

6 REGION  
8 NATION



- PM Modi to launch several railway projects
- Dhalpukhuri-Lanka flyover opened in Hojai, boost for traffic
- 'God saved me': Farooq Abdullah reacts to assassination bid
- PM asking people not to panic but is himself panicked for different reasons, says Rahul



*Guwahati Glitters with Iconic Landmarks*

## Inauguration of PM Ekta Mall

Betkuchi, Guwahati

Chief Guest  
**Shri Narendra Modi**  
Prime Minister

13 March 2026 5 PM Jyoti-Bishnu Antarjatik Kala Mandir, Khanapara, Guwahati

### Key Features

- Stalls for Districts in Assam - **35**
- Stalls for States/UTs - **35**
- Additional commercial stalls - **35**
- Anchor shops - **14**
- Dedicated food courts (cuisines from across India)

Project cost  
**₹298**  
crore

### Objectives

- Provide a common platform for showcasing ODOP, GI tagged products, handicraft, etc.
- Provide market access to artisans across India
- Promote national integration
- Promote 'Made in Assam' brand

### August Presence

**Shri Lakshman Prasad Acharya**  
Governor, Assam

**Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma**  
Chief Minister, Assam

**Shri Sarbananda Sonowal**  
Union Minister, Ports, Shipping & Waterways

**Shri Pabitra Margherita**  
Union MoS, External Affairs, etc.

**Shri Atul Bora**  
Minister, Agriculture, etc., Assam

**Shri Keshab Mahanta**  
Minister, Revenue & Disaster Management, etc., Assam

**Shri Bimal Borah**  
Minister, Industries, Commerce & Public Enterprises, etc., Assam

**Shri Prasanta Phukan**  
Minister, Power, etc., Assam

**Shri Rupesh Gowala**  
Minister, Tea Tribes & Adivasi Welfare, etc., Assam

**Shri Dilip Saikia**  
MP, Mangaldai HPC

# Brent crude oil tops \$100 a barrel as Iran attacks on shipping worsen supply concerns

Since the start of the war, sharp moves for oil prices have triggered swings up and down for financial markets worldwide

**BANGKOK, March 12:** The price of a barrel of Brent crude oil, the international standard, topped \$100 a barrel early Thursday, just days after it spiked near \$120 in the latest jolts to financial markets and the global economy as a whole.

Oil prices shot more than 9% higher as supply concerns worsened with Iranian attacks on commercial shipping around the Strait of Hormuz.

US benchmark crude oil jumped to about \$94 a barrel.

Iran has escalated its attacks aimed at generating enough global economic pain to pressure the United States and Israel to end the war that started 12 days ago. But there were no signs that the conflict was subsiding.

Iran has targeted oil fields and refineries in Gulf Arab nations and effectively stopped cargo traffic through the narrow Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of all traded oil passes.

In response, the International Energy Agency agreed Wednesday to release 400 million barrels of oil, the largest volume of emergency oil reserves in its history, in a bid to counter the war's effects on energy markets. The US planned to release 172 million barrels of oil next week from its Strategic Petroleum Reserve to combat steep prices.

The IEA's announcement came a day after energy ministers from the Group of Seven — the leading industrialized nations of Canada, the United States, France, Italy, Japan,



Germany and Britain — met in Paris to look at ways to bring down prices.

But the continued strife and uncertainty have fueled speculation prices could push still higher.

Markets in Asia fell back, with Tokyo's Nikkei 225 losing 1.8% to 54,043.38. In South Korea, the Kospi lost 1.2% to 5,540.56, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng gave up 1.2% to 25,577.71.

The Shanghai Composite index shed 0.6% to 4,106.96 and in Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 dropped 1.7% to 8,599.00.

US futures were down 1% and the dollar climbed to 159.02 Japanese yen from 158.95 yen. The euro fell to \$1.1538 from \$1.1566.

On Wednesday, US stocks were little changed as the S&P 500

edged 0.1% lower, to 6,775.80, for a second day of modest moves following a wild stretch caused by the war with Iran. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 0.6% to 47,417.27, and the Nasdaq composite rose 0.1% to 22,716.13.

Since the start of the war, sharp moves for oil prices have triggered swings up and down for financial markets worldwide, sometimes by the hour. Oil prices briefly spiked to their highest levels since 2022 this week because of the possibility that production in the Middle East could be blocked for a long time, which in turn raised worries about a surge of debilitating inflation for the global economy.

In a report, Oxford Economics said "the swings in Brent crude oil prices over the past several days are

eye-catching and odds are volatility will remain because of the absence of a timeline for when the conflict will de-escalate and when the Strait of Hormuz, which is effectively closed, will see traffic begin to recover."

It said the volatility suggests that depending on news developments, oil prices could spike as high as \$140 per barrel.

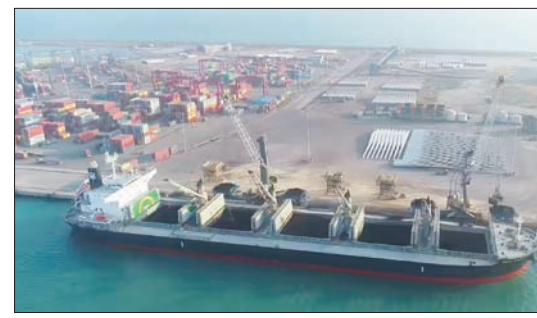
A report released Wednesday showed US consumers paid prices for groceries, gasoline and other costs of living that were 2.4% higher in February than a year earlier.

That's the same level as the month before and better than the 2.5% that economists expected, but it remains above the Federal Reserve's 2% target and doesn't include the spike in gasoline prices this month due to the war.

High inflation combined with a stagnating economy would create a worst-case scenario called "stagflation" that the Federal Reserve has no good tools to fix. Stagflation fears are rising not just because of higher oil prices but also because of weakness in hiring by US employers.

Because of the spike for oil prices, traders have pushed back forecasts for when the Fed could resume its cuts to interest rates. President Donald Trump has been angrily calling for such cuts, which would give the economy and job market a boost but also potentially worsen inflation. (AP)

## VOC Port Authority arranges 90,000 sqm land for shipping lines amid West Asia crisis



**NEW DELHI, March 12:** VOC Port Authority has made an arrangement of additional 90,000 square meter of space for shipping lines to keep their containers in the wake of the ongoing West Asia crisis, its Chairman Susanta Kumar Purohit said on Thursday.

The official made the remarks while replying to a question on the sidelines of PHDCCI conference on shipbuilding and ship recycling.

"We have given additional land to our customers where they can keep their goods safely beyond the time limit," Purohit said, sharing preparations made

to deal with the situation of container diversions.

However, the land remains unutilised as of now as operations and business at the port have not been affected, he said.

He said all major ports are in constant touch of the Ministry of Shipping, terminal operators and shipping lines.

Speaking further, the Chairman said the government is taking efforts to develop India as a hub of shipbuilding and ship recycling.

The move will help save resources and increase availability of raw materials for ship building, he said. (PTI)

## Airtel marks Customer Day 2026

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 12:** Bharti Airtel observed Customer Day 2026 on Thursday, reinforcing its organisational focus on understanding customer concerns and improving service delivery. The initiative, described by the company as a mass internal movement, saw nearly 20,000 Airtel employees—from leadership teams to functional specialists—step out of their offices to engage directly with customers in the field.

During the programme, employees worked alongside frontline teams, shadowed field engineers, visited homes and shops, and interacted with customers at retail outlets and service centres to gain first-hand insight into customer issues and expectations. According to the company, Customer Day is meant to serve as a moment of reflection for the organisation to assess how it can further improve services and address customer pain points.

Commenting on the initiative, Shashwat Sharma, Managing Director and CEO of Airtel India, said the exercise reinforces the company's commitment to customer-centric innovation. "Customer Day is an important reminder of our responsibility to listen deeply, challenge ourselves and act with urgency. It strengthens our commitment to solving pain points, simplifying experiences and continuously raising the standard of service we deliver to millions of our customers every day," Sharma said.

The company said several of its customer-focused innovations have emerged from such engagement exercises, including measures aimed at strengthening spam and fraud protection, improving digital journeys through the Airtel Thanks App, and introducing AI-enabled tools for service delivery.

Airtel added that the initiative reflects its broader belief that improving customer experience is a continuous process, driven by listening to feedback and simplifying services to make them more reliable and user-friendly.

Contd. from Page 3...

## PM on two-day

their bank accounts. He will then dedicate to the nation the Kopili Hydro-Electric Project, located in Dima Hasao and West Karbi Anglong districts. "Constructed at a cost of over ₹ 2,300 crore, the project will enhance clean energy generation, improve grid stability in the region and ensure reliable power supply to households, farmers and industries," the release said.

It said the PM will also inaugurate the Capacity Enhancement Project of the Numaligarh-Siliguri Product Pipeline (NSPL) of Oil India Ltd, facilitating the expansion of the Numaligarh Refinery from 3 MMTPA to 9 MMTPA by enabling evacuation of additional petroleum products.

"The PM will also inaugurate Phase-1 of the North East Gas Grid, a major pipeline project that connects Guwahati with Numaligarh, Gohpur and Itanagar with a branch line extending to Dimapur," the release said.

In addition, Modi will lay the foundation stone for the Numaligarh Refinery Ltd's Rail-Fed POL Terminal at Panchgram in Hailakandi district.

He will then inaugurate several railway electrification projects -- Rangiya-Murkongselek (558 km, ₹ 420 crore), Chaparmukh-Dibrugarh (571 km, ₹ 1,180 crore), and Badarpur-Silchar and Badarpur-Churaibari rail lines (₹ 650 crore). "The PM will also lay the foundation stone for the Furkating-Tinsukia rail line doubling project (194 km), costing over ₹ 3,600 crore, which will enhance line capacity and enable the operation of additional passenger and freight trains," it said.

In the waterways sector, Modi will lay the foundation stone for cruise terminals at Biswanath Ghat in Biswanath district and Neamat in Jorhat.

He will also perform bhoomi puja for the Regional Centre of Excellence (RCoE) at Bogibeel in Dibrugarh, which will serve as a premier maritime training and research hub for the northeast, it said.

Besides, Modi will lay the foundation stone for a ropeway project, connecting Kamakhya Railway Station to Kamakhya Temple, having a capacity to carry 17,000 people daily.

He will also inaugurate the PM Ekta Mall in Guwahati, envisioned as a major commercial and tourism hub for Assam and the northeastern region, featuring permanent stalls for One District One Product (ODOP) items, GI-tagged products, handicrafts and handloom goods.

On Saturday, Modi will perform the bhoomi puja of the Shillong-Silchar Corridor.

"The 166-km corridor, with an investment of around ₹ 22,860 crore, will significantly improve connectivity between Meghalaya and Assam. The project will reduce the distance between Guwahati and Silchar and cut travel time from 8.5 hours to approximately 5 hours," the release said.

The PM will also lay the foundation stone for the first phase of an elevated corridor on NH-306 from Trunk Road near Capital Point to Rangirkhari Point in Silchar, as well as the College of Agriculture at Patharkandi in Karimganj district. (PTI)

## Former MP Biren

legacy of public service and dedication to the welfare of tribal communities in Assam's hill districts.

## Nagaland may set

area belt in Ralan area along the border, following the recent eviction drive by Assam, environment, forest & climate change minister CL John informed the House that no plantation drive has been carried out so far.

However, he said the department is considering initiating such a drive in the coming months.

Responding to a supplementary question on whether forest guards have been posted to patrol the reserve forest in the disturbed area belt, John said the area is currently being patrolled by neutral forces and that the state has not stationed any personnel there at present.

## Action to be taken

remains comfortable, and adequate stock is currently available.

Assam has four refineries -- three owned by Indian Oil Corp at Digboi, Guwahati and Bongaigaon, and another at Numaligarh operated by PSU Numaligarh Refinery Ltd.

There is a requirement of 1.91 lakh domestic cylinders every day of 14.2 kgs for the entire Northeast market. Of this, 1.34 lakh is consumed by Assam alone. In the commercial segment of 19 kg cylinders, the NE market size is 5,777 units per day, including 4,112 units in Assam. (PTI)

## India in touch

affairs minister and the foreign minister of Iran have had three conversations in the recent days. The last one discussed issues pertaining to safety of shipping and India's energy security. Beyond that, it would be premature for me to say anything," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in his weekly media briefing.

Global oil and gas prices have surged after Iran virtually blocked the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow shipping lane between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, that handles roughly 20 per cent of global oil and LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas).

When asked about reports that Iran allowed two Indian-flagged ships to pass through the key shipping route, Jaiswal said he was not aware of it and suggested that the shipping ministry could answer the query.

Jaiswal said around 9,000 Indians are currently staying in Iran and the government of India is assisting those who want to travel to Azerbaijan and Armenia for their subsequent return to India.

"These 9,000 Indian nationals comprise students, they also comprise seafarers, some business people, some professionals, and some pilgrims," he said.

India has already shifted several Indian nationals including students and pilgrims, from Tehran to other safer locations and cities in Iran. "We are also assisting Indian nationals who wish to travel to Azerbaijan and Armenia, and from there to take commercial flights to return home. We are assisting them with visas, we are also assisting them with land border crossings," Jaiswal said.

"We have had several Indian nationals who have approached us and we have helped them to cross over into Azerbaijan and Armenia, and from there to take commercial options of flying back home," he said.

Jaiswal also urged the Indians who want to leave Iran to adhere to the advisory issued by the Indian embassy in Iran. "I would take this opportunity to advise all Indian nationals who are desiring to leave Iran via land borders, they should adhere to the advisory that our embassy has issued," he said. (PTI)

## Assam signs investment

companies for expansion.

"From tea to chips, Assam is steadily building a diversified and future-ready economy," Sarma said, adding that these investments will accelerate industrial growth and employment generation in the state.

He also informed that during Advantage Assam 2.0, investment Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) worth about ₹ 5.18 lakh crore were signed.

Of these, projects valued at nearly ₹ 3 lakh crore have already been grounded within a year of the summit.

Sarma emphasised that industrialisation is not only an economic strategy but also a social imperative, as it will create employment opportunities for the youth of the state and reduce the need to seek jobs outside Assam.

The chief minister said the agreements represent a decisive step towards building Atmanirbhar Assam and contributing to the broader national vision of Viksit Bharat.

The programme was also attended by Industries and Commerce minister Bimal Bora, Power minister Prasanta Phukan, chief secretary Ravi Kota, and other officials.

## ISRO conducts sea

test has undergone a record maximum number of hot tests (20 Nos) successfully, that has enabled the demonstration of several key technologies using a single engine, such as engine ignition using multi element igniter, ignition margin demonstration for Gaganyaan over a wide range of propellants tank pressure and pre-ignition chamber pressure, engine qualification for Gaganyaan at 20 tonne thrust level...." it added. (PTI)

### NAME CHANGE

I have changed my name to Elizabeth Marak. My previous name was Bennen Wanth. Now, Elizabeth Marak is correct name for all official purpose.

Elizabeth Marak

DoB: (07-03-1922)

F/N Lt Rohish Sangma

M/N Marji Marak

Vill: Boldampara

PO: Satgaon

Dist: West Karbi Anglong, Assam

### NAME CHANGE

I have changed my name to Agesh Marak. My previous name was Champa Ejung. Therefore Agesh Marak is correct name for all official purpose.

Agesh Marak

DoB: (15-11-1922)

Vill: Boldampara

PO: Satgaon

PS: Boithalangso

Dist: West Karbi Anglong.

### CONSTRUCTION WORK IN LUMDING DIVISION

**Tender Notice No.:** LMG/Engg/18 of 2026; **Dated:** 09-03-2026; **E-** Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work; **SN.1: Brief Description of Item:** At New Harangajao (NHGJ) construction of 10 Units standard Type-II quarters in replacement of abandoned quarters under the jurisdiction of Sr. DEN/III/Lumding. **Tender Value:** ₹ 2,75,88,907.09/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹ 2,87,900/-; **Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 02-04-2026 and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 03-04-2026.** Complete information alongwith the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 15:00 hrs. on 02-04-2026 in the website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)

DRM(W)/Lumding  
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY  
Serving Customers With A Smile

### NAME CHANGE

I,Rita Moni Bordoloi,W/O-Umal Konwar,R/O-VIII-Garmari,P.O.-Sarubori,P.O.-Morigaon,Dist.-Morigaon,Assam have changed my name from Rita Bordoloi to Rita Moni Bordoloi through a notary public at Morigaon court. Rita Moni Bordoloi and Rita Bordoloi is the same and one person.

### AFFIDAVIT

I, Sampat Soni, S/o Tara Chand Soni residing at A.T. Road, P.O./ P.S. & Dist- Jorhat, Assam, Pin-785001 shall henceforth be known Sampat Lal Soni as declared before the Notary public at Jorhat vide affidavit SL No. 226 on 12.03.2026. That Sampat Soni and Sampat Lal Soni both are same and one identical person.

### SHORT e-PROCUREMENT NOTICE:

#### GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

#### OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (PHE), DIPHU RURAL W/S DIVISION, DIPHU.

No: PHE-DIP/R/TB/TND/1(12)/2025-26/1938 A Dated 09/3/2026

#### SHORT e-PROCUREMENT NOTICE/INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB) NIT No. 5 OF 2025-26

On behalf of the Governor of Assam, Bids are invited online through e-Procurement system against (IFB) NIT No. 5 OF 2025-26 of Diphu Rural W/S Division from the eligible registered contractor (Class-2 and above category) having valid trading license/ NOC from Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council under Public Health Engineering Deptt., Assam, in two Part viz., Part I: Technical Bid and Part II: Financial Bid, for the work "Construction of (Two) nos. of reservoir connecting water facilities to Gangjang village from the main source of water at a distance of 09 KM." The detail Bid Document is available in the web portal [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in) and can be viewed from 11/03/2026 up to 11.00 Hr. of 31/03/2026. Bid is to be submitted through online and in no case manual bid shall be entertained.

Sd/-

Executive Engineer (PHE)  
Diphu Rural W/S Division.

Memo No: PHE-DIP/R/TB/TND/1(12)/2025-26/1938-45 Dated 09/3/2026

### SHORT e-PROCUREMENT NOTICE:

#### GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

#### OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (PHE), DIPHU RURAL W/S DIVISION, DIPHU.

No: PHE-DIP/R/TB/TND/1(12)/2025-26/1946A Dated 09/3/2026

#### SHORT e-PROCUREMENT NOTICE/INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB) NIT No.6 OF 2025-26

On behalf of the Governor of Assam, Bids are invited on line through e-Procurement system against (IFB) NIT No.6 OF 2025-26 of Diphu Rural W/S Division from the eligible registered contractor (Class-2 and above category) having valid trading license/ NOC from Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council under Public Health Engineering Deptt., Assam, in two Part viz., Part-1: Technical Bid and Part II: Financial Bid, for the work "Construction of water reservoir with piped water supply facility connecting all household at Joysing Rongpi village(Birhum)." The detail Bid Document is available in the web portal [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in) and can be viewed from 11/03/2026 up to 11.00 Hr. of 31/03/2026. Bid is to be submitted through online and in no case manual bid shall be entertained.

Sd/-

Executive Engineer (PHE)  
Diphu Rural W/S Division.

Memo No: PHE-DIP/R/TB/TND/1(12)/2025-26/1946-52 Dated 09/3/2026

# THE HILLS TIMES

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Voice of the hills people

FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 2026

THE HILLS TIMES 3

## PM on two-day visit of Assam from today Projects worth ₹47,800 cr to be inaugurated, flagged off

**NEW DELHI, March 12:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will roll out a series of development projects worth nearly ₹ 48,000 crore during his two-day tour of Assam from Friday, officials said. Modi will inaugurate, lay foundation stones and flag-off projects worth over ₹ 47,800 crore across Kokrajhar, Guwahati and Silchar, they said. This will be the PM's fourth visit to the state in as many months, where assembly polls are likely to be held in April. "On March 13, at around 1:30 pm, Prime Minister will perform bhoomi puja, lay foundation stones and flag-off projects worth over ₹ 4,570 crore at Kokrajhar," an official release said. Later in the day, Modi will perform bhoomi puja, inaugurate and dedicate to the nation several projects to the tune of around ₹ 19,680 crore in Guwahati, it said. "On March 14, at around 10:45

am, the Prime Minister will perform bhoomi puja and dedicate to the nation various projects worth about ₹ 23,550 crore at Silchar," it said. The PM will kick-off his Assam trip by performing bhoomi puja of the Assam Mala 3.0 road projects, worth over ₹ 3,200 crore, in Kokrajhar district. "Under this scheme, more than 900 kilometres of roads will be constructed across Assam to improve inter-state connectivity and strengthen linkages between national highways and rural roads," the release said. Besides, Modi will lay foundation stones for six other road projects in the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) area, including four flyovers and two bridges, with an investment of around ₹ 1,100 crore. He will also lay the foundation stone for a Periodic Overhauling (POH) Workshop at Bashbari in

Kokrajhar. The PM will then flag-off three trains – the Kamakhya-Charlapalli Amrit Bharat Express, the Guwahati-New Jalpaiguri Express and the Narangi-Agartala Express. After coming to Guwahati later on Friday, Modi will distribute land pattas to tea garden workers, marking a historic milestone in providing homestead land rights to the tea garden community, the release said. "Secure land ownership is expected to improve housing security, enable better access to institutional credit and welfare schemes, and promote long-term social and economic mobility," it said. Modi will also release the 22nd instalment of the PM-KISAN scheme to over 9.3 crore farmers across the country from Guwahati. Under this scheme, eligible farmers receive ₹ 2,000 directly into (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'Pawan Khera tried to contact militants to influence poll results, 3-4 FIRs registered' Himanta fires fresh salvo at Cong leader

**GUWAHATI, March 12:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said 3-4 FIRs have been registered against senior Congress leader Pawan Khera for allegedly trying to contact militant groups to influence election results. Sarma levelled the allegations a day after the Congress spokesperson asserted that the CM would be lodged in jail within weeks after the election results are out due to his alleged corruption. "There are 3-4 cases already registered against Pawan Khera for trying to contact some militant organisations in Assam to influence election results," Sarma told reporters. An investigation into the matter is going on, he added. "So, you will know after the election who will end up in jail. I think that Pawan Khera's final address will be in Assam jail," the



CM asserted. No immediate comment could be obtained from the All India Congress Committee Media and Communications Chairman. Khera on Wednesday alleged

that the BJP and its government work only for their own interests, and that ministers, including the CM, prioritise the interests of their families above all else. "No one can save Himanta Biswa Sarma after the elections, not even his masters sitting in Delhi. After the Assam assembly results are declared, he will be behind bars within weeks," he had claimed. Khera expressed confidence that under the leadership of Gaurav Gogoi, the Congress and its allies will form the next government in the state and establish a 'new Assam model'. The Assam Assembly elections for 126 constituencies are expected to take place in April this year. This will be the first assembly polls after the delimitation exercise, which was carried out in 2023. (PTI)

## Nagaland may set up 9 new police outposts along Assam-Nagaland border



**HT Correspondent**  
**DIMAPUR, March 12:** Nagaland deputy chief minister Y Patton, who is also minister in charge of border affairs, told the Nagaland assembly on Thursday that the state government is examining the matter of setting up nine new police outposts in border villages along Assam-Nagaland border. Responding to a starred question by MLA Achumbemo Kikon on the concluding day of the eighth session of the 14th Nagaland assembly in Kohima, Patton said Nagaland had withdrawn all police outposts from the border areas following the 1972 Interim Agreement, whereas Assam has since established 63 permanent police outposts along the Assam-Nagaland border. Kikon also raised the issue of the current status of the Tchuinjanphen and Lio-Longchym/Longayim police outposts on the border.

