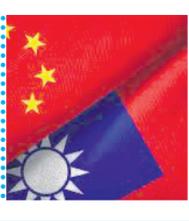




Candid Aarti
Aarti Chabria opens up about lesser-known realities and unpredictable nature of film industry
LEISURE | P2



China-Taiwan tensions
China stations obsolete supersonic fighters converted to attack drones at six air bases close to the Taiwan Strait
INTERNATIONAL | P10



Wealth erodes
Equity investors face an erosion of ₹8.86 lakh crore from their wealth as markets go into a tailspin, falling over 2%
BUSINESS | P11



Hockey's finest
Hardik Singh and Navneet Kaur win the Hockey India Player of the Year awards in the men's & women's categories respectively
SPORTS | P12

Ex-rapper Balen Shah sworn in as Nepal's 47th PM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kathmandu, March 27: Rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah 'Balen,' took oath as Nepal's democratically elected prime minister Friday, around six months after the KP Sharma Oli-led government was ousted in a Gen-Z protest that shook the nation. The 35-year-old Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) leader was sworn in by President Ram Chandra Paudel at a ceremony at the President's Office in Sheelal Niwas at the auspicious time of 12.34 pm.

Balen, the former mayor of Kathmandu, is the youngest person to be democratically elected to the office in the Himalayan nation, and also the first person from the Madhes region to hold the top executive post.

A unique blend of Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions featured in his swearing-in ceremony. It comprised elaborate religious rituals, including Shankhanad (conch blowing) by seven Brahmins, recitation of Vedic hymns or Swasti Bachan by 108 Hindu Batuks or young Brahmins and Mangal Bachan or recitation of Buddhist scripture by 107 Lamas.



SEASONAL BLOOM
Wearing a Chinese Hanfu dress, Jiahui Xu, who is from China, is photographed with cherry blossoms at the Tidal Basin in Washington, D.C. REUTERS

7 killed, 5 injured in avalanches

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, March 27: A child and two women were among seven people killed, while five others were injured, after multiple avalanches hit vehicles on the Srinagar-Leh national highway in Jammu and Kashmir Friday, officials said.

The avalanches hit the stretch between Zero Point and Minimarg on the Zojila Pass along the national highway connecting the Union territories of J-K and Ladakh in the afternoon, leaving several vehicles trapped under the debris, they said. Large volumes of snow came crashing down while vehicles were passing through the high-altitude stretch, engulfing several of them. A multi-agency rescue operation was immediately launched after the incident and efforts were on to clear the snow. Among the dead were a ten-year-old child and two women, they added.

In a post on X, Union minister Jitendra Singh confirmed the death of seven people in the incident. "Saddened to learn about the tragic death of 7 persons and injuries to 5 after avalanche hit the vehicle at Zojila pass. My sincere condolences to the bereaved families," Singh posted on X.

₹ crashes 89 paise

PTI & REUTERS

Mumbai, March 27: The rupee slumped by a massive 89 paise to close at a historic low of 94.85 against the US dollar Friday, as concerns of higher crude oil prices weighed heavily on the currency and overall macroeconomic outlook.

Forex traders said the rupee is succumbing to the pressure exerted by continued sales by foreign investors and a stronger greenback amid uncertainties over the West Asia conflict.

Sustained dollar demand and energy-led inflation risks are keeping the rupee under stress, they said, adding that bias remains weak unless crude prices show a meaningful correction.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 94.18 and breached the

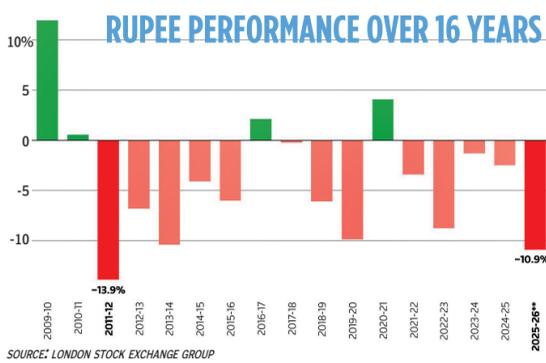
\$1 = ₹94.85

94.50-mark for the first time. The domestic unit settled for the day at 94.85 against the US dollar, down 89 paise from its previous close.

The rupee had slumped 20 paise to close at a record low of 93.96 against the US dollar Wednesday.

Stock, forex, commodity, and bullion markets remained closed Thursday on account of Ram Navami.

Rupee continued its sharp



Foreign investors flee India at record pace

MUMBAI: Foreign investors are pulling out of Indian bonds and equities at a record pace, as the Iran war-driven surge in oil prices fanned worries over a pick-up in inflation and clouded India's growth outlook, sending the rupee reeling. Foreign investors have sold a net \$12.14 billion worth of Indian shares since the war began on February 28, marking the biggest monthly outflow on record. Net bond sales by foreign portfolio investors under the Fully Accessible Route (FAR) reached \$1.61 billion, the highest since this category was introduced six years ago. The war on Iran, now nearing a month, has driven a surge in oil prices, heightening macro risks for India. The country imports nearly 85-90% of its crude oil needs, leaving it particularly vulnerable to higher oil prices. "The escalation in the Middle East has pushed energy risks back to the centre of India's macro-outlook, with oil prices, the rupee and the current account now tightly intertwined in investor thinking," said Krishna Bhimavarapu, APAC Economist at State Street Investment Management.

weakness, as rising crude prices intensify pressure on India's import bill. The concern of higher crude for a prolonged period is weighing heavily on the currency and overall macro outlook, said Jateen Trivedi, VP

Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.04 per cent higher at 99.94.

TRUMP EXTENDS DEADLINE FOR IRAN TO REOPEN HORMUZ BY 10 DAYS

REUTERS

Jerusalem/Washington, March 27: US President Donald Trump extended his deadline for Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz or face the destruction of its energy plants for 10 days, after Iran rejected his 15-point proposal to end the war he launched together with Israel.

Iran gave no direct indication that it was ready for negotiation or compromise, although senior officials have said diplomacy continues. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps reaffirmed that all shipping "to and from ports of allies and supporters of the Israeli-American enemies" to any destination was prohibited.

It also urged civilians across the Middle East, where it has already attacked countries hosting US bases, to vacate areas near US bases, Iran's Mehr news agency reported.

Domestic row: Man attempts self-immolation

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 27: A man attempted self-immolation at Raj Mahal Square in Bhubaneswar Friday following a dispute with his wife. According to preliminary information, Sushant Nayak, who works in sewerage services, allegedly set himself on fire after an argument with his spouse. He is a resident of Capital police station area.

Locals rushed to the spot after noticing the flames and managed to rescue him. He was immediately rushed to Capital Hospital for treatment. Hospital sources said that the man sustained severe burn injuries and is currently under medical supervision. Police reached the spot and initiated an investigation to determine the circumstances leading to the incident.

The incident has spread shockwaves in the area.

Fuel excise duty slashed, no benefit to consumers

AGENCIES

The timing of the Centre's excise duty cut raises uncomfortable questions. When global crude price hovered around \$75 per barrel, the government chose not to pass on the benefit to consumers, instead retaining higher taxes to bolster revenues. Now, with prices elevated at around \$100 and elections in four states approaching, it has moved to slash duties, without reducing pump prices—effectively cushioning oil companies. The optics suggest that fiscal decisions on fuel are being shaped as much by electoral compulsions as by market dynamics, undermining the credibility of a transparent pricing regime

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 27: The government cut excise duty on petrol and diesel by ₹10 per li-



tre each, but retail prices will remain unchanged as refiners offset the reduction against higher input costs.

The reduction averts an increase in petrol and diesel price that had become necessary in view of rise in international oil prices by about 50 per cent in the last one month.

The cut in special additional excise duty on petrol from

₹13 to ₹3 per litre and on diesel from ₹10 to zero will not lead to any change in retail pump prices as the reduction will be offset against fuel losses -- estimated by Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri at ₹24 per litre for petrol and ₹30 for diesel, and by his ministry at ₹26 and ₹81.90, respectively.

Alongside, the government imposed an export duty of ₹21.50 per litre on diesel and ₹29.50 per litre on aviation turbine fuel (ATF), reinstating a levy first introduced in July 2022 to curb windfall gains by refiners following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and later withdrawn in December 2024.

However, unlike last time, there is no windfall tax that has been levied on domestically produced crude oil by firms like ONGC.

Oscars leaving Dolby for Peacock

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Los Angeles, March 27: The Oscars are leaving Hollywood. In 2029, the year the telecast moves from ABC to YouTube, the ceremony itself will move from its longtime home at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood to downtown Los Angeles and the Peacock Theater, 9 miles (14.5 km) away.

The Academy announced Thursday that it has reached a 10-year agreement with AEG, which operates the LA Live complex where the Peacock Theater sits.

It's a surprising move, given that the Dolby was developed by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences itself, expressly as a home for the Oscars.

The ceremony has been held there since 2002 (with the exception of the COVID-driven downsized show at Union Station in 2021) and has provided an especially steady home for



the Oscars, which have never stayed in a single venue for such a long stretch.

The awards bounced between various LA hotels in its early years, before moving up to theatres in the mid-1940s.

The downtown Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, a fine arts facility that is home to the LA Opera, became heavily identified with the Oscars when it hosted the ceremony from 1968 to 1986. The ceremony then alternated between the Chan-

dler and the Shrine Auditorium, next to the University of Southern California, until the long-term move to Hollywood.

The Dolby will continue to host the show as it airs in its final years on ABC, concluding with the 100th Academy Awards in 2028.

The Peacock Theater is next to the Crypto.com Arena, home to the Los Angeles Lakers and Kings. The theatre has hosted the Emmy Awards nearly every year since 2008 and, in recent

years, Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremonies.

The academy says in its announcement that, under its agreement, AEG will make major upgrades to the theatre and its tech setup, and will "collaborate closely with the Academy to incorporate bespoke design elements needed to accommodate the Oscars ceremony."

The Peacock Theater, previously known as the Nokia Theatre and Microsoft Theater, opened in 2007, as the then-Staples Center site expanded to become the LA Live entertainment complex. It hosted concerts from the Eagles and the Chicks to celebrate its opening. The theatre's capacity of about 7,000 is about twice that of the Dolby. And its plaza is bigger and more open-air than the Dolby's Ovation Hollywood complex, which has more of an enclosed shopping mall feeling. Like Hollywood, L.A. Live also has multiple hotels, essential to the logistics of the Oscars.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



One Nation, One Election. Bad for democracy, worse for mileage

leisure



ANTONIO BANDERAS REFLECTS ON LIFE AFTER HEART ATTACK

Antonio Banderas says his near-fatal 2017 heart attack became a life-changing warning that re-shaped his priorities. After leaving Hollywood and returning to Malaga, Spain, the actor embraced theatre, rediscovering his true passion. Living with partner Nicole Kimpel, he says the experience made him happier and deeply fulfilled

ZENDAYA'S TAKE ON PERFECT MARRIAGE

Zendaya believes a perfect marriage is built on genuine friendship. Speaking ahead of her upcoming film *The Drama*, the actor said partners should feel like best friends who truly enjoy each other's company. For Zendaya, mutual liking, trust, and emotional closeness form the foundation of a strong, lasting relationship



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
You have to take care of your health, and at last you realise the importance of diet and exercise. However, today you may wish to eat something new, or try some different cuisine. Ganesha says go out with some old friends whom you have been neglecting of late.

TAURUS
Be prepared for taking instant decisions and acting promptly on them. Today you are likely to meet several such situations Ganesha is pleased to see that you have the acumen and experience to deal with such contingencies.

GEMINI
There is a likelihood of some household disturbance cropping up today. Your family members could make a lot of demands from you. You may feel angry because of your inability to meet all their needs and wants. Unexpected expenses are also indicated. You need to control your spending, says Ganesha.

CANCER
Minor ailments like cough and cold may bother you, warns Ganesha. So avoid cold or sweet items. People admire your helpful nature. Take special care of your health, says Ganesha.

LEO
You need to curb down on your expenses. You need to moderate the risks you take on in the share market. It is a good day for financial gains though. You need to understand the value of compromise, says Ganesha.

VIRGO
In all likelihood you will indulge in some writing or artistic work, which will bring about wonderful results. As you are passionate about these things, you may convert them into your hobbies, if you are not involved in them as a professional. Ganesha gives you the green signal to enjoy the clout that you wield over others with your sweet words.

LIBRA
Ganesha says that there are chances that today you might start some long-pending renovation project for your house. You may decorate your home with new paintings and items. There may be guests over in the evening that will make you very happy.

SCORPIO
The one thing that we neglect the most about ourselves is health. But today you are unable to do that. Your health needs to be paid enough attention as you may be suffering from ailment/s. Try to regularise your routine along with healthy food and regular exercise, advises Ganesha.

SAGITTARIUS
Time to open up that can of confetti at the workplace today. Success never smelled sweeter. But you may bleed on the purchase front, says Ganesha, as in your revelry, you may just unknowingly end up shelling an extra buck or two on ordinary items.

CAPRICORN
Your accomplishments may take you on cloud nine today. Success may come easily to you, but don't try your luck too much, advises Ganesha. Make the most of today as tomorrow may not be the same as today. You will be popular today, especially in your social circle as you'll impress everyone with your wit and humour.

AQUARIUS
Today is the day to turn dreams into reality and how! With your talent, wit, and intelligence you will make a great impression on everyone's mind, feels Ganesha. Icing on the cake will be the cash inflow. You know your cards and you play them well to your advantage.

PISCES
Just as melting ice caps on faraway mountains can swell the oceans, concerted efforts you make now will have far-reaching beneficial consequences, says Ganesha. Do not be disheartened in the face of obstacles and keep soldiering on.

Malaika dismisses link-up rumours

Mumbai: Malaika Arora has addressed the persistent speculation surrounding her personal life, describing the constant dating rumours as "irritating" but something she has learned to deal with over time.

Speaking about the repeated link-up stories that frequently make headlines, the actor admitted that such scrutiny is an inevitable part of being in the public eye. However, she explained that her reaction to the gossip has evolved over the years. Instead of letting the rumours affect her, she now chooses to take them lightly. "Now, I laugh it off," she said, indicating that she no longer gives the speculation the importance it once carried.

Malaika also shared that she often jokes about these headlines with her son, Arhaan Khan. According to her, the two sometimes read the stories together and find humour in them. "Arhaan and me have a good laugh about it," she revealed, adding that the rumours have turned into something of a running joke between them rather than a source of concern.

Speaking about her outlook on relationships, Malaika emphasised that she feels se-

cure and fulfilled on her own. "I'm complete on my own," she said, making it clear that she does not define her happiness through a relationship.



AARTI on industry realities

Mumbai: Aarti Chabria recently opened up about the lesser-discussed realities of working in Bollywood, revealing how several of her roles were trimmed or removed from films despite being filmed. Speaking on a podcast, the actor reflected on the unpredictability of the film industry and how such situations were a recurring part of her career.

Sharing her experiences, Aarti said that many of her performances were reduced during the editing process. She recalled filming a complete song with Shahid Kapoor for the film *Milenge Milenge*, which was later removed from the final cut. According to her, similar situations happened in several other projects as well. In *Partner*, she explained that her role was initially expected to be bigger, but eventually appeared only as a brief cameo in the finished film.

Aarti also mentioned that parts of her work were cut in films like *Shootout at Lokhandwala* and *Awaraz Paagal Deewana*. Despite these experiences, she maintained that such decisions are part of filmmaking and are ultimately made by producers and directors. For her, the overall success of a film mattered more than individual screen time.

The actor later appeared in films such as *Shaadi No. 1* and *Heyy Babyy* before gradually stepping away from the industry after *Milenge Milenge*. In 2019, she married an Australia-based chartered accountant and embraced a new phase of life focused on family and motherhood.



National Theatre Festival – Day 1



Artistes of Bengal Repertory of Kolkata presented Bengali play *Nisango Ishwar* on the first evening of the 5-day Purva Ranga at Rabindra Mandap, Bhubaneswar, Friday. Written by Suman Saha & Soham Gupta, the one-and-half-hour play was directed by Suman Saha. The event is being organised by Department of Odia Language, Literature & Culture, Govt. of Odisha, Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi in collaboration with Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre (Kolkata), Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India.

Artistes champion world peace

Dhenkanal: Alternative Rhythm Theatre (ART), a renowned cultural organization, celebrated World Theatre Day Friday with great enthusiasm, organising a vibrant procession across the town to promote the message, "No War, Please. The World Needs Peace." Artists dressed as white doves symbolised harmony and unity during the rally.

The programme began at Baji Chowk, drawing artistes, students, intellectuals, and members of the public in a show of cultural solidarity. A roadside meeting, chaired by ART president Pushpalata Rath, marked the formal inauguration. Vice-President Manohar Satpathy delivered the welcome address and conducted the event.

Several distinguished guests, including playwright Dillishwar Maharana, edu-



cator Pratap Chandra Panigrahi, and poet Bahadur Patasahani, highlighted the role of theatre in fostering social awareness and personal development. Participants paid floral tribute to the statue of young martyr Baji Rout. The official message for the day, authored by Willem Dafoe, was also read out. The procession, flagged off by Maharana, featured participation from several educational institutions. It concluded near the Mini Stadium with a discussion session, followed by a vote of thanks by Rath.



PEANUTS



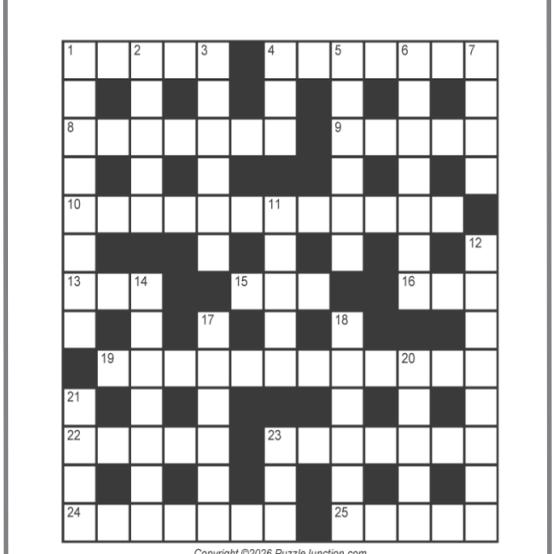
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



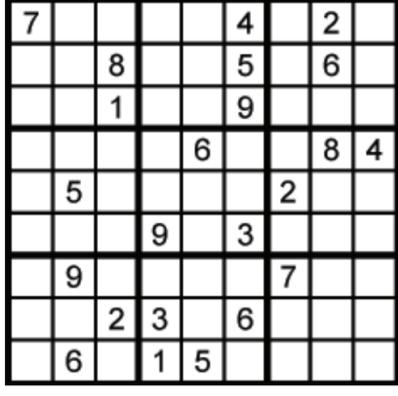
FUN post CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Alpha's opposite
 - 4 Kind of salesman (4-3)
 - 8 Frog's beginning
 - 9 Like helium
 - 10 Haitian capital (4-2-6)
 - 13 Track
 - 15 Aardvark's tidbit
 - 16 Malaysian export
 - 19 Riddles (5-7)
 - 22 Allegation
 - 23 Stuck to (4,3)
 - 24 Freedom from vanity
 - 25 Thought over
 - Down**
 - 1 Devilfishes
 - 2 Sea duck
 - 3 Statement of belief
 - 4 Island strings
 - 5 Magical drink
 - 6 Man's hair style (4,3)
 - 7 Merit
 - 11 Burgundy grape
 - 12 Biased (3-5)
 - 14 Laurel wreath
 - 17 Kind of test
 - 18 Havoc
 - 20 Continental money
 - 21 Rip-off
 - 23 "___ questions?"

