

# HYDERABAD HEADLINES

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### Relief Rally: Sensex Surges 1,372 pts

**MONEY MATTERS 10**

### Mrunal to Sizzle with Ram Charan in Peddi?



**BOX-OFFICE 12**



### No fuel crisis in TG: Govt debunks shortage rumours

HYDERABAD, MAR 24

Telangana's Food and Civil Supplies department clarified there's no shortage of petrol, diesel, or domestic LPG statewide. Supply chains from refineries to depots are fully operational with sufficient stock for daily needs.

Long queues and "No stock" signs stem from panic buying due to false rumours, creating artificial scarcity. Recent OMC advance-payment changes caused minor dealer adjustments, unrelated to supplies.

Governments, OMCs, and police are monitoring outlets; strict action against hoarding or black-marketing. Citizens: stay calm, avoid panic buying, trust official info. Call 1967 for queries.

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## Conversion Ends SC Status Immediately: Supreme Court

NEW DELHI, MARCH 24

In a significant ruling, the Supreme Court of India has held that a person belonging to a Scheduled Caste (SC) loses that status immediately upon converting to a religion other than Hinduism, Sikhism or Buddhism, regardless of birth. A Bench comprising Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and Manmohan upheld an earlier order of the

Andhra Pradesh High Court, stating that conversion to Christianity results in the "immediate and complete" loss of SC status.

The court clarified that under Clause 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, only persons professing Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism can be recognised as members of Scheduled Castes. "This bar is categorical and absolute," the Bench



observed, adding that conversion to any other religion automatically disqualifies an individual from claiming SC status and related benefits.

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## BJP Welcomes Ruling

Hyderabad, Mar 24 : BJP Telangana State President N Ramchander Rao today welcomed the apex court's verdict on Scheduled Caste (SC) reservation and constitutional rights to those who have converted to other religions. In a statement, Ramchander Rao hailed the apex court's decision to uphold a previous ruling by the Andhra Pradesh High Court, calling it a "historic victory for the spirit of the Constitution." Rao emphasized that the SC reservations envisioned by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar were specifically designed for the social upliftment of marginalized sections within the Hindu fold.

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## Trump, Modi Discuss Hormuz Crisis

New Delhi: Donald Trump spoke with Narendra Modi on Tuesday to discuss the ongoing West Asia conflict, with a key focus on keeping the Strait of Hormuz open for global trade. Modi stressed the need for de-escalation and early restoration of peace, highlighting that the strategic waterway is vital for global stability and economic security. This was the first

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## A Conspiracy Against the South

### CM Revanth Reddy Slams Proposed Lok Sabha Expansion

NEW DELHI

Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, currently on a high-profile visit to the national capital, has launched a scathing attack on the Central Government's reported proposal to increase Lok Sabha and State Assembly seats by 50%. Terming the move "anti-South India," Reddy warned that the proposed delimitation exercise is a "conspiracy" designed to diminish the political relevance of southern states. Speaking at an event in Delhi on Tuesday, the Chief Minister highlighted a widening disparity that could emerge if seat allocation is based strictly on population. He argued that states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Rajasthan—which have seen higher population growth—would



disproportionately benefit, while southern states like Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu would be penalized for their success in population control and economic development. Reddy remarked that with a 50% seat hike, southern states would become politically irrelevant, describing it as a

"final bullet" being fired at the South. To illustrate his point, the Chief Minister provided a comparison of the current versus the proposed political landscape. He noted that while the South's representation would rise by 65 seats, the North and other regions would

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## SHORT TAKES



### CATCH BY THE ROOTS

In West Bengal's red lateritic uplands—Jhargram, Bankura, Purulia—sabai grass sustains thousands of rural households. Thriving on drought-prone, marginal lands with minimal rain and labor, this hardy perennial withstands frost but not waterlogging in eastern India's dry tropics.

FOCUS POINT 10



### 95% INDIAN WOMEN READY FOR AI-FOCUSED ROLE

Nearly 95% of women would shift to AI roles with proper support, says report. AI could close India's gender gap—43% of global female STEM grads here, yet only 29% entry-level tech jobs, 14% C-suite.

MONEY MATTERS 09



### DUBIOUS INTENT & PROMISES

Lack of decency and morality are political trends reiterated by leaders. The clamour raised by some states and drama enacted specially by West Bengal, regarding SIR (Special Intensive Revision) bear testimony they don't want the mandatory revision.

OPINION 06

## KTR Welcomes Delimitation but Warns Against Population

### Based Disadvantage to Southern States

HYDERABAD, MARCH 24

Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) Working President K.T. Rama Rao (KTR) welcomed the long-pending delimitation process but expressed serious concerns over the potential disadvantages to southern states if it is carried out purely on a population basis. KTR stated that delimitation should have been conducted in 2014 as per the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act. "Even though it is delayed by over a decade, we welcome the initiation of the process now," he said.

However, he cautioned that if delimitation is based solely on current population figures, it would severely disadvantage southern states. "Our consistent stand—then and now—is that delimitation should not be based purely on population. Instead, it should follow the same proportional framework adopted earlier, based on the 1971 Census," he emphasised. KTR pointed out that southern states collectively account for around 24% of representation in

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## Twin-Level Solution

### Double-decker corridor for LB Nagar- Hayathnagar to ease traffic woes

HYDERABAD, MARCH 24

In a major boost to Hyderabad's transport infrastructure, Minister for Roads and Buildings Komatireddy Venkat Reddy has announced the construction of a double-decker elevated corridor between LB Nagar and Hayathnagar, promising long-term relief from traffic congestion on the busy NH-65 stretch. Replying to queries in the Assembly on Tuesday, the Minister said the 5.5-km corridor will be taken up at an estimated cost of ₹941 crore, benefiting nearly 10–12 lakh residents across 60–70 colonies in the eastern corridor of the city. The project proposes a three-tier structure with service roads at the ground level, highway traffic in the middle, and a Metro rail line on top.

Komatireddy Venkat Reddy noted that inadequate crossing facilities and heavy traffic flow currently force commuters to travel over 2 km extra, leading to congestion and safety concerns. The proposed elevated corridor is aimed at addressing these issues comprehensively while improving road safety and travel time, he said.

## TAMIL NADU'S POWER GAME: ALLIANCES, AMBITION AND A VOTER READY TO UPSET THE SCRIPT

BY CHATURVEDULA  
SUBRAHMANYAM

Tamil Nadu is heading into a fractured electoral contest where DMK-Congress alignment, AIADMK-BJP consolidation, and Vijay's TVK disruption are colliding. The voter is no longer sentimental. The verdict will be driven by tactical voting, alliance strength and ideological undercurrents.

Tamil Nadu's political theatre is entering a dangerous and decisive phase. The dominance of the Dravidian majors is no longer absolute, but it is not yet dismantled either. What we are witnessing is not collapse but controlled weakening. The



DMK remains the ruling force, but it carries visible strain.

Governance fatigue, internal pressures and rising public scrutiny have punctured the aura of inevitability that once surrounded it. Yet, writing it off would be premature. The

DMK still possesses organisational depth and a reliable vote base.

The AIADMK, once the only credible counterweight, is still searching for coherence after leadership transitions. It retains pockets of influence but

lacks a statewide surge on its own. This is where the equation turns sharply. Neither of the two can now comfortably cross the line alone.

### DMK-CONGRESS: A PARTNERSHIP OF NECESSITY

The DMK-Congress alignment is no longer just an electoral understanding. It has become a political compulsion on both sides. For the DMK, Congress adds incremental vote strength in key pockets and helps consolidate anti-BJP sentiment. For Congress, the DMK is indispensable in Tamil Nadu as it attempts to remain relevant in national politics and mount a challenge in Delhi.

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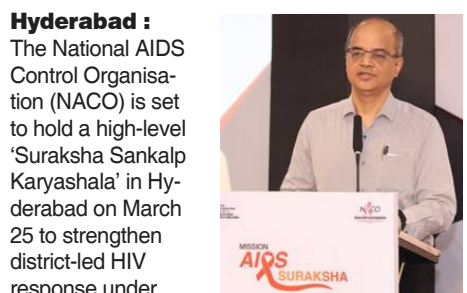


### SK Srivastava called upon Governor at Lok bhawan



**Hyderabad :** Sanjay Kumar Srivastava, General Manager, South Central Railway called upon Shri Shiv Pratap Shukla, Hon'ble Governor of Telangana at Lok Bhawan, Hyderabad today i.e., 24.03.2026 and briefed on on-going rail projects in the State of Telangana.

### NACO's 'Suraksha Sankalp' push to fast-track HIV control in Telangana



**Hyderabad :** The National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) is set to hold a high-level 'Suraksha Sankalp Karyashala' in Hyderabad on March 25 to strengthen district-led HIV response under Mission AIDS Suraksha. Chaired by NACO director general Dr. Rakesh Gupta, the workshop will bring together senior officials, including Dr. S. Sangeetha Satyanarayana, project director, Telangana State AIDS Control Society, district collectors, additional district collectors, district medical and health officer and District AIDS Control Officers. Telangana whose prevalence of 0.41 percent and people living with HIV/AIDS burden is 1,56,961, has been identified as a priority State under this focused approach, with total of 19 priority districts, including Hyderabad, Ranga Reddy, Khammam, Karimnagar, Nalgonda, Siddipet, Medak, Warangal, Nizamabad, Adilabad, Suryapet, Peddapalli, Jangaon, Vikarabad, Kamareddy, Hanamakonda, Sangareddy, Mahabubabad and Jayashankar Bhupalapally, identified for intensified programme action. Representatives from these districts will present progress, discuss challenges and develop targeted strategies for strengthening service delivery. The focus will be on improving testing, treatment access and patient retention, reinforcing a data-driven, decentralised approach to accelerate India's goal of ending AIDS as a public health threat.

# Centre Showing Step-Motherly Treatment to Telangana: Sridhar Babu

HYDERABAD

IT, Industries and Legislative Affairs Minister D. Sridhar Babu expressed concern that despite Telangana contributing nearly 5% to the country's GDP, the Union Government is not releasing funds proportionately. He stated that the Centre collects around ₹60,000 crore from the state in the form of taxes, yet continues to show discrimination.

Responding to questions from BRS and BJP members related to the Municipal Administration Department during the Assembly Question Hour on Tuesday, on behalf of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, the Minister clarified that no ongoing flyover or Road Over Bridge (ROB) projects in the twin cities and Rangareddy district have been cancelled. While minor modifications have been made in some cases, all projects are progressing at various stages. He said these works will be completed with an outlay of ₹2,250 crore.

Sridhar Babu recalled that several projects initiated during the previous BRS regime were left incomplete, and the current government is committed to finishing them in a phased manner based on priority.

He announced that works at the Kukatpally Y Junction will



commence within 15 days. The Bachupally HMDA flyover is expected to be completed and inaugurated by May, in line with the Chief Minister's directive.

He assured that these projects will help ease traffic congestion. He also clarified that there are no changes in link roads and dismissed claims that certain projects were cancelled, advising BRS MLAs not to spread misinformation.

Regarding the Medchal-Suchitra elevated corridor, the Minister said the contractor had abandoned the project midway. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and Roads & Buildings Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy have met Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, seeking support for early

completion. He added that the Uppal elevated corridor will also be expedited, with a new contractor already in place. The Paradise-Shamirpet and Paradise-Suchitra corridor projects are currently in the tendering stage. On issues related to defense land transfer, the Chief Minister has met the Union Defence Minister four times to resolve them, and works are expected to begin soon.

The proposed Hastinapuram flyover requires further studies, but will be taken up. Sridhar Babu also revealed that, along with the Musi rejuvenation project, plans are being prepared for major road networks connecting the eastern and western parts of the city.

He noted the rising migration to the twin cities from districts

and other states, and said the government has recognized the need to expand drinking water supply and road infrastructure accordingly. He pointed out that permissions granted by the previous government for high-rise buildings in western Hyderabad are nearing completion, and once occupied, could lead to peak-hour traffic congestion. The government is undertaking several measures to address this. As part of the Musi project, sewage treatment plants (STPs) are being completed, while some are under construction. He said earlier approvals to construct STPs within the riverbed were technically flawed, and the government is relocating them. Plans are also being made to utilize treated water for industrial purposes.

### Funds on Par with Andhra Pradesh Sought

Sridhar Babu said it is encouraging that Andhra Pradesh is receiving substantial funds under the AMRUT scheme, and urged BJP MPs to secure similar allocations for Telangana. Despite having two Union Ministers from the state, Telangana continues to face neglect, he said, adding that the Centre should not ignore a small state contributing 5% to the national GDP.



## BPCL Assures Uninterrupted Availability of Petrol, Diesel & Domestic LPG

HYDERABAD

Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL), a Fortune Global 500 company, and one of India's leading oil and gas companies, assures all citizens that sufficient Petrol, Diesel, CNG, and Domestic LPG are available across its vast network.

All BPCL fuel stations and Domestic LPG distributorships, across its network in Telangana are operating smoothly and are fully equipped to meet the energy needs of consumers.

There is no cause for concern or panic buying. Our supply chain operations remain robust and efficient, ensuring uninterrupted supplies.

We urge all customers to remain calm. BPCL remains steadfast in its commitment to energy accessibility and reliability.

### About Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (BPCL):

Fortune Global 500 Company, Bharat Petroleum is the second largest Indian Oil Marketing Company and one of the integrated energy companies in India, engaged in refining of crude oil and marketing of petroleum products, with presence in the upstream and downstream sectors of the oil and gas industry. The company attained the coveted Maharatna status, joining the club of companies having greater operational & financial autonomy.

Bharat Petroleum's Refineries at Mumbai, Kochi and Bina have a combined refining capacity of around 35.3 MMTPA. Its marketing infrastructure includes a network of installations, depots, fuel stations, aviation service stations and LPG distributors. Its distribution network comprises over 23,500+ Fuel Stations, over 6,200+ LPG distributorships, 500+ Lubes distributorships, 80 POL storage locations, 54 LPG Bottling Plants, 79 Aviation Service Stations, 5 Lube blending plants and 5 cross-country pipelines.

Bharat Petroleum is integrating its strategy, investments, environmental and social ambitions to move towards a sustainable planet. The company has Electric vehicle charging stations at 6500+ Fuel Stations. With a focus on sustainable solutions, the company is developing an ecosystem and a road-map to become a Net Zero Energy Company by 2040, in Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions. Bharat Petroleum has been partnering communities by supporting several initiatives connected primarily in the areas of education, water conservation, skill development, health, community development, capacity building and employee volunteering. With 'Energing Lives' as its core purpose, Bharat Petroleum's vision is to be an admired global energy company leveraging talent, innovation & technology.

## “Budget full of gaps, not growth”: BRS MLC Dasoju Sravan targets Cong govt

HYDERABAD

BRS MLC Dasoju Sravan launched a sharp attack on the Telangana government's latest budget, calling it a “number game” that fails to reflect ground realities and public expectations.

Speaking in the Legislative Council, the BRS MLC questioned the credibility of repeated inflated projections. He pointed out that for 2024-25, the government estimated Rs.2.2 lakh crore but spent only Rs.1.67 lakh crore. For 2025-26, against an estimate of Rs.2.29 lakh crore,

only Rs.2.03 lakh crore has been utilized so far. Despite this trend, the government has projected a higher Rs.2.41 lakh crore for the coming year, which he termed unrealistic. Sravan stressed that a healthy budget should have only a 5% to 10% variance between estimates and actuals, accusing the government of consistently overshooting targets and misleading the public. Citing findings of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), he said revenue realization remains weak. Against a projected Rs.2.29 lakh crore for 2025-26, only about

Rs.1.38 lakh crore had been collected by January 2026 - around 60%. Expecting the remaining Rs.65,000 crore in just two months is impractical, he argued.

On debt figures, Sravan alleged discrepancies in claims made by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy. While the CM stated that Rs.3,30 lakh crore out of Rs.3.47 lakh crore borrowings was used for loan repayments, Sravan said actual direct repayments are closer to Rs.1.67 lakh crore. He accused the government of including borrowings by corporations and SPVs to inflate repayment claims. Sravan

also flagged declining focus on social sectors like education, health and so on. He objected to claims in budget documents that no ration cards were issued in the last decade, asserting that the previous government distributed 6.45 lakh cards. On welfare, he demanded 42% reservation for Backward Classes (BCs) in contracts and maintenance works, urging immediate action from the government. Calling for accountability, Dasoju Sravan urged the government to present transparent data and revise the budget to align with the real needs of the people.

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## Alliances, ambition and a voter ready to upset the script

FROM PAGE 1

This is not ideological romance. It is arithmetic survival. But such partnerships carry inherent vulnerabilities. A dependent alliance is always under strain. Seat sharing tensions, cadre level friction and competing ambitions can surface at the worst possible moment. The DMK-Congress bloc will enter the election as a formidable formation, but not an invincible one.

### AIADMK-BJP: The counter consolidation taking shape

On the other side, the AIADMK-BJP alignment is gradually emerging as the only structured alternative capable of mounting a statewide challenge. The AIADMK brings legacy support and rural penetration. The BJP brings organisational energy, resources and a growing ideological base. Together, they are attempting to aggregate anti DMK sentiment into a single channel. This alliance is still evolving. Trust deficits exist. Coordination is not seamless. But the direction is unmistakable. If anti incumbency consolidates rather than scatters, this bloc becomes the principal challenger. And that is precisely where the third force complicates the picture.

### Vijay and TVK: The disruptor with unpredictable consequences

The entry of Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam has electrified the political atmosphere. Crowds are swelling. Youth engagement is visible. The optics are dramatic. But elections are not decided by optics alone. The critical question is not whether Vijay attracts support. He clearly does. The real question is whether that support converts into decisive seats. At present, the evidence suggests a more complex outcome. TVK is drawing significant energy from anti DMK sentiment. But unless it translates that into a concentrated vote share in specific constituencies, it risks splitting the very vote that seeks change. This creates a paradox. The more successful TVK becomes in mobilising sentiment, the greater the possibility of fragmenting the anti DMK vote. And in a triangular contest, fragmentation often strengthens the incumbent. The voter senses this risk. Tamil Nadu's electorate has a long history of tactical voting. When the final moment arrives, admiration can give way to calculation. The ball lot is not a stage for experimentation. It is a tool for outcome.

### The ideological undercurrent: a quiet but powerful shift

Beneath the visible contest runs a deeper ideological churn. For decades, Dravidian politics shaped the state's narrative framework. It influenced discourse on identity, language and culture. That influence remains significant, but it is no longer uncontested. A new assertion is emerging, rooted in cultural continuity and national integration. This is not always articulated loudly, but it is present in social behaviour and public sentiment. Political messaging that attempts to challenge traditional beliefs often encounters resistance at the ground level. People continue to practice their faith, visit temples and follow rituals with quiet conviction. This divergence between political rhetoric and lived reality is becoming more pronounced. When such divergence widens, narratives lose their grip.

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### The voter has changed the rules of the game

The most decisive factor in this election is not any leader or party—it is the voter. Tamil Nadu's voter is no longer driven purely by loyalty or emotion. There is a visible shift towards strategic thinking. The questions being asked are sharper: Who can realistically defeat the incumbent? Which alliance has the numbers to govern? Will my vote strengthen a winning formation or dilute the outcome? This is not casual voting; this is calculated intervention. And when voters begin to think this way, political equations can transform overnight.

### Ground whispers from districts

From the delta regions to the western belts, a consistent pattern is emerging. Public anger over governance issues exists, but it is tempered by caution. Voters express interest in new political alternatives, but they also speak of the need to avoid a fractured mandate. There is appreciation for strong personalities, yet a clear preference for stable combinations. This quiet balancing act will shape the final outcome far more than any rally or roadshow.

### A contest that will rewrite alignments

This election will not deliver a routine verdict. If the DMK-Congress bloc holds its base and benefits from a split opposition, it can retain power despite visible fatigue. If the AIADMK-BJP combine manages to consolidate anti-incumbency, it could mount a serious challenge and alter the balance. If TVK converts sentiment into structured vote banks, it could redraw the political map; if it does not, it may unintentionally reshape the outcome in favour of others. Tamil Nadu stands at a hinge moment. Power will not go to the loudest voice, but to the sharpest combination. And the voter, watching silently, is preparing to deliver a result that will force every political player to rethink their place in this new order.

“Tamil Nadu will not vote for noise. It will vote for the formation that convinces the voter it can actually take power and hold it.”

## A Conspiracy Against the South

FROM PAGE 1

gain 207 seats, effectively allowing a central government to be formed without any dependency on the southern mandate. He specifically cited that the gap between Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu would widen from the current 40 seats to 60 seats under the new formula. Beyond his remarks on delimitation, Reddy's Delhi visit is packed with administrative and political priorities. Speculation is rife that the CM has sought the Congress High Command's “green signal” for a cabinet reshuffle or expansion to fill vacant berths.

