



Nora's assurance
Actor Nora Fatehi, reacting to backlash over her latest song, says she'll be more vigilant in picking projects
LEISURE | P2



Pak-Afghan conflict
Pakistan announces 'temporary pause' in operation against Afghan Taliban in view of Eid and at the request of several countries
INTERNATIONAL | P10



Wealth rises
Equity investors' wealth surges by ₹9.18 lakh crore in three days of market rebound amid recovery in global benchmark indices
BUSINESS | P11



AFCON controversy
Morocco awarded the Africa Cup of Nations title by CAF who overturned Senegal's victory in a chaotic final in January
SPORTS | P12

17 KILLED IN DELHI, INDORE BLAZES

SCB FIRE
CM suspends 4 for negligence



DAY OF DEADLY FIRES Rescue operations underway after a fire broke out in a residential building near Palam Metro Station, in New Delhi, Wednesday. Ten persons lost their lives in the blaze



Police personnel gather near the wreckage of an electric car after a fire broke out in a house and claimed seven lives, in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, Wednesday

DEADLY FIRES Rescue operations underway after a fire broke out in a residential building near Palam Metro Station, in New Delhi, Wednesday. Ten persons lost their lives in the blaze

cue those trapped, ordered probes into the incidents and announced financial compensation for the victims. In the national capital, nine members of a family, including three children and a 70-year-old woman, were killed after a massive fire tore through a multi-storey residential-cum-commercial building in southwest Delhi's Palam area.

Around 30 fire tenders and 11 ambulances were pressed into service, along with personnel from the police, BSES, Air Force Police and the NDRF, as part of a massive firefighting and rescue operation. Visuals from the scene showed thick plumes of black smoke billowing out of the building and rising into the sky, with flames engulfing parts of the structure as firefighters battled the blaze in the congested market area. The fire was doused around 2.20pm, and a cooling operation began after that. In Madhya Pradesh's In-

dores, eight members of a family were killed after a fire broke out at a local businessman's three-storey house following an explosion at an Electric Vehicle (EV) charging point outside the building. Police said a car being charged outside the house caught fire after the explosion, and the flames spread rapidly to the building. Investigators said they found clues of 10 to 11 LPG cylinders stored at the house located in Brajeshwari Annex Colony, and explosions of some of these gas containers intensified the blaze that broke out around 4am. Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed deep sorrow over the two fire incidents and announced an ex gratia of ₹2 lakh from the PMNRF for the next of kin of each deceased.

SCB FIRE
CM suspends 4 for negligence

Bhubaneswar, March 18: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Wednesday suspended four officers for dereliction of duty, two days after a fire at SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack killed 12 patients, officials said. The suspended officials include three personnel of Odisha Fire Service and one from the electrical department. Preliminary investigations suggest the fire may have been caused by a short circuit in the air-conditioners. "In the wake of the horrific fire incident at the SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack, which resulted in the loss of many lives, Majhi has taken strong action by placing four officers under suspension," the CMO said. The suspended officers are deputy fire officer Prakash Kumar Jena, assistant fire officer Sanjib Kumar Bhera (both Cuttack circle), station officer of SCB Abhinav Prusty, and assistant executive engineer of SCB sub-division under Cuttack GED, Ranjan Kumar Biswal. Meanwhile, another fire was reported at non-trauma care casualty unit Wednesday. **P3**

RUPEE IN FREE FALL

Mumbai: The rupee slumped 49 paise to close at a record low of 92.89 against the US dollar Wednesday, weighed down by a stronger greenback and sustained FII outflows. Elevated crude oil prices in global markets amid intensifying conflict in West Asia further dampened sentiments, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 92.42 against the greenback and traded in the range of 92.41-92.89 before closing at its record low of 92.89, sharply down by 49 paise from its previous close.

MIDEAST ON BOIL

Iranian intelligence minister dead: Israel

BOTH SIDES ATTACK ENERGY FACILITIES

Dubai, March 18: Israel kept up its campaign of targeting Iran's leaders Wednesday, killing the country's intelligence minister, and an Iranian offshore natural gas field was struck in a sign of the war's mounting pressure from both sides - on the region's economic lifeblood: energy. Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said Iranian Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib had been killed in an overnight strike and promised "significant surprises" to come. Iran retaliated by unleashing attacks against its Persian Gulf neighbours and Israel, where two people were killed near Tel Aviv. Three private aircraft at Ben Gurion International Airport were damaged in recent days by shrapnel after missiles fired from Iran were intercepted, according to Israel's airports authority. Iranian state television confirmed the killing of Khatib, who the US sanctioned in 2022 for alleged cyber-related activities against the US and its allies. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian calling Khatib's killing "an unfair assassination." On Tuesday, Israel killed top Iranian security official Ali Larjani and the head of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard's Basij force, Gen. Gholam Reza Soleimani. **P10**



Vig nabs banker for ₹5.5cr fraud

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhadrak, March 18: Vigilance sleuths Wednesday arrested the branch head of Jana Small Finance Bank here for his involvement in misappropriation of pensioners' funds worth more than ₹5.56 crore. The accused was identified as Matruprasad Mohanty, branch head of the scheduled commercial bank in Bhadrak. The funds sanctioned for the office of the Korei block education officer (BEO) in Jajpur district resulted in misappropriation of ₹5,56,11,495 by Mohanty. Vigilance probe revealed a sophisticated nexus between the accused and his father Pradip Kumar Mohanty, a retired headmaster, who has been reappointed at the BEO office. Pradip hacked the Human Resource Management System (HRMS) at the office and targeted the IDs of 13 retired teachers, all pensioners. He manipulated records to show these retirees as "active in service" and prepared monthly pension bills in their names.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Global leaders urged our PM to lead the path to peace by asking our media to be a little more responsible

'Sarke Chunar' ire spills over to Parl

Govt says song banned; NHRC notice to Information and Broadcasting Ministry, CBFC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi/Mumbai, March 18: The controversy over 'Sarke Chunar' and its sexually explicit lyrics spilled over from angry discussions on social media platforms and elsewhere to Parliament Wednesday with the government saying the song from the upcoming film "KD The Devil" has already been banned. Actor Nora Fatehi, who features in the video along with Sanjay Dutt, distanced herself from the gathering storm, saying she had flagged the vulgarity of the Hindi version to the filmmakers. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) issued notice to the Information and Broadcasting Ministry and the Cen-

sor Board, which in turn said it had nothing to do with the matter since the song was released on YouTube. As the issue gathered traction, Samajwadi Party (SP) MP Anand Bhadoria brought it up in the Lok Sabha during Question Hour. Unchecked content on OTT platforms and social media was a bad influence, he said. Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said in his response that the song has already been banned. "A ban has been imposed on the song. The framers of Constitution placed certain reasonable restrictions, and we should function within those limits. Freedom of speech cannot be absolute, it has to be in the context of the society and culture," Vaishnav said. "The way things are spreading rapidly today through digital medium, for the protection of the society, especially for the protection of children, women and deprived groups of the society, whatever hard actions should be taken, the government is ready to take them," he added. The song was released on YouTube two days ago and quickly went viral for its shock value and lyrics that almost describe a sexual act, triggering outrage on social media. The video disappeared from the platform after the uproar. "KD The Devil" is a Kannada film, dubbed in four languages, including Hindi. It will release April 30. **P2**

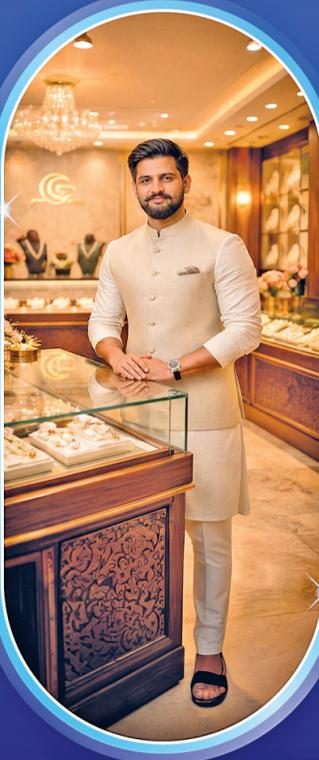




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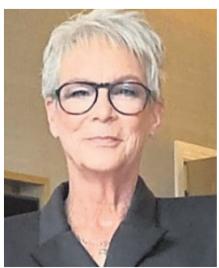


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leisure



JAMIE LEE NOT FOND OF HORROR GENRE

Hollywood actress Jamie Lee Curtis isn't really fond of horror movies. The 67-year-old actress established herself as a scream queen with her portrayal of Laurie Strode in the *Halloween* franchise. However, the actress has said that personally, the horror genre is not her thing, reports Female First UK.

TIA MOWRY FINDS LOVE THREE YEARS AFTER MARRIAGE ENDED

American actress Tia Mowry is in love again, three years after her marriage ended. However, the *Sister, Sister* actress didn't share any details about her new relationship but admitted she is very happy. "I'm in love. I'm keeping this close to my heart. I'm very grateful. I'm happy," she said.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
Today people will actually drag you into altercations, so flash the peace sign if you must. You may face some sort of legal troubles from peace-loving groups. Therefore, Ganesha advises you to meditate, take a walk or just seek out the company of your near and dear ones.

TAURUS
Today, you need to take hold of your emotions. Ganesha urges you to get carried away by your feelings. Instead, you should try to maintain a practical, sensible frame of mind. Women are like to feature prominently in your life during the day. Try to be magnanimous and open hearted. That will take care the problems that could coming your way and help you end the day on a happy, cheerful note.

GEMINI
An extremely profitable and progressive day awaits you. You may come into a handsome inheritance. Your responsibilities will increase along with a possible promotion at work. However, do not let your success go to your head, says Ganesha.

CANCER
Ganesha advises you to watch your back today. However, he wants to make it clear that you may be at the receiving end of others' actions. Anyway, your cautious and watchful approach will save you from needless discomfiture.

LEO
You have to let go of your stubborn and obstinate streak. You will need to compromise according to the situation. If you do not have such an attitude, arguments and confrontations with your business partners, friends and family members are possible. You do not like delays, however you will be forced to postpone important events, says Ganesha.

VIRGO
You are quick-witted, sharp and artistic to the core, says Ganesha, so you may go ahead and enrapture people with your special abilities, perhaps at a social gathering. However, Ganesha says it would be better if you could conserve some of that enthusiasm in order to focus your attention on issues of greater importance.

LIBRA
Ganesha says you will be able to show your love and appreciation for your beloved. Small issues will crop up and keep you tensed and uncomfortable today. Just remember good days and old memories and life will seem good again. It is essential to have confidence in yourself if you want to go ahead in life and be happy.

SCORPIO
According to Ganesha, it's a good day for long term and real estate investments. It may lead to benefits and profits in long run. Sit back, relax and enjoy the pleasures of life before you miss out on them. Welcome all the opportunities with open arms.

SAGITTARIUS
The wheel of fortune turns towards you today, says Ganesha. Make a wish and it's bound to come true. However don't be over-confident when it comes to decision-making. In case of disappointments, 'this too shall pass' would be the best remedy.

CAPRICORN
Overcome with feelings, you may take decisions that may stand in the way of success. Don't let your sentiments ruin your future prospects because the damage done will be beyond repair, warns Ganesha. Today, there are also chances that your down-to-earth nature and amiable approach will win the hearts of many.

AQUARIUS
You will be on a spending spree today. But, make sure that your desire to enjoy life doesn't burn a hole in your pocket. Watch your words and steps, as people are observing your every move. You have put all of your eggs in one basket, so make sure that you don't mess up and lose everything that you have, advises Ganesha.

PISCES
Today your professional and love life will cause worry. You will want to be emotionally balanced but you may not find the time to sort things out. Long sightedness and open discussions will help resolve matters easily.



Priyanka, Alia among 'global changemakers'

Mumbai: National Geographic has unveiled its National Geographic 33 - 2026 list, a lineup of global changemakers for the year. Actors Alia Bhatt and Priyanka Chopra featured in the list as influential voices from India making a global mark. The list was revealed by National Geographic March 17. In a statement, National Geographic revealed that the list recognised 33 leaders rising to meet the most critical challenges of our time, making meaningful progress and achieving incredible breakthroughs. "These are bold thinkers and problem solvers from across the globe who believe that our world needs imaginative solutions and urgent action—and are leading the charge for change," read the statement. Alia has been recognised for using her platform to bring climate consciousness into the mainstream, championing environmental sustainability and inspiring a new generation to engage with urgent ecological issues. Priyanka has been acknowledged for her continued advocacy in healthcare accessibility, using her global influence to spotlight critical issues such as diabetes and drive meaningful social awareness. Some of the other names on the list include Harrison Ford, Russell Westbrook, Shailene Woodley, Ewan McGregor, and Idris Elba, each contributing to change in their own way. AGENCIES

SONG CONTROVERSY

Nora breaks silence on backlash



Mumbai: Actress Nora Fatehi, who is at the centre of the controversy surrounding her song *Sarke Chunar Teri Sarke* from *KD: The Devil*, has reacted to the issue, and has ensured that she will be more careful and vigilant in picking and executing projects going forward. On Wednesday, the actress took to her Instagram, and shared a video of herself talking to the camera. She said, "I just want to come on here to discuss this controversy regarding the song. One, I shot this song three years ago in Kannada. I said yes to it because it was a part of a big film it was with a big icon Sanjay Dutt. I don't understand Kannada so I'm just relying with whatever they're telling me". The actress added that the makers have created a Hindi version of the song, and she agrees that dubbing the song in Hindi and having those lyrics are very inappropriate. She went on, "I had no idea about that. They didn't take any approvals they didn't take any permission from me." She continued, "I knew there will be issues because at least I understand Hindi. So, I disassociated myself with the project as you can see, I didn't promote it at all. I again flagged it to the director I said my image and reputation on the line." "On that note I will be more strict moving forward", she added.

Divya on living life on her terms

Mumbai: Actress Divya Dutta, known for her outspokenness and calling spade a spade, has opened up about the idea of being single. In an exclusive conversation with this agency, Divya expressed her opinion by saying that not just a woman's but anybody's life choices cannot be generalised. The actress, who has always lived her life on her own terms, was asked whether staying single in today's world is difficult and whether society still believes a woman is "complete" only through marriage or motherhood. Responding candidly yet firmly, Dutta said, "Even if I had a partner, even if I am single, I enjoy my life and that's what matters. Whatever works for you is great. So this works for me. I am happy about it." She further added that people should not judge someone's life choices. "If somebody's got a great partner, it works for them. If somebody doesn't have a good partner, maybe they need to do something that they feel is right about it." IANS



Trade predicts 'Dhurandhar 2' to shatter records

Mumbai: With hours to go for the release of *Dhurandhar: The Revenge*, the buzz around the Ranveer Singh starrer has reached unprecedented levels. Trade experts are betting big on the film's box office prospects, with Kamal Gianchandani expressing strong confidence in its opening numbers. "I hope it breaks the record of *Dhurandhar* one and becomes the first Hindi film to cross Rs 1,000 crore nett. The dubbed versions will be an added advantage," he told this agency. Trade analyst Taran Adarsh didn't hold back while describing the craze around the film. "In the past, I've seen this kind of craze for Sholay and Baahubali 2. Now this film has caught the attention of one and all—not just in India but overseas as well. This is a toofan, a tsunami—how do you handle a tsunami?" he said. In a rare move, theatres in Mumbai, Pune and Ahmedabad have opened post-midnight and early-morning shows ahead of the film's March 19 release. Some cinemas have scheduled screenings as early as 2:15 am. Even Mumbai's iconic Maratha Mandir has tweaked its long-standing schedule, shifting its daily screening of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* to accommodate multiple shows of the sequel. Filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma echoed the sentiment, saying, "In Indian cinematic history, no film is being awaited more eagerly than *Dhurandhar 2*. I wouldn't be surprised if it earns over Rs 120 crore in a single day."

PEANUTS



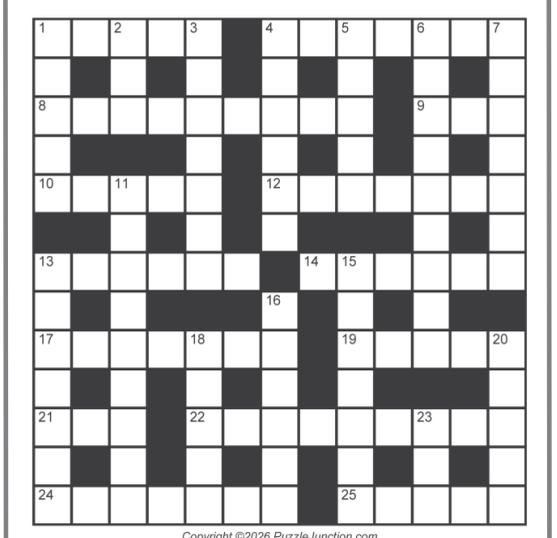
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



FUN POST CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Picture cards
 - 4 Quandy
 - 8 Garden tool (4,5)
 - 9 Stadium cheer
 - 10 Lilac, e.g.
 - 12 Svelte
 - 13 Street sign (3-3)
 - 14 Nook
 - 17 Young swans
 - 19 Dwelling
 - 21 Leave speechless
 - 22 The one next door
 - 24 One who knows the drill (5,4)
 - 25 Track event
 - Down**
 - 1 Oasts
 - 2 Just out
 - 3 Indonesian island
 - 4 Dilly-dally
 - 5 Fisherman's collection
 - 6 He explored Asia in the 13th century (5,4)
 - 7 Succeed
 - 11 Coniferous tree
 - 13 Apple growing site
 - 15 Cowhide
 - 16 Help out
 - 18 The blabs
 - 20 Kind of bird?
 - 23 Salad topper

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.

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

SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD

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

SUDOKU

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

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

History-sheeter hurt in police encounter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Sambalpur, March 18: A man, booked in more than 40 criminal cases, was Wednesday injured in an encounter with police in Sambalpur district, an official statement said.

The exchange of fire occurred in Dumchhali forest under Rairakhol Police Station at around 5:45am when a police team reached the area and was challenged by the man and his associates.

The criminals started firing, targeting the police party, when they were trying to flee the spot, and the police personnel retaliated, the statement said.

In self-defence, the police team retaliated with controlled firing, during which the accused sustained gunshot wounds on his right leg, the statement said.

The man and his three associates were arrested during the operation, it said.

The accused, identified as Tima alias Dhaneswar Jhankar, is undergoing treatment at a hospital.

He was hiding in the dense forest for some time and did not use a mobile phone to avoid detection.

He was involved in 41 criminal cases, including robbery, offences under the Arms Act, and aluminium wire theft, the police said in the statement.

The police team seized a pistol along with live ammunition, a vehicle and tools used for cutting power transmission wires.



FOR A CAUSE: Police stop members of All India Forum for Equity during a march to Raj Bhavan in support of the University Grants Commission's newly notified anti-discrimination regulations, in Patna, Wednesday

Census house listing in state from April 16

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 18: The first phase of the Census house listing operations will begin across all districts of Odisha from April 16 and continue till May 15, a top official said Wednesday.

