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PERSPECTIVE
If it's allowed in an R-rated movie, it's allowed in @GrokImagine
~ Elon Musk

Assam Signs Rs 1.67 Lakh Crore Investment Agreements with 69 Companies

GUWAHATI
The Assam government on Thursday signed 'confirmation of investment' agreements with 69 companies involving investments worth Rs 1.67 lakh crore, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

According to an official release, the agreements with leading business houses and public sector undertakings are expected to bring investments amounting to Rs 1,67,108.51 crore and generate around one lakh direct and indirect employment opportunities in the state.

The agreements were signed at a function in the presence of the chief minister as part of efforts to convert investment proposals made during the Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit into concrete projects.

Major organisations that entered into the agreements include Adani Defence & Aerospace, Adani Airport City Ltd, Ambuja Concrete North Pvt Ltd, Ambuja Neotia Healthcare Venture Ltd, Bharat A to Z Pvt Ltd, Conmat Systems Pvt Ltd, Numaligarh Refinery Limited, Oil India Limited and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, among others.

Speaking on the occasion, Sarma thanked the participating companies for translating their commitments made during the summit into concrete partnerships.

"These investments will accelerate industrial growth, generate employment opportunities and further strengthen the state's economic transformation. From tea to chips, Assam is steadily building a diversified and future-ready economy," he said.

WHO SAID WHAT



The Revolutionary program of Arunachal Govt-Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Swavalamban Yojana that is transforming Arunachal's youth from job seekers into job creators.
~ Mutchu Mithi, MLA, Arunachal Pradesh, BJP Chief Spokesperson

Manipur Assembly Passes Rs 8,208.80 Cr in 12 Demands for Grants for 2026-27

IMPHAL
The Manipur Legislative Assembly on Thursday approved 12 Demands for Grants amounting to Rs 8,208.80 crore for several key departments during the fourth day of the seventh session of the 12th Assembly for the financial year 2026-27.

Leader of the House and Chief Minister Y. Khemchand Singh tabled the demands for discussion and voting in the House.

The approved grants cover departments including Finance, Education, Co-operation, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary including Dairy Farming, Election, Minor Irrigation, Panchayat, Sericulture, Water Resources, Horticulture and Soil Conservation, and Relief and Disaster Management.

Among the allocations, the Finance Department received the largest share of Rs 3,532.11 crore, followed by the Education Department with Rs 3,077.43 crore.



Other allocations include Rs 371.78 crore for the Water Resources Department, Rs 346.51 crore for Relief and Disaster Management, Rs 257.39 crore for Agriculture and Rs 134.83 crore for Animal Husbandry and Veterinary including Dairy Farming.

The Assembly also approved Rs 132.53 crore for Panchayat, Rs 108.95 crore for Horticulture and Soil Conservation, Rs 108.91 crore for Minor Irrigation, Rs 82.22 crore for the Election Department, Rs 29.64 crore for Co-operation and Rs 26.46 crore for Sericulture.

During the session, the chief minister responded to starred and supplementary questions raised by MLA Surjakumar Okram regarding medical assistance for internally displaced persons and the rising number of suicide cases reported among inmates in relief camps.

Singh assured the House that the government would examine the issues and present detailed

findings before the conclusion of the ongoing session.

Clarifying the state's borrowing position, the chief minister said Manipur had not taken loans beyond permissible limits and that all borrowings were made in accordance with government guidelines. He added that the state's economic position remains stable, with the interest ratio around six per cent.

Highlighting fiscal indicators, Singh said the Gross State Domestic Product ratio had declined significantly over the years from around 70 per cent in 2005-06 to 41 per cent in 2024-25 and is estimated to fall further to about 40 per cent in 2025-26.

The Assembly also witnessed cut motions moved by MLAs K. Meghachandra Singh and Th. Lokeshwar Singh on several demands. Responding to concerns raised during the discussion, the chief minister said agriculture remains one of the major revenue sources for the state. He also

announced that the government would initiate departmental inquiries into alleged irregularities in the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana and lapses in the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme.

On compensation for farmers affected by violence in the state, Singh said 5,808 farmers were identified as affected during the 2024-25 financial year and Rs 34.13 crore had been disbursed as assistance.

However, he added that a fresh list identifying 10,286 affected farmers had recently been received, which would be verified by the government before further action.

Following the discussions, all the cut motions moved by the opposition members were withdrawn and the House passed the demands for grants.

The Assembly was later adjourned till 11 am the next day for the next sitting of the ongoing session.

GUWAHATI

Narendra Modi will inaugurate, lay foundation stones and flag off development projects worth nearly Rs 48,000 crore during a two-day visit to Assam beginning Friday, officials said. The Prime Minister is scheduled to launch projects worth over Rs 47,800 crore across Kokrajhar, Guwahati and Silchar, aimed at boosting infrastructure, connectivity, energy and industrial development in the state and the wider Northeast region. Modi will begin his visit in Kokrajhar, where he will perform bhoomi puja, lay foundation stones and flag off projects worth more than Rs 4,570 crore. Among the key projects is a wagon repairing factory at Bashbari in Kokrajhar district to be developed at a cost of Rs 256 crore under the Bodo Peace Accord. The facility, to be built on around 2,200 bigha of land, is expected to strengthen railway infrastructure and generate employment in the Bodoland Territorial Region.

He will also launch the Asom Mala 3.0 road infrastructure programme

worth over Rs 3,200 crore, under which more than 900 km of roads will be constructed across Assam to improve inter-state connectivity and link national highways with rural road networks.

The Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone for six road projects in the Bodoland Territorial Region, including four flyovers and two bridges, with an estimated cost of Rs 1,100 crore. During the programme, Modi will flag off three train services - the Kamakhya-Charlapalli Amrit Bharat Express, the Narangi-Agartala Express and the Guwahati-New Jalpaiguri Express. Later in the day, the Prime Minister will travel to Guwahati, where he will inaugurate and launch projects worth around Rs 19,680 crore.

He will distribute land pattas to tea garden workers, granting homestead land rights to members of the tea garden community. Officials said secure land ownership is expected to improve housing security and facilitate access to institutional credit and welfare schemes.

From Guwahati, Modi will also re-



lease the 22nd instalment of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme to more than 9.3 crore farmers across the country. Under the scheme, eligible farmers receive Rs 2,000 directly in their bank accounts. Among major energy projects, the Prime Minister will dedicate the Kopili Hydro-Electric Project, built at a cost of over Rs 2,300 crore in Dima Hasao and West Karbi Anglong districts, which is expected to enhance clean energy generation and strengthen power supply in the region. He will also inaugurate the capacity enhancement project of

the Numaligarh-Siliguri product pipeline of Oil India Limited, supporting the expansion of Numaligarh Refinery Limited from 3 MMTPA to 9 MMTPA. In the gas sector, Modi will inaugurate Phase 1 of the North East Gas Grid connecting Guwahati with Numaligarh, Gohpur and Itanagar, along with a branch line to Dimapur.

In the railway sector, he will inaugurate electrification projects on the Rangiya-Murkongselek, Chaparmukh-Dibrugarh, Badarpur-Silchar and Badarpur-Churairbari lines. The Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone for the doubling of the 194-km Furkating-Tinsukia rail line, a project estimated to cost over Rs 3,600 crore.

