



IN BRIEF

10 foreigners sent back for illegal stay

New Delhi: The Delhi police has deported 10 foreign nationals for staying illegally in the Dwarka area of the national capital, officials said on Wednesday. The foreign nationals who didn't have valid documents were apprehended following a tip-off, and sent to a detention centre in February, deputy commissioner of police (Dwarka), Ankit Singh, said. The deportees included eight Nigerian nationals, and one each from Ghana and Ivory Coast, they said. They have been identified as James Chibuike (34), Kwatpan Luka Dalang (25), Nnamdi Michael Uduaka (32), Chijioke Euzabus Onumajuru (48), Destiny Michael (25), Chris Nwachi (34), Precious (35) and Ejike Obadi (32), all from Nigeria, and Michel Okou (36) from Ivory Coast and Andrews Kwabena (36) from Ghana. After their detention, the foreigners regional registration office (FRRO) reviewed their cases and issued the deportation orders, the DCP said.

Man linked to rly job scam arrested

New Delhi: A proclaimed offender has been arrested for his alleged involvement in a large-scale railway job scam, the Delhi police said on Wednesday. The accused, Ranjan Paswan, was arrested from the Tilak Bridge railway station. He has allegedly duped several people of over ₹1 crore on the pretext of providing jobs in the Indian Railways. "Paswan, a resident of Mayur Vihar, had been absconding since the court declared him a proclaimed offender on January 14," DCP (crime) Apoorva Gupta said. He was wanted in multiple cases of cheating and FIRs were lodged against him at several police stations, she said.

Delhi to give 'Best MLA of year' award

New Delhi: Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta on Wednesday introduced a 'Best MLA of the Year' award to recognise their legislative excellence. Addressing the valedictory session of a two-day orientation programme for the newly elected MLAs of the Delhi Assembly, Mr Gupta said the criteria for the award will include excellence in parliamentary debate, attendance record, and decorum in the House. "This award will serve as a motivation for legislators to uphold the highest standards of parliamentary conduct and actively contribute to meaningful legislative discourse," he said.

CRPF WOMAN SAVED MAN'S LIFE IN METRO

New Delhi: A female CRPF sub-inspector has saved the life of a passenger, who fell unconscious in a packed Delhi Metro coach, by promptly performing the cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) procedure on him, officials said on Wednesday. The incident took place between the Kirti Nagar and Moti Nagar stations on the Blue line of the Metro rail network on Tuesday evening. SI Anjali, 27, saw a man in his 40s standing behind her falling unconscious on the floor of the coach. The man probably suffered a cardiac issue and fainted in the train that was heavily crowded, CRPF officials said. Losing no time, the SI immediately administered CPR on the man and he soon came back to his senses. The passenger was evacuated at the Moti Nagar Metro station for a proper medical assistance, the officials added. Anjali, who joined service in 2022, belongs to the 88th Mahila battalion of the Central Reserve Police Force and is posted at Jantar Mantar in central Delhi for security duties. Talking to reporters, she regretted that none of the passengers came forward to help the affected man.

■ 'Many cameras found to be non-functional at time of handover'
Jain accused of taking ₹7cr bribe in CCTV case, bookedBHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

In more trouble for the beleaguered AAP leader Satyendar Jain, the Delhi government's anti-corruption branch (ACB) has registered a case against him over alleged corruption in a ₹571-crore CCTV project.

The FIR was registered on Tuesday after obtaining prior sanction under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act from the competent authority against Jain, a former PWD minister.

Joint commissioner of police (ACB) Madhur Verma, said, "Jain is accused of arbitrarily waiving liquidated damages worth ₹16 crore imposed on Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) for delays in installing CCTV cameras across Delhi. The waiver was allegedly granted after receiving a ₹7-crore bribe."

Multiple complaints have suggested that the project was executed in a shoddy manner, with sev-



Satyendar Jain

eral cameras found to be non-functional at the time of handover, he said.

According to the statement, the case is based on a news report, which claimed that a bribe of ₹7 crore was arranged for Jain, who was the nodal officer for the CCTV project, in exchange for waiving penalties imposed on BEL and its contractors.

The penalties were initially levied in August 2019 by the previous AAP government due to significant delays in the installation of 1.4 lakh CCTV cameras across Delhi's 70 Assembly constituencies.

During verification, a BEL officer provided a

▶ **ACCORDING TO** the statement, the case is based on a news report, which claimed that a bribe of ₹7 crore was arranged for Jain, who was the nodal officer for the CCTV project, in exchange for waiving penalties

detailed complaint supporting the allegations.

The complaint further alleged that in addition to waiving the penalties, additional orders for 1.4 lakh more CCTV cameras were awarded to BEL, the joint CP said.

The bribe was allegedly routed through contractors who received the additional camera installation orders.

Payments were reportedly made by inflating vendor order values, said Mr Verma, who is heading the ACB. The ACB is in the process of scrutinising relevant documents from the public works department (PWD) and BEL.

Atishi claims 'witch-hunt' as BJP talks of ₹7cr bribe

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

A political tussle has erupted after the anti-corruption branch (ACB) of the Delhi government registered an FIR against the former PWD minister and senior AAP leader Satyendar Jain over alleged corruption in a ₹571 crore CCTV project. While senior AAP leader Atishi called it a case of "political witch-hunt", Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva accused Jain of accepting a bribe of ₹7 crore. The Delhi Congress however claimed that the FIR validates its charge of huge corruption in the CCTV camera installation project.

In a post on X, former Delhi chief minister Atishi said, "When investigating agencies leave their work and start political witch-hunting on the orders of the boss..."

She also shared a document highlighting a reply by the BJP-led Centre in Parliament, which claimed that out of the 193 cases filed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) against political leaders in the past 10 years, only two resulted in convictions.

In a video post on X, Mr Sachdeva alleged that the previous government led by Arvind Kejriwal covered up the corruption case for years.

"In 2017-18, the Kejriwal government awarded a contract of ₹571 crore to Bharat Electronics Limited for installing CCTV cameras in Delhi. Due to delays, a penalty of ₹16 crore was imposed in 2019 but Satyendar Jain waived it after taking ₹7 crore bribe. The ACB completed its investigation in 2023 but the FIR was delayed due to AAP's cover-up act," Mr Sachdeva claimed.

Delhi Congress president Devender Yadav said that the party has been insisting that huge corruption had been committed by Mr Jain.



BJP and AAP councillors protest during the Budget Session at MCD House in New Delhi. — G.N. JHA

MCD mayor Mahesh Khichi claimed that the BJP councillors snatched mic from him. He said that despite it being the last day of the Budget session, the Opposition refused to cooperate and disrupted proceedings.

During a press conference, he alleged, "The Opposition councillors stood on the table and tore up the list of key points

that were to be discussed in the House." He claimed that for the past two years, the Opposition had continuously been disrupting House proceedings, preventing discussions from taking place.

"They did the same this time as well... This kind of behaviour towards a Dalit mayor is inappropriate and goes against the Constitution," the mayor said.

Child mowed down by tempo, driver arrested

New Delhi, March 18: A 10-year-old boy died after being hit by a tempo in outernorth Delhi's Shahbad Dairy area, the police said on Wednesday. The tempo driver, identified as Harish (25), has been arrested, they said.

The incident took place on Bawana Road around 7.50 pm on Tuesday. The boy, identified as Angad, was running and crossing the road when the speeding tempo mowed him down, an official said.

The police said that the boy's father, a resident of Shahbad Daulatpur, works as a labourer.

"A PCR call regarding the accident was received at 8.04 pm, following

▶ **THE BOY**, identified as Angad, was running and crossing the road when the speeding tempo mowed him down, an official said

which a police team rushed to the spot. By the time police arrived, the injured child had been taken to BR Health Hospital in Rohini, where doctors declared him dead," a senior police official said.

An FIR has been registered and further investigation is underway, the police said, adding that the body has been shifted to BSA Hospital mortuary for postmortem.

— PTI

■ 'But claims 75% of people were BPL when it came to subsidies'
SC: States show high per capita for growthAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said states showed a high per capita growth in the development index but claimed 75 per cent of their population was below the poverty line when it came to subsidies and wondered if the benefits meant for the poor percolated to underserving persons.

Underlining that the benefit of subsidies should reach the genuine beneficiaries, a bench of Justices Surya Kant and N. Kotiswar Singh said, "Our concern is... are benefits meant for the genuinely poor persons percolating to those pockets who do not deserve it?" Justice Surya Kant said,

"Ration card has become a popularity card now. These states just say we have issued these many cards. There are some states who when they have to show their development say our per capita income is growing. And then when we talk of BPL, they say 75 per cent of the population is BPL. How can these facts be reconciled? The conflict is inherent. We have to ensure that benefits reach the genuine beneficiaries."

The observations by the top court came while hearing a plea in a suo motu case initiated during the Covid-19 pandemic to address the miseries of migrant labourers.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for some intervenors, said

▶ **THE OBSERVATIONS** by the top court came while hearing a plea in a suo motu case initiated during the Covid-19 pandemic to address the miseries of migrant labourers

the anomaly stemmed from the inequalities in the income of people.

"There are a handful of people who have huge wealth as compared to other populations and the per capita income figure is the average of total income of the state. The rich continue to be getting richer while the poor remain poor," he said.

The poor migrant workers, who are registered in the e-shram portal of the government, need to be

given free ration and the figure was around 8 crore people, Mr Bhushan said.

Justice Surya Kant said, "We hope that in the issuance of ration cards, there are no political elements involved. I have not lost my roots. I always want to know the plight of the poor. There are families who continue to be poor."

Mr Bhushan said the Centre did not conduct the 2021 Census and was continuing to rely on data from the 2011 Census and as a result around 10 crore people, requiring free ration, remained out of the BPL categories.

The bench adjourned the matter and asked the Centre to file its response on the status of free ration distributed to the poor.

CM slams AAP, says 'starting from zero' on drain cleanup

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

Delhi chief minister Rekha Gupta asserted on Wednesday that the new government in the national capital will leave no stone unturned to ensure the desilting of all the drains and prevent waterlogging issues during the rainy season.

Accompanied by lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena, PWD minister Parvash Verma, and senior officers of various departments, the chief minister inspected the desilting work at the Sunehri Pul drain.

Complaining that no desilting was undertaken in the tenure of the previous Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) regime in Delhi, Ms Gupta said the new Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has to start from "zero" and complete the work.

She also said the condition of the water pipelines and leakage is such that almost half of the city is getting water through tankers.



Delhi lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena and chief minister Rekha Gupta inspect Sunehri Pul drain in New Delhi. — PTI

"There is no water and taps and these need to be created," she said.

The "double-engine" government of the BJP, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is committed to getting all these things done and has already started working on it, Ms Gupta said in reference to the party being in power both at the Centre and in Delhi.

Two days after the L-G, chief minister, and public works department (PWD) minister inspected the Sunehri Pul drain in south Delhi, they again

went to the spot to supervise the desilting work on Wednesday.

"Nothing was thought about the desilting of this drain by those who constructed it by covering it with at least 15-inch thick concrete slabs. The nearby colonies get waterlogged," Ms Gupta told reporters.

She said the slabs have to be cut to expose the clogged drain for desilting.

"The accumulated silt has solidified like rock and is being removed with the help of machines," she said.

Delhi plans artificial rain to curb pollution

New Delhi, March 19:

The Delhi government plans to conduct artificial rain trials, a move hinging on the success of the upcoming water sample tests, alongside a series of large-scale anti-pollution projects designed to target multiple pollution hotspots across Delhi-NCR to ensure a widespread, lasting impact.

