

## BRIEF NEWS

### Amit Shah to Visit Bengal Tomorrow

New Delhi: Union Home Minister Amit Shah is scheduled to visit West Bengal on March 28 as part of the Bharatiya Janata Party's intensified political outreach in the state.

During his visit, Shah will address a key press conference and formally launch a chargesheet against the Trinamool Congress (TMC), outlining the party's allegations against the ruling dispensation.

According to the Bengal BJP source, "Home Minister Amit Shah will do an important press conference and launch a chargesheet against the TMC government. The chargesheet is expected to comprehensively detail alleged corruption, governance failures, and law-and-order concerns under the TMC government over the past several years. Senior BJP leaders indicate that the document will focus on issues such as alleged irregularities in recruitment, financial mismanagement, and what the party terms as systemic administrative lapses".

### Amit Shah to Visit Bengal Tomorrow

New Delhi: Union Home Minister Amit Shah is scheduled to visit West Bengal on March 28 as part of the Bharatiya Janata Party's intensified political outreach in the state.

During his visit, Shah will address a key press conference and formally launch a chargesheet against the Trinamool Congress (TMC), outlining the party's allegations against the ruling dispensation. According to the Bengal BJP source, "Home Minister Amit Shah will do an important press conference and launch a chargesheet against the TMC government. The chargesheet is expected to comprehensively detail alleged corruption, governance failures, and law-and-order concerns under the TMC government over the past several years.

### Seizures Surpass Rs 400 Crore From Poll-Bound States, UT: ECI

New Delhi: The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Thursday said seizures of more than Rs 400 crore, including cash, liquor, drugs, freebies and other inducements, have been made by the enforcement agencies before the Assembly elections and bypolls in different states and Union Territory (UT) next month. These seizures have been conducted since the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) came into effect following the announcement of the poll panel. ECI had announced the schedule for the Assembly elections in Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal and bye-elections in six states on March 15. Elections in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Assam will be in a single phase and West Bengal in two phases.

## It'll Be TMC's Credit if 30 Lakh Names Feature on Voters' List After Adjudication, Says Mamata

Dubrajpur: Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee on Thursday claimed that it will be her party's credit if around 30 lakh of the over 60 lakh names under adjudication appear on the voters' list. Addressing an election rally here in Birbhum district, Banerjee, also the West Bengal chief minister, asserted that the TMC will ensure a legal recourse for all those whose names were deleted. "It is to our credit if 29 to 30 lakh of the over 60 lakh names under adjudication find themselves in the list... It is because of our campaign and fight that these names would be on the list. But I want 100 per cent names to appear on the list as they are all genuine voters," she said. The EC released the first supplementary list of 'Under Adjudication' voters on Monday, but did not officially disclose the number of deletions or the precise figure of cases disposed of in that list.

A top EC official in Kolkata said on Wednesday that 32 lakh 'Under Adjudication' cases have been disposed of so far, and



around 28 lakh names remain to be cleared by judicial officers. Addressing the rally, Banerjee said that TMC's lawyers will help those not on the list fight their cases before the tribunals set up for the purpose. She accused the saffron party of harassing people over the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and demonetisation. The CM urged the Election Commission to publish the complete list detailing the logical discrepancies for over

60 lakh people. Claiming that it is still not clear whose names have been deleted from the adjudication list, she asked the Election Commission to "come out with the final list if they have the guts." Banerjee said that she will ensure that those who do not find their names on the list appeal before the tribunal. "Do you want to stand in queues again or derail the BJP?" she asked, while addressing the public rally.

### BJP Plotting to Delete Names of Bona Fide Citizens From Poll List: Abhishek

Trinamool Congress leader Abhishek Banerjee on Thursday accused the BJP government at the Centre of conspiring against the country's bona fide citizens by deleting their names from the electoral rolls under the pretext of the SIR exercise. Canvassing for TMC candidate Nirmal Chandra Roy at a rally in Jalpaiguri district's Dhupguri, he also accused the saffron party of indulging in politics on the basis of religion and diverting people's attention from core issues of livelihood and housing. "The BJP government at the Centre is conspiring against the bona fide citizens of the country. In the name of SIR, those living here for a hundred years are being forced to give proof of their citizenship. Even elderly people are being asked to stand in queues for hours, just to see their names either deleted (from the electoral rolls) or under adjudication," the TMC national general secretary alleged.

The TMC supremo pointed out that people had to stand in queues over demonetisation, procuring the Aadhaar card and the SIR exercise. Banerjee claimed that in BJP-ruled states, restrictions are being imposed on eating non-vegetarian food. "If you speak the Bengali language, you will be branded as Bangladeshi," the TMC supremo said, claiming that atrocities on this count were fought against by her only before the courts. The chief

minister said that if the people want the doles to continue, then they should vote for the TMC in this election. "Elections will come and go, it's an affair of one month, but after that? There is no party other than the Trinamool Congress which can come to power in West Bengal or remain at the helm," she said. She said that the TMC, if it comes back to power, will never allow the NRC and let anyone be taken to detention camps.

## No Shortage, 60 Days of Fuel Stocks Available: Govt

New Delhi: The Petroleum Ministry on Thursday clarified that India's energy supply is fully secure and stable. The Ministry further stated that there is no shortage of petrol, diesel, or LPG anywhere in the country. All retail outlets are operating normally, with adequate supplies. Misinformation and

panic-driven narratives are completely unfounded. The Ministry said that citizens are advised to rely only on official sources and avoid spreading rumours. The government remains committed to ensuring uninterrupted energy access for every citizen. The Petroleum Ministry on Wednesday said that the Centre is prioritising Piped Natural Gas (PNG), while noting that there is adequate petrol and diesel available and the fuel prices have not changed. Addressing the Inter-Ministerial briefing, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, highlighted that the govern-



ment is ensuring 100 per cent domestic PNG supply and has issued a notification, streamlined and time-bound framework for laying and expanding pipelines across the country, and developing the natural gas infrastructure. Addressing concerns over LPG and fuel shortage amid the West Asia conflict, she

asked the public not to believe any rumours and avoid panic buying. Sujata Sharma said, "Refineries operating at optimum capacity. We have the capacity to refine 26 crore tonne of crude oil annually. In the last two days, queues have been seen outside retail outlets and petrol pumps, and we observed panic buying. I want to assure the nation that we have adequate petrol and diesel. There is no scarcity in petrol pumps or the terminals supplying petrol to the pumps. Do not trust the rumours and avoid panic buying. Diesel and petrol prices have not been increased."

### Hormuz Opens for India: Iran

Amid the escalating conflict in the Middle East, Iran announced that it would not impose a blockade on vessels belonging to five friendly nations, including India, in the Strait of Hormuz. Other than India, ships from Russia, China, Pakistan, and Iraq have been allowed safe passage through the conflict-torn chokepoint. In an interview with Iranian state TV, Abbas Araghchi, the Foreign Minister of Iran, said that the Strait of Hormuz is not entirely closed, as ships belonging to several nations with whom Iran shares friendly ties were allowed to pass through. "Many of the shipowners, or the countries that own these vessels, have contacted us and requested that we ensure their safe passage through the strait.

## 14 Killed as Bus Catches Fire in Andhra After Collision



Hyderabad: At least 14 people were burnt alive in a road accident that occurred near Rayavaram, close to Markapuram, in Andhra Pradesh on Thursday morning. According to the Markapuram police, a bus belonging to Hari Krishna Travels collided with a tipper truck near a slate quarry, triggering a fire in both vehicles. The bus was completely engulfed in flames, and 14 people were burnt alive.

The accident happened between 6 am and 6:30 am when the bus was traveling from Jagtial in Telangana to Vinjamuru in Andhra Pradesh. Many people were reported to have sustained injuries. Both the bus and the tipper truck were completely destroyed in the fire.

Police and fire department personnel launched rescue operations.

### PM Modi Announces Ex-gratia

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed profound sorrow over the recent tragic incident in Markapuram district, Andhra Pradesh, extending condolences to the families of those who lost their lives and wishing a speedy recovery for the injured. In a statement, the Prime Minister announced that an ex-gratia payment of Rs 2 lakh from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF) will be provided to the next of kin of each deceased, while those injured in the incident will receive Rs 50,000. The Prime Minister's Office shared the announcement on social media, stating: "The mishap in Markapuram district, Andhra Pradesh, is tragic.

## Chief of Iran's Elite Naval Force, Responsible for Hormuz Blockade, Killed: Israel

Tel Aviv (Agency): The commander of Iran's elite naval force, Alireza Tangsiri, has been killed in a strike in southern Iran, an Israeli official said, the latest high-profile casualty in the war that's now in its fourth week. Tangsiri, who led the naval wing of Iran's powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, was reportedly killed in a strike in the port city of Bandar Abbas. The official added that Commodore Tangsiri had been responsible for overseeing the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Iran's



chokehold on the crucial waterway has upended oil and gas deliveries from the Middle East. There was no immediate confirmation from Iran, and the Israel Defense Forces did not comment on the reported strike. If confirmed, the killing would deal a major blow to Iran's

military leadership, particularly its naval operations in the strategically vital Persian Gulf. Born in Bushehr Province in southern Iran, Alireza Tangsiri rose through the ranks of the IRGC Navy after serving during the Iran-Iraq War and the so-called Tanker Wars, the United States' first conflict with Iran during the 1980s. Tangsiri went on to command the IRGC Navy's 1st Naval District in Bandar Abbas and served as deputy commander from 2010 to 2018, before taking over as the force's chief.

## Worm Found in Vande Bharat Curd Cup, IRCTC Fined Rs 10 Lakh

New Delhi (Agency): The Ministry of Railways has penalised the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) after a passenger aboard a Vande Bharat Express alleged poor food quality and shared a video showing worms in the curd served to him during the journey.

The incident came to light after Ritesh Kumar Singh recorded a video shortly after being served his meal on the Patna-Tatanagar Vande Bharat Express on March 15. In the clip, he panned the camera towards a bowl of curd, where worms were



clearly visible. He criticised the quality of food on board and said he had already called the train manager to lodge a complaint.

In another video, railway authorities were seen arriving at his seat to inspect the complaint. Using a torch, officials closely examined the curd while the passenger pointed out worms moving on the tray.

## PM Modi to Interact With CMs on West Asia Crisis Today

New Delhi (Agency): Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Friday interact with Chief Ministers through video conferencing on the West Asia conflict to review preparedness and plans of states, said an official.

The meeting will focus on ensuring synergy of efforts in the spirit of 'Team India', said the official.

With geopolitical tensions escalating and their global fallout becoming more pronounced, the meeting is likely to serve as a platform for PM Modi to brief Chief Ministers and seek broader consensus on India's



approach to the crisis.

"Chief Ministers of election-bound states shall not be a part of this meeting due to the model code of conduct," said the official.

There will be a separate meeting for Chief Secretaries of election-bound states

which will be held through the Cabinet Secretariat, he said.

Earlier, the government convened an all-party meeting on the West Asia situation at the Parliament House complex in New Delhi on Wednesday evening.

The meeting followed PM Modi's address to Parliament on the West Asia situation. In his statement, PM Modi said the government has constituted seven empowered groups to develop strategies on fuel, supply chains, fertilisers, and other areas to mitigate the impact of the Iran-Israel-US conflict.

## Air India's London Flight Back To Delhi After Snag, Was in Air For 7 Hours

New Delhi (Agency): A London-bound Air India flight (AI 111) returned to Delhi on Thursday afternoon after being airborne for nearly seven hours following a technical glitch. Flight radar data showed that the A350 aircraft, en route to Heathrow airport, made a turnaround while it was flying over Saudi Arabian airspace, which was recently affected due to the Iran war. This is the second time in a week that an Air India flight made a U-turn mid-air over

technical issues. The London-bound flight took off from Delhi at 6.13 am on Thursday and landed at around 1.20 pm. Data showed that the Air India aircraft flew for around 3,300 km before turning back mid-air. It takes around 6-7 hours to reach London from Saudi Arabia. Air India hasn't given any reason why it decided to take the long way back to Delhi. Sources told India Today that the AI 111 flight made a U-turn after noises were heard in the air-



craft. Earlier, the same issue was encountered on this aircraft while operating flight AI102 (New York, JFK-Delhi) on March 16. Then maintenance/inspection was carried out on the aircraft in

consultation with Airbus and no deficiencies were observed.

Since then, the aircraft has flown ten sectors without any abnormality.

It was the same aircraft,

registered as VT-JRF, that was diverted to Shannon in Ireland while it was en route to New York from New Delhi. The incident happened on March 15. Air India had then also stated

that it was due to a technical issue. However, an Air India spokesperson said the flight made a precautionary return to Delhi's IGI Airport following a suspected technical issue. "The aircraft landed safely and, consistent with Air India's high safety standards, it is currently subject to extensive technical evaluations, which will require additional time to complete," the statement said.

The spokesperson said all assistance, including refreshments, was being

provided to the passengers.

The aircraft was airborne for around four hours before the turnaround decision was taken. In total, the plane was airborne for nearly seven hours. The incident comes nearly a week after a Vancouver-bound Air India flight returned to Delhi after being airborne for over seven hours. The carrier had cited an operational issue. The Boeing 777-200 LR aircraft made a U-turn when it was over Chinese airspace.