Other initiatives include the foundation stone for cruise terminals at Biswanath Ghat in Biswanath district and Neamat in Jorhat, as well as a Regional Centre of Excellence for maritime training and research at Bogibee in Dibrugarh.

The Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone for a ropeway project connecting Kamakhya Rail-

way Station with the Kamakhya Temple, which will have the capacity to transport around 17,000 passengers daily. Additionally, he will inaugurate the PM Ekta Mall in Guwahati, envisioned as a commercial and tourism hub showcasing One District One Product items, GI-tagged goods, handicrafts and handloom products.

On March 14, Modi will visit Silchar where he will launch projects worth about Rs 23,550 crore. A key project includes the foundation stone for the 166-km Shillong-Silchar Corridor, estimated to cost around Rs 22,860 crore, which is expected to reduce travel time between Guwahati and Silchar from about 8.5 hours to nearly five hours.

He will also lay the foundation stone for the first phase of an elevated corridor on NH-306 in Silchar and for a new College of Agriculture at Patharkandi in Karimganj district.

Officials said this will be Modi's fourth visit to Assam in as many months, ahead of the assembly elections expected to be held in the state in April.

IMD Forecasts Rain, Thunderstorms and Gusty Winds in Assam Over Next Five Days

GUWAHATI

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast moderate rain and thunderstorms across several parts of Assam over the next five days, warning that isolated heavy downpours, lightning and gusty winds may lead to localised flooding, power disruptions and travel delays.

According to the Regional Meteorological Centre Guwahati, rainfall activity is likely to increase across the state between March 12 and 17 due to the influence of an upper-air cyclonic circulation over central Assam and associated trough systems.

Weather observations over the past 24 hours indicated largely dry conditions across the state, although light rainfall was recorded at a few locations. Silchar received 4.3 mm of rain, followed by 3.0 mm in Rangia, 2.4 mm in Jorhat and 1.8 mm each in Guwahati and North Lakhimpur.

Day temperatures across Assam ranged between 31°C and 33.4°C, slightly above normal, while night temperatures hovered between 18°C and 22°C, also above the seasonal average.

The IMD said moderate rain or thundershowers are likely at many places in the state, accompanied by thunderstorms, lightning and gusty winds of 30-40 kmph. At isolated locations, heavy rainfall is also expected.

Rainfall activity is expected to intensify in the coming days, with precipitation likely at most places across the state. During this period, wind speeds may increase to 40-50 kmph at some locations.

Similar weather conditions are likely to persist through the middle of next week, with moderate rain and thunderstorms continuing across several parts of the state. Winds of 30-40 kmph may accompany the storms and isolated heavy rainfall is expected in some areas.

Toward the latter part of the forecast

period, rainfall activity may ease slightly, though thunderstorms accompanied by lightning could still occur at isolated locations.

District-level analysis indicates stronger rainfall activity across western and central parts of the state, including Kamrup Metropolitan district, Kamrup district, Nagaon, Barpeta and Goalpara, where fairly widespread rain is expected initially before gradually reducing to isolated showers by around March 18.

In contrast, northeastern and southern districts such as Dibrugarh, Cachar and Jorhat are likely to witness scattered to isolated rainfall events.

The IMD has also forecast a drop in maximum temperatures by about 3-4°C in the coming days before stabilising later in the week.

Meteorologists have advised farmers, commuters and outdoor workers to remain cautious during thunderstorms and lightning and to stay updated with weather bulletins issued by the RMC.

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Assam CM Orders Crackdown on LPG Black Marketing, Warns of Arrests

GUWAHATI

Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday ordered strict action against black marketing of LPG cylinders in Assam, warning that anyone found purchasing cylinders beyond the permitted limit could face arrest. The chief minister issued the warning amid concerns over a possible fuel shortage due to ongoing tensions in West Asia. Addressing a press briefing in Guwahati, Sarma said the Government of India has fixed a 25-day gap for LPG bookings, compared to the earlier 22-day interval. "The Chief Secretary has spoken to all the Deputy Commissioners. If any place is found purchasing LPG cylinders beyond their requirement, we will take action," the chief minister said.

He pointed to unusual purchasing patterns in Dhing in Nagaon district, where a large number of LPG cylinders were reportedly bought within a span of 10 days. "The Nagaon DC visited Dhing to find out why such a large quantity was purchased. To ensure that no black market is created, the DCs have started their work. I will also speak to them so that no one purchases LPG beyond what is required, as the whole world is facing LPG-related concerns," Sarma added. The chief minister stressed that vigilance is necessary to prevent misuse of the supply chain.

"The more careful we are, the better we will be able to tackle the situation. If people try to create a black market, ordinary citizens will suffer."

We have started monitoring the situation, and if anyone is found engaging in black marketing of LPG, I have ordered that the person be arrested," he said.

Earlier on March 11, Sarma had assured that there is no shortage of domestic LPG in the country, stating that India sources LPG and gas from nearly 40 countries and that supplies are being maintained smoothly.

Nagaland to Begin First Phase of Census 2027 in July 2026: CM Neiphiu Rio



KOHIMA

The first phase of Census 2027, focusing on house listing and housing, will begin in Nagaland in July 2026, Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio said. Speaking during a meeting in Kohima, Rio said the upcoming census would be a significant exercise for the state and called on elected representatives and political party leaders to cooperate in ensuring accurate data collection.

The chief minister noted that the decadal population growth rate of Nagaland has shown inconsistencies when compared with the national average and urged responsible leadership to help correct such discrepancies.

Rio also said inflated census data had created complications in areas such as Aadhaar coverage and school enrolment figures, stressing the need to avoid multiple entries during the enumeration process.

Referring to Nagaland as a predominantly Christian state, the chief minister appealed to all stakeholders not to engage in wrongful practices or unhealthy competition but to uphold honesty and integrity during the census exercise.

Chief Secretary Sentiyanger Imchen highlighted the importance of conducting an accurate census, saying reliable data is essential for planning and implementing government projects and development programmes.

Home Commissioner Abhijit Sinha presented an overview of the census exercise, followed by a detailed presentation by Director of Census Operations Zasekuolie Chusi on the methodology, processes and challenges involved. Chusi urged participants to ensure a clean and accurate census by avoiding duplicate enumeration and deliberate inflation of population figures, noting that such practices undermine the integrity of socio-economic data used for policy planning and government schemes.

Deputy chief ministers T. R. Zeliang and Yanthungo Patton, Speaker of the Nagaland Legislative Assembly Sharingain Longkumer, along with cabinet ministers, MLAs and senior officials, were present at the meeting.



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TRUMP-NETANYAHU'S IRAN WAR MAY BE PROLONGED

JAPAN GETS ITS 'IRON LADY'

The Japanese people went to the polls on February 8 to elect their representatives to the Lower House of Parliament, although the last elections were held only in October 2025. Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae unexpectedly dissolved Parliament January-end 2026, after just three months in office, to obtain a clear answer as to whether the Japanese people wanted her in office. She secured a decisive victory and a majority in Parliament. This signified stability and the continuation of the current government's political course.

