

# HYDERABAD HEADLINES

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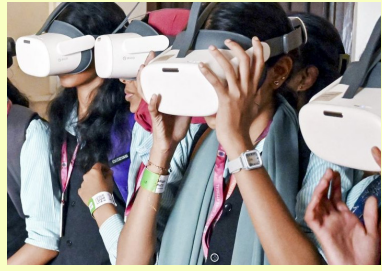
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## AMID SLUMP, HYDERABAD BUILDERS OFFER HARLEYS

Amid sluggish sales, several developers in Hyderabad are doling out expensive gifts — from premium motorcycles to 24-carat gold coins — to lure prospective homebuyers. Also on offer are electric vehicles, complimentary interior work and modern fixtures.

FOCUS POINT 10



## India Talks About Science, But Its Institutions Don't Support It

MONEY MATTERS 09

## 'some sentiments are beyond trends'

BOX -OFFICE 12



### SHORT TAKES



#### Online Registration and Application Process Begins

The Indian Army has opened online applications for Agniveer recruitment 2027 for residents of Telangana. Eligible unmarried youth can apply for multiple categories through www.joinindianarmy.nic.in until 1 April 2026, with the Online Common Entrance Examination scheduled in June.

CITY BEAT 04



#### Welfare push, women voters ancho

The TMC on Friday unveiled its manifesto for the West Bengal assembly elections, focusing on welfare expansion, women and minority outreach, and targeted social schemes as it seeks a fourth consecutive term.

HOME LAND 07



#### NEPAL AFTER ELECTIONS PROSPECTS FOR NEW GOVT

The recent elections in Nepal saw Rashtriya Swatantra Party and its leader Balendra Shah win a decisive victory, ending the uncertainty after last September's revolution and an interim government.

OPINION 06

#### THE DAILY MANTRA SOCIETY # ILLUSIONS

You have been through things that would have broken most people. And nobody saw it. Nobody sent flowers. Nobody checked in. You just quietly carried it, kept showing up, kept functioning like everything was fine while something inside you was barely holding together. That kind of strength doesn't make the news. But it's the real kind of strength.

- Inner strength is powerful – You can endure and keep going despite challenges.
- Silent struggles are real – Not all battles are visible to others.
- External validation isn't necessary – You don't need praise to prove yourself.
- Never underestimate yourself – You are stronger than you think

Collected by Venna Srinivasa Reddy

# TELANGANA BUDGET 2026-27: ₹ 3.24 Lakh Crore

## Bhatti Unveils Welfare-Focused Budget

KEY ALLOCATIONS	
Irrigation	: ₹22,615 crore
Energy	: ₹21,285 crore
Education	: ₹26,674 crore
Medical & Health	: ₹13,679 crore
Panchayat Raj & Rural Development (highest allocation)	: ₹33,688 crore
Roads & Buildings	: ₹12,789 crore
Municipal Administration	: ₹17,907 crore
Housing	: ₹7,430 crore
SC Welfare	: ₹11,784 crore
ST Welfare	: ₹7,937 crore
BC Welfare	: ₹3,769 crore
Minorities Welfare	: ₹3,769 crore



Hyderabad, March 20: Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka on Friday presented the Telangana Budget for 2026-27 in the Assembly, proposing a total outlay of ₹3,24,234 crore. The budget includes ₹2,34,406 crore towards revenue expenditure and ₹47,267 crore for capital expenditure. The minister said

the budget balances welfare commitments with fiscal discipline while ensuring continuity of development programmes without imposing additional burden on people. The budget focuses on welfare, housing, irrigation, infrastructure, and social justice, along with new initiatives for youth, education, and family security.

**New Schemes and Initiatives**  
The government announced several welfare measures, including the Indiramma Family Life Insurance Scheme, which will be launched on June 2, 2026, providing ₹5 lakh insurance cover to 1.15 crore families. A provision of ₹6,000 crore has been made for the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 >

### NEW SCHEMES IN BUDGET 2026-27

- 1. Indiramma Family Life Insurance Scheme**  
Launch date: June 2, 2026  
Coverage: ₹5 lakh life insurance per family  
Beneficiaries: 1.15 crore families  
Budget allocation: ₹4,000 crore
- 2. Cheyutha Scheme**  
2 lakh new pensions to be sanctioned  
Budget allocation: ₹14,861 crore
- 3. Telangana Public Schools**  
Upgradation of select government schools  
Facilities: modern infrastructure, digital classrooms, trained teachers, transport  
Coverage: Pre-primary to Class 12 (1,500 students per school)  
Budget allocation: ₹500 crore

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 >

## Modi, Bahrain King Talk Security, Shipping, Eid Greeting

NEW DELHI, MAR 20

Prime Minister Narendra Modi today held a telephonic conversation with the King of Bahrain, Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa and conveyed greetings on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr. In a social media post, he said both the leaders discussed the current situation in the West Asian region and condemned the attacks on the energy and

civilian infrastructure, underscoring their adverse impact on global food, fuel and fertilizer security. Mr Modi reiterated the importance of ensuring freedom of navigation and keeping shipping lines open and secure. Prime Minister Modi thanked the King of Bahrain for his continued support for the well-being of the Indian community in Bahrain.



## New Tax Act 2025 Simplify Compliance, Reduce Disputes: FM

NEW DELHI, MARCH 20

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday said the new Income Tax Act, 2025, will simplify tax compliance, lower disputes, and reduce errors and costs for taxpayers. Addressing the nationwide awareness campaign PRARAMBH 2026, she highlighted that the revamped law provides a clearer and simpler framework

for citizens and businesses. Ms. Sitharaman emphasised that small business owners and professionals form the backbone of the economy, and under the new act, the presumptive taxation scheme has been strengthened to benefit them. The Finance Minister noted that the entire act has been recast, with language simplified, and explanatory

tables and formulae added. She revealed that over 75,000 person-hours were dedicated by Income Tax officials to drafting the legislation. The new law reduces the number of sections from 819 to 536 and chapters from 47 to 23, streamlining the structure significantly. The Income Tax Act, 2025, is set to come into effect from April 1, 2026.

## Six Guarantees Unmet

### KTR Leads BRS Protest at Gun Park



HYDERABAD, MARCH 20

Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) Working President K. T. Rama Rao (KTR), along with Deputy Floor Leader T. Harish Rao, MLAs and MLCs, staged a protest at Gun Park accusing the Congress government of failing to implement its six electoral guarantees.

During the protest, BRS leaders held placards and displayed "due cards" allegedly issued by Congress, claiming that the ruling party had deceived the public by not fulfilling its promises. Former ministers KTR and Harish Rao, along with several legislators, alleged that Telangana has been pushed into distress due to non-implementation of the guarantees announced during the elections.

The leaders raised multiple issues, questioning the status of ₹54,000 dues promised to persons with disabilities.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 >

## Eatala Rajender Thanks Supporters, Reaffirms Commitment to People on Birthday

Hyderabad, March 20: Senior leader Eatala Rajender expressed gratitude to supporters who gathered in large numbers at his Sameerpet residence on the occasion of his birthday, stating that the strength of the people continues to guide his political journey. He said thousands of well-wishers visited him from late Friday night until Saturday evening, cutting across political affiliations, caste, and religion.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 >

## BJP Calls Telangana Budget "All Numbers, No Action"

Hyderabad, March 20: Telangana BJP President N. Ramchander Rao on Friday launched a scathing attack on the Congress government's 2026-27 budget, branding it a "failed, false and fancy" exercise filled with

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 >

## HYD REALTY REBOUNDS: REGISTRATIONS JUMP 32%, PREMIUM HOMES LEAD GROWTH

Hyderabad, March 20: The capital city's residential property market staged a strong comeback in February 2026, with registrations rising to 6,179 units, marking a 3% year-on-year increase and a sharp 32% jump over January, according to Knight Frank India. Shishir Bajjal, Chairman and Managing Director, Knight Frank India said "The February data indicates that Hyderabad's residential market continues to demonstrate resilience despite short-term fluctuations in

monthly registrations." In value terms, transactions touched Rs.4,139 crore, up 5% YoY and 42% month-on-month, reflecting a surge in higher-value home purchases. Properties priced above Rs.1 crore continued to dominate, accounting for 18% of total registrations and nearly 48% of overall transaction value. While the premium segment saw a 6% annual rise, affordable housing (below Rs.50 lakh) also showed signs of recovery with a 7% increase. However, the mid-segment (Rs.50 lakh

- Rs.1 crore) remained under pressure, declining 7% YoY. Key IT-driven micro-markets such as Gachibowli, Kondapur and Narsingi continued to anchor demand, supported by strong infrastructure and employment hubs. Medchal - Malkajgiri and Rangareddy districts together accounted for 85% of total registrations. The data highlights a resilient housing market in Hyderabad, with premium homes driving growth even as broader demand gradually stabilizes.

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### CONG DEFENDS STATE BUDGET, CALLS IT PRO-PEOPLE & INCLUSIVE

Advisor to Telangana government and senior Congress leader Mohammed Ali Shabbir on Friday backed the Congress government led by A. Revanth Reddy, hailing the 2026 - 27 Budget as pro-farmer and welfare-driven. He highlighted Rs.3,769 crore for minority welfare and Rs.6,000 crore for youth schemes, saying the allocations reflect a strong push for social justice and inclusive growth.



Describing the budget as a step towards inclusive growth and social justice, Shabbir Ali, talking to newsmen, said it balances welfare and development while prioritizing marginalized communities. The budget places minorities at the centre of welfare planning, with initiatives aimed at education, entrepreneurship and financial independence. He welcomed the Rs.6,000 crore allocation for Rajiv Yuva Vikasam scheme, which will provide financial assistance to youth from SC, ST, BC, minority and other sections to promote entrepreneurship and self-employment, he noted.

Highlighting the emphasis on education, he appreciated the Young India integrated residential schools initiative, under which 105 schools are being established across all the Assembly constituencies. This project would ensure quality, skill-oriented education for students from all communities, with 79 schools already sanctioned and construction under way at 44 locations, he added. Praising Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and Deputy CM M Bhatti Vikramarka, the senior Congress leader said, "This is a pro-farmer, pro-people budget that strengthens social justice and ensure equal opportunities for all sections, especially minorities and other disadvantaged communities."

# NO MORE 10TH BOARD EXAMS IN FUTURE: CM REVANTH REDDY

HYDERABAD

In a major policy signal, Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy informed that the 10th-grade board examinations may be scrapped in the future, aligning the state with the national "+2 system".

Speaking informally with media persons in the Assembly premises on Friday, the Chief Minister described the state budget as a "Welfare and Development Budget" and said education reforms were under active consideration, with a report already referred to the KK Committee.

With regard to phone-tapping and other cases, Revanth Reddy said his government would proceed strictly as per law in the Formula E car race and phone-tapping cases, cautioning that haste could weaken the cases in court. He noted that the key accused former IPS officer Prabhakar Rao remains 'unavailable', delaying the probe. He added that no punitive action could be taken regarding the phone-tapping issue until the investigation is complete. The BJP leaders remain silent even when drugs are seized in the state which serves as proof that the BRS and BJP parties were colluding with each other, he remarked. Taking a sharp dig at opposition leaders, he alleged 'collusion between Bharat Kashtra Samithi and Bharati-



ya Janata Party', citing their silence on drug seizures. He mocked BRS leaders K.T. Rama Rao and T. Harish Rao, claiming they had "confined" K. Chandrashekar Rao during the Assembly session. The CM stated that his government had borrowed Rs.3.47 lakh crore mainly to repay past dues, claiming Rs.3.3 lakh crore has already been cleared. He alleged that the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project failed to irrigate even a single acre despite massive spending. According to CM, only Rs.17,000 crore of fresh loans were used out of the total loans raised in the last

two years. The GST collections has crossed Rs.4,000 crore in two months and Telangana's GSDP is outperforming national GDP.

As for governance and reforms, the CM said that there will be no immediate changes to districts or mandals. As for MPTC / ZPTC, its removal needs a Constitutional amendment. With regard to MLC posts, he said the MLC nominations will follow Supreme Court guidelines. In a veiled remark, the Chief Minister said the people would decide who truly deserves to be called the "Father of Telangana".

## Budget aligned with Telangana Rising 2047 vision: Jupally

HYDERABAD

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Excise, Jupally Krishna Rao, on Friday said the State Budget, aligned with the Telangana Rising 2047 vision, reflects fiscal discipline while setting the course for inclusive and sustainable growth. In a statement, he said the budget seeks to instil confidence among all sections of society and lays emphasis

on balanced development. He noted that the allocations would benefit farmers and strengthen key sectors such as agriculture, education, and healthcare. Provisions for the implementation of nine new schemes, he said, are expected to support students, employees, and the elderly. Welcoming the allocation of ₹1,224 crore to the tourism and cultural sectors, the Minister termed it a significant step towards boosting the sector.

He said the proposed Tourism Policy 2025-2030 would help attract investments and generate employment opportunities. Jupally Krishna Rao said that the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model has received encouraging response, with investment proposals worth over ₹25,000 crore under consideration, and said the government is proceeding with a clear policy framework and actionable plan.

## FSL Recruitment Results Released: TSLPRB Chairman V.V. Srinivasa Rao

HYDERABAD

The Chairman of the Telangana State Level Police Recruitment Board (TSLPRB), V.V. Srinivasa Rao, announced on Friday that the recruitment process for various vacant posts in the Telangana State Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) has been completed. He stated that, out of a total of 60 posts notified on November 14, 2025, candidates have been selected for 59 posts.

### As part of the selections

Under Post Code 51 (Scientific Officer - Physical/General), 2 vacancies were filled by 2 male candidates.

Under Code 52 (Scientific Officer - Chemical), 3 vacancies were filled by 2 male candidates and 1 female candidate.

Under Code 53 (Scientific Officer - Biology/Serology), 3 vacancies were filled by 1 male and 2 female candidates.

Under Code 54 (Scientific Officer - Computers), 2 vacancies were filled by 1 male and 1 female candidate.

### In the Scientific Assistant category

Physical/General (Code 55): 5 vacancies filled by 4 males and 1 female.

Chemical (Code 56): 10 vacancies, of which 9 candidates were selected (8 males and 1 female).

Biology/Serology (Code 57): 10 vacancies filled by 4 males and 6 females.

Computers (Code 58): 7 vacancies filled by 6 males and 1 female.



### In the Laboratory Technician category:

Physical/General (Code 59): 2 vacancies filled by 2 males.

Chemical (Code 60): 6 vacancies filled by 4 males and 2 females.

Biology/Serology (Code 61): 4 vacancies filled by 1 male and 3 females.

Computers (Code 62): 5 vacancies filled by 3 males and 2 females.

For Laboratory Attendant (Code 63), the single vacancy was filled by one male candidate.

The Chairman stated that selections were made based on candidates' academic marks, work experience, and merit in the written examination.

Selected candidates are instructed to complete attestation forms on the official website between March 23 and 25, and submit them on March 30 at the City Armed Reserve Office, Petlaburji, Hyderabad.

### CONTINUATION FROM PAGE 1

## Telangana Budget 2026-27: 3.24 Lakh Crore



FROM PAGE 1

Rajiv Yuva Vikasam scheme to promote self-employment among youth from SC, ST, BC, minority and other communities.

In the education sector, the midday meal scheme will be extended to Intermediate students, and ₹1,000 crore has been allocated for infrastructure development at Osmania University.

Growth Performance

Bhatti Vikramarka stated that Telangana continues to outperform national growth trends. The State's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) for 2025-26 is estimated at ₹17,82,198 crore, registering a growth rate of 10.7 per cent, higher than the national GDP growth of 8 per cent. He noted that Telangana contributes 5 per cent to the national GDP, positioning it as a key growth engine for the country. The State's per capita income stands at ₹4,18,931, significantly higher than the national average of ₹2,19,575.

### INSURANCE SCHEME HIGHLIGHT

Elaborating on the Indiramma scheme, the minister said it aims to provide financial security to families in case of the death of the earning member. "Every family in Telangana should feel secure. No child should face financial distress due to unforeseen circumstances," he said, adding that the scheme will cover all sections of society without discrimination.

## BJP Calls Telangana Budget "All Numbers, No Action"

FROM PAGE 1

Addressing a press conference here, Rao alleged that the budget lacked substance and reflected the government's inability to deliver results even after two and a half years in power. He mocked Finance Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, saying the speech appeared no different from last year's, with no significant policy changes or new initiatives.

Rao raised concerns over the education sector, pointing out that despite a claimed increase

of Rs.1,000 crore, its share remained at just 8%, far below states like Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. He accused the government of failing to introduce meaningful reforms beyond "headline-driven" announcements like Integrated Universities.

On healthcare sector, he alleged that AarogyaSri dues remain unpaid and warned that diverting welfare funds into the scheme could weaken it financially. He also criticized the government's claims on industrial growth, stat-

ing that aerospace investments were driven by Central initiatives like Make in India. The BJP leader further accused the Revanth Reddy government of betraying farmers by failing to release Rythu Bharosa payments and not allocating funds for key promises such as unemployment allowance and financial aid for women. He condemned the alleged demolitions under the Musi River project and questioned cost escalations, calling it a "loot-driven plan". (NSS)

## Six Guarantees Unmet KTR Leads BRS Protest at Gun Park

FROM PAGE 1

They also asked what happened to the commitment of providing 2 lakh jobs to unemployed youth and the promised unemployment allowance. They further alleged that out of ₹24,000 promised to auto drivers, ₹12,000 per year for two years remains unpaid. Questions were also raised regarding ₹54,000 dues (₹4,000 per month) promised to the elderly, and the commitment of providing one tola gold to poor women. The Congress government

was accused of misusing Telangana's revenue and neglecting public welfare.

Addressing the gathering, KTR said the Congress had secured votes by promising to implement the six guarantees within three months under the "Abhaya Hastham" manifesto. However, even in its third budget, the government had neither provided legal backing nor allocated sufficient funds for these promises, amounting to a betrayal of the people.

"This protest at the Martyrs' Memorial is to question that deception," he said.

KTR further alleged that the Congress had issued "bond papers" assuring implementation of guarantees within 100 days, but failed to honour them. "Like James Bond-style agreements, those promises misled the public. Even in the third budget, there is no mention of 'guarantee' or 'declaration,' deceiving every section of society," he said.

He also questioned the government's financial commitments, stating that despite promising a ₹1 lakh crore budget for weaker sections, allocations across three budgets have not exceeded

₹20,000 crore. He demanded clarity on the implementation of ₹4,000 monthly pensions for the elderly and widows.

KTR raised concerns over the status of the ₹2,500 Mahalakshmi scheme for 1.58 crore women above 18 years, and demanded implementation of ₹6,000 pensions promised to 5 lakh persons with disabilities. He also criticised the government for not implementing the ₹15,000 Rythu Bharosa scheme for farmers, adding that even the existing Rythu Bandhu scheme had not been properly executed. He pointed out that funds expected by

## Eatala Rajender Thanks Supporters, Reaffirms Commitment to People on Birthday

FROM PAGE 1

"Political ideologies may differ, but many who care for society came to bless me. This shows that people themselves empower leaders," he remarked. Reflecting on his political journey, Rajender said he had faced "many blows and injuries" but remained committed to righteousness. "Just because a tiger roars, its stripes do not disappear," he said, asserting that challenges and conflicts ultimately lead to change that benefits the public. Recalling the Telangana movement, he said the state was achieved through "bloodshed, struggle, and determination," and stressed that its ideals must be protected. He noted that people were increasingly politically aware and would respond strongly at the right time if governance failed to meet expectations.

Rajender criticised attempts to influence public perception, saying money could be used to manage narratives temporarily but "ultimate victory belongs to righteousness." He added that Telangana was not created for exploitation, land grabbing, or benefiting a few, and that people were closely observing developments. Emphasising leadership values, he said a



leader must act with dignity and responsibility, rather than reacting impulsively. "Not responding immediately does not mean one is not thinking. Every issue has a solution," he said.

He reiterated that his politics is not driven by personal gain, noting that he had an established business background before entering public life. "I did not enter politics to earn money. I stand for what is right, not to harm anyone," he said.

Describing himself as a leader beyond caste, religion, or constituency, Rajender said his thoughts align with the aspirations of the people of Telangana. He assured continued commitment to justice and public welfare. "As long as I am in a position, I will stand with the people and uphold righteousness," he said, thanking supporters once again for their affection and blessings.