Environment minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa said the government is actively working on reducing pollution, with visible improvements already seen and efforts accelerating to ensure better air quality than in previous years.

Mr Sirsa said that the government is considering a plan for artificial rain, and a study is underway. "We have asked for detailed reports to determine whether the chemicals used in artificial rain could have any harmful effects on the human body or skin."

"Based on the report, we will conduct a small-

scale test in an outer Delhi area, and water samples will be analysed to ensure there are no adverse effects. If the tests are successful and the samples show no side-effects, we will move forward with the plan."

Talking about the smog tower project, Mr Sirsa acknowledged it as a "failure" and said that the BJP government will soon announce a new plan that will operate on a multi-area scale to make a noticeable difference across Delhi-NCR.

He said the focus will be on targeting pollution sources directly and working to eliminate or reduce them.

The national capital's air quality worsens significantly during peak winter, with the air quality index (AQI) often crossing 450 - among the worst in the country.

The BJP government, which took charge of Delhi after 26 years, has vowed to tackle pollution.

— PTI

Flier deploys emergency slide of IndiGo plane at airport

New Delhi, March 19: An IndiGo passenger deployed an emergency slide of a Leh-bound aircraft before takeoff at the Delhi airport on Wednesday. In a statement, IndiGo said a slide was deployed inadvertently on flight 6E 5161 from Delhi to Leh before takeoff.

"Following Standard Operating Procedures, the crew reported the incident and the customer was offloaded and handed over to concerned authorities," the airline said and regretted the inconvenience caused to other passengers.

Specific details about the incident could not be immediately ascertained.

As per information available on flight tracking website flightradar24.com, it was an A320 aircraft.

Generally, an inflatable slide is deployed for evacuation of passengers during an emergency.

NORTHERN RAILWAY
CORRIGENDUM
Ref: Tender Notice No. 97/2024-25 dated 18.02.2025 S. No. 02
Tender Number 77259006RGC Opening date 19.03.2025
In reference to above, Tender Opening date has been extended from 19.03.2025 to 26.03.2025 and Some Tender Conditions of above referred tender has been modified. All other terms and conditions remain unchanged.
The corrigendum has been published on website www.irops.gov.in
Note: This is the Second Corrigendum in above referred tender. Date: 18.03.2025
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE 864/2025

NORTHERN RAILWAY
Sub: Pre bid meeting for procurement of Elevators
Tender No. 12255003 due on 14.04.2025 for procurement of "Elevators" has been floated by Northern Railway, Baroda House, New Delhi. The Pre Bid meeting is scheduled for dated 27.03.2025 at 11:30 Hrs. at Conference Hall, 2nd Floor, Stores Department, Baroda House, New Delhi India.
Please make it convenient to attend the same.
No.: 12255003/Elevator/P-12 Dated: 17.03.2025 866/2025
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTHERN RAILWAY
CORRIGENDUM
Ref: i) Tender Notice No.03/2024-25 dated 10.04.2024
ii) Tender No.15235293 due on 19.05.2025.
01. In reference to above tender, Commercial-Compliance has been revised.
02. In reference to above tender, the due date has been extended from 18.03.2025 to 19.05.2025
All other terms & conditions remain unchanged.
The Corrigendum has been published on website www.irops.gov.in
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

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OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER :: P.W.D. ::
NAGAON BUILDING CIRCLE, NAGAON::ASSAM.

PRESS NOTICE

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Sl.No	Name of Work	Approximate value of work (Rs. in Lakhs)	Category of APWD (B) registered contractor
1	"Construction for Development of Existing School Infrastructure of Sankardev Vidya Niketan at Bhakatgaon, under Shankardev Vidya Niketan Parichalana Samiti, Bhakatgaon, Morigaon" Under Untied Fund Scheme for the year 2022-23.	Rs. 139.66081 L	Class-I(A/B/C)

Note:-

- Any modification of tender may be seen in the portal www.assamtenders.gov.in.
- Value of work may vary according to the Detail NIT.
- The prospective bidder may visit the work site before submission of tender. The Bidder have to submit evidence of site visit in the form of a certificate duly certified by the concerned Executive Engineer, PWD.

The Press Notice will be a part of the Bidding Documents.

RO No. JANASANYOG/C/8449/24/20-MARCH-25

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JEE MAIN
2024 **AIR#1**
Nilkrishna
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2024 **AIR#1**
Mazin Mansoor
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SHORT TAKES

MP boat capsizes: Bodies of six seized

Shivpuri, MP: The authorities on Wednesday recovered the bodies of six persons, including three children, who drowned after a boat carrying them capsized in Matatila dam in Madhya Pradesh's Shivpuri district, while search was on to trace a teenage girl, police said. The incident occurred on Tuesday evening when the boat was carrying 15 persons to a temple located on the island in Matatila dam under Khaniyadhana police station limits, police officials said. While eight persons were rescued with the help of villagers, seven others went missing in the water, they said. Pichhore's sub divisional officer of police (SDOP) Prashant Sharma said the rescue operations were carried out throughout the night and the bodies of six missing persons were recovered till Wednesday afternoon. Search for a minor girl named Kunkum is still on, he said. — PTI

Odisha keen for PM Surya Ghar Yojana

Bhubaneswar: The Pradhan Mantri Surya Ghar Yojana has garnered significant interest among Odisha residents, with 93,367 applications registered so far. The scheme, launched in 2024, aims to promote solar energy adoption by providing subsidies for installing rooftop solar panels in residential households. In a written reply to the Odisha Legislative Assembly on Wednesday, deputy chief minister K.V. Singh Deo stated that 2,740 beneficiaries in the state have already benefited from the scheme. To support its successful implementation, the Odisha government has allocated ₹100 crore in financial assistance. Among the districts, Bhadrak has recorded the highest number of registrations with 17,167 applications, followed by Ganjam with 14,189 households signing up for the scheme.

1 killed in fresh Manipur clashes

■Continued from Page 1
down schools and colleges and shutting shops and business establishments, until the situation improved in the area. The six Kuki-Zo legislators of the district also issued a joint statement appealing for maintaining peace. "Let us remember that we have been going through the most critical and difficult times in our history; and we have been fighting for our rights shoulder to shoulder as one. Let us also understand that our forefathers have taught us the spirit of resilience and that of forgiveness and peaceful resolution of any kind of conflicts through our customary laws. Let us all invoke these values, the Christian values of forgiveness to resolve the ongoing misunderstanding among us in the interest of our community and for posterity," the statement said.

BJP warms to Shashi Tharoor, Cong silent

■Continued from Page 1
The President in Moscow two weeks apart and be accepted in both places," Mr Tharoor stressed. The BJP on Wednesday projected Mr Tharoor's praise of the government's handling of the Russia-Ukraine war as an endorsement of India's deft diplomacy under Mr Modi's leadership. Former Union minister and Lok Sabha MP Ravi Shankar Prasad described Mr Tharoor's acknowledgement that he has been proved incorrect in his early criticism of the government for not speaking out against the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a case of "better late than never". Mr Prasad told the media that the Modi government takes decisions that are good for India. "The way Mr Tharoor has accepted it, if other Congress leaders would also acknowledge it, then it will be good," he said. BJP MP Sambit Patra said that the Congress leaders, including party president Mallikarjun Kharge and Lok Sabha Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi, should "appreciate" Mr Tharoor's stand on India's position on the Ukraine-Russia conflict. "Mr Tharoor understands diplomacy... the Congress should also learn from him," Mr Patra said. The BJP Kerala state unit

SC cracks down on mining near Sariska

Top court asks Rajasthan govt to appoint nodal officer

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Rajasthan government to appoint a nodal officer in Alwar district to deal with complaints of illegal mining within a kilometre of the Sariska Tiger Reserve. A bench of Justices B.R. Gawai and Augustine George Masih passed the order while hearing pleas that claimed illegal mining activities within a kilometre of the tiger reserve despite the apex court's ban on such activity. The Rajasthan government denied the allegations and said inspections were conducted by the authorities even at night on the highways to prevent any such unauthorised activity. Senior advocate K. Parameshwar, assisting the court as an amicus curiae, said the state

SC raps U'khand over 'snail's pace' action on Jim Corbett construction

New Delhi, March 19: The Supreme Court on Wednesday pulled up the Uttarakhand government for moving at a "snail's pace" against its senior officers accused of illegal constructions in Corbett Tiger Reserve. While ordering for the departmental proceedings to be concluded within three months, a bench of Justices B.R. Gawai and Augustine George Masih deprecated the state's

appointing a nodal officer would be a better way to deal with the grievances. The apex court said, "We, therefore, direct the state of Rajasthan to appoint a nodal officer in the office of the district mining officer, Alwar."

practice of moving speedily against junior level officers but not against the senior officers. It noted an affidavit of the state elaborated on the departmental proceedings initiated against the officers. Referring to a chart placed before it, the court said the departmental proceedings were completed against 16 of the 17 officers who were in the rank of ranger, deputy ranger, etc.

The SC said the nodal officer would take a decision within two weeks upon the receipt of the complaint. "If such a grievance was not entertained, the aggrieved person could approach the jurisdictional high court, it said.

Top court directs Neeri to submit report on Matheran

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

The Supreme Court on Wednesday asked the National environmental engineering research institute to submit a report on whether it was necessary to lay paver blocks on roads in Matheran hill town of Maharashtra to avoid soil erosion. Automobiles are not allowed in the hill station of Matheran which is located about 83 kilometres away from Mumbai.

A bench of Justices B.R. Gawai and Augustine George Masih passed the order while hearing an application over the laying of paver blocks on the mud roads of Matheran. The applicant's counsel claimed the attempt was to motorise the hill town of Matheran. While claiming the exercise was necessary to stop soil erosion, the state's counsel said the decision to lay clay paver blocks in place of concrete paver blocks was being mulled over.

ED questions Lalu for nearly 4 hours in land-for-jobs scam

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/PATNA, MARCH 19

Rashtriya Janata Dal president Lalu Prasad Yadav on Wednesday reached the Enforcement Directorate office at Bank Road in Patna around 10.30 am and left the premises after being grilled for nearly four hours in land-for-jobs scam case.

Mr Prasad's eldest daughter Misa Bharti, who is also the RJD MP from Pataliputra, accompanied her father. The ailing septuagenarian leader was summoned by the Central financial probe agency on Tuesday. The street leading to the ED office kept reverberating with slogans, in praise



Lalu Prasad Yadav of RJD supremo, raised by party workers who had gathered in large numbers. Known for his gift of the gab, Mr Lalu Prasad did not take any questions from the posse of journalists, choosing to wave at them quietly from inside his car. On Tuesday, Mr Prasad's wife Rabri Devi and elder son Tej Pratap Yadav, both named as co-accused in the case, had been quizzed by the agency for close to four

■ ‘Government staff making reels for their glorification’ Maha mulls social media curbs on staff

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, MARCH 19

The Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday announced new rules for use of social media by the state government employees. Mr Fadnavis said that few government employees have been found posting messages against the government's policy. He was replying to a calling attention motion, moved by BJP MLC Pranay Fuke in the upper House. The CM said that they will incorporate new rules under Maharashtra Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1979 within the next three months.



Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis arrives at Vidhan Bhavan during the Budget session of the Assembly in Mumbai on Wednesday.