Addressing a press conference here, Director of Census Operations in Odisha, Nikhil Pawan Kalyan, said over 1 lakh trained enumerators and 17,282 supervisors will visit households and collect data during the period.

"They will ask 33 questions prepared by the Ministry of Home Affairs to the head of each household, including residential, non-residential, jails and malls," he said.

"Persons residing in any place in Odisha, whether from the state or other states, will be enumerated. Not a single household will be left out during the Census," Kalyan added.

He said the operation will be conducted through field visits using a mobile application.

Prior to this, a self-enumeration provision will be available online from April 1 to midnight of April 15, allowing citizens to submit their information themselves, he said.

Renowned sand artist and Padma Shri awardee Sudarshan Pattanaik has given his consent to be the brand ambassador for the promotion and outreach of this Census programme, he informed.

Cybercrimes against women on the rise

PTI & AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 18: There has been a steady rise in cybercrime incidents against women since 2023, according to data from the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP) presented in the Rajya Sabha Wednesday.

In a written reply, Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar said the complaints include cases related to sexually obscene material, sexually explicit acts, rape or gang rape-related sexually abusive content and child sexual abuse material reported online.

Sharing year-wise figures of the number of cybercrime incidents related to crimes against women reported on the NCRP in the last five years, the minister said the number of such complaints stood at 52,048 in 2021, 62,224 in 2022, 40,066 in 2023, 48,335 in 2024 and 76,657 in 2025.

The data showed that complaints related to sexually obscene material were the highest in 2025 at 37,743, followed by sexually explicit acts at 19,703, rape or gang rape-related sexually abusive content at 8,780 and child sexual abuse material at 10,431.

The minister also gave details of incidents reported under the 'online and social



Complaints under 'online and social media related crime' category, which include offences such as cyberstalking, fake profiles and identity theft which showed a rising trend.

media related crime' category, which include offences such as cyberstalking, fake profiles and identity theft which showed a rising trend.

According to the data, complaints in this category increased from 72,301 in 2021 to 1,31,634 in 2022, 1,41,264 in 2023, 1,57,054 in 2024 and 1,73,766 in 2025.

Among these, cyberbullying, stalking or sexting accounted for 45,832 complaints in 2025, while fake or impersonating profiles accounted for 46,784 cases and profile hacking or identity theft for 34,533 cases. Cheating by impersonation accounted for 23,252 complaints during the year.

Other incidents reported in

2025 included 11,126 cases of online job fraud, 7,595 cases related to provocative speech for unlawful acts, 2,240 cases of e-mail phishing, 754 cases of impersonating e-mail, 522 cases of intimidating e-mail and 1,128 cases of online matrimonial fraud.

In the reply, Kumar said, "Police and public order are state subjects as per the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India. The states/UTs are primarily responsible for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of crimes including cybercrime against women through their law enforcement agencies."

He added that the Centre supplements the initiatives of states and UTs through advisories and financial assistance under various schemes for capacity-building of law enforcement agencies.

"To strengthen the mechanism to deal with cybercrimes, including cybercrimes against women in a comprehensive and coordinated manner, the Central government has taken steps," the minister said, listing initiatives including financial assistance of ₹132.93 crore under the Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC) scheme.

'Industry': SC verdict will apply to existing cases under 1947 Act

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: A nine-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court Wednesday said its verdict on the correctness of a 1978 judgment which gives an expansive interpretation of the term 'industry' to govern labour relations will apply to existing cases under the now-repealed Industrial Disputes (ID) Act, 1947.

On February 21, 1978, a seven-judge bench delivered a verdict on the definition of 'industry' while deciding the plea of Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board and expanded the definition which brought millions of employees in hospitals, educational institutions, clubs and government welfare departments under the protection of ID Act, 1947.

The nine-judge bench comprising CJI Surya Kant and Justices BV Nagarathna, PS Narasimha, Dipankar Datta, Ujjal Bhuyan, Satish Chandra Sharma, Joymalya Bagchi, Alok Aradhe and Vipul M Pancholi is hearing submissions on the issue of defining 'industry' under the 1947 Act.

"Whatever is going to be said now will apply to the existing cases under the old law. That is the long and short of it," Justice Nagarathna said. The observation assumes significance as some advocates have questioned the reference made to the nine-judge bench on the ground that the 1947 Act has since been repealed and instead, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, which became operative in 2025, is now in force.

SCB FIRE SINGES HOUSE

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 18: Opposition BJD and Congress members created a ruckus in the Assembly Wednesday, demanding Health and Family Welfare Minister Mukesh Mahaling's resignation over the death of 12 patients in a fire mishap at SCB Medical College and Hospital (SCBMCH) in Cuttack two days ago.

The Opposition members trooped into the Well of the House before Speaker Surama Padhy took her seat for the Question Hour.

They carried a symbolic 'body' wrapped in white cloth into the House and placed it on the reporters' table, and shouted anti-government slogans. Several MLAs displayed placards, demanding the resignation of the Health Minister.

The Speaker appealed to agitating members to maintain calm in the House.

Unable to run the House, Padhy adjourned the proceedings till 11.30 am. When the House reassembled, a similar scene was witnessed.

Several treasury bench members, comprising Babu Singh, Santosh Khatua and Manas Dutta, came down heavily on the Opposition and alleged that the BJD and Congress were politicising a tragic incident for which the government has taken immediate measures.

As the protest continued, the Speaker again adjourned the proceedings till 4 pm.

When the House remained



adjourned, BJD lawmakers, most of them clad in white clothes, were seen participating in a mock funeral procession on the Assembly premises.

Senior BJD members, such as Ranendra Pratap Swain and Arun Kumar Sahoo, were seen shouting 'Ram nam satya hai', traditionally chanted during funeral processions, and alleged that the "Health department has collapsed" in Odisha.

"This kind of procession on the Assembly premises is not acceptable. The state government has been taking steps in the hospital fire incident. Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi visited the hospital and ordered a judicial inquiry," BJP legislator Ashok Mohanty said.

Expressing concern over

the death of 12 patients in the state-run hospital, Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik said, "During the BJD regime, there was a fire at a private hospital, and the then Health minister resigned. Now, several patients have died in the hospital fire. But the government did not take any steps to make the Health minister resign. It is shocking."

The administration must take steps for the improvement of the health sector and hospitals across the state, he said.

The fire at SCB has sparked outrage across the state. The Opposition parties and family members of deceased have been demanding a thorough investigation into the circumstances that led to the fire.

'Fall in love' during spring break: Chinese varsity to students

REUTERS

Hong Kong, March 18: A Chinese university is urging students to "enjoy the flowers, fall in love" during their mid-term break, an unusual directive in a nation obsessed with getting good grades, as authorities seek new ways to spur marriages and domestic consumption.

"See the flowers and enjoy romance" is the theme for the spring holidays from April 1 to 6, the Sichuan Southwest Vocational College of Aviation said on its official Wechat account.

Tuesday's notice exhorting teachers and students to put down the books came about

two weeks after China said it would introduce spring and autumn holidays for schools, in addition to the traditional times of summer and winter.

Authorities have said they will also encourage staggered paid leave to enable workers to travel in off-peak seasons.

Provinces such as Sichuan and eastern Jiangsu, along with cities like Suzhou and Nanjing, have unveiled plans for spring breaks, most set for April or early May.

China seeks to boost domestic consumption by encouraging travel and leisure activities among its population of 1.4 billion. Authorities also hope more free time will set the stage



A couple reacts during their wedding photoshoot near the Forbidden City

for births to reverse a worrisome trajectory of decline.

In 2025, the population fell for a fourth consecutive year, as the birth rate dropped to a record low, with experts warning of further decline.

Beijing also issued a guide-

"child-friendly cities", by improving public services in areas from education and health to travel, sports and recreation. Society needs to have enough time and money to raise children, said James Liang, the co-founder of Chinese travel company Trip, who called for more such initiatives.

"Greater efforts are needed to educate young people on the social and personal benefits of raising larger families," added Liang, who is also a prominent demographic expert.

The government could establish a broader support framework by reallocating resources and boosting financial assistance, he said.

Don't levy addl charges for 60% seats in flights: DGCA to airlines

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: The government Wednesday said airlines have been asked not to levy additional charges for 60 per cent of seats from passengers in a domestic flight.

Besides, airlines have been asked to ensure that those travelling on the same PNR are seated together in a flight as part of the civil aviation ministry's efforts to strengthen passenger facilitation.

Announcing the steps Wednesday, the ministry said the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has asked airlines to make sure that at least

60 per cent of seats on any flight are allocated free of charge to ensure fair access.

At present, 20 per cent of the seats can be booked free of charge while the rest is paid, according to an airline official.

"Passengers travelling on the same PNR are to be seated together, preferably in adjacent seats," the ministry said in a release.

These directions are applicable for domestic flights, an official said.

These steps come against the backdrop of rising concerns that airlines are levying high charges for various services, including for choosing seats.

TOURIST RAPE CASE

Court awards 10-yr jail term to accused

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 18: In a significant judgment in a sensitive case involving the rape of a woman tourist in Rayagada district, an Additional District Judge Wednesday awarded rigorous punishment to the accused, underscoring the swift investigation and prosecution carried out by the police.



According to an official press note from the State Police Headquarters, the court convicted the accused under Section 64(1) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, sentencing him to 10 years of imprisonment along with a fine of Rs 10,000. The court also directed that the survivor be provided financial compensation of Rs 4 lakh.

The case was resolved within 120 days, which police described as a notable example of a fast-track investigation and timely delivery of justice.

As per case records, the incident occurred November 18, 2025, when the victim and her

husband were waiting in Rayagada while returning to Koraput. The accused allegedly approached them on the pretext of arranging accommodation and took them to Rayat Colony. Later, finding the woman alone, he sexually assaulted her.

Following the complaint lodged by the survivor, police acted promptly and arrested the accused. DGP Yogesh Bahadur Khurania congratulated the Rayagada SP, the investigating officer and the prosecution team for their coordinated efforts in ensuring swift justice.

He noted that since the implementation of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, speedy investigation, robust evidence collection and timely filing of chargesheets have significantly improved conviction rates in such cases.

Officials said the judgment reflects the police department's commitment to ensuring women's safety and delivering justice without delay.

CM, Governor discuss devpt



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 18: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Wednesday paid a courtesy visit to Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati at Lok Bhavan here, where the two held discussions on key issues related to the state's development and ongoing welfare initiatives.

During the meeting, Majhi outlined the government's efforts to ensure effective implementation of various welfare schemes and to accelerate Odisha's overall growth trajectory.

He emphasised that the Governor's guidance and support continue to serve as a source of inspiration for the administration in achieving its developmental priorities and governance goals.

Governor Kambhampati appreciated the Chief Minister's commitment to public service and his focused approach to the state's growth. The discussions also touched upon future development initiatives aimed at building a more prosperous and progressive Odisha.



MDM PROTEST: Members of the Nikhila Odisha Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Workers Association stage a demonstration at Lower PMG in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday under the Biju Sramika Samukhya (BSS) banner during the Budget Session, pressing their seven-point charter of demands. **PFI PHOTO**

Odisha DMD patients seek urgent govt aid

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 18: Members of the Odisha Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy Association (ODMDA) Wednesday submitted a letter to the Health & Family Welfare Minister Mukesh Mahaling highlighting the severe challenges faced by children with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD) and urging immediate policy interventions, including the fulfilment of key demands.

Families of affected children, who staged a demonstration at Lower PMG here, described the condition as emotionally and physically exhausting, noting that patients require constant care throughout the day. Many children are unable to attend school, play, or lead a normal life despite their willingness, resulting in social isolation and distress.



The association president Bishnu Charan Panigrahi highlighted that access to treatment remains a major challenge. Following intervention by the High Court, AIIMS-Bhubaneswar was directed to refer patients to a Centre of Excellence in Kolkata for specialised care. However, many families are unable to afford or manage travel and treatment outside the state.

Despite the presence of a national policy for rare diseases,

members alleged that poor implementation and limited support from the Central government have left treatment inaccessible for many patients.

Appealing to the state government for urgent relief, the association submitted several key demands, including the introduction of advanced gene therapy for DMD in India, particularly in Odisha, to ensure access to modern treatment; a one-time financial assistance of

Rs 1 lakh for affected children; a monthly medical allowance of Rs 15,000 for ongoing care; free genetic testing for DMD, both pre- and post-natal; and the development of AIIMS-Bhubaneswar as a dedicated treatment centre for muscular dystrophy.

Panigrahi stressed that without timely intervention, the condition deteriorates rapidly, imposing immense financial and emotional strain on families. They urged authorities to act promptly to improve access to treatment and ensure a dignified life for affected children.

Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD) is a hereditary, progressive disorder that weakens muscles, mainly affecting young boys. Children often lose mobility early and become wheelchair-dependent by 10-12 years, with basic daily activities like eating, drinking, and sitting becoming increasingly difficult.

Min inspects MLA complex progress

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 18: Law, Works and Excise Minister Prithiviraj Harichandan Wednesday reviewed the progress of the under-construction MLA residential complex in Bhubaneswar. During his site visit, he inspected the project area and directed senior officials and the executing agency to expedite the remaining work.

The government has set a target to complete the project by June 30. The residential complex, comprising six towers, will have a total of 300 flats, including 105 Type-VII and 195 Type-VI units, designed to accommodate 130 MLAs and 170 senior officials.

The project also includes provisions for a sewage treatment plant and groundwater conservation systems. Plans are underway to develop a green belt within the campus by planting large, beneficial trees to enhance the overall environment.

Additionally, discussions were held on the construction of a 50-room clubhouse to accommodate guests and provide recreational facilities.

A review meeting was later held, attended by Ekamra-Bhubaneswar MLA Babu Singh, Works department Principal Secretary Sanjay Kumar Singh, Managing Director of Odisha Bridge and Construction Corporation (OBC) Anupam Saha, along with senior officials, engineers and representatives of the contracting agency.

Annual Mines Safety Fortnight held in City



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 18: The 43rd Annual Mines Safety Fortnight Celebration (AMS-FC-2025) was recently held here at a City hotel under the aegis of the Directorate General of Mines Safety (DGMS), Bhubaneswar Regions I & II, with the Eastern Zone Mining Association (EZMA) organising the event to strengthen and promote a robust safety culture in the mining sector.

Director General of DGMS, Dhanbad, Ujjwal Tah attended the event as the chief guest, while Deputy Director General of Mines Safety, South Eastern Zone, Ranchi, Shyam Sundar Prasad graced the occasion as the guest of honour. Other prominent dignitaries included Director of Mines Safety, Bhubaneswar Region-I, Awanish Kumar Mishra, and Director of Mines Safety, Bhubaneswar Region-II, Nasina Balasubrahmanyam.

The event was presided over

by Eastern Zone Mining Association (EZMA) president Rajib Lochan Mohanty, general secretary Prabhodh Mohanty, and AVP (Corporate Affairs), Jindal Steel Ltd, RS Raghuvanshi, among others.

It served as a significant initiative to enhance awareness on safety standards and promote the adoption of best practices across mining operations, bringing together DGMS officials, representatives of mining companies, safety professionals and other key industry stakeholders.

During the event, a series of activities—including safety awareness programmes, trade tests, inspections, silicosis screening, quiz competitions and defensive driving training—were conducted to promote a proactive approach to accident prevention and work safety in mines. A total of 122 mines participated in the various activities organised as part of the celebration.

IMA call to standardise ICU services across state

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 18: With and aim to standardise delivery of intensive care services across Odisha, the state branch of Indian Medical Association (IMA) hosted a crucial state-level conference here Wednesday. Health and Family Welfare Secretary Aswathy S joined the discussions with senior doctors and experts on framing uniform protocols for ICU, CCU and HDU operations in both government and private hospitals. She urged participants to align recommendations with national and global standards and directed that outcomes be documented and submitted to the Central government by March 23.

During the session, Nibedita



Pani presented draft guidelines for intensive care services, prepared in line with directions of the Supreme Court of India.

Around 70 experts from leading institutions, including AIIMS-Bhubaneswar, SCB Medical College and Hospital and other major government and private hospitals, participated in the deliberations.

The draft framework classi-

fies ICUs into three levels based on patient severity—ranging from basic stabilisation units (Level-1) to advanced critical care facilities (Level-3) equipped for multi-organ support and complex therapies.

Key issues discussed included admission policies, infrastructure standards, equipment, trained manpower, infection control, patient safety, diagnostic support, communication with families, discharge protocols and end-of-life care.

Medical Education and Training director Santosh Mishra and Health Services director Pradeep Guru moderated the discussions, while additional DMET Umakanta Satpathy outlined the objectives of the conference.

Wildfire damages forest

CHHATRAPUR: A wildfire spread rapidly across a hill forest near Landabaansa under Chhatrapur block Wednesday morning, causing damage to several shrubs and medicinal plants at the onset of the summer season, villagers said. Residents alleged that despite being informed, forest officials reached the spot nearly two hours later. They further claimed that instead of responding promptly, officials advised villagers to contact fire services to bring the situation under control. Former panchayat samiti member Mathura Charan Subudhi said he has apprised Berhampur Divisional Forest Officer Sunny Khokhar of the entire incident, alleging negligence by forest officials in responding to the rapidly spreading wildfire. However, forest officials and fire personnel later reached the spot after repeated follow-up calls and brought the situation under control.

Developers seek ease in land conversion rules

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 18: Real estate developers have called for urgent reforms in the state's land conversion framework, citing delays, regulatory complexities, and outdated processes that hinder urban growth. Their demand comes in the wake of progressive changes introduced by Maharashtra and Karnataka, where land conversion procedures have been streamlined to align with modern urban planning requirements.

In a significant policy shift, both states have simplified land conversion norms by integrating them with building plan approvals. In Karnataka, the requirement for separate land conversion within Greater Bengaluru Area has been removed, allowing conversion to take place automatically during plan approval under the Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP). Maharashtra has adopted a similar approach, eliminating the need for separate Non-Agricultural (NA) permission, with approvals from town planning authorities now deemed sufficient.

In contrast, developers in Odisha continue to face prolonged delays in securing land conver-



sion approvals. Industry stakeholders point to outdated or unclear land records, inconsistent decisions by local authorities, and multiple layers of permissions as major bottlenecks. Additional challenges, such as the conversion of leasehold land to freehold, further complicate access to financing and property transactions. Frequent regulatory changes and stringent planning norms have also increased project costs and risks.

Commenting on the reforms in other states, Odisha Developers Federation (ODFED) chairman Pradipta Kumar Biswasroy said, "These changes reflect a forward-looking approach where land conversion is treated as an integral part of planned urban development. They help streamline procedures, reduce bureaucratic delays, and promote efficient growth. In Odisha, howev-

er, developers operate within a permission-heavy system that often leads to significant delays." He added that builders are required to obtain separate building plan approvals from Bhubaneswar Development Authority (BDA), along with Non-Agricultural conversion orders from the Revenue department. Projects must also undergo on-site verification to ensure they do not impact natural streams or agricultural land. Developers in districts like Khurda and Puri face additional procedural hurdles.

