

PM Modi, Trump discuss West Asia crisis, stress keeping Strait of Hormuz open

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New Delhi, Mar 24: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Tuesday, spoke with US President Donald Trump, with discussions focusing on the ongoing crisis in West Asia, US envoy Sergio Gor said. "President Donald Trump just spoke with Prime Minister Modi. They discussed the ongoing situation in the Middle East, including the importance of keeping the Strait of Hormuz open," Gor said in a post on social media. Earlier in the day, in a statement in the Rajya Sabha, Modi reiterated India's position that dialogue and diplomacy remain the only viable paths to restoring peace in West Asia. He said India is in constant touch with all parties, including Iran, Israel and the United States, to push for



de-escalation. The Prime Minister described the conflict as a matter of concern and stressed that India seeks a peaceful resolution through sustained dialogue. India's objective, he said, is both the de-escalation of the conflict and the continued opening of the Strait of Hormuz, while encouraging all sides to resolve differences

through peaceful means.

Meanwhile, the Centre, on Tuesday, said that two LPG carriers, Pine Gas and Jag Vasant, have safely crossed the Strait of Hormuz and are on their way to India. Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, said during an inter-ministerial briefing

that the Pine Gas vessel will arrive at New Mangalore port on March 27, which carries 45,000 metric tonnes of LPG.

"Jag Vasant will arrive at Kandla port on March 26, carrying 47,600 metric tonnes of LPG. Twenty Indian-flagged vessels remain to the west of the Strait of Hormuz," Sinha informed. Jag Vasant loaded LPG from Kuwait, while Pine Gas picked up its cargo from Ruwais in the UAE. They had remained stuck in the region due to the tensions before now being allowed to move. The development comes at a time when the Strait, a key global route for oil and gas shipments, has been severely affected by rising tensions following US and Israeli strikes in the region late February.



SC: Conversion Ends Scheduled Caste Status

New Delhi, Mar 24: The Supreme Court on Tuesday ruled that only individuals belonging to Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist faiths can claim Scheduled Caste (SC) status, and that conversion to any other religion results in the loss of such status. A bench of Justices P K Mishra and Manmohan delivered the ruling while hearing an appeal filed by pastor Chinthada Anand, who had alleged caste-based abuse and discrimination by Akkala Ramireddy and others. Based on his complaint, police had registered an FIR under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

The appeal challenged a

May 2025 judgment of the Andhra Pradesh High Court, which had quashed the FIR on the grounds that Anand, having converted to Christianity, could no longer claim SC status or seek protection under the Act. Upholding the high court's order, the apex court observed that Dalit person who converts to Christianity — a religion that does not recognise caste distinctions — nullifies SC status. "No person professing a religion other than Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist shall be deemed a member of a Scheduled Caste," the court said. Anand then approached the Supreme Court in appeal.

Delhi HC Rejects Lalu's Quashing Plea

New Delhi, Mar 24: In a significant legal blow to RJD supremo Lalu Prasad Yadav, the Delhi High Court on Tuesday dismissed his petition to quash the CBI's FIR in the "land-for-jobs" case. Justice Ravinder Dubeja ruled the plea "devoid of merit," upholding three chargesheets filed between 2022 and 2024. The case stems from allegations that during Yadav's 2004-2009 tenure as Railway Minister, Group D appointments in the West Central Zone were exchanged for land parcels gifted to his family and associates. The court rejected Yadav's primary defense—that the investigation was legally unsustainable without prior sanction under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act. With the dismissal, the 77-year-old former Chief Minister, along with his wife Rabri Devi and two daughters, remains under the scanner, though they are currently out on bail.



Objectionable Videos and ₹1,500cr: Nashik Godman Exposed



Mumbai, Mar 24: The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing cases against self-styled godman and rape accused Ashok Kharat has unearthed assets worth Rs 1,500 crore and 100 objectionable videos, a senior police official said on Tuesday. With the discovery widening the scope of the investigation, the Nashik police and Income Tax Department have also been roped in for the probe, the official said.

Kharat, who heads a temple trust at Sinnar in Nashik district and had several political leaders visit him over the years, was arrested on March

18 after a 35-year-old woman accused him of repeated rape over a period of three years. Two more cases have been registered against him in connection with his alleged sexual exploitation of a seven-month pregnant woman and another woman on the pretext of getting her remarried. "The SIT has discovered 100 objectionable videos and assets worth around Rs 1,500 crore related to him. While the I-T department is investigating financial irregularities and property holdings of Kharat and people related to him, the cyber police are examining the videos," he said.

A multi-agency investigation is underway, considering the scope and seriousness of the probe, he added. The expansion aims to manage the complex layers of evidence, including digital forensics and financial trails, he said.

The SIT led by IPS officer Tejaswini Satpute is probing six cases against Kharat and has appealed to the public to come forward with any relevant information related to the criminal cases in Nashik.

The official said that the SIT has assured that the identities of those providing information or reporting a crime committed by the accused will be kept strictly confidential.

The probe team comprises five to 10 officers from the crime branch, including women personnel to handle victims' sensitive statements, the official said. Maharashtra Director General of Police (DGP) Sadanand Date and the state government are monitoring the investigation to ensure accountability and swift progress.

Bihar CM Nitish Kumar elected JD (U) president unopposed



Patna, Mar 24: Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar was on Tuesday re-elected national president of Janata Dal (United) unopposed. This comes close on the heels of his election to the Rajya Sabha on March 16. As no other nomination papers were filed for the post, Nitish was elected unopposed after the withdrawal deadline concluded on Tuesday. He has been re-elected for the 2025-28 term. Earlier, on behalf of Nitish, JD (U) working president Sanjay Kumar Jha, Bihar Rural Development Minister Shrawan Kumar, party MLC Sanjay Gandhi, and other senior party leaders had handed over the nomination papers to the party's returning officer and former MP, Aneel Prasad Hegde, at the party's central office in New Delhi.

JD(U) was formed in 2003 by former union minister and socialist leader George Fernandes, who was elected as its first national president. He was later succeeded by Sharad Yadav, who led the party for several terms. Sharad later parted ways and joined Lalu Prasad's Rashtriya Janata Dal. Nitish assumed the post of JD (U) national president for the first time in April 2016, succeeding senior leader Sharad Yadav. He was re-elected in 2019 but stepped down in 2020, making way for RCP Singh.

In 2021, Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lalan Singh assumed the charge. However, ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha election, Nitish became national president of the party again on December 29, 2023. Nitish's son, Nishant Kumar, recently joined JD(U). He is likely to be given an important role in the organisation.



No alliance for ADC polls, Pradyot Debbarma says Tipra Motha to go solo

No Deal: Solo ADC Bids Signal a New Era for Tripura Politics

Agartala, Mar 24: In a surprise move that has reshaped the State's political landscape ahead of the Autonomous District Council (ADC) elections, Tipra Motha chief Pradyot Kishore Debbarma on Monday announced that his party will not enter into electoral alliance with any political party. Speaking via a live address on social media, Pradyot declared that his "alliance is with the Tiprasa people," asserting that this stand would remain unchanged unless a written assurance is provided for the swift implementation of the tripartite Tiprasa Accord signed in 2024. "A stage has now come when I am announcing that there will be no alliance with any party or group unless we receive a written assurance," he said.

