

Across State

Year - 9 Issue - 25

Mumbai, Thursday 26-31 March 2026

EDITOR IN CHIEF : SANJAY M. BHAIRE

Rs.5/ Pages- 24

They don't have jurisdiction - CM

Zero FIR in Karnataka over Ajit Pawar's death

Mumbai

In what could snowball into a major political issue between Maharashtra and Karnataka, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday said that the neighbouring state has no jurisdiction to register a Zero FIR into the Baramati plane crash.

The Zero FIR has been done with a purpose to defame Maharashtra, Fadnavis said.

NCP (SP) MLA Rohit Pawar, the grand-nephew of Pawar-family patriarch Sharad Pawar and nephew of the late Ajit Pawar filed a Zero FIR on Tuesday at the High Grounds police station in Bengaluru City.

The FIR has been sent to Maharashtra's Director General of Police for transfer to the Baramati Rural police station in Pune district.

"Karnataka cannot take the Zero FIR...it does not have the jurisdiction to do so...it is illegal," Fadnavis told the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly as the Budget Session drew to a close in Mumbai.

"Perhaps (Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha) Rahul Gandhi may have told them to take the FIR...may be or may not be...it cannot take a Zero FIR in this case," said Fadnavis, who is also the state Home Minister and Law & Judiciary Minister.

"Just assume if a minister files a Zero FIR in Mumbai against the Karnataka Chief Minister (Siddaramaiah)...the Zero FIR is not for this purpose," he said.

According to him, a Zero FIR is taken when an aggrieved party or the victim cannot reach a police station.



"It may not be in your mind...but Karnataka has done it for a political purpose...actually the police station in Karnataka should have told you that you can go to the concerned police station and get the FIR done," he told Rohit Pawar.

Fadnavis said under the Section 175 (3) of Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita a person can approach the concerned Magistrate to get an FIR done if the police station refuses.

Speaking about the investigations into the 28 January 2026 Learjet plane crash in which Ajit Pawar (66), the then Deputy Chief Minister and NCP President and four others died, the Chief Minister said that an Accidental Death Report (ADR) was taken and investigations is being done by state CID.

"The purpose of an FIR is to set the law in motion...in case of an accident, an ADR is registered to set the law in motion...the purpose of both (FIR and ADR) is the same... in case of an ADR, if criminality or conspiracy emerges, it is converted into an FIR and a chargesheet is filed," Fadnavis said.

"In know being the nephew of Ajit

Pawar, it is an emotional matter...but people close to you know that in the last seven to eight years, I am one of those who was closest to Ajit Dada.... rest assured.... If Ajit Dada's accident was a murder, then I assure this House that we will move heaven and earth (aakash-paataal) to find whosoever is the 'baap' (person)," Fadnavis assured the House.

Fadnavis also said that on the day of the incident a three-member team from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) had visited the crash site. "The AAIB has come out with the preliminary report," he said.

Fadnavis also said that Deputy Chief Minister Surendra Pawar had requested for a probe by Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) which the State has recommended to the Centre. "The NCP (leaders and legislators) have requested for a meeting with Union Home Minister...we will surely do that," he said.

"If the report of (CID and AAIB) suggests foul play, it would be converted into an FIR," he said.

Inside

Maharashtra amends law to protect acid attack victims' identities
Jail for online sexual harassment

Read full story on p 2

BMC Cracks Down on Illegal Pan-Patti Stalls in Goregaon
Seizure of Contraband Under Inspector Ketaki Desai's Leadership

Read full story on pg 3

Republican Women's Front Stages Aggressive Protest Against Fake Baba Ashok Kharat in Mumbai; Demands Strict Action

Read full story on page 4

Opposition Satisfied With Govt Efforts, Stands By Us: Rijiju After All-Party Meet On West Asia Crisis

Read full story on pg 5

Maharashtra amends law to protect acid attack victims' identities

JAIL FOR ONLINE SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Mumbai

The Maharashtra legislative council on Wednesday unanimously passed the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (Maharashtra Amendment) Bill 2026 to include provisions in the Shakti Bill to protect the identities of acid attack victims and ensure jail term for digital sexual overtures.

The bill to amend the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) in its application to the state of Maharashtra was earlier passed by the assembly.

Speaking in the council, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who also heads the Home department, said that the Shakti Bill was passed by the state legislature in 2020 and sent to the Centre for the President's assent.

The President had subsequently sent it back.

The state was told that the Centre was formulating a similar law combining the provisions of the then Indian Penal Code (IPC), CrPC (Code of Criminal Procedure) and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, he said.

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which replaced IPC, came into force in July 2024.

The Centre asked the state whether amendments to BNS with respect to Maharashtra were still required, he said.

Accordingly, a committee



was formed to assess whether all aspects of the SHAKTI Criminal Laws (Maharashtra Amendment) Bill, 2020, which has provisions for strict punishment for crimes against women, were covered in the BNS, Fadnavis said.

Following the panel's suggestion, two provisions -- to protect the identities of acid attack victims and to ensure jail for online sexual harassment -- have been added to the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (Maharashtra Amendment) Bill 2026, he said.

Since the provisions are not contained in the BNS, these amendments are proposed, according to the statement of objects and reasons of the bill.

While Section 72 of the BNS concerns disclosure of the identities of survivors of certain sexual offences, it doesn't include

the victims of acid attacks, which have been covered as an offence under Section 124.

"The government of Maharashtra, therefore, considers it expedient to provide punishment for disclosure of identity of the victim of acid attack by amending the said section 72, suitably," the statement of objects and reasons of the bill said.

Similarly, BNS Section 75 covers acts that constitute offences of sexual harassment, but doesn't include sexual harassment by email, social media or through any other electronic or digital mode like offensive communication, threat to upload or disseminate any photograph, sound or video file, it said.

"The Government of Maharashtra considers it expedient to include such acts of sexual harassment and to provide punishment by amending section 75," it added.

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (Maharashtra Amendment) Bill 2026 also proposes rigorous punishment of three years with a fine or both for online sexual harassment.

The Shakti Criminal Laws (Maharashtra Amendment) Bill, 2020, has been inspired by the Disha Act of Andhra Pradesh and other similar laws.

planning schemes in Mumbai City district have been made available on the website *mahabhumi.gov.in* as well as on the District Collector's official website. A dedicated online system has been developed, enabling citizens to apply for property mutations from the comfort of their homes. Applicants can also track the status of their applications online, eliminating the need to visit government offices.

Digital Literacy is Essential for Women's Economic Empowerment – Aditi Tatkare



Mumbai

Through the 'Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin' scheme, many women have started small businesses using their savings. With the support of training, subsidies, and capital provided through the Women Development Corporation, these women are receiving significant assistance not only in establishing their businesses but also in bringing their products to the market. Minister for Women and Child Development, Aditi Tatkare, emphasized that providing digital financial literacy training is extremely important while working towards women's economic empowerment.

She was speaking at a capital and subsidy distribution ceremony organized in the hall of the Women Development Corporation, in collaboration with Learning Links Foundation and Mastercard. During the event, women entrepreneurs were provided with cheques, sewing machines, and equipment to start small-scale businesses such as home-based flour mills. District Coordination Officer of Raigad for the Maharashtra State Rural Livelihoods Mission, Vijay Dhoke, Mastercard Vice President Harish Babu S.N., Senior Manager Sarat Chandran, Learning Links Foundation Trustee Agni Nathan, Senior Program Manager Apurva Shinde, along with officials from various organizations, MAVIM, and the Ministry of Micro, Small and

Medium Enterprises were present.

Minister Aditi Tatkare stated that many women in rural areas face financial losses due to a lack of adequate understanding of digital processes while conducting online transactions. Therefore, she underlined the importance of making women digitally literate, especially those starting new businesses.

She also expressed the expectation that the work currently being carried out in Sindhudurg, Pune, and Raigad districts should be expanded across the state so that more rural women can access business opportunities. She further stated that the Women and Child Development Department, Women Development Corporation, and social organizations should work in coordination to extend these benefits to a larger number of women.

Several inspiring examples are emerging of women achieving self-reliance by systematically saving the funds received through the 'Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin' scheme. In Pune, Riddhi Wakanakar saved money for about six months and purchased raw materials such as soap base, Multani mitti, and pomegranate peel powder. Using these, she started a home-based Ayurvedic products business. Today, she is successfully managing both her household responsibilities and her small enterprise. She mentioned that the income generated from this business is helping her complete her daughter's education.

Property Mutation Goes Online in Mumbai; Relief for 3 Million Citizens

Mumbai

The property mutation process in Mumbai City district has now been digitized, bringing significant relief to citizens. Around 3 million residents of Mumbai are expected to benefit from this initiative, Revenue Minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule stated while informing the Legislative Council that, for the first time, property mutation services have been launched online in Mumbai.

The minister explained that due to differences between the computerized property card systems in Mumbai City and the rest of Maharashtra, several technical challenges had so far hindered the implementation of an online mutation process in Mumbai. However, considering the growing demand from citizens, the government has now accelerated the process.

Approximately 27,847 property records from 19 revenue divisions and 4 town

BMC Cracks Down on Illegal Pan-Patti Stalls in Goregaon

Seizure of Contraband Under Inspector Ketaki Desai's Leadership

Mumbai

In a firm move against unauthorised street vending, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) Encroachment Department (P-South Ward) launched a major drive against illegal pan-patti stalls in the Goregaon (East and West) areas.

Led by Inspector Ketaki Desai, teams conducted surprise raids with police assistance at multiple locations and seized large quantities of cigarettes, tobacco, gutkha, pan masala, and other addictive substances. The confiscated material has been transported to the BMC godown and will be disposed of as per prescribed procedures.

Several unauthorised pan-patti stalls were operating on road margins, footpaths, and public spaces in the P-South Ward's Goregaon area. These stalls were causing traffic congestion, sanitation issues, and—more seriously—posing a significant risk of addiction among youth and school

students.

Proactive and vigilant officer Inspector Ketaki Desai took serious note of the problem and has been consistently taking strict action. Regular surprise raids are conducted in coordination with the police, resulting in the seizure of all goods from such stalls. In addition to tobacco products, police have also recovered more dangerous narcotics like charas and ganja from some stalls, leading to immediate investigation and further action.

Local residents have warmly welcomed the campaign. "Now we can keep our young children and college students away from addiction. Officers like Ketaki Desai are making our area clean and safe," many locals stated. Parents expressed relief, noting that these stalls on school and college routes made it easy for children to come into contact with harmful substances. With the removal of the stalls and seizure of goods, they feel their children's future is now

more secure.

BMC officials have made it clear that removing unauthorised encroachments and curbing the sale of addictive substances remains their top priority. Under Inspector Ketaki Desai's guidance, the department continues to remain vigilant. Police have also responded promptly and extended full cooperation whenever information is received.

"Such actions will continue regularly to protect public health and ensure compliance with the law," officials asserted firmly.

The drive has already brought visible positive changes in the Goregaon area. Pedestrian pathways have become cleaner, and traffic movement has improved. Local elected representatives and social activists have also praised Inspector Ketaki Desai's sustained efforts.

Citizens strongly demand that such strict action should continue with the same rigor in the future.



'A premeditated plan': Rohit Pawar alleges internal conspiracy to seize NCP control weeks after Ajit Pawar's death

Mumbai

NCP (SP) MLA Rohit Pawar Wednesday alleged that a group of leaders wrote to the Election Commission of India (ECI) claiming changes to the party constitution to vest sweeping powers in a working president, and Sunetra Pawar later asked the poll body to disregard any such correspondence during the transition period after Ajit Pawar's demise.

Addressing a press conference at the legislative building campus, while showing the letters, Pawar said, "Within just 18 days of Ajit Pawar's death; Praful Patel, Sunil Tatkare and Brijmohan Srivastava wrote



to ECI on February 16, fraudulently claiming that the party constitution had been amended and sought that all powers be handed to the working president, who was Praful Patel".

"Neither Sunetra Pawar nor Parth Pawar was taken into confidence. No legislators were told about this. After becoming national

president, Sunetra Pawar learnt of this and wrote to ECI requesting that any correspondence between January 28 and when she became the party president should not be taken into consideration."

Recalling the sequence of statements by Union Minister and BJP leader Piyush Goyal, where he first asserted that Praful Patel had become party president and later termed it a mistake, Pawar alleged there had been a premeditated plan among certain leaders to wrest control of the party. "Patel and Tatkare wanted to take control of the party," he said, adding that instructions were issued by both of them

not to raise the issue of Ajit Pawar's accident during the ongoing Budget session of the Maharashtra Assembly.

He further alleged that certain BJP leaders, along with Patel and Tatkare, exerted pressure to stall a proposed press conference by Jay Pawar, Ajit Pawar's younger son.

Referring to his meeting with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Rohit said he was advised to file a First Information Report in a state where he could get justice, and a Zero FIR was subsequently registered in Karnataka. "Now that the FIR has been transferred to Maharashtra, we expect that

the investigation will take place," he said.

Demanding a criminal investigation, Pawar questioned whether the entire episode, from the alleged letters to attempts to control the party, was part of a larger conspiracy.

He also raised suspicions about an alleged attempt to conduct "black magic" or suspicious rituals outside Ajit Pawar's residence prior to his death, possibly involving a self-styled godman from Nashik. He also asked whether the January 28 plane crash was truly an accident or something more sinister, adding that discussions and inquiries were ongoing.

Republican Women's Front Stages Aggressive Protest Against Fake Baba Ashok Kharat in Mumbai; Demands Strict Action



Mumbai

The true face of Nashik-based self-styled 'fake baba' Ashok Kharat (also known as Captain Kharat), who allegedly exploited women's emotional vulnerability under the guise of religion and spirituality, has now been exposed. Nashik Police have arrested him on serious charges of sexual exploitation, adultery, blackmail, and fraud against multiple women. He is currently in police custody, with a total of six cases registered against him.

