



Saiee's aspiration

Actor Saiee M Manjrekar says acting in a period drama has always been one of her dreams

LEISURE | P2



'Coward' allies

Trump assails NATO allies over their lack of support for the US-Israel war against Iran, calling the longtime US allies 'cowards'

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Markets rebound

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty give up most of their intra-day gains to end nearly half a per cent higher

BUSINESS | P11



Cue ball history

At 50, seven-time world champion Ronnie O'Sullivan makes highest-ever break in the history of snooker with a 153

SPORTS | P12

GOVT REGULARISES 13K JUNIOR TEACHERS

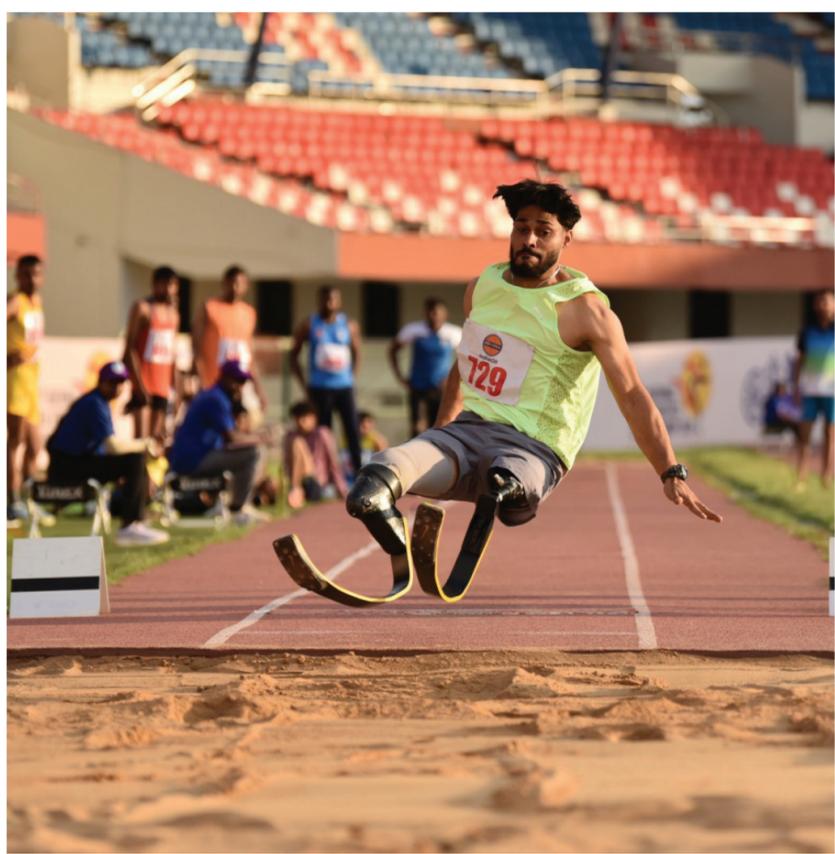
POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 20: In a significant move, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Friday approved the regularisation of Schematic Junior Teachers who were previously working on contractual basis across the state. According to an official release from the Chief Minister's Office (CMO), the decision applies to junior teachers appointed during the 2023-24 period. With this move, more than 13,000 contractual teachers will benefit, gaining greater job stability and recognition.

The decision applies to junior teachers appointed during the 2023-24 period

The teachers will be considered regular employees from their respective dates of joining. However, they will receive notional benefits for the period up to December 31, 2025. With effect from January 1, 2026, they will be entitled to full salaries and all benefits available to regular government employees, according to the release.

It may be noted that the Chief Minister had earlier announced his intention to regularise these junior teachers, and this decision fulfils that commitment. The decision has sparked widespread joy among the teaching community, marking a major step toward improving job security.



LEAP OF RESILIENCE

Para athlete Akash Mehra of Punjab takes part in a long jump event during the 24th National Para Athletics Championship at Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar, Friday

PICT: BIKASH NAYAK

₹ crashes 64 paise to all-time low of 93.53

The Indian rupee's slide to a record low of 93.53 against the US dollar underscores the mounting vulnerabilities in the country's external sector at a time of deepening global uncertainty. Driven by relentless foreign fund outflows and a sharp surge in crude oil prices amid escalating geopolitical tensions, the currency's decline reflects eroding investor confidence and heightened risk aversion. With the Strait of Hormuz disruptions threatening supply chains, India faces the twin challenge of a widening trade deficit and rising inflation. Unless stabilising measures are undertaken swiftly, the rupee's downward trajectory could further strain macroeconomic stability.



oil prices and a shift toward risk-aversion dented investor sentiments.

Moreover, heightened geopolitical uncertainty risks are driving energy costs higher, which could widen the trade deficit and stoke inflationary pressures, they added.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 92.92 against the greenback and soon breached the 93-mark for the first time. It kept losing ground through the session and eventually settled at 93.53, down 64 paise from its previous close.

On Wednesday, the rupee slumped 49 paise to close at its previous record low of 92.89 against the US dollar. Forex markets were closed Thursday on account of Gudhi Padwa.

"The Indian rupee resumed its downward spiral to fresh record lows following Thursday's

holiday, battered by a 'double whammy' of persistent foreign fund outflows and surging crude oil prices," said Dilip Parmar, Senior Research Analyst, HDFC Securities.

Parmar further noted that "while geopolitical volatility remains a key driver for short-term sentiment, the USDINR technical setup remains bullish; having breached ascending channel resistance, the pair eyes a 93.75 level with support shifting to 92.90."

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.37 per cent higher at 99.60.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading 0.03 per cent lower at USD 108.62 per barrel in futures trade.

Forex traders said the third week of the Iran conflict has triggered severe global energy supply concerns, with the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial waterway for the energy supply located between Iran and Oman, largely closed, crude oil prices are witnessing a sharp uptrend and is causing widespread inflation fears.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

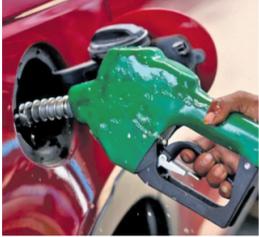
Mumbai, March 20: The rupee crashed 64 paise to settle at an all-time low of 93.53 against the US dollar Friday, weighed down by persistent foreign fund outflows and a steep rise in crude oil prices amid mounting geopolitical tensions. Forex traders said the Indian rupee is under tremendous pressure as surging crude

Indian killed in Iran strike on Riyadh

New Delhi: An Indian national was killed in an Iranian attack on Riyadh this week. The Indian national died following a missile attack on Riyadh Wednesday, people familiar with the matter said. It remains unclear whether the individual was a direct victim of the strike or was killed by the falling debris from an intercepted missile. The Indian embassy in Riyadh, without providing details, condoled the death of the Indian. "The Embassy of India expresses its deepest condolences on the tragic demise of an Indian national in Riyadh due to recent events on March 18th," it said.

Premium petrol price up by ₹2

New Delhi, March 20: The price of premium or higher-grade petrol Friday was increased by ₹2 per litre while the rate of bulk diesel sold to industrial users was hiked by about ₹22 a litre, reflecting the spike in global oil prices amid conflict in the Middle-East. However, the price of normal petrol and diesel remains unchanged. Premium 95-Octane petrol price in Delhi has been increased from ₹99.89 per litre to ₹101.89 in the national capital, industry sources said. Alongside, bulk or industrial diesel prices were hiked from



₹87.67 per litre to ₹109.59 in Delhi. International oil prices touched USD 119 per barrel Thursday on intensifying Iran war, before pulling back to around USD 108 a barrel. Normal petrol typically has an octane rating of 91-92

and is suitable for standard engines, offering adequate performance for everyday driving. Premium petrol, on the other hand, has a higher octane rating of 95-98, making it ideal for high-performance or high-compression engines. At a media briefing, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, said there is no increase in prices of normal petrol and diesel.

"Some increase is reported in the premium category which hardly makes up for 2-4 per cent of the entire petrol (sold in the country)," she said. "There is no increase in price for the common man."

Chuck Norris dies at 86

New York, March 20: Chuck Norris, the former martial arts champion and 1980s action-film hero who fought the bad guys in "Code of Silence," "Missing in Action" and "The Delta Force" and upheld the law in the TV series "Walker, Texas Ranger," died Thursday, his family said in a statement on his Instagram account Friday. "While we would like to keep the circumstances private, please know that he was surrounded by his family and was at peace," the statement read. The six-time undefeated World Professional Middleweight Karate Champion, whose tough-guy image inspired



satirical "facts" that made him an internet phenomenon, had been hospitalised in Hawaii Thursday, Variety reported. Norris starred in more than two dozen films portraying silent loners, soldiers, lawmen, veterans and All-American heroes who captured criminals, released prisoners of war, rescued hostages and battled terrorists. **OBIT ON P10**

DADLS-88

MESSAGE OF HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF ODISHA ON THE AUSPICIOUS OCCASION OF EID-UL-FITR-2026

On the auspicious occasion of Eid-UI-Fitr, I convey my greetings and good wishes to all brothers and sisters of Muslim community of our State. On this festival of joy, friendship and peace, I call upon all to participate in this festival and work collectively towards the overall development of Muslim brothers and sisters.

(Hari Babu Kambhampati)

ଇଦ୍-ଉଲ୍-ଫିତର ପର୍ବ ଅବସରରେ ମୁଖ୍ୟମନ୍ତ୍ରୀଙ୍କ ଶୁଭେଚ୍ଛା

ପବିତ୍ର ଇଦ୍-ଉଲ୍-ଫିତର ପର୍ବ ଅବସରରେ ମୁସଲମାନ ଭାଇଭଉଣୀମାନଙ୍କୁ ମୋର ଆନ୍ତରିକ ଶୁଭେଚ୍ଛା ଜଣାଇବା ସହିତ ସମସ୍ତଙ୍କର ସୁଖ ଓ ସମୃଦ୍ଧି କାମନା କରୁଛି ।

(ନୋହନ ଚରଣ ନାୟକ)
ମୁଖ୍ୟମନ୍ତ୍ରୀ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା

OIPR-

leisure



GOSLING'S CRAZY STORIES ABOUT HARRISON FORD

Hollywood actor Ryan Gosling has shared crazy stories of his interaction with Hollywood star Harrison Ford. Ryan said that the senior actor is 'not like us' and he once took 'half a bottle' of painkillers just to mock him, reports *Female First UK*.

OLIVIA EXPRESSES WISH TO 'HALF MOVE TO THE UK'

Singer-actress Olivia Rodrigo has shared that she would like to 'half move' to the UK. The 23-year-old, who lives in LA, said, "I just think British people are cool, they don't want to bug you. I love everything English, English culture and English people. I want to half move here."



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
Positive thinking can change the world, and you could do with some today. No matter how tough the going gets, take it in your stride, says Ganesha. If you think you can do it, you will. You have the magic touch today to initiate a new business strategy.

TAURUS
Definitely not a day when you plan to get your feet dirty (maybe a pedicure, though). You might delay the start of a new project. Perhaps, a romantic escape with your sweetheart or a day in the spa grooming yourself with a lavish makeover will validate your lethargy today. Either way, it will be heavy on your pocket.

GEMINI
Ganesha advises that while today will be a day filled with a lot of festivity, you still need to guard against getting carried away. You will spend the day socialising with friends and family. You might end up neglecting your household duties in organizing some function or picnic, says Ganesha.

CANCER
A hectic day, combined with domestic pressure will make you exhausted. You feel a heavy burden on mind and heart. Don't be too emotional, says Ganesha. Take care not to pass domestic burdens on to your career or business, and thereby mar your capacity and efficiency.

LEO
You will pay more attention to the younger members in the family. You will guide the children in improving their daily schedule. An occasion to celebrate will present itself. You will be desirous of participating in some competition or program, says Ganesha.

VIRGO
Foreign contacts will in all likelihood be a source of monetary profits. Ganesha says you will perform wonderfully in anything you might choose to undertake today. Even your ambition of setting up an offshore business enterprise will take root today.

LIBRA
Lady Luck smiles on you today. With all the good fortune on your side, it's assured to be a day when financial gains come your way, especially if you are in the banking business. Agreed everything is going your way today, but be careful not to let your emotions cloud your reasoning and slow you down. Don your rational hat and lower your expectations a little. It never hurts to want less, especially since it is saves you from disappointments later on, advises Ganesha.

SCORPIO
Ganesha asks you to practice caution today. There are strong possibilities that an evil eye may attack you in some or other way. So, keep a watchful eye. And remember, every day brings along an experience and a lesson with it. Learn and move on.

SAGITTARIUS
Your stars are aligned in a way that you may have to travel long distance, either for business or for leisure. Socially, you are active as you are likely to attend a function and take the centre stage. You may also participate in religious activities and give importance of rites and rituals, if need be, informs Ganesha.

CAPRICORN
After all the drudgery you endured in a bid to reach a certain point in your career, it's time to sit back and enjoy the rewards, says Ganesha. Today, you can expect to get a transfer, a promotion, a pay hike or all the three. But these will be accompanied by added responsibilities and work, leaving you wondering if it really was an achievement or a bait used to trap you. A lucrative job offer may also come your way, and given the circumstances, you may find it hard to resist.

AQUARIUS
You will tackle complicated issues with infinite ease! But you will also find people passing the buck onto you. It irks you no end, having to take the blame for others' mistakes. But here's a chance, says Ganesha, to turn a weakness into a strength.

PISCES
The focus today will be on self-improvement. You may find yourself attending seminars or workshops. Self-employed people are likely to find lucrative deals landing in their laps in the afternoon. Quality time with your family in the evening will give you a sense of balance and of belonging, says Ganesha.

PRIYA MANI'S CONFESSION

MUMBAI: With web shows like *The Family Man* and *The Good Wife*, Priya Mani Raj has found a renewed connection with audiences across India.

While she has long been a well-known name in the South, the digital space has helped her reach a wider, pan-India audience. Yet, her journey with Hindi cinema began much earlier — with Mani Ratnam's *Raavan*.

When asked if she had high expectations from her Bollywood debut, she says, "Yes, I did. I was brought up watching Hindi films, so when I got an offer to do the Hindi version of *Raavan*, I was thrilled. I got to act with Abhishek Bachchan and so many wonderful actors like Ravi Kishan and Pankaj Tripathi. I was very happy. I didn't have scenes with Aishwarya, but I met her during pro-

motions, and she was so warm."

She adds, "Honestly, I did think I'd get more offers after that. But I was quite selective. I got some offers that I liked and some I wasn't convinced about, so I just kept them at bay. I wasn't disappointed because I had my plate full with South films anyway." AGENCIES



Hrithik befriends alien Rocky from Project Hail Mary

MUMBAI: Actor Hrithik Roshan has collaborated with the team of *Project Hail Mary* to introduce the film to the audience in India. Taking to Instagram Friday, Sony Pictures India and Hrithik shared a joint post in which he taught alien Rocky, from Ryan Gosling's film *Project Hail Mary*, how to dance. This, in turn, irked Hrithik's old friend Jaadu. He is the alien character from Hrithik's 2003 film *Koi Mil Gaya*.

The video showed Hrithik trying to teach Rocky the hookstep of *Ek Pal Ka Jeena* from his 1999 film *Kaho Naa Pyaar Hai*. This budding friendship received a strong reaction from Jaadu. After Rocky successfully learnt a step, Hrithik called him "the best."

This angered Jaadu, who slammed the door. Even though Hrithik tried to convince him, his alien friend stayed upset. Jaadu calmed down after Hrithik gave him tickets to the film, asked him to accompany him, and expressed his love. The clip, however, didn't show Jaadu in person.

The caption read, "There is no language for friendship, just pure math and signals! the stars have sent someone incredible to Hrithik Roshan. This one is a genius engineer from another world." Reacting to the post, Rakesh Roshan said, "Novel." AGENCIES

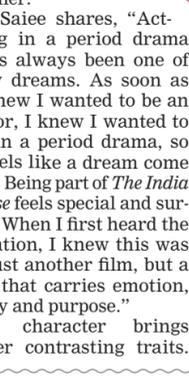
MUMBAI: A long-held aspiration is taking shape for Saiee M Manjrekar as she steps into period cinema with *The India House*. Set in 1905 against the backdrop of love and revolution, the pan-India film features her as Sati. Produced by Ram Charan and Abhishek Agarwal, the Ram Vamsi Krishna directorial also stars Nikhil Siddharth and Anupam Kher.

Saiee shares, "Acting in a period drama has always been one of my dreams. As soon as I knew I wanted to be an actor, I knew I wanted to be in a period drama, so it feels like a dream come true. Being part of *The India House* feels special and surreal. When I first heard the narration, I knew this was not just another film, but a story that carries emotion, history and purpose." Her character brings together contrasting traits.

She says, "My role is Sati, and it's a beautiful part. She is strong-willed, yet soft and kind-hearted. Finding that balance within myself has been a very exciting process."

Adapting to the demands of a period setting came with its own learning curve. She says, "I remember in the middle of a scene, I would end up saying 'please' or 'thank you', phrases we use casually in other genres. I would then apologise and do the scene again. It has been an interesting process, learning about that time and understanding how people lived, dressed and spoke." AGENCIES

Saiee steps into history



Dhurandhar 2 shatters most box office records

MUMBAI: Some films release. Some arrive like a storm. And then there's *Dhurandhar 2*, a film that didn't just hit theatres, it practically rewrote the rulebook within hours of its release.

Here's a detailed look at all the box office records *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* (*Dhurandhar 2*) shattered on Day 1:

The movie opened to unprecedented numbers Thursday, March 19, minting Rs 102.55 crore nett in India on its first day.

Including its paid preview collections of Rs 43 crore, the film's total domestic earnings stand at Rs 145.55 crore.

Globally, the film has raked in Rs 236.63 crore (early estimates), cementing its place among the biggest openers in In-



cluding Pawan Kalyan's *They Call Him OG*, which had collected Rs 25 crore.

On its opening day, the film's Hindi version alone brought in Rs 99.10 crore, the highest ever for a Hindi-language release.

The total Day 1 India collection stood at Rs 102.55 crore, with the Hindi version contributing the

bulk despite delays in regional screenings.

Previously, the record was held by *Pushpa 2*, which earned Rs 70.30 crore in Hindi on its opening day.

With Rs 236.63 crore worldwide on Day 1 (including previews) *Dhurandhar 2* has secured the second spot among the biggest Indian openers globally.

It trails only *Pushpa 2*, which recorded Rs 275.2 crore, and has surpassed SS Rajamouli's *RRR*, which had earned Rs 223 crore on its opening day.

Adding to its long list of records, *Dhurandhar 2* registered the highest-ever advance ticket sales for Day 1 across national cinema chains.

The film sold an impressive 925,000 tickets in advance, leaving behind major blockbusters like *Baahubali 2* (Hindi) - 650K tickets, *Street 2* - 565K tickets, *Jawan* - 557K tickets and *Pathaan* - 556K tickets.