Reaffirming his position as 'Bubagra' (king), Pradyot maintained that he would never mislead or betray his people. He also touched upon broader regional dynamics, stating that indigenous communities across the Northeast could achieve significant out-



comes if united on a common platform, despite differences in identity, language, and culture. At the same time, he urged supporters to remain calm, avoid violence, and respond democratically during the ADC polls scheduled for April 12 and 17. The announcement has added a new twist to pre-election alliance calculations, particularly amid widespread speculation of a possible tie-up between the BJP and Tipra Motha.

Sources within the BJP indicated internal dissatisfaction over the handling of alliance talks, alleging that certain elements within the party may have complicated negotia-

tions for factional gains, indirectly putting Chief Minister Manik Saha in a difficult position. According to sources, negotiations between Tipra Motha and the BJP broke down over seat-sharing arrangements. While the BJP reportedly proposed a 50:50 formula, it was unwilling to offer more than 14 seats, a proposal that Tipra Motha found unacceptable. Following the deadlock, Pradyot formally announced that his party would contest the ADC elections independently. With only two days left for filing nominations, political activities have intensified across the State.

JMM's Assam foray worries Congress over split in anti-BJP tribal vote

Guwahati, Mar 24: As Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) enters Assam's political fray, the Congress has expressed concern over its decision to contest 21 seats in the upcoming Assam Assembly elections, saying that the move could split anti-BJP tribal votes. From Ranchi, Congress leader Rakesh Ranjan has said the party had expected JMM to join the Opposition coalition in Assam. "We wanted to contest the Assam elections together. Assam Congress chief Gaurav Gogoi had visited Jharkhand along with other senior leaders, and we expected an alliance with JMM. However, the party chose to field 21 candidates on its own, which may split tribal votes," he said.

Ranjan, however, underlined that both parties share the broader objective of defeating the BJP in Assam. Echoing similar concerns, Jharkhand Congress president Keshav Mahato Kamlesh said the party had made a "serious and positive effort" to forge an understanding with JMM. "Our intention was to ensure JMM's representation in the Assam Assembly through a united effort," Kamlesh said, adding that the Congress had proposed offering five to seven seats along with organisational support in constituencies where JMM candidates would contest.

Without commenting on JMM's electoral prospects, he cautioned that the decision to go solo could weaken the collective political strength of tribal communities by dividing their votes. Earlier on Monday, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha has announced 21 candidates for the April 9 elections to the 126-member Assam Assembly. The party is contesting



seats including Mazbat, Biswanath, Khumtai, Chabua, Gossaigaon, Rangapara, Margherita, Naharkatia and Titabor. Seeking to expand beyond Jharkhand, JMM is aiming to shed its regional image by tapping into Assam's sizeable tribal population, including tea garden workers with roots in the Chhotanagpur region. The party believes these communities have long-standing socio-economic concerns requiring stronger political representation. Meanwhile, political signals indicate that channels between the two parties could remain open. Senior Congress leaders, including Gaurav Gogoi, recent meetings with Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, fuels speculation that a post-poll alliance in Assam could still be on the table. JMM is also understood to be in touch with the newly formed Jai Bharat Party, which may extend support, adding another dimension to evolving electoral equations in the state.

Aizawl Polls: ZPM, Congress to Contest All 19 Seats



Aizawl, Mar 24: Mizoram's ruling party, Zoram People's Movement (ZPM), on Monday released its candidate list for the upcoming Aizawl Municipal Corporation (AMC) polls slated for April 21. Similarly, the state Congress also released the full list of its candidates for the municipal polls. Earlier, Congress had announced names of candidates for 13 seats. The ZPM and Congress will contest all 19 seats. Apart from announcing their candidates, both parties also launched election campaigns and released manifestos on Monday.

The main opposition, Mizo National Front (MNF), has already declared the names of 19 candidates for the upcoming polls. The BJP is yet to release its candidate list. Polling for the 19-member AMC

will be held on April 21, with counting of votes scheduled for April 27. The last date for filing nomination papers is March 25, while candidates can withdraw their nominations by March 30. Scrutiny of nomination papers will be held on March 27.

Although the municipality's current term expired on March 1, the State Election Commission (SEC) delayed the elections due to several overlapping administrative priorities. Over 2.37 lakh electors, including 1.28 lakh female voters, are eligible to exercise their franchise in the AMC polls, according to the SEC. In the last AMC polls held in February 2021, the MNF secured a majority with 11 seats, followed by the ZPM with six and the Congress with two.

Sikkim CM Prem Singh Tamang Meets SKM Candidates Ahead Of 2026 Municipal Elections

Sikkim, Mar 24: Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Tuesday chaired a meeting at Samman Bhawan with Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) candidates for the upcoming General Municipal Elections 2026. The meeting was attended by state ministers, MLAs, and political secretaries. During the session, Tamang congratulated the candidates and acknowledged their consistent dedication and contributions to the party,

which he said earned them the opportunity to represent the people. He urged them to work collectively with humility, integrity, and a sense of responsibility towards the welfare of the state.

He also assured the candidates of full support from the party in their electoral campaigns and encouraged them to complete their nomination formalities promptly. Tamang extended his best wishes for their success in the elections.



Assam Polls: 3 Congress Nominations Rejected

Sikkim, Mar 24: Guwahati, Mar 24: The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Tuesday rejected the nominations of three Congress candidates in Assam, including from Jalukbari—the constituency where Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is contesting in the upcoming Assembly elections. By 4:30 PM, scrutiny of nomination papers had led to 18 cancellations, with the process still ongoing. According to the ECI website, the rejected Congress nominees are Bidisha Neog from Jalukbari, Ananda Narah from Dhakuakhana (currently held by BJP's former minister

Naba Kumar Doley), and Nirmal Langthasa from Haflong. The Election Commission did not specify reasons for the rejections. In Haflong, BJP cabinet minister Nandita Garlosa had her nomination accepted as a Congress candidate. She switched to the opposition party late Sunday and filed her nomination the following day. Other rejections included three candidates each from Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and Voters Party International, one each from SUCI (Communist) and Apni Janta Party, and eight Independents.

A total of 815 candidates submitted 1,389 nomination



papers for the 126-member Assam Assembly. Polling is scheduled for April 9, with re-

sults to be declared on May 4. The last date for withdrawals is March 26.

BPCL-Sembcorp JV bags 10KTPA green hydrogen deal from NRL, sets pricing benchmark

Guwahati: Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL), a Fortune Global 500 Maharatna PSU, has marked a major milestone in India's energy transition, with its joint venture NeuEN Green Energy Pvt. Ltd. securing a 10,000 tonnes per annum (10KTPA) green hydrogen supply contract from Numaligarh Refinery Ltd. (NRL) in Assam.

NeuEN, a 50:50 venture between BPCL and Sembcorp Green Hydrogen India, will develop a green hydrogen production facility at the refinery backed by a long-term offtake agreement. The project, expected to be operational by 2028, will deploy hybrid renewable energy systems integrated with advanced storage solutions to ensure reliable, round-the-clock electrolyser



operations.

The contract was awarded at the most competitive tariff discovered to date, setting a glob-

al benchmark for commercially contracted green hydrogen pricing and underscoring the sector's growing cost com-

petitiveness and scalability in India.

BPCL CMD Sanjay Khanna said the project strengthens the company's presence across the green hydrogen value chain and aligns with its goal of building a resilient, future-ready energy portfolio. Sembcorp's Vipul Tuli noted that the milestone reflects the importance of structured long-term contracts in accelerating a low-carbon energy future.

NeuEN Chairman Shelly Abraham said the partnership combines BPCL's domestic strength with Sembcorp's global renewable expertise to drive industrial decarbonisation. The project is set to enhance Northeast India's role in national energy security and support India's net-zero ambitions.

