

Iran Rejects U.S. 15-Point Plan to Halt Gulf War

Iran Intensifies Attacks on Neighboring Nations; U.S. Deploys Additional Forces

Dubai, March 25: On Wednesday, Iran rejected a U.S. plan aimed at temporarily halting the ongoing war in the Middle East. Furthermore, it launched additional attacks against Israel and the Gulf Arab nations; these included an attack that sparked a massive fire at Kuwait International Airport. Iran's defiant stance emerged amidst a backdrop in which Israel had initiated airstrikes against Tehran, and the United States had deployed additional paratroopers and Marines to the region. Reports emerged citing an anonymous official—speaking on the English-language broadcast of Iranian state television—who stated that Iran had rejected the U.S. ceasefire proposal and maintained its own specific demands for bringing the fighting to an end. "Iran will end the war only when it decides to do so, and only when its own conditions are met," stated 'Press TV'—an outlet controlled by Iranian hardliners—



quoting the official. Earlier, two Pakistani officials who had conveyed the U.S. plan to Iran provided a detailed overview of the 15-point proposal. They noted that the plan encompassed measures such as providing relief from economic sanctions, curbing or rolling back Iran's nuclear program, imposing limits on its missile capabilities, and reopening the 'Strait of Hormuz'—the vital

waterway through which one-fifth of the world's total oil exports pass. An Egyptian official involved in mediation efforts stated that the proposal included restrictions on the support Iran provides to armed groups. Speaking on the condition of anonymity, the officials requested that their names not be revealed. Although Iranian officials have denied that

negotiations are taking place, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre insisted that talks between the United States and Iran are indeed continuing. "The talks are ongoing. As the President noted on Monday, they are constructive—and they will continue to be so," Ms. Jean-Pierre stated during a White House press briefing on Wednesday. She also warned that if

negotiations with Iran do not proceed as expected, President Donald Trump would "ensure that they face attacks far more severe than any they have encountered before." Some elements of the U.S. ceasefire proposal were rejected during pre-war negotiations: Iran has insisted that it will not discuss its ballistic missile program or its support for regional militant groups, as it views these as vital to its national security. Furthermore, its ability to control the shipping lanes through the Strait of Hormuz remains one of its most significant strategic assets. Three individuals familiar with the plans told the Associated Press that at least 1,000 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division would be deployed to the Middle East in the coming days. They spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military planning. These paratroopers are trained to parachute into hostile or contested zones to secure key terrain and airfields.

New Delhi: Addressing the reported mediation efforts by Pakistan in the ongoing conflict in West Asia, the Central Government stated during an all-party meeting held on Wednesday that India cannot act like a "broker" by interfering in the internal affairs of every nation. Convened within the Parliament complex, the meeting was attended by key Union Ministers and members representing various opposition parties. The Trinamool Congress was the only party to boycott the meeting. Presided over by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, the all-party meeting commenced with a preliminary briefing regarding the energy crisis and the measures India is undertaking to tackle it. Members were briefed on India's preparedness to face these challenges, as well as the diplomatic initiatives being pursued to safeguard the country's national interests. Responding to the opposi-



tion's allegation that India remains a silent spectator while Pakistan acts as a mediator in West Asian affairs, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar stated that the United States has been "using" Pakistan since 1981, and that there is nothing novel about the mediation efforts currently being undertaken by Pakistan in this matter. "We are not a 'broker nation'," Jaishankar asserted categorically during the meeting. Responding to questions raised by opposition parties regarding the telephone conversation between Pri-

me Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump, Jaishankar stated that Prime Minister Modi had emphasized that the conflict in West Asia must come to an end soon, as it adversely affects everyone. However, the opposition parties remarked that the government's responses were "unsatisfactory." Strongly criticizing the government, Tariq Anwar of the Congress party told reporters that a discussion regarding the situation in West Asia should be held in the Lok Sabha under Rule 193, and in the Rajya Sabha under Rule 176.

Stalin strongly criticized the BJP-led Central Government regarding the LPG shortage and the hasty passage of the Transgender Persons Bill.

The Central Government is raking up the issue of constituency delimitation solely to divert the public's attention away from key issues: Chief Minister

Chennai: Expressing concern over the proposed amendments to the 'Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019' and the prevailing shortage of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Wednesday accused the BJP-led Central Government of failing to resolve key issues while simultaneously attempting to divert the public's attention. Speaking on the proposed amendments to the 2019 Transgender Persons Act, Stalin emphasized the necessity of conducting comprehensive consultations with the transgender community and building a consensus among them. "The proposed amendments to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, cannot be forcibly

enacted without first seeking the views of the very people whose rights and lives stand to be impacted by this legislation," Stalin noted in a post shared on the 'X' platform (formerly Twitter) on Wednesday. Pointing out that opposition to the Act has emerged from within the transgender community itself, Stalin stated that this moment should serve not as an occasion for the forceful implementation of the law, but rather as an opportunity for introspection. "When the very community for whose protection a law was enacted voices its opposition to it, such a moment calls not for the imposition of the law, but rather for deep reflection. The BJP-led Central Government must pause—without acting in haste—engage in consultations with the



transgender community, and proceed with further steps only after forging a genuine consensus," he emphasized. Following the passage of this bill in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday, the 'Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026' has now been passed by both Houses of Parliament. In another post shared on the 'X' platform, Stalin stated that the Prime Minister's remarks—in which he compared the current

LPG shortage to the situation that prevailed during the COVID-19 pandemic—have only served to heighten public anxiety. "As noted by the Honorable Prime Minister, the comparison to a 'situation akin to that which existed during the COVID-19 pandemic' has triggered widespread panic among the public, who are already grappling with the scarcity of cooking gas," he observed. Accusing the Central Government of attempting to divert public attention, Stalin remarked, "Instead of undertaking earnest measures to resolve this issue, the BJP-led Central Government has now seized upon the issue of 'Delimitation' with the specific intent of diverting the public's focus.

"Taking a dig at the AIADMK—an opposition party allied with the BJP that has maintained a conspicuous silence regarding public grievances—he stated: "While simultaneously raising questions about the actions of the State Government, the AIADMK has chosen to sidestep the pressing issues affecting the public and has opted, instead, to remain silent," he posted on 'X'. Stalin also dismissed the criticisms leveled against the State Government. He also raised the question of whether gas cylinder distribution and foreign policy fall under the control of the State Government. "The State Government has taken all possible measures within its jurisdiction," he stated.

Delay in Registering FIR in 'Cash-for-Jobs' Scam Case in MAWS Department: Court Sternly Reprimands DVAC

Chennai: The Madras High Court on Wednesday questioned the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC) regarding its failure to register a First Information Report (FIR)—despite prior court orders—concerning an alleged 'cash-for-jobs' scam within the Municipal Administration and Water Supply (MAWS) Department. The First Bench, comprising Chief Justice Sushrut Arvind Dharmadhikari and Justice G. Arul Murugan, raised these queries while hearing a contempt of court petition filed by AIADMK Rajya Sabha member I.S. Inbathurai. On February 20, the High Court had directed the DVAC to register an FIR based on information provided by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) regarding the alleged 'cash-for-jobs' scam involving appointments to 2,538 posts within the MAWS Department. The present petition for contempt of court was filed seeking action against A.T. Duraikumar, the then-Director-in-charge of the DVAC, for failing to implement that court order. In response to this contempt petition, the DVAC filed a counter-affidavit on Wednesday. The Bench directed the DVAC either to register the FIR or, alternatively, to pursue other available legal remedies (such as filing an appeal). "If the FIR is not registered, the entire purpose of this proceeding will be defeated. Either register the FIR, or pursue the other

legal avenues available to you," the Court observed. Senior Counsel N.R. Elango, appearing on behalf of the DVAC, submitted that their department had no intention of defeating the purpose of the proceedings and that it holds the Court in the highest regard. He explained that, under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act (which pertains to the investigation of offenses related to decisions taken by a public servant while discharging their official duties), his department is mandated to obtain prior sanction from the government before registering an FIR. The Advocate General, P.S. Raman, informed the court that the State Government has filed a review petition in the Supreme Court challenging this order of the High Court, and that the said petition has not yet been assigned a registration number. In his petition, Inbathurai had alleged that the agency had deliberately refrained—due to extraneous considerations and political influence—from registering a First Information Report (FIR) against K.N. Nehru, the Minister for Municipal Administration and Water Supply; he further charged that, by doing so, the agency had defeated the very fundamental objective of the court's order.

