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PERSPECTIVE
Sometimes the best way to solve a problem is to just stop caring.

HOLIDAY NOTICE

On 4th March, on account of Holi Celebration, our e-copy issue will not be published. The next issue will be published on 5th March 2026. We wish our readers and their family members Happy Holi.

Three Abducted, Truck Torched on NH-102 in Senapati district

IMPHAL
Unidentified armed miscreants set ablaze a truck transporting construction materials from Dimapur in Nagaland to Imphal on National Highway 102 in Senapati district on Monday morning. Three persons travelling in the vehicle were reportedly abducted, and their whereabouts remain unknown. The incident occurred around 8:30 a.m. between Kabinam and Lairouching villages along the highway. According to preliminary reports, two masked men armed with sophisticated weapons intercepted the truck, which was carrying Thermo-Mechanically Treated (TMT) materials, including iron rods and plastic barrels. The assailants allegedly forced the occupants out of the vehicle and whisked them away before setting the truck - bearing registration number NL07AA 2863 - on fire. The vehicle was reduced to a charred shell by the time local authorities reached the spot. The All Naga Traders Association Manipur (ANTAM) stated that the truck belongs to the General Secretary of the North East Federation of Trade Unions (NEFTU). The attack drew sharp condemnation from several civil society organisations, including the Maram Students' Union (MSU), ANTAM and NEFTU. In a joint statement, the groups described the incident as a "direct challenge to the collective security, dignity, and harmony of the region."

WHO SAID WHAT

World Wildlife Day is about celebrating the incredible faunal diversity that enriches our planet and sustains our ecosystems. It is a day to acknowledge everyone working towards wildlife protection. We reaffirm our commitment to conservation, sustainable practices and protecting habitats so that our wildlife continues to thrive.
~ Narendra Modi, PM

Tripura Begins Budget 2026-27 Consultations; Finance Minister Reviews Departmental Allocations



AGARTALA
Ahead of the Budget Session for the financial year 2026-27, the Tripura government has initiated an intensive round of consultations to finalise departmental allocations, with Finance Minister Pranjit Singha Roy holding a series of high-level meetings with Cabinet colleagues and senior officials at the State Secretariat. The Budget Session is scheduled to commence on March 13, and the meetings are aimed at aligning departmental proposals with the state's broader development priorities while ensuring prudent resource utilisation. In a social media post, the Finance Minister said he met Animesh Debbar-

ma, Minister of State for General Administration (Printing & Stationery), Science, Technology & Environment, along with departmental officials, to deliberate on the proposed income and expenditure framework for 2026-27. The discussions centred on anticipated revenues, expenditure rationalisation and sectoral requirements to ensure fiscal balance in the upcoming financial year. Singha Roy also held a detailed planning session with Sukla Charan Noatia, who oversees Tribal Welfare and Minority Welfare. The meeting reviewed the Revised Estimates for 2025-26 and the Budget Estimates for 2026-27, with emphasis on strengthening welfare initiatives and improving service delivery in tribal and minority-dominated areas. In a separate consultation, the Finance Minister met Bikash Debbarma, Minister in charge of Tribal Welfare, Handloom, Handicrafts & Sericulture, and Statistics. The deliberations covered proposed income and expenditure statements for both the closing fiscal year and the upcoming budget cycle, focusing on sustaining traditional industries and data-driven governance. Budgetary allocations for Higher Edu-

cation, Panchayat and General Administration (Political) were reviewed during discussions with Kishor Barman. Officials examined sector-wise requirements, ongoing schemes and potential new initiatives requiring financial backing in 2026-27. Similarly, a meeting with Tinku Roy, Minister for Youth Affairs & Sports, Social Affairs & Social Education, and Labour, focused on departmental budgetary requirements and allocation planning to support youth engagement, skill development and labour welfare. A comprehensive review was also conducted with Sushanta Chowdhury, who heads Transport, Tourism, Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs. The meeting examined sector-specific allocations and priority initiatives aimed at infrastructure development, tourism promotion and strengthening essential commodity distribution systems. Summarising the objective of the consultations, the Finance Minister

said the meetings were aimed at finalising departmental allocations in a structured manner to ensure that developmental and welfare programmes are implemented effectively in the 2026-27 financial year. With the Budget Session set to begin on March 13, the state government is expected to place a comprehensive fiscal roadmap before the Assembly, balancing growth-oriented investments with social sector commitments and fiscal discipline.