## BRICS CCI WE Summit Advances Women's Leadership

**The Eastern Voice Correspondent Patna** Addressing the 6th Edition of the BRICS CCI WE (Women Empowerment) Annual Women's Summit & Felicitations 2026, Chief Guest Smt. Raksha Khadse, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports, said, "India's vision of becoming a developed nation by 2047 is firmly rooted in inclusive growth, with women empowerment as a central pillar. Empowering India's youth and women with opportunities in innovation and entrepreneurship is key to nation-building." The Women Empowerment Vertical of the BRICS Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BRICS CCI WE), a not-for-profit dedicated to promoting entrepreneurship, trade and business across BRICS+ and partner countries organised the 3-day Summit (March 21-23) on the theme Women in Innovation, Science Leadership, Innovation & Entrepreneurship (WISE)-Inspiring Change, Shaping Tomorrow, with the support of BRICS WBA (Women Business Alliance). Delivering the welcome address, Ms. Ruby Sinha, President, BRICS CCI WE (Women Empowerment) said, "This Summit is a call to action. It is our collective responsibility to build stronger ecosystems, enable greater access, and invest in women-led innovation. Because when women lead in science and entrepreneurship, innovation accelerates, economies expand and societies transform." In his special address, Mr. Sameep Shastri, Vice Chairman, BRICS CCI, remarked, "The BRICS+ nations represent a powerhouse of talent. Strategic policy interventions are now equipping our women to lead in high-tech industries, ensuring sustainable growth that is truly inclusive." Addressing the global gathering, Shri Abhishek Singh, DG NIC & Additional Secretary, MeitY, Government of India and Chief Guest of the Convocation Ceremony of the BRICS CCI WE Global Women Leadership Programme said, "As technology becomes more embedded in governance and everyday life, addressing bias especially in AI systems requires diverse perspectives and women must be at the centre of that effort". Unveiling Mission ShaktiSAT, an initiative that reflects the growing participation and leadership of women in science, technology and space exploration, Smt. Meenakshi Lekhi, Former Minister of State for External Affairs and Global Chair, Mission ShaktiSAT said: "Women-led leadership is central to global diplomacy, innovation, and cultural exchange." The BRICS CCI WE: Trailblazer Global Woman Icon: Lifetime Achievement felicitation was given to Ms Debjani Ghosh, Distinguished Fellow, NITI Aayog, & Former President of NASSCOM. Smt. Kalpana Murmu Soren, M.L.A., Gandey, Jharkhand, was felicitated as BRICS CCI WE Inspiring Woman of the Year and Dr. Rupinder Brar, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Coal, GOI was felicitated as BRICS CCI WE Trailblazer Woman Icon. Ms Shabana Azmi, who received the BRICS CCI WE Trailblazer: Living Legend recognition for '50 Years of Excellence in Indian Cinema' said, "Cinema, as a mirror to society, is amplifying women's voices and aspirations.

## UFBU AGITATION AGAINST UNILATERAL PLI SCHEME, DEMAND IMMEDIATE NEGOTIATED RESOLUTION

**The Eastern Voice Correspondent Patna** The United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) states that the agitational programme launched against the unilateral implementation of the revised Performance Linked Incentive (PLI) formula has evoked a tremendous and widespread response across the banking industry. From branches to administrative offices, employees and officers have participated spontaneously and with a high degree of unity and seriousness, reflecting the depth of feeling on the issue and the strong determination of the workforce to defend fairness, collective rights and industrial harmony. The response on the ground makes it abundantly clear that the opposition is not confined to the question of incentive payment alone. The revised PLI formula sought to be imposed by the Department of Financial Services (DFS) is viewed by the workforce as a unilateral and divisive departure from the existing settlement-based PLI scheme evolved through bilateral discussions and incorporated in the Bipartite Settlement / Joint Note framework. The present scheme is uniform in character and linked to the collective performance of the bank, whereas the revised formula seeks to introduce differentiation and artificial classification among officers, thereby disturbing long-settled service conditions and industrial relations norms. UFBU has consistently maintained that the revised formula strikes at the unity of the banking workforce. By seeking to separate Scale IV and above officers from the existing collectively negotiated dispensation and by introducing a differentiated structure based on individual evaluation, the scheme is bound to create avoidable disparities, breed resentment, weaken teamwork and undermine the collective ethos on which banking operations depend. It is precisely for this reason that the issue has been received so strongly at the ground level by employees and officers alike, who see in it a serious attempt to divide the workforce and erode the established framework of collective bargaining. UFBU further points out that the matter is already under conciliation before the office of the Chief Labour Commissioner (Central). In the conciliation proceedings held on 09.03.2026, the issue of payment of PLI to officers in Scale IV to VII for FY 2024-25 under the existing Bipartite Settlement / Joint Note remained under active consideration, with further steps to be taken through conciliation and bilateral discussions. In such a situation, any unilateral implementation by DFS, IBA or individual bank managements during the pendency of conciliation is wholly unacceptable and cannot be reconciled with the requirement of orderly and lawful industrial relations. UFBU has already approached the Chief Labour Commissioner seeking urgent intervention and has placed on record its considered stand that unilateral implementation during the pendency of conciliation is prejudicial to industrial peace and contrary to the requirement of maintaining status quo. UFBU has further submitted that, in its considered view, such unilateral action during conciliation raises serious issues under Section 33 of the Industrial Disputes Act and ought not to be allowed to create a fait accompli on a live industrial dispute affecting settled service conditions and the sanctity of collective settlements. The present agitation, and the powerful response it has received, reflect the determination of bank employees and officers to defend collective bargaining, preserve settled service conditions, and maintain the unity of the banking workforce. UFBU remains committed to a responsible and negotiated settlement of the issue. However, that requires DFS and IBA to immediately take concrete steps for an early and fair resolution through dialogue and conciliation, instead of permitting unilateral actions that further aggravate the situation and disturb industrial peace in the banking industry.

# "Didi Ki Rasoi Express" Food Truck to be Stationed Near Kanbehri Pond

**The Eastern Voice Correspondent Aurangabad** As part of the fourth phase of the 'Samridhi Yatra' (Prosperity Journey), Chief Minister Nitish Kumar inaugurated the Jeevika "Didi Ki Rasoi Express" food truck at Munshi Bigha, located in the Barun block of Aurangabad district. During the event, the Chief Minister received detailed information regarding the concept behind the "Didi Ki Rasoi Express food truck" and its operational mechanism. This initiative marks a significant step toward providing new self-



employment opportunities to women associated with Jeevika. Through this food truck, women from rural areas will now be able to deliver pure, nutritious, and affordable food to urban centers, public spaces, and tourist destinations. This initiative will not only economically empower women but also inspire them toward entrepreneurship and generate employment opportunities. The dishes prepared in the food truck will be crafted with a focus on local flavors and nutritional value, thereby ensuring that quality food is made available to the general public. One of these stalls is also set to be stationed near Kanbehri Pond, located within the Sadar block of the district. "Didi Ki Rasoi" is already operational in hospitals and various other locations, providing food to people at affordable rates. Now,

its expansion in the form of the "Didi Ki Rasoi Express food truck" will provide a new direction to this endeavor. This will offer the Jeevika Didis' (women members) a better platform for marketing their products and will lead to an increase in their income. Appreciating this initiative, the Chief Minister stated that the state government is continuously striving toward the economic empowerment of women. He lauded the work being undertaken by the Jeevika Didis and described it as a pivotal initiative aimed at strengthening the rural economy.

## On the Sacred Evening of Ram Navami, Career Mission Computer Academy Ignites Hope and Self-Reliance

**The Eastern Voice Correspondent Jandaha / Vaishali.** On the auspicious evening of Ram Navami, a beautiful blend of devotion, emotion, and inspiration was witnessed at Career Mission Computer Academy, Jandaha. As the time for the evening aarti approached, the entire campus resonated with the chants of "Jai Shri Ram," illuminated by the glow of lamps. The atmosphere was deeply emotional, filling every heart with renewed hope and positive energy. On this occasion, the Director of the institute, Dr. Anand Ranjan Jha, addressed the students and said that the life of Lord Shri Ram is not just a symbol of faith, but also the greatest inspiration for struggle, patience, and dedication to duty. In an emotional tone, he added, "Just as Lord Ram never deviated from his path despite hardships, we too must not lose courage in the face of challenges." Several students present at the event shared their personal struggles and dreams. Some spoke about



continuing their education despite financial difficulties, while others expressed their determination to fulfill their family's aspirations. These heartfelt stories made the environment even more touching and inspiring. The institute conveyed a strong message that Career Mission is not just a training center, but a platform where dreams are nurtured and transformed into reality. Along with technical education, the academy focuses on building confidence, discipline, and strong moral values among the youth. The program concluded with a collective aarti and distribution of prasad, where everyone pledged to follow the ideals of Lord Ram and move forward towards a brighter, self-reliant future.

## "Tree Plantation Should Become Our Culture": Vijoy Prakash

**The Eastern Voice Correspondent Patna** An inspiring tree plantation program was organized by the trainees of B.Ed. Second Year at Deshratna Rajendra Prasad Shikshk Prashikshan Mahavidyalay, run by Bihar Vidyapeeth. On this occasion, the trainees planted various medicinal and ornamental plants including insulin plant, Ashwagandha, Bael, Sadabahar, Petunia, Rose, Bougainvillea and Cactus. The objective of the program was not limited to planting trees but also to develop a culture of environmental conservation and to instill sensitivity towards nature among future teachers. The trainees elaborated on the medicinal, environmental, and social importance of each plant, conveying the message that plants not only purify the environment but are also essential for human health and ecological balance. On this occasion, the Chairman of Bihar Vidyapeeth, Mr. Vijoy Prakash (Retired IAS Officer), in his inspiring



address said, "Environmental protection is not merely a responsibility but should be an integral part of our lifestyle. Plantation of medicinal and useful plants symbolizes the co-existence of humans and nature. If we conserve plants today, we can ensure a healthy and secure environment for future generations. Therefore, tree plantation should become our culture." He also urged the trainees to remain committed not only to planting

but also to the protection and nurturing of plants and introduced them to modern techniques such as vertical plantation. The program witnessed the active participation of Chairman Mr. Vijoy Prakash, Secretary (Finance) Dr. Neeraj Sinha, Director (Education, Culture & Museum) Dr. Mridula Prakash, Principal Dr. Poonam Verma, Joint Secretary Mr. Awadhesh K. Narayana and the faculty members of the college. All dignitaries and teachers themselves participated in the plantation, spreading the message of environmental conservation. The program was successfully coordinated under the leadership of Assistant Professor Mrs. Rajni Ranjan. This initiative is not only a meaningful step towards environmental conservation but also an excellent example of promoting green awareness and the spirit of sustainable development through teacher education.

## Life of Lord Sri Ram serves as an unparalleled example of ideals and sacrifice: Dr Prem Kumar

**The Eastern Voice Correspondent Gayaji** Dr. Prem Kumar, Speaker of the Bihar Legislative Assembly, participated in the grand procession (Shobha Yatra) organized by the Shri Ramnavami Puja Central Committee at Azad Park in Gayaji. On this occasion, he extended his greetings to the devotees and the general public, while also commending the dignity and grandeur of the procession. In his address, Speaker Dr. Prem Kumar stated that the life of Lord Shri Ram serves as an unparalleled example of ideals, propriety



and sacrifice for us all. He remarked that the festival of Ramnavami inspires us to walk the path of truth, righteousness (Dharma) and duty. Such religious and cultural

events play a pivotal role in fostering mutual harmony, brotherhood and peace within society. He further added that the sacred land of Gayaji has historically remained a

## New Honda BigWing launched in Motihari

**The Eastern Voice Correspondent Motihari** Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India (HMSI) has further strengthened its premium network in Bihar with the inauguration of a new Honda BigWing dealership in Motihari. This expansion reflects HMSI's commitment to meeting the growing demand for a sophisticated and experience-driven ownership journey in India's fast-rising premium motorcycle market. As more riders seek expert product guidance, personalised engagement, and dependable service, HMSI continues to broaden its premium ecosystem to better cater to these evolving expectations. The newly launched



BigWing outlet in Motihari offers a world-class premium retail environment, built around Honda's signature black-and-white monochromatic design. The Honda BigWing Motihari facility features a thoughtfully curated space designed for customers exploring mid-size and high-performance motorcycles, supported by a team of specially trained professionals who provide in-depth product knowledge.

## BHIM Payments App Introduces Biometric Authentication for UPI Payments on Android and iOS

**The Eastern Voice Correspondent Patna** NPCI BHIM Services Limited (NBSL), a wholly owned subsidiary of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), announced the launch of Biometric Authentication for UPI Payments on the BHIM Payments App. The new feature allows users to approve UPI transactions up to 25,000 using their smartphone's fingerprint or facial recognition, making everyday payments quicker, simpler, and more secure. The feature is currently available for iOS and Android devices, which supports fingerprint and facial recognition capabilities. With this launch, BHIM users can transact without manually entering their UPI PIN for every payment.

This is especially helpful in situations where users may forget their PIN or enter it incorrectly, which can lead to failed payments, making the experience smoother and more reliable. The feature can be used across common payment scenarios, including sending money to friends and family, merchant QR payments and online transactions, making digital payments more intuitive for everyday use. Lalitha Nataraj, MD & CEO, NBSL, said, "BHIM Payments App has always focused on making digital payments simple, secure and accessible for every Indian. With biometric authentication, we are making everyday payments easier while strengthening trust in how they are approved.