Gen Z drives shift to coffee gifting, brands tap into experiential trend

Guwahati: A growing shift in consumer behaviour is reshaping India's gifting market, with Gen Z increasingly turning to coffee as a preferred choice for thoughtful and experience-led presents. Moving away from conventional, last-minute gifting, this generation is prioritising intentional purchases that reflect personality, shared moments, and everyday meaning.

Market trends indicate that coffee is no longer viewed as a routine beverage but as an immersive experience. From long conversations and creative brainstorming sessions to slow weekend mornings, coffee is becoming central to social interactions. Industry players note that rituals such as brewing together, experimenting with blends, and recreating café-style drinks at home are driving this transition towards more personal gifting habits.

The trend also aligns with Gen Z's focus on individuality. Variants ranging from strong and bold to smooth and balanced allow consumers to curate gifts that mirror moods and preferences. As a result, premium coffee hampers paired with stylish mugs are emerging as popular options, offering not just products but shared experiences. In Guwahati, the evolving trend is gaining traction among urban youth and young professionals. Retailers and café operators report a steady rise in demand for premium coffee products and curated gifting hampers. With the city's café culture expanding and consumers becoming more brand-aware, businesses see significant potential for coffee-led gifting to grow into a strong niche segment in the local market.

CDSL-KPMG report calls for data-led overhaul of securities market with '3C' framework

Guwahati: Central Depository Services (India) Ltd (CDSL), in partnership with KPMG in India, has released the third edition of its Reimagine thought leadership report titled "Reimagine: Securities Market through Data Synergy," proposing a Creation-Control-Culture (3C) framework to drive data-led transformation across India's securities market.

The report underscores that "data risk is market risk" and highlights the need for structured data governance to boost resilience, transparency, and innovation. It proposes building shared data infrastructure, embedding cyber safeguards, and fostering responsible data practices. A central regulatory operating model has also been suggested to improve interoperability, align regu-

latory expectations, and strengthen investor protection in an increasingly data-driven ecosystem.

CDSL MD & CEO Nehal Vora said data synergy can enable innovation while strengthening trust, supporting India's journey towards a "Viksit Bharat." KPMG's Akhilesh Tuteja noted that treating data as core infrastructure will be critical to sustaining market leadership and investor confidence.

In Guwahati, the report's emphasis on data access and multilingual investor education is expected to boost retail participation in Assam. As more investors enter capital markets, improved digital systems and stronger safeguards could enhance trust and deepen financial inclusion in the region.

Bandhan Life rolls out accidental death rider with up to Rs 3 crore cover amid rising risk concerns

Guwahati: Bandhan Life has launched its Linked Enhanced Accidental Death Benefit (ADB) Rider, an add-on insurance cover offering financial protection of up to ₹3 crore, as concerns over accidental deaths persist despite increased safety investments in India. The move comes at a time when Indian Railways' safety budget has risen sharply from ₹39,463 crore in 2013-14 to ₹1,16,470 crore in 2025-26, with consequential train accidents declining from 135 to 11. However, risks remain significant, with NCRB data reporting 21,803 deaths in rail accidents in 2023 and over 3,000 deaths in stampedes between 2001 and 2022.

The ADB rider, an optional add-on to existing policies, provides additional payouts to nominees in case of accidental death, including incidents such as train or aeroplane accidents, stampedes, and fires at large public or religious gatherings. It is available in Premium and Classic options.

The Premium variant offers up to 300% of the rider sum assured, while the Classic option allows coverage from one to three times the base sum assured, capped at ₹3 crore. The rider can be added or removed during the policy term and adjusted based on income, liabilities, or lifestyle needs.

Maneesh Mishra, Chief Product and Marketing Officer, Bandhan Life, said the product aims to address everyday risks and bridge India's protection gap, where nearly 95% of the population lacks adequate life cover.

In Guwahati, insurers are witnessing rising awareness around risk-based financial planning, driven by increasing urban mobility and income growth. Industry observers say flexible, low-cost riders like ADB starting at ₹700 for ₹10 lakh cover under the iInvest Ultima plan are likely to gain traction among middle-income families seeking practical, event-specific protection solutions.

Axis Max Life-Saarathi Finance pact targets MSME credit protection push

Guwahati: Axis Max Life Insurance Limited (formerly Max Life Insurance Company Limited) has entered into a strategic corporate agent partnership with Saarathi Finance and Credit Private Limited, a greenfield NBFC focused on bridging the credit gap for India's MSMEs. The collaboration aims to strengthen financial protection for micro and nano-entrepreneurs through embedded insurance solutions.

As part of the tie-up, Axis Max Life will offer its Group Credit Life Secure (GCLS) product (UIN: 104N072V04) via Saarathi's lending network. The offering is designed to act as a "security shield," ensuring that in case of an unforeseen event, the borrower's outstanding debt does not burden their family or business.

Axis Max Life MD and CEO Sumit Madan said the partnership combines Saarathi's digital-first, last-mile lending reach with the insurer's strong claims settlement track record to make protection more accessible. Saarathi Finance Founder and CEO Vivek Bansal noted that with over 90% of MSMEs operating on thin capital buffers, embedding insurance into loans can convert credit into long-term financial security frameworks.

The partnership aligns with the national vision of "Insurance for All by 2047," targeting deeper penetration across Tier 3 and Tier 4 markets and addressing the protection gap among underserved entrepreneurs.

In Guwahati, the collaboration is expected to support small traders and emerging enterprises by integrating insurance with credit access. With increasing MSME activity in Assam's commercial hub, such bundled financial products could enhance credit confidence, reduce risk exposure, and enable sustainable business growth in the region.

TVS Motor rolls out mega TV campaign for iQube, bets big on family EV segment



Guwahati: TVS Motor Company has unveiled a new nationwide campaign for its flagship electric scooter, TVS iQube, reinforcing its positioning as "India's Favourite Family EV" and marking one of its largest television-led marketing pushes.

The campaign celebrates the trust of over 8.5 lakh families who have adopted the iQube, highlighting its role in India's fast-growing electric mobility space. With a high-impact rollout across marquee platforms such as the IPL and movies, TVS aims to significantly expand its reach across diverse consumer segments.

"Our journey has been built on customer trust and everyday relevance. This campaign takes that story to a national stage and will further accelerate EV adoption," said Saurabh Kapoor, VP - Marketing, EV Business, TVS Motor Company.

The campaign film captures real-life family scenarios—from school drops to office commutes—while showcasing key features like pillion backrest, hill hold assist, smart connectivity, large under-seat storage, and low running costs. Built on principles of choice, safety, and simplicity, the iQube is currently available in over 1,000 cities through 3,300+ dealerships.

In Guwahati, rising fuel prices and improving EV infrastructure are driving interest in electric scooters. Dealers say the iQube's family-centric positioning and low running cost are resonating with urban buyers, making it a strong contender in the city's evolving mobility market.

Nissan, Spinny launch 55-minute exchange programme to accelerate car upgrades



Guwahati: Nissan Motor India has announced a nationwide 55-minute vehicle exchange programme in partnership with Spinny, aiming to streamline car buying and selling under its 'Customer First' strategy. The initiative enables on-the-spot vehicle assessment, quick exchange, and access to attractive exchange bonuses for customers purchasing new Nissan vehicles. The programme will be supported by dedicated Spinny evaluators across 30 key cities, with on-ground counters at Nissan dealerships to provide real-time assistance. Customers can also access

the exchange service through Spinny's digital interface. A key highlight is the acceptance of a Spinny-issued 'Selling Letter' as valid proof of exchange, removing the need for RC transfer documentation and ensuring faster, hassle-free transactions. The collaboration is expected to strengthen Nissan's dealer ecosystem through improved used car inventory management, incremental lead generation, and joint marketing initiatives. Nissan said the move integrates digital and physical touchpoints to create a more agile retail environment.