Arms Smuggling Gang Linked to Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal Arrested

New Delhi, March 25: In a major crackdown against international criminal syndicates, the Delhi Police have busted an international arms smuggling gang suspected of having links with Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh. During this operation, 10 members of the gang were arrested, and a large cache of sophisticated, foreign-made weapons was seized. Speaking on the matter, Sanjeev Kumar Yadav, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime Branch), stated that the gang had been operating from the congested lanes of 'Old Delhi' and functioned as part of a vast cross-border network distributing illicit weapons to criminal gangs across Delhi-NCR and neighboring states. During the police raids, a total of 21 firearms—including a Czech-made Sub-Machine Gun (SMG) and 20 sophisticated semi-automatic pistols—along with 200 rounds of ammunition, were seized. The seized weapons included PX5.7 pistols (typically used by special forces), Turkish-made Stoeger pistols, Chinese-made PX-3 pistols, Czech-made Shadow CZ pistols, as well as pistols manufactured in Italy, Brazil, and Germany. Police officials revealed that these weapons were procured from Pakistan and smuggled into India through clandestine routes,

exploiting gaps in surveillance along the India-Nepal border. "The arrested criminals maintained direct contact with intermediaries operating from Nepal and Bangladesh. These intermediaries procured weapons from Pakistan and dispatched them into India for distribution," a senior official stated. To evade surveillance, these arms smugglers utilized encrypted messaging apps and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services, while simultaneously frequently switching their SIM cards and mobile phones. The police further revealed that all financial transactions related to this syndicate were conducted exclusively through the 'Hawala' system. The individuals arrested in connection with these charges—Rahil (37), Hasim (45), Saim (24), Sonu Gupta (31), Ghanshyam Sharma (26), Waseem Malik (39), Nishant Arora (34), Nawab (31), Mohammed Nauman (32), and Mohammed Naushad (37)—all hail from Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and surrounding regions. This crackdown was executed through coordinated raids conducted across Delhi-NCR and parts of Uttar Pradesh between March 13 and March 24, based on continuous technical surveillance and human intelligence inputs.

Land Acquisition Compensation: Not Linked to Project Cost Supreme Court Verdict

New Delhi, March 25: Emphasizing that the constitutional guarantee for fair compensation cannot be diluted, the Supreme Court ruled on Wednesday that the 'solatium' (compensation for mental distress) and interest awarded in land acquisition cases cannot be made contingent upon the financial burden imposed by the project itself. A Supreme Court bench made these observations while hearing and dismissing a review petition filed by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), which sought a review of

a verdict delivered by the Court on February 4, 2025. The 2025 verdict had affirmed that a 2019 Supreme Court judgment—which allowed for the payment of compensation and interest to farmers whose land was acquired under the National Highways Authority of India Act (NHAI Act)—would apply retrospectively. A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan held that the interest payable to landowners must be calculated in accordance with the 'Land Acquisi-

tion Act' (1894)—which stipulates an interest rate of 9 percent—rather than under the NHAI Act, which imposes a ceiling of 5 percent. The Court noted that the NHAI had sought a review of the verdict by contending that the financial liability arising from the solatium and interest payable to those whose land was acquired by the Authority was not Rs 100 crore—as previously estimated—but actually amounted to approximately Rs 29,000 crore. "A mere increase in the estimated

financial liability—however substantial it may be—does not constitute a valid ground sufficient to review or modify the judgment," the Bench categorically ruled. Furthermore, the Court directed that among landowners whose land was acquired under the National Highways Authority Act, all those whose claims regarding the quantum of compensation or its components were pending (i.e., under adjudication before the designated statutory forums) on or after March 28, 2008, are entitled to claim 'interest,' 'solatium,'

and 'interest on solatium' in addition to their compensation claims. Moreover, the Bench ordered that in cases where compensation claims were pending as of the aforementioned date, yet the landowner sought 'interest,' 'solatium,' and 'interest on solatium' only after March 28, 2008, no interest need be paid on these two components for the intervening period of delay. "Such a landowner shall be entitled to receive 'interest' and 'interest on solatium' only from the date on which such claims were put forward," it noted.

Today horoscope



Conflicts between husband and wife will be removed and happiness will increase. Relatives will come looking for the house. Solve old problems. You will visit holy places. There is sudden profit in business. You will finish work quickly at work. A day of renewal.

Anxiety will increase before completing the work. Talk to children gently. Do not over speed the vehicle. Handle expensive items with care. Problems will arise due to employees in business. Implicit objections will come and go at work. A profitable day with flurries.



First stop doubting because Moon is in Rasi. Ego problems with family will come and go. Cross the roads carefully. You will have to work extra hard at work. Do not disclose business secrets. A day to let go.

You will complete challenging tasks with ease. Fraternal assistance is available. You will buy expensive jewelry. There is good news on the way of the wife. Officer will respect you in office. Unexpected profits will come in business. A day where talent emerges.



Conflicts between husband and wife will be removed and happiness will increase. Relatives will come looking for the house. Solve old problems. You will visit holy places. There is sudden profit in business. You will finish work quickly at work. A day of renewal.

You will attend auspicious events with family. The government has an advantage. A favorable verdict will be obtained in the case. You will get the friendship of those in positions of authority. You will adopt new strategies in business. At work, you will behave like a superior. A day of progress through effort.



You will take some important decisions boldly. Siblings are compatible. You will participate in auspicious events. The government has an advantage. You will profit by taking a different approach to business. Support for your opinion at work will increase. Discussions will be successful.

You will meet a childhood friend. You will complete some important tasks with the help of government officials. Vain arguments with mother will come and go. Don't tarnish your reputation by seeking justice for others. Partners will cooperate in business. There will be job satisfaction. A day where expectations are fulfilled.



Since the Moon is in the sign, four or five jobs will have to be done in one day. Expenses will be borne by friends and relatives. By pointing out the mistakes of others, you will get into arguments. Be moderate with officials at work. A deal in business will be delayed. A day that requires patience.

Love support will increase between husband and wife. There will be a happy atmosphere in the family. Half-finished works will be completed. Expected money will come in hand. New ventures in business will be strengthened. You will finish work quickly at work. Good day.



You will meet a childhood friend. You will complete some important tasks with the help of government officials. Vain arguments with mother will come and go. Don't tarnish your reputation by seeking justice for others. Partners will cooperate in business. There will be job satisfaction. A day where expectations are fulfilled.