 AGENCIES

PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

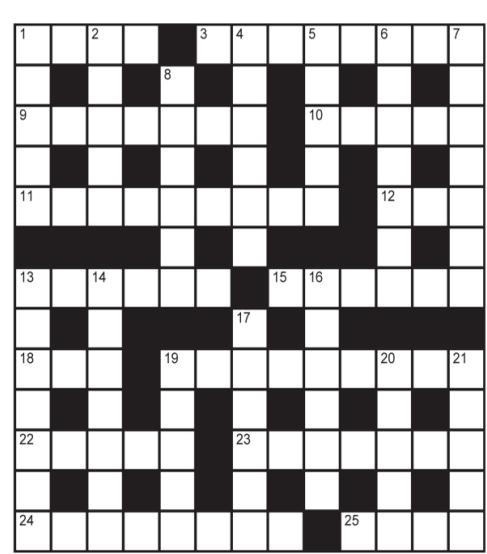


BREVITY



FUN POST

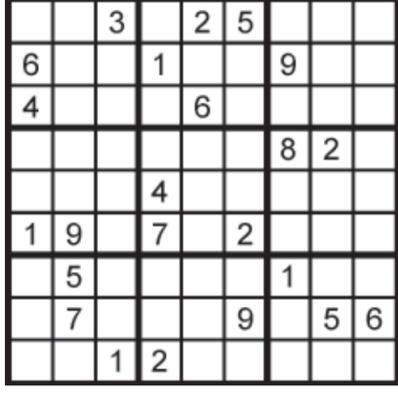
CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Treaty
 - 3 They were woolly
 - 9 Mollicoddles
 - 10 Ophidian
 - 11 Synthetic fibre
 - 12 Psychic's claim
 - 13 Reverberated
 - 15 Worn and tattered
 - 18 Hubbub
 - 19 Piggy bank substitute (6,3)
 - 22 Eskimo dwelling
 - 23 Separate (5,2)
 - 24 Propose as a candidate
 - 25 Like the Gobi
- Down**
- 1 Kind of web ad (3-2)
 - 2 Caravan beast
 - 4 Stocks and such
 - 5 Scrooge
 - 6 Catastrophe
 - 7 Took a walk
 - 8 Tranquil
 - 13 Jubilation
 - 14 Thug
 - 16 Increased
 - 17 Cold dessert
 - 19 Funnier topper
 - 20 Queeny man
 - 21 Speedy

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

Refused US request to land warplanes: SL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Colombo, March 20: Sri Lanka (SL) refused permission for the US to land two of its warplanes in the island's southeast Mattala International Airport in early March, President Anura Kumara Disسانayake told Parliament here Friday.

Disسانayake said that two US warplanes from Djibouti asked for permission to come to Sri Lanka March 4 and 8. Both requests were rejected, he said.

"We want to maintain our neutrality despite many pressures. We won't give in. The Middle East war poses challenges but we will do everything possible to remain neutral," he said.

"They wanted to bring in two warplanes armed with eight anti-ship missiles from base in Djibouti to the Mattala International Airport and we said no," he said.

Disسانayake's statement comes a day after his meeting with US Special Envoy for South and Central Asia Sergio Gor.



Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, Deputy CM Pravati Parida, Forest Minister Ganesh Ram Singkhuntia, and Chief Secretary Anu Garg, along with other dignitaries, take stock of Odia delicacies at an event organised by the Tourism department at Panthanivas, Bhubaneswar on the occasion of Pakhala Divas, Friday (REPORT PA) OP PHOTO

Wife life partner, not maid, says SC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: The Supreme Court Friday said a husband has to equally participate in household chores like cooking, cleaning and washing as he is not marrying a maid but a life partner.

The observations came from a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta which was hearing a petition filed by a man challenging an order of the Karnataka HC. The HC had set aside a trial court order granting divorce to the man on ground of cruelty. During the hearing before the SC, the counsel appearing for the man said the mediation between the parties had failed. The SC asked what the cruelty was as alleged in the matter. The counsel appearing for the man said the woman had indulged in improper behaviour and was not cooking food.

"You (man) have to equally participate in all these. Cooking, cleaning, washing, everything. Today's times are different," Justice Nath said, adding the HC was right that it might not be a ground for cruelty. "You are not marrying a maid. You are marrying a life partner," Justice Mehta said.

Search on for Maoist leader Sukru: DGP

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 20: With the March 31 deadline for making Odisha Maoist-free drawing closer, the state police have launched an operation to nab wanted Maoist leader Sukru, carrying a reward of Rs 55 lakh on his head, after the forces located his hideout in a dense forest, a top police official said Friday.

DGP YB Khurania said security forces comprising central forces and Odisha Police are progressing inch-by-inch into the dense forest located in the trijunction of Kandhamal, Rayagada, and Kalahandi districts, where Sukru was hiding.

"We have complete information about his (Sukru's) whereabouts. When we are talking, the forces are on operation in forest," the DGP said while replying to the police efforts to nab or eliminate the most wanted red rebel in the state.

Sukru, 49, a native of Malkangiri, has been leading a small group of around 13 Maoists, mostly hailing from Chhattisgarh, posing a challenge for the security forces.

In January this year, Sukru killed one of his junior Anwesh, who wanted to surrender to the police. He buried Anwesh's body in a jungle with the help of his associates, like Shila and Jogesh. Meanwhile, Jagesh was neutralised February 22, said Kandhamal SP Harisha BC.

Anwesh was a divisional committee member and military platoon commander, the SP said.

However, of late, sources said now under severe pressure from family and continued police operation, Sukru was showing interest to surrender, but he faced strong opposition from his associates.

As a state committee member, Sukru carries a bounty of Rs 55 lakh and is considered the most senior active Maoist in Odisha.

Iran threatens tourism sites

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dubai, March 20: Nearly three weeks into US-Israeli strikes that have killed a slew of Iran's top leaders and hammered its weapons and energy industries, a defiant Tehran Friday threatened to target recreational and tourist sites worldwide and insisted it is still building missiles.

Iran's top military spokesman warned Friday that "parks, recreational areas and tourist destinations" worldwide won't be safe for Tehran's enemies.

The threat from General Abolfazl Shekarchi renewed concerns that Iran may revert to using militant attacks beyond the Middle East as a pressure tactic.

US and Israeli leaders have said that weeks of strikes have decimated Iran's military. Airstrikes have also killed its supreme leader, the head of its Supreme National Security Council and a raft of other top-ranking military and political leaders. The Israeli military Friday said that Esmail Ahmadi, head of intelligence for the Basij, and internal security force, had been killed by a strike earlier in the week that hit other Basij leaders.

Iran fired on Israel and energy sites in neighbouring Gulf Arab states as many in the region marked one of the holiest days on the Muslim calendar. Iranians were also celebrating the Persian New Year, known as Nowruz, a



Iranians attend the funeral procession of intelligence minister Esmail Khatib and, according to Iranian officials, his wife and daughter, in Tehran, Friday

normally festive holiday that is more subdued this year.

With little information coming out of Iran, it was unclear how much damage its arms, nuclear or energy facilities have sustained since the war began February 28 or even who was truly in charge of the country. But Iran has showed it is still capable of attacks that are choking off oil supplies and denting the global economy, raising food and fuel prices far

beyond the Middle East.

The US and Israel have offered shifting rationales for the war, from hoping to foment an uprising that topples Iran's leadership to eliminating its nuclear and missile programmes. There have been no public signs of any such uprising and no end in sight to the war.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Thursday claimed Iran's navy was sunk and its air force in tatters, while adding that its ability to produce ballistic missiles had been taken out. Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard disputed the missile claim Friday.

"We are producing missiles even during war conditions, which is amazing, and there is no particular problem in stockpiling," spokesman Gen. Ali Mohammad Naeini was quoted as saying in Iran's state-run IRAN newspaper.

A short time after the statement was released, Iranian state television said Naeini was killed in an airstrike. The country's new Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khomeini also released a rare statement, saying Iran's enemies need to have their "security" taken away.

Meanwhile, Israel broadened its attacks to Syria Friday, saying it hit infrastructure there in response to what it described as attacks on the Druze minority. Syria's state-run SANA news agency did not immediately acknowledge the attack.

BTS comeback concert today

ASSOCIATED PRESS



Seoul, March 20: BTS will stage its long-awaited comeback concert Saturday night at Seoul's Gwanghwamun Square, one of South Korea's most famous landmarks representing its royal heritage and political and cultural life.

In a free concert expected to draw tens of thousands of fans, the K-pop juggernaut's seven members, all South Koreans, will perform songs from their first album in nearly four years, 'ARIRANG', whose title is taken from the most beloved traditional folk tune on the Korean Peninsula.

"ARIRANG" is an album that embodies the origin

and identity of BTS and carries the message that they want to convey now," Hybe Corp., the parent company of BTS' management agency, said. "Considering the symbolic significance of the word 'Arirang,' we've decided to hold a performance at Gwanghwamun, a place that represents Korea."

Observers say the hour-long Gwanghwamun concert, which will be livestreamed on Netflix globally, will reaffirm BTS' identity

as a group that expanded from Korea to the world stage. BTS had been on hiatus because its members had to complete their mandatory military duties in South Korea.

Officials believe the concert will likely enhance South Korea's international cultural influence. They also plan to take extensive safety steps to prevent crowd-related incidents.

BTS is set to kick off a world tour next month to introduce their new album, 'ARIRANG'. BTS will start the tour with a concert April 9 in the South Korean city of Goyang before visiting 33 more cities around the world for a total of 82 concerts lasting into March 2027.

Fire breaks out at market in Bhubaneswar

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 20: A fire broke out at a market complex in Bhubaneswar Friday morning, officials said.

The blaze was first noticed by a trader, who detected smoke inside his shop in the market at CRP Square area around 10 am, they said.

Firefighters broke open win-

dows on the first floor and sprayed water to douse the flames. With dense smoke engulfing the building, the personnel entered the premises using oxygen support, the officials said.

Preliminary reports suggest that several shops, including those selling cosmetics, garments and books, were damaged.

No injuries or fatalities have been reported so far, they said.

"The fire has been brought under control, though smoke persists. A damage assessment will be carried out." Fire Services Department Officer Manoranjan Rout told reporters.

A detailed investigation will be conducted to ascertain the cause of the blaze, he said.

In February, a market complex in Lingipur area here was severely damaged in a massive fire.

IEA for carpooling, less air travel, speed curbs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: Reducing highway speed limits by at least 10 km/h, switching to electric cooking, avoiding air travel where alternatives are possible and increasing car sharing - these are among the recommendations made in a new report by the International Energy Agency (IEA) to ease the economic impacts on consumers from oil market disruptions stemming from the Middle East war.

The conflict has triggered the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market, with shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, which normally carries around 20 per cent of global oil

consumption, reduced to a trickle. Around 20 million barrels per day of crude oil and oil products typically transit the Strait. The loss of these flows has tightened markets significantly, pushing crude oil prices above USD 100 per barrel and driving even sharper increases in refined products such as diesel, jet fuel and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG).

According to the report, restoring transit through the Strait remains essential to stabilise global energy markets. In the meantime, countries are acting on both supply and demand.

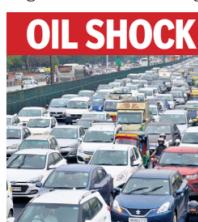
On March 11, IEA member countries agreed to release 400 million barrels of oil from emergency reserves - the largest stock draw in the agency's history. "As the global energy authority, the IEA is doing everything we can to support the stability of energy markets. We have recently launched the largest ever release of IEA emergency oil stocks à " and I am in close contact with key governments around the world, including major energy producers and consumers, as part of our international energy diplomacy," said IEA executive

director Fatih Birol.

However, supply-side measures alone cannot fully offset the scale of the disruption. Addressing demand is a critical and immediate tool to reduce pressure on consumers by improving affordability and supporting energy security.

The IEA report identifies 10 measures that can be implemented quickly by governments, businesses and households.

"The war in the Middle East is creating a major energy crisis, including the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market. In the absence of a swift resolution, the impacts on energy markets and economies are set to become more and more severe," said Birol.



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SCB fire paralyses House for 4th day

Guinness World Record for serving of 'pakhala'



clear that they are not withdrawing the agitation until the minister resigns on moral ground.

"Who is responsible for the death of 12 patients and burn injury of 11 others in a government-run hospital?" Mallik asked.

She cited the resignation of the then health minister Atanu S Nayak over a similar fire tragedy at a private hospital in 2016 during the BJD regime.

"Where is the morality of the BJP government? This time the incident occurred in a government facility," Mallik said, adding that the opposition will fight for justice.

BJP member Ashok Mohanty rejected the Opposition's demand, claiming that resignation of the minister would not solve the problem.

"The previous BJD government did not make any fire safety arrangements in SCB medical college hospital during its 24-year tenure. Now, within two years, the BJP government has provided ₹800 crore for the infrastructure development of the SCB Medical College. Things could not be set right overnight," Mohanty said.

He added that the government has placed four officials under suspension, announced ex gratia for the victims' families and also ordered a judicial probe.



PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 20: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Friday said the state Tourism department has set a Guinness World Record for the largest serving of 'pakhala' (fermented rice) of 1,174 kg prepared and presented in a single vessel.

The remarkable feat was achieved on the day the state observed 'Pakhala Divas'.

Majhi, in a post on X, said, "On the occasion of Pakhala Divas, Odisha has achieved a remarkable global milestone with Odisha Tourism setting a Guinness World Record for the largest serving of pakhala."

He said, "With an unprecedented 1,174 kg prepared and presented in a single vessel, this historic achievement brings global recognition to pakhala, one of Odisha's most cherished traditional dishes, deeply rooted in our culture and daily life."

The Chief Minister also said

that this accomplishment reflects the state's commitment to promoting Odisha's rich culinary heritage on the global stage.

"It is a proud moment for every Odia, as we take our timeless traditions from local to global, further strengthening Odisha's identity as a hub of cultural and gastronomic excellence," the CM said.

He also posted the picture of the certificate issued by Guinness World Records on his social media post.

Organised by the Tourism department at Panthanivas, 'Pakhala Divas' aimed to promote the popularity of 'pakhala' globally. Addressing the gathering, the Chief Minister said that 'pakhala' is not merely a food item but an integral part of the state's culture and tradition.

Highlighting the global appeal of the dish, Majhi noted that World Pakhala Divas is no longer confined to Odisha but has evolved into an international celebration, with Odias across India and abroad observing it with pride.

"Pakhala connects people living away from their homeland to their roots and showcases our culture to the world," he said.

He also underlined the probiotic benefits of pakhala, stating that the beneficial bacteria in the dish help improve gut health by eliminating harmful microbes. Calling it a "zero-waste food," Majhi stressed its relevance in today's sustainability-focused world.

The Chief Minister expressed gratitude to farmers and urged

the younger generation to understand and preserve Odisha's rich traditions. He added that while progress is important in a rapidly changing world, staying connected to one's roots is equally essential.

As part of the celebrations, the CM interacted virtually with members of the Odia diaspora from countries including Indonesia, Malaysia, Bahrain, and Singapore, along with participants from 15 Indian states. Chefs promoting Odia cuisine at national and international levels were also felicitated.

Earlier, Majhi visited an Odia food festival at the venue, appreciating the preparation of around 326 traditional dishes, and later joined guests in relishing pakhala.

The event was attended by several dignitaries, including ministers, legislators, and senior officials, making it a vibrant celebration of Odisha's culinary heritage and cultural identity.



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 20: The proceedings of the Assembly were disrupted for the fourth consecutive day Friday, following frequent adjournments as the Opposition BJD and Congress demanded resignation of Health Minister Mukesh Mahaling over the fire incident in a hospital that left 12 patients dead.

The House witnessed noisy scenes from the very beginning when it assembled for the Question Hour at 10:30am.

Holding placards and shouting anti-government slogans, the Opposition members trooped into the well of the House and demanded resignation of the minister holding the state government responsible for the death of 12 patients at SCB Medical College and Hos-

pital in Cuttack.

The fire incident took place at the trauma care ICU of the premier government hospital early March 16.

The agitating members attempted to climb the Speaker's podium and were prevented by the marshals. Opposition MLAs raised slogans like "Ram Naam Satya Hai" and "(CM) Mohan Majhi Hai Hai" when Speaker Surama Padhy allowed School and Mass Education Minister Nityananda Gond to reply to certain questions.

The minister's reply was not audible in the din.

Unable to run the proceedings, the Speaker first adjourned the House till 11:30am and later till 4pm. She convened an all-party meeting to break the four-day-long stalemate.

However, Opposition Chief Whip Pramila Mallik made it

OUAT hosts Farmers' Fair

Bhubaneswar: Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT) hosted OUAT Farmers' Fair 2026 here Friday, focused on women agri-entrepreneur. Deputy Chief Minister and Agriculture and Farmers' Empowerment Minister as well as OUAT Pro-Chancellor Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo inaugurated the event. Joining on the occasion, FARD Minister Gokulanand Mallik emphasised women's empowerment through mixed farming.

CLASSIFIED AFFIDAVIT

By virtue of an affidavit sworn before the Executive Magistrate, Panposh at Uditnagar, Rourkela, Dt.20.03.26, I, Vijay Chandra Patra, R/o. Plot No. 1053/1382, St. Thomas School Lane, Kishantola, Old Chhend, PO. Rourkela-15, PS-Raghunathpali, Dist. Sundargarh, Odisha, declare that I have made necessary correction in my sons birth certificate vide regd. No.-2229/2013 dated 20.07.2013 issued date 23.09.2017 of my name from Vijay Chandar Patra to Vijay Chandra Patra. Both the name stands for one and same person. I am swearing this affidavit to produce before the concerned authority to make necessary correction.

LOST

Sidharth Kumar Sahu (S/o Sri Bhaskar Sahu, Vill/Po. Takarada, PS-Sheragada, Dist-Ganjam, Odisha) lost his land sale deed (No. 10631064179, Dt.27.07.2010) on February 24, 2026, around 9.30 AM at Sheragada Market while attempting to make a photocopy. The deed pertains to land in Mouza Lunilathi, Khata No. 110/65, Plot No.122, 1.375 Dec. under Sanakhemundi Tahasil, Ganjam. Finders are requested to contact the nearest police station or the address mentioned above. Sd./- Deponent

World to witness Odisha's love for sports: CM Majhi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 20: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Friday said the world will witness the love for sports that the state has as it will host the World Athletics Indoor Championships 2028.

The state is looking forward to welcoming athletes and fans from across the globe and showcasing its organisational prowess and Indian hospitality, he said.

The World Athletics Council has awarded the hosting rights of the prestigious event to India for 2028 and it will be held in Odisha.

"Extremely proud to share that #Odisha is hosting the World Athletics Indoor Championships, 2028. With the Odisha edition, the prestigious event is back in India after 22 long years. This milestone reflects our emergence as a global sporting hub and our unwavering

The World Athletics Council has awarded the hosting rights of World Athletics Indoor Championships to India for 2028 and it will be held in Odisha

commitment to world-class excellence," Majhi said in a post on X.

Asserting that the state has arrived on the global stage, he said the world is ready to witness the love for sports that the state has.

"We extend our sincere gratitude to World Athletics and the Athletics Federation of India for placing trust in Odisha to host one of the most prestigious championships in global athletics," he said.

The 2028 World Indoor Cham-

pionships will see India host a global track and field championships for the first time, from March 3 to 5 in 2028, according to the statement.

World Indoor Championships typically has 26 events - 13 each for men and women - to be competed across three days.

The 13 events are 60m, 400m, 800m, 1500m, 3000m, 60m hurdles, 4x400m relay, high jump, pole vault, long jump, triple jump, shot put, heptathlon (pentathlon for women). The 4x400m mixed relay will be held for the first time in this year's edition in Poland.