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

HC: Married man living with another woman not crime

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Prayagraj, March 27: The Allahabad High Court has said that a married man living in a consensual live-in relationship with an adult woman does not amount to a criminal offence under law.

A division bench of Justices JJ Munir and Tarun Saxena made the observation while granting interim protection from arrest to two petitioners in the case.

Staying their arrest, the court said, "There is no offence where a married man is staying with an adult woman in a live-in relationship with her consent. Morality and law have to be kept separate. If there is no offence under the law, social opinions and morality will not guide the court."

The matter came before the court after an FIR was lodged by the woman's mother alleging that her 18-year-old daughter had been taken away by the man.

However, according to the petition, the woman had submitted a representation to the Shahjahanpur Superintendent of Police (SP) stating that she is an adult and is living with the man of her own free will in a live-in relationship.

She also alleged that her family members were opposed to the relationship and had threatened her with death, raising fears of an honour killing. No action was reportedly taken on her complaint.

After hearing both sides, the court granted two weeks for filing a counter affidavit and listed the matter for April 8.

The bench ordered that no coercive action be taken against the petitioners till further orders.

Man, pregnant wife killed, minor daughter hurt in Jajpur mishap

PNN & AGENCIES

Jajpur, March 27: A 35-year-old man and his pregnant wife died and their four-year-old daughter suffered critical injuries when a car hit their scooter in Jajpur Friday, police said.

The accident took place near Sankharidiha village on NH-16 under Dharmsala police station. The deceased couple was identified as Subrat Kumar Sahu and his wife Annapurna Pal, 30, residents of Siha under Barchana block. Their daughter, Aaradhya, sustained injuries and is undergoing treatment at SCBMCH in Cuttack, IC Chimmayee Sahu said.

Police said the family was returning home on a scooter after Aaradhya's routine medical check-up at a private clinic when the accident occurred.



WORTH A CAPTURE: Indian Air Force's Surya Kiran Aerobatic Team performs manoeuvres during an air show, near Sukhna Lake in Chandigarh, Friday

PTI PHOTO

Switch off for Mother Earth

PNN & AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 27: Millions of people are set to observe Earth Hour Saturday evening, as the annual initiative marks its 20th anniversary.

India is expected to witness one of its largest-ever participations in the green movement, as it will be on switch-off mode from 8:30pm to 9:30pm Saturday.

From north to south, east to west, some of the country's most iconic monuments, heritage sites, and government buildings will switch off their lights in a powerful show of solidarity for the planet, according to World Wildlife Fund (WWF)-India, according to reports.

The national capital, Delhi, will witness participation from prominent sites such as Akshardham, India Gate, Qutub Minar, Red Fort, Humayun's Tomb, Jantar Mantar, and Safdarjung Tomb, among others.

This year's theme, "Give an Hour for Earth," calls on people to switch off their lights for 60 minutes, offering the planet a symbolic pause and a reminder of calm and darkness.

Observed every last Saturday of March since 2007, Earth Hour was launched by WWF to raise awareness about climate change. It has since grown into one of the world's largest environmental movements, spanning over 190 countries and engaging billions.

Energy security, citizens' interests top priorities: PM at meet with CMs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Friday said the global situation arising out of the West Asia conflict remains dynamic, and asserted that maintaining economic and trade stability, ensuring energy security, strengthening industry and supply chains, and safeguarding citizens' interests remain the government's top priorities.

Chairing a virtual meeting of chief ministers, Modi said the situation necessitates continuous monitoring and adaptive strategies, as he called for constant communication and coordination between the Centre and the states, along with timely sharing of information and joint decision-making, so that the responses are swift and well-aligned.

Urging the CMs to ensure smooth functioning of supply chains and to take strict measures against hoarding and profiteering, Modi cautioned against the spread of misinformation and rumours, asserting



that timely dissemination of accurate and credible information is essential to prevent panic. The PM said India has prior experience in dealing with similar global disruptions, recalling the collective response during the Covid-19 pandemic, when the Centre and the states worked together as "Team India" to mitigate the impacts on supply chains, trade and daily life.

During the pandemic, the PM held regular meetings with the CMs to review the situation and take action accordingly. The same spirit of cooperation and coordination remains India's greatest strength in navigating the present situation, Modi said. He added that the situation remains dynamic, necessitating continuous monitoring and adaptive strategies.

He also said that an inter-ministerial group has been operational since March 3, reviewing the situation on a daily basis and taking timely decisions.

He also advised vigilance against online fraud and fake agents and called for special attention in the border and coastal states to address any emerging challenges related to shipping, essential supplies, and maritime operations.

Modi underscored the importance of maintaining public confidence, noting that assurance about the availability of essential commodities will help prevent unnecessary panic among citizens. The CMs who attended the meeting included N Chandrababu Naidu (AP), Yogi Adityanath (UP), Revanth Reddy (Telangana), Bhagwant Mann (Punjab), Bhupendra Patel (Gujarat), Omar Abdullah (J&K), Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu (HP), and Pema Khandu (Arunachal Pradesh), among others.

Cabinet Secretary T V Somanathan made a presentation on the current situation and enumerated steps and recommendations for the states to tackle the situation. The CMs appreciated the steps taken by the Centre to tackle the situation. They expressed confidence that the situation remains stable, with adequate availability of petrol, diesel and LPG, and continuous monitoring mechanisms in place to ensure uninterrupted supply of essential commodities, they said.

Army Chief calls on Guv



General Upendra Dwivedi, Chief of the Army Staff, calls on Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati at Lok Bhavan in Bhubaneswar, Friday

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 27: Chief of the Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi, who is on a three-day visit to Odisha, called on Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati here Friday evening.

The Governor and General Dwivedi together visited Atal Van, an ecological park on the Lok Bhavan premises.

Sharing pictures of their interaction on X, Kambhampati said, "General Upendra Dwivedi, Chief of Army Staff, called on me at Lok Bhavan today. I congratulated him and the Indian Army on the successful execution of Operation Sindoor, which reflects their unwavering

dedication and exemplary service to the nation."

The Governor said he visited Atal Van on Lok Bhavan premises along with General Dwivedi. Dedicated to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the space brings together nature and national pride in a meaningful way, he wrote.

"The T-55 battle tank installed at the Atal Van stands as a proud symbol of the Indian Army's role in the 1971 war and the courage of our brave soldiers," he said. After arriving here this afternoon, General Dwivedi visited the 20th Infantry Battalion (TA) in the City, where he will spend the night.

Cryptocurrencies aiding Iran during war

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

London, March 27: Since the start of the Middle East conflict, Iran has witnessed massive cryptocurrency flows.

Experts say they are being used to circumvent sanctions placed on Iran's Revolutionary Guards as well as a financial safe haven by civilians hit by soaring inflation. AFP examines how exactly digital currencies are being used in the country.

In an unusually large movement, more than \$10 million worth of cryptocurrencies left Iranian exchange platforms between February 28 – the first day of Israeli-US airstrikes – and March 2, according to data analytics firm Chainalysis.

By March 5, nearly one-third of these funds had been transferred to foreign exchanges. While some of this exodus can be explained by citizens rushing to protect their savings, the sheer size of the sums involved suggests the involvement of "regime actors", Kaitlin Martin of Chainalysis said. Such action would likely occur out of fear of further sanctions or cyberattacks, according to experts.

In June 2025, at the height of the previous Israel-Iran conflict, leading cryptocurrency platform Nobitex had



\$90 million stolen by hackers linked to Israel, according to TRM Labs.

According to Chainalysis, several digital wallets used during this surge in cryptocurrency activity are directly linked to the Revolutionary Guards. "Even during these internet outages some outflows are seen, suggesting that some have access to the exchange's cryptoasset holdings even when its website is inaccessible," noted Elliptic.

The state's grip is massive. Last year, wallets associated with the Guards were funded with more than \$3 billion in cryptocurrencies, representing more than half of the country's cryptocurrency flows – a share that continues to grow according to Chainalysis. For Iran, largely cut off from the traditional financial system by international sanctions, cryptocurrencies are an alternative channel – allowing the state to sell embargoed oil or to discreetly finance allied armed groups, such as the Houthis rebels in

Yemen according to US authorities.

The Financial Times earlier this year reported that Iran offered ballistic missiles, drones and other advanced weapons systems for sale using cryptocurrencies. These digital assets contribute to a veritable "shadow banking", Craig Timm of the anti-money laundering organisation ACAMS, told AFP. Quicker to send and less expensive than a bank transfer, cryptocurrencies are difficult to trace owing also to loopholes in global regulations, he added.

The Revolutionary Guards and Iranian central bank favour "stablecoins" – digital currencies generally pegged to the dollar to avoid volatility. But civilians are turning en masse to bitcoin, the world's leading cryptocurrency, which can be withdrawn from platforms and stored in personal wallets, beyond the authorities' reach.

This strategy was already widely evident during brutally suppressed protests in Iran ahead of the war, according to Chainalysis. In a country where inflation was already nearing 50 per cent before the conflict started, cryptocurrencies are acting as a "lifeline" for the population in the face of the collapse of the national currency, said analyst Martin.

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Handlooms, Textiles & Handicrafts Deptt., Govt. of Odisha

OIPR-31001/31004/25-26/0012

Slash VAT on fuel, BJD tells state govt

Odisha hosts VBYP 2026

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 27: Opposition BJD Friday demanded that BJP government in the state slash the rate of VAT on petrol and diesel, asserting that reducing the central excise duty on fuel is not enough to mitigate the sufferings of the people.

The Centre has slashed excise duty on petrol to ₹3 a litre and exempted diesel fully from it to help oil marketing companies like HPCL, BPCL and IOC deal with the rising global crude prices amid the war in the Middle East.

Addressing a presser here, BJD spokesperson Lenin Mohanty said, "Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi has welcomed the Centre's reduction of excise duty by ₹10 on petrol and ₹10 on diesel. However, it is not clear whether the consumer will benefit from it."

Significantly, reports said the cut in special additional excise duty on petrol from ₹13 to ₹3 per litre and on diesel from ₹10 to zero will not lead to any change in retail pump prices as the reduction will be offset



against fuel losses -- estimated by Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri at ₹24 per litre for petrol and ₹30 for diesel, and by his ministry at ₹26 and ₹81.90, respectively.

He asserted that the rate of VAT imposed in Odisha is one of the highest in the country.

The BJD leader claimed that the Odisha government imposes 28 per cent VAT on fuel while

it is 25 per cent in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, and 19 per cent in Rajasthan impose 19 per cent.

"If the CM is keen to provide relief to people on the purchase of petrol, diesel and cooking gas, then he should reduce the VAT imposed by the state government. When the BJP was in the opposition in the state, it had repeatedly

demand a reduction in VAT on petrol, diesel and cooking gas," Mohanty said.

Therefore, instead of just welcoming the reduction in excise rates made by the Centre, Majhi should reduce VAT in the interest of the people of the state, he said.

The BJD leader said that there is doubt in the minds of people on the availability of petrol, diesel and cooking gas in the state due to the ongoing conflict between Israel, America and Iran.

"Though the government is claiming that there is no crisis in India and also in Odisha, it has not cleared the doubt of people who stand in queues to avail an LPG cylinder. It is not yet clear in what context the excise rates have been reduced by the Centre," Mohanty said.

The BJD leader feared that the excise rate might have been reduced, keeping in view the possibility of fuel prices rising.

"It is suspected that the government has probably reduced the excise rates earlier to avoid public anger in case of price rise," he said.



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 27: The state-level Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament (VBYP) 2026 concluded here at Kalinga Stadium Friday, bringing together 150 exceptional youth representatives from 30 districts of Odisha. Organised by 'MY Bharat', Odisha, in collaboration with the National Service Scheme (NSS), Odisha, and department of Youth Services and Sports, the two-day programme March 26 and 27 served as a vibrant platform for

youth engagement in democratic dialogue and policy discourse.

Originally launched as National Youth Parliament Festival in 2019, the initiative has since evolved into the Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament, aligning with the national vision of Viksit Bharat@2047.

The programme reflects the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to nurture young leaders as active contributors to nation-building. The scale of participation has been significant, with a total

of 3,764 youth taking part at the district level, including 1,607 male and 2,157 female participants. From these, the top five participants from each district advanced to the state level, resulting in a total of 150 participants, comprising 60 males and 90 females.

The deliberations are centred on the theme 'Union Budget 2026 - Yuva Shakti: Budget towards Viksit Bharat 2047' with each participant allotted three minutes to present their views in Odia, Hindi, or English. The discussions reflect a strong engagement with national priorities such as accelerating economic growth, strengthening human capital, and ensuring inclusive development. The programme not only enhances policy awareness among youth but also fosters leadership skills and encourages constructive dialogue on pressing national issues, thereby creating a pool of informed and solution-oriented young leaders.

Looking ahead, the top three participants from Odisha will represent the state at the national-level youth parliament.

ECoR GM inspects Talcher rly station

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 27: East Coast Railway (ECoR) General Manager Parmeshwar Funkwal carried out a window trailing inspection from Mancheswar Railway Station to Talcher, and Talcher to Balaram, Angul and reviewed railway operations, infrastructure development, condition of tracks, signalling systems, safety installations, station infrastructure, passenger facilities, freight movement arrangements and ongoing developmental works in this section.

At Talcher Railway Station, he inspected the station premises and reviewed passenger amenities, cleanliness, platform condition, circulating area, waiting hall facilities and safety arrangements.

During the inspection, he also interacted with passengers and took note of their feedback on station facilities and services.

The GM instructed officials to maintain all passenger amenities and railway assets in a safe, efficient and passenger-friendly manner and directed them to complete the ongoing development and station improvement works within a time-bound schedule.

He advised officials to focus on safety enhancement, reliable train operations, improved passenger amenities, smooth freight movement and timely progress of developmental works. Senior officers from various departments accompanied him during the inspection.

Ram Navami: Devotees throng temples amid tight security



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 27: Devotees Friday thronged temples across the state, including the Srimandir in Puri, on the occasion of Ram Navami amid stringent security arrangements.

Surveillance was intensified across the state, particularly in Balasore, Bhadrak, Cuttack and Sambalpur districts, which have witnessed untoward incidents earlier, officials said.

Quick response teams were stationed in sensitive areas, and drones and CCTV cameras have been deployed to monitor processions and gatherings, they said. In Cuttack, where clashes broke out during last

year's Dussehra celebrations, over 30 platoons of police forces were deployed, along with CRPF personnel.

More than 300 CCTVs were installed across key routes, marketplaces and congregation points, officials said.

Security personnel carried out flag marches in areas such as Dargha Bazaar, Choudhury Bazaar, Dolamundai and Buxi Bazaar to instil confidence among residents, they said.

"We have ensured robust law and order mechanisms, efficient traffic management, and effective crowd control measures during the festival. Officers are vigilant and taking proactive steps to prevent any untoward incidents," said IGP (Central

Range) Satyajit Naik. DIG (Eastern Range) Pinak Mishra said Bhadrak and Balasore have been identified as sensitive districts.

Over 40 platoons, along with CAPFs, have been deployed in Bhadrak, with close monitoring of social media platforms and regular flag marches in place, he said.

Governor Hari Babu Kam-bhampati, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik extended greetings to the people on the occasion.

The Governor urged people to follow the ideals of truth, righteousness and compassion exemplified by Lord Ram, wishing everyone a peaceful and meaningful Ram Navami.

MEGA TRADE FAIR KICKS OFF

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 27: The India International Mega Trade Fair (IIMTF) and Home Décor Expo 2026 kicked off in City Friday, bringing together key stakeholders from real estate, finance, and lifestyle sectors under one roof. Housing and Urban Development Minister Krushna Chandra Mahapatra, in the presence of public representatives, industry leaders, and organisers from GS Marketing Associates and Odisha Developers Federation (ODFED) inaugurated the event.

Speaking at the inauguration, ODFED president Pradipta Kumar Biswas highlighted the federation's longstanding role in shaping Odisha's real estate landscape. He emphasised that the expo, now in its 22nd edition, aims to simplify property buying for consumers, while fostering collaboration between developers, bankers, and allied industries. The platform showcases over 100 projects by more than 40 developers, featuring modern amenities tailored to evolving urban lifestyles.

The expo features participation from over five countries and 12 states, showcasing more than 35,000 products. With an expected footfall of over three lakh visitors, the event offers significant opportunities for business networking, property investment, and home loan consultations.

Open daily from 1pm to 9pm until April 4, the expo has an entry fee of Rs 40 and is set to be a major attraction for families, investors, and homebuyers alike.

ICMAI hosts outreach on New Income Tax Act



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 27: The Institute of Cost Accountants of India (ICMAI) Bhubaneswar Chapter, in association with the institute's Tax Research Department (TRD), successfully organised an outreach programme on New Income Tax Act, 2025 here at CMA Bhawan Thursday.

The programme was part of a nationwide initiative spearheaded by the TRD, under the guidance of Direct Taxation Committee and the task force on IT Act, 2025, in collaboration with Directorate of Training (DoT), CBDT.

The event was graced by NALCO Director (Finance) CMA Abhay Kumar Behuria as chief guest. Income Tax Principal Commissioner Saroj Mahapatra, OPTCL Director (Finance) CMA Srikanth Kumar Sahoo, OPGCL Director (Finance) CMA Gagan Bihari Swain, GRIDCO Ltd Director (Finance) CMA Kshirod Chandra Nanda, IC-

MAI Former President and task force chairman CMA Bibhuti Bhusan Nayak and EIRC chairperson CMA Arati Ganguly.

Bhubaneswar Chapter chairman CMA Sarat Kumar Behera delivered the welcome address and highlighted the importance of new tax regime in simplifying compliance and enhancing transparency.

The technical sessions were conducted by eminent professionals, including CMA Sudhansu Kumar Sahu and CMA Avinash Kotni, who provided in-depth insights into the provisions and implications of the act.

The programme witnessed enthusiastic participation from professionals, students, and stakeholders, making it a meaningful platform for knowledge sharing and discussion on recent tax reforms.

The session concluded with vote of thanks, proposed by Bhubaneswar Chapter secretary CMA Soumya Ranjan Jena.

HC puts brakes on ASI move to concretise pedestrian track

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 27: The Orissa High Court directed the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to immediately halt the laying of paver blocks on the walking track at Satyabrata Stadium, located near the iconic Barabati Stadium in Cuttack, citing potential health risks to pedestrians.

The Division Bench of Justice K R Mohapatra and Justice V Narasingha delivered the ruling, taking strong exception to ASI's 'concretisation' of pedestrian track.

The court observed, "It is indeed baffling that when the district administration is in the process of submitting Detailed Project Report (DPR) relating to the overall development of Satyabrata Stadium, public money is being siphoned off in paving the walking track with concrete at this stage with undue haste."

In view of the health hazards posed by these concrete blocks, particularly the adverse impact on pedestrians due to the hard, non-shock-absorbing surface which may lead to joint strain, foot-related ailments, and an increased risk of slips and falls—posing a long-term risk



of physical injury, especially to the vulnerable sections such as the elderly and children and since the authorities decided to commit 'harakiri' in sacrificing basic right of a citizen to walk in a safe manner on the altar of concrete, this Court is left with no other alternative but to direct ASI to stop the work of laying paver blocks on the walking track of Satyabrata Stadium with immediate effect, the Division Bench ordered.