He is also expected to meet Union Ministers to discuss the Musi River Rejuvenation Project, the expansion of the Hyderabad Metro, and the development of the “Future City.” Reddy continues to promote the “Telangana Rising 2047” vision, seeking central support for his plan to transform Telangana into a \$3 trillion economy by 2047. The Chief Minister has called for a united front among southern states to challenge the population-based delimitation. He previously suggested that South India's representation in the Lok Sabha should be increased to 33% to ensure its contribution to the national exchequer is reflected in its political power.

## Conversion Ends SC Status Immediately Supreme Court

FROM PAGE 1

The judgment further noted that the 1950 Order initially limited SC recognition to Hindus, later extended to Sikhs in 1956 and Buddhists in 1990. Christianity, the court pointed out, has not been included in this list. On the issue of Scheduled Tribes (STs), the Bench said that while conversion does not automatically strip a person of tribal status, it becomes a question of fact. If an individual abandons tribal customs, rituals, and identity over time and assimilates into the new religion, they may no longer be considered part of the tribe. The court emphasised that loss of SC status also leads to the automatic termination of all associated benefits, including reservations, protections, and statutory entitlements. At the same time, the Bench laid down

conditions for reconversion. A person seeking to regain SC status must prove original caste identity, establish genuine reconversion to Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism, and demonstrate acceptance by the original caste community. “Mere self-proclamation is insufficient,” the court said. The ruling came while dismissing a plea challenging a High Court decision involving a pastor from Andhra Pradesh who had converted to Christianity but sought to invoke provisions of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act in a criminal case. The High Court had earlier ruled that a person actively professing Christianity cannot claim SC status. The Supreme Court's verdict is expected to have far-reaching implications for the interpretation of caste-based reservations and legal protections in cases involving religious conversion.

## BJP Welcomes Ruling

FROM PAGE 1

He noted that the Supreme Court has rightly clarified that claiming the same social status and benefits after conversion is unconstitutional. The State President pointed out that for a long time, some individuals have been undergoing religious conversions while illegally retaining SC certificates to claim reservation quotas. “This has caused grave injustice to genuine Dalit children. The Apex court's verdict will put an end to such irregularities and ensure justice for the truly eligible SC community,” he stated. Taking a swipe at rival political parties, Rao remarked that the judgment serves as a “strong slap in

the face” to those who encourage conversions and create confusion surrounding reservations solely for vote-bank politics. Rao highlighted that numerous instances of individuals using SC certificates after conversion to illegally obtain government benefits have been reported in Telangana. He demanded that the State Government “open its eyes” and strictly implement the Supreme Court's verdict at the field level to protect the rights of eligible SCs. Reaffirming the party's stance, he said “It is the BJP's core ideology that constitutional benefits must reach the genuine beneficiaries and our struggle to protect the rights of Dalit brothers and sisters will continue relentlessly.”

## Trump, Modi Discuss Hormuz Crisis

FROM PAGE 1

conversation between the two leaders since the conflict began on February 28. The call came a day after Trump extended a deadline for Iran to reopen the Strait, which handles about 20% of global oil and LNG supplies. Disruptions have already

pushed up global energy prices. India, heavily dependent on West Asian energy imports, has been engaging with regional leaders, including Iran and Gulf nations, to ease tensions. New Delhi has, however, ruled out direct involvement while focusing on safeguarding its energy and maritime interests.

## KTR Welcomes Delimitation but Warns Against Population

FROM PAGE 1

Parliament and stressed that this share must not be reduced. “States that have effectively implemented population control measures should not be penalised for their success,” he added. Welcoming the proposal to increase Assembly seats in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, KTR said that greater representation would bring governance closer to the people. He highlighted stark disparities in constituency sizes, noting that while constituencies like Aswaraopet have around 1.3 lakh voters, areas like Serilingampally have nearly 9 lakh voters. “Such vast disparities are not healthy for a functioning democracy,” he said. Reiterating his party's stance, KTR said that BRS supports delimitation but only if it ensures fairness and does not undermine the voice of southern states. “Delimitation must be carried out in a manner that protects the interests of southern India and ensures balanced representation,” he concluded.



## MoU signed between TGREDCO and GGGI

HYDERABAD

MoU signed between TGREDCO and Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) under SMARTEE-B initiative to promote Energy Efficiency in Telangana

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between Smt Anila Vavilla, VC & Managing Director, Telangana Renewable Energy Development Corporation Ltd. (TGREDCO) and Soumya Prasad Garnaik, Country Representative, the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI)-India on 24th March, 2026 in the presence of the Sri Navin Mittal, IAS, Special Chief Secretary, Energy Department, Government of Telangana to strengthen collaboration in the areas of energy efficiency, energy conservation, and renewable energy in the State. The event was also attended by Sri GSV Prasad, General Manager, TGREDCO, Sri Ashok Bonam, Regional Senior Officer – Project Coordination, GGGI, Sri D. Rajanikant, Director (EM), National Productivity Council (NPC), Hyderabad, Sri SaarthakKhurana, Associate Director, Climate Policy Initiative (CPI)

This collaboration is aligned with the "Sustaining & Promoting Market Transformation for Energy Efficiency in Buildings in India (SMARTEE-B)" initiative, which aims to accelerate energy efficiency improvements in the building sector through innovative business models and financing mechanisms. Under this MoU,

TGREDCO and GGGI will jointly work on the design and implementation of programs and initiatives in key sectors such as Demand Side Management (DSM), sustainable cooling, energy-efficient buildings, green small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and e-mobility. The collaboration will also focus on developing bankable project pipelines, facilitating innovative financing mechanisms including ESCO models, and enhancing institutional capacity through training and knowledge-sharing initiatives.

The MoU aims to leverage GGGI's global expertise and technical support to accelerate Telangana's transition towards a low-carbon, energy-efficient, and sustainable growth pathway, aligned with national priorities and international climate commitments.

Speaking on the occasion, officials highlighted that this collaboration, particularly under the SMARTEE-B initiative, will help strengthen policy frameworks, promote adoption of energy-efficient technologies in buildings, and create new opportunities for green investments and employment in the State. It is noteworthy that the MoU enables access to global best practices and technical assistance in the energy sector. This initiative reinforces Telangana's commitment to sustainable development and its proactive approach in addressing climate change through innovative and collaborative partnerships.

## Workshop on Modern AI Inaugurated at GITAM



HYDERABAD

The Department of Mathematics and Statistics at GITAM School of Science, Hyderabad, inaugurated a two-day hands-on workshop titled "Exploring Modern AI: From Natural Language Processing to Cognitive Intelligence" on 24 March 2026.

Prof. Siba Udgata from the University of Hyderabad, the Chief Guest, highlighted the remarkable capabilities and efficiency of the human brain, emphasizing that human intelligence continues to surpass artificial intelligence in many aspects. He encouraged participants to remain confident, continuously learn, and use AI responsibly as a tool for societal benefit.

Dr. K. Sampathkumar from KPMG Global Delivery Centre, Hyderabad, the Guest of Honour, spoke on the rapid evolution of AI, tracing its breakthroughs from foundation research such as the "Attention Is All You Need" paper to modern applications like ChatGPT. He underscored the transformative impact of AI across industries, the growing role of developers in leveraging AI, and the importance of staying prepared for emerging challenges, including cybersecurity.

The workshop features ex-



pert sessions by eminent academicians including Dr. P. Krishnamurthy (IIIT Hyderabad), Prof. Ramesh Kumar Mishra (University of Hyderabad), and Prof. Animesh Mukherjee (IIT Kharagpur). It aims to provide participants with insights into recent advancements in AI, NLP, and cognitive science, along with hands-on exposure to technologies such as large language models, agentic AI, and multilingual systems.

The programme is coordinated by Dr. D. MallikarjunaReddy, with support from Dr. K. Krishna and Dr. BheemashankerKodage, under the guidance of Dr. Jadav Ganesh, Head of the Department. Faculty members, students, and industry professionals are actively participating in the workshop. Dr. Motahar Reza, Principal, School of Science, welcomed the gathering, while student coordinators Sahasra, Deepa, Sushmika, and Sneha

efficiently anchored the event.

### HAVANA-2026: GITAM Hosts Grand National-Level Tech Fest

The GITAM School of Core Engineering inaugurated its two-day national-level tech fest, HAVANA-2026, on 24 March 2026, bringing together students and innovators from across the country. Organized by G-Electra (Smart Systems Club) of the Electrical, Electronics, and Communication Engineering (EECE) Department, the event celebrated innovation, creativity, and emerging technologies.

Udaya Kumar Dintyala, Chairman of Cognitivebotics, attended as the Guest of Honour and encouraged students to reimagine problems with clarity and purpose, emphasizing the transformative power of technology in shaping industries such as education and healthcare. Sravanth Ga-

jula, Co-Founder of AdOnMo, also graced the occasion and shared key entrepreneurial insights, urging students to step out of their comfort zones, focus on problem-solving, and build meaningful professional networks.

The inaugural session was held in the presence of Prof. Ramesh Vaddi, Director, School of Core Engineering, Prof. Madhavi Tatineni, Head of the EECE Department, delivered the welcome address. A. Venu Gopal presented a report on G-Electra's activities, while K. Sravya proposed the vote of thanks. The event was convened by M. Naresh Kumar, with support from Dr. D. Anitha and M. Gowri Shankar.

HAVANA-2026 featured a diverse range of competitions, including Robo Race, Robo Soccer, Project Expo, Hackathon, and Codeathon, along with sessions on emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain, and Robotics. The fest witnessed enthusiastic participation from students representing over 25 colleges in and around Hyderabad.

The event provided a dynamic platform for knowledge exchange, skill development, and industry interaction, reinforcing GITAM's commitment to fostering innovation and technological excellence.

## Santosh Nagar flyover works to be completed by June: Karnan

HYDERABAD: GHMC Commissioner R.V. Karnan has directed engineering officials to ensure that the construction of the Chanchalguda-Santosh Nagar steel flyover is completed by June. The Commissioner made an unscheduled inspection of the ongoing works at Santosh Nagar on Tuesday.

### SOUTHERN RAILWAY

#### Chennai Division E-Auction Notice / Catering / Passenger Amenities / NFR / Parking / E-Auction / 2026

For and on behalf of the President of India, the Divisional Railway Manager, Chennai Division, Southern Railway calls for bids (commercial) through E-Auction and E-tender for award of Catering stall contracts and Passenger Amenities, NFR and Parking contracts in the following Railway Stations / locations. The E-Auctions and E-tenders scheduled are as detailed below:

Sl. No.	Catalogue No.	Sub Category	Location	Auction Date	Tendering Mode	Auction Time
1	MAS-EMR-2026	Emergency Medical Room	TBM	01.04.2026	E-auction	15:00
2	MAS-EMR-2026	Emergency Medical Room	KPD	01.04.2026	E-auction	15:00
3	MAS-EMR-2026	Emergency Medical Room	CGL	01.04.2026	E-auction	15:00
4	MAS-EMR-2026	Emergency Medical Room	MS	01.04.2026	E-auction	15:00
5	MAS-PAUT-177	Pay & Use Toilet	CGL	07.04.2026	E-auction	15:00
6	MAS-PAUT-177	Pay & Use Toilet	MLMR	07.04.2026	E-auction	15:00
7	MAS-BOC-31	Battery Operated Carts	CGL	07.04.2026	E-auction	15:00
8	MAS-BOC-31	Battery Operated Carts	TBM	07.04.2026	E-auction	15:00
9	MAS-MPS-2026-2	Multi-purpose stall	KPD	31.03.2026	E-auction	15:00
10	MAS-MPS-2026-2	Multi-purpose stall	KPD	31.03.2026	E-auction	15:00
11	MAS-MPS-2026-2	Multi-purpose stall	TBM	31.03.2026	E-auction	15:00
12	MAS-MPS-2026-2	Multi-purpose stall	PER	31.03.2026	E-auction	15:00
13	MAS-WVM-CGL	Water Vending Machine	CGL Cluster (15 locations at 10 stations)	31.03.2026	E-auction	15:00
14	Tender No. 26008	Catering stall / General Minor Unit	CGL	10.04.2026	E-Tender	15:00
15	Tender No. 25009	Catering stall / General Minor Unit	PON	10.04.2026	E-Tender	15:00
16	NFR-BSS-VLK	Battery Swapping Stations	VLK	30.03.2026	E-auction	15:30
17	NFR-MAS-GZ-2026	Gaming Zone	MAS	06.04.2026	E-auction	15:30
18	NFR-MAS-BR-26	Supply of sanitized quality bedroll services	16159/160, 12695/696 & 22639/640, 12671/672 & 12685/686	06.04.2026	E-auction	15:30
19	MAS-PARKING-26	Two Wheeler Parking	KVP	06.04.2026	E-auction	15:00
20	MAS-PARKING-26	Two Wheeler Parking	GI	06.04.2026	E-auction	15:00
21	MAS-PARKING-26	Mixed Parking	VLKY Part C and D	06.04.2026	E-auction	15:00

All other details can be viewed in the website - [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in).

Senior Divisional Commercial Manager / Chennai

## BJP Slams Revanth Reddy's 'Hate Speech' Bill as Politically Motivated

NV Subhash, BJP Chief Spokesperson and Media Incharge Telangana

HYDERABAD

The Telangana unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has launched a sharp and unequivocal attack on the Congress government led by Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, alleging that the proposed 'hate speech' legislation is a politically motivated instrument designed to target opposition voices rather than uphold communal harmony.

State BJP Chief Spokesperson and Media In-charge N.V. Subash questioned the very necessity of introducing a new law when robust provisions already exist under the Indian legal framework to deal with hate speech and incitement. "This raises a fundamental question - is this Bill intended to strengthen the rule of law, or to selectively silence dissent?" he asked. Subash expressed serious concern over what he described as glaring inconsistencies and hidden intent in the proposed legislation. He challenged the Congress government to clarify whether such a law would be applied uniformly, particularly to its perceived ally All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM),



whose leaders, he alleged, have repeatedly made provocative statements against the Hindu faith without facing adequate legal consequences.

"The credibility of this Bill hinges entirely on its impartial enforcement. Will the government act against those who openly insult Hindu beliefs and deities, or will selective silence continue under the guise of political convenience?" Subash asked, accusing the Congress of indulging in vote-bank politics at the cost of social harmony.

Drawing parallels with developments in Karnataka, Subash termed the Telangana proposal a "copy-paste exercise" of a similar law passed by the Congress government there. He noted that the Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Pre-

vention) Bill, 2025, has already drawn criticism from legal experts for vague definitions and disproportionately stringent penal provisions, raising concerns over potential misuse.

"The Telangana government appears to be replicating a flawed legislative model without addressing its inherent ambiguities. Laws that lack clarity often become tools of harassment rather than instruments of justice," he warned.

Subash further cautioned the Congress against what he described as legislative overreach driven by political insecurity. "History is replete with examples of governments that enacted draconian measures to suppress opposition, only to face the consequences when power changed hands. No party can assume permanence in a democracy," he said. The BJP also questioned the stance of AIMIM on the proposed legislation, stating that the party's position would be closely watched, as the provisions of the Bill, if applied fairly, would hold all political actors equally accountable. Reiterating its firm opposition, the BJP demanded that the Congress government either withdraw the Bill or subject it to wider public and legal scrutiny to ensure that it does not become a tool for political vendetta under the pretext of regulating speech.

## HAM model to transform road network across Telangana, says Komatireddy

HYDERABAD

Minister for Roads and Buildings Komatireddy Venkat Reddy informed that the State government has embarked on an ambitious road development programme under the Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM), aimed at transforming connectivity from villages to the State capital.

Addressing the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday, the Minister said the initiative would significantly upgrade road infrastructure across the Telangana State within the next two years.

He said that under HAM Phase-I, road works covering a total length of 6,092.37 km



have been taken up at an estimated cost of ₹13,006 crore and these works are being executed through 441 projects grouped into 34 packages.

"While tenders for 24 packages have already been received and are under scrutiny, the remaining 10 packages are expected to

complete the tender process within a week," he said.

Stating that the government is ensuring transparency and efficiency in execution, Komatireddy Venkat Reddy noted that a direct debit mechanism has been introduced to facilitate timely payments to contractors,

thereby expediting the pace of works. Komatireddy Venkat Reddy further said the government plans to invest around ₹20,000 crore to provide BT roads to every village, while strengthening connectivity at mandal, district and State levels. He said the focus is on developing a model road network with single-lane, double-lane and four-lane roads to meet future traffic demands.

The initiative is expected to substantially improve transport infrastructure and provide seamless connectivity, contributing to economic growth and public convenience across the State, Komatireddy added.



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## PONNAM LAUNCHES EV INCENTIVE SCHEME FOR GOVT EMPLOYEES

■ Up to 20% discount on EVs, with savings of up to 4 lakh per family. 5 lakh+ state govt employees to benefit

■ Transport Minister Ponnab Prabhakar: Our vision is to make Telangana a leader in sustainable mobility

■ Collaborations sealed with leading EV makers - Mahindra Electric, Ola Electric, Gravton Motors & Ather Energy

### HYDERABAD

In a landmark move, Telangana Transport Minister Ponnab Prabhakar today announced a first-of-its-kind initiative to encourage the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) as an eco-friendly alternative to fossil fuel-run vehicles.

To encourage this transition, Transport Minister Ponnab Prabhakar successfully secured discounts of up to 20% on electric two- and four-wheelers for state government employees. This was done after multiple rounds of negotiations with leading EV manufacturers Mahindra Electric, Ola Electric, Gravton Motors, and Ather Energy. This unique move could translate into savings of up to ₹4 lakh per employee for

around five lakh government employees across Telangana. This is the first such initiative in India in which a state government has specifically negotiated discounts from Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) for its employees to purchase EVs, going beyond conventional tax waivers to create a direct financial benefit for Government Employees.

While announcing the scheme, Transport Minister Ponnab Prabhakar said that the State was moving beyond mere encouragement by seeking to make EVs more affordable, accessible and practical for everyday use, beginning with incentives and measures aimed at government employees. "When our government fleet goes electric, everyone in Telangana breathes cleaner air. This is governance that serves both people and the planet," said Minister Ponnab Prabhakar.

Earlier too, in 2024, within a year of taking office, the Telangana government, under Transport Minister Ponnab Prabhakar had announced and executed 100% exemption from road tax and registration fees for electric vehicles, including two-wheelers, four-wheelers, taxis, autorickshaws, goods carriers, tractors, and buses, as part of its public EV policy. "With the additional 20% purchase discount, on top of the existing 100% exemp-



tion from road tax and registration fees, Telangana is making EV ownership among the most affordable in the country. By empowering government employees as early adopters, we are accelerating the transition towards cleaner mobility across society," said Minister Ponnab Prabhakar.

The announcement follows a clear directive from Telangana Chief Minister Anumula Revanth Reddy, who has mandated that all government departments must henceforth purchase only EVs. Even vehicles hired by government departments within core urban areas must now be electric, signalling Telangana's commitment to building a clean and sustainable transport ecosystem. In a major

achievement, the state already operates more than 2,800 electric buses as part of its public transport fleet.

It is to be noted that the "up to 20%" discount is secured through OEM negotiations under a bulk institutional framework and does not involve direct budgetary subsidy. Further, Minister Ponnab Prabhakar added that he is actively engaging with leading EV manufacturers such as Tata EV and other Indian companies to expand partnerships and ensure more choices, better technology, and greater accessibility for consumers in Telangana.

We want Telangana to be a leader when it comes to building an ecosystem that supports innovation, clean

energy, and future-ready transportation. Our goal is simple - cleaner air, lower fuel dependence, and a future where Telangana becomes a model state for green mobility in India," said Minister Ponnab Prabhakar.

In a strong bid to encourage EV adoption, Minister Ponnab Prabhakar stated that to support this transition, charging infrastructure will be expanded across the state - from the Telangana Secretariat to district and mandal-level government offices, as well as major public parking spaces ensuring convenience and confidence for EV users. At the same time, he has also called on hotels, malls, commercial complexes, and public parks to set up EV charging facilities, making charging accessible in everyday parking spaces.

We don't want Hyderabad to go the Delhi way (with respect to pollution levels). Nearly one lakh auto-rickshaws currently running on petrol, diesel or gas will be retrofitted with electric kits. Along with the introduction of 2800 EV buses, these initiatives will significantly reduce vehicular pollution and promote cleaner urban transport. From a consumption standpoint, Telangana is positioning itself as an EV hub, which will, in turn, attract production companies as well," said Transport Minister Ponnab Prabhakar.



## BJP chief asked party workers to visit villages and expose state Cong govt

### HYDERABAD

BJP State President N Ramchander Rao today asserted that the BJP is an ideological and cadre-based party and every worker must be prepared to take the party's programs, ideology and discipline to the public.

Rao was addressing a mandal level Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Prashikshan Abhiyan program held in Kothakota in Mahabubnagar district in which karyakartas of four mandals participated.

He emphasized that the BJP is the only party in the world that trains lakhs of workers on such a scale. Our goal is to develop a leadership rooted in patriotism, discipline, and a spirit of service.