Sankranti were not released even after Ugadi.

On employment, he said that only 11,900 jobs had been provided out of the

promised 2 lakh, terming it a betrayal of youth. "Those bond papers have now become meaningless. In the Assembly and Council sessions,

we will question the government at every step on behalf of the people. If the promises are not fulfilled, we will not let it go," KTR warned.

## Revanth Reddy Extends Ramzan Greetings to Muslims

**HYDERABAD:** Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy extended heartfelt greetings to Muslim brothers and sisters on the occasion of Ramzan (Eid-ul-Fitr). He expressed hope that the festival would be celebrated with joy and enthusiasm along with family members, relatives, and friends. The Chief Minister stated that Ramzan stands as a symbol of secularism and communal harmony. Highlighting the spiritual significance of the holy month, he noted that the rigorous fasting observed by Muslims, the disciplined prayers, and acts of charity such as Zakat and Fitra serve as inspiring examples for all humanity. He further remarked that Telangana represents the spirit of "Ganga-Jamuna Tehzeeb" and reaffirmed that the state government gives the highest priority to the welfare and empowerment of Muslim minorities. The Chief Minister prayed that the state of Telangana continues to prosper and that people live together in peace, harmony, and happiness under the blessings of Almighty Allah.

## KCR Extends Ramadan Greetings to Muslims..!

**HYDERABAD:** On the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr, the final day of the holy month of Ramadan, the first Chief Minister of Telangana and BRS leader Sri K. Chandrashekar Rao (KCR) extended heartfelt greetings to Muslim brethren. He stated that Muslims observe the sacred month of Ramadan from the beginning to the last day with special prayers, fasting, and devotional fervor every day. On this occasion, KCR emphasized that it fosters mutual peace, tolerance, brotherhood, and feelings of love and affection. Highlighting secular values, he mentioned that the BRS government has continued governance respecting the culture, traditions, and practices of different religions, symbolizing the Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb. KCR noted that the development programs implemented in education and other sectors for the welfare and progress of the Muslim minority in the state have contributed to qualitative improvements in their way of life. He wished that progress continues to flourish and that all the people of the state live with happiness, prosperity, and good health on this occasion.

## Governor Greets Muslim Brethren On the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr

**HYDERABAD:** As the sacred month of Ramadan comes to a close, I extend warm wishes to the Muslim community on the joyous occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr. I express my deep reverence for the teachings of the Holy Quran, and their profound influence on society throughout history. My prayers are with everyone, seeking well-being, prosperity, and peace across the world. Ramadan is a time of self-discipline and spiritual reflection, urging us to uphold the principles of dignity, the sanctity of life, and adherence to religious teachings. Eid-ul-Fitr is a celebration of blessings, a time to spread love, and an opportunity to create beautiful future. Wishing all a joyful Eid. Eid Mubarak to all.

# SCR Registers Record Revenue of Rs. 223.60 Crores in Ticket Checking

**This is the highest ever ticket checking revenue registered by the zone in any financial year**

**HYDERABAD**

South Central Railway has achieved a major milestone in Ticket Checking by registering record revenue of Rs 223.60 Crores in the current financial year 2025-26. The zone surpassed the target of Rs. 221.08 Cr set by Railway Board for the current FY, achieving it 14 days before the year's end. This is the highest ever revenue in ticket checking in any financial year, the previous best being Rs. 220.81 crores in 2023-24. The revenue was earned from the cases booked against irregular travel and unbooked luggage etc. During the year, the zone also generated record ticket checking revenue of Rs. 1.85 Cr in a single day on 18th October, 2025.

Ticket checking in Railways plays a vital role in curbing ticketless and irregular travel and acts as a deterrent against habitual defaulters, thereby contributing to increased ticket sales through booking windows. It also helps create awareness among the general public about the importance of having valid travel authority. Further, ticket checking also aids in guiding and educating passengers on the ease and comfort of travelling with valid tickets.



Apart from booking window, several digital initiatives for issuing of tickets have been introduced in the ticketing system to enhance passenger convenience and boost ticket sales.

The digital initiatives include the Rail One App, ATVMs near booking counters, and the display of QR codes at stations. These initiatives, combined with the relentless efforts of ticket checking staff, have significantly improved ticket sales

leading to increased passenger revenue. Shri Sanjay Kumar Srivastava, General Manager, SCR congratulated the entire Commercial wing along with officers and staff for crossing Rs 223 Crore revenue in ticket checking for the first time in any financial year. He stated that Ticket checking is an asolid mechanism which helps in curtailing irregular travel and also helps in building confidence among the genuine rail passengers.



## Telangana plans global disaster institute with high-tech response systems

**HYDERABAD**

Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy on Friday announced plans to establish a State Institute of Disaster Management (SIDM) with international standards, aimed at strengthening preparedness and response capabilities. During a high-level review meeting here, the minister directed the officials to prepare proposals and form a committee to finalize the project in consultation with Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy.

The proposed institute will focus on training personnel across the departments, enhancing early warning systems, and minimizing loss of life

through scientific disaster management practices. Advanced equipment such as drones, real-time monitoring systems, and high-speed rescue boats will be procured. The initiative seeks to shift the state's approach from reactive relief measures to proactive disaster preparedness, positioning Telangana as a national model in disaster management.

Special chief secretary for disaster management Dana Kishore, director of fire services Vikram Singh, Hydrabad commissioner AV Ranganath, ICCD director Kamal Hasan Reddy, Addl. DG of special police battalion Sanjay Jain and others participated in this meeting. (NSS)

## Master Plan for Development of Bhadrachalam Temple



**Development Works in Three Phases**

**Ministers Discuss Master Plan**

**HYDERABAD**

State Ministers Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy, Konda Surekha, Tummalala Nageswara Rao, and Vakiti Srihari stated that the Congress government, under the leadership of Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, is giving top priority to the development of the renowned pilgrimage center Bhadrachalam Sri Sita Ramachandra Swamy Temple, popularly known as "Dakshina Ayodhya" in Telangana. They affirmed their commitment to developing Bhadrachalam into an international-level spiritual destination.

A meeting was held on Friday at the Secretariat in the office of Minister Konda Surekha to discuss the master plan designed to transform the temple's infrastructure and facilities. The

ministers stated that keeping a 200-year vision in mind, the temple will be developed in three phases in accordance with Agama Shastra and in line with the sentiments of devotees. It was decided to finalize the master plan after discussions with the Chief Minister. Officials were directed to prepare plans to complete the first phase of development, including the Pushkar Ghat, before the commencement of the upcoming Godavari Pushkaralu next year.

The ministers said that Bhadrachalam will be developed as the largest spiritual hub in Telangana. It was also decided to establish a Tribal Museum at Ramavaram near Bhadrachalam. Additionally, as part of the Pushkaralu preparations, officials were instructed to develop important temples such as Korivi Veerabhadra Swamy Temple and Mallur Narasimha Swamy Temple. Members of Parliament and MLAs, including Balaram Naik and Tellam Venkata Rao, also participated in the meeting.

## Farmer, youth-centric budget: Vivek

**HYDERABAD**

Expressing happiness over the Telangana State Budget 2026-27, Labour, Employment and Mines Minister Dr. G. Vivek Venkatswamy said the budget presented by Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka clearly reflects the government's commitment to welfare and farmer-centric development.

As expected, the budget has given top priority to inclusive growth and social justice, he said. "I am particularly pleased that two important initiatives under my ministry—the CM Overseas Employment Programme and the Scholarship



for ATC Trainees—have been included in the budget," the Minister said. He said these schemes would significantly enhance skill development among youth and expand global employment opportunities. "This is a forward-looking and transformative budget,

as I had stated earlier. Giving top priority to employment and employability is a crucial step towards empowering the educated youth of the state," Vivek noted. The Minister further stated that key sectors such as agriculture, farmer welfare, healthcare, education,

women and child welfare, and Panchayati Raj have received adequate and necessary allocations. "These investments will not only strengthen grassroots development but also contribute to the long-term socio-economic progress of the state," he said.

Vivek emphasised that the Telangana Budget 2026-27 strikes a balance between welfare commitments and infrastructure expansion, aiming to accelerate economic growth while maintaining social inclusivity. "It reflects a balanced approach that advances urban modernization without neglecting rural and weaker sections," he added.

## Health push gets Rs.13,679 cr boost; EHS scheme finally takes off

**HYDERABAD**

Presenting the 2026-27 budget in the Assembly, Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka announced a Rs.13,679 crore allocation to the health sector, alongside major initiatives aimed at expanding access and infrastructure.

A key highlight was the launch of the long-awaited Employees Health Scheme (EHS), which will provide cashless treatment for government employees and pensioners. The scheme will cover 1,998 ailments across the government hospitals and 421 em-

paneled private hospitals, with digital health cards to be issued to beneficiaries.

Bhatti also revealed that three new TIMS hospitals will be inaugurated by year-end, while tertiary care capacity will be significantly expanded to 6,582 beds, including upgrades at NIMS and a new super-specialty hospital in Warangal. He further noted that the state has already established 9 government medical colleges, 16 nursing schools, and 28 paramedical colleges, positioning Telangana as a growing hub for medical education and healthcare services.

## Govt announces free breakfast, lunch for all students up to intermediate level

**HYDERABAD**

The Telangana government has announced good news for all the students up to intermediate level. Presenting the annual budget in the Assembly on Friday, Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka stated that from the academic year 2026-27, the government has decided to newly launch a Breakfast Scheme across the State for students studying from pre-primary to Intermediate, with quality nutrition.

"Under the breakfast programme, every student will be given milk on three days a week and ragi malt on the remaining three days," he said.

Bhatti Vikramarka further stated that the State government is now extending a new Midday meal scheme to students pursuing Intermediate education in government Junior Colleges as well. This marks the beginning of a new chapter in the measures we are taking for student welfare, he said. The Deputy Chief Minister said this landmark initiative will improve nutrition and health outcomes, increase attendance and punctuality, and reduce dropouts and absenteeism.

"It will ease the burden on working parents. In simple words, no child in Telangana should begin a school day on an empty stomach. This is a watershed reform for student welfare. This Breakfast initiative will not only nourish bodies, but also it will nourish the future of Telangana," Bhatti Vikramarka said.

## 732 Maoists surrender under welfare-driven approach: Dy CM Bhatti

**HYDERABAD**

Telangana Deputy Chief Minister and finance minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka on Friday informed the Assembly that 732 Maoists had surrendered between December 2023 and March 2026, attributing the development to the government's focus on welfare and inclusive growth.

During the budget presentation, Bhatti emphasized that extremism cannot be tackled through force alone, but requires addressing underlying socio-economic inequalities. He stat-

ed that the government's strategy of providing livelihood opportunities and social dignity has encouraged individuals to return to the mainstream.

He contrasted this with previous approaches that treated Naxalism purely as a law-and-order issue. He also noted that Rs.11,907 crore has been allocated to the Home Department, reinforcing both security and rehabilitation efforts. Bhatti described Telangana's model as a "people-centric approach" that could serve as a template for the nation in addressing extremism.

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## SHORT TAKES

**TGHRCC Recommends Rs.5 Lakh Compensation in Custodial Death Case**



**HYDERABAD:** TGHRCC, headed by Dr. Justice Shameem Akther, Hon'ble Chairperson, in HRC No.3514 of 2017, by order dated 25.02.2026, has recommended payment of Rs.5,00,000 compensation to the next of kin of Makkala Hanmanthu @ Nani, S/o Laxman, a remand prisoner who died on 08.09.2017 while undergoing treatment at Government General Hospital, Nizamabad. On examining the Magisterial Inquiry Report and forensic material, the Commission found that the deceased died due to asphyxia consequent to hanging and held that the incident clearly disclosed negligence on the part of the prison authorities, as a wire used for hanging was available within the jail premises. Observing that prisoners and undertrial detainees are also entitled to protection of life under Article 21 of the Constitution, and relying on the principle of State liability in custodial death cases, the Commission concluded that the State is vicariously liable for the custodial lapse and accordingly recommended to the Chief Secretary to Government, Telangana, to pay compensation as reparation to the bereaved family, and then closed further proceedings.

# This is a Fake, Revision, Fabricated Budget: Kavitha

**Kalvakuntla Kavitha, President, Telangana Jagruthi**

**HYDERABAD**

On the occasion of Ugadi, Telangana Jagruthi introduced a new initiative called the "People's Budget." According to their experts, the total budget figures presented by the government match their estimates. However, a budget gains public approval only when it reflects the demands of the people. The budget presented by the government today does not meet public expectations.

Although BCs constitute 56% of the population, only 4% of funds have been allocated to them. Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi had promised ₹20,000 crore annually for BCs, but those promises were not fulfilled.

Promises like forming an MBC Ministry and corporations for backward communities within MBCs have not been implemented. Telangana Jagruthi claims it is the only organization speaking for MBCs. They stated that once they come to power, their first signature will be on a government order supporting traditional occupations like making bangles and pottery. They criticized the government for not having a tribal minister and pointed out that until recently there was no minority minister either. Only after protests was a ministerial post given to Azharuddin. They demanded the appointment of a Lambada minister as well.

The government promised to build 22.5 lakh houses but allocated only ₹5,500 crore. Compared to ₹12,000 crore last year, this year's allocation has been reduced by ₹7,000 crore—showing, according to them, that claims of concern for the poor



are false. In many sectors, the same allocations as last year have been repeated without change, including minority welfare, farmer support schemes, agricultural labor assistance, and Gruha Jyothi. Hence, they argue this is not a "vision budget" but merely a "revision budget." The Chief Minister claimed restructuring ₹20,000 crore in loans, while central grants estimated at ₹20,000 crore last year amounted to only ₹11,120 crore. Despite multiple visits to Delhi, they questioned why the Chief Minister failed to secure more central funds. This year, too, central grants are estimated at ₹24,000 crore, which they allege is misleading. They questioned why issues like the BC Bill and all-party meetings are not being discussed with the Prime Minister. They accused the government of securing positions for associates through influence while failing to bring funds for the public.

Revenue surplus is estimated at ₹6,800 crore, but last year's estimate of ₹2,000 crore resulted in only ₹500 crore. No budget allocation has been made for Telangana activists, no new pensions announced, and no new job recruitments addressed. They stated the total state debt has

reached ₹8,64,198 crore, including borrowings under FRBM limits and through corporations. This translates to ₹2.16 lakh per person and approximately ₹9 lakh per family. Despite heavy borrowing, they claim no effective welfare schemes have been implemented. They criticized inconsistencies between the Chief Minister's announcements and budget allocations, citing examples like scooter schemes not being funded. They alleged that Congress leaders are making misleading claims similar to Rahul Gandhi.

On employment, they cited a report stating that only 1 out of 4 male graduates and 1 out of 2 female graduates in Telangana secure jobs—indicating 50% unemployment among women, compared to 20% in Karnataka. They mocked the "Rising Telangana" slogan, saying it reflects rising unemployment. They compared Rahul Gandhi to a local entertainer "Saleem Fake," stating that while the latter entertains, Rahul's statements cause distress. They alleged discrepancies in Skill University enrollment figures and lack of funding, urging removal of misleading information from its website. They also raised concerns about

food adulteration, citing a report by News Meter, claiming that despite widespread adulteration in Telangana, very few cases are registered.

They accused the government of ignoring public health issues and failing to act against adulteration mafias.

They criticized SERP and Stree Nidhi leadership, alleging long-term irregularities and demanding removal of G. Vidyasagar Reddy.

They alleged political influence in maintaining positions and questioned the status of inquiry commissions.

They demanded immediate repayment of ₹1.5 lakh crore dues to Singareni, Transco, and Genco. They questioned the allocation of ₹5,000 crore to Young India Schools without addressing teacher recruitment. They supported protests by unemployed youth and criticized the lack of a job calendar and recruitment. They claimed the government failed to deliver on promises to BCs, minorities, SCs, STs, disabled persons, and women. They concluded by reiterating that this is a "Fake, Faker, Fakest government" and stated they would question Rahul Gandhi whenever he visits Telangana.

## Shabbir Ali praises pro-people Budget, highlights boost to minority welfare and social justice

**HYDERABAD**

Advisor to Telangana Government Mohammed Ali Shabbir on Friday praised the Congress government headed by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and Deputy CM and Finance Minister Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu for presenting a pro-farmer and pro-people Budget for 2026-27, highlighting increased allocation for minority welfare and a strong push towards inclusive growth.

He welcomed the Rs.3,769 crore allocation for minorities, stating that it reflects the government's commitment to their comprehensive uplift and equal development. He noted that the allocation marks an increase of Rs.178 crore compared to the previous year, reflecting the government's continued priority for minority welfare. He said focused measures such as distribution of 10,000 sewing machines to minority women and skill development training for 4,655 minority youth were taken to enhance economic self-reliance and improve employability.

Shabbir Ali noted that the budget places minorities at the centre of welfare planning, with initiatives aimed at education, entrepreneurship and financial independence. He also welcomed the Rs.6,000 crore allocation for the Rajiv Yuva Vikasam Scheme, which will provide financial assistance to youth from SC, ST, BC, minority and other sections to promote entrepreneurship and self-employment.

Highlighting the emphasis on education, he appreciated the Young India Integrated Residential Schools initiative,



under which 105 schools are being established across Assembly constituencies. He said the project would ensure quality, skill-oriented education for students from all communities, with 79 schools already sanctioned and construction underway at 44 locations. Shabbir Ali further noted that the government has allocated over Rs.36,000 crore for SC, ST, BC and minority welfare, including Rs.11,784 crore for SCs, Rs.7,937 crore for STs and Rs.12,511 crore for BCs, calling it a clear reflection of the Congress government's commitment to social justice.

He said the allocation of pending SC/ST Sub-Plan funds and expansion of education, skill development and livelihood programmes would help bridge historical inequalities and ensure that benefits reach marginalised communities.

Praising Deputy CM Bhatti Vikramarka, he said the budget strikes a balance between welfare and development while prioritising farmers, weaker sections and youth. He termed it a continuation of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's vision of inclusive governance. "This is a pro-farmer, pro-people budget that strengthens social justice and ensures equal opportunities for all sections, especially minorities and other disadvantaged communities," Shabbir Ali said.



## Minister Uttam reviews SLBC tunnel progress

**Insists on strict adherence to safety protocols**

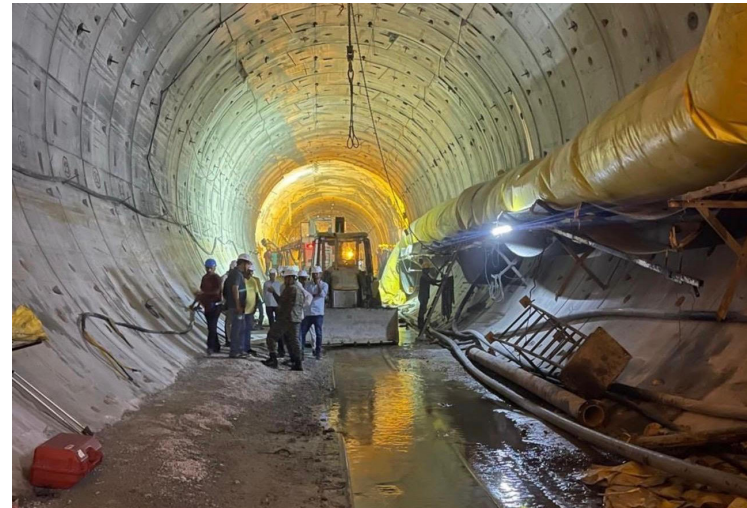
**Works resumed on inlet side too**

**HYDERABAD**

Irrigation and Civil Supplies Minister N. Uttam Kumar Reddy announced today that excavation work on the inlet side of the Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel has been resumed, placing the entire operation on a fast-track mode. This development follows the recent resumption from the outlet (Devarkonda) side and aims to complete what is poised to become the world's longest tunnel excavated without any intermediate access shafts.

The minister chaired a high-level review meeting at the Secretariat today to assess the progress of the SLBC tunnel, the Dindi Irrigation Project, and the Achampet branch canal. He directed officials spearheading the tunnel works to strictly adhere to safety protocols in letter and spirit, leaving no room for lapses or disruptions. Emphasizing worker safety, Reddy insisted on ensuring proper ventilation right up to the last point of the tunnel face, along with continuous monitoring and the deployment of all necessary safeguards.