## LGE India Manufacturing Plants Accelerate Transition to Renewable Energy

**The Eastern Voice Correspondent Patna** As part of its commitment to expand clean energy adoption across its manufacturing operations, LGE India, one of India's leading consumer electronics brands, has signed long-term solar Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) with Hinduja Renewables Energy Private Limited (HREPL) and Suresure Energy. LGE India will source solar power for its Greater Noida and Pune manufacturing facilities, thereby reducing its carbon footprint while strengthening its transition towards sustainable manufacturing. As part of these tie-ups, LGE India has signed a 9.80 megawatt peak (MWp) solar

PPA with HREPL for its Pune manufacturing facility and an 11 MWp solar PPA with Suresure Energy for its Greater Noida facility. LGE India will source approximately 3.21 crore units of renewable energy annually for both facilities, collectively offsetting around 0.61 million metric tonnes of CO2e over the project lifetime. "This project represents a defining milestone for LGE India, marking our first captive renewable energy project in the country and reinforcing our decisive shift towards sustainable manufacturing," said Mr. Hong Ju Jeon, Managing Director and Chief Sales and Marketing Officer, LGE India. "It strongly aligns with LG's global sustainability

commitments, including our transition towards achieving 100% renewable energy under the RE100 initiative. Beyond powering our operations, these collaborations also strengthen our contribution to meeting India's net-zero ambitions for 2070 and accelerate our journey towards responsible manufacturing. By integrating clean energy with our production ecosystem, we are not only reducing our carbon footprint but also enhancing the global competitiveness of LGE India's products." HREPL will supply 1.61 crore units of clean power annually from its 27.7 MWp solar plant in Nanded, Maharashtra, helping meet 40% of the Pune facility's

energy needs and offset 0.31 million metric tonnes of CO2e over the project lifetime. Similarly, Suresure Energy will supply approximately 1.6 crore units of renewable electricity annually from its 82.5 MWp solar plant in Erach, Uttar Pradesh, enabling LGE India to meet around 30% of its Greater Noida facility's energy requirement and increase total renewable energy consumption at the plant to approximately 50%, while offsetting 0.30 million metric tonnes of CO2e over the project lifetime. Mr. Deepak Thakur, MD & CEO, HREPL said, "We are pleased to be a part of LGE India's sustainability journey.

# Madrasa teacher found dead in Dumka hotel

**Dumka (Agency):** Tension gripped Dumka, the sub-capital of Jharkhand, on Thursday after a madrasa teacher was found dead under suspicious circumstances in a hotel room within the Nagar police station limits of the city, officials said.

The deceased has been identified as Mohammad Sadiq Hussain Ansari, a resident of Sakrikitta Rampur under Boarjor police station in neighbouring Godda district. He was employed as a teacher at a madrasa in the district.

According to police,



Ansari had checked into a hotel near Dumka's Dudhani Tower Chowk along with a woman. The incident came to light on Thursday morning when hotel staff alerted the police after finding him unconscious in the room. He was rushed to a nearby hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

The body has been sent to Phulo Jhano Medical College Hospital for a post-mortem

examination. Preliminary inquiry suggests that the deceased and the woman were in a personal relationship. The woman, who was present in the room at the time of the incident, has been taken into custody and is being questioned. In her statement, she has told police that Ansari's health suddenly deteriorated shortly after they returned to the room following a meal. She said he began to writhe in discomfort and later became unresponsive. Assuming he had fallen asleep, she said she did not initially raise an alarm, but

informed hotel staff when he remained motionless for a prolonged period. Police said they are probing the matter from all angles, including natural causes and possible foul play. They said CCTV footage from the hotel is being examined, and the deceased's family has been informed. The officer in charge of the police station said the exact cause of death will be known only after the post-mortem report is received.

The police are also trying to find out the reason behind the woman's visit to Dumka.

## BJP Terms Electricity Tariff Hike Unjustified, Warns of Agitation in West Singhbhum

**Chaibasa (Agency):** The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in West Singhbhum has criticized the Jharkhand government over the recent increase in electricity tariffs, calling the move unjustified and burdensome for the public. District BJP President Geeta Balmuchu said the hike would place additional financial pressure on people already struggling with rising prices.



In a press statement issued on Thursday, she said consumers are already affected by inflation and the global energy crisis, and increasing electricity tariffs by 8 to 15 percent at such a time is unfair. She added that the rise in fixed charges would impact not only domestic consumers but also industries, potentially increasing

production costs and pushing up market prices. The BJP also questioned the state's power management system,

stating that although Jharkhand's electricity availability is estimated between 2,500 and 3,000 megawatts, there remains a gap between billing and revenue collection.

The party alleged that the burden of this deficit is being shifted onto ordinary consumers.

Geeta Balmuchu further alleged that while strict measures are taken to recover dues from common consumers, large outstanding amounts from government departments and residences of public representatives remain unpaid. She termed this a double standard and demanded greater accountability.

The party called for immediate withdrawal of the tariff hike and sought strict action against corruption along with transparency in the Energy Department. BJP leaders warned that if the demands are not met, they would launch a large-scale public agitation.

## Two Arrested with Opium Worth Nearly Rs 50 Lakh in Khunti

**Khunti (Agency):** Police arrested two individuals and recovered a large quantity of opium pods from their possession during a raid in Naudhi (Babutoli) village under the Arki police station area. The accused were identified as Ankit Hajam alias Saju Thakur (28) and Lalu Hajam (31).



was formed under the leadership of Station In-charge Praveen Kumar Tiwari.

According to police officials, the raid was conducted on Thursday following confidential information received by Superintendent of Police Manish Toppo about illegal storage of opium pods at the residence of the two men. After verifying the input, a raiding team

of opium pods packed in 21

sacks from the house. The seized contraband is estimated to be worth around Rs 49.53 lakh in the market.

Following the recovery, police conducted another raid and arrested Lalu Hajam. A case has been registered at Arki police station under Sections 8(c), 15(c), 22(c) and 25 of the NDPS Act, 1985. The arrests were made in connection with Case No. 07/26 dated March 25.

The raiding team included Station In-charge Praveen Kumar Tiwari, Sub-Inspectors Manish Kumar and Kundan Kumar, along with armed police personnel.

## Kalash Yatra Organized in Khunti to Mark Bajrangbali Temple Anniversary

**Khunti (Agency):** A grand Kalash Yatra was organized on Thursday in Mitkora village under Udikel Panchayat of Karra block to mark the first anniversary of the installation of the Bajrangbali idol and to celebrate the commencement of construction of a new temple. A large number of devotees participated in the religious procession.



Men and women dressed in traditional attire proceeded to the banks of the Deshwali River, where they performed rituals and filled sacred pots with holy water. Carrying the

kalashes, devotees moved through the entire village before reaching the site of the

atmosphere remained devotional throughout the procession, with chants of "Jai Shri Ram" and "Jai Bajrangbali" echoing across the village.

Rituals and ceremonies at the temple premises are being conducted by Pandit Vishwanath Sharma following traditional scriptural procedures. Devotees said that the first annual celebration of the idol installation will be observed on the occasion of Ram Navami with great devotion. The formal construction work of the temple is also set to begin, generating enthusiasm among vil-

lagers. After the conclusion of the Kalash Yatra, prasad in the form of khichdi and kheer was distributed among devotees. Women participants sat together and partook of the prasad, reflecting social harmony and unity within the community.

Program President Ramkeshwar Singh, Secretary Naveen Kumar Singh, and several villagers including Ram-Lakhan Singh, Pradeep Singh, Arjun Singh and Birendra Singh were present on the occasion along with a large gathering of residents.

## HC Reserves Verdict on PIL Seeking Burn Units in Government Hospitals

**Ranchi (Agency):** The Jharkhand High Court on Thursday reserved its verdict on a Public Interest Litigation seeking the establishment and operationalization of burn units in government hospitals, Sadar hospitals and medical colleges across the state. The matter was heard by a division bench comprising Chief Justice M.S. Sonak and Justice Rajesh Shankar, which reserved its decision after hearing submissions from the State Government.



During the hearing, the government informed the court that arrangements for

burn units have been made in government hospitals and medical colleges in all districts. It stated that necessary infrastructure is available

and monitoring is being carried out to further strengthen facilities. The government also submitted that adequate medical practitioners are

available to manage these units.

However, the Amicus Curiae and Advocate Diksha Dwivedi told the court that several government hospitals still face a shortage of specialist doctors for burn treatment, which needs urgent attention.

The petition had sought operational burn units in all Sadar hospitals and medical colleges in the state. In an earlier hearing, the government had submitted a chart regarding burn units, but the court observed that the data suggested satisfactory burn ward facilities in only four of

the state's 24 districts. The bench also noted that although the affidavit claimed a list for other districts was attached, no such list was actually included, raising doubts about the availability of facilities.

The court had earlier remarked that every district must have at least one properly equipped burn ward, warning that facilities should not remain only on paper. It had directed the Director-in-Chief of Health Services, Jharkhand, to file a detailed affidavit clarifying the actual status of burn wards in all districts.

## Woman Killed in Truck Accident, Villagers Block NH-99 in Chatra

**Chatra (Agency):** A woman died after being hit by a truck on Thursday morning at Bagra Morh under the Simaria police station area on the Chatra-Ranchi main road (NH-99). The deceased was identified as Asha Devi, wife of Jeetan Saw and a resident of Kashi Mahua village in the Lawalong police station area.



According to reports, Asha Devi was crossing the road when a speeding truck struck her, resulting in her death on the spot. The incident triggered anger among family members and local residents, who blocked NH-99 at Bagra Morh by placing the body on the road. The blockade led to long queues of vehicles on both

sides, severely disrupting traffic movement on the Ranchi-Dobhi route via Chatra. The protesting villagers demanded the arrest of the truck driver responsible for the accident and compensation of Rs 5 lakh for the victim's family. The demonstration continued for hours, creating tension in the area. Simaria Circle Officer

Gaurav Kumar and Station In-charge Surya Pratap Singh reached the spot after receiving information and attempted to pacify the agitated crowd. However, the road blockade was still in place at the time of filing the report. Considering the tense situation, additional police forces were also called to the location.

## Ranchi on High Alert Ahead of Ram Navami



**Ranchi (Agency):** Security has been tightened in Ranchi ahead of the Ram Navami festival, with the state police placed on high alert to maintain law and order. A high-level review meeting was held late Wednesday night at the Ranchi SSP office under the chairmanship of Jharkhand Director General of Police Tadasha Mishra. During the meeting, the DGP issued

key directives to senior police officials, stressing the need for adequate deployment of security personnel across the city. She instructed officers to identify sensitive and crowded locations and ensure heightened vigilance in such areas. Officials were also directed to physically verify routes designated for religious processions and parades to prevent any untoward inci-

dents. The DGP further emphasized strict monitoring of social media and other digital platforms, directing authorities to take immediate action against rumours or misleading information. She asked officials to remain fully prepared to handle any situation that may arise during the festival period. The meeting was attended by ADG (CID) and IG (Ranchi Zone) Manoj Kaushik, Ranchi SSP Rakesh Ranjan, Traffic SP Rakesh Singh, City SP Paras Rana, Rural SP Praveen Pushkar, along with all Deputy Superintendents of Police and Station House Officers of the district.

## Orange Alert Issued in Nine Districts for Lightning and Hailstorm Today

**Ranchi (Agency):** The Meteorological Department has issued an Orange Alert for nine districts of Jharkhand for March 27, warning of rain accompanied by thunder, lightning and possible hailstorms. Authorities have advised residents to remain cautious in view of the anticipated weather conditions. The department has also forecast light rain with thunder and lightning across several parts



of the state between March 28 and March 31. A Yellow Alert has been issued for this

period, indicating the possibility of moderate weather activity. According to weath-

er data recorded over the past 24 hours, Seraikela registered the highest temperature in the state at 36.7 degrees Celsius, while Gumla recorded the lowest at 15.3 degrees Celsius. In Ranchi, the weather remained clear during the morning on Thursday, but the heat intensified during the afternoon. The maximum temperature in Ranchi was recorded at 32.4 degrees Celsius, while the minimum stood at 19.3

degrees Celsius. Other major locations reported the following temperatures: Jamshepur recorded a maximum of 35.8 degrees Celsius and a minimum of 23.2 degrees Celsius; Daltonganj registered 36 degrees Celsius and 17.8 degrees Celsius; Bokaro reported 35.5 degrees Celsius and 18.6 degrees Celsius; and Chaibasa recorded 35 degrees Celsius and 22.6 degrees Celsius.

## All Market Association Delegation Meets ADC, Submits Seven-Point Memorandum

**East Singhbhum (Agency):** A delegation of the All Market Association met the Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) on Thursday to discuss trade-related issues and submitted a memorandum presenting a seven-point charter of demands. The delegation sought clear information on several administrative and constitutional matters affecting traders in the city. Association General Secretary Mohammad Naseem Ansari said the memorandum requested clarification on the current status of local governance under the 74th Constitutional Amendment. The delegation also sought a detailed response regarding the rules and constitutional provisions under which the Jamshepur Notified Area Committee (JNAC) is presently functioning. Issues related to 'Sairat' markets were also prominently raised during the meeting. The traders asked the administration to clarify the rules and orders that formed the basis for the recent hike in market rents. They further requested information about the regulations governing the transfer process of Sairat markets between Tata Steel and the JNAC. The memorandum additionally sought clarification regarding the present land status of Sairat markets and a clear definition of what constitutes a Sairat market. The Association urged the administration to provide official information on



these matters at the earliest to address the concerns and doubts of the trading community.