"Over the past decade, Odisha has made sport a central pillar of its development vision. Through sustained investment in world-class sporting infrastructure, athlete development programmes, and high-performance ecosystems, the state has emerged as a leading destination for international sporting events," he said.

Wildlife panel recommends six development projects

Bhubaneswar: State Wildlife Board Standing Committee, Friday recommended six major development projects, aimed at boosting irrigation and ensuring safe drinking water in ecologically sensitive regions of the state. The 12th meeting of the committee was held at Khavel Bhanwan here under the chairmanship of Forest, Environment and Climate Change Minister Ganesh Ram Singhkhuntia.

The panel functions under Section 6(A) of the Wildlife (Protection) (Amendment) Act, 2022, which mandates regular and technically rigorous evaluation of projects affecting wildlife habitats. During the meeting, the committee examined six proposals, including three irrigation projects in Angul and Mayurbhanj districts. These initiatives are expected to strengthen water availability for agriculture, providing assured irrigation to rural farmlands and supporting livelihoods in agrarian communities. The remaining three proposals focus on supplying safe drinking water to remote and forest-fringe settlements within protected areas -Satkosia Wildlife Sanctuary, Simlipal Wildlife Sanctuary, and Chandaka Dampara Wildlife Sanctuary, as well as nearby villages. The projects aim to address critical public health needs while balancing ecological considerations.

Odisha to pioneer futuristic City Gas Distribution Policy

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 20: In a significant step towards strengthening urban utility infrastructure and promoting clean energy adoption, Housing and Urban Development (H&UD) department has initiated the process for framing a comprehensive City Gas Distribution (CGD) Policy.

In a high-level consultative meeting was held Friday, under the chairpersonship of H&UD Additional Chief Secretary Usha Padhee, with leading energy stakeholders, including Indian Oil Corporation Limited and GAIL. The meeting deliberated on a strategic roadmap for the expansion of Piped Natural Gas (PNG) across the state, with a focus on building a future-ready and citizen-centric policy framework aligned with the state's long-term development goals.

Chairing the meeting, Padhee emphasised the need for an aspirational yet practical policy architecture to support

the rapid expansion of city gas distribution networks across urban Odisha. She highlighted that the proposed policy would play a pivotal role in enhancing access to clean, efficient and reliable energy, while contributing to sustainable urban development and improved service delivery.

She further reiterated that the state is committed to designing a futuristic policy in the best interest of the public, which will simplify processes, accelerate infrastructure rollout, and significantly enhance the ease of living for citizens across urban centres.

The deliberations focused on key components of the proposed policy, including streamlining of permissions, rationalisation of licence fees, introduction of single-window clearance systems, and operationalisation of deemed approval mechanisms. Discussions also covered adoption frameworks, institutional coordination, and service delivery systems to ensure seamless implementation.

CRACKDOWN ON DRUG TRADE

In 14 months, cops seize narcotics over ₹3,000cr

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 20: In a major breakthrough against narcotics, Odisha Police has reported a historic success in its anti-drug campaign, destroying illegal cannabis cultivation and seizing drugs worth thousands of crores over the past 14 months.

According to an official press note issued Friday by the State Police Headquarters, between January 1, 2025 and February 28, 2026, authorities have destroyed illegal cannabis cultivation worth approximately ₹1,444 crore across 48,160 acres of land. Additionally, cannabis worth ₹1,346 crore was seized, along with 1,862 litre of cannabis oil valued at around ₹200 crore.

Police also confiscated brown sugar worth ₹41.7 crore and cough syrup valued at ₹10.17 crore, while arresting 654 interstate drug traffickers during the period.

The campaign aligns with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a 'Drug-Free India' and the 15-point action plan laid out by Union Home



Minister Amit Shah. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, the state police intensified its crackdown, leading to what officials describe as an 'unprecedented achievement'.

Addressing a presser at Police Bhavan here Friday, Director General of Police Yogesh Bahadur Khurania said that a well-coordinated strategy has significantly weakened drug mafia networks across the state.

During the period, A total of 2,69,166 kg of cannabis was seized, with over 2,300 arrests

linked to these cases. Brown sugar seizures stood at 20.69 kg, leading to 910 arrests across 445 cases. Over 1,01,755 bottles of illegal cough syrup were confiscated, with 236 arrests.

In a recent operation, Koraput police busted a major hashish oil manufacturing unit, seizing over 1,800 litres of cannabis oil worth nearly ₹200 crore and more than 1,000 kg of cannabis. Seven individuals, including four from Kerala, were arrested and the unit was dismantled.

Authorities noted that illegal cannabis cultivation was large-

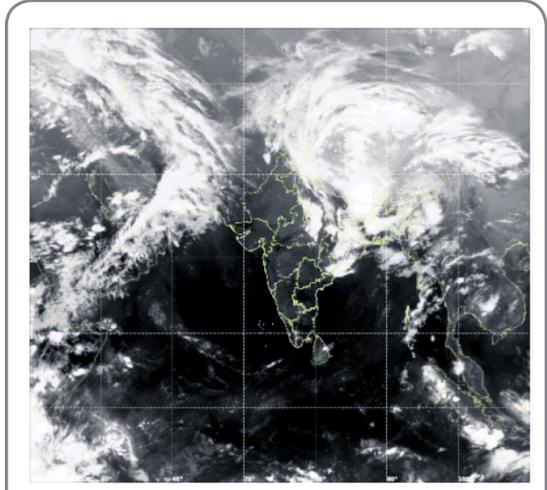
ly concentrated in Naxal-affected regions, where it served as a source of funding for extremist activities. However, sustained police action has reduced Naxal presence from 12 districts to just 2 to 3 districts. Gajapati, Rayagada, and Koraput have witnessed nearly a 50 per cent decline in cannabis cultivation.

The DGP announced that a new statewide special campaign will be launched from April 1, aiming to completely eradicate cannabis and other narcotics from Odisha within the next three years.

To dismantle the financial backbone of drug networks, properties worth over ₹10 crore have been seized. Strict legal provisions, including the PIT-NDPS Act, are being invoked against habitual offenders, with proposals submitted for preventive detention in multiple cases.

Alongside enforcement, Odisha Police is focusing on rehabilitation and awareness. Currently, 52 de-addiction centres are operational across 29 districts, helping individuals recover and reintegrate into society. So far, 19,395 persons have successfully overcome addiction.

| MARKET WATCH | | | | | |
|--------------|---------------|---------|-------------------|-------------|------------------|
| CURRENCY | | BOURSES | | COMMODITIES | |
| INDEX | VARIATION | INDEX | VARIATION | INDEX | VARIATION |
| DOLLAR | 93.59 ▲ 0.89 | SENSEX | 74532.96 ▲ 325.72 | GOLD | ₹144,500 ▼ ₹454 |
| EURO | 125.30 ▲ 1.36 | NIFTY | 23114.50 ▲ 112.35 | SILVER | ₹227,614 ▼ ₹4460 |



| WEATHER | | | |
|----------|-------|-------|--|
| | BBSR | CTC | FORECAST |
| Max Temp | 35.2° | 34.4° | Light to Moderate rain or thunderstorm |
| Min Temp | 23.0° | 21.6° | |
| Humidity | 65% | 82% | |
| Rainfall | Nil | Nil | |

Gram Sabha for mega steel plant turns violent; 4 held

POST NEWS NETWORK

Patana, March 20: Tensions flared during a Gram Sabha Friday in Keonjhar district over a proposed mega steel plant, as clashes broke out between supporters and opposition groups, prompting police to resort to lathi charge and make four arrests.

The fourth Gram Sabha on the project was held at Dhanurjyapur school ground under Chemena panchayat in Patana tehsil. Villagers affected by the proposed land acquisition demanded compensation of ₹50 crore per acre, along with 36 additional conditions.

Trouble began even before the meeting commenced, when pro-plant and anti-plant groups confronted each other near the venue. The situation soon escalated into a scuffle, forcing police to intervene. Officers resorted to a baton charge to disperse the crowd and restore order.

According to officials, four leaders from the opposition group were arrested. The individuals have been identified as Nirmal Mahanta, Manohar Mahanta, Amiya Naik and Dhaneswar Mahanta, all from Kodkhaman village under Jamunaposi panchayat. "The arrests were linked to previous cases," said Turumunga police station



Villagers affected by the proposed land acquisition demanded steep compensation of ₹50 crore per acre

After a scuffle broke out, police resorted to a baton charge to disperse the crowd and restore order, leaving many injured

tion IIC Diptiranjana Sahu.

Several protesters were reportedly injured in the police action and were admitted to the District Headquarters Hospital for treatment.

The Gram Sabha was chaired by local sarpanch Hemalata Naik and attended by Additional District Magistrate and Special Land Acquisition Officer Rabindra Kumar Pradhan, probationary IAS officer Pawan Kumar, Patana Tehsildar Ashwini Naik, BDO Manas Dandapat, and IDCO land acquisition officer Krushna Kishore Patra, among others.

Officials said opinions were sought from residents regarding the acquisition of 57.110

decimals of land spread across 166 plots belonging to 44 landowners in the mouza.

During the meeting, villagers Prafula Maharana, Ramachandra Mahant and Sait Maharana presented their demands, including the high compensation and other rehabilitation measures.

Pradhan said the demands had been formally received and would be forwarded to the government for consideration.

Meanwhile, members of a resistance forum condemned the police action and demanded the immediate and unconditional release of the arrested leaders.

Police maintained that the situation was under control.

48-hr bandh begins over arrest of 34 tribals

POST NEWS NETWORK

Baripada, March 20: A 48-hour shutdown called by tribal organisations paralysed normal life in Bamanghati subdivision of Mayurbhanj district, as protesters demanded the release of 34 tribals arrested following a clash with police.

The bandh, convened by the Mayurbhanj Adivasi Ekta Manch, began at 6am Friday and is scheduled to continue until 6am Sunday. The call was given in protest against the arrest of 34 tribal people in connection with a confrontation that erupted during a road blockade at Bahalda.

The incident stemmed from tension over alleged molestation of a minor tribal girl in Tiring police station limits. During



the blockade on the national highway, protests escalated into a face-off between police and villagers. Amid the unrest, the vehicle of the Bahalda tehsildar was vandalised and overturned.

Following the incident, police arrested 34 individuals, who were later forwarded to court. Tribal organisations claimed that those arrested are

innocent and demanded their immediate release.

Enforcing the shutdown, activists picketed at multiple locations across the subdivision, bringing vehicular movement to a standstill. Traffic along National Highway 220, which passes through Rairangpur and connects Ranchi and Vijayawada, was severely affected due to

road blockades.

Transport services remained off the roads, causing inconvenience to commuters. Connectivity between Rairangpur and Baripada was also disrupted.

Shops, markets, educational institutions and both government and private offices remained closed across the subdivision, reflecting the widespread impact of the bandh.

Several political parties and organisations, including the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), Congress ASECA, MASA Army and Bhanu Kherwal Jumid, extended support to the shutdown and joined the protests. Organisers have warned that the agitation will continue until their demand for the unconditional release of the arrested tribals is met.

Labourer electrocuted

Nandapur: A construction worker died after coming into contact with a live electric wire at an under-construction bridge site in Koraput district Friday. The deceased has been identified as Kanta Muduli, son of Shiba Muduli of Talagadala village under Chikamputi panchayat in Dasmantpur block. The incident occurred at the Semela-Jogiput bridge project in Khuj panchayat under Nandapur block, where work is being carried out by the Rural Development (RD) department. Muduli was engaged in measurement work near the bridge when he accidentally touched an overhead electric wire, officials said. Co-workers rushed him to the Nandapur Community Health Centre, where doctors declared him dead. Police have initiated an investigation into the incident. Nandapur police are in contact with the contractor, Narayan Bishoi, departmental engineers and the victim's family, said Inspector-In-Charge Trinath Totapadia.

Retd SDMO dies in road mishap

Bhawanipatna: A retired senior doctor was killed after his car rammed into a stationary truck in Kalahandi district Friday morning. The deceased has been identified as Harish Chandra Pradhan (77), a former sub-divisional medical officer (SDMO) of Dharmagarh. According to reports, Pradhan was travelling from his residence at Purunapada in Bhawanipatna to his clinic in Dharmagarh when the accident occurred near Baladiamal petrol pump on National Highway 26 under Junagarh block. His car collided with a truck that was parked on the roadside, leading to his death on the spot. The driver of the car sustained injuries in the incident. News of his death drew a large number of people to his residence to pay their last respects. His last rites were conducted in a sombre atmosphere, with his only son, Uttam Pradhan, performing the final rites.

CRZ violation: Unauthorised prawn dykes dismantled in Bhitarkanika

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kendrapara, March 20: A joint raid by Bhitarkanika National Park, Revenue department and police Friday demolished unauthorised prawn dykes on the fringe of the park in Kendrapara district for violation of the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ), an official said.

Acres of encroached government land were reclaimed after the demolition drive. These plots were under unauthorised occupation of prawn farmers.

The erection of prawn dykes was unlawful as these plots had spilled into prohibited CRZ areas, said Assistant Conservator of Forest (ACF), Manas Das.

The dyke (locally called



ghery) demolition was undertaken along the forest-side patches on the fringes of the national park. The gheries were dismantled in the presence of armed police. The exercise was incident-free with no report of untoward incidents, said officials. The reclaimed patches are

being taken up for the mangrove regeneration programme so that prawn farmers would not reoccupy the encroachment-free areas. The mangrove plantation work would begin within a week, said the officer.

He said that the reclaimed areas are conducive for mangrove regeneration as there is regular inflow of tidal waters.

Noting that a task force comprising senior and experienced forest protection officials has been constituted, the officer said public awareness is being generated on mangrove protection, and residents of nearby villages are beginning to realise that mangrove is a time-tested natural barrier against tidal surge and cyclones.

Bee attack leaves worker stuck atop tank for 4 hrs

POST NEWS NETWORK

Udala, March 20: A swarm of bees attacked four workers cleaning an overhead water tank in Mayurbhanj district Friday, leaving three seriously injured and trapping one man atop the structure for nearly four hours.

The incident occurred in Ward No. 1 under Udala NAC when the workers had climbed the tank to carry out cleaning work. As they ascended, bees from a hive on the ladder suddenly attacked them.



Three workers — Jitendra Jena, Sanjay Kumar Jena and Balaram Jena — managed to climb down but collapsed near the base of the tank with severe injuries. Locals rushed them to Udala hospital, where they are

undergoing treatment.

However, another worker, Himanshu Das, could not descend and took shelter inside the tank to escape the swarm. He remained trapped inside the 80-foot-high structure for around four hours.

Fire services personnel reached the spot after being alerted and rescued him using protective gear.

All four workers are from Motiganj area in Balasore district and had been engaged for cleaning the tank, officials said.

Situation remains grim for tomato farmers despite govt intervention

POST NEWS NETWORK

Chhatrapur, March 20: Tomato cultivation, once a key source of income for farmers in Ganjam block, has taken a backseat with a drastic price drop forcing them into distress sale. Even after intervention by the district administration, farmers say the measures have not been sufficient to offset their losses.

Following reports of distress sale, the Odisha Rural Development and Marketing Society (ORMAS) procured tomatoes at ₹6 to ₹7 per kg. The produce is being transported to a Cuttack-based spice manufacturer for processing into tomato sauce. However, farmers say this has done little to ease their financial burden. In villages such as Madhurachua, Sipakuda, Jhareid and Subalaya, surplus production has left farmers with few options. Many have allowed cattle to graze on ripened



tomatoes or have ploughed them back into the soil to prepare fields for the next crop.

Market prices have plunged to as low as ₹2 per kg, far below the cost of production. A crate weighing 25 to 27 kg fetches only ₹50 to ₹60, leaving farmers unable to recover their investment.

Farmers estimate cultivation costs at ₹20,000 to ₹30,000 per acre. Expenses include seeds, fertilizers, irrigation and labour, with daily wages ranging from ₹350 to ₹400. Favourable weather conditions after winter boosted

production, further contributing to the glut.

The crisis is not limited to Ganjam block. Farmers in Buguda, Purushottampur and Hinjilicut are also facing similar challenges. Large quantities of harvested tomatoes remain unsold in fields due to a lack of buyers.

Excess irrigation during the ripening stage has worsened the situation, causing tomatoes to rot and weakening plant roots, leading to bacterial infections.

Farmer Satyabrata Nahak said he ploughed his field despite unharvested tomatoes lying on the ground. With no buyers, he has shifted to cultivating spiny gourd on his one-acre farm for the summer season. According to Nahak, ORMAS collects about 10 vehicle loads of tomatoes daily, a process expected to continue for up to a month until stocks are exhausted.

Farmers say the lack of adequate cold storage facilities has

compounded the problem, limiting their ability to preserve perishable produce. Many have appealed to the Agriculture department and district administration for support and long-term solutions. ORMAS officials confirmed that the procured tomatoes are being supplied to Bharat Masala, a Cuttack-based company, for sauce production. Still, farmers say the initiative has failed to significantly reduce their losses.

Many farmers, who rely solely on agriculture for their livelihood, have taken bank loans expecting good returns. With prices collapsing, they now face mounting debt.

Frustrated by what they describe as inadequate government response, some farmers have warned of drastic steps, including boycotting upcoming panchayat elections or resorting to suicide if conditions do not improve.

EAST COAST RAILWAY

Tender Notice No. SBP-ELECT-2026-T-273
NAME OF WORK: ELECTRICAL WORKS FOR CONNECTION WITH CONSTRUCTION OF RUNNING ROOM BY PROVIDING ADDITIONAL ROOMS AT TITLAGARH JUNCTION IN SAMBALPUR DIVISION.
Approx. Cost of the Work: ₹16,88,268.41, EMD: ₹3,38,000/-, Completion Period of the Work: 54 (06) Months from the date of issue of L.O.A.
Tender Closing Date and Time: At 1530 hrs. of 06.04.2026.

No manual offers sent by Post / Courier/ Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be rejected summarily without any consideration. Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website: www.ireps.gov.in

Note: The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website fifteen (15) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes/corrigenda issued for this tender. The tenders/bidders must have Class-III Digital Signature Certificate and must be registered on IREPS Portal. Only registered tenderer/bidder can participate on e-tendering.
Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer (G)/ PR-1244/Q/25-26 Sambalpur

EAST COAST RAILWAY

Tender Notice No. ST-OT-ROB-SOUTH-KUR-550, Dt: 13.03.2026
NAME OF WORK: CONSTRUCTION OF ROAD OVER BRIDGES (ROBs) IN LIEU OF LEVEL CROSSINGS ALONG WITH MODIFICATION OF EI (ANSALDO MAKE) ON KHURDA ROAD-PALASA MAIN LINE OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION (LEVEL CROSSING NOS. 319, 322, 326, 330, 334, 348, 351, 353, 354 & 358).
Tender Value: ₹7,12,07,728.78, EMD: ₹5,06,000/-
Bidding Start Date: 23.03.2026.
Tender Closing Date and Time: At 1100 Hrs. of 06.04.2026.

