



## Perspective shift

Actor Kiara Advani speaks about life after motherhood, revealing how it has completely changed her perspective

LEISURE | P2



## US troops hurt

More than two dozen US troops wounded in Iranian attacks on a Saudi air base in the past week

INTERNATIONAL | P10



## Growth lingers

Near-term outlook uncertain as West Asia crisis raises input costs, risks supply disruptions, says Finance Ministry

BUSINESS | P11



## Ruthless RCB

Virat Kohli and Devdutt Padikkal star as Royal Challengers Bengaluru defeat Sunrisers Hyderabad in the Indian Premier League opener

SPORTS | P12

## Woman attempts to immolate self day after filing rape FIR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Berhampur, March 28:** A 20-year-old woman allegedly attempted self-immolation in Ganjam district Saturday, a day after filing a rape complaint, police said.

The woman, a college dropout, suffered around 50 per cent burn injuries after allegedly pouring kerosene and setting herself on fire behind her house in the Kotinada police station area, they said.

The incident happened when no one else was at home. She was rescued by her parents and initially taken to a nearby hospital before being shifted to MKCG Medical College and Hospital in Berhampur, where her condition is stated to be critical.

Police said the exact reason behind the alleged suicide attempt is yet to be ascertained.

"We are investigating the matter from various angles," Kotinada police station inspector-in-charge Damodar Bihari said.

According to police, the woman had lodged a rape complaint against a man Friday, and her statement was scheduled to be recorded Saturday before the incident took place.

Preliminary investigation suggested that the woman had been in a relationship with the accused since 2022, when she was a minor, they said.

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Wish I had the confidence of a BJP voter

## Over 4L KitKat bars stolen en route from Italy to Poland: Nestle



ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Geneva, March 28:** Swiss food giant Nestle says about 12 tonnes, or 413,793 candy bars, of its KitKat chocolate brand were stolen after leaving its production site in Italy earlier this week for Poland.

The company, based in Vevey, Switzerland, said in a statement that "the vehicle and its load are still nowhere to be found."

The shipment of the crunchy bars, made of waffles covered with chocolate, disappeared last week while en route between production and distribution locations. The chocolate bars were to be distributed throughout Europe. The missing candy bars could enter unofficial sales channels across European markets, the company said, but if this does happen, all products can be traced using the unique batch code assigned to individual bars.

A spokesperson for KitKat said that as a result, consumers, retailers and wholesalers would be able to identify if a product is part of the stolen shipment by scanning the on-pack batch numbers.



FOR A CAUSE: A woman dressed as the Statue of Liberty takes part in the "No Kings" protest in Paris, France, Saturday

## Prof booked for calling student 'terrorist' in class

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bangalore, March 28:** An FIR was registered Saturday against an adjunct professor of a private university here for allegedly referring to a student as a 'terrorist' and making derogatory remarks during a class, police said.

A purported video of the professor admonishing the student for allegedly disturbing the class has gone viral on social media.

Following the incident March 24, the student approached the college authorities, after which the professor was suspended Friday.

Police registered a case against the professor under Sections 299 (deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings) and 352 (intentional insult with intent to provoke a breach of peace) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

"We did not receive a complaint from the student. However, taking cognisance of the video and based on preliminary findings, we registered a case on our own. Further investigation is underway," a senior police officer said. According to the FIR, the professor repeatedly referred to the student as a 'terrorist' and verbally abused him during the class.

## Musk joined Trump, Modi call: Report; MEA denies

The reported presence of billionaire Elon Musk on a sensitive call between US President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi underscores the growing blur between private influence and statecraft. Even as New Delhi firmly denied the claim, the episode raises troubling questions about transparency in high-level diplomacy. At a time when the Strait of Hormuz remains critical to global stability amid the Iran war, any ambiguity over who participates in such discussions risks undermining trust

REUTERS & PTI

**Washington/New Delhi, March 28:** Elon Musk joined a phone call between US President Donald Trump and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi Tuesday about the war in Iran, the New York Times reported Friday, citing two US officials.

It was unclear why Musk was on the call or whether he spoke, the newspaper said.

"President Trump has a great



relationship with Prime Minister Modi, and this was a productive conversation," White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt said when asked for comment on the report.

However, India Saturday rejected the report that Musk had joined the phone conversation between Modi and Trump earlier this week. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said Tuesday's conversation was between the two leaders only.

"We have seen the story. The telephone conversation March 24 was between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Donald Trump only," Jaiswal said.

"As has been stated earlier, it provided the opportunity for exchange of views on the situa-

tion in West Asia," he said. "Our Prime Minister only spoke to Trump and there was no one else who spoke to the PM," people familiar with the matter said.

They suggested that it is for Washington to clarify if somebody else was in the room or listening to the conversation.

The New York Times said Musk's participation in the phone call signalled a reconciliation between the billionaire and Trump. The two had fallen out last year following Musk's exit from a government task force charged with slashing the federal workforce. The US President had initiated the phone call with Modi to discuss the West Asia crisis. It was the first conversation between the two leaders since the West Asia conflict began February 28.

## Fresh Subhadra Yojana applications from April 1

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, March 28:** Deputy Chief Minister Pravat Parida Saturday announced that the government will accept new applications for the inclusion of eligible beneficiaries under the Subhadra Yojana, a state-run scheme aimed at women empowerment, from April 1.

Parida, who is also in charge of the Women and Child Development department, said the new applications will be accepted through the Subhadra portal for a period of one month, from April 1 to April 30. The applicants in the age group of 21-60 years as April 1 can apply.

The scheme, launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi September 17, 2024, has so far covered more than one crore women beneficiaries, who are entitled to receive ₹10,000 per annum in two instalments for five years. Therefore, each beneficiary will get ₹50,000 in five years, an official said.

Parida made it clear that only those women who had not applied earlier for inclusion in the scheme are eligible to

## NEW APPLICATIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED THROUGH THE SUBHADRA PORTAL FOR A PERIOD OF ONE MONTH

put forward their applications this time.

Applications from those who had previously applied will not be considered. New applications will be registered through the Subhadra portal via Common Service Centres (CSC) or Ama Seva Kendras (ASK), she said. The application forms will be available free of cost at all Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) and CDPO offices.

Parida said Subhadra Yojana stands as a landmark initiative for the empowerment of women in the state. The government has made all necessary arrangements to ensure that no eligible beneficiary is left out of the scheme, she added.

Notably, the fourth instalment under the scheme was disbursed to beneficiaries March 8.

## Former Nepal PM Oli held over Gen Z protest crackdown

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kathmandu, March 28:** Nepal's Former Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli was arrested Saturday, a day after the newly formed government of Balendra Shah implemented the probe commission report on the Gen Z protest that rocked the nation last year.

Oli, also CPN-UML chair, was arrested at the Gundu area of Bhaktapur district, 12 km east of Kathmandu, early Saturday morning, according to the police. Former Home Minister and Nepali Congress leader Ramesh Lekhak has also been arrested from his residence at Katunje of Suryabinayak Municipality in Bhaktapur district, police added.

Both Oli and Lekhak have been arrested on charges of their involvement in suppressing the Gen Z movement of September 8 and 9 last year, in which 76 people, including around two dozen youths, were killed. The probe commission formed to investigate the incident surrounding the Gen Z movement has recommended legal action against Oli and Lekhak, among others, under criminal offence.

## Russia sending upgraded drones used in Ukraine war to Iran

Russia's reported transfer of upgraded drones to Iran marks a deepening of military cooperation with potentially far-reaching consequences. Having once relied on Iranian drone technology during the Ukraine War, Russia now appears to be returning the favour with enhanced capabilities. Such collaboration underscores the emergence of a more coordinated axis challenging Western influence and complicating efforts to stabilise an already volatile region.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**London, March 28:** Russia is sending a shipment of drones to Iran including upgraded versions of the drone technology that Tehran originally supplied to Moscow after its invasion of

Ukraine, US and European officials told The Associated Press.

Iran has been firing drone barrages at Israel, its Gulf neighbours and US bases across the Middle East for more than a month following the US and Israeli attack on the country. While Iran has its own stocks of Shahed drones, Russia has made improvements to the design during the war in Ukraine, including adding better navigation capabilities. Russian and Iranian officials have had "very active" discussions this month regarding transferring drones from Russia to Iran, the European intelligence official told AP. A US defence official said it is unclear if the shipment is a one-time delivery or part of a series. Neither official could say how significant the deliv-

ery is or how many drones were sent. Another European official said a small number of drones would not have a major impact on the outcome of the war. All the officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

The US defence official said Moscow's motivation in giving Tehran more advanced drones is also unclear given that every munition sent to Tehran is one Russia is not able to launch at Ukraine. White House spokeswoman Olivia Wales told AP that "nothing provided to Iran by any other country is affecting our operational success." The Pentagon did not respond to a request for comment.

The European official said their intelligence suggests a drone shipment is on its way,



but that they could not confirm exactly how the drones are being transported. Two convoys of trucks carrying what Russia has described as humanitarian aid have travelled to Iran from Russia via Azerbaijan and it's possible

they could contain drones, the European official said.

The UK's latest defence intelligence assessment says Russia almost certainly provided training and intelligence, including on types of drones and electronic warfare, with Iran

ahead of the war in the Middle East. Iran is also sharing information with Russia "quite generously," the European intelligence official said.

Russian specialists have adapted and refined the Shahed drone by creating decoys with no explosives that are designed to overwhelm air defences. They also have variously added jet engines, cameras, advanced anti-jammers, radio links, AI computing platforms or Starlink internet devices.

Drone debris found in Ukraine also indicates further cooperation between Iran and Russia on war technology, including exchanges in advanced anti-jamming systems and jet-powered engines that also are used to power Iran's cruise missiles.

# leisure



## EVA LONGORIA SAYS SHE KNEW SHE WOULD BE SUCCESSFUL

Hollywood star Eva Longoria, who has enjoyed a highly successful career, said she had clear career ambitions, and she never doubted that she'd become a success, reports femalefirst.co.uk. Longoria had previously insisted that she's never doubted her own talent even when other people thought otherwise.

## BAILEY FOR QUEEN'S ROLE IN BRIDGERTON

Hollywood actress Halle Bailey has shared which character she would most like to play in the hit Netflix period drama *Bridgerton*. She said, she has her eye on one of the show's most powerful roles. "I love Bridgerton, yes. I would want to be the queen," the actress told The Guardian.



### FORTUNE FORECAST

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**ARIES**  
Go on, express your artistic side today, says Ganesha. Redecorate your home, or rearrange your work space. The stars foretell expenditure. However, if you've been eyeing that new mahogany dresser or the antique colonial teak desk, grab it. It is okay to splurge once in a while.

**TAURUS**  
You will be on your feet today, shuffling from destination to destination for business purposes. Forehead wrinkles might burden your brow due to financial worry this afternoon. Fret not, says Ganesha, you will handle your situation well and enjoy the higher accountability by sun down.

**GEMINI**  
You are likely to work extra hard to assert your authority at the workplace. On the work front, your seniors and colleagues will appreciate your devotion and dedication to work. Monetary gains may be expected in the evening, says Ganesha.

**CANCER**  
Today, you are likely to be a force to reckon with in every sport you take part in, predicts Ganesha. There may be some speed breakers in the second half of the day, but nothing that you can't overtake. At work, support from your seniors may help you finish long-pending projects.

**LEO**  
It's just good business to be on the move and avoid complacency. In fact, it is one of the secrets to success in business. Keep this in mind as today, you might have to be on the move constantly, foresees Ganesha. Monetary situations will be a matter of concern and anxiety in the afternoon, but you are of invaluable support to your peers.

**VIRGO**  
The day will bring in innovation and ingenuity on your part today. Expect a probable visit to a museum or a historical place, says Ganesha. Being frisky will help shape that body up a bit. Entertainment will work as a wonderful remedy to cure the wounds of an estranged relationship, says Ganesha.

**LIBRA**  
There are chances that you will be in a great mood to organise things your own way. You will make a favourable impression on your superiors at work through your problem-solving abilities. Do not discount a scrumptious dinner with your loved one, which will go a long way in intensifying your senses, hints Ganesha.

**SCORPIO**  
In all probability, today you will work on improving your personal relations, foresees Ganesha. On the family front, your kids may force you to make hasty choices, after all, that is what tantrums are for. It is highly likely that family feuds with siblings may erupt today.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Various things will play on your mind today. From metaphysics to philosophy, from weight loss to diet plans - your thoughts may find it hard to stay steady. Your hands may also have some trouble keeping a check on the outflow of money during a shopping excursion with a loved one. Your charm will help you achieve many things today, says Ganesha.

**CAPRICORN**  
Your sweetheart may seem to be difficult to fathom, but he/she will appear a little more readable today, says Ganesha. If you have any plans to make the day special for your love, taking him/her out for shopping; buying presents will be just the thing to do.

**AQUARIUS**  
Spirituality takes over you today! You will surely make your way to a temple, mosque or church later in the day, says Ganesha. That, or you may simply meditate in seclusion. Shopping too is a good prospect, and you get your penny's worth if you shop for clothes.

**PISCES**  
It is time to socialise, says Ganesha. Though it is unlikely that you will hit the casinos at Las Vegas today, what could be on the agenda is meeting up with long-lost school friends, or exchanging pleasantries with relatives so distant you are unsure if they are related to you.

## Kriti redefines glam quotient

**Mumbai:** Kriti Sanon recently spoke about her character in *Cocktail 2*, sharing that the role presents her in a noticeably different screen avatar at a media conclave. Opening up about the look and tone of her character, Kriti said, "I think I'm looking very different from what I've ever looked and it's probably the hottest character that I've done so far. And I think Homi is someone who has great aesthetic visual sense and he's just inherently cool and I think he's brought a cool side to me which I didn't know I had."

The actor also addressed speculation about whether the film is connected to *Cocktail* starring Saif Ali Khan, Deepika Padukone and Diana Penty. She clarified that the upcoming film is not a continuation of the earlier

story. "It's a franchise," Kriti stated, adding, "It carries a vibe similar to *Cocktail*, which is also present in *Cocktail 2*." She further shared that while the tone may feel familiar, the narrative and characters are different from the earlier film.



## Kiara gets transformed

**Mumbai:** Bollywood actor Kiara Advani embraced parenthood in 2025 when she and Sidharth Malhotra welcomed their daughter, Saraayah Malhotra. In a recent interview, Kiara spoke about life after motherhood, revealing how it has completely changed her perspective.

Kiara shared that not much has changed between her and Sidharth after marriage. She explained that while marriage brought a sense of independence in running their home and building a life together, their bond remains largely the same. She told Grazia India, "Before marriage, Sidharth

and I had the same banter and enjoyed travelling together, and those things still remain. We also watch films together, and since we look at them both as cinema lovers and as actors, we get excited to discuss them."

Talking about motherhood, Kiara added, "I've become more of a tigress. The way I see life now is through a completely different lens. It feels like nothing else matters, and

at the same time, everything matters. That little girl is still inside me."

Kiara and Sidharth first met on the sets of *Sherashaah*. Their on-screen chemistry soon translated into real life, and the couple dated briefly before tying the knot in an intimate yet grand wedding ceremony in 2023.

AGENCIES

## Kubbra's plea to filmmakers

**Mumbai:** Kubbra Sait gained fame with her portrayal of Kukoo in *Sacred Games*. Since then, she has only improved and associated herself with compelling scripts and well-developed characters. The recently released web series, *Sankalp*, is no exception. As DCP Parveen Sheikh, she leaves a deep impact and in a recent interview she made an appeal to the filmmakers.

According to viewers' feedback, many felt bad when Kubbra's character dies in the show.

On this she says, "Everyone kills me. I think now the makers should stop killing me! My character was killed in *Foundation*, in *Sacred Games* and now *Sankalp*."

Asked if Prakash Jha and

Sankalp's lead actor, Nana Patekar, were intimidating, she said, "They are incredible human beings and it was a fortunate experience to work with them."

Kubbra went on to add, "Prakash sir is very confident about what he's making. He's also very patient and a kind man. He has people who have worked with him for 15 years and he has people who have worked with him for 5 months. And he treats all of them with love and respect. The same applies to Nana sir. He's somebody who'd come on the set and won't leave until it's time to pack up. Even today, he writes his lines and learns them."



**NATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVAL - DAY 2**  
The members of Himachal Culture Research Forum & Theatre Repertory performed Hindi play *Panchali* on the second evening of the 5-day Purva Ranga at Rabindra Mandap, Bhubaneswar, Saturday. Written by Nand Kishore Acharya, the play was directed by Suresh Sharma. The Department of Odia Language, Literature & Culture, Govt. of Odisha is organising the event in collaboration with Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi, and Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre (Kolkata), Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India.

### PEANUTS



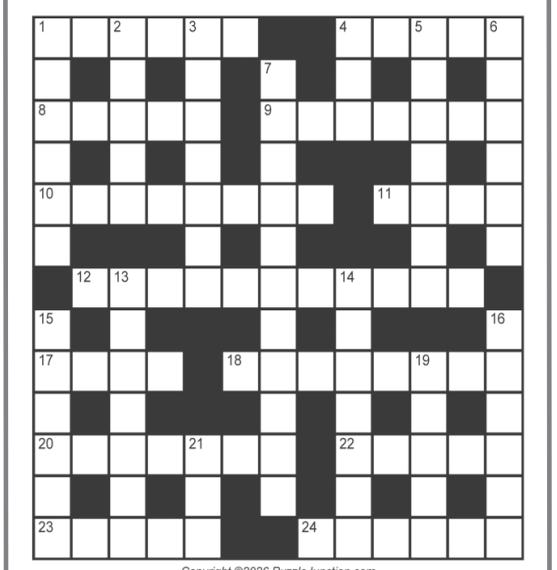
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### BREVITY



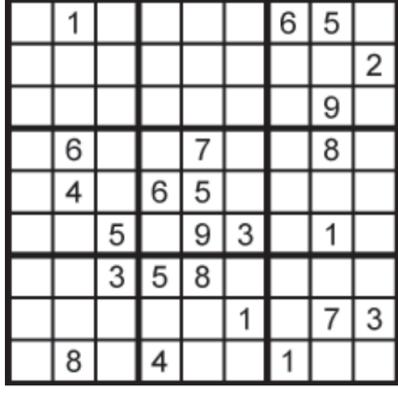
### FUN POST CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Orts
  - 4 Wine barrels
  - 8 Scrapbook
  - 9 Better
  - 10 Paragon (5,3)
  - 11 Liberate
  - 12 Hawks and owls (5,2,4)
  - 17 Summit
  - 18 Minor to-do
  - 20 Athlete's forte
  - 22 Give the green-light
  - 23 Bracelet site
  - 24 Sporting dog
  - 6 Lake Vanern locale
  - 7 Some radio personalities (4,7)
  - 13 Hockey game venue (3,4)
  - 14 Share in a meal
  - 15 Most of Mauritania
  - 16 Minor rain storm
  - 19 Coastal feature
  - 21 Wrath
- Down**
- 1 Unsafe
  - 2 Planetary shadow
  - 3 Perplexed
  - 4 Tube top
  - 5 Bane

### 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



**WAR FURY:** Smoke rises from a building following an Israeli airstrike in Dahiyeh, Beirut's southern suburbs, Lebanon

AP PHOTO

## New front opens as Houthis strike Israel

AP & AGENCIES

**Dubai, March 28:** A new front opened in the ongoing Middle East conflict as Iranian-backed Houthi rebels claimed a missile launch toward Israel early Saturday, marking their first such strike since the war began. The Israeli military said it successfully intercepted the projectile.