EDITORIAL

A race against the climate clock

Over the past many decades, scientific organisations and experts have warned the world about climate change and its consequences on life on the planet. The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), the United Nations' climate-tracking agency, has regularly released reports highlighting the evolving crisis. Its latest, the State of

the Global Climate Report 2025, has presented a darker picture of our climate future - a world on the brink of a climate disaster, with all the markings of an irreversible tragedy. The report says the decade that ended in 2025 was the warmest in history. Key climate indicators, such as atmospheric greenhouse gases, surface temperature,

ocean heat, ocean acidification, sea levels, the health of glaciers, and the extent of ice caps in the sea, have consistently underlined the impending fallout. The world was about 1.43 degrees Celsius warmer than the pre-industrial average in 2025. The temperature has been rising over the last many years, even as efforts remained focused on

limiting it to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels. In 2024, the atmosphere saw the highest level of concentration of carbon dioxide in the last two million years, and the largest presence of methane and nitrous oxide in the last 800,000 years. The report also notes the presence of excess energy accumulated in the atmosphere because of

various factors. About 90% of this energy is absorbed in the form of heat by the oceans, which have seen their rate of warming double in the last 10 years. This indicates that the planet would continue to get warmer in the coming years, even if the emission of greenhouse gases is stopped now.

A Northern Discomfort for Mamata Banerjee

Ajit Kumar Jha

There is a particular weather to political voyages: not the weather the meteorologist reads, but the climate that surrounds a leader as she steps from the capital, Kolkata, into places that hold both memory and mystery. Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's sudden pivot north after unfurling the Trinamool Congress manifesto in Kolkata last week felt like that kind of atmospheric change - as if the very air of West Bengal had shifted its axis, and she, who has long been mistress of the south (Central Bengal) and the city (Greater Kolkata region and the metropolis), was now testing the gusts of a different wind. There are journeys that are outward but inward at the same time - trains that are maps of the self, landscapes that reflect an inner composition. Banerjee's barnstorming of North Bengal over the past three days has a similar double vision. On the surface, it is a tautly strategic exercise: rallies in Maynaguri, Dabgram-Fulbari, Naxalbari; speeches on the grounds of Jabravita High School and Nandaprasad High School; logistics checked and rechecked by the cops and administrators. Underneath, though, there

is an old story being reread - of a leader known for populist intimacy, threading herself through markets and alleys, now reaching for constituencies that have long been resistant to her voice. Mamata Faces a Challenge From Saffron, Not Erstwhile 'Red Brigade' Historically, Naxalbari was the place where the CPI-ML had its genesis, hence the Naxalite movement. But that was decades ago, in the era of 1967 to 1969, when the Maoists under Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal had begun the peasant uprising. Mamata Banerjee, however, rushed to the erstwhile revolutionary zone not to face the gauntlet from the Red revolutionaries but to meet an electoral challenge from a different hue: the Saffron brigade. Numbers, of course, are blunt and crystalline companions to any political pilgrimage. In the last assembly round, the TMC's wounds in the north were visible not just in seats but in the geometry of votes: 23 seats out of 215 for Banerjee's TMC party, while the BJP pocketed 30 of 77 in that very region; a vote share where TMC's 44.53% faced the BJP's 42.27%, margins thin enough to be measured

in gestures and grievances. North Is a Different Mood If the map of Bengal is divided into quadrants of



mood and memory, the north stands as a different country to which Mamata must now become an eligible immigrant: not only to be seen, but to be heard, recognised, forgiven, persuaded. There is a peculiar restlessness in Cooch Behar these days, as if a quiet tea-stall conversation has spilled into the high rooms of power. The TMC - long accustomed to a rhythms of Bengal's politics - now finds itself tugged in different directions, not by an external foe but by the uneasy strains of its own inside chorus. With the assembly elections approaching, dissatisfaction has seeped into the veins of the party in the district, making what was once a simple contest into something

knottier. Consider Khokon Mian, whose resignation reads less like a rupture and more like a small, telling admission of a larger unsettlement. Once a close companion of Rabindranath Ghosh - the district's steady hand for more than 20 years - Mian has moved across the aisle to the Congress Party. In such moments, allegiance shifts not because of one glaring betrayal but because the ground beneath many feet feels less sure. Ghosh himself, a former MLA and minister, has been quietly sidelined after the party declined to give him the Natabari ticket. His response was characteristically low-key: a retreat, a pause. "I am taking a break and am currently resting," he said. But the unease is not his alone. A cluster of senior figures - former ministers like Binay Krishna

Barman and Jiten Barman, and Suchismita Deb Sharma, who leads the district's women's wing - have also found themselves without tickets. They have not staged loud rebellions; instead, their silence and absence from campaigning is conspicuous, a negative space on the political canvas that observers cannot help but notice. The Fault Lines In Cooch Behar These fissures arrive against a backdrop that is already unforgiving. In 2021, the BJP captured seven of Cooch Behar's nine Assembly seats, leaving Trinamool with barely a foothold; a later bypoll reclaimed one seat, but the larger map still favours the BJP. When a party that once felt at home in a place finds itself reduced to tentative holdouts, anxiety multiplies. Another fault line is representation. The party's decision not to field any candidates from the district's sizeable Muslim community has stung. For many in the Muslim community, politics is not merely transactional; it is a question of presence, of seeing oneself reflected in the corridors of influence. One local leader voiced the sentiment plainly: "Are minorities to remain mere vote banks, present to rally and to vote but never to

lead?" In a set of four general seats, surely one might have borne the face of that community. Abhishek Banerjee Starts From Natabari Into this simmering scene comes Abhishek Banerjee, the nephew of Mamata Banerjee, set to launch the campaign from Natabari on March 26. His arrival is intended as a steady gesture, a moment to draw loose threads together and remind local cadres of the party's larger narrative. Whether it will soothe the bruises or simply paper over them remains the open question. Some local leaders, perhaps out of loyalty or habit, insist that all is well. Yet reassurance and reality often travel different roads. In Cooch Behar, the party now faces the old political paradox: when the centre cannot reach every corner, corners begin to tug at one another, and the map of allegiance is redrawn in soft, sometimes painful strokes. The Rush To Cooch Behar There is something almost cinematic about a charismatic leader like Mamata Banerjee who, just after announcing a manifesto in the cosmopolitan heart of Kolkata, drives into places that feel lateral to the capital's rhythm.

Growth and governance face the ethics test

Jagdish Rattanani

It is not common for the chairman of a large bank classified as "too big to fail" to quit suddenly. It is even more uncommon to send a resignation letter that raises questions about the bank's values and ethics. But this is precisely what Atanu Chakraborty, the Chairman of HDFC Bank for almost five years, did earlier this month, rattling the markets, regulators, and the bank management. He wrote: "Certain happenings and practices within the bank that I have observed over the last two years are not in congruence with my personal values and ethics." HDFC is India's largest private sector bank by assets and market cap. It is the poster boy of India's retail banking transformation in the post-liberalisation era. A tremor here can shake the entire banking sector and raise questions about wider financial stability. To be sure, no material concerns have been raised, and the RBI has been quick to give the bank a clean chit, citing "sound financials, professionally run board and competent management team". This timely assurance calms the markets and reflects the bank's reputation for good governance and the consequent trust premium it enjoyed in valuations. Yet concerns remain high, as the questions asked at an analysts' call made evident. While it is too early to speak about likely issues at the bank in the absence of a fuller investigation, the episode once again highlights that reputations built over decades can get sorely damaged in no time when it comes to issues of ethics and governance. HDFC's pre-eminent position showcases the positives of private sector efficiency in a liberalised economy. But this pre-eminence is also why the bank deserves

more scrutiny and places on it a burden to transparently discuss how challenges of this kind emerge and how they might be handled. In that sense, this is a defining moment that carries implications for the bank in the immediate, and takes in its sweep the entire Indian corporate sector in the medium and long term. Indeed, HDFC's reputation has already taken a hit. This has led some voices to argue that the Chairman should have spelt out his concerns with specifics rather than leave with fuzzy pointers that others must now figure out. This position has its merits. But a bigger case can be made for the outgoing chairman boldly airing his concerns in writing and, in that sense, forcing a relook at some of the goings-on at the bank, particularly in a context where such issues are rarely discussed in the open. Moreover, the case of HDFC deserves to be seen in a larger light and in the context of governance systems that are improving but still leave a lot to be desired. This is particularly so at the level of boards, where directors question less than they should, where dissent is usually not the norm, and issues tend to get brushed aside rather than discussed in the open. It is noteworthy that the bank fired three senior employees soon after the resignation, and not before, with reports saying they were removed for their roles in mis-selling bonds in Dubai. Broadly, the reputation of Indian banks has been hit by a spate of scandals, the latest being the alarming case of IDFC First Bank, where employees are alleged to have colluded and conspired to create a hole of Rs 583 crore in the account of the government of Haryana, no less.

What Iran Might Really Demand From Trump Before It Backs Down

Harsh V. Pant

As the fourth week of the US-Israeli military campaign against Iran unfolds in March 2026, what is emerging is not merely another episode of kinetic escalation in the Middle East, but a familiar interplay between coercion and diplomacy that has long defined Washington's engagement with Tehran. President Donald Trump, never one to shy away from grand declarations, has signalled movement toward what he calls a "comprehensive resolution" even as the fog of war continues to obscure both intent and outcome. The trajectory to this

moment has been predictable in its broad contours. Deadlines issued in 2025 demanding Iran's complete nuclear rollback - cessation of enrichment, dismantling of infrastructure, and abandonment of proxy networks - were never likely to be met on American terms. The subsequent resort to force, led by Israeli strikes and reinforced by US strikes on nuclear and leadership targets, reflects a classic escalation ladder: diplomacy first as an ultimatum, then as justification for military action. Tehran, for its part, has stayed consistent in its denials of nuclear weapon ambitions



even as its regional posture and capabilities have drawn sustained scrutiny. The Choreography Around The Talks Trump's announcement on March 23 of "very good and productive conversations" with Iranian representatives, alongside claims of near-total agree-

ment, must be read less as a breakthrough and more as a tactical pause. The much-touted 15-point framework, still shrouded in secrecy, appears to follow the logic of maximalist demands softened by the promise of sanctions relief and normalisation. Nuclear disarmament

remains non-negotiable in Washington's framing, with Trump underscoring that Iran "is not going to have a nuclear weapon" - a reiteration that collapses diplomacy into a singular objective. Yet, what is equally striking is the choreography around the negotiations. The emergence of Pakistan as a mediator, with a high-level summit in Islamabad reportedly involving figures such as Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, reflects a pragmatic widening of diplomatic channels. The involvement of familiar Trump-era interlocutors like Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner suggests

that back-channel diplomacy remains central to this effort, even as public rhetoric oscillates between conciliation and coercion. At its core, this approach is vintage Trump: a fusion of "maximum pressure" with transactional deal-making. Iran is cast as a long-standing destabiliser, its nuclear ambitions framed as imminent and existential, particularly for Israel. Military action, in this narrative, becomes both punitive and preventative - degrading capabilities while forcing Tehran to the negotiating table before any potential "breakout" moment.

'Undeclared Emergency' in Bengal: Four Pieces Of Proof

Derek O'Brien

After you read this column, you may want to Google Article 356 (1) of the Constitution of India. To put it in a sentence, under this Article, the Union government can assume powers and responsibilities of a state legislature, take over the working of the state and govern it through the office of the President. Which is why it is also known as the President's Rule. In June 2021, Narendra Modi had tweeted, "The Dark Days of Emergency can never be forgotten. The period from 1975 to 1977 witnessed a systematic destruction of institutions. Let us pledge to do everything possible to strengthen India's democratic spirit, and live up to the values enshrined in our Constitution". Empty words. In the last week, a Chief Minister and two former Chief Ministers have spoken up. Omar Abdullah: "These sweeping transfers only happen in non-BJP

ruled states & especially in West Bengal but that's no surprise. However, West Bengal will once again prove what I have always believed to be true - officers don't win elections for political parties, the leaders of political parties do. No amount of effort by the Election Commission to gerrymander will change the results. Come counting day Mamata Didi will win a thumping majority". Akhilesh Yadav: "The conspiracy the BJP is plotting by removing the DG of police, other senior officials in West Bengal, will not work. The people will vote for Mamata Banerjee". Arvind Kejriwal: "The BJP has turned the Election Commission into its weapon to win elections through deceit. What is happening today in West Bengal is exactly what happened in the Delhi elections as well. Names were struck off the voter list, the police administration gave free rein to the BJP's



thuggery, and the entire administration was engaged in ensuring the BJP's victory. The very fabric of democracy was torn apart. Today, Mamata Didi too is fighting to save democracy. In this struggle, we stand with her". Then, on the floor of Parliament, your columnist said: "The Home Ministry should ensure they perform (their duties) in Parliament. But currently, the Home Ministry is more interested in doing

an 'undeclared Emergency' in Bengal" All this is not hollow rhetoric. Here is what is happening. Transfer of senior officials of the state government: Within hours of the announcement of the elections in Bengal, the Election Commission of India (ECI) issued unilateral directions to transfer senior officials, without any rationale or explanation. These included the Chief Secretary, the Home Secretary, the DGP, and

hundreds of other officials from different departments at various levels. All this being done, without consulting the state government, is both unusual and unprecedented. Another example of the ECI being a law unto themselves. Electors, candidates under 'adjudication': At the time of writing, there is still no clarity on who is eligible to vote, and who is not. 60 lakh names in Bengal are up in the air. Even some candidates are in this list of 'to be adjudicated'. With elections weeks away, when will all these pending claims be resolved? Why is the right of a genuine citizen to vote, or stand for election, under threat? Deployment of 2 lakh central forces: 480 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) have already been deployed in Bengal. Indications are that the ECI will deploy another 2,000 companies. This will take the total number of CAPF personnel to over two lakh.