Further, the bench directed that the paver blocks already laid, be removed, restoring the track back to its 'un-paved' state.

The overall development of sports centric facilities at Satyabrata Stadium was submitted to the state's Sports department. Cuttack Collector informed the court that the district administration is unaware of walking tracks inside Satyabrata Stadium being paved by concrete, the order stated.

CALL FOR ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT VISION

Medha Patkar to address 'Loka Adhikara Samabesha'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 27: Noted social activist Medha Patkar will address 'Loka Adhikara Samabesha' March 29 in City, bringing together activists, civil society groups, and concerned citizens, to mark the martyrdom day of Shaheed Laxman Nayak. On the occasion, a declaration outlining an alternative development vision for Odisha will be released.

Following the conclusion of 'Loka Adhikara Yatra', leaders of Lok Shakti Abhiyan (LSA) and the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) announced during a presser recently.

Addressing the media, LSA national convener Prafulla Samantara, along with Narendra Mahanty and Biswajit of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, said the convention aims to mobilise public opinion against policies that, they allege, are rapidly depleting Odisha's natural resources.

The Loka Adhikara Yatra, jointly organised by LSA,

The Loka Adhikara Yatra, jointly organised by LSA, NAPM's Odisha unit, and Centre for Climate Justice, started from Satyabhamapur—the birthplace of Madhusudan Das & concluded in Cuttack

NAPM's Odisha unit, and Centre for Climate Justice, started from Satyabhamapur—the birthplace of Madhusudan Das, concluded in Cuttack March 23, highlighted concerns over unchecked mining and industrial expansion.

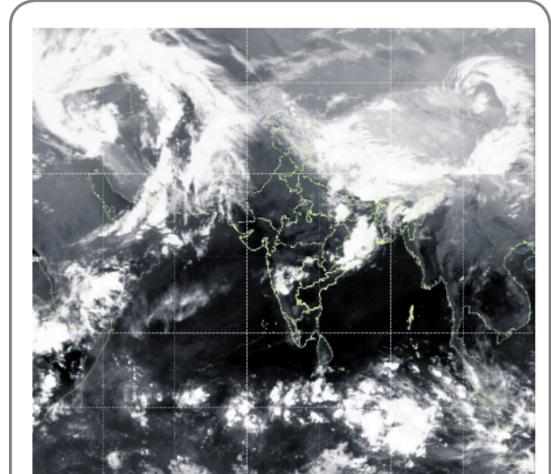
Citing findings from the journey and State Economic Survey, the leaders warned that Odisha's mineral resources could be exhausted within next 50 years. They pointed to projections that iron ore reserves

may deplete within 30 years and bauxite within 40 years due to indiscriminate mining.

They further cautioned that Odisha's bauxite-rich mountain ranges—from Gandhamardan in Bargarh to Deomali in Koraput—could face severe ecological damage, threatening rivers, forests, and water systems across several districts.

The groups also raised alarm over coal mining, stating that the excavation of 66 coal blocks could destroy nearly one lakh acres of forest and agricultural land, posing serious risks to regions such as Angul. Calling for urgent policy changes, the leaders demanded cancellation of indiscriminate mining leases and a shift toward sustainable, employment-intensive development models. They also alleged suppression of people's movements in mining-affected areas and urged proper implementation of Forest Rights Act (2006), PESA, and the Land Acquisition Act (2013).

MARKET WATCH					
CURRENCY		BOURSES		COMMODITIES	
INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR	95.09 ▲ 0.79	SENSEX	73583.22 ▼ 1690.23	GOLD	₹144,883 ▲ ₹5,390
EURO	109.75 ▲ 0.05	NIFTY	22819.60 ▼ 486.85	SILVER	₹231,099 ▲ 11,225



WEATHER			
	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	37.2°	36.2°	Light to Moderate rain or thunderstorm
Min Temp	22.5°	23.6°	
Humidity	86%	85%	
Rainfall	19.7	Nil	

Kendrapara: Drying Luna rings water crisis alarm

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kendrapara, March 27: A steady decline in the water level of the Luna River in Kendrapara district has raised serious concerns over drinking water supply and agricultural sustainability, with officials warning of an impending crisis if the situation persists.

Authorities say potable water supply to Kendrapara town could be disrupted within the next 15 days as the riverbed near the pump house at Kalapada has dried up. A temporary channel dug to draw water from about 700 metres away has also run dry, worsening the situation.

The district, largely dependent on agriculture, is already facing multiple water management challenges. Around 15,850 hectares of farmland lack proper drainage for excess water, while 32,350 hectares are affected by salinity. During the monsoon, nearly 34,952 hectares are inundated by floodwaters. Despite this, about 84,910 hectares of land do not receive adequate ir-



rigation, effectively rendering large areas drought-prone.

Experts warn that the early summer drop in the Luna River's water level could leave nearly 10,000 hectares of farmland fallow this season.

Local residents allege that illegal sand mining has altered the river's course and reduced its water-holding capacity. "The situation is alarming. If this continues, both drinking water supply and irrigation will be severely affected," said Santosh Kumar Panda, a local intellectual.

Several check dams have been constructed on the river at Padagayasapur, Gayasapur, Thauri, Chadheiguan, Rajgarh

and Angulai to support drinking water supply and irrigation. However, these measures have failed to offset the sharp decline in water levels this year.

Former Zilla Parishad member Ganesh Chandra Samal said the 73-km-long river, once a key navigation route during British rule, has deteriorated due to neglect, encroachment and unregulated sand extraction. Social worker Pratap Kumar Tripathy added that the river earlier supported paddy, rabi and cash crops such as groundnut and sugarcane, but declining water levels in recent years have affected cultivation.

Farmer leader Bijay Kumar Parida called for interlinking of rivers and construction of barrages across the district to ensure irrigation, criticising the lack of concrete action by authorities.

Officials from the Water Resources department said efforts are underway to implement projects aimed at improving the river's water retention capacity.

Legal action missing after HM's suspension over misbehaviour

POST NEWS NETWORK

Hatadihi, March 27: A headmaster in Keonjhar district has been suspended for allegedly behaving inappropriately with a tribal woman teacher, but no legal action has been initiated even three weeks after the incident.

The accused, Harekrushna Behera alias Babula, headmaster of Mithigaon Upper Primary School under Hatadihi block, allegedly took advantage of the teacher being alone after school hours and engaged in misconduct.

Following a complaint, an inquiry was conducted by the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) under the supervision of Block Education Officer (BEO) Rajib Dalei. As per official communication issued by the BEO vide Letter No. 736 dated March 7, 2026, the headmaster was placed under suspension as part of departmental action.

However, the absence of legal proceedings has raised concerns. Repeated attempts to contact the BEO for comment were unsuccessful. Officer-In-Charge of Soso police station, Kanan Sahu, said no written complaint has been received in connection with the incident.

NH-57 bypass road in Subarnapur gets nod

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sonepur, March 27: Construction of a bypass road for National Highway 57 (NH-57), connecting Khurda and Bolangir, has received technical and administrative approval from the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

The proposed bypass, aimed at diverting heavy vehicles away from Subarnapur town, will be developed at an estimated cost of Rs 145.54 crore. The project involves construction of a 9.6-kilometre stretch under the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) mode.

The initiative was actively pursued by Bolangir MP Sangeeta Kumari Singh Deo, who made repeated appeals to Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari. The Centre has now sanctioned Rs 145.54 crore for the project.

According to officials of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), a joint verification process is currently underway prior to the floating of tenders.

The proposed alignment will begin near Arjunpur Nagarban



and pass along the rear side of Pipilipali Odisha Adarsha Vidyalaya. It will traverse areas including Gatarkela, Kushtapali, Janmura, Baldapali, Haldipali and Kulapada, running along the bank of the Tel River before connecting to the Sonepur-Manamunda bridge.

Once completed, heavy vehicles travelling on NH-57 will bypass Subarnapur town, significantly reducing congestion and improving traffic flow. The project is also expected to address future traffic challenges in the area.

Residents and intellectuals in Subarnapur district have welcomed the approval and funding for the bypass. Members of the district's civil society groups, including Sitanashu Sekhar Mishra, president of the District Conscious Citizens' Forum, and MP's representative Saunda Kumar Meher, have lauded Singh Deo's efforts in securing the project.

Boy killed, mother critical in accident

JHARSUGUDA/KOLABIRA: A minor boy died and his mother was critically injured in a road accident on NH 49 near Kundursingha village under Kolabira police limits in Jharsuguda district Friday morning. The deceased has been identified as 10-year-old Akshit Patel from Taimal village near Arda under Kirmira block. His mother, Kavita Patel, sustained serious injuries. According to reports, Kavita was riding a scooter with Akshit seated behind her. While attempting to overtake a truck, their scooter collided with an oncoming motorcycle. As a result, Akshit, Kavita, and the biker were thrown onto the road. Akshit came under the truck, leading to his death on the spot. Kavita was initially taken to Kolabira hospital and later shifted to the Jharsuguda DHH. However, she was again referred to VIMSAR in Burla after her condition worsened.

Vigilance arrests engineer in DA case

BHUBANESWAR: Vigilance officers Friday arrested an Irrigation department engineer, a day after unearthing assets allegedly disproportionate to his known sources of income, officials said. Acting on a tip-off, Vigilance sleuths Thursday conducted simultaneous raids at five locations linked to Panchu Behera, an assistant engineer posted as Sub-Divisional Officer in the Bhanjanagar Irrigation Division of Ganjam district, they said. During the searches, officials detected a three-storey building in Berhampur, five plots in and around the town, Rs 18.90 lakh in cash, and deposits worth around Rs 90 lakh in banks and other financial institutions, a Vigilance statement said.

Basic amenities elude cut-off Juang hamlets

POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, March 27: Two Juang tribal hamlets in Banspal block of Keonjhar district remain deprived of basic amenities such as roads, electricity and safe drinking water, underscoring persistent gaps in rural development.

The villages — Dhenkitopa, located on Singha hill, and Handibhangaa on Alupada hill — remain largely inaccessible. Residents must traverse three hills on foot to reach nearby areas. With no motorable road, even bicycles are impractical, leaving villagers dependent entirely on narrow footpaths.

Dhenkitopa is home to about 20 families, while Handibhangaa has around 15. Livelihoods depend on shifting cultivation, goat rearing and collection of forest produce. Villagers travel to Kanpani market once a week to procure essential items.

Basic services remain scarce. Residents rely on hill streams for drinking water, often digging small pits to collect it. Although solar lighting has recently been provided, the villages still lack electricity connection.

Educational facilities are also inadequate. With no schools in the hamlets, children attend a primary school at Upper Panasansa, which itself operates without a proper building. Classes are reportedly conducted in a community hut.

Villagers have long demanded a pucca road to improve connectivity. "There is no use of bicycles as there is no road. If a road is built, we will consider buying one," said resident Danar Juang.

Upper Panasansa, which faced similar hardships, is now seeing road construction. ITDA Project Director Shibashankar Mishra said he would review the situation and initiate steps after assessment.

Effective public communication key to national devpt: PIB ADG

POST NEWS NETWORK

Koraput, March 27: Effective public communication and ethical journalism are critical to achieving inclusive national development, Additional Director General of the Press Information Bureau (PIB) and Central Bureau of Communication (CBC) Akhil Kumar Mishra said here Friday.

Addressing a seminar on the "Sociology of Communication" at the Central University of Odisha during his four-day visit to Koraput district, Mishra emphasised

that timely, transparent and accessible dissemination of information is essential in the digital era.

He said effective communication helps bridge the gap between policy formulation and public awareness, ensuring that government schemes and welfare initiatives reach people at the grassroots level.

Mishra also highlighted the need for innovative outreach strategies, including the use of digital media platforms and community-based communication methods, to boost citizen participation and strengthen public trust in governance.

The seminar was attended by Vice-Chancellor Narasingh Charan Panda, Sociology Department head Kapila Khemunda, Journalism and Mass Communication Department head Nikhil Gouda, Associate Professor Sourav Gupta, along with faculty members, media professionals and students.

Uttar Pradesh Taking Off to New Heights

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Grand Inauguration of Noida International Airport (Phase I)

by **Narendra Modi** Prime Minister

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- Envisioned as a major international gateway for the NCR region

- Passenger handling capacity of 1.20 crore annually
- Expansion of passenger handling capacity up to 7 crore annually by Phase 4
- Architecturally inspired by the rich cultural heritage of Uttar Pradesh, featuring haveli-style design elements and a multi-level terminal blending the divinity of the ghats of Varanasi and Haridwar
- Interiors enhanced with handicrafts and textiles from states across India

In the august presence of

Anandiben Patel Governor, Uttar Pradesh	Yogi Adityanath Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh	Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu Minister, Civil Aviation, Government of India
Pankaj Chaudhary Minister of State, Finance, Government of India	Keshav Prasad Maurya Deputy Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh	Brajesh Pathak Deputy Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh
Brajesh Singh Minister of State, Public Works Department, Uttar Pradesh	Dr. Mahesh Sharma MP, Gautam Buddha Nagar	Surendra Singh Nagar Member, Rajya Sabha
Amit Chaudhary Chairman, District Panchayat, Gautam Buddha Nagar	Pankaj Singh MLA, Noida	Tejpal Singh Nagar MLA, Dadri
Lakshmi Raj Singh MLA, Sikandrabad	Shrikant Sharma MLA, Mathura	Dhirendra Singh MLA, Jewar
Minakshi Singh MLA, Khurja	Rajesh Chaudhary MLA, Mant	Sanjay Kumar Sharma MLA, Anupshahr
Rajesh Singh MLA, Barauli	Narendra Singh Bhati MLC	Sunder Diler MLA, Khair
Shrichand Sharma MLC		

and other dignitaries

Date: 28th March, 2026 | Time: 11:30 AM | Venue: Jewar, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Uttar Pradesh

Vikas ki Gati Apaar-Double Engine Sarkar

Information and Public Relations Department, U.P.

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FOCUS MIDDLE EAST CRISIS

IN THE CROSSHAIRS



Having lost the goodwill and international standing in a conflict in which USA and Israel are about to accept a retreat, India is in a precarious situation

ernment has been at a loss to justify its position. While the PM gave a statement in the Parliament on the ongoing conflict and India's concerns stating that India had enough stocks to last another two months or more under these circumstances, it was clear that India was looking for alternatives in these trying times. Iran has played its ace card by blocking the Strait and used the weapon of energy to manoeuvre a win, while India has been left standing as an outsider despite its civilizational links with former.

President Trump, it seems, has lost control of himself and the war. With no clear war goals, a confused strategy and no endgame in sight, and under immense pressure on the home front with price escalation and growing unpopularity among his MAGA constituents, he cannot justify any more continuing with the war (his getting 2000 paratroopers and 5000 marines may have been a last ditch effort to bolster America's sagging image and convey a faux confidence to the allies in the region as well as in Europe) though it would be equally difficult to get out of Netanyahu's embrace as well as call a halt to the war without a decent face saving. The war meanwhile continues to wreak havoc while completely changing the strategic architecture and power dynamics of this extremely volatile region.

The old world order has taken a burial and it is in the plains of West Asia and in the waters of the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea that a new geopolitical order may just have been created signalling the end of America's unbridled power projection.

The writer is a foreign policy analyst and had served in the Indian Mission in Tehran during the mid-90s.

gion, pay war reparations to Iran and acknowledge Iran's position (status quo ante) in the West Asian region with sovereignty over Hormuz.

Meanwhile, India's position seems to have been compromised with PM Modi's 2-day visit to Israel barely 36 hours before the war broke out. Modi, during his visit, had been openly supportive of Israel's actions and had in a speech at the Knesset affirmed India's full support for Israel "now and in future." That was a fatal mistake which while giving the impression of India's partisan behaviour towards USA and Israel also signalled that it had jettisoned its decades-long strategic and political relations with Iran which had been a solid support for India in the Muslim world (OIC) all along. With the unenviable task of chairing both the BRICS and Quad groupings slated for this year, Delhi is at a loss to justify its stand. While Iran has raised the legitimate point for India under the BRICS Chairmanship to issue a statement calling for cessation of hostilities and restoration of peace in the region, Delhi has given the justification of two of the BRICS members engaged in the war (Iran

and UAE) which has made a consensus position difficult to reach within the group. As regards India's outreach, it has cited the Foreign Secretary's visit to the Iranian Embassy in Delhi to sign the condolence book five days after the killing of the Supreme Leader, a clear violation of protocol. This, along with India's lack of immediate response to the sinking of the Iranian naval vessel Dena by an American submarine off Sri Lankan waters on 4th March had been taken amiss by Tehran.

Contrastingly, Pakistan of late rose into regional prominence by offering to host "comprehensive" talks between the US and Iran against the backdrop of Trump understandably wanting a ceasefire and looking for an off-ramp. In that context, Pak PM Sharif's suggestion was taken up by Trump in his post to convey his willingness for the Pak-hosted talks despite Iran's persistent denial.

With over 60% of its oil and gas needs met through the Strait of Hormuz, India has been feeling the impact of the war like never before. Iran's behaviour towards India at this time having been less than cordial, the Modi gov-



Malay Mishra

WITH OVER 60% OF ITS OIL AND GAS NEEDS MET THROUGH THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ INDIA HAS BEEN FEELING THE IMPACT OF THE WAR LIKE NEVER BEFORE

It's nearly a month since the West Asia conflict began with the combined Israeli-US assault on Iran on 28th February with the targeted killings of the Supreme Leader and scores of senior military and security officials. The war has seen a progressive escalation from both sides with the Strait of Hormuz still blocked by Iran for ships and tankers carrying oil and gas through this narrow passageway, creating havoc in global energy markets and supply chains. Having realized that the war was turning in Iran's favour President Trump relaxed his 48-hour ultimatum and gave a five-day pause to Iran (which has now been extended to 10 more days) while Israel has continued to attack Iranian installations and infrastructure.

The war saw shifting of war goals from the US side, from regime change to opening the Strait of Hormuz and there was wide divergence in war goals and strategy in both the US and Israel's approach to the war. While the Israeli PM aimed at decapitating the Iranian leadership and killing as many top officials of Iran as possible, Trump was more geared towards styming Iran's nuclear programme, though he had categorically stated at the conclusion of the 12-day war in June last year that Iran's nuclear programme had been "obliterated", and ending Iran's missile and drone capability, a position which has been squarely negated with Iran's continued missile attacks on Israel and US military installations and civilian targets in the US-allied Arab Gulf states. Besides, with the express support of China and Russia Iran is confident of staying on in the war and therefore has refused any move towards a cease-fire. Instead it has stuck to its original demands—USA to close down all its bases in the re-



Quiet Realignment

The news that a clutch of Bihar's senior babus may soon head to Delhi on Central deputation, in the wake of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's move to the Rajya Sabha, says something important about how power really travels in India: it rarely travels alone. Governments change, leaders shift roles, and officers seek "broader exposure" in the Union government. In reality, this looks more like a familiar administrative migration where trusted babus quietly follow their political anchor to the next theatre of influence.

Nitish Kumar's transition marks the end of a long state-level innings and the beginning of a likely national role. And if the chatter is even half accurate, he isn't going to Delhi empty-handed. A few handpicked officers, particularly those who understand his style, instincts, and priorities, are expected to make the journey with him.

There's a certain logic to it. Governance, especially at higher levels, runs as much on trust as on rules. A politician stepping into a new ecosystem would rather work with officers who "get it" than spend months decoding new ones. Efficiency, continuity, and comfort all rolled into one neat deputation file.

