

PAGE 6 NATION
 Bihar CM unveils projects worth ₹1,213 crore in Jamui, Nawada districts



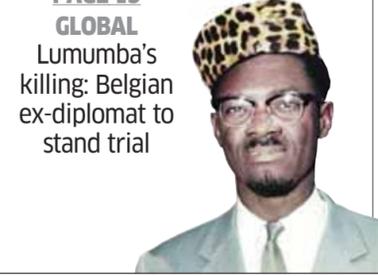
PAGE 7 LAW & JUSTICE
 Legal profession tainted by hooliganism: SC slams UP lawyers



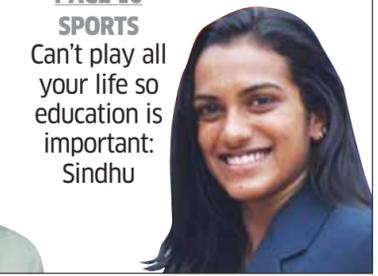
PAGE 10: BUSINESS
 'Strait' crude story is not straight



PAGE 13 GLOBAL
 Lumumba's killing: Belgian ex-diplomat to stand trial



PAGE 16 SPORTS
 Can't play all your life so education is important: Sindhu



PIONEER IN SHORT

SYNCED POLLS PANEL'S TENURE EXTENDED
 The Lok Sabha on Wednesday extended the tenure of the parliamentary joint committee examining Bills to introduce simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, officials said. PP Chaudhary, chairman of the Joint Committee on the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024, and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, moved a motion seeking extension of the panel's tenure until the last week of the 2026 Monsoon session. The motion was adopted by voice vote. Since its formation in December 2024, the 39-member multi-party committee has met constitutional experts, economists, Law Commission members, and several politicians, including Ghulam Nabi Azad. The Bills, introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 17, 2024, were referred to the committee for detailed scrutiny, with its first meeting held on January 8, 2025. Notable experts appearing before the panel include former IMF deputy managing director Gita Gopinath and former Chief Justices of India Sanjiv Khanna, UU Lalit, DY Chandrachud, and JS Khehar, reflecting the extensive consultation process.

Fires in Delhi, Indore claim 17 lives, including 5 minors

ABHINAV KUMAR JHA/ AGENCIES
 ■ New Delhi/Indore

At least 17 people, including five children, were killed in separate fire incidents in Delhi and Indore on Wednesday, while major blazes in Ahmedabad and Chandigarh gutted dozens of shops, triggering panic and large-scale firefighting operations.

In Delhi, nine members of a family died after a fire tore through a multi-storey residential-cum-commercial building in the Palam area of southwest Delhi.

The blaze broke out around 7.04 am in a four-storey building at Ram Chowk Market near Palam Metro station, rapidly engulfing the structure and trapping residents. Around 30 fire tenders were deployed as firefighters battled flames in the congested locality. Rescue teams from police, NDRF, BSES, and other agencies joined the operation.



Rescue operations underway after a fire broke out in a residential building near Palam Metro station in New Delhi

Amit Goel, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southwest), said several people were trapped as the fire spread quickly. "The firefighting operation continued for hours. We are consistently monitoring the situation. Our police personnel also assisted the firefighters," he said.

Officials said flammable materials stored in lower-floor shops, including clothing and cosmetics, accelerated the blaze.

Among the dead were multiple members of a single family, including three children and a 70-year-old woman. Eight victims were declared dead at Manipal Hospital, while one was brought dead to IGI Hospital. At least 10 people were rescued, many unconscious due to smoke inhalation.

Three injured survivors, including a two-year-old girl, are undergoing treatment at city hospitals.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

ECI appoints 13 IAS, 5 IPS officers for West Bengal Assembly election

RAJESH KUMAR
 ■ New Delhi

Ahead of the high-stakes West Bengal election, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has reshuffled senior officers, appointing 13 IAS officers as District Magistrates-cum-District Election Officers (DMs-cum-DEOs) and five IPS officers as Deputy Inspectors General (DIGs). Key postings include Jitin Yadav (Cooch Behar), Sandeep Ghosh (Jalpaiguri), Vivek Kumar (Uttar Dinajpur), and R Arjun (Murshidabad). Smita Pandey has been appointed Municipal Commissioner of Kolkata Municipal Corporation and DEO, Kolkata North, while Randeep Kumar will serve as DEO, Kolkata South. The DIG postings cover Raiganj, Murshidabad, Bardhaman, Presidency, and Jalpaiguri ranges. The Commission directed immediate compliance, with joining reports due by March 19.

"These officers will play a crucial role in ensuring free, fair, and transparent elections. Many will also function as observers to monitor poll pre-



Security personnel conducting a route march in Birbhum district of West Bengal after the ECI announced the dates for the State Assembly polls

paredness at the district level," said a senior ECI official.

The reshuffle follows earlier transfers of Chief Secretary Nandini Chakravorty, Home Secretary Jagdish Prasad Meena, DGP Peeyush Pandey, and Kolkata Police Commissioner Supratim Sarkar. The 294-member West Bengal Assembly will vote in two phases on April 23 and 29, with counting scheduled for May 4.

Meanwhile, the ECI has launched one of its largest-ever deployments for elections next month in Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal, alongside bye-elections in six States. Over 25 lakh election officials will be on duty, including one senior official for every 70 voters.

The deployment comprises nearly 15 lakh polling personnel, 8.5 lakh security staff, 40,000 counting personnel, 49,000 micro observers, 21,000 sector officers and additional staff specifically for vote counting.

CONTINUED ON >> P4



PM invited to open Jewar airport

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
 ■ Lucknow

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said a request has been sent to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to inaugurate the Noida International Airport at Jewar on March 28.

Addressing an event, CM Adityanath said Uttar Pradesh has significantly expanded its air connectivity in recent years.

"For connectivity in the country, especially air connectivity, Uttar Pradesh today has 16 domestic airports and four international airports. The fifth international airport in the country is coming up at Jewar. We have sent a request to Prime Minister for its inauguration on March 28 and have invited him," he said.

He added that the airport is expected to give a major boost to the State's economy. "Imagine the scale of growth once the Jewar airport becomes operational. It is expected to generate revenue of around Rs 1 lakh crore for the Uttar Pradesh Government," the CM said.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Northeast States on alert after arrest of 7 foreigners

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
 ■ New Delhi

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has issued fresh directives to the Governments of Mizoram, Nagaland, and Manipur, the three northeastern States bordering Myanmar, instructing strict and continuous monitoring of all foreigners visiting or residing in the region.

The move follows the National Investigation Agency's (NIA) arrest of six Ukrainian nationals and one

American, accused of using India as a transit hub to smuggle European-sourced drones and provide training for terror activities targeting the country. "Central security agencies were closely monitoring these individuals. The NIA arrested them after gathering evidence of waging war against India," sources said.

A senior Home Ministry official confirmed that the alert was triggered by intelligence inputs pointing to suspicious foreign activity in the sensitive border region.



Representative image

The Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) has been directed to track movements meticulously and take legal action as required.

Under existing rules, foreigners must obtain a Restricted Area Permit (RAP) to enter these protected States. The permit specifies authorised entry points, places of residence, and duration of stay; violations are treated as serious offences.

The NIA investigation revealed that the seven arrested — American national Matthew Aaron Van Dyke and Ukrainians Hurba Petro, Sliyviak Taras, Ivan Sukmanovskiy, Stefaniv Marian, Honcharuk Maksim, and Kaminskyi Viktor — arrived in India in February 2026 on valid tourist visas but entered Mizoram without RAPs. Investigators found that 14 Ukrainians had entered India on different dates to avoid suspicion, travelling via Guwahati to Mizoram and crossing illegally into Myanmar.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

GANGSTER RAVI PUJARI ARRESTED IN THANE
 Thane Police have arrested notorious gangster Ravi Pujari in connection with a 2017 extortion and firing case, officials said. The 57-year-old was produced before a special MCOCA court on Wednesday, which remanded him in police custody until March 27. The Anti-Extortion Cell of the Thane Crime Branch took Pujari from Parappana Agrahara Central Jail in Bengaluru on Tuesday and brought him to Thane. Originally from Udipi, Karnataka, Pujari had operated from abroad for several years and was extradited to India from Senegal in 2020. Police said Pujari demanded a ransom of ₹10 crore from a construction businessman in 2017, threatening to kill him if the amount was not paid. He allegedly sent henchmen to fire at the victim's office.

Iran's intelligence chief killed, says Israel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
 ■ New Delhi

Israel on Wednesday claimed it had killed Iran's intelligence minister Esmail Khatib in an overnight strike, marking what could be the third high-profile assassination of a senior Iranian figure within 24 hours.

If confirmed, Khatib's death would follow the reported killings of Ali Larijani and Gholamreza Soleimani, both key figures in Iran's political and security establishment.



Iran's intelligence minister Esmail Khatib

tional senior Iranian officials without further approvals, signalling an escalation in operations.

"Significant developments are expected across all arenas as the campaign against Iran and Hezbollah escalates," Katz said, adding that strikes inside Iran are increasing in scale and intensity.

The conflict, now in its third week, has reportedly left over 2,000 people dead, with no immediate resolution in sight.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Ensure 60% seats free, airlines told

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The Ministry of Civil Aviation on Wednesday directed airlines to ensure that at least 60 per cent of seats on every flight are provided free of charge. The move follows widespread complaints over additional charges for seat selection, particularly for window, aisle and extra-legroom seats. Currently, only a limited number of seats — often middle seats at the back — are available without extra cost. The new directive is expected to reduce the financial burden on passengers, for whom seat selection has increasingly become an additional expense rather than an add-on.

Civil Aviation Minister K Rammohan Naidu said the Government has issued "important directions to further strengthen



Representative image

passenger facilitation measures."

"60 per cent seats free of charge, assured seating together for families, and clear, transparent norms for carriage of sports equipment, musical instruments & pets," he posted on X.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Central Bank of India faces ₹1.44 lakh crore in defaults, files 4,903 cases

J GOPIKRISHNAN ■ New Delhi

The Central Bank of India is grappling with loan defaults worth ₹1.44 lakh crore from large corporate borrowers, ranking seventh among public sector banks in recovery from big-ticket defaulters, according to data up to January 2026.

Figures from TransUnion CIBIL show the bank has filed 4,903 recovery suits across the country as total large defaults in the PSU banking system exceed ₹29 lakh crore.

The biggest defaulter is the Videocon Group, which owes ₹25,299 crore. This group headed by Venugopal Dhoot and brother former Shiv Sena MP Rajkumar Dhoot got nine loans, split into equal value from the Central Bank. It is also under investi-

gation in a CBI case linked to alleged bribery involving former ICICI Bank CEO Chanda Kochhar. 10 per cent of the loan value given as bribe to her husband Deepak Kochhar's firm. The company is currently undergoing insolvency proceedings.

Anil Ambani-led Reliance Communications, Reliance Naval Engineering and Reliance Telecom together account for ₹4,402 crore in dues, followed by Dunn Foods Pvt Ltd (₹4,191 crore) and Punj Lloyd (₹4,055 crore).

Chennai-based Coastal Energen Pvt Ltd has defaulted on ₹3,630 crore. The company, now acquired by Adani Power through insolvency, had also borrowed heavily from multiple banks, leaving lenders to pursue recovery through legal routes.



Apart from Central Bank, Coastal Energen Private Limited took loans from SBI (₹10,605 crore), Punjab National Bank, Indian Overseas Bank, Indian Bank, UCO Bank, HUDCO, IFCI, Bank of India, Bank of Baroda, Corporation Bank, Andhra Bank, J&K Bank, Canara Bank and Tamilnadu Mercantile Bank. This company was promoted Ahmed AR Buhari, settled in Dubai.

Other major defaulters include Lanco Infratech (₹3,543 crore) headed by former Congress MP L Rajagopal, Rolta India (₹3,422

LARGE DEFAULTERS OF CENTRAL BANK OF INDIA	
● Videocon Industries	● Pioneer Gas and Power
● Dunn Foods Pvt Ltd	● Ushdev International
● Anil Ambani' Reliance Group	● Pratibha Industries
● Reliance Communication, Reliance Telecom	● Winsome Diamonds and Jewellery
● Punj Lloyd	● Senbo Engineering
● Coastal Energen Private Limited	● Lloyds Steel Industries
● Lanco Infratech	● Forever Precious Diamonds and Jewellery
● Rolta India	● Konaseema Gas Power
● S Kumars	● C and C Construction
● Gitanjali Gems	● Vandana Vidyut
● KS Oil	● Shrenuj and Company
● Shri Lakshmi Cotsyn	● Varun Industries
● Frost International	● VVF (India) Ltd
● Nagarjuna Oil Corporation	
● EPC Constructions	
● Sujana Towers	
● Housing Development and Infrastructure	

Total ₹1.44 lakh crores

crore) and S Kumars Nationwide (₹3,146 crore).

Gitanjali Gems, promoted by fugitives Mehul Choksi and Nirav Modi, has defaulted on ₹2,815 crore. Additional large defaulters include KS Oils (₹2,746 crore), Shri Lakshmi Cotsyn (₹2,315 crore), Frost International (₹2,138 crore), Nagarjuna Oil Corporation (₹2,117 crore) and EPC Constructions linked to the Essar Group (₹2,087 crore).

Among other borrowers with significant dues are Sujana Towers (₹1,925 crore), Housing Development and Infrastructure Ltd (₹1,464 crore), Pioneer Gas and Power (₹1,435 crore), Ushdev International (₹1,403 crore) and Pratibha Industries (₹1,174 crore).

Winsome Diamonds and Jewellery, linked to fugitive

jatin Mehta, accounts for around ₹1,400 crore in defaults.

Transtroy India, promoted by former TDP MP Royapatti Sambasiva Rao, has defaulted on ₹1,389 crore and is under investigation by central agencies for alleged fund diversion. This company engages in road, rail, power contracts in facing CBI and ED cases. CBI and SFIO found that Sambasiva Rao (82) created fake companies in the name of his maids, drivers and sweepers. Interestingly, Central Bank has given loan to Transtroy India's linked company Betul Tollways Private Limited and a Russian Citizen Oleg Sergeev is shown as personal guarantor. This person is director of many toll companies of Sambasiva Rao.

CONTINUED ON >> P4



Civil defence sammelan showcases rescue drills

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Wednesday emphasised the importance of preparedness, resilience and coordinated response during natural disasters and man-made emergencies, stating that minimising loss of life and restoring normalcy at the earliest should remain the top priority. He was addressing the Madhya Pradesh Civil Defence Volunteers Sammela-2026 held at the Home Guards Parade Ground in Bhopal.

Highlighting the role of civil defence volunteers, the Chief Minister said that maintaining patience and courage during crises is crucial, and the dedication of volunteers serves as a protective shield for society. He noted that



Madhya Pradesh has over 82,000 trained and disciplined civil defence volunteers, forming a strong support system during emergencies. He also underlined the growing importance of civil defence in the changing global scenario and said that the country's preparedness has improved significantly in recent years.

During the programme,

volunteers showcased various disaster response techniques through live demonstrations. These included rescue operations during floods using rubber boats, preparation of floating rafts with available resources, rope bridge construction, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and rescue measures during aerial attacks. Rope rescue techniques were

also demonstrated. A special self-defence presentation by women volunteers from Indore drew appreciation from the audience. The Chief Minister also distributed civil defence jackets to the participants.

Yadav stressed the need to expand training, particularly for women and police personnel deployed along major highways, so they can respond effectively to road accidents and save lives. He also referred to initiatives such as Rahveer Yojana and the PM Shri Air Ambulance Service, stating that Madhya Pradesh is among the first states to introduce such measures aimed at strengthening emergency response.

Referring to a recent fire incident in Indore linked to an electric vehicle, the

Chief Minister highlighted emerging challenges posed by new technologies. He said civil defence and home guard personnel must continuously upgrade their skills to deal with such evolving risks.

Director General of Home Guards and Civil Defence Pragna Richa Srivastava said that around 780 volunteers from five districts participated in the event after undergoing a month-long specialised training. She noted that these volunteers are trained in disaster management, fire safety, traffic control, first aid, crowd management and relief operations. She added that civil defence volunteers play a crucial role in saving lives, reducing property damage and maintaining public morale during emergencies.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav with members of the Maharashtrian community during Gudhi Padma celebration on the eve of the festival, at his residence in Bhopal on Wednesday. Pioneer photo

LPG crisis hits hotels, restaurants in MP

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

The LPG crisis continues across Madhya Pradesh, with hotels and restaurants facing acute shortages as commercial cylinder supplies have remained suspended for the eighth consecutive day.

Although oil companies have issued new guidelines allowing supply of up to 10 per cent of commercial cylinder demand to select categories, including hotels and eateries, no formal supply orders have been issued yet. Officials said that if orders are released, nearly 50,000 hotels and restaurants in the state could receive cylinders.

The shortage has led to a sharp surge in demand for domestic LPG cylinders, which has increased by nearly 70 per cent. As a result,

waiting periods have stretched to three to four days in several cities. In Bhopal alone, the average daily booking has risen from around 8,500 to nearly 14,000 cylinders, creating a gap of 5,000 to 6,000 cylinders.

Officials said the supply chain has also been affected, with gas agencies now receiving deliveries on alternate days instead of daily. Around 12,000 to 13,000 cylinders are currently being supplied daily in Bhopal, and authorities expect the backlog to be cleared within the next few days.

The crisis has severely impacted the hospitality sector, with many establishments running out of gas. While some have adopted alternatives such as induc-

tion cooking and diesel-based systems, these options have increased operational costs. Several hotels have also modified their menus to cope with the shortage.

Despite the challenges, no layoffs have been reported in the sector so far. Industry representatives said that even partial restoration of supply would provide significant relief.

The situation has also triggered protests across the state. Opposition leaders and activists staged demonstrations in Bhopal, highlighting the shortage and criticising the handling of the crisis.

Officials said detailed orders from oil companies are awaited, following which commercial LPG supply is expected to resume.

Vikram Samvat 2083 festivities to resonate across all districts

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said that Ujjain has, for centuries, been a centre of religion, knowledge, science and culture, and continues to inspire through its rich legacy. He noted that the ongoing Vikramotsav celebrates the enduring traditions established by Emperor Vikramaditya, whose legacy remains a source of inspiration.

Marking the occasion of Vikram Samvat 2083, celebrations will be held across all district headquarters on March 19, including Surya Upasana and cultural programmes. A ceremonial Brahm Dhvaj will be installed atop the Mahakaleswar Temple, while theatrical performances based

Prehistoric elephant remains discovered in MP

FAROOQ QURESHI ■ Bhopal

A significant paleontological discovery has been reported from Atrela Hill in Korauli Kala village of Sihawal block in Sidhi district, where fossil remains believed to belong to the proboscidean family—ancient ancestors of elephants—have been unearthed.

The discovery was made during an initial survey conducted by a scientific team from PM Shri College of Excellence, Satna. According to the team, the fossils are estimated to be between 25,000 and 250,000 years old. The survey was led by assistant professor Harshit Soni, along with Rishabh Dev Saket and archaeologist Dharendra Sharma, who identified tooth fragments and bone remains of large herbivorous mammals at

the site.

Researchers observed that the recovered teeth exhibit distinct enamel plates, dentin structures and characteristic wear patterns typically associated with early proboscideans. In addition to the fossil remains, the team also documented hardened sedimentary soil fragments showing root impressions and micro-porous features, indicating the presence of ancient soil layers, or paleosols.

The findings suggest that the site may be linked to the sedimentary formations of the Son River Valley, a region known for earlier discoveries of Pleistocene-era megafauna fossils. Experts, however, cautioned that determining the exact age of the fossils will require advanced scientific techniques such as uranium dating, as DNA analysis and

carbon dating may not be feasible in this case. They added that even Electron Spin Resonance alone may not provide conclusive results, making detailed geological studies and comparative analysis essential.

College principal S.C. Rai described the findings as preliminary but significant, noting that the discovery highlights the scientific importance of the site. He also expressed concern that some fossil remains may have already been damaged due to local activities.

They emphasised that with proper conservation and collaboration with national and international experts, the site has the potential to provide valuable insights into prehistoric environments, climate patterns and the natural history of the Vindhyan region.



Devotees carry an idol of Goddess Kali for installation at a puja pandal on the eve of Chaitra Navratri festival in Bhopal on Wednesday. Pioneer photo

Electric car fire triggers LPG explosions; eight lives perish

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Indore

At least eight people, including a pregnant woman, were killed and four others injured after a fire, suspected to have been triggered by a short circuit in an electric car, engulfed a three-storey house in Indore in the early hours of Wednesday.

The incident took place between 3:30 am and 4 am near Bengali Square in Greater Brijeshwari Colony. According to preliminary findings, a Tata Punch EV was being charged when the fire broke out and quickly spread from the vehicle to the house.

Police said the flames intensified rapidly after reaching multiple LPG cylinders stored inside the building, leading to a series of explosions that caused part of the structure to collapse. The situation was further aggravated by the presence of highly flammable polymer chemicals in the house.

Among the deceased are rubber businessman Manoj Pugalisa, his pregnant daughter-in-law Simran, and six relatives who had arrived from

Kishanganj in Bihar a day earlier. Several occupants were trapped inside as the fire spread, and officials said digital door locks failed after the power supply was cut, preventing timely escape.

Rescue teams later broke open doors and grills to reach those inside. Eyewitnesses claimed that fire brigade teams arrived nearly an hour after the alert, by which time the blaze had engulfed all three floors. More than 10 gas cylinders were reportedly present, significantly intensifying the fire.

The injured have been admitted to hospital, with some sustaining severe burn injuries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief over the incident and announced an ex gratia of Rs 2 lakh for the families of the deceased and Rs 50,000 for the injured.

State minister Kailash Vijayvargiya termed the incident serious amid the growing use of electric vehicles and called for an expert committee to examine the cause and suggest safety measures. Police have launched a detailed investigation into the incident.

HC seeks report on court safety

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Jabalpur

The Madhya Pradesh High Court on Wednesday expressed serious concern over inadequate security arrangements in courts across the state and directed the government to submit a detailed report by March 31.

A division bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjeev Sachdeva and Justice Vinay Saraf made strong observations while hearing the matter, questioning the effectiveness of existing safety measures in judicial premises. The court noted that recent incidents, including injuries to judges due to collapsing structures and reports of explosions within court complexes, point to significant lapses.

According to a report submitted by Registrar Naresh M. Singh, as many as 29 district courts lack boundary walls, while 27 tehsil courts have walls that are too low to ensure proper security. The report also revealed that only five district court complexes currently have police outposts.

Collector marshals departments for Jal Ganga campaign rollout

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Ujjain

A preparatory meeting for the Jal Ganga Conservation Campaign 2026 was held on Wednesday at the Collectorate auditorium under the chairmanship of Collector Roshan Kumar Singh, with officials from various departments in attendance.

Addressing the meeting, the Collector emphasised the importance of ensuring active public participation in the campaign. He directed officials to organise activities in a ceremonial manner in the presence of public representatives to generate awareness and encourage community involvement. He also instructed that all pending works under the Jal Ganga Conservation Campaign 2025 be completed at the earliest.

The meeting focused on key activities to be undertaken during the campaign, including plantation drives, construction of farm ponds, dugwell recharge structures and development of Amrit Sarovars. Officials were also directed to undertake clean-

EPF members told to enable DBT

Jabalpur: The process of disbursing benefits under the Prime Minister Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana into the bank accounts of Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) members is currently underway, officials said.

Regional Provident Fund Commissioner Rakesh Sahrawat stated that members must ensure their bank accounts are linked with Aadhaar and enabled for Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to receive the scheme's benefits without delay.

He added that employees who joined a company for the first time on or after August 1, 2025, are required to complete Aadhaar-based face authentication with their Universal Account Number (UAN) to avail the benefits under the scheme. Eligible members have been advised to complete this process at the earliest.

Surgeons extract exceedingly rare spinal tumour at AIIMS

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

In a major medical achievement, doctors at AIIMS Bhopal have successfully performed a complex surgery to remove a rare spinal cord tumour, significantly improving the condition of a 40-year-old woman who had been bedridden for months.

The patient had been suffering from severe neurological complications, which had progressed to the extent that she was unable to move independently. She had also lost control over bowel and bladder functions, severely affecting her quality of life. Detailed medical examination revealed a rare intramedullary tumour within the spinal cord, a condition found in only about 1.1 per cent of spinal schwannoma cases and considered highly challenging due to the risk of permanent paralysis during surgery.

After consulting multiple hospitals, where the procedure was either delayed or termed highly risky and expensive, the patient eventually approached AIIMS Bhopal.

A team from the Department of Orthopaedics, led by Pankaj Mishra, undertook the case with careful planning and advanced diagnostic support.

The surgery involved the use of specialised microsurgical techniques to remove the tumour from within the spinal cord while preserving critical nerve structures.

The procedure was carried out with multidisciplinary support. The Anaesthesia Department ensured the patient's stability during the operation, while the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation played a key role in post-operative recovery and functional restoration.

The entire treatment was provided free of cost under the Ayushman Bharat Yojana, ensuring that the patient's family did not face any financial burden.

Following the surgery, doctors observed significant improvement in the patient's condition. She has gradually begun regaining strength and has also regained control over her bodily functions. Doctors said her recovery is progressing steadily, and she is moving towards regaining independence.

Officials at AIIMS Bhopal described the case as an example of advanced medical care and coordinated teamwork, highlighting the institute's capability in handling rare and complex conditions.

Govt to examine EV fire incident

Bhopal: Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Wednesday ordered a detailed investigation into the Indore accident linked to an electric car charging, terming the incident serious and indicative of emerging risks associated with new technologies. He said teams of officials and experts have been sent from Bhopal to assist in the probe.

Speaking to the media after a programme at the Home Guard Lines, Yadav noted that the incident, involving an electric vehicle and a digital door lock, highlights new safety challenges. He said the government will take steps to prevent such incidents and raise public awareness, urging citizens to exercise caution while using modern technologies.

Name Change	
I, Matadeen Prajapati, S/o Midwa Prajapati, resident of Ward No. 4, Barigarh, near Gandhi Chowk, Juharnagar, Block Gaurihar, District Chhatrapur (M.P.), father and natural guardian of my minor son, hereby declare that my son's name recorded as Amit Kumar Prajapati in some documents shall henceforth be known as Amit Prajapati for all purposes. Affidavit sworn before Notary/Oath Commissioner, Chhatrapur (M.P.).	

Bank of Maharashtra (A Govt. of India Enterprise) www.bankofmaharashtra.in		ZONAL OFFICE, 1/14, ADMINISTRATIVE ZONE, ARERA HILLS, BHOPAL, 462011.	
POSSESSION NOTICE [Rule - 8 (1)]			
WHEREAS, The undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the Bank of Maharashtra under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, and in exercise of the powers conferred under Sub-Section (12) of Section 13 read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rule, 2002, issued a Demand Notice dated mentioned below calling upon the borrower and guarantor to repay outstanding Amount (mentioned below) within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said Notice. The notice was sent by Regd AD Post and hand delivery.			
The borrower having failed to repay the amount, the undersigned has taken Possession of the properties described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under section 13 (4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on dates mentioned below. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the properties will be subject to the charge of Bank of Maharashtra, Itarsi Branch, Itarsi for an amount herein above mentioned. The borrower's attention is invited to the provisions of sub-section 8 of Sec 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.			
Name & Address of Borrowers & Guarantor (s)	Details of Property	Outstanding Amount ₹	
Borrower: 1. M/s R K BRICKS INDUSTRIES Prop. - Mr. Amarjeet Singh Tuteja (Deceased) Through Legal Representative/ Legal Heirs:- 1. (a) Mr. Rinku Tuteja S/o Mr. Amarjeet Singh Tuteja and all other legal heirs	All those piece and parcel of land along with residential house situated at east to west 74 ft., North to South 12 ft., whose adm. Area 888 Sq. Ft., out of sheet no. 02 Plot no. 11/4w/2, 11/3s/2, 14/1v/2, Situated at Mehargan Ward no. 19, Kasturba Nagar Itarsi, Tehsil-Itarsi, Dist. - Hoshangabad, Boundaries: North:-House of Swaroop Singh, East:-Road, South:-House of Ravel Singh, West:-Street, This property is owned by Mr. Narendra Singh Tuteja S/o Mr. Swaroop Singh Tuteja.	₹ 612,372.48/- + Unapplied Interest at applicable rate + other Charges w.e.f. 01/09/2025 Demand Notice Date 01/09/2025 Possession Notice 18/03/2026	
Address: 1: Village Pandukhedhi, Post Pathrota, Ordinance Factory, Tehsil- Itarsi, Dist. - Hoshangabad, M.P.-461111 Address 2: House No. 112, Ward No. 19, Punjabi Mohalla Itarsi, Dist. - Hoshangabad, M.P.-461111 Guarantor: 2. Mr. Narendra Singh Tuteja S/o Mr. Swaroop Singh Tuteja , Address : House No. 112, Ward No. 19, Punjabi Mohalla Itarsi, Dist. - Hoshangabad, M.P.-461111 Cersai Asset ID - 200011494341		(SANJEEV SAJJAN) Chief Manager & Authorized Officer, Zonal Office Bhopal	
Date : 19.03.2026 Place : Itarsi			



Statewide push for water conservation begins

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav will launch the third phase of the 'Jal Ganga Samvardhan' campaign on March 19, coinciding with Gudi Padwa (Chaitra Shukla Pratipada), from the ISKCON Temple in Indore. A state-level programme will be held in Indore, while similar events will take place simultaneously near rivers, ponds and other water sources across all districts, urban bodies and gram panchayats.

The statewide campaign will run for three and a half months, concluding on June 30, and will involve 18 departments. The Panchayat and Rural Development Department has been designated as the nodal agency,

with the Urban Administration and Housing Department as co-nodal. Detailed guidelines have already been issued to district collectors for implementation.

The campaign will be carried out under the leadership of district in-charge ministers, with collectors acting as nodal officers. District-level committees comprising officials, representatives of participating departments, voluntary organisations, industry bodies, agricultural institutions and citizens will oversee planning and monitoring. At the block level, sub-divisional officers (revenue) will coordinate activities with the support of local committees.

The initiative aims to strengthen water conservation and management across the state through coordinated efforts. Departments includ-



ing forest, water resources, public health engineering, agriculture, environment, education and others will participate in the campaign.

