tight headlocks, neutralising her aggressive style. She denied an early double-leg attack, executed key takedowns, and led 6-2 in the

It's really fun winning the trials. I am enjoying the moment

MEENAKSHI GOYAT

second period. With seconds left, Meenakshi pinned the three-time Asian medallist. The 25-year-old, a two-time national champion training in Sonapat, has now established herself strongly in the 53kg category.

"I could play my game today. I would lose to big names in the past despite well-prepared but this time I didn't let it slip. I always had these doubts in mind about my own capabilities but I have overcome that mental block. She (Antim) also made mistakes and I cashed in on,"

said Meenakshi, the daughter of a farmer from Jind.

The chirpy wrestler said how she spent the night before with positive affirmations.

The Asian Championships are slated to be held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan from April 6 to 11.

Also putting up an impressive show was Neelam who claimed her spot in the Indian team in the 50kg weight class.

Neelam's suplex throw which she effected against Shivani during her 7-3 win was easily the 'move of the day'. Neelam got a grip of Shivani's waist, arched backward, lifted her landed her on their back.

Neelam outclassed Priyanshi in the final, winning by technical superiority.

FIFA WORLD CUP

Uncertainty grows as Iran eyes venue change

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, March 17: Iran's participation in the FIFA World Cup 2026 is uncertain as the country's football federation are in talks with FIFA to move its scheduled matches in the United States to Mexico due to rising security concerns.

Iranian football president Mehdi Taj confirmed this development. He stated that safety assurances are a major issue. "When [US President Donald] Trump has said he cannot ensure the security of the Iranian national team, we will certainly not travel to America," Taj said in a post shared via the Iranian embassy in Mexico's X account. "We are negotiating with FIFA to hold Iran's World Cup matches in Mexico."

These concerns arise from the ongoing conflict following the US-Israel airstrikes on Iran in 2026, which started in late February and has heightened regional tensions. Iran's sports minister



previously indicated the seriousness of the situation, mentioning that the national team might not be able to take part in the tournament as planned.

Earlier, US President Donald Trump stated that Iran would be allowed to participate but recognized the sensitivity of the matter. He said the team is welcome but suggested it might not be suitable for them to play

in the United States "for their own life and safety."

Iran had easily qualified for the expanded 48-team tournament co-hosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada. They became the first Asian team to secure their spot March 25, 2025. According to the current schedule, they are set to play two group matches in Los Angeles and one in Seattle.

However, the worsening geopolitical situation raises the possibility of a dramatic withdrawal. This would be unprecedented in the modern era of the World Cup and could require FIFA to make a last-minute replacement decision.

For now, the Asian Football Confederation has said it has not received any official communication about a withdrawal. It added that the Iranian federation has confirmed its intention to participate, although the rapidly changing situation continues to create uncertainty about their final decision.

IPL

Blow to KKR: Knee injury sidelines Rana

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 17: Kolkata Knight Riders pacer Harshit Rana is likely to miss a significant part of the upcoming IPL as he continues to recover from a knee surgery he underwent last month.

According to a report by 'ESPNCricinfo', the BCCI is yet to fix a timeline for his return.

Rana, who sustained a ligament strain in his right knee injury during India's T20 World Cup warm-up match against South Africa, is currently undergoing rehabilitation, with "no firm date of return earmarked by the BCCI medical team yet".

The pacer had pulled up after delivering just one over in that game and was subsequently ruled out of the T20 World Cup following surgery. He was replaced by Mohammed Siraj, who played one match (against the USA) during India's title-winning campaign.