Raising the issue of "misuse" of social media by the government servants especially officials, Mr Fuke said that the government employees including officials and personnel have been using facebook, Instagram and snapchat to

tions. It appears that they are only running the government and all machineries in the system," the motion said. The BJP legislator alleged that the government employees are defaming the government by making the reels on social media and asked whether the government will bring an amendment to existing law to stop the misuse of social media by the government employees. Replying to the questions, Mr Fadnavis said that Maharashtra Civil Services (Conduct) Rules were framed in 1979, therefore, there were no express provisions for social media.

Political tensions escalate over Bihar Diwas in Assam

Ulfa issues threat ■ CM warns against regional divides

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MARCH 19

Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday condemned the move opposing the celebrations of Bihar diwas in Upper Assam's Tinsukia district. Defining it a narrow approach, Mr Sarma told reporters that there should be no opposition to the proposed celebrations of Bihar Diwas in Assam. Pointing out that Assam Diwas is also observed in different parts of the country, including Bihar, Mr Sarma said, "There should be no opposition if some people want to observe Bihar diwas in Assam. Hundreds of our boys and girls are working outside the state. Such a narrow approach may paint the state's image in



a very poor light. We should not send a message that we are opposed to any community. Such protests may spoil the investment scenario of the state too." Mr Sarma was reacting to the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent) led by Paresh Baruah's warning to the Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled government and Hindi speaking people against organising "Bihar Diwas" in upper Assam's Tinsukia town. The decision to organise the event dedicated to

Bihar on March 22 was taken at a meeting of local BJP leaders in Tinsukia a few days ago. It is significant that eastern Assam's Tinsukia has a large population of Hindi speaking people, mostly from Bihar and Jharkhand. The town is also known as the commercial hub of much of the eastern half of the Northeast. The outlawed Ulfa-I, which warned of a serious consequences if their diktat is defied, in a statement said, "The move by (BJP) legislators Suren Phukan (Digboi constituency) and Sanjoy Kishan (Tinsukia) is an attack on the culture, heritage, and pride of the indigenous people. We will not tolerate the celebration of 'Bihar diwas' by outsiders."

CISF cyclothon unites coastal communities

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

The CISF Coastal Cyclothon 2025, a first-of-its-kind initiative covering 6,553 km of India's coastline, is set to reach Mumbai on March 20 that will mark its half-way distance of about 3300 kms (both coasts combined). This historic ride is raising awareness amongst the local population about the importance of coastal security and appealing to the fisherman communities to actively support the law enforcement agencies in keeping a vigil over potential threats like smuggling of drugs, weapons and explosives through the sea.

Govt schemes reach 100 villages, says Sai

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
RAIPUR, MARCH 19

Chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Wednesday said that establishment of security camps in remote areas in Leftwing insurgency-hit Bastar in Chhattisgarh has helped over 100 villages in the region get the government schemes. Mr Sai who held discussion with Union home minister Amit Shah on the counterinsurgency measures being undertaken in Bastar to free the region of the Maoist influence, during his recent two-day visit to Delhi, said that 52 schemes of 70 have now been implemented in these interior villages due to establishment of security

camps in the remote Bastar. "People in these villages are now able to get cheap rations due to the opening up of the public distribution system (PDS) shops in the areas." "Around 52 schemes of 70 government departments have reached over 100 villages following the establishment of security camps", he said. He reiterated his assertion to end Naxalism in Bastar by March 2026 and said that his government is committed to achieve the target to free Bastar of Maoist menace. Exhorting the Maoists to give up arms and join the mainstream, Mr Sai said that the government is ready to rehabilitate them suitably with dignity in the society.

Sunita returns after 9+ mnths in space

■Continued from Page 1

Ms Williams, 59, was born to a Gujarati father Deepak Pandya hailing from Jhulasan in Mehsana district and Slovenian mother Ursuline Bonnie Pandya on September 19, 1965 in Euclid, Ohio. Proud of her multicultural roots, Ms Williams had carried symbols of her heritage to space, including samosas, a Slovenian flag and a Ganesha idol during previous missions. Calling Ms Williams "India's daughter", the President said and her fellow astronauts have inspired everyone with their perseverance, dedication and never-say-die spirit. "Congratulations to the entire team behind the safe return of NASA's Crew 9 mission on Earth!... Their historic journey is a tale of determination, teamwork and extraordinary courage. I salute their unwavering resolve and wish them excellent health!" Ms Murmu said in a post on X. The Prime Minister welcomed Ms Williams and her fellow Crew-9 members saying their unwavering determination will forever inspire millions. "Welcome back, Crew9! The Earth missed you. Yours has been a test of grit, courage and the boundless human spirit. Sunita Williams and the #Crew9 astronauts have once again shown us what perseverance truly means. Their unwavering determination in the face of the vast unknown will forever inspire millions," Mr Modi posted on X.

Mr Modi added space exploration is about pushing the limits of human potential, daring to dream and having the courage to turn those dreams into reality. "Sunita Williams, a trailblazer and an icon, has exemplified this spirit throughout her career. We are incredibly proud of all those who worked tirelessly to ensure their safe return. They have demonstrated what happens when precision meets passion and technology meets tenacity," said the PM. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Union ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh and Piyush Goyal as well as Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and the Trinamul Congress chief and West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, were among those who congratulated Ms Williams. Messages also came in from several chief ministers. "Heartiest congratulations to NASA and the incredible team behind the safe return of the Crew9 mission! Sunita Williams, with her Indian roots and global spirit, has inspired the entire world with her remarkable achievements and unwavering determination." "During this mission, Sunita Williams with her fellow astronauts, has showcased the power of perseverance, teamwork, and courage. Their mission is not just a milestone in space exploration but a testament to what humanity can achieve when we dream big and work together.

We salute their extraordinary journey and wish them good health and continued success," wrote Mr Birla on X. "Welcome back to Earth, Sunita Williams!" Mr Kharge said, adding that the safe conclusion of the extended mission has brought a sense of relief and relation to the 1.4 billion citizens of India. Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan said the astronauts' "extended mission, shaped by technical challenges, has left an inspiring legacy in space exploration". Describing Ms Williams as "daughter of India", Ms Banerjee hailed her return, saying, "Welcome Sunita Williams and other astronauts back to Earth, finally and safely, after so many days." "Our daughter of India returns to us, and we are deeply deeply happy and elated. We are profoundly happy for other returnees also. Hail their courage, hail their return, hail human glory!" Ms Banerjee said in a post on X. On her third mission to the ISS in June last year, along with Ms Wilmore, which lasted for 286 days, Ms Williams also created history by setting a record for the most time spent spacewalking by a woman. Ms Williams now has 62 hours and nine minutes of extravehicular activity, surpassing former astronaut Peggy Whitson's record of 60 hours and 21 minutes, a feat Ms Williams achieved on January 30.

PM to attend Bimstec meet

■Continued from Page 1

security situation there has severely deteriorated since last year. Both India and Thailand are neighbours of Myanmar. The PM is also expected to visit Sri Lanka early next month, either before or immediately after the Bimstec summit. Sri Lankan foreign minister Vijitha Herath was quoted as saying by news agency reports last Saturday that Mr Modi will be visiting the island nation. "We have maintained a close relationship with our neighbour India. Our first diplomatic visit was to India, where we reached several agreements on bilateral cooperation. Indian PM Narendra Modi will arrive here early April", the Sri Lankan foreign minister said last week. Left-leaning Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake had visited New Delhi in December last year and had held talks with Mr Modi, after which the two nations had announced increased cooperation in the fields of development assistance, including debt restructuring, trade, digital technology, energy, defence and security, connectivity and people to people ties. Mr Modi had then announced that a futuristic vision had been adopted by the two sides that included investment-led growth and connectivity.

SHORT TAKES

Terror cases down by 71%: Rai in RS

New Delhi: The minister of state for home affairs Nityanand Rai on Wednesday said in the Rajya Sabha that there has been a 71 per cent reduction in terror incidents in the country under the Modi government, and terrorists will now either go to jail or “jahannum” (hell). Replying to the written questions during Question Hour, Mr Rai said unlike in the past when terrorists were glorified and served “good food”, the Modi government has a “zero tolerance” policy towards terrorism that has helped bring down the cases of terror to zero in the hinterland. He claimed that after an amendment in the National Investigation Agency Act, the NIA is now investigating cases on foreign land including attacks on the Indian high commissions in London and Ottawa.

MP to develop green belt along Narmada

Bhopal: A green belt surrounding Narmada will be developed for the conservation of the river. The decision was taken at the meeting of the state Cabinet held here on Tuesday night under the chairmanship of chief minister Mohan Yadav. “The Cabinet has granted in-principle approval for the new scheme, christened as “Aviral Nirmal Narmada” (clean and uninterrupted flow of Narmada) under the Campa (compensatory afforestation fund management and planning authority) for the financial years 2025-26 to 2031-32 with a total budget of ₹124.46 crore”, a spokesman of Madhya Pradesh government said on Wednesday. Under the scheme, in the next seven years, dense plantation will be carried out in 5,600 hectares of forest land across 12 forest divisions and 95 forest compartments, covering all available forest areas within 10 km from both the banks of Narmada, he added.

Kin seeks CBI probe in ex-mantri murder

Bhubaneswar: The family of Naba Kishore Das, the late senior Biju Janata Dal leader and Odisha's former health minister who was shot dead in January 2023, met chief minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Wednesday evening at the state secretariat, urging him to order a Central Bureau of Investigation probe into the incident. Das' wife, Minati Das, daughter Dipali Das and son Vishal Das, held a 90-minute discussion with the CM, which was also attended by state director-general of police Yogesh Bahadur Khurania and Crime Branch DG Vinaytosh Mishra. “We submitted a letter to CM Majhi, requesting him to initiate a CBI probe into our father's murder. The CM assured us that the ongoing crime branch investigation will be conducted properly.

GOVT MUST SET UP BODY TO CURB FAKE NEWS: MP

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

A BJP MP Dilip Saikia on Wednesday urged the government to establish a regulatory licensing authority to curb news portals and digital news channels from spreading fake narratives and launching personal attacks on political leaders. BJP MPs also demanded roll back of the Karnataka government bill that grants four per cent reservation to Muslims in government contracts, contending that the move amounted to partitioning of the country. Raising the issue during the Zero Hour in Lok Sabha, the MP from Assam's Darrang-Udalguri, Mr Saikia, said, “There are a number of portals and digital news channels some of which are spreading fake narratives. There are some channels that launch personal attacks targeting political leaders. There have been incidents when some people were even compelled to commit suicides.” “I request that a regulatory authority be established for issuing licence to portals and digital news channels so that they can be restricted (from spreading fake narratives),” Mr Saikia said.



Dilip Saikia

Local neta mastermind of Nagpur violence, arrested

Fahim Khan sent to police custody till March 21 ■ Female cop molested

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, MARCH 19

The Nagpur police has arrested local politician Fahim Khan, president of the Minorities Democratic Party (MDP), for allegedly instigating Monday's violence in the city. A new FIR was registered on Wednesday regarding the alleged molestation of a woman officer during the violence.

While the police said that the situation in the city is under control, curfew orders continued in sensitive parts of the city. Chief minister Devendra Fadnavis said the police will dig out all the culprits of the violence even “from graves”.

Mr Khan, who unsuccessfully contested the Lok Sabha election last year against Union minister Nitin Gadkari, was arrested on Tuesday night.