## Govt appoints over 5,500 teachers



**GUWAHATI, March 12:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday distributed appointment letters to over 5,500 people under the Education Department, and claimed that the administration eliminated corruption in government recruitments. The CM also alleged that government recruitments in the state were marred by corruption during the Congress regime. Ahead of the assembly elections, Sarma promised 2 lakh corruption-free government job opportunities in the next five years. At an official function here, he ceremonially handed over the letters to 5,690 teachers. These appointments have been made from primary schools to research-level positions in the higher education sector. The chief minister's office termed the occasion a "historic day for Assam's education sector, marking another milestone in transparent and merit-based recruitment". "With this, the total number of

government appointments in Assam has reached 1,64,359, reflecting Govt of Assam's unwavering commitment to empowering youth and strengthening the education system," the CMO said in an X post. The BJP had promised to provide one lakh government jobs every year in Assam during campaigning for the 2021 assembly polls, but later said the figure was for the entire five-year tenure. "The 2021-2026 job season concludes. Govt recruitments in Assam were marred with corruption during the Cong era. Today, I humbly state that not only have we eliminated corruption in Govt recruitments but also given 1.64 lakh jobs against our promise of 1 lakh jobs," Sarma said in a post on X. This could not have been possible without the support of the people of Assam, especially the youths, who chose hard work over shortcuts and believed in the government's promise, he added. "To them, I promise again today, the 2026-2031 season will bring in 2 lakh corruption free Govt job opportunities," Sarma said. (PTI)

## Former MP Biren Singh Engti cremated with full honours

**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, March 12:** The mortal remains of veteran politician and former Member of Parliament Biren Singh Engti were cremated with full honours in Diphu on Thursday.



A pioneering political figure from Assam's hill districts, Engti was the first MP to represent the regions of Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao in Parliament. The mortal remains of the former Chief Executive Member (CEM) were taken to the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Secretariat, where he was accorded a ceremonial guard of honour, including a gun salute and a minute of silence. Current CEM Tuliram Ronghang and other officials paid floral tributes, describing his death as the end of a significant political era in the hill districts. During the funeral procession, the cortege also halted at Reenu Terangpi Memorial College, an

institution founded by Engti in memory of his late wife. Later, leaders and members of the Indian National Congress paid their respects at the District Congress Committee office, remembering him as a foundational leader who helped establish the party in the region. In his condolence message, Tuliram Ronghang said Engti remained deeply committed to public service throughout his life and worked tirelessly for the welfare and aspirations of the people of the hill districts. "His passing marks the end of an important chapter in the political journey of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao. His dedication, leadership and contributions will continue to be remembered with deep respect and gratitude," Ronghang said. Engti's journey—from his rural village of Baroi Rongpi to the floor of Parliament—has left a lasting (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Action to be taken for spreading rumours on fuel shortage: Assam Police

**GUWAHATI, March 12:** Assam Police on Thursday said strict action will be taken against all those spreading rumours regarding shortages of LPG and other fuels, a day after the chief secretary's assertion that local refineries can meet only about 30 per cent of the state's demand for the cooking fuel. In a post on X, Assam Police said: "Strict legal action will be taken against anyone trying to spread rumours about shortages of LPG, POL and other petroleum products." Citizens are advised not to believe or forward any such misleading claims that may be spread by "inimical elements" to try and create confusion, it added. The government has already formed a dedicated media monitoring committee to track rumours, misinformation and misleading reports that may create panic among consumers. On Wednesday night, Assam

Chief Secretary Ravi Kota said local refineries have the capacity to meet only about 30 per cent of the state's LPG demand, indicating a possible shortage of the cooking fuel in the coming days. He said all four refineries in the state have been requested to ramp up production to ensure an uninterrupted supply of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) to consumers. Kota, along with Assam DGP Harmeet Singh, officials of the Food and Civil Supplies Department and representatives of oil marketing companies joined a video conference with Union Home Secretary, along with chief secretaries and DGPs of all states and Union territories, to review the availability and supply of LPG and diesel across the country. The State Level Coordinator of Indian Oil Corp reviewed the LPG supply position in Assam and informed that the overall situation in the state (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Assam signs investment confirmation agreements worth ₹1.67 lakh crore



**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, March 12:** The Government of Assam on Thursday signed 'Confirmation of Investment' agreements worth ₹1.67,108.51 crore with 69 leading organisations, translating commitments made during Advantage Assam 2.0 into concrete investment projects. The agreements were signed at a function held at the Sri Sri Damodardeva International Auditorium in the presence of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. According to the state government, the investments are expected to generate nearly one lakh direct and indirect employment opportunities.

Major organisations that entered into the agreements include Adani Defence & Aerospace, Adani Airport City Limited, Ambuja Concrete North Pvt Ltd, Ambuja Neotia Healthcare Venture Limited, Bharat A to Z Private Limited, Conmat Systems Pvt Ltd, Numaligarh Refinery Limited, Oil India Limited, and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, among others. Speaking at the event, Sarma thanked the participating companies for converting their investment commitments into concrete partnerships. He said the agreements mark a major step towards translating the momentum generated during the investment summit into actionable projects. The chief minister said Assam is increasingly emerging as a preferred destination for industry and enterprise as it partners with leading national (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Storm damages around 100 houses in Dibrugarh

**DIBRUGARH, March 12:** Over a hundred people have been affected in a storm in Assam's Dibrugarh district on Thursday, officials said. The storm was followed by a heavy spell of rain, which damaged houses and crops, they said. "Over a hundred people were affected in Lezai Kalakhowa area of Dibrugarh after a devastating storm wreaked havoc in the area," an official said. According to reports, several villages in Dighalia and Panigaon have suffered extensive damage, he added. "Around noon, a heavy storm damaged houses and crops. A cow was also killed. We want full compensation from the government," a victim, whose house was completely damaged, said. Lezai Kalakhowa falls under Khowang Assembly seat in Dibrugarh. (PTI)

## 19 tonne thrust to 22 tonne thrust ISRO conducts sea level test of cryogenic engine

**BENGALURU, March 12:** ISRO on Thursday said it has successfully conducted a sea level hot test of its cryogenic engine (CE20) at 22 tonne thrust using nozzle protection system and multi-element igniter at its Propulsion Complex at Mahendragiri in Tamil Nadu. Earlier, the sea level tests utilising the nozzle protection system were being carried out at a 19-tonne thrust level. The CE20 cryogenic engine powers the upper cryogenic stage of the Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (LVM3). "In order to enhance the payload capability of the LVM3 vehicle, future missions of LVM3 are planned to be operated with an uprated C32



stage with 22 tonne thrust for the CE20 engine. In view of this, the flight acceptance test of the CE20 engine also needs to be conducted at 22 tonne thrust level," ISRO said in a post on its website. "Therefore, the present test (on March 10) qualified the sea-level testing of the engine with a test duration of 165 seconds at 22t thrust

level using the Nozzle Protection System (NPS). The performance of the engine as well as the test facility was as expected during the entire test duration," it said. Noting that testing the CE20 engine at sea-level possess considerable challenges primarily due to the high area ratio nozzle, which has an exit pressure of ~50 mbar (millibar), the space agency said, "Main concern during testing at sea-level include flow separation inside the nozzle, which leads to severe vibrations and thermal problems at the flow separation plane leading to possible mechanical damage of the nozzle." "The Cryogenic engine utilized for this (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## India in touch with Iran to secure safe passage for its merchant vessels through Strait of Hormuz



**NEW DELHI, March 12:** India is in touch with Iran to secure safe passage to around 28 Indian-flagged merchant vessels through

the strategic shipping route of Strait of Hormuz that has been partially blocked by Tehran following its escalating conflict with the US and Is-

rael, people familiar with the matter said on Thursday. The issues relating to safety of shipping and India's energy security had figured during External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's conversation with his Iranian counterpart on Tuesday, according to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). It is learnt that MEA has not permitted any Indian-flagged commercial tanker to pass through the Strait of Hormuz in the last four-five days. A total of 24 Indian-flagged vessels with 677 Indian seafarers are currently located to the west of the Strait of Hormuz, while four vessels with 101 Indian seafarers are stationed to the east of the strategic waterway, according to a senior official in the shipping ministry. "The external (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

Fortune favors the prepared mind.  
—Louis Pasteur

## President's disappointment

Never before in the political history of India, the institution of President was used in such a blatant manner as was done on Saturday March 7, by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, for ensuring the victory of the BJP at the Bengal assembly elections. What has been most shocking is, the President Draupadi Murmu allowing herself to be exploited without realising the impact her action would have on the sovereign character of the country and its body politic. Her action could be questioned at least on three broader contours: First, Murmu, during her visit to West Bengal expressed concerns regarding the welfare and development of tribal communities in the state and sought to know whether the development benefits meant for tribal communities, specifically the Santhal and Adivasi communities in North Bengal, were effectively reaching them, noting a lack of progress. As the President she could not be faulted for posing this question. But the issue is: why she chose to ventilate her disappointment just ahead of elections? Secondly, she tried to project the 9th International Santhal Conference, being held in Siliguri on March 7, as government event, which was not the fact. It was organized by the International Santhal Council, a private organization. Under constitutional conventions, the chief minister is not obligated to receive President on private visit. President also expressed her displeasure at the change of site of the meeting.

Murmu expressed disappointment that no state minister was present to receive her, contrary to normal protocol. However, TMC leaders clarified that neither the CM nor her ministers were scheduled to attend, as it was a private event and they were not mandated to attend. Instead of blowing the issue out of proportion, Murmu, as a normal practice, could have taken the issue at administrative level and sought Mamata's clarification. No denying, she at that point of time chose to forget that she was President of India and must adhere to the norms and ethics. Modi who had master minded the plot was quick to grab Murmu's jibes, picked up the issue and used to malign Mamata's image. PM's strategy was to convey the message to the tribal of Bengal that the TMC supremo and the chief minister Mamata Banerjee had insulted the first tribal president who is also a woman.

One thing is absolutely clear that after having exhausting his arsenal in electoral fight against Mamata, Modi as the last resort used Presidential ill-treatment as a psychological missile, to demean her in the eyes of Bengalis and especially tribals of the state. He used the words "shameful and unprecedented" to arouse the tribal passion. It was like devil quoting the scripture. Mamata accused the BJP of trying to "malign the state" and using the highest office in the country for accomplishing its political agenda. She said she was busy with a protest over voter rights and accused the Election Commission of working under BJP influence.

## West Asian war Is increasingly turning into a battle over hormuz straits and Oil Prices

By: Anjan Roy

The West Asia war between Iran and US-Israel combine now seems to be converging on the Strait of Hormuz and the price of oil. Three vessels have been hit on the twelfth day of the war by projectiles while approaching the Strait of Hormuz and in the waters nearby, including a Thai cargo vessel. Iran has threatened not to allow even "a single litre of oil" pass through the Strait of Hormuz. Donald Trump, on the other hand, has said American vessels would escort ships passing through the Strait. In his desperation to keep the Strait clear, Donald Trump has even urged the global shipping lines to show a bit of guts and cruise through the narrow waters of the Strait. However, all major shipping lines like Maersk or Hapag LLoyd, have stayed far away from these dangerous waters now.

And how can they. When the world insurance market and the re-insurers of Lloyds of London are refusing insurance cover, no shipping line can even think of sailing through the Straits. Bravado alone does not really work. On top of that Iran has now extended its strategy into an economic warfare as well, stating that financial institutions in the West Asia region and of US allies were a legitimate target for destruction. Financial institutions play a vital role in the West Asian countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar and Bahrain, which have global linkages.

An increasing part of the economies of the Gulf states are becoming service oriented and they depend on their global linkages for survival. If these are severed, this becomes an existential crisis. Donald Trump was working on putting out a picture of stability returning. He was claiming oil price spurt was only a temporary episode, and prices were coming back to their normal levels. In fact, for a while yesterday, it was looking as if the Trump scrip was working out. However, no. Heightened hostilities are again pushing pressures on the global markets.

These new challenges have undone Donald Trump's plans for smoothening out the severe instability in oil prices, stock markets, and fears of interest rate hikes on government bonds. Oil prices were temporary improving before these began to harden again. Notwithstanding the words of comfort from Donald Trump, it turned out that America was spreading false rumours about passage through the Strait of Hormuz. While during the day there were claims that the an armed US vessel has already escorted a ship through the Strait, White House later on formally denied the claim.

This worsened the situation, as claims and denials made it clear that so far USA have not been able to force through the Hormuz. It has subsequently claimed that US forces have sunk 16 Iranian mine-laying vessels in these waters. However, it is clear that the Strait has already been heavily mined by Iran in preparation for the assault.

The West Asia war is now turning increasingly into a battle over oil prices. While Donald Trump and US officials are promising to bring oil and gas prices down, the global markets are witnessing high oil prices and fear has gripped oil buyers.

Since the war broke out, price of oil shot to over \$100 per barrel before retreating to \$90-91 per barrel yesterday. It again rose sharply during the day on Wednesday. The European governments have meanwhile agreed to release from their Strategic Oil reserves to calm down the markets.

The G7 and other major economies have agreed to release 400 million barrels of oil from their strategic oil reserves into the market which represents almost a third of their total oil reserves. However, despite promises of such huge release prospects, the oil markets did not quieten down. Gas prices are doing even worse as some of the largest gas field in Qatar have all been closed down. The primary reason the oil markets have not taken the strategic oil releases seriously because of Iran's determination to shut to the narrow patch of land through which 20% of the global oil movements pass. This is giving a mortal blow to all gesture for bringing stability to oil prices.

Iran has turned increasingly belligerent in its language and actions about the Strait, while the Americans have made wild claims about escorting ships through the Strait. The claims and counterclaims have further added to the fear and confusion than clearing the air of rumours. (IPA Service)

## The Assam Accord and its contemporary relevance

The Assam Accord is not an ordinary agreement; it is the outcome of a prolonged struggle to protect the very existence of the Assamese nation, a struggle that has left a lasting impact on the political and social life of Assam. Signed on 15 August 1985 between the Government of India, the Government of Assam, and the Assam Gana Sangram Parishad formed under the leadership of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), this historic document brought an end to the six-year-long anti-foreigner movement. The primary reason for considering this accord historical lies in the fact that it shook the very foundations of Assam's society, politics, and economy, and each of its clauses carried a constitutional commitment to safeguarding the fundamental rights and security of the indigenous people of Assam. The accord was a reflection of the collective aspirations of the people of Assam, and it continues to be regarded as an indispensable milestone in determining the future of a nation. The agreement did not merely promise a solution to the foreigner problem; it also created a framework to function as a strong protective shield for preserving the language, culture, and identity of the Assamese people. The accord instilled a new sense of hope for peace and progress among the people, which was a pressing necessity in the conflict-ridden environment of that time.

The background leading to the signing of this accord was extremely complex, sensitive, and written in the language of blood and sacrifice. From the period following the 1951 census to the time of the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, the large-scale illegal infiltration that occurred brought a grave crisis to the demographic structure, language, and culture of Assam. This infiltration created a deep sense of fear among the indigenous people regarding the loss of their land, language, and cultural identity. Gradually, this fear transformed into a massive mass movement known as the Assam Movement. This six-year-long movement from 1979 to 1985 completely paralyzed the social life of Assam. The consequences were not limited to political and economic damage; during the course of the movement, 855 Assamese people lost their invaluable lives, and the Assamese nation had to pass through an extremely tragic phase. In order to rescue the state from this grave situation, restore peace, and formulate a permanent and legal solution to the foreigner problem, the necessity of the Assam Accord was deeply felt. The decision of the movement leaders to sit across the negotiation table with the government marked the first step toward this accord, where attempts were made to find a solution based on a specific cut-off year regarding the foreigner issue. A detailed analysis of this background clearly reveals that the accord was born out of an unprecedented national struggle and a highly conflict-ridden environment, and through this, the sacrifices and determination of the Assamese nation become clearly visible.

The most significant historical importance of the Assam Accord lies in its core clauses, particularly those related to the identification and deportation of foreigners. Through this agreement, a specific and legal cut-off year was determined for the identification of foreigners. Clause 5.1 of the accord clearly declared that foreign nationals who entered Assam after 25 March 1971 would be identified and deported through legal procedures. The determination of this cut-off year established a clear legal foundation for identifying illegal infiltrators, which was the central demand of the Assam Movement. Moreover, the accord made provisions under Clause 6 to ensure constitutional, legal, and administrative safeguards for the indigenous people of Assam, which was considered a crucial measure for protecting national existence.

Through Clause 6, a profound commitment was made to safeguard the language, culture, land rights, and political representation of the Assamese people. Furthermore, the accord included several other important provisions such as strengthening border security, constructing border fencing, and providing special economic packages for the development of the state. Rather than being a political surrender, the accord represented a historic acknowledgement at the governmental level of the problems faced by Assam. These clauses generated a new wave of hope among the people of the



state, as they brought the issues related to the survival of the Assamese nation to the center of discussion at both the central and state governmental levels. Through these provisions, the people realized that their struggle had not gone in vain; it had received recognition in the form of legal and governmental commitments.

The Assam Accord immediately initiated a significant and far-reaching transformation in the political landscape of Assam. One of the most notable outcomes of the agreement was the entry of the movement leadership into democratic politics. The leaders of the All Assam Students' Union formed a new regional political party known as the Asom Gana Parishad, and shortly after the signing of the accord, they contested the state elections and came to power with overwhelming public support. This political transformation instilled a powerful sense of self-confidence and national pride among the Assamese people regarding their ability to determine their own destiny. It demonstrated that the Assamese nation possessed the capacity to transform the demands of democratic mass movements into political power through constitutional means. However, the political trajectory created by this accord permanently altered the direction of Assam's politics. It led to the rise of nationalist politics, which subsequently began to influence every electoral equation in the state. Regional political forces started participating in power equations with national political parties, which resulted in renewed attention being given to the problems of the state and gave a new dimension to politics centered on national interests. This new political current inspired the people of Assam with the hope of solving their own problems through their own collective strength, and it also made the public more conscious about national interests. This political rise marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Assam.

Despite its immense historical importance, the serious failures, delays caused by vested interests, and political betrayals in the implementation of the Assam Accord have given its contemporary relevance a complex dimension. The most crucial aspect of the agreement—namely the process of identifying and deporting foreigners—has not progressed as expected or effectively. Due to years of delay in implementation, the foreigner problem in Assam still remains unresolved and continues to exist as a burning issue. As a result, public confidence in the accord as a legal foundation for resolving the foreigner problem has gradually declined. Furthermore, although a high-level committee was formed to implement Clause 6, its recommendations have not been fully and sincerely implemented. This lack of effective execution has created a deep sense of disappointment among the Assamese people regarding the hopes and promises associated with the accord. In the present time, when new laws related to citizenship have been introduced, the fundamental objectives and ideals of the Assam Accord have once again become the center of intense debate. Many believe that these laws challenge the very foundation of the accord, particularly the concept of the 1971 cut-off year, thereby raising

serious questions regarding the commitments made through the agreement. Because of such political pressures, the demand for the complete implementation of the unfinished provisions of the accord remains equally strong even today, as nationalist forces firmly believe that only through this can the future of the Assamese nation be secured.

In the present context, the relevance of the Assam Accord is no longer confined only to the resolution of the foreigner problem. It has deeply influenced every aspect of Assam's national life and has become a symbol of collective

## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

national consciousness. In safeguarding the language, culture, land rights, and political rights of the indigenous people of Assam, the relevance of Clause 6 remains immense even today. This clause serves as a legal and moral foundation for providing genuine constitutional protection to the indigenous communities of the state, without which the existence of the Assamese nation could face serious threats. The accord also retains its importance in the economic development and infrastructural progress of the state. Only through the full implementation of the provisions mentioned in the agreement—such as securing the borders, constructing border fencing, and improving infrastructure—can a stable, conflict-free, and prosperous Assam be built.

The concepts of national consciousness and legal rights established through the Assam Accord have deeply influenced the thought processes of contemporary Assamese society and the decision-making mechanisms of its political sphere. The agreement constantly reminds the people of Assam of their past struggles and future aspirations. For the present generation as well, the accord stands as a powerful reminder that inspires them to remain conscious of national responsibilities and rights and to prioritize national interests. This relevance clearly demonstrates that the Assam Accord is not merely a matter of the past; it is a living document that shapes present demands and future directions.

A deeper analysis of the impacts and challenges created by the Assam Accord in national life is also essential. After the signing of the accord, the emergence of a new political party in power led to the strengthening of nationalist ideological politics in the state. As a result, several important national issues that had previously been neglected began to gain political attention. However, delays and complexities in implementing the agreement created divisions within Assamese society. Differences of opinion emerged between supporters and critics of the accord, and these disagreements later contributed to political conflicts.

The failure to completely resolve the foreigner issue also created conditions for the rise of aggressive nationalism, which posed new challenges to peace and stability. The accord further strengthened demands for self-rights and autonomy among the indigenous people of Assam, and this encouraged tribal communities to initiate movements for protecting their languages and cultures. In this way, the Assam Accord did not remain merely a political document; it became a powerful source of social and cultural transformation in Assam. These impacts clearly illustrate

how deeply and extensively the agreement influenced the lives of the people and the structure of society. A detailed study of these transformations helps in understanding the broader significance of the accord.