The now month-long war erupted after the US and Israel attacked Iran, which retaliated with strikes against Israel and neighbouring Gulf Arab states. Israel struck Iran's nuclear facilities hours after threatening to "escalate and expand" its campaign against Tehran Friday. Iran vowed to retaliate and struck a base in Saudi Arabia, wounding more than a dozen US service members and damaging planes. Before Saturday's attack, there appeared to be a breakthrough as Tehran agreed to allow humanitarian aid and agricultural shipments through the Strait of Hormuz.

Israeli airstrikes continued Saturday. AP footage showed smoke rising from northeastern Tehran. Iran sent missiles toward Israel with loud booms

**Saturday's assault calls into question whether Houthis will target commercial shipping in the Red Sea corridor**

heard in Jerusalem.

Houthi Brig. Gen. Yahya Sa'eed said on the rebels' Al-Masirah satellite television station Saturday that the Houthis launched a barrage of ballistic missiles toward what he described as "sensitive Israeli military sites" in southern Israel.

The attack came hours after Saree signalled in a vague statement Friday that the rebels would join the war.

Sirens went off around Israel's southern city of Beer Sheva and near Israel's main nuclear research centre as Iran and Hezbollah fired

on Israel overnight. Explosions filled the air in Tel Aviv, where Israel's Fire and Rescue Service said it responded to 11 impact sites.

Saturday's assault calls into question whether the Houthis will target commercial shipping in the Red Sea corridor, as they did during the Israel-Hamas war. The rebels also fired drones at Israel.

The involvement of the Houthis would complicate the deployment of the USS Gerald R. Ford, the aircraft carrier that sailed to Crete for repairs then to Split, Croatia, where it arrived Saturday.

## 5 killed, 30 injured as tourist bus overturns

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, March 28:** At least five persons were killed and 30 others injured when a tourist bus overturned in Nayagarh district in the early hours of Saturday, police said. The accident took place around 2 am when the bus, carrying 55 passengers, overturned on the Hanuman Ghati road at Daspalla.

Speeding is suspected to be the reason for the accident, police said.

"The bus overturned on Hanuman Ghati road while negotiating a curve," police said.

The deceased have been identified as Hari Patra, his wife Laxmi Patra, Suprabha Sahu, her daughter Sumati and the driver, Prabin Kumar Sahu. All were residents of Berhampur, police said.

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi expressed grief over the incident and conveyed his condolences to the families of



the deceased persons.

He has also announced Rs 4 lakh ex gratia from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CM-RF) for the next of kin of the deceased.

Deputy Chief Minister Pravat Parida also expressed grief over the incident.

"Hearing the news of multiple passengers losing their lives in a tourist bus accident near Daspalla in Nayagarh district, I am deeply grieved and heartbroken. I pray to

Lord Jagannath for the eternal peace of the departed souls and the speedy recovery of the injured," she said in a social media post.

Arya Patra, one of the injured passengers, alleged that the vehicle was speeding.

"The bus was at a very high speed, possibly over 100 kmph, on the ghat road. It suddenly overturned. While some passengers were thrown out, nearly five remained trapped under it," he said.

■ **CM Mohan Charan Majhi expressed grief over the incident and conveyed his condolences to the families of the deceased**

■ **Majhi also announced Rs 4 lakh ex gratia from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund for the next of kin of the deceased**

Another passenger, Santosh Pradhan, said they had hired the bus from Berhampur and were travelling to Harishankar in Balangir district.

Personnel from Daspalla and Banigocha police stations, along with fire services teams, rescued the injured passengers and took them to the community health centre at Daspalla.

Daspalla police has started an investigation into the incident, officials said.

## Ratna Bhandar: Next phase of inventory starts April 8

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, March 28:** The next phase of the inventory of the Ratna Bhandar in Puri will be conducted over three days from April 8, Law Minister Prithiviraj Harichandan said Saturday.

Speaking to reporters, Harichandan said preparations have been completed for the next phase of the inventory of the Ratna Bhandar or outer chamber.

"During this period, the ornaments and valuables of the deities will be counted, weighed and digitally documented, including through 3D mapping," he said.

The 12th-century shrine is administered by the state Law department.

The outer chamber houses ornaments and valuables used during major festivals such as the Suna Besha (golden attire) of the deities, which is observed five times a year, including once on the chariots during the Rath Yatra. Harichandan said about 80 per cent of the movable treasures kept in the 'Chalanti' Ratna Bhandar (ornaments used for daily rituals) were documented on the first day of the inventory

March 25 using 3D mapping, photography and videography.

Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) Chief Administrator Arabinda Padhee said the inventory exercise, being conducted after a gap of 48 years, covers three categories of storage.

The inner chamber of the Ratna Bhandar, where the temple's most valuable ornaments have been preserved for centuries, falls under the first category.

Jewellery used during festivals is classified under the second category and stored in the outer chamber, while daily-use ornaments are listed under the third category.

Padhee said the process, which began March 25 under tight security, is being carried out by teams comprising temple servants, bank officials, gemologists and representatives of the RBI.

He said the inventory is being cross-verified with records from 1978. Each ornament is being weighed and examined by gemologists, and then digitally documented and securely packed in specially prepared chests based on metal classification, he said.

About 80 per cent of the movable treasures kept in the 'Chalanti' Ratna Bhandar were documented on the first day of the inventory March 25

## Army Chief at Lord's abode

AGENCIES

**Puri, March 28:** Chief of the Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi offered prayers at Srimandir in Puri, Saturday.

Talking to reporters later, General Dwivedi said he prayed for the well-being of the Indian Army, its personnel and their families. "I feel very fortunate to have received the blessings of Lord Jagannath. My main objective was to seek blessings on behalf of the Indian Army and for the well-being of its personnel and their families. I am confident that the Indian Army will perform even better in the coming days with the Lord's blessings," he said.

Accompanied by his wife Sunita Dwivedi, General Dwivedi said he experienced a sense of sanctity and peace at the temple, where centuries-old traditions have been preserved.



"I will try to visit the temple every year," he said. General Dwivedi was received by Puri district Collector Dibya Jyoti Parida and Superintendent of Police Prateek Singh, who escorted him to the shrine. He spent around an hour at the temple. Army personnel had visited the premises ahead of his arrival.

The visit marked the second day of his three-day tour of Odisha, which began Friday with a meeting with Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati at Lok Bhavan.

Later, the Army Chief left for Gopalpur by a special aircraft to review training infrastructure at the Army Air Defence College and interact with officers and ex-servicemen.

On Friday, General Dwivedi called on Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati here. They visited Atal Van, an ecological park on the Lok Bhavan premises.

Sharing pictures 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 Army Chief is scheduled to return to New Delhi March 29.

## Tiger Woods held for DUI

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

**Tallahassee, March 28:** Tiger Woods' turbulent career veered into fresh turmoil when the golf icon was arrested and charged with driving under the influence (DUI) after a rollover crash near his Florida home, authorities said.

Woods, 50, escaped injury but was detained after his vehicle

clipped a truck while attempting to overtake on a residential road on Jupiter Island, flipping over before sliding

to a stop. Martin County Sheriff John Budensiek said Woods - who was arrested for driving under the influence in 2017 - showed signs of "impairment," though he passed a breathalyzer test.

However, he was formally charged with DUI after refusing to take a urine analysis test, Budensiek said. "When it came time for us to ask for a urinalysis test, he refused, and so he's been charged with DUI, with property damage and refusal to submit to a lawful test in the crash," Budensiek said.



## Meet Artemis II crew set to blast off to moon

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Cape Canaveral (US), March 28:** The Americans who blazed the trail to the moon more than half a century ago under the Apollo programme were white men chosen for their military test pilot experience. This first Artemis crew making up NASA's next lunar leap includes a woman, a person of colour and a Canadian, products of a more diversified astronaut corps.

None of them were alive during NASA's storied Apollo programme that sent 24 astronauts to the moon including 12 moonwalkers. They won't land on the moon this time or even orbit it, but the out-and-back journey will take them thousands of miles deeper into space than even the Apollo astronauts ventured, promising unprecedented views of the lunar far side. Here's a look at the Artemis II astronauts whose mission aims to pave the path for future moon landings.

**Commander Reid Wiseman** Wiseman, 50, a retired Navy captain from Baltimore, was serving as NASA's chief astronaut when asked three years

ago to lead humanity's first lunar trip since 1972. His wife Carroll's death from cancer in 2020 gave him pause.

He'd spent more than five months at the International Space Station in 2014, and his two teenage daughters, especially the older one, had "zero interest" in him launching again. "We talked about it and I said, Look, of all the people on planet Earth right now, there are four people that are in a position to go fly around the moon," he said. "I cannot say no to that opportunity."

The next day, homemade moon cupcakes awaited him, along with his daughters' support. The toughest part isn't leaving them - "it's the stress that I'm putting on them," he said.

**Pilot Victor Glover** As one of NASA's few Black astronauts, Glover sees his presence on the mission as "a force for good." The 49-year-old Navy captain and former combat pilot from Pomona, California, makes it a habit to listen to Gil Scott-Heron's "Whitey on the Moon" and Marvin Gaye's "Make Me Wanna Holler" from the white-dominated Apollo era.



Jeremy Hansen, Christina Koch, Reid Wiseman and Victor Glover pose for a photo after their arrival at the Kennedy Space Center

AP PHOTO

"I listen to those for perspective," he said. "It captures what we did well, what we did poorly."

The ability for him now to offer hope to others is "an amazing blessing and a privilege." Despite having one spaceflight behind him - an early SpaceX crew run to the International Space Station - he finds himself in new personal territory.

He's hyper-focused on running "our best race so that we can hand the baton off to the next leg" - a 2027 practice dock-

ing mission in orbit around Earth between an Orion crew capsule and one or two lunar landers. The all-important moon landing would follow in 2028 with yet another set of astronauts.

**Mission specialist Christina Koch**

The 47-year-old electrical engineer from Jacksonville, North Carolina, holds the record for the longest single spaceflight by a woman - 328 days. She took part in the first all-female spacewalk during her lengthy

stay at the space station in 2019. Before she got called up by NASA, Koch spent a year at a South Pole research station. Between that and her space stint, she feels she's "inoculated" most of her family and friends.

"So far, I haven't gotten too many nerves from folks. Maybe my dog, but I've reassured her that it's only 10 days. It's not going to be as long as last time."

**Canadian Space Agency's Jeremy Hansen**

The Canadian fighter pilot and physicist is making his space debut, stressful enough, but also serving as his country's first emissary to the moon.

Hansen, 50, grew up on a farm near London, Ontario, before moving to Ingersoll and pursuing a flying career. The Canadian Space Agency selected him as an astronaut in 2009, and he was named to the Artemis crew in 2023.

"When I walk out and I look at the moon now, it looks and feels a little bit farther than it used to be," he said. "I just understand in the details how much harder it is than I thought it was watching videos of it."

**VIOLATING LAWS DURING RAM NAVAMI PROCESSION**

# BJD seeks Mahaling's ouster, MLA's arrest



PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, March 28:** The BJD Saturday demanded the dismissal of Health Minister Mukesh Mahaling and sought the arrest of BJP's Titlagarh MLA Nabin Jain for allegedly violating laws during Ram Navami processions at separate places.

In a statement, the Opposition party alleged that Mahaling was seen riding a motorbike without a helmet and leading a rally, while MLA Jain allegedly resorted to blank firing in the air in full public view.

Both cases are a stark display of the breakdown of law and order in the state, the BJD claimed.

Videos of the minister riding the bike without a helmet in Bhubaneswar Friday and the MLA making blank fire at Titlagarh have gone viral on social media.

Mahaling was not immediately available for comment.

"The BJP, which claims to uphold values, ethics, and morality, is in reality undermining them daily. These two incidents are sufficient to speak about the BJP's moral value," BJD spokesman Lenin Mohanty said.

Addressing a press conference, BJD senior general secretary and former minister Tukuni Sahu alleged that Nabin Jain, being a ruling party MLA, has grossly violated the legal system.

"As a public representative, firing gunshots in a peaceful place like Titlagarh in front of the public constitutes a serious criminal offence," Sahu said, asking the Odisha Police to take cognisance of the matter and immediately arrest him.

"Such incidents are not new for him. Earlier, during a Holi procession, Jain had allegedly pushed a worker out of a moving auto-rickshaw, resulting in the worker's death. Since he is a ruling party MLA, no action was taken against him," Sahu

alleged. She said that getting patronage from the government has only increased Jain's arrogance and reckless behaviour, which is dangerous for Titlagarh and the people of the state.

Jain, however, claimed that the gun used to make blank fire was a toy gun and not a real gun. The BJP MLA said he made blank firing only to encourage the Ram Bhakts in the rally and not to terrorise anyone, as alleged.

Meanwhile, sources said the district police have sought a report from the PSO (personal security officer) who was accompanying the MLA and seen in the viral video.

According to officials, the Ram Navami procession began from the Radhakrushna Temple at Thikadarpada and moved through Titlagarh town. Police personnel were deployed to maintain law and order.

The alleged firing took place when the procession reached Shastri Square. Jain was seen pointing a pistol upward and firing before tucking it into his trousers, seen in the video footages.

The BJD also, in the statement, alleged that BJP workers have been creating disturbances on the capital's main roads using private vehicles fitted with red beacons, while the Commissionerate Police remain a silent spectator.

"We want Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, who is also the Home minister of the state, to take immediate note of the incident and restore the law and order situation in the state," Mohanty said.



**FESTIVE CAMARADERIE:** Dharitri and Orissa POST Editor Tathagata Satpathy and people from various walks of life pose for a photo op during Shree Lingaraj Mahotsav 2026 in Old Town area of Bhubaneswar, Saturday

## 2 smugglers held; 45 kg ganja seized

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, March 28:** The Excise team Saturday arrested two notorious ganja smugglers and seized 45 kg of ganja along with crude bombs near Sai Mandir Chhak on Tankapani Road here, officials said.

The accuseds have been identified as Manoranjan Roul (24) and Amarjit Patra. An official said Roul is a habitual offender and was absconding in an NDPS case registered December 17, 2025, in which 50 kg of ganja and two cars were seized.

March 17, while attempting to smuggle the contraband, the excise team waiting to nab Roul



failed to arrest him as he created panic on a national highway by ramming his car into other vehicles while fleeing. Similarly, March 26, Roul

**Accused Roul twice evaded arrest— March 17 by ramming vehicles on a highway and March 26 by hitting officials and damaging a vehicle during a chase near Medical Square in Khurda**

again managed to escape the excise trap by hitting officials and damaging an official vehicle during a chase near Medical Square in Khurda.

Following sustained surveillance, the excise team received fresh inputs March 28 about Roul's movement, indicating he was likely to pass through Tankapani Road. Acting swiftly, the team intercepted the car and apprehended Roul along with another accused.

"Roul is a notorious smuggler and had repeatedly managed to evade arrest. However, we apprehended him Saturday along with his aide, and both have been forwarded to court," said Bhubaneswar Excise DSP Raj Sekhar Swain.

The Excise department has initiated a further probe to ascertain the supply chain of the narcotics racket.



**IN ACT:** An artiste performs during Sahijata in Puri Saturday

OP PHOTO

## City cops foil robbery bid, arrest looters' gang

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, March 28:** In a major breakthrough, Laxmisagar police foiled a planned armed robbery and arrested four members of a looters' gang, while one accomplice managed to flee from the spot late Friday night near Joka Pokhari under Laxmisagar police limits here, police said Saturday.

The arrested accuseds have been identified as Kanha Lenka (25), Rampal (22), Balaram Bhoi (21) and Biswamohan Nayak (18). According to police, a tip-off about a planned armed robbery at a jewellery shop on Jagannath Nagar Main Road led to the formation of a special team to nab the gang.

Around 11:50 pm, when the team reached the spot, the accused allegedly brandished deadly weapons, including swords, in a bid to intimidate police and flee. However, police chased them and apprehended four persons, while one accomplice escaped.

During interrogation, the accused confessed they had assembled with weapons to execute a robbery at Mahavir Jewellers on Jagannath Nagar



**According to police, a tip-off about a planned armed robbery at a jewellery shop on Jagannath Nagar Main Road led to the formation of a special team to nab the gang**

Main Road. Following a search at the spot, police seized two iron

rods, a screwdriver, a hacksaw blade, a knife, a hammer, two swords, two packets of chilli powder, empty liquor bottles, plastic glasses, cigarette packets, a matchbox, a torchlight and four black monkey caps.

"A case has been registered at Laxmisagar police station under Sections 310(4) and 310(5) of the BNS. The accused have been forwarded to court, and efforts are underway to trace and arrest the absconding member," a police official said.

**CLASSIFIED AFFIDAVIT**

By virtue of an Affidavit sworn before Executive Magistrate, Dhenkanal vide. no.1600, dtd. 19.3.2026. I JAYKRUSHNA Sahoo, S/o.Late Hadibandhu Sahoo, At/Po-Kakudibhag, PS-Sadar, Dist.-Dhenkanal, Pin-759015, Odisha declare that I have changed my son's name from Prakash Prasad Sahoo (old name) to Rakesh Prasad Sahoo (new name). Henceforth he shall be known as Rakesh Prasad Sahoo for all purposes.

**BBA ELECTIONS Chhotray elected prez, Routray secy**

**Bhubaneswar:** Elections to the Bhubaneswar Bar Association (BBA) for the 2026-27 term concluded Saturday, with Ashok Kumar Chhotray elected president and Suman Routray as secretary. Susanta Dash was elected vice-president, Hiten Nayak as treasurer, while Sangeeta Pattnaik and Jyotirmayee Panda were elected joint secretary and assistant secretary, respectively. Similarly, Goura Prasad Ratha has been elected president of the Bhubaneswar Tax Bar Association (BTVA). Upendra Kumar Pattnaik was elected vice-president, Prasanta Kumar Satapathy as secretary, Biswajit Pattnaik as joint secretary, Sushil Kumar Samantray as assistant secretary and Sumanta Kumar Acharya as treasurer. Besides, five members were elected to the executive body. It may be noted that elections to various bar associations were held across the state on Saturday. A total of 38,883 voters cast their votes to elect new office-bearers. Officials said that out of 158 bar associations, polling was conducted in 155, while elections at Sundargarh, Umakote and Jatni were postponed due to administrative reasons.

**Veteran Soldiers' Association observes 4th Foundation Day**

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, March 28:** The All Odisha Veteran Soldiers' Association (AOVSA) Saturday celebrated its Fourth Foundation Day at Jayadev Bhawan here with grandeur and patriotic fervour. The day kicked off with cultural programme, followed by felicitation of Kargil War martyrs' families.

Ekamra-Bhubaneswar MLA Babu Singh attended the programme as chief guest, while industrialist Srikant Mishra graced the occasion as the guest of honour. Several families of Kargil martyrs, including the mother and the wives of martyrs, were honoured. War veterans, including those who served in the 1971 war, were also felicitated for their

contributions. Two students from Nargoda Upper Primary School, who secured top positions in a military education initiative, were recognised during the event.

On the occasion, the second edition of the association's annual magazine 'Sainik Swabhimani' was released. The association also unveiled its official flag, symbolising unity among ex-servicemen across the state.