Under the programme, ongoing works initiated last year—such as farm ponds, Amrit Sarovars and dugwells recharge structures under MGNREGA—will be completed, while new projects will also be taken up.

These include construction of

ponds, restoration of existing water bodies, repair of wells and stepwells, canal improvement and groundwater recharge structures. Desilting of ponds and check dams will be carried out with public participation, and the removed silt will be provided to farmers for agricultural use.

The government has set an ambitious target of undertaking water conservation and storage works worth around Rs 2,500 crore during this phase. Special focus will be given to maintenance and repair of over 10,000 check dams and stop dams to improve irrigation and groundwater recharge.

In urban areas, water conservation works will be implemented under the AMRUT 2.0 scheme, while

the forest department will undertake recharge activities across large areas through structures such as check dams, percolation pits and contour trenches. The Public Health Engineering Department will ensure testing of drinking water quality in schools and anganwadi centres, along with cleanliness drives around water sources.

Officials said funds for the campaign will be mobilised through departmental budgets, government schemes, public participation and CSR contributions. The campaign will be implemented across all 55 districts, with coordinated efforts aimed at ensuring sustainable water management and long-term water security in the state.



Chief Minister Mohan Yadav inaugurates a Kavi Sammelan organised by Karm Shree in TT Nagar, Bhopal, on Wednesday night, with noted poet Kumar Vishwas in attendance. Pioneer photo



Bomb Detection and Disposal Squad personnel during a search operation after a bomb threat, at JK Hospital and Medical University in Bhopal on Wednesday. Pioneer photo

Fresh wave of hoax bomb emails hits key institutions

Bhopal: A fresh wave of bomb hoax threats triggered panic across Bhopal on Wednesday, with several major institutions, including JK Medical University, LNCT University, JK Hospital and LN Medical College, receiving threatening emails.

According to officials, the emails were sent to institutional addresses around 10 am, claiming that nearly 21 bombs had been planted on campuses and warning of serial blasts scheduled around 1:30 pm. Following the alerts, police teams, along with bomb disposal and dog squads, rushed to the locations and carried out extensive searches. Students, staff and patients were evacuated from the premises, leading to chaos, particularly in hospital areas.

The threat emails also targeted key public institutions, including the Bhopal District Court, Atal Bihari Vajpayee Hindi University and the com-

mercial tax office in Arera Hills. Security was tightened immediately and thorough search operations were conducted, but no suspicious objects were found.

At the Hindi University, the campus was evacuated on the directions of the vice-chancellor, while similar precautionary measures were taken at the district court, where the email claimed explosives had been placed inside sacks across courtyards.

Police have confirmed that all the threats were hoaxes. However, investigations are underway to trace the source of the emails. Officials noted that similar threats had recently been sent to other institutions, including People's University and AIIMS Bhopal, raising concerns over a pattern of repeated hoax messages disrupting normal operations in the city.

Rain, storms bring relief from rising heat

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

A strong weather system became active across Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday, bringing a noticeable change in conditions and offering temporary relief from the rising heat. The system is expected to remain active for the next four days, leading to thunderstorms, gusty winds and rainfall in several parts of the state.

Late Tuesday night, parts of Balaghat district received nearly one inch of rainfall. Cloud cover was also reported in northern districts such as Bhand and Datia, while Bhopal witnessed light cloudiness during the day.

Despite the shift in weather, temperatures remained relatively high in many areas. Khajuraho recorded the highest temperature at 39.2°C, followed by Khargone at 38.8°C, while Bhopal registered 35.4°C. Other major cities also reported moderate temperatures, with Jabalpur at

36.1°C, and Indore, Ujjain and Gwalior remaining in the mid-30s.

According to the Meteorological Department, rainfall is likely in at least 19 districts. Heavy showers are expected in Chhindwara, Pandhurna, Seoni, Mandla, Dindori and Balaghat. Meanwhile, districts including Neemuch, Mandasaur, Agar Malwa, Rajgarh, Guna, Ashoknagar, Shivpuri, Sheopur, Morena, Gwalior, Bhand, Datia and Niwari may witness light rain accompanied by thunder, lightning and strong winds.

Senior meteorologist Divya E. Surendran said the system will remain active between March 19 and 21, influencing weather patterns across the state.

The weather change is being attributed to the presence of five cyclonic circulations over the northwestern parts of Madhya Pradesh, along with the impact of a western disturbance affecting adjoining

Two arrested for intimidatory conduct outside ADG's dwelling

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Shahpura police have arrested two youths for allegedly creating a disturbance and issuing threats outside the residence of Madhya Pradesh Police Additional Director General (Training) Rajababu Singh in Trilanga.

According to police, the incident took place in the early hours of Tuesday when a group arrived in a car, abused the officer and created a ruckus. CCTV footage from the residence showed one of the individuals carrying a stick.

Following the incident, Singh lodged a complaint with the State Police Headquarters and the Bhopal Police Commissioner, seeking enhanced security and expressing concern for his safety.

Based on the footage, police identified and arrested Nitesh Chourasia and Rudraksh Yadav, both local residents employed in private jobs. During questioning, the accused claimed they had reached the location by mistake and denied any deliberate intent to target the officer.

Police officials said no direct dispute between the accused and the officer or his staff has been established so far, while their backgrounds are being verified. Investigators are also examining whether the incident is linked to Singh's recent initiatives in police training, which have sparked debate in administrative and political circles.

New leadership for CII MP

Bhopal: The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) held its Madhya Pradesh State Annual Meeting 2026 at the Brilliant Convention Centre in Indore, bringing together industrialists, policymakers, academicians and stakeholders to discuss the future of industrial growth in the state.

During the meeting, the new leadership team for CII Madhya Pradesh was announced. Siddharth Chaturvedi, director of AISECT Ltd., has been appointed chairman for 2026-27, while Saurabh Singh Mehta, director of Kriti Nutrients Ltd., will serve as vice chairman.

Chaturvedi's appointment is expected to strengthen industry-government collaboration and promote innovation in the state. CII Madhya Pradesh aims to focus on industrial growth, policy advocacy, skill development and inclusive economic progress under the new leadership.

HC orders purge of illegal hoardings

Jabalpur: The Madhya Pradesh High Court has directed the Indore Municipal Corporation to take action against illegal hoardings installed on road dividers and footpaths, while hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) on the issue.

The order was passed on Tuesday by a division bench of Justices Vijay Kumar Shukla and Alok Awasthi, which issued notices to the concerned authorities and sought their response within four weeks. The court also instructed the municipal commissioner to identify hoardings installed in violation of rules and initiate action as per law.

The PIL raised concerns over alleged violations of the MP Outdoor Advertisement Media Rules, 2017, which regulate the installation of hoardings and unipoles.

It pointed out that Rule 28 prohibits placing such structures on road medians and footpaths due to safety risks for pedestrians and motorists, yet several hoardings were reportedly found in these restricted areas.

The petition also highlighted non-compliance with tender conditions issued in 2019 and 2020, alleging that contractors failed to follow mandatory norms while authorities did not enforce them.

It further claimed that contracts were awarded much later than scheduled and extended for up to seven years without revision of rates, leading to revenue losses for the civic body.

During the hearing, the petitioner's counsel presented photographs showing hoardings on dividers and footpaths, underlining concerns related to public safety and regulatory violations.

बैंक ऑफ बड़ोदा Bank of Baroda
Branch: Jayendraganj, Nisha Plaza, Jinsi Road, Near Aachran Press, Gwalior-474009 (M.P.) Ph. 72477-16428, 81695-56638
Email: vjgwal@bankofbaroda.com

E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE
"APPENDIX- IV-A [See proviso to Rule 9 (1) & 8 (6)]
SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 9 (1) & 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Bank of Baroda, Secured Creditor, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" for recovery of below mentioned account/s. The details of Borrower /s/ Guarantor/s/ Secured Asset/s/ Dues/ Reserve Price/ e-Auction date & Time, EMD and Bid Increase Amount are mentioned below.

Name & Address of Borrowers / Guarantors/ Mortgagor	Description of the immovable property with known encumbrances, if any	Reserve Price EMD Bid Increase Amount	Date & Time of E-Auction	Demand Notice Possession Date Outstanding Amount
Borrower: 1. Mayank Yadav S/o Mahipal Singh Yadav Add: 1. D-19, Gokul Apartment City Center, R.K. Puri, Gwalior-474011 Add: 2. Collector Bangle ke Peeche, Ganesh Pura, Purani Jail Road, Morena-476011	Property Owner- Mrs. Meena Yadav D/o Shri JS yadav- EMDT of Land and building situated at Ward No. 30, Duplex No. D-19, Gokul Apartment, Near Patel Nagar, City Center, Thatipur, Area of the Property 106 Sqm. Boundaries : North: 6 Mtr. Wide Road for Colony, South: House No. D-1, East: House No. D-20, West: House No. D-18	Rs. 1,12,00,000/- Rs. 11,20,000/- Rs. 10000/-	24-04-2026 Time : 2:00 PM to 6:00 PM	28-08-2025 05-02-2026 Rs. 17,83,927.47/- + Interest & charges
Borrower: 2. Meena Yadav W/o Mahipal Singh Yadav Add: 1. D-19, Gokul Apartment City Center, R.K. Puri, Gwalior-474011 Guarantor : Mahipal Singh Yadav S/o Natthu Singh Yadav Add: 1. D-19, Gokul Apartment City Center, R.K. Puri, Gwalior-474011 Add: 2. D-2, Gokul Apartment City Center, Patel Nagar, Gwalior-474011				

For detailed terms and conditions of sale, please refer to the link provided in <https://www.bankofbaroda.in/e-auction.htm> or e-bikray.com prospective bidders may contact the authorized officer on Mobile- 72477-16428, 81695-56638

Place: Gwalior **Date: 18/03/2026** **Authorised officer, Bank of Baroda**

केनरा बैंक Canara Bank
Regional office -1st Floor, Sai Baba Complex, Near GDA Building, Phool Bagh, Gwalior Ph. 0751-2423126

POSSESSION NOTICE (Rule 8 (1) For Immovable Property)

The Understanding being the Authorised officer of the Canara Bank Under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, in exercise of the power conferred under Section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002 issues a demand notice on below mentioned date to the following Borrowers/Guarantors, calling upon them to repay the amount mentioned in the respective Notice with in 60 days from the date of receipt of said notices. The borrowers having failed to repay the amount, Notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described here in below in exercise of powers conferred on him under Section (4) of Section 13 of the Act read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 on dates mentioned below, the borrowers/Guarantors in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealing with the properties will be subject to the charge of Canara Bank, for an amount herein below mentioned & Interest thereon. The borrower's attention is invited to provision of Section 13 (8) of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

Name and Address of Borrower/Property Owner	Outstanding Amount (Rs.)	Description of the Property
Branch : Canara Bank, Tikamgarh, Ph. 99397-85183, E-mail : cb4145@canarabank.com		
Borrower - 1. Sidhvi Vinayak Construction Proprietor Bhuvaneshwar Prasad Dixit Add: Chitransh Nagar Colony Near Collectrate Tikamgarh, M.P.-472001. Proprietorship Firm 2. Prop. Bhuvaneshwar Prasad Dixit S/o Jagdeesh Prasad Dixit Add: Ro Chitransh Nagar Colony Tikamgarh, M.P. - 472001. Gaurantor / Mortgagor : Gaurav Dixit S/o B.P. Dixit Add: Chitransh Nagar Colony Jhansi Road Tikamgarh, M.P. - 472001.	Rs. 17,31,801.40/- + Interest and Other Expenses - Recovery Demand Notice: 26-12-2025 Possession Date 16-03-2026	Property Owner - Gaurav Dixit S/o B.P. Dixit - EMT of Land having the extent of site 110.59 sq Meter, situated at Khasra No. 684/Min-1, Digoda Naka to Kuwarpara Marge, Village Kuwarpara, Tehsil/District-Tikamgarh, M.P., Parameter of Plot East- 40 Foot wide, West- 40 foot Wide, North- 29.75 foot wide, South- 29.75 Foot wide. Boundaries: East: Foola Devi's Plot, West: 20 foot wide road, North: Plot of Shivram Dangi, South: Plot of Anita Dangi.
Borrower - 1. Khajrana Construction Company Prop. Gaurav Dixit S/o B.P. Dixit, Add: Chitransh Nagar Colony, Taluk Jatara, Tikamgarh, M.P. 472001. (Proprietorship Firm) 2. Prop. Gaurav Dixit S/o B.P. Dixit Chitransh Nagar Colony Jhansi Road Tikamgarh, M.P. - 472001. Guarantor / Mortgagor : Ramkumari Dixit W/o Bhuvaneshwar Prasad Dixit, Add: Chitransh Colony, Near Collectorate, Tikamgarh, Madhya Pradesh - 472001.	Rs. 20,53,263.71/- + Interest and Other Expenses - Recovery Demand Notice: 29-12-2025 Possession Date 16-03-2026	Property Owner - Ramkumari Dixit W/o Bhuvaneshwar Prasad Dixit - EMT of Land & Building having the extent of site 1200 Sqft., situated at Khasra No. 679/2/Min-3, Chitransh Nagar Colony, Village- Kunwarpara, Halka No. 09, Tehsil & District Tikamgarh, M.P. Boundaries: East: 20 Fit wide Road, West: Plot of Ritesh Jain, North: House of Hanmantri South: Plot of Santosh

PLACE: GWALIOR **DATE : 18-03-2026** **AUTHORISED OFFICER CANARA BANK**

New Vikram Year: A resolve for the roadmap of agriculture, water, and development

DR MOHAN YADAV

The New Year that begins with Chaitra Shukla Pratipada symbolizes our cultural consciousness, scientific outlook, and natural way of life. This year marks the beginning of Vikram Samvat 2083. It is a matter of pride and honor for Madhya Pradesh that this glorious tradition of Indian chronology originated from Ujjayini (Ujjain).

The Vikram Samvat era began with the coronation of Emperor Vikramaditya and represents the spirit of Indian culture and the identity of the nation. Emperor Vikramaditya is remembered as an ideal ruler known for justice, valor, patience, wisdom, and good governance. By defeating foreign invaders, he protected the nation and upheld the dignity of Indian culture. During his reign, exemplary traditions of governance were established. The ideals of justice and policy he set continue to inspire governance and administration even today.

The tradition of Vikramaditya's good governance is described in the stories of Simhasan Battisi. These stories reflect an ideal administrative system in which the state was run with the guidance of capable ministers, scholars, and policy experts. The way Emperor Vikramaditya nur-

tered knowledge, culture, and administration reflects the excellence of India's ancient governance traditions.

To take various dimensions of Emperor Vikramaditya's personality and the Indian knowledge tradition to the masses, the state is organizing "Vikramotsav 2026." This 139-day festival, running from 12 February 2026 to 30 June 2026, will set a remarkable record as a long-duration cultural celebration. Through various cultural, historical, and intellectual programs, the life, ideals, and achievements of Emperor Vikramaditya are being shared with society.

Since ancient times, Ujjayini has been a center of India's cultural and scientific consciousness. The sacred city of Baba Mahakal has long been associated with time calculation, astronomy, and spiritual practice. Thousands of years ago, our ancestors studied the movements of planets and constellations and developed a system of time calculation that still amazes the world. The observatory of Ujjain and the Vedic system of chronology stand as testimony to our rich knowledge tradition.

It is a matter of great satisfaction that under the guidance of Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the world's first Vikramaditya Vedic Clock has been reinstalled. This clock is an

important effort to revive the tradition of Indian time calculation in the modern era.

The Indian New Year is a celebration of nature's renewal. During this time, nature blossoms with new life and fills the earth with fresh energy and creativity. Across the country, the New Year is celebrated with different names—Gudi Padwa, Ugadi, Cheti Chand, and Navroz. The auspicious festival of Chaitra Navratri also begins on this day. The nine days of Navratri provide an opportunity for spiritual practice, self-purification, and worship of divine power. In Indian life traditions, festivals and customs guide the holistic development of individuals and society.

In Madhya Pradesh, the New Year is being celebrated with new resolutions for development and public welfare. On this natural occasion of renewal, I am pleased to share that this year is being observed as the "Kisan Kalyan Varsh" (Year of Farmers' Welfare) in the state. Agriculture is the backbone of our state's economy, and farmers are its foundation. Therefore, several significant decisions have been taken to increase farmers' income, make agriculture more profitable, and strengthen the rural economy.

This year, the first Agriculture Cabinet Meeting was held at the sacred site

of Bhilat Baba Devasthal Nagalwadi in Barwani district. In this meeting, schemes worth Rs 27,500 crore were approved for agricultural development and farmer welfare.

To promote modern technologies in agriculture, expand irrigation facilities, encourage natural farming, and enhance the value addition of agricultural products, several initiatives have been implemented in the state. Our goal is that farmers not only increase production but also earn additional income through agro-based industries and become self-reliant.

Under the guidance of our Hon'ble Prime Minister, we are moving forward on the path of development while preserving our heritage. Accordingly, work is being done for the conservation and development of historical, cultural, and religious sites across the state. Omkareshwar, Ujjain, Maihar, and other major pilgrimage sites are being developed as centers of spiritual tourism. I am also pleased to share that preparations for the Simhashta Festival of 2028 in Ujjain are progressing steadily. Along with this, initiatives such as Ram Van Gaman Path and Krishna Pathya are connecting the younger generation with India's cultural and spiritual heritage.

The celebration of the Indian New Year also inspires us to protect nature.

Our traditions encourage taking a holy bath before sunrise and offering water to the Sun on the day of Gudi Padwa. This tradition conveys the message of purity and conservation of water sources.

With the same spirit of water conservation, the "Jal Ganga Samvardhan Abhiyan" is being launched in Madhya Pradesh from today. This third state-level campaign will begin from the banks of the Shipra River in Ujjain on the New Year's day. Through traditional water conservation methods, modern technologies, and innovations, we will work to preserve water sources across the state.

I urge the people of the state to turn this Jal Ganga Samvardhan Campaign into a mass movement. On this occasion of nature's renewal, let us resolve to build a Developed Madhya Pradesh. With renewed awareness and collective effort, let us move forward for the welfare and progress of our state and contribute to the vision of a Developed India.

I am confident that this year will prove to be a year of progress, prosperity, and new achievements for Madhya Pradesh. Once again, I extend my heartfelt greetings to all of you on the occasion of Nav Samvatsar and wish you a happy, prosperous, and joyful year ahead. (Author is Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh)



IN FOCUS



Children dressed in various costumes participate in a welcome procession on the eve of the Marathi New Year in Mumbai

22 Indian vessels safe amid Hormuz crisis

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

The Government of India on Wednesday confirmed that all 22 Indian-flagged vessels stranded in the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz are safe, even as the ongoing conflict in West Asia continues to disrupt global energy supply chains and maritime movement.

According to officials, as much as 1.7 million tonnes of Indian energy cargo remains stuck in the region. This includes nearly 1.67 million tonnes of crude oil, about 3.2 lakh tonnes of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), and approximately 2 lakh tonnes of liquefied natural gas (LNG) onboard the vessels awaiting clearance to transit through the narrow sea lane connecting the Persian Gulf to the open ocean.

Special Secretary in the Shipping Ministry, Rajesh

Kumar Sinha, said all 611 seafarers aboard the 22 vessels positioned on the western side of the strait are safe.

Efforts are underway to secure safe passage for these ships through the conflict-hit corridor. The crisis began after military strikes by the United States and Israel on Iran, followed by retaliatory action from Tehran, effectively shutting down the Strait of Hormuz — a key artery for global oil and gas transport between Iran and Oman. Initially, 28 Indian-flagged vessels were present in the region when hostilities erupted. Of these, 24 were located on the western side of the strait and four on the eastern side. Over the past week, four ships — two from each side — managed to move to safer waters.

Currently, 22 vessels remain on the western side, while three are positioned on



Indian vessel Jag Laadki carrying 80,800 metric tonnes of crude oil arrives at Mundra Port in Kutch, Gujarat

the eastern side after an additional ship joined them.

The stranded fleet comprises a mix of vessel types, highlighting the scale of disruption. Among the 22 ships on the western side, six are LPG carriers, one is an LNG tanker, and four are crude oil tankers. The remaining include container ships, bulk carriers, a chemical carrier, a dredger, and vessels under maintenance or without cargo. Despite the tense sit-

uation, India has managed to maintain some inflow of critical energy supplies. On Wednesday, the crude oil tanker Jag Laadki, carrying around 80,886 metric tonnes of crude, docked safely at Mundra Port.

The shipment originated from the United Arab Emirates and was loaded at Fujairah Port, which itself has faced drone and missile threats during the conflict. Earlier, LPG carrier Nanda

Devi reached Vadar Port with 46,500 metric tonnes of cargo, while another vessel, Shivalik, had docked at Mundra earlier this week.

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone said it ensured safe berthing and coordinated maritime operations to protect India's energy supply chain during the ongoing crisis. India's dependence on imported energy makes the disruption particularly significant.

The country imports nearly 88 per cent of its crude oil, 50 per cent of natural gas, and about 60 per cent of LPG requirements. Before the conflict escalated, a substantial portion of these supplies originated from Middle Eastern nations, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The blockade of the Strait of Hormuz has forced India to diversify sourcing, includ-

ing increased crude procurement from Russia. However, supply constraints have already begun to affect domestic sectors, with reduced gas allocation to industries and limited LPG availability for commercial establishments such as hotels and restaurants.

The scale of disruption extends beyond India. Nearly 500 tanker vessels remain confined within the Persian Gulf region due to the conflict. These include over 100 crude oil tankers, along with significant numbers of product, chemical, and other specialised carriers.

As geopolitical tensions persist with no immediate resolution in sight, Indian authorities continue to monitor developments closely, prioritising the safety of seafarers and the continuity of vital energy supplies.

MEA: 2.6 lakh Indians returned from West Asia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Amid the escalating West Asia conflict, the Government on Wednesday said around 2.6 lakh people have returned from the region to India since February 28.

At an inter-ministerial briefing here on the West Asia situation, Additional Secretary (Gulf), Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Aseem R Mahajan, said that on Wednesday, around 70 flights were expected to operate from various airports in the UAE to different destinations in India. The flight situation is "reassuring," he said. MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal spoke about a telephonic conversation between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan on Tuesday. "The two leaders discussed the current situation in West Asia. The prime minister reiterated India's strong condemnation of all attacks on the UAE that have resulted in loss of innocent lives and damage to civilian infrastructure," he said.

The two leaders agreed on the importance of "ensuring safe and free navigation through the Strait of Hormuz," Jaiswal said. "Both leaders will continue to work together for the early restoration of peace, security and stability in the region," the MEA spokesperson said. This was for the second time Modi spoke to the UAE President since the US-Israel combine launched an attack on Iran on February 28. Tehran has retaliated by attacking several Gulf countries hosting



Aseem R Mahajan

US military bases. The Indian Embassy in Tehran is aiding Indian nationals, especially students, Jaiswal said. Many more Indians have expressed the wish to cross the Iranian border to go to Armenia and Azerbaijan, he said.

"Our embassy has issued an advisory and we appeal to all to follow them to ensure safe transit across Iran-Armenia and Iran-Azerbaijan borders," he added.

On a query on the supply of fuel to some of the neighbouring countries of India, the MEA spokesperson said, "This particular question I have already addressed before.

I would like to reiterate that we have received these requests, and we are examining those requests, keeping in mind our own requirements and availability." Mahajan said the MEA "continues to monitor developments" in the Gulf and the West Asia region "very closely".

"We continue to assist seafarers, stranded Indian nationals and short-time visitors for visas, consular services, and logistical support wherever required... We have made special efforts to help Indian students in the Gulf region," he said.

Family attempts to send man in parcel to protest high bus fares

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bengaluru

A family allegedly attempted to send an elderly man in a "parcel" through a courier service in protest against high bus fares ahead of Ugadi and Eid-ul-Fitr, police said on Wednesday.

The incident occurred in the Vyalikaval area of central Bengaluru on Tuesday evening, they said. Following the incident, Bengaluru City Police Commissioner Seemant Kumar Singh said that an action will be taken against the family for staging the act as part of a protest reel. The footage of the incident that went viral drew criticism, the officer told reporters. "A case will be



registered against the family. Such incidents send a bad message on social media. So, we will take action," he said. According to police, the family of five members approached a private courier centre claiming they wanted to parcel the man as a symbolic message to the public over rising fares in both private and Government buses. They claimed it was part of

a prank meant to highlight the difficulties of the festival travel. Startled by the request, the courier staff alerted the police.

During the inquiry, the elderly man's daughter said the act was staged as a protest and to create a social media reel. As part of the stunt, the family had placed the elderly man inside a gunny sack, a senior police officer said.

Police said the situation turned serious when the man experienced breathing difficulties inside the sack. Subsequently, the family apologised to the police and the public for their actions. The officials warned that the act could have endangered the man's life and attracted serious legal consequences.

Union Govt failed to tackle unemployment: Congress

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Congress on Wednesday attacked the Government over graduate unemployment, saying that apart from rolling out a new agenda now and then to distract the public, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has no solution to the "mega-crisis." Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh cited a report by the Azim Premji University to make the allegation.

According to the report, 11 million out of 63 million graduates between the ages of 20 and 29 in India are unemployed, with only a small proportion securing stable salaried jobs within a year of graduation. "This Government, expert at queuing up the country's



people, the youth are standing in line for jobs, but there are no jobs. Apart from rolling out some new agenda every now and then to distract attention, the Prime Minister has no solution to this mega-crisis," Ramesh said in a post in Hindi on X.

The Modi Government is a champion in "wildly fuelling unemployment," he alleged. "It's no surprise when the Prime Minister counts 'reel-making by youth' as the main achievement of his Government in his election speeches.

BJP defaming SP, but ready to face all challenges: Akhilesh



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday accused the BJP of conspiring to defame his party, saying that its supporters were actively spreading misinformation.

He asserted that however, the Samajwadi Party is fully prepared to face the challenges posed by the BJP, and the people of Uttar Pradesh are also set to bring his party to power in 2027.

Addressing a 'Digital Democracy Dialogue' at the Samajwadi Party headquarters here, Yadav remarked, "The BJP is not a political party but a gang".

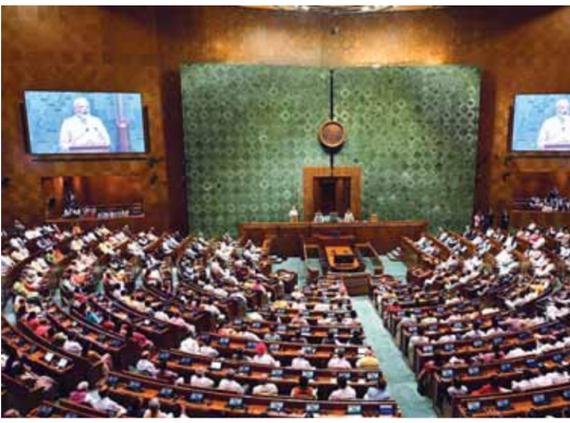
The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said democracy is facing serious threats under the prevailing circumstances, emphasising that dialogue and social harmony are essential for its proper functioning. "Citizens are in crisis. In today's politics, a positive direction can only be achieved through the PDA path. Any campaign without positive thinking or a clear ideology becomes directionless," he said.

Tenure of parliamentary panel on simultaneous polls extended

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Lok Sabha on Wednesday extended the tenure of the parliamentary committee examining Bills that seek to introduce simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies till the Monsoon session. PP Chaudhary, chairman of the Joint Committee of Parliament examining the Bills seeking to introduce simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, moved a motion seeking extension of the tenure of the panel.

He sought an extension of the tenure of the Joint Committee on the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024, and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, up to the first



day of the last week of the 2026 monsoon session. The Lok Sabha adopted the motion by a voice vote.

The committee has met constitutional experts, economists, Law Commission members, several politicians, including Ghulam Nabi Azad, since it was constituted in December 2024. The Bills were introduced on December 17, 2024, in Lok Sabha and sent to the joint committee for further scrutiny. The 39-member multi-party panel held its first meeting on January 8, 2025.

Former first deputy managing director of IMF Gita Gopinath has also appeared before the panel. Former chief justices of India Sanjiv Khanna, U U Lalit, D Y Chandrachud and J S Khehar have also appeared before the panel.

FROM PAGE - 1

Fires in Delhi, Indore claim 17 lives...

NDRF Deputy Inspector Vicky Ranga said the rescue was challenging due to structural damage. "We reached within 10 minutes. The building was damaged from the inside. Conducting a rescue in such conditions is a big challenge," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced an ex gratia of ₹2 lakh for the families of the deceased and ₹50,000 for the injured. "The fire incident in Palam is saddening. My condolences to those who lost their loved ones. I pray for the speedy recovery of the injured," the Prime Minister's Office said.

Delhi Lt Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu, chairing his first Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), ordered a comprehensive fire safety audit across the city, while Chief Minister Rekha Gupta announced a magisterial inquiry and compensation of ₹10 lakh for families of adult victims and ₹5 lakh for minors.

Authorities said the cause of the fire is under investigation.

In Indore, eight members of a family were killed after a fire broke out at a three-storey house following an explosion at an electric vehicle charging point outside the building. Police said a car being charged caught fire after the explosion, and flames quickly spread to the house in Brajeshwari Annex Colony. Investigators found 10-11 LPG cylinders on the premises, some of which exploded and intensified the blaze that began around 4 a.m.

The Madhya Pradesh Government has ordered a detailed probe and will frame a standard operating procedure for EV charging safety. Chief Minister Mohan Yadav termed the incident "extremely heartbreaking".

Separately, a fire in a wholesale cloth market in Ahmedabad's Kalupur area destroyed over 25 shops, though no casualties were reported.

In Chandigarh, a blaze in a Sector 22 shop spread to adjoining establishments in one of the city's busiest commercial areas. More than 15 fire tenders were deployed, with addition-

al support called in from Mohali. No casualties have been reported so far.

Officials said the incidents highlight persistent fire safety gaps, particularly in densely populated areas and mixed-use buildings, as authorities step up investigations into the causes.

Ensure 60% seats free, airlines told

The Government has also reiterated that passengers booked under the same PNR should be seated together, preferably in adjacent seats — a long-standing concern for families and group travellers. In April 2024, the Directorate of Civil Aviation (DGCA) had already mandated that young children must be seated with at least one parent or guardian without additional charges.