Bharat Ko Jano & Border Area Programme
&
Madhya Dakshini Festival 2026
6th March, 2026

Ministry of Culture, Government of India
Central Agricultural University, Imphal, North East Integration Rally & KRC Foundation
Sponsored By
North East Zone Cultural Centre (NEZCC), Dimapur & South Central Zone Cultural Centre (SCZCC), Nagpur

VENUE: The College of Post-Graduate Studies in Agricultural Sciences Barapani (Umiam), Meghalaya
TIME: 11:30 AM onwards

Nagaland MLA Seeks Review of MHA Directive on 'Vande Mataram,' Cites Article 371A and Religious Safeguards

KOHIAMA
A constitutional debate reverberated through the Nagaland Legislative Assembly on Tuesday after Kohima Town MLA Dr Tseihoutio Rhuito objected to the mandatory singing of Vande Mataram under a recent directive issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), urging the state government to review its applicability in Nagaland in view of the State's special constitutional protections. Participating in the Motion of Thanks to the Governor's Address during the Eighth Session of the Assembly, the 9 A/C Kohima Town legislator supported the government's developmental initiatives but flagged what he described as "constitutional and conscientious concerns" arising from the MHA notification dated January 28, 2026. The directive mandates the singing or playing of the National Song across States and Union Territories. While acknowledging the historical significance of Vande Mataram in India's freedom struggle, Dr Rhuito questioned whether a uniform directive could be enforced in Nagaland, a predominantly Christian State protected under Article



371A of the Constitution. "Patriotism in Nagaland is evident in the service of our youth, the integrity of our institutions, and our unwavering contribution to the Union. It need not be measured by a compelled hymn," he said on the floor of the House. The MLA argued that making the National Song compulsory risks equating patriotism with uniformity and could infringe upon Articles 25 and 29 of the Constitution, which guarantee freedom of religion and protection of cultural and educational rights. He urged the state government to examine the directive

in consultation with the Assembly to ensure that national unity remains "voluntary and respectful of conscience, not imposed by circular." Vande Mataram was composed between 1870 and 1875 by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and first appeared in his 1882 novel Anandamath. The poem consists of six stanzas. However, due to references to Hindu deities in the later verses, only the first two stanzas considered free of explicit religious imagery were endorsed in 1937 by national leaders including Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose and Rabindranath Tagore. On January 24, 1950, the first two stanzas were adopted as the National Song, while Jana Gana Mana was designated as the National Anthem. Dr Rhuito noted that unlike the National Anthem, which is governed by specific statutory provisions, there are no codified rules mandating the singing of the National Song. He referred to a 1986 observation of the Supreme Court of India, which held that singing Vande Mataram is not compulsory and that compelling an individual to do so would violate the freedom of religion guaranteed under Article 25(1) of the Constitution. Invoking Article 371A, which accords special protections to Nagaland's religious and customary practices, the MLA argued that any mandatory recitation-particularly if extended beyond the first two stanzas-would conflict with the conscience of the State's Christian-majority population. "In a State that professes belief in one living God, to require the recitation of verses naming Hindu deities and idols is incompatible with our deepest convictions," he said. He maintained that refusal to sing the National Song does not undermine the

sovereignty or integrity of India, asserting that loyalty to the Constitution and service to the nation are the true tests of patriotism. Despite his reservations over the MHA directive, Dr Rhuito reaffirmed his support for the Governor's Address and commended the leadership of Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio. The Address highlighted progress on the Naga political issue, the Foothill Naga Territorial Administration, infrastructure expansion, sports achievements, human resource development, and growth in agriculture and allied sectors. Calling for sensitivity toward Nagaland's "unique heritage," the MLA concluded with an appeal for an inclusive and secular understanding of patriotism. "A secular India is a vibrant India," he said. "No citizen must pray to a particular deity to prove love for the motherland." The intervention is expected to trigger wider discussion on the balance between national symbolism and constitutional pluralism, particularly in States that enjoy special protections and maintain distinct cultural and religious identities.