700 companies will be retained in the state, even after polling is completed. Unprecedented. Model Code of Conduct (MCC): The MCC comes into effect immediately after the announcement of election dates. Consider this: On 14 March, Narendra Modi visited Bengal and announced developmental projects. On March 14, Narendra Modi visited Assam and announced developmental projects. On March 15, the ECI announced the dates for the elections. What a glorious coincidence! P.S. In August 1949, speaking during the Constituent Assembly debates, Dr Ambedkar said, "I do not altogether deny that there is a possibility of these articles (provisions of Emergency) being abused or employed for political purposes... the proper thing we ought to expect is that such articles will never be called into operation and that they would remain a dead letter".

# Security Ops intensify in Manipur after Kuki militants open fire

**Imphal (Agency):** Security forces in Manipur on Thursday continued their massive joint operations in Bishnupur district after suspected armed Kuki militants opened fire at Phouljang and Gothol areas, targeting an Indian Army post, officials said. A police official in Imphal stated that the militants opened fire in the Phouljang and Gothol areas, directing their attack towards an Indian Army post located in Phougakchao Awang Leikai. "The Indian Army and the Central Reserve Police Force (58th Battalion), deployed in the area, retaliated swiftly by returning fire, leading to an exchange of fire that lasted approximately 30 minutes late on Wednesday night," he said. The official added that from the early hours of Thursday, a joint operation was launched by the Indian



Army, CRPF, Manipur Police, and Manipur Armed Forces (Indian Reserve Battalion) in the area where the firing occurred, as well as in adjoining hill regions. "The situation continues to be closely monitored, and security forces will persist with operations in the surrounding hill areas," he stated. Manipur Police authorities have urged civilians to refrain from spreading rumours and to verify information before sharing it. In a separate development, con-

tinuing operations that began on Wednesday, security forces dismantled six illegally constructed bunkers in the Litan and Mongkat Chepu Upper village areas of Ukhrul district. Following the operation, the majority of bunkers in the violence-affected Litan area have been rendered ineffective. Security forces remain on high alert, with troops strategically deployed to prevent any escalation of violence in the region, the official added. Meanwhile,

security forces arrested an active cadre of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) from the Patsoi area of Imphal West district. The arrested militant has been identified as Asem Subash Meitei alias Lingjelkhomba (30). A mobile phone was seized from his possession. In another major operation, security forces on Sunday (March 22) arrested 14 cadres of the UNLF (Koireng faction) from the Haokhong area of Thoubal district. A significant cache of items was recovered from them, including two INSAS rifles, 13 magazines of various weapons, 100 rounds of INSAS ammunition, cash amounting to Rs one lakh, 12 mobile phones, five helmets, five backpacks, and four vehicles. Security forces, comprising both central and state units, continue extensive crackdowns

on militant activities across the state. Search operations and area domination drives are ongoing in fringe, mixed-population, and vulnerable areas across multiple districts. A total of 113 checkpoints have been set up across Manipur in both valley and hill districts to monitor and restrict the movement of suspicious individuals and vehicles. Additionally, security forces are providing escorts to vehicles, including trucks carrying essential commodities, along the Imphal-Jiribam National Highway (NH-37). Strict security arrangements and convoy protection measures remain in place in sensitive stretches to ensure safe transit. Manipur Police have once again urged the public not to believe rumours or be misled by fake videos circulating on social media.

# Bomb threat email triggers panic at Muzaffarpur civil court



**Patna (Agency):** A tense situation prevailed on Thursday at the Muzaffarpur Civil Court complex after a bomb threat email triggered panic among lawyers, staff, and visitors. According to officials, a suspicious email was sent to the District Judge's official ID around 11.30 a.m., claiming that an explosive device had been planted within the court premises. Following this, the administration immediately swung into action, tightening security and evacuating the entire complex as a precaution. Police and administrative teams quickly reached the spot, set up a security

zone, and ensured that everyone was safely moved out of the premises. Judicial proceedings were suspended for the first half of the day amid the security alert. Advocate Rajesh Kumar said that information regarding the suspension of court work was circulated through WhatsApp groups. Many lawyers found their offices locked, with clear instructions issued to vacate the campus. Another advocate, Sanjay Prasad, expressed concern over the incident, noting that such threats have been occurring frequently in Bihar, raising serious questions about security. Authorities are treating

the matter with utmost seriousness, and a further probe is underway to verify the authenticity of the threat and trace its source. Teams from the bomb disposal squad and dog squad have reached the court complex and are conducting an intensive search operation. Every corner of the premises is being thoroughly checked for any suspicious or unattended objects. "As of now, no suspicious object has been found, but all aspects are being closely monitored," the DSP said. He urged people not to believe in rumours and to cooperate with authorities until the security checks are completed. Officials also highlighted that in recent months, several courts across Bihar have received similar bomb threats, often triggering panic and disruption of judicial work. Security agencies remain on high alert, taking each threat seriously to ensure public safety and maintain order within court premises.

# Odisha Assembly notifies withdrawal of controversial salary hike bills



**Bhubaneswar (Agency):** The Secretariat of the Odisha Legislative Assembly has formally notified members of the withdrawal of the controversial amendment bills that proposed a threefold increase in the salaries and allowances of legislators and ministers. In an official communication, Secretary Satyabrata Rout informed all members that Parliamentary Affairs Minister Dr Mukesh Mahaling has given notice of his intention to move for leave to withdraw the amendments that had sparked widespread discontent in the state. Bills proposed to be withdrawn include the Odisha Legislative

Members' Salary, Allowances and Pension (Amendment) Bill, 2025; the Odisha Legislative Assembly Speaker's Salary and Allowances (Amendment) Bill, 2025; the Odisha Legislative Assembly Deputy Speaker's Salary and Allowances (Amendment) Bill, 2025; and the Odisha Ministers' Salaries and Allowances (Amendment) Bill, 2025. It is worth noting that the four legislations, which were passed in December 2025, had sparked widespread public debate over the hike in salaries of Odisha ministers and MLAs by around threefold, with effect from June 5, 2024, and

had drawn attention across the state due to the unprecedented scale of the increase. Reports indicated that the Chief Minister's monthly remuneration was slated to increase from Rs 98,000 to around Rs 3.74 lakh, while legislators' pay was similarly projected to rise from about Rs 1 lakh to nearly Rs 3.45 lakh. The revision of salaries and pensions, Odisha's MLAs also joined the ranks of the highest-paid legislators in the country, which led to a major public debate and attracted criticism from citizens from all walks of life, raising questions over the timing and necessity of the hike. A few days after the passage of the bills, Biju Janata Dal (BJD) president and former Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, in a letter addressed to CM Mohan Charan Majhi, announced that he would forego the salary and allowances hiked for the Leader of Opposition, taking a step that was widely noted in the state's political discourse.

# Delhi Crime Branch busts LPG hoarding racket in Ranhola; 459 cylinders seized

**New Delhi (Agency):** In a major enforcement action under the Essential Commodities Act and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the Delhi Police Crime Branch on Thursday unearthed an illegal operation involving the hoarding and misuse of LPG cylinders in the Ranhola area of Outer Delhi. A total of 459 empty gas cylinders, including 175 Bharat Petroleum and 284 Indane cylinders, were seized during the raid. According to officials, the operation was carried out by the Western Range-I (WR-I) unit of the Crime Branch based on specific and credible Intelligence inputs. The raid exposed a large-scale illegal practice of unauthorised storage and alleged black marketing of LPG cylinders, highlighting deliberate misuse of the LPG distribution system.



In view of concerns regarding a perceived shortage of LPG, despite government assurances of adequate supply, a dedicated team was constituted to identify and act against hoarders. The team, led by Inspector Pradeep, comprised several officers, including Sub-Inspectors Dharmendra, Naresh

Kumar, and Mohit Batan, along with other personnel, under the close supervision of ACP Raj Kumar. Acting swiftly on the Intelligence received, the team conducted a coordinated raid at HP Balaji Gas Agency located on Nilothi Road in Village Ranhola. During the operation, the agency owner, Susheel

Kumar Singhal, was found allegedly involved in the illegal hoarding of LPG cylinders. The Food Supply Officer (FSO), Jag Pravesh, was immediately called to the spot and initiated necessary legal action as per prescribed procedures. The seized cylinders were subsequently handed over on superdara to Sanjay Kumar Mehta, Sales Area Manager of Hindustan Petroleum Gas, following due process. A case has been registered under FIR No. 62/2026 at the Crime Branch police station under Section 7 of the

Essential Commodities Act and Section 61(2) of the BNS. Further investigation into the matter is underway. Police officials revealed that the accused, being the owner of an LPG agency, allegedly misused his position to accumulate a large stock of commercial LPG cylinders without authorisation. It is suspected that he intended to create artificial scarcity by withholding supply and later selling the cylinders in the open market at inflated prices for wrongful gain. - The illegal stock was reportedly kept under the guise of regular inventory to evade detection, indicating a well-planned and systematic operation. Kumar Singhal, a resident of Nihal Vihar and currently residing in Ambika Vihar, Delhi, owns and operates the HP Balaji Gas Agency. Officials stated that the action reflects the Delhi Police's continued commitment to curbing illegal activities such as hoarding and black marketing of essential commodities. They added that strict action will continue against offenders to ensure fair distribution and protect public interest.



# "Vote for BJP is a wasted vote" Congress's Tharoor ahead of Kerala assembly polls

**Kollam (Agency):** Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on Thursday urged voters in Kerala to cast their ballots for the United Democratic Front (UDF), calling a vote for the BJP a "wasted vote." Tharoor emphasised that the real contest in Kerala is between the UDF and the LDF. Speaking to the news agency in Kollam, Tharoor said, "My focus is on the Kerala state election. My colleagues in Assam, Bengal, Tamil Nadu are all campaigning...In Kerala, people are looking for change. The BJP is not an irrelevant factor in the state...The real fight is between UDF and LDF. So a vote for BJP is a wasted vote...Vote for the UDF." Kerala legislative assembly elections will be held in a single phase on April 9, with counting of votes scheduled for May 4. The tenure of the

current assembly is set to conclude on May 23. Further, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor welcomed the UK High Court's decision to reject Nirav Modi's bid to reopen his extradition appeal to India in connection with the over Rs 13,800 crore Punjab National Bank (PNB) alleged fraud case. He emphasised that fugitives should not be allowed to seek refuge in foreign countries and must face justice in India. "That's a good thing because fugitives from justice should not be able to seek refuge in foreign countries...Let them come if they're innocent, let them prove their innocence before an Indian court, Indian judge. I think that's only fair. But there are too many fugitives who have left our country and gone to other countries.

# CBI conducts searches in Mumbai in Reliance Telecom SBI fraud case

**Mumbai (Agency):** The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has registered a case against Reliance Telecom Ltd., its then Directors Satish Seth and Gautam B. Doshi, along with unknown public servants and others, in connection with an alleged bank fraud case involving State Bank of India (SBI) amounting to Rs 114.98 crore. According to officials, the agency has invoked charges of criminal conspiracy and cheating under the Indian Penal Code, along with provisions related to criminal misconduct and abuse of official position under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988. The case was registered following a complaint lodged by the SBI, which alleged that the accused entities and individuals defrauded the bank, resulting in substantial financial losses. The SBI was part of a consortium of 11 banks that had collectively sanctioned a term loan facility of Rs 735 crore to Reliance Telecom Ltd. Following the registration of the case, the CBI conducted searches at multiple locations in Mumbai, including the residential premises of Seth and Doshi,



as well as the registered office of Reliance Telecom Ltd. Officials said that several documents related to loan transactions and financial dealings have been recovered during the searches. The agency is expected to scrutinise banking records, correspondence, and internal approvals linked to the loan disbursement. Further action will be taken based on the findings of the ongoing investigation. Officials said that searches are still underway and more evidence may be collected as

the probe progresses. The latest action comes amid a series of ongoing investigations into alleged financial irregularities involving companies linked to the Reliance Group. In a related development earlier this month, the CBI questioned Reliance Group Chairperson Anil Ambani for nearly eight hours in connection with a separate SBI complaint involving an alleged Rs 2,929 crore fraud linked to Reliance Communications (RCOM). According to officials, the case pertains to alleged mis-

appropriation of loan funds and transactions that were in violation of lending terms. The accounts had earlier been classified as fraud by the bank, prompting investigative action, including searches at company premises and residences of key individuals. Ambani has been asked to join the probe again, while other individuals, including corporate executives linked to associated entities, have also been examined as part of the widening investigation into multiple financial dealings under scrutiny.



# 50 residents rescued from high-rise fire in Ahmedabad

**Ahmedabad (Agency):** Around 50 residents were safely rescued after a fire broke out in a residential high-rise in Ahmedabad's Shela area on Thursday morning, with officials crediting the building's fire safety systems and a swift response for preventing casualties. The incident was reported at about 7.58 a.m. in flat C-302 on the third floor at the Sky City building near O7 Road. According to fire officials, flames spread to the upper floor, and thick smoke quickly filled multiple levels of the building, triggering an emergency response. "Due to heavy smoke, nearly 40 to 50 residents were initially moved to the terrace as a precautionary measure. All of them were later brought down safely through the staircase," a senior fire department official said. Officials said the building's in-house fire sys-

tem was functional and helped initiate immediate firefighting efforts before fire brigade teams arrived. "The fire was brought under control in time. There were no injuries or casualties reported," an official added. A total of 18 vehicles were deployed as part of the operation, including six 20 KL water bowsters, one 12 KL water tanker, a hydraulic platform, a mini fire fighter, eight first responder vehicles (Bolero), one first responder (Scorpio), and an ambulance. Fire crews focused on containing the blaze and ventilating the smoke-filled structure to enable safe evacuation. In all, 73 personnel took part in the operation, comprising 41 firemen, five jamadars, 19 drivers, three station officers, three divisional officers, one deputy chief fire officer and one additional chief fire officer.

