







## IN BRIEF

## Dhankar discharged from AIIMS

New Delhi: Vice-president Jagdeep Dhankar was discharged from AIIMS-Delhi on Wednesday after making a satisfactory recovery. He was admitted to the AIIMS on March 9 following cardiac-related ailments, it said in a statement.



Jagdeep Dhankar

"After receiving necessary care from the medical team at AIIMS, he made a satisfactory recovery and was discharged on March 12," said AIIMS. He has been advised to take adequate rest for the next few days. In a post on X, Mr Dhankar thanked the medical team of the AIIMS. "Deeply appreciate the exemplary care and professionalism of the medical team at AIIMS, New Delhi, from my admission on March 9 to discharge on March 12. Their dedication and meticulous attention ensured a smooth recovery," he said. "Grateful for the concern and good wishes from well-wishers across India and beyond. Your thoughtful gestures have been truly heartening," the V-P added.

## TB drive mobilises many for awareness

New Delhi: Delhi's 100-day tuberculosis awareness and screening campaign, launched in December last year, has mobilised schools, colleges and shelter homes to enhance prevention of the disease and early detection efforts. Educational institutions, including Kendriya Vidyalayas, Delhi government schools and private schools like Ramjas International, have conducted awareness sessions and rallies. IIT Delhi, Jamia Millia Islamia and JNU have also joined the initiative, with many students becoming Nikshay Mitras — adopting TB patients and providing them with food baskets for six months.

## Army Subedar die in road accident

New Delhi: A 48-year-old Army Subedar, posted in Ambala Cantonment, died in a road accident in outer-north Delhi's Alipur area, the police said on Wednesday. An emergency call was received from Max Hospital in Shalimar Bagh on March 8 regarding Jagtar Singh being brought dead after a road traffic accident on the service road near Khampur Red Light, towards Sonipat, they said. The body was later shifted to BJRM Hospital mortuary for postmortem. A case was registered, following a statement from his wife, Neelam Saini, and further investigation was taken up, the police said.

## END SINGLE-USE PLASTIC, DELHI SCHOOLS TOLD

New Delhi: The Delhi directorate of education has instructed all the government schools to phase out single-use plastics (SUPs), commonly used for serving food and beverages, following a directive from the department of environment. In a circular issued on Tuesday, the directorate said, "All Heads of Government and government-aided recognised schools are directed to refrain from using single-use plastics." The government has identified 19 single-use plastic items to be phased out, including ice cream sticks, wrapping or packaging films around sweet boxes, plastic flags, candy sticks, straws, plastic spoons, and forks. On February 28, the department of environment in its advisory highlighted that SUPs are non-biodegradable and create anaerobic conditions. "Many of these items, including carry bags, packaging films, straws, and cups, are lightweight and can be easily carried by the wind or mixed with other solid waste. They often end up in water bodies, clog drains and sewer systems," the advisory said.

## ■ 12 India univs in top 50; 3 IITs, 2 IIMs and JNU's rank drop IITs, IIMs, JNU among top 50 in QS rankings; ISM tops list

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

Nine Indian universities and institutions have appeared among the world's top 50 in Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings by subject even as some of the top institutions on the list, including three IITs, two IIMs, and JNU, saw a drop in their positions. The Indian School of Mines (ISM) University, Dhanbad, which ranks 20th globally for engineering-mineral and mining has bagged the top position in India.

As per the 15th edition of the QS World University Rankings announced on Wednesday, India celebrates 12 top 50 positions across the subject rankings and the broad faculty areas earned by nine institutions.

Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay and Kharagpur have been ranked 28th and 45th in engineering-mineral and mining.



However, both institutions have seen a drop in their positions. IIT Delhi and Bombay, which shared the 45th rank for engineering and technology, have improved their position to bag the 26th and 28th spots, respectively.

The two institutions have also improved their rank for engineering-electrical and electronic to enter the top 50 list. Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad and Bangalore continued to be among the world's top 50 for business and manage-

ment studies but their ranking has dropped since the previous year.

While IIM Ahmedabad's ranking dropped to 27 from 22, that of IIM Bangalore slipped to 40 from 32.

IIT Madras (petroleum engineering) and Jawaharlal Nehru University (development studies) continued to be among the world's top 50 but their ranks also dropped by a few spots.

"A total of 79 Indian universities — 10 more than last year — feature 533 times across this year's rankings, marking a 25.7

per cent increase compared to the previous edition. This includes 454 entries in individual subjects and 79 appearances across the five broad faculty areas," QS said in a statement.

O.P. Jindal Global University has also retained its position in law.

"For the sixth consecutive year, Jindal Global Law School (JGLS) has been ranked as the first Law School in India and the top 100 in the world (78th in the world)," said the university in a statement.

In the latest edition of the QS subject-specific rankings, India has the fifth highest number of new entries behind China, the US, the UK, and Korea, and ranks 12th for the number of overall entries.

"The high number of the new entries featured in the rankings is a continuation of a trend of the country's growing higher education ecosystem, both in terms of size and quality," QS added.

## Atishi claims bias in Assembly; Speaker says charges political

'Opp MLAs unfairly marshalled out during L-G address'

AVINASH PRABHAKAR  
JHA  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

A fresh political row has erupted ahead of the budget session of the Delhi Assembly as Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Atishi on Wednesday accused Speaker Vijender Gupta of "undermining democratic norms" by selectively targeting Opposition MLAs and expelling them during the Assembly session that concluded on March 3.

Terming Ms Atishi's allegations as "political," Mr Gupta said that actions against the AAP MLAs were taken in line with the Assembly rules.

In her letter to Mr Gupta, the Leader of the Opposition alleged that Opposition MLAs were unfairly marshalled out during the lieutenant-governor's address for chanting slogans whereas BJP MLAs faced no action for similar sloganeering.

"During the address of the L-G (V.K. Saxena), sloganeering was done by MLAs of the Opposition and the ruling party. The Opposition raised slogans



AAP workers during a protest against the BJP government in New Delhi on Wednesday.

— ASIAN AGE

of 'Jai Bheem' while the ruling party raised slogans of 'Modi, Modi, Modi.' All Opposition MLAs were marshalled out of the Assembly. However, no ruling party MLA was marshalled out or asked to leave despite repeated sloganeering," Ms Atishi wrote.

Mr Gupta in his response said, "I am surprised that instead of apologising for yourself and your party members' disruptive behaviour, you are finding fault with my lawful directions."

Citing Rule 277 to justify his decision to expel the

AAP members, he clarified that the said rule spells out the definition of "precincts," which covers the Assembly premises for regulating access.

She also criticised the decision to bar suspended MLAs from the Assembly premises, calling it "unprecedented in independent India."

Additionally, she claimed that AAP MLAs were allotted only 14 per cent of the speaking time during discussions on the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report while BJP MLAs were given 86 per cent.

## JNUSU polls to be held in next 2 months, HC verdict pending

Circular comes amid growing student protests

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

The Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) administration has announced that the students' Union elections for the 2024-25 terms will be held in the next two months subject to the outcome of an ongoing case in the Delhi high court.

In a circular issued by dean of students Manuradha Chaudhary, the university stated that the elections must be conducted in accordance with applicable laws and guidelines.

The circular comes amid growing student protests, demanding an immediate election notification.

■ AROUND 80 students led by the JNUSU have been staging a sit-in at the dean of students' office for the past six days, alleging the administration was deliberately delaying the elections

Around 80 students led by the JNU students' union (JNUSU) have been staging a sit-in at the dean of students' office for the past six days, alleging the administration was deliberately delaying the elections.

"Detailed guidelines from the office of the dean of students will be shared in due course," the circular read.

It also clarified that the

process is contingent on the verdict in a case in which the university has sought necessary clarifications from the Delhi high court on some provisions of the Lyngdoh Committee Report, which governs student body elections.

In a separate notice on March 5, the administration cited a report by a court-appointed observer, former Supreme Court judge V. Ramasubramanian, who pointed out inconsistencies in the Lyngdoh Committee Report.

The university has sought legal clarification, with the next court hearing scheduled for March 27.

## ■ Suicide suspected due to financial distress, bodies 4-5 days old

## Mother, 2 kids found dead at home

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

A 42-year-old woman and her two daughters were found dead at their home in southeast Delhi's Molarband, with initial investigations suggesting suicide due to financial distress, the police said on Wednesday.

The decomposed bodies were found after neighbours reported a foul smell emanating from the residence, a police officer said.

The police received a PCR call from Molarband, with the caller informing

that a strong odour was coming from house number 43 on the second floor in street number 16, where the mother and daughter resided, he said.

Responding immediately, assistant commissioner of police (ACP) and station house officer, Badarpur, rushed to the spot and found the bodies of — Pooja (42), her elder daughter (18), and her younger daughter, aged around 8-9 years, he added.

The three had white foam coming out of their mouths, suggesting the consumption of a poison-

■ LOCALS INFORMED that the family had not paid rent for the past two months, which might have contributed to their decision of allegedly killing themselves

ous substance, a senior police officer said.

Initial observations suggested that the bodies were around four to five days old.

Preliminary investigations suggest financial distress as a possible reason behind the alleged suicide, he said.

Locals informed that the family had not paid rent for the past two months, which might have contributed to their decision of allegedly killing themselves, the police said.

The crime team was called to the scene, and forensic experts examined the site for evidence. The bodies have been sent for postmortem which will confirm the exact cause of death, they said.

Further investigation in the matter is underway, with police probing all angles, including financial hardships, the officer added.

## ₹2.01cr paid to 33 affected families in NDLS stampede

New Delhi, March 12: A

total of ₹2.01 crore was paid to 33 families whose members either died or were injured in the February 15 stampede at the New Delhi Railway station, the government informed Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

"In the instant case, ex gratia of ₹10 lakh to the next of kin of each deceased, ₹2.50 lakh each to the grievously injured, and ₹1 lakh each to the lightly injured has been paid," Railway minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said in a written response to a question in Lok Sabha.

The stampede happened at the New Delhi Railway station on the evening of February 15 amid a huge rush of devotees headed to the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj.

In his response in

■ EX GRATIA of ₹10 lakh to the next of kin of each deceased, ₹2.50 lakh each to the grievously injured, and ₹1 lakh each to the lightly injured has been paid

Parliament, Mr Vaishnaw did not give the number of the deceased and the injured, but after the incident officials had said the stampede killed 18 people and left 15 injured.

Mr Vaishnaw said a high-level inquiry has been ordered into the incident.

On other questions by members on the stampede and amenities created for devotees during the Maha Kumbh Mela, the Railway minister gave a detailed response.

"Infrastructure improvement/augmentation/capacity enhancement works

in the Prayagraj area of more than ₹5,000 crore have been completed," he said, giving details about the doubling of lines and construction of road under and over-bridges among others.

According to the Railway minister, more than 17,300 trains were operated during the Maha Kumbh period — January 13 to February 28 — and they carried 4.24 crore passengers.

"This includes more than 3,000 special trains, a significant increase from the 694 trains operated during the 2019 Kumbh. For the first time, ring rail services connecting key religious sites like Ayodhya, Varanasi, and Chitrakoot were operated on a daily basis during the mela," Mr Vaishnaw said.

## Diplomat suicide: Batchmates hold condolence meet

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

Batchmates of deceased Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer Jitendra Rawat of the 2011 batch who committed suicide last week held a condolence meeting in his memory recently and hailed his professional dedication during his various postings as a diplomat in the past more than a decade.

The IFS officer had reportedly jumped to his death from his residential complex at Chanakyapuri in south Delhi.

Fellow IFS officers of the 2011 batch said India had "lost one of its young, bright and committed civil servants of the IFS and an affable, promising and progressive diplomat".

