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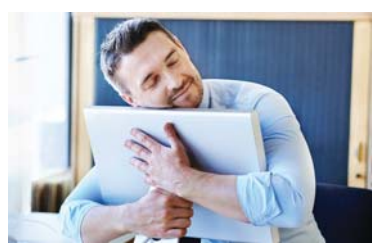

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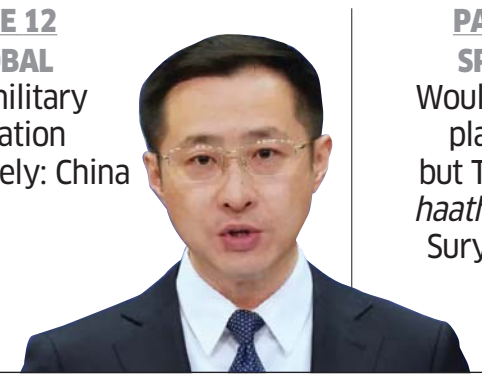

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Midnight transfers by ECI in West Bengal trigger protests

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The Election Commission of India (ECI) ordered a late-night reshuffle of senior bureaucratic and police officials in West Bengal on Sunday, triggering street protests by the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) and a walkout following sharp exchanges in Parliament.

In a March 15 order issued hours after announcing election schedules for four States and a Union Territory, the poll body transferred the State's Chief Secretary and Principal Secretary (Home and Hill Affairs) and directed the Government to keep the transferred officers away from any election-related work.

The move sparked protests in the Rajya Sabha, led by TMC MP Derek O'Brien. Addressing the House before staging a walkout, he accused the poll panel of overstepping its authority by making late-night transfers under the Model Code of Conduct. He argued that while the ECI has powers to enforce the code during elections, they should not undermine the functioning of the State administration.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee staged a protest rally at Dorina Crossing in Kolkata on Monday. She said the "saffron camp" could change as many officers as it wished but "cannot change the Government."

The ECI said the reshuffle followed a review of the State's preparedness for the upcoming Assembly elections.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee speaking during a protest rally in Kolkata on Monday PTI

BJP UNVEILS 144 PICKS IN WB

New Delhi: The BJP on Monday released its first list of 144 candidates for West Bengal Assembly polls, including key leaders Suvendu Adhikari, Dilip Ghosh, Swapan Dasgupta, Ashok Dinda, Rudranil Ghosh, and Soumitra Chattopadhyay. Adhikari will contest from Bhabanipur and Nandigram, setting up a high-stakes face-off with CM Mamata Banerjee. Former State president Ghosh, Swapan Dasgupta, and actor Rudranil Ghosh are fielded from Kharagpur Sadar, Rashbehari, and Shibpur, respectively. The BJP has renominated 41 sitting MLAs and emphasized social diversity, with 57 candidates from teaching, law, medicine, social work, and armed forces. Youth representation is strong, with 36 nominees under 40.

DETAILED REPORT ON >> P5

NDA SWEEPS RAJYA SABHA SEATS IN BIHAR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Patna/Bhubaneshwar/Chandigarh

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, BJP President Nitin Nabin, Union Minister Ramnath Thakur, and Independent candidate Dilip Ray from Odisha comfortably won Rajya Sabha seats in Monday's biennial elections.

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) secured all five seats in Bihar, with victorious candidates including Nitish Kumar, Nitin Nabin, BJP's Shivesh Kumar, JD(U)'s Ram Nath Thakur, and Rashtriya Lok Morcha chief Upendra Kushwaha. Sources said all 202 NDA MLAs voted, while three Congress and one RJD MLA were absent. AIMIM and BSP MLAs voted for RJD candidate Amarendra Dhari Singh, but the absence of opposition MLAs prevented a seat gain. The Bihar NDA alliance includes JD(U), LNJP, HAM, and RLM.

In Odisha, NDA won two of four seats, with BJP leaders Manmohan Samal and incumbent Sujeet Kumar elected.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Bank of Baroda chases ₹2.21 lakh crore

J GOPIKRISHNAN ■ New Delhi

The Pioneer Exclusive PART-7

Out of more than ₹29 lakh crore owed by large corporate defaulters to PSU banks, Bank of Baroda ranks fifth with outstanding dues of ₹2.21 lakh crore. According to TransUnion CIBIL data, the bank has filed 9,013 civil suits nationwide to recover dues as of December 2025. At the top of the bank's defaulter list is Reliance Communications, promoted by Anil Ambani, with 11 cases totaling ₹23,151 crore. Earlier reports in the series show Ambani-linked firms owe ₹48,282 crore to 13 banks. With Bank of Baroda's exposure included, the total dues rise to ₹71,433 crore.

Other major defaulters include the Lanco Group (₹7,215 crore), Hyderabad-based Gayatri Projects (₹7,142 crore), and the Videocon Group (₹5,296 crore).

CONTINUED ON >> P4

LARGE DEFAULTERS OF BANK OF BARODA

Anil Ambani's Reliance Group	
Lanco Group	
Gayatri Projects	
Videocon	
GTL limited	Siddhi Vinayak Logistics
Concast Steel and Power	JVL Agro
Frost International	REL Argo
Spice Trading Corporation	Associate Decor
Pratibha Industries	Rotomac Global
EMI Transmission	Winsome Diamonds
Emco Limited	Metenere Limited
EMC Limited	Rolta Pvt Ltd
Transstroy India	Ushdev International
Gammon India	Monnet Power Co
Gitanjali Gems	EPC Construction
Parekh Aluminex	Simplex Projects
	Surana Industries

Total ₹2.21 lakh crore

10 die in Odisha hospital fire

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhubaneswar

At least 10 patients were killed after a fire broke out in a Government-run hospital in Odisha on Monday. The fire occurred in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack.

Around 11 hospital staff members suffered burn injuries while rescuing patients to safety, Mohan Charan Majhi, the chief minister of the State said. The fire broke out between 2.30 am and 3 am, early on Monday morning.

The CM, who visited the hospital, has formed a six-member fact-finding team, to investigate the cause of fire. The CM also announced ₹25 lakh ex gratia for the next of kin of each deceased person. The fire probably originated from a short circuit, the CM said.

President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President CP Radhakrishnan and Prime Minister Narendra Modi condoled the death of patients.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Govt approves free bus travel for transgender passengers: CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

In a significant step towards inclusive and compassionate governance, the Rekha Gupta Government has approved the proposal to include transgender passengers in the free bus travel scheme on all routes operated by the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) and buses run by the Transport Department.

With this decision, eligible transgender persons residing in Delhi will be able to avail free travel in DTC and cluster buses, on the same pattern as the existing free travel facility provided to women passengers in Delhi buses. Besides, the Delhi government has said that free travel for women in public transport buses through the pink ticket will continue for three months and urged them not to worry or rush for having 'Pink Saheli' cards. According to a statement issued from the chief minister's office, the decision was taken at a Cabinet meeting on Monday.

After the cabinet decision, the chief minister said that her government remains committed to building a more inclusive, equitable and compassionate Delhi, where every citizen is able to access opportunities and public services with dignity. The decision aims to ensure that members of the transgender community can travel safely and conveniently across the city without financial barriers.

HOW TRANSGENDER PERSONS WILL GET THE PINK CARD

New Delhi: Under the scheme, members of the transgender community will first need to obtain a transgender identity certificate from the District Magistrate. Once they receive this certificate, they can apply for the Pink Card at around 50 designated centres, including offices of District Magistrates, Sub-Divisional Magistrates (SDMs), and selected DTC centres.

The card will be issued on the basis of minimal documentation and will be linked to the beneficiary's mobile number and Aadhaar.

Verma lays foundation stone for new flood control monitoring centre

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi's Irrigation and Flood Control Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma on Monday laid the foundation stone for a new flood control monitoring centre at the L.M. Bund Office Complex in Shastri Nagar. The centre aims to strengthen the capital's preparedness for the monsoon season.

The proposed facility will function as a central monitoring hub for flood management operations in the city. The project, with an estimated cost of ₹355.72 lakh, is expected to be completed by June 15, 2026, ahead of the peak monsoon period.

Senior officials and engineers of the Irrigation and Flood Control Department were present during the foundation-laying ceremony.

Officials stated that the new building will significantly enhance the department's ability to monitor river water levels, coordinate field operations, and respond promptly to emergency situations during the flood season.

According to the department, the ground floor of the facility will house the main flood control room. This room will be used to monitor water levels in rivers and drains across the city, review reports from field teams, and coordinate responses in case of rising water levels or flooding threats.

The first floor of the building will include a conference and coordination hall designed to accommodate around 50 people.

The space will be used for review meetings, planning sessions, and operational briefings during emergency situations when officials and engineers need to make quick decisions.

Speaking after laying the foundation stone, Verma said the Delhi government is working to strengthen institutional infrastructure so that departments can function more efficiently during critical situations.

"Every monsoon, our engineers and field teams work round the clock to monitor river levels, drainage systems, and vulnerable locations across Delhi. Facilities like this monitoring centre will make coordination smoother and help officials make decisions faster when required," he said.

Gupta opposes Opposition's motion to remove Birla

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Opposition's move in the Lok Sabha to remove Speaker Om Birla from the post undermined the parliamentary traditions, Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta said on Monday.

In a letter written to Birla, he asserted that the neutrality of the Chair of the House is central to the parliamentary democracy of the country and urged that the members respect constitutional institutions.

The resolution brought by the opposition parties, seeking the removal of Om Birla as the Lok Sabha Speaker, was defeated by a voice vote last Wednesday.

Gupta, in his letter to Birla, said, "It is deeply saddening that certain opposition parties, driven by narrow political considerations, chose to bring a motion against the incumbent Speaker - an office that stands above partisan politics and is entrusted with safeguarding the rules, traditions and dignity of Parliament."

Defeat of the motion reaffirmed the confidence of the members in the authority and impartial functioning of the Chair, the Delhi Assembly speaker asserted.

Three minors apprehended for sexually assaulting 7-year-old in Okhla

ABHINAV KUMAR JHA
New Delhi

The Delhi Police on Saturday apprehended three minors in connection with the alleged inappropriate conduct involving a seven-year-old girl in South-East Delhi's Okhla Industrial Area. The police managed to resolve the sensitive POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) case within hours of receiving a distress call.

The incident came to light on March 14, 2024, when a PCR call was made to the Okhla Industrial Area police station. According to the victim's statement, the distressing situation unfolded over two days: March 12 and 13. The seven-year-old girl reported that the three boys persuaded her to go to a godown near her residence in Okhla Phase-II during the daytime.

Once inside the secluded spot, the trio allegedly engaged in inappropriate behaviour towards her.

Upon receiving the call, a special police team was dispatched to the spot.

Recognising the sensitivity of the crime, a female police official was also brought in to assist with the inquiry and ensure the victim felt safe while recording her statement.

The three accused, aged between 12 and 13 years, were identified and taken into custody following a coordinated effort by the local police team. The victim was immediately rushed to AIIMS Hospital for a medical examination and is currently receiving necessary support.

CM Rekha honoured with traditional floral fan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The sound of the shehnai echoed through the Delhi Secretariat on Monday as Chief Minister Rekha Gupta was honoured with a traditional floral fan.

The Chief Minister was welcomed during a ceremony linked to the historic festival Phool Walon Ki Sair.

Members of Anjuman Sair-e-Gul Faroshan presented the customary floral pankha to the Chief Minister in keeping with the long-standing tradition of the festival. The ceremony was accompanied by live shehnai music, adding a ceremonial touch and reviving the cultural atmosphere associated with the historic celebration.

Delhi Cabinet Minister Kapil Mishra and several dignitaries were also present during the programme held at the Secretariat. The event was organised as part of the week-long celebrations of Phool Walon Ki Sair, one of Delhi's oldest cultural festivals that symbolises the city's composite culture and communal harmony.

Public Notice / General Information

The general public is hereby informed that my client is lawfully purchasing the below-described land/property/agricultural land from 1. Sh. Umaradeen, Sh. Babu, Sh. Nasruddin, Sh. Sarfuddin Ss/o Sh. Habeeb, all resident of 318, Village Mahadipur Bangar, Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P. – 203209, 2. Sh. Madhu Sudan S/o Sh. Mool Chand, resident of M.C.F.-615, Mewla Maharajpur, Harijan Basti, Faridabad NIT, Faridabad, Haryana-121001, 3. Mr. Salmuddin S/o Rasooli, resident of 303, Mahadipur Bangar, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Bhaipur Brahmanan, Uttar Pradesh-203209, Mr. Mubarak S/o Asuliya resident of Mahadipur Bangar, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Uttar Pradesh-203209, Mr. Tayayoob S/o Alimuddin resident of Village Mahadipur Bangar, Post Bhaipur Brahmanan, Mahadipur Bangar, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Uttar Pradesh-203209 ("Seller").

Sh. Umaradeen, Sh. Babu, Sh. Nasruddin, Sh. Sarfuddin are having share in the land as details hereunder in Khewat/Khatoni No. 118/126, Rect. No. 41, Killa No. 4, 5/1, 7, 8, 9, 13, situated at Nagalia, Tehsil & District Palwal, Haryana, as per Fard Jamabandi for the year 2021-2022.

Sh. Madhu Sudan having share in the land as details hereunder in Khewat/Khatoni No. 170/185, Rect. No. 33, Killa No. 23/2, Rect. No. 42, Killa No. 3, situated at Village Nagalia, Tehsil & District Palwal, Haryana, as per Fard Jamabandi for the year 2021-2022.

Mr. Salmuddin, Mr. Mubarak, Mr. Tayayoob are having share in the land as details hereunder in Khewat/Khatoni No.146/160, Rect. No. 35, Killa No. 4, 7/1, 7/2, 7/3, 7/4, 14, 17/1, situated at Village Nagalia, Tehsil & District Palwal, Haryana, as per Fard Jamabandi for the year 2021-22, the above said person have agreed to sell their entire respect shares in the aforesaid Khewat(s)/Khantoni(s) to my Client (hereinafter collective share of all is referred as "Scheduled Property/Land").

The said purchase is being undertaken by my Client with due care, proper due diligence, by issuing this public notice, so as to ascertain and invite disclosure of any hidden claims, rights, or disputes, if any, relating to the said Scheduled Property/Land.

The Seller has declared that the said Scheduled Property/Land is completely free from all kinds of encumbrances including but not limited to charges, mortgages, loans, claims, disputes, litigations, attachments, stay orders, ceiling proceedings, acquisition, surplus land, government dues, or any third-party rights or claims whatsoever, and that the title of the Scheduled Property/Land is clear, clean, and marketable. The Seller has further represented and warranted that the Seller has clear, valid, absolute, and marketable right, title, interest and ownership and is in actual, vacant, peaceful physical and legal possession of the said Scheduled Property/Land and that no prior, existing, or subsisting agreement, transaction, understanding, or arrangement of any nature whatsoever, whether oral or written, in respect of the said Scheduled Property/Land has been entered into with any third party in respect thereof. It has also been declared that no case, proceeding, or dispute in respect of the said Scheduled Property/Land is pending before any court, tribunal, or any competent legal or quasi-legal authority/forum.

Therefore, any person, bank, financial institution, government department, or any other party, firm, company, or entity, who has or claims to have any valid, legal, or equitable right, title, interest, claim, demand, charge, or encumbrance of any nature whatsoever in respect of the said Scheduled Property/Land—whether by way of sale, gift, lease, tenancy, license, exchange, partition, mortgage, lien, inheritance, succession, agreement, litigation, decree, stay order, possession, or otherwise—shall intimate the undersigned in writing, along with full particulars of such claim/objection and supporting documentary evidence, within fifteen (15) days from the date of publication of this notice.

In case no information or objection is received within the stipulated period, it shall be conclusively and lawfully presumed that there exists no encumbrances including but not limited to third-party claim, right, or dispute etc. in respect of the said Scheduled Property/Land, and my client shall be free to proceed with and complete the proposed sale transaction with the Seller and shall be legally deemed to have clear, valid, absolute, and marketable right, title, interest and ownership therein along with actual, vacant, peaceful physical and legal possession thereon, entitling my Client to lawfully proceed with and complete the proposed sale transaction of the Scheduled Property/Land with the Seller. Thereafter, any such claim, objection, or dispute shall be treated as legally untenable, deemed to have been waived, and my client shall not be held liable for the same in any civil or criminal proceedings before any court, tribunal, or any competent legal or quasi-legal authority/forum.

The Scheduled Property/Land shall be deemed to include all rights, easements, pathways, appurtenances, standing crops, trees, plants, constructions, fences, boundary walls, etc. attached thereto.

The general public is hereby cautioned not to deal or enter into any transaction concerning the Schedule Property/Land with any person, party, or entity, failing which such transaction shall be at their own cost, risk and consequences.

This public notice is issued on behalf of my Client with complete bona-fide, transparency, and good faith.so as to safeguard my client against any future allegations of fraud, misrepresentation, or collusion or any other allegations whatsoever in relation to the Schedule property. This notice is being issued without prejudice to any of the legal rights, contentions and remedies available to my client under applicable law.

Durga Lal - Advocate, Law Consultant Office,
Office No. 57 Nehru Ground Near Main Post Office,
B.K. Chowk, NIT Faridabad, Haryana. ENROL. No. PH/5563/2022
Mobile No.7303834091, Email- lawconsultantsoffice@gmail.com

The Pioneer Classified

LOST & FOUND

Lost my original Sale Deed of Property No. G-21/1A, First & Second Floor with roof rights, Rajouri Garden, New Delhi in favour of Smt. Meena Arora W/o Late Sh. Bharat Bhushan Arora registration No. 5562, Book No.1 Vol. No. 6530, on pages 21-28, dated 13.07.1994, executed at Sub Registrar Delhi. Founder kindly Contact **9654952882.**

PD(502)C

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Jemima Biju, wife of Biju Neerparakalayil Varghese, residing at C-1, MCD Flats, B-Block, Defence Colony, New Delhi – 110024, here by declare that my husband's name have expanded from Biju N V to Biju Neerparakalayil Varghese for all future purposes.

PD(500)C

I hitherto known as AFREEN JAHAN W/o PREM R/o W-167/1A, Harijan Colony, Tilak Nagar, New Delhi-110018 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as RUHI. I have changed my name not my religion. It is certified that I have complied with other legal requirements in this connection.

PD(501)C

I, Sabbir Hussain Father of- JC-NYA-19000462X NB/SUB CLK Mohammad Ashiq, R/o- Vill & PO- Wazirganj, Teh- Bisouli, Dist- Badaun, U.P.- 243726, have changed my name from Sabbir Hussain to Shabbir Husain, vide affidavit dated 16/03/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(504)C

I, Kisvan Begum, Mother of- JC-NYA-19000462X NB/SUB CLK Mohammad Ashiq, R/o- Vill & PO- Wazirganj, Teh- Bisouli, Dist- Badaun, U.P.- 243726, have changed my name from Kisvan Begum to Kishwari Begam, vide affidavit dated 16/03/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(505)C

I, Tippana Rani W/o- No. 17005426K Nk Pilaka Venugopal Reddy, R/o- H. No. 1-46, Vill- Jadupudi, Post- Jhadupudi, Teh- Kanchili, Dist- Srikakulam, A.P.- 532290, have changed my name from Tippana Rani to Pilaka Rani, vide affidavit dated 16/03/2026 before Executive Magistrate, Delhi Cantt.

PD(506)C

I, No.4204355L Hav/Clk (SD) Vinod, R/o VPO- Dobh, Teh & Dist- Rohtak, Haryana -124001, have changed my son's name from Shaurya Dhaniya to Shaurya Dhaania, vide affidavit No. 57 AA 744782, dated 09 Mar 2026 before Notary Public Dist- Rohtak.

PD(507)C

I, No.4204355L Hav/Clk (SD) Vinod, R/o- VPO- Dobh, Teh & Dist- Rohtak, Haryana -124001, have changed my daughter's name from Riya Dhaniya to Riya Dhaania, vide affidavit No. 57 AA 744781, dated 09 Mar 2026 before Notary Public Dist- Rohtak.

PD(508)C

I, Jaishree Benjwal W/o JC-780706M Sub Pankaj Benjwal, R/o- House No. 52, City Enclave-III, Zirakpur, Punjab - 140603, have changed my name from Jaishree Benjwal to Jaishri Benjwal, vide affidavit dated 16/03/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(509)C

In the documents of my Plot No. 780, Block- O, Sector- 20, Allotment No. YEA016604 issued by Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority, my name was mistakenly recorded as Gauri Sharma Paul whereas my correct name is Gauri Sharma, So I shall hereafter be known as Gauri Sharma W/O Shri Pankaj Paul R/O 217, Hari Nagar, Gali No.- 5, B.E. Block, Maya Puri, South West Delhi, Delhi-110064.

PD(510)C

I, Suresh Devi W/o- JC-468671W Sub & Hony Capt Fateh Singh Chauhan (Retd), R/o- VPO- Rajgarh, Teh- Bawal, Dist- Rewari, Haryana- 123412, have changed my name from Suresh Devi to Suresh, vide affidavit No. IN-DL73344444012232Y dated 16/03/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(511)C

I, JC-310153W Ex-Hony Sub Maj Sanjeev Singh Chauhan, R/o- 15, Govt. Colony Road, Birla Gram Nagda Junction, Dist- Ujjain, M.P.- 456331, have changed my daughter's name from Nikita to Nikita Chauhan, vide affidavit dated 16/03/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(512)C

I, JC-310153W Ex-Hony Sub Maj Sanjeev Singh Chauhan, R/o- 15, Govt. Colony Road, Birla Gram Nagda Junction, Dist- Ujjain, M.P.- 456331, have changed my daughter's name from Susmita Chauhan to Sushmita Chauhan, vide affidavit dated 16/03/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(513)C

I, Meenakshi daughter of Hardeep Bains, resident of 4, Tughlak Lane, New Delhi, have changed my Name from 'Meenakshi' to 'Meenakshi Bains' vide Affidavit dated 13/03/2026) before Mr RV Singh, Advocate, Delhi Area.

PD(514)C

I, Manju Kharab W/o Subhash Chander Kharb R/o V.P.O. Uldepur (Tharu) distt. Sonipat Haryana declare that In my Husband Office documents my name is wrongly mentioned Manju Devi. Manju Kharab and Manju Devi is one and same Person. Affidavit No. IN-DL73266438929757Y

PD(515)C

I, Manoj Kumar S/o Suresh Chand Singhla 137/3 Patparganj Village Gharonda Neem Ka Bangar, Delhi-110091 have changed my name from Manoj Kumar to Manoj Kumar Singhla. Manoj Kumar and Manoj Kumar Singhla is one and same Person.

PD(515)C

PUBLIC NOTICE

To be known to all that **I,SUBHASH CHAND S/O SH.BABU LAL R/O DDA LIG FLAT NO 358, FIRST FLOOR POCKET-13, DWARKA, NEW DELHI owner of DDA LIG FLAT NO.358,FIRST FLOOR, POCKET-13,DWARKA,NEW DELHI.The original documents i.e. DEMAND-CUM-ALLOTMENT LETTER AND NOC FOR ELECTRICITY & WATER CONNECTION of the above flat have been lost.** An FIR to this effect has been lodged in P.S.Crime Branch in vide S.O.No.430/2014 & LR No.168100/2026 dated 16.03.2026 Any person(s)claiming any right interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above address/phone 9911317373 within 15days from the date of publication of this notice.The person claiming any right, interest, objections with respect to this property can personally inform or write to **Dy. Director (LAB) H or Director (H)-1,D Block, 3rd Floor, Vikas Sadan, INA,New Delhi.**

PUBLIC NOTICE

My client Suresh Kumar Gupta S/o Late Ram Karan R/o H.No.37, Plot No.165& 166, Kh. No. 23/21/2 and 31/1/12, 1st floor Block-C, Deep Vihar Pansali Delhi has severed all his relations & disowned his son Sunny Gupta and daughter in law Anju & grandchildren from all movable immovable properties due to their misconduct. My client shall not be responsible for their acts.

P.P. Upadhyay (Advocate)
Ch. No. 615, Lawyer's Chamber Block, Rohini Courts, Delhi-110085

उत्तराखण्ड लोक सेवा आयोग
हरिद्वार
पिन कोड–249404

संख्याः 672 / 86 / डी0आर0 / (मु0अ0अधि0) / सेवा–1 / 2025–26
दिनांकः 16 मार्च, 2026
मुख्य अग्निशमन अधिकारी परीक्षा–2026
विज्ञप्ति

एतद्द्वारा सूचित किया जाता है कि उत्तराखण्ड अग्निशमन एवं आपात सेवा विभाग के अंतर्गत मुख्य अग्निशमन अधिकारी के कुल रिक्त 01 (अनुसूचित जाति हेतु आरक्षित) पद पर सीधी भर्ती के माध्यम से चयन हेतु विज्ञापन संख्याः A-1/DR(CFO)/S-1/2026 द्वारा पात्र अभ्यर्थियों से आयोग की वेबसाईट **psc.uk.gov.in** पर ऑनलाईन आवेदन–पत्र आमंत्रित किये जाते हैं। ऑनलाईन आवेदन किए जाने से सम्बन्धित महत्वपूर्ण तिथियां निम्नवत हैं–

विज्ञापन प्रकाशन की तिथि	दिनांक 17 मार्च, 2026
ऑनलाईन आवेदन पत्र भरने की अंतिम तिथि	दिनांक 06 अप्रैल, 2026 (रात्रि 11:59:59 बजे तक)
आवेदन शुल्क– Net Banking/Debit / Credit Card/UPI Payment द्वारा जमा करने की अंतिम तिथि	दिनांक 06 अप्रैल, 2026 (रात्रि 11:59:59 बजे तक)
ऑनलाईन आवेदन प्रक्रिया पूर्ण करने के पश्चात ऑनलाईन आवेदन पत्र की प्रतिष्टियों में संशोधन / परिवर्तन किये जाने हेतु समय	दिनांक 15 अप्रैल, 2026 से दिनांक 24 अप्रैल, 2026 (रात्रि 11:59:59 बजे तक)
ऑनलाईन आवेदन पत्र की प्रिंट–आउट प्रति, समस्त शैक्षणिक एवं अन्य अभिलेखों के साथ जमा करने की अंतिम तिथि	दिनांक 11 मई, 2026 (सायं 6:00 बजे तक)

अभ्यर्थी ऑनलाइन आवेदन करने से पूर्व आयोग की वेबसाईट पर प्रसारित विज्ञापन में वर्णित समस्त शर्तों / निर्देशों का भली–भाँति अवलोकन कर लें।

(अशोक कुमार पाण्डेय) सचिव।

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public is hereby informed that my client **Kushager Mehta** S/o Ms. Mona Mehta R/o 31 J K Apartments, A-3 Block, Paschim Vihar, New Delhi - 110063, contact no. 9810906061 intends to purchase Kothi/House **A-2/265, Paschim Vihar, New Delhi-110063** from **Mr. Maheshinder Singh & Ms. Ramandeep Sachar.** In case any person has any right, title, interest, claim of whatsoever nature by way of sale, gift, lease, heirship, possession or by any other nature in respect of aforesaid property, the same should be known in writing to me at the address mentioned below with the documentary proof within **14 days** from the date hereof, failing which it shall be constructed that such claim is waived, abandoned.

R. K. Srivastava & Vishal Srivastava Advocate, Shop No. 4A, Old SDM Office, Rohtak Rd, Nangloi, New Delhi - 110041

PUBLIC NOTICE

This notice is issued on behalf of my client Acme Excellent Management Pvt. Ltd., having its office at E-5, UGF, LSC, M.O.R. Land, DDA Market, New Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi. It is hereby informed to the general public that an internal investigation conducted by the company, along with information received from other reliable sources, has revealed that Mr. Arif Peter @ Banty, S/o Mr. Peter Channa, R/o House No. 175, Plot No. 143, Part-2, Raj Nagar, Palam, Delhi, has been involved in fraudulent activities, including cheating the company, misuse of the company's stamp, and misappropriation of funds. It has further come to the notice of my client that the said Mr. Arif Peter @ Banty has been collecting money from various persons without the knowledge, authority, or consent of Acme Excellent Management Pvt. Ltd. The company strongly condemns such illegal actions and hereby clarifies that the said person is not authorized to collect any money or act on behalf of the company in any manner whatsoever. The general public is therefore cautioned not to deal with the said Mr. Arif Peter @ Banty in the name of the company. If any person deals with him, they shall do so at their own risk, responsibility, and consequences, and the company shall not be liable for any such transaction. My client further assures that appropriate legal and criminal proceedings are being initiated against the said person for his illegal and fraudulent acts.

Reena Luka (Advocate) Ch No. K-40A, Tis Hazari Court, Delhi, Mob:9891767081

FARIDABAD METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
SCO-28-33, HUDA Complex, Sector- 12, Faridabad

Dated: 12 March, 2026

BOX Advertisement for News Papers

Re-Advertisement for engagement of experts under FMDA (Engagement of Experts) Regulations, 2020.
In continuation to the posts advertised vide Advertisement No. 1/2026 published on 30.01.2026 in newspapers, **Faridabad Metropolitan Development Authority (FMDA)** invites application for the following positions against which applications/ sufficient number of applications have not been received from eligible candidates for contractual engagement of experts under FMDA (Engagement of Experts) Regulation, 2020.

- **Infrastructure Engineering Experts (Water Supply and Sewerage) Level-I- 03 (DSC-01, OSC-01, BC (A)-01)**
- **Infrastructure Engineering Experts (Road, Buildings & Mobility) Level-I - 01 (DSC)**
- **Infrastructure Engineering Experts (Horticulture) Level-I-02 (General)**
- **Geospatial Information Systems and Technology Experts Level-1- 08 (All General) (Survey -02, Cadastral -01, Software Development -02, Quality Assurance & Standardization -01, FMDA Plan 1-01, Property and Land Record Management -01)**
- **Architectural Expert Level-I-01 (General)**
- **Engineering Expert Level-1-04 (General-03, DSC-01)**
- **Geospatial Information Systems and Technology Expert Level-II (AI/ML -01, Infrastructure -01) - 02 (General)**
- **Transport Planning Level- III-01 (General)**
- **Infrastructure Engineering Experts Level-III-01 (General)**
- **Information Technology Expert Level-III - 01 (General)**

For detailed advertisement on format of application, eligibility, qualification, experience etc. please visit FMDA website **https://fmda.haryana.gov.in/careers.html?language=en**

• Last date of submission of online application on **(https://deployment.setchartron.in/) is 31-03-2026, Tuesday (23:59 Hrs.).**

• Applicants who have applied for the above posts in response to FMDA Advertisement No.1/2026 published on **30-01-2026** need not apply as their applications already submitted will be considered.

Deputy Secretary (Admin)
FMDA

RO 43862-C-27-7

CM Rekha approves infrastructure projects worth over ₹3,000 cr

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Facing endless traffic congestion and finding it difficult to commute in the national Capital, citizens are in for some good news. The Delhi Government on Monday approved two key infrastructure projects, including the Barapullah Phase-111 Elevated Corridor and a six-lane elevated corridor with underpasses on the MB road. The cost of the two projects is worth over ₹3,000 crore.

Announcing these major projects cleared in a cabinet meeting, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta later said these corridors will bring relief to millions of commuters and help make Delhi's road network more modern and efficient.

