



SCAN QR CODE FOR E-PAPER

6 STATES • 9 EDITIONS | PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM: JAIPUR • JODHPUR • KOTA • UDAIPUR • NEW DELHI • AHMEDABAD • LUCKNOW • CHANDIGARH • BHOPAL

## NATION

### West Asia war: Gas crematoriums close down in Pune

>> Page: 03 <<



## BUSINESS

### Investors lose Rs 22L cr as markets crash over 2%

>> Page: 05 <<



## SPORTS

### IPL starts on 28 March, final in B'loru on 31 May

>> Page: 08 <<

## TATA IPL 2026



## Bomb threat emails put courts on high alert

JAIPUR, 9 MARCH

Court complexes in Rajasthan's Barmer and Nagaur were put on high alert after bomb threat emails mentioning Ajmal Kasab were received. Police evacuated the premises and conducted searches with dog squads and bomb disposal teams. Cyber experts and intelligence agencies launched investigations to trace the sender.

## Raj Assembly removes two-child rule for Panchayati Raj election

JAIPUR, 9 MARCH

The Rajasthan Panchayati Raj (Amendment) Bill, 2026 was passed in the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly on Monday, removing the two-child norm for contesting Panchayati Raj elections. The amendment modifies Section 19 of the Rajasthan

Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, which earlier disqualified individuals with more than two children from participating in local body elections. With this change, there will no longer be any child-related eligibility restriction for candidates contesting posts such as ward panch, sarpanch, panchayat samiti member,



zila parishad member, pradhan and district head.

The two-child norm was introduced about 31 years

ago during the tenure of former Chief Minister Bhairon Singh Shekhawat. The rule applied to both Panchayati

Raj institutions and urban local bodies. The amendment bill was tabled in the Assembly on March 5 and later passed after a discussion among members.

State Minister Madan Dilawar said the government observed that many capable individuals with leadership potential were unable to con-

test elections because they had more than two children. Removing the restriction will allow more people to participate in local governance.

The bill will now be sent to the Governor for approval. After receiving assent, a gazette notification will be issued and the amendment will officially come into effect.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY



Short term oil prices, which will drop rapidly when the destruction of the Iran nuclear threat is over, is a very small price to pay for USA, and World, Safety and Peace

—DONALD TRUMP, US President

## In an all-time low, Rupee breaches the 92 mark

MUMBAI, 9 MARCH

The rupee crashed to its all-time closing low of 92.21 against the US dollar on Monday, losing 39 paise during the session, as global crude oil prices saw a sharp spike, and the greenback strengthened amid worsening conflict in the West Asia. Forex traders said heightened geopolitical uncertainty risks driving energy costs higher, which could widen the trade deficit and stoke inflationary pressures. Moreover, withdrawal of foreign funds amid intense selling in domestic equity markets further pressured the rupee, they added. At the inter-bank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 92.22 and rose briefly to 92.15 but kept losing ground through the session and recorded an intraday low of 92.35.

>>>More on Page 5



## Rajasthan heatwave alert as mercury crosses 40

JAIPUR, 9 MARCH

The Meteorological Department has issued a heatwave alert for parts of Rajasthan on Monday and Tuesday as temperatures have started crossing the 40°C mark for the first time this season. Pilani in Jhunjhunu district recorded the highest maximum temperature at 40.2°C, while Barmer reached 40°C. Cities including Bikaner (39.4°C), Churu (39.1°C), Jaisalmer (39.2°C), Jodhpur (38.8°C) and Phalodi (38.2°C) also recorded high temperatures. Parts of Barmer and Balotra experienced heatwave conditions with bright sunshine and hot winds during the day. The Meteorological Centre in Jaipur has issued a yellow alert for heatwave conditions in Jaisalmer, Barmer and Balotra. Several cities including Jaipur, Udaipur, Ajmer and Kota recorded temperatures above 36°C. Officials warned that temperatures across the state may rise by another 2-3°C in the coming week.

## Oil price hits record high; India sees 26% surge

### World on edge as crude nears levels last seen during Covid

NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH

Crude oil prices surged 26 per cent on Monday to a record Rs 10,549 per barrel in futures trade as the war in West Asia disrupted global energy supply. Globally, Brent crude climbed 60 per cent since the US and Israel launched attacks on Iran on 28 February. On Monday it surged nearly 24 per cent to \$114.93 per barrel.

The last time Brent and US crude traded near current levels was during the Covid pandemic and in 2022 after Russia invaded Ukraine. Analysts say the current situation is similar to 1973's oil crisis, which saw crude prices rally 300 per cent.

The surge is due to disruption



Saudi Aramco's Ras Tanura refinery, one of the world's largest oil facilities, was forced to shut down following a drone strike

tion in production and shipping in West Asia. Iran's attacks in the Strait of Hormuz have restricted tanker movement through the route that carries about 20 per cent of global oil supplies. Iraq, Kuwait, UAE, Saudi, Qatar and Bahrain have cut produc-

tion after attacks on refineries. Oil depots in Tehran were hit in Israeli strikes. Iran exports 1.6 million barrels of crude daily, mainly to China. The shortage of crude oil is pushing fuel prices higher and straining economies, particularly in Asia. Higher oil prices

could raise inflation, weaken currencies and dampen consumer spending. For India, the world's third-largest crude importer, the impact could be significant. India imports 85 per cent of its oil, and every \$1 rise in crude increases the bill by Rs 16,000 crore. Analysts said the price surge could raise India's foreign exchange outflow by \$8B per month. Government, however, said petrol and diesel prices will not be raised immediately.

INDIA DECLINES IEA CALL ON OIL RESERVES  
India has decided not to join the International Energy Agency initiative to release strategic oil reserves to cool global prices. India said the country's 5.33MT of reserves, currently about 80 per cent full, are only for supply disruptions.

>>>More on Page 5

## Mojtaba is Iran's Supreme Leader

DUBAI, 9 MARCH

Iran on Monday named hard-line cleric Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei as the new Supreme Leader following the death of his father, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, signalling continued defiance amid the ongoing war with the United States and Israel.

The secretive 56-year-old cleric, who has close ties with the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, succeeds his father who ruled Iran for 37 years before being killed during the war's opening strikes. The appointment by the Assembly of Experts came even as heavy US and Israeli bombardment continued for more than a week.

Khamenei now controls Iran's armed forces and decisions on its nuclear programme.

In Israel, sirens sounded



Mojtaba Khamenei y

repeatedly as Iranian drones and missiles continued to hit the country. A man was killed in central Israel in a missile strike, the first such death in a week, while a woman was wounded.

Israel said it struck Iran's city of Isfahan, targeting Revolutionary Guard and Basij command centres, a rocket engine production facility and missile launch sites.

Iran has been firing missiles

and drones at Israel and Gulf Arab states. An oil facility in the United Arab Emirates also caught fire after an Iranian strike

Saudi Arabia condemned Iran after a thwarted drone attack on its Shaybah oil field. The UAE reported 15 missiles and 18 drones fired on Monday alone, bringing the total since the war began to 253 missiles and 1,440 drones. Four foreign nationals have been killed and 117 injured in the UAE.

Iran also struck Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain, wounding 32 people in a residential area. A US service member died of injuries from an Iranian attack in Saudi, raising the number of US troops killed to seven. Russia's President Vladimir Putin congratulated Mojtaba and reaffirmed Moscow's support for Tehran.

>>>More on Pages 4 & 5

## No Indian fatality in Saudi: Embassy

RIYADH, 9 MARCH

The Indian Embassy in Riyadh on Monday said no Indian was killed in the projectile strike that hit a residential compound in Al-Kharj, Saudi Arabia, on Sunday.

In a social media post, the Saudi Civil Defence said two Bangladeshi nationals were killed and 11 others from Bangladesh injured, along with one injured Indian national.

The Indian embassy said the injured Indian is undergoing treatment at a government hospital and it remains in contact with Saudi authorities. Earlier reports had suggested an Indian was among those dead in the Saudi attacks creating a panic.

## Contact with Iran difficult: EAM in Parl

NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH

India on Monday said that contract with Iran leadership is difficult, as it put the safety of one crore Indians in the region as its top priority.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said in the Parliament that New Delhi is struggling to have a dialogue with the warring nations on the conflict in West Asia.

He also said that Iran had sought India's permission for three of its ships to dock at Indian ports and the approval was granted the next day.

He said the Indian government has been monitoring the evolving situation and has already brought back 67,000 stranded Indians from the conflict zone.

Jaishankar said the safety of Indian nationals and national interests, such as energy security and trade, remain the topmost priority for the government.

Meanwhile, the Opposition voraciously protested, demanding that a full-fledged discussion should precede his state-

ment on the situation in West Asia. While the Opposition staged a walk-out in the Rajya Sabha, they forced the Lok Sabha to be adjourned amid noisy scenes.

The government had on 28 February expressed its deep concern and urged all sides to exercise restraint, avoid escalation and prioritise the safety of civilians.

Jaishankar said Prime Minister Modi has spoken to leaders of several countries in West Asia and has received assurances that the well-being of the Indian community would be a priority for them.

Jaishankar informed Parliament about the steps taken by the government to bring back Indians and provided details of the operation of flights by several airlines to bring back those affected. Referring to concerns on the energy front amid rising global crude oil prices, he said the government remains committed to ensuring that fully, taking into account costs and risks of the energy markets.

>>>More on Page 2



## INDIA ASKS CITIZENS IN BAHRAIN TO REMAIN VIGILANT

India on Monday advised its citizens in Bahrain to remain vigilant and follow safety guidelines issued by local authorities in view of the prevailing regional situation.

In an advisory, the Embassy of India in Bahrain urged Indian nationals to monitor updates from the mission and local authorities. The embassy said it continues to function normally.

Transit for stranded

Indians is being arranged through Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, with priority given to those on tourist or short-term visas.

The Embassy of India in Riyadh is obtaining individual Saudi transit visas.

Travellers must carry confirmed onward tickets and a Note Verbale issued by the Riyadh mission. Saudi transit visas will remain valid for 72-96 hours.



## Oppn seeks to impeach CEC; WB says Gyanesh 'go back'

NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH

The Opposition parties are set to move an impeachment motion seeking removal of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, who also faced 'go back' slogans while visiting a temple in Kolkata.

The draft of the impeachment notice is ready and likely to be submitted this week.

Sources from Congress said they would support the notice. Other INDIA bloc parties are also on board, and the notice has been drafted collectively.

Opposition MPs will now collect signatures of MPs from both Houses. As per rules, the signatures of at least 100 MPs from Lok Sabha and at least 50 MPs from Rajya Sabha are required for the notice.

The CEC can be impeached only on the grounds of proven misbehaviour or incapacity.

A motion for removal may be introduced in either House of

Parliament and must be passed by a special majority -- a majority of the total membership of the House and a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting.

Meanwhile, TMC workers displayed black flags and raised "go back" slogans against Kumar on Monday as he visited the revered Kalighat temple in Kolkata.

Kumar is in Kolkata to hold meetings with political parties, enforcement agencies and senior administrative officials to review preparedness for the upcoming Assembly elections.

Police personnel present at the spot brought the situation under control.

Similar demonstrations were seen near the airport on 8 March over the special intensive revision exercise, after Kumar arrived in the city.

Activists of Left parties also staged protests outside the airport.



## PAK RELIES ON CHINA India 2<sup>nd</sup> largest arms importer after Ukraine: SIPRI report

NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH

India was the world's second largest importer of arms and military hardware from 2021 to 2025 and the largest imports came from Russia, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) said.

Ukraine which received 9.7 per cent of all arms transfers in 2021-25 was the world's largest arms importer. China dropped out of the top 10 arms importers for the first time since 1991-1995 due to expanded domestic production of its own designs, the think tank noted in its report, 'Trends in International Arms Transfers'.

The US supplied 42 per cent of all international arms transfers during 2021-25.

India, Pakistan, Japan and Australia - ranked among the 10 largest arms importers globally in 2021-25.

The main supplier to the region in 2021-25 was the US,



which accounted for 35 per cent of regional arms imports. Russia accounted for another 17 per cent and China for 14 per cent.

India also bought arms from France and Israel as well.

China supplied 80 per cent of Pakistan's arms imports in 2021-25.

The US has further cemented its dominance as an arms supplier, even in an increasingly multipolar world, said Pieter

Wezeman, senior researcher with the SIPRI Arms Transfers Programme.

For importers, US arms offer advanced capabilities and a way of fostering good relations, he said. While conflicts in Asia and Oceania and the Middle East continue to drive arms imports, the sharp increase in arms flows to European states pushed global arms transfers up almost 10 per cent, SIPRI further said.