No manual offers sent by Post/ Courier/ Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration. Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website: www.ireps.gov.in

Note: The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website 15 days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes / corrigendum issued for this tender.
Sr. Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer, PR-1245/Q/25-26 Khurda Road

BHUBANESWAR REGIONAL OFFICE (550000), 1st Floor, Alok Bharti Tower, Sahid Nagar - 751007, Ph: 0674-2545467
CORRIGENDUM:
Extension of last date of bid submission for E Tender
With reference to E-tender [Advertisement No.: BHUBANESWAR RO / ESTB. / BHADRAK BO / INTERIOR CIVIL & ELECTRICAL WORK/550801] issued by this dept. on 16.02.2026, all prospective Bidders are hereby informed that the Dept. has extended the last date of bid submission for E Tender as follows:

| Particulars | Original Date | Revised Date |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Bid submission closing date | 05:00 PM on 19.03.2026 | 05:00 PM on 30.03.2026 |
| Bid Opening date | 11:00 AM on 20.03.2026 | 11:00 AM on 31.03.2026 |

Bidders can download tender documents from our website: www.tenderwizard.com/NIAEPROC
Sd/- Chief Regional Manager Bhubaneswar, Regional Office

PANCHAYAT SAMITI OFFICE, LATHIKATA INVITATION FOR BIDS
Bid Identification No. BDO/LKT/03/2025-26
Letter No. 742 Dt. 18.03.2026
No. 19001/93/2526: The Panchayat Samiti Office, Lathikata on behalf of the Govt. of Odisha invites Percentage Rate bids in Double Cover System on online Mode. Bid Identification No. BDO/LKT/03/2025-26 for 01 No. Civil work with value of Rs.71.97 Lakh.
1. Bid documents will be available in website www.tendersorissa.gov.in from 20.03.2026.
2. Bids must be submitted on "Online" on or before 02.04.2026 by 17.00 hours.
3. Bids shall be opened at 11.00 hours on 04.04.2026 in the office of the undersigned in the presence of the bidders or their authorized agents.
4. Other details will be available in the website tendersorissa.gov.in.
Sd./- Block Development Officer, Lathikata OIPR-19001/19036/1/25-26/0001

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA No. 1001/67/2526
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (AGRI.) SOIL CONSERVATION, NORTHERN ZONE AT/P.O.: BURLA, SAMBALPUR - 768017 e-mail: enzsc.sambalpur@gmail.com Dt.: 17.03.2026
Notice No. 617
NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING THROUGH e-Procurement Identification No. 10/DSC & WD/NZ/25-26 Dt. 17.03.2026

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Nature of Work | : Repairing of Check Dam (Civil) |
| 2. Nos. of Work | : 01 No. |
| 3. Tendered amount in Rs. | : Rs. 10,47,375/- |
| 4. Period of Completion | : 150 days |
| 5. Date & time of availability of bid document in the portal | : From 10.00 hrs. of 25.03.2026 to 17.30 hrs. of 07.04.2026 |
| 6. Last date/time of receipt of original documents in the tender box at the office of the undersigned | : Before 17.30 hrs. of 15.04.2026 |
| 7. Date & time of opening of bids | : 11.00 hrs. of 18.04.2026 onwards |
| 8. Name and address of the Officer Inviting Bid | : Executive Engineer (Agril.), Sambalpur, A/P.O.: Burla, Near Planetarium Chowk, PIN - 768017 |

Further details can be seen from the website www.tendersorissa.gov.in.
Sd./- Executive Engineer, (Agril.) Soil Conservation, NZ, Sambalpur OIPR-1001/1481/1/25-26/0014

The Divine Truth is greater than any religion or creed or scripture or idea of philosophy.

SRI AUROBINDO



Danger Downplayed

Now and then, public policy produces a decision so baffling that you instinctively read the news twice. The rollback of India's revised earthquake zoning framework, within just three months, is one such decision. At the centre of this policy tremor is Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, who seems to have had his way against earthquakes.

For a brief period, India appeared ready to update its approach to preparing for seismic risk. The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) had proposed revising the country's earthquake hazard zoning map and building codes. The idea was to adopt more advanced scientific methods to assess seismic risk and introduce stronger design norms for buildings, especially across the Himalayan belt, where scientists have long warned of major earthquakes. In practical terms, this meant safer buildings—but also costlier ones.

That's where the ground began to shake in sarkari circles. Several ministries and infrastructure agencies flagged financial implications. Stricter design standards could push up construction costs, potentially affecting housing projects, infrastructure budgets and urban development plans. The Housing Ministry, reportedly under Khattar's direction, led the charge in raising these concerns. The result was swift and decisive. The revised earthquake zoning proposal was withdrawn, and the existing framework continues for now.

Developers, naturally, are relieved. Babus may feel they have avoided an abrupt regulatory disruption. But disaster experts are less amused. Earthquakes, after all, are not known for consulting cost sheets before striking.

Scientists have repeatedly warned about the risk of a major Himalayan earthquake in the future. The revised zoning map was meant to align building standards with this uncomfortable reality. Instead, the policy response has been to press pause.

If the ground shakes tomorrow, will the earthquakes respect the government's decision to defer stricter building norms? For now, the tectonic plates will continue their slow, patient movement beneath India. And in New Delhi, it appears the earthquakes have been politely asked to wait.



BABUDOM BYTES
Dilip Cherian

A curious babu trend

Indian babudom has an oddly elastic relationship with accountability. Every few months, a case pops up that makes one wonder whether suspension is truly punishment or merely a temporary pause.

The latest instance is the reinstatement of IAS officer Abhishek Prakash in Uttar Pradesh. The 2006-batch officer, who served as CEO of Invest UP, was suspended last year after allegations that a bribe was sought in connection with a solar project. Now he is back in service after the Allahabad High Court found no prima facie evidence against him in the case involving the alleged middleman. The departmental inquiry, the government says, will continue.

Legally, this is unobjectionable. If a court sees insufficient evidence, reinstatement is the natural administrative outcome. Due process must prevail. But zoom out, and a broader pattern becomes hard to ignore.

Consider the case of Jharkhand cadre IAS officer Pooja Singhal. Arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in a money-laundering probe linked to alleged embezzlement of MGNREGA funds meant for some of India's poorest households, she spent nearly three years in jail. Yet after she secured bail in late 2024, the Jharkhand government revoked her suspension and reinstated her into service, even as the trial continues.

Again, technically correct. Bail is not a conviction. Yet the optics are difficult to ignore. In both instances, suspension begins to look less like a serious disciplinary measure and more like a time-out, something that lasts until the legal clouds thin. For the public, that raises uncomfortable questions. When allegations involve bribery or the diversion of welfare funds, should the threshold for returning to office be no higher than securing bail or benefiting from evidentiary gaps?

If reinstatement becomes routine in cases involving serious allegations, that trust begins to corrode quietly, steadily, and in plain sight.

Naidu's reality check

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu recently did something that Indian chief ministers occasionally do when patience runs thin: he delivered a public dressing-down to his babus. At a meeting with district collectors and senior officials recently, Naidu warned that arrogance, administrative rigidity and poor field engagement would simply not be tolerated. The implied message was to get out of the air-conditioned echo chamber and start listening to people.

Naidu's frustration is not unusual. Across India, elected governments frequently complain that a section of the government behaves as if it is accountable to procedure rather than to citizens. The chief minister's complaint about "arrogance" and "rigidity" hints at a deeper institutional tension. Babus are trained to follow rules and maintain continuity. Netas, on the other hand, are judged by how quickly they deliver results. When governance slows down, each side tends to blame the other.

Yet Naidu's criticism also carries a warning that many civil servants would do well to heed. The Indian administrative system still commands enormous authority, but authority without empathy can quickly begin to look like indifference.

Whether Naidu's rebuke will actually change behaviour is another question. Bureaucracies, after all, are famously resilient to reform as much as to chaos. But occasionally, a blunt reminder from the political boss helps clear the fog. And if it nudges officials to step outside their offices and into the real world, the chief minister's scolding may not be such a bad thing after all.

Share a babu experience! Follow [dilipthecherian@twitter.com](https://twitter.com/dilipthecherian). Let's multiply the effect

FOCUS NEPAL

REVOLUTION TO REFORM

The recent elections in Nepal saw Rashtriya Swatantra Party and its leader Balendra Shahwin a decisive victory, ending the uncertainty after last September's revolution and an interim government. The defeat of the current elite is indisputable and gives the new government a strong mandate to implement profound reforms.

Nepal needs significant infrastructure investments and a high pace of development over the long term. It is not yet clear whether Shah will be able to achieve this. It can be predicted that Nepal will emphasise its independence in foreign policy, while also turning subtly to India and indirectly to the West.

Everyone expected Shah to win, but the final results were a surprise due to the scale of the defeat for the incumbent government. The RSP secured the support of nearly 48% of voters and won 182 seats in the 275-seat parliament. This was the second-best result in Nepal's history, and Shah himself personally defeated former Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli in the constituency. Second and third place went to the largest parties of the previous regime: Congress (16.2%) and former Prime Minister Sharma Oli's Communists (13.4%). It's worth noting the exceptionally poor performance of monarchists (around 2%), meaning the issue of restoring the old system, which had been circulating in the media worldwide for sometime, was shelved for a long time.

Balendra Shah received an exceptionally strong mandate. This gives him a secure majority in parliament and stable support for the long term. He can therefore proceed with the reforms he has announced and the public expects.

Who is Balendra Shah, and does he really want to implement reforms? In the media,



If Balendra Shah succeeds in reforming the country, it will be the most positive outcome of such a revolution and could draw others along. If he fails, Generation Z protests around the world may suffer

especially globally, he is portrayed primarily as a singer. He does indeed sing and record; this is undoubtedly one of his personalities. His style is nephop – short for Nepali hip-hop, combining Melo declamation and modern sound with traditional instruments. On stage, he performs under the stage name Balen, a diminutive of his name, and cultivates a star-like image.

However, it's worth noting that he is first and foremost a politician. Educated at a prestigious polytechnic university in Bangalore, India, in 2021 he became an independent candidate for mayor of Kathmandu and won the elections held the following year, thanks to his image as a figure outside the system, uncorrupted, and young.

As mayor of the capital, he led programmes to modernise and reconstruct streets and neighbourhoods, sometimes using controversial methods such as forced evictions. He also sought to portray himself as an uncompromising politician, acting in the interests of the entire country. He criticized both of Nepal's neighbours and their attempts to influence national

politics. So, he is young, but with a lot of political experience for a person his age.

During the term of the interim government, he repeatedly praised Prime Minister Karki; she was more reserved towards him (perhaps because of the ongoing campaign; she wanted to avoid accusations of bias), but she congratulated him immediately after the elections, and he in return thanked her for professionally managing the country for half a year and preparing the parliamentary elections.

So which way will Balendra Shah and the new Nepalese government go? Will he succeed in making real changes that will set Nepal on a path to rapid development, as its neighbours have been doing for decades? Or will he concentrate on accumulating power and promoting a cult of personality around himself? History is full of such examples. However, it seems that this is an exceptionally favorable moment for Nepal: the former elite has been discredited, the population wants real change, and, moreover, is young and willing to make sacrifices for the country's

prosperity.

From a global perspective, Balendra Shah's success or failure is significant. If Shah succeeds in reforming the country, it will be the most positive outcome of such a revolution and could draw others along. If he fails, Generation Z protests around the world may suffer.

What position will Nepal take on the international stage? It's a cliché to say that the country is located between the two most populous countries – China and India – and therefore has only two options: closer to Beijing or closer to Delhi. Previous governments tended to pursue a northeastern course, particularly KP Sharma Oli and his communist party. China, associated with economic success, has failed to contribute to Nepal's growth, limiting itself to showy investments and promoting its language and culture.

In this context, Balendra Shah has for years sought to portray himself as a primarily pro-Nepal politician, balancing influence and emphasising his country's independence. His Indian education and the cultural codes surrounding him align him with India and, indirectly, the West. From this perspective, one might expect Balen to pursue a 'Nepal First' policy, perhaps publicly demonstrating independence from New Delhi, while de facto remaining slightly closer to India, treating it more strategically, while relations with China and other countries remain transactional.

It is in Nepal's best interest to ensure that this opportunity is not wasted, that real reforms are implemented, and that economic growth is ensured. Balendra Shah has the potential to accomplish this, but only time will tell.

The writer is expert, Centre for International Relations, Poland

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SPECTRUM SUSTAINABILITY

Where water flows, equality grows

Water, water everywhere, not a drop to drink', writes Samuel Coleridge in his 'Rime of the Ancient Mariners' as the ship of the ancient mariner sailed from the land of mist and snow and treaded into the calm, uncharted waters of the equators haunted by an evil spirit. He tried to describe a situation where enough water abounds the surroundings, but unfit to produce any tangible human benefit. However, this mystical scenario is fast going to be a reality now!

Although our Earth is called the Water planet, the stock of fresh water on Earth fit for human consumption is very much limited. This is due to the fact that around 97% of water on Earth is located in seas and oceans which is salty and not suitable for human use. The remaining 2.5% is fresh water out of which a major portion, (around 68%) is located in ice caps and glaciers and 30% is underground which are again beyond the reach of humans. Only 0.3% of fresh water flows in rivers and lakes which is

available for human consumption. Hence, there is great need for conserving water on our planet by minimizing its wastage and optimizing its prudent use. Water is a unique liquid of nature in the sense that it is the only liquid that can exist in all its three different forms in Earth's temperature ranges.

However, in recent times, due to man's nature-unfriendly activities, a situation of acute water crisis has arisen in our planet. Effluents released from industries and biological wastes of cities into rivers and lakes pollute water sources that lead to drinking water crisis. The holy river Ganges, known since mythological times for its clean and rejuvenating flow, has become one of the ten most polluted rivers of the world due to the activities of people living near its banks. Similarly, in Odisha, another sacred river, named Brahmani, has lost its sacredness due to the pollutants released from nearby industries.

According to an estimate of the United Nations, there is a minimum need of nearly 50

litres of water (or 2.5 buckets) daily per head for leading a healthy life. However, it is a matter of grave concern that millions of people living in rural areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America are deprived of this minimum necessity of water. Access to clean drinking water is considered to be a basic human right.

The theme for World Water Day 2026 (March 22) campaign is 'Water and Gender: Where water flows, equality grows'. It emphasizes the crucial role of women in water management, advocating for their equal representation in decision-making process underscoring the need for their secure access to water. However, globally, more than 1 billion women, more than a quarter of all women, lack access to safely managed drinking water services. Among them, an estimated 205 million women drink water from unimproved sources or surface water. Nearly 380 million women and girls, or 9% of the world's total female population, live with high or critical water stress, a number project-

ed to increase to 674 million in 33 countries by 2050. About 156 million girls aged 10-19 still lack access to basic hygiene services globally, compromising their health, dignity, and education. Globally, an estimated 1.5 billion women and girls live in countries facing high or very high exposure to droughts.

Given the dismal scenario as such, we must invest in women's leadership to make water a force for a healthier, more prosperous, gender-equal future. As the world navigates the labyrinthine complexities of climate change, gender inequality and economic disparity, the role of women in shaping a resilient future emerges a beacon of hope. In this context, the need for empowering women to have an equitable and rightful access to a very important resource of nature like water is imperative for humanity's transformative and sustainable future.

The writer is Education Officer, Regional Science Centre, Bhopal.



Nikunja Bihari Sahu

DUE TO MAN'S NATURE-UNFRIENDLY ACTIVITIES, A SITUATION OF ACUTE WATER CRISIS HAS ARISEN IN OUR PLANET

Unsettling truth

Sir, As AAP MP Raghav Chadha continues to question entrenched norms, he has brought into focus an uncomfortable truth: India's political system risks creating its own version of Non-Performing Assets. With elections around the corner, the need for introspection is urgent. Many candidates' seeking re-election carry records that would be unacceptable in any other profession. Dynastic politics, pending criminal cases, and the unchecked influence of money power continue to distort the democratic process, often sidelining merit and accountability. Chadha's questions are both simple and unsettling. If politics is public service, why does it guarantee salaries, perks, and pensions? If it is a taxpayer-funded profession, why are there no minimum qualifications or measurable standards of performance, unlike other public roles? Each election cycle seems to replenish the system with underperforming representatives' ministers, MPs, and MLAs who fall short of public expectations yet face little consequence. This recurring pattern erodes institutional credibility and raises serious concerns about the efficient use of public funds. Democracy cannot rely solely on electoral legitimacy while ignoring performance and accountability. Voters deserve not just representation, but effective governance. If India is to safeguard both its democracy and its resources, it must confront this issue head-on. The cost of inaction is simply too high.

AP Thiruvadi, CHENNAI

Sobering reality

Sir, The World Happiness Report 2026 presents a sobering reality. Though India's rank has slightly improved to 116, it still lags behind many neighbours like Nepal and Pakistan, exposing deep social and economic imbalances. Finland continues to lead, proving that good governance, social trust and welfare matter more than mere economic growth. The report also warns about declining happiness among youth due to excessive social media use. India must prioritise mental health, reduce inequality and strengthen community bonds. Happiness cannot be measured by GDP alone; it demands dignity, security and emotional well-being for all citizens. Urgent policy attention is therefore essential for sustainable national progress.

Sidhartha Kar Mohapatra, BARIPADA

WISDOM CORNER

Never confuse the size of your paycheck with the size of your talent. MARLON BRANDO

No one is perfect, and criticism is always welcome and expected. AMITABH BACHCHAN

I do respect people's faith, but I don't respect their manipulation of that faith in order to create fear and control. JAVIER BARDEM

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1727: Sir Isaac Newton, whose Principia (1687) was one of the most important single works in the history of modern science and who was the culminating figure of the Scientific Revolution of the 17th century, died in London.

1815: The Hundred Days—during which Napoleon, having ended his exile by escaping the island of Elba, would try to recapture his empire in France—began with Napoleon's arrival in Paris.

1828: Playwright Henrik Ibsen, who introduced to the European stage a new order of moral analysis that was placed against a severely realistic middle-class background, was born in Skien, Norway.

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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

Over 85 hospitalised in 3 UP districts after eating 'kuttu ka atta'



The incidents have caused a stir within the health and food safety departments, and joint teams have initiated a probe into the cases

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Baghpat/Bareilly (UP), March 20: Nearly 85 people including an additional district magistrate fell ill after consuming 'kuttu ka atta' (buckwheat flour) in Baghpat, Bijnor, Bareilly and Bulandshahr districts of Uttar Pradesh, officials said Friday.

Kuttu ka atta is typically consumed during fasting rituals. All affected individuals have been hospitalised, they said.

More than three dozen people fell ill after consuming buckwheat flour in various areas of Bulandshahr. All have been admitted to the district hospital and their health is showing signs of improvement, an administrative official said Friday.

Sadar Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Dinesh Chandra said during Navratri, devotees observe a fast and consume 'falahaar' (light fruit-based meals without food grains) prepared using buckwheat flour.

Thirty-nine individuals were admitted to the hospital and are currently undergoing treatment.

The SDM and the circle offi-

cer (CO) of police have met the patients and spoken with their family members.

The SDM said all patients are now in good health. Their condition is gradually improving.

These individuals hail from various parts of the city. They informed officials that they had purchased the buckwheat flour from different locations rather than from a single source, the SDM said.

He added that samples have been collected for testing and further action will be initiated based on the results of the investigation.

In Baghpat district, more than 18 people including Additional District Magistrate (Judicial) Shiv Narayan Singh suffered from food poisoning after eating meals prepared with buckwheat flour during Navratri.

According to officials, Thursday evening, Shiv Narayan Singh, his associate Satish Kashyap and several others consumed dishes made from buckwheat flour.