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
E-TENDER NOTICE	
Open tender through E-tendering are invited by Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer/ TRS, Electric Loco Shed, Khanalpura Yard, Northern Railway, Saharanpur (Ambala Division) for and on behalf of the President of India from the registered tenderer on web site <a href="http://www.reps.gov.in">www.reps.gov.in</a> for the following work upto 11:00 hrs on the date of closing shown against the work and will be opened thereafter:-	
Open Tender No.	ELS-SRE-T-54
Name of work	Overhauling of Co-Co High Adhesion Bogies of WAG-9 Locomotives at ELS/SRE.
Date of Closing/ Opening	04.04.2025
Approx. Cost.	Rs. 15,51,180/-
Earnest Money	Rs. 31,000/-
Completion period	01 years
Validity period	60 days
Cost of tender form	Free of cost for downloading from IREPS & ₹ 3000/- for obtaining from Sr.DEE/TRS/SRE office.
1. Tenderer(s) should have Class-II Digital Signature Certificate to participate in E-Tendering of Works Tenders. 2. Tenderer are required to upload self-attested scanned copies of all related eligibility documents as per conditions. 3. Taxes & Charges will be applicable as per extant rule. 4. For details, please log on IREPS website <a href="http://www.ireps.gov.in">www.ireps.gov.in</a> No. ELS-SRE-T-54 Dt. 11.03.2025	
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	
783/25	

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
NOTICE INVITING TENDER	
Name of work and its locations	30-Elect-64-T-2024-25-E3 Electrical work in connection with: Provision of 08 Nos. Rooms, with combine toilet/bathroom in 04 Nos. Room on PF No. 01 at HNZ Metastation. (iv) Replacement of mechanical cabin of TKD (D & F) cabin with EL.
Approx cost of the works in	Rs. 36.27 lacs
Address of the office	Sr. Divl Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.
Earnest Money	Rs. 72,600.00
Date & time of submission of tender	07.04.2025, 12:00 Hrs.
Opening of tender	07.04.2025, 12:00 Hrs.
Website & notice board	<a href="http://www.ireps.gov.in">www.ireps.gov.in</a> & Sr. Divl. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	
785/2025	



## SHORT TAKES

## Nitish high in House on cannabis: Rabri

**Patna:** Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar on Wednesday came under a no-holds-barred attack from the Opposition RJD after he engaged in a verbal duel with his predecessor Rabri Devi inside the state Legislative Council. An unprecedented spat was witnessed between the two septuagenarians after which Ms Devi staged a walkout and accused the CM of having come to the House after consuming "bhang" (cannabis) while her son Tejashwi Yadav, a former deputy CM, demanded the resignation of his ex-boss whom he charged with "gesticulating at female legislators". Trouble began when Shashi Yadav, an MLC of the CPI(M), an RJD ally, rose in her chair to submit before the House that she was not satisfied with the government's reply to her question. On which, Mr Kumar said, "The government is doing so much. The earlier governments did nothing." — *PTI*

## Menu, food rate list mandatory in trains

**New Delhi:** Display of menu and rate list of food items being served to passengers in trains is mandatory, railway minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told Lok Sabha on Wednesday. "Menu of all food items along with rates are available on IRCTC's website for information of passengers. Printed menu cards with all details are made available with waiters and presented to passengers on demand," he said in a written reply. "The rate list is also displayed in pantry cars. Further, to make the passengers aware of menu and tariff of catering services over Indian Railways, SMS to passengers with link to menu and tariff has been started," he added. — *PTI*

## Odisha Cong will gherao House Mar 27

**Bhubaneswar:** The Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) has announced plans to gherao the state Assembly on March 27 in protest against the alleged rise in atrocities against women and the suspension of senior leader Tara Prasad Bahinipati for his alleged "unruly" behavior. The decision was taken during a meeting at the Congress bhawan, chaired by state party chief Bhakta Charan Das. The party has seized on the issue of women's safety to corner the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). On Monday and Tuesday, Congress MLAs created a commotion in the Assembly, demanding a chief minister Mohan Charan Majhi's response. Mr Bahinipati, an MLA from Koraput, was seen climbing onto the Speaker's podium and damaging the microphone. In response, Speaker Surama Padhy suspended him for seven days on Tuesday.

## MUNDE IRKED AS BJP MLA LINKS HER TO MURDER

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI, MARCH 12

BJP secretary and Maharashtra Cabinet minister Pankaja Munde on Wednesday complained against her party legislator Suresh Dhas for dragging her name in the murder case of Santosh Deshmukh, the slain sarpanch of Massajog village in Beed district. Ms Munde said that she has asked the party leadership to give a warning to Mr Dhas and ask him not to link her with the Massajog case. Ms Munde is the cousin of NCP leader Dhananjay Munde, who resigned from the state Cabinet after his close aide Walmik Karad was arrested in the murder case. Mr Karad is the alleged mastermind behind the murder.

Mr Dhas, who is the MLA from the Ashti constituency in Beed, has been vocal in raising the issue of Deshmukh's murder. He was at the forefront of demanding action against Mr Karad and Mr Munde. Recently, Mr Dhas had questioned why Ms Munde maintained silence and did not visit the sarpanch's family after he was killed. Mr Dhas had also said that Mr Karad had worked for Ms Munde.

## BJP sweeps Haryana civic polls; 'stamp of approval', claims CM

■ Wins 9 of 10 bodies ■ Cong bites dust, fails to defend Rohtak bastion

SHASHI BHUSHAN and BHASKAR HARI SHARMA  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

The BJP on Wednesday swept the Haryana municipal polls by winning nine of the 10 civic bodies, while the remaining one was won by an Independent candidate. The Congress, which was looking to turn around its electoral fortunes after suffering a blow in the 2024 Assembly polls, had to bite the dust as it neither opened its account nor was it able to defend its bastion Rohtak.

The civic polls dealt a blow to the Congress, which saw workers and leaders in districts switching over to the BJP ahead of the elections. The party state unit has, in the past, been faced with infighting and factionalism unlike the BJP, which has a well-organised and strong organisational structure at the grassroots level.

Polls to elect mayors and ward members in seven municipal corporations — Gurgaon, Manesar, Faridabad, Hisar, Rohtak,



Haryana chief minister Nayab Singh Saini distributes sweets on Wednesday after BJP's mayoral candidates registered victories in seven municipal corporations in Haryana, while its nominees were leading in two other civic bodies in the recently held elections. — *PTI*

Karnal, and Yamunanagar — were held on March 2. The bypolls for the mayoral posts in Ambala and Sonapat and the elections for presidents and ward members in 21 municipal committees were also held the same day. For the Panipat municipal corporation, polling was held on March 9 to elect the mayor and 26 councillors. Prime Minister Narendra Modi thanked the people of

Haryana for the BJP's historic victory in the municipal elections. "I am very grateful to my family members in Haryana for the historic victory of BJP in the Haryana civic elections," he said on X., adding that the landslide win was "an expression of the unwavering faith of the people in the development work being carried out by the government led by chief minister Nayab Singh Saini.

Thanking the people of the state, and other leaders, Union home minister Amit Shah said, "Haryana has 'faith only in Modi ji."

With the BJP sweeping the civic polls, party president J.P. Nadda and chief minister Nayab Singh Saini hailed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's governance.

"This is a historic victory for the BJP and a 'reflection of the unwavering faith' people have in the public welfare schemes and development-oriented policies that reached wards under the guidance of PM Modi," Mr Nadda said.

Before interacting with reporters and making a statement in the Assembly, Mr Saini expressed heartfelt thanks to the people of Haryana and also thanked the state election commission for conducting smooth and peaceful elections.

The CM said that the people have put their stamp of approval on the policies of the government and the "triple engine government".

## Shah on 3-day visit to Assam, Mizoram from March 14 to 16

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

Union home minister Amit Shah will embark on a three-day visit to Assam from March 14 to 16, during which he will address an annual conference of the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) in Kokrajhar and also inaugurate the Lachit Borpuhan Police Academy at Dergaon. Mr Shah will inaugurate the police academy on March 15 and leave for Mizoram, where he will attend a function for shifting of the Assam Rifles establishments from Aizawl to Zokhawasang, around 15 km from the state capital. He will return to Guwahati after the event. The next day (March 16), he will address the 57th annual conference of the ABSU, before returning to Delhi, officials said on Wednesday.

In Guwahati, ABSU president Dipen Boro said the four-day conference, which will begin on March 13 at Dotma in Kokrajhar district, will bring together policymakers, educators, and community leaders to discuss education and youth development.

The conference aims to advance the "Mission Quality Education Movement — 2030", he said.

The education and youth conclave will focus on strategies to empower students and professionals, while experts will analyse the impact of NEP 2020 on regional learning. Perspectives from scholars, policymakers, and industry specialists will shape conversations that seek practical solutions for improving education and employment opportunities, he said.

## Manipur: 3 held for posing as Shah's son

MANOJ ANAND  
GUWAHATI, MARCH 12

Manipur police on Wednesday brought three persons who were arrested from Uttarakhand for allegedly impersonating as Union home minister Amit Shah's son and approaching several of Manipur legislators to make them chief minister in case of them paying money.

Informing that after the imposition of the President's rule in the state, security sources said that several legislators had received phone calls from the three accused who allegedly identified themselves as Mr Shah's son Jay Shah and offered them a CM

position for a sum of ₹4 crore.

"Three individuals arrested earlier in Uttarakhand were brought to Imphal by the Manipur police, following an investigation in connection with two FIRs registered at Imphal police station," the police said.

The accused had made phone calls to several MLAs of Manipur in February, following the resignation of N. Biren Singh as the CM.

The police added that they impersonated Jay Shah, son of Union home minister Amit Shah, and had asked the MLAs for huge funds promising that they would be considered for the post of CM.

## Parl's nod to bill to amend law on oil exploration, production

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

The Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Bill, 2024, after a two-hour discussion. The bill, passed by the Rajya Sabha on December 3, 2024, aims to amend the existing law governing exploration

and production of oil and gas. It also aims to delink petroleum and mineral oil production from mining and decriminalise minor offences, replacing imprisonment and minor fines with a penalty of ₹25 lakhs for violations.

The Act defines mineral oils to include petroleum and natural gas and expands the definition to include any naturally occurring hydrocarbon, coal bed methane, and

shale gas/oil. It clarifies that mineral oils will not include coal, lignite or helium. The Act provides for a mining lease. The lease provides for various activities such as exploration, prospecting, production, making merchantable, and disposal of mineral oils.

However, the bill replaces the mining lease with a petroleum lease, which also covers a similar set of activities. Existing mining leases granted under the Act will continue to be valid.

While moving the bill for consideration and passage in the Lok Sabha, petroleum and natural gas minister Hardeep Singh Puri said the proposed law does not alter the existing level-playing field for both public and private sectors.

"The oil bill aims to resolve one of the biggest grievances of global oil companies interested in investing in India by providing stability in operation, both in terms of tenure of the lease and the condition," he said.

"The bill also does not alter the rights of the states, which will continue to give petroleum leases and receive royalties as before. The bill also does not alter the existing level-playing field and offers no preference to either the private or the public sector," the minister added.

## Govt gave free food to 80cr poor: Joshi

'UPA govt introduced food security law haphazardly ahead of '14 LS polls'

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

Union minister Pralhad Joshi on Wednesday said that the UPA government introduced a food security law in 2013, haphazardly eying next year's general elections, but it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who took the initiative to provide free foodgrains to 80 crore people in a systematic way.

Replying in Question Hour in Lok Sabha, the Centre also said that it is the responsibility of state governments to stop all kinds of illegal coal mining, including rat-hole, underlining that it is working in close coordination with states to lower the number of accidents in coal fields.

## Nothing left if poll process is compromised: RJD's Jha in RS

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

RJD MP Manoj Kumar Jha on Wednesday expressed concern in Rajya Sabha over duplicate voter ID card numbers, and demanded that the Election Commission should immediately take a call on the extent of the duplication in the country. Later, raising the issue of duplicate Electoral Photo Identity Card

During Question Hour, replying to Congress member Praniti Shinde remark that the National

(EPIC) numbers, the RJD MP said it is a matter of concern, as the Article 324 of the Constitution enshrines free and fair elections as well as the level-playing field.

"This (Parliament) is temple of democracy and democracy thrives because of elections. If the procedure and process of election is compromised and there is a smell of fraud therein then nothing will be left," he said.

Food Security Act, 2013, which aimed to provide subsidised food grains to the poor, was the brain-

child of her party's leader Sonia Gandhi. Mr Joshi said that UPA government introduced a food security law in 2013 haphazardly eying next year's general elections. "The Congress brought the food security act in 2013 only because of the election. It was introduced in a haphazard manner. Even rules under the act were not framed. When the NDA government assumed charge after the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took the initiative to ensure free food grains to the poor as he understands their pain," the Union minister said, adding that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is providing free foodgrains to 80 crore people in the country.

## ■ 'Muslims were part of Shivaji Maharaj forces' Unease in Mahayuti after Ajit warns Rane over hate speech

BHAGWAN PARAB  
MUMBAI, MARCH 12

Rift in the ruling Mahayuti government has again come to fore as deputy chief minister and NCP chief Ajit Pawar on Wednesday asked BJP minister Nitesh Rane to show restraint and ensure that statements in public do not cause a communal rift. "Whether from the ruling or Opposition side, leaders must refrain from making statements that could create a law-and-order situation. There are many Muslims in our country who are patriotic," Mr Pawar said in Karad on Wednesday.

The NCP leader's remarks have come on the backdrop of Mr Rane's controversial claims that Muslims were not part of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's army. Calling Mr Rane's statement "misleading", Mr Pawar said historians have shown that members of the Muslim community were indeed part of Shivaji Maharaj's forces.

"Historians, after intensive research, have proven that Muslims were indeed



Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar arrives to pay tribute to Maharashtra's first chief minister Yashwantrao Chavan on his birth anniversary in Karad on Wednesday. — *PTI*

part of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's army. While founding a sovereign state, Shivaji Maharaj never discriminated against any one on the basis of caste or creed. Who was in charge of Shivaji Maharaj's ammunition department? He was a Muslim. Several such examples can be given. Muslims in India are patriotic," Mr Pawar said.

"Some individuals, from both sides of the political

divide, sometimes make statements that are detrimental to Maharashtra's rich cultural heritage," the deputy chief minister said.

Mr Rane has already stoked controversy by supporting the "jhatka meat" suppliers in Maharashtra to counter the "halal" meat. He has launched a certification called "malhar certificate" under which only Hindus are allowed to sell meat.

## ■ Bhagwa is my identity, one day the world will wear it: UP CM Sambhal predates Islam, claims Yogi

Lucknow, March 12:

Sambhal has been mentioned in scriptures 5,000 years ago, and it predates Islam, Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath said on Wednesday amid a controversy over the origins of a mosque believed by some to be built on the site of a demolished temple.

The Vishnu temple in the town was destroyed in 1526, so was the Ram temple in Ayodhya two years later; the CM said, while asserting that "bhagwa" (saffron) is his identity and the "entire world will wear it one day".