## Has right to be heard: SC on Unnao rape survivor's plea

NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Monday allowed the Unnao rape survivor to be a party in the CBI petition contesting the suspension of Kuldeep Singh Sengar's life sentence, stating she has a right to be heard.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi permitted her to join the case, emphasising victims are entitled to participate in proceedings affecting their interests, as per an earlier judgement in the Lakhimpur Kheri case. The Chief Justice said, "We are of the view that the victim has the right to be heard," and granted two weeks to file her affidavit opposing the suspension. The bench, however, dismissed an intervention application filed by a relative of the survivor alleging threats to his life and liberty, with the CJ advising him to seek protection through an independent remedy in the high court. The court did not consider the CBI's plea against the suspension, as Solicitor General Tushar Mehta was unavailable.

# LS fails to move motion against Birla

## Congress will move the motion; Home Minister Amit Shah will speak against it

NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH

The Lok Sabha on Monday could not take up a notice seeking to move a resolution to remove Speaker Om Birla from office amid disruptions as opposition members demanded a debate on the West Asia situation.

The opposition's resolution is now likely to be taken up on Tuesday, at noon, soon after the Question Hour.

The motion will be moved by three Congress members -- Mohamed Jawed, K Suresh and Mallu Ravi.

The proposed motion questioned the conduct of the Speaker in disallowing the leader of the opposition and other opposition leaders to speak and in "making unwarranted allegations against women MPs belonging to the Opposition".

In the Lok Sabha, the government and the Chair, earlier in



LoP in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, Congress MPs KC Venugopal, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and other opposition leaders protest over the West Asia crisis, during the second part of Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi

the day, accused the opposition of holding the House proceedings "hostage" to its demands.

Around 12 noon, as soon as Jaishankar rose to make a statement in the lower house on the "situation in West Asia", opposition members started raising slogans against the government.

Jagadambika Pal, who was chairing the proceedings, urged the opposition members to maintain decorum and allow the House to take up the resolution against Birla.

Pal said that while a resolution to remove Birla as the Lok Sabha Speaker is already on the agenda, the Opposition was pushing for a notice for adjournment of the proceedings to discuss West Asia.

The House was adjourned for the day shortly after it reassembled at 3 pm, following an earlier adjournment.

Outside the House, opposi-

**“**  
The government should explain its position on India's broader foreign policy. There should be a discussion on these issues and the way the government has auctioned its foreign policy  
**”**

- Akhilesh Yadav, Samajwadi Party Chief

tion MPs, including Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, former party chief Rahul Gandhi and SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, staged a protest demanding a discussion on the West Asia conflict.

Earlier, Trinamool Congress MPs gave notices in both Houses of Parliament to discuss "voter disenfranchisement", sources said. In Lok Sabha, senior party leader Saugata Roy demanded a debate on the issue of voter disenfranchisement.



## Cong protests in Jammu demanding Modi's resignation

JAMMU, 9 MARCH

The Jammu and Kashmir Congress held a protest outside its headquarters, demanding Prime Minister Narendra Modi's resignation over his alleged surrender to the US. Led by PCC president Tariq Hameed Karra, protesters called for the early restoration of statehood, carrying placards saying "Restore Statehood" and "Hamari Riyasat Hamara Haq". Police prevented them from moving forward, citing law and order concerns. Karra accused Modi of damaging India's global reputation, weakening institutions, and surrendering to international pressures, claiming "US and Israel have videos of Modi and are blackmailing him." Protesters also set US and Israeli flags ablaze, criticising restrictions on peaceful demonstrations and asserting their commitment to statehood and opposition to rising prices.

## CBI summons Vijay again in Karur stampede probe

NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has summoned actor and Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam chief Vijay on Tuesday for a fresh round of questioning in the Karur stampede case, officials said. The actor was earlier questioned at the agency headquarters on 12 and 19 January. The CBI took over the probe after a Supreme Court of India order into the 27 September, 2025 incident in Karur, Tamil Nadu. The court said, "The faith and trust of the general public in the process of investigation must be restored."

## PM to launch NDA poll campaign in Kochi on 11 March

KOCHI, 9 MARCH

Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the NDA's massive election campaign convention, to be attended by around 50,000 people, here on 11 March, senior BJP leaders said on Monday. Modi will participate in the convention to be held at the Jawaharlal International Stadium in Kaloor, they said. Addressing reporters, BJP state General Secretary S Suresh said the NDA has adopted the slogan "Let change begin, Viksit Keralam with Modi" for the campaign. He also said the PM's speech may include special announcements related to the state.



## Ex-MLA Moquim announces new party in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, 9 MARCH

Former MLA Mohammed Moquim announced the formation of a new party, Odisha Janata Congress, to be launched on 8 April. Moquim, expelled from Congress last December for questioning party leadership, said the new party would fight corruption. He criticised both BJD and Congress, claiming they had lost relevance. "Though BJD ruled for 24 years, it did nothing for the youth," he said. The party's flag is nearly ready, and he has applied for registration with the Election Commission. Moquim added, "The programme will be youth-centric," with a launch event at Bhubaneswar's Exhibition Ground attended by supporters, including his daughter Sofia Firdous, a Congress MLA.

## RS: 6 win unopposed in TN, 7 in M'ashtra

CHENNAI, 9 MARCH

All six candidates vying for the Rajya Sabha seats in Tamil Nadu have been elected unopposed. The six candidates are DMK's Tiruchi Siva and Constandine Ravindran, Congress's Christopher Manickam, DMDK's LK Sudhish, AIADMK's M Thambi Durai, and PMK's Anbumani Ramadoss. Notably, Tiruchi Siva and Thambidurai have been re-elected. The official also confirmed that the nominations of PMK founder S Ramadoss's aide Swaminathan was rejected.

## SHARAD PAWAR AMONG 7 ELECTED UNOPPOSED

Six candidates of the ruling Mahayuti alliance, including Union Minister Ramdas



Athawale and BJP General Secretary Vinod Tawde, and Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi nominee Sharad Pawar, were elected unopposed too. Besides Athawale and Tawde, the BJP had fielded two more candidates, Ramrao Wadkute and Maya Ivnate.

dates were in the contest. This marks Congress' return to the Rajya Sabha after 10 years.

BJP MLA Terash Gowalla and United People's Party Liberal chief Pramod Boro were elected unopposed to the Rajya Sabha from Assam.

## BJP APPOINTS OBSERVERS

Meanwhile, BJP appointed central observers for Rajya Sabha elections in Bihar, Haryana, and Odisha. Union Minister Harsh Malhotra and Chhattisgarh's Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma have been assigned to Bihar. For Haryana, Gujarat's Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghani was picked, while Maharashtra's Minister Chandrasekhar Bawankule will oversee the elections in Odisha.

## TMC flags SIR, BJP seeks fewer phases

KOLKATA, 9 MARCH

The row over West Bengal SIR split into the Election Commission's pre-poll consultations on Monday, with the TMC alleging voter harassment and the BJP pressing for fewer phases in the elections.

TMC, BJP, CPI(M), Congress and other parties met the EC's full bench led by Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar at a hotel in New Town to place their concerns before it.

TMC alleged that the revision process had led to harassment of ordinary citizens and claimed its concerns were not adequately heard during the interaction.

State Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya said she was asked not to "shout" while raising objections about the exercise.

She said whenever the party attempted to raise concerns over the SIR process, the commission responded by saying the matter was sub-judice in



Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, EC officials at a meeting with National and State political parties West Bengal in Kolkata

## SC to hear on WB voters' deletion

The Supreme Court agreed to consider on Tuesday a fresh plea filed by some persons whose names were deleted from the electoral rolls in West Bengal. The apex court said that it could not sit on appeal over the decisions of the judicial officers. When the counsel of the petitioners said the appeals are maintainable, the court agreed to hear it. On 24 February, SC allowed the deployment of West Bengal civil judges, in addition to 250 district judges, and the requisitioning of judicial officers from Jharkhand and Odisha to handle 80 lakh claims and objections of those facing deletion from the electoral roll.

the Supreme Court, where the TMC has challenged the exercise.

Around 63.66 lakh names have been deleted since the revision began in November, 2025, bringing down the voter base from about 7.66 crore to a little over 7.04 crore.

Over 60 lakh electors have been placed under the "under adjudication" category.

Kolkata Mayor and senior TMC leader Firhad Hakim alleged that the exercise had forced ordinary citizens to repeatedly prove their nationality.

Meanwhile, BJP demanded that the upcoming assembly elections be conducted in three phases, arguing that a prolonged polling schedule could facilitate the movement of anti-social elements.

It said that central forces deployed in relatively peaceful areas instead of sensitive locations.

The CPI(M) also demanded that the elections be conducted in a single phase.

## Kerala CPI MLA warns he will contest as Ind

THRISSUR, 8 MARCH

CPI's candidate selection process has entered rough weather with sitting Dalit MLA CC Mukundan from Nattika on Monday openly declaring that he would contest as an independent following reports that he was denied a party ticket for the upcoming Assembly elections.

The CPI has almost completed its selection of candidate for the 25 seats it contests as part of the LDF, according to reports.

## Wouldn't let Saffron crowd swallow TN: Stalin

TIRUCHIRAPPALLI, 9 MARCH

In a scathing attack on the BJP, ruling DMK president and Chief Minister MK Stalin on Monday alleged that a "saffron crowd" wanted to "swallow" the southern state, but asserted his party would not allow that.

Addressing a mega party conference here, he also took on his rival, AIADMK chief Edappadi K Palaniswami, accusing him of becoming a "slave" to the BJP in order to



DMK MP Kanimozhi Karunanidhi, ex-TN CM M Karunanidhi's wife Rajathi Ammal meets CM MK Stalin & DyCM Udhayanidhi Stalin, in Chennai,

become CM.

Further, with Bihar CM Nitish Kumar set to step down, he said that state never had a BJP CM, and that after winning polls by showcasing the JD (U) veteran, "now they have sidelined him".

A 'Saffron crowd', an obvious reference to the BJP, wants to "swallow Tamil Nadu".

DMK will not allow it to happen, the CM asserted.

Turning to the party members he said "tell people, polls are all about TN vs NDA, 2026

polls is all about who is going to win... for the Tamil Nadu team to emerge victorious request people to vote for the DMK and its allies," he said.

"This is the message you must take to the people during the next two months," Stalin added.

He said it will always be no-entry for NDA in Tamil Nadu, no-entry to NDA's dabba (dysfunctional) engine in the state.

Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin will rule Tamil Nadu, he asserted.

## US ENERGY SECY CLAIMS

## 'US told India to buy Russian oil already at sea'

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, 9 MARCH

The US has urged India to buy Russian oil already floating at sea and redirect it to Indian refineries to "tamp down" fears of supply shortages and price spikes amid the ongoing West Asia conflict, US Energy Secretary Chris Wright has said.

However, the move, he said is a short-term, pragmatic effort to stabilise the market and did not signal any change in Washington's policy towards Russia.

In an interview to CNN on



Chris Wright

Sunday, Wright said he, along with Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, had spoken to Indian

authorities about buying Russian crude cargoes currently waiting to be unloaded at Chinese refineries.

"India has been a great partner through this. I did call up the Indians, as did Treasury Secretary (Scott) Bessent, and said there's a whole bunch of oil floating waiting to unload at Chinese refineries.

"Instead of having it wait six weeks to unload there, let's just pull that oil forward, have it land in Indian refineries and tamp this fear of shortage of oil, tamp the price spikes and the concerns we see in the marketplace," he said.

However, the US policy towards Russia has not changed at all, Wright said, adding that "India is very clear on that".

Responding to a question on whether the Treasury Department's 30-day waiver allowing Indian refiners to purchase Russian oil amid the US-Israel war against Iran undermined the Trump administration's goal of isolating Moscow, he said, "It is not."

"It's just a pragmatic effort that has a short time span. No change in policy towards Russia," he said.

## Govt's resolve is to fulfil people's aspirations: Modi

NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday called for accelerating the process of linking the country's education sector to the real-world economy, while sharpening focus on subjects like artificial intelligence and automation.

Addressing a post-budget webinar, Modi also said that fulfilling aspirations of the people is the resolve of his government and education, skill development, health, tour-

ism, sports and culture are some of the sectors that act as a medium to fulfil them. He said education, skill, health, tourism, sports, and culture are fundamental sectors and major means of fulfilling these aspirations. He said another major sector is STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics. He said the health sector has been strengthened, the Ayushman Bharat Yojana and Arogya Mandirs have led to greater penetration of health services in rural areas.