Shortly afterwards, they began experiencing symptoms such as vomiting, restlessness and discomfort. As their condition deteriorated, they were all rushed to a hospital.

Nine members of a family from Kasimpur Khedi village, six people from Malakpur village and two from Bawli village also fell ill following consumption of items prepared with buckwheat flour and required medical attention.

Patna University's historic Wheeler Senate House turns 100

The charming senate house with Doric columns framing its entrance was inaugurated March 20, 1926 by the then-governor of Bihar and Orissa province and Patna University chancellor Sir Henry Wheeler, and named after him

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Patna, March 20: Patna University's historic Wheeler Senate House, the traditional venue of PU's convocation ceremonies, which also played host to Nobel Laureate poet Rabindranath Tagore in March 1936, turned 100 Friday.

However, the landmark occasion passed like a blip in its centennial journey with no commemorative event scheduled to mark the milestone.

"Today is a holiday at Patna University. The Wheeler Senate House building is a pride of the university and the city, but no event is planned to be hosted in the Senate hall for today," a senior official of the 108-year-old university told PTI.

The charming senate house with Doric columns framing its entrance was inaugurated March 20, 1926 by the then-governor of Bihar and Orissa province and Patna University



chancellor Sir Henry Wheeler, and named after him.

It was built using a generous endowment from Raja Devaki Nandan Prashad Singh of Monghyr (now Munger in Bihar). Sir Henry Wheeler had laid its foundation stone March 16, 1925, according to archival records.

"Before a large and distinguished gathering Sir Henry Wheeler inaugurated today the new building of the Wheeler Senate House presented to

Patna University by Raja Devaki Nandan Prashad Singh of Monghyr," reads a report on the inauguration, published in a newspaper in March 1926.

An old marble plaque embedded on a wall in the entrance lobby area carries the inscription of the inauguration event.

After the opening ceremony, Singh hosted an "at home" for the guests.

This iconic landmark in Patna has been a venue for many historic events since its opening.

It traditionally hosted innumerable convocation ceremonies of PU before the function was moved out to a larger public auditorium, senate meetings, opening session of the Indian Science Congress in 1933, the All-India Oriental Conference in 1933, and the All-India Library Conference in 1940 and 1964.

Besides, several annual general meetings of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society (later Bihar Research Society) in the 1920s and 1930s, annual conferences of medical associations, among other key events, have been held at this capacious hall.

But, perhaps one event that lends it a different aura, is the felicitation of Tagore by a citizens' committee March 17, 1936, during his two-day visit to Patna 90 years ago, as part of his north India tour in aid of Visva-Bharati.

The senate house, facing the

Ashok Rajpath in Patna, is adjoined to the university office building, also erected in the early 1920s, when PU, established October 1, 1917, moved to its current location after operating from various sites since its inception.

Gopal Chandra Singh (49), a staffer at PU, who has been working at the university office since 2002, says the PU buildings and the Wheeler Senate House stand as a symbol of a glorious chapter in Bihar's modern education history.

"There is also a concealed door in the wall facing the dais of the senate hall, which leads to the examination department of the university office and eventually to the VC Office on the first floor. It has not been used for a long time now," he told PTI.

The senate hall, a prominent landmark, has enjoyed nearly an uninterrupted legacy in its 100-year journey.

CM Yogi pays tributes to 1857 warrior Rani Avantibai Lodhi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, March 20: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath Friday paid tributes to Rani Avantibai Lodhi, who is remembered for her valiant fight against British rule, on her death anniversary, describing her as an inspiring example of women's power and patriotism.

"A humble tribute on the martyrdom day of Rani Avantibai Lodhi - a heroine of the First War of Independence of 1857 and an immortal symbol of national self-respect. Her unparalleled courage, leadership and supreme sacrifice in defence of the motherland constitute a golden chapter in Indian history. Her life stands as an inspiring example of women's power and patriotism," Adityanath said in a post on X in Hindi.

According to the official website of Rani Avantibai Lodhi University in Sagar, Madhya Pradesh, Rani Avantibai Lodhi displayed bravery and courage from an early age.

On this day in March 1858, when the British army attacked, she fought valiantly. Upon seeing herself surrounded by the British forces, she sacrificed herself with her sword to not let the enemy touch her body.

Deputy Chief Ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak also took to X to pay tributes to the queen on Ramgarh.

"A humble tribute on her martyrdom day to Rani Avantibai Lodhi - the immortal 'veerangana' of the 1857 War of Independence and a symbol of indomitable courage and valour. The history of her unparalleled bravery and supreme sacrifice in defence of the motherland will forever inspire patriotism, self-respect and courage," Maurya wrote.

Pathak said, "A humble tribute on the martyrdom day of the immortal warrior Rani Avantibai Lodhi - a great fighter who dedicated her entire life to upholding the honour of the nation and an embodiment of 'Nari Shakti' (women's power)."

EOU forms special team to track tender scams in Bihar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Patna, March 20: Bihar Police's Economic Offences Unit (EOU) has constituted a dedicated team to monitor irregularities in the tender process across all government departments, a senior official said Friday.

The five-member team, headed by EOU SP Pankaj Kumar, includes a DSP and inspectors.

Talking to reporters, Kumar said, "The unit has constituted a team to monitor irregularities in tender invitations and allotments across all departments, based on complaints received from the public and other sources."

He said the team was formed about a fortnight ago. During the briefing, the SP also outlined actions taken by the EOU over the past three months.

"Sarfaraz Shahid, the main accused in connection with the paper leak of examinations conducted by SCERT for classes 3 to 8, was arrested in January," he said.

Kumar highlighted that a disproportionate assets (DA) case was registered against the executive engineer of North Bihar Power Distribution Company Limited, Manoj Rajak, March 16. "Preliminary investigation revealed assets 62.66 per cent in excess of his known sources of income. Searches conducted at seven locations led to recovery of land documents, jewellery, bank accounts and evidence of properties in Nepal. Further investigation is underway," he said.

Under the PMLA, the EOU has referred two cases to the ED in the last three months, which involve the confiscation of assets worth approximately Rs 21 crore, the SP said.

Lucknow police bolster security for Eid celebrations

To prevent potential incidents of harassment against girls and women in public or crowded places, female police personnel in plain clothes, along with the Anti-Romeo Squad, Pink Patrol units, and I12 emergency response teams, will be deployed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, March 20: Extensive police arrangements have been made in Lucknow ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr (Eid) to ensure that the various programmes and events associated with the festival are conducted in a safe, orderly, and dignified manner, the Lucknow Police said Friday.

Based on the sighting of the Moon this year, Eid will be celebrated March 21. On this occasion, a large number of people offer Eid prayers.

Members of the Sunni community offer prayers at the Eidgah located in Aishbagh, and the Tile Wali Masjid. Similarly,

Shia community members offer prayers at the Asifi Masjid (Bara Imambara), and at the Jama Masjid in Thakurganj.

According to the police arrangements, there will be the deployment of 1 Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), 5 Additional Deputy Commissioners of Police (ADCP), 10 Assistant Commissioners of Police (ACP), 47 inspectors, 456 sub-inspectors, and 606 head constables and constables, the Lucknow Police said in a statement.

To prevent potential incidents of harassment against girls and women in public or crowded places, female police personnel in plain clothes,



along with the Anti-Romeo Squad, Pink Patrol units, and 112 emergency response teams, will be deployed. They will remain mobile and vigilant in the area.

The traffic police force will include 1 Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (AD-

CP), 3 Assistant Commissioners of Police (ACP), 6 inspectors, 33 sub-inspectors, 54 home guards, and 102 head constables and constables.

In addition to this, there will be 14 companies of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), along with wireless

units and intelligence teams.

During the namaz (prayers), key routes used by the public, as well as critical locations (such as Tile Wali Masjid, Chowk Bara Imambara, Asifi Masjid Chowk, and Aishbagh Eidgah) and intersections will be monitored 24/7 via CCTV cameras. Furthermore, a vigilant watch will be maintained round-the-clock through social media monitoring channels, the police said.

A special traffic plan has been implemented for the routes leading to the event venues.

"All police personnel have undergone training to ensure courteous and sensitive interaction with the public. The general public is requested to cooperate with the security arrangements and to strictly adhere to the traffic diversion guidelines issued by the police from time to time," the statement said.

UP man takes day off work, stands in 9-hour queue for LPG cylinder

The sole breadwinner for the family, which also includes his two school-going daughters, Arun works as a gardener in Shahjahanpur, around 200 km from his native village

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Barabanki (UP), March 20: A man, employed as a gardener in Shahjahanpur district, took a day's leave from work to stand in queue in the hope of securing an LPG cylinder for his ailing parents here, waiting around nine hours in front of a distribution agency.

Arun Kumar, a resident of Tindola Barethi village in Banki block, said he reached a local gas agency around 3 am Wednesday after walking nearly 8 km from his home, and stood in line for hours to obtain an LPG cylinder.

His mother recently suffered a brain haemorrhage, while his father is battling cancer.



With both parents bedridden, Arun said he had to urgently arrange an LPG cylinder for

their meals. The sole breadwinner for the family, which also includes his

two school-going daughters, Arun works as a gardener in Shahjahanpur, around 200 km from his native village.

With no cooking gas left at home, he took a day off work and returned to his village to arrange a refill.

"I had booked the cylinder four-five days ago, but it has not been delivered. Due to rising prices and delayed supply, it is becoming increasingly difficult for poor families like ours to cook daily meals," he said.

"I lined up at the agency at 3 am and got the cylinder around 12 noon. The agency opens at 10 am," he said.

District Supply Officer Rakesh Tiwari said the mat-

ter was inquired into after it came to notice. "The agency informed that the connection holder, Arun Kumar, was provided a gas cylinder the same day. He has also been given the agency's contact number so that cylinders can be delivered to his home whenever required," Tiwari said.

Arun confirmed that he has received a cylinder and was provided a contact number for future home delivery.

"I come home from Shahjahanpur once a month, and ensure there is cooking gas for my ailing parents at home. Due to some shortage this time, I had to wait longer in the queue," he said.



Do you know that we actually spent more money on debt servicing, interests on debts, and on salaries and pensions than we do on all of our development projects put together. It is a disgrace

SHASHI THAROOR | CONGRESS LEADER

CBDT NOTIFIES NEW INCOME TAX RULES

The Central Board of Direct Taxes Friday notified the rules for Income-tax Act, 2025 which provided enhanced tax benefit for HRA to salary earner but makes disclosure of landlord-tenant relationship mandatory



of the day quote

Farm incomes are declining and crop productivity has reached a saturation point, making it important to adopt AI-based techniques to improve output and reduce pressure on natural resources



BHAGWANT SINGH MANN | PUNJAB CM

Is it to get funds that are being denied for Tamil Nadu? Is it to insist on implementing the projects that remain stalled in Tamil Nadu? Is it to resolve the shortage of cooking gas cylinders? No. Not at all



M K STALIN | TN CM

Eid is a joyous occasion that brings people together to celebrate the blessings of Ramadan. It strengthens the bonds of community and reaffirms the values of mutual respect and brotherhood. It is a time to spread happiness, extend kindness and lend a helping hand to those in need



OMAR ABDULLAH | J&K CM

TMC manifesto bets on women voters, ramps up welfare push

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 20: The TMC Friday unveiled its manifesto for the West Bengal Assembly elections, focusing on welfare expansion, women and minority outreach, and targeted social schemes as it seeks a fourth consecutive term.

Releasing the document titled 'Banglar Jonno Didir 10 Protitya', Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee outlined ten promises ranging from expansion of welfare schemes and healthcare outreach to infrastructure development and economic growth.

At the centre of the manifesto lies a Rs 500 hike in the 'Lakshmir Bhandar' scheme, widely regarded as the ruling party's most politically potent welfare programme, with the monthly assistance promised to rise to Rs 1,500 for women from the general category and Rs 1,700 for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe beneficiaries. Women voters constitute nearly half of the state's electorate and have increasingly turned out in larger numbers than men in recent elections, a trend political observers say has significantly strengthened the TMC's electoral position since the scheme was introduced.

Underscoring the political importance of the constituency, Banerjee said empowering women remained central to her government's agenda.

"I am determined to make the mothers and sisters of Bengal self-reliant," she said.

Alongside the welfare push, the manifesto proposes annual healthcare outreach under a new 'Duare Chikitsa' initiative, under which health camps will be organised in every block and town to provide doorstep medical services.

To address youth unemployment, a recurring political issue



■ The manifesto promises doorstep healthcare services through 'Duare Chikitsa' camps in every block and town, ensuring access to quality healthcare

■ The TMC aims to address youth unemployment by continuing financial assistance through the 'Banglar Yuva-Sathi' scheme, providing Rs 1,500 per month to eligible beneficiaries

■ A Rs 30,000 crore special agriculture budget is promised to strengthen the farming ecosystem and support farmers and landless cultivators

■ The TMC plans to transform West Bengal into a commercial hub by developing world-class logistics, ports, and commercial infrastructure

in the state, the TMC promised continued financial support for jobless youth through the Banglar Yuva-Sathi scheme with a monthly assistance of Rs 1,500.

Farmers also feature prominently in the party's electoral pitch, with Banerjee announcing a Rs 30,000-crore agriculture budget aimed at strengthening rural livelihoods, supporting landless cultivators and boosting productivity.

The manifesto promises pucca houses for all families, piped drinking water to every household and a major infrastructure upgrade of government schools

under the Banglar Shikshayata initiative.

Economically, the party has sought to project a growth narrative alongside welfare politics.

The manifesto says West Bengal's economy has expanded nearly sixfold over the past 15 years and outlines a road-map to transform the state into the gateway of trade for eastern India through world-class logistics, ports and a proposed global trade centre.

The document also promises revival of the jute sector through a Natural Fibres Revival Mission, a hike in the daily wages of tea garden workers from Rs 250 to Rs 300 and extension of tax exemptions for green tea leaves to strengthen the plantation economy. Senior citizens are promised uninterrupted pension coverage with gradual expansion of beneficiaries, while the party has also pledged administrative restructuring through the creation of seven new districts and expansion of urban local bodies.

Beyond the governance promises, the manifesto reflects a carefully calibrated electoral strategy aimed at reinforcing the party's core support base of women, minorities and marginalised communities.

Delhi Police seals news agency UNI's office, cites HC order

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: Delhi Police Friday sealed news agency UNI's office here, citing a high court order, even as the media organisation termed the action an "attack on press freedom".

The news agency also alleged that their female staff members were manhandled by the police team.

However, Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi) Sachin Sharma told PTI that legal process was followed and no wrongdoings happened as everything was videographed.

The police reached the premises on Rafi Marg with adequate deployment to carry out the sealing process after the Delhi High Court dismissed a petition filed by the news agency challenging the cancellation of its land allotment.

The case pertained to an order issued by the Land and Development Office (L&DO) under the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry, which had asked the news agency to vacate the premises.

The matter is related to the cancellation of the allotment of land to the news agency.

The high court upheld the cancellation, rejecting the news agency's plea.

UNI said on X, "The sealing of the office of United News of India (UNI), one of the country's oldest and most respected news agencies, has raised serious concerns over press freedom."

In a purported video shared on X, a woman personnel is seen allegedly manhandling a woman journalist during a confrontation. The footage shows the journalist losing her balance, after which she falls to the ground. Meanwhile, a person in the background can be heard objecting, saying, "Ye kya kar rahi ho madam, haath-pair toot jayega" and "Ye kya tareeka hai."

WEST ASIA CONFLICT

Six Indians lost their lives in 'various incidents': MEA



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: Amid the escalating West Asia conflict, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Friday said six Indian nationals have lost their lives while one remains missing in "various incidents".

At an inter-ministerial briefing here, Additional Secretary (Gulf), MEA, Aseem R Mahajan, also said, "Late yesterday night, we received information regarding the tragic demise of an Indian national, during an attack in Riyadh March 18." He, however, did not elaborate upon the circumstances of this death.

"We express our deepest condolences to the family of the deceased. Our Mission in Riyadh is in touch with the family and closely co-ordinating with local authorities for the early return of the mortal remains to India," he said.

On Friday, the Indian Embassy in Riyadh also said that an Indian national was killed in Saudi Arabia due to the "recent events of March 18".

In a social media post, the Indian Mission expressed its "deepest condolences on the tragic demise of an Indian national in Riyadh due to recent events March 18".

A day earlier, the Indian embassy said alerts were received

■ The West Asia conflict began February 28 when the US-Israeli combine launched military strikes on Iran

■ In retaliation, Tehran has targeted Gulf countries hosting US military bases

by residents in Riyadh and some other regions Wednesday. "The Indian community is advised to remain calm and composed," the embassy said. Mahajan also told reporters in Delhi that "six Indian nationals have lost their lives and one is missing in various incidents".

"Our missions in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Iraq, and the UAE are in regular touch with the concerned authorities regarding the missing Indian national and for the early repatriation of mortal remains of the deceased Indian nationals to India," he said.

Less than a week ago, the MEA official had told reporters in an inter-ministerial briefing on the West Asia situation that five Indian nationals had lost their lives while one is missing in various incidents.

The West Asia conflict began February 28 when the US-Israeli combine launched military strikes on Iran. In retaliation, Tehran has targeted Gulf countries hosting US military bases.

SHORT TAKES

U'khand: Dhani expands cabinet

Dehradun: Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhani expanded his cabinet Friday, with five MLAs taking oath as ministers at the Lok Bhavan here. With the induction of the new ministers -- Khazan Das, Bharat Singh Chaudhary, Madan Kaushik, Pradeep Batra, and Ram Singh Kaidia -- the Uttarakhand cabinet has reached its maximum strength of 12, officials said.

Telangana presents ₹3.24L-cr Budget

Hyderabad: The Telangana government Friday presented a budget of Rs 3.24 lakh crore for the year 2026-27, up by nearly Rs 20,000 crore over the previous year, prioritising its flagship programmes such as Musi Riverfront beautification and Hyderabad Metrorail Phase 2 and 3, besides fulfilment of poll promises. Presenting the budget in the assembly, Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka allocated Rs 50,713 crores to the Congress government's six poll 'guarantees', including 'Rythu Bharosa' investment support scheme for farmers (Rs 18,000 crores).

Jayant Chaudhary receives death threat

New Delhi: Union minister Jayant Chaudhary allegedly received a death threat from an unknown caller, triggering a review of his security and a police probe based on a complaint lodged in the matter, officials said Friday. Police said the caller has been traced to Murshidabad in West Bengal. Chaudhary, the minister of state (Independent Charge) for skill development and entrepreneurship, received the threat call around 11 am March 18 from an unidentified number, the officials said.

Pondy elections: AINRC, BJP finalise seat sharing

Pondicherry: The ruling AINRC and BJP-AIADMK combine Friday reached an agreement for the Assembly polls in the union territory, where the AINRC will contest 16 seats. Pondicherry Chief Minister and AINRC leader N Rangasamy held talks with BJP leader and Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya at a private hotel here. Accordingly, the BJP will contest the remaining 14 seats.

SNIPPETS

Rly Board hikes kilometerage allowance for loco pilots

New Delhi: Meeting a long-standing demand of over two lakh train operations staff, the Railway Board Friday announced a 25 per cent increase in the kilometerage allowance for loco running staff with retrospective effect from January 1, 2024. The announcement comes after over two years of persistent representations and protests by various railway employee unions and federations. An official order issued Friday said that following a 50 per cent increase in dearness allowance (DA) effective from January 1, 2024, the Board decided to increase the kilometerage allowance for various categories of loco running staff from the same date.