"Sambhal has been mentioned in scriptures that are 5,000 years old. They contain references to Lord Vishnu's future incarnation, Islam, on the other hand, emerged only 1,400 years ago. I am talking about something that pre-



Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath during inspection of the under-construction Varanasi International Cricket Stadium on Wednesday. — *PTI*

dates Islam by at least 2,000 years," Mr Adityanath said at an event in Lucknow.

"The evidence for these things has existed for centuries. Remember, in 1526, a temple of Lord Vishnu in Sambhal was demol-

ished. Two years later, in 1528, the Ram temple in Ayodhya was destroyed," the CM asserted.

He claimed that both acts were done by Mir Baqi, commander of Mughal emperor Babur, but excavation efforts in

Sambhal have uncovered 18 ancient pilgrimage sites.

Tension has been simmering in Sambhal since last November after riots erupted during a court-ordered survey of Shahi Jama Masjid. The survey was ordered, following claims that the mosque was built over the ruins of a Hindu temple allegedly destroyed during the Mughal era.

Addressing a gathering at the event titled, "Manthan: Kumbh and Beyond", organised by RSS-linked weeklies *Organiser* and *Panchjanya*, Mr Adityanath said, "I am a Yogi. I respect every sect, community and form of worship. If you visit Gorakhnath Peeth, you will see that there is no discrimination against anyone." — *PTI*



Young women participate in Basanta Utsab in Kolkata on Wednesday. — *PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY*

## More schemes for 1.27cr ladli behna in MP

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
BHOPAL, MARCH 12

Around 1.27 crore women beneficiaries of the "Ladli Behna Yojana" of the Madhya Pradesh government will be included in the three Central welfare schemes to avail additional benefits of pension and insurance cover, provided under these programmes.

This was announced by deputy chief minister Jagdish Devda, who holds the finance portfolio, while presenting an annual budget of ₹421,032 crore for 2025-26, a 15 per cent increase over the last fiscal, in the state Assembly here on Wednesday.

The budget has earmarked ₹18,669 crore for the implementation of the "Ladli Behna Yojana".

Piggybacking on the populist scheme, the BJP retained power in the state by securing 163 seats in the 230-member Assembly in the last state polls.

## Dhami cracks down on illegal madrasas, 55 sealed in 15 days

PRITHVIRAJ SINGH  
DEHRADUN, MARCH 12

Clamping down on illegal madrasas in the state, the Pushkar Singh Dhami government in Uttarakhand has sealed more than 55 such institutions in the last 15 days. The state Waqf Board criticised the move, saying the action was aimed at preventing the future of the minority community.

Reiterating the BJP government's commitment to act against such religious institutions, the CM said any attempts to shift the demographic status of the state will not be allowed by his government.

According to officials of the urban development department, several illegal madrasas were raised in Dehradun as they were constructed without permission from the authorities concerned. As per officials, 12 illegal madrasas were sealed in the Vikasnagar block of Dehradun and nine in Mr



Pushkar Singh Dhami

Dhami's home town of Khatima in the Udham Singh Nagar district. Prior to this, the district administrations ordered the closure of 31 illegally-run madrasas in their respective areas, including several in hill towns.

The CM said he was getting repeated complaints against illegal madrasas being run in different parts of the state for a long time. "Complaints were being received about the expanding network of illegal madrasas. There were attempts to create population imbalance by setting up religious institutions. Strict action was taken against such illegal structures," he said.



SHORT TAKES

INA veteran will visit War Memorial

**Nagpur:** Age Correspondent New Delhi, March 12 Lieutenant R. Madhavan Pillai, a 99-year-old veteran of the Indian National Army (INA), will begin his 100th year by placing a wreath at the National War Memorial and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's statue at Kartavya Path on March 13. Lt. Pillai, born on 13 March 1926 in Swryan Township, Burma, is one of the last surviving INA veterans. He belonged to a family originally from Sivagangai district, TN, and joined the Indian Independence League as a civilian before enlisting in the Azad Hind Fauj on 1 November 1943, at the age of 18. The ceremony will be attended by dignitaries, members of the armed forces, and the public, to remember India's rich legacy of sacrifice and patriotism. Serving as a recruiting officer, he mobilised support for the INA across 32 locations in Burma, including Hanthawaddy, Sawbwagale, Ywadanhshe, Swryan, Yangon, and Mayongone.

DefMin inks ₹2.9cr contract with BEL

**New Delhi:** As part of the government's efforts to strengthen indigenous defence capabilities, defence ministry on Wednesday signed a ₹2,906 crore contract with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Ghaziabad for the procurement of Low-level Transportable Radar (Ashwini) for Indian Air Force. The radar is indigenously designed and developed by Electronics and Radar Development Establishment, DRDO. LTR (Ashwini) is an active electronically scanned phased array radar based on state-of-the-art solid state technology. The radar is capable of tracking aerial targets from high-speed fighter aircraft to slow moving targets such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and helicopters. Its acquisition will significantly enhance the operational preparedness of the Indian Air Force.

BJP importing fake Hinduism: Mamata

**Kolkata:** West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday lashed out at LoP Suvendu Adhikari over his controversial remark on Muslim MLAs, accusing the BJP of importing "fake Hinduism". She also expressed concern over the BJP's treatment of minorities and criticised the Opposition party for allegedly undermining democratic values. Her comments came a day after Mr Adhikari claimed that if the BJP comes to power in Bengal in the next Assembly polls, Muslim MLAs from the TMC will be "thrown out" of the Assembly. In response, Ms Banerjee condemned the statement and remarked, "Your imported Hindu dharma is not supported by the Vedas or by our seers. How can you deny the rights of Muslims as citizens? This is nothing but a fraud. You are importing fake Hinduism." — PTI

Vance, wife may visit India

■ **Continued from Page 1** Delhi. Ms Gabbard, according to reports, will attend a security conference this weekend hosted by national security adviser Ajit Doval and is also expected to address the Raisina Dialogue conference in New Delhi early next week. Politico said this will also be Usha Vance's "first visit to her ancestral country as the US Second Lady". Usha Vance's parents Krish Chilukuri and Lakshmi Chilukuri emigrated from India to the US in the late 1970s. Usha met JD. Vance met while attending Yale Law School. Usha is a litigator and has also clerked for Chief Justice John G. Roberts of the US Supreme Court. She has a bachelor's degree from Yale University and a master's degree from the University of Cambridge. These developments come amid the increasingly shrill rhetoric from US President Donald Trump targeting several nations, including India, on trade tariffs and accusing these nations of unfair trade practices, promising to levy reciprocal tariffs from April 2. Mr Trump had even recently accused India of levying more than 100 per cent tariffs on US-made automobiles. On Wednesday, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt claimed India was levying 150 per cent tariffs on American-made alcohol. "In fact, I have a handy dandy chart here that shows not just Canada but the rate of tariffs across the board... You look at India, 150 per cent tariff on American alcohol. Do you think that's helping

In UP's Shahjahanpur, mosques are covered for 'Laat Saheb' Holi

Nearly 350 CCTV and still cameras along procession route installed

**Shahjahanpur (UP), March 12:** Mosques on the route of the traditional "Laat Saheb" Holi procession here have been covered with tarpaulins and strict security measures put in place ahead of the festival of colours which coincides with the Friday prayers.

Following an 18th-century tradition, Holi in Shahjahanpur begins with revellers hurling footwear at a man impersonating "Laat Saheb" — a British Lord — seated on a bullock cart. The local administration has raised barricades along the procession route and installed several CCTV cameras.

"There are 18 Holi processions in the city, including the two major 'Laat Saheb' processions. To ensure security, the larger procession has been divided into three zones and eight sectors, with around 100 mag-



A mosque covered in tarpaulin as prevention against Holi colour, ahead of traditional 'Laat Saheb' procession on Holi in Shahjahanpur, UP, on Wednesday. — PTI

istrates deployed," superintendent of police Rajesh S. said. Moreover, the police have taken preventive action against 2,423 people to deter potential trouble-makers, he said.

"The security deployment includes 10 police circle officers, 250 sub-inspectors, around 1,500 police personnel and two companies of the Provincial Armed Constabulary

(PAC)," the SP added. Warning that no one will be allowed to take the law into their hands, the police officer said, "We urge everyone to celebrate Holi peacefully. Our police force will keep a close watch on miscreants and the entire event will be monitored live."

Municipal commissioner Vipin Kumar Mishra said, "We have installed around

350 CCTV and still cameras along the procession route. Additionally, about 20 mosques on the route have been covered with tarpaulin so that these are not stained by colours."

Barricades have also been placed near mosques and electrical transformers for safety, he said.

"Two tractor trolleys will accompany the procession to collect the discarded shoes, torn clothes and other debris. A sky lift will also be part of the procession and cameras will be positioned at 16 police picket points for video recording and it will be monitored live."

Dr Vikas Khurana, a historian from Swami Sukhdevanand College, traced the origins of the tradition to 1728, when Nawab Abdullah Khan, who had left Shahjahanpur for Farrukhabad, returned to the city on Holi. — PTI

4 sites from MP included in Unesco's tentative list

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, MARCH 12**

Four historical sites in Madhya Pradesh have been included in the tentative list of world heritage by the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organisation (Unesco).

They are the Ashokan Edict sites, Palace-Fortresses of Bundelas, Chausath Yogini temple, and the Gupta period temples.

Chhattisgarh's famous Kanger Valley National Park in Bastar's Jagdalpur has also been included in the tentative list. The park draws its name from the Kanger river, which meanders from northwest to south-east.

The park is known for its diverse topography, featuring low flatlands, gentle slopes, steep inclines, plateaus, deep gorges, valleys, and winding stream courses.

Hailing the development, Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav said, "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the state has achieved another milestone in promoting the cultural legacy on the world stage (with the inclusion of the four historical sites in the tentative list of Unesco)."

This highlights Madhya Pradesh's distinct place in India's cultural and historical landscape, he said.

'Crypto being used to fund terror, drugs'

It is major threat to macro-economic, financial stability, warns RBI

**AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 12**

A recent study conducted by the Central financial intelligence unit has flagged suspicion that cryptocurrency is being used across the country in serious criminal acts like terrorist financing, cyber-crime, narcotics trafficking and fuelling secessionist activities, including illegal betting and gambling.

The typologies report for the virtual digital assets (VDAs) and their service providers (crypto

exchanges) was prepared by the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) during the 2023-24 financial year after gathering a number of suspicious transaction reports generated from this sector and conducting their "operational analysis".

The report, however, made it explicitly clear that these trends were based "only on suspicion" and involved financial and national security implications.

The FIU has shared these trends as well as credible intelligence on

Govt hospital soon in Naxal hotbed Sukma

Puvarti once ruled by dreaded Maoist

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY RAIPUR, MARCH 12**

Puvarti, a remote village in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district that hogged limelight for being birthplace of dreaded Maoist Hidma, is all set to get a government hospital.

The village which has produced 22 hardcore Maoists including Hidma has witnessed massive infrastructure development in the last one year following establishment of a security camp in it.

"A government hospital is coming up in Puvarti", chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai said on Wednesday.

The development of the village showed the commitment by the government to make the state Naxal free by March, 2026, he said.

The village which produced dreaded Maoists such as Hidma, a Central

Committee (CC) member of outlawed CPI (Maoist), and Deva, commander of the battalion number one of Naxals, was once considered the invincible fort of the ultras.

Hidma, who had allegedly masterminded a number of major attacks on security forces in Bastar in the last one and half decades, had proved to be elusive for police so far.

For the first time after independence, the tricolour was hoisted in the village on the Republic Day last year.

"Puvarti has now been electrified. A road has been laid and a school opened in the village. A public distribution system (PDS) shop has also come up in the village. Besides, a mobile tower has been installed in the village", Bastar range inspector general of police P. Sunderraj told this newspaper on Wednesday.

■ **INDIA IS** currently formulating a framework for regulating and monitoring cryptocurrencies, but until that is implemented, crypto is not yet illegal in the country

the operations of cryptocurrency in the country with relevant law enforcement agencies like the Enforcement Directorate, CBI and the income-tax department and "necessary" enforcement action was taken by them in certain cases, the sources said.

India is currently formulating a framework for regulating and monitoring cryptocurrencies, but until that is implemented, crypto is not yet illegal in the country.

The income earned out of cryptocurrency transactions is taxed at a flat rate of 30 per cent since 2022.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) too has been sceptical about the use of private crypto assets and considers it a major threat to the macro-economic and financial stability of the country.

Man stripped, tied to tree & beaten in UP

**Saharanpur (UP), March 11:** Police in Saharanpur have made one arrest after a video went viral on social media showing a man being stripped, tied to a tree, and brutally beaten in the Gangoh police station area, officials said on Wednesday.

Superintendent of police (Rural), Sagar Jain, told that the victim, Mubarik (35), is a resident of Mohalla Aurangabad who works as a mason.

"On Monday, a person named Raees (36) gave Mubarik ₹500 to purchase liquor. However, Mubarik allegedly lost the money. Enraged by this, Raees tied Mubarik to a tree, stripped him, and subjected him to severe beating," the SP said. — PTI

India successfully test-fires Astra missile from Tejas jet

**PAWAN BALI NEW DELHI, MARCH 12**



In what would bring down India's dependency on costly foreign weapons, A e r o n a u t i c a l Development Agency (ADA) on Wednesday successfully conducted test-launch of homegrown ASTRA, which is a beyond visual range air-to-air missile (BVRAAM), from Tejas-MK1 prototype fighter aircraft. Currently, India's top fighter aircraft are armed with European firm MBDA's Meteor beyond visual range air-to-air missile.