# Bullet 650 Launch Signals Royal Enfield's Premium Push

**■ CTNN**  
**Chennai:** Born in India and rooted in heritage, this machine represents the evolution of a legend. The Bullet Classic 650 cc—more precisely a 648-cc twin-cylinder motorcycle—stands as a powerful symbol of Indian motorcycling excellence. At first glance, many might even compare it to an Indian version of a Harley-Davidson. Heavy, powerful, and fast, the word cruiser fits this machine perfectly. Every element of its design feels large, muscular, and technically refined. True to its legacy, the Bullet continues to rule the roads like a "maharaja" among motorcycles. This time, with a robust 650 cc engine, the iconic dug-dug transforms into a



deeper, more commanding roar—yet the bike retains a calm and composed personality, delivering a riding rhythm that stays with you for a lifetime. This beast comes equipped with a twin-cylinder engine that delivers smooth and consistent power. Producing around 47

horsepower and 52.3 Nm of torque, it offers strong performance with refined throttle response. The engine feels alive, especially when cruising at steady speeds. A 6-speed gearbox ensures seamless riding, while the suspension setup—featuring telescopic

forks and twin shock absorbers—keeps the ride stable and comfortable. Built with a strong, masculine character, the motorcycle is designed for long, effortless cruising without compromising rider comfort. The twin chrome-finished exhausts are a high-

light, producing a rich, satisfying note that defines its identity. Ignoring this exhaust note would mean missing the very soul of the machine. As delivered, the bike feels complete, leaving little room for modification for those who appreciate originality. Modern touches like LED headlamps and tail lamps, USB charging, analogue-digital instrumentation, and ABS bring contemporary practicality to this classic machine. Once the engine fires up, it's all about the ride—smooth, powerful, and deeply engaging. Expected to be priced above ₹3 lakh, this motorcycle proudly carries forward the legacy of Royal Enfield. In many ways, it truly feels like the Indian Harley-Davidson.

# India housing affordability likely to stabilise this year

**New Delhi (Agency):** Buying a home in India may stop getting tougher from this year, as rising incomes and supportive policies are expected to balance out high property prices, according to a new report released on Thursday. India's housing affordability is likely to stabilise between 2026 and 2028, offering some relief to homebuyers who have struggled with rising property prices and high loan costs in recent years, a report by CBRE South Asia Private Limited said. The consultancy, in its India Residential Market Outlook 2026, noted that for the first time since 2021, household income growth is expected to grow faster than property prices. This shift is likely to ease the burden of home loans for a wide range of buyers across major cities. The report analysed the EMI-to-income ratio across



six key cities, including Mumbai, Delhi NCR, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai and Pune, covering three income groups between 2021 and 2028. According to the findings, affordability had worsened steadily between 2021 and 2024, mainly due to higher interest rates and faster growth in property prices compared to incomes. However, the trend is now expected to reverse. From 2026 onwards, the EMI-to-income ratio is likely to stabilise across income groups -- indicating that buying a home will become more

manageable. Industry experts said this marks an important turning point for India's housing market. The combination of easing interest rates, slower price growth and rising household incomes is expected to support demand going forward. The report also suggests that India's progress towards becoming an upper-middle-income economy by 2030 will further strengthen housing demand. The study also highlighted that the residential market remained strong in 2025, with both new launches and sales crossing 2.7 lakh units.

# India remains Asia Pacific's most cost-competitive office fit-out market: Report



**New Delhi (Agency):** India continues to reinforce its position as the most cost-competitive office fit-out market in Asia Pacific, offering global occupiers a compelling combination of cost efficiency, scale and quality, a new report showed on Thursday. Across India's major office markets, fit-out costs ranged between USD 65-73 per square foot, significantly lower than key regional markets such as Tokyo (USD 215), Sydney (USD 161) and Singapore (USD 140), said Cushman & Wakefield's 'Asia Pacific Office Fit Out Cost Guide 2026'. This reinforces India's position as the most economical destination for delivering high-quality, collaborative workplace environments at scale. "India continues to stand out as one of the most cost-competitive fit out markets in Asia Pacific, not just on absolute cost benchmarks but also in terms of consistency across cities and depth of delivery capability. As occupiers increasingly look to deliver higher-quality, experience-led workplaces, this cost advantage becomes even more relevant," explained Shashi Bushan, Executive Managing Director-Project and Development Services (PDS) India, and Lead Occupier-PDS APAC, Cushman & Wakefield. In the current environment, where global supply chains are adjusting and input costs remain sensitive to energy prices, India's relative positioning is strengthening further. The country's cost advantage comes at a time of strengthening occupier activity across the region. Prime office net absorption across Asia Pacific's 27 markets reached 92 million sq ft in 2025, up from 76 million sq ft in 2024, reflecting continued recovery in demand. India has been central to this growth, with its top eight cities accounting for nearly two-thirds of regional office demand, underlining the depth and resilience of its occupier base. On the supply side, the divergence across the region is becoming more pronounced.

# Nokia appoints Samar Mittal, Vibha Mehra to lead India business from April 1



**New Delhi (Agency):** Nokia on Thursday announced key leadership changes in India, appointing Samar Mittal as India Country Business Leader and Vibha Mehra as India Country Manager, effective April 1. The move is part of the company's renewed strategy to strengthen its presence and sharpen its business focus in the country. In his new role, Samar Mittal will lead Nokia's business strategy in India, focusing on expanding the company's partnerships with telecom operators, as well as players in artificial intelligence, cloud services, and critical enterprise sectors. He will also work on identifying new growth opportunities and aligning Nokia's offerings with the changing needs of the Indian market. Vibha Mehra, on the other hand, will oversee Nokia's overall presence in India. She will handle communications, government relations, and public engagement, while also guiding the company's corporate social responsibility initiatives and internal people strategy. Her role will be key in strengthening Nokia's reputation as a trusted technology company in India. Both leaders bring extensive experience to their new roles. Mittal has nearly three decades of experience in the telecom and IT sectors and has previously led Nokia's Cloud and Network Services business in the Middle East and Africa.

# India's e-commerce hiring surges 35 pc in last 2 years: Report

**■ CT Bureau**  
**New Delhi:** Hiring in India's e-commerce and quick commerce sector has grown sharply by 35 per cent over the last two years, with companies increasingly focusing on technology and execution capabilities, a new report said on Thursday. According to a report by CIEL HR, total hiring demand in the sector rose from 73,320 roles in 2023 to nearly 98,750 roles in 2025. "This growth is also accelerating a structural shift in hiring, as e-commerce companies move beyond expansionist recruitment to build deeper capability in platform resilience, fulfilment precision and AI-enabled customer experience," it said. Technology and engineering roles have seen the biggest jump, with demand increas-



ing more than three times in the last two years. Roles such as software developers, DevOps engineers, solution architects and AI and machine learning experts are now at the centre of hiring strategies. Supply chain and fulfillment demand has risen by 25 per cent over the same period, the report stated. Positions like warehouse managers, inventory controllers and city operations leads are becoming increasingly important, especially for quick commerce companies as companies expand their reach into smaller cities and focus on improving delivery efficiency.

# India's commercial drone market to grow at 18 pc till FY29: Report

**Mumbai (Agency):** India's commercial drone industry had a market size of USD 1.88 billion (Rs 17,000 crore) in FY26, which is expected to grow at a compounded 17.98 per cent rate during FY25-29, a report showed on Thursday.



Globally, the US leads the commercial drone industry, followed by China, with India currently ranked seventh, according to a research report by B2K Analytics. As per the report, drones can cut the cost of agrochemical spraying by nearly 80 per cent compared with manual spraying. A study analysed small and medium-sized drones costing Rs 6.4-7.1 lakh with a maximum operational life of three years versus annual manual labour costs of about Rs 1.7

lakh. "Despite the higher upfront cost, drones can cover 6-6.6 acres in the time manual labour covers one acre. After accounting for efficiency and depreciation, drones were found to be over 78 per cent more cost effective than manual labour," the findings showed. In India, there are currently 122 holders of the Type Certificate - an approval issued by the DGCA confirming that a drone model meets safety, airworthiness, and performance standards for commercial use. Among these, about 70 per cent have obtained certification for drones used in agriculture, mainly for agrochemical spraying. Another 24 per cent operate in surveillance and mapping, high-

# India health insurance sector grows 9 pc: Govt

**New Delhi (Agency):** India's health insurance sector has recorded strong growth, with total premiums crossing Rs 1.2 lakh crore in 2024-25, the government said on Thursday. India's health insurance sector continues to expand steadily, growing at around 9 per cent annually, driven by increasing awareness, better access to healthcare financing and a rising need for financial protection against medical expenses. To improve efficiency and ensure faster support to policyholders, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India has set strict timelines for processing cashless health insurance claims. As per the norms, insurers must approve cashless pre-authorisation requests within one hour, while final approval must be completed within three hours. These measures are aimed at reducing delays and ensuring patients get



timely treatment, the government stated. The rise in health insurance premiums has been attributed to multiple factors, including agei zng policyholders, higher coverage amounts and improved policy features. The regulator's 2024 guidelines also ensure that insurance products are priced fairly based on risk factors, with regular reviews using data and customer feedback. In terms of claims settlement, the sector has shown improvement. The claims paid ratio stood at 87.5 per cent in 2024-25, compared to 82.46 per cent in 2023-24 and 85.66 per cent in

2022-23. Data from the IRDAI's Bima Bharosa portal shows that 1,37,361 grievances related to general and health insurance were reported in FY25. Of these, about 93 per cent were resolved within the same financial year, it added. However, some claims continue to be rejected due to policy-related conditions such as exceeding the sum insured, co-payment clauses, sub-limits, deductibles, room rent caps and non-medical expenses. The regulator has taken several steps to improve transparency and streamline the claims process.

# Private fuel retailer Nayara hikes petrol by Rs 5, diesel by Rs 3

**■ CT Bureau**  
**New Delhi:** Nayara Energy on Thursday increased petrol and diesel prices, becoming one of the first fuel retailers in India to pass on the recent rise in global crude oil prices to consumers. The company has raised petrol prices by Rs 5 per litre and diesel by Rs 3 per litre, according to sources. The actual increase may vary slightly across states due to differences in local taxes such as VAT. In some regions, petrol prices have gone up by as much as Rs 5.30 per litre. The move comes at a time when global oil prices have surged sharply following tensions in the Middle East. Prices had jumped nearly 50 per cent since late February, after Israel carried out military strikes on Iran, leading to retaliation and fears of supply disruptions. International crude prices recently touched around USD 119 per barrel before easing to about USD 100. Despite this surge, state-owned oil marketing companies such as Indian



Oil Corporation, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited have not changed the prices of regular petrol and diesel, which have remained largely unchanged since April 2022. These companies continue to control about 90 per cent of the fuel retail market in India. India depends heavily on imports for its energy needs, sourcing about 88 per cent of its crude oil from abroad. A significant portion of these supplies passes through the Strait of Hormuz, a key shipping route now under threat

due to rising geopolitical tensions in the region. Meanwhile, earlier in the day, the government said that all retail outlets are operating normally with sufficient petrol and diesel stocks to meet national demand. It added that a rapid rollout of PNG connections is currently underway across the country. All refineries are operating at a high capacity with adequate crude inventories. While panic buying did occur in some areas due to rumours, the government has confirmed that all retail outlets are operating normally.

# India credit growth surges 61 pc in FY26: Report

**■ CT Bureau**  
**New Delhi:** India's credit growth has seen a sharp jump in FY26, rising 61 per cent, driven mainly by strong demand from retail borrowers and MSMEs, a new report showed on Thursday. Credit growth in India has accelerated significantly in FY26, with total credit flows rising to Rs 25.1 lakh

crore, nearly matching deposit mobilisation of Rs 26.1 lakh crore, a report by Yes Bank said. The report noted that strong demand across retail, MSME and infrastructure sectors has been the key driver of this growth. However, deposit growth has been slowing since FY24, creating some pressure on liquidity in the banking system. As a

result, the credit-deposit (C/D) ratio has climbed to 82.4 per cent, its highest level in a decade. Retail loans continue to dominate credit growth. Personal loans have seen their share rise from 29 per cent to 33 per cent in recent years, supported by tax relief measures and GST-related benefits that have boosted household incomes.

Within this segment, vehicle loans have emerged as the biggest driver, overtaking housing loans since the third quarter of FY26. There is also a noticeable shift towards secured lending as growth in unsecured loans has slowed. The report also highlighted a recovery in industrial credit, led by MSMEs. The segment now accounts for

nearly one-third of total industrial credit and has seen strong growth due to government support, including credit guarantee schemes and revised MSME definitions. Micro and small enterprises alone added Rs 2.38 lakh crore in loans during the year, while medium enterprises contributed Rs 63,000 crore, the report said.

Looking ahead, the report cautioned that credit growth may slow in FY27 due to several risks. Higher oil prices, weaker exports and rising food inflation could impact economic activity and reduce demand for loans. At the same time, the fading impact of GST benefits may also weigh on growth, the report stated.

## Turkiye-operated oil tanker attacked in Black Sea: Transport Minister



vehicle at water level." The minister would not specify if the attack on the Sierra Leone-flagged tanker happened in Turkish waters but local media reported that it took place less than 30 kilometers from the Bosphorus strait. "It appears to be an externally caused explosion, particularly directed at the engine room, with the aim of completely disabling the ship," Uraloglu said. "We have sent the necessary units to the scene and are monitoring the situation," he added. In December, Turkiye witnessed a series of security incidents linked to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warning against the Black Sea becoming an "area of confrontation" between the warring parties.