5 engineering students drown in Godavari River

Polavaram (Andhra Pradesh): Five engineering students drowned in the Godavari river here in Eluru district Friday, while two others survived, a police official said. While the bodies of three students were recovered, efforts are underway to trace the remaining two, he added. Meanwhile, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu directed officials to intensify the search operations, officials said. The engineering students, all from a private university in Amaravati in Guntur district, had entered the river for a bath, police said.

HC quashes look-out for Prannoy, Radhika Roy

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court Friday quashed look-out circulars (LOCs) issued against NDTV founders Prannoy Roy and Radhika Roy in 2021 following a case lodged against them by the CBI, saying they cannot be subjected to an indefinite restriction on their right to travel abroad. Asserting that the right to travel abroad is an integral part of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution, Justice Sachin Datta held that the continued operation of the LOCs against the petitioners is an unjustified curtailment of their fundamental right, which cannot be sustained in law. Justice Datta observed that the investigation against the couple was pending for more than five years, during which the petitioners never attempted to evade the process of law, and that a chargesheet had not even been filed yet.



Tourists gather at the snow-covered areas of the Solang Valley, in Kullu, Himachal Pradesh

PTI PHOTO

Govt emphasis on improving logistics ecosystem

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: With the West Asia conflict disrupting the global supply chain, the government has given maximum emphasis on improving the logistics ecosystem of the country and its cost, which is estimated to be 7.97 per cent of GDP or approximately Rs 24.01 lakh crore.

Officials said India's logistics ecosystem has entered a phase of structural transformation, driven by coordinated policy reforms, institutional realignment, digital platforms and large-scale infrastructure planning.

These efforts aim to address long-standing challenges such as fragmented planning, model inefficiencies, limited visibility across supply chains and high logistics costs.

According to an official study, India's logistics cost is estimated at 7.97 per cent of the GDP, which is about Rs 24.01 lakh crore in absolute terms.



Officials said India's logistics ecosystem has entered a phase of structural transformation, driven by coordinated policy reforms, institutional realignment, digital platforms and large-scale infrastructure planning

India's logistics reforms are anchored in a set of mutually reinforcing policies, digital platforms and infrastructure initiatives aimed at improving

efficiency, reducing costs and strengthening supply chain integration, the officials said.

At an event here March 12, Prime Minister Narendra Modi

had said that the current conflict, which is going on nearby, had triggered a worldwide energy crisis, serving as a critical test of national character that required dealing with circumstances through peace, patience and increased public awareness.

The PM emphasised that the government was working relentlessly to address and overcome the various disruptions that had emerged within international supply chains.

According to the officials, India's path to economic growth increasingly relies on efficient logistics, which are key to enhancing competitiveness and global connectivity.

The National Logistics Policy and PM GatiShakti have injected a new momentum into this transformation, laying the foundation of a more integrated and data-driven logistics ecosystem, the officials said.

The Strengthening Multimodal and Integrated Logistics Ecosystem (SMILE) programme

launched by the government focuses on developing integrated logistics planning at the state and city levels.

As part of SMILE, integrated logistics planning has been undertaken in eight pilot cities across eight states to assess existing logistics infrastructure and improve efficiency and reduce costs.

Under SMILE, each of the eight pilot cities is developing an integrated logistics plan covering urban and peri-urban areas.

These plans map and optimise freight-intensive activities such as retail distribution, e-commerce delivery routes, warehousing clusters, truck terminals and last-mile corridors.

"The focus is on data-driven planning, institutional coordination, congestion and noise reduction, adoption of low and zero-emission vehicles, process automation and better alignment between freight and passenger movement," the officials said.

60 drug samples fail quality standards, central body finds

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: The Central Drugs Laboratories have found 60 drug samples manufactured by various firms to be "not of standard quality (NSQ)" in its monthly drug alert for February, health ministry officials said Friday.

The state drug testing laboratories have identified 134 drug samples as NSQ, they said.

According to a routine regulatory surveillance activity, the list of Not of Standard Quality (NSQ) and Spurious Drugs is being displayed on the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) portal on a monthly basis.

"For the month of February 2026, Central Drugs Laboratories have identified 60 Drug Samples to be Not of Standard Quality (NSQ) and State Drugs Testing Laboratories have identified 134 Drug Samples as Not of Standard Quality (NSQ)," a health ministry statement said.

Identification of drug samples as NSQ is done based on failure of the drug sample in one or more of the other specified quality parameters. The failure is specific to the drug products of the batch tested by the government laboratory and it does not warrant any concerns on the other drug products available in the market, it said.

Further, in February, one drug sample from North Zone, Ghaziabad, two drug samples from Delhi and one drug sample from Assam were identified as spurious drugs, which were manufactured by unauthorised manufacturers using a brand name owned by another company. The matter is under investigation and action will be taken according to the law.

This action of identifying NSQ and spurious medicines is taken on a regular basis in collaboration with the state regulators to ensure that these drugs are identified and removed from the market.



We will convert the entire DTC fleet into electric vehicles (EV) buses. The Delhi government is working towards last-mile connectivity

PARLIAMENTARY PANEL FLAGS OUTDATED NORMS IN PMGSY

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development has recommended a comprehensive revision of population and eligibility norms under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), flagging concerns that outdated benchmarks are leading to the exclusion of deserving rural habitations



of the day uote

Very pleased to speak with my Austrian counterpart @SenatorWong. Shared our assessments of the ongoing West Asia conflict. Also discussed Indo-Pacific issues

Officials should take immediate measures to assess crop losses and ensure support to affected farmers while preventing any disruption in essential supplies

Gujarat is gearing up to become a USD 1 trillion economy by 2030 by following the development path envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. To achieve this target, the state government is committed to providing all necessary support to industries

LPG crunch hits commercial supply

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: LPG supply crunch continued for the third straight week on Friday, but there was some easing in bookings for refills, in signs of things slowly crawling towards normalcy.

However, concerns persist as supply restrictions on commercial consumers, including hotels, remain in place due to ongoing disruptions in input supplies caused by the West Asia conflict.

The war in the Middle East, triggered by the US and Israel attacks on Iran, has led to the shutdown of the Strait of Hormuz - the critical shipping lane through which India gets 60 per cent of its imports. The overnight wiping away of such large volumes led to the government prioritising supplies to domestic household kitchens.

Supplies to commercial establishments were initially stopped, but later restored to a fifth of their requirement.

This triggered panic buying by domestic users, fearing that the availability of their gas cylinders too may be rationalised. Panic booking peaked at 87.7 lakh March 13 but fell thereafter.

At a media briefing, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, said March 19,



Panic buying of LPG cylinders by domestic users has started to decrease, but the overall supply situation remains a concern

The Indian government is prioritising LPG supply to domestic households while commercial establishments face restrictions

Increased domestic LPG production and normal delivery levels are being maintained to address the supply shortage

Consumers are encouraged to use alternative fuels like piped natural gas and kerosene to reduce pressure on LPG demand

around 55 lakh bookings were made, down from 57 lakh on the previous day.

Pre-war average booking per day was 50-55 lakh.

"Panic booking is coming down," she said, adding that the government continues to prioritise the supply of available LPG to domestic households.

However, "LPG (supply) situation remains worrisome, but there is no dry out at any LPG distributor," she said.

She said in the last week, 11,300 tonnes of commercial LPG were given to commercial establishments.

Sharma said domestic LPG production has increased by over 40 per cent in the last two weeks, and the three public sector oil marketing companies have been making normal, pre-war levels of daily deliveries of LPG refills.

"LPG cylinder delivery continues to be normal," she said.

POST OF THE DAY

Movies before 2014: 3 Idiots, Lagaan, Swades, Veer Zara, Chak De India, Nayak, Sholay, Taare Zameen Par, Rang De Basanti. Movies after 2014: The Kerala Story, Dhurandar, Tejas, Fighter, Emergency, 72 Hoorain, Accidental Prime Minister, The Kashmir Files, Main Atal Hoon. + What else

SHORT TAKES

Prez greets on eve of Eid-ul-Fitr

New Delhi: President Droupadi Murmu Friday greeted the public on the eve of Eid-ul-Fitr, and urged all to resolve to promote unity and harmony in society and contribute to the nation's progress. Celebrated after the end of the holy month of Ramadan, the festival gives the message of self-control, charity and compassion for the underprivileged, she said. It also conveys the message of love, brotherhood, peace, and mutual harmony, the President said.

Maha women's panel chief Chakankar quits

Mumbai: Facing flak from Opposition parties over her association with rape-accused 'godman' Ashok Kharat, Maharashtra State Commission for Women chairperson Rupali Chakankar Friday tendered her resignation. Chakankar, who is also the NCP women's wing chief, submitted the resignation letter to deputy Chief Minister and party president Sunetra Pawar. According to sources, she met Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis earlier in the evening, and he asked her to resign. In the letter addressed to Fadnis, Chakankar stated that she was stepping down from the post with immediate effect. Earlier, Opposition leaders sought to corner the BJP-led government by highlighting Chankankar's links with the accused.

Student shot dead

Varanasi (UP): A 22-year-old undergraduate student was shot dead on the campus of Uday Pratap College here Friday afternoon, following an alleged dispute with another student, police said. The victim, identified as Surya Pratap Singh, was rushed to a hospital by police where doctors declared him dead on arrival. Varanasi Police Commissioner Mohit Agarwal said the shooting was the result of a personal dispute between two students.

Delhi on high alert ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: With Eid-ul-Fitr a day away, security has been stepped up across South-west Delhi's Dwarka district, as the Uttam Nagar area remains tense after the March 4 killing.

Police said more than 100 pickets have been set up, with personnel deployed on rooftops and at key junctions to maintain a close watch on movement in sensitive pockets.

Security has been tightened around the Uttam Nagar East metro station following directions from the Delhi High Court after apprehensions of unrest during the festival.

"We have made detailed deployment plans and are ready to respond swiftly to any situation," an officer said.

The HC order was passed on a PIL filed by a civil rights group, the Association for Protection of Civil Rights, which approached the high court to prevent "imminent communal violence" on Eid in Uttam Nagar.

A civil society group comprising eminent Muslims wrote to Union Home Minister Amit Shah Thursday over "open threats" to the Muslim community in Uttam Nagar, and urged him to pass special instructions to the police to take strict action.

AI deployed wrong aircraft for Vancouver

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: A Vancouver-bound Air India (AI) Boeing 777-200 LR aircraft, after being airborne for over seven hours, returned to the national capital Thursday evening after it was found that the plane was not approved for operating the flight, according to sources.

An apparent lapse in updating the list of requirements for the operation of flights to Canada resulted in the situation, where a wrong aircraft was deployed for the particular service, sources said.

Without providing specific details, Air India, in a statement Friday, said the aircraft had landed safely at the Delhi airport.

The flight was operated with Boeing 777-200 LR aircraft VT-AEI and was airborne for over seven hours.

The plane turned back to Delhi when it was in the Chinese airspace, according to information available on the flight tracking website Flightra-dar24.com.

CBI questions Anil Ambani in RCom loan 'fraud' case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



New Delhi, March 20: The CBI Friday questioned industrialist Anil Ambani for seven hours in connection with a ₹2,929-crore cheating case, registered against Reliance Communications Ltd and him on a complaint by the State Bank of India, officials said.

The second consecutive day, Ambani arrived at the agency headquarters at around 10 am in his grey sedan and left the office at around 5.15 pm, they said.

He was questioned on alleged fund diversion, misappropriation and other irregularities in the loan funds issued to the company by the bank, besides being confronted with several documents, they said.

"Since the interrogation remained incomplete March 19, 2026 he was summoned again to attend CBI office March 20, 2026 i.e. today. The accused Anil D Ambani re-appeared before the Investigating Officer in CBI Head Office today for further examination and has been interrogated for about seven hours," the CBI spokesperson said in a statement. In a separate case of loan defaults and

fraud involving Reliance Commercial Finance Ltd, the CBI on Friday examined Divy Dangi, a whole-time Director at Authum Investment & Infrastructure Ltd, which has taken over the assets of companies under investigation - Reliance Commercial Finance Ltd and Reliance Home Finance Ltd, the spokesperson said.

The case involves a ₹57.47 crore fraud in which the CBI has booked Reliance Commercial Finance Ltd, Devang Pravin Mody, Ravindra Somayajula Rao, and other unknown entities, including public servants, on allegations of defrauding the Bank of Maharashtra.

On Thursday, a spokesperson for Anil D Ambani had issued a statement, "The appearance is in furtherance to Mr Ambani's commitment to extend full cooperation in the matter with all agencies."

Even yesterday, the industrialist was questioned by the probe agency for nearly eight hours in connection with the same case.

The CBI had booked Ambani in August last year for allegedly defrauding the SBI to the tune of ₹2,929 crore, officials said.

People have the right to criticise judgements: SC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: The Supreme Court Friday refused to entertain a plea seeking removal of a remark against its verdicts from NCERT's old Class VIII Social Science textbook, saying that people have a right to criticise them.

The Centre, meanwhile, informed a bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi that it had constituted an expert committee comprising two former apex court judges and an ex-attorney general to review the NCERT book with a chapter on corrup-

tion in the judiciary. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta told the bench that the committee comprises senior advocate and former Attorney General KK Venugopal, former top court judge Justice Indu Malhotra, and former Supreme Court judge and current National Judicial Academy director Justice Aniruddha Bose, along with a vice chancellor.

"We have formed the committee to draft the chapter. Mr KK Venugopal will be a member of the committee. Justice Indu Malhotra will also be a part. We have also requested Justice Aniruddha Bose from the National Judicial Academy to be there," Mehta said.

Govt cracks down on illegal gambling, betting websites

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: In a massive crackdown against illegal gambling and betting websites, the government has blocked 300 such websites and applications, sources said Friday.

The blocked sites and apps are related to online sports betting platforms; online casinos offering slots, roulette, live dealer tables; betting exchanges functioning like P-2-P betting marketplaces.

Action has also been taken on satta/matka gambling networks, and real-money card and casino game apps.

Sources said the government has blocked 300 such websites and applications, as it came down heavily on illegal gambling and betting websites.

A source said a total of around 8,400 such websites have been blocked so far, and that the majority (about 4,900 out of 8,400) were blocked after the passage of the Online Gaming Act.

The Centre has all along maintained it is committed to ensuring a safe, responsible and accountable online gaming ecosystem in the country.

In this context, the government enacted the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025, with a goal of promoting innovation in e-sports and online social games and prohibiting online money games.

The Gaming Act comprehensively prohibits all forms of online money games, be it games of chance, games of skill, or any combination. It also prohibits the advertising, promotion, and facilitation of such games, as



House sparrows perch and fly over a wooden post, in Nadia, West Bengal



The government has blocked 300 such websites and applications, as it came down heavily on illegal gambling and betting websites

three years of imprisonment (may extend up to 5 years), and a fine of minimum ₹1 crore (may extend up to ₹ 2 crore).

Advertising such online money games is punishable with imprisonment of up to two years or a fine up to ₹50 lakh or both. Subsequent conviction for advertising such online money games involves more severe consequences.

Besides this, the Gaming Act also provides for the recognition and promotion of e-sports and online social games, the establishment of the Online Gaming Authority of India, a transparent registration mechanism for online games, a grievance-redressal system for users, and safeguards against prohibited online money games and associated harms.

The national-level Online Gaming Authority will be responsible for classifying and registering permissible games, determining whether a game constitutes a money game, issuing codes of practice, and addressing public grievances.



The top court was hearing a petition by former NCERT member Pankaj Pushkar against a passage in an older class 8 textbook that read, "re-

cent judgments tend to view the slum dweller as an encroacher in the city."

The court refused to entertain the petition, observ-

ing that the judiciary should not be oversensitive about healthy criticism. "It's a viewpoint about a judgment. That's a healthy criticism. Why the judiciary should be so oversensitive about that. This part of the book points out what is the structure of the judiciary, how they work, what they have done, some good has also been highlighted."

"Then they say, however, there are also court judgments that people believe work against the best interests of common persons. This is a viewpoint about a judgment, people have a right to criticise our judgments," the CJ observed orally.

international



We can confirm that we are adjusting our posture in the context of NATO Mission Iraq. We are working in close coordination with Allies and partners
ALLISON HART | NATO SPOKESPERSON

CHINA GREET'S INDIA'S NEW ENVOY DORAISWAMI

China Friday welcomed the appointment of veteran diplomat Vikram Doraiswami as the new Indian Ambassador, expressing hope that he will make a positive contribution to the sustained improvement of Sino-India ties. Doraiswami, a 1992-batch Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer, is currently serving as the Indian High Commissioner to the UK



of the day quote

I can categorically confirm that ... the political system of Cuba is not up for negotiation, and of course neither the president nor the position of any official in Cuba is subject to negotiation with the United States
CARLOS FERNANDEZ DE COSSIO | VICE FOREIGN MINISTER, CUBA

Switzerland is currently not sufficiently protected against the most likely forms of threat
MARTIN PFISTER | DEFENCE MINISTER, SWITZERLAND

History and reality have repeatedly shown the world that force is not the solution to problems and armed conflict will only breed new hatred
LIN JIAN | FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESPERSON, CHINA

SHORT TAKES

Zelenskyy sends delegation to US

Kyiv: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he sent an official delegation to the US in a bid to move forward suspended negotiations on ending Russia's invasion of his country. A senior Kremlin official also indicated Friday that a new round of US-brokered talks between Moscow and Kyiv will likely take place soon. The trilateral talks, which have yet to produce any breakthrough on key issues, have been on ice while the Iran war has dominated international attention. Zelenskyy is keen to restore momentum to the negotiations and said late Thursday that he had sent representatives to the US for a meeting expected Saturday. The White House did not confirm any meeting. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia won't be present at those talks. He said the time and venue for a new trilateral meeting haven't been agreed yet. "The pause is temporary, we hope it's temporary regarding the continuation of the trilateral format," he said.

Chad to send 800 personnel to Haiti

N'djamena: Chad intends to deploy 800 police officers and gendarmes to Haiti this year to participate in an international force to help Haiti's police fight powerful armed gangs, a senior Chadian police official told Reuters. The Chadian forces are expected to arrive by June after receiving training from "European and American partners", said the official, who requested anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to the media. Dominican Republic Foreign Minister Roberto Alvarez said this week that the UN-backed Gang Suppression Force would reach its full capacity of 5,500 by October and that Kenyan police who deployed to Haiti under an earlier model of the force should withdraw gradually.

23 Indians rescued from Nepal brick kiln

Kathmandu: Twenty three Indian nationals have been rescued from a brick kiln in Nepal's Madhesh province, police said Friday. Human Rights Commission Madhesh Province Office rescued the Indian nationals from Assam from Baba Dharmaraj Brick Kiln in Daksheshwori Municipality-9, the police said. The commission investigated at the kiln following a complaint registered online regarding forced labour and exploitation, the police quoted Chief of Human Rights Commission Madhesh Province Buddha Narayan Sahani as saying.

IRAN WAR

Trump calls NATO 'cowards'

Trump has been calling for major US allies and others, none of which were consulted or advised on the war, to help secure the safety of shipping through the Iran-controlled Strait of Hormuz

REUTERS



Washington, March 20: President Donald Trump assailed NATO allies Friday over their lack of support for the US-Israel war against Iran, calling the longtime US allies "cowards."