He said that the BJP believes in the "Nation First" philosophy which means Nation first, Party next and Family last.

Despite global wars and instability, India stands as a powerful nation due to the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he said adding that stability and development were progressing steadily, and it was the responsibility of every worker to convey this to the people.

Rao alleged that both Congress and BRS prioritize family and power politics over national interest. The people have observed family rule and corruption under BRS and now the Congress government was running "commission-based" politics. In these circumstances, BJP is the only alternative for the people, he averred.

BJP State Chief maintained

that the people of Telangana have seen the rule of both BRS and Congress and are now seeking change. There is a clear sentiment among the public to give BJP a chance for good governance.

He said people of all walks of life including youth and women, joining in the BJP which is a visible reality at the field level, making a BJP government in Telangana a certainty in the coming days.

Highlighting the central government's welfare schemes, Rao said the Center is implementing numerous programs like free rice, investment support for farmers, National Highways and water projects under Sinchayee Yojana. While all funds and schemes for development come from the Center, the Congress government is spreading lies claiming the Center does nothing.

He alleged that the funds allocated under the PM Awas Yojana are being diverted by the State Government under different names for "commission politics." Party workers must go to the village level and expose these truths to the people, he said.

Rao said the BJP started with just two seats, but through the hard work of Karyakartas and the sacrifices of leaders, it is now in power in 21 states. With the same spirit, we must bring the BJP to power in Telangana, he roared.

He said social media is a powerful tool and must be used responsibly and suggested everyone should utilize it to take the party's ideology and Central schemes to the masses.

## Tow-day National Conference on "Beyond Boundaries: The New ODL Landscape"

### HYDERABAD

The Indian Distance Education Association (IDEA), in collaboration with Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU), hosting in association with Indra Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Telangana Council for Higher Education, and INFLIBNET, is organizing a two-day National Conference titled "BEYOND BOUNDARIES: THE NEW ODL LANDSCAPE" on March 25 & 26 at BRAOU. The conference aims to deliberate on the evolving dimensions of Open and Distance Learning (ODL), focusing on digital transformation, policy frameworks, and inclusive access to education.

The conference will commence with an Inaugural Session presided over by Prof. Ghanta Chakrapani, Vice Chancellor, BRAOU. Anand Rao Vishnu Patil, IAS, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Education, Government of India, will attend as Special Guest. Prof. Uma Kanjilal, Vice Chancellor, IGNOU, will be the Chief Guest. Prof. Saji Gopinath, Vice Chancellor, Digital University, Kerala, will participate as Distinguished Guest.

The keynote address will be delivered by Prof. V. S. Prasad, Former Director, NAAC. Guests of Honour include Prof. K. Seetharama Rao, President, IDEA, and Prof. Murali Manohar, Honorary President, IDEA. Prof. Pushpa Chakrapani, Director (Academic) will serve as Conference Director, and Dr. L. V. K. Reddy, Registrar,

as Secretary General. A Round Table Meeting on "Digital Technologies: Future of ODL" will be held, chaired by Prof. Ghanta Chakrapani, with distinguished panellists from leading institutions across the country and abroad. In the afternoon, a Plenary Session on "ONOS and INFLIBNET Services to Academic Community" will feature experts from INFLIBNET. This will be followed by parallel technical sessions focusing on "Expanding Access: Reaching the Unreached."

The second day will begin with the Prof. G. Ram Reddy Endowment Lecture on "Open Distance Policy and Leadership: From Compliance to Critical Engagement," to be delivered by Prof. Sanjay Mishra, Digital Learning Specialist, and former COEL Educational Technologist. A panel discussion on "Dual Mode Universities: Issues and Challenges" will follow, along with multiple parallel technical sessions addressing key themes in ODL.

The conference will conclude with the Valedictory Session, presided over by Prof. Ghanta Chakrapani. Dr. Yogitha Rana, IAS, Principal Secretary, Education, Government of Telangana, will be the Chief Guest. Guest of Honour Prof. Navin Chandra Lohani, Vice Chancellor, Uttarakhand Open University.

In addition to the various sessions, the conference will feature eight technical sessions, during which approximately 90 research papers will be presented.

## Media plays vital role in building public trust

NTPC ED Chandan Kumar Samanta

Dr Srinivas Vooradi

### PEDDAPALLI

NTPC Ramagundam & Telangana held its annual Press Meet for the financial year 2025-26, welcoming mediapersons from Ramagundam, Godavari, Jyothinagar, and Karimnagar along with the senior officials from the organization. Speaking on the occasion, Executive Director Chandan Kumar Samanta provided valuable insights into the organization's operational performance, its achievements, and future objectives. He underscored NTPC's dedication to operational excellence, sustainability, and dependable power generation, while also highlighting the media's vital role in driving transparency and building public trust. Chandan Kumar expressed grat-



itude for the ongoing support from journalists, which plays a key role in effectively communicating NTPC's initiatives and successes to the community. "This programme is a significant opportunity to foster communication and engagement between NTPC and representatives from both print and electronic media," he remarked. Several senior officials including GM (O&M)

Telangana Mukul Rai, GM (O&M) Ramagundam Manish Aggarwal, GM (Maintenance & ADM) Abhijit Dutta, GM (Projects) Binoy Jose, HOD (TS) D.S. Rawat, and AGM (HR) Bijoy Kumar Sikdar, were also present and shared their insights during the proceedings. Later, the dignitaries were honored by the NTPC employees reflecting the organization's respect and gratitude.



Ahead of Sri Rama Navami, an artist gives the final touches to beautifully crafted idols of Lord Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, and Hanuman at an idol-making unit in Dhoopet, Hyderabad. The workshop, bustling with activity, showcases artisans working long hours to meet the festive demand.

## Geetha Murthy attended as a special guest Sri Rama Navami

### NIZAMABAD

In the mandal headquarters of Pothangal in Nizamabad district, special rituals were conducted today at the very ancient Sri Ram Temple on the occasion of Sri Rama Navami. Chandhi Yagam and Vishnu Yagam were performed.

Under the leadership of the temple founders—Brahma Shri Sriram Bharat, Brahma Shri Srinivas, and Brahma Shri Gajanan Srinivas—Vedic scholars Brahma Shri Satish, Brahma Shri Ananth Maharaj, and Brahma Shri Raju Maharaj conducted the homams (sacred fire rituals) in a grand manner.

Mandal BJP leaders Pabba Shekhar, Srikar Maharaj, Shekhar Set, Gandha-



pu Hanumanlu, Pagala Naveen, Raju, Nagayya, Gangaram, along with village elders Kishan Rao, Krishna Veni, Lalita Sharma, Leelavathi, and others participated. On this occasion, BJP National Council member Geeta Murthy attended as a special guest and took part in the homam.

## "Vote for equality": BC leaders push for representation in bar polls

### HYDERABAD

BC Dal National President Dundra Kumaraswamy has urged the advocates to elect Backward Class (BC) candidates in the upcoming Bar Association elections on March 26. Calling for unity under the slogan "BC votes for BCs", he said equitable representation in the judiciary is essential for social justice.

Addressing a gathering during campaigning at the High Court here on Tuesday, he met BC candidates and stressed that the elections are a "defining moment" for the legal fraternity. Highlighting underrepresentation, he said systemic barriers - not lack of merit - have kept BC advocates out of key positions. Kumaraswamy expressed concern over the lack of adequate representation of BC communi-



ties in the judiciary. He stressed the need for strategic and united voting to enhance the presence of BC advocates in institutional structures.

He observed that the discourse on social justice and equality in the judiciary has become imperative in the present context. "Justice is not confined to courtrooms alone; it attains true meaning only when it reaches every section of soci-

ety and every social group", he added. "Every vote is a step towards equality in the judiciary," he asserted, invoking Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision of inclusive justice. Later, BC advocates and leaders of various BC organizations took a pledge of unity, reiterating the call for consolidating BC votes. Advocates Om Prakash, Sai Sarika Chandana and others participated in the programme.

## Senior Maoist leader Paparao surrenders



HYDERABAD: In Bijapur, senior Maoist leader Paparao, also known as Sunnam Chandrayya, has surrendered. He surrendered before the Bijapur SP along with his 17 associates. Police have seized a large quantity of weapons from them. A reward of ₹2 crore had been announced on Paparao, who belongs to the Bastar region, and more than 50 cases have been registered against him.

## All 'Bhadrakali' Temple Works to Be Completed by Year-End, says Minister Sridhar Babu

### HYDERABAD/WARANGAL

IT, Industries and Legislative Affairs Minister D. Sridhar Babu announced that all development works at the Bhadrakali Ammavari Temple in Warangal will be completed within the next nine months, restoring the temple's grandeur.

Responding to a question raised by MLC Pochampalli Srinivas Reddy during the Legislative Council Question Hour, the Minister said that Ministers Konda Surekha and Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy have conducted several review meetings and provided guidance on the temple works. They have also visited the temple and given multiple suggestions to officials.

Sridhar Babu stated that the state government is firmly committed to restoring the historic and spiritual significance of the temple. He assured that all works—including mada streets, compound wall construction, gardening, and public amenities—will be complet-



ed without any shortcomings by the end of the year.

"We will ensure that all works are completed on a fast track. We will deliver on our promise," he said. The Minister pointed out that the previous government had issued Government

Orders (GOs) allocating ₹30 crore under the Bhadrakali Temple master plan, but the funds were never released, leaving the plan unimplemented. "Now, we have allocated the necessary funds and are committed to the temple's development," he added.

## Nagpur to host RSS top body meet in March 2027

NAGPUR: (MAR 24)

The next annual meeting of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's top decision-making body - Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS) - will be held in Nagpur in March 2027, an office-bearer of the organisation said on Tuesday. This year's ABPS concluded in Haryana's Samalkha on March 15. The meeting reviewed activities from 2025-26 across the RSS prants and discussed the 'Panch Parivartan' (five transformations) campaign to be implemented through the 'shakhas' and other factors.

## Are you prepared to protect Indians? MK Stalin attacks PM over Iran war response

NEW DELHI: MAR 24

**MK Stalin attacks PM Modi's 'be prepared' remark, questions if the Centre is ready to protect citizens amid the West Asia crisis.**

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Tuesday launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his call for people to be prepared for the impacts of the West Asian crisis. Stalin questioned whether it is the public or the government that needs to be prepared, and asked if the Prime Minister himself is ready to safeguard the people. Addressing Parliament on Monday, Prime



Minister Narendra Modi, while speaking on the ongoing conflict, urged that, much like during the Covid pandemic, "we must be prepared" for the fallout of the West Asia war. Slamming the remarks, Stalin said preparedness is the government's responsibility and "cannot be outsourced to the people". "Prepared for what -- the leadership, or its absence?"

Honourable Prime Minister, who needs to be prepared, the Union government or the people of the country?" Stalin asked in a social media post.

He further pointed out that Opposition parties had, at an early stage, urged the government to act proactively and had protested in Parliament against what they described as a lack of foresight and pre-

caution. He alleged that even Opposition-ruled states took steps without waiting for the Centre, but received no response. "After all this, you are advising that 'people should be prepared'. Before telling citizens to be prepared, are you prepared to protect them? What precautionary measures have you taken to shield Indians from the impact of the West Asia war?" he asked. The DMK leader added, "The country now has only one question: Is the Prime Minister prepared to protect us?" Preparedness cannot be outsourced to the people. In his address, the Prime Minister highlighted the escalating conflict in West Asia, now in its fourth week, and warned that

it poses significant challenges for India, particularly in terms of energy security and trade disruptions. "The situation in West Asia is worrisome. This conflict has been ongoing for over three weeks. It is severely impacting the global economy and people's lives, which is why the world is urging all sides to move towards an early resolution," Modi said.

He cautioned that the conflict could have long-term consequences and emphasised that India has consistently called for de-escalation. Stressing that dialogue and diplomacy remain the only viable solutions, the Prime Minister said the country must be prepared for the lasting impact of the US-Israel-Iran conflict.

## Special Trains between Hubballi and Rameswaram

HUBBALLI, MARCH 24:

South Western Railway will operate nine-trip special trains between SSS Hubballi and Rameswaram to clear the extra rush of passengers during the summer season. Train No. 07355 SSS Hubballi - Rameswaram Weekly Express Special will leave SSS Hubballi at 06:50 AM on 05th, 12th, 19th & 26th April and 03rd, 10th, 17th, 24th & 31st May 2026 (Sundays) and will reach Rameswaram at 05:20 AM the next day. In the return direction, Train No. 07356 Rameswaram - SSS Hubballi Weekly Express Special will depart from Rameswaram at 08:00 PM on 06th, 13th, 20th & 27th April and 04th, 11th, 18th & 25th May and 01st June 2026 (Mondays) and will arrive at SSS Hubballi at 07:40

PM on the next day. These trains will run for nine trips (services) in each direction.

Enroute, the train will have stoppages at SMM Haveri, Ranibennur, Harihar, Davangere, Chikajalur, Birur, Arsikere, Tiptur, Tumkur, Banaswadi, Hosur, Dharmapuri, Salem, Namakkal, Karur, Tiruchchirappalli, Pudukkottai, Karaikkudi, Sivaganga, Manamadurai and Ramanathapuram in both directions. The special train will consist of one AC First Class Coach, Two AC Two Tier Coaches, Three AC Three Tier Coaches, Six Sleeper Class Coaches, Four General Second Class Coaches, One Pantry Car, One Generator-cum-brake van and One Second Class Luggage-cum-Brake Van/Divyangjan friendly. Advance reservation for the above special trains is open.

## Naidu orders probe into Amaravati fire conspiracy

AMARAVATI, MARCH 24

Taking a serious note of a series of fire incidents in Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday directed officials to uncover the truth behind these incidents. The Chief Minister ordered an investigation to determine whether the series of fire accidents taking place since the formation of the coalition government are accidents or if there is a conspiracy angle behind them. Noting the sequence of events and the manner in which they are occurring, the Chief Minister expressed suspicion that a conspiracy might be involved and directed officials to conduct a deeper inquiry into the matter from every possible angle. According to an official release, he instructed officials to analyse whether a conspiracy exists—taking into account both past incidents and the accidents currently occurring in the capital region—and to bring the facts to light. Chief Minister Chandrababu held a review meeting in his chamber at the Secretariat with DGP Harish Kumar Gupta,



Guntur SP Vakul Jindal, and Intelligence Chief Mahesh Kumar Laddha regarding the incident on Monday night in Rayapudi, where pipes belonging to a construction firm were gutted by fire near the HOD Towers construction site. During the meeting, officials briefed the Chief Minister on the details of the incident. The Chief Minister inquired about the exact time the accident occurred and the specific time the fire department received the distress call regarding the blaze. He also sought to understand the reasons why the fire spread so rapidly at the accident site. The Chief Minister directed officials to identify the causes of the incident through forensic analysis. "Large-scale

construction activities are currently underway in the capital city. Materials worth crores of rupees have been stockpiled across the capital region. Work is progressing at a rapid pace. Incidents occurring at such a critical juncture could create unnecessary impediments. Against this backdrop, there is an urgent need to implement robust security measures," he said. The Chief Minister told the officials that additional patrolling must be conducted throughout the capital region, particularly in areas where construction work is in progress. Every construction firm must mandatorily install CCTV cameras within the yards where they store their materials.

## Andhra: Jagan thanks PM Modi for FCRA renewal for Rural Development Trust

AMARAVATI, MARCH 24

Former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Tuesday welcomed the renewal of FCRA permissions for the Rural Development Trust (RDT) and thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah for the decision. He stated that the renewal under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act will ensure the continuation of RDT's vital services in education, health-care, environment, and social development across the undivided Anantapur district, significantly benefiting the poor and vulnerable sections who depend on the organisation.

The YSR Congress Party chief, however, criticised Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu for attempting to claim credit for the renewal, questioning why it took nearly a year to restore permissions that were halted on April 21, 2025.

He pointed out that the delay was due to inaction, which forced people, along



with YSRCP and civil society groups, to launch sustained protests demanding restoration. He asserted that the renewal was achieved through public pressure and collective struggle, not through any initiative from the ruling leadership, adding that attempts to portray it otherwise amount to mere publicity stunts and credit appropriation. Earlier, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu took to 'X' to thank Prime Minister Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and the Central Government for resolving the issue concerning foreign funding for RDT, which has been providing wonderful services to the

poor for decades. He noted that the Rural Development Trust offers various services to the poor in thousands of villages across Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

A previous decision to halt funds coming from abroad to voluntary organisations under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act had created obstacles for the organisation's services.

"However, upon explaining the services provided by the organisation and submitting a petition to the Union Home Minister to resolve this issue, with his special intervention, the hurdles have been cleared today. By granting permission to RDT for fund collection under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, the Central Government has paved the way for the smooth inflow of funds. On behalf of the lakhs of poor people benefiting through this Trust, I express my thanks to the Central Government for taking into consideration the requests from the state governments," posted CM Chandrababu Naidu.



## "Simha Garjana" Heat Rises in Kakinada

BCY Party Cadres March to the Collectorate

BY DR SUNEELKUMAR YANDRA,

Pitapuram, March 24 : Responding to a call issued by Bode Ramachandra Yadav, the Founder-President of the Bharatha Chaitanya Yuvajana Party (BCY), members of the party's district committee mobilized in large numbers on Tuesday, marching to the Kakinada Collectorate to meet with the Collector and submit a memorandum. They firmly demanded the immediate implementation of five key demands that the party had put forward during the "Simha Garjana" (Lion's Roar) event. Speaking at a subsequent press conference, Seeram Srinu, the BCY Party Convener for Pitapuram, warned the government against delaying matters concerning BC (Backward Class) rights and urged it to take immediate action. He made it clear that if these five demands—namely, the immediate implementation of the BC Protection Act; the allocation of 1,000 acres of

land to BCs within the capital region; the release of adequate funds to BC caste corporations; the conduct of a comprehensive caste census across the state; and the provision of 44% reservations for BCs in education, employment, local bodies, and legislative assemblies—are not met, the party would further intensify its agitation across the entire state. Furthermore, he announced that, under the leadership of Party President Bode Ramachandra Yadav, the party is preparing to undertake a hunger strike unto death in Vijayawada on April 11th. Kakinada District Convener Rayudu Nageshwar, Pitapuram Convener Seeram Srinu, Prathipadu Convener Gopma Sivakumar, PAC AP member Rayudu Sudhakar, Kakinada Town youth leader Palepu Ganesh, Shanti, Devi, Ginjala Raja, Kurandasa Ramesh, Kundaala Srinu, Gorla Shivaji, Kolluboyena Ganesh, along with other party leaders and activists, participated in this program.

## Minister Gottipati Calls for Swift Grounding of Renewable Energy Projects

AMARAVATI:

Andhra Pradesh Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar conducted a high-level review meeting on the implementation of renewable energy projects undertaken by industrial investors across the state. The meeting was held at the Secretariat on Tuesday, with participation from Brookfield-Axis representatives and senior officials from NREDCAP. During the review, the Minister assessed the progress of renewable energy projects currently under various stages of construction statewide. He emphasized the need to expedite execution, directing investors to ensure timely completion and move swiftly towards commissioning with-

out delays. He also urged stakeholders to immediately bring any ground-level challenges to the government's attention for prompt resolution.

Reaffirming the government's strong commitment, the Minister assured full support to investors, including facilitation of land availability, infrastructure, and necessary clearances. He instructed officials to proactively eliminate bottlenecks and ensure a seamless implementation environment. Aligned with Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's vision, the state is advancing an Integrated Clean Energy Policy aimed at attracting large-scale investments while simultaneously generating significant employment opportunities for youth.

## Naxal insurgency hit hard 256 Maoists killed, 1562 surrendered in 2025

RAIPUR, MARCH 24

Security forces have delivered a crippling blow to the Naxalite movement in 2025, with official figures revealing massive gains in the fight against left-wing extremism across central and eastern India. The data paints a picture of a rapidly weakening Maoist outfit, marked by heavy losses in encounters, mass surrenders, and the elimination of key leadership. According to the latest statistics received from police and security personnel, they engaged in 99 fierce encounters with Naxalites throughout the year. In these operations, 256 Naxals were killed, while 884 were arrested. In a major morale



booster for the forces, a record 1,562 Naxalites surrendered. Security teams also seized 645 weapons and recovered as many as 875 Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) from the militants. The operations, however, came at a cost; 23 jawans were martyred in the line of duty. Naxalites, in retaliation, killed 46 innocent

civilians during the year. Compounding the setback for the outlawed CPI (Maoist), the last one-and-a-half years have seen the elimination of more than twenty top Naxal leaders, severely disrupting the group's command structure. Prominent casualties include: Madvi Hidma and Madvi Hidma alias Santosh - both Central Com-

mittee members, Baswaraju, who was General Secretary and Politburo member, Jayaram alias Chalapati, Vivek alias Prayag Manjhi, Narsimha Chalam alias Gautam, Gajara-la Ravi, Modhem Balkrishna alias Bhaskar, Sahdev Soren alias Prayag, Raju alias Katta Ramchandra Reddy, Kosa alias Kadri Satyanarayana Reddy, Ganesh alias Chamaru Dada - all Central Committee members. Several Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee Members (DKSZCM) were also neutralised, including Sudhir alias Sudhakar, Kuhadani Jagdish, Renuka alias Bhanu, Jangu Naveen alias Madhu, Munda-gula Bhaskar Rao, Randhir, Neeti alias Nirmala, Rupesh, Joganna, Dasru, and Raju.