Managing Director Saurabh Vatsa said the initiative reinforces Nissan's focus on convenience, transparency, and value, while Spinny CEO Niraj Singh highlighted its role in simplifying ownership journeys. The programme complements Nissan's growing portfolio, including the New Magnite and the recently launched Nissan Gravite, priced at an introductory Rs 5.65 lakh (ex-showroom) with a limited-period launch edition. In Guwahati, the faster exchange model is expected to boost upgrade cycles, especially in the price-sensitive compact SUV segment. With rising demand for value-driven models, the initiative could increase dealership conversions and strengthen Nissan's retail footprint in the Northeast.

Life Insurance sector pays ₹6.30 lakh crore in FY25, signals strong fundamentals amid rising protection gap

Guwahati: India's life insurance sector reported total benefit payouts of ₹6.30 lakh crore in FY2024-25, reflecting strong fundamentals and its growing role in household financial planning, according to the IRDAI Annual Report 2024-25.

The data highlights a structural shift in the market, with 92% of payouts attributed to living benefits, indicating increased adoption of life insurance as a long-term savings and liquidity instrument. Industry metrics such as robust persistency ratios, near 100% claim settlement and solvency levels above the regulatory threshold of 1.50 underscore operational stability.

Withdrawals and surrenders accounted for ₹2.33 lakh crore, up 1.77% year-on-year, suggesting planned lifecycle exits rather than distress-driven redemptions. Policyholders are deploying funds for key milestones including education, housing and discretionary spending, while reinvesting in diversified offerings such as annuity, children's and market-linked products.

Despite benefit payouts constituting 71.92% of net premium income, insurers maintained healthy solvency margins through disciplined asset-liability management and conservative assumptions.

Industry stakeholders note that in a volatile global environment and India's push towards a \$5 trillion economy, life insurance remains a critical financial buffer. However, a significant protection gap persists, with 87% of the population underinsured, rising above 90% among individuals aged 18-35, indicating strong headroom for future market expansion.

Tata AIA bets big on innovation, AI with three new ULIP funds; NFO opens March 24



Mumbai: Tata AIA Life Insurance has launched three new funds—Large Mid Cap Innovation Fund, Large Mid Cap Innovation Pension Fund, and Global AI & Technology Leaders Fund—to capitalise on India's innovation-led growth and global technology megatrends, while offering life insurance protection through ULIPs.

The New Fund Offer (NFO) will be open from March 24 to March 31, 2026. Units will be issued at ₹10 for domestic funds and \$10 for the global fund. The funds are regulated under IFSC norms and target both domestic equity opportunities and global exposure to artificial intelligence, semiconductors, and digital platforms.

The Large Mid Cap Innovation Fund focuses on India's large and mid-cap companies driving digital transformation, with 60-100% equity allocation and benchmarked to the NSE 500 Index. Its pension variant is tailored for long-term retirement planning through Tata AIA's unit-linked pension solutions. The Global AI & Technology Leaders Fund follows a passive strategy tracking global tech leaders, offering 70-100% equity exposure via Tata AIA Shubh Global Invest.

Harshad Patil, CIO, Tata AIA Life Insurance, said, "Innovation is reshaping economies... this is the right moment for investors to capitalise on these opportunities and secure their financial future."

Ai+ Smartphone ties up with Mumbai Indians, KKR ahead of IPL season



Guwahati: Ai+ Smartphone has signed on as the Official Smartphone Partner for two leading IPL franchises; Mumbai Indians and Kolkata Knight Riders for the upcoming T20 season, in a move aimed at expanding its brand reach across India's cricket audience.

The partnership places Ai+ Smartphone at the centre of one of the country's biggest cultural platforms, enabling direct engagement with millions of fans. The company will roll out exclusive fan experiences including player meet-and-greet opportunities, match tickets, signed merchandise, and access to exclusive player content shot on Ai+ devices.

Madhav Sheth, CEO of Ai+ Smartphone and Founder of NxtQuantum Shift Technologies, said, "Sport has a unique ability to bring people together... Our partnership with Mumbai Indians and Kolkata Knight Riders allows Ai+ Smartphone to connect with millions of fans where India's energy is most visible and alive."

A Mumbai Indians spokesperson said the brand's focus on accessible, high-performance technology aligns with fan expectations. Binda Dey, CMO, Knight Riders Sports, said the collaboration will help create meaningful engagement and enhance fan experiences.

The collaboration will see Ai+ Smartphone integrated across team platforms, fan experiences, and digital activations throughout the season, positioning the brand at the intersection of technology, culture, and sport.

In Guwahati, IPL-linked partnerships typically drive strong consumer interest in cities like Guwahati, where cricket holds high engagement. The visibility from associations with top teams is expected to boost Ai+ Smartphone's brand recall and sales traction, particularly among youth and first-time smartphone buyers seeking value-driven devices.

Godrej Consumer bets on behaviour change with 'Machar Hai, Mehman Nahi' campaign to tackle mosquito-borne diseases

Guwahati: Godrej Consumer Products Limited (GCPL) has launched a nationwide public service film, 'Machar Hai, Mehman Nahi', as part of its CSR initiative EMBED (Elimination of Mosquito Borne Endemic Disease), aiming to drive behavioural change and strengthen preventive action against mosquito-borne diseases. The campaign comes amid rising public health concerns, with India reporting over 1.13 lakh dengue cases in 2025, alongside widespread incidence of malaria and chikungunya.

The film leverages India's cultural ethos of hospitality, reinterpreting the phrase 'Padharo Mare Desh' into 'Na Padharo Mare Desh', positioning mosquitoes as unwelcome intruders rather than harmless visitors. It highlights everyday practices such as stagnant



water in coolers, uncovered buckets, and neglected household corners that serve as breeding grounds. GCPL MD & CEO Sudhir Sitapati said the initiative seeks to inspire sustained behavioural change through culturally resonant messaging. Creative lead

Swati Bhattacharya noted the campaign uses storytelling to challenge habitual acceptance of mosquitoes, urging households to "unfriend" them.

The campaign will be amplified through school engagement programmes, community outreach, wall

art across Maharashtra, radio storytelling, and a national digital movement. GCPL, part of the Godrej Industries Group with a legacy of over 125 years, serves 1.4 billion consumers globally and remains a leader in household insecticides in India.

In Guwahati, where high humidity and waterlogging create conducive conditions for mosquito breeding, the campaign is expected to find strong relevance. The city regularly reports seasonal spikes in dengue and malaria cases, prompting higher demand for household insecticide solutions. Increased awareness initiatives by companies like GCPL could further accelerate market growth, support preventive health behaviour, and align with ongoing public health efforts to curb vector-borne diseases in Assam.