To address complaints over damaged belongings, airlines have been directed to handle sports equipment and musical instruments in a "transparent and passenger-friendly manner," subject to safety norms. The ministry further stressed strict compliance with passenger rights in cases of delays, cancellations and denied boarding. Airlines must prominently display these rights across websites, mobile apps, booking platforms and airport counters, and communicate them clearly, including in regional languages.

The ministry said passenger facilitation remains a top priority, alongside initiatives such as UDAN Cafes for affordable food, Flybrary for free books and free Wi-Fi at airports.

PM invited to open Jewar airport

The remarks come days after Noida International Airport CEO Christoph Schnellmann met Adityanath in Lucknow and presented the aerodrome licence issued by the Centre for the airport. The Noida International Airport, being developed at Jewar in Gautam Buddha Nagar district under a public-private partnership model, is a major greenfield project aimed at boosting

connectivity between the National Capital Region, western Uttar Pradesh and key domestic and international destinations.

In its first phase, the airport will have one runway and a passenger terminal with an annual handling capacity of around 12 million passengers.

The terminal, spread over about 1.38 lakh square metres, will include 48 check-in counters, nine security screening lanes and nine immigration counters, along with domestic and international lounges.

Central Bank of India faces ₹1.44 lakh crore...

Further defaulters include Lloyds Steel Industries (₹1,321 crore), Forever Precious Diamonds (₹1,267 crore), Konaseema Gas Power (₹1,222 crore), C&C Construction (₹1,161 crore), Vandana Vidyut (₹1,117 crore), Shrenuj & Co (₹1,129 crore), Varun Industries and VVF (India) Ltd.

Other defaulters ranging between ₹600 crore to ₹1,000 crore are Kolkata based Rabirun Vinimoy, Surat based Nakoda Ltd, Surya Vinayak Industries, Unity Infra Projects, Spanco Ltd, Prakash Vanijya, Warasgaon Assets Maintenance Limited, Best Foods, Archo Tech Ltd, EMC Limited, and The Sirpur Paper Mill.

Interestingly, Central Banks has filed two case against NAFED for recovery of ₹663 crore. NAFED is a cooperative society under Union Agriculture Ministry. Fugitive C Sivasankaran has defaulted more than ₹25,000 crore with many banks and has not left even Central Banks also. His Siva Ventures is defaulted ₹525 crore.

All these big loans have no recoverable collaterals, except shares pledged and personal guarantee of company directors. Bankers say many big loans were allotted due to political support. The Then Central Bank of India's CMD Dharam Vir Taneja faced action for not giving loans to Congress stalwart late Sanjay Gandhi's Maruti car project in 1975. A CBI case was registered against him and later the agency closed the case. Taneja has chapter on his life in Central Bank on his book — *A Chronology of Men, Matters and Events*.

Iran intelligence chief killed, says Israel

Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz—a key global energy route—have raised concerns over oil and liquefied natural gas supplies.

In the United States, President Donald Trump ????? a tougher stance on Iran in a social media post, while reiterating criticism of allied burden-sharing in protecting key maritime routes.

Israeli defence sources said recent strikes were enabled by precise intelligence targeting senior Iranian leadership. Khatib, appointed in 2021 under former president Ebrahim Raisi, was closely linked to Iran's security apparatus, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Israel's military described Iran's intelligence ministry as central to internal repression and external covert operations, alleging its role in surveillance and actions targeting Israeli interests. Fighting has spread across the region. Iran has launched fresh missile and drone strikes on Israel and Gulf states, with Israeli authorities reporting civilian casualties, including two elderly people killed near Tel Aviv.

In Beirut, Israeli airstrikes hit central areas early Wednesday, killing at least 12 people and injuring dozens in one of the heaviest bombardments in recent years.

Israel has also warned of imminent strikes in southern Lebanon, including along the Litani River, targeting movements by Hezbollah. Civilians have been urged to move north as hostilities intensify. The rapid succession of targeted killings and retaliatory attacks highlights the widening scope of the conflict, raising fears of broader regional destabilisation.

Northeast States on alert after arrest of 7...

Once in Myanmar, the group allegedly met Ethnic Armed Groups (EAGOs) hostile to India, supplying drones and providing weapons, drone warfare training, jamming technology, and tactical support to banned terrorist organisa-

tions inside India. All seven have been charged under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), including Section 18, and other laws. They were arrested on March 13, 2026, from Delhi, Lucknow, and Kolkata airports, and remanded in NIA custody until March 27 for intensive interrogation.

Officials warn that the case exposes the growing threat of foreign mercenaries using India's northeastern States as launch pads for cross-border terror operations and proxy warfare. The probe is expanding to trace the full network, funding sources, and additional accomplices. Interrogations indicate coordination with an external agency.

Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhma said in the State assembly that the arrests underscore the seriousness of foreigners using Mizoram as a transit route, prompting the re-imposition of the Protected Area Permit. India's States bordering China, Pakistan, and Myanmar—including Jammu & Kashmir, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand—are designated protected areas, with central security agencies maintaining constant vigilance to safeguard internal and external security.

ECI appoints 13 IAS, 5 IPS officers for West...

More than 2.18 lakh Booth Level Officers will remain accessible to voters via phone and the ECI net app's 'Book-a-call' feature. The ECI said this scale of mobilisation is aimed at conducting polls free of violence and inducement across 832 Assembly constituencies.

"All personnel on election duty will be considered on deputation to the Commission under Section 28A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, ensuring full administrative control during the electoral process," the poll body said.

Additionally, 1,111 central observers—including 557 general, 188 police, and 366 expenditure monitors—have been deployed to monitor polling and report daily on grievances, meeting candidates, parties, and the public at designated times.



Kharge's witty dig at Deve Gowda leaves PM smiling

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Rajya Sabha on Wednesday saw rare banter with Prime Minister Narendra Modi also having a good laugh when Leader of Opposition and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, who retired from the House, took a dig at him during the farewell speeches for outgoing Elders.

Delivering his farewell speech, Kharge spoke about former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda and NCP leader Sharad Pawar, who were among the retiring members.

Kharge said Deve Gowda was the Prime Minister and served in several other capacities. "I have known him for 54 years and have worked with him. But I don't know what happened. *Wo Mohabbat humare saath kiye, shaadi Modi Sahab ke saath* (he dated us, loved us, but married Prime Minister Narendra Modi)," he said, drawing a round of laughter from across the House.

The Prime Minister was seen laughing too. This light-hearted exchange was a welcome shift from noisy protests and acrimonious scenes in the last few sessions.

Deve Gowda was the Prime Minister for less than a year after the 1996 Lok Sabha polls. The Congress supported the United Front government he headed. HD Deve Gowda's JDS tied up



Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi interacting with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge during a CEC strategy meeting ahead of the Puducherry Assembly elections at Indira Bhawan in New Delhi

with the Congress in Karnataka for the 2018 state polls, and the alliance won.

Deve Gowda's son, H D Kumaraswamy, became Chief Minister, but the State Government collapsed in 2019 after several Congress and JDS MLAs rebelled. JDS later allied with the BJP, explaining Kharge's dig.

Kharge said he has had a long association with Pawar and DMK's Tiruchi Siva, too, and he was glad that they are returning to the Rajya Sabha for another term. The Congress president also took a potshot at Union Minister and RPI (A) chief Ramdas Athawale. "He always praises Modiji in his poems. He doesn't know

any other poem," he said, drawing smiles from Congress members. "Those in politics, public life, neither get tired nor retire for the passion to serve the country," Kharge added.

Earlier, Prime Minister Modi thanked retiring Rajya Sabha MPs for their contributions and wished them well, saying that there is "no full stop in politics." "The future is waiting for you. Your experience and contribution will always be remembered," he said.

He advised newly elected MPs to learn from veterans like Deve Gowda, Kharge and Pawar. "HD Deve Gowda ji, Mallikarjun Kharge ji, and Sharad Pawar ji are senior leaders who have spent

more than half of their lives in parliamentary work. Newly elected MPs should learn from them," he said.

Referring to Athawale, the Prime Minister said, "Sometimes we used to hear that there is a lot of opportunity for humour and satire in the House. These days, perhaps it is gradually decreasing. But our Athawale is evergreen." The RPI (A) chief is also returning for another term in the Rajya Sabha.

Thirty-seven seats in Rajya Sabha became vacant this year. While 26 candidates were elected unopposed, the remaining seats were filled after an election on Monday.

Was in forced marriage with Congress; Gowda hits back

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Bengaluru

Former Prime Minister and JD(S) supremo HD Deve Gowda on Wednesday claimed that he was in a "forced marriage" with the Congress but had to "divorce" the national party because it was an "abusive relationship".

He was reacting to a statement made by the Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge while bidding farewell to retiring members.

Kharge, who is also AICC President, recalled his association with Deve Gowda, who he said served as the Prime Minister and held several important positions.

"I have known Deve Gowda for a long time — 54 years — and have worked with him. But I do not know what happened. He fell in love with us, but married Modi sahab (Prime Minister Narendra Modi)," Kharge said in Rajya Sabha, visuals of which were aired in local media. The analogy made the Prime Minister, who was present in the

Rajya Sabha, laugh.

Taking to social media platform 'X', Deve Gowda, the JD(S) patriarch said "my dear and longtime friend, Mallikarjun Kharge, made a light-hearted comment in Parliament today about me having been in "love" with them (Congress) but "married" Modi Ji (BJP) eventually. He also said he did not know the reason as to why I did so."

Deve Gowda said he was not in the House when Kharge spoke as he had to leave for Bengaluru to be present for Ugadi celebrations on Thursday.

"If I were to respond to my friend in the same language of marriage, I would like to say that I was in a "forced marriage" with the Congress but had to "divorce" them because it was an abusive relationship," he said, in a statement on 'X'.

He sought to remind Kharge that in 2018 Congress had sent its leader Ghulam Nabi Azad and offered Kumaraswamy the chief minister's post. "I did not consent to this."



Nation Focus



Govt committed to ensuring safe online gaming ecosystem

The Government is committed to ensuring a safe, responsible and accountable online-gaming ecosystem in the country, Parliament was informed on Wednesday. In a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha, Union Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting L Murugan said the Government has enacted the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025 (Gaming Act) with the objective of promoting innovation in e-sports and online social games and prohibiting online money games. The Government is committed to ensuring a safe, responsible and accountable online-gaming ecosystem in the country, he said.



Rahul, Priyanka meet Gadkari, discusses various issues

Former Congress President Rahul Gandhi and party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, accompanied by a delegation of small truck and bus body builders from Rajasthan, met Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari on Wednesday and urged him to resolve their grievances. Prior to meeting Gadkari, the delegation met with Rahul Gandhi and claimed that the Government's new standards and excessive fees could drive many small manufacturers out of business, thereby threatening the livelihoods of millions of families.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaking in the Rajya Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi on Wednesday

RS bids farewell to 59 members; PM lauds contribution



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Rajya Sabha on Wednesday bid farewell to 59 of its retiring members, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging them to remain active in the service of the nation and its people while noting that there is no full stop in politics.

The Prime Minister lauded the contribution of the members, whose tenures will end between April and July, and called Parliament an "open university" that offers an opportunity to gain insight into intricate nuances of life.

Among those retiring are former prime minister H D Deve Gowda, Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge and veteran politician Sharad Pawar, who have been in active politics for over five decades. Pawar has already been re-elected to the Upper House. One-third of the Rajya Sabha members retire every two years.

Modi reserved special praise for the three senior leaders, calling them stalwarts who have spent more than half their lives in parliamentary proceedings.

"The manner in which they continue to attend the House with such dedication — a spirit from which all new parliamentarians ought to learn — is truly exemplary," he said. "Such a long tenure is no small feat — it is a matter of immense significance."

Addressing the Upper House on the occasion of the farewell, Modi said such moments naturally dissolve partisan divides. "When an occasion such as this arises — naturally and spontaneously — we rise above partisan differences, and a shared sentiment emerges within us all," he said.

To members who do not plan to return, the Prime Minister offered reassurance. "In politics, there is no such thing as a full stop," he said.

PM hails Cabinet's approval of BHAVYA scheme

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday hailed the Union Cabinet's approval of the Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojana (BHAVYA) and the Small Hydro Power Development Scheme, among other decisions, and said these will attract investments and create employment in rural and remote regions.

Modi also said the NDA Government is leaving no

stone unturned to make the lives of farmers as easy as possible and in this direction, MSP funding for the 2023-24 cotton season was approved on Wednesday.

"In line with this, the four-laning of the Barabanki-Bahraich section of the national highway was approved today. This will not only reduce travel time but will also boost the economic development of the region," Prime Minister said.

"A landmark step towards accelerating India's industri-

al growth! The Union Cabinet has approved Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojna (BHAVYA). This will enable the development of 100 plug-and-play industrial parks, boosting manufacturing, investment and jobs across the nation," he said in a post on X.

The PM said the scheme will significantly enhance ease of doing business through streamlined approvals and single-window systems and boost the logistics and services

sectors too. He said the Union Cabinet has approved the Small Hydro Power Development Scheme, which will boost clean energy, attract investments and create employment across rural and remote regions.

"The Northeast in particular will gain significantly from the scheme," he said.

The Prime Minister said his Government is leaving no stone unturned to make the lives of farmers as easy as possible.

VP hosts farewell dinner for retiring Rajya Sabha MPs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Rajya Sabha Chairman C P Radhakrishnan on Wednesday hosted a farewell function for retired/retiring members of the Upper House at the Vice-President Enclave and expressed confidence that their experience would continue to guide them in their engagement in public life.

A total of 26 members retired in 2025, while 73 members have retired or are retiring this year, including Deputy Chairman Harivansh.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju and convener of the farewell organizing committee of Rajya Sabha welcomed Chairman Radhakrishnan and other dignitaries.

Addressing the gathering, Radhakrishnan highlighted the unique parlia-



mentary tradition of the biennial transition of members, noting that it reflects both continuity and change-where experience makes way for fresh perspectives while the enduring spirit of the House remains constant.

He expressed appreciation for the invaluable contributions of the retiring members, stating that their wisdom, debates, and commitment to public service

have enriched the functioning of the House and strengthened democratic values. He further conveyed confidence that their experience would continue to guide and inspire in their continued engagement in public life.

Radhakrishnan presented mementoes to the retired/retiring members. A cultural programme was also organized in their honour, featuring a folk dance performance of Bhavai, a classical recital, and a musical ensemble.

Deputy Chairman Harivansh, Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar, Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, and Minister of Tourism and Culture Gajendra Singh Shekhawat were also present on the occasion.

members of the upper house. In his speech, he said some colleagues would be retiring in the months of April to July this year on completion of their term of office and wished that they continue to serve the nation and people with the same dedication and commitment that they demonstrated in this house.

Radhakrishnan presented mementoes to the retired/retiring members. A cultural programme was also organized in their honour, featuring a folk dance performance of Bhavai, a classical recital, and a musical ensemble.

Deputy Chairman Harivansh, Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar, Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, and Minister of Tourism and Culture Gajendra Singh Shekhawat were also present on the occasion.

India will shape future on its own values, says RSS on women's participation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

RSS functionary Sunil Ambekar on Wednesday said the issue of women's participation should be seen from an Indian perspective, and not through Western thinking.

"This is not a question of RSS and women. This question arises because the Bharatiya perspective on women has not been properly understood," he said at the launch of the book 'Shatayu Sangh Aur Mahila Sahabhagita' at the NDMC Convention Centre.

Expressing confidence in the younger generation, Ambekar, the RSS national media and publicity department head, said they are better placed to make balanced choices.

"I feel today's generation, which people call Gen Z, is more aware because it has got the opportunity to see the whole world. They are seeing Bharat, they are seeing Bharat's past, they are seeing the world's past and present, and they are comparing all this. They clearly know who has gained what, who has lost what and what we have to achieve," he said. He said India will shape its future on the basis of its own values.

"The new combination in Bharat will not be one in which our culture and families are shaped on the basis of the market and technology. We will decide, according to our values and culture, what technology we need," he said. Ambekar said women are already playing an important role in society, and their participation will grow further.

"The real dream is that women across Bharat should come forward in every sphere of life and leadership with confidence, without fear and in greater numbers," he said.

He said many Western ideas on gender are based on conflict between men and women.

"In those societies, the problem was seen as a struggle between men and women and, therefore, the effort was to find solutions through competition between the two," he said.

Ambekar said the Indian view is different and sees men and women as equal and complementary.

"In Bharat, it was clearly understood that a woman is as pure as a man, or even more pure, and as capable as a man, and at times even more capable. But this was never seen as a competition between men and women," he said.



RSS functionary Sunil Ambekar

NIA launches probe into Nalhati arms cache, seizes gelatin sticks and ammonium nitrate

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has taken over and initiated a detailed investigation into the seizure of a large cache of explosives from Nalhati in Birbhum district. It has been revealed that during routine patrolling in the Khapur Canal area of Banior Panchayat under Nalhati Police Station, officers intercepted a suspicious motorcycle (registration number WB-46C-3325). The bike had a sack loaded on the pillion seat, covered with a blanket.

The search led to the recovery of approximately 500 pieces of gelatin sticks while another sack contained approximately 50 kg of ammonium nitrate.

The rider of the bike has been identified as Chandu Let, a resident of Radipur village under

Rampurhat Police Station area. He was placed under arrest on the spot as he could not produce any valid documents or permits for the explosives. During initial questioning, he claimed the material was procured from the Rampurhat area and was being transported to the Nalhati stone quarry industrial area for alleged illegal mining purposes. Initial Case Details: Nalhati police station immediately registered FIR No 86/2026 dated 14.02.2026 under: Sections 303(2) and 316(2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023

Section 9(B)(2) of the Explosives Act. The NIA took over the probe following a directive from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). The NIA has now registered the case and assumed full investigation. The central agency suspects a larger terror conspiracy. The MHA order explicitly notes that the activities



attract Sections 4 & 5 of the Explosive Substances Act, 1908, involving possession of explosives "under suspicious circumstances with an intent to endanger life or cause serious injury to property and create panic

in the minds of the people." The NIA aims to unearth any organised network, external linkages, or smuggling corridors that may be using West Bengal as a route. This probe gains added sig-

nificance as the state heads into Assembly Elections in two phases on April 23 and April 29, 2026. Security experts have long warned that ammonium nitrate and gelatin sticks — while used in mining and construction — are frequently diverted for illegal and terror activities.

Birbhum district has seen multiple such seizures in the past, but the timing and scale of this recovery have prompted the shift from local police to central agency investigation.

The NIA spokesperson has confirmed the agency has already begun investigation into this case. Further arrests and recoveries are expected as the trail is followed. The probe agency has also issued an advisory for the citizens. They have been urged to report any suspicious movement of chemicals, vehicles, or unknown persons in border and industrial areas.



States Focus



President greets on eve of Chaitra Sukladi, Gudi Padava

President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday greeted citizens on the eve of Chaitra Sukladi, Ugadi, Gudi Padava, Cheti Chand, Navreh and Sajibu Cheiraoba festivals. The celebration of these festivals on the arrival of New Year symbolises India's rich cultural diversity and our deep connection with nature, she said. They inspire us to move forward in life with new hopes, new resolutions and a spirit of positivity, Murmu said, adding that these festivals are vibrant expressions of our rich cultural heritage and our traditions of sharing joy with others.



Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar ZP: BJP win top posts

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won the posts of president and vice-president of the Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar Zilla Parishad in Maharashtra unopposed here on Wednesday. Avinash Galande was elected as the president, and Jitendra Jaiswal as the vice-president of the ZP, an official said. The process to elect them was held in the district collector office premises. In the election to the 63-seat Zilla Parishad last month, the BJP bagged 23 seats followed by the Shinde-led Shiv Sena with 21 seats. Shiv Sena (UBT) won nine seats and the NCP won four. On Wednesday, as no other party fielded their candidates for the posts, BJP's Galande and Jaiswal were declared winners for the post of president and vice-president respectively, the official said. The Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena as well as rival Shiv Sena (UBT) headed by Uddhav Thackeray remained absent during the process, and out of the total 63 members, only 31 were present, he said.

Himachal Govt bans party wear for officials

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Shimla



The Himachal Pradesh Government has introduced a strict dress code for its employees, banning jeans, T-shirts and party wear in both offices and courts, and has also restrained them from commenting on Government policies through social media platforms.

According to the detailed guidelines issued by Chief Secretary Sanjay Gupta, all government employees are required to wear formal, clean, and modest clothing in sober colours. The guidelines explicitly forbid casual or party wear while in the office or appearing in court.

For male employees, the dress code mandates wearing shirts and pants or trousers, specifically collared shirts paired with trousers, and appropriate footwear such as shoes or sandals. Female employees are required to wear sarees, formal suits, salwars, *churidars*, or *kurtas* with dupattas, as well as trouser pants and shirts paired with *chappals*, sandals, or shoes.

Jeans and T-shirts are not permitted, officials said on

Wednesday. The Government said it observed instances of employees wearing casual clothing and using their personal social media accounts to share Government schemes or endorse products. The guidelines reference a letter dated August 3, 2017, which advised that, "All Government servants should be attired in appropriate, formal, clean, modest and decent clothes in sober colours. Casual and party attire should be strictly avoided during appearance in court and while attending office."

Despite previous instructions, many employees are still not complying with these guidelines. This enforcement of the dress code marks a second reiteration of the Government's stance, the Government said.

Pradyut Bordoloi joins BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi



Pradyut Bordoloi joins BJP in presence of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and State president Dilip Saikia in Delhi on Wednesday

In yet another jolt to the Congress ahead of the April 9 Assam Assembly polls, its senior leader and Lok Sabha MP Pradyut Bordoloi joined the BJP on Wednesday. A Congress member for more than five decades and the chairman of the manifesto committee for the Assembly polls, Bordoloi claimed that he resigned on Tuesday as he was facing humiliation in the party and was sidelined after he supported Shashi Tharoor's candidature for the party president's post.

A two-term MP from Nagaon and a former four-time MLA, Bordoloi was inducted into the BJP in the presence of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and other party leaders in the national Capital, weeks after former Assam Congress chief Bhupen Kumar Borah switched to the ruling party. The Congress termed his decision as "unfortunate", while the BJP claimed it reflected the Opposition

party's weakening base, with Sarma saying that "no self-respecting individual" can remain in the Congress. "BJP national president Nitin Nabin approved sitting Congress MP Pradyut Bordoloi's joining on Tuesday. Our state president Dilip Saikia has welcomed him to the party," Sarma told reporters in Delhi after a brief ceremony where Saikia presented Bordoloi with a

stole and party cap. "Our goal is to bring all good leaders of Congress to the BJP fold. We have to brighten the future of the BJP and Assam both," he said. Sarma said that the state party leadership will recommend a ticket for Bordoloi for the April 9 Assembly polls. A Congressman since 1975, Bordoloi's joining will strengthen the BJP and help translate into reality Prime

Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a 'Viksit Bharat, Viksit Assam', he said.

Bordoloi, who is also a former Assam cabinet minister, had sent his resignation letter to AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday evening.

State Congress chief Gaurav Gogoi and AICC general secretary in-charge of Assam Jitendra Singh had rushed to meet Bordoloi the same evening, but apparently could not convince him to reverse his decision. Bordoloi's son Prateek is a Congress nominee from Margherita constituency for the State polls.

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who is the chairperson of the Screening Committee for candidates for Assam polls, said that Bordoloi's resignation was unfortunate and added that differences over ticket allocation may have led to the decision. "I think he was upset over ticket allocation, and I wish we had a chance to have a conversation; it is unfortunate," Vadra told reporters inside the Parliament House complex.

Bihar CM unveils projects worth ₹1,213 crore in Jamui, Nawada districts



Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar along with others during the Samridhi Yatra in Jamui on Wednesday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Jamui/Nawada

Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Wednesday launched development projects and schemes worth around ₹1,213 crore in Bihar's Jamui and Nawada districts during his 'Samridhi Yatra'. The CM also reviewed ongoing schemes and development projects in both districts.

According to a statement by the Chief Minister's Office, "Kumar launched 370 projects worth ₹914 crore in Jamui. These include the inauguration of 181 schemes and projects worth ₹602 crore and foundation stones for 189 schemes and projects valued at ₹312 crore".

He inspected ongoing projects, including the construction of a sports complex in Sonpe Mauja of Jamui block, renovation of Kumar Surendra Singh Stadium in Gidhaur block, development of Garhi Nature Park under Jamui Forest Division, development of Patneshwar Dham Temple, restoration and lining of the main canal under the Upper Kiul Reservoir Project, and construction of a bridge over the Kiul River on Garhi-Laghuad road. Kumar

instructed officials to complete the works on time, the statement said.

Later in the day, Kumar launched several development projects and schemes worth around ₹299 crore in Nawada district. He inaugurated 37 schemes worth ₹55 crore and laid the foundation stones for 21 schemes worth ₹244 crore.

He also inspected the newly constructed campus of the Bihar Home Guard at Budhaul and reviewed projects, including widening and strengthening of Govindpur-Darshan Nala Road (NH-103), construction works on the Tilaiya River between Panch Bigha and Aadampur villages under Nardiganj block, and construction on the Dhanarjay River to connect Rajoli-Shivala with Rajoli-Dih in Rajoli West Gram Panchayat under Rajoli block.

Others present on the occasion included Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary, Water Resources Minister Vijay Kumar Choudhary, Commissioner of Magadh Division Safina AN, Inspector General of Police (Magadh Range) Vinayak Singh and other senior officials of the district administration.

85 under-construction national highway projects face delay

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi



As many as 85 under-construction national highway projects are facing a delay of over three years on account of multiple reasons, including legal and land acquisition issues, Parliament was informed on Wednesday.

The Government has undertaken various initiatives to prevent recurrence of delays and cost escalations, Road, Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari said in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha.

"Currently, as per the available data, 85 under-construction National Highways (NHs)

projects are delayed by more than three years, attributable to various issues such as bottlenecks relating to land acquisition, statutory clearances/permissions, utility shifting, encroachment removal, law & order issues," Gadkari informed the Upper House.

Other reasons include financial crunch affecting implementation capacity of concessionaire/contractor, poor performance of contractor/concessionaire, and force majeure events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, change of law, etc, the minister said. Gadkari said the government has undertaken

various initiatives to prevent the recurrence of delays and cost escalations.

The efforts include streamlining and expediting land acquisition and compensation using "BhoomiRashi" portal integrated with Public Finance Management System (PFMS) and GIS-based Land Acquisition Plan, revamping "Parivesh" Portal, to facilitate faster forest and environmental clearances, enabling online approval of General Arrangement of Drawings (GAD) of Road Over Bridge/Road Under Bridge (ROB/RUB), and leveraging the mechanism of review and resolution of bottlenecks/hindrances in ongoing projects.

Second edition of IOS SAGAR begins, INS Sunayna again to be part of mission

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi



The second edition of Indian Ocean Ship (IOS) SAGAR, a mission that seeks to reaffirm India's commitment to building stronger ties with its maritime neighbours, has begun, according to officials.

The initiative builds on India's long-standing maritime cooperation efforts and reflects the government of India's vision of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), while also advancing the broader framework of MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security Across the Regions), a spokesperson of the Indian Navy said on Wednesday.

"Reaffirming India's commitment to collaborative maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region, the second

edition of Indian Ocean Ship (IOS) SAGAR commenced on March 16. The Indian Navy assumed the chair of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in Feb 2026. Therefore, this edition includes participation from 16 IONS nations of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)," he said.

IOS SAGAR is designed as a unique operational engagement programme that enables naval personnel from friendly foreign countries to train and sail together onboard an Indian naval ship. By integrating international participants into shipboard activities and professional training modules, the initiative promotes practical cooperation, interoperability and shared understanding of maritime operations, he said.

As part of the current edition of IOS SAGAR, naval personnel from 16 friendly foreign countries will par-

ticipate in the programme, the Navy said. The programme will commence with professional training interactions at Indian naval training establishments in Kochi, where participants will be exposed to key aspects of naval opera-

tions, seamanship practices and maritime security concepts.

This phase will be followed by deployment onboard INS Sunayna, where international participants will sail together with Indian Navy personnel and take part in opera-

tional activities at sea, the spokesperson said, adding it this phase will begin off the coast of Mumbai. During the voyage, the ship will undertake maritime engagement activities and port visits, enabling interaction with partner navies and maritime agencies across the region, the spokesperson said.

These engagements are intended to strengthen professional linkages, encourage exchange of best practices and foster a deeper understanding of shared maritime challenges, he said. In May 2025, after nearly a month-long deployment in the south-west Indian Ocean Region, IOS SAGAR had returned home, with the Navy saying it marked a "new chapter" in maritime cooperation and underscored India's commitment to safeguarding collective maritime interests.

Zero customs duty to transform nuclear energy economics: Singh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi



Union Minister Jitendra Singh

The exemption of customs duty on imported nuclear fuels and reactor components up to the year 2035 will contribute to reducing both project costs and electricity generation costs, thereby improving the economic viability of nuclear power projects, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Wednesday.

In a written reply to the Lok Sabha, the minister said that this would accelerate the pace of

nuclear energy development in the country.

"Zero customs duty on the import of goods required for nuclear power projects... (would bring) down the overall project cost and per-unit cost of electricity, making such projects more viable, particularly those involving foreign cooperation with substantial import content," Singh said.

The minister also highlighted that Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) had taken several steps to strengthen the

domestic supply chain for the 10 newly approved 700 MW pressurised heavy water reactor (PHWR) units.

"These include placing bulk orders to ensure continuity, expanding the vendor base with necessary support, promoting indigenous equipment for import substitution, reserving certain equipment for class-1 local suppliers, and organising vendor meets with a focus on encouraging MSMEs and giving them preference in bids," Jitendra Singh said.

Govt asks airlines not to levy additional charges for 60 pc seats in flights

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Government on Wednesday said airlines have been asked not to levy additional charges for 60 per cent of seats in domestic flights on passengers.

Besides, airlines have been asked to ensure that those travelling on the same PNR are seated together in a flight as part of the civil aviation ministry's efforts to strengthen passenger facilitation.

Announcing the steps on Wednesday, the ministry said the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has asked airlines to make sure that at least 60 per cent of seats on any flight are allocat-

ed free of charge to ensure fair access. At present, 20 per cent of the seats can be booked free of charge while the rest are paid, according to an airline official.

Generally, airlines charge ₹200 to ₹2,100 for choosing seats, depending on various factors, including front rows and extra leg room, a travel industry executive said.