Assam Orders Major IPS, APS Reshuffle; Multiple SSPs Transferred



GUWAHATI
The Government of Assam on March 2 ordered a major reshuffle of senior police officers, transferring and reassigning several IPS and APS officials in what it described as a move taken "in the interest of public service." The notification, issued by the Home (A) Department from Janata Bhawan in Dispur, directs the officers to assume their new assignments with immediate effect and join their respective posts on or before March 5, 2026. Dr. Robin Kumar, IPS (RR-2013), who was serving as Director of the Directorate of Forensic Science, Assam, has been transferred and posted as Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Darrang. He replaces Hemanta Kumar Das, APS. Shri Mohan Lal Meena, IPS (RR-2016), SSP Bongaigaon, has been appointed as Director, Directorate of Forensic Science, Assam, succeeding Dr. Robin Kumar. Ms. Pankaj Yadav, IPS (RR-2017), who was serving as SSP (V&AC-G), Assam, Srimantapur, Guwahati, has been transferred as SSP, Bajali, replacing Suman Chakraborty, APS. Shri Partha Protim Das, IPS (RR-2018), SSP Cachar, has been posted as SSP, Nagaon, vice Swapnaneel Dekha,

APS. Ms. Somalin Subhadarsini, IPS (RR-2019), Commandant, Assam Police Training College (APTC), Dergaon, Golaghat, with additional charge of the Emergency Response Support System (ERSS), has been appointed as Principal, Lachit Barphukan Police Academy, Dergaon. She will retain additional charge of ERSS (112), replacing Papori Chetia, APS. Among APS officers, Hemanta Kumar Das has been posted as SSP (V&AC-G), Assam, Srimantapur, Guwahati, while Swapnaneel Dekha has been appointed as SSP, Dhemaji. Singha Ram Mili has been posted as Commandant, 1st Assam Police Battalion (APBF), Basistha, Guwahati, and Hitesh Ch. Ray as Commandant, APTC, Dergaon. Numal Mahatta has been transferred as SSP, Bongaigaon, and Sanjib Kumar Saikia has been posted as SSP, Cachar. Tabu Ram Pegu has been appointed Deputy Commissioner of Police (East), Guwahati, while Mrinal Deha has been posted as SSP, South Salmara. Suman Chakraborty has been transferred as SSP, Tamulpur; Balin Deuri as Deputy Commissioner of Police (West), Guwahati; Subhashish Baruah as SSP, Kamrup; and Papori Chetia as SSP, Sivasagar. Strengthening law enforcement Officials said the reshuffle is aimed at improving policing efficiency and strengthening administrative functioning across districts and specialised units. The state government expects the transfers to enhance law enforcement coordination and service delivery. The notification was issued by the Secretary to the Government of Assam, Home & Political Departments.