Representatives from various districts, including Sambalpur, Balasore, Nuapada, Rourkela, Puri and Khurda participated in the programme. A proposal was also placed to establish a Saheed Park in Kalinga Nagar and to form an Ex-Servicemen Corporation in the state.

**Odisha Police finish 2nd at AIPDM shooting**

**Bhubaneswar:** Odisha Police secured an impressive second place at the 26th All India Police Duty Meet (AIPDM) shooting competition held at the CRPF premises in Gurugram, Haryana, bringing laurels to the state. The competition, held from March 22 to 30, witnessed participation from various police teams across the country. Odisha Police scored a total of 1,601 points to finish second among state police forces. The team achieved 743 points in rifle shooting, 527 points in pistol shooting and 327 points in carbine shooting. In an individual achievement, shooter Akshaya Kumar Sahani clinched a silver medal in the 300 yards snap category. Sahani, bearing number 5/131, is currently posted at SSBN, Bhubaneswar. Director General of Police Yogesh Bahadur Khurania congratulated the Odisha Police team, medal winner Sahani and Deputy Commandant, team manager and coach MSA Farid for the outstanding performance.

**WEATHER FORECAST**

	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	35.3°	34.6°	Light to moderate rain or thunderstorm very likely to occur
Min Temp	21.2°	20.4°	
Humidity	68%	73%	
Rainfall	2.1mm	Nil	

# Sans cryofuge, blood goes to waste in Keonjhar DHH

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Keonjhar, March 28:** The absence of a cryofuge machine at the District Headquarters Hospital (DHH) in Keonjhar is leading to wastage of blood and causing difficulties for patients requiring plasma and serum.

Patients in need of such components are often referred to SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack due to the lack of facilities at the local blood bank. The situation has become more concerning amid a shortage of blood, with collected units going to waste.

Sources said a cryofuge machine worth ₹75 lakh had earlier been procured for the blood bank at Keonjhar DHH to separate plasma, serum and other components from whole blood. However, due to inadequate infrastructure, the machine was sent to MKCG Medical College and Hospital in Berhampur in 2020.

Despite improvements in



infrastructure and management at the blood bank, a new machine has neither been purchased nor has the old one been returned. As a result, patient care continues to be affected, with critically ill individuals being shifted to Cuttack for treatment.

Interestingly, Dharanidhar Medical College and Hospital in Keonjhar, which is yet to have a functional blood bank, has two cryofuge machines since 2022, supplied by the District Mineral Foundation and the Odisha State Medical Corporation. With delays in operationalising the blood bank there, locals have suggested that one of the machines be temporarily

shifted to the DHH to benefit patients.

Additionally, a blood separation machine procured years ago at the blood bank is now lying unused and is no longer functional. This has further contributed to the wastage of blood, which could otherwise be processed into smaller units for multiple uses.

Retired CDMO Dr Udayanath Barik said that making cryofuge facilities available locally would reduce the need to transfer patients to Cuttack. Social worker Dilip Sahu also stressed the need for the machine, noting that the number of voluntary blood donors in the district is rising and proper utilisation of collected blood is essential.

CDMO Dr Binod Bihari Mishra said the cryofuge machine had been sent to MKCG Medical College and Hospital due to infrastructure constraints, but with facilities now in place, a request has been made to bring it back.

## Bride found dead; kin allege murder

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bolangir, March 28:** A 10-month-old marriage ended in tragedy after a young bride was found dead in Mahipur village under Tushura police limits in Bolangir district, with her family alleging murder.

The deceased, identified as Anupama Mahananda, had married Maidanshu Mahananda May 8 last year. According to her family, the couple engaged in frequent quarrels. Suspicion arose after Anupama's relatives noticed marks on her neck, prompting allegations that she was strangled to death by her in-laws.

Police have detained her husband Maidanshu, along with his brother and sister-in-law for questioning. Tushura police have launched an investigation based on the complaint filed by the victim's family.

The post-mortem is being conducted at Bhima Bhoi Medical College and Hospital in Bolangir, police said, adding that further action will be taken based on the findings.

Station house officer Manoj Pradhan confirmed that an inquiry is underway.

# Forest personnel assaulted during crackdown on illegal prawn dykes

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Rajnagar, March 28:** Forest personnel were assaulted during a drive to demolish illegal prawn gheries in Bhitarkanika area under Rajnagar block of Kendrapara district Saturday.

The incident occurred when officials were dismantling unauthorised prawn dykes in compliance with a directive of the Orissa High Court. After demolishing one enclosure, the team proceeded to a second site at Gopaljew Patna when the dyke's owner, financiers and several outsiders confronted them, protesting the action.

As the forest personnel continued demolition despite resistance, the protesters attacked a forest official identified as Arjun Dalai. The critically injured

forest personnel was hospitalised following the attack.

In this connection, forest officer Dalai, forest guard Satish Lakra and Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF) Manas Kumar Das filed a written complaint at Talachua Marine PS. Those named in the complaint include Shambhuanth Mandal, Jayadev Jena, Dilip Kumar Panda and Shantanu Pahadi. The attackers allegedly used sharp weapons and abused the victim using caste-based slurs.

The incident has sparked concern as it occurred during enforcement of a court-ordered crackdown on illegal aquaculture activities. When contacted, IIC Sandhyarani Jena of Talachua Marine PS said a case (61/26) has been registered under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), including

Sections 296, 121, 115(2), 132, 351(3) and 3(5), along with provisions of the SC/ST Act.

Notably, the biodiversity of Bhitarkanika National Park is threatened by illegal prawn gheries. As per Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) norms, no prawn dyke is allowed within 500 metres of tidal areas along rivers and the sea. The high court has also directed the removal of such enclosures within the Bhitarkanika National Park area.

Earlier, the Forest department had demolished 20 enclosures of 12 persons March 20 and 21 enclosures of 11 persons March 24. On March 25, when a forest team reached Pattaparia to dismantle more enclosures, women and prawn farm owners opposed the demolition drive and gheraed them, forcing them to retreat.

## 3 killed as Nor'wester wreaks havoc in Puri, Mayurbhanj districts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Baripada/Puri, March 28:** At least three persons died and three others were injured as Nor'westers wreaked havoc in Mayurbhanj and Puri districts, police said Saturday.

Strong winds followed by thunderstorms lashed the Mayurbhanj district headquarters, Baripada, around 11pm Friday, an officer said. Two people were killed, and three others were injured. The deceased were travelling on motorcycles when the Nor'wester hit the region. Due to the storms, they lost control of their two-wheelers and hit the roadside trees, he said.

The deceased have been identified as Ramdas Hansada of Asanayoda and Nagen Murmu of Khunta area in the district. The three injured are undergoing treatment at the Baripada district headquarters hospital.

A man, identified as Jagannath Behera of Alis village under the Pipili police limits in Puri, died after a coconut tree fell on him during the storms in the district Friday night, another officer said.

Several houses were damaged by strong winds in Kanasa, Delanga and Satyabadi areas of Puri district, he said.

## Man beaten to death; 3 detained

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhuban, March 28:** A man was allegedly beaten to death at a village in Dhenkanal district prompting police to detain three persons including a relative of the victim in connection with the case.

The incident took place in Bhaju Sahi of Krushnapur village under Bhuban police limits Friday evening. The deceased has been identified as Montu Mahanta, a truck driver.

According to a complaint lodged by his mother, Khadika Mahanta, the victim was allegedly assaulted by Trilochan Mahanta and his family members following a domestic



dispute. Police said the accused had called Montu to his house, where he was attacked.

Preliminary investigation suggests that the accused, along with his wife and son, beat Montu severely, causing multiple injuries. His hands were found fractured, and there were several injury marks on his body and head.

Police also suspect that the accused attempted to dispose of the body by dragging it outside the house and trying to set it on fire. A scientific team visited the spot Saturday and carried out a detailed examination.

Police have registered a case (162/26) and detained three persons for questioning. Trilochan, who was reportedly injured, was initially admitted to Bhuban Community Health Centre and later shifted to Dhenkanal District Headquarters Hospital as his condition deteriorated.

The body was sent for post-mortem and later handed over to the family. Further investigation is underway, police said.

## MAN HACKED TO DEATH

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Dhenkikote, March 28:** A 45-year-old man was brutally hacked to death by unidentified assailants in Keonjhar district, police said Saturday.

The deceased, identified as Bhagirathi Palei of Pitaputi village under Harichandanpur police limits, had gone out Friday night but did not return home. Family members searched for him through the night but could not trace his whereabouts. His body was found lying in a pool of blood on a paddy field near his house Saturday morning by villagers.

The family later identified the body and informed Harichandanpur police. Police said the victim had sustained

severe head injuries, leading to excessive bleeding and death at the spot.

On receiving information, local police informed senior officials. Acting on directions from Keonjhar Superintendent of Police Nitin Kushalkar, a team led by SDPO Bijay Krushna Mohapatra, along with a scientific team and sniffer dogs, reached the spot and began an investigation.

A murder case (89/26) has been registered at Harichandanpur police station. Police have detained three to five persons for questioning, though no arrest has been made so far.

The body was handed over to the family after post-mortem.

The accused are absconding and efforts are on to trace them, police said.

## Man tries to immolate self over suspected love affair

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Talabasta/Banki, March 28:** A youth reportedly attempted suicide by setting himself on fire near a park of Tarini temple under Bilipada panchayat in Dampada block of Cuttack district Saturday.

The man was identified as Soumya Ranjan Barik, 28, of Talabasta panchayat under Banki police limits. He was rescued in critical condition and first taken to Banki Sub-Divisional Hospital before being shifted to SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack. A relative said his condition was stable. Police suspect the incident may be linked to a love affair.

According to eyewitnesses, Soumya arrived on a motorcycle at around 11am and met a woman from the same village near the park. After a brief conversation, an argument broke out between them. During the altercation, he

allegedly poured petrol on his body and set himself ablaze.

The woman rescued him and rushed him to Banki Sub-Divisional Hospital on her scooter. Attending physician Dr Markandeya Acharya said Soumya sustained about 36 per cent burn injuries. After preliminary treatment, he was referred to SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack as his condition was critical.

Informed, Banki IIC Dilip Kumar Bhuyan and SDPO Balakrishna Kuanr reached the spot and launched an investigation. Locals, requesting anonymity, said the two were in a relationship but belonged to different castes, which had become a barrier to their marriage.

He might have taken the extreme step after facing obstruction to their marriage, they said. Police said the exact cause of the incident will be known after further investigation.

## MLA, BEO visit door-to-door to boost school admissions

**Chhatrapur:** Chhatrapur MLA Krushna Chandra Nayak and Block Education Officer Sujit Kumar Paddy conducted a door-to-door campaign Saturday to reduce school dropouts and encourage new admissions in government schools. The campaign followed instructions from Chief Minister Mohan Charan Mahi to observe April 2 as "Khadi Chhuan Diwas," marking the start of a child's formal education. The state government has also planned a series of programmes under the "Odia Pakhya" initiative, to be observed from Utkal Diwas April 1 through the Odia New Year April 14. Nayak invited children and urged parents to enroll them in Odia-medium schools, emphasising the government's commitment to providing quality education. Paddy said children who have completed 5 years of age as of September 1 are eligible for admission to kindergarten (vatika), while those older than 6 years as of that date can enroll in Class I. Counsellors from various wards of the Chhatrapur Municipality, along with Cluster Resource Centre Coordinator Alok Kumar Sethi and other officials, participated in the campaign.

## Interstate robbers' gang uses Google Maps to target temple

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Chhatrapur, March 28:** Use of Google Maps in identifying temples to carry out theft has come to light with the arrest of two members of an interstate robbers' gang over stealing of valuables from a Shirdi Sai temple in Ganjam district, police said.

The accused were identified as Oniya Antaram of Gujarat and Uttam Singh of Rajasthan. Police arrested them and seized 6.964 kg of silver items from their possession. The accused reportedly use Google Maps to identify temples and assess the surroundings before carrying out thefts. The accused persons were involved in the recent theft at the Shirdi Sai Baba temple in Mandiapalli under Chamakhandi police limits in Ganjam district.

Police recovered stolen items including silver padukas, a throne and other articles weighing 6.964 kg, a copper-based Sai Baba idol, and a mobile phone from the accused persons. According to police, four members of the gang had initially attempted a theft at the temple March 19 but were unsuccessful. They later travelled to Puri and visited Lord Jagannath temple. After returning, they successfully carried out the theft at the Mandiapalli temple on the night of March 21.

This was stated here at a press conference addressed by SDPO Chandan Kumar Ghadai and IIC Shradhdhanjali Subuddhi Saturday. Following a complaint filed by temple committee member Baijayanti Mishra March 22, Chamakhandi police registered a case (102/26) and launched an investigation. Based on CCTV footage and local intelligence, the team apprehended the two accused at Brahmapur railway station. Two other members of the gang remain absconding, police officials said.

**National Highways Authority of India**  
(Ministry of Road Transport & Highways, Government of India)  
NHAI/15011/14/Gurapalli/2026/PIU/BAM/285 Date 29.03.2026

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

The public is hereby informed that the user fee rate shall be revised w.e.f. 01.04.2026 (00:00 hrs.) up to 31.03.2027 in respect of Toll Plaza at Gurapalli Km. 389.609 in Ganjam District for Sunakhala to Puintola section from Km. 362.000 to Km. 419.600 of NH-16 (Old NH-5) in the state of Odisha, as per table below:

Category of Vehicles	Fee for single journey	Fee for return journey within a day	Fee for monthly pass for 50 single journeys in a month	Fee for single journey for the commercial vehicles registered within the district of fee plaza
Car, Jeep, Van or Light Motor Vehicle	105	155	3490	50
Light Commercial Vehicle, Light Goods Vehicle or Mini Bus	170	255	5640	85
Bus or Truck (Two Axles)	355	530	11815	175
Three-Axle Commercial Vehicles	385	580	12885	195
HCM or EME or MAV (four to six axles)	555	835	18525	280
Oversized Vehicles (Seven or more axles)	675	1015	22555	340

The rates of monthly pass applicable for local non-commercial vehicle residing within a distance of 20 Km. from the above toll plaza for the year 2026-27 shall be Rs.350/-, subject to revision every year as per the provisions of said rules.

Annual Pass priced at Rs. 3,075/- w.e.f. 01.04.2026 for the FY 2026-2027 for non-commercial private vehicles as per NHAI HQ New Delhi letter no. 18, dated. 12.03.2026.

As FASTag is mandatory for all vehicles hence all users are requested to purchase FASTag. Ph. No. (0663) 2548966, Email: nhaipluber@gmail.com, pluberhampur@nhai.org. Sd/- Project Director

**BUILDING A NATION, NOT JUST ROADS**

**National Highways Authority of India**  
(Ministry of Road Transport & Highways, Government of India)  
NHAI/15011/15/Skyarkar/2026/PIU/BAM/284 Date 29.03.2026

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

The public is hereby informed that the user fee rate shall be revised w.e.f. 01.04.2026 (00:00 hrs.) up to 31.03.2027 in respect of Toll Plaza at Gudipada Km. 323.600 in Khordha District for Sunakhala to Bhubaneswar section from Km. 362.000 to Km. 286.010 of NH-16 (Old NH-5) in the state of Odisha, as per table below:

Category of Vehicles	Fee for single journey	Fee for return journey within a day	Fee for monthly pass for 50 single journeys in a month	Fee for single journey for the commercial vehicles registered within the district of fee plaza
Car, Jeep, Van or Light Motor Vehicle	120	175	3920	60
Light Commercial Vehicle, Light Goods Vehicle or Mini Bus	190	285	6330	95
Bus or Truck (Two Axles)	400	595	13265	200
Three-Axle Commercial Vehicles	435	650	14470	215
HCM or EME or MAV (four to six axles)	625	935	20800	310
Oversized Vehicles (Seven or more axles)	760	1140	25325	380

The rates of monthly pass applicable for local non-commercial vehicle residing within a distance of 20 Km. from the above toll plaza for the year 2026-27 shall be Rs.350/-, subject to revision every year as per the provisions of said rules.

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**BUILDING A NATION, NOT JUST ROADS**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
**NATIONAL HIGHWAY-49 (Old NH- 06) REVISED USER FEE APPLICABLE ON M/S MALAYAGIRI HIGHWAYS PRIVATE LIMITED**

Pursuant to the Gazette Notification Published in Gazette of India in the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, CG-DL-E-24052021-227122 dated 24th May 2021 and revised user fee approved by NHAI vide letter no. NHAI/11018/11/BT (TOLL)/2021/PIU/KJR/ 348 dated 28.03.2026, the public are hereby informed that the revised toll fee for use of the section from Km 414.000 to Km 491.710 (Design Chainage Km 414.982 to Km 493.300) (Binjabahal-Telebani) of National Highway 49 (Old NH- 06) in the state of Odisha will be as given below w.e.f. 00:00:01 hrs. on 01.04.2026 at Babelbadkudar Toll Plaza (Chainage 439+515 Km) near Bidebadkudar Village in Deogarh District in the state of Odisha.

PIU- Keonjhar Babelbadkudar Toll Plaza					
New User fee rate w.e.f. 01.04.2026 for FY. 2026-27					
Vehicle Category	Fee for the Single Journey	Fee for the Return Journey within a day	Fee for the Pass for 50 Single Journeys in a Month	Fee for Single Journey for the Commercial Vehicles Registered within the District of Fee Plaza	Remarks
Car/Jeep/Van or Light Motor Vehicle	155	230	5085	75	Applicable as per Fee Rules, 2008 as amended in 2011. The monthly pass for non-commercial vehicle residing within a distance of 20 km of the toll plaza is Rs.360/-
Light Commercial Vehicle, Light Goods Vehicle or Mini-Bus	245	370	8215	125	
Truck or Bus (Two Axle)	515	775	17210	260	
Three-axle Commercial Vehicles	565	845	18770	280	
HCM or EME or MAV (4 to 6 Axle)	810	1215	26985	405	
Oversized Vehicles (7 or more axles)	985	1480	32850	495	

1) The above rates are applicable for a completed length of 78.318 Km which comprises of 71.157 Km net road length without bypass and 5.274 Km bypass and 1.887 Km length of structure.  
2) The following Concessions are available at above Toll Plaza. As per Gazette Notification no. G.S.R 523 (E), dated: 24.08.2020 fee payable towards discounts as under sub-rules (2), (3) and (3A) of rule 9, shall be paid through FASTag.  
i. Return Journey within 24 hours from time of payment for all categories of vehicles (One & half times of the fee for one way journey)  
ii. 50 single journeys in a month from date of payment for all categories of vehicles (Two thirds of the amount of the fee payable for fifty single journey)  
iii. Monthly Pass at Rs. 360/- per calendar month for non-commercial vehicle residing within 20 Km from Toll Plaza.  
iv. Fee for Single Journey for the commercial vehicle (excluding vehicles plying under National Permit) registered in the district where the fee plaza falls (Discount 50%).  
3) The list of exempted vehicles is as given in the fee notification No. 950(E) dated 03.12.2010. To get Exempted FASTag for eligible vehicles, online application may be submitted on [www.exemptedfastag.nhai.org/exemptedfastag/](http://www.exemptedfastag.nhai.org/exemptedfastag/)  
4) The driver or owner or person in charge of a Mechanical Vehicle shall be liable to pay fee, for entering the overloaded vehicle on the National Highway, to the user fee collecting agency, equal to fee as per Gazette Notification Published in Gazette of India in the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, S.O. 920 (E), dated: September 25, 2018 and remove the excess load to make use of Highway.  
5) As per Gazette Notification No. G.S.R 831 (E), dated: 21.11.2014 and amendment thereon G.S.R 298, dated: 15.05.2020. user of the vehicle not fitted with "FASTag" or vehicle without valid, functional "FASTag" entering into "FASTag lane" of the Fee plazas shall pay a fee equivalent to two times of the fee applicable to that category of vehicles as per sub-rule (2) of rule 4.  
6) Vehicles without a valid or functional FASTag are charged 1.25x times the applicable toll fee when payment is made via UPI.  
1) Name and address are as under, for any enquiry and / or giving complaints / suggestions.