"Passengers travelling on the same PNR are to be seated together, preferably in adjacent seats," the ministry said in a release. These directions are applicable for domestic flights, an official said. According to the release, carriage of sports equipment and musical instruments is to be facilitated in a transparent



and passenger-friendly manner, subject to applicable safety and operational regulations. Airlines have also been asked to "bring out clear, transparent policies for carriage of pets".

The ministry emphasised that there should be strict adherence to the passenger rights framework, particularly in cases of delays, cancellations and denied boarding. There should be a promi-

nent display of passenger rights across airline websites, mobile applications, booking platforms, and airport counters, as well as clear communication of passenger entitlements in regional languages to ensure wider accessibility and awareness, it added.

The ministry also mentioned that India has emerged as the third-largest domestic aviation market globally, with air travel becoming increasingly accessible and inclusive under the regional air connectivity scheme UDAN. Indian airports handle over five lakh passengers daily, reflecting the rapid growth of the sector, it noted. The

steps come against the backdrop of rising concerns that airlines are levying high charges for various services, including for choosing seats. Specific details related to the directives, such as the date from which the new norms will be applicable, were not available.

In a post on X on Wednesday, Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu said important directions have been issued to further strengthen passenger facilitation measures. "60 per cent seats free of charge, assured seating together for families, and clear, transparent norms for carriage of sports equipment, musical instruments & pets," he said.

Odisha hospital fire: CM suspends four officers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Bhubaneswar



Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Wednesday suspended four officers for dereliction of duty, two days after a fire at SCB Medical College Hospital in Cuttack killed 12 patients, officials said.

The suspended officials include three personnel of Odisha Fire Service and one from the electrical department. Preliminary investigations suggest the fire may have been caused by a short circuit in the air-conditioners. "In the wake of the horrific fire incident at the SCB Medical College Hospital in

Cuttack, which resulted in the loss of many lives, Majhi has taken strong action by placing four officers under suspension," the chief minister's office said in a statement. Sources said the action was taken based on preliminary findings of the fact-finding committee headed by development commissioner DK Singh.

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Order Order

Sheena Bora murder case: SC grants nine months extension to complete trial



The Supreme Court has granted an additional nine months to complete the trial in the Sheena Bora murder case, while making it clear that no further extension will be entertained. A bench comprising Justices MM Sundresh and N Kotiswar Singh passed the order after receiving a letter from the Special Judge, CBI, City Civil and Sessions Court, Greater Bombay, seeking extension of time to conclude the trial. "Considering the prayer made, the time to conclude the trial stands extended by nine months while making it clear that no further prayer seeking extension of time will be entertained," the bench said in its March 16 order. The top court also granted liberty to Indrani Mukerjea, Sheena Bora's mother and the prime accused in the case, to file a new application seeking permission to travel abroad. Media baron Peter Mukerjea, Indrani's ex-husband, is also a co-accused in the case. Sheena Bora (24) was allegedly strangled to death in a car by Indrani Mukerjea, her driver Shyamvar Rai (who later turned approver in the case) and Khanna in April 2012. Her body was burnt and disposed of in a forest in nearby Raigad, according to the police. The murder came to light in 2015 after Rai spilt the beans about the murder following his arrest in another case. Indrani and Khanna were arrested in October 2015, while Peter was arrested three months later. All the accused are currently out on bail.

Surgeon gets two-year jail in 2014 sterilisation deaths case in Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

A court in Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur has sentenced a surgeon to two years of jail term in connection with the deaths of 12 women following sterilisation surgeries conducted by him here in 2014. The court of First District and Additional Sessions Judge Shailesh Kumar Ketarap on Tuesday convicted surgeon Dr R K Gupta under the charge of culpable homicide not amounting to murder and awarded him two years of imprisonment, Additional Public Prosecutor Devendra Rao Somawar said on Wednesday. The court also imposed a fine of Rs 25,000 for each of the 12 deaths, he said. The court also sentenced Gupta under other charges, awarding six months' imprisonment with a fine of Rs 500 under one section, and one month's jail with a fine of Rs 100 under another. All sentences will run concurrently, he said. The case relates to a sterilisation camp held on November 8, 2014, at a private hospital in Pendar near Sakri village in Takhatpur block of Bilaspur district. A total of 83 women from nearby rural areas were brought

to the camp for sterilisation procedures, he said. According to the prosecution, Dr Gupta, who was then a senior surgeon at the district hospital, conducted all the surgeries within a span of about three hours. Soon after the operations, the women fell ill and were admitted to different hospitals, including district and CIMS (Chhattisgarh Institute of Medical Sciences) hospitals in Bilaspur, where 12 of them died. The prosecution said the deaths were linked to alleged negligence during surgeries leading to septicemia, as well as controversy over contaminated post-operative medication. Following an investigation, the police had filed a chargesheet against Dr Gupta and five individuals associated with two drug supply firms - Ramesh and Sumit Mahavar of Mahavar Pharma firm, and Rakesh, Rajesh and Manish Khare of Kavita Pharmaceuticals. However, the court acquitted all five accused linked to the pharmaceutical firms due to lack of evidence, he said. Since the sentence awarded to Gupta is less than three years, the court granted him bail as per legal provisions, the prosecutor added.



SC begins hearing on definition of industry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A nine-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court on Wednesday said its verdict on the correctness of a 1978 judgment which gives an expansive interpretation of the term "industry" to govern labour relations will apply to existing cases under the now-repealed Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.

On February 21, 1978, a seven-judge bench delivered a verdict on the definition of the term "industry" while deciding the plea of Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board and expanded the definition which brought millions of employees in hospitals, educational institutions, clubs and Government welfare departments under the protection of the Industrial Disputes (ID) Act, 1947.

The nine-judge bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices B V Nagarathna, P S Narasimha, Dipankar Datta, Ujjal Bhuyan, Satish Chandra Sharma, Joymalya Bagchi, Alok Aradhe and Vipul M Pancholi is hearing submissions on the

contentious issue of defining the word "industry" under the 1947 Act.

"Whatever is going to be said now will apply to the existing cases under the old law. That is the long and short of it," Justice Nagarathna said during the hearing. The observation assumes significance as some of the advocates have questioned the reference made to the nine-judge bench on the ground that the 1947 Act has since been repealed and instead, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, which became operative in 2025, is now in force. "The reference is made. Now, show us an authority which says in these circumstances, the nine-judge bench may not answer (the reference)," Justice Datta asked senior advocate C U Singh, who was arguing in the matter.

Singh said he was not questioning the reference but the 1947 Act has now been repealed.

During the day-long arguments, senior advocate Indira Jaising assailed the vehement opposition of the 1978 verdict by several states irrespective of the fact as to



which party is ruling there.

She said these oppositions seem to be a "surrogate litigation" on behalf of private players. Referring to the 1947 Act, she said it provided security of tenure to the workmen. "Every democratic society is duty-bound to give access to justice and all that the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, gave is access to justice to the workmen in relation to victimisation, malafide termination, etc.," Jaising said.

The CJ concurred with the submissions and said, "The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, is a beneficial legislation and workmen are entitled to

some kind of statutory protection." Justice Datta observed that the court would have to first see what an industrial dispute is. "Unfortunately, yesterday, no senior counsel referred to the provisions of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947. We have to first understand what an industrial dispute is," Justice Datta said.

Jaising argued that the reference was based on "incorrect information" on whether or not there was a conflict between two judgments of the apex court.

Justice Bagchi observed, "Our interpretation is in reference to the repealed law

and not in reference to the 2020 Code." The arguments in the matter would continue on Thursday. While hearing the matter on Tuesday, the bench said it would not deal with the term as defined in the Industrial Relations Code, 2020.

"That does not mean we are helpless. There is a reference before us. We are directly examining the question whether the interpretation of the original provision itself in the Bangalore (case) was correct or not," the CJ had said. "If that interpretation was wrong, if that provision has been completely misconstructed by giving such a wide meaning, then we will correct our mistake," the bench had said.

The bench, earlier, formulated the broad issues for its adjudication and the first issue reads: "Whether the test laid down in paragraphs 140 to 144 in the opinion rendered by Justice V R Krishna Iyer in Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board's case (of 1978) to determine if an undertaking or enterprise falls within the definition of 'industry' lays down correct law?"

"And whether the Industrial Disputes (Amendment) Act, 1982 (which seemingly did not come into force), and the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 (with effect from November 21, 2025), have any legal impact on the interpretation of the expression 'industry' as contained in the principal Act?" it had said.

It had said one of the issues to be adjudicated would be whether social welfare activities and schemes or other enterprises undertaken by Government departments or their instrumentalities can be construed to be "industrial activities" for the purpose of Section 2(j) of the 1947 Act. At the heart of the dispute is the 1978 ruling delivered by Justice V R Krishna Iyer as it expanded the definition of the term 'industry' and established the "Triple Test" to define it.

According to the 1947 Act, the term 'industry' means any business, trade, undertaking, manufacture or calling of employers and includes any calling, service, employment, handicraft or industrial occupation, or avocation of workmen.

SC rejects UP power body's claims in Essar Power MP insolvency dispute

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday rejected an appeal filed by UP Jal Vidyut Nigam Limited (UPJVNL), assailing the insolvency resolution of Essar Power MP Limited (now Mahan Energen Limited). A bench of Justices Manoj Mishra and Manmohan upheld the concurrent findings of the NCLT and NCLAT, holding that no interference was warranted with a resolution plan that had already been implemented.

The legal battle originated from a 2009 agreement where Essar Power MP Limited (EPMPL) was to receive water from the Rihand reservoir. Following a series of jurisdictional disputes over water charges between Madhya Pradesh



and Uttar Pradesh, EPMPL entered the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) in September 2020. Subsequently, UPJVNL submitted claims of over Rs 12 crore for pre-insolvency dues. However, the Resolution Professional (RP) classified these as "contingent claims" and admitted them at a nominal value of just Rs one. Rejecting UPJVNL's claims, the apex court noted that under the approved resolution plan,

which saw Adani Power Limited emerge as the successful bidder, operational creditors had received "NIL payment" under the approved resolution plan. It said that even if UPJVNL's claims were fully admitted, the outcome would remain unchanged.

The bench underlined that once a resolution plan is implemented, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) provision binds all stakeholders, and reopening settled claims would disrupt the insolvency process and prejudice creditors.

It observed that the CIRP-period dues raised by UPJVNL had been fully paid under protest by EPMPL. The bench noted that a fresh agreement has already been signed between UPJVNL and EPMPL, regularising the

ongoing commercial relationship. Earlier in 2021, the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) approved Adani's resolution plan and dismissed UPJVNL's application challenging the RP's classification.

Later, the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) upheld the NCLT's findings, noting that the RP's role is administrative, not quasi-judicial, and that contingent claims may be admitted at a nominal value where disputes are pending before courts. The NCLAT also underscored that the operational creditor's claims would not have resulted in any payment under the plan, given the priority of secured financial creditors.

Advocate Sandeep Singhi from Karanjwala & Co law firm appeared for Adani Power Limited.

Gangster Ravi Pujari held in 2017 extortion case



Police produce Ravi Pujari before court

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Thane Police has arrested jailed gangster Ravi Pujari in a 2017 extortion and firing case in the city and obtained his custody from a local court, officials said.

The 57-year-old gangster was on Wednesday produced before a special MCOCA court which remanded him in police custody till March 27.

The Anti-Extortion Cell of

the Thane Crime Branch took his custody from Parappana Agrahara Central Jail in Bengaluru and brought him to the city on Tuesday, said a police release. Pujari, who hails from Udipi, Karnataka, and had been operating from abroad for several years, was extradited to India from Senegal in 2020.

"The accused Ravi Pujari had demanded a ransom of Rs 10 crore from a construction businessman in 2017.

Legal profession tainted by hooliganism: SC slams lawyers in UP toll plaza case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court has come down heavily on members of the Barabanki District Bar Association in Uttar Pradesh for vandalising a toll plaza and ransacking a fellow advocate's office after he appeared for the toll employees, saying that legal profession is now tainted by such acts of "hooliganism".

On January 14, five persons allegedly assaulted advocate Ratnesh Shukla, a resident of Pratapgarh, during a dispute over the passage of a car at the toll plaza in Haidergarh tehsil.

The incident triggered protests, with a large number of advocates gathering at the toll plaza on the Lucknow-Sultanpur stretch of National Highway 731 and forcing a shutdown of operations. Later, a resolution was passed and circulated within the local Bar to the effect that no advocate would represent the accused persons.

Despite the resolution, advocate Manoj Shukla filed a bail application

on behalf of the accused and thereafter, the members of the Bar resorted to unruly behaviour and the office furniture of the said advocate was set on fire, and his effigy was also burnt. The accused then filed a petition before the top court seeking bail as no lawyer was ready to represent them in the trial court and also sought transfer of trial.

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta condemned the role of the members of the Bar at Barabanki, who indulged into "hooliganism" by damaging the furniture etc. of the advocate, who had filed the bail application on behalf of the petitioners.

"The facts noted reveal a very sorry state of affairs. The legal profession, which was once regarded as a noble profession, has clearly been tainted and tarnished by the acts of hooliganism perpetrated pursuant to the fracas which took place at the toll plaza on January 14, 2026.

"We can understand the sentiment of fraternity amongst the lawyers but that, by no means, can



Lawyers clash with toll plaza staff

justify the acts of violence and lawlessness which ensued when a brave lawyer came forward to defend the accused. These deplorable acts of hooliganism deserve to be deprecated. The disciplinary body, i.e., the Bar Council of India is expected to take appropriate steps in this regard," the

bench said. The top court said a "bare perusal of the FIR is sufficient to satisfy us that it was not a case wherein the accused could have been denied bail".

"There is no dispute that the petitioners were performing their duties at the toll plaza where the incident happened. Possibility

cannot be ruled out that the complainant may have resisted the attempt of the petitioners in demanding toll (rightly so) resulting into a spat between the complainant and the employees of the toll plaza i.e., the petitioners herein," the bench said.

The apex court said denial of bail to the accused and the curtailment of their liberty for a period exceeding two months is absolutely unjustified and violative of the Fundamental Right of Liberty.

"In order to ensure that the accused get proper legal representation and a fair trial, we direct that the proceedings arising out of the FIR No.15/2026 shall stand transferred to the Tis Hazari Courts, New Delhi, for all further actions, i.e., remand, filing of result of investigation, and trial," the bench said.

The top court said the Director General of Police, Uttar Pradesh shall be responsible for the safety and security of the petitioners, and shall ensure that after their release on bail, the petitioners are duly escorted to a safe location.

HC stays trial court proceedings against Bina Modi, Lalit Bhasin

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday stayed trial court proceedings against industrialist Bina Modi and senior lawyer Lalit Bhasin in a case of alleged assault of Godfrey Phillips India (GPI) executive director Samir Modi during a board meeting in 2024.

Justice Saurabh Banerjee issued notices on petitions filed by Samir Modi's mother, Bina Modi, and Bhasin challenging the summons issued to them. The court directed the Delhi police to file a status report in four weeks.

"In the meanwhile, there shall be a stay of pending proceedings (in the trial court)," the court said, listing the matter for further hearing on July 29.

Calling the case "complete

perversity," senior counsel appearing for the petitioners argued that the trial court's decision was without any basis, based on the assumption that the police cannot "exonerate" any person during investigation.

The senior counsel said the CCTV footage showed no case of assault and that Samir Modi attended the meeting for two hours before the alleging assault on him.

The trial court on February 10 took cognisance of the matter and issued summons to Bina Modi, Bhasin, and Bina Modi's personal security officer Surendra Prasad, who allegedly assaulted Samir Modi. They were directed to appear on May 7.

While the police charge sheet filed on March 1, 2025, named Prasad as an accused with sufficient prima facie



Bina Modi

material, it stated there was absence of enough evidence to prosecute Bina Modi and Bhasin.

However, acting on a "protest petition" by Samir Modi, the trial court held that conspiracy or common

intention could be inferred from circumstances.

"Further, it is a matter of trial and for the prosecution to lead evidence and to prove the allegations levelled against the accused persons and for the defence

to counter them. The Investigating Officer cannot be a deciding authority in a case that he is investigating, that too on the basis of the statement of one of the accused that the other accused persons have not committed any offence," the court of judicial magistrate said, finding sufficient prima facie material against Bina Modi and Bhasin.

Allowing the protest petition, the judicial magistrate said, "At the stage of taking cognizance, a meticulous evaluation of evidence is neither warranted nor permissible and the material on record, though circumstantial, forms a prima facie chain pointing towards a meeting of minds between the accused persons which is sufficient at this stage to proceed with the trial."

According to the prosecu-

tion, Samir Modi went to the GPI office on May 30, 2024, to attend a board meeting as executive director. He alleged that Prasad, acting on Bina Modi's instructions, stopped him from entering the boardroom and assaulted him when he insisted on attending. The complaint said his right index finger was broken and required surgical intervention with insertion of a screw and wire. The medico-legal certificate described the injury as grievous. CCTV footage of the incident was also part of the material collected.

Samir Modi further alleged that when he informed his mother about the assault, she asked him to sit down and allow the meeting to proceed. He claimed Bhasin also insisted the meeting continue despite his injuries.



Editor's TAKE

Afghan-Pakistan rift turns deadly

The latest airstrikes on Kabul and rising casualties mark a sharp escalation between former allies turned adversaries, underscoring a dangerous shift

It is understated yet deadly and could have far-reaching implications for the South Asian region. The conflict between Afghanistan and Pakistan is escalating and, with world attention focused on West Asia, it is playing out loudly but no one seems to care. What is more disturbing is the fact that its human cost is rising with every assault, and soon it could be a major flashpoint that would be hard to contain. The reported Pakistani air strike on a Kabul hospital, which the Afghan Taliban claims killed nearly 400 people and injured 250, is not a border skirmish; it is a full-blown conflict. Though Islamabad insists it targeted militant infrastructure, not civilians, it was a massacre nonetheless. Ironically, Pakistan is getting a taste of its own medicine. For years, Pakistan nurtured, trained and used Taliban militants, who are now turning against it. Pakistan wanted a friendly regime in Kabul which would not only make its eastern border secure but also stand alongside it, in providing manpower when needed against India. However, Pakistan's calculus failed when the Taliban returned to power in 2021. The Taliban, now in power and running Afghanistan, is no longer the insurgent force it once was. In five years of its tenure, Afghanistan has wilfully demonstrated autonomy and refused to take diktats from Pakistan's generals.

At the heart of the breakdown is the resurgence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Pakistan accuses the Afghan Taliban of providing a safe haven to TTP fighters, who have intensified attacks within Pakistani territory. Kabul denies these allegations, countering with claims that anti-Taliban groups find refuge in Pakistan. This blame game has steadily escalated into military confrontation. The latest strikes fit into this paradigm. Border skirmishes, air raids and retaliatory attacks have become rather routine. Moreover, diplomatic interventions by regional players have failed to produce lasting stability. What we are witnessing is not an isolated crisis but the steady normalisation of conflict between two deeply intertwined states.

There is an acute asymmetry in military capabilities. Pakistan, with its advanced air power and large standing army, holds sway over the Taliban's limited conventional capabilities. Yet, its military might does not guarantee decisive victory. If Pakistan has the machinery, the Taliban have the will and mettle to fight, especially in rugged border regions where insurgency tactics thrive. What is worrisome is the fact that, at the moment, West Asia is unstable and in a state of flux. The chances of this war getting mixed up with West Asia are high, as eventually China, Russia and the US would get involved and contest any attempt by the rivals to dominate these strategically important countries. This creates a conducive environment for escalation, reducing the likelihood of timely international mediation. As the two nations slog, power has altered priorities and ideology has collided with sovereignty. The path forward demands restraint and the need for dialogue that can eventually stop this conflict. Ironically, neither Pakistan nor Afghanistan can afford to go to full-fledged war, and if they do, it would be catastrophic for their people and the region at large.



SUSHIL KUMAR SINGLA

The common prevalent notion is that the Government has no business being in business. Is it time to move beyond and take a leap from PPP 1.0 to PPP 2.0, with Public being replaced with People as far as the management of national resources is concerned?

Nature-based Solutions (NBS) can be, and must be, taken forward with People at the forefront, as they are the most vulnerable and victims of climate change and resultant warming; and they must be placed at the front as leading partners. This will help in bringing all the stakeholders—Public, People or Private Entity—on the same footing and on the same page, as all of them will carry equal weightage, which will help in creating an inclusive and equitable societal order without any frills.

A case in point is the Forest Conservation Amendment Act, 2023, allowing industries to take up plantations on forest land, particularly degraded forest lands, aimed at enhancing green cover in the country. This is in line with the National Forest Policy 1988 goal of bringing one-third of the land area under forest or tree cover from the current level of approximately one-fourth.

In the mountainous Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh, two Ayurvedic manufacturers, using bio-resource material for the production of plant-based formulations, have come forward to collaborate and work closely with people residing in rural areas to cultivate medicinal and herbal species. One of these, a leading company, shall provide free-of-cost plants to people for raising on their private lands or to farmers for growing on farmland as per feasibility assessments. Dabur India Limited has signed an MoA to supply 1.2 million plants every year without any charge to local people, and this free distribution shall continue for the next 10 years. The company has agreed to create awareness, impart technical know-how to the people, in addition to having a buy-back arrangement with the growers of these medicinal and herbal produce.

The Department of Forest and Ayurveda under the State Government shall have a limited mandate of facilitating and providing a common platform to People and Private entities to coordinate, collaborate and cooperate to take forward the objectives of mutually

PPP: Reimagining national resource management

By placing communities at the centre of Nature-based Solutions, PPP not only addresses environmental challenges but also empowers those most affected, paving the way for sustainable livelihoods, equitable growth and a participatory framework



AS NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS HAVE A LONGER GESTATION PERIOD, THEY REQUIRE LONG-TERM AND CONTINUOUS EFFORTS TO MAKE THEM SUCCESSFUL AND SUSTAINABLE

The writer is Secretary Environment, Science Technology and Climate Change Government of Himachal Pradesh. Views expressed are personal

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signed agreements. This will pave the way for the scientific propagation of herbal plants with the twin objectives of enhancing local rural livelihoods and ensuring quality herbal produce for the manufacture and preservation of traditionally harvested forest and conservation areas.

A similar approach has been taken by the State Government in the field of climate change projects in the state, such as India's first state-supported biochar production programme. Under the Biochar Project, forest-based bio-resources will be used to convert them into biochar, which shall help in protecting forests from forest fires and also create avenues for local people's livelihood enhancement. A tripartite Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) in this regard was signed between Y S Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry, Nauni, the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department, and ProClima Services Private Limited, Chennai. The initiative will not only create employment opportunities but also help the State to secure carbon credits. ProClima, through the Forest Department, will engage local communities in sustainable biomass collection, and the participants will be paid per kg of biomass collected, with performance-based incentives for maintaining quality and quantity.

The programme is expected to generate nearly 50,000 person-days of income annually through biomass collection, along with direct employment in plant operations. Skill

development programmes will also be organised in partnership with the university on safe collection practices, biochar applications in agriculture, and climate change mitigation. Over its 10-year operational period, the project is expected to generate about 28,800 carbon credits, giving a boost to Himachal Pradesh's green initiatives.

The Afforestation, Reforestation and Re-vegetation (ARR) project is being promoted on land owned by people by roping in private investments. Under ARR, the private company will supply seedlings free of cost to farmers for raising on private lands and, after five years, will be eligible to partake in the carbon credits accumulated on account of these plantations undertaken on farmland. Here, Government departments, particularly the Forest Department, shall play a peripheral role.

As nature-based solutions have a longer gestation period, they require long-term and continuous efforts to make them successful and sustainable.

Now, public servants have to think from the perspective that People, Private Entities and Public Servants are sitting on the same side of the table, and the table is not square or rectangular but round. National resource management has to graduate from joint management to community-led management, which shall ultimately lead to sustainable management.

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Contentment, not possession, holds the key to peace



RAHYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

2ND OPINION

It has often been observed that whenever people meet a spiritual personality or a learned, enlightened soul, they invariably express the feeling that their faces reflect inner contentment, peace and purity. However, hardly do these people make a sustained effort to go deeper into the factors that lead to a life of contentment and inner harmony and a state of calm and composure, and much less do they make a serious attempt to attain these, even though they value them highly. A quiet reflection and serene introspection would, however, lead to the conclusion that contentment does not come from high and numerous material attainments. Contentment dawns when the dark night of ignorance ends. It is born of a sense of realisation that all that this material world offers is only ephemeral and short-lived. Only he, from whose

mind desires for mundane achievements have been eliminated, has contentment. Contentment is thus a sign of spiritual wisdom and maturity.

So, what is so special about contentment that has made many great people talk or write about it? Well, to understand it, we would first need to understand the opposite of it, i.e. discontentment. A discontented person has a typical habit of building castles in the air while he is as poor as he can be. Such people totally fail to understand that it is only by dint of hard work that a man can make both ends meet, and only a man of right understanding can work on the right lines. Otherwise, it is a blunder to let your reason be clouded by passion and thus lose your own happiness. Hence, we should remember that just as food sustains the body, so does the mind find sustenance in happiness. So, the saying goes: there is no food as good as happiness. And, to be happy, you have to be content. Just as, for bodily well-being, man seeks food, so should he maintain the state of contentment to ensure happiness of mind.

As Alfred Nobel has rightly said, 'Contentment is the only real wealth', we should therefore not run after securing another kind of wealth to lose the wealth of contentment. Likewise, peace comes when one's inner conflicts have been resolved and harmony of the mind and the intellect has been achieved. Peace is born of purity.

Contentment, purity and peace are the trio which make one's life worth living. They appear on the life scene after one has been pursuing one's spiritual studies and has also been practising deep meditation. Without the practice of yoga, one cannot attain and sustain inner peace and tranquillity.

One of the biggest illusions is that external circumstances must become perfect before we feel inner peace. In truth, it is the opposite—only when we cultivate peace, purity and contentment within does the external world begin to reflect it. Just as a lamp cannot spread light unless lit from within, society cannot become peaceful unless individuals awaken to their inner light.

Spiritual studies are often seen as uninteresting and ritualistic, but this is not so. They are as engaging as any other subject, and meditation is simply about reflection, remembrance and feeling. With a little guidance, even a small investment of time can yield rich dividends in the form of contentment and peace.

Today, very few people devote their time, money and energy to harmony in society. It is time we resolve to do so, for a peaceful and harmonious world must begin with each one of us.

The writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist

PICTALK



A barbet attempts to catch a honeybee while perched on a tree branch. PHOTO: PTI

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TIME TO REVIVE PARLIAMENT'S CREDIBILITY AND PURPOSE

Parliament, once revered as the supreme forum of democracy, is increasingly losing its vitality and dignity. The sight of empty seats, computers left switched on without use, and lights blazing in deserted halls reflects wasteful expenditure and disregard for public resources. Poor attendance and lack of seriousness among lawmakers have become routine, undermining the very essence of parliamentary functioning. Opposition parties often reduce their role to mere disruption, while treasury benches remain largely passive, showing limited engagement beyond praising the Prime Minister. The absence of top leaders, who skip more sessions than they attend, further erodes credibility and weakens accountability. Citizens expect Parliament to be a space for

debate, constructive policymaking and responsible governance.

Instead, it has become symbolic of neglect and inefficiency, where discussions are overshadowed by walkouts and noise rather than substance. Important Bills are passed without meaningful debate amidst uproar.

Restoring discipline, responsibility and genuine debate is essential if Parliament is to regain respect. Only through active participation, meaningful dialogue and respect for procedure can it reclaim its role as the guardian of democratic values. It is the responsibility of all Members of Parliament to ensure it does not degenerate into redundancy.

O PRASADA RAO | HYDERABAD

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LPG supply concerns rise

In the March 15 update, the Ministry of Petroleum stated that there were "no reported dry-outs at LPG distributorships". However, the Strait of Hormuz, the main route for India's LPG imports, remains forcibly closed by Iran. After talks between the Indian Prime Minister and the Iranian President, Iran granted a special concession, allowing LPG carriers bound for India to pass through the Strait. However, the Iranian Ambassador to India, Mohammad Fathali, declined to specify the number of ships given permission.

Abdul Majid Hakeem Ilahi, representative of Iran's Supreme Leader in India, addressed Indians as "dear brothers and sisters" and stated that the concession reflected the solidarity shown by people towards Iran. It can be inferred that this balanced approach helped secure the concession.

India's LPG storage capacity, estimated between 1.2 and 1.9 MMT, remains unchanged since 2015, while consumption has risen from 17 MMT to 31 MMT. Import dependence has increased to 60 per cent. Countries such as Canada and China maintain significantly higher storage capacities. A comprehensive strategy to address supply disruptions and price volatility is urgently required.

HARIDASAN RAJAN | KERALA

Cheetah project shows progress

Wildlife enthusiasts are understandably euphoric over the birth of five cubs to Jwala, a cheetah at Madhya Pradesh's Kuno Palpur National Park. Asiatic cheetahs had vanished from India by 1950, and the species was declared extinct in 1952.

Low genetic variability and prolonged inbreeding were once cited as causes for their decline, although several wildlife experts argue that this loss occurred thousands of years ago. The more immediate causes were poaching, hunting and habitat destruction.

After initial setbacks, India's cheetah relocation project now appears to be on track. With recent additions, there are currently 53 cheetahs across Kuno National Park and Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary. Early planning recognised the importance of restoring suitable grassland and scrub forest habitats.

Attempts to source cheetahs from Iran did not succeed. Subsequently, Kuno National Park, spanning 750 sq km and offering a strong prey base, was identified for reintroduction following approval from the Supreme Court. The recent births signal cautious optimism. Continued scientific monitoring and habitat management will be essential to ensure the long-term success of this ambitious conservation initiative.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

Self-identification under threat

The Transgender Persons Amendment Bill, 2026 requires careful scrutiny, as it raises significant concerns regarding constitutional protections and fundamental rights. By replacing self-identification with medical verification, the Bill appears to contradict the Supreme Court's 2014 ruling. Under the proposed amendment, gender recognition would depend on medical verification rather than self-identification. This creates additional procedural barriers for transgender persons seeking identity documents. In a society where transgender individuals often face discrimination, such requirements may further restrict access to education, employment and healthcare.

Supporters argue that clearer definitions are necessary for effective implementation of welfare measures. However, constitutional guarantees must remain paramount.