In the previous elections, the then ruling Liberal Democratic Party (PLD) under the leadership of Ishiba Shigeru lost her majority. Takaichi Sanae, elected leader of the PLD in October 2025, formed a minority government in coalition with the Komeito, and later with the Ishin no Kai (Renewal Party, or Ishin for short). The goal of the early elections was for the new prime minister to win a simple majority of 233 of 465 seats to implement her announced policies.

In the February elections, the PLD received 316 seats, setting a record in the party's over 70-year history. Its coalition partner secured 36 seats. In fact, the PLD even gained 15 more seats under the proportional representation system, but it didn't have enough candidates. Nobody expected such a victory. Both coalition partners control 352 seats, meaning the lower house of parliament can pass legislation even if it is rejected by the upper house, where the Ishida government lost its majority in July 2025.

How did Prime Minister Takaichi achieve such a resounding victory after only three months in office? Above all, the strategy of dissolving parliament during a political boom, fueled by high public support, proved effective. This is an ace in the hands of prime ministers, based on Article 7 of the Japanese Constitution. Although over 30% of Japanese people reacted lukewarmly to the news of the dissolution of parliament, nearly 70% of respondents expressed support for the Takaichi cabinet. Among young voters (aged 19-29), support even exceeded 80%. So where did this popularity come from?

Firstly, Takaichi's charismatic personality plays a significant role. She is energetic, intelligent, smiling, enthusiastic, and direct. Unlike many of her party colleagues, she answers questions directly. She has some rather endearing quirks for a politician: she listens to heavy metal music, plays the drums, and likes motorcycles. Her dedication to serving Japan is evident.

Moreover, she is a woman. Critical voices that Takaichi displays conservative and nationalist values and therefore will not bring a feminist turn to politics are currently irrelevant. Many young people are impressed that a woman has become the head of government in Japan. Crowds gathered at election rallies announcing her presence. Some carried placards: Sana-chan, ganbare, or "Hang in there, Sana-chan" (a diminutive of the prime minister's name, Sanae, + the suffix "chan," denoting sympathy and close relationships).

Secondly, Takaichi demonstrated her expertise in the difficult art of political negotiation. Immediately after her victory as PLD leader, the party's longtime coalition partner, Komeito, unexpectedly announced the end of their 26-year partnership. He disliked Takaichi's views on the constitution and military buildup. The prime minister's position seemed to be slipping away. Takaichi refused to give up. She initiated talks with opposition parties and, after a few days, found a new partner, the conservative Ishin, with whom the PLD ran the elections. Third, Takaichi has proven herself adept at international socializing. She speaks English, which usually arouses admiration among the Japanese, who often have a complex about it. Immediately after her appointment, she was thrown into the deep end of diplomatic negotiations. First, the ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, then APEC Summit in South Korea, President Trump's three-day visit to Tokyo, South Korean President Lee Jae-myung's visit to her hometown of Nara, and a meeting with Prime Minister Georgia Meloni in Tokyo.

Fourth, Takaichi has defied China and refuses to apologize for it. All indications are that this was not a planned action. She has said that a possible Chinese attack on Taiwan could constitute a "situation threatening Japan's survival," which, according to Japanese law, could justify the use of the Self-Defense Forces. This was a scenario where the US, Japan's ally, would join the conflict on Taiwan's side, not direct aid to Taiwan, but the information spread. Beijing clamped down sharply, restricting the export of rare earth metals to Japan, and strongly discouraged tourism and study trips to Japan. The impasse continues. Takaichi assures that she has no intention of retracting her statement, although she adds that her government is open to talks with Beijing.

Takaichi's decisive victory means, above all, a continuation of the current course. This time, however, without the need to negotiate every decision not only with the government coalition partner but also with the opposition. While she has announced that she will engage in discussions with opposition parties, as this is required by political culture, she will ultimately be able to make decisions independently on fundamental issues. Furthermore, Takaichi confirmed she has no intention of changing the composition of the Council of Ministers for now, as it constitutes a committed team, and only three months have passed since its inauguration. The absence of changes in these key positions means an acceleration of the work already underway.

Economic and national security issues are on the agenda, topics from the PLD leadership campaign last October. These are close to voters' hearts and include: lowering the consumption tax, subsidizing electricity and gas bills, raising the basic tax-free threshold, and reforming the pension and healthcare systems. After winning, she declared a shift away from "excessive budget discipline" in favor of "responsible but aggressive fiscal policy." Markets reacted positively.

Continuation is expected in foreign policy. The goal is to strengthen relations with Japan's main ally, the US, and maintain American security guarantees against threats directly emanating from China and North Korea. This relationship was built on the special relationship between Trump and assassinated Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. The President's relationship with the Prime Minister seems to be flourishing. Trump even openly supported her candidacy in the election.

While maintaining its relations with the United States, Japan will expand its cooperation with other partners in the region, particularly Australia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and South Korea, and countries outside the Indo-Pacific, primarily NATO. Since taking office, Prime Minister Takaichi has declared continued support for Ukraine. Japan has announced a further \$6 billion in funding for this purpose.

In defence policy, Takaichi intends to further increase military spending. She has accelerated spending to 2% of GDP by the end of the current fiscal year (March 30th) and likely won't stop there. Other key demands include the development of the domestic defence industry and the easing of restrictions on arms exports; the expansion of intelligence and counterintelligence capabilities, which have been severely lacking until now; and a revision of the country's key strategic documents (National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and Defense Expansion Program) by the end of this year.



ASHOK NILAKANTAN AYERS

The war that began with a lightning decapitation strike has settled into something far more uncertain. President Donald Trump said Tuesday that U.S. military operations against Iran could last "four to five weeks" — and possibly "far longer." Across the Atlantic, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu defended Israel's decision to strike, arguing that Tehran was rebuilding hardened missile and nuclear sites that would soon be beyond reach.

But even as American and Israeli officials describe tactical objectives — degrading missile forces, crippling naval capacity, deterring nuclear escalation — the broader strategic endgame remains opaque. There is no announced exit plan, no stated political settlement to aim for, and no visible channel for negotiations. Instead, the conflict is widening — militarily, economically and politically.

In Washington, officials describe a campaign focused on dismantling Iran's short-range ballistic missile infrastructure and naval capabilities in the Gulf. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has framed the operation as preemptive — an attempt to blunt what intelligence officials say would have been a sweeping retaliatory strike on American assets. Yet the timeline is uncertain.

Iran has retaliated across the region, targeting U.S. bases and Gulf infrastructure. The United States Central Command continues high-tempo air operations. Israeli strikes have expanded beyond Iranian territory to proxy targets in Lebanon. The risk of escalation — rather than resolution — appears to be rising.

Unlike the early weeks of the Iraq war, where Washington articulated regime change as a central objective, the present conflict lacks

a clearly defined political horizon. Is the goal to topple the Iranian regime? To force capitulation? To reset deterrence? Administration officials offer varying emphases. That ambiguity has fuelled anxiety in markets and among allies.