The test launch was carried out off the coast of Chandipur, Odisha. The test-firing successfully demonstrated the direct hit of the missile on flying target. All the subsystems performed accurately meeting all mission parameters and objectives. ASTRA missile is designed and developed by DRDO capable of engaging the targets over 100km and equipped with advanced guidance and navigation capabilities allows missile to destroy targets with greater accuracy. The missile is already inducted into the Indian Air Force.

"The successful test-firing is a significant milestone towards the induction of LCA AF MK1A variant," said defence ministry.

"The success is the result of hard work by the integrated team of Scientists, Engineers and Technicians from ADA, DRDO, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) along with support from CEMILAC, DG-AQA, IAF and Test range team," it said.

Further trials are planned towards the performance evaluation.

Opp slams govt over Pak border project

■ **Continued from Page 1**

agencies. New and renewable energy minister Pralhad Joshi said that the government is keen to produce renewable energy in the country.

"Clearances are sought from the Central, state government and relevant agencies before licences are issued and a nod is granted," the minister said.

Not satisfied with the government's reply, Congress members raised slogans on national security and stormed the Well of the House. They, along with DMK members, then staged a walk out.

Later, speaking with the media outside Parliament, Mr Tewari said, "There needs to be a balance in energy security and national security. A big renewable energy project is coming up in Khavda. That project is 1 km away from the Pakistan border. As per the directions on national security, no project can come up within a 10 km distance from the border. We asked the question. There was no answer... hence we boycotted the Parliament."

Congress' deputy leader in Lok Sabha Gaurv Gogoi said that the Congress wants to know whether the Adani Group is above national security and that the apprehensions expressed by the Army were ignored for the profit of the group. "No satisfactory answer has been given by the government. The party that seeks votes on national security has ignored national security for facilitating the close friend of (PM) Narendra Modi. We condemn this and seek a satisfactory answer from the government," Mr Gogoi said. The Congress had recently hit out at the Centre, alleging that it has endangered national security to benefit private billionaires, over reports that border security rules were relaxed for a business group to set up an energy park.

IAF needs to boost capability soon: Air Chief

■ **Continued from Page 1**

fifth-generation F-35 fighter jets to India. Russia too has offered their fifth-generation Su-57 to India and has offered to make the aircraft in India.

It is to be seen whether the F-35 and the Su-57 will be part of the trials given the new reality in the neighbourhood with China having flown a prototype of a sixth-generation fighter aircraft. The defence secretary-led Empowered Committee for Capability Enhancement of the Indian Air Force report is significant as its current strength has dropped to 30 squadrons, well below the sanctioned strength of 42 squadrons.

Also, two squadrons of MiG-21 are set to be retired this year. Moreover, existing 5 or 6 squadrons of Jaguars, three squadrons of Mirages and three squadrons of MiG-29s will also get number platted in the middle of the next decade.

To make matters worse, India has been hit by delays in the delivery of the Tejas Mark-1A aircraft. The Air Chief Marshal had earlier said that the force will need to induct 35-40 fighter jets every year to cater to existing gaps in fighter fleet strength and also to replace aircraft that will be phased out in the next couple of years.

India and Mauritius sign 8 pacts

■ **Continued from Page 1**

avoidance agreement at the earliest" and to "promote investments in sunrise sectors such as the ocean economy, pharmaceuticals, IT and fintech, among others, to support Mauritius in the diversification of its economy for long-term and sustainable economic growth".

The Prime Minister also sought to expand India's one-decade-old vision of Sasar, which stands for "Security and Growth for All in the Region" to a vision for the Global South called Mahasagar (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions).

The Mahasagar vision will encompass mutual security, tech-sharing and project-specific Indian concessional finance, including grant assistance. New Delhi also fully backed the sovereignty of Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago in the backdrop of the agreement last year between the Indian Ocean nation and Britain.

Lauding the ties between the two nations, Mr Modi said, "India and Mauritius are not only bound by the Indian Ocean but also by our shared culture, traditions, and values. We are partners on the journey to economic and social development..."

In the backdrop of growing Chinese military presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), Mr Modi added that defence cooperation and mar-

itime security are key pillars of India and Mauritius strategic partnership.

"Free, open, secure, and safe Indian Ocean is our common priority. We are committed to providing our full support for the security of the Exclusive Economic Zone of Mauritius," he said.

The Prime Minister said: "People-to-people ties form a strong foundation for our partnership. Cooperation shall be extended in areas like digital health, AYUSH centres, school education, skilling and mobility. We will work together to utilise AI and digital public infrastructure for the development of mankind." He also promised that the people of Mauritius will also be provided facilitation in India on the Char Dham Yatra pilgrimage and the Ramayan trail.

Highlighting in a joint vision document India's support in successfully implementing several high-profile infrastructure projects, such as the India-Mauritius Metro Express project, the New Supreme Court building, and the New ENT Hospital, among others, Mr Ramgoolam "expressed gratitude for India-aided projects that form part of the Mauritius landscape across various sectors".

He also thanked India for India's role as a "first responder" for Mauritius in times of need. Regarding cooperation in the space sector, Mr Ramgoolam conveyed his appreciation to India "for its support towards the joint

development of a satellite for Mauritius". It was also decided at the talks that both nations would "work closely towards the successful development and launch of the India-Mauritius satellite, including requisite training for Mauritian scientists and experts at the Indian Space Research Organisation."

On trade cooperation, Mr Ramgoolam "underlined the need for Indian companies and businesses to see Mauritius as a gateway to India's engagements with Africa and benefit from trade and business opportunities offered by Africa".

After the talks, Mr Modi attended the 57th National Day celebrations of Mauritius as the chief guest and was conferred the Grand Commander of the Order of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean (GCSK) award, the highest civilian award of the Indian Ocean nation, by Mauritius President Dharambeer Gokhool.

During the National Day celebrations, an Indian Navy marching contingent participated in the parade while an Indian Navy ship made a port call to coincide with the National Day celebrations.

In his final engagement during this visit, Mr Modi visited the sacred "Ganga Talao", offered prayers and immersed the holy water from the recently concluded Mahakumbh Triveni Sangam of Prayagraj into the sacred lake in Mauritius.



THE ASIAN AGE

13 MARCH 2025

Appeals mechanism must in new law on immigration

The Immigration and Foreigners Bill aims to streamline services related to immigration and visitors, including monitoring their entry, exit and stay in India. A clause of the Bill grants the Central government sweeping powers to prohibit the entry of any foreign national into India on grounds like national security, sovereignty and integrity.

The Bill imposes certain harsh conditions on long-term visitors though their numbers could only be small considering that, overall, there were only one crore foreign visitors to India in the year to March 31, 2024. The mandatory registration for all visitors can be irksome considering the lethargy of India's bureaucratic processes.

Even so, the legislation only aims to follow the universal trend of tightening of immigration as we see in the US, UK, Europe and countries which are digging in to tackle illegal immigration that has several consequences for their societies. Control over who visits a sovereign country is getting more complex given the ease of movement across countries in a connected world and yet it is being attempted universally for national security purposes.

Countries like the US that are actively moving against illegal immigrants may also have to contend with losing a part of their workforce, particularly in the farming sector, but the message of controlling who visits and who stays and for how long serves the principle of sovereignty. There is nothing in the Constitution that gives non-Indians a right to reside in India.

It is the misuse of the already existing provisions whereby governments aim to muzzle critics and other undesirable visitors from abroad that is the problem. In whatever form the final bill passes through Parliament, the fact that it satisfies a sovereign right is important. There can be no objection to the bill on the grounds of legislative competence of Parliament.

The bill itself will meet the aims of modernising and consolidating the three existing immigration laws. The power to stop anyone considered inimical to the regime or undesirable in other ways like persons with just proselytising aims in mind has been subject to misuse over decades. But that does not preclude the nation from exercising its right to legislate further.

The unrestricted nature of the executive power being envisaged and the lack of an appeal mechanism are two major drawbacks because absolute power tends to corrupt. Targeting persons with different ideological or political affiliation is an issue that has cropped up too frequently in India for it not to be considered the biggest reason for not allowing such sweeping powers to control entry.

An appeals mechanism must be in place and must be time-bound for it to be fair, especially considering the kind of powers that may be granted to immigration officers in new laws and the all-pervasive liability of the people carriers. It may not be necessary to keep all the overreaching provisions that are being built into the controls.

India's illegal immigration issue primarily involves refugees, driven by economic reasons and the appeal of India's freedoms compared to nearby countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar. A global estimate has it that this may lie anywhere between a low of 14 lakhs and a high of one crore, which given India's population, is not massive. But a nation's right to evict non-citizens is again a sovereign right. All processes must, however, satisfy the principle of fairness.

EC needs to clean up its act

The decision of the Election Commission of India to call leaders of the political parties for an interaction to "further strengthen the electoral process" and invite suggestions regarding any "unresolved issues" is a welcome move. The political parties must make use of the opportunity and ensure that their grievances and complaints on the shortfalls are presented in a comprehensive manner and forward suggestions that can make the election exercise fool-proof.

The electoral process in India has undergone tremendous changes in the last three decades. The first change was witnessed when the Election Commission of India stopped acting as just another department of the government and instead chose to act in an independent way. Better formulae, including the introduction of the voter photo identity card, almost ended widespread rigging which was a curse at one point in time. A tectonic shift in the process came with the rolling out of the electronic voting machines across the nation which cut down on both the time and spending in one go.

There have been several complaints against the EVMs, the underlying one being the possibility of mass manipulation of the machines thereby undermining the entire poll process, but no charge has survived scrutiny yet. The EC has fought both legal and technical challenges quite convincingly. Political parties who have lingering doubts about the machines must take this opportunity to seek further clarifications.

The latest in the series of allegations, though, is duplicate electoral photo identity cards and possible manipulation of the electoral rolls. Prima facie, the EC has found some meat in the allegations and has ordered action to ensure that there is no more duplication of the cards. But it ought to address this issue in a comprehensive manner.

While the technical problems are identifiable and amenable to correction, the independence of the EC as a constitutional institution has been a big question of late. Doubts have been raised about it returning to its old status as an adjunct of the government. It is for the EC, and EC alone, to settle those.

A productive interaction among the key players of the world's largest democratic process should culminate in further streamlining it; and the country is looking forward to such a conversation.

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Subhani



Europe FTA: India must be firm on quid pro quo



Abhijit Bhattacharyya

Over a year ago, on March 10, 2024, India signed a free trade area agreement with the four-nation European Free Trade Association (EFTA), comprising Norway, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Iceland (with a combined GDP of \$2 trillion and a population of 14.2 million), under which New Delhi agreed to slash tariffs on high-end watches, chocolates, biscuits, assorted luxury goods and diamonds on the condition that this European group would invest at least \$100 billion in India. Optimism ran high and India's commerce minister hoped it could further attract a total investment of \$400-500 billion from the spin-off effects. That, regrettably, did not materialise, but it was still a pioneering FTA with a European bloc.

Now, in 2025, the 27-nation European Union has begun formal negotiations in Brussels for a Free Trade Agreement with India after a high-profile visit to New Delhi by the European Commission president and a bevy of European commissioners. The EU's primary focus is to persuade India to reduce or abolish tariffs, about which the entire West suddenly appears to be on a synchronised cacophony. Being unable to deal with the Chinese thrust and mercurial US President Donald Trump's tariff offensive, which may shrink its profits from exports, the European nations have identified India's consumer market as the next best alternative.

New Delhi, however, needs to remember that the proposed future FTA with the 27-member EU will be a totally different ballgame in comparison to the earlier FTA with the much smaller EFTA in 2024. Barring the UK, the EU

today includes all eight (France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium) imperialist states of yesteryears who aren't used to playing second fiddle even now because of their "once a ruler always a ruler" psyche. Loss of kingdoms doesn't necessarily imply loss of attitude: the memory of the "glory-that-was" lingers. The present Ukraine crisis stands as a classic example of the attempt by the EU's former imperial powers to push back the era of lost times to make a comeback.

President Donald Trump's tariff and trade war threats have rattled most of the export-oriented economies of some of America's closest allies, as well as its chief rival China. Most countries have little idea of what lies ahead. Amid this turmoil, India's economy, which is less focused on exports as it serves its own vast domestic market, is unlikely to face the kind of major shock that will face both Europe and China.

That is why European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen rushed to New Delhi in a bid to fast track the FTA with India. To reiterate, the EU is an organisation of 27 European nations that "cooperate in a wide field, including a single market with free movement of people, goods, services, capital, a common currency (euro) for some members, and a common foreign and security policy". With a population of 450 million and a GDP of \$21 trillion, the EU's high standard of living and strong economics is a contrast to India's 1.4 billion heads of a \$3.2 trillion economy.