	Concessionaire	Independent Engineer	PIU of NHAI
Name of Representative	Sh. Sanjay Kumar Mohanty Project Head	Sh. Suwendu Das (Resident Cum Highway Engineer)	Sh. Mahesh Gami Project Director
Address	M/s. Malayagiri Highways Private Limited, At/Village- Bidebadkudar, P.O-Bamparada, Tehsil- Barkote, Dist. Deogarh, Odisha-768110. Email: Sanjay.Mohanty@malayagiri.com	M/s. MSV International inc. in Association with D.N. Consultant, Gupta Palace, Unit No.2, At/PO-Purunagarh, Deogarh, Odisha-768108 Email: msvilitebanin49@gmail.com	National Highway Authority of India, PIU - Keonjhar, Badadera, Mandua, Keonjhar, Odisha-758014. Email: pdnhai.kjr@nhai.org
Mobile No.	+91 89173 95746	+91 95565 96615	+91 6766-253295

**EAST COAST RAILWAY**  
e-Tender Notice No. EPC-CECONIBBS  
2026015, Dated : 19.03.2026

**NAME OF WORK : CONSTRUCTION OF BALLAST LESS TRACK FOR YARD R1, R2, R4 & R5 AND CONSTRUCTION OF WATER HYDRANT BETWEEN THE PLATFORM AT CUTTACK RAILWAY STATION UNDER KHURDA ROAD DIVISION OF EAST COAST RAILWAY ON EPC MODE.**

Approx. Cost of the Work : ₹ 1614.64 Lakh, EMD : ₹ 8,07,400/-, Completion Period of the Work : 365 (Three hundred sixty-five) Days.

Tender Closing Date & Time : At 1200 hrs. of 18.05.2026.

No manual offers sent by Post / Courier / Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration.

Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website : [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)

Note : The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website 15 (Fifteen) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes / corrigenda issued for this tender. The tenderers/bidders must have Class-III Digital Signature Certificate and must be registered on IREPS Portal. Only registered tenderer/bidder can participate on e-tendering.

The tenderers should read all instructions to the tenderers carefully and ensure compliance of all instructions.

Chief Administrative Officer (Con)/  
PR-327/C/25-26 Bhubaneswar

FOCUS IRAN WAR

# MOTHER OF ALL DEFEATS



**There's a possibility that the US will eventually end up where the November 2025 NSS wanted it to go. That is, it will be forced out of the Middle East, obliged to recognize the limits and obsolescence of US power**

course, food. US bases in the Persian Gulf region have been partly destroyed or rendered unusable.

As matters stand, America will never be able to return to those bases, because Iran shows no sign of bending before the bombs, nor will it run short of drones and missiles. Nor is there any chance that a few thousand Marines will turn the tide. To put it more bluntly, the US has already been expelled, once and for all, from the Gulf – though this may not yet have dawned on US officials or the public.

How can we explain the vast gap between strategy and policy? One possibility is that the US government is no longer really a government, being unable to devise, announce, implement, and execute a strategy – something that real governments are supposed to do. A second interpretation is that the government the US did have, until three months ago, has since been replaced, through a silent coup d'état, with a different regime that is using Trump as a figure head. Something like Venezuela, without the helicopters.

The third possibility is that the US will eventually end up where the November 2025 NSS wanted it to go. That is, it will be forced out of the Middle East, obliged to recognize the limits and obsolescence of US power, and made to respect the sovereignty and autonomy of other nation-states. This would not be the worst result. But it would have been much easier to arrive at it directly, without the humiliation of a brutal military defeat, the elimination of allies, and the lasting damage to the global economy.

*The writer is a professor at The University of Texas at Austin.*

©PROJECT SYNDICATE

The National Security Strategy that US President Donald Trump's administration published last November was remarkable, far-reaching, and unlike any other NSS that has appeared since George H.W. Bush "kicked the Vietnam syndrome" in the early 1990s. In the cover letter that bears his signature, Trump described the document as a "roadmap to ensure that America remains the greatest and most successful nation in human history."

Trump's NSS anchors America's greatness and success in its founding ideals. "In the Declaration of Independence, America's founders laid down a clear preference for non-interventionism in the affairs of other nations." But, alas, "our elites badly miscalculated America's willingness to shoulder forever global burdens to which the American people saw no connection to the national interest." They "allowed allies and partners to offload the cost of their defense onto the American people," and "sometimes to suck us into conflicts and controversies central to their interests but peripheral or irrelevant to our own."

Until last month, Trump's policies seemed to be working toward disengagement from the Middle East. The NSS had laid this out clearly: "As this Administration rescinds or eases restrictive energy policies and American energy production ramps up, America's historic reason for focusing on the Middle East will recede."

There were, of course, qualifications: "America will always have core interests in ensuring that Gulf energy supplies do not fall into the hands of an outright enemy, that the Strait of Hormuz remain open." But "we can

and must address this threat ideologically and militarily without decades of fruitless 'nation-building' wars."

Yet despite these stirring words, the United States on February 28 attacked Iran, a country 4.6 times the size of Germany, with more than 90 million people. The two Iraq wars may have been larger (so far), but they were against a rather puny opponent. Iran, by contrast, is acivilization-state with a deep reserve of missiles, drones, and patriotic and religious commitment. To attack it is to launch the mother of all forever wars.

Of course, one could dismiss Trump's NSS as yet another dishonest statement cooked up to mislead the American public – and many commentators did exactly that. But what purpose would this have served? If the goal was to get through the 2026 midterm elections by reaffirming Trump's commitment to the promises he made during his last campaign, it makes no sense to expose the fraud just three months after the document's release and

eight months before Americans head to the polls.

Moreover, the quality of the document suggests that those who composed it were serious people. This is no typical Trump campaign speech or press gaggle. Because such documents must be crafted and reviewed, written and rewritten, their importance lies precisely in the fact that they must overcome internal opposition before a president's signature is added. This NSS was a largely coherent articulation of a distinct and important worldview: it set out a new direction for America, renouncing the NATO-centric, global-policeman, Pax Americana rhetoric of every administration since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Yet here we are, at war again in the Middle East. It is not going according to plan, if there even was one. The Strait of Hormuz is closed to US, European, Japanese, South Korean, and Israeli shipping. World oil supplies have fallen, and there will be severe shortages of gas, fertilizer, and, in due



James K Galbraith

**IRAN SHOWS NO SIGN OF BENDING BEFORE THE BOMBS, NOR WILL IT RUN SHORT OF DRONES AND MISSILES**



Aakar Patel

**IRAN, LIKE INDIA, LIKE PAKISTAN AND INDEED LIKE AMERICA AND ISRAEL, HAS THE RIGHT TO A PEACEFUL NUCLEAR PROGRAMME THAT INCLUDES THE ENRICHMENT OF URANIUM**

Abnormality in Nature is no objection, no necessary sign of imperfection, but may well be an effort at a much greater perfection.

SRI AUROBINDO



## Selective Outrage

Consider this thought experiment. Imagine that two large missiles struck the White House. The first hit the residential quarters at a time when the family were all home. President Trump, his wife Melania, his sons Donald and Eric and their wives and their children. Imagine they were killed by the first missile, all of them. And a second missile landed just when rescuers ran to the family gathering to help and killed all of them as well.

After this, imagine Trump's cabinet dying in their homes, with their families. Foreign minister (they call it secretary of state) Rubio, Peter Hegseth the defence minister, and others who are usually seen around Trump.

And after this, think of the same people who did all this, striking an American school and killing more than 150 schoolgirls.

America has the greatest navy in history – it has 11 giant aircraft carriers, each with a dozen or more ships attached to it in support – and imagine that without a declaration of war, this same entity that killed all those people above, surreptitiously torpedoed one of the great American battleships and sank it killing most of the sailors on board.

Readers of these words will not require much imagination to consider these things, because these things all actually happened to the Iranis. And they happened at the hands of the Americans. If these words above appear jarring it is because we are conditioned to think of Americans in a different way than we are conditioned to think of Iranis. This is particularly true of the Anglophone world of which we are part but is more generally true almost anywhere.

The consistent demonisation and maligning of Iran (as was the case with Iraq, Afghanistan, Russia and so on and so forth) has led to our not being able to empathise with them as we might do for the Americans.

Now set aside our thought experiment and consider these two lists of conditions that the two sides have laid out to end the war. The Americans have 15 items on their list. These are: Iran must completely dismantle its nuclear program; End all uranium enrichment; Allow America unhindered inspections of this; Stop ballistic missile development; Scale back military capabilities; End support for groups in Palestine and Lebanon; End influence abroad; Cede control of the Hormuz Strait; Cede control over shipping lanes; Stop attacks against US allies in Gulf; De-escalate war in the region; Submit to US-led negotiations; Accept long-term monitoring and compliance conditions; Limit arms transfers; Change future behaviour

The Iranis have a list with five conditions which read: Assassinations of Irani leaders must end; Guarantee of no future war; Compensation for damage of this war; End of Israel's wider war on region; Recognition of Iran's sovereign rights over Strait of Hormuz

We can observe a few things here. There are elements missing from the Irani list though they have been spoken about by them and heard by the world. Iran, like India, like Pakistan and indeed like America and Israel, has the right to a peaceful nuclear programme that includes the enrichment of uranium. Why have they left it out? Likely because it should not be said to the world that Iran must not and cannot be treated differently from the rest.

Other than that Iran's list is defensive in nature and makes no demands on those who have waged war on it. About the American list which has been confirmed by Trump, what can be said? Only that it is offensive, maximalist and deranged. Offensive in the sense of threatening, maximalist in that it in no way offers space for negotiations. And deranged because it assumes that America and Israel are currently in the position to drive the direction of this conflict, which they are not. For this reason, unfortunately for all involved in this conflict and its effect, including us, the pain is not expected to end soon.

Now consider one final thing. If indeed what we began with had come to pass. That it had been America and Trump and his family and his ministers and American schoolgirls and sailors who had been murdered without provocation, would our prime minister and foreign minister have said and done the same things as they have since February 28? I doubt it.

When we say Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, do we actually mean that India's wisdom is to consider the world and all its people as one family? The answer is no, as India shows clearly and transparently with its actions rather than with its words. The world has a hierarchy and the family has immediate members and distant aunts and forgotten uncles and disliked cousins.

Relatives who are geographically quite close (Iran and India shared a physical border till 1947) but mentally far can be set aside and their trauma overlooked, as we have so comprehensively done in the case of Iran.

I am not arguing for a new way of approaching this crisis, which can be done elsewhere and not in this column. I am asking merely that we consider the prejudices and biases we have burdened ourselves with when we examine the world and what is happening in it today.

### WISDOM CORNER

Death is not extinguishing the light; it is only putting out the lamp because the dawn has come.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Love is not love that alters when it alteration finds.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

I am married and happy. My only wish is that nothing will change.

ALEXANDER PUSHKIN

### THIS DAY IN HISTORY

**1867:** With the British North America Act, the British colonies of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Canada were united as the Dominion of Canada, and the province of Canada was separated into Quebec and Ontario.

**1936:** Inge Lehmann upended prevailing theories about the nature of Earth's core. Seven years prior, an earthquake had struck New Zealand. Lehmann studied the waves produced by the quake, which consisted of P and S waves—the former of which pass through all states of matter, the latter of which pass only through solids.

**1951:** The Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *The King and I* debuted on Broadway; a classic of the stage, it made Yul Brynner a star and was adapted into a popular film (1956).

### SPECTRUM MIDDLE EAST

## Israel eyes strategic shift amid uncertainty

Contrary to optimistic vision of stabilisation and economic development in the Middle East contained in Trump administration's US strategic documents, Israeli political elites appear to perceive the coming years as a period of systemic uncertainty. From their perspective, Israel is at a historic turning point that justifies pursuing policies that maximize strategic goals, even at high international cost. The goal is to gain acceptance for the vision of a single state in the Palestinian territory.

Regardless of whether the Palestinians will have a broader or more limited scope of presence and self-government in West Bank, it should be assumed that by 2028 the strategy of the government of Benjamin Netanyahu will be focused on three aims.

One, the annexation process of parts of West Bank, while maintaining limited Palestinian representation in selected areas, could be seen as a strategic goal. Two, the voluntary or forced relocation of a portion of the Palestinian population from the West Bank. Three, pursuing an offensive-defensive policy towards the Gaza Strip, the nature and intensity of which will depend on the evolving

security situation in the area.

The pursuit of a lasting resolution of the status of the territories of historic Palestine should be viewed as a central element of Israel's strategic calculation.

The Gaza Strip occupies a more ambivalent position within this strategy. On one hand, its permanent integration into Israeli security system cannot be ruled out, but on the other, under favourable conditions, it could become part of a broader regional and international agreement.

Many indications suggest that Israeli strategic planning is currently being conducted within the timeframe set by Trump's second term. This period can be viewed in Jerusalem as a window of opportunity, enabling fundamental territorial and structural changes with relatively limited political costs in relations with US.

At the same time, a gradual erosion of Israel's relations with some European countries is visible. Although it maintains relatively stable relations with selected Central European countries, as well as with Germany and Austria, in the long term, the political directions of Israel and the European Union may increasingly diverge.

A key element of Israel's

strategy is relations with India, maintaining channels of communication with Russia, especially in context of Syria and Moscow's relations with Tehran, and deepening cooperation with Persian Gulf states are gaining importance.

From Israel's perspective, the most desirable scenario would be the creation of a regional security system focused on containing Iran, functioning independently of a resolution to the Palestinian issue.

The second dimension of this strategy remains the continuation and expansion of the Abrahamic Agreements, albeit within a modified political logic. Until now, the normalization process has been characterized by relations between formally equal partners. In the current geopolitical situation, this dynamic may change. Arab states may find themselves under increasing psychological pressure stemming from the belief that remaining outside the system of regional agreements with Israel will have tangible consequences for their security. From a different perspective, regional states may seek to deepen strategic relations, including in military and defense dimensions, with powers such as China and India.

For Israel, the expansion of the Abrahamic Accords remains a key strategic objective in the process of building a new security architecture. For Saudi Arabia, the Palestinian issue remains an obstacle to normalizing relations. This very area may become the subject of intensified diplomatic activity. From Israeli perspective, the new security structure is based on two parallel processes: changing the status of West Bank and normalizing relations with Riyadh. With its growing military superiority, Israel may seek to exert political pressure on Saudi leadership to marginalize the Palestinian issue or partially exclude it from the normalization process.

The reduction of American security guarantees in Middle East, combined with growth of Israel's regional military advantage, may induce Saudi Arabia to fundamentally redefine its policy towards the Palestinian issue and to revise its current support for the two-state concept. Solution, and Israel itself may take additional military and diplomatic initiatives to accelerate the process.

*The writer is an expert, Centre for International Relations, Poland*

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Jerzy Wójcik

**FROM ISRAEL'S PERSPECTIVE, THE MOST DESIRABLE SCENARIO WOULD BE THE CREATION OF A REGIONAL SECURITY SYSTEM**

### Crude humour

Sir, Amid the intensifying Israel-US-Iran conflict, remarks attributed to Donald Trump—such as suggesting renaming the Strait of Hormuz after himself, dismissing allied military assets as "toys," and making exaggerated claims about oil shipments sent as "gestures"—stand in stark contrast to the heavy casualties across Iran, Israel and Lebanon. These lighter or offbeat remarks, often delivered alongside serious policy announcements, suggest a leadership style under strain—using humour, bravado, or hyperbole to dominate narratives amid escalating war pressures, economic shocks, and military uncertainty. Globally, such statements draw mixed reactions: allies view them as undermining gravity and coordination, while adversaries exploit them for propaganda, reinforcing concerns about consistency and credibility of US leadership during a widening and volatile conflict.

RS Narula, PATIALA

### SocMed impact

Sir, A citizen journalist with experience, believes the rise of digital platforms has fundamentally changed how information is reported and consumed. It has made news faster and more digital, with people relying on online platforms rather than face-to-face interaction. Visuals, short posts, and instant updates now play a key role. Drawing from experience, we observe and noted how social media enables real-time reporting of everyday issues. The current issues examples such as onion shortages and rising gas prices, where updates shared online quickly gained attention. We also felt and highlighted how citizen reporting can lead to immediate outcomes. A damaged road near your neighbourhood in that was repaired the same day after the report gained visibility online. The follow-up and public attention are critical in resolving such issues. While we do not see social media as a replacement for journalism, it is viewed that an effective tool to support social causes and improve civic life overnight. Social media enables real-time issue reporting by acting as a high-velocity, user-generated, and publicly accessible data stream. Live broadcasting and several other social media monitoring tools allow organizations and the public to detect crises, breaking news, or service disruptions within minutes.

Nikhil Akhilesh Krishnan, NAVI MUMBAI

## Letters

### TO THE EDITOR

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

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

# Two months on, Pawar plane crash sparks fresh political heat

AGENCIES

**Mumbai, March 28:** Two months after the death of former Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar in a plane crash near Baramati, leaders of the NCP-SP and members of the late NCP leader's family, Saturday, paid their tribute, even as demands for a detailed probe continued to stir political tensions.

NCP-SP working president Supriya Sule and party MLA Rohit Pawar shared messages on social media platform X, reflecting on the loss of the veteran NCP leader.

Sule, a cousin of Ajit Pawar, on X said, "It has been two months since our beloved Ajit Dada, the late Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister, left us. It still feels as though Dada is right here among us. We miss you, Dada."

Rohit Pawar, Ajit Pawar's nephew, said in an X post, "Two months of memories... this love and struggle will continue until the end," and used the hashtag #JusticeForAjitDada, underlining his call for a deeper investigation into the air crash.

Maharashtra NCP Chief Sunil Tatkare also released a video message, recalling his association with Ajit Pawar and paying homage to the late leader.

Ajit Pawar's son, Jay Pawar, visited his memorial at Vidya Pratishthan in Baramati and offered his tributes.

The aftermath of the air



crash has been marked by political friction, with Rohit Pawar repeatedly alleging 'foul play' in the incident.

Sule has echoed these concerns and recently raised the issue in the Lok Sabha.

Responding to the allegations in the State Assembly, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said, "My intensity regarding this matter may be different from yours, but it is not so blunt that we would let anyone go if a conspiracy was hatched in Ajit Dada's case. We will dig out the truth, even if it means 'unearthing the corpse' (a metaphor for a relentless investigation). I support your efforts, but do not assume that others feel the gravity of this loss any less than you do."

A jurisdictional dispute has also emerged over the investigation.