Energy markets reacted swiftly. Brent crude surged sharply as reports emerged of shipping disruptions through the Strait of Hormuz — the narrow maritime corridor through which roughly a fifth of the world's oil supply passes. Tankers have reportedly slowed or halted transit amid missile threats and drone activity. Several shipping companies are reassessing voyages; insurers are recalculating risk premiums.

Japan has already advised shipowners to avoid the Persian Gulf. European and Asian importers are scrambling to secure alternative supply lines. An unofficial estimate puts the figure at 200 ships stranded unable to pass through Hormuz for either its closed or going there is high risk.

Even partial closure or restricted passage through Hormuz sends shock waves through global pricing. Traders fear not only immediate supply loss but cascading uncertainty: if Gulf production cannot reliably reach markets, inventories tighten and futures spike. Energy analysts warn that oil prices could remain elevated for weeks if instability persists — feeding inflation just as major economies had begun stabilizing from previous price shocks.

The economic implications extend far beyond fuel. Higher oil prices ripple through transportation costs, manufacturing inputs and consumer goods. Shipping firms facing war risk premiums are diverting vessels around Africa, adding thousands of nautical miles and days to delivery times. Container insurers, wary of missile and drone threats, are revising coverage terms. Some carriers

are declining Gulf-bound routes altogether. The result is a logistical bottleneck.

Electronics manufacturers dependent on Middle Eastern petrochemicals and Asian assembly hubs face cost surges. Automotive producers worry about plastics and synthetic materials derived from oil inputs. Fertilizer, chemicals and refined fuels face similar constraints.

Delays are translating into price increases. Retailers are warning of tighter inventories. Economists caution that if maritime insurance markets seize up, trade friction could multiply. "This is how regional war becomes global inflation," said one London-based commodities strategist.

Back in Washington, the political temperature is climbing. Members of Congress from both parties are questioning the scope of presidential authority in launching and sustaining the campaign. The War Powers Resolution requires congressional authorization for extended hostilities, yet presidents of both parties have historically interpreted their powers broadly. House and Senate leaders are preparing hearings that could turn combative. Some lawmakers argue that preemptive action to protect U.S. forces falls squarely within executive authority. Others insist that prolonged offensive operations require explicit congressional approval. Fireworks are expected on Capitol Hill.

The debate carries echoes of earlier conflicts — from Vietnam to Iraq — when questions of strategy blurred into constitutional disputes. Critics warn of mission creep. Supporters argue that hesitation emboldens adversaries. Iran's ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency has alleged that U.S.-Israeli strikes targeted facilities near Natanz, one of Tehran's principal enrichment sites. The IAEA says it has

not confirmed damage to nuclear installations and reports no abnormal radiation levels in neighbouring countries.

The spectre of nuclear escalation — even accidental — adds to the tension. Iran's missile production capacity remains significant. Regional proxies retain operational capability. Gulf monarchies hosting U.S. bases are potential flash-points. Each exchange increases the risk of miscalculation.

The combination of elevated oil prices, disrupted maritime trade and geopolitical uncertainty is already unsettling financial markets. Equity indices in Asia and Europe have swung sharply. Currency markets reflect a flight to perceived safe havens.

Central banks, already balancing inflation and slowing growth, may be forced into difficult choices

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

The Union Govt gave a target to all States of India to activate a mine within one year of its auction, which will entail a ₹400cr incentive. Assam achieved the target, received the incentive and received a very special appreciation.
~ Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM Assam



if energy-driven price pressures intensify. Developing economies heavily dependent on imported fuel face acute vulnerability. The global economy, only recently regaining momentum after years of pandemic and supply-chain turbulence, now confronts renewed instability.

President Trump's warning that the campaign could extend beyond initial projections underscores the central reality: wars rarely conform to timetables. For now, military operations continue, oil tankers hover uncertainty near contested waters, lawmakers sharpen their arguments and markets oscillate with each headline. The objectives remain contested. The duration is uncertain. The economic consequences are increasingly visible.

What began as a preemptive strike has evolved into a test — of endurance, of political will, and of whether modern economies can absorb another geopolitical shock without tipping into a deeper crisis. The world is watching not only the battlefield, but the balance sheets.



QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Rumors are created by haters, spread by fools, and accepted by idiots." - Paulo Coelho

Seat-sharing talks with AGP concluded, 'friendly contests' possible in some seats: Himanta Biswa Sarma

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said seat-sharing discussions between the Bharatiya Janata Party and its NDA ally Asom Gana Parishad for the upcoming Assembly elections have been finalised, though "friendly contests" may occur in a few constituencies.

"Our discussions with the AGP leadership are over. We have finalised the seat-sharing arrangement and communicated it to them," Sarma told reporters on the sidelines of an event in Khanapara.

He, however, acknowledged that both parties could field candidates in certain constituencies and described such sit-

uations as "friendly contests".

"If there is any clash of seats between the two parties, we will handle it as a friendly contest," he said.

Despite the alliance projecting unity within the National Democratic Alliance, signs of friction have surfaced in a few constituencies where local AGP leaders and workers have expressed dissatisfaction over seat allocation.

The discontent has been particularly visible in Dergaon and Khumtai in Golaghat district, and Barhampur in Nagaon district, all considered politically significant for the regional party.

In Dergaon, tensions escalated after Sarma indicated that the BJP may field its own



candidate from the seat and suggested the possibility of a friendly contest with the AGP.

The Dergaon (SC) constituency is currently represented by the AGP. In the 2021 Assembly elections, AGP candidate Bhabendra Nath Bharali won the seat with 64,043 votes, securing about 48 per cent of the vote share.

In neighbouring Khumtai, grassroots AGP workers have demanded that the seat be allotted to their party instead of the BJP, claiming that the regional outfit enjoys strong organisational support in the constituency.

A similar demand has emerged in Barhampur, where AGP leaders have urged that the seat be returned to the

party. The constituency holds historical significance for the AGP, having twice elected former chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta.

AGP leader Manimadhav Mahanta said the seat had been ceded to the BJP in the previous election due to health issues faced by the party's candidate. Despite the discontent at the grassroots level, AGP leaders have reiterated their commitment to the alliance with the BJP. With electoral preparations intensifying and candidate announcements expected soon, the unresolved tensions in a few constituencies could test the cohesion of the NDA in Assam ahead of the Assembly polls for the 126-member House.

Himanta Alleges Congress Leader Pawan Khara Tried to Contact Militants to Influence Assam Polls

GUWAHATI

Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday alleged that senior Pawan Khara attempted to establish contact with militant groups in Assam to influence the upcoming Assembly elections, claiming that multiple FIRs have been registered and investigations are underway.

Speaking to reporters here, the Assam chief minister said three to four cases have already been filed against the Congress leader over the alleged attempt to contact militant organisations in the state.

"There are three to four cases already registered in the name of Pawan Khara for trying to contact some militant organisations in Assam to influence election results. Investigations are going on. Who will end up in jail-you will know after the elections," Sarma said.

The allegation came shortly after Khara criticised the BJP-led government in Assam and accused Sarma of corruption, while also calling for what he termed an "apology tour" by the party over issues related to development and illegal infiltration.

