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PIONEER IN SHORT

AIRFARES TO RISE AMID FUEL SURGE

Airfares in India are set to rise as airlines impose fuel surcharges amid soaring jet fuel prices triggered by the ongoing West Asia conflict. Following Air India and Air India Express, IndiGo announced that it will levy fuel charges on domestic and international flights starting March 14. Charges will range from ₹425 for domestic and SAARC flights to ₹2,300 for Europe-bound tickets. Flights to the Middle East, Southeast Asia, China, and Africa will see surcharges of ₹900-₹1,800. Aviation Turbine Fuel, which accounts for nearly 40 per cent of an airline's operating costs, has surged sharply since early March due to regional supply disruptions and geopolitical tensions. IndiGo said the surcharge is a smaller adjustment aimed at easing customer impact, though some fare increase is unavoidable. Earlier, Air India and Air India Express had introduced similar charges, with domestic surcharges starting at ₹399 and international fees ranging from \$10 to \$90. Budget carrier SpiceJet warned that airlines may have little choice if oil prices remain high. Beyond fuel costs, flight disruptions have escalated. Cirium reported over 43,000 cancellations between February 28 and March 10, as carriers avoid West Asian airspace, increasing travel times and ticket prices.

The Bystander



CURFEW PARTIALLY LIFTED IN MEGHALAYA

Curfew was partially relaxed on Friday in the two unrest-hit districts of Meghalaya to allow residents to purchase essential goods, officials said. In West Garo Hills, restrictions were eased from 9 am to 1 pm, while in East Garo Hills, Deputy Commissioner RP Marak extended the relaxation from 8 am to 5 pm. Earlier this week, clashes erupted between tribal and non-tribal groups during the nomination process for the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) elections, leaving two people dead in police firing and causing widespread damage to property. Reports of arson, vandalism, and looting in parts of Tura town prompted the imposition of curfew and deployment of the Army to prevent further violence. Following the unrest, the State has postponed the GHADC elections scheduled for April 10.

TN POLICE SEIZE NEARLY 400 CYLINDERS

In a first-of-its-kind action in Tamil Nadu, police in Madurai arrested two men under the Goondas Act for hoarding 398 LPG cylinders for black marketing, officials said on Friday. The raids, conducted by the Civil Supplies CID following a tip-off, recovered 100 subsidised domestic cylinders and 109 commercial cylinders from one location, and 189 cylinders including 126 commercial units from another. Chief Minister MK Stalin urged the public not to panic, highlighting that the State has sufficient fuel and gas supplies. The Tamil Nadu Petroleum Dealers' Association also reassured citizens that 14 terminals across the State can meet demand for over 7,000 retail outlets, and warned against panic buying. Authorities have booked the accused under the Essential Commodities Act, emphasising strict action against illegal hoarding.

## Govt reassures cooking gas distribution is normal

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The demand for cooking gas in India has surged amid the ongoing West Asia conflict, reflecting widespread panic buying, the Government said on Friday, even as domestic LPG production has risen by 30 per cent. LPG bookings jumped to 75.7 lakh in March from an average of 55.7 lakh, driven by anxiety over supply disruptions. Online bookings rose to 83 per cent in March from 71 per cent in February.

In a joint inter-ministerial briefing, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas,

said 100 per cent of domestic LPG is being supplied to households. She confirmed that commercial LPG supply has slowed, affecting food businesses, but the Union Government has placed these cylinders at the disposal of State Governments for priority distribution. Supply chains, she added, are functioning normally.

Despite assurances, consumers and dealers report uncertainties. The Government said LPG is also being supplied to hospitals and educational institutions, and black-marketing and hoarding are being strictly



Joint Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoP&NG), Sujata Sharma addresses the Inter-Ministerial Briefing on Recent Developments in West Asia at National Media Centre in New Delhi

monitored. There are 25,605 LPG distributors serving 33.37 crore consumers, delivering roughly 50 lakh domestic cylinders daily. About 60 per cent of India's LPG requirement is imported, with 90 per cent passing through the Strait of Hormuz, currently shut by Iran.

The Government also confirmed that Piped Natural Gas (PNG) to households and Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) for vehicles continues without interruptions. Industrial consumers connected to the gas grid, such as tea factories and manufacturing units, will receive around

80 per cent of their previous six-month average supply, while fertiliser plants will get about 70 per cent.

Sharma addressed crude oil concerns, noting that all refineries operate at 100 per cent or higher capacity, ensuring self-sufficiency in petrol and diesel. She advised households near PNG networks—about 60 lakh—to consider switching to piped connections for convenience.

In the Parliament, Opposition MPs disrupted proceedings over the alleged LPG shortage, citing long queues and uncertainty for consumers and small businesses.

### CONFLICT IN WEST ASIA CLAIMS TWO INDIAN LIVES

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Two Indians were killed and ten injured on Friday in a drone attack on an industrial area in Oman amid the ongoing West Asia conflict, the ministry of external affairs (MEA) said. Five of the injured have been discharged from hospital. The strike marks the first Indian casualties on land in a West Asian country since the Iran-US conflict began on February 28.

The drone hit the Al Awahi Industrial Area in Sohar city, about 200 km from the capital Muscat. More than three dozen Indians have been injured in drone and missile strikes across several West Asian countries, including the United Arab Emirates, since the conflict began.

Aseem Mahajan, joint secretary (Gulf) in the MEA, said two Indian nationals died in the attack. Of the 11 people injured, ten were Indians. Adding that the Indian mission is in touch with the company and local authorities.

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### SC: PIL on menstrual leave policy dismissed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a PIL seeking a nationwide policy providing paid menstrual leave for women, observing no one would give them jobs and such a provision would unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes. The court, however, asked the Centre and competent authorities to consider the representation of the PIL petitioner and examine the possibility of framing a policy

on menstrual leave after consulting relevant stakeholders.

A bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Jyotsna Banerjee observed that while the intent behind the petition might be welfare-oriented, the practical reality of the job market could lead to "counter-productive" outcomes for women. "This is an affirmative right... but think about the employer who needs to give paid leave," the bench observed.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

### PM Modi urges voters to punish Congress in Assam

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said that sounds of bombs and gunfire were a thing of the past in the Northeast, and asserted that the BJP ensured long-lasting peace in the region while the Congress, during its tenure, signed various accords for "selfish political interests".

Addressing a public meeting in Assam's Kokrajhar district virtually from Guwahati, the PM said Assam was writing a new chapter of peace and development under the "double-engine" Government. PM Modi alleged



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the foundation stone laying and inauguration ceremony of various development works in Guwahati

that the Congress endangered national security by handing over the land of indigenous people to infiltrators. "Punish the Congress in the upcoming elections and send a clear message that there is no place for infiltrators in this country," he asked the people. The election to the 126-member Assam Assembly is likely to be held in April.

"I am happy that Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is leading a big drive to clear land from encroachment, and the BJP Government has handed rights to the indigenous people," the PM said.

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### Delhi engages Tehran to secure shipping lanes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

External Affairs Minister (EAM) S Jaishankar held talks with his Iranian counterpart Seyed Abbas Araghchi on Thursday night, their fourth such conversation since the West Asia crisis began. Currently, 28 merchant vessels are stationed on either side of the Strait of Hormuz. "Had another conversation with Iranian FM



Union Minister S Jaishankar speaks in the Lok Sabha during the second part of Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi on Friday

@araghchi yesterday night. Discussed bilateral matters as also BRICS related issues," the minister posted on social media.

The latest phone conversation came as India ramped up efforts to secure safe passage to the Indian-flagged merchant vessels through the Strait of Hormuz, which has been partially blocked by Tehran following the conflict in the region. An Iranian

readout said Araghchi briefed his Indian counterpart on the latest situation "resulting from the aggressions and crimes" committed by the US and Israel against Iran and its consequences on the stability and security of the region and the world. The Iranian foreign minister emphasised Tehran's firm will to exercise the "legitimate right to self-defence".

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### Speculations grow on health of Iran's Mojtaba Khamenei

AGENCIES ■ Dubai/Jerusalem

Iran's newly appointed Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei has taken center stage in the ongoing West Asia conflict, following the death of his father, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in a joint US-Israel strike on February 28. Mojtaba has not appeared publicly since assuming office, with his first statement delivered in writing via State television. In it, he vowed to continue Iran's missile and drone attacks on Israel and neighbouring Gulf States, and to



Demonstrators marching during the annual anti-Israeli Quds Day in Tehran

maintain the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a vital route for global oil shipments.

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said Khamenei "is wounded and likely disfigured," though no evidence was provided. Israel also suspects he was injured at the start of the war.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, addressing the conflict, stated that the joint US-Israel campaign is "going better than expected" and emphasised Israel's strength.

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### Govt sets ₹1 lakh crore safety net

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday said the ₹1 lakh crore Economic Stabilisation Fund will help in dealing with the impact of crisis such as the ongoing conflict in West Asia. "The Economic Stabilisation Fund will provide fiscal headroom to allow India to respond to global headwinds such as the recent crisis, unanticipated supply chain disruptions, unexpected shocks to sub-sectors in Indian economy and any other event that may have significant fiscal

#### THE PIONEER REPORTS RAISED IN LS

New Delhi: Congress MP in Lok Sabha, Dr MK Vishnu Prasad, raised a series of reports by The Pioneer on Large Defaulters published between March 9-March 13. While citing the reports, Prasad also highlighted names of the largest defaulters. "We demand explanations as how such a huge amount Rs 29 lakh crore disbursed and defaulted. How Government will be able to recover from these defaulters?" Prasad asked.

implications. So, we are coming up with Economic Stabilisation Fund," she said.

Replying to a debate in the Lok Sabha, Sitharaman slammed the Opposition for disrupting the House and said giving confidence to the people, they are taking "irresponsible positions". "It is ironic that even while I am speaking about how the Government is preparing itself, including supply chain disruptions and issues related to LPG, the Opposition is not willing to listen to the reply. Instead, they prefer to pursue their own agenda," she said.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

### FIRST-EVER CEC REMOVAL NOTICE FILED

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Opposition MPs have submitted notices in both Houses of Parliament seeking a motion for the removal of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar. According to a source, 130 Lok Sabha MPs and 63 Rajya Sabha MPs have signed the notice.

The signatories include members from all the INDIA bloc parties, including the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which is no longer formally a part of the opposition alliance, they added. This is the first time a notice has been moved seeking the removal of the CEC. According to sources, the notice lists seven charges against Kumar, including alleged "partisan and discriminatory conduct in office", "deliberate obstruction of investigation of electoral fraud" and "mass disenfranchisement".

Opposition parties have accused the CEC of aiding the ruling BJP on several occasions, especially with the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, which they alleged aims to help the saffron party.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

### West Asia crisis pushes Indian kitchens to panic book cylinders

ABHINAV KUMAR JHA/ RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The unease over LPG supply that began with tensions in West Asia is now quietly simmering in kitchens across India — from households waiting for cylinders to restaurants in Delhi's dining districts weighing shut-downs.

Even as the Union Government has repeatedly assured that there is no shortage of LPG and urged consumers not to panic, reports of supply delays and black-market pricing are spreading

across several cities. A nationwide survey by community platform LocalCircles suggests that more than half of household consumers have faced disruptions over the past week.

According to the survey, 53 per cent of respondents said LPG dealers had informed them of supply delays or disruptions. Another 57 per cent reported difficulties booking or receiving cylinders in the last seven days, including longer delivery times, delayed bookings or cylinders being unavailable.

The shortage fears have



A worker arranges LPG cylinders at a gas agency, amid supply crisis in the country in New Delhi on Friday

triggered panic booking and long queues at distribution agencies in some areas. While a domestic LPG cylinder typically costs between ₹900 and ₹1,000, survey respondents reported paying significantly more in the open market. About 36 per cent of households experiencing black-marketing said suppliers or middlemen were charging ₹100-₹500 extra per cylinder, while 9 per cent reported paying more than ₹500. In some parts of Delhi-NCR, prices have reportedly reached ₹1,500 to ₹2,800 per cylinder. The Government

has directed oil marketing companies to prioritise domestic consumers and asked State authorities to monitor the situation closely to prevent hoarding and profiteering.

The strain on supply is also beginning to show in Delhi's restaurant industry, where kitchens depend heavily on commercial LPG cylinders.

Across major dining districts such as Connaught Place, Khan Market and Greater Kailash, restaurants are rethinking fuel options and reorganising operations.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

# Govt to rename Shahjahanabad Redevelopment Corporation: CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta announced on Friday that the Delhi government plans to rename the Shahjahanabad Redevelopment Corporation (SRDC). The chief minister headed a high-level review meeting of the SRDC board on issues related to the overall development of Old Delhi areas and "serious irregularities and corruption" of the previous government.

"The proposal to change the name of the board was discussed, and it was decided that three proposed names would be prepared in order of preference, after which the final name will be selected," a statement said.

The meeting also reviewed the Chandni Chowk redevelopment project stretching from Lal Jain Mandir to Fatehpuri Masjid.

"The time has come for a comprehensive restructuring and revival of the institution. The Government will not only change the board's name but will also use it to accelerate the real redevelopment of Old Delhi and the Shahjahanabad area," she said. The meeting also examined the functioning of SRDC during the previous government's tenure. No immediate response was available from AAP on the allegations.

"A project that began in 2018 with an estimated cost



of around ₹65 crore eventually rose to nearly ₹148 crore, raising serious questions about approvals and procedural compliance. Available documents clearly indicate that serious irregularities and corruption were carried out in the name of development works," she added.

According to the chief minister, "records of the proceedings also reveal the role of the then board chairperson and other officials."

"Suggesting that procedures were improperly advanced in the name of development, thereby opening the door to corruption. All these irregularities will be thoroughly investigated," she further said.

The chief minister also announced that the historic Town Hall will be developed as an important heritage monument, further enhancing the cultural and historical appeal of the area.

The Delhi Government has also initiated development work worth around ₹160 crore, which is currently underway on 28 roads in the area.

According to the Chief Minister, records of the proceedings also reveal the role of the then board chairperson and other officials, suggesting that procedures were improperly advanced in the name of development, thereby opening the door to corruption.

# DU to introduce new Linguistic Anthropology elective paper for master's students

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Delhi University's Anthropology Department is preparing to propose a new discipline-specific elective on 'Linguistic Anthropology' for the second year of the master's programme under the postgraduate curriculum framework, 2024.

Titled 'M.Sc. Linguistic Anthropology', the paper is expected to carry four credits and will be laid before the Standing Committee for Academic Affairs at their next meeting. Once approved by the committee, the proposal will be forwarded to the Academic Council and then the Executive Council before being included in the syllabus.

Dannarapu Venkata Prasad, professor at the Department of Anthropology, said, "We hope to introduce the paper as an elective for now and then later as a core paper."



"Currently, the paper has been designed to contain four units, covering 'Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology', 'Social Context of Language Use', 'Structure of Linguistic Forms', and 'Sanskrit as Ancient Indian Language,'" Prasad said.

Speaking on the importance of the paper, head of the Department of Anthropology and director of the Centre for Tribal Studies, Soumendhra Mohan Patnaik, said the department had long felt the need to

introduce the "Anthropology of Linguistics".

"Franz Boas, the American anthropologist who provided the road map for the subject, showed that we must study four terrains of anthropology to create an integrated understanding of society, namely cultural anthropology, physical or biological anthropology, linguistic anthropology and pre-historic anthropology," Patnaik said.

"As the first branches of the anthropology department in various universities in India

were established under the British influence, linguistic anthropology remained under-represented for decades," he said.

Patnaik added that linguistic anthropology was more of an American concept. He said that Claude Levi-Strauss, another eminent personality in the field of anthropology, had argued that in order to understand social phenomena like marriage, kinship, politics or anything surrounding the society, we have to understand the deeper structures that are involved.

"These structures need a substratum, and that is not material; it rests on a linguistic platform. That is where the centrality of language arises in anthropology," he said.

The restructuring under PGCF and the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) has provided the department with an opportunity to introduce the fourth branch of anthropology in its curriculum, he added.

# Pink bus tickets still valid for women, no need to rush for Pink Cards: DTC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Delhi Government on Friday clarified that women in the national Capital can continue to travel in the DTC buses using pink paper tickets until they get a new "Pink Card." The Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC), in a statement, urged women in Delhi not to "worry or rush" to collect the "Pink Saheli Smart cards".

"It is important to note that women can continue to travel in DTC buses using the existing Pink Paper Ticket system according to the current practice, even if they do not yet possess the Pink Saheli Smart Card," the statement said.



After assessing that most eligible women have received the Pink Saheli Smart Cards, the Delhi government will gradually replace the paper ticket system with that based on cards, it added.

"Women commuters are advised not to worry or rush, as the card distribution will

continue smoothly over time and all eligible beneficiaries will be able to obtain their card conveniently," the DTC further said.

Eligible women residents of Delhi can obtain the Pink Saheli Smart Card free of cost from the 50 designated counters established by the DTC across the city.

# CM Rekha launches amphibious excavators for city drain cleaning

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Friday launched new state-of-the-art amphibious excavator machines (long boom and short boom) at Badusarai Bridge, Najafgarh Drain and Pankha Road Drain for cleaning the city's drainage network. These machines will significantly speed up and improve desilting operations, removal of garbage, and clearing of water hyacinth from the drains.

The move is expected to improve water drainage capacity and help reduce waterlogging during the monsoon season.

The chief minister, who visited the Badusarai area for ground inspection, said that



Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and Deputy CM Parvesh Verma inspect an amphibious excavator machine deployed for drain cleaning near Badusarai Bridge and Pankha Road, in New Delhi

the new machines procured by the Irrigation and Flood Control department is a step towards a cleaner Yamuna. Delhi Cabinet Ministers Parvesh Sahib Singh and Ashish Sood, along with

senior officials of the concerned departments.

"These machines will speed up the removal of silt and garbage and improve the drainage system, which is a step towards cleaning

the Yamuna River," she told reporters after the launch of the machines. The Najafgarh drain is one of the biggest contributors to Yamuna pollution. According to estimates, more than 10 million metric tonnes of silt have accumulated in the Najafgarh Drain.

The newly deployed amphibious machines will be used to remove this massive buildup. The Delhi government has also decided to procure more amphibious machines. One machine had already been brought earlier, while four new machines were flagged off on Friday. The remaining machines will be handed over to the department soon.

The machines have been deployed by the Irrigation and Flood Control (I&FC)

Department at several key locations, including Badusarai Bridge, Kakrola, Dwarka and Uttam Nagar.

The Government aims to ensure that desilting of drains continues throughout the year, helping control waterlogging during the monsoon. The Chief Minister added that the Delhi government is now carrying out desilting work throughout the year, instead of limiting it to the period before the monsoon. This approach aims to more effectively prevent waterlogging during the rainy season.

The short-boom amphibious machine costs around ₹1.27 crore. It has a boom length of about 6 metres, a bucket capacity of 0.20 cubic metres, and is powered by a 65 HP engine.

**AXIS BANK** Retail Lending and Payment Group (Local Office/Branch): Axis Bank Ltd., 1st Floor, G-4/5, B, Sector-4, Gomi Nagar Extension, Lucknow, U.P. 226010 Axis Bank Ltd., 3rd Floor, Gigaplex, NPC - 1, TTC Industrial Area, Mughal Road, Aurli, Navi Mumbai - 400706. Registered Office: "Trishul", 3rd Floor Opp. Samarsheshwar Temple Law Garden, Ellisbridge Ahmedabad - 380006

**E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTY**

**E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(b) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rule, 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 is mortgaged/charged to the secured creditor, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of Secured Creditor will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", "Whatever there is" and "No Recourse Basis" on 16.04.2026 for recovery of Rs. 62,56,066.52/- (Rupees Sixty-Two Lakh Fifty-Six Thousand Sixty-Six and Fifty-Two Paise Only) dues as on 03.04.2024 with future interest and costs due to the secured creditor from Mr. Praveen Kumar (Applicant), & Mrs. Varsha Lodhi (Co-Applicant). Please refer the appended auction schedule for necessary details.

**KNOWN ENCUMBRANCES (IF ANY)** NIL

**RESERVE PRICE (IN RS.)** Rs. 54,00,000/- (Rupees Fifty-Four Lakh Only)

**EARNEST MONEY DEPOSIT (IN RS.)** Rs. 5,40,000/- (Rupees Five Lakh Forty Thousand Only) through DD/PO in favor of Axis Bank Ltd. payable.

**BID INCREMENTAL AMOUNT** Rs. 30,000/- (Rupees Thirty Thousand Only)

**LAST DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR SUBMISSION OF BIDS / TENDER WITH EMD** Till 15.04.2026 latest by 05:00 PM. Axis Bank Ltd., 1st Floor, G-4/5, B, Sector-4, Gomi Nagar Extension, Lucknow, U.P.-226010 addressed to Mr. Abhishek Sharma

**DATE, TIME, AND VENUE FOR PUBLIC E-AUCTION** On 16.04.2026, between 11:00 AM and 12:00 Noon, with unlimited extensions of 5 minutes each at web portal <https://www.bankauctions.com>

e-auction tender documents containing e-auction bid form, declaration etc., are available in the website of the Service Provider as mentioned above.

**SCHEDULE - DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY**

Immovable Asset All such pieces or parcel of diverted land/property (residential/commercial) measuring area 167.22 Sq. Mts. situated C-117, TDI City, Lakshmi Near Blue Spices Hotel, Agra Uttar Pradesh-282001. In the name of Mrs. Varsha Lodhi. Boundaries: East - Road 9 Mtr. West - Other Plot North - Plot no. C-118 South - Plot no. C-116

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided in the secured creditor's website i.e. <https://www.axisbank.com/auction-retail> and the Bank's approved service provider M/S C1 India Private Limited at their web portal <https://www.bankauctions.com>. For any other assistance, the intending bidders may contact Mr. Abhishek Sharma, Mobile. No. +91-8077839704, Abhishek.S.Sharma@axisbank.com Authorized officer of the Bank during office hours from 10 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The earlier auction publication dated 10.03.2026 stand withdrawn from effect of this Publication, treat this publication as final.

Dated: 14.03.2026, Place: Lucknow Authorized Officer, Axis Bank Ltd.

**GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA TENDER NOTICE**

Sr. No.	Name of Department	Name of Work Notice Tender	Opening Date Closing Date	Amount / EMD (Approx.) in Rupees	Website of the Department	Nodal Officer/Contact Details/Email
1	PWD B&R, HISAR	SPECIAL REPAIR OF ELECTRICAL SERVICES IN OLD CIVIL HOSPITAL DISTT FATEHABAD. (BALANCE EI INTERNAL WORK ONLY).	11.03.2026 17.03.2026	18.31 LACS	<a href="https://etenders.hry.nic.in">https://etenders.hry.nic.in</a>	01662225651 pwd-eeed-hisar@hry.nic.in
2	PWD B&R, FATEHABAD	CONSTRUCTING A NEW INTERNAL ROAD FROM JUDICIAL COURT COMPLEX TO MINI SECTT. (PHASE-II) AT FATEHABAD IN FATEHABAD DISTT.	11.03.2026 18.03.2026	8.79 LACS	<a href="https://etenders.hry.nic.in">https://etenders.hry.nic.in</a>	01667-220120 pwd-eeep-fatehabad@hry.nic.in
3	PWD B&R, FATEHABAD	SPECIAL REPAIR OF SUB TEHSIL BUILDING AT BHUNA IN DISTT. FATEHABAD	11.03.2026 19.03.2026	14.89 LACS	<a href="https://etenders.hry.nic.in">https://etenders.hry.nic.in</a>	01667-220120 pwd-eeep-fatehabad@hry.nic.in
4	PUBLIC HEALTH ENGINEERING, HISAR	DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION, ERECTION, TESTING AND COMMISSIONING OF 25 MLD SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT (STP) ALONG WITH INTERMEDIATE PUMPING STATIONS (IPS) AND RISING MAINS, INCLUDING 03 MONTHS TRIAL RUN FOLLOWED BY 06 YEARS DEFECT LIABILITY CUR-OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE PERIOD COMPLETE IN ALL RESPECTS, ALONG WITH ALL OTHER WORKS CONTINGENT THERETO. + 1 WORKS	CLOSING DATE 01.04.2026	8577.87 LACS	<a href="https://etenders.hry.nic.in">https://etenders.hry.nic.in</a>	01662-247033 eehisar@gmail.com
5	PUBLIC HEALTH ENGINEERING, MANDI DABWALI	MANDI DABWALI TOWN:- DNIT FOR PROV. AND FIXING OF DG SET 400 KVA AND TRANSFORMER 500KVA AT 2ND WATER WORKS, REPAIR OF 3 NOS. S/S TANK AT 2ND WATER WORKS AND 4 NOS. OF OLD WATER WORKS IN MANDI DABWALI TOWN AND ALL OTHER WORKS CONTINGENT THERETO. CH. TO:- MANDI DABWALI:- TECHNICAL PROPOSAL FOR UPDATING, RENOVATION OF WATER WORKS, CONSTRUCTION OF 2 NOS. BOOSTING STATIONS AND PROVIDING AND LAYING OF WATER SUPPLY DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM AT MANDI DABWALI DISTT., SIRSA.	12.03.2026 02.04.2026	295.15 LACS	<a href="https://etenders.hry.nic.in">https://etenders.hry.nic.in</a>	8730000001 ee.mandidabwali@gmail.com
6	PANCHAYATI RAJ, RAJOURD	CONST. OF BALMIKI CHAUPAL IN SIDDA PATTI AT VILLAGE MAJRA NAND KARAN BLOCK RAJOURD DISTT. KATHNAL	12.03.2026 19.03.2026	11.31 LACS	<a href="https://etenders.hry.nic.in">https://etenders.hry.nic.in</a>	8630071961 sdoprajournd@gmail.com
7	PANCHAYATI RAJ, BHIWANI	CONSTRUCTION WORK IN BRAHMAN CHAUPAL, VILLAGE- BAPORA HGVI + 8 WORKS	10.03.2026 16.03.2026	199.12 LACS	<a href="https://etenders.hry.nic.in">https://etenders.hry.nic.in</a>	01664243927 prexeeng.bhw@hry.nic.in
8	PANCHAYATI RAJ, SONIPAT	CONST. OF RASTA FROM PWD ROAD TO H/O SATEIR SINGH S/O SURAT SINGH AT VILLAGE BHATGAON DUNGRAN MP LAD	12.03.2026 19.03.2026	7.40 LACS	<a href="https://etenders.hry.nic.in">https://etenders.hry.nic.in</a>	9268376188 brijmohansto@gmail.com
9	PANCHAYATI RAJ, KURUKSHETRA	JOGI MAJRA CONST. OF JLPB PATHWAY (RASTA) FROM TUBWELL OF SH. SANTOSH KUMAR S/O SH. PURAN SINGH TO FARM OF SH. RAJESH KUMAR S/O SH. RANJIT SINGH SAINI, VILLAGE JOGI MAJRA, BLOCK LAOWA, DISTT KURUKSHETRA + 5 WORKS	11.03.2026 24.03.2026	166.30 LACS	<a href="https://etenders.hry.nic.in">https://etenders.hry.nic.in</a>	9896224357 prexeeng.krkr@hry.nic.in
10	IRRIGATION & WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT HARYANA, SONPAT	ESTIMATE FOR PROVIDING PROTECTION WORKS AT TIKOLA COMPLEX BY CONSTRUCTING 3 NO. NEW STONES WITH 600 FT REVENUEMENT NEAR ZAIRPUR VILLAGE ON RIVER YAMUNA AFTER FLOOD 2025.	CLOSING DATE 24.03.2026	121.90 LACS	<a href="https://etenders.hry.nic.in">https://etenders.hry.nic.in</a>	9813232636 xenwsdvsrps@rediffmail.com
11	IRRIGATION & WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT HARYANA, BAHADURGARH	REPLACEMENT OF PIPE CULVERT INTO RCC BOX CULVERT ON SARAI AURANGABAD KASSAR LINK DRAIN AT RD 716,2300,6460,7250,27700 AND 28960.	CLOSING DATE 23.03.2026	195.65 LACS	<a href="https://etenders.hry.nic.in">https://etenders.hry.nic.in</a>	01276-298418 wsvlvislonbgrh@gmail.com
12	IRRIGATION & WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT HARYANA, KARNAL	SUPPLY, ERECTION AND COMMISSIONING OF 02 NO. V.T. PUMPS HAVING DISCHARGE CAPACITY OF 05 CS EACH ALONG-WITH ALL ALLIED ACCESSORIES AT PERMANENT PUMP HOUSE ON NARDAK DISTY. AT RD 113200/L NEAR VILLAGE JALMANA. + 3 OTHER WORKS	12.03.2026 18.03.2026	EMD 96,284	<a href="https://etenders.hry.nic.in">https://etenders.hry.nic.in</a>	9991831221 xen-wsmkrl.rr@gov.in

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION KINDLY VISIT [www.etenders.hry.nic.in](http://www.etenders.hry.nic.in) RO 43832-1-27-7

**GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM**  
**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER:: PWD BUILDING:: ASSAM:: GUWAHATI-3.**

**No. CE/TB-II(Bldg.)/50/2023/33**  
**PRESS NOTICE(RE-TENDER)**

The Chief Engineer, PWD (Building), Assam, on behalf of the Governor of Assam, invites bids from eligible contractors/firms having requisite experience in similar nature of works for the following work. Details of the bid may be seen at e-procurement portal website i.e. [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in). The Bidders must be enrolled in [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in).