The Supreme Court had affirmed that gender identity is rooted in self-perception and lived experience, and not solely in biological criteria.

The Bill's emphasis on biological determinism risks undermining this principle. It may inadvertently reverse progress made in recognising the dignity and autonomy of transgender persons.

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



An open letter to Rahul Gandhi

India deserves an opposition that challenges the government with seriousness-not slogans; with evidence-not conjecture; with statesmanship-not theatrics. As Leader of the Opposition, you have a rare opportunity to elevate national discourse. That responsibility demands intellectual discipline & historical awareness

FIRST Column



BALBIR PUNJ

Dear Rahul ji,

I write with candour, yet with due regard for the office you occupy as Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. In any parliamentary democracy, this office is not meant merely to oppose, but to scrutinise rigorously, question the government of the day fearlessly, and do so while safeguarding national interest. A mature democracy requires both — a strong government and a credible opposition. When either falters, democratic balance weakens. Unfortunately, I must say that the dignity of the office has declined since your takeover, due to your conduct and statements that appear impulsive, theatrical, and lacking a solid grounding in facts or historical knowledge. My concern is not limited to a single incident. The pattern predates 2014 and indicates a deeper intellectual attitude—one that is sometimes disconnected from historical realities and national sensitivities.

In 2010, diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks recorded that you told the US Ambassador that radicalised "Hindu groups" posed a "bigger threat" to India than the Pakistani terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba-responsible for the horrific 2008 Mumbai 26/11. This disclosure came when India was still scarred by the Godhra train burning, where fifty-nine pilgrims were burnt alive by jihadists.

Yet, instead of confronting Islamist extremism with clarity, a fake counter-narrative of "saffron terror" was constructed, even casting suspicion on organisations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. The 2007 affidavit questioning the historicity of Lord Ram further reflected a disturbing intellectual drift. In a continuity of this disposition, you and your family chose to absent yourselves from the historic 2024 Ram Temple Pran-Pratishtha ceremony at Ram Mandir, Ayodhya.

In 2013, the country witnessed an extraordinary spectacle. During Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's tenure, you publicly dismissed your party-led Cabinet-approved ordinance as "complete nonsense" that should be "torn up and thrown away." The ordinance had already been cleared by the Cabinet and the Congress leadership. Democracy welcomes dissent; it also demands institutional respect.



Where do you get such arrogance? From a sense of entitlement owing to your dynastic roots? More recently, on 13 March last in Lucknow, while commemorating Kanshi Ram's birth anniversary, you suggested that had Jawaharlal Nehru been alive, Kanshi Ram might have become Chief Minister through the Congress.

The claim surprised many observers-not just because it was speculative, but because it overlooked Kanshi Ram's political journey and the historic disdain of Congress for dissenting Dalit voices outside its organisational structure. In 1994, I had the opportunity to meet Kanshi Ram several times. Each interaction lasted hours. These meetings were facilitated by a Dalit leader from South India who then served as a minister in the government of P. V. Narasimha Rao and remains associated with your party even today. Kanshi Ram impressed me as a man uniquely dedicated to Dalit empowerment. Unlike many politicians who see power as an end in itself, he viewed political office solely as a tool for social change. Personal ambition did not motivate him. He politely declined an offer to move to Rashtrapati Bhavan, made by Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Ultimately, he trusted his movement to Mayawati, whom he believed could continue the struggle. The analogy you used in your speech—holding a pen vertically to symbolise hierarchy and horizontally to represent equality—was actually Kanshi Ram's favourite metaphor. I remember him

demonstrating it vividly during our conversations.

Invoking Nehru in this context, however, appeared historically misplaced. Kanshi Ram built his politics precisely because he believed the Congress system had failed Dalits. The historical relationship between Congress leadership and Dr BR Ambedkar also deserves reflection. Kanshi Ram regarded Ambedkar as his greatest inspiration. Yet Ambedkar's political experience with Congress leaders—particularly Nehru—was marked by sharp tensions.

Nehru had no hesitation in awarding himself the Bharat Ratna in 1955. Ambedkar, the chief architect of India's Constitution, received the same honour only in 1990—thirty-five years later—under the government of V. P. Singh, which was supported from outside by the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Left. Ambedkar's entry into the first Cabinet of independent India occurred largely because Mahatma Gandhi insisted that the new government must include distinguished non-Congress figures. Thus, Ambedkar served alongside leaders such as Syama Prasad Mukherjee and Sardar Baldev Singh.

The 1952 general election further highlights the relationship. After resigning from the Cabinet, Ambedkar contested from North Bombay. The Congress fielded Narayan Sadoba Kajrolkar against him. Ambedkar lost by around fourteen thousand votes, while over 75,000 ballots were declared invalid. It was probably the first case of vote chori (theft), scandalising independent India in its very first election to the Lok Sabha. Compounding the hostility, Congress and Communist leaders called Ambedkar a "traitor". Yet such accusations were

not entirely novel. Writing to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur on 26 January 1946, Nehru himself remarked that Ambedkar had "allied himself with the British Government against the Congress".

Savita Ambedkar records in her autobiography that Nehru was "keeping a sharp eye on the constituency" during the 1952 election. According to her account, Nehru, S. K. Patil and Dange were determined to ensure Ambedkar's defeat. Nehru himself appeared jubilant with the outcome. In a letter to Lady Edwina Mountbatten dated 16 January 1952, he wrote: "In Bombay city and to a larger extent in Bombay province, our success has been far greater than expected. Ambedkar has been dropped out." Rahulji, please ask yourself: Why was Nehru celebrating Ambedkar's electoral defeat? I am not implying anything, but I wonder why he was happily sharing the news of Ambedkar's loss with a woman who was the consort of a colonial ruler responsible for planning and executing India's partition, and had then left Indian shores for her country. Hopefully, you know the answer.

Ambedkar's anguish is recorded by his biographer Dhananjay Keer in 'Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission'. Ambedkar lamented that Congress leaders routinely branded him a "traitor". In contrast, Mahatma Gandhi once told him: "I know you are a patriot of sterling worth."

In this context, your recent demand for the Bharat Ratna for Kanshi Ram raises questions about consistency. When Mayawati made the same request in 2008, the Congress-led UPA government rejected it, arguing that such honours should not be subject to lobbying. Why were you silent then? Today, the same demand, raised by you on the eve of Uttar Pradesh elections, seemingly appears insincere and driven by political opportunism. Kanshi Ram himself had little faith in the Congress. In his 1982 book 'Chamcha Yug', he accused the party of cultivating "stooge" Dalit leaders who served its interests rather than empowering the community. Your rhetorical framework often echoes familiar ideological clichés about India's civilisation. This has repeatedly led to judicial corrections. Your remarks linking the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh to Gandhi's assassination required clarification in court. The "Chowkidar Chor Hai" episode led to an apology to the Supreme Court. Your statements on Vinayak Damodar Savarkar invited judicial caution.

Criticism is legitimate, and indeed a vibrant democracy's lifeline. However, undermining the nation while trying to criticise the government, echoing external prejudices, and making baseless accusations against political rivals and ideological opponents fall into a different category. It is irresponsible behaviour unworthy of a credible

leader. Your endorsement of foreign criticism describing India as a "dead economy" raised concerns about national disparagement. Your remarks abroad suggesting that "Sikhs may not freely practise their faith in India" were swiftly appropriated by hostile elements. Most alarming was your assertion that your party is fighting not merely the BJP or RSS, but the "Indian State"—a formulation historically invoked by insurgent movements. In 2018, you made an unsubstantiated claim in the Rafale matter, invoking the French President—swiftly contradicted by the French government. In 2017, during the Doklam standoff, you met the Chinese Ambassador, with your party first denying and then admitting the meeting.

During foreign visits, Rahulji, you have expressed concern that Western powers no longer comment on India's internal affairs and have repeatedly described India as merely a "union of states"—not as a nation. This is less a constitutional observation and more an intellectual stance that diminishes India's civilisational continuity—a doctrine Gandhiji often emphasised and strived for.

Even recent episodes—such as the conduct of Youth Congress activists at an international forum, followed by your approving remark—suggest a troubling preference for spectacle over seriousness. You have warned that India would "burn" if the BJP returns to power and questioned constitutional stability. After electoral defeats, you and your party have cast doubts on institutions such as the Election Commission. Opposition is legitimate; delegitimising institutions is not.

Your parliamentary conduct has occasionally reinforced perceptions of theatricality—the 2018 embrace of the Prime Minister followed by a wink, or recent public gestures that prioritised superficial optics over substantive politics. Your renewed emphasis on redistribution slogans such as "jiti abadi, utna haq" raises further concern. History offers a cautionary lesson. Under Indira Gandhi, excessive nationalisation weakened production, fuelled shortages, and culminated in the Indian Emergency. Redistribution without wealth creation destroys the very foundation it seeks to distribute. The test of leadership lies not in applause, but in arguments that withstand scrutiny—historical, judicial, and intellectual.

India deserves an opposition that challenges the government with seriousness-not slogans; with evidence-not conjecture; with statesmanship-not theatrics. As Leader of the Opposition, you have a rare opportunity to elevate national discourse. That responsibility demands intellectual discipline, historical awareness, and an unwavering commitment to the dignity of the Republic. I hope you will reflect — not as a matter of partisan disagreement, but as an appeal to restore seriousness to India's political conversation.



The writer is an eminent columnist, former Chairman of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), and the author of 'Trust with Ayodhya: Decolonisation of India' and 'Narrative ka Majaal'

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Unearthing Kerala's carved legacy: A tribute to sacred woodcraft

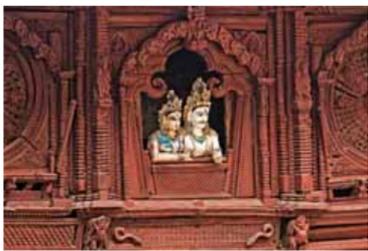


RAGHVENDRA SINGH

I must, at the outset, concede that I am no art historian. Yes, I am a student of history but not particularly well placed to write a critical review on wooden sculptures in Kerala temples. My workplace experience fortunately exposed me to the marvels of Indian sculpture. A stint as Director General of the National Museum, New Delhi, gave me a wonderful opportunity to learn about Indian architectural masterpieces. It also gave me a chance to witness these artefacts in different museums across India and the world and compare them across time and space. I could not stop myself from embarking on the delightful task of going through the two recent publications on Kerala sculptures by Professor Preeti Nayar and attempting a review. Painstakingly composed, they caught my attention immediately. These two books have been curated imaginatively and explained interestingly, even for a casual reader of this genre. The research done is meticulous. The temple architecture of Kerala is quite distinct from the 'Dravidian' and the 'Nagara' style. The Kerala temple architectural features manifest the integration of cultural elements from both within and without. It also has its own indigenous features, quite pronounced, for example, a modest structure with a subdued gopuram, lively in style, that merges elegantly with climate-friendly patterns of domestic dwellings, elevating it to a divine status. Timber is the main construction material, with striking wooden artistry as a dominant feature. Sculptural art of Kerala has a tradition of more than a millennium. The two main elements of the sculptural wealth come from the Vaishnava and Shaiva traditions. The lyrical quality of twists and turns in forms, the musical harmony in proportions, the natural artistry in moulding shapes, and the precision in carving anecdotes in finite spaces greatly manifest in the craftsmanship of the godly hands of the woodcarvers of Kerala. They effortlessly impart a gigantic feel to miniature forms and transform expressions of fierce ferocity into subtle aesthetic delight.

The art of Kerala is one of the richest and most exuberant. It is with some hesitation that I venture some reasons for it. Temples in Kerala adhere to a series of strict and closed-door ritualistic traditions with many layers of limitations. These traditions, under normal circumstances, do not permit access to sculptural niches for the purpose of iconographic investigation.

It is against this background that the relevance of the two important publications, "Vaishnava



Sculptures of Kerala: An Iconographic Study" and "Carved Wonders in Wood: Rare Sculptures of Kerala," authored by Professor Preeti Nayar of the Department of Archaeology, University of Kerala, should be viewed. The book on Vaishnava sculptures of Kerala is methodically organised into eight chapters. It begins with the origin and development of Vaishnavism, and traces the historical roots and evolution of this tradition in the state. The next theme covers the cultural perspective and provides a contextual backdrop by examining the social dynamics that influenced the region's art and architecture. The author thereafter delves into the architectural features of the Hindu temples in Kerala. The various forms of 'Vishnu' are examined in detail, represented as they are in the sculptural art of the state. The 'Dashavatara of Vishnu' illustrates the ten principal avatars, highlighting their iconographic significance.

This is followed by a lucid analysis of minor avatars of Vishnu, focusing on lesser-known incarnations and their representations. Then there are the composite and associate deities of Vishnu, discussed extensively as per delightful visual representations. The book on Vaishnava sculptures of Kerala provides a comprehensive evaluation of the sculptural forms and their iconographic relevance. It is an in-depth scientific study of Vaishnava sculptures in stone and wood. Informative iconographic descriptions of different forms of Vaishnava sculptures starting with sthanaka (standing), asana (sitting) and shayana (reclining) forms of Vishnu, his major and minor avatars, are all presented aesthetically. It deals with sculptural depictions of many anecdotes (for example, Krishnalila) affiliated with these forms. The work examines the explanations given for these forms in ancient iconographic texts like Vishnudharmottara and evaluates the salient features while indicating the degree of fidelity observed between the texts (shastras) and the images (prayogas).

Morphological features of the icons, like the number of different deities, the attributed symbols they hold and their schematic arrangement, are incisively analysed and classified. The findings in the book sub-regionalise important forms in different geographical areas of the state.

It categorises over 97 basic forms of Vaishnava sculptures, with 120 sub-forms and over 200 other varieties. The study compares these forms with those from northern and other parts of South India, attempting a broader classification and understanding of regional variations.

The visuals and descriptions enhance the understanding of the intricate details and variations within the Vaishnava sculptures of Kerala. This publication is a pivotal contribution to the understanding of Kerala's rich sculptural heritage. By intertwining the historical, cultural and iconographic perspective, the book offers a 360-degree framework to appreciate the intricate relationships between the art and architecture of Kerala temples through iconography.

Now I come to the second work of Professor Preeti Nayar, the 'Carved Wonders in Wood: Rare Sculptures of Kerala'. This too is a beautifully brought-out volume in colour. It takes the readers on a journey through the magnificence of Kerala's wood carving heritage. It commences with a brief description of the unique architecture of Kerala temples and illustrations of its various architectural components. The rest of the text is a rare treat on the splendour of the 'least seen and least known' atypical sculptural forms, depicting 66 themes of Hindu mythology, carefully selected from a multitude of wooden sculptures that richly adorn the sculptural niches of 76 ancient Hindu temples across the state.

The sculptures are described with emphasis on their iconography after narrating the story associated with their respective forms. This is followed by images of specific niches where those sculptures are positioned in the temples, the names of those temples and their location in the state. The contents are supported with 186 original colour photographs, most of them in larger format. The work contains rare forms of cosmic Vishwadeva, Kinnara Shiva, Rakshoghnamurti. Sculptures depicting themes like Vishnu in Yoganidra and the origin of Madhu and Kaitabha, Bhima carrying his family on his shoulder to the Hidimba forest, Kalki in a termitarium, Aghasuravada, Ashtavakra, rare sculptures with philosophical dimensions like Vighna, and some denoting localised themes like six-breasted Pidari and many other rare images.

Both these publications, significant in their own way, come with references to literature and a glossary of technical terms which make them user-friendly. These two books add immensely to our understanding of the local Kerala tradition in the Indian context. Undoubtedly, it will prove to be an important source of reference for archaeologists, Indologists and art historians.

The writer is a former Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Government of India and an Advisor at Bharat Ki Soch Foundation

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West Asia crisis and the Modi doctrine



ISHAAN SAXENA

As the conflict in the Middle East continues to escalate unabated, and the US and Israel continue their ferocious campaign against Iran, the world is on tenterhooks. The broad repercussions of this raging war can be felt worldwide, from rising energy costs to the profound implications for the tourism sector. But in the midst of this latest conflagration, which has captivated global attention and headlines, India, under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, appears to have skillfully navigated a tumultuous environment with great ease. This is a testament to our diplomatic sagacity and the art of dealing with close allies on a plethora of issues, even though our interests diverge on the current problem that is brewing.

Even though Israel and the US are acting in concert to obliterate targets in Iran and its proxies, India has skillfully demonstrated its ability to manoeuvre through this complex web and yet keep its ties intact with the Arab world. Three issues come to mind. First, the balancing act that occurred during the Gaza and Middle East conflict is a masterstroke.

Mr Modi's visit to Israel was timed at a very crucial juncture. Both Israel and the US could not have launched a coordinated attack on Iran with his presence in the Middle East. When the Prime Minister addressed the Israeli Parliament, he reiterated the strategic partnership between the two nations and the urgent need to further bolster defence and technology ties. The devastating war commenced less than two days after his departure. Terror was condemned in the harshest terms, but India successfully articulated a clear message to Israel: it has deep-rooted economic interests in Iran (the Chabahar Port), and India will not forsake them in light of the current situation. Concurrently, gone are the days when India had to tread a fine line to establish deeper ties with Israel. The message is loud and strident: our national interest comes first.

Second, despite a belligerent Iran that is hell-bent on striking any vulnerable targets in the Middle East, India opened direct talks with Iran to allow the passage of its oil tankers. This again is a manifestation of how intelligent diplomacy works. We have proven to the world that we embrace, empathise and cooperate with Israel, but that does not diminish the nature of our ties with the Middle East.

The cooperation between the two nations has evolved tremendously pursuant to the attacks,

especially in terms of intelligence sharing. Despite the fact that India has condoned the assassination of Ali Khamenei, our national interest in securing our energy needs has prevailed effortlessly in a very precarious security scenario.

Third, America seems to be urging India to purchase Russian oil, which it was vehemently opposing prior to the war. This is to contain surging oil prices. Yes, deep-rooted concerns remain in ongoing trade negotiations that reference environmental and labour standards, but history is a witness that these standards have always been employed to gain an upper hand in trade negotiations. Ever since the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1948 until the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995, Article XX has been invoked under the guise of genuine concern, but the core reason has been protectionism. Throughout modern history, this has been the bone of contention between the developed and developing world, and India will eventually manage to surmount this challenge and sign a successful deal in the coming months. America is too engaged in the Middle East right now to pay close attention to a deal that will be mutually beneficial to both nations. After all, in Trump's own words, Mr Modi is a very tough negotiator.

So, if anything, the recent unfolding of events has only proved that the Indian economy is slated to outpace the rest of the world. Meanwhile, China's economic interests have been threatened by the recent bombing campaign on Iran's Kharg Island. Its air defence systems have proven to be weak. Operation Sindhoor, the abduction of the Venezuelan President, and the attack on Iran port illuminatingly to this indisputable fact. Furthermore, Pakistan's reluctance to join Saudi Arabia in the war proves that the so-called Islamic NATO is just baloney—a Catch-22 situation. If it joins the war, it will be implicitly endorsing Israel, and if it does not, the Islamic NATO becomes a laughing stock.

India has demonstrated that when interests align, it will constructively engage with all stakeholders, and when they do not, it will follow its national interest. The linear unfolding of events has conveyed a very powerful diplomatic message to the world: we watch quietly and act with purpose when necessary, in the interest of our country. Furthermore, the precision with which we react and activate our diplomatic channels will astonish India's mightiest adversaries.



The writer is a national security analyst

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Even as the US, Israel, and Iran use artificial intelligence (AI) in the ongoing war in the Middle East, and the use of AI tools become relevant in modern warfare, as is and was witnessed in the Russia-Ukraine and India-Pakistan wars, there are open battles being fought between leading AI and tech firms in the US. The latter tech wars are related to the use of AI in the national and global wars. In the US, OpenAI, Anthropic, and others like Dell tussle over how a government, in this case the Pentagon and department of war, can or cannot use AI in their weapons and equipment. Top-notch CEOs of three firms, Sam Altman of ChatGPT, Dario Amodei of Claude, and Michael Dell of Dell Technologies, have fired their verbal missiles over the past few days, both against each other, and in support of each other.

First, Anthropic's Amodei refused to allow the US to use its AI, Claude, in fully autonomous weapons that "lack a human in the targeting or firing loop." He argued that the existing AI systems are not reliable or safe enough for such tasks. Amodei has problems with tech being used for "bulk, surveillance-level monitoring of American citizens." Claude draws strict lines of non-use in these two issues. A peeved and angry Pentagon cancelled the Claude contract because the former wanted the removal of the two restrictions, allow "lawful use." Anthropic was dubbed as a "supply chain risk" in national interests. The tech firm filed two lawsuits against the department of defense that its blacklisting was illegal, and violated the First Amendment. As the legal and contractual battle ensued, American continued to use Claude in the Iran war to establish that the war of words was over control and policy. Claude emphasised that its refusal did not imply a blanket refusal to work with the military, but focused on 'red lines.'

On the day Claude's contract was cancelled, Altman's OpenAI signed a deal with the Pentagon on the same tech, and allowed the military the use without any restrictions. In posts on X, he wrote, "I think Anthropic may have wanted more operational control than we did," and Amodei was possibly "more focused on specific prohibitions in the contract, rather than citing applicable laws." He explained that military contracts were extremely sensitive because of the national interests, and negotiations can collapse due to several unrelated and unintended issues. "I have seen what happens in tense negotiations when things get stressed, and deteriorate superfast, and I could believe that was a large part of what happened here," he added. In effect, what Altman indicated was that his firm had no qualms about how the US military used its tech, and he had no intentions to escalate discussions. The Pentagon was free to do what it wanted to do with OpenAI.

Dell's Dell quickly entered the three-way debate, and added his own viewpoints. This time, he was on the same page as Sam Altman. According to Dell, firms cannot dictate how their tech is used by the government, if it wishes to work with the government. The sovereign authorities and agencies have the right to use the tech that they wished to, as it implies national interests. The last segment was implicit, and never expressed openly by Dell. In a contract of such a sensitive nature, the most workable model or solution is to let the user decide how and why it wants to use the tech, if it is legal, and as per the contract. Red or green lines cannot restrict military use, especially when a nation is at war with an enemy, as the US is with Iran. Dell said that Dell, as a firm, sells only to authorised users, without expanding the meaning and implications of the ambiguous statement and explanation.

The fact remains that ChatGPT and Claude have pitched themselves at the two extremes of AI and tech. The former believes in faster adoption and inculcation in military, commercial, and social worlds. The latter is more cautious and doubtful, and even delayed the launch of Claude despite being the first developer. Claude became public because ChatGPT entered, and there was little option. There is a kind of moral veil that separates the two, or at least seems too. Claude is forever apprehensive about what AI can and cannot do, and the pitfalls of AI. ChatGPT thinks that AI is the panacea, and the problems will be solved as the use grows, rather than to do the reverse, i.e., find safe options, and then introduce the new features and tools. In this differing mindset, Claude experiments with what can go wrong with AI. ChatGPT engages with what is right, and how one can make it more right. Obviously, the approaches are so radically different that there can be minimal meeting grounds. Dell seems to be caught in the middle, and fears being left behind in the AI sprint races. This explains why Claude opposed ChatGPT's move to introduce limited advertisements in AI conversations. The latter stated that this was just selective to engage and understand how ads clash or do not clash with AI conversations. Claude felt that such efforts need to be done in the labs rather than in actual situations because of the intimacy between humans and AI.

'Strait' crude story is not straight

Iran's tankers, ships linked to 'friends of Iran' cross Hormuz

OUR TAKE

For two weeks or so, headlines claimed that the Strait of Hormuz, which earlier accounted for a fifth to a third of global crude oil supplies, was effectively closed by Iran. In the past few days, there was news of a few ships crossing it to reach India, Pakistan, and a few Asian destinations. However, new data according to Lloyd's List Intelligence claims that 89 ships, which included 16 oil tankers, crossed the Strait between March 1 and 15, 2026. A fifth of them belonged to Iran, bulk of them claimed to be Chinese, either genuinely or as masquerades, and a few that reached other ports. There were some that were affiliated to Greece. Among them were two ships, Shivalik and Nanda Devi, which came to India, and carried more than 90,000 tonnes of much-needed liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), whose shortages have rocked Indian consumers. Hence, the Strait of Hormuz narrative related to crude oil shipments is crooked and twisted rather than straight.

In effect, Iran's smuggling of crude oil exports, which have continued for years after the western sanctions were imposed before the ongoing war, ships owned by the so-called friendly nations, vessels that moved because of diplomatic efforts, and some that served Iran's interests account for the movements. According to Lloyd's List, "Many of the vessels that passed through the Strait were so-called 'dark' transits evading western government sanctions and oversight that have likely ties with Iran." In essence, Iran's smuggling initiatives that enabled it to sell oil in the pre-war period to willing buyers like China continued. According to an analytics platform, Kpler, "Iran has still managed to export well above 16 million barrels of oil since the beginning of March (2026)." Thus, the

nation has preserved a part of its revenues, which are crucial to support the war, and manage the war-ravaged society. A global consulting firm, Reddal, claims, "Iran has managed to profit from oil sales, and also 'preserve its own export artery' by using control over the chokepoint (Strait of Hormuz)." Thus, Iran achieved a twin victory, as it allowed its vessels to sail, and stop others with attack threats.

Most of Iran's oil during the war, as was the case before the war, is destined for China, which is, and was, the largest buyer of the smuggled shipments. Since the latter did not believe in the western sanctions, it purchased huge quantities of Russian and Iranian oil, especially through the 'dark' transits, or ships that changed their ownerships several times during the sea journeys. The same strategy applies today. Indeed, according to many analysts, other vessels, and nations, gained from the strong Iran-China links. "Some vessels near or in the Strait were found to have declared themselves as China-linked or with all-China crew to reduce risks of being attacked," say some reports, and took advantage of "China's closer ties with Iran." Thus, an ongoing 'energy' collusion between the two nations has helped both, as well as others, which Iran feels are friendly or not enemies. The 'friendship' vessels include several Asian and Middle East nations.

For example, according to reports, Iraq is in talks with Iran to allow the former's ships to cross the Strait safely. This seems surprising, and counterintuitive since the two nations have fought several wars with each other in the past. However, in diplomacy and geopolitics, there are no permanent friends or enemies, and

diplomacy is the art of the possible. Hence, some Iraq-owned ships may have been given a reprieve. Lloyd's List claimed that a Pakistan oil tanker, which is controlled by the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation, passed through the Strait a few days ago. But the route of the ship was neither denied nor confirmed by Pakistan official sources. A spokesman of Pakistan Port Trust admitted that the tanker would reach Karachi soon. The two Indian ships safely crossed the Strait around the same time, and carried the much-needed LPG. India's external affairs minister, S Jaishankar, told a foreign newspaper that this was because of successful diplomatic talks with Iran. Some reports suggest that the two vessels were not in the Strait, or on the non-Asia side, but on the side nearer to the Indian coast. Hence, it was easier for them to sail.

America has added another twist to the narrative. Instead of accepting Lloyd's List story that most of the Iranian ships opted for 'dark' transits, the US maintained that it had 'deliberately' and 'consciously' allowed the Iranian ships to pass through the Strait. In a TV interview, Scott Bessent, US treasury secretary, said, "The Iranian ships have been getting out already, and we have let that happen to supply to the rest of the world." It was a humane gesture to help the Asian nations that were suffering due to high prices and shortages. Given this thought process, the story about American attacks has changed. President Donald Trump claimed that the Kharg Island, which is the key for Iran's oil network, infrastructure, and exports, was destroyed, and he would possibly bomb it more "just for fun." Now, it seems that only the military sites in Kharg Island were destroyed, and most of the oil structures are intact, and were left alone. Hence, America is intent on safeguarding Iran's oil network to help the rest of the world.

Whether one accepts America's viewpoint, or goes with the Iran-China-Friends theory, the fact remains that the Strait of Hormuz is selectively operational, and not completely shut. Indeed, it never was since the beginning of the war on February 28, 2026. Through the first fifteen days of March, shipments continued to cross it, albeit the numbers were drastically reduced from an average of 100-135 vessels a day to 89 over 15 days. As one of the analysts explains, "It (the situation) is better understood as closed selectively against some traffic (western nations), while still functioning for Iranian exports, and a narrow set of tolerated non-Iranian movements." However, Iran's strategy related to the Strait is quite clear. The idea is to inflict maximum pain on the western nations, especially America, drive the fear of God among the Middle East nations through attacks on military and civilian positions, and help a few large consumers, which proved to be friends in the past. In the process, Iran hopes to drive the global crude oil prices nearer to \$200 per barrel. At present, though, oil prices, despite jerking to \$120 from \$80 or so within a day or two, seem settled around \$100.



A Contrarian Investor

Bulls out of hiding, run amok

From its low on Monday morning, Sensex gained over 3.5 per cent

On Monday morning (10.30 am; March 16, 2026), the Sensex was just over 74,000 points, or down almost 14 per cent from its high of nearly 86,000 in December 2025. Now, it is up more than 2,500 points within three trading days. The almost-unstoppable, ever-rising index, with minor, almost irrelevant, intra-day dips, has surprised, even shocked even the most optimistic investors. Even the Nifty Small-Cap 100 index gained almost four per cent from its Monday's lows. Yesterday, the gains were bolstered by one of the most battered sectors over the past several months, IT and software. Somehow, excitement and enthusiasm seem to have returned on Dalal Street.

Most people cannot fathom this change, from a feeling of doom last week to one of boom this one. The change in sentiments comes due to no rhyme or reason, as the war-related tensions in the Middle East continue, global crude oil prices remain over \$100 a barrel, supply constraints tighten, currencies dip, and GDP growths falter. Although the US claims that the war is at an end, it adds that it is likely to continue the bombings and missile attacks. Although nations may release emergency oil reserves, the shortfalls will not vanish. So, what explains the turnaround in the Indian stock indices?

It is not what is happening that has become important but events that were anticipated, even predicted, and did not happen that are crucial. In some ways, it is reverse psychology at work. One expected the worst. Since it did not materialise, it was taken as a huge positive. The lack of bad is good. The lack of good does not matter. A positive-negative is a positive. A negative-positive is not relevant. It is like when you expect to die, and escape with serious injuries, it is something to celebrate. The lack of death, even if it is a near-death experience, is life.