During the raid on his office, police recovered a pen drive containing obscene videos of 58 women, hidden cameras, fake snake and tiger skins, 'energised' rudraksha beads worth lakhs of rupees, and other evidence of fraud. The incident has sparked widespread outrage across Maharashtra, with strong demands for stringent action against such fake godmen.

Republican Party of India (RPI) National President and Union Minister of State for Social Justice, Hon. Ramdas Athawale, and National

President of the Republican Women's Front, Seematai Athawale, have expressed strong condemnation over the matter. "Those who shamelessly exploit women in the name of religion and spirituality, like this perverted fake baba, must receive the harshest punishment. The Maharashtra Government should conduct a thorough investigation and take strict action against Kharat and all his accomplices," they demanded.

In line with this, the Republican Party's Mumbai Provincial Women's Front organised a fierce protest demonstration on Monday, 23 March 2026, from 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM in front of the District Collector's Office near Chetna College, Bandra East, Mumbai. Women participants raised powerful slogans such as "Fake Baba Ashok Kharat Murdabad", "Hang the exploiters of women", and "Stop adultery in the name of religion", turning the area into a scene of intense protest. The demonstrators carried placards and banners strongly condemning Kharat's misdeeds.

The protest was organised and

led by Usha Ramlu, President of the Republican Party Women's Front, Mumbai Province. Prominent attendees included Mumbai Province President Siddharth Kasare, National Secretary of the Women's Front Sangeeta Kapure, Mumbai Province Treasurer Jayshree Khandagale, Organisational Organiser Panchshila Misal, Vice President Jayshree Kamble, Sona Kamble, South Central Mumbai District President Amit Tambe, North-West Mumbai District President Prakash Jadhav, Women's Front South Central Mumbai District President Swapnali Jadhav, North-West Mumbai District President Reshma Khan, North Mumbai District President Nisha Modi, and many other women activists including Rina Zaa, Chhayatai R. Raut, Kalpanatai Bawiskar, Ratnatai Shinde, Krishnatai Gaud, Ratantai Dhiware, Meghatai Bhosale, Munnitai, Saroj Singh, and Kusumtai Maurya.

The protesters submitted a written memorandum to the District Collector and the local Senior Police Inspector. In the memorandum, they urged the Maharashtra Government to conduct a detailed inquiry into Ashok Kharat and his associates and take stringent action. The key demands included treating the case seriously in the interest of eradicating superstition

and ensuring women's safety, and delivering justice to women trapped in the web of such fake godmen.

Nashik Police arrested Kharat on 18 March 2026. The court has remanded him in police custody until 29 March. The Special Investigation Team (SIT) has launched a probe, which also includes examining the 74-fold increase in income of his 'Shri Shivnika Sansthan', assets worth ₹200 crore, and his connections with political leaders. According to the allegations, Kharat lured women by claiming "I am the incarnation of Krishna, you are Radha", drugged them, and exploited them under the pretext of hypnosis and tantric rituals. Police evidence shows he used fake snakes, tiger skins, and remote-controlled devices to scare and control the victims.

The Republican Women's Front's protest has once again brought public anger over the Kharat case to the fore in Mumbai. "Such fake babas should get no support from society. Strict enforcement of the law is essential for women's safety," the protesters stated. They also appealed to all women's organisations and social institutions in Maharashtra to unite and raise their voices against the menace of fake godmen and spiritual fraud.

'One-team league won't work': Uddhav takes swipe at BJP as he retires from Council

Mumbai

The Council bid farewell to nine members whose terms end in May 2026, including Uddhav Thackeray, Neelam Gorhe, Amol Mitkari, Shashikant Shinde, Rajesh Rathod, Sandeep Joshi, Dadarao Keche, Ranjitsinh Mohite-Patil and Sanjay Kenekar.

A farewell event for nine retiring members of the Legislative Council on Tuesday turned into a light but sharp exchange of political remarks between Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray.

Taking a swipe at the BJP, Thackeray compared politics to a cricket league. "The Indian Political

League cannot run if one team starts taking players from all other teams. How will it work if only one team is left? Is that good for democracy?" he said.

Despite the criticism, the mood in the House remained friendly. Both Fadnavis and Thackeray said their political split had not ended their personal relationship.

Fadnavis called Thackeray the "son of Balasaheb Thackeray" and said he is "not political by nature" but a "sensitive artist" who takes decisions without worrying about political gains or losses. "We are still friends, but we took different political paths," he said.

Replying in a lighter tone, Thackeray said, "Aisi kaun si baat thi ki kisi aur ka haath pakadna pada?"

(What was it that made you hold someone else's hand?) drawing laughter in the House.

Shinde, who split from Thackeray in 2022, addressed him as "Uddhav Thackeray Saheb" and wished him well. He also recited a Marathi poem, saying he hoped they would meet again in the House. Thackeray responded with a folded-hands gesture, adding to the humour.

The Council bid farewell to nine members whose terms end in May 2026, including Uddhav Thackeray, Neelam Gorhe, Amol Mitkari, Shashikant Shinde, Rajesh Rathod, Sandeep Joshi, Dadarao Keche, Ranjitsinh Mohite-Patil and Sanjay Kenekar.

Bharat Petroleum says no shortage of fuel, urges citizen not to panic



New Delhi

A long queue of two-wheeler vehicles at a petrol pump as people wait to refill fuel, in Nagpur on Tuesday. Image credits/ANI Photo

State-owned fuel retailer Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) on Wednesday issued a public clarification, saying that India has sufficient fuel reserves and there is no shortage of petrol and diesel.

In its official X account, BPCL wrote, "Rumors of petrol and diesel shortages are completely unfounded. India has ample fuel reserves and supply chains are running normally."

"BPCL is fully operational and committed to uninterrupted fuel supply. Please don't

rely on rumours or crowd fuel stations and only rely on official sources for further information", it said.

The company said there is no shortage of fuel across the nation. India is a net exporter of petrol and diesel. "We have adequate stocks of crude oil, petrol, diesel, and aviation turbine fuel (ATF). Supply chains are operating smoothly without disruption," it added.

BPCL urged citizens not to panic or engage in unnecessary buying. Fuel availability remains stable and sufficient.

The public statement comes at a time when global oil markets are facing continuous volatility in the face of the conflict in West Asia.

Opposition Satisfied With Govt Efforts, Stands By Us: Rijiju After All-Party Meet On West Asia Crisis

New Delhi

Union Minister Kiren Rijiju on Wednesday said the Opposition parties have shown maturity by asserting at the all-party meeting over the West Asia crisis that they stand by the steps taken by the Centre in such a challenging situation.

Rijiju said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has appealed that the Indian Parliament should rise together in any challenging situation. "The Centre has addressed all queries and confusions in the all-party meeting held in New Delhi over the Middle East conflict, and the Opposition parties thanked the government for calling the meeting," he told reporters.

The minister said the members were satisfied after learning that the country has secured four ships of natural gas and crude oil through the Strait of Hormuz.

Sources said the Opposition told at the meeting that they want a debate under Rule 190



in Parliament on the situation in West Asia. CPI(M) MP John Brittas questioned on economic status, but External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said his stance was wrong. Jaishankar said more ships are about to arrive through the Strait of Hormuz.

The government said PM Modi has conveyed to US President Donald Trump that India wants the war to end soon. The Centre refused to comment on AAP MP Sanjay

Singh's questions on panic buying.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri gave a presentation at the meeting, where the Centre said it doesn't know how long the war will continue.

The government informed that domestic production of LPG has now increased from 28% to 60%. Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said five more oil tankers are likely to come.

Questions on caste to be notified before second phase of Census 2027: Govt

New Delhi

The questions on caste to be asked by enumerators will be notified before the commencement of the second phase of the Census 2027, the Rajya Sabha was informed on Wednesday.

In a written reply, Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai said the questions will be finalised on the basis of inputs and suggestions received from different ministries, departments, organisations, Census data users, etc., before each Census.

"The questions, including on caste, for the second phase will be finalised and notified as per the established procedure," he said.

The Census will be conducted in two phases -- houselisting and housing census from April to September 2026, and population enumeration (PE) in February 2027.

The houselisting and housing



census will systematically list all structures, houses and households throughout the country to provide a sound framework for the conduct of the population enumeration.

The Union Cabinet has approved Rs 11,718 crore for conducting the Census of India, 2027, which would include the caste enumeration for the first

time.

The 16th Census since Independence will be a fully digital exercise and will offer citizens the option of self-enumeration. The decadal exercise, scheduled for 2021, was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic across the country.

No Shortage Of Fertilisers, Stocks Fully Replenished: Union Minister Chouhan

Gorakhpur

Amid growing concerns over the Middle East crisis, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Wednesday said there is no shortage of fertilisers in the country, as the entire stock remains fully replenished.

He was in Gorakhpur to attend the 30th death anniversary of former MLA Om Prakash Paswan, father of Union Minister of State for Rural Development Kamlesh Paswan. Speaking to the media at Gorakhpur Airport, he emphasised that the nation is operating under the leadership of a Prime Minister who can find solutions to every crisis. "Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, neither farmers nor ordinary citizens of the country would face any form of crisis. Concerted efforts are being made to ensure that robust systems and arrangements remain in place moving forward. While challenges may exist, a resolution is invariably possible under the



Prime Minister's leadership," he added.

Earlier in the day, he convened a review meeting in Delhi and stressed shoring up fertiliser supplies, curbing black marketing and other measures. The meeting also sought to ensure strategic preparedness for the upcoming Kharif season, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare said in the statement.

Singh emphasised in the

meeting the need to ensure an equitable and uninterrupted supply of fertilisers and directed officials to expedite the work on 'Farmer IDs' to make the distribution system transparent, and that he would soon meet chief ministers and state agriculture ministers to coordinate the effort.

Further, instructions were issued to take strict action against black marketing and hoarding of fertilisers and seeds to profit from the global crisis. Chouhan said state governments will also be encouraged to take stringent measures in this direction.

The meeting also reviewed the availability of agro-chemicals and the essential gases required for Drying Seed, while the minister emphasised adequate packaging materials, particularly for milk and other agricultural products, amidst the global crisis. He also issued directives to coordinate with the Ministry of Petroleum and other relevant departments to ensure supplies.

No Gas, No Problem: Farmers In Rajasthan's Barmer Set Up Biogas Plants Using Cow Dung

Barmer

While the Iran-Israel conflict is precipitating an LPG gas crisis in several countries — including India — many farming families in Rajasthan's Barmer have shifted away from their dependence on LPG, opting instead to utilise biogas produced from easily available cow dung.

These rural families are able to keep their kitchen stoves burning without the hassle of booking LPG cylinders, long queues, or concerns regarding shortages. The biogas, generated from cattle dung, not only fulfills their culinary requirements, but also proves to be an environment-friendly alternative.

Khartaram, a farmer and resident of Ishrol village in the district, explains that he drew inspiration from observing biogas plants in the homes of neighbouring farmers to replicate it on his own farm. The results have been overwhelmingly positive. His household kitchen now relies entirely on biogas.

According to Khartaram, cow dung was previously underutilised — often simply discarded haphazardly — but now, that same waste material is being transformed into both cooking gas and organic fertiliser.

In neighbouring Janpaliya village, progressive farmer Hariram noted that while the gas crisis is

a topic of nationwide discussion, his household continues to cook exclusively using biogas. A few years ago, he installed a biogas plant — part-funded by a Rs 40,000 government subsidy — for which he personally contributed around Rs 15,000-17,000. Now, the gas is delivered directly to his kitchen via a dedicated pipeline, eliminating the physical burden of fetching LPG cylinders, as well as the hassle of booking refills. Furthermore, the residual waste generated by the plant is utilised as fertiliser for gardening and agricultural purposes.

Agricultural expert Dr Ravtaram said he too has been using a biogas plant in his home for the past 4-5 years. Given its success, more than 50 farmers across several villages in the district have installed these plants at their homes.

Every day, a large number of farmers visit these farmhouses to observe and understand the technology. According to Dr Ravtaram, a biogas plant consists of three main components: The inlet, where the cow dung is fed in; the central storage tank, where the dung accumulates and gets processed; and the outlet, from which the gas is released. The gas is then transported directly to the kitchen via a pipeline. Operating this plant requires a daily input of 15-20 kg of cow dung, which is sufficient to handle all daily household chores, such as cooking meals and preparing tea.



Parliament Passes Bill To Amend Law On Protection And Rights Of Transgender Persons



New Delhi

Parliament on Wednesday passed a bill to amend a law on protection and rights of transgender persons that proposes excluding social orientations from the ambit of the statute, with the Rajya Sabha giving its nod.

The bill, which seeks to amend Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Act 2019, also provides for graded punishment based on the gravity of harm inflicted on such people. The bill was passed in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

Replying to the debate on the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, in the Upper House, Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Virendra Kumar said the proposed legislation is an effort to take along all segments of society together.

He said that the bill aims to provide protection to only those who face discrimination due to biological issues. The minister asserted that the amendment will ensure that transgender persons continue to get legal recognition and protection.

The

Modi

government is committed to protecting all those people who are suffering due to biological reasons, he said, adding that their rights will be protected.

The minister opined that such persons should be brought into the mainstream so that they should not live in dejection. Highlighting the steps taken by the government for the welfare of the community, the minister said that transgender welfare boards have been set up in over 30 states. This bill will bring administrative clarity and protect the rights of transgender persons.

The bill was passed by a voice vote in the Rajya Sabha after rejecting amendments moved by the Opposition. The House did not approve the demands by the opposition for sending the bill to a select committee.

The bill seeks to give a precise definition of the term "transgender" and exclude "different sexual orientations and self-perceived sexual identities" from the proposed law's ambit. It was introduced in the Lok Sabha earlier this month.