The exchange marks the latest escalation in political tensions ahead of the next elections to the Assam Legislative Assembly, which are expected to be held in March or April 2026. Illegal immigration and border security are likely to remain key issues during the campaign, with the Bharatiya Janata Party aiming to retain power for a third consecutive term while the Indian National Congress seeks to regain ground in the state.

Centre clears Rs 15,431 cr four-laning of NH-15 on Assam's North Bank

GUWAHATI

The Centre has approved a major highway expansion project in Assam, recommending the four-laning of a 136-km stretch of National Highway 15 from Baihata Chariali to Mission Chariali, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Thursday.

The project, estimated to cost Rs 15,431 crore, has been recommended by the Ministry of Finance, India and is aimed at improving connectivity along the North Bank corridor of the Brahmaputra.

According to Sarma, the project will involve a mix of brown-field widening of the existing highway and the construction of new greenfield alignments.

"Extremely happy to share that the Finance Ministry has recommended the proposal for four-laning of the 136-km Baihata Chariali-Tezpur stretch of NH-15," the chief minister said in a post on social media, thanking Prime Minister Narendra Modi for sup-

porting infrastructure development in the state.

Once completed, the highway will form part of a continuous four-lane route linking the West Bengal border in Kokrajhar with the Arunachal Pradesh border in Dhemaji, significantly improving connectivity across northern Assam.

Of the total length, around 71 km of the existing highway will be widened, while approximately 65 km will be developed as new greenfield stretches through by-passes and realignments to ease congestion in urban areas.

The upgraded corridor will include 15 major bridges, 19 flyovers and 43 underpasses to ensure smoother traffic movement and improved safety.

A key strategic component of the project will be an Emergency Landing Facility (ELF) near the Tezpur Air Force Station, enabling fighter aircraft to use the highway as an emergency landing strip if required.

KOHIMA

The Nagaland Legislative Assembly was adjourned till March 25 after the completion of proceedings on Thursday during the ongoing eighth session of the 14th Assembly, Speaker Sharin-gain Longkumer said.

Longkumer informed the House that the second phase of the budget session will resume on March 26 at the Assembly Hall in Kohima.

During the fifth day of the session, MLA Achumbemo Kikon raised a starred question regarding the status of the Tchuinjanphen and Lio-Longchym/Longgayim police outposts, stressing that recent incidents in the area require urgent attention and calling for deployment of more police personnel.

Responding to the query, Deputy Chief Minister and Border Affairs Minister Yanthungo Patton said a temporary police out-

post has been set up in the area and that a proposal for establishing a permanent outpost is under process.

On the demand for a permanent outpost at Lio-Longchym, Patton said the matter is under examination by the state government. He also informed the House that the government is considering setting up nine new police outposts in border villages.

During supplementary questions, the minister said the state had withdrawn its police outposts following the 1972 Interim Agreement, while Assam has since established 63 permanent police outposts along the Assam-Nagaland border.

Patton also dismissed rumours about the alleged charging of Rs 2,500 as training fees from candidates selected in the ongoing police constable recruitment drive, stating that no such fee will be collected.

Nagaland Assembly Adjourned Till Mar 25; Budget Session to Resume on Mar 26

Replying to another starred question raised by Kikon regarding plantation activities in the Disputed Area Belt in the Ralan area after a recent eviction drive, Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister C. L. John said no plantation drive has been undertaken so far, though the department is considering initiating one in the coming months.

Responding to a supplementary query on whether forest guards had been deployed to patrol the reserve forest in the disputed area, John said the region is currently being patrolled by neutral forces and that the state government has not stationed personnel there at present.

In another supplementary question, Kikon raised concerns over the extension of power supply from the Nagaland side to Tchuinjanphen and neighbouring villages in the border region.

Power and Parliamentary Affairs Minister K. G. Kenye said

the department's efforts to extend electricity have been stalled as the Right of Way for the proposed transmission line passes through a disputed area, with a larger portion falling under Assam. He, however, said the department is exploring an alternative route to provide electricity to the villages.

Kikon also expressed concern that several villages in the border region, though recognised by the state government during geo-tagging, currently fall under Assam and should be properly demarcated during the census exercise.

Supporting the concern, Public Health Engineering and Cooperation Minister Jacob Zhi-momi suggested writing to the concerned ministry or department to ensure real-time population data and accurate geographical mapping of Nagaland so that people living in border areas are not deprived of basic facilities and government benefits.

Amid Dibrugarh University protest, Assam minister assures fee waiver for students

GUWAHATI

Assam Education Minister Ranaj Pegu on Thursday assured that the state government will implement the fee waiver scheme and a special 50 per cent fee concession for self-financing courses at Dibrugarh University, amid protests by students over admission-related issues and a recent fee hike.

The assurance came as members of the university's Postgraduate Students' Union staged protests and launched a hunger strike over the matter.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said discussions on the issues raised by students should take place only after the protest phase ends.

"When a protest is going on, there is no requirement for immediate discussion. Once the protests



conclude, discussions can take place after 15 to 20 days," Sarma told reporters.

"Right now protests are underway and people should allow the process to continue. Dialogue can

happen once the situation becomes calmer," he added.

In a post on social media, Pegu said the government remains committed to implementing the fee waiver scheme and the special 50 per cent fee waiver for self-financing courses at the university.

"The Government of Assam remains firmly committed to implementing the Fee Waiver Scheme and the Special 50% Fee Waiver for self-financing courses at Dibrugarh University in both letter and spirit. All concerned are requested to carefully go through the guidelines," the minister said.

Addressing concerns related to reimbursement, he also stressed the need for timely submission of utilisation certificates by colleges and universities. "Colleges and universities must ensure that utilisation certificates are submit-

ted well in advance of the close of the financial year. UCs submitted towards the end of the financial year are difficult to process and may lead to delays or lapses in reimbursement," he added.

The clarification came after the Postgraduate Students' Union launched a 36-hour hunger strike on Wednesday over admission-related concerns, the fee hike and alleged remarks made by the minister that students claimed were disrespectful to the legacy of the Assam Movement.

Led by union president Ashish Bhushan Gogoi and general secretary Madhurjya Bora, the students staged a sit-in in front of the university's main gate and burned an effigy of the education minister, demanding that he clarify his remarks and issue a public apology.

Manipur's Jiribam DC Orders Removal of Encroachments from Public Places by Mar 15



IMPHAL

The Deputy Commissioner of Jiribam district in Manipur has directed the removal of all unauthorised encroachments from public places and government land in the district by 3 pm on March 15, according to an official order.

In the directive issued on March 12, Deputy Commissioner Krishna Kumar said the district administration has noticed several instances of unauthorised occupancy and temporary fencing through construction of house extensions, shops, sheds and other structures along town areas and public spaces.

The order stated that such encroachments on government land and public places in Jiribam town have been causing inconvenience to the public, obstructing traffic movement and posing safety hazards to commuters.

Invoking powers under the Manipur Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants)

Act, 1978, the deputy commissioner directed all unauthorised occupants to remove structures, items and debris from public places and town areas within the stipulated deadline.

The administration warned that failure to comply with the directive will invite strict penal action under relevant laws.

It further said eviction, demolition and removal of the structures will be carried out by the district administration, police and other line departments without further notice if the encroachments are not cleared within the deadline.