### JNUSU announces referendum on VC's removal

**NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH**  
The Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU) has announced a student referendum, which will be conducted on Tuesday, seeking the mandate of the students "on whether the vice chancellor should be removed." The referendum will be overseen by former members of the JNU Teachers' Association (JNUTA), and the results will be released on Wednesday. No response was immediately received from the JNU VC's office. JNU, as well as the university students' union, has recently been mired in controversies. The JNU campus witnessed protests after the university suspended four JNUSU office bearers for two semesters.

### Ex-judge loses Rs 1 crore in digital arrest scam

**HYDERABAD, 9 MARCH**  
A 69-year-old retired district judge in Hyderabad lost more than Rs one crore after falling victim to a 'digital arrest' scam. The cyber-criminals threatened the judge, claiming his mobile number was involved in women trafficking and other offences. The victim, a resident of Malkajgiri in Hyderabad transferred the money before realising he had been duped. He lodged a complaint three days ago, and police have launched an investigation. Police explained that victims often get scared and fall prey to such scams. The fraudsters impersonate law enforcement officials, falsely accuse individuals and extort money from them after threatening them with prosecution.



### Bihar cleric booked for remarks on Yogi's mother

**BALRAMPUR, 9 MARCH**  
Maulana Abdul Salim from Bihar has been booked for allegedly making objectionable remarks about Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's mother. An FIR was filed on 7 March at Balrampur's Nagar Kotwalli police station, based on a complaint by BJP district president Ravi Mishra. Salim is accused of making inflammatory comments during a religious gathering, attempting to incite the minority community against cow slaughter laws. The remarks led to protests across Balrampur and Lucknow, with BJP workers demanding strict legal action. BJP MP Ravi Kishan condemned the comments, emphasising respect for motherhood as a symbol of Indian culture.

### India-Seychelles military exercise 'Lamitiye' starts

**NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH**  
The Indian armed forces are participating in a joint exercise with Seychelles from 9-20 March. Conducted at the Seychelles Defence Academy, this exercise involves personnel from the Assam Regiment, the Indian Navy (including INS Trikand), and the Indian Air Force (C-130 aircraft). The 12-day event aims to enhance cooperation, interoperability, and joint training in semi-urban environments, peacekeeping, and counter-threat operations. The exercise, named Lamitiye meaning 'friendship' in Creole, has been held since 2001. It will include tactical drills, discussions, demonstrations, and a final validation, strengthening bilateral military relations.

# West Asia war: Gas crematoriums close down in Pune

## LPG imports from GCC countries affected

**PUNE, 9 MARCH**

The Pune Municipal Corporation has temporarily closed the city's gas crematoriums due to restrictions on the use of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) components like propane and butane amid the West Asia conflict. LPG is a mixture of propane and butane.

The US-Israel war on Iran has disrupted oil and natural gas exports from West Asia.

The Pune civic body said the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas issued an order on 5 March directing that propane and butane should be prioritised for domestic LPG supply. In view of the gas shortage, the Pune Municipal Corporation has decided to keep its gas crematoriums closed from 5 March until further orders, a civic official said on Sunday.

Electric crematoriums and wood-fired facilities equipped



The Centre said priority must be given to domestic consumers while supplying Liquefied Petroleum Gas

with air pollution control systems will continue to function, the official added.

At the Vaikunth crematorium in the city, three gas-fired

furnaces will remain shut temporarily, while five electric furnaces at the facility will remain operational, the civic body said.

## SC bins 5 'frivolous' PILs on Jain food

**NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH**

The Supreme Court on Monday trashed five "frivolous" PILs filed by a lawyer, including one seeking a scientific study on whether onion and garlic contain "tamasic" (negative) energy, and asked if he drafted them in the middle of the night.

The bench, also comprising Justice Joyymalya Bagchi, pulled up lawyer Sachin Gupta for filing a series of PILs.

One of the petitions sought directions to constitute a committee to research what constitutes "tamasic" or negative content in onion and garlic.



The petition referred to dietary practices of the Jain community, which traditionally avoids onion, garlic and root vegetables, considering them "tamasic."

"Why do you want to hurt the sentiments of the Jain community?" the CJI asked Gupta, who appeared in person.

The petitioner replied, saying that it is a common issue and claimed that a divorce allegedly took place in Gujarat over the use of onions in food.

Expressing strong displeasure, the CJI said, "Next time you come up with this kind of frivolous petitions, you will see what we will



do." The bench also dismissed four other PILs filed by Gupta: one sought directions to regulate allegedly harmful content in alcohol and tobacco products, another sought directions to ensure mandatory registration of properties, while yet another sought



Arvind Kejriwal



Manish Sisodia

## Excise case: HC stays action against CBI

**NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH**

Delhi High Court on Monday stayed a trial court recommendation for departmental action against a CBI investigating officer in the excise policy case and sought responses from former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and 22 others on the agency's petition challenging their discharge.

Issuing notice to all 23 accused, Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma said certain observations made by the trial court while deciding on framing of charges "prima facie appear erroneous and need consideration". The court also stayed the trial court's "scathing remarks" against the Central Bureau of Investigation officer, including findings that he had abused his official position and conducted an unfair investigation.

The High Court said some factual discrepancies pointed out by the trial court, and its assessment of witness and approver statements at the

stage of charge, required reconsideration in the light of settled legal principles on conspiracy and framing of charges.

The matter has been listed for hearing on March 16, with the court directing Kejriwal, former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and other accused to file their replies by then.

The court also directed the trial court to adjourn the connected money laundering case being probed by the Enforcement Directorate and await the outcome of the CBI's petition.

Appearing for the agency, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta argued that the trial court's discharge order was perverse and "turned criminal law on its head". He alleged the case involved one of the biggest scams in the capital and said the CBI had gathered extensive evidence, including witness and approver statements, indicating conspiracy and bribery linked to the Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22.

### 2020 Delhi riots: Sharjeel gets 10-day bail

**NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH**

A court here on Monday granted 10-day interim bail to activist Sharjeel Imam, an accused in the 2020 Delhi riots case, for attending his brother's wedding.

Additional Sessions Judge Sameer Bajpai was hearing the interim bail application filed by Imam, seeking relief for six weeks to attend the marriage scheduled this month. In an order, the court granted interim bail from March 20 to 30.

Imam is an accused in the case pertaining to the February 2020 riots in Delhi that killed 53 people and injured around 700.

The violence erupted during the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).



## Boy, 7 others held for Delhi Holi murder

**NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH**

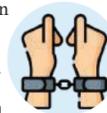
The Delhi Police has arrested seven more people and a minor in connection with the killing of a 26-year-old man during a clash between two families on Holi in Delhi's Uttam Nagar, an official said on Monday. With the latest arrests, the number of people arrested in the case has increased to 14. Two minors have also been apprehended.

Those arrested now are three women, Sayra alias Kali, 40, Sharifan, 50, and Salma, 36, all residents of Uttam Nagar.

They were taken into custody earlier for questioning in connection with the incident, a senior police officer said.

The others arrested are Suhail alias Sahil, 21, Sameer Chauhan, 20, Firoj, 22, and Ismile, 50, all residents of the same locality. A 14-year-old minor was also arrested, police said.

Police said Sayra alias Kali was the woman who allegedly started an argument when a young girl from the victim's family threw a water balloon which burst and splashed water on Kali who was passing by.



## ORDER TODAY ON COUPLE'S BAIL IN RACIAL SLUR CASE

**NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH**

A Delhi court on Monday reserved its order on the bail plea of a married couple accused of hurling racial slurs at their neighbours from Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur.

Additional Sessions Judge Samar Vishal heard the arguments of both parties on Monday and reserved the order for Tuesday.

The accused, Harsh Priya Singh and Ruby Jain, were arrested on 25 February 25 by the Delhi Police for allegedly hurling racial slurs at the three north eastern women.

The counsel for the accused, advocate Gaurav, argued that the case was merely a sponta-



neous dispute between two neighbours, where both parties used derogatory remarks.

It was not a case of racial discrimination that attracted the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, as the accused were not aware that the complainants were tribal, he said.

He also argued the dispute occurred in their apartment complex, which is not a "pub-

lic place" as per the essential ingredients of an offence under Section 3 of the SC/ST Act.

He also submitted that the Police Control Room (PCR) call was made by the accused themselves, as they felt intimidated by the complainants.

Gaurav said that evidence related to the incident had been seized by the police, and the accused had earlier joined the investigation on their own volition before their arrest, and so there is no need for further custodial interrogation.

He also alleged that the medical condition of accused Ruby Jain has deteriorated in jail as her treatment regime has been interrupted.

## Manipuri woman beaten up by boys in racist attack at Delhi park

**NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH**

A Manipuri woman has alleged that she was beaten with a belt and attacked with a knife after she objected to sexual and racial remarks by a group of boys in a south Delhi park.

The police apprehended four juveniles in connection with the incident that took place on Sunday evening Malviya Nagar. The woman and her friend had gone to the park for a walk and were taking pictures when

around six to seven boys started harassing them with sexual slurs, the police said.

"When we objected, the group called us 'prostitutes,' made racist remarks and used abusive Hindi slang," the woman said.

She alleged that the situation quickly escalated into violence. "They started assaulting me. They did not stop even after beating me."

She said that one of the attackers took out a knife and attempted to stab her, forcing her to run away.

"When I fell running, they took an iron belt and hit me on the back of my head, causing bleeding in my right ear," she said.

The woman alleged that she and her friend begged the attackers to stop, but the assault continued.

The woman said she had never seen the attackers before.

The local SHO and other staff rushed to the spot and met the injured woman after a distress call, the police said.

## UP man, his son found motionless inside house

**BALLIA, 9 MARCH**

A father and son were found unconscious in their house, which had been locked for three days in Sahatwar in Uttar Pradesh's Ballia.

Sonu, 35, was later declared dead by the doctors while his father, Ashok, 61, is being treated. Both were habitual drinkers, police said.

As the house was closed for

three days, on 8 March neighbours informed the relatives of the house owner. SHO Anil Singh said that when the relatives arrived, they found the door locked from the inside and alerted the police. The police broke open the door and found Sonu and Ashok unconscious. Police sent Sonu's body for autopsy. An investigation into the matter is underway.

## Kerala Min Ganesh's wife alleges infidelity

**T-PURAM, 9 MARCH**

Kerala Transport Minister KB Ganesh Kumar's wife on Monday levelled allegations of infidelity against him after he denied the rumours circulating on social media regarding the matter. Bindhu Menon said there had been problems with Ganesh Kumar since their marriage in 2014.

The Kerala Congress (B)



leader married Menon in 2014 after separating from Yamini Thankachy.

She said a dispute occurred in 2019 and that she had sought the assistance of BJP leader R Sreelekha, who is her relative.

Menon said she had been living separately for the past several months because of Ganesh's relationship with other women. "I used to fight with him over several women. Then my phones were tracked and allegations were raised against me of

having affairs with my friends," she said.

She alleged that Kumar blocked her phone. She said that after learning about what was happening at Kumar's house in Valakom, she contacted many women and warned them.

She said she wanted closure in their relationship and went to the Valakom house to know what was happening there.

### WORLDWIDE NETWORK

## Reptile smuggling gang's chief arrested

**NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH**

The Madhya Pradesh State Tiger Strike Force, in a coordinated operation with the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, has arrested one Tarak Nath Ghosh, the kingpin of a reptile smuggling racket from Kanpur, officials said on Monday.

The accused, wanted in three cases of transnational illegal trade in turtles and gharials registered in Madhya Pradesh, had been absconding for eight years.

Arrest warrants had been issued against him by three different courts.

"Ghosh's syndicate is spread across several states, including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya



The accused is wanted in three cases of transnational illegal trade in turtles and gharials registered in Madhya Pradesh

Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and West Bengal. Bihar, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, He is also suspected to have a

● The accused, Tarak Nath Ghosh, wanted in many cases had been absconding for 8 years

network outside India, including in Bangladesh, Thailand, Myanmar and Singapore," an official statement by the Ministry of Environment said.

The accused will be produced before the Chief Judicial Magistrate in Madhya Pradesh's Shivpuri on Monday.

"Police or forest custody remand will be sought to obtain further information and intelligence about his alleged network," the statement said.

## Five cheetah cubs born at Kuno National Park

**NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH**

Namibian cheetah Jwala on Monday gave birth to five cubs at Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park, taking the country's cheetah population to 53, Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav announced. The development comes days after cheetah Gagini gave birth to four cubs at the same park.

"A moment of great pride for Project Cheetah as Jwala, the Namibian Cheetah and a successful third-time mother, gave birth to five cubs today at the Kuno National Park. With this, the number of Indian-born thriving cubs has risen to 33, marking the 10th successful cheetah litter on Indian soil -- another import-



A cheetah named Jwala rests with her cubs after giving birth at the Kuno National Park, in MP

ant milestone in India's cheetah conservation journey," Yadav said on X.



