



## PC's feat

Actor Priyanka Chopra adds another milestone to her journey by appearing on the cover of the National Geographic 33

LEISURE | P2



## China-US trade talks

China and US reach trade consensus, but Trump postpones Beijing visit amid West Asia conflict

INTERNATIONAL | P10



## Gold, silver prices fall

Silver prices tank ₹17,800 to ₹2.38 lakh per kilogram Thursday, while gold prices drop ₹7,000 to ₹1.53 lakh per 10 grams

BUSINESS | P11



## Athletics era

India will host the World Indoor Athletics Championships for the first time in 2028 in Bhubaneswar

SPORTS | P12

## SHORT TAKES

### Vikram Doraiswami new envoy to China

**New Delhi:** Seasoned diplomat Vikram Doraiswami was Thursday appointed as India's new ambassador to China, a move that comes amid efforts by the two sides to rebuild ties that came under severe strain following the over four-year military standoff in eastern Ladakh. Doraiswami, a 1992-batch IFS officer, is currently serving as Indian High Commissioner to the UK. He will succeed Pradeep Kumar Rawat. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said Doraiswami is expected to take up the new assignment shortly.

### SIR: City BLO suspended

**Bhubaneswar:** A schoolteacher, who was appointed as a Booth Level Officer (BLO) for the SIR of electoral rolls, was suspended for alleged dereliction of duty here Thursday. Rashmi Sahoo, an assistant teacher at Government High School in Chandrasekharpur Phase-II, was appointed as BLO for SIR, said a BMC notification. "However, she failed to attend and properly discharge her assigned duties related to the exercise without any valid reason or prior authorisation. This amounted to gross negligence, dereliction of duty, and disobedience of lawful orders," it said, adding that the BLO has been suspended.



**RISKY JOURNEY:** People board an overcrowded passenger train to reach their homes on the eve of Eid al-Fitr holidays, marking the end of the Islamic holy fasting month of Ramadan, at a railway station in Lahore, Pakistan, Thursday

### CLASS XI GIRL FOUND DEAD; FAMILY CRIES RAPE & MURDER

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Kamakhyanagar, March 19:** A college girl, who had been missing since Wednesday, was found dead with multiple injuries across her body in a forest in Dhenkanal district Thursday morning, with her family alleging that she was raped before being murdered.

The girl, a resident under the Bhuban police limits, was a Class XI student at a local college. According to family sources, she did not return home after attending an examination at her college Wednesday. Relatives conducted a search throughout the night, but to no avail.

However, locals found her body, bearing multiple physical injuries, in a forest and alerted the police early Thursday morning. Dhenkanal SP Abhinav Sonkar, along with Kamakhyanagar SDPO Rajani Kant Samal and IIC Jeetendra Kumar Mallick, reached the spot and conducted a probe. A forensic team was also deployed.

Later, the victim's family filed a formal complaint with the police, reportedly alleging rape and murder. Kamakhyanagar police registered a case (191/26) under multiple sections of the BNS. The SP said that the police are conducting the investigation from various angles.

## War escalates as energy sites hit

AP & REUTERS

**Dubai, March 19:** Iran intensified its attacks on Gulf energy sites Thursday, striking back after an Israeli attack on its main natural gas field — a major escalation in the Middle East war that sent global fuel prices soaring and risked drawing Iran's Arab neighbours directly into the conflict.

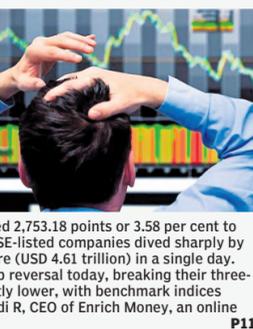
Tehran's targeting of energy production further stressed global supplies already under pressure because of Iran's stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz.

Since the US and Israel launched the war February 28, Iran's top leaders have been killed in airstrikes and the country's military capabilities have been severely degraded. Still, Iran - now led by the son of the supreme leader killed in the war's opening salvo - remains capable of missile and drone attacks rattling its Gulf Arab neighbours and a global economy dependent on the energy they produce.

Underscoring the danger to ships in the region, a vessel was set ablaze off the coast of the UAE and another damaged off Qatar. But efforts to bypass the strait were also under pressure: An Iranian drone hit a Saudi refinery on the Red Sea, which the country had been hoping to use as an alternative exit route. Brent crude oil, the interna-

### MARKET MAYHEM: ₹12.87L-CR WIPED OUT

**New Delhi:** Equity investors' wealth eroded by ₹12.87 lakh crore Thursday as stock markets went into a tailspin, with the benchmark Sensex plunging over 3 per cent, pressured by a spike in crude oil prices due to increasing attacks on energy infrastructure in West Asia. Investors have lost over ₹37 lakh crore since the West Asia crisis erupted February 28. Snapping its three-day winning run, the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 2,496.89 points or 3.26 per cent to settle at 74,207.24, a level not seen since April 7, 2025. During the day, it dived 2,753.18 points or 3.58 per cent to 73,950.95. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies dived sharply by ₹12,87,273.89 crore to ₹4,26,13,557.95 crore (USD 4.61 trillion) in a single day. "Indian equity markets witnessed a sharp reversal today, breaking their three-day recovery rally and closing significantly lower, with benchmark indices declining by nearly 3.3 per cent," Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.



P11

tional standard, briefly rose above USD 119 per barrel in the morning before pulling back to USD 112.70, which is still a 5 per cent rise from the prior day.

Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE denounced the Iranian attacks. Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit called them a "dangerous escalation".

But Iran showed no signs of backing down. Saudi Arabia said its SAMREF refinery in the Red Sea port city of Yanbu was hit. Saudi Arabia had begun pumping large volumes of oil west toward the Red Sea to avoid the Strait of Hormuz.

Qatar, a key source of natural gas for world markets, said extensive damage was caused by Iranian missiles hitting the Ras

Laffan LNG facility, where production had already been halted after earlier attacks. Damage to the facility could delay Qatar's ability to get supplies to the market even after the war ends. Two refineries in Kuwait and gas operations in Abu Dhabi also were targeted by Iran, local authorities said.

An Iranian missile attack hit Israel's Oil Refineries Ltd in the northern port city of Haifa but did not cause "significant damage", Reuters reported, quoting Israel's Energy Ministry.

Iran stepped up its attacks on Gulf energy facilities after Israel hit South Pars, the Iranian part of the world's largest gas field, which is located offshore in the Persian Gulf and owned

jointly with Qatar.

With some 80 per cent of all power generated in Iran coming from natural gas, according to the International Energy Agency, the attack directly threatens the country's electricity supplies. Natural gas is also used to supply household heating and cooking across the Islamic Republic.

Hitting the gas field is a "clear expansion of the conflict", the New York-based Soufan Centre said in a research note.

Iran condemned the strike on South Pars, with President Masoud Pezeshkian warning of "uncontrollable consequences" that "could engulf the entire world".

In Washington, President Donald Trump said that Israel would not attack Iranian natural gas infrastructure. But he warned on social media that if Iran continued striking Qatar's energy infrastructure, the US would retaliate and "massively blow up the entirety" of the field.

Asked later about the possibility of US ground troops being deployed to Iran, Trump responded, "No. I'm not putting troops anywhere."

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth told reporters that the US military "controls the fate" of Iran. The Pentagon is seeking USD 200 billion in additional funds for the Iran war, a senior administration official said. **P8 & 10**

## Lightning, drowning & snakebite claimed 6,578 lives in 2 yrs: Min

PNN & AGENCIES

### Bhubaneswar, March 19:

A total of 6,578 people were killed in lightning, drowning, and snakebite incidents in the state over two financial years — 2023-24 and 2024-25, Revenue and Disaster Management (R&DM) Minister Suresh Pujari told the Assembly Thursday.

In a reply to a question from MLA Chakramani Kanhar, Pujari said 3,439 people died in such incidents in 2023-24, and 3,139 in 2024-25.

During the two years, 3,860 people drowned in different water bodies, while lightning strikes claimed 600 lives and 2,118 people were killed after being bitten by venomous snakes, Pujari said.

In 2015, the Odisha government declared heatwave, lightning, boat capsizing, tornado, heavy rain, drowning, snakebite and fire as state-specific disasters, providing assistance to victims from the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF).

"In case of deaths due to lightning, drowning and snakebite, the Odisha government provides ₹4 lakh to the next of kin of each deceased from the SDRF through direct benefit

### 416 KILLED IN FIRE MISHAPS

**R**&DM Minister Suresh Pujari Thursday informed the Assembly that 416 people have lost their lives in fire accidents across the state over three financial years.

Property worth ₹27.84 crore and 2,537 houses were damaged in the fire incidents during 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25, Pujari said in a written reply to a question by BJD legislator Arun Kumar Sahoo.

He said 192 people died in fire accidents in 2022-23, while 118 and 106 deaths were reported in the subsequent two financial years.

"In case of death due to fire-related accidents, an ex gratia of ₹4 lakh is being pro-

vided to the next of kin of the deceased in accordance with the norms of the SDRF," he said. "According to norms, a financial assistance of ₹16,000 is being provided to injured fire victims who remain under treatment in hospital for more than a week and ₹5,400 to those who remain under hospital care for less than a week," he added.

In case of complete damage of a house in a fire accident, financial assistance of ₹1.30 lakh is provided in hilly areas and ₹1.20 lakh in plain areas. Similarly, assistance of ₹6,500 and ₹4,000 is provided for damage to pucca and kutcha houses, respectively, Pujari said.

transfer," Pujari said. During the two financial years, the government disbursed a total of ₹263.12 crore as ex gratia to the families of 6,578 deceased people, he said.

More than 200 people drowned in Balasore, Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh, Keonjhar, Ganjam and Cuttack during the period, as per the data

provided by the minister in the House.

The majority of snakebite deaths were registered in Balasore, Cuttack, Ganjam, and Keonjhar districts, he said.

Mayurbhanj district accounted for the highest number of deaths at 119 due to lightning strikes in the two years.

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## NASA rover finds about 4-bn-yr-old buried river delta on Mars

REUTERS

**Washington, March 19:** Using ground-penetrating radar, NASA's Perseverance rover has detected underground remains of an ancient river delta on Mars in some of the oldest evidence yet obtained showing how water once flowed on the surface of Earth's planetary neighbour.

Researchers said the six-wheeled rover revealed geological features up to 115 feet (35 metres) underground while traversing 3.8 miles (6.1 km) of terrain inside Jezero Crater, an area in the Martian northern hemisphere believed to have been flooded with water and home to an ancient lake basin long ago.

Perseverance identified layered sediments and eroded surfaces indicative of a delta environment, a large-scale fan-shaped deposit of sediment formed at the location where a river enters a larger body of water like a lake. They estimated that the now-buried delta dates to about 3.7 to 4.2 billion years ago. Mars, like Earth, formed roughly 4.5 billion years ago, meaning this delta existed relatively early in its history.

The researchers said this delta predated a similar nearby surface feature called the Western Delta that dates to about 3.5 to 3.7 billion years ago.

The rover's RIMFAX instrument sends radar pulses downward and records puls-

es bouncing back off underground features, allowing a three-dimensional mapping of the subsurface. The new findings were based on RIMFAX's deepest data collected to date, obtained from September 2023 to February 2024 over a span of 250 Martian days.

Because water is considered crucial to the possibility of past life on Mars, the mounting evidence of its wet past is of particular interest. Mars, now cold and desolate, long ago possessed a thicker atmosphere and warmer climate, allowing for liquid water on its surface.

"From the features mapped by RIMFAX, we believe that Jezero Crater hosted an ancient water-rich environment,



A 'selfie' taken by NASA's Perseverance Mars rover July 23, 2025

REUTERS

capable of biosignature preservation that existed prior to the formation of Jezero's Western Delta," said UCLA planetary scientist Emily Cardarelli, a

member of the Perseverance science team and lead author of the research published Wednesday in 'Science Advances'.

A biosignature refers to

chemical or physical evidence indicating past or present life.

On Earth, river deltas are places that concentrate sediments and create niches favourable to microbial life.

Scientists last year announced that a sample of rock obtained by Perseverance in Jezero Crater contained a potential biosignature suggestive of ancient microbial life, though the minerals in the sample also can form through nonbiological processes. The rock dated to roughly 3.2 to 3.8 billion years ago.

Perseverance since 2021 has been exploring Jezero Crater. Scientists believe river channels spilled over the crater wall and created a lake.

# leisure



## PFEIFFER REFLECTS ON LESSONS FROM LOSS

Hollywood actress Michelle Pfeiffer has learned some lessons and she has done that through losing people in her life. The 67-year-old actress has "suffered losing someone who was meaningful" to her more than once in her life, and Michelle admits that the experience has taught her some valuable lessons

## DEMI LOVATO OPENS UP ON FOOD STRUGGLES

Demi Lovato has revealed how her relationship with food has evolved after struggling with an eating disorder. The singer shared that she once avoided even birthday cake during her own celebrations. Today, however, that same cake has become a powerful symbol of healing, self-acceptance and her journey toward a healthier mindset



### FORTUNE FORECAST



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#### ARIES

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

#### TAURUS

Ganesha is happy to say that you will acquit yourself well in whatever you do or undertake today. You will show outstanding caliber in handling the responsibilities given to you. If you are participating in a competition, you are likely to be way ahead of others. Those engaged in business can look forward to an exceptionally profitable day. By and large, the day will keep you happy and in high spirits.

#### GEMINI

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

#### CANCER

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

#### LEO

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

#### VIRGO

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

#### LIBRA

Sit back and think hard – think about what is it that you really want when it comes to your business enterprises, because there are many ways to go about things at work, and they all shall lead you somewhere different. The stars favour you today with a golden touch, so take it in your stride and make hay while the sun shines. Learn to take charge and take initiatives, says Ganesha.

#### SCORPIO

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

#### SAGITTARIUS

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

#### CAPRICORN

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

#### AQUARIUS

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

#### PISCES

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

# Wamiqa pushes limits

**Mumbai:** *Bhooth Bangla* has been generating strong buzz ever since its teaser was released online. The film marks the much-anticipated reunion of Akshay Kumar and director Priyadarshan after 14 years, promising audiences a signature blend of comedy and spooky entertainment.

Amid the ongoing shoot, a behind-the-scenes moment from one of the film's songs has caught attention. According to sources from the production team, Wamiqa Gabbi performed a challenging train sequence where she stood at the edge of a moving train. The scene required careful coordination and perfect timing with Akshay Kumar to ensure both safety and visual impact.

What stood out during the shoot was the strong trust and comfort Wamiqa shared with her co-star while executing the stunt. A source close to the film revealed that she relied entirely on Akshay during the sequence and was confident performing the scene without external support. Their effortless coordination helped the moment appear seamless and natural on camera.

The sequence has since become a talking point on the set, with crew members praising Wamiqa's confidence and the on-screen chemistry between the two actors.

Backed by Balaji Motion Pictures in association with Cape of Good Films, the film also stars Paresh Rawal, Tabu and Rajpal Yadav. The film is scheduled to release in theatres April 10, 2026.

AGENCIES



## Priyanka hits another milestone

Her advocacy is closely linked to Beyond Type 1, a nonprofit co-founded by her husband Nick Jonas, who himself lives with Type 1 diabetes. Through this platform, Priyanka has actively worked to increase awareness about the disease, particularly in India where it is often misunderstood despite affecting many children and teenagers.

For the past five years, Priyanka has served as a board member of Beyond Type 1, supporting educational campaigns, digital outreach, and the recruitment of diabetes ambassadors across the country. These initiatives aim to improve early detection and provide reliable information to communities that may lack access to proper healthcare resources. Priyanka has shared that learning about the condition through Nick Jonas deepened her understanding and motivated her to support awareness efforts.

The recognition also reflects her broader humanitarian work, including more than a decade with UNICEF, where she became a Goodwill Ambassador in 2016. Through health advocacy and social initiatives, Priyanka continues to use her global platform to inspire meaningful change.

AGENCIES

**Mumbai:** Priyanka Chopra Jonas has added another milestone to her global journey by appearing on the cover of the National Geographic 33, recognised as a changemaker for raising awareness about Type 1 diabetes. The honour celebrates her efforts to challenge stigma and promote access to life-saving information about the condition.

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**Mumbai:** Bollywood actress Alia Bhatt, who is gearing up for the release of her upcoming film *Alpha*, has shared that she is launching outsiders with her upcoming production. The actress attended the launch of her upcoming production *Don't Be Shy* Thursday, where she took to the stage and had a fun exchange with her mentor Karan Johar.

The show was unveiled as a part of the Prime Video Play slate event. During the event, KJo told Alia, "You've truly mastered the art of being a season producer already, Alia because your answers seem beautifully independent of my questions for some reason".

Responding to the same, Alia said, "Yes Karan because there is a way to launch actors".

KJo then quipped, "And clearly I wouldn't know that, would I? I've never done something like that", referencing how he launched Alia through his production *Student of the Year*.

The actress then said, "Well, what can I say? We've learnt from the best. And the best have always taught us that there is a timing for everything".

KJo then said, "I have a very important question to ask you. It's crucial and critical and it's not on a script. Are they outsiders?".

The actress then said, "Yes". KJo told her, "I'm so proud of you".

AGENCIES



## Alia backs outsiders

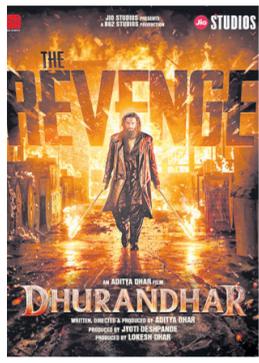
# Dhurandhar 2: Ranveer powers an explosive sequel

**Mumbai:** The last time a film release felt like a nationwide celebration was when Shah Rukh Khan returned to the big screen with *Pathaan*. In 2026, that same excitement surrounds *Dhurandhar 2*, led by Ranveer Singh and directed by Aditya Dhar. Bigger, louder, and more intense than the first installment, the film delivers a high-octane action spectacle driven largely by Ranveer's commanding performance.

The sequel focuses on the backstory of Jaskirat Singh Ranghi, a young man from Pathankot training to become a third-generation Indian Army



officer. His life takes a tragic turn when his father is killed and his sisters are assaulted during a land dispute. Sentenced to death, Jaskirat is secretly recruited by intelligence officer Ajay Sanyal, played by R Madhavan, as part of Operation Dhurandhar. Over time, he transforms into Hamza Ali Mazari, an undercover asset



tasked with dismantling Pak-

**Director:** Aditya Dhar  
**Cast:** Ranveer Singh, Akshaye Khanna, Sara Arjun, Sanjay Dutt, R Madhavan

istan's terror networks. Ranveer Singh dominates the film with a performance that balances vulnerability and ferocity. As Hamza, he moves seamlessly between emotional family moments and brutally intense action sequences. One standout scene shows a wound-

ed, chained Hamza laughing maniacally while facing his enemies, creating one of the film's most gripping moments.

The film expands its geopolitical themes, touching upon terror funding, fake currency rackets, drug trafficking in Punjab, and pro-Khalistani networks. It also references real-world events such as the Uri attack, surgical strikes, demonetisation, and the Ram Jannabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute.

Supporting performances add weight to the narrative. Arjun Rampal plays the menacing Major Iqbal, while

Sanjay Dutt makes a stylish extended cameo as SP Chaudhary Aslam. Sara Arjun and Gaurav Gera also contribute memorable moments.

Musically, the film blends nostalgia with variety, featuring recreations of classics and international tracks.

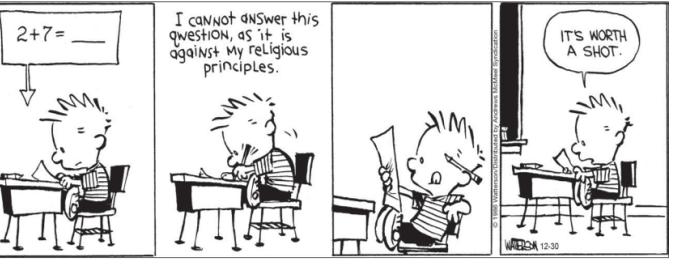
While the climax may not reach the emotional crescendo of the first film, *Dhurandhar 2* delivers answers fans were waiting for. Ultimately, the film is a must-watch for its scale, action, and Ranveer Singh's powerhouse performance.