The resumption from the inlet side comes after preparations, including a 20-metre open cut and additional safety installations, were completed. Earlier, work restarted from the Devarkonda (outlet) end last month where approximately 20 metres were excavated in the first week through seven successful excavation cycles using advanced tunnelling methods.



The outlet side had remained stalled for nearly seven years prior to that restart. The 43.93 km-long SLBC tunnel, a key component of the Alimineti Madhava Reddy Project (AMRP) initiated in 1983, originates from the left bank of the Srisailem reservoir. It is being excavated simultaneously from both ends due to the dense reserve forest cover and technical constraints that prevent intermediate adits or shafts. On completion, it will set a world record as the longest such tunnel globally, he said. Current progress stands close to 50 meters. The tunnel traverses challenging quartzitic and granitic formations, crossing 15 nalas, four of which are perennial streams. The project has long suffered delays due to geological issues like faults, shear zones, and poor rock conditions, with historical average progress of only about 75 metres per month per face. A devastating setback occurred on February 22, 2025, when a roof collapse near the inlet side led to massive

water, silt, and debris ingress, flooding 2.5 km of the tunnel and burying a 130-metre-long Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM). Tragically, eight workers lost their lives. This incident halted operations and prompted a high-level technical committee review. Adopting the committee's recommendations, the Telangana Cabinet approved advanced tunnelling methodologies on October 23, 2025 incorporating observational techniques, scientific monitoring, and enhanced safety measures. TBM technology has been largely set aside in favor of these safer, adaptable approaches.

To better understand subsurface risks, a helicopter-borne VTEM Plus Magnetic Geophysical Survey (Heli-borne AEM) was conducted over more than 200 km of the alignment by experts from the National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI). The survey's data, penetrating 800-1000 metres deep, helps identify shear zones, water bodies.

## Disaster Training Center with International Standards in the State

**Review Conducted on Disaster Management**

**HYDERABAD**

State Revenue, Housing, and Information & Public Relations Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy has instructed officials to prepare proposals for establishing a State Institute of Disaster Management (SIDM) with international standards. He suggested forming a high-level committee with officials from relevant departments to design an action plan. He also stated that a final decision will be taken after discussions with Hon'ble Chief Minister Revanth Reddy. The Minister stated that the objective is to provide uniform disaster management training to all government departments across the state, reduce loss of life and property through scientific methods, and strengthen disaster response capacity at the grassroots level, especially in districts. He added that the institute will function as a premier research and policy support center for disaster prevention.

On Friday, the Minister held a review meeting at his office in the Secretariat with officials from the Disaster Management De-

partment, Fire Services, SDRF, HYDRA, and ICCD departments.

During the meeting, Minister Ponguleti said that instead of limiting efforts to relief operations after disasters, the government has decided to establish the State Institute of Disaster Management (SIDM) with a focus on preparedness and minimizing damage in advance. He emphasized that all departments should work in coordination to make Telangana a model state for disaster management in the country.

He also stated that advanced equipment is being procured to handle all kinds of disasters. To ensure rapid response during emergencies like floods and fire accidents, systems such as real-time monitoring, accurate information networks, early warning systems, drones, and high-speed boats are being acquired.

The meeting was attended by Special Chief Secretary for Disaster Management Dana Kishore, Fire Services Director Vikraman Singh, HYDRA Commissioner Ranganath, ICCD Director Kamal Hassan Reddy, Additional DGP of Special Police Battalion Sanjay Jain, and other officials.

## Online Registration and Application Process Begins

**for Recruitment into the Indian Army - Recruitment Year 2027**

The online registration and application process has begun for candidates to apply for recruitment into various categories in the Indian Army.

The recruitment notification for unmarried youth under the Agniveer categories was released on 13 February 2026 on the official website ([www.joinindianarmy.nic.in](http://www.joinindianarmy.nic.in)). Applications are invited from residents of all 33 districts of Telangana under the Secunderabad Army Recruiting Office. These districts include: Adilabad, Bhadradi Kothagudem, Hanumakonda, Hyderabad, Jagtial, Jangaon, Jayashankar Bhupalpally, Jogulamba Gadwal, Kamareddy, Karimnagar, Khammam, Kurumam Bheem Asifabad, Mahabubnagar, Medak, Mahabubabad, Mancheril, Medchal-Malkajigiri, Mulugu, Nagarkurnool, Nalgonda, Narayanpet, Nirmal, Nizamabad, Peddapalli, Rajanna Sircilla, Rangareddy, Sangareddy, Siddipet, Suryapet, Vikarabad, Wanaparthy, Warangal, and Yadadri Bhuvanagiri.

**Recruitment will be conducted in the following categories:**

Agniveer General Duty  
Agniveer Technical  
Agniveer Clerk / Store Keeper Technical  
Agniveer Tradesman (10th pass)  
Agniveer Tradesman (8th pass)

Candidates can apply for any two categories based on their qualifications. The maximum age limit for Agniveer categories has been increased from 21 years to 22 years. The Online Common Entrance Examination (CEE) will be conducted in 13 languages (including Telugu). Candidates with ITI, Diploma, and NCC qualifications will receive additional marks. Applications must be submitted only through the website [www.joinindianarmy.nic.in](http://www.joinindianarmy.nic.in). The last date to submit applications is 01 April 2026.

The Online Common Entrance Examination (CEE) is tentatively scheduled from 01 June 2026 to 15 June 2026. Admit cards can be downloaded from the same website. Candidates should regularly check the website [www.joinindianarmy.nic.in](http://www.joinindianarmy.nic.in) for updates and also monitor their registered email IDs. For further details, the Secunderabad Army Recruiting Office can be contacted at 040-27740059.

The recruitment process is fully automated, fair, and transparent. Candidates are advised not to trust any middlemen or fraudsters who claim to provide jobs. Selection will be strictly based on merit through hard work. There is no role for agents or intermediaries in this process.

**HYDERABAD**

The State Government has stepped up efforts to curb rising road accidents with a renewed focus on enforcement, awareness and inter-departmental coordination, as part of the "Arrive Alive" programme under the 99-day Praja Palana-Pragathi Pranalika.

At a high-level review held at the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Secretariat on Friday, Roads & Buildings Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy and Transport Minister Ponnampalabhar underscoring the urgency of treating road safety as a public movement rather than a routine administrative exercise.

Flagging alarming trends, the Ministers noted that road accidents are claiming more lives than several health-related causes, with a significant proportion of victims in the 18-40 age group. Telanga-

# ARRIVE ALIVE DRIVE Govt Pushes for Tougher Road Safety Measures

na recorded over 22,000 accidents and more than 6,200 deaths in 2025, with nearly 20 fatalities occurring daily. Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy stressed that negligence, particularly by heavy vehicle drivers, is a major contributor to fatalities and called for stricter legal provisions, including non-bailable offences in cases of fatal accidents caused by negligence. He also sought tighter regulation of heavy vehicles and firm action against drunk driving, rash driving, mobile phone usage while driving and overload-

ing. Pointing out that a majority of accidents are preventable, he said measures such as helmet usage, improved signage, zebra crossings and rectification of black spots could significantly reduce fatalities. Minister Komatireddy cited ongoing works to address 17 accident-prone locations on the Hyderabad-Vijayawada highway and stressed the need to prevent roadside parking of heavy vehicles, especially at night. Calling for a wider behavioural shift, the Minister advocated intensified awareness campaigns involv-

ing students, drivers and the general public, and suggested roping in film personalities to amplify messaging.

Transport Minister Ponnampalabhar, meanwhile, proposed institutionalising road safety at the grassroots level by constituting village Road Safety Committees, led by local representatives and involving community members. These panels would identify local risk factors, monitor compliance and conduct regular awareness drives.

He emphasised achieving 100% helmet

usage, promoting "zero accident villages" and integrating road safety education into school curriculum. Measures such as strict enforcement against minor driving, mandatory helmets for pillion riders, eye check-ups for drivers and monitoring of school bus drivers were also highlighted.

The Minister further suggested leveraging digital platforms, including WhatsApp groups and display boards in urban areas, to expand outreach, while encouraging recognition for drivers maintaining long accident-free records.

Officials informed that a six-day statewide "Arrive Alive" campaign will be conducted from April 13 to 18, with coordinated participation from Police, Transport, R&B and Health departments. The government expects that a combination of enforcement, engineering improvements and sustained public awareness will help bring down.

## Lift death in Kolkata sparks political row

KOLKATA: (MAR 21)

A man died after allegedly getting trapped in a lift at the state-run R G Kar Medical College and Hospital in north Kolkata on Friday, sparking a political storm ahead of the Assembly elections, with the opposition BJP alleging negligence and demanding a murder probe. Leader of the Opposition Suwendu Adhikari termed the death "murder" and held Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who also heads the health department, along with Health Secretary Narayan Swaroop Nigam and hospital authorities, responsible. "I have documents with me... they intentionally killed (the man) using a lift that was being repaired."

# Another Indian killed in Riyadh amid Iran war, toll mounts to 6

The Indian embassy in Saudi Arabia cited 'recent developments' on March 18 as the cause behind the death of the Indian national. On that day, Saudi Arabia downed four ballistic missiles targeting Riyadh. However, some debris fell near a refinery south of the city.

An Indian national was killed in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, amid the Middle East conflict, taking the total casualties from India to six. While the circumstances regarding the Indian national's death are not clear, the Indian embassy in Saudi Arabia cited "recent developments" on March 18 as the cause.



The embassy, in a post on X, said it was in touch with the Indian national's family and was providing all necessary assistance.

On March 18 (Wednesday), Saudi Arabia claimed it downed four ballistic missiles targeting Riyadh, and some

debris fell near a refinery south of the city. The Indian national likely died after being hit by falling debris.

The attack was in response to Israeli strikes on Iran's South Pars gasfield, the world's largest such facility. It is the backbone of Iran's

domestic electricity production as well as global LNG supplies. In fact, according to a report in Al Jazeera, the developments on March 18 marked the first time many in Riyadh heard blasts or received warning messages via text. Since the conflict began on February 28, Iran has fired a barrage of missiles and low-cost drones towards Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, in an effort to pile up economic pressure by choking energy supply chains. However, Riyadh has intercepted a vast majority of the projectiles. It must be remembered that the Gulf states host lakhs of Indian expatriates, many of whom work in construction, healthcare, hospitality, and fi-

nance sectors. So far, six Indians have been killed amid the ongoing Middle East conflict. On March 14, two Indians were killed following a drone strike in Sohar, Oman. A week ago, an Indian national was killed in Al Kharj, Saudi Arabia, when an Iranian missile, meant to target radar systems, hit a residential area.

A seventh Indian is missing, Aseem Mahajan, additional secretary (Gulf), said at a media briefing. "Six Indian nationals have unfortunately lost their lives, and one is missing... Our missions in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Iraq and the UAE are in regular touch with the concerned authorities regarding the missing Indian national," he said.

## Changes in the pattern of Train Services

CHENNAI, MARCH 20:

Due to Signal & Traffic Block for commissioning of Automatic Signalling between Jolarpettai and Doddampatti section on 24.03.26, the following changes have been made in the pattern of train services:

### Full Cancellation of Train Services:

Train No. 16087 Arakkonam - Salem MEMU Express scheduled to leave Arakkonam at 05.15 hrs on 24th March, 2026 is fully cancelled

Train No. 16088 Salem - Arakkonam MEMU Express scheduled to leave Salem at 15.30 hrs on 24th March, 2026 is fully cancelled

Train No. 12680 Coimbatore - Dr MGR Chennai Central Intercity Express scheduled to leave Coimbatore at 06.20 hrs on 24th March, 2026 is fully cancelled

Train No. 12679 Dr MGR Chennai Central - Coimbatore Intercity Express scheduled to leave Dr MGR Chennai Central at 14.30 hrs on 24th March, 2026 is fully cancelled. Train No. 56107 Jolarpettai - Erode Passenger scheduled to leave Jolarpettai at 14.45 hrs on 24th March, 2026 is fully cancelled

Train No. 56108 Erode - Jolarpettai Passenger scheduled to leave Erode at 06.00 hrs on 24th March, 2026 is fully cancelled. Train No. 56107 Jolarpettai - Erode Passenger scheduled to leave Jolarpettai at 14.45 hrs on 24th March, 2026 is fully cancelled

Train No. 22666 Coimbatore - KSR Bengaluru Uday Express scheduled to leave Coimbatore at 05.45 hrs on 24th March, 2026 will be diverted to run via Salem, Dharmapuri and Hosur skipping stoppages at Tirupattur

Train No. 18190 Ernakulam Jn - Tatanagar Express scheduled to leave Ernakulam Jn at 07.15 hrs on 24th March, 2026 will be regulated for 1 hour 30 mins enroute

Train No. 13352 Alappuzha - Dhanbad Express scheduled to leave Alappuzha at 06.00 hrs on 24th March, 2026 will be regulated for 1 hour 30 mins enroute

Kuppam and Krishnarajapuram

Train No. 16340 Nagercoil - Mumbai CST Express scheduled to leave Nagercoil at 06.45 hrs on 24th March, 2026 will be diverted to run via Dindigul, Tiruchirappalli, Vriddhachalam, Villupuram and Katpadi skipping stoppages at Karur, Namakkal, Salem, Samalpatti, Tirupattur and Jolarpettai

Train No. 22665 KSR Bengaluru - Coimbatore Uday Express scheduled to leave KSR Bengaluru at 14.15 hrs on 24th March, 2026 will be diverted to run via Hosur, Dharmapuri and Salem skipping stoppages at Krishnarajapuram, Kuppam and Tirupattur

Rescheduling of Train Services:

Train No. 20643 Dr MGR Chennai Central - Coimbatore Vande Bharat Express scheduled to leave Dr MGR Chennai Central at 14.15 hrs 24th March, 2026 will be rescheduled to leave Dr MGR Chennai Central at 16.15 hrs (Late by 2 hours)

Train No. 12676 Coimbatore - Dr MGR Chennai Central Kovai Express scheduled to leave Coimbatore at 15.15 hrs on 24th March, 2026 will be rescheduled to leave Coimbatore at 17.15 hrs (Late by 2 hours)

Regulation of Train Services:

Train No. 18190 Ernakulam Jn - Tatanagar Express scheduled to leave Ernakulam Jn at 07.15 hrs on 24th March, 2026 will be regulated for 1 hour 30 mins enroute

Train No. 13352 Alappuzha - Dhanbad Express scheduled to leave Alappuzha at 06.00 hrs on 24th March, 2026 will be regulated for 1 hour 30 mins enroute

## AP: Rs 65 Cr. worth crops damaged due to untimely rains

VIJAYAWADA, MAR 20

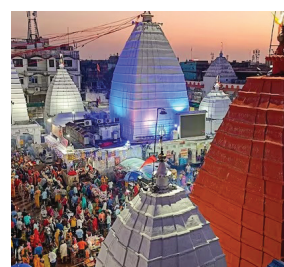
The unseasonal rains which have occurred during the last two days damaged crops worth Rs 63 crores in the State. Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu held a meeting with the district Collectors and officials on Friday and reviewed the situation. The officials informed the Chief Minister that crops were damaged in 42 mandals in 12 districts due to unseasonal rains, hailstorms and gales, which occurred two days in the week. The officials told the Chief Minister that maize crop was damaged in 4,840 hectares, paddy crop in 1,534 hectares and black gram in 310 hectares. Moreover, horticulture crops including banana, papaya, chilli, vegetables, mango, orange and lime, worth Rs 40 crore, were damaged in 48 mandals in 9 districts due to untimely rains and heavy gales. The total crop damage due to untimely

rains was enumerated as Rs 63 crore, the officials said. Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu also reviewed the supply of domestic gas to the consumers. He discussed with the officials on how to overcome the crisis in case of disruption of the LPG global supply chain due to war in the Middle East. He directed the officials to set up a strong mechanism to efficiently tackle the LPG scarcity.

The Chief Minister also ordered the officials to take steps for the uninterrupted supply of LPG to the domestic consumers in the state, educational institutions, temples, anna canteens and anganwadi centres. Mr.Naidu suggested that the use of induction stoves and PNG should be encouraged as alternatives to the LPG to mitigate the LPG crisis. He told the officials to discuss with the Central government officials regarding supply of petrol, diesel and fertilizers.

## One-second darshan at Deoghar's Baidyanath Dham triggers VIP-vs-commoner debate

The clip has gone viral showing devotees at Deoghar's Baidyanath Dham shoved aside after only a few seconds of receiving darshan. A short clip of devotees being systematically pushed as a crowd-control measure in the sanctum of the Baidyanath Dham in Jharkhand's Deoghar has gone viral with debating the difference in treatment to VIPs and the common people. One person said devotees were "treated like animals" while politicians, bureaucrats and the wealthy got preferential treatment. The viral showed security personnel "manhandling" devotees who had gathered for darshan. In the video, security personnel and staff were seen shoving and pushing away a rush of devotees, each of whom were afforded a few seconds of darshan at most before being unceremoniously ejected. The Baba Baidyanath Dham in Deoghar, Jharkhand, is one of the 12 Jyotirlingas, making it one of Hinduism's holiest temples. Lord Shiva is worshipped here as Baidyanath, meaning the "healer". The clip sparked



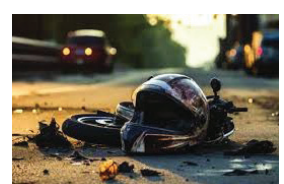
criticism of the temple's management, with users alleging "widespread mismanagement". Nishikant Dubey, a BJP MP from Jharkhand, who has frequently locked horns with the Hemant Soren-led government on issues surrounding the temple, blamed Soren for the situation. "The chairman of this temple is Hemant Soren. His government is being supported by the Indian National Congress. From 2019 till now (2026), not a single meeting has been held. I myself have been fighting a case in the Jharkhand High Court since 2023 regarding its management and the queue complex," Dubey posted on X on Thursday.

Alongside claims of mismanagement, people also raised the issue of VIP darshan.

## AP: Three youths killed as bike rams road divider

RAYACHOTI, MAR 20

Three youths were killed when their bike moving at a high speed ramed a road divider at Kurabalakota village in Annamayya district on Friday. Police said that the deceased who went to Madanapalle on some work, were travelling back to their native village when the accident took



place. The deceased were identified as Surendra, Madav and Mahesh. The police registered a case and shifted the bodies to the GGH for postmortem.

## Andhra CM seeks report on crop losses due to unseasonal rains

AMARAVATI, MARCH 20

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, on Friday, directed officials to prepare comprehensive estimates within two days regarding the crop damage caused across the state by strong winds, unseasonal rains, and thunderstorms.

The Chief Minister held a video conference from his camp office with district collectors and senior officials.

Officials briefed Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu that crop damage has occurred in 42 mandals across 12 districts. They said maize crop over 4,840 hectares, paddy over 1,534 hectares and black gram over 310 hectares were damaged, adding that the loss is estimated at Rs 40 crore.

The Chief Minister was told that rains also impacted



horticultural crops on 1,301 hectares in 48 mandals across nine districts. Crops such as banana, papaya, chili, vegetables, mango, orange, and lemongrass were damaged, with the estimated loss valued at Rs 23 crore. Based on the estimates compiled so far, officials have calculated the total combined loss for all crops at Rs 63 crore. According to India Meteorological Department (IMD) at Amaravati, there will be widespread rain until March

22 in the state, and thereafter isolated rainfall is expected. Thunderstorms, accompanied by lightning and gusty winds reaching 60 kmph, are likely in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema. Andhra Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority (APSDMA) Managing Director Prakhar Jain has advised farmers to take precautions.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu also conducted a review regarding the

supply of LPG.

He said that if the conflict between Iran, Israel, and the United States persists for some time, the global LPG supply chain could be disrupted and hence a system must be put in place within the state to effectively tackle such a crisis.

He directed them to ensure that there are absolutely no interruptions in the supply of LPG gas cylinders anywhere.

He emphasised that priority should be accorded to gas deliveries in rural and tribal areas, educational institutions, temples, Anna canteens, and Anganwadis. The Chief Minister suggested focusing on alternative options such as induction stoves and PNG. He also directed officials to engage in consultations with the Central government to ensure that there are no shortages of fertilisers, petrol, or diesel.