Sufficient stocks of Petrol, Diesel available; No need for panic buying: Government

New Delhi

The country has sufficient stocks available with sufficient supply of petrol and diesel, a senior official confirmed on Tuesday. Speaking at an Inter-Ministerial Briefing on Recent Developments in West Asia, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, stated that all refineries currently operate at high capacity with adequate crude inventories.

"All the refineries are operating at high capacity with adequate crude inventories. We have sufficient stock of petrol and diesel. The domestic production of LPG has been stepped up in the refineries," she said.

Sharma addressed reports of supply disruptions that emerged following localized incidents of misinformation. She mentioned that some cases of rumour mongering came to the notice of the ministry yesterday, leading to observed panic buying in certain areas.

She clarified that oil marketing companies and



state officials already issued the necessary clarifications to the public. "In this regard, I request the citizens to not trust rumours and avoid panic buying. We have more than 1 lakh retail outlets and there is normal operation on all the retail outlets," she said.

The briefing also highlighted a push for expanding Piped Natural Gas (PNG) connections. Sharma informed that the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) "issued an order and has directed all the CGD entities to provide PNG connections to residential schools, colleges,

hostels, community kitchens, Anganwadi kitchens, etc. within 5 days, wherever pipeline infrastructure is available in near vicinity."

Sharma noted that about 7,500 domestic and commercial connections were provided yesterday alone across 110 geographical areas. She reminded the public that approximately "60 lakh such households where PNG connection can be provided. And all these people have been requested and appealed to take PNG connection as soon as possible."

Regarding the LPG sector,

Sharma acknowledged that the geopolitical situation affected supply, but confirmed that several cargoes were already lined up. She stated that "no dry out has been reported at the LPG distributorships also. Although yesterday we also observed some panic booking, but the deliveries were normal".

On March 21, the government increased the allocation of commercial LPG to approximately "50%" of the requirement. This move prioritized essential sectors including "restaurants, dhabas, hotels, industrial canteens, food processing industry, dairy, subsidized canteens and outlets run by the state government, and local bodies for food, community kitchens and migrant labour."

Sharma also highlighted that under the Ujjwala scheme, 11 lakh connections were provided to migrant labourers, with 20,000 small 5 kg cylinders distributed yesterday alone.

To maintain market stability, the Centre has requested state governments

to increase enforcement against illegal activities.

"In about 32 states, a control room and a district level monitoring committee has been set up. Under the enforcement action, about 3,400 raids have taken place yesterday and about 1,000 cylinders have been seized. Raids were carried out in Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Telangana," she said.

Apart from this, the secretary also disclosed that the team of oil marketing companies was also active and about 1,500 surprise inspections had taken place. "Till yesterday, about 642 FIRs have been filed and 155 people have been arrested. OMCs have also issued a show-cause notice to about 250 distributors and some have been suspended," she said.

Sharma concluded by stating, "Finally, I would like to reiterate my point and request everyone not to believe in rumours. There are sufficient stocks available. There is sufficient supply of petrol and diesel."

50 Indian Seafarers Repatriated From Gulf In Last 24 Hours: Ministry Of Shipping

New Delhi

The Ministry of Shipping on Wednesday said that 50 Indian seafarers have been repatriated from the Gulf region in the last 24 hours while 540 Indian crew in 20 Indian vessels are currently safe.

Providing an update on maritime movements at the Inter-Ministerial Briefing on Recent Developments in West Asia, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, special secretary in the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways said port operations are normal and no congestion has been reported anywhere. "The Ministry continues to closely monitor shipping movements, port operations, safety of Indian seafarers and continuity of maritime trade in view of the evolving situation



in West Asia," Sinha said.

According to him, "Twenty Indian-flagged vessels with around 540 Indian seafarers remain in the western Gulf region. The Directorate General of Shipping (DG Shipping) is closely monitoring the situation in coordination with ship owners, agencies and Indian Missions. The DG Shipping Control Room has

handled 4,108 phone calls and 7,909 emails from seafarers and their families, of which, 187 calls and 462 emails were in the last 24 hours," Sinha said. He said that DG Shipping has facilitated safe repatriation of over 635 Indian seafarers, including 50 in the past 24 hours, from airports and various regional locations.

"As confirmed by State Maritime Boards including Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Puducherry, no congestion has been reported across ports. Ports are closely monitoring vessel movements and cargo operations, with additional space already created at key ports," Sinha said. Elaborating on the ongoing outreach extended through Indian

Missions to the Indian nationals in the Gulf region, Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson of External Affairs Ministry, said conversation with global leaders and countries have continued. "Yesterday Prime Minister Narendra Modi received a call from US President Donald Trump. Both leaders exchanged views on the evolving situation in West Asia and agreed to remain in touch regarding ongoing efforts to promote peace and stability in the region," Jaiswal said.

Also, PM Modi received a call from President of Sri Lanka, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, during which both leaders discussed the evolving situation in West Asia, particularly disruptions impacting global energy security.

Iran Agreed Not To Have Nuclear Weapon, Sent 'Very Big Present' To US: Trump

Washington

US President Donald Trump said Iran agreed never to have a nuclear weapon and sent a "significant prize" related to the Strait of Hormuz even as he declared victory in the three-week war.

Speaking to reporters at the Oval Office on Tuesday, Trump claimed Iran was keen to "make a deal" and indicated that Vice President J D Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Special envoy on Middle East Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner were leading the negotiations.

The President said that the current Iranian leadership had already undergone significant changes.

"It's what we really have, regime change. You know, this is a change in the regime because the leaders are all very different from the ones that we started off with that created all those problems," he said.

Earlier, Trump endorsed a social media post by Pakistan



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on facilitating the talks between Iran and the US. Sharif also offered to host the talks for a comprehensive settlement of the ongoing conflict.

"I don't want to say in advance, but they've agreed they will never have a nuclear weapon," Trump told reporters after the swearing in ceremony of Markwayne Mullin

as the new secretary for Department of Homeland Security. Trump said the Iranian leadership gave the US a "significant prize" related to the Strait of Hormuz and the flow of oil.

"They are going to make a deal. They did something yesterday that was amazing, actually. They gave us a present. And the present arrived today. It was a very big present worth

a tremendous amount of money," the US President said.

"I am not going to tell you what that present is, but it was a very significant prize. And they gave it to us," he said. "So that meant one thing to me, we're dealing with the right people. No, it wasn't nuclear weapons. It was oil and gas related," Trump said. The US President asserted that the war against Iran has been won.

"I don't like to say this. We've won this. This war has been won... It's like we're not winning a war where they have no Navy and they have no Air Force and they have no nothing. And we literally have planes flying over Tehran and other parts of their country. They can't do a thing about it," Trump said. He said the US obliterated Iran's nuclear potential, which could have been used against American allies in the Middle East.

"We obliterated it. Just obliterated their nuclear potential. You would have had them having two weeks after that attack, had we not made the attack (using B-2 bombers). They would have had a nuclear weapon. They would have absolutely used it. And they would have used it on the entire Middle East, including Israel," Trump said.

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said never in history has a modern military been so rapidly and historically obliterated, defeated from day one.

"Never in history has a modern military, Iran had a modern military, a modern Navy, a modern Air Force, modern air defences, leadership, massive bunker. Never has a modern military been so rapidly and historically obliterated, defeated from day one with overwhelming firepower," Hegseth said.

At Least 1,000 US Troops From 82nd Airborne Set To Deploy To Mideast

Washington

The U.S. military is preparing to deploy at least 1,000 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division to the Middle East in the coming days, according to three people with knowledge of the plans.

The unit is considered the Army's emergency response force and can typically be deployed on short notice. The force would include a battalion of the 1st Brigade Combat Team as well as Maj. Gen. Brandon Tegtmeier, the division's commander, and division staff, according to the people, who spoke Tuesday on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military plans or private conversations.

It's the latest addition of American troops to the Iran war effort after U.S. officials recently said thousands of Marines aboard several Navy ships

will be heading to the region.

While the Marine units are trained in missions that include supporting U.S. embassies, evacuating civilians and disaster relief, the soldiers of the 82nd Airborne, based at Fort Bragg in North Carolina, are trained to parachute into hostile or contested territory to secure key territory and airfields.

When asked about the deployment, White House spokeswoman Anna Kelly deferred to the Pentagon but noted that "President Trump always has all military options at his disposal."

Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee are scheduled to receive a classified briefing from Pentagon officials Wednesday on Capitol Hill where the potential deployment is expected to be discussed, according to a U.S.

official who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. The New York Times earlier reported the possible deployment of the 82nd Airborne to the Middle East. U.S. officials previously have said the Japan-based USS Tripoli and the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit had been ordered to the Middle East — shifting them from exercises near Taiwan. They also confirmed that the Navy has rushed to deploy a set of ships carrying a rapid-response Marine force to the Middle East from their home post of San Diego. The pair of Marine Expeditionary Units will add about 5,000 Marines and thousands of sailors to the region, where the U.S. already has about 50,000 troops.

The troops are being added just as the Trump administration says it has begun negotiations with Iran to

end the war. Pakistan offered to host diplomatic talks, but Iran has denied that any negotiations are taking place.

While speaking Tuesday at the White House, Trump said the U.S. is "in negotiations right now" and his envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner are involved in the talks, along with Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Vice President J D Vance. "We have a number of people doing it," Trump said. "And the other side, I can tell you, they'd like to make a deal." Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi's office said he has been discussing the war this week with several counterparts. But Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, the speaker of Iran's parliament, denied Trump's claim of direct talks, and an Iranian military spokesman issued a newly defiant statement vowing to fight "until complete victory."

Iran Receives 15-Point US Ceasefire Proposal; Israel Says It Dropped More Than 15,000 Bombs On Iran

Tehran

Iranian Military mocks Donald Trump's claims of negotiations with Tehran, telling him that Americans were "only negotiating with themselves", while Iran's foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi's office confirms that he is in talks with several countries, including Egypt, Pakistan and Turkey, for a potential ceasefire.

These and other conflicting developments continue to keep the situation fluid as the US-Israel-Iran war nears a month. Attempts are being made by "friendly countries" led by Pakistan to bring Tehran and the US to the negotiating table. A 15-point US proposal has reached Iran through intermediaries from



Pakistan, Associated Press reported on Wednesday afternoon, though Tehran dismisses the idea of

negotiating with Washington.

Israel, meanwhile, says it is not part of the negotiations as it continues

to target Iran and Lebanon, hitting multiple locations in both countries, while its defence minister stated that it dropped more than 15000 bombs on Iran so far.

At the same time, missiles and drones from Iran and allied groups have targeted sites in northern Israel. Washington is also preparing to send more troops, at least 1,000 from the 82nd Airborne Division, to the Mideast in the coming days. AP further reported that the Pentagon is also in the process of deploying two Marine units that will add about 5,000 Marines and thousands of sailors to the region. The moves are being framed as Trump manoeuvring to give himself "max flexibility" on what he will do next.

Sharif Briefs Saudi Crown Prince As Pakistan Pushes To Mediate US-Iran Talks

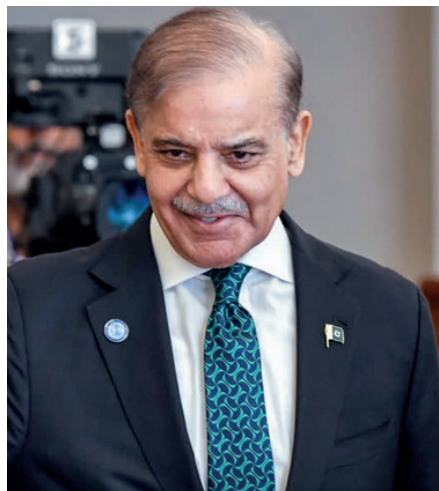
Islamabad

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday briefed Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman about Islamabad's diplomatic efforts to de-escalate the tenuous West Asia situation. The prime minister said in a statement on X that he spoke with the crown prince and discussed the regional situation in addition to exchanging traditional Eid greetings.

The call comes a day after Sharif offered to host talks between the US and Iran for a comprehensive settlement of the ongoing conflict. Sharif said that during the call, he appreciated the Kingdom's restraint and, "I stressed the urgent need for de-escalation, an end to hostilities, and unity in the ranks of the Ummah".

"I also briefed His Royal Highness on Pakistan's diplomatic outreach efforts for regional peace and stability. We agreed to remain in close coordination," he said. Sharif also reiterated Pakistan's strong condemnation of the recent attacks on the Kingdom and reaffirmed Islamabad's unwavering solidarity and unequivocal support for Saudi Arabia in these challenging times.

During the conversation, he conveyed warm Eid-ul-Fitr greetings



to the Crown Prince as well as King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and to the royal family and the brotherly people of Saudi Arabia. In an X post on Tuesday, Sharif said that Islamabad was "ready and honoured" to facilitate "meaningful and conclusive talks" between the US and Iran to end the ongoing conflict.

Hours later, US President Donald Trump shared Sharif's post on his Truth Social platform. According to media reports, the US on Tuesday sent Iran a 15-point plan and ceasefire proposal to end the war in the Middle East. The peace plan was shared with Iranian officials via Pakistan.

Russia Says It Shot Down Almost 400 Ukrainian Drones As Moscow And Kyiv Escalate Aerial Barrages

Kyiv

Russian air defences downed 389 incoming Ukrainian drones, Russia's Defence Ministry said Wednesday, in what was the largest reported overnight attack on Russian regions and Crimea since Moscow's forces invaded Ukraine more than four years ago.

The drones were stopped over 13 Russian regions as well as the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014. The attack underlined the growing capability of Ukraine's domestically developed and manufactured long-range drones.

It came a day after Russia fired almost 1,000 drones and 34 missiles at civilian areas of Ukraine in the space of 24 hours, extending its usual nighttime barrage into daylight hours in one of its biggest aerial attacks of the war. At least 6 people were killed and around 50 people were injured, Ukrainian authorities said.

Alexander Drozdenko, governor of the Leningrad region north of Moscow, said 56 drones were shot down there, and a fire broke out in the Baltic Sea port of Ust-Luga as a result of Ukraine's attack.