AGENCIES

### PEANUTS



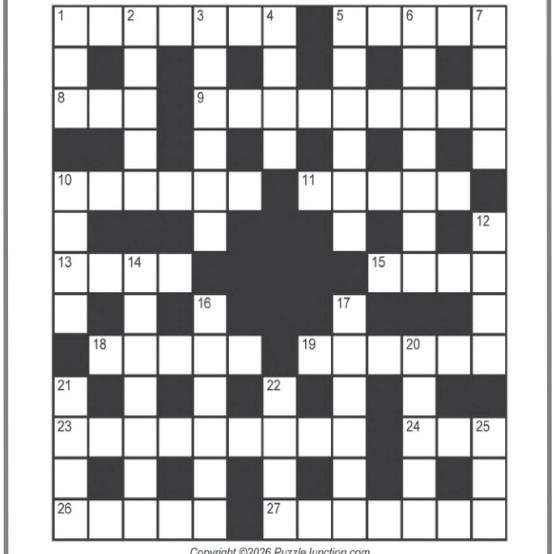
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### BREVITY



### CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Inuits
  - 5 Apprehension
  - 8 Tourist's aid
  - 9 Disguised
  - 10 Some joints
  - 11 Lucifer
  - 13 Badgers
  - 15 Like a crone
  - 18 Dependable
  - 19 Firebird
  - 23 As a rule
  - 24 Health resort
  - 26 Rocker
  - 27 Garlands
  - Down**
  - 1 Stately tree
  - 2 Done for
  - 3 Kind of voyage
  - 4 Big bag
  - 5 Stiletto
  - 6 Departing
  - 7 Lozenge
  - 10 Abbey resident
  - 12 Nipper
  - 14 Black Sea republic
  - 16 Farm machine
  - 17 Sock pattern
  - 20 Beginning
  - 21 Gator's kin
  - 22 Forehead
  - 25 Commercial

### SUDOKU

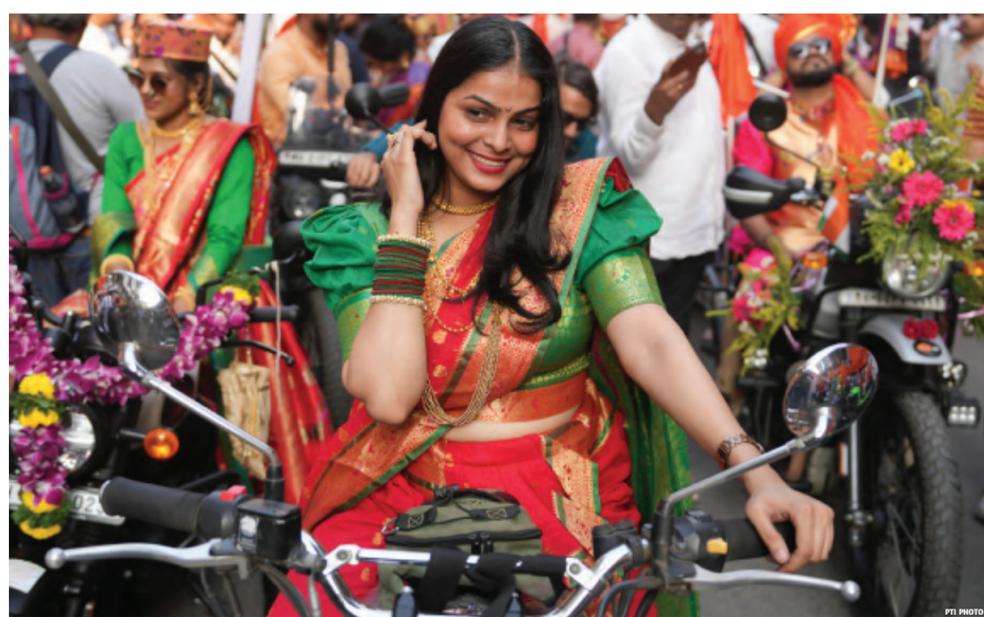
To solve the Sudoku puzzle, fill in the boxes in such a manner that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any.



### SOLUTIONS



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW



**SPRING FEST:** A woman dressed in traditional attire takes part in a bike procession on the occasion of 'Gudhi Padwa' in Mumbai, Thursday

## House din over SCB fire; Oppn seeks min's scalp

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, March 19:** The Assembly was adjourned thrice Thursday as the Opposition disrupted the House proceedings, demanding Health Minister Mukesh Mahaling's resignation over the death of 12 patients at a state-run hospital in Cuttack.

The House saw multiple adjournments during the day, initially till 11:30am and then again till 1pm. Speaker Surama Padhy had convened an all-party meeting to address the stalemate. But it failed to resolve the impasse. The ruckus continued when the House reconvened, leading to its adjournment till 4pm.

As soon as the Question Hour began, Opposition BJD and Congress MLAs stormed into the well of the House, waving placards and raising slogans, while some attempted to climb the Speaker's podium. Opposition MLAs slammed the BJP government with the chant "Ram nam satya hai" and slogan "Mohan Majhi Hai Hai", targeting the Chief Minister.

The Speaker could continue the Question hour for just about eight minutes amid the din, after which she adjourned the proceedings till 11:30am.



The uproar continued even when the House reassembled at 11:30am, forcing the Speaker to adjourn the proceedings till 1pm. Padhy convened an all-party meeting to resolve the stalemate, but that remained inconclusive.

Outside the House, BJD Chief Whip Pramila Mallik said, "The minister must resign as over 10 people have died in the devastating fire at the ICU of SCB Medical College, a government-run premier medical facility."

Targeting the BJP government, she pointed out that a fire incident had occurred during the BJD rule, and the then health minister Atanu Sabyasachi Nayak was asked to resign on moral grounds. "Where is the morality of the BJP government? The government cannot absolve itself of responsibility by ordering a judicial inquiry or

suspending four junior-level officers," she said.

Mallik also demanded stringent action against the hospital superintendent and top officials "for their negligence that led to the loss of lives".

BJP member Irasis Acharya came down heavily on the Opposition for disrupting the proceedings while pointing out that the state government has already taken punitive steps in the matter.

"The government has suspended four officials, launched an investigation by a fact-finding team and also ordered a judicial probe into the matter. There is no point in stalling House," he said.

The fire at the Trauma Care ICU of SCB early March 16 that killed 12 people and left 11 injured has sparked outrage across the state.

## Diamond found in Nuapada: Min

AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, March 19:** A preliminary survey by multiple agencies has revealed the presence of diamond in Nuapada district, marking a significant development in the state's mineral exploration efforts.

Steel and Mines Minister Bibhuti Bhushan Jena informed the Assembly that traces of diamonds were found at Kalamidadar in Nuapada district.

He added that detailed technical, economic, and feasibility studies are currently underway to determine whether mining operations would be commercially viable. Beyond diamond, several other valuable minerals have also been identified across the state. Ruby deposits have been detected in Hinjilibahal-Jilingbar region of Kalahandi district.

In Realmal area of Deogarh district, surveys have uncovered copper, nickel, graphite, and gold reserves.

Further discoveries include gold deposits in Gopur-Jaldih area of Banspal block in Keonjhar district, as well as copper and gold in Kuliana block of Mayurbhanj district.

A joint survey by the Directorate of Mines and Geology (DoMG) and the Atomic Mineral Directorate has estimated approximately 407.722 million tonnes of rare earth elements along the coastal belt of Puri and Jagatsinghpur districts.

## SC relief for Elvish Yadav

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 19:** Supreme Court Thursday quashed an FIR and subsequent proceedings against YouTuber Elvish Yadav who was arrested for allegedly using snake venom at a rave party in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, in 2023, and said the case cannot be sustained in law.

A bench of Justices MM Sundresh and N Kotiswar Singh said it was confining its consideration to two

specific questions – the applicability of Section 2(23) of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, and the validity of proceedings under Section 55 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

The top court, however, granted liberty to the competent authority to initiate appropriate proceedings in accordance with law by filing a proper complaint under Section 55 of the Wildlife Protection Act.

The case against Yadav was registered November 22, 2023, and he was arrested March 17, 2024.

The apex court said offences under Indian Penal Code (IPC) invoked in the FIR against Yadav were based on an earlier FIR registered in Gurugram, in which a closure report has been filed.

The bench noted that no recovery had been made from Yadav himself, with the chargesheet only alleging that he placed orders for snake venom for recre-

ational purposes through his friends, who are co-accused in the case.

It said provisions of NDPS Act cannot be invoked as the liquid substance recovered from the co-accused was not a prescribed substance under the schedule.

On the invocation of the Wildlife Protection Act, the SC said Section 55 mandates that prosecution can be initiated only through a complaint filed by a duly authorised officer.

## 5 killed in two road accidents

**Bhubaneswar/Balasure:** Five people were killed in two separate road accidents in Ganjam and Balasure districts Thursday, police said. Three people travelling on a motorcycle died after their bike hit a bus at Patapalli village under Sorada police station of Ganjam district, the police said. The police, with the help of locals, took them to Sorada hospital, where they were declared brought dead. In another accident, two people, the driver and helper of a potato-loaded truck, were killed when the vehicle skidded off the road and rolled down 20 feet into a ditch after it rammmed into another heavy vehicle. The accident occurred at a bridge near Talanagar on NH-16 under Soro police station in Balasure district. The truck was coming from Chandrakona of Medinipur district in West Bengal to Pattamundai in Kendrapara, a police officer said. Soro police reached the spot and took the duo to Soro hospital where doctors declared them brought dead, he said.

## Dead snake in dalma; 30 fall ill

AGENCIES

**Kendrapara, March 19:** At least 30 people, including women and children, fell ill after consuming dalma served during a religious function in Nuagaon village under Ward No-10 of Pattamundai municipality in this district.

The incident occurred Wednesday night during a "Bhagabat Parayan" event, where prasada had been arranged for nearly 400 attendees.

After the ritual concluded, villagers began eating the food when a shocking discovery was made—a dead poisonous snake was found in the dalma.



Soon after consuming the dish, around 40 people reported feeling unwell and were rushed to the Pattamundai Sub-Divisional Hospital for treatment.

According to physician Chandra Sekhar Das, who attended to the patients, all affected persons were treat-

ed and kept under observation for about two hours. Fortunately, no signs of poisoning or toxic effects were detected, and they were later discharged.

A medical team visited the village Thursday on the directions of the district administration, including the Collector and the Chief District Medical Officer (CDMO) of Kendrapara.

However, no evidence of poisoning was found among the villagers.

Authorities are monitoring the situation, while the incident has raised concerns over food safety during large community gatherings.

## WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT 2026

### SocMed use sinks happiness among girls

Finland happiest country for 9th straight year

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Helsinki, March 19:** Heavy social media use contributes to a stark decline in well-being among young people, with the effects particularly worrying in teenage girls in English-speaking countries and Western Europe, according to the World Happiness Report 2026 published Thursday.

The annual report, published by the Wellbeing Research Centre at the University of Oxford, also found that Finland is the happiest land in the world for the ninth year in a row, with other Nordic countries such as Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway ranking among the top 10 countries.

But it highlighted how life evaluations among under 25-year-olds in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have dropped significantly over the past decade, and suggested that long hours

### INDIA BEHIND NEPAL, PAKISTAN

India ranked 116th, in terms of overall 'Happiness ranking' - up from 118th in 2024 and 126th in 2023 - but yet remains behind Nepal and Pakistan. While Nepal with 99th rank (92 in 2025, 93 in 2024) and Pakistan with 104th rank (109 in 2025, 108 in 2024) remained much ahead of India, Sri Lanka ranked 134th (134 in 2025, 128 in 2024) and Bangladesh 127th (127 in 2025, 129 in 2024). However, in 2026, India ranked much better on several of the factors. For instance, it was 64th on perception of corruption (questions about prevalence of corruption); 78th on generosity (donation to charity); 61th on freedom (freedom to choose); 89th on GDP per capita (in terms of purchasing power parity); 95th on healthy life expectancy (based on data from WHO), and 123rd on social support (who one can count in need), the report showed. In India's neighbourhood, Afghanistan is yet again ranked as the unhappiest country in the world, this year again 147th, same as for 2025.

spent scrolling through social media is a key factor in that trend.

### Costa Rica jumps to fourth place

A new entry to the top five on the list is Costa Rica, which climbed to fourth place this year after rising through the ranks from 23rd place in 2023. The report attributes that to well-being boosts from family bonds and other social connections.

"We think it's because of the quality of their social lives and the stability that they currently enjoy," said Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, an Oxford economics professor who directs the Wellbeing Research Centre and co-edits the World

Happiness Report. Latin America more generally has strong family ties, strong social ties, a great level of social capital, as a sociologist would call it, more so than in other places," he added.

The report said Finland and the other Northern European countries' steady ranking on top is related to a combination of wealth, its equal distribution, having a welfare state that protects people from the risks of recessions, and a healthy life expectancy.

As in previous years, nations in or near zones of major conflict remain at the foot of the rankings. Afghanistan is ranked as the unhappiest country again, followed by Sierra Leone and Malawi in Africa.

### Teenage girls especially vulnerable

Respondents were asked to evaluate their lives on a scale from 0 to 10. Among under-25s in English-speaking and Western European countries, that score dropped by almost one point over the past decade.

The report said the negative correlation between well-being and extensive social media use is particularly concerning among teenage girls. For example, it said that 15-year-old girls who use social media for five hours or more reported a drop in life satisfaction, compared to others who use it less.

Young people who use social media for less than one hour per day report the highest levels of well-being, researchers said, higher than those who do not use social media at all. But adolescents are spending an estimated average of 2.5 hours a day on social media.

"It is clear that we should look as much as possible to put the social back into social media," De Neve said.

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## Govt signs pact to revive forgotten foods & crops

## Odisha marks culinary tradition today

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

**Bhubaneswar, March 19:** With Pakhala Dibasa set to be observed March 20 (Friday), a wave of enthusiasm is sweeping across homes, hotels, and cultural spaces, turning the humble dish into a celebration of identity, heritage, and health.

This year, the festivities have scaled up significantly, with over 100 leading hotels and restaurants in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack hosting dedicated Pakhala festivals. Prominent hospitality brands such as Nimantran, Mayfair and Swosti Premium are offering elaborate “Gourmet Pakhala Thalis” featuring up to 20 traditional side dishes, attracting food lovers and tourists alike.

With participation from millions of households and the Odia diaspora across more than 20 countries, Pakhala Dibasa has evolved into a global observance—often described as an unofficial “national day” for Odias. As temperatures rise, the state is once again uniting over a bowl of its signature dish, celebrating not just food but a way of life.

A two-day Pakhala Paraba

### PAKHALA DIBASA



was inaugurated Thursday at Panthanivas, showcasing Odisha’s rich culinary heritage through a blend of food, culture, and discussions on sustainability.

The inaugural session was addressed by Tourism Director Deepankar Mohapatra, setting the tone for the festival. The event will continue Friday in the presence of Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida, along with other dignitaries.

A key highlight of this year’s

celebrations is the Tourism department’s bid to secure a Guinness World Record for the largest serving of pakhala, with around 800-850 kg being prepared to showcase its nutritional and agricultural significance.

Organised in collaboration with the Robin Hood Army, the initiative also promotes a zero-wastage approach in line

with sustainability goals. Meanwhile, Cuttack is set for a vibrant community celebration at Barabati Fort, with festivities scheduled from midnight to early afternoon Friday. Mayor Subhash Singh noted that pakhala, once seen as a simple household dish, has now earned wide recognition for its health benefits and cultural significance.

More than just a seasonal meal, Pakhala—fermented rice soaked in water and often served with curd—is deeply rooted in Odia culture. Traditionally paired with accompaniments such as badi chura, aloo bharta, saga bha-ja, roasted vegetables like baigana poda and bilati poda, and even fried or dried fish such as sukhua bha-ja, it offers both nutrition and relief during the sweltering summer months. Its probiotic qualities and cooling effect have also helped it gain popularity beyond Odisha.

Deputy CM Singh Deo says the agreement aims to preserve tradition through the conservation, documentation, and commercialisation of neglected crops



**Bhubaneswar, March 19:** The state government’s Agriculture and Farmers’ Empowerment department Thursday signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with Watershed Support Service and Activities Network (WASSAN), a non-profit organisation, to revive forgotten foods and neglected crops in the state.

According to an official statement, the state government has plans to implement a ₹247.024 crore initiative to preserve and promote traditional crops and indigenous seed varieties in 25 biodiversity-rich blocks across 15 districts.

These biodiversity blocks are mostly located in Gandhamardhan, Niyamgiri, Sunabeda, Satkosia, Gupteswar, Malyagiri and Similipal.

The main objective of this programme is to preserve and promote traditional crops and indigenous seed varieties that are disappearing from the current agriculture. The implementation period of the scheme is for five years (2025-26 to 2029-

**S**tate government plans a ₹247.024 crore initiative to preserve and promote traditional crops and indigenous seed varieties across 25 biodiversity-rich blocks in 15 districts

**I**dentified blocks are located in regions such as Gandhamardhan, Niyamgiri, Sunabeda, Satkosia, Gupteswar, Malyagiri and Similipal

**T**he programme aims to revive disappearing traditional crops and safeguard indigenous seed diversity

30) with an outlay of ₹247.024 crore, the statement said.

Deputy Chief Minister KV Singh Deo, who is also in charge of the Agriculture department, said, “Food keeps the tradition alive, its protection is the protection of our tradition. The project will focus on conservation, documentation, and commercialisation of neglected crops, benefiting local farmers and communities.”

Senior government officials, including the department commissioner-cum-secretary Sachin Ramachandra Jadhav, were present when the MoA was signed.

Officials said that the initiative aligns with Odisha’s efforts to promote sustainable agriculture and preserve its rich biodiversity.

The main objectives are conservation and documentation of neglected crops, multiplication of the traditional and indigenous varieties, revival of neglected crops, establishment of State Resource Centres, Kamala Pujari fellowship programme, farmer field schools, nutrition profiling on traditional foods, value addition and commercialisation of various food items prepared from forgotten crops.

## CPET application deadline extended

**Bhubaneswar:** Deadline for submitting Common PG Entrance Test (CPET) application has been extended again. Students can now apply till March 22, up to 11:45pm through SAMS portal by filling out the Common Application Form (CAF). The deadline was earlier scheduled for March 18. Higher Education (HE) department decided to extend it in view of the larger interest and future prospects of students. CPET is mandatory for students seeking admission to postgraduate courses for the academic session 2026-27, with selections based on marks secured in the entrance examination. Meanwhile, the HE department has set a target to commence PG courses across universities and colleges by July 10.

## BPFTIO unveils ‘Rewind & Reframe’

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Cuttack, March 19:** Biju Pattanaik Film and Television Institute of Odisha (BPFTIO), Cuttack has unveiled its flagship initiative, ‘Rewind and Reframe,’ a Thursday talk series designed to spark dialogue and inspire creative minds.

Conceived by BPFTIO chairman Himanshu Sekhar Khatua, the landmark initiative is envisioned as a dynamic platform that fosters dialogue, encourages thoughtful reflection, and sparks inspiration.

Speaking about the initiative, Khatua said, “Rewind and Reframe is more than a talk series as it is a bridge between experience and aspiration. By engaging with creative luminaries, we aim to inspire our students

and encourage them to hone their research capabilities. It will enrich their perspectives, and preserve invaluable knowledge for generations to come.”

“The initiative is in alignment with the spirit of National Educational Policy, 2020 and serves to redefining learning, experimental education, critical thinking, interdisciplinary engagement, and mentorship,” he added. Speaking on the new initiative, institute Director Suvera Ranjan Ray said, “The series is designed to ignite curiosity and provide insights into diverse fields that include cinema, media, culture, education and emerging technologies. Each session will offer valuable perspectives that go beyond textbooks and classrooms.”

The inaugural event was

graced by eminent director and thespian Ananta Mahapatra and Padma awardee Adwaita Charan Garanayak, who shared their creative journeys and insights with the audience. Federation of Film Society of India chairman Premendra Majumdar extended his best wishes and reflections through a video message.

The occasion also marked the unveiling of the Rewind and Reframe logo and the launch of the Campus Film Society. The programme concluded with a screening of acclaimed film ‘Krantidhara’, followed by an interactive session with students, faculty, and guests.

TV Engineering-cum-Department HOD Rakesh Kumar Das delivered vote of thanks.

## HEATWAVE PREPAREDNESS Protecting human life top priority: Minister

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, March 19:** Protection of human life is our top priority, said Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari Thursday, as the state government reviewed its heatwave preparedness at a high-level meeting at Lok Seva Bhawan. He directed all departments to take proactive and co-ordinated measures to effectively manage potential heatwave conditions across the state.

The government has decided to set up model cooling shelters in heatwave-prone areas, along with special measures to ensure the safety of schoolchildren and outdoor workers.

In a key decision, no physical or construction work will be permitted between 11 am and 3 pm during extreme heatwave conditions. The minister warned of strict action against those violating the guidelines.

Authorities have been directed to ensure uninterrupted power supply and adequate drinking water, along with the installation of water kiosks, ORS supplies, first-aid kits, and cooling spaces in schools, hospitals, and other public places. Hospitals will set up dedicated heatstroke wards, while schools may introduce water breaks to keep children hydrated.

Districts such as Jharsuguda, Brajrajnagar, Angul, and Talcher—known for severe heat conditions—will receive special focus with targeted interventions. Mining and industrial zones will also adopt enhanced safety measures, including cooling facilities.

To tackle recurring summer power issues, the Energy department has been directed to ensure uninterrupted electricity supply, maintain adequate reserves, and respond promptly to public complaints through helplines.

## DPS KALINGA CELEBRATES PREP GRADUATION DAY



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, March 19:** Delhi Public School (DPS) Kalinga celebrated its Prep Graduation Day Thursday, marking the culmination of the pre-primary academic session 2025-26. Prithi Mummid, Developmental Paediatrician and Founder-Director of Blossom Centre for Child Development, Saheed Nagar, attended the event as the chief guest.

The event began with Principal Subabrata Mukherjee extending a warm welcome to the guests. The programme opened with “Divine Steps,” an Odissi recital, followed by a melodious English choir and a captivating dance presentation, “Rang-e-Rehmat,” highlighting unity in diversity. The young

performers enthralled the audience with their energy and enthusiasm.

A special address by Pro-Vice Chairperson Mala Mishra highlighted the importance of inculcating values such as kindness and empathy in today’s competitive world.

Speaking on the occasion, Mummid expressed her delight at being part of the programme. She spoke about contemporary parenting and emphasised the importance of leading by example for children.