The importance of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord and the challenges surrounding its implementation also deserve extensive discussion. For the Assamese nation, this clause represented the final ray of hope. It clearly stated that constitutional, legal, and administrative safeguards would be provided to protect the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the indigenous people of Assam. Through this provision, commitments were made to ensure reservation of seats for indigenous communities in the state assembly, parliament, and local bodies, along with the protection of land rights.

However, for a long time this clause remained unimplemented, which compelled national organizations in Assam to launch strong protests. As a result, the central government formed a high-level committee under the leadership of retired Justice Biplab Kumar Sharma, which submitted a comprehensive report regarding the implementation of Clause 6. This report made several significant recommendations regarding the definition of indigenous people, protection of land rights, and distribution of political power. Nevertheless, even after the submission of the report, delays and the lack of political will in implementing its recommendations have raised serious questions about the future of this important clause. In the present political context, especially after the introduction of new citizenship-related laws, the relevance of Clause 6 has become even more significant. For safeguarding the existence of the Assamese nation, the complete and effective implementation of this clause is essential; otherwise the fundamental objectives of the accord will fail.

The most significant challenge in implementing the Assam Accord lies in the complexity of the process of identifying foreigners. Although the agreement fixed 25 March 1971 as the cut-off year, in reality the identification process based on this year has been extremely slow and entangled in legal complications. Various mechanisms such as Foreigners' Tribunals and the updating of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) were initiated to identify foreigners.

However, these processes faced numerous legal and administrative difficulties, and therefore a permanent and satisfactory solution to the foreigner problem has not yet been achieved. The updating of the NRC became a prolonged and controversial process that created a new form of division among the people of Assam. Additionally, the commitment to securing the borders has also not been fully realized. Delays in constructing border fencing and weaknesses in border monitoring systems have prevented the complete control of illegal infiltration. Because of these reasons, even after so many years since the signing of the accord, the people of Assam have not been able to achieve complete freedom from the foreigner issue. These challenges stand as major obstacles to the full success of the Assam Accord and continue to serve as a significant test for contemporary political leadership.

The Assam Accord also created a new sense of national consciousness and self-awareness

among the Assamese people. The collective resistance against foreign infiltration increased public interest in Assamese culture, language, and literature. The agreement connected the people of Assam with the pride of their past and the hopes of their future. However, the disappointments and uncertainties created by the incomplete implementation of the accord have left a lasting sense of hurt and frustration within Assamese society.

The unresolved foreigner problem has continued to generate socio-economic issues such as unemployment, land ownership disputes, and questions regarding the rights of indigenous people over resources. The failure to fulfill the promises made by the central government through the accord has also somewhat reduced public trust in the central authority. These cultural and psychological impacts clearly demonstrate that the Assam Accord is not merely a legal document; it is a reflection of the soul and emotions of the Assamese nation. These effects remain deeply embedded in the present political and social realities of the state.

When evaluating the historical significance of the Assam Accord, it becomes clear that it was not merely a political document but the culmination of a relentless struggle for self-assertion, justice, and rights by the Assamese nation. The agreement proved that through peaceful and democratic movements, people can present their legitimate demands before the government and seek solutions. The accord united the people of Assam under a common national consciousness. It provided the strength to stand united against the perceived threats posed by foreign infiltration, and it elevated politics centered on national interests to a new dimension. This historical truth has granted the agreement a special status that the history of Assam can never erase. An analysis of the accord from this perspective helps in realizing its immense value and significance. Through the Assam Accord, the people of Assam gained an opportunity to determine the direction of their future, which was a major achievement of their prolonged struggle.

In conclusion, it can be said that the historical significance of the Assam Accord will always remain undiminished, because it highlighted the fundamental problems faced by the people of Assam and formally concluded a long period of struggle. However, the contemporary relevance of the accord lies in the incomplete implementation of the promises contained within it and the new political challenges that have emerged. Even today, the agreement remains a central and sensitive issue in the political, social, and cultural life of Assam. Ensuring genuine protection for the indigenous people of Assam by fulfilling the fundamental objectives of the accord remains the greatest challenge of the present time. Only through the complete and effective implementation of Clause 6, the acceleration of the process of identifying foreigners, and the strengthening of border security measures can the dream of a stable, conflict-free, and prosperous Assam be realized. Therefore, the Assam Accord is not merely a document of the past; it is a living and indispensable foundation that determines present challenges and future directions, and the future of the Assamese nation largely depends upon its effective implementation.

# The Rise of a New Political Era in Nepal

By: Satyabrat Borah

Nepal has always lived with the rhythm of political change. Mountains that seem permanent and calm have witnessed decades of agitation, hope, disappointment, and renewal in the country's public life. Elections in Nepal often carry a sense of drama, and the latest political developments once again show how voters can reshape the political landscape when frustration meets a new possibility. A generational shift appears to be unfolding, one that reflects changing expectations among citizens who are tired of old patterns of governance.

For many years, Nepal's political field was dominated by a familiar set of parties and leaders. The Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist), led by K. P. Sharma Oli, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) under Pushpa Kamal Dahal, and the Nepali Congress led by Sher Bahadur Deuba shaped the country's political direction. Each of these leaders played a significant role in Nepal's transition after the monarchy ended and the republic was established. Their influence extended across governments, alliances, and political debates.

For a long time, Nepali voters accepted the idea that power would rotate among these familiar parties. Elections would bring adjustments in parliamentary strength, alliances would shift, and a coalition government would eventually take shape. Citizens hoped that such arrangements would lead to stability and development. The country had already endured years of conflict, constitutional struggles, and economic difficulties. Many people simply wanted peace, infrastructure, and opportunities for the younger generation.

The 2017 election appeared to offer a decisive moment. The Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) decided to contest the election together. Their alliance created a powerful political force. When the results arrived, the alliance had secured close to a two-thirds majority in Parliament. Supporters celebrated the victory as a turning point that could bring stability after years of fragile coalitions.

Soon after the election, the two parties formally merged and formed the Nepal Communist Party. The new entity seemed to carry enormous political weight. K. P. Sharma Oli became Prime Minister, and many observers believed the government would have the strength to push through reforms and long term plans. Citizens hoped that a stable majority government could focus on roads, electricity, education, healthcare, and employment.

At that time, there was a sense that Nepal might finally escape the cycle of constant political bargaining that had slowed decision making. The country had adopted a new constitution in 2015 and was adjusting to the

federal system that divided authority between the central government and the provinces. Implementation of the new constitutional framework required steady leadership.

But politics rarely moves along a smooth path. The merger that appeared so promising began to face internal tensions. Differences in leadership style, ideology, and ambition gradually surfaced. K. P. Sharma Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal had different visions of how power should be shared inside the party and the government. What began as quiet disagreements eventually turned into open conflict.

The unity of the Nepal Communist Party began to crack. Supporters who had celebrated the alliance started watching a familiar drama unfold. Internal meetings became arenas of dispute. Party factions lined up behind different leaders. The promise of a united communist government slowly faded as the rivalry between Oli and Dahal deepened.

In 2021 the Supreme Court of Nepal delivered a ruling that changed the course of events. The court invalidated the merger of the two communist parties, effectively restoring the original political groups. The decision reopened the old divisions between the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre). The political balance that voters had created through the election was suddenly undone. The court's ruling created a wave of uncertainty in Kathmandu's political corridors. Parliament faced a new round of negotiations and alliances. Leaders who had campaigned together only a few years earlier found themselves on opposite sides once again. The sense of stability that citizens had expected began to dissolve.

What followed was a period that many Nepali voters had seen many times before. Governments rose and fell through parliamentary maneuvers. Alliances shifted rapidly. One coalition replaced another with little warning. The Prime Minister's chair became part of a political carousel that rotated among familiar faces.

K. P. Sharma Oli served as Prime Minister, then Pushpa Kamal Dahal returned to the position through coalition arrangements, and later Sher Bahadur Deuba also took charge of the government. Each administration promised stability and progress, but the underlying reality remained fragile. Political survival often became the immediate priority for leaders navigating coalition arithmetic.

For ordinary citizens, such shifts created a sense of fatigue. People living in cities like Kathmandu, Pokhara, and Biratnagar as well as those in remote hill villages wanted steady governance rather than endless political bargaining. Young Nepalis who had grown up after the civil war expected more opportunities, better jobs, and stronger institutions.

Migration became a major re-



ality for the country. Large numbers of young people left Nepal for employment in the Gulf, Malaysia, South Korea, and other destinations. Families depended heavily on remittances sent from abroad. Many youths felt that domestic politics was disconnected from their daily struggles and aspirations. Social media played a growing role in shaping political conversations. Young voters used digital platforms to discuss corruption, unemployment, and the performance of established parties. Debates that once happened quietly in tea shops and community gatherings now unfolded online with sharp intensity.

Against this backdrop, a new political force began attracting attention. The Rastriya Swatantra Party, often called RSP, emerged as a symbol of dissatisfaction with the traditional political order. The party's appeal came largely from its promise to challenge corruption and introduce a different style of leadership.

The rise of RSP reflected a deeper shift in Nepal's political culture. Many citizens no longer wanted to choose between the same established parties that had governed for decades. They were willing to experiment with new figures who spoke in a language that seemed closer to everyday concerns.

RSP's leaders presented themselves as representatives of a new generation. They talked about transparent governance, efficient administration, and accountability. Their message resonated strongly with urban voters and younger citizens who felt alienated from traditional political structures. When election results began to show strong support for RSP candidates, political observers realized that something important was happening. Nepal's voters were sending a message that dissatisfaction with the established order had reached a significant level. The shift was not simply about party competition. It reflected changing expectations in society.

The generational dimension of this moment is particularly striking. Many of Nepal's long standing leaders emerged during periods of struggle such as the democratic movement against the monarchy or the Maoist insurgency. Their political legitimacy was built through those historic battles.

Younger voters respect that history, but they also want leaders who focus on contemporary challenges. The country now faces questions about economic growth, urban development, climate vulnerability in the Himalayan region, and the integration of technology in governance. Addressing such issues requires new energy and ideas.

The success of RSP therefore represents both hope and risk. On one hand, the party's rise demonstrates that democratic systems can renew themselves when voters demand change. Citizens have used the ballot to express their frustration and search for alternatives. On the other hand, the real test begins after electoral success. Campaign promises must translate into practical governance. Managing ministries, coordinating with bureaucratic institutions, and working with coalition partners can prove far more complicated than mobilizing voters during an election campaign.

RSP now faces the challenge of proving that it can deliver effective governance. Many supporters see the party as a fresh voice that can break the culture of political bargaining and patronage. But expectations are extremely high, and any misstep could quickly erode public trust.

Nepal's political system also requires negotiation and compromise. Even a rising party cannot easily transform the system without engaging with other forces in Parliament. Coalition politics remains a reality. Leaders must balance idealism with practical strategy. Traditional parties are also adapting to the changing environment. The Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist

Leninist), the Maoist Centre, and the Nepali Congress still have deep organizational networks across the country. Their leaders understand that the electorate is becoming more demanding.

For them, the emergence of RSP serves as a warning that voters are willing to punish complacency. Established parties must demonstrate that they can reform themselves and respond to the concerns of citizens.

The broader story of Nepal's politics reflects the country's long journey toward democratic stability. The abolition of the monarchy in 2008 opened a new chapter in national history. The process of writing and implementing a constitution required negotiation among diverse political forces and communities.

Federalism introduced another layer of complexity by creating provincial governments with their own responsibilities. The success of the federal system depends on cooperation between different levels of administration.

Economic development remains one of the most pressing priorities. Nepal has enormous potential in tourism, hydropower, agriculture, and cultural heritage. The Himalayas attract visitors from around the world. Rivers flowing through the mountains could generate significant electricity for domestic use and export. But realizing such potential requires consistent policies and long term planning. Investors and entrepreneurs need confidence that political conditions will remain stable. Frequent government changes can slow progress in infrastructure projects and economic reforms.

Nepal also occupies a sensitive position between two major neighbors, India and China. Managing relationships with both countries requires diplomatic skill. Political instability at home can complicate foreign policy decisions.

Citizens understand these challenges. Many voters believe that political leaders should devote

more attention to governance rather than power struggles. Roads, schools, hospitals, and reliable electricity are tangible signs of progress that people expect from their government.

In recent years, natural disasters have also shaped public expectations. The devastating earthquake of 2015 revealed weaknesses in infrastructure and emergency preparedness. Reconstruction efforts highlighted the need for effective administration and transparency.

Climate change poses another challenge for Nepal's fragile mountain ecosystems. Glacial melting, landslides, and unpredictable weather patterns affect communities living in high altitude regions as well as those in the plains. Younger Nepalis are increasingly aware of global conversations about environment and sustainability. They want policies that protect natural resources while creating economic opportunities. Political renewal therefore connects with a broader transformation in society. Education levels have improved, access to information has expanded, and citizens are more willing to question authority. Democratic participation has become part of everyday life. The latest election results illustrate how democratic systems evolve through public pressure. Voters did not simply accept the continuation of old patterns. They used their ballots to signal that political culture must change.

Still, change rarely happens overnight. The institutions of governance move slowly, and entrenched interests resist rapid transformation. RSP and other emerging forces must navigate this complex environment while maintaining the trust of their supporters. Nepal's democratic journey has always involved experimentation. From constitutional debates to coalition governments, the country continues to search for a political formula that balances stability with representation. The generational shift

now unfolding may mark another stage in that journey. Older leaders who shaped earlier chapters of Nepal's history remain influential, but a younger political imagination is taking shape among voters and new candidates.

Whether this moment leads to lasting reform will depend on the choices made in the coming years. Political leaders must show humility, patience, and a willingness to listen to citizens.

For many Nepalis, the dream is simple. They want a government that works steadily, treats people fairly, and focuses on building a prosperous society. Elections provide a chance to express that hope, but the true measure of democracy lies in the daily practice of governance.

The latest developments in Nepal remind observers that democracy is never static. It moves through cycles of expectation, disappointment, and renewal. When voters feel ignored, they search for new voices. When leaders respond to public concerns, trust can slowly rebuild. Nepal's mountains stand as a silent witness to these political currents. Generations have come and gone while the country continues its search for stability and progress. The current generational shift suggests that citizens remain deeply engaged in shaping their nation's future. RSP's rise signals that the electorate is ready to test new leadership. At the same time, established parties still possess experience and networks that could contribute to governance if they adapt to changing expectations.

The coming years will reveal whether Nepal's political system can translate voter energy into practical reform. Success would strengthen faith in democratic institutions and offer a hopeful example for other societies navigating similar transitions.

For now, one message from Nepal's voters is unmistakable. They are no longer satisfied with the predictable rotation of familiar leaders. They want accountability, efficiency, and a sense that politics can serve ordinary people rather than political elites. That demand for change carries both excitement and responsibility. Parties that receive public trust must demonstrate that they deserve it through honest work and thoughtful leadership.

Nepal stands at another turning point in its democratic story. The election results reflect the voices of citizens who believe their country can move toward a more responsive and energetic political culture. The path ahead will require patience, wisdom, and cooperation among leaders and citizens alike.

The generational shift in Nepal's politics may still be unfolding, but it already reveals an enduring truth about democracy. When people decide that the old order no longer represents their hopes, they find ways to reshape it. In Nepal, that process has begun once again, carried forward by voters who are determined to influence the direction of their nation's future.

## The paradox of Nepal's 'New' political order

By: Dipak Kurmi

The recent electoral upheaval in Nepal has sent shockwaves through the Himalayan nation's traditional power structures, presenting a stark contrast to the political continuity observed in neighboring Bangladesh. This shift is most visibly manifested in the dramatic ascent of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), whose candidates have flooded the halls of parliament, effectively displacing long-standing veterans. While casual observers might attribute this to a sudden surge of visionary leadership, a deeper analysis suggests that these new entrants did not secure their mandates through profound political acumen or meticulously crafted policy frameworks. Instead, their success appears rooted in a sophisticated form of political showmanship that resonated with a populace weary of the status quo. The central question lingering in the aftermath of the September 2025 turmoil is whether the electorate was truly persuaded by the intrinsic potential of these newcomers or if they were simply grasping at any alternative to the entrenched "old guard."

Television commentators and editorial writers have been quick to frame these results as a magnetic pull toward a revolutionary political force, yet this narrative often ignores the cyclical nature of Nepalese coalition politics. A critical examination reveals that the "newness" of the RSP is more cosmetic than structural; the party has not only contested previous electoral cycles but has also actively participated in coalition governments alongside the very establishment figures they now ostensibly oppose. To maintain the alluring but potentially deceptive "old versus new" dichotomy, media outlets have focused on the fresh faces of individual

candidates rather than the novelty of the party's ideological core. Furthermore, if the public were genuinely inspired by a new dawn of governance, one would expect a corresponding surge in voter engagement. Contrarily, the voter turnout stagnated at approximately 60 percent, a figure lower than previous cycles, suggesting that the "new" force failed to mobilize the silent or disillusioned segments of the population.

The success of these nascent political actors is perhaps better understood not as an endorsement of their platform, but as a visceral manifestation of public aversion toward the traditional elite. Decades of corruption, blatant nepotism, and the suffocating dominance of an aging leadership have fostered a deep-seated resentment that transcends mere policy disagreement. The political culture of Nepal has long been tarnished by the extravagant lifestyles of its leaders and recurring scandals that have eroded institutional trust. In such an environment, any individual capable of projecting an image of youth and vitality automatically becomes a symbolic challenger to a perceived gerontocracy. This sentiment was not a sudden explosion of anger but a slow-burning fire that was fueled from within the established parties themselves, where internal complaints regarding patronage and self-aggrandizement were frequently amplified by a vigilant media.

The catastrophic performance of influential powerhouses like the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and the Nepali Congress underscores the severity of this internal rot. The data suggests that a significant portion of their traditional base simply abandoned them, either through abstention or by casting "revenge votes." While some superficial



comparisons have been drawn between the RSP's victory and the Maoist surge of 2008, the contemporary context is distinctly different. Today's results are a byproduct of a grassroots rebellion where party cadres, feeling betrayed by the imposition of unpopular candidates or the denial of tickets to deserving workers, weaponized the ballot against their own leadership. This internal fragmentation was further exacerbated by factional rivalries that encouraged loyalists to support outsiders purely to spite their internal rivals, turning the election into a theatre of administrative retribution.

The loss of territory in constituencies historically considered "safe" for the old guard reveals the lasting damage caused by the general and special conventions organized by the CPN-UML and the NC prior to the polls. Rather

than unifying the ranks, these gatherings served to deepen existing divisions and broadcast internal discontent to the wider public. Dissatisfied party members transformed their ballots into tools of protest, frequently influencing their families, acquaintances, and broader social circles to vote independently of traditional party lines. This shift in family-level voting patterns marks a significant departure from the ideological commitments of the past. Whereas families once voted as blocks based on deep-rooted political philosophies, they are now increasingly driven by a decentralized, anti-establishment impulse that prioritizes the removal of the incumbent over the specific merits of the successor.

The RSP now finds itself at a precarious crossroads, where the weight of expectations far exceeds its current in-

stitutional capacity. The transition from demagogic rhetoric and social media showmanship to the arduous reality of institutional governance is rarely smooth. In a digital age where political dissatisfaction can be shared and amplified as quickly as scrolling through a social media reel, the patience of the electorate is remarkably thin. The absence of a strong, unified opposition in the immediate term does not grant the RSP a free pass; rather, it places their every move under a microscopic lens. Without a rapid evolution from populist posturing to concrete legislative results, the impulsive voters who propelled them to power may soon find ample reason to complain, leading to a cycle of regret that could leave Nepal's democracy even more fragile than before.

Furthermore, the regional implications of this political turnover cannot

be ignored, as Nepal continues to balance its delicate relationships with India and China. Historically, the "old guard" possessed a predictable, if sometimes strained, diplomatic shorthand with New Delhi and Beijing. The influx of inexperienced parliamentarians may introduce a period of strategic unpredictability in Himalayan geopolitics, particularly regarding large-scale infrastructure projects and border management. If the RSP fails to master the nuances of foreign policy as effectively as they mastered the art of the electoral campaign, the "stability" sought by the voters after the 2025 turmoil will remain an elusive dream. The structural challenges of a developing economy and the complexities of federalism require more than just new faces; they require a level of statecraft that has yet to be demonstrated by the current winners.

Ultimately, the story of Nepal's latest election is a cautionary tale about the difference between political change and political progress. While the electorate has successfully cleared out a significant portion of the old leadership, they have filled the void with a force that remains largely untested in the crucible of governance. The "new" political forces must now prove that they are more than a temporary vessel for public anger and that they can build institutions that outlast their own charisma. If they remain tethered to the same coalition-building habits and patronage systems as their predecessors, the "old versus new" dichotomy will be revealed as a mere marketing triumph rather than a genuine democratic evolution. The coming months will determine whether Nepal has truly turned a page or if it has simply replaced one set of flawed actors with another, more photogenic group. *(the writer can be reached dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)* at

Prime Minister to visit Kokrajhar, Guwahati and Silchar on March 13 and 14

# PM Modi to launch several railway projects

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, March 12:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Assam on March 13 and 14, 2026. During the visit, the Prime Minister will inaugurate, dedicate to the nation, lay foundation stones, perform Bhoomi Poojan and flag off multiple development projects worth more than ₹ 47,800 crore across Kokrajhar, Guwahati and Silchar.

On March 13, at around 1:30 PM, the Prime Minister will perform Bhoomi Poojan, lay foundation stones and flag off projects worth over ₹ 4,570 crore at Kokrajhar. Later in the day, at around 5 PM in Guwahati, the Prime Minister will perform Bhoomi Poojan, inaugurate and dedicate to the nation several development projects worth around ₹ 19,680 crore.

On March 14, at around 10:45 AM, the Prime Minister will perform Bhoomi Poojan and dedicate to the nation various projects worth about ₹ 23,550 crore at Silchar.

In Kokrajhar, the Prime Minister will lay the foundation stone of a Periodic Overhauling (POH) Workshop at Bashbari in Kokrajhar district. The workshop will strengthen railway maintenance infrastructure, enhance



operational efficiency and create employment opportunities in the region. The Prime Minister will also flag off three new train services aimed at improving connectivity in Assam and the North-East region. These include the Kamakhya-Charlapalli Amrit Bharat Express, providing direct rail connectivity between the North-East and

southern India; the Guwahati-New Jalpaiguri Express, enhancing connectivity between Assam and West Bengal and the Narangi-Agartala Express, improving connectivity between Assam and Tripura and facilitating smoother inter-state travel for passengers, traders and tourists.