## Andhra: All households to get safe drinking water by 2028

AMARAVATI, MARCH 24

All households in Andhra Pradesh will have access to safe drinking water by 2028 under the Jal Jeevan Mission 2.0. Officials from the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti and the Andhra Pradesh government formally signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) 2.0 in New Delhi today. Union Minister for Jal Sakti C.R. Paatil praised the efforts of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu in extending the Jal Jeevan Mission until 2028. He also urged the Centre to extend support for completing the Polavaram Project by the time of the Godavari Pushkarams. Union Minister C. R. Paatil highlighted that in the first phase of the mission, tap connections were provided to 16 crore households across the country, while another 3 crore households are yet to be covered. He suggested involving DWACRA women's groups in Andhra Pradesh to conduct water quality testing, thereby empowering rural women. He further noted that the mission has already reduced the burden of fetching water for nearly 9 crore women nationwide.

## Changes in the Pattern of Train Services

CHENNAI, MARCH 24:

In view of Non interlocking work at Coimbatore North yard in Salem Division, the following changes have been made in the pattern of train services.

### Diversion of Train Services:

1. Train No. 22816 Ernakulam Jn - Bilaspur Superfast Express scheduled to leave Ernakulam Jn at 08.40 hrs on 25th March, 2026 will be diverted to run via Podanur, Irugur skipping stoppage at Coimbatore. Additional Stoppage will be provided at Podanur with timings 13.10 (Arr)/13.15 hrs (Dep)
2. Train No. 22619 Bilaspur - Tirunelveli Superfast Express scheduled to leave Bilaspur at 08.15 hrs on 24th March, 2026 will be diverted to run via Podanur, Irugur skipping stoppage at Coimbatore. Additional Stoppage will be provided at Podanur with timings 15.42

- (Arr)/15.45 hrs (Dep)
3. Train No. 12675 Dr MGR Chennai Central - Coimbatore Kovai Superfast Express scheduled to leave Dr MGR Chennai Central at 06.10 hrs on 25th & 29th March, 2026 will be diverted to run via Irugur and Podanur skipping stoppage at Coimbatore. Additional Stoppage will be provided at Podanur.
4. Train No. 12243 Dr MGR Chennai Central - Coimbatore Shatabdi Express scheduled to leave Dr MGR Chennai Central at 07.15 hrs on 29th March, 2026 will be diverted to run via Irugur and Podanur skipping stoppage at Coimbatore. Additional Stoppage will be provided at Podanur.
5. Train No. 12970 Jaipur - Coimbatore Superfast Express Scheduled to leave Jaipur at 19.35hrs on 24th March, 2026 will be diverted to run via Podanur and Irugur skipping stoppage at Coimbatore. Additional Stoppage will be provided at Podanur.

6. Train No. 22670 Patna - Ernakulam Superfast Express scheduled to leave Patna at 16.30 hrs on 24th March, 2026 will be diverted to run via Podanur and Irugur skipping stoppage at Coimbatore. Additional Stoppage will be provided at Podanur with timings 15.42 (Arr)/15.45 hrs (Dep)
7. Train No. 13352 Alappuzha - Dhanbad express scheduled to leave Alappuzha at 06.00 hrs on 29th March, 2026 will be diverted to run via Irugur and Podanur skipping stoppage at Coimbatore. Additional Stoppage will be provided at Podanur with timings 12.15 (Arr)/12.20 hrs (Dep)
8. Train No. 22620 Tirunelveli - Bilaspur Superfast Express scheduled to leave Tirunelveli at 01.25 hrs on 29th March, 2026 will be diverted to run via Podanur and Irugur skipping stoppage at Coimbatore. Additional Stoppage will be provided at Podanur.

9. Train No. 12512 Thiruvananthapuram North - Gorakhpur Raptisagar Express leaving Thiruvananthapuram North at 06.35 hrs on 29th March, 2026 will be diverted to run via Irugur and Podanur skipping stoppage at Coimbatore. Additional Stoppage will be provided at Podanur with timings 15.20 (Arr)/15.25 hrs (Dep)
10. Train No. 20630 Thiruvananthapuram Central - Secunderabad Sabari Superfast Express scheduled to leave Thiruvananthapuram Central at 06.45 hrs on 29th March, 2026 will be diverted to run via Irugur and Podanur skipping stoppage at Coimbatore. Additional Stoppage will be provided at Podanur. With timings 15.35 (Arr)/15.40 hrs (Dep)
11. Train No. 16160 Mangaluru Central - Chennai Egmore Express scheduled to leave

- Mangaluru Central at 06.45 hrs on 29th March, 2026 will be diverted to run via Irugur and Podanur skipping stoppage at Coimbatore. Additional stoppage will be provided at Podanur with timings 15.57 (Arr)/16.00 hrs (Dep)
12. Train No. 12626 New Delhi - Thiruvananthapuram Central Kerala Express scheduled to leave New Delhi at 20.10 hrs on 27th March, 2026 will be diverted to run via Irugur and Podanur skipping stoppage at Coimbatore. Additional stoppage will be provided at Podanur with timings 12.30 (Arr)/12.35 hrs (Dep)
13. Train No. 12675 Dr MGR Chennai Central - Coimbatore Kovai Express scheduled to leave Dr MGR Chennai Central at 06.10 hrs on 29th March, 2026 will be diverted to run via Irugur and Podanur skipping stoppage at Coimbatore. Additional stoppage will be provided at Podanur

14. Train No. 12243 Dr MGR Chennai Central - Coimbatore Shatabdi Express scheduled to leave Dr MGR Chennai Central at 07.15 hrs on 29th March, 2026 will be diverted to run via Irugur and Podanur skipping stoppage at Coimbatore. Additional stoppage will be provided at Podanur

### Change in Origin of Train Services:

1. Train No. 12676 Coimbatore - Dr MGR Chennai Central Kovai Express scheduled to leave Coimbatore at 15.15 hrs on 25th & 29th March, 2026 will originate from Podanur at 15.15 hrs. The train will be diverted to run via Podanur and Irugur
2. Train No. 12244 Coimbatore - Dr MGR Chennai Central Shatabdi Express scheduled to leave Coimbatore at 15.05 hrs on 25th & 29th March, 2026 will originate from Podanur at 15.05 hrs. The train will be diverted to run via Podanur and Irugur

EDITORIAL

Special on Martyrdom Day (25 March) of Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi

A LABORATORY OF LOYALTIES:  
THE BJP'S QUEST FOR  
DOMINANCE IN ASSAM

The BJP is seeking a third consecutive term in Assam in Assembly polls on April 9, 2026, while the Congress is fighting to make a comeback after 10 years in the wilderness. In 2021, the coalition of BJP, AGP and UPPL won 75 of 126 seats, with the BJP alone winning 60. Communal mobilisation and welfare schemes make the standard BJP toolkit here too, but Assam is a unique theatre of political experimentation for the party and its governments at the State and the Centre. Conflicts over large-scale migration of Bengali-speaking people have long shaped Assam's politics. Nativist politics developed primarily in opposition to this migration. The BJP's growth has come by recasting that nativism into a question of Hindu-Muslim conflict, creating a new political dynamic weakening subnational outfits and pressuring the Congress. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 enacted a communal eligibility clause for people who entered India from Bangladesh. Nativist opposition to citizenship for any immigrant — including Hindus — and other factors stalled the large-scale rollout of the law, but rhetoric over demographic change remains the mainstay of politics. This will be the first Assembly poll after the 2023 delimitation of constituencies, which has displayed patterns of communal gerrymandering, reducing the impact of Muslim voters and enhancing representation for indigenous communities. BJP functionaries, including Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, have been open about the intended impact.

Meanwhile, the BJP continues to recruit leaders from the Congress. The AIUDF, mainly representing Bengali-speaking Muslims in lower Assam and the Barak Valley, contributed to the collapse of the Congress in 2016, now fights for survival, contesting alone after exclusion from the Congress-led Opposition alliance. The Congress has allied with the Rajjor Dal, led by activist Akhil Gogoi, and the AJP, a party born from the anti-CAA movement that channels renewed Assamese subnationalism among younger voters. Their common ground is the promise of democratic governance, land rights, and inclusive development. The AGP, once the torch-bearer of Assamese regionalism, is a junior NDA partner contesting 26 seats, its independent ideological space largely absorbed by its larger ally. In Bodoland, the BJP has replaced its 2021 partner, the UPPL, with the BPF, an older formation. In 2021, the BJP had managed to subsume most regional sentiment through alliances and the recasting of the migration debate. Big infrastructure projects are presented as milestones, but allegations of crony capitalism and disregard for the environment are serious. Such substantive questions get sidelined as fear rather than hope dominates.

Ideals of Journalism and the Relevance of Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi

Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi was one of the immortal pioneers of Indian journalism, whose fearless writing not only shook the foundations of British rule but also spread the message of justice and communal harmony in society. Such was the power of his revolutionary journalism that the British government sentenced him five times to rigorous imprisonment and fines for his writings. His articles carried such force that they robbed the colonial rulers of their peace. Whenever his pen moved, it shook the very roots of British authority. Because of his unmatched revolutionary journalism, Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi and his newspaper Pratap are still regarded as ideals in the field of journalism today. He was a fearless journalist, social worker, great revolutionary, and freedom fighter. Not only was he an exceptional journalist himself, but he also inspired and trained many young people to become writers, journalists, and poets. Due to his active participation in various Congress movements and his bold writings against British atrocities in Pratap, he was imprisoned five times. Whenever he was arrested, stalwarts of literature like Makhanlal Chaturvedi and Balkrishna Sharma 'Naveen' would take over the editing of Pratap in his absence.

Born on 26 October 1890 in the Atarsuiya locality of Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, in the home of a school headmaster, Jayanarayan, Vidyarthi received his early education in Urdu and English. During his time in Allahabad, he developed a strong inclination toward journalism. He began assisting Pandit Sundar Lal in

editing the Hindi weekly Karmayogi. While teaching in Kanpur, he contributed articles to Karmayogi and several other newspapers, thereby deeply connecting himself with the freedom movement through journalism. Eventually, he adopted the surname "Vidyarthi," reflecting his lifelong commitment to learning, and thus became known as Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi.

Impressed by his remarkable writing style, the pioneer of Hindi journalism, Pandit Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi, offered him the position of assistant editor in his literary magazine Saraswati in 1911. However, Vidyarthi Ji was more inclined toward current affairs, political issues, and burning social questions. Therefore, instead of accepting Dwivedi Ji's offer, he joined Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya's Hindi weekly Abhyudaya.

On 9 November 1913, he launched his own newspaper Pratap from Kanpur, marking the beginning of his journey as a revolutionary journalist. Through Pratap, he highlighted the sufferings of farmers, laborers, and the oppressed who were crushed under British rule. Raising a voice against oppression and injustice became the central pillar of his journalism—something the British government could not tolerate. As a result, he had to face numerous lawsuits, heavy fines, and repeated imprisonments.

In 1920, he started the daily edition of Pratap, which became a strong advocate for farmers, workers, and the marginalized. Apart from Pratap, he also published a literary magazine Prabha and a politi-

cal monthly journal.

An important incident occurred in January 1921, when a landlord, Sardar Veerpal Singh of Rae Bareilly, ordered firing on farmers. Vidyarthi Ji published a detailed account of this incident in Pratap, for which he and the printer Shivnarayan Mishra were charged with defamation and sent to jail. On 16 October 1921, he voluntarily courted arrest and was released on 22 May 1922. During his imprisonment, he maintained a diary, and after his release, he published a series titled Glimpses of Prison Life, which gained immense popularity and expanded the readership of Pratap. Thereafter, the British government left no opportunity to harass him, yet Vidyarthi never deviated from his revolutionary ideals.

Soon after his release, he was again arrested on charges of delivering provocative speeches and was released in 1924 when his health deteriorated severely. In 1925, he was elected from Kanpur to the legislative assembly and was also appointed the Prime Minister (Chairman) of the Reception Committee for the Kanpur session of the Congress. However, in 1929, he resigned from the assembly at the request of the party. In 1930, he was elected President of the Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee and was entrusted with the responsibility of leading the Civil Disobedience Movement across the province. During this period, he was again arrested and imprisoned, and was released on 9 March 1931 following the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.

During the freedom struggle, Hindus and Muslims were united in their

fight against British rule. However, the British adopted a divisive policy, inflaming communal sentiments and triggering riots across the country. Kanpur too was engulfed in communal violence. Deeply distressed by these riots, Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi personally stepped forward to restore peace and harmony. He moved from place to place, persuading people to maintain brotherhood. In many instances, he succeeded and even saved thousands of lives.

However, during these efforts, he was trapped by a mob that did not recognize him. Despite extensive search, he could not be found. Eventually, his body was discovered among a heap of corpses in a hospital, so swollen that it was difficult to identify him. Despite saving countless lives, he himself fell victim to communal frenzy. Thus, just two days after the execution of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdev on 23 March 1931, the nation lost, on 25 March 1931, a fearless, impartial, honest, and revolutionary journalist whose pen had shaken the British Empire. His last rites were performed on 29 March 1931. Ironically, the very communal hatred and fanaticism against which he fought throughout his life ultimately claimed his life.



YOGESH KUMAR GOYAL

TIME — THE RISING EPIC

We were not merely children of time... we were time breathing in dust, blooming in wonder, becoming—without knowing we were becoming. Once life was not a race, but a rhythm; not a ladder, but a landscape. We held the sky in careless hands and called it play. Now the sky is smaller. It fits inside a screen. And we have grown... strangely diminished. Neon nights numb the nerve of knowing, endless echoes erode our ease; we are louder than ever before yet silence has never felt so far away. We were the wind unwritten, unrul'd, untamed; no metrics measured our meaning, no system stamped our souls. We learned from scraped knees and stubborn climbs, from laughter that lingered longer than pain, from falling... and rising without witness. Now we perform even our pain. Friendship, once rolled forward on rusted wheels: two hearts, one horizon, no destination needed. Now we travel at the speed of light, yet arrive nowhere. Connected—to everyone... and belonging to none. Once "Pass or Fail" was a phase, not a fate; we lost a mark, but never ourselves. Now numbers narrate our nervous existence, and worth is weighed on invisible scales. We have succeeded and still feel insufficient. A feather in a forgotten page

once carried the courage to dream; imagination was rebellion wild, radiant, free. Now dreams are filtered, approved, algorithmically allowed. And daring dies quietly. We ran barefoot on burning ground yet our hearts were oceans: cool, kind, unbound. Now we walk in comfort, and burn within. Once a teacher's glance was a compass, a quiet correction—a lifelong direction; respect was not demanded it was felt. Now voices rise, values fall, and roots are questioned... by those who forgot how to grow. We shared little and felt infinite. Now we possess plenty and feel incomplete. Hunger has changed not of the body... but of the being. We have the world yet miss the meaning. Love once lived in silence, in glances that spoke galaxies, in presence that needed no proof. Now love is loud, yet hollow; expressed in excess, experienced in fragments. A thousand words and not one truth. Once friendship was carved in stone. Now it flickers on glass. We swipe. We scroll. We start. We stop. But we do not stay. And yet ( pause ) Not all is lost. Somewhere beneath this noise, beyond this numbness, within this restless rush

there still lives... a quiet light. A voice ancient as innocence, soft as satya, strong as soul whispers: "Return not backward, but inward. Become not what the world demands, but what you once were... before the world named you." Rise not to outshine, but to outgrow not to conquer, but to complete. Let your roots drink deep from forgotten truths; let your vision touch heights untouched by haste. The past is not gone. It waits... as wisdom. The present is not pressure. It stands... as possibility. The future is not fate. It rests... in your hands. You are not just the sculptor You are the stone. So carve not a career alone, but a calling. Build—l not a name that shines, but a life that means. Let kindness be your quiet revolution. Let truth be your timeless rebellion. Yes we too were once an age... not a memory, but a flame. Now it is our turn to become an age again. Not louder but deeper. Not faster but truer. For the greatest victory is not in rushing ahead, but in rooting something that will outlive you. So be the dawn that does not demand attention, yet defeats the night.

... Dr. Peruka Raju ...  
7810032847

Ensuing Elections

DUBIOUS INTENT & PROMISES

BY DHURJATI MUKHERJEE

Lack of decency and morality are political trends reiterated by leaders. The clamour raised by some states and drama enacted specially by West Bengal, regarding SIR (special intensive revision) bear testimony they don't want the mandatory revision. Is it because the parties don't want elimination of false voters or have any other intention? The coming elections are a wake-up call for other more crucial elections in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra next year.

With election campaigning started with dates announced in four states and one UT, starting from April 9 in Puducherry and ending in West Bengal on April 29, political violence has already started. Also, in Tamil Nadu, successive Dravidian governments have invested in women-centric welfare schemes from marriage initiatives and TMC has followed in West Bengal. Similar initiatives also exist in Assam. However, whether these schemes help in improving conditions of rural women, needs a close watch.

It is generally believed that competitive welfarism shifts electoral politics away from male political brokers, who stitch together caste or religious coalitions. Across poll-bound states, young voters evaluate government less through ideological narratives than through perceived performance. Education and job opportunities are in a precarious condition in West Bengal and Assam but the governments in these states have done precious little.

It may also be mentioned that minority citizens in these poll-bound states exceed those in the rest of India. From an eighth in Tamil Nadu to two-fifths in Assam and Kerala and even in Bengal religious minorities matter electorally. Whether political misgovernance and wanton corruption will matter remains to be seen but the aspirational youth are disappointed with the leadership.

Apart from this, political leaders have started making promises as their only intention is to woo voters

and capture power by hook or by crook. There is no political ideology outlined by them, but dubious intentions and false promises are becoming manifest with each passing year. Added to this, violence before and after polls has led reinforced 'criminalisation of politics'.

This apart, dynasticism in politics has been manifest since the times of Indira Gandhi. It's well-known that collective federalism and inner-party democracy has been absent both at the Centre and in most states. While Vajpayee did not dominate his Cabinet the way that Modi does, state chief ministers never sought to speak in sycophantic terms of their prime minister as they do now. Since May 2014, much of the resources of the Union government and the ruling party have been used to boost the image of the Prime Minister, who carries in his person the past, the present and future of the Indian nation and of Indian civilization itself.

In the states also this is glaringly evident. The degradation of the Indian party system is complete with one set of political parties becoming family firms and another set becoming quasi-religious cults, exalting their leader as a religious god. It's quite discernible that the broader consequences of this depressing trend have led the country towards autocracy far away from democratic pluralism.

There is much talk of 'Viksit Bharat' and good governance, but doubts arise whether the current genre of political leaders have the capability to lead the country forward in a sincere and judicious manner. Undeniably, some politicians may be highly educated and sincere but are often side-tracked in their own parties while a small coterie wields power.

Politics in recent years has taken a new form. Though it can't be said it's not based on ideology, the manner of approach now lacks decency and moral values. There is no fellow-feeling in their addresses to the community but one based on castigating other opponents and

spreading venom and hatred. There is a steady rise of hate speech in public domain. In 2025, 1318 verified in-person hate speech events targeting religious minorities were documented by India Hate Lab across 21 states, one UT and NCR of Delhi. This implied a rise of 13% in hate speeches compared to such incidents in 2024 and a 97% spike from the corresponding figure in 2023.

Another report of Centre for the Study of Organised Hate had found a significant rise in such hateful speeches in 2024, which was incidentally an election year, with BJP leaders bearing a disproportionate share of such utterances. It's clear that political representatives, especially those belonging to the ruling dispensation, have willingly failed the test of fraternity, putting a question mark on the democratic process and cleanliness and decency of the political system and its future generation.

The other example is of freebies, wherein it's evident these are offered to win elections, instead of sharing their ideological position on issues and awaken masses about their sharing responsibility in building a just social order. Notably, Supreme Court recently questioned state governments' tendency to dole out freebies such as free electricity, particularly before elections, across the board without distinguishing between the well-off and the poor. The judgment stated: "The economic development of the nation will be hampered with this kind of largesse distribution... We are on the fact as to why are schemes being announced just before elections?" It suggested political leaders, social activists and other stakeholders resist such freebie schemes, while neglecting expenditure in the realm of public roads, hospitals and schools.

Sadly, the top court's orders won't be entertained by political parties. Some leaders suggest the welfare approach is being negated by the judiciary, but fact is opposite. State governments, which are in dire financial stress, announce schemes a few months or even days before

elections or raise the amounts earmarked in the schemes to attract voters.