Fadnavis criticised the filing of an FIR in Karnataka, calling

it 'illegal'.

"Rohit Pawar met Lok Sabha Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi, who likely advised filing an FIR in Karnataka," the Maharashtra CM said.

"Karnataka has no jurisdiction to file a 'Zero FIR' in this matter. A Zero FIR is only permissible when the victim is unable to file one; Karnataka simply does not have the legal standing in this case," Fadnavis added.

He said that the Maharashtra government is following due process and criticised the Opposition for seeking legal recourse outside the state.

In the Lok Sabha Friday, Sule demanded a time-bound inquiry into the crash during Question Hour.

"If a late Deputy Chief Minister of a state cannot get justice, what hope is there for others?" she asked, criticising the delay in registering a formal FIR.

## BMC to shut musical patch on Coastal Road at night

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, March 28:** More than a month after introducing a 'musical road patch' on Coastal Road, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation has decided to shut it during nighttime due to complaints from local residents.

"We have decided to curtail the time...music will play only from 6am to 10pm," said a BMC official.

The patch, around 500 metres ahead on the first lane adjoining the divider after the exit for the Worli-bound underground tunnel, consists of special strips. When vehicles travel over the grooves at 70 to 80 kmph, friction-generated sound waves produce the melody of 'Jai Ho' from the film 'Slumdog Millionaire' which can be clearly heard inside the vehicle.

The novel feature was inaugurated by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde February 11, but soon complaints began to pour in from local residents who said the frequent playing of music was disturbing their sleep.

# NGT slaps notice to Assam over illegal water boring

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Guwahati, March 28:** The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has issued notice to the Assam government and various state agencies over alleged illegal groundwater boring in parts of Guwahati.

The NGT's Eastern Zone Bench admitted an application, which highlighted serious concerns over alleged illegal groundwater extraction in the Barshapara area of the capital city of Assam, filed by Milan Kanti Das and others.

The Bench comprising Justice Dinesh Kumar Singh and Expert Member Ishwar Singh Monday issued notices to all respondents, directing them to respond within four weeks.

The Tribunal fixed May 8 as the next date of hearing.

The case has made the Assam government as respondent, represented by the Special Chief Secretary (PHED), along with the Executive Engineer (PHED), District Commissioner of Kamrup Metropolitan, Central Ground Water Board and the Water Supply Management



Committee of Barshapara No 1.

During the hearing, the applicants submitted that as per information obtained under the Right to Information Act from the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB), no NOC has been issued for groundwater extraction in the Barshapara area.

It has been alleged that the Barshapara No 1 Water Supply Scheme Management Committee is operating multiple borewells without authorisation and extracting groundwater for extended hours daily.

The area has been categorised as a semi-critical ground-

water zone, and such excessive extraction has reportedly led to a sharp decline in groundwater levels, causing water scarcity for local residents, the petition claimed.

The applicants also alleged that groundwater is being commercially supplied, deviating from the intended purpose of providing drinking water, and that no effective regulatory action has been taken so far.

Taking note of these submissions, the Tribunal observed that the matter involves a substantial question relating to the environment and admitted the application.

# Mass cleanliness drive to make Aizawl 'garbage-free'



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Aizawl, March 28:** A mass cleanliness drive was held across Aizawl Saturday to make the Mizoram capital one of the cleanest cities in the country.

The initiative, organised by the Coordination Committee for Aizawl City Cleanliness, was a joint effort of the state Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation (UD&PA) Department, Aizawl Smart City Ltd, Aizawl Municipal Corporation and the Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA).

UD&PA Secretary Lalmasawa Pachuau flagged off the drive in front of Vanapa Hall.

Addressing the gathering, Pachuau stressed that maintaining cleanliness is an important aspect of patriotism and urged people to take collective responsibility for preserving and maintaining their surroundings.

He also described cleanliness as an economic asset that en-

hances the state's appeal and serves as a major attraction for tourists.

Officials said the campaign witnessed wide participation from government departments and various YMA branches despite adverse weather conditions that affected activities in some localities.

As part of the drive, organisers identified 15 high-priority garbage 'black spots' marked by heavy waste accumulation. YMA branches located near these sites carried out special community cleaning activities.

Several local YMA units also undertook cleanliness drives in their respective neighbourhoods on Saturday, while some branches conducted similar activities on Friday, officials said.

The campaign forms a key component of the Comprehensive Plan for Municipal Solid Waste Management in Aizawl, which aims to transform the state capital into a garbage-free city and one of the cleanest urban centres in the country, they said.

## Naga Assembly refers FNTA Bill back to govt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kohima, March 28:** The Nagaland Assembly recently referred the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA) Bill back to the state government for further examination following fresh concerns raised by MLAs and pending inputs from the Centre. The Bill, introduced Thursday by Deputy Chief Minister Yanthungo Patton, was listed for discussion and passage Friday.

However, before it could be taken up, Speaker Sharin-gain Longkumer informed the House of a communication received from Parliamentary Affairs Minister KG Kenye.

Kenye told the House that a letter from the Eastern Nagaland Legislators Union (ENLU) highlighted certain provisions missing in the Bill when compared to the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) signed on February 5, in New Delhi, between the Centre, the state government and the Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation (ENPO).

He said the discrepancies and 'contentious issues' necessitated reconsideration, suggesting that the Bill should not be enacted in the current session but be referred back to the government for further consideration.

CM Neiphiu Rio said the government was committed to equitable and inclusive development of the six eastern districts, Tuensang, Mon, Longleng, Kiphire, Noklak and Shamator.



A man carries empty LPG cylinders on a sunny afternoon, amid disruptions in LPG supplies due to the ongoing West Asia war, at Malad, in Mumbai, Maharashtra, Saturday

# Infra boost for 143 border villages in Manipur: CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Imphal, March 28:** Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh Saturday said that infrastructure, connectivity and service delivery will be improved in 143 border villages in the state under the Centre's Vibrant Villages Programme-II.

Singh was addressing a gathering during a day-long state-level workshop here on the scheme.

The CM said the Vibrant Vil-

lages Programme-II is a central initiative for the development of villages along international borders.

He said the programme aims to improve the infrastructure, livelihood opportunities, and basic services in border areas.

The chief minister said Manipur shares an international boundary with Myanmar, and stressed the need to prioritise development in the border areas. He expressed gratitude to Union Home Minister

Amit Shah for including five districts - Tengnoupal, Kamjong, Ukhrul, Chandel and Churachandpur - under the programme.

Singh said 143 villages in the state have been identified for implementation of the initiative, under which the habitations will get improved infrastructure, better connectivity, and enhanced service delivery.

He further stressed the need for timely and coordinated implementation, while highlight-

ing the role of the Planning Department, district administrations, and security forces in this regard.

He said the programme must benefit all sections of society.

The CM expressed hope that the workshop would help improve coordination and delivery on the ground.

The workshop focused on the development of border villages and improving coordination among departments and agencies.

# Butterfly species named after Zubeen Garg

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Itanagar, Marv 28:** A newly identified butterfly species discovered in Arunachal Pradesh has been named after Assamese music icon Zubeen Garg, highlighting both the region's rich biodiversity and the enduring cultural legacy of the celebrated singer. The species, scientifically classified as *Euthalia (Limbusa) zubeengargi*, was recorded from the Basar region of Leparada district in the northeastern state recently, officials said.

The discovery was made by butterfly enthusiast and policeman Roshan Upadhaya, along with researcher Kalash Sadasivan, during field studies in the forested landscapes of Basar.

The researchers later confirmed the species as previ-

ously undocumented and proposed the common name 'Basar Duke', linking it to the place of its discovery. The finding is being seen as both a scientific milestone and a tribute to the cultural influence of the late singer across Northeast India.

According to officials, the butterfly appears to be extremely rare. Despite extensive field surveys, only two individuals of the species were recorded, raising questions about whether the species is naturally scarce or simply difficult to observe within dense forest habitats.

The species inhabits semi-evergreen forest ecosystems at elevations of around 600-700 metres, where it is usually found in shaded understories. Observations indicate that the butterfly moves slowly through foliage and feeds primarily on tree sap while also drawing



minerals from moist surfaces in the forest. Morphologically, the butterfly is distinguished by its olive-brown wings marked with white patterns and a faint iridescent sheen.

Detailed examination of wing patterns and the unique anatomical characteristics of

the male specimens helped researchers confirm that it represents a distinct species within the *Euthalia* genus.

Zubeen Garg, after whom the species has been named, was one of Northeast India's most influential musical figures. The celebrated Assamese singer

died in Singapore on September 19 last year.

The naming of the butterfly after Garg reflects his deep cultural impact across the region.

Researchers said the gesture was intended to honour a figure whose music and artistic contributions helped shape the identity of Assam and the wider Northeast.

Interestingly, the butterfly discovery comes days after another newly identified plant species was also named in Garg's honour, underlining the growing trend of recognising regional icons in scientific nomenclature.

Scientists say such gestures not only celebrate cultural figures but also help draw public attention to the extraordinary biodiversity of the Eastern Himalayan region and the need for its conservation.

# 2 more cases registered against Kharat

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Nashik (Maharashtra), March 28:** Two more cases have been registered against self-styled godman Ashok Kharat, police said Saturday, adding that the Special Investigation Team which conducting a probe against him has received more than 100 complaints over phone.

With this, a total of ten FIRs, eight for alleged sexual assault or exploitation and two for cheating, have been registered against Kharat at Sarkarwada police station in the city.

Kharat, who was visited by several prominent Maharashtra politicians over the years, was arrested on March 18 after a woman alleged that he had repeatedly raped her for three years.

Friday, another FIR was registered against him on a complaint filed by a woman, officials said.

The woman met Kharat for guidance as her relations with the husband were strained and the family was having financial troubles, she told police.

Kharat allegedly told her that she would have to do his every bidding if she wanted a solution to her problems, and sexually exploited her between March 2022 to 2024. The second FIR registered Friday was based on a cheating complaint filed by Rajendra Bhagwat, a cloth merchant from Nevasa. He wanted his business to do well and met Kharat on a relative's advice, Bhagwat told police.

Kharat allegedly took a gold ring and a few gemstones from him and gave him a ring and a gemstone in return, asking him to wear them.

As per Bhagwat, he paid ₹2.62 lakh for this, but later realised that the ring and gemstone given by Kharat were fake, and he had been duped.



The type of administration run in Assam, the corruption going on here, no other state in the country has at such level. The entire ministry is involved. Some BJP leaders and even family members are involved in it

DK SHIVAKUMAR | DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER, KARNATAKA

NMC LAUNCHES ONLINE FEEDBACK SYSTEM

The National Medical Commission (NMC) has for the first time launched an online feedback system for undergraduate medical students to anonymously register complaints or evaluate their colleges' infrastructure and faculty



of the day quote

We will also try to bring policies similar to those on pollution, where polluting industries have to pay for carbon credits, we will try to introduce laws so AI firms can be taxed for people credits



A REVANTH REDDY | CHIEF MINISTER, TELANGANA

From a national perspective, also, the entire country is looking at Kerala right now. It's a very literate state, and there is significant anti-incumbency against the LDF government. People want to see them out



PAWAN KHERA | AICC LEADER

In view of the prevailing situation in West Asia, a review meeting was held today at the Chief Minister's residence with senior state officials, Commissioners, Inspectors General (IGs), and District Collectors to assess the availability and supply mechanisms of petroleum products, LPG, and essential commodities



VISHNU DEO SAI | CHIEF MINISTER, CHHATTISGARH

SHORT TAKES

'Scolded' by teacher, Class-5 girl ends life

Kannauj (UP): A fifth standard student allegedly committed suicide Saturday after being "reprimanded" by her teacher, prompting her family members to lay siege to the school with the body, police said. The incident was reported from a school in the Saurikh police station area of Kannauj district, where Nidhi (10), a resident of Rampur, allegedly hanged herself at her home. Her younger sister, Neha (3), also studies in the same school, police said. Saturday, Nidhi's teacher, Mridula Tripathi, reportedly reprimanded her for her personal hygiene and untidy clothes, asking her to leave the classroom. Nidhi, who was seen sobbing uncontrollably, remained silent even after returning home, though she did not mention the incident to anyone in the house. According to police, Nidhi later went inside a room and hanged herself from the ceiling fan with a rope. Her younger sister, Neha, discovered Nidhi's body and screamed in horror.

Massive fire at 'yagna' venue

Ayodhya: A massive fire broke out at the venue of a 'yagya' organised by Uttar Pradesh Transport Minister Dayashankar Singh in Ayodhya Saturday, police said. No casualties were reported in the incident, they said. Local who participated in the rituals said the fire started when coconuts offered during the yagya -- a ritual in which ghee, herbs and other offerings are placed in a consecrated fire -- suddenly caught fire. According to the police, the Shri Lakshminarayan Mahayagya was organised by Singh on the occasion of Ram Navami. The yagyashala was located about 800 metres from the Ram temple.

Property of LeT terrorist attached

Jammu: Jammu and Kashmir police Saturday attached the immovable property of a terrorist associate linked with Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) outfit in Reasi district, an official said. The attachment proceedings under Section 25 of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) against the accused, Mohd Qasim, were part of the drive to dismantle the terror eco-system, a police spokesman said.

Shah's 'chargesheet' against TMC govt



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 28: Union Home Minister Amit Shah Saturday sharpened the BJP's campaign pitch for the West Bengal Assembly polls, releasing a "chargesheet" against the TMC government and framing the election as a battle not merely for Bengal, but for the country's security.

Launching a broadside against the Mamata Banerjee government at a press conference here, Shah alleged that after 15 years of the TMC rule, West Bengal had become the country's "principal corridor" for infiltration due to "TMC's appeasement politics, corruption and political violence".

In a state where Banerjee, the TMC supremo, has often capitalised her image of a besieged streetfighter, Shah sought to puncture that narrative first. "Mamata Didi has always played the politics of the victim card. Sometimes she talks about her injury, sometimes she abuses the Election Commission. But the people of Bengal now understand Mamata Didi's victim-card politics very well," he said.

Cong expels Palakkad councillor over sexual assault complaint

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Palakkad (Kerala), March 28: The Congress Saturday expelled a councillor of the Palakkad Municipality from the party following a sexual assault complaint against him.

Palakkad District Congress Committee (DCC) president A Thankappan said that Prashob C Valsan, a councillor from the 24th division, was removed from the party after reports of the incident surfaced.

"We came to know about the incident through media reports. Soon after, we expelled him from the party," Thankappan told reporters.

On his continuation as a councillor, Thankappan said the party has no authority to act on that front. "He may resign from the councillor post on moral grounds, but that is his decision. The party is also conducting an internal inquiry. We did not receive any formal complaint, but still decided to remove him," he said.

The DCC president also asserted that the incident would

not affect the party's prospects in the upcoming elections, stating that Prashob was not a prominent leader. Police registered a case Saturday after recording the woman's statement. The case was registered at Palakkad South Police Station under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. Police said Valsan is currently absconding, and efforts are underway to trace him. The woman, who belongs to a Scheduled Tribe community, has alleged that the councillor sexually assaulted her multiple times on the promise of arranging a stable job and later pressured her to terminate the pregnancy. She has lodged complaints with the police and CM Pinarayi Vijayan. The BJP and the ruling LDF have criticised the Congress over the issue, alleging that Prashob is a close aide of sitting MLA Rahul Mamkootathil, who they claim has faced sexual assault cases and was arrested earlier.

Mamata Didi has always played the politics of the victim card. Sometimes she talks about her injury, sometimes she abuses the Election Commission. But the people of Bengal now understand Mamata Didi's victim-card politics very well

AMIT SHAH | UNION HOME MINISTER

Veteran Punjab Cong leader Lal Singh dies



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Patiala, March 28: Veteran Congress leader and former Punjab Minister Lal Singh passed away Saturday, according to family sources.

Known as the "Bhishma Pitamah" of the Punjab Congress, the 84-year-old leader breathed his last at a private hospital in Mohali, they said.

He complained of breathing difficulties at his Chandigarh residence earlier in the day and was rushed to a hospital, where he died, they said.

A towering figure in Punjab politics, his career spanned nearly five decades. In the 1990s, he emerged as a powerful and influential minister in the Cabinet of the then Chief Minister Beant Singh, playing a key role in governance during a transformative period in the state's history.

He later served as finance minister under the Congress government headed by Amrinder Singh between 2002 and 2007. A six-term MLA, Lal Singh was first elected in 1977 from Dakala -- which he represented five times -- and later won from Sanour in 2012. He also served as president of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee (PPCC).

He is survived by his son, former Samana MLA Kaka Rajinder Singh, and daughter Rupinder Kaur. Kaka Rajinder Singh accompanied his father's mortal remains to Patiala.

Modi speaks to Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia

In his telephonic conversation with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, the Prime Minister also reiterated India's condemnation of attacks on regional energy infrastructure



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 28: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Saturday spoke to Crown Prince and PM of Saudi Arabia, Prince Mohammed bin Salman, discussed with him the ongoing conflict in West Asia and agreed on the need to ensure freedom of navigation.

In his telephonic conversation with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, the Prime Minister also reiterated India's condemnation of attacks on regional energy infrastructure.

"Spoke with Crown Prince and PM of Saudi Arabia, HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman and discussed the ongoing conflict in West Asia," he said in a post on X. Modi said both leaders agreed on the need to ensure freedom of navigation and keep shipping lines open and secure.

"Thanked him for his continued support for the welfare of the Indian community in Saudi

Arabia," he said.

This was the second telephonic conversation between the prime minister and the crown prince of Saudi Arabia since the West Asia conflict started February 28.

While the US and Israel attacked Iran, the Persian nation targeted its neighbours and Israel.

Iran controls the Strait of Hormuz, a key shipping route through which the world's 20% of energy is transported. Since the conflict, very few ships are allowed by Iran to cross it.

Modi has also spoken to several world leaders since the conflict started and they include those from the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Iran, France, Israel and Malaysia.

US President Donald Trump has also spoken to Modi following which the Prime Minister said he "had a useful exchange of views on the situation in West Asia".



A child waves as Indian Air Force's (IAF) Surya Kiran Aerobatic Team (SKAT) performs manoeuvres during an air show, near Sukhna Lake in Chandigarh, Saturday

Maldives aims to attract more Indian tourists

The Island Plans to expand flight services from India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thiruvananthapuram, March 28: Maldivian, the national carrier of the Maldives, is planning to expand its operations in India as part of its aim to attract around 2 lakh Indian tourists, the airline said Saturday.

Following a brief strain in diplomatic ties with India after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Lakshadweep, the Maldives is once again promoting its tourist destinations to Indian travellers.

"We never had any issues with India. In fact, the number of Indian tourists visiting the Maldives has gone up. India is

also our biggest trade partner," Ibrahim Iyas, Managing Director of Maldivian, told reporters here.

The airline interacted with the media while celebrating 18 years of service in India. Maldivian operates five flights a week from Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram.

The airline is aiming to increase flights from India to the Maldives and is exploring options to start services from other parts of the country, especially southern states. Apart from Maldivian, Indian carriers also operate flights to the Maldives from various airports across India.

"Last year, we had over 1.3 lakh Indian tourists visiting the Maldives. Moreover, we have more than 1 lakh Indians as permanent residents in the Maldives. So our airline has mainly been operating as an



The Maldives has a tourism-driven economy, with the industry contributing about 60 per cent to its GDP

The country is also exploring options to increase trade with India, as it depends on India for most of its imports

essential service," Iyas said.