The government has an advantage. You will benefit from others. There is an unexpected cash flow. Old relatives will visit and talk to friends. Debits in business will increase. You will behave in a manner that will impress the superiors at work. A day of sudden yoga.



EPS Launches Fierce Attack on Stalin at Urban Campaign Kick-off

Chennai, March 25: Launching scathing criticisms against the ruling DMK, AIADMK General Secretary and former Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami categorically declared, "Those who place their trust in the DMK will ultimately find themselves left stranded on the streets." He made these remarks on Wednesday while inaugurating his election campaign in Mandaveli, Chennai. After offering prayers at the Kapaleswarar Temple, Palaniswami addressed a massive crowd gathered on St. Mary's Road, expressing his confidence that the AIADMK-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) would achieve a resounding victory. "We will win 210 constituencies; the AIADMK will form the government with an absolute majority," he asserted. Drawing a comparison between the alliances, EPS noted that the AIADMK coalition

had acted with great speed regarding seat-sharing and candidate announcements, whereas the DMK coalition was floundering in a state of "confusion and anxiety." He alleged that the DMK's alliance partners were being treated "like slaves" and had been allotted fewer constituencies compared to the 2021 elections. Furthermore, he issued a warning to smaller parties, stating, "The DMK utilizes its alliance partners while in power, but denies them the respect they rightfully deserve when elections draw near." Leveling severe criticisms against Chief Minister M.K. Stalin and his family, Palaniswami accused the Tamil Nadu government of having failed in the key sectors of administration, infrastructure, and law and order. He severely criticized the DMK government, alleging that it has failed to fulfill even a quarter of its 525 election promises—including pledges to cancel the

Manamadurai custodial death: Judges dismiss plea to arrest suspects

Madurai: Dismissing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed to demand the immediate arrest of police personnel accused in connection with the alleged custodial death of R. Akash, a resident of Manamadurai, the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court observed that it was distressing that the deceased's body still remained in the mortuary. While hearing the case on Wednesday, a bench comprising Justices N. Sathish Kumar and M. Jothiraman noted that a dignified burial is a fundamental right, yet the deceased's parents were effectively denying him that

right by refusing to accept his body. Furthermore, pointing out that there are no legal provisions mandating the immediate arrest of suspects in a criminal case, the judges remarked that this PIL appeared to be a 'Publicity Interest Litigation' and proceeded to dismiss it. Earlier, Additional Advocate General M. Ajmal Khan appeared before the court and submitted that a single judge, who was already seized of this matter, had reserved orders on a petition filed by Akash's father, Rajesh Kannan. He further stated that, acceding to the demands of protesters,

the State government had voluntarily taken steps to alter the charges framed in the case and to provide compensation to Akash's family. Noting that seven police personnel have been suspended in connection with this case, Mr. Ajmal Khan informed the court that the CB-CID police had so far examined 41 witnesses and had secured the CCTV footage from the police station. He added that they were currently awaiting the inquiry report from the Judicial Magistrate and the final medical opinion regarding the post-

mortem examination. C. Selvakumar—the petitioner in this case and Founder-President of the Madurai District Devendra Kula Velalar Relatives Association—had sought a directive from the Election Commission to transfer all police personnel currently serving in Sivaganga District to other districts during the election period, and to deploy officials from other districts in their stead. However, the judges observed that this matter falls within the exclusive discretionary powers of the Election Commission.

Petition Seeking Permission for Anti-War Protest Dismissed; High Court Imposes ₹50,000 Fine

Madurai: The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court on Tuesday dismissed a petition filed by an individual seeking permission to conduct an indefinite protest against the ongoing war in West Asia at a bustling public intersection in Periyakulam. Severely reprimanding the petitioner for refusing to accept alternative venues and for making derogatory remarks regarding two towering leaders, the Court also imposed a fine of ₹50,000 on him. Justice L. Victoria Gowri observed that, under the guise of constitutional freedom, the Court cannot be turned into an instrument to uphold individual obstinacy. She further added that the right to protest cannot be elevated to a right for an individual to occupy any location, at any time, and for any duration solely based on their personal preference. The Judge pointed out that although the police had proposed two alternative venues—near the statues of B.R. Ambedkar or Muthuramalinga Thevar in Periyakulam—the

petitioner had refused to accept them, claiming that these two leaders had become symbols of casteism and, therefore, he did not wish to conduct his protest near their statues. Noting that these two leaders are historical figures of public significance, the Judge criticized the petitioner, stating that making such remarks during a court proceeding was entirely unnecessary and that he could not be permitted to justify his refusal by casting derogatory generalizations upon them. "It has become necessary to impose an exemplary fine for such conduct on the part of the petitioner—who not only made unbridled remarks regarding public figures respected at both national and regional levels, but also wasted the precious time of the Court in a matter where reasonable alternative arrangements had already been made by the

authorities," the Judge ruled. The Judge further observed that the extraordinary jurisdiction vested in the High Court under Article 226 of the Constitution is intended to redress genuine and substantial injustices, and not to validate eccentric obstinacies masquerading as constitutional rights. Furthermore, the Judge directed the petitioner to pay a sum of Rs. 50,000 as costs to the Victoria Memorial Government Higher Secondary School in Periyakulam within one week; failing which, the petitioner was ordered to undergo one day of simple imprisonment in the Periyakulam Sub&Jail. Justice Gowri issued this order against S. Prabhu, the Union Secretary of an organization named the 'Pathu Rupai Iyakkam' (Ten Rupee Movement), who had filed a petition challenging an order issued by the Inspector of Police, Tenkarai, Periyakulam.

In the order issued by the Periyakulam Police Inspector, the petitioner had been denied permission to conduct an indefinite protest under the banner 'Ahimsa Paathai' (Path of Non-Violence) daily between 10:00 AM and 12:00 PM, until the conclusion of the 'World War' (referring to the ongoing conflict in West Asia). In his petition, the petitioner had asserted that the right to assemble peacefully and to protest constitutes an integral part of the fundamental civil liberties available to every citizen under the Constitution. Moreover, he had insisted that permission to conduct the said protest be granted specifically at the location designated by him. However, the Government Pleader argued before the Court that the police had not imposed any complete ban on the petitioner's activities, but had merely suggested alternative venues in order to avoid inconvenience to the general public.

Nominations to be open from March 30 till April 6

CHENNAI, MARCH 25 The office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Tamil Nadu, has announced the schedule for filing nominations for the upcoming Assembly elections. According to the official notification, candi-

dates can file their nomination papers from March 30 (Monday), the date of notification, until April 6 (Monday), the last date for submission. Nominations will be accepted daily between 11 am and 3 pm at the

designated offices. However, the Election Department clarified that nominations will not be received on certain public holidays declared under the Negotiable Instruments Act, 1881. These include March 31 (Tuesday),

April 1 (Wednesday), April 3 (Friday), and April 5 (Sunday). Officials emphasized that April 6 remains the final deadline, and no nominations will be accepted beyond this date under any circumstances.