Of course, this blurring of political and administrative mobility raises questions about the neutrality of the civil services. Deputation is meant to be about institutional need, not personal alignment. Yet, time and again, it begins to resemble a parallel patronage pipeline.

For Bihar, this could mean a double churn—new political leadership and a reshuffled bureaucracy. For Delhi, it's a quiet infusion of a state-specific administrative style into the Union system.

Transfer Raj: the poll shuffle no one trusts fully
Election-time transfers are the Election Commission's version of a pre-match pitch inspection. They are necessary, earnest, and almost guaranteed to annoy at least one team before the game even begins.

The theory is beautifully tidy. Move out babus who might be a little too comfortable with the ruling establishment, plug in "neutral" replacements, and hopefully create a level playing field. It's an administrative deodorant, removing any lingering whiff of bias before voters show up.

But, as is often the case, the execution develops a personality of its own. When transfers are selective and surgical, they pass with mild grumbling. When they arrive in bulk, with dozens of officers shifted overnight, it starts to feel less like fine-tuning and more like a bureaucratic musical chairs tournament. Continuity takes a hit, governance wobbles briefly, and everyone pretends this is perfectly normal.

Naturally, politics fills the vacuum. The ECI has ordered large-scale transfers ahead of the state polls in five states, but notably in Assam, West Bengal and Kerala. It insists it is merely enforcing neutrality. The political parties insist that neutrality seems suspiciously selective. Both claims can coexist quite comfortably, which is precisely the problem. In a system driven as much by perception as by procedure, intent is quickly overshadowed by interpretation.

There's also the small matter of federal pride. States, which ordinarily control their administrative machinery, are suddenly reduced to watching from the sidelines while their officials are rearranged. None of this makes the transfers unnecessary. Far from it. Without them, accusations of partisan administration would be even louder. But scale and opacity have a way of turning a sensible tool into a talking point.

When expertise becomes indispensable

Parameswaran Iyer's three-month extension at the World Bank looks modest on paper. In reality, it's another small reminder of a larger truth: some officers don't just serve the system but become quietly indispensable to it.

Iyer's career has been anything but linear. A 1981-batch IAS officer who took voluntary retirement in 2009, he could easily have faded into the usual post-retirement advisory circuit. Instead, he built a second innings that keeps looping back into relevance. From the World Bank to leading the Swachh Bharat Mission, then a stint at NITI Aayog, and back again to Washington, his trajectory reads less like a career path and more like a series of strategic recalls.

What explains this staying power? For one, Iyer sits at a rare intersection: he understands the Indian administrative state but is equally fluent in the language of global institutions. That dual credibility is not easily replaceable. When the Modi government needed someone to drive Swachh Bharat with both bureaucratic discipline and international visibility, Iyer fit. When it needed a steady hand at the World Bank, he fit again.

The extension, then, is less about tenure and more about continuity. Three months may look like a stopgap, but it signals a familiar instinct in Delhi: when in doubt, stick with the known quantity.

To be clear, Iyer's relevance isn't confined to one political dispensation. His ability to move across governments and institutions suggests a broader acceptability, even adaptability. But under the Modi government, that utility appears to have sharpened into something more consistent: a go-to technocrat for assignments that require both credibility and execution.

Is this unusual? Somewhat. India has no shortage of capable former babus, but very few manage to stay in circulation at this level across roles and years.

In that sense, the extension is almost incidental. The real story is that in a system that often struggles to retain talent meaningfully, Parameswaran Iyer has made himself difficult to replace and, therefore, hard to let go.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect

WISDOM CORNER

- Man is a genius when he is dreaming.** AKIRA KUROSAWA
- I am not worried about people's expectations. I just want to get the film right.** MANI RATNAM
- If you set your goals ridiculously high and it's a failure, you will fail above everyone else's success.** JAMES CAMERON

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1890:** American bandleader Paul Whiteman, called the "King of Jazz" for popularizing a musical style that helped to introduce jazz to mainstream audiences during the 1920s and '30s, was born.
- 1930:** Built as Byzantium about 657 bce, then renamed Constantinople in the 4th century ce after Constantine the Great made the city his capital, the Turkish city of Istanbul officially received its present name.
- 1939:** Francisco Franco, leader of the Nationalist forces during the Spanish Civil War, captured the capital city of Madrid en route to his overthrow of the democratic Spanish republic.

SPECTRUM UPCOMING POLLS

Dubious intent & promises

Lack of decency and morality are political trends reiterated by leaders. The clamour raised by some states and drama enacted specially by West Bengal, regarding SIR bear testimony they don't want the mandatory revision.



Dhurjati Mukherjee

THE POLITICAL SYSTEM CAN'T DELIVER GOOD AND INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE, IF A CHANGE IS NOT IN PLACE

ter remains to be seen but the aspirational youth are disappointed with the leadership.

Apart from this, political leaders have started making promises as their only intention is to woo voters and capture power by hook or by crook. Added to this, violence before and after polls has led reinforced 'criminalisation of politics'.

This apart, dynasticism in politics has been manifest since the times of Indira Gandhi. It's well-known that collective federalism and inner-party democracy has been absent both at the Centre and in most states. While Vajpayee did not dominate his Cabinet the way that Modi does, CMs never sought to speak in sycophantic terms of their prime minister as they do now. Since May 2014, much of the resources of the Union government and the ruling party have been used to boost the image of the Prime Minister, who carries in his person the past, the present and future of the Indian nation and of Indian civilization itself.

In the states also this is

glaringly evident. The degradation of the Indian party system is complete with one set of political parties becoming family firms and another set becoming quasi-religious cults, exalting their leader as a religious god.

There is much talk of 'Viksit Bharat' and good governance, but doubts arise whether the current genre of political leaders have the capability to lead the country forward in a sincere and judicious manner.

Politics in recent years has taken a new form. Though it can't be said it's not based on ideology, the manner of approach now lacks decency and moral values. There is no fellow-feeling in their addresses to the community but one based on castigating other opponents and spreading venom and hatred. There is a steady rise of hate speech in public domain.

A report of Centre for the Study of Organised Hate had found a significant rise in such hateful speeches in 2024, which was incidentally an election year, with BJP leaders bearing a disproportionate

share of such utterances. Meanwhile, a fresh controversy arose with a chapter on 'Corruption in Judiciary' in a Class VIII NCERT textbook. And though Union education minister offered an unconditional apology, the Supreme Court banned the book and rightly stated that it is "a well-orchestrated conspiracy" to defame only the judiciary.

All the above impact democratic functioning. The reason why the young, educated people are wary of political leaders and refrain from joining politics is not far to seek. Only those who are half literate and can't find any job opportunities join political parties and turn into ruffians and extort money for unethical and official deals.

Therefore, there is need for a drastic transformation, which is easier said than implemented. Dedication and sincerity must be inculcated in the political system, as parties largely serve their interests and needs. The political system can't deliver good and inclusive governance, if a change is not in place.

INFA

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



Food safety equality

Sir, The recent rejection of a Verka milk consignment by the Army in Jammu raises a troubling question: if milk fails to meet standards for soldiers, how can it be deemed safe for civilians? Are quality benchmarks different for people in uniform and those outside it? This distinction appears unreasonable. Every soldier was once a civilian and will eventually return to civilian life. Food safety should be universal, not selective. The issue demands transparency. Authorities must clearly disclose the reasons for rejection—whether due to contamination, storage lapses, or quality degradation. More importantly, corrective measures must be implemented immediately. Public trust in essential food supplies cannot be compromised. Milk, a staple in Indian households, must meet uniform safety standards for all consumers. After all, health does not differentiate between uniforms and ordinary clothing.

Lessons from Lanka

Sir, In a recent press meet, the Sri Lankan President, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, disclosed that the US had requested his government to permit the US Air Force to use the Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport following the outbreak of the latest West Asia war. He then confirmed that his government firmly declined the request in order to maintain the country's neutrality. What a quick and bold decision by a small country like Sri Lanka, compared to the dilly-dallying of India in its foreign policy and decision-making! We have seen how the Central Government has surrendered to the US President and allowed him to dictate terms. At his instruction, India stopped buying oil from Russia, and isn't it a shame that Donald Trump has now relaxed his condition for India to buy oil from Russia—only for 30 days—due to the West Asia crisis? The fact that Iran, extremely pleased with Sri Lanka's neutrality, has assured an uninterrupted supply of petrol and diesel to the island nation is also a case in point. India should learn from Sri Lanka how to make bold decisions and practice foreign policy in the right way.

RS Narula, PATIALA

Tharcus S Fernando, CHENNAI

BJP youth wing holds rally demanding nat'l law school

The march was taken through the city under a 'Secretariat Chalo' call, and slogans such as 'Bharat Mata ki Jai', 'NLU for Jammu', and 'NC (National Conference) hai hai' were raised



Jammu, March 27: Members of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), joined by several BJP MLAs, took out a rally in Jammu demanding a National Law University (NLU) in the region but were stopped by police from marching to the Civil Secretariat at the Assembly. The BJP and its youth wing BJYM have been accusing the ruling National Conference government of "dividing the Union territory on religious and regional lines" by announcing an NLU for Kashmir while denying one to Jammu. The march was taken through the city under a 'Secretariat Chalo' call, and slogans such as 'Bharat Mata ki Jai', 'NLU for Jammu', and 'NC (National Conference) hai hai' were raised. BJP MLAs Sham Lal Sharma, Yudhvir Sethi, Arvind Gupta, Vikram Randhawa, Sunil Bhardwaj, Shagun Parihar and Divyani Rana among others joined the rally and sat on a dharna. The police stopped the protesters from marching to the Civil Secretariat at the Assembly. Heavy police deployment, including barricades, barbed wire and security vehicles, was in place. Alleging police excesses, BJYM J&K president Arun Prabhat said, "We were not doing anything wrong and had called for a peaceful march. But thousands of police personnel were deployed to stop us from marching to the Secretariat. Despite this, protesters broke through barriers and reached near the Secretariat." He said this is just a trailer. "If you do not open an NLU in Jammu and revoke decisions like the alleged selling of 24,000 jobs, this struggle will turn into a movement." MLA Rana said the party was not opposed to an NLU in Kashmir but demanded equal rights for Jammu. "If an NLU is established in Kashmir, Jammu also deserves one. We are not saying

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Kashmir should be deprived, but both must get equal opportunities," she said, referring to an alleged resolution passed in October 2025 seeking an NLU for Kashmir. MLA Ajay Gupta said Jammu has historically secured its rights through sustained struggle. "Whether it was for the central university or AIIMS, Jammu has always had to fight for its due. The demand for an NLU has been ongoing for quite some time, and people will continue the agitation until it is achieved," he said. Gupta also alleged that the Assembly did not allow debate on the issue. MLA Sethi accused the government of attempting to create divisions. "We will continue our struggle to bring the university to Jammu." Sethi further claimed that a future BJP government would ensure equitable development.

UP cancels MoU signed with Puch AI after review

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

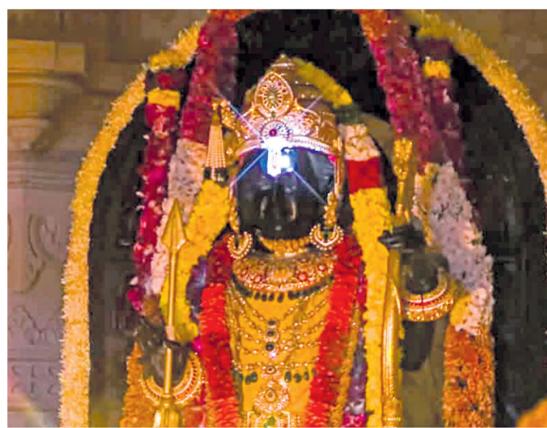
Lucknow, March 27: The Uttar Pradesh government Thursday cancelled the MoU with Puch AI in the interest of transparency and the highest level of probity in governance. Invest UP said in an X post that, as per standard protocols laid by the State Government, the MoU signed with Puch AI March 23, 2026, was reviewed. "Necessary details as per SOP were sought from the investor, but they failed to provide them in a timely manner. Due diligence showed a lack of net worth and credible financial linkages for the project's scale. On the directions of the State Government, the MoU is cancelled with effect from today. No rights or obligations remain," said Invest UP. The MoU has been cancelled in the interest of transparency and the highest level of probity in governance, which are at the core of the Government of Uttar Pradesh, it added. Invest UP had signed the MoU with Puch AI to establish an AI park in the state with a proposed investment of ₹25,000 crore. Earlier, the Uttar Pradesh government issued a detailed clarification regarding the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between Invest UP and startup Puch AI, following growing scrutiny over the firm's financial and operational capacity to execute a project of significant scale. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath shared a post on the social media platform X, underlining that such MoUs are only preliminary arrangements and do not guarantee final approval or the execution of projects.

Lakhs gather for Ram Navami

'Surya Tilak' of Ram Lalla's idol performed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ayodhya, March 27: The 'Surya Tilak' illuminated Ram Lalla's idol at the grand temple here Friday on the occasion of Ram Navami, which was marked by religious fervour and drew lakhs of devotees to the holy town. The festival, marking the birth of Lord Ram, falls on the ninth day of Chaitra Navratri. While most parts of the country celebrated the festival on Thursday, the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple observed it Friday. The Uttar Pradesh government declared a two-day holiday Thursday and Friday on account of Ram Navami. At around noon, during the auspicious 'Abhijit Muhurat', the Surya Tilak ritual was carried out, with precisely channelled sun rays illuminating the deity's forehead for about nine minutes through a specially aligned system of lenses, a temple trust member said. Fourteen priests conducted the rituals inside the sanctum sanctorum in accordance with Vedic traditions. Following the ceremony, the temple doors were briefly closed and 'bhog' comprising 56 dishes was offered to the deity. Officials said this was the second Surya Tilak ceremony since the consecration of the idol. A specially designed mechanism - featuring around 20 ashtadhatu pipes along with four lenses and four mirrors - was used to direct sunlight onto the deity's forehead from a height of nearly 65 feet. Ram temple trust member



Anil Mishra told PTI that the Surya Tilak ceremony remained the central attraction, with sun rays illuminating the idol's forehead at noon. He said big screens were installed across the city to broadcast the rituals and associated ceremonies for devotees. Earlier in the day, the deity was adorned in yellow garments, and the morning 'aarti' was performed at around 5.30 am. Authorities estimated that around 10 lakh devotees visited the temple on the occasion, with heavy footfall reported across the complex and adjoining routes, including

Ram Path, Bhakti Path and Janmabhoomi Path. The festival was celebrated peacefully under stringent security arrangements, officials said. Senior police officers said the city was divided into multiple security zones and sectors, with personnel from paramilitary forces, Pradeshik Armed Constabulary and civil police deployed at key locations, they said. Water police, National Disaster Response Force and State Disaster Response Fund teams kept vigil along the Saryu River.

Kashmir leaders call upon Iranian envoy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, March 27: A delegation comprising several religious bodies in Kashmir on Friday called upon the Iranian ambassador in New Delhi to convey condolences over the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and to express solidarity with the people of the Islamic Republic. The delegation of the Mutahida Majlis-e-Ulema (MMU) was led by its patron and Kashmir's chief preacher Mirwaiz Umar Farooq. "A delegation of Mutahida Majlis-e-Ulema (MMU) met the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Dr. Mohammad Fathali, and other officials in New Delhi today," the office of the Mirwaiz said in a statement. It said the delegation conveyed heartfelt condolences on



the "martyrdom of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, his family members and other leadership and expressed deep solidarity with the people of Iran in their hour of invasion and hardship". "On behalf of the people of Kashmir, the delegation stated that the martyrdom of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the prominent and respected leader of the Muslim Ummah, has deeply saddened them," the statement said. The delegation expressed serious concern and condemned

the ongoing war imposed on Iran by Israel and the United States, and expressed hope that diplomatic efforts will prevail to bring "an end to this aggression, restoring peace and stability". The US and Israel launched a joint attack on Iran February 28 and the retaliation by the Islamic nation extended the war to the entire Gulf region. The US-Israeli attack killed Iran's Supreme Leader Aya-

tollah Ali Khamenei. The joint strikes came after days of build-up, with US President Donald Trump ramping up the pressure on Tehran to agree to a new deal on its nuclear programme. The conflict has also taken a major toll on energy supply chains, especially across the Strait of Hormuz. Meanwhile, the delegation also highlighted the deep-rooted cultural, historical and religious ties between Kashmir and Iran, noting that Kashmir has long been referred to as "Iran-e-Sagheer" (little Iran), reflecting the enduring bonds between the two peoples, the statement said. The MMU delegation reiterated that unity, steadfastness and collective prayers for peace are "the need of the hour for the ummah to face these challenges", it added.

J&K aims to triple installed hydropower capacity: Omar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

The delegation of the Mutahida Majlis-e-Ulema (MMU) was led by its patron and Kashmir's chief preacher Mirwaiz Umar Farooq



Jammu, March 27: The Jammu and Kashmir government Friday said the Union Territory possesses an estimated hydropower potential of about 18,000 MW, of which nearly 15,000 MW has been identified, and that it is on a fast track to triple its installed capacity to around 11,000 MW by 2035. Replying to a question of MLA Javid Iqbal in Jammu and Kashmir assembly Friday, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said, "J&K has an estimated hydropower potential of around 18,000 MW out of which around 15,000 MW has been identified". He said that the 3,540.15 MW -- about 24 per cent of the identified potential -- has been harnessed so far. "This includes 13 projects with an aggregate capacity of 1,197.4 MW in the UT sector, six projects totaling 2,250 MW in the Central sector, and 12 projects with a combined capacity of 92.75 MW in the Independent Power Producer (IPP) or private sector", he said.

Chief Minister said that a comprehensive roadmap for the next decade has been drawn and is under implementation, and the UT is on a fast track to triple its installed hydropower capacity by 2035. "The roadmap includes 3,063.5 MW from six under-construction hydroelectric projects and 4,507 MW from eight projects in the tendering, award, DPR or clearance stages. An additional 100-150 MW is expected to come from private sector projects during this period". Consequently, the total installed hydropower capacity of Jammu and Kashmir is projected to reach around 11,000 MW by 2035, he added. The government also said that in the backdrop of the Indus Water Treaty being kept in abeyance by the government, construction

on ongoing projects has accelerated, and efforts are underway to identify potential storage projects to maximize the remaining hydropower potential. On the existing operational capacity, he said that union territory-owned hydropower projects contribute 1,197.4 MW, including major plants such as Baglihar-I and II (450 MW each), Lower Jhelum (105 MW) and Upper Sindh projects. Central sector projects operated by NHPC account for 2,250 MW, including Salal (690 MW), Uri-I (480 MW), Dulhasti (390 MW), Kishenganga (330 MW) and Uri-II (240 MW), he said. "Private sector projects contribute 92.75 MW through smaller installations across districts such as Doda, Poonch, Bandipora, Baramulla, Ganderbal, Budgam, Anantnag and Ramban", he added.