## Odisha signs ₹247 cr deal to revive traditional crops

BY VINAY KAKKAD

Odisha's government just signed an agreement with Watershed Support Service and Activities Network (WASSAN) with the goal of restoring "forgotten foods" and neglected crops. This project is fairly substantial - valued at ₹247.02 crore, and it'll run for five years, from 2025-26 to 2029-30. The main goal? Bring back traditional crop varieties and indigenous seeds that have almost vanished from today's farms. The project will target 25 biodiversity-rich blocks across 15 districts, focusing on ecologically and culturally significant regions such as Gandhamardhan, Niyamgiri, Sunabeda, Satkosia, Guptheswar, Malyagiri, and Similipal.

## AAP govt ramps up Punjab's healthcare with record doctor hiring, new hospitals

The Punjab government has completed one of the largest doctor recruitment drives in the state since Independence, while also expanding key diagnostic and cancer care infrastructure, according to official announcements.

Sharing updates on X, the Shaam Aadmi Party (AAP) said the Bhagwant Mann-led government has taken significant steps to strengthen healthcare services across Punjab. Among the major initiatives, PET scan facilities for cancer diagnosis have been started in Amritsar, Faridkot, Mohali and Patiala. In addition, more than 200 private centres have been empanelled to provide free X-ray and ultrasound services, especially benefiting women patients. The government also plans to introduce CT scan facilities in eight more state hospitals

soon. Highlighting recruitment efforts, the government said it has completed the largest-ever hiring of doctors in Punjab. Over the past four years, 35 per cent of the total government doctor workforce has been recruited. This includes the appointment of 948 general doctors and 627 specialist doctors. The recruitment process has also covered 300 nursing staff and 250 pharmacists, while the hiring of 2,000 nurses is currently underway. Meanwhile, Punjab Health Minister Dr Balbir Singh announced the establishment of a new government medical college in Kapurthala. The institute, named Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji State Institute of Medical Sciences, will be built within the existing district hospital complex. The minister said all formalities, including the tendering process, have been completed and work orders have been issued. Construction is scheduled to begin on March 25

and is expected to be completed within 24 months, by March 2028. The project will be developed at a cost of Rs 275 crore and will include a 300-bedded hospital along with a medical college offering 100 MBBS seats annually. The facility is expected to strengthen medical education in the state and reduce the need for students to seek expensive education abroad. Once operational, the institute will provide advanced secondary and tertiary healthcare services and is expected to generate significant employment, directly benefiting over 1,000 people while creating indirect opportunities for thousands more.

As part of the expansion, the government hospital in Sultanpur Lodhi will be upgraded into an urban centre, while the Begowal government hospital will be developed as a rural centre. Both will be linked to the upcoming medical college in Kapurthala.

## Bengal man strangles six-month pregnant wife for refusing his demands for money

A 24-year-old woman who was six months pregnant was allegedly murdered by her husband in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, police said.



allegedly killed after she refused to meet her husband's monetary demands. Per preliminary investigation, cops suspect Harichand strangled her with a piece of cloth and attempted to conceal the crime by hiding the body.

Local sources said Mondal and Harichand had been married for about two years. Her family alleged she had faced repeated harassment over

to her in-laws' house later that afternoon. Unable to find her, they alerted police, who subsequently recovered the body from under the bed. Goutam Biswas, the victim's maternal uncle, told India Today, "Rishi would demand money from my niece Puja. They married each other without our consent. None of our family had accepted them. Later we heard that she was pregnant. After that, we accepted the couple." He added, "Her husband does not do any work. Therefore he often demands money. After getting the phone call, we reached the spot and saw my niece was hidden under the bed. And we also heard that her husband, mother-in-law and others surrendered at the police station." Police said further investigation is on.

## Odisha CM takes historic decision! Contractual schematic junior teachers regularized

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi today took a historic decision today as he regularized the Junior Teachers, Schematic, who are working on a contractual basis.



Bhubaneswar: Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi today took a historic decision today as he regularized the Junior Teachers, Schematic, who are working on a contractual basis. The junior teachers of this category who were appointed in the year 2023-24 have been regularized. This has benefited more than 13,000 contractual junior teachers of the state.

These teachers have been regularized from the time of joining their jobs. However,

they will get Notional Benefit from the time of joining the job till December 31, 2025. They will get the salary and all other benefits of regular employees from January 1, 2026. It is worth noting that the Chief Minister had earlier announced to regularize these junior teachers. Today's decision has created a wave of joy among the teachers.

EDITORIAL

NAVIC IN DISTRESS:  
INDIA'S GPS ALTERNATIVE  
FACES SYSTEMIC FAILURE

ISRO's NavIC constellation, for which it has launched 11 satellites since 2013, is in operational distress. Only three satellites remain capable of providing position, navigation, and timing (PNT) services, leaving the constellation unable to fulfil its purpose of replacing the U.S.'s GPS system over the Indian subcontinent. A PNT constellation requires at least four PNT-capable satellites, and India had only four until ISRO said an atomic clock onboard the IRNSS-1F satellite failed on March 13. The constellation's first-generation satellites use rubidium atomic clocks made by Swiss company SpectraTime, and which have been dogged by failure. ISRO's latest attempt to launch a second-generation satellite, NVS-02, was abortive after the machine was left in the wrong orbit. IRNSS-1F, launched in March 2016, completed its 10-year design life just three days before its clock failed. Eight other satellites have either been decommissioned, have failed to reach orbit or have bad clocks. In 2018, ISRO transitioned to using indigenous rubidium atomic clocks, developed by the ISRO-Space Applications Centre. NVS-01, launched in May 2023, was the first to carry the device; all second-generation NVS series satellites will too.

Part of NavIC's genesis was the U.S.'s refusal to share GPS data over Kargil during the 1999 war, and it continues to function largely as a defence programme managed by ISRO. However, while the space sector reforms in 2020 vouchsafed ISRO for R&D and NewSpace India for commercialisation, the absence of a national space law leaves ISRO acting as both designer and operator of NavIC, overextending the agency. Equally, India lacks a counterpart to the GPS Directorate or EUSPA, which respectively manage the GPS and Galileo constellations. The new generation of rubidium clocks also faces procurement challenges and ISRO has proposed equipping each satellite with five atomic clocks instead of the previous three. The constellation has been degrading faster than it can be replenished, due to ISRO's poor launch rate. This problem stems from several factors, including issues with the PSLV, an insufficient budget that must maintain a PNT constellation, an upcoming human spaceflight programme, several earth-observation satellites, and R&D for new rockets. ISRO is also hand-holding start-ups that have yet to get a grip on launching rockets to low-earth orbit. Meanwhile, the Union government has encouraged electronics manufacturers to support the L1 band of the NVS series for better interoperability with GPS while expecting its use by the armed forces. For all these reasons, ISRO's plan to launch three more second-generation satellites in 2026 does little to inspire confidence.

PAUSE FOR A MOMENT

Pause for a moment—  
pause and see,  
In time's vast, silent infinity,  
Your life—a spark, a fleeting gleam,  
A whisper woven in a dream.  
Will it fade like breath in air,  
Lost in winds that do not care?  
Or rise as truth, refined and bright,  
A living flame that conquers night?  
Time  
the sculptor, patient, still,  
Carving souls with unseen will;  
Not in hours does it confine,  
But shapes the human into divine.  
The mind  
a stone beneath its art,  
Bearing echoes of the heart;  
Not mere memory, cold and deep,  
But truths awakened from their sleep.  
Tears  
not weakness, nor defeat,  
But verses where emotions meet;  
Each drop a word the soul must  
write,  
In ink of pain, in glow of light.  
Speech  
a blossom soft and fair,  
Spreading fragrance through the air;  
Not a flame that burns too fast,  
Leaving only ash at last.  
Words  
like moonlight, calm and wise,  
Healing wounds no hand denies;  
Not like storms that break and  
bend,  
Trust that may not rise again.  
A word  
a melody when kind,  
Binding hearts, aligning mind;  
A wound when sharpened, cold,  
and sly,  
A silent sword that severs ties.  
The same word  
nectar when it gently flows,  
Where hope like tender garden  
grows;  
Poison when in anger cast,  
Turning futures into past.  
A glance  
a lamp in shadowed space,  
A quiet hymn of unseen grace;  
A smile  
a chord the soul can hear,  
Dispelling doubt, dissolving fear.  
Yet neglect  
a winter's breath,  
Turning bloom to silent death;  
Spring undone by one cold hour,  
Fading hope, a fallen flower.  
Words as flowers  
harvest love in golden streams;

Words as thunder  
shatter hearts and break their  
dreams. Words alone  
can raise the human to the height  
Where soul meets soul in shared  
delight;  
Words alone  
can cast him down to depths  
unseen,  
Where silence reigns, cold and  
between.  
So pause  
pause and weigh each sound  
you sow,  
For every word is seed you throw;  
What tree shall rise from  
what you say?  
Shade or storm along the way?  
If your heart  
an ocean wide and deep,  
What waves shall wake,  
what shores shall keep?  
Calm that heals or tides that tear  
The choice is yours, the path is clear.  
Let thought  
be vast as starry skies,  
Where endless light in silence lies;  
Let feeling  
root like earth below,  
Where seeds of grace and  
mercy grow.  
Let kindness  
soft as jasmine bloom,  
Dispel the night, dissolve the gloom;  
Let doubt  
like passing clouds depart,  
Never anchoring in the heart.  
Let ego  
melt like dew at dawn,  
Gone before the day is born;  
Let compassion  
flow, a sacred stream,  
Through waking life and  
silent dream.  
Let forgiveness  
stand, a mountain high,  
Unshaken 'neath the changing sky;  
Let love  
resound, creation's tone,  
The pulse that makes all life one.  
Then words  
become like sacred song,  
Where souls awaken,  
pure and strong;  
And hearts  
like lamps in temples bright,  
Illumine the world with living light.  
Life  
no longer fleeting, lost in time,  
But shaped into a deathless rhyme;  
And you  
no moment passing into sea,  
But meaning carved in eternity.

...: Dr. Peruka Raju ...  
7810032847

Spotlight

Nepal PROSPECTS FOR  
After Elections NEW GOVT

IN A HISTORIC ELECTORAL UPSET, NEPAL'S RASHTRIYA SWATANTRA PARTY, LED BY MUSICIAN-TURNED-POLITICIAN BALENDRA SHAH, SECURED A COMMANDING VICTORY, SIGNALING A DECISIVE END TO THE DOMINANCE OF THE COUNTRY'S TRADITIONAL ELITE. WITH NEARLY 48% OF THE VOTE AND 182 OF 275 PARLIAMENTARY SEATS, SHAH NOT ONLY DEFEATED FORMER PRIME MINISTER KP SHARMA OLI IN HIS CONSTITUENCY BUT ALSO GAINED A STRONG MANDATE TO PURSUE SWEEPING REFORMS. AS NEPAL FACES URGENT NEEDS FOR INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND SUSTAINED ECONOMIC GROWTH, THE YOUNG LEADER'S CHALLENGE WILL BE TRANSLATING HIS OUTSIDER APPEAL INTO TANGIBLE DEVELOPMENT, WHILE NAVIGATING COMPLEX REGIONAL AND GLOBAL PRESSURES.

The recent elections in Nepal saw Rashtriya Swatantra Party and its leader Balendra Shah win a decisive victory, ending the uncertainty after last September's revolution and an interim government. The vote took place smoothly and peacefully. The defeat of the current elite is indisputable and gives the new government a strong mandate to implement profound reforms.

Nepal needs significant infrastructure investments and a high pace of development over the long term. It is not yet clear whether Shah will be able to achieve this. It can be predicted that Nepal will emphasise its independence in foreign policy, while also turning subtly to India and indirectly to the West.

Everyone expected Shah to win, but the final results were a surprise due to the scale of the defeat for the incumbent government. The RSP secured the support of nearly 48% of voters and won 182 seats in the 275-seat parliament. This was the second-best result in Nepal's history, and Shah himself personally defeated former Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli in the constituency. Second and third place went to the largest parties of the previous regime: Congress (16.2%) and former Prime Minister Sharma Oli's Communists (13.4%). It's worth noting the exceptionally poor performance of monarchists (around 2%), meaning the issue of restoring the old system, which had been circulating in the media worldwide for sometime, was shelved for a long time.

The turnout was a surprise, reaching just under 60%, a record low (for example, in 2017 it was 68%), and it was expected to be higher this time due to the emotions stirred by the revolution. Why didn't this happen? Commentators cite two primary reasons: growing distrust of the electoral process and all political parties, and logistical issues related to the voting it-



self. The events of the last six months have led many citizens to conclude that elections are pointless, as the situation is being shaped regardless of the outcome. Elite parties primarily inspire apathy among such voters, while the RSP (Russian Socialist Party) and its leader have failed to convince them to support them.

Logistics certainly influenced voter turnout. In Nepal, many urban residents are registered in their villages. Voting is often not enough to justify traveling many hours in difficult conditions (infrastructure in Nepal still leaves much to be desired, which was one of the reasons for the protests). Several million Nepalese work abroad, a growing number, and Nepalese law does not allow voting at diplomatic missions. Furthermore, war broke out in the Middle East just before the elections, with numerous flights canceled, preventing citizens from reaching Kathmandu and thus from voting.

Nevertheless, Balendra Shah received an exceptionally strong mandate (weakened only by low turnout). This gives him a secure majority in parliament and stable support for the long term. He can therefore proceed with the reforms he has announced and the public expects.

The new leader and his chances

Who is Balendra Shah, and does he really want to implement reforms? In the media, especially globally, he is portrayed primarily as a singer. He does

indeed sing and record; this is undoubtedly one of his personalities. His style is nepoh – short for Nepali hip-hop, combining Melo declamation and modern sound with traditional instruments. On stage, he performs under the stage name Balen, a diminutive of his name, and cultivates a star-like image.

However, it's worth noting that he is first and foremost a politician. Educated at a prestigious polytechnic university in Bengaluru, India, in 2021 he became an independent candidate for mayor of Kathmandu and won the elections held the following year, thanks to his image as a figure outside the system, uncorrupted, and young.

As mayor of the capital, he led programmes to modernise and reconstruct streets and neighborhoods, sometimes using controversial methods such as forced evictions. He also sought to portray himself as an uncompromising politician, acting in the interests of the entire country. He criticized both of Nepal's neighbours and their attempts to influence national politics. So, he is young, but with a lot of political experience for a person his age.

During the term of the interim government, he repeatedly praised Prime Minister Karki; she was more reserved towards him (perhaps because of the on-going campaign; she wanted to avoid accusations of bias), but she congratulated him immediately after the elections, and he in return thanked her for professionally managing the coun-

try for half a year and preparing the parliamentary elections.

So which way will Balendra Shah and the new Nepalese government go? Will he succeed in making real changes that will set Nepal on a path to rapid development, as its neighbours have been doing for decades? Or will he concentrate on accumulating power and promoting a cult of personality around himself? History is full of such examples. However, it seems that this is an exceptionally favorable moment for Nepal: the former elite has been discredited, the population wants real change, and, moreover, is young and willing to make sacrifices for the country's prosperity. People demonstrated this during and after the revolution, when the riots were not prolonged and the focus was on organising solidly conducted parliamentary elections.

To ensure Nepal's development leap, massive infrastructure investments and economic growth of 7-8% over many years are needed. Both of Nepal's neighbours achieved this a long time ago (though India still faces significant infrastructure challenges, particularly in the mountainous regions bordering Nepal) and are currently at a completely different stage. Implementing such reforms is difficult, but not impossible. There will undoubtedly be resistance from existing systems unwilling to change.

On the global stage

From a global perspective, Balendra Shah's success or failure is significant. Similar pro-

tests have erupted in several other countries. In nearby Bangladesh, they led to the return to power of a group that had held power for decades, leaving no real change. In Madagascar, they ended with the establishment of a military dictatorship. If Shah succeeds in reforming the country, it will be the most positive outcome of such a revolution and could draw others along. If he fails, Nepal will join the examples above, and Generation Z protests around the world may suffer the fate of the "Arab Spring."

What position will Nepal take on the international stage? It's a cliché to say that the country is located between the two most populous countries – China and India – and therefore has only two options: closer to Beijing or closer to Delhi. Previous governments tended to pursue a northeastern course, particularly KP Sharma Oli and his communist party. China, associated with economic success, has failed to contribute to Nepal's growth, limiting itself to showy investments and promoting its language and culture.

In this context, Balendra Shah has for years sought to portray himself as a primarily pro-Nepal politician, balancing influence and emphasising his country's independence. His Indian education and the cultural codes surrounding him align him with India and, indirectly, the West. From this perspective, one might expect Balen to pursue a "Nepal First" policy, perhaps publicly demonstrating independence from New Delhi, while de facto remaining slightly closer to India, treating it more strategically, while relations with China and other countries remain transactional.

It is in Nepal's best interest to ensure that this opportunity is not wasted, that real reforms are implemented, and that economic growth is ensured. Balendra Shah has the potential to accomplish this, but only time will tell.

International Day of Forests(21 March)

Heeding the Call of Forests for Ecological Balance

The International Day of Forests, observed every year on 21 March, is not merely a symbolic celebration; it is a profound reminder of a serious challenge confronting human civilization. Declared by the United Nations in 2012, this day aims to inspire global awareness about the significance of forests, encourage collective efforts for their conservation, and promote a harmonious coexistence with nature. In an era when the Earth is grappling with unprecedented environmental crises, the relevance of this observance has grown even more urgent. The 2026 theme, "Forests and Food," clearly emphasizes that forests are not just green cover but foundational pillars of global food security.

Today, environmental imbalance has reached alarming levels. Climate change has triggered rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, droughts, floods, and an increasing frequency of natural disasters, placing human life under severe threat. In such circumstances, forests emerge as a vital natural system that plays a central role in maintaining the Earth's equilibrium. They absorb carbon dioxide, thereby helping to mitigate global warming, regulate the water cycle, and prevent soil erosion. Despite this, the irony remains that human beings, driven by short-term needs and blind economic ambition, continue to exploit forests indiscriminately. This is why initiatives like Van Mahotsav and similar awareness campaigns are no longer mere formalities—they have become essential instruments of widespread social awakening.

The importance of forests extends far

beyond ecological balance; they are deeply intertwined with economic and social life as well. The emerging theme of "Forests and Economy" in 2026 highlights the reality that forests are fundamental to sustainable economic development. Millions of people around the world depend directly on forests for their livelihoods. Minor forest produce such as medicinal plants, resins, gums, honey, and bamboo not only strengthen rural economies but also contribute significantly to international trade. Additionally, eco-tourism has opened new avenues for employment and income generation. In this way, forests present themselves as a unique economic resource capable of balancing development with conservation.

The social and cultural significance of forests is equally profound. For indigenous and tribal communities, forests are an inseparable part of life. Their traditions, beliefs, and entire way of living are deeply rooted in forest ecosystems. For them, forests are not merely resources but the very foundation of existence. Therefore, forest conservation is not only an environmental concern but also a matter of social justice and cultural preservation. Observances like Van Mahotsav bring together diverse sections of society and reinforce the understanding that protecting forests is not solely the responsibility of governments—it is a shared moral obligation of every individual.

In the context of India, the importance of forests becomes even more expansive and multidimensional. Here, forests are not just natural assets but symbols of cultural and spiritual consciousness. In Indian tradition, trees are revered as sacred

entities. Species such as Peepal, Banyan, and Neem are not merely biological organisms but are worshipped as life-sustaining forces. India's rich biodiversity is heavily dependent on forests, and its conservation is essential for the nation's ecological security. Forests play a crucial role in regulating the climate, controlling rainfall patterns, and ensuring the stability of agricultural production.

Another significant aspect of forests in India is their role as the backbone of rural and tribal life. Millions depend on forests for food, fuel, fodder, and medicinal needs. Moreover, forests are critical for water conservation, helping sustain rivers and other water sources. At a time when water scarcity is intensifying across many regions of the country, the importance of forest conservation becomes even more evident. Without forests, the survival of natural water systems—and consequently human life—would be at serious risk.

In recent years, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, several noteworthy initiatives have been undertaken to promote forest conservation and green development. Programs such as the Green India Mission have led to large-scale afforestation efforts aimed at expanding forest cover and restoring ecological balance. The Namami Gange project has focused on plantation drives along riverbanks to support water conservation and reduce pollution. Additionally, the effective utilization of the CAMPA fund has accelerated forest restoration and conservation activities. In urban areas, innovative approaches

like the Miyawaki method are being encouraged to develop dense forests even in limited spaces. These initiatives reflect a growing commitment to integrating environmental sustainability with developmental goals.