As regards the projects, the government cleared a revised cost of ₹1,635.03 crore for the construction of the Barapullah Phase-III elevated road over the Barapullah drain, connecting Sarai Kale Khan to Mayur Vihar.

This project is an extension of the existing Barapullah elevated corridor. Once completed, it will provide direct, signal-free connectivity from Mayur Vihar in East Delhi to AIIMS in South Delhi.

According to the Chief Minister, the project will significantly reduce travel time for the lakhs of commuters who travel daily between East and South Delhi. It is also expected to ease congestion around Sarai Kale Khan, Ring Road, the DND Flyway and NH-24. The government has set a target of completing the project by June 30, 2026.

Rekha Gupta said the government has taken serious note of the unnecessary delays that occurred during the tenure of the previous administration.

She announced that the matter has been referred to the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) for a detailed investigation to determine why the project was delayed and who was responsible for it. The current Government, Rekha Gupta said, is moving ahead with the project with clear financial planning and accountability.

The Chief Minister also announced that the Cabinet has approved another major project – a six-lane elevated road along with underpasses on MB Road, stretching from Saket G-Block to Pul Prahladpur.

The project is estimated to cost ₹1,471.14 crore and will be executed by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC). According to the Chief

Minister, the project will be implemented in two phases.

In the first phase, a double-decker integrated structure will be built between Saket G-Block and Sangam Vihar.

This will include a six-lane elevated flyover, a six-lane underpass at Saket G-Block, an elevated ramp connecting the BRT corridor to the flyover, and a two-lane underpass linking MB Road with the BRT corridor.

In the second phase, a nearly 2.48-kilometre-long six-lane elevated flyover will be constructed from Maa Anandmayee Marg to Pul Prahladpur. This flyover will be built above the Delhi Metro tunnel.

Rekha Gupta noted that MB Road is among the busiest roads in South Delhi and has long suffered from heavy traffic congestion.

Once the project is completed, traffic movement between Saket, Ambedkar Nagar, Khanpur, Sangam Vihar and Pul Prahladpur will become smoother. This is expected to significantly reduce congestion and cut travel time for commuters.

She added that the Cabinet has also directed the Public Works Department (PWD) to finalise the alignment for the remaining stretches of MB Road at the earliest.

These include the sections from Sangam Vihar to Maa Anandmayee Marg and from Pul Prahladpur to Badarpur. Once completed, the entire stretch from Saket G-Block to Badarpur will see improved traffic flow. The Chief Minister said the Delhi Government is working consistently to equip the capital with modern, seamless and world-class infrastructure.

She emphasised that the government is developing modern road networks, better connectivity and stronger infrastructure in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a developed India. These projects, she said, are concrete steps toward building a 'Viksit Delhi', making the city's transport system more efficient and commuter-friendly.

Rekha Gupta added that her government is committed to fast-tracked, transparent and accountable infrastructure development in Delhi.

Police bust LPG racket in Mundka storing 610 cylinders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi Police have busted a racket storing more than 600 LPG cylinders in a godown in the Mundka area and arrested a man in a separate case for refilling gas cylinders illegally. In the first case, the Crime Branch conducted a raid in a godown under the name of Guruji Indane Gas Service in the Mundka area, police said in a statement.

During the raid on Sunday, the team found that commercial LPG cylinders belonging to multiple oil marketing companies were stored together inside the godown.

The premise was authorised only for the distribution of Indane commercial cylinders, but it had cylinders belonging to other companies, such as Bharat Gas and HP Gas, violating the licensing conditions and control regulations, the statement said.

"During the search, a total of 610 LPG cylinders, both filled and empty, were recovered. It included 423 cylinders of Indane, 92 cylinders of

Bharat Gas and 95 cylinders of HP Gas," it added. Among the Indane cylinders, 133 were filled while 290 were empty. The team also seized 17 filled and 75 empty cylinders of Bharat Gas and 47 filled and 27 empty cylinders of HP Gas.

The statement further said that 21 small-sized empty cylinders were also recovered during the spot. Further verification also revealed discrepancies in stock records. According to preliminary information received from officials of Indian Oil Corporation, the authorised stock of Indane commercial cylinders at the distributorship was expected to be nil as of March 10, 2025.

However, during the raid, police found 133 filled Indane commercial cylinders present inside the premises, raising suspicion of irregular stock management and illegal storage.

Police suspect that such hoarding of LPG cylinders is often carried out during periods of supply shortage or artificial scarcity, after which the cylinders are sold in the market at inflated prices through black marketing.

"Illegal storage of LPG cylinders also poses serious safety hazards, as the highly inflammable cylinders were kept without following mandatory safety protocols. The raid was conducted in the presence of an officer from the Food Supply and Consumer Affairs Department," they added.

Based on the findings, a case has been registered under Section 7 (penalties for violating control orders) of the Essential Commodities Act and Section 61(2) (criminal conspiracy) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita at the Crime Branch police station, an officer said.

He added that the owners of the godown were not present during the raid and are currently absconding. Efforts are underway to trace and apprehend them. Police arrested a 46-year-old man for allegedly refilling LPG gas from large cylinders into smaller ones at his shop in Shakarpur.

On Sunday, police received a tip-off regarding the black marketing and illegal refilling of LPG cylinders. Based on the information, a raid was conducted in the shop, and Yogesh Gupta, from Shakarpur, was arrested. The accused admitted to refilling LPG gas from large domestic cylinders into smaller cylinders for the past few days, a police officer of the east district said.

During the search of the shop, police recovered two domestic LPG cylinders of 14.2 kg capacity, three small cylinders of five kg each, a "totapilas" (gas transferring pipe), an LPG refilling machine and a weighing machine.

"The accused did not possess any licence or authorisation to carry out LPG refilling activity and was operating the setup without any safety measures. Such illegal refilling poses serious risks of fire or explosion in densely populated areas," the officer said.

A case has been registered against Gupta at Shakarpur police station under sections 3 (powers to control production, supply, distribution, etc., of essential commodities) and 7 of the Essential Commodities Act, he said.

Assembly Budget session to be held from March 23 to 25

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Budget Session of the Delhi Legislative Assembly will be held from March 23 to March 25. The decision was taken during a Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta at the Delhi Secretariat on Monday. According to the Cabinet's decision, the Economic Survey report will be tabled in the House on March 23. The following day, March 24, the Delhi government will present its budget.

Earlier, highly placed sources had claimed that the Delhi Government is examining the idea of introducing a Green Budget, aimed at striking a better balance between economic growth and environmental sustainability in the national capital.

According to Government sources, the primary objective of a Green Budget is to ensure that a significant

portion of government spending and development programmes is directed towards environmental priorities. These include pollution control, clean energy, water conservation, biodiversity protection and broader sustainable development initiatives. Such a budgeting framework would also make it easier to track how much the government is investing in environmentally focused programmes and what impact those investments are generating.

Sources say the concept of a Green Budget goes beyond environmental protection alone. It can also open up new avenues for economic growth. Increased investment in sectors such as clean energy, green mobility, waste management, water conservation and green infrastructure can encourage technological innovation while also generating new employment opportunities. In this way, a Green Budget has the potential to advance both environmental sustainability and economic progress at the same time.

Govt to deploy 50 new interstate AC buses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Delhi Government will soon deploy 50 environment-friendly air-conditioned buses on 17 interstate routes, Transport Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh announced on Monday.

The minister said that the new fleet of buses would strengthen regional connectivity and improve travel for commuters between the national capital and neighbouring states.

The buses will be operated by the Delhi Transport Corporation as part of a plan to expand interstate services and make travel more comfortable and accessible for passengers.

Officials said the 12-metre buses will operate on benchmark rates prescribed by the Association of State Road Transport Undertakings. The initiative is aimed at improving connectivity between Delhi and nearby cities while strengthening public transport infrastructure in the region.

According to the transport department, the corporation has already started operating electric buses on several key interstate routes. These include services between Delhi and Baraut in Uttar Pradesh, and between Delhi and Sonipat, Dharuhera, and Panipat in Haryana.

The government is also planning to expand interstate operations by introducing bus services on several additional routes. These include Nanaksar Delhi to Ghaziabad Bus Terminal, Delhi to Rewari, Delhi to Karnal, Delhi to Rohtak, Delhi to Alwar, and Delhi to Jewar.

Transport officials said these routes are expected to benefit daily commuters, office-goers, and regional travellers who frequently travel between Delhi and surrounding cities. Transport Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh said the expansion of interstate bus services is part of the government's broader plan to strengthen connectivity and make public transport more accessible. "Our priority is to strengthen interstate connectivity and provide seamless travel for citizens. At the same time, we want to ensure that people can travel comfortably and affordably to nearby cities and regions," he said.

The minister also said the Government is focusing on improving connectivity to important religious destinations through the public bus network. According to Singh, the transport department is planning to introduce bus services from Delhi to major religious centres such as Katra, the base town for pilgrims visiting Vaishno Devi, Khatu Shyam in Rajasthan, and Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh. "These services will help devotees travel safely and conveniently to important religious destinations," the minister said.

In addition to expanding services to neighbouring states and religious centres, the Delhi Government is also exploring the possibility of launching interstate bus services between Delhi and Bihar. The proposal is being considered in view of the large Poorvanchali population living in the national Capital.

Need to get out of mindset that only Delhi requires greenery: Supreme Court

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

There is a need to get out of the mindset that only the national capital needs to have greenery and other states are lesser mortals, the Supreme Court said on Monday while hearing a matter related to the Delhi Ridge.

The Ridge is an extension of the Aravalli Hill range in Delhi and is a rocky, hilly and forested area. For administrative reasons, it has been divided into four zones -- south, south-central, central and north -- which make up an area of around 7,784 hectares.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi observed there was a need to have a holistic approach on the issue of green cover.

"We need to get out of this mindset that only Delhi, being the national capital, needs to have greenery and the others are lesser mortals,"

the bench observed.

Senior advocate K Parameshwar, assisting the top court as an amicus curiae in the matter, pointed to the November 11 verdict of the apex court which directed the Centre to give statutory status to the Delhi Ridge Management Board (DRMB) and make it the single-window authority for all matters related to the Ridge and Morphological Ridge.

The top court had then directed the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to formally constitute the DRMB under Section 3(3) of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

The reconstituted DRMB would include top officials from both the Centre and the Delhi government, senior representatives from urban and forest departments, and members from two NGOs.

A representative of the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) would also be a member, ensuring coordination and accountability.

During the hearing on Monday, the counsel appearing for the Centre said that a notification was issued constituting the DRMB on December 1 last year.

The bench directed the Centre to place on record an affidavit along with the details of the constitution of statutory or non-statutory committees dealing with the management of forest and green areas and/or related to environmental issues.

The top court said such information was necessitated in order to delineate the area of operations and further to identify overlapping, if any. It said the affidavit would also explain the statutory framework under which different bodies were constituted.

The bench said the affidavit should be filed within two weeks and the matter would be heard after that.

During the hearing, the bench was told that various committees were looking into the issue of green cover in the national capital and across the country.

Roti, poori disappear from JNU messes amid gas shortage

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

A quiet food crisis is beginning to simmer inside the hostels and canteens of Jawaharlal Nehru University. With cooking gas supplies reduced, staple items such as *roti* and *poori* are slowly disappearing from campus menus, leaving students worried about further cuts and a possible rise in food costs.

The change began after gas supplier Indraprastha Gas Limited imposed a 20 per cent reduction in supply to industrial and commercial consumers earlier this month. The restriction has forced hostel mess committees and campus eateries to revise food plans in order to keep kitchens running.

At Lohit Hostel, the impact has already reached the dining table. According to a revised menu issued by the hostel mess committee, *rotis* will not be served during lunch on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Instead, students will be given alternatives such as plain rice or khichdi on those days.

Letters sent by Indraprastha Gas Limited to mess heads at Sabarmati and Lohit hostels informed them that gas supplies to commercial users would be limited to 80 per cent of their average consumption over the previous six months. The restriction came into effect at 6 am on March 11.

With a fifth of their usual supply gone, hostel kitchens say they have little choice but to ration gas usage and prioritise items that require less cooking time. The effects

are not limited to hostels alone. Students say several campus canteens have also begun trimming their menus.

At the School of International Studies canteen, samosas have already been taken off the menu. At the TEFLAS canteen, tea is no longer being served. Students say items that require longer cooking times or heavy gas usage are gradually disappearing from food counters across the campus.

The Disha Students' Organisation said in a statement that several food items have already been removed from canteen menus due to what it described as an "impending crisis".

A student from the School of International Studies said that while the current changes to mess menus are still manageable, anxiety among students is beginning to grow. He said that institutions such as JNU attract many students who depend on affordable hostel meals and campus dhabas for their daily food.

The Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union has announced a march to the office of the Dean of Students on Tuesday.

The union says the protest will demand urgent steps to ensure that hostel messes and campus dhabas continue to function smoothly despite the gas shortage. Student groups are also asking the administration to ensure that mess fees are not increased during the ongoing crisis.

Govt committed to strengthening judicial infrastructure: CM Rekha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Monday said that her Government is committed to strengthening judicial infrastructure in the city, emphasising that it will speed up the disposal of cases.

Speaking at a ceremony to lay the foundation stone of a family court complex in North West Delhi's Rohini Sector 14, she said judicial infrastructure is lacking and requires expansion. The ceremony was attended by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, Delhi High Court Chief Justice D K Upadhyay and other judges.

In a lighter vein, Gupta said she was a "little scared" while speaking amidst the gathering

as the judges and the judicial officers have the "talent" to keenly focus on each word uttered.

She said that the Rohini family court complex will have 14 courtrooms, and they will be equipped with several modern facilities.

The chief minister said the Delhi government was committed to extending 100 per cent cooperation for strengthening the judicial infrastructure and cited various ongoing projects in the city.

The government is readying court complexes in Sector 26 of Rohini. They will have 102 court rooms and 346 lawyers' chambers. The upcoming court complexes in Karkardooma Shastri Park will have 50 courts each.

The Pioneer
NEW DELHI | TUESDAY | MARCH 17, 2026

IN FOCUS

Participants dressed in traditional attire during the Mirage-4 fashion show organised by the Department of Fashion Design at Khalsa College for Women in Amritsar PTI

India engages Iran, ensures safe transit of oil tankers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Two Indian-flagged oil tankers have safely crossed the Strait of Hormuz after receiving clearance from Iran, with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar saying diplomatic engagement with Tehran is producing results.

Speaking to the Financial Times, Jaishankar said the discussions were ongoing and had helped ease the passage of some vessels through the strategic waterway.

"I am at the moment engaged in talking to them, and my talking has yielded some results. This is ongoing. If it is yielding results for me, I would naturally continue to look at it," he said.

EAM S Jaishankar during a meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus in Belgium on Monday PTI

"Certainly, from India's perspective, it is better that we reason and we coordinate and we get a solution." The minister clarified there was no blanket agreement with Tehran for Indian vessels. "There was no 'blanket arrangement' with Iran for Indian-flagged ships and... 'every ship movement is an individual happening'," he said.

Rejecting suggestions of any quid pro quo, Jaishankar added: "It's not an exchange issue. India and Iran have a relationship. And this is a conflict that we regard as something very unfortunate." Prime Minister Narendra Modi had earlier spoken with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian about ensuring the transit of goods and energy supplies.

The two vessels that crossed the Strait were carrying liquefied petroleum gas. The narrow shipping route - the Persian Gulf's only outlet to the Arabian Sea - has become a major chokepoint amid escalating tensions in West Asia.

Jaishankar also thanked Armenia for helping evacuate Indian nationals from Iran. "Thank the Government and the people of Armenia for facilitating the safe evacuation of over 550 Indian nationals from Iran so far," he said during his visit to Brussels.

LPG shortage: Uddhav slams Maharashtra Govt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Jaipur

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Uddhav Thackeray on Monday questioned the claims of the Union and Maharashtra Governments on no shortage of LPG amid the West Asia crisis and asked why queues were being seen for cylinders if this was the case.He also took a swipe at Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis over the latter's assertion that the Opposition was creating panic through misinformation despite there being no shortage of LPG or fuel in the state.

"If there is (LPG) supply, then why are queues (for cylinders) being seen? I have received information that 30 to 40 per cent of hotels in Mumbai are shutting down due to the shortage.

Common citizens are suffering," Thackeray said.

If the Government claims there is no shortage of LPG cylinders, then why are people struggling to get them, the Shiv Sena (UBT) leader asked.

"If the chief minister is not willing to accept that such a situation exists, then the state's situation is really difficult," he said while alleging that the Government machinery had failed to convey the ground reality to Fadnavis.

Israel clarifies war on Iran unrelated to PM Modi's visit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Israel on Monday said the opportunity to launch its joint military offensive with the United States against Iran emerged only after Narendra Modi concluded his two-day visit to Tel Aviv in February, rejecting Opposition criticism over the timing of the trip.

Israel's envoy to India, Reuven Azar, said the regional situation was already volatile during the Prime Minister's visit on February 25-26. His remarks came amid criticism from the Indian National Congress, which had described Modi's visit as "shameful" and "ill-timed".

Senior Congress leader Salman Khurshid had argued that the timing of the trip "creates the perception of a political endorsement of military escalation".

Addressing reporters, Azar said Israel remains open to diplomacy despite the ongoing hostilities. "We are ready to stop hostilities if Iran changes course," he said, adding that Tel Aviv had consulted diplomatic channels in recent days, including partners such as the United States and several regional countries.

As the conflict entered its 17th day on Monday, the envoy said a full-scale ground invasion was unlikely. "I don't think a full-fledged terrestrial invasion is on the cards," he said. Azar claimed Israeli operations had significantly weakened Iran's offensive capabilities. "We've

managed to degrade Iran's launching capabilities to a large extent. We are still hunting launchers and the remnants of other military capabilities," he said. "Right now, we are controlling the skies of Iran," he added. He acknowledged that diplomatic avenues had been explored before the military action. "We are always for diplomacy. Unfortunately, we exhausted diplomacy to the extent that we had to take military action. We hope diplomacy will again become relevant as a result of our actions," Azar said.

Asked whether Israel was prepared for a prolonged conflict, the envoy said the country had the capacity to sustain operations. "We have the oxygen and the capabilities to continue this until we exhaust the options," he said.

Azar also criticised Iran for allegedly targeting Gulf countries, calling the attacks "very unfortunate" and accusing Tehran of using "terror and coercion" against its partners.

Government likely to amend Women reservation Act

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Seeking to implement the Women Reservation Act before the delimitation exercise is completed, the Government is likely to bring a bill to amend the law, most probably in the ongoing Budget session of Parliament.

Government sources said feelers have been sent to the opposition to bring them on board to ensure a smooth sailing for the Constitution amendment bill in Parliament. However, sources made it clear that the proposed measure has

not been cleared by the Union Cabinet yet.

There are indications that the legislation will be brought to the Rajya Sabha first, possibly next week once it is approved by the Cabinet, they said.

The Women's Reservation Act was passed by Parliament in 2023. The provision to provide 33 per cent reservation to women in the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies was brought by amending the Constitution, but it will come into effect after the completion of the delimitation exercise. If the proposal to implement the law even before the delimitation exercise actually materialises, another amendment to the Constitution will be required. Besides the delimitation exercise, which can decide the constituencies that can be reserved for women, as it does for the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes (by way of population in their cases), another way to decide on constituencies can be by rotation. The sources underlined that a delimitation or boundary commission is a "neutral" body mandated to redraw Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies, and its decisions cannot be challenged even in the Supreme Court.

They said a neutral body will instil faith in the delimitation exercise.

The Election Commission is another independent institution, but it cannot be mandated to carry out a pan-India delimitation exercise. "At best, it can carry out delimitation of one or a few states, as it carried out delimitation in Assam recently," a Government functionary pointed out.

In the mid-1990s, the Geeta Mukherjee Committee had suggested the rotation of reserved seats for women in successive elections to ensure equitable representation across all constituencies over time. Under this recommendation, the reserved seats would be rotated after each general election. This cycle was designed so that after three general elections, all constituencies in the Lok Sabha and Assemblies would have been reserved at least once for women.

SMVDSB reviews arrangements for Navratri yatra in J&K

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Jammu

The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board on Monday reviewed arrangements for smooth conduct of pilgrimage to the cave shrine during the forthcoming Chaitra Navratri beginning March 19, and said additional security personnel will be deployed during the period for safety of devotees.

The meeting, held in Katra, the base camp for the pilgrimage to the hilltop shrine, was presided over by the shrine board Chief Executive Officer Sachin Kumar Vaishya who reviewed crowd management, security deployment, disaster preparedness and pilgrim facilitation along the entire yatra route in view of the expected surge in devotees. Additional security personnel will be deployed at key checkpoints, while regular public announcements will guide and sensitise pilgrims, officials said, elaborating on the arrangements. During peak rush hours, alternate tracks will be optimally utilised to regulate movement and ensure effective crowd management, they said.

Security measures include deployment of Quick Response Teams (QRTs) and a multi-tier setup comprising police, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and other agencies, Reasi Senior Superintendent of Police Paramvir Singh said while presenting a detailed security grid. Officials also discussed the use of advanced wireless communication systems linked to the Integrated Command and Control Centre to enhance real-time coordination, surveillance and overall security in and around the shrine area.

47% sitting MLAs in West Bengal have declared criminal cases: ADR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Around 47 per cent of sitting MLAs in poll-bound West Bengal have declared criminal cases against them, while 37 per cent face serious criminal cases, a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) said.

The assembly polls in West Bengal will be held in two phases on April 23 and 29, and votes will be counted on May 4.

According to the report that analysed self-sworn affidavits of 291 out of 294 sitting MLAs, 136 (47 per cent) have declared criminal cases against themselves, while 109 (37 per cent) have declared serious criminal cases.

At least eight sitting MLAs have declared cases related to murder, 29 have declared cases related to attempt to murder, while 22 have declared cases related to crimes against women, with one MLA declaring cases related to rape.

In the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC), 92 (41 per cent) of 223 MLAs have declared criminal cases, while in the BJP, 42 (66 per cent) of 64 MLAs have declared criminal cases. The report also says 152 (52 per cent) of the total MPs are crorepatis. The total assets of 291 sitting MLAs are ₹821.50 crore, and the average of assets per sitting MLA is Rs 2.82 crore.

The average asset per MLA for 223 TMC MLAs analysed is ₹3.27crore, for 64 BJP MLAs, it is ₹1.07 crore, while one Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha MLA analysed has assets worth ₹18.23 crore.

As far as education is concerned, 104 (36 per cent) MLAs have declared their educational qualification to be between Class 8 and 12, while 182 (63 per cent) MLAs have declared having an educational qualification of graduate or above.

ATS arrests dental student for links with ISIS online module

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Lucknow

The Uttar Pradesh Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) has arrested a 19-year-old student pursuing dentistry for allegedly having links with an online module of the banned terror outfit ISIS, officials said on Monday.

Haarish Ali, a resident of Saharanpur district, was arrested in Moradabad on Sunday during an ongoing probe into activities of ISIS-linked online networks operating in India, a statement from the ATS said.

The second-year BDS student is alleged to have been associated with ISIS handlers and sympathisers through social media platforms such as Instagram and encrypted applications like Session and Discord, officials said.

According to the ATS, intelligence inputs indicated that some individuals in Up and other parts of the country were creating online groups to propagate ISIS ideology aimed at establishing a Sharia-based caliphate system and recruit people to strengthen the terror outfit in India. The groups were allegedly used to share propaganda materials, extremist literature and instructions related to ISIS activities.

Based on the inputs, a case was registered at the ATS police station in Lucknow under relevant sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the statement said.

During the investigation, it was found that the accused allegedly created several groups using pseudonyms and virtual private networks (VPNs) to recruit like-minded individuals and circulate ISIS propaganda, it said. Officials said the accused also ran a separate group named "Al Ittihad Media Foundation" and maintained contacts with individuals linked to ISIS networks in India and abroad.

SP Govt cared only for its kin, failed to provide housing: Yogi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday said leaders of the earlier Samajwadi Party Government worked to serve the interests of only their own family and relatives, but for the BJP, the entire 25 crore population of the state is its family.

Speaking at a programme organised to distribute the first instalment under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) 2.0 to 90,000 families, Adityanath said the earlier

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath offers prayers during a visit to the Sire Temple Jalore in Rajasthan PTI

Government lacked the political will to provide housing benefits to the poor despite schemes announced by the Centre in this regard.

"It was not that the prime minister had not made the announcement, the state Government did not have the will to implement it. When a person immerses in self-interest, his sensitivity dies; he thinks only about himself and his family," Adityanath said in an apparent reference to former chief minister Akhilesh Yadav, but without taking his name.

Alleging nepotism in the earlier regime, he said, "Before 2017, the state Government thought only about itself, about one family and its relatives." The chief minister said that after the BJP-led Government came to power in 2017, the state's population of around 25 crore became its family and hence, it aims to ensure that the benefits of Government schemes reach every eligible person.

Congratulating the 90,000 families who received the first instalment of ₹1 lakh each under the scheme, he said owning a house is every person's dream.

FROM PAGE - 1

Midnight transfers by ECI in West Bengal trigger...

Dushyant Nariala, a 1993-batch IAS officer, has been appointed Chief Secretary, replacing Nandini Chakravorty, who took charge in December 2025. Jagdish Prasad Meena, a 2004-batch IAS officer, has been named Principal Secretary for Home and Hill Affairs.

The poll panel also transferred four IPS officers, including the state's police chief and the Kolkata Police Commissioner. Siddh Nath Gupta, a 1992-batch IPS officer, has been appointed Director General and Inspector General of Police, replacing Peeyush Pandey. Senior IPS officer Ajay Kumar Nand has been named the new Kolkata Police Commissioner, replacing Supratim Sarkar.

Gupta has previously handled major law-and-order challenges in the state, including the Nandigram agitation, the Lalgarh Naxal Movement and the Gorkhaland agitation in Darjeeling. Opposition parties accused the poll panel of acting at the behest of the Bharatiya Janata Party, a charge the BJP rejected, saying the Opposition was attempting to malign constitutional institutions. While the TMC called the reshuffle a "panic reaction" by a party that fears electoral defeat, the BJP and Communist Party of India (Marxist) welcomed it as a step towards ensuring free and fair polls.

For the first time, the ECI also issued stricter guidelines under the Model Code of Conduct, directing political parties to respect citizens' privacy, avoid demonstrations outside private residences, and seek property owners' consent before putting up flags, banners or posters.

10 die in Odisha hospital fire

The PM also spoke to Odisha CM over the phone and took stock of the situation.

"The mishap at a hospital in Cuttack, Odisha, is deeply painful. Condolences to those who have lost their loved ones. I pray for the speedy recovery of the injured. An ex gratia of ₹2 lakh from PMNRF would be given to the next of kin of each deceased. The injured would be given ₹50,000," the Prime Minister's Office said on social media.

Noting that there were 23 patients at the Trauma Care ICU and an adjacent ICU and ward, the CM said. Seven patients died in the fire, while three others succumbed to burns and suffocation during evacuation, he added.

Officials said the fire erupted at the ICU of the Trauma Care department of the hospital, where critically ill patients were being treated. The fire service officials, along with hospital staff, police and patients' attendants, rescued the patients undergoing treatment at the ICU and shifted them to other departments of the SCB hospital.

According to an eyewitness, the power supply was cut twice, and then the fire broke out, and the entire ICU was filled with thick smoke. "I called the fire brigade personnel, and they arrived around 20 minutes later. Meanwhile, the relatives and attendants of patients joined hands with the medical staff to rescue the patients," the eyewitness said. Another man said he broke the window glass and poured water to douse the fire before any assistance reached the patients and hospital staffers.

NDA sweeps Rajya Sabha seats in Bihar

Independent Dilip Ray, backed by the BJP, also triumphed, reportedly due to cross-voting by BJD and Congress MLAs. BJD's Santrupt Misra secured the remaining seat, ensuring the party's continued presence in the Rajya Sabha. The Odisha elections witnessed intense activity, including a brief halt over a ballot paper dispute and allegations of attempts at influence, highlighting the competitive nature of the polls.

Voting in Haryana was temporarily suspended after BJP and Congress candidates objected to certain votes, while counting for Haryana and Himachal Pradesh Rajya Sabha seats was ongoing as of the last reports.

Political analysts noted that the results in both Bihar and Odisha reflect the NDA's strong organisational base and the impact of cross-voting in regional parties. The success of Independent candidate Dilip Ray in Odisha underscores the continuing influence of veteran leaders supported by the alliance, while Bihar's clean sweep consolidates the NDA's hold in the State legislature ahead of future electoral battles.

Bank of Baroda chases ₹2.21 lakh crore

Mumbai-based GTL Limited has 11 loans totaling ₹5,142 crore. The CBI registered an FIR for banking fraud, but the Bombay High Court recently quashed it, citing lack of details on bankers or fund diversion.

Several other firms face significant recovery cases: Kolkata-based Concast Steel and Power (₹6,287 crore), Frost International (₹4,112 crore), fugitive-linked Gitanjali Gems and Gitanjali Export Corporation (₹2,194 crore), Bangalore-based Spice Trading Corporation (₹2,729 crore), Mumbai-based EMI Transmission (₹2,705 crore) and Pratibha Industries (₹2,307 crore), along with Emco Ltd (₹1,766 crore).

Additional large defaulters include EMC Ltd (₹1,744 crore), Transstroy India (₹2,255 crore), Gammon India (₹2,194 crore), Parekh Aluminex (₹2,080 crore), Siddhi Vinayak Logistics (₹1,922 crore), JVL Agro (₹1,915 crore), REI Agro (₹1,727 crore), Rotomac Global (₹1,370 crore), Winsome Diamonds (₹1,243 crore), Monnet Power Co (₹1,119 crore), Simplex Projects (₹1,110 crore), and Surana Industries (₹1,085 crore).

Other notable defaulters with dues between ₹600-₹1,000 crore include Surya Pharmaceutical, Golden Jubilee Hotels, ABG Shipyard, Kwality Ltd, Zoom Developers, Sai Infosystems, Vimal Oil & Foods, Forever Precious Jewellery, and Kingfisher Airlines. Banking sources note that most of these borrowers also owe large sums to multiple banks, often without recoverable collateral, and many loans were split into smaller accounts, resulting in multiple recovery cases.

The Pioneer
NEW DELHI | TUESDAY | MARCH 17, 2026

Govt urges shift to PNG to ease LPG supply pressure

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

To ease pressure on LPG supplies due to the near-shutting of the Strait of Hormuz because of the ongoing war between the US, Israel, and Iran, the Government on Monday urged commercial consumers to shift to piped natural gas (PNG) wherever available to ease pressure on LPG distribution, adding domestic cooking gas supplies remain stable. Meanwhile, LPG refill bookings have declined to about pre-war levels of 50-55 lakh on March 15 from about 77 lakh on Saturday and a peak of 88.8 lakh on March 13, she said, but hastened to add that it remains to be seen if this was a permanent trend or a one-off decline primarily due to March 15 being a Sunday.

Addressing a media briefing, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary (Marketing and Oil Refinery) in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, said commercial establishments using LPG can switch to PNG by contacting their respective City Gas Distribution (CGD) companies through email, customer portals, letters or call centres, with company details available on PNG service websites.