Consider the crude prices, for instance. Once the global prices reached \$120 within no time, and Iran selectively, but effectively, closed the Strait of Hormuz, which earlier handled a fifth to a third of global supplies, the expectations were that the prices will continue the upward climb. Iran claimed that \$200 was a distinct possibility, and might happen sooner than later. Then, prices dipped to \$80-90, and went up to over \$100, and stabilised around those levels. Since the prices did not climb back to \$120, or go up to \$150, but remained at \$100 was seen as extremely good news, and positive one, by the investors.

According to an analyst quoted in media reports, "Despite the uncertainty regarding the war, markets have staged a bounce-back.



One factor that enabled this... is crude remaining around the \$102 level, and fears spiking above \$120 not materialising. The near-term scenario will be one of the markets responding mildly positively to some good news, and negatively to bad news." In effect, crude is the new reverse benchmark for the stocks. If it is stable, equities zoom. If it is down, stocks boom. If it is up, stocks will not know what to do.

As usual, despite the tensions, war bugles, and crude screams, there are other ongoing battles between foreign and domestic investors in the Indian stock markets. For almost two years, these tussles were on, and they seem to go on without respite. In March 2026 so far, the foreigners have sold shares worth more than ₹70,000 crore. But the domestic ones pur-

chased stocks worth more than ₹88,000 crore. It does not make sense why the latter bought shares in a flailing and sensitive situation, when indices across the globe were on the way down.

For some experts, the trend indicates that the Indian investors have more faith in the

Indian equities, and nation's growth story. The high GDP growths in the past few quarters, low inflation for a year or so, and exports resilience despite the trade-tariff tensions show that the economy is on track despite the falling rupee, and restrained corporate earnings. The GST changes will boost volumes, and rev up future margins. So, the Indians, rather than being reactive, are buying for the long term, and with a mindset of 2-3 years, or more.

However, the foreigners are being, what can

one say, foreigners. Given their constraints to show quarterly gains, and provide adequate annual returns to shareholders, they need to book profits whenever they spot opportunities, or whenever they even smell a whiff of a crisis. Hence, they sold in the past because of low corporate earnings. They are selling now because of the Iran war, rise on global oil prices, and economic disruptions. If they make money on their sales, they are comfortable because they have the flexibility to enter at low values later. For them, the globe is the oyster. This is not true for Indians.

When indices slump, and then bump up, as has happened in the past 10 days, it indicates an ongoing churn in portfolios and holdings. Even when there is a deep fall, most sector-specific indices, and most stocks tumble, but there are some that survive, and are resilient to the shocks. Such trends indicate that investors are possibly shifting from some falling sectors to those that seem to withstand the pressures. Once the dust settles, when it does, and the air clears, the investment scenario may change. Some sectors will gain, and some lose permanently.

"Despite being sustained sellers in the market, FIIs (foreign institutional investors) have been selectively buying in some sectors like telecom. This partly explains the resilience in telecom stocks. There is a portfolio churn happening away from IT, and highly-valued FMCG stocks towards telecom, pharma, defense, and select financials. Market leaders and fancied stocks in these segments will continue to be resilient even in a choppy market," explains an analyst. The only problem is that different brokerages have different perspectives on what they dub as survival stocks in the post-war period.

In effect, bargain buying becomes the norm for the Indian investors, who have limited choices since they have limited options to buy in foreign exchanges, and they do not wish to rejig the portfolios in terms of asset classes. If they need to buy Indian equities and, for instance, invest 70 per cent of the portfolio in stocks, they buy what seems cheap, and has some chances of going up in the future. When this happens, the downward trend changes, only if for a small period. The buying window closes as soon bad news streams in through the same window.



West Asia war to dent ceramic industry revenue

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The Indian ceramic tiles industry is expected to witness a 1-2 per cent decline in revenue this fiscal, marking the second consecutive year of fall, due to the war in West Asia, which is affecting production and exports amid supply constraints, Crisil Ratings said on Wednesday.

The ongoing developments in West Asia have a twin impact on the ₹53,000-crore Indian ceramic tiles industry, the agency said in a statement.

"One, exports to the ME (Middle East) have been impacted by logistical challenges and supply-chain realignment. Notably, exports constitute 40 per cent of the industry's revenue, with the ME accounting for 15 per cent of ceramic exports," it said.

Export revenue may decline 6-7 per cent due to the closure of the

Straits of Hormuz, which has disrupted deliveries and increased freight and insurance costs, the ratings agency noted.

This has not only halted exports to ME but also raised the cost of exports to other regions, it added.

On the other hand, Crisil Ratings said, the supply of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and propane — key raw materials that make up 35 per cent of the cost of goods sold (COGS) — has been curtailed, forcing most ceramic plants to either shut down production or operate at significantly reduced levels.

"With production nearly grinding to a halt in March, domestic consumption growth is likely to slow down. The domestic market is now expected to grow just 4-5 per cent this fiscal, slower than the earlier projection of 7-8 per cent," it pointed out.

Commenting on the development, Crisil Ratings Director Nitin Kansal said, "The ceramic industry



will face significant challenges due to the current ME conflict. Specifically, the availability of gas supplies, low-to-no demand from the ME region, and increased logistics costs for other overseas markets

will directly impact production schedules". If the situation persists for a further two to three weeks, he said, "It may lead to longer shutdowns and substantial losses for companies, ultimately causing a 1-

two per cent revenue decline this fiscal".

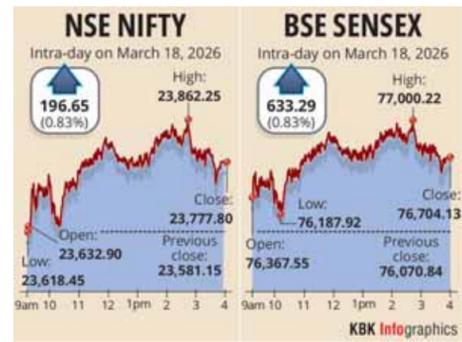
"If the situation prolongs, we may see a 7-8 per cent monthly decline in revenue," Kansal said.

Alongside revenue loss due to plant shutdowns and underutilisation, Crisil Ratings said companies will face the burden of fixed costs (15-20 per cent of the COGS) and higher logistics costs (3-5 per cent of COGS) due to an increase in freight cost by 45-50 per cent and insurance cost by 25-30 per cent for shipments.

"The above factors are expected to drag down operating profitability by 130-150 basis points (bps) to a five-year low of 9.3-9.5 per cent this fiscal and, if the situation persists in the first quarter of the next fiscal, decline to 8.2-8.5 per cent in fiscal 2027," it added.

Crisil Ratings said the report analysed inputs of 40 manufacturers rated by it, accounting for about a fourth of the industry's revenue.

Markets extend winning run; Sensex, Nifty climb nearly 1%



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended nearly 1 per cent higher on Wednesday, extending their winning run to the third day in a row, amid a slight drop in crude oil prices and a firm trend in global peers.

A rally in IT stocks also led to the optimistic trend in the domestic markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 633.29 points or 0.83 per cent to settle at 76,704.13. During the day, it soared 929.38 points or 1.22 per cent to 77,000.22.

The 50-share NSE Nifty surged 196.65 points or 0.83 per cent to end at 23,777.80.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Eternal, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, Mahindra & Mahindra, HCL Tech, Adani Ports, Tata Consultancy Services and Axis Bank were among the major gainers.

NTPC, Hindustan Unilever, Sun Pharma and HDFC Bank were among the laggards.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, dipped 0.10 per cent to \$ 103.3 per barrel. In Asian markets, South Korea's benchmark Kospi

jumped 5 per cent and Japan's Nikkei 225 index climbed 2.87 per cent. Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index also ended higher.

Markets in Europe were trading in positive territory. The US market ended higher on Tuesday.

"Domestic markets extended their recovery, supported by opportunistic buying after the recent sell-off. The rebound was broad-based, driven by a combination of short covering and value buying, with leadership from IT, realty, and auto sectors, alongside strength in mid and small-cap stocks," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,741.22 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs), however, bought stocks worth Rs 5,225.32 crore.

On Tuesday, the Sensex jumped 567.99 points, or 0.75 per cent, to settle at 76,070.84. The Nifty climbed 172.35 points, or 0.74 per cent, to end at 23,581.15.

India uniquely placed in global AI race, cites Cognizant chief officer

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

India has a "unique" position in AI enablement due to its deep technology foundation and large pool of people who understand digital systems and processes, according to Babak Hodjat, Chief AI Officer at Cognizant.

Hodjat told media that while AI tools are increasingly generating more and more codes, developers will still be needed to build modular systems and evaluate the quality of outputs produced by AI.

"So this is not going to go to waste... A coder using AI is going to be well ahead of a non-coder using AI," he said.

Artificial Intelligence is empowering more professionals across fields, even



Babak Hodjat

though core tech expertise remains valuable, Hodjat believes.

The recent India AI Impact Summit, held in New Delhi, showed the extent to which the country is prioritising artificial intelligence.

"India has a unique position because they have a starting point that is ahead of everyone else. Because you have a tech-savvy population and you are building on solid grounds which is the technological foundation and

that is what is going to drive AI enablement," he said.

People who understand systems, processes and applications will play a key role in building AI systems and accelerating adoption across industries, he said adding "so I do think this is a unique position".

Citing India's deep knowledge base and rich culture of entrepreneurship, Hodjat termed it a strong start. Cognizant, he said, has repositioned itself as an 'AI builder' company, focusing on enabling enterprises to adopt artificial intelligence technologies.

"We are an AI builder company now, which means, we are AI enabling the future of the enterprise which is our clients. We own the last mile, we understand their busi-

ness often better than they do, so we are well-positioned to do that," he said.

He added that the company is also embedding AI internally, including technologies such as multi-agent systems and context engineering, while tracking returns on investment before deploying solutions for clients.

"We are enterprise ourselves, so it makes a lot of sense for us to adopt AI technology, multi-agent system, context engineering and use it in-house ourselves, meter it and ensure we are getting Return on Investment (RoI), and also passing on RoI to our clients," he said.

The company is also focusing on upskilling employees and building an 'AI-first' culture.

"And we have empowered all of our associates to make use of AI systems to augment their coding...and coding is just one of the areas where we are making use of AI right now," the senior Cognizant executive said.

The proportion of AI-generated code within the company has been increasing. "Last time we announced it was about 30 per cent of code and growing," he observed.

On the future of IT services, Hodjat said software developers will continue to play a role even as AI writes more code.

"Today we can't survive without coders. Coders have to be on top of building programs and writing software, of course, augmented with AI," he said.

6G to drive next leap in human civilisation: Scindia stresses interoperability, innovation, inclusivity

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The era of 6G will mark the next leap in human civilisation, Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Wednesday, emphasising that global interoperability across networks, devices, and services, a common technical framework, accelerated innovation, and a strong commitment to inclusivity would be key to unlocking the full potential of technology.

Speaking at an international workshop on 6G standardisation, the minister noted that the world is at the threshold of a new technol-



ogy perspective, he said. The minister emphasised the need for a multi-pronged approach, underlining four key elements.

"Our decisive role has to be

based on four key pillars. First to ensure global interoperability between devices, networks and services. And this has to be the case across the world so the world communicates seamlessly across a global unified communication ecosystem," he said.

Other aspects include creation of common technical framework, acceleration of innovation and research for transforming lab breakthroughs into real-world solutions.

"The fourth and most important is to ensure inclusive growth and indigenous innovation and open standards to create that level playing field," Scindia added.

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"The fourth and most important is to ensure inclusive growth and indigenous innovation and open standards to create that level playing field," Scindia added.

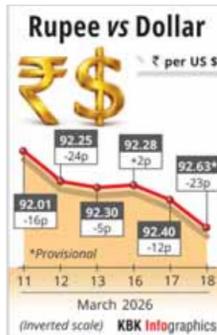
Rupee crashes 23 paise to close at record low of 92.63 against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

The rupee slumped 23 paise to close at a record low of 92.63 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, weighed down by a stronger greenback and sustained FII outflows.

Elevated crude oil prices in global markets amid intensifying conflict in West Asia further dampened sentiments, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 92.42 against the greenback and traded in the range of 92.41-92.48 for most of the session before



losing ground at the fag end to close at its record low of 92.63 (provisional), down 23 paise from its previous

close. The rupee logged its record intra-day low of 92.65 during the session.

Earlier on Tuesday, the domestic hit its previous lowest intra-day level of 92.47 against the dollar before settling at an all-time low of 92.40.

"The rupee hit a new low ahead of the major central banks meetings... as the Reserve Bank of India allowed the 92.50 level to be breached," Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director, Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the

greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.05 per cent higher at 99.62.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading flat at \$103.4 per barrel in futures trade.

On the domestic equity market front, the Sensex settled higher by 633.29 points, or 0.83 per cent, to 76,704.13, while the Nifty also rose sharply by 196.65 points, or 0.83 per cent, to 23,777.80.

Foreign institutional investors sold equities worth ₹4,741.22 crore on a net basis on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

Packaged foods see demand growth

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

E-commerce major Amazon India has witnessed a significant surge in demand for convenient, ready-to-consume meals, with categories such as instant noodles, packaged meals, snacks, and beverages recording over 15 per cent growth on its platform, driven by concerns over the ongoing LPG shortage.

The spike in demand is not limited to major urban centres but is broad-based, spanning metros like Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Chennai, as well as tier-2 and tier-3 cities such as Sonipat



and Panaji, the company said.

"Over the past few weeks, we have seen consistent growth in demand for convenient, ready-to-consume meal solutions that require minimal cooking time. Categories such as instant noodles, packaged meals, snacks and beverages

are seeing over 15 per cent growth on Amazon.in," an Amazon India spokesperson said.

The demand is particularly pronounced on the company's quick commerce vertical, Amazon Now. Sales of ready-to-eat and packaged foods on Amazon Now have increased around 20 per cent month-on-month, driven by customers in select parts of Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, and Bengaluru who are increasingly relying on quick deliveries for immediate needs.

Alongside the rise in quick-convenience shopping, the e-tailer reported sustained momentum in planned grocery purchases.

India's semicon market to reach \$300 b by 2035: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

India's semiconductor market is projected to nearly triple to \$ 120 billion by 2030 and reach \$ 300 billion by 2035, driven by the exponential adoption of artificial intelligence (AI), automotive growth, and data centre expansion, according to a report by Deloitte.

India, which currently imports over 90 per cent of its semiconductor needs, is poised for a structural shift as local production is expected to meet more than 60 per cent of domestic demand by the end of 2035, the report titled "Technology, Media,



and Telecommunications Predictions 2026' said.

"India's semiconductor market is estimated at \$ 45 billion in FY2024 and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 20 per cent over the past three years. The market is predicted

to reach \$ 120 billion by 2030 and \$ 300 billion by 2035, driven by AI, automotives, data centres, and electronics manufacturing. "By 2035, India is expected to host 4-5 silicon fabs, 8-10 compound fabs, 1-2 display fabs and 20-25 OSAT facilities,

supported by ISM and state-level incentives," the report said, adding that by 2035, 60 per cent of the country's domestic semiconductor demand is expected to be met through local production.

By 2035, various segments, such as mobile phones, automotive, computing, and data centres, are expected to account for more than 70 per cent of the total semiconductor demand in the country.

Supported by the Government's India Semiconductor Mission (ISM), the sector has already attracted over \$ 19 billion in manufacturing investments

across 10 approved projects, which include eight Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test (OSAT) facilities, one compound fab, and one semiconductor fab.

Another 18-20 proposals with a total investment of \$ 20-25 billion are currently in the pipeline at various stages, Deloitte pointed out. "Over the next five years, the semiconductor industry in India is predicted to attract an additional \$ 50 billion in capital investment," the report stated, adding that another \$ 75-80 billion investment is expected between 2030 and 2035 that will enable ecosystem expansion.

Centre promise 10% more LPG to States, which expedite piped gas rollout

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

As the LPG supply squeeze extends into the third week, the central Government on Wednesday promised to increase supplies of commercial LPG to states that fast-track the rollout of piped gas networks in a bid to ease pressure on the cooking fuel availability.

As the war in West Asia blocked India's access to almost 60 per cent of its LPG, the Government prioritised supplies to domestic household kitchens. Supplies to commercial establishments, such as hotels, were initially cut off, but later gave a fifth

of their requirement. Now, the central Government has offered to raise commercial LPG supplies to 30 per cent in states that expedite the rollout of piped natural gas - an easier alternative to LPG for household kitchens and commercial establishments.

Briefing reporters, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, said that while LPG supplies are constrained, piped natural gas (PNG) supplies to households and industries continue unabated.

"LPG users should shift to PNG wherever there is a city gas distribution (CGD) network nearby," she said, adding that

her ministry has written to states, offering 10 per cent more commercial LPG if they grant deemed permissions to all old applications, and the same after 24 hours of new application for laying pipelines, cut annual rental/lease charges and allow dig and restore schemes.

"Onus is on States and UTs to take this reform forward and expedite approvals," she said.

On the LPG supply situation, she said there was no dry out anywhere in the country.

"Situation, however, continues to be worrisome" primarily because the imports have been blocked, she said.



Online bookings have increased to 93 per cent, but consumers continue to queue up at dealerships.

"LPG consumers are requested to wait after doing

online booking. Cylinders will be delivered to their homes," she said. "There is no need for panic booking or going to LPG distributors."

To ease pressure on LPG,

the Government is promoting commercial and household LPG users to switch to piped natural gas. City gas companies are offering incentives and faster connections.

On Wednesday, Oil Secretary Neeraj Mittal wrote to all State Governments and UTs stating that city gas operators have complained about high charges for Right of Use (ROU) for laying and digging as well as lease rent being levied, which has "dampened the CGD investment climate".

"It is known that excessive taxes on a fledgling business could have a strangulating effect on other consequential economic activities of that

business," he wrote. To improve the investment environment and expedite the adoption of natural gas as a lean fuel and the substitution of scarce LPG supply, the state Government should minimise the levy of charges, he said, citing that just 1.6 crore domestic piped cooking gas connections are being issued by CGD entities despite a commitment of 12.63 crore.

"If this gap can be bridged through ease and cost of doing business reforms, one can easily generate economic activity and earn higher corresponding revenue from a larger pie," he wrote.

Listing out reforms needed for states to get higher com-

mercial LPG quota, Mittal said 1 per cent additional allocation of LPG will be done to states that form panels for approval of CGD applications and resolving grievances.

An additional 2 per cent allocation will be given to those who grant deemed CGD permissions to all old applications and to new applications after a lapse of 24 hours of applying for laying pipeline.

States would get an additional 3 per cent of LPG if they introduce a 'Dig and Restore Scheme' for CGD entities so they can dig and restore roads, etc., on their own, thereby eliminating restoration charges.



FROM THE WORLD

UK University faces health crisis

A meningitis outbreak in southeast England has led to the deaths of a university student and a pupil from a nearby school, prompting public health officials to quickly roll out medical interventions. The outbreak in the county of Kent was described Wednesday as unprecedented by UK Health Secretary Wes Streeting, owing to the high number of cases appearing in such a short space of time. The first case was only confirmed on Friday. The number of meningitis cases rose by a further five on Tuesday to 20. Thousands of students at the University of Kent in the city of Canterbury are being offered antibiotics as well as a vaccination against the strain that has been identified as the source of the outbreak. With public health officials turning up in Kent, and with students jittery.

US Trump boosts oil supply

US companies will be allowed to do business with Venezuela's state-owned oil and gas company after the US Treasury Department eased sanctions, with some limitations, on Wednesday as the Trump administration looks for ways to boost world oil supplies during the Iran war. The Treasury issued a broad authorisation allowing Petroleos de Venezuela SA, or PDVSA, to directly sell Venezuelan oil to US companies and on global markets, a massive shift after Washington for years had largely blocked dealings with Venezuela's government and its oil sector. The move highlights the increased pressure that the Republican administration is under to ease soaring oil prices as the United States, along with Israel, wages a war with Iran without a foreseeable end date. Global oil prices have since spiked as Iran halted traffic through the narrow Strait of Hormuz.

Iran's South Pars gas field attacked: Report

JON GAMBRELL/DAVID RISING/ SAMY MAGDY
Dubai

Iranian state-run media say that facilities associated with Iran's massive offshore South Pars natural gas field came under attack Wednesday.

Both Iranian state television and the state-run IRNA news agency reported on the attack targeting facilities at Asaluyeh in Iran's southern Bushehr province. It did not immediately elaborate. Iran share the offshore field in the Persian Gulf with Qatar, which it has repeatedly attacked during the war along with other Gulf Arab nations.

It wasn't clear if Israel or the United States had carried out the attack, however the US has been operating primarily in



Missiles launching from Iran streak across the sky over central Israel

southern Iran. The US previously attacked Iran's Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf, its main oil terminal. Iran's state television published a threat Wednesday, saying the Islamic Republic would be attacking oil and gas infrastructure in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The threat resembled other attack warnings put out by Iran during the war, copying the style used by the Israeli military.

Iran specifically threatened Saudi Arabia's Samref Refinery and its Jubail Petrochemical Complex. It also threatened the UAE's Al Hasan Gas Field and the petrochemical plants and a refinery in Qatar.

It comes after Iran said its South Pars gas field and associated infrastructure came under attack earlier Wednesday.

Qatar blames Israel for the attack

Qatar on Wednesday blamed Israel for an attack on an offshore natural gas field it shares with Iran. The accusation came from Majed al-Ansari, a spokesperson for Qatar's Foreign Ministry. The Iranian side of the field, the South Pars field, came under attack Wednesday and was burning.

Al-Ansari called the attack "a dangerous & irresponsible step amid the current military escalation in the region." "Targeting energy infrastructure constitutes a threat to global energy security, as well as to the peoples of the region & its environment," he wrote on X. "We reiterate, as we have repeatedly emphasized, the necessity of avoiding the targeting of vital facilities."

Iran-US Talks Unlikely Amid Conflict: Rafael Grossi

International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi says he doesn't believe Iran would be willing to return to nuclear negotiations with the United States until there's a ceasefire and a halt to U.S.-Israeli military operations and Iranian retaliation. "It is not a moment to consider that as an immediate possibility," Grossi told reporters in Washington on Wednesday. "For as long as there is a military campaign ongoing, I don't think that there would be negotiations."

Grossi took part in portions of the last round of Oman-mediated talks between the US and Iran that were held in Geneva, Switzerland, shortly before the war began. He declined to comment on the substance of those talks.

Fear returns to northern Israel towns

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Kiryat Shmona

Gila Pahima returned to her hometown of Kiryat Shmona in northern Israel last spring, 18 months after its population had been evacuated because of Hezbollah rocket fire. Now air raid sirens are again sounding around the clock as the boom of missiles and interceptors echoes overhead.

"I feel like we're in constant war," she said. "You feel like you're on a battlefield all day." Israel seemed to have decimated the Iran-backed Hezbollah when their ceasefire in November 2024. Hezbollah's top leader was dead, hundreds of its members had been maimed by booby-trapped pagers and much of southern Lebanon was in ruins.

Hezbollah resumed its rocket fire days after Israel and the United States attacked its main patron, Iran, which has also launched waves of missiles at Israel. Most



Israeli authorities hang Israeli and US flags at the site struck by an Iranian missile in Israel

Israelis support the war against Iran, hopeful it can lead to meaningful change in the West Asia.

But a sense of fatigue has crept in, especially in the north, as people repeatedly race back into bomb shelters or take up full-time residence inside them. Many

wonder if airstrikes or ground incursions can ever bring calm. "You brought us. You said, 'Hezbollah is weakened,'" said another resident, Avraham Golan, addressing the Israeli Government. "Where is it weakened? They are worse than what they used to be."

Pak President expresses grief over killing of Larijani, calls for cessation of hostilities

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
Islamabad

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari on Wednesday expressed grief over the killing of Iran's top security official Ali Larijani by Israel and called for immediate restraint and cessation of hostilities.

Larijani, the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, had effectively evolved as the in-charge of the country's war management following the assassination of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei by Israel on February 28. President Zardari



Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari

expressed "profound grief over the assassination of senior Iranian leader Dr Ali Ardeshir Larijani amid ongoing Israeli attacks on Iran and extended his earnest condolences to people of Iran," according to a statement issued by his office.

Zardari recalled Larijani's official visit to Pakistan in

November 2025, during which they discussed ways to deepen bilateral cooperation across multiple domains, and noted Larijani's contribution to strengthening the positive momentum in Pakistan-Iran relations, it said.

The President called for immediate restraint of hostilities, urging all parties to prioritise dialogue, the statement said. "Pakistan remains committed to supporting all efforts aimed at de-escalation and the promotion of peace, and stands ready to play a constructive role in facilitating dialogue and diplomatic efforts to help defuse tensions in the region," he said. (PTI)

Iranian women's soccer team returned home

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Dubai

Iran's national women's soccer team has returned to the Islamic Republic after several of the players sought asylum in Australia, Iranian media reported on Wednesday.

The outlets shared footage of the players entering Iran after landing in Turkey and taking a bus to the border. They were greeted by some officials at the border.

Two Iranian female players, Fatemeh Pasandideh and Atefeh Ramezansadeh, chose to remain in Australia and have been training with the Brisbane Roar club.

Others who initially sought asylum after the team was knocked out of the Women's Asian Cup later changed their minds and said they would return to Iran.

Iran's squad arrived in Australia for the tournament shortly before the Iran war began on February 28. The team initially gained global attention after some players stayed silent during Iran's national anthem before their first game in the Asian Cup.

The silence was cast as an act of resistance



or protest by some commentators and a show of mourning by others. The players didn't publicly disclose their views or explain their actions and sang the anthem before their next two matches.

17 dead in fighting on Sudan's border with Chad

FATMA KHALED
Cairo

The latest heavy fighting between warring parties along Sudan's border with Chad has killed 17 people and many wounded, a medical group said.

The attacks on Monday in Tina left 66 people in serious condition, Doctors Without Borders, also known as Medecins Sans Frontieres, or MSF, said in a post on X late Tuesday. The army said in an update that the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, or RSF, had expanded its attacks on military areas in Tina, but that troops were able to repel them and forced them to withdraw.

The attacks were part of intensified fighting near the border between the army



and the RSF, who have been at war since April 2023. The conflict has killed more than 40,000 people, according to UN figures, but aid groups say the true number could be much higher.

Tina is one of the last areas still being held by the Sudanese military in the sprawling Darfur region,

which has been under RSF control since October 2025. The nearby Tine crossing was also used as the sole route for cross-border humanitarian aid and delivery from Chad when Adre border crossing was temporarily closed in recent years. Chad said last month it had closed its border with Sudan "until further notice" in an attempt to limit the spread of conflict into its territory.

Those injured in Monday's attacks were treated by MSF teams and Chadian health services at a new hospital in Tine, Chad. A MSF staffer at the hospital said doctors are treating patients without water or electricity and are relying on generators and solar panels. Stockpiles of

medicine are also said to be running low because of the influx of new patients. Chad closed its border for a period shortly after Sudan plunged into chaos in April 2023, when a power struggle between the military and the RSF exploded into open fighting in the capital, Khartoum, and elsewhere in the country.

The Darfur and Kordofan regions became the epicentre of the Sudan war, with deadly drone attacks frequently reported in Kordofan. A surge in drone strikes in the Sudanese region of Kordofan has taken a growing toll on civilians and hampered aid operations, analysts and humanitarian workers previously said. (AP)

Nirav seeks to reopen extradition appeal

ADITI KHANNA
London

Fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi's application hearing seeking permission to reopen his extradition appeal concluded in the High Court in London, with claims that he faces a "real risk of torture" during interrogations by the investigating agencies in India.

Lord Jeremy Stuart-Smith and Justice Robert Jay, presiding over the appeal at the Royal Courts of Justice, reserved their judgment at the end of a day-long hearing on Tuesday.

"This case is of extreme importance, to Modi and to the Indian officials who have travelled from India. We will deliver the judgment as soon



appeared via videolink from Pentonville prison in north London. His lawyers relied heavily on the extradition case of Sanjay Bhandari - the defence sector consultant accused of tax evasion and money laundering, who was discharged from extradition bail on human rights grounds last year.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), representing the Indian Government in court, argued against the grounds for reopening a matter in which Nirav's extradition had been ordered nearly six years ago.

Extradition poses a real risk of inhuman or degrading treatment or torture arising from interrogation in India, argued Nirav's barrister Edward Fitzgerald KC. (PTI)

as possible," said Stuart-Smith, as the hearing listed over two days was wrapped up early.

The 54-year-old businessman, wanted in India to stand trial on charges of fraud and money laundering in the estimated USD 2 billion Punjab National Bank (PNB) loan scam case,



People attending a demonstration in support of the US and Israeli strikes on Iran in front of the Iranian embassy in Berlin

Mass funeral held in Kabul for hospital airstrike victims

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Kabul

Bulldozers dug pits in a cemetery in the Afghan capital ahead of a mass funeral on Wednesday for some of the victims of what officials have said was a Pakistani airstrike that hit a drug rehabilitation hospital in Kabul earlier this week.

The strike was the deadliest in an escalating conflict between the two neighbours, now in its third week. Afghan officials have put the death toll at 408 people, with 265 wounded. The toll could not be independently verified. Pakistan rejects Afghanistan's accusation that



it targeted the Omid Addiction Treatment Hospital, insisting its strikes in Kabul and eastern Afghanistan Monday had been against military facilities.

It has dismissed Afghan claims of hundreds of casualties as propaganda. In an interview with The Associated Press in Islamabad Wednesday,

Pakistan's Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said Pakistan had "only targeted terrorist infrastructure."

"We have just gone after the Afghan Taliban regime, their military setups, their terrorist infrastructure, and all the setups which are supporting or promoting terrorists," Tarar said.

The conflict between Afghanistan and Pakistan has seen repeated cross-border clashes as well as airstrikes inside Afghanistan, including several in the capital, since it began in late February, despite international calls for a ceasefire.

Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of providing a

safe haven for militants who carry out attacks inside Pakistan, especially for the Pakistani Taliban. The group is separate but closely allied with the Afghan Taliban, who took over Afghanistan in 2021 in the wake of the chaotic withdrawal of US-led troops. Kabul denies the charge. On Wednesday, light rain fell as ambulances lined up outside the cemetery and began unloading plain wooden caskets.

The mass funeral was for victims who were from the province of Kabul and whose bodies had already been identified. Victims from elsewhere in Afghanistan would be transported to their home

provinces for burial, authorities said.