In Guwahati, major railway electrification projects will be dedicated to the nation by the Prime Minister. These include the Rangiya-Murkongselek rail line electrification (558 km), built at a cost of around ₹ 420 crore; the Chaparmukh-Dibrugarh rail line electrification (571 km), built at a cost of about ₹ 1,180 crore and the Badarpur-Silchar and Badarpur-Churaibari rail lines, built at a cost of around ₹ 650 crore. These projects will enable faster, energy-efficient and environmentally sustainable train operations while improving connectivity across the Brahmaputra and Barak Valley regions.

The Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone for the Furkating-Tinsukia rail line doubling project (194 km), costing over ₹ 3,600 crore, which will enhance line capacity and enable the operation of additional passenger and freight trains.

# Dhalpukhuri-Lanka flyover opened in Hojai, boost for traffic

Minister Hazarika praised CM's leadership for Assam's steady growth



**HT Correspondent**  
**HOJAI, March 12:** After years of waiting, Lanka residents finally got their wish. Minister Piyush Hazarika inaugurated the Dhalpukhuri-Lanka railway level crossing flyover in a grand ceremony in Lanka within Hojai District. This is a big step forward for traffic in the district.

Addressing the public, Hazarika praised Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's leadership for Assam's steady growth. He highlighted people-friendly projects benefiting Hojai, like flood-proof embankment construction, Rabindranath Tagore University, modern roads and industrial progress. The flyover will end long

traffic jams in Lanka, making travel easier for business, education and daily life. Kaziranga MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa, Hojai MLA Ramkrishna Ghosh and Luning MLA Shibu Mishra, Ex-MLA Shiladitya Dev among others also attended the ceremony. They all praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Chief Minister for Assam's all-round development. District Commissioner Bidyut Bikash Bhagwati said Lanka is an significant place in the Chief Minister's welfare plans. He thanked the CM on behalf of the administration and residents. He expects the flyover to bring big gains for traders and the public.

# Meeting held with LPG distributors and petrol pump dealers

**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, March 12:** In view of reports of panic buying due to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, a meeting with LPG distributors and petrol pump dealers was held on Thursday at the office of the District Commissioner, Kokrajhar in the presence of the Additional District Commissioner and the Joint Director of Supply. During the meeting, all dealers clarified that there is no shortage of LPG or petroleum products (POL) in the district and that sufficient stock is available to meet normal consumer demand. The Supply Department has been requested to undertake awareness measures to inform consumers and discourage panic buying. Citizens have been urged not to panic, as the supply of essential petroleum products in Kokrajhar district remains normal and uninterrupted.

# 24th convocation of Dibrugarh University held



**HT Correspondent**  
**DIBRUGARH, March 12:** The 24th convocation ceremony of Dibrugarh University, which has made significant contributions to the higher education sector of the country was held on Thursday in a solemn and dignified atmosphere on the university campus. The ceremony was presided over by the Governor and Chancellor of the university, Lakshman Prasad Acharya.

In his presidential address, the Chancellor highly appreciated the quality of academic standards maintained by Dibrugarh University and urged the student community to move forward in response to the demands of changing times. Referring to Dibrugarh as the "Tea City of India", he said that the region's vast tea gardens, natural beauty and the industrious spirit of its people have given it a distinct identity.

Addressing the graduating students, he said, "We are living in an era in which Artificial Intelligence, the digital revolution and automation are redefining our economy and social structures. You are the

generation that will determine the direction and destiny of India. Therefore, in this digital revolution we must not remain mere passengers, but become its drivers."

The solemn convocation ceremony was attended as the chief guest by noted literary figure and Sahitya Akademi award-winning writer Dr Dhruvjayoti Bora, former Vice-Chancellor of Srimanta Sankaradeva University of Health Sciences and former President of Assam Sahitya Sabha.

Dr Bora urged the younger generation to remain curious about Artificial Intelligence and technological advancements while emphasising the need for responsible and cautious use of such technologies. Highlighting the transformation brought about by robotic surgery, he noted that robotic surgery enables extremely precise and delicate surgical procedures on the human body, but stressed those ethical considerations must remain a priority in this field as well.

In his welcome address, Vice-Chancellor Professor Jiten Hazarika said that the nation stands at

an important moment in its journey and that all efforts are now guided by the vision of building a "Developed India" by 2047.

He stated that Dibrugarh University views itself not merely as an educational institution but also as a catalyst for national transformation. The year 2025, he said, stood as a testimony to this commitment, as the university has strived to ensure that every student graduating from the institution becomes capable of contributing to nation-building.

The momentum has also extended to other science departments. The Departments of Chemistry, Pharmaceutical Sciences and Life Sciences, among others have been making rapid progress through the publication of research papers in high-impact Q1 journals.

Highlighting the support extended by the Central and State governments, the Vice-Chancellor said that funds received under the PM-USHA scheme have been utilised to implement new curricula in line with the National Education Policy 2020, incorporating

contemporary subjects such as Artificial Intelligence and digital tools, strengthening structured research and developing world-class academic infrastructure.

He further informed that the university has undertaken initiatives to create an academic environment in educationally backward tea garden areas through special awareness workshops. Under this programme, nine districts of Assam were covered last year. This year, nine such workshops have already been conducted and the concluding programme is expected to be held in September.

During the ceremony, renowned poet, novelist and journalist from Arunachal Pradesh, Mamang Dai, who received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2017 for her novel The Black Hill, was conferred the honorary Doctor of Letters (D.Litt.) degree in recognition of her exceptional literary contributions.

Similarly, eminent surgeon and professor of Assam Medical College, Dr Sarbeswar Bhuyan, widely known for his accessible medical services to economically disadvantaged patients and his humanitarian approach was awarded the honorary Doctor of Science (D.Sc.) degree in recognition of his contributions to medical science.

A total of 12,266 students had applied to receive degrees at the convocation. Altogether 126 students were awarded doctoral degrees.

A total of 42 students received gold medals in recognition of their academic excellence. Among them, 38 students received gold medals in the best postgraduate category, while three students were awarded gold medals in the best undergraduate categories in Arts, Science and Commerce.

# Joya Smiti Divas to be organised

**HT Correspondent**  
**DEMOW, March 12:** The Asom Jatiyatbadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP), Demow Regional Committee to organise Joya Smiti Divas again in Demow. Rupiyoti Handique presided over the public meeting and Jamunoni Aditya, General Secretary of AJYCP, Demow Regional Committee, spoke about the objective of the meeting. Bipul Gogoi was selected as president. Latu Bhattacharjee and Biswajit Shyam were selected as secretaries for the committee. As per the decision in the public meeting, the programme will be organised on March 28 and at night, Ujjashree Phukan's 'Mahasati Joymoti' drama will be staged. The AJYCP, Demow Regional Committee will present a Joymoti Award to a woman social worker of Demow.

# Krishak Mela -2026 begins



**HT Correspondent**  
**MORIGAOON, March 12:** In order to create mass awareness through farmers' on modern agricultural technology and farmers can get avail the benefit of various govt schemes, Morigaon District Agriculture Office (DAO) in collaboration with Morigaon District Administration and under the courtesy of Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) organised a two day 'Krishak Mela-2026' in the premises of agriculture office on Thursday, which was formally inaugurated by the District Commissioner Anamika Tewari in presence of DAO Dilip Kr Bora, GM of NABARD K Sabita Devi, DPD of ATMA Hiramoni Das. Speaking on the occasion The District Commissioner Anamika Tewari said the Krishak Mela organised by the Agriculture Department has become a huge platform for the farmers and the agricultural sector in the district.

He also highlighted issues such

as creating public awareness through agriculture, ensuring that farmers get proper benefits of schemes and innovation in the agricultural sector.

As part of the function, progressive farmers Raju Mani Bhuyan and Junti Bhuyan, who were specially invited by the President to the National Parade on Republic Day, were specially felicitated. The event, which began with a concert by invited artists, also honoured 12 progressive entrepreneurial women farmers by NABARD in conjunction with the International Women's Year.

This Krishak Mela also includes exhibition of agricultural, horticultural crops, exhibition of quality products produced by various departments, buyer-seller conference, digital business training, technical seminars, exhibition of modern agricultural machinery, farmer training etc. The fair also featured 25 shops with products produced by various departments,

Agricultural Science Centres, Self Help Groups and Farmer Producer Companies under the district administration. The crops produced by the farmers in various markets have attracted the attention of all the farmers who come to the Krishak Mela. A "buyers-sellers" conference was also held as part of the first day of the Krishak Mela.

Digital business training, marketing of produce and value addition were discussed in detail at the event. The program was moderated by Asstt Inspector of Agriculture Dibyajyoti Hazarika. The programme was attended by Sub-Divisional Agriculture Officer and Nodal Officer Muchahid Faruqi, Mehedi Arif Hussain, ATMA's Deputy Project Director Hiramani Das, District Fisheries Officer, District Animal Husbandry Officer, officers of relevant departments, Agricultural Development Officers, Agricultural Inspectors, ATMA's ATMs and BTMs were present.

# GNDG Commerce College organises session on Research Methodology



**HT Correspondent**  
**NAGAON, March 12:** A technical session on 'Research Methodology' was organised by the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) of Nagaon GNDG Commerce College on Thursday at college premises.

The programme was held at the mini auditorium of the college and witnessed enthusiastic participation from faculty members and students. Ahead of the technical

session, the Principal of the college, Dr Mriganka Saikia, introduced the resource person Professor M K Sinha of Nagaland Central University to the students and highlighted the significant achievements that Professor Sinha has made throughout his academic career. The programme was anchored by Dr Puja Neog, Assistant Professor, Department of Hindi, who conducted the session smoothly.

In his lecture, Professor Sinha highlighted the importance of research methodology in academic and scientific studies. He explained various aspects of research including problem identification, research design, data collection methods and the significance of proper analysis and interpretation of data. He also emphasised the need for developing critical thinking and analytical skills among students and researchers. His presentation provided valuable insights into conducting systematic and meaningful research, which was highly appreciated by the participants. The session proved to be informative and beneficial for both students and faculty members, helping them gain a clearer understanding of the fundamentals and practical applications of research methodology in different research activities.

The programme concluded with an interactive discussion where participants had the opportunity to ask questions and clarify their doubts.

# Storm affected several gaons of Nitai- Panidehing areas

**HT Correspondent**  
**DEMOW, March 12:** The Storm came on Wednesday night and affected several Gaons of Nitai-Panidehing areas. According to information received in Gohainpukhuri, Lachan Gaon, MiripatharHiloidhari Gaon, Gelapathar, Nemukur, Potia Gaon, the storm has affected minor damages in People's houses.

Ankan Jyoti Phukan, Demow Revenue Circle Officer, visited the affected areas inNitaipukhuri on Thursday. Ankan Jyoti Phukan, Demow Revenue Circle Officer said that assessment for the compensation of the affected people is going on and after the assessment, it will be provided.

# 1 died, another injured in road accident in Kheroni

**HT Correspondent**  
**KHERONI, March 12:** A tragic road accident occurred on Wednesday evening in Kheroni, West Karbi Anglong, resulting in the death of one individual and leaving another seriously injured.

The collision took place during heavy rainfall when a motorcycle and a Maruti WagonR collided head-on. According to local reports, the victims were daily wage labourers who were travelling from Kheroni toward Chariali when the mishap occurred.

The deceased has been identified as Phuleswar Chauhan, who died on the spot due to the impact of the crash. Another person, Manik Das was injured. He sustained serious injuries and was rushed to a nearby medical facility for treatment. The vehicles involved in the accident have been identified by their registration numbers — motorcycle (AS02 AA 9154) and Maruti WagonR (AS02 AW 0223).

Local authorities suggest that poor visibility caused by the torrential rain may have contributed to the collision. Police arrived at the scene and have begun a formal investigation.

# Three bear cubs rescued in West Karbi Anglong

Forest Department monitoring cubs, efforts underway to reunite them with mother



**HT Correspondent**  
**KHERONI, March 12:** In a heart-warming wildlife rescue, three bear cubs were found on Wednesday evening in the Lama-rang area of West Karbi Anglong.

The cubs were first spotted by a local farmer who had headed to the hills for jhum cultivation (slash-and-burn farming). Upon noticing the vulnerable animals alone in the fields, the farmer immediately took action to ensure their safety and alerted the author-

ities.

The cubs are currently under the close supervision of the Kheroni Forest Department. According to departmental officials, the cubs are receiving preliminary health check-ups and first aid. The forest staffs are providing necessary food and hydration to keep the cubs stable. They are being kept in a controlled environment to minimise stress.

Forest officials have stated that the primary goal is to reunite the

cubs with their mother.

"We are currently tracking the movements of the mother bear in the area. Once we have a clear trail, the cubs will be released back into the deep forests of the region to ensure they can grow up in their natural habitat," a department official confirmed.

The Forest Department has urged locals to remain cautious and report any further sightings of adult bears in the vicinity to facilitate a safe reunion.

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## Rio asks people to avoid multiple entries during census operation

HT Correspondent

**DIMAPUR, March 12:** Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Thursday stressed the importance of avoiding multiple entries during the upcoming census enumeration, saying the Census 2027 would be a significant and important exercise for the state.



Referring to Nagaland as a predominantly Christian state, he appealed to all participants not to take pride in wrongful practices or unhealthy competition, but instead to uphold honesty and integrity in the conduct of the census.

Rio was addressing a briefing session on Census 2027 at the state banquet hall in the chief minister's residential complex in Kohima.

He noted that the decadal population growth rate of Nagaland has shown inconsistencies when compared to the national average.

He urged all elected representatives and political party leaders to help correct such discrepancies through responsible leadership.

Rio also pointed out that inflated census data has resulted in complications in areas such as Aadhaar coverage and school enrolment figures.

Chief secretary Sentianger Imchen highlighted the importance of conducting an accurate census in the state.

He emphasised that reliable census data is crucial for planning and implementing various government projects and developmental initiatives.

Home commissioner Abhijit Sinha presented an overview of Census 2027, which was followed by a detailed presentation by director of census operations Dr Zasekuolie Chusi on the methodology, processes and challenges involved in the census exercise.

## IAF helicopters help contain forest fire in Arunachal's East Siang

**ITANAGAR, March 12:** The Indian Air Force helicopters conducted a four-day operation to help contain a forest fire in Arunachal Pradesh's East Siang district, carrying out 54 sorties and dropping around 1.62 lakh litres of water over affected forest areas and nearby settlements, officials said on Thursday.

The firefighting operation began on March 8 after the East Siang district administration reported the spread of the forest fire in Mebo circle and sought helicopter support.

Following the request, the state civil aviation department approached the Defence ministry and the Eastern Air Command, after which the IAF launched the operation, starting with aerial reconnaissance of the fire-hit areas and trial lifting of water before undertaking full-scale dousing efforts.

During the operation, helicopters lifted water from the Siang River and dropped it over interior forest areas as well as locations close to human settlements, a press statement by state disaster management secretary Dani Sulu said.

The operation, which ended on Thursday, was supported on the ground by teams from the district administration, the incident command unit at Mebo, the state civil aviation department, fire and emergency services, the disaster management and personnel from the nearby Sagar Military station.

Firefighting teams from neighbouring districts, the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), personnel from Assam fire and emergency services, along with Aapda Mitras, community volunteers and villagers led by gaon buras also joined the effort to prevent the fire from spreading to inhabited areas.

An additional team of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) was requisitioned on March 10 as a precautionary measure in case the situation worsened.

Officials said the forest fire affected around 140 hectares of reserve forest and nearly 200 hectares of community forest, agricultural and horticultural land in Sagar, Ralling and Mebo areas under the Mebo sub-division.

However, no human casualties or livestock losses have been reported.

Authorities said the fire has been brought under control to a large extent following the combined efforts of multiple agencies and heavy rainfall in East Siang on Wednesday night. (PTI)

Reimbursement of stamp duty, registration fees, capital investment subsidy and power subsidy

## Arunachal formulates new industrial policy with incentives to boost investment

**ITANAGAR, March 12:** Arunachal Pradesh Commerce and Industries Minister Nyato Dukam on Thursday informed the Assembly that the government has formulated a new industrial policy aimed at transforming the northeastern state into an industrial hub, offering a host of incentives to attract private investment and support new and expanding industrial units.

Replying to a written question by BJP MLA Wanglin Lowangdong, Dukam said the Arunachal Pradesh Industrial Development & Investment Policy, 2025 provides several incentives, including reimbursement of stamp duty and registration fees, capital investment



subsidy, capital interest subvention and power subsidy.

## Curfew relaxed in Meghalaya's Garo Hills

Residents of Tura hit streets to clean up town after 2 days of violence

**TURA, March 12:** Hundreds of people stepped out of their homes on Thursday to clean the streets of Tura town in Meghalaya's West Garo Hills, after it was rocked by violence during protests linked to elections to the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council, resulting in the death of two persons.

The total curfew imposed in Meghalaya's East and West Garo Hills districts following the violence on Tuesday and Wednesday was relaxed for a few hours on Thursday to allow people to procure essential items, officials said.

The curfew in East Garo Hills was relaxed for five hours from 8 AM to 1 PM, while in West Garo Hills, it was relaxed for two hours from 2 PM to 4 PM.

During the brief window, a large number of youths, including women, took to the streets with brooms to clear debris left behind after incidents of arson and damage to property in parts of the Garo Hills region.

Many were seen sweeping roads, removing burnt materials from the streets, and cleaning up market areas.



The curfew was imposed in the two districts under Section 163 of the BNSS, after violence erupted in West Garo Hills during protests linked to the elections to the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC), with demonstrators opposing the participation of non-Garo communities in the filing of nominations for the polls.

Two persons were killed and several others injured when police opened fire to disperse a mob during clashes in Chibinang area on Tuesday, officials said. (PTI)

Two persons were killed and several others injured when police opened fire to disperse a mob during clashes in Chibinang area on Tuesday, officials said. (PTI)

## 16 deaths, 581 houses damaged in natural disasters in Mizoram last year: Minister

**AIZAWL, March 12:** Mizoram has recorded 16 deaths and significant property destruction due to natural calamities over the past year, State Disaster Management and Rehabilitation Minister Lalnilawma informed the Assembly on Thursday.

In a written reply to a query from opposition Mizo National Front (MNF) legislator K Laldawngliana, the minister said that the state government has released ex-gratia payments of ₹ 4 lakh each to the next of kin of the 16 deceased people.

Lalnilawma also said that 581 houses were destroyed by landslides, rain, cyclone and other calamities during the same period.

He said that the affected families were given compensation ranging from ₹ 1.3 lakh to ₹ 4,000, depending on the category of the house and severity of damage. (PTI)

## 21 Tangkhul Nagas detained by armed men released following negotiations

**IMPHAL, March 12:** Twenty-one Tangkhul Naga civilians, who were detained by villagers and armed men of the Kuki community in Manipur's Ukhrul district, were released early on Thursday following negotiations, officials said.

The civilians, travelling in three vehicles were detained by Kuki villagers and armed men at Shangkai on Wednesday afternoon.

"Following intense negotiations involving the state government and civil society organisations from both the Naga and Kuki communities, the detained civilians were released around 4 AM," an official said.

The civilians were brought to Litan police station, 5 km from Shangkai, and reunited with their respective families, he said.

Tension remained high on Thursday morning in the Tangkhul Naga-majority district, particularly along areas bordering Kuki-majority Kangpokpi, with security forces conducting patrols to avoid any unwanted incidents, the official said.

Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand had expressed "profound



concern regarding the distressing situation along the Ukhrul-Imphal Road, where innocent civilians have been reportedly held captive under the area covered by Litan police station".

Singh had appealed to those responsible to uphold the highest traditions of humanity and ensure the safe and unconditional release of all the civilians at the earliest.

He also assured the public that the government was "treating the matter seriously and would take necessary steps to book the culprits

involved in such a cowardly act". Shangkai Village Authority had alleged that 'Tangkhul volunteers' fired upon villagers who were working in the fields, following which they were detained.

It also said two members of the Kuki community, who had gone to repair a water pipeline, were fired upon and remained missing.

Gunfights between armed groups of two communities were also reported in nearby Thawai Kuki and Mahadeva areas in the district on Wednesday. (PTI)

## Sikkim International Film Festival to be held from March 19-22

**GANGTOK, March 12:** The first-ever Sikkim International Film Festival will be held in the state capital from March 19-22, officials said on Thursday.

The film festival will be hosted by the Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Sikkim in collaboration with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India and the National Film Development Corporation of India (NFDC), they said.

Sikkim's Music, Drama, Dance and Film Board Chairman Tashi Tshering Bhutia told reporters that the festival aims to celebrate the art of cinema while promoting Sikkim as an emerging destination for filmmaking and cultural exchange.

The festival is envisioned as a platform that will bring together filmmakers, artistes, critics and cinema enthusiasts from across the country and abroad, fostering dialogue, collaboration and appreciation for diverse cinematic expressions, they said.

Bhutia said that the launch of the Sikkim International Film Festival marks an important milestone in the state's efforts to strengthen film culture and provide a meaningful platform for creative talent.

"Cinema is a powerful medium that connects cultures, ideas and people. Through SIFF, we aim to showcase the rich cultural heritage, natural beauty and creative potential of Sikkim to the global film community," Bhutia said.

He said that Sikkim has evolved as a distinct hub for creative economy since 2019 through the personal

guidance and patronage of Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang.

IPR Chairman Ashit Rai said that the Sikkim International Film Festival comes at a time when Sikkim is witnessing a coming of age of filmmakers making their presence felt in India and abroad.

He said that the film festival will provide a platform for meaningful exchanges and collaborations and establish Sikkim as a favourable destination for filmmakers from around the world.

Information & Public Relations Department secretary Annapurna Alley, who is also the Festival Director, said that the four-day festival will feature a curated selection of national and international films along with special screenings, panel discussions, masterclasses and interactive sessions with noted personalities from the film fraternity.

"The festival is envisioned not only as a cultural celebration but as a strategic step towards establishing Sikkim as a recognised destination for film, storytelling and creative collaboration," she said.

Alley said that a key highlight will be a special screening dedicated to the cinematic legacy of Satyajit Ray, including the historic documentary on Sikkim, which holds immense cultural and historical significance for the state.