Executive Trustee Sunaina Patro, Vice Principals Swati Nath and Sanjay Kumar Jena, and Headmaster Mustaque Ahmed congratulated the mentors and applauded the students for their impressive performances.

## BJD urges NCST to act on tribal atrocities

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, March 19:** Biju Janata Dal (BJD) Thursday urged the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) to take suo motu cognisance of the alleged molestation of a girl in Mayurbhanj district and incidents of atrocities against tribal women in the state.

In a memorandum submitted to the commission, the party expressed grave concern over the “rising incidents” of violence against tribal women and minor girls, alleging police inaction and administrative negligence in several districts.



The party highlighted an incident that took place March 12 under Tiring police station limit of Mayurbhanj district, where a 14-year-old tribal girl was allegedly molested, which triggered widespread outrage among local tribal communities.

Alleging that the police did not take action, the BJD said that the aggrieved people were instead dispersed by force,

which raised serious questions about accountability and sensitivity.

The BJD memorandum was submitted to the NCST by party leader Priyabrata Majhi.

He claimed this was not an isolated case and similar cases were reported from districts such as Rayagada, Kandhamal, Koraput (Borigumma), Lampatput, and Sundargarh, which indicate systemic gaps in ensuring safety, justice, and protection for tribal communities.

The memorandum also underlined key concerns, including delays in FIR registration, lack of timely arrests, insensitive handling of victims, suppression of public protests,

and absence of accountability for erring officials.

Majhi urged the NCST take cognisance of the Bahalda incident and similar cases and order an independent and time-bound inquiry, including the role of police officers, recommend immediate departmental action against those found negligent or complicit, and establish a robust monitoring mechanism to ensure accountability and timely justice.

The party emphasised that the prevailing situation has created a climate of fear and insecurity among tribal communities and called for immediate intervention to restore faith in the justice system.

## Happy mouth, happy life: Spreading smiles

ASHOK KUMAR MOHANTY

**A**s part of the global oral health awareness campaign, World Oral Health Day—established by the FDI World Dental Federation—is observed March 20 each year to highlight the importance of maintaining healthy teeth and gums. The date symbolically reflects key oral health indicators: healthy adults should retain 20 natural teeth throughout life, while children should have 20 baby teeth.

This year’s theme, “A Happy Mouth is a Happy Life,” underscores that good oral health is fundamental to overall well-being, confidence, and quality of life at every age. With nearly 3.5 billion people affected globally, prioritising oral hygiene can help prevent chronic diseases, boost confidence, and enhance overall quality of life.

Poor oral health has been linked to several serious conditions, including cardiovascular disease, stroke, pneumonia, diabetes, and Alzheimer’s disease. It is also associated with an increased risk of preterm birth and low birth weight in pregnant women. To maintain good oral health, it is essential to follow consistent daily dental hygiene habits. Brushing your teeth after every meal is ideal, but if

### WORLD ORAL HEALTH DAY



### ‘Oral health is the new wealth’



**Bhubaneswar:** As the world prepares to observe World Oral Health Day, this year’s theme, “A Happy Mouth is a Happy Life,” puts the focus on the importance of oral hygiene beyond just a bright smile. Dental surgeon **Subasish Behera** underscored its growing significance, calling oral health “the new wealth.” He noted that the mouth serves as a gateway to the body, and poor oral health—especially gum disease—is closely linked to conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and respiratory infections. “A healthy mouth allows individuals to eat, speak,

and smile with confidence—free from pain or embarrassment,” he said, stressing that preventive care is far more cost-effective than advanced treatments. Echoing similar views, actress and practicing dentist **Bhoomika Dash** highlighted the importance of daily oral care. “Everything we eat passes through the mouth, directly impacting our health. Often, the condition of our teeth reflects our overall health status,” she said. She urged people to adopt simple yet effective habits such as brushing twice daily with fluoride toothpaste, flossing, using mouthwash, and consulting a dentist regularly.



that is not possible, it should be done at least twice a day—once in the morning and before going to bed. Use a soft-bristled toothbrush with fluoride toothpaste

and follow the correct up-and-down technique for at least two minutes each time.

A well-balanced diet rich in vitamins and minerals plays a key

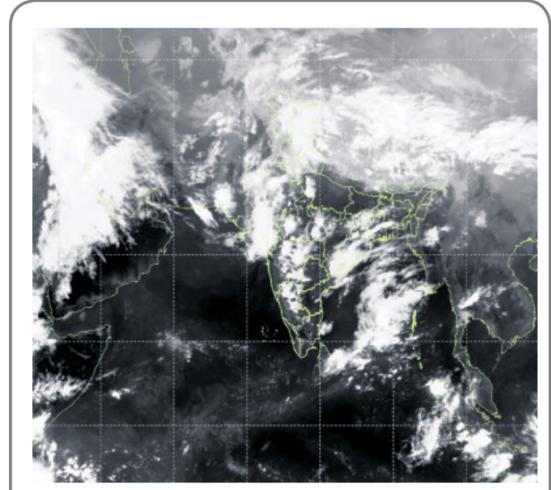
role in oral health, while foods high in added sugars should be limited. It is also advisable to avoid consuming sweet or sticky foods between meals, as they can increase the risk of tooth decay.

Cleaning the tongue is important, as a large portion of bacteria in the mouth resides there. Gently massaging the gums with your fingers can also help improve blood circulation. Flossing daily helps remove plaque and food particles from between the teeth and under the gums, while using a mouthwash can clear any remaining debris after brushing and flossing. Toothbrushes should be replaced every three months or sooner if the bristles begin to wear out. It is also important to change your toothbrush after recovering from illnesses like a cold, flu, or cold sores to prevent re-infection.

Regular visits to a dental professional, ideally every six months, are crucial for preventive check-ups, professional cleaning, and early detection of oral problems. Additionally, avoiding tobacco in all forms and limiting alcohol consumption can significantly reduce the risk of oral cancer, gum disease, and tooth loss.

(The write is a Senior Dental Surgeon at Tata Main Hospital, Noamundi.)

MARKET WATCH					
CURRENCY		BOURSES		COMMODITIES	
INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR	92.80 ▲ 0.34	SENSEX	74207.24 ▼ 2,496.89	GOLD	₹144,854 ▼ ₹8,171
EURO	107.12 ▲ 0.57	NIFTY	23002.15 ▼ 775.65	SILVER	₹228,813 ▼ ₹19,381



WEATHER			
	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	34.7°	34.2°	Light to Moderate rain or thunderstorm very likely
Min Temp	22.5°	20.8°	
Humidity	58%	61%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	

## CLASSIFIED AFFIDAVIT

By virtue of Affidavit No.-4788, I, Pradeep Kumar Debta, S/o Keshaba Debta, Resident of Debta Colony, W.D. No.-13, Bargarh-768028, I do here by declare that henceforth, I shall be known as Pradeep Debta for all purposes.

# Family ostracised over sale of land to Dalit man

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Kabisuryanagar, March 19:** In a disturbing instance of social ostracism, a family in Arjunpalli village under Kabisuryanagar police limits in Ganjam district has allegedly been boycotted by co-villagers for selling land to a person belonging to the Scheduled Caste (SC) category. According to reports, Dayanidhi Gouda, who lives with his wife, son and three daughters, had sold a portion of his land about four years ago to meet the expenses for his children's marriages. His eldest daughter has been married off while the marriages of rest three children are finalised. The land sale reportedly triggered anger among villagers, who convened a meeting and imposed a fine of ₹3,500 on Gouda. He paid the fine and also signed an undertaking not to sell land to outsiders in the future. However, another village



meeting was convened March 16, 2025 and the villagers allegedly imposed a fresh penalty of ₹7 lakh or equivalent land on Gouda. When Gouda failed to comply, the family was socially boycotted. The family was denied access to the village temple, shops, roads and essential services such as water, washerman and community support, forcing them into severe mental dis-

stress and social isolation. After enduring the situation for months, Gouda and his son Anil Kumar Gouda approached Kabisuryanagar police and lodged a complaint, seeking justice. They also alleged that villagers had fenced the disputed land. Kabisuryanagar police station in-charge and IPS probationer Nitesh Kumar Mishra said that a probe is underway.

# Hubby held for strangulating woman

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Buguda, March 19:** Police arrested a man on charge of strangling his wife to death over dowry demand at Pochalundi village under Balipadar police outpost in Buguda police limits of Ganjam district. The deceased was identified as Sunita Nayak, 34, the younger daughter of Narayan Nayak of Adipur village. The accused husband, Manoj Kumar Jena, 36, is the elder son of Nikunjia Jena of Pochalundi village. Manoj is accused of strangling his wife to death with an iron



lock chain used for bikes. Based on a complaint filed by the woman's father alleging dowry-related murder, police registered a case (124/26). The body has been sent for post-mortem, and the bike

lock chain, allegedly used in the crime, has been seized, said IIC Sitanshu Sekhar Mandhata. According to reports, Sunita and Manoj got married five years ago as per traditional rites. At the time of marriage, the bride's family had given gold ornaments, a motorcycle, household items and ₹1.35 lakh in cash as dowry. Later, the husband's family allegedly demanded an additional ₹5 lakh, which the bride's father said he was unable to provide. Police said Sunita had been subjected to prolonged harassment by her husband and

sister-in-law. She endured the abuse hoping things will get better and considering her 4-year-old daughter. On Wednesday night, Manoj informed his father-in-law about Sunita's death. When the family reached her in-laws' house, they noticed injury marks on her neck, raising suspicion of strangulation with a chain or rope. Following the complaint, police reached the spot and recovered the body. The accused man was arrested and the iron chain allegedly used in the murder seized.

# EOW nabs another man for swindling ₹9.6-cr DMF fund

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar/Bariapada, March 19:** The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Odisha Police arrested a man for his alleged involvement in swindling funds worth ₹9.6 crore of the District Mineral Foundation (DMF), Mayurbhanj, an official said Thursday. One builder, Brajesh Mishra, was arrested from Chhattisgarh Tuesday, and he was brought to Bhubaneswar on transit remand after being produced in a court in the neighbouring state, the EOW officer said.

# 8 arrested for shielding cattle smugglers; arms, cars seized

BARGAON: Police in Sundargarh district have arrested eight men for allegedly posing as cow protectors while secretly aiding cattle smugglers and extorting money from them. Authorities seized two firearms, 10 rounds of ammunition and two cars from the suspects, police said. Superintendent of Police Amrit Pal Kaur said the group publicly opposed cattle smuggling but privately provided protection to smugglers in exchange for payment. Their activities were uncovered late Wednesday night and disclosed Thursday during a press briefing at Bargaon police station. Police said a special team acted on information about the illegal transportation of about 150 cattle from Chhattisgarh through Bargaon to Khatkurbahal in Kutra block. A team led by SDPO Bibhuti Bhushan Bhol conducted a raid near Jarangoli and apprehended the suspects, who were allegedly escorting the smugglers. Police also seized a knife and eight mobile phones. A total of 105 cattle were rescued and moved to a local shelter. A case has been registered, and further investigation is underway.

# Balasure runner awarded medal at Sikkim marathon

BALASORE: Marathon runner Dambardhar Chanda of Balasure has won a medal at a marathon in Gangtok, Sikkim, completing a 75-kilometre race in just over 11 hours at age 56. Chanda finished sixth in the race, clocking 11 hours, 10 minutes and 55 seconds, within the 12-hour limit set by organisers. The event, held in snow-covered mountainous terrain, was considered highly challenging. He said he was the only participant from Odisha in the competition. A resident of the Kuruda area, Chanda began running regularly about two years ago and started competing in marathons in August 2024. Since then, he has participated in events across 24 states within a year and a half, winning several medals. In September, he became the first Odia runner to win a medal in Ladakh, finishing second. He has also received recognition and cash awards in multiple states, including West Bengal, Manipur and Jharkhand. Chanda is scheduled to compete in marathons in Patna and Haryana over the next two weekends. He aims to participate in events across all states and Union territories by 2026. He also urged authorities to develop proper running tracks in Balasure, citing safety concerns.

# Patients suffer as SLNMCH new building remains shut

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Koraput, March 19:** Raising serious concerns over the state of healthcare infrastructure, former MLA Nimai Sarkar has questioned the government on the operational status of the new building of Saheed Laxman Nayak Medical College and Hospital (SLNMCH) in Koraput. Despite being inaugurated by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, the building remains largely non-functional, exposing what many are calling sheer administrative negligence. Functioning for over a decade now, SLNMCH was expected to significantly upgrade healthcare services in the region with the addition of the new infrastructure. However, the reality on the ground paints a disappointing picture. Since its inauguration, the new building has reportedly remained



underutilised, with nearly 50 per cent of its facilities lying unused and deteriorating. Basic medical necessities such as properly equipped ICU rooms, patient wards, and resting facilities are either incomplete or non-operational. As a result, patients continue to suffer despite the presence of a medical college in the district. "What is the use of such a massive infrastructure if it cannot serve the people?" said Sarkar, expressing frustration over the continued delay. Patients from Koraput and nearby areas are still forced to travel to cities like Visakhapatnam and Bhubaneswar for proper treatment and diagnostics. This not only increases their financial burden but also puts lives at risk during emergencies. The situation inside the hospital further reflects the strain on the system. Hundreds can be seen daily waiting in long queues in front of the hospital, especially at critical service points like the blood bank and drug distribution counters. Patients and their attendants endure hours of waiting, often in distressing conditions. Local residents and healthcare activists have strongly criticised the administration, accusing it of neglect and lack of accountability. "Healthcare is a basic right, not a privilege. The people of Koraput deserve better," said a local social worker.

# After banker, his parents, aide held in ₹5.56-cr fraud

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

The arrest was made on the basis of a police case registered by the chief manager of a nationalised bank, Bariapada branch. According to the EOW, a gang of fraudsters managed to transfer ₹9.56 crore from the account of the DMF trust of Zilla Parishad, Mayurbhanj, by producing clone cheques in April 2024. Out of the illegally transferred amount, ₹5.04 crore was blocked, and ₹13.56 lakh lying in 33 accounts have been frozen, they said. During the investigation, the police officers found that an amount of ₹98 lakh and ₹49 lakh had been transferred to the bank accounts of Mishra's two construction companies. Of which, ₹14.19 lakh was transferred to Mishra's own bank account, and the rest amount to some other accounts with ill intention, the officer said. Mishra is a member of a larger gang having complex networks in different states like Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha, he said. After his arrest, EOW has obtained important clues about the entire gang. They have been doing these scams for the last four years. An investigation is in progress to reach out to the other fraudsters, including the boss of the gang, he said. Earlier, three accused persons of the case—Pomesh Tembhare, Ghanshyam Ahuja and Ajmir Mondal—were arrested from Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal, respectively.

# 8 arrested for shielding cattle smugglers; arms, cars seized

**Jajpur, March 19:** A day after arresting a banker, Vigilance officers Thursday arrested his father and mother along with another man for allegedly embezzling government funds to the tune of ₹5.56 crore in Jajpur district, officials said. The accused have been identified by the Vigilance officers as Pradip Kumar Mohanty, his wife Gitarani Mohanty and Bishnu Prasad Dash, former senior clerk at the office of BEO, Korei. Pradip's son, Matruprasad Mohanty, the branch head of a small finance bank in Bhadrak, was arrested by the Vigilance team Wednesday. The Vigilance team managed to catch the couple after tracking them across multiple locations in Odisha and West Bengal as they were on the run to evade arrest. Pradip, a headmaster in a government high school under the Korei block education office (BEO), was re-engaged in the Korei BEO office after his retirement seven years back. The couple had allegedly been absconding since the misappropriation case came to light, and they had been frequently changing their locations to evade the police net, a

# Berhampur University hosts career counselling workshop

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Berhampur, March 19:** The PG Department of English at Berhampur University organised a one-day career counselling workshop Thursday on "Career Opportunities in Education and the Corporate World," aimed at guiding postgraduate students and research scholars on emerging career paths. The programme was held under the patronage of Vice-Chancellor Geetanjali Dash and PG Council Chairman Sukant Kumar Tripathy. Resource persons included former professor E. Raja Rao and State Bank of India Branch Manager Ritesh Kumar Panda, who shared academic and industry perspectives. Assistant Professor T. Eswar Rao convened the workshop and introduced the speakers and theme. Former professor Balabhadra Tripathy highlighted diverse career prospects, while department coordinator Anil Kumar Tiriyia supported the event's organisation. Raja Rao conducted two sessions on soft skills and employment opportunities for English postgraduates, emphasising communication and adaptability. Panda spoke on the banking sector's role in employment generation and the impact of digital transformation on job trends in India. The workshop enhanced participants' awareness of career options and employability skills. It concluded with a vote of thanks by Rao.

**EAST COAST RAILWAY**  
**'E' PROCUREMENT SYSTEMS**  
Tender Notice No. PCMM/EP/2025-26/24, Date : 16.03.2026

**SL NO. 01 | TENDER NO. 05265066, SHORT DESCRIPTION OF ITEM : UNDER GROUND RAILWAY SIGNALLING CABLE SIZE 12 CORE x 1.5 SQ MM, QUANTITY: AS PER TS.**

**SL NO. 02 | TENDER NO. 05265062, SHORT DESCRIPTION OF ITEM : UNDER GROUND RAILWAY SIGNALLING CABLE SIZE 21 CORE x 1.5 SQ MM, QUANTITY: AS PER TS.**

**SL NO. 03 | TENDER NO. 05262025, SHORT DESCRIPTION OF ITEM : RATE CONTRACT FOR 6.2 MM THICK COMPOSITE GROOVED RUBBER SOLE PLATE, QUANTITY: AS PER TS.**

**SL NO. 04 | TENDER NO. 05255318B, SHORT DESCRIPTION OF ITEM : SUPPLY OF PU/F CABLE, QUANTITY: AS PER TS.**

**SL NO. 05 | TENDER NO. 05265063, SHORT DESCRIPTION OF ITEM : OPTIC FIBER CABLE ARMOURED 24 FIBER, QUANTITY: AS PER TS.**

**SL NO. 06 | TENDER NO. 07261112, SHORT DESCRIPTION OF ITEM : PU PAINT TOP COAT (TWO PACK SYSTEM), QUANTITY: 39540 LTR.**

**SL NO. 07 | TENDER NO. 02261630, SHORT DESCRIPTION OF ITEM : SPHERIBLOC FOR AXLE GUIDE LINK/TM TORQUE ARM, QUANTITY : AS PER TS.**

**SL NO. 08 | TENDER NO. 03263839, SHORT DESCRIPTION OF ITEM : BRAKE DISC FOR LHB WHEEL SET, QUANTITY: 475 NOS.**

**SL NO. 09 | TENDER NO. 03253979A, SHORT DESCRIPTION OF ITEM : VERTICAL SUPPORT ASSEMBLY, QUANTITY: 650 NOS.**

Tender Opening Date: For Sl. No. 01, 06 dt. 30.03.2026, for Sl. No. 02 dt. 25.03.2026, for Sl. No. 03, 05, 07 dt. 06.04.2026, for Sl. No. 04 dt. 26.03.2026, for Sl. No. 08 dt. 09.04.2026 and for Sl. No. 9 dt. 10.04.2026.

Regarding detailed notice, EMD, Purchase restrictions and detailed tender conditions, please visit website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) and [www.eastcoastrail.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.eastcoastrail.indianrailways.gov.in).

Principal Chief Materials Manager/ Bhubaneswar

**Sambalpur Municipal Corporation Sambalpur**  
Email id: [sambalpurm.hud@od.gov.in](mailto:sambalpurm.hud@od.gov.in)  
Notice No: 3403 / SMC/Emg. Dt. 16.03.2026

**'e' Procurement Notice.**  
Bid Reference No: Emergency/SMC\_SBP/2025-26  
Tender ID No: 2026\_ORULB\_127320

No.13001/689/2526: The Municipal Commissioner on behalf of Municipal Corporation, Sambalpur invites tenders in Single Cover System. Bid documents consisting of specification the Schedule of Quantities and the set of terms and conditions of contract and other necessary documents can be seen the Govt. Website i.e. <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>

- Number of works : 1 (One) number
- Period of completion : As per NIT
- Date and time of availability of the bid documents in the portal : From 12.00 noon of 17.03.2026 To 12.00 noon of 26.03.2026
- Last Date/Time for receipt of bids in the portal : 12.00 noon of 26.03.2026
- Bids will be opened on : 02.00 PM of Dt. 26.03.2026
- Name and address of the officer inviting bid : Municipal Commissioner, Sambalpur Municipal Corporation, Sambalpur

Sd/- Commissioner Sambalpur Municipal Corporation  
OIPR-13001/13122/1/25-26/0031

No.34001/227/2526

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, GANJAM (R&B) DIVISION NO. I, BERHAMPUR**  
Phone / Fax : (0680) 2233583, e-mail : [sernb1.ganjam@yahoo.com](mailto:sernb1.ganjam@yahoo.com)

**"e" Procurement Notice**  
Bid Identification No. SE R&B Divn. No.I Bam. 70/2025-26  
Lr. No. 3806 Dated : 16.03.2026

Name of work : E.I. Work  
No. of works : 09 (Nine) No's  
Estimated Cost : Approximately Rs.5.88 to 38.66 Lakh  
Period of Completion : One to Three Calendar Months  
Date and time of Availability of bid document in the portal : From 10.00 hours of 23.03.2026 to 16.00 hours of 30.03.2026  
Last date / time for receipt of bids in the portal : Upto 16.00 hours of 30.03.2026

Name and address of the Officer inviting Bid : Superintending Engineer, Ganjam (R&B) Division No.I, Berhampur

Further details can be seen from the e-Procurement portal <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>

Sd./J. Superintending Engineer Ganjam (R&B) Division No.I Berhampur  
OIPR-34001/34109/1/25-26/0036

# Idol theft case solved; conviction in 28 days

PNN & AGENCIES

**Maradugochha PACS secretary suspended**  
**SONEPUR:** The secretary of Maradugochha Primary Agricultural Cooperative Society (PACS) in Tarbha block of Subarnapur district, Naveen Dash, has been suspended, officials said Thursday. The action was taken by PACS management committee president Santosh Dang, Meanwhile, Deputy Registrar of Cooperative Society (DRCS) Sanjay Kumar Tripathy of Subarnapur division has directed Krushna Prakash Kumbhar, secretary of Sarajal PACS, to hold additional charge as acting secretary until further orders. The suspension follows allegations of irregularities in recruitment at the PACS. Das, along with night watchman Makunda Naik and peon Manoj Das, allegedly attempted to appoint their sons to various posts. All three had applied for voluntary retirement (VRS) citing health reasons, and their applications were approved by the management committee. However, no approval had been obtained from the registrar for fresh recruitment, nor were advertisements issued or a selection committee formed, as required under government norms.