### Japan to deploy 1st home grown long-range missile

TOKYO, 9 MARCH  
Japan is set to deploy its first domestically developed long-range missile, with launchers arriving at Camp Kengun in Kumamoto. The upgraded Type-12 land-to-ship missile, developed by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, will be operational by the end of March. It has a range of about 1,000km, enough to reach mainland China, a significant increase from the original 200km. The deployment follows Japan's accelerated military build-up due to regional tensions, especially with China around Taiwan. The missile's deployment at Camp Fuji in Shizuoka is scheduled later this year. Japan considers China a security threat and is expanding its military presence on southwestern islands. Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi announced plans to deploy midrange surface-to-air missiles by 2031, amid rising regional tensions.

### US kills six in Eastern Pacific drug boat strike

WASHINGTON, 9 MARCH  
The US military announced it killed six men on Sunday in a strike targeting an alleged drug-smuggling vessel in the Eastern Pacific, as part of its anti-trafficking campaign. This attack brings the total deaths to at least 157 since September, targeting suspected traffickers along known routes. The military did not confirm the vessel was carrying drugs but released a video showing the boat being destroyed. President Donald Trump claimed the US is in "armed conflict" with Latin American cartels, justifying the strikes. Critics question legality and effectiveness, noting that most fatalities enter the US via land from Mexico. The strikes have also faced criticism for killing survivors of initial attacks, with some calling it murder or war crimes.

### Five killed as Indonesia's largest landfill collapses

JAKARTA, 9 MARCH  
Heavy rain triggered a collapse at Indonesia's largest landfill, killing at least five and leaving several missing. Rescuers, police, soldiers, and volunteers, deployed over 300 personnel to the Bantargebang dump near Jakarta. Victims included two garbage truck drivers and two food stall sellers. Four others escaped, but search efforts continue for at least three missing persons. Photos showed excavators working through debris, with warnings about further ground movement due to unstable waste heaps. The site, already overwhelmed, is under pressure from ongoing capacity issues. Indonesia has previously experienced similar disasters, with a 2005 collapse killing 31. The government plans a two-year project to convert waste into energy to reduce reliance on open dumping.

# US says 'WTF' as Israel bombs Iran's oil depots

## US official says Trump wants to save oil, not burn it

WASHINGTON/TEL AVIV, 9 MARCH

US officials were reportedly taken aback by Israel's large-scale strikes on Iranian fuel depots, with one Israeli official saying the White House sent a "WTF (what the f---)" message, in the first major disagreement between the allies since the war began. According to US and Israeli officials, Israel informed the US military in advance of Saturday's attacks, but Washington was surprised by the scale. Israeli air strikes hit around 30 fuel depots, triggering massive fires in Tehran and blanketing the capital in thick smoke. "We don't think it was a good idea," a senior US

official said, expressing concern that targeting infrastructure used by civilians could backfire by rallying public support for the regime and driving up global oil prices. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) defended the operation, saying the fuel depots were used by the Iranian military. An Israeli military official said the strikes were also meant to warn Tehran against targeting Israeli civilian infrastructure. US officials said the facilities were not oil production sites but warned that burning fuel depots could spook global energy markets. "The president doesn't like the attack. He wants to save the oil," a Trump adviser said.



Iran warned it could retaliate by targeting energy infrastructure across the region. A spokesman for the Khatam al-Anbiya military headquarters said Iran had so far avoided striking regional fuel facilities. Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf

also warned that Tehran would respond "without delay" if attacks on infrastructure continued. Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump said any decision on ending the conflict would be made jointly with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "I think

it's mutual... I'll make a decision at the right time," he said in an interview with The Times of Israel. Trump claimed the intervention had prevented Iran from destroying Israel and said weakening Tehran could also force groups such as Hamas to disarm.

Flames rise from an oil storage facility near Tehran during the US and Israel military campaign in Iran on Saturday

### APOCALYPTIC: IT IS RAINING OIL IN TEHRAN

Oil-saturated raindrops reportedly fell over Tehran on Sunday morning hours after Israeli strikes hit oil facilities in and around the city. Residents said the smell of burning lingered in the air, with many reporting it remained dark even after sunrise as rain fell through black clouds. Some said the rainfall appeared mixed with oil. Authorities urged people to remain indoors amid fears of toxic "acid rain". Residents described the morning gloom as "apocalyptic", switching on lights as smoke blotted out the sun. Iran's environmental authorities warned of respiratory risks, while the Iranian Red Crescent said the explosions released "toxic hydrocarbon compounds, sulphur and nitrogen oxides" into the atmosphere. "In the event of precipitation, the resulting rain is dangerous and highly acidic," it said, warning of skin burns and severe lung damage. Videos shared by citizens showed massive flames lighting up the night sky and smoke billowing from oil storage facilities.

### BAHRAIN'S ONLY OIL COMPANY SHUTS AFTER IRAN ATTACK

An attack by Iran appears to have started a fire in Bahrain's only oil refinery. The state-run refinery declared force majeure on Monday for its shipments after an Iranian attack set its refinery ablaze, sending thick plumes of smoke into the air. Force majeure is a legal manoeuvre that releases a company from its contractual obligations because the

company's operations "have been affected by the ongoing regional conflict in West Asia and the recent attack on its refinery complex." However, it insisted that local demand could still be met. Bahrain also accused Iran of damaging a desalination plant, although authorities stated that water and electricity supplies remain unaffected.



### ISRAEL ACCUSED OF USING WHITE PHOSPHORUS IN LEBANON

Human Rights Watch said in a report on Monday that the Israeli military "unlawfully" struck the southern Lebanese village of Yohmor with artillery shells containing white phosphorus. Using white phosphorus in populated areas is illegal under international law. The substance causes excruciating burns to the bone, respiratory failure, and organ

damage — even from minor exposure. The group said it verified images and geolocated the attack, which hit residential areas hours after the Israeli military warned residents to evacuate. Human Rights Watch said it wasn't able to independently verify whether any residents remained in the area or if anyone has been harmed.

## Amid war, Europe tense after attacks

BRUSSELS/BEIRUT, 9 MARCH

European countries are tightening security after explosions near a synagogue in Belgium and the US Embassy in Norway. Belgian Interior Minister Bernard Quintin described an overnight blast near a synagogue in the eastern city of Liege as a "despicable antisemitic act". Police said the explosion occurred early on Monday, damaging windows of a nearby building but causing no injuries.

Federal prosecutors are investigating the incident as a possible terrorist offence, while the area remained cordoned off for forensic checks. Belgium, France and Germany have announced enhanced security measures due to the conflict, while insisting they are not directly involved alongside the US and Israel. Belgium's transport minister called for stronger security across the rail network.



Police inspect the explosion at the US Embassy in Oslo, Norway; (Inset) Norway police released CCTV footage of the suspect

In Norway, police in Oslo are analysing surveillance footage after an explosion outside the US Embassy early Sunday. Authorities said a loud blast occurred around 1 am, damaging the embassy entrance but causing no injuries. Investigators believe an improvised explosive was placed at the entrance. Police released an image of a suspect wearing dark clothes, a backpack and facial covering. Amid rising tensions, French

President Emmanuel Macron travelled to Cyprus after deploying the frigate Languedoc to waters near the island to strengthen anti-drone and missile defences. France is also sending ground-based defence systems after a Shahed drone struck a British base in Cyprus last week. Macron is meeting Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

Meanwhile, Lebanon's parliament voted to extend its term by two years citing the war and escalating Israeli attacks. Seventy-six MPs backed the move, with Hezbollah's bloc supporting it, as more than half a million people have been displaced ahead of planned elections. Israel carried out fresh airstrikes in Beirut's southern suburbs targeting Hezbollah-linked financial sites. The war has killed at least 1,230 people in Iran, 397 in Lebanon and 11 in Israel.

Meanwhile, Iraq downed a drone targeting a US military compound at Baghdad airport, while Turkey said NATO intercepted a missile entering its airspace. The US has ordered nonessential staff to leave Saudi Arabia. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Washington was "well on our way" to eliminating Iran's missile threat, while Germany's Friedrich Merz said it was up to Iran to stop the fighting.



### INVESTIGATION PROVES US STRUCK IRANIAN SCHOOL, KILLING 165

JERUSALEM, 9 MARCH

The investigative group Bellingcat says a newly released video "appears to contradict" US President Donald Trump's claim that Iran was responsible for an explosion on 28 February at an Iranian school that killed over 165 people during the start of the West Asia conflict. Evidence continues to mount regarding US culpability for the strike on the school. Trevor Ball, a Bellingcat researcher, identified the munition as a Tomahawk cruise missile, which only the US possess. The video shared by Bellingcat shows a munition

falling on a building, sending a dark plume into the air that mingles with smoke that likely came from earlier strikes on the compound. Ball geolocated the video to a site near the school, which was also confirmed by AP. Complicating any assessment of the incident is the lack of images of bomb fragments from the blast. No independent agency has reached the site during the war to investigate the matter. When asked on Saturday if the US was responsible for the blast that killed children, Trump said, without evidence: "No. Based on what I've seen, that was done by Iran."

### US-S KOREA HOLD MILITARY DRILL AMID WEST ASIA WAR

SEOUL, 9 MARCH

The US began a large military exercise with South Korea involving thousands of troops on Monday while also waging an escalating war in West Asia. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff has said about 18,000 Korean troops will take part in Freedom Shield, which runs through March 19. US Forces Korea has not confirmed the number of American troops participating in the training in South Korea.



The allies' combined exercise comes amid South Korean media speculation that Washington is relocating some military assets from South Korea to support fighting against Iran.

## Friend or foe? Don talks to Starmer, Carney

LONDON/TORONTO, 9 MARCH

US President Donald Trump and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer have spoken for the first time since Trump sharply criticised Britain's response to the escalating conflict involving Iran. Downing Street gave limited details of the call, saying the two leaders discussed the war. Trump had earlier dismissed reports that Britain was considering sending aircraft carriers to the region. Posting on Truth Social, he wrote that while the UK, "our once great ally, maybe the greatest of them all", was thinking of



deploying two carriers, the US no longer needed them." The remarks came after the UK Ministry of Defence confirmed that HMS Prince of Wales had been placed on advanced readiness, with its crew in Portsmouth told to be ready to deploy within days.

Four Typhoon jets have arrived in Qatar, while HMS Dragon is set to sail to the Mediterranean to strengthen air defence around in Cyprus.

CARNEY WEIGHS OPTIONS  
Canadian Prime Minister

Mark Carney has also held discussions with Trump on the crisis. Last week, Carney said he could not rule out Canadian military involvement, though he described such a scenario as "hypothetical". Speaking in Canberra with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Carney said Canada would "stand by our allies" and "always defend Canadians". While noting that the US-Israeli strikes on Iran were "inconsistent with international law", he said he supported the action "with regret", calling it an "extreme example of rupturing world order".

### Epstein files: Andrew seen with woman in new photo

LONDON, 9 MARCH

A recent photograph released in files linked to the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein appears to show a man resembling former prince Andrew sitting with a young woman on his lap. According to The Daily Telegraph, the photo is said to have been taken inside Epstein's residence in New York City. Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, who was stripped of his royal titles last year, was arrested in February 2026 on suspicion of misconduct in public based on Epstein files. He denies all allegations. Amid the fallout from her father's legal crisis, Princess Eugenie has since stepped down from the Anti-Slavery International, the world's oldest human rights organisation. Eugenie is also a potential witness in his defence.



A man who looks like Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor with a young woman on his lap

Princess Eugenie is a potential witness in her father's defence for the night he allegedly slept with Virginia Giuffre in March 2001, claiming he "was at home with the children". Giuffre, who died in 2025, had long alleged she was paid USD 15,000 to have sex with Andrew during a visit to London. In January, attorney Brad Edwards said, a second victim claimed she was trafficked to the UK in 2010.