According to the police, he made videos urging Muslims to gather near a police station and then near a mosque in the Mahal area of Nagpur, where the clashes erupted. Videos of the violence show rioters shouting slogans in support of Aurangzeb. They hailed the Mughal emperor as “alamgir hazrat”.

Mr Khan provoked people, incited violence and played a role in spreading rumours that a holy book was desecrated during the earlier protests held by Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajarang Dal, the police said.

The police produced Mr Khan before a magistrate court, which remanded him along with 18 other accused to police custody till March 21.

The Nagpur police said



A road closed amid curfew in Hanspuri area in Nagpur on Wednesday.

‘Drop protective tag to Aurangzeb’s tomb’

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, MARCH 19

The Shiv Sena (UBT) has demanded that the Centre should remove the protected tag of the Aurangzeb tomb. “This will prevent riots and cool down the heads of fanatics,” the party said.

An editorial in Shiv Sena (UBT) mouthpiece *Saamana* termed the Hindu groups' demand to remove Aurangzeb's tomb a “plain drama”.

Earlier, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader had said that the tomb is a testament of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's bravery, and wiping out a villain (Aurangzeb) from the history will eventually devalue the hero (Chhatrapati

that they were investigating whether the conspiracy behind the violence was hatched by one person or a group.

“We are verifying the

Shivaji Maharaj). “There is no need to do this drama to remove Aurangzeb's grave. Aurangzeb is under the grave and he will never get up and come out,” said the editorial.

The Mughal emperor's grave is currently being protected by the Central Security Forces. Since this grave is under the Central agency, Archaeological Survey of India, the Centre should immediately remove this security and withdraw the status of the protected monument given to the grave, so that the land would be freed. This will prevent riots and cool down the heads of fanatics,” *Saamana* editorial said.

names coming up in relation to the rioting,” Nagpur police commissioner Ravinder Singal said. The police has already arrested more

Aurangzeb irrelevant today: RSS

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) on Wednesday maintained that Mughal emperor Aurangzeb is no longer relevant in today's context, and also condemned the recent violence in Nagpur.

Violence erupted in central Nagpur amid rumours that the holy book of a community was burnt during an agitation by a right-wing body demanding the removal of 17th century Mughal emperor's tomb in C h h a t r a p a t i Sambhajinagar district. The RSS also asserted that any form of violence is detrimental to the society's well-being.

“Any type of violence is not good for the health of the society and I think police have taken cognizance of it and so they will get into the details,” the RSS Akhil Bharatiya Prachar Pramukh Sunil Ambekar said.

Mr Ambekar was briefing the media in Bengaluru regarding the three-day long Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha meeting of the Sangh from March 21.

than 50 people.

Curfew continued to be imposed for the second consecutive day in the jurisdiction of 10 police stations across Nagpur.

Cabinet okays 6-lane eway to boost Maha port connectivity

Clears ₹3,400cr livestock, ₹2,790cr dairy reforms

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved construction of a six-lane access-controlled greenfield high-speed national highway starting from Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA) at Pagote to Chowk (29.219 km) in Maharashtra. The project will be developed on a build, operate and transfer (BOT) mode at a total capital cost of ₹4,500.62 crore. The Cabinet also approved the revised Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM) to boost growth in livestock sector and revised National Programme for Dairy Development (NPPD).

Sharing the details of the Cabinet meeting, Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said that the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the construction of a six-lane access-controlled greenfield high-speed national highway

- Farmer leaders Pandher, Dallewal detained
- Meet with Centre inconclusive, next May 4

Shambhu border to open as police evicts farmers

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

Several farmer leaders including Sarwan Singh Pandher and Jagjit Singh Dallewal were detained in Punjab's Mohali on Wednesday while returning from a meeting with a Central delegation, as Punjab police began evicting protesting farmers from Punjab and Haryana border's Shambhu and Khanauri points, which have been closed since February 2024.

The farmers' delegation were detained by the Punjab police when they were on their way to join the ongoing farmers' protest at the Shambhu and Khanauri borders after meeting the Central delegation led by Union agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

The meeting with the farmers had remained inconclusive. However, Mr Chouhan said it took place in a “very positive environment” and the next meeting between the government and the farmers has been scheduled for May 4.

Later in the day the Punjab police started removing farmers from the Punjab-Haryana Shambhu and Khanauri borders and dismantled the temporary structures they erected and detained number of farmers from the area.

Punjab minister Harpal Singh Cheema said that the action was taken as they want to open Shambhu and Khanauri borders. “We want to open Shambhu and Khanauri borders. The demands of the farmers are against the Central government and they should stage a protest in Delhi or somewhere else, but should not



Farmer leaders (above) come out after a meeting with Central ministers in Chandigarh on Wednesday. Farmers, detained at Chandigarh, being taken to the Bahadurgarh commando training centre in Patiala on Wednesday.

— PTI



block the roads of Punjab,” Mr Cheema said. “The people of Punjab were facing significant inconvenience and suffering. We have been telling them that enough is enough, and it's time to end this protest as it has become unlawful. The operation is ongoing, and several structures they had built are being demolished. Around 40-50 people have been detained, and many of them are requesting to return home. We will arrange transportation and send them back,” Punjab DIG Harmanbir Singh Gill told media.

The police said, in the presence of duty magistrates, the area was cleared after they were given proper warning. A few people showed a willingness to go home. So, they were sent home on a bus. In addition, the struc-

tures and vehicles here are being moved. The entire road will be cleared and opened for traffic... Haryana Police will also begin their action. Once it opens from their side, the movement on highway will resume. We did not need to use any force because there was no resistance. Farmers cooperated well and they sat in buses by themselves,” the police added.

The protesting farmers have been camping at Shambhu and Khanauri points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13 last year, after security forces did not allow them to march to Delhi.

The police action took political turn as leaders from Congress BJP and Shiromani Akali Dal slammed chief minister Bhagwant Mann.

V-P calls for structured discussion on freebies

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar on Wednesday opined that there should be a structured discussion on freebies and subsidies in the House, as there is an urgent need for a national policy to help put all government investments to the larger good.

Responding to the demand made by Samajwadi Party's Ram Gopal Yadav for increasing the funds, which Members of Parliament have at their disposal for developmental projects and schemes in their respective constituencies to ₹20 crore a year from the current ₹five crore during the Zero Hour, Mr Dhankhar said he would be open to a structured discussion on the issue if the government and the Opposition agree.

Electoral freebies, such as free electricity and water, subsidised cooking gas, and cash handouts to certain groups like farmers and women, have often been criticised as something that may lead to unsustainable financial burdens on the government, distort public resources, and undermine long-term development goals.

“On placatory mechanisms, on appeasement, which is often known as freebies, this House needs to deliberate. I will be open to a structured discussion after consulting the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition,” he said.

The country can grow only if money is available for capital expenditure, he said.

“There is an urgent need for a national policy so that all investments of the government in any form are used in a structured manner for the larger good,” the vice-president said.

If the leaders of both sides agree, there can be a discussion, Mr Dhankhar said, adding this is a very serious issue.

Salute their resolve: Murmu Earth missed you, says Modi PM, Prez greet Nasa on Sunita's return

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

Celebrations, prayers and good wishes poured in from several quarters in India as the SpaceX capsule carrying American astronaut of Indian origin Sunita Williams splashed down the waters in Gulf of America in Florida.

On Wednesday, President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi sent congratulatory messages to the Nasa scientist who returned home after being stuck in space for nearly ten months.

Calling Sunita Williams India's daughter, President Murmu said she and her fellow astronauts have inspired everyone with their perseverance, dedication and never-say-die spirit. “Congratulations to the entire team behind the safe return of Nasa's Crew-9 mission on

Earth!...Their historic journey is a tale of determination, teamwork and extraordinary courage. I salute their unwavering resolve and wish them excellent health!” Ms Murmu said in a post on X.

Ms Williams' father Deepak Pandya, who hails from Jhulasan, a village in Gujarat's Mehsana district, moved to the US in 1957. Ms Williams has visited India at least thrice, including in 2007 and 2013, soon after her space missions and has been honoured with the Padma Bhushan in 2008.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed Ms Williams and her fellow Crew-9 members saying their unwavering determination will forever inspire millions. “Welcome back, Crew9! The Earth missed you. Theirs has been a test of

Sunita Williams, a trailblazer and an icon, has exemplified this spirit throughout her career. We are incredibly proud of all those who worked tirelessly to ensure their safe return

— Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

grit, courage and the boundless human spirit. Sunita Williams and the #Crew9 astronauts have once again shown us what perseverance truly means. Their unwavering determination in the face of the vast unknown will forever inspire millions,” Mr Modi said in a post on X. He added space exploration is about pushing the limits of human potential, daring to dream

and having the courage to turn those dreams into reality.

“Sunita Williams, a trailblazer and an icon, has exemplified this spirit throughout her career. We are incredibly proud of all those who worked tirelessly to ensure their safe return. They have demonstrated what happens when precision meets passion and technology meets tenacity,” said the PM.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Union ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh and Piyush Goyal as well as Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and the Trinamul Congress were among those who congratulated Ms Williams.

“Sunita Williams, with her Indian roots and global spirit, has inspired the entire world with her remarkable achievements,” Mr Birla said on X.

Cong slams Sawant for forest land conversion

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

The Congress launched a sharp attack on Goa chief minister Pramod Sawant, accusing him of facilitating backdoor access for real estate interests at the cost of the environment.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh in his post on X said, “The Supreme Court has very recently halted the conversion of Goa's private forest land at least for the time being. Much earlier, the National Green Tribunal too had prohibited the development of denotified forest lands, until physical verification of all plots was completed. This was never done. The Supreme Court's order is a temporary respite. Bigger battles lie ahead given the single-minded focus of the Goa CM to free up forest lands for

real estate purposes.”

Environmentalists have echoed Mr Ramesh's sentiments, viewing the court's intervention as a critical reprieve for Goa's forests, which have faced increasing pressure from tourism and real estate projects.

However, critics of the order argue it could delay infrastructure development vital to the state's economy.

Mr Ramesh urged the Central government to prioritise sustainable development over short-term gains, emphasising that the Goa forests are a national asset.

The controversy revolves around a 2021 move by the Goa government to form a review committee (RC-II) to re-evaluate forest lands earlier identified by the Thomas & Araujo Committee.

SHORT TAKES

EX-ENGINEER TO BE EXECUTED IN CHINA FOR SPYING

Beijing, March 19: A former Chinese engineer has been sentenced to death for leaking state secrets to a foreign power, Beijing's spy agency said on Wednesday.

The man, surnamed Liu, "secretly copied, duplicated, and sold a large volume of state secrets to a foreign espionage and intelligence agency", China's ministry of state security said.

Liu had worked as an assistant engineer at a research institute and had resigned after believing he had been treated unfairly.

RSF ATTACKS KILL 50 IN KHARTOUM IN ONE WEEK

Omdourman, Sudan, March 19: Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces killed at least 50 people in Khartoum during the past week, rescuers said on Wednesday, as fighting with the Army for control of the capital intensifies. "Khartoum's citizens are facing widespread violations by the RSF and allied militias," the Khartoum Emergency Response Room said.

The group said about 70 people, including 12 volunteers, had been abducted during the past week, and that forced displaced had sharply increased in the capital's centre, south and east.

POPE WRITES LETTER TO EDITOR FROM HOSPITAL

Rome, March 19: Pope Francis said in a letter that his lengthy illness has helped make more lucid to him the absurdity of war, as his top deputy rejected any suggestion of resignation and Buckingham Palace announced plans for an upcoming audience with Britain's King Charles III.