Sharma said several companies have announced incentives to encourage the transition to cleaner fuel. Indraprastha Gas Ltd (IGL), for instance, is offering ₹500 worth of free gas to domestic consumers who obtain a PNG connection before March 31 and start purchasing gas, while Mumbai-retailer Mahanagar Gas Ltd has announced incentives, including waiver of ₹500 registration charge for domestic household consumers and ₹1-5 lakh security deposit for commercial users. Similar promotional measures have also been introduced by GAIL and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL). The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) has also advised CGD companies to deploy additional resources and accelerate the rollout of PNG connections.

Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra with party MPs Hibi Eden, Prashant Padole and others at a protest over LPG crisis in New Delhi on Monday PTI

Despite concerns over LPG availability, authorities maintained that domestic consumers continue to receive uninterrupted supply and no "dry-outs" have been reported at LPG distributorships. "The share of online LPG bookings has risen to about 90 per cent from 87 per cent, with the Government continuing to promise the use of digital modes of bookings rather than queuing up at LPG dealerships for panic purchases," Sharma said.

The use of Delivery Authentication Codes (DAC) has also improved significantly, rising from 53 per cent earlier to 72 per cent. State Governments have started distributing commercial LPG cylinders based on allocations issued by the Centre, with priority given to essential sectors such as hospitals and educational institutions.

India imports about 88 per cent of its crude oil, 50 per cent of its natural gas and 60 per cent of its LPG needs. More than half of India's crude imports, about 30 per cent of gas and 85-90 per cent of LPG imports came from West Asian countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE, through the Strait of Hormuz.

Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary, Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways, confirmed that the LPG carrier Shivalik, carrying over 40,000 metric tonnes of LPG, is expected to reach Mundra Port in Gujarat around 5 pm on Monday after safely crossing the Strait of Hormuz earlier this week.

Authorities said documentation and priority berthing arrangements have been completed in advance to ensure the quick discharge of cargo. Another vessel, Nandadevi, which also crossed the Strait of Hormuz safely, is expected to arrive at Kandla Port on Tuesday.

"Indian-flag vessel 'Jag Laadki', which sailed from the UAE on 14th of March, is carrying about 81,000 tonnes of Murban crude oil and is safely en route to India. The vessel and all Indian seafarers on board are safe. They'll be reaching tomorrow at Mundra Port," he added.

Sinha said that 22 Indian-flagged vessels with 611 Indian seafarers remain in the Persian Gulf west of the Strait of Hormuz and are being closely monitored. The Directorate General of Shipping has also facilitated the safe repatriation of 286 Indian seafarers from the Gulf region so far.

AIIMS begins first-ever passive euthanasia

Harish Rana before the 2013 incident (left) and after he slipped into a vegetative state

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

AIIMS-Delhi has initiated protocols to implement the Supreme Court verdict allowing passive euthanasia for Harish Rana, a process that will take about two to three weeks, say insiders.

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

A specialised medical team headed by Dr Seema Mishra, professor and head of the department of anaesthesia and palliative medicine, has been constituted to implement the process, the first ever in India.

The team comprises doctors from departments of neurosurgery, onco-anaesthesia and palliative medicine, and psychiatry.

In a landmark judgment, the Supreme Court on March 11 allowed passive euthanasia for Harish, who was a BTech student at the Panjab University who fell from a fourth-floor balcony in 2013 and suffered severe head injuries. He has been in a coma since, with artificial nutrition support and occasional oxygen support.

The apex court also directed AIIMS-Delhi to ensure that life support is withdrawn with a tailored plan so that dignity is maintained.

"The process generally involves withholding or withdrawing the nutritional support gradually while ensuring adequate pain relief. The patient is given palliative sedation so that he or she is not in distress. Life support measures such as artificial nutrition, oxygen and medications are slowly withdrawn. The aim is not to prolong nor hasten death," Dr Sushma Bhatnagar, former head of the department of onco-anaesthesia, pain and palliative care, AIIMS-Delhi.

In Harish's case, sources said the entire process could take two to three weeks to complete.

Nation Focus

Rajya Sabha bids farewell to former CJI Ranjan Gogoi

The Rajya Sabha bid farewell to former Chief Justice of India (CJI) Ranjan Gogoi, who retired on Monday after completing his six-year term. He was nominated to the Upper House in March 2020. Chairman CP Radhakrishnan said as a distinguished jurist, Gogoi brought unparalleled legal acumen and experience to the deliberations of the House. "His intervention in the Rajya Sabha reflected a deep understanding of legislative process and public interest," he said. On behalf of the entire House, the chairman extended best wishes to him and said: "I wish that he will continue to contribute to the nation in different capacities with the same dedication, integrity and spirit of service that he has exemplified throughout his illustrious career."

Technical glitch triggers security alarm at Parliament

A technical glitch, apparently caused by strong wind, led to a boom barrier falling down at an entry gate of Parliament, which activated the security alarm and a quick reaction team (QRT) being mobilised on Monday. Senior officials of the CISF, which is responsible for the protection of the Parliament House complex, rushed to the spot, assessed the situation and found that there was no security threat, sources said. Normal vehicle movement through the gate, near the Vijay Chowk, was resumed after some time.

Deve Gowda writes to Sonia Gandhi over Parliament stir

HD Deve Gowda, Sonia Gandhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi/Bengaluru

Former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda has written to former Congress President and Rajya Sabha MP Sonia Gandhi expressing concern over "chaos" inside Parliament and its premises by Opposition parties, particularly by her party's MPs.

"I strongly feel that Congress parliamentarians, led by the leader of the Opposition, have provided far too many disruptions inside Parliament and in its premises. Their dharnas and blockades outside Parliament are unprecedented. Parliament in recent times has witnessed an excess of slogan shouting, display of placards and name-calling," Gowda said in a two-page letter.

Describing it as an attitude of non-seriousness, he said it has assaulted his very idea of construct of Parliament and parliamentary democracy.

The nonagenarian Janata Dal (Secular) leader, whose son HD Kumaraswamy is minister of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises in the Narendra Modi Government, asked Sonia Gandhi to urge her party leaders and encourage a "return to parliamentary democracy", using her political experience and guidance as one of the most senior leaders. "You can perhaps ask them not to harm themselves, their cause and their political futures, in the long run," said the former PM.

Comparing his experience of running Government at the Centre and as chief minister in Karnataka, he said the Opposition had always acted with restraint that national interests demanded. "Even when they protested, they did not block the entrance to Parliament, make their gathering look like a tea-shop assembly, and worse order tea, biscuits and pakoras, sitting on the steps of Parliament," he said.

He expressed apprehensions that it may immensely harm the foundations of democracy and leave a trail of indelible bitterness.

BJP releases 1st list of 144 candidates for Bengal polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Monday released its first list of candidates for 144 seats in the upcoming Assembly elections in West Bengal, fielding several key leaders, including Suvendu Adhikari, Dilip Ghosh, former Rajya Sabha MP Swapan Dasgupta, former India cricketer Ashok Dinda and actor Rudranil Ghosh. Soumitra Chattopadhyay, from the family of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, has been made the candidate from Naihati.

The party has also announced its list of 41 candidates for Kerala polls which includes former Union Ministers Rajeev Chandrashekhar, V Murlidharan and K Surendara. Former Kerala Chief Minister K Karunakaran's daughter Padmaja Venugopal is also in the list.

While former State BJP president Dilip Ghosh has been fielded from Kharagpur Sadar, Suvendu Adhikari will contest the elections from two seats — Bhabanipur and Nandigram while former Rajya Sabha MP Swapan Dasgupta has been fielded from the Rashbehari assembly seat in south Kolkata. Party leader Sajal Ghosh will contest from Baranagar, and actor-turned-politician Rudranil Ghosh has been nominated from Shibpur.

This sets the stage for a likely face-off between Adhikari and chief minister Mamata Banerjee, as Bhabanipur is currently represented by Mamata. Adhikari's candidature from both Nandigram and Bhabanipur is widely seen as the party's most high-stakes decision in the first list, underscoring his role as the BJP's principal field commander in Bengal. While Nandigram carries deep political symbolism as the epicentre of the 2007 anti-land acquisition movement that propelled Banerjee's rise to power, it also became the stage for one of the most dramatic electoral battles in recent years when Adhikari defeated the chief minister there in 2021 by a slender margin of around 1,900 votes.

(L-R) Suvendu Adhikari, Dilip Ghosh

Bhabanipur, in contrast, is considered Banerjee's political stronghold. She returned to the Assembly from the seat in a 2021 bypoll with a margin of more than 58,000 votes.

In Bhabanipur alone, over 47,000 names have been struck off the voters' list while more than 14,000 remain under adjudication, developments that have already begun shaping the constituency's political discourse ahead of the polls. In Nandigram, about 11,000 names have been removed from the electoral rolls during the revision process.

In the 2021 Assembly elections, Suvendu contested from Nandigram and defeated Mamata Banerjee. The announcement made in New Delhi signals the BJP's attempt to sharpen the electoral narrative around Banerjee versus Adhikari while largely retaining its sitting legislators and inducting candidates from diverse professional backgrounds to broaden its social outreach ahead of the two-phase polls on April 23 and 29.

The first list also indicates the BJP's preference for continuity, with the party renominating 41 of its sitting legislators. Among those repeated are Agnimitra Paul from Asansol South, Chandana Bauri from Saltora and Shikha Chatterjee from Dabgram-Phulbari. Two of the candidates are former MPs, and three are ex-MLAs. Female candidates have been given representation on 11 of the announced seats.

The list reflects a deliberate attempt to project social diversity, with the BJP highlighting candidates drawn from varied professional backgrounds. Of the 144 nominees, 57 come from fields such as teaching, law, medicine, social work and the armed forces.

Teachers account for the largest group with 23 candidates, while the party has also fielded advocates, doctors, retired military personnel, journalists and cultural personalities such as actor Rudranil Ghosh. Former India cricketer Ashok Dinda has been renominated from Moyna.

Among other candidates, former cricketer Ashok Dinda has been fielded from Moyna, while Gauri Shankar Ghosh will contest from a constituency in Murshidabad. The party has nominated Dipak Kumar Haldar from Diamond Harbour, Savitri Barman from Sitalkuchi, and Shankar Ghosh from Siliguri. Additionally, Umesh Rai has been fielded from Howrah Uttar.

The BJP fielded candidates below 40 years of age in 36 seats, "as a symbol of trust in the youth". Similarly, 72 nominees are in the 41 to 55 age group, while 32 candidates are in the 56 to 70 years age bracket. Four candidates are above the age of 70.

"This list reflects grassroots representation and social diversity. Many candidates have strong public engagement in their respective professions," a senior BJP leader said. The inclusion of 41 sitting MLAs and three former legislators suggests that the party has opted to bank on existing political networks rather than undertake a large-scale reshuffle.

The BJP's list comes amid intense political debate over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, which has triggered controversy after large-scale deletions in several constituencies.

Govt to revamp Stand-Up India for SC/ST and women entrepreneurs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Government will soon come out with a modified Stand-Up India scheme to provide better benefits to SC/ST and women entrepreneurs looking to set up new projects, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Monday.

Launched in 2016, the Stand-Up India scheme aimed to empower Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and women entrepreneurs by facilitating bank loans for setting up new enterprises. The scheme expired on March 31, 2025.

Replying to a supplementary question in the Lok Sabha, the Minister said the modified scheme will incorporate lessons learnt in the implementation of the original Stand-Up India scheme.

"With studies done by Niti Aayog and others, this scheme is being redrafted, and soon the Cabinet will be given a proposal with which we will launch a new scheme to continue with this Stand-Up, which benefited SC/ST and women all over the country," Sitharaman said.

Kerala polls 2026: BJP releases first list, names Rajeev Chandrasekhar and V Muraleedharan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi
/Thiruvananthapuram

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Monday released its first list of 47 candidates for the upcoming Kerala Assembly elections, fielding several key leaders, including former Union ministers George Kurian, Rajeev Chandrasekhar, V Muraleedharan and former state chief K Surendran. The list also includes Padmaja Venugopal, daughter of former Kerala chief minister K Karunakaran, PK Krishnadas, former director general of police R Sreelekha and filmmaker Major Ravi.

Among the prominent names, Rajeev Chandrasekhar has been fielded from the Nemom constituency, while Muraleedharan has been fielded from Kazhakkoottam, both key constituencies in the Thiruvananthapuram district.

Nemom is the only constituency in Kerala that has so far been won by the BJP, when O Rajagopal won the seat in the 2016 Assembly election. Several other constituencies are also expected to see closely fought battles. BJP leader K Surendran will contest from Manjeshwar, where the party is likely to face the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) in a direct contest.

Surendran is known for his long political journey that began with student activism in the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP). Over the years, he rose through the party ranks with organisational work and grassroots mobilisation. In the 2016 Assembly election in Manjeshwar, Surendran narrowly lost by just 89 votes, making it one of the closest electoral contests in Kerala politics. Senior BJP leader Shobha Surendran has been fielded from Palakkad, a seat where the main fight is expected to be between the Congress and the BJP.

In Vattiyoorkavu, the BJP has nominated former IPS officer R Sreelekha. The constituency is expected to witness a three-way contest involving the CPIM, Congress and the BJP. Padmaja Venugopal has been nominated from Thrissur. Padmaja joined the BJP after a long association with the Congress party and remains a well-known political figure in central Kerala. Fielding a mix of senior leaders and new faces as it prepares for the April 9 polls, the party is hoping to end its electoral drought in the state, where politics has traditionally been dominated by the CPI(M)-led LDF and the Congress-led UDF.

(L-R) Rajeev Chandrasekhar and V Muraleedharan

George Kurian will contest from the Kanjirappally constituency in Kottayam district. The seat is considered significant for the BJP as it seeks to expand its presence in Christian-dominated central Kerala constituencies in the election. A familiar political face in central Kerala, PC George has represented the Poonjar constituency several times in the Kerala Assembly. Before aligning with the BJP, he had earlier served as a leader of the Kerala Congress and had also contested elections as an independent candidate.

George has been active in Kerala politics for more than four decades and is known for his outspoken style in public life. Sreelekha earlier served in the Indian Police Service and made history as the first woman officer from Kerala to reach the rank of Director General of Police. After retiring from service, she entered politics and later joined the BJP. She was elected as a councillor in the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation in the local body polls held a few months ago.

In Kozhikode North, the party has nominated Navya Haridas, the state president of the BJP Mahila Morcha. A former software engineer, she had earlier worked in Singapore before returning to Kerala and entering public life.

Navya first gained attention in local politics after winning the Karaparamba ward in the Kozhikode Corporation. She has since been re-elected as a councillor and has been active in party organisational work.

In Ottapalam, the BJP has nominated Major Ravi, a retired Indian Army officer and filmmaker. Known for directing several Malayalam films based on military themes, Major Ravi earlier served in the Indian Army and the National Security Guard before entering politics.

Another senior leader in the fray is C Krishnakumar, who will contest from the Malampuzha constituency in Palakkad district. A State vice-president of the BJP, he earlier served as vice-chairperson of the Palakkad Municipality and has contested several elections in the region. The party has also fielded senior leader PK Krishnadas from the Kattakada constituency. Krishnadas, a former state president of the BJP in Kerala, is considered one of the key organisers who helped strengthen the party's grassroots network in the state.

Among the younger leaders drawing attention in the party's preparations is Anoop Antony Joseph, who is expected to contest from the Thiruvalla constituency. At 35, he represents a younger generation of leadership emerging within the BJP's Kerala unit.

States Focus

CM Naidu unveils 58-foot statue of Potti Sriramulu

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday unveiled a 58-foot bronze statue of Potti Sriramulu, a freedom fighter, who had fasted unto death demanding to carve out a separate State from Madras for Telugu-speaking people. Sriramulu's indefinite fast lasted for 58 days, and he died on December 15, 1952. As a fallout of this fasting, a separate State, Andhra Pradesh, was carved out from the then Madras State for the Telugu-speaking people, which ultimately led to the creation of other linguistic States in India. Andhra Pradesh was further bifurcated into Telangana and Andhra Pradesh decades later. The CM unveiled the statue of Potti Sriramulu, who is revered as 'Amarajeevi' (immortal being), at Shakhamuru Park on the occasion of his 125th birth anniversary, on Monday. The first phase of this project, carried out at ₹150 crore, has been completed on a 6.8-acre plot, while the Potti Sriramulu Memorial Trust completed the construction of the 58-ft statue in six months.

Goa Budget session cut short due to Model Code of Conduct

Goa's Budget session was curtailed on Monday following the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct for the upcoming bypoll to an Assembly constituency in the State. Before the session was adjourned, the State Budget was passed in the House. The session, which began on March 6 at the Vidhan Sabha in Porvorim, North Goa, was originally scheduled to continue till March 27. Earlier in the day, CM Sawant said they would seek the opinion from the Election Commission of India (ECI) to decide about the continuation of the Assembly session, in view of the bypoll announcement.

India investing in next-generation defence tech, says Rajnath Singh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Gandhinagar

In the past decade, India has emerged as a vibrant hub of innovation in the defence and security ecosystem, and is today investing in next-generation technology, transforming the way defence solutions are conceived and developed, Union Minister Rajnath Singh said here on Monday.

Virtually addressing a two-day roundtable conference for defence attaches at the Rashtriya Raksha University (RRU), Singh said India understands that technological progress cannot flourish in isolation. The two-day conclave, on the theme 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat in the Global Defence Tech Landscape: Accelerating Innovation, Exports, and Joint Technology Partnerships', brings together diplomats and defence representatives from 24 nations, including from Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and the Caribbean.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during the second part of the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi on Monday PTI

"Over the past decade, India has emerged as a vibrant hub of innovation in the defence and security ecosystem. Guided by the vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat, our approach seeks to build self-reliance while remaining globally connected," Singh said in his welcome address.

"India today is investing in next-generation technology, from Artificial Intelligence and unmanned systems to space and advanced digital capabilities, transforming the way defence solutions are conceived and developed," he added. Asserting that technological progress cannot flourish in isolation, he said the evolving character of warfare, from cyberspace domains to hybrid threats, underscores the need for deeper international cooperation.

Singh said India firmly believes that sustainable security is built through partnership, co-development, knowledge sharing, training, and collaborative capability building. "India's expanding network of defence engagements across regions reflects this belief," he pointed out.

Singh said India is using dialogue, joint exercises and industrial cooperation to work with partners to promote a secure, open and inclusive international order.

"This forum brings together strategic minds and trusted partners who share a common commitment to peace, stability and progress through defence cooperation. Their presence reflects the spirit of trust and friendship that lies at the heart of India's engagement with the international community," he said.

Singh said the round table reflects India's enduring commitment to dialogue, innovation and partnership in the defence and security domain, adding that collaboration has become not merely desirable but essential in an era marked by rapid technological change.

LAB, KDA protests day after Wangchuk's release

People gather during a protest demanding inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution in Leh, Ladakh on Monday PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Jammu

Two days after the release of climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, the twin towns of Leh and Kargil witnessed peaceful protests to press the Central government to resume talks and address long-standing demands for full statehood and constitutional safeguards under the Sixth Schedule.

The protests, called by the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), saw thousands of residents taking to the streets despite the recent revocation of Wangchuk's detention under the National Security Act (NSA). Wangchuk, who had been held for nearly six months following violent clashes in Leh in September 2025, was freed on March 14 after the Ministry of Home Affairs withdrew the order, citing efforts to foster peace and dialogue in the Union Territory.

It was the first major rally by LAB since violence had erupted during protests in September, prompting a clampdown by authorities.

The LAB and KDA had issued a bandh call urging the centre to resume the next round of talks, as promised during the High-Powered Committee meeting. The last round of talks was held on February 4. During the meeting, which was the first since last year's clashes, both groups had demanded that Wangchuk be freed and 70 other detainees be released unconditionally.

The Director General of Police of Ladakh, Mukesh Singh, visited the rally site at Singay Namgyal Chowk in Leh to take stock of the security arrangements, with additional police and security personnel deployed across the town to maintain law and order.

Led by LAB co-chairman Chering Dorjay, the protesters started from the Singay Namgyal Chowk and marched to Leh polo ground with participants, including a sizeable number of women, chanting slogans in support of the demands for statehood and inclusion in the Sixth Schedule.

A similar rally was also held in Kargil town, where KDA co-chairman Asgar Ali Karbali, Member of Parliament Haneefa Jan and prominent activist and KDA member Sajjad Kargilli addressed the gathering.They reiterated the demands for statehood and Sixth Schedule inclusion, besides seeking the release of two jailed activists and the revocation of cases in connection with last year's violence in Leh.

2,500 companies of forces to be deployed for Bengal polls: CEO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Kolkata

The Election Commission may deploy 2,000 to 2,500 companies of central armed police forces for each phase of the West Bengal Assembly elections to ensure free and fair polling, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Manoj Kumar Agarwal said on Monday.

Addressing a press conference, Agarwal said the Commission is prepared to take an unprecedented approach to the deployment of central forces during the two-phase elections.

"Our only target is to ensure free and fair elections. Around 2,000 to 2,500 companies of central forces may be required in each phase," Agarwal said.

Each company of central forces typically consists of 100 to 135 personnel. He said the forces would play a crucial role in maintaining order on polling day and responding to any disturbance at booths.

"If there is any disturbance at polling booths, the central forces will be responsible for controlling the situation. If they come across any unethical activity, they will immediately report it to their senior authorities," Agarwal said.

The CEO also made it clear that any misuse of central forces would not be tolerated. "The central forces will work strictly as per law, and any proven negligence or misuse will invite strict action," he said.

Meanwhile, in a bid to strengthen law-and-order arrangements ahead of the polls, the Election Commission has directed every police station in the State to submit a detailed report on the law-and-order situation in its jurisdiction by Thursday.

The reports must include information on illegal arms in the area, identified anti-social elements and other crime-related data.

CM Fadnavis defends bill against fraudulent religious conversions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday said several women have been lured into relationships, married and later abandoned, asserting the bill against fraudulent religious conversion aims to address these issues and curb such practices.

The Opposition parties are politicising the issue for vote-bank gains, but once they read the bill carefully, they will have no objections, Fadnavis told reporters at the Mantralaya.

Maharashtra was not the first State to introduce such legislation, and several States had already enacted similar laws to curb unlawful religious conversions, he noted. If enacted, Maharashtra will join states like Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Uttarakhand that have enacted similar laws to regulate religious conversions.

The Government on Friday introduced in the state Assembly the Maharashtra Freedom of Religion Bill 2026, which has stringent provisions to prohibit religious conversions carried out through coercion, fraud, inducement or marriage.

Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis during the State Assembly Budget session at Vidhan Bhavan in Mumbai on Monday PTI

As per the Bill, those involved in unlawful conversions on the pretext of marriage will be punished with imprisonment of seven years and shall also be liable for a fine of ₹1 lakh.

Violations in respect of a minor, a person of unsound mind or woman or a person belonging to the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribe will be punished with imprisonment of seven years and a fine of ₹5 lakh.

"There have been many cases where women were lured, they eloped, and were abandoned after marriage. In such a situation, it raises the question of their child from such a relationship. It complicates their life. The bill is trying to find out solutions to such problems," Fadnavis said.

If the Opposition parties had read the bill carefully, they would realise that it does not target any community but is aimed at preventing conversions carried out through inducement, coercion or pressure, he said.

"The Opposition is merely trying to politicise the issue for their vote bank politics. I can guarantee you that after careful reading of the bill, the Opposition will not object to it," the CM said.

Navtej Sarna, Mamta Kalia win Sahitya Akademi Award

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

English author and former ambassador Navtej Sarna and Hindi writer Mamta Kalia are among the 24 authors in as many languages who will receive the Sahitya Akademi Award for 2025, the National Academy of Letters announced on Monday.

"Sahitya Akademi is happy to announce today its annual Sahitya Akademi Awards in 24 Indian languages recognised by it.

8 books of poetry, four novels, six books of short stories, two essays, 1 literary criticism, 1 autobiography and 2 memoirs have won the Sahitya Akademi Awards 2025," it said in a statement. Sarna has been named the recipient of his novel "Crimson Spring", while Kalia will receive the award for her memoir "Jeete Jee Allahabad".

The awardees will receive a casket containing an engraved copper plaque, a shawl and an amount of Rs 1 lakh at a ceremony on March 31, the academy said.

Other awardees include Prasun Bandyopadhyay for "Shrestha Kabita" in Bengali, Yogesh Vaidya for "Bhattkhadaki" in Gujarati, Amresh Nugadoni for "Dada Seerisu Tande" in Kannada, N Prabhakaran for "Maayamanushyar" in Malayalam, Raju Baviskar for "Kalyanilya Resha" in Marathi, Jinder for "Safety Kit" in Punjabi, Jitender Kumar Soni for "Bharkhama" in Rajasthani and Sa Tamilselvan for "Thamiz Sirukathaiyin Thadangal" in Tamil.

(L-R): Hindi writer Mamta Kalia and English author Navtej Sarna

Tax-free Budget of ₹34,212.31 crore presented in Tripura Assembly

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Agartala

Tripura Finance Minister Pranajit Singha Roy on Monday presented a tax-free deficit Budget of ₹34,212.31 crore for the financial year 2026-27, emphasising infrastructure, digital transformation and rural employment.

The Budget reflects a 5.52 per cent growth compared to the previous year's Budget estimate of ₹32,423 crore.

In spite of the hike in the overall outlay, the budget anticipates a deficit of ₹240.72 crore during the year. To push for infrastructure development, the minister proposed capital expenditure of ₹8945.92 crore, which is 13.19 per cent more than that of last year's outlay.

Roy said this year's Budget laid a strong foundation for sustainable economic growth, placing emphasis on infrastructure, digital transformation, rural employment and development of connectivity to achieve 'Viksit Tripura' by 2047.

Claiming that the Budget is inclusive, Roy said that despite resource constraints in the State, it took care of all aspects — from infrastructure development to social commitment and skill development.

Tripura Finance Minister Pranajit Singha Roy

"I have proposed a capital expenditure of ₹8945.92 crore, which is 13.19 per cent more than that of last year's outlay that will generate extra employment in the state," he said.

Roy said, "Strengthening infrastructure, promoting investment, creating employment, and developing health and tourism sectors are a few of the proactive measures that the Government continues for all-around socio-economic development."

The minister said that the Government will establish a technical university, a medical varsity and a women's university to boost the higher education sector.

"The Government is committed to ensure welfare of indigenous people living in the State. Out of the total proposed budget of ₹34,212.31 crore, around ₹15,000 crore has been earmarked for tribal development," he said.

Roy added that the Government has increased the size of the Budget substantially, from ₹15,000 crore in 2017-18 FY to ₹34,212.31 crore in 2026-27, without imposing any new tax, reflecting the commitment to relief to the common people.

Hailing the Budget, Chief Minister Manik Saha said the Government has given focus to boost the economy by spending more on Capital expenditure.

Symphony of colours: Asia's largest Tulip Garden thrown open in Srinagar

MOHIT KANDHARI Jammu

With over 1.8 million tulips of 75 exquisite varieties in its lap, Asia's largest Tulip garden overlooking the world-famous Dal Lake was thrown open on Monday by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, marking the beginning of the spring season in the Valley.

Soon after Omar, along with his cabinet colleagues, stepped out of the garden, a large number of tourists from different parts of the country flocked to the garden. During his stay in the garden, Omar clicked selfies with his cabinet colleagues.

Extending a warm welcome to tourists visiting Kashmir, the Chief Minister said that the mesmerising beauty, vibrant colours and soothing fragrance of the blooming tulips would offer visitors a unique and unforgettable experience.

The Chief Minister appealed to tourists from across the country and around the world to visit Jammu & Kashmir during the spring season and experience its unmatched natural beauty.

First-time visitors were particularly effusive in their praise. Many said stepping into the garden felt like entering a dream-like paradise. One delighted tourist from New Delhi, Jai Singh, shared, "We felt we were in paradise, the colours, the freshness, the mountains... it's beyond words." Others echoed the sentiment, calling it "truly stunning" and "the cherry on the cake of Kashmir's beauty," far exceeding their expectations.

A newlywed couple from Tripura echoed similar sentiments, marvelling at how the riot of colours against the backdrop of snow-capped mountains and the shimmering lake created an unforgettable scene straight out of a dream.

Visitors wandered along colourful pathways lined with reds, yellows, pinks, purples, whites, and more, snapping photos against the scenic valley vistas.

This year, around 18 lakh tulips of over 70 varieties, along-with nearly one lakh other bulbous flowers including daffodils, hyacinths and narcissus, have been planted, adding vibrant colours to the valley's spring landscape. Authorities are optimistic that this season will break previous visitor records, boosting spring tourism in the region.

The Tulip Festival is expected to continue through mid-April, weather permitting, with peak bloom anticipated in the coming weeks.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister expressed hope that the onset of spring would usher in renewed optimism, prosperity and growth for the people of Jammu and Kashmir, particularly for the tourism sector which serves as a major driver of the region's economy.

He stated that the Tulip Festival has emerged as one of the most prominent tourism events in the Kashmir Valley and provides an excellent platform to showcase the breathtaking natural beauty, cultural richness and hospitality of Kashmir to visitors from across the country and around the globe.

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah in a group picture during a visit to the Tulip Garden in Srinagar on Monday PTI

Chief Minister complimented the Floriculture Department for making the Tulip Garden ready in time and said that officers and gardeners of Floriculture department deserve to be appreciated for their efforts in curating this garden. CM said that in time to come, the Floriculture Department shall be developing its own rootstock so that dependence on importing of bulbs is gradually reduced and this would also require support of SKUAST Kashmir.

On the occasion, the Chief Minister also released a tourism promotional song titled 'Wadi-e-Sumbul' produced by the Department of Information and Public Relations. During the event, the Chief Minister inaugurated a souvenir point established by the Floriculture Department.

He also inaugurated the exhibition of Handicrafts and the handloom department and inspected the stalls.

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MP HC to inspect Bhojshala Temple, Kamal Maula Mosque complex

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Indore

The Madhya Pradesh High Court on Monday said it will inspect the Bhojshala Temple-Kamal Maula Mosque complex in Dhar before April 2 in light of the "numerous disputes" pertaining to the ASI-protected structure.

The Hindu community considers Bhojshala to be a temple dedicated to Goddess Saraswati, while the Muslim side claims the 11th-century monument is the Kamal Maula Mosque. As per an ASI order of April 7, 2003, Hindus are allowed to worship at the complex every Tuesday, while Muslims are permitted to offer namaz every Friday.

A bench of High Court Justices Vijay Kumar Shukla and Alok Awasthi on Monday set April 2 for the regular hearing of petitions related to the disputed complex.

The bench, in its oral remarks, said, "In view of the numerous disputes, we would like to visit the complex and inspect it. We will visit the complex before the next date (April 2)." The HC clarified that no party involved in the case will be allowed to be present during the visit.

Bhojshala Temple-Kamal Maula Mosque

After hearing lengthy arguments, the division bench admitted separate interim applications filed in the case and said parties can present documents and affidavits related to these applications in court.

"We will give all parties involved in the case a full opportunity to be heard," the HC asserted.

The disputed complex in Dhar is protected by the Archaeological Survey of India, which, following HC orders, conducted a scientific survey of it and submitted a detailed report. The ASI report, running into more than 2000 pages, indicates that a large structure dating back to the reign of the Parmar kings of Dhar predated the mosque and that the current disputed structure was built by reusing parts of ancient temples.