The secretary further said that the festival will host a short film competition, for which entries have already been invited from Sikkim, North Bengal and neighbouring countries of Nepal and Bhutan. (PTI)

## Awaiting administrative reforms panel recommendations for recruitment in vacant posts: Pema Khandu

**ITANAGAR, March 12:** Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Thursday said that his government was awaiting the recommendations of the administrative reforms commission (ARC) to undertake a recruitment drive to fill up vacant posts in various districts.

Replying to a question raised by NPP MLA Thangwang Wangham during Question Hour, Khandu said the commission, headed by a retired IAS officer was constituted to make administration more efficient, transparent, accountable and citizen-centric by examining existing structures, procedures and policies.

"We are waiting for the recommendations of the commission so that recruitment can be undertaken to fill up vacant posts in various districts," the chief minister said.

Khandu informed the House that 94 posts have been sanctioned for Longding district, of which four remain vacant. Requisitions for filling up these posts have already been placed with the Arunachal Pradesh Staff Selection Board (APSSB), he added.

On the issue of district quota recruitment, the chief minister said the matter is currently sub judice and therefore, no recruitment can be made under the quota system at present.

The district quota recruitment mechanism was introduced by the state government to ensure the equitable distribution of government jobs among various districts. It is mainly applicable to Group C and D posts, many of which are recruited through the APSSB.

## Arunachal tops Fiscal Health Index among NE-Himalayan states

**ITANAGAR, March 12:** Arunachal Pradesh topped the Fiscal Health Index (FHI) for 2023-24 among North Eastern and Himalayan states, according to a report released by NITI Aayog.

The FHI is a comprehensive framework for assessing and comparing the fiscal performance of states. It outlines each state's fiscal strengths, weaknesses and overall profile.

Niti Aayog's 2026 Fiscal Health Index (FHI) for 2023-24 was released by vice chairman Suman Berry in New Delhi on Wednesday.

The FHI evaluates states on five pillars, such as quality of expenditure, revenue mobilisation, fiscal prudence, debt index and debt sustainability.

The second edition of FHI expanded to cover 18 major states and 10 North Eastern and Himalayan states (including Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Meghalaya, Assam, Uttarakhand and others).

Congratulating the people on the achievement, Chief Minister Pema Khandu, in a social media post, said this recognition reflects the state's strong commitment to responsible fiscal management, improved revenue generation and better utilisation of public resources.

"This recognition reflects the state's strong commitment to responsible fiscal management, improved revenue generation and better utilisation of public resources. Among the North-Eastern and Himalayan States, Arunachal Pradesh ranked 1st, followed by Uttarakhand and Tripura. (PTI)



The policy was brought in to address regional imbalances in employment opportunities across the state.

However, the system has recently come under legal scrutiny after a writ petition challenged the validity of district-wise reservation in recruitment before the Gauhati High Court.

The petitioners have argued that district-based reservation may violate the constitutional principle of equal opportunity in public employment under Article 16 of the Constitution.

Following the petition, the court directed authorities not to proceed with appointments under the district quota in certain recruitment processes, including those conducted by the APSSB, until the matter is decided.

Khandu said he has discussed the matter with the state advocate general to pursue an early settlement of the case so that recruitment under the system can

proceed. He said the government has asked all deputy commissioners to submit reports on vacant posts in their respective districts.

"The government is awaiting the reports and will act accordingly to fill up vacant posts based on the recommendations of the ARC," he said.

Raising the issue, Wangham stated that since the carving out of Longding district from Tirap, no substantial or proportionate creation of new administrative posts has taken place to meet the district's growing administrative requirements.

Responding to this, the chief minister said there is no immediate proposal for the creation of additional administrative posts in the district at present.

However, he added that the government would take appropriate action based on the recommendations of the ARC and examine the issue. (PTI)

## Advised to move to safer place after info of possible attack but didn't leave home: Meghalaya CM

**SHILLONG, March 12:** Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma said he had been advised to move to a safer location after receiving information about a possible attack on his residence amid the ongoing unrest in the Garo Hills region, but he did not relocate as he was not afraid.

The chief minister, who belongs to the Garo community, also appealed for peace in a video message on Wednesday.

Sangma said he was informed that different groups and several individuals were heading towards his residence with the intention to burn his house at Tura, the headquarters of West Garo Hills and attack his family.

"Based on this information and in accordance with my security protocol, I was advised to move to another place. However, I did not leave and



I did not agree to relocate, because I am not afraid," he said.

Sangma said his life was in the hands of God and he would not be intimidated by threats.

Clashes between tribals and non-tribals over filing nomination papers in the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) elections left two people dead on Tuesday. Mobile internet services were suspended in five districts of the region on Wednesday, while curfew has also been imposed in West Garo Hills and East Garo Hills

districts. The government postponed the April 10 polls in view of the violence.

Invoking the legacy of his father, former Lok Sabha Speaker P A Sangma, the CM said he drew courage from him and remained committed to working for the welfare of the people.

"I am also an A'chik (Garo) and the blood of P A Sangma runs in me. I draw courage from his legacy. I love my community deeply and I am working for the cause of our people with utmost integrity and honesty," he said. Amid the prevailing unrest, Sangma appealed to citizens to maintain peace and refrain from acts of violence and vandalism.

He said incidents of destruction of government properties and religious places, intrusion into homes and disturbance to families were being reported.

"Such actions do not reflect the values of our community and society," he said. He urged people to resolve the situation through dialogue and not violence.

"Whatever situation we are facing today can only be resolved through dialogue. Let us not resort to violence. Instead, let us respect our systems, put our community and our state first and work together to restore peace," he added. (PTI)

# 'God saved me': Farooq Abdullah reacts to assassination bid

## Flags 'inadequate' security at venue

**JAMMU, March 12:** Veteran politician and National Conference (NC) president Farooq Abdullah on Thursday described his narrow escape from an assassination attempt as an act of divine intervention, while raising serious questions over the "total absence" of police deployment at a high-profile wedding where the incident took place.

The 88-year-old former chief minister was targeted at point-blank range on Wednesday night while leaving a marriage pavilion in the Greater Kailash area on the outskirts of Jammu.

"I am fine and God has saved me," Abdullah told PTI on Thursday morning.

The assailant, identified as 63-year-old Kamal Singh Jamwal, reportedly told investigators he had been waiting two decades for an opportunity to kill Abdullah as he had a "personal motive".

"I do not know that man, nor had anyone ever told me anything about him. As for what his motive was... how would I know what it could have been?" he told reporters at his residence.

Recounting the moments of the attack, Abdullah said he was about to step out of the wedding pavilion after the bride arrived when he heard what he initially thought was the sound of firecrackers.

"When the bride arrived, after that we took permission from them and we started leaving for home. I



had just stepped out of the wedding pavilion (mandap) and was walking when I heard a sound like a firecracker. I thought someone must have burst a firecracker, because people often burst them at weddings," he said.

Abdullah, however, said he had later felt a burning sensation but did not realise at the time that it was a gunshot.

"Then I felt a kind of burning sensation, but at that moment I did not realise what had happened. In the meantime, they (security personnel) quickly pushed me into a car, and when they were seated, they told me, 'Sir, it was actually a pistol.' They said that the person had fired two shots at me," Abdullah said.

CCTV camera footage showed that the gunman had positioned

himself directly behind Abdullah, but an alert police officer and an NSG commando held and overpowered the attacker, causing the weapon to misfire and hit the ground.

Asked about a possible security lapse, Abdullah said that it would be premature to make such claims, but said that many prominent people were present at the function, and adequate police arrangements should have been in place.

"It seems like there might have been a security lapse somewhere, but calling it a security lapse is a very big statement. The question is that many prominent people were present at this wedding, so the police should have taken proper precautions. But there was a total absence of police arrangement," he said.

Despite being a Z+ category protectee, Abdullah highlighted a glaring lack of basic security protocols at the venue.

He said the biggest issue is that there was no police presence at all. "Not for me alone, but many prominent people had come to that wedding. It was necessary to have protection at such an event, especially in the kind of environment we are living in today, where such elements exist. Precaution is necessary," Abdullah said.

The accused, a resident of Purani Mandi, remains in custody.

Following the incident, Union Home Minister Amit Shah spoke with Abdullah to check on his well-being and assured a thorough investigation into the security breach and the attacker's motives.

"Yes, the home minister also called me. He asked how I was. I told him, 'By the grace of God, I am safe.' He said they had caught the person and that an investigation would be conducted, and they would inform me what exactly happened," he added.

Abdullah said a proper inquiry should be conducted to determine the reasons behind the attack.

"There should be a proper inquiry into this matter. Now it is up to them to investigate and find out why this happened and what the reason was. These kinds of things keep happening nowadays...where an atmosphere of hatred has been created," he said.

Abdullah credited his survival to the swift reactions of his Special Security Group (SSG) and NSG cover. "They stood in front of me and showed immense courage. That is why I am alive."

"I do not have enough words to praise them. There were people in the room with me, including local police personnel, security men who stayed with me, and members of the NSG, who stood in front of me to protect me," he said.

On whether the earlier downgrading of his security could have contributed to the incident, Abdullah said that increasing security alone does not fully eliminate risks.

"Even if you increase your security, remember one thing: the attacker always has the advantage. He knows where he wants to target you and what he wants to do. But I will not say that security should be increased further. That is not the main issue," he said.

He said terrorism continues to be a global challenge. "We live in an era where terrorism is hanging over us like something in the sky, and we cannot completely control it. Terror exists not only in our country but across the world. Anything can happen anywhere," he added.

His son and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah had echoed concerns about security on X, questioning how an armed man reached point-blank range. (PTI)

# PM asking people not to panic but is himself panicked for different reasons, says Rahul

**NEW DELHI, March 12:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi amid concerns over reported LPG shortage, saying the PM is asking the people not to panic but is himself panicked for "completely different reasons".

Gandhi alleged that the prime minister is panicked because of the Epstein files issue and the Adani Case in the US. He made the remarks after several opposition MPs, including himself and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, staged a protest in the Parliament House complex over the shortage of commercial LPG cylinders to demand answers from the government over it.

Speaking with reporters after the protest, Gandhi said, "The PM is saying there is no need to panic, but the PM himself has panicked for completely different reasons... he is panicked because of Epstein, he is panicked because of the Adani case, he is not able to come inside the House." "You saw yesterday that the prime minister's chair was empty. So, he is telling the country not to panic but has panicked himself," Gandhi added.

In a Facebook post in Hindi after the protest, Gandhi said, "Sansad mein Narenra gayab, desh mein cylinder gayab". Several opposition MPs from the Congress, DMK, TMC and SP, among others, staged a protest near Parliament's

Makar Dwar, raising slogans such as 'Naam Narendar, Kaam Surrender' and 'Modi ji, LPG'. The women opposition MPs, including Priyanka Gandhi, sat down with a mock brick cooking stove and raised slogans against the government.

In a post on X in Hindi, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said, "When the country is grappling with a severe crisis, Prime Minister Modi ji is engrossed in election tours. 'There is a severe shortage of LPG across the country, and people are standing in queues. Countless small and large industries are being forced to bear the consequences of the BJP's failure. But the government has no answers. Only false claims," he said. The failure of diplomacy is a serious issue, and the result of the mismanagement of energy is being borne today by the 1.4 billion people of the country, he claimed.

"Narendra Modi ji, bahut hai 'Mann ki Baat, zara sansad mein aa kar kariye 'mudde ki baat' (Enough of 'Mann Ki Baat', come to Parliament and talk on real issues)," the Congress chief said. With the House being adjourned shortly after meeting at 11 am amid sloganeering by the opposition demanding a discussion on the West Asia situation, Gandhi sat with suspended opposition MPs on the steps of the Makar Dwar and had tea with them. (PTI)

# Modi govt increased allocation towards MGNREGA four times, says BJP MP

**NEW DELHI, March 12:** The Modi government has increased the allocation to the erstwhile rural employment scheme MGNREGA by nearly four times to ₹ 8.53 lakh crore as compared to the funds earmarked by the Congress-led UPA regime, BJP member in the Rajya Sabha Bhim Singh said on Thursday.

He was participating in a discussion on the working of Ministry of Rural Development which had implemented the scheme in the UPA regime. It has now been replaced by VB-G RAMG scheme.

Singh said the Centre was not trying to kill the scheme but has brought it back in a revised form as Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) due to the evolving needs with time. "They (Congress-led UPA government) had not done anything even under MGNREGA about which they keep beating the drum. The budget of MGNREGA during the UPA regime was ₹ 11,300 crore in 2006-07, the maximum they did was ₹ 33,000 crore in 2013-14, but our government increased it to ₹ 86,000 crore in 2025-26 and the G-RAMG that has come now," Singh said in the House.

He further said under G-RAMG also, a provision of ₹ 95,000 crore has been made and if there is any outstanding amount in MGNREGA work, then a provision of ₹ 30,000 crore has been made.

"During the 10-year rule of the UPA government, ₹ 2.13 lakh crore was released under MGNREGA. Our government, Modi's government, has allocated ₹ 8.53 lakh crore in the last 11 years. This is four times their (UPA's) allocation. And they say you killed MGNREGA." (PTI)

# No MP enjoys privilege; would be forced to take action to maintain LS dignity: Birla

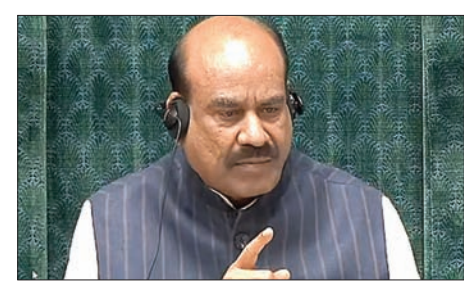
**NEW DELHI, March 12:** Speaker Om Birla on Thursday said Lok Sabha functions strictly according to rules and no member has the privilege to speak whenever he or she wishes and warned that if anyone behaves contrary to the decorum of the House, he would be compelled to take strict action to preserve its dignity.

A day after a resolution seeking his removal from office was defeated, Birla also said in Lok Sabha that members may personally agree or disagree with the decision of the Chair, but it remains his duty to enforce the rules, procedures and traditions of the House.

He said the Chair does not belong to any individual, it is a symbol of India's democratic traditions, the spirit of the Constitution, and the prestige of this great institution.

The speaker said whether it is the Leader of the House (Prime Minister), the Leader of the Opposition (LoP), or any other member - they can speak only by following the procedures laid down in the rules of the House.

Thursday was the first time Birla came to the



House to conduct the proceedings since the notice of no confidence was given against him by the opposition on February 10 during the first part of the Budget session, which ended on February 13. The second part of the session began on March 9. Birla said MPs always must remember that disagreements and intense exchanges of ideas are natural in parliamentary debate but there is a clear line between democratic discourse and disorder.

"Waving placards, shouting slogans, tearing papers, or climbing on desks are contrary to our

great parliamentary traditions. Such behaviour not only disrupts proceedings but also diminishes the prestige of the House," he said, adding whether there is praise or criticism, his resolve remains the same: to protect the dignity of the House and uphold its rules. Referring to remarks by some members that the Leader of the Opposition (Rahul Gandhi) was disallowed to table a magazine article based on the unpublished memoir of former Army chief M M Naravane on the India-China conflict of 2020, Birla cited rulings by past speakers when members were not allowed to table documents by the Chair.

"From this sacred Chair, I wish to clarify that whether it is the Leader of the House (Prime Minister), the Leader of the Opposition (LoP), ministers, or any other member - all members can speak only by following the procedures laid down in the rules of the House," he said.

The speaker said some members believe that the LoP may rise at any time and speak on any subject of their choosing, they consider this to be a special privilege. (PTI)

# Delhi: LPG supply concerns trigger spike in induction cooktop sales

**NEW DELHI, March 12:** Retailers across Delhi are witnessing a sharp rise in the sale of induction cooktops, with some reporting an increase of 75 to 80 per cent in purchases amid concerns over LPG shortage.

Shopkeepers said the surge has been there for the past two days, with customers increasingly turning to electric cooktops, infrared stoves and compatible utensils as a backup to an LPG stove.

Amit Gupta, who owns Effects Kitchens and Hardware at Connaught Place, spoke about a spike in online and offline demand.

"Since yesterday, we have recorded more than 200 walk-in customers, while another 250 to 300 existing and new clients reached out through phone calls. Earlier, electric cooktops were largely purchased by hospitality outlets, but now even households are coming in a panic, fearing stoppage of LPG supply," he said.

Gupta said the demand has exceeded the shop's existing stock, forcing the store to source additional inventory. He said at present they have more pending orders than the stock and are trying to procure bulk lots of different brands every day to fulfil the growing demand.

The government has revised the priority order for allocating domestically-produced natural gas, placing LPG production, CNG, and piped cooking gas at the top.

Another retailer, Praveen Kumar, who runs NG Kitchenware in Green Park, said his shop has seen a sharp rise in customers purchasing induction cooktops and electric appliances. (PTI)

# AAP's Sanjay Singh alleges attack on party councillor

**NEW DELHI, March 12:** Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MP Sanjay Singh on Thursday alleged that a party councillor and a worker were assaulted in west Delhi and demanded that the police register an FIR and take action against those involved.

Addressing a press conference, Singh said the incident occurred on Wednesday when AAP councillor Jyoti Gautam visited her ward to inspect ongoing road work along with party worker Sanjay Bhairava in Rajendra Nagar constituency.

He alleged, "Some individuals linked to BJP MLA Umang Bajaj attacked the worker and misbehaved with the councillor."

There was no immediate reaction available from the BJP over the allegations.

Singh claimed that Gautam later approached the police station and sought registration of an FIR, stating that the incident and injuries had been medically documented.

He urged the Union Home Ministry and the Delhi Police to take immediate action in the matter. The AAP MP also referred to a separate case involving former party MLA Somesh Shokeen, alleging that he had received threats and an extortion demand of ₹ 10 crore. (PTI)

# Attack on Abdullah matter of 'great concern': Nadda in RS

**NEW DELHI, March 12:** The Union government on Thursday termed the murderous attack on veteran leader Farooq Abdullah a matter of "great concern" and assured the Rajya Sabha that all necessary steps will be taken to ensure his security.

The government is taking the assassination bid with utmost seriousness. Leader of the House and Union minister J P Nadda said a day after the 88-year-old National Conference leader escaped a bid on his life when a gunman fired a shot at point blank range while he was coming out a wedding event in Jammu.

The 63-year-old gunman, identified as Kamal Singh Jamwal, was quickly overpowered and taken into custody.

Nadda's statement came in response to Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge's allegation that there seemed to be a conspiracy to eliminate Abdullah - who has Z+ category security - and blaming revocation of Jammu and Kash-

mir's statehood for the incident.

"A murderous attack on Abdullah is a matter of great concern and a very serious matter..." Nadda said. He said a thorough investigation is being conducted to ascertain the motive of the arrested assassin and to prevent any such security lapse in the future.

The security of the National Conference party president is a matter of great importance and the investigation will not be limited to the arrest, the minister added.

He assured the members that "appropriate action will be taken".

Accepting the severity of the attack on Abdullah, Nadda strongly rebutted the opposition's attempt to use the security breach to comment on the political status of Jammu and Kashmir.

"Reaching a conclusion that this happened because (Jammu and Kashmir) was not given statehood... and making allegations that there is in a way a conspiracy being hatched to kill him... is condemnable," Nadda said.

He also stated that it would not be correct to politicise the issue as investigation into the security breach was still active.

Kharge raised the issue when the House met for the day, saying the former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister's security was at risk.

"His security is under threat because statehood of Jammu and Kashmir was revoked," the Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha said. He added that no such incident could happen in the days when local security and police arrangements were with the state government.

The situation in Jammu and Kashmir today is because security is with the Union Home Ministry after the revocation of statehood, Kharge alleged. "Law and order has broken down and conspiracy is being hatched to eliminate important leaders." People will be safe when the state gets full statehood, he said. "People of Kashmir are not safe in your hands," he told the Centre. (PTI)

# Govt 'bartered' to US India's right to determine its ties with oil suppliers: Rahul

**NEW DELHI, March 12:** Asserting that the foundation of every single nation is its energy security, Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Thursday alleged that the government has "bartered" to the US India's right to determine its relationships with different oil suppliers due to a "compromise".

Raising the issue in the Lok Sabha, Gandhi said the war between the US-Israel and Iran is going to have far-reaching consequences.

"The central artery from where 20 pc of global oil flows, Strait of Hormuz, has been closed and this is going to have tremendous repercussions, particularly for us because a very large portion of our oil and natural gas comes through the Strait of Hormuz," Gandhi said.

"The pain has just started -- restaurants are closing, there is widespread panic about LPG, street vendors are affected and as I said, this is only the beginning," the former Congress president said.



The foundation of every single nation is its energy security, Gandhi asserted.

"I do not say this lightly, but allowing the US to decide who we buy oil, gas from... whether we buy oil from Russia or not, whether our relationship with different oil suppliers can be decided by us, this is what has been bartered," the Congress leader said.

"This is a very puzzling fact for me, this is a very puzzling fact as to why a nation the size of India would allow the president of any

other nation to give us permission to buy Russian oil, to decide who our relationships are with," Gandhi said in an apparent reference to the US giving a 30-day waiver to buy oil from Russia.

"This has been a puzzle and I have been trying to figure this puzzle out. I have figured the puzzle out."

"The puzzle is about compromise. We have a gentleman sitting here who is the oil minister (Harddeep Puri), he himself has said that he is a friend of Mr Epstein," Gandhi said, adding, "I have a document which shows his (Puri's) daughter has received money from George Soros."

This evoked an uproar from the treasury benches.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla asked Gandhi to speak on the notice he has given and not move to other topics.

With Gandhi repeatedly asserted that what he was saying was connected with energy security, Birla asked Puri to make his statement. (PTI)

# Women in agri-food sector should get greater role in policy formation, decision making: Prez Murmu

**NEW DELHI, March 12:** President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday said women engaged in agriculture and agri-food sectors should get a greater role in policy formation, decision-making and leadership positions, and called for collective action to close gender gaps across the value chain.

Addressing the three-day Global Conference on Women in Agri-Food Systems, the President said success case studies on women in agriculture should be published widely to ensure more people were aware of their contributions.

Emphasising India's strategic choice of women-led development, Murmu said women in the agriculture sector must be given a greater role in policy formulation, decision-making, and leadership positions.

"Larger participation of women

at all levels in the sector will promote gender-inclusive agricultural growth," she said. She called for targeted support for women farmers on issues of land titles, access to technical knowledge, and institutional finance.