**Sambalpur, March 19:** In a remarkable example of speedy justice under India's new criminal laws, the SDJM Court of Sambalpur has convicted an accused in a temple idol theft case within just 28 days from the date of the complaint. The court found Rajanikant Bhainsal guilty under Sections 331(3) and 305(D) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and sentenced him to two years of imprisonment along with a fine of ₹1,000. According to the prosecution, temple trustee Loknath Pandey lodged a complaint February 17, 2026 stating that a brass idol of Lord Ganesha weighing around 2 kg had been stolen from the Somnath Baba Temple at Balibandh, which falls under the



jurisdiction of Sambalpur Town police station. Acting promptly on the complaint, Sambalpur police launched a swift investigation. The accused was arrested February 20, and the stolen idol was successfully recovered during the investigation. Demonstrating the accelerated

pace of investigation under the new criminal laws, the police filed the chargesheet February 27—within just 11 days. The entire process—from investigation to trial and conviction—was completed in only 28 days, highlighting the improved efficiency in handling criminal cases after the implementation of the new Indian criminal justice framework. Police officials stated that the case reflects the strong commitment of Sambalpur police to maintaining law and order and ensuring prompt justice. The Director General of Police of Odisha, YB Khurania, has congratulated the Sambalpur SP and the investigating officer for their swift action and successful conviction in such a short period.

**यूनियन बँक Union Bank of India**  
REGIONAL OFFICE: BHUBANESWAR  
3/1A, Civic Centre, IRC Village, Nayapalli, Bhubaneswar-751015

**POSSESSION NOTICE**  
(For Immovable Property)

**(RULE 8(1) OF SECURITY INTEREST (ENFORCEMENT) RULES – 2002)**  
Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of Union Bank of India, Tankapani Road Branch under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (Act 54 of 2002) and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) of the Act read with Rule 3 of the Security interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a Demand Notice calling upon the Borrower/Mortgagor in loan A/c mentioned below to repay the amount mentioned in the notice plus interest and other charges thereon within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The Borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower/Mortgagor in particular and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said Rules. **The Borrower's attention is invited to provisions of Section 13 (8) of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.** The Borrower/Mortgagor in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of Union Bank of India, Tankapani Road Branch for an amount mentioned below with interest, incidental expenses, costs & charges thereon.

TANKAPANI ROAD BRANCH/ Name and Address of Borrower/ Mortgagor	Liabilities due as per Notice (in ₹)	Date of Demand Notice / Date of Possession	Description of Immovable property
Borrower: M/s. Shree Binori, Prop.: Mrs. Bandana Pradhan, At: MIG-86, Kalinga Vihar Square, AIIMS Nagar, Patrapada, Bhubaneswar, Khurda, Odisha-751019 Mortgagor: Mrs. Bandana Pradhan, D/o.: Mr. Niranjan Pradhan, Address-1: At: Plot No.: 3/315, Phase-3, Dumuduma Housing Board Colony, PO.: Dumuduma, P.S.: Khandagiri, Bhubaneswar, Dist.: Khurda, PIN-751019, Address-2: At: Plot No.: 37/468, Khata No.: 203/72, Mouza: Champapur, P.S.: Khurda, Dist.: Khurda, Odisha-752055	₹25,04,904.58 + Interest thereon	16.12.2025 / 17.03.2026	All that piece and parcel of Residential Land and Building situated at Plot No.: 37/468, Khata No.: 203/72, Mouza: Champapur, SRO: Khurda, Dist.: Khurda, Odisha, Area: Ac.0.030 Dec, KISSAM: Gharabari, standing in the name of Mrs. Bandana Pradhan, D/o.: Mr. Niranjan Pradhan, Bounded by North: Road, South: Plot No.: 108 of Brajabandhu Behera, East: Plot No.: 105 of Raj Kishore Behera, West: Plot No.: 37

Place: Bhubaneswar  
Date: 19.03.2026

Sd/- Authorised Officer Union Bank of India

FOCUS HUMAN TRAFFICKING

# GLOBALISED EXPLOITATION



We are always surrounded by the things of which we think.



THE MOTHER

## Food Shock

Since the start of the US-Israeli campaign against Iran, only a handful of the 100 vessels that once transited the Strait of Hormuz each day have managed to pass through. Now, with Iran reportedly laying sea mines in the narrow waterway, the possibility of its closure lasting days – or even months – is no longer hypothetical.

Shockwaves are already coursing through global energy markets, but the most immediate and dangerous consequences of a prolonged closure may show up at the dinner table, not the gas pump. The Strait of Hormuz, after all, is not just a shipping lane for oil tankers; it is a critical artery of the global food system. Key food staples – including wheat, corn, rice, soybeans, sugar, and animal feed – travel through the Strait on their way to the Gulf countries, and farmers around the world depend on the fertilizers and fuel that flow out of it.

The Gulf states, which rely heavily on imported food, are particularly vulnerable. To secure grain, rice, animal feed, and cooking oil, they depend on open waterways and a constant flow of international shipments.

As the COVID-19 pandemic showed, supply-chain fragility is not just a wartime problem. Over the past few years, many Gulf countries have taken steps to strengthen their food systems, expanding strategic reserves and investing in domestic production. They have also explored alternative shipping routes, with some cargo moving overland or through ports that bypass the Strait of Hormuz, such as Saudi Arabia's Jeddah Islamic Port on the Red Sea.

These measures have improved resilience, but they cannot fully compensate for a prolonged blockade of the Persian Gulf. Roughly 70 per cent of the food consumed in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq moves through the Strait of Hormuz. With a combined population of about 100 million, replacing disrupted imports in these countries would require moving approximately 191.3 million pounds of food into the region every single day, according to data from FAOSTAT.

Supplying the Gulf under a blockade would therefore require an unprecedented humanitarian operation, possibly through contested airspace. For comparison, the United Nations World Food Programme delivered an average of just 15 million pounds of food per day to 81 million people in 71 countries in 2024.

A full blockade would hurt Iran just as much as its Arab neighbours. Disruptions to maritime trade would squeeze the country from both ends, restricting energy exports while driving up the cost of imported staples such as wheat, rice, animal feed, and vegetable oil. For many Iranians, basic necessities, from bread to rent, have already become unaffordable, fueling the mass protests that swept the country earlier this year.

Historically, food-price spikes and shortages have been major drivers of political instability. In 2008, rising energy and fertilizer costs, combined with extreme weather and persistent policy failures, nearly doubled the price of staple crops, sparking food riots in dozens of countries. A few years later, in 2010 and 2011, a historic drought and heatwave in Russia slashed grain harvests and pushed the global food prices to record highs, setting the stage for the Arab Spring.

More recently, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 drove up global grain, fertilizer, and fuel prices, contributing to a sharp rise in food insecurity. With the global food system under growing strain from climate shocks and the lingering effects of the pandemic, it is hardly surprising that the world faces the largest surge in violent conflicts since the end of World War II.

The impact of further disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz would extend far beyond the Gulf. Farmers around the world, from South Asia to Sub-Saharan Africa – and even in Europe and the United States – depend on stable supplies of fertilizer and fuel. Natural gas is a key ingredient in nitrogen fertilizer, a cornerstone of modern agriculture that has helped crop yields reach historic highs. An estimated 30-40 per cent of the world's traded nitrogen fertilizers pass through the strait.

When fertilizer and fuel become more expensive, farmers adjust by applying less fertilizer or planting fewer acres. As a result, yields decline, and the effects ripple through the entire food system. From farmers and truckers to food processors, the supply chain passes along higher costs until they reach households' grocery bills.

While disruptions to food, fuel, and fertilizer shipments could drive up prices within weeks or months, another resource could be at risk within days: water. If the conflict contaminates the Gulf's waters or disables desalination plants, the consequences would be catastrophic.

The risk is already acute. Last week, both Bahrain and Iran – which is itself experiencing severe water shortages – reported that desalination plants had been attacked. If deliberate, such strikes would be considered war crimes under international law, as destroying or contaminating these facilities would immediately threaten millions of lives. While Ukraine has demonstrated that critical infrastructure can be repaired under fire, desalination systems are highly complex, and there are few quick alternatives.

For decades, international security efforts in the Middle East have focused on preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Yet the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, whether through sea mines or sustained military conflict, could inflict civilian harm on a similar scale by disrupting global food and energy systems, as well as triggering a regional water crisis. All parties to the conflict, along with the broader international community, must do everything possible to prevent such an outcome.

At the same time, this episode should serve as a warning: the global food system is dangerously vulnerable. Policymakers must act to shore it up before the next shock pushes millions more people toward a humanitarian cliff.

*Bram Govaerts is Director General of CIMMYT. Sharon Burke is Chief Engagement Officer at CIMMYT and a former US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Operational Energy.*

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Bram Govaerts & Sharon Burke

**The Strait of Hormuz is not just a shipping lane for oil tankers; it is a critical artery of the global food system. Key food staples travel through the Strait on their way to the Gulf countries, and farmers around the world depend on the fertilizers and fuel that flow out of it**



Kevin Hyland

**THE SCOURGE OF MODERN SLAVERY AND CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION EXTENDS FAR BEYOND THE EPSTEIN CASE**

It is astonishing that, in the 21st century, influential individuals still act as though they were immune to legal consequences. But even more worrying is that they can indeed expect to be shielded from scrutiny over extremely serious crimes. The Jeffrey Epstein scandal is a case in point. Epstein's crimes were not only vile; they were exacerbated by the failure of US and UK authorities to listen to the many children whom he and his powerful friends exploited and abused.

But while the Epstein affair is at least receiving global attention, the true scale of human trafficking and modern slavery remains underappreciated. The first corrective is to understand that this scourge does not require border crossing or even movement. It is about the control, coercion, and abuse of the vulnerable.

Despite many legal instruments, protocols, and commitments from bodies like the UN, as well as laws in more than 180 countries criminalizing human trafficking, the demand for sexual exploitation, human organs, forced criminality, illegal adoption, forced marriage, child soldiers, and exploitative labour continues to rise.

It is no secret why: The exploitation of some 50 million children, women, and men generates at least \$236 billion per year in illicit profit. Criminals are thriving from a steady supply of people – often the world's poorest and most vulnerable – and because values like compassion, respect, and equality are increasingly being called into question or perceived as weaknesses. A more cynical politics creates gaps in governance and social unity that criminals are quick to notice and exploit.

For comparison, \$236 billion exceeds the GDP of about two-thirds of the 193 UN member states, and is greater than the total official development assistance from OECD countries. Given recent reductions in ODA budgets, it has become even more important to identify and seize illicit profits from human trafficking to compen-



**Criminals are thriving from a steady supply of people – often the world's poorest and most vulnerable – and because values like compassion, respect, and equality are increasingly being called into question or perceived as weaknesses**

sate for criminal injuries, provide victim care, return stolen wages, eliminate debt bondage, improve prevention, and strengthen enforcement.

While campaigns to raise public awareness are important, they do little to disrupt gangs, stop forced labour and child exploitation, curb the illegal organ trade, or prompt governments to ensure that their procurement is free from these crimes. Moreover, current efforts often fail to recognize the broader impact on individuals, communities, and national security.

Consider the example of a 15-year-old girl who leaves Eritrea to avoid national service and a life of rape and servitude at the behest of her military superiors. She escapes to Libya, only to be sold for sex daily until she earns enough for her exploiters to justify a place on an overcrowded boat destined for Italy, where the cycle of exploitation will be renewed.

Then there are the thousands of trafficked Vietnamese who are employed on illegal contracts tied to debt bondage each year. They are directed to jobs in China, then in Russia, and finally in Europe. In a UK trafficking case, 39 people died in a freight truck in Essex. Most had paid large sums to secure work. Ten were teenagers, the youngest aged 15. Their families had to pay the debts charged by the traffickers, as well as the high cost of repatriating their loved ones' remains.

On the high seas, many fishing fleets are crewed by Filipinos or Africans who face persistent racism, dangerous working conditions, low or even no pay, and de facto enslavement on their vessels. Many have untreated injuries such as broken bones and deep lacerations.

Yet despite there being some 50 million victims of criminal exploitation – including 22,000 children who die each year, on average, performing hazardous work in high-risk industries – the US State Department reported that only 102,027 victims were identified worldwide in 2024, with just 7,975 convictions. That works out to one conviction for every 6,270 victims. According to Praeveni Global, G20 countries together allocate only \$1.6 billion to combating the problem – less than 1% of the \$236 billion in annual illicit profits.

Although many relevant laws and tools are in place, greater follow-through is needed. To their credit, Australia, the UK, France, Germany, Brazil, the US, Canada, and the EU have implemented various strategies to boost supply-chain transparency. For example, Australia can restrict access to public procurement for businesses believed to have exploitation in their supply chain, the UK has mandatory reporting, and the US and Canada have banned imports linked to exploitation.

But more needs to be done. The G20 summits in the US

this year and in the UK in 2027 offer opportunities for world leaders to commit finances and political will to combating human trafficking and modern slavery. Government-led action must be expanded to include intelligence gathering. Although NGOs have created tools for collecting information, only governments have the necessary authority and capacity to compile intelligence and intervene effectively.

Specifically, G20 governments should focus on six priorities. The first is to ensure accountability in business and government procurement processes. The second is to target the profits derived from criminal activities. That means establishing legal frameworks that allow for the seizure of proceeds – from hotel revenues to large-scale transactions – and for their re-allocation toward reparations, preventive strategies, and prosecutions.

The third priority is to mandate that technological advances, such as digital platforms or cryptocurrencies, do not facilitate or contribute to exploitation. Governments must also make greater use of international instruments such as the Global Magnitsky Act or the European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters to promote effective cross-border collaboration. They should encourage international networks and agencies involved in criminal justice, professional associations, and intergovernmental bodies such as the G20 and G7 to tackle these issues. Lastly, they need to reinforce ethical standards by empowering faith groups and other segments of civil society who can keep pressure on governments to uphold their responsibilities.

The scourge of modern slavery and criminal exploitation extends far beyond the Epstein case. We don't need lengthy inquiries or further research into the matter. The problem is well known. What we need is immediate action to address it.

*The writer is the UK's first Anti-Slavery Commissioner.*

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SPECTRUM ECONOMY

## Telling effects of West Asia war

Predictions and projections may not turn out to be accurate. While promises of politicians mostly are found to falter, this may not be the same in case of professional economists who predict something based on scientific calculations. In this connection, the West Asian crisis has complicated the situation in most countries of the Third World, including India, which is heavily dependent on oil and gas imports.

It is a well-known fact that the world remains dependent on reliable oil and gas supplies, even though two-thirds of global spending in the energy sector now go to cleaner alternatives. While oil now meets a smaller share of global energy needs than it earlier used to – less than 30 per cent, according to the International Energy Agency – the world uses almost twice as much of the fuel as it did in the early 1970s. And natural gas used to heat homes and generate electricity, underpins much more of the economy than it used to. According to experts,

the post-oil world is still a future proposition.

Meanwhile, a sustained rise in crude oil prices could widen India's current account deficit, push up inflation and affect growth, pointed out most economists. However, Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, informed the Lok Sabha that the government does not expect inflation to rise substantially due to the recent spike in global crude prices. Crude hovers below \$100 per barrel presently from just below \$70 per barrel in end February. However, analysts believe that the price may eventually stabilise at around \$85 per barrel compared to last year's average of \$69 per barrel though Fitch projected a few days back the global crude oil to average \$70 per barrel in 2026.

According to SBI Research and many other studies, if oil prices reach the \$120 mark, which at present appears quite unlikely, GDP growth may fall to around 6%.

India may face serious disruptions in supply of fertilizers and raw materials in next

Kharif season, starting June, if the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz continues. Any reduction in the supply of LNG to urea manufacturers in coming weeks could impact production of the key soil nutrient ahead of the Kharif season. As is well known, Kharif crops account for more than half of India's foodgrain production as major crops such as rice, pulses, oilseeds, cotton and sugarcane are sown during the season. If LNG supplies are not normalised, production could be affected, industry experts pointed out, highlighting that production of fertilizers usually begins in end March. At present 60% of LNG used in urea manufacture is imported from Qatar. The blockade of shipping routes in the Gulf would obviously push up prices of DAP and urea and impact the government's food subsidy expenses. Regarding LPG, India imports 60% from West Asia and the longer the conflict lasts, households as well as commercial users are expected to suffer though in-

dications point to an early settlement.

Right now, it is important for the country to tap other sources like Australia and Canada but, in the long-term, there is need to scale up biogas production in India. Simultaneously also, India has enough compostable biomass to meet at least 75 to 80% of our gas needs. And compost can easily replace fertilisers whereby valuable foreign exchange would be saved.

An interesting plan that would be of great help in availability of gas is through coal gasification that converts coal to synthetic gas, consisting of carbon monoxide and hydrogen. Through this process, it would be possible to harness the vast coal reserves efficiently and sustainably.

It would be prudent to evolve a long-term plan that needs to be evolved immediately, especially in the gas sector, and how much dependence can be eased not just on West Asia but also reducing imports as a whole. **IHFA**



Dhurjati Mukherjee

**A SUSTAINED RISE IN CRUDE OIL PRICES COULD WIDEN INDIA'S CURRENT ACCOUNT DEFICIT, PUSH UP INFLATION AND AFFECT GROWTH**

## 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](mailto:edit@orissapost.com)



B-15, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

### Ladakh's demands

Sir, Recent protests in Ladakh following the release of activist Sonam Wangchuk reflect both the demand for statehood and public anger over his six-month detention. Many locals see him as a national figure advocating sustainable development and indigenous rights; his arrest was viewed as excessive and an attempt to curb a peaceful movement, triggering widespread protests. Ladakhis seek statehood to gain legislative powers, protect land and jobs, and preserve cultural identity—concerns heightened after it became a Union Territory without an elected Assembly. While statehood promises accountable governance, the Centre remains cautious due to strategic sensitivities and administrative viability. Restrictions on Wangchuk's political activity post-release raise concerns about fundamental rights. If perceived as unjust, they could invite legal scrutiny and deepen distrust. A balanced way forward lies in dialogue, possible safeguards like the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution (which grants tribal areas autonomous councils with powers over land, resources, and local laws, protecting identity and ensuring self-governance within India) and restoring trust while ensuring security and democratic rights. **RS Narula, PATIALA**

### Impractical policy

Sir, The Supreme Court declined to mandate a national menstrual leave policy, triggering a nationwide debate. In fact, it is not the responsibility of the Supreme Court to lay down such a policy. It should be discussed in Parliament and state Assemblies and at workplaces. Menstruation is a biological process which affects millions of women across the world. However, its impact varies from person to person. In some women that time passes without complications whereas in some other women it becomes a tough time. It is not practical to mandate a national menstrual leave policy. As it is a personal problem, only the person concerned knows her physical condition. Women already face several challenges at workplace. Workforce participation rate for women in India is the lowest in the world. Making menstrual leave compulsory could put women at a disadvantage. It could harm their employment prospects. Given that making menstrual leave compulsory is not feasible, the onus is on workplaces to put the policy in place. **Venu GS, KOLLAM**

## WISDOM CORNER

**The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.**

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

**You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view.**

HARPER LEE

**Success is getting what you want. Happiness is wanting what you get.**

DALE CARNEGIE

## KERALA POLLS

# Farmers flag agrarian distress, wildlife conflict, seek remedy

Farmers say many of their long-standing issues remain unresolved, particularly the increasing number of wild-animal crop raids that have caused severe distress in high-altitude regions



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kochi, March 19:** Every election, agrarian issues dominate the political discourse in Kerala, and this time it is no different, with farmers flagging persistent concerns ranging from human-wildlife conflict in the high ranges to paddy procurement issues in Palakkad and Kuttanad.

Farmers say many of their long-standing issues remain unresolved, particularly the increasing number of wild-animal crop raids that have caused severe distress in high-altitude regions.

Mathew George, who owns eight acres of land near Sultan Bathery and cultivates coffee, pepper and tapioca, said wildlife attacks have significantly affected his livelihood.

"Monkeys come in large numbers and destroy our coffee. With stringent wildlife laws, we cannot take preventive measures. Almost 20-30 per cent of the crop is lost due to wild animal raids," he told PTI.

George added that living near forest areas has become increasingly unsafe.