**Istanbul (Agency):** A Turkish-operated oil tanker was attacked early Thursday in the Black Sea, possibly by an unmanned surface vehicle, Turkiye's transport minister Abdulkadir Uraloglu said. "I can say that a foreign-flagged ship operated by a Turkish company, which had loaded crude oil from Russia, reported an explosion in its engine room after midnight to our emergency call center," the minister said in a televised interview. "We believe that the engine room was specifically targeted. We think the attack was not carried out by a drone, but by an unmanned surface

# 'Return hubs' for migrants set to clear EU parliament hurdle

**Brussels (Agency):** European lawmakers are expected to clear the way Thursday for stiffer penalties for irregular migrants and their potential deportation to so-called "return hubs" outside the bloc. The measures, criticized by human rights groups, are part of a tightening of Europe's immigration rules in response to pressure across the 27-nation bloc to curb migration. The vote in the European Parliament would get the move a step closer to approval, ushering in negotiations between lawmakers and member states on a final text. The reform would notably allow for the opening of centers or "return hubs" outside the EU's borders to which migrants

whose asylum applications have been rejected would be sent. It also envisages harsher penalties for migrants who refuse to leave, including through detention and entry bans. The package has proven divisive. Some in the bloc, including France and Spain, have questioned the effectiveness of return centers, which the International Rescue Committee (IRC), an NGO, has described as "legal black holes." "They will be located outside of EU territory, where policymakers cannot guarantee that people's rights will be upheld," said the IRC's Marta Weland. A small group of countries, including Denmark, Austria, Greece, Germany and the



Netherlands, is nevertheless plowing ahead and exploring options to set them up, according to a diplomatic source. Proponents say the hubs could act as a deterrent and discourage migrants from attempting to reach Europe in the first place. Critics instead point to the

hurdles faced by similar projects. Britain abandoned a scheme to deport undocumented migrants to Rwanda, while Italian-run facilities to process migrants in Albania have faced legal challenges and a slow uptake. Despite opposition from the left, the package, first proposed by

the European Commission last year, comfortably passed a preliminary parliamentary vote this month with support from center-right and far-right lawmakers. EU member states gave their green light in December. Negotiations with parliament after the vote are likely to zero in on a small number of issues, including the extent of search powers that could be granted to authorities seeking out irregular migrants, observers say. A group of 70 rights groups warned in February that the reform would allow for "ICE-style immigration enforcement" - a reference to the heavy-handed practices used by Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the

United States under President Donald Trump. "Each and every one of us will have to answer a very simple question. What kind of Europe do we want? One of rejection, hatred, and imprisonment?" said Melissa Camara, a lawmaker with the Greens opposing the text. European governments have sought a tougher stance amid a souring of public opinion on migration that has fueled far-right electoral gains across the continent. With migrant arrivals down in 2025, focus in Brussels has turned to improving the repatriation system, which currently sees about 20 percent of people ordered to leave actually returned to their country of origin.

## China says 'glimmer of hope' on Iran war talks

**Beijing (Agency):** China's top diplomat has said that a "glimmer of hope" for peace has emerged due to moves to stop the war in the Middle East, despite Tehran vowing to keep fighting. The White House has warned that US President Donald Trump is ready to "unleash hell" if Iran does not accept a peace plan to end the war, but Tehran insisted it will not negotiate. The ramped-up messages dashed hopes of any imminent de-escalation, with violence on the ground showing no sign of abating after almost four weeks. China's foreign minister Wang Yi urged dialogue in separate calls with his Turkish and Egyptian counterparts, suggesting that both



Tehran and Washington had shown signals they were willing to return to the negotiating table. "With both the United States and Iran signalling a willingness to negotiate, a glimmer of hope for peace has emerged," Wang told Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty, according to a Beijing readout published late

Wednesday. The statement came hours before Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that "so far, no negotiations have taken place, and I believe our position is completely principled." "Speaking of negotiations now is an admission of defeat," he added. Trump insisted on Wednesday that Iran was taking part in peace talks, suggesting Tehran's denials were because Iranian negotiators fear being killed by their own side. "They are negotiating, by the way, and they want to make a deal so badly. But they're afraid to say it, because they figure they'll be killed by their own people," Trump told a dinner for Republican members of Congress.

## Israel medics say Iranian missile attack leaves 6 wounded

**Jerusalem (Agency):** The Israeli military said air defenses responded to missile attacks from Iran on Thursday that according to medics left six people lightly wounded and caused some damage. A spokesperson for Israel's Magen David Adom emergency medical service said paramedics were providing medical treatment to "six people who were lightly injured by blast effects," updating an earlier toll of two injured. Earlier on Thursday, a spokesperson for MDA told public radio there was damage to several houses in the central city of Kafr Qassem,

whose Mayor Haitham Taha said it was caused by cluster munitions. The military said three separate statements in around 90 minutes, the military said it had "identified missiles launched from Iran toward the territory of the State of Israel." "Defensive systems are operating to intercept the threat," the statements said, followed by announcements that people were "now permitted to leave protected spaces in all areas of the country."

## Food poisoning hits multiple schools in Japan's Osaka, affecting over 600

**Tokyo (Agency):** More than 600 students and staff members at multiple schools in Kumatori Town, Osaka have reported symptoms of food poisoning, public broadcaster NHK reported Thursday. Students and staff members at eight elementary and junior high schools in the town have successively developed symptoms, including diarrhoea and vomiting, since last Thursday. As of Tuesday, the total number of those affected reached 633, according to the report. The local health centre detected norovirus in some of the affected students. The same virus was also found in



employees of a company that supplied bread for school lunches to all elementary and junior high schools in the town. Xinhua news agency reported. Based on these findings, the public health centre determined that the outbreak was caused by food poisoning from bread served in school lunches and imposed a five-

day business suspension on the related manufacturer. Food poisoning, a type of foodborne illness, is a sickness people get from something they ate or drank. The causes are germs or other harmful bacteria or contaminants in the food or drink. Symptoms of food poisoning often include upset stomach, loose stools and vomiting. Symptoms most often start within hours or days of eating the food. Most people with food poisoning have mild illness and get better without treatment. But sometimes food poisoning causes serious illness or complications. Symptoms of food poisoning.



## North Korea, Belarus sign 'friendship' treaty during Lukashenko visit

**Seoul (Agency):** North Korea and Belarus's strongmen leaders signed a "friendship and cooperation" treaty on Thursday after Kim Jong Un gave a lavish welcome to President Alexander Lukashenko on his maiden visit. Besides supporting Russia's war against Ukraine - around 2,000 North Korean soldiers are thought to have died - both nations are under Western sanctions and are accused of gross human rights violations. The two men met last year in China. "In the modern realities of global transformation - at a time when the world's major powers openly ignore and violate the norms of international law - independent countries must cooperate more closely and consolidate their efforts aimed at protecting their sovereignty and improving the well-being of their citizens," Belarusian state news agency Belta quoted Lukashenko as saying. "We oppose the illegitimate pressure on Belarus from the West and express our support and understanding

for the measures taken by the leadership of Belarus aimed at ensuring social and political stability and economic development," Belta quoted Kim as saying. Earlier Belta showed Kim and Lukashenko hugging at a lavish welcome program on Wednesday at the start of the two-day visit involving an artillery salute and goose-stepping soldiers before a large flag-waving crowd. Lukashenko visited the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun - where Kim's embalmed father and grandfather lie in state - to pay his respects, flanked by top North Korean officials, the Korean Central News Agency reported. Lukashenko, 71, who has ruled Belarus since 1994 and has swung firmly behind Moscow since the start of the Ukraine war in 2022, also laid a bouquet on behalf of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Belarus and North Korea are part of a push driven by Chinese President Xi Jinping and Putin to create what they call a "multipolar world" to challenge Western hegemony.

## Pakistan's education system struggling with underfunding, weak learning outcomes: Report

**Islamabad (Agency):** The recently released government report titled 'Public Financing in Education 2025-26' has revealed that Pakistan's education system is struggling with severe underfunding, weak learning outcomes, and millions of children left behind, a report has stated. According to the statistics presented in the report, more than 25.37 million children remain out of school, and 77 per cent of the school-going 10-year-olds are virtually illiterate. These numbers showcase a national emergency that poses a threat to Pakistan's social progress and economic development. "One of the most troubling aspects revealed in the report is the declining share of education spending in the national economy,



Education expenditure has consistently remained below international benchmarks, averaging less than two per cent of the GDP. Over the past five years the trend has been even more discouraging, reflective of the low priority education gets within the national fiscal framework," an editorial in Pakistan-based

daily Business Recorder stated. "Its share fell from 1.9 per cent of the GDP in 2019-20 to 1.4 per cent in 2020-21, briefly rose to 1.7 per cent in 2021-22, and then slipped again to 1.5 per cent in 2022-23. The provisional estimate of 0.8 per cent for 2024-25 is particularly worrying, indicating a further downward trend

in government spending on education," it added. The continuous under-investment explains many of the structural problems in education sector. Schools in Pakistan often do not have basic infrastructure, teaching materials, and trained teachers. Access to education remains uneven in rural and marginalised areas, with girls and children especially affected, according to the report in Business Recorder. If government does not provide adequate resources, students in classrooms are directly impacted due to overcrowding, poorly trained staff and outdated materials. According to the report, 77 per cent of 10-year-olds in Pakistan cannot read and understand a simple text, showcasing a serious learning crisis.



## US social security faces financial crisis

**Washington (Agency):** Social Security, the backbone of retirement security for millions of Americans, is approaching a financial cliff, with lawmakers warning that benefits could be cut sharply within the decade if Congress fails to act. At a Senate Budget Committee hearing, lawmakers from both parties said the programme faces a worsening funding gap driven by demographic shifts, rising costs and insufficient revenue. Projections show the main trust fund could be exhausted as early as 2032, leaving the system able to pay only a fraction of scheduled benefits. "This program is under stress because of demographics," Senator Lindsey Graham said, pointing to fewer workers supporting a growing number of retirees. Officials warned that once the trust fund is depleted, benefits could be cut by roughly a quarter. For millions of Americans who depend on Social Security as their primary source of income, even modest reductions would have immediate con-

sequences. "It's right here," Senator Jeff Merkley said, noting that the shortfall could hit within the current political cycle. Experts told lawmakers that the scale of the challenge leaves few easy options. Karen Glenn said programme income is projected to fall short of costs "in all future years," adding that lawmakers would need to increase revenue, reduce benefits, or pursue a combination of both to restore solvency. Data presented at the hearing showed that about 72 million Americans are expected to receive Social Security benefits in 2033, underscoring the system's reach across the population. The debate exposed sharp differences over how to address the shortfall. Senator Bill Cassidy proposed creating a government-backed investment fund to supplement the programme's finances, arguing that a diversified approach could help offset future borrowing needs. Others emphasised raising revenue. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse said that with-

## Japan starts releasing state oil reserves to blunt impact of West Asia tensions

**Tokyo (Agency):** Japan began releasing 30 days' worth of oil from state reserves on Thursday to cushion the impact of the West Asia conflict on its economy, as concerns over supply mount and oil prices soar, local media reported. The move came after the country started drawing down 15 days' worth of oil from private-sector stockpiles last Monday, reports Xinhua news agency. The government plans to sell a total of about 8.5 million

kiloliters of oil from 11 storage bases across the country, according to Kyodo News. Japan will also begin to tap joint oil reserves held in the country by three Middle Eastern nations, including the United Arab Emirates, with five days' worth to be released by next Tuesday for supply to oil wholesalers. Japan relies on the Middle East for more than 90 per cent of its crude oil imports, leaving it highly vulnerable to the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz following

the outbreak of the Middle East conflict in late February. The disruption has driven sharp rises in both crude oil and retail gasoline prices in the country. In addition to tapping oil reserves, the Japanese government also resumed gasoline subsidies to cap fuel costs for consumers. The measure has brought the average retail price for regular gasoline down to 177.7 yen (about 1.11 US dollars) per litre from a record high of 190.8 yen last week,

according to Kyodo News. As of the end of 2025, Japan held an oil reserve equivalent to 254 days of domestic demand. The impact of the tensions in West Asia is being seen in several nations. Meanwhile, in the Philippines, President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos on Wednesday signed a law allowing the government to temporarily suspend or cut fuel excise taxes on petroleum when global oil prices reach a set threshold.

## LSG owner Goenka debunks rumours around Pant's captaincy

**New Delhi (Agency):** Sanjiv Goenka, owner of Lucknow Super Giants (LSG), dismissed rumours about Rishabh Pant's captaincy following 'fake reports' that suggested the wicketkeeper-batter was losing his leadership role at the franchise ahead of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026 season and wished the 28-year-old luck for the tournament. The LSG captain faced intense scrutiny for his subpar performances during IPL 2025. There were high hopes for the left-handed player after he was bought for an impressive Rs. 27 crores in last year's mega auction, but he could not rise to the occasion. Ahead of the 19th edition of the tournament, rumours about replacing him as captain began to circulate. However, Goenka



debunked all such speculations and lauded his 'character and commitment' before wishing for him to have 'a great season.' "Heading into the season, I had read the speculations around @RishabhPant17's captaincy and smiled. We've spent enough time together to know his character and commitment. Have a great season, Cap!" Goenka wrote in an X post on Thursday.

