



Manasi mantra

Actor Manasi Parekh opens up about the philosophy that has shaped her life and career

LEISURE | P2



Kim threatens South

Kim Jong Un vows to strengthen 'self-defensive nuclear deterrent' and treat South Korea as its most hostile state

INTERNATIONAL | P10



LPG imports hit

The war in Iran and the blockage of the strategic Strait of Hormuz are likely to halve this month's imports of liquefied petroleum gas by India

BUSINESS | P11



USL sells RCB

United Spirits Ltd announces sale of RCB in a ₹16,706cr all-cash deal to a consortium led by Aditya Birla Group

SPORTS | P12

Only Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs can claim SC status

Press Trust of India

New Delhi, March 24: In a significant ruling, the Supreme Court Tuesday held that a Scheduled Caste (SC) community person converting to a religion other than Hinduism, Sikhism or Buddhism loses the SC status from the moment of conversion regardless of birth.

A bench of Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and Manmohan, which upheld an order of the Andhra Pradesh HC, said that a person belonging to an SC community loses his Scheduled Caste status "immediately and completely" upon conversion to Christianity.

The bench said under Clause (1) of Article 342 of the Constitution, the President of India promulgated the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order of 1950, identifying the tribes and tribal communities recognised as 'Scheduled Tribes' for different states and UTs.

It said a person can claim benefits under the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 only if he/she continues to belong to that particular tribe in substance and if, due to conversion or long-term abandonment of tribal customs, his/her tribal identity is in doubt, that question becomes a factual matter to be determined at trial.

"No person who professes a religion other than Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste. This bar under Clause 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 is categorical and absolute. Conversion to any religion not specified in Clause 3 results in immediate and complete loss of Scheduled Caste status from the moment of conversion regardless of birth," it said. The top court said once a person belonging to a Scheduled Tribe converts to another religion, ultimately through the passage of time, the customs, rituals and other traits of that particular tribe may fall into eclipse.

"If so, in such circumstance, it is proved that the person has completely renounced himself from the customs, rituals and other traits of his tribe, and has assimilated into the converted religion following the practices and customs of that particular religion, a reasonable inference can be drawn that such a person shall not be considered a part of the tribe," it said.

It upheld the Andhra Pradesh HC order April 30, 2025 that said once an individual converts to Christianity and actively professes and practices the faith, he cannot be regarded as a member of the SC community.



DEFYING GRAVITY: An athlete soars through the air during the long jump event on the opening day of the inaugural National Indoor Championships at Kalinga Stadium, Bhubaneswar, Tuesday

Rupee slumps 23 paise

Mumbai: The rupee dropped 23 paise to close at 93.76 against the US dollar Tuesday as a strengthening greenback against major crosses and elevated global crude prices spooked investors. Foreign fund outflows amid uncertainties over the West Asia crisis further weighed on the local unit, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 93.66 against the greenback and remained volatile throughout the session. **P11**

Wanted Maoist Sukru surrenders

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar/Phulbani, March 24: With the Centre's March 31 deadline to end Naxalism in Odisha drawing closer, top Maoist leader Kasa Sodi alias Sukru, who was carrying a bounty of ₹55 lakh on his head, surrendered before Kandhamal police, along with four associates. Under sustained pressure from security forces and lured by the government's surrender and rehabilitation policy, Sukru decided to renounce violence and return to the mainstream. With this, the number of active Maoists in Odisha has now dropped to single digit.

Director General of Police (DGP) YB Khurania said, "Sukru, who was a state committee member of CPI (Maoist), surrendered with an AK-47 rifle. His associates also laid down



four guns while surrendering." A native of Malkangiri district, 49-year-old Sukru was considered one of the last remaining Maoist leaders active in the state, the DGP said, adding that he was leading a small group of around 13 cadres.

Security forces, comprising the Special Operations Group (SOG), CRPF, District Voluntary Force and BSF, had intensified anti-Naxal operations at the tri-junction of Kandhamal,

Rayagada and Kalahandi districts, where Sukru and his associates were hiding.

The security forces used modern technology like drones and satellite pictures to locate the Maoist group in the dense forests in the tri-junction areas, officials said. Police said Sukru was leading a group of around 13 cadres, of which five surrendered Tuesday. There is no active Odia in the CPI (Maoist) now, an official said.

Kandhamal SP Harish BC, who led the operation, said the police were recording Sukru's and his associates' statements in presence of ADG (anti-naxal operations) Sanjeeb Panda.

"With this, the number of active Maoists in Odisha is now in the single digit. I appeal to the remaining ultras to surrender and take advantage of the government's policy," he said.

No refund if rly ticket cancelled within 8 hrs

Press Trust of India

New Delhi, March 24: There will be no refund for cancellation of train tickets up to eight hours before departure, instead of the existing norm of four hours, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said Tuesday.

The new refund rule will take effect between April 1 and 15 this year. Other refund slabs have also been revised: a cancellation between 24 and eight hours will incur a 50 per cent deduction from the ticket cost. This is currently 12 to four hours.

Similarly, the Railways will deduct 25 per cent of the ticket cost for cancellation between 72 and 24 hours before departure.

A full refund - except a flat cancellation charge per passenger - will be given for cancellations made more than 72 hours before the train's departure.

Under the existing policy, cancellations made between 48 and 12 hours incur a 25 per cent deduction of the ticket cost, while a full refund will be given for cancellations made more than 48 hours in advance.

Iran toughens stance

REUTERS

Dubai, March 24: Iran's negotiating posture has hardened sharply since the war began, with the Revolutionary Guards exerting growing influence over decision-making, and it will demand significant concessions from the United States if mediation efforts lead to serious negotiations, three senior sources in Tehran said.

In any talks with the US, Iran would not only demand an end to the war but concessions that are likely red lines for US President Donald Trump - guarantees against future military action, compensation for wartime losses and formal control of the Strait of Hormuz, the sources said.

Iran would also refuse to negotiate any limitations to its ballistic missile programme, they said, an issue that had been a red line for Tehran during the talks that were taking place when the US and Israel launched their attack last month.

Trump said Monday that

TRUMP BLAMES HEGSETH FOR WAR

Washington: The US President said that Secretary of War Pete Hegseth was the "first one" to suggest attacking Iran when he discussed the "problem in the Middle East" with his close aides. Speaking at the Memphis Safe Task Force Roundtable in Tennessee, Monday, Trump said he called all his aides, including Hegseth and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Air Force Gen Dan Caine, to discuss the situation in Iran before making the decision. "Pete, I think you were the first one to speak up and you said let's do it because you can't let them have a nuclear weapon," he said. Trump, who is facing backlash in his country over the issue, praised Hegseth for his quick response on the issue.

Washington had already had "very, very strong talks" with Tehran more than three weeks into the war, but Iran has publicly denied this.

The three senior sources said Iran had only had preliminary discussions with Pakistan, Turkey and Egypt over whether the groundwork existed for talks with the US over ending the war. **P10**

Gulf to glass: War puts India's beer supply on edge

Gas is essential to keeping furnaces and production lines running, and shortages have forced several glass bottle makers to halt operations

REUTERS

New Delhi, March 24: Global brewers operating in India are warning of price escalations and supply disruptions as a shortage of gas due to the Iran war drives up the cost of glass bottles and shipping delays hit imports of aluminium needed by can makers.

India is especially vulnerable to fuel availability as the world's fourth-largest importer of natural gas, relying heavily on the Middle East for shipments, sourcing about 40% of its supply from Qatar.

Iranian attacks have partially disrupted Qatar's export capacity, tightening gas availability for Indian manufacturers.

The Brewers Association of India, representing global brewers Heineken told Reuters that glass bottle prices have surged around 20%, paper carton rates have doubled as well as other packaging materials such as labels and tape.

Gas is essential to keeping furnaces and production lines running, and shortages have forced several glass bottle makers to partially or fully halt operations. Aluminium can suppliers have also warned of possible reductions just as India heads into its peak summer season, when beer sales typically rise.

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"We are asking for price increases in the range of 12-15%," association director general Vinod Giri said, adding, "We have advised our member companies to individually approach states."

The rising cost of production is making some operations unsustainable, he added.

Heineken's India unit Unit-

ed Breweries Anheuser-Busch InBev and Carlsberg did not respond to Reuters queries.

The market was worth \$7.8 billion in 2024, and is expected to double by 2030, Grand View Research says. Heineken alone accounts for roughly half the market, while AB InBev and Carlsberg each account for 19%, the association said.

While the three companies dominate India's beer sector, many smaller players such as Bira and Simba also operate in the market. Beer and liquor sales in India have grown steadily alongside rising urbanisation and a young, increasingly affluent population.

The Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies, which represents many domestic companies, said it has written to several states seeking price adjustments to offset rising freight,

logistics and input costs. India's alcohol sector is tightly regulated, and raising retail prices typically requires approval. Around two-thirds of India's 28 states must authorise changes.

"Brewers may find it difficult to maintain supplies in states that do not allow price increases," the association said.

Some glass bottle vendors are warning their clients of reduced supplies and have increased their prices.

Nitin Agarwal, CEO of Fine Art Glass Works in Firozabad, a glass-making hub in northern Uttar Pradesh, said he has cut production by 40% at his glass bottle making factory due to gas shortages. His customers include many liquor companies as well as producers of juice and ketchup bottles. "We've increased prices by 17-18%," Agarwal said.

Passive euthanasia: Harish Rana dies

Press Trust of India

New Delhi, March 24: Harish Rana, the first person in India to be allowed passive euthanasia, passed away Tuesday at AIIMS-Delhi after more than 13 years in coma, sources said.

The 31-year-old, who has been in a coma since 2013, was shifted from his Ghaziabad home to the palliative care unit at Dr BR Ambedkar Institute Rotary Cancer Hospital at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences March 14.

Three days before that, the Supreme Court March 11 allowed passive euthanasia for Harish, who was a B.Tech student at the Panjab University who fell from a fourth-floor balcony in 2013 and suffered severe head injuries. He had been in a coma with artificial nutrition support and occasional oxygen support.



leisure

FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
Business affairs and love will flourish today. You can expect some monetary benefits and even some loans to be sanctioned. In love, you anticipate a romantic evening, where you will confide your deepest feelings to your beloved. Ganesh says you couldn't possibly ask for more.

TAURUS
This is a productive day to deal in money matters, foresees Ganesh. You will probably enjoy both money and muscle power in the afternoon. A necklace or pendant is awaiting your sweetheart, so surprise her. Caution: There is a risk of your money being swindled.

GEMINI
It is possible that the start of the day may not see you in the best of moods and some mental distress is the likely reason behind it. You need to consult an expert to find out the best way out of your current predicament. You will feel the need to do things that appeal to you in the evening, in a bid to elevate your mood, says Ganesh.

CANCER
A perfect day in store for you, says Ganesh! You may begin the day on a positive note, and may decide to express your gratitude towards the God by visiting a temple. Religious feelings may also keep you preoccupied. Stars will take a good care of your health today, and you may also get a plenty of free time. Primp yourself to perfection for a romantic evening after lazing around to your heart's content in the afternoon.

LEO
You will face some problems today and will be tense on account of them. You may experience instability and conflict in your personal relationships. You should not spend time chasing useless schemes and concentrate on fruitful and progressive activities, says Ganesh.

VIRGO
All big businessmen may expect a very beneficial and progressive day. The loans for which you have applied may be sanctioned by the financial institutions today. However, Ganesh advises you not to neglect your beloved and near and dear ones, for without them there is little cause for interest in life.

LIBRA
Ganesh says you will be busy in work related to your business field. People in the field of research will gain success today. In legal matters that are pending, the judgment will be in your favor today.

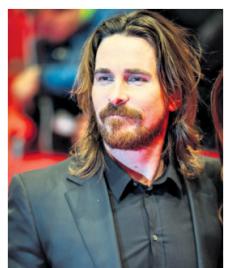
SCORPIO
Fully charged up, your enthusiasm and sense of humour is quite contagious today. People who belong to creative fields should let their creative juices flow freely. In short, you are performance driven today. All's well that ends well, and this day is sure to end on a positive note, says Ganesh.

SAGITTARIUS
Caught in a whirlpool of thoughts, you are likely to give a new look to your lovely abode. You plan to decorate it with rare artefacts and object de art. Evening will be high on romance as you treat your sweetheart and taste-buds with sumptuous dinner.

CAPRICORN
Mounting work load may give you wrinkles on the forehead, but you see light at the end of the tunnel. With undying spirit you keep on going irrespective of the magnitude of the problems. Don't get demotivated though, says Ganesh, as you are blessed with loving and supportive family members. After a long day at work, coming home will be like a breather as your family will cheer you up.

AQUARIUS
Your intelligence and positive attitude will get you through every situation today. You will spend afternoon with friends and have a gala time with them. Why should family be left alone? Plan the evening with family members, and enjoy their presence in your life, suggests Ganesh.

PISCES
Your hidden hopes will be shown today or you will share them with someone. You will suddenly come across people who had gone away from your life some time back. Today is the day to dream and to foster new hopes and dreams. With Ganesh's blessings your planetary positions are favourable.



BALE'S INSPIRATION BEHIND FRANKENSTEIN IN THE BRIDE

Hollywood star Christian Bale has shared the inspiration behind his portrayal of Frankenstein in *The Bride*. The actor has shared that it was shaped by punk icon Sid Vicious and musician Richey Edwards, reports *Female First UK*

KIRSTEN DUNST JOINS CAST OF THE HOUSEMAID'S SECRET

Hollywood actress Kirsten Dunst has joined the cast of *The Housemaid's Secret*. The 43-year-old actor will join Sydney Sweeney, 28, in the sequel to *The Housemaid*. The film sees Millie Calloway (played by Sydney Sweeney) lying on her resume to become a live-in nanny for wealthy couple.



MUMBAI: National Award-winning actress Manasi Parekh has opened up about the guiding philosophy that has shaped both her personal journey and professional path, saying she has always believed in carving her own space rather than following a conventional route.

Manasi's mantra for life, career

The actress took to Instagram, where she shared a transition reel of herself. In the clip, the actress is initially seen dancing in front of the camera at home, before the video swiftly transitions to her holding an award at an event.

Sharing her mantra at the captions section, the actress said, "Hum banaye apni nayi jagah" has always resonated deeply with her, both in life and

in her career. Manasi revealed that she consciously chose to step away from the expected trajectory, even when it meant embracing uncertainty. "I've never followed the expected path. Creating my own, even when it felt uncertain, has always been worth it."

According to her, building her own path has consistently proven to be a rewarding decision.

She added: "From a grounded middle-class upbringing with no industry connections to now living my dreams and helping create opportunities for others — it's deeply fulfilling."

Mani made her acting debut in the serial *Kitni Mast Hai Zindagi* in 2004, but gained popularity through *India Calling* in 2005.



KANTARA MIMICRY ROW



COURT ASKS RANVEER TO APOLOGISE

MUMBAI: The Karnataka High Court reviewed a petition filed by Ranveer Singh seeking to dismiss a private complaint and FIR registered over his alleged derogatory comments about a divine character in Rishab Shetty's *Kantara: Chapter 1*.

During the hearing, a single-judge bench of Justice M. Nagaprasanna questioned the delay in filing objections.

They further noted that Ranveer's comments were "not right", emphasizing the responsibility of public figures in their statements.

It was argued that Ranveer's previous apology on social media was insincere. It was demanded that he should visit Chamundi Hill along with his counsel to apologise in person.

The bench agreed to this, further suggesting that if Ranveer is asked to appear before the court for an apology, he should comply.

The court has adjourned the matter to April 10 for further hearing.

Refreshing your memory, Ranveer faced some massive backlash after a video of his from the event went viral on social media, where he was heard calling Chamundi daiva a "Female ghost".

Expressing his appreciation for the movie, Ranveer was heard saying, "I watched *Kantara Chapter 1* in theatres, and Rishab, it was an outstanding performance, especially when the female ghost (Chamundi daiva) enters your body that shot was amazing."

However, he did not stop there; after this, he went on to imitate the scene in which Chamundi daiva possesses Rishabh.

This sparked backlash from the netizens who pointed out that Chamundi is a Goddess and not a Ghost.

MUMBAI: Actress Richa Chadha has raised a question on the need for glass buildings in a tropical country like India.

Richa concerned about glass buildings

The *Fukrey* actress pointed out that these glass buildings end up creating the greenhouse effect, leading to more heat.

Richa further shared that thanks to the heat, it is almost impossible to sit in a glass building without an AC, further contributing to the heat.

The *Masaan* actress took to the *Stories*

section of her official Instagram handle and shared a video of a man cleaning a glass building from the outside by hanging from a rope.

The text on the post read, "In hot countries like India, is it really wise to construct with glass? It creates the greenhouse effect, so increases the heat...it needs SO MUCH power for cooling, (can't survive without an AC basically)...and needs so much cleaning and such stunts for cleaning!"

Aside from raising her voice for such sociological matters, Richa's feed is also full of some precious moments with her actor husband, Ali Fazal.

Ali also leaves no chance to show his admiration for his lady-love.



ALAYA busts beauty myths

MUMBAI: Fitness-focused Bollywood star Alaya F has always been outspoken, and she didn't hold back when online speculation heated up. After turning heads at an event, videos of her appearance quickly spread, prompting rumors of a nose job and lip fillers. Alaya shut them down swiftly and straightforwardly through an Instagram story, staying cool and transparent.

Holding the camera near her face, Alaya dismissed the buzz with a laugh, explaining, "A lot of you guys think

that I've gotten some surgery done I'm getting like nose job and lip filler comments. I have not done anything, I promise.

If I had, I would've told you. See, it's the same nose, same lips. It's just the different lighting or it's good habits, hydration, lymphatic and face massages; I don't know," she said, giggling.

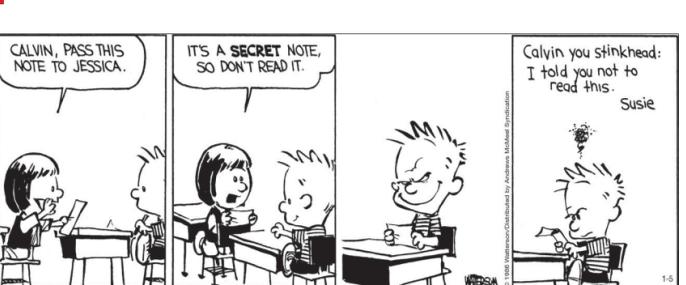
She reiterated firmly: "Surgery toh nahi kiya hai maine; if I had done it, I would've happily told you. I'm not the type to hide about all of this or lie about all of this at all."