Assam Court Orders Unfreezing of Accused's Bank Account

GUWAHATI
The Kamrup Metropolitan District and Sessions Court on March 2 directed the immediate unfreezing of the bank account of accused Shyamkanu Mahanta, criticising the prosecution for procedural lapses and non-compliance with statutory provisions in the ongoing probe linked to the death of Assamese singer Zubeen Garg. During the hearing, the court observed that investigators had failed to follow due legal procedure while freezing Mahanta's account and had not complied with Section 107 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS). Citing these inconsistencies, the court ordered that the account be restored with immediate effect. The order underscores the judiciary's emphasis on strict adherence to procedural safeguards, even in cases involving serious financial allegations. The issue of obtaining documents from Singapore in connection with another accused, Siddharth Sharma, also came up during the proceedings. The court noted that investigators had already secured and submitted certain documents from Singapore along with the chargesheet. However, it clarified that under the BNSS, it does not have the authority to directly summon records from a foreign jurisdiction. If additional documentation is required, the proper course would be for the Government of India to initiate a formal request through established diplomatic or legal channels. The matter is linked to Mahavir Aqua, a packaged drinking water company reportedly co-owned by Siddharth Sharma and his business associate Chetan Dhiraichariya. The case is scheduled for further hearing on March 19, which will also be the next date in the main proceedings. According to the police report, Sharma allegedly invested ₹1.1 crore in Mahavir Aqua. Investigators claim that during interrogation he admitted that the funds were sourced from money allegedly misappropriated from Garg's income.

Manipur Civic Group Urges PM to Halt Development at Historic Koirengei Airfield

IMPHAL
A citizens' collective from Manipur has appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to immediately intervene and halt ongoing as well as proposed development works at Koirengei Airfield, a World War II-era site the group describes as one of the most historically layered landscapes in India's eastern frontier. In a memorandum dated February 2, 2026, the Citizens for the Protection and Preservation of Koirengei Airfield (CPPKAF) warned that continued construction could irreversibly damage what they call a "palimpsest of Southeast Asia where world history was written on Manipur's soil." The non-political civic body, formed after consultations among historians, research scholars, local residents and concerned citizens, asserted that Koirengei is not merely an abandoned airstrip but a site embodying overlapping chapters of humanitarian crisis, global conflict and political transformation. "Few sites in Southeast Asia contain within a single landscape such convergence of humanitarian experience, military strategy and political transition," the memorandum stated. According to the representation, the airfield played a crucial humanitarian role

in 1942 during the mass civilian exodus from Burma (now Myanmar), when thousands fled advancing war zones. Koirengei reportedly functioned as a transit and evacuation ground, providing temporary refuge amid one of South Asia's largest wartime civilian movements. Two years later, in 1944, during the decisive Battle of Imphal, the site is said to have transformed into a key operational and command airfield. The battle marked a critical turning point in the Burma Campaign, with military operations coordinated from installations across Manipur influencing the defence of India's eastern frontier. The group argued that decisions taken from such terrains shaped the outcome of a major theatre of the Second World War, embedding the site within global wartime history. Beyond its wartime significance, the memorandum noted that the airfield also carries symbolic value in the post-independence period, reflecting Manipur's political transition from colonial rule to sovereign integration within the Indian Union. Describing the terrain as "not unused land but a manuscript of memory," the collective said the physical landscape itself bears tangible traces of humanitarian suffering, military sacrifice and geopolitical struggle.



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DESTRUCTION OF THE MIDDLE EAST



The latest attacks by Iran and Israel on each other heralds a horrific and decisive phase in the verbal duel between the two. It is no longer just a traditional fight of words between two countries, but is leading to a permanent change in the geographical and political map of the Middle East.

For almost four decades, Israel and Iran have fought a "shadow war" against each other, which included cyber-attacks, targeted killings and proxy wars. However, the Israeli attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus on April 1, 2024, and then the first Iranian attack on Israel from its territory with hundreds of drones and missiles, broke all old records. By 2025 and early 2026, this tension has now taken the form of a regular regional war.

The recent events of February 2026 have proven that Israel has now decided to uproot Iran's nuclear and military programs. On February 28, 2026, Israel launched "Operation Lions Roar", which aims to target sensitive areas in Tehran and the Iranian leadership and their offices.

Attacks on nuclear facilities: By targeting Iran's nuclear centres (Natanz and Fordow), Israel sent a clear message that it would go to any extent to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear power.

End of strategic patience: Iran, which previously struck through its proxies (Hezbollah, Hamas and Houthis), is now directly targeted by them. On the other hand, the explosions in the Iranian capital have also exposed the weaknesses of Iranian security institutions.