NEET examination and waive educational loans. "They claim to have fulfilled 98 percent of their promises; however, every single word of that is an outright lie," he categorically asserted. Noting that rising prices have emerged as a major issue, EPS pointed out that the cost of essential commodities—such as rice, cooking oil, and pulses—has skyrocketed. Furthermore, he accused the government of imposing a severe tax burden on the public by not only hiking electricity tariffs annually but also increasing property

tax by 100 percent and shop tax by 150 percent. "Is this governance, or is it oppression of the people?" he questioned. Speaking on infrastructure projects, Palaniswami noted that initiatives such as the construction of stormwater drainage systems and the expansion of the Chennai Metro Rail were originally conceptualized and implemented during the AIADMK regimes led by Jayalalitha and M.G. Ramachandran. He alleged that the DMK government focuses solely on "sticking nameplates" onto existing projects while

failing to complete critical tasks; he further stated that this failure has resulted in the unfortunate situation where the state repeatedly faces severe flooding. Moreover, branding the DMK's style of governance as being founded on "extortion, commissions, and corruption," he launched a scathing attack, accusing the current administration of allowing corruption to run rampant. He also criticized the state's escalating debt burden, pointing out that over the past five years, the state's total debt has reached the ₹5 lakh crore mark. "How are the people supposed to repay this debt?" he questioned. Criticism regarding the law and order situation formed the central theme of his attack. Citing murders, sexual assaults, and drug-related crimes occurring across Tamil Nadu, EPS painted a grim picture of the state's rising crime

rate, rampant drug abuse, and violent incidents. "From young girls to elderly women, no woman in Tamil Nadu is safe," he asserted categorically; furthermore, he noted that the rampant dominance of narcotics has undermined the very fundamental stability of the state. He leveled sensational allegations regarding organ trafficking and various irregularities allegedly taking place in hospitals linked to key figures within the ruling party. EPS pledged that if the AIADMK returns to power, strict action will be taken against these crimes, and all those implicated will undoubtedly be brought before the law and held accountable. Portraying this election as a battle against "four centers of power"—Stalin, his son Udhayanidhi Stalin, his son-in-law, and his wife—EPS declared that his party aims to "put an end to dynastic rule" in Tamil Nadu.

March 26 Thursday, 2026

The 'Deputy' SIR Affair: LPG Pressure Amidst the Conflict

Supplementary lists resemble by&-Selections—a mechanism devised inefficiently with the sole aim of rectifying a blunder that occurred during an initial exercise. The voters of West Bengal, already under immense pressure, are poised to cast their ballots to elect a new government. In doing so, they will also be evaluating the competence of the Election Commission; for the Commission has subjected over six million voters to a process akin to a by&election. By segregating those excluded from the initial rolls, these supplementary lists create a hierarchy, distinguishing the "winners" from the rest. Yet, in the eyes of the voters, there exists no significant distinction between those featured in the primary rolls and those relegated to the supplementary lists. These lists were created solely to rectify the Election Commission's failure to complete the "Special Summary Revision" of voter rolls in a timely and proper manner. This situation places the BJP in a precarious position, as it stands as the only political entity that has consistently endorsed this unfairly convoluted and distressing Special Summary Revision process. The Iran&Israel&US conflict has inflicted further misery upon a populace already exhausted by the Election Commission's arduous, multi-layered verification process—dubbed the "Special Investment Report" (SIR)—which was rife with errors and corrections. The people are currently grappling with a multitude of issues: disruptions in LPG supply, skyrocketing prices, precarious livelihoods, sluggish economic prospects, and an all-pervading atmosphere of uncertainty, sorrow, and hardship. The most objective yardstick for assessing the cumulative impact of these various pressures is the sheer number of rallies organized by political parties across West Bengal over the past three months to address this diverse array of issues. Organizers affirm that compiling a comprehensive list of these events is a daunting task; they concede that they have not been this intensely active in a long time, and they anticipate that the situation will escalate further as the election season begins to heat up. The CPI(M), Congress, and Trinamool Congress parties have taken to the streets and mobilized the masses; this demonstrates a marked increase in public participation as a form of protest. Samik Lahiri—a former Member of Parliament and currently the editor of *Ganashakti*, the Bengali daily mouthpiece of the CPI(M)—listed at least ten distinct issues on which the party took to the streets to protest, excluding the SIR process and the 1,000&kilometer&long *Bangla Bachao Yatra*. A wide spectrum of issues was highlighted in this series of events: ranging from demanding a ceasefire against the undeclared genocide being perpetrated against women, children, and civilians in Gaza; to farmers mobilizing against the policies of the Narendra Modi government; to participating in the nationwide strike held against the new labor laws; to opposing the education policies of the West Bengal government; to protesting against the discriminatory amendments introduced by the Modi government to the University Grants Commission (UGC) regulations regarding the promotion of equity in higher education institutions; and, finally, to holding rallies specifically against the SIR process itself. "Over the past year, we have consistently organized rallies and small&scale meetings; on behalf of the party, approximately 70,000 group discussion sessions have been conducted across the state to disseminate information to the public and to listen to their grievances. All political parties in West Bengal are actively and deeply involved in the SIR process; they are extending assistance in various ways—ranging from setting up camps to help citizens fill out verification forms, to escorting anxious voters to their inquiry sessions. Furthermore, in the seven districts bordering Bangladesh, the BJP has established camps and is working intensively to assist those wishing to submit applications under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The hike in the price of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) cylinders—for both domestic and commercial use—has severely impacted not only ordinary consumers but also daily&wage earners and, in particular, the roadside eateries that provide affordable meals to 'gig' workers toiling amidst grueling work schedules. To save on gas costs, some eateries have begun using coal; others have purchased new stoves that utilize alternative fuels instead of gas burners. Moreover, many eateries have reduced both the portion sizes and the variety of the food they prepare and serve. Among the people."

Sand Lorry Owners Announce Protest Demanding Height Increase of National Highway Medians State-wide Protest on April 1

Chennai, March 25: Accusing officials of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) of negligence in ensuring road safety, condemning the hike in toll charges, and demanding disciplinary action against the officials, the Tamil Nadu Sand Lorry Owners Federation has lodged a formal complaint with the police. Furthermore, the Federation has issued a warning that it intends to stage a state-wide protest against the hike in toll fees. In a petition addressed to the Inspector of Police, Madhavoyal, the Federation highlighted that the insufficient height of the central medians on national highways is the primary cause behind dangerous head-on collisions between vehicles traveling in opposite directions. According to the Federation, vehicles that lose control often breach these low-height medians and veer into the lanes of oncoming traffic, resulting in major accidents. To prevent such accidents, the Federation has urged that the height of the ce-

tral medians on national highways be raised to between 3 and 4 feet. The Federation further alleged that despite submitting numerous petitions to Highway Department officials regarding this issue in the past, no concrete action has been taken to date. Citing recent accidents, the Federation specifically referenced two tragic incidents: one in the Salem district, where 8 people lost their lives, and another in the Cuddalore district, where 9 people were killed. The Federation argued that such tragic occurrences could be averted through improved median designs and the implementation of enhanced road safety measures. The complaint petition has severely criticized the actions of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), which continues to hike toll charges twice a year while simultaneously failing to improve basic road safety infrastructure. The Federation has condemned the practice of raising toll fees without enhancing

road safety facilities, terming it an injustice inflicted upon road users. Announcing its intention to stage protests against the toll hike, the Federation stated that state-wide demonstrations will be held on April 1st, bringing together sand lorry owners, Omni bus and van operators, trade associations, and residential welfare associations. These protests are planned to involve picketing the toll plazas where the increased charges are set to take effect, with the aim of demanding superior road maintenance and improved safety amenities. Federation leaders stated that the primary objectives of these protests are to raise awareness regarding national highway safety and to compel authorities to implement necessary structural changes related to road safety. Furthermore, they urged both the Central Government and the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to take immediate and appropriate measures to prevent fatalities occurring on national highways.