KATHMANDU, 9 MARCH

The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) is heading towards a two-thirds majority in Nepal's parliamentary polls, securing 124 seats under direct voting and over 40 lakh votes under the proportionate-voting system as on Monday morning. The RSP has won 124 seats under direct voting and is leading in one, whereas the Nepali Congress (NC) has won 17 seats. The CPN-UML has won eight seats, the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) seven, and the Shram Sanskriti Party (SSP) three, while the Rastriya Prajantantra Party (RPP) and an Independent candidate have won one seat each. So far, the results for 161 of the 165 seats have been declared under direct voting. Under proportionate voting, the RSP has secured 4049,604



Balendra Shah of RSP after winning the constituency in the Nepal general election

votes, followed by the NC at 13,60,281, the CPN-UML 11,50,679, the NCP 5,91,940, the Shram Sanskriti Party 2,91,965, the Janata Samajwadi Party 1,16,463 and the Rastriya

Parivartan Party 276,931. With more than 40 lakh votes under the proportional representation system, the RSP is expected to secure at least 40 additional seats, taking its tally to around 164 seats in the 275-member House of Representatives, which is well above the 138 needed for a simple majority, political observers said. Nepal is set to witness its first Madhesi prime minister - Balendra Shah - who will also be the youngest elected executive head in the history of the Himalayan country. Fourteen women have been elected to Nepal's parliament, accounting for just over eight per cent of the total seats. Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke with RSP's leader and Shah over telephone on Monday to convey India's commitment to work together for mutual prosperity.

### Anthropic sues Pentagon over nat'l security blacklist

CHICAGO, 9 MARCH

Anthropic has filed two lawsuits against the Trump administration to overturn the Pentagon's designation of the AI as a "supply chain risk." The legal action follows Anthropic's refusal to grant the military unrestricted access to its AI technology. The Pentagon last week formally designated the tech company a "supply chain risk" after an unusually public dispute over how its AI chatbot Claude could be used in warfare. Anthropic aims to prohibit its AI from being used for mass surveillance of US citizens and the development of autonomous weapons. However, Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth demanded the company permit "all lawful uses" of its Claude models, threatening punitive actions.



"These actions are unprecedented and unlawful," Anthropic's lawsuit says. "The Constitution does not allow the government to wield its power to punish a company for its protected speech." US President Donald Trump plans to order federal agencies to stop using Claude, though he gave the Pentagon six months to phase out the product as it is deeply embedded in classified military systems, including in the current Iran war. As well as earlier, in capture of Venezuela's then president Nicolas Maduro.

### 'Iran conflict can strain emerging mkt sovereigns'

**NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH**  
Fitch Ratings on Monday said the Iran conflict could raise additional challenges for some emerging market sovereigns in areas like energy imports, remittances and exchange rates. In a report titled 'Iran conflict raises new credit risks for emerging market sovereigns', the provider of credit ratings said more sustained disruption to global energy supplies from the Gulf than envisaged under its baseline could significantly damage global investor sentiment. Fitch said oil and gas imports are the most direct channel for contagion from the conflict, given its effect on global energy prices. For larger economies, like India, net fossil fuel imports are equivalent to 3 per cent or more of GDP.

### Sebi reviewing Calcutta Stock Exchange exit plea

**NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH**  
The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) is currently examining the application from the Calcutta Stock Exchange (CSE) seeking voluntary exit, said Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary in Parliament. Chaudhary revealed that SEBI has formed a Working Group and appointed a valuation agency for verifying CSE's assets and liabilities. Some information requested by SEBI remains pending. He stated that SEBI would issue a detailed order, considering the assets, liabilities, and regulatory relaxations, to facilitate CSE's exit. The exchange wrote to SEBI on 18 February, 2025, seeking voluntary exit under the Sebi Exit Policy. Trading on CSE's platform was halted in April 2013.

# RBI injects ₹50,000 cr durable liquidity in banking system

MUMBAI, 9 MARCH

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday injected Rs 50,000 crore into the banking system through Open Market Operation (OMO) purchases of government securities, according to a release. The Central bank purchased 6.33 per cent Government

Security (GS) 2035 bonds worth Rs 13,507 crore, 6.01 per cent GS 2030 worth Rs 13,494 crore, 6.10 per cent GS 2031 of Rs 8,157 crore, 7.30 per cent GS 2053 of Rs 6,955 crore, 7.18 per cent GS 2033 worth Rs 4,479 crore, 6.92 per cent GS 2039 of Rs 2,304 crore, and 6.19 per cent GS 2034 of Rs 1,104 crore, it said.

The liquidity in the banking system, currently, is estimated to be in surplus of around Rs 2.41 lakh crore. The OMO purchase auction was announced ahead of expected heavy outflows from the banking system due to advance tax and Goods and Services Tax (GST) payments scheduled later this month.

This comes even as liquidity conditions in the banking system currently remain in a significant surplus of Rs 3.02 lakh crore. As per RBI data, it has infused Rs 2.50 lakh crore through OMO purchases of government securities so far since the start of this calendar year.

Meanwhile, the government has bought back G-secs worth Rs 6,309 crore from the switch auction conducted by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), and has issued bonds worth Rs 6,431.797 crore, according to a release. Government securities (G-Secs) are low-risk debt instruments that are issued by

the government and offer fixed returns and are backed by a sovereign guarantee. The securities repurchased by the government were part of the scheduled bonds set to mature in the next financial year. This is the fourth switch auction by the RBI since February.

# Investors lose Rs 22L cr as markets crash over 2%

Sensex declines by 1,352.74 pts; Nifty tumbles 422.40 pts

NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH

Equity investors became poorer by Rs 22.40 lakh crore since the beginning of the conflict involving the US, Israel and Iran, which has rattled stock markets, driving the BSE Sensex lower by 4.6 per cent. The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 1,352.74 points, or 1.71 per cent, to settle at 77,566.16, registering its second day of decline. During the day, the benchmark crashed 2,494.35 points, or 3.16 per cent, to 76,424.55.

On similar lines, the 50-share NSE Nifty dropped 422.40 points, or 1.73 per cent, to end at 24,028.05. Intra-day, it tumbled 752.65 points, or 3.07 per cent, to 23,697.80.

Since 27 February, the 30-share BSE Sensex has tanked 3,721.03 points or 4.57 per cent.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies dropped sharply by Rs 22,40,408.82 crore to Rs 4,41,10,262.45 crore (USD 4.78 trillion) during this time.

UltraTech Cement was the biggest loser in the Sensex pack, tumbling 5.09 per cent, followed by Maruti, Mahindra & Mahindra, State Bank of India, InterGlobe Aviation, and Adani Ports, which were among the major laggards.

In contrast, Reliance Industries, Sun Pharma,



Infosys, Tech Mahindra and HCL Tech were the gainers. The BSE smallcap select index dived 2.11 per cent and the midcap select index tanked 2.08 per cent. All BSE sectoral indices

WORLD MARKETS			
DOW (US)	47,070.29	(0.95%)	↓
S&P 500 (US)	6,718.47	(0.63%)	↓
Nasdaq (US)	22,305.60	(0.37%)	↓
Nikkei (Japan)	52,728.72	(5.20%)	↓
Hang Seng (CN)	25,408.47	(1.35%)	↓
DAX (Germany)	23,335.88	(1.08%)	↓
FTSE 100 (UK)	10,212.87	(0.70%)	↓
CAC 40 (Paris)	7,878.04	(1.44%)	↓
KOSPI 5 (Korea)	5,251.87	(5.96%)	↓

ended lower. The BSE mid-small private banks quality tilt tumbled 4.50 per cent, PSU Bank (3.92 per cent), auto (3.89 per cent), services (3.37 per cent), Bankex (3.16 per cent),

oil & gas (3.11 per cent) and Private Banks index (2.89 per cent). A total of 3,379 stocks declined, while 972 advanced and 185 remained unchanged on the BSE.

### Oil & paint companies' stocks tumble

Shares of oil marketing companies and paint manufacturers ended lower on Monday amid a sharp rally in crude oil prices due to the deepening conflict in West Asia, which has entered the second week. The stock of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd dropped 6.12 per cent, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd tanked 5.05 per cent, and Indian Oil Corporation declined 4.30 per cent on the BSE. Shares of Shalimar Paints tumbled 4.18 per cent, Indigo Paints dropped 3.83 per cent, Asian Paints 2.75 per cent and Kansai Nerolac Paints 2.09 per cent.



## Global crude price hike won't impact inflation majorly: FM

NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH

The impact of global crude price rise on inflation is not substantial now as India's inflation is near the lower bound, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Monday.

Sitharaman said the price of both global crude oil and the Indian basket has been on a declining trajectory for the past one year, till the clashes commenced in West Asia.

Between the end of February and 2 March, the crude oil FOB price (Indian Basket) rose from USD 69.01/barrel to USD 80.16/barrel.

The RBI's Monetary Policy Report had estimated that if crude oil prices are higher by 10 per cent than the baseline assumptions, and assuming full pass-through to domestic prices, inflation could turn out to be higher by 30 basis

points. However, the medium-term impact of the global crude oil price rise on inflation depends on several factors, including exchange rate movements, global demand and supply situation, monetary policy transmission and the extent of the indirect pass-through. The average retail inflation declined from 4.6 per cent in 2024-25 to 1.8 per cent in 2025-26 (April - January).

The headline inflation for January 2026 stood at 2.75 per cent and is near the lower bound of the RBI's inflation tolerance band of 4 per cent ± 2 per cent. The Monetary Policy Committee also reduced the policy rate by 125 basis points, Sitharaman said.

The government has also undertaken several administrative measures, including fiscal and trade policy, to control inflation.

## Rupee falls to all-time low of 92.35 against USD

MUMBAI, 9 MARCH

The rupee crashed to its all-time closing low of 92.35 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, losing 53 paise during the session, as global crude oil prices saw a sharp spike, and the greenback strengthened amid worsening conflict in West Asia.

Withdrawal of foreign funds amid intense selling in domestic equity markets further pressured the rupee, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 92.22 and rose briefly to 92.15 but kept losing ground through the session before eventually settling at its all-time low of 92.35 (provisional), down 53 paise from its previous close.

The rupee depreciated 18 paise against the US dollar on Friday to close at 91.82 against the American currency. "The rupee opened sharply



lower, hitting a fresh record low of 92.35 on weak global markets and an overnight surge in crude oil prices. Oil prices surged around 25 per cent in the Asian session. Strong dollar and FII outflows also pressured the rupee," Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said.

The dollar index, which gauges greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.35 per cent higher at 99.33.

## Silver slides to ₹2.68L/kg, Gold stays at ₹1.64L/10g

NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH

Silver prices declined by Rs 3,400 to Rs 2.68 lakh per kg, and gold traded almost flat at Rs 1,64,300 per 10g in the national capital on Monday as a firm US dollar dampened the precious metals' demand amid volatile global markets.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, the white metal extended its losses for the third straight day by plunging Rs 3,400, or nearly 1.3 per cent, to Rs 2,68,300 per kg (inclusive of all taxes) from Friday's closing level of Rs 2,71,700 per kg.

Higher energy prices tend to feed into broader inflation expectations, which may delay the pace of interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve. "This scenario supported the US



dollar and Treasury yields, which in turn weighed on precious metals, he added.

Meanwhile, gold of 99.9 per cent purity rose marginally by Rs 200 to Rs 1,64,300 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes). Gold had settled at Rs 1,64,100 per 10g in the previous market session, Association said.

Globally, spot gold fell USD 65.23, or 1.26 per cent, to trade at USD 5,105.89 per ounce, while silver was also trading 0.53 per cent lower at USD 83.92 per ounce.

### AMID WEST ASIA CONFLICT

## Nasscom warns firms of cyber risks, activates contingency plans

NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH

IT industry body Nasscom on Monday said that companies are reviewing contingency framework to ensure operational continuity and service delivery to mitigate potential disruptions amid the conflict in West Asia.

It advised technology companies to heighten vigilance and preparedness across cybersecurity frameworks.

The conflict in West Asia disrupted airspace and raised concerns over regional stability, cyber threats, and potential spillover effects on global technology infrastructure, travel routes, and maritime trade.

It also rattled global markets, as investors turned cautious amid fears around interruption in the global supply of



oil and gas, as well as logistics and technology-related disruptions.

Firms are also prioritising employee safety by enabling work-from-home arrangements for staff in affected areas.

Drones had hit three of Amazon's cloud computing businesses in the UAE and Bahrain last week.

The advisory also recommends that companies evaluate alternate routing options for cloud infrastructure and data centres to maintain system resilience and safeguard critical services.

Organisations are also engaging with their clients to communicate preparedness and ensure the continuity of services.

## Bengaluru's Hical Tech to supply Rafale aircraft parts



BENGALURU, 9 MARCH

Bengaluru-based aerospace manufacturer Hical Technologies has received a contract from Dassault Aviation to manufacture products for Rafale fighter aircraft control systems applications. Hical Technologies said it will deliver mission-critical products that meet Dassault Aviation's stringent engineering, qualification, and reliability standards under the agreement.