Sl. No.	Name of work	Approx value of work (in Rs.)	Bid Security	Cost of Document (in Rs)	Completion period
1	Modernization of Jorhat Science Centre and Planetarium.	4,45,62,896.00	2 % for General category or 1 % for Reserved category on value of work	Rs. 20,000.00	15 (Fifteen) Months

N.B. (i) Value of work may vary according to the detail NIT.  
(ii) All terms and conditions will be as per the Bidding Documents.  
(iii) The Press Notice will be a part of the Bidding Documents.

Sd/-  
Chief Engineer, PWD (Building)  
Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3.

**DIPR/C/PIO/995/14-Mar-26**

**GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM**  
**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER (PWD BUILDING), P.W. (B&NH) DEPTT., CHANDMARI, GUWAHATI-3, ASSAM**

**No.Arch/I/1491477/2026**  
**PRESS NOTICE**

The Chief Engineer (Building), P.W. (B&NH) Deptt., Chandmari, Ghy-3, Assam, on behalf of the Governor of Assam invites Bids for Technical & Financial offer as per Request for Proposal from qualified and experienced firms (criteria as per RFP document) for providing "Project Management Consultancy Services" for the following work:

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Approx. Value of the project	Approx. PMC Value
1.	PMC services for "Development of Maa Kamakhya Temple Access Corridor at Guwahati. (Additional Works)"	Rs. 320.56 Cr	Rs. 7.56 Cr including GST

- The details/RFP document may be seen in e-procurement portal website i.e. [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in)
- The validity period of the Bid shall be 180 days from the date of submission.
- The Bidders must be registered with the E-tendering system (ETS) of the Govt. of Assam (website: <http://assamtenders.gov.in>)
- The Chief Engineer P.W.D (Building), Assam reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals without showing any reasons what so ever.

Sd/-  
Chief Engineer (Building), P.W. (B&NH) Deptt.,  
Chandmari, Guwahati-3, Assam

**DIPR/C/PIO/989/14-Mar-26**

**GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM**  
**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER: PW (HEALTH & EDUCATION) DEPARTMENT: CHANDMARI, GUWAHATI-3**

**No. Tech-I(H&E)/15/2026/5**  
**PRESS NOTICE**

The Chief Engineer (Health & Education), P.W.D. (H&E), Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3 on behalf of the Governor of Assam, invites bids from the eligible contractors having experience in similar nature of work for the following work:

Sl. No.	Name of work	Bid Value (including GST @18%)	Completion Period	Bid Security	Cost of Bid
1	Vertical Extension of Pub Kamrup College Girl's Hostel (18 Nos. of Room of 50 Bedded Capacity)	Rs. 1,07,88,193.00	8 (Eight) months	2% of Bid value for General category and 1% of Bid Value for reserved Category	Rs.2,200.00

Details of the bid may be seen at e-procurement website i.e. [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in). The bidders must be enrolled with the tendering web-portal [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in). All terms and conditions will be as per the Bidding Documents. The Press Notice will be a part of the Bidding Documents. The Bid price may vary at the time of detail tendering for which no claim will be admissible.

Chief Engineer (Health & Education),  
PW(H&E) Deptt.,  
Chandmari, Guwahati-3

**DIPR/C/PIO/990/14-March-26**



## Govt tightens monitoring of LPG, CNG and PNG supply

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Delhi Government has directed strict monitoring of LPG, CNG, and PNG supplies across the national capital and ordered daily reporting from oil and gas companies amid concerns over disruptions in the global energy supply chain. The decision was taken during a high-level meeting chaired by the Chief Secretary of Delhi at the Delhi Secretariat on March 11 to review the availability of LPG, oil, CNG, and PNG in the National Capital Territory.

The meeting was attended by senior officials from the Department of Food, Supplies, and Consumer Affairs, Delhi Police, the Revenue Department, oil marketing companies, and Indraprastha Gas Limited. Among those present were Additional Chief Secretary-cum-Commissioner (Food and Supplies) Prashant Goyal, Secretary (DIP) Vikas Anand,

and District Magistrate (New Delhi) Sunny Kumar Singh. Apart from that, senior police officials of Delhi Police, DGM of HPCL Akhilesh Jha, Vice Chairman of IGL Vikas Bansal, among many other senior officials of various energy sector enterprises, are also present in the meeting.

The Chief Secretary said that although disruptions have been reported in international energy supply chains, the Government of India is taking several steps to manage the situation. These measures include arranging alternative supplies, increasing domestic production, and reordering priorities for distribution based on public interest.

He stressed the importance of clear communication with the public to prevent rumours, panic, or misinformation regarding fuel availability. Officials were asked to regularly reassure residents about stock availability and normal replenish-



A worker arranges LPG cylinders at a gas agency, amid supply crisis in the country in New Delhi

PTI

ment of supplies after verifying the situation with oil and gas companies.

During the meeting, several decisions were taken to strengthen monitoring and ensure a smooth supply of fuel in the capital. Oil and gas marketing companies

were directed to provide daily reports on supply levels, stock availability, and replenishment schedules in a format prescribed by the Food and Supplies Department. A mobile phone communication group involving all concerned officers

and agencies will also be formed to enable faster communication and quick resolution of critical issues.

The Department of Food, Supplies, and Consumer Affairs was asked to closely monitor the situation and coordinate with all depart-

ments and agencies, including the police. Field officers will be deployed extensively to keep watch on LPG supply centres, replenishment facilities, and godowns to assist oil and gas companies in streamlining the booking and delivery process. They will also conduct surprise inspections to check hoarding, black marketing, or diversion of domestic LPG cylinders for commercial use.

The Delhi Police and the Revenue Department have been directed to maintain strict surveillance on such activities and take strong action if violations are detected. Officials were also asked to collect intelligence inputs related to hoarding or illegal trading of LPG cylinders and take preventive action where necessary.

The Food and Supplies Department will examine whether provisions for preventive detention have been properly notified and may take such action if required to

stop activities that disrupt the supply of essential commodities. Authorities will also promote PNG connections in areas where the pipeline network is already available to reduce dependence on LPG cylinders.

To counter rumours, the Food and Supplies Department will issue daily press releases on the availability of LPG, oil, CNG, and PNG in Delhi. Officials said the police, intelligence, and revenue departments will closely monitor social media and respond quickly to any misleading information that could lead to panic buying.

The meeting also decided that if any serious issue arises, it may be escalated to the Committee of Executive Directors of oil marketing companies for immediate resolution. Officials further said a plan may be prepared for rationalised use of commercial LPG in Delhi based on sector-specific needs if additional quotas are allocated by

the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

The Chief Secretary also directed that call centres, IVRS systems, electronic booking services, SMS facilities, helplines and chatbots of oil and gas companies must function smoothly without disruption.

Police and revenue department control rooms will remain operational round the clock, staffed by senior officers to ensure quick response to any situation.

Authorities were also asked to ensure adequate security and protection for oil and gas companies at their godowns, showrooms, transportation networks, and distribution systems if required.

In addition, the Delhi Power Department has been asked to take up the matter with the Ministry of Power and the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas to ensure an uninterrupted supply of gas to power plants generating electricity for the city.

## Leaves of police personnel cancelled

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Delhi Police has cancelled routine leave for its personnel with immediate effect to maintain law and order amid the LPG supply concerns triggering widespread anxiety among households and businesses. In an order issued by the Joint Commissioner of Police (Operations), all districts and units have been directed not to grant routine leave to any personnel until further orders.

The communication, dated March 12, stated that leave will be sanctioned only in genuine emergency cases and that too after due verification and approval by the competent authority.

"All DCPs are requested to ensure meticulous compliance," the order said, adding that it has the approval of the special commissioner of police (operations).

The directive comes as Delhi Police has increased vigilance across the city due to irregular LPG supplies that have led to complaints of black marketing, panic



buying and crowding outside gas agencies in some areas.

Earlier, senior police officials had directed station house officers (SHOs) to prepare lists of gas agencies in their jurisdictions and deploy police personnel near them to maintain law and order and ensure smooth distribution of LPG cylinders.

Police teams, including PCR vans, motorcycle patrol units and plain-clothes personnel, have been stationed near gas agencies to deter hoarding and prevent the illegal sale of cylinders at inflated prices. The deployment aims to ensure that cooking gas reaches consumers through

the proper distribution system and to prevent any attempt to exploit the supply crunch, according to officials.

Several households and businesses, especially restaurants, reported disruptions in regular supplies, with some switching to alternatives such as piped natural gas and induction cooking.

The Delhi Police has cautioned citizens against clicking on suspicious links or trusting calls from unknown numbers claiming to be from gas agencies, warning that cyber fraudsters may exploit the ongoing panic over LPG availability to dupe people and steal their hard-earned money.

## LPG availability issues hit street vendors

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Issues with the availability of LPG have begun to disrupt the livelihoods of street vendors across the national Capital, forcing many to shutter their stalls or borrow heavily to sustain daily operations.

The disruption has pushed several small-scale traders into financial distress. While some have suspended business, others are buying cylinders at "inflated rates" on the black market to keep their stoves burning.

Naresh Chawla, who operates a fast-food stall near PVR Saket, said a single establishment often supports several workers and their families.

"One small shop supports eight to 10 livelihoods. I employ three to four workers who have migrated from villages. Many of us have taken loans to run these stalls. If this continues, 30 per cent of street vendors will lose their means of survival," he said.

He added that the



exhaustion of savings is making it difficult for vendors to meet household responsibilities and care for elderly parents.

The disruption is visible across the city. In Adarsh Nagar, a food vendor named Vicky said he paid around Rs 4,000 for a small cylinder. To offset the cost, he increased the price of his dishes by Rs 10 but said many customers immediately walked away after hearing the new rate.

"Customers at street stalls are not wealthy. They tell me if they had more money, they would dine at restaurants," Vicky said. He further

said that after paying his staff, he lacked the funds to purchase basic ingredients like paneer, having already borrowed money for his mother's treatment. Many vendors said they are now dipping into savings or taking loans to manage daily household expenses.

In Sangam Vihar, Upendra Gupta, a tea and samosa vendor, said he managed to stay open only after buying a small LPG cylinder for around Rs 2,200 from the black market. Meanwhile, in northwest Delhi, pani puri seller Rafiq Ahmed was forced to close his stall on

Thursday afternoon.

"I simply could not arrange a cylinder," Ahmed said, expressing concern for his workers who send their earnings back to their families in rural areas. "They come from very poor backgrounds. I don't know how to face them when I am struggling to make ends meet myself."

Manoj Kumar, a chaat vendor in southeast Delhi, said the shortage has also meant long queues and uncertainty at gas agencies. "We cannot take the LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) cylinder from our homes and use it at the stall because then what will we cook for our children?" he said, adding that by the time vendors reach gas agencies, the stock is often exhausted.

The supply situation comes after a government revision of the priority order for allocating domestically produced natural gas, driven by energy supply disruptions linked to the widening West Asia conflict.

## Atal Canteens under pressure as residents turn to them for daily meals

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The footfall at Atal Canteens across the Capital has increased sharply as concerns over dwindling LPG stock have come to haunt city residents in the wake of military escalations in West Asia.

With residents rushing to Atal Canteens to avail daily meals as LPG cylinders at their homes are exhausted, the sudden dependence on these subsidised facilities has resulted in long queues outside the canteens, with food items running out on some evenings.

Abha Shekhar, a resident of Ashram, said her family has been eating at an Atal Canteen twice a day as they have not been able to arrange a gas cylinder for the past few days.

"Since Tuesday, my family has been coming here for lunch and dinner. It is close to our home, so we manage. Otherwise, I have no other option to cook food," she said. Shekhar said she works as a house help and her husband is a construction worker.

The couple have been visiting cylinder distributors every day, but they have still not been able to get a refill.

Hemant, who runs a ration shop near the Atal Canteen in Ashram, said he has also started eating at the facility in recent days to save the gas available at his home.

"I have started eating at the canteen for the past few days. Earlier, I never came here, but yesterday and even this morning I brought my family to eat here," he said.

Hemant said he had refilled his gas cylinder around 20 days ago, and it is likely to last only a few more days. Until he manages to get another cylinder, he plans to rely on the canteen, as the meals are affordable.

## Gurdwara committee writes to Government to ensure a steady LPG supply for langars

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Committee on Friday sought the petroleum minister's help in ensuring a steady supply of LPG cylinders to ensure the 'langar' (community kitchen) service continues without fail.

In a letter to Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, the DSGMC said the war in West Asia has affected the langar service across gurdwaras for want of LPG because its supply has been "stopped" by the gas agencies.

A DSGMC office-bearer said that although there is a piped natural gas supply in bigger gurdwaras, the smaller ones depend on LPG cylinders for



running the langar kitchens. The DSGMC is a statutory body established under the Delhi Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1971, that looks after the religious matters of Sikhs and the upkeep of gurdwaras in the city.

The body looks after the management of several bigger gurdwaras in the national capital, including

Sheesh Ganj Sahib, Rakabganj, and Bangla Sahib, where food is served to thousands of people every day.

The letter was signed by DSGMC president Harmeet Singh Kalka and general secretary Jagdip Singh Kahlon.

As a result of the war-fuelled LPG crisis, several restaurants and small eateries across Delhi have tem-

porarily halted operations over the past few days.

From neighbourhood cafes to roadside eateries, operators say the disruption has slowed or forced some establishments to shut temporarily, while others are trying to stretch the limited gas supplies they have left. The Delhi government on Thursday assured people that the supply of LPG, petrol, diesel, and piped natural gas in the city was normal and urged them to refrain from panic buying or hoarding.

A statement from the chief minister's office said that there was no scarcity of fuel and officials were carrying out rigorous inspections to curb black marketing and hoarding of LPG cylinders.

## ACs, laundry units among upgrades planned at Asha Kiran home

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Air-conditioners, new laundry units and improved water supply systems are among upgrades being rolled out at the Asha Kiran home in Rohini, Delhi Social Welfare Minister Ravinder Indraj Singh said during an inspection of the facility on Friday.

Singh, conducted an inspection of Asha Kiran Home for men and women at Avantika Sector in Rohini along with senior officials of the social welfare department, and reviewed the ongoing development and renovation works, and the facilities available for residents.

Spread across about 6.04



acres, the institution houses persons with intellectual disabilities and has a capacity of 570 residents.

According to an official statement, around ₹5.34 crore has been sanctioned to the Public Works Department in FY 2025-26 for upgrading buildings, infrastructure and facilities at the institution.

The works include paint-

ing and repairs in dormitories, tile work in toilets and bathrooms, steel work and coil fencing around gym and park areas, and horticulture-related improvements.

The institution is also being equipped with two new laundry machines of 60 kg capacity each and installation of air-conditioners as part of the infrastructure push.

## LG Taranjit Singh Sandhu meets President Murmu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Newly appointed Delhi Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu on Friday met President Droupadi Murmu and held a series of review meetings with senior officials to assess key issues related to security, law and order, civic administration, and public services in the national Capital.

Sandhu, who took the oath as Delhi's 23rd Lieutenant Governor on March 11, has begun consultations with senior officers across departments as part of his initial administrative review after assuming office.

During the day, the Lieutenant Governor called on the President at Rashtrapati Bhavan. In a message shared on social media platform X, Sandhu said he received guidance



and encouragement from the President during the meeting. "Honoured to call on Hon'ble President of India Droupadi Murmu and receive her guidance for the road ahead. Grateful for her encouragement," Sandhu said in the post.

During his visit to the presidential estate, Sandhu also walked through the

gardens of Rashtrapati Bhavan and interacted with visitors who had come to see the seasonal flower displays. The gardens, known as Amrit Udyan, attract a large number of visitors every year during February and March when a wide variety of flowers bloom.

Sharing photographs from the visit, the

Lieutenant Governor said he enjoyed meeting residents of the capital who had gathered there. "A lovely walk through the famed gardens of Rashtrapati Bhavan this forenoon. Nice to meet many Dilliwalas enjoying the spring blooms," he said.

Later in the day, Sandhu held a meeting with Delhi Police Commissioner Satish Golchha at Lok Niwas. During the meeting, the Lieutenant Governor reviewed the law and order situation in the national Capital and discussed the challenges related to security and policing.

Officials said the discussion also focused on strategies to deal with cyber-crime and other emerging unconventional threats that are becoming increasingly significant in urban policing. Sandhu described the

interaction as a productive discussion. "Had a good discussion with Satish Golchha, Commissioner of Police, Delhi Police, at Lok Niwas," he said in a post on X. Apart from security issues, the Lieutenant Governor also met senior officials from other departments to review civic and administrative matters in the capital. He held discussions with Sanjeev Khirwar regarding several civic challenges faced by the city.

According to officials, the meeting focused on improving waste management systems and accelerating efforts to flatten the city's large garbage mounds. The Lieutenant Governor also emphasised the need to improve transparency and efficiency in licensing and enforcement activities carried out by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi.

## IIT Delhi student found dead

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

A first-year student of the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi was found hanging from a ceiling fan inside a campus apartment on Thursday morning. The student was declared dead after being taken for medical examination, and a case has been registered as part of an investigation into the suspected suicide.

According to police, a PCR call about the incident was received at Kishangarh Police Station at around 8:35 am on March 12. After receiving information, a police team rushed to the New Vindhyaal Apartment located inside the IIT Delhi campus, where the student was found hanging from a ceiling fan with the help of a stole. An attending doctor from the IIT Delhi hospital examined the student at



the spot and declared him brought dead.

Police said the deceased was a first-year student who had been living in the apartment with his mother. Preliminary investigation revealed that the student's mother had left for her native place on March 10. She last spoke to her son on the phone at around 11 pm on March 11. When the student did not respond to calls the following morning, another resident of the apartment checked on him. With the help of security staff, the

room door was opened, and the student was found hanging inside.

Police were immediately informed, and the PCR team rushed to the location. Officials said a crime team and forensic experts from the Forensic Science Laboratory inspected the scene and collected evidence as part of the investigation. No suicide note was recovered from the room during the inspection.

Police said the student's father was informed about the incident, and his statement was recorded by investigators. According to officials, the father told the police that he had no suspicion of foul play. The body was later sent to Safdarjung Hospital mortuary for post-mortem examination. After completion of the legal formalities, the body was handed over to the family.



### IN FOCUS

# UP to set new benchmarks in education: Rajnath

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Lucknow

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday said that Uttar Pradesh will set new benchmarks in the field of education in the years to come, as the State's focus is to create an ecosystem where children can develop and flourish within a positive learning environment.

Speaking at the inauguration of the main building at the City Montessori School Golf City campus in Lucknow, Singh said, "Educational institutions here will emerge as centres of attraction not only for students within the State, but also for students across the entire nation."

He said the focus within the State is not merely on opening schools and colleges. Rather, an endeavour is underway to create an ecosystem wherein children can develop and flourish within a positive learning environment, alongside their academic studies.

"I am confident that, thanks to such concerted efforts, Uttar Pradesh will set new benchmarks in the

field of education in the years to come," Singh added.

The Lucknow MP said that Uttar Pradesh is moving ahead with a comprehensive vision. "Over the past few years, we have all witnessed the state making significant strides across all sectors. In the realms of infrastructure, investment, industry, and education, Uttar Pradesh has gained a new momentum," Singh said.

He also said that when the identity of a city extends beyond its streets and buildings and is defined by its educational and cultural institutions, that city is truly shaping the future of society.

Citing Savitribai Phule and Jyotiba Phule, he said that these visionaries extended education to the marginalised sections of society; that is, to those situated at the very lowest rung of the social ladder.

"They demonstrated that education is the most effective instrument for fostering equality and awareness within society," he said.

The minister said, "India, true to its very name, has always remained engaged in



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh

the pursuit of knowledge. If you look at its history, from ancient times right up to the present day, India has remained steadfastly dedicated to this quest for knowledge. Within India's knowledge traditions, education was never regarded merely as a means to acquire information; rather, it was considered a vital medium for character formation, he said.

He added that when great universities such as Takshashila, Nalanda, and Vikramshila flourished, students would travel from distant corners of the world

to India to study at these esteemed educational institutions. "You have likely heard the names of Fa-Hien and Hiuen Tsang. These individuals, too, came to India. They undertook this journey because, in this land, education encompasses not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the inculcation of 'jeevan Mulya' (life values). That is precisely why they came to India.

And in that era, India was perceived by the world not merely as a geographical unit, but was renowned as a global epicentre of knowl-

edge and culture," Singh said. Singh, on this occasion, also said that Dr MS Swaminathan played a pivotal role in making the nation self-reliant in the realm of food grains through the application of agricultural science. Dr Verghese Kurien, through White Revolution, propelled India to one of the world's largest milk-producing nations.

"The example of Dr Jagadish Chandra Bose stands before us. In his early days, he did not have access to highly modern, magnificent, or sophisticated laboratories. Yet, the inquisitiveness, the curiosity, and the spirit of discovery within him have today immortalised him in the world of science," Singh said.

"A common thread runs through all these examples: First, they acquired knowledge, and subsequently, they dedicated that very knowledge to the welfare of society. "This constitutes the true objective of education, that an individual utilises his knowledge not merely for personal gain, but also for the advancement of society. It is

this very ethos of education that naturally fosters a sense of curiosity and inquiry among children. It develops their thoughts, and also inspires them to move ahead," he said. Giving a new definition of school, he said that a school is not merely a place for imparting knowledge; it is also a laboratory for character building.

"It is a place where not only mathematics, science, or languages are taught, but where the values of life are also instilled," he said, and added that along with the education of our children, attention has also to be given to character building.

The true objective of education is for an individual to utilise their knowledge not solely for their own benefit, but also for the progress of society, he said.

"Children certainly pursue their studies at school, but their personality is shaped at home.

The school provides them with knowledge, discipline, and exposure, whereas the home gives them the experience of life, sensitivity, and moral values," Singh said.



Mustard flowers bloom in a field in Tral area of Pulwama district in Jammu and Kashmir PTI

## Mamata sets up development boards for five communities ahead of polls



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
Kolkata

Ahead of the West Bengal Assembly election, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday said her Government would soon constitute five new cultural and development boards for specific communities, a move aimed at consolidating support among key social groups, particularly in the politically sensitive western districts of the State.

Banerjee said the proposed boards would be formed for the Munda (ST), Kora (ST), Dom (SC), Kumbhakar (OBC) and Sadgope (OBC) communities.

"I am pleased to announce that our Government intends to constitute soon five new Cultural and Development Boards for the Munda (ST), Kora (ST), Dom (SC), Kumbhakar (OBC) and Sadgope (OBC) communities," the chief minister said in a social media post.

## Delhi to be cultural capital of country: Kapil Mishra

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

Delhi Art, Culture & Languages Minister Kapil Mishra on Friday said restoring the pride of national Capital's original culture is a priority for the Government. "Folk culture and devotional events in Delhi are now being organised with full grandeur. Delhi is steadily moving towards becoming the cultural capital of the country," Mishra said, inaugurating the three-day event 'Bhakti Sangeet' organised by Sahitya Kala Parishad.

The celebration of faith and expression began on Friday evening at Central Park, Connaught Place, with a devotional musical performance by renowned singer Anuradha Paudwal.

Mishra said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi envi-



Culture & Languages Minister Kapil Mishra

sions making Delhi a major centre for live events and cultural programmes. In this direction, under the leadership of Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and with the support and blessings of the people of Delhi, the city's cultural landscape has witnessed a significant transformation over the past year.

The Delhi Government is continuously working to give a new identity to the capital's art, culture and spiritual traditions, he added.

The Cabinet Minister further stated that recently, Bhajan Clubbing programmes were organised in various colleges of Delhi University, which received

an excellent response from the youth. A grand devotional programme dedicated to Lord Somnath is also planned to be organised soon at Connaught Place, he mentioned. Mishra also highlighted that several grand religious and cultural programmes have been organised in Delhi.

Earlier, around 170 Kanwar camps used to be set up, but this time, after the Government announced direct assistance, nearly 400 Kanwar camps were established, providing great convenience to devotees.

He also mentioned that the Teej Mahotsav was organised on a large scale this year, with nearly 50,000 women participating. Similarly, the historic celebration of Chhath Puja in Delhi was widely appreciated across the country and abroad.

## Nehru would have made Kanshi Ram CM if he were alive: Rahul

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
Lucknow

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday said that had Jawaharlal Nehru been alive, then Kanshi Ram would have been made a chief minister from the Congress.

Nehru, India's first prime minister, died in 1964, while Kanshi Ram broke out onto the political scene with his founding of backwards-championing BAMCEF in 1978, and later bolstered his position with the formation of the Bahujan Samaj Party in 1984.

In his tribute to the Dalit icon, Gandhi said Mahatma Gandhi, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, and Kanshi Ram never compromised on their principles.



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi

He was speaking at the Samvidhan Sammelan held in Lucknow ahead of the birth anniversary of Kanshi Ram.

"The path on which we were moving, we should have moved at a faster pace. There have been shortcomings on the part of the Congress party," the leader

of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said. He said that had the Congress done its job, Kanshi Ram "would not have been successful."

He added, "If Jawaharlal Nehru were alive, then Kanshi Ram would have been a chief minister from the Congress."

Gandhi said that in politics, there are two types of people — one of them wants progress for all, while the other seeks only personal enrichment.

"Gandhiji (Mahatma) went to jail for 10-15 years, but he did not compromise. Babasaheb Ambedkar gave his life, but did not compromise. Did Kanshi Ram ji compromise? The question does not arise. He could not have done it," Gandhi said.

## Odisha Congress moves 8 MLAs to Karnataka amid fears of cross-voting in Rajya Sabha polls

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
Bhubaneswar/ Bengaluru

The Opposition Congress in Odisha has moved eight of its MLAs to Karnataka amid apprehensions of cross-voting in the March 16 Rajya Sabha elections, party leaders said on Friday.

The State's main Opposition BJD, on the other hand, has asked all its legislators to attend "priority" meetings at the residence of



party chief Naveen Patnaik every evening from Friday to Sunday, according to a statement.

The Congress had summoned all its 14 MLAs to the

State Capital Bhubaneswar on Thursday night, and then moved eight of them, including Chief Whip CS Raazen Ekka, to a resort on the outskirts of Bengaluru, the leaders said.

Congress legislature party leader Rama Chandra Kadam said, "Yes, eight of our MLAs have gone to Bengaluru so that they can be shielded from horse-trading attempts by the BJP. Our MLAs will remain united."

## Cong MLAs moved to Himachal before RS polls in Haryana

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
Chandigarh

In an attempt to keep its flock together, Congress on Friday moved its Haryana MLAs to Himachal Pradesh ahead of the polling for two Rajya Sabha seats in Haryana on March 16, according to sources.

BJP's Sanjay Bhatia, Congress' Karamvir Singh Sapra, and BJP-backed Independent candidate Satish Nandal are in the fray for the polls. The party legis-



lators left from here late afternoon.

Congress with 37 members in the Assembly has the required strength to

help its candidate win a seat. The prospects, however, could be in jeopardy in case of cross-voting. While Congress leaders and

MLAs who attended a legislature party meeting here did not disclose the destination they were headed to, sources said that they have been moved to Himachal Pradesh, a neighbouring State ruled by the party. The MLAs will return shortly before the voting, they said.

The Congress MLAs assembled at the residence of CLP leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda, where the meeting was held, and later on most legislators left in two tempo travellers.

### FROM PAGE - 1

## SC: PIL on menstrual leave policy dismissed

Senior advocate MR Shamsad, appearing for the petitioner, said the Karnataka Government has formulated a policy to allow menstrual leave and some private organisations are also providing this facility. During the hearing, the bench highlighted the risk of "unintended consequences", suggesting that a mandatory leave policy might discourage private employers from hiring women. "The moment you introduce it as a compulsory condition in law, you do not know the damage it will do to the career of women," CJJ Kant remarked.

"Nobody will give them responsibilities... This can be harmful to their growth," the bench added. Justice Bagchi echoed these concerns from a business perspective, noting that affirmative action is constitutionally recognised but must be balanced against market realities.

The bench was hearing a PIL filed by Shailendra Mani Tripathi. It was the third petition filed by Tripathi on the same issue.

## Delhi engages Tehran to secure shipping lanes

"Referring to the importance of the role and position of BRICS as a forum for developing multilateral cooperation, he considered it essential for this institution to play a constructive role at the current juncture to support stability and security in the region and the world," the readout read.

On Thursday evening, PM Narendra Modi also spoke to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and underlined India's commitment to peace and dialogue. This was the first direct contact between the two leaders since the Iran conflict began last month.

Prime Minister Modi has spoken to leaders of several West Asian countries in the last 10 days

in the wake of the ongoing conflict. Earlier, India highlighted a high-level diplomatic effort to protect its interests, stressing the twin priorities of citizen safety and the stability of energy supply chains.