While India is on the rise and is aiming to become the world's third largest economy, it remains way behind the overall prosperity index of the European

However, with a population of 450 million and a GDP of \$21 trillion, the EU's high standard of living and superior economics is a contrast to India's 1.4 billion heads of a \$3.2 trillion economy

group. Clearly, therefore, the EU-India FTA will be an agreement between "unequals". Both manufacturing and technology are the strength of EU, which is eager to tap into India's readymade consumer market. China has, incidentally, already done it to capture the Indian market through its industrial muscle, thereby giving a crushing blow to India's trade balance. New Delhi doesn't have much to offer Beijing, except mostly non-industrial, traditional goods and material.

What should India do now, with Brussels pushing for steep cuts in duties and a sleeping of India's tariffs on high-end consumer goods, which the West is known for?

New Delhi must remain firm on a quid pro quo. "You want smooth access to the vast market of 1.4 billion (with reduced tariffs) wherein 450-500 million have the means to use your goods, fine. Let it be linked with modernisation and indigenisation of India's defence production, with special reference to three fields. Give India the latest and the best main battle tank (MBT) engines; fighting ships (frigates, destroyers, cruisers, submarines and aircraft-carrier engines) and fighter aircraft power plant". All should be on full transfer-of-tech basis. All must be produced in India with the collaboration of Avadi tank factory, Tamil Nadu; Garden Reach Shipbuilders, Kolkata; Hindustan Shipyards, Visakhapatnam; Mazagaon Dock Ltd, Mumbai; Cochin Shipyards and Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd, Bengaluru.

This writer is convinced this is very much doable if India shows some political

will and courage. Defence technology is after all part and parcel of international trade between nations. New Delhi must be firm that any lowering of trade deficits cannot be a one-way traffic, simply to allow the West to create a vast consumer market for its manufactured goods. There must be substantive gains for Indians too.

Look back at the history of the East India Company. How the private corporation headquartered in London badgered Delhi's Mughal ruler Jehangir day in and day out to grab unfettered rights to make merry in the Indian market, which it later converted into a colony and gained a monopoly market for the next 150 years.

It's time for India to deal with trade issues on an equal footing, and not be deceived by diplomatic niceties. The EU must have been emboldened seeing how Chinese dictator Xi Jinping had encircled New Delhi with a few malice-filled satellite estates to sow disruption. And then, how the pushback from the United States led Chinese diplomats to resort to a sudden charm offensive to signal what a Good Samaritan Beijing's now prepared to be — as a "partner rather than rival".

The Dragon has been taking advantage of lack of vigilance by Indian policymakers by dumping exorbitantly priced goods on India, like electric and fossil-fuel motor vehicles to metro rail rakes to telecommunications gear and sub-standard consumer products to derive huge profits. The inherent craze for "cheap foreign goods" among naive Indian buyers, like Americans got addicted for more than 40 years, has put New Delhi in an extremely tight spot. That lesson must be learnt and understood. The EU-India FTA should not be allowed to keep India under perpetual debt, with an unbridgeable trade balance deficit, like the Indian fiasco before Beijing's guile.

The writer has served as a chief commissioner of customs in Hyderabad and Delhi

LETTERS

EC CHANGES TUNE!

At last, the Election Commission of India has invited presidents and senior leaders of national and state parties for discussions aimed at improving the electoral process. The initiative comes amid the BJP-led Central government's ongoing disputes with the Opposition regarding discrepancies in thousands of voter photo-identity cards. The Election Commission of India has invited feedback from all national and state political parties by April 30, 2025, regarding any outstanding issues. This is a welcome surprise, since the EC is otherwise known as an agent of the ruling party.

Bhagwan Thadani Mumbai

AIR OUT POLITICS

DELHI HAS once again been declared as the world's most polluted capital, but none of the political parties which make all kinds of promises before the elections appear to be much concerned. Sadly, even residents seem to be bothered more about the promised doles. The doles could easily disappear into the cost of medicines, something poor and rich alike fail to understand. It should also not come as a great surprise that 13 of the world's most polluted cities are in India. Had we paid even a fraction of the attention to the quality of air we breathe of what we pay to our family politics and religious rites and rituals, we'd be living healthier lives.

Anthony Henriques Mumbai

LET CHILDREN PLAY

UNBRODLED growth of mobile phones and social media has diminished the scope of outdoor activities and physical work. This is the sole reason for rising obesity in India making it the diabetes capital of the world. Obesity also increases the risk of cardiovascular diseases. The plight of young children between 10 and 14 years can be gauged from the prevalence of Type 2 diabetes in that age group. Unless there is a change in mindset of families such that parents encourage children to pursue sports for recreation and character building even if it does not make champions out of them, there is no hope.

Vijay Singh Adhikari Nainital

Dilip Cherian  
Dilli Ka Babu



Questions linger on empanelment: No one on list from UP, Gujarat

The latest empanelment list for secretary and secretary-equivalent posts in the Government of India is out, and as always, it has its fair share of intrigue. This time, 37 IAS officers from 1992, 1993, and 1994 batches have made the cut, including eight review cases. But what's catching everyone's attention is the glaring absence of officers from Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh — two states one would expect to have a strong presence, given their political significance.

Is it just a coincidence, or is there a deeper story?

For years, the government has maintained a steady pace of empanelment, clearing two IAS batches annually. That rhythm, however, has stumbled in 2024. Only the 1993 batch saw fresh empanelment in February, while the 1994 batch is still waiting for the process to even begin. And according to insiders, they might have to hold out until next year.

Two possibilities emerge. One, there's a shortage of secretary-level posts, meaning the pipeline is getting clogged. Two, senior officers from previous batches are still waiting for their turn, leaving little room for fresh empanelments.

But if the government is slowing down the empanelment process due to limited vacancies, how do we explain the total omission of officers from Gujarat and UP? Are these states sudden-

ly running low on top babu talent? Unlikely. If anything, these states have historically been well-represented in key government postings.

This is where the speculation starts. Could it be that the leadership wants to send a message, reshuffle loyalties, or simply keep the decks clear for a later game plan? Whatever the reason, the absence of Gujarat and UP officers in this round is bound to raise eyebrows in bureaucratic and political circles alike.

For now, the 1994 batch can only wait and watch. But one thing is certain — the process of IAS empanelment, often seen as routine, is anything but predictable these days.

NOIDA'S BIG LAND MESS: 10 OFFICIALS UNDER FIRE

The Noida Sports City project was to be a grand vision — green sports complexes, world-class infrastructure, and a short in the arm for the region's real estate scene. Instead, it became one of Noida's largest land scams, involving 10 IAS officers and a former Noida Authority CEO in a sordid CBI probe.

At the heart of the scandal is a rather straightforward but incriminating pattern: twisting rules to profit builders while conveniently ignoring fiscal and regulatory commitments. Mega-size land plots destined for sports infrastructure were somehow subdivided into group housing projects, occupancy and completion

certificates issues despite glaring transgressions. And all the while, huge dues payable by builders simply ignored!

Sources have informed DKB that this was not an isolated mistake. The chronology of dubious decisions runs from 2007 to 2017, involving a long list of senior officials, some of whom even occupied the highest position twice. It looks like a relay race in which every runner handed over the baton of mismanagement to the next, ensuring that the irregularities remained unchecked.

Now, with the high court intervening and the CBI closing in, fear is in the air. The probe is unearthing the financial mismanagement and policy manipulations that facilitated this fiasco. According to sources, FIRs are imminent, and accountability may finally catch up with those who converted a public project into a private bonanza.

For Noida residents, this unsavoury saga is a reminder yet again that when it comes to high-end urban projects, the biggest game in town is not sports — it's corruption.

BABUS, 'DEEP STATE', AND THE POLITICS OF PARANOIA

American author and political columnist Seth Abramson's recent tweet regarding Trump supporters' disdain for the US federal civil service — now derided as the 'Deep State' — elicits an interesting parallel here in India. The desi

'babu' perhaps carries the same connotation and has long been a source of ire for the political class.

In America, the 'Deep State' is an easy bogeyman — a shadowy group of unelected technocrats allegedly acting in opposition to the public good. In India, babus are not a phantom elite lurking in the background; they are a well-entrenched presence of governance, steering the ship of state through stormy political waters. Though they are frequently blamed for inefficiency, corruption or obstruction, they also give institutional stability, which keeps administration from foundering into anarchy.

The paradox, of course, is that politicians in both countries bemoan bureaucratic gridlock when it suits them but depend on it when the political winds shift. So when outrage against American 'babus' overflows into the Indian blogosphere, the problem isn't that bureaucracy is terrible — it generally is — but that we know our alternative selves. Because dismantling the system in the name of promoting efficiency and complete political control is not governance, but a recipe for institutional free-fall.

Love them, hate them ignore them at national peril, is the babu guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com.



SHORT TAKES

### MAN, 25, SHOT OUTSIDE CHICAGO O'HARE AIRPORT

**Chicago, March 12:** A man was shot outside of a Chicago O'Hare International Airport terminal early Wednesday following an altercation among multiple people, police said.

The 25-year-old suffered two gunshot wounds to the lower body, a Chicago police department news release said.

He was taken to a hospital, where he was listed in stable condition.

Another person was being interviewed, police said.

The shooting happened on a street outside of Terminal 2, the news release said.

### SEA COLLISION: CARGO VESSEL CAPTAIN FOUND

**London, March 12:** The captain of a cargo ship that collided with a US tanker is a Russian national who remains in UK police custody, the vessel's owner said on Wednesday, as it emerged that the ship failed several safety checks last year.

The 59-year-old man, who hasn't been named by authorities, was arrested on Tuesday on suspicion of manslaughter by gross negligence over the collision. He hasn't been charged.

Shipping company Ernst Russ, which owns cargo vessel Solong, said that the ship's 14 crew were a mix of Russian and Filipino nationals.

### LANKAN DOCS ON STIR TO SUPPORT RAPED COLLEAGUE

**Colombo, March 12:** Doctors in Sri Lanka on Wednesday launched a 24-hour strike following the rape of a female doctor in Anuradhapura in the North Central province.

The 32-year-old doctor was sexually abused on Monday night while she was returning to her accommodation after the night shift. Someone who walked behind her pointed a knife at her and raped her, the police said.

The Government Medical Officer's Association (GMOA), the doctors' trade union, announced a 24-hour strike, calling for the suspect's arrest.

### WEINSTEIN DUE IN COURT AS HIS RETRIAL NEARS

**New York, March 12:** Harvey Weinstein's #MeToo retrial next month will largely be an abridged version of the original, with one big addition: A charge based on an allegation from a woman who wasn't a part of the first case.

Just how the reprise of the disgraced movie mogul's prosecution plays out should come into focus on Wednesday, when a judge is set to issue rulings on a variety of issues.

Weinstein, 72, is expected to be in court when Judge Curtis Farber rules. His retrial is scheduled to start April 15 in state court in Manhattan.

### PORTUGAL PREZ HOLDS TALKS WITH PARTIES

**Lisbon, March 12:** Portugal's President was on Wednesday holding talks with political leaders on whether to call fresh elections, after Prime Minister Luis Montenegro's government lost a vote of no confidence.

Montenegro, who came to power last year but without a parliamentary majority, quit on Tuesday following the defeat, which was called over a possible conflict of interest row.

Head of state Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa will hold meetings with Montenegro's Social Democratic Party, the main opposition Socialist Party, the far-right Chega party and others.

### FRENCH BOOK OWNERS TAKE ON META OVER AI

**Paris, March 12:** rench organisations representing publishers and authors said on Wednesday they were launching legal action against Facebook owner Meta, after their books were used to train generative AI applications.

The three groups — publishers' outfit SNE and authors' and composers' groups SGGD and SNAC — registered a complaint in a statement while alleging "massive use of copyrighted works without authorisation from their authors and publishers" by the American company.

## 21 passengers, 4 soldiers killed in Pak train siege

**Karachi/Islamabad, March 12:** Twenty-one passengers and four paramilitary soldiers were killed by militants holding hostages after seizing control of a train in Pakistan's Balochistan province, an Army general said on Wednesday.

Army spokesman Lt Gen Ahmad Sharif told *Dunya News TV* that security forces killed all 33 militants present at the scene.

"The armed forces successfully concluded the operation in the (Wednesday) evening by killing all terrorists and rescuing all passengers safely," Lt Gen Sharif said.

He said that 21 passengers were killed by the terrorists when they attacked the train on Tuesday. He added that four paramilitary Frontier Corps soldiers were also killed in the incident.

The Jaffar Express, carrying 440 passengers in nine coaches, was going from Quetta to Peshawar when militants derailed it using explosives and hijacked it near the mountainous terrain of Gudalar and Piru Kunri in a tunnel 160 km from Quetta.

The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) claimed responsibility for the attack on Tuesday when they said they killed six soldiers. Lt Gen Sharif said that on March 11, around 1 PM, terrorists blew up a railway track in the Bolan Pass area of Osi Pur. He described the area as difficult terrain, where the terrorists initially used hostages, including women and children, as human shields. "The rescue operation began immediately, with participation from the Army, Air Force, Frontier Corps, and Special Services Group commandos," he said.

"During the operation, the terrorists remained in contact with their facilitators and masterminds in Afghanistan via satellite phones," he said, adding that it showed their foreign nexus.

Sharif said that forces took time to complete the operation because the terrorists were using the hostages as human shields.

"By last evening, around 100 passengers had been safely rescued from the terrorists," Lt Gen Sharif said. — *PTI*



Paramedics treat an injured passenger at the Mach railway station, which has been turned into a makeshift hospital, in Pakistan's Balochistan province. — *AFP*

### CHINA: READY TO BOOST SECURITY CO-OP WITH PAK

**Beijing, March 12:** A concerned China on Wednesday condemned the hijacking of a passenger train by militants in Pakistan's Balochistan province and expressed readiness to strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation with Islamabad.