On the role of technology, Murmu highlighted 'Sarlaben' -- an AI-powered initiative inspired by the government's livestock care vision -- as an example of how artificial intelligence is opening new possibilities for women farmers.

Noting that the government had conferred Padma Shri awards on women farmers from Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Bihar, Murmu said the next generation should draw inspiration from these trailblazers to contribute meaningfully to the farm sector.

The President welcomed the UN's declaration of 2026 as the In-



ternational Year of Women Farmers, describing it as a call for "collective action to close gender gaps and promote leadership roles for women across the agri-food value chain".

The President cited a series of

central government initiatives from the past decade that have sought to economically empower women in agriculture.

The Jan Dhan Yojana, the world's largest financial inclusion programme, now has 570 million

bank accounts, of which 56 per cent are held by women. Women also constitute 68 per cent of all Mudra loan beneficiaries, reflecting the reach of India's digital public infrastructure.

Under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana -- National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) -- over 10 crore rural households and 90 lakh self-help groups (SHGs) have been mobilised, making it one of the world's largest women-led community initiatives.

More than 4.6 crore women farmers under this mission have received support for adopting improved farming practices.

The Namo Drone Didi scheme provides drones to women SHGs for precision agriculture. The National Rural Livelihood Mission has set a target of creating 6 crore Lakhpati Didis -- women earning

over ₹ 1 lakh annually -- of whom more than 3 crore have already achieved that status.

The 2025-26 Union Budget has also introduced SHE Marts (Self-Help Entrepreneur Marts) community-owned retail outlets in every district dedicated to marketing products made by SHGs and rural enterprises -- to provide women in agriculture and allied sectors better market access. Closing her address, Murmu invoked the global framework of people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership, urging all stakeholders to make gender a special priority in both thought and action. "With effective gender inclusion in every sphere of activity, including agriculture, we will not only achieve the SDGs but will also make the planet a much more sensitive and harmonious place," she said. (PTI)

# West Asia crisis: No fuel shortage in country, says Oil Min Puri

**NEW DELHI, March 12:** The government on Thursday said there is no shortage of petrol, diesel, kerosene or aviation turbine fuel in the country despite the ongoing West Asia crisis, and urged the Opposition not to spread rumours and fake narratives.

Responding to concerns raised by Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi in the Lok Sabha, Petroleum Minister Hardeep Puri said it is the foremost priority of the government that the kitchens of over 33 crore families, especially the poor and the underprivileged, do not face any shortage of gas.

Domestic supply is fully protected, and the delivery cycle is unchanged, he said.

"There is no shortage of petrol, diesel, kerosene, aviation turbine fuel or fuel oil. The availability of petrol, diesel, aviation turbine fuel, kerosene, and fuel oil is fully assured," Puri said.

He noted that retail outlets across the country are stocked, supply chains for these products are functioning normally, and additional allocation of PDS (public distribution system) kerosene has been issued to all the states.

"This is not the moment for rumour-mongering or fake narratives. India is navigating the most severe global energy disruption in recorded history," he said, adding

that crude supply is flowing and gas is prioritised for homes and farms. Gas is prioritised for homes and farms, and LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) production has been stepped up by 28 per cent, the minister noted.

"Consumer prices are held far below what markets and regional comparators would dictate. Schools are open. Petrol is on the forecourt. Every citizen, regardless of political affiliation, has a stake in that," he said.

"India must stand united behind its energy warriors, behind the institutions managing this crisis, and behind the national interest."

"Amid sloganeering by Opposition members, the minister said that due to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's effective diplomatic outreach, India has secured crude volumes that exceed what the disrupted Strait of Hormuz route would have delivered in the same period.

Before this crisis, about 45 per cent of India's crude imports transited the Hormuz route. "Non-Hormuz sourcing has risen to approximately 70 per cent of crude imports, up from 55 per cent before the conflict began," he said.

Puri informed that India sources crude from 40 countries, against 27 in 2006-07.

Refineries are operating at high



capacity utilisation, and in several cases, they are exceeding 100 per cent. "The world has not faced a moment like this in modern energy history," he said.

Following the joint attack launched by the US and Israel on Iran on February 28, the Islamic nation has stopped the movement of oil and gas ships from the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 per cent of the world's crude, natural gas and LPG flows.

The supply was disrupted following the military operation between Iran, Israel and the US, the minister said, adding that despite

India having no role in causing the conflict, like many countries, India has to navigate through its consequences.

He said an Indian neighbour has shut all schools for two weeks, moved government offices to a four-day work week, ordered 50 per cent of public employees to work from home, cut fuel allowances for official vehicles by half, and taken 60 per cent of government vehicles off the road.

Another neighbour, he said, has closed universities early and brought forward the Eid al-Fitr holiday to save fuel.

Countries in Southeast Asia have also had to take energy rationing and conservation measures. Meanwhile, non-Hormuz sourcing has also risen to about 70 per cent of crude imports, up from 55 per cent before the conflict began.

India was previously importing about 60 per cent of its LPG requirements from Gulf countries, such as Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait and 40 per cent is produced domestically.

He informed that the procurement has now been actively diversified, with cargoes being secured from the US, Norway, Canada, Algeria, and Russia, in addition to available Gulf sources.

The LPG Control Order issued on March 8 directed all refineries to maximise LPG yields.

"Hence, in the last five days, LPG production has been increased by 28 per cent through refinery directives, and further procurement is actively underway," he said.

Puri said the standard time from booking to delivery for domestic LPG cylinders remains 2.5 days, unchanged from pre-crisis norms.

Hospitals and educational institutions have been placed on uninterrupted priority supply. Their access to LPG is fully assured regardless of broader demand conditions, the minister said, adding that

field reports indicate hoarding and panic-buying at the distributor and retail level, driven by consumer anxiety rather than any actual supply shortage, the minister said.

"The House should be clear on this: the rush-buying pressure in some localities reflects a demand distortion, not a production or supply failure," he said.

Delivery Authentication Code coverage is being expanded from 50 per cent to 90 per cent of consumers. Under this system, a cylinder can only be logged as delivered when the consumer confirms receipt through a one-time code on their registered mobile, making undocumented diversion effectively impossible to conceal, he added.

A 25-day minimum booking gap has been introduced as a demand management measure in urban areas and 45 days in rural and Durgam Kshetra (remote areas).

Further, he said commercial LPG has been regulated to prevent black marketing, not to penalise the hospitality sector.

Commercial LPG is sold in a completely deregulated, over-the-counter market at market price, without any government subsidy.

There is no registration system, no booking requirement, no digital authentication, and no delivery confirmation mechanism. (PTI)

## Cong's Aiyar, Tharoor face-off in 'open letter war'

**NEW DELHI, March 12:** In an 'open letter war', Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar declared that he was parting ways with party colleague Shashi Tharoor while the latter hit back at the veteran politician for his "many gratuitous" comments.

It all started with Aiyar penning an open letter to Tharoor that was published in Frontline magazine earlier this week.

Aiyar said he was shocked to the core by Tharoor's answers to questions on a TV channel on March 6, on the ongoing "illegal and sinful war" on Iran by Israel in cahoots with the US and the West in general.

"I have been so disturbed that I could not sleep and have woken at 3 in the morning to write you this open letter," Aiyar wrote.

Aiyar claimed that he had put his political career on the line by not only voting for Tharoor in the election to the post of the Congress president, even when he knew Tharoor would be badly defeated, but also by writing in The Indian Express next day that the victor, Mallikarjun Kharge, should magnanimously respect his democratic right to stand against him despite his being backed to the hilt by both the Gandhi family and the scattered remnants of the G-23.

"I argued fiercely that he (Kharge) should grant you (Tharoor) an honourable place in the Congress hierarchy, as befits a mature political party, to fully use your many talents. In consequence, the Gandhis and Kharge have refused to meet me ever since. Nevertheless, I felt vindicated on moral grounds," Aiyar said in his 'open letter' to Shashi Tharoor on moral amnesia, and more".

"I now find I should have championed a worthier cause. Your shameful espousal last night of 'might is right' has horrified me. You say you fully understand the reason why Foreign Minister S Jaishankar is extremely wary of taking on the Americans: fear of the 'consequences' that may result for India, particularly its economy.

"As Chairman of the Standing Committee on the LPG situation, you surrender decision-making on foreign policy to the government because only they have all the required information. Then what are you doing in your high office?" he said, slamming Tharoor. (PTI)

## Andhra CM Naidu asks collectors to step up efforts to attract investments

**AMARAVATI, March 12:** Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday directed district collectors to focus on investment proposals and continuously take measures to attract industries across districts.

Reviewing investment proposals during the second day of the sixth District Collectors' Conference here, the chief minister stressed the need for proactive efforts by collectors to bring investments into the state.

"Steps must be taken to ensure investments coming into the state are grounded quickly. If investments come, employment opportunities for local youth will increase," Naidu said.

He noted that increased investments will increase the per capita income of people across the state.

Naidu said the government is developing Visakhapatnam, Amaravati and Tirupati as Economic Region Development areas to accelerate industrial and economic growth.

According to the CM, Industries Secretary N Yuvaraj will oversee the Visakhapatnam region, Municipal Administration Special Principal Secretary Suresh will supervise Amaravati and Principal Secretary (Excise) Mukesh Kumar Meena will handle Tirupati.

He said the officials will take responsibility for industries, investments and economic development in their respective regions while coordinating closely with district collectors.

Naidu instructed collectors to regularly review investment proposals and ensure projects are grounded quickly by expediting approvals and completing land allocations.

He emphasised that industries can begin production quickly only when water supply and basic infrastructure are ensured.

Highlighting infrastructure development, Naidu said an industrial cluster has been designed at Orvakal where facilities, including an airport have already been established.

He added that Kopparthi village in Kadapa district should also be developed as a major industrial cluster in the coming years.

The chief minister instructed collectors to hold district-level meetings on investments and take initiative in attracting industries

based on local opportunities.

He also announced that district-wise rankings will be introduced based on speed of doing business to create competition among collectors.

Naidu alleged that during the previous YSRCP government between 2019 and 2024, investors were reluctant to come to the state due to the policies.

He claimed that an automotive battery company had set up its corporate office in Tirupati but was forced to move out under the previous (YSRCP) administration.

According to Naidu, lands allotted to industries during the earlier TDP government between 2014 and 2019 were allegedly used for other purposes by the previous government.

Naidu said a Hyderabad-like ecosystem is now being planned across Andhra Pradesh to promote balanced development in all districts.

He observed that if industries cannot be established in some districts, sectors such as tourism, IT, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) or agriculture should be promoted.

The CM said that development strategies should be designed based on the strengths and advantages of each district to attract investments.

The TDP supremo also directed collectors and ministers not to focus only on their own areas but to work for the overall development of the state.

Naidu further reviewed various departments, stressing people-friendly governance and development coordination.

"The Forest Department should cooperate in development and infrastructure. The police became people-friendly, but the Forest Department has not. It must change," Naidu said.

He said complaints increased about forest officials ignoring collectors' advice, urging cooperation with environment-friendly projects and proper identification of reserve lands during surveys.

He criticised impractical thinking among some forest officials, questioning how infrastructure could be denied in tribal areas. He emphasised improving green cover and biodiversity while ensuring people can travel freely and enjoy nature in forest regions. (PTI)

## India's energy security compromised due to 'flawed' foreign policy: Rahul

**NEW DELHI, March 12:** Alleging that India's energy security has been compromised due to a "flawed" foreign policy, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government must prepare in advance. If not, crises will suffer in the future, he said amid reports of LPG shortages.

Gandhi said the PM is unable to function as the prime minister of India as "he is trapped". But he still needs to make sure that the people of India are protected and "our energy security is managed by us", the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha told reporters in the Parliament House complex.

Basically, gas and fuel are going to be a problem because "our energy security has been compromised", Gandhi said. "A flawed foreign policy has created this problem. Now, what we have to do is to prepare. You have some time. The government and the prime minister must immediately start the preparations because otherwise crises of people will suffer massive losses," he said.

"It is a bigger issue than Iran allowing oil and



not allowing oil. This war is fundamentally about the current world order...We are going into an unstable time. When you are going into an unstable time you have to change your mindset, you cannot have the same mindset," Gandhi said. Gandhi said he is suggesting to the government that it must start thinking deeply about the possibilities and what India can do to make sure its people are not harmed.

"I am not making any political statement. I am just saying that I can see that a big problem is coming and if this is resolved at the level of Iran then also this problem will not go away be-

## Bomb threat to Maharashtra Vidhan Bhavan sparks security alert

**MUMBAI, March 12:** An email threatening "missile and bomb attacks" on Maharashtra Vidhan Bhavan and other key locations in Mumbai triggered a security alert on Thursday, prompting authorities to conduct extensive searches in the legislature complex during the ongoing Budget session, officials said.

The email, received on an official email account of the legislature at 6.57 am, mentioned possible attacks on the Vidhan Bhavan complex, Bombay Stock Exchange, Bombay High Court, Mumbai Metro and a bank, legislative council chairman Ram Shinde said.

The threatening email may be linked to the pro-Khalistani movement, but it is too early to say anything concrete on it, Shinde told reporters in the Vidhan Bhavan premises.

Following the hoax email, the premises was locked down for about 40 minutes and a fresh BDDSS team was deployed to scan and sanitise the entire complex again, Vidhan Sabha sources said.

The premises is usually checked and sanitised between 6 am and 8 am as part of a standard security procedure, while the bomb detection squad as well as the dog squad conduct daily scans of the entire premises as a precautionary measure, they added.

However, the email was noticed later in the morning and therefore the complex was locked down briefly to recheck the entire area. After the search, the police said nothing suspicious was found in the legislature complex and a preliminary probe suggested the threat was a hoax. The Bomb Detection and Disposal Squad (BDDSS) subsequently declared the premises safe, officials said. As per the standard procedure, Vidhan Bhavan officials lodged a complaint at Marine Drive police station against an unidentified person.

The sprawling complex, which houses the legisla-

tive assembly and the council, is located at Nariman Point in south Mumbai, where the Budget Session began on February 23 and will conclude on March 25. The winter session of the legislature is traditionally held in Nagpur. Shinde said the email referred to possible "missile and bomb attacks" at a time when the state legislature's budget session is underway.

"It will not be appropriate to disclose further details at this stage. More information will be shared after the probe is completed," he told reporters. Security agencies have launched an investigation and were monitoring the situation closely, he said.

"The Bomb Detection and Disposal Squad immediately began a detailed search operation in the legislature complex after the email was received," he added. After the threat email was received, security protocols were promptly initiated, and the employees and other people were safely evacuated from the building, a police official said. The security in and around the legislature complex was stepped up.

As a precautionary measure, all officers and staff assembled outside the premises while security agencies, including the city police's BDDSS, conducted checks. The home department and security agencies were on alert, and an investigation was underway to trace and identify the sender of the threatening email, officials said.

Meanwhile, Opposition Shiv Sena (UBT) MLC Milind Narvekar demanded that the legislature proceedings be adjourned for the day and the entire building be thoroughly checked in view of the threat.

Raising the matter in the legislative council, Sena (UBT) member Anil Parab said the government should at least make a statement on it and apprise the House of the situation. (PTI)

## 'Shortage' of LPG cylinders affecting public, govt should take necessary steps: Hooda

**CHANDIGARH, March 12:** Former Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda on Thursday alleged that the "shortage" and "black marketing" of LPG cylinders were affecting common people and asked the government to take necessary steps to ensure the public did not face problems.

"Long queues are being seen in different parts of the state. Black marketing is also happening.

"The government should take necessary steps to deal with the situation and build confidence among people," the Congress leader told reporters here.

He further said if one goes by what the government is saying that adequate stocks are available, "then why are long queues seen outside gas agencies? The shortage of commercial LPG cylinders was already there, but now people are facing problems even for the domestic cylinders".

Referring to the West Asia conflict, Hooda said war is taking place and some difficulty arises, but the government should provide relief to the people and reassure them. "The government should also give a statement clarifying the

stock position. This is also the time when so many marriages are taking place.

"Hotels and restaurants are facing problems due to the shortage of commercial LPG. What will happen to common people who have booked these hotels for marriages? Where will they go?" he asked. On Wednesday, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini chaired a meeting with senior officers of the Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department and officials of oil companies here to review the situation of cooking gas and fuel supply across the state.

During the meeting, officials of oil companies informed that the supply of petrol, diesel and domestic LPG is normal at present, with adequate stock available with the firms, according to an official statement.

Meanwhile, Hooda reiterated that his party will win one of the two Haryana seats for which polls will take place on March 16.

"The polling is taking place for two seats but there are three candidates. It is clear that one seat will go to the BJP and one to the Congress," he said. (PTI)

## My marriage not a case of 'love-jihad', we did not convert: Viral Kumbh Mela girl

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, March 12:** Monalisa Bhonsle, the young woman who shot to fame during the Prayagraj Kumbh Mela last year, on Thursday said that her wedding to a Muslim man here was as per her choice and according to Hindu customs, rejecting allegations that it was a case of "love-jihad".

Bhonsle, who hails from Madhya Pradesh, said neither she nor her husband changed their religion and that she had forced him to marry her.

"He did not want to marry me, but I forced him to do so. We got married according to Hindu customs," she told reporters at a press conference here.

The couple also said that "it was not a case of love-jihad" as allegedly reported by a section of media, as being artists all religions are the same for them.

"We respect all religions and we have not converted," they said.

The term 'love Jihad' is used by right-wing groups to allege a conspiracy by Muslim men to lure Hindu women into relationships and marriage to convert them to Islam.

Bhonsle's husband, who is from Uttar Pradesh, also said that when in love, there is no need to convert to another religion.

He also showed soft copies of Bhonsle's Aadhaar card and birth certificate on his phone in support of his assertion that her birthday was January 1, 2008 and that she was an adult now.

He also showed copies of their marriage certificate.

He further said that he got married according to Hindu customs as he loves Bhonsle and wanted to make her happy.

Bhonsle, eldest of four children,



said her parents wanted her to marry her paternal aunt's son, but she opposed the idea.

"He is like a brother to me. How could I marry him," she said, adding that her father is in Kerala,

but did not attend their wedding as he was upset with her.

"We will placate him in time," her husband said.

She said that she has a younger sister and two younger brothers

back home.

Responding to reporters' queries regarding his career, Bhonsle's husband said he has been travelling frequently to Kerala and Chennai in connection with film work and he has worked in some Tamil movies.

"But for the last one-and-half years I have been living in Thiruvananthapuram," he said.

The couple thanked the Kerala government and the police for their help in getting married and said that they never thought they would get so much support from everyone.

Earlier in the day, Bhonsle and her husband told reporters that she was over 18 years of age.

Her husband said that they had a registered their marriage and the same would not be possible if she was underage.

"She is above 18 years of age.

Otherwise, how would our registered marriage be possible. All the news regarding her being underage are fake and incorrect. Please do not believe that," he said. Bhonsle also said such news items were "fake and incorrect."

When reporters asked the couple whether the two intended to continue staying in Kerala, the man said that it depends on his wife's wishes.

Bhonsle said that she likes Kerala and wants to stay in the state.

She also said that the shooting of one of her movies was over and the other was ongoing.

Her husband said that they had met and fell in love six months ago when they were cast for a movie.

"Shooting of that movie has not started yet," he added.

The couple got married on Wednesday at the Nainar Temple at Arumanoor in Poovar in the

presence of Kerala General Education Minister V Sivankutty, ruling CPI (M) state secretary M V Govindan, Rajya Sabha MP A V Rahim and other prominent leaders of the Marxist party.

Bhonsle had said that her family did not like their relationship and had pressured her to marry another person.

On Wednesday, the couple had reached the Thampanoor police station alleging that her father was trying to forcibly take her back to her hometown.

The couple had arrived in nearby Poovar recently in connection with a film shoot.

With a captivating smile and beautiful eyes, the Indore girl had shot to fame after a virtual content creator shared a video of her selling rudraksh garlands at Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh last year. (PTI)

# Cinema of heart and sensibility taking a beating in theatres: Vishal Bhardwaj



Good cinema is going through a deep struggle, says Vishal Bhardwaj. This was the case in the pre-OTT era and even now with filmmakers taking their projects to streaming platforms and being told the film should be released in theatres first.

The casualty of this is "cinema of the heart and sensibility", added the "O Romeo" director. Twenty years ago, it would be easy to raise money for films such as his own "Haider", Vikramaditya Motwane's "Udaan" and Anurag Kashyap's "Gangs of Wasseypur" that were released in theatres and celebrated by discerning audiences.

Not any more. "Now you won't be able to raise money for them. Now there is

a straight demarcation. "This is the subject, take it to OTT" and OTT people say, "No, we don't want it, release it in theatres first, then we will take it here". Good films are getting beaten in the process," Bhardwaj told PTI.

What is needed is a "revolutionary step" and we don't know when that will happen and whether it will be through a film or a new medium, he said. The current theatrical landscape, Bhardwaj went on to explain, is difficult for filmmakers with his contemporaries and directors he admires now telling their stories on streaming platforms.

"We are in a very strange and difficult phase of filmmaking. I think it's global... The films to be made for theatres have taken a totally new turn," Bhardwaj said.

Referring to his contemporaries -- Anurag, Dibakar (Banerjee) Shriram (Raghavan), Vikramaditya and Imitiaz (Ali) - he said most are working for OTT. And even if they do make films for theatres, it doesn't always work.

"... It's so sad. I don't remember Vikram's last film in theatres. I am Vikram's fan. I am Dibakar's great fan, they make great cinema," Bhardwaj added.

According to the director, theatrical movies faced a challenge in the past with the advent of satellite television. Then, the gap between a film's release in theatres and their arrival on TV would be five to six months. Today, a film releases in theatres and is on some OTT platform eight weeks later.

"If you want to make films for theatres, you have to look at yourself from a new perspective. By doing all that, how do you still keep yourself alive in that film is a challenge. In between, OTT platforms were making originals but that's also now less... Good cinema is going through a deep struggle, which is always the case anyway," the filmmaker said.

"To make people go that 'I want to see it now, I don't want to wait for eight weeks', to create that lure, you have to do all kinds of things. What is happening is, the ones who are getting defeated are the cinema of the heart, cinema of the sensibilities," he said.

The days following the release of his 2003 film "Maqbool", starring Irrfan, Pankaj Kapur, Tabu and Piyush Mishra, were great for directors, Bhardwaj said.