"Without the USA, NATO IS A PAPER TIGER!" Trump said in a social media post. Trump has been calling for major US allies and others, none of which were consulted or advised on the war, to help secure the safety of shipping through the Iran-controlled Strait of Hormuz. The conflict has roiled global markets, killed thousands and displaced millions since US-Israel strikes began Feb. 28. The US president complained NATO countries did not want to join the fight against Iran, yet still complain about high oil prices. "Now that fight is Militarily WON, with very little danger for them, they complain about the high oil prices they are

forced to pay, but don't want to help open the Strait of Hormuz, a simple military maneuver that is the single reason for the high oil prices. So easy for them to do, with so little risk," he wrote. **"COWARDS, and we will REMEMBER!"** Germany, Britain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Japan and Canada pledged in a joint statement Thursday to join "appropriate efforts to ensure safe passage through the Strait." But German Chancellor Friedrich Merz made clear that this presupposed an end to combat. French President Emmanuel Macron said after a European Union summit in Brussels that defending international law and promoting de-escalation was "the best we can do," adding,

"I have not heard anyone here express a willingness to enter this conflict — quite the opposite." **US TO DEPLOY THOUSANDS OF ADDITIONAL TROOPS TO THE MIDDLE EAST** The United States military is deploying thousands of additional Marines and sailors to the Middle East, three US officials told Reuters Friday, as the US-Israeli war on Iran reached the three-week mark. No decision had been made to send troops into Iran itself, the officials told Reuters, but they will build up the capacity for future operations in the region. The deployments of the USS Boxer, along with its Marine Expeditionary Unit and accompanying warship, come as Reuters reported that President

'Manipulated and deceived' by Epstein: Norway's crown princess

REUTERS

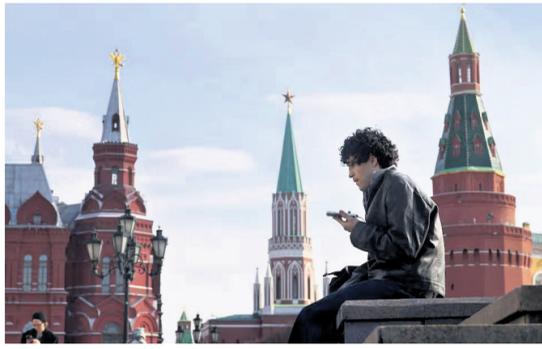


Oslo, March 20: Norway's Crown Princess Mette-Marit said Friday she regretted her friendship with the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, seeking to contain one of the biggest scandals to hit the country's royal family. The US Justice Department's release of millions of Epstein documents has sent shockwaves around the world, revealing the disgraced financier's ties to prominent people, including the crown princess and top Norwegian politicians, business executives and diplomats. "I was manipulated and deceived," Mette-Marit said in a tearful interview with public broadcaster NRK screened Friday morning. "Of course, I wish I had never met him," she said of Epstein. The files showed frequent communication between Mette-Marit and Epstein that occurred long after he pleaded guilty in 2008 to soliciting an underage girl. The 52-year-old crown princess, who apologised to King Harald and Queen Sonja in a February 6 statement, has not been accused of any criminal wrongdoing. While earlier media coverage had shown that Mette-Marit had links to Epstein, the new documents showed a more extensive relationship, prompting an unusual rebuke from the prime minister and demands that she give a full account. Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere Friday said it was important Mette-Marit had answered questions about her relationship with Epstein. "She regretted her contact with him and she was genuine-ly remorseful. She took responsibility for not having checked his background more thoroughly," he said in an emailed statement to Reuters. The princess, the spouse of Crown Prince Haakon, the heir to the throne, maintained contact with Epstein from 2011 to 2014, and stayed at his Palm Beach house for four days during a private trip in 2013, the US files show.

GREAT CRACKDOWN

Russia tightens internet screws

REUTERS



Moscow, March 20: Office workers toiling with blocked internet. Teenagers continually forced to switch VPNs. Taxi drivers struggling to find their way around Moscow without online navigation. The Kremlin is flexing its muscles over the internet. The government is periodically jamming the web in regions across Russia, while restricting messaging services Telegram and WhatsApp and taking down dozens of virtual private networks that can be used to sverve bans on sites and apps. Over the past week, mobile internet has been completely down every day in parts of central Moscow, St Petersburg and other major cities, according to Reuters reporters in those areas and eight senior foreign diplomats in Russia. "These measures are taking place," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Reuters when asked about restrictions to messaging apps and internet service. "They are partly related to the fact that a number of foreign companies refuse to comply with the norms of Russian legislation, and partly due to security measures against the threat of Ukrainian drones." Attack drones can use cellular networks to aid navigation.

Moscow jams mobile internet in parts of Russia Government blocks WhatsApp, restricts Telegram New laws bolster powers of FSB security agency Russia's online clampdown this year has been accompanied by the introduction of new laws which oblige mobile operators to cut off any client at the demand of the Federal Security Service and give the agency powers to create a network of pre-trial detention centres under its own jurisdiction. The broader aim of the bolstering of online powers is to help the Kremlin shore up domestic control in the context of the war against Ukraine, according to the diplomats who requested anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

KREMLIN TARGETS MESSAGING APPS After the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia imposed the most repressive laws since Soviet times, bolstering censorship powers and the influence of the FSB, the main successor to the Soviet-era KGB. This year, Moscow has further ratcheted up security. President Vladimir Putin, who served as a KGB officer from 1985-1990, marked the fourth anniversary of the Ukraine war February 24 by attending the FSB's annual meeting in Moscow. He told the agency to step up the fight against terrorism - in which he included attacks from Ukraine - while strengthening the "information and digital space".

Fire at car parts factory in Korea leaves 55 injured

REUTERS

Seoul, March 20: A fire broke out around lunchtime at a car parts factory in the South Korean city of Daejeon Friday, injuring 55 people, including 24 seriously, while 14 others were unaccounted for, fire authorities said. The South Korean government activated a centralised disaster management system for the large-scale accident after President Lee Jae Myung ordered the mobilisation of all available resources to deal with the fire and save lives. More casualties are feared, with 14 people missing. Phone data showed their locations near where the fire broke out, but officials said search efforts were hampered after the building partially collapsed in the blaze. Many employees were believed to have been in a second-floor break room when the fire started, fire authorities said. Some people were injured after jumping from the building to escape, officials added. As of about 6 p.m. local time, roughly 80% of the fire had been contained, authorities said. Fire officials said the car parts supplier that owned the factory was Anjun Industrial, which said on its website it makes engine valves and is a supplier for Hyundai Motor and Kia Corp among others.

Chuck Norris, actor and martial artist, dies at 86

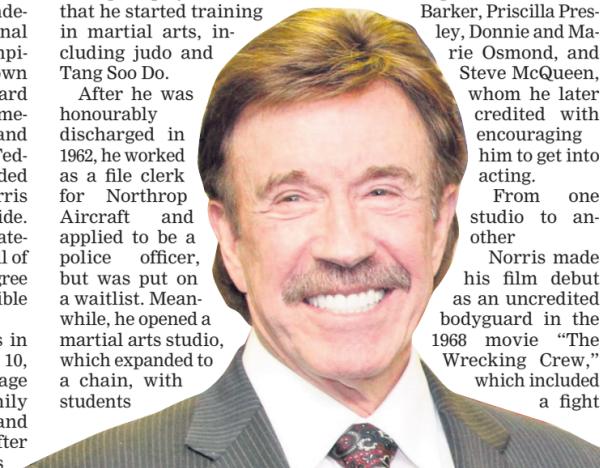
ASSOCIATED PRESS

New York, March 20: Chuck Norris, the martial arts grandmaster and action star whose roles in "Walker, Texas Ranger" and other television shows and movies made him an iconic tough guy - sparking internet parodies and adoration from presidents - has died at 86. Norris died Thursday, in what his family described as a "sudden passing." "While we would like to keep the circumstances private, please know that he was surrounded by his family and was at peace," the family said in a statement posted to social media. Before he would become a star in movies and on TV, Norris was wildly successful in competitive martial arts. He became a six-time undefeated World Professional Middleweight Karate champion. He also founded his own Korean-based American hard style of karate known sometimes as Chun Kuk Do and the United Fighting Arts Federation, which has awarded more than 3,300 Chuck Norris System black belts worldwide. Black Belt magazine ultimately credited Norris in its hall of fame with holding a 10th degree black belt, the highest possible honor. Born Carlos Ray Norris in Ryan, Oklahoma, March 10, 1940, he grew up poor. At age 12, he moved with his family to Torrance, California, and joined the US Air Force after high school, in 1958. It was

during a deployment to Korea that he started training in martial arts, including judo and Tang Soo Do. After he was honourably discharged in 1962, he worked as a file clerk for Northrop Aircraft and applied to be a police officer, but was put on a waitlist. Meanwhile, he opened a martial arts studio, which expanded to a chain, with students including such stars as Bob Barker, Priscilla Presley, Donnie and Marie Osmond, and Steve McQueen, whom he later credited with encouraging him to get into acting. From one studio to another Norris made his film debut as an uncredited bodyguard in the 1968 movie "The Wrecking Crew," which included a fight

with Dean Martin. He had also crossed paths with Bruce Lee in martial arts circles. Their friendship - sometimes, as sparring partners - led to an iconic faceoff in the 1972 movie "Return of the Dragon," in which Lee fights and kills Norris' character in Rome's Colosseum. He went on to act in more than 20 movies, such as "Missing in Action," "The Delta Force" and "Sidekicks." "I wanted to project a certain image on the screen of a hero. I had seen a lot of anti-hero movies in which the lead was neither good nor bad. There was no one to root for," Norris said in 1982. Chuck Norris: the man, the meme, the legend It was around the time of

"Dodgeball" that his toughman image became the stuff of legend, literally: "Chuck Norris Facts" went viral online with such wildly hyperbolic statements as, "Chuck Norris had a staring contest with the sun -- and won," and, "They wanted to put Chuck Norris on Mt. Rushmore, but the granite wasn't tough enough for his beard." Norris ultimately embraced the absurdity of the meme craze, putting together "The Official Chuck Norris Fact Book," which combined his favorites with supposedly true stories and the codes he aimed to live by. He would also write books on martial arts instruction, a memoir, political takes, Civil War-era historical fiction and more.





Our ambition is bold: to grow India's bioeconomy to \$300 billion by 2030 and \$1 trillion by 2047
JITENDRA KUMAR | MD, BIRAC

ZOMATO HIKES PLATFORM FEE

Food delivery aggregator Zomato has hiked the platform fee it charges users by Rs 2.40 to Rs 14.90 per order, its app showed Friday. Zomato's platform fee now stands at Rs 14.90 on a pre-GST basis, from Rs 12.50 earlier. Rival Swiggy has been charging a platform Rs 14.99 inclusive of GST from its users



of the day quote

India's power system is experiencing unprecedented ramping and flexibility requirements, with grid demand swings reaching up to 90 gigawatts. In this context, large-scale energy storage is no longer optional; it is essential for a resilient and reliable grid

SC SAXENA | CHAIRMAN & MD, GRID INDIA

India represents one of the most dynamic and inspiring creative markets in the world today. With a young population, a strong education ecosystem, and a deep cultural appreciation for art and expression, it is a natural next step in Crayola's global journey

PETE RUGGIERO | PRESIDENT & CEO, CRAYOLA LLC

The disruptions may lead to shortage of certain crop protection products during a critical agriculture season, impacting yield and quality of produce

ANKUR AGGARWAL | CHAIRMAN, CROPLIFE INDIA

SHORT TAKES

Forex reserves dip

Mumbai: India's forex reserves dropped \$7.052 billion to \$709.759 billion during the week ended March 13, the RBI said Friday. In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had dropped \$11.683 billion to \$716.81 billion. The kitty jumped \$4.885 billion to an all-time high of \$728.494 billion during the week ended February 27. For the week ended March 13, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, fell \$7.678 billion to \$555.568 billion, the data released by the central bank showed. Value of gold reserves increased \$664 million to \$130.681 billion during the week, the RBI said. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down \$23 million to \$18.697 billion, the apex bank said. India's reserve position with the IMF was also down by \$15 million to \$4.814 billion in the reporting week, according to the apex bank's data.

RBI injects ₹25,101cr

Mumbai: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Friday injected Rs 25,101 crore transient liquidity in the banking system through a three-day variable rate repo (VRR) auction. The RBI injected the funds at cut-off and weighted average rates of 5.26 per cent, the central bank said in a release. The liquidity injected was much lower than the notified amount of Rs 75,000 crore, despite a sharp drop in surplus liquidity in the banking system due to advance tax payments. Currently, liquidity in the banking system is estimated to be in surplus of around Rs 16,875.36 crore as of March 19. On March 17, the central bank injected Rs 48,014 crore liquidity into the banking system via a seven-day VRR. Prior to this, the RBI has infused Rs 3.50 lakh crore of durable liquidity into the banking system through open market purchase (OMO) of government securities since January 2026.

Tata cars to get dearer

New Delhi: Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles Ltd Friday said it will hike prices of its internal combustion engine (ICE) passenger vehicles from April 1, 2026, citing rising input costs. The weighted average price increase will be 0.5 per cent of the ICE portfolio, and the extent will vary across models and variants, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles Ltd said in a statement. This revision is being undertaken to partially offset the continued increase in input costs, it added. Key players like Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Audi, and Honda are raising prices to offset rising input costs, surging material costs, and currency fluctuations.

WEST ASIA CRISIS

HPCL buys 2mn barrels of West African crude

Indian refiners are actively diversifying their crude basket, sourcing from West Africa, Brazil, and the US as alternatives to Middle Eastern oil, particularly as geopolitical tensions and market volatility affect supply routes

REUTERS

New Delhi, March 20: India's state-run Hindustan Petroleum has bought 2 million barrels of Angolan oil via a tender, three trade sources said, as reduced availability of costly Middle Eastern oil leads Indian refiners to shift to West African and Asia-Pacific grades.

India, which used to rely on Middle Eastern oil for over 45% of its oil imports, has been hit hard by the disruption caused by the US-Israeli war on Iran that has halted shipments via the Strait of Hormuz.

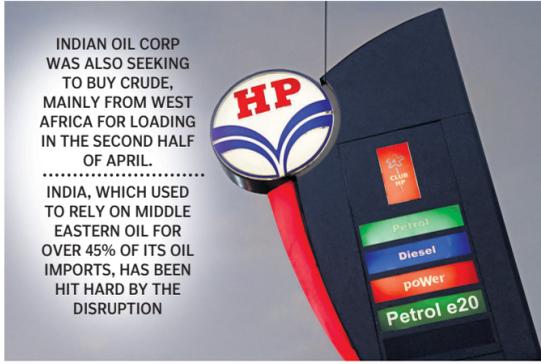
The Oman and Dubai benchmarks eased Friday, but earlier in the week surged as Middle Eastern crude became the world's most expensive. Peaks earlier this week exceeded the previous record of \$147.50 hit by Brent futures in 2008.

REFINERS SEEK ALTERNATIVES OR CUT OUTPUT

The surge in the benchmarks, used to price millions of barrels of Middle Eastern crude bound for Asia, has increased costs for Asian refiners, leading them to seek alternatives or reduce output.

HPCL has bought a million barrels each of Clov and Cabinda from Exxon at about a \$15 premium to dated Brent on a delivered basis for May 1-10 arrival in India's west coast, the sources said.

Indian companies do not



comment on their crude purchases as the deals are confidential. The refiner has bought oil for its 180,000-barrels-per-day Barmer refinery in the desert state of Rajasthan. Earlier this week, HPCL bought a million barrels each

OIL PRICES EASE TO \$108/BARREL

Oil prices Friday pared earlier gains on the intensifying Iran war, falling back to around \$108 a barrel, as Iran strikes Gulf energy facilities, while Asian shares were mostly down following Wall Street losses. US futures edged up 0.1 per cent. Oil prices had a roller-coaster day Thursday with the Brent crude, the international standard, briefly surging to around \$119 per barrel as attacks by Iran on oil and gas facilities around the Gulf escalated after Israel's attack of Iran's key natural gas field. In early Friday trading, Brent crude fell 0.4 per cent to \$108.19 a barrel, following Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's remarks that he would hold off on further attacks on Iran's gas field at the request of US President Donald Trump. Benchmark US crude was down 1.2 per cent to \$94.40 a barrel.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY EXCELLENCE

TPNODL honoured with OHSSAI Safety Award

POST NEWS NETWORK

Balasure, March 20: TP Northern Odisha Distribution Limited (TPNODL), a joint venture between Tata Power and the Government of Odisha, has been awarded the prestigious OHSSAI Safety Award (Gold Category) with a 6-star rating at the 10th Annual OHSSAI HSE Excellence & ESG Global Awards 2026 in Goa.

The rating in the gold category underscores TPNODL's rigorous adherence to safety protocols, environmental stewardship, and its strategic focus on ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) principles. Additionally, Tapan Kumar Patra, Head of Department (Safety) at TPNODL, was honoured with the EHS Mentor Award for his exceptional leadership in fostering a "Safety First" culture within the organisation.

This prestigious award is a testament to TPNODL's unwavering commitment to safety, a core value deeply embedded in its operations, driving the organization to create a safe



and secure environment for its employees, consumers, and the communities it serves, said Gajanan S Kale, Chief of Odisha Distribution Business and CEO of TPNODL.

TPNODL remains steadfast in its commitment to electrical safety across all operational areas. Through proactive measures, enhanced public awareness, and community engagement, the company strives to create a safe environment for both consumers and its workforce. TPNODL encourages all stakeholders to collaborate in promoting electrical safety and reporting potential power hazards to its offices or toll-free customer care numbers 1800-3456-718 or 1912.

Silver rebounds ₹1,800/kg, gold eases ₹650/10g

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: Silver prices rebounded by Rs 1,800 to Rs 2.40 lakh per kg while gold prices dropped by Rs 650 to Rs 1.52 lakh per 10 grams in the national capital Friday, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The white metal prices increased by Rs 1,800, or nearly 1 per cent, to Rs 2,40,500 per kg (inclusive of all taxes) from Thursday's closing level of Rs 2,38,700 per kg.

However, gold of 99.9 per cent purity extended its losses for the third consecutive day, declining by Rs 650, or 0.42 per cent, to Rs 1,52,650 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes). The yellow metal had settled at Rs 1,53,300 per 10 grams in the previous session.

Analysts said gold prices remain under pressure due to macroeconomic uncertainties and global cues favouring the US dollar. In the international market, spot silver slipped nearly 1 per cent to trade at \$72.18 per ounce, while gold was trading 0.27 per cent higher at \$4,663.54 per ounce.

Markets recover on buying in IT, PSU bank stocks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 20: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty gave up most of their intra-day gains to end nearly half a per cent higher Friday, following intense buying in PSU bank, IT and metal stocks amid concerns over a further spike in fuel-driven inflation.

In another volatile session, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 325.72 points, or 0.44 per cent to settle at 74,532.96. During the day, it jumped 1,079.15 points, or 1.45 per cent, to 75,286.39.

The 50-share NSE Nifty edged higher by 112.35 points, or 0.49 per cent, to end at 23,114.50. Intra-day, it jumped 343 points, or 1.49 per cent, to 23,345.15.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Tata Steel, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, Trent, Reliance Industries, Titan, NTPC and Sun Pharma were among the major gainers. HDFC Bank, Bharat Electronics, Kotak Mahindra Bank and ICICI Bank were among the laggards.