EAST COAST RAILWAY

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR EMPANELMENT OF SERVICE PROVIDER FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REFORMED ON-BOARD HOUSEKEEPING SERVICE POLICY
EOI Notice No. ECoR/EnHM/Empanelment/2026/Onboard-1
EMPANELMENT OF SERVICE PROVIDER FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REFORMED ON-BOARD HOUSEKEEPING SERVICE POLICY IN EAST COAST RAILWAY.
Last date & time for submission of documents : 17.04.2026 (till 17:00 Hrs.).
Validity of Empanelment : The empanelment shall be valid for a period of 2 years from the date of publication of the empanelment list.
Address for submission of application : Office of the Principal Chief Mechanical Engineer, 3rd Floor, South Block, Rail Sadan, Bhubaneswar-751017.
Bidders are advised to regularly check our website : www.eastcoastrail.indianrailways.gov.in for any corrigendum / amendments.
PR-1272/Q/25-26 Chief Mechanical Engineer (EnHM & DM) / Bhubaneswar

EAST COAST RAILWAY

Tender Notice No. ST-OT-TLSB-SPUR-WORKS-555, Dt : 23.03.2026
NAME OF WORK: SIGNAL & TELECOM ESTIMATE FOR PROPOSED ANNUAL MAINTENANCE CONTRACT FOR THREE YEARS DURATION FOR MAINTENANCE OF SPUR 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, TLSB-SPUR SECTION INCLUDING MSDAC EQUIPMENTS OF TLSB AND ALL THE SIGNAL & TELECOM INSTALLATION OF BLOCK SECTIONS BETWEEN SPURAREA (OUTSOURCING & WORKS PORTION).
Tender Value : ₹ 2,73,60,549.28, EMD : ₹ 2,86,800/-
Bidding Start Date : 31.03.2026.
Tender Closing Date and Time : At 11:00 Hrs. of 14.04.2026.
No manual offers sent by Post/ Courier/ Fax or in person accepted against such e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration. Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website : www.reps.gov.in
Note : The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website 15 days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes/corrigendum issued for this tender.
Sr. Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer, PR-1273/Q/25-26, Khurda Road

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CIN No. : U71440JH1973GO1001199
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1. MECON Limited requires 24 (Twenty Four) Nos. of Non-Executive Personnel in Regular Scale of Pay (Adv. No.11.73.4.3/2026/Reg/02 dated : 03.03.2026) as follows :
Post Code Name of Posts No. of Posts Pay Scale Grade
1. Accountant 14 Rs.27,710-3%-2,20,000/- S-6
2. Assistant (HR) 02 53,590/-
3. Assistant (Administration) 02
4. Assistant (Secretarial Services) 06
2. MECON Limited requires 4 (Four) Nos. of Executives in the Regular Scale of Pay (Adv. No. 11.73.4.3/2026/Reg/03 dated : 10.03.2026) as follows :
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01 Manager (Civil) E-3 02 Rs.80,000-3%-2,40,000/-
02 Senior Manager (Civil) E-4 02 Rs.90,000-3%-2,40,000/-
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Contact No. : Mr. B. Harikrishna, Mob. No. 99374 90975, Pinaki Dutta, Mob. No. 94374 79421, Suman Kalyan Satapathy, Mob. No. 79787 44193

E-auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) & 9(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.
Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower / Co-Borrower / Mortgagee(s) that the below-described Immovable Properties mortgaged to the Secured Creditor, the Symbolic Possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Company Limited the same shall be referred hereinafter as Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Company Limited. The Secured Assets will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "What ever there is" basis through E-Auction.
It is hereby informed to the General public that we are going to conduct a public E-Auction through the website <https://bankauctions.in/>.

Account No. and Name of the Borrower / Co-borrower / Mortgagee	1. Date of Demand Notice	Descriptions of the Property / Properties	Reserve Price
Loan A/c. No. : HE01BHU00000086144	1. Date of Demand Notice : 08.10.2025		Rs. 20,50,000.00
1. Krutibas Parida (Applicant), S/o. Kailash Chandra Parida, Ghanta Pada, Central Colony, Balanda, Dist - Angul, Odisha, Pin - 759 116. Also at : Dhurusia, Tahasil - Athagad, P.S. - Khuntuni, District - Cuttack, Odisha, Pin - 754027.	2. Demand Notice Amount : Rs. 20,85,399.00 as on 08.10.2025	All that Part and Parcel of Land is that Khata No. 280/392, Plot No. 1316 / 1988 and Plot No. 1316/1989, Area-Ac. 0.0400 Decimals, Mouza - Dhurusia, Tahasil - Athagad, Thasil No. 130, P.S. - Gurudihajita, P.S. No. 61, Kisanam - Gharabari, District - Cuttack, Odisha.	Earnest Money Deposit : Rs. 2,05,000.00 Bid Increment Amount : Rs. 50,000.00 E-Auction Date and Time : 17.04.2026 (11.00 A.M. to 1.00 P.M.) (with unlimited extension of 3 Minutes) EMD Submission Last Date : 16.04.2026 (up to 5.30 P.M.) Inspection Date : 10.04.2026 & 11.04.2026 (10.00 A.M. to 1.00 P.M.)
2. Sumitra Parida (Co-applicant), W/o. Krutibas Parida, Ghanta Pada, Central Colony, Balanda, Dist - Angul, Odisha, Pin - 759 116. Also at : Dhurusia, Tahasil - Athagad, P.S. - Khuntuni, Dist - Cuttack, Odisha, Pin - 754 027.	3. Total Loan Outstanding : Rs. 22,89,013.00 as on 25.03.2026 together with further interest, penal interest, costs and charges thereon till the date of payment.		
3. M/s. Jagan Jewellers (Co-applicant), Through its Proprietor : Krutibas Parida Talcher, Plot No. 6296/108/7, Dera Colliery Township, Talcher, Dist - Angul, Odisha, Pin - 759 103.	4. Possession Date : 26.12.2025 (Symbolic Possession)		
4. Kailash Chandra Parida (Co-applicant), S/o. Late Prana Krushna Parida Alias Panu Parida Dhurusia, Tahasil - Athagad, P.S. - Khuntuni, Dist - Cuttack, Odisha, Pin - 754 027.			
Loan A/c. No. : HE01BHU00000086448	1. Date of Demand Notice : 17.11.2025		Reserve Price : Rs. 1,00,00,000.00
Borrower / Co-borrower / Mortgagee: 1. Soubhagini Swain (Applicant), W/o. Pradeep Kumar Swain, Anuary VTC, Gopa, Near Temple, P.O. - Anuary, Sub-Dist - Banki, District - Cuttack, Odisha, Pin - 754 009.	2. Demand Notice Amount : Rs. 82,44,460.00 as on 15.11.2025	Property 1 : All that Part and Parcel of the Property bearing Khata No. 227/259, Plot No. 305, Area Ac. 0.120 Decimals, Status - Home Stead, Mouza - Gopa, Tahasil - Banki, P.S. - Banki, District - Cuttack, (Odisha), Pin - 754009. Bounded as : North - Road and Plot No. 298, South - Plot No. 306, East - Plot No. 304, West - Plot No. 269.	Earnest Money Deposit : Rs. 10,00,000.00 Bid Increment Amount : Rs. 1,00,000.00 E-Auction Date and Time : 05.05.2026 (11.00 A.M. to 1.00 P.M.) (with unlimited extension of 3 Minutes) EMD Submission Last Date : 04.05.2026 (up to 5.30 P.M.) Inspection Date : 24.04.2026 & 25.04.2026 (10.00 A.M. to 1.00 P.M.)
2. Pradeep Kumar Swain (Co-applicant), S/o. Pramod Swain, Anuary VTC, Gopa, Near Temple, P.O. - Anuary, Sub-Dist - Banki, District - Cuttack, Odisha - 754009.	3. Total Loan Outstanding : Rs. 87,32,245.00 as on 23.03.2026 together with further interest, penal interest, costs and charges thereon till the date of payment.	Property 2 : All that part and parcel of the property bearing Khata No. 227/246, Plot No. 269, Area Ac. 0.220 Decimals, Status - Home Stead, Mouza - Gopa, Tahasil - Banki, P.S. - Banki, District - Cuttack, (Odisha), Pin - 754009. Bounded as : North - Plot No. 270, South - Plot No. 267, East - Road, West - Plot No. 267, 268, 270 & 272.	
3. Swadhin Swain (Co-applicant), S/o. Pramod Swain, Anuary VTC, Gopa, Near Temple, P.O. - Anuary, Sub-Dist - Banki, District - Cuttack, Odisha - 754 009.	4. Possession Date : 02.02.2026 (Symbolic Possession)		
4. M/s. Sitaram Enterprises (Co-applicant), Anuary VTC, Gopa, Near Temple, P.O. - Anuary, Sub-Dist - Banki, District - Cuttack, Odisha - 754 009.			
5. Purna Chandra Swain (Co-applicant), S/o. Pramod Swain, L-292, Phase-4, HB Colony, Near High School, Dumuduma Khorda, Odisha, Pin - 751 019.			
1. All interested participants / bidders are requested to visit the website https://bankauctions.in and www.cholamandalam.com/news/auction-notices . For details, help, procedure and online training on e-auction, prospective bidders may contact - Mr. Muhammed Rahees - Ph. No. 81240 00030 / 63748 45616, M/s. 4 Closure; Rekha, Ph. No. 81420 00622, E-mail : CholaAuctionLAP@cholamurugappa.com . 2. For further details on terms and conditions please visit : https://bankauctions.in and www.cholamandalam.com/news/auction-notices to take part in e-auction. THIS IS ALSO A STATUTORY 15/30 DAYS SALE NOTICE UNDER RULE 8(6) & 9(1) OF SECURITY INTEREST (ENFORCEMENT RULES 2002)			
Date : 28.03.2026 Place : Cuttack (Odisha) Authorised Officer Cholamandalam Investment And Finance Company Limited			



I welcome this people-centric decision and appreciate the union government for prioritising economic stability and public welfare during a period of global uncertainty
EDAPPADI K PALANISWAMI | AIADMK GENERAL SECRETARY

TRADE UNIONS TO OBSERVE APRIL 1 AS 'BLACK DAY'

A joint platform of central trade unions on Friday gave a call for observing April 1, 2026, as Black Day, to stage a protest against the four labour codes implemented by the government. The government of India implemented four labour codes -- Code on Wages 2019, Industrial Relations Code 2020, Social Security Code 2020, and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code 2020, from November 21, 2025



of the day note

We are in a war situation. We all pray that God ends this war and peace prevails so that we all can live in peace
FAROQ ABDULLAH | NC PRESIDENT

The state government is fully committed to supporting higher education and skill development in the state. It will continue to work hand in hand with institutions like Manipur University to ensure that youths have access to the best possible opportunities
Y KHEMCHAND SINGH | MANIPUR CM

Maharashtra has the potential to become a global destination for integrated healthcare and recovery. As the state moves towards its Viksit Maharashtra 2047 vision, healthcare will serve as a key pillar - not only as a social responsibility, but also as a catalyst for innovation, investment and economic growth
DEVENDRA FADNAVIS | MAHARASHTRA CM

WEST ASIA CRISIS

Rumours of lockdown false: Govt

INDIA HAS ABOUT 60 DAYS OF OIL STOCK COVER AND HAS ARRANGED ONE FULL MONTH OF LPG SUPPLY, A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL SAID, ADDING THAT THERE IS NO SHORTAGE OF PETROL, DIESEL, OR LPG

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: India has enough petrol, diesel and LPG stocks to last at least two months with normal delivery cycles, the government said Friday, as it ruled out imposing any lockdown in view of energy supply disruptions caused by the war in West Asia.

India has about 60 days of oil stock cover and has arranged one full month of LPG supply, a government official said, adding that there is no shortage of petrol, diesel, or LPG.

"There is no situation like lockdown. It is not even under consideration," Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, said at a media briefing on the situation arising out of war in West Asia.

She said panic buying and long queues at petrol pumps and LPG distributors in parts have been triggered by misinformation and rumours.

"There is no crisis or shortage," she said. "We have a sufficient amount of crude oil (raw



material to make fuels like petrol and diesel). Our stocks of petrol and diesel are sufficient, and LPG supplies have been ensured."

All petrol pumps across the country are adequately stocked and operating normally, with no rationing of petrol or diesel.

Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, in a post on X, said while the global situation remains in flux, "all necessary steps are being taken to ensure uninterrupted availability of fuel, energy, and other critical supplies for our citizens".

"We are fully prepared to handle emerging challenges," he said. "Rumours of a lockdown in India are completely false. Let me state this clearly, there is no such proposal under consideration by the Government of India."

India, he said, has consistently demonstrated resilience in the face of global uncertainties, and the government will continue to act in a timely, proactive, and coordinated manner.

"In such times, it is important that we remain calm, re-

sponsible, and united. Attempts to spread rumours and create panic in such a situation are irresponsible and harmful," he added.

India relies on imports to meet 88 per cent of its crude oil needs, half of its natural gas requirement and 60 per cent of its LPG demand. Half of the crude oil, a third of the gas and 85-90 per cent of LPG came from the Gulf countries through the Strait of Hormuz. The war has effectively shut the strait, leaving importers scrambling for supplies.

India, the world's third-largest oil-importing and consuming country, has managed to replenish the crude oil volumes lost in the Strait through sourcing from West Africa, Latin America and the US. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) is being sourced from Australia and the US to make up for the deficit, while LPG has been contracted from the United States, Russia, and Australia.

Also, domestic production of LPG has been raised by 40 per cent by diverting streams used in petrochemicals.

Ram Navami celebrated nationwide with fervour



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi/Ayodhya, March 27: From the grand 'Surya Tilak' ceremony at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya to vibrant processions in West Bengal, Telangana and Jharkhand, Ram Navami was celebrated with devotion and grandeur in different parts of the country Friday.

The festival, marking the birth of Lord Ram, was observed Thursday in most parts of the country. However, several regions, including Ayodhya -- considered to be the birthplace of Lord Ram -- held the celebrations Friday. The Uttar Pradesh government declared a two-day holiday Thursday and Friday on account of Ram Navami.

Following the ceremony, the temple doors were briefly closed and 'bhog' comprising 56 dishes was offered to the deity, a temple trust member said, adding that this was the second Surya Tilak ceremony since the consecration of the idol.

A specially designed mechanism -- featuring around 20 ashtadhatu pipes along with four lenses and four mirrors -- was used to direct sunlight onto the deity's forehead from a height of nearly 65 feet.

Ram temple trust member Anil Mishra told PTI that big screens were installed across the city to broadcast the rituals and associated ceremonies for devotees. Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually witnessed the ceremony. Earlier in the day, the deity was adorned in yellow garments, and the morning 'aarti' was performed at around 5.30 am. In Jammu and Kashmir, the

nine-day-long 'Shat Chandi Maha Yagya' concluded at the revered shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi atop Trikuta hills in Reasi district on Ram Navami. The rituals culminated with the 'Purna Ahuti' amid vedic chants, with participation from shrine board officials, devotees and a group of distinguished priests.

In poll-bound West Bengal, the celebrations were marked by 'shobha yatras' in several districts. BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari held a Ram Navami procession in his constituency, Nandigram, in the Purba Medinipur district.

Members of the minority community were seen offering water, sweets and fruits to Adhikari and other participants, reflecting moments of communal harmony. In Telangana, the festival was celebrated with traditional fervour, including the celestial wedding ceremony of the presiding deity at the renowned Sri Sita Ramachandraswamy Temple in Bhadrachalam. Jharkhand also witnessed vibrant celebrations, with devotees thronging temples since early morning to offer prayers.

Religious processions were taken out in most districts during the day, while in Hazaribag and East Singhbhum -- considered sensitive zones -- these will be held Saturday, officials said. BJP president Nitin Nabin offered prayers at several temples, including the famed Mahavir temple, in the capital Patna. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar extended greetings to the people on the occasion and said Lord Ram's life symbolises love for humanity, harmony, tolerance, sacrifice and righteousness.

SNIPPETS

Taken note of introduction of Bill related to H-1B, L-1 visa in US Senate: Govt

NEW DELHI: The government Friday informed Parliament that it has taken note of the introduction of a Bill related to H-1B and L-1 visa in the US Senate last September and according to available information, it remains at the 'introduced' stage with no hearings, markup, or further legislative progress. The H-1B and L-1 Visa Reform Act of 2025 seeks to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to reform the H-1B (specialty occupation) and L-1 (intra-company transferee) visa programmes with the stated objectives of "curbing fraud, abuse, outsourcing, and displacement of American workers", Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh said in a written response to a query in Lok Sabha.

Modi to inaugurate Noida International Airport today

NEW DELHI: The much-awaited Noida International Airport (NIA) is set to be inaugurated Saturday by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the second major airport in the national capital region that will boost the country's efforts to be a global aviation hub. Among the largest greenfield airport projects in the country, NIA, located in Jewar, Gautam Buddha Nagar district of Uttar Pradesh, will initially have a capacity to handle 12 million passengers per annum. Once fully developed, the airport will have a total passenger handling capacity of 70 million. Modi Friday said the airport will boost commerce and connectivity and ease congestion at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in the national capital.

Security breach: NIA custody of 7 foreign nationals extended

NEW DELHI: A Delhi court Friday extended by 10 days the NIA custody of seven foreign nationals, including six Ukrainians, accused of breaching national security. NIA special judge Prashant Sharma, who conducted the proceedings in the agency's headquarters here, directed the production of the accused persons after completion of their custodial interrogation April 6. Earlier in the day, the judge allowed the agency's plea seeking holding the judicial proceedings at its headquarters against six Ukrainians and a US national, noting that the case pertained to breach of national security and the investigation is highly sensitive with global ramifications.

SHORT TAKES

Palghar 'godman' booked for rape

Palghar/Pune: Police have registered a case against a self-styled godman from Maharashtra's Palghar district for allegedly raping a 35-year-old Pune-based woman after claiming to be an incarnation of Lord Shiva, officials said Friday. The woman gathered courage to file a complaint against the 40-year-old accused, identified as Hrishikesh Vaidya, after the recent arrest of rape accused self-styled godman Ashok Kharat in Nashik, they said. Accused Vaidya, in a social media post, however denied the allegations against him and claimed a false case has been registered against him.

Gym trainer rapes nursing student

Saharanpur (UP): Uttar Pradesh Police have arrested a gym trainer for allegedly raping a woman after rendering her unconscious by mixing an intoxicant in her protein drink, officials said Friday. The police have also arrested his accomplice, who kept track of her and assisted the accused in the crime, they said. Superintendent of Police (Rural) Sagar Jain said that a 21-year-old B.Sc Nursing student lodged a complaint at the Biharigarh police station Wednesday, alleging that she used to visit a gym in the area where she became acquainted with the accused, Shehzad, 28.

Mumbai court acquits 5 cops

Mumbai: A court here Friday acquitted five Haryana police personnel, including a then sub-inspector, and two others booked for the alleged fake encounter of gangster Sandeep Gadoli at a hotel in Mumbai in 2016. Prashant Kale found the accused not guilty of charges under section 302 (murder) and other relevant provisions of the Indian Penal Code. Gadoli was killed in an alleged shootout by the Gurugram police at a hotel in Andheri East February 7, 2016.

Man kills three kids over family dispute

Aurangabad: A man allegedly hacked his two minor nephews and a niece to death in Bihar's Aurangabad district over a family dispute Friday, police said. The incident happened in the Haspura police station area of the district, they said.

Oppn MPs urge Centre to clear film on Gaza conflict

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: A group of Opposition MPs Friday wrote to Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, raising concerns over the alleged denial of certification for theatrical release to 'The Voice of Hind Rajab'.

In a joint letter, the MPs said reports suggesting that the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) had "orally declined" certification to the film - without issuing a formal written order - undermined transparency and due process.

They stressed that the certification mechanism under the Cinematograph Act, 1952, mandates a structured, reasoned decision-making process, and warned against any deviation from statutory norms.