Retrieved architectural remains, sculptural fragments, large slabs of inscriptions with literary texts, Nagakarnika inscriptions on pillars, etc. suggest that a large structure associated with literary and educational activities existed at the site, it said.

Based on scientific investigations and archaeological remains recovered during the investigations, this pre-existing structure can be dated to the Paramara period, the report emphasised.

"Based on scientific investigations, survey and archaeological excavations conducted, study and analysis of retrieved finds, study of architectural remains, sculptures, and inscriptions, art and sculptures, it can be said the existing structure was made from the parts of earlier temples," the report stated.

From the art and architecture of the decorated pillars and pilasters, it can be said they were part of earlier temples and were reused while making colonnades of the mosque over the high platform of basalt, the ASI said in the report.

The Hindu community, which approached the court with the primary plea of determining the religious nature of the entire disputed complex, claims that coins, sculptures, and inscriptions found by the ASI during its scientific survey prove the structure was originally an ancient temple.

Excise case: HC grants time to Kejriwal, Sisodia to respond to CBI's plea

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Arvind Kejriwal

The Delhi High Court on Monday granted time to former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, his deputy Manish Sisodia and 21 others to respond to the CBI's petition challenging their discharge in the liquor policy case. Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma listed the CBI's petition assailing the trial court's decision for hearing on April 6.

The judge noted that Kejriwal and the other accused persons did not appear on the first day of the hearing, when they were asked to file their replies, and are now seeking more time to do so.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the agency, said the trial court's "perverse" order "cannot remain on record even for a second more than necessary" and that Kejriwal and others should not be given more than a week's time to file their response.

Reply is not necessary when the entire record of the trial court was available, he said. Senior counsel for the AAP leader, senior advocate N Hariharan, informed the court that they have already approached the Supreme Court challenging the matter. "I have not received any stay yet.. till the court gets an order staying the proceedings, the case has to proceed," the court observed. Mehta asserted that although Kejriwal has the right to file an appeal, it must be ensured that the plea is listed in the Supreme Court this week if an adjournment was being sought on this ground, and he "can't keep it pending" in the top court's registry.

"There has been a pattern. Make allegations and run away. Such litigants can't be encouraged.. career (has been made) out of allegations," he said.

Order Order

SC appoints ex-CJI UU Lalit as mediator to resolve dispute over UAE decree

The Supreme Court on Monday appointed former Chief Justice of India UU Lalit as the sole mediator to amicably resolve the dispute over the execution of a money decree of ₹500 crore passed by the UAE court in favour of Ras Al Khaimah Investment Authority (RAKIA) and against Hyderabad-based industrialist Nimmagadda Prasad. RAKIA is seeking to enforce a UAE civil judgment for AED 267,941,374 (approximately ₹543 crore principal and ₹643 crore with interest).

The case stems from the 'Vanpic Project', a failed 2008 joint venture to develop ports and an airport in Andhra Pradesh. RAKIA alleges that Prasad, in collusion with former RAKIA CEO Khater Massaad, misappropriated $120 million intended for the project.

On Monday, a bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi was informed by senior advocate Gopal Subramanium, appearing for Prasad, that the industrialist has deposited ₹125 crore as cash security as directed earlier.

'Not granted sanction to prosecute professor as one-time magnanimity'

The Haryana Government on Monday told the Supreme Court that it has decided not to grant sanction to prosecute Ashoka University professor Ali Khan Mahmudabad, who was booked last year for social media posts on Operation Sindoor, as a one-time magnanimity.

Appearing for the Haryana Government, Additional Solicitor General SV Raju told a bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi that they have closed the issue by not according sanction to prosecute Mahmudabad.

"As a one-time magnanimity, we have closed the issue by not according sanction," Raju told the bench, adding, "He may be warned not to indulge in similar activity in future."

The bench said that since the state has decided not to grant sanction to prosecute Mahmudabad, the proceedings pending before the trial court concerned would stand closed.

Minister's daughter moves Delhi HC over allegations of links with Epstein

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri's daughter has moved the Delhi High Court for the removal of "false" and "defamatory" social media content linking her to convicted American sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

The lawsuit by Himayani Puri is likely to be heard in the High Court this week. In her lawsuit seeking ₹10 crore as damages and an order to restrain several entities from disseminating defamatory content, Himayani Puri said there was a "coordinated and malicious online campaign" to link her to Epstein and his crimes.

Himayani Puri

She also sought an unconditional apology and retraction from the defendant entities. "Commencing on or around February 22, 2026 a series of false, misleading and defamatory posts, articles, videos and digital material were published, disseminated and amplified across social media and intermediary platforms including inter alia X, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, digital news portals and other web-based publications," the plea said.

Himayani Puri asserted that she is an accomplished finance and investment professional, who is being targeted solely because she is Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Puri's daughter.

According to her lawsuit, the defendants disseminated "baseless imputations" that Himayani Puri maintained direct or indirect business, financial or personal network links with Epstein. The allegations are entirely false, malicious and devoid of factual foundation, the plea said.

36 years after ₹500 bribe, SC reduces 75-yr-old ex-constable's jail term

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Over three-and-a-half decades after a petty bribery case began, the Supreme Court has upheld the conviction of a former Uttarakhand excise constable but reduced his sentence.

A bench of Justices Pankaj Mithal and PB Vrale was hearing the plea of the former constable against the 2012 order of the High Court of Uttarakhand quashing his appeal against a trial court's order of sentencing him to two years of rigorous imprisonment under the Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act provision.

In an order dated March 13, the bench said there was no error in the High Court's decision upholding the trial court's order of sentence and conviction but the official, who was now 75 years of age, had already been incarcerated for over two months.

"We are of the opinion that the sentence awarded by the trial court and upheld by the High Court can be modified to the extent of a minimum sentence for the said offences," the apex court said. It then reduced the jail term to one year under the PC Act provision for a public servant committing criminal misconduct. The protracted legal proceedings began after the former constable was nabbed taking a ₹500 bribe during a trap proceedings on June 19, 1990, following which an FIR was registered in district Udham Singh Nagar.

The case was committed to a sessions court the next year, which eventually convicted him in 2006. He then spent 14 years appealing the decision in the Supreme Court after the High Court dismissed his plea in 2012. He has been out on bail since January 2013.

Congress files defamation case against Arnab Goswami over claims about party office in Turkey

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Indian National Congress (INC) has filed a defamation case before the Delhi High Court against Republic TV editor Arnab Goswami over his claim during a show that Congress has an office in Turkey. The case is expected to be heard on Wednesday before Justice Mini Pushkarna. Congress has sought damages of ₹2 crore.

In May 2025, Goswami had claimed that Congress party operated an office in Turjey. The claim was aired on Republic TV, showing showing a building in Istanbul as the alleged office. The claim was made in the backdrop of Operation Sindoor when Turkey sided with Pakistan.

Arnab Goswami

During the broadcast, Goswami said, "If you're a Congress party voter, if you're among that vanishing group of people who are a Congress party voter, then I want to ask you something. What kind of business does your party have in Turkey?"

He went on to add that as of now, the Congress party is "with the enemies of the nation". "They are non-committal on Turkey. What kind of a party is this? How much more will this party compromise our national interest?" Goswami added.

Fact-checks and reports later indicated that the building was actually the Istanbul Congress Centre, a convention venue run by the Istanbul municipality, not a political party office. Congress denied the allegation and accused Goswami of spreading misinformation and defaming the party.

Republic TV later issued a clarification, calling the use of the image an editorial error.

Air Force Group Insurance Society performs public function, it is 'State' under Constitution: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Supreme Court has held that the Air Force Group Insurance Society (AFGIS) is a 'State' under Article 12 of the Constitution as it performed public duty by protecting and looking after the welfare of armed forces personnel and their family.Article 12 of the Constitution defines 'State' for enforcing fundamental rights.

A bench of Justices Sanjay Karol and Vipul M Pancholi overturned the view taken by the Delhi High Court on February 1, 2023, in a pay parity dispute related to the employees of AFGIS. "In our view, a perusal of the documents extracted makes out a case for AFGIS to be considered 'State' within the meaning of Article 12. For the aspect of deep and pervasive control, we observe that the President of India granted sanction for AFGIS to be established and also specifically approved the deputation Rules...," the bench said in its March 12 verdict.

It further said the principal director of AFGIS has to apprise the assistant chief of air staff every month about the cash flow of the society, which ensures monitoring by a core member of the IAF on its activities.

The membership and deductions arising therefrom are a compulsory aspect of serving in the IAF, meaning thereby that there is no choice of the individual officer in that matter and instead is a mandate from the employer.

"When the aspect of administrative control is examined, it is seen that all the members of the Board of Trustees, so also the managing committee, are serving members of the IAF and are deputed to AFGIS for a fixed period.

"In essence, therefore, the administration of the body is entirely in the hands of Government servants even though the body itself is a purportedly private, self-contained society," the top court said.

The top court further elaborated that providing insurance coverage is a public function as it addresses a collective obligation the state has towards a defined public class whose service is indispensable.

"Insurance to service members is a critical instrument for safeguarding their physical, mental well-being, dignity and economic security... The fact that healthcare, rehabilitation, and support to dependants is available readily is undoubtedly an aspect that gives great peace of mind to the member of service, enabling them to carry out their duties without worry, at least in this regard," it said.

The top court added that the role of the State in protecting them does not end upon their superannuation from service, for the life of a person from the forces is forever shaped by their time in service. Justice Karol, who penned the verdict, pointed out that at one point AFGIS itself claimed to be Government while claiming an exemption from service taxes, since it is under the control of the Ministry of Defence.

Murshidabad violence: SC dismisses West Bengal Govt's plea against HC order

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed a plea of the West Bengal Government against a Calcutta High Court order that had refused to stay an NIA probe into incidents of violence in Murshidabad district in January.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi said the High Court had taken a "balanced view".

The top court was hearing a plea filed by the state against the February 26 order of the High Court that refused to stay the NIA probe in the case.

During the hearing, the top court referred to its February 11 order on a separate plea of the State Government.

The apex court had then asked the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to file a report in a sealed cover before the High Court, justifying the invocation of a UAPA provision pertaining to terror acts in a case related to repeated incidents of violence and unrest in Murshidabad.

Disposing of the state's appeal, the bench had asked the Government to approach the High Court with its grievances against the NIA probe.

The top court had said the High Court could also examine the state Government's challenge to the Centre's decision to order an NIA probe in the case.

The bench had asked the NIA what was the basis for invoking the provision of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) to justify its probe into the violence at Murshidabad's Beldanga. The NIA, which was handed over the probe by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on January 28, has invoked section 15(1)(a) of the UAPA in the case.

The provision deals with terrorist acts and can be slapped on whoever indulges in any act with an intent to threaten the unity, integrity, security, economic security or sovereignty of India or with an intent to strike terror.

The provision is attracted if "bombs, dynamite or other explosive substances or inflammable substances or firearms or other lethal weapons or poisonous or noxious gases" are used in terror acts.

The top court had asked the NIA to file a report in a sealed cover on this aspect in the High Court.

Appearing in the court for the NIA, Additional Solicitor General S V Raju had defended the agency's decision, citing the use of deadly weapons and the proximity of the area (Beldanga) to the Bangladesh border.

On January 20, the High Court expressed concern about repeated incidents of violence and unrest in Murshidabad, and directed police and the administration to ensure peace in the district.

On January 16, protesters blocked National Highway-12 over the death of a Beldanga resident working as a migrant worker in Jharkhand. On January 17, similar blockades took place over the alleged heckling of a Murshidabad resident working as a migrant worker in Bihar.

Editor's TAKE

The battle for the States: All eyes on Bengal

With high political stakes, the elections in four states will test both political strength and the resilience of democracy, with Bengal under the scanner

The election season has just begun. Polls will be held in the month of April in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and the Union Territory of Puducherry. These elections will be crucial as three out of the four states are ruled by non-BJP parties, while the BJP rules Assam and Puducherry in a coalition arrangement.

Unlike last time, when the elections were spread across several phases, barring West Bengal, which will go to the polls in two phases, all other states will vote on a single day. While most states will vote in a single phase, Bengal will vote in two phases on April 23 and April 29, with the results to be declared on May 4. These elections will test the Election Commission of India (ECI) as well as the mettle of the political parties. For the ECI, the challenge will be to conduct free and fair elections without disruptions or violence, while political parties will slog it out in a highly charged and polarised atmosphere.

Since two southern states - Tamil Nadu and Kerala - along with the Union Territory of Puducherry will be in the fray, and two eastern states, West Bengal and Assam, will also be casting their votes, the election results will provide a barometer of the public mood across India, especially in southern and eastern India.

The keenest contest will indeed be seen in Bengal, where Mamata Banerjee will be seeking a fourth term while defending her turf, as the BJP had made substantial gains in the last election and won over 77 seats. The Bengal battle will be fought over ideology, identity and anti-incumbency.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, having ruled the state since 2011, remains formidable, rooted in an extensive network of welfare schemes, particularly those aimed at women and marginalised communities. At the same time, fifteen years in power inevitably bring anti-incumbency, and the opposition is expected to highlight issues of corruption, governance, and law and order. The principal challenger remains the Bharatiya Janata Party, led nationally by Narendra Modi, though the party does not have a local leader to match Mamata Banerjee's stature.

The BJP will seek to capitalise on the momentum of the last election. It won 77 seats and garnered 37.9 per cent of the vote, a jump of 27 per cent from the previous election. However, it will have to address internal organisational challenges and counter the Trinamool Congress's longstanding narrative portraying it as an "outsider" force in the state. The election comes in the wake of the recent Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voter lists conducted by the Election Commission. The exercise has resulted in the deletion of nearly 63 lakh voter, a figure that exceeds the margin separating major parties in the previous election. The SIR could have a tangible impact on voting patterns and the final results. However, the most important aspect is that the elections must remain peaceful, free and fair. The onus lies on the Central Government, the State Government, and the ECI. Elections are meant to be a celebration of democracy, not a theatre of confrontation.

Kharg Island: The centre of the world's energy chessboard

What appears to be a small island on the map is, in reality, a geopolitical nerve centre where energy flows, maritime strategy, and global economic stability intersect

SANTHOSH MATHEW

"*Whoever rules the waves rules the world's trade.*" — Alfred Thayer Mahan

A tiny island in the northern waters of the Persian Gulf has suddenly become the focus of global attention. Kharg Island, a small stretch of land off the Iranian coast, stands today as one of the most crucial energy hubs on the planet. Recent claims by Donald Trump that Iranian oil facilities could face military action pushed this island into the headlines of the world press. Geography made it small; energy politics made it powerful.

The island occupies a pivotal place in the strategic landscape of West Asia. Nearly ninety per cent of Iran's oil exports leave the country through terminals located on Kharg Island. Pipelines carrying crude oil from Iran's vast oil fields converge here. Tankers then transport this oil to markets across Asia and the rest of the world. The island functions as the principal gateway through which Iranian energy flows into the arteries of the global economy.

Its importance grows even greater because of its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz, the world's most vital maritime energy corridor. This narrow waterway links the Persian Gulf with the Arabian Sea. Thousands of vessels cross it every month, carrying crude oil and liquefied natural gas from the Gulf region. Global energy security depends heavily on this route.

The geographical characteristics of the strait amplify its strategic value. The narrowest section measures barely thirty-three kilometres across. Iran lies on one side of the strait, while countries such as Oman and the United Arab Emirates stand on the other. International maritime law allows coastal states to control large portions of the surrounding waters. This geographical reality provides Iran with significant leverage over the movement of ships passing through the corridor.

Kharg Island sits just twenty-five kilometres from the Iranian mainland. The island enjoys deep waters capable of accommodating massive oil tankers. Much of Iran's coastline remains shallow and unsuitable for such vessels. Kharg therefore became the natural oil export hub of the country. Huge storage tanks, loading terminals and pipeline networks dominate the island's landscape. Every day between 1.3 and 1.6 million barrels of crude oil depart from this location.

The geoeconomic implications of this infrastructure stretch far beyond Iran. Asian economies rely heavily on energy shipments that pass through the Strait of Hormuz and originate from the Persian Gulf. Countries such as China, India and Japan remain among the largest importers of Gulf oil. More than eighty per cent of the oil transported through the strait ultimately reaches Asian markets. Any disruption around Kharg Island would immediately shake the energy security of these nations.

> AS ALFRED THAYER MAHAN REMINDED THE WORLD, CONTROL OF STRATEGIC MARITIME SPACES DETERMINES THE COURSE OF INTERNATIONAL POWER. KHARG ISLAND SILENTLY CONFIRMS THAT LESSON EVERY DAY

The island also stores enormous reserves of crude oil. Strategic storage facilities hold millions of barrels ready for export. Iran possesses nearly twelve per cent of the world's proven oil reserves. Kharg operates as the central distribution hub for a significant portion of this wealth. The island functions not merely as a loading terminal but as the economic heartbeat of the Iranian petroleum sector.

Energy markets react swiftly to geopolitical tension in this region. Even the possibility of disruption at Kharg Island can push global oil prices sharply upward. Analysts estimate that a shutdown of the island's export facilities could propel crude prices far beyond one hundred and fifty dollars per barrel. Rising energy prices would influence inflation, trade costs and industrial production across the globe.

Military strategists remain deeply aware of the island's sensitivity. During the Iran-Iraq War, Kharg Island became a frequent target because both sides understood its critical role in Iran's economy.

Modern conflicts in the region carry similar calculations. A strike on the island would damage Iran's export capacity and simultaneously send shockwaves through global energy markets.

Geopolitics often revolves around powerful ideas and strategic spaces. The American naval thinker Alfred Thayer Mahan shaped maritime strategy through his theory of sea power and introduced the geopolitical expression "Middle East" to describe this pivotal region. The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas contributed another influential idea by explaining the "public sphere", the space where society debates its future through communication. In the physical world of geopolitics, islands such as Kharg function as strategic spheres where geography, economics and power intersect.

Kharg Island stands as a striking example of how a small geographical feature can influence the destiny of nations. The pipelines running across Iran's deserts end here. The tankers anchored in its waters carry fuel that powers factories, vehicles and industries thousands of kilometres away. Markets in Asia, financial institutions in Europe and strategic planners in Washington, DC watch this island carefully.

Energy corridors and maritime choke points shape the structure of the global economy. The Strait of Hormuz remains the gateway of the Persian Gulf. Kharg Island acts as the oil nerve centre connected to that gateway. A quiet island with storage tanks and pipelines continues to hold enormous geopolitical influence over the modern world.

As Alfred Thayer Mahan reminded the world, control of strategic maritime spaces determines the course of international power. Kharg Island silently confirms that lesson every day.

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PIC TALK

Women dressed in traditional attire hold swords during a procession as part of the 'Matri Sanskar Samagam' organised by the Vishwamangalya Sabha in Varanasi. PHOTO: PTI

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The common man in the shadow of war

RACHNA LAKHPATI

2ND OPINION

When nations go to war, the language is always lofty - sovereignty, security, honour, strategic dominance. Yet beneath these grand abstractions lies a quieter, harsher truth: it is the common man who pays the heaviest price.

From the rubble-strewn streets of the Gaza Strip to the battered cities of Iran and Kyiv, and from border villages in Israel to displaced communities across Afghanistan and Ukraine, the cost of conflict is counted not in policy briefs but in broken homes. Men, women, and children — shopkeepers, teachers, nurses, drivers - find their lives overturned overnight. The headlines speak of territorial advances and military strategy; the ground reality speaks of funerals, hunger, and exile.

It is worth asking: for whom are these wars fought? If wars are waged for the protection of citizens, why do those very citizens become collateral damage? When leaders declare that a conflict is necessary for national security, do they pause to measure the insecurity it breeds in ordinary households? A father who cannot provide because his factory has been bombed. A mother who stands in a ration line for hours, uncertain whether food will last the week. A child whose classroom has turned into a shelter.

According to global humanitarian agencies, recent conflicts have displaced millions. In the war between Russia and Ukraine alone, millions have fled their homes, seeking refuge in unfamiliar lands. In recent hostilities involving the United States, Israel, and Iran, civilian casualties have mounted at an alarming pace. These are not just statistics; they are interrupted dreams. Livelihood is often the first silent casualty of war. Markets collapse, currencies weaken, and supply chains fracture. The farmer cannot sow. The entrepreneur cannot import raw materials. The daily-wage worker finds no work. Even those far removed from the battlefield feel the tremors — fuel prices rise, food becomes expensive, and economies strain under the weight of military expenditure. Psychological scars linger long after ceasefires are declared.

A generation raised amid sirens and shelling grows up internalising fear as routine. Trauma does not make headlines, but it shapes societies for decades. Children who learn to distinguish the sound of drones from birds inherit a childhood stolen.

One must then question the moral architecture of war. If the end goal is stability and prosperity for the people, can devastation be the means? Leaders deliberate in secure chambers; soldiers fight on the front lines; but it is the common citizen who endures the prolonged aftermath - the rebuilding of homes, the repayment of debts, and the mourning of loved ones.

History shows us that wars may redraw borders, but they also redraw destinies - often for the worse. The common man does not seek conquest; he seeks continuity. He seeks a steady income, education for his children, healthcare for his parents, and peace in his neighbourhood. The world today stands at a crossroads where diplomacy must outpace destruction. The true strength of a nation lies not in the magnitude of its arsenal, but in the well-being of its people. If war is indeed for the people, then their suffering cannot be dismissed as unavoidable. Perhaps the more urgent question is not who will win the next war, but who will heal the ordinary lives shattered by it. Until that question guides policy, the common man will remain the forgotten soldier of every battlefield.

The writer is a freelancer who writes of development, gender and social issues

VAIRAMUTHU HONOURED WITH PRESTIGIOUS JNANPITH AWARD

The renowned Tamil poet and lyricist Vairamuthu has added another feather to his cap by being honoured with the prestigious Jnanpith Award for the year 2025, one of India's highest literary honours. The recognition is a proud moment not only for the poet but also for lovers of Tamil literature across the world. Known for his evocative poetry and deeply reflective lyrics, Vairamuthu has made a lasting impact on contemporary Tamil writing through his unique blend of literary depth and emotional resonance.

This award is particularly significant because it comes after a long gap of twenty-four years for Tamil literature. Earlier, only two eminent Tamil writers had received this coveted honour - Akilan in 1975 and Jayakanthan in 2002. The conferment of the award on Vairamuthu once again brings national attention to the richness and literary heritage of the Tamil language.

A recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award, Vairamuthu has also been honoured with the Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan in recognition of his immense contributions to literature and the arts. Over the decades, his poems, essays, and film lyrics have captured the imagination of millions and enriched modern Tamil literature.

His illustrious career reflects his extraordinary calibre as a wordsmith. The state of Tamil Nadu can take immense pride in his outstanding contributions as a distinguished exponent of Tamil literature.

AP THIRUVADI | CHENNAI

Please send your letter to the info@dailypioneer.com.
In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

War leaves deep psychological scars

Wars not only destroy a nation's property and infrastructure, but major battles also lead to human devastation through the loss of confidence in one another, diminishing trust in humanity, and the erosion of the value of human life. One of the most serious setbacks that continues long after war situations is mental trauma. This is especially a major cause of concern for children in their teenage years. They grow up with unpleasant memories, shattered confidence, broken dreams, and unprecedented circumstances that they experienced during the war.

Many live with the painful memory of seeing their parents die while trying to secure their safety, while some parents must endure the unbearable trauma of watching their loved ones breathe their last in tragic circumstances. Ceasefires do not bring back those who were lost. War situations frequently leave devastating psychological effects on civilians. Many people are forced to live with anxiety, depression, behavioural changes, developmental setbacks, and emotional dysregulation. Psychological complications are tragic and long lasting. Often, innocent people pay the price for the egos and high-handedness of rulers. Unfortunate, yet true.

SUNIL OKHADE | INDORE

Opposition targets Election Commission

In a sharp escalation of the political battle over the functioning of India's election watchdog, the entire opposition bloc of 235 MPs has voiced strong support for the removal of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar. They have accused him of dishonesty and questioned the impartiality of the Election Commission of India. Opposition MPs have submitted notices in both Houses of Parliament calling for Kumar's removal. The move has received signatures from 130 members of the Lok Sabha and 63 from the Rajya Sabha. If formally pursued, it would mark the first time that a motion has been initiated to remove a sitting Chief Election Commissioner.

According to the notice, seven charges have been outlined against Kumar. These include allegations of partisan and discriminatory conduct in office, deliberate obstruction of investigations into electoral fraud, and mass disenfranchisement of voters.

Opposition parties have also accused the CEC of favouring the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, particularly during the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls. Although the opposition may lack the numbers required for removal, the image and credibility of the Election Commission have suffered serious damage.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

LPG supply crisis rising

The black marketing of LPG gas cylinders has become a common occurrence in almost every Indian city these days. Prices are rising rapidly, and the cost of induction stoves has also increased significantly, with margins ranging from ₹1,000 to ₹3,000 depending on demand. Many online platforms, including e-commerce and quick commerce services, are currently showing temporary unavailability of induction stoves. Recently, during an inter-ministerial briefing, government officials highlighted that the average number of LPG bookings was around 55 to 57 lakh cylinders per day. This figure has now risen sharply to nearly 88.8 lakh bookings daily.

It is particularly concerning that India is still not fully self-reliant in the production and supply of cooking fuel, which is a basic household necessity. The growing demand has disrupted the supply cycle and created opportunities for illegal profiteering through black marketing.

The government must urgently take effective steps to manage the disturbed LPG supply chain. Strategic planning and immediate action are required to ensure a smooth and consistent supply of cooking fuel across the country.

KIRTI WADHAWAN | KANPUR

A world without Kissinger's back channels

The consequences are both predictable and terrifying. When there is no subtlety, no back channel, no trusted whisper between statesmen, diplomacy is replaced by bluster. Threats become commitments by default. Negotiation is abandoned for posturing. Allies are alienated; adversaries are emboldened. Civilian populations are killed without pretext beyond headline value

FIRST Column

NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

We are living in darkness while believing we possess light. We are entrenched in disorder, deceived into thinking that international law, respect for judicial authority, or even the concept of an "orderly" world exists. We are confused, stranded on a precarious portal between illusion and reality, living in an interregnum where some will pass through history with legacy, while others perish, leaving nothing but despair, agony, and the hubris of leaders who have perpetually clung to power.

Meanwhile, the United States — whose military budgets dwarf comprehension-spends millions on luxury indulgences while preparing the machinery of indiscriminate death. Recent reports revealed that the Department of Defense (War) spent $2 million on Alaskan king crab, $6.9 million on lobster tails, $15.1 million on rib-eye steak, and hundreds of thousands on doughnuts, ice-cream machines, and sushi tables. Nearly $100,000 was spent on a Steinway & Sons grand piano for the Air Force chief of staff's home, while Apple devices, Herman Miller chairs, and lavish furniture accounted for hundreds of millions more. And to digest these excesses, they unleash bombs that obliterate innocents, killing schoolchildren in Iran, and call it "decapitation".

Who can justify this? Who can stand for it? The modern theatre of war is a shocking carnival of unaccountable power. A conflict in Iran spiralled into chaos, bolstering the political fortunes of Donald Trump, who, in public and private, sought exits to rationalise the mayhem. When the Iranian warship IRIS Dena was attacked in Sri Lankan waters (EEZ), over 130 sailors perished, and Trump's generals allegedly expressed a morbid glee, describing the slaughter as "fun". This is no Hollywood scene; this is the reality of twenty-first-century warfare, where extra-judicial justice is applied at whim, judicial process is hollowed out, and even local courts are mocked, as seen in the exposure of the Epstein files.

In this void of discreet strategy, of subtle diplomacy, the world is poorer. And as I wrestled with this horror, I returned to one of my favourite-and yet the most annoying-scholars and diplomats: Henry Kissinger. The world is missing him. Kissinger, for all his moral ambiguity and Machiavellian manoeuvres, operated in a sphere that demanded secrecy, subtlety, and, above all, back-channel communication. He understood, with ruthless clarity, that public posturing and moral grandstanding are liabilities in the orchestration of power. He once noted, "We are not that moral, except for Ziegler," acknowledging the calculated deception necessary to manage war and diplomacy. He was conscious of the stakes of secrecy, telling Pakistan's ambassador in 1971, "I just wanted to tell you for your own information and slight peace of mind that we are working very actively on getting military equipment to you-but for God's sake don't say anything to anybody!"

> THE KISSINGER TAPES ALSO REVEAL THE DEPTH OF HUMAN CALCULATION BEHIND POWER. HE UNDERSTOOD AMBITION, LOYALTY, AND FEAR AS INSTRUMENTS

Tom Wells' newly published The Kissinger Tapes: Inside His Secretly Recorded Phone Conversations offers a revelatory glimpse into this era. The book demonstrates that Kissinger understood the messy machinery of power, and the peril of transparency in a world that does not reward discretion. "If it is leaked we can have it denied. Have it done one step away," Nixon instructed, exemplifying the strategic use of deniability-an art that modern administrations have lost. Today, everything is on display. Every threat, every posture, every escalation is staged for cameras and social media. The result is appalling: diplomacy is paralysed, adversaries emboldened, allies terrified, and civilians are left as collateral in a theatre of performative statecraft.

Kissinger's conversations reveal the cold logic that once underpinned American policy. On Vietnam, he observed that U.S. forces were not designed for the war they faced: "They are not designed for this war... In fact, they are not designed for any war we are likely to have to fight." Nixon's impatience with military caution was palpable: "You'll hit something," he ordered, impatient with any delay. The brutality was deliberate. The psychological impact of bombing was calculated: "It is going to break every window in Hanoi." And yet, every act of destruction was framed in the language of leverage and negotiation. Kissinger reflected, "All they understand is brutality or deviousness," capturing the dark pragmatism of an era in which moral considerations were subordinated to outcomes.

Kissinger's mastery of clandestine diplomacy was ruthless, precise, and unapologetic. On the India-Pakistan conflict of 1971, he was explicit: "We can't be neutral. Of course we're not neutral. Neither are the Indians. They're always neutral against us." His actions were designed to tilt outcomes without public exposure. He advised feeding the press selectively: "I will just step into his briefing," recognising the power of narrative control without sacrificing operational secrecy. And in moments of existential risk, he remained brutally honest about the stakes: "Starve them out if necessary," he told Nixon regarding North Vietnam. The language is shocking, even repulsive, but it is candid, unvarnished, and strategic.

The consequences are both predictable and terrifying. When there is no subtlety, no back channel, no trusted whisper between statesmen, diplomacy is replaced by bluster. Threats become commitments by default. Negotiation is abandoned for posturing. Allies are alienated; adversaries are emboldened. Civilian populations are killed without pretext beyond headline value. Kissinger's dark pragmatism, which once shielded innocents while advancing national interest, is now absent, and the result is a theatre of atrocity in plain view.