As urbanisation accelerates across India, experts emphasise the need for regulatory frameworks to evolve in tandem. Land conversion remains a critical component of urban expansion, enabling the transformation of agricultural land into residential, commercial,

and infrastructure spaces. Since land is a state subject under the Constitution, conversion processes are governed by state-specific laws, typically requiring NA permissions from district authorities in line with master plans or comprehensive development plans.

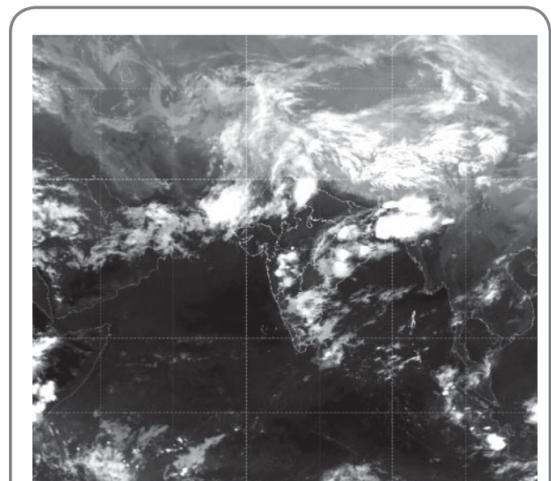
Echoing the industry's concerns, ODFED general secretary Umesh Pattnaik, said developers are advocating for the integration of land conversion with building plan approvals in Odisha. "Once land use has been designated under the master plan by a competent development authority, additional clearances from multiple departments only create redundancy and slow down the process," he noted. "Separate laws and overlapping authorities make the system unnecessarily complex and time-consuming," he added.

Developers believe that adopting similar structural reforms as seen in Maharashtra and Karnataka could significantly transform Odisha's real estate sector. Such changes, they argue, would not only expedite project approvals but also create a more transparent, investor-friendly, and growth-oriented regulatory environment for the state's rapidly expanding urban landscape.

CLASSIFIED AFFIDAVIT

Sri Subas Gandalaka, S/o. Late Tisara Gandalaka declare by this affidavit No. 101, Dated: 09.03.2026, sworn before the Executive Magistrate, GUDARI that now onwards I want to correction my name from Sunas Gandleka to Subas Gandalaka bearing Aadhaar Card No. xxxxxx 0749 of Village At: Kadama, P.O.: Kadama, P.S.: Gudari, Dist.: Rayagada for all future purposes.

MARKET WATCH					
CURRENCY		BOURSES		COMMODITIES	
INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR	92.80 ▲ 0.34	SENSEX	76704.13 ▲ 633.29	GOLD	₹152,291 ▼ ₹3694
EURO	107.12 ▲ 0.57	NIFTY	23777.80 ▲ 196.65	SILVER	₹246,000 ▼ ₹7113



WEATHER			
	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	34.7°	34.2°	Light to Moderate rain or thunderstorm
Min Temp	23.0°	21.4°	
Humidity	73%	78%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	

Arribada crosses 2L in 4 days | 1 killed, another hurt as Nor'wester hits Kalampur

Thermal drones used in turtle census for the first time

DWARKA PRASAD PATNAIK

Chhatrapur, March 18: In a significant surge in mass nesting, more than two lakh Olive Ridley turtles have emerged on the golden sands at Rushikulya rookery, Berhampur Divisional Forest Officer Sunny Khokhar said.

Wednesday early hours witnessed about 52,900 female turtles nesting their eggs on the fourth day since commencement of the season March 15. As many as 10,220 turtles were recorded on the first day while the subsequent two days witnessed an upward trend with 69,900 and 72,300 turtles laying eggs Monday and Tuesday respectively. The total count has now reached to 2,05,320 within four days of Arribada.

The DFO informed that thermal drones are in use for the first time in the census process of the turtles to achieve accuracy.



Mass nesting is divided into 100 segments stretched upto 5km along the coastline, where each segment is monitored by three officials, the DFO added.

Gokharkuda island beach has recorded a healthy population of nesting while sand erosion at Podampeta beach has

pulled back the nesting this season. Although the Arribada commenced a month late in comparison with the previous year, which saw more than 9 lakh turtles turning up in two phases, the forest officials and experts have expected the mass nesting to conclude in the first phase itself this year.

4 held for attacking woman, 3 others

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Berhampur, March 18: Odisha Police Wednesday arrested four persons, including two brothers, for allegedly assaulting a 45-year-old woman and three youths by tying them to an electric pole on suspicion of theft in Ganjam district.

The accused are residents of Bhetanai village under Kotinada police station limits.

They were arrested on the basis of a complaint lodged by the woman and prima facie evidence, said Damodar Bihari, inspector in charge of Kotinada police station.

A group of people knocked on the woman's door early Tuesday, forcibly entered the house and dragged out her son and two of his friends, he said. The trio was allegedly beaten and tied to electric poles, police said.

When the woman tried to intervene, she was also restrained, "assaulted" and tied to the same pole, the officer said, adding that the victims were later rescued by villagers.

Some villagers suspected their involvement in theft incidents in the area, claiming that unidentified persons had visited the woman's house on several occasions earlier, police added.

Kalahandi MP demands Kesinga-Bhub train



POST NEWS NETWORK

Kesinga, March 18: Kalahandi MP Malvika Devi has raised an 18-point charter of demands in Lok Sabha, seeking major railway infrastructure revamp across Kalahandi and neighbouring districts.

Speaking in the Lower House Tuesday, Devi called for new rail projects benefiting Kalahandi, Nuapada, Nabarangpur and Bolangir districts. Among the key demands was the introduction of direct train service between Kesinga and Bhubaneswar.

The MP thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw for previously approved projects before placing fresh demands. She also urged the Centre to set up a locomotive engine factory at Narla and restore pre-Covid stoppages of

several trains at Narla Road station, including Visakhapatnam-Nizamuddin and Bilaspur-Tirupati express services.

Further, she sought construction of a railway station at Dharamgarh, restoration of train stoppages at Rupra Road, and development works such as an overbridge at Narla Road. The MP also demanded improved connectivity through direct train services linking Bhubaneswar with Rayagada and Koraput-Titlagarh routes.

Additionally, she called for doubling of the Lanjigarh-Junagarh rail line to ease congestion and improve regional connectivity.

The demands are aimed at strengthening rail infrastructure and boosting connectivity in western Odisha, sources said.

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhawanipatna, March 18: A sudden Nor'wester turned deadly in Kalahandi district Tuesday evening, leaving one person dead and another critically injured after a tree collapsed on their motorcycle.

The incident occurred at Bachhi under Kalampur police limits when Rabishankar Majhi was travelling to Kumjor along Bijamara canal road with his uncle-in-law Amar



Majhi. Strong winds triggered by the storm uprooted a roadside tree, which fell on Rabishankar.

He died on the spot due to

the impact, while Amar, who was riding pillion, sustained grievous injuries.

Locals rushed to the scene and shifted them to Jayapa-

tna community health centre. Amar was later referred to Bhawanipatna DHH, where his condition is stated to be critical.

After postmortem, Rabishankar's body was handed over to his family members Wednesday.

The storm, accompanied by high-velocity winds, disrupted normal life in several parts of Kalampur block, with reports of fallen trees and minor damage to property.

Man attacks wife on court premises

POST NEWS NETWORK

Balasore, March 18: High drama unfolded on the family court premises here Wednesday after a woman was allegedly attacked and rendered critical by her husband during the proceeding of a divorce petition.

The accused husband was identified as Pratap Jena, a native of Chhanua under Sadar block and his estranged wife as Anima Jena of Basta police station area in the district.

The critically injured woman was admitted to Balasore District Headquarters Hospital while the accused husband was detained by Sahadevkhunta police. The attack on the woman in broad daylight drew the attention of the passers-by on the main road in front of the Collectorate.

The couple had arrived at the court for a counselling session related to their ongoing divorce case.

After the session, Pratap allegedly assaulted his wife with a spade, leaving her bleeding profusely.

Odia Captain wins laurels for safe return of 'Nandadevi'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bolangir, March 18: Indian gas carrier 'Nandadevi' has safely returned from the conflict-hit Middle East, drawing widespread attention for the role played by its Odia captain, Dheeraj Agrawal.

Captain Agrawal, a native of Kantabanji in Bolangir district, has been widely praised for his leadership, patience and courage in ensuring the safe return of the vessel and its crew. His family members celebrated his homecoming, while congratulatory messages have been pouring in.

The vessel, along with another Indian ship 'Shivalik', had been stranded in the strategically sensitive Strait of Hormuz amid escalating tensions involving Iran, Israel and the United States. The narrow sea route witnessed heavy missile strikes and aerial bombardment, creating a tense and uncertain situation for crew members onboard.

Despite the hostile conditions, 'Nandadevi' successfully navigated back to India, reach-



ing the Gujarat coast Tuesday following diplomatic efforts that eased movement restrictions in the region.

The ship had departed from a UAE port about 12 days ago before being caught in the crisis after Iran imposed restrictions on maritime movement in the Strait of Hormuz.

Agrawal, son of late Ramesh Chhapatia and Santosh Devi, completed his schooling in Kantabanji and later earned a degree in nautical science from a maritime training institute in Mumbai. Since 2017, he has been serving in key roles in India's shipping sector and is currently associated with the Shipping Corporation of India. His mother expressed happiness over reports that he may meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi, calling it a proud moment for the family.

13 schoolchildren hurt as van overturns

POST NEWS NETWORK

Pattamundai, March 18: More than 13 schoolchildren were injured after a van carrying students overturned near Andhara Veterinary Hospital in Kendrapara district Wednesday morning.

The van, transporting students of Sudhananda Public School at Amrutmanohi under Pattamundai police limits, reportedly lost control and flipped over. Locals rushed to the spot, rescued the children and the driver before shifting them to Andhara CHC.

School manager Amit Mallik said the injured were later referred to Pattamundai and then to Kendrapara DHH. Most of the children were discharged after treatment. However, one child suffered a head injury, while the driver and a female teacher sustained serious injuries.

Sudhananda Baba, associated with the school, reached the DHH from Bhubaneswar after being informed and interacted with the injured children and their parents, Mallik added. Local police were reportedly unaware of the incident at the time.

Locals alleged vans, auto-rickshaws and Tata Magic vehicles frequently carry far more children than their permitted capacity. RTO Lokanath Meher said inspections are being carried out and warned that strict action would be taken against the violators.

Man drags, beats RI in office; CCTV footage goes viral

POST NEWS NETWORK

Chandbali, March 18: A youth allegedly assaulted a revenue inspector (RI) inside his office in Bhadrak district, triggering concern over CCTV footage of the incident circulated widely on social media.

The attack occurred Tuesday afternoon at the Sarana Revenue Inspector's office under the Chandbali tehsil. According to officials, Revenue Inspector Tapas Ranjan Jena was attending to official duties

when Subas Das, a resident of Jagannathpur village under Bhuinbuthi panchayat, entered the office.

Das allegedly asked Jena to extend an illegal land-related favour involving a relative. When the officer refused, Das reportedly became violent. CCTV footage shows the accused dragging Jena from his chair and assaulting him inside the office.

Jena sustained injuries and was admitted to the Chandbali Community Health Centre

for treatment. He later filed a written complaint with the Bansada police and informed the tehsildar.

Police have registered a case and launched a search for the accused, who remains absconding.

The Revenue Field Officers' Association condemned the attack and demanded strict action. Tehsildar Bhavatosh Mallik said authorities are taking the matter seriously and assured that stringent legal action will be taken.

NIT Rourkela: Global warming may strengthen monsoon

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, March 18: Researchers from National Institute of Technology (NIT) Rourkela have found that rising global temperatures were about 4°C higher than pre-industrial levels, and compared it with projections for the late 21st century under a high-emissions scenario.

The study found that monsoon rainfall over India was higher during the mid-Pliocene and is likely to increase again as the climate warms. However, the underlying causes differ. In the mid-Pliocene, stronger winds and more active atmospheric circulation drove increased rainfall, whereas future intensification is expected to result from a warmer atmosphere holding more moisture.

Chilukoti said studying past climate conditions provides critical insights into future trends, noting that increased moisture over the Indian Ocean and landmass could strengthen moisture flow towards India. The study also indicates that the peak monsoon rainfall month may shift from July to August.

The findings could help improve early warning systems for floods and droughts, support better crop planning and irrigation strategies, and guide water management in major river basins such as the Ganges and Brahmaputra.

cene period, around three million years ago, when global temperatures were about 4°C higher than pre-industrial levels, and compared it with projections for the late 21st century under a high-emissions scenario.

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THE DEFENCE ESTATES OFFICER
GOVT. OF INDIA, MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
DEFENCE ESTATES OFFICE, ODISHA CIRCLE
163, Prachi Enclave, Chandrasekharpur, Bhubaneswar, odisha-751016
Tele: 0674-2747631, (email: deobhub-stats@nic.in)

REQUIREMENT OF BUILDING/HOUSE FOR ECHS POLYCLINIC, DHENKANAL

The Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS) Polyclinic, Dhenkanal requires suitable accommodation with an approximate built-up area of 2500 sq. ft. on a rental basis for a period of two (2) years, effective from 16 May 26. The building should preferably be enclosed by a boundary wall. It must be in good condition, well-maintained, and hygienic from a sanitation perspective. The premises should have proper road connectivity and be located in a suitable area. All electrical and plumbing fittings must be in good working condition. The building should have an adequate water supply and a separate electric meter. The property must be free from any litigation or dispute at the time of hiring. Interested property owners are requested to submit detailed information about their property along with valid ownership documents to the address mentioned above within 20 days from the date of publication of this advertisement. A copy of the same should also be sent to: **Station Headquarters, ECHS, PO – Naval Base Chilka, Ashok Building, Khurda- 752037, Odisha.** Alternatively, interested persons may email the required documents to: **echs.chilka@gmail.com, deobhub-stats@nic.in.**

Chola CHOLAMANDALAM INVESTMENT AND FINANCE COMPANY LIMITED
Corporate Office: Chola Crest, Super B, C54 & C55, 4, Thiru Vi Ka Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai-600 032, T. N.

DEMAND NOTICE

UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF THE SECURITIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT, 2002 ("the Act") AND THE SECURITY INTEREST (ENFORCEMENT) RULES, 2002 ("the Rules")

The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Company Ltd. (the Secured Creditor) under the Act and in exercise of the powers conferred under Sec. 13(12) of the Act read with Rule 3 issued Demand Notice(s) under Sec. 13(2) of the Act, calling upon the following borrower(s) to repay the amount mentioned in the respective notice(s) within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The undersigned reasonably believes that borrower(s) is/ are avoiding the service of the Demand Notice(s), therefore the service of notice is being affected by affixation and publication as per Rules. The contents of Demand Notice(s) are extracted herein below :-

Sr. No.	Name & Address of the Borrower/s & Co-Borrower/s	Loan Amt.	Dt. of Demand Notice & D/s. Amt.	Description of the Property / Secured Asset
1	Loan A/C. No(S). : LAP3PUR000115533 1. Mr/Mrs. Rabinarayan Das 2. Mr/Mrs. Sibani Das Add For Sr. No. 1 & 2 :- C/O-Birakisor Das, Nachuni, Khorda, Near Anganabadi Kendra, Khorda, Orissa - 752034 Add For Sr. No. 1 & 2 :- Plot No.177/1148, Khata No. 446/34, Sunakhala, Na. Sunakhala, Bhanapur, Khurda, Orissa, 752034	Rs. 30,00,000/-	10.03.2026 Rs. 31,56,490/- (Rupees Thirty One Lakhs Fifty Six Thousand Four Hundred Ninety Only) as on 10.03.2026	Dist- Khurda, Tahsil- Banapur, No-358, S.R.O-Banpur, P.S:- Banpur, No-358, Mouza- Sunakhala, R.O.R. NO- 446/34, Plot No-177/1148, Area-AD-057Dec., Kisan-Homestead, with Status- Shikhan. Corresponds to R.O.R. No-218, Plot No-177, Area- AD-526Dec. Bounded as under:- (As per Regd. Sale- Deed) North-Govt. Road, South-Akhaya Kumar Guru, East-Seller, West-Prava Pandit

The borrower(s) are hereby advised to comply with the Demand Notice(s) and to pay the demand amount mentioned therein and hereinabove within 60 days from the date of this publication together with applicable interest, additional interest, bounce charges, cost and expenses till the date of realization of payment. The borrower(s) may note that Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Company Ltd. is a secured creditor and the loan facility availed by the Borrower(s) is a secured debt against the immovable property / properties being the secured asset(s) mortgaged by the borrower(s). In the event borrower(s) are failed to discharge their liabilities in full within the stipulated time, the Secured Creditor shall be entitled to exercise all the rights U/s. 13(4) of the Act to take possession of the secured asset(s) including but not limited to transfer the same by way of sale or by invoking any other remedy available under the Act and the Rules thereunder and realize payment. The Secured Creditor is also empowered to ATTACH AND / OR SEAL the secured asset(s) before enforcing the right to sale or transfer. Subsequent to the Sale of the secured asset(s), the Secured Creditor also has a right to initiate separate legal proceedings to recover the balance dues, in case the value of the mortgaged properties is insufficient to cover the dues payable to the Secured Creditor. This remedy is in addition and independent of all the other remedies available to the Secured Creditor under any other law.

The attention of the borrower(s) is invited to Section 13(8) of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured asset(s) and further to Section 13(13) of the Act, whereby the borrower(s) are restrained / prohibited from disposing of or dealing with the secured asset(s) or transferring by way of sale, lease or otherwise (other than in the ordinary course of business) any of the secured asset(s), without prior written consent of the Secured Creditor and non-compliance with the above is an offence punishable under Section 29 of the said Act. The copy of the Demand Notice is available with the undersigned and the borrower(s) may, if they so desire, can collect the same from the undersigned on any working day during normal office hours.

Place : Khurda, Orissa
Date : 10.03.2026

Sd/-
Authorized Officer
For Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Company Limited

CORRIGENDUM

With reference to the public notice published under the heading "LOST" in Orissa Post dated 20.12.2025, I, K. Narin Kumandan, S/o Late K. Kodandaram Kumandan, residing at New Colony, Rayagada, Odisha, wish to clarify that there was an inadvertent error in mentioning the date of loss of documents as 09.12.2025 instead of 08.12.2025, which is the correct date of loss. The other contents of the said lost notice dated 20.12.2025 remains unchanged and this corrigendum is published for information and record purpose.

Sd/- K. Narin Kumandan
New Colony, Rayagada, Odisha
Phone: 9437021110

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER,
RURAL WORKS DIVISION, KUCHINDA
E-mail : eerw_kuchinda@yahoo.com

OFFICE ORDER

No.25001/346/2526 : Due to no Bidder in Sl. No. (01) S/R to Road from NH-6 to Khirdihi Road in the District of Sambalpur for the year 2025-26. Tender Bid ID / 22 / RWD / Kuchinda / 2025-26 is hereby cancelled.

Sd/- Superintending Engineer,
Rural Works Division, Kuchinda

OIPR-25001/251511/25-26/0025

EAST COAST RAILWAY
PUBLIC NOTICE

The following Manned Level Crossing No. ST-14 will be closed temporarily from 25.03.2026 for a period of four months on account of construction of limited height subway (LHS) work. During this period road users will be diverted through nearby existing level crossing No. ST-12 at Km: 13/31-33 (UP) 13/32-34(DN) for which both side diversion road has been constructed. Road users may please note this notice w.e.f. 25.03.2026.