Such policy measures demonstrate that it is indeed possible to harmonize economic growth with ecological preservation, provided there is a clear vision and determined effort. However, it is equally important to enhance public participation in these initiatives. Forest conservation cannot succeed through government policies alone; it requires active involvement and awareness at the societal level. Only when people recognize forests as integral to their own survival will meaningful and lasting change be possible.

Ultimately, the International Day of Forests and celebrations like Van Mahotsav convey a powerful message: maintaining harmony with nature is the foundation of human sustainability. It is imperative that we move beyond viewing forests merely as exploitable resources and begin to see them as an essential part of our existence. Without this shift in perspective, addressing environmental crises will remain an elusive goal.

If we are truly committed to securing our future, we must prioritize the protection and restoration of forests. This is not just an environmental necessity but a moral and existential imperative. The real essence of the International Day of Forests lies in awakening this consciousness—a call to listen to the silent yet urgent appeal of forests, and to act before it is too late.

## Welfare push, women voters anchor TMC's manifesto strategy for fourth term

KOLKATA, MAR 20

The TMC on Friday unveiled its manifesto for the West Bengal assembly elections, focusing on welfare expansion, women and minority outreach, and targeted social schemes as it seeks a fourth consecutive term. Releasing the document titled 'Banglar Jonno Didir 10 Protigya', Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee outlined ten promises ranging from expansion of welfare schemes and healthcare outreach to infrastructure development and economic growth. At the centre of the manifesto lies a Rs 500 hike in the 'Lakshmi Bhandar' scheme, widely regarded as the ruling party's most politically potent welfare programme, with the monthly assistance promised to rise to Rs 1,500 for women from the general category and Rs 1,700 for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe beneficiaries. Women voters constitute nearly half of the state's electorate and have increasingly turned out in larger numbers than men in recent elections, a trend political observers say has significantly strengthened the TMC's electoral position since

the scheme was introduced. Underscoring the political importance of the constituency, Banerjee said empowering women remained central to her government's agenda.

"I am determined to make the mothers and sisters of Bengal self-reliant," she said.

Alongside the welfare push, the manifesto proposes annual healthcare outreach under a new 'Duare Chikitsa' initiative, under which health camps will be organised in every block and town to provide doorstep medical services. To address youth unemployment, a recurring political issue in the state, the TMC promised continued financial support for jobless youth through the Banglar Yuva-Sathi scheme with a monthly assistance of Rs 1,500. Farmers also feature prominently in the party's electoral pitch, with Banerjee announcing a Rs 30,000-crore agriculture budget aimed at strengthening rural livelihoods, supporting landless cultivators and boosting productivity. The manifesto promises pucca houses for all families, piped drinking water to every household and a major in-



frastructure upgrade of government schools under the Banglar Shikshayata initiative. Economically, the party has sought to project a growth narrative alongside welfare politics. The manifesto says West Bengal's economy has expanded nearly sixfold over the past 15 years and outlines a roadmap to transform the state into the gateway of trade for eastern India through world-class logistics, ports and a proposed global trade centre. The document also promises revival of the jute sector through a Natural Fibres Revival Mission, a hike in the daily wages of tea garden workers from Rs 250 to Rs 300 and extension of tax exemptions for green tea leaves

to strengthen the plantation economy. Senior citizens are promised uninterrupted pension coverage with gradual expansion of beneficiaries, while the party has also pledged administrative restructuring through the creation of seven new districts and expansion of urban local bodies. Beyond the governance promises, the manifesto reflects a carefully calibrated electoral strategy aimed at reinforcing the party's core support base of women, minorities and marginalised communities.

Muslims constitute nearly 30 per cent of West Bengal's electorate and are decisive in more than 110 assembly constituencies, particularly in districts such as Murshid-

abad, Malda, Uttar, and Dakshin Dinajpur and South 24 Parganas - regions where the TMC made substantial gains in the 2021 assembly elections. The manifesto includes promises to protect and utilise Waqf properties for community welfare, expand job-oriented courses at Aliah University and introduce skill training in industrial institutes located in minority-dominated districts. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, who together account for 84 reserved assembly seats, form another key battleground in the BJP-TMC contest.

The party has promised expanded scholarships, stronger coaching support through the Yogyashree programme and enhanced hostel facilities for SC and ST students, while reiterating efforts to secure Scheduled Tribe status for communities such as Mahatos and Kisan Jatis. The outreach assumes significance in western districts such as Bankura, Purulia, Jhargram and parts of Paschim Medinipur, where the BJP had made deep electoral inroads in recent years.

Political observers say the manifesto underscores the TMC's continued reliance on

welfare-driven politics combined with targeted outreach to key voter blocs -- a strategy that has helped the party defeat the BJP's aggressive electoral challenge in successive polls. However, the welfare expansion also comes amid concerns over the state's finances, with West Bengal's outstanding debt estimated at over Rs 8 lakh crore and social sector spending accounting for more than half of total expenditure.

For Banerjee, who led the TMC to a sweeping victory in the 2021 assembly elections that halted the BJP's bid for power in the state, the manifesto represents both a governance blueprint and an electoral message.

"These commitments will ensure the momentum of development continues and the light of happiness reaches every household," she said.

Elections to the 294-member West Bengal Assembly will be held in two phases on April 23 and April 29, with votes to be counted on May 4, setting the stage for another high-stakes contest between the ruling TMC and the BJP in one of the country's most politically polarised states.

## NFR Registers Significant Growth in Solar Power Generation

MALIGAON, 20 MARCH, 2026:



The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) continues to make significant strides in its commitment towards green energy and sustainability, with substantial progress achieved in solar power installation across its divisions and units. As of February 2026, the total installed solar capacity across NFR has reached 31,890 MWp since the inception of the solarisation initiative in 2011. During the current financial year 2025-26 alone, an additional 22,734 MWp capacity has been installed, reflecting accelerated efforts toward renewable energy adoption. Among the divisions, Lumding (including Guwahati portion) has recorded the highest cumulative installation of 13,334 MWp, followed by Rangiya division with 8,941 MWp. Other divisions such as Alipurduar, Katihar and Tinsukia have also contributed significantly to the overall capacity enhancement. The solar installations have resulted in notable operational benefits. During 2025-26 (till February 2026), the average monthly solar energy generation stands at approximately

9.18 lakh units, leading to an average monthly financial saving of about Rs 68.80 lakh. This reflects NFR's focused approach toward reducing carbon footprint while optimizing energy expenditure. Further strengthening its green energy portfolio, NFR currently has 19.14 MWp of additional solar capacity under various stages of implementation across divisions. Major upcoming installations are planned in Lumding, Rangiya, Katihar and Alipurduar divisions, which will significantly enhance the overall renewable energy capacity in the near future. These initiatives underline Northeast Frontier Railway's commitment to sustainable development and its proactive role in supporting Indian Railways' vision of becoming a net-zero carbon emitter. The ongoing solarisation efforts not only contribute to environmental conservation but also ensure long-term economic benefits through reduced energy costs.

## Amit Shah to table CAPFs bill in Rajya Sabha Monday

NEW DELHI: (MAR 21)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah is set to introduce the Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026, in the Rajya Sabha on Monday to regulate the recruitment, deputation, and promotion of CAPF officers, according to the List of Business issued by the House. All the CAPFs -- Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF), Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), and Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) -- are governed by their respective Acts.

The rules under these Acts govern the recruitment and conditions of service of Group A General Duty Officers and other officers and members in the CAPFs.

## Government Committed to Upliftment of Every Section, Says CM Nayab Singh Saini

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 20

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini reaffirmed the government's commitment to inclusive development, stating that the welfare and upliftment of every section of society remains its top priority. He was speaking at a programme held at Sant Kabir Kutir to mark the birth anniversary of Sant Shiromani Sri Guru Ladhunath Ji Maharaj, organised under the Sant Mahapurush Samman evam Vichar Prasar Yojana. On the occasion, the Chief Minister paid floral tribute to the saint and extended greetings to Navratri, highlighting the importance of cultural values, spiritual heritage, and social unity. Describing Sant Ladhunath Maharaj Ji as a guiding light, Saini said his life symbolised truth, service, and dedication. He noted that the saint devoted his life to the service of humanity and worked tirelessly to eradicate social evils,



Haryana Chief Minister, Sh. Nayab Singh Saini addressing the gathering at the Sant Shiromani Sri Guru Ladhunath Ji Maharaj Jayanti programme held at his residence, Sant Kabir Kutir, Chandigarh on March 20, 2026.

discrimination, and ignorance. His teachings, especially the belief that "service to humanity is the true service to God," continue to inspire generations. The Chief Minister also praised the Nayak community, calling it a symbol of hard work, honesty, and social harmony. He said the community has preserved its identity and culture for centuries despite facing numerous challenges. Highlighting their historical contributions, Saini said members of the community played an active role

in India's freedom struggle and have a legacy marked by bravery and sacrifice. He recalled the courage of notable figures like Bhima Nayak, Budhu Bhagat, and Narsa Nayak, whose stories continue to be celebrated in folklore. In Haryana too, he said, the Nayak community contributed significantly to various revolutionary movements. Reiterating the government's vision of "Antyodaya" -- reaching the last person in the queue -- Saini said both the state and central gov-

ernments are working with the principle of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas," a vision championed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He added that efforts are being made to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all, regardless of caste, region, or background. Highlighting welfare initiatives, the Chief Minister said that over 1.56 lakh houses have been provided under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, while more than 27,000 plots have been allotted under the Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana. Financial assistance for housing repairs, healthcare coverage of up to ₹5 lakh under Ayushman Bharat-Chirayu Yojana, and scholarships for students from Scheduled Castes and economically weaker sections are among the many measures aimed at improving quality of life. He further noted that significant support has been extended in education, including cash incentives for meritorious students, scholarships, free bi-

cycles, and reimbursement of examination fees. Financial assistance for the marriage of daughters from underprivileged families has also been provided under the Mukhyamantri Vivah Shagun Yojana. Public Health Engineering and Public Works Minister Ranbir Gangwa, who was also present, said that the government is committed to standing with the underprivileged and ensuring timely resolution of public grievances. He added that celebrating the birth anniversaries of saints at the official level reflects the government's respect for India's spiritual heritage. The event saw the participation of several dignitaries and members of the Nayak community, who honoured the Chief Minister during the programme. Saini concluded by urging people to follow the path of service, dedication, and goodwill, and work collectively towards making Haryana a leading state in the country.



## Seminar Organized on Vigilance Awareness at BLW

VARANASI, MARCH 20:

A significant seminar on the topic of "Preventive Vigilance" was organized today, March 20, 2026, by the Vigilance Department at the Hall of Fame located in the Administrative Building of Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW). The seminar was conducted in two sessions. The objective of this seminar was to create awareness among all officers of BLW regarding vigilance and transparency in the discharge of their duties. Officers from Administration, Electrical, Mechanical, and the Chemical Laboratory

departments actively participated in the seminar today. On this occasion, Chief Vigilance Officer Mr. Ankur Chandra elaborated on various aspects of Preventive Vigilance through a Power Point presentation. He encouraged the officers to carry out their responsibilities with honesty, integrity, and transparency while adhering to vigilance practices. It is noteworthy that a three-day seminar on the topic of "Preventive Vigilance" was organized at BLW on March 18 to 20, 2026, in which officers from all departments of BLW participated enthusiastically.

## Media Dialogue on VB-G-RAM-G Held in Imphal to Strengthen Outreach

IMPHAL, 20 MARCH 2026:

The State Monitoring Cell of Manipur's Rural Development & Panchayati Raj Department organised a one-day Jan-Samvaad media dialogue at Classic Hotel, North AOC, to raise awareness of the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G-RAM-G). The IEC programme brought together officials and media representatives to discuss the Act's provisions and its push for public outreach. VB-G-RAM-G, enacted in 2025, reforms MGNREGA and guarantees 125 days of wage employ-



ment per rural household while prioritising durable assets under four verticals: water security (building on Mission Amrit Sarovar's revival of 68,000+ water bodies), core rural infrastructure, livelihood infrastructure, and special works for extreme weather. Created assets will feed into the Viksit Bharat National Rural Infrastructure Stack for

unified tracking. Addressing the session, Commissioner Shri Sumant Singh noted Manipur received its highest MGNREGA allocation--60 days for 2025-26--and highlighted that IEC efforts have been visible in rural areas but need media support to reach urban audiences. A video and presentation detailed the scheme's mandate. Attendees included Jt. Secretary Shri Lanjoy Thoudam, Director Shri Ksh. Umanand, Executive Engineer L. Ramesh Singh, Legal Officer Smt. Sanatombi Kojiam, department officials, and media personnel from print and electronic outlets.

## N.E. Railway to reschedule, regulate trains for yard work

GORAKHPUR, MARCH 20, 2026:

Due to engineering work in the Gorakhpur yard, train operations will be controlled or rescheduled as follows: **Control/Rescheduling: 15089 Godda-Gomti Nagar Express:** On March 22, 2026, it will be controlled for 55 minutes in the Varanasi division. **15049 Kolkata-Gorakhpur Express:** On March 23 and 26, 2026, it will be controlled for 45 minutes in the Varanasi division. **15014 Banaras-Gorakhpur Express:** On March 23, 2026, it will be controlled for 30 minutes

in the Varanasi division. **14011 Radhikapur-Anand Vihar Terminal Express:** On March 25, 2026, it will be controlled for 45 minutes in the Varanasi division. **05741 Kishanganj-Lalkuan Special Train:** On March 27, 2026, it will be controlled for 45 minutes in the Varanasi division. **15621 Kamakhya-Anand Vihar Terminal Express:** On March 27, 2026, it will be controlled for 30 minutes in the Varanasi division. **18630 Gorakhpur-Ranchi Express:** On March 28, 2026, it will be controlled for 45 minutes in the Varanasi division.

**Rescheduling: 09190 Katihar-Mumbai Central Special Train:** On March 24, 2026, it will be rescheduled by 2 hours from Katihar. **05579 Purnia Court-Anand Vihar Terminal Special Train:** On March 25 and 28, 2026, it will be rescheduled by 2 hours from Purnia Court. **05575 Saharsa-Anand Vihar Terminal Special Train:** On March 26, 2026, it will be rescheduled by 2 hours from Saharsa. **05736 Katihar-Amritsar Special Train:** On March 26, 2026, it will be rescheduled by 1 hour from Katihar.

## I TEC programme sends participant to India for urban development training

JAIPUR, MARCH 20:

For a period of 20 days, under the I TEC program, the participant received training on 23 technical subjects, specifically attending a course titled "Towards Sustainable Urban Mobility in Developing Urban Context." During the course, the participant was given practical exposure through field visits and exercises, in the context of the course "Towards Sustainable Urban Mobility in Developing Urban Context," they learned about implementing city-level urban transport projects and associated strategies.

All participants of the course completed both theoretical and practical sessions successfully. Upon completion, the participant acquired advanced knowledge in the relevant domain, including understanding urban planning, sustainable transportation strategies, and the integration of modern urban mobility solutions. The participant also prepared project reports and analyses on case studies of urban mobility, including planning measures for non-motorized transport, traffic management, and pedestrian infrastructure, and policy interventions for sustainable mobility.

## Haryana brings 11 services of Fisheries Department under Right to Service Act with defined timelines

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 20

The Haryana Government has brought 11 services of Fisheries Department under the Haryana Right to Service Act, 2014. A notification in this regard has been issued by Chief Secretary Sh. Anurag Rastogi. A provision has been added for subsidy on insurance premium for shrimp/fish crop insurance, providing financial protection to fish farmers against potential losses. In addition, a series of new services have been included under the Act to support fisheries devel-

opment. Under the Intensive Fisheries Development Programme, subsidy for loading auto, four-wheeler or mini tractor with trolley has been notified with a service delivery timeline of 40 days. Under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY), several services have been included with a uniform timeline of 50 days. These include subsidy for genetic improvement programmes and establishment of Nucleus Breeding Centres (NBCs), subsidy for innovations and innovative projects or activities including technology demonstra-

tion, startups, incubators and pilot projects, and subsidy for training, awareness, exposure and capacity building initiatives. In addition, subsidy for establishment of integrated ornamental fish units for breeding and rearing of freshwater fish and subsidy for establishment of freshwater ornamental fish brood banks have also been notified with a 50-day timeline. The notification also includes subsidy for promotion of recreational fisheries, subsidy for development of e-platforms for e-trading and e-marketing of fish and fisheries products,

and subsidy for modernization of cold storage and ice plants, each to be delivered within 50 days. Further, subsidy for fish value addition enterprise units and subsidy for extension and support services through Matsya Seva Kendras have also been included, both with a prescribed timeline of 50 days. For all these services, the District Fisheries Officer concerned has been designated as the competent authority for service delivery, while the Deputy Director Fisheries and Director Fisheries will act as the first and second appellate authorities respectively.

## Special Trains between Hubballi and Rameswaram

HUBBALLI, MARCH 20

South Western Railway has notified for special trains to clear extra rush of passengers during Summer Season as given below:

**Train No. 07355/07356 Hubballi - Rameswaram - Hubballi Express Specials:**

Train No. 07355 Hubballi - Rameswaram Express Special will leave Hubballi at 06.50 hrs on 05th, 12th, 19th, 26th April, 03rd, 10th, 17th, 24th, 31st May, 2026 (Sundays) and reach Rameswaram at 05.20 hrs, the next day (9 Services). In return direction, Train No. 07356 Rameswaram - Hubballi Express Special will leave Rameswaram at 20.00 hrs on 06th, 13th, 20th, 27th April, 04th, 11th, 18th, 25th May & 01st June, 2026 (Mondays) and reach Hubballi at 19.40 hrs, the next day (9 Services). Coach Composition: 1- AC First Class Coach, 2- AC Two Tier Coaches, 3- AC Three Tier Coaches, 6- Sleeper Class Coaches, 4- General Second Class Coaches, 1- Pantry Car, 1- Second Class Coach (Divyangjan Friendly) & 1- Luggage cum Brake Van. The details of timings and stoppages of Train No. 07355/07356 Hubballi - Rameswaram - Hubba-



lli Express Specials are as follows (Timings in hours): The Railways has released the schedule for the special express service between Hubballi and Rameswaram.

Train No. 07355 will depart Hubballi at 6:50 am on Sundays and reach Rameswaram at 5:20 am on Mondays. In the return direction, Train No. 07356 will leave Rameswaram at 8:00 pm on Mondays and arrive at Hubballi at 7:40 pm on Tuesdays.

En route, the train will halt at key stations including Haveri, Ranibennur, Harihar, Davagere, Chikjajur, Birur, Arsikere, Tiptur, Tumkur, Banaswadi, Hosur, Dharmapuri, Salem, Namakkal, Karur, Tiruchchirappalli, Pudukkottai, Karaikkudi, Sivaganga, Manamadurai and Ramanathapuram. The special service is expected to improve connectivity between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, benefiting passengers traveling for pilgrimage and other purposes.

## US warship, Marines head to Hormuz, Kharg

NEW DELHI: MAR 20, 2026

Over the past week, Trump has dropped enough hints of putting US boots on the ground in Iran. It could be just a matter of days. Satellite images have captured the USS Tripoli, an amphibious assault warship, speeding through the Indian Ocean. Is a ground offensive imminent? Will he, won't he? The world has been on tenterhooks over the past three weeks, guessing whether US President Donald Trump would put boots on the ground in Iran. While Trump has been unusually secretive about it, even though he has been toying with the idea, the latest satellite images show that a new US warship, the USS Tripoli, with 2,200 personnel, was en route to the Middle East. It is presently in India's backyard, in the south Indian Ocean. It signals that the Iran war may enter a new phase next week.

"I am not putting troops anywhere. If I were, I certainly wouldn't tell you," Trump quipped on Thursday during a media interaction. But the

unpredictable US President is known to pull a rabbit out of a hat, even though it may not give the desired consequences. US security officials told Reuters that an impatient Trump was actively considering deploying thousands of US troops to reinforce its offensive in Iran. There are two major reasons behind it.

### WHY THE US MAY PUT BOOTS ON THE GROUND?

One is to find a way to reopen the crucial Strait of Hormuz, through which 20% of the world's oil and gas passes. Since the war began on February 28, Iran has almost completely blocked ship movements through the channel, leading to surging oil prices.