"Around 2004-2005, and before the pandemic, it was the golden pe-

riod. You could make anything, you could release anything, people used to come to theatres for films like 'Haider'. 'Gangs of Wasseypur' becomes a cult... 'Khosla Ka Ghosla', 'Oye Lucky Lucky Oye', 'Udaan'..."

The filmmaker, who most recently released Shahid Kapoor-Triptii Dimri-starrer "O Romeo", said the advent of OTT, rising ticket prices and the shortening gap between the theatrical window and the films' arrival and other such factors have led to the dip in the theatrical business.

"I was in Delhi and a few of my friends were going to watch my film. So they said, 'Give us Rs 6,000, we are going to watch your film'. They were three. I said, 'Why 6,000? They said, 'You don't know, the ticket price is Rs 1,900 rupees per seat in that (hall)'. Everyone must be having their reasons, the theatres, and the infrastructure of the theatres, the taxes, or whatever."

"People say they will watch it on OTT. But there is so much content available on OTT, not just Indian, but globally, there is so much available. We need a revolutionary step and we don't know when that will happen and whether it will be through a film or a new medium?" (PTI)

## ARBAAZ KHAN SAYS FATHER SALIM KHAN'S HEALTH IS 'IMPROVING', TO BE DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITAL SOON



Actor-filmmaker Arbaaz Khan has recently shared an update on his father, veteran screenwriter Salim Khan's health. The veteran filmmaker has been admitted to Lilavati Hospital in Mumbai for nearly a month.

While talking to the reporters while exiting an iftar party on Wednesday, Arbaaz revealed that Salim Khan's health is "improving" and he will soon be released from the hospital.

Arbaaz said, "He's better now, he's improving." The actor was asked about Salim Khan's discharge from the hospital, to which he simply responded, "Soon." Salim Khan, 90, suffered a minor brain haemorrhage and was brought to Lilavati Hospital on February 17. Last month, the renowned filmmaker underwent a minor surgery.

Salim Khan was "stable" at the moment, but he was being closely monitored in the Lilavati Hospital's Intensive Care Unit (ICU) in Mumbai. On the day of Salim Khan's surgery, the screenwriter's physician, Dr Jalil Parkar, released a statement stating that, in accordance with his family's wishes, no more medical updates regarding the senior screenwriter's health would be released.

Arbaaz's latest update on Salim Khan's health is the first official statement from the Khan family. No Khan family member has previously discussed Salim Khan's condition with the public or posted anything on social media since he was admitted to the hospital.

The hospital's doctor had previously come forward to share a health update about Salim Khan in detail, but that reportedly offended Salman Khan. Salim Khan is doing well, according to public statements made by actors Amir Khan, Chitrangda Singh, and Daisy Shah regarding his health.

Salim Khan is known for writing some of the most famous Hindi films, including Andaz, Seeta Aur Geeta, Sholay, Don, and Mr India with his erstwhile partner Javed Akhtar. (PTI)

## RASHMIKA MANDANA'S OLD PRIVATE AUDIO LEAKED, ACTRESS WARNS LEGAL ACTION

Actor Rashmika Mandana on Thursday said she will take legal action against those publishing an "old private conversation" that is being circulated now to create controversy just after her marriage.

Mandana was previously engaged to Kannada actor Rakshit Shetty but they called off the engagement in 2018, just a year later.

The "Thamma" star tied the knot with fellow actor Vijay Devarakonda in a lavish ceremony in Jodhpur recently.

"To my dearest people who have been with me through this incredible journey so far. And to others concerned with this matter. It has been 8 years since a sustained campaign of misinformation, harassment, and targeted attacks from a section of the media and individuals online had started against me," Mandana wrote on X.

The actor said she chose patience and silence despite being at the end of "unfair criticism" but not anymore.

"... What has happened in the last 24 hours crosses a line that can't be ignored.

An old private conversation, believed to be from nearly eight years ago, appears to have been recorded and circulated without the knowledge or consent of those involved. A small portion of that conversation has now been deliberately taken out of context and circulated widely to create yet another disconcerting controversy- strategically coinciding with recent developments in my personal life," the 29-year-old actor said.

Mandana said her family and people she shares "cordial relationship with" have been dragged into this controversy.

"This constitutes a serious invasion of privacy and the circulation of misleading and defamatory material. While we move forward in life, grow, create meaningful work, and spread positivity, it is unfortunate that a few continue to manufacture hate and controversy at the cost of another person's dignity and peace. (PTI)

## T'gana CM inaugurates Netflix' Eycline Studios in Hyderabad

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Thursday inaugurated Netflix's Eycline Studios here and invited the OTT leader to set up a bigger facility in the 'Bharat Future City' being developed by the state government on the city outskirts.

Eycline is Netflix's innovation hub. Reddy vowed to attract all the Fortune 500 companies to the Bharat Future City.

Highlighting his dream to make Hyderabad a hub of the international film industry, Reddy said Netflix setting up a facility in the city means the "arrival" of Hollywood.

"This is the stepping stone for my dream. This is the place not only for Tollywood, Bollywood, Kollywood. I have been focusing on Hollywood. Today, I am happy to announce that Netflix is here. I can authoritatively say Hollywood is here. My dream is going to come true. I sincerely welcome Netflix," he said.

Urging Netflix to expand its presence in Hyderabad, he assured the government's support to the OTT platform.

Reddy, who said he has been interested in films since his childhood, offered to allot land in the 'Bharat Future City' where AI would be hosted in a big way for Netflix to establish a bigger facility.

"I don't know where your corporate office is. But, you have to relocate your corporate office to my Bharat Future City. I have openly told my Prime Minister (Narendra Modi). I am going to attract every company in the Fortune 500 list to my Bharat Future City," he said.



Observing that "Hyderabad is a natural home for Netflix", he said both the city and the OTT platform are global success stories.

Noting that Netflix has, of late, been putting lot of focus on sports, Reddy said his government is promoting sports in a big way by building sports infrastructure and establishing a sports university.

The launch of Eycline Studios aligns with Netflix's global strategy to expand its production innovation infrastructure, a company release said.

The facility positions India as a core node in global production pipelines, embedding advanced visual effects, virtual production, and next-generation production technology, it said.

The new office spans 32,000 sq.ft. and features state-of-the-art technology for advanced visual effects and generative virtual effects, all supported by a robust hybrid cloud infrastructure.

The Hyderabad facility is the fifth global location for Eycline, in addition to Los Angeles, Vancouver, Seoul, and London, the release said.

Speaking at the launch of Eycline Studios, Secretary, Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Sanjay Jaju said Hyderabad has emerged as a vibrant hub of talent and innovation, with a rapidly expanding media and entertainment ecosystem.

Jaju said Eycline Studios will serve as an im-

portant centre in South Asia, integrating technological innovation with the art of storytelling and creating new opportunities for the audiovisual and entertainment sectors.

Referring to the World Audiovisual Entertainment Summit held in Mumbai last year, he recalled that Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised the importance of the "Orange Economy", which focuses on creative and cultural industries.

He also highlighted that the Union Budget announced the establishment of 15,000 content creator labs in schools and 500 in colleges across the country, expected to generate nearly two million jobs in the creative sector.

Jaju expressed confidence that Hyderabad would play a key role in this growth due to its strong presence in the Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming and Comics (AVGC) sector.

He also announced that the Indian Institute of Creative Technologies (IICT) will soon open a regional campus in Hyderabad, further strengthening the ecosystem for creative technologies and content creation.

Jeff Shapiro, CEO, Eye-



## NETFLIX LAUNCHES EYELINE STUDIOS IN HYDERABAD, ITS FIFTH GLOBAL VFX HUB

Netflix on Thursday launched its premier visual effects and virtual production hub, Eycline Studios, in Hyderabad, marking a significant strategic push in the country's fast growing animation, VFX, gaming, and comics sector.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, state IT minister Sridhar Babu, information & broadcasting ministry secretary Sanjay Jaju, and actor-producer Rana Daggubati, alongside Jeff Shapiro, CEO of Eycline Studios.

Eycline Studios is Netflix's premier innovation hub for visual effects and virtual production, where practical filmmaking and next-generation technology converge.

Founded in 2019, the studio unified with Scanline VFX — a visual effects powerhouse established in 1989 — in 2025 to form a single, comprehensive creative force operating across three divisions: Studios, VFX, and Labs.

Its proprietary capabilities include the Light Dome volumetric lighting system, LED volume stages, 4D capture systems, and AI/ML-driven production tools.

The studio's credits span popular and upcoming productions such as "Happy Gilmore 2", "Wednesday", "Stranger Things", and "Daredevil: Born Again", earning multiple prestigious awards in recognition of its groundbreaking work in visual effects.

The Hyderabad office is Eycline's fifth global location after Los Angeles, Vancouver, Seoul, and London, spanning 32,000 sq ft with state-of-the-art technology for advanced vi-

sual effects and generative virtual production, backed by a hybrid cloud infrastructure.

At the event, Netflix Co-CEO Ted Sarandos addressed the gathering through a video message and described Eycline as the streamer's production innovation hub.

"When creators imagine something bold and new, the question should not be, 'is this possible?' It should be, 'how do we build it?' And Eycline exists to answer that very question," he said.

"India is one of the most dynamic storytelling markets in the world, with extraordinary creative voices, technical depth, and production scale. We're also encouraged by the strong national focus on the AVGC sector. The Government of India's emphasis to create 2 million skilled jobs in this sector by 2030 signals confidence and optimism, and we are committed to supporting this vision," he added.

Sarandos said Netflix wants more innovation and creation to happen from India with Indian talent.

"Creative technology is not just culture, it is capability, jobs, exports, and future-ready skills. Eycline Hyderabad can contribute meaningfully to that momentum. Many of the most loved and ambitious stories in the world are brought to life with advanced visual effects and production technology," he said. Speaking at the launch, Shapiro said India had long played a defining role in global visual effects — not merely because of scale, but because of the depth of creative and technical talent.

"I'm amazed by the scale and superiority of visual effects

in Indian films, like 'Brahmastra', 'RRR', 'Kalki' and 'Baahubali'. Over the past two decades, the visual effects industry here has grown. We are also seeing strong momentum in the sector, particularly across the AVGC ecosystem, supporting policy initiatives and growing focus on building the next generation talent.

"Eycline was created to bring together filmmakers, artists, and technology to develop workflows and visual effects to bring these stories to life. That is why Hyderabad feels like such a natural place for us to be here. This city brings together two things that modern storytellers really depend on - One, a really neat production of the system and two, a big pool of technology engineering," he added.

Daggubati said the launch of Eycline Studios in India is a big moment for the Indian film industry.

"For the past 20-25 years, we have been building a visual effects industry and that has led to this big cinema that Telugu cinema makes. It is because of those artists and minds. I think this is a great time for anyone who is looking for a career in this sector," he told reporters.

According to the actor, Hyderabad is the ideal location for Eycline Studios in India.

"It is a culturally easy place for anyone to live in. It is built for large shootouts to happen. The convenience that a film person has in Hyderabad, it is not available in other part of the country. The infrastructure is also there to constantly support filmmakers, whether it is large studios or small production houses," he added. (PTI)

# Bayern faces a tough Leverkusen test in Bundesliga after a 6-1 win and injury concern



**DUESSELDORF (GERMANY), March 12:** Bayern Munich is heading to Bayern Leverkusen in the Bundesliga after contrasting Champions League games in midweek for the two clubs.

Bayern was on rampant form in a 6-1 win at Atalanta overshadowed by injuries in the first leg of their round of 16 matchup, while Leverkusen had to settle for a 1-1 draw against Premier League leader Arsenal which kept its hopes alive. Bayern leads the Bundesliga by 11 points with nine games remaining.

#### Key matchups

There aren't many tricky away trips for Bayern in the Bundesliga these days, but Leverkusen is one of them. Bayern hasn't won there in the league since October 2021, though Vincent Kompany's team did get a victory in a Champions League

playoff last year.

Hoffenheim is flying high in third, which would be its best finish since Julian Nagelsmann coached the team in 2017-18. Saturday's opponent Wolfsburg is having a nightmarish campaign in the relegation zone as Dieter Hecking becomes the team's third coach of the season.

In a tight Champions League qualification fight, fourth-place Stuttgart is unbeaten in four Bundesliga games as it takes on fifth-place Leipzig, which is unbeaten in five, on Sunday.

#### Players to watch

Deniz Undav has scored in his last four Bundesliga games to take him to 15 goals for the season. Even if he's got half of Kane's tally of Bundesliga goals for Bayern, it's enough for second in the standings. Undav's

run of form could help him make his case for a return to the Germany squad in time for the World Cup.

Nico Schlotterbeck could be one of the most in-demand defenders on the transfer market this off-season, with no obvious progress on renewing a Borussia Dortmund contract which expires next year, though a decision to let midfielder Julian Brandt leave might free up some funds. Dortmund plays Augsburg on Sunday.

#### Who's out

Manuel Neuer's return from a calf injury lasted just 45 minutes last week before the Bayern goalkeeper was great picked up another calf injury which kept him out of Tuesday's Champions League win at Atalanta. Jonas Urbig stepped in but was hurt in a heavy collision with an opponent, so third-choice Sven

Ulreich may start.

Kane has missed two games with a calf issue but is set to return, though Alphonso Davies has pulled a hamstring and Bayern said Jamal Musiala was experiencing pain related to an ankle injury from last year. It wasn't immediately clear how seriously that would affect Musiala.

#### Off the field

Two bizarre disciplinary cases are getting German fans talking. The national soccer federation is investigating Cologne for its announcer making comments over the PA system loudly condemning refereeing decisions that went against the team.

Second-division Preussen Muenster faces a disciplinary case over a masked fan who unplugged the referee's video monitor during a penalty review against the team. (AP)

## Tottenham's Premier League position is damning and so are the numbers

**LONDON, March 12:** Tottenham's position in the Premier League is increasingly concerning. So are the numbers.

It feels like things can hardly get any worse at Spurs, who — let's not forget — won the Europa League last season and were one of the 12 founding members of the ambitious but flawed Super League project that was quickly aborted in 2021.

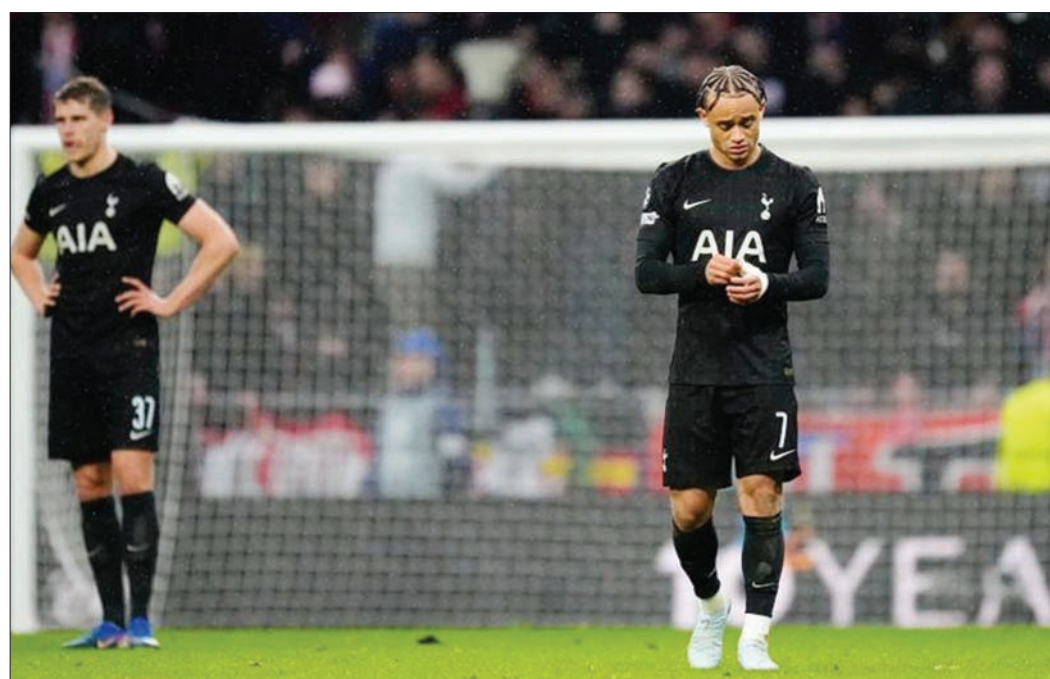
But, rest assured, it can get worse.

Still reeling from a calamitous 5-2 loss in the Champions League at Atletico Madrid on Tuesday, Tottenham must travel to Anfield for a league match against Liverpool on Sunday with its squad ripped apart because of a mixture of injuries, suspensions, potential concussion issues and a general lack of belief.

The 30th round begins with Spurs — an ever-present in the top flight since the 1970s — two places and one point above the relegation zone with nine games left. By kickoff at Anfield, they could be in it.

Third-to-last West Ham and fourth-to-last Nottingham Forest are both a point behind Tottenham going into home games against Manchester City on Saturday and Fulham on Sunday, respectively. Liverpool-Tottenham is the last game on Sunday.

Key players like James Maddison, Dejan Kulusevski, Mohammed Kudus, Rodrigo Bentancur and Destiny Udogie remain on the injured list, while captain Cristian Romero and midfielder Joao Palhinha might miss this weekend after being shaken following a clash of heads late in the game against Atletico. Key defender Micky van de Ven is



suspended.

Then there's the goalkeeper situation. Guglielmo Vicario's form was so poor that Tudor felt it necessary to drop him against Atletico and hand a first start since October to Antonin Kinsky. The 22-year-old Czech didn't even last 17 minutes before being hauled off because of an error-strewn display.

It means Vicario is likely to regain his starting place but his confidence can't be high, either. Despite coming under heavy pressure, Tudor appears likely to be in charge this weekend. Tottenham confirmed midweek that the Croatian will conduct a news conference on Friday ahead of the Liverpool game. Then the second leg against Atletico is on Wednesday.

After that, Tottenham's sole

focus might just be avoiding relegation.

#### Key matchups

Arsenal and Man City play on the same day in the latest chapter of the title race.

Holding a seven-point lead, Arsenal is at home to Everton. City plays a few hours later at the Olympic Stadium. Manchester United and Aston Villa are level on points — in third and fourth place, respectively — ahead of their meeting at Old Trafford.

#### Players to watch

With the 30th round coming in the middle of a tight turnaround in the Champions League round of 16, expect to see some rotation among the top teams.

Man City manager Pep Guardiola might want to keep Antoine Se-

menyo in his team, though, with the Ghana international having scored seven goals in 13 games since his January arrival from Bournemouth.

Chelsea striker Joao Pedro has eight goals in his last eight games heading into a home match against Newcastle on Saturday.

#### Out of action

Liverpool has its own injury concerns for the visit of toiling Tottenham: Brazil goalkeeper Alisson Becker didn't travel to Turkey for the 1-0 midweek loss to Galatasaray in the Champions League because of an undisclosed problem.

Arsenal is set to again be without midfielder and captain Martin Odegaard, who is nursing a knee injury. (AP)

## Bim10: ICC suspends player, two top officials on corruption charges

**BRIDGETOWN, March 12:** The ICC has provisionally suspended fast-bowling all-rounder Javon Searles and two people linked to a franchise for multiple breaches of the apex body's anti-corruption codes during the 2023-24 Bim10 tournament in Barbados.

Besides Searles, the ICC has suspended Titans team owner Chitranshan Rathod and team official Trevon Griffith from all cricket.

Bim10 was a fast-paced 10-over per innings tournament that featured six teams — Voyagers, Guardians, Titans, Settlers, Warriors, and Pelicans.

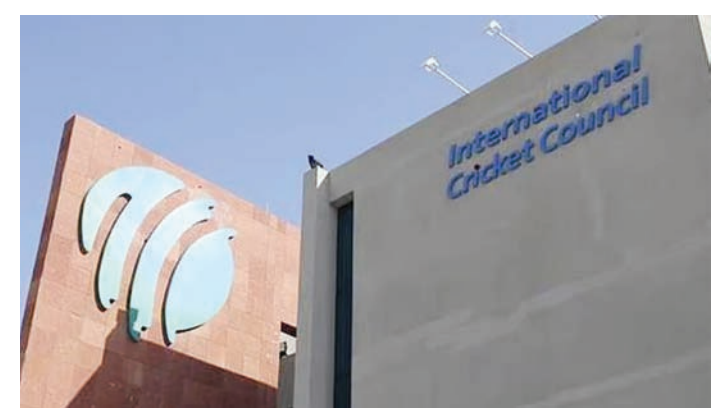
The tournament, which was last held in 2023-24, falls under the jurisdiction of Cricket West Indies (CWI) anti-corruption code and the charges were brought by the ICC and CWI under their respective anti-corruption codes.

The trio have 14 days from March 11, 2026 to respond to the charges, the ICC said.

The charges involve match-fixing, soliciting players, and failing to report corrupt approaches to the anti-corruption officials.

Searles, who has represented West Indies Under-19s, played for Trinbago Knight Riders in the CPL, and also featured in the IPL for Kolkata Knight Riders in 2018, faces four charges under the CWI anti-corruption code.

Rathod has been charged with facilitating corruption within his franchise, and Griffith also faces four charges under the CWI code and one under the ICC code, including allegedly obstructing the



investigation by tampering with information.

These charges are part of a larger, ongoing investigation into the 2023-24 edition of the tournament, which also previously involved suspended USA batter Aaron Jones being charged with five breaches.

All three have been charged with the following offences, as per ICC:

Breach of Article 2.1.1 of the CWI Code - Fixing, contriving to fix or otherwise influencing improperly, or being a party to an agreement or effort to fix or contrive in any way or otherwise influence improperly, the result, progress, conduct or other aspect of matches in the Bim10 tournament in 2023/24 (or attempting to do so).

Breach of Article 2.1.4 of the CWI Code - Soliciting, instructing, encouraging or facilitating Players and/or Player Support Personnel to commit offences under the CWI Code.

Breach of Article 2.4.4 of the CWI Code - Failing or refusing to cooperate with a reasonable investigation carried out by the Designated Anti-Corruption Official (or his/her designee) in relation to possible offences under the CWI Code.

Additionally, Searles and Griffith have also been charged with: Breach of Article 2.4.2 of the CWI Code - Failing to disclose to Cricket West Indies details of any approaches or invitations to engage in conduct that would amount to a breach of the CWI Code.