Sl. No.	Route	Between Stations	LC No.	Railway Kilometer of LC (F/UBP)	Manned / Unmanned	District Magistrate & Collector, Sambalpur's letter No.
1	Sambalpur-Angul	Sambalpur City-Maneswar	ST-14	14/5-7 (UP) 14/6-8(DN)	Manned	1149/Judl, Dtd. 20.06.2012

PR-1240/Q/25-26 Sr. Divisional Engineer (East), Sambalpur

ବନଖଣ୍ଡ ଅଧିକାରୀଙ୍କ କାର୍ଯ୍ୟାଳୟ, ଦେବାନାଳ ବନଖଣ୍ଡ
OFFICE OF THE DIVISIONAL FOREST OFFICER
DHENKANAL FOREST DIVISION
Tele Fax No-06762226717, e-mail id-dfo.dhenkanal@odisha.gov.in

ANNUAL/SUPPLEMENTARY (IF NECESSARY) AUCTION SALE NOTICE FOR LEASE OF CASHEW NUTS FROM PLANTATION AREA FOR THE YEAR 2025-26 (2026 CROP YEAR) OF DHENKANAL FOREST DIVISION

NO.8001/167/2526: THE ANNUAL/SUPPLEMENTARY (IF NECESSARY) AUCTION SALE FOR LEASE OF CASHEW NUTS FROM PLANTATION AREA OF BEGA RF UNDER SADANGI RANGE OF DHENKANAL DIVISION FOR THE YEAR 2025-26 (2026 CROP YEAR) WILL BE HELD IN THE OFFICE OF THE DIVISIONAL FOREST OFFICER, DHENKANAL DIVISION ON 25.03.2026 RESPECTIVELY. FOR FURTHER PARTICULARS, THE UNDERSIGNED MAY BE CONTACTED ON ANY WORKING DAY DURING OFFICE HOURS.

Sd/- DIVISIONAL FOREST OFFICER
DHENKANAL DIVISION

OIPR-8001/80371/125-26/0004

EAST COAST RAILWAY
Tender No. MCSW-Buffering-25-26-31

NAME OF WORK :- BUFFING AND POLISHING OF STAINLESS STEEL FIXTURES AND PANELS IN RAILWAY BG COACHES AT CARRIAGE REPAIR WORKSHOP, MANCHESWAR.

Advertised Value : ₹ 27,97,986.60, EMD : ₹ 56,000/-, Period of Completion : 36 Months.

Bidding Start Date : 19.03.2026.

Tender Closing Date and Time : At 1500 Hrs. of 02.04.2026.

Manual offers are not allowed against this tender, and any such manual offer received shall be ignored. Complete information including e-tender documents and corrigendum is available in website www.ireps.gov.in

Dy. Chief Mechanical Engineer (POH-II), PR-1238/Q/25-26 CRW/Mancheswar

S. E. RAILWAY – TENDER

Tender Notice No. CKP-D-627-OPERATION-MCL. Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer (TRD), Chakracharpur acting for & on behalf of The President of India invites e-Tender as mentioned below. The Manual offers are not allowed against this tender and any such manual offer received shall be ignored. Name of the work : Operation of isolators at MCL Sardega siding (RLS) in Chakracharpur Division on deposit term for one year. Tender Value : ₹ 34,56,330.01. EMD : ₹ 69,100/-, Completion Period: 12 months. Place of opening of e-tender : Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer/TRD/South Eastern Railway. Date & Time of closing of tender: 15.00 hrs. of 08.04.2026. Date & Time of opening tender: 15.30 hrs. of 08.04.2026. E-tender can be viewed at website <http://www.ireps.gov.in> The tenderer/ bidder must have Class-III digital signature certificate & must be registered on IREPS portal. Only registered tenderer/bidders can participate on e-tendering. All relevant paper must be uploaded at the time of participating in e-tendering. (PR-1326)

S. E. RAILWAY – TENDER

e-Tender Notice No. CE-Con-RSP-01-2026. Chief Engineer/RSP & GS, S.E. Railway, Garden Reach Road, Kolkata-700043 invites e-tenders for the following work. Following tender has been uploaded on website www.ireps.gov.in & the tender will be closed at 15.00 hrs. on due date. Brief Description of works : Construction of full Road Over Bridge (ROB) of Track portion span of 1x60 m BSG including approaches with via-duct and Retaining wall between Railway Station (i) Amarda Road & Basta in lieu of LC No. 60 at Km 202/11-13, (ii) Amarda Road & Basta in lieu of LC No. 61 at Km 203/27-29, (iii) Soro & Sabira in lieu of LC No. 106 at Km 265/33-35, (iv) Markona & Soro in lieu of LC No. 110 at Km 278/21-23 and (v) Ranital - Kuparai Road in lieu of LC No. 115 at 286/13-15 in Kharagpur-Bhadrak Section. Approx. Cost : ₹ 247.8 Crore. Bid Security : ₹ 1 Crore. Period of Completion : 24 months from the date of issue of LOA. Interested tenders may visit website www.ireps.gov.in for full details/ description/specification of the tenders and submit their Bids online. In no case manual tenders for these items will be accepted. NB: Prospective Bidders may regularly visit www.ireps.gov.in to participate in all other tenders. (PR-1318)

FOCUS GENDER

AN ECONOMIC MAGIC



For governments seeking more jobs and growth, the question is not whether they can afford to close the opportunity gap for women, but how they can afford not to

Six of them – Belize, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Peru, Suriname, and Zambia – raised the legal minimum age for marriage or removed the parental-consent exception, closing a loophole that enabled child marriage. Seven economies – Argentina, Brazil, Mali, San Marino, Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay – introduced or strengthened cyberharassment laws.

Some progress has also been made on building supportive frameworks for entrepreneurship, with 21 reforms across 19 economies. Suriname's Trade Register Act now allows women to register businesses in the same way men do, removing a long-standing structural barrier. Ecuador's Organic Law to Promote the Economy of Ecuadorian Women Entrepreneurs bans gender-based discrimination in credit evaluation, adds oversight, and introduces sanctions for non-compliance. Thirteen economies strengthened women's representation on corporate boards. But, overall, implementation has been uneven.

For governments seeking more jobs and growth, the question is not whether they can afford to close the opportunity gap for women, but how they can afford not to. By aligning laws that empower women with systemic changes, enforcement mechanisms, and public reporting, policymakers can track results, adjust strategies, and, perhaps most importantly, show that gender equality delivers measurable economic returns.

Indermit Gill is Chief Economist and Senior Vice President for Development Economics at the World Bank. Tea Trumbic leads the World Bank's Women, Business, and the Law project. ©PROJECT SYNDICATE

ness and the Law 2026 report shows that even where protections exist on paper, fewer than half of the policies and services needed to implement them are in place. And a new enforcement index reveals that these laws are applied only about half the time, creating a massive gap between legal rights and lived reality.

Today, only 4 per cent of women worldwide live in countries that recognise nearly full legal equality, while none of the 190 countries covered by the Women, Business and the Law 2026 report provides women with the same legal environment as men across all ten assessed areas.

The biggest gap is in safety. Limited and inconsistent protection from gender-related violence prevents women from joining and remaining in the workforce. Similarly, laws against sexual harassment vary considerably depending on the environment: 143 countries ban it at work, but only 90 address it online, 63 in education, and just 36 in public spaces.

Another weak area is entrepreneurship. Women can legally start businesses in most countries, but they still face obstacles to securing funding:

Only about half of all countries support equal access to credit. The lack of diversity in leadership is another barrier to entrepreneurship, as just 40 countries require minimum representation of women on corporate boards.

Childcare is the third-weakest area, with the lack of affordable and high-quality services keeping too many women out of paid work. While 146 countries regulate childcare services for children under the age of three, fewer than half (66) set comprehensive quality standards, like caregiver-to-child ratios, group-size limits, education or training requirements, and mandatory periodic inspections. And only 78 offer financial or tax support to families.

These deficiencies depress labour-force participation rates, reduce hours worked, and slow formal employment and firm creation, all of which are vital to long-run growth, tax revenues, and resilience.

The good news is that governments have started to address the most problematic areas over the last few years. Twenty-two economies, many in Latin America and the Caribbean, enacted reforms to improve women's safety.

In 2012, facing a shrinking labour force and economic stagnation, then-Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo bet on women. To encourage more women to work, his government rolled out a series of reforms, including expanded childcare, enhanced parental leave, and tax incentives for firms that promoted women. By 2019, 2.5 million additional women were employed, female labour-force participation reached 67 per cent, and job placement for graduates was nearly universal. The conclusion is straightforward: When barriers to women's workforce participation are removed, economic outcomes improve.

Today, developing economies face the opposite challenge: a massive youth bulge. Over the next 10-15 years, 1.2 billion young people will enter the labour market in these economies, which are expected to generate only about 400 million jobs over that period, implying an unprecedented jobs deficit.

Ensuring that young women – roughly half of this bulge – have the same opportunities as men to participate fully in the economy will be crucial to turbocharging growth and employment. As more women join the workforce on equal terms, they will increasingly start businesses and create jobs. Research shows that in most countries, closing the opportunity gap could boost GDP by as much as 20 per cent.

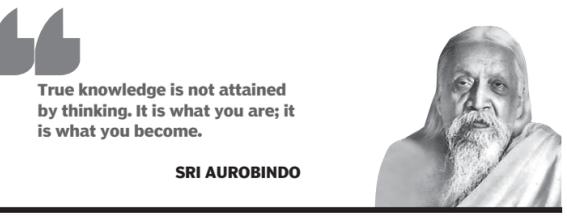
In recent decades, dozens of countries have taken the first step toward supporting women's economic participation by reforming family, labour, and financial laws. As a result, women today have about two-thirds of the legal rights that men enjoy, up from barely half at the turn of the century.

But too many countries fail to take the next step. The World Bank's Women, Busi-



Indermit Gill & Tea Trumbic

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT IN MOST COUNTRIES, CLOSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP COULD BOOST GDP BY AS MUCH AS 20 PER CENT



True knowledge is not attained by thinking. It is what you are; it is what you become.

SRI AUROBINDO

The Feasibility Trap

The US-Israeli war with Iran is a striking illustration of an all-too-common phenomenon: feasibility bias. The tendency to favour actions primarily because they are technically or operationally possible, rather than because they are strategically optimal, can lead to decidedly suboptimal outcomes.

Consider the warring parties in this conflict. Military operational feasibility, rather than broader strategic judgment, seems to be governing their decisions. Israel and the United States appear to have organized their strategy around their joint capabilities to strike the Iranian leadership. The decision was taken to use these capabilities, with the expectation that the political consequences could be managed afterward.

Iran's response, meanwhile, is largely determined by the number, range, and accuracy of its missiles and drones, and rests on the assumption that saturation attacks can overwhelm defenses and impose severe costs on its adversaries. Thus, instead of refraining from launching drones and missiles at Gulf Cooperation Council countries, which could have leveraged their clout with the US to act as intermediaries to bring an end to the war, Iran opted to attack its non-aggressor neighbours to score a feasibility point.

From a purely military perspective, there is nothing unusual in this logic. Military planning has always been shaped by operational capabilities. What is striking, however, is that strategy itself now seems to flow from feasibility, rather than the other way around.

In The Guns of August, Barbara Tuchman's classic study of the rush to war in 1914, the American historian documented how Europe "sleepwalked" into World War I. The operational plans, she argued, had developed an internal logic so consuming that by August 1914, generals could credibly insist that diplomacy was no longer possible – that the mobilization timetables had their own momentum, and that no one could stop the troop trains once they began moving. Instead of shaping political decisions, operational logic replaced them.

The parallel with the current conflict is uncomfortable. Each actor's strategic posture flows directly from what its technology allows it to do: one side launches missiles and drones and lays anti-ship mines, while the other side intercepts missiles and drones and launches airstrikes. The result is a dynamic in which decisions are driven less by long-term strategic calculation than by the operational possibilities created by intelligence and technology.

The psychological dimension of this dynamic is captured by Abraham Maslow's famous aphorism: "it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail." Military capabilities can have the same effect on strategic thinking. Once governments possess advanced capabilities, operational success begins to appear more plausible, and policymakers may be more willing to consider deploying them.

In fact, policymakers may come under institutional pressure to do so. Technologies that require large investments – from missile defense systems to aircraft carriers to cyber operations – tend to produce constituencies committed to their use. Demonstrating the effectiveness of these systems becomes part of the institutional logic that sustains them. The result is the same: a capability's mere existence may gradually evolve into an argument for its deployment.

Recall US President Donald Trump's rhapsodic admiration for "those beautiful B-2 bombers" that "totally obliterated the nuclear potential ... of Iran." Likewise, commanders of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (who are widely regarded as overseeing political decision-making) have boasted about hypersonic ballistic missiles that "will be able to breach all the systems of anti-missile defense" and represent "a great generational leap in the field of missiles."

This enthrallment produces a subtle transformation in decision-making logic. The central question is no longer, "Is this strategically wise?" It is, "Can this be done successfully?" Once the answer to the second question is yes, the first question may be asked less forcefully – or not at all.

The feasibility trap explains the strategic fog surrounding American decision-making in the current conflict. The late British strategist Colin Gray called it the failure to maintain the "strategy bridge": the connective tissue that must link military action to political purpose if force is to serve any rational end. Gray argued that operational success which fails to cross that bridge is not merely incomplete but potentially self-defeating.

Technological capability widens the menu of tactical options available to leaders, but it does not necessarily widen their strategic freedom. Instead, it reshapes influence inside the decision system. Operational actors – military planners, intelligence services, and technical specialists – can demonstrate how objectives could be executed in practice, which gives their advice unusual authority. The result is a subtle shift in power: operational feasibility begins to outweigh diplomatic caution and political judgment. Decisions gravitate toward what can be done rather than what should be done, and the bridge between strategy and operations – what Gray called the central tension of statecraft – begins to erode.

As AI-powered automation takes hold and technological capabilities increase even further, so, too, will the realm of operational feasibility. The Iran war offers little evidence that a better mechanism for stopping such momentum has been found in the years since Tuchman's trains steamed ahead toward WWI.



Sami Mahroum

Military planning has always been shaped by operational capabilities. What is striking, however, is that strategy itself now seems to flow from feasibility, rather than the other way around

SPECTRUM SOCIETY

When red carpet shapes political messaging



Pratigyan Das

HISTORY IS REPLETE WITH INSTANCES WHEN THE OSCARS STAGE WAS USED TO ECHO THE POLITICAL ANXIETIES OF THE TIME

The Iran and US-Israel war reached the red carpet of the 98th Academy awards as host Conan O'Brien cautioned in his opening monologue at the Oscars on 15 March. "I warn you, tonight could get political," O'Brien said. "If that makes you uncomfortable, there's an alternative Oscars being hosted by Kid Rock at a Dave & Buster's down the street," he said unapologetically.

Similarly, Spanish actor Javier Bardem, known for films like Jamón Jamón, Boca a Boca and Carne Trémula, shared a message of solidarity for Palestine on stage, with our own Priyanka Chopra by his side. While presenting the award for best international feature film, Bardem, who wore a "No to War" pin on his tuxedo, said, "No to war and free Palestine," drawing rousing applause from audience at Los Angeles' Dolby Theatre.

"I'm wearing a pin that I used in 2003 with the Iraq war, which was an illegal war, and we are here, 23 years after, with another illegal war, created by Trump and Netanyahu with another lie," Bardem told reporters on the red carpet before the Oscars

ceremony began.

Well, this isn't the first time that geopolitics grabbed attention on an awards night. In 2024, Hollywood stars and others donned pins in support of the Palestinian people on the Oscars red carpet. Singer Billie Eilish and her brother Finneas O'Connell wore red Artists4Ceasefire pins and urged President Joe Biden to call for a ceasefire in Gaza.

Geopolitics has often shaped the tone of global award ceremonies. History is replete with instances when the Oscars stage was used to echo the political anxieties of the time. For example, in 1973, Marlon Brando refused his Oscar for The Godfather, prompting activist Sacheen Littlefeather to highlight the mistreatment of Native Americans in the US. Decades later in 2003, filmmaker Michael Moore used his acceptance speech for Bowling for Columbine to criticise the Iraq War, drawing mixed reactions from the crowd.

Political messaging is not confined to Hollywood. Film festivals in Europe too have witnessed similar situations. Recently at the Berlin International Film Festival, debates

over the Gaza conflict escalated when writer and activist Arundhati Roy pulled out from the festival in protest after disagreeing with remarks suggesting filmmakers should stay away from political commentary.

Back in India, the clash of culture and politics has also made headlines. In 2015-2016, after BJP came to power, a campaign on 'award return' gained momentum. Many writers and artists returned their honours, including the Sahitya Akademi Award, to protest what they described as growing intolerance and threats to free expression. Cultural recognition, during that season, became a vehicle for political dissent.

While everyone has the fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression, let's not forget that award ceremonies, meant to celebrate creative excellence, shouldn't become a stage for venting out political opinions as distracts from the core objective of recognising artistic merit. When acceptance speeches become political statements, attention shifts away from films, performances and technical achievements that the awards

are meant to celebrate.

In this social media era, where things move faster than lightning, a political statement by a celebrity can cause polarisation and destroy the artistic flavour of the entertainment industry.

Moreover, there's a danger of cultural icons getting influenced to take sides. Artists may be incentivised to promote ideological positions. As statements delivered on an awards stage spread rapidly across social media, it is likely that this visibility could be used by governments and interest groups as a platform to use celebrities to shape public narratives.

But then, it's equally important to understand that writers, filmmakers and performers have always played significant roles in shaping public debates. However, there are appropriate platforms for such engagement—public forums, interviews, activism, where ideas can be expressed with nuance and depth. Needless to say, award ceremonies should focus on talent and artistry, transcending political divides.

The writer is a journalist.

The writer, Founder of Spark X, previously held posts at INSEAD, the OECD, and Nesta. ©PROJECT SYNDICATE

WISDOM CORNER

I have learned over the years that when one's mind is made up, this diminishes fear; knowing what must be done does away with fear.

ROSA PARKS

Remember, if you ever need a helping hand, it's at the end of your arm, as you get older, remember you have another hand: The first is to help yourself, the second is to help others.

AUDREY HEPBURN

You have to take risks. We will only understand the miracle of life fully when we allow the unexpected to happen.

PAULO COELHO

Alarming report

Sir, The report "344 elephant deaths in 4 years," published in Orissa POST, March 18, is deeply alarming. Elephants, symbols of our rich biodiversity, are dying at an unacceptable rate due to habitat loss, electrocution, train hits, and human-animal conflict. Despite existing laws, enforcement remains weak and fragmented. Forest corridors are shrinking, pushing elephants into villages and triggering tragic encounters. Authorities must ensure strict monitoring of power lines, secure railway tracks, and restore natural habitats. Community awareness and rapid response teams are equally essential. Without urgent, coordinated action, we risk losing this majestic species.