The film, directed by Kaouther Ben Hania, is based on the killing of a Palestinian child during the 2024 Gaza conflict and has received international acclaim, including an Oscar nomination. The MPs highlighted that cinema plays a crucial role in engaging with complex humanitarian and political issues, and cautioned against curbs imposed through "informal or extra-legal mechanisms."

Emphasising India's constitutional commitment to freedom of expression, the parliamentarians argued that artistic works must be evaluated strictly within the legal framework, and not on the basis of extraneous considerations such as geopolitical sensitivities. They said such an approach could set a "dangerous precedent" inconsistent with democratic principles.



Passengers show a victory sign while boarding the Deccan Queen train, marking 95 years of service, at CSMT in Mumbai, Maharashtra

PTI PHOTO

'India saw 24,700 maternal deaths per 1L live births in 2023'

Estimates suggest that Pakistan saw 10,300 maternal deaths per one lakh livebirths the same year, while the African countries of Ethiopia and Nigeria had 11,900 maternal deaths per one lakh livebirths and 32,900 maternal deaths per one lakh livebirths, respectively

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: India was among the countries in South Asia and others in sub-Saharan Africa with the highest number of maternal deaths in 2023 of 24,700 per one lakh live births, according to a new global analysis published in The Lancet Obstetrics, Gynaecology, and Women's Health journal.

Estimates suggest THAT Pakistan saw 10,300 maternal deaths per one lakh livebirths the same year, while the African countries of Ethiopia and Nigeria had 11,900 maternal deaths per one lakh livebirths and 32,900 maternal deaths per one lakh livebirths, respectively.

Researchers, led by those from the Institute for Health



Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the US University of Washington and global collaborators, noted that maternal deaths have declined over the past three decades, yet progress has slowed in recent years and remains uneven across countries.

The Global Burden of Disease (GBD) 2023 research provides the most up-to-date global assessment of maternal mortality trends across 204 countries and territories through 2023, they said.

The world saw a total of 2.4

lakh maternal deaths in 2023, which equates to a global maternal mortality ratio of 190.5 maternal deaths per one lakh livebirths -- a decline by more than one-third from 321 maternal deaths per one lakh livebirths in 1990, the researchers estimated.

However, 104 of 204 countries and territories have yet to meet the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of a maternal mortality ratio of under 70 per one lakh livebirths, the team said.

While leading causes of maternal deaths were found to vary by location, maternal haemorrhage and hypertensive disorders of pregnancy were responsible for the largest share of deaths globally.

Improved access to antenatal care, safe delivery services,

emergency obstetric care, and post-partum follow-up could substantially reduce mortality, especially in countries with the highest burdens, the researchers said. Furthermore, the COVID-19 infection also led to increases in maternal mortality early in the pandemic.

Before widespread vaccination, during 2020-2021, COVID-19 caused temporary increases in maternal deaths in regions and locations with a high COVID-19 mortality, the team said.

They added that with less than five years remaining to meet the SDG target, a renewed global action and sustained investment will be needed to accelerate progress, strengthen health systems, and improve countries' ability to monitor and reduce maternal mortality.

5 women, 3 kids killed in UP mishap

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kaushambi (UP), March 27: A pickup truck carrying devotees rammmed into a stationary trailer truck on a national highway in Kaushambi district Friday, killing five women and three children, police said.

The accident took place near Doroma petrol pump under Saini police station around 4pm.

The pickup vehicle, en route to Fatehpur from Prayagraj, crashed into a trailer parked on the roadside, a local police official said. The victims, residents of Jahanabad-Bindki area in Fatehpur district, were returning home after visiting the 'Maa Sheetla' shrine at Kada Dham. They had earlier travelled to Prayagraj to attend a child's tonsure ceremony, the police said.

Around two dozen devotees, including women and children, were travelling in the pickup truck at the time of the incident, the official added.

Additional Director General of Police (Prayagraj Zone) Jyoti Narayan, who also reached the accident site, confirmed to PTI that eight people died in the crash, while several others sustained serious injuries.

Eyewitnesses described scenes of panic, with injured passengers lying on the highway and calling for help. Locals rushed to the spot and alerted authorities. Police, along with emergency teams, launched rescue operations and deployed multiple ambulances to shift the injured to a nearby Community Health Centre.

An official associated with the Health department said more than 20 injured persons were brought to the facility, some with fractures, while several were referred to the district hospital for advanced treatment. A few victims succumbed to their injuries while being taken to hospital, the official added.

national



“In the last decade, we have a big career scheme now. We have made various entry programmes. We are also providing wide scholarship schemes to women at different levels of their education, as well as fellowships for those going abroad”
JITENDRA SINGH | UNION MINISTER

KCR'S DAUGHTER KAVITHA TO LAUNCH POLITICAL PARTY APR 25

Telangana Jagruthi president K Kavitha Friday said she would launch her new political party April 25 with "Telangana-centric" issues as its main focus. Speaking to reporters in Nizamabad, she said the name and flag of the party would be announced at 10 AM on April 25 at an event to be held at Muneerabad on the outskirts of Hyderabad



of the day uote

The CAG report clearly establishes that this was not a policy error but a deliberate design. From education to healthcare, transport to power, irregularities have surfaced across departments

Barak Valley is not just a geographic region, it is the culturally and spiritually rich heartbeat of Assam. The journey of integration that began in 2016 has brought historic progress, harmony and opportunity to this region

Both petrol and gas cylinders are available in sufficient quantity. But gas cylinders produced in Haldia and elsewhere in the state should not be sent outside in a situation where SPs and DMs of our state have been removed (by the EC)

DAC clears proposals worth ₹2.38 lakh-cr



“The IAF is procuring the military transport aircraft to replace its aging fleet of Soviet-era AN-32 and IL-76 planes”
“The top contenders for the multi-billion deal are Lockheed Martin's C-130 J Super Hercules, Embraer's KC-390 aircraft are Airbus Defence and Space's A-400M plane”
“The IAF already operates 12 C-130 J Super Hercules”

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: In a major defence acquisition push, India Friday cleared procurement of a fresh batch of five S-400 missile systems from Russia and 60 medium transport aircraft as well as a few other military platforms at a total cost of ₹2.38 lakh crore to boost combat prowess of the defence forces.

The procurement proposals were approved by the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), the defence ministry's highest decision-making body on military procurement. It was chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. While the defence ministry confirmed that the DAC cleared the procurement of S-400 missile systems and military transport aircraft, it did not specify the exact quantities. However, authoritative sources said the approval covers five S-400 units and 60 transport aircraft. The IAF is procuring the military transport aircraft to replace its aging fleet of Soviet-era AN-32 and IL-76 planes.

The top contenders for the multi-billion deal are Lockheed Martin's C-130 J Super Hercules, Embraer's KC-390 aircraft are Airbus Defence and Space's A-400M plane. The IAF already operates 12 C-130 J Super Hercules.

It is learnt that 12 aircraft will be procured in fly-away condition while 48 will have to be produced in India.

The decision to procure an additional batch of five S-400 air defence missile systems came months after their capability was proved during Operation Sindoor. The missile system played a crucial role in India's dominance over Pakistan during the May 7-10 hostilities last year. In October 2018, India had signed a USD 5 billion deal with Russia to buy five units of S-400 air defence missile systems, notwithstanding a warning by the US that going ahead with the contract may invite US sanctions under the provisions of Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). Three squadrons have already been delivered. Sources

Govt introduces 2nd edition of Jan Vishwas Bill in LS



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: The government Friday introduced in the Lok Sabha the second edition of the Jan Vishwas Bill seeking to amend certain provisions to decriminalise a host of minor offences to promote ease of doing business, rejecting objections raised by Congress members.

The Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2026, introduced by Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Jitin Prasada, proposes to amend 79 central acts administered by 23 ministries.

A total of 784 provisions are being proposed to be amended under the Bill, out of which 717 provisions are getting decriminalised to foster ease of doing business, and 67 provisions are proposed to be changed to facilitate ease of living.

At the introduction stage, Congress Members K Kavaya and GK Padavi opposed the introduction of the Bill, stating that it infringes on the basic structure of the Indian Constitution by changing imprisonment for violations with fines.

Padavi urged the government to resend the Bill to the select committee or a joint parliamentary committee. "This is an administrative oversight...the Bill is arbitrary and encourages corruption, and it should be reexamined," Padavi said, adding that a dissent note has been given in the select committee report also.

On this demand, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla wanted to know whether a Bill can be resubmitted to a parliamentary panel.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said there is no provision for resending the bill to the parliamentary committee for scrutiny, and there is no precedent.

Responding to the Congress objections, Prasada said that only minor offences of a procedural nature have been proposed to be replaced with a fine.

Major violations and serious offences have not been diluted in any manner, he said, adding that the reform process has been carefully structured to exclude critical areas, such as the laws related to national security, labour courts, armed forces and international obligations.

"These are not under this purview. So, these are all minor offences that have been done away with," Prasada said, adding that extensive consultations have been held on the provisions of the Bill.

He said that Parliament has the power to amend the Constitution, and the bill seeks to make minor changes in other legislation.

Prasada added that the Bill enhances ease of doing business and living by decriminalising minor offences and implementing measures, such as revising fines and penalties proportionate to the offence, and setting up appellate authorities.

DGCA guidelines for operators flying VVIPs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai/ New Delhi, March 27: Aviation regulator DGCA Friday issued guidelines for aircraft operators flying VVIPs including chief ministers, central ministers and governors.

The guidelines, applicable for non-scheduled aircraft and helicopter operators carrying VVIPs, also come against the backdrop of the fatal plane crash in January that killed Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar and four others. Issuing the guidelines, DGCA said analysis of earlier accidents/incidents associated with aircraft operations to/from airstrips/temporary helipads, and during election flying of VVIPs, has often revealed violation of instructions and safety was jeopardised.

"It is essential that adequate measures are taken by all concerned to ensure the high-est standards of safety for the operation of such flights," the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said.



Anna varsity professor arrested for 'sexual harassment, stalking'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, March 27: A professor of the state-run Anna University here was arrested Friday evening following allegations of sexual harassment and stalking, police said.

A case was registered under the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Harassment of Women Act, 1998, and Section 78 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) for stalking, said a senior police official. The professor has been identified as Gnanavel Babu, according to police.

"We arrested him in Tirunelveli and he is being brought to Chennai for interrogation," the officer said. The legal action comes amid intense student protests and a subsequent suspension order by the university administration.

According to police sources, the FIR was registered following a complaint by a woman student who alleged that the professor had been subjecting her to sexual harassment for nearly two years.

The complainant further stated that several other female students had also been victimised and requested a confidential inquiry within her department to ensure the safety of all students.

The university campus witnessed significant unrest as students hit the streets, alleging that despite complaining twice previously, no concrete action was taken by the authorities. The protesters demanded the immediate removal of the faculty member and a complete overhaul of the campus safety grievance mechanism.

POST OF THE DAY

>Rupee is at an all-time low.
>Foreign policy is a disaster.
>Unemployment is at its peak.
>Corruption still exists.
>Ministers are not held accountable. But yes, people pointing these things out are considered more anti national than those responsible for them... bravo

SHORT TAKES

Delhi court acquits ex-MP Vijay Darda

New Delhi: Holding that the allocation of coal blocks was part of a "policy decision" of a high-powered panel and the PMO, a special CBI court Friday acquitted former MP Vijay Darda, his son Devendra Darda, and former coal secretary HC Gupta in a case related to alleged irregularities in allocation of the Bander coal block in Maharashtra.

Councillor accused of sexual assault

Palakkad (Kerala): A woman has lodged a complaint with Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and the police, alleging sexual assault by a Congress councillor, officials said Friday. The complainant, who belongs to a Scheduled Tribe community, has levelled sexual assault charges against Prashob C Valsan, a Congress councillor from the 24th division of Palakkad Municipality.

BJP-TMC clashes: EC suspends PS officer

Kolkata: In a first this election season in West Bengal, the EC on Friday ordered the immediate suspension of Basanti Police Station Inspector-in-Charge Avijit Paul for allegedly failing to tackle BJP-TMC clashes March 26, according to a notice issued by the poll panel.

Delhi records hottest morning of the year

New Delhi: The national capital on Friday recorded its hottest morning of the year, even as parts of the city witnessed light rainfall during the day, as the maximum temperature settled at 32.6 degrees Celsius. The minimum temperature settled at 20.6 degrees Celsius, making it the warmest morning of this year.

SNIPPETS

Driving licence: 30-day grace period proposed

New Delhi: The government has proposed to amend the Motor Vehicle Act to allow a 30-day grace period after the expiry of a driving licence, during which it will continue to remain valid. This is part of the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2026, which was introduced by Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Jitin Prasada in the Lok Sabha Friday. It also proposed to amend 79 central acts administered by 23 ministries. A total of 784 provisions are being proposed to be amended, of which 717 provisions are being decriminalised to foster ease of doing business, and 67 provisions are proposed to be amended to facilitate ease of living.

ED arrests AI Falah group chairman

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate Friday said it has again arrested AI Falah Group chairman Jawad Ahmad Siddiqui in a new money laundering case linked to "fraudulent" acquisition of a ₹45 crore worth land in Delhi. The 61-year-old was first arrested by the federal probe agency in November 2025 in a different money laundering case linked to the alleged cheating of students of his educational institutions by misrepresenting the accreditation and recognition of his institutions. The Faridabad- (Haryana) located University came under scrutiny during the probe into a 'white-collar' terror module linked to the November 10, 2025, Red Fort area blast in which 15 people were killed. One of the doctors at the varsity-cum-hospital, Dr Umar-un-Nabi, is alleged to be the suicide bomber in this case. He died when he was driving an explosive-laden car that day.



Mascots Chhota Bheem and Chutki during the SVEEP (Systematic Voters Education and Electoral Participation) Tram Car Joy Ride as part of the voter awareness initiative ahead of the West Bengal Assembly elections, in Kolkata

Worms in Vande Bharat curd: IRCTC seeks Amul reply

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: The IRCTC said Friday that it has summoned Amul, a premier dairy brand, to seek its response after live worms were allegedly found in its packaged curd served to a passenger on the Patna-Tatanagar Vande Bharat Express.

The corporation's action follows a reprimand from the railway ministry, which not only imposed heavy fines on both Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) and the service provider, Krishna Enterprises, but also directed termination of the contract. "IRCTC has viewed the complaints very seriously about the

quality of Amul curd served in Patna-Tata Vande Bharat train," the corporation said in a statement.

It noted that it has not only imposed a substantial penalty on the licensee and Amul but has also initiated the process of terminating the contract and blacklisting the train's licensee. "Additionally, Amul has been summoned March 27 to explain the grave quality concerns related to its curd," the statement said.

When contacted, the IRCTC refused to disclose the explanation provided by Amul. No immediate response was received from Amul, either.

On March 15, a group of seven passengers on the Vande



Bharat train found live worms and insects in one of the Amul packaged curd containers served with their dinner. The passenger, Ritesh Singh, immediately flagged the issue on his X handle, tagging the IRCTC, the railway minister and others.

Amul, from its official customer care account on X wrote, "We're concerned to know about your experience. Please DM us your contact number, residential address, and the batch number so we can investigate this further."

After probing the matter, the IRCTC imposed a fine of ₹25,000 on the vendor, Krishna Enterprises, for negligence in food handling. It also instructed the firm to maintain a proper cold chain, be more vigilant and adhere to food safety protocols.

Dissatisfied with the IRCTC's action, the railway ministry March 25, 2026, directed it to terminate the contract of Krishna Enterprises and enhance the

fine from ₹25,000 to ₹50 lakh. The ministry has also imposed a fine of ₹10 lakh on IRCTC.

"Considering the gravity of the lapses, the competent authority has decided to impose a fine of ₹10 lakh on IRCTC for such deficiency in services. Further, IRCTC is advised to ensure strict monitoring of on-board services to prevent any such incident in future," the ministry said in its order.

"All concerned IRCTC supervisors must be directed to ensure that food quality, food safety and hygiene are their prime concerns," it added.

Railway ministry officials noted that the IRCTC had acted leniently in a very sensitive situation.

international



We are very disappointed with NATO because NATO has done absolutely nothing
DONALD TRUMP | PRESIDENT, US

SPAIN'S 100% NON-EU PROPERTY TAX STALLS

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's plan to tax non-European Union property buyers up to 100% of the value of the purchase has stalled due to difficulties in gaining the needed support from political minorities, a government source said



of the day quote

The poorest farmers in the Northern Hemisphere rely on fertiliser imports from the Gulf, and the shortage comes just as planting season begins
CARL SKAU | DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME

The situation in South Kivu remains tense and the renewed hostilities have expanded and shifted the front lines, including toward Burundi's border, increasing the risk of a regional conflagration
VIVIAN VAN DE PERRE | UNITED NATIONS' ACTING TOP ENVOY FOR CONGO

We agreed to support all efforts aimed at ensuring an immediate end to hostilities, resumption of peace talks, protection of non-combatants, security of shipping lanes, and adherence to the UN Charter
ISHAQ DAR | FOREIGN MINISTER, PAKISTAN

War between Hezbollah, Israel deepens fractures in Lebanon

REUTERS

Beirut, March 27: War between Israel and Hezbollah is pushing Lebanon's fragile state and society towards breaking point, straining sectarian and political faultlines as Shi'ite Muslims are displaced and enmity deepens between the Iran-backed group and its opponents.

Of all Lebanon's many crises since a 1975-90 civil war, the renewed conflict ignited by the Iran war could be its most destabilising, Lebanese analysts and figures from across the political spectrum say.

Israel has threatened Gaza-like destruction and an occupation of the south and there are acrid splits in Lebanon over Hezbollah's weapons, which the group has refused to give up despite a year-long effort by the state to disarm it peacefully.

Israeli bombardment and orders for people to leave have driven Hezbollah's Shi'ite constituents into Christian, Druze and other areas, where many blame the group for starting a war in support of Tehran only 15 months after the last one.

Local authorities are vetting displaced people seeking rented accommodation, fearing the presence of anyone who might be a target for Israel.

Tensions between Hezbollah and the government are worsening. The administration led by Prime Minister Nawaf Salam and President Joseph Aoun has banned Hezbollah's military wing, called for talks with Israel and demanded Iran's ambassador leave.



DIVISIONS OVER WAR AND DISPLACEMENT FUEL TENSIONS
DISPLACED SEEKING ACCOMMODATION FACE ID CHECKS
LOCALS BRAWL WITH DISPLACED AFTER ROCKET FRAGMENTS FALL
ISRAEL ORDERED ONLY SHI'ITE VILLAGES EVACUATED IN SOUTH
CHRISTIANS REMAIN, SAYS ISRAELI MILITARY OFFICIAL

Hezbollah official Mahmoud Qmati has compared the government to the Vichy France leaders sentenced to death for collaborating with Nazi Germany in World War Two.

"We are capable of turning the country upside down," he told a Lebanese media outlet although he later said his remarks were taken out of context. Druze lawmaker Wael Abu Faour says internal tensions are increasing because of political divisions over the war and displacement and "the defiant rhetoric from more than one side".

"This exacerbates fears for internal stability," he said. **'TICKING BOMB'**

More than 1,000 people have been killed in Lebanon and over a million - more than a fifth of the population - have been displaced, most of them Shi'ite Muslims, since Hezbollah fired at Israel March 2 and Israel hit back.

A foreign official said the displacement was straining communal ties and would be "a ticking bomb" if the displaced cannot go home.

Israel's military has ordered people to leave much of the south as well as Beirut's Hezbollah-controlled southern suburbs and the group's heartlands in eastern Lebanon.