# Odisha teenager Anjali Munda turns chance selection into historic gold at KITG 2026

**Raipur :** In 2022, during a regular class, when a sports teacher asked students to select different sports, 11-year-old Anjali Munda quietly raised her hand and chose swimming, the only sport she knew. Anjali comes from Gahiragadiya village in Odisha's Jajpur district, about 100 kilometres from Bhubaneswar. She knew swimming as a fun activity that involved splashing water, but she never received any formal training. Anjali, the youngest of four siblings whose father is a van driver at a local factory, moved to the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) at

age 10. There, tribal students from across the state receive free education and boarding. She was initially inspired by her elder sister, an archer. However, when the opportunity arose, Anjali selected swimming as her preferred sport, trusting her innate ease in the water. Although it took her some time to develop the confidence to compete, she has never looked back after winning a silver medal at a local club tournament a year later. "The silver medal was the first in my life, and is very special. It gave me the confidence that I could do well in the sport. I have to thank my coaches for believing in me, and the



effort that they put during my training sessions," said the 15-year-old Anjali, who became the first female gold medallist on the opening day of the inaugural Khelo India Tribal Games here on

Wednesday. In fact, if Anjali had not clocked 2:39:02 to win the gold in the 200m freestyle, Karnataka, India's swimming powerhouse, would have claimed all six gold medals available on the

opening day. Anjali emphasises that her upward trend is due to the Union Sports Ministry's targeted initiatives, such as the ASMITA League (Achieving Sports Milestone by Inspiring Women Through Action). "In 2024, I won two silver medals in the Khelo India ASMITA League, held in Sambalpur. I had finished within striking distances of the podium in the other two events. The medals boosted my confidence further, and I believed I could do well in the bigger tournaments," she added. Anjali continued to excel at the recent Khelo India ASMITA (U-15 & U-18) Swimming League (East

Zone) held on March 21 and 22 in Guwahati, where she won a couple of silver medals. A few days afterwards, Anjali brought that form to the first Khelo India Tribal Games 2026 in Raipur and secured her first national gold medal. Although she achieved a landmark victory, the Odisha teenager admitted she was not completely happy with her performance, as she had hoped to surpass her personal best of 2:25. The young athlete is now aiming to beat her personal bests in the upcoming events, specifically the women's 50m backstroke, 100m backstroke.

## Gulveer Singh to lead Indian elite field at World 10K Bengaluru

**Bengaluru (Agency):** Gulveer Singh, 10,000m & 5,000m national record holder, will lead the Indian elite field at the 18th edition of the World 10K Bengaluru, scheduled to take place April 26. A World Athletics Gold Label Race, carries a total prize purse of USD 210,000, with USD 26,000 awarded to the winners in the men's and women's categories. Indian elite athletes will also compete for top honours with Rs 3 lakh on offer for the top finishers, with an additional Rs 1 lakh awarded for setting an event record. Gulveer heads into the race in red-hot form, having finished third at the New York City Half Marathon earlier this month, where he clocked 59:42, which is the best timing for any Indian half-marathon runner. The national record holder in both the 10,000m



(27:00.22) and 5000m (12:59.77), Gulveer enjoyed a standout 2025 season, winning both events at the Asian Athletics Championships. He also set an event record of 1:12:06 at the Tata Steel World 25K Kolkata 2025. "The TCS World 10K Bengaluru is one of the most competitive road races in the country, and I'm excited to line up this year. It will be a great

opportunity to test myself again on the roads in Bengaluru," said Gulveer. Earlier in the month, organisers also announced a strong international elite line-up for the 18th edition of the race, including the likes of Herbert Kibet of Uganda, Kenya's Vincent Langat, Ethiopia's Gemechu Dida and Eritrea's Samuel Habte. Speaking about the quality of the field, Gulveer said, "The TCS World 10K Bengaluru attracts some of the best international athletes every year. Competing against such a strong field motivates Indian runners to push themselves harder, and it can also inspire many young athletes in the country to take up running." "Events like this are very important for the ecosystem, especially in a year where we are focusing on the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games."

## Bengaluru FC appoints Pep Munoz as head coach

**Bengaluru (Agency):** Indian Super League (ISL) 2018-19 champions Bengaluru FC have appointed Spaniard Pep Munoz as their new head coach, with a contract running until the end of the 2026-27 season. Munoz will take charge of the first team as the club looks to continue competing at the highest level. Munoz has great experience of coaching. He has previously worked within FC Barcelona's youth setup with Barca U19 and Barcelona B, and has also spent time in China with Qingdao Huanghai and Shandong Luneng, in addition to working with the China Football Team. His first full role as head coach came in

Cambodia with Preah Khan Reach Svay Rieng, where he enjoyed a successful two-year stint that saw the club win the league twice and the domestic cup once, while also reaching the final of the AFC Challenge League. Munoz will be joined by Ferran Borrás, who comes in as part of BFC's coaching staff. "The decision to join Bengaluru FC was an easy one for me. It is a model club in Indian football, with a clear vision and a steady path forward, and I have only heard very positive things from my fellow Spanish compatriots who have been or are in India about the club, the city, and the supporters," Munoz said in a statement released by the club.

## Skipper Gaikwad, Samson set to form CSK's opening pair in IPL 2026

**Mumbai :** Chennai Super Kings (CSK) captain Ruturaj Gaikwad dropped a hint about the team's opening combination for the Indian Premier League edition, revealing he, along with wicketkeeper batter Sanju Samson, will open the innings in IPL 2026. CSK had a dismal campaign last year and their top order was a major weakness. They had tried multiple combinations, but all led to disaster. The five-time winners then tried Ayush Mhatre at the top, and he provided some brisk starts. But with CSK roping in Sanju Samson for IPL 2026, the franchise opted to go in with an experienced pair. During the IPL 2026 captain's meet in Mumbai, Gaikwad was asked about CSK's opening combination,



and the skipper confirmed that he will return to the top of the order, partnering with newly added member in Samson. Samson was traded in from Rajasthan Royals to CSK ahead of the auction in a major move as the five-time champions traded out Ravindra Jadeja and Sam Curran to RR. Last year, CSK had struggled to find stability at the top. Gaikwad himself batted at No. 3 for a

large part of the season, while the team rotated between Rachin Ravindra, Devon Conway and Rahul Tripathi as openers. No combination worked for CSK until youngsters Ayush Mhatre and Dewald Brevis came as replacements and gave the team some much-needed aggression in the powerplay. Joining as a replacement player last season, Mhatre amassed 240 runs in seven innings, averaging 34.28 at a striking rate of 188.97, including a stand-out 94 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB), while Brevis scored 225 runs in six innings at the strike rate of 180. CSK will begin their IPL 2026 campaign against Rajasthan Royals at Barsapara Cricket Stadium.

## 'It was quite tough for me': Dube on his secret train journey after T20 WC triumph

**Chennai (Agency):** Indian all-rounder Shivam Dube said on Thursday that his train journey back home after winning the T20 World Cup 2026 with his family was exciting but also quite tough, as he had to take extra precautions to avoid being recognised. Dube had to take an unusual route to get back home from Ahmedabad after the historic win. Unlike most Indian cricketers who travel by chartered or private flights, he couldn't find any available flights from Ahmedabad to Mumbai, as they were fully booked. So, he decided to travel by train in a 3rd AC coach. Even though there was a risk of being recognised by fans, he felt it was the quickest option. In a video shared by



Chennai Super Kings (CSK) on X, Dube explained how he managed to avoid attention. "It was quite tough. We took the train around 5 a.m., and there were many people. But since it was right after the World Cup, no one expected me to be there. I went to the top berth and slept for some

time. We slept around 5:30 and woke up at 10:30," he said. Dube also shared that he had travelled by train in a similar way last year during a BPCL tournament in Baroda. "I had done this before as well, wearing a mask. Last year, before the IPL, I travelled by train from a BPCL tourna-

ment in Baroda because I wanted to reach home early. I was sleeping on my berth, and there were a few friends with me," he added. Sanju Samson, who was also part of the World Cup-winning team, will join Dube at Chennai Super Kings for the first time. Dube said Samson had asked him about the atmosphere in Chennai, and he replied, "You'll love it. It will feel like home. There's no pressure; you can just focus on your practice and training." Dube is expected to play an important role for CSK in IPL 2026. The five-time champions will begin their campaign on March 30 against the Rajasthan Royals at Barsapara Stadium in Guwahati.

## 'Haven't told my family about it yet': Sakshi Rana on 'Upcoming Player of the Year' nomination

**New Delhi :** Ahead of the eighth Hockey India Annual Awards on March 27 in New Delhi, rising Indian hockey stars Sakshi Rana and Anmol Ekka shared their pride and excitement upon being nominated for prestigious under-21 honours. Anmol has been nominated for the 2025 Hockey India Jugraj Singh Award for Upcoming Player of the Year (Men U21). Meanwhile, Sakshi is a nominee for the Hockey India Asunta Lakra Award for Upcoming Player of the Year 2025 (Women - Under 21). The nominations emphasise the notable contributions of the two players last year. Speaking about his nomination, Anmol said, "It's a great feeling to be nominated for



this award. Some distinguished names have won the award in the past, but I didn't think I'd be amongst the players being nominated. So, when I saw my name, it was an amazing feeling. I haven't told my family about the nomination yet. I will hopefully tell them when I win." The 20-year-old excelled at

the FIH Hockey Men's Junior World Cup Tamil Nadu 2025 in Chennai, netting four goals-all from penalty corners. His key moment was in the third-place match against Argentina, where his goal helped India win the bronze medal and earned him the 'Player of the Match' award.

Sharing his experience from the tournament, Anmol stated, "I got a lot of experience and exposure at the Junior World Cup. It felt like a reward for all the hard work that I have done in the last couple of years." Anmol considers his nomination for the Hockey India Jugraj Singh Award for Upcoming Player of the Year 2025 to be just the start of his journey. The young athlete stays committed to daily improvement and aspires to represent the senior team. "There are areas of my game that I want to improve on, even when it comes to penalty corners. I'm still in the junior team, so I have a couple of years to showcase the best of my abilities with consistency."

## Rinku Singh thanks UP government for appointing him as Regional Sports Minister

**Lucknow :** Indian batter Rinku Singh thanked Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and his government for appointing him a Regional Sports Officer on Wednesday. X handle of Government of UP, shared a video in which the flamboyant left-hand batter thanked the Chief Minister and said, "I am deeply grateful from the bottom of my heart to Chief Minister @myogiadityanath ji for honouring me with a sum of Rs 3 crore and assigning me the responsibility of Regional Sports Officer." In the video, the 27-year-old batter also said that he couldn't meet the Chief Minister due to his commitments with the Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) and is expecting to meet him after the conclusion of the IPL



2026, and also collect his appointment letter from him. Rinku rose to stardom by smashing Gujarat Titans' Yash Dayal during the IPL 2023 for five successive sixes in the final over during a tense chase of 200-odd runs for Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR), and since then, has become an Asian Games gold medal winner, Asia Cup winner and, most recently, the T20 World Cup winner with Men in Blue. He has helped the India men's team

win several matches by playing the role of an explosive, six-hitting finisher down the order. In 45 T20Is, Rinku has made 665 runs at an average of 39.11 and a strike rate of 155.73. He also has three half-centuries in the shortest format. Rinku has also represented India in a couple of ODIs. He has three T20Is and an ODI wicket under his name. Rinku has also been named the vice-captain of KKR for the upcoming IPL 2026, taking on a new leadership role within the team. He will serve as the deputy to Ajinkya Rahane, stepping into the vice-captaincy role previously held by Venkatesh Iyer, who was acquired by defending champions Royal Challengers Bangalore for Rs 7 crore ahead of the season.

## 'Keen to play all three formats, we can make it work,' says Cummins on workload and commitments

**New Delhi (Agency):** Australia captain Pat Cummins has acknowledged the growing strain between international commitments and franchise cricket, warning that the balance may become harder to sustain for future players, even as he remains determined to represent Australia across all formats for as long as possible. Several of Cummins' long-time teammates, including Steve Smith, Glenn Maxwell, and Marcus Stoinis, have already stepped away from ODIs, while Mitchell Starc has given up T20Is in an effort to extend their careers. Cummins, however, is still committed to playing all three formats, even if that requires carefully managed rest periods. "Still very keen to play all

three formats, and at the moment I think we can make it work. I love Test cricket. Hopefully I'm in a cadence where I can keep doing that for three, four, five years and don't have to forgo Test cricket," Cummins told the Business of Sport podcast. Despite ongoing back concerns, Cummins has maintained a strong presence in Test cricket, missing just two matches in a packed schedule between mid-2023 and the start of the recent home summer. At the same time, he has largely stepped back from white-ball internationals since Australia's recent World Cup campaigns. Beyond the IPL, Cummins' global franchise footprint is expanding. He has already signed a long-term deal with a Major



League Cricket team and expressed interest in eventually featuring in England's Hundred competition. These commitments highlight the financial and professional pull of franchise leagues worldwide. Reflecting on the broader landscape, Cummins admitted the sport is approaching a critical juncture. "I think it's at a tension point. It has been for a while, but I think it's only growing. As each of these franchise leagues get well capitalised, get more sophisticated - some

because there is so much demand for them elsewhere. "Even the way we contract players and talk about whether we let players go or not has evolved a lot in the last five or so years, because we don't want to lose them, so you've got to give them a little more leash than maybe you did previously," he added. Cummins also pointed to a telling example later this year: Australia's two-Test series against Bangladesh, scheduled during the Hundred window. Several Australian players are expected to forgo significant earnings to prioritise national duty, a decision he believes may not always be the case in the future. "The interesting point is, big Ashes series, all the main guys want to play that series."