"We noted the reports and strongly condemn this terrorist attack," Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a media briefing here while replying to a question on the train hijacking by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA). Mao said China firmly opposes terrorism. — *PTI*

## Greenland poll winners push back against Trump

**Nuuk, March 12:** A party that favours a gradual path to Greenland's independence from Denmark won a surprise victory in parliamentary elections, held in the shadow of US President Donald Trump's stated goal of taking control of the island one way or another.

The centre-right Demokraatit Party has pushed back against Trump's rhetoric, saying it is for Greenlanders to decide the future of the strategically important territory, which holds large reserves of rare minerals needed to make everything from mobile phones to renewable energy technology.

The Arctic island is also home to a US air base and straddles strategic air and sea routes in the North Atlantic.

"The result should send a clear message to Trump that Denmark is not for sale," Demokraatit leader Jens-Friederik Nielsen said. "We don't want to be Americans. No, we don't want to be Danes. We want to be Greenlanders. And we want our own independence in the future. And we want to build our own country by ourselves." — *AP*



Chairman of Demokraatit, Jens-Frederik Nielsen (C) celebrates during the election party at Demokraatit by cafe Killut in Nuuk, on Wednesday. — *AP*

### FEDERAL JUDGE HALTS LOUISIANA'S FIRST NITROGEN GAS EXECUTION

**Baton Rouge, March 12:** A federal judge has halted Louisiana's first death row execution using nitrogen gas, which was scheduled to take place next week. US District Court Judge Shelly Dick issued a preliminary injunction on Tuesday, stopping the state from immediately moving forward with the execution which would have been Louisiana's first execution in 15 years.

Attorney General Liz Murrill said the state will immediately appeal the decision. Last month, Jessie Hoffman Jr filed a lawsuit against the state and sought to block his March 18 execution date.

Attorneys for Hoffman argued that the execution method of nitrogen hypoxia is cruel and unusual punishment under the US Constitution and infringes on Hoffman's freedom to practice his religion. — *AP*

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## Affordable housing plan halts

**Washington, March 12:** The Trump administration is halting a \$1 billion programme that helps preserve affordable housing, threatening projects that keep tens of thousands of units livable for low-income Americans, said a document obtained by *The Associated Press*.

The action is part of a slew of cuts and funding freezes at the US department of housing and urban development, largely at the direction of President Donald Trump and Elon Musk's department of government efficiency, that have rattled the affordable-housing industry. Preserving these units gets less attention than ribbon-cuttings, but it's a centre-piece of efforts to address the nation's housing crisis.

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Hundreds of thousands of low-rent apartments, many of them ageing and in need of urgent repair, are at risk of being yanked out from under poor Americans. It has already awarded the money to projects that would upgrade at least 25,000 affordable units across the country, and details of how it will be wound down remain unclear. — *AP*

# Swift EU retaliation to Trump metals' tariffs

### UK splits with EU by opting against snap tariff retaliation

**Washington, Brussels, London, Oslo, March 12:** President Donald Trump's increased tariffs on all US steel and aluminium imports took effect on Wednesday, stepping up a campaign to reorder global trade in favour of the US and drawing swift retaliation from Europe.

Trump's action to bulk up protections for American steel and aluminium producers restores effective global tariffs of 25% on all imports of the metals and extends the duties to hundreds of downstream products.

The UK reaffirmed its commitment to US trade talks as British exports were swept up in Trump's global steel and aluminium tariffs, breaking with the European Union and its decision to retaliate immediately. The European Commission, the executive arm of the European Union charged with coordinating trade matters, responded swiftly, saying it would impose counter tariffs on up to 26 billion euros (\$28 billion) worth of US goods from April.

"We are ready to engage in meaningful dialogue," Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said, adding she had tasked trade commissioner Maros Sefcovic to resume his talks with the US.

Norway is working to persuade the European Union to exempt it from any broad protective tariff as a response to the US after President Donald Trump kicked off a trade war with levies on metals.

Trump's administration hit out at Japan's elevated rice tariffs, signaling that the grain and Tokyo will likely be targeted as the US seeks to apply reciprocal tariffs. — *Agencies*



Workers clear slag from the blast furnace at a factory which produces steel for export in Anyang, in China's central Henan province. — *AFP*

## Look at India, 150% tariff on US alcohol: WH press secretary

**New York, Washington, March 12:** The US again raised the issue of tariffs that India imposes on its goods, citing high tariffs on American alcohol and agricultural products.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt made references to high tariffs by India during a press briefing on Tuesday when she was responding to a question on Canada.

"Canada has been ripping off the United States of America and hard-working Americans for decades. If you look at the rates of tariffs across the board that Canadians have been imposing on the American people and our workers here, it is egregious. In fact, I have a handy dandy chart here that shows not just Canada, but the rate of tariffs across the board. If you look at Canada-American cheese and butter,

nearly 300% tariff," she said.

"You look at India, 150% tariff on American alcohol. You think that's helping Kentucky bourbon be exported into India? I don't think so. 100% tariff on agricultural products from India," Leavitt said.

Leavitt held up a chart that showed tariffs charged by India, Canada and Japan. On the chart, two circles with the colours of the Tricolour highlighted tariffs that India imposes.

"Trump believes in reciprocity, and it is about dang time that we have a President who actually looks out for the interests of American businesses and workers, and all he's asking for at the end of the day are fair and balanced trade practices, and unfortunately, Canada has not been treating us very fairly at all." — *PTI*

### DUTERTE TO FACE MURDER CHARGES AT ICC

**Rotterdam, March 12:** A plane carrying former Philippine leader Rodrigo Duterte to the International Criminal Court to face charges over his bloody "war on drugs" took off for Rotterdam on Wednesday, after being delayed by a few hours during a layover in Dubai.

Duterte, who led the Philippines from 2016 to 2022, was arrested on Tuesday, marking the biggest step yet in the ICC's probe into alleged crimes against humanity during an anti-drugs crackdown. — *Reuters*

### HOUTHIS: WILL RESUME ATTACKS ON ISRAELI SHIPS

**Dubai, March 12:** Yemen's Houthi rebels warned shippers early Wednesday that "any Israeli vessel" travelling through nearby Mideast waters is now a target as Israel continues to block aid to the Gaza Strip.

The warning from the Houthis again throws into chaos a crucial maritime waterway between Asia and Europe, threatens revenue from Egypt's Suez Canal and possibly will halt aid shipments to all the war zones. — *AP*

**Jeddah, March 12:** The United States agreed to resume military aid and intelligence sharing with Ukraine after Kyiv said it was ready to support Washington's proposal for a 30-day ceasefire with Russia, the countries said in a joint statement.

After more than eight hours of talks with Ukrainian officials in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, US secretary of state Marco Rubio said the US would now take the offer to Russia, and the ball is in Moscow's court.

"Our hope is that the Russians will answer 'yes' as quickly as possible, so we can get to the second phase of this, which is real negotiations," Rubio told reporters.

The Kremlin launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine three years ago.

Moreover, Russia, which has been making rapid advances, now holds around a fifth of Ukraine's territory. This incidentally includes Crimea, which it annexed in 2014.

Rubio said Washington wanted a full agreement with both Russia and Ukraine "as soon as possible."

"Every day that goes by, this war continues, people die, people are bombed, people are hurt on both sides of this conflict," he said. — *Reuters*



A burnt car and damaged residential buildings are seen after a Russian missile hit the area, in Kryvyi Rih, Ukraine, on Wednesday. — *AP*

## Zelenskyy: US to act if Russia nixes truce

**Kyiv, March 12:** Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Wednesday said that the United States would issue a "strong" response to Russia if the Kremlin refused a 30-day ceasefire offer put forward by Washington and Kyiv.

The proposal to pause fighting between Russia and Ukraine after more than three years of brutal warfare came after intensive talks between Ukrainian and US officials in Saudi Arabia.

It also follows an explosive spat between Zelenskyy and Trump, who lifted

a freeze on military aid to Ukraine after Kyiv accepted the truce plan — the latest in a rapid-fire series of developments on the conflict.

Zelenskyy told reporters in Kyiv that the United States would pile pressure on Moscow if it did not accept a halt to fighting that has claimed tens of thousands of lives.

"I understand that we can count on strong steps. I don't know the details yet but we are talking about sanctions and strengthening Ukraine," he told reporters. — *AFP*

## Russia-Iran N-talks tomorrow in China

**Beijing, Dubai, March 12:** China said it would hold nuclear talks with Iran and Russia, discussions that come just after the Trump administration urged Tehran to return to negotiate a new deal over its atomic activities.

"The three parties will exchange views on the Iranian nuclear issue and other issues of mutual interest," China's foreign ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

Chinese Vice foreign minister Ma Zhaoxu will chair the meeting in Beijing on Friday, the ministry

said, adding that Russian deputy foreign minister Ryabkov Sergey Alexeevich and Iranian deputy foreign minister Kazem Gharibabadi will also be attending.

Last week, US President Donald Trump said he'd written a letter to Iran's leadership urging them to work out a new agreement.

An Emirati diplomat earlier identified by Tehran as carrying a letter from US President Donald Trump met on Wednesday with Iran's foreign minister. — *Agencies*

### GALAXY | GAZE Four suitcase-size satellites to study sun in \$488 million mission

## Nasa's newest space telescope blasts off

**Vandenberg Space Force Base (US), March 12:** Nasa's newest space telescope rocketed into orbit on Tuesday to map the entire sky like never before — a sweeping look at hundreds of millions of galaxies and their shared cosmic glow since the beginning of time.

SpaceX launched the Spherex observatory from California, putting it on course to fly over Earth's poles. Tagging along were four suitcase-size satellites to study the sun. Spherex popped off the rocket's

upper stage first, drifting into the blackness of space with a blue Earth in the background. The \$488 million Spherex mission aims to explain how galaxies formed and evolved over billions of years, and how the universe expanded so fast in its first moments.

Closer to home in our own Milky Way galaxy, Spherex will hunt for water and other ingredients of life in the icy clouds between stars where new solar systems emerge.

The cone-shaped Spherex — at 1,110 pounds (500



kilograms) or the heft of a grand piano — will take six months to map the entire sky with its infrared eyes and wide field of view. Four full-sky surveys are planned over two years, as the telescope cir-

cles the globe from pole to pole 400 miles (650 km) up.

Spherex won't see galaxies in exquisite detail like Nasa's larger and more elaborate Hubble and Webb space telescopes, with their narrow fields of view.

Spherex will observe the total glow produced by the whole lot, including the earliest ones formed in the wake of the universe-creating Big Bang.

"This cosmological glow captures all light emitted over cosmic history," said the mission's chief scientist Jamie Bock of the California Institute of Technology.

"It's a very different way of looking at the universe," enabling scientists to see what sources of light may have been missed in the past. — *AP*



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	74,029.76	-0.10
Nifty 50	22,470.50	-0.12
S&P 500*	5,585.08	0.23
Dollar (₹)	87.2	-0.02
Pound Sterling (₹)	112.80	-0.01
Euro (₹)	95.18	0.03
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	86,064.88	-0.10
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	70.88	1.90
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.683	-0.009
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.32	0.032

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Centre gets 73 applications under PLI for steel

The government has received 73 applications under the second round of production linked incentive (PLI) scheme for specialty steel, Sandeep Poundrik, secretary in Union steel ministry, said. The PLI schemes were launched as part of government's efforts to increase production of special steel in India to make the country self-reliant in high grade steel, the official said on sidelines of an event in New Delhi.

PFC board gives nod to borrow ₹1.4 lakh crore

State-owned Power Finance Corporation (PFC) said its board has approved ₹1,40,000 crore borrowing plan for FY26 and also approved fourth interim dividend of ₹3.5 per share for FY25. The board of directors of PFC also approved the proposal to change the name of the company from Power Finance Corporation Ltd to PFC Ltd or any other name as may be approved by Registrar of Companies.



Paradeep arm fixes price band at ₹93 to ₹98

Odisha based Paradeep Parivahan's initial public offering (IPO) of ₹44.86 crore in the price band of ₹93 to ₹98 per equity share of ₹10 face value opens on March 17 and closes on March 19. The public issue by the company which specializes in logistics solutions in and around the port areas of Paradeep is completely a fresh issue of equity shares. The equity share will be listed on BSE SME platform.

Ola Electric begins programme for cost cutting

Ola Electric said it has successfully completed a company-wide initiative to reduce cost and improve customer experience. The company has successfully implemented network transformation and opex reduction programme, a company-wide initiative launched in November 2024, Ola Electric Mobility said. The initiative has delivered a sustainable cost reduction of ₹90 crore per month, it added.

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Retail inflation at 7-mth low

Falls to 3.61%, staying well within the Reserve Bank of India's comfort zone

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

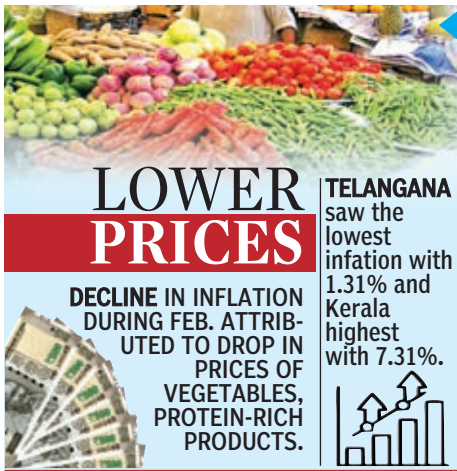
With significant decline in the prices of vegetables and protein-rich foods, headline retail inflation fell to seven-months low of 3.61 per cent in February, staying well within the Reserve Bank of India (RBI's) comfort zone.