PEANUTS



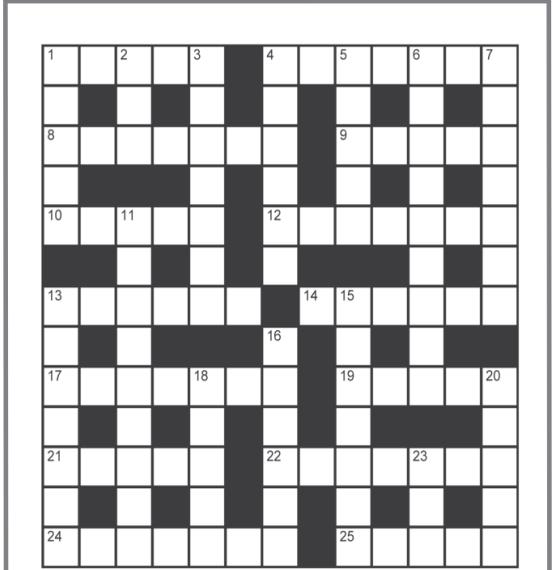
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



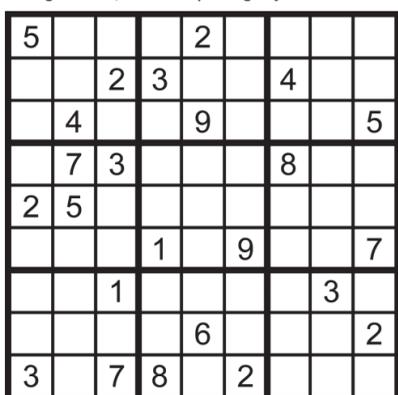
CROSSWORD



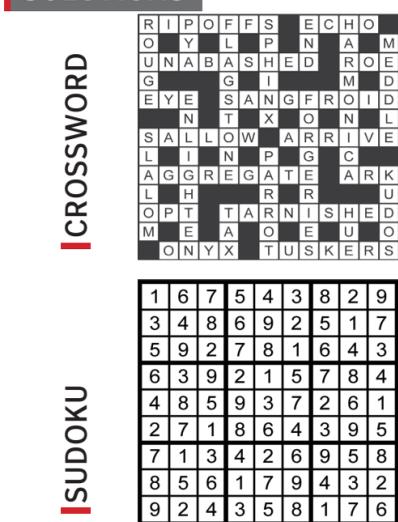
- Across
- 1 Ancient Mexican
 - 4 Heebie-jeebies
 - 8 Former German coin
 - 9 African river
 - 10 Poetic Muse
 - 12 Really old
 - 13 Spanish rogue
 - 14 Devil rays
 - 17 Oath
 - 19 Unpunctual
 - 21 Listing
 - 22 To the point
 - 24 Sparrow hawk
 - 25 Appealed
 - 6 Kitchen gizmo (3-6)
 - 7 Pixies
 - 11 Pizza additions
 - 13 Exhortation, of sorts (3,4)
 - 15 Lobster part
 - 16 Eraser holder
 - 18 Bury
 - 20 Traffic sign
 - 23 Squid's squirt
- Down
- 1 Sufficient
 - 2 Make fast
 - 3 Honesty
 - 4 Puzzle type
 - 5 Pick-me-up

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



AMID CONFLICT: Palestinians inspect the wreckage of an Iranian missile that landed in the West Bank village of Kifl Haris, Tuesday

Over 14K-ha forest land diverted for mining: Min

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 24: A total of 14,433.621 hectares of forest land has been diverted for 176 mining projects in Odisha over the past 10 years, Forest, Environment and Climate Change Minister Ganesh Ram Singkhuntia told the Assembly Tuesday.

During this period, 11,214.977 hectares have been transferred and mutated in favour of the Forest department for compensatory afforestation (CA). Of this, CA plantations have been raised over 4,228.400 hectares, the minister said in a written reply to a question by Barabati-Cuttack MLA Sofia Firdous.

The minister added that the highest diversion — 8,676 hectares — occurred in the Rourkela circle, while 3,794

325 wild animals poached: Singkhuntia

Forest, Environment and Climate Change Minister Ganesh Ram Singkhuntia Tuesday informed the Assembly that 325 wild animals, including a tiger, 11 leopards, and 14 elephants, were killed by poachers over the past three years.

Replying to a written question by BJD MLA Ramesh Chandra Behera, he said 136 animals were poached in 2023-24, 79 in 2024-25, and 110 cases have been reported so far in 2025-26. The animals killed also included 160 wild boars, 23 sambar, 31 deer, one bear, one king cobra, two pangolins, and 11 porcupines, he said.

During this period, Forest officials registered 89,805 cases and seized 1,452 vehicles in connection with the smuggling of timber and other forest produce. He added that several measures — including anti-poaching camps, foot patrolling, and the use of technology and artificial intelligence for early warning of forest fires — have been undertaken.

hectares were diverted in the Angul circle. Among other circles, 492 hectares in Koraput, 470 hectares in Baripada, and 0.073 hectares in Sambalpur were diverted for mining projects during the past decade.

No forest land has been diverted in the Bhubaneswar, Bhawanipatna, and Berhampur circles for mining activities, the minister added.

STATE INKS PACT FOR JJM 2.0

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 24: The state government inked a pact with the Ministry of Jal Shakti Tuesday for the implementation of Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) 2.0.

The agreement was signed in New Delhi in the presence of Union Jal Shakti Minister CR Patil and Minister of State for Jal Shakti

V Somanna. Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Panchayati Raj and Drinking Water Minister Rabi Narayan Naik attended the event virtually from Lok Seva Bhavan here.

Majhi said that 77.3 per cent of families in the country have received tap water

connections so far, and the extension of the mission till 2028 is a significant step towards achieving the goal of 'Har Ghar Jal'.

He added that Odisha has prepared a roadmap for the implementation of JJM 2.0. The CM said that the IDs of around 5,000 rural piped water schemes have been

prepared through the 'Sujalam Bharat' platform, and the financial coordination of all these schemes has been completed. Majhi said that JJM has brought a major change in the lives of women, as they no longer have to travel long distances to fetch water. He added that the 'Jal Shakti Abhiyan' under the mission has evolved into a mass movement in Odisha.



India 6th most polluted country: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 24: India is the sixth most-polluted country when it comes to levels of fine particulate matter, a major air pollutant, while UP's Loni is the most polluted city across the globe and Delhi is at the fourth spot, according to the World Air Quality Report, 2025.

The eighth edition of the report published by IQAir, a Swiss air quality technology company, analysed data from monitoring stations across 9,446 cities in 143 countries, regions and territories. According to the report, Pakistan (67.3 µg/m³) is the most polluted country, followed by Bangladesh (66.1 µg/m³), Tajikistan (57.3 µg/m³), Chad (53.6 µg/m³), Democratic Republic of the Congo (50.2 µg/m³) and India (48.9 µg/m³).

Among the 10 most polluted cities across the globe, five are from India — Loni, Byrnihat, Delhi, Ghaziabad and Ula. "The world's 25 most polluted cities were all located in India, Pakistan and China, with India home

to three of the four most polluted. Loni, India, was the most polluted city, recording an annual average PM2.5 concentration of 112.5 µg/m³ - a nearly 23 per cent increase from 2024 and more than 22 times the WHO guideline," the report said.

Comparing this year's report to the previous year, 54 countries experienced a rise in the annual average of PM2.5, 75 saw a drop, two remained

UP's Loni world's most polluted city

unchanged and 12 were newly represented in this year's dataset.

"Only 14 per cent of global cities met the World Health Organization (WHO) annual PM2.5 guideline of 5 µg/m³, down from 17 per cent the previous year. Only thirteen countries/territories met the WHO annual average PM2.5 guideline - French Polynesia, Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands, Barbados, New Caledonia, Iceland, Bermu-

da, Reunion, Andorra, Australia, Grenada, Panama, Estonia," the report said. Wildfires, intensified by climate change, played a major role in degrading global air quality in 2025. Record biomass emissions from Europe and Canada contributed to approximately 1,380 megatons of carbon.

Canada was the most polluted country in Northern America for just the second time in the report's eight-year history, as its second-worst wildfire season on record affected air quality across Canada, the US and parts of Europe.

"In the US, annual average PM2.5 levels increased to 7.3 µg/m³. Smoke from wildfires in both Canada and the US raised averages across parts of the Great Lakes states in the summer and in the Pacific Northwest in the fall. El Paso was the most polluted major city in the US. Historic dust storms triggered a 46 per cent increase in PM2.5 levels to 11.4 µg/m³ as the city recorded the highest number of major pre-summer dust storms since the 1930s," the report said.

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No power tariff hike

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 24: In a consumer-friendly move, the Odisha Electricity Regulatory Commission (OERC) Tuesday announced that electricity tariffs in Odisha will remain unchanged for the financial year 2026-27.

According to OERC's latest tariff order, the Retail Supply Tariff (RST) will remain the same across all consumer categories, offering continued relief to both households and industries. This marks the fifth straight year of stable power rates in the state.

LT domestic consumers will receive a 4 per cent rebate if they pay their full electricity bills online before the due date. Prepaid consumers will also be eligible for a 4 per cent rebate on recharge amounts. Additionally, those opting for e-bills will get ₹10 discount per bill, the OERC said.

In a step towards smarter energy management, OERC has introduced a Time of Day (ToD) tariff system, set to roll out from July 2026 for consumers with smart meters. Under this system, electricity will be cheaper during solar hours (8 am to 4 pm) and more expensive during peak hours (6 pm to midnight), encouraging balanced power usage.

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भारतीय जीवन बीमा निगम

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₹208cr interest aid to over 2.67L SHGs

DY CM PRAVATI PARIDA DISBURSES ADDITIONAL ₹64.88 CRORE TO GPLFs, SHGs & CLFs UNDER MULTIPLE SUPPORT SCHEMES



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 24: The state government Tuesday disbursed interest subvention of ₹208.35 crore against loans to more than 2.67 lakh women self-help groups (SHGs).

Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida disbursed the money to the women SHGs here at a special event.

She also distributed financial assistance of ₹6.43 crore as Revolving Fund to 3,510 SHGs, ₹57.05 crore as Community Investment Fund to 180 Gram Panchayat Level Federations (GPLFs), and ₹1.40 crore to 101 Cluster Level Federations (CLFs) under the Vulnerability Reduction Fund.

Addressing the gathering,

PARIDA SAYS WOMEN NOW LEAD ODISHA'S DEVELOPMENT, DRIVING SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

DEPUTY CM SAYS ECONOMICALLY STRONGER SHGS ARE BUILDING FOUNDATION FOR A DEVELOPED ODISHA

SHE URGES WOMEN TO USE FUNDS WISELY, BOOST FINANCIAL LITERACY AND STAY ALERT TO CYBER FRAUDS

Parida said that women are now at the forefront of the state's development journey.

"While earlier efforts focused on how to uplift women, today they have emerged as key drivers of social and economic transformation in Odisha," she said. As the women SHG members

grow economically stronger and self-reliant, they are laying a solid foundation for a developed Odisha, said Parida, who is in charge of Mission Shakti department.

She further urged women to effectively utilise financial resources provided under various government schemes, reinvest their earnings wisely, enhance financial literacy, and remain vigilant against rising cyber frauds.

The deputy chief minister also interacted virtually with SHG members and officials from districts such as Koraput, Balasore, Kalahandi, Ganjam, and Keonjhar.

Parida reviewed the grassroots implementation of schemes and assessed whether the benefits of interest subvention have successfully reached the SHGs.

She also engaged with Bank Mitras, Krushi Mitras, Pashu Mitras, and other grassroots-level functionaries to evaluate the effectiveness of programme delivery.

The state government has reimbursed a total of ₹724.39 crore as interest subvention to 3.80 lakh SHGs during the financial year 2025-26, officials said.

Secretariat officials get POSH training

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 24: With an aim to strengthen awareness and promote a safe, respectful, and inclusive work environment, Women and Child Development (WCD) department organised a workshop on Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (POSH Act) for officials of the state Secretariat here Tuesday.

The session was conducted by Sneha Sharma and Mansi Padhi, who delivered comprehensive presentations on the provisions, implementation, and significance of the act. They emphasised the importance of fostering a workplace culture grounded in dignity, equality, and mutual respect.

The programme was inaugurated by the department's Commissioner-cum-Secretary Mrinalini Darswal, who highlighted the growing relevance of the act within the administrative framework. She noted that ensuring a safe workplace is not only a legal obligation but also a moral imperative, particularly in a progressive state like Odisha.

Majhi's instruction for peaceful Ram Navami



PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 24: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Tuesday issued strict instructions to the police to ensure that Ram Navami is celebrated smoothly across the state March 27.

Majhi, who also holds the Home portfolio, said that the police must make foolproof arrangements so that the festival is observed peacefully.

The CM chaired a high-level meeting attended by Chief Secretary Anu Garg, Director General of Police YB Khurania, Bhubaneswar-Cuttack Police Commissioner SD Singh and other officers.

The CM's instruction is significant in the backdrop of Odisha witnessing at least 54 communal clashes including one in October 2025 in Cuttack, during the last 24 months.

Replying to a question in the Assembly earlier this month, Majhi mentioned that the highest number of cases of communal riots, 24, was reported in Balasore district, followed by 16 in Khurda district, which includes the state capital Bhubaneswar.

"Ram Navami, the birth anniversary of Lord Ram, is celebrated with immense devotion and reverence across the country. It is the responsibility of the police administration to ensure devotees and faithful in Odisha can observe this spiritual festival without any hindrance, in a completely peaceful manner," he said in a statement.

₹6 crore marijuana seized at City airport

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 24: The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) and Customs officials Tuesday seized 5.5 kg of high value marijuana, valued at ₹6 crore, from two persons at Biju Patnaik International Airport (BPIA).

According to sources, the accused—whose identities are yet to be ascertained—are residents of Tamil Nadu and had arrived from Bangkok on flight 6E-1066.

Customs officials received specific input about hydroponic ganja being smuggled into the City. Acting on the intelligence, they heightened surveillance and detained two passengers on suspicion at the airport.

During a thorough search, officials recovered 5.5 kg of hydroponic ganja concealed inside their bags. The officials detained the duo for further investigation to ascertain details of the supply chain involved in the racket.

Notably, January 3, 8 kg of high-value marijuana worth ₹7.5 crore was seized from BPIA, with two persons detained after arriving from Bangkok.

Officials said efforts are underway to identify the intended recipient of the consignment and unravel the syndicate behind the racket, with further investigation ongoing.

H&UD Min seeks strict SOP compliance

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 24: A high-level meeting on heatwave preparedness was held Tuesday at the Kharavela Bhawan conference hall here, chaired by Housing & Urban Development (H&UD) Minister Krushna Chandra Mahapatra. The review assessed departmental readiness and stressed strict adherence to SOPs ahead of the summer heatwave.

Director of Municipal Administration Arindam Dakua presented a comprehensive overview of heatwave SOPs, outlining key action points and preparedness measures for urban local bodies (ULBs).

Addressing senior officials virtually, Minister Mahapatra emphasised the need for proactive and coordinated action as temperatures rise, stressing urban resilience and uninterrupted delivery of essential civic services.

The minister directed all



departmental heads and ULBs to strictly adhere to the prescribed SOPs, underscoring that guidelines must be followed in both letter and spirit.

Ensuring continuous and equitable water supply was flagged as a key priority, with the minister directing WATCO and the Engineer-in-Chief (Public Health) to maintain zero disruption, especially during peak

heat hours.

Municipal Commissioners and Executive Officers of municipalities and NACs were directed to implement localised heat mitigation measures, including setting up public drinking water points, creating shaded rest areas and providing cooling arrangements in high-footfall areas.

To strengthen district-level

coordination, Project Directors of District Urban Development Agencies (DUDAs) were tasked with closely monitoring field implementation and ensuring prompt response to heat-related emergencies. All ULBs were further instructed to make 24x7 control rooms fully operational, with dedicated helpline numbers widely publicised to ensure easy public access.

Reinforcing a people-centric approach, Minister Mahapatra issued a firm directive: "No one should die of sunstroke. All officials must remain alert, vigilant and responsive at all levels." He stressed timely intervention, community awareness and field-level vigilance to prevent any loss of life.

H&UD department Additional Chief Secretary Usha Padhee emphasised strict adherence to notified SOPs, calling for continuous monitoring and accountability at all administrative levels to ensure effective implementation.

Assembly deadlock over Mahaling exit

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 24: The State Assembly has been witnessing continuous disruptions since March 17, with the Opposition BJD and Congress persisting in their demand for the resignation of Health Minister Mukesh Mahaling following the March 16 fire at SCB Medical College and Hospital that claimed 12 lives. Efforts to resolve the impasse have so far remained unsuccessful.

Speaker Surama Padhy convened three all-party meetings, but no consensus emerged as the Opposition stood firm on its demand for the minister's resignation.

BJD and Congress members, waving placards and raising slogans in the well of the House, have repeatedly stalled proceedings—disrupting Question Hour, Zero Hour and adjournment motions, and forcing adjournments till 4 pm for the past seven days.

Tuesday, similar scenes continued. As the House met at 10:30 am, Opposition members rushed to the well, shouting slogans and demanding the min-

SCB FIRE TRAGEDY



ister's resignation. Despite the Speaker's appeals, protests persisted, leading to adjournment at 10:46 am till 11:30 am.

When the House reconvened, the deadlock continued, with agitated members again storming the podium and raising anti-government slogans.

Amid the chaos, some BJP members accused the Opposition of deliberately stalling the Assembly to avoid debate. They also raised issues related to the Biju Naveen Inspiration Trust, targeting Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik, who was present in the House.

BJP members alleged that the BJD was intentionally disrupting proceedings despite the government's willingness to discuss the matter.

The situation soon turned chaotic, with some Opposition members attempting to approach the Speaker's podium, only to be restrained by security personnel.

Deputy Chief Minister KV Singh Deo appealed to the protesting members to participate in discussions and place their views on record instead of disrupting proceedings and wasting valuable legislative time.

As the deadlock continued, the Speaker called another all-party meeting in an effort to restore normalcy and adjourned the House at 12:20pm until 4pm.

Meanwhile, the Biju Janata Dal filed an FIR Tuesday at Mangalabag police station in Cuttack against Minister Mahaling and former SCB Medical College Superintendent Gautam Satapathy.

The complaint alleges gross criminal negligence in connection with the fire incident, which resulted in the deaths of 12 patients, injuries to several others, and damage to public property. The party has demanded immediate arrest of those responsible.

CM calls for public role to eradicate TB

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 24: On the occasion of World Tuberculosis Day at the state level, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Tuesday said government initiatives alone are insufficient to eradicate TB, stressing the need for greater public participation to achieve a TB-free Odisha and India.

He made the remarks while chairing an event at Lok Seva Bhawan to launch a 100-day campaign under TB-Free India Campaign 2.0. Union Health Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda inaugurated the nationwide campaign.

Launching the state initiative, the CM distributed a food basket to a beneficiary, symbolising the start of intensified efforts to eliminate tuberculosis.

He urged public representatives, self-help groups, civil society organisations, and educational institutions to spread awareness and eliminate misconceptions about the disease.