He added that several private jets from India, mostly from Mumbai, also fly to the Maldives, bringing in tourists.

Ahmed Shafeeu, Chairman of Island Aviation Services Ltd, which operates Maldivian, said the airline has been engaging with tour operators and govern-

ment departments to grow the tourism segment.

"This is not just for tourism to the Maldives but also to promote India as a tourism destination for Maldivian travellers," he said.

Shafeeu, who is also the Maldives' Minister for Higher Education, said many people in India consider the Maldives an expensive destination, but more affordable options are available.

"Our guesthouse tourism has grown significantly over the years. From zero guesthouses, we now have over 900 offering budget-friendly stays on the islands. Those seeking luxury resort stays can opt for them, and we also offer packages combining resort and guesthouse stays for a varied experience," he said. According to Mohammed Saffah, General Manager (Commercial International) at

Maldivian, the airline is also looking to expand its traveller base to include more tourists from India.

"From being an essential service catering to the regular needs of people in the Maldives and India, we are now aiming to carry more tourists in both directions," Saffah said.

He said talks are underway with other airports in the country to begin operations to the Maldives.

"We are unable to confirm anything at this time," he added.

He noted that with the largest domestic network in the Maldives, Maldivian provides seamless connections for travellers arriving from India to destinations across the country, linking them to resort islands, local communities, business hubs, and essential services.



Do you hear about any incident of rioting or clash during Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Jagaddhatri Puja, Eid, Chhat Puja, Christmas or when processions are taken out by the Jain community?

ABHISHEK BANERJEE | SENIOR TRINAMOL CONGRESS LEADER

## RAHUL TO HOLD ROADSHOWS IN PATHANAMTHITTA MONDAY

Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi is set to hit the campaign trail in Kerala with two roadshows in Pathanamthitta district Monday, giving fresh momentum to the United Democratic Front's (UDF) election push. Pathanamthitta district has five Assembly constituencies, and in the 2021 Assembly polls, the Congress-led UDF drew a blank



### of the day quote

We gave jobs to 1.65 lakh youths. Can anyone name a Congress CM giving one lakh jobs without paying anything? If anyone can name one, I will leave politics. I challenge Gaurav Gogoi and Binanda Saikia to tell during whose tenure such a huge number of youths got jobs in Assam

HIMANTA BISWA SARMA | CHIEF MINISTER, ASSAM

After assuming the office of the Vice President, I am deeply moved to once again visit Ulihatu, the sacred birthplace of Bhagwan Birsa Munda. I pay my deepest respects to this great freedom fighter, whose life and sacrifice continue to inspire generations

CP RADHAKRISHNAN | VICE PRESIDENT

For India to become 'saarejahaan se achha' (the best in the world), we need to work hard for that

RAJENDRA VISHWANATH ARLEKAR | GOVERNOR, KERALA

## POST OF THE DAY

**IMPORTANT:** Yet another high profile corruption case from UPA era falls flat. 'Not an iota of evidence, CBI miserably failed': Delhi court acquits all accused in 2012 Bander Coal block case. Please think of HC Gupta, former coal secretary, widely acknowledged in IAS circles as a man of integrity, whose reputation was destroyed by alleged coal scam. What does it say about CBI's track record in such cases?

@sardesaiarajdeep

### SHORT TAKES

#### 3 Naxalites surrender in Chhattisgarh's Kanker

**Kanker:** Three Naxalites including a woman surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district Saturday, police officials said. The surrendered cadres were identified as Radhika Kunjam, Sandip Kadiyam and Rainu Padda. Kunjam and Kadiyam were 'Area Committee Members' of the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist), said Superintendent of Police Nikhil Rakhecha. They also handed over two Self-Loading Rifles (SLR) and .303 rifle to the police, he said. Based on the information they provided, efforts were underway to establish contact with other active Naxalite cadres in the region and encourage them to give up violence and join the mainstream, the SP added.

#### Drugs worth ₹25cr seized in Patna

**Patna:** Two persons were arrested in Patna with drugs worth around ₹25 crore, police said Saturday. The arrests were made during a raid conducted at an apartment in the Alamganj police station area, they said. The accused were identified as Jitendra Kumar of Samastipur district and Nitish Kumar of Jehanabad. Police said Jitendra was arrested around five years ago with about 9 kg of smack and had spent several months in jail in that case. SSP Kartikeya Sharma told reporters that the raid at the Alamganj flat led to the seizure of 1.68 kg of brown sugar, along with cash.

# Trump's Iran war pushes India to rekindle old friendship with Russia

REUTERS

**New Delhi, March 28:** As India's diplomats negotiated an accord that would ease punitive US tariffs on the South Asian country's exports in January, New Delhi slashed its purchases of Russian crude oil in a move that was widely seen as a painful concession to President Donald Trump.

Just two months later, however, Delhi and Moscow are deepening their energy cooperation, with both sides agreeing to prepare for Russia to resume direct sales of liquefied natural gas for the first time since the start of the Ukraine war, according to two people familiar with the matter. If India decides to pursue the deal, which risks violating Western sanctions, negotiations could be concluded in weeks, one of the people said.

Details of the talks, which come amid skyrocketing energy prices triggered by the US-Israeli attack on Iran, have not been previously reported. The "verbal agreement" to negotiate an LNG deal was reached during a March 19 meeting between Russian Deputy Energy Minister Pavel Sorokin and Indian Petroleum and Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri in Delhi, the people said.

The two officials also agreed to further increase crude oil sales to India, which could double from January's levels to at least 40% of India's total imports in about a month, three people familiar with their deliberations said.

India became a major buyer of Russian crude that was heavily discounted after the invasion of Ukraine, which became a point of contention with the Trump



administration. The world's third-biggest oil importer and consumer purchased nearly \$44 billion of crude from Moscow last year, playing a vital role in keeping the Kremlin's wartime economy alive.

Delhi has separately told its energy importers to get ready to resume purchases of Russian LNG, one of the people said. India has already approached Washington about

a possible sanctions waiver, according to the source and a second person familiar with the request.

Indian authorities have also said they are purchasing cargoes of Russian liquefied petroleum gas, which is largely used for cooking and isn't under sanctions.

**WARMING TIES** Russia, which has main-

- India and Russia discuss resuming LNG trade amid Gulf supply disruptions, sources say
- New Delhi has approached Washington for potential sanctions waiver
- India's Russian crude imports could also soon double to 40% of its total supply
- US had spent years pressuring India to curtail Russian energy purchases

tained friendly ties with India since the Cold War, is pressing its advantage.

Any new LNG accord would likely contain less favourable terms for India as compared to the 20-year supply deal India's state-owned GAIL agreed with Russia's Gazprom in 2012, according to one of the sources. "It is now a seller's market," the person said.

Executives at Russian state

power grid company Rosseti, who were in Delhi this month for an industry summit, also proposed working with their Indian counterparts on transmission facilities, largely in mountainous and remote areas of the country, one of the sources said.

If an agreement is reached, it would mark Moscow's first foray into India's power transmission sector.

Chief Kremlin diplomat Sergei Lavrov told a conference on Indo-Russian relations this week that 96% of trade between the two countries is now conducted in rupees and roubles.

"The time-tested Russian-Indian friendship serves as an example of how interstate relations should and can be built - based on equality, mutual trust and respect, and consideration of each other's interests," he said.

# DMK finalises seat-sharing

## Stalin releases names of 164 party candidates

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Chennai, March 28:** The ruling DMK Saturday named its candidates for 164 constituencies for the April 23 Assembly polls, renominating Chief Minister MK Stalin and his son and deputy Udhayanidhi from their existing city seats and setting up a direct fight with archrival AIADMK in a number of constituencies.

Winding up days of seat-sharing talks with allies, including Congress and Left, the DMK identified the constituencies for them. Minutes later, at a press conference at DMK headquarters Anna Arivalayam, Stalin released the names of 164 candidates of his party.

Stalin denied any "delay" in seat-sharing parleys, saying the "patient discussions" have ensured everybody is satisfied. Also, he was making efforts to ensure unity in the bloc.

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami has been mocking the DMK, claiming it suffered from delay in seat-sharing talks, claiming that his party has taken the lead and got on to the cam-



campaign mode by finalising everything. Besides DMK's 164 seats, 11 alliance party candidates, including those from Vaiko-led MDMK, will contest on the ruling party's Rising Sun symbol, effectively making it 175 constituencies for the party.

Election to 234 Assembly seats in the state will be held April 23.

Stalin retained all but three of his 33 cabinet colleagues and some senior MLAs Saturday. He fielded over 60 persons for their maiden electoral battle, even as the candidates' composition included doctors, engineers and Phd holders. Besides, 18 women are in fray on behalf of the ruling party.

Stalin, the ruling DMK president, said he would contest once again from Kolathur.

Udhayanidhi is seeking re-election from Chepauk-Triplicane, also in the city.

Ministers Durai Murugan (DMK general secretary), KN Nehru, Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi, Thangam Thennarasu, Ma Subramanian, and EV Velu have been retained.

Interestingly, expelled AIADMK leader O Panneerselvam, who recently joined DMK, has been fielded from Bodinayakkanur, the seat he represented in the outgoing Assembly. He had resigned as MLA after joining DMK.

Two of Panneerselvam's colleagues, Paul Manoj Pandian and R Vaithilingam, who had joined the DMK earlier, have also been given poll tickets.

Another interesting move is shifting former Electricity minister V Senthil Balaji from his stronghold Karur to

# 2 India-bound LPG tankers crossing Strait of Hormuz



India is gradually moving its stranded LPG cargoes out from the strait, with four LPG tankers moved so far - Shivalik, Nanda Devi, Pine Gas, and Jag Vasant

REUTERS

**New Delhi, March 28:** Two liquefied petroleum gas tankers, BW Elm and BW Tyr, are crossing the Strait of Hormuz bound for India, according to ship tracking data from LSEG and Kpler.

The US-Israeli war against Iran has all but halted shipping through the strait, but Iran said this week that "non-hostile vessels" may transit the waterway if they coordinate with Iranian authorities. The two India-flagged vessels have crossed the Gulf area and are in the eastern Strait of

Hormuz, the data showed. India is gradually moving its stranded LPG cargoes out from the strait, with four LPG tankers moved so far - Shivalik, Nanda Devi, Pine Gas, and Jag Vasant.

As of Friday, 20 Indian-flagged ships including five LPG carriers were stranded in the Gulf, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, special secretary in the federal shipping ministry, said. LPG carriers Jag Vikram, Green Asha and Green Sanvi are still in the western Strait of Hormuz, LSEG data show.

India, the world's second-largest LPG importer, is battling its worst gas crisis in decades, with the government cutting supplies for industries to shield households from any shortage of cooking gas. The country consumed 33.15 million metric tons of LPG, or cooking gas, last year, with imports accounting for about 60% of demand. About 90% of those imports came from the Middle East.

# PM lacks courage to oppose Israel's actions in West Bank: Congress

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 28:** The Congress Saturday claimed that Israel is moving ahead on its vision of a "Greater Israel" under the cover of the West Asia war, finishing off any hope for a Palestinian state, and slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for not raising his voice against its actions in the West Bank.

Congress general secretary in charge of communications Jairam Ramesh said it has been 28 days since the US-Israeli aerial bombings of Iran and Iran's counter-offensive began.

"In the past four weeks, while the world's gaze has been on the Strait of Hormuz and energy infrastructure in the Gulf countries, Israel has (i) continued its brutalities on the people of Gaza; (ii) begun operations to create a large buffer zone for itself in southern Lebanon; and (iii) taken decisive steps to convert its annexation of the West Bank to firm occupation," Ramesh said on X.

The current West Asia war is providing cover for Israel to move ahead on its vision of Greater Israel and also finishing off any hope for a Palestinian state, he said.

"The US-Israeli bombardment of Iran began just two days after Mr Modi left Israel. What is not realised is that just a few days



**The Congress had strongly criticised Prime Minister Modi's visit to Israel last month, despite that country "mercilessly" continuing attacks on civilians in Gaza**

before he arrived there, the Israeli cabinet had approved land registration in roughly half of the occupied West Bank for the first time since 1967," Ramesh said.

"This would lead to the dispossession of lakhs of Palestinians. But Mr Modi does not have the courage to raise his voice and speak truth to his

good friend Benjamin Netanyahu," the Congress leader said. The Congress had strongly criticised Prime Minister Modi's visit to Israel last month, despite that country "mercilessly" continuing attacks on civilians in Gaza.

The Opposition party said the Modi government has made cynical and hypocritical statements on its commitment to the cause of Palestinians, but in reality, it has abandoned them.

Israel's dispossession and displacement of thousands of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank has intensified and drawn worldwide condemnation, Ramesh had said last month.

Israel's attacks on civilians in Gaza continue mercilessly, he had said.

## GOA SEX SCANDAL

# Over 100 minor victims linked to councillor's son: Cong leader

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Panaji, March 28:** Goa Congress chief Amit Patkar Saturday claimed the sex scandal in which the son of a councillor is an accused involves more than 100 minor victims and that the police were initially reluctant to register a case.

Soham (20), son of Sushant Naik, a member of Curcholem Municipal Council in south Goa, was arrested March 21 in four cases filed under Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, Goa Children's Act, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Information Technology Act for allegedly raping minor girls, filming their obscene videos and circulating them. Addressing a press conference during a protest march organised by the Goa Pradesh Mahila Congress Committee, Patkar alleged,

"The number of victims exceeds 100. The accused had been perpetrating the crime for the last three years. This sex scandal is much bigger than what it is being made out to be."

Patkar claimed the minor girls are from places like Curcholem, Margao, Vasco da Gama and Ponda, adding there is an urgent need to provide counselling to victims to ensure they do not take any extreme step under pressure. "The accused turned 21 this week. It means he was



involved in the crime since he was 17-18. The Curcholem police were initially reluctant to register the case and did so only after pressure from local residents. Why have Goa State Women's Commission, Goa State Commission for Protection of Child Rights and state education department not swung into action as yet," he questioned.

When contacted, an official of the Crime Branch, which is investigating the case, said three girls have come forward so far with complaints. "Efforts are underway to encourage more victims to file complaints. The exact number of victims can be ascertained only after the investigation is completed," the official added.

Meanwhile, BJP leader Siddharth Gauns Desai said the accused's father Sushant Naik is not associated with the ruling party. "Sushant Naik was never related to Bharatiya Janata Party as is being projected in some media reports. He is not even a primary member of the party. He is an independent politician. Municipal council polls are not fought on party symbols," Desai added.

# IndiGo flight makes emergency landing due to engine failure

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, March 28:** A Delhi-bound IndiGo flight from Visakhapatnam, carrying 160 passengers on board, made an emergency landing at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport Saturday due to an engine failure, according to sources.

"Full emergency was declared at Indira Gandhi International Airport at 10.39 for IndiGo Visakhapatnam-Delhi flight 6E 579 due to one engine failure," a source said. There were 160 passengers on board the Boeing 737 aircraft, the source said.



The flight landed at 10.59 am as per flight tracking website flightradar24.com. Meanwhile, IndiGo, in a statement, said, "A technical snag was detected shortly before landing on IndiGo flight 6E 579 operating from Visakhapatnam to Delhi 28 March 2026." "As a precautionary step and in accordance with the standard operating procedure, the pilots requested for priority landing and the aircraft arrived safely at Indira Gandhi International Airport, Delhi. All relevant authorities were promptly informed and the aircraft is undergoing necessary checks and maintenance," an IndiGo Spokesperson said.



I would love my legacy to be made as a great peacemaker because I really believe I am a peacemaker. It doesn't seem like it right now, but I think I am a peacemaker  
DONALD TRUMP | PRESIDENT, US

## INDIA-RUSSIA MUSICAL COMEDY

A Bollywood-style musical comedy with song and dance shot entirely in India is all set to release in Russia April 1, celebrated in the country not as the April Fools but as a day of laughter. The Russian-Indian joint production 'Persimmon of My Love' marks a major milestone as the first full-length film since the Soviet era, reviving a historic cinematic partnership between the two nations, its promoters claim



## of the day quote

What Trump is doing right now is not de-escalation and an attempt to reach a peaceful solution, but a massive escalation with an uncertain outcome  
FRIEDRICH MERZ | CHANCELLOR, GERMANY

Thank you, PM @narendramodi for your kind words and warm wishes. I am eager to work closely with you to advance the multifaceted relations between our two countries for the common prosperity of our people  
BALENDRA SHAH | PM, NEPAL

Our alliance with Taiwan is one of the most strategically and morally significant partnerships America has in the Indo-Pacific  
JOHN CURTIS | REPUBLICAN SENATOR, US

## PM TO OUSTER TO ARREST

# Rise & fall of Nepal's Oli

Nepal's former Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli was arrested Saturday, a day after the newly formed government of Balendra Shah implemented the probe commission report on the Gen Z protest that rocked the nation last year

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

**Kathmandu, March 28:** Tough-talking Nepali leader Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli spent decades in communist politics and served as prime minister four times before he was ousted in 2025 by deadly youth protests.

He was arrested Saturday morning, one day after the country's new prime minister took office, following the defeat of the 74-year-old's bid for a political comeback in elections earlier this month.

Oli, leader of the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), painted the polls during campaigning as a "competition between those who burn the country and those who build it".

He suffered a decisive defeat. Oli was detained by police after a government-backed commission recommended his prosecution for his alleged role in the September violence that killed at least 77 people.

He has previously denied responsibility or that he ordered the police to open fire. **'No effort'**

The protests were triggered by the Oli government's brief ban on social media, but were driven by widespread frustration over economic stagnation and entrenched corruption.

He quit as premier as mobs torched his house, parliament and government offices.

In his resignation letter, Oli said he hoped stepping down would help "move towards a political solution and the resolution of the problems".

In January, he gave a statement to a commission established by the interim government to investigate the deadly crackdown on the youth-led uprising.

Oli has denied he had told the police to open fire on protesters.

"I did not give any orders to shoot," he said, in an audio statement posted on his social media accounts in January.

Instead, he has blamed "infiltrators" or "anarchic forces" for igniting violence -- without giving further details.

"The children were led to such a point where the law itself orders shooting," he added.

The commission report said Oli had held responsibility as the government's head.

The commission report said that it was "not established that there was an order to shoot", but said that "no effort was made to stop or control the firing".

### Authoritarian streak

Political journalist Binu Subedi said Oli had an authoritarian streak, and considered his word as "final", rarely accepting criticism or suggestions.

Often known by his first initials "KP", Oli spent years cultivating a cult-like image, with life-size cutouts and banners of "KP Ba (father), we love you"



at rallies. Oli's political career stretches nearly six decades, a period that saw a decade-long civil war and Nepal's 2008 abolition of its monarchy.

Drawn into underground communist politics as a teenager, he was 21 when arrested in 1973 for campaigning to over-

throw the king.

"I was sentenced to harsh imprisonment for 14 years, with four years of solitary confinement", he wrote in a book of selected speeches.

He studied and wrote poetry in detention, penning his verses on cigarette boxes when he

couldn't access paper.

"My crime was that I fought against the autocratic regime," Oli added. "But this never deterred me; instead, it emboldened me to continue the struggle."

After his release in 1987, he joined the CPN-UML and rose through the ranks, winning a parliamentary seat.