While Iran has allowed a handful of oil tankers to pass, including those headed towards India and Pakistan, it has warned of attacks on Western ships. To maintain its grip on the vital waterway, Iran has also started levying transit fees, with a tanker operator claiming to have shelled out \$2 million (Rs 18 crore) in exchange for safe passage, as per a report in The Financial Times. Over the past few days, Trump



has pressed US allies to send warships to Hormuz. However, the response has been muted. For Trump, his best bet might be the US Marine Corps aboard the USS Tripoli. To secure the vital oil chokepoint, Trump would have to deploy US troops to Iran's shoreline. With much of Iran's naval fleet destroyed, it remains a viable and less risky option. Another section of US officials has suggested that the Marines aboard the amphibious assault ship could be used to seize one or more of the islands off Iran's southern coast. These might be used as leverage or as a base to counter possible Iranian attacks on commercial ships, the officials

told The Washington Post. "That creates a dome or bubble over a certain part of the strait which helps the convoys defend themselves," security analyst Mark Cancian told CBC News.

### KHARG ISLAND, URANIUM STOCKPILE

One unit could also be sent to Kharg Island, Iran's 'Crown Jewel' and economic lifeline through which 90% of its oil exports flow. The US bombed military sites on the island, around 25 km from the mainland, on March 13. However, oil infrastructure was spared. Thus, given Kharg's significance, Trump may consider controlling the island rather than destroying it, officials told

Reuters. Recently, Israeli envoy to India, Reuven Azar, suggested that Trump might have to deploy forces to secure maritime traffic in Hormuz. Secondly, Trump may put boots on the ground to secure over 950 pounds of highly enriched uranium, which Iran can potentially use to develop nuclear weapons. Much of the uranium is believed to be under the rubble of facilities pounded by the US and Israel, and securing it will require ground forces. Since February 28, Trump may have shifted goalposts on his reasons for starting the war, but he has been consistent on one thing: ensuring that Iran will never have a nuclear weapon.

### USS TRIPOLI ON WAY WITH 2,000 MARINES

It is here that the arrival of the USS Tripoli holds significance. On board are 2,200 troops from the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), who are based on Okinawa, Japan. The troops are trained in ground and aviation combat, raids, assaults and amphibious operations that require ship-to-shore movements, CNN reported.

The USS Tripoli is not just any other warship. It is an aircraft carrier that has the ability to support Marine operations from the sea. The warship is equipped with F-35 stealth fighter jets, MV-22 Osprey transport helicopters, and landing craft to move troops ashore. Significantly, Trump and the Japanese Prime Minister, Sanae Takaichi, held a closed-door meeting on Thursday. Already, around 50,000 US troops are in the Middle East. The USS Tripoli is expected to enter the war zone next week. If Trump decides to put boots on the ground, it would be the first deployment of US troops in over two decades in a combat scenario.

The warship was named to honour the US's victory against the Regency of Tripoli during the First Barbary War in 1805. It was the first time that the US flag was raised after victory on foreign soil.

With the Iranian regime showing no signs of capitulating and the energy crisis only escalating, Trump's best bet seems to be to secure the Strait of Hormuz through force.

## Jeffrey Epstein manipulated, deceived me

### Norway's Crown Princess claims

NEW DELHI: MAR 20, 2026

The statement came as the Norwegian royal family had been at the fore of severe scrutiny due to the Crown Princess's friendship with late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Though she has not been accused of wrongdoing, their connection has raised multiple questions. Norway's Crown Princess Mette-Marit has, for the first time, addressed her connection to late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, in front of journalists and said she was "manipulated and deceived" by him. She also said that during a 2013 stay at a Florida home of the convicted paedophile, she felt unsafe to the extent that she called her husband, Norway's Crown Prince Haakon, at home. Haakon is the heir apparent to the Norwegian throne. The statements were made during the royal couple's sit-down with Norwegian broadcaster NRK on Thursday. It came as the royal family had been at the fore of severe scrutiny due to the Crown Princess's friendship with Epstein. Though she has not been accused of wrongdoing, their connection has raised



multiple questions. "Of course, I wish I had never met him," she told NRK. "It is extremely important for me to acknowledge that I did not look into his past more carefully, and also to acknowledge that I was manipulated and deceived to such an extent." The princess said she feels a sense of guilt for the paedophile's victims and has spent years processing their friendship and the charges against him. Mette-Marit told NPK that she takes responsibility for not researching his background thoroughly. Last month, the Epstein files that have been released by the US Justice Department, revealed many email exchanges between Epstein and Norway's Crown Princess, with some being flirty in nature.

## WFH, speed cuts, carpool: Global energy body suggests measures to tackle oil crisis

NEW DELHI: MAR 20, 2026

Reducing highway speed limits by at least 10 km/h, switching to electric cooking, avoiding air travel where alternatives are possible and increasing car sharing - these are among the recommendations made in a new report by the International Energy Agency (IEA) to ease the economic impacts on consumers from oil market disruptions stemming from the Middle East war. The conflict has triggered the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market, with shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, which normally carries around 20 per cent of global oil consumption, reduced to a trickle. Around 20 million barrels per day of crude oil and oil products typically transit the Strait. The loss of these flows has tightened markets significantly, pushing crude oil prices above USD 100 per barrel and driving even sharper increases in refined products such as diesel, jet fuel and liquefied petroleum gas



(LPG). According to the report, restoring transit through the Strait remains essential to stabilise global energy markets. In the meantime, countries are acting on both supply and demand. On March 11, IEA member countries agreed to release 400 million barrels of oil from emergency reserves - the largest stock draw in the agency's history. "As the global energy authority, the IEA is doing everything we can to support the stability of energy markets. We have recently launched the largest ever release of IEA emergency oil stocks - and I am in close contact with key governments around the world, including major energy producers and consumers, as part of our international energy diplomacy," said IEA executive director Fatih Birol.

## Is China finally regretting its iron brotherhood with Pakistan?

NEW DELHI: MAR 20, 2026

China poured sixty billion dollars into Pakistan, defended it at the UN, armed its military and mediated its wars. Pakistan responded by letting Chinese workers die and chasing Donald Trump.

There is an old saying about no good deed going unpunished. China is learning that lesson the hard way in Pakistan. For decades, Beijing called Islamabad its "Iron Brother" and its "all weather ally." It funded the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a sixty billion dollar network of roads, ports, power plants and pipelines designed to transform Pakistan into a regional economic hub and give China its gateway to the Arabian Sea. Beijing backed Pakistan at the United Nations Security Council, shielded it from Western pressure, supplied it with weapons, and treated it as its most indispensa-



ble partner in South Asia. In return, Pakistan has given China dead workers, broken promises and a foreign policy that increasingly looks like it was written in Washington. The numbers alone tell a damning story. Since July 2021, at least twenty Chinese nationals have been killed on Pakistani soil. Engineers were blown up on the Dasu hydroelectric project. Workers were targeted in Karachi, Gwadar and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Baloch Liberation Army, which opposes CPEC on the grounds that Chinese investment serves nobody in Balochistan, has repeatedly

attacked Chinese-funded projects and twice warned Beijing to leave the province entirely. In January 2026 alone, BLA attacks killed thirty one civilians. Pakistan's response has been reactive, fragmented and consistently too little too late. The Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan publicly lost his composure at a seminar, furious at Islamabad's failure to protect Chinese nationals. That is not the behaviour of a satisfied partner. That is the behaviour of a backer who has started doing the maths. Then came the war with Afghanistan. In February 2026, Pakistan launched Operation

Ghazal Lil Haq, conducting airstrikes on Afghan border posts. Pakistan bombed a drug rehabilitation centre in Kabul and killed four hundred people. The UN counted at least one hundred and forty six civilian casualties. The fragile ceasefire brokered by Qatar and Turkey in October 2025 collapsed entirely. China, watching its entire vision of a connected South and Central Asia go up in smoke, had to intervene. Beijing sent its special envoy Yue Xiaoyong to both Islamabad and Kabul. Foreign Minister Wang Yi called his counterparts and urged restraint. Chinese ambassadors applied pressure behind closed doors. Beijing mediated, cajoled and pushed for a ceasefire. It worked, partially. Large scale strikes declined. A fragile breathing space opened. But China had to do all of that not out of friendship, but because its own strategic and economic interests were at stake. That distinction matters enormously.

## Iran military spokesperson Naini killed in strikes soon after warning Israel, US

NEW DELHI: MAR 20, 2026

The Spokesperson for the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), General Ali Mohammad Naini, was killed in an airstrike launched by Israel on Friday, the Iranian state television confirmed. Along with Naini, the IRGC's Basij Forces' intelligence Chief General Esmail Ahmadi, also died in the Israeli strikes. Earlier in the day, Naini dismissed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's claim that Iran can no longer enrich uranium or manufacture ballistic missiles, following near-



ly three weeks of coordinated US-Israeli air strikes. "Iran can no longer enrich uranium or make ballistic missiles," Netanyahu said, adding, "We are winning, and Iran is being decimated." Defying the statement, Naini said, "Our missile industry score is 20, and there is no concern in

this regard because we are producing missiles even during war conditions, which is amazing, and there is no particular problem in stockpiling." He also emphasised that the people of Iran have confidence in the regime and they want the war to go on till the enemy is completely defeated. "These people expect the war to continue until the enemy is completely exhausted," he said as per a report by Iranian state media. A few hours after issuing the statement, Naini was killed in the Israeli air raids. On Friday, both Iran and Israel launched several air raids against each other.

## No evidence right now: Canada police chief on India's interference in Ottawa

NEW DELHI: MAR 20, 2026

Canada's national police chief, Mike Duheme, has said that there is no latest evidence that would link the involvement of the Indian government with foreign interference in Ottawa's affairs at this time. The big statement comes at a time when the two nations are focusing on resetting ties, which received a huge boost after Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney's visit to New Delhi earlier this month.

"In the files that we have that involve transnational repression, we're not seeing any connection right now with any



foreign entity, based on the criminal information, the investigations that we have presently," Duheme told television network CTV in an interview, when asked repeatedly if clandestine or transnational agents of India were still a concern on Canadian soil. India and Canada's diplomatic relations took a

downward swing and reached one of its worst after former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accused the Indian government of being involved in the killing of Sikh separatist leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar. He had said that Ottawa had "credible allegations" that Indian government agents were involved. Nijjar was labelled a terrorist in India. New Delhi, however, denied the accusations. Soon after, Canada expelled six Indian diplomats, including the High Commissioner, and India did the same in a tit-for-tat move. Mike Duheme, however, dismissed any foreign interference connected to the Indian authorities any more.

## Air India's Vancouver flight makes U-turn over China, returns to Delhi after flying 7 hours

NEW DELHI: MAR 20, 2026

Air India's AI 185 flight from Delhi to Vancouver was forced to return to the national capital after being airborne for over almost eight hours on March 19, the airline confirmed in an official statement.

The flight had taken off from Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport but made a U-turn while flying through Chinese airspace, according to flight tracking data. The aircraft eventually landed safely back in Delhi, and all passengers and crew disembarked without incident. Air India said the decision to return was taken due to "an operational issue and in line with established standard operating procedures," without disclosing specific details. Notably, AI 185 was operated using a Boeing 777-200 LR aircraft (VT-AED) on March 19, whereas the route is usually served by a Boeing 777-337 (ER). The midair return of the flight appears to be an administrative issue related to the unusual deployment of aircraft. However, the exact reason for the



diversion and the number of passengers on board couldn't be exclusively confirmed by the airline. In its statement, the airline said, "Air India flight AI185, operating from Delhi to Vancouver on 19 March, returned to Delhi due to an operational issue and in line with established standard operating procedures. The aircraft landed safely, and all passengers and crew disembarked." "We sincerely regret the inconvenience caused to our guests by this unforeseen situation. Our ground teams in Delhi provided all necessary assistance, including offering hotel accommodation while every effort was made to fly the passengers to their destination at the earliest," it added. Air India also confirmed that the affected passengers were accommodated, and the flight departed for Vancouver the following morning with all passengers on board.

## Iran strikes slash Qatar LNG capacity by 17% for up to 5 years

NEW DELHI: MAR 20, 2026

Recent Iranian missile strikes severely damaged Qatar's liquefied natural gas infrastructure, impacting global energy supplies and causing extensive revenue losses.

Iranian strikes have dealt a severe blow to Qatar's energy sector, wiping out 17% of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) export capacity and inflicting massive financial losses, QatarEnergy CEO Saad al-Kaabi said, warning of prolonged disruptions to global supply. Kaabi revealed that the company has already suffered a USD 20 billion loss at a facility that cost USD 26 billion to build just two years ago. The attacks damaged two of Qatar's 14 LNG trains and

one gas-to-liquids (GTL) facility, taking about 12.8 million tonnes of annual LNG production offline. Repairs are expected to take three to five years, translating into an estimated USD 20 billion in revenue losses each year during the outage. Highlighting the unprecedented nature of the incident, Kaabi told Reuters, "I never in my wildest dreams would have thought that Qatar would be - Qatar and the region - in such an attack, especially from a brotherly Muslim country in the month of Ramadan, attacking us in this way." He added that the scale of the damage has shaken confidence in the region's energy security and reliability. The strikes come amid escalating tensions in the Middle East, triggered by Israeli attacks on Iran's gas infrastructure, in-



cluding the strategically vital South Pars field. In retaliation, Iran targeted key energy facilities across the Gulf, including Qatar's Ras Laffan Industrial City, the world's largest LNG export hub. Missile strikes on the complex caused significant damage, compounding earlier disruptions and forcing widespread shutdowns. QatarEnergy has declared force majeure on



affected long-term LNG contracts, signalling that supply commitments to countries such as Italy, Belgium, South Korea and China could be disrupted for years. "These are long-term contracts that we have to declare force majeure now it's whatever the period is," Kaabi said, indicating the uncertainty surrounding the duration of the outage. International partners are also im-

acted. US energy major ExxonMobil holds stakes in the damaged LNG trains, while Shell is involved in the affected GTL facility, which could take up to a year to repair. Kaabi noted that the broader damage could set the region's energy infrastructure back by as much as 10 to 20 years. The fallout extends beyond LNG exports. Qatar's condensate shipments are expected to fall by about 24%, while liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) exports could drop 13%. Helium output may decline by 14%, and naphtha and sulphur by around 6%. These reductions could have wide-ranging consequences, from higher fuel costs for households to supply constraints for industries such as semiconductor manufacturing that depend on helium. Kaabi emphasised that a

return to normal operations depends entirely on an end to hostilities. "For production to restart, first we need hostilities to cease," he said, urging all sides to avoid targeting critical energy infrastructure. He warned that continued attacks could destabilise global energy markets and erode the region's standing as a dependable supplier. The strikes mark a sharp escalation in the ongoing regional conflict, raising concerns about sustained supply disruptions and rising energy prices worldwide. With repairs likely to take years and geopolitical tensions showing no immediate signs of easing, global LNG markets face a period of heightened uncertainty, with significant implications for major importing nations reliant on Gulf energy exports.

## India Talks About Science, But Its Institutions Don't Support It

In 1976, the 42nd Amendment did something few constitutions have attempted. It made scientific temper a civic obligation. Article 51A(h) placed on every Indian citizen the duty to "develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform." The clause was quietly radical – not because it mandated knowledge, but because it framed a way of thinking as essential to democratic citizenship. Nearly fifty years on, that framing deserves serious examination, not as a tribute to constitutional foresight, but as a measure of how far institutional reality has drifted from it.

The numbers are the obvious starting point. India's gross expenditure on research and development has remained stubbornly below 0.7% of GDP for over a decade. The global average stands at 1.8%. South Korea spends 4.9%. Even among middle-income economies, India is an outlier. The private sector, which typically drives R&D dynamism as economies mature, contributes only about 36% of India's total research expenditure – compared to 70-80% in China, the United States and Germany. This is not a talent gap. India produces more STEM graduates than almost any country on earth. It is a structural gap, rooted in how research institutions are governed and the incentives under which they operate.

That governance problem runs deeper than budgets. Public research institutions function under tight reg-



ulatory control, with limited academic and financial autonomy. The contrast with Germany's Max Planck and Fraunhofer Institutes, which combine clear public mandates with significant operational independence, is instructive. The Anusandhan National Research Foundation, operationalised in 2024 with considerable fanfare, has not yet resolved the persistent problem of research grant disbursal delays. Projects stall not because scientists are absent but because administrative systems are slow. The infrastructure for inquiry exists; the institutional conditions for it are often absent.

The quality of research outputs compounds these concerns. India now ranks third globally in life sciences paper retractions, behind only China and the United States, a pattern that reflects the distorted incentives of an ecosystem that rewards publication volume over rigour. The National Institutional Ranking Framework has recently begun penalising universities with high retraction rates, which is a

welcome corrective. But fixing the signal without changing the underlying incentive structure is unlikely to produce lasting improvement.

What has received less attention is the constitutional dimension of this failure. Article 51A(h) places the duty of developing a scientific temper on citizens, but the constitutional logic implies a reciprocal obligation on the state. A citizen cannot reasonably be expected to develop a spirit of inquiry in a university system that penalises questioning, or in a research environment where independent thought is structurally constrained. The duty the constitution assigns to individuals is only fulfillable if institutions make it possible. That precondition has not been consistently met.

The non-justiciability of Fundamental Duties is a known feature of Indian constitutional design. Article 51A cannot be enforced through courts and no institution is formally accountable for its implementation. This produces a specific kind of policy vacuum: there is

no body tasked with assessing the institutional conditions for scientific temper, no benchmarking framework, no periodic review of whether the state is creating the environment the clause demands. The contrast with Fundamental Rights, which carry justiciability, remedies and decades of jurisprudence best illustrates this asymmetry.

The comparative picture offers some direction. Countries that have meaningfully narrowed their science-society gap, including Finland, South Korea and Taiwan, have done so primarily through institutional investment rather than communication campaigns. Research autonomy, doctoral pipeline support, stable long-term funding and governance frameworks that insulate scientific institutions from short-cycle pressures: these are the common denominators. India's challenge is less a shortage of institutions than a shortage of institutional urgency, the sense that science governance is a first-order policy priority rather than a residual one.

None of this requires locating blame. It requires locating the problem accurately. The science-society disconnect in India is not primarily a public awareness problem, solvable through outreach or curriculum reform. It is a governance problem – one of institutional design, incentive structures and accountability frameworks. Article 51A(h) named the aspiration in 1976. The work of building the institutional architecture capable of realising it remains, fifty years later, substantially unfinished.

## Pilot Plant for Nd-Fe-B Rare Earth Magnets Set Up at ARCI Hyderabad



HYDERABAD, MARCH 20

A Pilot Plant for the manufacture of Nd-Fe-B (Neodymium-Iron-Boron) rare earth permanent magnets established at the International Advanced Research Centre for Powder Metallurgy and New Materials (ARCI), Hyderabad, an autonomous institution of the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India.

The pilot-plant was inaugurated by Prof. Abhay Karandikar, Secretary, DST, with Dr. R. Vijay, Director, ARCI in the august presence of Prof. Ashutosh Sharma, Former Secretary DST and Chairman, Governing Council, ARCI; Dr. S. K. Jha, Former CMD, MIDHANI, Member-Technical Review Committee; Dr. Shivkumar Kalyanaraman, CEO, Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF), several delegates with major participation from industries, national institutes and other stakeholders.

The facility established at ARCI adopts an end-to-end approach, covering the process from strip-cast alloy to finished sintered magnets, enabling the development of a robust and self-reliant manufacturing ecosystem.

The pilot plant marks a significant step towards achieving self-reliance in critical materials and strengthening India's position in the global rare earth value chain. Nd-Fe-B magnets are essential components in electric vehicles, renewable energy

systems, electronics, and advanced manufacturing technologies.

While inaugurating the pilot plant Prof. Karandikar highlighted this pilot plant is an important step towards building strategic autonomy in critical materials, particularly in the context of global supply chain vulnerabilities and India's growing demand in clean energy and advanced manufacturing sectors. "As we work towards Viksit Bharat 2047, addressing resource constraints and strengthening indigenous capabilities in critical technologies will be central to our development strategy. Initiatives like this help reduce dependence while enhancing resilience and competitiveness," he added.

Dr. Shivkumar Kalyanaraman, CEO, ANRF explained about Mission for Advancement in High-impact Areas (MAHA) initiatives for accelerating critical technologies including India's EV ecosystem and invited private sectors for active participation in translational research.