## Govt sets ₹1 lakh crore safety net

She said that when the world is facing a crisis, it is necessary for all political parties to rise above party lines and support the Government in dealing with the challenges coming from abroad. "We must come together for the benefit of the country and speak in a way that gives hope and confidence to the people... It is unfortunate that some in the Opposition believe that their only role is to come into the Well of the House and shout slogans," Sitharaman said.

Sitharaman said the Government has strengthened its macroeconomic framework, which has helped India to absorb the economic shocks various. She also said that the additional expenditure will not impact the fiscal deficit for the financial year 2025-26.

Rejecting the opposition charge that bringing supplementary demands for grants shows "poor budgeting" by the Government, Sitharaman said the argument is based on "flawed logic" and asked whether the Government should not have brought the Economic Stabilization Fund in times of unforeseen challenges. "Does the Opposition want the Government not to make any provision for a developing emergency situation?" the Minister asked.

## Speculations grow on health of Iran's Mojtaba...

Responding to questions about targeting Khamenei and Hezbollah leader Naem Qassem, Netanyahu said, "I wouldn't take out a life insurance policy on any of the leaders of the terror

organisations." He highlighted that the strikes, part of campaigns codenamed Roaring Lion (Israel) and Epic Fury (US), aim to foil Iran's nuclear ambitions, dismantle its missile programme, and weaken regional proxies, while leaving regime change to the Iranian people.

Netanyahu said Israel is actively targeting Revolutionary Guards and Basij forces, reshaping the Middle East and Iran's military landscape. On diplomacy, he praised his alliance with US President Donald Trump and hinted at new regional partnerships, describing them as breakthroughs that would have seemed unimaginable weeks ago.

Mojtaba Khamenei's statement and the ongoing strikes signal continuity in Iran's confrontational policy, while his health and public absence continue to draw speculation from both regional and international observers.

## First-ever CEC removal notice filed

TMC MP Derek O'Brien said members of the opposition are using "every constitutional tool available to protect the sanctity of India's glorious institutions". "However, if the notice is not taken up by the Union Government, doubts will be raised about a tacit understanding between the executive and the CEC," he said.

## West Asia crisis pushes Indian kitchens to panic...

Managers say the city's dining ecosystem has effectively split into three groups: establishments connected to Piped Natural Gas (PNG) net-

works that remain unaffected, restaurants confident of regular commercial LPG supply, and smaller eateries that rely entirely on cylinder deliveries and are already feeling the strain.

At Diggin Cafe in Connaught Place, manager Rakesh said the delay in new cylinders has made operations uncertain.

"There is a lot of difficulty. We may have to shut down," he said, adding that the kitchen was close to exhausting its fuel stock. Large multinational chains appear even more confident about managing supply. At KFC in Connaught Place, a manager said fuel supply is handled centrally by the company. "One cylinder lasts around four days. The company manages the entire fuel supply system. If there is any major issue, they might temporarily shut outlets for a few days. But so far we have not faced any problem," he said.

In South Delhi, the shortage has already forced one temporary closure. Gagandeep Singh Sapra, owner of the North Indian restaurant Tadka Rani, said he had to shut his kitchen after running out of LPG. Posting on social media, he said black-market prices had surged to over ₹5,000 per cylinder. "It hurts to close the kitchen and select the option 'Closed due to LPG shortage'," he wrote.

However, many established restaurants say operations remain stable. Managers at long-standing eateries in Connaught Place said regular commercial cylinder supplies were continuing, though they were monitoring the situation closely.

The most secure businesses are those connected to piped natural gas networks. Restaurants in areas such as Khan Market said the PNG system has shielded them from the current disruption.

For now, Delhi's dining scene continues to function - but unevenly. While kitchens with piped gas remain insulated, smaller establishments dependent on cylinder deliveries are beginning to feel the pressure of a supply chain strained by global tensions and rising domestic demand.

## conflict in West Asia claims two Indian lives

Earlier, three Indian sailors were killed in attacks on merchant vessels and tankers and one remains missing.

Mahajan also said 15 Indian crew members of the US-owned oil tanker Safesea Vishnu, attacked near Basra on Wednesday, were evacuated to a hotel. One Indian crew member was killed in the attack. About 150,000 Indians have returned from West Asia since February 28.

## PM Modi urges voters to punish Congress in...

PM Modi said that Kokrajhar was betrayed by the Congress for decades. "The Congress signed peace accords just for show and for selfish interests, but the BJP worked for permanent peace, and ensured the development of Bodoland," he said. "The people have suffered and lost a lot over the years...we have seen those difficult days, but now the beats of the 'kham' (drum) and 'siphonoo' (flutes) are heard," he said. Only when the people removed the Congress from both the state and the Centre, "we were able to begin the region's development honestly and sincerely", Modi said.

"In today's programme itself, projects worth more than Rs 4,750 crore have been launched with over Rs 1100 crore to be spent on the development of road infrastructure in Bodoland, which will further strengthen road connectivity in the State," he said. Trains have also been flagged off, which will not only be convenient for the people but also promote trade and tourism, the PM said, adding that a railway workshop will be set up here and help the region to be a major logistics hub. Work on railway connectivity with Bhutan is also progressing along with the modernisation of several stations, he said.

## Opposition protest, question PM's absence from House

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Opposition MPs on Friday held a protest in the Parliament Complex over the LPG crisis issue, and raised slogans demanding answers from Petroleum Minister Hardeep Puri and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

TMC MPs started the protest around 10.30 am on Friday outside the Parliament building, holding posters, chanting "LPG crisis", and raising slogans attacking the ruling BJP, questioning "where did the gas cylinders go?" They were joined by MPs from Congress and other INDIA bloc parties.

Opposition MPs also raised slogans accusing Prime Minister Modi of "vanishing" along with the gas cylinders, and accused him of "surrendering."

"There's an acute crisis of LPG in the country. People are panicking. You can see



Congress MPs Amrinder Singh Raja Warring, Hibi Eden, Manickam Tagore, Prashant Padole and others staging a protest over LPG crisis during the second part of Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi PTI

that even in Bengal, because systems are crashing at the main distributors, they're resorting to manual bookings," TMC MP Mahua Moitra said.

"You have families, old people, young parents standing in queue waiting to book their cylinders, and the Government is putting out this information that you can get your cylinders in two and a half days... We challenge the prime minister,

challenge ministers to go and find out where people are getting their cylinders within two and a half days on booking," she said.

She said the petroleum minister "lied to the country" and said that India has 75 days' worth of supplies.

"Now they've invoked the Essential Commodities Act and said that there are barely 25 days. All we get are lies. And where is the prime minister? The prime minister

has not come to the house for the last five days," she said. "While this acute crisis is going on, he's electioneering in Kerala; he's become an election machine, not a prime minister. It's really a shame," Moitra added.

Some opposition MPs held large cut-outs of gas cylinders and slogans. Chants of "Modi Ji-LPG" echoed as the INDIA bloc MPs attempted to corner the Government in unison.

The opposition has been demanding a full-fledged discussion on the West Asia situation and its impact on India. On Wednesday, Prime Minister Modi appealed to the people not to panic and assured them that public interest will be protected. He expressed confidence in tackling the LPG crisis, where the disruption in the supply of commercial LPG has crippled the country's hotel sector.

## CPI(M) urges PM to tackle cooking gas crisis

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) has raised a red flag over the escalating cooking gas crisis in the country, attributing the "grave situation" to the Government's failure to shield energy supply chains from the ongoing US-Israel war on Iran.

In a letter addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday, CPI(M) General Secretary MA Baby expressed deep anguish over the "debilitating impact" of the conflict on Indian households. He noted that despite official claims, the scarcity of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) has forced citizens into long queues, while black-marketeers are selling domestic cylinders for as much as ₹4,000.

"The Government appears to have failed to ensure adequate gas reserves that could protect the country's interests from external shocks caused by the US-Israel war," the letter stated. The scarcity has triggered a ripple effect across various sectors. The party highlighted that student hostels are reducing food menus or shutting down entirely, forcing students to return home. Furthermore, the crisis has hit restaurants and office canteens, leading to job losses for food delivery gig workers.

The CPI(M) also pointed out the soaring costs of alternatives, with firewood prices increasing five-fold and induction stoves



CPI(M) General Secretary MA Baby

becoming costlier. Even gas-based crematoriums have reportedly ceased operations in several areas.

Drawing a parallel to 2003, when the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA Government passed a unanimous resolution deploring the US attack on Iraq, the CPI(M) urged the Prime Minister to move a similar resolution in the current Parliament session.

The party's key demands include strict action against hoarders and black-marketeers, the guaranteed uninterrupted supply of LPG to student hostels and small restaurants, and the implementation of price regulations for edible oils alongside compensation for displaced gig workers.

Furthermore, the CPI(M) has called for a firm diplomatic stance condemning the "US-Israel aggression" to safeguard national energy security, with the letter concluding by urging the Centre to call upon both nations to end the war immediately to restore global supply chains.

## Nation Focus



### PROJECT GIB CAPTIVE BREEDING PROGRAMME ENTERS 4TH YEAR

Project Great Indian Bustard (GIB) has entered the fourth year of its captive breeding programme with the hatching of two new chicks at the Conservation Breeding Centre in Rajasthan this week, taking the tally of birds in captivity to 70, Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav said on Friday. The minister said one of the two chicks hatched through natural mating and the other through artificial insemination. "Project Great Indian Bustard entered into the fourth year of its captive breeding with two new chicks hatched at the Conservation Breeding Centre of Rajasthan this week, one from natural mating and the other from artificial insemination, taking the tally of birds in captivity to 70," Yadav said in a social media post.



### KERALA'S CONNECTIVITY: ASHWINI SAYS 3 PROPOSALS UNDERWAY

As many as three proposals for developing long-pending rail connectivity from north to south Kerala are currently under consideration, from which the best and most cost-effective option for the state will be chosen, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said in the Rajya Sabha. Vaishnaw, while responding to CPI(M) member John Brittas on his demand for the status of a Detailed Project Report on the north-south rail connectivity, said the first option is the State Government's K-Rail project (Thiruvananthapuram to Kasaragod), which has been proposed on an embankment.

## Centre approves ₹1,912.99 crore relief for J&K

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Centre has approved ₹1,912.99 crore in additional financial assistance to five states and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir affected by floods, flash floods, cloudbursts, landslides and cyclone 'Montha' in 2025, an official statement said on Friday. The decision was taken by a high-level committee (HLC) chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, it said.

According to the statement, the five states are Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, and Nagaland.

"Of the total amount, ₹341.48 crore has been approved for Andhra Pradesh, ₹15.70 crore for Chhattisgarh, ₹778.67 crore for Gujarat, ₹288.39 crore for Himachal Pradesh, ₹158.41 crore for Nagaland and ₹330.34 crore for Jammu and Kashmir," it said. This assistance is over and above the funds already released to states under the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF), it said.

During the Financial Year 2025-26, the Centre has released ₹20,735 crore to 28 states under the SDRF and ₹3,628.18 crore to 21 States under the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), it said.

In addition, ₹5,373.20 crore has been released to 23 states from the State Disaster Mitigation Fund (SDMF), while ₹1,189.56 crore has been provided to 21 states under the National Disaster Mitigation Fund (NDMF), it said.

"Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Government of India is standing shoulder to shoulder with the State Governments during natural calamities and disasters and providing all necessary support," it said.

## India, US engaged in talks on bilateral trade pact, says Commerce ministry

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

India and the US remain engaged in discussions for a mutually beneficial bilateral trade agreement, the commerce ministry said on Friday.

Chief negotiators of the two countries were scheduled to meet last month in Washington to finalise the legal text for the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement, but it was agreed to be postponed following a decision of the US Supreme Court striking down sweeping tariffs of the American administration.

The ministry has denied reports about a hold off on bilateral engagement. "We have noted a media report regarding ongoing trade talks with the US. It is denied that there is any hold off in bilateral engagement. It is reiterated that the two sides remain engaged for a mutually beneficial trade agreement," the commerce ministry said in a statement.

The remarks came after the United States Trade Representative (USTR) on March 11 launched a fresh round of Section 301 trade investigations targeting policies and industrial practices of 16 economies, including India and China. Following the US Supreme Court's ruling, President Donald Trump announced 10 per cent tariffs on all countries for 150 days from February 24. And now the US has announced these investigations.

An official clarified that at no point in time have the two sides ever stated that the trade talks have stopped or "we are not doing an agreement".

Some countries, such as Bangladesh, Malaysia, and



Cambodia, have signed trade deals with America, but some others have only finalised and not inked the legal text. India and the US have finalised the contours of the first phase of the trade pact. "Every country is watching how the overall scenario of tariffs is in the US. The chief negotiators of India and the US have spoken at least 4-5 times since this (West Asia) crisis, and virtual sessions are also happening."

"There is no breakdown of talks. We are discussing. We are trying to see that we keep the agreement ready, but signing of the agreement will only happen at an opportune time, because this agreement, as you all are aware, is based on comparative advantage, preferential access to the US market," the official added.

The US tariffs are not going away; they will be calibrated and placed at a level where India is going to get a comparative advantage vis-a-vis its competitors in the US market, another official said.

Before the US Supreme Court ruling, the Trump administration had announced in a joint statement to reduce tariffs on India to 18 per cent from 50 per cent. The tariffs at that

time on India were among the lowest compared to its competitor nations, such as China, Thailand, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

"So, since their side of the deal is not clear, there cannot be any signing ceremony right now. But the deal is there, and the design structure and the position of the deal are there," the official said.

The US had announced that it would reinstate the tariffs, which were set aside by the court. Initiation of Section 301 investigations by the US against 16 economies is a step in that direction.

"So, their intent is very clear. Now, what actions follow we have to see and based on that, we will have to take the next steps," the official added.

At present, there are no reciprocal tariffs. The 10 per cent levies are for all countries for 150 days.

"The basket of goods and services that India supplies to the US...we are in a good zone," the official added.

During the April-January period of this fiscal year, the country's exports to the US increased 5.85 per cent to \$72.46 billion, while imports rose 13.87 per cent to \$43.92 billion.

## BJP BLAMES OPPOSITION FOR PANIC OVER LPG SHORTAGE REPORTS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

Refuting claims of LPG cylinder shortages, the BJP said the Congress and the Trinamool Congress (TMC) are trying to create "inconvenience" for consumers, adding that such reports were emerging only from States ruled by these parties.

BJP IT department head Amit Malviya said Karnataka was the first state from where reports of LPG shortages surfaced, followed by West Bengal, while alleging that Samajwadi Party leaders in Uttar Pradesh were found hoarding LPG cylinders.

"Karnataka was incidentally the first state from where reports of LPG shortages began to surface. Soon after, similar news emerged from West Bengal. Media reports now suggest that Samajwadi Party leaders in Uttar Pradesh are hoarding gas cylinders," Malviya said in a post on X.

BJP national spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari also criticised the Congress, the TMC and the Samajwadi Party, alleging they were "working against India's interest".

## Prices Soar to ₹1,500-₹2,800 per cylinder in black market

RAJESH KUMAR  
New Delhi

The ongoing Iran conflict has severely impacted LPG supplies in India, with consumers forced to shell out exorbitant money ranging from ₹1,500 to ₹2,800 per cylinder in the black market. Besides, a majority of consumers are facing difficulties in accessing LPG cylinders for the past one week.

Moreover, LPG dealers have outlined supply/disruption delay, according to a survey. This comes even as the centre has repeatedly assured that there is no shortage of LPG or fuel and there is no need to panic. The survey report reveals that 53 per cent of household consumers were told by dealers about supply disruptions or delays in the past week. In fact, 57 per cent reported experiencing cylinder delays and black marketing over the same period.

The survey conducted by LocalCircles found that the impact is that 36 per cent consumers surveyed who are experiencing LPG black marketing in their area say suppliers/middlemen are charging ₹100-₹500 extra per cylinder, but 9 per cent of them are also paying over ₹500. Cases have emerged in Delhi-NCR where some gas agencies are charging as much as ₹1,500-₹2,800 per cylinder," according to the survey.



An LPG cylinder in India costs between ₹900 and ₹1,000, whereas a commercial gas cylinder costs between ₹1,800 and ₹2,200, according to data from OMCs. As a result, many Indian households are scrambling to find alternative cooking options, relying on appliances such as induction cooktops. Meanwhile, restaurants have warned that disruptions in gas supply could force them to reduce menu options, raise prices, or even temporarily shut operations.

Fears of shortages have triggered panic booking and long queues at LPG distribution agencies across several cities, the report says. Many households have attempted to secure replacement or additional cylinders even as private distributors increased prices. The Government has directed Oil Marketing

Companies (OMCs) to prioritise LPG supply for domestic consumers and asked state authorities to closely monitor the situation to prevent hoarding and profiteering. The survey received over 57,000 responses from household consumers located in 309 districts of India. 61 per cent respondents were men while 39 per cent respondents were women. 40 per cent respondents were from tier 1, 27 per cent from tier 2 and 33 per cent respondents were from tier 3, 4 & 5 districts.

In view of many consumers lining up in front of LPG suppliers to get replacement cylinders or striving to book extra cylinders, the survey asked household consumers, "Have LPG dealers in your area mentioned supply disruption/delay issues in the last 1 week?" Out of 19,307 who responded to the question 43 per cent indicated that "no such issue (has been) mentioned" by their dealers; 32 per cent of respondents indicated that the "dealer said supply may be delayed"; 21 per cent of respondents indicated that their "dealer said supply shortage currently exists" and 4 per cent of respondents did not give a clear answer. To sum up, 53 per cent of household consumers surveyed say LPG dealers have mentioned supply disruption/delay to them in the last one week.

## Opposition urges Govt, Speaker to revoke suspension of eight MPs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Opposition has urged the Government and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to revoke the suspension of seven Congress members and one CPI-M MP who were suspended during the first part of the Budget session for "unruly behaviour".

Congress general secretary KC Venugopal, SP's Dharmendra Yadav, NCP (SP)'s Supriya Sule, DMK's Kanimozhi and TMC's Shatabdi Roy met Parliamentary Affairs minister Kiren Rijiju on Thursday and called for revoking the suspension of the eight opposition MPs, Congress sources said. According to sources, Rijiju assured them that he would take up the matter with the Speaker.

During a meeting of the Business Advisory Committee on Friday, Congress' chief whip, K Suresh, again raised the issue with the Speaker and Rijiju, the sources said. The issue of suspended MPs remains the only sticking point between the opposition and the Government, sources said, adding that the Government is also likely to agree to a discussion on the West Asia conflict and its impact on India's energy security under Rule



193. In an escalation of the tussle between the Government and the Opposition, seven Congress members and one CPI-M MP were suspended from the Lok Sabha on February 3 for "unruly behaviour" after they tore papers and threw them at the Chair.

Their suspension from the House for the remaining part of the Budget Session that concludes on April 2 had intensified the face-off with the Government over various issues. The suspended members are Gurjeet Singh Aujla, Hibi Eden, C Kiran Kumar Reddy, Amarinder Singh Raja Warring, Manickam Tagore, Prashant Padole and Dean Kuriaokose (all Congress) and S Ventakesan (CPI-M).

## Online crimes against women rising in digital ecosystem: Govind Mohan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan on Friday said online crimes against women and children are rising in an increasingly digital ecosystem and asked States and other stakeholders to step up efforts for a stronger and more coordinated response to tackle the issue, an official statement said.

He made the remarks while inaugurating the 'National Dialogue on Online Crimes Against Women and Children (OCWC)' here. The event was organised by the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

"The Union Home Secretary highlighted the growing challenges posed by online crimes in an increasingly digital ecosystem and emphasised the



Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan

need for strengthening institutional capacities at the State and Union Territory-level to combat such offences effectively," the statement said.

Mohan said States and Union Territories must develop robust, specialised units and coordinated response mechanisms to ensure timely investigation,

the Information Technology Act and relevant rules, and called upon all stakeholders to work collectively towards ensuring a safe and secure digital ecosystem for women and children.

The inauguration also marked the launch of the 'Master Trainers Induction Programme for States and Union Territories on Online Crimes Against Women and Children', aimed at creating a national pool of trained officers who will lead capacity-building initiatives in their respective regions.

According to the statement, the programme seeks to equip selected officers with specialised knowledge, investigative techniques and best practices to tackle emerging cyber threats targeting women and children.

These officers will further train law enforcement personnel at the state and district levels, strengthening the

country's response framework to such crimes.

The dialogue saw participation from senior officials of state and UT law enforcement agencies, representatives of various ministries and departments of the Government of India, social media intermediaries, internet service providers, academia, civil society organisations, legal experts and student representatives.

During the event, discussions focused on emerging trends and patterns in online crimes against women and children, strengthening investigative frameworks and digital forensics capabilities, improving victim support and reporting mechanisms, enhancing coordination with digital platforms for timely removal of harmful content, and promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration for prevention and awareness.



## States Focus

# Farooq Abdullah attends Iftar after court recalls arrest warrant

MOHIT KANHDARI ■ Jammu

Within hours after earning a reprieve from the Court of the Chief Judicial Magistrate Srinagar, National Conference President Dr Farooq Abdullah, Thursday evening, attended an Iftar party hosted by one of the Cabinet colleagues of Omar Abdullah in Jammu.

At the Iftar, Dr Abdullah mingled with the prominent citizens and came across hale and hearty.

Before Dr Abdullah stepped out of his fortified residence in the Bhatindi area on the outskirts, where security was further beefed up after a failed assassination bid on him on Wednesday night, the Court of the Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) had recalled a non-bailable warrant (NBW) issued earlier in the day against him in the Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA) scam case.

Upon learning of the CJM Court's rejection of the exemption application, counsel for Dr Abdullah submitted a new application setting out the specific reasons preventing Abdullah from appearing in court.

It was submitted in the fresh application that there was an assassination bid on Abdullah's life on Wednesday night during a marriage reception in the Greater Kailash area.

The application read that the bid has impacted Abdullah physically and psy-



chologically, including fluctuating blood pressure and cardiac distress.

"The Applicant has been placed under strict clinical observation and Restricted Security Protocol. His medical consultants have strictly prohibited any travel, particularly air or road travel between Jammu and Srinagar, as the same would pose a grave risk to his life and health."

It also said that Abdullah is a senior citizen, aged 88 years and is suffering from multiple age-related ailments and is currently under a high-risk medical category.

However, before the court proceedings took place, Dr Abdullah was seen addressing a press conference in the

sprawling lawns of his private residence in Jammu. He also met a large gathering of party leaders and prominent citizens who called on him to learn about his well-being after he escaped unhurt during the firing incident.

While issuing a Non-bailable warrant against him, the CJM Court had first rejected the exemption application filed on behalf of Abdullah, noting that his counsel stated that the accused could neither appear physically nor through virtual mode.

On Friday, the National Conference president returned to Srinagar and visited the Hazratbal shrine to offer Jum'at-ul-Vida

prayers. Interacting with the media Dr Abdullah wished a swift end to the war in West Asia, ascribing the shortage of fuel in Indian markets to the conflict that has led to the closing of the Strait of Hormuz, a key oil route.

"The shortage of fuel and gas is due to a war that is going on. Let's hope and pray that this war ends soon," Abdullah told reporters at Hazratbal shrine here.

Abdullah said some forces were trying to destroy Islam. "May Allah destroy them (who want to destroy Islam)," he said.

The party president urged the people to stay united. "We can move forward only when we are together."



## MODI CONGRATULATES CHILE'S NEW PRESIDENT JOSE ANTONIO

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday congratulated Jose Antonio Kast Rist on assuming the office of President of Chile and said he was looking forward to working closely with him to further strengthen bilateral ties. Far-right leader Kast was sworn-in on Wednesday as Chile's new president, marking the Latin American nation's most pronounced shift to the right since the return of democracy in 1990. "Warm congratulations to Jose Antonio Kast Rist on assuming the office of the President of Chile. I look forward to working closely with him," Modi said in a social media post.



## NEW NDA GOVT TO WORK UNDER NITISH'S GUIDANCE: SAMRAT

Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary on Friday asserted that the new NDA Government in the State will continue to function under the guidance of Nitish Kumar, who is slated to relinquish the chief minister's post after being elected to the Rajya Sabha. Choudhary, a senior BJP leader, made the remarks in Saharsa district while accompanying Kumar during the 'Samridhi Yatra'. Showering praise on the State's longest-serving chief minister, Choudhary said, "Bihar owes a lot to Nitish Kumar, who took charge shortly after the creation of Jharkhand, which had deprived the state of more than 80 per cent of its revenue."

# New governor of Nagaland sworn in



Chief Justice of the Gauhati High Court Justice Ashutosh Kumar administers the oath of office to Nand Kishore Yadav as the Governor of Nagaland at Lok Bhavan in Kohima

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kohima

Nand Kishore Yadav was sworn in as the new governor of Nagaland at a programme in Lok Bhavan on Friday. The oath of office was administered by Justice Ashutosh Kumar of the Gauhati High Court in the presence of Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio and Assembly Speaker Sharingain Longkumer.

Yadav was appointed as the 23rd governor of the state on March 5.

He succeeded Ajay Kumar Bhalla, who had been holding the additional charge as governor of Nagaland and continues to serve as the governor of Manipur.

The ceremony was also attended by state ministers, MLAs, representatives of tribal organisations, senior bureaucrats, and officers from the police and

security forces. Following the swearing-in ceremony, the Governor interacted with the CM and members of the state cabinet.

In his address to the people of the state on assuming office, Yadav said Nagaland occupies a special place in the rich and diverse fabric of India.

"The state is known for its vibrant cultural heritage, strong community values, and the warmth and resilience of its people."

The traditions and spirit of the Naga people are a source of pride not only for the state but for the entire nation," he said.

Asserting that India is undergoing a period of remarkable transformation, Yadav said the Northeastern region has witnessed renewed focus and investment in recent years, particularly in connectivity, infrastructure and economic development.

# Stalin urges PM to release pending Jal Jeevan Mission dues to TN

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Chennai



Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Friday sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi's intervention to release ₹3,112 crore in pending dues to ensure completion of the ongoing Jal Jeevan Mission schemes in the state.

In a letter to Modi, Stalin pointed out that the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti, recently indicated that central assistance cannot be extended to the Hogenekkal Phase-III Combined Water Supply Scheme. This comes despite the project receiving approval in June 2023.

"The scheme was approved in the State Level

Scheme Sanctioning Committee of the Ministry of Jal Shakti on June 15, 2023, at a cost of ₹8,428 crore, including the Central Government's Jal Jeevan Mission share of ₹2,283 crore," he said.

Highlighting the State's significant strides under the Jal Jeevan Mission, Stalin said 1.12 crore homes now

have functional household tap connections, which is 90 per cent of the total 1.25 crore rural households.

"In the first phase of Jal Jeevan Mission, the State took up 45 new Multi Village Schemes, 56 Retrofitting Combined Water Supply Scheme and 21,258 Single Village Schemes at a total of ₹18,123 crore. I am glad to inform that all Single Village Schemes and 92 out of the 101 Multi Village Schemes and retrofitting schemes have been completed, while the remaining 9 MVS are in advance stages of implementation," he said.

He noted that the union Government has released ₹5,914 crore as its share under the Jal Jeevan Mission, leaving a pending balance of ₹3,112 crore.

# Namami Gange failed to deliver results in Uttarakhand: CAG report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dehradun



A report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has said that the Centre's 'Namami Gange' programme has failed to deliver the desired results in Uttarakhand due to the failure of the state's implementing agencies.

It said that under the flagship programme, launched over a decade ago to clean Ganga river, the Centre had provided ₹1,000 crore between 2018 and 2023 (the auditing period) for the effective implementation of the project in the state.

However, the report, presented during the ongoing state's budget session, notes several irregularities found in this project, including defective designs of sewage treatment plants (STPs), poor maintenance of infrastruc-

ture, failure to tap drains discharging into the Ganga, and the dumping of waste near rivers and smaller streams.

The CAG observed that the detailed project report (DPR) for Forestry Interventions for the Ganga (FIG) included a budgetary provision of ₹885.91 crore and a plantation target of 54,855.43 hectares.

However, contrary to this, only ₹144.27 crore amounting

to just 16 per cent of the allocated funds — was actually utilised. Consequently, physical progress remained sluggish, and the scheme failed to achieve the specific objectives related to the rejuvenation of the Ganga.

Of the 44 STPs inspected by the CAG in 2023, only three to five were found to be compliant with the norms set by the National Green Tribunal

(NGT), while merely six to twelve were found to be in compliance with the standards of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF) and other relevant criteria.

The report States that this reveals widespread non-compliance and a substandard level of sewage treatment.

Of these 44 STPs, the majority demonstrated gross non-compliance with the norms of both the MoEF and the NGT across all three quarters of 2023, with levels of Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD), Total Suspended Solids (TSS), and Faecal Coliform far exceeding the permissible limits.

The report also notes that in Chamoli, Rudrapur, Tehri, and Uttarkashi districts, cremation ghats were constructed at 11 locations without assessing local needs or cultural practices; conse-

quently, these facilities are neither being utilised nor maintained, while funeral pyres continue to be lit along the riverbanks.

According to the report, in 2011, the then State River Conservation Authority set a target to prevent untreated urban wastewater and industrial effluents from entering the Ganga by 2020; yet, State Government officials have failed to formulate a plan even 13 years later.