Sidhartha Kar Mohapatra, BARIPADA

Sedentary future

Sir, This refers to "Climate change to increase physical inactivity by 2050: Study," Orissa POST, March 18. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and deteriorating air quality are likely to discourage outdoor activities, pushing people towards more sedentary lifestyles. This shift could aggravate existing public health challenges, including obesity, cardiovascular diseases, and mental health disorders. The intersection of environmental degradation and human behaviour presents a complex crisis. As cities become hotter and less walkable, access to safe, active spaces may shrink, particularly for vulnerable populations. This is not merely an environmental issue but a looming health emergency. The findings should serve as a wake-up call for policymakers, urban planners, and communities to act decisively. Investing in climate-resilient infrastructure, promoting green spaces, and encouraging adaptive lifestyles are essential steps to mitigate this emerging threat and safeguard long-term public well-being.

N Sadhasiva Reddy, BANGALORE

Pre-poll ritual

Sir, It has become ritual on the part of the Election Commission to transfer top government officials of non-BJP ruled states just before elections allegedly to serve the vested interests without deeming it necessary to consult the chief ministers of the respective states. How can the EC devour the power of an elected government in the name of conducting free and fair elections? How can the EC be biased and prejudice the performances of top government officials? This is highly illegal and should not be allowed to continue. The need of the hour is to change the relevant Act.

Arun Gupta, KOLKATA

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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

Neighbours tried breaking walls, windows

The multi-storey building near Ram Chowk Market, close to the Palam Metro Station, has been gutted from the inside as nine members of the family that lived there, including three children, were killed in the blaze Wednesday, with three others injured.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: Neighbours of the family that got trapped in a fire in Delhi's Palam area said they made frantic attempts to get them out by attempting to break windows and a portion of the wall of the building, while others alleged that the malfunctioning hydraulic machine of firefighters delayed their rescue.

The multi-storey building near Ram Chowk Market, close to the Palam Metro Station, has been gutted from the inside as nine members of the family that lived there, including three children, were killed in the blaze Wednesday, with three others injured.

The building had a cloth and cosmetic showroom on the ground and first floors, while the family of the owner, Rajender Kashyap, lived on the second and third floors.

Locals said a flower-seller alerted the neighbours after spotting the fire around 6.30 am. Police said information about the blaze was received at around 7:04 am at Palam

Village police station, following which teams rushed to the spot.

Kamal, a school cab driver, said around 40 people, including locals and fire personnel, attempted to break open the shutter of the showroom to rescue those trapped inside. The shutter now lays completely broken due to the fire, with electrical wiring visibly burnt.

Kamal alleged that the fire brigade faced technical issues on arrival.

"When the fire brigade arrived, it was unable to operate its equipment due to a malfunction in the pressure system. Had the equipment worked on time, some people would have been saved," he said.

People made repeated attempts to reach those trapped before additional fire tenders could arrive. The fire office said 30 fire tenders in total were deployed for the operation.

Raghuandan Sharma, who owns a garment shop nearby, recounted the sequence of events. He was informed about the fire by his son.

"By the time I reached, the fire had already spread. I start-



PALAM BUILDING FIRE

ed shouting for people to run upstairs. Someone shouted back that they were stuck," he said.

He said they went to the terrace of the adjacent house and broke a wall common to both buildings using hammers.

"We went to the top of the adjacent building and tried to get inside from there, but the smoke was so dense that we couldn't enter," Sharma said.

They also tried to break a front-facing window of the burning building. Their efforts were unsuccessful as the smoke was too dense, he said.

"When the fire brigade arrived, their hydraulic machine did not work for around 45 minutes. Another fire tender took

around 50 minutes to arrive, and because of that delay, people had to try going up themselves," Sharma said.

If the fire brigade's hydraulic system had worked on time, the tragedy could have been prevented, he added.

Neighbours who were also involved in the rescue operation said the smoke was so dense that no one could see anything and it kept getting denser.

Police were also involved in breaking a portion of the wall from the adjacent house. "We all tried together and managed to break a part of the wall, but the smoke was so dense that it was impossible to even take a single step inside," a neighbour said. Officials said they are prob-

ing the cause of the fire and looking into allegations of delays and malfunctioning fire-fighting equipment.

The neighbours also said the goods stored in the building contributed to the rapid spread of the fire.

"Since the family ran a shop dealing in undergarments and cosmetics, which is highly flammable, the fire spread rapidly. The house was packed with goods and had little to no ventilation," a neighbour said.

Residents described the victims as part of a large joint family. They said the household included an elderly couple, their sons and daughters-in-law, and several grandchildren.

Some family members were away at the time of the incident, including one son who was in Shimla with his family.

Sharma added that Kashyap's wife was physically disabled and used a wheelchair, which may have made evacuation more difficult.

Kashyap, he said, is the market president and had been elected twice consecutively. "He was a very good and friendly person, his family was very sociable and always stood by others in their times of sorrow."

"All of his children were involved in handling their business, while the daughters-in-law were homemakers," he added.

Task force to curb internet safety gaps for children: Min

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 18: Maharashtra's efforts to promote safety amid children's growing, often unregulated use of the internet and social media are proving inadequate, prompting the state IT department to set up an expert task force to study the issue, Minister Ashish Shelar said Wednesday.

Once the task force submits its report, the government will decide on measures to enhance child safety, strengthen education, promote digital empowerment, and encourage responsible use of technology, IT Minister Shelar stated in the legislative council. Surveys indicate a significant rise in the use of mobile phones, the internet and social media among children below 16 years of age in the state, he said in a written response to a question by Independent MLC Satyajit Tambe.

There are growing demands from various quarters, including parents' associations and social groups, to frame regulations to restrict or control such use through measures like screen-time limits, parental controls and age-based restrictions, Shelar noted.

Parents, experts and public representatives have repeatedly raised concerns that increased screen time is adversely affect-



ing children's mental health studies and social behaviour he informed the House.

"Unregulated use of the internet and social media, online gaming, objectionable content and cyber crimes have heightened risks to children's safety, and the outcomes of government schemes and awareness initiatives in this regard have not been as expected," he stated.

In view of these concerns, the government is setting up an expert task force through the Information Technology department to study the issue comprehensively. The task force will include experts from relevant sectors and examine multiple aspects of children's digital usage, Shelar said.

It will also study the nature and extent of social media usage among minors, its mental, physical and educational impact, and the influence of digital advertisements and online platforms. It will also review national and international regulatory frameworks and suggest necessary legal, technical and administrative measures, he said.

Maha Assembly passes Wildlife Protection Amendment Bill

The bill is aimed at facilitating better management of human-wildlife conflict



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 18: The state legislative Assembly Wednesday passed the Wildlife Protection (Maharashtra Amendment) Bill, 2026, with the government asserting that it would not lead to issuance of permits to hunt wild animals including leopards.

The bill is aimed at facilitating better management of human-wildlife conflict, said Forest Minister Ganesh Naik

leopards from Schedule I to Schedule II. "This is not about shifting leopards from Schedule I to Schedule II. It is only about granting limited permissions for specific purposes. There is no provision to allow hunting of any wildlife," he said.

Notably, while Schedule I grants the highest level of protection to endangered species, Schedule II grants protection to less endangered species.

Even after the state legislature's approval, the amendment would require further clearances, including assent from the Governor and the President, and would remain subject to the authority of the Union government, the minister said. "It will not come into effect immediately. Due process at multiple levels will be followed," he added.

The intent of the bill is to protect both human life and wildlife, said Naik.

during the debate.

The amendment pertains to provisions under Section 12 of the Wildlife Protection Act, he said.

Section 12 empowers the Chief Wildlife Warden to grant permits allowing the hunting of wild animals for specific purposes such as research, scientific management for population control, etc.

Naik rejected apprehensions that the bill seeks to downgrade the protection status of



Women in traditional attire participate in a bike rally during celebrations on the eve of Gudi Padwa, in Nagpur, Maharashtra, Wednesday

PTI PHOTO

WEST ASIA CONFLICT

Dry fruit prices surge up to 50 pc in Delhi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: Dry fruit prices in the national capital have risen by up to 50 per cent amid the ongoing conflict in West Asia, which has disrupted supplies of several items, including medicinal herbs, traders said Wednesday.

Rajiv Bhatia, president of the Khari Baoli Market Association which is the hub of wholesale markets for spices and dry fruits, said prices of dry fruits have increased by 20-50 per cent as traders are facing supply shortages due to the conflict. "Except for cashew, most dry fruits are imported from West Asian countries, and supplies have come to a halt. With the Eid festival approaching, demand for dates has increased, but stocks are limited," he said.

He added that the supply of several medicinal herbs from the region has also been affected. Khari Baoli, located in Old Delhi near Chandni Chowk, is known as Asia's largest wholesale spice market and has been a key hub for trade in spices, dry fruits, herbs and related commodities for centuries.

Another wholesaler, Omesh Jain, at the market said traders are currently relying on existing stocks as fresh supplies have stopped. "We are operating with limited stock. The supply of items such as almonds, figs, pine nuts, dates and several herbs has come to a standstill," Jain said.

400-yr-old Barapullah Bridge restored to glory

Today, the Mughal-era bridge stands rejuvenated, offering a rare glimpse into the past amid dense urban sprawl

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: The 400-year-old Barapullah Bridge, which had fallen into a dilapidated state after years of neglect as recently as 2024, has been restored to its former glory by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

Located beneath the modern Barapullah flyover and behind the Nizamuddin railway station, the historic structure underwent a two-phase restoration project, which has now been completed, ASI officials said.

Today, the Mughal-era bridge stands rejuvenated, offering a rare glimpse into the past amid dense urban sprawl.

Rajkumar Patel, Superintending Archaeologist in the ASI's Delhi circle, told PTI that the first phase of the work, which was the removal of large quantities of debris, had begun in January 2025 and the second phase, involving structural restoration, was completed between October 2025 and February 2026.

"The structure now mostly resembles the original Mughal structure and is open for the public to visit," he said.

The restoration process began after a site visit by then-Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena in August 2024.

At the time, the bridge had nearly merged with the adjoin-



ing Madras Colony in Jangpura-B, with its passage encroached upon and converted into a makeshift marketplace, its historical significance largely forgotten.

The Barapullah drain flowing beneath the bridge had also become choked with untreated sewage, adding to the effects of heavy urbanisation.

However, the bridge presented a starkly different picture.

"Several bituminous layers were removed to finally reveal the original material of the bridge, which was Delhi quartzite. While near the edges of the bridge, one can see the original material, the middle pathway of the bridge had to be repaired extensively as it was damaged from years of use, including vehicular movement," an ASI official told PTI.

Following debris removal,

the level of the bridge is now significantly lower than what it was a year ago. The edges and the 12 piers of the bridge from which the structure derives its name have also been repaired.

ASI officials said at least four of the piers had been originally damaged, and a couple were even missing, on one end of the bridge where it had been formerly engulfed by the Madras Colony. The piers have been repaired, some even freshly constructed in the original Mughal design, they said.

"When we began restoration, the portion adjoining the road was heavily encroached upon by shops. We have reinstated the boundary between the bridge and the road, and installed iron grills for protection," the official said.

In addition to restoration,

the ASI addressed several structural challenges.

"The bridge, after restoration, emerged to have a very steep slope as it is curved and higher at the centre. Grassing has been carried out on one side to prevent soil erosion during the monsoon. This was not part of the original plan but was later incorporated as both a practical and aesthetic measure," Patel said.

The bridge is now secured with iron gates, with one side open to visitors.

The Barapullah drain, despite extensive desilting, remains under monitoring, with agencies including the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) and the flood control department continuing cleaning efforts, according to ASI officials.

An ASI information board at the site notes that the 17th-century bridge once served as a

key route for the Mughals to cross the Yamuna and access important cultural and religious sites such as the Nizamuddin Dargah and Humayun's Tomb from Agra.

According to the revised 2001 edition of ASI's book 'Delhi and its Neighbourhood', the bridge originally measured 14 metres in width and over 195 metres in length. However, the ASI board at the site lists its current length at about 100 metres, while the width remains unchanged.

The book notes that the bridge, located on the old Mathura Road, about 1 km east of Khan-i-Khanan's tomb (the tomb of Abdu'r-Rahim Khan), features 11 arched openings and 12 piers, giving it the name 'Barapullah', meaning '12 piers'.

It also records that an inscription now untraceable once indicated the bridge was built in 1621-22 by Mihr Bannu Agha, the chief eunuch in Mughal emperor Jahangir's court.

The restored Barapullah bridge now stands as a striking contrast to the urban landscape, with roads and flyovers crisscrossing beside it, a wide drain flowing beneath as a reminder of urbanisation, and heavy concretisation flanking it on all sides; yet the structure endures, telling the story of a time long lost.

PUBLIC NOTICE
 IN THE COURT OF COMPETENT AUTHORITY UNDER THE MAHARASHTRA RENT CONTROL ACT, 1999 (KONKAN DIVISION AT MUMBAI) EVICTION APPLICATION NO. 57 OF 2024

Applicant: Mr. Deepak Kumar Agarwal, R/o 38B, Panditya Road, Fort Oasis, Tower-1, Flat No. 604, P.S. Lake, Kolkata-700029.

Versus
 Respondents:
 1. Mr. Sourav Mohanty
 2. Mrs. Sagarika Mohanty
 3. Mr. Rahul Mohanty
 4. Mr. Hota Sanjeev

Last Known Address: Flat No. A/3001, 30th Floor, Metropolis CHS Ltd., J.P. Road, Opp. Gurudwara, Andheri (West), Mumbai-400053.

Also at: Plot No. 3C/678, Sector-8, CDA, Cuttack-753014, Odisha.

TAKE NOTICE that the Hon'ble Court of Competent Authority under the Maharashtra Rent Control Act, 1999, Konkan Division, Mumbai, vide Judgement and Order dated 23-12-2025, has directed the Respondents to hand over vacant and peaceful possession of Flat No. 2905, C-Wing, 29th Floor, Metropolis CHS Ltd., J.P. Road, Andheri (West), Mumbai-400053 (Built-up area approx. 2400 sq.ft.) to the Applicant within 30 days from the date of the Order.

The Respondents have further been directed to pay damages of ₹90,000/- per month from September 2022 to October 2023 and double license fees of ₹1,80,000/- per month from November 2023 until handing over possession.

A Demand Notice dated 26-01-2026 issued by the Applicant's Advocate was sent to the Respondents through Speed Post at their last known addresses, which has been returned undelivered/unclaimed.

Therefore, the present public Notice is being issued as alternative / substitute service as whereabouts of the Respondents are not known. NOTE that through present Notice we hereby direct you all the respondents to comply with the aforesaid Order of Rent Control Authority immediately, failing which the Applicant shall initiate Execution Proceedings for recovery of possession and dues, at the risk as to cost and consequences of the Respondents.

Place: Mumbai Date: 18th March 2026 Sd/- SMIT SHAH
 Advocate for the Applicant
 Office No. 211, Maker Bhavan III, Vitthaladas Thackersey Marg, New Marine Lines, Mumbai-400020



May these festivals foster unity among India's various communities through love and harmony and bring happiness, prosperity and well-being to everyone

DROUPADI MURMU | PRESIDENT

SC GIVES MORE TIME IN SHEENA BORA CASE

The Supreme Court has granted an additional nine months to complete the trial in the Sheena Bora murder case, while making it clear that no further extension will be entertained



of the day quote

Stability cannot be sustained without inclusive growth. This is the foundational principle on which we will build our work



N BIREN SINGH | MANIPUR CM

The UPPL will contest 15 seats, and our best wishes are with them. Our alliance is with the BPF. Assembly elections for the 126-member House will be held April 9, and votes will be counted May 4



HIMANTA BISWA SARMA | ASSAM CM

High-rise development in Bengaluru city is becoming increasingly restricted. We are unable to widen roads much either. On one side, there is HAL Airport, on another Kempegowda Airport, then Jakkur Airfield, and the Air Force base at Yelahanka. Because of this, high-rise construction is not permitted for several kilometres around these areas



D K SHIVAKUMAR | K'TAKA DY CM

SHORT TAKES

Retired Merchant Navy officer held in rape case

Nashik: A retired Merchant Navy officer, who projected himself as an astrologer, was arrested in Maharashtra's Nashik district Wednesday for allegedly repeatedly raping a woman for over three years, police said. Accused Ashokkumar Kharat had several leaders from Maharashtra politics visit him over the years. Altogether 58 videos, including some objectionable clips, stored on a pendrive have been recovered from Kharat, who used to call himself "Captain", police said.

Five killed in 2 road accidents

Korba: Five persons, including a woman and her nine-year-old granddaughter, were killed in two separate road accidents in Korba district of Chhattisgarh, police said Wednesday. While the first accident occurred Tuesday night, the other one took place Wednesday morning, they said. Three workers were killed after a coal-laden trailer truck lost control and overturned on their motorcycle in the Pali police station area at around 9 am Wednesday, a police official here said. In the second incident, Nanki Bai (60) and Manisha Kumari (9) were killed after their motorcycle was hit by an unidentified vehicle on the Rava main road near Jampani hills under the Jatga police outpost area Tuesday night, he said.

Bird Flu reported in Kerala's Kozhikode

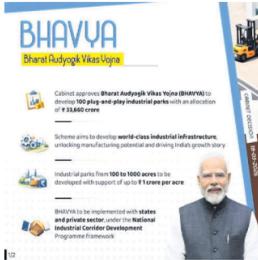
Kozhikode (Kerala): Authorities in Kozhikode district have initiated precautionary and containment measures after cases of avian influenza were confirmed in multiple local bodies, officials said Wednesday. According to the District Animal Husbandry Officer, bird flu has been detected in Panangad, Olavanna, Kakkodi and Perumanna panchayats, as well as the Nallalam area under the Kozhikode Corporation.

TMC faces protests over denial of tickets

Kolkata: Signs of simmering rebellion surfaced within the ruling TMC a day after the party unveiled its candidate list for the West Bengal assembly polls, with several sitting MLAs and leaders openly expressing resentment over being denied tickets in what the party describes as a sweeping "controlled churn" to counter anti-incumbency.

Cabinet clears ₹33,660-crore BHAVYA industrial scheme

The scheme aims to develop world-class industrial infrastructure, unlocking manufacturing potential and driving India's growth story, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said while briefing reporters on Cabinet decisions



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: In order to boost manufacturing, the government Wednesday approved ₹33,660 crore Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojna (BHAVYA) to develop 100 plug-and-play industrial parks across the country.

The scheme aims to develop world-class industrial infrastructure, unlocking manufacturing potential and driving India's growth story. Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said while briefing reporters on Cabinet decisions. The Cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the BHAVYA scheme, which is expected to generate about 15 lakh direct jobs. Under the scheme, industrial parks ranging from 100 to 1,000 acres will be taken up for the development with financial support of up to ₹1 crore per acre.

These parks will have core infrastructure like internal roads, underground utilities, drainage, common treatment facilities, ICT and administrative systems. Besides, there would be value-added infrastruc-

structure like ready-built factory sheds, built-to-suit units, testing labs, warehousing and social infrastructure, including houses for workers and other amenities.

Moreover, he said, support for external infrastructure will also be provided up to 25 per cent of the project cost, ensuring seamless connectivity and integration with existing networks.