Ukrainian forces also carried out a



missile strike on the Belgorod region on the border with Ukraine overnight, damaging energy infrastructure, its Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said. Power, water and heating supplies were disrupted, he said. On Tuesday, Russia fired 948 drones of various types at Ukraine.

Russia launched swarms of Iranian-designed Shahed drones, hitting at least seven cities, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said on X. Russia also launched 23 cruise missiles and seven ballistic missiles at Ukraine during the night, hitting at least 10 locations across the country, according to the air force.

Trump's climbdown: Strategic pause raises hopes of a breakthrough

US President Donald Trump's announcement that Washington and Iran have resumed talks is a welcome sign of respite after weeks of military attacks and counter-attacks. The prospect of a diplomatic breakthrough has raised hopes of de-escalation of hostilities in West Asia, even though optimism must be tempered with caution, especially considering Trump's tendency to jump the gun. Taking his foot off the pedal, he has extended his deadline for Iran to reopen the crucial Strait of Hormuz to international shipping, saying that the US would hold off on threatened strikes against Iranian power plants for five days. His climbdown has come after the US and Iran traded threats over energy targets; had the escalation happened, it would have had catastrophic consequences for the region and beyond.

The US President has stated that his Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff and close aide Jared Kushner are talking to "a top Iranian official". Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, has dismissed Trump's



claim that Washington-Tehran discussions are underway. The ministry has described his remarks as an attempt to buy time for further US military operations and influence energy markets amid soaring prices due to the conflict.

Mistrust, flip-flops and fragile commitments continue to define US-Iran relations. The absence of detailed disclosures by Trump raises two key questions: are the current talks a concrete step toward de-escalation, or merely a tactical pause shaped by immediate political and military pressures? And what is Israel's role in these developments? Complex disputes, particularly those rooted in decades of hostility, rarely have a swift resolution. Overpromising could undermine Trump's credibility if talks stall or collapse. Clarity and transparency are a must to ensure that renewed diplomatic engagement makes a visible difference on the ground.

// sātyāsya pārāmām nidhānām //

**"THE BEST WAY
TO PREDICT**

**THE FUTURE IS TO
CREATE IT."**

— PETER DRUCKER

Iran's gambit: Bid to hit Diego Garcia sends strong message

THE Israel-US-Iran war has entered a critical phase with Tehran's audacious attempt to strike Diego Garcia, an American-British military base in the Indian Ocean — around 4,000 km from the Iranian mainland. Iran launched two intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) towards the island; neither hit their mark — one was intercepted, while the other failed mid-flight. Even in failure, the message was unmistakable: Iran has the intent and the capability to carry out strikes far beyond West Asia. Its broader strategy is evident: rattle the US by posing a threat to vital installations rather than targeting only regional

adversaries. It's feared that the war will no longer remain confined to the region; a wider international confrontation is not ruled out. No wonder Israeli military chief Eyal Zamir said European capitals such

as Berlin, Paris and Rome were within striking distance of such missiles.

The IRBMs have a range



of 3,000-5,500 km, while intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) go beyond 5,500 km. This escalation comes amid US President Donald Trump's declaration that Iran's power

plants would be "obliterated" if it does not fully reopen the Strait of Hormuz within 48 hours. In its turn, Iran has warned that it would attack American infrastructure, including energy facilities in the Gulf, if the US carries out this threat. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, however, is noncommittal on whether his country would join the US — as and when Trump orders strikes on Iran's energy grid.

The growing differences between Trump and Netanyahu are no secret. The US President urged Israel to refrain from repeated attacks on critical Iranian economic targets like gas fields. Divergent strategies are taking their toll on coordination between the allies. Moreover, Britain's assertion

that it would not be dragged into the war — despite Iran's Diego Garcia gambit — is set to make the going even tougher for Trump.

Printer-Publisher &
Editor In Chief

Sanjay Mangesh Bhaire
Allied publication Across Mumbai
(Marathi & Hindi)

Managing Editor
Suchita Bhaire

Editor
Sreeraj N.

Legal Advisor
Adv. Ameet Mehta

Special Correspondents
K V Raman
Vinod Raghavan
Asha Menon

Chief Designer
Vikram Jadav

Cartoonist
Sunil Vinekar

Photographers
Ajit Raut
Bhooshan Koyande

Contributors and Advertising
Satish Shetty
Savita Tiwari
J D Rodrigues

Circulation Dept.
Dinesh Gupta
Suchit Kumar Saytonday

United Nations Losing Relevance

The growing military conflicts in West Asia and wars like the Russia-Ukraine conflict have not only disrupted global supply chains but have also created an economic crisis due to rising geopolitical tensions. The sharp increase in energy prices has destabilized the international trade system, while pressure on currency exchange rates is affecting economies across the world. Today, every country—whether developed or developing—is struggling with challenges such as inflation, unemployment, and slow economic growth.

The changing global geopolitics is not only affecting political balance but is also deeply impacting the global economy, trade, energy supply, and the role of international institutions. In such circumstances, it was expected that the United Nations would maintain global stability by facilitating dialogue between nations, preventing conflicts, and promoting diplomatic solutions.

However, the reality is that the United Nations has not fully lived up to these expectations. Increasing mistrust among major powers, conflicts of interest, and power politics have rendered institutions like the UN Security Council ineffective in taking decisive action. As a result, wars are not only prolonged but their impact on the global economy continues to deepen.

During rising tensions in West Asia between Iran, Israel,

and other regional powers, the warnings issued by the United Nations have remained largely symbolic. On one hand, there are calls for peace and dialogue from UN platforms; on the

the UN's response remains relatively slow and procedural, leading to a decline in its credibility and relevance.

The United Nations was established after World War

Emerging economies such as India, China, and Brazil are playing crucial roles in global politics. In this context, it has become essential to restructure and strengthen the

merely inactivity but structural constraints, particularly the politics of veto power, which repeatedly obstruct efforts toward global peace. First and foremost, the UN Security Council should be expanded to provide proper representation to countries like India, Japan, Germany, and Brazil, thereby reflecting current global realities.

Reforms in the veto power system are also necessary to ensure that no single country can block efforts for global peace. The decision-making process should be made faster, more transparent, and accountable, enabling timely and effective action during crises. The United Nations has played a vital role in humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, and the protection of international law.

Agencies like the World Food Programme and UNICEF continue to safeguard the lives of millions around the world. However, changing global conditions demand that the United Nations be made more effective and capable. Accelerating decision-making, balancing geopolitical influences, and formulating policies that consider global economic interests are the needs of the hour. The United Nations is not just an institution; it is a symbol of humanity's hope for a peaceful world beyond war and conflict. To keep this hope alive, it must be strengthened—not abandoned.



other, missile attacks, military actions, and civilian casualties continue to rise on the ground. This gap reflects not just diplomatic weakness but also the reality of global power dynamics, where powerful nations act according to their strategic interests and often ignore international appeals.

It is evident that the United Nations' diplomatic processes are not aligned with the fast-paced and complex nature of modern warfare. While conflicts have evolved rapidly,

II to promote cooperation, dialogue, peace, and to prevent future wars. In its early decades, it played several important roles. However, in today's changing global environment, its structure and functioning are no longer in sync with current realities. At that time, global power was concentrated in a few countries, whereas today the world has become multipolar. The influence of countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America has significantly increased.

United Nations in line with present global realities so that it can regain its effectiveness and guide the world toward a safer, more balanced, and progressive direction. The role of responsible and democratic nations like India is especially important in this process. India should not only take an active part in reform efforts but also provide leadership in building a balanced, inclusive, and just global order.

The biggest challenge facing the United Nations is not

Bengal duel: SIR, officers' transfers create discord



THE battle lines are hardening in the run-up to the West Bengal Assembly elections, which will be held in two phases (April 23 and 29). The bitter fight between the Trinamool Congress and the BJP is inseparable from the no-holds-barred Centre-State conflict. The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls continues to be a contentious issue. Confusion and uncertainty persist among voters even after the publication of the first supplementary list on Monday night. It contains the names of around 29 lakh electors whose cases have been adjudicated by judicial officers. The fate of over 30 lakh voters still hangs in the balance.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has upped the ante against the Election Commission of India (ECI), accusing it of crossing all "boundaries of decency and constitutional propriety". She has alleged that since the start of the SIR exercise in the state, the ECI has acted in a biased manner, ignoring ground realities and public welfare. The

poll body led by Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, however, insists that it is doing its job of purifying voter lists by removing duplication and ineligible entries. Amid the slanging match, lakhs of eligible voters are at risk of being left out of the electoral process. The gruelling SIR is also taking its toll on booth-level officers, many of whom have succumbed to work pressure.

The recent transfers and postings of key administrative and police officers have also raised eyebrows. The controversial move has been challenged in the Calcutta High Court. The ECI faces the onerous task of ensuring a level playing field, even as the situation is also getting tougher for Central forces and the police. West Bengal is no stranger to poll-related violence, and the inevitable is expected this time too. The stakes are so high that both the Trinamool Congress and the BJP will give no quarter. The animosity is set to keep Bengal on edge over the next five weeks.

Challenge of Withstanding the Heat of War

In view of the West Asia crisis, the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security chaired by the Prime Minister deliberated on all possible measures to ensure the availability of essential commodities for the public, such as petrol, diesel, gas, electricity, and fertilizers. Since the war in West Asia is affecting the entire world, it is natural for the government to focus on ensuring uninterrupted supply, stable logistics, and efficient distribution across the country. The Modi government will also need to coordinate effectively with states to prevent black marketing and hoarding of essential goods. At the same time, efforts must be intensified to boost exports of Indian goods and to develop new export destinations.

The prolonged war in West Asia appears to be increasing economic challenges not only globally but also for India. A recent report by Goldman Sachs has revised India's growth forecast for the financial year 2026-27 from 7 percent down to 6.5 percent. ICICI Bank has also lowered its growth estimate from 7.5 percent to 7 percent.

According to rating agencies, rising global crude oil prices and supply disruptions may lead to a sharp increase in India's energy import bill. Additionally, declining exports and rising inflation are posing risks to the stability of the Indian economy.

The expanding conflict involving Iran, Israel, and the United States is already causing disruptions in the supply of domestic and commercial LPG cylinders in several parts of the country. Exporters are also facing increasing difficulties. A fall in the Sensex and a weakening rupee against the dollar have also been observed. Investors seem to be withdrawing funds from Indian markets, and the impact of the war is becoming visible in the financial sector. Investor wealth has declined, and

the market capitalization of Indian companies has dropped significantly.

Such a decline was last seen during the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. However, despite the adverse effects of war, India has certain strong economic buffers that can protect its

following diplomatic talks between India and Iran, Iran has allowed Indian-flagged oil and gas tankers to safely pass through the Strait of Hormuz.

Despite the sharp rise in global crude oil prices, domestic petrol and diesel prices have remained stable. Retail inflation is below the Reserve Bank of India's target of 4 percent. India's large food grain reserves, strategic petroleum reserves, and sufficient stock of essential medicines act as key economic strengths. Record food grain production ensures food security for the country's population and also supports supply to several needy nations. Last year, India achieved a record production of 357 million tonnes of food grains, and even higher production is expected this year. The Food Corporation of India is estimated to have around 18.2 million tonnes of wheat in the central pool by April 2026. Currently, more than 800 million vulnerable people in the country are receiving free food grains.

During the COVID-19 crisis, food reserves proved to be a major support, and once again, amid rising global food prices and supply disruptions caused by the Iran-Israel-US conflict, India's strong food production is providing relief.

India is also working on alternative strategies to increase crude oil imports from countries such as the United States and Russia. Earlier, India imported crude oil from 27 countries, but this number has now increased to around 40. Concerns regarding essential medicines are also limited. India is the third-largest producer of medicines globally and ranks first in generic drug production. Additionally, India has foreign exchange reserves exceeding 700 billion dollars, enabling it to effectively manage economic risks.



growth from a severe shock. The government has implemented the Essential Commodities Act and has taken several strategic steps to control inflation and reduce its impact on the common man. These include increasing buffer stocks of essential food items, strategic sale of food grains in the open market, and facilitating necessary imports.

To support exporters, the government has introduced the Resilience and Logistic Intervention for Export Facilitation (RELIEF) scheme. Its objective is to assist exporters facing rising freight costs, higher insurance premiums, and risks associated with war. Under this scheme, MSME exporters are expected to benefit significantly. The government will also bear the insurance costs for goods exported to Gulf countries. Notably,

Uniform bias- SC restores justice denied to women officers

THE Supreme Court's ruling on Tuesday on women officers and permanent commission is not merely corrective; it is a damning indictment of how institutional bias can survive even after landmark judgments. Six years after the watershed 2020 verdict promised equality, the court has once again had to intervene. This time, it has exposed how discrimination was quietly embedded in evaluation systems. At the heart of the ruling lies a troubling revelation: women officers were assessed with the implicit assumption that they had no long-term future in the armed forces. Their annual confidential reports (ACRs) were graded "casually", the SC noted, because evaluators presumed they would not be considered for career progression. This skewed appraisal system "adversely affected their overall merit", effectively locking them out of permanent commission despite comparable service.

The SC's response is significant. By invoking its extraordinary powers, it has granted deemed completion of 20 years of service to the affected officers, ensuring pensionary benefits even where careers were prematurely cut short. This is both restitution and recognition that



discrimination in process is as damaging as denial in policy. The judgment also underscores a deeper malaise. The armed forces, despite judicial clarity since the Babita Puniya case (2020), have struggled — or resisted — to internalise gender parity. What emerges is systemic

bias disguised as neutral procedure: opaque criteria, subjective assessments and shifting benchmarks.