The report further states that District Ganga Plans were not formulated in any of the districts within the Ganga basin, resulting in the poor management of sewage-related issues and a failure to achieve the 2020 target.

According to the report, one of the key objectives of the 'Namami Ganga' was to involve local communities in the planning of sustainable infrastructure.

# Goa: BJP panel sweeps Panaji civic body polls, bags 27 out of 30 seats

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Panaji

A panel led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) registered a sweeping victory in the elections to the Corporation of the City of Panaji (CCP) in Goa on Friday, clinching most of the wards in the civic body.

BJP Minister Atanasio Monserratte-led panel won on 27 out of 30 seats, while the panel floated by Utpal Parrikar, son of former Goa CM Manohar Parrikar, could manage only three seats.

The polls took place on March 11, while the counting of votes began this morning.

CCP mayor Rohit Monserratte won from the BJP panel, while hospitality entrepreneur and President of Travel and Tours Association of Goa, Jack Sukhija, won from the Parrikar-led panel.

Parrikar had floated his panel with the support of the Congress, Aam Aadmi Party and independents.

Reacting to the victory, Monserratte said that he was expecting to win all 30 seats, considering the development that was undertaken in the capital city.

He said that the BJP panel will continue working for the people.

# RSS plans to expand shakhas, focus on public outreach campaigns to mark centenary year

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Chandigarh



RSS Sarsangchalak Mohan Bhagwat, left, and General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale during the All India Representative Assembly of RSS in Samalkha, Panipat

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Joint General Secretary CR Mukund on Friday said special emphasis is being placed on the expansion of *shakhas* and engagement of society through public outreach programmes to mark the organisation's centenary year.

In Kerala, over 55,000 Muslim and 54,000 Christian homes were covered under the public outreach initiative, he said in a press conference in Samalkha, Panipat.

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat and general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale inaugurated the three-day meet of the RSS' top decision-making body — Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS) — in Samalkha.

As this year marks the centenary of the right-wing organisation, the meeting will include detailed discussions on major programmes and campaigns organised as part of the celebrations. These include *grihasampark* (mass contact programme), Hindu Sammelan, youth conferences, gatherings of prominent citizens and social harmony meetings.

In his address, Mukund talked about the RSS' *panch parivartan* initiative, which

focuses on social harmony, preservation of family values, environmental protection, selfhood and self-reliance, and adherence to legal, civic, and constitutional duties.

The RSS has reached out to more than 10 crore homes under *grihasampark*, he said, adding that more than 3 lakh villages have been covered and the organisation is also seeing a positive impact in society of *sabbhav gosti* and the "pramukh nagrik gostis".

In Kerala, RSS reached out to several households including Muslims, Christians and also those belonging to individuals with communist leanings.

also reached tribal regions through its public outreach initiative.

Elaborating on the Sangh's plan of action to mark its centenary year, Mukund said there are two main dimensions to various initiatives — organisational growth, focused on expansion of *shakhas*, and concerted effort to engage with society, foster harmony within it, and mobilize all the virtuous forces of the community to dedicate themselves to the work of social transformation, and public awakening.

Hindu Sammelans have been held at more than 36,000 places in the country and more are going to take place including urban, rural areas and remote corners, Mukund said.

The Sangh's ongoing endeavour involves engaging prominent citizens across various localities to

serve as key community leaders, he added.

BJP chief Nitin Nabin and presidents and other senior functionaries of its 32 sister organisations, among others, will attend the key three-day meet. To foster harmony within society, we are collaborating at the block level with local community leaders, heads of spiritual organisations, and heads of religious centres, Mukund said.

"Together, we aim to deliberate upon and implement positive initiatives that bring about necessary social reforms. Specifically, the Sangh has identified five transformations. Five key themes representing the changes currently desired within society," he said.

On the Naxal-affected regions, the Sangh said that the situation is gradually returning to normal due to the Government's efforts. Mukund said political stability is coming in Manipur. Moreover, the ongoing effort wherein individuals from all communities and castes, along with prominent figures, come together to deliberate collectively, is yielding results, an endeavour in which the Sangh, too, has a role.

He added that a difficult situation arose in Bangladesh, one that persists to this day.

# IDFC First Bank fraud case: 11 accused arrested so far, 100 bank accounts frozen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chandigarh



Eleven accused have been arrested so far, including six bank employees, four private individuals, and one Government official, as part of the ongoing investigation into a fraud case involving the IDFC First Bank by the Haryana State Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau.

According to the Bureau, a breakthrough has emerged in the case, revealing that several fake firms and companies were created by the prime accused to illegally divert Government funds into multiple bank accounts.

Preliminary investigation has indicated that money from the accounts of various Government departments was unauthorisedly transferred to accounts operated in the names of these fictitious companies, the ACB said.

Some of the entities identified during the probe include RS Traders, Cap Co Fintech Services, SRR Planning Gurus Pvt Ltd, and Swastik Dosh Project, among others, an official statement said.

Requests had been sent to freeze more than 100 bank accounts suspected to be linked to the fraudulent transactions, which have been frozen, it said.

Private lender IDFC First Bank had disclosed a Rs 590

crore fraud committed by certain employees and others at a branch in Chandigarh in a specific set of accounts held by the Haryana Government.

Charu Bali, ADGP, State Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau, said an FIR was registered on February 23 in Panchkula, following directions from the Haryana Government. A Special Investigation Team (SIT) was constituted under the supervision of senior IPS officer Ganga Ram Punia to probe the matter.

The investigation has so far revealed the involvement of 12 bank accounts linked to eight Government departments. Out of these, 10 were maintained at the IDFC First Bank's branch in Sector 32, Chandigarh, and two at the AU Small Finance Bank, the

ADGP said. So far, 11 accused have been arrested, including six bank employees, four private individuals, and one Government official. Among them, 10 are currently in judicial custody, while one is on police remand. The investigation team has raided 16 locations, leading to the recovery of crucial documents related to property purchase, reportedly by using the proceeds of crime. Additionally, more than 25 electronic devices, including mobile phones and laptops, have been seized and sent for examination to the cyber forensic laboratory.

The authorities have also seized six luxury vehicles, including three Toyota Fortuners, two Innovas, and one Mercedes, suspected to have been purchased using illicit proceeds.

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**Order Order**

**Delhi HC rejects Volkswagen's opposition to Maruti Suzuki trademark application**



The Delhi High Court recently refused to entertain a petition filed by German automobile manufacturer Volkswagen challenging the dismissal of its opposition against registration of an allegedly similar mark filed by rival Maruti Suzuki India Limited. Maruti Suzuki had filed a trademark application before the Registrar of Trade Marks for registration of its mark 'TRANSFORMATION'. The Registrar accepted the application and advertised the application. Volkswagen filed a notice of opposition against the registration of the mark stating that it is deceptively similar to its registered trademark '4MOTION'. The Registrar dismissed Volkswagen's opposition, prompting Volkswagen to move the High Court in appeal. Justice Manmeet Pritam Singh Arora affirmed the decision passed by the Registrar, observing that the two marks have no deceptive similarity capable of confusing the public.



**SC takes suo motu cognisance of illegal sand mining in Chambal**

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday took suo motu cognisance of illegal sand mining in the National Chambal Sanctuary and threats to endangered aquatic wildlife.

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta said the court has taken cognisance of recent newspaper reports highlighting rampant illegal mining in areas where endangered gharial (long-snouted crocodile) species preservation programme is going on.

Due to the illegal mining, the endangered gharials have to relocate, the court said. The bench said that even



Illegal sand mining at National Chambal Sanctuary

areas where the Madhya Pradesh chief minister had released gharials have come under illegal mining. "Place the matter before the chief justice of India for

necessary directions," the top court ordered the registry. According to reports, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav released 10 gharials into the

Chambal river at the sanctuary in Morena in February last year.

The National Chambal Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary, also called the National Chambal Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary, is a 5,400 sq km tri-state protected area. Besides the endangered gharial, it is home to the red-crowned roof turtle and the endangered Ganges river dolphin.

Located on the Chambal river near the tripoint of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, the sanctuary was first declared a protected area in Madhya Pradesh in 1978 and now constitutes a long narrow eco-reserve co-administered by the three States.

**HC gives MP 5 weeks to submit plan for cleanup of Union Carbide site**

**PIONEER NEWS**  
Jabalpur

The Madhya Pradesh High Court on Friday gave the State Government five weeks to submit a plan for assessment and remediation of contaminated soil and groundwater in and around the defunct Union Carbide factory in Bhopal.

At least 5,479 people were killed and thousands were maimed after highly toxic methyl isocyanate gas leaked

In this meeting, discussions took place on various issues, including the assessment of remediation of contaminated soil and groundwater, detoxification and decontamination of the corroded structure of Union Carbide plant, and time-bound remediation of site.

A decision was made to initiate the process and issue a short tender for these works from the empanelled list of 'reference organisations' pre-



Union Carbide factory, Bhopal

pared by Central Pollution Control Board under Environment Protection (Management of Contaminated Sites) Rules 2025, the State Government said. The court is hearing a clutch of petitions aimed at making the area pollution-free.

Rachna Dhingra of NGO Bhopal Group for Information and Action, who attended the hearing, told PTL the State Government was supposed to provide the plan on Friday but couldn't and requested an extension.

from the Union Carbide's pesticide factory in Bhopal in the intervening night of December 2-3, 1984. A division bench of Justices VK Singh and AK Niranankari took on record an affidavit filed by the state Government that sought more time to submit the plan.

In its affidavit, the state Government said a meeting was held on March 3 with the Additional Chief Secretary of Health and other officials to invite organisations capable of carrying out such assessment and remediation.

**ED arrests 2 'absconding Ponzi accused from Gujarat**

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate on Friday said it arrested two "absconding" accused in an alleged ₹180 crore digital Ponzi scheme case from Gujarat's Bharuch district where they were "hiding" after returning from Dubai via Nepal. Sudhir Dalsukhbhai Kotadiya and Umang Santibhai Kotadiya were taken into custody on March 11 under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

They are accused in an investigation relating to a "fraudulent" digital investment scheme (Ponzi) operated through QFON App Limited and other associated enti-



ties, the central probe agency said in a statement. A Special PMLA court in Mumbai sent the two to ED custody until March 20, according to the agency.

The ED case stems from a December 2024 FIR filed by the Thane Police against the

two accused and others named Jaysukh Sakhariya and Umang Kotadiya, among others, for operating a digital Ponzi investment scheme.

The agency claimed that the two arrested accused were "absconding" and were "deliberately" evading investigation. They fled to Dubai (UAE) and later returned to India via the Nepal route. After sustained efforts and intelligence-based tracking, the ED traced and apprehended the accused persons. They were arrested after raids conducted in Bharuch, the ED said.

It is alleged that the accused "lured" innocent investors from Gujarat and Maharashtra to deposit funds in the said Ponzi scheme on

the promise of returns ranging from two to 10.5 per cent. They claimed that returns would be generated through online advertisement viewing and application-based digital activities.

Probe found, the ED said, that funds collected from new investors were used to pay returns to earlier depositors while a "substantial" portion of the funds was siphoned off by the accused.

The funds were routed through multiple bank accounts belonging to firms, entities and individuals associated with the accused persons, and some funds were also transferred in cash through Angadiya operators (illegal cash transporting agents).

**Sun TV moves Madras HC against Chennai Super Kings over use of their movies' in promo**

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Chennai

Sun TV Network has moved the Madras High Court against the owner of IPL cricket team Chennai Super Kings (CSK) for copyright infringement over the alleged use of music, background scores and dialogues from the films Jailer, Jailer-2 and Coolie in a promotional video for the IPL 2026 jersey launch.

The civil suit has been filed by Sun TV Network Limited against Chennai Super Kings Cricket Limited (CSKL) and three of its officials.

The suit accuses the IPL franchise company of using music and dialogues from films to which Sun TV holds copyright without obtaining a licence.

Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy heard preliminary submissions in the matter today, before adjourning the case till March 16.

Sun TV said that the video incorporated audio tracks, background scores and dialogues from Jailer, Jailer-2 and



Coolie - three high-profile Rajinikanth projects produced by Sun Pictures, the film production arm of Sun TV Network.

Sun TV has sought a permanent injunction to restrain CSK from using such songs, dialogues or background scores from Sun TV films on any

medium, including social media, stadium broadcasts and promotional material. The company has also sought ₹1 crore in damages and a direction for CSK to disclose revenues generated through the promotional campaign that allegedly used the copyrighted music.

**SC orders status quo in defamation case against lawyer over sharing excerpts on Mamata Banerjee**

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday ordered status quo in a defamation case filed against BJP leader Koustav Bagchi who is accused of sharing on social media excerpts from a book containing allegations about the alleged private life of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

A bench comprising Justices BV Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan issued a notice to the West Bengal Government on a plea filed by Bagchi against an order of the Calcutta High Court.

The High Court had dismissed his petition challenging a trial court order issuing him a summons in the defamation case. The dispute originated from a book first published in 2015 stating that the West Bengal chief minis-



Mamata Banerjee

ter married someone clandestinely.

It also published some other alleged details of her private life before she assumed the post of chief minister. Bagchi, an advocate, uploaded some pages of the said book on social media platforms and also allegedly made comments on the per-

sonal life of the chief minister in several television networks. A complaint was thereafter filed by the public prosecutor before the City Sessions Court invoking Section 222(2) BNSS, 2023, (prosecution for defamation) alleging commission of an offence punishable under Section 356(2) BNS, 2023,

(inquiry, trial or judgment in absentia of proclaimed offender) after obtaining statutory sanction.

The Sessions Court granted the applicant an opportunity of hearing under Section 223 BNSS, 2023 (providing the accused an opportunity to be heard), took cognisance and issued summons.

**2020 Delhi riots: Court declines plea seeking FIR against Kapil Mishra**

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

A Delhi court on Friday dismissed an application seeking registration of an FIR against Minister Kapil Mishra and others in connection with an alleged incident linked to the 2020 northeast Delhi riots.

Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Ashwani Panwar dismissed the plea filed by Mohammad Ilyas saying that registration of an FIR was not legally permissible in view of earlier judicial findings.

Earlier on November 10, 2025, the sessions court had set aside the Magistrate court's order which directed Delhi Police to seek Mishra's role in the riots.

In its Friday order, the court said, "The submissions of the learned counsel for the applicant that FIR be registered for the incident dated February 23, 2020 against proposed accused no 2 (Mishra) and his associates is legally impermissible at this stage in view of the findings laid down in the order passed by the learned special judge."

The court noted that the findings of the earlier order passed by a special judge on November 10, 2025 "attained finality". "The findings are binding on this court and



Kapil Mishra

have attained finality. The learned special judge has further held in order dated November 10, 2025, that Section 531(2)(a) of the BNSS does not apply in this case. Even this finding has attained finality," the magistrate said.

The court noted that a previous order dated April 1, 2025 directing further investigation into the alleged incident had already been set aside by a special court on November 10, 2025.

"Keeping in view of the above findings, prayer for registration of FIR against BJP MLA Kapil Mishra and others, on the basis of application under Section 175(3) of the BNSS is hereby rejected," the court said.

According to the complaint, the alleged incident took place on February 23, 2020, during the communal riots, in which Mishra and his associ-

ates purportedly blocked roads at Kardampuri, vandalised carts belonging to Muslims and Dalits, allegedly with police complicity.

The court noted that a previous order dated April 1, 2025 directing further investigation into the alleged incident had already been set aside by a special court on November 10, 2025.

Quoting the special court's observations, the Magistrate said the earlier order directing further investigation was "fundamentally flawed, illegal and improper" and therefore unsustainable.

The court further noted that the special judge had held that the application did not clearly disclose the commission of a cognisable offence and that the findings had attained finality as they were not challenged before the Delhi High Court.

**SC stays Delhi HC order on Lokpal sanction for CBI to try Moitra**

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday stayed a part of the December 19, 2025 order of the Delhi High Court permitting the Lokpal to consider granting sanction to the CBI to file a charge sheet against Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra in the alleged cash-for-query scam.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi issued notices to Moitra, the CBI and BJP MP and complainant Nishikant Dubey on the Lokpal's plea against the High Court's decision.

The Lokpal had challenged the High Court's judgement that had held that separate sanctions for the filing of a charge sheet and initiating prosecution are not contemplated by the Lokpal and Lok Ayuktas Act, 2013.

On December 19 last year, the High Court had set aside an order of the Lokpal granting sanction to the CBI to file a charge sheet against Moitra in the alleged cash-for-query scam.

"The learned Lokpal is requested to accord its consideration for grant of sanction under Section 20 of the Lokpal Act, strictly in accordance with provisions thereof as construed hereinabove, within a period of one month



Mahua Moitra

from today," the High Court, however, had said in para 89 of that judgement.

The CJ-led bench stayed the para 89 of the High Court judgement while issuing notices on a batch of pleas related to power and procedures enumerated under section 20 of the Lokpal Act.

The High Court passed the verdict on a plea by Moitra challenging the November 12, 2025 order of the Lokpal granting sanction to the CBI to file the charge sheet against her in connection with the alleged cash for query scam.

Holding that Section 20 of the Lokpal Act did not contemplate the separate grant of a sanction for filing of a charge sheet, and the sanction is granted only in a composite manner for prosecution, the High Court had

quashed the sanction granted by the Lokpal to the CBI to file a charge sheet against Moitra in the case.

The ombudsman moved the apex court challenging the interpretation given by the High Court.

Senior advocate Ranjit Kumar, appearing for the Lokpal, submitted that the ombudsman was aggrieved with the interpretation given to the Lokpal Act by the High Court, and was not concerned with any particular individual.

Solicitor General Mehta, appearing for the CBI, said the probe agency supported the interpretation given by the High Court.

He also added that the respondent TMC MP needs to be investigated. The law officer said the question was whether two rounds of sanctions were contemplated,

one for filing of the charge sheet and the second for initiating prosecution.

"Solicitor, if you see the provisions (Section 20(7)(a) and 20(8)), apparently there is overlap. But there are fine distinctions between the filing of a charge sheet and the conduct of prosecution. And when the conduct of prosecution comes into play, see the history of Lokpal Act.

The Lokpal Act is to create public confidence in the enquiry into and prosecution of public servants who are highly placed, where there's a real or perceptible fear that he/she may disable the investigating and prosecution agencies from conducting their duties..." Justice Bagchi said.

Justice Bagchi said Lokpal may withhold the prosecution from the investigating agency and may direct prosecution through its agency. "Let's examine the interplay of the sections in light of BNSS and the Prevention of Corruption Act," she said.

The High Court, while setting aside the order of the Lokpal granting sanction to the CBI to file a charge sheet against Moitra, had said there was a "clear departure" from the procedure expressly mandated under the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, and the Lokpal had erred in its understanding and

interpretation of the provisions of the Act. The court asked the Lokpal to accord its consideration for grant of sanction under Section 20 of the Lokpal Act, strictly in accordance with the provisions within a month.

The cash-for-query scam pertains to the allegation that Moitra asked questions in the House in exchange for cash and gifts from a businessman. The court passed the verdict on a plea by Moitra challenging the November 12 order of the Lokpal granting sanction to the CBI to file the charge sheet against her in connection with the alleged cash for query scam.

The CBI in July last year submitted its report to the Lokpal in connection with the cash-for-query scam case involving Moitra and businessman Darshan Hiranandani.

The agency registered its FIR on March 21, 2024, against the two under provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act on a reference from the Lokpal. It was alleged that Moitra indulged in corrupt practices, including, but not limited to, taking bribes and other undue advantages from Hiranandani for "compromising her parliamentary privileges and causing national security threats by sharing her Lok Sabha login credentials".



## Editor's TAKE

### A World Beyond the United Nations?

The UN was founded on noble ideals for a peaceful world. Yet, in a world governed by realpolitik, the institution appears sidelined and ineffective

After the World War II ended, world leaders united to form a body that would not let the horrors of war revisit the planet. They thought of an organisation that would foster peace, encourage dialogue amongst nations, and build a mechanism to avoid conflicts and war. Fifty countries came together on 24 October 1945 to make that happen, and thus the United Nations was born – the only truly global organisation that was meant to ensure peace in the world.

Unfortunately, in more than eight decades of its existence, the UN has lost its steam and has been reduced to a world forum that can only condemn conflicts and wars. The big five – the United States, United Kingdom, France, China and Russia – the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council can easily thwart any resolution to enforce action and foster peace with their veto. The world thus does not have an effective mechanism to stop wars or a framework to prevent illegal actions by powerful nations. The war in Ukraine rages on, Israel has continued its assault on Palestine, and most recently Iran has faced the onslaught of missiles and bombers from the United States and Israel. Not only does the UN lack the teeth to punish wrongdoing, it has increasingly appeared redundant even in promoting climate consciousness, addressing crimes against humanity, fostering united action against pandemics, and tackling many other issues humanity confronts today.

The inability of the UN to prevent conflicts or enforce accountability has exposed its structural weaknesses. Does this mean that multilateral institutions are meaningless? Certainly not. On the contrary, they remain our only hope. Our approach should be to recalibrate them for a changing world order.

In recent years, several smaller groupings have emerged, such as Conference of the Parties (COP) and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD). The approach should be to integrate such platforms within the broader UN system so that it can effectively coordinate critical humanitarian operations, peacekeeping missions, and development initiatives that smaller or regional alliances cannot easily replicate. What is required, therefore, is not the dismantling the UN but reforming it to make it more representative, aligning with the present situation. Today's world is very different from what it looked like after World War II in 1945. Emerging powers, developing economies, and regions such as Africa and South Asia must receive greater representation in global decision-making structures. For India, this evolving landscape presents both an opportunity and a responsibility. As a rising global power with longstanding commitments to multilateralism, India is uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between global institutions and regional partnerships. In this transitional world order, India has the potential to act both as a reformer of global institutions and as a constructive participant in emerging strategic partnerships. The time has come to build an effective multilateral organisation – whether under the name of the UN or otherwise – capable of managing the crucial affairs of the planet. After all, it is the only place we have to live.

## When politics had moral role models

At a moment when the world appears increasingly unstable-conflicts escalating in regions such as the Middle East, threats of military retaliation, and the looming possibility of wider war-the need for moral leadership feels more urgent than ever



RACHITA RAMYA

There are many quotes attributed to Mahatma Gandhi that often require verification-whether it is "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind," or the idea that when someone slaps you on the right cheek, you offer the left. Yet perhaps one of the most relevant principles associated with Gandhi today is simpler and more direct: The best politics is right action.

At a moment when the world appears increasingly unstable-conflicts escalating in regions such as the Middle East, threats of military retaliation, and the looming possibility of wider war-the need for moral leadership feels more urgent than ever. When global politics seems driven by power, retaliation, and strategic interests rather than human consequences, the world longs for leaders who remind us that peace is essential for survival and flourishing.

There was a time when figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. served as moral role models for political leaders. Their ideas shaped a generation that believed politics could be guided by ethics as much as by ambition. Leaders looked to such figures not for perfection but for principles-lessons about courage, restraint, and justice.

Today, however, we live in an age of relentless scrutiny and "cancel culture", where historical figures are often judged solely by their flaws. Certainly, no individual is beyond criticism, and honest historical reflection is necessary. Yet in our eagerness to expose mistakes, we sometimes forget the moral frameworks these leaders provided. Their influence once encouraged politicians to measure themselves against ethical standards that seem increasingly absent in contemporary politics.

One Indian politician who embodied many of Gandhi's ideals was Shankar Dayal Singh, who, as a young man, had the rare opportunity to meet Gandhi in 1947, leaving a lasting impression. Though Gandhi would be assassinated within a year, the values he represented-simplicity, moral courage, and service-remained deeply etched in Singh's outlook. In 1971, Singh joined the Congress and was among the youngest members to serve in the Fifth Lok Sabha. He conducted himself with dignity and integrity, as a dynamic yet idealistic politician untouched by moral and financial corruption, mirroring Gandhi's teachings.

Much like Gandhi, Singh demonstrated defiance towards those in power. However, in Singh's case, it was the Congress leadership



AS GANDHI REMINDED US, THE BEST POLITICS IS RIGHT ACTION. AND RIGHT ACTION BEGINS WITH THE CHOICES WE MAKE AS CITIZENS

Rachita Ramya is an author and public health researcher

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under scrutiny. During the Emergency, Singh quietly helped in sheltering political figures such as Krishan Kant despite his own proximity to the leadership, which reflected a moral courage rarely seen in political circles and reaffirmed Gandhi's philosophy: The best politics is right action. With Gandhi acting as his moral compass, Singh gave weight not to ambition and power, but to idealism and the dignity of doing what is right for the general public.

In one of his notable works, Emergency: Fact and Fiction, Singh drew a striking contrast between Indira Gandhi and Mahatma Gandhi, arguing that the two figures represented opposing moral visions of India. He wrote that while Mahatma Gandhi sought to uplift and live among the poor, Indira Gandhi's politics increasingly distanced itself from those ideals. He argued that Mahatma Gandhi wore hand-spun khadi and attempted to dissolve divisions of caste and religion, while Indira Gandhi's politics deepened social and political lines.

The contrast extended symbolically to lifestyle and philosophy: Singh advocated throughout his life for khadi, swadeshi goods, and the promotion of Hindi as a unifying cultural language. Yet his advocacy was rooted not in exclusion but in a broader respect for India's religious and cultural diversity. Despite his contributions as a parliamentarian, writer, and advocate of

Gandhian ethics, figures like Shankar Dayal Singh have gradually faded from public memory. Our age tends to remember scandals and controversies more readily than integrity and service. In an era of social media, where public service is curated and admiration is carefully manufactured, this was an organic affection-free of transaction or calculation, born simply from Singh's lifelong commitment to moral integrity and virtue of character.

Gandhi himself has been the subject of intense criticism in recent years. Yet acknowledging his flaws does not erase the transformative power of his ideas. His philosophy of non-violence and civil resistance shifted the balance of power away from weapons and towards the collective strength of ordinary people.

Perhaps the deeper question we must ask ourselves today is this: too often, we vote based on narrow calculations, choosing what seems like the "lesser evil" rather than asking larger moral questions. We may ask whether a politician will benefit us personally, but rarely do we ask whether their actions will be just for others, for the environment, or for future generations.

The world today could benefit from a return to such idealism.

As Gandhi reminded us, The best politics is right action. And right action begins with the choices we make as citizens.

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## PICTALK



A man participates in an event to make 1.25 crore clay Shivalings during a Srimad Bhagwat Katha in Bhopal.

PHOTO: PTI

## After all, what are wars all about?



ASHA IYER KUMAR

### 2ND OPINION

Two headlines - both equally belligerent and spewing fire – confronted me this morning. "Trump threatens Iran with consequences 'at a level never seen before'" and "Iran launches 'most intense' barrage of missiles since start of conflict". My initial response to them was one of utter disbelief, which then gave way to revulsion at the scale of animosity human beings are capable of directing at one another. My logical brain split into scraps of queries to which I may not have immediate solutions, just as many other existential dilemmas do not, but it was important to raise them so we know from where this quenchless thirst for blood arises.

Have you noticed how a war is now not called a war, per se? It goes by phrases such as strategic strikes, combat operations, special military operations, and is often

explained as pre-emptive action taken to install peace. It's all for the sake of eventual amity, the warmongers disguised as peacekeepers say, making a case for the terror they unleash. This language of peace that sounds controlled, defensive, or morally justified is wickedly flawed and makes blood-letting look like a worthy cause to pursue in the long run. If war must be justified as the protection of righteousness, like it was done in the Mahabharata, there should be a clear-cut classification of who is righteous and who is not. Apparently, the one who made the opening gambit in the present crisis cannot make any claim to such virtues. If a trigger-happy, megalomaniac politician sells war to the world in the name of peace, no one is going to buy it.

Sadly, most armed conflicts of this nature are fallouts of decades of hostility, betrayal and mutual suspicion that have piled up over time. As years pass, the historical background gets overshadowed by power equations, and if there is one thing that violence cannot achieve, it is peace.

So then, are these wars merely projections of force and domination? Are they statements about who the masters are and who the minions are? Such questions invite us to look deeper into the psychology of human beings and the thought patterns that drive our actions. The craving to win keeps most of us running, jostling, scrambling and elbowing one another in the race - striving to outdo everyone else and reach the top so that we become the undisputed master of all we survey. Yet this is not the whole truth.

The hunger for supremacy is rooted in the ego - a sense of self built around our achievements, beliefs and place in the world. It seeks constant validation and keeps repeating that "I matter" in the larger scheme of the universe. The ego cannot bear to be ignored or sidelined. It feeds on authority, regardless of the method used to obtain it. The primacy it demands is insatiable. At the slightest threat to its dominance or survival, it strikes. The instinct to survive overwhelms every other emotion. The fear of losing our identity and everything we hold dear becomes our greatest weakness. Fear is humanity's ultimate adversary – the fear of loss, dispossession, insignificance and death. These fears accumulate and often translate into oppression, aggression and the primal urge to eliminate threats, both real and imagined. Those who

occupy the highest positions of power and privilege often suffer from these impulses more intensely than those who have little to lose. What we are witnessing across the world today is an illustration of how the insecurities of powerful individuals can result in the death and destruction of countless innocent lives. No war, however cleverly justified, can restore lasting order or stability. The victory of one side – always temporary – only deepens resentment and grief among the defeated. True peace cannot emerge while self-importance and hubris guide human intentions.