Project selection will be undertaken through a challenge mode, ensuring that only high-quality, reform-oriented and investment-ready proposals are taken forward.

Building on the success of Industrial Smart Cities developed under the National Industrial Corridor Development Programme (NICDP) framework, Vaishnaw said BHAVYA will be implemented in partnership with states and private sector players.

At the heart of BHAVYA lies a strong push for deregulation and ease of doing business, with streamlined approvals, effective single-window systems, and investor-friendly reforms led by states. The scheme will deliver plug-and-play industrial ecosystems, enabling industries to move from intent to production with speed and certainty, he said.

With pre-approved land, ready infrastructure, and integrated services, BHAVYA will significantly reduce entry barriers for investors, he added.

The proposed industrial parks will be developed as future-ready and sustainable ecosystems. They will be aligned with the PM GatiShakti principles to ensure seamless multimodal connectivity and efficient last-mile access.

The parks will promote green energy and sustainable resource utilisation, supported by integrated underground utility corridors that enable a 'no-dig' environment.

This will facilitate efficient maintenance and ensure uninterrupted industrial operations.

Overall, these parks aim to set new benchmarks in industrial infrastructure by enhancing reliability, reducing inefficiencies, and boosting productivity across sectors.

The BHAVYA scheme is expected to generate large-scale employment, creating significant direct and indirect job opportunities across manufacturing, logistics, and services while attracting substantial investments.

The initiative will be implemented across all states and Union Territories, generating lakhs of employment opportunities nationwide and accelerating industrial growth. By promoting cluster-based development and enabling the co-location of industries, suppliers, and service providers, BHAVYA will strengthen domestic supply chains, encourage regional industrialisation, and open up new opportunities for millions.



A school student looks out of a vehicle window during rainfall, in Srinagar

RS bids farewell to 59 members

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: The Rajya Sabha Wednesday bid farewell to 59 of its retiring members, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging them to remain active in the service of the nation and its people while noting that there is no full stop in politics.

The Prime Minister lauded the contribution of the members, whose tenures will end between April and July, and called Parliament an "open university" that offers an opportunity to gain insight into intricate nuances of life.

Among those retiring are former prime minister H D Deve Gowda, Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge and veteran politician Sharad Pawar, who have been in active politics for over five decades



Among those retiring are former prime minister H D Deve Gowda, Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge and veteran politician Sharad Pawar, who have been in active politics for over five decades

Pawar has already been re-elected to the Upper House

One-third of the Rajya Sabha members retire every two years

ken"yet "a man of rigorous action, constantly working for the betterment of every corner of India".

In a lighter vein, the Prime Minister singled out Union Minister Ramdas Athawale. Lamenting that wit and humour in the House had declined in the age of round-the-clock media - "everyone has become extremely self-conscious", he said.

"While members come and go, our Athawale-ji is Ztruly evergreen. He is departing, yet I am confident that no one here will feel a void; he will continue to serve and contribute tirelessly," Modi quipped.

Reflecting on the bicameral structure of Parliament, Modi said it is akin to seeking a "second opinion" - a practice that strengthened democratic decision-making.

Modi also noted that some outgoing members had the rare distinction of having served in both the old and new Parliament buildings. He described a six-year Rajya Sabha term as a transformative experience. Chairman C P Radhakrishnan opened the House proceedings by noting that a total of 59 members from 20 states, including nine women members, will retire.

25L personnel to be deployed for 5 Assembly elections: EC

New Delhi: As many as 25 lakh personnel, including 8.5 lakh security personnel, will be deployed for the five Assembly polls to be held next month, the Election Commission said Wednesday. As many as 17.4 crore electors are eligible to vote in the elections in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam and Pondicherry. The EC noted that Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, while announcing the schedule of the elections, had asserted that the officials have been directed to act with complete impartiality to ensure that the elections are violence-free and inducement-free so that each elector votes without fear or favour.

Fire erupts as tanker overturns; driver killed

Jodhpur: The driver was burnt alive after a tanker transporting an inflammable substance overturned and burst into flames on a stretch of National Highway-68 in Rajasthan's Jalore district Wednesday afternoon. The incident took place around 2 pm near the Sinwada overbridge in Sanchora area, with flames spreading up to 200 metres along the road following the accident, causing traffic disruption on one of the carriageways.

Heavy rains lash northern states

New Delhi: Heavy rains and gusty winds hit the northern states Wednesday, with a few places in Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir receiving snow. The national capital Delhi also witnessed a turbulent weather in the evening as gusty winds, dust storms and thunderstorms, accompanied by rain, swept across parts of the city. Meanwhile, the India Meteorological Department, in an X post, said it has issued "an orange warning for light to moderate thunderstorm with lightning and gusty wind activity along with light to moderate rain over Jammu region and Himachal Pradesh", along with some other states.

Pradyut Bordoloi joins BJP

New Delhi/Guwahati: In yet another jolt to the Congress ahead of the April 9 Assam Assembly polls, its senior leader and Lok Sabha MP Pradyut Bordoloi joined the BJP Wednesday. A Congress member for more than five decades and the chairman of the manifesto committee for the Assembly polls, Bordoloi claimed that he resigned Tuesday as he was facing humiliation in the party and was sidelined after he supported Shashi Tharoor. A two-term MP from Nagaon and a former four-time MLA, Bordoloi was inducted into the BJP in the presence of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and other party leaders in the national capital, weeks after former Assam Congress chief Bhupen Kumar Borah switched to the ruling party.

B'lore family tries to 'courier' elderly man

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore, March 18: A family allegedly attempted to send an elderly man in a "parcel" through a courier service in protest against high bus fares ahead of Ugadi and Eid-ul-Fitr, police said Wednesday.

The incident occurred in the Vyalikaval area of central Bengaluru Tuesday evening, they said.

Following the incident, Bengaluru City Police Commissioner Seemant Kumar Singh said that action will be taken against the family for staging the act as part of a protest reel.

The footage of the incident that went viral drew criticism, the officer told reporters here. "A case will be registered against the family. Such incidents send a bad message on social media. So, we will take action," he said.

According to police, the family of five members approached a private courier centre claiming they wanted to parcel the man as a symbolic message to the public over rising fares in both private and government buses. They claimed it was part of a prank meant to highlight the difficulties of the festival travel.

Started by the request, the courier staff alerted the police.

During the inquiry, the elderly man's daughter said the act was staged as a protest and to create a social media reel. As part of the stunt, the family had placed the elderly man inside a gunny sack, a senior police officer said.

Police said the situation proved serious when the man experienced breathing difficulties inside the sack. Subsequently, the family apologised to the police and the public for their actions.



The officials warned that the act could have endangered the man's life and attracted serious legal consequences. The family was let off with a warning after issuing a video apology and were strictly cau-

tioned against such dangerous stunts in the future, an officer earlier said.

In a video statement, the family clarified that the intention behind their act was to draw attention to the high

- A Bengaluru family staged a protest by attempting to 'parcel' an elderly man via courier to highlight high bus fares
- The family claimed the stunt was a social media reel intended to draw attention to the difficulties of festival travel due to rising bus fares
- Police intervened after the courier staff raised concerns, warning the family about the dangers and legal consequences of their actions
- The incident highlights public frustration over increasing transportation costs during festive seasons in Bengaluru

ticket prices amid the upcoming festivities and the lack of bus connectivity leaving many stranded without seats.

Expressing regret for their actions, the family said they asked for forgiveness, assuring that such things would not be repeated.

70% Kerala MLAs face criminal cases: ADR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: Nearly 70 per cent of sitting MLAs in Kerala have declared criminal cases against themselves, while more than half are crorepatris, according to a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).

The analysis, conducted by ADR and Kerala Election Watch, examined affidavits of 132 sitting MLAs and found that 92 legislators have pending criminal cases. Of these, 33 MLAs, or 25 per cent, have declared serious criminal cases, including charges related to murder and attempt to murder.

The report noted that two MLAs have declared cases related to murder under Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code while three face charges of attempt to murder under Section 307. Additionally, three MLAs have declared cases related to crimes against women, including one involving rape.

Party-wise data shows a high proportion of MLAs with criminal cases across political parties.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) had 43 out of 58 MLAs (74 per cent) facing criminal cases, while the Indian National Congress recorded 19 out of 21 MLAs (90 per cent). Among others, the Communist Party of India had 44 per cent, and the Indian Union Muslim League (IUM) had 86 per cent of its MLAs declaring such cases.

Cheque bounce case: Actor Rajpal Yadav gets relief

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: Extending the suspension of actor Rajpal Yadav's sentence till April 1, the Delhi High Court Wednesday said it will not send him to jail in connection with his conviction in cheque bounce cases as he has made "substantial" payment.

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma observed that the court will hear and finally decide Yadav's appeal against the trial court decision and asked the actor's lawyer to make his submissions. "I am hearing you on the main petition. I am not sending him to jail right now. He has made a substantial payment. I will decide the matter," the judge said.

The court told Yadav, who was physically present, that he has the option to either return the money or contest the matter.

The counsel for the complainant said his application for vacation of suspension of sentence was pending.

Noting that Yadav has already deposited ₹4.25 crore, the court responded, "I don't find any reason. He is not running away..." "He has given you (some) money. On the next date, if I decide the money has to come to you, it will come to you... He is coming to the court, he has been in jail. What else do you want in (Section) 138?" Section 138 of the Negotiable Instruments Act makes dishonour of cheques a punishable offence.



Citizens are in crisis. In today's politics, a positive direction can only be achieved through the PDA path. Any campaign without positive thinking or a clear ideology becomes directionless

MAN FORCED TO DRINK URINE OVER 'WITCH' CLAIM

A group of villagers allegedly forced an elderly man to drink urine after he was branded a 'witch' in Jharkhand's Latehar district, officials said Wednesday



of the day uote

Earlier, festivals were often marked by fear, tension and curfews. Today, festivals like Navratri and Ramzan are being celebrated together with harmony and dignity

Rajasthan paid royalty till 1960. But it stopped paying money thereafter, and Punjab also stopped demanding the same

We are hopeful that the judiciary will do justice in the case of Mehraj Malik as it did in Sonam Wangchuk's case

Bengal polls: EC tightens grip with strategic transfers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 18: The Election Commission (EC) Wednesday intensified preparations for the West Bengal Assembly elections, ordering a fresh reshuffle of senior officers, posting two secretaries to other poll-bound states as observers, and deploying 13 IAS and five IPS officers in key poll management roles, an official said.

Priyanka Shingla, special secretary of the civil defence and disaster management department, and P Mohan Gandhi, secretary of industries, commerce and enterprises, were sent to other states as election observers, he said. In a parallel order, 13 IAS officers were appointed district magistrates (DMs), who will also serve as district election officers (DEOs), placing them at the centre of poll supervision.

Officers Jitin Yadav (Cooch Behar), Sandeep Ghosh (Jalpaiguri), Vivek Kumar (Uttar Dinajpur), Rajanvir Singh Kapur (Malda) and R Arjun (Murshidabad) have been posted as DMs-cum-DEOs.

Similarly, Srikant Palli has been appointed as DM-cum-DEO of Nadia, Sweta Agarwal in Purba Bardhaman, Shilpa Gorisaria in North 24 Parganas, Abhishek Kumar Tiwari in South 24 Parganas, Harishankar Panicker in Darjeeling and T Balasubramanian in Alipurduar. Smita Pandey has been posted as Municipal Commissioner of Kolkata Municipal Corporation and DEO of Kolkata North, while Randhir Kumar will serve as DEO of Kolkata South.



Five IPS officers were also transferred as deputy inspectors general (DIGs), including Rathod Amitkumar Bharat (Raiganj Range), Ajeet Singh Yadav (Murshidabad), Shrihari Pandey (Bardhaman), Kankar Prasad Barui (Presidency Range), and Anjali Singh (Jalpaiguri).

"These officers will play a crucial role in ensuring free, fair and transparent elections. Many will also function in observer capacities to closely monitor poll preparedness and conduct at the district level," a senior officer of the Election Commission said.

In a late evening development, the EC appointed IPS officers Murlidhar Sharma and Waquar Raza as observers for the Tamil Nadu election. Sharma is currently CP Bidhanagar, while Raza serves as CP Siliguri. Both have been directed to report immediately.

The poll panel has also deployed IPS officers Abhijit Banerjee and Dhritiman Sarkar in poll-bound Kerala, Sandip Karra (Nagaland bypoll) and Amandeep in Tamil Nadu as police observers.

The Election Commission has reshuffled senior officers in West Bengal to ensure free and fair Assembly elections. Thirteen IAS officers have been appointed as district magistrates and district election officers. Five IPS officers have been transferred as deputy inspectors general across key ranges.

India's 1.7MT oil, gas stuck in Hormuz

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: India's 1.67 million tonnes of crude oil, 3.2 lakh tonnes of LPG and about 2 lakh tonnes of LNG are stuck on the 22 Indian-flagged ships stranded in the Persian Gulf, waiting to transit through the Strait of Hormuz, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary in the Shipping Ministry, said Wednesday.

Originally, there were 28 Indian-flagged vessels in the Strait of Hormuz when the war in the Middle East broke out following US-Israel attacks on Iran. Of these, 24 were on the west side of the strait and four on the east side. In the last week, two vessels from each side have managed to sail to safety.

"All 611 seafarers on 22 vessels (on the west side of the Strait) are safe," he told a news briefing. There are now 3 vessels on the east side after one more Indian-flagged ship joined them.

Of the 22 remaining Indian-flagged vessels on the west side of the Strait of Hormuz, six are LPG carriers, one is a lique-



1K Indians still in Iran: MEA to Parl panel

New Delhi: Nearly 1,000 Indians are still in Iran amidst the ongoing conflict in West Asia while 23,000 school students based in Gulf region could not appear in the CBSE final examinations due to the turmoil. This was conveyed by the Ministry of External Affairs to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs at a meeting held here Wednesday.

Additionally, one vessel is a dredger, another is empty with no cargo, and three are in dry dock undergoing routine maintenance.

Sinha said efforts are on to secure passage of the Indian vessels through the war-hit strait. The Strait of Hormuz, the narrow waterway that connects the Persian Gulf to the open ocean, has effectively been shut following the US and Israel attack on Iran and Tehran's sweeping retaliation.

Overall, close to 500 tanker vessels remain confined to the Persian (Arabian) Gulf. These include 108 crude oil tankers, 166 oil product tankers, 104 chemical/product tankers, 52 chemical tankers and 53 other tanker types. Analysts say Iran may be allowing select vessels to transit the strait after verifi-

cation. At least 4 vessels have transited outbound the Strait of Hormuz in the last couple of days with a short diversion via the Larak-Qeshm Channel. This, they say, appears to be a verification process whereby Iran confirms the ownership, cargo and vessel are not US, or belong to those that Iran has permitted transit to.

The ships that have passed are 3 bulk carriers (2 Greek / 1 Indian) and one Aframax tanker (Pakistan). India imports about 88 per cent of its crude oil, 50 per cent of natural gas, and 60 per cent of LPG. Before the war broke out, more than half of the crude oil that India imported came from countries like Saudi Arabia, Iraq and the UAE, which use the strait for shipping.

As much as 85-95 per cent of LPG and 30 per cent of the gas came through the strait. While the disruption in crude oil has been partially offset through alternative sources, such as Russia, West Africa, the US and Latin America, gas and LPG supplies to industrial and commercial users have been curtailed.

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SBI-led secured lenders move SC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: A consortium of secured lenders including banks of Sterling Biotech Ltd of promoters Chetan and Nitin Sandesara has moved the Supreme Court for disbursement of their claim amounts from Rs 5,100 crore deposited in the apex court registry while highlighting their total outstanding against the Group companies was at Rs 19,283.77 crore.

A bench of Justices J K Maheshwari and A S Chandurkar, which Monday took on record the joint application filed by the consortium led by the State Bank of India and while asking it to be served to Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, listed the matter for further hearing March 23.

The banks placed on record a consolidated computation of claims across multiple Group entities and setting out the methodology adopted for the distribution of the amount.

"The applicants are the Secured Lenders of M/s. Sterling Biotech Ltd. and its Group Companies and are jointly filing the present application seeking directions for disbursement of their respective claim amounts, which stand deposited with the Registry of this court by the petitioners, in terms of the order/directions dated November 19, 2025 passed by this court," it said.

The application stated that the claims relate to exposures across 10 companies of the Sterling Group, including Sterling Biotech Ltd, Sterling Oil Resources Ltd, Sterling SEZ Ltd and other domestic and overseas entities. The lenders further stated that the claims were consolidated following a series of joint meetings, where a uniform formula was agreed upon for calculating total dues and apportioning the deposited amount.

POST OF THE DAY

Expensive air tickets, high hotel room rents and garbage everywhere are badly hurting Indian Tourism Industry. People are choosing foreign destinations over local places.

SHORT TAKES

BJP wins ZP posts; Sena alleges betrayal

Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar: The BJP won the posts of president and vice-president of the Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar Zilla Parishad in Maharashtra unopposed here Wednesday, drawing the ire of ally Shiv Sena, which alleged betrayal. Avinash Galande was elected as the president, and Jitendra Jaiswal as the vice-president of the ZP, an official said. The process to elect them was held in the district collector office premises here.

C'garh: Man shot dead outside gym

Chandigarh: A 31-year-old man was shot dead by two unidentified assailants in a brazen daylight attack in Sector 9 here Wednesday, police said. The attackers arrived on a motorcycle, and one of them, wearing a helmet, opened fire at the victim -- Charanpreet Singh -- who had gone to a gym in the upscale market of Chandigarh. In a video, the unidentified assailant, wearing a red T-shirt, could be seen spraying bullets at Singh as he stepped out of his black SUV. The assailants approached the car from the driver's side and fired at close range.

Speeding SUV mows down two

Etah (UP): A speeding SUV rammed into a motorcycle -- killing two riders -- and mowed down a pedestrian on a national highway stretch near Balgarhi here Wednesday, police said. The incident took place when the SUV -- a Mahindra Scorpio, on its way from Jalesar to Rajawali -- apparently spun out of control under Sakrauli police station limits, they said. According to police, the SUV driver lost control of the vehicle while trying to avoid a pedestrian walking along the roadside.

Seeking married woman's help for family care isn't cruelty: HC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: Merely asking a married woman to assist in caring for a family member is not cruelty under criminal law, the Delhi High Court has said.

Justice Neena Bansal Krishna passed the judgment while quashing criminal cases against a husband and his family for alleged cruelty and domestic violence against his wife. The parties married in 2005 in Haldwani, Uttarakhand according to Hindu rites and customs. While it was mutually agreed that after marriage the couple would reside at the petitioner's house in Rankhet, the wife soon moved back to Delhi to her mother's house



and insisted her husband relocate as well. The husband was granted an ex parte divorce in 2012. The wife levelled serious accusations against the husband and his family, including her in-laws, alleging that they were habitual drinkers and tortured her and taunted her for insufficient dowry.

In her complaint, the wife alleged that her husband's brother pressured her to take responsibility for his 11-year-old son by keeping him permanently at her

mother's house in Delhi.