Italian daily *Corriere della Sera* published on Tuesday the letter to the editor from Francis, signed and dated March 14 from Rome's Gemelli hospital where the 88-year-old pontiff has been treated since February 14 for a complex lung infection and double pneumonia.

AF-PAK TORKHAM BORDER CROSSING REOPENS: REPORT

Islamabad, March 19: The Torkham border crossing between Pakistan and Afghanistan reopened on Wednesday after 27 days of closure following talks between jirga members from both sides, according to a media report.

The cross-border movement was suspended on February 21 after Islamabad shut it down over a dispute concerning the construction of a border post by the Afghan government.

Head of the Pakistani jirga (tribal council) Syed Jawad Hussain Kazmi told the *Dawn* newspaper that the border has opened for cargo vehicles.

NEW 'ASSASSIN'S CREED' GAME PLAYED IN JAPAN

Tokyo, March 19: A Japanese lawmaker on Wednesday slammed the latest video game in the hit "Assassin's Creed" series, complaining that a samurai character destroys the interior of a Shinto shrine.

"Shadows" — the game by France's Ubisoft, that is scheduled to be released on Thursday — is set in 16th-century feudal Japan inspired by real historical events and samurai movies.

But one gameplay video on YouTube shows the character firing a bow towards priests and destroying a traditional drum and an altar.

MANILA WANTS INDIA TO JOIN U.S.-LED GROUP

Manila, March 19: The Philippines wants India to join an emerging US-backed military alliance to push back against China's rising assertiveness in Indo-Pacific, according to a top military official from the Southeast Asian nation.

Romeo Saturnino Brawner, the country's military chief, said he wants India to become a part of "Squad" comprising the US, Australia, Japan and the Philippines. "I'm going to talk to General Anil Chauhan this afternoon and I am going to open it up," Brawner told *Bloomberg News*.

Trump says 'We're on track' after Kyiv's call

Russia, Ukraine accuse either of violating new agreement

Washington, March 19: Russia and Ukraine accused each other on Wednesday of violating a new agreement to refrain from attacks on energy targets hours after it was agreed by US President Donald Trump and Russia's Vladimir Putin.

But a prisoner swap touted as a confidence-building step went ahead, and Trump followed Tuesday's phone call with Putin with a call on Wednesday with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, saying afterwards that "we are very much on track".

Trump said his "very good telephone call" with Zelenskyy lasted an hour, their first conversation since an Oval Office meeting descended into a shouting match on February 28.

The discussion followed Tuesday's call with Putin, and aimed "to align both Russia and Ukraine in terms of their requests and needs", Trump posted on social media.

During Putin's call with Trump on Tuesday, the Russian leader rejected a proposed full 30-day ceasefire, which had been sought by Trump and previously accepted by

UKRAINE TRUCE IN COUPLE OF WEEKS, SAYS U.S. ENVOY

Washington, March 19: US envoy Steve Witkoff said technical discussions on a possible deal to end the Russia-Ukraine war will begin Monday in Saudi Arabia, predicting a ceasefire agreement could come as soon as "a couple of weeks." "I believe on Monday we actually have the technical teams going" to the kingdom, Witkoff told *Bloomberg Television* on Wednesday as he expressed confidence. — *AFP*

Ukraine. But Putin agreed to pause attacks on energy infrastructure, a proposal Zelenskyy accepted.

That narrowly defined pause appeared in doubt on Wednesday, however, with Moscow saying Ukraine hit an oil depot in southern Russia while Kyiv said Russia had struck hospitals and homes, and knocked out power to some of its railways.

Still, the two sides announced they had carried out an exchange of prisoners, each releasing 175 troops in a deal facilitated by the United Arab Emirates. Moscow said it also freed an additional 22 wounded Ukrainians as a goodwill gesture.

Zelenskyy said on Wednesday that the continued attacks showed Moscow's words did not match its actions, and that Russia was not ready for peace. He said the United States should be put in



Flames of fire and smoke engulfed a building after a Russian attack in Krasnopillia, of Sumy region, in Ukraine, on Tuesday. — *AP*

charge of monitoring any ceasefire. "If the Russians will not strike our facilities, then we will definitely not strike theirs," he said at a briefing in Helsinki alongside the president of Finland. The Kremlin said it had called off planned attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, including by shooting down seven of Russia's own drones heading towards Ukraine. — *Reuters*

charge of monitoring any ceasefire.

"If the Russians will not strike our facilities, then we will definitely not strike theirs," he said at a briefing in Helsinki alongside the president of Finland. The Kremlin said it had called off planned attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, including by shooting down seven of Russia's own drones heading towards Ukraine. — *Reuters*

6 migrants die in shipwreck off Italy

Rome, March 19: Six people died and 40 are missing after a migrant shipwreck in the Mediterranean, the United Nations said on Wednesday, as Italian authorities searched for survivors off the island of Lampedusa. "Still too many dead in a new shipwreck in the

Mediterranean," Chiara Cardoletti, the Italy representative of the UN refugee agency UNHCR, said on X.

An inflatable dinghy carrying 56 people left the Tunisian port of Sfax on Monday before getting into trouble, she said. "After a few hours of

sailing, the dinghy began to deflate and take on water. Six bodies recovered. 40 missing," she wrote.

Italy's Coast Guard said it pulled 10 people to safety and was scouring the area for survivors.

"Due to the particularly adverse weather and sea conditions, the search

operations are being carried out with the support of various aircraft... which will take turns in overflying the area," the coastguard said in a statement. Those included aircraft belonging to Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, it said. — *AFP*

Trump purges two Democrats from US Federal Trade panel

Washington, March 19: President Donald Trump fired two Democratic members of the Federal Trade Commission on Tuesday, intensifying efforts to exert his administration's control over independent agencies across the government.

Commissioners Alvaro Bedoya and Rebecca Kelly Slaughter said they'd been dismissed illegally and would sue to block Trump's order.

They also said they consider themselves still part of the FTC, though whether they will still have access to their offices and logistical tools like email going forward was unclear.

Removing Bedoya and Slaughter could free up space on the five-member FTC for new commissioners loyal to Trump and his priorities and policies.

The White House confirmed the dismissals. FTC Chair Andrew Ferguson, a Republican whom Trump designated for the role upon taking office in January, released a statement on X saying he had no doubts about Trump's "constitutional authority to remove Commissioners, which is necessary to ensure democratic accountability."

The FTC is a regulator created by Congress that enforces consumer protection measures. — *AP*



Cardboard sculptures known as 'Ninots' depicting US President Donald Trump and Tesla CEO Elon Musk (R) are displayed during the Fallas festival in Valencia, Spain, on Wednesday. — *AP*

Violent attacks on Tesla dealerships up

Seattle, March 19: Cybertrucks set ablaze. Bullets and Molotov cocktails aimed at Tesla showrooms.

Attacks on property carrying the logo of Elon Musk's electric-car company are cropping up across the US and overseas. While no injuries have been reported, Tesla showrooms, vehicle lots, charging stations and privately owned cars have been targeted.

There has been a clear uptick since President Donald Trump took office

and empowered Musk to oversee a new department of government efficiency that is slashing government spending.

Experts on domestic extremism say it's impossible to know yet if the spate of incidents will balloon into a long-term pattern.

In Trump's first term, his properties in New York City, Washington and elsewhere became a natural place for protest. In the early days of his second term, Tesla is filling that role. — *AP*

Israeli def. min. warns Gazans of evacuations

Israel resumes Gaza ground operations

Deir Al-Balah, March 19: Israel has resumed "focused ground operations" in the "centre of the Gaza Strip" over the past 24 hours, according to the Israel defence forces. Israeli forces have also taken control and "re-expanded their control to the centre of the Netzarim" corridor — the line that separates northern Gaza from the south.

Israeli strikes killed at least 20 Palestinians in Gaza on Wednesday, local health workers said, as the Israeli military unleashed more bombardments of the enclave.

An international United Nations staffer was killed and five others were wounded in a strike on Wednesday on a UN guest-house in the Gaza Strip.

As a part of the terms of the truce deal that went into effect on January 19, Israeli forces agreed to withdraw troops on the ground in Gaza to a buffer zone they carved out along the perimeter of Gaza, and troops remained in the Philadelphia corridor the 8-mile-long border between Gaza and Egypt. During phase one of the ceasefire deal, Israel withdrew completely from the Netzarim corridor.

Israeli defence minister Israel Katz warned the residents of Gaza that "the evacuation of the population from the battle zones" in Gaza will "begin again soon," in a video message in Hebrew on Wednesday.

Katz encouraged Gaza residents to go to "other places in the world for those who wish."

"Take the advice of the US President. Return the hostages and eliminate Hamas, and other options



Israelis march in a protest against PM Benjamin Netanyahu and his plans to dismiss the head of the Shin Bet internal security service, on Wednesday. — *AP*

will open up for you — including going to other places in the world for those who wish," he said. Last month, President Donald Trump called for the forced displacement of Palestinians in Gaza, drawing wide international criticism and accusations from allies and the United Nations. He has since said that Palestinians should want to leave voluntarily due to the destruction.

Residents of Gaza are currently unable to leave on their own because the border crossing into Egypt is closed.

Israel's current plan is to make Gaza unlivable, re-establish those so-called "humanitarian zones," concentrate Palestinians in those bubbles or islands and from there offer voluntary transfer out of Gaza, retired Brig. Gen. Amir Avivi, a security hawk who continues to advise the military and defense ministry, told *ABC News*.

Avivi stressed leaving would be voluntary. They would be loaded on buses and sent through the

Kerem Shalom crossing either to Ashdod port, or to an airport near Eilat.

Prior to resuming ground operations, an Israeli official told *ABC News* that its renewed campaign of strikes on the Gaza Strip would continue until all remaining hostages are released.

Palestinian health officials said that at least 436 people have been killed including more than 130 children, according to Unicef figures — since Israel renewed its bombardment of the coastal territory overnight on Tuesday, marking the collapse of a ceasefire with Hamas that began in January. Another 678 people have been wounded, Palestinian officials said.

On Tuesday, an Israeli official told *ABC News* of Hamas, "They got hammered last night and they're going to continue to be hammered until we get the hostages out."

The official described the Israel defence forces' renewed attacks against Hamas in Gaza as a "different form of negotiating." — *Reuters*



Supporters of the Mayor of Istanbul walk to Istanbul townhall as they demonstrate against his detention over a corruption probe, on Wednesday. — *AFP*

Mayor of Istanbul arrested over graft

Istanbul, March 19: Turkish police on Wednesday arrested Istanbul's mayor — a popular opposition leader and key rival of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan — and several other prominent figures as part of investigations into alleged corruption and terror links.

It was a dramatic escalation in an ongoing government crackdown on the opposition and dissenting voices in Turkey. The state-run *Anadolu Agency* said prosecutors issued detention warrants for the mayor, Ekrem Imamoglu, and some 100 other people.

Among those detained was Imamoglu's close aide, Murat Ongun. Authorities also closed several roads around Istanbul

and banned demonstrations in the city for four days in an apparent effort to prevent protests following the arrest.

Private NTV television reported that two Istanbul district mayors were among those detained. Critics say the crackdown follows significant losses by Erdogan's ruling party in local elections last year amid growing calls for early national elections.