This moment, thus, is more about institutional accountability. Courts can open doors, but they cannot ensure fairness within closed systems. That

requires a cultural shift within the military establishment itself. The message from the Bench is clear: equality cannot be selectively implemented. If merit is to remain the cornerstone of military service, it must first be freed from prejudice.

S&P Global lifts India FY27 GDP forecast to 7.1%, raises growth outlook

New Delhi

S&P Global has raised India's GDP growth forecast for FY27 by 40 basis points to 7.1%, signalling confidence in the country's economic momentum despite global uncertainties.

The ratings agency also upgraded its projections for the following years, increasing FY28 growth by 20 basis points to 7.2% and FY29 by 20 basis points to 7.0%, pointing to sustained expansion over the medium term.

On the policy front, Reserve Bank of India is expected to keep interest rates unchanged, maintaining a neutral stance in the base case as it balances growth and inflation dynamics.

However, S&P flagged emerging risks from rising fuel prices and elevated crude oil levels, which could push inflation higher.

Consumer price inflation is now projected to rise to 4.3% in FY27 from 2.5% in FY26, reflecting these pressures.

After Zomato, Swiggy hikes platform fee by 17 pc to Rs 17.58 per order



Mumbai

Food delivery platform Swiggy has hiked the platform fee it charges users to Rs 17.58 per order, its app showed on Tuesday, days after rival Zomato increased the charges.

Swiggy had last hiked its platform fee in September last year.

The company has now raised it to Rs 17.58 per order inclusive of GST, whereas rival Zomato charges Rs 14.90 on a pre-GST basis.

The latest round of increase by Swiggy brings the platform fee charged by both food delivery players effectively at par with each other (to around Rs 17.58 per order).

On March 20, Zomato hiked the platform fee it charges users by Rs 2.40 to Rs 14.90 per order on a pre-GST basis

Platform fees are fixed, per-order charges in addition to delivery and restaurant fees. To cover operating costs, technology maintenance, and customer support for services.

The latest hike in platform fees is set to make ordering food costlier for millions of users across the country. The increase in platform fees by Zomato and Swiggy comes at a time when crude oil prices are rising due to the West Asia conflict. Higher fuel costs are expected to drive up the cost of delivery operations

India may deepen fertiliser import diversification with China, Russia, Canada as key options

New Delhi

India may deepen its fertiliser import diversification strategy by identifying sourcing options across China, Russia and Canada, while engaging with Iran to safeguard supply chains amid global disruptions, two senior government officials have said.

China may emerge as a swing supplier for urea in case of shortfalls, while supplies from Russia could be routed through alternative channels and long-term sourcing arrangements with Canada may be expanded to ensure stability, they said.

"Urea imports are already quite diversified. If there is any disruption, India can increase procurement from other major producers. China is a very large producer of urea, and if required we can import more from there. Supplies can also come from countries such as Russia through alternative routes," one of the officials told Moneycontrol on condition of anonymity.

China a fallback option

Diversification will allow India to shift sourcing, depending on supply disruptions or logistical constraints, the officials said.

"Even if disruptions occur in certain regions, fertiliser imports are not dependent on a single country. Supplies can be sourced from different producers, including countries like China and Russia. If supply is affected from one source, India can procure additional quantities from producers like China," he



said.

"The government is also trying to maintain good relations with Iran so that India's supplies are least affected."

Maintenance shutdowns

At home, the government has taken various measure to improve production and availability.

"Plants usually go for maintenance shutdowns during this period. We have asked companies to pre-pone their shutdown schedules, so that we can manage production and the situation better, the second official said.

The government is also encouraging alternatives such as nano-fertilisers and other technologies to reduce dependence on conventional imports.

"We are trying to diversify our supply. We already import from Russia and are also engaging with Canada through long-term arrangements. At the same time, we are encouraging alternatives such as nano fertilisers and other technologies... countries

we could tap into to secure our fertiliser supplies," the official said.

Global tenders

The Centre has already indicated that it is following a diversified approach to fertiliser imports.

"Regarding our fertiliser situation at this point in time, especially for Kharif 2026, we have adequate stocks; we are comfortable. The department of fertilisers has also put out global tenders well in advance in anticipation of the current situation, and these have received very good responses. We expect the bulk of the quantities ordered from a variety of sources to arrive by the end of March," external affairs ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at an inter-ministerial press briefing.

"Having said that, let me say: yes, we have a diversified approach towards procuring fertiliser imports, and we continue to remain in touch with several countries in that regard," he added.

Alcohol industry body CIABC urges States to revise liquor prices amid rising global input costs

New Delhi

The Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC) urged state governments to consider price revisions for Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) as geopolitical tensions in West Asia drove up input and logistics costs. The industry body noted that the volatility in global crude and fuel prices, alongside significant disruptions in shipping routes, created a broad-based

increase in expenses across various sectors in India.

According to a press release by the CIABC, the alcoholic beverage industry faced sustained cost pressures across its value chain even before recent escalations. The ongoing conflict in West Asia added further inflationary strain on supply chains, specifically impacting petroleum products, freight, and logistics. The industry also managed the

consequences of a rising US Dollar against the Indian Rupee, which caused additional spikes in the cost of production.

Anant S Iyer, Director General of the CIABC, stated that in addition to higher fuel and transportation expenses, manufacturers witnessed significant cost escalations in packaging materials such as PET, aseptic formats, and other polymer-linked inputs.

Private Sector and Taxpayers Are Key Pillars of Nation-Building, Says MP Naveen Jindal

New Delhi

Member of Parliament from Kurukshetra, Shri Naveen Jindal, today strongly endorsed the Finance Bill 2026 in the Lok Sabha, describing it as a transformative and forward-looking roadmap that will shape the future of 140 crore Indians. He emphasised that India's growth story is being powered by the combined strength of its taxpayers and the private sector--both of whom are indispensable partners in nation-building.

Calling the Finance Bill more than just a fiscal exercise, Shri Jindal said it lays the foundation for inclusive and sustainable development by empowering farmers, enabling youth, enhancing women's dignity, and securing long-term economic resilience. "This bill is not for any one party; it is for the future of the nation, and its benefits will reach every citizen," he stated.

Highlighting the critical role of the private sector, Shri Jindal underscored that it contributes over 80% of employment and more than 60% of India's GDP, while also driving innovation and global competitiveness. He noted that India's IT exports have surpassed USD 200 billion, the pharmaceutical sector serves over 200 countries,



and the country today has more than one lakh recognised startups and over 100 unicorns. "The private sector is not just a means of profit-making; it is a strong pillar of nation-building," he said.

Shri Jindal also called for a shift in mindset towards taxpayers, advocating for a more respectful and citizen-centric approach. He highlighted improved compliance trends, noting that the GST taxpayer base has crossed 1.5 crore and gross GST collections in FY 2024-25 exceeded ₹22 lakh crore. "A taxpayer is not a suspect, but a partner in nation-building. Their contributions must be respected," he emphasised.

Drawing from his personal background, Shri

Jindal compared India's economic resilience to the perseverance of farmers, who continue to work despite challenges. He noted that India has demonstrated a strong recovery in the face of COVID-19, geopolitical tensions, and global supply chain disruptions.

Emphasising sustainability and quality of life, he advocated for greater promotion of natural farming to reduce dependence on chemical fertilisers, lower subsidy burdens, and ensure healthier food systems. He stressed that development must be measured not only by GDP, but by improvements in everyday life. "We must look beyond numbers and focus on what we eat, the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the overall quality of life," he said.

While welcoming the provisions of the Finance Bill, Shri Jindal also proposed key reforms to strengthen the taxation framework, including the introduction of joint tax filing for families, institutionalising dispute resolution mechanisms such as "Vivad se Vishwas," promoting faster and more structured resolution of tax disputes, and ensuring that tax notices are simple, transparent, and respectful in nature.

Byculla's Transformation Drives Demand for Luxury Living in Central Mumbai

Mumbai

Byculla is fast emerging as one of Mumbai's most coveted residential destinations, a rare enclave where the charm of old-world heritage blends seamlessly with contemporary urban living. With smooth connectivity to major business districts and ongoing infrastructure upgrades, the neighbourhood offers unmatched convenience at the very heart of the city. Life in Byculla is defined by exclusivity, comfort, and sophistication. From breathtaking views of the city skyline to thoughtfully designed developments, every detail reflects a higher standard of living tailored for discerning residents.

Infrastructure and Central Connectivity Strengthened Byculla's Appeal

The strategic location of Byculla ensures close proximity to South Mumbai and key business centres such as Lower Parel, a major financial and corporate hub.



Infrastructure projects like the Atal Setu Sea Bridge and the Eastern Freeway have significantly reduced travel times, enabling faster access to workplaces, social infrastructure, and essential services. Better mobility, facilitated through strong road networks and accessibility to well-developed schools, hospitals, and business centres, enhances Byculla's strategic residential appeal.

Byculla's transformation is shaped by Mumbai's redevelopment model, which

replaces ageing residential and industrial structures with modern developments that meet current safety, sustainability, and lifestyle standards. This approach is reimagining older plots into planned communities that feature improved road layouts, upgraded drainage systems, and enhanced public utilities. These initiatives in Byculla are introducing landscaped open spaces, organised community zones, and stronger urban infrastructure, all of which enhance the

overall living experience. The involvement of established developers further strengthens buyer confidence through professional execution, transparent processes, and long-term maintenance.

Piramal Aranya, located in Byculla, is a seven-acre residential development designed to deliver a high-end living experience across modern high-rise towers. The project offers 2, 3, 4, and 5 BHK residences with panoramic views of the Eastern Harbour, Rani Baug, and the city skyline. Combining contemporary architecture with wellness-focused design, Piramal Aranya integrates comfort, exclusivity, and modern lifestyle standards.

Avyan, the most luxurious tower of the project, offers 2, 3, and 4 BHK residences designed to provide enhanced privacy and a premium lifestyle. Each home is thoughtfully planned with dual-sided panoramic views, floor-to-ceiling windows to

enhance natural light, and well-designed layouts that give a sense of openness, comfort, and exclusivity.

Arav, another distinguished tower within Piramal Aranya, is designed to deliver comfortable living with views of the botanical gardens and the Eastern Harbour. The tower offers 2, 3, 4, and 5 BHK residences, with dual-aspect panoramic views, floor-to-ceiling windows for abundant natural lighting, and carefully designed layouts maximizing privacy, openness, and the sense of calm.

Ahan, the third tower at Piramal Aranya, comprises two wings--Ahan I and Ahan II--offering 2, 3, and 4 BHK residences with panoramic views of Rani Baug and the Arabian Sea. These apartments have floor-to-ceiling windows, spacious layouts, and modern interiors. With Ahan I officially occupancy certified, the tower is ready to deliver refined urban living in the heart of Mumbai.

Business activity slows to 41-month low in March as Iran war bites

India's economic momentum showed signs of strain in March, with business activity expanding at its slowest pace in nearly three-and-a-half years, as Iran war weighed on demand and sentiment.

Preliminary data released by HSBC on March 24 showed the composite PMI slipped to 56.5, down from 58.9 in February, the lowest reading in 41 months. While the index remained firmly in the expansion territory — above the 50-mark that separates growth from contraction — the sharp decline signals a loss of momentum.

The slowdown was broad-based.

Manufacturing activity weakened sharply, with the PMI dropping to 53.8, the lowest in 54 months, indicating that factory output and new orders have taken a hit.

The sector, which had been a pillar of growth in recent months, appears to be facing pressure from softer



demand as well as rising input uncertainties.

Services activity also moderated, with the PMI easing to 57.2 from 58.1, reflecting a cooling in demand across consumer-facing sectors.

The data suggests that the US and Israel war on Iran and broader West Asia tensions are beginning to filter into the real economy. Higher commodity prices, supply chain concerns, and cautious business sentiment appear to have dampened activity across

sectors. The composite PMI remained close to or above 60 for much of 2024 and mid-2025, signalling strong expansion. Since late 2025, the index has shown signs of moderation, slipping from 59.7 in November to 57.8 in December before stabilising briefly and then dropping sharply in March.

Despite the slowdown, the broader picture remains one of expansion, with both manufacturing and services still above the 50 threshold.

MCA presents plan to PMO to build domestic audit ecosystem; govt likely to amend 3 laws this year

New Delhi

The government will likely amend the Chartered Accountants Act, the Cost and Works Accountants Act and the Company Secretaries Act this year to enable multidisciplinary audit and consulting firms, as part of the push to build large domestic players capable of competing with global Big Four firms, sources said.

The secretary of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) made a presentation on developing the domestic ecosystem of consulting and auditing firms at a meeting chaired by Principal Secretary

to the Prime Minister Shaktikanta Das towards the end of last week, a government source said.

The proposed changes are expected to allow integrated service offerings across accounting, cost auditing and company secretary functions, something Indian firms currently face regulatory limits on offering under a single structure. The move is likely aimed at reducing concentration in the audit market and strengthening India's professional services ecosystem, amid concerns around data sensitivity and the outflow of high-value advisory work.

Govt offers 19 critical mineral blocks across 10 states; lithium, rare earth in focus

New Delhi

The Centre on March 23 launched auctions for 19 critical and strategic mineral blocks across 10 states, with key assets in Rajasthan, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Bihar, including lithium-bearing and rare earth element (REE) deposits, as part of efforts to strengthen domestic availability of minerals used in clean energy, manufacturing and fertiliser sectors.

The auction comes alongside changes to the mineral allocation framework, with the government easing timelines for post-auction clearances and allowing the use of insurance surety bonds instead of bank guarantees to lower entry barriers for bidders.

The seventh tranche was launched in New Delhi by Union Minister of Coal and Mines G Kishan Reddy.

The blocks are spread across 10 states, led by Bihar with four, followed by Odisha and Chhattisgarh with three each, while Rajasthan and Telangana have two each. The rest are in Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and



Uttarakhand.