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## WEST ASIA WAR THREATENS STABILITY AND INDIA'S ENERGY SECURITY

Washington appeared to aim for a swift regime change in Tehran by launching a sudden, massive attack on Iran and targeting its supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The objective seemed to be gaining greater control over the region and its oil reserves. However, the ongoing military campaign, reportedly called Operation Epic Fury, shows no visible signs of ending. The bombings have caused severe destruction in Tehran, while Iran's retaliatory missile strikes have inflicted damage in Israel. Gulf nations are increasingly uneasy about the Iranian attacks, which have shaken their confidence in U.S. military protection. At the same time, European countries in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation have begun serious discussions on achieving greater

defence self-reliance. The possibility of closer strategic alignment between China, Russia, North Korea and Iran is also being widely discussed. In this evolving geopolitical landscape, India is often perceived as being aligned with the United States and Israel.

The cost of imported crude oil and LPG has surged sharply, while tensions around the Strait of Hormuz have disrupted supply routes. India's dependence on crude oil imports has steadily increased, reaching nearly 89 per cent by early 2026. Imports account for around 60 per cent of the country's LPG consumption, with most shipments passing through the Strait. Any disruption has immediate consequences for industries and households alike.

HARIDASAN RAJAN | KERALA

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Questioning the roots of war

The attacks on Iran by the United States and Israel must stop immediately. Ordinary people across the world are already suffering from the economic consequences of war. In our town, we once gathered at tea shops to drink tea and discuss the news. Today, many of those tea shops cannot even serve tea or snacks because of the shortage of LPG gas. The families that depend on these shops for their livelihood are struggling to survive. The reach of American imperialism now extends even to our food bowls. If this situation continues, its effects may soon reach our homes. Few realise that American imperialism controls nearly 50 per cent of the world's arms supply. The arms trade grew by about four per cent in 2024, generating profits of roughly 338 billion dollars. Such profits come at the cost of human suffering.

Like the British once ruled by dividing people along religious and caste lines, today powerful nations expand their influence through conflict and division.

India has before it the paths shown by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru – the path of peace, scientific progress and national development. We must follow those ideals rather than allow our society to be dragged into conflict and division.

UNNIKRISHNAN MANGALASSERI | KERALA

### Clean rivers are national assets

Rivers are national assets, yet awareness about protecting their purity and usefulness remains inadequate. Rivers are indispensable for everyday needs, agriculture and drinking water. They also serve as important inland transport routes that can strengthen trade and commerce. River systems represent some of the most biologically diverse ecosystems on Earth. However, only about ten per cent of the world's river basins are protected. Human activities such as dam construction, encroachment, deforestation and pollution have severely threatened their existence.

Saving and celebrating rivers must therefore become a priority for governments, communities and individuals. People must ensure that rivers remain free from garbage, sewage and industrial waste. No nation can allow its rivers to become dumping grounds for pollution. River management, pollution control and conservation must be treated as critical priorities. Every year on March 14, more than thirty countries observe the International Day of Action for Rivers, reflecting on ways to protect rivers and uphold the principle: "Protect Rivers, Protect People." Only through collective responsibility can we safeguard rivers for future generations.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

### Rahul corners government on oil policy

This refers to the report, "Government bartered India's oil rights to US: Rahul Gandhi" (March 13). Rahul Gandhi has repeatedly accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of surrendering to the United States and undermining India's sovereignty. According to him, the government compromised the country's energy security and allowed foreign influence to shape India's decisions. He claims that oil purchases were directed by US President Donald Trump, thereby weakening India's autonomy in critical energy matters. Rahul Gandhi has also argued that government policies have triggered an energy crisis leading to shortages and instability.

Such serious allegations require a clear response from the Prime Minister, as silence may be misread as acceptance.

The government should clarify that India's energy decisions are sovereign and guided by national interest. India has diversified oil imports, expanded renewable energy and built strategic reserves, sourcing oil from multiple regions despite external pressure. The global energy crisis stems largely from geopolitical conflicts and market volatility, not domestic mismanagement. The Prime Minister should reaffirm India's independent energy policy.

O PRASADA RAO | HYDERABAD



## Rethinking the Aryan narrative and colonial historiography

Recent developments in archaeology, linguistics, and interdisciplinary scholarship are steadily questioning many colonial-era assumptions. Emerging evidence suggests a far more intricate and interconnected civilisational history, one that challenges the simplistic narrative of invading Aryans subduing indigenous populations

FIRST Column



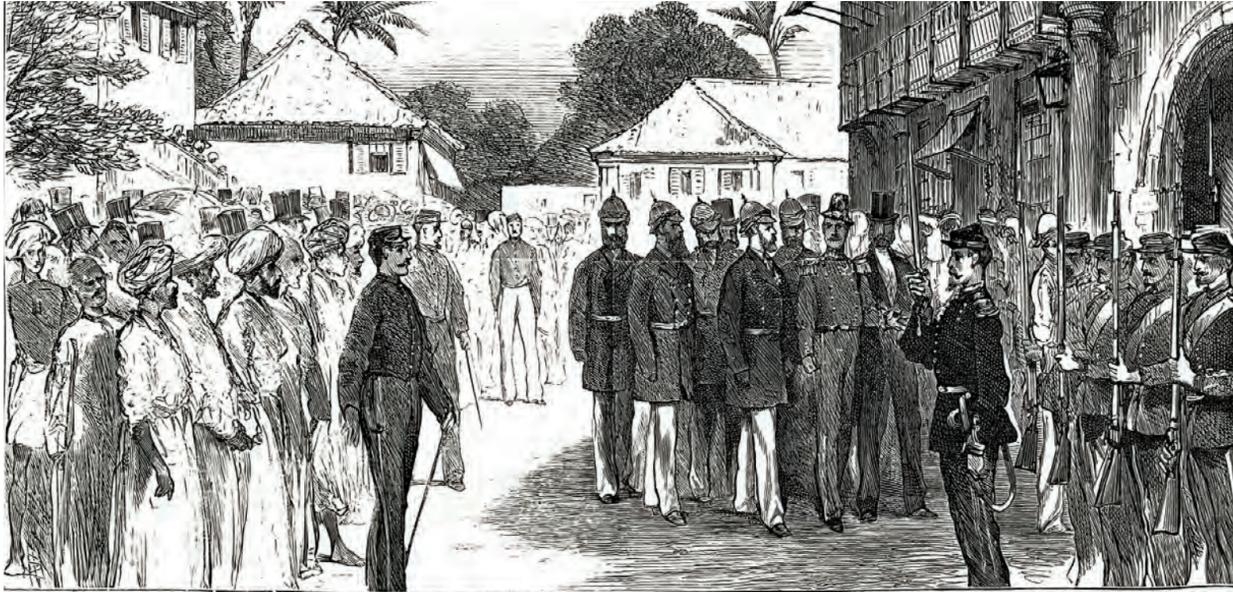
RAGHVENDRA SINGH

Indian historiography is largely the legacy of British colonial rule. The imprint of Western social sciences was so strong on the Indian psyche that our subcontinent found it impossible to break away from the old methodologies of interpreting Indian society. It suited the colonials to recreate just such an Indian past that provided them with a suitable justification to rule. They devoted their energy and attention to finding fault lines in the Indian social fabric, their investigation going back to early times.

The British sculpted the 'Two-Nation Doctrine' and then gave it to Jinnah to precipitate India's partition. This doctrine also triumphed in J&K. The problem still festers. The colonial education policy, enunciated bluntly by Thomas Babbington Macaulay, created more cracks and divisions. They also sought to forcibly separate and isolate the hills and forest people from the inhabitants of the plains in India, thus creating a hiatus between 'us' and 'them'. The hallmark trait of the communities of 'Bharat', their diversity in terms of language, linguistic characteristics, ecological environment and physical traits, instead of being hailed, was used to create rifts.

The British came up with the Aryan invasion theory. The Aryan stereotype was a tall, comparatively fair-skinned, tough and aggressive character who rode through the north-western passes in his horse-drawn chariot, overwhelming the sedentary indigenous non-Aryans of India. The Aryan invasion got commonly interpreted as a process of fusion of Aryan and non-Aryan elements over time.

The early racial history of India is difficult to construct because skeletal remains are rarely found, owing to the ancient custom of cremation. Knowledge of this period of the Indian subcontinent depends largely on the evidence provided through language and literature, studied in the light of archaeology. In fact, there is enough proof that points towards a Dravidian influence on Vedic Sanskrit, not only on its phonology and vocabulary (of the earlier stratum of Vedic literature) but also on its sentence structure. The racial and linguistic situation in the



THE RIG VEDA IS THE OLDEST COLLECTION OF HYMNS, CRUCIAL TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE EARLY VEDIC ERA. THE VEDAS ARE THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN COMPOSED BY THE ARYANS

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northwest at the dawn of history was complex. The simplistic interpretation of tall, fair charioteer Aryans bringing civilisation to a land of insignificant dark-skinned people has now stood completely debunked, as revealed by archaeology and linguistics. The term 'Arya' in Pali canons and in Dravidian languages has been there for long and has been used as a respectful form of address.

The Rig Veda is the oldest collection of hymns, crucial to the understanding of the early Vedic era. The Vedas are thought to have been composed by the Aryans. It was long believed that the Aryans had played a major role in civilising the Indian subcontinent. Aryans were also considered to represent a linguistic group speaking Indo-European languages. Colonial historians saw them as different from the non-Aryan Harappans of the preceding period.

Two types of sources are available, as previously noted, to study the early Vedic period, namely literary and archaeological. The four Vedas represent the oral tradition of their times. Since the hymns were meant to be recited, learnt and transmitted orally, they were not written down when they were first composed. For this reason, they cannot be dated precisely.

There is no substantial archaeological proof of large-scale migration of people from Central or Western Asia into the Indian subcontinent around 1500 BCE. There is also no archaeological proof of the claim that the Aryans destroyed the Harappan civilisation and laid the foundation of a new one. The Rig Veda does refer to hostilities and wars between different groups, but the so-called clashes between Aryan and non-Aryan communities are not evidenced in archaeology. Since the Rig Veda is the first compilation of hymns, its importance as a historical document is immense. It offers perspectives on aspects of traditional civilisation not provided through archaeology. Glimpses of the economy, social and political organisation, belief systems and kinship can be gleaned from Vedic literature.

The Aryan 'came, conquered and built India' narrative was a wrong theoretical construct, serving the ulterior motives of the colonisers by establishing that the first colonisers were the Aryans who had come all the way from the 'Steppe' in Central Asia. This was used to justify the

second colonisation by the Europeans. Europe and the north Indian groups got conveniently linked to each other through Indo-European languages. These north Indian groups were the 'Indo-Aryans'. The Asiatic Society of Bengal, a colonial research institution on Orientalism, desperately tried to identify common strands that would link India with the West.

India was neatly sectioned into Aryan and Non-Aryan. For the British, who claimed that they were the custodians of high civilisation, all Indians, particularly those living in forests and hills, represented the primitive, indigenous and backward. In giving identity to the subject Indians, they used criteria that suited them.

Researchers, on the contrary, have systematically unveiled striking similarities between the early metaphysical ideas central to Eastern and Western philosophies. Key philosophical paradigms such as monism, reincarnation in India and Egypt, and early pluralism in Greece and India indicate how trade, migration and imperialism allowed these ideas to circulate and intermingle freely throughout India, Greece and the Near East. Studies

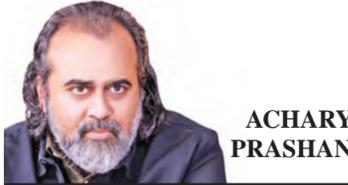
based on early historical, philosophical, spiritual and Buddhist texts from 600 BCE till the era of Aristotelian thought illustrate this. The British, to justify imperialism, successfully tied race with language, specifically the Indo-European categorisation of Sanskrit, and through it sought to associate many other Indian languages. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, language was regarded as linked to race. And if the language of classical Indian literature was of the same family as the literatures of the white-skinned colonisers, then an ambiguity entered the equation: "Does the racial justification for colonialism apply to India, or doesn't it?" If Sanskrit was an Indo-European language, its original speakers, the "Aryans", must have been more or less white people. To Romantic Orientalists such as Friedrich Schlegel and Arthur Schopenhauer, this meant that the Indo-Europeans had dominated the development of civilisations, both East and West. But to another group, the inference that the Indo-Aryans were more or less white people had a different, more ominous implication. It meant that the racial justification for imperialism was not even needed.

Nineteenth-century studies of culture and philology placed the languages of the Western colonisers at the top. These were regarded as the languages of natural conquerors. The languages of the colonised, in contrast, were the languages of naturally slavish peoples, who were born to be conquered. The discovery that Sanskrit was Indo-European shockingly contravened that assumption. The language of slaves turned out to be the language of the masters. We all know that the Vedas are the earliest documents in any Indo-European language. Therefore, among the most important language families, Sanskrit emerged as the oldest one. Though India was admitted belatedly to the ranks of the masters, it actually had a claim to priority there.

What transpired during the rule of the East India Company and thereafter the British Crown reads like a litany of mischief, bent on creating tensions within Indian society, which had long remained stable. Colonial Indian historiography was one such major tool or weapon. It will do us immense good to be aware of their deliberate policies. It is incumbent that India's narrative is now based on empirical studies rooted in civilisational sources rather than copied from Western experience and pasted onto the Indian context.

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## The climate cost of the war machine



ACHARYA PRASHANT

There is a particular dissonance that comes with reading the news in the current age. On one page, a missile strike; on the next, a climate summit. We have learned to hold these two realities at the same time without connecting them, consuming one as geopolitics and the other as science, treating them as simultaneous emergencies that happen to share a world but not a cause.

This separation is not accidental. It is one of the most consequential errors the modern mind makes, and its consequences are measured not in misunderstanding but in carbon and in blood. The refusal to see that these two crises share a root, are fed by the same engine, and cannot be solved while that engine continues to run is not merely an editorial convenience. It is the ego's oldest defence: keep the problems in separate compartments, and neither will ever demand a reckoning with the one who is producing both.

They are not parallel catastrophes but the same catastrophe wearing different faces.

### The emissions the treaties forgot

The world's militaries account for an estimated five and a half per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. To appreciate what this means: civil aviation accounts for roughly two per cent. The militaries of the world emit nearly three times as much as all the world's commercial flights combined, and this figure is almost certainly an underestimate because military emissions are the one major category of human activity that is systematically excluded from climate accounting. If all the world's militaries were counted as a single country, they would rank as the fourth-highest emitter on the planet, behind only the United States, China, and India.

This exclusion has deep roots. During the Kyoto Protocol negotiations of 1997, the United States pushed hard for military activity to be carved out of binding emissions targets, and it succeeded. The world is attempting to manage a civilisational crisis with a structural blind spot at the centre of its data, and that blind spot is growing.

The United States military alone is the largest single institutional consumer of hydrocarbons on the planet. Between 2001 and 2018, total Pentagon emissions reached an estimated 1.3 billion metric tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent. Of this, the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Syria accounted for 440 million metric tonnes, with the Iraq invasion alone responsible for 250 million. To hold these numbers in perspective: 180 countries in the world have total annual emissions below 250 million metric tonnes. Crucially, two-thirds of total US military emissions in this

period came not from active war zones but from the peacetime existence of the military machine itself. The climate cost does not wait for the shooting to start.

When a war is actually fought, the accounting becomes staggering. Three years of the Russia-Ukraine conflict generated 230 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent. The largest single source was warfare itself, accounting for 36 per cent of the total; reconstruction came second at 27 per cent. Meanwhile, the first fifteen months of Israel's bombardment of Gaza generated an estimated 32 million metric tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, roughly equal to Croatia's entire annual emissions.

All of this is happening while military spending is accelerating. Global military expenditure reached \$2.7 trillion in 2024, a 9.4 per cent increase from the previous year and the steepest annual rise since the Cold War.

### The same engine, running both

The richest nations of the world spend thirty times more on their militaries than on climate finance for the countries most vulnerable to climate breakdown. The money exists; the political will does not, because the political will is being consumed by the same appetite that is generating the emissions. The ego that launches a war and the ego that cannot stop burning carbon are not two different egos with different problems. They are the same ego with the same problem: the refusal to identify with anything beyond the immediate boundary of the self, whether that self is called a nation, a civilisation, a generation, or simply the quarterly earnings cycle. Both the war-monger and the climate-indifferent consumer are running the same programme: consume, expand, secure, do not look at the cost. The military-industrial complex and the fossil fuel complex are not separate systems that happen to cause overlapping damage. They are the same system, the organised institutional expression of what an unexamined ego does when it reaches civilisational scale, embedded in the same governments, funded by the same tax revenues, and defended by the same rhetoric of necessity and security.

When a government argues that it cannot reduce military spending because security is under threat, and simultaneously argues that it cannot fund climate adaptation at the required level because resources are constrained, it is not making two separate arguments. It is making one argument: the present emergency, visible and named and emotionally galvanising, must take priority over the slower, more abstract, more inconvenient emergency whose gravest consequences fall on populations in other countries and on generations not yet born, neither of whom have a vote in its elections. This is not a failure of reason but a structural feature of the ego's operation. The ego will not sustain attention on what does not immediately threaten it. It is not that it cannot; it is that looking honestly at the slow emergency would require it to look at itself.

### The accounting that is never done

Wars are said to be fought out of necessity, and the necessity is real enough as the ego experiences it. None of this is being denied. What is being asked is something simpler: whether the same governments that cannot fund climate adaptation at \$387 billion can explain why they can sustain military budgets of \$2.7 trillion, and whether the necessity that justifies the war also justifies the silence about what the war costs the planet. That accounting is not being done, and its absence is not accidental.

Military emissions are exempt from the frameworks that govern every other source of human carbon output. The countries most responsible for global warming are the same countries that dominate global military spending. The carbon released by three years of war in Ukraine, and fifteen months of bombardment in Gaza, appears in no nation's Paris Agreement commitments. None of this appears in the ledger against which the world measures its progress towards the temperature targets it has set itself.

This is not bureaucratic failure but the ego's oldest and most consistent manoeuvre: the refusal to be the object of its own scrutiny. Every accounting system reflects the priorities of the one doing the accounting. A system that accounts for the carbon in a return flight to London but not for the carbon in a sortie over a conflict zone is a system organised around the protection of certain categories of human activity from the consequences of their own costs. It is the same refusal that prevents the individual ego from looking honestly at its own motivations, scaled up to the level of international law.

When you read about military budgets and feel, underneath the numbers, a quiet reassurance - your interests protected - notice what that feeling is made of. It is made of the same material that the ego has always used to make its case: the present threat, vivid and nameable, against the future cost, slow and statistical and happening to someone else first.

The ego that will not conduct an honest accounting of its own costs is not a problem confined to governments and militaries. It is the individual ego, operating at its own scale, consuming what it consumes and sanctioning what it sanctions without looking at the ledger it is helping to fill. The governments that refuse to account for military emissions did not arrive from nowhere. They were elected, tolerated, and applauded by people running the same programme of exemption on a smaller scale.

That question, honestly pursued, is more dangerous to the ego than any weapon. And so it goes unasked, and the carbon accumulates, and the temperature rises, and the next war begins.

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## Indore tragedy: The cost of complacency



NARESH SINGH

Indore ranked first as India's cleanest city continuously for eight years from 2017-18 to 2024-25. The city was preparing to retain the first rank for the ninth consecutive year in 2025-26. Unfortunately, the recent water contamination disaster claiming lives has shattered that ambition. In Bhagirathpura locality of Indore, about 30 people lost their lives and more than 1,400 fell ill after consuming contaminated drinking water supplied by the municipality. Sewage-borne bacteria infiltrated the Narmada pipeline supplying drinking water, causing a severe outbreak of diarrhoea and vomiting.

Failure of a civic structure has damaged the image of Indore as the cleanest city. The tragedy reminds us of the need to relearn from Sir Patrick Geddes' holistic approach to urban planning and civic governance implemented in Indore in 1917-18. During the 1910s plague repeatedly struck the city, spreading through contaminated water and poor sanitation.

The Maharaja of Indore from the Holkar dynasty spent large resources on a water supply system designed to flush water through the sewers and remove the causes of plague. However, the engineering-centric scheme could not succeed and the epidemic persisted. In 1917 the Maharaja invited Sir Patrick Geddes, a renowned Scottish town planner and environmentalist, to study the problem. After extensive fieldwork for a year he prepared the two-volume "Town Planning and City Development Report of Indore".

The report examined water supply, drainage systems, public health conditions, spread of disease and poor maintenance of gardens, parks and public spaces. It proposed a holistic vision integrating sanitation, green spaces and social conditions. Geddes initially faced suspicion from residents who feared the maps he prepared would lead to demolition of their houses. Taking this as a challenge he requested the Maharaja to symbolically make him Maharaja for a day.

He organised a large Diwali procession and announced that it would pass through streets where houses had been repaired and cleaned. More than 6,000 cartloads of waste were removed and rats were trapped across the city. Cleaning, repairing and painting of houses took place across Indore since everyone wanted the procession to pass along their streets. The grand procession took place on Diwali. Through this symbolic event rooted in local traditions

Geddes mobilised people to fight plague through cleanliness and civic participation.

A century later Indore's journey to becoming the cleanest city echoed Geddes' civic mobilisation. The transformation began on 2 October 2017 when Municipal Commissioner Manish Singh convened a meeting of officials, civil society organisations (CSOs) and citizens.

Suggestions were collected and a five-month strategic plan prepared to secure the top rank in Swachh Survekshan. Waste collection began from households, shops and markets and was transported to the trenching ground. Waste was segregated into wet and dry at the source. Earlier waste had been dumped in open plots across localities, which were later fenced.

About 850 vehicles were deployed for waste collection, carrying nearly 800 tonnes of wet waste and 1,200 tonnes of dry waste daily. Old waste was converted into manure while dry waste was recycled. An energy plant producing about 18,000 kilograms of CNG was established and Indore joined the International Clean Air Catalyst Programme. More than ten CSOs conducted awareness campaigns on waste segregation and cleanliness. Toilets were built for below poverty line households and public toilets were constructed across the city, eliminating open defecation. Roads, drainage networks and sewage lines were repaired and expanded. Twice-daily cleaning was introduced and apps and WhatsApp groups were used for monitoring.

Citizen participation remained central to these efforts and the project gained global recognition, becoming a case study published in Harvard Business Review.

However, the contamination tragedy reveals a gap between Indore's management-driven cleanliness campaign and Geddes' principle of diagnosing problems before implementing solutions. The disaster reflects systemic lapses including complacency, weak supervision and declining civic vigilance.

Retaining the top rank will now be far more difficult. Municipal officials, political representatives, ward corporators, citizens and CSOs must work together to restore Indore's image. The inclusive approach advocated by Sir Patrick Geddes in 1918 must guide the city again.

Sir Patrick Geddes is regarded as a pioneer of sociology in India along with Professor GS Ghurye. After leaving Indore he established the first Department of Sociology at the University of Bombay in 1919. In 2019 an international conference on Clean India was organised in Indore where Marion Geddes, granddaughter of Sir Patrick Geddes, was invited and honoured.

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As far as the US President Donald Trump is concerned, if his latest assertions are to be believed, which might change tomorrow, the US' war with Iran is over. In a virtual G-7 meeting, he categorically said that "Iran is about to surrender," and added, "I got rid of a cancer that was threatening us all." His social media post is more revealing, "We are totally destroying the terrorist regime of Iran, militarily, economically, and otherwise, yet, if you read the failing New York Times, you would incorrectly think that we are not winning. Iran's Navy is gone, their Air Force is no longer, missiles, drones, and everything else are being decimated, and their leaders have been wiped from the face of the earth.... They have been killing innocent people... for 47 years, and now I, as the forty-seventh president of the United States of America, am killing them. What a great honour it is to do so."

Operation Epic Fury, as Trump dubs it, has brought Iran to its knees, or rather at the knees of America. The US president does not like Iran's new supreme religious leader, the son of the former one who was killed on the first day of the missile attacks. America feels that the son is "unacceptable." There are experts who contend that the vast sections in Iran do not like the new leader, and want to be rid of any religious leader. The population will be happy if the US succeeds, as it will herald an open and liberal culture. Many of the leaders at the G-7 call left unconvicted, and felt that the US president was "ambiguous and non-committal." He is unsure about either the objectives or the timelines. He never expected Iran to retaliate the way it did, and to do so for almost two weeks. He wanted the war to be over in days.

However, reports from the American media, and remember the way Trump dumped a leading newspaper in his social media post, indicate that the war is far from over. According to a foreign news agency, "US intelligence indicates that Iran's leadership is still largely intact, and is not at the risk of collapse any time soon after nearly two weeks of relentless US and Israeli bombardment, according to three sources familiar with the matter. A 'multitude' of intelligence reports provide 'consistent analysis that the regime is not in danger' of collapse, and 'retains control of the Iranian public,' said one of the sources, all of whom were granted anonymity to discuss US intelligence findings." The stark conclusion is that despite the claims of Trump, or other world leaders, an "acceptable end" is unlikely if the Iranian leaders remain entrenched, and the public stands behind them. World-over, Sunni and Shia populations have come together to oppose the US attacks.

Hence, for the war to end, America will need to manage a regime change in Iran. This will only escalate the war, and will dissuade some of the powerful allies in Europe and the Middle East. For a regime change, the US will need to send ground troops, and seek the support of the other militaries. According to a foreign agency quoted above, "Reuters reported last week that Iranian Kurdish militia based in neighbouring Iraq consulted with the US about how and whether to attack Iran's security forces in the western part of the country. Such an incursion could put pressure on the Iranian security services there, allowing the Iranians to rise against the government. Abdullah Mohtadi, the head of the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, part of six-party coalition of Iranian Kurdish parties, said in an interview... that the parties are highly organised inside Iran, and that 'tens of thousands of young people are ready to take up arms' against the (Iranian) Government if they receive (the) US support."

But Trump does not want to make the situation messier by sending in ground troops. He has ruled out the involvement of the Kurds, as this will complicate the matter. His allies will not approve of sending troops. They are fine with air and missile attacks, but they will shudder at the thought of bodybags coming back home. Israel, however, will propel the US and other European nations to continue the war until the Iranian leadership capitulates and collapses. The Middle East nations are caught in a shambles. They truly face the Catch-22 situation. They may want the US to continue the attacks, and risk more attacks on their civilian and other targets, which will worsen the crisis. They may want the US to withdraw, but this will leave the Iran leadership intact, and possibly more confident because it defeated the mighty Americans.

What is more ironic is that a self-acclaimed 'Man of Peace,' who stopped several global wars, and thought he was the right and true recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, has escalated a Middle East war into an almost-world war situation. He went in without realising what will happen if Iran fights back. Hence, he has no way of knowing how to get out. In the end, his allies are suffering the most, even as his part-friend, part-enemy, Russia, seems to be having fun. Some estimates contend that Russia's revenues are up by \$150 million a day.

# Iran cooks up a new India crisis

*Excessive buying, hoarding, low imports create LPG shortages*

**OUR TAKE**

If the petroleum minister, Hardeep Puri, is to be believed, there is no shortage of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) in the country, especially for the household sector. According to a civil servant in the same ministry, the so-called shortages, which are entirely based on anecdotal evidence, and magnified fears, are due to large scale disinformation. The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, targeted the Opposition political parties, and charged that they have stoked unnecessary fuel and fire in the ongoing crisis. The regime blames excessive buying and hoarding, including black marketing, rather than low imports, for the scenario.

Indeed, the petroleum ministry doles out figures to manage and discredit the panic, and indicate that the shortages are being 'cooked-and-served,' and do not show the reality. For example, a civil servant disclosed that the Indian refineries produce more than 50 per cent of the LPG, or 97.5 million metric standard cu m per day, out of a total requirement of 189 million cu m a day. Out of the imports of just over 90 million cu m, 47.5 million cu m is affected as the foreign suppliers have declared force majeure, or reneged on their contractual obligations.

However, Indian refiners have hiked the local production by a quarter or more since March 8, 2026, or a week after the Middle East crisis began. Hence, this adds more than 24 million cu m to the overall supplies, and makes up for more than half of the declines in imports. In essence, the actual shortage is just over 20 million cu m, which can be easily made up as bookings for household LPG was increased from 21 to 25 days, and LPG supplies for commercial ventures, like restaurants, was capped. Ergo, there is no shortage in the country.

Yet, media reports, and other actions by the

Government indicate a completely different picture. Imports account for 60 per cent of the daily requirement, and 80-90 per cent of it passes through the Strait of Hormuz, which is almost shut due to Iran attacks. Reports that some ships had passed through the Strait, including a few destined for India, were denied later. Iran warned that ships passing through it will do so at their own peril. If these facts are true, it seems to hint at a far-larger crisis. The shortages may be 40-50 per cent of the daily needs.