The 2,000-bed Omid hospital was hit at around 9pm on Monday. It had been renamed and expanded in size roughly a year ago from a previously existing treatment facility as part of the Taliban government's efforts to stamp out a significant drug addiction problem in the country.

Afghanistan's vast poppy fields have been the source of much of the world's heroin, and that, in combination with decades of conflict and widespread poverty, has fuelled drug addiction that the country's current rulers have vowed to combat.

Takaichi to meet Trump amid West Asia tensions

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Tokyo

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi is travelling Wednesday to the United States for what she expects to be a "very difficult" meeting with US President Donald Trump after he called on Japan and other allies to send warships to secure the Strait of Hormuz.

The three-day visit to Washington was originally expected to focus on trade and strengthening the US-Japanese alliance as China's influence grows in Asia. It is now expected to be overshadowed by the war the United States and Israel launched against Iran on February 28. "I think the US visit will be a very difficult one, but I will do everything to maximise our national interest and to protect the daily lives of the people when the situation changes daily," Takaichi told parliament on Wednesday, hours before her departure.

Takaichi held her first meeting with Trump in October in Tokyo, days after becoming Japan's first female prime minister. A hard-line conservative, Takaichi is a protégé of former leader Shinzo Abe, who developed a close friendship with Trump. Her initial plan was to focus largely on China and strengthen the Japan-US alliance ahead of Trump's highly anticipated diplomatic trip to China that had been planned for months. The White House announced



Tuesday that it is being delayed due to the war in the Middle East.

Takaichi will be in the hot seat figuring out what best to offer to Trump. Experts say showing commitment and progress in investment deals is key to a successful summit. Japanese officials say the two sides will work to deepen cooperation in regional security, critical minerals, energy and dealing with China.

A key US ally in Asia, Japan has carefully avoided clear support for the US-Israel strikes on Iran or a decision over a warship deployment. That's mainly because of Japan's constitutional constraints but also due to a legal question over the US action and strong public opinion against it. She told parliament that Japan hopes to see a de-escalation of the war, which has disrupted deliveries of oil and gas that Japan is highly dependent on.

"Without early de-escalation of the situation, our economy will be in trouble," she said. "Early de-escalation is important for both the US and global economy."

Top US officials to testify on Iran war

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Washington

Top Trump administration national security officials facing back-to-back congressional hearings starting on Wednesday are expected to be pressed on the war in Iran, including a deadly strike on a school, as well as the FBI's Capacity to prevent terror attacks inside the United States.

The annual worldwide threats hearings involving the Government's senior-most intelligence officials are taking place at a time of scrutiny over the US military campaign in the West Asia and heightened concerns about terrorism in the homeland following recent attacks



at a Michigan synagogue and Virginia university.

The testimony before the House and Senate intelligence committees is expected to centre on the war and in particular the revelation that outdated intelligence likely led to the US firing a

missile that hit an elementary school in Iran and killed over 165 people.

The outdated targeting data was reported to have come from the Defence Intelligence Agency, whose director, Lt Gen James H Adams, is among those set to

testify. The White House says the strike is still under investigation. The hearings, which begin in the Senate and continue Thursday in the House, are also likely to delve into internal administration debate over the war given the resignation this week of Joe Kent as director of the National Counterterrorism Centre. Kent said on Tuesday that he could not "in good conscience" back the Trump administration's war and that he did not agree that Iran posed an imminent threat to the US.

Hours later, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, whose office oversaw Kent's work and who is expected at the hearings this week, wrote in a

carefully worded social media post that it was up to Trump to decide whether Iran posed a threat. She did not mention her own views of the strikes.

Gabbard and CIA Director John Ratcliffe may also be questioned over recent intelligence assessments about Iran, including one that showed US strikes are unlikely to result in a regime change in Tehran, and another that cast doubt on claims Iran was preparing to strike first.

The hearings are also likely to focus on Kash Patel's leadership of the FBI.

It will be his first public appearance on Capitol Hill since video surfaced last month showing him partying

with members of the US men's hockey team following their gold medal win at the Winter Olympics.

He has fired dozens of agents in his first year on the job, raising concerns about an exodus of national security experience at a time when the US is confronting an elevated terrorism threat.

This month alone, a gunman wearing clothes with an Iranian flag design and the words "Property of Allah" killed two people at a Texas bar; two men who authorities say were inspired by the Islamic State were arrested on charges of bringing homemade powerful explosives to a protest outside the New York City mayoral mansion.

New US trade deal with Indonesia secures fossil fuels, access to critical minerals

ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL/ANTON L DELGADO
■ Hanoi

A new trade pact between Indonesia and the United States has recast their economic ties, binding Jakarta's resource wealth and energy future more closely to Washington's strategic needs.

Indonesia agreed to widen access for US investors in critical minerals, boost its purchases of US crude and liquefied petroleum gas, back the development of an American coal export corridor and cooperate on small modular nuclear reactors. In turn, the US trimmed a threatened 32 per cent tariff on Indonesian goods to 19 per cent and granted broader access to the American market, including a zero-tariff entry policy for major products such as



palm oil, coffee, cocoa, spices and rubber.

Though the US Supreme Court's ruling against President Donald Trump's tariffs may impact how it is implemented. The deal fits with longer-term US efforts to secure critical mineral supply chains, beef up its oil and gas exports and reduce depen-

dence on China. Meanwhile, other export-reliant Southeast Asian economies negotiating with the United States, including Vietnam, are closely watching the Indonesia-US trade deal for clues about the tariff levels and concessions Washington may demand across the region.

Indonesia, the world's largest nickel producer, has vast mineral reserves needed for electric vehicles and clean energy systems. It's caught between the conflicting aims of the US and China, a key source of foreign investment and market for Indonesian coal and nickel, analysts say.

China is concentrating on electrification, renewables and dominance of battery supply chains, while the US is pairing its push for mineral access with more fossil fuel exports. (AP)

NYC drops ex-Mayor Adams' legal defense

ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE
■ Washington

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani's administration wants to stop representing Eric Adams in a lawsuit that alleges the former mayor sexually assaulted a woman more than three decades ago, according to a court filing on Tuesday.

The move comes just a few months after Mamdani took office, following a bitter campaign season last year that had the two Democrats taking turns bashing each other in often caustic and personal terms.

The suit, filed while Adams was still in office,



accuses the former mayor of sexually assaulting a woman, Lorna Beach-Mathura, in 1993 when he was a police officer, alleging that he demanded a sexual favor in exchange for his help in advancing her career in the police department. Adams has vehemently denied the allegation and said he does not remember meeting her.

Colombia seeks US sanctions exemption to invest in Venezuelan energy projects

ASTRID SUAREZ
■ Bogota

Colombia said it is seeking an exemption from US sanctions to invest in Venezuelan electricity projects and natural gas ventures that could include the reopening of a gas pipeline between the neighbouring South American countries.

Colombia's Mines and Energy Minister Edwin Palma said in a statement that his country is seeking a license to invest in Venezuela from the US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control or OFAC, and that the Colombian state-run oil company Ecopetrol is conferring with US officials about the regulatory requirements to launch several ventures with the Venezuelan Government.

The United States has been



easing sanctions against Venezuela's oil industry following a US military raid that captured then-President Nicolas Maduro.

The shift has enabled several US companies to buy and sell Venezuelan oil. Colombian President Gustavo

Petro has long been a critic of US sanctions against Venezuela, which he blamed for the nation's protracted economic crisis.

Colombia's interest in Venezuela's natural gas was revived in 2022, when Petro was elected into office and restored diplomatic relations with Venezuela. But US sanctions against companies that invest in Venezuela had prevented Colombia's national oil company from developing projects there.

Companies, or Government entities that invest in Venezuela without a special US license risk severe penalties, such as being cut off from the US financial system, or having their assets in the US seized. In December 2024, Colombia began to import gas on a massive scale after being self-sufficient for four decades, with critics saying

that Petro had discouraged companies from launching new ventures in Colombia.

Last week, a meeting between Petro and Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodriguez was cancelled but bilateral meetings were held between officials representing the ministries of defense, commerce and energy.

Following those meetings, Venezuela sent Colombia a small export of liquefied petroleum gas or LPG, via tanker trucks that crossed the shared border. "This is the first step... the first LPG export from Venezuela to Colombia," Rodriguez told reporters.

Colombian officials now say they want to reopen a pipeline between both countries that was built in 2007 but has been inactive since 2019, due to political disputes and lack of maintenance. (AP)

US offers \$2,600 exit bonus to illegal immigrants

SAGAR KULKARNI
■ Washington

The US Department of Homeland Security has released posters offering to fly illegal immigrants, including from India, to their home countries for free with an exit bonus of \$2,600.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) used an image of the Taj Mahal and prominent landmarks of Colombia and China to promote its self-deportation initiative targeted at illegal immigrants living in the US.

"Receive a FREE flight home and a \$2,600 exit bonus when you use CBP Home to self-deport," DHS said in a post on X. The initiative, called Project



Homecoming, was launched in May last year, after the inauguration of US President Donald Trump's second term in office.

The DHS has advised migrants to use the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) app to begin the process, allowing them to register their intent to leave the

country voluntarily, submit their details, and access information about travel assistance and the financial incentive offered under the programme.

According to the DHS, over 2.2 million illegal immigrants have availed of the scheme since its launch in January 2025. The current cost of a single enforced deportation is \$18,245. With the new offer of a \$2,600 stipend, the cost of a single self-deportation via the CBP Home App will be just \$5,100 - saving the American taxpayer over \$13,000 per illegal alien, the DHS said in a note in January.

The programme provides migrants the chance to "return home as regular travelers-without arrest, detention, or restraints. It's a safe,

orderly alternative that provides assistance and flexibility, not fear, according to the website.

Using the CBP Home app, according to DHS, "allows illegal aliens to plan their return, including having an opportunity to depart in a timely manner - allowing illegal aliens to wrap up work, school, and personal matters and organise their return in an orderly and lawful way."

When the programme was launched in May last year, the DHS was offering an exit bonus of \$1,000, which was tripled to \$3,000 during the holidays in December if the illegal aliens opted to leave before the new year. The exit bonus was fixed at \$2,600 in January this year. (PTI)

Shooting at Holloman air force base leaves one dead

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Alamogordo

A shooting at a US Air Force base in New Mexico has left one person dead and another wounded, according to military officials. The Holloman Air Force Base near Alamogordo was put on lockdown at about 5:30 pm because of reports of an active shooter, according to a statement released by the base.

The person who was wounded has been taken for medical treatment. Security officials have confirmed the base is safe and the lockdown has been lifted. "Emergency personnel are



responding to the situation and there is no threat at this time," the statement said.

Neither the names of the people shot nor additional details on the shooting have been released. The roughly

Congo's president Denis Sassou reelected for 5th term



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Brazzaville

The Republic of Congo's President Denis Sassou N'Guesso has been reelected for a fifth consecutive term, according to provisional results announced Tuesday by the authorities. Sassou N'Guesso won 94.82 per cent of the vote, Interior Minister Raymond Zephirin Mboulou announced on state television. Six other candidates challenged the 82-year-old for the top job in the Central African country that boasts one of the largest oil reserves in sub-Saharan Africa. The internet was shut down across the country as usual during the presidential election and traffic was restricted across the capital. Sassou N'Guesso, running for the Congolese Party of Labour, first came to power in

1979 and ruled until 1992 when he organised the country's first multi-party elections. He returned to power as a militia leader following a four-month civil war in 1997. The campaign period showed a vast mismatch between Sassou N'Guesso and his opponents, with the incumbent being the only candidate to travel around the country to canvass for votes. Roads in the capital city, Brazzaville, were paved with Sassou N'Guesso's effigies. Two other major parties boycotted the elections over allegations of unfair electoral practices. A constitutional referendum in 2015 removed presidential age and term limits, allowing him to run again. The country is struggling with high international debt, which stands at 94.5 per cent of its gross domestic product.

Belgian ex-diplomat to stand trial for Lumumba's killing



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Brussels

In a rare judgment on Belgian involvement in a former colony, a Belgian court ordered that a 93-year-old former diplomat stand trial for the 1961 assassination of Congo's former prime minister and independence icon, Patrice Lumumba, according to local media reports. Lumumba, who was killed at 35, was the political springhead of mineral-rich Congo's independence from colonial Belgium in June 1960. He served as the country's first prime minister

briefly for three months before he was forced out and killed a year later. Etienne Davignon, a junior diplomatic intern in Kinshasa at the time, is the last living among 10 Belgians with suspected involvement in the killing. Davignon has two weeks to appeal the charges and has previously denied any wrongdoing. The Belgian federal prosecutor's office is charging Davignon, a former vice president of the European Commission, with "participation in war crimes" in relations to his role in the "unlawful detention and transfer" of Lumumba.

Zelenskyy, Starmer urge continuing support for Ukraine against Russia as Iran war steals focus

JILL LAWLESS
■ London

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called Russia and Iran "brothers in hatred" as he sought support from UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer at a time when the Iran war has robbed US-brokered talks to end Russia's invasion of Ukraine of momentum.

Zelenskyy urged Ukraine's allies not to forget about his country during a Middle East war that has also revived Russia's ailing economy through increased oil revenue and could soon limit Kyiv's access to vital Western air defense systems that are needed in the West Asia. "The regimes in Russia and



Britain's PM Keir Starmer, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte in London

Iran are brothers in hatred and that is why they are brothers in weapons," Zelenskyy told lawmakers

in Britain's Parliament. "And we want regimes built on hatred, to never, never win in anything."

Holding talks with Zelenskyy at 10 Downing Street, Starmer said "(Russian President Vladimir) Putin can't be the one who benefits from the conflict in Iran, whether that's oil prices or the dropping of sanctions."

The meeting came days after the US temporarily waived some Russian oil sanctions in a bid to ease pressure on global supplies triggered by the war in the Middle East, which was sparked by the joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran starting February 28. Zelenskyy and some other European leaders criticised Washington's move to ease sanctions, saying it would provide a windfall for

Moscow to keep up its attacks on Ukraine.

Zelenskyy also met with King Charles III at Buckingham Palace before addressing dozens of members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords in Parliament. He told them that other countries could learn from Ukraine's agile adoption of technology, including drones and AI, for defence. "The fact we got through this winter, which Russia tried to make deadly for all our families, shows that our solutions work," Zelenskyy said.

Zelenskyy said the London talks, also attended by NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte, would assess energy

security, after Russia hammered Ukraine's power grid over the winter, and the battlefield situation.

In Brussels, the European Union's chief diplomat Kaja Kallas noted Tuesday that Russia stands to gain from higher energy prices and the rerouting of advanced Western air defence systems from Ukraine to the West Asia. But, she said, Ukraine "remains Europe's top security priority and attention for Ukraine will not be allowed to fizzle out."

Finland's President Alexander Stubb said the Iran war is bad for Ukraine, "mainly because of the oil price which feeds the

Russian war machinery. The Russian economy was actually doing extremely badly a couple of weeks back. Now it's bouncing back." US President Donald Trump says he wants to secure a peace deal that ends Europe's biggest conflict since World War II and has rattled the continent's leaders, who reckon that Russia could pose a credible security threat to the European Union by the end of the decade.

But the US-mediated talks between delegations from Moscow and Kyiv, which so far have yielded no significant progress on key issues, are on hold during the Middle East conflict. (AP)

Don Tracy wins GOP primary for US Senate seat



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Chicago

Don Tracy, the former chairman of the Illinois Republican Party, has won the GOP nomination for US Senate.

The retirement of Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin triggered a competitive campaign, with 10 Democrats and 6 Republicans in the race. Furious fundraising and sharp elbows marked the contest, which has tested the influence of Democratic Gov. JB Pritzker. He backed Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton over Raja Krishnamoorthi and Robin Kelly in that primary.

Tracy was the state party chairman from 2021 to 2024. Illinois last had a Republican in the Senate a decade ago, when Mark Kirk was defeated by Democrat Tammy Duckworth.

Illinois voters decided primaries Tuesday for six open US House and Senate seats in contests that became a testing ground for issues shaping the Democratic Party's future. From questions about the cryptocurrency and AI industries to immigration enforcement to fracturing US support for Israel.



PROSPECT

Army, Northeast Frontier Railway hold scenario planning exercise



TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

A scenario planning exercise was held in Guwahati under 101 Area and HQ Eastern Command, the Indian Army's largest command covering Northeast Bharat. This vital conference between the Army and Northeast Frontier Railway focused on understanding mutual strengths and optimising resources. The primary goal was to align working mechanisms to ensure rapid, coordinated responses during any national crisis. The session brainstormed diverse contingencies to bolster operational preparedness across the extensive Eastern

sector. Significant emphasis was placed on developing dual-use infrastructure, a strategic move designed to enhance logistics while ensuring substantial expenditure savings for the Government. Senior officers from NFR, Eastern Command, and Army HQ attended to draw critical lessons in synergy and inter-agency coordination. By streamlining these processes, the exercise developed a higher level of confidence among stakeholders. This collaborative framework ensures that both the military and railways can seamlessly integrate their efforts, providing a unified and efficient front during times of criticality.

VIT surpasses 10,000 placement offers for 2026 batch



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

global competitiveness of VIT students. The Marquee offers: 696 (CTC of 20 LPA and above), Super Dream offers: 2,292 (CTC of 10 LPA and above) and Dream Offers: 3,333 (CTC of 6 LPA and above). These figures, which include both internships and full-time placements, highlight VIT's successful partnership with leading corporate giants. By consistently producing industry-ready graduates, VIT continues to bridge the gap between education and employment, ensuring its students are well-equipped to lead in an evolving global economy. For the 2026 batch, the future doesn't just look bright—it looks exceptionally secure!

Vedanta deploys 30 women crane operators at BALCO



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Vedanta Aluminium has deployed its first cohort of women crane operators at its BALCO unit in Korba, Chhattisgarh, marking a significant milestone in advancing women-led operations in core manufacturing. A total of 30 women have been inducted, including 20 pot-tending machine (PTM) operators and 10 beam-raising operators; they now handle critical potroom operations such as anode

changing, covering, tapping molten aluminium, and ensuring stable production processes. These professionals underwent rigorous training involving classroom sessions, simulator practice, and hands-on experience, equipping them to manage highly technical, safety-critical roles. Notably, beam-raising operations across all potlines are now fully managed by women, reflecting a shift towards a gender-inclusive operating model. According to CEO Rajiv

The tsunami of 2026: How *Dhurandhar* brought audiences flooding back to theatres



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

There was a time, not too long ago, when it genuinely felt like the cinema hall was becoming irrelevant. Streaming had taken over convenience, attention spans had shortened, and the ritual of going to the movies seemed almost... nostalgic. Something you did before life got faster, smaller, more screen-sized. And then *Dhurandhar* happened. Not quietly. Not gradually. But like a full-blown cultural jolt. What we're witnessing in 2026 isn't just the success of a film. It's a phenomenon, almost a collective remembering. The kind where audiences aren't just watching a movie, they're returning to something they didn't realise they had missed this deeply. If you've seen the visuals, packed theatres, people lining up hours in advance, fans celebrating outside cinemas, you know exactly what this feels like. It's not just footfall; it's emotion spilling into public space. "First Day First Show" used to be a badge of honour. With *Dhurandhar*, it has become a movement again. There's something electric about sitting in a dark hall, surrounded by strangers who are reacting with you. The whistles, the gasps, the applause, it's chaotic, loud, and completely alive. No living room, no matter how high-end your setup is, can replicate that shared adrenaline. And *Dhurandhar 2* is riding that wave with full awareness. This time, the audience isn't just curious, they're waiting. Anticipating. Almost rehearsing their return. Why *Dhurandhar* Worked (And Why the Sequel Will Too) Let's be honest, hype alone

doesn't create a tsunami. Plenty of films open big and disappear just as quickly. What *Dhurandhar* got right was deceptively simple: it respected the audience's intelligence while still delivering spectacle. It wasn't trying to be clever for the sake of it, nor was it relying purely on scale. It struck that rare balance, strong storytelling, memorable characters, and moments that were designed for the big screen. And that last part matters more than we often admit. Some films can survive on OTT. *Dhurandhar* demanded a theatre. Wide frames, sound design that hits your chest, sequences that feel incomplete on a smaller screen, this is cinema built for immersion. Once audiences experienced that, it reset expectations. So when *Dhurandhar 2* comes in, it's not starting from zero. It's building on trust. The audience already believes this world is worth returning to. Sequels, when done right, aren't just continuations, they're invitations. And here, the invitation is clear: come back, it's going to be bigger, louder, and worth your time again. Is This a One-Off, or Something Bigger? That's the more interesting question. Because if this was just about one film, we wouldn't be seeing the ripple effects elsewhere. The re-release culture, for instance, is telling us something important. Classics returning to theatres, and filling seats, is not just nostalgia. It's proof that audiences are craving the experience, not just the content. People aren't just going to watch a film they've already seen. They're going to feel it again, but this time, collectively. Similarly, the success of sequels and franchise continuations isn't just about brand value. It's about emotional continuity. Audiences want to revisit worlds they've already invested in, but they want to do it in a space that amplifies that connection. The theatre does that. Maybe this resurgence is also about something more human. After years of isolation,

personal screens, and fragmented attention, there's a quiet hunger for shared experiences. Not curated, not algorithm-driven, but spontaneous, collective, and a little unpredictable. Cinema halls offer that. You don't control the reactions around you. You absorb them. And in doing so, the film becomes bigger than itself. That's what *Dhurandhar* tapped into, perhaps unintentionally, but effectively. It reminded people that movies are not just stories. They're events. What makes this moment even more fascinating is how cinema is quietly reclaiming its place as a social ritual. For a long time, entertainment became increasingly individual, your phone, your headphones, your algorithm. Even when we watched the same shows, we watched them alone. The theatre disrupts that isolation. With *Dhurandhar*, people didn't just attend screenings, they planned them. Group bookings, late-night shows, repeat viewings with different friends. It almost feels like going to the movies has become an occasion again, not just an activity you squeeze into your day. And that shift matters. Because when something becomes an occasion, it automatically gains value. You dress up for it, you make time for it, you talk about it afterwards. The film extends beyond its runtime, it becomes part of conversations, memes, and shared memory. There's also an interesting recalibration of what "star power" means in this moment. Earlier, stars alone could pull audiences to theatres. Then came a phase where even big names couldn't guarantee footfall. But now, with films like *Dhurandhar*, it feels like star power has evolved, it's no longer just about who is on screen, but what the film promises. The actor, the director, the music, the visual scale, they all come together to create a sense of inevitability. A feeling that this is something you cannot miss in theatres. And once that perception is established, audiences respond instantly.

What *Dhurandhar* and its sequel are ultimately doing is setting a new benchmark, not just commercially, but experientially. It's no longer enough for a film to be "good." It has to justify the decision to step out, buy a ticket, and sit in a theatre with strangers. It has to offer something that cannot be replicated at home. That's a higher bar, but also a more exciting one. Because if this trend continues, we might be entering a phase where filmmakers start designing cinema for the theatre first again, instead of treating it as just one of many distribution platforms. And maybe that's the real story here. Not just that audiences are coming back, but that cinema is slowly reclaiming its original promise. A place where stories aren't just watched, but felt together. Calling this a "tsunami" isn't exaggeration. It's a shift in behaviour. Audiences are showing up again, not just for content, but for connection. For scale. For that fleeting, unrepeatable energy that only exists when hundreds of people are watching the same moment unfold together. *Dhurandhar 2* is poised to amplify this even further. Because now, it's not just a film release. It's a continuation of a feeling people don't want to lose again. If there's one takeaway from all of this, it's this: The cinema-going experience was never dead. It was waiting, for the right trigger. *Dhurandhar* happened to be that trigger. And if filmmakers understand what truly brought audiences back, not just scale, not just hype, but the promise of an experience worth leaving home for, this resurgence might not just last. It might redefine what success in cinema looks like again. Because at the end of the day, people don't just want to watch movies. They want to go to the movies.

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Khaki wrapped in golden honour

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Dinesh Reddy, a former top cop of Andhra Pradesh, stands out as a rare blend of administrative acumen, institutional integrity, and public-oriented vision. Over the course of his distinguished career in policing, he earned a reputation not merely as an enforcer of law, but as a reformer who understood the deeper structural challenges within governance systems. His tenure was marked by a firm commitment to discipline, transparency, and accountability, qualities that remain critical in today's complex administrative landscape.



Former DGP of Andhra Pradesh, Dinesh Reddy, called on Vice President of India C P Radhakrishnan

Beyond his policing career, his role as a former chief of the Indian Hockey Federation reflected his versatility as an administrator. Managing a national sports body requires negotiation, stakeholder alignment, and long-term strategic thinking, skills that complement his experience in public service. His ability to navigate institutional challenges across sectors demonstrates a leadership style that is both adaptive and result-oriented. In the last decade, his association with the Bharatiya Janata Party has added a political dimension to his

public life. However, unlike conventional political entrants, he brings with him a deeply grounded understanding of governance from the field level. This combination of administrative experience and political alignment positions him uniquely as someone who can bridge the gap between policy formulation and on-ground execution. At a time when several states grapple with issues such as deteriorating law and order, systemic corruption, and administrative paralysis, leaders with proven track records are indispensable. Dinesh Reddy's experience in handling sensitive situations, implementing reforms, and maintaining institutional discipline makes him a strong candidate to intervene in such critical environments. His approach has consistently emphasised root-cause correction rather than superficial fixes, which is essential in addressing entrenched governance challenges. Moreover, his work as a social contributor underscores his commitment to public welfare beyond formal roles. Engaging with communities, understanding

grassroots concerns, and advocating for equitable systems reflect a leadership philosophy that prioritizes inclusivity and long-term impact. This dimension of his personality strengthens his credibility among both policymakers and the public. For the central leadership, the current governance challenges in certain states present an opportunity to deploy experienced individuals who can deliver stability and reform. In scenarios marked by administrative deadlock or governance deficits, a figure like Dinesh Reddy could play a transformative role. His credibility, coupled with his experience in both enforcement and administration, equips him to take decisive action while maintaining institutional balance. Ultimately, the effective utilisation of seasoned leaders is not just a matter of political strategy but a necessity for governance excellence. Dinesh Reddy's career reflects a consistent commitment to public service, discipline, and reform. Leveraging such experience in critical situations could help restore trust, strengthen institutions, and set a precedent for accountable governance in challenging environments

IRFC CMD addresses infrastructure conclave



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Finance Corporation, Dubai highlighted its evolving role as a rail-linked infrastructure financier. He stressed IRFC's commitment to facilitating efficient and innovative funding solutions across the broader logistics value chain, supporting the nation's growth ambitions. The conclave also marked the release of the FICCI-CRISIL Knowledge Report titled "Paving the Road Ahead: INVITs as Engines of Long-Term Value Creation," offering valuable insights into the growing significance of INVITs in infrastructure financing. The event brought together key stakeholders from Government, industry, and financial institutions, fostering dialogue on unlocking the next phase of infrastructure-led growth in India. Reiterating the strategic vision of the Indian Railway

Hindu Shree Foundation urges PM to declare Hindu New Year a national holiday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

In a significant initiative to honour the country's cultural identity and ancient traditions at the national level, the Hindu Shree Foundation has appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to declare Hindu New Year (Hindu Nav Varsh—the beginning of Vikram Samvat) as a National Holiday. In a letter addressed to the Prime Minister, the Hindu Shree Foundation requested that in the interest of Indian culture, tradition, and historical heritage, March 19, 2026—the day marking the start of Vikram Samvat—be nationally recognised as "Hindu Nav Varsh". Citizens of India are hopeful that such a decision can only be taken by the Government under your leadership. The Foundation emphasised that Hindu Nav Varsh is not merely a religious celebration, but a symbol of India's millennia-old calendar system and cultural continuity. Vikram Samvat has for centuries provided a structured basis for Indian

life, traditions, and festivals, which continue to thrive in diverse forms across the country today. Hindu Nav Varsh is celebrated across different states under various names and traditions, such as Chaitra Navratri, Gudi Padwa, Ugadi, Cheti Chand, Navreh, and other regional forms. Despite their diversity, all these festivals share a common essence: "welcoming the New Year, celebrating the new cycle of nature, and marking new beginnings in life." Integrating these varied traditions under a common national recognition could further strengthen cultural unity and harmony. The new year beginning in the month of Chaitra is considered a symbol of renewal in nature. During this period, one experiences environmental changes, new energy, and balance, which holds special significance in Indian knowledge traditions. The Indian Panchang, based on the movements of the sun and moon, provides a scientific basis to this tradition, making it not only a matter of faith but also an example of



the harmony between nature and astronomy. In the current global context, where cultural influences are rapidly changing, granting national recognition to such traditions is seen as an essential step toward strengthening cultural pride. It will provide the younger generation with an opportunity to connect with their roots and understand Indian cultural values. Moreover, this initiative could help present India's cultural heritage more prominently on the global stage. The Hindu Shree

Foundation has long been working to preserve Sanatan traditions and promote cultural awareness. The organisation aims to build a robust cultural framework by actively involving temples, scholars, and social organisations. Through this initiative, the Hindu Shree Foundation expressed the belief that granting national recognition to Hindu Nav Varsh will not be merely an administrative decision, but a recognition of Sanatan culture, Indian tradition, and the faith of millions of devotees. This step could serve as a milestone in connecting India to its civilisational roots and advancing cultural revival. The Hindu Shree Foundation stated that Hindu Nav Varsh is not just the beginning of a new calendar year—it symbolises the holistic renewal of life, mind, and spirit, deeply embedded in Indian culture and cosmic rhythms. Hindu Nav Varsh holds profound cultural, spiritual, and historical significance in Indian tradition. According to a Press Release, Spiritual Significance Hindu Nav Varsh begins on the first day of the Chaitra month (March–April), considered highly auspicious. According to tradition, this day is associated with the creation of the universe by Lord Brahma. It symbolises a fresh start for spiritual growth, self-discipline, and devotion. This period coincides with the arrival of Vasant Ritu (spring). Trees bloom, crops ripen, and the environment feels renewed. The festival reflects the harmony between human life and the cycles of nature, reminding people to live in balance with the environment.