Rajasthan hosts blocks containing lithium, tungsten and associated minerals, along with rare earth elements, while Karnataka has a block with REE and yttrium. Odisha and Chhattisgarh together account for multiple graphite blocks, and Bihar and Telangana include vanadium-bearing minerals and titanium deposits. Uttarakhand has a rock phosphate block.

The minerals on offer include lithium, rare earth elements, tungsten,

graphite, vanadium, titanium, glauconite and rock phosphate, which are used in clean energy technologies, advanced manufacturing, fertilisers and other strategic applications.

Policy push to ease participation
The government has also revised auction rules to tighten timelines for post-auction steps such as submission of performance security, upfront payments and issuance of the letter of intent, while allowing insurance surety bonds to be used in place of bank guarantees.

The Mineral (Auction) Second Amendment Rules, 2025 streamline timelines for key post-auction steps such as submission of performance security, upfront payments and issuance of the letter of intent.

Separately, the Mineral (Auction) Amendment Rules, 2026 allow bidders to use insurance surety bonds as an alternative to bank guarantees, providing flexibility and reducing upfront financial burden.

The auction will be conducted through a two-stage ascending forward e-auction process, with bidders selected based on the highest percentage of the value of mineral despatched quoted.

Sale of tender documents will begin on March 30, 2026. The last date for purchase is May 18, 2026, and bids must be submitted by May 25, 2026.

The auction will be conducted on the MSTC platform. SBI Capital Markets Limited is acting as transaction advisor and Mineral Exploration and Consultancy Limited (MECL) as technical advisor.

Trump may want it but conditions are not ripe for a durable ceasefire in West Asia

A dramatic turn of events in the US-Israel war against Iran on Monday (March 23) seems to suggest that a cessation of hostilities is on the cards and that backdoor diplomacy enabled by Oman may be successful.

This was the inference drawn from US President Donald Trump's Monday morning (US time) social media post, where he claimed that talks with Iran have been productive.

Are all on board?

The post added that based on these talks a five-day pause in the US military strikes against Iranian power plants would come into effect based on the outcome of the backdoor negotiations. The allusion was that Tehran had agreed to such a ceasefire and accepted the US conditions to end the war.

However, almost immediately, Tehran rejected the proposed offer related to a ceasefire from the Trump administration and Iranian officials, including Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi repeatedly stated that Iran has never requested or agreed to a ceasefire or negotiations.

What is the context and trigger for the Trump social media post and the Iranian rejection of the five-day pause? A brief recap of recent events may be relevant.

Energy shock is rippling out

The US-Israel war against Iran entered its fourth week on Saturday (March 21) with the Strait of Hormuz closed and oil prices surging to \$120 per barrel, leading to considerable global anxiety about energy security and related supply chain disruptions, with no sign of any cessation of hostilities.

The US and Israel had subjected Iran to a massive barrage of missile and aerial strikes for 20 days, and claimed that Tehran had been militarily degraded by over 90 percent. However, much to Israel's consternation, Iran fired missiles (March 21) that reached sites close to Israel's nuclear assets.

The inference?

Iran was down, but it was not out of the ring.

Setting the stage for escalation

Iran had thrown the proverbial gauntlet and predictably, Trump raised the ante dramatically.

This Trump threat came amid Iran's partial/selective blockages disrupting global oil flows during the ongoing conflict. Some countries were allowed to sail their tankers through the Hormuz (China and India among others), while enemy nations (US and Israel) and their allies were prevented.

The 48-hour ultimatum was met with a defiant Iranian response that warned the US (March 22) of intense retaliation if Iranian power plants were attacked. The retaliation included three elements: threat to fully close the Strait of Hormuz indefinitely;

retaliation against regional (US-linked) infrastructure in nations like Saudi Arabia and UAE; and rejection of any statement suggesting any Iranian capitulation or direct talks with the US at that point.

Overnight, after the tit-for-tat Iranian warning about the nature of its response, America woke up to the early Monday (March 23) Trump post about the five-day pause in the 'Epic Fury' war.

Iran has forced Trump to blink

From the above sequence of events, it is evident that President Trump has been compelled to tone down his public denunciation of Iran and blink in the face of unflinching Iranian resolve.

Factors inconsistent with a durable ceasefire

What will be posted by President Trump on Tuesday, or later in the week is unpredictable (another U-turn?) but the manner in which the US has prosecuted Epic Fury could turn the war into an epic setback for the Trump team.

US allies have been wary of saying yes to the Trump call that other nations join the US Navy in keeping the Hormuz open; Gulf states are quietly fuming that a reckless Trump has caused great turbulence and insecurity in what was perceived to be a perpetually prosperous oasis; and the domestic mood in the US is surly, with gas prices going up and the stock market going down.

The Trump post regarding a five-day pause and the Iranian response indicate a tense and intractable impasse in the current war. The markets are jittery and the positions taken by the US and Iran are irreconcilable.

Israel would like to see this war being prosecuted till Iran is totally denuded of its military capability but the US is in a bind. What began as a confident pre-emptive war by the US and Israel has plunged the world into a massive crisis and there is a definitive pushback.

President Trump has been fickle about the objectives of the unprovoked, illegal war that he launched on February 28. Iranian terms to end this war are steadfast: a permanent end to hostilities; a US pledge never to attack Iran again, and no temporary pause that could allow renewed strikes by Israel and the US.

Secret talks with Oman as the sherpa have been alluded to as the trigger for the five-day pause olive branch - but the probability of a consensual modus-vivendi to the current war, leading to a total and equitable cessation of hostilities remains low.

Human security across the world, alas, will take a beating.



'War-torn bonds may need recession to bounce back': Mike Dolan

New Delhi

Investors seeking safety from the Iran war just ran into harm's way. Government bonds and gold have both failed to protect portfolios. Gold at least had an excuse - it had already doubled last year - but bonds have never really recovered from the Ukraine invasion and may well need an outright recession to perform again.

It's not easy to keep tabs on the Iran conflict day to day or the financial fallout. But since the first attacks on February 28, two things have been clear: energy prices are significantly higher, and neither bonds nor gold has offered any haven.

Gold's worst month in 43 years is a bit of a puzzle.

Supposedly a safe harbor in times of global stress and a hedge against inflation, gold's proven to be neither. The simplest explanation: gold's parabolic surge last year was already pricing in these risks, before getting whipped into a speculative frenzy of its own. Now it is being sold to meet liquidity needs.

Government bonds are a different matter. They sit squarely at the heart of conservative fixed-income funds and act as ballast in mixed-asset portfolios, helping soften the blow from big stock market drawdowns.

A flight from stocks and relatively risky assets would typically see money cling to "safe" government bonds.

But not this time.

The prospect of both an oil-fueled inflation surge and hawkish central bank tightening to counteract it have overwhelmed bonds again, pushing yields higher to compensate for both rising base rates and inflation expectations.

"The Middle East conflict is a reminder that the Achilles' heel of a 60-40 equity-bond portfolio is an inflation shock," wrote Ulrike Hoffmann-Burchardi, UBS Global Wealth Management's Americas chief investment



officer and global head of equities. "In this scenario, both sides of the portfolio lose money."

She estimates a typical 60-40 mix is down 3.5 per cent this year and argues that diversifying further into commodities with scarcity premia may now be warranted.

War bonds

Perhaps the most striking question is why government bonds were ever considered a safe buffer during wars at all.

A paper published last week on the Centre for Economic Policy Research's VoxEU site analyzed 300 years of government spending shocks - from major wars to the COVID-19 pandemic - and found that government bonds repeatedly generated substantial real losses during these episodes, even underperforming equities and real estate.

Over three centuries, wars have typically triggered large, sudden increases in U.S. and British government spending averaging about 7 per cent of GDP annually in their first four years.

And that spending is rarely met by higher taxation alone.

"Wars are always disaster times for bondholders," the paper concluded. Bondholders suffered average real losses of 14 per cent during the first four years of crisis, with

cumulative returns running some 20 per cent below stocks or real estate. By contrast, bonds outperform during recessions and financial crises.

Nominal returns during war periods were positive, but inflation destroys the real calculation - often deliberately, as governments have historically sought to inflate their way out of mounting war debt. Both America and Britain suspended various iterations of the gold standard during wartime for exactly this reason.

"Financial repression" - such as U.S. Treasury yield capping during World War Two or British moves to lock in creditors - compounded bondholder pain and helped cut debt-to-GDP ratios after conflicts ended.

"Government bonds provide insurance against many types of economic downturns, including financial crises and recessions," the paper noted, adding that governments had to decide between big hits to taxpayers and lingering risk. "But they perform poorly precisely in states of the world associated with large fiscal shocks."

4 years of pain

Many investors are hoping this conflict is measured in weeks, not months. The nature of modern wars might support that hope - though the Ukraine

war is now entering its fifth year, with no clear end in sight.

Already, government bonds are clocking losses.

Exchange-traded funds tracking Treasuries and the Bloomberg Multiverse global government bond index are both down 2% in March.

Neither index has recovered from the inflation and interest rate shock that followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Both remain down 14 per cent over five years.

Central bank rates have settled higher than pre-pandemic levels - and despite coming off recent highs, another sustained inflation burst could push them back up.

In America at least, the fact the inflation and rate shock four years ago did not trigger a recession is telling - as inflation and Fed rates are settling at higher levels than before the pandemic and prolonging the pain for bondholders.

Whether bonds need recession to truly outperform again is now the big question. Only then would central banks likely floor rates again as any price pressures would be drowned by collapsing demand.

An energy squeeze and cost-of-living shock may well do that eventually. But war alone won't boost bonds. Quite the opposite.

Two Ways of War: Attrition vs Precision in Modern Conflict

In recent years, two types of war have emerged. The first one is the older kind, redefined in Ukraine, where adversaries have been engaged in a prolonged war for the past four years, losses of life have been staggering, as has the loss of infrastructure. The battlefield has shown that high-tech, small-unit tactics involving drones, Artificial Intelligence, and commercial technology are as crucial as heavy armour.

The second is the American-Israeli approach, one that has been reframed since 26 February, a model of precision-long range warfare, using missiles and bombers. The loss of life for the attackers is almost negligible, but proves to be devastating for adversaries, as the experience of Gaza and the recent strikes in Iran indicate.

These are not merely tactical variants of the same enterprise. They reflect fundamentally different approaches to military coercion with different assumptions about the relationship between force and political outcome and tolerances for cost and time. Understanding their respective logic—and limits—is now essential for any serious defence planning community.

Any war with an adversary like the US cannot but be fought in an asymmetrical fashion. The US “shock and awe” strategy of long-range precision strikes is based on total domination and requires a sophisticated and layered air defence system. So far, none have tested an air defence against it, although Serbia did take on the US-NATO air forces to an extent in 1999 and also shot down a stealth fighter.

For the US, in Iran war, the key lesson was to avoid committing ground forces, given its experience in Iraq and Afghanistan. This will limit its ability to end the Iran campaign on its terms. As it is, despite having destroyed most of the Iranian military and decapitating its leadership, the US has yet to win the key campaign—that for the control of the Hormuz Strait. Here it confronts a hybrid Iranian threat involving sea mines, anti-ship cruise missiles, drones, midget submarines, fast speed-boats and unmanned undersea vessels. And, above all, geographical advantage.

The Iranian asymmetrical response has unfolded with drone and missile attacks on its Gulf neighbours and also Israel. Its limited missile arsenal prevents it from focusing on its primary adversary, Israel, and so, a major focus is on raising the economic cost of the war to its neighbours and the world. The key, however, will remain how social resilient Iran can be. Sustained internal cohesion is the only way that it can defeat the US campaign, much as



the Taliban did in Afghanistan, and the Vietnamese decades earlier. However, Iran has revealed major fractures in the recent past, which should be taken into account.

The Third Dimension: Integration of AI

Both current campaigns contain a third dimension that remains only partially visible but whose strategic significance is growing rapidly: the integration of AI into targeting processes, and the use of cyber operations as a force multiplier.

There are credible indications that AI-assisted targeting—specifically variants of the Project Maven programme, which uses machine learning to process surveillance data and refine target lists—has been applied in the current campaigns. If so, this represents a qualitative shift in the speed and granularity with which an attacker can identify, classify, and prioritise targets. AI enables the shortening of the sensor-to-shooter cycle that significantly impacts both offensive and defensive operations.

On the cyber dimension, reported Israeli penetration of Tehran's traffic camera network and mobile telephone infrastructure suggests that cyber operations have served not merely as a tool of disruption, but as a critical enabler of the physical targeting campaign—providing real-time movement intelligence on high-value individuals and feeding into the broader ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance) architecture. The convergence of cyber and kinetic operations represents perhaps the most consequential evolution in this domain since the advent of precision guidance.

For defence planners, the implications are significant. A force that has been

comprehensively surveilled, whose communications have been penetrated, and whose leadership movements are being tracked in real time by AI-assisted analysis, faces a qualitatively different threat than one confronting a purely conventional adversary. The battle for information dominance—over networks, sensors, and AI systems—is increasingly inseparable from the physical battle.

There remain, however, substantial unknowns. The full extent of AI integration into targeting processes, the degree to which cyber operations have shaped the course of events, and the countermeasures that have been deployed remain largely opaque. Both sides have invested heavily in capabilities that remain partially disclosed. These unknowns should counsel analytical humility; the visible dimensions of these campaigns may not fully represent their operational reality.

Lessons for India

For India, these campaigns carry direct and pressing implications. India occupies a uniquely demanding strategic position: it must be prepared to operate across both paradigms simultaneously. Last year's Operation Sindoor demonstrated that the precision strike model is applicable in the subcontinent and that India possesses the capability to dominate Pakistani military facilities from the air. Significantly, both sides avoided attacking civilian infrastructure—reflecting a shared understanding of the escalatory risks inherent in the region's nuclear environment.