Evidence from across the country shows signs of extreme shortages. Obviously, in the commercial segment, the situation is acute. Restaurants across the country have shut down, or curtailed their activities. Large firms that employ tens of thousands of people have urged them to either bring food from home, or work from home because their cafeterias are closed due to the lack of LPG supplies. Commercial buyers, according to media reports, pay 5-10 times higher prices to procure some supplies. Citizens, whose daily food intake depends on external sources, like tiffin and dabba services, are in a quandary.

Now, let us turn the attention towards household consumption. Supplies are choked to say the least. LPG employees have switched off their phones because of regular and incessant calls for deliveries, or complaints from the customers. The online supply system, which depends on OTPs and messages, is in trouble. People queue up outside LPG supply offices to demand a cylinder or two. There is complete chaos and confusion in the streets, as households struggle to procure supplies. There are fears that kitchens may come to a stop. Many households have purchased alternative cooking equipment.

Look at the import logistics. The LPG dependency on the Strait of Hormuz creates huge problems. In contrast, the crude oil dependency is less, as "India has successfully diversified its crude oil imports, with 70 per cent now arriving from alternative routes that bypass the disrupted Strait of Hormuz." The latter was done since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war, and especially so in the past 12 months due to the American pressure to stop purchases from Russia. In contrast, the LPG global supply chain remained intact, and was shattered immediately by the Iran war. New Delhi had little warning to stock up LPG.

India, like other large consumers, including the International Energy Agency (IEA), maintains massive strategic emergency reserves of petrol and crude oil for use during such crises. Recently, the IEA and G-7 agreed to open the spigots and valves of these strategic supplies to ease the bottlenecks. But India has "thin storage buffers" for LPG. Hence, any shortages at the global supply level immediately translates into one at local distributor one. The transition happens within days, as is the case now. Once the shortage fears escalate, there is no stopping them, even with higher local supplies that take time to reach the market.

Of course, the LPG crisis is worsened by consumer behaviour, and those of the local retailers and distributors. Due to the fears, and media reports about restaurants shutting down, LPG booking volumes from the household sector surged by 50-300 per cent across the cities and towns. Panic set in as people felt that if the war continues, there will be a complete shut-down, and each household wanted a cylinder or two so that each can last for a few weeks. The massive spikes rattled the tech-based booking system. As computer servers crashed in some parts, the news spread that LPG was not available, which aided the panic.

The Government, of course, accorded priority to the household sector, and did not wish to disrupt those supplies. So, while it increased the household booking period from 21 to 25 days, it capped the commercial sector sullivan at just a fifth of its consumption. This turned out to be a blunder, as news from restaurant closures convinced the housewives that they were next in the line. Large media headlines forced even the sober people to rush to book LPG cylinders. Indeed, the policy hastened the panic buying, as well forced people to hoard to make money.

A crackdown on hoarding and black marketing to increase supply so that there are no queues, and forcing extra supplies from the refineries may assuage some of the concerns. But this will take concerted efforts from the various governments to push excessive supplies into the markets, and in the right places, to counter negative media headlines. In addition, after the Russia-Ukraine war, India-Pakistan tensions, Pakistan's attack on Afghanistan, and US' takeover of Venezuela, and attempts on Greenland should have convinced New Delhi that it needs sturdier energy security measures in case of force majeure.



**A Left-Handed Economist**

# Does GDP matter in a crisis?

*Debates about how India grew, or will grow seem irrelevant now*

As the Iran crisis escalates, asset classes stumble and tumble, several problems like LPG shortages loom large, experts contend that a prolonged war can dent India's GDP growth by a per cent or two. Instead of a more than seven per cent growth, we may be back to the age-old five per cent ones. Hence, talking about growth in such a scenario may seem meaningless. What may be important is how much can India suffer and sustain, and how fast can it recover, before it makes the transition towards another take off?

But even as economists and policy-makers grapple with this adverse and stark scenario, a new research paper states that calculations about the country's GDP are irrelevant for another reason. For the past two decades, they were calculated wrongly, and not just because of old series. Although many of the aspects may be corrected in the new recently-launched series, and others may get perfected in the future, India may still get the GDP estimates wrong. The new series does admit to some of the mistakes inherent in the old one.

According to media reports, a new research paper by several authors, suggests that the "official data may have mis-estimated the country's growth trajectory over the past two decades." Indeed, the GDP was possibly underestimated by 1-1.5 per cent between 2005 and 2011, and overestimated by 1.5-2 per cent between 2012 and 2023. Thus, instead of the "steady high growth" that the policy-makers claimed over two decades, there was a huge mismatch. According to the authors, the breaking point or transition point was the 'Great Recession,' or 2008.

One can pinpoint several factors to explain the dichotomy, or problem areas. One of the most prominent, which this newspaper has regularly highlighted in these columns, is the transfer of data from the formal sector to the informal one. In a sense, the former was used to estimate the latter, which constitutes almost half of the overall gross value-added. The approach became problematic after several policies hit the informal sector more disproportionately than the formal one, and these include demonetisation, launch of GST, and the pandemic.

"While the formal firms recovered relatively quickly, many smaller enterprises struggled or shut down. Yet the GDP methodology effectively assumed that the informal sector was growing at the same pace as the formal one," states a media report. In fact, the research shows that while the formal sector grew at a faster clip of 10 per cent since 2015, the rate of annual growth in the informal one was a mere 6.7 per cent. This created a huge diver-



gence. The new series aims to set this right via an annual survey of the informal sector. But this may not be enough, as it will be highly subjective, and may be biased.

A second problem area was that several sectors relied on the wholesale price index for the deflators to convert nominal output, or actual output, into real growth, or growth adjusted against inflation. These calculations, or deflators, as they are called, are unduly affected by the changes in commodity prices, especially oil and oil-related ones. Between 2011 and 2025, sadly, the wholesale price index was 2.2 per cent lower than consumer price inflation, which is the crucial figure. Hence, the output prices were possibly understated, so was inflation, which pushed up the real GDP, or the figure that we know of.

The new research points to a third divergence, which seems a bit mysterious. "After

2011, the GDP growth appeared to diverge sharply from several widely-used economic indicators. Exports, bank credit, industrial production, tax revenues, and electricity consumption showed a sharp slowdown after the mid-2000s boom. Yet, official GDP data suggested that the economy continued to expand at a similar pace," states the media report. For example, bank credit growth fell by a third, from 15.6 per cent in 2005-11 to 5.6 per cent after that, and industrial production slowed down too. These raise questions about GDP.

In a nation like India, individual sectors diverge sharply from overall trends, and even if the relationship between the sectors and GDP is "tight," the correlations often break down as the economy evolves, changes, and transforms. However, if each of the six parameters that the new research included, "posted double-digit growth (annual

average) in the first period (2005-11), and collapsed in the second (2012-23)," there are inherent issues with the calculations. In the two periods, apart from real credit and production mentioned above, real exports fell from nearly 14 per cent to 5.4 per cent, and direct tax revenues "slumped from 13 per cent to seven per cent a year."

Several researchers pointed out the breakdown between the correlations. They maintained that this suggested that "something may have gone awry." According to the new research, "Divergences between corporate sales, investment, and official GDP growth have previously been interpreted as warning signals of possible measurement issues.... These breakdowns suggest problems in the measurement of nominal output, price deflators, or the proxying of economic activity...." The same was witnessed over the past 12 months, when the data about external disruptions did not match some of the other data.

Despite the high American tariffs, exports went up in several months. If the industrial production figures were up, the numbers for the core sector were down, or the surveys among managers showed variance. Similarly, despite complaints from the corporate sector, and surveys that showed low consumer buying sentiments, the GDP growth in the first half of 2025-26 was a massive eight per cent. Indeed, after the GST tax cuts in September, the estimates were lower. Such divergences confuse experts, and the media continues to choose the figures that best suited its bias or ideology. The critics were happy, so were loyalists.

"For much of the past decade, experts had raised questions about the methodology used to estimate GDP. These doubts spread to the wider public in 2016, when the demonetisation, and withdrawal of 86 per cent of the country's currency apparently caused real GDP to accelerate to an eye-popping annual rate of 8.3 per cent. The resurfaced in 2019, when a credit crunch caused by a crisis in India's non-bank financial institutions apparently caused only a minor blip in growth. Then, in June 2025, with private investment and job creation weak but GDP apparently booming, two former officials... expressed concern that 'something does not add up,' states the research report.

## Powering Resilience: India's long-term energy strategy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Operation Epic Fury has had an impact of epic proportions on world energy prices, sending crude oil prices skyrocketing to \$120 per barrel just a few days ago. Since then, prices have remained volatile, keeping the entire energy market on edge.

At the centre of global concern lies the Strait of Hormuz, the world's most critical chokepoint, through which nearly one-fifth of global crude oil passes. The Strait of Hormuz matters significantly for India's energy supplies, but things currently look manageable. Over the last 11 years, India has actively diversified the sources of its energy imports. India has also worked to change the mix of its energy sources, strongly pushing domestically generated renewable energy.

Imagine if this crisis had hit India a decade ago. With almost all our oil and gas coming from the same volatile region and no real alternatives in place, the impact would have been devastating. Petrol and diesel prices would have shot up overnight, crippling transport and pushing inflation through the roof. India has relatively remained insulated from the churn caused by the crisis.

In comparison, other countries are struggling sig-

nificantly. Japan, already burdened by record-high public debt, has become one of the most vulnerable economies. The gas-reliant UK has seen immediate price spikes leading to renewed inflation. Nations like Egypt and Turkey are confronting fresh inflationary pressures. Singapore is dealing with sharp increases in electricity and petrol costs, while South Korea has resorted to imposing a fuel price cap for the first time in nearly three decades to stabilise its economy amid the oil surge.

The current crisis, therefore, offers an important reminder: India's relative resilience today is not accidental. It is the result of deliberate policy choices made over the past decade under Prime Minister Narendra Modi to diversify energy sources and strengthen domestic capacity.

In today's interconnected world, no country can be fully self-sufficient in energy. Even advanced economies rely on global supply chains for fuel, technology and critical minerals. The real challenge is not eliminating dependence, but ensuring that a single disruption does not cripple the entire system.

Over the past decade, India has steadily moved in that direction. Through a strategy of multi-alignment diplomacy, the country has expanded its crude sourcing network from 27 countries to

over 40, reducing reliance on any single supplier or region. In the event of supply disruptions in one part of the world, this broader network provides India with greater flexibility to adjust.

Thus, not putting all eggs in the same basket has helped us sail through.

At the same time, India has accelerated the expansion of its domestic energy capacity. The country's total installed electricity capacity has more than doubled in the past 11 years and now crossed 520 GW, with more than half coming from non-fossil fuel sources, including renewable energy, hydro and nuclear power. Without this rapid expansion of clean energy, India would today be far more dependent on imported fuels to meet rising electricity demand.

One of the other most visible examples of this shift is the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, which aims to install rooftop solar panels in one crore households. This has enabled families to generate their own electricity, promoted decentralised energy production and reduced pressure on conventional power sources.

Beyond lowering household electricity bills, the programme carries significant long-term economic and environmental benefits. The initiative is expected to save the Government nearly ₹75,000 crore annually in



electricity costs, highlighting how clean energy expansion can simultaneously strengthen fiscal efficiency and sustainability.

Without such decentralised solar expansion, rising electricity demand would have placed greater pressure on fossil-fuel-based power generation, increasing fuel imports and making India far more vulnerable to global energy disruptions like those unfolding today.

Such initiatives have also begun to influence household energy behaviour. As rooftop solar expands and electricity becomes cheaper, families may increasingly rely on electric appliances for cooking and other daily needs. Over time, this

shift could reduce India's dependence on imported LPG as well.

Alongside renewable electricity generation, India is also transforming its mobility sector through EVs. This shift is strategically important because the transport sector accounts for a significant share of India's oil consumption, meaning that electrifying mobility can gradually reduce long-term crude oil demand. Reflecting this transition, India's EV sector has expanded rapidly from just 2,600 electric vehicles in 2014 to 16.71 lakh EV sales in 2025, signalling the growing adoption of clean mobility.

Government policies have played a crucial role in

this transition. The FAME-I scheme (2015) supported around 2.78 lakh EVs, saving nearly 50 million litres of fuel.

As EV adoption grows, its impact goes beyond cleaner transport. Over time, greater electric mobility will reduce India's dependence on imported oil, making the country less vulnerable to global disruptions like those currently unfolding in the Middle East. If the rapid expansion of electric vehicles had not taken place over the past decade, India would have been in a tight spot. India would be even more dependent on petrol and diesel for transportation, exposing the economy to sharper fuel price spikes and

a much larger import bill at a time when global energy markets are already under severe stress.

The integration of renewable energy with electric mobility creates a powerful multiplier effect. Electric vehicles already have significantly lower operating costs than petrol or diesel vehicles. When EVs are charged using solar power generated at home, transportation becomes not only cleaner but also significantly cheaper. The broader impact is both economic and strategic. Lower fuel imports not only improve air quality and mobility but also shield the economy from external oil shocks like those currently unfolding in global energy markets.

India has also strengthened its Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) capacity over the past decade to prepare for supply disruptions during geopolitical crises. Under PM Modi, India expanded its emergency oil storage infrastructure with strategic reserves at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru, and Padur, while initiating additional facilities at Chandikholand Padur Phase-II. As a result, India today has oil reserves that can sustain the country for around 74 days when strategic reserves are combined with commercial inventories.

A decade ago, however, India's emergency crude

reserves could barely cover 13 days of demand, leaving the economy far more exposed to sudden import shocks. The expansion of strategic reserves has therefore placed India in a significantly stronger position to manage supply disruptions and price volatility during crises like the one currently unfolding in global energy markets.

In a world where geopolitical tensions can disrupt global energy supply chains overnight, true resilience is not something built during a crisis. It must be forged years in advance through foresight, strategic planning, and decisive action. India's decade-long push for energy diversification under PM Modi, including diversifying import sources and routes, building strong long-term global partnerships, making massive investments in domestic infrastructure, and accelerating the shift to renewables, is now clearly proving its value.

As the Hormuz crisis reveals vulnerabilities across the globe, India's preparations have significantly softened the impact compared to many other nations. This moment underscores why proactive self-reliance in energy is more critical than ever. In an unpredictable world, such forward-thinking strategies remain the strongest defence against sudden economic shocks.

## Akasa Air to set up MRO facility at Noida International Airport

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Mumbai

Domestic carrier Akasa Air on Friday announced a strategic collaboration with Noida International Airport for setting up an aircraft Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facility at the upcoming airport in Jewar, Uttar Pradesh.

Under the collaboration, Akasa Air will operate the facility within the airport premises, offering advanced MRO services, supporting a broad spectrum of maintenance activities, it said in a statement.

Aimed at strengthening India's aviation infrastructure and positioning Noida International Airport (NIA) as one of the country's leading MRO hubs, the facility will enhance operational efficiency, generate local employment opportunities and foster skill development in the region, as per the statement.



This would be Akasa Air's first MRO facility, since its launch in August 2022. "This partnership will not only enhance India's MRO capabilities but also create opportunities for skill development and employment in the region," said Christoph

Schnellmann, Chief Executive Officer, NIA. This collaboration marks an important step toward strengthening India's self-reliance in aviation maintenance services while advancing innovation and operational excellence across the sector, the statement

said. The partnership also marks a major step in shaping an integrated aviation ecosystem that supports long-term industry growth and contributes to the regional economy.

As India's aviation market continues to grow at an unprecedented pace, developing strong domestic MRO capabilities will be critical for airlines to operate efficiently and reliably at scale, said Vinay Dube, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Akasa Air. "For Akasa, investing early in this capability is part of a disciplined approach to growth, strengthening our operational backbone while contributing to the development of a more self-reliant aviation ecosystem in India," he added.

On March 6, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation issued the aerodrome licence to the Noida International Airport, marking a key step towards the commencement of flight operations.

## Fitch raises India's GDP growth projection for FY26 to 7.5%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

Fitch Ratings on Friday raised India's GDP growth forecast marginally to 7.5 per cent for current fiscal with domestic demand being the biggest growth driver this year.

In December, Fitch had projected India's GDP growth at 7.4 per cent for current fiscal.

For next fiscal (2026-27), Fitch has revised upwards its growth estimate to 6.7 per cent, from 6.4 per cent projected in December 2025.

In its Global Economic Outlook — March 2026, Fitch projected world GDP growth



at 2.6 per cent in 2026 on the assumption that the Iran war does not result in a larger or an enduring spike in energy prices that pushes the annual 2026 oil price forecast above \$70/barrel.

"But a scenario where oil prices rise to USD 100 and stay there would be a signif-

icant adverse global supply shock," Fitch Ratings Chief Economist Brian Coulton said.

With regard to India, Fitch said there are tentative signs that real activity is slowing in January and February, but the economy remains resilient, and credit growth is still in double digits.

Fitch expects growth to slow in first half of FY 2026-27; with rising inflation constraining real incomes and limiting consumer spending growth.

GDP growth slowed in the December quarter to 7.8 per cent YoY from 8.4 per cent in September quarter.

## Passenger vehicle dispatches rise 10.6% in February to 4,17,705 units: SIAM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

Domestic passenger vehicle dispatches from companies to dealers rose 10.6 per cent year-on-year to 4,17,705 units in February as positive market sentiments continued but the war in West Asia remains a concern as it could impact manufacturing and exports, industry body

Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) said on Friday. Passenger vehicle dispatches stood at 3,77,689 units in February 2025.

Growth in PV sales last month was driven mainly by utility vehicles, which clocked a growth of 13.5 per cent at 2,36,957 units as compared to 2,08,795 units in February last year.

Passenger car dispatches declined 3.8 per cent at 1,06,799 units last month as compared to 1,10,966 units in the year-ago period, SIAM said.

Sales of vans in the domestic market were at 11,620 units last month as compared to 11,493 units in February 2025, up 1.1 per cent, it added. Two-wheeler sales



rose 35.2 per cent to 18,71,406 units last month as against 13,84,605 units in February

last year, SIAM said in a statement. Motorcycle sales in February were up 30.8 per

cent at 10,96,537 units as against 8,38,250 units in the year-ago month.

Similarly, scooter sales rose 42.3 per cent at 7,29,774 units last month as compared to 5,12,783 units in the same period last year, SIAM said.

Three-wheeler dispatches to dealers were up 29 per cent last month at 74,573 units as against 57,788 units in the year-ago period, it added.

Commenting on the performance, SIAM Director General Rajesh Menon said, "Positive sentiments in the industry continue as passenger

vehicles, two-wheelers, and three-wheelers posted their highest ever Sales of February in 2026, with double-digit growth compared to February 2025."

On the road ahead, he said, "While March has festive drivers in several parts of the country, the recent conflict in West Asia remains a concern, both from the perspective of the supply chain, which could impact the manufacturing processes and exports." Industry would keep a close watch on evolving geopolitical developments, he added.

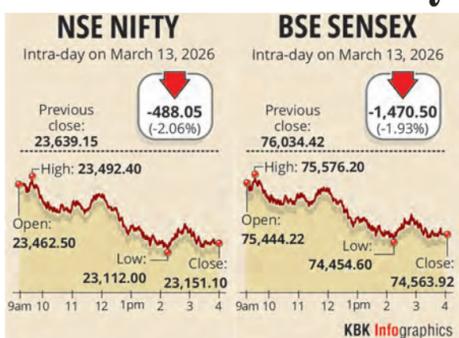
## Stock markets tumble for 3rd day

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Mumbai

Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended sharply lower on Friday, propelled by heightening conflict in West Asia and surging oil prices.

Besides, heavy selling in global markets, persistent foreign fund outflows and weakness in the rupee also dented investors' sentiment. Declining for the third day running, the 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 1,579.82 points, or 2 per cent, to 74,454.60 during intra-day trade. The benchmark finally settled at 74,563.92, down 1,470.50 points, or 1.93 per cent. The 50-share NSE Nifty tanked 488.05 points, or 2.06 per cent, to end at 23,151.10.

From the 30 Sensex firms, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Steel, SBI, Bharat Electronics, Maruti, and UltraTech Cement were among the prominent laggards. Hindustan Unilever and Bharti Airtel were the



gainers. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, climbed 0.25 per cent to \$100.7 per barrel.

In Asian markets, South Korea's benchmark Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended lower.

Markets in Europe were quoting in negative territory. The US market ended sharply lower on Thursday. The Nasdaq Composite tanked 1.78 per cent, Dow Jones Industrial

Average tumbled 1.56 per cent, and S&P 500 dived 1.52 per cent.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹7,049.87 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) however, bought stocks worth ₹7,449.77 crore.

On Thursday, the Sensex tanked 829.29 points, or 1.08 per cent, to settle at 76,034.42. Similarly, the Nifty fell by 227.70 points, or 0.95 per cent, to close at 23,639.15.

## Rupee falls 20 paise to settle at record low of 92.45 against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Mumbai

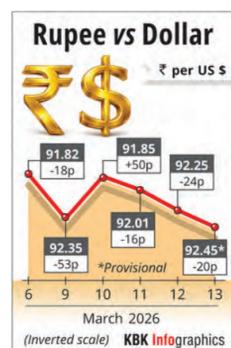
The rupee slumped 20 paise to close at a fresh record low of 92.45 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday as crude oil prices crossed \$101/barrel amid the raging West Asia conflict.

A stronger greenback, heavy foreign fund outflows and sustained selling in the domestic equity markets further weighed on the rupee, according to forex traders.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 92.33 and kept losing ground to hit a fresh intra-day low of 92.47 against the US dollar.

It eventually settled at its lifetime low of 92.45 (provisional), down 20 paise from its previous close.

In the preceding session, the rupee lost 24 paise to settle at 92.25 against the US dollar, its lowest-ever closing



level until Thursday. "The rupee hit a new record low on Friday on weak domestic markets and a strong dollar. Rising crude oil prices and continued FII outflows also pressured the rupee," Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on risk aversion in global

markets amid the ongoing US-Israel and Iran war. Rising crude oil prices and worries over inflation may further pressurise the rupee. A strong dollar and rising US treasury yields may too weigh on the domestic unit," he said.

Rupee is expected to trade in the range of ₹92.10-92.80, Choudhary added.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.43 per cent higher at 100.17.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading higher by 1.41 per cent at \$101.9 per barrel in futures trade.

On the domestic equity market front, the 30-share BSE Sensex crashed 1,470.50 points, or 1.93 per cent, to 74,563.92, while the Nifty plummeted to 23,151.10, down 488.05 points, or 2.06 per cent.

## IESA to bring white paper on stationary energy storage market next week

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

Indian Energy Storage Alliance (IESA) on Friday said it will bring a white paper on the stationary energy storage market at the Stationary Energy Storage India conference on March 20.

The Stationary Energy Storage India (SESI) 2026 will be held on March 20 at Yashobhoomi, Dwarka, on the sidelines of the Bharat Electricity Summit, accord-

already awarded. The total pipeline of Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) projects now stands at 92 GWh, while pumped (hydro) storage projects (PSP) have surged from 50 GWh to 132 GWh since last year.

With India set to commission nearly 5 GWh of new capacity in 2026, a tenfold jump in installed capacity, the sector is poised for a breakthrough year.

Adding to this momentum, 69 new BESS tenders totalling 102 GWh were



ing to a statement. The event is expected to bring together more than 300 industry leaders, Government officials and international partners from over 10 countries.

According to the statement, India's energy storage sector is experiencing unprecedented momentum, with the cumulative stationary energy storage market soaring from 122 GWh to 224 GWh in just one year, a remarkable 1.8x increase.

The project pipeline has rapidly expanded, with 60 GWh under execution, 80 GWh in various tendering stages, and 35 GWh

issued in the past year alone, marking a 35 per cent jump over 2024 and nearly doubling the annual tender volume.

The Indian Energy Storage Alliance (IESA) is set to unveil its white paper on the Stationary Energy Storage Market at the Stationary Energy Storage India (SESI) 2026 conference.

The new white paper, developed in partnership with Customized Energy Solutions (CES), delivers the most comprehensive analysis to date of India's burgeoning stationary storage sector, the statement claimed.

## FROM THE WORLD

### NEPAL

#### Oli's father passes away

Former Nepal prime minister KP Sharma Oli's father, Mohan Prasad Oli, passed away after a prolonged illness on Friday. He was 97. Mohan Prasad Oli breathed his last early in the morning at the Nepal-Korea Friendship Hospital in Bhaktapur district, where he was undergoing treatment for some time, according to the CPN-UML sources. Oli, the chair of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), lit his father's funeral pyre at Pashupati Aryaghat in Kathmandu later in the day, the party sources said. Oli, the four-time prime minister ousted in September last year after a massive Gen Z-led protests, lost the recently concluded general election to former Kathmandu Mayor Balendra Shah 'Balen' from the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) in Jhapa 5 constituency in eastern Nepal.

### TURKIYE

#### NATO intercepts Iranian missile

NATO defences on Friday intercepted a ballistic missile fired from Iran over Turkey, the Defense Ministry said. It marked the third such incident since the start of the Iran war. Turkey's Defence Ministry said the missile was destroyed by NATO air defences deployed in the eastern Mediterranean. Residents in the southern city of Adana reported hearing a loud explosion and sirens sounding at Incirlik Air Base, which is used by US forces, in the early hours of Friday. No casualties were reported. This week, NATO deployed an additional Patriot air defense system in the southeastern province of Malatya, where the Kurecik radar station is based. The Defence Ministry stressed Thursday that Incirlik is a Turkish base - and that the foreign troop presence doesn't alter the base's status - in an apparent response to warnings from Tehran to regional countries not to host US military bases.

# Blast hits Tehran rally site after Israeli warning

**BJON GAMBRELL/DAVID RISING/SALLY ABU ALJOUNDI**  
Dubai

A large explosion rocked an area of Iran's Capital where thousands were gathered Friday for the annual State-organised Quds Day to support the Palestinians and call for Israel's demise.

Israel had earlier warned that it would target the area in central Tehran.

There were no immediate reports of casualties. But the decision to proceed with the mass demonstrations, and Israel's threat to target the area, underscored the fierce determination on both sides nearly two weeks into a war that has rattled the global economy and shows no sign of letting up.

Iran has continued to launch widespread daily missile and drone attacks on Israel and neighbouring Gulf States, and has effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's traded oil passes, even as US and Israeli warplanes pummel military and other targets across Iran.

Iran's Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei on Thursday vowed to continue the attacks and keep the strait closed in his first public statement since succeeding his father, who was killed in the opening day of the war.

Khamenei has not been seen in public since taking over leadership, and the written statement was read by a State TV anchor.

With growing global concerns about a possible energy crisis and no end to the war in sight, the price of Brent crude oil, the international standard, remained over \$100 per barrel. Brent prices have spiked as high as about \$120 per barrel and are about 40 per cent higher than when Israel and the United States launched the war on February 28.

The US military meanwhile said that four of six crew members of an American KC-135 refuelling plane that went down in Iraq had been found dead and that recovery efforts were ongoing to find the other two.

US Central Command said that the crash wasn't related to friendly or hostile fire, and that two aircraft were involved, including one that landed safely. The KC-135 is the fourth publicly acknowledged aircraft to crash as part of the US military's operations against Iran. Last week, three American fighter jets were mistakenly downed by friendly Kuwaiti fire. Explosion rocks area of mass demonstration.

The explosion rocked the Ferdowsi Square area midday, where thousands



A cleric chants slogans in support of Palestinians in Tehran on Friday

had gathered for an annual rally organised by the Government in which they chanted "death to Israel" and "death to America."

Israel had issued a warning on a Farsi-language X account for people to clear the area shortly before the blast. But few Iranians would have seen it, as authorities have almost completely shut down the internet since the start of the war. Footage from the scene showed people chanting "God is greatest," as smoke rose in the area.

Israel did not say what it was targeting, but Iranian leaders often attend the annual rallies. The hard-liner

who leads Iran's judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, had been giving an interview to a State television reporter at the demonstration when the strike happened. His bodyguards encircled him, as he raised his fist and said Iran "under this rain and missiles will never withdraw." Senior security official Ali Larjani, who was also at the Quds Day demonstration, told Iranian media covering the event that the suspected Israeli attack was a "sign of its desperation."

Israel had earlier announced another wave of strikes in Iran targeting infrastructure, and said its air

force had hit more than 200 targets in the last 24 hours, including missile launchers, defence systems and weapons production sites.

In a social media post hours earlier, US President Donald Trump had said "watch what happens to these deranged scumbags today," while claiming that Iran's military had been decimated and that its leaders had been "wiped from the face of the earth." New Iranian attacks across the region.

Iran has been attacking oil and other infrastructure around the Gulf region, and on Friday Saudi Arabia that it

had downed nearly 50 drones sent in multiple waves. In Oman, two people were killed when two drones crashed in an industrial area in the region of Sohar, the Oman News Agency reported.

Sirens also sounded in Bahrain warning of incoming fire, and black smoke billowed from an industrial area in the business and tourism hub of Dubai, after a blaze that authorities said was sparked by debris from an interception.

A building at the Dubai International Financial Centre also sustained damage when hit with debris from what authorities described as a "successful interception." DIFC is an economic free zone for banks, capital traders and wealth managers, home to exclusive restaurants and nightclubs.