Independent analysts note the lure for power arises from the fact that political leaders, both at the apex level and the grassroots, end up making big bucks. A state level leader or that in the district makes crores of rupees within a span of three to five years as seen in Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, U.P. and other states.

While corruption in politics is well-established, recently a fresh controversy arose with a chapter on 'Corruption in Judiciary' in a Class VIII NCERT textbook. And though Union education minister offered an unconditional apology, the Supreme Court banned the book and rightly stated that it is "a well-orchestrated conspiracy" to defame only the judiciary.

All the above impact democratic functioning. Besides, there are analysts who believe that digitization to check fraud is not a solution, rather aids it some way or the other. Recall, the CAG who Murthy warned (on December 16 last year) that hundreds of crores of rupees were flowing through the direct benefit system, in referring to PM Awas Yojana, and other such schemes without mandatory checks, leading to corruption.

The reason why the young, educated people are wary of political leaders and refrain from joining politics is not far to seek. Only those who are half literate and can't find any job opportunities join political parties and turn into mastaans (ruffians) and extort money for unethical and official deals. Even money for mid-day meals or awas yojana are subject to cut money.

Therefore, there is need for a drastic transformation, which is easier said than implemented. Dedication and sincerity must be inculcated in the political system, as parties largely serve their interests and needs. The political system can't deliver good and inclusive governance, if a change is not in place.

## Apologise or face 7-day jail: Maha Council to NCP (SP) leader

MUMBAI: (MAR 24)

The Maharashtra Legislative Council on Tuesday passed a motion recommending an apology from NCP (SP) leader Suryakant More for making objectionable remarks against Chairman Ram Shinde and members of the house, failing which he will have to face a seven-day jail term.

In another motion, an apology was also sought from journalists Ganesh Sonawane, Harshada Sonawane, and Amol Nandurkar and Ankush Gawde for making "baseless allegations" through YouTube channel Satya Ladha, failing which the four will have to face a five-day jail term. BJP member Prasad Lad had moved the motions about More and journalists in the legislative council.

# Brace for impact: PM Modi cautions on West Asia crisis, calls for Team India unity

NEW DELHI: MAR 24

As the West Asia conflict disrupts energy, trade and global markets, PM Modi lays out India's strategy, concerns for citizens abroad, and a broader plan to shield the economy from prolonged shocks. Prime Minister Narendra Modi warned that the ongoing West Asia crisis has shaken the global economy and could take a long time to recover, cautioning that prolonged conflict may trigger serious consequences worldwide. Addressing the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday, PM Modi said the war, now over three weeks old, has already caused a major energy crisis and disrupted key trade routes. "This war has created a serious fuel issue in the world. For India, too, this situation is concerning. The war has impacted our trade routes. With this, the routine supply of petrol, diesel, gas and fertilisers has been affected," he said. PM Modi assured that the government

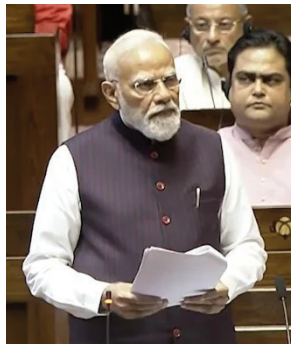
is closely tracking the rapidly changing situation and taking continuous steps to limit its impact on India. "Our economy's fundamentals are strong. The government is keeping a close watch on every changing situation and taking decisions with full seriousness," he said. He added, "This crisis is of a different kind and its solutions are also being worked out differently. We have to face every challenge with patience, restraint and a calm mind."

### WARNING OF PROLONGED IMPACT

PM Modi cautioned that the effects of the conflict could be long-lasting. "The adverse impact of this war is likely to remain for a long time," he said, while assuring citizens that the government is "alert, prepared and working with full seriousness" to safeguard national interests.

### CALL FOR STATES TO ACT, AVOID SHORTAGES

The Prime Minister urged states to act swiftly against



black marketing and hoarding of essential commodities and to take proactive steps for the poor and migrant workers.

He recalled the coordinated response during the Covid period, calling for a similar "Team India" approach in the current crisis. "Strict action should be taken at the earliest to ensure smooth supply of essential commodities," he said.

### ENERGY, SHIPPING CONCERNS INTENSIFY

The Prime Minister flagged the situation in the Strait of Hormuz as a major concern, with many global ships strand-

ed and Indian crew members on board. "Many ships from around the world are stranded in the Strait of Hormuz, and a large number of Indian crew members are on board them," he said. He added that India is working through diplomacy to ensure safe movement of its vessels and to push for de-escalation. "Our aim is de-escalation and opening of the Strait of Hormuz," Modi said.

### SAFETY OF INDIANS TOP PRIORITY

With nearly one crore Indians living and working in Gulf countries, Modi said their safety remains a key concern. "In times of crisis, the safety of Indians both in the country and abroad is our top priority," he said. He added that more than 3,75,000 Indians have returned safely since the war began, including over 1,000 from Iran, among them 700 medical students. PM Modi said India has remained in constant contact with countries across the region, including Iran, Israel

and the US, while pushing for a peaceful resolution. "Any threat to human life in this war is not in the interest of humanity. India is making constant efforts to encourage all sides to reach a peaceful solution," he said. He also revealed that he had spoken with several world leaders in recent weeks to discuss the crisis.

### STEPS TO SECURE SUPPLIES, BOOST SELF-RELIANCE

The government is working to secure energy supplies from multiple sources to deal with disruptions. "We are trying to procure gas and crude oil from all possible sources. Efforts will continue in the coming days," Modi said. He added that India has built strategic oil reserves of 53 lakh metric tonnes over the past 11 years, with work underway to expand capacity by another 65 lakh metric tonnes. Modi also pointed to a Rs 70,000 crore shipbuilding project and stressed the need for self-reliance.

## NFR Introduces 20 Pairs of New Train Services During FY 2025-26

Enhancing Connectivity Across the Region

MALIGAON, 24 MARCH, 2026:



Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has undertaken a major initiative to enhance passenger connectivity, comfort and operational efficiency with the introduction of 20 pairs of new train services during the Financial Year 2025-26. This significant expansion includes a balanced mix of premium, semi-premium, and conventional train services, aimed at strengthening railway links within the Northeast region as well as with other parts of the country. This initiative reflects NFR's continued commitment towards improving accessibility, passenger service quality and overall travel experience across its network.

A major highlight of this expansion is the introduction of several advanced train services, notably the Vande Bharat Sleeper Express operating between Kamakhya and Howrah, offering a modern, high-speed overnight travel experience with enhanced passenger amenities. In addition, seven pairs of Amrit Bharat Express train services have been launched to provide affordable yet comfortable long-distance travel, connecting key locations such as Gomeiroli, Tiruchirappalli, Nagri, Rohtak, Bengaluru, Panvel, and Charlapalli. Among the list, another significant addition is the Rajdhani Express linking Sairang with Delhi, substantially improving connectivity between Mizoram and the national capital. Further strengthening

long-distance connectivity, services like the Humsafar Express between Jalpaiguri Road and Sealdah, the Sairang-Kolkata-Sairang Express etc. have been introduced. At the regional level, trains such as the Sairang-Guwahati-Sairang Express, Silchar-Sairang-Silchar Express, NJP-Guwahati-NJP Express, Agartala-Narangi-Agartala Express etc. are few such trains enhancing intra-zone connectivity. Overall, the newly introduced services comprise a mix of express and passenger trains operating on daily, weekly and bi-weekly frequencies across key routes in the zone, and are expected to play a transformative role in strengthening regional integration and facilitating economic mobility. This expansion aligns with Indian Railways' broader vision of strengthening last-mile connectivity, promoting tourism and supporting socio-economic development across the Northeast and its adjoining regions. With services operating at varied frequencies, these new trains are expected to play a transformative role in regional integration and mobility. NFR remains committed towards delivering safe, efficient and passenger-centric rail services while continuously upgrading its infrastructure and service standards.



## Tamil Nadu polls: DMDK secures 10 seats in DMK alliance deal

CHENNAI, MARCH 24

In a significant boost to its political revival, the Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK) formed by the late Tamil superstar Vijayakant has secured 10 seats in the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance (SPA) for the upcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, emerging as the third-largest partner in the coalition after the Congress, which has been allotted 28 seats. The seat-sharing agreement was finalised on Tuesday following talks between DMK president and Chief Minister M.K. Stalin and DMDK general secretary Premalatha Vijayakant at Anna Arivalayam, the DMK headquarters in Chennai. In addition to the Assembly seats, the DMDK has also been assured a Rajya Sabha berth, with party treasurer L.K. Sudhish to be nominated. The deal marks a notable turnaround for the DMDK, which has struggled to maintain its political relevance in recent years.

The allocation is being seen as a strategic move by the DMK to consolidate its alliance by accommodating key partners, even as some long-time allies fell short of their expectations of securing

double-digit seat shares. Addressing reporters after the agreement was signed, Premalatha Vijayakant dismissed any speculation of secrecy in the negotiations and expressed confidence about the alliance's electoral prospects.

Striking an optimistic note, she quoted a popular dialogue of actor Rajinikanth, saying, "Even if we come late, we will be the latest," indicating the party's renewed political momentum. She also announced that the party would soon constitute a committee to finalise the constituencies it will contest.

The DMDK has already submitted a list of around 25 preferred constituencies to the DMK, including Virudhunagar, Virudhachalam, Gudiyatham, and Rishivandiyam — regions where the party had performed strongly during the 2011 Assembly elections.

Emphasising commitment to coalition unity, Premalatha said the DMDK would adhere to "alliance dharma" and work towards ensuring the victory of all partners.

She expressed confidence that the DMK-led alliance would secure more than 200 seats in the 234-member Assembly.

## Railways announces 5 new reforms

NEW DELHI, MARCH 24:

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Monday announced five new reforms under Indian Railways' "Reform Express" initiative, taking the total number of reforms introduced in 2026 to nine. The latest measures focus on cargo transport, construction quality, and passenger convenience. Two of the reforms target freight operations, particularly salt and automobile transportation. India produces nearly 35 million tonnes of salt annually, but only about 9.2 million tonnes is transported by rail. To improve efficiency, Railways has introduced corrosion-resistant stainless steel containers with top-loading and side-discharge mechanisms. These containers reduce handling losses, prevent damage, and enable seamless multimodal transport. In the automobile sector, where rail currently



accounts for only about 24 per cent of passenger vehicle transport, manufacturers will now be allowed to design specialised wagons suited to specific routes. This flexibility is expected to overcome infrastructure constraints like tunnels and bridges, and increase rail's share in vehicle transportation. A major reform has also been introduced to improve construction quality in railway projects. Seven key changes include stricter eligibility criteria for contractors, mandatory bid capacity assessment for

projects above ₹10 crore, and reduced subcontracting limits from 70 per cent to 40 per cent. Additional provisions such as fixed bid security, penalties for unethical practices, and safeguards against unrealistically low bids aim to ensure accountability, transparency, and timely execution of projects. On the passenger front, Railways has introduced measures to curb ticket misuse and improve access for genuine travellers. Cancellation windows have been revised to 72, 24, and 8 hours before departure, align-

ing with earlier chart preparation timelines. The move is expected to reduce last-minute speculative bookings without any extra cost to passengers. Further easing travel, passengers will soon be able to change their boarding station digitally up to 30 minutes before train departure. Counter tickets can now be cancelled from any station, while refunds for e-tickets will be processed automatically without the need for filing a Ticket Deposit Receipt (TDR). Additionally, passengers can upgrade their travel class up to 30 minutes before departure.

The minister noted that earlier reforms, including improvements in onboard services, expansion of cargo terminals, and the RailTech policy, have already shown positive results. With the new measures, Indian Railways aims to enhance efficiency, boost freight share, and significantly improve passenger experience.

## Sonia Gandhi admitted to Delhi hospital after feeling unwell

NEW DELHI: MAR 25, 2026

The Congress matriarch was hospitalised after she started feeling unwell, sources said. Both Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi are present in the hospital, they added.



Senior Congress leader Sonia Gandhi has been admitted to the Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in Delhi as she was feeling unwell, sources said on Tuesday. Both her children, Lok Sabha MPs Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, were also present in the hospital, they added. Rahul, however, left later. It was not

immediately clear what was the exact cause behind Sonia Gandhi's latest hospitalisation. The Rajya Sabha MP was earlier admitted to the same hospital in January this year due to respiratory discomfort. At the time, doctors had determined that her bronchial asthma was mildly exacerbated due to the combined

effects of Delhi's winter and air pollution. Sonia Gandhi turned 79 this December. She currently serves as a member of the Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan. The veteran Congress leader also served five terms as a Lok Sabha MP prior to her stint in the Upper House. The high-profile parliamentarian is also a two-time former

president of her party.

### SONIA'S HEALTH OVER THE YEARS

Throughout last year, there were at least three publicly known instances when Sonia Gandhi was hospitalised for various reasons.

In June 2025, she was admitted to Sir Ganga Ram due to a stomach-related issue. Earlier that same month, the Congress leader was hospitalised in Shimla for a routine check-up following minor health concerns.

Prior to that, Sonia Gandhi was hospitalised at Sir Ganga Ram in February 2025. That hospitalisation was also attributed to a stomach-related issue.

## ₹55,000 Aid for 16 Differently-Abled BLW Staff to Buy Scooters

VARANASI, MARCH 24

On March 24, 2026, a special program was organised in the Hall of Fame of the Administrative Building at Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW), where sixteen differently abled (locomotor disability) employees were provided financial assistance of ₹55,000 each as a subsidy for purchasing scooters. The subsidy amount was distributed through cheques by the Principal Chief Personnel Officer, Mr. Lal Ji Chaudhary. The primary objective of this initiative, is to empower differently-abled

employees, promote self-reliance, and make their daily commuting more convenient, safe, and accessible. On this occasion, Deputy Chief Personnel Officer Mr. Sameer Paul, Joint Secretary of the Staff Council Mr. Pradeep Kumar Yadav, along with members Mr. Naveen Kumar Sinha and Mr. Amit Kumar, and a large number of employees were present. The program was conducted by Senior Personnel Officer Mr. Rajkumar Gupta, and the vote of thanks was delivered by Assistant Personnel Officer (Workshop) Mr. Piyush Minji.

## Govt forms 7 empowered groups for various issues amid West Asia war: PM Modi

NEW DELHI, MARCH 24:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday told the Rajya Sabha that the government has formed seven empowered groups to monitor various issues in view of the ongoing war in West Asia.

These groups will focus on inflation and supply chain disruptions linked to petrol and diesel, fertiliser, and gas. They consist of domain experts and officers. PM Modi outlined the impact that the world will have to tackle in the long-term. "The current crisis has shaken the entire global economy. The world will take a lot of time to recover from the loss in West Asia. To ensure that there is minimal impact on India, contin-

uous efforts are being made. The fundamentals of our economy are strong. Govt is keeping an eye on the frequently changing situation. Govt is working strategically for its short-term, medium-term and long-term impact. Govt of India has also formed an interministerial group which meets regularly and assesses all the problems that occur in our import-export," he said.

"This group has also been working on necessary solutions...7 empowered groups have been formed yesterday. This group will work under a swift and far-reaching strategy for supply chain, petrol, diesel, gas, inflation and other essential things. I am confident that we will be able to face the situation better through a joint effort," the prime minister added.

## Ghaziabad spy racket: 3 more held, total arrests 21

GHAZIABAD (UP): (MAR 24)

Police have arrested three more alleged members of a Pakistan-linked espionage racket that was sending sensitive information to the neighbouring country, taking the total number of arrests in the case to 21, an official said on Tuesday.

The accused includes Sameer alias Shooter, a native of Bihar's Bhagalpur and currently residing in Delhi, who is said to be a key member of the alleged network. The other two arrested are Sameer of Shamli district and Shivraj from Shahjahanpur, currently residing in Ghaziabad, police said.

## Forgotten the tragedies: Rahul Gandhi slams PM for Covid-like remark on Gulf war

Rahul Gandhi also attacked the Centre's foreign policy as "personal" and ineffective, alleging it was influenced by global powers. PM Modi, in his Lok Sabha address earlier, had urged unity and preparedness, warning that the conflict could have long-term impacts.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for invoking the Covid-19 pandemic in his recent statement on the West Asia crisis, saying the prime minister had "forgotten the kind of tragedies" the country witnessed during that period. Speaking to reporters in the

Parliament complex, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said PM Modi's remarks about a "Covid-like time" returning were insensitive, given the scale of suffering during the pandemic. "He has forgotten what had happened then, how many people had died and what kind of tragedies had unfolded," Gandhi said. He also mounted a sharp attack on the government's foreign policy, alleging that it had become "the PM's personal foreign policy" and was being viewed as a "universal joke". Referring to global perceptions, Gandhi claimed that Donald Trump "knows exactly what Mr. Modi can do and what he cannot do," adding, "If the PM is compromised, our foreign



policy is compromised." On the evolving West Asia situation, Gandhi suggested that India lacked an independent strategic position. He alleged that key decisions were being influenced externally and claimed the prime minister "will do what America and Israel say", rather than act in India's interests. Gandhi also

questioned the government's handling of the crisis, warning of its potential economic fallout. "It is the beginning — LPG, petrol, fertiliser, all these would pose a problem," he said, adding that the government lacked a clear understanding of the situation.

He said he would not be able to attend the all-party meeting on West Asia scheduled for Wednesday due to a prior engagement in Kerala, but stressed that a wider debate was necessary. Earlier this week, PM Modi, addressing the Lok Sabha, had cautioned that the ongoing conflict in West Asia could create prolonged global instability. Drawing a parallel with the pandemic, he urged the nation

to remain "prepared and united", as it had during Covid-19.

"This war has created difficult global conditions that may persist for a long time. Hence, we must remain prepared and united," Modi said, adding that India must respond with "patience, restraint and calmness." The prime minister also highlighted concerns over fuel supply, fertilisers, national security and the safety of Indian nationals in the region, outlining steps taken by the government to minimise disruptions for ordinary citizens. Reaffirming India's position, he said dialogue and diplomacy remain the only path forward and emphasised efforts towards de-escalation and peace.

## Trump wants deal, but Iran may not agree to conditions: Israeli officials

NEW DELHI: MAR 24

US President Donald Trump appears intent on pursuing a diplomatic agreement with Iran to halt escalating tensions in the Middle East, according to three senior Israeli officials. Speaking anonymously to news agency Reuters, the officials expressed scepticism about the prospects of success, suggesting that Tehran is unlikely to accept key US conditions in any renewed negotiations. Talks between Washington and Tehran reportedly collapsed on February 28, coinciding with the outbreak of a US-Israeli military campaign against Iran. That breakdown in talks was followed by one of the deadliest military confrontations in the Middle East, which has resulted in nearly 1,500 deaths in Iran alone since it broke out over Tehran's reported nuclear build-up and the expansion of its ballistic missile programme. The officials indicated that any fresh round of discussions would likely include American demands to limit Iran's nuclear ambitions and its ballistic missile program—issues that have long been major sticking



points between the two sides.

Despite the apparent deadlock, Trump signalled optimism about diplomatic progress. In a social media post on Monday, he stated that the US and Iran had engaged in "very good and productive" conversations aimed at achieving a "complete and total resolution of hostilities in the Middle East". However, Iran swiftly rejected that claim, asserting that no such negotiations had taken place. The contradiction underscores the deep mistrust between the two countries and highlights the uncertainty surrounding any potential diplomatic breakthrough. Interestingly, signalling a shift toward cautious diplomacy, Trump on Monday paused planned strikes on Iranian energy tar-

gets following "productive" talks. In a Truth Social post, he said he had ordered the US Department of War to "postpone any and all military strikes against Iranian power plants and energy infrastructure for a five-day period," calling discussions "constructive". Soon after Trump's announcement, the Iranian embassy in Kabul adopted a defiant tone, portraying the US move as a climbdown. In a post on X, it said, "Trump's retreat after Iran's firm warning. After the Islamic Republic threatened that in the event of any US attack on Iran's energy infrastructure, it would target the energy infrastructure of the entire region. Trump backed down and stated that he had issued an order to postpone

the attack". Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also weighed in on the situation, indicating alignment with Washington's broader objectives but emphasising caution.

He said Trump believed there was a possibility of "leveraging the mighty achievements obtained by the IDF (Israel Defence Forces) and the US military, in order to realise the goals of the war in a deal – a deal that will preserve our vital interests". The remarks suggest that while Israel supports efforts to capitalise on recent military gains, it remains wary of concessions that could undermine its security priorities.

Notably, late last week, Trump firmly made it clear that while the talks and efforts to bring Iran to the table would continue, there would not be an immediate ceasefire despite growing calls for de-escalation. "Look, we can have dialogue, but I don't want to do a ceasefire. You know, you don't do a ceasefire when you're obliterating the other side," he said, while speaking to reporters at the White House on Friday.