Reiterating his government's commitment to healthcare, Majhi said the sector remains a top priority, with a budget allocation of ₹23,182 crore for 2026-27.

CREDAI ODISHA SEEKS LAND CONVERSION REFORM

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 24: Leading real estate developers in Odisha, under the aegis of CREDAI Odisha, have urged the state government to initiate immediate reforms in the existing land conversion framework, citing that the decades-old system is causing project delays, escalating costs and slowing urban development.

President of CREDAI Odisha and CREDAI National Vice President Swadesh Kumar Routray noted that while progressive states like Maharashtra and Karnataka have adopted simplified, automated land conversion processes, Odisha continues to follow a complex, multi-layered permission-based system.

"In states like Maharashtra, land conversion is treated as

an automatic process during building plan approvals, eliminating the need for separate permissions. However, in Odisha, developers still have to navigate multiple authorities, lengthy scrutiny procedures and inconsistent interpretations," Routray said.

He further said that the current system remains heavily dependent on multiple approvals and verification processes,

unlike the modern self-certification models adopted elsewhere, leading to project delays, increased uncertainty in land records and regulatory compliance challenges.

"Streamlining the land conversion process will significantly boost investor confidence, shorten project timelines and support sustainable urban development in Odisha," Routray added.

'Odisha, U'khand share common spiritual and tourism potential'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 24: Odisha and Uttarakhand share deep-rooted spiritual traditions and tourism opportunities. Sri Mandir in Odisha and Kedarnath temple in Uttarakhand are significant pillars of Indian faith, symbolising the country's enduring unity, said Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati during interaction with a 13-member media delegation from Uttarakhand at Lok Bhavan here Tuesday.

The visit is a part of a press tour, organised by the Press Information Bureau (PIB), Dehradun, under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. PIB Dehradun assistant director Sanjeev Kumar Sundriyal led the delegation.

During the interaction, visiting journalists outlined Uttarakhand's unique geographical and cultural identity, popularly known as 'Devbhoomi', recognised for its pilgrimage centres, tourism and natural beauty.

Highlighting Odisha's development trajectory, Kambhampati said the state is steadily emerging as a prosperous region with notable progress in economic growth, infrastructure, and social sectors. Referring to areas earlier

affected by left wing extremism, he said coordinated efforts by the Centre and the state have largely brought the situation under control, enabling development in previously isolated tribal regions, particularly in education, healthcare, and employment.

Describing Odisha as a mineral-rich state, the Governor said investments in aluminium and other core industries have accelerated economic growth. He also pointed to the expansion of road networks, railway corridors, and ports, supported by enhanced Central allocations. Investments in semiconductor and IT sectors, he added, are positioning Odisha as an emerging IT and education hub.

Recalling his association with Uttarakhand, Kambhampati mentioned his visit to the state in 2012-13, where he observed its development model. He referred to the industrial package introduced under former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, noting its transformative impact on regions such as Rudrapur through employment generation. The Governor also highlighted the shared spiritual heritage and growing development potential between the two states.

Odisha MPs seek RECA land solution in Kharagpur



PNN & AGENCIES

New Delhi/Bhubaneswar, March 24: Odisha MPs Tuesday urged Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw to intervene in a land dispute involving the Railway Employees Cultural Association (RECA) in Kharagpur, West Bengal (WB).

A delegation of MPs led by Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan met Vaishnaw in New Delhi and submitted a memorandum, seeking resolution of the long-pending allocation issue of 5,915 square metre of railway land in New Settlement area of Kharagpur, an official release said.

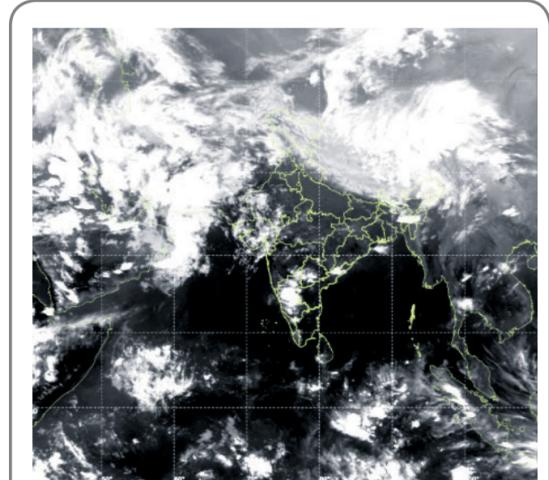
The MPs said the matter has remained unresolved for over three decades, recalling that Odisha MPs had written to the

then prime minister March 8, 1999, while former Union minister Debendra Pradhan had also taken up the issue with then minister of state for railways Ram Naik March 15, 1999.

The legislators said the association has been playing a key role in promoting cultural unity, social welfare and Odia culture among railway employees in Kharagpur through activities centred around the Shri Jagannath Temple.

Citing an internal railway report, Pradhan said the association has been using the land for a long time and that schools, temples and other public infrastructure have been built on it. He said the divisional railway manager of South Eastern Railway and other officials have already recommended regularisation of the land.

MARKET WATCH					
CURRENCY		BOURSES		COMMODITIES	
INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR	93.74 ▲ 0.18	SENSEX	74068.45 ▲ 1372.06	GOLD	₹139,648 ▲ ₹388
EURO	109.36 ▲ 0.96	NIFTY	22912.40 ▲ 399.75	SILVER	₹226,154 ▲ ₹987



WEATHER			
	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	35.6°	34.4°	Light to Moderate rain or thunderstorm
Min Temp	23.4°	22.2°	
Humidity	75%	81%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	

Clash erupts as bulldozers raze homes in Bargarh



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bargarh, March 24: Tension flared up in Bargarh town Tuesday as police and residents clashed during an ongoing anti-encroachment drive, with bulldozers demolishing houses in a low-income settlement. Tuesday, officials moved to clear encroachments in Canalpada areas under ward-14 and ward-15 of the Bargarh Municipality. As bulldozers arrived with a heavy police

which are scheduled in the coming days.

The drive has drawn criticism, with locals questioning why authorities are targeting poor settlements while allegedly going soft on influential encroachers in other parts of the town.

The eviction campaign has been carried out in phases across different localities in the town. However, daily wage earners and economically weaker residents have been the worst affected, with many losing both shelter and livelihood.

According to residents, the demolition has left families struggling to survive after losing their homes. Many said they had repeatedly appealed to local authorities and their local legislator for rehabilitation and more time before eviction. Though assurances were reportedly given, no resettlement arrangements were made.

presence, residents staged a protest, sitting on the road to block the operation.

Police forcibly removed the protesters, following which demolition began.

The affected residents said they are devastated, with elderly family members left without shelter and children's education disrupted, as many attend nearby schools. The evictees are also concerned over managing upcoming social obligations, including weddings

Ganjam police conduct mock coastal security drill

POST NEWS NETWORK

Chhatrapur, March 24: Ganjam police personnel conducted a mock drill launched under Operation Sagar Kavach, along the Ganjam and parts of Chilika lake coastlines Tuesday. Coastal areas under Arjyapalli, Chhatrapur, Ganjam, Chamakhandi, Rambha were covered during this military exercise.

Police personnel of the Marine Police Station, Indian Coast Guard officials, fire personnel, fisheries and health department officials participated in the drill. The officials informed that security checking has been beefed up along the 40km stretch under Marine police limits.

Markedly, the terrorists approached Mumbai through sea route from Pakistan to carry out the deadly 26/11 attacks back in 2008. Odisha, being one of the vulnerable areas having a long coastline falls under extremely high risk indicating a possible terrorist infiltration through the sea. Considering the situation, the police and the military forces are kept on high alert following the mock drill. Chhatrapur SDPO Chandan Kumar Ghadei created awareness among the fishermen and the coastal residents.

Disha College holds annual function, 'DRIFT 2026'



POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, March 24: The 18th annual function, DRIFT 2026, of Disha College of Management & Technology and Disha Institute of Nursing was held Tuesday at Ganjam Kala Parishad.

Rabi Narayan Panda, Head and Professor, Department of Neurosurgery, attended as chief guest and highlighted the growing importance of nursing professionals in healthcare.

The guest of honour was Akhaya Kumar Swain, chairman of the Institute of Cost Accountants of India, while Parth Sarathi Choudhury, entrepreneur and legal consultant, was the chief speaker.

Chairman Susanta Palo and Secretary Dinesh Mishra presided over the event. Trustees Arun Sabat, Suresh Pani, Shaik Illias and Manas Sahu were also present at the event. Students participated in cul-

tural programmes, followed by a prize distribution ceremony. Sourav Ranjan Mishra was named the best student of Disha College of Management & Technology, while the BCA second-year team won the cricket championship.

Best student awards in nursing were given to B Ramaya (BSc Nursing, fourth semester), Arpita Patro (ANM, second year) and T Shakti Dora (GNM, second year).

The vote of thanks was delivered by Suresh Kumar Pani, director of the college. Faculty members present included Bibekananda Patnaik, Muna Acharjya, Nityananda Patnaik, Sneha Seena Mishra, Bhagabata Prasad Pattnaik, B Venkata Ramanna and Rajesh Acharjya.

COUPLE KILLED AS TRUCK RAMS BIKE

Balikuda: A couple was killed after a speeding truck rammed into their motorcycle and dragged them for about 200 meters on Cuttack-Nuagaon National Highway-55 in Jagatsinghpur district Tuesday morning, police said. The accident occurred around 9 am at Dengapola (Fakirpada) Square on National Highway 55. The deceased were identified as Bichitra Behera (42), and his wife Limna Behera (39) of Balijori (Bagheipur) village under Balikuda police limits. While Bichitra died on the spot after the truck ran over his body, Limna, who was critically injured and was rushed to the district headquarters hospital in Jagatsinghpur, succumbed during treatment. According to the complaint filed by Bichitra's elder brother Pabitra Behera, the couple had left home for Jagatsinghpur at around 8 am on a motorcycle (OR 21E 4873). They were returning after misplacing some documents when a potato-laden truck (WB 33C 1988) hit them from behind near Fakirpada, about 500 meters from Dengapola junction. The truck dragged both victims along with the motorcycle for nearly 200 meters.

Tobacco raids conducted in Nandapur, fines imposed

POST NEWS NETWORK

Koraput, March 24: As part of the strict enforcement drive over tobacco ban, a raid was conducted in several grocery shops in Nandapur of Koraput district Tuesday. During the inspection, officials

identified violations of the ban, leading to the collection of a fine amounting to Rs1,300 from shopkeepers found stocking prohibited items. The enforcement drive was carried out in the presence of Food Department officer N. Pankaj, Drug Inspector Nakhetra

Bhusan Nayak, along with police officials including ASI Pratyush Pal and Havildar Purma Chandra Nayak from the local police station. Authorities stated that such surprise inspections will continue across the district to ensure strict compliance with the ban.

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Aid delays hit disabled widow in Dhenkanal



Dhenkanal: A differently abled widow from Tentulipada village under Odapada block has sought urgent assistance from the district administration, highlighting gaps in the delivery of welfare schemes. Promoda Nayak, who lost both legs in a railway accident several years ago, has been enduring hardship since the death of her husband four years ago. She now resides in a makeshift hut covered with plastic sheets along with her young grandson. Her shelter has reportedly been damaged twice by elephants. Despite repeated visits to the Odapada block office over the past five years, Nayak has not received benefits under key schemes, including housing and subsidised food under the Antyodaya programme. She alleges that her appeals to officials have gone unheard. She approached District Collector Ashish Ishwar Patil Tuesday, requesting support for a house and food assistance. Responding to the complaint, the Collector said Nayak is eligible for benefits under the Antyodaya housing scheme. Her application has been forwarded to the Chief Development Officer, and steps are being taken to include her in the next list of beneficiaries. He added that she is currently receiving a disability pension and assured further assistance.

Name and Address of the Borrowers/Guarantors	Description of Immovable Property	A) Amount Due as of Notice Date B) Date of Demand Notice C) Date of Possession
<p>1) Mrs. Nayana Nahak @ Nayani Nahak (Primary Applicant), D/o: Jhadia Nahak, Ramachandrapur, Longhar Srikrushna Saranpur, Panditagaon, Khallikote, Ganjam, Odisha-761029</p> <p>2. Mr. Bikram Nahak (Co Applicant), S/o: Jhadia Nahak, Ramachandrapur, Longhar Srikrushna Saranpur, Panditagaon, Khallikote, Ganjam, Odisha-761029</p>	<p>Collateral Security: All that piece and parcel of Land measuring about an Area: Ac. 0.034 Dec., under Khata No.: 129/132, Plot No.: 430/850, Situated under Mouza: Panditagaon, Tahasil: Khallikote, Tahasil No.: 216, PS: Khallikote, PS No.: 136 & Dist.: Ganjam, KISSAM: Gharabari (as per RoR) together with the building constructed upon the land. The property is in the name of Mrs. Nayani Nahak @ Nayana Nahak, D/o: Jhadia Nahak</p>	<p>Rs.19,19,717/- (Rupees Nineteen Lakh Nineteen Thousand Seven Hundred Seventeen only) under Loan Ac No.: xxxxxx0203 and Rs.35,341/- (Rupees Thirty Five Thousand Three Hundred Forty-One only) under Loan Ac No.: xxxxxx0216 due as on date of NPA, being the amount due on termination of the agreement, together with further contractual rate of interest till the date of payment B) 12.09.2025 C) 23.03.2026</p>
<p>1) Mr. Manas Ranjan Narendra, (Borrower/Primary Applicant) S/o: Krishna Prasad Rout, At: Khallikote, Saraswati Vihar, Khallikote, Ganjam, Odisha-761030</p>	<p>Collateral Security: All that piece and parcel of Land measuring about an Area: Ac. 0.036 Dec., under Khata No.: 74/111, Plot No.: 478/916, situated under Mouza: Palujahara, Tahasil: Khallikote, Tahasil No.: 553, Thana: Rambha, Thana No.: 101 & Dist.: Ganjam, (as per RoR) KISSAM: Gharabari together with the building constructed upon the land. The said property stands Registered in the name of Mr. Manas Ranjan Narendra, S/o: Krishna Prasad Rout</p>	<p>Rs.10,92,490.31 (Rupees Ten Lakh Ninety Two Thousand Four Hundred Ninety and Thirty One Paise Only) under Loan Ac No.: xxxxxx9265 and Rs.35,746.16 (Rupees Thirty Five Thousand Seven Hundred Forty Six and Sixteen Paise only) under Loan Ac No.: xxxxxx9317 due as on date of NPA, being the amount due on termination of the agreement, together with further contractual rate of interest till the date of payment B) 22.08.2025 C) 23.03.2026</p>
<p>1) Mr. Muna Pradhan (Primary Applicant), S/o: Raju Pradhan, Kanheipur, Patana Kanheipur, Near RCM High School, Khallikote, Ganjam, Odisha-761029.</p> <p>2. Mr. Raju Pradhan (Co-Applicant), S/o: Mangala Pradhan, Kanheipur, Patana Kanheipur, Near RCM High School, Khallikote, Ganjam, Odisha-761029.</p>	<p>Collateral Security: All that piece and parcel of Land measuring about an Area: Ac. 0.057 Dec., under Khata No.: 466/146, Plot No.: 618/789, situated under Mouza: Patana Kanheipur, Tahasil: Khallikote, Tahasil No.: 197, Thana: Khallikote, Thana No.: 61 & Dist.: Ganjam, KISSAM: Gharabari (as per RoR) together with the building constructed upon the land. The property is in the name of Mr. Raju Pradhan, S/o: Mangala Pradhan</p>	<p>Rs.22,53,845.03 (Rupees Twenty Two Lakh Fifty Three Thousand Eight Hundred Forty Five and Three Paise Only) under Loan Ac No.: xxxxxx0809 and Rs.31,939/- (Rupees Thirty One Thousand Nine Hundred Thirty Nine only) under Loan Ac No.: xxxxxx0867 due as on date of NPA, being the amount due on termination of the agreement, together with further contractual rate of interest till the date of payment B) 14.10.2025 C) 23.03.2026</p>
<p>1) Mr. Pabitra Barik (Borrower), C/o: Mr. Gandharb Barik, At: Odialapur, Pathara, City: Khallikote, PO: Pathara, Near Ratane Temple, Dist.: Ganjam, Odisha-761029.</p> <p>2) Mrs. Mamata Barik (Co-Borrower), D/o: Mr. Ranka Tarei & W/o: Pabitra Barik, At: Odialapur, Pathara, City: Khallikote, PO: Pathara, Near Ratane Temple, Dist.: Ganjam, Odisha-761029.</p> <p>3) Mr. Gandhraba Barik, S/o: Mr. Sankuli Barik, At: Odialapur, Pathara, City: Khallikote, PO: Pathara, Near Ratane Temple, Dist.: Ganjam, Odisha-761029.</p>	<p>Collateral Security: All that piece and parcel of Land measuring about an Area Ac. 0.040 Dec. under Khata No.: 208/262, Plot No.: 1390/1768, situated under Mouza: Odialapur, Tahasil: Khallikote, Tahasil No.: 205, PS: Khallikote, PS No.: 144 & Dist.: Ganjam together with the building constructed thereon. The property is in the name of Mr. Gandhraba Barik, S/o: Mr. Sankuli Barik</p>	<p>Rs.28,93,107/- (Rupees Twenty Eight Lakh Ninety Three Thousand One Hundred Seven Only) under Loan Ac No.: xxxxxx0610 and Rs.29,552/- (Rupees Twenty Nine Thousand Five Hundred Fifty Two only) under Loan Ac No.: xxxxxx0623 due as on date of NPA, being the amount due on termination of the agreement, together with further contractual rate of interest till the date of payment B) 20.08.2025 C) 23.03.2026</p>
<p>1) Mr. Balistha Sahoo (Primary Applicant), S/o: Nandi Sahoo, At/PO: Tejagola, Bargarh, PS: Bhatli, Dist.: Bargarh, Odisha-768030</p> <p>2) Mrs. Sanjukta Sahoo (Co-Applicant), W/o: Mr. Balistha Sahoo, At/PO: Tejagola, Bargarh, PS: Bhatli, Dist.: Bargarh, Odisha-768030</p>	<p>Collateral Security: All that piece and portion of Land and Building, situated under Dist.: Bargarh, Mouza: Tejagola, Tahasil: Bhatli, Tahasil No.: 228, Thana: Bhatli, Thana No.: 72, Khata No.: 150/169, Plot No.: 1052/2414, admeasuring an Area: Ac. 0.170 Dec. (as per ROR), KISSAM: Gharabari and the said property stands registered in the name of Balistha Sahoo, S/o: Nandi Sahoo.</p>	<p>Rs.3,14,521/- (Rupees Three Lakh Fourteen Thousand Five Hundred Twenty One Only) under Loan Ac No.: xxxxxx9436 being the amount due as on 19.11.2024 (this amount includes interest till 19.11.2024) together with further contractual rate of interest till the date of payment B) 19.11.2024 C) 20.03.2026</p>

Place: Bhubaneswar
Date: 25.03.2026

Authorised Officer
Axis Bank Ltd.