"Merely asking the Complainant to assist in caring for a family member cannot, by itself, constitute cruelty within the meaning of Section 498A IPC," the court ruled in the judgment passed March 10.

The court termed the wife's allegations vague and omnibus, remarking, "It is so simple to make such allegations against the family members; there is no explanation about any specific incident to explain her absolutely vague allegations."

The court emphasised that the wife resided with her in-laws "only for a few days" before shifting to her mother's house in Delhi and the husband visited her from time to time.

Vijay: TVK belongs to 'people's team', 'no alliance' with NDA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, March 18: Avoiding directly naming the NDA, TVK chief Vijay Wednesday dismissed as "false campaign" claims of "alliance talks" for the April 23 Tamil Nadu Assembly polls.

The actor-politician asserted that the TVK belongs to the 'people's team,' and dismissed allegations that his party functioned as a "B-Team," for a dominant party. However, Vijay did not elaborate on who made that accusation, which he said began with the founding of the party in 2024. Addressing an Iftar event at Mamallapuram near here, Vijay said when other "defamatory attempts" did not succeed, rivals launched a false campaign claiming that

TVK would choose the alliance path for the polls.

Against this background, the cadres may have been confused due to claims that TVK may go in for an alliance, he said.

Hence, he declared: "We are firm on the stand that the government will be led by us (following a big win in the polls); there will be no compromise on secular, social justice principles."

That there will be no compromises was spelt out clearly in the party's first conference itself held at Vikravandi. "Hence, do not believe any defamatory content. By God's grace, we can achieve our target," he said.

Vijay's declaration on full commitment to secularism is seen as a clear hint that TVK will not align with the NDA for the 2026 Tamil Nadu Assembly polls.

'India's sustained efforts driving sharp decline in child mortality'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: India has emerged as a key contributor to global progress in reducing child mortality, according to the latest United Nations report.

The UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UNIGME) Report 2025 highlighted India's sustained and large-scale efforts in improving child survival outcomes, particularly across neonatal and under-five mortality indicators.

Over the last two decades, India has played a pivotal role in reducing child mortality in the South Asia region, which witnessed a 76 per cent decline in under-five deaths since 1990 and a 68 per cent drop since 2000.

The under-five mortality rate in the region has fallen significantly -- from 92 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2000 to nearly 32 in 2024 -- reflecting

sustained progress in child health outcomes.

This sharp reduction is largely driven by countries like India through targeted public health interventions, improved institutional delivery systems, and expanded immunisation coverage. This progress is anchored in a continuum-of-care strategy that integrates strengthening of the health system with targeted, demand-driven initiatives such as Janani Suraksha Yojana and Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram, the statement said.

At the same time, the expansion of newborn care infrastructure -- including Special Newborn Care Units and digital innovations such as Tele-SNCU -- highlights how strategic investments and coordinated implementation are contributing to improved child survival outcomes across diverse settings, it said. The report underscored



that a majority of child deaths are preventable or treatable, and India's scaling up of interventions such as the Universal Immunisation Programme, facility-based newborn care, and Integrated Management of Neonatal and Childhood Illnesses

has significantly improved survival rates.

India's improvements in neonatal care systems have been particularly impactful. Across South Asia, neonatal deaths declined by nearly 60 per cent since 2000 and mortality in

children aged 1 to 59 months declined by over 75 per cent.

While South Asia still accounts for nearly 25 per cent of global under-five deaths, the region has made one of the fastest reductions globally, positioning India as a leader among high-burden countries.

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India's success demonstrates that targeted, large-scale, and equity-driven interventions can deliver rapid results, even in populous and diverse settings, health ministry sources said.

India is among the first few countries to set targets and release operational guidelines on Stillbirth Surveillance and response, the report said. This surveillance will strengthen systematic reporting to enable corrective actions in the public health system.

According to the UNIGME report, the under-five mortality rate in India reduced to 26.6 in 2024 from 127 in 1990, registering a sharp 79 per cent decline.

Infant mortality fell to 23.3 per 1000 live births, while the neonatal mortality rate recorded a 70 per cent decline from 1990. That year, India had a neonatal mortality rate of 57, which had fallen to 17 in 2024.



The regimes in Russia and Iran are brothers in hatred and that is why they are brothers in weapons. And we want regimes built on hatred, to never, never win in anything

MENINGITIS OUTBREAK IN ENGLAND

Britain will roll out meningitis vaccines to students at a university in southeast England after an "unprecedented" outbreak of the disease killed two people while the number of new cases jumped to 20.



of the day quote

Middle East conflict is upending its supply chains like rarely before and could push 45 million more people into acute hunger if the war lasts through June.

Government is fighting narco terrorism in all its forms and bombing places that serve as hideouts for those groups, of which many are Colombian, but only within Ecuadorian territory

We cannot deny that the crisis in the Middle East is monopolising conversation and precisely for that reason, I want to say to the government of Ukraine that nothing and no one will make us forget what is happening in Ukraine

Tehran warns Gulf energy installations

Dubai/Jerusalem/Beirut, March 18: Iran's huge Pars gas field was hit Wednesday in the first reported strikes on Iranian energy infrastructure in the Gulf during the US-Israeli war, a major escalation that prompted Tehran to warn its neighbours that their energy installations would be targeted "in the coming hours".



N-doctrine unlikely to change, Hormuz Strait needs new protocol: Iran

DUBAI: Iran's stance against the development of nuclear weapons will not significantly change, Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi told Al Jazeera in remarks relayed by Iranian media Wednesday, cautioning that the new supreme leader is yet to publicly express his view on the matter.

PARS IS IRAN'S SECTOR OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST GAS DEPOSIT, SHARED WITH QATAR. IRAN CONFIRMS KILLING OF IRANIAN INTELLIGENCE MINISTER. TEHRAN STRIKES ISRAEL AFTER KILLING OF SECURITY CHIEF LARIJANI.

Trump hosts Japan's Takaichi at White House

Japan's leader faces high-wire act in Washington over Trump's Iran demands



TRUMP HAS DEMANDED JAPAN, OTHERS SEND SHIPS TO STRAIT OF HORMUZ. JAPAN'S PACIFIST CONSTITUTION LIMITS MILITARY MISSIONS ABROAD. POLLS SHOW JAPANESE LARGELY OPPOSE ATTACKS BY US, ISRAEL

Tokyo, March 18: Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi visits the White House Thursday for meetings that offer US President Donald Trump a chance to lean on a key security partner for support in his Iran war, threatening to strain a decades-old alliance.

Takaichi is the first major ally set for face-to-face talks with Trump since he demanded that Japan, among a coalition of nations, send ships to escort tankers through the Strait of Hormuz waterway, largely closed by Iran in the conflict.

Indonesia arrests 4 military officers

Jakarta: Indonesian military authorities said Wednesday that they have arrested four officers allegedly involved in an acid attack on an activist known for his opposition to the expanded role of the military in civilian life.

Russian LNG tanker reaches Libyan waters

Rome: The damaged Russian liquefied natural gas tanker that has been adrift in the Mediterranean for the past two weeks has now entered Libyan search and rescue waters, Italy's civil protection agency said Wednesday.

1 hurt as helicopter crash lands in Nepal

Kathmandu: A private airline's helicopter carrying six people crash landed in Nepal Wednesday, with one person critically injured and five others sustaining minor injuries, authorities said.

3 Indian-origin men killed in Canada within week

Ottawa, March 18: Three India-origin persons were killed in Canada during the last seven days -- two cases of homicide, while one died in a group clash -- even as their friends worry they were the target of a racial hate crime, according to media reports.

Afghan-Pak CONFLICT

Kabul/Karachi, March 18: Pakistan and Afghanistan said they were pausing their military operations against each other Wednesday for the Islamic festival of Eid-al-Fitr, a surprise move two days after a drug rehab centre in Kabul was hit in the deadliest strike in months.

Pak, Afghanistan to pause fighting for Eid

KYIV: Ukraine's military struck two Russian plants producing and repairing military transport and cargo planes in the Ulyanovsk and Novgorod regions, the Ukrainian General Staff said Wednesday.



People travel on top of an overcrowded train, as they leave Dhaka to celebrate Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan, with their families, at Tongi Railway Station in Gazipur, Bangladesh

Pak, Afghanistan to pause fighting for Eid

said, adding that operations would resume with renewed intensity if there was any cross-border attack, drone attack or any "terrorist incident" inside Pakistan.

Ukraine strikes Russian aircraft plants, Kyiv says

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AFGHAN-PAK CONFLICT

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Perhaps the time has come for the regulators to consider some flexibility for consolidation and capital raising by the private sector banks

M RAJESHWAR RAO | FORMER DEPUTY GOVERNOR, RBI

RELIANCE JIO IPO ON ANVIL

Reliance Jio Platforms has hired 17 banks to manage its Mumbai stock listing, which will see the company raise no new funds and allow exits for some shareholders, four sources familiar with the matter said. The hiring of banks brings the parent of India's largest telecom operator Reliance Jio, with over 500 million users, closer to being possibly the country's largest IPO worth more than \$4 billion



of the day quote

The ceramic industry will face significant challenges due to the current ME conflict. Specifically, the availability of gas supplies, low-to-no demand from the ME region, and increased logistics costs for other overseas markets will directly impact production schedules

NITIN KANSAL | DIRECTOR, CRISIL RATINGS

Our decisive role has to be based on four key pillars. First to ensure global interoperability between devices, networks and services. And this has to be the case across the world so the world communicates seamlessly across a global unified communication ecosystem

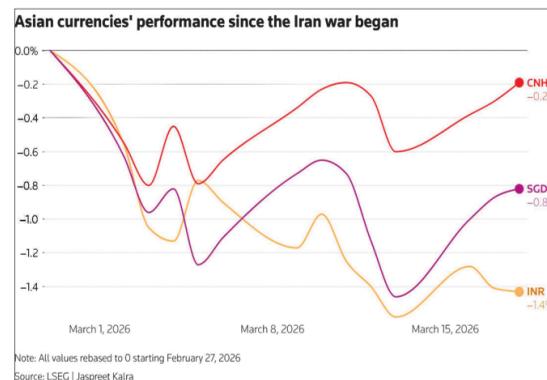
JYOTIRADITYA SCINDIA | COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER

UPI has transformed digital payments across India, but access to cash remains critical for millions, especially in rural and semi-urban markets

KRISHNAKUMAR DAGA | CEO, RNFI SERVICES

Iran war spotlights rupee's vulnerability

The rupee is down about 1.5% since the war began, hitting a record low of 92.4750 versus the US dollar last week. In that time, the yuan has slipped 0.2% and the Singapore dollar dipped 0.8%



REUTERS

Mumbai, March 18: Dark clouds over the rupee's outlook are prompting banks to pitch cross-currency trades targeting its underperformance against certain Asian peers, highlighting how the Iran war-sparked oil surge may create uneven outcomes.

Barclays Bank is recommending positioning for rupee weakness against the Chinese yuan, while HSBC is backing the Singapore dollar.

India is among the economies most sensitive to rising oil prices. Brent crude is up nearly 40% since the conflict in the Middle East began, threatening India's external balances and weighing on its inflation-growth balance. The rupee is down about 1.5% since the war began, hitting a record low of 92.4750 versus the US dollar last week. In that time, the yuan has slipped 0.2% and the Singapore dollar dipped 0.8%.

"The escalation in the Middle East will likely exacerbate the divergent external picture for India and China, with the former facing relatively more pain," Mitul Kotecha, head of Barclays' FX & EM macro strat-

- Oil price surge raises economic risks for India
- INR hit record low of 92.4750 last week
- SGD, CNY among Asia FX seen faring better than INR

The escalation in the Middle East will likely exacerbate the divergent external picture for India and China, with the former facing relatively more pain

MITUL KOTECHE | HEAD OF FX & EM MACRO STRATEGY ASIA, BARCLAYS

egy Asia, said in a note.

Barclays pointed to China's resilient exports and large buffers against the oil shock.

China is estimated to have strategic and commercial crude reserves of around 1.2 billion barrels. Barclays' economists expect it to log a record trade surplus above \$1.3 trillion this year.

The yuan has rallied nearly 15% against the rupee since May 2025, and Kotecha believes there is further room to run, recommending a long yuan/rupee position via a six-month non-deliverable forward.

HSBC, meanwhile, expects the Singapore dollar to remain well-supported regardless of how the conflict evolves.

The firm sees heightened chances of the Singaporean central bank steepening the SGD nominal effective exchange rate policy slope in April to manage

imported inflation, supporting the currency.

The bank noted that the rupee was already under pressure from a large non-oil trade deficit, sluggish IT exports, and weak portfolio flows.

Macro-focused hedge funds, meanwhile, have trimmed exposures as volatility rises, three traders at such funds said, requesting anonymity as they aren't allowed to speak to the media.

Two among them explained that while relative value trades between energy winners and losers make intuitive sense, most participants are focused on avoiding excessive risk, which would mean positions on such trades are likely to remain contained in the near-term.

PROFIT BOOKING

Silver slides ₹6K, gold plunges ₹1K

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: Silver prices plunged by Rs 6,000 to Rs 2.56 lakh per kilogram in the national capital Wednesday, while gold dropped by Rs 1,000 to Rs 1.60 lakh per 10 grams due to bearish domestic sentiment, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The white metal declined by Rs 6,000, or 2.28 per cent, to Rs 2,56,500 per kg (inclusive of all taxes) from Tuesday's closing level of Rs 2,62,500 per kg.

In the bullion market, gold of 99.9 per cent purity dipped by Rs 1,000, or 0.62 per cent, to Rs 1,60,300 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes). The yellow metal had closed at Rs 1,61,300 per 10 grams, up by Rs 1,050.

Gold prices declined as a wave of profit booking by traders met lacklustre physical demand, Dilip Parmar, Senior Research Analyst at HDFC Securities, said.



In the international market, spot silver was trading 0.79 per cent higher at \$79.92 per ounce, while gold fell \$16.10, or 0.32 per cent, to \$4,989.65 per ounce.

Investors are closely monitoring the outcome of the US Federal Reserve's policy meeting for cues on interest rate trajectory, which is expected to influence policy outlook and gold and silver prices.

CRUDE CHAIN DISRUPTION

Asian refining margins slip into negative space

Analysts say the current environment makes it increasingly difficult for refiners to sustain positive margins in the near term



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: Asian refining margins have turned negative after a brief surge earlier this month, as the ongoing Iran conflict disrupts crude supply chains and forces refiners across the region to cut operating rates.

Benchmark Singapore gross refining margins (GRMs), a key indicator of regional refining profitability, have fallen sharply from multi-year highs of about \$40-45 per barrel in early March to between negative \$5 and negative \$10 per barrel in recent sessions, according to market estimates.

The reversal highlights a rapid shift from supply-driven gains to mounting structural stress in the refining sector.

Supply disruptions strain ops

Countries across Asia are heavily dependent on oil and gas sent through the Strait of Hormuz, a critical waterway where shipping has almost halted following the US-Israeli strikes on Iran and Tehran's sweeping retaliation.

The disruption has led to feedstock shortages, prompting refiners in Singapore, Southeast Asia and parts of North Asia to scale back throughput.

While oil and gas price rises have already rocked markets in the region and raised concerns about inflation, freight rates from available export routes, including Red Sea ports, have also surged, raising the landed

cost of crude for Asian buyers.

Industry sources said Singapore GRMs do not account for freight costs, implying actual refining losses may be deeper than indicated by headline margins.

Freight charges have surged by as much as 842 per cent, as shipping companies impose war risk premiums and re-route vessels along longer, safer paths to deliver crude oil.

Rates for an Aframax, a medium-sized crude tanker, have jumped to \$9.46 per barrel from pre-war levels of \$2.46. Freight on larger Suezmax vessels has risen to \$9.90 per barrel from \$1.87, while rates for very large crude carriers (VLCCs) have climbed to \$9.18 per barrel, up from \$0.97 earlier, sources said.

Indian refiners not immune

Sources said Indian refiners are also facing similar pressures, given their reliance on Middle Eastern crude imports. Supply disruptions and logistical challenges are beginning to affect procurement strategies and overall refining economics.

At the same time, volatility in product cracks and weaker export arbitrage opportunities are narrowing margins. While complex refineries retain some flexibility to optimise crude sourcing and product yields, the broader trend points to margin compression and increased earnings volatility.

SHORT TAKES

Axis Bank to infuse ₹1,500cr in NBFC arm

New Delhi: Axis Bank Wednesday said it has approved the proposal to infuse Rs 1,500 crore in its NBFC arm Axis Finance Ltd (AFL) via rights issue over next one year to fund business growth. The Acquisitions, Divestments and Merger Committee of the Board of Directors of the bank at their meeting on March 18, 2026, has approved the proposal to infuse Rs 1,500 crore in AFL in one or more tranches before March 31, 2027, in one or more tranches as approved by the Reserve Bank of India vide its letter March 10, 2026, it said.

Meta moves Delhi HC against CCPA order

New Delhi: Meta Platforms Inc Wednesday assailed in the Delhi High Court a Central Consumer Protection Authority order imposing a Rs 10 lakh penalty on it for alleged unauthorised sale and listing of walkie-talkies on the Facebook Marketplace. The senior counsel for Meta submitted that, unlike Amazon and Flipkart, Facebook was not an e-market but merely a "notice board", and therefore, the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has no jurisdiction over it. Justice Purushendra Kumar Kaurav listed Meta's petition for hearing March 25, asking it to explain how the order can be termed "without jurisdiction". The judge also asked the petitioner why the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission cannot consider the issue.

Mankind acquires Rivortril from Roche

New Delhi: Mankind Pharma Wednesday said it has acquired Rivortril brand from Roche for the Indian market, with exclusive rights to manufacture, market and distribute the product across the country. Rivortril is the innovator brand of clonazepam and is widely prescribed for the management of neurological and psychiatric conditions.

CureBay acquires Saveo's pharma distribution biz

POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, March 18: CureBay, a hybrid healthcare company focused on expanding access to quality care across underserved communities, has acquired the pharmacy distribution business of Saveo Healthtech.

CureBay is backed by Bertelsmann India Investments, Elevar Equity, and British International Investment (BII). Saveo's Pharmacy distribution business is a technology-enabled B2B pharma distribution company serving over 10,000 retail pharmacies across Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, with operational hubs in Bangalore and Hyderabad.

This acquisition brings into CureBay an operational pharma distribution network, including physical hubs, procurement

capabilities, digital ordering systems and an experienced distribution team.

CureBay currently operates over 190 eClinics, serving more than 10 lakh patients across 15,000+ villages.

Priyadarshi Mohapatra, Founder and CEO, CureBay, said, "Medicines are central to continuity of care. By acquiring Saveo's pharmacy distribution business, we are strengthening our ability to ensure consistent and affordable access to medicines across the communities we serve. We see significant value in Saveo's operating processes, procurement depth and experienced team. This integration accelerates our pharmacy roadmap, enables us to scale faster and improves customer satisfaction by reducing supply gaps and enhancing reliability."

THREE DAYS OF MARKET RALLY

Sensex, Nifty climb nearly 1%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: Equity investors' wealth surged by Rs 9.18 lakh crore in three days of market rebound amid value buying and recovery in global benchmark indices.