Israel's defence minister has said his country intends to create a "security zone" up to the Litani River, which meets the sea about 30 km (19 miles) north of the border with Israel. He has said hundreds of thousands of Shi'ites will not return south of the Litani until security is ensured for northern Israel.

Nadim Gemayel, a Christian lawmaker opposed to Hezbollah, expressed concern that Israel was deliberately pushing Shi'ites into other parts of Lebanon to create conflict with other communities.

Hezbollah has long been at odds with many other Lebanese factions, and has an arsenal more potent than the army's.

During a brief civil war in 2008, when a Western-backed government tried to outlaw Hezbollah's communications network, Hezbollah fighters took over Beirut. The government backed down.

Iran-linked hackers breach FBI director's personal email

REUTERS

Washington, March 27: Iran-linked hackers have broken into FBI Director Kash Patel's personal email inbox, publishing photographs of the director and other documents to the internet, the hackers and the bureau said Friday.

On their website, the hacker group Handala Hack Team said Patel "will now find his name among the list of successfully hacked victims." The hackers published a series of personal photographs of Patel sniffing and smoking cigars, riding in an antique convertible, and making a face while taking a picture of himself in the mirror with a large bottle of rum.

The FBI confirmed that Patel's emails had been targeted. In a statement, bureau spokesman Ben Williamson said, "we have taken all necessary steps to mitigate potential risks associated with this activity" and that the data involved was "historical in nature and involves no government information."

Handala, which presents itself as a group of pro-Palestinian vigilante hackers, is considered by Western researchers to be one of several personas used by Iranian government cyberintelligence units. Handala recently claimed the hack of Michigan-based medical devices and services provider Stryker March 11, saying they had deleted a massive trove of company data.

Alongside the photographs of Patel, the hackers published a sample of more than 300 emails, which appear to show a mix of personal and work correspondence dating between 2010 and 2019.



US Intel: Only one-third of Iran's missile arsenal confirmed destroyed

REUTERS



Washington, March 27: The United States can only determine with certainty that it has destroyed about a third of Iran's vast missile arsenal as the US and Israeli war on the country nears its one-month mark, according to five people familiar with the US intelligence.

The status of around another third is less clear but bombings likely damaged, destroyed or buried those missiles in underground tunnels and bunkers, four of the sources said. The sources spoke on condition of anonymity given the sensitive nature of the information.

One of the sources said the intelligence was similar for Iran's drone capability, saying there was some degree of certainty about a third having been destroyed.

The assessment, which has not been previously reported, shows that while most of Iran's missiles are either destroyed or inaccessible, Tehran still has a significant missile inventory and may be able to recover some buried or damaged missiles once fighting stops.

The intelligence stands in contrast to President Donald Trump's public remarks Thursday that Iran had "very few rockets left". He also appeared

US IS CERTAIN ABOUT HAVING DESTROYED A THIRD OF IRAN'S MISSILES, SAY SOURCES
ANOTHER THIRD IS BELIEVED TO BE DAMAGED, DESTROYED OR BURIED
IRAN IS CONTINUING ATTACKS, MAY BE CONSERVING MISSILES
ESTIMATES OF IRAN'S MISSILE STOCKPILE VARY WIDELY

to acknowledge the threat from remaining Iranian missiles and drones to any future US operations to safeguard the economically vital Strait of Hormuz.

Reuters first reported that he is weighing whether to escalate the conflict by deploying US troops to Iranian shores along the Strait.

"The problem with the straits is this: let's say we do a great job. We say we got 99% (of their missiles). 1% is unacceptable, because 1% is a missile going into the hull of a ship that cost a billion dollars," Trump said at a televised Cabinet meeting Thursday.

IRAN'S MISSILES ARE PRIME US TARGET
The Trump administration has said it aims to weaken Iran's military by sinking its navy, destroying its missile and drone capability and ensuring that the Islamic Republic never has a nuclear weapon.

SHORT TAKES

3 killed in tourist helicopter crash

Hanaei (US): A tourist helicopter crashed on a remote beach on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, killing three people and injuring two others, authorities said. The helicopter was carrying one pilot and four passengers when it crashed Thursday afternoon at Kalalau Beach, the Kauai Fire Department said. The beach is on the Na Pali Coast on Kauai's north shore. The area is otherwise reachable only by hiking or boat. Police said three people died and two others were transported to Wilcox Medical Centre for treatment. An email was sent to the medical centre seeking the patients' conditions.

Bolsonaro returns to house arrest

Sao Paulo: Brazil's former President Jair Bolsonaro was discharged from a hospital in the capital Friday to continue serving a 27-year sentence for a coup attempt at his residence in an upscale gated community. The Supreme Court, earlier in the week, granted him the right of house imprisonment due to failing health. The measure could be revised within 90 days. Bolsonaro left the hospital DF Star in Brasilia at around 10 am local time and headed to the Jardim Botânico neighbourhood, where he lived prior to his conviction, with his wife, Michelle Bolsonaro, and his 15-year-old daughter, Laura. The 71-year-old was hospitalised March 13 for pneumonia, one of several health issues he has faced since he was stabbed by a man in 2018 before being elected president. He was put in intensive care for days due to kidney and inflammatory problems.

Slovenia's PM seeks coalition talks

Sarajevo: Slovenia's Prime Minister Robert Golob launched talks on a broad coalition with leaders of political parties Friday after an inconclusive election, pledging urgent measures to help the Alpine country's economy cope with soaring energy costs. With nearly all of the votes in the March 22 election counted, Golob's Freedom Movement (GS) has garnered 29 parliamentary seats, one more than the right-leaning Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) led by populist ex-premier Janez Jansa. Either needs coalition partners to secure a working majority in the 90-seat parliament, making smaller parties potential kingmakers.

Balen orders probe into Oli



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kathmandu, March 27: The first Cabinet meeting of the newly formed government, chaired by Prime Minister Balendra Shah, Friday decided to immediately implement the report of the high-level commission's investigation into the Gen Z movement in September last year.

The cabinet meeting also decided to appoint Minister for Science and Technology Sasmit Pokharel as its spokesperson.

Following the cabinet meeting, Spokesperson Pokharel informed media persons that the cabinet had decided to immediately implement the report of the probe commission relating

to last year's Gen Z movement.

The probe commission has recommended a maximum of 10 years imprisonment for officials, including then Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak, for negligence during the uprising, despite being in high positions.

Pokharel, sharing the cabinet decision, said that among the recommendations made by the Gauri Bahadur Karki-led probe commission for actions against security officials, a study team would be formed.

However, in the case of others, the recommendation would be implemented immediately, he added. The probe commission had recommended actions against many other high officials, including then Inspector General of Nepal Police, Chandra Kuber Khapung.

The erstwhile government led by Sushila Karki had decided to make public the probe commission's report by placing it in the library archive of the federal parliament secretariat.



The second day of the G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting at Vaux-de-Cernay Abbey in Cernay-la-Ville near Paris, France

REUTERS

Can a new generation of hydropower dams save the energy transition?

REUTERS

Portugal, March 27: Last year, despite the growing global demand for energy, countries began to report record levels of energy-dumping, or curtailment, which kicks in when electricity grids can no longer cope with the renewable energy being created.

In Brazil, for instance, 20% of the country's solar power was reported to have been dumped last year, while collectively Germany, France and the Netherlands were forced to cut 3.9 terawatt hours (TWh) of renewable production. It's a paradox that is vexing grid managers, as they search for ways to store this green energy rather than waste it.

"The record levels of curtailment we saw in 2025 are

a clear warning sign," says Eddie Rich, chief executive of the International Hydropower Association (IHA). "The world is building clean generation at a rapid rate ... but now that rate must be matched by building the infrastructure needed to use it or to store it."

When it comes to energy storage, there is already a clear leader. There is nearly 200 GW of pumped storage hydro (PSH) capacity, accounting for 90% of long-duration energy storage globally. And preliminary figures from the IHA, ahead of its 2026 World Hydropower Outlook, show that another 570 gigawatts (GW) of PSH is being developed worldwide.

Around 40% of this is in China, which is already the global frontrunner, with over 50 GW of installed capacity.



This includes the Fengning Pumped Storage Power Station, the largest facility of its kind in the world. Operated by the State Grid Corporation of China (SGCC), it has a total installed capacity of 3.6 GW. In comparison, Europe's largest PSH plant, La Muela II, near Valencia, has a capacity of 850

megawatts (MW). While lithium-ion batteries are the go-to solution to help manage daily peaks, long-duration energy storage (LDES) is needed for anything longer than four hours.

Conventional hydropower, such as the Three Gorges Dam, stores energy by holding water

CURTAILMENT OF RENEWABLE ENERGY DRIVING DEVELOPMENT
PIPELINE OF 570 GW PUMPED HYDRO CAPACITY WORLDWIDE
GREATEST GROWTH IN CLOSED-LOOP HYDRO PROJECTS, WHICH AVOID DAMAGE TO RIVER ECOSYSTEMS
US HAS 90-PLUS PUMPED HYDRO PROJECTS PLANNED AS ENERGY DEMAND SET TO HIT RECORD GROWTH
UK PLANS 10GW OF PUMPED STORAGE BY MID-2030S TO ABSORB SURPLUS WIND AND SOLAR POWER

ervoir to a higher one, before allowing gravity to take over, sending the water back down pipes to generate power. This helps to balance the grid and provide electricity in times of low production.

"It's proven, it's a reliable technology, it reduces greenhouse gas emissions (and) dependence on fossil fuel," says Erik Steimle, chief development officer at U.S. hydropower developers Rye Development.

Pumped storage also helps safeguard the grid against blackouts and extreme weather events, he continues.

Figures from the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) predict a 1% rise in energy demand this year and 3% growth in 2027, marking the strongest period of growth since the turn of the century.



While India's residential segment's long-term fundamentals remain strong, the short-term tremors of the Iran War were clearly visible in the first quarter

ANU PURI | CHAIRMAN, ANAROCK GROUP

WHATSAPP ROLLS OUT DUAL IPHONE ACCOUNTS

Meta-owned messaging platform WhatsApp Friday announced a slew of new features, allowing Apple iPhone users to operate two accounts on a single device simultaneously, while also introducing new artificial intelligence (AI) tools for photo editing and drafting messages. The 'two accounts, one phone' feature, which was previously available only to Android users, is now rolling out on iOS



of the day **note**

We are also looking for diversification, new markets, newer areas, wherefrom we will get raw materials also for fertilisers. We have framed up our strategy to ensure fertiliser availability

JP NADDA | CHEMICALS AND FERTILISERS MINISTER

Gas allocation to the fertilizer units has been maintained at 65 per cent of their past six-month average consumption, considering the operational availability

ANUPRIYA PATEL | MINISTER OF STATE FOR FERTILISERS

India has emerged as an important global voice in the transition towards sustainable development, and maintaining this position requires both accelerated scaling of existing initiatives and the launch of new ones in a time-bound manner

JITENDRA SINGH | UNION MINISTER

SHORT TAKES

Forex kitty drops to \$698.346bn

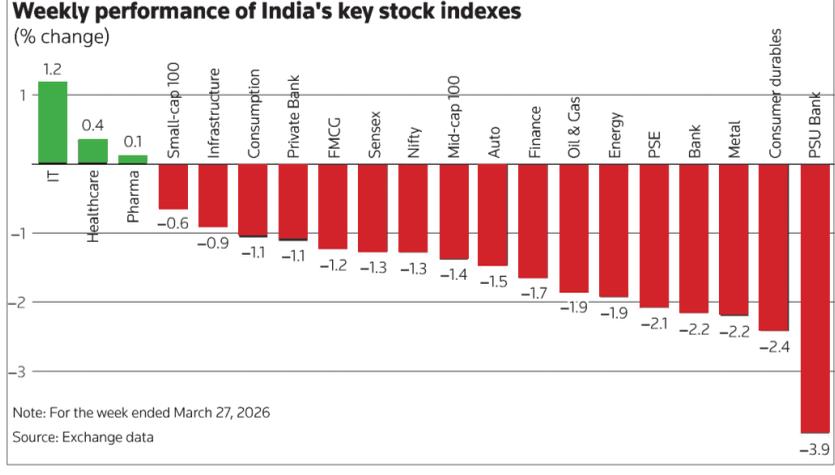
Mumbai: India's forex reserves dropped by \$11.413 billion to \$698.346 billion during the week ended March 20 due to a sharp decrease in gold reserves, the RBI said Friday. In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had dropped \$7.052 billion to \$709.759 billion. The kitty had expanded to an all-time high of \$728.494 billion during the week ended February 27 this year, before the onset of the West Asia conflict. For the week ended March 20, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased by \$2.127 billion to \$557.695 billion, the central bank's data showed. Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include effects of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units, such as the euro, pound, and yen, held in the foreign exchange reserves. However, the value of gold reserves decreased by \$13.495 billion to \$117.186 billion during the week, the RBI said. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down \$65 million to \$18.632 billion, the apex bank said. India's reserve position with the IMF was up by \$19 million to \$4.833 billion in the reporting week, according to the apex bank's data.

RBI injects ₹65,322cr in banking system

Mumbai: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Friday injected Rs 65,322 crore of transient liquidity into the banking system through a six-day variable rate repo (VRR) auction. The RBI injected the funds at a cut-off rate of 5.26 per cent and a weighted average rate of 5.29 per cent, the central bank said in a release. The liquidity injected was lower than the notified amount of Rs 75,000 crore, despite the sharp drop in surplus liquidity in the banking system due to advance tax payments and GST outflows. Currently, liquidity in the banking system is estimated to be in surplus of around Rs 48,698.38 crore as on March 26. In the last few days, the central bank infused transient liquidity of Rs 2,08,208 crore into the banking system through VRR auctions of various tenures. Before this, RBI had infused Rs 3.50 lakh crore of durable liquidity into the banking system through open market purchase (OMO) of government securities since January 2026.

GEOPOLITICAL CHAOS

Investors' wealth slumps ₹8.86L-cr



With crude oil prices staying above the \$100 per barrel mark, the rupee's free fall and relentless foreign fund outflows have also made investors jittery amid the ongoing West Asia uncertainty

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: Equity investors faced an erosion of Rs 8.86 lakh crore from their wealth Friday as markets went into a tailspin, falling over 2 per cent as the West Asia conflict shows no signs of easing, leading to a fresh spike in crude oil prices.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 1,690.23 points or 2.25 per cent to settle at 73,583.22. During the day, it plunged 1,739.04 points or 2.31 per cent to 73,534.41. Tracking the bearish trend in equities, the market capi-

TPSODL gears up for summer demand

POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, March 27: With summer approaching and electricity demand expected to rise significantly, TP Southern Odisha Distribution Limited (TPSODL) has stepped up its preparedness to ensure reliable power supply across its service areas.

The company anticipates peak demand to reach around 855 MW and has rolled out a series of measures covering technology, infrastructure, and customer service to meet this demand efficiently.

At the core of TPSODL's strategy is a strong, round-the-clock monitoring system. The company operates a Centralized Power System Control Centre (PSCC) in Berhampur, supported by decentralised Area Power System Control Centres (APSCCs) in Jeypore, Rayagada, and Phulbani. These centres are equipped with advanced SCADA systems that allow engineers to monitor the entire power distribution network in real time, including 33 kV feeders, Primary Substations (PSS), and 11 kV feeders.

This system captures critical operational data such as feeder-wise interruptions, helping teams quickly identify faults and restore supply faster. To further strengthen reliability, TPSODL also has a backup control centre at the TPCODL Technology Centre in Bhubaneswar, which ensures automatic failover and zero downtime during emergencies.

talisation of BSE-listed companies slumped by ₹8,86,383.92 crore to ₹4,22,15,450.82 crore (\$4.46 trillion). Meanwhile the 50-share NSE Nifty dropped 486.85 points, or 2.09 per cent, to end at 22,819.60. From the 30-Sensex firms, Reliance Industries dropped the most by 4.55 per cent, followed by InterGlobe Aviation, Bajaj Finance, State Bank of India, Eternal and HDFC Bank.

In contrast, Tata Consultancy Services, Bharti Airtel, Power Grid and Sun Pharma were the gainers.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 2.93 per cent to \$111.2 per barrel.

"Indian equity markets witnessed a steady and broad-based decline through the session, with sentiment remaining clearly subdued despite President Trump extending the pause on strikes targeting Iran's energy infrastructure until April 6 and reiterating the possibi-

Benchmark indices extended their fifth straight weekly loss amid the ongoing Iran war, with the BSE falling 949.74 points (1.27%) and the Nifty dropping 294.9 points (1.27%) in a holiday-shortened week

ty of diplomatic engagement. "However, the reassurance failed to fully translate into market confidence, as Tehran continued its retaliatory actions following the US-Israel offensive, with no clear signs of alignment on US proposals," Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said. A total of 3,544 stocks declined, while 822 advanced and 135 remained unchanged on the BSE Friday.

Silver, gold prices crash

New Delhi: Precious metal prices dropped up to 5 per cent, with silver plunging by ₹11,250 to ₹2.30 lakh per kilogram, while gold declined to ₹1.47 lakh per 10 grams in the national capital Friday. According to the All India Sarafa Association, the white metal slumped ₹11,250, or nearly 5 per cent, to ₹2,30,000 per kg (inclusive of all taxes) from Wednesday's closing level of ₹2,41,250 per kg. Bullion markets remained closed Thursday on account of Ram Navami. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity depreciated by ₹1,900, or 1.3 per cent, to ₹1,47,800 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes). The yellow metal had settled at ₹1,49,700 per 10 grams in the previous market session. Analysts said bullion prices remained volatile as movements in crude oil and global cues influenced investor sentiment. In the international markets, spot gold gained \$37.19, or nearly 1 per cent, to \$4,416 per ounce while silver was trading 0.23 per cent higher at \$68.12 per ounce. The yellow metal climbed to around \$4,420 per ounce on bargain buying as crude prices weakened, but later pared gains as oil prices in the global markets recovered, Praveen Singh, Head of commodities at Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said.

FUNDING FISCAL DEFICIT

Centre to borrow ₹8.2L-cr from market in H1 of FY27

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: The Centre is planning to mobilise ₹8 lakh crore through dated securities during the April-September period of 2026-27 to fund the revenue gap, the finance ministry said Friday.

Gross Market Borrowings in BE 2026-27 were ₹17.20 lakh crore. Since the Budget presentation, switches of G-Sec were conducted, reducing Gross Market borrowing to ₹16.09 lakh crore, it said.

"Of ₹16.09 lakh crore, ₹8.20 lakh crore (51 per cent) is planned to be borrowed in H1 through issuance of dated securities, including ₹15,000 crore of Sovereign Green Bonds (SGrBs)," it said. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in the Budget, proposed to borrow ₹17.2 lakh crore to fund its fiscal deficit projected at 4.3 per cent of the GDP. In absolute terms, the fiscal deficit is pegged at ₹16.9 lakh crore for 2026-27. "To finance the fiscal deficit, the net market borrowings from dated securities are estimated at ₹11.7 lakh crore. The balance



financing is expected to come from small savings and other sources. The gross market borrowings are estimated at ₹17.2 lakh crore," she had said while delivering the Budget 2026-27. According to the statement, the Gross Market Borrowings of ₹8.2 lakh crore shall be completed through 26 weekly auctions. The market borrowing will be spread over 3, 5, 7, 10, 15, 30, 40 and 50-year securities, it said. The share of borrowing (including SGrBs) under different maturities will be: 3-year (8.1 per cent), 5-year (15.4 per cent), 7-year (8.1 per cent), 10-year (29 per cent), 15-year (14.5 per

Resilient founders power nation building: Bodhisattwa

Bodhisattwa Sanghapriya, Founder and CEO of IG Defence, is among India's most inspiring young innovators and is widely recognised as the 'Drone Boy of Bharat'. Hailing from humble beginnings in Odisha, his journey has been driven by a strong sense of purpose to develop technology that serves the nation. What started as a passion for solving grassroots challenges has evolved into a mission to strengthen India's defence capabilities through indigenous innovation. Today, through IG Defence, he leads the development of AI-powered drone, strike, and counter-UAS, contributing to India's vision of technological sovereignty and Atmanirbhar Bharat. Excerpts...