The order also stated that the cost incurred for removal of structures and debris during the eviction drive will be recovered from the concerned encroachers.

Copies of the order have been forwarded to several authorities, including the Superintendent of Police of Jiribam to ensure adequate security during the eviction drive, and to the District Information Office for wide publicity.

GI-tagged joha rice from Assam exported to UK, Italy; APEDA facilitates first 25 MT consignment

GUWAHATI

In a major boost to India's agricultural exports, the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry facilitated the first export consignment of 25 metric tonnes of GI-tagged Joha rice from Assam to the United Kingdom and Italy on March 12, 2026, in collaboration with the Assam Agriculture Department.

The aromatic indigenous rice variety, which received its Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2017, is gaining recognition in premium global markets for its distinctive fragrance, fine grain texture and rich taste.

The Joha rice got the GI tag in 2017. Joha rice, an indigenous aromatic variety from Assam, is highly valued for its distinct fragrance, fine grain texture and rich taste. With growing interest in traditional and health-promoting grains, Joha rice has started gaining traction in premium domestic and international markets, reflecting its unique blend of heritage, nutrition, and market potential.

Joha Rice is cultivated in about 21,662 hectares with a production of ap-

Quest!

A study found that a woman is far more likely to give a stranger her phone number if he is holding a guitar.



proximately 43,298 metric tonnes (FY 2024-25). The leading districts in Joha rice production are: Nagaon, Baksa, Goalpara, Sibsagar, Majuli, Chirang and Golaghat. This strong production base provides a good opportunity to create a surplus for exports and enhance farmers' income.

APEDA facilitated the export of 1

Metric Tonne of GI-tagged Joha Rice to Vietnam, and subsequently 2 Metric Tonnes were exported to five Middle Eastern countries - Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and Saudi Arabia.

This milestone first shipment of Joha rice to the UK and Italy, not only demonstrates our capability to meet international quality standards but also

enhances the visibility of Joha rice in other markets.

APEDA remains committed to promoting the agri products from the North Eastern Region of India through the development, ensuring better price realization which will directly benefit the farmers.

The shipment was flagged off by Hon'ble Agriculture Minister Government of Assam Atul Bora, in the presence of Agriculture Production Commissioner Government of Assam Aruna Rajoria (IAS), virendra Mittal (IAS), State Project Director, ARIAS Society, Director of Agriculture, Government of Assam Dr Uday Praveen (IAS), Saurabh Srivastava (APEDA), officials from Plant Quarantine, Agriculture Department and APEDA regional office Guwahati.

An APEDA-registered exporter, M/s Safe Agritrade Pvt Ltd, Kolkata, primarily engaged in the export of rice and spice, is undertaking the first-ever export of GI-tagged Joha Rice from Assam to the UK and Italy.

Approximately 25 MT of Joha rice will be exported from Assam. The consignment is processed and packed at Pratik Agro Food Processing, Guwahati, Assam.

The initiative aligned with APEDA's strategy for promoting GI-tagged products, enabling direct market linkages between producer groups and buyers, thus expanding agri exports from India.

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ECI likely to announce West Bengal Assembly poll dates on March 16



KOLKATA

At a time when there is a buzz over imposition of President's rule in West Bengal, the Election Commission of India (ECI) is expected to announce the dates for the Assembly polls in the state on March 16, a couple of days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the concluding rally of the BJP's 'Paribartan Yatra' at the Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata on March 14.

According to ECI sources, the Assembly polls in Bengal are likely to be held in two phases. The first phase may take place either at the end of the second week or in the third week of April. Apart from Bengal, the Commission may also announce the dates for Assembly elections in four other states—Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Puducherry—on the same day. Besides the ruling Trinamool Congress in Bengal, most political parties, including the BJP, CPI(M), and Congress, have urged the ECI's full bench, headed by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, during its two-day visit to the state, to conduct the elections in one phase or at most two phases.

“Conducting Assembly elections in West Bengal in two phases would help check

poll-related violence, as miscreants would not get the time to move from one place to another to create disturbances. This factor will also be considered before taking the final call,” an official of the national poll panel said.

Conducting elections in Bengal appears particularly significant this time, especially when the voting rights of more than 60 lakh voters categorized under ‘under adjudication’ status remain in limbo. They are awaiting clearance from judicial officers to retain their voting rights.

So far, only 10 lakh cases out of these 60 lakh voters have been disposed of by judicial officers in the state. Among the 10 lakh disposed cases, the voting rights of around 3.5 to 4 lakh voters have been rejected, it is learnt.

A section of officials in the office of the West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer (WBCEO), Manoj Agarwal, feel that it would be difficult to clear the cases of the remaining 50 lakh voters after thorough scrutiny of their documents and other details by around 800 judicial officers within the limited time of 20 to 25 days, until the last date for the withdrawal of nominations by contesting candidates in the first phase of the polls.

Requesting anonymity,

they said that the issue related to the publication of a supplementary list of voters whose cases are cleared by judicial officers has not yet been finalised by the Commission.

The process may also be further jeopardised if people whose voting rights are rejected by the judicial officers move the tribunal challenging the deletion of their names from the supplementary lists in the coming days.

The Supreme Court on Tuesday directed the Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court to form an appellate tribunal of retired High Court judges where voters who have been excluded from the list following the post-Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in the state can appeal.

Political observers feel that the situation in Bengal could head towards the imposition of Article 356 in the state if a new government is not formed by the May 7 deadline.

The official said that law and order during the election period remains a major concern for the Election Commission. Senior officials of the West Bengal government have assured the poll body that there will be strict vigilance during the pre-poll and post-poll periods.

India's crude supply secure, no shortage of fuel; refineries running at over 100%: Petroleum minister

NEW DELHI

Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri on Thursday said India's crude supply position remains secure despite the ongoing West Asia crisis and disruption to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.

Speaking in the Lok Sabha, Puri said the world has not faced a moment like the present in the history of the energy sector and noted that the Strait of Hormuz is effectively closed to commercial shipping for the first time in recorded history.

He said India, despite having no role in causing the West Asia conflict, has to navigate through its consequences.

“The refineries are operating at high capacity utilisation. In several cases, they are exceeding 100%. There is no shortage of petrol, diesel, kerosene, ATF or fuel oil. The availability of petrol, diesel, aviation, turbine fuel, kerosene and fuel oil is fully assured...” he said.

Responding to concerns raised by Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi, Puri said the Modi government's utmost priority is that kitchens of India's 33 crore families do not face any fuel shortage.

Puri added that India has significantly diversified its crude oil import sources over the years, reducing dependence on shipments passing through the Strait of Hormuz.

“Non Hormuz sourcing has risen to approximately 70 % of crude imports, up from 55 % before the conflict began. India's sources grew from 40 countries as against 27 in 2006 and 2007. This structural diversification built through sustained policy over successive years has given us options that other nations find themselves without. The refineries are operating at high capacity utilisation. In several cases, they are exceeding 100%. There is no shortage of petrol, diesel, kerosene, ATF or fuel oil. The availability of petrol, diesel, aviation, turbine fuel, kerosene and

fuel oil is fully assured. Retail outlets across the country are stocked and supply chains for these products are functioning normally...” he said.