Among sectoral indices, BSE PSU Bank jumped 2.19 per cent, Focused IT (2.18 per cent), IT (2.08 per cent), healthcare (1.45 per cent), metal (1.41 per cent) and energy (1.03 per cent).

However, financial services, Private Banks index, BSE Top 10 Banks, realty and BSE Mid-Small Private Banks Quality Tilt were the laggards.

A total of 2,458 stocks advanced, while 1,804 declined and 170 remained unchanged on the BSE.

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark dipped 30.96 points or 0.04 per cent, the Nifty slipped 36.6 points or 0.15 per cent.

Core sectors growth drops to 3-month low

OIL AND GAS OUTPUT DECLINES WHILE ELECTRICITY GENERATION GROWTH SLOWS



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: Production growth in eight core infrastructure sectors slowed to a three-month low of 2.3 per cent in February due to a contraction in the output of crude oil, natural gas, and refinery products.

According to the government data, these eight sectors expanded by 3.4 per cent in the same month last year.

The growth rate in production of fertiliser, cement and electricity declined to 3.4 per cent, 9.3 per cent and 0.5 per cent, respectively, in February this year.

However, coal and steel production recorded healthy growth.

During April-February, the cumulative production growth in the infrastructure sector was 2.9 per cent compared to 4.4 per cent in the same period of the last financial year.

Commenting on the data, Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist

The longer that the crisis persists, resulting in higher fuel prices and tighter availability, the larger the downside will be for India's GDP growth in FY2027, notwithstanding the buffers provided by resilient domestic demand

ADITI NAYAR | CHIEF ECONOMIST, ICRA

at Icria Ltd, said that even before the start of the West Asia crisis, the growth of the core sector output in India had slowed to a three-month low.

Accordingly, IIP growth appears set to moderate to around 4 per cent in February 2026 from 4.8 per cent in January 2026, she said.

"The longer that the crisis persists, resulting in higher fuel prices and tighter availability, the larger the downside will be for India's GDP growth in FY2027, notwithstanding the buffers provided by resilient domestic demand," she added.

Vedanta Aluminium cuts CO2 emissions at Kodingamali

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 20: Vedanta Aluminium, India's largest aluminium producer, has achieved a major decarbonisation milestone at its Kodingamali bauxite mines with the deployment of Electric Vehicle (EV) loaders, cutting 50% of CO2 emissions from its loading operations. This transition, shifting half of the loading fleet from diesel to electric, marks a significant step in the company's journey toward net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

At Singaram Siding, operations earlier relied on six diesel loaders. With the new 3:3 diesel-to-EV configuration, carbon emissions have been reduced by 120 kg per hour, contributing substantially to cleaner and more efficient mining. The shift also brings immediate environmental benefits including lowered air and noise pollution, higher energy efficiency, and reduced fossil fuel dependency.

This initiative is part of Vedanta Aluminium's larger vision to build a fully electric fleet across operations. The



company already operates India's largest fleet of lithium-ion battery-powered electric forklifts across Odisha and Chhattisgarh, and is advancing its decarbonization goals while aiming to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 or sooner.

Commenting on the milestone, Pranab Kumar Bhatnagar, CEO, Vedanta Alumina Business, "At Vedanta Aluminium, we view Electric Vehicles as a sustainable and renewable source of energy that powers both our operations and our planet's future. Our investment in EV loaders at Kodingamali demonstrates how clean technology delivers

immediate emission cuts while building long-term resilience. This milestone strengthens our net-zero journey and proves sustainable innovation drives mining excellence without compromise."

Beyond emissions savings, electric drive trains significantly reduce maintenance versus diesel machines and bring near-zero tailpipe emissions. The 120 kg/hour CO2 reduction translates into thousands of tonnes saved annually, setting a benchmark for environmentally responsible mining. Lower noise emissions further support ecological well-being in sensitive and remote mining areas.

Airlines seek fare cap removal as Iran crisis hits ops

JET FUEL PRICES HAVE RISEN SHARPLY IN RECENT DAYS DUE TO THE MIDDLE EAST WAR

REUTERS

New Delhi, March 20: An airlines group representing IndiGo, Air India and SpiceJet has warned the Indian government of route withdrawals and delayed fleet and network expansions if fare caps imposed in December are not revoked, a letter shows.

The letter highlights growing financial pain in the world's fastest-growing market where, even before the Iran crisis, airlines were hit hard by a Pakistani airspace ban for international operations due to diplomatic tensions.

In December, widespread aviation disruptions due to

mass flight cancellations by IndiGo over operational issues prompted authorities to cap airfares depending on the distance, with the maximum being 18,000 rupees (\$192.04) for a one-way journey.

The crisis has since eased, but caps remain in place without any timeline. Indian airlines are incurring "huge" revenue losses and face higher operational costs in part because of a jump in jet fuel prices due to the Iran war,



A \$1 PER BARREL CHANGE IN FUEL PRICES COULD IMPACT INDIGO'S FULL-YEAR FUEL BILL BY ABOUT RS 3 BILLION, HSBC ANALYSTS HAVE SAID

the Federation of Indian Airlines said in a private letter to the government March 12, seen by Reuters. CURRENT SITUATION MAY

THREATEN VIABILITY

"If the current situation continues, airlines will face severe financial losses, pushing several operators closer to unsus-

MIDDLE EAST WAR DISRUPTS OPERATIONS FOR INDIAN CARRIERS
FARE CAP CAUSING FINANCIAL STRAIN AMID RISING COSTS, FIA WARNS
FIA URGES WITHDRAWAL OF RULE REQUIRING 60% SEATS WITHOUT EXTRA CHARGE
AIRLINES MAY CUT ROUTES OR DEFER EXPANSION, FEDERATION WARNS

and the FIA did not respond to requests for comment. IndiGo and Air India, which control more than 90% of India's domestic market, did not respond. A spokesperson for SpiceJet also did not respond to a request for comment.

IndiGo and Air India are also flying longer routes to reach Europe and North America owing to airspace restrictions.

In a separate letter sent Thursday, the FIA also urged the government to withdraw a directive mandating that a minimum 60% of seats on any flight be made available without additional charges for seat selection, saying it could lead to higher fares.



Injury woes mar IPL



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 20: In a big blow to Kolkata Knight Riders, pacer Harshit Rana was Friday ruled out of the entire IPL 2026 owing to the ligament injury that he sustained during a warm-up match ahead of the recent T20 World Cup.

The fast bowler suffered a ligament strain in his right knee during India's T20 World Cup warm-up game against South Africa, following which he underwent surgery, needing an extensive rehabilitation process.

"It is a big blow because Harshit Rana has been an integral part of this team for the last couple of seasons, also the championship season. Over the last year, he's really grown as a cricketer," KKR head coach Abhishek Nayar said, without giving a confirmed timeline for Rana's return to action.

"We will always miss Harshit Rana, it's not easy to replace him." The KKR team think tank is now considering a replacement for Rana with Navdeep Saini, Akash Madhwal, Simarjeet Singh, Sandeep Warrier and KM Asif having taken trials and are playing practice matches.

Asif and Warrier were called up for trials during KKR's first training session at Eden Gardens Wednesday, while Simar-

jeet had impressed earlier in Mumbai during the first phase of the trials as head of scouting Biju George and deputy Manvinder Bisla oversaw the process. Then Thursday, Mumbai Indians and Rajasthan Royals pacer Madhwal and former Royal Challengers Bengaluru quick Saini joined the trials along with Simarjeet.

Nayar said they would make the announcement before the team departs for Mumbai to play their IPL 2026 opener against Mumbai Indians March 29.

"Over the last few days, we've looked at a few bowlers, we've had to evaluate with the help of our leadership group as to who fits in and who can do that role to the best of their prowess. We're still evaluating that, but hopefully soon we'll identify someone who we feel can make a difference."

He further said they are awaiting a medical update from the BCCI's Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru where Rana is undergoing rehab at the moment.

"Obviously Harshit is with the BCCI CoE... So once the Medical Team communicates to us, we'll let you know. But today (Friday) is our first practice game. We've got one more game on the March 23. So we try and make sure we evaluate whoever we are picking before we actually make that announcement. So it'll take

PLAYERS MISSING ACTION

HARSHIT RANA of Kolkata Knight Riders will miss the entire season after suffering an injury during India's T20 World Cup warm-up match against South Africa February 4 in Navi Mumbai. His absence weakens the team's pace options.

NATHAN ELLIS was signed by the Chennai Super Kings for ₹2 crore. However, the Australian pacer has been ruled out of the entire 2026 season due to a hamstring injury. Previously, he was part of the Punjab Kings (PBKS) franchise from 2021 to 2024.

SAM CURRAN of Rajasthan Royals will not take part this season due to a groin injury. He was traded by CSK to RR last year along with Ravindra Jadeja in exchange for India wicketkeeper-batter Sanju Samson.

JACK EDWARDS, signed by Sunrisers Hyderabad for ₹3 crore in the 2026 auction, has been ruled out with a foot injury and will miss his debut season.

PAT CUMMINS will not be available for the initial matches for Sunrisers Hyderabad as he continues recovery from an injury that also kept him out of the T20 World Cup. In his absence, Ishan Kishan will lead the side, with Abhishek Sharma as vice-captain.

JOSH HAZLEWOOD is recovering from a long-term injury and will miss the early phase for Royal Challengers Bengaluru despite being part of their title-winning squad last season.

LOCKIE FERGUSON will not be available for the start of the season for Punjab Kings. The fast bowler is spending time with his family following the birth of his child and is expected to join later.

MITCHELL STARC will miss the initial matches for Delhi Capitals as Cricket Australia manages his workload ahead of upcoming international commitments.

MATHEESHA PATHIRANA, picked by Kolkata Knight Riders for ₹18 crore, is also recovering from an injury. The team expects him to return during the tournament, but his availability remains uncertain.

a few more days, but most probably before we leave for Mumbai."

Sri Lanka pacer Matheesha Pathirana's injury has also disturbed KKR's plans ahead of the new season.

"Matheesha Pathirana, who has requested NOC to partici-

pate in IPL 2026, is yet to undergo the Physical Performance Test, as he is still undergoing rehabilitation to recover from injury sustained. He will undergo the tests upon completion of the recovery and rehabilitation programs," the Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) later said in a release.

'The Rocket' Ronnie's historic break-through

King of 147s makes snooker history with a highest-ever break of 153

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Yushan (China), March 20: Ronnie O'Sullivan keeps breaking records in snooker - now, at age 50, he's made the highest-ever break in the history of the professional game.

The seven-time world champion, famous for his moniker 'The Rocket', cleared the table for a break of 153 in the first frame of his 5-0 win over Ryan Day at the World Open in China Friday.

The previous biggest break in competition was 148, made by Jamie Burnett in qualifying for the UK Championship in 2004.

"It was a pretty cool moment, really happy to do it," O'Sullivan said in a video posted on X.

The classic "maximum" break in snooker is 147 - 15 reds, 15 blacks and all the colors - but a player can score more if he starts it with a free ball. That happens when a player is snookered on all the reds following a foul by the opponent, and can nominate another ball as a red before potting a color and then starting his break as normal.

It means it is technically possible to make a break of

155. O'Sullivan followed a free ball and a black by potting 15 reds, 13 blacks and two pinks to reach the colors, which he cleared up under huge pressure with history on the line. He smiled and laughed as he shook hands with Day, and appeared confused as he looked at the score-board.

"I was just thinking about trying to win the frame, you know," O'Sullivan said, "and then it got to a certain point and I did realize and I was like, It seems there's too many balls on the table so something's not quite right."

Already this season, O'Sullivan, who only plays sporadically on the circuit in the latter years of his career, had made two 147s in one match - in the semifinals of the Saudi

Arabia Masters. "I still feel a little rusty, though - I obviously haven't played enough matches and tournaments," he said in a tongue-in-cheek comment. "That's what everybody seems to be saying."

Long list of records

- MAJOR TITLES**
 - 7X World Champion:** Tied record with Stephen Hendry for most World Snooker Championship titles
 - Most Triple Crown titles (23):** Across World Championship, UK Championship, and Masters
 - Record 8X UK Champion:** At the UK Championship
 - 8X Masters Champion:** The youngest player to win the Masters in 1995 at age 19 years and 69 days
- ICONIC BREAKS**
 - Highest-ever break: 153**
 - Fastest 147 maximum break: 5 minutes 8 seconds (1997)**
 - Most 147 breaks: 17 official maximums**
 - Highest career century breaks: 1300+,** first player to cross the 1000 milestone

It was a pretty cool moment, really happy to do it
RONNIE O'SULLIVAN



INDIAN SUPER LEAGUE

OFC ride Rahul's brace to defeat Highlanders



Juggernauts register their first win of the campaign to move up to ninth in the standings with five points and two games in hand

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, March 20: Two goals from Rahul KP powered Odisha FC to a comprehensive 4-1 victory over NorthEast United FC in an Indian Super League match at the Indira Gandhi Athletic Stadium here Friday.

Odisha FC found the goals through Rahul KP (6', 65'), Subham Bhattacharya (24') and Bekey Oram (68' OG), while Macarton Nickson (10') was the lone scorer for NEUFC.

Rahul handed Odisha FC an early lead before Nickson drew NorthEast United FC level, but debutant Subham Bhattacharya restored the advantage prior to the break.

Highlanders right back Muthu Mayakkannan was sent off in the first half. Rahul then added his second goal in the second half, before an own goal by Oram.

The Juggernauts registered their first win of the campaign to move up to ninth in the standings with five points and two games in hand, while NorthEast United FC remain seventh with six points. Rahul was adjudged the Player of the Match for his brace.

Odisha made an early impact in the sixth minute following a defensive lapse from the hosts. Striker Rahim Ali's pressure on

NorthEast goalkeeper Gurmeet Singh worked as the ball fell kindly for the former, who sent it to Rahul to finish calmly.

The Highlanders responded immediately. In the 10th minute, Parthib Gogoi surged down the left flank and set up Nickson, who finished with a composed right-footed strike from inside the box to level the scores at 1-1.

Odisha regained the lead in the 24th minute through debutant Subham. From a corner delivered by Isak, Rahim flicked the ball into the danger area, where Subham reacted quickest to stab it into the bottom-right corner and make it 2-1.

NorthEast United's challenge became tougher in the 36th minute when right-back Muthu Mayakkannan was shown a red card for a foul on Rahul KP. The hosts struggled to create clear openings thereafter as Odisha carried a 2-1 lead into the break.

Odisha gradually grew into the game and capitalised on their numerical advantage. In the 65th minute, Rahul KP found himself one-on-one with the goalkeeper following a fast break and finished confidently to extend the lead to 3-1.

NorthEast midfielder Bekey tried to clear it but could only hit the roof of his own net, making it 4-1 in the 68th minute for the visitors.

The final whistle confirmed a commanding 4-1 victory for Odisha FC, as the Juggernauts secured their first win of the season while NorthEast United FC were left to reflect on a difficult outing at home.

NATIONAL PARA ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS

Odisha on a medal rush

State's para athletes secured a total of nine medals, including three gold, four silver and two bronze

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 20: Odisha para athletes continued to make their mark across various track and field events with impressive performances in the Day 2 of 24th National Para Athletics Championships 2026 at Kalinga Stadium here Friday.

In the Men's Long Jump T36 event, Jayprakash Barik delivered an outstanding performance, clinching the gold medal with a jump of 4.83m, bringing pride to the host state.

In the Men's 400m T11, Jadhunath Majhi showcased great determination and endurance to secure the silver medal with a timing of 57.70 seconds.

Continuing her consistent form, Jayanti Behera earned



a silver medal in the Women's 400m T47 event, clocking 1:04.35 and further strengthening Odisha's medal tally.

In the Men's Long Jump T13, Managat Hembrom secured a silver medal with an impressive jump of 6.33m. Meanwhile, Pipun Kumar Sahoo finished in 5th place with a jump of 5.71m, and Pankaj Bhue secured 8th place with 5.24m, reflecting the depth of talent in the Odisha contingent.

On Day 2, Odisha secured

a total of four medals, including a gold and three silver medals. Odisha had already made a strong start on Day 1, winning a total of five medals, including two gold, one silver, and two bronze.

With multiple events taking place, all para athletes showed the power of a human mind, giving out their best in each performance with grunts and cheers from spectators. From where life seems impossible is where they find hope.

Odisha teams script history with stellar show

Men's team secures bronze medal by defeating Delhi while women's team delivers a commendable performance finishing 4th

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 20: The 26th Youth National Volleyball Championship 2025-26 (Men & Women) concluded today at the Biju Patnaik Multipurpose Indoor Stadium, KIIT Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar.

The championship witnessed exceptional performances from teams across the country, but it was Odisha that emerged as one of the biggest highlights of the tournament with its best-ever performance in the

YOUTH NATIONAL VOLLEYBALL CHAMPIONSHIP



history of any National Volleyball Championship.

Both the Odisha men's and women's teams had already created history by entering the semifinals for the first time. Continuing their impressive run, the Odisha men's Team secured the bronze medal by defeating Delhi

in the 3rd/4th position match, marking a proud achievement for the state. The Odisha women's Team also delivered a commendable performance and finished among the top four teams in the country after a hard-fought campaign, eventually finishing in 4th position following their

match against Haryana.

In the women's final, Kerala delivered a dominant performance against Tamil Nadu and secured a convincing 3-0 victory with set scores of 25-16, 25-19, and 25-14 to clinch the championship title. The men's final witnessed a thrilling con-

Eves to play one-off Test, three ODIs in South Africa

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Johannesburg, March 20: The Indian women's team will play a one-off Test during its tour of South Africa later this year, which will also feature a three-match ODI series, Cricket South Africa (CSA) said Friday.

CSA said the Test will be held in Gqeberha from December 20 to 23, while the ODIs are scheduled from December 9 to 15 across Potchefstroom, Bloemfontein and Cape Town.

"The Proteas will face India in a three-match ICC Women's Championship (IWC) ODI series from 09-15 December, with the JB Marks Oval in Potchef-

stroom hosting the series opener before Mangaung Oval in Bloemfontein and the Newlands Cricket Ground stage the second and third matches," CSA said in a statement.

"The tour will also include a one-off Test match at St George's Park in Gqeberha from 20-23 December.

"It will be the fourth red-ball contest between the two nations and only the second women's Test match in the Friendly City since South Africa hosted England there in December 1960."

Australia will also tour South Africa for three T20Is, as many ODIs and a solitary Test from March 18 to April 11, 2027.



test between Punjab and SAI, where Punjab staged a remarkable comeback after losing the first two sets to win the match 3-2 with scores of 21-25, 21-25, 25-15, 25-22, and 15-13.

To recognise excellence and encourage players, prize money of Rs 30,000 for champions, Rs 20,000 for runners-up and Rs 15,000 for third position was announced. In addition, special cash prize of Rs 75,000 for the Odisha Men's Team and Rs 50,000 for the Odisha Women's Team were announced in appreciation of their historic and outstanding performance. Prof Samanta congratulated both teams for bringing pride to the state and extended his best wishes for their future endeavours.

The Closing Ceremony was held in the presence of distinguished dignitaries, officials, and sports enthusiasts.