The Kissinger tapes also reveal the depth of human calculation behind power. He understood ambition, loyalty, and fear as instruments. "I am not going to wind up as an Ehrlichman — an errand boy in the White House," he told himself, acknowledging his own indispensability. He observed, "They are trying to deprive you of any success," understanding that enemies and friends alike operate on incentives and resentment. His manipulation of allies and adversaries alike-his delight in exposing bureaucratic rivalries, his ability to reward intransigence, his willingness to abandon those who failed the test of strategy-illustrates a world in which power is preserved not through virtue but through clarity, courage, and cunning. In reading Wells' book, one realises that Kissinger was both brilliant and morally flawed, terrifying and indispensable. "I think the motives were honourable," he claimed when justifying his wiretapping and surveillance, yet his honesty never obscured his ruthlessness. He knew that the pursuit of national interest is rarely moral, often horrifying, and always human. His secrecy, his calculations, his manipulation of perception, his ability to operate two steps ahead, made the United States formidable even in the darkest of crises.

The Kissinger tapes remind us, with unsparing clarity, of what we have lost: the art of the back channel, the subtlety of influence, the moral ambiguity of statecraft wielded with skill. What Kissinger once achieved through secrecy, calculation, and the delicate balance of threats and concessions is now impossible, replaced by a performative brutality, an administration untrained in subtlety, and a theatre in which every action is interpreted, judged, and weaponised against both friend and foe.

We are missing Kissinger. The absence of back channels, of hidden dialogue, of carefully calibrated deception, has left the United States vulnerable to both moral criticism and strategic failure. Wells' book, with its chronological transcripts, illuminates a world in which the exercise of power was deliberate, cold, and guided by ruthless logic. "Every goddamn second-rater talks his stupid head off... it's absolutely killing us," Kissinger complained of leaks undermining negotiations. Today, that dynamic is not just evident-it is amplified. Every misstep, every threat, every military operation is broadcast, commented upon, and politicised in real time, often with lethal consequences.

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The silent but deadly roommate

BALRAJ MEHTA

In a heartbreaking incident that shook Delhi NCR a few days back, three minor sisters — 12, 14, and 16 — reportedly died by suicide, after having fallen from the balcony of their 9th floor flat. Preliminary investigations pointed to academic underperformance compounded by excessive screen time and digital addiction as key factors. The sisters were, surprisingly, not attending any school and spent hours on mobile phones and social media, mostly unsupervised.

This case is admittedly the most tragic seen so far but is not an isolated one; it mirrors a rising crisis in India where digital devices, once hailed as educational tools, have morphed into silent predators of young minds! The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data reveals that over 13,000 students aged 18 and below died by suicide in India in 2024. Academic stress emerged as the top trigger, cited in 35-40 per cent of cases, often intertwined with cyberbullying, toxic institutional climate, online gaming addiction, and social media pressures.

Academic pressure and digital overload

Our hyper-competitive education system amplifies individual vulnerabilities. Combined with uncertainties of future which a majority of students and young job seekers face, this makes the world too dreary for them. There has been a 15% spike in child suicides linked to "examination failure" and "family problems". Many of Indian adolescent suicides are linked directly to digital overload, whereby endless scrolling erodes real-world coping skills.

A 2025 survey by the Indian Council of Medical Research found that 22 per cent of Indian children aged 10-16 are severely addicted to screens, averaging seven to nine hours daily — far beyond the World Health Organization's two-hour recommendation. Much of this use is unsupervised. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and games like PUBG trigger addictive dopamine loops. Reports suggest the sisters spent six to eight hours daily on reels and chats, neglecting studies despite parental scolding. This cycle - addiction, failure, punishment and deeper withdrawal - can overwhelm a child left unattended.

A cascade on health, studies, and wellbeing

Digital addiction admittedly increases suicide risk in teens facing academic stress. Recent times have seen dramatic rise in percentage of screen-addicted children as per various reports and observations. Digital addiction leads to an all-round decline in children's faculties and capability. Physically, it sparks lethargy, obesity, myopia and sleep disorders including insomnia. Blue light disrupts melatonin, leading to chronic fatigue and poor academic performance. Mentally, the effects are more devastating. Screen overuse correlates with a 50 per cent higher depression risk (American Psychological Association Review 2025) and anxiety disorders in 25 per cent of heavy users. Social media's curated perfection fuels FOMO and low self-esteem. According to a 2024 UNICEF report cyberbullying affects 1 in 5 Indian kids, often escalating to self-harm.

Academically, digital addiction fragments attention. Heavy screen users score low in math and reading. Multi-tasking like studying with some or the other programme running on a screen in front of you, reduces retention by 40 per cent, as per a research on cognitive behaviour.

Wellbeing suffers too: real friendships erode, replaced by fleeting, sometimes toxic, online validation. Children, once outgoing, get pulled into virtual worlds, familial bonding suffers due to their near total withdrawal and ultimately harmful behaviour results; tragically sometimes permanent and even fatal!

In the long-term, this breeds a generation of "digital zombies" — disconnected, unhealthy, and prone to extremism. Abert Einstein had observed in his times, "I fear the day when the technology overlaps with our humanity. The world will have only a generation of idiots." He is not far off the mark — the 2025 WHO report quoted above warns India's 400 million child internet users face a "mental health tsunami" unless curbed!

Innovative checks without harsh punishment

Any punitive approach like withholding phones amid physical or mental punishment is likely to backfire. Punishments trigger rebellion and secrecy; instead parents can innovate with empathy-driven tactics to reclaim balance.

- Tech-Enabled Family Pacts.

Co-create "screen contracts" using apps like 'Qustodio' or 'Screen Time' (built into iOS/Android). Set mutual goals: like 'No screens before homework' or 'one-hour family game post-dinner'. Involve the children in setting up the limits — when they own it, resentment is reduced. Reward compliance with fun outings, not bribes. Spend time together — don't fret over quality — just be present in the lives of your children. It is not said in vain that 'families that eat together stick together'!

- Gamify Offline Adventures

Turn disconnection into play. Apps like 'Forest' grow virtual trees during focus time (real trees if you hit goals). Organise "device-free zones" like dinner tables, board games or nature walks. For urban kids apps like 'Goose Chase' create local scavenger hunts. This builds dopamine from real wins — studies show 40 per cent addiction drop after 3 months.

- Digital Literacy Workshops at Home

Host weekly "tech talks" demystifying algorithms. Use free YouTube channels like 'Crash Course on Digital Citizenship' created by John Green, to explain dopamine traps. Role-play cyberbullying scenarios. Empower kids as "family tech experts" to audit apps — this flips control to collaboration. Such education can effectively cut down screen time without fights or heartburns.

- Routine Hacks with Smart Tools

Leverage router-level controls like Circle Home Plus, which auto-limits devices by age/schedule. Pair with "phone parking stations" at bedroom doors — make it a charging ritual with bedside books. Introduce "analog anchors": alarm clocks and journals for mood-tracking. Tracking sleep with wearables like Fitbit and sharing insights positively can be very motivating!

- Emotional Check-Ins and Professional Boosts

Daily 10-minute "heartfelt chats" sans devices can help spot red flags like irritation, mood swings, poor food habits e.g lack of interest or binging, and withdrawal. Apps like 'Calm' offer kid-friendly mindfulness in which even 5-min sessions can reduce anxiety. If addiction persists, consult play therapists via platforms like 'YourDOST'— no stigma, just support!

- Model the Change

Parents need to audit their habits because kids usually mimic parents. Lead "unplugged family challenges" by organising weekend hikes or cooking marathons. Some schools have now started to mandate parent-child digital detox pledges — you can suggest this to your child's school administration.

These strategies emphasise connection over control, fostering resilience and it is indeed a proven fact that early intervention can reverse mild addictions.

A call to collective action

The gruesome tragedies when they unfold are not just a family's loss — they are a wake-up call for the whole society. Technology is not going to go away; in fact with AI and supercomputing, engagement of youngsters with smart devices is going to go up even more. Controlled exposure, fulfilling the learning need yet avoiding mindless entertainment will be required. To achieve that end state a productive, innovative and interesting exploitation of the devices and software must be encouraged. With 500 million internet users under 25, India needs policy muscle like enforcing app age-gates, school-mandated screen audits, and counselling hotlines. We can start small today to integrate digital wellness awareness to save more young precious lives.

'Disconnect to Reconnect' must be the modern day mantra of sanity!

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Congress needs to reinvent itself

ANIL ANAND

The Jeffrey Epstein-gate has given Congress a new opportunity to corner the Narendra Modi dispensation, with a direct focus on the Prime Minister. Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi has seemingly lapped up the chance with both hands to launch a direct diatribe against the PM without mincing words. The issue found forceful mention in Parliament and echoed outside as well, with the latest manifestation being the Indian Youth Congress protest during the India AI Impact Summit 2026. What next? Where do the Congress and Rahul Gandhi go from here to make Epstein-gate, in the Indian context, a countrywide issue so as to rattle the powerful ruling leadership? Or will it, like many previous instances, die its own death due to a lack of will to follow up?

First and foremost, he should bear in mind that building a national movement on any issue, particularly of the Epstein kind which has already created tremors in many countries across the world, will require concerted, coordinated and unified action. There is no doubt that Rahul Gandhi and a handful of his party colleagues, while others remain silent ringside spectators, have shown courage in speaking out and trying to corner Narendra Modi directly.

Congress is at the crossroads on two counts, and both are significant and central for any movement to have a successful nationwide impact. Firstly, the Congress organisational structure is crying out for immediate attention and repair. Intriguingly, this issue of immense urgency has not attracted the attention of Rahul Gandhi, as from all available indications nothing happens in the party without his sanction.

The lackadaisical approach in this regard is reflected, and has now become routine, in the absence of tough decision-making to revamp the organisational set-up, corner habitual dissenters and saboteurs, and remove deadwood and non-performers. Rahul Gandhi's words must match his actions. In fact, such inaction has emboldened those performing similar acts in other states and Union Territories to serve the BJP's cause.

How can any movement at the national level be built or succeed without a strong organisation? Congress may not be considered a cadre-based party, but it still has infrastructure, rank and file, and followers in every corner of the country. Yet much of it lies dormant due to the lack of interest shown by leaders at various levels.

Rahul Gandhi has, from time to time, taken important and daring initiatives to highlight issues and expose the BJP-led dispensation. The twin Bharat Jodo Yatras were undoubtedly a revolutionary step. They generated considerable public attention and enabled him to establish direct contact with the people through their overwhelming participation. However, in the end, with no worthwhile follow-up plan and, more importantly, no organisational set-up to carry the message forward, the momentum has largely fizzled out.

The second factor that has placed the Congress at the crossroads is the present standing and status of the I.N.D.I.A alliance. There were occasions in the past when the opposition could have united to raise issues and build momentum against the Modi government, but these opportunities were frittered away for want of unity. Being the only national party in the alliance with a countrywide presence, Congress and particularly Rahul Gandhi should have adopted a proactive approach to cohesively lead the front, but this has not happened.

As a result, owing to Congress's weaknesses, vested interests have begun creating the impression that the leadership of the I.N.D.I.A bloc is up for grabs. At the grassroots of this situation lies Congress's organisational weakness and the reluctance of its leadership to take tough decisions of far-reaching consequences. In addition, occasional sniping by Congress leaders or MPs at allies such as Mamata Banerjee or M K Stalin has further harmed the opposition coalition. This is one side of the story. Leaders such as Mamata Banerjee, Uddhav Thackeray and the grand old Maratha strongman Sharad Pawar also share responsibility for allowing personal ambitions and inflated egos to weaken the I.N.D.I.A alliance, often targeting Congress, and more specifically Rahul Gandhi, on various pretexts.

Rahul Gandhi should continue his efforts to connect with people. It suits his affable personality and willingness to mingle with the man on the street.

However, sustaining such efforts requires a strong organisation with committed leaders at every level. Jeffrey Epstein-gate presents another opportunity for Rahul Gandhi to set his house in order without delay. Only by speaking from a position of organisational strength can the Congress leadership resolve its internal weaknesses and silence opposition alliance partners who question the party's leadership.

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Stay where you are, hug the jobs

Workplace trends have changed from job-hopping to job-cuddling

OUR TAKE

There was a time, not too long ago, possibly half-a-generation ago, when it was cool to hop jobs, excitedly grab a new opportunity, even if the pay was 10-15 per cent more, and even if you had spent only a few months at the old workplace. According to HR experts, and behaviour psychologists, job-hugging is the new mantra across generations, not just Genz or millennials. Even those at the fag end of their careers, a few years from retirement, are unwilling to leave their present jobs. Look around you, and there are scores of examples that will stare at you.

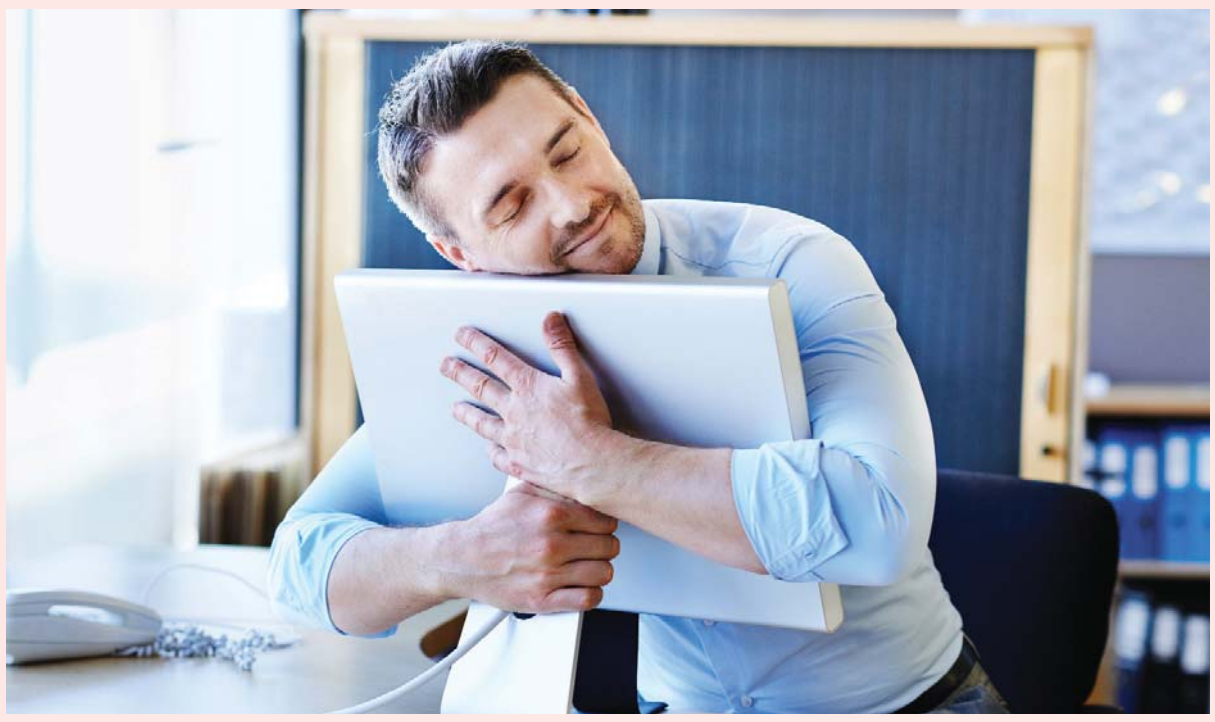
A Delhi-based woman in her early fifties, who works in publishing management, faces several problems. For more than a year, she has not got any increments, bonuses, or promotions. Yet, she refuses to look around, and sticks to the present job. Another senior executive in an IT firm faces almost-daily backlash from the boss. But he grits his teeth, and takes it. He does not want to leave, or even look around. In this sense, job-hugging, or staying where you are, with complete disregard to the workplace environment, has become the norm, not the exception.

"Simply put," according to a media report, "job-hugging refers to employees choosing to stay in their current jobs despite feeling under-challenged, disengaged, or unhappy primarily because they fear the uncertainty of changing roles." According to another article, "Today, many workers are prioritising security.... Rather than pursuing new opportunities, they are choosing the reliability of a steady pay cheque." Hence, it is not about loyalty, or the previous century's dogma of joining the best-possible firm, and retiring from it. This is about fear and caution. This is about doubts that there is another job for you.

Post-pandemic scenarios, joblessness, tech invasion, war disruptions, trade wars, lack of belief, genuine lack of skills, and inability to change and adjust are among the several factors that contribute to job-hugging. But before we delve into some of the reasons, it is an opportune time for a caveat. Job-hugging goes together with other employee-related trends. These include a pattern among Gen Z to work as freelancers, and gig workers, and invariably have a gig on the side. Others, like millennials, acquire additional skills to change responsibilities. There are many who pursue multiple consultancies to expand the job basket.

According to a media article, "In the ever-evolving world of work, new trends seem to emerge almost every year to describe how employees are navigating their professional lives. Over the past few years, phrases like 'quiet-quitting,' 'bare-minimum Mondays,' and 'career-cushioning' have entered everyday conversations about workplace culture. Each of these trends reflects changing attitudes towards work, productivity, and job satisfaction...." Hence, the entry or popularity of job-hugging does not imply that the others have vanished. Each one coexists with the others. People adopt multiple ways to deal with the workplaces.

Let us return to job-hugging. In the pandemic world, two trends became dominant. Millions lost their jobs immediately, a similar number witnessed huge dips in existing salaries, and many lost any chances of increments and promotions for a couple of years. At the same time, as an economic 'J' curve emerged, a steep fall in GDP growth, followed by a much-higher rise, job opportunities opened, but mostly for the youngsters and newcomers. The older generation, which lost jobs during the pandemic, remained at not-working-from-home. This is when the 1990s-2000s trend of job-hopping coupled with job-losses.



This marked the beginning of job-hugging, when a huge number of scared and scarred employees, who saw their colleagues being asked to leave within a day or a week, decided to sit tight, stick to their jobs, and do whatever it takes not to lose them. However, it was clear for most generations, including newcomers and first-timers that the number of jobs had dropped, and finding the 'right' one became tougher. According to reports, joblessness, or lack of jobs has plagued India for more than a decade, ever since 2013. With fewer opportunities, caution reigns.

Artificial intelligence (AI), and the induction of other tech, has made matters worse. Most of the available jobs require different skills compared to the pre-pandemic world. Workplaces, or at least in the organised urban setups, have radically changed in the past six years. Each time, executives are nudged, even forced, to adopt new tech, their fears, doubts, and uncertainties rise exponentially. They are unsure about their future. They do not wish to think about their futures, and hope to ride out the present, and stick to their jobs. Tech is the new glue that binds them tightly to the existing workplaces.

Over the past 3-4 years, external disruptions, disconnected with India, workplaces, or jobs have dislocated minds and behaviour. Starting from the Russia-Ukraine war, trade wars, tariff tensions, India-Pakistan drone battles, to the Iran war, Indian and global employees have walked in from one crisis into another one. Each one undermined their confidence to deal with daily life pressures. Each one created more uncertainty at homes and workplaces. No one wanted to move or budge. Sit where you are. Stay where you are. Do not do anything drastic. These became the new mantras of life for the working class.

Global surveys indicate similar trends. According to one on job-hugging in 2025, an astounding 75 per cent of the polled executives contend that they plan to stay in their present roles until 2027. Half of them admit that this is because of fears and uncertainty, and has nothing to do with job satisfaction. Almost 60 per cent agree that job-hugging is more common, and a higher percentage expect the trend to rise. Of course, employees juggle between the pay they get, and security a job provides. In the survey, just over a quarter cite the two reasons.

What is more interesting is that job-hugging is a two-way trend. Firms too are scared to lose talent. In the pandemic madness, when employees were let go with impunity and complete disregard, firms lost skills and experience. They replaced them with youth and energy. But this worked up o a point. Hence, employers are "reluctant to lose experienced staff." However, on the positive side, employers make attempts to make those employees happy who they wish to hug. Employees, who indulge in job-hugging realise that they need to do something extra to grow within. Career coaches give similar advice, 'pivot in place,' or find ways to grow within a firm, rather than another one, and not remain passive.

BLASÉ CAPITAL

ALTERNATE ISSUES

Over the past year or so, the stock market regulator, Sebi, seems worried about AIFs, or alternate investment funds. Even recently, the Sebi chief hinted at possible changes that were required in its sub-ecosystem, even as it released a consultation paper largely related with the winding up of AIFs. Most experts feel that the regulator wants to tighten the screws, or its oversight over AIFs to tackle multiple issues. It has resorted to measures such as mandated due diligence, direct plans, and stricter custody to ensure investor protection. However, these may not be enough, and Sebi wants to do more, even as it wishes to adopt a hands-off approach to ensure minimal interference. Caught between the two extremes, the regulator hopes to somehow keep the AIFs in check. In recent speeches, Sebi chairman, Tuhin Kanta Pandey, emphasised that AIFs were a "crucial pillar" in the country's capital market, and had nearly Rs 16 lakh crore in commitments. Yet, he simultaneously insisted that the segment needs to focus on "sound fundamentals over just financial returns, and improve disclosure standards."

One of the major charges against the AIFs is that they are used to bypass the existing regulations and guidelines on sector-specific foreign direct investment (FDI). Foreigners structure their money inflows through specifically-designed vehicles with the Indian managers. This allows the former to circumvent the FDI caps across sectors. According to AI search, "Sebi has flagged this as regulatory arbitrage, prompting stricter investor due diligence, and investment oversight to prevent misuse." The use of Indian or domestic managers, who are shown as investors, allow the foreigners to hide their identities. For all purposes, the investments are regarded as domestic by legal and regulatory entities. This allows illegal FDI flows in restricted areas. One of the oft-used purposes of the AIFs to hide FDI, and masquerade as domestic investment is seen in the highly-sensitive banking sector. Since 2024, Sebi introduced several measures and circulars to curtail such practices, with "enhanced due diligence on beneficial owners." According to Sebi, ₹1 lakh crore, or a huge percentage, is used to bypass FDI.

AIFs were increasingly used by the banks and NBFCs to evergreen stressed loans. This practice became common after the popularity of the AIFs, and the huge impact of the new insolvency law, which made it easier for any financial creditor to drag a defaulting firm to the bankruptcy table. Banks would invest in AIFs, which would lend money to a stressed borrower, which enabled the borrower to repay the original loan, with the bank avoiding a possible bad loan. Hence, the central bank tightened the regulations to prevent this. Now, banks cannot invest in AIFs, which have invested in firms that have loan exposure with the banks over the past 12 months. In case of the breach of policy, the bank needs to get out of investment in 30 days. "In March 2024, the RBI clarified that equity-based downstream investments are generally excluded from this restriction, aiming to distinguish genuine investments from evergreening attempts," explains AI-linked search.

In March 2024, a note by a legal firm, stated that many NBFCs ran "pillar-to-post in a major attempt to transfer or sell their holdings in AIFs. Most of their attempts have either been futile or come at a huge cost as investors demand sizable discounts.... The plight of NBFCs stem from a central bank directive... to forgo investing in AIFs should the downstream investments be a debtor company.... Regulated entities, such as banks and NBFCs... have been given 30 days to assess their investee AIFs' portfolios, and liquidate their investments in the AIFs, or else male 100 per cent provisioning (of the loans). This poses major challenges for NBFCs and banks, as the transfer of units is highly restrictive. India's secondary market for AIF units is still at a nascent stage of growth, with few takers having the ability to absorb the units...." However, one is not sure if other practices have cropped up.

There are other charges against the AIFs. In some cases, the funds provide better or preferential terms to the larger investors, which breaches the requisite "proportional, equal-footing principle." Some experts highlighted that AIFs fail to "properly value debt securities, often relying on collateral value rather than the debt's actual worth." Tax experts contend that several AIFs fail to liquidate their assets within the prescribed period.

This is why Sebi issued a consultation paper for public feedback in February 2026 to deal with this issue. According to a law firm, "The proposal seeks to address challenges faced by AIFs that retain liquidated proceeds beyond the permissible fund life due to pending or anticipated litigation, tax contingencies, or residual operational expenses. The key proposals include: permitting AIFs to surrender their registration while retaining funds, with such AIF schemes being designated as inoperative funds... permitting retention of funds for anticipated liabilities... and permitting retention of funds for operational expenses up to three years."

Yet Sebi's Pandey wants more. "AIFs often invest in early-stage and illiquid assets. In such cases, credibility begins with valuations. Weak or opaque valuations erode confidence. When investee companies move towards the public market, valuation concerns can distort price discovery and weaken trust. Therefore, fair valuation matters."

The Tech Wrecker

War you do not, and cannot, see

Forget drones and missiles; focus on GPS-spoofing warfare

As the Iran-Israel-US war disrupts nations, as well as transport and logistics in the Middle East, there are quiet, somewhat invisible, battles that confront maritime analysts, airline pilots, and infrastructure experts. Over the past two weeks, they have observed growing interference with the satellite navigation systems, which are crucial to guide global trade and transport. Across the Persian Gulf's shipping lanes, on the digital navigation charts, the sailing tankers and vessels have appeared to be located at places where there were not, or could not be. Many appeared as if they were on land. Some were located near the airports. A few were clustered together at identical coordinates.

Each of the possibilities did not exist, or was impossible as the vessels were on the sea, and miles apart from each other. Initially, the experts felt that these were software glitches, or malfunctions that coincidentally emerged simultaneously, and that too in the area where an aggressive war was on. But when maritime intelligence firm, Windward, detected over 1,100 ocean vessels that experienced GPS-related anomalies within 24 hours, and as the number rose to more than 1,600 in the following week, the narrative changed. Analysts were convinced that these were cases of deliberate and sustained electronic interference in one of the world's strategic shipping corridors.

Obviously, the locations of the digital disruptions were significant. They occurred around the Strait of Hormuz, which used to carry 20-21 million barrels of oil per day, and accounted for close to a fifth of the global crude consumption. When navigation signals begin to behave unpredictably in such a corridor, the consequences extend far. Analysts identified this phenomenon as GPS-spoofing, or a form of coordinated electronic attacks that manipulate satellite signals, rather than block them outright. It was being used by some sides in the Middle East war to confuse the enemies, or so-called friends of the enemies.

GPS-spoofing occurs due to the inherent weaknesses in how the satellite navigation systems operate, and which can be easily exploited. GPS satellites orbit 20,200 km above the Earth, and transmit signals that allow receivers to calculate positions using precise measurements. By the time the signals reach the ships, aircraft, or your smartphones (remember you use GPS almost all the time), they are faint, which makes them vulnerable to interference from any ground-based transmitters. If someone is hellbent to confuse and confound those who receive the signals, it is not too difficult to do so.

Electronic disruptions occur in two forms. Jamming blocks the satellite signal, and leaves the navigation systems unable to determine their positions. Spoofing is a more sophisticated technique, which broadcasts counterfeit signals to imitate the real satellites. The genuine receivers continue to function normally, or seem to do so, but their calculations go awry, and provide the incorrect locations. Spoofing is considered more dangerous because the operators and receivers may not immediately realise that something is wrong. A vessel or aircraft can appear to navigate normally but its digital position and location can drift hundreds of km away from its true location.

As mentioned earlier, the evidence of this phenomenon repeatedly appeared across the vessels plying in the Gulf area. Foreign news agency, Reuters, reported that dozens of French commercial vessels were affected by the disruptions. This led to the heightened security conditions in the Gulf, according to French transport officials, as the vessel crews struggled with unreliable navigation signals. For captains navigating one of the world's busiest oil corridors, inaccurate positioning data is not merely inconvenient. It raises the risk of collisions, delays, and congestion in the shipping lanes, which handle the movements of hundreds of tankers movements each week.

Ami Daniel, CEO, Windward, told Reuters that the Gulf historically saw little satellite interference but the pattern changed sharply. Shipping is one part of the system that is affected. Aviation saw the scale of the problem. The International Air Transport Association reported that airlines logged more than 46,000 incidents of GPS interferences, which affected commercial aircraft in 2023. Many occurred in regions that were experiencing military conflicts. Pilots in the Middle East region, and over the Black Sea reported that they either lost the satellite signals, or saw navigation systems temporarily display incorrect positions. They had to resort to backup systems.

Investigations by Wired magazine documented cases where the GPS interferences near Iran disrupted mapping platforms and delivery services, and caused vehicles using navigation apps to appear in incorrect locations. A study by the Center for Advanced Defense Studies found that more than 9,000 ships experienced GPS spoofing near the Russian ports between 2016 and 2019. These incidents highlight how satellite navigation is embedded in infrastructure. The signals that guide ships and aircraft provide the timing used across telecom networks, financial trading systems, and electricity grids.

Shipping firms that operate in the Gulf region have begun to adjust their behaviour in response to the interference instability. Some vessels slow down during the transits through sensitive areas, or temporarily alter routes as operators assess the navigation reliability. War-risk insurance premiums for ships in the region have increased, which reflects the uncertainty surrounding it. Even small disruptions can have outsized consequences. Delays in tanker movements affect refinery supply chains in Asia, Europe, and North America. They influence freight costs, insurance pricing, and energy markets.

Given that 90 per cent of the global trade moves by sea, according to the UN estimates, navigation reliability is not just a technical issue. It is a core component of the infrastructure that supports global commerce. The economic dependence on satellite navigation is substantial. A study by the US National Institute of Standards and Technology estimated that a 30-day disruption of GPS services can cost the US economy about $1 billion per day. The most exposed and vulnerable segments include the telecom networks, financial markets, power grids, logistics and manufacturing, and transportation systems, among others.

Imagine this is an estimate for a single nation, albeit the largest economy. A worldwide or regional disruption in the GPS signals can wipe out billions of dollars. The frequency of satellite interference has begun to attract the attention beyond the defence community. Infrastructure planners, regulators, and tech firms are increasingly examining how dependent the modern systems and networks have become on a single positioning, and timing network. Policy-makers and researchers are exploring alternatives, alt-PNT systems, or short for alternative positioning, navigation, and timing technologies. These include systems designed to operate independently of GPS.

Trade deal awaits new US tariff structure, says official

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

The interim trade agreement between India and the US will be signed once the new global tariff architecture of America is in place, a senior government official said on Monday.

"Because at the end of it, each country is doing a deal as a part of a package where one is at comparative advantage... vis a vis competitors," the official said.

India and the US last month announced finalisation of a framework for the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement. According to that framework, the US had agreed to reduce tariffs on India to 18 per cent.

However, the tariff architecture in the US has changed following its Supreme Court ruling against President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs. After that, the US President imposed 10 per cent tariffs on all countries for 150 days from February 24.

In view of these changes, the meeting of the chief negotiators of India and the US has been postponed. They were scheduled to meet last month to finalise the legal text of the pact, which was expected to be signed this month.

"The deal was to be signed in March. (But) When we said this, that time, the Supreme Court judgment on IEEPA (International Emergency Economic Powers Act) tariffs had not come. Now, with the Supreme Court judgment on IEEPA tariffs, the tariffs per se don't exist.

"Now there are tariffs under Article 122, which is related to the balance of payment crisis, which are for five months. And the tariff is around 10 per cent. So the deal that we finalise and sign has to be against the tariff structure or the comparative advantage that India gets in the US market," the official said.

The official added that the US is working to recreate a global tariff architecture.

"Once they are on that pathway, they are able to create that. I think at that juncture, it would be right to sign the deal," the official said.

The pact, the official said, has already been finalised and decided upon, and both teams are negotiating to iron out the finer details.

"But actual signing, to my mind, will be done when the new architecture of tariff globally will be in place," the official added.

In case of any change in the 18 per cent tariffs on India, the official said, these are all subject to how it happens and how the global architecture pans out.

"If the global architecture is exactly the way the IEEPA tariffs were there, then it may remain so also. If it is different, then it may also change. So we will have to wait to see how it goes," another official said.