AIADMK Cadres Express Dissatisfaction Over Seat Allocation in Thanjavur District

Thanjavur, March 25: According to the final seat-sharing agreement announced by AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami, one constituency each has been allotted to AIADMK's alliance partners—the BJP, AMMK, and TMC—within the Thanjavur district. Accordingly, the Thanjavur constituency has been allotted to the BJP, the Thiruvaiyaru constituency to the AMMK, and the Kumbakonam constituency to the TMC. However, expressing their dissatisfaction regarding the allocation of seats to alliance partners, AIADMK cadres staged protests in all three of these constituencies. In Thanjavur, AIADMK cadres staged a demonstration, insisting that the Thanjavur constituency should have been allotted to the AIADMK itself. The protesters argued that the party had bright prospects of winning in this constituency and that, by allotting it to the BJP, the party had taken a significant risk. They also pointed out that the party's District Secretary, N.S. Saravanan, had already commenced election-related groundwork in the belief that this constituency would be allotted to him.

They asserted that any other constituency in the district could have been allotted to the BJP, and that the AIADMK should have retained the Thanjavur constituency—which stands as a prestigious seat—for itself. They further recalled that during the previous Lok Sabha elections, the AIADMK had similarly allotted this very constituency to its then-alliance partner, the DMK. In that election, the DMK candidate was defeated by the DMK candidate, S. Murasoli, who currently serves as the Member of Parliament for this constituency. Meanwhile, in Thirukkattupalli—located within the Thiruvaiyaru Assembly constituency—AIADMK cadres staged a protest demanding that the seat be allotted to the AIADMK itself, rather than being allocated to the AMMK. "For the past three elections, this constituency has not been allotted to the AIADMK but has instead been handed over to its alliance partners; consequently, the people have been deprived of the opportunity to cast their votes for the AIADMK's 'Two Leaves' symbol. Even this time around, the constituency has been allocated to the AMMK," they

stated. They raised slogans, emphatically demanding that they be allowed to cast their votes specifically for the 'Two Leaves' symbol. They further insisted that the constituency be allotted to M. Rathinasamy—the AIADMK's Thanjavur West District Secretary and a former Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). In a separate incident, AMMK members staged a protest in Sakkottai, near Kumbakonam. This protest was held to condemn the party leadership for failing to secure the Papanasam constituency for M. Rangasamy—the party's Deputy General Secretary and a former MLA hailing from Thanjavur. During the protest, they burned an effigy of AMMK General Secretary T.T.V. Dhinakaran. Of the eight Assembly constituencies in the Thanjavur district, three have been allotted to the AIADMK's alliance partners; these are: the BJP (Thanjavur), the AMMK (Thiruvaiyaru), and the TMC (Kumbakonam). This leaves only five constituencies for the AIADMK to contest. They are: Pattukkottai, Peravurani, Orathanadu, Papanasam, and Thiruvidaimarudur (Reserved).

CAG Report Exposes GST Flaws: ₹1,200 Crore Unverified Due to Lack of Documentation

Ahmedabad: The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) report, tabled in the Gujarat Legislative Assembly, exposes gaps in the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST). The report highlights irregularities amounting to ₹2,606.62 crore, unexplained discrepancies totaling ₹266.63 crore, and an amount of ₹1,234.71 crore that auditors could not verify due to the absence of supporting documentation. This report for the year 2024&25 begins by outlining warning signs regarding compliance with tax regulations and delves into intricate details concerning data discrepancies. Right at the outset, the audit sharply points out structural deficiencies. Specifically, it notes deviations from GST Act provisions and official instructions across 10 selected units—particularly regarding the cancellation of registrations, the restoration of cancelled registrations, and delays in the recovery of outstanding dues. Discrepancies obse-

erved in reports generated through the Management Information System (MIS) concerning applications for registration cancellations raise questions regarding the reliability of the Tax Department's backend monitoring mechanisms. Furthermore, the audit identifies 738 discrepancies within a list of major irregularities. Despite the escalating nature of these warning signs, the Tax Department's response mechanism appears to remain sluggish. This is because, in five key cases involving discrepancies valued at ₹266.63 crore, preliminary responses from the respective departments have not yet been received. In cases where responses were submitted, the audit identified instances of non-compliance in 291 cases—valued at ₹2,606.62 crore—which account for 39.70 percent of the total discrepancies. Discrepancies are predominantly concentrated within the core GST filing procedures, which serve as the ba-

ckbone of tax compliance. Specifically, these deficiencies are most prevalent in areas involving discrepancies in tax liability between GSTR&3B and E&Way Bills; discrepancies between Forms GSTR&01 and GSTR&09; and Input Tax Credit (ITC) discrepancies between Forms GSTR&2A and GSTR&3B. Among the responses submitted to scrutiny, the audit team accepted the explanations provided in 340 cases. Within this subset, it was determined that errors in 45 cases were attributable to data entry errors on the part of taxpayers; meanwhile, in 87 cases, the Tax Department demonstrated that it had already undertaken appropriate remedial measures. The auditors requested detailed financial records—including financial statements, ledgers, invoices, audit reports, and debit/credit notes—from 65 taxpayers selected on a sample basis. However, the Department failed to submit the requested documentation for 63 of these 65 cases.

Government: Switch to PNG if Available; Otherwise, Risk of LPG Supply Discontinuation

New Delhi, March 25: In a move aimed at expanding gas pipeline networks and reducing reliance on a single fuel source, the government has issued an order. Accordingly, the government has announced that in areas where Piped Natural Gas (PNG) connectivity is available, the supply of cooking gas (LPG)—for both domestic and commercial use—will be discontinued if consumers fail to switch to PNG. Amidst reports of a widespread LPG shortage across India—attributed to disruptions in key supply channels resulting from ongoing conflicts in West Asia—the government is actively promoting viable alternatives to meet the demand for LPG. In an order issued by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, targets have been set to accelerate pipeline infrastructure projects, simplify approval procedures, and encourage the transition from LPG to PNG, with the overarching objective of bolstering energy security. This order, issued on March 24, stipulates that if a household has access to a PNG connection but chooses not to opt for it, their LPG supply will be discontinued "after three months." However, the regulation allows for the continuation of LPG supply—subject to obtaining a 'No-Objection Certificate'—in instances

where providing a pipeline connection is deemed "technically unfeasible." Commenting on this order, Petroleum Secretary Neeraj Mittal noted in a post on the platform 'X' (formerly Twitter) that, "Through reforms aimed at ease of doing business, a crisis has (now) been transformed into an opportunity." Issued under the Essential Commodities Act, this order seeks to accelerate pipeline infrastructure projects by simplifying approval procedures, rationalizing fees, and ensuring that permissions are granted within a stipulated timeframe. To facilitate the speedy implementation of this scheme, public authorities are required to grant 'Right of Way' or permissions within a specified period; failure to do so will result in the permissions being deemed as granted. Furthermore, this order prohibits authorities from levying charges in excess of the prescribed fees. The order stipulates that in residential areas, the entities controlling entry and access must grant permissions within three working days, and the PNG connection for the end-user (last-mile connectivity) must be provided within 48 hours. It is further specified in the order that applications seeking pipeline connections in such areas must not be rejected.