Amazon Air enters Northeast market, promises 5X faster deliveries

Aizawl: Amazon on Monday announced the expansion of its dedicated air cargo service, Amazon Air, to Northeast India, introducing new air cargo routes connecting Kolkata and Guwahati to strengthen logistics connectivity and improve delivery speed across the region. The expansion is expected to significantly enhance delivery reliability and speed, with Amazon projecting up to five times faster deliveries for customers across the Northeast. The service will support shipments to all seven sister states—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura—through Amazon's integrated air and surface transportation network. Customers in the region will gain quicker access to a wide selection of products ranging from everyday essentials to smart phones, consumer electronics, fashion and beauty items. The inaugural Amazon Air flight to Guwahati was flagged off from Indira Gandhi International Air port, New Delhi, by Union Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarapu in the presence of Abhinav Singh, Vice President (Operations), India and Australia, Amazon, and Chetan Krishnaswamy, Vice President (Public Policy), Amazon India. Kinjarapu said the launch aligns with the government's focus on improving connectivity in the Northeast under the 'Act East, Act Fast, Act First' vision and will support farmers, artisans and entrepreneurs in the region. He noted that operational airports in the Northeast have increased from nine in 2014 to 16 today. Assam Chief Secretary Dr Ravi Kota said the improved logistics connectivity will help local enterprises expand market access and generate employment opportunities for youth.

Škoda sharpens SUV play with new Kushaq, targets value buyers with Rs 10.69 lakh entry price

Guwahati: Škoda Auto India has launched the refreshed 'Easy to Love' Kushaq, strengthening its compact SUV portfolio with enhanced safety, segment-first features and aggressive pricing starting at ₹10.69 lakh (ex-showroom). The move aligns with the company's strategy to democratise European technology and expand its footprint across India.

The new Kushaq is offered in five trims — Classic+, Signature, Sportline, Prestige and Monte Carlo — with both 1.0 TSI and 1.5 TSI turbo-petrol engines. A key highlight is the segment-first eight-speed torque converter automatic, now available from the base variant, alongside features like a rear seat massager, panoramic sunroof, and 26.03 cm digital cockpit in higher trims.

Safety remains central, with a Global NCAP 5-star rating backed by over 40 features, including six airbags, rain-sensing wipers and rear defogger as standard. The 1.5 TSI DSG variant, priced from ₹18.79 lakh, targets performance-focused buyers, while the Classic+ aims to reset expectations in the



entry segment with premium features.

Škoda is also pushing ownership value through its 'Super Care' package, offering a 4-year warranty, roadside assistance and maintenance benefits, while leveraging a network of over 325 touchpoints across 183+ cities.

In Guwahati, the new Kushaq is expected to gain traction amid rising de-

mand for premium compact SUVs with automatic options and high safety ratings. Dealers indicate that price competitiveness and feature-loaded base variants could attract first-time SUV buyers and young professionals, especially as urban consumers increasingly prioritise comfort, technology and long-term ownership benefits.

East India leads in retirement readiness with score of 52: Axis Max Life IRIS 5.0 highlights strong financial and health trends



New Delhi: Axis Max Life Insurance Ltd., formerly Max Life Insurance Company Ltd., has released the East Zone findings of its fifth India Retirement Index Study (IRIS 5.0), conducted with Kantar. East India emerged as the most retirement-ready region, recording the highest index score of 52, significantly above the national average of 48. The study underscores the region's strength in financial

and health preparedness. The Financial Preparedness Index remains stable at 52, the highest among all regions, reflecting disciplined investment behaviour and early planning. The Health Preparedness Index has improved from 46 to 49, indicating increased focus on preventive care. However, the Emotional Preparedness Index has declined slightly to 59, pointing to rising concerns around post-retirement

life.

Anurag Gupta, Director, Chief Business Officer & Retirement Head, Axis Max Life Insurance, said the findings reflect early adoption of retirement investing, strong insurance uptake, and proactive health practices, while highlighting the need for a more balanced approach including emotional wellbeing.

Around 75% of respondents have started investing for retirement, while term plan ownership rose from 47% to 60% and ULIP adoption from 34% to 46%. Nearly 69% feel financially secure about retirement, and 52% expect their savings to last over 10 years. Health awareness is also high, with 55% opting for annual check-ups and 53% covered by health insurance.

BHIM ropes in MS Dhoni as brand ambassador to drive next phase of digital payments growth

Mumbai: NPCI BHIM Services Limited (NBSL) has appointed former India captain and World Cup winner Mahendra Singh Dhoni as the brand ambassador for the BHIM Payments App, in a strategic move aimed at accelerating scale, inclusion, and user confidence in digital payments.

The partnership brings together two names associated

with trust and dependability, as BHIM enters its next phase of growth. Built on NPCI's robust infrastructure, the app has evolved into a widely used digital payments platform, while Dhoni's journey from a small town to leading India reinforces the brand's positioning across diverse geographies.

Lalitha Nataraj, MD & CEO, NBSL, said the fo-

cus now is on strengthening user preference and trust. "Our objective is to position BHIM not just as a payments option, but as the preferred app for every Indian household. Dhoni represents trust built over time, making this partnership a natural fit," she said.

Dhoni highlighted the app's simplicity and accessibility, noting that ease of use is key

to driving digital adoption.

Repositioned as "Bharat Ka Apna Payments App," BHIM has expanded across Tier 1, 2, and 3 markets, offering services in over 15 regional languages. With features optimised for low-connectivity environments, alongside rewards and merchant partnerships, the platform is targeting deeper penetration in rural and semi-urban India.

Chupa Chups launches 'Crazy Raffe' twisted jelly candy at Rs 20 to tap India's teen snacking market

Kolkata: Confectionery brand Chupa Chups has introduced a new playful candy product, Crazy Raffe, a long, twisted, centre-filled jelly designed to bring an interactive experience to everyday snacking. The product, launched nationally in February 2026, is priced at ₹20 for a 30-gram pack and is now available across retail stores in India. The brand is part of global confectionery major Perfetti Van Melle.

The new jelly has been developed keeping in mind the evolving preferences of teens and tweens who increasingly look for visually engaging and shareable snack formats. Inspired by a giraffe, the candy features an extra-long twisted design that transforms a simple treat into a playful experience. It comes with a vibrant strawberry-flavoured outer shell in two shades of red, wrapped around a creamy vanilla centre filling. The sweet-and-sour combination aims to deliver a layered taste experience while encouraging stretching, sharing and playful interaction.

Commenting on the launch, Gunjan Khetan, Director-Marketing at Perfetti Van Melle India, said the brand continues to focus on creativity and self-ex-



pression among young consumers. "With Crazy Raffe, we wanted to introduce a format that feels fresh, interactive, and exciting for today's teens. It is not just about flavour but about turning everyday moments into playful experiences," Khetan said.

The giraffe-inspired packaging, designed with bold and elongated visuals, aims to make the product instantly noticeable on retail shelves while reinforcing the brand's focus on fun and experiential snacking. In Kolkata, the demand for innovative confectionery products among school-going consumers and young shoppers remains strong. Local distributors note that brightly packaged candies priced at accessible levels often see high impulse buying in neighbourhood stores and modern trade outlets. With its quirky format and interactive design, Crazy Raffe is expected to attract curiosity among young consumers in Kolkata's competitive confectionery retail segment.



Cucumber Raita Vs Boondi Raita: Which Is Lighter On The Stomach?

For many of us, raita is a daily staple that complements Indian meals perfectly. It's a great way to balance the spiciness and richness of curries, biryanis and parathas. The best part? There are several different varieties of raita to choose from. Among the many options, cucumber raita and boondi raita are two popular choices. Whether you make them at home or order them via an online food delivery app, they're a great addition to meals. Both have unique flavours and textures, but when it comes to being gentle on the stomach, there are differences worth noting.

Is Cucumber Raita Good For Health?

Cucumber raita is a simple and healthy side dish that combines the freshness of cucumber with the creaminess of curd. Here's why it's good for you: High Water Content: According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), cucumbers comprise approximately 96% water, making them one of the most hydrating fruits. This high water content helps keep the body hydrated and supports overall health.