The Investor Education and Protection Fund Authority (IEPFA)
(Ministry of Corporate Affairs)

PUBLIC NOTICE

Niveshak Shivir

The Investor Education and Protection Fund Authority (IEPFA), operating under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), is launching Niveshak Shivir – a dedicated initiative to address the concerns and queries of claimants across India.

Objective

Niveshak Shivir aims to simplify investor services, promote financial literacy and strengthen investor protection to:

- Facilitate the transfer of unpaid dividends (held for 6-7 years).
- Assisting with KYC and nomination updates with the company.
- Resolving pending IEPFA claims of unclaimed and unpaid shares and dividends.

Scheduled City

To take this vision forward, Niveshak Shivir will be organised in **Bhubaneswar**.

Event Details

Date/Time: 27th March 2026, 10:00 a.m. to 04:00 p.m.
Venue: Event Square, Near Hotel Swosti Premium, Jaydev Vihar, Bhubaneswar, Pincode - 751013

How to Participate

Please register by scanning the QR code provided in this notice or by clicking on the link: <https://qr.me-qr.com/I/NiveshakShivir>
This registration will help us ensure that you have received the most effective and timely assistance in Niveshak Shivir.

For More Information

Please visit our official website at www.iepfa.gov.in. You can also follow us on our social media channels for the latest updates and announcements related to Niveshak Shivir.

We encourage all claimants to take advantage of this opportunity to have their concerns addressed directly by our experts. Your engagement is crucial in helping us provide better service and support.

Toll Free Number : 14453 | Call Centre: Monday to Friday 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

www.iepfa.gov.in

CBC 07110/12/0013/2526

FOCUS POLITICS

NEW POLITICAL REALITY



Politics does not occur in a vacuum. It grows out of lived experience, reflecting whether people feel secure, respected, and optimistic about a shared future

and realism. As Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney recently put it, "Nostalgia is not a strategy." Faced with military escalations, tensions between longstanding allies, and state violence in American cities, we can no longer pretend that the old order will return. Once legitimacy is lost, it cannot be restored through rhetoric alone.

The work ahead is slower, less theatrical, and more demanding. The pillars of an open society must be rebuilt. We need education systems that open real paths to mobility; economic models that foster dynamism while ensuring broad prosperity; institutions that treat citizens as participants, not problems; and leaders who tell the truth, even when it is uncomfortable.

This is not about winning the next news cycle or launching the next grand framework. It is about restoring the basic conditions for democratic life, replacing cynicism with agency and protest with possibility. It is about fixing the broken pipeline between civic energy and public authority, between movements and mandates. That is how we approach our work at the Daniel Sachs Foundation, focusing on the intersection of social cohesion, institutional renewal, and responsible leadership.

If there is one lesson the current moment offers, it is that open societies are not self-sustaining. They must be cultivated — patiently, collectively, and with humility. We are all embedded in the soil where our new political reality has taken root, and change will come from people who refuse to wait for permission to act. It falls to all of us, not only to politicians, to replace complacency with the hard, patient work of nurturing the demand for a different reality. The future will depend on whether enough of us choose to stop worrying about what comes next and start building it.

The writer is a Swedish business leader, investor, and philanthropist working at the intersection of finance, democracy, and inclusive growth.

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Proliferating wars and shaky alliances are hallmarks of today's brutal new political reality, one that would have been unimaginable a decade ago. But the geopolitical rupture currently underway is no accident of history, nor is it simply the result of strongmen, weak institutions, or a sudden loss of restraint. It mirrors something more fundamental: the social soil of our societies. Politics does not occur in a vacuum. It grows out of lived experience, reflecting whether people feel secure, respected, and optimistic about a shared future.

For years, political volatility has been treated as a series of external shocks. But today's reality is the culmination of choices made over many decades. Like all political shifts, this one has a supply side and a demand side. Yet most commentaries on the new world disorder focus disproportionately on the supply side: authoritarian leaders and new doctrines, blocs, or geopolitical arrangements that might replace liberal democracy and the rules-based international order. While important, this perspective ignores the demand that is driving current political trends. Why are so many people willing to support authoritarian ideas and leaders? Polling shows that we are not dealing mainly with an ideological shift. Datapraxis' research across eight European Union countries finds that only 23% of voters who switched to populist parties did so because they believed those parties had the best policies; the dominant motive was a more basic desire for change. Similarly, the OECD's most recent trust survey finds that only 39% of citizens across 30 member states trust their national government, and the Pew Research Center's survey of 24 countries finds that 59% of respondents are dissatisfied with how democracy works.

The data do not indicate declining support for democratic values or a sudden conversion to extreme ideas, but rather a slow loss of confidence that

democratic institutions still offer a credible path to a good life. We have allowed inequalities to harden, social mobility to stall, and trust to erode, undermining social cohesion.

This is the demand side, the desperation for change that authoritarianism exploits. When people's trust in democratic institutions' capacity to improve their lives erodes, they stop asking whether ideas are good and start asking whether anyone is even listening. Here lies the deeper danger. When the root causes are hidden by a complex mix of symptoms, polarization, democratic backsliding, and support for authoritarianism tend to be treated as isolated pathologies rather than as expressions of unmet social needs.

Renewing our institutions to meet citizens' legitimate demands is the central challenge of our time. Democratic renewal begins not with constitutions or conferences, but with a more basic query: Is our democracy generating broad prosperity, promoting social mobility, and giving everyone a shared stake in society? If the answer is no, democracy risks becoming a hollow ritual.

Democratic renewal is not abstract. It is about institutions that deliver, that invite participation rather than create distance, and that form pathways from voice to influence, from engagement to leadership, and from effort to improved chances in life. We need serious commitments to confront structural problems without ideological shortcuts. Open societies must be both economically dynamic and socially cohesive; both globally engaged and domestically rooted; and both principled and pragmatic.

Reform cannot be left to politics alone. Since businesses play a leading role in shaping opportunity, they must serve as the trustees of open, democratic, institutionally stable societies. And philanthropic organizations must experiment and invest more in meeting needs that markets and governments are ill suited to address. Civil society can give people a voice and build trust.

All these forces must be integrated into a credible social contract. Institutions that are relevant, representative, and in service of citizens' needs must be built on a foundation of broader civic participation and new methods of deliberation that close the gap between people and politicians. The challenge is a generational one. Democracy becomes fragile when too many people feel it no longer belongs to them. Yet according to TUI Stiftung, only 57% of Europeans aged 16-26 unreservedly prefer democracy, while one in five would accept authoritarian government under certain circumstances.

One reason for cautious optimism is increasing honesty

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One reason for cautious optimism is increasing honesty



Daniel Sachs

LIKE ALL POLITICAL SHIFTS, THIS ONE HAS A SUPPLY SIDE AND A DEMAND SIDE

IN JEST THIS

Walking offers many benefits, few downsides



Melvin Durai

NOT EVERYONE CAN WALK TO WORK, BUT MOST PEOPLE CAN FIND TIME TO DO A LITTLE WALKING

A Bangalore woman named Silpa recently shared a video on Instagram that showed her walking home from her office. "Google Maps said 38 minutes and 2.7 kilometres, but it was more than that," she said.

Summarizing her results after two weeks of walking home from work, she said the pros were that she had "way better energy than before" and could easily meet her step counts. Her watch indicated that she had walked more than 7,250 steps during the walk home.

The downside of walking home, she said, was that she had spent 840 rupees on coconut water. (The coconut wallah calls it an "upside.")

Walking home from the office is apparently so rare that several Indian news outlets carried articles about Silpa's feat. Her video received more than 500 likes and 45 comments on Instagram. Not surprisingly, some commenters were quick to belittle Silpa's

achievement. "What about me," one man wrote. "I walk 5.5 km daily to and from, and 30 minutes of evening walk."

Another man wrote: "What's the big deal of just 2 weeks? I've done this at Nashik for a year. ... Neediness of vehicles is just an annoying absurdity when timing can be matched with low UV index."

I've never considered the need for a vehicle as an "annoying absurdity," but I applaud anyone who walks to and from work, or even just one way. Walking to work is not practical for most people, of course. They either live too far away from their workplaces or face other obstacles, such as the absence of footpaths or the presence of wild animals. Wild animals can be quite annoying, especially if they have two legs and want to harass you.

Not everyone can walk to work, but most people can find time to do a little walking. The benefits of walking are numerous. One of the most underrated

forms of exercise, walking can give you many health benefits, including helping you lose fat, reducing your stress, protecting you from certain diseases, keeping your heart healthy, and increasing your consumption of coconut water. (Coconut water is good for you, at least that's what the coconut wallah says.)

Studies have shown that walking can also improve your thinking and memory. When I take my dog for walks, I do a lot of thinking — at least one thought per kilometer. Walking has produced some of my best ideas. This only happens, of course, when I'm not listening to music or looking at my phone.

Unlike other forms of exercise, walking is something that most people can do at almost any age. Young people can generally walk faster than old people, but I've seen some 70-year-olds walk incredibly fast, especially at the Senior Olympics.

One of the best things about

walking is that it can be done in many different places. You can go to a mall or large store and just walk around in circles — nobody will care. But if you start running, you can bet that a security guard will come running after you.

Guard: "Why are you running? Did you steal something?"

You: "Just getting some exercise."

Guard: "Exercise? Not here! Go and join a gym."

Walking does not bring you as much attention as running does (this may be a plus or a minus for you).

What about the downsides of walking? Well, if you're in a car with air conditioning, you aren't exposed to the temperature outside or even air pollution (depending on where you live). Walking exposes you to everything in the street, even animal droppings. But think of all the extra steps you're getting while you walk around everything you encounter in your path!



When mind is still, then truth gets her chance to be heard in the purity of the silence.

SRI AUROBINDO



War Or Peace

The big question being asked 24 hours after US President Donald Trump announced a five-day pause on the ongoing US-Israel war on 23 March is whether any talks were held at all, as claimed by Trump, between the US and Iran to end the ongoing war. Iran has not only dismissed Trump's claim, but also accused him of buying time to launch fresh offensives. Standing beside Air Force One, Trump tried his best to sell his sudden change of mind and talked about detente with little detail as a US ultimatum to bomb Iran's power plants loomed unless Tehran opened up the Strait of Hormuz. The about turn came just hours before US markets were to open for what looked like another punishing round of trading on the day. The markets did ease to some extent immediately after the announcement and started recovering from the oil shocks.

True, military strategies or peace deals are not discussed at a Press conference. But Trump's evasiveness and the subsequent denial of any negotiation by Iran makes his motive suspect. Asked who the US was negotiating with in Iran, Trump said: "We are dealing with a man that I believe is the most respected." Pressed further, he said he could not name the person lest he should get killed. The little hints that he dropped about the terms of a deal are an exercise in obfuscation. He said Iran would not have a nuclear weapon, but control over the Strait of Hormuz would be held by "maybe me, me and the Ayatollah ... whoever the next Ayatollah is."

On 24 March Trump seemed to be shifting the blame for the war on his Secretary of War Pete Hegseth. Trump said that Hegseth was the "first one" to suggest attacking Iran when he discussed the "problem in the Middle East" with his close aides.

Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, the speaker of the parliament of Iran, who previously served as an Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps commander, has already denied that he or anyone in Iran's government is speaking with the US. According to him, Trump's sole intent is to mitigate the financial damage done by Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz. He insisted fake news is used to "manipulate" the financial and oil markets and escape the "quagmire in which the US and Israel are trapped."

While India continues to adopt a policy on the war that is neither here nor there, Pakistan, an ally of Iran, seems to be emerging as a key player in working out a negotiated resolution of the conflict. Iran's foreign ministry has said that in recent days it received messages from some friendly countries indicating a US request for negotiations aimed at ending the war. A spokesperson of Iran, Esmail Baqaei, who indicated the involvement of Pakistan and some other countries in the process to end the war, denied there were ongoing talks directly between Iran and the US.

It appears talks are being held through mediators for which neither Trump would divulge details nor Iran would admit it till any concrete deal takes shape. That is why UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer asserted he was aware of the talks, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had spoken with Trump and sought to present a potential deal as one that could safeguard Israel's interests.

The latest negotiations may also be another way for Trump to buy time, especially with oil and energy markets. The Pentagon is still moving marines and airborne soldiers into position. This gives rise to speculation that the US may in the coming days launch a strike or go for potential occupation of Iran's islands or coastline that would allow the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz in case diplomacy does not in the end yield any results.

Significantly, a Pakistani official has reportedly told the media Islamabad may host direct talks between Iran and the US. According to him, US Vice-President JD Vance as well as Trump envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner are expected to meet Iranian officials in Islamabad this week. Trump had a phone call with Pakistan's army chief, Asim Munir, the official said. If there is truth in the claim, a breakthrough may be expected even though both sides are making cautious moves.

Since last couple of days, the sole aim of the war seems to have become the opening of the Strait of Hormuz which, interestingly, was open till the beginning of the war.

Now the rest of the countries can only wait till the end of the 5 Days period and see what happens.

WISDOM CORNER

Nature gives to every time and season some beauties of its own; and from morning to night, as from the cradle to the grave, it is but a succession of changes so gentle and easy that we can scarcely mark their progress.

CHARLES DICKENS

Your living is determined not so much by what life brings to you as by the attitude you bring to life; not so much by what happens to you as by the way your mind looks at what happens.

KAHLIL GIBRAN

It's very important that we re-learn the art of resting and relaxing. Not only does it help prevent the onset of many illnesses that develop through chronic tension and worrying; it allows us to clear our minds, focus, and find creative solutions to problems.

THICH NHAT HANH

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

■ **1655:** Dutch mathematician and astronomer Christiaan Huygens discovered Titan, the largest moon of Saturn.

■ **1807:** First passenger railway line begins operations. On this day in 1807, the first fee-paying passenger railway began operating in Wales. It was eventually known as Mumbles Railway, and it became the longest-running locomotive line in the world. Passengers, however, were an afterthought; the train was designed with industry in mind. A 16-person horse-drawn carriage made a trip twice a day along the railway line. After electricity arrived in 1928, double-decker trams began running, and millions of passengers were riding the line annually by the 1940s. After World War II, however, plunging passenger demand could no longer justify costs of operating the line. A funeral (featuring an empty coffin) was held for the line on January 4, 1960.

■ **1947:** British singer, composer, and pianist Sir Elton John, who was known for both his popular music and his stylistic showmanship, was born.

■ **1965:** Martin Luther King, Jr., and other civil rights activists completed their march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama; two previous marches had been halted by local police.

■ **1975:** King Faisal of Saudi Arabia was shot to death by his nephew.

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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

Strategic reserves

Sir, India's strategic petroleum reserves, managed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserve Ltd, are currently at about 64% capacity, holding around 3.37 million tonnes of crude—enough to cover roughly 9.5 days of demand during disruptions. These reserves are stored in underground facilities at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru, and Padur. India, the world's third-largest energy consumer, imports nearly 88% of its crude oil, with a large share transiting through the vulnerable Strait of Hormuz. Ongoing Middle East tensions have disrupted supplies, particularly of gas and LPG, despite diversification to sources like Russia and the US. To enhance energy security, the government has approved additional reserves at Chandikhol and expanded capacity at Padur, along with partnerships such as with Abu Dhabi National Oil Company. The government needs to plan on more such reserves to cater for emergency situation likely to be encountered in near future.

RS Narula, PATIALA

War pause

Sir, This refers to "Trump pauses strikes for 5 days," Orissa Post, Mar 24. The decision by Donald Trump to halt, even briefly, the impending strikes on Iran is not just a pause—it is a moment of profound moral significance in a world teetering on the edge. In an era where escalation often seems inevitable, this act of restraint stands out as a courageous choice against the tide of destruction. Regardless of competing narratives, what truly matters is that the drums of war have, for a moment, fallen silent. This conflict has already inflicted immense suffering far beyond battlefields. It has disrupted global energy lifelines, fuelled inflation, and placed unbearable strain on ordinary people across continents. The cost of war is never confined; it reverberates through every household, every economy, every fragile hope for stability. In this charged atmosphere, even a five-day pause carries immense weight. It is a chance—a fragile, fleeting chance—for sanity to prevail over aggression, for dialogue to replace destruction. Such moments must not be squandered, for they hold the power to transform conflict into coexistence and despair into the possibility of peace.

N Sathasiva Reddy, BANGALORE

Iran war halts Marathwada turmeric exports

Turmeric is a cash crop cultivated in nearly 2 lakh acres in Hingoli district, and the Vasmata variety received a Geographical Identification (GI) tag in 2024

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, March 24: The ongoing conflict between the US, Israel and Iran has halted turmeric exports from Maharashtra's Marathwada region, causing domestic prices to crash from ₹16,500 to ₹13,000 per quintal. Shiv Sena MLC Hemant Patil Tuesday said that turmeric cultivated in Marathwada is exported to the Gulf and African countries, but the war that broke out last month has halted

exports completely. Turmeric is a cash crop cultivated in nearly 2 lakh acres in Hingoli district, and the Vasmata variety received a Geographical Identification (GI) tag in 2024. Containers of turmeric from Hingoli and adjoining regions are shipped out of the country from Tamil Nadu and Kerala after processing, said Patil, who also heads the Balasaheb Thackeray Turmeric Research and Training Centre in Hingoli. "Hingoli, Nanded, Ward-



ha, Parbhani, Yavatmal and Washim are the turmeric belts in Marathwada. These districts produce nearly 25 lakh tonnes of the crop. The land under tur-

meric cultivation in Hingoli district alone is around 2 lakh hectares," he said. Prakash Soni, a turmeric trader from Hingoli, said the

Iran war has not only completely halted the exports, but the price of the produce in the domestic market has also taken a hit.

"Before the war, turmeric was being sold at ₹16,500 per quintal. The price has now reached ₹13,000. The price will drop further if the war continues," he said.

According to data from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, India exported turmeric worth \$341.54 million in 2024-25, with Maharashtra alone accounting for USD 155.35 million.

The produce was exported to Bangladesh, the UAE, the US, Malaysia and Morocco.

UP woman puts wedding funds into establishing first female-only gym



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Shahjahanpur (UP), March 24: In a small Uttar Pradesh town, where marriage often takes precedence over careers for women, 30-year-old Mansi Mishra has chosen self-reliance over matrimony, using the funds set aside for her wedding to kick-start her entrepreneurial ambitions -- a gym by a woman, exclusively for women.

Challenging traditional expectations, Mishra put her wedding funds to establish a women-only gym, a first-of-its-kind in her hometown, emerging as a symbol of empowerment and independence in Shahjahanpur.