The fall of prices, however, will encourage the RBI for a second reduction in interest rate next month to boost the economic growth in the country.

Besides, India's industrial output growth also accelerated to 5 per cent in January, driven by a rebound in manufacturing activity, the two separate official data showed on Wednesday.

As far as inflation is concerned, the government said that the reason for the decline during February has been mainly attributed to a significant drop in prices of vegetables, egg, meat and fish, pulses and products, and milk and products.

"The consumer price index (CPI)-based retail



CPI-BASED RETAIL INFLATION WAS AT 4.26% IN JAN. AND 5.09% IN FEB. 2024, WHILE THE PREVIOUS LOW WAS WITNESSED IN JULY.

INFLATION decline will encourage RBI for possible second reduction in interest rate next month to boost economic growth in the country.

SEQUENTIAL UPTICK in vegetables inflation in March is likely to prevent a further softening in food and beverages inflation print in the month, after the substantial cooling seen over the past four months.

— ADITI NAYAR, Chief economist, ICRA

inflation was at 4.26 per cent in January and 5.09 per cent in February 2024, while the previous low was witnessed in July," the National Statistics Office (NSO) said.

The data showed that the state with lowest inflation was in Telangana (1.31 per cent) and highest in Kerala (7.31 per cent).

"There is a decline of 65 basis points in headline inflation of February in comparison to January. It

is the lowest year-on-year (YoY) inflation after July 2024. Year-on-year food inflation for February was 3.75 per cent. The food inflation in February is lowest after May 2023," the NSO data showed.

Data on urban inflation showed a significant decline from 3.87 per cent in January to 3.32 per cent in February. A similar decline was observed in food inflation, which decreased from 5.53 per

cent to 3.20 per cent in February. "A sharp decline in headline and food inflation in the rural sector was also observed in February to 3.79 percent from 4.59 percent a month earlier," it showed.

Economists said that the CPI inflation declined sharper than expected, appreciably below the mid-point of the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee's medium-term target range, led by a welcome cooling in

Jio in deal with SpaceX for high speed internet

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO WITH AGENCY INPUTS NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

Day after Bharti Airtel's announcement of partnership with Elon Musk's-owned SpaceX, its rival Reliance Industries' Jio platforms on Wednesday signed a deal with SpaceX to provide Starlink's high-speed internet services to its customers in India.

It is, however, learnt that the surprise move of the aerospace company led by Musk will not only bring Starlink's broadband internet services to India, but also expect Musk's venture should be granted spectrum rights.

The deal is subject to SpaceX gaining approval from Indian authorities to sell Starlink in the country. SpaceX has applied for a security clearance with the Indian government, but it is understood that its application is undergoing review at the home ministry.

Starlink can help Bharti and Jio Platforms provide connectivity to previously underserved areas, especially areas currently

CONNECTIVITY

MUSK'S STARLINK expects spectrum rights apart from broadband services.

DEAL IS subject to SpaceX gaining approval from government to sell Starlink in India.

STARLINK HELP Bharti and Jio provide connectivity to previously underserved areas.

JIO WILL make Starlink solutions available through its retail outlets and online stores

SATELLITE WILL add the mix of communication technologies like 4G, 5G, 6G and enable customers to carry their mobile phones to the remotest part of the world.

— SUNIL MITTAL, Founder, Bharti Group

with limited to no coverage across the country.

"Jio will make Starlink solutions available through its retail outlets as well as through its online storefronts," the company said.

Apart from offering Starlink equipment in its retail outlets, Jio Platforms will also establish a mechanism to support customer service installation and activation.

Meanwhile, Bharti Group founder Sunil Mittal on Wednesday said that satellite will add the

mix of communication technologies like 4G, 5G, 6G and enable customers to carry their mobile phones to the remotest part of the world, even in skies and to the ocean.

"For the telecom industry, the addition of satellite technology should be no different from bringing new technologies to its customers. Just like 4G, 5G, and 6G in the future, we will now have one more technology in our mix, i.e. SAT-G," said Mittal, founder and chairman of Bharti Enterprises.

InfloWS into equity MFs fall 26%

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MARCH 12

Due to ongoing market volatility, flow into equity mutual funds (MFs) were down by 26 per cent and hit a 10 month low in February of ₹29,303 crore from ₹39,687 crore in January on risk aversion among investors.

Mutual fund industry's total assets under management (AUM) also fell to ₹64.53 lakh crore from ₹67.25 lakh crore in the previous month, as per monthly data released by Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI).

Debt funds saw outflow

of ₹6,525.56 crore, being the only category that saw money being taken out in February. However, passive funds were not impacted with combined flows in Gold ETF, other ETFs and index funds at ₹10,248 crore from ₹10,255 crore in January.

Among equity funds Thematic funds saw a big drop in flows to ₹5,711.58 crore from ₹9,016.60 crore in January, flows in flexi cap funds also dropped from ₹5,697.58 crore in January to ₹5,104.22 crore in February.

"Continuous monthly market correction has led to slowdown of the sales



for the first time in February, this could also be partially attributed to a truncated month. Allocations are being tilted towards multi asset allocation, large and flexi cap categories," said Akhil Chaturvedi, chief business officer, Motilal Oswal AMC.

Contribution under Systematic investment plan remained robust at

₹25,999.14 crore, a tad lower than ₹26,400 crore in January. "SIP numbers have remained strong. While there was a marginal drop in February, this could be attributed to fewer days in the month," said Anand Vardarajan, chief business officer, Tata Asset Management. Meanwhile, after merging Baroda Asset Management India into Baroda BNP Paribas Asset Management India with new name as Baroda BNP Paribas Mutual Fund has more than doubled its AUM from over ₹21,000 crore to over ₹49,000 crore in just three years.

Banks' derivatives under RBI review

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MARCH 12

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has begun a review of the derivative exposure of both private and state-owned banks after private lender IndusInd Bank reported a massive discrepancy in the forex derivative portfolio which could lead to an adverse impact on its net worth by ₹1,530 crore.

The central bank has asked lenders for details of their overseas borrowings and deposits as well as their forex hedge positions. The banking regulator is now assessing the hedging strategies of these banks and collecting information on their respective trades.

Before new investment norms for banks kicked in from April 1, 2024, banks' asset liability management and treasury desks were permitted to enter into internal swaps, where one cash flow is exchanged for another. An early termination of such deals led to the profit being accounted for while the loss was not, IndusInd Bank's chief executive officer (CEO) Sumant Kathpalia said.

According to Reuters, es after the banking regulator last week approved a one-year extension for Sumant Kathpalia's reappointment as CEO. Kathpalia's term, originally set to end on March 24, will now conclude on March 23, 2026.

Shares of IndusInd Bank settled 4.43 per cent higher on Wednesday at ₹685 apiece on NSE breaking a five day losing streak after the management assured investors that Q4 will be a profitable quarter for the bank.

the RBI wants "to ascertain that banks with heavy foreign liabilities are not exposed to a situation wherein any losses from internal hedges done previously have not been accounted for".

The central bank also wants to evaluate each bank's internal compliance on treasury operations. If any discrepancies are found, RBI may nudge lenders to go for an external audit, said Reuters report.

Meanwhile, a report has also emerged that the central bank has asked the IndusInd Bank board to propose names of two external candidates for the positions of CEO and chief operating officer.

This development comes after the banking regulator last week approved a one-year extension for Sumant Kathpalia's reappointment as CEO.

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Silver ETFs' AUM crosses ₹13,500 cr

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, MARCH 12

Silver exchange traded funds have seen massive growth in assets under management (AUM) in less than three years, crossing the ₹13,500 crore mark in January 2025.

Sebi had allowed asset management companies to launch silver ETFs in November 2021. Since then, silver exchange-traded fund (ETFs) have seen massive growth. In January 2022, the AUMs stood at ₹123 crore and they jumped to ₹1,651 crore by January 2023.

Silver ETF AUMs have seen the steepest climb in 2024 from ₹3,705 crore in January 2024 to ₹13,566 crore by January 2025 – a growth of 266 per cent.

Twelve silver ETFs also have crossed 6 lakh investor folios across them as of January, growing from 1.9 lakh in January 2024, as per the data of Zerodha

Fund House.

The growth indicates that Indian investors are taking exposure to silver. As investors seek diversification and exposure to commodities, Silver ETFs provide a simple and hassle free way to take exposure to precious metal.

"The increasing transaction volumes of silver ETFs are a clear indication of growing investor interest. These ETFs offer an alternative to physical silver ownership, addressing concerns about storage, security, and insurance while providing access to silver's price movements," Vaibhav Jalan, CBO of Zerodha Fund House said.

While silver has been tracking the gold prices amidst global geopolitical uncertainties, the overall industrial demand for silver has increased by more than 55 per cent driven by its applications across various industries.



ALIBABA UNVEILS AI MODEL TO READ EMOTIONS

Hangzhou (China), March 12: Alibaba Group Holding has released a new artificial intelligence (AI) model that it says can read emotions, in an apparent bid to outpace OpenAI's latest model.

In two demonstrations, Alibaba's Tongyi Lab researchers showed their new open source RI-Omni inferring the emotional state of a person in a video while also offering descriptions of their clothes and environment.

It adds another layer of understanding to so-called computer vision, and is an enhanced version of another open source model, HumanOmni, authored by lead researcher, Jiaxing Zhao. Alibaba's effort to carve out a leading position in AI was accelerated by DeepSeek's splashy debut in January, and the e-commerce leader is now pushing out new releases of AI tools and apps.

The Group's Qwen model against DeepSeek, secured a major partnership with Apple for AI on iPhones, and now looks to be taking on OpenAI as well. — Bloomberg

MONEY MATTERS

Credit scores now updating more frequently



ADHIL SHETTY

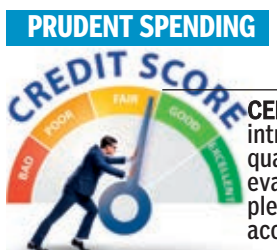
RBI has introduced major reforms in the credit reporting system to enhance accuracy, transparency, and consumer protection. These changes impact both lenders and borrowers.

Under the new regulations, lenders must update

credit information twice a month - within seven days of the 15th and the last day of each month. Credit bureaus must process and reflect these updates within five days of receiving them. This ensures that a borrower's loan repayments or credit card bill payments are recorded in near real-time for their improved credit behavior reflected in scores.

STANDARDISED SCORE

The RBI has mandated that all credit bureaus use a uniform 300-900 scale for



RBI mandates credit bureaus use uniform 300-900 scale for credit scores.

CENTRAL bank introduces data quality index to evaluate completeness and accuracy of data.

DELAYED payments or high credit utilisation could impact scores faster than before.

credit scores. This allows comparison of different reports easily. The reports will consolidate all credit accounts, addresses, and co-borrower details into a single document, improving clarity and eliminat-

ing redundant entries. This provides a transparent view of creditworthiness.

DATA QUALITY INDEX

To address inaccuracies in credit reports, RBI

introduced a data quality index (DQI) that evaluates completeness and accuracy of data submitted by lenders. The index will assess key details such as name, date of birth, ID proof, and contact information. Lenders will receive monthly DQI scores, pushing them to improve data management and ensure fewer errors in credit reports.

COMPENSATION

If borrowers file a correction request and the issue is not resolved within 30 days, they will receive

₹100 per day as compensation until the problem is fixed from the . Credit bureaus must notify consumers via SMS or email when their reports are accessed or updated.

MONITORING

With credit scores now updating more frequently, borrowers must maintain good credit habits. Delayed payments or high credit utilisation could impact scores faster than before.