Government officials insist that the courts operate independently and reject claims that legal actions against opposition figures are politically motivated. The arrest came during a search of Imamoglu's home, but it was not immediately clear if police confiscated anything at the site. — *AP*



(L to R): Nasa astronaut Butch Wilmore, Roscosmos cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbunov, Nasa astronauts Nick Hague and Sunita Williams inside a SpaceX Dragon spacecraft after having landed in the water off the coast of Tallahassee, Florida, on Tuesday. — *AFP*

FINALLY | HOME

Wilmore, Williams ended up spending 286 days in space — 278 days more

Astronauts return to Earth after nine months



This still image shows dolphins around the Dragon capsule. — *AFP*

rida Panhandle, bringing their unplanned odyssey to an end.

Within an hour, the astronauts were out of their capsule, waving and smiling at the cameras

while being hustled away in reclining stretchers for routine medical checks. It all started with a flawed Boeing test flight last spring. The two expected to be gone just a week or so after launching on Boeing's new Starliner crew capsule on June 5.

So many problems cropped up that Nasa eventually sent Starliner back empty and transferred the test pilots to SpaceX, pushing their homecoming into February.

Then SpaceX capsule issues added another mon-

th's delay. Sunday's arrival of their relief crew meant Wilmore and Williams could finally leave.

Nasa cut them loose a little early, given the iffy weather forecast later this week. They checked out with Nasa's Nick Hague and Russia's Alexander Gorbunov, who arrived in their own SpaceX capsule last fall with two empty seats reserved for the duo. Wilmore and Williams ended up spending 286 days in space — 278 days longer than anticipated when they launched. — *AP*

THE ASIAN AGE

20 MARCH 2025

No end to war likely in both Ukraine and Gaza

Russia’s President Vladimir Putin agreed to pause strikes on Ukrainian energy targets for 30 days. This may have been construed as a prelude to peace but his reluctance to even accept a 30-day full ceasefire in Ukraine, or even observe the partial ceasefire, means the war is here to stay. And just the day prior to the hyperbole over the Trump-Putin phone call peaking, Israel’s Benjamin Netanyahu ordered a massive bombing spree over Gaza, breaking a two-month ceasefire.

It is back to square one then on the two wars that have tested global peace the most in the last three years since the Russian invasion that began on February 24, 2022, and the Israeli counter-strikes on Hamas actions of October 7, 2023, converted Eurasia into a major battle zone. There is no end in sight as Putin will clearly not negotiate further until his big push into Ukraine with more than six lakh troops brings in the territorial gains that he has set his eyes on.

As the hapless pawn in this battle of super powers, Ukraine can expect not only to lose most of the 65,000 square miles of territory that Russia is occupying currently, including Crimea, but also the sliver of Russian land in the Kursk region of Russia which is all that is left as a bargaining chip for Volodymyr Zelenskyy after Putin’s forces began its most recent offensive in which it regained land and also targeted those Ukrainian armoured vehicles that were on the retreat.

The eternal optimist US President Donald Trump may be blowing the trumpet over the movement for peace having begun with the agreed ceasing of fire on energy and infrastructure on both sides of the conflict as Ukraine had also been flying drones into Russia’s oil and gas installations that are the financial key to Putin’s war effort as most of the revenue flows from energy sales.

Truth to tell, this does not sound promising at all. There is no making sense of continued Russian attacks at night that included a hit on a power plants in eastern Ukraine and a hospital after the 90-minute phone call had ended and word had gone out to the Russian army on the partial ceasefire. Since Moscow has already emphasised that a fuller truce would depend on long-standing demands for a total cessation of Western military and intelligence to Ukraine’s army and that Ukrainian troops should not rearm or mobilise, the ceasefire is a total sham.

Preceding this failure of the Trump conversation with Putin was Netanyahu’s decision to resume the bombing of Gaza aimed at Hamas targets. The far-right Otzma Yehudit party that had left his coalition is back along with its leader and former minister Itamar Ben-Gvir. This carries more than a hint that the Israeli PM has done this only to prolong his rule that could end if the hostilities stop.

A fragile 60 days of truce with exchange of prisoners for hostages, alive or dead, was better than the pounding and killing of Palestinians, with the toll now nearing 50,000. But Israel’s latest actions, which are to do with denying Hamas the right to retain control of the Gaza Strip and play its role in administering it, mean that the aerial war has resumed, and a ground invasion is probably coming. The war hawks are having their way even as ceasefire agreements are being shredded.

A welcome return from space

American astronauts Butch Wilmore and Sunita Williams returned to earth safely after spending 286 days in space — 278 days longer than anticipated when they were launched into space to test Boeing’s Starliner crew capsule on June 5. This is the second longest space mission after US astronaut Frank Rubio’s 371-day stint in space.

On both occasions, the prolonged stay in space was caused by the malfunction of spacecraft — because of an internal issue for Boeing Starliner and an accident caused by space junk to Rubio’s Soyuz MS-22. These space missions highlight the need to improve the safety and predictability of space travel.

The return of the astronaut duo was facilitated by SpaceX, which sent its four-member Dragon capsule with two empty seats to the International Space Station. This mission also underlines the dominance of SpaceX in the field of private spaceflight. Elon Musk’s company focuses on reusable rockets, which revolutionised the space launch industry, reducing costs and increasing efficiency. It has already launched 62 space missions, which is more than those launched by several countries.

However, the unfortunate stranding of Williams and Wilmore in space could be useful for researchers as Nasa can study the impact of prolonged stay in space on their bodies. Past studies indicated that humans are not made to live in zero gravity and an extraordinarily long stay could deteriorate bone density, muscle quality and impact brain fluids, potentially altering brain structure.

This data will be useful for Nasa and other space agencies which are planning to set up permanent facilities on the moon, requiring humans to remain in space for extended periods. After the American astronaut duo landed on earth, Elon Musk promised to send humans to Mars in the next 20 or 30 years.

The growth chart of SpaceX can also inspire budding startups in India as the race for exploiting outer space begins to speed up once again after decades of lull.

THE ASIAN AGE

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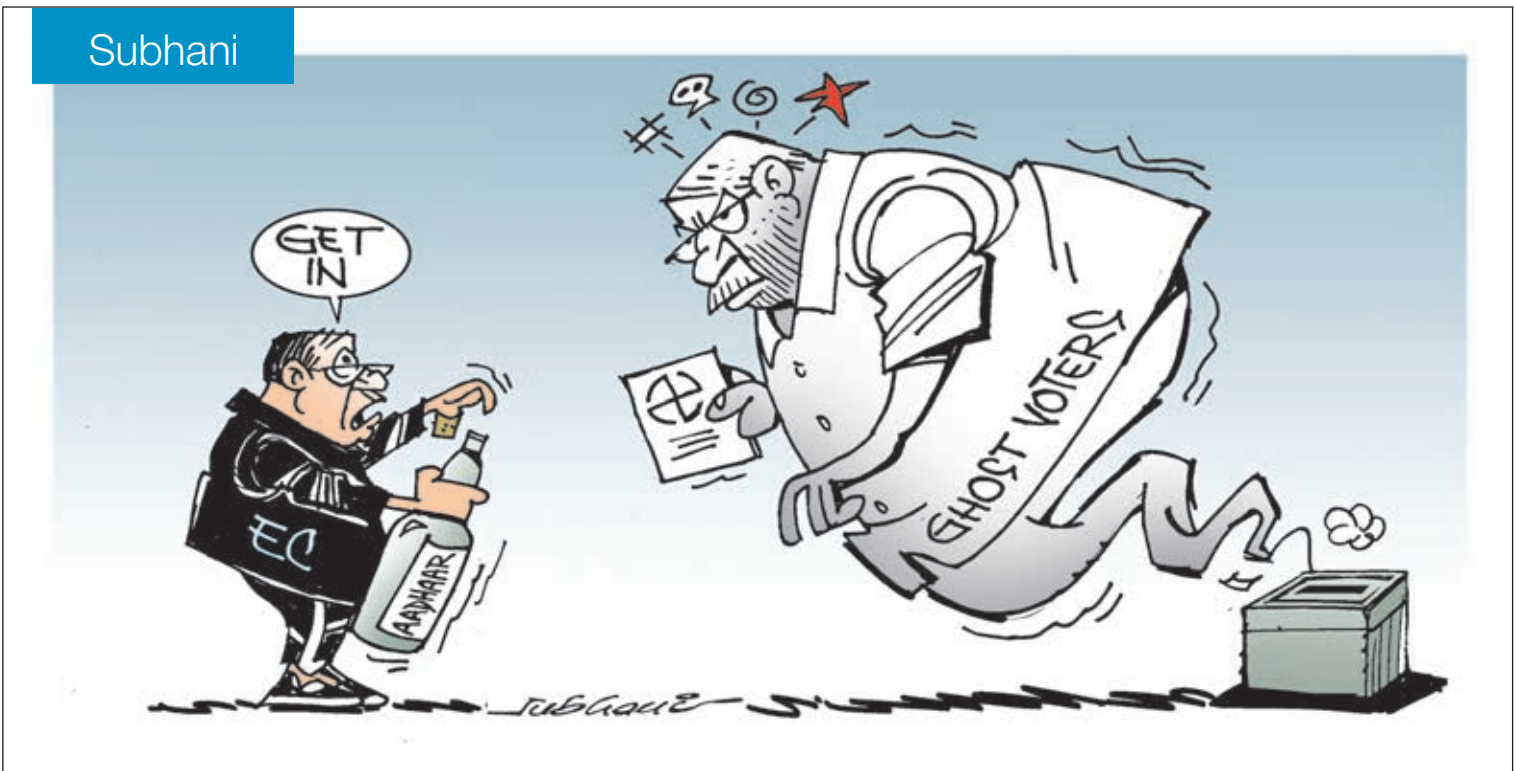
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Subhani



Will AICC in Gujarat mark major reset for Congress?



Sunil Gatade

Let us continue to debate whether democracy in India is fully or partially free and the extent of the “institutional capture”. But the Congress Party’s decision to hold the next AICC session in April in Gujarat is certainly good news, signalling that the badly battered Opposition is still not vanquished. There is certainly no question of putting up the white flag.

No doubt, the BJP led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been at the zenith for over the past decade, but there is still a challenger around, however feeble or incapacitated it may be.

It speaks volumes on the state of Indian democracy that no anti-BJP party has thought it fit for the past decade of holding its key meeting on the home turf of Narendra Modi and home minister Amit Shah.

Banking on the Hindutva card, a resurgent BJP has changed the grammar and vocabulary of the Indian polity. Aided and abetted by the cacophony of a not-so-independent media, the growing footprint of the world’s largest party has clouded the existence of other forms of political creatures. The just concluded Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj was utilised to further the Hindutva vote bank.

The detractors of the BJP insist that the ultimate intent behind the “one nation, one election” move is to have “one leader”.

At such a time, it is certainly brave or foolhardy as one chooses to think to challenge the saffron party in its backyard. There have been a series of elections sched-

uled next year after those in Bihar at the end of this year. They include those in West Bengal, Kerala, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. The Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections are scheduled for early 2027, while Gujarat will go to the polls by the end of that year.

The AICC session at Ahmedabad on April 8 and 9 is also an unmistakable message to those squabbling allies in the INDIA Opposition bloc as to who is the leader of the anti-BJP group. A single action often matters more than a thousand words.

Besides telling the other Opposition parties that it alone could take on the BJP in its den, the move is intended to enthuse the dispirited Congress cadres and tell them that there is a rain-bow at the end of the tunnel.

The Congress has created a dubious record of sorts since May 2014 of losing a record number of state polls and three successive Lok Sabha elections. It is witnessing the worst dry patch in Independent India, when the party which helped the country get its freedom from the British yoke is finding itself in the political wilderness.