In the current situation, America's role is no longer that of a mere assistant, but following the recent instructions of President Donald Trump, the US forces have launched "Major Combat Operations" against Iran.

Deployment of Naval Fleets: The presence of US Navy ships (USS Gerald R. Ford and USS Abraham Lincoln) in the Persian Gulf has brought the pressure on Iran to the limit.

Ultimate: The start of the bombing campaign as soon as the deadline given by the US to Iran to give up its nuclear weapons has expired, marks a new turning point in world politics.

The Israel-Iran war has put the Gulf States (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait) in a very difficult strategic dilemma. At the same time, Iranian attacks on American bases in these countries have also proven that this time Iran will not only directly target Israel and American assets, but also the countries supporting both of them, which could also cause military problems for the Gulf States in the Central Asian region.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE: On the one hand, these countries are afraid of Iran's growing influence and are cooperating with Israel behind the scenes on intelligence, but on the other hand, they do not want Iranian missiles to target their oil facilities (such as Aramco).

The importance of Qatar: Qatar, where the largest US military base (Al-Udeid) is located, is trying to mediate on the one hand, while on the other hand, it is also trying to protect itself from Iranian attacks.

Regional economic risks: If Iran were to close the Strait of Hormuz, oil prices would skyrocket worldwide, paralyzing Gulf economies and global supply chains.

Israel has almost completely destroyed Syria's air defences for operations against Iran, allowing it to gain access to the Iranian border.

Hezbollah's weakness: Despite a November 2024 ceasefire in Lebanon, Israel continues to bomb Hezbollah's weapons shipments. Hezbollah, once Iran's most powerful proxy, is now internally disintegrating.

Iraq's role: Pro-Iranian Iraqi militias have carried out drone attacks on Israel, prompting Israel to retaliate, violating Iraq's sovereignty.

A key feature of this war is the competition in technology. While Israel used the "Arrow" and "David's Sling" for its defence, it also activated its "Iron Beam" laser system by the end of 2025, but Iranian missiles, which despite being low-cost and capable of effectively destroying and attacking in the air, left no stone unturned in destroying the most expensive Israeli weapons.

Along with the war, Iran is also facing severe internal resistance. Inflation is increasing due to economic sanctions and war devastation, as well as unrest among the Iranian people and waves of protests have been seen in many cities. Israel and the United States are trying to use this public unrest for regime change.

This war is no longer limited to the Middle East. Russia and China's silent support for Iran and on the other hand, NATO and the US's support for Israel have deepened the shadows of World War III.

Impact on Pakistan and India: This situation is worrisome for the countries of South Asia because millions of Indians and Pakistanis live and work in the Gulf countries and this war is bound to have a negative impact on them and these countries.

The conflict between Israel and Iran has now reached a point from which the path of return is very difficult. Israel's aim is to eliminate Iran's 'strategic depth', while Iran is fighting for its survival. If this conflict continues, the dream of development of the Gulf countries may be shattered and the world may suffer from a long economic crisis. The international community must intervene immediately, otherwise this fire in the Middle East will engulf the entire world.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Never was anything great achieved without danger."

- Niccolo Machiavelli

INDIA'S REASSESSED GDP GROWTH RATE OF 7.6 PER CENT IS GOOD BUT UNEVENLY DISTRIBUTED



R. SURYAMURTHY

India's 7.6 per cent real GDP growth in FY26, as per the Second Advance Estimates released under the re-based national accounts with 2022-23 as the base year, is being widely read as confirmation of macroeconomic strength. In a global environment where most large economies are struggling to sustain even 3 per cent growth, such a number commands attention. Yet, a rigorous reading of the data suggests that this expansion is being driven by a shrinking set of sectors, a rising dependence on capital formation, and a weakening consumption and rural income base, making the growth trajectory far more fragile than the aggregate suggests.