In the past three trading days, the 30-share BSE Sensex has rallied 2,140.21 points or 2.87 per cent. On Wednesday, the Sensex jumped 633.29 points or 0.83 per cent to settle at 76,704.13.

Following the recovery in equities, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies surged by Rs 9,18,579.57 crore to Rs 4,39,00,831.84 crore (\$4.75 trillion) in three days.

"Indian equity markets extended their upward momentum for a third consecutive session, underpinned by a

Investors pocket ₹9.18L-cr



Domestic markets extended their recovery, supported by opportunistic buying after the recent sell-off

VINOD NAIR | HEAD OF RESEARCH, GEJIT INVESTMENTS LIMITED

steady build-up in buying interest through the day. The rally found support in mildly easing crude oil prices, even as lingering geopolitical tensions continued to cast a shadow in the background," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

Global cues remained constructive, with overnight

gains in US equities setting the tone, followed by firm trends across Asian markets and positive indications from European bourses, he added.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Eternal, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, Adani Ports, HCL Tech, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services and Axis Bank were among the major

gainers Wednesday.

NTPC, Hindustan Unilever, Sun Pharma and HDFC Bank were among the laggards.

In Asian markets, South Korea's benchmark Kospi jumped 5 per cent and Japan's Nikkei 225 index climbed 2.87 per cent. Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index also ended higher. Markets in Europe were trading in positive territory. The US market ended higher Tuesday.

The BSE MidCap Select index jumped 2.39 per cent, and the SmallCap Select index climbed 1.59 per cent.

Weak investor interest: India's privatisation drive derails

REUTERS

New Delhi, March 18: India is considering shelving three planned privatisation sales amid weak investor appetite, two government sources said, a slump that has already derailed its attempt to sell a stake in IDBI Bank and is a fresh blow to the government's flagship divestment programme.

The privatisation plan, delayed, opens new tab for years, is now facing fresh setbacks that include dwindling interest in state-run firms such as Shipping Corporation of India and HLL Lifecare, besides the collapse of the IDBI Bank stake sale last week after bids fell short of the government's minimum price.

India's finance, shipping and health ministries and the companies did not respond to Reuters' queries.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ambitious privatisation

plan was aimed at having the state exit most sectors while remaining only in sensitive ones such as telecom and banking.

But the government could only sell Air India to Tata Sons, and indirect holdings in steel-maker Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd to Tata Steel, and Ferro Scrap Nigam to Konoike Transport Co.

The initial delays to the plan came from bureaucratic red tape and political pushback after Modi failed to secure a full majority in 2024 elections and had to rely on regional allies to form the government.

DWINDLING BUYER INTEREST

India had invited bids to privatise Shipping Corporation in 2020 and received interest from multiple bidders, but a later review found the shortlisted bidders were ineligible to acquire the firm, the two government sources said.

The divestment department



has since proposed scrapping the sale and either restarting the process, or exploring a merger with Container Corporation of India to integrate the logistics chain, the sources said.

The government had also targeted privatising Container Corporation of India in 2021-22 but never launched the sale.

Another state-run firm, HLL Lifecare, was put on the block in 2021 and financial bids were invited for the sale. However, interested bidders declined to

Operational inefficiencies, unclear asset transfers and high government pricing expectations, coupled with limited incentives, are keeping investor interest weak and stalling privatization

ANKUR WAHAL | DIRECTOR, EN POINTE ADVISERS

- Weak buyer interest stalls privatisation of firms identified in 2021 plan
- Shipping Corp review finds bidder eligibility issues; fresh process or merger proposed
- Investors exit HLL Lifecare sale process, government considers splitting assets

move ahead with the process and sought changes in the sale offer terms, both the sources said, without giving details.

curbed investor interest, an industry source said.

Also, the lack of protection for liabilities such as pension and gratuity dues further deterred investors.

The failed sale will likely hit divestment receipts for the next financial year, starting April 1, Wahal said. India has targeted Rs 800 billion (\$8.66 billion), in asset monetisation and divestments, with a significant portion earlier expected from IDBI Bank.

This comes as the Middle East crisis threatens to raise India's oil import bill, adding pressure through higher inflation and a wider current account deficit.

"The government's privatisation plan has hit a wall," said NR Bhanumurthy, director at the Madras School of Economics. Potential bidders will be interested in acquiring state-run companies if valuations are attractive, he said.

Bowling void hits KKR

Simarjeet, Asif, Warriar in focus as Harshit Rana replacement

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 18: Three-time champions Kolkata Knight Riders have on their radar former Chennai Super Kings pace duo Simarjeet Singh and KM Asif, along with veteran Sandeep Warriar, to fill the void left by the injured Harshit Rana in the upcoming Indian Premier League.

KKR's pace resources have been hit hard by Rana's ligament strain in the right knee, sustained during India's T20 World Cup warm-up against South Africa.

The pacer has undergone surgery and is currently in rehabilitation with no fixed timeline for his return. Keeping Rana's absence in mind, the KKR think tank is exploring other options.

Simarjeet, who has played for CSK (2022, 2024) and Sunrisers Hyderabad, has 11 wickets from 14 IPL games.

A tall quick capable of hitting 140kph-plus and delivering sharp yorkers, he impressed with nine wickets in 10 matches for CSK in 2022 but struggled last season for SRH, managing two wickets in four games.

Asif and Warriar were called up for trials during KKR's first training session at Eden Gardens Wednesday, while Simarjeet had impressed earlier in Mumbai during the first phase of the trials as head of scouting Biju George and deputy Manvinder Bisla oversaw the process.

Asif, who rattled Mumbai with a career-best 5/24 in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, is known for his 140kph pace but has struggled with niggles.

The 32-year-old made his IPL debut for CSK in 2018 and has featured only sporadically since, with his last appearance coming for Rajasthan Royals in 2023. He has seven wickets from seven matches.



The 34-year-old Warriar debuted for KKR in 2019 and has since represented the franchise across three seasons apart from a stint with Gujarat Titans. He has eight wickets from 10 IPL matches.

Pathirana yet to get SLC clearance
There is also uncertainty over Sri Lanka pacer Matheesha Pathirana's availability as he is yet to receive clearance from Sri Lanka Cricket.

The slinger, bought for Rs 18 crore, is recovering from a calf strain suffered during the T20 World Cup against Australia, where he limped off after bowling four overs.

"They are yet to confirm about his joining. We are in constant touch and almost every day tickets are being booked and cancelled for him," a team source said.

KKR are also without left-arm seamer Mustafizur Rahman after he was released following a BCCI directive earlier this year, with Zimbabwe pacer Blessing Muzarabani

brought in as replacement.

All eyes on Muzarabani

Muzarabani, who grabbed 13 wickets in the T20 World Cup to become the joint second-highest wicket-taker, had a stunning 4/17 against Australia in a famous upset that led to the ouster of the former champions from the tournament, was the cynosure of all eyes during their first training session of the season.

The Zimbabwe quick, who has over 200 international wickets, is yet to make his IPL debut despite being previously signed by RCB in 2025 as a replacement for Lungi Ngidi.

He had also served as a net bowler with Lucknow Super Giants during Andy Flower's tenure.

KKR still have pace options in Vaibhav Arora, Akash Deep, Kartik Tyagi and a fit-again Umran Malik, who was seen working on his variations.

Kivi firepower joins Thursday

The squad will be bolstered

by New Zealand trio Finn Allen (Rs 2 crore), Tim Seifert (Rs 1.5 crore) and Rachin Ravindra (Rs 2 crore), who are set to join Thursday after their impressive T20 World Cup campaign.

Seifert was New Zealand's leading run-getter with 326 runs at a strike rate of over 165, while Allen smashed 298 runs at a strike rate of 200, including the fastest century in T20 World Cup history, against South Africa at Eden Gardens.

India spinner Varun Chakravarthy will also join on Thursday, while their record signing Australian all-rounder Cameron Green (Rs 25.20 crore) is set to arrive Friday.

The West Indies contingent -- Sunil Narine, Rovman Powell and Russell -- will link up March 24 ahead of their departure to Mumbai.

KKR begin their campaign against Mumbai Indians March 29 and will play their first home match against Sunrisers Hyderabad April 2, where team owner Shah Rukh Khan is expected to be present.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Sporting comeback ends Bodo/Glimt fairytale run

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, March 18: Real Madrid and Paris Saint-Germain comfortably saw off English opponents Manchester City and Chelsea, Arsenal battled past Leverkusen and Sporting CP mounted a memorable comeback against Bodo/Glimt as the first four teams through to the UEFA Champions League quarterfinals are confirmed.

Scintillating Sporting CP became just the fifth team in Champions League history to overcome a first-leg deficit of three goals or more as they struck twice in extra time to complete a memorable comeback against Bodo/Glimt.

Trailing 3-0 after last week's first leg in Norway, the hosts made the breakthrough when Goncalo Inacio rose to head in a corner. They kept the pressure on in the second half and got their reward when Pedro Goncalves finished off a brilliant team move before Luis Suarez converted a penalty with 12 minutes remaining.

In extra time Maximiliano Araujo quickly fired in to spark delirium and Rafael Nel slammed in a late fifth as Sporting reached the quarter-finals for the first time since the 1982/83 European Cup.

Real Madrid knocked out Manchester City for the third straight campaign, sealing a 2-1 win through Vinicius Junior's late double.

City, trailing 3-0 from the first leg, started brightly but were undone after a penalty incident saw Bernardo Silva dismissed. Erling Haaland equalised on the night, while efforts from Jeremy Doku and Rayan Ait-Nouri were ruled out.

Paris Saint-Germain produced a ruthless display to hammer Chelsea 8-2 on aggregate in London, underlining their title credentials.



FIVE-STAR SPORTING STAGE FIGHTBACK TO REACH QUARTERFINALS

VINICIUS JR NETS DOUBLE AS REAL MADRID DISPATCH MAN CITY

PSG CRUSH CHELSEA 3-0 FOR 8-2 AGGREGATE WIN

EZE STUNNER HELPS ARSENAL PAST LEVERKUSEN INTO LAST EIGHT

gate in London, underlining their title credentials.

Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, who had already struck twice in the first leg, wasted no time adding to his tally, muscling past his marker to score inside six minutes.

The visitors continued their early blitz as Bradley Barcola capped a swift counterattack

with a clinical finish in the 15th minute, effectively putting the tie beyond Chelsea's reach.

Even after the break, PSG maintained control, with substitute Senny Mayulu adding a superb third to complete a dominant performance. The French champions now march into the quarter-finals brimming with confidence, where a tougher test awaits.

Elsewhere, Arsenal secured a composed 3-1 aggregate victory over Bayer Leverkusen to book their quarter-final spot. Arsenal's first goal arrived just before half-time when Eberechi Eze unleashed a thunderous strike after a slick passing move.

Declan Rice then added a composed second, ensuring Arsenal's dominance was reflected on the scoreboard and sealing a deserved progression

SHORT TAKES

Ishan to lead SRH in early part of IPL

Hyderabad: Sunrisers Hyderabad Wednesday appointed India wicketkeeper-batter Ishan Kishan as interim captain for the early part of IPL 2026, with Abhishek Sharma as his deputy, while Pat Cummins recovers from his injury. Cummins has been sidelined with a stress injury on his lower back, which kept him away for a major part of the last Ashes series Down Under as well as the T20 World Cup. "Pat Cummins will miss a few games while recovering from injury. Until he recovers, Ishan Kishan will be the captain and Abhishek Sharma will be the vice-captain," the franchise said on social media. IPL 2016 winners SRH, however, did not specify the number of matches Cummins is set to miss. Kishan's appointment as SRH's stand-in skipper comes after a successful run across formats. The left-handed batter played a key role in India's title-winning campaign in the T20 World Cup, finishing as the fourth-highest run-scorer in the tournament with 317 runs in nine matches at 199.37. He averaged 80.25 and struck three half-centuries. His exploits with the willow also saw Kishan rising to the No 2 spot in the ICC rankings for T20I batters, a list which is led by Abhishek. Earlier this season, Kishan had captained Jharkhand to their first-ever title in India's premier domestic T20 competition, Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 Trophy.

Winning start for Advani, Kothari

Mumbai: Defending champion Pankaj Advani and India No 6 Sourav Kothari won their respective round of 32 matches in the CCI Snooker Classic tournament here Wednesday. Advani overcame Robin D'Souza 4-0 (58-55, 73-7, 92-33, 64-52) while producing one notable break of 65 in the third frame. Kothari, on the other hand, rolled in successive breaks of 59 (second frame) and 57 (third) to beat Pune's Suraj Rathii 4-0 (93-28, 70-0, 123-7, 72-37) and make it to the round of 16. Former national champion and India No 2 Aditya Mehta dropped a frame against Mumbai's Manav Panchal before winning 4-1 (94-6, 79-37, 37-69, 72-7, 119-20) which included a century effort of 113. He had other breaks of 58 in the first frame and 71 in the fourth.

THOMAS AND UBER CUP

Indian teams clubbed with defending champions China

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, March 18: The Indian men and women teams have been handed a decent draw in the group stages of the 2026 Thomas and Uber Cup badminton team championships to be held in Horsens, Denmark, from April 24 to May 3.

Both the Indian teams, seeded eighth in the tournament based on their individual players' world rankings, have been clubbed in Group A alongside defending champions and top seeds China.

The 2022 Thomas Cup champions, India, will be favourites to claim one of the two quarterfinal spots from Group A, which also comprises Pan Am champions Canada and Oceania champions Australia. The women's team, however, has a slightly tricky road to the knockout stages, as



they are clubbed with European team championship runners-up Denmark and bronze medallists Ukraine.

While the Indian men created history by winning the 2022 edition of the Thomas Cup, the women's team won the bronze medal in the 2014 and 2016 editions. The upcoming Thomas Cup will mark the 34th edition of the tournament, while the Uber Cup returns for its 31st edition. As many as 16 teams will be competing in each tournament and will be divided into four groups of four teams each.

National Para Athletics C'ship kicks off

RISHABH PAREKH, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 18: The 24th National Para Athletics Championship commenced Wednesday at the Kalinga Stadium here. The event is organised by the Department of Sports and Youth Services (DSYS), Government of Odisha, in collaboration with the Paralympic Committee of India (PCI) and the Para Sports Association of Odisha, and will run until March 21, 2026.

The prestigious championship was officially declared open by the Minister of Sports and Youth Services, Suryabanshi Suraj, who graced the occasion as the chief guest.

Around 1,460 para-athletes from 28 states, along with teams from the BSF and SSCB, are participating in the competitions, which will be held across 145 medal events. The host state, Odisha, is being represented by 40 athletes. Events are scheduled daily from 9:00 AM to 11:00



AM and 4:00 PM to 8:00 PM.

Speaking at the inauguration, Sports Minister Suraj remarked, "Odisha is redefining inclusive sports by ensuring that all upcoming sports projects are Divyang-friendly. This event is a testament to India's growing stature as a global sporting power, aligned with the vision of 'Viksit Bharat 2047.'"

Babu Singh, MLA (Ekamra-Bhubaneswar), added, "Our para-athletes are the pride of the nation. From this sacred land of Lord Jagannath, they will carry home the best experience of Odisha's hospitality."

Renowned Paralympian and PCI President Devendra Jharia emphasised that "this is the largest championship to

date, showcasing the historic progress of Indian para-sports following the success at the Paris Paralympics."

The event was attended by Ashok Kumar Panda and Bijay Kumar Swain, Additional Secretaries of DSYS, Markanda Reddy, Odisha's first-ever Paralympian, and several other senior officials.

An inspiring, multi-medal-winning athlete who played a key role in ushering in the Paralympics movement in Odisha, Markanda said, "In my view, this is one of the best platforms for players to showcase their talent. It serves as a challenge for the contestants to perform at their best, which will help identify and retain top para athletes for bigger tournaments like the Commonwealth Games and the Olympics. I would also like to thank the Prime Minister for providing such wonderful opportunities for para athletes, and I wish all the players the very best."

Morocco new AFCON champions; Senegal stripped of title

Senegal slams 'illegal and deeply unjust' decision after CAF strips the title and pledges to appeal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dakar (Senegal), March 18: Senegal isn't giving up its Africa Cup of Nations title without a legal fight, with the country's soccer federation saying it will appeal the "unfair, unprecedented, and unacceptable decision" to strip the team of its victory in a chaotic final against host Morocco.

The country's government went further as it said it will "pursue all appropriate legal avenues" to overturn the decision and called for an international investigation "into suspected corruption" within African soccer's governing body.

The Confederation of African Football's appeals board Tuesday ruled Senegal forfeited the final in January by walking off the field and turned its 1-0 win

in extra time into a 3-0 default win for Morocco.

"This unprecedented and exceptionally serious decision directly contradicts the fundamental principles of sporting ethics, foremost among which are fairness, loyalty, and respect for the truth of the game," the Senegalese government said in a statement Wednesday.

"It stems from a manifestly erroneous interpretation of the regulations, leading to a grossly illegal and deeply unjust decision. By calling into question a result achieved at the end of a match that was properly played and won in accordance with the rules of the game, CAF seriously undermines its own credibility and the legitimate trust that the African people place in continental sporting institutions."

Appeal to CAS

The Senegalese Football Federation (FSF) said the decision "discredits African football," and that it will appeal "as soon as possible" to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne,

CONTINENTAL CROWN CONTROVERSY



Switzerland, a process that would typically take a year to deliver a verdict.

"The FSF reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the values of integrity and sporting justice and will keep the public informed of developments in

this matter," the federation said. **Shambolic final in Rabat**

The January 18 final descended into chaos when Senegal players left the field in stoppage time after having a late goal ruled out before Morocco was awarded a potentially game-de-

ciding penalty. There were scuffles between rival players while furious Senegal fans tried to storm the field where they were battling with stewards, before Senegal coach Pape Thiaw led most of his players off. It was unclear if the game could continue.

But they returned after around 10 minutes and play resumed with Morocco star Brahim Diaz having his "Panenka"-style penalty saved by Edouard Mendy. Senegal's Pape Gueye scored the only goal in extra time.

Rules and regulations

CAF in its decision referred to Articles 82 and 84 of its Africa Cup regulations. Article 82 says if a team "refuses to play or leaves the ground before the regular end of the match without the authorization of the referee" it loses the game and is eliminated from the competition. Article 84 awards the opposing team a 3-0 win.

However, Law 5 of the International Football Association Board (IFAB), which sets the

rules for the game globally, gives "full authority" to referees to determine what happens in a match. "The decisions of the referee regarding facts connected with play, including whether or not a goal is scored and the result of the match, are final. The decisions of the referee, and all other match officials, must always be respected," according to Law 5.2.

Previous decision

CAF in January imposed fines of more than \$1 million for both the Senegalese and Moroccan federations. It banned Thiaw for five Africa games for bringing the game into dispute. But it did not interfere with the outcome of the game.

On Tuesday, it reduced Morocco player Ismael Saibari's three-game ban to one match and scrapped his \$100,000 fine for unsporting behavior, while it also reduced fines that were imposed against the Moroccan federation for the conduct of its ball boys from \$200,000 to \$50,000. Another fine was also reduced.