Initially, she bore the brunt of social perceptions and financial risks as she toiled to establish herself in the male-dominated fitness industry. However, she persevered and is now a successful trainer running her own fitness centre.

Highlighting the need for safer spaces for women, she said many hesitate to join gyms due to the presence of male trainers and concerns over inappropriate behaviour. Her gym employs only female trainers to encourage more women to focus on their health without hesitation.

Mishra, the youngest among four siblings and a postgraduate and BE degree holder, said she decided against marriage two years ago when her parents began looking for a suitable match. Instead, she requested them to give her the funds set aside for her wedding so she could build her own future.

Speaking to PTI, Mishra said her parents supported her decision and provided around ₹10 lakh, which she used to set up a modern fitness centre exclusively for women.

"At a crucial stage in my life, I chose to prioritise my

dreams. Instead of spending on a wedding, I wanted to become self-dependent," she said.

Her father, Arendra Kumar Mishra, said he was happy with his daughter's decision.

"She wanted to become self-reliant and asked us for financial support. We gave her the money, and today we feel proud seeing her independent and helping other women through her gym," he told PTI.

Local residents said the gym is the first women-run fitness centre in the town and has become a milestone for women's empowerment in Shahjahanpur, a small town still removed from the influence of metropolises.

Mishra's journey towards fitness began four years ago when she weighed nearly 100 kg and was diagnosed with thyroid issues. She later moved to Delhi, where she underwent professional training at a gym for two years and continued practising thereafter.

She said her weight has now reduced to around 60 kg and her thyroid condition has significantly improved.

She said her family was initially surprised by her decision regarding marriage but later supported her determination and confidence, enabling her to establish the gym.

"Whether to marry or not is a personal choice. I chose to prioritise my dreams, and today I am proud of that decision," Mishra said.

Manali, a government school teacher training at the gym, said she joined as soon as she learnt about a facility run exclusively by female trainers.

"It feels like a family here. There are adequate safety arrangements and modern machines, which makes the experience very comfortable," she said.

Dr Namita Singh, founder of Rani Lakshmi Bai Mahila Wing, said the initiative was a matter of pride for the town.

UP cabinet clears ₹160 MSP hike for wheat

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, March 24: The Uttar Pradesh cabinet Monday approved a proposal to increase the minimum support price (MSP) of wheat by ₹160 per quintal for the current procurement season, along with an additional payment of ₹20 per quintal to farmers towards cleaning, sorting and handling costs.

The decision was taken at a cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

State Agriculture Minister Surya Pratap Shahi told reporters after the meeting that the MSP for wheat has been fixed at ₹2,585 per quintal by the central government for this year, reflecting an increase of ₹160 per quintal over the previous year. He said wheat procurement in the state will begin after Ram Navami, from March 30, 2026, and continue till June 15, 2026. Procurement will be carried out through eight agencies across 6,500 purchase centres in all 75 districts.

These agencies include the Food Corporation of India (FCI), the state Food and Civil Supplies Department, Uttar Pradesh Mandi Parishad, UP PCF, PCU, UP State Warehouses

ing Corporation, NAFED and NCCF, he said.

Shahi added that farmer-producer organisations (FPOs) and farmer-producer companies (FPCs) will also be allowed to participate in procurement, subject to conditions such as having a minimum bank balance of ₹20 lakh and at least one year of registration.

He further said farmers will receive ₹20 per quintal through procurement agencies towards expenses incurred on cleaning, sorting and unloading, with the financial burden of around ₹60 crore to be borne by the Mandi Parishad.

The minister said efforts are being made to ensure maximum procurement of farmers' produce, with directions issued for farmer registration, publicity and all necessary arrangements.

He added that a good crop is expected this year due to the availability of quality seeds and the government aims to ensure that farmers do not suffer any losses.

Replying to a query, Shahi said while the department had proposed procurement of 30 lakh metric tonnes of wheat, the chief minister has set a target of 50 lakh metric tonnes.

Centre asks Maha to address concerns on flamingo habitats

On World Water Day Sunday, the activists flagged the deteriorating condition of the DPS, NRI, and TS Chanakya lakes at Nerul, which serve as satellite wetlands for the Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary (TCFS), a Ramsar site

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thane, March 24: The Centre has asked the Maharashtra government to address on priority concerns raised by climate activists over the decline of flamingo habitats as wetlands in Navi Mumbai turn toxic.

On World Water Day Sunday, the activists flagged the deteriorating condition of the DPS, NRI, and TS Chanakya lakes at Nerul, which serve as satellite wetlands for the Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary (TCFS), a Ramsar site.

They sounded a 'wetland emergency', as the three key flamingo habitats in Navi Mumbai have turned toxic, with tests of water samples revealing alarming results.

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), in its response Monday, asked the Maharashtra State Wetland Authority to address the grievance on priority and submit its action taken report



to both the complainant and the Centre.

It cited the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017, under which discharge of untreated waste and effluents, dumping of solid and construction waste, encroachment, and any alteration of the ecological character of wetlands are prohibited.

Flamingo season in Navi Mumbai is from November to May, with January to March seen as the peak viewing time, as bird lovers and enthusiasts gather at wetlands to catch a glimpse of the pink parade.

Water sample tests commissioned by the NatConnect Foundation indicate a system under severe stress, activists stated in messages sent to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis.

The warning is reinforced by the absence of flamingos, which have not arrived this season, said BN Kumar, direc-

tor of NatConnect Foundation.

Four basic indicators - TDS, pH, BOD and COD - paint a consistent picture of decline. The results showed over-concentrated, stagnant water rather than natural tidal flushing.

"Put simply, all four indicators tell the same story-the water is not moving as it should in a healthy intertidal wetland," Kumar said, pointing to blocked or restricted tidal flow. Instead of being regularly flushed, the wetlands are turning into stagnant, polluted basins.

The City And Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO) is "largely responsible for what has happened," climate activist Nandakumar Pawar said, adding that regulators such as the Maharashtra Coastal Zone Management Authority and the forest department have "simply looked the other way".

The wetlands, he warned, are a public asset being destroyed in plain sight.

UP CM launches 'Nivesh Mitra 3.0'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Lucknow, March 24: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said Tuesday that entrepreneurs are the backbone of the economy and ensuring their safety and dignity is the state government's priority while launching the 'Nivesh Mitra 3.0'.

Launching the 'Nivesh Mitra 3.0' single-window system in Lucknow, the Chief Minister added that it will make the setting up of industries easier and more transparent due to investors' growing trust in state's potential as the leading investment destination.

"Over the past nine years, the state has completely transformed its identity through transparent policies, strict law and order, improved infrastructure, and an industry-friendly environment," he said.

Chief Minister Adityanath termed the distribution of incentives to 45 companies and Letters of Comfort (LoCs) to 62 companies during the Navratri programme as a major step for industrial development.

He said these proposals pave the way for nearly ₹50,000 crore in investments, creating employment opportunities for around 50,000 youth.

Congratulating the start-up founders, Chief Minister Adityanath said, "Government is committed to ensuring rapid ground-breaking after MoUs,



resolving minor issues related to investments quickly, and providing a favourable environment for industries."

He emphasised that investor confidence is the greatest capital of the state, and the state government is continuously working to strengthen it.

"Uttar Pradesh has a market-ready and industry-ready workforce, with a large pool of skilled youth. It also possesses one of the best demographic dividends globally, along with a vast consumer base, making it highly attractive for investors," the Chief Minister said.

With the launch of 'Nivesh Mitra 3.0', over 530 services from more than 43 departments have been simplified and consolidated into fewer than 200 services.

The platform offers features such as a PAN-based single user ID, dynamic Common

Application Form, AI chatbot, real-time tracking, automated alerts, and end-to-end online monitoring.

Chief Minister Adityanath said, "Incentives worth ₹2,781.12 crore have been distributed to 85 projects across sectors such as manufacturing, automobile, cement, bio-plastics, iron and steel, food processing, and electronics."

"Among these, ₹73 crore was given to four IT and electronics projects, and ₹20 crore to 10 food processing projects," he added.

Recalling the situation before 2017, the Chief Minister said investors earlier hesitated to come to Uttar Pradesh due to a poor image driven by identity issues and the dominance of mafia and criminal gangs.

He highlighted that only 16 LoCs were issued between 2012 and 2017, whereas 3,367 LoCs

have been issued in the past nine years - reflecting a major transformation in the investment climate.

He added that an industry not only brings investment but also generates employment and improves connectivity.

Entrepreneurs must be respected and protected as they are the backbone of the economy, he said.

Notably, the "zero tolerance" and "zero corruption" policies have transformed the investment climate.

The state offers 75,000 acres of land bank, seamless connectivity, 55 per cent share in India's expressway network (soon to be 60 per cent), 12 domestic and four international airports, and the upcoming Noida International Airport in Jewar is set to become the country's largest cargo and logistics hub with MRO facilities.

Skip strong perfumes, noise to avoid bee attacks in Ajanta Caves

After multiple incidents of honey bee attacks on tourists near the cave complex recently, the forest department has decided to take measures to prevent further occurrences

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chhattapati Sambhajnagar, March 24: After a spate of honey bee attacks near the world-famous Ajanta Caves in Maharashtra, the forest department has appealed to visitors to avoid loud noises and strong perfumes that attract the insects and announced plans to launch an awareness drive.

The forest department recently surveyed the Ajanta cave area in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district, covering caves 1 to 26. Three honeycombs - one near cave 26 and two near cave 10 - were detected. Local representatives of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) have been asked to take measures to prevent the combs from expanding and take steps for the bees to move away, a forest official here told PTI Monday.

After multiple incidents of honey bee attacks on tourists near the cave complex recently, the forest department has decided to take measures to prevent further occurrences.

"We have decided to launch an awareness campaign for tourists visiting the Ajanta cave complex. Visitors are advised not to use strong perfumes, as these attract bees. They should also avoid speaking loudly. To spread the message, banners will be put up in the cave area within the next couple of days," the official said.

"We will also be writing to the ASI office with certain directives, and we expect them to implement the measures to help prevent further honey bee attacks," he added.

The Ajanta Caves were inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983.



25 leopards relocated from Maha to Gujarat's Vantara facility: Min

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 24: Maharashtra's Forest Minister Ganesh Naik has said the state government had asked Reliance Foundation to accommodate leopards at its Vantara facility in Gujarat's Jamnagar, and 25 big cats have already been relocated there.

The population of leopards has risen four times in 10 years. The state, which had 101 tigers seven-eight years back, now has 444, Naik said in the legislative council Monday while speaking on the amendment of the Wildlife Protection Act as applied to Maharashtra.

The amendment bill was passed by the Assembly last week and cleared by the council Monday.

"Twenty-five leopards have been sent to Vantara. We made a demand (to take the leopards) because 150 leopards were trapped in Pune district," Naik said. The state government has signed an agreement to translocate 50 leopards to Vantara.

The Wildlife Protection Act amendment has been brought because the chief wildlife warden, in cases of human-leopard conflict, cannot take steps for population management or translocation of big cats under section 12 without permission from the Union government.



The BJP government's Trans-gender Persons Amendment Bill is a brazen attack on the Constitutional rights and identity of transgender people RAHULGANDHI | CONG LEADER

DELHI TOPS CYBERSECURITY INCIDENTS

The number of cybersecurity incidents in the country has more than doubled since 2021, with the national capital leading the way with the highest number of such cases being reported, Lok Sabha was informed Tuesday



of the day quote

Why did the Prime Minister fail to take Parliament and the nation into confidence about this apparent shift, and what concrete steps have been taken to restore India's strategic autonomy?

MALIKARJUNKHARGÉ | CONGRESS PRESIDENT

Countries with low birth rates have actively sought to increase their population above three

MOHANBHAGWANT | RSS CHIEF

We do not try to shield anyone. For me, Punjab is one family

BHAGWANTMANN | PUNJAB CM

Delhi CM presents ₹1.037L-cr Budget

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 24: Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta Tuesday presented a ₹1.037 lakh crore budget for FY27, announcing several welfare schemes, including free diagnostic tests for newborn babies, free bicycles to 1.3 lakh girl students and laptops for meritorious students, and a new semiconductor policy, besides an 'emergency operation centre' for disaster management.

Presenting the Budget for the second time in the Delhi Assembly, Gupta, who also holds the finance portfolio, called it a "Green Budget", pointing out that 21 per cent of the total appropriations are allocated to environmental protection initiatives.

For the next financial year, the government has earmarked ₹260 crore to provide a free LPG cylinder each on Holi and Diwali to ration card-holding families -- a pre-poll promise of the BJP. The chief minister announced ₹1,352 crore for developing dust-free roads, including end-to-end recarpeting of 750 km of roads across the city.

In her 116-minute speech, the chief minister highlighted several measures taken by the BJP government in the last year.

She said that the national capital has been progressing rapidly under a triple-engine government, highlighting that the city's per capita income is the third-highest in the country. The government has earmarked ₹19,326 crore for the education sector -- 18 per cent share of the total budget, followed by the health sector (₹13,034 crore), transport (₹12,613 crore), urban development (₹11,572 crore), social welfare (₹10,537 crore) and water supply (₹9,000 crore).

The chief minister also announced a slew of measures for women and assured that 'Mahila Samridhhi Yojna', a pre-poll promise of the ruling BJP, will soon be implemented with an outlay of ₹5,110 crore.



Presenting the Budget for the second time in the Delhi Assembly, Gupta, who also holds the finance portfolio, called it a "Green Budget", pointing out that 21 per cent of the total appropriations are allocated to environmental protection initiatives

For the next financial year, the government has earmarked ₹260 crore to provide a free LPG cylinder each on Holi and Diwali to ration card-holding families -- a pre-poll promise of the BJP

The chief minister announced ₹1,352 crore for developing dust-free roads, including end-to-end recarpeting of 750 km of roads across the city

Under the scheme, eligible women will be given ₹2,500 per month, the chief minister said, adding that a portal for registration will be launched soon. The government will also set up 'Rani Haat' for women to link their skills with markets.

The Delhi government will provide 1,100 electric auto-rickshaw permits to women and transgender persons under a

scheme aimed at promoting self-reliance, Gupta announced. Meanwhile, Opposition AAP MLAs boycotted the budget presentation over suspension of four party legislators, prompting Speaker Vijender Gupta to criticise their decision.

The chief minister said her government will set up an 'Emergency Operation Centre' to deal with any disaster. The budget estimates tax revenue of ₹74,000 crore, while an allocation of ₹11,666 crore has been made for the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD).

Pointing out the problem faced by girls in commuting to schools, Gupta announced an allocation of ₹90 crore in the budget for gifting bicycles to 1.30 lakh Class IX girl students of Delhi government schools.

During her budget speech, the chief minister also turned poetic as she said -- "Delhi ki raho me phirseujalach-hanelagahai...mehnat ka har deep ab jagmaganelgahai...naimueedo ke sang kadam badayehai...haradhuresapne ko phirsehu sajayehai"

Highlighting the benefits of the Ayushman Bharat Health scheme, she announced that it will also cover transgender individuals and announced ₹202 crore for the scheme.

Delhi HC dismisses Lalu Yadav's plea to quash CBI FIR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 24: In a setback to Lalu Prasad Yadav, the Delhi High Court Tuesday refused to quash a CBI FIR in the land-for-jobs case involving him and his family, rejecting the RJD supremo's contention that the agency's action was legally unsustainable in the absence of prior sanction under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

In his order, Justice Ravinder Dubeja said the section was introduced in 2018 with prospective effect, whereas the allegations date back to 2004-2009, and the court was "persuaded" by the agency's stand that permitting a belated challenge on a technical plea relating to prior approval would defeat the "orderly administration of criminal justice".

Justice Ravinder Dubeja dismissed the petition by Yadav, a former railway minister and ex-chief minister of Bihar, that also sought quashing of the three chargesheets filed in 2022, 2023 and 2024, and the subsequent orders of cognisance in the matter.

The 'land-for-jobs' case is related to Group D appointments made in the West Central Zone of the Indian Railways in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, during Yadav's tenure as the rail minister between 2004 and 2009, allegedly in return for land parcels gifted or transferred by the recruits in the name of the RJD supremo's family or associates, officials said.

Yadav had contended that the inquiry, FIR, as well as the investigation and subsequent chargesheets in the matter were legally unsustainable in the absence of prior sanction taken by the CBI under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

The court said that Section 17A, which was introduced in 2018, was prospective in operation and, therefore, has no application to the present offences, which were alleged to have been committed between 2004 and 2009.

BJP RUBBER STAMP ROW

The cat is out of the bag: Mamata

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 24: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Tuesday alleged that the purported BJP rubber stamp on a communication of the Election Commission proved beyond doubt which party was controlling the poll watchdog from backseat.

A political row erupted Monday after a March 2019 letter from the EC was found carrying the seal of the BJP's Kerala unit.

"It is now clear from this BJP rubber stamp on EC notification who is running the commission from behind. The cat is out of the bag," Banerjee told reporters at the Kolkata airport before boarding a flight to Bagdogra in north Bengal, where she is scheduled to commence election campaigns. She held up a newspaper report on the row to back her claims of the poll panel's "lack of neutrality" in conducting the Assembly elections.

"There's no need to play your games from behind the curtains. Come out in the open and fight us face to face," the CM said, without naming the commission.

Banerjee alleged that the EC's move to transfer the Nandigram BDO -- an officer she indirectly claimed was close to Suvendu Adhikari -- to Bhabanipur, the seat where the BJP leader would take on Banerjee in the upcoming polls, reeked of a political conspiracy.

"On Monday, the EC reshuffled 73 returning officers of the state. Earlier, they transferred out some 70 top IAS and IPS officers of Bengal, including the chief secretary, home secretary, the DGP and Kolkata CP. And now we know which party is pulling strings from behind," she said.

"This is not a clerical mistake, it was done with a deliberate political intention,"



A political row erupted Monday after a March 2019 letter from the EC was found carrying the seal of the BJP's Kerala unit

Banerjee claimed, refuting the EC's reported response that it was a human error.

She claimed that the EC communication was not meant only for Kerala but was addressed to the chief electoral officers of all states and union territories.

Alleging that the development put a serious question mark on the poll panel's impartiality in conducting the elections, Banerjee urged all parties to unite and fight the "attempt to impose one-party rule in India".

"It doesn't matter if opposition parties belong to the Right or Left ideologies. I request them to come together and fight against the dictatorship, autocracy and protest the one-party rule of the government and its agencies. I urge them to protest in the country's interest and ensure free and fair polls," she said, adding her call was not to elicit support but to "save democracy".

Reacting to Banerjee's comments, CPI(M) central committee member Sujan Chakraborty said, "When the TMC leaders frequently claim that we have become zero in Bengal, why is their supremo seeking our support? We have always been at the forefront in the fight against fascist forces," Chakraborty said.