In the Lok Sabha, Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri, says, “The refineries are operating at high capacity utilisation. In several cases, they are exceeding 100%.”

“This is not the moment for rumour-mongering or fake narratives. India is navigating the most severe global energy disruption in recorded history,” he said, adding that crude supply is flowing and gas is prioritised for homes and farms.

Gas is prioritised for homes and farms, and LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) production has been stepped up by 28 per cent, the minister noted.

“Consumer prices are held far below what markets and regional comparators would dictate. Schools are open. Petrol is on the forecourt. Every citizen, regardless of political affiliation, has a stake in that,” he said.

“India must stand united behind its energy warriors, behind the institutions managing this crisis, and behind the national interest.”

Amid sloganeering by Opposition members, Puri said that due to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's effective diplomatic outreach, India has secured crude volumes that exceed what the disrupted Hormuz route would have delivered in the same period.

Before the crisis, about 45 per cent of India's crude imports transited the Hormuz route.

“Non-Hormuz sourcing has risen to approximately 70 per cent of crude imports, up from 55 per cent before the conflict began,” he said, adding that India now sources crude from 40 countries, compared with 27 in 2006-07.

Puri highlighted the impact on neighbouring nations, saying one country has shut schools for two weeks, moved government offices to a four-day workweek,

valued fuel allowances for official vehicles, and taken 60 per cent of government vehicles off the road. Another neighbour closed universities early and advanced the Eid al-Fitr holiday to save fuel. Southeast Asian countries have also imposed energy rationing and conservation measures.

India was previously importing about 60 per cent of its LPG requirements from Gulf countries, including Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, while 40 per cent was produced domestically. Puri said procurement has now been actively diversified, with cargoes secured from the US, Norway, Canada, Algeria, and Russia, in addition to Gulf sources.

The LPG Control Order issued on March 8 directed all refineries to maximise LPG yields.

“Hence, in the last five days, LPG production has been increased by 28 per cent through refinery directives, and further procurement is actively underway,” he said, noting that the standard time from booking to delivery for domestic LPG cylinders remains 2.5 days, unchanged from pre-crisis norms.

Hospitals and educational institutions have been placed on uninterrupted priority supply, he said, and field reports indicate that hoarding and panic-buying are driven by consumer anxiety rather than actual supply shortages.

“The House should be clear on this: the rush-buying pressure in some localities reflects a demand distortion, not a production or supply failure,” Puri said.

Delivery Authentication Code coverage is being expanded from 50 per cent to 90 per cent of consumers, ensuring cylinders are logged as delivered only when confirmed through a one-time code on the registered mobile number, preventing undocumented diversion.

A minimum booking gap of 25 days in urban areas and 45 days in rural and remote areas has also been introduced to manage demand.

Commercial LPG has been regulated to prevent black marketing, he said, adding that it is sold in a completely deregulated market at market prices without subsidy. Any individual or business can purchase cylinders without booking requirements, but in a supply-constrained environment, unrestricted sales could lead to hoarding and resale at inflated prices.

“In a supply-constrained environment where public anxiety is elevated, this deregulated structure creates a direct and uncontrolled pathway for hoarding, diversion, and resale at inflated prices,” Puri said. He added that the government has regulated this channel responsibly, with clear priorities and transparent allocation.

Alternative fuel options are being activated to ease pressure on LPG and gas channels, with kerosene made available through retail and PDS channels, and fuel oil for industrial and commercial consumers.

Puri also highlighted measures to shield consumer prices from global fluctuations. Despite Saudi contract prices rising 41 per cent between July 2023 and March 2026, the PMUY beneficiary price has fallen 32 per cent to Rs 613 per 14.2 kg cylinder in Delhi.

The non-subsidised consumer price stands at Rs 913, against a market-determined price of about Rs 987. Of the Rs 134 per cylinder adjustment due to global prices, the government absorbed Rs 74.

“The effective additional cost for a PMUY household is under 80 paise per day. Equivalent LPG prices in the neighbourhood stand at Rs 1,046 in Pakistan, Rs 1,242 in Sri Lanka, and Rs 1,208 in Nepal. OMC compensation of Rs 30,000 crore has been approved against losses of approximately Rs 40,000 crore in 2024-25,” he said.

He concluded that consumer prices are being held far below what market forces and regional comparators would dictate, ensuring both availability and affordability.

INTERNATIONAL

Trump issues new threat to Iran's leaders as war rattles energy supplies

DUBAI

US President Donald Trump on Friday issued a new threat online to Iran's leadership, writing: “Watch what happens to these deranged scumbags today.” Trump tallied the damage inflicted on Iran and its leaders and called it a “great honor” to be responsible for it.

Trump made the post on Friday on his Truth Social website, saying that “Iran's Navy is gone, their Air Force is no longer, missiles, drones and everything else are being decimated, and their leaders have been wiped from the face of the earth.”

Trump's remarks came in response to Iran's new leader issuing his first public statements on Thursday, resolving to keep fighting, promising more pain for Gulf Arab states and threatening to open “other fronts” in a war that has already disrupted world energy supplies, the global economy and international travel.

The remarks by Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei came as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said his country's attacks were creating conditions for the Iranian population to topple the government.

“It is in your hands,” Netanyahu said at a news conference, addressing the Iranian people. “We are creating the optimal conditions for the fall of the regime.” Netanyahu also denounced Khamenei as a “puppet of the Revolutionary Guards.”

Khamenei is close to Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard and is widely seen as even less compromising than his father, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Khamenei said in a statement read by a state TV news anchor that he was keeping a “file of revenge.” He did not appear on camera and has not been seen since his father and

wife were killed in the war's opening salvo, which also wounded him, according to an Iranian ambassador.

Since the start of the war, US and Israeli strikes have targeted security checkpoints in Iran to undermine the government's ability to suppress dissent, according to Armed Conflict Location and Event Data, the US-based independent monitoring group known as ACLED.

Intense airstrikes hit early Friday around Iran's capital, Tehran, as well as outlying areas. It was not immediately clear what had been targeted.

US President Donald Trump speaks at an event in the East Room at the White House, Thursday, March 12, 2026, in Washington.

The war continued to escalate on its 13th day as oil prices spiraled up again to \$100 per barrel, and stocks sank worldwide over fears that the conflict could drag on longer than hoped. To relieve the surge in prices, the US Treasury Department announced it was further easing sanctions on Russian oil by granting a license that authorizes the delivery and sale of some Russian crude oil and petroleum products for the next month. Trump signaled earlier this week that he would take more action to address the squeeze on oil flows.

The move follows the administration's decision to grant temporary permission for India to buy Russian oil. The new exemption applies only to Russian oil already at sea.

Last week, analysts estimated there were about 125 million barrels loaded on tankers. To put that in perspective, about 20 million barrels of oil per day usually pass through the Strait of Hormuz, according to the International Energy Agency.

Iran has made clear it plans to keep up attacks on energy infrastructure across the region and use

the effective closure of the strait as leverage against the United States and Israel.

A fifth of the world's traded oil flows through the waterway leading from the Persian Gulf toward the Indian Ocean.