Trump said the US and Israel remain closely coordinated in

their goals. "The relationship is a very good one. We want more or less similar things. We want victory, both of us, and that's what we've got," he said, adding that he expects Israel to align with Washington's direction when it comes to bringing the conflict to a close. Analysts note that any agreement would need to balance US ambitions for regional stability with Israel's insistence on maintaining strategic advantages. With conflicting narratives and entrenched positions on both sides, the path toward a negotiated settlement remains uncertain, even as diplomatic signals continue to emerge. The conflict, which began on February 28, has spread beyond its initial flashpoints, fuelling fears of broader regional instability and prolonged disruption to global energy flows. Attacks on key infrastructure in Iran and across neighbouring Gulf states have driven oil prices up by nearly 50% since the war's onset, heightening concerns of a global economic shock. The fighting has already claimed over 2,000 lives across countries, with most casualties reported in Iran and Lebanon.

## Iran warns war won't end without compensation, guarantees

NEW DELHI: MAR 24

**In a televised address on Monday, Mohsen Rezaei, the senior military adviser to Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei, set out conditions for ending hostilities, saying Iran would not step back without what he described as full accountability.**

After US President Donald Trump said Iran wants to "make a deal," a senior Iranian adviser warned the war will continue until Tehran receives compensation, sanctions relief and guarantees against US interference, according to CNN.

In a televised address on Monday, Mohsen Rezaei, the senior military adviser to Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei, set out conditions for ending hostilities, saying Iran would not step back without what he described as full accountability.

"The war will continue

until we receive compensation for all our losses, all economic sanctions are removed, and we receive international legal guarantees that Washington will not interfere in our affairs," Rezaei said.

**HARDLINE STANCE ON WAR AND RETALIATION**  
Rezaei's remarks underscored a tougher tone from Tehran, as he warned that the conflict would not follow conventional retaliation logic. "This time it won't be an eye for an eye, but a head for an eye, and you will leave the Gulf," he said, in a pointed warning to adversaries.

He added that Iran's military operations were continuing with force, signalling that the country remains committed to sustaining pressure despite weeks of conflict.

"We see that our armed forces are carrying out operations and activities with strength," Rezaei said.

The adviser also claimed that the war had effectively reached a conclusion more than a week ago, alleg-

ing that the United States had been ready to pursue a ceasefire.

According to Rezaei, it was Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who pushed for the fighting to continue. "The United States was ready to stop but Netanyahu pressed to continue," he said, adding that Washington had realised there was "no path to victory" after the early phase of the conflict.

**US SIGNALS TALKS, IRAN DENIES NEGOTIATIONS**

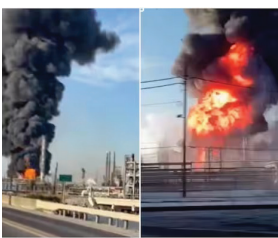
Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump said Washington was in contact with an Iranian leader and claimed Tehran was eager to reach a deal to end the war.

Trump told reporters that Iran wants "to make a deal" and said US envoy Steve Witkoff and his son-in-law Jared Kushner had held talks with an Iranian leader on Sunday, though he did not name the individual. He added that the US had not engaged with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei.

## Massive blast rocks Texas refinery, giant plumes of smoke after huge fire

NEW DELHI: MAR 24

Massive fire at Texas refinery after blast likely triggered by industrial heater. A massive fire broke out at a major oil refinery at Port Arthur in Texas late on Monday following an explosion in an industrial heater at the facility, according to local media reports and officials. The blaze erupted at Valero Energy's 380,000 barrel-per-day refinery, one of the key oil processing hubs in the United States, with thick plumes of smoke seen billowing from the site. Authorities said a loud explosion was heard around 6:30 pm local time, with the impact reportedly felt across nearby areas, including Port Arthur, Groves and Nederland. In the aftermath, officials issued a shelter-in-place order for residents in parts of the city, particularly on the west side,



advising people to remain indoors and keep windows and doors shut as emergency crews responded, local media reported. The cause of the explosion and the ensuing fire was not immediately known, and there was no official word on injuries or the extent of the damage. Valero Energy had not issued an immediate statement, and it remained unclear whether refinery operations had been affected. The Port Arthur facility is a critical component of the US Gulf Coast's refining network, which accounts for a substantial share of the country's fuel production.

## Iran's last official address in US is under Pakistan Embassy. This is why

NEW DELHI: MAR 24

**Operating under Pakistan's diplomatic umbrella, the Iran Interests Section in Washington remains Tehran's only official foothold in the US. It is sustaining consular services and a fragile backchannel amid the US-Israel-Iran war.**

This was the arrangement made after the US and Iran cut diplomatic ties after the 1979 Iranian revolution during which the American embassy in Tehran was seized by protesters. With no official ties, the US functions through the Swiss embassy in Tehran. But it is the Iran Interests Section in Washington DC that is interesting amid reports that Pakistan, along with Egypt and Qatar, is trying to play the role of a mediator in the US-Israel-Iran war. The Office for the Protection of the Interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran – Washington, DC, now operates from 1250 23rd Street NW, Suite



200, Washington, DC 20037. Though a larger and a standalone facility, it legally remains a part of the Pakistani Embassy and under Pakistani diplomatic protection. Come to think of it, Pakistan plays the role of a postal department. Whoever might emerge as the crucial moderator of the talks, the papers will be moved via Islamabad. While Pakistan, in desperate need of loans, moved closer to Saudi Arabia – Iran's power rival in the Islamic world – it continued supporting Tehran's diplomatic channel in the US. This is how cleverly Islamabad, which portrays itself as

the champion of the Ummah, has positioned itself among the two Shia-Sunni powers. The Interests Section of Iran, operating under the aegis of the Pakistani Embassy, provides Tehran its sole official foothold in the US. It has been thus since March 1992. Before that, Tehran functioned under the Algerian diplomatic umbrella.

**HOW US FUNCTIONS IN IRAN THROUGH THE SWISS EMBASSY**  
The arrangement traces its roots to the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Iranian students seized the US Embassy in Tehran on November 4,

1979, triggering the 444-day hostage crisis. The United States broke diplomatic ties on April 7, 1980. Under the January 1981 Algiers Accords that ended the crisis, both nations agreed to establish "interest sections" in each other's capitals, protected by a neutral third country. The US Interests Section in Tehran is housed in the Swiss Embassy. For Iran in Washington, Algeria initially served as protecting power. In March 1992, Algeria withdrew after Iran backed the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria's civil conflict; Pakistan assumed the role and has hosted the section ever since.

**HOW PAKISTAN HELPS IRAN WITH DIPLOMATIC CHANNEL IN US**  
From 1981 until 2015, the Iranian section occupied modest offices on Wisconsin Avenue associated with the Pakistani Embassy. It relocated in 2015 to larger quarters at 1250 23rd Street NW, Suite 200 – still legally part of the Pakistani chancery but with its own entrance, staff, and operations.

## Inside Trump-Netanyahu call that led to strike on Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

NEW DELHI: MAR 24

By the time of the call, Trump had already signed off on the idea of military action, according to Reuters, but had not decided "when or under what circumstances the United States would get involved."

Less than 48 hours before the United States launched its strike on Iran, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made a final, forceful case to President Donald Trump, arguing that the moment was ripe for a decisive blow against Tehran's leadership. According to a Reuters report, the Trump administration had already approved a military operation against Iran, but the timing and scope were still under consideration when Netanyahu placed the call. The Israeli leader, citing fresh intelligence, pressed for what officials described as a potential "decapitation strike" targeting Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and his inner circle at a moment when they were believed to be vulnerable.

**A DECISIVE CALL BEFORE THE STRIKE**  
"Less than 48 hours before the strike, Netanyahu spoke to Trump about the reasons for launching the kind of complex, far-off war," Reuters reported, highlighting how the call be-



came a critical moment in the decision-making process. New intelligence suggested that a planned meeting of Khamenei and senior aides had been moved forward, creating what Netanyahu saw as a rare opportunity. He argued there "might never be a better chance to kill Khamenei," framing the operation as both strategic and symbolic, including retaliation for alleged Iranian plots to assassinate Trump.

**TRUMP HAD APPROVED OPERATION, BUT NOT THE TIMING**

By the time of the call, Trump had already signed off on the idea of military action, according to Reuters, but had not decided "when or under what circumstances the United States would get involved." The conversation, described by sources as Netanyahu's "closing argument," is believed to have been a key catalyst in Trump's final decision to proceed with the operation, later codenamed Operation Epic Fury.

## Kim Jong Un vows to strengthen nuclear arsenal, calls South Korea hostile

NEW DELHI: MAR 24

Kim Jong Un said Pyongyang's status as a nuclear-armed state was irreversible and expanding a "self-defensive nuclear deterrent" was essential to national security, regional stability and economic development. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said his country would permanently strengthen its nuclear forces and treat South Korea as its most hostile state, as he set out policy priorities in a speech to par-



liament, state media KCNA reported on Tuesday. Kim said Pyongyang's status as a nuclear-armed state was irreversible and expanding a "self-defensive nuclear deterrent" was essential to national security, regional stability and economic development. He rejected the idea that nu-

clear disarmament could be exchanged for economic benefits or security guarantees, saying North Korea had already proven that maintaining nuclear forces while pursuing development was the correct strategic choice. Nuclear weapons had deterred war and allowed the state to focus resources on economic growth, construction and living standards, he said in the address on Monday to the Supreme People's Assembly, the communist-run country's rubber-stamp legislature.

## Saudi, UAE on cusp of joining Iran fight as attacks mount, patience runs out

NEW DELHI: MAR 24

Iran's actions in the Strait of Hormuz have stoked fears of long-term leverage over a vital global energy artery. In response, Gulf states are weighing both military and financial pressure. Angered by repeated strikes on their soil and wary of Tehran further tightening its grip over the critical Strait of Hormuz, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are on the verge of a decision to join the US-Israel war against Iran. After weeks of hedging and warning



against escalation, Gulf countries such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Qatar have come to reconsider their stance as Tehran remains undeterred. They are weighing to what degree they should get involved in the fight, be it military action or financial pressure, reported the

Wall Street Journal (WSJ).

**WHY THE SHIFT?**

When the US and Israel launched Operation Epic Fury and Operation Roaring Lion respectively, Gulf capitals expressed doubt about whether strikes could curb Iran's nuclear ambitions or missile programme. "There was also serious doubt that [military strikes] would have the desired effect of ending Iran's destabilising activities," a senior Gulf diplomat told the Times of Israel (ToI). Diplomacy, they believed, offered a safer off-ramp.

## Pakistan offers to mediate US-Iran talks: Sharif

BY SAJJAD HUSSAIN

ISLAMABAD: (Mar 24) Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday said that Islamabad was "ready and honoured" to facilitate "meaningful and conclusive talks" between the US and Iran to end the ongoing conflict. The announcement came following media reports about backdoor efforts by Pakistan along with Egypt and Turkey to broker peace in West Asia. "Pakistan welcomes and fully supports ongoing efforts to pursue dialogue to end the war in the Middle East, in the interest of peace and stability in the region and beyond," Sharif said in a post on X.

## Trump shifts Iran war blame to Hegseth

NEW DELHI: MAR 24

With the Iran war entering its fourth week and questions increasingly being asked about why and how the US went in for military action, President Donald Trump has a new story to tell about the start of the conflict. At a Monday roundtable in the US state of Tennessee, Donald Trump suggested his Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth was the first one to push for military action. "Pete, I think you were the first one to speak up, and you said, 'Let's do it because you can't let them have a nuclear weapon,'" Trump said, with Hegseth beside him. For a war that has already seen multiple reports and stories on who it was in the Trump administration that favoured an offensive against Iran, this was yet another.

**A SHIFTING SCRIPT ON WHY THE WAR BEGAN**  
Why did we go to war with

Iran? Ask any two people in Donald Trump's administration and you probably won't get the same answer. Depending on who is speaking within the administration, the reasons for going to war with Iran seem to vary. Some have claimed Israel was going to strike anyway, making US involvement inevitable. Others have insisted Iran was on the brink of deploying a nuclear weapon. Trump, for his part, offered his own dramatic retelling of the moment the decision took shape. "I called Pete. I called General Kane. I called a lot of our great people," he said. "We got a problem in the Middle East. Or we can take a stop and make a little journey into the Middle East and eliminate a big problem." The phrasing may have been casual. The consequences have not been. If the origins of the war are murky, the administration's account of what followed is no clearer. Just



hours before singling out Hegseth, Trump claimed that Iran's retaliatory strikes across the Gulf came as a surprise. "Look at the way they attacked, unexpectedly, all of those countries," he said. "Nobody was even thinking about it." That assertion sits uneasily with a Reuters report that internal warnings about possible Iranian retaliation were delivered in advance, and not acted upon. If there is one constant in the administration's messaging, it is Hegseth's visibility. The defence secretary has taken centre stage at the Pentagon, laying out goals that include dismantling

Iran's missile programme, drone production and naval power. He has also used the platform to challenge media coverage of the conflict, urging more favourable reporting on a campaign that has already claimed the lives of 13 American service members and widened into a regional crisis. Pressed on when the operation might end, Hegseth offered little clarity. "We wouldn't want to set a definitive timeframe," he said, adding that the effort was "very much on track".

**NOT EVERYONE WAS ON BOARD**

Trump did concede that Vice President JD Vance had been less enthusiastic about the war, though Vance has avoided airing any criticism in public. Behind the scenes, the picture appears more divided. Reports suggest Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and media figure Rupert Murdoch were among those encouraging military ac-

tion, while others within the administration urged caution. The tensions have already had consequences. Joe Kent, former head of the National Counterterrorism Center, resigned last week, becoming the first senior official to step down over the conflict. Even as the war continues, Trump has spoken of possible negotiations with Iran to end hostilities and reopen the Strait of Hormuz. "We'd like to make a deal," he said. "If it goes well, we're going to end up with settling this. Otherwise we'll just keep bombing our little hearts out." He described discussions involving a "top person" in Iran speaking with his son-in-law Jared Kushner and envoy Steve Witkoff. Iran, however, says no such talks are taking place.

Trump had set a Monday deadline for Iran to meet his demands or face further strikes. That deadline has now been extended by five days.

## After Larijani's killing, Iran appoints Mohammad Zolghadr as security chief

**Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr was appointed as Larijani's successor as secretary of the SNSC, the Iranian president's deputy of communications posted on X on Tuesday.**



Iran named a former Revolutionary Guards commander and senior figure in the hardline political faction on Tuesday to replace the powerful head of the Supreme National Security Council, Ali Larijani, killed in US-Israeli strikes last week. Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr was appointed as Larijani's successor as secretary of the SNSC, the Iranian president's deputy of communications posted on X on Tuesday. The SNSC, formally chaired by the elected president, Masoud Pezeshkian, coordinates security and foreign policy, and includes top military, intelligence and government officials in addition to representatives of the supreme leader who has ultimate say over all matters

of state. Zolqadr is a former Revolutionary Guards commander who has in the past held senior security positions such as deputy for security at the Interior Ministry, deputy at the armed forces' general staff and advisor to the judiciary chief for crime prevention. He headed the electoral headquarters of the hardline political faction, the Popular Front of Islamic Revolutionary Forces.

Since 2022 he has served as secretary of the Expediency Discernment Council, an assembly that resolves differences between parliament and the Guardian Council of Shi'ite clerics and jurists who can veto legislation and supervise elections.

## PFC Showcases AI-Driven Power Solutions at Bharat Electricity Summit

NEW DELHI

Power Finance Corporation Ltd. (PFC), a Maharatna CPSE under the Ministry of Power, highlighted its growing role as a technology enabler at the Bharat Electricity Summit (BES), presenting a range of advanced IT/OT innovations aimed at strengthening India's power sector.

Moving beyond its traditional financing role, PFC unveiled several AI-driven and indigenous solutions designed to enhance power distribution, improve system reliability, and support the transition towards a smarter and more efficient grid.

Among the key attractions was India's indigenous SCADA-ADMS-OMS platform, along with advanced



GeoAI-based asset mapping and real-time fault detection systems. These technologies are expected to significantly boost operational efficiency and enable faster response to outages. The corporation also showcased innovative solutions focused on last-mile electrification.

A major highlight of the

pavilion was the National SCADA Resource Centre (NSRC), underscoring PFC's commitment to capacity building and improving operational excellence across power utilities. Additionally, a Micro Substation—developed in Japan as a low-cost solution for last-mile power access—drew considerable

attention from visitors.

The initiatives, led by PFC Chairman and Managing Director Parminder Chopra, reflect the organisation's strategic focus on building a resilient, efficient, and self-reliant power ecosystem aligned with national priorities.

The PFC pavilion witnessed strong engagement from policymakers, industry leaders, and DISCOM representatives, with live demonstrations showcasing the real-world impact of reforms under the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS).

PFC's participation at BES 2026 reinforces its pivotal role in driving India's next phase of energy transformation through innovation, digitalisation, and sustainable infrastructure development.

“No permission required to sail through Strait of Hormuz”

NEW DELHI

Sailing through the Strait of Hormuz - the only sea channel linking the oil-rich Persian Gulf with open oceans - does not require permission from any country, a senior government official said as more Indian vessels prepared to sail through the war-hit zone. Rejecting talks of stranded Indian vessels



in the Persian Gulf being allowed to sail through the strait only after reaching some kind of an agreement with Iran, which controls the narrow shipping lane, Rajesh Kumar Singh, Special Secretary at the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, said the movement through strait is taken by shipping companies and their contracting entities after considering safety and other conditions.

Movement of ships through the strait had come to a near halt after the US and Israel launched military strikes against Iran, and Tehran's sweeping retaliation that hit US bases in the Gulf regions as well as Israel.

## 74 Lakh New Jobs in Informal Sector, Up 6% in '25: Govt

NEW DELHI

Employment grew 6.18 per cent to 12.80 crore in the unincorporated enterprises sector in 2025, adding more than 74.52 lakh new jobs during the period, according to a government survey.

The Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) for 2025, released on Tuesday, showed that the number of workers in the unincorporated sector rose to 12,80,51,800 in 2025 from 12,05,99,800 during the October 2023–September 2024 period.

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has released the results of ASUSE for 2025 for the reference period January 2025 - December 2025, referred to as ASUSE 2025.

# No Stigma, Just Treatment: Experts Call for Changing TB Narrative

HYDERABAD, MARCH 24

Tuberculosis (TB), often perceived as a disease of the past, continues to pose a serious public health challenge in India, with experts stressing that stigma and delayed diagnosis remain major obstacles in controlling its spread. Health professionals note that TB is a bacterial infection, not a reflection of poor hygiene or personal failure. However, social stigma often discourages patients from seeking timely medical help, allowing the disease to worsen and spread further.

## High Burden, Gradual Progress

India accounts for over a quarter of the global TB burden. Each year, nearly 27–28 lakh new cases are reported, with around 26.18 lakh patients diagnosed in 2024 alone. While the incidence rate has declined from 237 cases per lakh population in 2015 to 187 in 2024, TB still claims more than 3.23 lakh lives annually, underlining the need for sustained efforts.

## Understanding the Disease

Medical experts highlight that TB spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or speaks, rather than through physical contact. A significant portion of the population carries latent TB, where individuals show no symptoms and are not contagious, but the bacteria remain present in the body.

Symptoms such as persistent cough, unexplained weight loss, low-grade fever, and night sweats are early warning signs. While TB primarily affects the lungs, about 20 per cent of cases in India are extra-pulmonary, impacting areas such as lymph nodes, spine, and abdomen.

Despite its severity, doctors emphasise that TB is fully curable with a strict 6–9 month course of antibiotics, provided treatment is completed without interruption.

## Prevention and Early Detection Key

Health experts recommend the “three-week rule,” advising individuals with a cough, fever, or weight loss lasting more than 21 days to undergo testing. Proper ventilation, respiratory hygiene, and use of masks in high-risk areas can significantly reduce transmission.

Maintaining good nutrition, managing underlying conditions like diabetes, and avoiding smoking and alcohol are also crucial in strengthening immunity. For those in close contact with TB patients, preventive therapy for latent TB is advised.



DR. LAKSHMI BHAVANA CHUKKAPPALI  
CONSULTANT - PULMONOLOGY  
STAR HOSPITALS,  
NANAKRAMGUDA

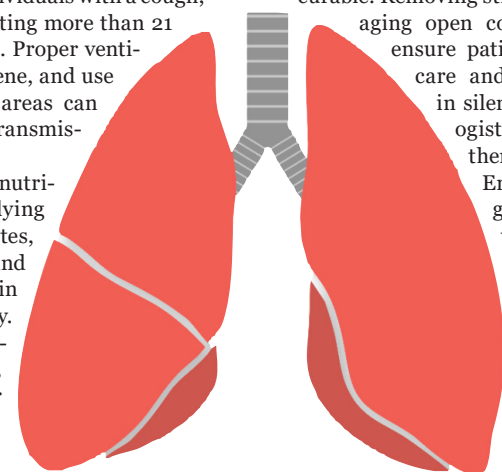
## When to Seek Medical Help

Doctors urge people not to ignore symptoms, particularly in urban environments where cough is often attributed to pollution. Persistent cough lasting over two weeks, sudden weight loss, evening fever, night sweats, chest pain, or coughing up blood should prompt immediate consultation with a pulmonologist.