SHORT TAKES

UP AIMIM chief booked for 'provocative' speech

Meerut (UP): An FIR has been registered here against AIMIM Uttar Pradesh unit chief Shaukat Ali after a video showing him purportedly making a provocative speech surfaced on social media, police said Tuesday. According to police, the video shows Ali making objectionable and inflammatory remarks. Ali, however, told PTI Videos in Lucknow that the video did not show his complete speech.

Bengal polls: Mamata resigns from 23 offices

Kolkata: Ahead of the West Bengal Assembly polls, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Tuesday resigned from 23 offices and positions she held across departments and affiliated bodies, according to an official communication. In a letter from the state's home department, its counterparts in the state government were directed to initiate necessary steps for the acceptance of her resignation from the posts, as well as from any other positions that may not have been explicitly listed in her communique.

₹85L robbery suspect held after encounter

New Delhi: A man wanted in an ₹85 lakh armed robbery case of Shastri Park and linked to a previous murder case was arrested after a brief exchange of fire in central Delhi's IP Estate area, police said Tuesday. Ajay alias Kaliya (34), a resident of Usmanpur, allegedly led a small gang of four to five criminals and was the main conspirator in the robbery case, they said.

Doc held for raping woman

Indore: Police have arrested a doctor in Madhya Pradesh's Indore district for allegedly raping a 30-year-old woman under the pretext of providing treatment and threatening her with obscene photographs, an official said Tuesday. Following the doctor's arrest on Sunday, a group of people vandalised his house and set it on fire, he said. In the wake of the public outrage, the police and the administration took action at various levels against the doctor, including sealing his clinic, he said. As per the FIR filed at the Badgonda police station on the night of March 22, the woman alleged that she had gone to the clinic of local doctor Shahid alias Saeed Khan three to four months ago complaining of stomach pain, Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Umakant Chaudhary said.

Statues of Kakori martyrs razed in UP's Shahjahanpur

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Shahjahanpur (UP), March 24: Statues of Kakori train action martyrs were demolished using a bulldozer allegedly during a road beautification work by a firm in Shahjahanpur, sparking outrage with opposition parties, including the Samajwadi Party (SP), Tuesday demanding action against those responsible for it.

The statues of freedom fighters Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqulla Khan and Roshan Singh, who hailed from Shahjahanpur, were installed at the Shaheed memorial site along a road outside the municipal corporation office here and were regularly garlanded by visiting public representatives. They were allegedly demolished on Sunday night.

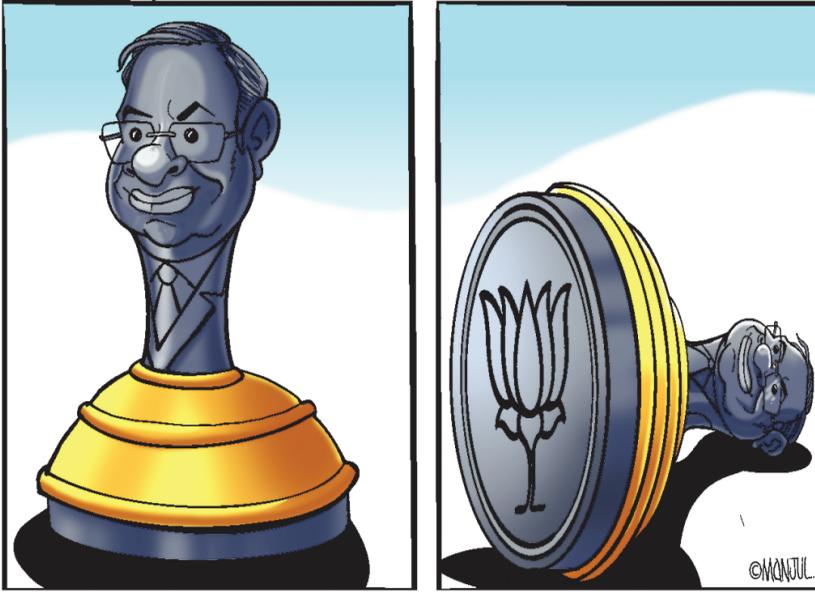
A video purportedly showing the statues being razed and their debris dumped at

a garbage site was posted on social media, drawing sharp reactions. Protests were held by the local Congress unit and a Hindu outfit.

On Tuesday evening, Shahjahanpur Police lodged an FIR against the company under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, including Sections 196(2) (promoting enmity affecting harmony at religious places) and 352 (intentional insult). Superintendent of Police Rajesh Dwivedi said that the municipal corporation's chief engineer lodged a complaint at Sadar Bazar police station.

Citing the FIR, he told PTI that beautification work was being carried out at the Shaheed memorial site located at Town Hall and the statues of the martyrs were to be shifted to a newly constructed pedestal as part of the project. The work was being executed by a firm, Infratech, he said, for martyrs.

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



AIADMK announces free refrigerator to ration cardholders

There are nearly 2.22 crore rice ration cardholders in the state who receive free rice, and commodities such as sugar, toor dal, and palmolein oil at subsidised prices every month through the public distribution system networked 34,773 fair price shops across Tamil Nadu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, March 24: AIADMK general secretary Edayappi K Palaniswami Tuesday announced free refrigerators for all rice category of ration cardholders if his party is voted to power in the 2026 Assembly election.

Also, he assured to provide one kilo of dal and one litre of cooking oil for free to rice ration cardholders in Tamil Nadu, and one-time grant of

₹10,000 to every family to manage tax burden and price rise.

There are nearly 2.22 crore rice ration cardholders in the state who receive free rice, and commodities such as sugar, toor dal, and palmolein oil at subsidised prices every month through the public distribution system networked 34,773 fair price shops across Tamil Nadu.

Palaniswami's announcements toe the line of the party leader and late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa, who had announced the populist scheme to provide free fans, mixies, and grinders as part of the AIADMK election manifesto ahead of the 2011 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections.



After coming to power, she launched the distribution of

these freebies on September 15, 2011, coinciding with former Chief Minister C N Annadurai's birth anniversary.

Releasing the party's poll manifesto for the April 23 election, at the AIADMK state headquarters here, Palaniswami

said, "The free fridge is meant to reduce the household workload of homemakers."

The party has already promised three free LPG cylinders per year to eligible households, and ₹10 lakh ex-gratia for families in case the Jallikattu bull tamers die during the sport, were among the numerous assurances in the AIADMK manifesto. He had already announced a slew of welfare measures for women, such as ₹2,000 monthly aid, Amma 2-wheeler to 5 lakh working women with subsidy of ₹25,000, waiver of education loans obtained from banks, assured hiking social security pensions for elderly and others to ₹2,000, free bus travel scheme for men, similar to women; increase rural em-

ployment scheme to 150 days, and one-time grant of ₹10,000 to every family to manage tax burden, price rise.

Palaniswami hit out at the DMK regime over alleged "commission, collection, and corruption" while releasing the party's manifesto. It may be recalled that in 2006, DMK president M Karunanidhi had announced free colour television sets to the poor households, as part of the DMK election manifesto. After coming to power, he launched the scheme on Annadurai's birth anniversary. Nearly 297 announcements figure in the AIADMK manifesto and the last one being "compassionate appointments to the family members of martyred and disabled soldiers in the military."

national



We have decided that sports colleges will be built in every commissioner (divisions), and they will be developed as a centre of excellence for a particular sport

YOGI ADITYANATH | UTTAR PRADESH CM

THANE COURT GRANTS BAIL TO COINDCX CO-FOUNDERS

A court in Thane district Tuesday granted bail to two co-founders of cryptocurrency exchange CoinDCX, Sumit Gupta and Neeraj Khandelwal, arrested in an alleged Rs 71.60 lakh cheating case, holding prima facie no case was made out against them



of the day uote

Enhancing institutions such as the Defence Cyber Agency and the Defence Space Agency would help secure communications, disrupt adversary networks and maintain information dominance

We made a promise and we delivered change. With the mandate given by the people, we are bringing transformation in every sector and every region

The country may face a crisis of LPG and petroleum products due to the ongoing war in West Asia, but instead of building consensus and preparing a strategy, the government has failed to act in time

POST OF THE DAY

Rupee- falling Gold- falling Silver- falling Stocks- falling Still, none of them can fall enough to reach the level of journalism in our country.

MODI, TRUMP DISCUSS MIDDLE-EAST CONFLICT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 24: India supports de-escalation and restoration of peace at the earliest in West Asia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Tuesday after he held a phone conversation with US President Donald Trump that focused on securing the Strait of Hormuz for global shipping.

The call was initiated by the US president, a day after he extended Washington's deadline by five days for Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

"Received a call from President Trump and had a useful exchange of views on the situation in West Asia," Modi said on social media.

"India supports de-escalation and restoration of peace at the earliest. Ensuring that the Strait of Hormuz remains open, secure and accessible is essential for the whole world. We agreed to stay in touch regarding efforts towards peace and stability," he said.

US envoy to India Sergio Gor also said that the two leaders deliberated on the importance of keeping the key shipping lane open.

"They discussed the ongoing situation in the Middle East, including the importance of keeping the Strait of Hormuz open," Gor said on social media.

Trump said Monday that he has extended the deadline for Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, the strategically



THE CALL WAS INITIATED BY THE US PRESIDENT, A DAY AFTER HE EXTENDED WASHINGTON'S DEADLINE BY FIVE DAYS FOR IRAN TO REOPEN THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ

PM urges states to work as Team India

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Tuesday announced the constitution of seven empowered groups to deal with the potential long-term impacts of the West Asia war and urged states to work with the Centre in a 'Team India' approach to ward off the crisis.

located shipping lane between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, and that he will hold off strikes against Iranian energy sites for five days.

sharing any details, also said that there have been "productive conversations" between the US and Iran for "complete and total resolution" to the conflict in West Asia.

Separatist Aasiya Andrabi gets life term in UAPA case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 24: A special NIA court Tuesday sentenced hardline separatist Aasiya Andrabi to life imprisonment for conspiring to wage war against India, observing that any leniency for the Dukhtaran-e-Millat chief would only "infuse fresh vigour" into her efforts to secede Kashmir.

Additional Sessions Judge Chander Jit Singh also handed down 30-year prison sentence to Andrabi's close associates, Sofi Fehmeeda and Nahida Nasreen, for their roles in the conspiracy.

After convicting Andrabi (62), Nasreen (58), and Fehmeeda (48) in the case in January this year, the court gave a reasoned 28-page order for the quantum of sentence for them.

The judge said "no remorse has been shown by any of the convicts in respect of their acts rather it is submitted that they are proud of what they were doing and also that they will continue to do the same work".

He drew a similarity of this case with that of 26/11 accused and lone terrorist arrested, Ajmal Kasab, who had shown no remorse for his act of violence while raining bullets in Mumbai on November 26, 2008.

The judge said showing any leniency will amount to infusing a fresh lease of life and vigour in the spirit of convicts which aims at secession of an integral part of India.

The court also reasoned that showing any tolerance to the convict has a potential to send a message to other with similar ideas that they can get away with such acts through incarceration for some years and may promote the ideas of causing secession of part of India.

Lok Sabha passes transgenders Bill



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 24: The Lok Sabha Tuesday passed a Bill to amend a law on protection and rights of transgender persons, even as opposition members raised concerns that the proposed legislation excludes social orientations from the ambit of the statute.

Responding to the debate on the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Virendra Kumar said the proposed legislation aims to provide protection to only those who face boycott due to biological issues.

He asserted that the amendment will ensure that transgender persons continue to get legal recognition and protection. Kumar said while the 2019 law had a provision for a maximum of two years of imprisonment, the amendment Bill provides for a maximum of 14 years in jail with a penalty.

Before the passage of the Bill, the House also rejected amendments moved by Opposition

members by a voice vote.

While the government said the objective is to provide protection to such persons, the opposition slammed the proposed legislation for taking away the right to self-determination of identity, such as gay and lesbian individuals, and demanded that it be sent to a standing committee for proper consultations.

The Bill seeks to give a precise definition of the term "transgender" and exclude "different sexual orientations and self-perceived sexual identities" from the ambit of the proposed law, which was introduced in the Lok Sabha earlier this month.

It underlines that a transgender person "shall not include, nor shall ever have been so included, persons with different sexual orientations and self-perceived sexual identities."

"The intent, object and purpose of the Act is and was to protect a specified class of persons socially and culturally known as transgender people who face societal discrimination of an extreme and oppressive nature.

Probe against Nashik 'godman' Kharat widens

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 24: The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing cases against self-styled godman and rape accused Ashok Kharat has unearthed assets worth Rs 1,500 crore and 100 objectionable videos, a senior police official said Tuesday.

With the discovery widening the scope of the investigation, the Nashik police and Income Tax Department have also been roped in for the probe, the official said.

Kharat, who heads a temple trust at Sinnar in Nashik district and had several political leaders visit him over the years, was arrested March 18 after a 35-year-old woman accused him of repeated rape over a period of three years.

Two more cases have been registered against him in connection with his alleged sexual exploitation of a seven-month pregnant woman and another woman on the pretext of getting her remarried.

A multi-agency investigation is underway, considering the scope and seriousness of the probe, he added. The expansion aims to manage the complex layers of evidence, including digital forensics and financial trails, he said.

SHORT TAKES

Cop arrested after SUV kills woman labourer

New Delhi: A Delhi Police sub-inspector was arrested after his SUV allegedly mowed down a 45-year-old woman labourer at a road construction site in west Delhi's Punjabi Bagh area on early Tuesday, an official said. The accused, identified as Lucky -- posted at Ranjit Nagar police station -- rushed the injured woman to the hospital on his car after the accident, where she died during treatment, the official added.

Top Maoist leader Papa Rao surrenders

Raipur/Kawardha: One of the last remaining senior Maoist commanders, Papa Rao, surrendered along with his 17 team members Tuesday, marking a significant milestone in Chhattisgarh's fight against Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), officials said. The surrender underscores the waning fortunes of one of the country's longest-running insurgencies, as a combination of security pressure and rehabilitation efforts chips away at the movement's core, they said.

Karnataka govt cancels RSS event

Bangalore: The Karnataka government Tuesday cancelled the proposed three-day lecture series on the RSS ideology Deendayal Upadhyay at KSOU in Mysore citing violations of protocol and guidelines. The decision follows scrutiny of the university's plan to host the event from March 25 to 27 without prior intimation to the government.

Ajit Pawar death: 'Zero FIR' registered in B'lore

Bangalore: The Bengaluru police have registered a case related to Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar's death in a plane crash in Baramati on a complaint by his nephew Rohit Pawar, who has alleged that the tragedy was a result of a "larger criminal conspiracy" to eliminate his uncle. Pawar was killed January 28 when a Bombardier Learjet 45 aircraft, operated by VSR Ventures Private Limited, crashed near Baramati Airport, Pune, Maharashtra.

EAST COAST RAILWAY Tender Notice No. ST-OT-FENCING-KUR-553, Dt: 17.03.2026

EAST COAST RAILWAY Tender Notice No. ST-OT-FENCING-KUR-553, Dt: 17.03.2026

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EAST COAST RAILWAY Tender No. 67-KUR-TRD-OT-2025-26

EAST COAST RAILWAY Tender Notice No. SBP-ELECT-2026-T-271



Russia is attacking a crowded city centre in broad daylight. Just minutes ago, Russian-Iranian drones struck the city of Lviv
YULIA SVYRYDENKO | PRIME MINISTER, UKRAINE

PAKISTAN RANKS MOST POLLUTED COUNTRY IN 2025

Pakistan was ranked the most polluted country in the world in 2025, followed by Bangladesh and Tajikistan, according to an annual report by a Swiss-based air quality firm released Tuesday. The Air Quality Index (AQI) country ranking shows that PM2.5 concentration in Pakistan is currently 13.5 times the World Health Organisation annual PM2.5 guideline value



of the day quote

The Department always complies with court orders but disagrees with the decision and is pursuing an appeal
SEAN PARNELL | SPOKESMAN, PENTAGON

As early as 2019 ... Lithuania ... requested the exclusion of the Hungarian delegation from a NATO meeting, stating that there were suspicions that the Hungarian delegation would pass on information of the highest confidentiality to Moscow
DONALD TUSK | PRIME MINISTER, POLAND

We are in close contact with U.S. administration over this, they took the decision to go to war according to parameters that they think are related to regional security
MAJED AL ANSARI | FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESPERSON, QATAR

SHORT TAKES

Australia, EU seal trade deal

Sydney: Australia and the European Union signed a free trade agreement Tuesday after eight years of negotiations, removing tariffs on almost all goods and potentially easing EU access to Australian critical minerals. However, some Australian agricultural exports, including beef and sheep meat, will face quotas. Australian farmers criticised the pact for offering what they called "subpar" access to the bloc, while French farmers argued the quotas were too generous. The deal follows intensified talks amid sharply higher US tariffs under the Trump administration and growing Western concerns over China's dominant position in rare earths and other critical minerals. The two sides also signed an agreement to deepen security and defence cooperation.

Bangladesh's influential ex-army general held

Dhaka: An influential former military general who played a key role in 2007 in installing an army-backed interim government replacing a caretaker one, which was presumed to be inclined to the BNP, now headed by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, has been arrested, police said Tuesday. Police said their men in plain clothes arrested retired Lieutenant General Masud Uddin Chowdhury, one of the key figures instrumental in changing the government in 2007 and installing an interim one that ran the country for the subsequent two years until the 2008 elections. "The detective branch arrested him (Chowdhury) last night from his Baridhara residence (in Dhaka). He has been arrested in relation to five cases which have been lodged against him," the branch's chief, Shafiqul Islam, told reporters.

Colombia military plane crash kills 66

Bogota: A Colombian military plane crashed in a takeoff disaster Monday, killing 66 people as rescuers shuttled dozens of survivors to nearby hospitals and searched for four who were still missing, according to a top official. The Lockheed Martin-built Hercules C-130 transport plane was carrying 128 people, including 11 Air Force members, 115 army personnel and two national police officers, according to Hugo Alejandro Lopez, head of the nation's armed forces. The death toll was nearly double that of the previous figure given by authorities, who continued search and recovery efforts at the site of the deadly crash.

US-ISRAELI WAR ON IRAN

Pak offers to host peace talks

REUTERS

Islamabad/Jerusalem/Tel Aviv, March 24: Pakistan's prime minister said Tuesday he was willing to host talks between the US and Iran on ending the war in the Gulf, a day after President Donald Trump postponed threats to bomb Iranian power plants, saying there had been "productive" talks.

In a post on X, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said Pakistan welcomed and fully supported ongoing efforts to pursue dialogue to end the war. "Subject to concurrence by the US and Iran, Pakistan stands ready and honoured to be the host to facilitate meaningful and conclusive talks for a comprehensive settlement," he said.

The US and Israel launched strikes on Iran February 28 after saying they had failed to make enough headway in talks aimed at ending Iran's nuclear program although mediator Oman said significant progress had been made.