BRIEFLY

Joachim Low voices safety concerns about World Cup



Former Germany coach Joachim Low has raised concerns about safety at the World Cup being hosted by the United States, Mexico and Canada. "We had debates before the 2018 World Cup in Russia and calls for a boycott before the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. But playing in a country that is actively at war is even more dangerous," Low told the Cologne Express newspaper in comments published Tuesday. "The political situation completely overshadows the tournament." The US-and-Israeli war with Iran is ongoing, and a wave of violence followed the Mexican army's killing of cartel chief Nemesio Ruben Oseguera Cervantes, "El Mencho," last month. Low, who led Germany to the World Cup title in Brazil in 2014, spoke on Monday evening at an event focused on previous World Cups with Rainer Bonhof, who helped West Germany win the 1974 tournament, and other World Cup winners. Attention turned to the upcoming tournament near the end of their discussion. "I don't even know if you should play at all," Bonhof said to loud applause, Express reported. "Given the current circumstances, for me only Canada is a neutral country," Bonhof said of the co-hosts. "I don't want to boycott any World Cup — we're too fond of football. But we really need to think about security measures, which we haven't considered yet."

Hansi Flick says Barcelona will be his last coaching job



Barcelona may be the last team Hansi Flick coaches. Flick said on Tuesday he doesn't plan on coaching anymore when his stint with Barcelona is over. He spoke ahead of the match against Newcastle in the Champions League round of 16 on Wednesday. The teams drew 1-1 in England last week. Newly re-elected club president Joan Laporta said he plans to extend the German coach's contract until 2028. Flick said it's not the time to talk about renewing a contract which ends in 2027 but hinted he was keen to end his career at Barcelona. "Everyone knows I'm happy here, but I also need to talk with my family," the 61-year-old Flick said. "There will be time for that. I love working here. I've got a fantastic family and great support in Barcelona. In football, I always aim for the highest level. I'm not thinking about leaving. Barca will be my last club." He did not elaborate on a possible plan in place for his retirement. Laporta was re-elected on Sunday for another five years after winning a leadership vote among members. Flick, a former Bayern Munich and Germany coach, came to Barcelona in 2024.

Champions League: Real Madrid, PSG in quarterfinals

STEVE DOUGLASAP
■ Manchester

Real Madrid and Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) quickly snuffed out hopes of epic comebacks by Manchester City and Chelsea in the Champions League.

Instead, it was tiny Bodø/Glimt on the receiving end of a historic second-leg fightback in the round of 16.

Protecting a three-goal lead from the first leg, Madrid won 2-1 at City — helped by an early red card to City captain Bernardo Silva — through two goals from Vinicius Junior to advance 5-1 on aggregate and defending champion PSG scored twice in the first 14 minutes on the way to a 3-0

victory at Chelsea. That sealed an 8-2 aggregate success.

Bodø/Glimt, the Norwegian club from a fishing town of around 55,000 people north of the Arctic Circle, also had a 3-0 lead from the first leg but was blown away 5-0 by Sporting Lisbon after extra time. There's only been one bigger comeback in the Champions League: Barcelona's storied "Remontada" against PSG in 2016-17.

Sporting's reward is a quarterfinal matchup with Arsenal, which beat Bayer Leverkusen 2-0 for a 3-1 aggregate win and kept alive its hopes of a quadruple of trophies this season.

Red card damages City



comeback bid: It's the fourth time in five years that Madrid has eliminated City from the Champions League and this one was realistically over when Silva was shown a red card in the 20th minute —

after a video review — for sticking out his elbow on the goal-line to block a shot from Vinicius.

The Brazil star tucked away his penalty to give Madrid a four-goal cushion and

applied a close-range finish in second-half stoppage time to secure victory on the night for the record 15-time European champions.

Erling Haaland equalised in the 41st minute for City, which created enough chances — even with 10 men — to score the goals required.

Kyllian Mbappe entered as a second-half substitute to mark his return from nearly a month out injured. Madrid will hope the France striker stays injury-free before a quarterfinal against either Bayern Munich or Atalanta. Bayern leads 6-1 from the first leg.

PSG gains belated revenge over Chelsea: Call it belated revenge. Eight months after losing the Club World Cup

final to Chelsea, PSG inflicted a huge two-legged beating of the English team with Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, Bradley Barcola and Senny Mayulu scoring the goals at Stamford Bridge. PSG will continue its title defense against either Galatasaray or Liverpool in the quarterfinals. Galatasaray won the first leg 1-0.

Eze wonder goal keeps Arsenal rolling: On an otherwise tough night for English clubs, Arsenal ensured there will be Premier League representation in the last eight.

Eberechi Eze swiveled to fire home a rising shot from the edge of the area before Declan Rice added a second at Emirates Stadium. (AP)

Kvaratskhelia, Barcola punish Chelsea

JEROME PUGMIREAP
■ London

Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and Bradley Barcola punished Chelsea again in the last 16 of the Champions League.

They both scored in a 3-0 away win that sent defending champion Paris Saint-Germain into the quarterfinals with an 8-2 aggregate win. And PSG's victory was sealed with a clinical goal from 19-year-old Senny Mayulu, highlighting the strength of PSG's youth academy. He scored the fifth goal in the 5-0 rout of Inter Milan in the Champions League final last year.

"We did almost everything well, we defended well and attacked with the abilities we



have," PSG coach Luis Enrique said. "We controlled the game (and) I think we counter-attacked very well."

After scoring two late goals in the first leg, Kvaratskhelia put PSG ahead in the sixth minute following a blunder from Chelsea center back Mamadou Sarr. The 20-year-old Senegal international

Everybody wants to fire me, says Guardiola after loss to Real Madrid

JAMES ROBSONAP
■ Manchester

Pep Guardiola wore a lumberjack-style shirt and Real Madrid chopped Manchester City down in the Champions League once again.

Who knows how many more chances Guardiola will get to win European club soccer's greatest prize with just one season remaining on his contract and increasing speculation he could walk away at the end of this campaign. "Everybody wants to fire me," Guardiola said when questioned about his future following the 2-1 loss at the Etihad Stadium on Tuesday. "One day I will



come out here and say 'bye, bye guys.'" Guardiola's position is the subject of much debate after 10 years at City, which is already by far the longest he has stayed at any club as a manager.

He has repeatedly referred to the remaining time on his contract when

questioned, but doubts remain. "The future will be bright and next season we will be back," he said following the 5-1 aggregate loss in the round-of-16 tie.

Was that a clue as to his immediate plans?

"When I've retired in 10 years I will always be City. In the Champions League, I will say I will be back because I am part of them."

It is difficult to second-guess Guardiola. There has often been speculation about him walking away, but he has repeatedly signed new contracts. He never ended a contract early in his time as coach of Barcelona and Bayern Munich. (AP)

Senegal's AFCON final win overturned as Morocco declared winners

GRAHAM DUNBARAP
■ Geneva

Morocco was stunningly awarded the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) title by governing body judges who overturned Senegal's victory in a chaotic final in January.

The Confederation of African Football said its appeals board ruled that Senegal is "declared to have forfeited the final" and its 1-0 win in extra time becomes a 3-0 default win for host nation Morocco.

In the January 18 final in Rabat, Senegal players led by coach Pape Thiaw left the field in protest during stoppage time for 15 minutes — and fans tried to storm the field — when Morocco was awarded a penalty that was

set to decide the match.

When play resumed, Morocco forward Brahim Diaz's spot kick — a controversial slow chip shot known as a "Panenka" — was saved by goalkeeper Edouard Mendy and Senegal scored the only goal in extra time.

Tension in the stadium was already raised by Senegal being denied a goal minutes before the penalty was given to Morocco.

In the second minute of stoppage time, Senegal's apparent go-ahead goal was ruled out for a foul by Abdoulaye Seck, but TV replays showed little contact on Morocco defender Achraf Hakimi. After the Senegal walk-off, the team's return to the field seemed to be as a result of urging by star



forward Sadio Mane to complete the game.

At an initial disciplinary hearing, CAF imposed fines of more than \$1 million and bans for Senegal and Morocco players and officials but left the result untouched.

Senegal defender Moussa Niakhate on Instagram posted an image of himself holding the trophy with a message that said, "Come

and get it! They're crazy!"

In a similar post, left back El Hadj Malick Diouf added: "It's not what I expected — this thing isn't going anywhere."

Senegal's appeal option: The case could go to a further appeal at the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

CAF cited article 82 of the tournament regulations for its marquee event to justify

the verdict enforced on appeal, though not at the first hearing. It states, "if, for any reason whatsoever, a team withdraws from the competition or does not report for a match, or refuses to play or leaves the ground before the regular end of the match without the authorisation of the referee, it shall be considered loser and shall be eliminated for good from the current competition."

Still, the appeal verdict did seem to override the referee's authority making field-of-play decisions.

The verdict on Tuesday awarded Morocco its first African title since 1976 and denied Senegal its second title, and second within three editions after also lifting the trophy in 2021.

World Cup-bound teams:

Any appeal by Senegal to CAS in Lausanne, Switzerland, would typically take about a year to reach a verdict — long after both teams play at the 2026 World Cup being co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Senegal has been drawn to play in a group with France, Norway and a playoff bracket winner this month which could be Iraq. The games against France and Norway both are at MetLife Stadium near New York. Morocco was drawn to face Brazil, Scotland and Haiti, with an opening game also at MetLife against Brazil. Under coach Walid Regragui at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, Morocco became the first African team ever to reach the semifinals. (AP)

PSG's surge sinks Chelsea at Stamford Bridge

JEROME PUGMIREAP
■ London

So much for being champions of the world. Chelsea played more like also-rans than world beaters on Tuesday night, losing 3-0 at home to Paris Saint-Germain in the return leg of their Champions League last-16 game for a staggering 8-2 defeat on aggregate.

Chelsea fans proudly displayed a banner reading "Champions of the World" before kickoff on Tuesday at Stamford Bridge. The stark reality painted a different picture. Chelsea collapsed with late goals last week in a 5-2 loss and imploded with early goals this time, trailing 2-0 inside 15 minutes. That banner referred to Chelsea's victory in the Club World



Cup final last July, when Chelsea beat PSG 3-0.

Some of the home fans started booing during the first half of Tuesday's loss and ironically cheered their players when they completed a pass. The defeat could

have been worse, but some Chelsea fans had already seen enough and started to leave after PSG's third goal in the 62nd minute. Chelsea coach Liam Rosenior looked on perplexed, chewing his pen or biting his nails as PSG

passed his side off the field at will. The Englishman only joined Chelsea in January after leaving French club Strasbourg. "In the Champions League you don't deserve better if you mistakes against a very good team," he said. "The first goal is a mistake from us ... (It's) impossible to concede so many goals."

Chelsea hired him after parting company with Enzo Maresca, who won Conference League and Club World Cup trophies.

Rosenior's choices: Last week, Rosenior surprisingly selected goalkeeper Filip Jorgensen ahead of Robert Sanchez and it was Jorgensen's error that led to PSG's third goal in the 74th minute of that game.

On Tuesday, he reinstated Sanchez and dropped central defender Wesley Fofana, replacing Fofana with 20-year-old center back Mamadou Sarr.

That didn't work, either, as it was Sarr's sloppy defending that allowed Khvicha Kvaratskhelia to score PSG's first goal after six minutes.

This was a third straight defeat for Rosenior, whose team is sixth in the Premier League with eight games left. There is still a trophy on offer, however, with Chelsea into the FA Cup quarterfinals.

Chalobah injured: Chelsea right back Trevoh Chalobah was stretchered off late on with an ankle injury.

Rosenior said it was too early to determine how bad the injury was. (AP)

Barcelona, Atletico Madrid look to complete trio of Spanish successes

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ London

Barcelona and Atletico Madrid will look to complete a trio of Spanish successes over English rivals in the Champions League's round of 16 on Wednesday.

A day after Real Madrid ousted Manchester City, Barcelona takes on Newcastle at Camp Nou with the score at 1-1 from last week's first leg after Lamine Yamal's stoppage-time penalty. Barca has won all seven of its home matches in 2026, scoring at least three goals in each.

Atletico is in a better position — 5-2 up on Tottenham — though facing an away



match in the second leg.

English hopes may rest with Liverpool, which hosts Galatasaray at Anfield needing to overturn a 1-0 loss from the first match in Istanbul. There is growing pressure on Liverpool manager Arne Slot heading into the game. England had

a record six teams in the round of 16 but only Arsenal has so far qualified, with Chelsea joining Man City in getting eliminated on Tuesday. In Wednesday's other match, Bayern Munich is expected to finish off Atalanta after a 6-1 rout in Italy last week.

French teams to have disability pictograms on jerseys

JEROME PUGMIREAP
■ Paris

Instead of having names on their jerseys, soccer players from Toulouse and Lorient will have pictograms of different disabilities during their Ligue 1 game on Saturday.

The measure is part of a French soccer league awareness campaign aimed at providing better long-term stadium facilities for people with disabilities. Seven disabilities feature on the pictograms: visual, cognitive, hearing, intellectual, debilitating illnesses, motor and intellectual. "This design embodies a collective com-



mitment to the inclusion and visibility of people with disabilities," the Ligue de Football Professionnel said Tuesday in a statement.

"The seven pictograms form the central part of the awareness campaign deployed around the match."

Saturday's game will have an accessible shuttle service for people with disabilities; an AD (audio description) service; visual help devices, and spaces specifically designed for those with sensory and autistic disability, with dedicated staff on site. (AP)

WADA delays decision on barring US officials until after World Cup

EDDIE PELLASAP
■ Washington

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) put off a decision about barring government officials from major sporting events if their countries voluntarily withhold dues, pushing a potential conflict with President Donald Trump and other US officials until at least after this summer's World Cup.

The WADA executive committee met and said it would consider the new rule in September, two months after the end of the World Cup, which the US is hosting along with Canada and Mexico. If such a rule is adopted later this year, it would presumably go into



effect before the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028.

The US hasn't paid its dues since 2023. If that continues, the new rule could place Trump and US lawmakers on a banned list for Games in their own country, though there are doubts about

whether an anti-doping regulator could keep any of them from attending the Olympics. Conflict with WADA has not been a particularly partisan issue in the US, which withheld the payments in 2024 and 2025 — once during Trump's presi-

gency and once during Joe Biden's. The US has withheld \$7.3 million over the two years in protest of WADA's handling of a case involving Chinese swimmers and other issues.

WADA spokesman James Fitzgerald previously told The Associated Press the proposed rule would "not (be) applied retroactively so World Cup, LA and SLC Games would not be covered." However, the proposal, a copy of which was obtained by AP, did not include language to that effect and Fitzgerald did not respond to multiple emails seeking clarification about his use of the word "retroactively." After the meeting Tuesday, WADA director

general Olivier Niggli said "the withholding of contributions by governments for political or other voluntary reasons remains a serious topic of concern for all WADA's stakeholders."

"Funding instability has a direct effect on the functioning and development of the World Anti-Doping Program," Niggli said. "Ultimately, those who are most directly and most negatively impacted are athletes around the world."

WADA started exploring the issue in 2020, around the time the US began threatening to withhold money. But it says the issue of penalizing governments for not paying is not directly related to the United States. (AP)



Varun will be crucial for KKR in IPL: du Plessis

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

An underwhelming T20 World Cup campaign notwithstanding, Indian mystery spinner Varun Chakaravathy would be crucial for Kolkata Knight Riders in the IPL beginning on March 28, former South African captain Faf du Plessis has said.

Du Plessis, who played for Chennai Super Kings, Delhi Capitals and Royal Challengers Bengaluru before retiring from the tournament, told 'JioHotStar' that the Eden Gardens pitch should be tailor-made for Sunil Narine and Chakaravathy.

"If I was part of the KKR

team management, I would ask the groundsman at Eden Gardens to make the wicket spin-friendly. KKR are blessed to have two absolute cannons in Varun Chakaravathy and Sunil Narine," he said.

"They are two of the best T20 spinners in the game right now. Both, Varun and Narine, have to be in the game. If they play on surfaces where they are not in contention, then you are losing those two cannons and your superpower.

"Yes, they can bowl well on any wicket and trouble batters. But for KKR to be successful this IPL, Varun and Narine need to fire. The pitch should be prepared keeping those two



players in mind," he added. Chakaravathy wasn't particularly effective during India's title-winning campaign at the T20 World Cup and managed 14 wickets at an ordinary economy rate of more than 9.

KKR finished third from bottom on the points table last season after winning just five of their 14 games.

The Ajinkya Rahane-led team will open their campaign against Mumbai Indians on March 29 in an away fixture. Du Plessis said another player who could prove

crucial for the side is Cameron Green even though he warned that the Australian all-rounder would be under tremendous price tag pressure given his Rs 25.2 crore contract.

"Cameron Green is a highly talented guy who has a lot of potential in him to succeed. He is the multi-skilled marquee buy for KKR and the replacement for Andre Russell.

"Green is six-foot tall, a massive guy, he bowls well, has a good bouncer and yorker, can hit the ball out of the stadium easily and is a proper batter. In short, he is a complete package. He balances KKR's team very well," he said.



Ponting approves late arrival of Jansen in wake of delayed departure post T20WC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Punjab Kings head coach Ricky Ponting has approved the late arrival of West Indies all-rounder Andre Russell for the IPL considering that the South African all-rounder was among the last batch of players who departed late from India following the T20 World Cup due to logistical issues.

South Africa and West Indies players were stuck in India for more than a week after concluding their World Cup campaigns. Some of them, including West Indies head coach Daren Sammy and Proteas batter David Miller, also vented out their frustration over the delay in their departure from India due to restricted operations of major airports like Dubai and Abu Dhabi amid the West Asia conflict.

Jansen, a key member of the PBKS unit, will join the squad on March 26. Ponting and majority of foreign players are set to link up with the team on March 21.

Afghanistan all-rounder Azmatullah Omarzai will join the team on March 23 from Kabul. His country is currently involved in a conflict with Pakistan.

In their first year with PBKS, the Ponting and Shreyas Iyer combine took the franchise to the final last season, its first since 2014.

"Ricky fully supports his players. Considering Marco left late from India, he understands the need for giving him adequate time at home," a source told PTI.

The lanky left-arm pacer took 16 wickets last season at an economy rate of 9.20.

Captain Iyer is expected to join the squad on March 19.

With Dubai and Abu Dhabi airports still operating at levels far below their capacity, the teams are facing an additional challenge while arranging players' travel from the west.

Punjab Kings will be open their 2026 campaign against Gujarat Titans at home on March 31. They face CSK in away game on April 3.



Mixing tours and camps, Marijne charts build-up for World Cup, Asian Games

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

India women's hockey team chief coach Sjoerd Marijne is banking on a mix of overseas tours, competitive exposure and national camps to ready the side for the World Cup and Asian Games this year.

The World Cup is scheduled to be held in Belgium and Netherlands in August, while the Asian Games will take place in Japan in September. The Indian women's team will compete in the FIH Hockey Nations Cup in Auckland from June 15 to 21. They are also scheduled to tour the United States and



Argentina, and play matches against Germany and the Netherlands.

"We have a tour to USA and Argentina, the Nations Cup in New Zealand, and practice matches in Germany. We will also play some matches in the Netherlands," Marijne said in media release.

"These scheduled games combined with our camps set us up for a very good mix

of matches and training to be ready for the World Cup and Asian Games."

India have been placed in Pool D alongside England, China and South Africa.

China are the top-ranked side in the group at world No. 4, followed by England at No. 6, while India and South Africa are ranked ninth and 19th respectively.

"This is a very competitive and balanced pool. There are teams like England and China that bring different styles and a lot of experience, while South Africa is always unpredictable and dangerous on their day," Marijne said.

Candidates Tournament: Humpy reiterates safety worries in Cyprus

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Indian Grandmaster Koneru Humpy is still undecided about competing at the prestigious Candidates Tournament in Cyprus this month but reiterated her concerns regarding the safety situation in the host country amid the West Asia conflict.

The Candidates, which will challenge the challengers to the world championship crowns currently held by D Gukesh (men) and Ju Wenjun (women), is scheduled to begin on March 28.

"I know that alone, I may not be able to change anything. But regardless of whether I play in the Candidates or not, I felt it was important to express what I genuinely feel," she posted on 'X' on Wednesday.

"I'm truly grateful to everyone who has shown their support. For those who cannot understand the sensitivity of this situation, I choose to leave it at that," she

added.

Earlier this week, the two-time Women's World Rapid Champion and former women's world title challenger, had said that she was hesitant to travel and was considering withdrawing from the tournament.

This came after a British air base in Cyprus endured a drone attack earlier this month, raising fears that the conflict, which began with US and Israeli strikes on Iran, could seriously affect the security at the island as well.

However, FIDE CEO Emil Sutovsky brushed off the concerns, saying there is nothing even "remotely dangerous" to warrant a change of venue. Gulf countries are currently caught in the crossfire and the air space over the region has been largely shut.

"Our plans have not changed. We are in the final stages of preparing (for) the Candidates Tournament. Of course, we are monitoring the situation," Sutovsky had said.

Journey from top-20 to top-10 will be a lot harder: Anahat Singh

DEVARCHIT VARMA ■ Mumbai

Having become the youngest Asian to enter the top-20 of world squash rankings, 17-year-old Anahat Singh knows that breaking the top-10 barrier will be a lot harder as she chases excellence at the highest level.

Dipika Pallikal and Joshna Chinappa reached as high as 10th in the PSA rankings but were not able to make further inroads. With age and special talent on her side, 20th-ranked Anahat can do what no Indian has done before.

"I know it's going to be quite tough; breaking into the top 20 wouldn't be as hard as it would be to get into the top 10 because now that you're at a high stage, even going up by one spot is

quite tough," Anahat told PTI on the sidelines of the Indian Open.

"I know it's going to be hard and I know that it's going to take quite some time. I'm really looking forward to training hard and improving my game and play with the top players."

The weight of expectations bear heavily on sports prodigies across the world but for India's top ranked female squash player, it is about not getting nervous and meeting the expectations she has set for herself.

"I don't think too much about the expectations. I try to just focus on — because I know what I expect from myself — and I know what I can do at tournaments and against the top players.



"It's more about my expectations for myself than the others, where I don't really get too nervous when I'm going into play tournaments. I just focus on taking it one step at a

time and make sure that I'm playing my best squash," she added.

Yet as she levels in her steady rise in the world of

squash, Anahat admits she also needs to revise her plans and formulas of success with her coaches if the need arises.

"If I ever do, (it's) just (about) talking to my coaches and getting that level of confidence from them when they run in the game plan and they know that I'm familiar with what I'm doing," she said.

"And just talking to them and just visualising myself is something that helps me if I'm a bit nervous in matches."

The youngest ever to win an Asian Games medal at the age of 15, Anahat believes in keeping it simple.

"Sometimes, if you're playing too many tournaments back-to-back, you get a bit tired, your shots don't

Can't play all your life so education is important: Sindhu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Gurugram

Two-time Olympic medal-winning Indian badminton ace PV Sindhu on Wednesday stressed on the need for aspiring athletes to have good education, warning that it is too "risky" to ignore academics and focus solely on a sporting career that can end with a single injury.

The former world champion made these remarks in a fireside conversation at DPS International, while speaking to educationist Devyani Jaipuria.

The Hyderabad touched upon several aspects of her own journey to drive home the point, including the self-doubt that she battled before



the 2016 Olympics after being laid low by a stress fracture of the left foot.

"I have been playing for so many years. At some point of time you have to retire, right? And that's the truth. You can't be playing sport

expressed by national coach Pullela Gopichand, who has urged parents of aspiring athletes to prioritise education.

"Nobody is born with a golden spoon and you have to work hard, whether it is in studies or sports... Studies and sports are equally important. I have done my MBA. So, I know, like, it's not easy... you go to training in the morning, come back, study, and then you go for evening sessions.

"Because at the end of the day, that is the truth, where sports is a very small thing, right? Life-long, you know, you will always have an education by your side. Sport is also important, but not that, you know, com-

pletely stop your studies," she asserted.

The 30-year-old is on a break after being stranded in Dubai due to closure of air space for some days in the middle of the American and Israeli bombing of Iran.

She said sporting injuries can be hard to comeback from and that's why she would urge budding athletes to always have academic backup.

"I might sound mean, maybe they might not understand now, but in the later stage in their life, they will understand that, yes, studies are also important. Because, you know, sport sometimes, it's very risky where sometimes you have an injury and you never know how it goes.

Japan beat South Korea to set up Women's Asian Cup final against Australia

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Sydney

Riko Ueki and Maika Hamano scored first-half goals to set Japan on course for a 4-1 victory over South Korea on Wednesday and a spot in the Women's Asian Cup final against Australia.

Japan dominated the semifinal at Sydney's Stadium Australia against a South Korea lineup that edged the Australians on goal difference in the group stage after both teams finished with two wins and a draw apiece.

Japan thought it had gone ahead 3-0 before halftime



with Aoba Fujino finding the back of the net in the 43rd minute, but the goal was disallowed after a VAR review.

Asia's top-ranked team at

Tanikawa's swinging corner kick in the 75th.

The Nadeshiko finally conceded a goal for the first time in the tournament when Kang Chae-rim turned and fired in a right-foot shot from close range in the 78th.

Remina Chiba restored the three-goal buffer with a powerful strike to make it 4-1 in the 81st.

The final will be played on Saturday in Sydney.

Japan beat Australia in back-to-back finals in 2014 and '18 but neither team reached the championship decider in 2022, when China edged South Korea in the final.

बैंक ऑफ बड़ोदा Bank of Baroda

E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE
Branch: Jayendragan, Nisha Plaza, Jinsi Road, Near Aachran Branch, Gwalior-474009 (M.P.) Ph. 72477-16428, 81695-56638
Email: vijwal@bankofbaroda.com

"APPENDIX- IV-A [See proviso to Rule 9 (1) & 8 (6)]

SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 9 (1) & (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Bank of Baroda, Secured Creditor, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" for recovery of below mentioned account/s. The details of Borrower /s/Guarantor/s/Secured Asset/s/Dues/Reserve Price/e-Auction date & Time, EMD and Bid Increase Amount are mentioned below.

Name & Address of Borrowers / Guarantors/ Mortgagor	Description of the immovable property with known encumbrances, if any	Reserve Price/EMD Bid Increase Amount	Date & Time of E-Auction	Demand Notice Date/ Possession Date/ Outstanding Amount
Borrower: 1. Mr. Shri Nivas Sharma S/o Devi Ram Sharma	Property Owner- Shri Nivas Sharma S/o Deviram Sharma- EMDTD of Land and building Plot No. B-1, Shikha Enclave, Maharajpura Gird, Gwalior-474001	Rs. 23,12,000/-	24-04-2026	16-09-2025
2. Mrs. Anjula Sharma W/o Mr. Shri Nivas Sharma	Plot No. B-1, Shikha Enclave, Ward No. 18, Patwari Halika No. 94, Part of Survey No. 406/Min-2, Maharajpura, Gird, Gwalior measuring 69.70 Sqm. (750 Sqft.) Boundaries : North: Plot of Rahul Singh Tomar, South: Road Colony, East: Road Sarkari, West: Plot No. B-2.	Rs. 2,31,200/-	Time : 2:00 PM to 6:00 PM	30-12-2025
Guarantor : Mr. Raghendra Sharma S/o Deviram Sharma	Add: 1. B-2, Shikha Enclave, Maharajpura Gird, Gwalior-474001	Rs. 1,00,000/-		Rs. 12,14,224.47/-
Add: 2. Post Office Ke Samne, Morena Road, Ward No. 12, Ambah, Dist-Morena-476111				+ Interest & charges

For detailed terms and conditions of sale, please refer to the link provided in <https://www.bankofbaroda.in/e-auction.htm> or e-bikray.com prospective bidders may contact the authorized officer on Mobile- 72477-16428, 81695-56638

Place: Gwalior Date: 18/03/2026 Authorised officer, Bank of Baroda

बैंक ऑफ महाराष्ट्र Bank of Maharashtra

ZONAL OFFICE, 1/14, ADMINISTRATIVE ZONE, ARERA HILLS, BHOPAL, 462011.

DEMAND NOTICE

DEMAND NOTICE UNDER SECTION 13 (2) OF THE SECURITISATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT 2002, (SARFAESI ACT)

In respect of loans availed by below mentioned borrowers/Guarantors through Bank of Maharashtra, Timarni Branch which have become NPA with below mentioned outstanding amount. We have already issued detailed demand notice on below mentioned dates under Sec. 13(2) of Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 by Registered post & Speed Post with acknowledge due to you which has been returned undelivered. We have indicated our intention of taking possession of securities owned by you as per sec. 13 (4) of the Act in case of your failure to pay the amount mentioned within 60 days.

The borrower's attention is invited to the provisions of sub-section 8 of Sec 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

Name & Address of Borrowers & Guarantor (s)	Details of Property & Property Owner	Nature & Amt. of Credit facility	Present outstanding
Borrower: Mr. Kaluram Kaushal S/o Mr. Gangavishn Kaushal	All the pieces & parcel of a residential Nazul Plot along with construction situated at Nagar Timarni, Ward No. 8(G), Sheet No. 13A, Plot Running No. 85/5, Khasra No. 138/1, admeasuring 56.30 square meters having dimensions North-South 57.8 feet and East-West 10.6 feet with a total area of 605.78 square feet	Housing Loan of ₹ 06.00 Lakh (Rs. Fifteen Lakh only) (A/C No. 60295145612)	as on 21/01/2026
Co-Borrower: Mrs. Lila Bai W/o Mr. Kaluram Kaushal	Address of Both 1:- Ward No. 9, Lodhi Mohalla, Timarni, Tehsil Timarni, District Harda, Madhya Pradesh-461228	Demand Notice Date: 22/01/2026	Ledger Balance: ₹ 312209.02
Address of Both 2:- Plot No. 85/5, Ward No. 8(G), Tehsil Timarni, District Harda, Madhya Pradesh-461228	Owned by Mr. Kaluram Kaushal S/o Mr. Gangavishn Kaushal. Cersai Asset ID - 200061868151	NPA Date: 12/01/2026	Unapplied interest : ₹ 3606.00
			Penal Charges ₹ 7.00
			Total : ₹ 315,822.02/-

You are advised (1) To collect the original notice/cover addressed to you and / if returned by Postal Authorities from the undersigned for more and complete details (2) To pay the outstanding amount Interest and costs etc. within 60 days from the date of notice referred to above to avoid further action under the SARFAESI Act. & (3) To refrain from disposing of dealing with the securities without our prior written consent.

Place : Timarni Date : 19-03-2026

Chief Manager & Authorised Officer Bank of Maharashtra