Government Introduces Central Armed Police Forces Bill in Rajya Sabha; Rejects Opposition Objections

New Delhi, March 25: On Wednesday, the Central Government introduced the 'Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026' in the Rajya Sabha. Despite strong objections raised by opposition parties, the government secured approval to introduce the bill through a voice vote. The objective of this bill is to establish a unified legal framework for governing the personnel serving across the five Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs); it is intended to serve as a replacement for the separate service rules currently in force. Speaking while introducing the bill, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai stated that the legislation aims to streamline administration,

reduce litigation, and ensure uniformity in matters concerning recruitment, promotions, and service conditions. He clarified that the bill would not alter the command structure or operational jurisdiction of these forces, nor would it impinge upon the regulations enshrined under Article 312 of the Constitution. The proposed legislation will function as an 'umbrella framework' encompassing aspects such as the appointment of officers, deputations, and career progression within the forces. This bill has been introduced against the backdrop of a Supreme Court verdict directing the gradual reduction of the deputation of IPS officers within the Central Armed Police Forces.

Send Bill to Select Committee for Comprehensive Consultation: Opposition Parties Demand

Transgender Bill Passed in Rajya Sabha via Voice Vote; It is Discriminatory: Congress Alleges

New Delhi, March 25: On Wednesday, the Rajya Sabha witnessed a heated debate marked by sharp disagreements between the ruling party and the opposition regarding the 'Transgender (Amendment) Bill, 2026'; the bill was ultimately passed. After rejecting amendments proposed by the opposition, the bill was passed through a voice vote. This bill had already been passed by the Lok Sabha on Tuesday. Responding to the debate on the bill in the Rajya Sabha, Virendra Kumar, the Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, stated that the proposed legislation is an endeavor to take all sections of society along in an inclusive manner. He further noted that the bill aims to provide protection specifically to individuals who face discrimination

due to biological factors. The Minister categorically asserted that this amendment act would ensure that transgender persons continue to receive legal recognition and protection. Congress MP Renuka Chowdhury offered a brief critique of the bill; terming it discriminatory, she questioned whether separate, additional laws were truly necessary to govern gender identity. She emphasized that the Indian Constitution itself already provides adequate protection for transgender persons; furthermore, she registered her concerns regarding government interference in an individual's right to determine their own gender identity. DMK MP Trichy Siva warned that the bill could potentially be subject to

judicial scrutiny. He argued that this Bill violates the fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 14, 15, 19, and 21 of the Indian Constitution. Recalling his own 'Private Member's Bill' passed in the Rajya Sabha in 2015—a rare feat in parliamentary history—he noted that the currently proposed Bill marks a departure from a rights-based legal framework. Several members from the opposition parties echoed similar concerns, demanding that the Bill be referred to a 'Select Committee' for comprehensive consultation. Trinamool Congress MP Saket Gokhale accused the government of enacting legislation without consulting the concerned stakeholders; he harshly criticized the Bill, terming it a "worthless, colonial-minded law."

Government Tables FCRA Bill; Action Assured on Religious Conversion Issue

New Delhi, March 25: The Central Government on Wednesday introduced a bill in the Lok Sabha to amend the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act. Through this bill, the government has categorically clarified that no individual engaging in forced religious conversions using foreign funding will be allowed to go unpunished. Introducing the 'Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026,' Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai stated that the primary objective of this legislation is to enhance transparency in the utilization of funds received from abroad and to ensure the proper application of such funds.

Refuting allegations leveled by opposition parties that the bill was "dangerous," Mr. Rai categorically asserted that the legislation is "truly dangerous" only for those who engage in forced conversions using foreign contributions and for those who misuse foreign funds for personal gain. "The Modi government will never tolerate the misuse of foreign funds; it will take stringent action against such forces," the Minister said. Earlier, opposing the introduction of the bill, Congress MP Manish Tewari argued that the legislation grants unfettered powers to the executive branch, devoid of any constitutional safeguards. Registering

her opposition to the bill, Trinamool Congress (TMC) MP Pratima Mondal described the legislation as both "dangerous" and "draconian," noting that it leads to the centralization of all powers in the hands of the Central Government. "Without any constitutional safeguards, the Central Government will acquire absolute power," said Mrs. Mandal. Furthermore, she noted that this legislation would ensure the concentration of power. Following a brief discussion, Krishna Prasad Tenneti, who was presiding over the House, called for a vote on the resolution; the resolution was adopted by a voice vote.

Sandhu stresses push for swift garbage management process

NEW DELHI, MARCH 25: Delhi lieutenant-governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu held a meeting with MCD officials on Wednesday to review ongoing efforts to deliver essential civic services and stressed a push for faster progress in key areas, such as garbage management, road repairs, and dust mitigation. While acknowledging the improvements made in recent years despite existing challenges, the L-G's office posted on X that gaps remain, particularly in addressing issues raised

by citizens and the media, and in ensuring timely redressal of grievances. Senior officials were advised to be more receptive to feedback and work towards bridging the gap between ground realities and public expectations. The need to address overlapping jurisdictions among agencies, including the Delhi Development Authority, Delhi Jal Board, public works department, and irrigation and flood control department, was also highlighted, with an emphasis on a coordinated

approach focused on public satisfaction, the post on X read. Additionally, the adoption of the best global practices and innovative solutions to tackle long-standing civic issues was encouraged in the meeting, along with an assurance of full support to overcome operational challenges. During a visit to Hindu Rao Hospital and Medical College, which also houses a nursing college, the LG posted on X that interactions were held with patients, the medical superintendent, and staff.

'No Penalty for Not Singing Vande Mataram'

Supreme Court Declares Circular on Vande Mataram Not Mandatory

New Delhi, March 25: On Wednesday, the Supreme Court refused to entertain a petition challenging a recent circular issued by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs regarding the singing of the national song, 'Vande Mataram,' at government functions and in schools. The Court observed that the guidelines contained in the said circular were not mandatory. A three-judge bench pointed out that the circular did not specify any penal consequences for failing to sing the song, and characterized the petition as "premature." "We feel that you harbor only vague apprehensions regarding discrimination that are not directly connected to this circular," Justice Bakshi remarked to Senior Counsel Sanjay

Hegde, who appeared on behalf of the petitioner, Mohammed Saeed Noori. Concurring with Justice Bakshi's observations, Chief Justice of India (CJI) Kant pointed out that the word "may" had been used in the circular, indicating that the guidelines were advisory in nature. "This is a premature apprehension; if any penal consequences arise, you may approach us then... The circular itself uses the word 'may.' It entails no penalty or adverse consequences. No one has asked you to do this in your educational institution or school," the Chief Justice stated. Continuing further, the Chief Justice observed, "This is merely a protocol. The specific phrase used is 'when it is played.' Previously, we had a protocol rega-

rding the National Flag... it specifies the procedures to be followed when the National Flag is hoisted." However, Mr. Hegde argued that even though no penalty is prescribed for non-compliance with this 'advisory,' it could potentially create a compulsion to sing 'Vande Mataram'; furthermore, he contended that those who fail to comply could face ostracism and discrimination, and might even be coerced into conforming. The petitioner has filed a plea challenging a circular issued by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs in January, which outlined the protocols to be observed while singing all verses of the song 'Vande Mataram.' Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who was present in court for the hearing of an

unrelated case, posed the question: "Do we really need an advisory to show respect to the National Song?" Mr. Hegde objected to the arguments advanced by Mr. Mehta, noting that no formal counter-affidavit had yet been filed in response to the petition; he further pointed out that people of all religious faiths—including atheists—could ultimately find themselves under compulsion to sing the song as a social act of demonstrating their allegiance. The Solicitor General (SG) drew the Court's attention to Article 51A(a) of the Constitution, which defines it as a fundamental duty of every citizen to abide by the Constitution and to respect its ideals, institutions, the National Flag, and the National Anthem.