The credit for the Congress fightback goes solely and squarely to Rahul Gandhi, who has been the most maligned leader in the history of free India, with a vicious campaign on to paint him as “Pappu” for the past nearly 15 years.

Whether Rahul Gandhi succeeds or not is another story, but his actions show that one who is already down does not fear defeat. If there is any movement, it could be up.

A redeeming feature is that in spite of most of the media playing a partisan game, there is a wide body of people that feels that the middle path offered by the Congress is the best way out for India at this juncture

Interestingly, the session in Gujarat, the birthplace of the Mahatma, is taking place when Rahul is firmly in command and has even brought about an organisational reshuffle, bringing to the fore his team to manage the party. The last such Congress meeting in Gujarat had taken place way back in 1961, when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was at the helm.

That glory is now a thing of the past. And living on it is not making any sense. The 1985 centenary celebrations of the Congress held in Mumbai, where the Congress was founded a century ago (1885), witnessed the party at its pinnacle of power. Since then, it has been a downhill journey, and it has only accelerated since the emergence of Narendra Modi on the national scene in May 2014.

So, Ahmedabad is crucial to see how the Congress seeks to reinvent itself and turns its character of an “umbrella” organisation encompassing all castes, creeds and religions an appealing thing in the changed circumstances. The “mohabbat ki dukan” pitch has to be made really catchy to all at a time when strident Hindutva is the order of the day.

This is easier said than done, as the Congress has for long remained content with the much-maligned “nomination” culture that has left the organisation hollow. The building up of the organisation and infusing fresh blood at all levels is a Herculean task that has yet to be seriously undertaken. A dia-

logue within the party is the need of the hour, to bring to the fore hidden talents as well as to ensure that the one within flourishes.

Brainstorming sessions at the national as well as state levels are necessary to generate fresh ideas to overcome the drawbacks being consistently observed in the working of the organisation to make it fighting fit.

What needs to be also done on a war footing is devising a strategy to take on the BJP, which is using every trick in the trade to deny a level playing field to its detractors. Right or wrong, some observers hail the BJP as the world’s most ruthlessly efficient political party, and therefore the Congress must realise what an onerous task it is facing.

A redeeming feature is that in spite of most of the media playing a partisan game to help the ruling side, there is a wide body of people at all levels that feels that the middle path offered by the Congress is the best way out for India at this crucial juncture.

There are no two opinions on this: The Gujarat session is crucial to make or mar the Congress. It must come out with a roadmap and a resolve on how to make a turnaround on a war footing. Time is crucial, as one has to prepare for the next Lok Sabha polls right now and virtually from scratch. It has to decide on how best to proceed on the issue of alliances while making the Congress shipshape. There is no time to lose. The Congress needs to remember that Mahatma Gandhi brought the mighty British Empire down with his Dandi march.

A small beginning sometimes brings miracles if backed by unwavering determination. Will the Congress act decisively? Only time will tell.

The writer is a journalist based in New Delhi

LETTERS

‘MOTHER’ OF MI6

Male bastions across the world are slowly falling down. It seems like the next head of MI6, the intelligence service of the UK, is going to have a female head for the first time. The fictional head of MI6 in the Bond movies was female, too, referred to as M. This raised many questions as to why Ian Fleming, the creator of James Bond, did so. Bond’s relationship with M was of an obedient employee. None of his quips and witticisms were directed at her making many think that M stood for mother. Be that as it may, life begins imitating art now at least in MI6.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

FDI IN INSURANCE

INDIA’S insurance penetration declined to 3.7 per cent of GDP in FY24 from four per cent the previous year, significantly lower than the global average of seven per cent, reflecting under-penetration despite the sector’s ₹80,000 crore capital base. However, the government’s approval of 100 per cent FDI in insurance is a game-changer, attracting global insurers, capital, and expertise. This move is expected to drive innovation, improve customer experiences, and enhance market reach, especially in underserved areas. Increased foreign investment will also boost competition.

Amarjeet Kumar
Hazaribagh

GOVT’S NORTH BIAS

IF THE delimitation exercise is undertaken as per schedule in 2026, the southern states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh are likely to lose 26 seats in the Lok Sabha election to be held in 2029. UP, Bihar, MP and Rajasthan are likely to gain 31 seats if number of seats remains 543. This is because delimitation is based on proportional representation of the population. Southern states have been able to control the birth rate and as such will be penalised for it instead of being rewarded. The government, therefore, may have to come out with a different formula, but this will require a constitutional amendment. This is definitely a tricky question which it has to answer, because the concern of the southern states is genuine.

D.B. Madan
New Delhi

Maleeha Lodhi



Under Trump, US is blind to power of nationalism across the world

In the opening weeks of his second term, President Donald Trump has used threats, intimidation and coercion against both America’s friends and adversaries to try to bend them to his will. His unilateralist ‘America First’ worldview has led to such pronouncements and measures. Trump assumes he can use US power — the *Economist* calls it the Don Corleone approach — to browbeat other countries into doing his bidding. But the growing pushback from countries, big and small, shows how mistaken this assumption is. It is becoming increasingly evident that nations faced with Trump’s actions are determined to stand up to US pressure.

Take for example Beijing’s response to Trump’s imposition of two rounds of tariffs on Chinese goods. China retaliated by imposing tariffs on a range of US products including agricultural goods that are likely to hurt American farmers hard. As trade tensions mounted, a spokesman of the Chinese Embassy in Washington said: “If war is what the US wants, be it a tariff war, a trade war or any other type of war, we’re ready to fight till the end.”

In fact, measured statements from Chinese officials earlier have given way to tougher rhetoric aimed at sending a strong message to both the US administration and the public in their own country that China will not take Trump’s actions lying

down. The strongest statement so far came from China’s foreign minister Wang Yi during a presser in Beijing earlier this month. He accused the US of using “two-faced methods” to engage and suppress China to the detriment of bilateral relations.

These efforts, he said, would fail as will any attempt to drive a wedge between China and Russia, which some have read into Trump’s overtures to President Vladimir Putin. The China-Russia relationship, Wang said, “is a constant in a turbulent world, not a variable in geopolitical games”. By both their rhetoric and actions, Chinese leaders have signalled resolve to counter Trump’s moves.

The pushback from other countries is taking different forms but indicates that Trump won’t find it easy to secure compliance with his plans. His outrageous idea of the US taking over Gaza, forcibly relocating Palestinians from their homeland and turning it into a ‘Riviera of the Middle East’ was universally condemned and rejected, especially by Muslim and Arab states but also many of America’s European allies.

Arab states came up with an alternative in the shape of the Egyptian plan for Gaza’s rebuilding and governance. This has been endorsed by the 57-member OIC, backed by Hamas and supported by France, UK, Germany and Italy. This foils the Trump proposal and has not surprisingly been

rejected by the US and Israel. There are many hurdles to cross before it can be implemented but for now it serves as a rebuke to Trump’s designs.

The response of countries to Trump’s pressure tactics has been a function of how dependent they are on the US and varied — offering talks to resolve problems, defiance and retaliatory measures as well as adopting hedging strategies. Trump has shown marked animosity towards neighbouring Canada, slapping stiff tariffs on its goods, repeatedly proclaiming the country should become the 51st state of America and that he will use economic coercion to achieve it.

This has provoked a furious response from Canadian leaders, with Ottawa hitting back with counter tariffs. It responded to US tariffs on metals by announcing levies on around \$30 billion worth of US imports. The Trump effect in Canada also saw a surge in the Liberal party’s popularity with its new leader and prime minister, Mark Carney, promising to confront the US, saying, “We didn’t ask for this fight, but Canadians are always ready when someone else drops the gloves”.

Meanwhile, Mexico, with an economy acutely vulnerable to the impact of sweeping tariffs on its goods, also signalled resistance to Trumpian pressure. Rejecting any capitulation to US demands and “interventionism”, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum declared: “Coordination, yes;

subordination, no.” Greenland’s likely new Prime Minister vehemently rejected Trump’s desire to annex the island saying “We don’t want to be Americans”.

European nations, stunned by Trump’s reversal of policy on the Ukraine war, his reaching out to Putin, public spat with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and being shut out of US talks with Russia, have quickly come together to evolve a unified position. Faced with an unreliable America, French President Emmanuel Macron’s call for “strategic autonomy” is getting wider traction in Europe. Meanwhile, the EU retaliated sharply to US tariffs on aluminium and steel imports by significantly increasing levies on American products.

Trump may be extreme in his imperious, unilateralist ways but there is continuity with past US conduct in an important respect. Throughout its history of dealing with other nations, the US has underestimated the power of nationalism and the resistance it would meet in trying to force its will on others. This has been responsible for its military debacles, diplomatic setbacks and strategic failures as exemplified by its experience from Vietnam to Afghanistan.

— By arrangement with Dawn

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	75,449.05	0.20
Nifty 50	22,907.60	0.32
S&P 500*	5,655.40	0.73
Dollar (₹)	86.43	-0.16
Pound Sterling (₹)	112.12	-0.37
Euro (₹)	94.22	-0.60
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	88,542	184 0.21
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	70.55	-0.01
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.659	-0.011
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.295	0.013

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Rays Power bags ₹2,000-cr projects across states

Rays Power has bagged new projects worth over ₹2,000 crore across Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh. It has also been declared the lowest or L1 bidder for engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) projects worth ₹1,600 crore in Assam and Madhya Pradesh. Rays Power Infra MD Ketan Mehta said: "Our recent project bid wins reaffirm our presence in renewable energy sector."

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Global economy under test

Escalating trade tensions, heightened uncertainty on intensity of tariffs key reasons: RBI

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MARCH 19

The Indian economy is exhibiting resilience despite escalating trade tensions and global financial market volatility. India's strength is driven by a robust agriculture sector and improving consumption demand, said the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) March Bulletin released on Wednesday.

"Policymakers are now walking a tightrope, having to balance the upward strain of rising prices on account of tariffs and currency depreciation, as well as the downward pressure on inflation from economic slowdown," Reserve Bank economists said in an article on State of the economy published in bulletin.

The resilience of the global economy is being tested by escalating trade tensions and a heightened wave of uncertainty around the scope, timing, and intensity of tariffs, said the article.

While engendering heightened volatility in global financial markets, these have also caused apprehensions about slowdown in global growth, it said.

"Amidst these challenges, the Indian economy continues to demonstrate the resilience as evident in the robust performance of the agriculture sector and improving consumption," it said.

The reverberations of a tumultuous external environment, however, are being reflected in sustained Foreign portfolio investment (FPIs), said the authors. FPI flows continued to experience out-



flows in February.

Net FPI outflows worth \$4 billion were recorded in February, with net equity outflows of \$5.4 billion.

The article further said India's macroeconomic strength to face these challenges is bolstered by a decline in headline Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation to a seven-month low of 3.6 per cent in February on account of a correction in food prices.

The second advance estimates of national income released by the National Statistical Office on February 28, placed India's real gross domestic product (GDP) growth at 6.5 per cent in 2024-25 – an upward revision of 10 bps from first advance estimates despite a higher base.

This reflects an upward revision of 120 bps in net exports to 7.1 per cent and 30 bps in private final consumption expenditure to 7.6 per cent.

NET FPI OUTFLOWS WORTH \$4 BN RECORDED IN FEB., WITH NET EQUITY OUTFLOWS OF \$5.4 BN.