Dr. R. Vijay, Director, ARCI informed that ARCI is developing a complete 'mineral-to-market' ecosystem—from rare earth extraction to magnet manufacturing—strengthening research translation and industry linkage. The pilot plant is expected to catalyse industry participation, foster innovation, and support commercialization of indigenous rare earth magnet technologies. It will also contribute to the growth of the electric mobility ecosystem and advanced materials manufacturing in India. This initiative represents a key step towards achieving Atmanirbhar Bharat and realizing the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

for technology validation and process optimization, industry collaboration and demonstration, scaling up indigenous innovations to commercial manufacturing and supporting deep-tech startups and private sector participation.

"The transition from research to manufacturing is what makes this pilot plant truly significant. Its flexibility will enable continuous innovation, process optimization, and product development," Prof. Sharma noted.

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Rare earth magnet supply chains are currently highly concentrated globally, creating vulnerabilities for emerging economies. The establishment of indigenous capabilities across the value chain—from materials to magnet manufacturing—will enhance supply security, cost competitiveness, and technological leadership.

The pilot-scale plant will serve as a critical platform

## Markets Rebound Amid IT, PSU Bank Buying; Fuel Price Hike Weighs

MUMBAI, MARCH 20

Benchmark indices BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty ended nearly 0.5% higher on Friday after a volatile session, supported by buying in IT, PSU bank and metal stocks.

The Sensex rose

325.72 points to close at 74,532.96, while the Nifty gained 112.35 points to settle at 23,114.50, after paring sharp intra-day gains. Among gainers were Tata Steel, Tech Mahindra, Infosys and Reliance Industries, while HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank were

among laggards.

Investor sentiment remained cautious following a ₹2 per litre hike in premium petrol and a sharp increase of about ₹22 per litre in bulk diesel prices, amid rising global oil rates. Brent crude climbed to \$110.7 per barrel.

## Odisha Tourism Sets Guinness Record with Giant 'Pakhala'

Bhubaneswar, March 20: On Pakhala Divas, the Odisha Tourism Department achieved a Guinness World Record by preparing 1,174 kg of Pakhala in a single vessel, celebrating the state's culinary heritage and bringing global recognition to the iconic dish. Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi hailed the achievement, saying it reflects Odisha's commitment to promoting its rich food

culture worldwide. He added that Pakhala is not just a dish but an inseparable part of Odisha's traditions.

The record attempt was part of the state-level 'Pakhala Parabha' festival at Panthanivas, Bhubaneswar, where nearly 326 varieties of Odia dishes were showcased. The 1,174 kg of Pakhala, prepared from 850 kg of rice, was served to over 2,000 people from underprivileged communities.

## Kia Expands Carens Clavis Line-Up with GT-Line, X-Line

NEW DELHI, MARCH 20

Kia India has expanded its Carens Clavis range with the introduction of GT-Line and X-Line trims in the MY26 update, while strengthening mid variants with added premium features.

The new GT-Line (GTX, GTX+) brings sporty styling elements, while the X-Line variant features an exclusive Dark Gun Metal exterior. Both trims are powered by a 1.5-litre turbo-petrol engine and are priced below ₹20 lakh.

The company has also enhanced mid trims, offering an electric sunroof in HTK+, and panoramic sunroof, LED headlamps, and dashcam from HTK+(O) onwards. A new HTX(OA) variant introduces Level 2 ADAS, making advanced safety features more accessible.

With multiple engine and transmission options, the updated Carens Clavis aims to cater to evolving customer preferences by combining practicality with premium features.



## Eesha Rebba Inaugurates 'Colors 2.0' Wellness Center in Gajuwaka

Gajuwaka: Actress Eesha Rebba inaugurated the new branch of 'Colors 2.0,' a wellness and healthcare center, in Gajuwaka as the chief guest. The launch marked the opening of the 54th branch of Colors Healthcare, celebrated with a grand inaugural ceremony.

Speaking to the media on the occasion, Eesha Rebba emphasized that beauty is closely linked to health and encouraged youth to prioritize fitness. She mentioned that she is currently working on two film projects and highlighted the importance of proper nutrition in achieving better health and appearance. Expressing her fondness for Visakhapatnam, she noted that in today's modern lifestyle, maintaining health and beauty has become essential. She appreciated the initiative of bringing international-standard treatments for weight loss, hair, and skin issues within reach, adding that Colors Healthcare has already helped boost the confidence of many individuals.

Colors Healthcare Executive Director Venkata Shivaji Konna expressed his



happyness over launching the branch in Gajuwaka. He shared his personal connection with the area, stating that he studied at TSR TBK College in Gajuwaka, and assured that the organization would prioritize services for local residents. He emphasized that their weight management services benefit people widely and noted that reducing body weight can help alleviate over 90 types of health issues. He also highlighted that Colors employs more than 250 nutritionists, over 100 expert doctors, and around 2,000 trained technicians, with 22

years of experience in the field. He further stated that with the evolving times, the organization is upgrading its services and introducing advanced technology through 'Colors 2.0.' The center offers international-standard treatments for obesity, hair, and skin concerns using US-FDA approved technologies.

Managing Director Dr. Vijay Krishna stated that the center was established keeping in mind the needs of Gajuwaka residents. He said that Colors, with over two decades of experience, has earned trust and is now ready to de-

liver more advanced services. He added that their services would benefit anyone aiming to stay healthy and look good.

Operations Director Krishnam Raju said that their goal is to make Colors the best wellness clinic. He highlighted their specialized services in weight loss, healthcare, and beauty care. He also noted that Colors is unique as it provides services with a team of 51 dermatologists across the country.

The event, organized by Jaideep under the banner of 5M Media, saw a large turnout of local youth.

## Krishna Kumar Thakur takes charge as Director (Personnel), NMDC



HYDERABAD, 20 MARCH

Krishna Kumar Thakur, 1998-batch IRPS officer, has assumed charge as Director (Personnel) at NMDC Limited, India's largest iron ore producer. With over 25 years of experience in Indian Railways and CPSEs, he has led major HR functions, including large-scale recruitments at Western Railway, and held key roles at RITES, Konkan Railway, and BHEL. An alumnus of Tilka Manjhi University and TISS, Shri Thakur brings extensive expertise in HR management, industrial relations, and workforce development, which will support NMDC's people-centric growth strategy.

## Union Ministers Inaugurate REC's 'Green Multiplier' Pavilion at Bharat Electricity Summit



NEW DELHI, MARCH 20

Union Ministers Manohar Lal Khattar, Prahlaad Joshi and Shripad Naik inaugurated REC Limited's "Green Multiplier" Pavilion at the Bharat Electricity Summit, highlighting India's push towards a sustainable energy future.

The event was attended by Pankaj Agarwal, Secretary (Power), and Jitendra Srivastava, along with senior officials from the Ministry of Power and REC.

Designed as a technolo-

gy-driven space, the pavilion reflects the theme "Financing India's Energy Abundance," showcasing REC's role in supporting renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure. The concept of the "Green Multiplier" underscores the organisation's efforts to expand access to clean energy and accelerate green growth. A key highlight of the pavilion is a solar-themed installation inspired by PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, emphasizing decentralized power and wider energy access.

The exhibition also highlights REC's financing initiatives supporting India's Net Zero 2070 goal, including investments in renewable energy and electric mobility.

Featuring advanced technologies such as LED walls, kinetic displays and interactive storytelling tools, the pavilion offers an immersive experience for visitors.

REC stated that the initiative reinforces its role in driving infrastructure development and supporting India's transition to a low-carbon economy.

# AMID SLUMP, HYDERABAD BUILDERS OFFER HARLEYS, EVS & GOLD TO PUSH HOME SALES

Amid sluggish sales, several developers in Hyderabad are doling out expensive gifts — from premium motorcycles to 24-carat gold coins — to lure prospective homebuyers. Also on offer are electric vehicles, complimentary interior work and modern fixtures.

One leading developer, for instance, has promised every buyer a Rs 3 lakh-worth Harley Davidson with their booking in select projects in prime pockets—Kokapet, Kukatpally, Uppal, Patancheru and Rajendranagar. On the other side of town, a developer has assured every confirmed client an EV, worth Rs 8 lakh, in the upcoming residential project located between Uppal and Ramanthapur.

Gold too has become a popular 'return gift', despite its soaring price. A builder from Miyapur has promised buyers gold worth Rs 3 lakh with the purchase of every ready-to-move-in apartment — 2BHK or 3BHK units priced between Rs 75 lakh and Rs 85 lakh. This comes alongside free inte-

riors for a children's bedroom and a swanky modular kitchen. The trend is not limited to residential projects within the city. Developers marketing open plots in Mahabubnagar have adopted similar tactics, with one of them offering 10-gram gold coin to every buyer.

Currently, a gram of gold costs around Rs 17,000 (approx.).

Industry insiders view these schemes as attempts to accelerate sales amid a slowdown in the property market. "Whenever the market slows down, developers introduce special deals to offload unsold inventory. In most cases, the cost of these freebies is factored into the project pricing, though buyers may not be aware of the calculations," said Ch Ramchandra Reddy, joint secretary of Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Associations of India (Creai-National). Realtors argue that attracting buyers with expensive gifts is neither healthy nor sustainable for the

real estate sector. "You cannot keep attracting buyers with freebies forever. If a customer genuinely wants to purchase a flat, the decision would be based on location, construction quality and pricing, not on a gift. Such schemes are primarily meant to boost short-term sales and clear unsold inventory. At best, they generate temporary interest," said N Praveen, president of the Telangana State Realtors Association.

Some realtors also point out that these promotional offers do not fall under the regulatory purview of the Telangana Real Estate Regulatory Authority (TG-RERA), which reduces the level of consumer protection. "Such schemes and incentives are essentially commercial strategies to attract buyers, and we cannot monitor them," a TG-RERA official confirmed. "However, if a developer fails to fulfil assurances mentioned in the sale deed — including such gifts — buyers can file a complaint and necessary action will be taken against those developers."



## Telangana yet to set up building tribunal despite 2022 HC order

Exactly a decade ago the Telangana govt had made provisions for setting up the Municipal Building Tribunal (MBT) to deal with building-related cases, especially unauthorised structures. The state govt informed the Telangana high court almost four years ago (April 2022) that it would constitute the tribunal within four weeks. To date, the govt did not set up the MBT at a time when unauthorised structures are mushrooming in the state, especially in Greater Hyderabad.

According to Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) officials, as many as 6,000 cases are pending with various courts, and 80% of them are on illegal constructions. In some cases, the owners or builders obtained stay orders from the courts, and the town planning wing could not demolish them. In the other 20% of cases, builders and owners approached the courts when the GHMC and other civic bodies denied or revoked permissions, or over land issues. The high court, in 2022, also observed that there was an urgent need for a building tribunal.

The tribunal should be set up with two or three members, with a retired district judge cadre officer as chairman and one retired municipal town planning officer of director cadre as technical member. The HC is to recommend the name of the district judge, and the state govt to nominate the technical member. Some names were suggested to the state in 2017 itself, but the govt did not constitute the tribunal. Forum For Good Governance (FGG), a not-for-profit organisation, wrote several letters to chief ministers, municipal ministers, and even municipal administration secretaries over the past 10 years, and also filed a Public Interest Litigation seeking direction to the state govt on the tribunal.

"Had the state govt taken steps to constitute the tribunal, there would have been no need for an agency like HYDRAA to demolish unauthorised structures," FGG president M Padmanabha Reddy told TOI on Friday. "Secondly, the earlier govt recommended eight names, including retired and suspended officials of town planning services. According to Section 462-A of the GHMC Act, 2016, the technical member should be a serving officer. The govt should call for a fresh list of eligible persons for the tribunal, as one recommended person is facing cases for disproportionate assets worth 250 crore, is suspended, and some are even facing vigilance cases." He said the govt should appoint persons with integrity and a clean record.

Sources in the municipal administration said the file for setting up the tribunal was under circulation, and the members would be appointed in a couple of weeks. They hoped that the tribunal would become operational soon.



## HYDRAA secures 11 acres of government land in Hyderabad



The Hyderabad Disaster Response and Asset Protection Agency (HYDRAA) secured 11 acres of govt and public-use land in city following complaints of encroachments. Officials estimate the market value of the protected land at around Rs 1,650 crore.

Of the total, two acres in Kondapur were earmarked for a public park. The land forms part of the Central Park Colony layout developed in 1998. Although municipal authorities had earlier demarcated the park area and constructed a boundary, residents reported repeated attempts by some individuals to encroach upon the land. Locals also alleged intimidation when they resisted these activities.

"Acting on complaints received through its grievance platform, HYDRAA, along with revenue and GHMC officials, conducted a field inspection and reaffirmed the land's status as park space. Temporary structures that had come up on the site were removed, and fencing has now been installed around the two-acre parcel. Signboards indicating its designated use have also been placed," said HYDRAA commissioner AV Ranganath.

In a separate case, authorities examined encroachment concerns over nine acres of land in Pragathi Nagar, near Ambir Lake, under Kukatpally mandal. The land includes five acres allocated for a cremation ground and four acres for a dumping yard. Following verification with revenue and municipal departments, the land was confirmed to be reserved for these public purposes.

Fencing has been put up around the nine-acre stretch, along with signboards marking the designated uses. "Residents in the area said they had raised multiple complaints in the past regarding alleged encroachments. They said the recent investigation has, for now, addressed the issue of unauthorised occupation," Ranganath said.

## Second phase of Indiramma housing scheme in Telangana to be launched in April



Telangana government announced that the second phase of Indiramma housing will be launched in April and May in the state. Minister for Housing Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy said the Indiramma housing programme would be a continuous initiative, with the govt planning to extend it every year to ensure housing for the poor.

"Govt's objective is to construct Indiramma houses in every urban ward over the next three years. About a lakh houses are expected to be completed by March, and a majority of the three lakh houses sanctioned in the first phase will be ready by June or July. Special focus is being given to urban housing, ensuring beneficiaries are allotted homes close to their existing locations to protect livelihoods," the minister said.

He also disclosed that the govt was preparing a plan to complete pending and stalled housing projects, particularly in tribal and remote areas, with flexibility to modify houses based on beneficiaries' needs. "There will be no discrimination in selecting beneficiaries. Stringent action will be taken against those indulging in irregularities. Nearly 99% of pending bills have been cleared for the 2-BHK units, and a special 99-day drive was underway to complete unfinished houses and hand them over to eligible families," he said.

## ABOUT 1.6 LAKH NOTICES ISSUED TO PROPERTY TAX DEFAULTERS BY CIVIC BODIES IN TELANGANA

The Core Urban Region (CURE) civic authorities have intensified efforts to recover pending property taxes as the financial year 2025-26 draws to a close, issuing a large number of notices to defaulters.

In the last 15 days alone, the three civic bodies — Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC), Cyberabad Municipal Corporation (CMC) and Malkajgiri Municipal Corporation (MMC) — served around 1.64 lakh demand notices to property owners who have not cleared their dues. Out of nearly 28.8 lakh property tax assessments in the city, about 40% are yet to pay their taxes for the current financial year.

What is more concerning for civic authorities is the scale of the pending amount. Against a total demand of around Rs. 6,387 crore, which includes both current dues and arrears, the corporations have so far collected only Rs. 2,186 crore. GHMC commissioner RV Karnan, warned that strict action will be taken under the GHMC Act against property owners who fail to clear their long-pending tax dues. "However, property tax collections in the CURE area, which includes

GHMC, MMC and CMC, have seen a notable increase. By the same period last financial year, the total collection stood at Rs. 1,984 crore, whereas 2,186 crore has been collected so far in current financial year," he said.

Karnan urged property taxpayers to take advantage of the One-Time Settlement Scheme (OTS), which offers a 90% rebate on interest for pending property tax dues.

The commissioner said the scheme will remain in force until March 31 and appealed to citizens to make the most of the opportunity. Property tax collections through the OTS scheme in the three corporations currently stand at Rs. 322 crore.

Officials said property tax reminders are being sent to citizens via SMS on alternate days. "Warrant officers have been appointed at the circle level. Action will be taken after issuing a distress warrant. If required, the Revenue Recovery Act will be implemented against the top defaulters," a senior GHMC official said.





# Abhay, Veer Chotrani, Anahat, Tanvi storm into semis

MUMBAI

India made an impressive showing in the men's and women's quarterfinals of the Indian Open squash championships on Friday, with multiple Indian players delivering dominant performances to secure semi-final berths.

India enjoyed an impressive outing in the men's quarterfinals as second seed Abhay Singh and fourth seed Veer Chotrani produced dominant performances to storm into the semifinals. In the last four stage, Singh will take on Malaysia's Ameeshenraj Chandaran, while Chotrani is set to face another Malaysian challenger, Sanjay Jeeva.

Jeeva secured his semifinal berth with a commanding 3-0 (11-8, 11-7, 11-8) victory over Egypt's Ibrahim El Kabbani in the quarterfinals. Chandaran, meanwhile, advanced after defeating compatriot Duncan Lee in an all-Malaysian contest. Singh was in excellent touch as he brushed aside Egypt's Yassin Shohdy 3-1 (11-8, 7-11, 11-5, 11-7). The Indian made a confident start, taking the initiative early and holding off Shohdy's challenge to clinch the opening game 11-8.

Shohdy, however, responded strongly in the second game, stepping up the intensity to claim it 11-7 and draw level in the match. The setback proved only temporary for Singh, who quickly regained control with his aggressive play and sharp court coverage. He dominated the next two games,



winning them 11-5 and 11-7 to seal a deserved place in the semifinals.

Earlier, Chotrani produced a composed performance to defeat Egypt's Mohamed Sharaf 3-0 (11-9, 11-8, 11-2). Despite the

straight-games victory, Sharaf put up a spirited fight, especially in the opening two games, where both players matched each other shot for shot. The Egyptians led for much of the first game before Chotrani

fought back to level the score at 8-8 and eventually edge ahead to secure the game.

Chotrani carried that momentum into the second game, taking a narrow lead at 4-3 and maintaining the advantage to move 2-0 ahead. Sharaf appeared to run out of steam in the third game as the Indian dominated proceedings to close out the match comfortably and book his place in the last four.

## Anahat, Tanvi advance

Top seed Anahat Singh and unseeded compatriot Tanvi Khanna ensured a strong Indian presence in the women's singles semifinals after winning their respective quarterfinal matches. However, local favourite Joshna Chinappa bowed out of the competition following a 1-3 defeat to Egypt's Nadien El Hammamy, which proved to be the only setback for Indian fans during the day.

In another quarterfinal clash, second seed Hana Moataz fought hard to edge past eighth seed Yashmitha Jadishkumar of Malaysia in a five-game thriller, winning 3-2 (11-8, 8-11, 7-11, 11-7, 11-8).

Saturday's semifinals will feature an all-Indian showdown between Anahat and Tanvi, while Moataz will square off against El Hammamy for a place in the final.

Anahat underlined her status as one of the top contenders for the title with a dominant 3-0 (11-2, 11-6, 11-4) victory over Malaysia's Sheveettraa Kumar. The top seed raced through the opening game with ease,

taking it 11-2 without breaking much sweat. Kumar offered a stronger challenge in the second game, but Anahat's blend of power and clever deception helped her maintain control and clinch it 11-6.

The third game followed a similar pattern, with Anahat dictating the pace and cruising to an emphatic 11-4 win to seal a comfortable passage into the last four.

Meanwhile, Tanvi produced one of the standout performances of the day by upsetting fourth seed Ainaa Amani 3-1. The Indian started strongly, taking the opening game 11-6 before Amani levelled the match by winning the second 11-7. Tanvi, however, held her nerve in the remaining games, winning 11-5 and 11-8 to book her semifinal berth.

Earlier, Joshna began confidently against El Hammamy but gradually found it difficult to counter the Egyptian's deceptive movement and sharp cross-court shots. After a closely contested start and a strong comeback in the second game, Joshna lost momentum as El Hammamy raised her intensity to clinch the final two games. Earlier, Joshna began confidently against El Hammamy but gradually found it difficult to counter the Egyptian's deceptive movement and sharp cross-court shots. After a closely contested start and a strong comeback in the second game, Joshna lost momentum as El Hammamy raised her intensity to clinch the final two games and seal the match.