According to ICC, Griffith has also been charged with: Breach of Article 2.4.7 of the ICC Code - Obstructing the ACU's investigation into possible Corrupt Conduct by concealing and/or tampering with information that may have been relevant to the investigation, or which may have constituted evidence or led to the discovery of evidence of Corrupt Conduct. (PTI)

## MOC extends support to top Indian tennis players

**NEW DELHI, March 12:** Indian tennis players Yuki Bhambri and Sumit Nagal were on Thursday sanctioned financial assistance of close to ₹ 30 lakh each by the Mission Olympic Cell (MOC) while rising player Dhakshinewar Suresh was included in the Target Asian Games Group (TAGG) to bolster preparations for the 2026 Asian Games and the 2026 Davis Cup Qualifiers.

The approvals were cleared during the 169th meeting of the MOC under the Sports Authority of India (SAI).

Bhambri, who is currently ranked world No. 23 in doubles and is Asia's top-ranked doubles player, will receive a financial assistance of ₹ 28.89 lakh to support his training and competition schedule between February and September 2026.

The funding covers his participation in ATP and Grand Slam events across a 33-week international calendar along with professional training commitments.

Under TAGG provisions, Bhambri's assistance will also include support for personal physiotherapy services from Daniel Hatch during training blocks and competitions leading up to key events such as the Davis Cup tie in September on Korea and the Asian Games in Japan.

India's top-ranked singles player Nagal was sanctioned ₹ 27.51 lakh to support his international training and tournament schedule from March to October 2026.

The MOC also approved coaching support for Nagal for 70 days between March and May through the Nensel Academy Tennis School, where he will train under Sascha Nensel and Milos Galecic.

The MOC also recommended the inclusion of Dhakshinewar in TAGG, citing his potential as a strong singles and doubles option for India at the Asian Games. (PTI)

## Hungary visa applications with forged WFI letter raise trafficking fears

**NEW DELHI, March 12:** A suspected human trafficking attempt has come to light after individuals posing as Indian wrestlers sought visas from the Hungarian Embassy in New Delhi for a purported competition in Budapest, prompting the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) to clarify that the documents submitted by them were fake.

The embassy sought verification from WFI on Thursday after receiving visa applications supported by a recommendation letter allegedly issued by the national federation on March 4 for participation in an "international wrestling training and

competition programme" scheduled in Budapest from March 15 to 22.

The WFI swiftly responded and said that the letter was forged and had not been issued by the federation.

"This has reference to your e-mail dated March 12 seeking clarification regarding the authenticity of the document... the attached letter is fake and has not been issued by the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI)," WFI president Sanjay Kumar Singh said in a reply to the embassy.

The federation also pointed out discrepancies in the document, including the use of the name of a former office-bearer in an incorrect capacity.

"It is also clarified that Mr V.N. Prasad is no longer holding the position of Secretary General of WFI and is currently serving as Vice President, WFI. The matter has been verified with Mr Prasad, who has categorically denied issuing any such letter," Singh said.

According to the forged letter submitted to the embassy, 11 wrestlers and a manager were recommended for visas to travel to Budapest, citing a training and competition programme at a local venue. (PTI)

## Lens has transformed from surprise package to genuine title threat to PSG in Ligue 1

**PARIS, March 12:** With nine rounds remaining in Ligue 1, Paris Saint-Germain still has not managed to shake off Lens in the title race.

Lens has gone from surprise frontrunner to genuine challenger and, with PSG not playing this weekend, coach Pierre Sage's side can move two points ahead at the top with a win at mid-table Lorient on Saturday.

PSG is off duty because Nantes agreed to postpone their scheduled game on Sunday in order to give PSG better preparation for the Champions League second leg against Chelsea next week.

It seems PSG hardly needs it, leading 5-2 from the last-16 first leg on Wednesday.

The decision hardly pleased Nantes fans, who are facing yet another relegation scrap with a third coach this season. Ahmed Kantari was sacked this week and replaced by Vahid Halilhodzic.



Kantari was in charge for just three months. He was hired in mid-December after Nantes fired Luis Castro, who lasted 15 games.

#### Key matchups

After scraping a narrow win at Toulouse last weekend, Marseille moved back into third place on goal difference from Lyon.

But Marseille's fans are still angry at facing another trophyless

season and coach Habib Beye's players need a strong performance at home against Auxerre on Friday to appease them.

Monaco is at home to Brest on Saturday and the players are on a roll under attack-minded Belgian coach Sébastien Pocognoli. Monaco has won its past four league games, including impressive away wins against PSG and

Lyon looks to snap a four-game winless streak when it travels to lowly Le Havre and fifth-placed Rennes seeks a fifth straight win when it hosts Lille, with both of those games on Sunday.

#### Players to watch

Monaco's turnaround in fortunes has coincided with American forward Folarin Balogun finding form. He looked at his best last Friday against PSG, where his movement and hold-up play stood out, and he has 13 goals overall this season.

Lens winger Florian Thauvin is in fine form after scoring in Ligue 1 and the French Cup last week.

Rémi Humbert has caught the eye on the left side of Lyon's attack and the 18-year-old forward's form has earned him a first professional contract until 2028.

Rennes striker Esteban Lepaul looks to add to his 13 league goals this season.

#### Out of action

Lyon's goalscoring midfielder Pavel Šulc remains sidelined with a hamstring injury.

Marseille central defender Nayef Aguerd requires an operation to treat pubalgia — a chronic groin injury problem — which has been troubling the Morocco international for months.

Nice midfielder Everton is expected to miss the rest of the season. The 18-year-old broke into the team this year but suffered a serious ankle injury in training this season.

#### Off the field

PSG's Qatari president Nasser Al-Khelaifi was grounded in Qatar this week amid the intensifying Iran war.

Flights in and out of the Middle East have been impacted by the Iran war, started by the U.S. and Israel on Feb. 28.

PSG has been bankrolled by Qatari backer QSI since the club's takeover 15 years ago. (AP)

## Madrid comes down from Valverde's Champions League hat trick to return to La Liga slog

**BARCELONA, March 12:** After Federico Valverde single-handedly got Real Madrid back in Champions League domination mode with his hat trick against Manchester City, the 15-time European Cup winner must take a brief dip back into La Liga this weekend.

Valverde's memorable three-goal first-half explosion on Wednesday fueled a 3-0 win over City and coach Pep Guardiola, a nemesis of Madrid from his years in charge of the best Barcelona squads.

The treble by Valverde came after his last-gasp goal snatched Madrid a 2-1 win at Celta Vigo in the Spanish league's previous round.

Now Madrid must refocus, albeit it just for a game, on the domestic competition where it has struggled of late and trails leader Barcelona by four points after 27 of 38 rounds.

Alvaro Arbeloa's side hosts Elche on Saturday, then three days later heads to England to try and finish off City and advance to the Champions League quarterfinals.

Barcelona hosts Sevilla on Sunday.

#### Key matches

While Elche looks like easy pickings for Madrid, the small southern club did hold the powerhouse to 2-2 at home in November.

Elche was in eighth place just two months ago but has plummeted to 17th and the edge of the relegation zone.

Prior to that Valverde-inspired win at Celta, Madrid lost twice in the league to Getafe at home and away at Osasuna.

Barcelona will also be looking to avenge a 4-1 loss at Sevilla in October, its worst defeat in the league this campaign. In that loss, Barcelona was without injured attackers Lamine Yamal and Raphinha.

#### Players to watch

Valverde has emerged as the leader of an injury-hit Madrid. All six of his goals this season have come since January with Kylian Mbappé and Jude Bellingham both injured. (AP)

## Major boost to Rail Infrastructure and Connectivity in Assam

**Laying of Foundation Stone of**

- Furkating - Tinsukia Double Line (184 Km)
- POH workshop at Basbari

**Dedication to the Nation of**

- Ranglyta - Murkongsolek Electrified line (558 Km)
- Chaparmukh - Dibrugarh line Electrification (571 Km)
- Badarpur - Silchar line and Badarpur - Churabari line Electrification (315 Km)

**Flagging off of**

- Kamakhya - Chariapalli Amrit Bharat Express
- Narangi - Agartala Express
- Guwahati - New Jalpaiguri Express

by  
**Narendra Modi**  
Prime Minister



13 March, 2026 02:30 pm Guwahati, Assam

**Features**

- Modern coaches designed for comfortable long-distance travel
- Improved speed, punctuality and operational efficiency
- Affordable rail travel with enhanced passenger amenities

**Benefits**

- Stronger connectivity between Assam, Northeast and other parts of India
- Faster and convenient travel for commuters, students and traders
- Boost to tourism, trade and regional economic activity

## Real Madrid dominates Man City in Champions League

# PSG beats Chelsea, Arsenal salvages draw

**MADRID, March 12:** Even without a host of Galacticos, Real Madrid was far too strong for Manchester City in the latest Champions League clash of these titans.

A 3-0 win at the Bernabeu on Wednesday put Madrid in control of this round-of-16 tie at the halfway mark after a stunning first-half hat trick by Federico Valverde. The Uruguayan international took on the responsibility of inspiring the record 15-time champion in the absence of injured stars Kylian Mbappe, Jude Bellingham and Rodrygo.

"We are Real Madrid and you should never consider us dead," Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa told broadcaster Movistar.

The victory could have been even more commanding, but Vinicius Junior's casually taken second-half penalty was saved by Gianluigi Donnarumma. Defending champion Paris Saint-Germain beat Chelsea 5-2 and tiny Bodø/Glimt is also in sight of the quarterfinals after a 3-0 win over Sporting Lisbon.

Arsenal drew 1-1 with Bayer Leverkusen.

**Madrid masterclass**  
By fulltime at a rocking Bernabeu, the only comfort City could cling to was the fact that it could have been so much worse.

When Vinicius stood over the ball on the penalty spot shortly before the hour mark, he looked certain add to the lead. But the Brazil forward skipped in his run-up and hit a weak side-footed effort that Donnarumma pushed



away. It will still take a massive turnaround to see City advance after being outclassed by Madrid.

Valverde's hat trick featured three outstanding goals. The pick of the lot was his third when he flicked the ball over the head of City defender Marc Guehi before volleying home.

TV cameras caught Bellingham watching in the stadium with his mouth wide open in awe of the move.

City manager Pep Guardiola will likely be worrying that history is set to repeat itself after his team was eliminated at the hands of

Madrid in each of the last two seasons.

"Our game was not as bad as this result," Guardiola said. "I'm not someone to say we are going to turn it round, but we will try."

**PSG takes control against Chelsea**

After losing to Chelsea in the final of the Club World Cup last year, PSG got some revenge. A three-goal advantage after the first leg saw Luis Enrique's team take a big step toward the last eight.

Chelsea had twice leveled the game, but a mistake by goalkeeper Filip Jørgensen, who gave the ball away on the edge of his box in the 74th minute, allowed Vitiña to lift a shot into the open net.

PSG substitute Khvicha Kvaratskhelia scored twice more to leave Chelsea with a mountain to climb back at Stamford Bridge.

"This is our most important moment in the competition," Luis Enrique said. "We'll try to play the second leg in the same way as we did today. We'll try to win the game. That's the best mentality as if we're thinking about defending our lead, it could be a big mistake."

**There's no stopping Bodø/Glimt**

Bodø/Glimt's fairytale run just keeps on going.

Manchester City, Atletico Madrid and Inter Milan have been left in the tiny Norwegian club's wake. Now Sporting Lisbon's Champions League hopes are hanging by a thread. Bodø/Glimt — located north of the Arctic

Circle and farther north than any team in Champions League history — took full advantage of playing the first leg at home and led 2-0 at halftime through Sondre Fer's penalty and Ole Blomberg's goal just before the break.

Kasper Høgh scored in the 71st to put his team on the brink of the next round.

Bodø/Glimt was already the first Norwegian team to the advance to the knockout rounds of the Champions League and could now go even further.

**Havertz haunts Leverkusen**

Kai Havertz returned to haunt Bayer Leverkusen and seal a late draw for Arsenal.

The Germany international struck an 89th-minute penalty against the team where he started his career and leveled the round-of-16 first leg tie at BayArena.

"I know the stadium well and have taken many penalties from this spot," said Havertz, who left Leverkusen for Chelsea in a \$95 million deal in 2020.

Premier League leading Arsenal fell behind on Robert Andrich's goal just after halftime. But Malik Tillman fouled Noni Madueke in the box, and Havertz fired low past Janis Blaswich from the spot.

"The time between the penalty whistle and the penalty kick felt like an eternity," Havertz said. "But in the end, you have to be mentally present in those moments."

## Bhambri enters maiden ATP Masters 1000 semifinal

**INDIAN WELLS (USA), March 12:** India's Yuki Bhambri entered his maiden ATP Masters 1000 semifinal as he and his Swedish partner Andre Goransson defeated Alexander Erler and Andrea Pavanetti in straight sets in Indian Wells here. The 33-year-old Indian had previously reached the doubles quarter-finals at the Masters 1000 level twice, including at Indian Wells last year.

Bhambri and Goransson defeated the Austrian-Italian pair 6-3 7-6 in the quarterfinals that lasted over one hour 30 minutes.

The Indo-Swedish duo dominated on their first serve, winning 83 per cent of the points (29/35), which proved crucial in taking the second-set tie-break and closing out the match. (PTI)

## Verstappen sees 'a jungle' in F1 but still hopes for 'simple solutions'

**SHANGHAI, March 12:** Max Verstappen's blunt assessment: "It's a jungle" in Formula 1.

The four-time F1 world champion isn't a fan of the new 2026 technical regulations, despite working his way up from No. 20 on the grid to place sixth at the season-opening Australian Grand Prix last weekend.

Verstappen predicted his Red Bull probably couldn't go any higher than fifth place this weekend in the Chinese Grand Prix — even if he starts much closer to the front in Sunday's race in Shanghai — because of the big gap between Mercedes and Ferrari and all the other teams.

"Honestly, it's such a jungle out there at the moment," Verstappen said Thursday at the driver news

conferences in Shanghai. "I mean, I would hope that it gets a bit closer ... but it's clear that at the moment we cannot fight with those cars."

It's not the first time Verstappen has taken a swipe at the sport's new regulations, which he thinks are anti-fun, anti-racing and could potentially be dangerous.

F1's new cars are complex, with unprecedented changes across the chassis and power unit, which now feature an almost 50:50 output split between the turbo 1.6-liter V6 engine and electrical energy harvested from the brakes — one that requires a new, often counterintuitive driving style.

One of Verstappen's concerns is starting the race with empty batteries in the hybrid cars.

Franco Colapinto only very narrowly avoided Liam Lawson at the start of the Australian Grand Prix, with the Racing Bulls car was slow off the line with minimal battery power — many drivers started with depleted batteries among the teething issues with the new rules.

"There are a few simple solutions, but they need to be allowed by the FIA, with the battery related stuff, because, yeah, starting with the 0% battery — not a lot of fun and also quite dangerous," Verstappen said. "You can see, I mean, we almost had a massive shunt in Melbourne in the start."

"This is something that I think can be easily fixed."

As for speculation he may quit if reforms aren't made quickly,

Verstappen said: "I don't want to leave, but I also hope, of course, that it gets better."

"I've had discussions with F1 and FIA and, I think, we are working toward something, hopefully, and, hopefully that will improve everything," he said, without elaborating on what the changes might be. "I hope already for next year we can already make a decent improvement."

**A 24-hour switch**

In the meantime, in the search of more "fun," he has confirmed this week he'll be driving his first 24-hour sportscar race at the historic Nürburgring Nordschleife circuit in May. F1 hasn't used since 1976, when then-reigning champion Niki Lauda suffered severe burns in a crash. (AP)

## LIV Golf-backed International Series, IGPL unveil pathway for Indian golfers to access global events

**SINGAPORE, March 12:** The LIV Golf-backed International Series and the Indian Golf Premier League (IGPL) on Thursday announced a partnership to create a performance pathway for Indian players to compete on the global stage. Leading IGPL players will gain access to various International Series events and also get opportunities to compete at LIV Golf Promotions, accelerating their progression into elite-level golf.

The collaboration was formalised at Aramco LIV Golf Singapore, where leaders from both organisations confirmed their

shared ambition to strengthen the development pathway for emerging talent.

"This kind of an opportunity is a game changer for Indian golfing talent, and we are happy to extend our platform to such incredible opportunities," IGPL CEO Uttam Singh Mundy said in a release.

Through the partnership, IGPL's leading players, determined by the league's rankings at agreed points during the season, will earn places in various International Series events across the calendar.

"India is a market with huge potential for

the sport, and aligning IGPL with LIV Golf and The International Series helps create a clearer ladder for talented players to test themselves internationally, progress their careers through these pathways, and inspire India's next generation of golf stars," Scott O'Neil, CEO of LIV Golf, said.

The franchise based league featured 11 tournaments in its inaugural 2025-26 tour. The second edition kicked off in Chandigarh on Wednesday.

Competing in the International Series will give these players the chance to test them-

selves on world-class courses against elite fields and offer a higher level of competition.

Strong performances can open the door to further opportunities across the LIV Golf ecosystem, including a pathway to the league through the season-long International Series Rankings and LIV Golf Promotions.

"Through this partnership with IGPL, India's top performers gain a direct pathway towards the sport's most elite stages," Rahul Singh, Head of the International Series, said. (PTI)

## Final batch of SA, WI players leave India after travel chaos triggered by West Asia conflict

**DUBAI, March 12:** The last batch of South African and West Indian players stranded in India after the T20 World Cup have departed, the ICC announced on Thursday, ending a crisis caused by the closure of Gulf air space in the wake of the raging West Asia conflict.

The ongoing war threw travel plans into disarray, leaving the South African and West Indies teams stranded in Kolkata due to closure of air space and airports at major transit points like Dubai. The West Indies and South Africa played their final T20 World Cup matches in Kolkata on March 1 and March 4 respectively. While nine West Indies players had left earlier this week, the remaining 16 were booked on commercial flights. A 29-member Proteas contingent has also departed.

"Within the past 24 hours, South Africa's remaining 29 members and the West Indies' final 16 members have departed on flights to their respective homelands, bringing to a close a complex operation that has taken place under exceptionally challenging global travel conditions," the ICC said. ICC added that ensuring the "safe onward travel for all players and staff was the sole aim", which required constant adjustments as conditions evolved.

"Throughout this period, the ICC's operations and logistics teams have worked continuously with governments, airlines, charter providers, airport authorities and our Member boards to navigate a number of operational disruptions caused by the evolving environment."

The ICC had earlier drawn criticism from former England captain Michael Vaughan and South African stars Quinton de Kock and David Miller, who insisted that England players were given better travel arrangements as they were able to leave within a day of their semifinal exit.

Earlier, West Indies head coach Daren Sammy had also expressed frustration at the lack of updates from the governing body after a charter flight scheduled to depart from Kolkata was cancelled due to logistical issues.

The ICC's airline partner Emirates has been unable to operate flights following the shutdown of airspace over Dubai. (PTI)

## Disappointed to see I'm the only female coach in women's Hundred: Keightley

**LONDON, March 12:** Former Australian cricketer Lisa Keightley is "disappointed" at the lack of female head coaches in the women's Hundred and hopes more will join her in the future.

Keightley, who is at the helm of MI London, was the only woman head coach among the eight teams at Wednesday's historic player auction.

There has been a significant increase in player salaries, with a total of 178 cricketers going under the hammer at the auction.

"It's really changing fast, isn't it? And I suppose the three powerhouses - India, England, and Australia - having a very competitive T20 competitions - it's really driving the women's space and the pay equity," she told 'ESPNcricinfo'.

"We're not there, but it's moving and it's moving pretty fast, so that's really good."

"The only thing I'm disappointed in is I look around the room and I'm the only female head coach. So for me, waving the flag and hopefully as we move into cricket, we get a few more female head coaches here," she added.

The League will start on July 21 and conclude on August 16.

"In saying that, we've got a few coaching



internationally and I'm really hoping that a lot of the staff have female coaches within their coaching set-up, so from that point of view, it's moving quick, but looking around being the only female coach, that's a bit disappointing to be totally honest," she contin-

ued.  
Keightley has established a highly successful international coaching career spanning over two decades, leading top national teams, state sides, and premier T20 franchise leagues across Australia, England, and

## Ministry asks NCSSR to create SOP for athletes' fitness test, tells NSF's to set testing calendar



**NEW DELHI, March 12:** In a bid to standardise the medical assessment of athletes representing India, the Sports Ministry has directed the National Centre for Sports Science and Research (NCSSR) to develop discipline-specific protocols for periodic fitness reviews which will have to be mandatorily uploaded on the National Sports Repository System.

In a letter to the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and the National Sports Federations (NSFs), the ministry has said that the Sports Authority of India (SAI) will coordinate the entire exercise.

"...in line with the policy framework of Khelo Bharat Niti 2025, which emphasises the integration of sports science and technology, it has been decided that a standardised, dynamic, and robust mechanism will be introduced for athletes representing India in international competitions," the letter stated.

"Sports Authority of India (SAI) and National Centre for Sports Science and Research (NCSSR) in coordination with the concerned NSFs, will develop sport-specific fitness protocols and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). SAI shall advise the NSFs for implementation of the same after finalisation," it added.

Currently, the fitness assessment of elite athletes, who are part of the Target Olympic Podium Scheme, is overseen by the Mission Olympic Cell, while the national federations also carry out such assessments during camps. But once the NCSSR comes up with the Standard Operating Procedure for it, the body would also become sole regulator of the process.

"The NCSSR will be responsible for scientific oversight, validation and periodic review of the fitness protocols and SOPs. NSFs shall ensure that fitness assessment of athletes is conducted strictly in accordance with the prescribed sports specific test protocols including informed consent and medical safety of athletes, at facilities of the NCSSR," the letter stated but did not give a clear timeline for implementation.

"All such assessment data shall mandatorily be uploaded on the National Sports Repository System (NSRS)."

The NSFs have also been told to publish an Annual Fitness Testing Calendar on their respective websites in consultation with SAI.

Athletes are tested quarterly for medical condition, fitness level, and biomechanics among other aspects especially before proceeding for major events.

**Testing of supplements**

The ministry has also directed the NSFs to ensure the food supplements taken by athletes are tested at the National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU) and/or National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER) before being procured for consumption.

This, the ministry said, is being done to "mitigate the risk of athletes consuming prohibited substances from contaminated, spiked, or mislabelled nutritional supplements."

The NSFs have also been told to maintain records of testing reports and batch details for traceability besides continuing to create awareness among athletes, coaches, and support staff regarding the risks associated with unverified supplements.

India has a massive doping problem and the country has been topping the World Anti-Doping Agency's Annual Testing Figures' positivity rate for the past three years. (PTI)