Low In Calories: Cucumber raita is naturally low in calories and fat, making it a lighter choice for those looking to manage their weight. Aids Digestion:

Additionally, cucumbers are rich in fibre, which aids in smooth digestion and prevents bloating. The cooling effect of cucumber raita on the stomach makes it an ideal side dish, especially after spicy or heavy meals.

Is Boondi Raita Good For Health?

Boondi raita, made by adding fried boondi to yoghurt, has a completely

different texture and taste. Here's a look at its nutritional benefits and considerations:

Potential Digestive Issues: The combination of fried boondi and yoghurt can cause slight indigestion or bloating in sensitive stomachs. While yoghurt helps balance some of the heaviness, boondi raita may not be as easy to digest as other raita options.

Cucumber Raita Or Boondi Raita? Which Is Lighter On The Stomach?

From the info above, it's clear that between the two, cucumber raita is definitely lighter and easier to digest. Its high-water content, low calorie profile and cooling nature make it ideal for meals or for people with sensitive digestion. Boondi raita, while delicious, is comparatively heavier due to the fried boondis, making it better suited for occasional indulgence rather than daily consumption. So, if you're looking for a guilt-free side dish, cucumber raita is the way to go! Ultimately, whether you choose cucumber raita or boondi raita, the key is to enjoy these delicious side dishes in a way that suits your taste preferences and dietary needs.



different texture and taste. Here's a look at its nutritional benefits and considerations:

Higher Calorie Content: Boondi raita is higher in calories due to the deep-fried boondi, which adds extra oil and fat to the dish.

Protein-Rich: Boondi provides a good amount of protein from gram flour, which can be beneficial for overall health. How-

Pot Pie Recipes the Whole Family Will Love

From classic chicken pot pie to hearty beef pot pie, these one-pot meals are the definition of hearty comfort food. Pot pie is always delicious—it's comforting and full of complex textures. Filled with hearty meat (like chicken, beef or turkey) and packed with nutritious vegetables, it's a full dinner all in one, and pie crust or puffed pastry adds buttery flavor and flaky texture. Regardless of how you make it, this filling dinner is the definition of family-friendly comfort food. Better yet? It's a classic one-pot meal that cuts down on cleanup. These recipes, which range from traditional to twists on the classic (pretzel topping, anyone?) all share one thing in common: they're sure to satisfy the whole family. This classic dish is as hearty and wholesome as it gets. It's creamy and meaty with bold flavor from fresh thyme, bay leaves and black pepper. Mushrooms, peas, carrots and pearl onions add fresh, vegetal flavor to help round out the rich filling. A buttery, crunchy topping gets baked until golden and crispy. Prepare the crust. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. On a lightly floured surface, roll out the dough with a floured rolling pin into a 12-inch square. Transfer to the prepared baking sheet, cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate while you make the filling. Cook the chicken. Combine the chicken broth, peppercorns, thyme sprigs, bay leaves and quartered onion in a large pot over high heat. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer 30 minutes. Add the chicken to the pot.

Increase the heat and return to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer until the chicken is just cooked through, 10 to 15 minutes. Using tongs, transfer the chicken to a plate to cool. Strain the stock through a fine-mesh sieve. You'll need 2 1/2 cups for the filling; reserve the rest for another use. When the chicken is cool to the touch, cut it into bite-size chunks and set aside. Make the filling. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Melt the butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the pearl onions and carrots and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the mushrooms and peas and cook until softened, another 5 minutes. Stir in 5 tablespoons flour and cook, stirring, 1 more minute. Add 2 1/2 cups chicken stock and the milk, stirring constantly. Cook until thickened, about 5 minutes. Remove the skillet from the heat. Add the chicken and chopped thyme; season with salt and pepper. Form the pot pies. Set out four 2-cup ovenproof bowls or ramekins. Transfer the pastry to a floured surface. Using a paring knife, cut out 4 rounds of dough that are slightly larger than the mouth of the bowls. Place the bowls on a baking sheet and spoon in the filling. Place 1 dough round on each pot pie, pressing the pastry against the side of the bowl to seal. Brush the dough with the beaten egg using a pastry brush. Cut a slit or hole in the center of the dough to vent. Bake until the pastry is puffed and dark golden brown, about 35 minutes.

Breakfast Recipes That Make It Easy To Rise and Shine

Start your day right with delicious options like waffles, omelets, granola and more. Maybe it's just us, but the thought of syrup-drenched pancakes (and some bacon and eggs on the side!) make it so much easier to spring out of bed and tackle the day. So, it's no wonder that we've got more than a few great ideas for your morning meal. You'll find something for everyone in this roundup, from healthy breakfasts that'll keep you full and fueled to ones that you can make on the fly and enjoy as you're running out the door. With easy recipes for muffins, French toast, breakfast casseroles and more there's no reason you should ever have to skip breakfast again. Wondering where to start? Try a chaffle. A chaffle is a low-carb, cheese-and-egg-based waffle that's taken the world by storm. One look at its fluffy texture and crispy edges and it's easy to see why. Preheat a waffle iron to medium-high. Whisk the eggs



in a large bowl until well beaten and smooth. Whisk in the Cheddar, scallions, parsley, 1/4 teaspoon salt and a few grinds of pepper. Coat the waffle iron with nonstick

cooking spray, then ladle a heaping 1/4 cup of batter into each section. Close the lid and cook until well browned and fluffy, 4 to 5 minutes. Use a small offset spatula or tongs

to transfer the chaffles to a serving plate. Repeat with the remaining batter. Top each chaffle with a pat of butter and drizzle with maple syrup. Blueberry Coffee Cake Muffins Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Place 16 paper liners in muffin pans. In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the butter and sugar until light and fluffy, about 5 minutes. With the mixer on low speed, add the eggs 1 at a time, then add the vanilla, sour cream, and milk. In a separate bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. With the mixer on low speed add the flour mixture to the batter and beat until just mixed. Fold in the blueberries with a spatula and be sure the batter is completely mixed. Scoop the batter into the prepared muffin pans, filling each cup just over the top, and bake for 25 to 30 minutes, until the muffins are lightly browned on top and a cake tester comes out clean.



SC Slams Bengal for Metro Delays



New Delhi, Mar 23: "Do not politicise everything. This is a development issue," the Chief Justice of India Surya Kant observed, as the Supreme Court on Monday came down heavily on the West Bengal government for delaying the implementation of the Kolkata's Orange Line Metro Project. The court observed that the State had exhibited an "obstinate attitude" in stalling a public infrastructure initiative, according to Live Law. The Bar and Bench quoted the Bench as saying that

the State's argument that blockades cannot be implemented due to the festival season and upcoming assembly elections revealed the government's "obstinate attitude".

The Bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, Justice Joymalya Bagchi and Justice Vipul Pancholi dismissed the petition filed by the State of West Bengal challenging an order passed by the Calcutta High Court in December last year directing the authorities to identify two consecutive weekend night traffic blockade dates to enable the construction of metro piers at the busy Chingrighata junction. The High Court had rejected the State's argument that traffic blockades cannot be imposed due to the festival season, the Live Law report said.

The Supreme Court expressed strong disapproval of the State challenging the

High Court's direction issued to facilitate the expeditious construction of a public utility project. Justice Bagchi noted that the authorities had earlier informed the High Court that police support could not be provided due to festival arrangements. The State defended its position by citing concerns regarding public safety and essential services, submitting that ambulances and organ transplant vehicles frequently used the affected corridor and sought additional time to manage traffic arrangements. However, the Bench remained unconvinced.