The estimates, released by the Government of India through the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) and the National Statistics Office (NSO), reveal not just how fast the economy is growing, but how unevenly that growth is being produced and distributed. And it is this unevenness — not the headline number — that should be the focus of policy concern.

Rebasing GDP to 2022-23 has done more than update weights; it has reshaped the architecture of India's growth narrative. Under the revised series, Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) is estimated at 31.7 per cent of GDP, among the highest ratios seen since the mid-2000s. By contrast, Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE)

fore implies that India's growth engine is now far more dependent on investment momentum than on household purchasing power, a configuration that historically has proven less resilient in the face of shocks.

Equally revealing is the fact that GVA growth has exceeded GDP growth in both FY25 and FY26. In FY26, while real GDP grew 7.6 per cent, real GVA grew 7.7 per cent, implying a negative contribution from net indirect taxes. In absolute terms, this suggests that tax growth has lagged output growth despite nominal GDP expanding by 8.6 per cent. This weak tax-growth linkage undermines the assumption that high GDP growth automatically translates into stronger fiscal capacity.

Manufacturing has emerged as the undisputed driver of FY26 growth, expanding by 11.5 per cent in real terms and contributing the largest share to incremental GVA. Over the past three years, manufacturing GVA has grown at an average annual rate of about 11.1 per cent, compared to overall GVA growth of around 7.3 per cent.

However, the employment and demand implications of this surge remain limited. Manufacturing today accounts for less than 18 per cent of total employment, while absorbing a disproportionately high share of incremental capital. The implied capital-output ratio of manufacturing has risen, indicating that each unit of output growth is being generated with less labour intensity than in earlier industrial phases.

Moreover, the rebound is uneven.

manufacturing growth of this scale risks becoming self-limiting, as capacity addition outpaces demand.

In contrast to manufacturing, construction growth has slowed to 7.1 per cent in FY26, down from near double-digit rates immediately after the pandemic. This matters disproportionately because construction absorbs over 13 per cent of India's workforce and is among the most employment-elastic sectors in the economy.

The slowdown coincides with a shift in housing demand toward mid-range and premium segments, while affordable housing — which accounts for the bulk of employment generation — has weakened. The macro consequence is visible: despite strong GDP growth, employment growth remains subdued, and income gains among migrant and informal workers remain limited.

In an economy where consumption accounts for over half of GDP, this deceleration in an employment-heavy sector acts as a direct brake on demand expansion.

The most troubling numbers in the FY26 estimates relate to agriculture. Agriculture and allied activities grew just 2.4 per cent in FY26, compared to 7.6 per cent GDP growth and 11.5 per cent manufacturing growth. In Q3 FY26 — the festive quarter — agricultural growth fell further to around 1.4 per cent, while overall GDP expanded 7.8 per cent.

With over 40 per cent of the workforce dependent on agriculture, this divergence is economically destabilising. Even assuming population growth of roughly 1 per cent, real per-worker income growth in agriculture remains close to 1-1.5 per cent, insufficient to drive meaningful consumption growth.

This helps explain why, despite PFCE growing 7.7 per cent in FY26, rural consumption indicators continue to lag urban demand. The recovery in consumption is real, but it is concentrated among salaried, urban households, not farm-dependent ones.

Services GVA grew 9.0 per cent in FY26, providing stability to overall growth. Within services: Trade, transport, hotels and communication grew over 10 per cent. Financial, real estate and professional services also expanded close to 10 per cent.

However, public administration and defence grew significantly slower, reflecting subdued state-level spending. This matters because state expenditure traditionally plays a counter-cyclical role, especially in supporting rural and semi-urban demand. Its weakness leaves growth increasingly dependent on private-sector confidence and urban credit cycles.

One of the headline positives of FY26 is the compression of the real-nominal GDP growth wedge to about 1 percentage point, compared to 3-4 percentage points in earlier years. While this reflects moderating inflation, it also implies weaker nominal income growth, especially

in sectors already facing real growth constraints such as agriculture and construction.