(The writer is BankBazaar.com CEO)



SHORT TAKES

BFI rejects Thakur nomination for poll

**New Delhi:** The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) on Wednesday rejected Anurag Thakur's nomination for inclusion in the electoral college finalised for the March 28 elections, saying the former Sports Minister was not eligible to represent Himachal Pradesh. Himachal Pradesh Boxing Association had sent Thakur and Vice President Rajesh Bhandari's names. The BFI issued a 60-member electoral college that was finalised after scrutiny. "Mr. Anurag Singh Thakur (Himachal Pradesh Boxing Association) — The State Unit had sent the name, however, he is found ineligible for violation of Boxing Federation of India notice dated 07.03.2025 and National Sports Development Code of India, 2011," BFI said, explaining the decision. The March 7 notice, sent to all affiliated state associations, had mentioned that only bonafide and duly elected members during the election AGM (duly notified to BFI) of the State Units affiliated with the BFI shall be authorised to represent their respective States/Union Territories. "Mr Thakur is not an elected member of the Himachal Pradesh state body, that's why his name has been rejected," said a BFI source. — PTI

PSA event returns to India after 7 yrs

**Mumbai:** Mumbai will host a PSA event from March 24 to 28, pitting India's top squash players like Ramit Tandon and Anahat Singh against their overseas rivals. The \$40,000 prize money Indian Open, to be held at the indoor courts of Bombay Gymkhana, will see participation of players from countries like Egypt, Canada, Malaysia and Japan. Besides Tandon and Anahat, other Indian players set to take part are Velavan Senthilkumar, Veer Chotrani, and Akanksha Salunkhe. The event will mark the return of a top squash tournament in the country after 2018, when Mumbai hosted the CCI International — a PSA World Tour Silver tournament, a release from title sponsors JSW Sports said. Starting in August 2024, PSA (Professional Squash Association) replaced World Tour tournaments with new PSA World Events, comprising new tournament-tiers — Diamond, Platinum, Gold, Silver, Bronze and Copper. The Indian Open will be a copper event. — PTI

WFI to hold trials for Asian C'ship

**New Delhi:** Its status as a National Sports Federation (NSF) restored, the WFI swung to action, announcing that the selection trials for the upcoming Asian Championship will be held at Delhi's Indira Gandhi Sports Complex on March 15. It will be first proper trial under the supervision of the new WFI administration as it was suspended three days after it conducted election on December 21, 2023 to pick new office bearers. The trials will be conducted to identify the top wrestlers who will represent the country in Amman, Jordan from March 25 to 30. According to a WFI circular, the weigh-in for all categories — men's freestyle, women's wrestling and Greco Roman style — will be held on the day of the trials and a relaxation of 2kg weight will be allowed to all participants. The WFI could not pick national teams during the suspension period as wrestlers who had protested against the former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, had dragged the Federation to the court, questioning its authority. — PTI

Figo, Puyol to play 'Legends Faceoff'

**Mumbai:** Football greats from Real Madrid and FC Barcelona, including Luis Figo, Carles Puyol, Fernando Morientes, and Ricardo Quaresma have confirmed their participation in the Legends Faceoff scheduled to be held at DY Patil Stadium here on April 6. This will be the first time ever that India will host an *El Clasico* between Real Madrid Legends and Barcelona Legends, with the exhibition match organised by Sports Front, a pioneer in global sports entertainment. "India, I know you love football, and I can't wait to bring the magic to Mumbai. Let's make this an unforgettable night," Figo, a *Ballon d'Or* winner (2000) and a key figure in Portuguese football history, said in a release. — PTI

PALPABLE PAIN

Samson 'hurt' on releasing close friend Buttler ahead of auction

**New Delhi, March 12:** Rajasthan Royals captain Sanju Samson is still not over Jos Buttler no longer being part of the team, and if he had his way, he would do away with the rule of releasing players in the IPL.

Samson and Buttler opened batting for Royals for seven years but they did not retain the Englishman ahead of the mega auction last year.

Buttler will play for Gujarat Titans in the upcoming IPL. "The IPL gives you the opportunity to lead a team and play at the highest level, and it also allows you to build close friendships," Samson told Jiostar.

"Jos Buttler is one of my closest friends. We played together for seven years. During this time, our batting partnership time itself is so long that we got to know each other so well.

"He has been like an elder brother to me. Whenever I had a doubt, I would talk to him. When I became captain [in 2021], he was my vice-captain and helped me become a good captain."

Samson said letting go of Buttler was one of the hardest decision he has had to make. Royals had retained six players, including Samson, Yashavi Jaiswal, Riyan Parag, Dhruv Jurel, Shimron Hetmyer and Sandeep Sharma.

"Letting him go has been one of the most challenging decisions for me. During the England series, I told him over dinner that I was still not over it. If I could change one thing in the IPL, I would change the rule of releasing players every three years," he said.

"While it has its positives, on a personal level, you lose that connect, that relation you built over years. He was a part of the family. What more can I say?"

While Buttler will not be around in Royals dugout, Samson is happy about reuniting with head coach Rahul Dravid.

"Rahul sir was the one who spotted me from the trials. He came up to me and said, 'Can you play for my team?' From there to now, with me being the captain of the franchise and he coming back — I'm very grateful, as we all are in the franchise, to have Rahul sir back," he said.

"I have played under him [at RR] as a player when he was the captain and I have played under him in the Indian team when he was the coach. But a captain-coach relationship is very special and I'm very much looking forward to learning a lot from him.

"He is a top-notch professional and makes sure everything is done properly. I was with him last month in Nagpur at RR's sports academy. From morning 10 o'clock till evening 5 o'clock, he was standing in the heat, watching the batsmen bat and the bowlers bowl, interacting with them, discussing with the coaches. He is absolutely involved in each and everything," he added. — PTI



Captain Sanju Samson (right) and Jos Buttler opened batting for Rajasthan Royals for seven years but the Franchise did not retain the Englishman ahead of the mega auction last year. — PTI

Rohit might be eyeing '27 ODI WC title, says Ricky

**Dubai, March 12:** Australia legend Ricky Ponting believes Rohit Sharma is still going strong and a sense of unfinished business was behind his decision to continue playing and leading India in the 50-over format until the 2027 ODI World Cup to be jointly hosted by South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia. Barring the ODI World Cup, Rohit has won all ICC titles while captaining India. He came agonisingly close to laying his hands on the 50-over world title at home in 2023, only to lose to Australia in the final.

Speaking on The ICC Review, the former Australia skipper said Rohit is pretty clear about his future goals. "When you start getting to that point of your career, everyone's waiting for you to retire. And I don't know why, when you can still play as well as he's played (in the Champions Trophy final), I think he was just trying to put those questions to bed once and for all and say, 'no, I'm still playing well enough. I love playing in this team. I love leading this team.'

"And I think, the fact that he said that, to me, it means that he must have that goal in mind of playing in the next (50-over) World Cup (in 2027)," Ponting stated.

Handed the responsibility of captaincy in 2021 at the age of 34, Rohit on Sunday clinched his sec-



and ICC title — following the T20 World Cup win last year — as India defeated New Zealand by four wickets to win the Champions Trophy here.

Chasing 252, Rohit, 38, led from the front with an 83-ball 76 at the top to set the platform for a comfortable win.

In the run-up to the tournament, there were talks around Rohit's retirement from the ODI format after

MUMBAI ENJOY UPPERHAND OVER GIANTS IN ELIMINATOR

**Mumbai, March 12:** Harmanpreet Kaur's ability to unflinchingly guide Mumbai Indians in difficult situations could be the clinching factor for the former champions when they take on Gujarat Giants — a team they have vanquished twice this season — in the Women's Premier League Eliminator here on Thursday. With Delhi Capitals already sitting snugly in the final after topping the WPL table with 10 points, the focus is now on India skipper Harmanpreet and Gujarat Giants' captain Ashleigh Gardner to guide their sides into the title round.

Mumbai Indians would certainly enjoy the home advantage as the match will be played at the Brabourne Stadium and the fact that they overhauled Gujarat Giants in their penultimate league game here on Monday, with Harmanpreet blazing to a 33-ball 54 in the nine-run victory.

Mumbai Indians' playing XI has largely remained unchanged with Hayley Matthews giving them flourishing starts while also tormenting the opponents with her off spin. — PTI

SHUBMAN WINS PLAYER OF THE MONTH AWARD

**Dubai, March 12:** Star India opener Shubman Gill was on Wednesday named the ICC Men's Player of the Month for February following his stellar performances, which includes his exploits in his team's title-winning Champions Trophy campaign. Gill took home the award, beating competition from Australia's Steve Smith and New Zealand's Glenn Phillips.

In his five ODIs over the course of the month, Gill compiled 406 runs, averaging 101.50 at a strike rate of 94.19.

This included a stellar outing in the 3-0 series win over England, wherein Gill registered three consecutive scores of over fifty.

Gill began with a confident 87 in Nagpur and followed it up with a 60 in Cuttack. He finished in a grand style, smashing a hundred in Ahmedabad. His 112 came from merely 102 balls and included 14 fours and three sixes.

Gill was awarded player-of-the-match for this innings, and also took home the player-of-the-series award.

Continuing his golden run into the Champions Trophy, Gill hit an unbeaten 101 to lead India's chase in their tournament opener against Bangladesh here.

He followed it up with a resolute 46 against Pakistan. — PTI

ROHIT CLIMBS TO THIRD IN ICC ODI RANKINGS

**Dubai, March 12:** India captain Rohit Sharma jumped two places to third in the latest ICC ODI batter rankings following his stellar performance in the Champions Trophy final, while teammate Shubman Gill held on to the top spot.

Rohit smashed 76 from just 83 deliveries, helping India secure a four-wicket victory over New Zealand in the summit clash.

Star India batter Virat Kohli, who amassed 218 runs in the eight-team ICC tournament, slipped one place to fifth, while Shreyas Iyer remained steady at eighth, keeping four Indians in the top-10.

New Zealand trio of Daryl Mitchell (up one place to sixth), Rachin Ravindra (up 14 spots to 14th) and Glenn Phillips (up six rungs to 24th) also made significant gains.

New Zealand captain and leftarm spinner Mitchell Santner was a big improver on the updated list for ODI bowlers.

Santner, who claimed nine wickets including two in the final, climbed six spots to second behind Sri Lankan off-spinner Maheesh Theekshana. — PTI

ALL ENGLAND | BADMINTON

Rohan-Ruthvika win, Sindhu exits

**Birmingham, March 12:** Star Indian shuttler P. V. Sindhu suffered an inexplicable meltdown, bowing out of the All England Championships with a three-game loss to Korea's Kim Ga Eun in the women's singles opening round on Wednesday.

The two-time Olympic medallist squandered an opening-game advantage to lose 21-19, 13-21, 13-21 to world number 21 Kim in a match that lasted just over an hour at Arena Birmingham.

Sindhu, 29, was cruising at 20-12 in the opening game but almost threw it away, allowing Kim to recover to 19-20 before eventually winning the game.

However, Sindhu's form dipped thereafter, while Kim grew in confidence, which was reflected in her improved movement and shot selection.

It was yet another disappointing result for world number 16 Sindhu, who had exited in the opening round of the Indonesia Masters in January, following a quarterfinal finish at the India Open Super 750 to start the year.

India's Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Shivani Gadde, however, progressed to the second round of mixed doubles competition, prevailing 21-10 17-21 24-22 over Chinese Taipei's Ye Hong

● Two-time Olympic medallist Sindhu squandered an opening-game advantage to lose 21-19, 13-21, 13-21 to world number 21 Kim in a match that lasted just over an hour at Arena Birmingham.

Wei and Nicole Gonzales Chan, ranked 41st.

The duo will face fifth seeds Yan Zhe Feng and Ya Xin Wei of China next.

Sindhu had defeated Kim in their only meeting in 2019 Hong Kong Open but was coming into the event after withdrawing from the Asia Mixed team championships due to a hamstring injury.

Playing with a blue tape on her right leg, Sindhu had a strong 3-0 start, which included her trademark forehand cross.

However, Kim surpassed her at 5-4 after the Indian made a few judgement errors and miscued a shot. Sindhu's ability to put the shuttle in awkward positions and close out rallies with whipping, precise smashes helped her take a handy four-point lead at the break.

The Indian, however, suffered an inexplicable meltdown, squandering seven of them before finally sealing the game when Kim went wide. — PTI

CHAMPIONS | LEAGUE



Bayern Munich players celebrate at the end of the Champions League Round of 16 second leg match against Bayer Leverkusen at the BayArena in Leverkusen, Germany, on Tuesday. — AP

Paris down Reds to reach quarters

**Paris, March 12:** Paris Saint-Germain held their nerve to beat Liverpool 4-1 on penalties and reach the Champions League quarterfinals on Tuesday after their tie finished one-apiece on aggregate, while Bayern Munich saw off Bayer Leverkusen to complete a 5-0 win over both legs.

Lamine Yamal and Raphinha fired Barcelona into the next round as the Catalans bested Benfica 3-1, and Inter Milan booked a last-eight meeting with Bayern by seeing off Feyenoord 2-1.

At Anfield, Ousmane Dembele netted the only goal of the night as PSG bounced back from Liverpool's late winner last week to force the tie to extra-time and penalties.

Maligned for his weak attempted save at the Parc des Princes from Harvey Elliott's strike, Italian goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma produced two excellent saves in the penalty shoot-out to send the French champions into the last eight.

Donnarumma plunged first to his left to deny Darwin Nunez, before going low the other side to deny Curtis Jones, with his team-mates dispatching all of their penalties.

"It was a great perform-

ance. We really deserved to go through over the two legs, hands down," PSG captain Marquinhos told Canal Plus.

The hosts dominated the opening exchanges but could not make their chances count, much like PSG in last week's return fixture.

Dembele poked home in the 12th minute after he reacted quickest to Ibrahima Konate's attempt to clear a PSG counter-attack in the Liverpool penalty box. — AFP

THE RESULTS

**Liverpool** 0  
**Paris Saint-Germain** 1  
(Dembele 12) aet 1-1 on aggregate  
Paris Saint-Germain win 4-1 on penalties

**Barcelona** 3  
(Raphinha 11, 42, Yamal 27)  
**Benfica** 1  
(Otamendi 13)  
Barcelona win 4-1 on aggregate

**Bayer Leverkusen** 0  
**Bayern Munich** 2  
(Kane 52, Davies 71)  
Bayern Munich win 5-0 on aggregate

**Inter Milan** 2  
(Thuram 8, Calhanoglu 51-pen)  
**Feyenoord** 1  
(Moder 42-pen)  
Inter Milan win 4-1 on aggregate