When India finalised the deal, it was at a comparative advantage as compared to its competitor countries.

"So whenever we are ready, the US side is ready with that architecture, I think that will be the opportune time to sign it," the official said, adding, "There is nothing that there is a standoff. There is nothing that the deal is not there."

The trade deal is about comparative and preferential market access to each other. The 18 per cent tariff on India was the lowest among its competitors, including China, Vietnam and Thailand.

In case under the new tariff architecture of the US, other countries will be "at 19 or 20 or 21 or 22 per cent, then maybe India will remain at 18 per cent. But if others come down, then India will also come down. So it will depend on how the new architecture comes out. And that is something for US to take a call," the official said, adding that as of now, the deal was on 18 per cent.

Meanwhile, as per reports, Malaysia has stated that the country is not going ahead with its trade deal with the US.

There are two sets of countries that have finalised pacts with America — one that have announced the framework deal but have signed the legal agreement, and the other that have not signed the legal pact.

When asked about the two investigations started by the US under Section 301, the official said the ministry is examining its legal impact.

"These investigations take time. My sense is whenever a (trade) deal is finalised and signed in the future, this will take care of these investigations," the official added.

On March 12, the United States Trade Representative (USTR) launched a Section 301 probe, covering 60 economies, including India and China.

The investigations will determine whether acts, policies, and practices of each of these economies related to the failure to impose and effectively enforce a ban on the importation of goods produced with forced labour are unreasonable or discriminatory, and burden or restrict US commerce.

On March 11, the USTR launched a Section 301 trade investigation targeting policies and industrial practices of 16 economies, including India and China.

About the trade deal, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agarwal said that "India remains engaged with the US side for a mutually beneficial trade agreement".

India is discussing details with the US, as there are many elements of the deal.

"There are certain non-tariff barriers which need to be ironed out. There are certain other details under the 232 tariffs also, which need to be worked out. So I think we are using this time constructively to see that we are able to iron out these things so that these things don't take time whenever the time is right for signing the deal," the official said.

Sensex jumps 938 pts, Nifty above 23,400 after 3-day fall

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Mumbai

Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded by over 1 per cent on Monday after facing a massive drubbing in the past three trading days, driven by value-buying in blue-chip banking counters.

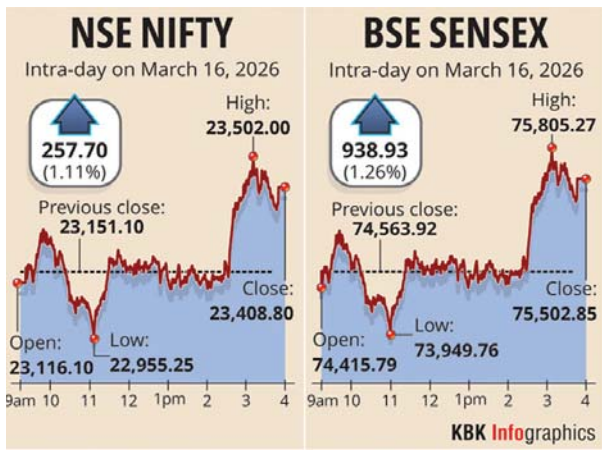
The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 938.93 points or 1.26 per cent to settle at 75,502.85. During the day, it hit a high of 75,805.27 and a low of 73,949.76.

The 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 257.70 points or 1.11 per cent to end at 23,408.80.

From the 30 Sensex firms, UltraTech Cement surged 4.22 per cent. Trent, HDFC Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, Eternal, Bajaj Finance, ITC, Tata Steel and State Bank of India were among the biggest gainers.

Bharat Electronics, Sun Pharma, Power Grid and Bharti Airtel were among the major laggards.

"The equity market staged a late-session rebound, supported by value buying in domestically oriented sectors such as auto, banking, and FMCG, a relief rally following the recent sell-off. "In the near term, investor sentiment will hinge on developments in the Strait of Hormuz, where any easing of supply chain disruptions could provide further support," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.



In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225 index and Shanghai's SSE Composite index ended lower, while South Korea's benchmark Kospi and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index settled higher. Markets in Europe were trading mostly lower.

The US market ended lower on Friday.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 1.41 per cent to $104.4 per barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹10,716.64 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs), however, bought stocks worth ₹9,977.42 crore. On Friday, the Sensex settled at 74,563.92, down 1,470.50 points or 1.93 per cent.

Casual workers joining formal workforce: Mandaviya

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Minister of Labour and Employment Mansukh Mandaviya on Monday said increasing number of casual workers are getting into formal employment and with economic growth job opportunities are increasing day by day.

"Day by day employment in increasing in the country, and unemployment is getting reduced. When any economy grows, employment is generated," he said during the Question Hour.

To meet the rising demand of a growing economy, supply has increase for which manufacturing is required and that is where jobs are getting created, he said.

The Minister further said that self-employment too has increased from 52 per cent in 2017-18 to 58 per cent.

He said according to Periodic Labour Force Survey, average income of casual workers have increased from ₹255 in FY'18 to currently ₹418.

Further, casual labourers are also shifting to formal employment.

"People with regular salary have risen in the country. Casual workers are joining the formal workforce and the number of casual labourers have come down to 19 per cent, from 24 per cent in 2017-18. This is a result of high economic growth," Mandaviya said.

Minister of Labour and Employment Mansukh Mandaviya

Banks report highest contraction in MFI portfolios in Q3 of FY26

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Mumbai

Banks' microfinance portfolio outstanding contracted by 40 per cent year-on-year to ₹65,687 crore in third quarter of FY26, according to a report released on Monday.

The fall is the sharpest among all categories of lenders, which also includes dedicated non-bank finance companies-MFIs (microfinance institutions) and small finance banks, according to the report by a credit information company.

Persistent stress in asset quality led to tightening of underwriting standards like adoption of guardrails to restrict number of loans and leverage at a borrower level, as per the report by Equifax and SIDBI.

Liquidity constraints particularly in smaller lenders also led to lower disbursements, the report said. The overall industry portfolio outstanding was down 22 per cent year-on-year and 7 per cent sequentially in December, 2025.

The largest contraction has been seen by banks, followed by 25 per cent for small finance banks, 22 per cent by not for profit MFIs and others, 14 per cent and 4 per cent by NBFC-MFIs and NBFCs, respectively.

The market share of banks has slipped to 25 per cent in Q3FY26 from 35 per cent in the year-ago period, while the same for NBFC-MFIs has risen to 44 per cent from 37 per cent.

The report said that NBFC-MFIs now account for 44 per cent of new sourcing. However, private sector banks continued to curtail their exposure, registering a 26 per cent contraction in disbursals.

It can be noted that the MFI industry has been grappling with challenges for the last few quarters, but some experts have been opining that the industry is cyclical and activity will come back.

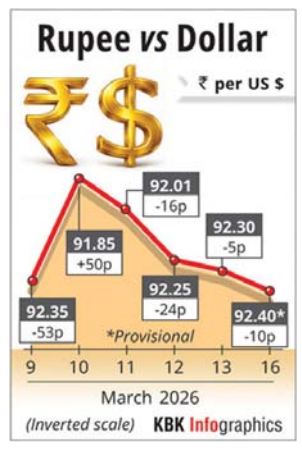
Rupee falls 10 paise to close at all-time low of 92.40 against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Mumbai

The rupee weakened by 10 paise to settle at a fresh record low of 92.40 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday amid surging crude oil prices and incessant withdrawal of foreign funds triggered by geopolitical uncertainties.

The local currency, however, resisted a sharp fall backed by a significant recovery in domestic equity markets amid hopes of the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, according to forex traders.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 92.44 and touched its lowest-ever intra-day level of 92.47 against the greenback during the session. The local unit ended the session at 92.40 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a loss of 10 paise from its previous close.



In the preceding session, the rupee hit its lowest intra-day level of 92.47 before ending at 92.30 against the dollar, its lowest-ever closing level until Friday.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said that some softness in the US dollar index and hopes of the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz cushioned the downside.

According to Jigar Trivedi, Senior Research Analyst at Indusind Securities, the rupee hovered near record lows, pressured by elevated crude prices and sustained foreign equity outflows.

"Persistently high oil prices are forcing importers to purchase more dollars, widening India's trade deficit and creating a material terms-of-trade shock," he said, adding, "The Reserve Bank of India has intervened in FX markets to stabilise the currency and prevent excessive volatility.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.13 per cent lower at 99.97.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading higher by 1.46 per cent at $104.69 per barrel in futures trade.

Crude futures rise to ₹9,171/barrel on strong global cues; Brent hits $106

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Crude oil prices rose ₹119 to ₹9,171 per barrel in futures trade on Monday as escalating tensions in West Asia kept supply risks in focus, even as the US explored ways to restore shipping around the Strait of Hormuz.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), crude oil for March delivery increased by ₹119, or 1.31 per cent, to ₹9,171 per barrel in a business turnover of 12,745 lots.

Similarly, the April contract also appreciated by ₹164, or 1.83 per cent, to ₹9,107 per barrel in 12,898 lots on the MCX.

Analysts said crude oil prices remained elevated amid supply concerns as the ongoing conflict in West Asia disrupted oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz, a key passage for global energy shipments.

In the international market, Brent Oil futures for May delivery gained $2.82, or 2.73 per cent, to $105.96 per barrel, while West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for the May contract went up by 2.36 per cent to $99.13 per barrel in New York.

Crude oil prices remained elevated above $100 per barrel despite signals from US President Donald Trump that talks were underway to form a coalition aimed at reopening the Strait of Hormuz, Manav Modi, Analyst-Commodities, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

EU's foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas on Monday said it is encouraging its member states to redirect the bloc's Red Sea naval mission to help restart oil and gas shipments in the Strait of Hormuz. Meanwhile, the geopolitical situation remains tense after reports that the United States and Israel conducted fresh airstrikes on a key Iranian export terminal over the weekend.

The attacks have prompted threats of retaliation from Tehran, underscoring the risk that the conflict could widen and disrupt supplies from one of the world's most critical oil-producing regions, Modi said.

Traders are now weighing the possibility of further escalation against diplomatic efforts to stabilise shipping in the region, with volatility expected to persist as geopolitical tensions continue to dominate the sentiment.

Wholesale price inflation rises 2.13% in February

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Wholesale price inflation rose for the fourth straight month, at 2.13 per cent in February, driven by an uptick in prices of food and non-food articles, even though vegetable prices eased on a month-on-month basis, Government data showed on Monday.

Wholesale Price Index (WPI)-based inflation was 1.81 per cent in the previous month and 2.45 per cent in February last year.

"Positive rate of inflation in February 2026 is primarily due to an increase in prices of other manufacturing, manufacture of basic metals, non-food articles, food articles and textiles, etc.," the industry ministry said in a statement.

According to WPI data, inflation in food articles was 2.19 per cent in February, as against 1.55 per cent in the previous month.

In vegetables, inflation eased to 4.73 per cent in February against 6.78 per cent in January.

However, pulses, potato and egg, meat and fish saw an uptick in inflation in February over the previous month.

In the case of manufactured products, WPI inflation inched up to 2.92 per cent in February, from 2.86 per cent in the preceding month. Non-food articles category inflation spiked to 8.80 per cent in February, from 7.58 per cent in January.

Negative inflation, or deflation, continued in the fuel and power basket, at 3.78 per cent in February, vis-a-vis 4.01 per cent in January.

The country's retail inflation rose to 3.2 per cent in February, from 2.75 per cent in January, data released last week showed.

India exports 3.15 lakh tonne sugar in Oct-Feb of 2025-26 marketing year: AISTA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

India exported 3.15 lakh tonne sugar during October-February in the current 2025-26 marketing year, with the UAE emerging as the top destination, the All India Sugar Trade Association (AISTA) said on Monday.

Sugar exports remain under Government control through quotas distributed proportionally among mills. The Central Government has approved total exports of 2 million tonne for 2025-26 marketing year (October-September), including an additional 5,00,000 tonne permitted recently.

White sugar accounted for 2,57,971 tonne of total shipments, with refined sugar making up 53,664 tonne, AISTA said in a statement.

The UAE received the largest volume at 79,683 tonne, followed by Afghanistan 71,813 tonne, Djibouti 45,801 tonne and Tanzania with 21,330 tonne.

"India will be able to do physical shipments of more than 8,00,000 tonne, including to Asian and Gulf countries," AISTA Chairman Praful Vithalani said.

India's sugar output for the 2025-26 season has been revised down 4.4 per cent to 28.3 million tonne from an earlier first estimate of 29.6 million tonne, AISTA said in its second estimate citing lower yields in key producing states due to adverse weather.

FROM THE WORLD

US

Strike hits beef plant

About 3,800 workers at one of the nation's largest meatpacking plants were set to strike Monday morning in Colorado in what union representatives said would be the first walkout at a US beef slaughterhouse since the 1980s.

The strike at the Swift Beef Co. plant in Greeley was set to begin at 5:30 a.m. MDT, said Kim Cordova, president of United Food Workers Local 7, which represents the workers. It follows accusations from union officials that owner JBS USA retaliated against workers and committed other unfair labor practices amid contract negotiations. A previous contract was due to expire at midnight Sunday. The expected strike comes at a 75-year low for the US cattle population, with a January 1 inventory of 86.2 million animals – down 1 per cent from the prior year.

EU cautious on Trump's Hormuz proposal

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Brussels

European countries on Monday demanded to know more about US President Donald Trump's plans for the war on Iran and when the conflict might end as they weighed whether to agree to his call to send warships to help shore up security in the Persian Gulf. Trump has asked allies - including France, China, Japan, South Korea and Britain - to help secure the strait for global shipping.

He said the US was talking to "about seven" countries for military support to help reopen the trade route. But he wouldn't say which ones and gave no indication of when such a coalition might be formed.

Debris litters a street from buildings damaged in an Israeli airstrike in Dahiyeh, Beirut's southern suburbs, Lebanon AP

Separately, in an interview with the Financial Times, he warned that "if there's no response or if it's a negative response I think it will be very bad for the future of NATO."

As European Union foreign ministers gathered to discuss Trump's demand, German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul said it's important for the United States and Israel to define "when they consider the military aims of their deployment to have been reached."

"We need more clarity here," Wadephul told reporters.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz's spokesperson, Stefan Kornelius, said underlined "this war has nothing to do with NATO - it is not NATO's war. NATO is an alliance to defend the alliance area."

Kornelius said that Berlin "took note" of Trump's comments, but he added: "The United States did not consult us before this war, and so we believe this is not a matter for NATO or the German government."

Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna also said that US allies in Europe want to understand Trump's "strategic goals. What will be the plan?"

Their reactions were typical of the cautious response that many in Europe have shown to the US-Israeli war on Iran, although few allies in Europe have openly opposed it. Trump has described his demand for help in the strait as "a very small endeavour."

Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski invited the Trump administration to go through the proper channels. "If there is a request via NATO, we will of course out of respect and sympathy for our American allies consider it very carefully," he said.

Sikorski made a reference to Article 4 of NATO's founding treaty, which allies can invoke if they believe their territory or security is under threat.

As she headed in to chair the meeting of ministers in Brussels, EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said that "it is in our interest to keep the Strait of Hormuz open, and that's why we are also discussing what we can do in this regard from the European side."

Kallas said the EU could expand its Operation Aspides naval mission to protect shipping in the Red Sea up into the Persian Gulf.

Stop military operation immediately: China

Lin Jian

KJM VARMA ■ Beijing

China on Monday called on all sides to immediately stop military operations in West Asia in response to US President Donald Trump's call to join other countries, including Beijing, to help keep Strait of Hormuz open for international transport.

The effective closure of the vital waterway by Iran in retaliation for airstrikes by the US and Israel has proved catastrophic for global energy and trade flows, causing the largest oil supply disruption and soaring global oil prices.

China also said it is in talks with the US about Trump's planned visit to Beijing later this month.

About Trump's call to China and other countries to deploy warships to keep the strait "open and safe," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian told a media briefing here that the recent tensions in Strait of Hormuz and adjacent waters impacted the flow of the goods and international energy and has damaged regional peace and global stability. (*PTI*)

Fears of global energy crisis rise as Iran escalates

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Beirut

Fears of a global energy crisis rose on Monday as the war in the Middle East raged on, with more US-Israeli strikes on the Iranian capital and Israel's bombardment of Lebanon. An Iranian drone strike temporarily shut Dubai's airport, a crucial global travel hub, underscoring the threats to the world economy.

Since the United States and Israel attacked Iran more than two weeks ago, Tehran has regularly fired on Israel, American bases in the region, and Gulf Arab countries' energy infrastructure with drones and missiles. Iranian strikes on commercial ships in and around the Strait of Hormuz and even just the threat of those attacks have also effectively stopped shipping traffic in the vital waterway, through which a fifth of the world's oil is transported. That has dramatically increased the price of oil and put pressure on Washington to do something to ease the pain for consumers. Brent crude, the international standard, remained stubbornly over $100 a barrel on Monday. It was at $104 in early trading, up nearly 45 per cent since the US and Israel attacked Iran on February 28. It has spiked as high as about $120 during the conflict.

US President Donald Trump said he has demanded that about seven countries send warships to keep the Strait of Hormuz open, but his appeals have brought no commitments.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi called claims that his country may be seeking a negotiated end to the war "delusional," saying in a social media post early on Monday that Iran was seeking neither "truce nor talks." Iran hits Dubai airport, forcing temporary closure

As morning broke on Monday, a drone hit a fuel tank near Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest for international passenger traffic, causing a large fire.

Fire and plumes of smoke rising after s drone struck a fuel tank forcing the temporary suspension of flights near Dubai Airport in UAE AP

Public Notice / General Information

The general public is hereby informed that my client is lawfully purchasing the below-described land/property/agricultural land from 1. Mrs. Bhoti W/o Sh. Tikaram Resident of Village Uncha Gaon, Ballabgarh, Faridabad Haryana-121004, 2. Mrs. Priya W/o Sh. Manish Yadav, resident of Chirsi (171), Tigaon, Faridabad, Haryana-121101, 3. Mrs. Rachna Devi W/o Sh. Harveer Singh, resident of Fathehpur Jado, Chola, Bulandshahr, Chol R.S. Uttar Pradesh-203203, 4. Sabir Khan S/o Islam Khan, resident of H. No. 47, Ward No., Village Dhenkli, Dhenkli (137), PO: Nuh, District Mewat, Haryana-122107, 5. Sh. Ramu, Sh. Padam Singh, Sh. Veer Singh all Ss/o Sh. Makkhan Singh, resident of Village Nagalia, Nagalia (197), Mohna, Palwal, Haryana-121004 ("Seller").

Mrs. Bhoti & Mrs Priya are having share in the land as details hereunder in Khewat/Khatoni No. 77/90 & 77/91 Rect. No. 26, Killa No. 20, Rect. No. 16, Killa No. 4, Khewat/Khatoni No. 143/172, Rect. No. 26, Killa No. 3, 8/1, 8/2, 13, 17, 18, 19/1, 19/2, 22, 23, 24/1, 24/2, Rect. No. 31 Killa No.6/1, 16/1, Rect. No.32 Killa No. 1/2, 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 20, 21, Khewat/Khatoni No. 91/208 Rect. No. 17, Killa No. 24/3, 25/1, Rect. No.27, Killa No. 3/1, Khewat/Khatoni No. 59/66, Rect. No.27, Killa No. 4, 5/1, Khewat/Khatoni No. 47/55 Rect. No. 27 Killa No.3/2, Khewat/Khatoni No. 47/57, Rect. No.27, Killa No. 7, 9, 10/1/1, 15/1, Khewat/Khatoni No. 87/104, Rect. No. 14, Killa No. 21/2, 22, Khewat/Khatoni No. 88/605, Rect. No. 27, Killa No. 6/2, 15/2, Khewat/Khatoni No. 85/1/101/1, Rect. No.27 Killa No. 5/2, 6/1, Khewat/Khatoni No. 124/148, Rect. No. 22, Killa No. 1, 2/1, 3/1, Khewat/Khatoni No. 6/9, Rect. No. 27, Killa No.18, 23, 24, Khewat/Khatoni No. 8/11, Rect. No. 27, Killa No.1, 10/2, 11/1, 17/2 situated at Village Jaibabad Kherli, Tehsil & District Palwal, Haryana, as per Fard Jamabandi for the year 2020-2021.

Mrs. Rachna Devi having share in the land as details hereunder in Khewat/Khatoni No. 223/242, Rect. No. 28, Killa No. 7, 14/1, 14/2, Rect. No. 31, Killa No. 18/2, 19, 20/2, 21/1, 21/2, 22, 23, 24/1, Rect. No.44 Killa No.1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11/1,12/1, 13/1 situated at Village Nagalia, Tehsil & District Palwal, Haryana, as per Fard Jamabandi for the year 2021-2022.

Sabir Khan having share in the land as details hereunder in Khewat/Khatoni No. 106/159-160 , Rect. No. 37 Killa No.10/1, Rect. No. 38 Killa No. 4, Khewat/Khatoni No. 113/170, Rect. No. 22 Killa No.18/2, 22 Rect. No. 33 Killa No. 3/1/2, 13/2 Khewat/Khatoni No. 112/169, Rect. No. 33 Killa No.1/2, 2, situated at Village Jhuppa, Tehsil & District Palwal, Haryana, as per Fard Jamabandi for the year 2019-20.

Sh. Ramu, Sh. Padam Singh, Sh. Veer Singh are having share in the land as details hereunder in Khewat/Khatoni No. 213/231, Rect. No. 26, Killa No. 14/2, 15/2, 17/1 Khewat/Khatoni No. 55/59, Rect. No. 26, Killa No. 7, 14/1, 16, 17/2, 25 situated at Village Nagalia, Tehsil & District Palwal, Haryana, as per Fard Jamabandi for the year 2021-22, the above said person have agreed to sell their entire respect shares in the aforesaid Khewat(s)/Khantoni(s) to my Client (hereinafter collective share of all is referred as "Scheduled Property/Land").

The said purchase is being undertaken by my Client with due care, proper due diligence, by issuing this public notice, so as to ascertain and invite disclosure of any hidden claims, rights, or disputes, if any, relating to the said Scheduled Property/Land.

The Seller has declared that the said Scheduled Property/Land is completely free from all kinds of encumbrances including but not limited to charges, mortgages, loans, claims, disputes, litigations, attachments, stay orders, ceiling proceedings, acquisition, surplus land, government dues, or any third-party rights or claims whatsoever, and that the title of the Scheduled Property/Land is clear, clean, and marketable. The Seller has further represented and warranted that the Seller has clear, valid, absolute, and marketable right, title, interest and ownership and is in actual, vacant, peaceful physical and legal possession of the said Scheduled Property/Land and that no prior, existing, or subsisting agreement, transaction, understanding, or arrangement of any nature whatsoever, whether oral or written, in respect of the said Scheduled Property/Land has been entered into with any third party in respect thereof. It has also been declared that no case, proceeding, or dispute in respect of the said Scheduled Property/Land is pending before any court, tribunal, or any competent legal or quasi-legal authority/forum.

Therefore, any person, bank, financial institution, government department, or any other party, firm, company, or entity, who has or claims to have any valid, legal, or equitable right, title, interest, claim, demand, charge, or encumbrance of any nature whatsoever in respect of the said Scheduled Property/Land—whether by way of sale, gift, lease, tenancy, license, exchange, partition, mortgage, lien, inheritance, succession, agreement, litigation, decree, stay order, possession, or otherwise—shall intimate the undersigned in writing, along with full particulars of such claim/objection and supporting documentary evidence, within fifteen (15) days from the date of publication of this notice.

In case no information or objection is received within the stipulated period, it shall be conclusively and lawfully presumed that there exists no encumbrances including but not limited to third-party claim, right, or dispute etc. in respect of the said Scheduled Property/Land, and my client shall be free to proceed with and complete the proposed sale transaction with the Seller and shall be legally deemed to have clear, valid, absolute, and marketable right, title, interest and ownership therein along with actual, vacant, peaceful physical and legal possession thereon, entitling my Client to lawfully proceed with and complete the proposed sale transaction of the Scheduled Property/Land with the Seller. Thereafter, any such claim, objection, or dispute shall be treated as legally untenable, deemed to have been waived, and my client shall not be held liable for the same in any civil or criminal proceedings before any court, tribunal, or any competent legal or quasi-legal authority/forum.

The Scheduled Property/Land shall be deemed to include all rights, easements, pathways, appurtenances, standing crops, trees, plants, constructions, fences, boundary walls, etc. attached thereto.

The general public is hereby cautioned not to deal or enter into any transaction concerning the Schedule Property/Land with any person, party, or entity, failing which such transaction shall be at their own cost, risk and consequences.

This public notice is issued on behalf of my Client with complete bona-fide, transparency, and good faith.so as to safeguard my client against any future allegations of fraud, misrepresentation, or collusion or any other allegations whatsoever in relation to the Schedule property. This notice is being issued without prejudice to any of the legal rights, contentions and remedies available to my client under applicable law.

Durga Lal - Advocate, Law Consultant Office,
Office No. 57 Nehru Ground Near Main Post Office,
B.K. Chowk, NIT Faridabad, Haryana. ENROL. No. PH/5563/2022
Mobile No.7303834091, Email- lawconsultantsoffice@gmail.com

DISTRICT CONSUMER REDRESSAL COMMISSION, GIRIDIH
Case No. 39/2023
Arvind Kumar Pandey.....
Complainant
Versus
Digital Vyapar Seva and Other.....opposite Party
Notice

1. Digital Vyapar Seva, 496, Munsiram Market, Nangloi — Najafgarh Road, Near Krishna Temple, Opp. ICICI Bank, New Delhi — 110041
Email: care@digitalvyaparseva.com.
Mob:9821046070.
2. Vyapari Bazar.com: 220, 2" Floor, Jaina Towers, Janakpuri District Center, Janakpuri, Delhi - 110058. Email — info(avvaparibazar.com
Mob:9990910991

Whereas, the above named complainant, who is petitioner has instituted the above noted case against you under Sec. 36 of the Consumer Act. But in-spite of sending notice by speed post you have failed to appear before the commission to answer the claim of complainant.

You arc hereby directed to appear before the commission on 18.03.2026 **at 10:30 AM** personally to answer the claim of the petitioner failing of which the case will be heard ex-party and decided in your absence in accordance with law.

Given under my hand and seal of the commission on this day the **18th day of 2026** at Giridih .

District Consumer Redressal Commission,
Giridih (Jharkhand) pin-815301
Letter no.55, dated- 16.03.2026

India urges citizens not cross Iran border crossing without coordination

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Dubai

India on Monday asked its citizens currently in Iran not to approach or attempt to cross any land border for onward travel without prior and explicit coordination with the Indian Embassy in Tehran.

In an advisory, the Indian Embassy further said that Indian nationals who attempt to leave Iran via land borders without its knowledge and guidance are highly likely to encounter serious logistical and immigration difficulties.

"...All Indian nationals currently in Iran are strictly advised not to approach or attempt to cross any land border of Iran for onward travel without prior and explicit coordination with the Embassy of India," the advisory said. It said the embassy will not be in a position to provide assistance once individuals move outside Iranian territory without prior coordination. "The Embassy is in regular contact with members of the Indian community, and coordinated arrangements are being undertaken wherever necessary.

Uncoordinated movement toward land borders is strongly discouraged," it added. The mission urged the Indian nationals in Iran to strictly follow its advisories and remain in touch with official channels and before undertaking any travel. The embassy also posted helpline numbers that Indian nationals could reach out to in case of travel-related queries or emergencies - Telephone: +98 912 810 9115, +98 912 810 9102, +98 9128109109, +98 993 217 9359; E-mail: cons.tehrant@mea.gov.in.

The advisory comes in the wake of recent attacks by the US and Israel on Iran.

Starting February 28, the US and Israel launched a massive joint attack on Iran and with Tehran's retaliation, the conflict has extended to the entire Gulf region.

NORTHERN RAILWAY
Tender Notice
Invitation of Tender through E-tendering (e-Procurement Systems)

NIT No.	6S-Efile-343507Tender
Name of Work and its location	Tender for "Provision of operation of general power across Residential complex, RCNK/SNP including repair of existing electrical inventory and minor new installations as per scope of work."
Approx. Cost of Work	Rs. 57,51,513.74/- including GST (Rs. Fifty Seven Lakh Fifty One Thousand Five Hundred Thirteen and Seventy Four Paisa only).
Earnest Money	Rs 1,15,000.00/-
Completion Period of Work	24 months from date of LOA
Cost of Tender document on cash/by post	NIL
Date and Time for submission of tender and opening of tender	Upto 15:00 hrs. on 06.04.2026
Website particulars, notice board location, complete details of tender can be seen	Above tender available on IREPS site i.e. **www.ireps.gov.in**

Tender No.: 6S-Efile-343507Tender Dated: 14.03.2026 **883/2026**
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल
पर्यावास भवन, सेक्टर-19, नवा रायपुर अटल नगर, जिला- रायपुर (छ.ग.)

// सर्व संबंधित को सूचना //

भारत सरकार, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय द्वारा जारी ई.आई.ए. नोटिफिकेशन, 2006 (यथा - संशोधित) के तहत् सर्व संबंधित को सूचित किया जाता है कि मेसर्स संभव स्टील ट्यूब्स लिमिटेड (यूनिट - 3) ग्राम- सरोरा, तहसील - तिल्दा, जिला-रायपुर (छ.ग.) में प्रस्तावित Proposed Ferro Alloys (SAF -18 MVA x 4 Nos.) Capacity - SiMn - 1,37,000 TPA and/or FeMn Capacity- 1,70,000 TPA and/or FeSi - 74,000 TPA and/or Pig Iron – 2,73,000 TPA and FBC Based Captive Power Plant – 60 MW के पर्यावरणीय स्वीकृति बाबत् **लोक सुनवाई दिनांक 17/04/2026 को प्रातः 11:00 बजे से स्थान- ग्राम- सरोरा, प.ह.नं. 06, तहसील- तिल्दा - नेवरा, जिला- रायपुर (छ.ग.) के खसरा नंबर 1328/10 का रकबा 2.023 हे. शासकीय भूमि में नियत की गई है।** यह भी सूचित हो कि लोक सुनवाई के दौरान भारत सरकार, पर्यावरण वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय, नई दिल्ली के ऑफिस मेमोरेण्डम F.No.22-25/2020-IA.III दिनांक 14.09.2020 तथा कोरोना वाईरस के नियंत्रण एवं रोकथाम हेतु शासन द्वारा जारी समस्त दिशा-निर्देशों का अक्षरशः पालन कराया जाना अनिवार्य होगा।

ई.आई.ए. नोटिफिकेशन, 14 सितम्बर 2006 (यथा- संशोधित) के अनुसार संबंधित व्यक्तियों के अवलोकन / पठन हेतु ड्राफ्ट ई.आई.ए. रिपोर्ट, कार्यपालक सार हिन्दी एवं अंग्रेजी भाषा तथा सी.डी. (साफ्ट कॉपी) डायरेक्टर, भारत सरकार, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय, जोर बाग रोड, नई दिल्ली, वैज्ञानिक 'ई', भारत सरकार, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय, एकीकृत क्षेत्रीय कार्यालय, अरण्य भवन, नार्थ ब्लॉक, सेक्टर-19, नवा रायपुर अटल नगर, जिला - रायपुर (छ.ग.), कार्यालय कलेक्टर रायपुर, जिला-रायपुर (छ.ग.), मुख्य कार्यपालन अधिकारी, जिला पंचायत रायपुर, जिला - रायपुर (छ.ग.), मुख्य महाप्रबंधक, जिला व्यापार एवं उद्योग केन्द्र, जिला - रायपुर (छ.ग.), मुख्य कार्यपालन अधिकारी, जनपद पंचायत- तिल्दा, जिला - रायपुर (छ.ग.), कार्यालय सरपंच / सचिव, ग्राम पंचायत सरोरा, तहसील- तिल्दा, जिला - रायपुर, क्षेत्रीय कार्यालय, छत्तीसगढ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल, न्यू ऑफिस बिल्डिंग, रिंग रोड़ नं.- 2, टाटीबंध, रायपुर, जिला - रायपुर (छ.ग.) एवं मुख्यालय, छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल, पर्यावास भवन, सेक्टर-19, नवा रायपुर अटल नगर, रायपुर, जिला - रायपुर (छ.ग.) में रखी गई है।

सदस्य सचिव
छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल,
नवा रायपुर, अटल नगर, रायपुर (छ.ग.)