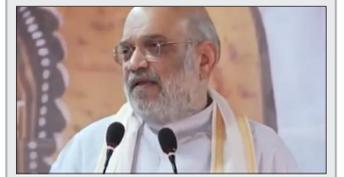
Projections suggest that this wedge could widen again to around 3 percentage points in FY27, meaning inflation may rise even as real growth moderates — a combination that would further squeeze real incomes at the bottom of the distribution.

Most forecasts place FY27 growth between 7 and 7.5 per cent. Achiev-

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

If the BJP forms the government in Bengal, we will ensure that within 45 days of forming the government, employees receive salaries according to the 7th Pay Commission. By December 2026, all vacant government positions in the state will be filled under the BJP's administration. The TMC government abolished many permanent government posts, but when the BJP comes to power, we will fill all vacant and previously revoked positions within just two months.

- Amit Shah, Union Home Minister



ing this would require: Manufacturing growth to remain above 9-10 per cent; Services to sustain high single-digit expansion; and Agriculture to improve meaningfully from 2.4 per cent.

Without a rebound in agriculture and construction — sectors that together employ over half the workforce — growth will remain capital-heavy, urban-centred, and demand-constrained. Such growth can persist for a time, but it lacks the internal consumption engine required for long-term stability.

India's FY26 growth is genuine. But it is also statistically concentrated and economically narrow. Manufacturing and services are expanding rapidly, but agriculture, construction and rural incomes are not keeping pace. Consumption growth exists, but it is unevenly distributed, while investment increasingly substitutes for demand rather than responding to it.

History suggests that growth models built on such asymmetries eventually confront their limits. Unless output expansion reconnects with employment, income growth and rural demand, India risks sustaining impressive GDP numbers that rest on a progressively thinner base. High growth is an achievement. Broad growth is a necessity.



now accounts for just 56.7 per cent of GDP, down sharply from the 58-60 per cent range seen consistently under the previous series.

This shift is not trivial. In a \$3.5-trillion economy, a 1 percentage-point change in the consumption share represents demand worth over ₹3.5 lakh crore. The new series there-

While core industries and large corporate manufacturers have benefited from infrastructure spending and balance-sheet repair, MSME-linked manufacturing remains constrained, as reflected in modest credit growth to smaller enterprises relative to large firms. Without a parallel rise in mass consumption,

Assam's Unemployment Rate Rises to 3.9%, Above National Average

GUWAHATI

As Assam prepares for Assembly elections expected in April-May, fresh employment data point to a mixed scenario - modest gains in participation but persistent structural challenges, particularly among youth and urban women.

The Economic Survey of Assam 2025-26, released on February 11 by the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, draws on findings from the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2023-24 (PLFS) and places the state's overall unemployment rate (for persons aged 15 and above) at 3.9% for 2023-24.

The figure marks a significant increase from 1.7% recorded in 2022-23 and remains higher than the national average of 3.2%.

Urban Assam continues to experi-

ence greater labour market stress, with unemployment pegged at 7.4%. Urban women are the most affected demographic group, recording a joblessness rate of 11.8%.

In comparison, rural male unemployment stands at 3.6%, reflecting relative stability in agrarian and allied sectors, though these areas face their own limitations in generating quality employment.

The PLFS Annual Report 2023-24, released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation in September 2024, places national youth unemployment (15-29 years) at 10.2%, with urban female unemployment at 20.1%.

A recent analysis estimates Assam's youth unemployment at 6.1% in 2023-24, an improvement from 8% in the previ-

ous year. However, concerns remain particularly acute among educated youth. One of the most striking findings in the state survey is the sharp rise in registered educated job-seekers, which reached 21.16 lakh in 2024. The increase underscores a widening gap between educational attainment and available employment opportunities.

At the same time, Assam's labour force participation rate (LFPR) has risen to 66.9%, significantly higher than the national average of 60.1%. While this reflects increased workforce engagement, analysts caution that higher participation without commensurate job creation can lead to rising unemployment rates.