Iran said earlier this week that it would target banks and financial institutions, after an airstrike hit a bank in Tehran. In Turkey, NATO defences intercepted another ballistic missile fired from Iran, the third time since the war began. Residents in the southern city of Adana reported hearing a loud explosion and sirens sounding at Incirlik Air Base, which is used by US forces, in the early hours of the day.

Fighting escalates between Israel and Hezbollah. Nearly

60 people were wounded in northern Israel after the Lebanon's Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah said that it had fired several rocket salvos toward the area and at Israeli troops in southern Lebanon. Almost all the injuries were described as very minor.

One person was killed in southwestern Beirut in an Israeli strike, according to the Lebanese Health Ministry, and another attack hit an apartment in the capital, leaving it engulfed in flames. The Israeli military said it had targeted a Hezbollah member.

In eastern Lebanon, a strike on an apartment wounded a local official with the Lebanese branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and killed his two sons, the State-run National News Agency reported. For the past two years, Israel has targeted officials with the group.

More than 600 people have been killed in Lebanon since the fighting began, the Health Ministry has reported, and nearly 8,00,000 have been internally displaced, according to the UN refugee agency.

Iranian authorities say that more than 1,300 people have been killed there, and Israel has reported 12 deaths. The US has lost at least 11 soldiers, while another eight have suffered severe injuries. (AP)

## Trump administration denounces CNN for airing messages from Iranian leaders

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
Washington



The Trump administration denounced CNN on Thursday for airing a portion of the new Iranian supreme leader's public statement, the second time in three days that he's targeted the network for reporting on how the regime is responding to the American attacks. The attack illustrated the care news outlets must take in reporting during wartime, and the responsibilities of American journalists to report the perspective of countries its Government views as enemies. It also exposed inconsistencies.

The message of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei during his first public statement since he succeeded his father, who was killed in an Israeli airstrike, was widely available elsewhere. The White House said on social media that "fake news CNN just aired four straight minutes of uninterrupted Iranian state TV, run by the same psychotic and murderous regime that prided itself on brutally slaughtering Americans for 47 years."

Earlier CNN interview criticised by Trump's communications leader

Two days earlier, White House communications director Steven Cheung took issue with CNN anchor Erin Burnett's interview with Hossein Mousavian, a former Iranian nuclear negotiator. Burnett asked Mousavian

what he had been hearing about the Iranian Government's interest in having talks with the United States. That wasn't much, he said.

"Ever notice how CNN just regurgitates quotes and unverified information from Iranian terrorists?" Cheung wrote on X. "Total disgrace. They have become the murderous Iranian Regime's version of Pravda," he said, referring to the official newspaper of the former Soviet Union. CNN did not address Cheung's statement but did respond to the White House attack on Thursday. It noted that CNN, Sky News and Al Jazeera also showed portions of the ayatollah's statement live.

"The world is watching with anticipation which direction this war will take," CNN said. "Purported remarks from Iran's new supreme leader are a critical component in helping audiences understand where this conflict is heading and were aired for their obvious news value." Other news

outlets, including The Associated Press, sent out alerts on what Khamenei said. His vow to keep up attacks on other Arab countries in the region and plans to choke off the world's oil supply were headlines.

The New York Times led its website with a story on the speech in its immediate aftermath, later writing that the speech "was an early indication of how the new supreme leader would approach the war, as well as how he would lead the country."

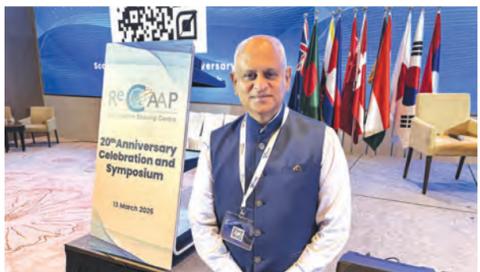
CNN has long been a favoured target of President Donald Trump, dating back to his first term. It's a particularly vulnerable time for the network with Paramount Global's agreement to purchase CNN's parent company, Warner Bros. Discovery, raising questions about its future editorial independence.

CNN showed a news anchor reading a portion of Khamenei's remarks in Farsi, with an English translation. It did not air them in full. After the speech, correspondent Nick Paton Walsh gave a debrief to anchor Kate Bolduan, noting how the non-appearance of the leader - reportedly injured in an air attack - was as important as what he said. "We were waiting to see the face of the man to have proof of his health and survival," Walsh said, "and they've not met that moment."

Instead, a handwritten message, it seems, that mostly reiterates things we kind of already knew. (AP)

## Asian nations boost capacity to keep oceans secure: ICG DG

**GURDIP SINGH**  
Singapore



Indian Coast Guard Director General Paramesh Sivamari at the 20th anniversary of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia or RECAAP in Singapore

Asian nations are building capacities to address emerging challenges for sound maritime governance, which will ensure that seas and oceans are used for legitimate purposes only, a top Indian Coast Guard official said on Friday.

Director General, Indian Coast Guard (ICG), S Paramesh, who is here to attend celebration for the 20th anniversary of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia, or RECAAP, also spoke about the modernisation and expansion of the ICG fleet.

"ICG always believes that the seas and oceans must be used for legitimate purposes to ensure sound ocean governance. And for this philosophy, Asian nations are building capacities to address emerging challenges," Paramesh told media.

"Enough impetus has been given to capacity building by the nations to address the challenges emerging at seas across Asia," he said at

ReCAAP's 20th anniversary celebrations. Congratulating ReCAAP on declaring the regional oceans piracy-free, DG Paramesh said, "India, as a founding member, is proud to be a partner of ReCAAP, which ensures that the seas and oceans around us are safe and free."

He noted that the organisation has been flourishing for over two decades and has been discharging its responsibility in a coordinated and effective manner.

The ICG DG, who is in Singapore since March 11 for the 20th Governing Council

Meeting of the ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre (ISC) and then the celebrations, also updated on the modernisation and expansion of the ICG fleet.

Talking about the 33 ships and 9 Advance Light Helicopters currently under construction and the Defence Ministry's recent approval for the acquisition of an additional six Advance Light Helicopters and eight Dorniers, he said, "All our assets, including vessels, are backed by the latest technologies, including Artificial Intelligence." (PTI)

### GOVT. OF ASSAM

#### OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, PWRD

##### DHEMAJI ROAD CIRCLE, DHEMAJI

#### PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER No. 04 OF 2025-26

The Superintending Engineer, PWRD, Dhemaji Road Circle, Dhemaji on behalf of Governor of Assam Invites Bids for the "Construction of Road from Telijan Butkur Road to Deoribhel Stadium of 1 (one) no. of work Amounting to Rs.485.44 Lakhs (Approx.) under SOPD-G for the year 2025-26" in Dhemaji District under Dhemaji Territorial Road Division, Dhemaji Details may be seen at Website <https://assamtenders.gov.in> from 16/03/2026 and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/-  
Superintending Engineer, PWRD  
Dhemaji Road Circle  
Dhemaji

DIPR/CF/PIO/4558/14-Mar-26

### NORTHERN RAILWAY

#### CORRIGENDUM

Ref: Tender Notice No. 72/2025-2026 dated 16.12.2025 (i). Tender No. 15225019B due on 15.04.2026 (S. No. 08) In reference to above tender, the due date has been extended from 10.03.2026 to 15.04.2026. All other terms and conditions remain unchanged. The corrigendum has been published on website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in).

854/2026

#### SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

**AXIS BANK LTD.** RETAIL ASSETS CENTRE, AXIS BANK LT. AXIS HOUSE, TOWER T-2, 2ND FLOOR, 1-14, SECTOR-128, NOIDA EXPRESSWAY, JAYTEE GREENS WISHTOWN, NOIDA (U.P.)-201301.

RETAIL ASSET CENTRE, AXIS BANK LTD. 1A, 2, 3 FIRST FLOOR, INDIA CITY CENTRE, VANHAH KHAND-3, INDIRAPURM, GHAZIABAD, UP-201010, AXIS BANK LIMITED, HIMALAYA HOUSE, UPPER GROUND FLOOR AND FIRST FLOOR, KASTURBA GANDHI MARG, CONNAUGHT PLACE, NEW DELHI - 110001. CORPORATE OFFICE: BLOCK-B, BOMBAY DYEING MILLS COMPOUND, PANDURANG BUKHAR MARG, WOLLA, MAUMBAI-400 025. REGISTERED OFFICE: TRISHUL, 3RD FLOOR, OPPOSITE SAMARTHESWAR TEMPLE, LAW GARDEN, ELLISBRIDGE, AHMEDABAD-380006

Whereas the borrowers/co-borrowers/guarantors/mortgagors mentioned hereunder had availed the financial assistance from Axis Bank Ltd. We state that despite having availed the financial assistance, the borrowers/guarantors/mortgagors have committed various defaults in repayment of interest and principal amounts as per due dates. The account has been classified as Non Performing Asset on the respective dates mentioned hereunder in accordance with the directives/guidelines issued by Reserve Bank of India, consequent to the Authorized Officer of Axis Bank Ltd. under Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 & in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(1)(c) read with Rule 3 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued Demand Notices on respective dates mentioned herein below under Section 13(2) of SARFAESI Act, 2002 calling upon the following borrowers / guarantors/mortgagors to repay the amount mentioned in the notices together with further interest at the contractual rate on the amount mentioned in the notices and incidental expenses, cost, charges etc. until the date of payment within 60 days from the date of receipt of notices. The notices issued to them on their last known addresses and they are also hereby informed by way of public notice about the same.

Name of the Borrower / Address / Co-Borrower / Guarantor	NPA Date / Date of Issuance of Notice / Last Amount (Rs.)	Outstanding Amount (Rs.) / As on Date of Notice
1. M/s. Khushi Enterprises (Through its All The Legal Heir) Ground Floor, Plot No. 52, Block-E, Sector-1, DSIIOC Industrial Area, Bawana, North West Delhi-110039	29-Sep-2025	40,57,006.97/- (Rupees Forty Lakh Fifty Seven Thousand Six and Paise Ninety Seven Only)
2. Mr. Manoj Kumar Jain (Through his All The Legal Heir) BLD-3, Ground Floor, Ptarmora, North West Delhi-110034 (Co-Borrower), 3. Mrs. Nidhi Jain BU-3, Ground Floor, Pitampura, North West Delhi-110034 (Mortgagor/Co-Borrower)	07-Feb-2026	Rs. 50,00,000/- (Rupees Fifty Lakh Only)

Property Address of Secured Assets:- All such pieces and parcels of Plot No. 3, Entire Ground Floor, Block-BU, Vistahka Enclave, Pitampura, New Delhi-110088, Bounded As Under: East - As Per Title Deed, West - As Per Title Deed, North - As Per Title Deed, South - As Per Title Deed

In the circumstances as aforesaid, the notice is hereby given to the above borrowers, co-borrowers and/or their guarantors (where ever applicable) to pay the outstanding dues as mentioned above along with future interest and applicable charges within 60 days from the date of the publication of this notice failing which further steps will be taken after the expiry of 60 days of the date of this notice against the secured assets including taking possession of the secured assets of the borrowers and the mortgagors under Section 13(1)(d) of Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and the applicable rules thereunder.

Kind attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of Section 13 of the SARFAESI Act where under you can tender the entire amount of outstanding dues together with all costs, charges and expenses incurred by the Bank only till the date of publication of the notice for sale of the secured asset(s) by public auction, by inviting quotations, tender from public or by private treaty. Please also note that if the entire amount of outstanding dues together with the costs, charges and expenses incurred by the Bank is not tendered before publication of notice for sale of the secured assets by public auction, by inviting quotations, tender from public or by private treaty, you may not be entitled to redeem the secured asset(s).

Please note that under Section 13(1)(3) of the said Act, no Borrower shall, transfer by way of sale, lease or otherwise any of his secured assets referred to in the notice, without prior written consent of the secured creditor.

Date: 14.03.2026, Place: Noida U.P Sd/-, Authorized Officer, Axis Bank Ltd.

### GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

#### OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER (HEALTH & EDUCATION)

##### P.W.(H&E) DEPTT.: CHANDMARI: GUWAHATI-3.

#### No. CE/TB-II(H&E)/54/2022/72

#### Press Notice (Re-Tender)

The Chief Engineer (Health & Education), P.W.(H&E) Deptt., Chandmari, Guwahati-3, on behalf of the Governor of Assam re-invites online EPC Mode-1 e-tenders in two bid system (Eligibility and Financial) on Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) Mode-1 basis from eligible firms/contractors of repute for the following work:

Details of the bid may be seen at e-procurement portal website i.e. [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in).

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Approx. Value of Work	Time of completion	E.M.D.	Tender Cost (Rs.)
1.	Proposed Private Ward Complex at Jorhat Medical College and Hospital, Jorhat	Rs. 30,10,23,300.00	24 months	(2% for General, and 1% for Reserved category)	20,000/-

Note :-

- NIT value may be changed during uploading of tender in the website, which may be seen in Detailed NIT of the bid document.
- The bidders must be enrolled in [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in)

Sd/-  
Chief Engineer (Health & Education)  
P.W.(H&E) Deptt. Chandmari, Guwahati-3  
DIPR/C/PIO/1002/14-Mar-26

### GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

#### OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER (BLDG.): PW (B&NH)

##### DEPTT.: CHANDMARI: GUWAHATI-3

#### No. T/TB-14/2025/36

#### PRESS NOTICE (Re-tender)

The Chief Engineer (Bldg.), P.W.(B&NH) Deptt., Chandmari, Guwahati-03 on behalf of the Governor of Assam invites fresh bids through Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) Mode-1 of contract (Single stage two-part bidding system) for the work detailed in the table below from eligible contractors having requisite experience in similar nature of works. Details of the bid may be seen at e-procurement portal website [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in)

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Approx. value of Work (Rs.)	Time of Completion	Bid Security	Tender Cost (Rs.)
1.	Construction of Indoor Stadium along with Wall, Gate etc. at Chatia under Naduar LCA, Sonitpur, Assam	13,86,431,121.00	18 (eighteen) months	2% for General Category (i.e. Rs.27,72,862.00) 1% for Reserved Category (i.e. Rs.13,86,431.00)	20,000.00

Note: 1. Value of work may vary during uploading of DNIT for which no claim will be entertained.

2. The Press Notice will form a part of the Bidding Document.

Sd/-  
Chief Engineer (Bldg.), P.W.(B&NH) Deptt., Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3  
DIPR/C/PIO/997/14-March-26

### PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform to General public that my clients, Amit Kumar Singhania (26601502) S/O Shankar Prasad Singhania and Sumitra Devi Singhania, R/O 802, Guru Govind Singh Avenue, Chiggiti bypass, Jalandhar-144009, Punjab, India / Ward no-13, Tahachal, Kathmandu, Nepal; & Kanchan Agrawal (10223340), D/O Ashok Kumar Agrawal and Laxmi Devi Agrawal R/O Purna Path, 09 Dharan Sunsari have got married at Agrawal Sewa Kendra, Kathmandu on 08th December 2024 as per Indian traditions. Since, then they have been living as Husband and Wife. They have published the notice for Registration of their Marriage at Embassy of India, Kathmandu. If anyone has any objection to the marriage, he/she can contact +977-9851107021 and Embassy of India, Kathmandu on [cons.kathmandu@mea.gov.in](mailto:cons.kathmandu@mea.gov.in)

TUSHAR SHARMA Advocate,  
Off: B-1/103, St No.4, Sant Nagar  
Burari Delhi 110084 Ph. 999952027

### NOTICE

Locker Hired by MRS REVA KHANNA having address at 98 UB JAWAHAR NAGAR, DELHI, 110007, India with KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK Situated at SHOPNO.3,4,5 GF, HARSHA MALL, ALPHA 1, COMMERCIAL BELT, PIN CODE 201308 GREATER NOIDA remains un-operated from more than last 10 years & 10 months and the rent is also pending from 1 year & 10 Months.

All the 3 letters earlier sent to MRS REVA KHANNA calling upon her to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned unopened and she is not contactable.

It is hereby informed that despite this notice, if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by MRS REVA KHANNA within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on June 12, 2026 at around 12p.m.





## PROSPECT

### Young Poet Launches Debut Collection 'Truly, Madly, Deeply' at School Event



Sixteen-year-old Anya Nigam, a student at Scottish High International School, Gurugram, unveiled her debut poetry collection Truly, Madly, Deeply in a heartfelt launch event hosted at her school. Published by Anecdote Publishing House, the book was celebrated in the presence of eminent educators, renowned authors, family, and friends. The occasion featured Dr (Cdr) Kartikay Saini (Chairman), Principal Dr Sanjay Sachdeva, and Primary School Director Seema Bhati. Guests of Honour included Dr Harshali Singh (founder, House of Harmony Literature Festival), Priyanka S Kaintura (Indira Priyadarshini Award 2023 recipient), poet Meenakshi M Singh, and Bharatnatyam exponent Priya Venkataraman. A panel discussion moderated by Dr Saini explored the writer's mindset and the vital role of art and literature for today's youth. The reflective collection delves into love, vulnerability, emotional honesty, and the courage to feel deeply in an often indifferent world. Through intimate poems, Anya—who has written since age six and is a trained Bharatanatyam dancer—urges authenticity and connection across generations. Her work dreams of a softer, more caring world, proving that profound change can begin "one poem at a time."

# Budaun HPCL plant killings: 2 cops suspended

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Budaun (UP)

After two senior officials associated with an ethanol plant were shot dead here, two police officers have been suspended with immediate effect for alleged negligence, following a report by the circle officer, officials said on Friday.

Meanwhile, family members of one of the deceased, Harshit Mishra, alleged that the concerns over the threat to his life were not heeded by the police despite complaints in the past.

Mishra (34), who was the assistant general manager (AGM) at the Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) plant in Sejni village was killed on Thursday, along with Sudhir Kumar Gupta (58), a general manager.

Reacting to the incident, Budaun Lok Sabha MP Aditya Yadav said the broad-daylight killing of two officials inside an industrial complex raised serious questions about the law and order situation.

Inspector Ajay Kumar and Sub-Inspector Dharmendra Kumar were suspended on Thursday night for alleged negligence in the discharge of their duties, officials said. The action followed a report submitted by Ujhani Circle Officer Devendra Kumar.

A crowd comprising family members of Mishra gathered outside the morgue here on Friday morning — where the bodies of the victims were kept.

Rani Devi, Mishra's mother, alleged that her son had informed the district magistrate (DM), superintendent of police (SP) and the local MLA about threats to his life.

She alleged that the accused, Ajay Pratap Singh alias Ramu, used to issue open threats and intimidate people by claiming to be affiliated with a criminal gang. "My son told everyone that his life was in danger. He approached the SP, the DM, and even the MLA, but no one listened to us. There were many people present at the meeting; why, then, was only my child killed? No one else even suffered a scratch. The security personnel were also



Senior Police officers inspecting the crime scene at HPCL plant

complicit," she claimed.

Prabhat Mishra, the maternal uncle of the deceased AGM, questioned the administration's conduct, stating that the accused had been issuing threats and tailing vehicles for some time, yet the police "never took serious action".

"The biggest question remains: how did he manage to enter the plant premises with a gun?" he said.

Sushil Kumar, the father of the deceased, said his son had repeatedly sought protection from the police and the administration.

"My son had sought protection from the DM, the SP, and the Musajhag police

station. A case was indeed registered, yet the accused continued to roam freely. Today, he returned to the scene and murdered two people," he told PTI at the morgue, alleging that the killing was part of a premeditated plan.

He further named a top HPCL official among four and

accused them of being involved in the conspiracy to commit the murder.

In a post on X on Thursday, the Budaun MP termed the incident "deeply tragic and shameful" and said criminals had become emboldened in the state.

He demanded the swift arrest of the perpetrators and the strictest possible punishment for those involved.

The two officials of the ethanol plant in Budaun were shot dead on Thursday after a blacklisted vendor allegedly opened fire inside the HPCL plant under the Musajhag police station area.

Police have arrested the alleged shooter, who is a former vendor at the plant, officials said.

They said Gupta, the deceased general manager, had recently terminated some employees and blacklisted vendors whose work was not satisfactory. Singh was among those removed.

Since the termination, Singh had been upset with the general manager and had threatened him on several occasions, they said.

## IP University organises Vikshit Bharat Yuva Connect programme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The National Service Scheme (NSS) of Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University Under the Guidance of Prof. (Dr) Varun Joshi, Dean USEM successfully organized the programme "Viksit Bharat, Yuva Connect 2.0" with the objective of fostering youth engagement in the national vision of Viksit Bharat@2047.

The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from students, faculty members, and distinguished guests, creating an enriching platform for dialogue, learning, and reflection.

The programme commenced with a formal inauguration marked by the ceremonial lighting of the lamp by respected dignitaries.

The session highlighted the significance of youth involvement in nation-building and emphasised the need for leadership, responsibility, and innova-



tion among young citizens. The highlight of the event was the insightful address delivered by the Viksit Bharat Yuva Connect Youth Icon, Mr. Abhigyan Pandey, who shared his valuable perspectives on the evolving role of youth in shaping India's future.

Drawing from his academic and professional experiences, he encouraged students to actively contribute toward inclusive growth, sustainable development, and social responsibility. His interaction with students proved both inspiring and thought-provoking.

The programme also reflected the core values of the National Service Scheme, whose motto, "Not Me, But You," continues to inspire students to engage in selfless service and responsible citizenship.

Initiatives like Yuva Connect complement the mission of NSS by offering opportunities for meaningful engagement with national priorities while nurturing leadership and awareness among young individuals.

The event concluded with a formal Vote of Thanks delivered by Professor Dr Ravinder Kumar, who expressed gratitude to the distinguished speakers, dignitaries, faculty members, organisers, volunteers, and students for their contributions and participation. The programme successfully reinforced the spirit of collaboration, awareness, and commitment among youth towards building a developed and progressive India.

## Assam rifles honours veterans with mega ex-servicemen rally at Silchar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Guwahati

In a heartfelt gesture to honour the selfless service and sacrifices of its veterans, the Assam Rifles organised a Mega Ex-Servicemen Rally at Silchar, Assam, reaffirming its enduring commitment to the welfare of former soldiers and their families. The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from a large number of Ex-Servicemen, Veer Naris, widows and dependants, who gathered to reconnect with the force and avail various welfare services.

The rally was inaugurated by the General Officer Commanding (GOC), Spear Corps, Lt Gen Abhijit S Pendharkar, UYSM, AVSM, YSM. Addressing the gathering, the GOC paid rich tributes to the brave veterans for their unwavering dedication and invaluable contributions to nation-building.

He acknowledged their sacrifices and reiterated the Government and Assam Rifles' steadfast commitment towards ensuring the welfare and well-being of the veteran fraternity.

To provide comprehensive support, several service and assistance counters were established during the rally. These included a Grievance Cell, Canteen Stores Department (CSD) facil-



ity, Banking Help Counters and Medical Assistance, enabling veterans and their families to resolve their issues and access essential services at one place.

A special medical camp was also organised as part of the rally, where eight medical specialists offered consultation and treatment. The specialists covered key disciplines including ENT, Ophthalmology (Eye), Gynaecology, Cardiology, Gastroenterology and Oncology (Cancer), ensuring quality healthcare support for the attending veterans and their families.

The rally also served as a meaningful platform for the veterans to recon-

nect with their comrades, share experiences and strengthen their bond with the force. It allowed participants to voice their concerns, seek assistance and receive guidance on various welfare schemes and benefits available to them.

Through initiatives like these, Assam Rifles continues to reaffirm its deep respect and unwavering commitment towards the welfare of its veterans and their families. The successful conduct of the rally stands as a testament to the organisation's dedication to honouring those who have served the nation with courage and distinction.

## NBCC to execute ₹480 crore Marine Eco City project in Kochi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Kochi

In a significant boost to Kerala's urban infrastructure, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday laid the foundation stone for the landmark 'Marine Eco City' project at Marine Drive, Kochi. The ambitious waterfront development is being executed by the Kerala State Housing Board (KSHB) in collaboration with NBCC (India) Limited, a Navratna CPSE, which will serve as the Project Management Consultant (PMC) on an EPC basis.

The ceremony, conducted via online mode, was attended by State Revenue and Housing Minister K Rajan, Rajya Sabha MP PP Suneer,

and senior officials from both NBCC and KSHB. Conceived as a self-sustainable urban development model, the project is spread across 17.9 acres of prime land. It aims to monetise the valuable land parcel while creating a modern residential, commercial, and hospitality hub.

The project will be executed in three distinct phases. Phase I of the project, estimated to cost approximately Rs 480 crore, will be developed on 3.16 acres and features a landmark mixed-use tower comprising a lower ground floor, an upper ground floor, and 26 storeys.

The architectural layout designates the first to fifth floors for retail and office spaces, while the sixth floor



is reserved for a dedicated clubhouse and recreational facilities. The residential component, spanning from the 7th to the 26th floors, will offer 152 premium apartments, consisting of 80 three-bedroom and

72 four-bedroom units.

The project has already secured critical statutory clearances, including CRZ and Environmental clearances, alongside a GRIHA pre-certification, underlining its eco-friendly credentials.

The subsequent phases (II and III) will cover the remaining 14.74 acres. Phase II is set to introduce a 5-star hotel with 105 rooms and a convention centre to bolster Kochi's tourism and business infrastructure. Phase III

will see the construction of six residential towers providing an additional 952 apartments.

Commenting on the development, Dr KP Mahadevaswamy, CMD, NBCC (India) Limited, stated, "This landmark waterfront development reflects a forward-looking approach towards integrated and sustainable urban infrastructure. NBCC remains committed to bringing its expertise in project management to ensure timely delivery of this iconic project."

"The Marine Eco City is expected to redefine the skyline of Kochi's Marine Drive, blending luxury living with commercial viability and environmental consciousness.

## CBI quizzes Anil Ambani's son in ₹228 cr bank fraud case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The CBI on Friday questioned Anil Ambani's son Jai Anmol Ambani in a ₹228 crore Union Bank of India fraud case, officials said.

Jai Anmol Ambani has been called again on Saturday for questioning, they said.

The agency questioned him in connection with an alleged bank fraud case in which he was booked along with Reliance Housing Finance Limited's former CEO and ex-whistle-blower director Ravindra Sudhakar, among others, they said.

No immediate reaction was available from the company.



Jai Anmol Ambani

On December 9, 2025, the agency conducted searches at the residence of Jai Anmol Anil Ambani after registering an FIR against him and others. The CBI had acted on a complaint from the Union Bank of India (erstwhile Andhra Bank) alleging that the company did not repay the credit availed from the bank, which turned the account into a non-performing asset in 2019.

## Tokhan Sahu felicitates Delhi Metro enthusiast

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Union Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs Tokhan Sahu felicitated Anil Marwah, a dedicated enthusiast of the Delhi Metro, for his remarkable personal milestone of riding the first train on the opening day of every newly inaugurated metro corridor in the Delhi Metro network.

The felicitation ceremony took place on Wednesday in New Delhi in the presence of Dr Vikas Kumar, Managing Director of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation.

Marwah has maintained this unique tradition for the past 24 consecutive years, becoming one of the most committed followers of the Delhi Metro's journey.

Recalling his first ride in 2002, he said the Metro marked a historic turning point in urban transport in India by improving connectivity across the city and easing depen-



dence on road-based commuting. He noted that the Metro's punctuality, reliability and convenience have reduced travel stress for millions of commuters and made it one of the most efficient modes of public transport in the national capital.

Congratulating Marwah, Sahu said such stories reflect the strong emotional connection citizens have developed with the Delhi Metro. He described the Metro as a transformative urban mobility solution and a symbol of India's modern infrastructure development.

He also noted that the project was initiated during the tenure of the National Democratic Alliance Government led by former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, whose vision laid the foundation for modern metro rail systems in the country and triggered rapid expansion of metro networks nationwide.

## MTNL fails to deposit interest on sovereign guarantee bonds in escrow account

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

State-owned MTNL has failed to deposit interest on sovereign guarantee bonds in the escrow account due on March 24 this year, the company said in a regulatory filing on Friday.

As per the structured payment mechanism of Tri-Partite Agreement (TPA) signed among MTNL, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Beacon Trusteeship Limited, the telecom company has to fund the semi-annual interest into the escrow account maintained in Bank of India with an adequate amount 10 days before the due date, which in this case is March 24, 2026.

"In view of the above provisions of TPA, it is informed that due to insufficient funds, MTNL could not fund the escrow account maintained in Bank of India with an adequate amount," the public sector telecom firm said.

MTNL said that all bonds issued by MTNL



are Sovereign Guaranteed Bonds by the centre.

"In case of any default made by MTNL in payment of Principal and Interest on the Bonds issued by it, then the Sovereign Guarantee will be invoked by the Debenture Trustee and the Government of India is obliged to make the payment to MTNL for the same," the filing said.

## BRIEFLY

### Goa to host next Ultimate Table Tennis event in July



Goa will host the seventh season of franchise-based Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT) event in July at the Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Indoor Stadium, the organisers said on Friday. Organised by 11Sports Pvt Ltd under the aegis of the Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI), UTT has grown into one of the country's most prominent sporting properties since its launch in 2017, the organisers said in a statement. Speaking about the upcoming season, UTT co-promoter Vita Dani said, "Ultimate Table Tennis has steadily become a key pillar in India's table tennis ecosystem. Over the years, we've seen the standard of the sport rise across every level, from grassroots programmes to international competition. "The league has created more exposure, stronger competition, and greater belief among Indian players. Our focus remains on building a world-class league that inspires young athletes, engages fans, and supports the long-term development of the sport."