Iranians cross into Iraq for cheaper food, work after border reopens

SAMYA KULLAB
■ Haji Omeran (Iraq)

Dozens of Iranians crossed into northern Iraq on Sunday - the first day the border had opened since war struck their country - to buy cheaper groceries, access the internet, contact relatives and find work.

Travellers said constant airstrikes and soaring food prices have made life in Iran increasingly desperate.

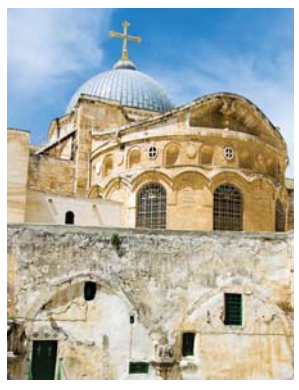
Trucks laden with goods snaked through the Haji Omeran crossing from Iraq's Kurdish region, offering a hoped for respite from high costs on the Iranian side. Even before the US and Israel launched their war against Iran, Iranian Kurds routinely crossed into Iraqi Kurdistan, sharing deep familial, cultural and economic ties and porous borders that enable steady trade and regular visits.

Now Iraq's Kurdish region has become a crucial lifeline for Iranians in the war-torn region to reach the outside world. "When this border was closed, it affected everyone. Poor people, rich people, workers," said Khider Chomani, a truck driver on his way to Iran carrying goods.

The border was closed in response to heightened regional military tensions. Iraqi Kurdish authorities have been waiting for their Iranian counterparts to reopen the crossing.

Almost all Iranian Kurds interviewed by The Associated Press asked to remain anonymous, saying they feared for their safety and reprisals from Iranian intelligence, which they allege monitors anyone who speaks to the media. (*AP*)

Shrapnel from Iranian missile barrage falls near Church of Holy Sepulchre



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Jerusalem

Shrapnel from an interception fell on the rooftop of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem, according to the Patriarchate.

That's just metres from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built on the spot where Christian tradition holds that Jesus was crucified, buried and resurrected.

There were no immediate reports of injuries from the impact. Jerusalem's Old City, where there are holy sites sacred to Muslims, Christians, and Jews, has come under uncommon fire this war. In past missile exchanges with Iran - including the 12-day-war - the city had been spared the damage seen in nearby cities like Tel Aviv or Beersheba. But since the start of the most recent war, shrapnel has struck multiple sites close to the Old City, including homes in east Jerusalem, a main highway into Jerusalem and a concert venue in West Jerusalem.

PM Netanyahu posts fresh video amid death rumours

HARINDER MISHRA
■ Jerusalem

A day after releasing a video debunking conspiracy theories of his death, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday came up with yet another video 'showing he is alive'. In the 90-second video shared on his personal X account, Netanyahu is seen interacting with people in the Jerusalem Hills.

"Sticking to the guidelines and winning together," he captioned the video.

In the clip, Netanyahu is seen posing for photographs with two girls, both named Shir, asking a woman walking her dog about its breed, and admiring the view of Jerusalem. "How beautiful is Jerusalem. Nothing like Jerusalem," he is heard saying in the video. Netanyahu also stressed the need for people to step out for fresh air while remaining close to shelters amid the ongoing security situation. "Where is the shelter here?" he asked people, who responded, "Nearby." "That is very important," the Prime Minister emphasised. On Sunday, Netanyahu posted a video on X in which he was seen ordering coffee at a cafe while dismissing speculation on social media claiming he had been killed. In Monday's video, the Prime Minister is seen near the same coffee shop featured in the earlier clip and is wearing the same outfit. (*PTI*)

Referendum: Kazakhstan approves new constitution

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Astana

A new constitution that strengthens President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's grip on power in Kazakhstan, Central Asia's largest country, has won overwhelming approval in a referendum, according to preliminary results released on Monday.

The country's Central Election Commission announced that over 87 per cent of respondents in Sunday's vote supported the constitutional changes that merge the Kazakhstani parliament's two chambers into one and give the president the right to appoint key Government officials with parliament's approval, including the restoration of the post of vice president.

The turnout exceeded 73 per cent. The constitutional changes also envisage the creation of a new body, the People's Council, alongside parliament, empowered to initiate legislation and referendums. Its members will be appointed entirely by the president.

The second constitutional change in four years was initiated by Tokayev, and some observers say it could pave the way for him to retain power after his term expires.

The 72-year-old Tokayev, a former Soviet official and Kazakhstani diplomat who previously served at the UN, is currently limited to one seven-year term until 2029.

Analysts believe Tokayev could use the referendum to reset presidential term limits.

Leaders of several former Soviet republics, including Russia, Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, have previously used new or amended constitutions to revise statutory term limits.

The new constitution also stipulates that marriage will no longer be a union of two people, but rather a union of a man and a woman.

Analysts say this provision was introduced in the new constitution as a follow-up to a law banning what authorities view as "propaganda" of LGBTQ+ relations.

Tokayev, who has maintained a delicate balance between Moscow and the West since the imposition of sanctions against Russia over its war in Ukraine, explains the constitutional changes as a response to the need to make quick decisions in a rapidly changing world.

"This step is of exceptional importance, especially in the current period when the geopolitical situation is unstable and challenges and threats to national security are becoming increasingly tangible," Tokayev said last week.

The opposition in Kazakhstan is not represented in Government structures and, in the month since the referendum was announced, has been unable to significantly influence public sentiment.

The vote took place at a difficult time for Kazakhstan, where inflation reached 11.7 per cent in February and tax increases have fuelled public discontent. Analysts say economic problems could trigger a new wave of protests akin to nationwide unrest in 2022, triggered by hikes in fuel prices, in which dozens of protesters and police were killed — something Tokayev is trying to contain by consolidating power in his own hands.

Thailand's 'Death Fest' invites visitors to embrace mortality

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Nonthaburi (Thailand)

Thailand's "Death Fest" invites people to confront mortality while also offering practical services and spiritual advice for the inevitable.

The unusual fair, now in its second year, has broached the subject that's uncomfortable for many. It's also one of the central teachings of Buddhism, which shapes much of Thailand's culture, about life's unavoidable sufferings: birth, old age, sickness and death.

Sangduan Ngamvinijaroon attended the three-day event on Friday with her mother in Nonthaburi province near Bangkok. She said death used to be a difficult subject for her family, but having spent more than 20 years caring for ill family members, including her husband with a stroke and relatives with cancer, she has witnessed several deaths firsthand and now feels more at ease talking about it.

She said she liked the fair because "it's not just about dying well. It's also about the present moment and taking good care of our lives while we're still here." The event brought together experts and organisations involved in health care, financial planning, palliative care, funeral services and memorial innovations. Activities and talks focused not only on preparing for death but also on maintaining quality of life until the final days. "Death involves everybody. It's not just about you," said Zcongklod Bangyikhan, editor-in-chief of The Cloud magazine and one of the event's lead organisers.

Trump seeks help from China to secure Strait of Hormuz

SEUNG MIN KIM/WILL WEISSERT/BILL BARROW
Washington

US President Donald Trump relied on his gut and largely side-stepped diplomatic coordination as he made the decision to launch strikes on Iran with Israel.

But now with the war's economic and geopolitical consequences unfurling rapidly, he's cajoling allies and other global powers to help mop up the mess.

Trump says he's asked roughly a half-dozen other countries to send warships to reopen the vital Strait of Hormuz, a consequential waterway through which one-fifth of the world's traded oil flows.

So far, none has committed.

Trump even indicated he would use his long-planned trip to China to pressure Beijing to help with a new coalition meant to get oil tanker traffic moving through the strait - a notion that his treasury secretary later downplayed.

"We strongly encourage other nations whose economies depend on the strait far more than ours ... we want them to come and help us with the strait," Trump said at the White House on Monday, listing Japan, China, South Korea and several countries in Europe as examples.

Trump has argued that the shipping channel is not something the United States needs because of its own access to oil.

It's the type of bullying to action that has secured key foreign policy wins for the Republican president in his second term, like prompting nearly all NATO countries to up their defense spending last year after he spent years accusing allies of freeloading off American largess, and using tariffs to extract investments and concessions from trade partners.

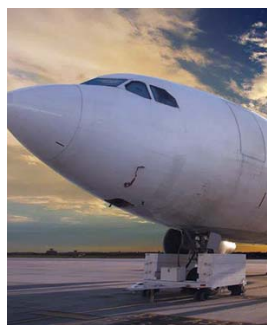
But with oil prices soaring and the Middle East rattled by violence, there's little inclination from other countries to heed Trump's call.

China is noncommittal. France is a maybe on escorting ships, when "circumstances permit". Britain is unlikely to dispatch a warship.

In Trump's view, this lack of appetite for helping to secure the strait confirms his suspicions about the benefits of working with other countries, because "if we ever needed help, they won't be there for us".

"I've always felt that was a weakness of NATO," Trump said Monday. "We were going to protect them, but I always said when in need, they won't protect us."

Top airlines CEO demand US to restore funding



ASSOCIATED PRESS
New York

The CEOs of the nation's top airline companies, including American, Delta, Southwest and JetBlue, are imploring Congress to restore funding to the Department of Homeland Security and embrace a bipartisan solution to pay federal aviation workers including airport security officers during the partial Government shutdown.

"Once again, air travel is the political football amid another Government shutdown," the executives wrote in an open letter to Congress that was published Sunday online and in The Washington Post.

The letter, which was also signed by the CEOs of the cargo companies UPS, FedEx and Atlas Air, said that Congress should pass the Aviation Funding Solvency Act and the Aviation Funding Stability Act, which would guarantee air traffic controllers are paid regardless of the Government's funding status, as well as the Keep America Flying Act.

Veeraswamy restaurant marks 100 years amid closure threat

ADITI KHANNA
London

Veeraswamy, one of the world's oldest Indian restaurants, on Monday marks 100 years since it first opened its doors at Victory House on London's Regent Street in March 1926, even as its battle to hold on to the iconic location in the city continues.

The Michelin-starred diner, with a rich history of guests including Mahatma Gandhi and Charlie Chaplin, is celebrating the centenary with a celebratory re-creation of some of the dishes on the menu a century ago – served by staff in the classic uniform of the time. However, the "Save Veeraswamy" campaign seeking the restaurant's lease renewal at Victory House from its landlord, the Crown Estate, casts a long shadow over the celebrations. "In an increasingly fractious and divided world, Veeraswamy survives as a beacon of civilisation, a place where people from all countries and all walks of life can meet and dine together in a spirit of mutual understanding and enjoyment, just as its founder envisaged a century ago," they said.

Two dead in Japan boat accident in Okinawa

MARI YAMAGUCHI
Tokyo

Two boats carrying 21 people capsised on Monday off Henoko, a controversial relocation site for a US military base off Japan's southern island of Okinawa, throwing all into the water and leaving two of them dead, officials said. The Japan Coast Guard said 18 of them were students from a Kyoto high school on two boats, 10 on Heiwa Maru and eight on the smaller Fukutsu, to observe the Henoko area as part of their peace education programme.

Coast guard rescuers pulled all 21 people out of the water, but a 17-year-old female student and the captain of Fukutsu were later pronounced dead, officials said. Two people were injured but their conditions are not life threatening.

Coast guard officials said the cause of the accident is under investigation.

The boats were about a kilometre east of Henoko when they capsized. A wave advisory was in place during the accident, but the water was not very rough and there was no sign the boats collided, officials said.

Persistent protests and lawsuits between Okinawa and Tokyo have held up the relocation plan of the US Marine Corps Air Station Futenma from a crowded neighbourhood on the island for nearly 30 years.

Henoko is a popular destination for activists opposing the relocation, but the students were not protesting, officials said.

Okinawa is home to about half of the 50,000 American troops stationed in Japan under the bilateral security pact.Many Okinawans complain about risks of accident, noise and crime associated with US bases. (*AP*)

Israeli strikes killed 12 in Gaza, including 2 children: Authorities

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Cairo

At least 12 Palestinians, including two boys, a pregnant woman and eight police officers, were killed Sunday by Israeli airstrikes in the war-torn Gaza Strip, hospital authorities said.

A strike Sunday morning hit a house in the urban refugee camp of Nuseirat in central Gaza and killed four people, including a couple in their 30s and their 10-year-old son, according to the nearby Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital. The woman had been pregnant with twins, the hospital said. The fourth fatality, a 15-year-old neighbour, was taken to the Awda hospital in Nuseirat.

"We were sleeping and got up to the strike of a missile. The strike was strong," said Mahmoud al-Muhtaseb, a neighbour. "There was no prior warning." Another strike Sunday afternoon hit a police vehicle on the south-north Salah al-Din route at the entrance of the central town of Zawaida, the Hamas-run Interior Ministry said.

Myanmar Parliament meets with military dominance

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Naypyitaw

Myanmar opened its first parliamentary session in more than five years on Monday following an election that did not include major opposition parties, ensuring that the ruling military is set to retain a firm grasp on power.

The military blocked Myanmar's last parliament from convening when it seized power from the last legitimately elected Government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021, and has governed without a legislature since then. It's touted elections held in late December and January as a step toward the return of democracy. But the military and its allies hold nearly 90 per cent of the seats in two-chamber parliament, while Myanmar's former ruling National League for Democracy and other major opposition parties were either blocked from running or refused to compete under conditions they deemed unfair. Delegates wearing traditional attire arrived in the capital, Naypyitaw, on Monday for the opening session of the 373-seat lower house, which convened in the tightly guarded parliamentary complex, newly renovated after being badly damaged by last year's earthquake.

Security forces sealed roads leading to the parliament, and vehicles were searched for explosives before entering. The 213-seat upper house is scheduled to open Wednesday, with 14 regional parliaments set to convene two days after that.

A quarter of the 586 seats in the upper and lower houses — 166 seats — were reserved for the military by the military-written constitution, and the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party won 339.

Twenty-one other parties won between one and 20 seats each. The parliament session comes after phased elections were held in December and January in 263 of the country's 330 townships. Critics described the vote organized by the military Government as an effort to legitimize its rule. The 2021 coup triggered widespread opposition that dragged Myanmar into a civil war.

Tom Andrews, a special rapporteur working with the U.N. human rights office, has urged the international community to reject the election results and any power arrangements that follow. The new Parliament's first task will be to elect a speaker for each house, then elect a president and two vice presidents.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who currently heads the current military Government, is widely expected to assume the presidency.

Chinese university launches Punjabi language course

KJM VARMA
Beijing

China's Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) has added the Punjabi language to its list of foreign and Indian languages.

BFSU has appointed Prof Zameerpal Kaur Sandhu Bajwa, former dean and professor, School of Language, Literature and Culture, Central University of Punjab, Bathinda, to teach the Punjabi language.

Kaur told that besides teaching the language, she will conduct classes in Punjabi history and culture and train Chinese teachers to teach the Punjabi language. BFSU offers teaching programmes for 101 languages, including Hindi, Tamil and Urdu.

In addition, it added Punjabi to its list of languages, making it a 102-language course.

The foreign languages are mostly taught to Chinese students as well as diplomats and officials to specialise in foreign languages. (*PTI*)

Gulf investors seen likely to keep funding Africa renewable energy

ALLAN OLINGO
Nairobi

Middle Eastern sovereign wealth funds and -backed companies are unlikely to scale back renewable energy investments in Africa despite disruptions from the Iran war, analysts say, given the strong long-term economic and strategic reasons driving such funding.

Investors made wealthy by the Gulf region's abundant oil and gas increasingly are turning to Africa's clean energy sector, attracted by rising electricity demand, rapid urbanisation and the continent's growing role in global supply chains tied to critical minerals and manufacturing. A report released last month by the Clean Air Task Force found that more than $101.9 billion had flowed into Africa's renewable energy sector from Gulf countries by end of 2024, led by the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain.

Much of the investment has been concentrated in North Africa, Southern Africa and parts of East Africa, while West Africa has attracted relatively limited funding.

"Africa remains one of the few regions where demand growth is unequivocal," said Matthew Tilleard, chief executive of CrossBoundary Energy, a Nairobi-based firm that develops and operates renewable energy projects.

"Short-term shocks may delay individual transactions, but the biggest infrastructure opportunities require a long-term view of risk and value."

Africa faces one of the world's largest electricity gaps. About 600 million people across the continent still lack access to power and many more face unreliable supplies. Governments have increasingly turned to private investors to help finance solar, wind and hybrid power projects to expand generation capacity without overstretching public finances.

That gap has created opportunities for Gulf investors looking to diversify beyond oil and gas.

"Ultimately, Gulf investments in Africa tend to be driven by pragmatic national interests and strategic returns," said Louw Nelson, a political analyst at Oxford Economics.

"There is currently a significant amount of energy investment underway across Africa, which are long-term projects that have been years in the making, so we don't anticipate major disruptions." (*AP*)

Cuban activist Yoani under house arrest

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Havana

Cuban activist Yoani Sanchez said that an alleged policeman dressed in civilian clothes is stopping her from leaving her home in Havana.

The accusation comes in the wake of protest in the city of Moron, where a group partially destroyed the local headquarters of the ruling communist party as the island struggles with energy blackouts and food shortages.

Sanchez confronted the man in a video published a video on Facebook and argued he was violating her rights. She also said two women who do not live in her building were roaming around since the officer arrived.

Cuban activist Yoani Sanchez

PROSPECT

VIPS-TC hosts symposium for Viksit Bharat 2047

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies – Technical Campus (VIPS-TC), affiliated with Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, hosted a symposium under the 'Viksit Bharat Yuva Connect' programme on 12 March.

The event, held at the institute's Pitampura campus, sought to align the student body with the Government of India's ambitious vision for a developed nation by 2047.

The 'Viksit Bharat Yuva Connect' is a flagship initiative launched by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, designed to galvanise the youth towards national development.

Beyond promoting the vision for 2047, the symposium also marked the 150th anniversary of the national song, Vande Mataram.

Addressing the gathering, Youth Icon Mahendra Singh emphasised the pivotal role young citizens must play in the nation-building process.

He urged the students to focus on innovation, cultivate responsible citizenship, and engage actively in the country's social and economic growth.

A highlight of the proceedings was the 'Yuva Samvad' session, an interactive forum that allowed students to voice their perspectives. The session saw vibrant discussions on the country's future trajectory, providing a platform for young minds to engage directly with the roadmap for a developed India.

Banks write off loans worth ₹9.75 lakh cr

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Banks have written off loans worth ₹9.75 lakh crore in the last 11 financial years, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said on Monday. The write off peaked in FY20 at ₹1.59 lakh crore, and since then it has been declining to Rs 47,568 crore in FY25.

Banks have written off ₹31,723 crore in FY15, ₹40,416 crore in FY16, ₹68,308 crore in FY 17, and ₹99,132 crore in FY18, he said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha. In 2018-19, he said, the write off of loans crossed ₹1 lakh crore to ₹1.59 lakh crore.

"Banks write off NPAs, including those in respect of which full provisioning has been made on completion of four years, as per RBI guidelines and policy approved by banks' boards. Such a write-off does not result in waiver of liabilities of borrowers, and therefore, it does not benefit the borrower," he said. The borrowers continue to be liable for repayment, and banks continue to pursue recovery actions initiated in these accounts, he added.

The recovery in written-off loans is an ongoing process, and banks continue pursuing their recovery actions initiated against borrowers under various recovery mechanisms available to them, he noted.

AAHAR 2026 concludes with record-breaking success

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The 40th edition of AAHAR, Asia's premier trade fair for the food and hospitality sectors, concluded on a high note at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, on March 14, 2026.

The five-day event, organised by the India Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO) in collaboration with the Ministry of Food Processing Industries and leading industry bodies, drew a record-breaking 1.25 lakh visitors, reaffirming its status as a cornerstone event for the global hospitality trade.

Marking a significant milestone, the event saw a substantial increase in exhibitor participation and space bookings compared to previous years. The fair served as a vital platform for brand promotion, business generation, and high-level buyer-seller networking sessions. The official mobile app proved to be a key tool for engagement, recording over 17,000 downloads and facilitating approximately 2,800 structured business meetings.

During the valedictory ceremony, Jawed Ashraf (IFS Retd.), Chairman of ITPO, presented the 'Awards for Excellence in Display' to outstanding participants across various categories.

Reflecting on the fair's expansion, Chairman Ashraf highlighted that Italy served as the partner country for the 2026 edition and expressed optimism that future iterations would attract even more international partnerships. He noted that the next edition of AAHAR is scheduled to be held from March 2 to 6, 2027, at Bharat Mandapam, which will benefit from the second phase of the venue's ongoing redevelopment.

The ceremony was also graced by HH

Kenneth Félix Haczynski da Nóbrega, Ambassador of Brazil to New Delhi, along with senior officials, industry leaders, and diplomatic representatives.

Among the major awardees, Italy was honoured with the Gold Medal as the Partner Country. In the 'Processed Food & Beverages (Domestic)' category, Jivo Wellness Pvt Ltd secured the Gold, while the 'Dairy/Bakery/Confectionery' Gold was awarded to Nestlé India Limited.

The Ministry of Food Processing Industries, Government of India, received the Gold Medal in the 'Spices/Agri Products' category, and the Government of Meghalaya (Meghalayan Age Limited) took top honours in the 'Central Ministries/State Governments' category.

This milestone edition was organised by the India Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO) in strategic collaboration with the Ministry of Food Processing Industries, Government of India, and supported by a robust network of industry partners. Key associations contributing to the fair's success included APEDA, AIFPA, ARCHII, FAIC, FHSAI, FIFHI, FIFI, FIWA, HOTREMAI, ICMA, KREMAG, PBFIA, and CIFT.

Academic Research Readiness to Market Ready Product - A boost for Make in India Readiness Level

DR T SENTHIL SIVA SUBRAMANIAN

India's Research Readiness to Market

India's 21st century especially the present decade is marked as historicachievement in transforming laboratory innovations, translational-Responsible Research to market ready customized products. The milestones achieved in the past decade have created steppingstones for our nation to climb the ladder from service-based industry to technological market ready products. The ideology and icon behind this success is our unique educational policy, strong research, credit and skilling framework, digital public infrastructure, investments and funding from Government of India like Nidhi Prayas, SIDBI, Public Private Partnership [PPP] like Texas Instruments, technological tools and techniques like Cadence, Synopsis, Xilinx in semiconductor, ParamRudra super computers [low cost CPU core per Unit, GPU card per unit], large data base especially the genome in biotechnology are prominent examples created by Government of India in collaboration with academia, industry and startups.India's homegrown recent breakthrough design of 2nm Chips which shows the strength of local to global design, talent, and research ecosystems of our nation.

Indian institutions, industries, and training parters like C-DAC, NIELIT are equipping students to reskill and upskill their knowledge and create brainchild products which is need of the hour for our national economic growth. The Government of India initiatives like Production Linked Initiative and Design Linked Initiative acts as a catalyst to be blueprint for design and production of products in India that cater locally and globally.

India has successful and notable examples, case studies of transforming academic research to startups leading to manufacturing of swadeshi products in our homeland enabling to achieve the vision of **Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi: Innovate, Patent, Produce and Prosper Research innovation systems: A Snapshot** Indian institutions are successfully adapting the best practices of National Educational Policy 2020, National Credit Frameworks (NCrF) and National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) to train the students on cutting edge technologies such as Unmanned Aeriel Vehicle, Block Chain (Smart contract) and Artificial Intelligence for precession farming, 3D additive manufacturing for leather, designing chips forautomotive and healthcare applications.

Additionally, the educational and research practices are pushing our nation's industrialisation and globalisation through the research and innovations funds and schemes such Anusandhan National Research Foundation, initiative of Department of Science & Technology, Government of India, BIRAC (Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council), Visvesvaraya PhD Scheme for Electronics & IT' which promotes research and development in Electronic Design and Manufacturing [ESDM], Prime Minister's fellowships for Doctoral Research, Academy of Scientific and Innovative Research (AcSIR),has given unique identity for the students and faculty members to carrying out research in various real-time projects and translating into product developments from the laboratory thereby facilitating the concept of Lab to Market.

The present spectrum of research ecosystems paves the way for academic institutions to function as pivoting tools to develop 'swadeshi' and 'vocal for local' products for our nation leading to build a product nation.

Research into Product Readiness Level (PRL): Lab to Market

Indian institutions are working on emerging real-time problem statements especially through doctoral researchthereby making a change in thinking from turning their laboratory research- Research Readiness Level[RRL] to develop market ready products. The academic institutions are adapting the best practices of investing research funds through Investment Readiness Levels [IVL] leading to achieve distinct levels of matrices such as Technology Readiness Level [TRL], Manufacturing Readiness Level [MRL], Market Readiness Leve [MRL] and finally end-to-end Product Readiness Level [PRL] meeting the Customer Readiness Level [CRL].

Additionally, many institutions are creating startup ecosystems in their workspace for the undergraduate, postgraduate, doctoral, and post-doctoral research students enabling students to create an opportunity for their research and product ideas converted toStartup Readiness Level [SRL] and Industry Readiness Level [IRL].

Case Studies-SRL-IRL: Impactful Research Initiative to Market Ready Products

1. Nanosafe Solutions, head quartered at New Delhiis an outcome of Doctoral Research (PhD), founded by Dr. Anasuya Roy and Prof. Mangala Joshi. This startup is the first IIT Delhi-incubated startup in the healthcare applications thatstood unique in developing customized antimicrobial and anti-viral-healing products, such as self-reliant active advanced copper technology and self-sanitizing masks. This translational researchboosts the Make in India, Vocal for Local and National Manufacturing vision of our nation.

2. Prenishq Private Limited a flagship Indian deep-tech startup, incubated at IIT Delhi, which function as a spin-off from the Cold Atom Quantum Technologies (CAQT). It is a prominentcase study of transforming academic research into commercial technology under the initiative of the National Quantum Mission (NQM).

3. ePlane anincubated startup founded by faculty of IIT Madras Prof. Satya Chakravarthy stands unique in offering India's first Air Ambulance and App based Services, is a prominent example of creating a paradigm shift of academic research to profitable swadeshi technologies in India.

4. Another best exampleis the Chip to Startup (C2S) supported by MeitYand the flagship initiative of All India Council for Technical Education [AICTE]-Idea Labscreates unique opportunities for the students to develop solutions for real-time problems such as intelligent traffic management and pacemakers for healthcare applications.

5. Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) supported [DIA-CoE] — DRDO Industry Academia Centres of excellence established across PAN India is paving the way for student and faculty members to develop products such Armour grade ceramic materials for body armour applications, intelligent smart soldiers using advanced plasmonic chips for defence applications.

6. The Boeing Inc., USA supported Intelligent condition monitoring of Air compressors and motors developed by Indian Institute of Technology, IIT Kanpur is a classical example of Global innovations and partnership of industries with India in developing customised solutions for aerospace industries.

Indian research framework is also steadily focusing their responsible research values to meet the primary objectives of Quality Readiness Level [QRL].

The academic institutions are slowly, steadily, and rapidly adopting the policy framework of University Grants Commission [UGC] and All India Council for Technical Education [AICTE] promoted research-based internships in institutions, startup, MSMEs and large enterprises which facilitate the students to work on market ready solutions.

Also enhancing the publication and citation index and various elements of intellectual property rights [IPR] such as Indian Copy rights, design registration, trademarks, and utility patents as well.

The global industry giants like Samsung and India's NASSCOM, INUP [I2P] are also creating in-house Cohort training programs for students to enhance their experiential firsthand learning, knowledge, and innovation base.

In addition to this, the research at the institutions is moving towards technology transfer and commercialisation to MSMEs and Startups as well.

This could be possible through National Research and Development Organisation [NRDC], innovation Technology Transfer Office [i-TTO] supported by BIRAC, technology licensing organisation like Foundation for Technology Transfer (FITT), IIT Delhi and other organisation established across PAN India. These initiatives directly or indirectly give a great push for the Global Innovation Index ranking and Ease of Doing business as well.

Way forward for Next Generation India: AI Readiness Level [AIL]

India's present decade sees an era of Artificial Intelligence diffusion across each corner of our nation especially the recent application Sarla bin facilitating the dairy farmer, especially the Women. India has successfully organised the pioneering India Global AI Impact summit which attracted global industry giants, startups, and academia to stand on one platform.

The outcomes of Global AI Impact summitwill confidently enhance the research and product development at the laboratory in India to Artificial Intelligence Readiness Level [AIL] leading to achieve the Next Generation India.

Head Institute Industry Interface Program Hindustan College of Science and Technology, Mathura

कार्यालय नगर निगम, देहरादून

(ई–निविदा सूचना)

नगर निगम देहरादून क्षेत्रान्तर्गत राजीव गाँधी कॉम्पलैक्स में सौन्दर्यकरण का कार्य किये जाने हेतु निम्नानुसार ई–निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है तथा निविदा से सम्बन्धित समस्त विवरण ई–निविदा पोर्टल www.uktenders.gov.in से प्राप्त किये जा सकते हैं।

कार्य का विवरण	आगणन धनराशि	निविदा शुल्क (18% जी०एस०टी० सहित)	धरोहर राशि निक्षेप (EMD @ 2% of Estimated Cost)	निविदा डाले जाने की प्रारम्भिक एवं अंतिम तिथि	निविदा खोलने की तिथि एवं समय
1. नगर निगम, देहरादून क्षेत्रान्तर्गत राजीव गाँधी कॉम्पलैक्स में सौन्दर्यीकरण का कार्य।	44,58,000/-	3540/– (तीन हजार पाँच सौ चालीस रूपये)	89,160/– (नवासी हजार एक सौ साठ रूपये)	18.03.2026 से 01.04.2026 अपराह्न 5:00 बजे तक।	02.04.2026 को पूर्वान्ह 11:00 बजे।

पत्रांक:1415/सा0नि0अनु0/न0नि0/दे0दून/2025–26 दिनांक 16.03.2026 नगर आयुक्त, नगर निगम, देहरादून

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THE PUNJAB STATE COOPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION LTD.
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Notice Inviting Tender

www.verka.coop

e tender are hereby Invited for the purchase and supply of following items:-

Sr. No.	Name of Work/Item	Period/Tentative Qty
1.	For Verka Chandigarh Dairy Providing Manpower as per requirement of Milk Plant, Chandigarh/ Milkfed Head Office, Sec-34, Chandigarh.	-
2.	For Verka Bathinda Dairy a) Hiring of:- i. Mahindra pickup/ Maxi pickup/ Tata Ace etc. to lift the milk from various societies/farms to Milk chilling centre, Bhikhi, Sardulgarh and Talwandi Sabo. ii. Insulated road milk tanker for lifting milk from BMC's:- Capacity 10 ton. iii. Diesel cars (Swift Dzires or Equivalent). b) Sales of:- i. Various types of unserviceable scrap materials on one-time, half yearly, annual basis. ii. Un-serviceable material and allied scrap.	 Annual /06 No's 05 No's 02 No's 01 No's Complete job One complete job
3.	For Verka Ludhiana Dairy Pest control service at Verka Ludhiana Dairy including DIET project GADVASU, Milk chilling centres and Godowns.	Annual
4.	For Verka Amritsar Dairy High cap. Dairy barn ventilation fan with motor. i. Single Phase ii. Three Phase (Triple)	 125 No's 125 No's
5.	For Verka Mega Dairy, Bassi Pathana Hiring of passenger vehicle Bolero/Swift Dzire/ Etios(platinum) or equivalent (AC)- 1 No.along with driver.	01 No.