"Hical Technologies has demonstrated a strong commitment to quality and reliability — values that strongly align with Dassault Aviation's heritage of excellence," said Bruno Coiffier, senior execu-

tive vice president, procurement & purchasing, Dassault Aviation. "This milestone is a testament to the years of engineering investment, precision manufacturing discipline, and quality culture that our teams at Hical have built," said Yashas Jaiveer, managing director, Hical Technologies. "Being entrusted with critical products for the Rafale is a recognition that Indian aerospace manufacturing has arrived on the global stage," Jaiveer said.

The firm said that its inclusion in the Rafale programme positions the country as a strategic contributor to one of the world's most operationally active fighter aircraft platforms.

### TO BOOST AI-LED MFG

## TCS launches Gemini experience centre in the US

MUMBAI, 9 MARCH

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) on Monday announced the launch of a new Gemini Experience Centre in Troy, Michigan in the US aimed at accelerating the adoption of artificial intelligence-driven solutions in the manufacturing sector.

The new facility, established in partnership with Google Cloud, is the seventh Gemini Experience Centre (GEC) globally and focuses on developing Physical AI solutions designed specifically for industrial and manufacturing environments.

According to the company, the centre will allow manufacturers to explore, test and scale AI-powered use cases to improve safety, quality and operational efficiency. The facility integrates Google's Gemini models with TCS' manufacturing expertise and features the TCS Physical AI Blueprint, an end-to-end framework combining robotics, advanced sensing technologies, edge intelligence and secure cloud orchestration.



The Troy-based centre will showcase several use cases, including autonomous patrolling and surveillance, environmental anomaly detection, personal protective equipment (PPE) compliance monitoring, intelligent quality inspection, progress mapping and predictive equipment health monitoring.

Speaking about the initiative, Anupam Singhal, President, Manufacturing at TCS, said Physical AI brings intelligence closer to real-world operations and enables organizations to extend decision-making capabilities

into environments that may be risky or inefficient for humans.

Saurabh Tiwary, Vice President and General Manager of Cloud AI at Google Cloud, said the collaboration aims to accelerate the deployment of agentic AI in industrial operations.

The launch forms part of TCS' broader expansion of Gemini Experience Centres globally.

The company said it plans to establish a total of 13 such centres by the end of 2026, including six additional facilities scheduled to open later this year.

## Meesho gets ₹1,500 cr I-T demand notice

NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH

E-commerce company Meesho has received a tax demand notice of approximately Rs 1,500 crore, including interest, which it intends to contest, according to a recent filing.

The notice was issued on March 6 for the assessment year 2023-24. The assessment year of the Income Tax Department has raised a demand of Rs 14,99,73,82,840, citing certain additions and adjustments to the income reported by the company.

Meesho stated that it is evaluating the order and does not



agree with the observations or adjustments made. The company believes it has sufficient legal and factual grounds to challenge the demand and is taking steps to protect its interests. A similar demand was issued in 2022-23, disclosed in the firm's December 2025 prospectus.

## ABB to invest \$75M in India for mfg expansion

NEW DELHI, 9 MARCH

Electrification and automation leader ABB announced plans to invest an additional USD 75 million in India during 2026, aimed at expanding manufacturing and R&D capabilities.

This investment follows a prior spend of over USD 35 million in 2025, reflecting a strong commitment to its "local-for-local" strategy.

Around 85 per cent of ABB's products sold in India are

manufactured locally. The investment will bolster growth across electrification, motion, and automation sectors, supporting India's status as a global manufacturing hub. Over the past decade, ABB has invested over \$230 million in India, with 2025 marking its 76th year of operations in the country. Investments include \$14 million in Nelamangala, \$21 million in Peenya, \$12 million in Hyderabad, \$22 million in Nashik, and \$6 million in Vadodra.

# Will Iran's new leader bring change or suppression?



Mojtaba Khamenei was often seen as a gatekeeper and powerbroker rather than a public political figure with a formal portfolio

The death of Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, during the holy month of Ramadan marks one of the most consequential turning points in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran. His successor, his son Mojtaba Khamenei, represents both continuity and contradiction in the revolutionary system established after the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

At stake is not only who leads Iran, but what the Islamic Republic has become, nearly half a century after the revolution that promised an end to dynastic rule.

## WHO IS MOJTABA KHAMENEI?

Mojtaba Khamenei is a cleric who has spent most of his career outside public office but close to power, working within the Office of the Supreme Leader. He was often seen as a gatekeeper and powerbroker rather than a public political figure with a formal portfolio.

At 17, he briefly served in the Iran-Iraq war. He only began attracting public attention in the late 1990s, by which time his father's authority as supreme leader was firmly established.

Over time, his reputation has centred on two key features. The first is a close relationship with Iran's security establishment, particularly the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and its hardline networks.

The second is a strong opposition to reformist politics and Western engagement.

Critics have linked him to the suppression of protests following the disputed 2009 presidential election.

In 2019, the first Trump administration sanctioned Mojtaba, accusing him of acting in an official capacity on behalf of the supreme leader despite holding no formal government position.

## MOJTABA'S LEGITIMACY AS A LEADER

Iran's constitution dictates

that the Assembly of Experts (an 88-member clerical body) selects the supreme leader.

The assembly lists the religious, political and leadership qualifications of possible candidates. But in practice, it is not a neutral electoral body. Candidates for the assembly itself are vetted through institutions ultimately shaped by the supreme leader's orbit, and its deliberations are opaque.

This creates a familiar Iranian scenario – the constitution supplies the choreography, while the security-clerical establishment supplies the music.

That matters when assessing why Mojtaba is seen as a viable supreme leader amid critiques that he lacks the senior religious standing traditionally associated with the office.

A mid-ranking cleric, he was only given the title *ayatollah* in 2022. The title is necessary to become the supreme leader, so the promotion signalled he was being groomed to take over from his ageing and ill father.

The revolution's founding myth was clearly anti-dynastic. After toppling the shah, the revolution's leaders rejected hereditary rule.

To many Iranians, a son following his father as supreme leader looks like an ideological backslide. The regime appears more like a theocratic monarchy, less the famous "guardianship of the jurist".

Yet, it is also important to be precise. Mojtaba cannot inherit the position by bloodline alone. The assembly must select him.

Still, political systems can become dynastic without rewriting constitutions. Dynastic outcomes emerge when informal power networks, such as family ties, political patronage, security ties, and control over the media, can make one candidate appear more natural, safe or inevitable.

That has essentially been the Mojtaba story in Iran for years: a man who built influ-

ence not by winning elections, but by managing the gate to the most powerful office in the country.

The circumstances of Ali Khamenei's death add another layer of significance and, ironically, legitimacy to Mojtaba's ascension.

For many Shi'a Muslims, being killed during Ramadan carries deep symbolic resonance. The first imam of Shi'ism, Ali ibn Abi Talib, was assassinated during the dawn prayer in Ramadan in 661 CE, an event still commemorated each year by Shi'ite Muslims.

Shi'ite historical memory places strong emphasis on martyrdom. In particular, the death of Husayn ibn Ali, a grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, at Karbala in 680 CE, symbolises the struggle between justice and oppression.

Because of this tradition, violent deaths of leaders in the past and today are framed within a broader narrative of sacrifice and resistance.

Iran's revolutionary ideology has long drawn on these themes. If the state presents Khamenei's death in this light, it could strengthen a narrative of martyrdom and defiance.

This, in turn, gives his son Mojtaba an aura of religious legitimacy that is very strong in the Shi'ite Muslim psyche.

## HOW DIFFERENT WOULD HE BE FROM HIS FATHER?

This is the most consequential question for Iran. The answer is likely less different than many might expect.

Ali Khamenei was a figure of the revolutionary generation. His authority rested on ideological legitimacy, decades spent amassing and consolidating power, and his ability to arbitrate between competing factions. Over time, he became the system's final referee. Mojtaba Khamenei, by contrast, is often portrayed as a product of the security establishment, rather than a public theo-

logian or statesman. He is known less for speeches or religious authority than for his influence and the networks he has built behind the scenes for coordination.

If that assessment is correct, the shift would be from a leader who balanced institutions to one who may lean more heavily on the IRGC's might. This would deepen an existing trend toward the securitisation of Iranian politics.

In a period of war and instability, regimes typically prioritise continuity and control. Mojtaba's appeal to the establishment, therefore, appears to rest on several factors:

- His close ties to the IRGC and intelligence networks
- His long experience inside the supreme leader's office
- His ideological alignment with hardline positions sceptical of reform and Western engagement.

A figure trusted by the most powerful security institutions also reduces the chance of power struggles or fragmentation at the top.

## WHAT MIGHT THIS MEAN FOR THE WAR?

A new supreme leader rarely produces an abrupt ideological shift, especially during a military conflict. Continuity is the more likely outcome.

Mojtaba Khamenei's profile suggests a more security-centred style of leadership with three possible ways forward.

First, domestic control may harden. Second, the IRGC could expand its influence in regional affairs, given how closely aligned Mojtaba is with the guards. Third, any negotiations with the West would likely be tactical rather than transformative. And given the fact that his father was killed in US-Israeli airstrikes, this will only reinforce a harder line posture toward both countries. In short, Iran under Mojtaba Khamenei would likely remain confrontational in rhetoric, but pragmatic when regime survival is at stake.

# Hormuz closure may spark fertiliser shock, food risks

Tehran is moving to restrict – or effectively close – the Strait of Hormuz to shipping, as part of the latest escalation in the war involving Iran.

Markets have reacted to the global impact of closing this incredibly busy shipping channel, focusing on the risk to oil and gas flows, the prospect of higher crude prices and the inflationary pressures that would follow.

A sustained disruption of traffic through Hormuz would not simply constitute an energy crisis.

It would also represent a fertiliser shock (where prices rise sharply and supply declines) – and, by extension, a direct risk to global food security.

Modern agriculture runs not only on sunlight and soil, but on natural gas. When German chemists Fritz Haber and Carl Bosch developed their nitrogen fixation method in the early 20th century, they did more than just manufacture ammonia at scale.

They launched a global chemical revolution that remains a cornerstone of modern civilisation and agriculture. Through this process, methane is transformed into ammonia, and ammonia into nitrogen fertilisers such as urea.

Those fertilisers allow crops to reach the yields on which today's global population depends. Without it, harvests of wheat, maize and rice would fall dramatically.

Around a third of globally traded urea passes through the Strait of Hormuz. The Persian Gulf sits at the centre of this system for two structural reasons. First, it offers access to some of the world's cheapest natural gas, essential for ammonia production.

Second, over decades, vast capital investments have built ammonia and urea capacity in countries within the region, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

A significant share of globally traded nitrogen fertiliser – and the liquefied natu-

ral gas (LNG) that powers fertiliser plants elsewhere – must therefore travel through the Strait of Hormuz.

The immediate effect would be delays to shipments of ammonia, urea and LNG. But the deeper impact would unfold in the months ahead at farms around the world.

In the northern hemisphere, fertiliser purchases accelerate before planting seasons. A delay of weeks can be disruptive; a disruption of months can make a huge difference.

If shipments fail to arrive on time, farmers face difficult choices, such as paying sharply higher prices, reducing application rates, or altering crop mixes. Because of how crops respond, even modest reductions in nitrogen use can produce disproportionately large declines in yield.

That could translate into millions of tonnes of lost crops. The consequences would ripple through global supply chains into feed markets, livestock production, biofuels and ultimately retail food prices.

## DO COUNTRIES NOT HAVE THEIR OWN SUPPLIES?

Some countries have fertiliser supplies, but self-sufficiency is rarer than it appears.

India, for instance, relies heavily on LNG imports from the Persian Gulf to run its domestic urea plants. Brazil depends substantially on imported nitrogen and phosphate fertilisers to sustain soybean and maize production.

Even the US, one of the world's largest fertiliser producers, imports meaningful volumes of ammonia and urea to help meet regional demand and reduce prices. In sub-Saharan Africa, the use of fertiliser is already low. A further rise in prices is likely to reduce yields and increase food insecurity.

The system's fragility extends beyond nitrogen.

Sulphur – as an essential nutrient for plant growth – is largely a byproduct of oil and gas processing. If energy shipments through Hormuz are disrupted, sulphur output falls alongside fuel exports.

Meanwhile, the production of synthetic nitrogen is tightly coupled to energy markets because it is manufactured continuously from natural gas. A disruption in gas supply or ammonia trade immediately constrains global nitrogen availability.

Estimates suggest that without synthetic nitrogen, the world could feed only a fraction of its current population. The Strait of Hormuz, therefore, sits at the intersection of energy and food security.

Changing where fertiliser is produced cannot happen overnight. Financing and constructing new ammonia plants takes years.