Hockey World Cup: India, Pak together

Mumbai: Traditional rivals India and Pakistan have been grouped in the same Pool D for the Men's FIH Hockey World Cup 2026 and will play their matches in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, in the event jointly hosted by Belgium and the Netherlands. Matches will be played in Amsterdam and Wavre (Belgium) from August 15 to 30, 2026. England and Wales are the other teams in Pool D in the 16-team draw in which teams have been divided in four groups of four each. It's a tough draw for India as they will have to top England and Pakistan to bag the direct spot in the quarterfinals, while the second and third placed teams in each ground will participate in the Cross-Over matches to clinch their berths in the top-eight stage. In the Women's FIH World Cup, which will be held on the same dates by Belgium and the Netherlands, Indian women will again face England, along with Asian champions China, and African champions South Africa in Pool D. The draw threw up the most interesting match-up of the Men's World Cup, with the 1975 winner India placed in the same Pool with traditional rivals and four-time champions Pakistan. This will be the first time that India and Pakistan will be meeting in the first round of the Hockey World Cup since the 2010 edition in New Delhi. India had defeated Pakistan 4-1 at the Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium. The full match schedule for both the men's and women's World Cup will be Wednesday (March 18).



Men	Women
Pool A: Netherlands, Argentina, New Zealand, Japan (Will play in the Netherlands)	Pool A: Netherlands, Australia, Chile, Japan (will play in the Netherlands)
Pool B: Belgium, Germany, France, Malaysia (Belgium)	Pool B: Argentina, Germany, USA, Scotland (Belgium)
Pool C: Australia, Spain, Ireland, South Africa (Belgium)	Pool C: Belgium, Spain, New Zealand, Ireland (Belgium)
Pool D: England, India, Pakistan, Wales (Netherlands)	Pool D: China, England, India, South Africa (Netherlands)

POOL TOPPERS

Odisha teams storm into QFs

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 17: Day 3 of the 26th Youth National Volleyball Championship 2025-26 (men & women) at the Biju Patnaik Multipurpose Indoor Stadium, KIIT Deemed to be University, witnessed a spectacular display of skill, confidence, and teamwork by the Odisha contingent, as both the men's and women's teams topped their respective pools and stormed into the quarterfinals.

The Odisha men's team continued their impressive run in the championship with two convincing victories, showcasing dominance in both attack and defense. In their first match, Odisha delivered a clinical performance against Chhattisgarh, completely outplaying their opponents in straight sets (3-0).

In the next match against Andhra Pradesh, Odisha faced a tougher challenge. After taking the first two sets, they momentarily lost momentum in



the third set but bounced back strongly to clinch the fourth set in a nail-biting finish (3-1). With these victories, the Odisha men's team remained unbeaten in their pool, displaying consistency and confidence as they advanced to the quarterfinals. In the Women's Section, the Odisha women's team showcased equal brilliance and determination. Their day began with a strong comeback victory against West Bengal.

After dropping the first set, Odisha displayed remarkable resilience, dominating the next three sets with controlled aggression and superior coordination

(3-1). Continuing their winning momentum, Odisha registered another commanding victory against Himachal Pradesh (3-0).

The Odisha Women's Team also remained undefeated in their pool, securing the top position and booking their place in the quarterfinals.

On this occasion, Achyuta Samanta, Chief Patron of the Volleyball Federation of India, Founder of KIIT, KISS & KIMS, and President of the Odisha Volleyball Association, congratulated both the Odisha Men's and Women's Volleyball Teams for their outstanding performances.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

English teams seek home turf revival

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London, March 17: English teams are playing this week to avoid a wipeout in the Champions League round of 16, with the reputation of the Premier League at stake.

All six English clubs - a record entry for any country in the competition - failed to win a first-leg game last week and only Premier League leader Arsenal is now clearly favored to advance.

Arsenal hosts Bayer Leverkusen Tuesday with the teams tied 1-1 and shapes as the most likely to represent Europe's richest league in the quarterfinals.

A hat trick of three-goal losses - albeit all on the road against high-class opponents - had many commentators using a famous saying credited to Michel Platini about the tiring



English season.

On Tuesday, Manchester City will start 3-0 down at home to Real Madrid and Chelsea faces a 5-2 deficit against defending champion Paris Saint-Germain.

Tottenham trails 5-2 at home to Atletico Madrid Wednesday, when Liverpool will hope the aura of its Anfield home can help overcome a 1-0 loss in the first leg at Galatasaray. Newcastle goes to Barcelona tied at 1-1.

In the two games without an English team, the remarkable Norwegian underdog Bodø/Glimt takes a 3-0 lead to Sporting Lisbon Tuesday and Bayern Munich is up 6-1 hosting Atalanta Wednesday.