NOTE:
1. For complete details regarding above tender (NIT), please visit our website i.e. www.verka.coop & e Tendering portal i.e. **eproc.punjab.gov.in.**
2. Corrigendum, if any, will be uploaded on website only.

1018/12/2025-26/9506 General Manager (Purchase)

CIABC criticises Uttarakhand excise policy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Dehradun

The Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC) has levelled serious allegations against the Uttarakhand Government, claiming that its current excise policy is discriminatory towards Indian liquor manufacturers while blatantly favouring imported brands.

In a press statement issued on Wednesday, the CIABC asserted that the State's decision to limit premium retail outlets in malls and departmental stores exclusively to imported liquor undermines the Prime Minister's 'Make in India' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiatives. The industry body argued that such a policy grants a virtual monopoly to importers, effectively denying con-

sumers access to high-quality, world-class Indian alcoholic beverages.

CIABC Director General Anant S Iyer stated that the organisation has submitted multiple representations to the State Government, urging for a more inclusive policy. "Denying popular and globally-awarded Indian wines and spirituous beverages access to mall and departmental stores simply because they are not produced in Uttarakhand is grossly unfair," Iyer said.

He further explained that logistics and raw material constraints — such as the fact that grapes for wine production are primarily sourced from Maharashtra and Karnataka — make it impossible for many renowned Indian brands to manufacture their products within Uttarakhand.

"Many brands produced in India are popular worldwide. Why should local residents and tourists be denied these Indian offerings? It goes against the ethos of encouraging Swadeshi goods," he added.Drawing a comparison to national security institutions, the CIABC noted that the Army and paramilitary forces have long discontinued the sale of imported liquor in Canteen Stores Departments to promote Indian-made spirits. The body maintained that Uttarakhand's mandate contradicts the national agenda of fostering self-reliance.

The CIABC has called upon the State Government to take proactive, non-parochial steps to support domestic producers.

"The domestic Indian alcoholic beverage industry urges the Government of Uttarakhand to support Indian-made products, including Indian-Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) and wines," the statement concluded.

Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
Engineering Department
Tender Notice
Tender Reference No.GNDU/ENGG/2026/02/07-09

The Engineering Department of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar invites online bids for:- (i) Construction of Hi-tech Polyhouse (556.80 Sqm) in department of Agriculture Department (ii) Construction of Boundary wall for International Boys Hostel and Mess (iii) Renovation and Repair various civil work (distemper, sanitary etc.) within GNDU College Baba Namdev Kishankot Gurdaspur.
Closing date & time: **24-03-2026 upto 04:00 pm** for one work and **01-04-2025 upto 04:00 pm for 2 works**
For details log onto **www.eproc.punjab.gov.in**
Note: Any Corrigendum/Addendum to the tender notice shall be published on the above website only.

2426/12/2025-26/9481 Dated CHD :- 16/03/2026

The BCCI felicitated five ICC trophy-winning Indian teams – spanning men's, women's, senior, and junior levels– at the BCCI Naman Awards 2026 in New Delhi on March 15

The Pioneer
NEW DELHI | TUESDAY | MARCH 17, 2026

BRIEFLY

Cesena hires Ashley Cole as its new coach

Italian second-tier club Cesena hired former England international Ashley Cole as its new coach on Sunday. Cole has signed a deal with the Serie B club until June 30 with an option to prolong under certain conditions, Cesena said. It is a first management role for the former Arsenal, Chelsea and England full-back, who has been developing as a coach since retiring from playing in 2019. Cole's positions have included working with Frank Lampard at Derby, Chelsea and Everton, with Wayne Rooney at Birmingham and with England and the Football Association. Cesena fired Michele Mignani on Saturday.

MI begin preparatory camp for IPL 2026

Five-time champions Mumbai Indians on Monday began training for the upcoming season of the Indian Premier League, which will start on March 28. Shardul Thakur, Mayank Markande, Allah Ghazanfar, Naman Dhir, Raja Angad Bawa, Robin Minz, Raghu Sharma, Mayank Rawat, Danish Malewar, Mohammad Izhar and Ashwani Kumar were the first group of players to arrive for training. The remainder of the squad, which includes the likes of Rohit Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah and skipper Hardik Pandya, is expected to join the camp in the coming days as preparations build in intensity ahead of the tournament. "There's always something special about the first day of pre-season. You see the players walk in, the energy builds, and the objective is to start strong. We've got the boys who know this franchise inside out, and we have got some exciting new faces coming in," MI head coach Mahela Jayawardene said. "Day one sets the tone for the entire campaign. We wanted everyone to feel the intent from the very first session, in how we train, how we prepare, and how we show up for each other. The first session is always exciting, but it's also the start of something serious and we know what we're building towards."

Sinner, Sabalenka win maiden Indian Wells titles

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Indian Wells (US)

Jannik Sinner beat Daniil Medvedev in the Indian Wells final 7-6 (6), 7-6 (4), winning seven straight points to rally from a 4-0 deficit in the second-set tiebreak and claim the title without dropping a single set.

The No 2-ranked Italian beat Medvedev for the ninth time in their last 10 matches to claim his first title at the California desert tournament. Medvedev handed top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz his first loss of the year in the semifinals of the BNP Paribas Open.

Sinner congratulated fellow Italian Kimi Antonelli, who won Formula One's Chinese Grand Prix earlier Sunday.

"It hasn't anything to do with tennis, but it has been a special day for Italy," Sinner said. "Because I'm a huge Formula One fan and having a very, very young Italian, Kimi, bringing Italy back home at the top, it's amazing. So, thanks, Kimi, thanks Formula One, and see you next year."

World No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka beat Elena Rybakina 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (6) in the women's final Sunday for her first Indian Wells title. Sabalenka, a runner-up in 2023 and '25, finished off the win with a big serve that Rybakina hit long.

It was a sweltering afternoon on the court as the temperatures soared into the 90s. The 27-year-old Sabalenka had a chance to close out the third set but was

broken at 5-4. Rybakina found herself with a championship point in the tiebreaker, only to have Sabalenka hit a backhand winner.

"I think the whole idea going into this match was to be mentally strong, to stay strong, no matter what, to show with the body language that I'm here, I'm fighting," Sabalenka said in a post-match interview on the Tennis Channel. "You have to get a win with incredible tennis and that was the whole idea going into this one. I'm happy that it really worked."

It's been quite a stretch for Sabalenka. First, a puppy and then an engagement ring from Brazilian businessman Georgios Frangulis.

Now, a title in the desert.

"I'll remember it for the rest of my life," she said.

This marked the 16th time the two players have met, with Sabalenka now holding a 9-7 advantage. Rybakina of Kazakhstan beat Sabalenka at the 2025 WTA Finals championship and the Australian Open two months ago. She also edged Sabalenka in the finals at Indian Wells in 2023.

"It was a very difficult match," Rybakina said after the match as she congratulated Sabalenka. There's not much time to celebrate for Sabalenka, who was set to leave Sunday night for the Miami Open, where she's the defending champion.

Laporta wins 5 more years as president of Barcelona after thousands vote in club election

JOSEPH WILSON Barcelona

Joan Laporta was reelected as the president of FC Barcelona for another five years after winning a leadership vote among members of the Spanish soccer powerhouse.

Shortly after midnight in Barcelona, the club announced Laporta had won.

His only rival, Victor Font, had earlier conceded defeat and congratulated Laporta "for his unquestionable victory."

With the counting now over, Barcelona said Laporta received 68% of the votes.

The club said that more than 48,000 of Barca's 114,000

club members cast ballots at Camp Nou Stadium or at four other voting stations across Catalonia in northeastern Spain and in Andorra.

"Thanks to this marvelous club, where its fans still vote to decide who will be their president and executive board," Laporta said in his victory speech inside an auditorium at Camp Nou, flanked by members of his incoming board.

Laporta successfully presided over Barca from 2003-10 during the glory years of coach Pep Guardiola and a young Lionel Messi.

He was voted back into his post in 2021 when the club was in a dire economic situation after the lavish spending on players by president Josep Bartomeu and the financial hit of the COVID-19 pandemic. Laporta responded to the crisis by deciding Barcelona could no longer afford Messi, who left for Paris Saint-Germain, and selling off some club assets, including 25 per cent of its Spanish league TV rights for the next 25 years. (*AP*)

Young rallies to win The Players Championship

DOUG FERGUSONAP
Ponte Verda Beach (US)

Cameron Young delivered the biggest birdie of his career on the most notorious hole on the TPC Sawgrass, a sand wedge to 10 feet to tie for the lead in The Players Championship. And then he was even better on a shot equally daunting.

Young finally won a big title to go with his major talent on an electric stage with pressure at every turn. He produced the goods on the final two holes — the birdie on the wind-blown island-green 17th, and a 375-yard drive down the 18th that set up a one-shot victory Sunday. "It's so loud on 17. You just know kind of all eyes are right there on you so there's nowhere to hide," Young said. "And I feel like I stepped up really well and hit a bunch of good shots those last couple holes, so I'm very proud of that."

Most impressive was the previous day on the 18th hole, his drive ended with a splash and a double bogey. There was no margin for error this time, tied for the lead with Matt Fitzpatrick. Young picked out his line and had one final thought: "I'm going to hit the best shot of my life right here."

He had never had a thought like that because he had never been in this position before. But he couldn't think of a better shot he ever hit. Moments later, Fitzpatrick failed to save par from the trees when he missed an 8-foot putt. Young tapped in for par and a 4-under 68. "The nerves kicked in over the 8-inch putt on the last," Young said. "That hole looked really, really small there from pretty close range."

It was only his second victory on the PGA Tour. He tied the tour record with seven runner-up finishes before finally winning late last summer in the Wyndham Championship. But this is the PGA Tour's crown jewel, loosely known as the fifth major, on a Stadium Course that taxes brains and more than not breaks hearts. (*PTI*)

Serie A: AC Milan trails city rival Inter in title race

ASSOCIATED PRESS Rome

AC Milan lost ground in the race for the Serie A title after a 1-0 defeat at Lazio on Sunday left it eight points behind leader Inter Milan. Gustav Isaksen's first-half goal proved enough for Lazio as Massimiliano Allegri's Milan wasted a chance to cut the gap on its city rival, which was held at home by Atalanta on Saturday. There are nine rounds of matches remaining.

Isaksen broke the deadlock in the 26th minute after connecting with a long ball, getting the better of defender Pervis Estupinan before sending the ball past Milan 'keeper Mike Maignan with a composed finish.

Milan defender Zachary Athekame's goal from a corner was ruled out in the 75th minute for a handball.

Como in the mixComo came from behind to move into fourth place and a Champions League spot with a 2-1 win

over 10-man Roma in the Italian league on Sunday.

Despite missing key players, Roma took an early lead from Donyell Malen's penalty after Stephan El Shaarawy was brought down. Both teams created chances after the interval and Como coach Cesc Fabregas' changes paid off as Tasos Douvikas beat the offside trap to equalize. A turning point came soon after when Roma's Wesley was shown a second yellow card for a challenge on Assane Diao. Como made the most of its numerical advantage and Diego Carlos sealed the win with his first Serie A goal in the 79th minute.

Goalkeeper crucial save gives Union Berlin win at Freiburg

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Freiburg (Germany)

Union Berlin's stand-in goalkeeper Matheo Raab made a last-minute diving save with his injured right hand on his top-division debut to ensure his team held on for a 1-0 win at Freiburg in the Bundesliga.

Union had already used all its substitutions when Raab injured his hand in a collision with Freiburg's Bruno Ogbus while diving to punch away a high ball in added time.

"In that moment I only felt pain," Raab told broadcaster DAZN. "We couldn't make any more changes and I wanted to somehow play out those last few minutes. There's nothing you can do but grit your teeth, somehow get the glove back on and get this thing done."

Raab used the same hand for an acrobatic diving save to keep out Niklas Beste's curling shot and ensure Union took the win. Jeong Woo-yeong had put the Berlin team in the lead with a low shot earlier in added time.

An injury to regular starter Frederik Ronnow meant Raab was playing in the Bundesliga for the first time since arriving at Union in July. He said he powered through with adrenaline. "I waited so long for this and didn't want it taken away."

Union rose two places to ninth, one place behind Freiburg.

Also Sunday, Deniz Undav scored for the fifth Bundesliga game in a row as a goalkeeping blunder handed Stuttgart a 1-0 win over Leipzig to strengthen its push to qualify for the Champions League.

Leipzig goalkeeper Maarten Vandevoordt was under no real pressure in the 56th minute when he passed the ball straight to Stuttgart's Chris Fuhrich, who played in Undav to score his 16th league goal of the season, more than any other player in the league except Bayern Munich's Harry Kane.

Stuttgart was fortunate to hold on in added time when Willi Orban was unmarked for a header which beat goalkeeper Alexander Nubel but bounced back off the post before being cleared.

Stuttgart tightened its hold on a Champions League qualifying spot in fourth, opening up a three-point gap to Leipzig in fifth. Stuttgart hasn't lost in five league games.

Barcelona routs Sevilla 5-2

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Barcelona

Raphinha scored a hat trick, including two goals from the penalty spot, as Barcelona reclaimed its four-point lead over Real Madrid at the top of the Spanish league.

Barcelona routed Sevilla 5-2 for its fourth straight league win and boosted its confidence ahead of the second leg of its Champions League last 16 match against Newcastle on Wednesday. Barcelona needed Lamine Yamal's penalty with the last kick of the game to rescue a 1-1 draw at Newcastle in the first leg.

Madrid beat Elche 4-1 on

Saturday to temporarily cut Barcelona's lead to one point.

After Portugal defender Joao Cancelo was fouled in the box, Raphinha put the Catalan side ahead in the ninth minute with a little dink of a shot known as a "Panenka," which fooled goalkeeper Odysseas Vlachodimos.

Gavaskar slams Indian T20 franchise owners for picking Pakistani player

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Indian cricket legend Sunil Gavaskar has sharply criticised the acquisition of a Pakistani player Abrar Ahmed by an Indian company saying the fees contribute to casualties of Indian soldiers and civilians.

This strong reaction came following SunRisers Leeds, whose parent company is Indian-owned (Kavya Maran), led to an outcry across the nation. Abrar Ahmed was picked at a cost of 190,000 GBP during the inaugural men's Hundred auction in London. The backlash was huge, with the SunRisers Leeds' social media account getting temporarily suspended. The

SunRisers owners also have SunRisers Hyderabad in the IPL and the SunRisers Eastern Cape in SA20.

Not mincing words, Gavaskar said in a column "The furore created by the acquisition of a Pakistani player by the Indian owner of a franchise in The Hundred is hardly surprising. Ever since the Mumbai attacks in November 2008, Indian franchise owners have simply ignored Pakistani players for the IPL.

Although belated, the realisation that the fees that they pay to a Pakistani player, who then pays income tax to his government which buys arms and weapons, indirectly contributes to the deaths of Indian soldiers and civilians is making Indian entities refrain from even considering having Pakistani artistes and sportspersons."

He also said "Whether it is an Indian entity or an overseas subsidiary of the entity that is making the payment, if the owner is Indian then he or she is contributing to the Indian casualties. It's as simple as that.

Finalissima in Qatar called off after widening of West Asia conflict

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Nyon (Switzerland)

UEFA said that the game between Argentina and Spain known as Finalissima that was supposed to be held in Qatar has been canceled after the widening West Asia conflict.

The game between South American champion Argentina and European champion Spain was scheduled to be held in Doha on March 27. It was going to be a marquee matchup between the teams led by Lionel Messi and Lamine Yamal before this summer's World Cup in North America.

But the security of the game was put into serious doubt when Iran intensified its attacks on neighboring countries in retaliation to the

aerial attacks by United States and Israel that are now in their third week.

"After much discussion between UEFA and the organizing authorities in Qatar, it is announced today that due to the current political situation in the region, the Finalissima between UEFA EURO 2024 winners Spain and CONMEBOL Copa America 2024 champions Argentina cannot be played as hoped in Qatar on 27 March," UEFA said in a statement.

Argentina and Spain were to play at Lusail Stadium, which staged the epic 2022 World Cup final. Argentina won a penalty shootout against France after Messi scored twice and Kylian Mbappe got a hat trick in a thrilling 3-3 draw.

Other venues had reportedly been considered as alternatives to Doha, including Spain's capital. UEFA, however, said all other feasible alternatives it explored "ultimately proved unacceptable to the Argentinian Football Association."

"The first option was to stage the match at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on the original date with a 50:50 split of supporters in the stadium," UEFA said. "This would have provided a world-class setting, befitting of such a prestigious event, but Argentina refused."

The option of staging the event over two legs — one in Madrid on March 27, the other in Buenos Aires before the Euros and Copa America in 2028 — was also rejected. Argentina had proposed to play the match later this year after the World Cup but Spain had no available dates.

South American soccer body Conmebol said in a statement on Sunday that Argentina's soccer federation (AFA) received an offer from UEFA to play the match in Italy on March 27, but the defending World Cup and Copa America champions countered that the game take place on March 31.

The Pioneer
NEW DELHI | TUESDAY | MARCH 17, 2026

Would love to play Test but T20 mein *haath set hai* : Suryakumar

VIJAY JOSHI ■ New Delhi

World Cup-winning skipper Suryakumar Yadav says he yearns to play Test cricket and finds ODI not his cup of tea, but ultimately his forte is T20 because "usmey apna haath set ho gaya hai."

In an exclusive podcast interview with PTI, Suryakumar occasionally slipped into charming Mumbaiya Hindi, such as the "*haath set ho gaya hai*" phrase which has no decent English equivalent. Roughly translated, he meant to say he is now a master of the shortest format of cricket and is comfortable playing that.

Relaxed throughout the hour-long conversation, clearly on cloud nine after leading India to a hugely successful World Cup campaign, Suryakumar opened up about his disappointment at not playing Test cricket.

He was reminded that he played one Test against Australia. "One inning!" he corrected the interviewer with his typically unabashed smile.

"...what is written in your life, you get that only. I started with red-ball cricket itself, played in the Ranji Trophy for 10-12 years. I played a lot of red-ball cricket in Bombay because if you grow up in Bombay, you start with red ball itself, so everything is around red ball," he said.

"But gradually, when we started playing white ball cricket, the inclination shifted a bit towards that. And after that, I came to this format (T20). I also tried a lot in one-day cricket to play well in it, but nothing happened there," he said.

"T20 mein jaisa chal raha tha, usme apna haath set ho gaya hai, aisa bol sakte hain" (The way T20 was working out for me, I had become good at it; you can say that)," he said.

Given an opportunity, would he want to play Test cricket? Without hesitation he replied, "I would love to, because, as I mentioned, I played red ball cricket from 2010-11 to 2020. So, 10 years is a long time to play red ball, and I was in love with that format. But yeah, obviously, given an opportunity, who wouldn't want to play Test?"

he said. Still, at 35 years of age it is virtually impossible for Suryakumar to get into the Test team. His only experience in Test was in 2023 against Australia in Nagpur when he scored 8 runs in one inning.

The same year he appeared in the ODI World Cup final against Australia when he scored 18 off 28 balls. India lost the final and Suryakumar has not played in that format ever since.

Asked if ODI has a future given that T20 provides immense excitement to fans in a short time while Test gives them old-fashioned satisfaction, Suryakumar remained diplomatic, giving the format its due without being too dismissive.

The dwindling number of bilaterals in the format seems to be indicating a decline that might eventually end with ODI becoming obsolete.

"I feel that as much as I have experienced ODI cricket closely and I have seen it, it is a format where you have to bat in three different ways. Sometimes if you go in early, if wickets fall quickly, then you have to bat like Test cricket.

"Then you have to bat with a good strike rate like a One Day and then later at the end of the innings, you have to bat like (you do in) T20 format. So, that is one format that I never understood. I tried my best to play it. But then it's a challenging format," he said.

India's spin great R Ashwin believes ODIs are dying a "slow death, Pakistan's Wasim Akram once advised the ICC to scrap them altogether and England's Kevin Pietersen perceives 50-over cricket to be under most threat amid the ever-expanding T20 universe.

Suryakumar also recalled the emotion that the format managed to stir during the 2023 World Cup.

"...when I was with the team for the 2023 ODI World Cup and I played, then that vibe, the whole atmosphere of that format, the build-up going into the final. That was completely different than what we played in 2026 and 2024 T20 World Cup. (*PTI*)

Picked Ishan for World Cup on gut feeling: Suryakumar

VIJAY JOSHI ■ New Delhi

India skipper Suryakumar Yadav says he brought power-hitter Ishan Kishan into the T20 World Cup-winning team purely on gut feeling, because he felt the Bihar batsman had the X-factor that could turn around matches.

In a podcast interview with PTI Videos on Sunday, Suryakumar was asked if he is a data-driven captain or gut-feel skipper, and what made him pick Kishan over Jitesh Sharma.

"It was completely on gut, little bit on data. It (the decision) was very harsh on Jitesh Sharma at that time because he was playing with the team for over an year. And he was

playing, had he not been playing then the story would have been different," he said.

Suryakumar, who led India to the T20 World Cup victory on March 8, spoke at length about his career, the future of Indian cricket, and his relationship with head coach Gautam Gambhir and the squad. He pointed out that his own batting is driven largely by reaction and instincts.

"I was also very sad when we had to pick Ishan over Jitesh. But we needed an opener who could fire at the top, so someone had to miss out." He revealed how Kishan came into the squad: Suryakumar called the 27-year-old and asked *"Chhotu, World Cup jitayega?"* (Will you get us the World Cup?). Kishan responded *"Bharosa karogey?"* (Do you trust me?) to which Suryakumar said "Chal kiya" (Done).

"And the way he played was amazing... I always knew that he can be the X-factor because he has no baggage," Suryakumar recalled. He added that Kishan was going through a bad patch, having been out of the team for a while. To stay in the game, he travelled all over India and played minor matches, even practice games, to keep himself in the reckoning.

Kishan didn't let down his skipper. In nine matches, he made 317 runs at a strike rate of over 190, batting in the opening and number three slot.

His aggregate was the fourth highest in this edition of the World Cup, the first time that any country has won back to back tournaments. India won the 2024 World Cup in Barbados under Rohit Sharma, who retired from the format internationally after that. (*PTI*)

M Chinnaswamy Stadium gets nod for hosting IPL 2026 matches

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Bengaluru

The Karnataka government on Monday gave formal approval to the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) and Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) to host the 2026 Indian Premier League matches at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium, ending months of uncertainty following the stampede after the team's maiden title win.

The 19th edition of the world's biggest T20 league begins on March 28 with defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru set to face Sunrisers Hyderabad

in their first match here at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in the tournament opener, as per the schedule.

The formal approval comes after a meeting chaired by Karnataka home minister Parameshwar with the Expert Committee, which was constituted by the state government, and representatives from the KSCA, RCB and their event management firm DNA.

Indian women's team to feature in FIH Hockey Nation Cup in June

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Lausanne (Switzerland)

The Indian women's team will feature in the FIH Hockey Nations Cup to be held in Auckland, New Zealand from June 15 to 21.

The Hockey Nations Cup was launched in 2021 to offer a top-level competition to the best-ranked teams not participating in the Hockey Pro League, and give the winning team an option to be promoted in it the following season.

The Indian women's hockey team was relegated from the Pro League 2024-25 after finishing at the bottom of the nine-team standings.

Apart from India, hosts New Zealand, USA, Japan, Korea, Chile, Scotland and France, who were promoted via the Hockey Nations Cup 2, will take part in the event.

The men's event will be held in Cape Town and will involve South Africa, New Zealand, France, Korea, Japan, Wales, Malaysia, along with Scotland, who were promoted via the Hockey Nations Cup 2, as well as Ireland, who were relegated from the 2024-25 season of the Hockey Pro League.

The 2025-26 edition of the Hockey Men's Nations Cup will run from June 11 to 20 and will mark the return of the competition to South Africa, which hosted the inaugural edition of the men's competition in Potchefstroom in 2022.

Following the confirmation of the hosts for the fourth edition of the Hockey Nations Cup, FIH President Tayyab Ikram said: "We are delighted to have two outstanding host nations and cities for these remarkable tournaments."

No shame in saying that India can field multiple T20 teams: Suryakumar

VIJAY JOSHI ■ New Delhi

India's T20 World Cup-winning captain Suryakumar Yadav believes the country's talent pool in the shortest format has grown so vast that it could comfortably field two or even three international-quality teams at the same time, underlining the depth created by a thriving domestic structure and franchise ecosystem.

The flamboyant batter, who has overseen a period of remarkable consistency since taking over the leadership after the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024, credited the steady pipeline of players emerging from domestic competitions and the Indian Premier League for strengthening India's dominance in T20 cricket.

Since Suryakumar took over the captaincy in 2024 —

right after Rohit Sharma stepped down following the World Cup victory in Barbados — the Indian team has won 42 of the 52 matches played, reflecting team's dominance in a fickle format.

In a podcast interview with PTI Videos on Sunday, Suryakumar called the current group "the best T20 team India has produced", adding that India's depth in T20 cricket is now too evident to be downplayed.

"If you talk about talent, I feel you can find talent regularly. There is IPL cricket, franchise cricket, then there is domestic cricket. You can see how many players come every year. So you can make as many teams as you want in T20 when I am talking about T20," Suryakumar said.

"So I feel talent is unlimited. If you can make two-three playing XIs, our base is so strong, of the Indian team. So this is not a modest and diplomatic reply. But now it is so strong, so there is no shame in telling the truth," he said.

Team effort behind 80 per cent win rate: Suryakumar credited the team's success coming into the World Cup to a collective approach in the dressing room, saying a shared vision among players and support staff helped produce an impressive 80 per cent win rate in a notoriously unpredictable format.

Even with that success rate, the World Cup was not going to be a cake-walk because as Suryakumar noted, "we played bilateral matches one way, and in ICC tournament something else happened." For this reason, he needed to motivate the team to maintain the winning streak in the Feb 7 to March 8 tournament.

"I don't pay too much attention to statistics but I hate losing any game. If everyone in the dressing room moves in the same direction, only then can you achieve such a percentage," he said.

India's consistency in T20Is over the past 18 months has been widely attributed to a stable leadership group led by Suryakumar and head coach Gautam Gambhir. (*PTI*)

Kibet, Edris to headline Bengaluru 10K

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Bengaluru

Ugandan Harbert Kibet and two-time 5000m world champion Muktar Edris of Ethiopia will headline the 18th edition of the TCS World 10K Bengaluru, scheduled for April 26.

The World Athletics Gold Label Race boasts a total prize purse of USD 210,000, with USD 26,000 for the winner in the men's and women's categories, along with significant bonuses for course record performances.

Headlining the men's category is Kibet. The 20-year-old Kibet, a finalist at the World Junior Athletics

Championships two years ago, made his first appearance in the 10K earlier this year, winning emphatically in the Spanish town of Castellon with a world-leading 26:39, which is the sixth-fastest time ever for the event.

While Kibet is one of the five athletes entered with a sub-27-minute time this year, a total of 11 athletes with personal bests faster than the Bengaluru course record of 27:38 are also in the fray.

"It is my first time in India, and in the TCS World 10K Bengaluru, I want the most out of it as I am in tremendous form," Kibet said in a media release.

He will face a stiff challenge from Ethiopian Khairi Bejiga (26:51) and two platinum-level runners, Rodrigue Kwizera of Burundi and another Ethiopian Gemechu Dida.

Kwizera was a silver medalist in Bengaluru two years ago, while Dida took a notable second spot in the RAK half-marathon in early 2026.

Athlete-first governance to guide the future of Indian sport: IOA chief PT Usha

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Indian Olympic Association (IOA) president PT Usha says India's sports administration must be guided by policies that place athletes at the centre of decision-making.

Speaking on Day 3 of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Sports Journalism Federation of India's (SJFI) Annual Convention, Usha said ensuring the preparation, welfare and development of athletes must remain the highest priority for administrators and sporting bodies. "Athlete-first governance must guide the future of Indian sport. Their preparation, welfare and development must remain our highest priority," Usha said while addressing members of the sports media fraternity on Sunday.

Reflecting on India's evolving sporting landscape, Usha said the country currently stands at a significant moment in its sporting journey, with improved infrastructure, better scientific training and stronger institutional support helping athletes compete confidently on the global stage.

"Over the past decade, we have witnessed a transformation in the way sport is supported and celebrated in our country. Athletes today benefit from better infrastructure, scientific training and stronger institutional support," she said.

"The real strength of Indian sport lies in the grassroots — in the villages, towns and schools where young talent is waiting to be discovered. If we continue to invest in coaching, infrastructure and talent identification, India can consistently produce world-class athletes."

I wanted Indian cricket to dominate and time has come: Mithali

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Mithali Raj said her dream of seeing Indian cricket dominate the global stage is finally becoming a reality with the men's, women's and junior teams winning major world titles in recent years.

In the past couple of years, the Indian men's side ended over a decade-long title drought by winning the 2024 T20 World Cup while the women's team followed it up by clinching their maiden ICC trophy— the ODI World Cup crown last year.

India's dominance extended to the junior circuit as well, with the under-19 teams also lifting world titles in recent years, reinforcing the country's status as the powerhouse.

"For the longest time, I wanted Indian cricket to dominate and the time has come," Mithali said at the BCCI Naman awards.

"The last two-three years, Indian cricket — men, women and the under-19 girls or boys, they've been doing immense-

ly well. It's a proud moment as a former cricketer to see the growth of Indian cricket."

Mithali, along with former players Rahul Dravid and Roger Binny, was honoured with the Col CK Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award during the BCCI's annual function on Sunday.

She credited former BCCI secretary and current ICC Chief Jay Shah for playing a key role in the transformation of Indian cricket, particularly the women's game.

"I have seen the evolution of women's cricket and I need to acknowledge the support of BCCI and Jay sir. In the last four-five years, there has been a huge transformation of the Indian women's cricket team and that is because of that one person.

"His vision and commitment towards it...globally also he has put in so much effort to enhance and promote women's cricket's profile. It shows that he is a visionary and committed to the cause," she said.

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