India's macroeconomic strength to face challenges is bolstered by decline in CPI inflation to 7-month low of 3.6% in Feb.

Maharashtra remains largest recipient of remittances, followed by Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Karnataka.

Policymakers are now walking a tightrope, having to balance upward strain of rising prices on account of tariffs and currency depreciation, as well as downward pressure on inflation from economic slowdown.

RBI ECONOMISTS SAID.

US tops remittances to India, pips UAE

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MARCH 19

The share of the US in India's total remittances remained largest, rising to 27.7 per cent in 2023-24 from 23.4 per cent in 2020-21. The share of inward remittances received from the UK has also increased to 10.8 per cent in 2023-24 from 6.8 per cent in 2020-21. UAE maintained its position as second largest source of India's remittances, with its share increasing from 18 per cent in 2020-21 to 19.2 per cent in 2023-24.

The change reflects a shift in migration pattern towards skilled Indian diaspora, according to sixth round of India's remittances survey for

2023-24 conducted by the Central bank.

Post-Covid pandemic period brought a shift in the source of funds away from Gulf economies.

State-wise data revealed that Maharashtra remained the largest recipient of remittances, followed by Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Karnataka.

Maharashtra, Telangana and Punjab accounted for the largest number of Indian students migrating abroad for education and staying back for employment opportunities, which is reflected in the increasing share in the inward remittances.

In terms of size of transactions, remittances over ₹5 lakh had highest share of 29 per cent in 2023-24.

MONEY MATTERS

Understand Trump's strategic bitcoin reserve



VIKRAM SUBBURAJ

The U.S. government's shift toward recognizing Bitcoin as a strategic reserve asset marks a major turning point for the crypto industry. The recent Executive Order 14,178 allows U.S. agencies to accumulate Bitcoin through asset forfeitures, signaling a policy shift from auctioning seized Bitcoins to retaining them as a long-term asset.

DIGITAL GOLD

This move is expected to reduce Bitcoin's market supply, potentially stabilizing prices and lowering volatility. It also strengthens Bitcoin's position as 'digital gold,' making it more appealing to institutional investors. The White House meeting with key crypto leaders, including Michael Saylor and Brian Armstrong, further highlights growing institutional adoption and the possibility of clearer regulations.

OPPORTUNITIES

For investors, this development brings both opportunities and challenges. The reduced supply of Bitcoin could drive its price higher over time, making it a valuable long-term asset. More financial institutions may now

include Bitcoin in their balance sheets, further legitimizing its role in global finance. Regulatory clarity, long sought after by the crypto industry, may also emerge, leading to a more structured investment environment.

POTENTIAL RISKS

Investors must consider potential risks. Regulatory shifts could introduce new compliance and taxation rules. Short-term market fluctuations may occur as the government executes its strategy. Additionally, global markets, including India, may adjust their crypto policies in response, impacting overall market dynamics.

REGULATION

The U.S. move could influence how other nations regulate and adopt crypto assets. India, which is currently working on a crypto concept paper, may reassess its stance as global trends shift. Any new regulations in India could impact domestic crypto investors and businesses, shaping the future of digital asset landscape. Globally, Trump's strategy could trigger a domino effect among other nations. After El Salvador's pioneering adoption of Bitcoin, the U.S.'s decision to establish a Bitcoin reserve may encourage countries worldwide to revisit crypto policies.

(The author is CEO of Giottus Crypto Platform)

GAMES

BCCI mulls lifting saliva ban in IPL

New Delhi: In a move that could have global impact, the BCCI is considering lifting the ban on applying saliva on the ball in the Indian Premier League beginning March 22.

The proposal has been discussed at length internally within the BCCI and will be floated to captains of all IPL teams in a meeting in Mumbai on Thursday. The ICC had banned the age-old practice of applying saliva to shine the ball as a precautionary measure during the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2022, the ICC made the ban permanent. The IPL too included the ICC ban in its playing conditions in the aftermath of the pandemic but its guidelines are outside the purview of the sport's governing body.

"Using saliva on the ball was part of the essence of the game until Covid hit. Now that we don't have that threat anymore, we feel there is no harm in lifting the ban on saliva in the IPL," a top BCCI official said. — PTI

Kabaddi WC in UK 'unauthorised'

New Delhi: The International Kabaddi Federation (IKF) on Wednesday declared that the World Cup being held in London is not an "authorised" event and asked the sport's Indian apex body to act against the team that had gone to take part in the tournament. Kabaddi World Cup 2025 is being held in the West Midlands from March 17 to 23. The tournament is being hosted by the England Kabaddi Association and the British Kabaddi League under the aegis of World Kabaddi Federation, a parallel international governing body of the sport.

"The ongoing so-called Kabaddi World Cup 2025 in the UK conducted under the aegis of the so-called World Kabaddi Federation has not been authorised by the International Kabaddi Federation, that is the international governing body for the sport of Kabaddi as recognized by the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA)," the IKF said. — PTI

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CRACKERJACKS

With Impact Player rule, all-rounders will succeed in IPL

Mumbai, March 19:

Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya on Wednesday said now that the contentious Impact Player rule has been extended by three years, a cricketer has to be a pure all-rounder to find place in the starting eleven. The rule allows a team to replace a player from their playing XI at a later stage of the match. The teams bring in a batting or bowling specialist as the situation demands.

The BCCI extended the rule to at least the 2027 edition despite reservations from leading Indian players, including Rohit Sharma who said the Impact Player strategy was holding back the development of Indian all-rounders with teams replacing them with an extra batter or bowler during the game.

"In the current scenario, it becomes difficult if you are not completely a 50-50 all-rounder to find your place. Going forward this can change or will change, we will have to see. But yes, definitely if you want to encourage more all-rounders they will need a fix spot for them to develop over the years," said Pandya during the season-opening media interaction.

Pandya will miss MI's opening game on Sunday



Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya (left) with coach Mahela Jayawardene during a press conference ahead of the Indian Premier League 2025, in Mumbai on Wednesday.

— DEBASISH DEY

due to one match suspension for over-rate related offences last year. Surya Kumar Yadav will lead the side.

Sitting next to him, head

coach Mahela Jayawardene also had his say on the matter.

"It has given a different set of challenges. So we have to adapt and get bet-

ter. My only concern at that time was that sometimes you have a pure all rounder and they have a specific role to play but the other all-rounders are

Chhetri back with a bang as India win

Shillong, March 19: The talismanic Sunil Chhetri scored on his international comeback to lead India to a commanding 3-0 victory over Maldives in a football friendly here on Wednesday, helping the home side snap their 12-match winless streak that started in November 2023.

Rahul Bheke gave India the lead in the 35th minute before Liston Colaco made it 2-0 in the 66th minute.

The 40-year-old Chhetri, who returned to the national team after hanging his boots in May last

year, made it a memorable day as he scored India's third with a glancing header in the 77th minute for his 95th international goal.

Captain Chhetri, who was denied by the Maldives goalkeeper in the 47th minute, was substituted by Irfan Yadwad in the 82nd minute. He made a comeback to the national team after 286 days to play his 152nd match.

This was India's first win in 16 months and also first under Manolo Marquez who was made the head coach in July last year.

The 40-year-old Chhetri, who returned to the national team after hanging his boots in May last year, made it a memorable day as he scored India's third with a glancing header in the 77th minute for his 95th international goal.

India's last win was against Kuwait (1-0) in their 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifying round match in Kuwait City on November

16, 2023. Before Wednesday, India under Marquez lost once and drew thrice.

The match served as a dress rehearsal for the all-important AFC Asian Cup qualifier against Bangladesh at the same venue on March 25.

Chhetri came out of his international retirement earlier this month to help the team successfully navigate the qualifiers for the AFC Asian Cup, starting with the March 25 clash.

Maldives are ranked 162 in the world, 36 places below India (126).

taken out of the game because you can get a genuine bowler or batter, that is something we have to see in the long term," reckoned the Sri Lankan great.

PANDYA UPBEAT ABOUT MI REVENAL

Pandya's return to Mumbai Indians last season was not the smoothest as the storied franchise finished last among 10 teams. He was also booed by the home fans. Considering their five IPL titles, Mumbai Indians have had a dry run since 2021.

The premier all-rounder said he will carry the confidence of winning two ICC titles with India over the past year.

"Playing for India has always been prideful. It has also been my number one priority, winning two trophies is very close to our hearts and that joy will carry forward to the IPL.

"Last four seasons have been dry for Mumbai Indians. This season we will approach the season with joyiness and togetherness," said Pandya who linked up with his IPL team hours after winning the Champions Trophy in Dubai. Pandya believes that he is constantly evolving as a cricketer notwithstanding his "unshakeable" confidence. — PTI

This is also Shillong's first international match.

Interestingly, all of India's goals came off headers. Bheke and Colaco scored off corner kicks.

Chhetri connected a fine cross from Colaco.

Chhetri's cross from the left at the goalmouth was a gem and a defensive error made things easier for India as the ball dropped free near the six-yard box. Naorem Mahesh Singh, however, failed to grab the opportunity.

— PTI

HC speeds up Chahal divorce case due to IPL

Mumbai, March 19: The Bombay High Court on Wednesday waived the mandatory six-month cooling off period post filing of divorce plea by cricketer Yuzvendra Chahal and his estranged wife Dhanashree Verma, and directed the family court to decide their divorce plea by Thursday.

A single bench of Justice Madhav Jamdar said Chahal would not be available from March 21 as he has to participate in the upcoming Indian Premier League cricket tournament.

The cricketer and Verma had filed a divorce plea in a family court here on February 5 this year.

They had submitted a petition mutually seeking for the cooling off period be waived as their divorce was by mutual consent.

However, the family

court on February 20 refused to waive the same. The duo then challenged the family court's order in the high court.

Under the Hindu Marriage Act, every couple has to undergo the six-month cooling-off period before they are granted divorce.

Justice Jamdar of the high court allowed the petition.

"As the petitioner No. 1 (Chahal) is a participant of IPL, the advocate informs that he may not be available post March 21. The family court is hence requested to decide their divorce plea by tomorrow (March 20)," High Court said.

Chahal is part of the Punjab Kings team for the IPL cricket tournament that is scheduled to start on March 22.

— PTI

POLITICS IN BOXING BODY DEALS BLOW TO PLAYERS

New Delhi, March 19: Boxing Federation of India president Ajay Singh on Wednesday alleged that Assam boxers, including Olympic bronze-winner Lovlina Borgohain, are being stopped from participating in the National Championships by suspended BFI secretary general Hemanta Kalita, who refuted the charge.

In an "emergency press conference" here, Singh said that the Tokyo Games medalist in the 69kg category is keen to participate in the marquee domestic event starting Thursday in Greater Noida but has been asked to withdraw by Kalita.

Kalita, who has been found guilty of financial mismanagement in an inquiry conducted by former Delhi High Court judge Sudhir Kumar Jain, holds the secretary's position in the

Assam body. "Assam is discouraging players from participating in the women's Nationals," Singh said.

"Lovlina has recorded a video of support. But officers have received a call that she has been asked by Hemanta Kalita not to participate. Because she owes a lot to Assam boxing, she is reconsidering her participation.

"We have been hearing that a lot of tickets are being cancelled (both) train and air," Singh added.

However, Kalita said the charges were baseless and the dispute was over the dates of the tournament. "This is all being done to malign me. I have done no such thing. Since the beginning, state units were unhappy with the dates of the women's nationals. Several states had written to BFI as well," Kalita said. — PTI