ED attaches ₹2.79cr assets of ex-NCL CMD

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday said assets worth ₹2.79 crore of former Northern Coalfields Ltd (NCL) CMD Bholu Singh have been attached under the antimoney laundering law in connection with a disproportionate assets case. The properties include cash and gold jewellery worth ₹1.94 crore and a residential flat located in SAIL City in Jharkhand's capital Ranchi worth ₹85.45 lakh, it said in a statement. Mr Singh could not be contacted for a comment on the ED action against him. The agency's case stems from an FIR registered by the CBI against Singh. The ED alleged that during the check period from January 1, 2022 to January 31, 2024, the former NCL CMD possessed assets of ₹1.74 crore which was about 124 per cent more than his known sources of income.

Israel and Hezbollah Launch Retaliatory Strikes

Gulf Nations: Iranian Attacks Pose an 'Existential Threat'; U.S. May Deploy Thousands More Troops to West Asia

Beirut, Geneva, March 25: Lebanon's state media reported on Wednesday that Israel had carried out strikes in southern Lebanon and the southern suburbs of Beirut; meanwhile, Hezbollah—the Iranian-backed militant group—stated that it was continuing its attacks against Israeli forces. Lebanon was drawn into the broader Middle East conflict on March 2, when Hezbollah launched rocket attacks against Israel in retaliation for the assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Israel, which

had occupied southern Lebanon for nearly two decades until the year 2000, has intensified its attacks across Lebanon since the current conflict began; it has also deployed ground troops into the southern part of the country. On Tuesday, Israel announced that its military would seize control of the border region extending up to the Litani River, located approximately 30 kilometers (20 miles) from the frontier. Lebanon's state-owned National News Agency (NNA) reported on Wednesday that Israeli

airstrikes and artillery bombardments had taken place at multiple locations throughout southern Lebanon. Following a renewed warning issued by the Israeli military on Tuesday night—urging residents to evacuate several districts serving as Hezbollah strongholds—the news agency further reported that "enemy warplanes... carried out attacks in the southern suburbs of Beirut." Although the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights had noted that Iranian attacks could

potentially be deemed war crimes, Gulf Arab nations—condemning Iran's attacks against their infrastructure—informed the UN Human Rights Council on Wednesday that Iran poses an existential threat to their very existence. "We perceive an 'existential threat' to international and regional security. This aggressive approach undermines international law and sovereignty," Kuwait's Ambassador Nasser Abdullah H. M. Al-Hayen stated before the Geneva-based council. Other Gulf

nations, emphasizing that Iran's actions are designed to sow fear, also strongly condemned the country's activities. Two individuals familiar with the matter told Reuters that the Pentagon plans to deploy thousands of troops from the U.S. military's elite 82nd Airborne Division to the Middle East. This move by the United States serves to further intensify its military buildup in the region, even as President Donald Trump pursues negotiations with Tehran regarding a potential agreement.

Ankara, March 25: Sources familiar with the matter report that Turkey is undertaking intense diplomatic efforts to prevent Gulf Arab nations from joining a potential U.S.-Israeli war against Iran. Speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive details, these individuals stated that Ankara has urged Gulf nations to exercise restraint. Turkey has intensified its diplomatic initiatives through Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, who has traveled to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar, and has also held

telephone conversations with other regional nations. Sources familiar with the situation—who spoke on condition of anonymity to speak freely—indicate that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the Gulf's most powerful nations, are losing patience with Iranian attacks that have already targeted ports, energy facilities, and airports. Three Council diplomats state that a United Nations Security Council resolution—calling on nations to use "all necessary means" to keep the Strait of Hormuz open—is facing some

opposition, as it raises the possibility of U.N.-backed military action against Iran. Bahrain introduced this proposal—a copy of which was obtained by the Associated Press on Tuesday—as global powers grapple with how to loosen Iran's tight grip on this critical waterway. However, the sources further noted that these nations would join the war only if the Islamic Republic were to carry out its threats to strike key power and water infrastructure in the Gulf—a threshold they described as extremely high.

UK nabs 2 over arson attack on Jewish community ambulances

London, March 25: British police said they arrested two men in connection with the suspected antisemitic arson attack on four Jewish community ambulances in north London earlier this week. Police said on Wednesday the men, aged 47 and 45, were arrested at addresses in north west London and central London respectively, and

were being held in custody. The ambulances were set on fire in the early hours of Monday morning in an attack which British Prime Minister Keir Starmer called a "deeply shocking antisemitic arson attack". No injuries were reported. Police, who had previously said they were looking into a possible link to Iran, said the investigation

continued. An enhanced police presence remained in place around the affected communities in north London as a precaution, the police statement added. In Britain, concern has mounted about rising levels of antisemitism, while authorities have warned of the threat posed by Iran, including the surveillance or targeting of Jewish sites.

Russia Claims 389 Ukrainian Drones Shot Down Over Its Regions and Crimea

Moscow: Russia's Defense Ministry stated on Wednesday that its air defense forces shot down 389 Ukrainian drones—marking the largest nighttime attack since Moscow's forces invaded Ukrainian territory and Crimea four years ago. These drones were intercepted over 13 Russian regions and the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014. This attack underscores the growing capabilities of Ukraine's domestically developed and manufactured long-range drones. The assault occurred just one day after Russia launched nearly 1,000 drones and 34 missiles at Ukrainian civilian areas within a 24-hour period—one of the largest aerial bombardments of the war—extending its routine nighttime attacks



offensive by Russia's large military forces this spring. Alexander Drozdenko, the Governor of the Leningrad region north of Moscow, stated that 56 drones were shot down in the area and that a fire broke out at the Ust-Luga port on the Baltic Sea as a result of a Ukrainian attack. Vyacheslav Gladkov, the Governor of the Belgorod region—located along the border with Ukraine—reported that energy infrastructure was damaged after Ukrainian forces launched a missile attack on the region overnight. He added that electricity, water, and heating services were disrupted. On Wednesday, in Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, at least nine people were injured when Russian drones struck residential areas during the afternoon, according to Mayor Ihor Terekhov.

into daylight hours. Ukrainian officials reported that at least six people were killed and approximately 50 were injured. In response to the attack, UNESCO—the United Nations' cultural ag-

ency—expressed "grave concern" on Wednesday regarding a Russian strike on a World Heritage site located in the city of Lviv in western Ukraine. These aerial attacks have intensified amidst a hia-

tus in U.S.-mediated talks between delegations from Moscow and Kyiv, occurring at a time when Washington's attention has shifted toward the conflict involving Iran, and as Ukraine anticipates a major

HC holds Raj IPS officer guilty of contempt over WA notice

Jaipur: A notice served solely through WhatsApp cannot be the basis for arrest, the Rajasthan High Court has ruled. In a case where an accused was arrested via a WhatsApp notice, the court has held IPS officer and then Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), Pushpendra Singh Rathore, guilty of contempt of court. The Court has

directed him to appear in person on April 6 for a hearing on the quantum of sentence. The order was passed by Justice Praveer Bhatnagar while hearing a contempt petition filed by Ravi Meena. According to the petitioner's counsel, prior to the arrest, the Investigating Officer had issued a notice on January 25, 2023, via WhatsApp, directing the petitioner to

appear on January 31. The petitioner responded to the notice, seeking additional time due to his wife's illness. However, the ACB proceeded to arrest him. The Court emphasised that notices must be served strictly in accordance with established legal procedures, such as personal delivery, affixation, or dispatch through Speed Post or other recognized modes.