In the interim, prices would rise, trade flows would re-route, and planting decisions would be made under uncertainty. Food price inflation, historically correlated with social unrest, could intensify.

Central banks, focused primarily on fuel-driven inflation, could underestimate the contribution of fertiliser scarcity to overall price increases. Crucially, fertiliser shocks do not register with the same immediacy as oil shocks. Petrol prices change overnight. Crop yields reveal themselves months later. Yet the latter may prove more destabilising.

If the 20th century taught policymakers to fear oil embargoes, the 21st should teach them to fear a fertiliser shock.

Energy markets can absorb shocks through reserves and substitution. But the global food system has far thinner buffers. A prolonged disruption at Hormuz would not simply reprice crude; it would test the resilience of the industrial nitrogen cycle on which modern civilisation depends.



Modern agriculture runs not only on sunlight and soil, but also on natural gas

## LETTERS

write to us at [growingindia.co.in@gmail.com](mailto:growingindia.co.in@gmail.com)

# Oil and desalinated water built Persian Gulf, but war threatens both

As missiles and drones curtail energy production across the Persian Gulf, analysts warn that water, not oil, may be the resource most at risk in the energy-rich but arid region.

Hundreds of desalination plants sit along the Persian Gulf coast, putting individual systems that supply water to millions within range of Iranian missile or drone strikes. Without them, major cities could not sustain their current populations.

In Kuwait, about 90 per cent of drinking water comes from desalination, roughly 86 per cent in Oman, and about 70 per cent in Saudi Arabia. The technology removes salt from seawater – most commonly by pushing it through ultra-fine membranes in a process known as reverse osmosis – to produce the freshwater that sustains cities, hotels, industry and some agriculture across one of the world's driest regions.

For people living outside West Asia, the main concern of the Iran war has been the impact on energy prices. The Gulf produces about a third of the world's crude exports, and energy revenues underpin national economies. Fighting has already halted tanker traffic through key shipping routes and disrupted port activity, forcing some produc-

ers to curb exports as storage tanks fill.

But the infrastructure that keeps Gulf cities supplied with drinking water may be equally vulnerable.

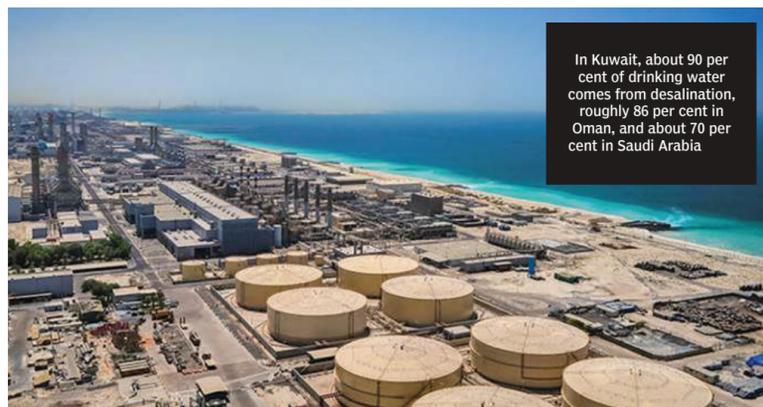
## EARLY SIGNS OF RISK

The war that began 28 February, with US and Israeli attacks on Iran has already brought fighting close to key desalination infrastructure. On 2 March, Iranian strikes on Dubai's Jebel Ali port landed some 12 miles from one of the world's largest desalination plants, which produces much of the city's drinking water.

Damage was also reported at the Fujairah F1 power and water complex in the United Arab Emirates, and at Kuwait's Doha West desalination plant. The damage at the two facilities appeared to have resulted from nearby port attacks or debris from intercepted drones.

On Sunday, Bahrain accused Iran of indiscriminately attacking civilian targets and damaging one of its desalination plants, though it didn't say supplies have gone offline.

Earlier, Iran said a US airstrike damaged an Iranian desalination plant. Abbas Araghchi, the country's foreign minister, said the strike on Qeshm Island in the Strait of Hormuz had cut into the water supply for 30 villages.



In Kuwait, about 90 per cent of drinking water comes from desalination, roughly 86 per cent in Oman, and about 70 per cent in Saudi Arabia

He warned that in doing so "the US set this precedent, not Iran."

Many Gulf desalination plants are physically integrated with power stations as cogeneration facilities, meaning attacks on electrical infrastructure could also hinder water production. Even where plants are connected to national grids with backup supply routes, disruptions can cascade across interconnected systems, said David Michel, senior fellow for water security at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

## A LONG-STANDING CONCERN

Gulf governments and US officials have long recognised the risks these systems pose for regional stability: if major desalination plants were knocked offline, some cities could lose most of their drinking water within days. A 2010 CIA analysis warned attacks on desalination facilities could trigger national crises in several Gulf states, and prolonged outages could last months if critical equipment were destroyed. More than 90 per cent of the

Gulf's desalinated water comes from just 56 plants, the report stated, and "each of these critical plants is extremely vulnerable to sabotage or military action."

A leaked 2008 US diplomatic cable warned the Saudi capital of Riyadh "would have to evacuate within a week" if either the Jubail desalination plant on the Gulf coast or its pipelines or associated power infrastructure were seriously damaged.

Saudi Arabia has since invested in pipeline networks, storage reservoirs and other

- Hundreds of desalination plants sit along the Persian Gulf coast, putting individual systems that supply water to millions within range of Iranian missile or drone strikes. Without them, major cities could not sustain their current populations.

redundancies designed to cushion short-term disruptions, as has the UAE. But smaller states such as Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait have fewer backup supplies.

## THE THREAT IS NOT HYPOTHETICAL

During Iraq's 1990-1991 invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent Gulf War, Iraqi forces sabotaged power stations and desalination facilities as they retreated, said the University of Utah's Low.

At the same time, millions of barrels of crude oil were deliberately released into the Persian Gulf, creating one of the largest oil spills in history.

The destruction left Kuwait largely without fresh water and dependent on emergency water imports. Full recovery took years.

The incidents underscore a broader erosion of long-standing norms against attacking civilian infrastructure, Michel said, noting conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza and Iraq.

International humanitarian law, including provisions of

the Geneva Conventions, prohibits targeting civilian infrastructure indispensable to the survival of the population, including drinking water facilities.

## IRAN'S OWN WATER SUPPLY AT RISK

After a fifth year of extreme drought, water levels in Tehran's five reservoirs plunged to some 10 per cent of their capacity, prompting President Masoud Pezeshkian to warn the capital may have to be evacuated.

Unlike many Gulf states that rely heavily on desalination, Iran still gets most of its water from rivers, reservoirs and depleted underground aquifers.

The country operates a relatively small number of desalination plants, supplying only a fraction of national demand.

Iran is racing to expand desalination along its southern coast and pump some of the water inland, but infrastructure constraints, energy costs and international sanctions have sharply limited scalability.



# lifestyle

**Rashmika:**  
Find a love that liberates you



## Kriti wishes 'Jiju'

**Stebin Ben on birthday: Happiest to call you Family**

**A**ctress Kriti Sanon has penned the sweetest birthday wish for her "Jiju" Stebin Ben as he turned a year older on Monday. Sharing a goofy yet adorable photo with Stebin on her Insta Stories, Kriti penned a heartfelt note in which she revealed that she feels the happiest to call the singer a part of her family.

Kriti further admitted that she is in awe of Stebin's talent. Expressing her pride in his incredible journey so far, Kriti wrote on the photo-sharing app, "Happiest Birthday Stebsssss!! Proud of your journey, in awe of your sheer talent & happiest to call you Fam! Always rooting for you!! (sic)".

The 'Tere Ishk Mein' actress dropped another picture with her brother-in-law, giving him a warm hug, and wrote, "Brother from another mother! Love you!!" Kriti's sister, Nupur Sanon, also compiled a heartmelting wish for her husband on social media, saying, "Words could never express how grateful I am for you...for the extraordinary man that you are. You are my safe place, where I get to be soft, silly, and completely me." Nupur and Stebin tied the knot this January in Udaipur as per both Hindu and Christian rituals after being in a relationship for some time. Kriti, who shared multiple glimpses from the wedding festivities on her social media handle, disclosed in one of the posts that Nupur and Stebin dated for around five years before getting hitched.



**A**ctress Rashmika Mandanna, who has stepped into her happily ever after, turned emotional after reading a heartfelt note written about her affection for actor Vijay Deverakonda, saying that love should be something that liberates a person. A user on X wrote an article about "romantic optimism in a cynical age" referencing Rashmika and Vijay's relationship. The user shared a note reflecting on admiration as a quiet but powerful expression of love. Reacting to the post on social media, Rashmika shared that she had not felt so emotional reading something written about her in a long time.

"I have never become so emotional reading something written about me this much in a long long time.. There is so much I want to say but so little I can say," Rashmika wrote. "I am finding my own room and that's a journey I am so grateful for.. Thankyou for recognising it.. About love all I can say is - Find a love that liberates you," Rashmika added.



## Rihanna 'okay' after home targeted in shooting while she was inside, accused arrested

**G**rammy winner Rihanna's home in California was shot at while the singer was inside. A 30-year-old woman was arrested after allegedly firing multiple shots at Rihanna's Beverly Hills mansion, one of which went through her wall, reprob people.com. A representative for the Los Angeles Police Department said that officers responded to a report of "shots fired" at the residence at around 1:15 p.m. local time. A suspect was located and taken into custody without incident, and a weapon was recovered.

No injuries were reported, the LAPD representative said, adding, "This is an active LAPD Robbery Homicide Division investigation." The Los Angeles Times was the first out to report that a 30-year-old woman, whose identity has not been made public, was arrested. A source confirmed that Rihanna, 38, lives at the home with her partner, rapper A\$AP Rocky, and their three children, RZA, Riot and Rocki.

The source says that the singer was home at the time of the incident. It is unclear if anyone else was also in the house at the time. The source also tells PEOPLE that Rihanna is "okay." Police Sgt. Jonathan de Vera, a spokesperson for the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), told the Times that the suspect fired multiple rounds from inside her vehicle toward Rihanna's home. In LAPD radio dispatch audio obtained by the outlet, first responders can be heard saying that "approximately 10 shots" had been fired at the residence from a vehicle, a white Tesla, across the street.



## Farah Khan says she 'always looks good in borrowed clothes'

**F**ilmmaker and choreographer Farah Khan made her fans giggle after quipping over her own fashion statement, saying that she "always looks good in borrowed clothes". The filmmaker shared a glimpse from a recent wedding she attended in Jodhpur. Taking to her social media account, Farah posted a picture from the celebration, giving fans a glimpse of her stylish traditional outfit.

In the picture, Farah is seen posing stylishly against a decorative wall. She is dressed in a deep green embroidered kurta paired with striped

pants and beige wedges, further completing her look with minimal accessories and a small maroon handbag. Sharing the image, Farah wrote, "Jodhpur wedding! Thank you for this beautiful outfit.. i always look good in borrowed clothes." Talking about Farah Khan, on the professional front, she began her journey in the entertainment industry as a background dancer in the early 1980s and was seen as a background dancer behind many stars of the 80s era of Bollywood.

Later, she went on to choreograph umpteen number of iconic songs and later ventured into direction with

films such as Main Hoon Na, Om Shanti Om and Happy New Year. In recent times, Farah has also been engaging her audiences through her popular vlogging content on social media.

In the videos she shares on her YouTube channel, she is seen visiting the homes of various celebrities along with her star chef Dilip, further engaging them in candid conversations while the hosts cook meals for her. In one of her interviews, Farah had stated that she's making more money through her YouTube content as compared to all her Bollywood projects.

## Daisy tells troll: Good luck with spreading hate in the name of religion

**A**ctress Daisy Shah strongly responded to a social media troll who attempted to target her after a video of the actress cooking iftaari. It began after a user shared the clip and wrote: "Meet Daisy Shah. She has a problem with firecrackers but she visits Iftaar parties and cooks there as well," attempting to question the actress's stance. Several others trolled her by commenting "All this to make Salman happy!!!" and "Who exactly is Daisy Shah? She must be a caterer for that party" among many other remarks. Reacting to the post, Daisy took to X, formerly called Twitter and dismissed the comparison and called out the attempt to spread hatred in the name of religion.

"Fire Crackers and cooking food are completely different from each other. Good luck with spreading hate in the name of religion. I hope you get well soon," Daisy wrote. Regarding the actress, Daisy first worked as an assistant to choreographer Ganesh Acharya on films like Zameen and Khakee, and later started modelling, appearing in photo shoots and print ads. Kannada director Harsha approached her to star in the film Chingari.