US President Donald Trump speaks at an event in the East Room at the White House, Thursday, March 12, 2026, in Washington.

US military ‘not ready’ to escort tankers through Hormuz Strait: Energy Secretary

At a news conference Thursday, Iran's ambassador to Tunisia, Mir Masoud Hosseini, said Iranian naval forces “have established full control” over the strait and “carried out precise strikes in response to attacks on our oil infrastructure.” “Global energy security is contingent on respect for Iran's sovereignty,” he said.

The pinch was being felt worldwide. South Korea reinstated government-set caps on oil prices for the first time in three decades as it sought to calm soaring fuel costs. The two-week caps, which took effect Friday, set maximum prices for petroleum products supplied by refiners to gas stations and other businesses.

Hosseini told The Associated Press the new supreme leader was wounded in the attack on his family's home, but “it is not serious.” The hope is he will attend the massive, state-organized Eid prayer next week that his father traditionally led. However, Khamenei remains a target for the Israelis, who have vowed to kill him.

Hosseini said Iran's strikes on Gulf nations have been strategic. “Even when we targeted hotels, we had precise information that they were hosting American and Israeli soldiers,” he said.

Khamenei called on Gulf Arabs

to “shut down” US bases in the region, saying protection promised by Washington was “nothing more than a lie.”

He also said Iran has studied “opening other fronts in which the enemy has little experience and would be highly vulnerable” if the war continues. He did not elaborate, but Iran has been linked to previous attacks on US, Israeli and Jewish targets around the world.

Attacks on Gulf states continued Friday with Saudi Arabia's defense ministry saying its air defenses downed more than three dozen drones headed toward the kingdom's Eastern Province over the span of a few hours, marking an unusually large barrage.

Trump said in a social media post Thursday that ensuring Iran does not develop a nuclear weapon was a higher priority than soaring oil prices.

Hours later, Netanyahu announced Israeli attacks had killed a top Iranian nuclear scientist and hit others but gave few details.

Israel said earlier it struck a nuclear facility in Iran in recent days that it had destroyed with an airstrike in October 2024. Earlier this year, satellite photos raised concerns that Iran was working to restore the facility.

The US military said American forces have now struck more than 6,000 targets since the operation against Iran began, including more than 30 minelaying vessels.

And on Thursday in western Iraq, rescue efforts were underway after an American military refueling plane went down.

US Central Command, which oversees the Middle East, said in a statement that two aircraft were involved, including one that landed safely, and that the cause was not related to friendly or hostile fire.

South Korean lawmakers pass law to manage Seoul's pledge of USD 350 billion in US investments



SEOUL

South Korean lawmakers on Thursday passed a law to implement a pledge of \$350 billion in U.S. investments Seoul made last year to avoid the Trump administration's highest tariffs.

Government officials had urged lawmakers to quickly pass the contested bill, submitted in November, as uncertainty mounts for the country's trade-dependent economy, already rattled by President Donald Trump's protectionist swing and now fearing the fallout from his war on Iran.

The bill's passage came hours after the Trump administration increased pressure on trade partners by opening a new investigation into manufacturing in foreign countries, including China and U.S. allies South Korea and Japan, which could result in new import taxes if U.S. officials see their practices as unfair.

Trump and his team have made clear they're seeking to use new tariffs to recoup lost revenue after the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated his sweeping tariffs issued

with emergency powers.

China expressed opposition to the move and called for negotiations to resolve any differences. “China opposes any form of unilateral tariff measures,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said in Beijing. “Tariff wars and trade wars serve no one's interests.”

The South Korean law, which passed 226 to 8, calls for establishing a public corporation to manage the promised U.S. investments, including reviewing and selecting projects based on input from South Korean and U.S. trade authorities.

Some lawmakers spoke against the bill ahead of the vote, expressing frustration over Trump's new trade investigations and the potential impact of the war in the Middle East, which has exposed the vulnerability of South Korea's export-dependent economy and reliance on imported fuel. “We cannot be the money machine Trump wants us to be,” said Son Sol, a member of the minor opposition Progressive Party. She said the bill does not give the legislature sufficient power to review and reject investments

that could go against South Korean business or public interests.

Following months of tense negotiations, South Korea finalized an agreement with the United States in November to invest \$200 billion in U.S. semiconductor and other high-tech industries and another \$150 billion in shipbuilding in exchange for Washington lowering reciprocal tariffs on Seoul from 25% to 15%.

The agreement, which followed a breakthrough at an October summit between Trump and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung, also caps South Korean investments at \$20 billion a year to protect the country's foreign currency reserves.

Lee's liberal Democratic Party introduced the legislation in November but faced resistance from opposition lawmakers worried about the economic impact. The legislative holdup frustrated Trump, who in January threatened to raise tariffs on South Korean autos, pharmaceuticals and other goods back to 25%, increasing pressure on the opposition to move the bill forward.

Two-Day Book Fair at Nagaland University Concludes, Promotes Reading and Academic Engagement



MEDZIPHEMA

The two-day Book Fair Exhibition organized by the School Library of the School of Agricultural Sciences (SAS), Nagaland University, concluded on Tuesday at the Old Administrative Building of the university's Medziphema campus in Medziphema, Nagaland. The purpose of the Book Fair was to provide a platform for students, research scholars and faculty members to explore and select new academic books for teaching, learning and research purposes. This year, the exhibition has featured nationally reputed publishers and suppliers from Delhi and Guwahati.

At the Fair, Mhonbemo Ngullie, Deputy Librarian, SAS, NU said that the purpose of the initiative was to provide a platform to academic community and encourage reading habits and research among the university community. He further added that the response from the faculty members, students and research scholars had been quite encouraging. The fair also provided an opportunity



taining a complete understanding and learning. He also encouraged the students to develop a habit of reading books regularly, stating that although information can be easily accessed online, there is no substitute for reading a physical book and engaging with it thoroughly and advised the students to make the best use of the books displayed in the library.

The attendees during the fair shared their experience and mentioned that the availability of diverse academic publications in one place was beneficial for both teaching and research. Some faculty members also expressed hope that more publishers would participate in such fairs in the coming days. Students and researchers who visiting the book fair expressed their positive feedback stating that with upcoming examinations approaching, the fair has helped guide them in selecting useful academic resources and broaden their knowledge. Many students described books as their "best friends" in their academic journey. One of the Research scholars noted that since the university campus is located in a relatively remote area with limited access to bookstores, the fair has provided him an opportunity to explore books from new publishers and discover titles relevant to his research topics as well as competitive examinations. The book fair exhibition, held on 12th-13th March 2026, has witnessed a good turnout of faculty members, students, research scholars and staff over the two days. The organizers mentioned that the event received positive feedback from participants and expressed hope that such initiatives would continue to promote reading habits and strengthen academic engagement within the university community.



for students and faculty members to access the latest publications and interact directly with publishers and suppliers.

Prof. Depak Sinha, Pro Vice-Chancellor of the SAS, NU campus appreciated the initiative taken by the School Library and reiterated on the importance of books in academia. While acknowledging that information and research publications are accessible in digital formats, He mentioned that books continue to offer a greater value in ob-

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