He first became prime minister in 2015, before being re-elected in 2018 and reappointed briefly in 2021 in Nepal's often turbulent parliament.

In the Himalayan republic of some 30 million people, overshadowed by giant neighbours India and China, Oli previously trod a fine balance between the rivals.

But he also stoked populist rhetoric against India, which is often portrayed as acting like an overbearing "big brother" to Nepal.

## CPN-UML party workers stage demonstrations

CPN-UML members Saturday staged demonstrations in different parts of Nepal to protest against the arrest of party chair and former prime minister K P Sharma Oli. The Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) leader Oli and former home minister Ramesh Lekhak were arrested early Saturday morning on charges of their involvement in suppressing the Gen Z movement of September 8 and 9 last year, in which 76 people, including around two dozen youths, were killed. Hundreds of CPN-UML activists gathered at Damak municipality of Jhapa district in Koshi province, Pokhara municipality of Kaski district and Maithighar Mandala and Babarmahal of Kathmandu to protest Oli's arrest. The agitating cadres of CPN-UML and activists belonging to All Nepal National Free Students Union (ANNFSU) chanted slogans against the newly formed Balendra Shah government and Home Minister Sudan Gurung and demanded the immediate release of Oli.



## SHORT TAKES

### 'Epstein Island' tag on White House calls

**Washington:** The official phone number of the White House appeared on some Android phones as "Epstein Island" for a brief period before Google fixed it, as per reports. It came to light when The Post reporters called the Oval Office this week. The calls reached the correct number, but the unusual label appeared on the screen instead of the "White House". The issue affected mainly Android devices, particularly Google Pixel phones, while iPhone users saw no name at all. "It was not a wrong number. That's what the phone displayed when some Washington Post journalists called the White House switchboard," reports said. Soon after, the American daily reported the issue to Google. A company spokesperson, Matthew Flegal, stated that it originated from a "fake edit" someone had made in Google Maps. This incorrect information briefly appeared in the call ID feature of some Android phones.

### Flood emergency in Russia's Dagestan

**Moscow:** Authorities in the capital of the southern Russian region of Dagestan declared a state of emergency Saturday after heavy rainfall led to widespread flooding and power cuts in the region. "Emergency services have been placed on high alert, efforts are under way to deal with the aftermath, and assistance will be provided to affected residents," the Makhachkala city administration said on Telegram. More than 327,000 people remain without power in Dagestan due to bad weather, the regional ministry of emergency situations said. "As of 12:00 (Moscow time, 0900 GMT), 283 settlements with a population of 327,183 people, including 89,705 children, remain without electricity," the ministry said on its website.

### Pak, IMF strike deal for \$1.2 billion fund

**Islamabad:** Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have reached a staff-level agreement (SLA) for the disbursement of approximately \$1.2 billion under two separate arrangements. The two sides successfully concluded the third review of the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and the second review under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF), the IMF said Saturday. The IMF mission held talks with Pakistani officials in Karachi and Islamabad from February 25 to March 2, but left without an agreement.

## Sectarian attacks rock Christian town in Syria after a dispute

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Suqaylabiyah (Syria), March 28:** An argument between two men in a Christian town in central Syria led to sectarian attacks that caused widespread damage to homes, shops and cars in a reminder of religious violence that followed the fall of long-time leader Bashar Assad two years ago.

The attacks in the predominantly Christian town of Suqaylabiyah in Hama province are the latest to target members of Syria's Christian minority, many of whom have left the country since the conflict began 15 years ago, leaving half-a-million people dead and the population deeply divided.

There was no immediate word on casualties in the attacks that lasted until the early hours of Saturday, during which scores of men on motorcycles from the nearby Sunni town of Qalaat al-Madiq attacked the property of Christians.

"We passed through a state



of terror, fear, and panic," said Liyan Dweir, whose clothes shop was riddled with bullets and suffered heavy damage. His children were terrified during the hours-long assault, he said.

Dweir said an argument between a resident of Suqaylabiyah and another from Qalaat al-Madiq led to scores of men from the Sunni town storming the area and attacking shops, homes and cars.

"It is unfair that because of an argument two towns clashed," he said.

## IRANIAN ATTACKS ON SAUDI AIR BASE IN PAST WEEK

# Over two dozen US troops wounded

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Dubai, March 28:** More than two dozen US troops have been wounded in Iranian attacks on a Saudi air base in the past week, according to two people who have been briefed on the matter.

Iran fired six ballistic missiles and 29 drones at Saudi Arabia's Prince Sultan air base in a Friday attack that injured at least 15 troops, including five seriously, according to the people who were not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

US officials initially reported that at least 10 US troops were injured, including two who were seriously wounded.

The base had come under attack twice earlier this week, including an incident that injured 14 US troops, according to the people who had been briefed on the matter.

Located about 96 kilometers (60 miles) from the Saudi capital of Riyadh, the base is run



by the Royal Saudi Air Force, but also used by US troops.

### Attempts at diplomacy falter

The latest attacks happened after Trump claimed that talks on ending the war were going "very well". He said he had given Tehran until April 6 to reopen the Strait of Hor-

muz. Iran says it has not engaged in any negotiations.

With the economic repercussions far beyond the Middle East, Trump is under growing pressure to end Iran's chokehold on the Strait.

Pakistan said Saturday that Saudi Arabia, Turkey and

Egypt will send their top diplomats to Islamabad for talks aimed at ending the war.

### Death toll climbs

Iranian authorities say more than 1,900 people have been killed in the Islamic Republic, while 19 have been reported dead in Israel.

In Lebanon, where Israel has started an invasion in the south, officials said more than 1,100 people have been killed since the start of the war. Meanwhile, at least 13 US troops have been reported killed, while in Iraq, where Iranian-supported militia groups have entered the conflict, 80 members of the security forces have died.

In the Gulf states, 20 people have been killed and four others in the occupied West Bank. The UN's International Organisation for Migration also said Friday that 82,000 civilian buildings in Iran, including hospitals and the homes of 180,000 people, were damaged.

# Africa hurting again from global crisis it had no part in starting

From the Covid-19 pandemic to the war in Ukraine and now the Middle East conflict, the world's fastest-growing continent - with a population rivalling China and India - is at the painful end of ripple effects that include a global scramble for critical resources like fuel and fertiliser

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Lagos (Nigeria), March 28:** Lagos taxi driver Adegbola Isaac went to the gas station twice last weekend. Each time, the price in the Nigerian city had climbed further and hit 1,350 naira (\$0.99) per litre, a nearly 35 per cent increase since the Iran war started. That's wiped out most of his daily profit.

"It is hitting hard," Isaac told The Associated Press.

Like many people across the world, Isaac is one of millions across Africa who are reeling from the economic impacts of the faraway conflict in the Middle East, which began February 28 with joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran.

For many Africans, the fuel price hike because of the Strait of Hormuz being largely closed off worsens the hardships they

already struggle with in some of the world's poorest households. The latest shock also isn't isolated.

Africa is hurting again from another global crisis it had no part in starting.

With the majority of African countries being net importers of refined oil products, the impact has been swift, leading to rising retail fuel prices in Africa and associated increases in the costs of most goods and services. Experts say African countries are critically integrated into global economies and are exposed to global shocks because of their dependence on major economies.

### Africa is the epicentre of crises

According to a 2025 report by the UN Trade and Development, or UNCTAD, which describes Africa as "the epicentre of overlapping global crises," more than half of the continent's im-



ports and exports are with five non-African countries.

All of Kenya's fuel comes from the Middle East, particularly from the United Arab Emirates, with its fuel retailers saying 20 per cent of the country's outlets are already affected. Uganda's fuel stock was initially projected to last a few weeks. South Africa sources a

significant amount of its fuel from Saudi Arabia. Nigeria, Africa's largest oil producer, lacks local refinery capacity and relies on importing refined crude products from Europe. **Adapting to higher prices**

In Zimbabwe, health labour workers protested in favour of an increase in wages as the cost of living rose sharply. In

response, the government plans to increase the blending of fuel with ethanol from the current 5 per cent to 20 per cent ethanol blending. The blend poses a danger to cars, and a higher blend contributes to the emission of pollutants.

"I now avoid going into town during peak hours because the fares are too high," said Washington Nyakarize, an informal cellphone trader who works in Harare's Central Business District. "If I go later, the charge is a bit lower, but I lose business, because most customers come early in the morning."

After South Africa's fuel supplies from Saudi Arabia dropped, diesel-dependent industries started to panic-buy, fearing the worst. That is despite the Department of Mineral and Petroleum Resources, or DMPR, saying the country still has untapped strategic reserves

and diversified supply routes. **War is likely to impact more than fuel**

Access to fertiliser across Africa, including conflict-wracked countries like Sudan and Somalia, is set to be impacted, according to UNCTAD.

Kenya's flower industry has also reported weekly losses of up to \$1.4 million since the Iran war began, with growers attributing the losses to a decline in demand and shipping disruptions. Experts say the war could further put Africa in uncharted territory if it lasts longer.

"If the conflict persists for another month or two, honestly, we're going to be in unknown terrain that no one else, like, no one can really predict, and we just have to wait and see," said Zainab Usman, a senior research scholar at the New York-based Centre on Global Energy Policy.



**For the past two years, we observed that cyber threats were not limited only to the IT systems**

**GAURAV SHUKLA** | PARTNER AND LEADER - CYBER AT DELOITTE SOUTH ASIA

**WALL ST'S 5TH STRAIGHT LOSING WEEK**

US stocks deepened their drops Friday as Wall Street finished off a fifth straight losing week, its longest such streak in nearly four years. The S&P 500 fell 1.7 per cent to close its worst week since the war with Iran began. The Dow Jones Industrial Average lost 793 points, or 1.7 per cent, and fell more than 10 per cent from its record set last month, while the Nasdaq composite sank 2.1 per cent



**of the day** **note**

**We have lived through 9/11, 26/11, we've been through that. We see that the recovery, especially on the luxury side, is pretty quick, and luxury as a segment has always been far more resilient**

**ANURAAG BHATNAGAR** | CEO, THE LEELA PALACES, HOTELS AND RESORTS

**The recent selloff created a really good opportunity because the market sold off... prices went below the 200-day moving average...this is an incredible time to buy gold**

**DANIEL PAVILONS** | SENIOR MARKET STRATEGIST, RJO FUTURES

**CXO compensation decisions in India have shown great maturity. Given the ongoing underperformance of Indian equity markets over the past 12-18 months, it is natural that pay increases were lower last year**

**ANANDORUP GHOSE** | PARTNER, DELOITTE INDIA

**SHORT TAKE**

**Info Edge commits ₹250 crore in AIF**

**New Delhi:** Info Edge (India) Ltd will invest up to ₹250 crore in an alternative investment fund (AIF) to back early-stage deep-tech companies in the country. According to a regulatory filing, the company has entered into a contribution agreement with A88 Fund I, a scheme by SEBI-registered A88 Trust. "Entering into a contribution agreement with A88 Fund I, a scheme launched by A88 Trust, a Trust registered with the Securities and Exchange Board of India as a Category II Alternative Investment Fund, to commit a contribution of up to ₹250 crore in aggregate, directly and/or through wholly-owned subsidiaries, including by Smartweb Internet Services Ltd," the Info Edge regulatory filing said.

**Vedanta Aluminium's Project Vidya benefits more than 1,800 students**



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, March 28:** Vedanta Aluminium, India's largest producer of aluminium, is strengthening learning outcomes across government schools in Jharsuguda and Sundargarh through Project Vidya, its education initiative launched in April 2025.

Focused on foundational literacy and numeracy along with core subjects such as Mathematics, Science, and English, the programme has reached over 1,800 students across 17 rural schools by improving classroom engagement and student-teacher ratios through the deployment of 20 additional educators. Sundargarh has a high dropout rate, necessitating a targeted focus on foundational learning and a strengthened student-teacher ratio to address the risk. Aligned with these priorities, Project Vidya has contributed to a notable rise in school attendance, from 64% to 76% in Lakhampur block and from 66% to 82% in Hemgir block, demonstrat-

**ENERGY COSTS BITE**

**FinMin warns of growth risks from Mideast crisis**



*Near-term outlook remains uncertain with external shocks posing downside risks to growth, says Finance Ministry*

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 28:** The near-term outlook remains uncertain, with external shocks particularly the West Asia crisis posing downside risks to growth through elevated input costs and potential supply disruptions, the Finance Ministry said in a report Saturday.

However, the report said, strong macroeconomic fundamentals and robust domestic demand may help cushion the impact.

The geopolitical developments have introduced a complex and multi-layered set of risks for India, given its position as a major energy importer with strong trade, investment, and remittance linkages with the West Asia region, the Monthly Economic Review for March released by the Department of Economic Affairs of the Finance Ministry said.

"While India's relatively robust macroeconomic fundamentals and sustained policy efforts provide resilience, the evolving situation warrants close monitoring and calibrated policy responses," it said.

The government's interventions across energy diversifica-

tion, agricultural preparedness, inflation conditions, external sector strength, and policy measures support the economy's ability to absorb near-term disruptions arising from global developments, while ongoing monitoring and calibrated responses remain important in view of evolving conditions, it said.

While these interventions, along with existing macroeconomic buffers, provide some support, the balance of risks remains tilted to the downside.

In this context, continued vigilance and proactive policy measures will be important to mitigate the impact of evolving global uncertainties, it said.

The report further said that the recent oil price shock presents an upside risk to the inflation trajectory in the medium term, as higher energy costs are gradually transmitted into domestic prices, particularly in fuel-intensive sectors.

While supply disruptions have added to cost pressures, selective price corrections in perishables, amid export-related dislocations, point to localised demand-supply imbalances, it said.

"A sustained elevation in oil and gas prices could lead to broader second-round effects through input cost pass-through across sectors. Nonetheless, the Government remains vigilant, with measures underway to ensure adequate

**W**ith regard to the current account deficit, the report said, it widened to 1.3% of GDP in Q3 of FY26, from 1.1% of GDP in Q3 FY25, mainly driven by a larger merchandise trade deficit, notwithstanding continued strong performance in the services sector

**D**uring April-January FY26, it said, gross FDI inflows increased; however, this momentum did not translate into higher net FDI, which remained subdued and has been negative for five consecutive months.

**I**ncreased geopolitical uncertainty has dampened global risk appetite; as a result, the portfolio flows remained negative in March 2026. Foreign exchange reserves continue to remain comfortable, providing cover for more than 11 months of goods imports

domestic energy availability and mitigate potential inflationary pressures," it said.

Elevated global crude oil prices also pose risks to the merchandise trade balance, while the outlook for remittances also remains sensitive as the Gulf Cooperation Council economies accounted for about 38 per cent of India's total remittances in FY24 and host nearly half of India's migrants worldwide, it said.

In an increasingly uncertain global environment, it said, the resilience of the Indian economy will depend on the strengthening of domestic fundamentals.

"This will require sustained focus on structural reforms to enhance competitiveness, achieve efficiency gains, and drive investment. At the same time, emphasis on preparedness, policy coordination, and domestic capacity development will remain important for navigating evolving global uncertainties and supporting growth," it said.

**Bellatrix Aerospace nets \$20 million**

**Mumbai:** Indian aerospace manufacturer Bellatrix Aerospace has raised \$20 million in a pre-Series B funding round led by Cactus Partners, it said on Saturday, as it looks to scale up manufacturing and delivery of its propulsion systems. Bellatrix said the funds would be used to expand manufacturing capacity to meet rising demand from satellite constellations in India and abroad. "This investment allows us to significantly increase annual production capacity," its CEO Rohan Ganapathy said. Founded in 2015, Bangalore-based Bellatrix manufactures satellite propulsion systems and has operations in the US. Led by equity fund Cactus Partners, the round drew new investors including Hero Investment Office, 35 North Ventures, Indusbridge Ventures and Monarch Holdings, along with existing backers Infexor, Pavestone, GrowX and Survam Partners. India has opened the country's space sector beyond the state-owned Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to private players and created a ₹10 billion (\$105.5 million) fund to support startups.

**TRADE RETALIATION**

**India warns WTO against transparency misuse**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 28:** India has cautioned WTO members against weaponising "transparency" to justify trade retaliation or challenge legitimate domestic policies, saying it should be backed by sustained capacity-building support to ensure that all countries meet obligations fairly and effectively.

"Transparency" is a key component of the technical barriers to trade agreement of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Under this, member nations have to regularly and clearly share information about their trade policies, subsidies, and regulatory measures.

The US has been pushing for stricter rules on mandatory disclosures as part of the WTO reform proposal. It alleges that many countries do not timely notify subsidies, tariffs, or policy changes to the WTO.

Developing member nations of the WTO agree in principle that transparency is important, but have serious reservations about how the US wants to implement it. These emerging economies oppose penalties for



failure to notify information, arguing that many countries lack capacity.

"India has cautioned WTO members against weaponising transparency to justify trade retaliation or challenge legitimate domestic policies, saying it must be backed by sustained capacity-building support to ensure all members, especially developing countries, can meet obligations fairly and effectively," the commerce ministry said in a statement.

The issue was flagged March 27 by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal in a session on 'level playing field issues' of the 14th ministerial conference (MC14), which is underway in Yaounde, Cam-

**Innovation drives sustainable entrepreneurship: Bhartia**

**Chandra Prakash Bhartia, Managing Director of Jagdamba Polymers Limited, is a first-generation entrepreneur with over four decades of experience in manufacturing. His entrepreneurial journey began in the early 1980s with a small industrial venture, and since then he has remained committed to building sustainable manufacturing enterprises in Odisha. Under his leadership, Jagdamba Polymers Limited has grown from a modest MSME into one of Eastern India's prominent plastic injection moulding manufacturers. The company's brand 'Ankur' is widely recognised in the plastic household products segment, offering a diverse range of products designed to enhance everyday convenience. Beyond business, Bhartia strongly advocates entrepreneurship and industrial development and is actively associated with several industry bodies working to strengthen the MSME ecosystem. Excerpts...**



**Chandra Prakash Bhartia**  
Managing Director, Jagdamba Polymers

**■ What key factors have driven Ankur's growth since its establishment in 1999?**

The growth of the Ankur brand has been driven by a strong focus on quality, innovation, and customer trust. Starting with one of Odisha's early injection moulding facilities, the company expanded from a few products to over 300 items, including household goods, furniture, and PET packaging, while maintaining global quality standards through ISO certifications and ZED Gold compliance.

**■ How has operating one of Eastern India's largest injection moulding facilities helped you gain a competitive advantage?**

Scale is crucial for manufacturing competitiveness. Our large facility enables economies of scale, efficient production, and quick response to market demand. Continuous investments in modern machinery, lean practices, and energy-efficient technologies help maintain operational efficiency while keeping products competitively priced without

compromising quality.

**■ How did Ankur develop a strong distributor network across multiple states, and what is your vision for the brand's future?**

Ankur's distribution network has grown through trust, long-term partnerships, consistent product quality, and reliable supply. Strong brand promotion has helped expand our presence across more than ten states, reaching both urban and rural markets. Looking ahead, our vision is to establish Ankur as a recognized pan-India household brand by expanding production capacity, strengthening distribution, and adopting advanced technologies like automation and Industry 4.0.