"The movement of wild animals into human settlements has become regular. This year alone, five tigers have been reported near residential areas, causing severe distress for residents. Other than promises during elections, no concrete steps are being taken to protect farmers," he alleged.

The Kerala Independent Farmers Association (KIFA), which represents farmers in high-range areas, has submitted a 15-point charter of demands to political parties ahead of the elections, seeking concrete action once a new government assumes power.

KIFA president Alex Ozhukayil told PTI that the organisation would support political fronts that genuinely address farmers' concerns.

"We have conveyed to political parties that whoever promises to resolve farmers' issues will get our support. We have not declared support to any front, though several have held discussions with us," Ozhukayil said.

Among its key demands, KIFA has called for a policy decision not to take action against farmers who kill or injure wild animals in self-defence or to protect their crops.

To address the rising human-wildlife conflict, the organisation has proposed 100-metre-wide "vista clearance" along forest and revenue boundaries, removing trees and undergrowth, and constructing hanging fences and trenches.

"Last year alone, 115 people died due to wild animal attacks, and a majority of them were farmers or agricultural workers. Due to fear, several farmers are giving up farming and selling their land," Ozhukayil said.

KIFA has also demanded enhanced compensation for victims of wildlife attacks, proposing Rs 25 lakh for deaths and adequate compensation for injuries and crop loss, along with the establishment of a tribunal similar to Motor Accidents Claims Tribunal (MACT) for speedy redressal.

A 62-year-old award-winning farmer allegedly died by suicide due to mounting debt following crop loss and low value for agricultural produce at Cherupuzha in Kasaragod.

On pricing, KIFA demanded a support price of Rs 250 per kg for rubber, Rs 70 per kg for coconut (de-husked), and Rs 35 per kg for paddy to ensure stable farm incomes.

"The previous (LDF) government had promised to raise rubber prices to Rs 250. Though it was recently increased to Rs 200, the promise is yet to be fulfilled. With agricultural expenses skyrocketing, the government must fix prices that help farmers sustain themselves," Ozhukayil said.

Paddy cultivation, a major agricultural activity in Kerala, particularly in Palakkad and Kuttanad regions, is also facing multiple challenges.



Border Security Force (BSF) personnel conduct a route march following the announcement of the West Bengal Assembly election dates, in Nadia, Thursday

PTI PHOTO

## Bengal hikes ad hoc bonus to ₹7,400 for civic & village volunteers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kolkata, March 19:** The West Bengal government Thursday notified the enhancement of ad hoc bonus of Rs 7,400 for civic volunteers and village police volunteers for the 2025-26 financial year.

The state had announced February 27 an increase in ad hoc bonuses for its employees, which has now been extended to civic and village police volunteers. The revised amount marks an increase of Rs 600 from the earlier bonus of Rs 6,800, an official said Thursday.

The notification, issued by the state secretariat Nabanna, said the revised bonus will be applicable to civic volunteers under the state police and Kolkata Police, as well as village police volunteers under the



West Bengal Police.

"The enhanced ad hoc bonus has been made effective for the current financial year in line with the government's earlier announcement," a senior state

finance department official said.

The elections to the 294-member West Bengal Assembly will be held in two phases April 23 and 29. Votes will be counted May 4.

According to the notification

issued by the Finance Department, employees not covered under the Productivity Linked Bonus Scheme and drawing a revised monthly salary of up to Rs 46,000 as of March 31, 2026, are eligible for the Rs 7,400 bonus.

"The move is aimed at ensuring parity among eligible categories of personnel and recognising their contribution," the official added.

The notification further stated that contractual employees meeting specified conditions and those who have completed at least six months of service will also be eligible for the bonus.

The payment will be made in accordance with the 2019 revision of the pay and allowances policy of the state government, and will not include any components such as house rent, medical expenses or other allowances, it said.

## CMFRI targets Arabian Sea seamounts for deep-sea fish resources

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kochi, March 19:** The ICAR-CMFRI Tuesday said it has launched a research initiative to explore fishery resources associated with seamounts in the Arabian Sea, with a special focus on cephalopods such as squids, cuttlefish and octopus.

In a release, Indian Council of Agricultural Research-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (ICAR-CMFRI) said the two-year project, funded by the Ministry of Earth Sciences at a total cost of Rs five crore, aims to document the diversity, ecology, distribution and biology of cephalopods centred around seamount regions in the eastern Arabian Sea.

The project will also develop Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based tools for automated identification of squid, cuttlefish and octopus species, which is expected to significantly strengthen scientific understanding of deep-sea biodiversity, the release said.

The research is being carried out by CMFRI's Kochi headquarters and Mangaluru Regional Centre in collaboration with the National Institute of Technology (NIT), Surathkal, it said. The research project is being implemented under Vertical-3 of the Deep Ocean Mission of the central government, it added.

The first exploratory survey targeting selected seamounts in the southeastern Arabian Sea was carried out onboard the CMFRI research vessel FV Silver Pompano, operating from Kochi, the release said.

The survey was led by senior scientist Dr Divya Viswambharan and scientist Kavitha M, it said. Another scientific team headed by principal scientist Dr V Venkatesan conducted parallel sampling operations onboard a fishing vessel from Azhekal fishing harbour in Kollam and it focused on documenting cephalopod assemblages associated with seamount habitats in the region.

## Over 20,000 birds to be culled in Kerala

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala), March 19:** Bird flu (H5N1) has been confirmed in parts of Alappuzha and Kozhikode districts, prompting authorities to step up containment measures, with over 20,000 domestic birds set to be culled, officials said Thursday.

In Alappuzha, the infection was reported in Ward 7 of Muthamma grama panchayat.

An emergency meeting chaired by District Collector Inbasekar Kalimuthu decided to implement preventive and control measures in line with the Government of India's 2021 action plan.

The Animal Husbandry Department has deployed rapid response teams to carry out culling operations within a one-kilometre radius of the epicentre.

"As many as 5,961 domestic birds in the affected zone will be culled. The culling operations are scheduled to begin on the morning of March 21," an official statement said.

Culling operations will also be carried out within a one-kilometre radius of the affected areas,



with joint efforts by the Animal Husbandry Department, the district administration, and local bodies, a statement said.

Meanwhile, in Kozhikode district, bird flu has been confirmed in multiple panchayats, including Olavanna, Kakkodi, Panangad and Perumanna, as well as Nallalam within the Kozhikode Corporation limits.

Authorities said 14,228 birds will be culled in the district as part of containment measures.

The decision was taken at a meeting chaired by Kozhikode District Collector Snehil Ku-

mar Singh, in line with national and international protocols for avian influenza control.

Officials said follow-up measures, including "mopping" operations to eliminate any remaining birds and "combing" to trace birds that may have been hidden or moved, will be undertaken in the second phase.

According to officials, samples sent to the National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases in Bhopal confirmed the presence of highly pathogenic avian influenza.

Officials said the disease has been reported so far only in birds. Authorities have urged the public to remain vigilant and report any unusual mass bird deaths to the nearest veterinary hospital.

People handling dead birds have been advised to use protective gear such as masks and gloves, and to bury the carcasses deep, using disinfectants such as lime and bleaching powder, officials said.

Restrictions have been imposed within surveillance zones, including a ban on the sale, transport and use of poultry, eggs, meat and related products until further notice in affected areas.

However, officials clarified that properly cooked poultry products are safe for consumption.

"Bird flu virus is destroyed when meat is cooked at 70 degrees Celsius for three to five minutes. Consumption of raw or undercooked eggs and meat should be strictly avoided," the Animal Husbandry Department said.

A control room has also been opened in Kozhikode for public assistance, with officials from multiple departments coordinating containment efforts.

## Mamata writes to CEC, expresses 'deep shock'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kolkata, March 19:** Hours after attacking the Election Commission for overnight transfers of top bureaucrats and IPS officers in poll-bound West Bengal, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Thursday again wrote to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, expressing "deep shock" over the functioning of the poll panel.

In a strongly worded letter, her eighth to the CEC, Banerjee alleged that it had "crossed all boundaries of decency and constitutional propriety".

The CM accused the poll panel of acting with "apparent bias" since the commencement of the Special Intensive Revision process and ignoring concerns raised by the state government.

"I am deeply shocked by the functioning of the Election Commission of India, which, in my view, has crossed all boundaries of decency and constitutional propriety. The ECI has acted with apparent bias, showing little regard for ground realities or the well-being of the people," she wrote.

The chief minister also referred to her government's move to approach the Supreme Court over the issue, stating that the court had acknowledged the concerns and issued directions that are currently being implemented.

Banerjee alleged that the EC had "unilaterally" transferred several senior state officials, including the chief secretary, home secretary, DGP, and multiple district magistrates and police officers, soon after the announcement of Assembly polls.

"These large-scale transfers have been effected immediately following the announcement of elections, without any cogent reasons and in the absence of any allegation of violation of electoral rules or the Model Code of Conduct," she said.

She further claimed that the transfer of district election officers during the ongoing revision of electoral rolls appeared to be "driven by a clear mala fide intent", raising concerns about the disposal of pending cases.

## Iconic bakery Nahoum's hits pause amid LPG supply crisis

THE CURRENT WEST ASIA CRISIS THAT DISRUPTED ENERGY SUPPLIES WITH THE CHOCKING OF THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ HAS DEALT A BODY BLOW TO THE CITY'S ONLY JEWISH BAKERY, FORCING IT TO SHUTTER ITS OPERATIONS FOR FIVE DAYS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kolkata, March 19:** In the heart of Kolkata stands Nahoum and Sons, which has withstood several headwinds, serving its customers with cakes and savouries for more than 120 years.

But the current West Asia crisis that disrupted energy supplies with the chocking of the Strait of Hormuz has dealt a body blow to the city's only Jewish bakery, forcing it to shutter its op-

erations for five days.

A notice pasted outside the shop stated that the bakery would remain closed from March 18 to March 22 due to "unavoidable circumstances".

However, an official at the outlet in the New Market area told PTI Thursday that the bakery had been struggling to cope with disruptions in cooking gas shortage for some time.

"We were continuing operation despite limited commercial LPG cylinder supply, but production had to be scaled down



significantly. Eventually, it became unfeasible to operate under such constraints, and a

temporary shutdown was the only option," said Jagadish Haldar. "We will open March

23 and hope to resume full-fledged operation as early as we can," he said.

Maintaining its longstanding traditions, the bakery remains closed Saturdays in observance of Jewish customs.

Barring the Covid-induced lockdown a few years ago, the temporary shuttering order, however, is unprecedented in recent memory. The bakery had earlier closed briefly in 2013, following the death of its owner, David Nahoum.

Regarded as a heritage land-

mark in Kolkata, the century-old confectionery continues to hold its place as a prominent destination for those seeking classic baked delicacies, even as it adapts to changing circumstances.

The menu had long been associated with a mix of traditional Jewish and Kolkata-style baked goods and continues to draw crowds for its signature offerings such as plum cakes, lemon tarts, brownies, almond kisses and fish pantras.



**The bhoomi puja at this sacred Ram Janmabhoomi, the Pran Pratishtha here, the opening of Ram Darbar for devotees, and the hoisting of the Dharma Dhvaj on the top of the temple -- all these are golden moments in our history**  
DROUPADI MURMU | PRESIDENT

## DGCA ASKS AIRLINES TO AVOID 9 AIRSPACES

Amid escalating conflict in West Asia, aviation watchdog DGCA Thursday asked airlines to avoid nine airspaces in the region and ensure robust contingency plans as part of safety risk assessments. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has asked airlines to avoid the airspaces of Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar and United Arab Emirates (UAE), according to an advisory



## of the day quote

On the auspicious occasion of Gudi Padwa, I extend my heartfelt greetings to you and your family. This sacred festival, marking the beginning of the New Year, is a time of renewed hope and the promise of new beginnings



As the entire world watches the ongoing conflict involving Russia and Ukraine, along with Iran-Israel, we can clearly see the extremely significant role of drones and counter-drone technologies in future warfare



Through a population management policy, we are taking steps to increase population again we must strengthen families and values in society



## SHORT TAKES

### Kanwaljeet Singh Cheema joins SAD

**Chandigarh:** Former IAS officer Kanwaljeet Singh Cheema joined the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in the presence of party president Sukhbir Singh Badal here Thursday. Cheema, a 1993-batch West Bengal-cadre Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer, served as the special principal secretary to former Punjab chief minister Parkash Singh Badal on inter-cadre deputation for a considerable period. After inducting him into the party, Badal said Cheema's joining will further strengthen the SAD.

### PM Modi meets trustees of IGNCA

**New Delhi:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi Thursday met the trustees of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) and discussed with them various aspects relating to further popularising India's diverse culture. During the meeting, the prime minister and the IGNCAs trustees also explored ways to bring more people into this journey, strengthen outreach through digital and grassroots initiatives "Met Trustees of IGNCAs and discussed various aspects relating to further popularising India's diverse culture," the prime minister said in a post on X.

### 2 engineering students killed

**Bihar Sharif:** Two engineering students were killed and three injured when their speeding car fell into a roadside pit in Bihar's Nalanda district Thursday, police said. The incident occurred near Gaudhapur More under Chandni police station area of Nalanda district. The deceased have been identified as Ashish Kumar and Rahul Kumar, both students of Nalanda Engineering College.

### Andhra unveils over 10,000 job calendar

**Amaravati:** Andhra Pradesh Human Resource Minister Nara Lokesh Thursday announced the release of a job calendar for over 10,000 jobs, specifying the notification dates and other details. The minister promised to conduct the recruitment examinations as per the defined timeline to fill the job vacancies, and announce the syllabus. "We are announcing a jobs festival for the youth of Andhra Pradesh on the occasion of Ugadi. We have released a job calendar for 10,060 jobs in various government departments, specifying the notification dates and the number of jobs," Lokesh said in a post on 'X'.

## WEST ASIA CONFLICT ESCALATES

# India slams Gulf energy infra attacks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 19:** As fresh attacks on West Asian gas hubs triggered global concerns, India Thursday said the strikes are "unacceptable and need to cease" even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached out to top leaders of Oman, Jordan, France and Malaysia, emphasising the urgency to restore peace in the volatile region.

Following his phone conversation with Jordan's King Abdullah II, Modi said the attacks on energy infrastructure in West Asia are "condemnable and can lead to avoidable escalation".

New Delhi described the attacks on the gas infrastructure as "deeply disturbing" and that assaults will only serve to further destabilise an already uncertain energy market globally.

An Israeli attack on Iran's strategic gas fields of South Pars Wednesday resulted in an intense Iranian retaliation on key energy infrastructure in a number of Gulf nations including Qatar's LNG (liquefied natural gas) hub of Ras Laffan. Qatar accounts for nearly 40 per cent of India's LNG requirement.

"India had previously called for the avoidance of targeting civilian infrastructure, including energy infrastructure, across the region," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at his



weekly media briefing.

The fresh attacks resulted in further spike in energy prices globally with global crude oil prices hitting USD 115 a barrel.

As concerns mounted over the escalating situation in West Asia, PM Modi spoke to Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Jordan King, French President Emmanuel Macron and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.

In his conversation with the Omani Sultan, Modi also spoke about the need for free passage through the Strait of Hormuz, a strategically key shipping lane.

Modi said he also reiterated India's condemnation of the violation of Oman's sovereignty and territorial integrity and appreciated the Gulf nation's efforts to facilitate the safe return of thousands of people, including Indian nationals.

Oman is among the Gulf nations bearing the brunt of Iranian

retaliation following strikes by Israel and the US on Iranian targets.

Following his phone conversation with Macron on the situation in West Asia, Modi said there is an "urgent need for de-escalation, as well as a return to dialogue and diplomacy".

Macron said India and France are "working closely together to reduce tensions in the region and to keep diplomacy at the heart of our efforts for peace".

After speaking to Ibrahim, Modi said: "We also discussed the deeply concerning situation in West Asia and reaffirmed our shared commitment to de-escalation and the early restoration of peace and stability through dialogue and diplomacy."

On his talks with Jordan King, Modi said India and Jordan stand in support of "unhindered transit of

## Govt okays ₹497cr 'RELIEF' scheme

**New Delhi:** The government Thursday rolled out the RELIEF (Resilience & Logistics Intervention for Export Facilitation) scheme with an outlay of Rs 497 crore to provide relief to exporters facing disruptions due to the ongoing West Asia conflict. The scheme, with the Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India (ECGC) as the implementing agency, includes automatic extension of export obligations, logistical support, and potential financial measures to manage shipping delays and higher freight and insurance costs, according to a Commerce Ministry release.

goods and energy".

As the overall situation deteriorated further in West Asia, several global leaders called for de-escalation of the situation.

Macron said tempers must cool and hostilities must cease, in order to give a real chance to the prospect of a negotiated solution to the crisis.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz indicated that US President Donald Trump is willing to halt the military action.

After Iran attacked Qatar's Ras Laffan LNG facility, Trump threatened to blow up Iran's largest gas field if Tehran keeps up its attacks on Qatar.

## 'SARKE CHUNAR' ROW

# NCW summons Nora Fatehi, Sanjay

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 19:** The National Commission for Women has summoned actress Nora Fatehi, actor Sanjay Dutt and others following a controversy over obscenity and vulgarity in the song "Sarke Chunar".

In a statement, the Commission said the content prima facie appears to be sexually suggestive, objectionable, and violative of provisions under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, IT Act, and PCO Act.

"The National Commission for Women, in exercise of its powers under the NCW Act, 1990, has taken suo motu cognizance of media reports alleging obscenity and vulgarity in the song 'Sarke Chunar Teri Sarke'," the Commission said.

The NCW said it has also summoned lyricist Raqueeb Alam, producer Venkat K Narayana of KVN Group, and Kiran Kumar to appear before it March 24. They have been asked to be present along with relevant documents, the Commission said. "Failure to appear may invite appropriate action as per law," it added. The song, which is part of the upcoming Kannada movie "KD: The Devil", released on YouTube earlier this week and kicked up a major controversy with its sexually explicit lyrics. It has since been pulled down



from the video sharing platform. The movie, directed by Prem and starring Dhruv Sarja in the lead, will release April 30. Fatehi, who features in the dance video of the song along with Dutt, and lyricist Alam, who translated the original Kannada song in Hindi, have distanced themselves from the controversy. Fatehi said she recorded the Kannada version three years ago and when she heard the Hindi version, she had already flagged the issue to the makers.

## NCW summons Badshah

**New Delhi:** The National Commission for Women has summoned singer Badshah and others over obscenity and vulgarity in his Haryana track "Tateere". In a statement, the Commission said the content of the song prima facie appears to be objectionable and violative of provisions under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Information Technology Act and the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986.

# SBI cheating case: CBI questions Anil Ambani



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 19:** The CBI Thursday questioned industrialist Anil Ambani for nearly eight hours in connection with a Rs 2,929-crore cheating case, registered against Reliance Communications Ltd and him on a complaint by the State Bank of India, officials said.

The industrialist, who is facing several investigations in CBI cases, has been called again Friday for questioning, they said.

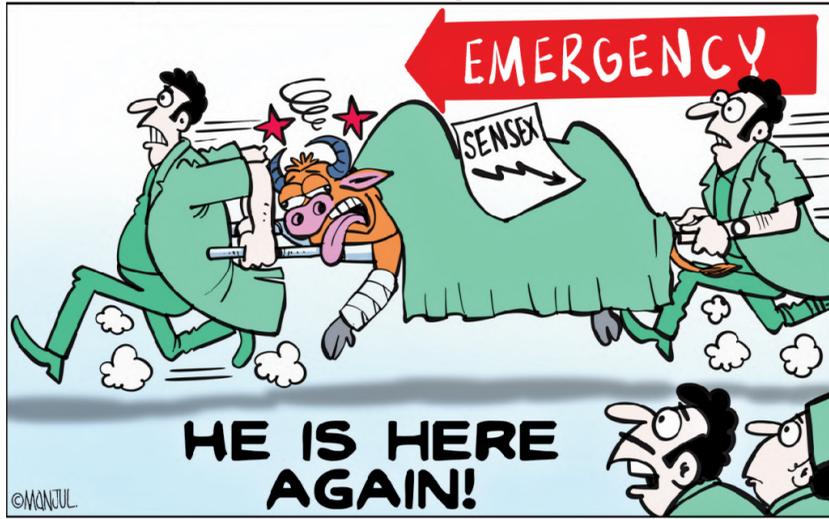
Ambani arrived at the agency headquarters at around 10.15 and was taken to the investigation team after the completion of formalities. He left the agency headquarters at around 6.15 in the evening. "In connection with the case registered by CBI August 21, 2025 against Reliance Communications Limited in Rs. 2929.05 crore Bank Fraud case in which Reliance Communications Limited, Anil D Ambani and others unknown including unknown public servants, are

accused, the CBI summoned Anil D Ambani for interrogation today at CBI Head Office at Delhi," a CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

"The accused Anil D Ambani appeared before the Investigating Officer today and has been interrogated for about 8 Hours. For further questioning, the accused has been directed to appear before the investigating officer tomorrow as well," the spokesperson said. According to the statement, the agency questioned Ambani about the decision-making process at the company, several emails exchanged between him and executives also came up. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) also sought his responses on alleged fund diversion, misappropriation and other irregularities in the loan funds issued to the company by the bank, they said.

The businessman's spokesperson in a statement said that Ambani would be appearing before the CBI in Delhi March 19 and 20 "for examination in connection with the FIR registered on the basis of a complaint filed by the State Bank of India." The statement also read, "The appearance is in furtherance to Mr Ambani's commitment to extend full cooperation in the matter with all agencies."