According to the Bar and Bench, while the State sought to withdraw the appeal, the Court rejected the same with the CJI saying, "This shows complete dereliction of your constitutional duty. This is just an attempt to politicise an issue where there is no such issue."



PM Chairs Emergency Oil Supply Meet

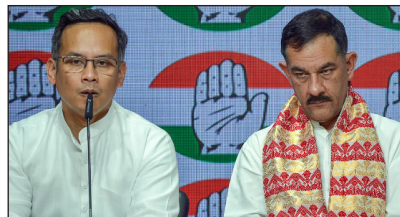
New Delhi, Mar 23: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Sunday, chaired a high-level meeting to review the situation in the petroleum, crude oil, gas, power, and fertiliser sectors, with a focus on ensuring uninterrupted supply and stable distribution amid the evolving crisis in West Asia. Officials briefed the Prime Minister on the current status of fuel availability and steps being taken to safeguard India's energy security. According to sources, the government is closely monitoring global developments and has taken proactive measures to ensure that consumers and industries are not affected by volatility in international markets.

Efforts are underway to maintain adequate reserves and strengthen supply chains amid rising geopolitical uncertainties. The review comes at a time when global energy markets remain on edge due to the ongoing conflict in West Asia, a region that plays a crucial role in global oil and gas supplies. Concerns have also been raised over disruptions in key shipping routes, particularly the Strait of Hormuz, which handles a significant share of global energy trade. A day earlier, Prime Minister Modi spoke with Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian to discuss the regional situation and emphasised the need for peace and stability. He also underlined the importance of keeping international shipping lanes open and secure, warning that any disruption could impact global supply chains. To reduce dependence on the Middle East, India has diversified its oil and gas imports, increasing purchases from countries such as the United States, Russia, and African nations like Nigeria. Officials said that nearly 70% of India's oil imports now come from sources outside the Gulf region. The government has also stepped-up efforts to manage LPG supplies, including sourcing liquefied petroleum gas from the US to address potential shortages. While concerns over LPG availability persist, officials said there has been no disruption in supply at the consumer level, with online bookings rising significantly.

Attack on police camp raises questions on Assam's internal security: Congress

Guwahati, Mar 23: Congress general secretary Jitendra Singh on Monday questioned Assam's internal security, a day after a state police commando camp was attacked by ULFA(I) militants. He claimed the state's security was in shambles and the people will hold the government accountable when the ruling parties approach them for next month's Assembly elections. "The attack on the Assam Police commando camp is a dangerous matter. The militants dared to attack the police," Singh told PTI. At least four security personnel were injured in the militant attack on the police commando camp at Jagun in Tinsukia district on Sunday.

The proscribed ULFA(I) took responsibility for the attack, while CM Himan-



ta Biswa Sarma said counter operations have been launched to nab those behind it. Singh maintained that the attack raised questions about the state's law and order situation. "On August 15 two years ago, 22 bombs were found in the state, but nothing happened. The chief minister said we will take strong action. Had such action been taken, this attack would not have taken place," the AICC general secretary in-charge of Assam

claimed. "Question is being raised on the state's internal security. If you can't secure your own state, can't fight the terrorists, with what face are you going for the elections and seeking votes?" Singh said, questioning the BJP-led regime in this northeastern state. "The biggest danger today is security, which is in shambles. The government has failed to protect our own state," he added.

He asserted that the public will question the government on its performance over the last five years, and speaking about polarisation along religious lines will not help. "Mere talk will not do. People want jobs for their children, they want the family's monthly budget to remain manageable, and prices are under control," Singh added.

Indian Army working on 'Shaurya' drone squadrons for tank units

Precision Strikes: Targeted destruction of enemy armor and logistics

New Delhi, Mar 23: With drones emerging as a decisive factor in contemporary conflicts, the Indian Army is working on raising dedicated "Shaurya" squadrons within its Armoured Corps to embed UAV-led surveillance and precision strike capabilities into mechanised operations. The concept was successfully demonstrated during Exercise Amogh Jwala last week at the Babina Field Firing Ranges, where Southern Army Commander Lt Gen Dhiraj Seth witnessed a Shaurya Squadron in action.

Sharing details on X on Sunday, Southern Command said, "Fielded in a realistic battle environment, Shaurya Squadron demonstrated the seamless integration of real-time surveillance assets with mechanised forces, attack helicopters, swarm strikes and coordinated firepower, enhancing battlefield awareness, compressing the sensor-to-shooter cycle and enabling swift, decisive battlefield response." Sources clarified that the concept is still at a nascent stage, with more trials planned before it receives formal approval for induction. Currently, the Army fields around 63 armoured regiments, each equipped



with about 45 tanks, including T-72, T-90 and Arjun variants. In the Armoured Corps, the regiment is the basic combat unit. A typical regiment comprises three combat squadrons and a headquarters squadron, with each squadron (equi-

valent to an infantry company) having around 120 personnel. "The Shaurya Squadrons will be equipped with swarm drones and first-person view (FPV) drones for real-time surveillance and precision strikes against armour and

logistics targets," a source said. "The aim is to compress the sensor-to-shooter cycle and push drone capability down to the unit level for faster targeting and engagement," the source added.

In parallel, the Army is equipping tanks and mechanised platforms with counter-unmanned aerial systems (CUAS), comprising both soft-kill and hard-kill capabilities, to address the threat posed by hostile drones. The drone-centric approach builds on a broader push to institutionalise unmanned capabilities across arms. In the infantry, the Army last year raised Ashni platoons, equipped with surveillance UAVs and loitering munitions for tactical ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) and strike roles. In the artillery, Divyastra batteries have been raised under a 'save and raise' approach to integrate UAV-based targeting with conventional guns for faster and more autonomous engagement cycles. The Army has also raised dedicated drone and loitering munition units in the artillery, known as 'Shaktibaan' formations, for long-range precision strikes using unmanned systems.



IPL 2026: Dubey confident of doing well for Sunrisers Hyderabad this season

Vidarbha All-Rounder Prioritizes Core Strengths



Chennai, Mar 23: Vidarbha's spin-bowling all-rounder Harsh Dubey, who recently won the prestigious BC-CI-Lala Amarnath Award for the Best All-Rounder in the Ranji Trophy 2024-25 season, is keen to do well in the IPL 2026 for Hyderabad. "I have been practising for a while now on my own and will go full throttle at the camp. I am in a good space now and keen to do well in the IPL when I get a chance," the genial Dubey told this daily in an exclusive chat before joining the camp.

Dubey also won the Madhavrao Scindia Award for being the highest wicket-taker in the 2024-25 Ranji season. The spin-bowling all-rounder scored 476 runs and claimed 69 wickets in 10 matches during the season. Besides, he also captained Vidarbha in the 2025-26 season and guided them to their first-ever Vijay Hazare Trophy title by defeating Saurashtra in the final.

A couple of years back the lanky left-arm spinner chose to play in the TNCA First Division league in Chennai to hone his skills. The move paid dividends as Dubey is now one of standout performers in the Indian domestic circuit and a player to watch out for in the IPL. Like Axar Patel, he can bowl at any stage of the match and bat at any position.