### Former AIFF general secretary Kushal Das dead



Veteran administrator and former All India Football Federation (AIFF) general secretary Kushal Das, who played a significant role in organising the 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup in India, died on Friday. Das was 65. He held the position of AIFF general secretary for 12 years before resigning in 2022 on health grounds. Before entering football administration in 2010, Das had served as Chief Financial Officer of the International Cricket Council (ICC) and International Management Group (IMG) India. He breathed his last at a private hospital in the capital, according to Shaji Prabhakaran, another long-time football administrator who succeeded Das as the AIFF's full-time secretary general in 2022 after former I-League CEO Sunando Dhar served as the acting GS for a brief while. "Former AIFF General Secretary Kushal Das passed away this morning at a private hospital in Delhi. Sending my deepest sympathies and prayers to his family and loved ones during this incredibly difficult time. Om Shanti," Prabhakaran wrote on his 'X' handle. During his tenure, the Indian national team qualified for three AFC Asian Cup tournaments besides the country hosting the prestigious FIFA U-17 World Cup for the first time in 2017, which he described as "game changer" for Indian football at the time. The event set a record for the most-attended FIFA youth World Cup in history. He also secured hosting rights for the 2022 AFC Women's Asian Cup and the 2022 FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup.

# Russell takes pole for China GP sprint race

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Shanghai

George Russell took pole for the sprint race at the Chinese Grand Prix to continue Mercedes' dominant start to the new era of Formula 1 on Friday. Russell is the driver to beat in Shanghai after his dominant win in Australia last week. With teammate Kimi Antonelli qualifying second and no other team close, Mercedes is on target for another 1-2 finish in Saturday's sprint, which is followed by qualifying for Sunday's Grand Prix.

Lando Norris was 0.621 of a second adrift, a vast gap in F1 terms, in third for McLaren. Only Lewis Hamilton of Ferrari in fourth and Norris' teammate Oscar Piastri in fifth got within a second of Russell's time.

Verstappen, the most prominent critic of the new cars, had another tough qualifying session in eighth, though not as bad as the crash which left him at the back of the grid in Australia last week.

**Ferrari debuts Macarena:** Russell and Mercedes led the way in Friday's sole practice session, as Ferrari failed to find a significant advantage from its unique rear wing which rotates upside-down for more speed on the straights. Ferrari's Charles Leclerc had the fifth quickest time (1:33.599) followed by Lewis Hamilton (1:34.129). Hamilton touched tires

with Norris in practice and also spun as he lost control on another lap.

Dubbed the "flip-flop" or "Macarena," it was used briefly in testing, dropped for Australia, and is the sort of innovation which could help Leclerc and Hamilton take the fight to Mercedes. It could also disrupt the airflow and hinder cars following close behind.

Changes on the way: F1's governing body, the FIA, could take stock of how the racing is going and make changes, potentially even in time for the Japanese Grand Prix later this month. One gripe so far has been the lack of control by drivers of when the electrical power kicks in and how much is used. They can't stop the power being deployed in typical straight-line driving and can only add an extra boost, which in Australia meant cars finishing the formation lap with an empty battery and lacking pace at the start. That's "not a lot of fun and also quite dangerous," Verstappen said Thursday.

A related issue ended home hero Oscar Piastri's race before it began in Australia, when the extra power kicked in unexpectedly and tipped him into the barriers before he even reached the grid. If F1 can't race next month in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, which remain on the schedule for now despite the Iran war, it would leave a five-week gap in the calendar, which teams could use to refine any changes.

Zhou a boost for Cadillac: There hasn't been a Chinese driver on the grid since Zhou Guanyu left Sauber at the end of 2024, but he's still a big celebrity in his home country. As reserve driver for Cadillac, he could give the new team extra recognition in a key market after its solid but unspectacular debut in Australia. It was a tough day for Cadillac as Valtteri Bottas was 21st and last in sprint qualifying, slower than even the unreliable Aston Martins, while Sergio Perez couldn't start because of a problem with his fuel system.



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## Mercedes aims to dominate again in China

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Shanghai

Formula 1 heads to China celebrating vast numbers of overtakes, even as drivers debate how meaningful they are.

Ahead of the Chinese Grand Prix and the first sprint race of the season Saturday, Max Verstappen said it's "a jungle out there" as teams adapt to the new way of racing. Instead of racking up hours on a state-of-the-art simulator, Verstappen joked his practice now focused on collecting Mario Kart's speed-boosting mushrooms to adapt to F1's new reliance on electrical power boosts.

**Ferrari debuts Macarena:** George Russell is the driver to beat in Shanghai after his dominant win in Australia last week, and Mercedes will be in contention for another 1-2 finish in China.

The only team which came close to crashing the party was Ferrari, which threw away its chances with a pit strategy error. A drive from seventh to second for Russell's teammate Kimi



Antonelli showed how Mercedes can sweep past other teams even if the start doesn't go its way.

All eyes will be on Ferrari in first practice as it uses a unique rear wing which rotates upside-down for more speed on the straights. Dubbed the "flip-flop" or "Macarena," it was used briefly in testing, dropped for Australia, and is the sort of innovation which could help Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Lewis Hamilton take the fight to Mercedes. It could also disrupt the airflow and hinder cars following close behind.

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## Klaebo taken to hospital after crashing in race

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Drammen (Norway)

Norwegian cross-country skiing star Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo was taken to a hospital for medical checks after hitting his head on the snow in a crash involving US skier Ben Ogden during a World Cup race.

The crash happened in a semifinal heat of the men's sprint competition in Drammen, just weeks after Klaebo won a record six gold medals at the Milan Cortina Winter Games. Ogden lost his balance and fell across the skis of Klaebo, who fell backward and hit his head on the snow. Norway team doctor



Ove Feragen told Norwegian broadcaster TV2 that Klaebo wasn't seriously injured.

"He is now in the hospital for tests that are necessary when it comes to head injuries," Feragen said. With his six wins at the Milan Cortina Games, the 29-year-old Klaebo set a record for most gold medals at a single Winter Olympics. His 11 career gold medals is also a Winter Olympics record.

## Theegala finishes joint leader after shortened first day at Players

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Ponte Vedra (US)

Indian-origin American golfer Sahith Theegala holed a wedge shot from 99 yards for a stunning eagle as he put together a round of 5-under 67 on the first day of the Players Championship.

He was among the five co-leaders as the play was suspended early due to darkness. Theegala shared the lead with Maverick McNealy, Lee Hodges, Sepp Straka and Austin Smotherman, who had one more to play.

Among other Indian-origin players, last week's winner at Arnold Palmer Invitational at Bay Hill, Akshay Bhatia carded (71) and was T-30, Sudarshan Yellamaraju (1-

over through 17) and Aaron Rai (74) were at T-69.

Theegala began his first round with three consecutive birdies on the front nine and his only bogey of the round was on the ninth hole. He ran into trouble from the left bunker for bogey.

On the back nine the 28-year-old made the stunning eagle as he holed his second shot from 99 yards. Then came a late birdie on the 16th to end the day tied at 67 and was tied for the lead.

Speaking about the 12th, Theegala said, "Yeah, I had 99 yards. That pin is on that little shelf, so usually it's just a stock lob wedge, but I hit a little 54 degree to try and just one-hop it up the slope there, and I blocked it a hair. I hit it



a little skinny and just came out a little right. Got a nice bounce. "You know, like, hitting that shot you actually have a little room right of that and past it, so my aim was a yard right of it, but I ended up hitting it like seven yards right of it and it kicked off the side of the bunker there and had plenty of spin. But it was probably going to

spin left off that slope, was probably going to go like 20, 25 feet down that slope, just straight left of the hole. So for it to crash into the pin and go in is pretty cool. It's a nice bonus." On his coming back from injury, he said, "So, yeah, it was nice to start this year healthy. I was healthy in the fall, but my speed took forever to come back and

guys were just telling me to stay patient, guys that had left shoulder and left oblique injuries or rib injuries. They said the speed just takes a while to come back. Your body just doesn't trust it until it's way outside the injury."

For Theegala, who after falling outside Top-100, has had three Top-10s this year, it has been a season of recovery. "So the speed is fully back. It's the easiest I can get to the speed right now in my life. I feel like I'm in the best shape I've been. So yeah, it's just nice to be able to listen to know my coach and do what he tells me to do and listen to my trainer and do what he tells me to be able to do. So, yeah, it's a feeling that I don't ever want again."

Bhatia, fresh from the biggest win of his career, just last week at the Arnold Palmer Invitational, carded 1-under 71 to end the day at T-30. Bhatia began the day on the back nine with two birdies only to drop the shots with a double bogey on the 14th.

A birdie-bogey-birdie finish on the back nine resulted in him being 1-under par at the turn before he carded nine pars on the front nine to close the day off. Bhatia, who has never played in India where his parents come from, recently announced that he will play at the Hero Indian Open later this month.

Yellamaraju was placed T-52 with a score of 1-over par with one hole left to play when play was suspended.

## Aryna Sabalenka, Jannic Sinner move to BNP Paribas semifinals

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Indian Wells (US)

Aryna Sabalenka held off Victoria Mboko, 7-6(0) 6-4 in the quarterfinals of the BNP Paribas Open, keeping the top-ranked player in women's tennis in the running for her first title at Indian Wells.

Jannic Sinner, Alexander Zverev and Daniil Medvedev all advanced to the men's semifinals on Thursday, with Medvedev benefiting from a disputed, overturned point late in his 6-1 7-5 victory over defending champion Jack Draper. Draper momentarily threw his arms to his side to signal he thought Medvedev's deep forehand had landed long during a rally that ended several shots later when



Medvedev's backhand went into the net. Medvedev, already up one set, asked chair umpire Aurelie Tourte for a video review.

Tourte said that by rule, Draper's gesture was "something different than you would do normally," and that she felt compelled to award the point to Medvedev.

"We played two shots afterwards," Draper protested calmly. "I get it if he missed the next ball, but he didn't." The ruling put Medvedev up 0-30 en route to a break that allowed him to serve out the match one game later.

Medvedev said he would have accepted whatever

ruling Tourte made and merely requested the review because the rules allow it.

"I don't feel great" about it, Medvedev told Draper on the court moments after the match. Draper told Medvedev that he "won the match fair and square," but didn't think his gesture distracted Medvedev enough to warrant the review. Medvedev moved on to play either Carlos Alcaraz or Cameron Norrie on Saturday, while Sinner and Zverev will meet in the other men's semifinal. Sabalenka will play her semifinal on Friday against 14th seed Linda Noskova of Czechia, a 6-2 4-6 6-2 winner over unseeded Australian Talia Gibson.

Sabalenka hasn't lost a set in the tournament, but was pushed by the 10th-seeded Mboko, a 19-year-old Canadian who won the 2025 Canadian Open — and whom Sabalenka defeated 6-1 7-6(1) in the fourth round of the Australian Open earlier this year. "That was a tough battle today," Sabalenka said.

"Happy with the level I played in those key moments in each set." After winning every point in a first-set tiebreaker, Sabalenka got the one break she needed to vanquish Mboko in two sets.

Also advancing to the semifinals for just the second time at Indian Wells was ninth-seeded Ukrainian Elina Svitolina, who knocked off second-seeded Iga Swiatek of Poland, 6-2 4-6 6-4.

Svitolina broke to go up 5-4 in the third set and held serve for the match.

## Mancini unable to return to Qatar as war disrupts travel plans

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Doha

Al-Sadd coach Roberto Mancini has been unable to return to Qatar and will miss the team's next game because of the war in the region, the club said.

The Italian coach, who had been out of the country on a family matter, will miss Friday's match against Umm Salal in the Qatar Stars League. An assistant coach will handle first-team duties for the game "while coordination will continue for the coach's return at the earliest available opportunity," Al-Sadd said on social media on Thursday. Mancini, who won the European Championship



as the Italy coach in 2021, was hired by Al-Sadd last November. The club said arrangements had been made for Mancini "to leave after the first leg of the AFC Champions League Elite match due to a family medical matter." That game, scheduled for early last week, was postponed.

"Following the recent developments in the region, Mancini departed as scheduled. However, due to the flight situation, he has not yet been able to return," the club's statement said.

## Schultz ending Paralympic snowboarding career to focus on building prosthetic gear

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Cortina D'Ampezzo (Italy)

American Para snowboarder Mike Schultz is putting an end to his competitive days at the Paralympics.

The Minnesota native will go behind the scenes to work fulltime making the prosthetic equipment that has helped so many Para athletes — including some of those who beat him this week at the Milan Cortina Games.

Seeing his business thrive from up close has helped Schultz — a three-time Paralympic medalist — go into retirement with greater peace of mind. "It's pretty awesome to



look back at my career, and all these athletes out here using the equipment I built," he said. "Being a big part of the prosthetic performance for pretty much every other lower-limb amputee that's racing here today using the equipment I built in my shop.

So I can hold my head high, you know, big picture. I'm loving it. I'm loving it."

The 44-year-old Schultz began building his own prosthetic equipment after an accident while competing in a professional snowcross race in 2008.

## New Zealand cricket board grants leave to Oram and Ronchi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Wellington

New Zealand men's team assistant coaches Jacob Oram and Luke Ronchi have been granted leave by the country's cricket board (NZC) to skip Black Caps' upcoming T20I series against South Africa and instead take up coaching assignments with Islamabad United in the Pakistan Super League.

Ronchi, who played for the franchise from 2017-2021, returns in the role as head coach with Oram confirmed as one of his assistants.

With the PSL starting on March 26 and running until late April followed by the finals, the pair will miss the BLACKCAPS upcoming series



against the Proteas and the tour to Bangladesh in April. Black Caps performance manager Mike Sandle confirmed Wellington Blaze coach

Jonny Bassett-Graham and NZC network coach Graeme Aldridge would assist Rob Walter in the upcoming South Africa series, with Canterbury's

Brendon Donkers to assist on the tour of Bangladesh. Sandle said the team and NZC supported Ronchi and Oram to pursue the coaching opportunity. "This is a great chance for Luke and Jake to further their coaching experience and grow their skills outside of the New Zealand cricket environment," Sandle said.

"Just like our players, our coaches are in demand around the world and we believe Luke and Jake will not only personally benefit from their time at the PSL, but they will also be able to bring back knowledge and IP (Intellectual Property) that can aid the BLACKCAPS and NZC in the future." Sandle in fact added that Oram and Ronchi's coaching gigs will

give other coaches in the system a chance to work with Black Caps head coach Rob Walter. "One of the added bonuses of Luke and Jake heading to the PSL is the opportunity it affords other coaches in the NZC network," Sandle said. "It will be great to have Jonny, Graeme and Brendon join the BLACKCAPS and I'm sure they will get a lot of out their time in the environment and the experience of working alongside our players and support staff.

"Their involvement will naturally help strengthen our high-performance coaching depth and we hope the coaches themselves will be able to take back some of what they've learned to benefit the domestic set-ups."

## No one can exclude us: Iran on FIFA WC

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Geneva

Pushing back on US President Donald Trump's comments, Iran's national soccer team says "no one can exclude" it from playing in the men's World Cup in the United States. Instead, a post on the team's official Instagram account Thursday suggested maybe the US team should be excluded after Trump indicated that the host country couldn't guarantee the safety of the Iranian players.

Trump wrote in a social media post Thursday that the Iranian team was welcome at the World Cup despite the ongoing war with Iran but that "I really don't believe it is appropriate that they be there, for their own life and



safety." Iran is set to play all three of its World Cup group games in the US, which is co-hosting the tournament with Mexico and Canada.

The regional war has put doubt on Iran's ability to fulfil

its World Cup entry, and sports minister Ahmad Donyamali told state TV this week the current circumstances meant it was not possible to play.

But the Iran team's riposte

on Instagram confirmed it still wants to participate, and pointed out that the tournament is run by FIFA — not Trump or the US.

"The World Cup is a historic and international event and its governing body is FIFA — not any individual, country," the post said. "Certainly, no one can exclude Iran's national team from the World Cup; the only country that could be excluded is one that merely carries the title of host' yet lacks the ability to provide security for the teams participating in this global event."

Iran is scheduled to play in Inglewood, California, against New Zealand on June 15 and Belgium on June 21, before finishing group play in Seattle against Egypt on June 26.

Mixed messages Trump's

mixed messages on the subject include saying last week "I really don't care" if Iran plays, then assuring FIFA President Gianni Infantino at the White House on Tuesday that Iran's team was welcome. Iran is a power in Asian soccer, ranked No. 20 in the world by FIFA and has qualified for its fourth straight World Cup edition.

Iran's soccer federation has planned to use a tournament base camp in Arizona, at the Kino Sports Complex in Tucson. Before the World Cup, Iranian soccer officials are due to attend FIFA's annual congress on April 30 in Vancouver. The Iranian federation was unable to attend meetings in Atlanta last week to help teams prepare for the 48-nation tournament.

## 5 Indian boxers assured of medals at World Boxing Futures Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Bangkok

Five Indian boxers assured themselves of podium finishes at the World Boxing Futures Cup after a series of impressive quarterfinals wins here on Friday.

India's medal hopes were strengthened with victories from Gunjan (48kg), Joyshree Devi (54kg), Ambekar Meetei (50kg), Chandrika Pujari (51kg) and Radhamani Longjam (57kg), all of whom advanced to the semifinals, thereby assuring the country five medals at the tournament.

In the morning session, Gunjan secured a convincing 5-0 unanimous decision victory over



Azerbaijan's Gular Huseynova, while Joyshree Devi produced a dominant display to defeat Japan's Yura Kanemaru by Referee Stopped Contest (RSC) in the first round. Ambekar Meetei also progressed with a 4-1 victory over Japan's Akira Uekubo in the men's 50kg category. The evening session saw two more

Indian boxers advance, with Chandrika Pujari (51kg) defeating Spain's Andrea Buelga Garcia by RSC in the second round, while Radhamani Longjam (57kg) registered a 4-1 win over England's Siobhan Haley. Meanwhile, Sahil Duhan (60kg) went down 1-4 to France's David Harutyunyan in his last eight bout.

## Not concerned, says Shukla on Sunrisers Leeds' signing of Abrar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

The BCCI vice-president Rajeev Shukla on Friday downplayed the acquisition of Pakistan spinner Abrar Ahmed by Sunrisers Leeds during The Hundred auction, saying the development in an "overseas league" is beyond the board's ambit.

The Sunrisers Leeds, owned by Chennai-based media conglomerate Sun Group, on Thursday signed Pakistan mystery spinner Abrar during The Hundred player auction, making him the first Pakistan cricketer to be picked by an Indian-



owned franchise in the tournament. "It doesn't concern us. It's not the IPL. What happens in The Hundred or other overseas leagues, we have nothing to do with it," Shukla told PTI.

The franchise paid GBP 190,000 (approximately ₹2.34 crore) for Abrar after a bidding contest with Trent

Rockets. The tournament will be held from July 21 to August 16. Sunrisers Leeds faced backlash following Abrar's signing, with the team's X account suspended briefly.

IPL franchises have not signed any Pakistani player since 2009 due to strained diplomatic relations between the two countries.

The Sun Group, which also owns Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL, completed a full takeover of the erstwhile Northern Superchargers last year, acquiring a 49 per cent stake from the ECB and the remaining 51 per cent from county club Yorkshire for around GBP 100 million.

## Sharp increase in Indian women's participation in cricket: Study

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

Women's cricket in India has grown exponentially with participation doubling across 14 states since 2020, according to a study commissioned by the BBC and Collective Newsroom.

The survey, which covered over 10,000 women, has found that the share of women who say they play cricket has risen from five per cent in 2020 to 10 per cent now. The participation of young women is growing even faster as 16 per cent of those aged 15 to 24 say they play cricket compared with six per cent in 2020.

"The research also finds



that one in four young women aged 15 to 24 have considered sport as a career option," according to the study. The Indian women's cricket team has been on a high recently, winning its maiden ODI World Cup and defeating Australia in a bilateral three-match T20I series for the first time in a decade, a surge that could also be contributing to the sport's growing popularity.

Cricket has overtaken traditional sport kabaddi, which has long been a favourite in India's hinterlands, by a huge

margin. "Cricket has also strengthened its position as the most played sport among women in the states surveyed. In 2020 it only narrowly edged past kabaddi, but the new figures suggest it is now firmly ahead. "Participation has increased across most regions. All but two of the states surveyed report a rise in the number of women playing cricket. In Uttar Pradesh, levels of participation have increased 10-fold, from one per cent to 10 per cent. The gender gap in cricket participation across the states covered has also narrowed." The study also shows that for every woman who plays cricket, three men

play the sport, compared with a ratio of one to five in 2020.

As for career interest, 26 per cent of young women aged 15 to 24 say they have considered a career in sport, up from 16 per cent in 2020, with the highest levels reported in Tamil Nadu (27 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (19 per cent), and Meghalaya (19 per cent), the study said.

The participation in badminton has also risen among the women surveyed, especially in Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

However, more women could get drawn towards sport if their safety concerns are properly addressed, the report says.

## Shooters Samrat, Suruchi added to TOPS core group

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

Rising pistol shooters Samrat Rana and Suruchi Singh, Asian gold-winning long-distance runner Gulveer Singh and world champion parashuttler Pramod Bhagat are among eight athletes who have been added to the Target Olympic Podium Scheme's (TOPS) Core group following a recent assessment of performances.

Badminton star HS Prannoy, former Asian gold-winning rifle shooter Divyansh Singh Panwar and wrestler Deepak Punia were among the major names dropped from the core group for failing to meet "the requisite parameters of performance", according to a well-

placed source.

The rejig of the list was undertaken at the 169th meeting of the Mission Olympic Cell (MOC), headed by TOPS CEO N S Johal, here.

While Samrat became a world champion last year in both the individual and team 10m air pistol events, Suruchi too enjoyed a fantastic run on the circuit, bagging four consecutive World Cup gold medals. Pramod, on the other hand, clinched his sixth world title earlier this year. The 37-year-old, whose left leg was disabled by polio, is a former Olympic gold-medallist and returned to competition last year after serving a three-year suspension for the anti-doping violation of missing three consecutive tests. Another



shooter who has been added to the list is this year's Asian silver medal-winner rifleman Niraj Kumar. Former Asian gold-winner Shiva Narwal was, however, left out of the core group that continues to be 56-strong after the most recent omis-

sions and additions.

It was a deserved elevation from developmental to core for Gulveer after his path-breaking performances last year. He is also a national record holder in both the 5000m and 10,000m events. He had scripted history

by bagging top honours in the Asian Championships last year in both the competitions. Also elevated from developmental to core were the badminton mixed doubles duo of Tanisha Crasto and Dhruv Kapila, along with boxer Jaismina Lamboria, who won the 57kg featherweight category gold at the world championships last year.

TOPS Core athletes get an allowance of ₹50,000. They are also USD 25 per day during the period of training and competition overseas.

**Boxing gets developmental push:** As many as 22 boxers, 14 of them women, were added to the developmental group of the TOPS list, including World Cup gold-winners Parveen (W60kg), Arundhati

(W70kg) and Hitesh Gulia (M70kg) among others.

"The idea is to create a bigger bench strength of boxers for future Olympic Games and including them in large numbers in the developmental group would be a crucial step," the source said.

Thirteen shooters have also been added to the developmental list that is 130-strong right now. Athletes in the Developmental group are given 25,000 as allowance besides and an additional USD 25 while training and competing abroad.

Both the Core and developmental athletes are evaluated at least half-yearly to ensure that their performance and fitness and levels meet the required criteria.

## KKR rope in Blessing Muzarabani for IPL 2026

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Kolkata

Three-time champions Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) on Friday announced the signing of lanky Zimbabwe pacer Blessing Muzarabani ahead of the Indian Premier League season, with the fast bowler pulling out of the Pakistan Super League, which will run concurrently.

The right-arm pacer Muzarabani was among the prominent bowlers in the recently-concluded T20 World Cup, finishing as the joint third-highest wicket-taker with 13 scalps as Zimbabwe made it to the Super Eights stage. "KKR have signed



Zimbabwe fast bowler Blessing Muzarabani to join the squad for the upcoming Indian Premier League 2026 season," KKR said in a statement. "The 6 ft 8" right-arm quick has emerged as one of Zimbabwe's leading pace bowlers in the shortest format, known for his steep bounce and ability to strike in key phases of the innings."

## Diksha, Vani, Avani make cut in Australian Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Adelaide

Diksha Dagar, Vani Kapoor and Avani Prashanth made the halfway cut at the Women's Australian Open, while two other Indians, Hitaashee Bakshi and Pranavi Urs missed the cut here on Friday. Diksha, who was the top Indian last week also, shot 2-over 74 and was now 2-over for two rounds.

Vani added 2-over 74 to her first round 72. She was also 2-over for 36 holes and the duo was tied-31st. Avani, who missed the cut in her last two starts, shot 77 on the first day and added 72 to make the cut on the line at 5-over. She was tied-60th, as 67 players made the cut. Hitaashee (77-74) and



Pranavi (78-75) missed the cut. Celine Herbin will take a one-shot lead into the weekend after carding a second round 69 (-3) at a testing Kooyonga Golf Club to move to six-under par.

Major winner Hannah Green, sits just one back in a tie for second alongside com-

patriot Kirsten Rudgeley and France's Agathe Laisne and a recent winner at the Ford Women's NSW Open.

The two-time Ladies European Tour (LET) winner Herbin as she came alive on her back-nine, the course's front-nine, following 10 consecutive pars. After the turn,

Herbin posted birdies at the 2nd, 4th, 5th and 6th to soar into a two shot lead before she handed two shots back to the field with a double bogey on the 8th. But with the Adelaide heat cooling down, the 43-year-old made a clutch birdie at the par-5 9th thanks to a wonderful third shot.

She leads a bunched field by a single shot heading into the weekend in Australia.

One of the chasers, seven-time LPGA winner Green, carded five birdies in her final 10 holes to recover from a double-bogey at the 7th and post a 69 (-3).

There has not been an Aussie winner of the Women's Australian Open since Karrie Webb lifted the famous trophy in 2014.

## Partey to plead not guilty to 2 new charges of rape

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ London

Former Arsenal player Thomas Partey intends to plead not guilty to two new charges of rape, his lawyer told a London court on Friday. The 32-year-old Ghana midfielder, who now plays for Spanish club Villarreal, is separately awaiting trial on five counts of rape related to two women and one count of sexual assault involving a third woman.

The new charges were brought after a different woman alleged Partey twice raped her on the same day in December 2020. According to a court hearing Friday, the new allegations arose after the first set of



charges were publicized.

Partey was not required to attend Friday's preliminary session at Westminster Magistrates' Court. His

lawyer, Emma Fenn, indicated he intends to plead not guilty to both charges. The next court date for the case is April 10. Partey pleaded not

guilty to the first set of charges and faces trial in November at Southwark Crown Court. Those alleged offenses were between 2021 and 2022, prosecutors have said. The midfielder had joined Arsenal in 2020 from Atletico Madrid.

He was initially charged last July, just days after his Arsenal contract expired. Villarreal signed him in August, two days after he was granted bail.

Ghana has qualified for the World Cup and is in the same group as England, Croatia and Panama.

Partey played in three World Cup qualifying games in September and October. He's made more than 50 appearances for Ghana.

## Rankireddy's shoulder pain forces Indian pair to pull out of Swiss Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Basel

Top-seeded Indian men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty pulled out of the Swiss Open here on Friday ahead of its quarterfinal clash after a shoulder issue troubled the former. Rankireddy and Shetty were scheduled to clash with Denmark's Christian Faust Kjaer and Rasmus Kjaer in the last-



eight pairs stage of the Super 300 badminton tournament. The 25-year-old from Amalapuram, known for one

of the fastest smashes in world badminton, has often struggled with his right shoulder.

## Bhullar rallies from four behind to win IGPL Chandigarh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Chandigarh

Gaganjeet Bhullar returned a bogey-free four-under 68 in the final round to successfully defend his title at the IGPL Invitational Chandigarh, rallying from four shots behind to register his fourth IGPL win in just six appearances.

Bhullar, who shot 68 and 69 in the first two rounds, signed off with another 68, highlighted by three birdies in four holes between the 13th and 16th on the back nine. His three-day

total of 11-under featured just one bogey, which came in the second round, as he displayed remarkable consistency and precision throughout. Bhullar finished three shots clear of Varun Parikh (70), while Sachin Baisoya (68) was third alongside Manav Shah (70) at seven-under. Both Parikh and Shah are debutants and were pleased with their start in the event. "A win is always most satisfying, and I try to stay focused at all times," said Bhullar, who was surrounded by his friends and fans as he



completed the win on the 18th green at the Chandigarh Golf Club. "I love this course, this is my home course," said Bhullar, who last year won the first two IGPL events and later added a third title.

Bhullar, who played only five IGPL events in 2025, was third on the Order of Merit behind Pukhraj Singh Gill and Aman Raj. Debutant Parikh, who revealed that Bhullar helped him make the decision to come to the IGPL, was second with a par on the final hole.