## POLITICKLE by MANJUL



## No Cong MP to contest Kerala Assembly polls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delh, March 19:** Determined to take on the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) in the April 9 Kerala Assembly polls, the Congress Thursday banked on its state leadership to see it through, deciding against fielding any of its MPs.

The party braved internal pressures to take the policy decision of banking on its Kerala leadership rather than sending parliamentarians to fight Assembly polls. The pressure on the party seemed immense Wednesday evening, when Kannur MP K Sudhakaran threatened to quit, even saying "good bye" to leaders after learning that his name was not considered for the Kannur Assembly seat. However, several leaders pacified Sudhakaran late on Wednesday and convinced him

to abide by the party's decision. In a sign that he has been placated, Sudhakaran on Thursday said he would not contest the Kerala polls without the party's permission. The Central Election Committee (CEC) of the party had left it to the Congress high-command to take a call on whether to allow MPs to contest the upcoming Assembly elections or not.

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma expressed displeasure over the request for more time by the lawyers appearing for Kejrival and other accused, and said it would fix a date for final hearing in the matter during the next hearing April 2.

"I don't know why you are not filing a reply. You should have filed a reply if you think you really needed to file a reply. They are only saying judge should not have written something that he has written."

"By second (of April), you file your reply. Then we will fix a date for final hearing," the judge said.

The Enforcement Directorate's counsel said there was no need to file replies to its petition and that this was an attempt to delay the case. Additional Solicitor General S V Raju, appearing for ED, contended that the agency's petition has no impact on the accused, as the challenge was limited to the trial court judge's observations against the agency when it discharged Kejrival, Sisodia and others in the CBI case.

The counsel for one of the accused said a brief reply was necessary and time was needed for it as the discharge order was 600 pages long.

Justice Sharma remarked that the ED's case has nothing to do with all 600 pages.

## EXCISE CASE

# Delhi HC gives Kejrival, Sisodia time on ED plea

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 19:** The Delhi High Court Wednesday granted time till April 2 to former chief minister Arvind Kejrival, his deputy Manish Sisodia and 21 others to respond to a plea by the Enforcement Directorate to expunge "unwarranted" remarks made against it by the trial court while discharging them in the liquor policy case.

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma expressed displeasure over the request for more time by the lawyers appearing for Kejrival and other accused, and said it would fix a date for final hearing in the matter during the next hearing April 2.

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Justice Sharma remarked that the ED's case has nothing to do with all 600 pages.



# Tourist influx spikes in Shimla, Manali

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 19:** Fresh snowfall and rain in the mountains north of Delhi brought down the mercury in the national capital by several notches Thursday, stopping in its tracks the mounting heat, which soared to a record high of 36 degrees Celsius earlier in the month.

Visuals from Shimla showed a bevy of tourists surprised by the sudden chill brought by the rain. People draped in shawls and hoodies milled on the Mall Road as a tapering rain pattered down.

"When we checked on the internet, it showed that it may rain. And it did. The prediction came true. We had prepared accordingly and packed warmer clothes. So it's good, we are enjoying the weather," a tourist told PTI Videos.



Visuals from Shimla showed a bevy of tourists surprised by the sudden chill brought by the rain

People draped in shawls and hoodies milled on the Mall Road as a tapering rain pattered down

Another female tourist said she was caught unawares by the rain.

"We are enjoying a lot. We did not expect it to rain so much, that's why I am in my summer clothes. Had I known, I

would have worn a jacket," the woman said. Meanwhile, Delhi experienced breezy weather due to brief spells of showers and drizzle.

Parts of the city received up to 12.5 mm of rainfall, keeping

the minimum temperature down to 17.6 degrees Celsius.

"The system is expected to intensify over central Pakistan and adjoining parts of Punjab and Haryana from Thursday, leading to further rainfall over the next two days," Mahesh Palawat, a weather expert, told PTI. "Current models suggest that weather conditions March 20 are likely to be more intense," he said.

The city Thursday recorded a maximum temperature of around 27 degrees Celsius, after simmering in the 30-plus degrees for most of the month.

In Jammu and Kashmir, the tourist resorts of Gulmarg and Sonamarg experienced fresh snowfall, while the plains were pummelled by heavy rain.

Approximately five to six inches of new snow had accumulated at the Gulmarg resort since the previous day, officials said. Other higher-altitude areas

in the Union Territory, including Pir Ki Gali along the Mughal Road in Shopian district, as well as Razdan Top, Gurez in Bandipora, and Sadhna Top in Kupwara, also received snow.

Most upper regions of the valley have experienced intermittent snowfall since Sunday.

The wet weather brought down temperatures across the region. In Himachal's Manali and its adjoining areas, snow occasioned a surge in tourists' arrival. People connected with Manali's tourism and allied industries welcomed the increase in hotel occupancy.

"The snowfall in Mid-March is a boon for the tourism industry as snow would last till summer in high altitude areas, attracting tourists, and the snow deficit during the winters would be covered up," said Roshan Thakur, president of Manali Hoteliers Association.



**The BJP is playing with the future of youth and has failed to provide jobs and employment opportunities to them. The BJP government has ruined the health and education systems**  
AKHILESH YADAV | SP PRESIDENT

**EID TO BE CELEBRATED IN INDIA SATURDAY**

Eid-ul-Fitr, which marks the culmination of the fasting month of Ramadan, will be celebrated in the country Saturday as the moon was not sighted this evening



**of the day quote**

There is no legal hurdle to issuing a notification for increasing the height of the Almatti dam, and there is no stay order either, as stated by legal experts. We will take our own decision soon. An all-party meeting may also be convened in the State



D K SHIVAKUMAR | KARNATAKA DY CM

There should be no unrest, violence, or mischief in the name of festivals. In such a situation, police and administration should remain alert. Swift action must be taken against those who disrupt law and order



HEMANT SOREN | JHARKHAND CM

Works of about ₹2,500 crore will be undertaken for water conservation and augmentation across the state. Citizens must participate in water conservation. The 'Jal Ganga Samardhan Abhiyan' should become a mass movement



MOHAN YADAV | MP CM

**CIC flags Aadhaar update delays**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 19:** The Central Information Commission (CIC) has flagged delays in updating Aadhaar details and asked the Unique Identification Authority of India to fix timelines and strengthen its grievance redressal system.

The observations came while disposing of an appeal filed by a woman who had sought correction of date of birth in her Aadhaar card, alleging that her request was not processed in time.

During the hearing, the appellant said that despite submitting the required documents, her request remained pending for a long time, forcing her to approach the Delhi High Court by filing a writ petition in the matter.

The CIC noted that applicants frequently approach it with grievances related to correction of date of birth, gender, spelling errors in names and other demographic details, often due to delays and lack of clarity in procedures.

Observing the trend, the Commission said such matters "primarily relate to service delivery and grievance redressal and ideally should be resolved within the administrative framework of the concerned authority without requiring citizens to resort to filing RTI applications".

Stressing the need for systemic improvements, the CIC advised the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to strengthen its mechanism for updating demographic details and ensure a transparent and user-friendly process.

It also asked the authority to lay down "clear timelines for disposal of such requests" and ensure that applications are processed in a "time-bound manner in accordance with applicable rules and regulations".

The Commission further stressed the need to improve grievance handling so that citizens receive timely responses "without the need to invoke the provisions of the Right to Information Act".



Priests perform the Ganga Aarti at Assi Ghat on the occasion of Hindu New Year and first day of the 'Navaratri' festival, in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh

**SC RESERVES VERDICT ON 'INDUSTRY' DEFINITION**

**Govt not anti-labour: Centre**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 19:** The Centre Thursday told the Supreme Court that it is "certainly not anti-labour" and will do everything to protect the interests of workers as a nine-judge Constitution Bench reserved its verdict on the correctness of 1978 ruling that gave expansive interpretation of term "industry".

The Constitution bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant would decide on the pleas questioning the correctness of the landmark verdict that broadened the term "industry" in the Industrial Disputes Act of 1947 bringing millions of workers under the protective umbrella of the law.

On the third day of the hearing, Attorney General R Venkataramani said, "I have consulted the government. The government is certainly not anti-labour. Labour welfare will be taken care of. We are moving towards a globalised economy and we need to take a call on how to manage the affairs."

The attorney general, however, sounded an alarm and said that departments like forest should be declared as an industry as such an interpretation will adversely impact various governmental activities.

Besides the CJI, the bench also comprised justices B V Nagarathna, P S Narasimha, Dipankar Datta, Ujjal Bhuyan, Satish Chandra Sharma, Joyimalya Bagchi, Alok Aradhe and Vipul M Pancholi.

The judgement, keenly awaited across labour and industrial sectors, is expected to have far-reaching consequences on the rights of workers and the applicability of labour protection under the now-repealed Industrial Disputes Act, 1947,



**A nine-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court Thursday reserved its verdict on the contentious issue of defining the word "industry" under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947**

even as the bench clarified that its ruling will govern pending and existing disputes under the old regime.

On February 21, 1978, a seven-judge bench delivered a verdict on the definition of the term "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 the Industrial Disputes (ID) Act, 1947.

The CJI-led bench, which is examining the correctness of the verdict delivered almost 48 years ago, heard the submissions of various lawyers including the attorney general, Additional Solicitor General K M Nataraj and others such as senior advocates Shekhar Naphade, Indira Jaising, C U

Singh and Sanjay Hegde during the three-day-long hearing.

The bench would examine whether the "triple test" evolved by Justice VR Krishna Iyer in the 1978 judgment correctly defines "industry" under Section 2(j) of the Act.

The test broadly holds that any systematic activity involving employer-employee cooperation for production or distribution of goods and services would qualify as an "industry", and hence, the statutory protection would be extended to the workers in a wide array of sectors.

Senior advocate CU Singh defended the breadth of the definition given in the 1978 verdict.

Singh criticised attempts by state governments to narrow the definition, contending that the Act itself provides "safety valves" enabling exemptions in public interest through statutory mechanisms. On the other side, lawyers sought a narrower interpretation, particularly to exclude sovereign functions, charitable activities and certain government operations.

Senior advocate and amicus curiae J Cama challenged the wide sweep of the 1978 ruling, particularly questioning the "triple test" and the inclusion of charitable and non-profit activities within the definition of "industry".

**Ensure peaceful Eid in Uttam Nagar: HC**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 19:** Ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr, a slew of security measures have been put in place in Delhi's Dwarka district, including Uttam Nagar, where a man was killed on Holi even as the Delhi High Court Thursday directed the city police to ensure that the situation in Uttam Nagar does not take "any ugly turn".

Communal tension has gripped Uttam Nagar area since the killing of 26-year-old Tarun March 4. The violence broke out after water from a balloon thrown by a girl from Tarun's family splashed on a woman from his neighbour's family.

The Delhi Police has drawn up a comprehensive plan to ensure peaceful celebrations. Besides rooftop surveillance, more than 100 picket points have been set up in Dwarka district.

"Adequate arrangements have been made and sufficient deployment will be in place to maintain law and order. We are fully prepared to deal with any situation," a senior officer said.

The police said deployment in and around sensitive pockets, particularly Hastal village, where the killing took place, has been reinforced and will remain in place throughout the festive period.

Meanwhile, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said the people of Uttam Nagar do not want any bloodshed as they have already paid a heavy price for violence and urged the people of Delhi not to fall for any provocation.

According to the police, special focus is on mosques, Eidgahs and other religious sites, where a large number of people are expected to gather. Regular foot and vehicle patrols are being conducted as part of area domination measures.

**MYANMAR INSURGENT TRAINING**

**7 foreigners sent to NIA custody**

THE ACCUSED ALLEGEDLY INFILTRATED INDIA FROM MYANMAR VIA MIZORAM AND WERE INTERCEPTED AT VARIOUS AIRPORTS



NIA SEEKS TO INTERROGATE THE ACCUSED TO UNCOVER A LARGER CONSPIRACY, TRACE FUNDING SOURCES, AND IDENTIFY ASSOCIATES

THE COURT NOTED THE ACCUSED'S ALLEGED LINKS TO ETHNIC ARMED GROUPS SUPPORTING PROSCRIBED INDIAN INSURGENT GROUPS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 19:** Security agencies have sent mobile phones of seven arrested foreigners, including a self-styled US mercenary, for data extraction to unearth a larger conspiracy of using Indian ethnic groups to hamper national security, officials said Thursday.

Besides, social media accounts of the accused, six of them Ukrainian nationals, are also being scanned to find out source of funding, mastermind of the conspiracy and their unknown accomplices, they said.

Acting on a specific tip-off last week, the Bureau of Immigration detained these seven persons while they were attempting to move through major Indian transit hubs. They were later arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

According to an FIR filed by the NIA, 14 Ukrainians had entered India on tourist visa on separate dates and flew to Guwahati (Assam) and then to Mizoram without requisite Restricted Area Permit (RAP)/ Protected Area Permit (PAP).

The group then entered Myanmar "illegally" to conduct a pre-scheduled training for Myanmar-based Ethnic Armed Groups (EAGs), known to support terrorist organisations operating in India in the domain of drone warfare and jamming technology, it said.

"These EAGs are also known to be supporting some proscribed Indian insurgent groups by way of supplying weapons and other terrorist hardware and training them, thus affecting national security and interest of India," the FIR stated.

The seven arrested include Matthew Aaron VanDyke, a US citizen and international security analyst, who was detained at Kolkata airport. He is the founder of 'Sons of Liberty International (SOLI)' and a self-described veteran of the 'Libyan Revolution'.

Six Ukrainian nationals, identified as Hurba Petro, Sliyviak Taras, Ivan Sukmanovskiy, Stefankiv Marian, Honcharuk Maksim, and Kaminskyi Viktor, were first detained from Delhi and Lucknow airports.

**POST OF THE DAY**

Saved for 12 years for daughter's wedding. Corpus: RS 25L. Daughter (age 24): "I'm marrying my boyfriend. Court marriage." Parents shocked. Wedding budget: RS 2L (small function). Remaining 23L: What to do? Daughter: "Invest it. Give me when I need." Invested in balanced mutual funds. 7 years later: Corpus: RS 82L. Daughter needed home down payment. They gave her RS 40L. Still have RS 42L left. Moral: "Big weddings burn money. Small weddings build generational wealth."

@Sakshi50038

**SHORT TAKES**

**Man shot dead by armed attackers**

**New Delhi:** A man was shot dead and three others, including his father, were injured when a group of armed attackers barged into his house in outer north Delhi's Bawana Thursday and opened fire, police said suspecting a gang rivalry behind the attack. According to preliminary information, the incident took place when a group of armed men barged into house and fired multiple rounds, hitting the man, identified as Ravi, and others present at the spot.

**RG Kar victim's mother eyes BJP ticket**

**Kolkata:** The mother of RG Kar victim Thursday said she wants to contest the West Bengal Assembly election as a BJP candidate, asserting that she aims to take the political route to remove the TMC government. Speaking to reporters, the deceased doctor's mother said she is likely to be fielded from Panihati constituency in North 24 Parganas, and her name may feature in the third list of candidates that the BJP is expected to release soon.

**11 Naxals surrender**

**Gadchiroli:** Eleven Naxalites including five senior cadres Thursday surrendered in eastern Maharashtra's Gadchiroli, police said, claiming that the Left Wing Extremism (LWE) has almost come to an end in the district. The Maoist cadres, which included six women, were carrying a total reward of ₹68 lakh on their heads. They surrendered before police and Central Reserve Police Force officials, said a release from Gadchiroli Police.

**Ch'garh Bill against forced religious conversions passed**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Raipur, March 19:** The Chhattisgarh Assembly Thursday passed a Bill aimed at preventing religious conversions carried out through force, inducement, fraud or misrepresentation, with stringent provisions including life imprisonment in cases of "mass conversion".

The Chhattisgarh Dharm Swatantraya Vidheyak 2026 (Freedom of Religion Bill 2026), tabled in the House by Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma, was passed following five hours of discussion amid a boycott by Congress legislators after their demand to refer the Bill to a Select Committee for consultation before its introduction was rejected by the chair.

During the discussion on the

Bill, Sharma, who also holds Home portfolio, accused the Congress of indulging in vote bank politics.

Citing alleged religious conversion incidents in Narayanpur and Kanker districts in Bastar, Sharma said the Bill was introduced keeping in view the current scenario, adding the government does not intend to restrict voluntary conversions. "Any person can choose to convert by their own will. How can we stop that? The issue is whether conversions are taking place through inducement, force, or misrepresentation," he said. The Bill seeks to replace Chhattisgarh Dharm Swatantraya Adhinyam (Freedom of Religion Act) 1968 adopted from Madhya Pradesh when the state was carved out in 2000.

**73 RS MPs face criminal cases: ADR**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 19:** Around 32 per cent of sitting Rajya Sabha MPs have declared criminal cases against themselves, while 14 per cent are billionaires, according to a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).

The report is based on an analysis of affidavits of 229 out of 233 Rajya Sabha MPs. One seat from Jharkhand is currently vacant, while affidavits of three MPs were unavailable. The analysis includes 37 recently elected members.

Of the 229 MPs analysed, 73 (32 per cent) have declared criminal cases, with 36 (16 per cent) of them facing serious charges. One MP has declared a case of murder, four have cases of attempt to murder,

**ADR**  
Association for Democratic Reforms

THE REPORT IS BASED ON AN ANALYSIS OF AFFIDAVITS OF 229 OUT OF 233 RAJYA SABHA MPS

ONE SEAT FROM JHARKHAND IS CURRENTLY VACANT, WHILE AFFIDAVITS OF THREE MPS WERE UNAVAILABLE

THE ANALYSIS INCLUDES 37 RECENTLY ELECTED MEMBERS

and three have cases related to crimes against women.

Party-wise, 27 of 99 BJP MPs, 12 of 28 Congress MPs, four of 13 TMC MPs, and four of 10 AAP MPs have declared criminal cases. Three MPs from CPI(M) and BRS each have disclosed criminal cases.

The report also found 31 MPs (14 per cent) having a net worth of billions of rupees.

Among major parties, six BJP MPs, five Congress MPs, four YSRCP MPs, two AAP MPs, two BRS MPs, and three NCP MPs have declared assets exceeding ₹100 crore.

The average assets of a Rajya Sabha MP stand at ₹120.69 crore.

Among major parties, the average assets per MP are ₹28.29 crore for BJP, ₹128.61 crore for Congress, ₹17.70 crore for TMC, and ₹574.09 crore for AAP. Other parties include YSRCP (₹522.63 crore), SP (₹399.71 crore), BJD (₹105.63 crore), and DMK (₹11.90 crore).

BRS MP Bandi Partha Saradhi has declared the highest assets at over ₹5,300 crore, followed by AAP's Rajinder Gupta with over ₹5,053 crore, and YSRCP's Alla Ayodhya Rami Reddy with over ₹2,577 crore.

On the other end, AAP MP Sant Balbir Singh is the poorest, with assets worth about ₹3 lakh. He is followed by Maharashtra Sanajaoba Leishemba of Manipur with around ₹5 lakh, and TMC's Prakash Chik Baraik with approximately ₹9 lakh.

# international



We are certainly not going to be anybody's vassals, we won't tolerate any threats and we'll defend our values

MARIA JESUS MONTERO | DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, SPAIN

## MEXICO INVITES SPAIN'S KING TO THE WORLD CUP OPENING MATCH

Mexico has invited Spain's King Felipe VI to attend the World Cup opening match, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said Thursday. Mexico's government representative for the 2026 FIFA World Cup Gabriela Cuevas sent invitations to all the countries with which Mexico has diplomatic relations, and among those invited was the king of Spain



### of the day quote

We value our special strategic partnership with India, the world's largest democracy

GIDEON SA'AR | FOREIGN MINISTER, ISRAEL

Trump administration publicly threatens Cuba's government almost daily with overthrowing it, and any act of aggression will clash with an impregnable resistance

MIGUEL DIAZ-CANEL | PRESIDENT, CUBA

To this day, there is no convincing plan for how this operation could succeed. Washington has not consulted us and did not say European assistance was necessary

FRIEDRICH MERZ | CHANCELLOR, GERMANY

# Iran war boosts Netanyahu, bruises Trump, Gulf states

Dubai, March 19: If the US-Israeli war on Iran ended tomorrow, one verdict is already clear: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would walk away stronger, while President Donald Trump would be left to manage the shock to global markets and to Gulf allies who have borne the heaviest costs.

For Netanyahu, analysts say, the war has redrawn Israel's political map on his terms, pivoting attention away from Gaza and toward Iran, where national consensus is strongest and his security and economic credentials resonate most.

For Trump, it has done the reverse: trapping him in a conflict with no clear exit, exposing his Gulf Arab allies to spiraling risks, and undercutting the economic storyline that powered his return to office.

"There is a clear winner and a clear loser," said Aaron David Miller, a former US Middle East negotiator. "Netanyahu is by far the key winner. He has demonstrated Israel's military competence. The Gulf states are by far the biggest losers."

For Trump, Miller said, there is no off-ramp that would allow him to declare victory and walk away. Trump, who demanded Iran's unconditional surrender, expected to find an Iranian Delcy Rodriguez, a pliant Venezuelan-style power broker, said Iran expert Karim Sadajpour, but instead "found an Iranian Kim Jong-un," invoking North Korea's defiant authoritarian model.

Unlike in Washington, the war against Iran is widely seen in Israel not as a war of choice but as a war of necessity, said Natan Sacks, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute. "Even if regime change doesn't happen," Sacks said, "weakening Iran and the (militia) axis it leads is a huge goal for Netanyahu."