However, India cannot design a force around a single threat or a single model of warfare. The Pakistan scenario, manageable through air dominance, is qualitatively different from the challenge posed by China. A conflict with China could rapidly develop into

an extended attritional campaign in which the lessons of Ukraine—mass, industrial depth, social resilience, and the avoidance of over-reliance on any single technological solution—become directly relevant. The two-front strategic problem demands a force structure and a doctrine that can credibly address both contingencies.

A conflict with China could rapidly develop into an extended attritional campaign in which the lessons of Ukraine—mass, industrial depth, social resilience, and the avoidance of over-reliance on any single technological solution—become directly relevant.

The AI and cyber dimensions add a further layer of urgency. India must develop offensive capabilities similar to that of the US and Israeli forces, and defensive architectures—hardened command networks, AI-resilient communication systems, and robust counter-cyber capacity—that can deny an adversary the information dominance that has proven so decisive in current campaigns. The battle for information superiority is now a precondition for effective operation across both warfare paradigms.

India cannot afford to be lax here. Reports that the Indian NavIC navigation satellite system is suffering major failure because of the failure to import atomic clocks is not good news. The NavIC is India's GPS alternative and has important defence applications, but it is yet to be fully operational.

The two paradigms—attritional and precision strike—are not mutually exclusive; they represent different points on a spectrum, and real-world conflicts may migrate between them in ways that defy initial planning assumptions.

The lesson drawn from the Ukraine war is that despite being the strongest force on paper, faulty plans and execution can still deny you victory. It also tells you that there is no weapon or class of weapons that can guarantee victory, and as in the case of drones, innovation can be quickly matched by the other side. The key factor in a military contest really is social resilience.

On the other hand, in the precision-strike paradigm, the refusal to commit ground forces preserves short-term options but restricts long-term outcomes. While AI-assisted targeting and cyber-enabled ISR are central components of this model, the capacity of an adversary to exploit asymmetric means and geography should engender caution in a technologically advanced force. In the case of Hormuz, for example, the attacker's ability to destroy does not quite automatically confer the ability to control.

Drifting Further from Resolution: The Escalating Afghanistan–Pakistan Crisis

On 18 March 2026, Pakistan and Afghanistan called a temporary truce in their month-long hostilities, suspending operations following mediation by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Türkiye on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr. In announcing the pause, both sides added a caveat, stating that they would respond to any violation of their sovereignty during the interim period. While Kabul did not specify the duration of the pause in hostilities, Pakistan stated that it would be in effect from midnight on 18 March until midnight on 23 March. Despite this agreement, reports emerged of Pakistan violating the ceasefire along the border on 19 March 2026, according to the Islamic Emirate’s Ministry of Defence. The Taliban did not respond to the alleged attacks, thereby keeping the truce in place, while Pakistan denied the accusations. This underscores the fragility of any surface-level understanding between the two countries and the tenuous nature of their relationship.

Operation Ghazab Lil-Haq and Its Aftermath

Since the Taliban’s return to power in Afghanistan in 2021 and the re-establishment of the Islamic Emirate, bilateral relations with Pakistan have deteriorated sharply. The initial optimism in 2021 about a cooperative and strategically aligned relationship has now eroded into a ‘near-war’ situation. The current phase of fighting shows both sides refusing to back down or offer concessions, with hardened positions making the underlying conflict increasingly difficult to resolve.

The initial optimism in 2021 about a cooperative and strategically aligned relationship has now eroded into a ‘near-war’ situation.

Since the launch of Operation Ghazab Lil-Haq by Pakistan and the Emirate’s ‘Radd al-Zulm’ response, the two sides have been exchanging artillery fire, ground-level attacks, air strikes and drone strikes, targeting critical military infrastructure. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA), 76 civilians have been killed and 213 injured between February 16 and March 17. The attack on Omid Hospital in Kabul significantly increased the number of casualties. With an estimated 800–850 people present at the facility on the day of the attack, sources report varying figures—from over 400 deaths, according to the Taliban’s public health authorities, to around 200 killed, based on an investigation by Amu TV. The attack has drawn widespread condemnation, with India also criticising Pakistan for violating Afghanistan’s sovereignty.

Officials in Islamabad have



maintained their initial position that the strikes were precision attacks on military infrastructure. According to the Pakistani Information Ministry, the site of the attack was a former US military base, Camp Phoenix. The timing of the temporary truce raises critical questions as to whether external mediators succeeded in persuading Pakistan to step back, even if temporarily, in response to the backlash over civilian casualties, or whether Afghanistan was compelled to reassess the costs of a prolonged conflict with no clear end in sight. Irrespective of the answers, the conflict has now expanded from one involving the TTP and Pakistan to a confrontation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, raising regional risks and marking a potential turning point in their bilateral relationship.

Since the launch of Operation Ghazab Lil-Haq by Pakistan and the Emirate’s ‘Radd al-Zulm’ response, the two sides have been exchanging artillery fire, ground-level attacks, air strikes and drone strikes, targeting critical military infrastructure.

For the Taliban, the conflict has created a ‘rally around the flag’ effect and allowed it to entrench its power further. Since the latest attack, the Emirate’s foreign minister has urged envoys to present its case to the international community. Pakistan’s escalatory rhetoric is also seen as a response to the Taliban’s miscalculation regarding the extent to which it expected Islamabad to act against this security threat, particularly in light of Afghanistan’s growing ties with India and the continuing attacks within Pakistan. While rhetoric in Afghanistan likens Islamabad’s actions to those of Israel in Gaza, framing them as driven by regime-change objectives, Pakistan’s policy on the ground appears more limited, focusing on signalling strength to the Taliban and curbing its ability to project cross-border capabilities.

From the Durand Line to the TTP Imbroglio

In 2021, the Pakistani establishment was optimistic about the Taliban’s return

in Afghanistan, viewing it as aligned with two key objectives: securing strategic depth to counter India’s influence and securing the Taliban’s support in constraining the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which had resurged after Pakistan’s 2014 military operations had nearly decimated the group. The reality now is markedly different from Islamabad’s expectations. The Taliban have diversified their external engagements by leveraging the security interests of multiple countries, reducing their dependence on Pakistan. This declining importance is also reflected in the Emirate’s rhetoric, including statements on its official website, which suggest that Pakistan’s actions are pushing it closer to Russia, China and India. The country’s defence minister reiterated this in a recent interview. The Taliban have also accused Pakistan of playing a double game by harbouring Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) members within its borders, who then carry out attacks in Afghanistan.

The conflict has now expanded from one involving the TTP and Pakistan to a confrontation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, raising regional risks and marking a potential turning point in their bilateral relationship.

On the other hand, while the TTP was regarded as a ‘force multiplier’ for the Taliban during its insurgency years, its transition to government and the TTP’s increasing strength, vis-à-vis Pakistan’s growing internal challenges, have allowed the Taliban to adopt a hands-off approach towards the group’s activities. Since 2021, the Taliban have maintained a consistent position, stating that the TTP issue is Pakistan’s internal matter and that Afghanistan has no stake in it — a stance they have upheld to date. This is due to the Taliban’s long-standing ideological and strategic ties with the TTP, which have led them to refrain from taking definitive action against the group. Since Pakistan’s first air strikes in April 2022 and the subsequent brokering of a short-lived ceasefire with Taliban mediation in

June that same year, the two countries have engaged in multiple strikes and counter-strikes. While the Taliban have, on various occasions, urged their fighters to refrain from waging jihad outside Afghanistan — including through a fatwa issued in December last year reiterating the ban — the extent to which the group is willing and able to influence the TTP’s activities remains uncertain.

Overlapping Crises: Constrained Pathways to De-escalation

The crisis in West Asia has also created attendant risks for this conflict theatre. Both Afghanistan and Pakistan share a border with Iran. According to the Norwegian Refugee Council, the number of returnees from Iran to Afghanistan has risen to around 1,700 people per day. Pakistan, on the other hand, has had to implement a series of austerity measures to address disruptions caused by the country’s energy crisis. It has also witnessed deadly protests in the aftermath of the killing of Iran’s Supreme Leader. Already grappling with internal insurgencies, particularly in Balochistan, Pakistan finds itself in an increasingly precarious position.

While the current pause in fighting and the absence of any TTP retaliation against Pakistan for its strikes in Afghanistan have brought some relief on both sides, albeit temporary, the risk of renewed escalation remains.

Trade between the two sides has remained at a standstill since October 2025, following which both began exploring routes through Iran as a viable alternative. However, with conflict simmering in West Asia, this route too remains fragile, raising the risk of economic strain in both countries and increasing domestic pressures.

Expectations that external actors would succeed in halting hostilities remained low. In October last year, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye hosted multiple rounds of negotiations between the two sides in an effort to reach a consensus. Other regional actors, including China, Iran and Russia, have also offered to mediate on several occasions. US policy towards the region has become more complex under the second Trump administration, with Washington acknowledging Pakistan’s right to defend itself against the Taliban and designating the latter as a state sponsor of wrongful detention. The Taliban also blame a US-fuelled military mindset in Pakistan for attacks on Afghanistan, arguing that Washington is furthering its own agenda through Islamabad. The Emir’s Eid message reiterated this sentiment, urging external actors not to interfere in Afghanistan’s internal affairs, without directly referencing the attack.

'Drishyam 3', featuring Mohanlal, to release on May 21



The makers of Malayalam superstar Mohanlal - starrer 'Drishyam 3' said the film will release in theatres on May 21, coinciding with the actor's birthday.

The film, which is the third instalment in the 'Drishyam' franchise, is directed by Jeethu Joseph, who has helmed the previous films. It was earlier slated to release on April 2.

Mohanlal, who essays the role of Georgekutty, shared the news with a post on his Instagram handle on Monday. It comprised the film's poster with the new release date written over it. "The past never stays silent it only waits. Georgekutty

arrives, May 21st 2026. #Drishyam3 | Worldwide Release," read the caption.

The film revolves around Mohanlal's character and his family, who come under suspicion when the son of the Inspector General of Police is killed.

Produced by Antony Perumbavoor under the banner of Aashirvad Cinemas, the first film in the franchise was a box office hit when it released in 2013. Its sequel, 'Drishyam 2', which came out in 2022, ended on a cliffhanger.

'Drishyam' led to its remake in several languages, including Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Chinese (Mandarin), and Sinhalese.

Delhi High Court protects actor Sonakshi Sinha's personality rights

The Delhi High Court has protected the personality rights of Bollywood actor Sonakshi Sinha by restraining several platforms, including AI chatbots, from unauthorised use of her image, voice or any other attributes of her persona.

Justice Jyoti Singh also restrained the sale of merchandise using her name or image without consent and encashing her goodwill and reputation.

The court directed the infringing parties to take down web-links within 36 hours.

In an interim order passed on March 20 on a lawsuit by Sinha, the court said the actor has the right to protect her name, likeness and all other attributes of her personality.

No third party has the right to use these attributes without her consent or authorisation, the court noted.

The actor said two US-based platforms had deployed multiple chatbots that impersonated her and generated lewd and obscene content.

Certain other entities, including unknown ones, were using her name, likeness, image, voice, etc. for unauthorised commercial and impermissible non-commercial purposes by falsely associating with and endorsing the actor, she said.

In the order, the court stated it was its prima facie view that the defendants unlawfully and illegally exploited and used various elements of Sinha's persona for unlawful and unjustified commercial gains, without her consent.

It further stated that hosting images with inappropriate clothing and obscene content



using AI tools caused irreparable damage to her reputation, and the unauthorised use of her name for selling inferior quality goods could also harm her goodwill and reputation.

The court stated that a celebrity's right of endorsement is a major source of livelihood that cannot be destroyed by permitting unlawful dissemination, such as the sale of merchandise or other articles, bearing the faces or other attributes of their persona, without their lawful authorization.

"Defendants No. 1 to 17, including John Does, are restrained from using and/or in any manner directly or indirectly, exploiting or misappropriating Plaintiff's: (i) name Sonakshi Sinha; (ii) image; (iii) voice; and (iv) likeness and/or any other attribute of her persona,

without her authorisation or consent, for any commercial and/or personal gain, through the use of technology, including but not limited to Artificial Intelligence, Generative

Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Deepfakes, AI Chatbots, Face Morphing and/or any other mediums and formats, amounting to violation of Plaintiff's personality/publicity rights," the court ordered.

"Defendants are also restrained from selling their merchandise and/or other articles using the elements and attributes of Plaintiff's persona, which are exclusively identified with her and/or from passing off their goods by encashing on the goodwill and reputation of the Plaintiff and misrepresenting to the public," the court further said.

It is important to make choices that will be remembered longer: Nimrat Kaur

Actor Nimrat Kaur, known for films such as "The Lunchbox" and "Airlift", says in a world where everything is forgotten so quickly, her priority is to focus on consciously choosing roles which she hopes will linger in the collective memory of the audience.

"In a world where everything is forgotten so quickly, there's overload of information, and hence it's important to make choices which will last little longer and stay in people's heart for long time. I've always believed in high quality work and I try to stay close stories that resonate with me," the actor

told PTI.

"Also, just because one is free doesn't mean picking up another job for the sake of it, so unless I feel I really want to be part of something is when I yes," she said, adding, she is eager to step into unexplored genres.

Kaur was talking on the sidelines of the recently concluded Lakme Fashion Week (LFW) x FDCI, where she walked the runway for designer label Jajaabor by Kolkata-based Neelanjana Ghosh and his wife Kanika Sachdev.

The actor wore a gold floral corset with a

knotted, draped skirt. She completed the look with a single-sleeved cutwork jacket and statement earrings.

Asked about her take on fashion, Kaur said it's a "constant evolution".

"Fashion for me means constant evolution, experimenting, taking risks, but always staying true to who I'm and keeping my body type in mind. I think that's when you truly channel your innermost confidence," she said.

Badshah marries Punjabi actress Isha Rikhi



Singer-rapper Badshah has reportedly tied the knot with Punjabi actress and model Isha Rikhi.

The news comes after Isha's mother, Poonam Rikhi, shared a series of photos on Instagram showing the couple participating in wedding rituals surrounded by family.