## A Call to End Stigma

On the occasion of World TB Day, experts reiterate that eliminating stigma is as important as medical treatment. With advancements in molecular diagnostics and government support programmes such as Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) for nutrition, India is better equipped than ever to tackle TB.

“The message is clear—TB is treatable and curable. Removing stigma and encouraging open conversations will ensure patients seek timely care and no one suffers in silence,” a pulmonologist said. The 2026 theme, “Yes! We Can End TB,” reflects growing optimism that with collective efforts, awareness, and early intervention, the disease can be effectively controlled in the coming years.



24 MARCH  
**WORLD TUBERCULOSIS DAY**

# Relief Rally: Sensex Surges 1,372 pts

MUMBAI, MARCH 24

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded sharply by nearly 2% on Tuesday, fuelled by a global relief rally after US President Donald Trump paused strikes on Iran's energy infrastructure and extended the deadline for reopening the Strait of Hormuz.

The BSE Sensex climbed 1,372.06 points, or 1.89%, to settle at 74,068.45. It touched an intraday high of 74,489.39, up 1,793 points or 2.46%. The NSE Nifty rose 399.75 points, or 1.78%, to end at 22,912.40.

Power Grid and State Bank of India were the sole laggards in a broadly positive market. Trump's social media post offered Iran a five-day window to reopen the vital shipping lane linking the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman, easing fears of oil supply disruptions. Brent crude, however, edged up 1.96% to \$101.9 per barrel after an 11% plunge earlier.

## Relief After Monday's Rout

The rally followed Monday's bloodbath, when Sensex plunged 1,836.57 points (2.46%) to 72,696.39 and Nifty shed 601.85 points (2.60%) to 22,512.65. Investors' wealth rebounded by ₹7.56 lakh crore to ₹4,22,78,312.77 crore (\$4.50 trillion).

“Markets staged a constructive rebound on moderated risk perception and early de-escalation signals in US-Iran tensions,” said Hariprasad K., founder of Livelong



Wealth. He cautioned that such bounces often stem from short covering and value buying, not a trend reversal.

Vinod Nair, head of research at Geojit Investments, noted lingering caution over Strait of Hormuz developments. Gaurav Garg of Lemonn Markets added that falling crude prices lifted sentiment post the selloff.

Asian peers like Japan's Nikkei 225, South Korea's Kospi, Shanghai Composite, and Hong Kong's Hang Seng surged. Europe traded mostly lower, while US markets rose Monday.

## Broad Gains Across Sectors

All sectoral indices advanced, led by services (+3.46%), mid-small private banks (+2.99%), industrials (+2.98%), private banks (+2.63%), and Bankex (+2.40%). BSE MidCap Select jumped 2.77%; SmallCap Select rose 2.29%.

On BSE, 2,968 stocks advanced against 1,295 decliners; 168 were unchanged.

FIIIs sold ₹10,414.23 crore worth of equities Monday, but DIIs countered with ₹12,033.97 crore in buys.

# Hindustan Power secures PGE block in MP, enters critical minerals sector

NEW DELHI, MARCH 24

Hindustan Power Group has secured a Letter of Intent (LoI) for exploration of the Padhar Platinum Group Elements (PGE) block in Madhya Pradesh, marking its entry into India's critical minerals sector, the company announced on Tuesday.

The LoI was awarded following a forward e-auction conducted by the union Ministry of Mines, in which a group firm emerged as the preferred bidder. The Padhar block, spread over nearly 200 square kilometres, has been identified as a prospective zone for platinum group elements and also contains zinc deposits.

Chairman Ratul Puri said the acquisition of the block is a significant step towards strengthening India's resource resilience. He noted that platinum group elements are vital for next-generation technologies such as clean hydrogen production, fuel cells, electronics and catalytic systems, and added that the exploration would help build a reliable domestic resource base while supporting supply chain security and energy leadership.

He further said the move reflects the company's strategic diversification beyond its core energy business into emerging sectors that will shape the future industrial landscape, including clean

energy, advanced mobility and high-value manufacturing.

Platinum group elements, including platinum, palladium and rhodium, are widely used in hydrogen fuel cells, emission control systems and electrolyzers for green hydrogen production. Zinc, also present in the block, plays a key role in galvanisation, battery technologies and corrosion protection for renewable energy infrastructure.

India has identified these minerals as critical for reducing import dependence and strengthening domestic manufacturing capabilities, particularly in clean energy supply chains.

Apart from this development, Hindustan Power is also working on two high-grade coal mines in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, expanding its presence in conventional mining.

On the renewable energy front, the company is accelerating its portfolio with several solar and storage projects, including a recently secured 435 MWp solar project in Uttar Pradesh and multiple grid-scale solar and battery storage developments.

The company said its expansion into critical minerals, alongside conventional and renewable energy initiatives, reflects its evolving role in India's energy sector and aligns with national priorities of building self-reliant supply chains and ad-

# India building world's largest 30 GW renewable park in Gujarat

NEW DELHI, MARCH 24

India is transforming the vast salt flats of the Rann of Kutch into what is set to become the world's largest single-site renewable energy project, underscoring its push towards clean energy and energy security. Spanning over 72,000 hectares in Gujarat, the 30 GW Khavda Renewable Energy Park, also known as the Gujarat Hybrid Renewable Energy Park, is being developed as a massive solar-wind installation capable of powering nearly

18 million homes upon completion.

The scale of the project is unprecedented, combining around 20 GW of solar capacity with 10 GW of wind energy. This hybrid design is aimed at ensuring more stable power generation by pairing daytime solar output with round-the-clock wind energy.

The project is being developed by a mix of public and private players, including Adani Green Energy, NTPC, the Gujarat State Electricity Corporation Limited, and the Gujarat Industrial Power Company Limited, with

Adani Green holding the largest share of about 9.5 GW capacity.

The Solar Energy Corporation of India has been allocated a significant portion for wind-only development.

The project, which was inaugurated in 2020 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, already has over 1 GW operational, with full capacity expected to be added in phases over the coming years. Envisioned as a key pillar of India's target of achieving 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030, the project is turning barren land into a

major power hub while boosting jobs and reducing coal dependence.

However, the project also brings challenges, including harsh working conditions, intermittency of renewable energy without adequate storage, and concerns over the fragile desert ecosystem.

Despite these concerns, the Khavda project represents a major step in India's clean energy transition, demonstrating how underutilised land can be repurposed for large-scale sustainable energy generation.

# 95 pc Indian women ready for AI-focused role: Report

NEW DELHI, MARCH 24

Around 95 per cent of women would consider transitioning into an AI-focused role with the right organisational support, a report said on Tuesday.

AI is emerging as the most powerful lever to close the gender gap as India currently produces 43 per cent of the world's female STEM graduates but they hold only 29 per cent of entry-level tech roles and 14 per cent of C-suite seats, the report from ANSR and Talent500 said.

The report dismantles the “pipeline myth” by showing “the gap is not talent but the systems around it,” adding

that AI adoption is accelerating career progression for women in tech.

The survey found 64 per cent of respondents saying AI adoption has accelerated their path to senior roles.

AI capability emerged as a significant career differentiator than tenure or traditional performance metrics, the report noted.

Around 65 per cent of respondents were optimistic about their AI opportunities, with 36 per cent identifying as very optimistic, signalling a workforce eager to lead the next wave of tech transformation, it said.

“The intent to lead in AI is present; the next step is providing structural support through mentorship and



accessible upskilling, to convert this readiness into reality,” the report urged tech leaders.

Around 69 per cent of women reported that AI has opened new career pathways, indicating strong momentum in AI-enabled career advancement such as product strategy, AI governance, and transformation leadership roles.

The report highlighted that AI en-

abled women to gain more time to invest in higher-value professional and personal opportunities.

India's GCCs are showing relatively stronger gender representation with women holding approximately 16–17 per cent of the nearly 6,500 total leadership roles. However, there remains a significant gap, with around a 40 per cent drop in representation from entry-level to senior leadership, it added.

The critical differentiator between leaders in the next decade from followers is how actively equity is embedded into their AI transformation, said Smitha Hemmigae, Managing Director, ANSR.

# Coffee farmers and SHG Sakhis are building resilient food systems



Indian coffee is recognised globally for its distinct aroma and flavour. Five varieties of Indian coffee have received Geographical Indication (GI) tags: Coorg Arabica coffee from Kodagu, Karnataka; Chikkamagaluru Arabica coffee from Chikkamagaluru, Karnataka; Araku Valley Arabica coffee from Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh; Babubudangiris Arabica coffee from Chikkamagaluru, Karnataka; and Wayanad Robusta coffee, from Wayanad, Kerala. These varieties are not only symbols of regional pride and sustainable livelihoods for coffee farmers.

## The cultural staple that is coffee

Globally, coffee is recognised as an important soft commodity. It however constantly remains at the mercy of climatic uncertainties like the El Nino events or droughts. Over the last couple of years, a severe drought has impacted production in Brazil — the largest coffee producer in the world — demonstrating how vulnerable this commodity is to changing weather patterns. According to reports from the Press Information Bureau (PIB), India currently ranks as the seventh-largest coffee producer in the world, with exports reaching \$1.29 billion in FY 2023-24. In January 2025 alone, India exported over 9,300 tonnes of coffee to its top buyers in different countries.

Moreover, increasingly, coffee dominates lifestyle trends. From local filter coffee brands to coffee tourism, the beverage is cherished both as staple and as a means of livelihoods. For example, the first coffee plantations in Southeast Cuba represent a 19th-20th century cultural landscape of colonial coffee production, with 171 cafetales, irrigation systems, and mountain routes connecting plantations to export points, according to the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. Similarly, the Coffee Triangle in Colombia, Coorg estates in India, the Sidamo region (along with Harar and Yirgacheffe) in Ethiopia, dedicated coffee tours in Brazil and Buon Ma Thuot (the coffee capital of Vietnam) bring coffee on the tourism map of the world.

While brands have long been using its thriving potential, small businesses have developed their own niche — preserving its essence while providing livelihoods to small and marginal farmers. Araku coffee even featured in one episode of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Mann ki Baat, while Wayanad Robusta gained recognition at the One District One Product Awards in 2024. More recently, the pressing concerns of coffee growers from Wayanad were directly taken up by the sitting MP, Priyanka Gan-

dhi, during her grassroots outreach programme.

Naandi Foundation's Small and Marginal Tribal Farmers Mutually Aided Cooperative Society (SAMTFMACS) in the Araku Valley of Vishakhapatnam district, Andhra Pradesh, was formed to allow farmers to take control of the entire 'bean to cup' supply chain in the case of coffee.

From Instagrammable coffee trends — green coffee, coffee cake and muffins, mushroom coffee, and egg coffee, to name a few — alongside dalгона coffee that kept many occupied during the long months of the lockdown, to pleasing 'home cafe aesthetics' or the culture of 'home cafes' that are now finding their ways into our living rooms and continue to go viral on social media, coffee has cemented its position as an evolving daily staple, especially appealing to younger generations like Gen Z. The popularity of the Starbucks 'Bearista' mug in the United States, together with trends like proffee (protein coffee), cloud coffee, and matcha lattes, further enhances the value chain and appeal of coffee.

## From farm to cup: SHG, Krishi, and Pashu Sakhis strengthening regenerative coffee systems

But in all of this value chain, who are some of the critical grassroots actors sustaining coffee economies across the world? This essay looks at some of the resilient and inspiring women from Chikkamagaluru in Karnataka who are continuously reshaping the coffee ecosystem in India, while also being the last mile delivery facilitators in agriculture and allied sector development.

Take the example of Chaitra, aged 45. She cultivates coffee on her farm while also being an active member of a self-help group (SHG) in Belur taluka, Chikkamagaluru district, Karnataka. For the last three years, she has been associated with the Shri Ganga Sanjeevani SHG run by the State Rural Livelihoods Mission in her district. Alongside her responsibilities as a coffee farmer, Chaitra also addressed livestock-related concerns of fellow farmers in her village doubling up as Pashu Sakhi. Being engaged in the coffee value chain, she mobilises farmers towards regenerative agriculture around coffee cultivation, vaccination drives for goats, livestock, and other domestic animals in her gram panchayat every six months. On her own farm, she grows approximately 550 kg of Robusta coffee per acre.

Livestock continues to be one of the most vital assets to the rural poor. Chaitra notes that the major beneficiaries of the Pashu Sakhi model are landless women and marginal farmers, since marginal and landless farmers rely heavily on livestock rearing in the absence of sustained

agricultural opportunities. Moreover, training women as Pashu Sakhis in basic veterinary and livestock management provides crucial services in remote areas where formal such services are often scarce.

Similar to Chaitra's journey is the story of Janaki — a Krishi Sakhi from Jodal Palya village, Mallimane gram panchayat. Every farmer Janaki engages with is a woman — either directly cultivating coffee or involved in some stage of its value chain. At present, she works with 150 such women coffee farmers and herself cultivate about 400 kg of Arabica coffee per acre. She joined the Sanjeevani SHG in 2012. A year later, she became an agriculture para-extension worker and subsequently took on the role of an official Krishi Sakhi. Her primary responsibilities include educating farmers about government schemes related to agriculture and livestock, collecting soil samples, testing soils, natural farming, promoting natural inputs like jeevamrutha and beejamrutha, demonstrating inter-cropping methods, and advising on the scanty use of fertilisers and pesticides to promote soil ecology — bringing attention to how cultivable soil or arable land resources will become scarce.

Both Chaitra and Janaki work on strengthening regenerative agriculture and sustainable livelihoods — focusing on soil health, biodiversity, and agroforestry where they educate on the importance of maintaining adequate tree cover for sustainable coffee farming. These efforts promote environmental harmony by attracting bees, butterflies, birds, and pollinators to the landscape.

In Chikkamagaluru alone, there are around 5,000 women coffee farmers. There are numerous inspirational stories like those of Chaitra and Janaki. Women across Chikkamagaluru are altering the coffee farming by first linking themselves with SHGs and then diversifying into alternate livelihood opportunities by taking on the roles of Krishi and Pashu Sakhis, while continuing their work as coffee growers.

Shruchi Singh, Project Lead at the S.M. Sehgal Foundation working on sustainable livelihoods and regenerative agriculture with women coffee farmers like Janaki and Chaitra in the region mentions, "Women coffee farmers in Chikkamagaluru play a pivotal role in shaping a more resilient and sustainable future for the coffee industry, working bottom-up in the decentralised value chain of coffee. The Foundation collaborates with 3,285 women coffee farmers, thereby creating a multiplier effect. By promoting agro-forestry in coffee and intercropping, they ensure minimal harm to soil health. These women act as ambassadors of biodiversity, educating communities on climate resilience, and through their consistent advocacy around coffee farming, they help create inclusive markets for women, small and marginal farmers. Empowering women through regenerative agriculture centred on coffee not only strengthens their socio-economic status but also generates demonstration effects — where their traditional and climate-friendly knowledge, resources, and market linkages inspire wider adaptation in communities."

Equally important is the role these women play as community resource persons drawn from their own communities facilitating governmental objectives while also promoting institutional public private community partnerships. Through these efforts, they advance key Sustainable Development Goals, like SDG 1 and 2 (zero poverty and hunger), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 13 (climate action) and, via a bottom-up, decentralised approach, SDG 17. Women like Chaitra and Janaki strengthen last-mile public service delivery and nurture social capital within their communities. By organising farmer meetings, conducting workshops, and leading training programmes, they are shaping the present and future of India's coffee sector — extending their impact — beyond the bean.



# India among four major contributors to global pesticide toxicity

Pesticide use is rising not just in volume but also intensity, posing major threats to ecologically important species as well as to human health. And this pesticide toxicity is driven by just four countries: India, China, Brazil and the US. These are the results of a February 5 study published by researchers with the University of Kaiserslautern-Landau, Germany in the journal Science.

The paper reviewed 625 pesticides used globally to understand progress in the goal to halve pesticide risks by 2030 (relative to 2010-20 levels). This goal was adopted at the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 2022, under the Global Biodiversity Framework. The study uses "total applied toxicity" (TAT), a metric adopted at CBD's COP16 in 2025, to gauge the reduction goal. TAT weighs the amount of pesticide used against how harmful each chemical is to different species groups. By this measure, India, Brazil, China and the US contribute 53-68 per cent of global pesticide toxicity.

The study says that of the 65 countries with national data—representing 79.4 per cent of global crop acreage—only Chile appears on track for the 2030 goal. China, Japan and Venezuela are also moving closer. However, Thailand, Denmark, Ecuador and Guatemala are moving away from the target, with at least one indicator doubling within the past 15 years. In many cases, toxicity trends have become entrenched and reversing them would require "systematic transformation" of agriculture, including integrated biological solutions, precision technologies, informed farmer practices and supportive policies.

The study analyses pesticide use between 2013 and 2019 across 201 countries and its impact on eight species groups. It found that even in countries where total volume of pesticides appears stable or rising gradually, ecological impact is intensifying for six groups—pollinators, aquatic invertebrates, fish, soil organisms and terrestrial arthropods and plants. Terrestrial arthropods, including insects, show the steepest global rise at 6.4 per cent per year, followed by soil organisms at 4.6 per cent.

It also shows that only 20 highly toxic pesticides (of 511 analysed) dominate over 90 per cent of a country's total toxicity burden. Organophosphates and pyrethroids dominate toxicity for aquatic invertebrates, fish and terrestrial arthropods and neonicotinoids account for the bulk of pollinator toxicity. Herbicides contribute heavily to plant toxicity. "High-volume herbicides, such as acetochlor (~54,000 metric tons per year), paraquat (~44,000 tons per year),

and glyphosate (~518,000 tons per year), belong to these classes and have been linked to environmental and human health risks," says the study. Similarly, fungicides significantly affect soil organisms.

## India's heavy burden

According to the Union government's Directorate of Plant Protection, Quarantine and Storage, chemical pesticide use in India increased about 20 per cent from 57,353 tonnes in 2014-15 to 67,221 tonnes by 2024-25. The Science study says that as India has one of the world's largest agricultural areas, pesticide use also has a large cumulative ecological burden.

Some areas also show an increase in per-hectare intensity, with toxicity levels above global average across the Indo-Gangetic plains and in intensively cultivated regions like Punjab and Haryana, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Telangana and Karnataka. The maps also indicate accelerating toxicity in 2013-19 across large parts of India and South Asia.

In terms of toxicity by crop type, India's burden is closely linked to staple cereals like rice, cotton and sugarcane. In particular, cotton has a high toxicity contribution, though occupies a smaller share of farmland compared to rice.

Narasimha Reddy Donthi, a public policy expert and consultant at Pesticide Action Network (PAN) India, says the study highlights how pesticide management in India does not factor in biodiversity harm.

On January 7, the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare released a draft of the Pesticide Management Bill, 2025, to replace the Insecticide Act, 1988. The Bill aims to "strive to minimise risk to human beings, animals, living organisms other than pests, and the environment". However, organisations such as PAN India say this language is weak.

According to Donthi, "The Pesticide Management Bill, 2025, and the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, sit in separate legislative silos, administered by separate ministries, with no formal connection between them. The TAT framework makes that separation indefensible." He emphasises that India adopt the TAT framework and include the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) in pesticide regulation. "Pesticide registration, renewal and phase-out decisions must carry a mandatory biodiversity impact assessment conducted by the NBA," Donthi says.

"The Bill is on the table. The Biodiversity Act is in force. What is missing is the political will to treat biodiversity loss as a consequence of pesticide approval," adds Donthi.



# Women farmers call for equal access to resources to boost global food production

Women-led farms are on average 25 per cent less productive than those led by men due to persistent barriers to productive resources and opportunities. To mark UN's International Year of the Woman Farmer, women smallholder farmers issued a global call for ensuring their equal access to agricultural technology, finance and markets, saying that unlocking women's full participation in agriculture could significantly boost food production and reduce hunger worldwide.

According to United Nations data, if women had the same access to productive resources as men, farm yields could increase by 20-30 per cent, which could feed an additional 100 to 150 million people. The participating farmers urged governments, funders and institutions to act on the structural barriers limiting their ability to feed their communities and strengthen food systems.

The farmers made the call during a global virtual event hosted by Heifer International, an organisation working

with smallholder farming households and partners to mark the United Nations (UN)-recognised International Year of the Woman Farmer, launched by the Food and Agriculture Organization, that recognises the vital role women play in global agriculture, and the urgent need to address the barriers that limit their productivity and leadership.

"Women farmers are protecting biodiversity, strengthening local markets and feeding vulnerable communities around the world, despite the barriers we face. Imagine what we could achieve if we had the same access to land, finance and decision-making power as men," said Josselyn Vega, an Indigenous Kichwa Panzaleo farmer from Ecuador who is the former president of the Association of Agroecological Producers of Cotopaxi in Ecuador.