Israel's Netanyahu emerges as conflict's early winner. Trump to face oil shock, economic turmoil and Gulf blowback. For Israel, Iran is war of necessity; for Washington a choice. Trump bet on Iranian capitulation, instead faced defiance.

Gulf states become the Iran war casualty

### FOR TRUMP, ONLY TOUGH CHOICES

Israeli officials say the air war has been broadly divided, with Israel focusing on western and northern Iran, attacking ballistic missile and nuclear sites, while the US concentrates on the east and south, including the Strait of Hormuz, to weaken Iran's naval capabilities.

Israel has led the killings of Iran's senior leadership, officials say, including security chief Ali Larjani Tuesday and Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib on Wednesday. Defence Minister Israel Katz said he and Netanyahu had authorised the military to strike any senior Iranian official it can locate, without requiring further approval.

Those gains, however, have not brought the war closer to an end. Trump is left with three bad choices: prolong the strikes, declare victory and hope Tehran stands down, or escalate dramatically — none of which offers a clear

off-ramp, the analysts said. The White House, the US State Department and Netanyahu's office did not respond to requests for comment for this story.

US intelligence chief Tulsi Gabbard told Congress Wednesday that while Iran's government has been weakened since the war began, it remains intact, with Tehran and its proxies still capable of attacking US and allied interests across the Middle East.

Trump's apparent miscalculation is reverberating loudly in the Gulf. As Iran fires missiles and drones at commercial hubs and chokes Hormuz, artery for a fifth of global oil, the risk is that the Gulf states become the biggest casualty, analysts say.

### US, ISRAEL OPERATE WITH DIFFERENT RISK PERCEPTIONS

Analysts say Israel may be more willing than the United States to tolerate instability in Iran, calculating it would face far less regional fallout, especially after the weakening of its proxies Hamas and Hezbollah

lah over the past three years.

At the same time Washington and its Gulf partners are far more exposed to attacks on energy infrastructure that drive up oil prices and disrupt shipping. Assaf Orion, a former head of strategy with the Israeli military, said regional states were questioning whether Israel is seeking chaos in Iran, adding that Israel would be less affected by such instability than its neighbors or Washington.

At heart, analysts say, the two allies' have varying risk perceptions: Israel views Iran as a potentially existential threat, while Washington is more focused on avoiding a drawn-out war that could impose heavy economic costs and damage alliances.

As if to illustrate the point, an Israeli attack on Iran's huge South Pars gasfield, the world's largest offshore natural gas deposit which it shares with Qatar, drew a furious response from Trump. He said on social media that the US "knew nothing about this particular attack", and that Qatar, a US ally which has faced Iranian attacks on its own gas facilities, was not involved.

Trump's Wednesday post highlighted his delicate balancing act between the close US military alliance with Israel and important US relationships with oil-rich Gulf Arab partners.

### ISRAEL MARKETS BUOYED BY ATTACKS ON IRAN

While the war against Iran enjoys public support in Israel, and could benefit Netanyahu politically, it has yet to translate into a polling boost ahead of elections due later this year.

Surveys show his right-wing coalition falling short of a majority, at around 50 of the Knesset's 120 seats,

## Europe, Japan ready to help stabilise energy prices, secure oil chokepoint

Doha/Riyadh: Leading nations in Europe, with Japan, said Thursday they would act to stabilise energy markets and join "appropriate efforts" to open the Gulf's oil chokepoint after tit-for-tat strikes on energy plants dramatically escalated the US-Israeli war on Iran. Major economies have been scrambling to cushion the impact of soaring oil prices after state oil giant QatarEnergy reported "extensive damage" from Iranian missile strikes on the Ras Laffan Industrial City in response to Israel's bombing of Iran's major gas field.



Ras Laffan processes about a fifth of the world's liquefied natural gas. Saudi Arabia's main port on the Red Sea, where it has been able to divert some exports to avoid Iran's closure of the Gulf's Strait of Hormuz, was also attacked. The seemingly precise strikes underscored Iran's continued ability to exact a heavy price for the US-Israeli campaign, and the limits of air defences in protecting one of the Gulf region's most valuable and strategic energy assets. They also suggested a lack of coordination of strategy and war aims almost three weeks into the war. US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, however, told a briefing that US objectives in the war were "unchanged, on target and on plan". The leaders of Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Japan issued a joint statement urging "an immediate comprehensive moratorium on attacks on civilian infrastructure, including oil and gas installations".

## US is not putting troops in Middle East region



Washington: US President Donald Trump Thursday suggested he was not looking at deploying soldiers to the Middle East with the Iran war heading toward a fourth week. "I'm not putting troops anywhere," Trump said in response to a reporter who

asked whether he was planning to send more service members to the region. "If I were, I certainly wouldn't tell you. But I'm not putting troops. We will do whatever is necessary." Trump spoke at the White House during an Oval Office meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi. Reuters reported Wednesday that the Trump administration is considering deploying thousands of US troops to reinforce the Iran operation, citing a US official and three people familiar with the matter. Thirteen US troops have been killed since Iran launched strikes against US military bases following the start of the conflict February 28.

down from 68.

That disconnect between public backing and political payoff is masked, for now, by buoyant Israeli markets. The

surge in Israel's stock market and the strength of the shekel may project confidence, but they conceal a more precarious reality.

### SHORT TAKES

#### Israel reopens key Gaza crossing

Cairo: Israel reopened the Rafah crossing with Egypt Thursday after nearly three weeks to allow some wounded Palestinians to leave for treatment, after Gaza medics said Israeli strikes had killed four people in the enclave. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society said only eight Palestinians who were injured in Israeli attacks during the two-year war and 17 of their family members would be allowed into Egypt for medical treatment after the crossing reopened Thursday. It was unclear how many would be let through from Egypt back into Gaza. Sources told Reuters earlier that the border opening resulted from recent talks that envoys from President Donald Trump's "Board of Peace" had with Hamas officials in Cairo in an effort to safeguard the Gaza ceasefire.

#### Thailand's Anutin returns to power

Bangkok: Weeks before Thailand's February general election, Anutin Charnvirakul stood at a rally in the capital Bangkok and declared that his Bhumjaithai Party should be the automatic choice for any patriotic Thai. "I promise to you all that I will safeguard Thailand with my life," the 59-year-old prime minister said. "Just choose Bhumjaithai to guard the country, to help safeguard all of our land." The stump speech captured Anutin's strategy of riding a wave of nationalism washing through Thailand in the wake of a fierce border conflict with Cambodia last year - a gamble that paid off. Bhumjaithai won 191 seats in the 500-member parliament, trouncing the progressive People's Party, and then cobbled together a coalition of 16 parties - including the populist Pheu Thai - that together hold 292 seats.

## Ukraine peace talks are on pause: Kremlin

REUTERS

Moscow, March 19: The Kremlin said Thursday that talks between Washington, Moscow and Kyiv on ending the war in Ukraine were on "situational pause" following the start of the Iran war.

US President Donald Trump vowed to end the Ukraine war on his return to the White House but has said efforts to resolve the conflict have been one of his biggest disappointments.

The Izvestia newspaper said in a front-page story that the Kremlin had confirmed a pause in talks on Ukraine and that war in the Middle East could push Kyiv towards compromise.

"This is a situational pause, for obvious reasons," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters when asked about the Izvestia report.

Peskov said that as soon as "our American partners" could pay more attention to Ukrainian affairs, Moscow hoped that the pause could end



Kremlin says peace talks on pause amid Iran war

Talks on economy and investment with US to continue

Kremlin says talks can resume when US can pay attention

and that a new round of talks could take place.

Izvestia said that talks on economic and investment cooperation with the United States, led by presidential envoy Kirill Dmitriev, would continue.

Ukraine and Russia, which invaded its neighbour in 2022, held talks in Turkey last year and have conducted sessions

with US mediation in Abu Dhabi and Geneva this year. They remain far apart on Russia's demand for Ukraine to cede control of the whole of its Donetsk region.

### US INTELLIGENCE CHIEF SAYS RUSSIA HAS UPPER HAND

Ukrainian and European leaders say Russia cannot be

allowed to achieve its aims after what they cast as an imperial-style land grab and that Moscow could next attack a NATO member state if it wins. Moscow denies this.

US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard told the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on Wednesday that Russia had "maintained the upper hand in its war against Ukraine."

"US-led negotiations between Moscow and Kyiv are ongoing. Until such an agreement is met, Moscow is likely to continue fighting a war of attrition with the aim of degrading Kyiv's ability and will to resist," Gabbard said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said he is open to discussing peace. He portrays the war as a watershed moment in relations with the West, which he says humiliated Russia after the Soviet Union fell in 1991 by enlarging NATO and encroaching on what he considers Moscow's sphere of influence.

## China says 'new points of consensus' reached in trade talks with US

China and the US have agreed to continue making good use of their economic and trade consultation mechanism to strengthen dialogue and communication



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, March 19: China Thursday said "new points of consensus" have been reached in its current trade talks with the US ahead of President Donald Trump's planned visit to Beijing, which was postponed due to the escalating conflict in West Asia.

China and the US have agreed to continue making good use of their economic and trade consultation mechanism to strengthen dialogue and communication, China's Commerce Ministry said Thursday.

The ministry's spokesperson, He Yongqian, while responding to a question on the recent China-US economic and trade talks in Paris, said both sides engaged in candid, in-depth and constructive consultations on issues of mutual interest, including tariff arrangements, promoting bilateral trade and investment, and maintaining the existing consensus from earlier consultations.

"Some new points of consensus were reached, and both sides agreed to maintain consultations." He said at a media briefing here.

The two parties also agreed to explore the establishment of working mechanisms to expand economic and trade cooperation, continue to make good use of the China-US economic and trade consultation mechanism, strengthen dialogue and communication, proper-

ly manage differences, and expand practical cooperation to advance the sustained and steady growth of bilateral economic and trade relations, the spokesperson said.

The talks were held between the US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng in Paris ahead of Trump's planned visit to Beijing later this month.

Trump previously scheduled to visit Beijing, the first by a US president since 2017, from March 31 to April 2.

But Trump said Monday he had to postpone it. "Because of the war, I want to be here, I have to be here, I feel. And so we've requested that we delay it a month or so," Trump said.

Observers say the postponement of his trip was a relief of sorts for China, which is a close ally of Iran, as Trump, along with Israel, launched the war against Tehran, killing most of its leaders, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei.

While condemning US-Israeli airstrikes, China, however, went ahead with preparations for Trump, with Paris trade talks focusing on a trade deal to remove heavy tariffs on Chinese goods.

According to reports, trade talks between the two countries focused on China increasing purchases of American soybeans, coal, oil, and Boeing jetliners, while the US pressed for access to Chinese rare earth minerals, specifically yttrium for aerospace applications.

### GREEK PET RESCUE

## Airlift saves paws, owners from conflict

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Athens (Greece), March 19: This was an animal airlift. Dozens of dogs and cats arrived in Athens Wednesday with their owners aboard a special evacuation flight for Greeks with pets who were trapped by the current war in the Middle East.

Emotional scenes unfolded at Athens airport as small dogs leaped for joy after being let out of their special travel carry cases. The government-organized Aegean flight from Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates carried 45 pets and 101 people.

"Our pets are not luggage, they are part of our families," said the Greek Interior Ministry's Special Secretary for the Protection of Companion Animals Nikos Chrysakis.



He said the interior and foreign ministries had worked together for days "so we can have this good result, for the animals and people to return home safely."

The Israeli and US attack on Iran has wreaked havoc on

airline travel across the Middle East. Countries have been forced to repeatedly shut their airspace and cancel thousands of flights in major airline hubs such as Dubai and Qatar as missiles flew overhead. Hundreds of thousands of travelers

Emotional scenes unfolded at Athens airport as small dogs leaped for joy after being let out of their special travel carry cases

The government-organized Aegean flight from Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates carried 45 pets and 101 people

found themselves stranded. For Danai Koukoulomati, finding a flight that would also take her cat Muay Thai was non-negotiable.

"To me, my pet, my cat is my family. There is no chance I'm going to leave him behind," she said. But she couldn't find any flight accepting animals in the cabin or in the cargo hold. "It is very, very difficult to fly out of the country with your pets."

As for dealing with the war,

Muay Thai was far more stoic than she was herself. When explosions sounded, "he would hide in the bathroom and that would be all. He was a calm cat," Koukoulomati said. "I was not as calm as my cat. I need to take some lessons from him."

Alexandra Papayanis, who has been living in Dubai for five years, arrived with her dog Sirtaki named after a Greek dance and a second dog she brought out for a friend. She too said she had struggled to find an evacuation flight that would take animals.

"It's so important. I mean, our pets are part of our family," she said. "And in these very difficult circumstance, the challenges we are facing is how to bring our dogs and our cats back." Returning to Greece with Sirtaki "was absolutely fantastic," she said.

## of the day quote

India is entering a new phase of mobility transformation, and HMSI is committed to leading this journey with responsibility and purpose

**TSUTSUMI OTAMI** | PRESIDENT & CEO, HMSI INDIA

There is bad and good news. So the fact that there is this signing between India and the EU to reduce the tariffs is a good sign. But unfortunately this is not affecting our type of cars because it is for internal combustion engine cars and not for plug-in hybrids. We have all plug-in hybrids

**STEPHAN WINKELMANN** | CHAIRMAN AND CEO, AUTOMOBILI LAMBORGHINI

Women today are playing a far more active role in financial decision-making and long-term wealth creation

**BHUVANESHWARI A** | MD & CEO, SBI SECURITIES

## SHORT TAKES

### Oilmeal export to China jumps 20-fold

**New Delhi:** India's oilmeal exports to China surged over 20-fold to 7.79 lakh tonne in the first eleven months of this fiscal, following higher demand due to lower prices compared to competitors, according to industry body SEA data. Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA), however, said the exports could face a challenge going forward. India exported 7,79,016 tonne of oilmeals, mainly rapeseed meal, to China during April 2025-February 2026 against 38,240 tonne in the corresponding period of the preceding financial year. China imported 7,71,435 tonne of rapeseed meal and 7,581 tonne of castorseed meal during the first eleven months of this fiscal. SEA Executive Director BV Mehta attributed the surge in exports to competitive pricing against European suppliers.

### BCCL achieves coal booking milestone

**New Delhi:** Coal India arm BCCL Thursday said it has achieved a record single-day coal booking of about 2.37 lakh tonnes under its special discount scheme aimed at liquidating stockpiles. Under the scheme, discounts ranging from ₹100-600 per tonne were offered across various slabs, which received an encouraging response from consumers. During the e-auction conducted Wednesday, under rail mode, around 1.80 lakh tonne of coal were booked across 45 rakes, while road mode bookings stood at about 56,850 tonne, taking the total to 2,36,850 tonne. The strong uptake, particularly through rail, is expected to bolster key sectors like steel and core industries, Bharat Coking Coal Ltd (BCCL) said in a filing to BSE. The strong response reflects the effectiveness of the company's consumer-centric policies, it said, adding that the higher booking through rail mode is expected to support key sectors such as steel and core industries.

### BMW set to hike prices by up to 2%

**New Delhi:** BMW Group India Thursday said it will increase vehicle prices by up to 2 per cent across its vehicle range with effect from April 1, in order to offset the impact of escalating logistics, material costs and depreciating rupee. The price increase will be applicable across the range for BMW and MINI vehicles, the German luxury carmaker said in a statement. Mercedes-Benz India and Audi India have already announced to increase vehicle prices from next month.



Keep an eye on our peak demand. Our peak demand, that is, the maximum amount of power we need at any given time

**MANOHAR LAL** | UNION POWER MINISTER

**ENERGY DATA NOW NATIONAL SECURITY**  
The government has classified energy data as a matter of national security, mandating all entities across the oil and gas value chain to furnish detailed operational information. The Oil Ministry's Petroleum and Natural Gas (Furnishing of Information) Order, 2026 requires refiners, LNG importers, pipeline operators, city gas distributors and petrochemical firms, across both public and private sectors, to regularly (even daily in some cases) report granular data to the ministry's Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell



# BLOODBATH ON D-STREET

Stock markets nosedive over 3% as boiling crude oil prices, weak global trends weigh on sentiments

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, March 19:** Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty plummeted by over 3 per cent to close at almost one-year lows Thursday as a sharp jump in crude oil prices and weak global trends, amid escalating strikes on energy infrastructure in West Asia, unnerved investors.

Snapping its three-day gaining streak, the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 2,496.89 points or 3.26 per cent - its biggest single-day plunge since June 2024 -- to settle at 74,207.24, a level not seen since April 7, 2025. During the day, it dived 2,753.18 points or 3.58 per cent to 73,950.95.

The 50-share NSE Nifty tumbled 775.65 points or 3.26 per cent to end at 23,002.15. Nifty had rallied 2.68 per cent or 626 points while Sensex jumped 2.8 per cent or 2,140 points in the last three sessions.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Eterna, Bajaj Finance, Mahindra & Mahindra, HDFC Bank, Larsen & Toubro and Bajaj Finserv were among the major



### Brent briefly tops \$119, stocks sink worldwide

Oil prices shot up again Thursday because of the war with Iran, tightening their grip on the global economy and sending stock markets worldwide sharply lower. Brent crude, the international standard, briefly rose above \$119 per barrel in the morning before pulling back to \$112.70, which is still a 5 per cent rise from the prior day. A barrel of benchmark US crude added 1.4 per cent to \$96.78 after Iran intensified its attacks on oil and gas facilities around the Persian Gulf in response to an Israeli attack on an important Iranian natural gas field. Stock indexes dropped 3.4 per cent in Japan, 2.7 per cent in South Korea, 2.6 per cent in Germany and 2.6 per cent in the United Kingdom. On Wall Street, where trading began after Brent crude's price pared some of its big gain and where companies are less reliant on oil from the Gulf, the losses were a bit more modest. The S and P 500 fell 0.9 per cent to deepen its drop for the week so far, which is on track to be its fourth straight losing week. The Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 331 points, or 0.7 per cent, as of 9:35 a.m. Eastern time, and the Nasdaq composite was 1.3 per cent lower.

laggards. HDFC Bank dropped 5.13 per cent after its chairman, Atanu

## GLOBAL SELLOFF

### Silver crashes ₹17,800/kg, gold dives ₹7K to ₹1.53 lakh/10gms



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 19:** Silver prices tanked ₹17,800 to ₹2.38 lakh per kilogram in the national capital Thursday, while gold dropped ₹7,000 to ₹1.53 lakh per 10 grams following a sharp selloff in global commodity markets.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, the white metal slumped by ₹17,800, or nearly 7 per cent, to ₹2,38,700 per kg (inclusive of all taxes) from Wednesday's closing level of ₹2,56,500 per kg.

Silver has now declined sharply by ₹1,65,800 per kilogram, or 41 per cent, from its lifetime high of ₹4,04,500 per kg recorded January 29.

Gold of 99.9 per cent purity also plunged by ₹7,000, or 4.37 per cent, to ₹1,53,300 per 10 grams

(inclusive of all taxes) from the previous close of ₹1,60,300 per 10 grams.

The yellow metal had fallen by ₹29,700, or 16.23 per cent, from its all-time high of ₹1,83,000 per 10 grams recorded January 29.

Precious metal prices also traded lower in the overseas trade. Spot silver tumbled by \$4.88, or 6.48 per cent, to \$70.49 per ounce, and gold declined \$140.19, or nearly 3 per cent, to \$4,678.69 per ounce.

Gold prices slipped below the \$4,700 per ounce, witnessing a sharp correction of \$100 in a single session and nearly \$300 in the last two days, as strong macro headwinds continue to weigh on prices, Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said.

### Joyalukkas announces discount, advance gold booking offer

**BHUBANESWAR:** Joyalukkas, the world's favourite jeweller, has announced a special limited-period offer for customers, bringing exceptional value on gold jewellery purchases during the peak buying season. The offer will be available at Joyalukkas showrooms from March 18 to 22. As part of the campaign, customers can enjoy flat 40% off on making charges on a wide range of jewellery collections. From timeless traditional designs to contemporary creations, the offer presents an excellent opportunity for customers to invest in jewellery with added value. In addition, Joyalukkas is introducing an exclusive advance-booking offer from March 18 to April 18 for customers planning their upcoming purchases. Customers can pay just 10% upfront to lock in the current gold rate until May 2, 2026, offering greater flexibility and protection against potential price fluctuations. Sharing his thoughts on the campaign, Chairman and Managing Director Joy Alukkas said, "This is a strong and significant period for jewellery purchases, as many customers plan ahead for weddings, special occasions and long-term investments. At Joyalukkas, we are committed to offering not just exceptional jewellery, but also meaningful value. These offers are designed to give our customers the confidence to make their purchases at the right time, with both flexibility and assurance." With its unparalleled designs, trusted quality and exceptional service, Joyalukkas continues to make every festive celebration even more memorable for its customers.

## HDFC Bank says chairman exit may be over rift with management

REUTERS

**Mumbai, March 19:** India's largest private lender said Thursday the abrupt exit of its chairman could be due to a rift between him and the management team, adding there were no material issues at the bank.

Shares of HDFC Bank fell as much as 8.7% Thursday after its non-executive Chairman Atanu Chakraborty resigned, citing differences over "values and ethics", which raised governance concerns among some investors.

India's central bank in a statement said that HDFC Bank was a domestic systemically important bank with sound financials, a professionally run board and competent management team.