**■ What are the key challenges currently facing the plastic manufacturing industry?**

The plastic manufacturing sector is currently facing challenges such as volatile raw material prices and growing environmental concerns. Manufacturers must adopt sustainable practices while ensuring products remain affordable. At Jagdamba Polymers, we address these issues by investing in energy-efficient machinery, minimizing material wastage through precision moulding, and implementing environmental management systems to reduce our ecological impact.

**■ With such a large product portfolio, how do you manage innovation?**

Innovation in our company is mainly guided by market feedback and consumer demand. Our distributors share valuable insights on evolving customer preferences, helping us identify opportunities for new products and improvements. By combining these

market insights with strong manufacturing capabilities, we continuously expand and diversify our product range while ensuring consistent quality and affordability.

**■ As an entrepreneur, what inspired you to venture into this line of business?**

The plastics industry fascinated me due to the versatility of polymers and their ability to create practical, affordable products. With this vision, we established Jagdamba Polymers and developed the 'Ankur' brand, focusing on quality, innovation, and reliability. What began as a small venture has grown into a large manufacturing organization serving multiple states. For me, entrepreneurship is about creating value for consumers while generating employment and supporting industrial growth.

**■ What advice would you give to aspiring entrepreneurs?**

Entrepreneurship requires perseverance, discipline, and a long-term vision built on quality and integrity. In today's dynamic environment, entrepreneurs must adopt technologies like digitalisation and automation to stay competitive. Taking calculated risks with proper planning and financial discipline is essential for growth. Continuous innovation, understanding customer needs, and improving processes help businesses remain relevant. Building strong relationships with suppliers, distributors, employees, and customers also supports sustainable growth. Ultimately, entrepreneurship is about creating value, generating employment, and contributing to economic development.

**Coal India Chairman reviews mining ops at Talcher Coalfields**



**TALCHER:** B Sairam, Chairman, Coal India Limited, reviewed key mining operations and infrastructure during his visit to Talcher Coalfields at Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL). He inspected the newly commissioned Automatic Truck Loading System (ATLS) at Bhubaneswari Area and assessed operational progress at Bhubaneswari OCP and Ananta OCP. The Chairman lauded MCL for its continuous focus on sustainable and innovative mining practices and operational efficiency. Later, he engaged into a discussion with public and union representatives, focusing on employee welfare and inclusive growth. While, in his address to the media, he highlighted Coal India's strategic move towards diversification into solar and other renewable energy, alongside a continued focus on sustainable coal mining operations; introduction of various technologies and infrastructures such as silo, Automated Truck Loading system (ATLS) etc to effectively mitigate dust pollution. "Coal India ensures 80% of the nation's energy need, which will continue for a long time" he added. Uday Anant Kaole, CMD, MCL, along with Functional Directors of the company accompanied him during the visit. Sairam is on a three-day maiden visit to MCL, during which he is scheduled to visit key mine areas and operational units of the company.

# Fiery start by ruthless RCB

### Devdutt, Kohli, Duffy star in defending champions's six-wicket win over SRH

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bangalore, March 28:** Devdutt Padikkal's 26-ball-61 crusted with class and Virat Kohli's masterly unbeaten half-century powered Royal Challengers Bengaluru to a dominant six-wicket victory over Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL 2026's season-opening match here Saturday.

Padikkal and Kohli (69 not out, 38b) stitched 101 runs off a mere 45 balls for the second wicket stand, lending meat to RCB's successful chase of 202 in just 15.4 overs. The hosts finished at 203/4 to start their title defence in spectacular style.

After Phil Salt was jettisoned early, Kohli and Padikkal, in particular, treated the Chin-naswamy crowd to a brilliant batting exhibition.

Their approach to batting was as different as chalk and cheese. Padikkal was all wrists, feet and thunderous cuts while Kohli dished out his favourite drives, shots on the 'V' and the money shot - the swat flick.

Padikkal oozed the left-hander's class even while plundering 6, 4, 6 off pacer David Payne and later while biffing spinner Harsh Dubey for a 4 and 6 off successive deliveries.

The Karnataka batter fetched his fifty off just 21 balls with a four off Harshal Patel.

Kohli brought out his swat, a shot with minimum feet movement and shot arm-throw, against pacers Jaydev Unadkat and Eshan Malinga as runs flowed thick and fast - team 50 came in fourth over, Power Play produced 76 and 100 cascaded in just 8.1 overs.



But the free-flowing alliance was snapped when Padikkal was holed out to Heinrich Klaasen, who had earlier spilled Kohli on 28 off RCB alumni Harshal, at long-on.

Kohli soon reached his half-century off 33 balls with

a single off left-arm seamer Payne.

Skipper Rajat Patidar did his bit for a smooth chase, waltzing to a 12-ball 31.

The consecutive dismissals of Patidar and Jitesh Sharma were just minor speed-breakers

in an otherwise easy journey, laced by Kohli's sequence of 6, 4, 4, 4 off Harshal.

Earlier, stand-in-captain Ishan Kishan smashed a blazing fifty as Sunrisers resisted Jacob Duffy's excellent spell but only managed a slightly below-par 201 for nine.

Kishan (80, 38b, 8x4, 5x6) and his 97-run stand with Heinrich Klaasen (31) for the fourth wicket was the core of SRH innings.

But the match had a rather different start once Patidar asked Hyderabad to bat first on a pitch that was deprived of top-flight cricket for nearly 10 months.

The pitch would have been a rather unknown commodity and chasing was a better option in that context.

Duffy's spell (4-0-22-3) vindicated that thought too.

The Kiwi pacer used his height well to generate considerable bounce off the track and Abhishek Sharma (7) looked frustrated not being able to free his arm despite carving Duffy for a six over backward point.

The left-hander, who has always been uncomfortable against short balls, soon fell to his frustrations as his awkward pull off Duffy ended in the big gloves of Jitesh Sharma.

**Brief scores:**  
**Sunrisers Hyderabad:** 201/9 in 20 over (Ishan Kishan 80, Ankit Verma 43; Jacob Duffy 3/22) lost to **Royal Challengers Bengaluru:** 203/4 in 15.4 overs (Devdutt Padikkal 61, Virat Kohli 69 not out) by 6 wickets

**TODAY'S MATCH**  
MI VS KKR  
TIME: 7:30 PM  
Star Sports channels & JioHotstar

## CALF STRAIN

### Dhoni to miss first two weeks of IPL

**New Delhi:** Chennai Super Kings icon MS Dhoni is set to miss the first two weeks of the IPL due to a calf injury, the franchise said Saturday. Dhoni has continued playing the IPL ever since retiring from international cricket in 2020. The 44-year-old's future in the IPL becomes a topic of intense discussion following CSK's campaign every season. Considering Dhoni only plays the IPL, it becomes tougher to maintain match fitness. Though Rituraj Gaikwad is the captain of the side, Dhoni is the de facto leader of the franchise having stayed with them since 2008 barring the time they were suspended from the competition. Dhoni played 14 games in the previous IPL and batted lower down the order to provide the final flourish to the innings. He has also had to deal with recurring knee issues since his international retirement and underwent a surgery in 2023. CSK open their IPL 2026 campaign against Rajasthan Royals in Guwahati March 30.

## SPORTS OVER POLITICS

### B'desh lifts IPL broadcast ban

**New Delhi:** Bangladesh has cleared the way for the telecast of the Indian Premier League, with the newly appointed Information and Broadcasting Minister Zahir Uddin Swapan confirming there are no restrictions on broadcasting the tournament in the country. In a significant policy shift, Swapan said the government does not intend to mix politics with sports and will instead evaluate the matter from a commercial perspective. He noted that broadcasters willing to air the IPL can approach the authorities, and their applications would be considered positively. The clarification comes in the backdrop of an earlier ban imposed by the previous interim administration, which had halted IPL telecasts in Bangladesh. The move had created uncertainty among broadcasters and cable operators ahead of the tournament.

# Relay records: India secures world berth

### Indian teams qualify for World Relays with record-breaking performance in nationals



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Chandigarh, March 28:** The Indian relay teams qualified for the World Athletics Relays in Gaborone, Botswana, this May with record-breaking efforts by India B in men's 4x400 and in Mixed Team 4x100 relay competitions in the 1st International Invitational Relay / 3rd National Open Relay Competition 2026 in Chandigarh Saturday.

The India B quartet clocked a stunning 42.30 seconds to win gold and shatter the previous 43.44s mark, while India A took silver at 42.34s—both securing spots at the World Athletics Relays in Gaborone, Botswana, this May.

The two squads featuring athletes like Gurindervir Singh and Tamilarasu produced seamless baton passes and explosive pace that had the crowd cheering heartily. The Indian teams faced competition from Nepal, the Maldives, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka in the 1st International Invitational Relay.

India A claimed senior mixed 4x400m gold over Sri Lanka in 3:18.90, with youth squads from Tamil Nadu and Chandigarh adding more victories in a meet that highlights the nation's relay surge.

India's 4x100m mixed relay

team clocked 42.30s to set a new National Record at the National Open Relay 2026. The quartet of Lalu Prasad, Unnathi, Harita, and Jayaram came up with perfect baton exchanges, explosive speed, and a historic finish.

In the junior section, Tamil Nadu women dominate the U20 Women's 4x100m relay, clocking 48.38, while Chandigarh clocked 45.44 to win the U20 4x100 Mixed Relay.

Competition in Botswana will be held in six relay events—4x100m (men and women), 4x400m (men and women), and mixed relay (4x100m and 4x400m), the Athletics Federation of India (AFTI) said in a statement Friday.

As per World Athletics guidelines, the qualification period started from January 1, 2025, and will on April 5, 2026. Teams within the top-24 World Rankings on the Road to Gaborone will be eligible to compete in Botswana.

The chief national athletics coach, Radhakrishnan Nair, had on Friday expressed confidence in a good show Saturday, and the teams lived up to that. "We are hopeful other four national relay teams will be successful in achieving the target time to board the flight to Botswana," Nair added.

## SHORT TAKES

### Sinner beats Zverev

**Miami Gardens:** Jannik Sinner sat out the Miami Open a year ago as he served a three-month suspension after testing positive for a banned substance. Now the 24-year-old Italian is on the verge of winning his second Miami Open title in three years and becoming the first male to win the "Sunshine Double" since Roger Federer in 2017. The second-ranked Sinner roared into the Miami Open final with a 6-3, 7-6 (7-4) win over No. 4 Alexander Zverev on Friday night at Hard Rock Stadium. Sinner, who served 15 aces, has beaten Zverev seven straight times and has won a record 32 straight sets at an ATP Masters 1000. Sinner will be a heavy favorite when he faces 21st-seeded Jiri Lehecka in Sunday's final. Sinner has won 11 straight matches in Miami dating to 2024. He captured the 2024 Miami Open but wasn't allowed to defend his title.

### Raphinha injured

**Barcelona:** Barcelona forward Raphinha will be out for approximately five weeks and miss Champions League quarterfinal games against Atletico Madrid after injuring his right hamstring while playing for Brazil in a friendly against France. Five-time champion Brazil starts its World Cup campaign against Morocco June 13. The 29-year-old Raphinha scored twice in Barcelona's 7-2 rout of Newcastle in the second leg of the Champions League round of 16 but is now set to miss both matches against Atletico Madrid in the last eight with Barcelona hosting the first leg April 8. Barcelona tops La Liga with a four-point lead over second-place Real Madrid with nine rounds remaining.

### Antonelli takes pole

**Suzuka:** Mercedes driver Kimi Antonelli took the pole for Sunday's Formula 1 Japanese Grand Prix, just two weeks after he led qualifying and won the first race of his career at the Chinese Grand Prix. The 19-year-old Antonelli's qualifying time Saturday was 1 minute, 28.778 seconds on the 5.8-kilometer (3.6-mile) Suzuka circuit in central Japan. Teammate George Russell will start alongside him. Russell won in Australia in the first race of the season and also took the pole, the start of Mercedes' early dominance in 2026.

## SNIPPETS

### Iran players hold schoolbags in solidarity with slain girls

**Belek:** Iran's men's national soccer team wore black armbands and held schoolbags as their anthem played ahead of a match in Turkey Friday, in what a team official said was a protest over the killing of schoolgirls on the first day of the Iran war. Iran were playing a friendly against Nigeria in the Mediterranean resort town of Belek ahead of the World Cup in the US, Mexico and Canada, at which their participation is in doubt due to the conflict. The men lined up holding pink and purple bags with ribbons on them - a reference to the attack on the Shajarah Tayyebah School that Tehran says killed more than 175 people, including children and teachers, on the first day of joint US-Israeli strikes on the country. Mehdi Mohammad Nabi, a vice president of the Iranian football federation, told Reuters that the players had decided to stage the protest as a symbolic gesture of solidarity with the victims. "They were deeply affected by the bombing of the girls' school and wanted to express their sympathy," Nabi said, speaking in Farsi through the association's translator. "This was a collective decision by the team. We are united."

### Pak pacer Naseem faces music over CM Maryam comments

**New Delhi:** Pakistan fast bowler Naseem Shah is under scrutiny from the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) after a controversial social media post, since deleted, appeared to criticise Punjab (province of Pakistan) Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz during the opening match of the Pakistan Super League (PSL). The post, which originated from Naseem's official X account, quote-tweeted a PCB media update from the PSL opener between Quetta Gladiators and Hyderabad Kingsmen in Lahore. It read, "Why is she treated like the Queen at Lord's" a remark widely interpreted as a jab at Maryam's high-profile arrival at Gaddafi Stadium, where she was escorted by a large security convoy and later seen interacting with players from both teams. The tweet was removed shortly after, and a follow-up message claimed the account had been hacked. However, the explanation reportedly failed to convince PCB officials, according to The Daily Star. Within 24 hours, the board issued a show-cause notice to the pacer, accusing him of breaching the terms of his central contract and violating the organisation's media policy. The alleged violation is believed to fall under a clause that prohibits players from publicly criticising board officials, sponsors, or related entities.

# Future tennis stars to compete in Major Sandeep Memorial C'ship

RISHABH PAREKH, OP

**Bhubaneswar, March 28:** The Major Sandeep Mahapatra Memorial Junior U16 Super Series Tennis Championship 2026 will be held at Gurukul Resorts & Country Club, Bhubaneswar from April 13-17, under the banner of the Odisha Tennis Association (OTA).

The organising committee, led by Pratap Kumar Pradhan, Chairman, hosted a press meet here Saturday. The briefing was attended by the family of the late Major Sandeep Mahapatra—his father Jagadananda Mahapatra, brother Sanjeev Mahapatra, and sister Alekhika Mahapatra—alongside Chinmay Pradhan, former ATP professional and CEO of the Mission Olympics Sports Foundation (MOSF). Together, they emphasised the tournament's mission to bridge the gap between state and national-level talent in honor of the late Major's legacy.

Major Sandeep Mahapatra was a special breed of officer who commanded respect both on the battlefield and the tennis court. As a valiant Indian Army officer and a multi-time national Army tennis champion, he seamlessly merged the



grit of military service with the precision of elite sports.

The tournament was previously held as Odisha Open at Bhubaneswar Club under the banner of KDITA and OTA and in recent years it has expanded into national-level AITA tournaments. It has been forwarded by the Odisha Tennis Association and approved by the All India Tennis Association (AITA).

The championship will feature both boys' and girls' events in the Under-16 category, providing young athletes from across the country an opportunity to compete at a national level and earn AITA ranking points. The organisers are expecting a strong participation from junior players across India.

Addressing the special initiative to focus on junior development, Chinmay Pradhan, CEO (MOSF) said, "The jump from state to the national level provides a successful pathway for emerging talents. By shifting the focus from seniors to juniors, we are investing in the next generation, identifying and nurturing the future stars of the game. The tournament in a super series format for the first time is expected to bring quality battles on the court from across country."

The Major Sandeep Mahapatra Memorial Tennis Championship has been organised every year since 2014, keeping his legacy alive through sport and youth development.

## KHELO INDIA TRIBAL GAMES

### Odisha eves dominate last day of swimming

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Raipur, March 28:** Weightlifter Nikita ended hosts Chhattisgarh's wait for a gold medal while Odisha's women swimmers clinched all the three yellow metals on offer on the fourth day of the Khelo India Tribal Games 2026 here Saturday.

Nikita dominated the women's 77kg weightlifting event to comfortably win the gold medal in the last event of the day while Odisha won gold through Ritika Minz (100m freestyle), Anjali Munda (50m Backstroke) and 4x100 medley relay team. Anjali finished with five golds, four of them in individual races.

Arunachal Pradesh were the other major movers in the medals table as they won both the men's weightlifting gold medals to close in on the third spot, which is currently held by Assam with four gold, seven silver and three bronze medals.

Karnataka continue to top the medals tally with 15 gold six silver and three bronze while Odisha are second with seven gold, three silver and 10 bronze medals. Hosts Chhattisgarh are seventh with eight medals (one gold, four silver and three bronze).

Having won four silver and three bronze medals from the swimming pool, Chhattisgarh sports fan were waiting for a gold from their athletes and Nikita fulfilled their wish with a dominating performance in women's 77kg category at the open ground in Pt Ravishankar University here.

The 20-year-old Nikita lifted a total of 160kg (70kg in Snatch and 90kg in Clean & Jerk), lifting 34kgs more than second-placed Srimati Jani of Odisha. Joyshree Patir of Assam took home the bronze medal with a total of 118kg.

In the swimming competition, Assam's Krow siblings Nibir Krow and Violina Krow won a gold and bronze medal, respectively, on the last day of competition at the international pool here. Nibir clinched the top spot in 50m Backstroke with a time of 31.31seconds, pushing Karnataka's Dhoneesh N (31.39s) to second spot.

# James pair mark NBA's first father-son assist

LeBron and Bronny are the first father and son ever to play in the NBA at the same time, let alone on the same team

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Los Angeles, March 28:** LeBron James literally passed it on to the next generation Friday night.

The top scorer in NBA history recorded the league's first father-son assist when he passed to Bronny James for a 3-pointer in the second quarter of the Los Angeles Lakers' game against Brooklyn.

"That was a special moment for us two, and a lot more to come down the road," Bronny said after the Lakers beat the Nets 116-99.



The Lakers' father-and-son duo played meaningful minutes together for the second straight game when the Lakers returned from a successful road trip to

host the struggling Nets. Bronny James was on court with his father for nearly 4 1/2 minutes after they checked in together to start the second quarter.

Both generations scored during their sequence together, with LeBron making a driving layup before he exchanged passes on the next possession with Bronny, who hit his 3-pointer from a step behind the line.

"Not taking it for granted, just being in the moment of us being on the floor once again," LeBron said. "That's two games back-to-back, playing meaningful minutes, and him also making another play. .... I got doubled, and he was able to take the pass to the corner and then knock down the 3. Definitely a cool moment for us, and also for the family."

While discussing his latest chance to play with his father, Bronny flashed back to a pleasant father-son memory - for him, at least. "Last time I played him

1-on-1, I don't know if this story has come out, but he broke a backboard at our house in Miami," Bronny said with a grin.

Austin Reaves, who was listening at the next locker, chimed in: "Because you won?"

Bronny nodded, his smile growing even bigger. "Yeah! You can say that!" Reaves said. "Don't leave that out!"

LeBron and Bronny are the first father and son ever to play in the NBA at the same time, let alone on the same team.

While Bronny has a supporting role for the Lakers, he's grateful for the chance to learn and to grow. He also has a front-row seat to another year of big accomplishments from his father, who set the NBA's career record for games played this month.