BODHISATTWA SANGHAPRIYA
FOUNDER AND CEO, IG DEFENCE

What drove the strategic transition from IG Drones to IG Defence, and how has the company's vision evolved since 2018?

The transition from IG Drones to IG Defence was driven by a clear realisation that the nature of warfare is rapidly evolving, and India needs strong indigenous capabilities to stay prepared. What began as a drone services and analytics company gradually transformed as we engaged closely with defence and government stakeholders, where the demand for reliable, combat-ready systems became evident. Since 2018, our vision has evolved from service delivery to building strategic defence capabilities, focusing on AI-powered autonomous systems, ISR platforms, and precision strike technologies. This shift was not just a business decision, but a commitment to national security and self-reliance.

How significant is the ₹300 crore Odisha manufacturing hub in scaling production and strengthening self-reliance?

The ₹300 crore manufacturing hub in Odisha is a defining milestone in our journey from innovation to scale. It is more than just a facility—it is the foundation of a robust, indigenous defence manufacturing ecosystem. This hub will

enable high-volume production of advanced drone and defence systems, reduce dependency on imports, and ensure faster deployment cycles for our armed forces. It will also generate local employment, strengthen supply chains, and reinforce India's Atmanirbhar Bharat vision. For us, it represents building in India, for India, and ultimately for the world.

What challenges do you face in indigenising critical drone and anti-drone technologies under the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative?

Indigenising defence technology comes with significant challenges, including rapidly evolving warfare technologies and rigorous testing and certification processes. Global competition further raises the bar. However, we view these challenges as opportunities to innovate and build deeper capabilities. At IG Defence, we are investing in AI, autonomy, embedded systems, and simulation technologies to reduce dependencies and develop end-to-end indigenous solutions. True self-reliance lies in the ability to design, develop, and deploy systems entirely within the country—and that is the path we are committed to.

How is IG Defence collaborating with the Indian Army, Navy, and other security forces for product customization?

Our development approach is deeply collaborative and driven by real-world requirements. We work closely with the Indian Army, Navy, and other security agencies through continuous field trials, rapid feedback loops, and co-development initiatives such as iDEX. Each system is tailored to specific mission needs and operational environments—whether high-altitude terrains, deserts, or

maritime zones. This ensures our solutions are not only technologically advanced but also battlefield-ready, reliable, and optimised for the most demanding conditions.

What is your long-term roadmap for exports and positioning India as a global hub for advanced defence drone systems?

Our long-term roadmap focuses on positioning India as a global hub for advanced defence drone systems by combining technological excellence with cost efficiency. We are developing next-generation AI-driven autonomous platforms, expanding into global markets, and building strategic partnerships with friendly nations. Our goal is to establish India as a trusted provider of defence technologies, particularly in emerging markets. "Built in Bharat, Built for Bharat & Ready for the World" is not just an ambition—it is a strategic responsibility to showcase India's growing defence capabilities on the global stage.

What inspired you to venture into this line of business, and what advice would you offer to aspiring entrepreneurs looking to enter this field?

My journey has been guided by a simple belief: technology must serve the nation and solve real problems. From grassroots solutions to strengthening defence capabilities, my purpose has remained unchanged—to contribute to Bharat. To aspiring entrepreneurs: choose problems that matter, stay resilient amid uncertainty, and remain committed to your mission. Deep-tech and defence demand patience and conviction, but with purpose, your work will go beyond building a business—it will help build the nation.

Reliance Digital unveils Utkal Diwas festive offers



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 27: Celebrating the spirit of Utkal Diwas, Reliance Digital has unveiled a range of exclusive festive offers and customer-centric initiatives across its stores in Odisha, aimed at blending cultural pride with enhanced access to modern technology Friday.

The special campaign has been thoughtfully curated to mark the occasion with value-driven deals, making it an ideal time for customers to upgrade their homes with the latest electronics and appliances.

The event was graced by Biswajit Sahoo, Cluster Manager, Odisha, Reliance Digital, Palak Kumar Sahu, Marketing Manager, Odisha, Reliance Digital and Krishna Rout, Social

Media Influencer and proud customer of Reliance Digital.

As part of the Utkal Diwas celebrations, customers can avail attractive instant discounts of up to Rs 26,000 on leading bank cards, along with cash back benefits of up to ₹30,000 on paper finance options, ensuring affordability and flexibility in purchases. The offer period is valid from March 28 to April 1. Adding to the festive excitement, Reliance Digital is offering compelling mega combo deals, including free QLED TVs on the purchase of select 1.5-ton air conditioners and complimentary washing machines on select models, providing greater value for money during the peak summer buying season.

Titans assemble for IPL saga

RCB LOOK TO REGROUP; CSK, KKR, MI HUNT LOST GLORY; RoKo LOOK TO MESMERIZE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore, March 27: Besieged defending champions seeking to regroup after an unprecedented tragedy, decorated sides chasing lost glory, two stalwarts fighting for relevance and a clutch of hopefuls eager to impress, the 2026 IPL, starting Saturday, is poised to offer intriguing moments over the next two months.

Title holders Royal Challengers Bengaluru, who host Sunrisers Hyderabad at the Chinnaswamy Stadium in the tournament opener, would have liked to enter the league's 19th edition with a lot more swag and pomp.

But an austere atmosphere surrounds the match, as the memory of 11 fans who lost their lives in the June 4 stampede outside the stadium during the team's title celebration dominates the lead-up to the match.

The Karnataka State Cricket Association and RCB management have also taken steps to keep the unfortunate souls' memory alive.

The KSCA announced leaving 11 permanent empty seats in the stadium, which itself had to go through a few uncertain months before the receiving necessary permissions from state government authorities to host the IPL matches. RCB players would wear jerseys printed No 11 on their back during the practice session on the first match-day.

While these are hugely appreciable measures, cricket on the ground often transcends such emotions and empathetic symbols.

Legacy sides eye redemption

Mumbai Indians, Chennai Super Kings and Kolkata Knight Riders have 13 IPL titles between them. But last season was one of struggle for them.

MI managed to reach the playoffs as the fourth-placed team but it was evident that they were running on reserve gas, and they will certainly eye a campaign that befits the five-time winners tag this time.

KKR and CSK ended up at eighth and 10th respectively. They have rejigged the teams. CSK imported Sanju Samson from RR and added Matt Henry and Noor Ahmad.

Padhy's gritty comeback stuns ex-world champion

POST NEWS NETWORK

Ludhiana, March 27: Odisha's snooker champion Asutosh Padhy staged a stunning comeback in a display of remarkable resilience and composure to defeat former world champion Shrikrishna Suryanarayan and book his place in the Top 32 of the ongoing National 9-Ball Pool Championship here Friday.

Trailing 3-5 against Suryanarayan of the Petroleum Sports Promotion Board—a former 6-Red Snooker World Champion—Padhy stared at elimination before mounting a nerve-steeling comeback. Holding firm under pressure, he unleashed a superb three-frame surge to snatch a dramatic 6-5 victory in the decider.



Padhy had already underlined his resilience earlier in the tournament, edging past Railways' Nitesh Madaan 6-5 in a tense Round of 128 clash. He had launched his campaign in commanding style, storming to a 6-0 victory over Neeraj Bagga in the Round of 264.

Riding high on confidence and momentum, Padhy will look to carry his impressive run forward in the championship. The tournament is organized by the Billiards and Snooker Federation of India (BSFI).



They will certainly look for one last hurrah from 'Old Lion' Mahendra Singh Dhoni, who has maintained the suspense over his IPL future.

KKR have added some muscle to their batting through Tim Seifert, Finn Allen, Rachin Ravindra and Cameron Green, who comes in with the highest pay package for an overseas player in IPL history.

Skipper Ajinkya Rahane will be the glue on top and his deputy Rinku Singh will have to slip into the role of a finisher that Andre Russell did for them from 2014 until his retirement last year.

In bowling, they have two trump cards in Varun Chakravarthy and Sunil Narine but their pace department remains a concern.

Rajasthan Royals and Gujarat Titans will be looking to add to one more trophy to their kitty, while Delhi Capitals, Punjab Kings and Lucknow Super Giants will hunt for their maiden titles.

RoKo dance

There is something so alluring about old champions trying to fight it out against younger generations and stay relevant.

Kohli and Rohit Sharma certainly have nothing to prove now after climbing seldom touched peaks in their illustrious careers.

Kohli added one missing silverware from his bustling

cabinet when RCB won their maiden IPL title last year, and now, having achieved his long-standing dream, can their talisman keep his intensity level up in this edition?

In that context, Kohli's contest will be with himself as well.

He is well rested after the home ODI series against New Zealand in January.

Rohit, whose last competitive outing was also against the Kiwis, offers a slightly different case. As a batter, he has never set the field ablaze in the IPL.

YOUNG GUNS READY TO MAKE IPL THEIR OWN

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi and Ayush Mhatre hogged the limelight in their debut IPL season last year and in the upcoming edition too, there would be quite a few who would like to justify the tournament tagline of "Where Talent Meets Opportunity". PTI takes a look at one rookie from each of the 10 franchises who are expected to make a name for themselves in the next eight weeks. The list comprises both Indian and international names who either haven't yet made their IPL debut or have played less than five games so far

Prashant Veer (Chennai Super Kings)

There are plenty of cricketers in India, who bowl slow left-arm orthodox and bat left-handed. But none of them are faced with the task of filling up the big boots of Ravindra Jadeja like the 20-year-old Amethi-born Prashant Veer. Never before has one witnessed Chennai Super Kings invest so heavily in youth. The franchise bagged him with a Rs 14.20 crore bid, based more on potential and how the scouts felt after looking at him during trials. The 20-year-old has only nine Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (SMAT) matches under his belt but with a bowling economy rate of 6.45 and a batting strike-rate of 167 plus, Prashant Veer is expected to play a big part for the 'Canary Yellows' this season.

Auqib Nabi (Delhi Capitals)

At 29, Nabi isn't a spring chicken and has a good eight years of domestic cricket under his belt but the anticipation surrounding his IPL debut would make DC fans believe that they are in for something special. After a stellar Ranji season during which he claimed 60 odd wickets to singlehandedly get the trophy for Jammu and Kashmir, the 'Baramullah Express's big-match temperament and India prospects will be judged this year.

Ashok Sharma (Gujarat Titans)

Ashok, one of the fastest young bowlers in India, has been a part of Rajasthan Royals set-up but hasn't got a game so far in the IPL. There are no guarantees that the 23-year-old will get one this season with GT, especially with Mohammed Siraj and Prasidh Krishna being around as first two choices along with Kagiso Rabada. However, among back-up Indian pacers, Ashok could be looked at by head coach Ashish Nehra, especially after clocking 150 kmph at this year's SMAT.

Tejasvi Dahiya (Kolkata Knight Riders)

Kolkata Knight Riders head coach Abhishek Nayyar's protegee Angkrish Raghuvanshi is being prepared as the batter-keeper since he has already played a couple of IPL seasons. But the 23-year-old Dahiya, who hails from Delhi, is also a serious talent, who if persisted with, could give results in long run. He scored a half-century for Delhi during the last SMAT and a strike-rate of 168 makes him a good bet in the middle-order.

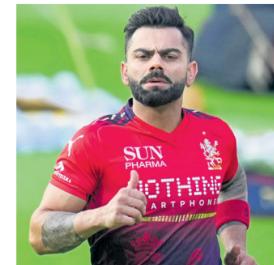
Naman Tiwari (Lucknow Super Giants)

Good left-arm pacers are few and far between in India and the 2024 U-19 World Cupper Naman Tiwari has impressed one and all during trials. The 20-year-old regularly clocks northwards of 140 clicks, had a good 2024 UP T20 league for Noida Kings and could be a handy back-up option if need be.

Allah Ghazanfar (Mumbai Indians)

If there is one bowler that IPL fans have been eagerly waiting to watch, it has to be 20-year-old Ghazanfar, the latest from the stable of mystery spinners produced by Afghanistan. Ghazanfar was supposed to play for KKR last season but had opted out. He has done well for MI Emirates and this sea-

SOUTH INDIAN DERBY RCB-SRH battle to ignite opener



The stage is all set for the 19th season of the Indian Premier League (IPL), which is set to commence March 28, with the defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) taking on 2016 champion Sunrisers Hyderabad at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bangalore.

It does not require any trained eyes to understand that both RCB and Sunrisers are thin on bowling resources after missing key players.

RCB will be without the metronomic Josh Hazlewood and left-arm seamer Yash Dayal. Both played significant roles in their triumphant campaign in 2025, but will be absent this year owing to various reasons.

Hazlewood is completing his rehabilitation process in Australia and might join the squad at a later stage. They will have to rely

heavily on veteran pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar, spinner Krunal Pandya, Suyash Sharma and left-arm pacer Mangesh Yadav.

SRH will be without skipper Pat Cummins at least for the initial phase. Ishan Kishan has been named the stand-in captain. RCB boasts of Virat Kohli, Tim David, Phil Salt, Jacob Bethell, skipper Rajat Patidar, Romario Shepherd in their ranks, and SRH can answer them through Travis Head, Abhishek Sharma, Kishan and Heinrich Klaasen.

HEAD-TO-HEAD: Matches played: 26 | SRH won: 14 | RCB won: 11 | No result: 1. WHERE TO WATCH: Fans can watch the entire tournament live on Star Sports channels, while millions can also stream it on the JioHotstar website and mobile app.

ASIA CUP-WORLD RANKING TOURNAMENT STAGE 1

Archers power India to 10 medals

Compound archers dominate with mixed team gold, sweep men's individual

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangkok, March 27: Indian compound archers delivered a dominant performance, clinching the mixed team gold and women's team silver, while also sweeping the men's indi-



vidual podium at the Asia Cup-World Ranking Tournament Stage 1, here Friday.

India also bagged two silver medals in the recurve section in the afternoon session to take their tally to two gold, four silver and four bronze, surpassing their eight-medal haul at the previous edition. But in gold medal count, India fared poorly as compared to the last edition when they clinched five yellow metals. It boiled down to their poor show in the recurve section where none of the archers could manage a gold, while they returned empty-handed

in men's individual section and mixed team event.

In 2025, India had a gold-silver finish in men's recurve individual, while mixed team bagged silver.

The highlight of the day was a clean sweep in the men's compound individual section, where Uday Kamboj edged past Prathamesh Jawkar 145-144 in a thrilling all-Indian final to clinch his maiden international gold, while seasoned campaigner Rajat Chauhan secured a bronze.

KITG: Karnataka first state to win over 10 gold

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Raipur, March 27: Karnataka extended their lead at the top of the medal tally with yet another dominant showing at the swimming pool while hosts Chhattisgarh had their best outing in the first Khelo India Tribal Games so far, winning one silver and two bronze, here Friday.

The strapping Manikanta L once again led the charge as the Karnataka swimmer added two gold and a silver to his individual tally. Karnataka ended Day 3 with



13 gold, 5 silver and one bronze. Odisha are second with six gold, two silver and nine bronze while Assam are third with two gold, four silver and two bronze medals. Chhattisgarh are joint seventh with Tripura with six medals each -- three silvers and as many bronze.

Hardik, Navneet crowned Hockey India's finest

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: Star midfielder Hardik Singh and striker Navneet Kaur Friday won the Hockey India Player of the Year awards in the men's and women's categories respectively.

The players were honoured during a glittering ceremony in the capital that celebrated the finest performers over the past one year.

Former India captain and a member of the 1980 Moscow Olympics gold medal-winning team, Zafar Iqbal, was bestowed with the Major Dhyan Chand Lifetime Achievement Award.

Hardik and Navneet were honoured with the coveted Balbir Singh Sr Award for Player of the Year 2025 that includes a cash reward of ₹20 lakh each.

Iqbal, who also won two silver medals at the Asian Games in 1978 and 1982 along with a bronze

medal at the 1982 Champions Trophy, was honoured with a cash reward of ₹25 lakh for his contribution to Indian hockey.

The Balbir Singh Award for Goalkeeper of the Year went to the women team's Bichu Devi Kharibam, while the Pargat Singh Award for Defender of the Year was bagged by Sanjay, both the accolades carrying a cash reward of ₹5 lakh each.

Hockey India Ajit Pal Singh Award for Midfielder of the Year was won by Sanjay, while the Dhanraj Pillay Award for Forward of the Year was collected by Sukhjeet Singh. Both the players got richer by ₹5 lakh each.

Hockey India Asunta Lakra Award for Upcoming Player of the Year (Women, U-21) was bagged by Sakshi Rana, while young goalkeeper Prince Deep Singh, who was an integral part of last year's Junior World Cup bronze medal-winning side,



won the Jugraj Singh Award for Upcoming Player of the Year in U-21 men's category. Both took home ₹10 lakh each.

Earlier in the day, Raghu Prasad RV was honoured for being named the FIH Umpire of the Year for 2025, while Ishika was recognised for scoring a goal on her debut against Uruguay during the FIH World Cup



2026 Qualifiers in Hyderabad. Deepika was recognised for winning the Poligras Magic Skill Award, while Abhishek was honoured for being named Player of the Tournament at the Asia Cup Rajgir, Bihar 2025.

Udita was recognised for being named Player of the Tournament at the Women's Asia Cup Hangzhou, China 2025, while

Navneet was honoured for being named Player of the Tournament at the FIH World Cup 2026 Qualifiers in Hyderabad.

All awardees in the individual achievement category received ₹1 lakh each.

Seven member units were also awarded with ₹10 lakh each for their performances at the 15th National Championships in 2025. The winners included Jharkhand, Haryana, Mizoram, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh.

The gold medal-winning men's hockey team of Asia Cup in Rajgir was felicitated during the ceremony, with each player receiving ₹3 lakh and the support staff taking home ₹1.5 lakh each. The World Cup bronze medal-winning Indian junior men's team was also honoured, with players receiving ₹5 lakh each and support staff pocketing ₹2.5 lakh each.

Key Winners

- Hockey India Balbir Singh Sr. Award for Player of the Year (Women) - Navneet Kaur
Hockey India Balbir Singh Sr. Award for Player of the Year (Men) - Hardik Singh
Major Dhyan Chand Lifetime Achievement Award - Zafar Iqbal
Hockey India Baljit Singh Award for Goalkeeper of the Year - Bichu Devi Kharibam
Hockey India Pargat Singh Award for Defender of the Year - Sanjay
Hockey India Ajit Pal Singh Award for Midfielder of the Year - Sumit
Hockey India Dhanraj Pillay Award for Forward of the Year - Sukhjeet Singh
Hockey India Asunta Lakra Award for Upcoming Player of the Year (Women - Under 21) - Sakshi Rana
Hockey India Jugraj Singh Award for Upcoming Player of the Year (Men - Under 21) - Prince Deep Singh