Women produce a significant share of the world's food, and up to 80 per cent of national supplies in developing countries, yet they face persistent barriers to productive resources and opportunities to market their output competitively.



# Catch by the roots

In the red lateritic uplands of western West Bengal, where sal forests sway over undulating terrain and agriculture survives on uncertain monsoons, an unassuming grass quietly sustains the rural economy. For thousands of households across the districts of Jhargram, Bankura and Purulia, it has long been a steady source of livelihood. Locally called sabai or babui, and Eulaliopsis binata in scientific nomenclature, the perennial grass grows in dense clumps and thrives where most crops struggle. It flourishes on degraded, rain-fed uplands, often dismissed as "marginal" and unproductive. It withstands drought, tolerates light frost and requires little beyond seasonal rainfall and minimal labour. Waterlogging can destroy it, but in the dry tropical climate of eastern India excess moisture is rarely the problem.

Nowhere are the ecological resilience and economic potential of this hardy grass more evident than in Jhargram. Four of its blocks—Nayagram, Gopiballavpur-I, Binpur-II and Jhargram—account for 85 per cent of sabai grown in the state. A field-based study was conducted between 2019 and 2025 by researchers from Raja Narendralal Khan Women's College in Midnapore. The study found that 42 per cent of rural households in districts of Jhargram, Bankura and Purulia depend wholly or partially on sabai-related activities, such as



rope-making and the weaving of baskets, mats and home décor.

For generations people in these rural areas have relied on minor forest produce to supplement subsistence farming. Sabai was gathered casually and woven into ropes for household use or sold in local markets for modest returns. Over time the practice has evolved into a semi-organised rural enterprise that now plays a central role in the survival of nearly 65 per cent households in marginalised pockets of these districts.



# Consortium led by Aditya Birla Group acquires RCB for Rs 16,660 crore

IPL 2026

## Spencer Johnson replaces injured Nathan Ellis in CSK



**CHENNAI:** Five-time champions Chennai Super Kings (CSK) have roped in Australian pacer Spencer Johnson as a replacement for Nathan Ellis, who has been ruled out of the whole tournament due to a hamstring injury. Earlier, Johnson had signed for the Quetta Gladiators for the Pakistan Super League (PSL) 2026 season, but he pulled out just before the tournament. The news was made official on March 15, and Johnson cited personal reasons for leaving the PSL. Johnson, who has played 13 international games – 5 ODIs and 8 T20Is – for Australia & has 18 wickets against his name.

MUMBAI

A consortium led by Aditya Birla Group and the Times Internet Limited has acquired the defending Indian Premier League (IPL) and Women's Premier League champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) for INR 16,660 crore, the owners of the franchise informed regulatory bodies on Tuesday.

United Spirits Ltd, the owners of the franchise, made this disclosure in mandatory regulatory filings with the Bombay Stock Exchange and the National Stock Exchange of India on Tuesday.

Bolt Ventures (Bolt) and Blackstone's perpetual private equity strategy (BXPE, Blackstone) are the other members of the consortium that have jointly bought the Royal Challengers Bengaluru, one of the eight original franchises of the IPL that was formed ahead of the inaugural edition in 2008.

The decision to sell off its 100% equity stake in Royal Challengers Sports Private Limited was approved by the board of United Spirits Limited, owned by Diageo India, a subsidiary of the UK-based Diageo plc. This decision was taken by its board in a meeting on Tuesday.

"We wish to inform you that the board of directors of United Spirits Limited at its meeting held today, i.e., March 24, 2026, has inter alia approved the sale of



14,690 equity shares of Royal Challengers Sports Private Limited ("RCSPL"), a wholly owned subsidiary of USL, for an aggregate consideration of INR 166.6 bn, subject to adjustments and other conditions set out in the Share Purchase Agreement (SPA) dated March 24, 2026

executed by and amongst USL, RCSPL, and Bolt IPL Holdings LLC; Aelius Investments Pte Ltd; Asia Investment Topco II Pte. Ltd.; Times Internet Limited; and Metropolitan Media Company Limited (the "Proposed Transaction" and such parties, the "Parties")," the company said

in its statement to the regulatory bodies. "Upon completion of the Proposed Transaction in accordance with the SPA (which is subject to customary conditions including the receipt of all requisite approvals as required to give effect to the Proposed Transaction, including from the Competi-

tion Commission of India and the Board of Control for Cricket in India), USL will cease to hold any shareholding in RCSPL and consequently RCSPL will cease to be a subsidiary of USL," the company said.

According to reports, under the new ownership structure, Aryaman Vikram Birla, Director at the Aditya Birla Group, will serve as Chairman, while Satyan Gajwani of Times Internet Limited will take on the role of Vice Chairman. The consortium also includes David Blitzer, founder of Bolt Ventures, and Viral Patel, CEO of BXPE.

Diageo plc had put RCB on the block as per a decision taken by its board in November 2025, with many suitors expressing interest in taking over the franchise. Those included Adar Poonawalla of Serum Institute of India. But in the end, the company got into a one-to-one negotiation, which eventually resulted in its accepting the offer by this consortium.

RCB is the first and only franchise to hold the IPL and WPL titles at the same time. RCB men won their maiden IPL title in 2025, while the women followed suit to win their second WPL title in February 2026.

The RCB franchise was won in the original team auction by United Spirits Limited, then controlled by the erstwhile liquor baron Vijay Mallya. The Diageo plc acquired the RCB franchise when it took over United Spirits from Mallya.

IPL 2026

## 'Tight security, traffic curbs for Chinnaswamy IPL matches'



**BENGALURU:** Bengaluru Police Commissioner Seemath Kumar Singh on Tuesday said elaborate security and traffic arrangements have been put in place for the upcoming cricket matches at the Chinnaswamy Stadium, scheduled to begin on March 28, with another match on April 5. Addressing a press conference, the Commissioner said the arrangements have been made in accordance with the committee's recommendations to ensure safety and the smooth conduct of the matches. He stressed the need for public cooperation, stating that only spectators with valid digital tickets will be allowed entry into the stadium.

## Ben Duckett pulls out after poor Ashes show; Delhi Capitals to pick replacement soon

NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026, Delhi Capitals opener Ben Duckett has pulled out of the tournament. A source in the Delhi Capitals confirmed to IANS that England batter Duckett informed them about pulling out of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026.

"Yes, Duckett told us he won't be available to play this season. A search for his replacement is on and will be conveyed in due course of time," further said the source.

Duckett was bought for Rs 2 crore at the auction and was expected to partner KL Rahul at the top of the order. However, he has decided to focus on his international commitments with England. The left-hander made this announcement just days before the tournament starts, which is a setback for Delhi's preparations.

Duckett explained that his choice to skip the IPL was influenced by a disappointing winter. He scored 221 runs at an average of 20.2 during the Ashes. Al-



though he was on the T20 World Cup 2026 squad, he did not play in any matches. This further shaped his decision to focus on his international career.

"It was a very difficult decision, and I want to apologise to everyone in Delhi that I won't be coming. I felt it was going to be a great opportunity when I put myself in the auction, and for a franchise like Delhi to pick me

up was amazing. I was buzzing. It's the best competition in the world with the best players, and would have been an amazing experience," Duckett told Telegraph Sport.

Reflecting on his future in the league, the 31-year-old admitted uncertainty over whether he will get another chance. "I don't know if I'm potentially saying goodbye to the IPL, having never

played in it. At my age, it might be tough for me, but I hope one day I'm able to represent Delhi. But I've thought a lot about this, and know it's the right decision for my career," he added.

Delhi Capitals will start their IPL 2026 campaign against the Lucknow Super Giants on April 1. The match is scheduled to take place at the Ekana Cricket Stadium in Lucknow.



## KKR retire jersey No.12 as a tribute to retired star Andre Russell

KOLKATA

Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) have decided to retire jersey number 12 as a tribute to the legendary all-rounder Andre Russell, the West Indian star they have lovingly designated as the Eternal Knight, for his yeoman service to the Indian Premier League (IPL) side. The three-time champions made the special announcement at their pre-season event - Knights Unplugged 3.0 - on Tuesday evening.

Andre Russell, who has returned to the KKR setup as a 'power coach' ahead of the new season, had a distinguished 12-year tenure with the Kolkata Knight Riders, representing the franchise in the Indian Premier

League (IPL) from 2014 to 2025. With his iconic hairstyle and incredible prowess on the cricket field, the West Indian went on to become one of KKR's most prominent players, playing a significant role in helping them secure two IPL titles (2014, 2024).

Russell featured in 140 IPL matches for KKR, scoring 2,651 runs at a strike rate of 174.17 and picking 123 wickets. He is only the second all-rounder in the IPL to register more than 2000 runs and 100 wickets. His power-packed performances also earned him the Most Valuable Player (MVP) of the tournament in 2019, where he amassed 510 runs at a staggering strike rate of 204.81 and an average of 56.66.

## National Indoor Athletics: Pole vaulter Baranica Elangovan raises bar to 4.22m, enters record books

BHUBANESWAR

Tamil Nadu's 29-year-old international pole vaulter Baranica Elangovan was the cynosure of all eyes on the opening day of the first edition of the National Indoor Athletics Championships at Indoor Stadium in Bhubaneswar, setting a new national record on Tuesday. Baranica raised the bar to 4.22m to set a national record in the women's pole vault. The previous national record of 4.21m was set by Rosy Meena Paulraj in 2022 in Bengaluru.

"It's a good day for me to enter my name in the record books," a jubilant Baranica said in a post-competition interaction. "I've been trying hard to cross 4.20m in the past, but Tuesday turned out to be a lucky day for me."

She made an attempt to further raise the bar to 4.25m, but wasn't successful in clearing the height. Away from the pole vault arena, there was an exciting duel in men's long jump between Praveen Chithravel of Tamil Nadu representing JSW and Odisha's Sarun Payasingh.

But it was the 25-year-old Payasingh who clinched the gold medal in the men's long jump with a distance of 7.80m, a personal best. Odisha's newly crowned champion was excited to have won gold in front of the home crowd. "My main focus here at the National Indoor competition was to improve my personal best. I'm happy to have successfully achieved my goal," the football turned long jumper said in the post-competition interaction.

Payasingh started with no mark but sailed to 7.80m in the second attempt, which earned him gold. The eventual winner had no marks on his third and fourth attempts. His fifth jump was 7.69m, and his last jump was 7.79m. Payasingh said he recently changed his jumping tech-



nique, which paid dividends. "I'm on the right track," Payasingh added.

Payasingh's previous best of 7.78m was recorded recently at the Indian Open Jumps Competition in Bengaluru. The main focus in the men's long jump was on Tamil Nadu's international athlete Praveen Chithravel. The national record holder in the triple jump was competing here in the long jump to gain valuable indoor experience. "It was a good experience for me here in Bhubaneswar," Chithravel added. Chithravel's opening jump was 7.32m. He recorded 7.78m in his second jump, and his third jump was 7.55m. Chithravel's main goal is the upcoming 29th National Senior Athletics Federation Competition in Ranchi, scheduled to be held between May 22 and 25.

The competition in Ranchi assumes significance as its qualification event for

the July 23 to August 2 Glasgow Commonwealth Games.

Earlier, Odisha's Sports and Youth Services Minister Suraj Suryabanshi inaugurated the competition, saying the first National Indoor Athletics Championships here at Bhubaneswar's Kalinga Stadium was a historic chapter in Indian athletics.

"Hosting the 2028 World Athletics Indoor Championships in Bhubaneswar will further reaffirm Odisha as the Sports Capital of India," he added.

**Results (day one):**

Men: 800m: Mohammed Afsal (Air Force) 1:47.86 seconds, Kalyan JR (Karnataka) 1:53.98 seconds, Sayan Karmakar (West Bengal) 1:56.98 seconds.

Men: U20: 800m: Lokesh Magendhiran (Tamil Nadu) 1:53.92 seconds, Rajdip Pal (West Bengal) 2:02.34 seconds.

## 74th B.N. Mullick All India Police Football Championship to Commence on March 25: DGP B. Shivadhar Reddy

HYDERABAD

Director General of Police Telangana, B. Shivadhar Reddy, announced that the prestigious 74th B.N. Mullick All India Police Football Championship 2025-26, being hosted by the Telangana State Police, will commence on March 25, 2026.

Sharing details of the tournament, the DGP stated that the Hon'ble Governor of Telangana, Sri Shiv Pratap Shukla, will grace the inaugural ceremony as the Chief Guest. The event is scheduled to be held at 3:00 PM on Wednesday at the GMC Balyogi Stadium, Gachibowli, where the Governor will light the ceremonial sports torch. The DGP informed that a total of 43 teams including police teams from various States and Central Armed Police Forces will participate in this national level tournament.

The championship will be conducted over a period of 12 days, from March 25 to April 5, 2026. The participating teams comprise 34 men's teams and 9 women's teams. A total of 1,038 players will take part in the tournament, including 851 men and 187 women athletes, showcasing their sporting talent and competitive spirit.

As part of the championship, 110 matches will be conducted across five venues in Hyderabad: GMC Balyogi Stadium (Gachibowli), HFC Stadium (Golconda), Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Police Academy Grounds, Sreenidhi Football Stadium, and the Artillery Grounds (Golconda).

During the inaugural ceremony, the participating teams will present a ceremonial Guard of Honour to the Hon'ble Governor as part of a march past led by the team

captains. The DGP further stated that eminent sports personalities, including former Indian football team captain Victor Amalraj, Asian Cup Senior Women's team player Guguloth Soumya, and Arjuna & Dronacharya Awardee and former Indian coach Mr. Nayeemuddin, will take part in the program and jointly light the ceremonial sports torch.

The closing ceremony of the championship will be held on April 5, 2026, during which the winners will be presented with trophies. DGP B. Shivadhar Reddy stated that skilled football players from various states across the country are participating in these competitions, and therefore a large turnout is expected. He further mentioned that the matches can be watched free of cost and invited all sports enthusiasts to attend.

## Rinku Singh named vice-captain of KKR for IPL 2026

KOLKATA



Three-time champions Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) have named Rinku Singh as their vice-captain for the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026 season. Rinku Singh has been a key performer for KKR with his explosive batting and sharp fielding. The 28-year-old brings leadership experience from domestic circuits and previous IPL stints.

"On behalf of everyone in the franchise, we're really delighted to announce that Rinku Singh will be the Vice-captain of the team. Rinku joined KKR in 2018 and has been a regular in the team ever since," said Venky Mysore, CEO, Kolkata Knight Riders.

KKR, led by veteran India opener Ajinkya Rahane, will open their IPL 2026 campaign against five-time champions Mumbai Indi-

ans at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on March 29. Their first home match will be against 2016 winners Sunrisers Hyderabad at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata on April 2, before hosting Punjab Kings and Lucknow Super Giants for clashes on April 6 and 9, respectively.

KKR are currently conducting trials on the sidelines of their pre-season camp to finalise replacements for injured pacers Harshit Rana. The likes of Navdeep Saini, Akash Madhwal, Simarjeet Singh, Sandeep Warrier, KM Asif, and Sunil Kumar have been attending the trials to fill the vacant spots in the KKR line-up.

Earlier, KKR replaced India pacer Akash Deep, who was ruled out of the competition due to a stress reaction in his lower back, with Vidarbha pacer Saurabh Dubey. Dubey was signed by the 2016 champions Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) for IPL 2022.

# Yami Gautam's Cameo In Aditya Dhar's Dhurandhar 2 Is Connected To Haq & Uri: Here's How

Aditya Dhar's Dhurandhar: The Revenge has been in the headlines ever since its release, and one of the most talked-about topics is Yami Gautam's cameo in the Ranveer Singh starrer. Yami's cameo in Dhurandhar isn't grand, but it comes at an important turn in the film. Now, people are finding it interesting because of how it links to the actor's roles in two of her earlier films, Haq and Uri: The Surgical Strike.

## About Yami Gautam's Cameo

In Dhurandhar: The Revenge, Yami makes a brief appearance as a nurse who is actually an undercover agent in Pakistan, helping Hamza keep his secret alive. Now, how does her character have a connection with her previous roles in Haq and Uri: The Surgical Strike? Read on to find out.

If you have watched Dhurandhar: The Revenge and remember Yami's character as the nurse, then you must have noticed the name Aditya Dhar has given her in the film. Dhar has named Yami's character in Dhurandhar 2 as Shazia Bano, which is the role she had acted in her previous film Haq. This similar name is a subtle callback or Easter egg for attentive viewers.

Now, coming to how her character is related to her role in the Vicky Kaushal starrer Uri. Remember when Yami played Pallavi Sharma, a R&AW officer in the 2019 spy drama? Her character was first introduced as a nurse named Jasmine, who enters Vicky's house to take care of his ailing mother. This narrative is mirrored in Dhurandhar as well, where Yami plays a nurse-turned-agent.

To note, Uri: The Surgical Strike also marked Yami Gautam's first collaboration with Aditya Dhar, following which they became friends. Their friendship soon turned into a beautiful love story, and they got married



## Why Puri Jagannadh Finding Himself In Deeper Trouble?

One of the iconic film makers in Telugu Cinema Puri Jagannadh this facing a very peculiar situation and let us have a look into the same. Puri Jagannadh is currently facing serious trouble with his upcoming films due to unpaid dues from his previous project Liger.

Distributors and theatre owners are reportedly refusing to release his new movies until he clears the money owed from Liger's theatrical run. Liger, which starred Vijay Deverakonda, was a high-profile film released in 2022 but failed to perform as expected at the box office. Many distributors and buyers claimed they faced losses and Puri Jagannadh had promised to settle the payments.

According to industry sources, he has not yet fully paid the dues, and this has led to the current standstill. The situation is not

an official government ban. It is an industry-driven decision where distributors and exhibitors are taking action to protect their financial interests. Until the payments are cleared, they are reportedly blocking the release of Puri's upcoming films, including Slumdog, which stars Vijay Sethupathi.

This move highlights the importance of financial accountability in the film industry. Directors and producers need to settle previous obligations to ensure smooth releases for future projects. Industry insiders say that unless Puri Jagannadh resolves the pending dues, he may continue to face resistance, delays, or limited releases for his films. The current scenario is a reminder of how crucial distributor relations are in Tollywood, and the resolution of these financial issues will determine how easily Puri Jagannadh's future films reach audiences.



## Badshah Marries Isha Rikhi 6 Years After Divorce From Jasmine Masih? Wedding Photos Go Viral

Singer-rapper Badshah has reportedly married Punjabi actress and model Isha Rikhi, though the couple has not officially confirmed the news. Speculation began after Isha's mother, Poonam Rikhi, shared photos on Instagram showing the two performing wedding rituals with family members.

In the pictures, Badshah is seen in a brown kurta with a golden saafa, while Isha wears a traditional red salwar kameez. The couple is also seen exchanging garlands and posing together, smiling. Poonam captioned

the post, "God bless you," further fueling marriage rumours.

Badshah and Isha have reportedly been in a relationship for nearly four years after meeting through mutual friends at a party. Isha made her acting debut with Jatt Boys Putt Jattan De (2013) and later appeared in Bollywood film Nawabzaade (2018).

Badshah was previously married to Jasmine Masih, with whom he shares a daughter. The couple separated in 2020, citing an unhealthy environment for their child as the reason for their split.



## Viral Video Sparks Dating Rumors Between Kavya Kalyanram, Kaala Bhairava

Kavya Kalyanram rose to fame with the movie Balagam in the year 2023. Earlier, she acted as a child artist in several movies. She got noticed after the success of Balagam. Later, she acted in Masooda. Over the past few days, rumors have been circulating that Kavya is dating Kaala Bhairava, the elder son of legendary music director MM Keeravani. If reports are to be believed, the families of the rumored couple have already accepted the relationship and given their blessings.

Fans are now eagerly waiting for the pair to make it official. The latest round of speculations gained even more traction after Kaala Bhairava and Kavya were spotted together at a book launch; the resulting pictures and videos went viral on social media.



## Mrunal Thakur in Talks for a Special Role in Ram Charan's Peddi?

Reports indicate that the makers of Peddi have approached Mrunal for a high-energy special song. While she has reportedly shown interest, the production team is currently awaiting her final confirmation. Industry insiders suggest there is a strong possibility she will either perform this special number or appear in a significant cameo alongside Ram Charan.

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Directed by Buchi Babu Sana, Peddi is scheduled for a grand theatrical release on April 30, 2026. The film features a heavy-hitting crew, with music by the legendary AR Rahman and production by Venkata Satish Kilaru. Janhvi Kapoor stars as the female lead, with Kannada superstar Shiva Rajkumar playing a pivotal role.

On the work front, Mrunal Thakur is also gearing up for the release of Dacoit: A Love Story, co-starring Adivi Sesh. Directed by Shaneil Deo, the film is slated to hit screens on April 10, 2026.