Based on its periodic assessments, there were "no material concerns on record as regards its conduct or governance," the Reserve Bank of India said.

The RBI has approved the appointment of former long-time HDFC Group executive Keki Mistry as an interim non-executive chairman for three months. Mistry told reporters and analysts on a call there had been no discussion regarding governance within the board.

He added that he was not aware of the issues raised by Chakraborty in his resignation letter that the bank received on Wednesday and said there were "no power struggles within the bank".

"There could have been a

Livelong Wealth, said. BSE MidCap Select index tumbled 3.34 per cent and SmallCap Select index dropped 2.77 per cent.

All sectoral indices ended lower. Auto dived 4.07 per cent, followed by realty (3.79 per cent), financial services (3.66 per cent), consumer discretionary (3.62 per cent), BSE Top 10 Banks (3.53 per cent), industrials (3.49 per cent), services (3.44 per cent), BSE Focused IT (3.41 per cent) and consumer durables (3.38 per cent).

A total of 3,192 stocks declined, while 1,051 advanced and 161 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) off-loaded equities worth ₹2,714.35 crore Wednesday, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs), however, bought stocks worth ₹3,253.03 crore.

On Wednesday, the Sensex jumped 633.29 points or 0.83 per cent to settle at 76,704.13. The Nifty surged 196.65 points or 0.83 per cent to end at 23,777.80.

## WEST ASIA CRISIS

### Global trade growth may drop to 1.9%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 19:** The global trade growth is expected to slow down to 1.9 per cent this year amid the West Asia crisis, the WTO said Wednesday.

WTO economists warn that the ongoing conflict in West Asia could further reduce trade growth if energy prices remain elevated, it said.

It would also put pressure on food supplies and trade in services due to travel and transport disruptions.

"...global merchandise trade growth would slow to 1.9 per cent in 2026 from 4.6 per cent in 2025, as trade is expected to normalise, following a surge in AI-related products and the front-loading of imports to avoid new tariffs," according to the WTO's Global Trade Outlook and Statistics.

The forecast does not augur well for India as the country is looking to boost its shipments. WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said this baseline forecast is under pressure from the conflict in the Middle East.

"Sustained increases in energy prices could increase risks for global trade, with potential spillovers for food security and cost pressures on consumers and businesses," she said.



- Chakraborty cites differences over 'values and ethics' in resignation
- RBI finds no governance issues at HDFC Bank
- Keki Mistry appointed interim chairman for three months
- Macquarie removes HDFC Bank from its marquee list amid governance concerns

and more than 120 million customers.

The bank holds a little more than a tenth of India's banking system deposits, making its stability key to the South Asian economy. It is designated by the central bank as a systemically important bank, a tag assigned to lenders considered to be too big to fail and required to hold additional capital.

Following the turmoil at India's largest private sector lender, Macquarie removed HDFC Bank from its marquee buy list.

"Near-term underperformance may remain. While fundamentals remain strong with good ROA (returns on assets), at this point in time governance concerns will weigh down heavily on the stock. Investors would want more comfort from the board," Suresh Ganapathy, an analyst at Macquarie, said in a note published Thursday.

He added that uncertainty around current chief's reappointment will also weigh on the stock.

Chakraborty, a former bureaucrat, was appointed as HDFC Bank's chairman in April 2021 for a three-year term and reappointed in 2024 through May 2027.

"While governance standards have historically been strong for the bank, the current episode raises concerns about aspects that we may have limited insights, but could be material from a stock multiple perspective," said Kotak Institutional Equities in a note.

## TPSODL leads rural solar adoption

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Berhampur, March 19:** In a significant stride towards India's clean energy transition, Matikhala village in Ganjam district of Odisha has emerged as a model for rural solar adoption, becoming fully solarised under the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana (ULA Model).

The initiative, implemented by TP Southern Odisha Distribution Limited (TPSODL), highlights how decentralised renewable energy solutions can transform rural livelihoods while advancing the country's sustainability goals.

Located under Kanamana Panchayat in Chhatrapur block, the village has seen 200 eligible households having a contract demand of 1 kW, equipped with rooftop solar



connections. Each beneficiary has been provided with a 1 kW solar system, enabling them to generate their own electricity, significantly reduce dependence on conventional power sources, and lower monthly electricity expenses.

Under the ULA model of the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, a beneficiary contributes ₹5,622, which includes the cost of the solar panel and solar meter, making the initiative

both accessible and affordable. The model ensures long-term benefits, with solar systems designed to provide reliable energy support for up to 25 years. With this, Matikhala has become a fully solarised village under the scheme, with all eligible beneficiaries covered. The district administration of Ganjam has provided necessary financial support in achieving this milestone.

The project was inaugurat-

ed by Krushna Chandra Nayak, MLA of Chhatrapur, in the presence of villagers and senior officials. The event was graced by Keerthi Vasan V, Collector and District Magistrate of Ganjam; Amit Kumar Garg, CEO of TPSODL; Sambit Sangramjit Sahoo, BDO, Chhatrapur; along with other senior officials of TPSODL.

Reinforcing TPSODL's commitment to sustainable energy, Amit Kumar Garg, CEO, stated, "The solarisation of Matikhala under the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana (ULA Model) marks a key step towards rural energy self-reliance. It not only reduces electricity costs for households but also ensures long-term sustainable benefits. We are committed to expanding such initiatives to build a cleaner and greener future."

## Union Bank of India holds CSR activities

CUTTACK:

Union Bank of India, Regional Office, Cuttack, conducted CSR initiatives for community welfare by organizing two meaningful activities under the theme "Empower Her and Power Him," supporting both the elderly and underprivileged children. A program was held at Sakha Old Age Home, Telengapentha led by regional head Bibekandana Sarangi along with Chinmaya Behera and Tasannum Naaz in the presence of Kabita Mohapatra, Secretary of Sakha Old Age Home. Five beds were donated to enhance the comfort of elderly residents. Another initiative was conducted at SAI School Basundhara, Gatrioutpatna where 100 school bags, notebooks and stationery items were distributed to orphan girls. Food was also arranged for the children. The event was led by the same people of the bank in the presence of Snigdha Biswal, secretary of SAI School Basundhara, Bidhu Bhusan Mohanty, coordinator and Harapriya Rout, superintendent of the institution. These initiatives reflect the bank's continued commitment to social responsibility, community welfare and inclusive growth.



# Teen's curiosity busts 'Youth Khelo India Federation'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 19:** The inquisitive mind of a 16-year-old Taekwondo player has unravelled an "elaborate fraud" being committed on thousands of athletes by a body claiming to have government affiliation and a stunned Sports Ministry is set to file an FIR against it.

The teenager, who wants to remain anonymous, had reached out to the ministry asking whether the 'Youth Khelo India Federation (YKIF)' was recognised by it and the Sports Authority of India (SAI) as mentioned on its official website. She said she had already paid Rs 7,000 to it to compete in a so-called national tournament in Udaipur in November last year.

The stakes became higher after that event as \$825 (approx Rs 77,000) were being sought by the same body to facilitate her participation in an international tournament in Thailand come April.

"I started training in Taekwondo only last year and a coach of mine, who I would not like to name, told me that a national tournament was being organised by 'Youth Khelo India Federation' in Udaipur. I participated in it and won my event, nothing seemed amiss, it felt like a normal competition to me," the class 12 student told PTI in a telephonic conversation.

The multi-sport event in Udaipur from November 1 to 3 featured budding athletes in taekwondo, badminton, boxing, kickboxing and wushu among others.

"I paid Rs 7,000 to compete there and after that I was told that the winners would be taken to Thailand for an international competition in April for which we needed to complete documentation and submit the fee by April 1," she recalled.

The amount to be paid was significantly higher and the aspirant was not entirely convinced by the tournament brochure presented to her. For



starters, the mascot bore an uncanny resemblance to Shan, the Khelo India Winter Games mascot, which is a snow leopard.

Although the brochure featured flags of other participating countries, including Pakistan and Bangladesh, it did not have a low-down on the number of expected athletes, which is basic information in tournament handbooks.

"The design looked quite

cheap and then bank details were on it, asking for money. I thought I would just do a basic google search to figure out and when I could not get clarity, I sent an e-mail to the sports ministry asking if the organisation was genuine," she said.

It didn't take long for the ministry to understand that youngsters were being misled in its name and acted immediately by issuing a fact-check through

the Press Information Bureau, stating "the organisation is neither recognised nor affiliated" with it. The next step is an FIR against the body.

"We were stunned by the website, it had used the logos of not just the Sports Ministry and SAI but also claimed affiliation with the Indian Olympic Association (IOA)," a ministry source said.

The YKIF website claims that it has over 22,000 athletes registered with it from over 200 districts. The body claims to be headquartered in Delhi's Shalimar Bagh and is led by one Shilpi Arora, who could not be reached for a comment although some of the other office-bearers did respond.

PTI spoke to YKIF's state coordinator Lavish Soni, who insisted that it did have ministry's affiliation. The body's national coordinator Deepak Attri stated the same but admitted that YKIF had no government sanction to organise national or district level competitions.

## CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

# Barcelona's goal opera in Camp Nou

Barca, Bayern, Atletico and Liverpool storm into quarter finals



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**London, March 19:** Barcelona scored seven and Liverpool revived its season with four goals to flip tight Champions League games Wednesday into big wins sending them to the quarter-finals.

Atletico Madrid survived a pulsating Tottenham fightback to make it Spain 3, England 0 in round-of-16 clashes this week.

Bayern Munich had it easiest of all, pushing aside Atalanta 4-1 Wednesday and 10-2 on aggregate, to get a blockbuster quarterfinal against Real Madrid.

Another Champions League goals rush was sparked by Barcelona tearing apart Newcastle in the second half of a thrilling 7-2 win after the teams went toe-to-toe before the break.

Tied 1-1 after the first leg in Newcastle, Barcelona surged to a victory after Lamine Yamal's momentum-shifting penalty kick in first-half stoppage time made the score 3-2.

Robert Lewandowski then scored twice, Fermin Lopez finished a slick move and Raphinha got his second goal as Newcastle's defense collapsed.

Barcelona is scoring for fun at Camp Nou this year. It's now eight games at home in the Champions League, La Liga or Copa del Rey and Barcelona has won all eight, getting at least three goals each time.

Liverpool ultimately eased to a 4-0 win over Galatasaray at Anfield, overturning a one-goal loss in Istanbul, despite Mohamed Salah missing a penalty in first-half stoppage time when the score was 1-0.

Still, Salah was key to Liverpool's strong second half with two assists, for Hugo Ekitike and Ryan Gravenberch, then a trademark goal in a performance that could restart an erratic season for the English champions.

"From start to finish, we played the game I was hoping for, the players were hoping for and the fans were hoping for," said Liverpool coach Arne Slot, who has been under growing pressure.

Tottenham showed real character after an embarrassing 5-2 loss in Madrid last week but was resisted by Atletico twice leveling the score in Wednesday's second leg. Xavi Simons' late penalty at least gave Tottenham a 3-2 win on the night.

- Barcelona score 7 against Newcastle
- Bayern to face Real Madrid in quarters
- Liverpool dismantle Galatasaray
- Atletico survive scare at Tottenham

Tottenham and Newcastle joined Manchester City, ousted by Real Madrid Tuesday 5-1 on aggregate score, as Premier League teams eliminated by La Liga's best.

England had a record six teams in the competition and all reached the round of 16, but only Arsenal and Liverpool advanced. Chelsea was eliminated Tuesday by defending champion Paris Saint-Germain.

In Munich, fit-again Bayern talisman Harry Kane scored twice, the second an impressive rising shot after deft footwork, against Atalanta to end Italy's challenge in this Champions League edition.

**QUARTERFINALS PAIRINGS**  
Real Madrid will play Bayern Munich, in a clash of 15-time and six-time European champions. They still have never met in the final across 71 years of the European Cup and Champions League.

Liverpool face defending champion PSG with the first leg at Parc des Princes. It's a rematch of their thrilling round-of-16 games last season, that Slot reminded Wednesday: "We were the only team that brought them to extra time and penalties."

The second leg at Anfield should be Tuesday, April 14. Liverpool hasn't played April 15 since the Hillsborough Stadium disaster on that date in 1989.

Barcelona and Atletico Madrid meet again twice just weeks after they played a two-leg domestic cup semifinal. Then, Atletico won 4-0 at home and lost 3-0 at Camp Nou to reach the Copa del Rey final.

Days before the Champions League quarterfinal first leg at Atletico's Metropolitan Stadium April 7 or 8, they are due to play there yet again in La Liga.

Tuesday's games confirmed Arsenal, the last unbeaten team in the competition, will face Sporting Lisbon. The Portuguese champion, which rallied to eliminate Bodo/Glimt with a 5-0 win Tuesday, last played at this stage in 1983.

## NAT'L PARA ATHLETICS C'SHIP

# Odisha bags five medals on Day 1



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, March 19:** Odisha para athletes made a strong impact on Day 1 of the 24th National Para Athletics Championships 2026, securing 2 gold, 1 silver, and 2 bronze medals. The championship commenced with great enthusiasm at Kalinga Stadium, bringing together top para athletes from across the country and witnessing high-energy performances across events.

Leading the medal tally for the host state, Jayanti Behera clinched the gold medal in the Women's 100m T47 event with an impressive timing of 13.17 seconds, showcasing excellent speed and determination.

In the Women's 100m T12 category, Janaki Oram delivered a standout performance to win the gold medal, clocking 13.81 seconds, marking one of the key

highlights of the day.

In the Men's Javelin Throw F46 event, Ranjit Chanda secured a bronze medal with a throw of 55.55 meters, while Satyanarayan Jena also put up a strong performance with a distance of 51.49 meters, finishing among the top competitors.

Adding to the tally, Kamalakanta Nayak clinched a bronze medal in the Men's 100m T53 event with a timing of 20.81 seconds, delivering a commendable sprint effort.

Further strengthening Odisha's performance, Kabita Prabhakar earned a silver medal in the Women's 100m T13 event, finishing with a timing of 16.05 seconds.

Odisha's strong start reflects the athletes' hard work, preparation, and competitive spirit, setting a positive tone for the remaining days of the championship.

## CCI Classic Snooker Gurbaxani ends Advani reign

**Mumbai:** Legendary cueist Pankaj Advani (PSPB) saw his reign come to an end as he suffered a defeat at the hands of Kreish Gurbaxani in the CCI Snooker Classic here Thursday. Gurbaxani pulled off a brilliant 4-2 (74-34, 38-68, 16-78, 76-14, 119-0, and 78-21) win in the summit clash of the Rs 13.5 lakh tournament. Gurbaxani, who competes on the World Snooker Tour, started with a run of 41 to win the opening frame. The balls did not roll favourably for Advani, who seemed to be out of sorts. But, he still managed to win the next two with decent breaks of 52 and 45 to grab the lead. Thereafter, Gurbaxani who was cool and composed and with clever tactical play won the subsequent three frames on the trot to script a deserving victory. The icing on the cake was a superb break of 102 in the fifth frame before snatching the sixth to close out the win. India No 2 Aditya Mehta (PSPB) was in complete control as he charged past I.H. Manudev 4-1 (52-43, 101-8, 69-6, 46-82, 60-63) to progress to the quarterfinals.

## FIRST TIME IN INDIA

# City to host World Indoor Athletics

This prestigious tournament underscores India's growing importance in global athletics and Kalinga Stadium's capacity to host top-tier events

POST NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi, March 19:** India will host the World Indoor Athletics Championships for the first time in 2028 in Bhubaneswar as the international body Thursday awarded the hosting rights of the prestigious event to the country at its council meeting in Torun, Poland.

The decision was taken at the World Athletics Council meeting a day before the start of World Indoor Athletics Championships (March 20-22) in the Polish city. "India has been awarded the World Indoor Athletics Championships for the year 2028," World Athletics vice president Adille Sumariwalla told PTI from Poland.

AFI had revealed its bid for the 2028 World Indoor Championships earlier this year.

A two-member team from World Athletics had visited the state-of-the-art indoor facility at the Kalinga Stadium Complex in Bhubaneswar in January.

Along with Sumariwalla, also a World Athletics Council member and a former Athletics Federation of India (AFI) president, officials of the Odisha government had travelled to the Polish city. AFI president Bahadur Singh Sagoo said the development was an indication of the growing stature of Indian athletics in the international stage.

"The World Athletics 2028 Indoor Athletics Championships alloted to India mark the growing stature of Indian athletics. Indian track and field has been in sharp focus since ace javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra won back-to-back Olympic and World



## EYES ON WORLD ATHLETICS STAGE

India has made bids for a slew of big-ticket global athletics events in line with the country's desire to host the 2036 Olympics

The country is bidding for the 2028 World U20 Athletics Championships as well as the 2031 World (Senior) Athletics Championships -- both in Ahmedabad. The Gujarat capital is hosting the 2030 Commonwealth Games

medals," he said. New Zealand had also earlier expressed interest to host the 2028 World Indoor Championships, a biennial showpiece for indoor events.

"Since India was in the fray, we were not allowed inside when the decision to choose the host city was taken. Later World Athletics announced that India has been awarded the Championships," technical committee chairman and former AFI secretary Ravinder Chaudhry said from Poland.

World Indoor Championships typically has 26 events -- 13 each for men and women -- to be competed across three days. The 4x400m mixed relay will be held for the first time in this edition in Poland.

The 13 events are 60m, 400m, 800m, 1500m, 3000m, 60m hurdles, 4x400m relay, high jump, pole vault, long jump, triple jump, shot put, heptathlon (pen-

tathlon for women).

India has also made a bid to host the 2028 Asian Indoor Athletics Championships at the state-of-the-art indoor facility at the Kalinga Stadium complex in Bhubaneswar which was inaugurated in 2024. A two-member delegation of the Asian Athletics Association (AAA) had made an inspection visit last month.

The Indoor facility at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar is also hosting the inaugural edition of the National Indoor Athletics Championships from March 24 to 25. The indoor athletics centre has a 200m synthetic track, an 80m plus 20m running track, and designated areas for long jump, triple jump, pole vault, and shot put, each meticulously designed to meet specific athletic requirements.

The facility features 60 twin-sharing rooms for those undergoing full-time coaching.

The 900th goal came 21 years after Messi scored his first in senior football for Barcelona as a 17-year-old in 2005

REUTERS

**Washington, March 19:** Lionel Messi scored his 900th career goal Wednesday to become the second player to reach the mark in elite men's football after Cristiano Ronaldo.

The 38-year-old Argentine World Cup winner brought up the milestone with a left-footed strike in Inter Miami's 1-1 draw with Nashville SC in the CONCACAF Champions Cup.

The 900th goal came 21 years after Messi scored his first in senior football for Barcelona as a 17-year-old in 2005.

Inter manager Javier Mascherano said Messi's tally was "insane".

"I've been lucky enough to see most, or many, of the goals he's scored, much closer than you all, and that's a privilege," he added. "The number we're talking about is insane, and that's why Leo is a one of a kind."

# India to tour Ireland ahead of England

Men in Blue maintain a perfect head-to-head record against Ireland in T20 Internationals, having won all 8 matches played between the two sides

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 19:** World champions India will tour Ireland for a T20I series in June ahead of their white-ball assignment in England.

Ireland's director of high performance Graham West confirmed the series when he announced Paul Stirling's decision to step down as their T20I captain. India, who host Afghanistan for a one-off Test and a three-match ODI series ending June 20, will travel to England for five T20Is and three ODIs from July 1-19, while the Ireland series will precede the English series.

Graham West said the India series is part of their plans for the upcoming summer. "With



## IPL lags Hundred and SA20 in player welfare, rights assessment: WCA

The Indian Premier League (IPL) is a financial juggernaut that spawned a slew of franchise leagues around the world but the elite T20 competition still has room to improve in terms of players' rights and welfare, according to an assessment by the global players body. The World Cricketers' Association (WCA) rankings released Thursday put the IPL (62.6) third of 10 leagues, behind England's The Hundred (75.2) and South Africa's SA20 (68). The world's richest 20-overs tournament received maximum points for average payment and payment reliability but lagged in areas such as "right to organise" and "dispute resolutions". WCA Chief Executive Tom Moffat said in a statement Thursday that while cricket had benefited from the increasing numbers of domestic competitions in recent years, it was important to ensure players were taken care of. "The growth of the domestic leagues landscape has been overwhelmingly positive for our sport, but it has the potential to be even better," he said. The IPL came in for criticism in January when Bangladesh player Mustafizur Rahman was dropped by Kolkata Knight Riders amid tensions between the South Asian neighbours.

## MESSI JOINS RONALDO IN ELITE CLUB

# No. 10 nets 900 goals

Messi, who has won the Ballon d'Or eight times, reached the landmark in his 1,142nd appearance for club and country, nearly 100 goals fewer than Ronaldo, who took 1,236 games to reach the milestone in September 2024.

Portuguese forward Ronaldo has now reached 965 goals and has targeted the 1,000-mark before he quits the game.

The majority of Messi's goals came during his spell at Barcelona, where he scored 672 times. He added 32 at Paris St-Germain and 81 for Inter Miami and scored 115 for Argentina.

with whom he won the World Cup in 2022. Messi's teammates have been able to depend on him at crucial times with 175 of his goals coming in knockout matches, including 35 in finals.

His 129 goals in Europe's Champions League is second only to Ronaldo's 140.

Messi's milestone goal came on a bitersweet night for Miami, who exited the competition on away goals after the first leg of their tie ended 0-0.