Finance Bill: Sets Surcharge on Share Buybacks at 12%

New Delhi: The Finance Bill, 2026, passed by the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, proposes to levy a uniform surcharge of 12% on income earned through share buybacks. Consequently, the effective tax rate for individuals with taxable income up to ₹1 crore will increase. Currently, the surcharge on capital gains varies according to an individual's income level; under the existing framework, no surcharge is levied on income up to ₹50 lakh, whereas a 10% surcharge applies to income ranging from ₹50 lakh to ₹1 crore. This proposed uniform 12% levy modifies the current structure; as a result, the effective tax rate rises for a broad spectrum of individual shareholders. "Imposing a uniform 12% surcharge on capital gains earned by individual shareholders will significantly

increase their effective tax burden—this is particularly significant considering that, previously, a lower tax regime was in place where no surcharge was levied on taxable income up to ₹50 lakh," stated Sandeep Jhunjhunwala, Partner in the M&A Tax division at Nangia Global Advisors. Raising the surcharge to 12% effectively increases the tax liability of individuals falling within specific income brackets. Consequently, compared to alternative avenues such as dividends, share buybacks prove to be a relatively expensive method for companies to return funds to their shareholders. This Bill eliminates the powers of arrest and detention previously vested in tax recovery officers. Under the previous regulations, one of the avenues available to a Tax

Recovery Officer (TRO) for collecting revenue was to arrest and imprison the taxpayer. Among other significant changes, this Bill introduces a minimum time limit for filing tax responses. Taxpayers will now be granted a minimum of 30 days to respond to re-assessment notices; this measure addresses concerns regarding the lack of sufficient time to prepare a response. "Currently, no minimum time limit is prescribed for filing a response to such notices. To address the concerns of taxpayers, it has been proposed to provide a minimum window of 30 days for filing such responses," stated officials from the Revenue Department. The objective of these amendments is to plug residual legal loopholes, even in instances where the Tax



Department prevails in court regarding re-assessment cases. If the Tax Department wins a case in court, they may resume re-assessment proceedings and issue the requisite notice within three months of receiving the court order. The revenue threshold for startups seeking tax concessions has been raised from ₹100 crore to ₹300 crore. The primary catalyst

for this increase is the Ministry of Commerce's revision of the revenue ceiling—to ₹200 crore—for a company to be recognized as a 'start-up.' "This reform ensures that rapidly growing, innovation-centric companies do not lose their tax incentives merely because their growth rate increases. This integrated policy shift—implemented

FM says 100% of cess funds sent to states, flags concerns over utilisation

New Delhi: DEFENDING the Centre's right to levy cesses and surcharges, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said the government is exercising a legitimately provided provision and has fully transferred these funds to states. However, she flagged concerns over the utilisation of these funds by several states. She stated that in the past six years (201920 to 202425), cumulative utilisation of cesses has exceeded collections. While the Centre collected ₹15.14 lakh crore, it sent ₹15.97 lakh crore to states under various schemes. She added that under health and education cess, an additional ₹74,000 crore has been spent over and above the amount collected. ₹7.03 lakh crore was collected between 201415 and 202627, while total utilisation stood at ₹7.77 lakh crore. So, more than what is collected under cesses and surcharges is being spent," she noted. She said schemes such as Samagra Shiksha and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, implemented

through state governments, are financed through health and education cess. "Even in recent Supplementary Demand for Grants, passed in this House a few days ago, ₹11,627 crore was transferred to PM Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi to meet NHM expenditure. So, resources from many cesses are 100% transferred to states," she said. The minister was responding to the debate on the Finance Bill, 2026 in the Lok Sabha. She criticised the West Bengal government for underutilisation or non-utilisation of funds under several central schemes like Pradhan Mantri Cha Shramik Protsahan Yojana, PM-KISAN Yojana, and Ayushman Bharat. Addressing broader fiscal concerns, Sitharaman said debt should be assessed relative to GDP, noting the Centre's target to reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio to around 50% by 203031. However, she emphasised that the onus lies equally on states to bring down debt.

..... under the DPIIT unified regulatory framework designed to support corporate growth," stated Amit Maheshwari, Managing Partner at the tax and advisory firm 'AKM Global'.

21-year-old man kills woman, dumps body in Koodakovil quarry pit; held

Sivagangal: A 21-year-old man was arrested on Tuesday for allegedly murdering a 52-year-old woman on February 17 in Madurai district. The deceased was identified as Saraswathi of Sottathatti village in Sivaganga, and the suspect was identified as Saravanakumar of Koodakovil in Madurai. According to sources, the two were in an alleged extramarital affair for many years. The incident came to light after the deceased's brother, Nirakulathan (66), filed a missing persons complaint at the

Thirupuvanampolice station on February 17. During the investigation, they detained Saravanakumar, who allegedly admitted to committing the murder and throwing her body inside a deep quarry pit located in Koodakovil and its limits. Sources further added that the duo was earlier working together at construction sites. When Saraswathi came to Saravanakumar's farm in Koodakovil to meet him on the day of the incident, she learnt that he was going to marry another woman, and a heated argument

broke out between them. In the heat of the moment, he assaulted her to death, packed her body inside a gunny bag tied with a stone and threw her body into the deep waters. SP R Shiva Prasad said that the quarry pit was very deep, so a diving team from Chennai was called to recover the body. The body was sent to the Government Rajaji Hospital for a postmortem. Since the incident took place in Madurai city limits, the case will be transferred from Thirupuvanampolice station to Koodakovil police station limits.

Praful Patel tried to take over NCP after Ajit: Rohit

Mumbai: THERE are rumblings in Maharashtra politics as it has been alleged that Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) working president Praful Patel wrote to the Election Commission of India (ECI) after party national president Ajit Pawar's death, informing it that in the absence of Pawar, Patel would take all important decisions in the party. However, Deputy Chief Minister and NCP national president Sunetra Pawar has told the Election Commission now that she being the national president of the party is not bound by Patel's letter. She said that any correspondence between the election

body and any other leaders of the party should not be considered as official correspondence of the party retrospectively. NCP (Sharad Pawar) MLA Rohit Pawar has alleged that Patel wanted to hijack the NCP after Ajit's demise. He said that Patel, along with NCP state president Sunil Tatkare, wrote to the ECI on February 16, saying that in the absence of Ajit, Patel would be the principal authority in the party. Rohit added that 35 MLAs of the NCP raised their voice against this move and elected Sunetra Pawar as the party's national president. He added that while

writing the letter to the ECI, Patel and Tatkare did not consult either Sunetra, her children Parth and Jay, or a majority of the NCP MLAs. "Praful Patel falsely claimed that the constitution of the NCP had been amended to allow the working president of the party to function as its national president. This is not true, and it has got exposed by Sunetra Pawar's letter to the ECI now," Rohit claimed. He added that Sunetra's letter to the ECI states that from January 28, 2026, till her appointment as the president of the NCP on February 28, 2026, any retrospective correspondence by

any leaders should be considered null and void. Rohit quoted Union minister and BJP leader Piyush Goel's statement to support his claim. Goel had stated that Patel was appointed as the national president of the NCP. Meanwhile, the zero FIR that Karnataka police registered in Ajit's death in an aircraft crash has been transferred to Maharashtra for detailed investigations. Rohit said that people had tried to lodge the FIR in Maharashtra, but the state police refused to register it. Rohit Pawar was part of the united NCP, but decided to side with the Sharad Pawar faction.