Since then, Iran has attacked countries that host US bases, struck Gulf energy infrastructure and effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, conduit for a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas, creating the worst energy supply shock in history. A Pakistani government



AIR SIRENS SOUND IN TEL AVIV

Iranian missiles triggered air raid sirens in densely populated Tel Aviv, Israel's commercial hub, where there are also military sites.

A missile carved a massive crater in the road of one neighbourhood, and the blast blew out the walls of a multi-storey apartment building, scattering debris across the street. It was the latest in a series of Iranian attacks in recent days that have penetrated Israel's sophisticated air defences. There were no reported deaths.

Israel's military said its fighter jets had carried out a wave of strikes in central Tehran Monday, targeting command centres including facilities associated with the IRGC's intelligence arm and the Intelligence Ministry. It said it had hit more than 50 other targets overnight, including ballistic missile storage and launch sites.

Air defence systems were activated across Tehran as explosions were heard simultaneously in several areas of the capital, according to the Iranian news agency Nournews.

At least eight people were killed and 28 injured in a strike on a residential area of Tabriz, a city of 1.7 million in Iran's northwest, the provincial director for crisis management told Tasnim news agency.

source said discussions on a meeting were at an advanced stage and if it did happen, "a big 'if'", it would take place within a week.

IRAN DENIES TALKS HAVE TAKEN PLACE

Trump said Monday the US and Iran had held "very good and productive" conversations about a "complete and total resolution of hostilities in the Middle East". He said talks had begun Sunday and continued into Monday, with Special Envoy Steve

Witkoff and his son-in-law Jared Kushner involved.

But after Trump's Truth Social comment Monday, Iran denied that any talks had been held.

Iran's powerful parliament speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf - the interlocutor on the Iranian side, according to an Israeli official and two other sources familiar with the matter - described reports of direct talks as "fake news".

Pakistan willing to host peace talks to end war
US-Israeli war on Iran now in its fourth week
Trump said "productive" talks had begun, Iran denied

Philippine Prez declares nat'l energy emergency

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Manila, March 24: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Tuesday declared a state of national energy emergency to respond to the impact of the Middle East war, which his administration said posed "an imminent danger of a critically low energy supply."

Under the declaration, which will initially last for a year, Marcos will lead a contingency committee that will ensure the availability and orderly distribution of fuel, food, medicines, agricultural products and other basic goods. Authorities were ordered to take action against the hoarding, profiteering and manipulation of the supply of petroleum products. The Department of Migrant Workers, meanwhile, was asked to brace for the possible rescue and evac-

uation of Filipinos in the Middle East. The government has started to provide 5,000 pesos (\$83) each to large numbers of motorcycle taxi drivers and other public

transport workers nationwide to help them cope with soaring gasoline and diesel prices. Free bus rides have also been provided to students and workers in selected cities.

About 2.4 million Filipinos live and work in the Middle East, including about 31,000 in Israel and 800 in Iran. Most have opted, however, to stay and work in the region, with only several hundreds being flown home so far with government help since the Middle East hostilities began.

A Filipina caregiver, Mary Ann de Vera, was killed in Tel Aviv, Israel, in an Iranian missile strike Feb 28 while helping bring her elderly charge to a bomb shelter, Philippine officials said.



Charleigh Wong, 8, poses for photos under cherry blossom trees for her grandparents as her brother Elias Wong, 5, watches at David Lam Park, in Vancouver, British Columbia

HOW THE US LOST LEVERAGE IN IRAN

The United States' war on Iran, initiated under President Donald Trump, has increasingly revealed the limits of military power in shaping political outcomes. What began as a campaign aimed at weakening Tehran and forcing strategic concessions has instead produced a complex and dangerous stalemate. Rather than collapsing under pressure, Iran has demonstrated resilience, recalibrated its strategy, and positioned itself to influence the terms of any eventual peace.

Years earlier, seasoned observers of Iranian politics had emphasized that real authority in the Islamic Republic rested not with elected officials but with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. For decades, Khamenei defined Iran's domestic and foreign policy trajectory. His tenure, which began in 1989, was marked by economic decline, political repression, and an entrenched hostility toward the US. Under his leadership, Iran's currency lost much of its value, while ordinary citizens endured rising inflation, resource shortages, and declining living standards. Despite these failures, Khamenei maintained a firm grip on power, often responding to dissent with force. Even in

the face of widespread protests and economic hardship, the regime showed little inclination toward reform. Instead, it doubled down on a strategy of resistance, preparing for confrontation with external adversaries. When that confrontation finally came in the form of a US-Israeli military campaign, Iran proved more capable of response than many had anticipated.

Although the war inflicted significant damage on Iran's military infrastructure, it did not achieve its broader political objectives. Tehran adopted a decentralized and adaptive approach, launching strikes not only against military targets but also against economic and civilian infrastructure across the region. These actions signalled that Iran retained both the will and the capacity to impose costs on its adversaries, even in a weakened state.

For the US, the challenge has been compounded by the absence of a clear endgame. The initial expectation that internal unrest would topple the Iranian regime has not materialized. While segments of the population oppose the government, the state has demonstrated its willingness to use extreme violence to suppress dissent. Moreover, Iranian society re-



mains deeply divided. A portion of the population supports the regime, another opposes it outright, and a large middle group prioritizes stability and economic improvement over political upheaval.

The war has, paradoxically, strengthened the regime's position in some respects. The death of Khamenei—brought about by external military action—has transformed him into a symbol of resistance, rallying nationalist sentiment and shifting attention away from domestic grievances.

Iran's current strategy does not rely on decisive victories but on sustained disruption. By periodically targeting critical infrastructure, par-

Efforts to undermine the Iranian regime through support for opposition groups are equally fraught. Such strategies could fragment the opposition, provoke nationalist backlash, and exacerbate regional instability without significantly weakening the government's hold on power. Historical experience suggests that external interference often strengthens authoritarian regimes by allowing them to frame internal dissent as foreign-driven.

A negotiated cease-fire remains the most plausible path to ending the conflict, yet it comes with significant complications. Iran is likely to demand assurances that future attacks—particularly by Israel—will be constrained. Meeting such demands would place the United States in a difficult spot, forcing it to balance its commitment to Israeli security with the need to stabilize the broader region and global markets.

Iran retains the capacity to target American interests and regional allies, and it may prefer a prolonged conflict now to deter future confrontations. This dynamic underscores the central dilemma facing Washington: the inability to impose a settlement on an adversary that

is both resilient and strategically patient.

Ultimately, Iran's objective is to raise the costs of the war to a level that compels the United States to seek compromise. By doing so, Tehran hopes to secure concessions that it can present as a strategic victory, reinforcing its position domestically and regionally. In this sense, the conflict has evolved into a contest of endurance rather than decisive force.

The broader tragedy lies in the impact on the Iranian people. Prolonged conflict delays the possibility of economic recovery and political reform, entrenching hardship and uncertainty. What began as an effort to reshape Iran's behaviour has instead reinforced the very dynamics it sought to change.

In the end, the war illustrates the limits of coercion in achieving complex political goals. Without a clear strategy for the aftermath of military action, even the most powerful nations can find themselves constrained by the resilience of their adversaries. As the conflict drags on, it becomes increasingly evident that there are no easy solutions—only difficult choices with far-reaching consequences.



Climate change is a reality. We need to make sure the supply chain is not disrupted. A steady supply of broken rice to the ethanol sector will help ensure that
SANJEEV CHOPRA | FOOD SECRETARY

AFTER ZOMATO, SWIGGY HIKES PLATFORM FEE

Food delivery platform Swiggy has hiked the platform fee it charges users to Rs 17.58 per order, its app showed Tuesday, days after rival Zomato increased the charges. Swiggy had last hiked its platform fee in September last year. The company has now raised it to Rs 17.58 per order inclusive of GST, whereas rival Zomato charges Rs 14.90 on a pre-GST basis. On March 20, Zomato hiked the platform fee it charges users by Rs 2.40 to Rs 14.90 per order on a pre-GST basis



WAR SAPS DEMAND

Private sector growth hits three-year low

REUTERS

Bangalore, March 24: India's private sector expanded at its weakest pace in over three years in March as price shocks from the US-Israeli war on Iran dampened domestic demand, yet international orders hit a record high, a survey showed Tuesday.

The data signals weakening activity in the final month of the fiscal year for one of the world's top-performing economies, and highlights the risks to growth in India and globally from the Middle East conflict.

India's GDP growth had already slowed to 7.8% last quarter from 8.4% in the previous one as government spending and private investment cooled.

HSBC's flash India Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), compiled by S&P Global, slumped to 56.5 this month, well below the median forecast of 59.0 in a Reuters poll which had expected little change from February's final reading of 58.9.

While a reading above 50 signals expansion, the downturn was the sharpest in 18 months, pointing to a notable loss of momentum.

Manufacturing bore the brunt with its PMI sliding to a 4-1/2-year low of 53.8 from 56.9 as the Middle East conflict stoked market instability and consumer uncertainty, dragging factory output growth to its softest since August 2021.

The services industry, which accounts for the majority of India's GDP, also lost ground with the PMI easing to 57.2 from 58.1.

Stock markets join global rally

REUTERS

Mumbai, March 24: Indian shares joined a global rally Tuesday, after US President Donald Trump postponed the bombing of Iran's power grid amid conflicting signals about talks between the two sides, with a rebound in heavyweight HDFC Bank lifting the benchmarks.

The Nifty 50 rose 1.78% to 22,912.40 points, while the BSE Sensex added 1.89% to 74,068.45.

Other Asian markets gained 1.9%, while Brent crude traded near \$102 per barrel. All 16 major sectors logged gains. The broader small-caps and mid-caps added 2.6% each.

India's largest private lender, HDFC Bank, rose 2.8% after it appointed external law firms to review the resignation letter of former part-time chairman Atanu Chakraborty.

The shares had fallen 11.7% over the last three sessions, wiping off \$16.3 billion in market value, after Chakraborty's abrupt exit. Financials and banks rose about 2.2% each. Auto stocks gained 2.4%, while tourism-linked shares jumped 3.9%.

FX intervention, a banker at a state-run bank said, selling on the interbank system to absorb dollar demand and marking a shift from past efforts to defend specific levels, he added. The banker requested anonymity as he is not authorised to speak to the media. US stocks staged a sharp recovery Monday, with the Dow, S&P 500 and the Nasdaq all gaining more than one percent.

There is a shift in the fundamental view about the economy's growth-inflation-current account mix, which warrants rupee weakness, said Dhiraj Nim, economist and FX strategist at ANZ. "The scale of the shock is large, which means burning FX reserves to defend any particular level of the exchange rate may not be prudent. Higher yields are also the natural market outcomes in such a scenario."

Iran war may halve LPG imports

India is reeling under its worst gas crisis in decades with the government cutting supplies for industries to shield households from any shortage of cooking gas

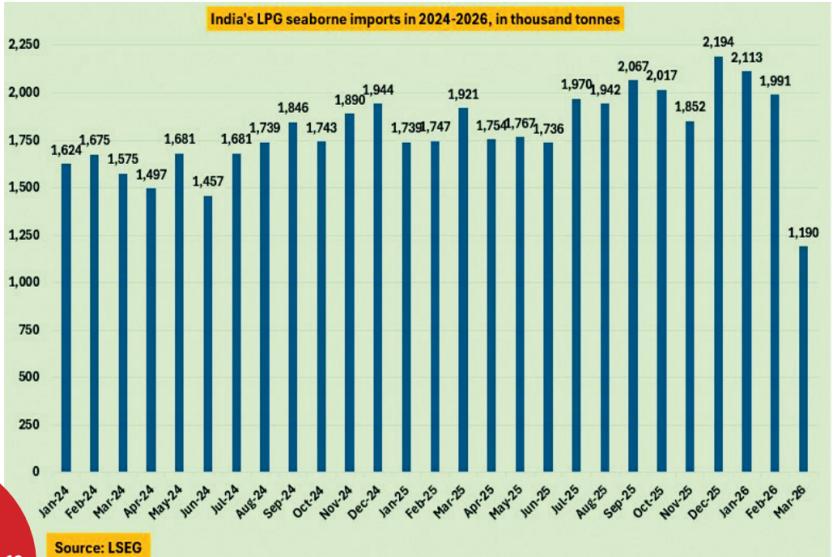
REUTERS

Moscow, March 24: The war in Iran and the blockage of the strategic Strait of Hormuz are likely to halve this month's imports of liquefied petroleum gas by India, its number-two importer, according to traders and ship-tracking data.

data from LSEG suggest India is set to import 1.190 million metric tons of LPG this month, down 46% from February on a daily basis.

LPG is mainly used as fuel for cars, heating and to produce other petrochemicals. The government in New Delhi earlier this month asked consumers to avoid panic buying of LPG cylinders and shift to piped natural gas where possible.

India is trying to secure more LPG, or propane and butane, cargoes from new sources such as the United States, Norway, Canada and Russia, in addition to Gulf region supplies that are



still available. Imports from Russia though are constrained by scarcity of available volumes

and vessels, as well as relatively long routes from the key LPG exporting outlet of Ust-Luga in the Baltic Sea.

India's government has said the local refineries have increased LPG output by around 40% from the start of March.

Iran war and Hormuz blockage disrupt fuel supply
Imports estimated at 1.19 mn tonnes, traders say
India seeking LPG from US, Norway, Canada, Russia

India consumed 33.15 million metric tons of cooking gas last year, with imports accounting for about 60% of demand. About 90% of those imports came from the Middle East

India covers around 60% of its LPG needs with imports and until the February 28 US-Israeli strikes on Iran, the Middle East had accounted for around 90% of sea-borne supplies, reaching 22.7 million metric tons last year.

However, this month so far, the share of Gulf exporters fell to around 55%, with about 40% of imports coming from the US and Russia and Argentina accounting for the rest, LSEG data showed.

Traders and ship-tracking

Vegetable oil buyers step back, betting war-driven rally will ease

Mumbai: Indian vegetable oil refiners are curtailing purchases of palm oil, soyoil and sunflower oil, betting that the Iran war-driven price rally will not last and that they can replenish stocks after the conflict ends, industry officials told Reuters. Lower buying by India, the world's largest importer of vegetable oils, could limit gains in Malaysian palm oil and US soyoil prices, while supporting local vegetable oil prices and domestic oilseed growers. Palm oil prices earlier this month climbed to their highest in more than a year on expectations that rising crude oil prices, driven by the Middle East conflict, would boost demand for the tropical oil from the biodiesel sector. "There's no need to panic-buy. There are ample stocks available in the global market, and prices will come down sharply the moment the war ends," said a senior official with a leading edible oil importing company, which has curtailed imports for March and April delivery. India, which meets nearly two-thirds of its vegetable oil needs through imports, brought in an average 1.36 million metric tons a month in the marketing year that ended in October 2025. Imports are likely to fall to about 1.1 million tons in March, with palm oil shipments seen at around 680,000 tons, down from 847,689 tons the previous month, according to estimates from three dealers at global trade houses. "Indian buyers have largely stayed on the sidelines over the past few days. The recent correction in palm oil prices may attract some buying, but overall sentiment remains wait-and-watch," said Sandeep Bajoria, chief executive of Sunvin Group, a vegetable oil brokerage and consultancy firm. Malaysian palm oil was trading 1.7% lower Tuesday. Stock levels from recent months of imports are comfortable, encouraging Indian buyers to bet the war will not last long, said a Mumbai-based dealer with a global trade house. Supplies from India's new-season rapeseed crop have started arriving, with output estimated at a record high, helping to partly offset lower imports, the dealer said. India buys palm oil mainly from Indonesia and Malaysia, and imports soyoil and sunflower oil from Argentina, Brazil, Russia, and Ukraine.

Aditya Aluminium honoured for tuberculosis initiative



POST NEWS NETWORK

Sambalpur, March 24: The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Sambalpur felicitated Aditya Aluminium Lapanga for its continued support to tuberculosis (TB) patients of Rengali Block under the Nikshay Mitra initiative of the Pradhan Mantri TB Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan.

The felicitation was conferred during a function organised by the Zila Swasthya Samiti Sambalpur at District Headquarters

Hospital Sambalpur. The event was chaired by the Chief District Medical & Public Health Officer (CDMO), Sambalpur, Pradeep Kumar Hota.

On the occasion, Jaganath Prasad Nayak, Unit Head of Aditya Aluminium, Lapanga, received the award and certificate on behalf of the organisation in recognition of its sustained commitment to supporting TB patients in Rengali Block, thereby contributing to the national mission of achieving a TB-free India.

₹ struggling to stay afloat

Rupee slumps 23 paise to hit an all-time low against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 24: The rupee dropped 23 paise to close at 93.76 against the US dollar Tuesday as a strengthening greenback against major crosses and elevated global crude prices spooked investors.

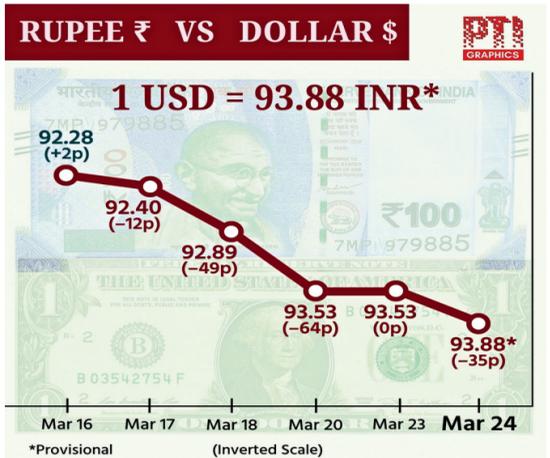
Foreign fund outflows amid uncertainties over the West Asia crisis further weighed on the local unit, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 93.66 against the greenback and remained volatile throughout the session. It eventually settled at 93.76, down 23 paise from its previous close.

The rupee breached the 94-level against the US dollar for the first time on Monday, before closing flat at 93.53.

Trump Monday said the US was talking with a "respected" Iranian leader and claimed the Islamic Republic was eager for a deal to end the war.

However, Iran's denial of



Trump's claims and continued hostilities in the region created uncertainty, pushing up global crude oil prices.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.23 per cent higher at 99.18.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading 1.45 per cent lower at \$101.4 per barrel in futures trade.

Foreign institutional investors sold equities worth Rs 8,009.56 crore on a net basis Tuesday, according to exchange data.

Dwindling RBI support for ₹, bonds spooks markets

While a pullback in oil offered marginal relief Tuesday, the rupee has fallen more than 3% since the war began

REUTERS

Mumbai, March 24: The recent selloff in the rupee and government bonds points to waning signs of central bank support, four bankers said, potentially exposing markets to sharper swings spurred by the Middle East war.

Indian government bonds plunged Monday, with the 10-year yield jumping 15 basis points to the highest in more than a year. The yield did not dip much a day later despite some pullback in crude prices.

This is in contrast to the first three weeks of the Iran war, when the benchmark yield rose only about 7 bps despite surging oil prices.