## IPL 2026

### Shreyas Iyer and Arshdeep say 'eyes are on the IPL trophy'



**CHANDIGARH:** With the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026 just around the corner, Punjab Kings (PBKS) captain Shreyas Iyer and fast bowler Arshdeep Singh shared their excitement and plans for the season. Speaking at a grand event in Mohali on Friday, to unveil the team's new jersey, the duo spoke about team bonding, overcoming personal challenges, and their deep connection with the franchise. A major focus for the team right now is building a strong bond off the field before the high-pressure games begin. Captain Shreyas Iyer explained that the time spent

## Premier League

### Liverpool's Salah to miss Brighton clash due to muscle injury



**LIVERPOOL:** English football club Liverpool FC manager Arne Slot has confirmed on Friday that star forward Mohamed Salah will miss the upcoming Premier League clash against Brighton & Hove Albion due to a muscle injury. Salah picked up the issue during Liverpool's recent UEFA Champions League match against Galatasaray at Anfield. The Egyptian forward was substituted in the second half despite delivering an impressive performance in the 4-0 win, where he registered both a goal and an assist. Providing an update ahead of the Brighton fixture, Slot said, "Unusual [he is injured], I think you expect the outcome, so he is not available for tomorrow."

# Indian Open squash: Anahat, Tanvi storm ahead as semi-final line-up takes shape

MUMBAI

Top seed Anahat Singh and unseeded compatriot Tanvi Khanna ensured a strong Indian presence in the women's singles semifinals of the Indian Open squash championship being played at the Cricket Club of India (CCI) courts in Mumbai after winning their respective quarterfinal matches on Friday.

However, local favourite Joshna Chinappa bowed out of the competition following a 1-3 defeat to Egypt's Nadien El Hammamy, which proved to be the only setback for Indian fans during the day.

In another quarterfinal clash, second seed Hana Moataz fought hard to edge past eighth seed Yashmitha Jadishkumar of Malaysia in a five-game thriller, winning 3-2 (11-8, 8-11, 7-11, 11-7, 11-8).

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# PGTI Open 2026: Daffue and Khan share two-stroke advantage on Day 2

NUH (HARYANA)

MJ Daffue and Rashid Khan share a two-stroke lead following the second day of the DP World PGTI Open. Khan from India, who still has three holes of his second round to play, pulled level with South African Daffue at 13 under par, who had earlier carded a course record 11-under 61 at Classic Golf and Country Club.

Daffue, who is chasing a second victory on the 2026 Road to Mallorca after his win at the NTT Data Pro-Am last month, started on the tenth and made gains on four of his first six holes before adding four consecutive birdies around the turn. The 37-year-old would pick up three more shots coming in and was delighted with his bogey-free effort to once again set the pace at the top of the leaderboard.

"Overall, it was a very easy 61. I hit it great, putted well, and didn't miss any," he said. "Days like this don't come around very often, but the game has been

trending, and I've been putting some hard work in. "Down the stretch, I was thinking about having a chance on the last for that magical number, but overall, I needed to stick to my game and not get in my own way. It's so easy to think too far ahead and to try to do certain things when you should just let it come to you. "Obviously, winning at Fancourt was amazing, and I feel like I want to be in these positions because I know I can get it done. I want to contend every week, and chasing a second win is nice."

Khan, also starting on the tenth, found his feet early in his round with three birdies and an eagle in his first seven holes to move to 11 under par. The 35-year-old would then add two more birdies to his scorecard to pull level with Daffue before play was suspended due to darkness. "I started really well," he said. "I made a birdie on my second hole, the par three eleventh, and that's not an easy hole to score two on, so I was pleased.

# IPL 2026: The batting group that we have this year is amazing, says KKR captain Rahane

KOLKATA

Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) captain Ajinkya Rahane struck a confident yet measured tone, emphasising positivity, adaptability, and belief in a well-rounded squad as the franchise eyes another strong campaign in the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026.

Addressing the media alongside head coach Abhishek Nayar, assistant coach Shane Watson, and mentor Dwayne Bravo, Rahane highlighted the depth in KKR's batting unit. "The batting group that we have this year is amazing. Most of the batters, including the overseas batters, are coming in with good form and had a very good World Cup as well. We're excited for the season, and we'll see how our combinations play out," he said.

Under the pressures of leadership, Rahane remained composed. "Every season brings its own expectations and challenges, whether you are a player or a captain. For me, the key has always been to stay positive. I've been leading the team since last year, and I'm really grateful to the franchise for giving me this responsibility. I'm taking everything in my stride. When there are challenges, there is also an opportunity. I've learned over the years to look at challenges as opportunities to grow and contribute. My mindset has always been like that throughout my career, and I'll always try to give my best as a player and a captain."

Looking back at areas of improvement, the KKR skipper stressed the importance of momentum. "As a team, we'd like to start really well and build momentum. It's a long tournament, so you don't want to peak too early. As a unit, we want to play a positive brand of cricket. We've got international and domestic players coming



into the team, having been in good form. So, as a team management, we're really confident that the team will do really well this season."

The presence of all-rounders like Cameron Green adds flexibility to the squad, and Rahane confirmed that clarity around roles will evolve. "We'll have detailed discussions with Cameron Green to define his role and responsibilities. He's a quality player who can bat in any position and contribute with some overs as well. Over the next few practice games, we'll get a better idea of how to utilise him most effectively within our combinations."

Watson, meanwhile, pointed to the abundance of options as both a strength and a challenge. "The beauty of this KKR squad is in the amount of incredible batting options that we have this season. It's an abundance of riches with the cavalry of players we have. Where they all fit in is the ultimate challenge, and for us to be able to get that first combination right as quickly as we can and then make little adjustments in the tournament. Obviously, with Cameron Green and the quality he brings as an all-rounder, wherever he gets the opportunity, we want him to make the most of that. We've got some serious

players with a great blend of experience and youthful energy as well. So, it's very exciting to be able to see how that's going to play out throughout the tournament."

With the potential absence of Andre Russell in the finishing role, Nayar sees an opportunity for others to step up. "Andre Russell has been a flag bearer for this franchise for many years. What he's done over the years in T20 cricket is going to be hard to replicate. However, this is a season of opportunities. We have Rinku and Ramandeep who can step up and do something for the franchise, as they have before. There's pressure when playing in the IPL, but we want our players to be true to their potential and make a name for themselves. There are a lot of young cricketers in our setup who can cement their name in the franchise's legacy. Rinku has taken that responsibility for India and KKR, and Ramandeep's also done it for us in the season when we won the championship. So, we're hopeful that they can replicate those performances and create something special for this franchise."

Nayar also reflected on his role within a star-studded support group. "The beauty of the IPL is the opportunity to work with legends like Watto (Watson), DJ (Bravo), Tim Southee, and Dre Russ (Russell), also coming in. The players are going to enjoy the luxury of having the level of input these guys can provide. For me, the designation might have changed, but not a lot has changed. The roles are a bit similar; you just take more criticism for what happens. But I think, besides that, to have these guys sitting next to me and being reliant on them, who have been very successful in this format, is exceptional. With such a leadership group, both Ajinkya and I know that we can rely on the entire support group to make sure.

# Golf: Hitaashee breaks into top-10, Diksha is tied 16th in Australia

GOLD COAST (AUSTRALIA)

A strong second-round performance saw Hitaashee Bakshi emerge as the leading Indian contender, moving into the top 10, while her compatriots delivered mixed results in the Australian WPGA Championships, being held at the Par-71 Sanctuary Cove Golf and Country Club in Gold Coast, Australia, on Friday.

Bakshi produced a solid 3-under 68 to add to her opening 69, taking her to a total of 5-under 137 and a share of eighth place. Diksha Dagar, who had an impressive first round, slipped slightly but remained within the top 20 at tied-16th after returning a 1-over 72. Pranavi Urs successfully made the cut at 2-over par (72-72) and sits at tied-60th, while Vani Kapoor narrowly missed out, finishing one shot outside the cut line



with rounds of 73 and 72. At the top of the leaderboard, Australia's Hannah Green continued her dominant run, carding a 4-under 67 to reach 10-under overall and take a two-shot lead. She recorded six birdies and an eagle, offset by two bogeys and a double

bogey. England's Meghan Maclaren follows in second place at 8-under after rounds of 66 and 68.

Elsewhere, first-round leader Kelsey Macdonald experienced a dramatic fall, carding a 77 that included three consecutive double bogeys, dropping her to tied-34th after setting a course record just a day earlier.

Bakshi's round began on the back nine, where she opened with a bogey on the ninth but quickly recovered with a birdie on the 10th. Despite another dropped shot on the 14th, she responded with a birdie on the 16th. Her round gathered momentum on the front nine, where she fired three consecutive birdies on the third, fourth, and fifth holes to close with a 68. Notably, she was highly accurate off the tee, hitting every fairway and missing only a handful of greens in regulation.

# SA are very inexperienced, but it's not an excuse: Maharaj

AUCKLAND



After being outplayed by New Zealand through an eight-wicket defeat in third T20I, South Africa captain Keshav Maharaj admitted the side's inexperience showed in the loss, but insisted it was no excuse.

Put in to batting first at Eden Park, South Africa struggled against disciplined bowling and slipped to 62/5 at the halfway mark, before ending up at 136/9. New Zealand's chase was anchored by Tom Latham, who struck an unbeaten 63 after Devon Conway hit a brisk 39, as the hosts reached the target in 16.2 overs.

"We are very inexperienced so you can understand the inconsistencies, but it's not an excuse. We're all professional enough; we are representing our country, so we've just got to go look back at ourselves and find ways through it.

"We have to put away our egos when it comes to playing on these types of wickets, because it doesn't allow you to play with the freedom that you want at times. I wouldn't use it as an excuse, even though we have a very inexperienced squad. Guys are professional enough and mature enough to find ways to combat it," said Maharaj in the post-match press conference. What also stood out as a huge area of concern is South Africa's batters being dismissed while trying to go for big shots. "It's definitely something we discussed... They felt like the only way was to target the short boundary, but it was a bit disappointing to say the least. "Conversations we had prior to coming into this game were about the short boundary. Our coaching staff mentioned that teams that look too much into the short boundary actually shoot themselves in the foot.

## Genelia Deshmukh says 'some sentiments are beyond trends' as she shares one of her old songs

**Mumbai:** Actress Genelia Deshmukh took a trip down memory lane as she dropped one of the tracks from her old South Indian movies on social media.

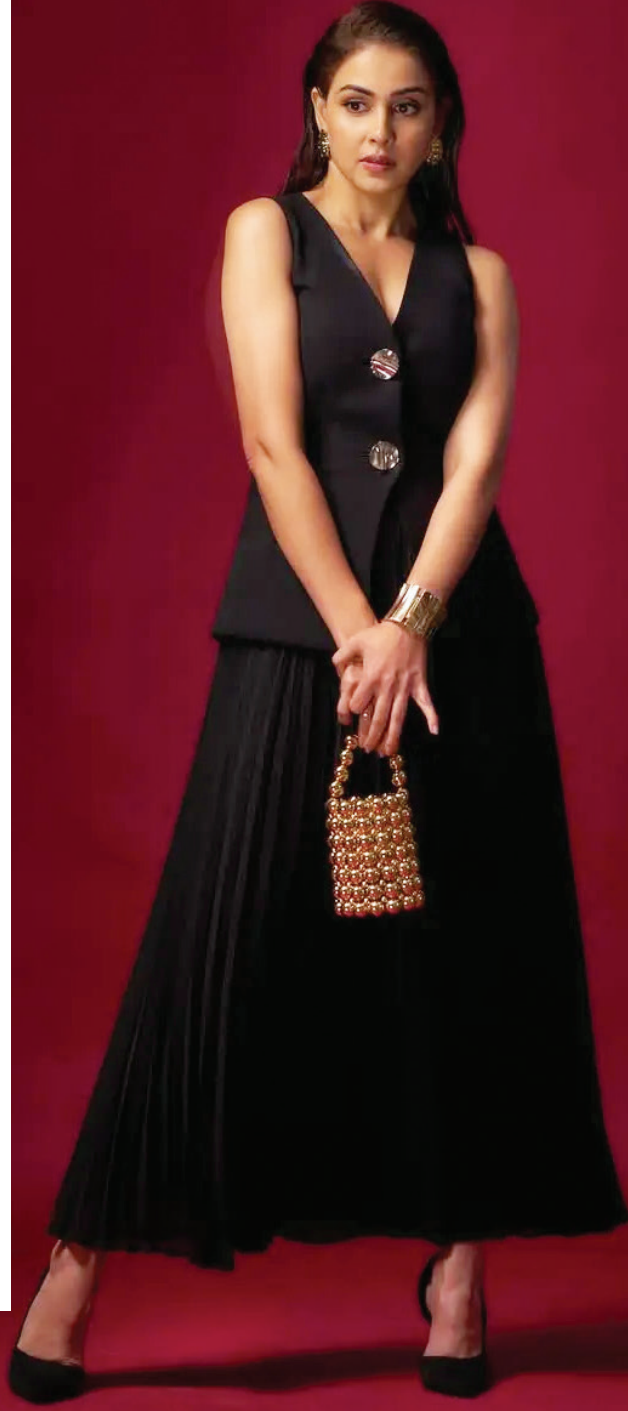
The 'Sitare Zameen Par' actress shared that whenever she posts one of her old songs and sees them trending, she ends up feeling a massive wave of nostalgia. However, she added that some feelings are more than just trends as they last a lifetime.

"Everytime I add my older south songs - it's just pure nostalgia and to see it trending, makes me feel some films and some sentiments are beyond trends - they just last for a lifetime #eternally-grateful (sic)", wrote Genelia. The 'Jaane Tu... Ya Jaane Na' actress posted some photos of herself posing in a stunning ethnic look and added the "Nalka Nal-lani" track from her 2004 movie "Sye" as the background score.

Composed by MM Keeravani, he has also lent his voice to the track, along with K. S. Chithra. Made under the direction of SS Rajamouli, "Sye" stars Nithin, Genelia, Shashank, and Pradeep Rawat as the primary cast, along with others.

Backed by A. Bharati under the banner of Sri Bharathi Enterprises, the movie has been set against the backdrop of rugby. It revolves around two rival student groups in a college - one from the Science stream and the other from the Arts stream. Both factions are forced to come together when a local gangster takes control of their university.

Genelia commenced her acting career with the Hindi film "Tujhe Meri Kasam" back in 2003. She came to the limelight with the Tamil film "Boys" in the same year. Along with being a part of many noteworthy Bollywood dramas such as "Jaane Tu... Ya Jaane Na", "Masti", and "Force", she has also delivered many South projects, including "Bommarillu" and "Satyam", to name just a few.



## Blockbuster Teja Sajja takes another big jump



One of the promising talents in the Telugu cinema industry, Teja Sajja is reportedly taking a very big jump and let us have a brief look into the story. Teja Sajja is currently experiencing a remarkable phase in his career, riding high on back-to-back successes and with a strong slate of projects lined up. His consistent performances have not only won him accolades but also strengthened his position as one of the most promising young actors in Telugu cinema.

Industry insiders note that his choice of scripts, combined with his natural screen presence, has helped him carve a distinct identity in a competitive space.

Adding to this growing momentum, Teja Sajja has now taken a strategic step by entering the digital space as the

host of #TheTraitorsTeluguOnPrime. This move marks a timely expansion of his career, demonstrating his versatility and willingness to experiment beyond traditional acting roles. Hosting a high-profile reality show allows him to connect with audiences in a different format, further increasing his visibility and fan engagement.

Fans are already excited to see him in this new avatar, and the industry views it as a smart move that could open more opportunities in digital entertainment.

By successfully balancing film projects with hosting responsibilities, Teja Sajja is setting an example of how young stars can diversify their careers while maintaining momentum. This phase is poised to further cement his status as a dynamic and multi-talented star in Telugu cinema.

## We Spent Big On NTR-Prashant Neel Movie, Says Naveen Yerneni



Producer Naveen Yerneni has shed light on the massive expenditure involved in shooting high-budget films, revealing that the team spent nearly Rs 1.5 crore per day during the Jordan schedule of their upcoming film Dragon. "We recently filmed Dragon in Jordan. We spent close to Rs 1.5 crore daily on production. The visuals we captured are extraordinary," he said, while promoting his film 'Ustaad Bhagat Singh'.

Speaking about the economics of big-ticket cinema, Naveen Yerneni also addressed the ongoing debate around ticket price hikes in Telugu states. He clarified that such hikes are usually sought only for large-scale productions. "Only five to six big films request ticket hikes to recover their heavy investments. Smaller films don't require such increases," he explained, citing examples of ambitious projects like Peddi and Varanasi.

According to sources, the team of Dragon, starring NTR and directed by Prashant Neel, had already completed their crucial action sequences in Jordan and will not be returning to the country. The remaining portions of the film are set to be shot in India.

The production team had exercised caution and wrapped up the Jordan schedule ahead of rising tensions. Originally planned until the first week of March, the shoot was completed by February 25, ensuring the safety of the cast and crew.

The film stars Rukmini Vasanth as the female lead and is being bankrolled by Mythri Movie Makers

## BTS Swim music video X reactions: Fans can't keep calm over comeback track



The release of Swim, the title track from BTS's new album ARIRANG, has sparked a massive wave of reactions on X, with fans flooding the platform within minutes of the music video drop. Marking their return after a three-year hiatus, the track quickly trended worldwide as listeners shared first impressions. Many praised its emotional tone and cinematic visuals, calling it one of BTS' most heartfelt releases. The comeback also delivered strong numbers, with ARIRANG crossing five million pre-saves on Spotify - a record for an Asian act. Fans have particularly highlighted the song's introspective lyrics and powerful vocals, noting how the visuals enhance its message of resilience and growth. Written by group leader RM, Swim is an alternative pop track encouraging listeners to navigate life at their own pace. Following the release, BTS will begin global promotions, including a comeback showcase in Seoul and an appearance on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, alongside plans for a major world tour.

## Did Trisha's Mother Hint at Marriage? Viral Speculation Sparks Debate

Rumours surrounding Vijay and Trisha Krishnan have once again taken social media by storm, with fresh speculation emerging from an unexpected source—Trisha's mother. The buzz began after Trisha's mother reportedly liked a fan-made Instagram reel depicting Vijay and Trisha getting married. This seemingly small action has been widely interpreted by netizens as a subtle hint, further fuelling ongoing rumours about a possible relationship between the two stars.

The speculation comes amid unverified reports that Vijay's wife, Sangeetha Sornalingam, has filed for divorce, allegedly citing his closeness with a Tamil actress. While there has been no official confirmation from any of the parties involved, gossip around Vijay and Trisha has continued to gain traction. Adding to the intrigue is Vijay's political journey. As the leader of his party and a rising figure ahead of upcoming elections in Tamil Nadu, any personal developments—especially something as significant as a remarriage—could attract intense public and political scrutiny.

Observers note that Tamil Nadu's political history has seen leaders like M. G. Ramachandran and M. Karunanidhi navigate complex personal lives alongside their political careers, the current socio-political climate is markedly different. For now, all eyes remain on Vijay and Trisha, as neither has addressed the rumours. Whether this social media activity is merely coincidental or indicative of something bigger remains to be seen, but it has certainly kept fans and followers talking.



## Raashi Khanna Fans Upset With Closeup Shots

Whenever Raashi Khanna appeared in the promotions of Ustaad Bhagat Singh, and stated that she did this role with conviction under Harish Shankar's direction, and agreed to go glamorous as he asked for it. However, after watching the film, many felt that Raashi is neither super glamorous nor did her role make any impact in the movie, except for filling the scenes in the first half. Moreover, the actress's fans have a complaint.

For reasons better known to the makers, in the close-up shots inside Ustaad Bhagat Singh, Raashi Khanna is looking quite aged, though she's just 35 years old. That cuteness fans expect from Raashi went missing, though that one loses that with age; she's looking good in other projects. In her upcoming web series on Amazon Prime Video, the upcoming Lukke, Raashi was shown in a very beautiful, stylised modern avatar. It looks like Raashi's visuals are not taken enough care during the post-production process, such that her looks will be stunning.

Also, the lack of any particular dance number with Pawan Kalyan or any other romantic song in the imagination is another thing that disappointed the fans of the actress. Even when Pawan Kalyan is a Deputy CM he has a romantic number with Priyanka Arul Mohan in #OG, then why not a similar thing went missing in Ustaad Bhagat Singh is the question here. After Telusu Kada, this looks like another major disappointment for Raashi, though Ustaad is likely to pose huge numbers by the weekend in terms of revenue.