Hyderabad finished sixth last season but now look more formidable especially after the mini-auction. They have some of the world's most explosive batters like Abhishek Sharma, Ishan Kishan, Travis Head, Heinrich Klaasen in their ranks. "I feel we have one of the best batting line-up in this IPL and I think we have a very good Indian domestic bowling unit, so I feel it's a very good team," said Dubey. Abhishek and Ishan, who were part of the World Cup-winning India squad, are in great form and it augurs well for SRH. Ishan in particular before the World

Cup had a spectacular Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy. He captained Jharkhand and ensured that they won their maiden SMAT title. "It is nice to have World Cup-winning heroes in the squad. Both Ishan and Abhishek were terrific in the tournament. Ishan as you said has been in terrific form in the last year or so. So it augurs well for us," insisted Dubey. So will the India duo open the batting for Hyderabad? "Both are a lovely opening pair. But I think Abhishek and Travis will open for us like last year. Ishan might follow them. Plus we have Nitish Reddy and Liam Livingstone. So we have a very deep batting line-up. I feel if Mavi (Shivam) plays, he can bat also," he said, adding they have the problem of plenty.

Last season against Kolkata Knight Riders, Dubey accounted for Rinku Singh, Andre Russell and Ramandeep Singh and that helped Hyderabad rout KKR by 110 runs. "I am bowling well, hitting the deck. It's (flow) going good, the rhythm is good. I have been bowling nicely in the last two years across formats for my state. So given an opportunity, I will certainly do well," explained Dubey.

The 23-year-old Pune-born player said that he has the experience to adapt to the shortest format of the game and will not make any drastic changes to his bowling. "I just want to stick to my basics, bowl according to my strengths. I don't think I will do anything different because it's the IPL. I will just try to bowl a little flatter, but I will still try to turn the ball," he signed off.

Arundhati Reddy Crowned ICC Player of the Month

Dubai, Mar 23: India seamer Arundhati Reddy has been named the ICC Women's Player of the Month for February 2026 for the first time in her career, thanks to her exceptional performance that played a key role in India's memorable victory in Australia. "It's a real honour to be named ICC Player of the Month, and even more special knowing I was able to contribute to a T20I series win in Australia. Beating Australia on their home turf is never easy, which makes this award even more meaningful. This series win has given our team a huge boost of confidence as we build towards the ICC Women's T20 World Cup in England and Wales this summer. We've got a well-balanced squad, and I believe we'll be a team to watch," Reddy said.

Reddy ended the three-match T20I series against Australia as the top wicket-taker, taking eight wickets with an average of 10.87 and an economy rate of 7.25. Her contributions were crucial to India's significant victory, as they won the series 2-1, their first T20I series win in Australia since 2016. The right-arm seamer was accurate from her very first game



in Sydney, finishing with a career-best 4/22 and earning the Player of the Match award. The 28-year-old had a series of impactful performances in the following two games, with figures of 2/30 in Canberra and 2/35 in the series-deciding match in Adelaide. India will rely on Reddy's ongoing consistency as they get ready for the ICC Women's T20 World Cup in England starting June 12. The Women in Blue's next assignment is against South Africa as they're set to embark on a five-match T20I series tour starting April 17. The Harmanpreet Kaur-led side will then head to England in May for a one-off Test followed by three T20Is, which will serve as a preparatory series before they kick off their T20 World Cup campaign.

Rajasthan Royals Sold For Record Amount

New Delhi, Mar 24: IPL franchise Rajasthan Royals is set to be sold to a US-based consortium for a whopping USD 1.63 billion (approximately Rs 15,290 crore). The Kal Somani-led consortium includes Rob Walton from the Walmart family and Hamp family (Ford). Somani is an Arizona-based tech entrepreneur who has founded IntraEdge, Truyo.AI and Academian. The other contenders were Times Internet-led consortium, the Aditya Birla Group and the Mittal family led by ArcelorMittal CEO Aditya Mittal. The sale of Rajasthan Royals is subject to approval from the BCCI and will come into effect after the 2026 edition. British-Indian Manoj Badale held a 65 per cent stake in the Royals. "Kal is an existing investor in the franchise. The deal is subject to approv-

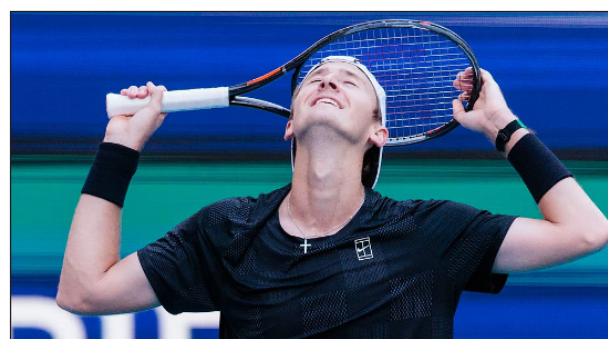


al from the BCCI and will be signed soon. The price of USD 1.63 billion reflects how far the IPL has come as a brand," a well-placed source told PTI. "If you look at the sale of the latest IPL entrants Lucknow Super Giants, it is way more than that. It just shows remarkable growth of the league," shared another source drawing a comparison with sale of LSG to RPSG Group for little over Rs 7000 crore back in 2021. "I expect the deal to be announced in the next four to five days," he added. Another major IPL franchise, defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru, is also up for sale and the value of that deal is likely to cross USD 2 billion.

Carlos Alcaraz loses to Sebastian Korda in the third round of the Miami Open

Miami Gardens, Mar 23: Carlos Alcaraz was eliminated in the third round of the Miami Open on Sunday, losing to Sebastian Korda in three sets. The 22-year-old Alcaraz, who completed the career Grand Slam when he won the Australian Open in January, dropped to 17-2 this season. The No. 1 player in the men's rankings also lost to Daniil Medvedev in the semifinals at Indian Wells last weekend.

Korda served for the match at 5-4 in the second, but Alcaraz rallied by winning five consecutive games. The 25-year-old Korda then regrouped and closed out a 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 victory in two hours, 19 minutes. "It was a tough match, obviously," Alcaraz said. "I think (Korda) was incredible today. Played such a



great game. A lot of tied moments that I just didn't make the most of it, and I think he was better on (those) points and (those) moments." At No. 36, Korda became the lowest-ranked man to beat Alcaraz since No. 55 David Goffin accomplished the feat in the second round in Miami last year, according to the ATP Tour. "A lot of tense moments, for sure," Korda said. "But you know I think today,

the ultimate thing was belief. Going back to just believing, committing into every shot, and luckily I got it done at the end." Next up for Korda is qualifier Martin Landaluce, who advanced with a 6-3, 7-6 (2) win against 14th-seeded Karen Khachanov.

Americans Taylor Fritz and Tommy Paul joined Korda in the fourth round. The sixth-seeded Fritz beat Reilly Opelka 6-3, 6-4, and No. 22

seed Paul eliminated Raphael Collignon with a 6-2, 3-6, 7-6 (5) victory. No. 21 Jiri Lehecka, No. 24 Valentin Vacherot and No. 29 Tomas Martin Etcheverry also were among the winners.

On the women's side, top-seeded Aryna Sabalenka cruised to a 6-4, 6-2 win against Catherine McNally. No. 3 Elena Rybakina beat No. 27 Marta Kostyuk 6-3, 6-4, and No. 5 Jessica Pegula posted a 6-2, 6-2 win over No. 26 Leylah Fernandez. No. 7 Jasmine Paolini, No. 9 Elina Svitolina, No. 11 Ekaterina Alexandrova, No. 15 Madison Keys and No. 18 Iva Jovic were eliminated. Paolini lost to No. 25 Jelena Ostapenko in three sets, and Svitolina was knocked out by Hailey Baptiste in straight sets.