### South Africa, West Indies set to leave India today

KOLKATA, 9 MARCH

The West Indies and South Africa squads have finally received confirmation regarding their departure from India after their campaigns in the ICC T20 World Cup came to an end. According to a report by ESPNcricinfo, both teams are currently stationed in Kolkata and are scheduled to leave in the early hours of Tuesday, on a charter flight bound for Johannesburg. The logistical complications followed the teams' respective exits from the tournament, with West Indies knocked out in the Super Eight stage after losing to India on 1 March, while South Africa's campaign ended with a semi-final defeat to New Zealand on 4 March. While confirmation of the charter flight has now provided some certainty.

### Radhamani and Sahil register wins in World Boxing

BAGHDAD, 9 MARCH

The Indian Youth boxing team continued its campaign at the World Boxing Futures Cup 2026 in Bangkok with mixed results on the second day of competition, as Radhamani Longjam and Sahil Duhan secured victories in their respective bouts. In the women's 57kg category, Longjam delivered a commanding performance to defeat her opponent from Uzbekistan, sealing the bout with a Referee Stopped Contest (RSC) in the third round. In the men's division, Duhan (60kg) continued his impressive run in the tournament with a dominant 5-0 unanimous decision victory over Turkmenistan. Meanwhile, Udhm Singh (55kg) put up a close fight but went down 3-2 against Japan in a tightly contested bout.



### Young talent needs to be tested in B'desh: Hesson

KARACHI, 9 MARCH

Pakistan's white-ball coach Mike Hesson says the exclusion of senior players such as Babar Azam, Saim Ayub, and Naseem Shah from the One-day series in Bangladesh should not be construed as punishment for non-performance in the just-concluded T20 World Cup. Under fire after Pakistan's exit before the knockout stage, Hesson insisted that Pakistan had scant opportunities to test young, promising talent, and the series in Bangladesh was one such chance. "I wouldn't say anyone was dropped. We just see this series as an opportunity to give these promising players a chance to prove themselves," he said.

### Jose Mourinho says he was called 'traitor'

LONDON, 9 MARCH

Jose Mourinho claimed a rival coach "called me a traitor 50 times" after being sent off in the final minutes of the latest frenetic "Clássico" between fierce rivals Benfica and Porto on Sunday. The 63-year-old Mourinho was shown a red card in the 90th minute of the 2-2 draw, with the Benfica coach saying after the game he was sanctioned for kicking a ball toward Porto's substitutes' bench. In quotes carried by Portuguese daily A Bola, Mourinho said that wasn't his intention. "Many times... I kick the ball toward the stands to give a lucky fan a chance," Mourinho said in the post-match news conference.

# Sindhu pulls out of Swiss Open; Prannoy, Srikanth to lead

BASEL, 9 MARCH

Two-time Olympic medallist P V Sindhu will give the Swiss Open a miss as she recovers from the three-day ordeal in Dubai, while H S Prannoy and Kidambi Srikanth will spearhead the Indian challenge at the USD 250,000 tournament starting here on Tuesday. Sindhu had to withdraw from the All England Championships after being stranded in Dubai for three days due to Gulf airspace restrictions following the US and Israeli bombing of Iran

and the subsequent retaliation by Tehran. She was to travel to Birmingham via Dubai, but could not do so.

"She is not playing at the Swiss Open. We all know what she went through in Dubai; she couldn't travel to Birmingham. So she has sought some time to recover from it," Badminton Association of India (BAI) secretary Sanjay Mishra told PTI.

After returning home, Sindhu had confessed that she struggled to remain calm during the ordeal in Dubai, wishing it to be the first and



last such experience in her life.

"There was a lot of stress. And it was scary. I think the only thing was to stay calm. I know that's not the ideal situation where you say we are

calm, but we're not inside," Sindhu had said.

"Actually, it is very stressful. But I think it is an experience, I must say. And I hope it's the first and the last experience like this."

Sindhu is likely to return to action at the Badminton Asia Championships in April.

In men's singles, Srikanth, who reached two finals last year at the Malaysia Masters and Syed Modi International, will open against Jason Gunawan, who had dashed his hopes of ending a title drought in Lucknow.



# Surya and Co. want to extend dominance with Olympic gold

Los Angeles 2028 will see cricket return to Olympics

AHMEDABAD, 9 MARCH

The on-field celebrations after India's second T20 World Cup title in 18 months were not particularly exuberant, to say the least. Perhaps they reflected the habit of winning that the shortest format team has normalised.

Yes, there were smiles and hugs all around, and a few of the players even did an impromptu bhanga gig after one of the most emphatic wins in ICC finals. Yet, the players' immediate reactions suggested that deep down they knew only an exceptionally bad day in office could have denied them the trophy.

Rohit Sharma and his team getting over the line in that 2024 final in Barbados ended a prolonged period of heart-break in world events. The victory on Sunday night had an air of inevitability to it.

Dhoni lauds Gambhir and team after historic T20 WC win

India's history-making T20 World Cup triumph here reactivated the enigmatic Mahendra Singh Dhoni on social media after nearly two years, and he took the opportunity to tell head coach Gautam Gambhir how good a



smile looks on his intense face said on Monday Dhoni's last Instagram post was back in 2024. "History gets created at Ahmedabad, big congratulations to the team and support staff and to all the fans of the Indian Cricket Team worldwide. Such a pleasure to see all of you play," he posted after attending the final in which India thrashed New Zealand by 96 runs to win the trophy for an unprecedented third time. "Coach Sahab's smile looks great on you. Intensity with a smile is a killer combo, very well done. enjoy guys...BUMRAH ke



baare mein kuch na likhooon tou hi acha hai. CHAMPION BOWLER (It's better if I don't write anything on Bumrah)," he quipped, referring to Gambhir's mostly serious demeanour.

Gambhir responded to Dhoni, saying he felt nice to see the former skipper at the stadium.

### Gauti bhai took two steps, I took two and we met somewhere in middle: SKY

After Rahul Dravid finished his tenure as the Indian cricket team's head coach, the then captain Rohit Sharma had talked about how the legend was perceived to be his "work wife" by his better half. When one watches his T20 successor Suryakumar Yadav speak about current head coach Gautam Gambhir, the equation seems as comfortable and built on mutual trust and respect as it was between Rohit and Dravid. "I think I have played cricket with Gauti bhai for four years (in Kolkata Knight Riders), and I knew how he thinks. He will take two steps, I will take two, and we will meet somewhere in the middle," Suryakumar said when asked about his relationship with Gambhir since the duo started headlining the shortest format team after the 2024 T20 World Cup triumph under Dravid and Rohit.



# Emma Raducanu was knocked out of Indian Wells by Amanda

INDIAN WELLS, 9 MARCH

Emma Raducanu suffered a quick exit to Amanda Anisimova at Indian Wells, losing a third-round clash 6-1, 6-1 in just 52 minutes.

Anisimova reached the Wimbledon and US Open finals last year and is the world No 6, and the level of her play was on full show against Raducanu.

After her split from coach Francisco Roig earlier this year, Raducanu had reunited with Mark Petchey on a day-to-day basis during this tournament. While she had played well in her opening game, when she dispatched Anastasia Zakharova in straight sets, Raducanu struggled with Anisimova. The American had Raducanu



under pressure from the start as she broke the Briton's serve in the very first game.

**Bhambri and Goransson move to pre-quarters**  
India's top doubles player, Yuki Bhambri, and his Swedish partner Andre Goransson had an easy day in the office, winning in straight sets against David Pel and Fabrice Martin at the Indian Wells Masters here. The unseeded Indo-Swedish pair



won 6-1, 6-3 as they broke the French-Dutch combo five times in the opening round of the ATP 1000 event. Bhambri and Goransson served five aces to three of their opponents.

Pel and Martin served six double faults in the 66-minute contest. They will next face the giant-killing team of Sander Arends and Jiri Lehecka, who knocked out second seed British pair of Julian Cash and Lloyd Glasspool.

### HELPED ME REGAIN FORM

### SAMSON SAID HE APPROACHED TOURNAMENT WITH A DIFFERENT GAME PLAN

T'PURAM, 9 MARCH

Star batsman Sanju Samson, who helped India lift the T20 World Cup, on Monday said he approached the tournament with a different game plan that helped him regain form.

He was speaking to reporters after returning to Thiruvananthapuram following India's World Cup triumph.

Samson, who won the 'Man of the Tournament' award for his performance in the cricket T20 World Cup, received a grand welcome at the airport,



where he was greeted by Kerala Education Minister V Sivankutty upon arrival in the evening.

Hundreds of cricket fans gathered outside the airport, raising slogans in support of the Kerala cricketer.

Speaking about the change in his batting approach, Samson said with a smile that earlier he had tried to attack every ball and often got out.

"I tried to hit every ball, but it did not work. Then I had to learn from those failures. In the five-match series, I tried to increase my strike rate, but it didn't work."

### Sri Lanka appoints Gary Kirsten as head coach

COLOMBO, 9 MARCH

Former India World Cup-winning coach Gary Kirsten was appointed head coach of the Sri Lanka cricket team on Monday for a two-year contract starting 15 April.

Kirsten, a former South African opener who later built a successful reputation as a coach, will remain in the role until April 14, 2028, and will primarily oversee Sri Lanka's preparations for the 2027 ODI World Cup, to be held in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Namibia.

Confirming the appointment in a media release, Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) said the move is part of its broader effort to revamp the structure of the National High Performance Center and strengthen the national side ahead of major global events.

Kirsten brings with him a wealth of international coaching experience, having previously guided India to the 2011 World Cup triumph during his tenure from 2008 to 2011.



# AFC Asian Cup: India women face Chinese Taipei in a virtual knockout

SYDNEY, 9 MARCH

India women's football team faces a must-win clash as they take on Chinese Taipei in their last Group C match of the AFC Women's Asian Cup here on Tuesday.

India is currently bottom of the group at fourth place with zero points from two matches after having lost against Vietnam (1-2) and Japan (0-11). Japan is at the top of the

group with six points from two games, while Chinese Taipei and Vietnam are second and third, respectively, with both sides tied on three points apiece.

However, the Blue Tigresses still have a chance to make it to the quarter-finals, should they defeat Chinese Taipei by a margin of two goals or more, and if Japan defeats Vietnam on Tuesday in the simultaneous kick-off.

Even a victory by a margin of one goal may be enough, should the match between Bangladesh and Uzbekistan on Monday end in a draw. The top two teams from each of the three groups, along with the two best third-place finishers, will make it to the last eight.

India head coach Amelia Valverde highlighted the importance of putting the past results behind them after the last two matches.



### DISRUPTIONS CAUSED BY WAR

### Iran soccer team exits Women's AC, faces prospect of returning home

GOLD COAST, 9 MARCH

Iran's football team lost its last group match at the Women's Asian Cup on Sunday and had to contemplate returning home to a country embroiled in war.

The Iranian women's squad arrived in Australia for the continental championship last month, before the war that began with the US-Israeli February 28 strikes on Iran. Teams ousted during the group stage usually leave within days, but organisers have not announced details for the departure of the Iran



delegation.

Australia's national news agency quoted Iran's head coach Marziyeh Jafari saying the squad "want to come back to Iran as soon as we can". "I want to be with my coun-

try and home.... We are eager to come back," AAP quoted Jafari as telling a post-match news conference.

Their silence during the anthem before an opening loss to South Korea last Monday was viewed by some as an act of resistance and others as a show of mourning.

The team has not clarified. But the players sang the national anthem and saluted during the national anthem ahead of their 4-0 loss to Australia last Thursday and a 2-0 loss to the Philippines on Sunday.

### Iraq coach Arnold urges FIFA to delay his team's World Cup playoff

BAGHDAD, 9 MARCH

Iraq head coach Graham Arnold has issued an urgent plea to soccer's international governing body to delay his team's intercontinental qualifier for the World Cup because of disruptions caused by the escalating Iran war.

The Iraq squad faces major logistical issues ahead of a winner-takes-all playoff against either Suriname or Bolivia, scheduled for March 31 in Monterrey, Mexico.

With Iraqi airspace closed until April 1 due to the esca-



ping conflict, Arnold's squad — containing predominantly players from the domestic league — is unable to fully gather.

Players haven't secured visas for the playoff tournament in Mexico due to for-

eign embassy closures, and Arnold is stranded in the United Arab Emirates due to the conflict.

"Please help us with this game because right now we are struggling to get our players out of the country of Iraq," Arnold, a former coach of Australia's national team, told the Australian Associated Press.

The turmoil has already forced the postponement of a planned training camp in Houston. Arnold said fielding a team comprised only of overseas-based players is not a viable option.