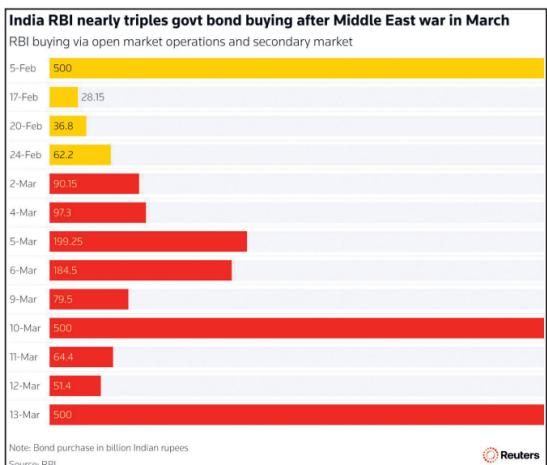
The rupee, which hit a record low of nearly 94 per dollar Monday, recovered slightly Tuesday but bankers worry about further losses from a foreign exo-

driven surge in oil prices. Since the conflict began February 28, the RBI has purchased

Rs 1.77 trillion (\$18.9 billion) of bonds through March 13, the latest date for which official

driven a surge in oil prices. Since the conflict began February 28, the RBI has purchased

Rs 1.77 trillion (\$18.9 billion) of bonds through March 13, the latest date for which official



Rupee, bonds tumble as RBI likely eases support - bankers
Rupee drops to near 94/dollar, 10-year yield hits 6.89%
RBI bought 1.77 trillion rupees of bonds in first 2 weeks of March
RBI has sold around \$16-18 billion so far in March - banker

data is available. Buying from an investor category that includes the central bank has also dropped since then, data from the clearing house shows. In the FX markets, the central bank has intervened across spot, forwards and non-deliverable forwards, according to bankers.

However, over the past three sessions, the RBI has adopted a more passive approach to

NATIONAL INDOOR CHAMPIONSHIPS

IPL CORNER

Baranica raises bar RCB sold for ₹16,706cr

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 24: Seasoned Tamil Nadu athlete Baranica Elangovan smashed the overall national record in women's pole vault event in a stunning performance, clearing a height of 4.22m on the opening day of the National Indoor Championships here Tuesday.

The 29-year-old Baranica, a three-time national outdoor champion, cleared 4.22m to better the earlier national record of 4.21m which has been in the name of Rosy Meena Paulraj since 2022.

Before Baranica's feat Tuesday, there was no official national indoor record for women's pole vault as this is the inaugural national championships.

The 4.22m mark of Baranica will now be the national indoor as well as the overall record, and it will just be a formality for the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) to ratify it. The officers of the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) took samples from her for dope test after her event, a requirement for ratification of national records.

She went on to further improve her national record but failed three times when the bar was raised to 4.25m.

"I have major competitions ahead and was focusing only on the techniques. It worked for me and I am really happy with that. I was mainly focusing on the runway approach only. Previously, I was struggling with the runway," said Baranica after her feat.

She credited her coach Milber Bertrand Russell, who has been with her since 2016, for her feat.

Baranica, who is currently with the Reliance Foundation High Performance Centre in Bhubaneswar after shifting



base from Chennai in 2023, had made a remarkable comeback from an Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) surgery on her left leg in 2020.

PAYASINGH SHINES



In other events, local athlete Sarun Payasingh won the men's long jump gold with a personal best effort of 7.80m.

The 25-year-old Payasingh beat triple jump national record holder Praveen Chithravel of Tamil Nadu, who was competing in long jump here.

Chithravel, who was representing JSW, made only three attempts and left after a best effort of 7.78m which fetched him a silver. P David of Railways was third with 7.69m.

"This is my first indoor competition and winning gold is a big achievement. I was not thinking about the medal but was looking to do my personal best," said Payasingh, who has been roped in by Reliance.

Born to a farmer at a village in Odisha's Kalahandi district, Payasingh is currently at the residential hostel attached to the indoor facility. He was earlier at the Sports Hostel in Bhubaneswar from 2016 to 2024 after he was spotted at the talent scouting at the district level.

"We have four acres of land at the village and my father grows crops there. I competed in the School Nationals and my PE teacher told me to participate in the talent scouting programme. I played football also earlier. I also run 100m. I am competing in 60m hurdles as well here,"

RESULTS

MEN

800m: Mohammed Afsal (Air Force) 1:47.86 seconds, Kalyan JR (Karnataka) 1:53.98 seconds, Sayan Karmakar (West Bengal) 1:56.98 seconds.

3,000m: Shivaji Parashuram (Reliance) 8:09.88 seconds, Vinod Singh (Madhya Pradesh) 8:16.93 seconds, Rahul Kumar Verma (Chhattisgarh) 8:18.21 seconds.

60m hurdles: Krishik M (Karnataka) 7.71 seconds, Rathish P (Reliance) 7.84 seconds, Muhammed Lazan (JSW) 8.00 seconds

Long jump: Sarun Payasingh (Odisha) 7.80m, Praveen Chithravel (JSW) 7.78m, David P (Railway) 7.69m.

Shot put: Ravi Kumar (BSF) 17.17m, Adhish Ghildiyal (Uttarakhand) 16.92m, Balaji (Tamil Nadu) 16.74m

WOMEN

3,000m: Priyanka C (Karnataka) 9:42.05 seconds, Kajal Rangnath (Gujarat) 9:44.01 seconds, Sushmita Tigga (Odisha) 10:22.30 seconds.

Shot put: Rekha (NCOE Patiala) 15.63m, Mayuri Arade (Karnataka) 9.15m.

MEN U20

Shot put: Ommkar Prasad Nand (Odisha) 17.77m, SAI Kiran A (NCOE Patiala) 17.00m, Harshit Gahlot (JSW) 16.98m

800m: Lokesh Magendhiran (Tamil Nadu) 1:53.92 seconds, Rajdip Pal (West Bengal) 2:02.34 seconds.

WOMEN U20

Shot put: Dona Maria (Kerala) 13.35m, Khusboo (Haryana) 12.03m, Akshaya GR (Tamil Nadu) 11.89m.

Pole vault: Baranica Elangovan (Tamil Nadu) 4.22m, Blessy Kunjumon (Kerala) 3.95m, Mariya Jaison (Kerala) 3.380m.

Long jump: Anamika KA (JSW) 6.05m, Manisha Merel (Odisha) 6.04m, Sherin A (JSW) 5.92m.

he said.

The same facility is hosting the 2028 World Indoor Championships.

T20I RANKINGS

Mandhana retains second position

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dubai, March 24: Swashbuckling India batter Smriti Mandhana retained her second spot, while skipper Harmanpreet Kaur moved up to 14th in the latest ICC women's T20I rankings for batters released here Tuesday.

Apart from Mandhana, the big-hitting Shafali Verma was the other Indian in the top 10, holding on to her sixth position, while Jemimah Rodrigues remained joint 11th. Among bowlers, spin all-rounder Deepti Sharma climbed one spot to third with pacer Renuka Singh Thakur retaining her sixth place. Seamer Arundhati Reddy, however, slipped out of the top 10 to 11th.

Deepti also rose to No 3 in the all-rounders' rankings.

Australia opener Georgia Voll entered the top 10 of the batting rankings for the first time while New Zealand star Sophie Devine moved up two places to 18th in the list.

SHORT TAKES

Lakshya to lead India

New Delhi: Lakshya Sen, fresh from his All England runner-up finish, will spearhead India's challenge in the Thomas Cup, while former world champion PV Sindhu and rising star Unnati Hooda will lead the women's team in the Uber Cup next month. The Badminton Association of India has largely retained the core of the side that scripted a historic triumph at the Thomas Cup in 2022, naming Sen, Kidambi Srikanth, HS Prannoy and the men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty for the upcoming edition in Horsens, Denmark, from April 24 to May 3. Young shuttler Ayush Shetty has earned a maiden call-up after consistent performances on the senior circuit.

Yuki, Venus make exit

Miami: India's Yuki Bhambri and his Kiwi partner Michael Venus made a first round exit from the Miami Open following a narrow loss to John-Patrick Smith and Sander Arends here. Yuki and Venus went down 6-4, 5-7, 13-15 in a round of 32 contest to the Australian-Dutch combine in one hour 52 minutes. There was little separating the two teams. Smith and Arends converted half of their four break points while Yuki and Venus were able to convert the couple of break points they earned in the match. It was the first meeting between Arends and Smit, and, Yuki and Venus. Yuki had reached the semifinals of the Indian Wells alongside Andre Goransson earlier this month. The 33-year-old Indian had famously made the semifinals of the US Open last year with Venus.

Mbappe fit again

Paris: France striker Kylian Mbappe says he has fully recovered from a knee injury and wants to play all of Real Madrid's remaining matches in the season run-in as he builds toward the World Cup. The 27-year-old missed four league games in 2026 due to a lingering knee issue from last season but featured off the bench in the 64th minute of Madrid's 3-2 win over Atletico Sunday. Mbappe has been named in France's squad for friendlies against Brazil on March 26 and Colombia three days later in the United States, which is co-hosting the June 11-July 19 World Cup with Canada and Mexico. "I have made a 100% recovery," Mbappe told AS. France will play in Group I at the World Cup with Norway, Senegal and the winner of an intercontinental playoff.

AFC ASIAN CUP 2027 QUALIFIER

AUS-BORN RYAN SET FOR INDIA DEBUT

Jamil names squad for Hong Kong qualifier

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 24: Australian-born forward Ryan Williams could make his much-anticipated India debut after being named in head coach Khalid Jamil's 23-member squad for the AFC Asian Cup 2027 Qualifier against Hong Kong March 31 in Kochi.

Williams was included in the squad after FIFA cleared his change of association, paving the way for the 31-year-old winger to represent India at the senior international level.

He had earlier been part of India's preparatory camp for the Bangladesh qualifier but missed out on the lineup due to pending documentation.

With all formalities now complete, he is in line to make his debut against Hong Kong.

Already ruled out of qualification for the Asian Cup, India will look to sign off their campaign on a positive note with a blend of experience and youth in the squad.

Williams, whose mother hails from an Anglo-Indian family in Mumbai, will thus become only the second foreign-born footballer of Indian origin to play for the country after Japan-born Arata Izumi, who represented India between 2013 and 2014.

A versatile attacker currently playing for Indian Super League side Bengaluru FC, Williams relinquished his Australian passport last year to play for India.

Born in Perth in 1993, Williams began his professional journey in England after joining Portsmouth's academy in 2010.

He broke into the senior side a year later, making his debut against Middlesbrough, before going on to have stints with clubs such as Fulham and Barnsley.

On the international stage, Williams represented Australia at the youth level, featuring in the 2012 AFC U-19 Championship and the 2013 FIFA U-20 World Cup.

His only senior appearance for Australia came in a 2019 friendly against South Korea, a non-competitive fixture that



This is a good opportunity for us to build for the future. We have a lot of promising players coming through, who are currently with the U20 and U23 national teams, playing in the SAFF U20 Championship in Maldives, and the U23 Tri-Nation in Arunachal Pradesh

KHALID JAMIL | HEAD COACH

allowed him to switch national allegiance under FIFA rules.

The Blue Tigers began their camp in Kochi Tuesday where 20 players along with the staff, have assembled.

Defender Anwar Ali, midfielder Jeakson Singh Thounaojam, and forward Edmund Lalrindika, who played their last ISL match against Mohammedian Sporting Club on Monday will join the squad later on Tuesday.

Squad

Goalkeepers: Albino Gomes, Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, Vishal Kaith.

Defenders: Abhishek Singh Tekcham, Akash Mishra, Anwar Ali, Bijoy Varghese, Nikhil Poojary, Rahul Bheke, Roshan Singh Naorem, Sandesh Jhinsgan.

Midfielders: Ashique Kurnyian, Danish Farooq Bhat, Jeakson Singh Thounaojam, Lalengmawia Ralte, Sahal Abdul Samad.

Forwards: Edmund Lalrindika, Farukh Choudhary, Lallianzuala Chhangte, Liston Colaco, Manvir Singh, Rahim Ali, Ryan Williams.

The defending champions have been acquired by a consortium led by the Aditya Birla Group, marking the most expensive franchise takeover in the league's history

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore, March 24: A consortium led by the Aditya Birla Group (ABG) Tuesday acquired 100 percent equity stake in IPL franchise Royal Challengers Bengaluru for a whopping \$1.78 billion (approximately ₹16,706 crore) from its current owner the United Spirits Limited.

Other parties involved in the group are -- Blackstone's perpetual private equity strategy, BXPE, a firm of which Viral Patel is the CEO, Bolt Ventures, owned by American investor David Blitzer, and media conglomerate Times of India.

"United Spirits Limited, pursuant to the meeting of its Board of Directors, today announced that it has entered into definitive agreements for the sale of the 100 percent equity stake held in its wholly owned subsidiary Royal Challengers Sports Private Limited (RCSPL) to a consortium," the USL said in a statement.

"The consortium comprises Aditya Birla Group (ABG), The Times of India Group (Times), Bolt Ventures (Bolt), and Blackstone's perpetual private equity strategy, BXPE (Blackstone) for a total consideration of INR 166.6 bn in an all cash transaction," the statement added.

The transaction includes RCB's men's and women's (WPL) teams.

"RCSPL owns and operates Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) franchises that participate in the Indian Premier League (IPL) and Women's Premier League (WPL).

"Upon completion of this transaction, the consortium will, through its ownership of RCSPL, acquire the rights to own and operate the IPL and WPL franchise," said the USL.

The announcement also concluded the strategic review of RCSPL that was initiated by USL November 5, 2025.

The United Spirits Limited is a subsidiary of UK-Diageo, and they were keen to move away from RCB as the team was not central to their business plans.

Commenting on the transaction, Praveen Someshwar, MD & CEO, USL, said: "This transaction marks an important milestone for USL as we sharpen focus on our core beverage alcohol business to unlock its true potential. RCB has grown into the most prominent and commercially successful franchise in the IPL and WPL.

"We are excited for the future of RCB under the stewardship of the new owner. As Sports enters a new phase of growth in India & globally, we believe



this is in the best interest of the franchise and our stakeholders."

Kumar Mangalam Birla, Chairman, Aditya Birla Group, said, "Over the past 2 decades, the IPL has morphed to become a global sporting powerhouse that has changed the face of Indian cricket creating enormous value for India.

"RCB, as one of the most compelling franchises in modern sport, offers the Aditya Birla Group a distinctive platform to extend its legacy of institution-building into the arena of global sport."

However, formalities such as ratification from the BCCI, IPL Governing Council, its WPL counterpart and the Competition Commission of India are still pending.

RCB, whose home ground is M Chinnaswamy Stadium, won their first title in 2025 and finished as the runners-up on three occasions -2009, 2011, and 2016.

RCB IMMORTALISES 11 SEATS TO HONOUR STAMPEDE VICTIMS

Defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) CEO Rajesh Menon said that throughout all domestic and international games at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, 11 seats will be kept empty to honour the lives of those who died in the stampede following their title victory last season. Menon also said that players will wear jersey No 11 in practice matches throughout the season and don black armbands in all their matches in this edition. "In memory of the 11 fans who we lost on June 4, the players will be wearing jersey number 11 for the practice, on the game day, on the practice time before the match. So all the players will have jersey number 11 on the back, not for the game but for the practice. Apart from that, they will be also wearing a black armband on that day. We are also looking at having 11 permanent seats empty in Chinnaswamy Stadium forever. This is for the 11 fans who will be with us forever. That's a quick update on what we are doing this year," Menon told the media during a press conference Tuesday. He further stated that several changes have been made this season as part of precautionary measures, and necessary safety steps are being implemented and discussions will be held on what more can be done for the victims' families in the future. On June 4, 2025, a tragic stampede took place outside the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru amid RCB's victory celebrations. The disaster resulted in 11 fans losing their lives and over 50 sustaining injuries, caused by severe overcrowding with approximately 300,000 people present.

DC's Duckett pulls out, faces two-year ban

Ben Duckett has decided to pull out of his IPL 2026 stint with Delhi Capitals, and the England opener now faces a two-year ban from the league and auction as per the amended rules. Duckett was roped in by the Capitals for ₹2 crore in last year's auction, but he now wants to spend time at home and play red-ball cricket, following a forgettable run in the Ashes and being on the sidelines for the recent T20 World Cup.

Dubey, Payne, Johnson named replacement

Kolkata Knight Riders and Sunrisers Hyderabad have named Saurabh Dubey and David Payne as replacements for the injured Akash Deep and Jack Edwards respectively ahead of the IPL beginning. India pacer Akash Deep has been ruled out of the tournament with a lumbar stress injury. He will remain under the supervision of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) medical team at the Centre of Excellence in Bangalore. Meanwhile, Chennai Super Kings have roped in Australian pacer Spencer Johnson in place of his injured compatriot Nathan Ellis.

FIRST EVER KHELO INDIA TRIBAL GAMES

Odisha fields largest contingent

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Raipur, March 24: Close to 1300 athletes from across the country will be seen in action across nine disciplines in the first ever Khelo India Tribal Games starting here Wednesday.

The Games will be held at three venues in Chattisgarh -- Raipur, Jagdalpur and Sarguja -- and 106 gold medals will be up for grabs.

Odisha has fielded the largest contingent of 125 athletes from among the 30 participating states and union territories. Hosts Chattisgarh (121), Jharkhand (107) and Assam (106) will also have sizeable presence at the Games.

Medals will be awarded in archery, athletics, football, hockey, swimming, weightlifting and wrestling. Traditional sports like mallakhamb and kabaddi will be the demonstration sports.

Overall close to 3800 participants, including coaches and officials, will take part in the Games that will end April 3.



"For me and for all of us, it is a matter of great pride that this championship is being started in the country for the first time. It is a very good opportunity for all the youth and tribal players to showcase their talent and move forward in sports, and to play for the country," tribal hockey star and current Hockey India head Dilip Tirkey told SAI media.

Shri Narendra Modi's vision is to make India a sporting nation. He wants all youth to be connected with sports and to play one game or another," he added.

The maximum gold medals will be in athletics (34). Swimming (24), wrestling (18), weightlifting (16) and archery (10) will also have gold medals at stake in double digits.

Hockey and football will be the two team games and both

For me and for all of us, it is a matter of great pride that this championship is being started in the country for the first time. It is a very good opportunity for all the youth and tribal players to showcase their talent and move forward in sports, and to play for the country

DILIP TIRKEY | HEAD, HOCKEY INDIA

will be played in Raipur. Athletics will be held in Jagdalpur while Sarguja will host wrestling.

National 100m and 200m record holder Animesh Kujur echoed the sentiment. "There are many places in India where sports haven't reached. This makes the Khelo India Tribal Games all the more special," he said.

All participating athletes have come through trials conducted by National Sports Federations. The performance of the athletes will be monitored by coaches appointed by the Sports Authority of India.