In the pictures, Badshah is seen in a brown kurta with a golden saafa, while Isha wears a traditional red salwar kameez. Both were also seen wearing wedding garlands. Captioning her post, Isha's mother wrote, "God bless you".

Neither Badshah nor Isha has made an official statement about the marriage yet.

Badshah and Isha Rikhi have reportedly been dating for nearly four years. They first met at a party through mutual friends and soon fell in love. Isha made her Punjabi film debut in 2013 with Jatt Boys Putt Jattan De and her Bollywood debut in 2018 with Nawabzaade.

Badshah was earlier married to Jasmine Masih, with whom he has a daughter, Jessemay Grace Masih Singh. The couple separated in 2020. In 2024, Badshah shared on the podcast Prakhar Ke Pravachan that their separation was due to the marriage being "not healthy" for their daughter, adding that while he meets his child, she primarily lives in London.

Will 'Dhurandhar Part 3' be launched this June

Social media is abuzz with claims that 'Dhurandhar Part 3: The Mayhem' is already on the cards, with a supposed end-credit slate hinting at a June release doing the rounds online.

The viral clip, widely shared across platforms, has left fans of Ranveer Singh excited and confused.

However, there's no truth to the speculation.

Sources indicate that the circulating 'announcement' is AI-generated content being

passed off as authentic, likely riding on the massive anticipation surrounding the franchise's next chapter.

So far, neither director Aditya Dhar nor the makers have issued a confirmation about a third instalment.

In fact, the 'Dhurandhar' story was conceptualised as a two-part narrative, with 'Dhurandhar: The Revenge' intended to wrap up the arc.

The confusion appears to have stemmed from Dhar's earlier appeal urging viewers to

stay back through the end credits of Part 2. His statement quickly snowballed into speculation about a hidden teaser or sequel announcement.

Contrary to viral claims, the end credits do not introduce a third film. Instead, they deepen the storyline and leave select threads open—an approach commonly used in large-scale cinematic franchises to keep audiences engaged.

For now, 'Dhurandhar Part 3' remains firmly in the realm of rumours, not reality.

Shweta Tripathi reflects on Mirzapur "Changed many things for me as an actor"

Actor Shweta Tripathi recently spoke about her enduring emotional connection with Gajgami "Golu" Gupta, one of the most beloved characters from the hit series Mirzapur.

As the show is about to complete eight years since it was first aired, Shweta reflected on her journey alongside her character, saying, "Golu is much more than just another character in my career. It is a character who has been my constant, who has impacted my growth as an actor and as a person."

As "Mirzapur" was first introduced, it was clear that Golu was a character who was quiet, sharp, and had a mind for learning, finding comfort in books, libraries, and debates, unlike much of the violence and chaos going on around her. In a story so full of guns, power



struggles, and politics, her calm demeanor and intellect immediately set her apart from everyone else.

The character was, even from the very beginning, a favorite among fans and critics alike, many of whom commented on Shweta's portrayal of her character, saying, "Golu is a character who is a breath of fresh air in a show like 'Mirzapur.'"

As the story moved forward, so did Golu. What began as the

journey of a reserved, observant girl gradually transformed into the rise of a fearless and strategic force—"Golu Didi." Over the seasons, her evolution into a calculating and powerful figure made her one of the most compelling characters in the Mirzapur universe.

Looking back now, Shweta admits that revisiting this journey still fills her with emotion.

"It's difficult to explain what Golu means to me because she has been a part of my life for almost eight years. When I first started playing her, she was this reserved, intelligent girl who believed deeply in books and knowledge. Over time we saw her grow, change and become stronger because of everything life threw at her. As an actor, getting the chance to live with a character for so many years is very rare, and I feel extremely grateful for it."

She also fondly recalled the response that poured in after the first season was released, especially the way audiences connected with Golu's personality.

"I still remember reading reviews after Season 1 and seeing how many people spoke about Golu. Some wrote about how she brought a certain calm intelligence into such a violent world. Others said they loved that she was observant and thoughtful rather than loud. That meant a lot to me because those are the qualities that define her."

Ranveer Singh's Dhurandhar 2 beats Ranbir Kapoor starrer Animal overtaking latter's lifetime box office collection in just 6 days

Ranveer Singh continues to dominate the box office conversation, and this time, the scale is even clearer in rupee terms. With Dhurandhar: The Revenge, the actor has delivered a performance-backed blockbuster that is rewriting benchmarks and overtaking the milestones set by Ranbir Kapoor's Animal.

In just six days, Dhurandhar 2 has managed what many films can only dream of achieving in their overall run. On Day 7, the India gross for Dhurandhar 2 stands at Rs 692.67



crore, whereas the India net figure for the film stands at Rs 580.11 crore, and it is still increasing at a brisk pace.

If we look at Animal's overall figures, we can understand the magnitude of what Dhurandhar 2 has achieved. Animal, in the end, managed to collect Rs 915.00 crore worldwide gross, including Rs 660.00 crore India gross, Rs 255.00 crore from overseas, and Rs 553.87 crore India net collections.

Ranveer Singh, through Dhurandhar 2, has managed to cross Animal's overall India net collections in just six days, which is a huge achievement.

"Arshdeep Singh needs to focus on how he bowls with new ball": Irfan Pathan ahead of IPL 2026

New Delhi

After winning the T20 World Cup 20-26 trophy, the Indian seamer Arshdeep Singh is aiming to win an IPL title with the Punjab Kings, but the former India all-rounder Irfan Pathan believes that the lanky seamer needs to focus on how he bowls with the new ball.

Speaking on his YouTube channel, Pathan said, "Arshdeep, who was your highest wicket-taker, has been consistently taking wickets. One thing he will definitely need to focus on is how he bowls with the new ball. Because over the past year, or slightly less than a year, from what I have observed, he hasn't been bowling much inswing with the new ball."

The 27-year-old pacer from Punjab is known to strike early with his accurate length deliveries. He took nine wickets in the recently concluded T20 World Cup, which India retained after defeating New Zealand in the final at Ahmedabad.

Pathan acknowledged that Arshdeep's stats have declined with the new ball, and he needs to pay attention to that.

"His statistics, compared to before and after the Asia Cup, have slightly declined in terms of new-ball bowling. He will need to pay attention to that, and also keep an eye on his economy rate," said Pathan.

Arshdeep Singh has been consistent for the Punjab Kings since his IPL debut in 2019. He has taken 97 wickets in 82 IPL matches for the franchise with a concerning economy rate of nine.

He was retained by the Kings before the 2025 IPL auction for Rs 18 Crore, and he played a vital role in taking his side to the final, where they eventually lost to the first-time winners Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB).

Singh is also the leading wicket-taker for India



in the T20Is with 127 wickets in 84 matches. He is expected to play a big role for Punjab if the Kings are looking to finish this season with a trophy.

Punjab Kings full squad for IPL 2026: Arshdeep Singh, Azmatullah Omarzai, Harnoor Pannu, Harpreet Brar, Lockie Ferguson, Marco Jansen, Marcus Stoinis, Mitch Owen, Musheer Khan, Nehal Wadhwa, Prabhsimran Singh, Priyansh Arya, Pyla

Avinash, Shashank Singh, Shreyas Iyer, Suryansh Shedge, Vishnu Vinod, Vyshak Vijaykumar, Xavier Bartlett, Yash Thakur, Yuzvendra Chahal, Cooper Connolly (Rs 3 Cr), Pravin Dubey (Rs 30 lakh), Vishal Nishad (Rs 30 lakh), Ben Dwarshuis (Rs 4.40 Cr).

Pant should bat at No. 3: Faf du Plessis

Former South Africa captain Faf du Plessis feels Rishabh Pant should bat at No. 3 position to maximise his impact, and also urged the hard-hitting wicketkeeper-batter to control his high-risk approach and aim for consistency in the upcoming IPL.

Pant shuffled his batting position from being No. 4 to opener and also lower down the order in a woeful last season. But he finally produced his best at No. 3 -- a 61-ball unbeaten 118 in Lucknow Super Giants' last league match. "Maybe there is an opportunity for Pant to bat at number three," said du Plessis speaking on JioStar's 'IPL Today Live'. "The numbers suggest that for him to be the best player he can be, number three looks good. I see him batting at number three for LSG this season

with Nicholas Pooran sliding down to number four.

"Looking at LSG's 2026 auction and their strategy around who they signed, you look at that top-heavy batting lineup—Aiden Markram, Mitchell Marsh and Pooran are the main ones alongside Pant," added the former RCB skipper. Pant heads into the new season with significant expectations after being bought for a record Rs 27 crore ahead of IPL 2025. However, his first stint as captain of LSG was underwhelming as they finished seventh. He endured an inconsistent campaign, scoring 269 runs in 13 innings at an average



of 24.45 with a strike rate just over 133. "When I look at him, he is almost like a highlight player. I want him to be more of a high-impact player in terms of what he can give in his numbers," du Plessis said. "He needs to figure out exactly what his game plan looks like to give himself the best chance." The IPL 2026 begins with defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru facing Sunrisers Hyderabad in the opener in Bengaluru on Saturday, while LSG start their campaign against Delhi Capitals at home on April 1. Du Plessis highlighted the contrast between

Pant's immense ability and his returns in T20 cricket. "The talent that Pant has is tremendous. You look at him playing Test cricket and you think, this guy has all the shots. When I look at his game, I feel he has too many options in his head. He feels like he can hit a six off every ball to any part of the ground. "But in T20 batting, you still need a method. You need a game plan for how you go about your business," he said. The South African pointed out that elite T20 batters operate with a clear mindset. "Look at all the great T20 players. You can almost have an idea of where they will score their boundaries and where they have slight weaknesses. They work their way through that.

Rinku Singh appointed as Regional Sports Officer by Uttar Pradesh govt

Lucknow

Praising Indian batter Rinku Singh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that he has been given an appointment letter as a Regional Sports Officer by the Uttar Pradesh government.

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 Team India.

He has won Men in Blue several matches by playing the role of an explosive, six-hitting finisher down the order.

Speaking during a programme organised for the distribution of appointment letters and prize money to international medal-winning players on Wednesday, CM Yogi emphasised that Uttar Pradesh is the first state in the country giving priority to athletes in government services.

"UP is the first state in the country to give athletes priority in government service. So far, we have provided appointment letters to over 500 athletes for various police positions... For his performance in cricket and the Asian Games, Rinku



Singh has been given an appointment letter as a Regional Sports Officer. He is already a part of a camp (KKR camp in the IPL), so he has gone there. Many other players have also got appointment letters here today," he said.

Rinku has been named the vice-captain of KKR for the upcoming IPL 2026, taking on a new leadership role within the team.

Rinku 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.

The announcement was made by KKR CEO Venky Mysore at the Knights Unplugged 3.0 event held in Kolkata on Tuesday.

"On behalf of everyone in the franchise, we're really delighted to announce that Rinku Singh will be the Vice-captain of the team. Rinku

joined KKR in 2018 and has been a regular in the team ever since," said Venky Mysore.

Rinku's form will be a big concern for the Knight Riders, as he had a sub-par T20 World Cup 2026, scoring just 24 runs in five innings. In the midst of the T20WC campaign, Rinku's father, Khanchand, also died after a battle with cancer. But after completing all the rituals, Rinku rejoined the squad, making this an extremely inspirational story emerging out of the tournament.

Also in the IPL, his performances have witnessed a decline since his breakout season in 2023, in which five successive sixes against Yash Dayal in a 200-plus run-chase against the Gujarat Titans (GT) launched him into stardom. Rinku's 2023 season saw him score 474 runs in 14 innings at an average of 59.25 and a strike rate of 149.52, with four fifties.

However, since then, he has scored just 374 runs in 22 innings at an average of 23.37, with a best score of 38*. Rinku has played 59 matches for the side, scoring 1,099 runs at an average of 30.53.

Having scored 55 runs in two ODIs, Rinku has also played 45 T20Is for India, scoring 665 runs at an average of 39.11 in 33 innings at a strike rate of over 155, with three fifties to his name.

It's already big as NBA: Sourav Ganguly hails IPL's rise after Rajasthan Royals' blockbuster deal

Kolkata

In one of the biggest deals in Indian Premier League (IPL) history, the Rajasthan Royals (RR) team was reportedly sold to US-based consortium led by Kal Somani for USD 1.63 billion (around INR 15,290 crore) on Tuesday. The sale of the first-ever IPL champions is set to come into effect after the 2026 season.

Former Indian captain and ex-BCCI president Sourav Ganguly commended the rise of IPL, demonstrating how the league's burgeoning presence outside India is shown by its rising valuation and interest from international investors.

While addressing reporters at an event in Noida, Ganguly said, "It (IPL) is only going to greater heights. I have been hearing RCB is also on sale. I don't know what has happened to that. It's great news for IPL. I played the first ball of the IPL in 2008, RCB vs KKR. We smashed them at Chinnaswamy Stadium and I faced the first ball. To see IPL grow to these heights is phenomenal. It also goes to show the game expanding, and some of the buyers are from America, and the game is going to that part of the world with interest, especially Indian cricket, it is fantastic." Ganguly

further emphasised the IPL's astounding financial growth, expressing amazement at the skyrocketing franchise valuations and making audacious parallels to major football leagues and international behemoths like the National Basketball Association (NBA).

"It's mind-boggling numbers for a franchise and a cricket team which plays three months a year, but great news for Indian cricket and the way forward. I think it's already as big as the NBA. The broadcast rights are as big as anywhere in the world, even compared to football," he said.





श्री रामनवमीच्या
हार्दिक शुभेच्छा!

Across State



मराठी
अक्रॉस मुंबई

महाराष्ट्र उपाध्यक्ष-डिजिटल मिडिया संपादक
पत्रकार संघटना महाराष्ट्र

श्री. संजय मंगेश भैरे