The survey highlights government initiatives such as the Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Asom Abhijan, which re-

portedly supported over one lakh applicants in 2025 with financial assistance of up to ₹5 lakh to promote self-employment and entrepreneurship.

However, concerns remain over declining factory employment, which fell by 9.85% in 2024, indicating stress in the industrial sector.

Traditional rural sectors continue to provide livelihood support. Sericulture engages nearly three lakh families, while the tea industry employs around seven lakh workers. Yet, these sectors have limited capacity to absorb the growing pool of educated youth seeking formal sector employment.

Academic research mirrors these concerns. A study by Niranjan Das of Duliajan College, published in August

2025, found elevated unemployment among rural youth aged 18-35. The study attributed the trend to limited agro-industrial expansion and outward migration and recommended vocational training aligned with local economic resources to address structural imbalances. Other research papers published in late 2025 and early 2026 link rising urban unemployment partly to post-pandemic labour market disruptions. Analysts have called for more targeted policy interventions to bridge the skills gap and promote industrial diversification.

An evaluation of the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) found the programme moderately effective in strengthening rural livelihoods but suggested improved targeting to reduce

informal and vulnerable employment.

With more than two crore voters - including a substantial number of first-time voters under 25 - employment is expected to remain a central electoral issue in the upcoming Assembly polls.

While welfare schemes and entrepreneurship initiatives have expanded in recent years, analysts argue that sustained job creation in formal and industrial sectors will be critical to addressing long-term concerns.

As Assam moves closer to elections, political parties face the challenge of converting the state's demographic potential into durable employment opportunities, ensuring that economic aspirations are matched by credible and sustained policy responses.

Mizoram to Step Up Crackdown on Myanmar Areca Nut Smuggling: Minister

AIZAWL

The Mizoram government will intensify its enforcement drive against the smuggling of areca nuts from Myanmar, Home Minister K Sapdanga informed the state Assembly on March 2.

Addressing legislators, Sapdanga said the sustained illegal influx of areca nuts from across the international border over the past several years has inflicted significant economic damage on local cultivators and fuelled the circulation of unaccounted "black money" in the region.

Citing official data covering the period from 2019 to 2025, the minister said enforcement agencies have registered 468 cases related to areca nut smuggling during the six-year span, resulting in the arrest of 292 individuals.

Of the total cases, 109 were filed for violations of prohibitory orders under provisions of the IPC or the recently implemented Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), while 359 cases were registered under the Customs Act, 1962.

Sapdanga stated that 184 individuals were arrested under IPC/BNSS provisions for defying promulgation orders, while 108 others were booked under the Customs Act. Those charged under IPC or BNSS are tried before a judicial magistrate and are liable to penalties ranging from fines to imprisonment as prescribed under law. Offenders prosecuted under the Customs Act are dealt with under its stringent statutory framework.

The minister emphasised that areca nuts entering from Myanmar evade mandatory import duties and taxes, amounting to a direct violation of customs regulations.

"As these goods are untaxed, they are sold at very low prices. This not only increases the circulation of illegal money but also severely affects local areca nut growers in selling their own produce," Sapdanga told the House.

He said the price distortion caused by cheaper smuggled consignments has undermined the competitiveness of locally cultivated areca nuts, placing farmers under sustained financial stress.

Tripura Cabinet Clears Pilot Launch of 'Nari Adalat' in 10 Gram Panchayats

AGARTALA

The Cabinet of Tripura has approved the pilot implementation of the Centre's 'Nari Adalat' scheme in 10 gram panchayats across the state, Transport and Tourism Minister Sushanta Chowdhury said on February 27.

Briefing mediapersons in Agartala, Chowdhury said the decision was taken at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Manik Saha.

The Nari Adalat initiative, launched by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, is designed as a grassroots arbitration forum to address cases related to atrocities and disputes involving women.

According to the minister, each Nari Adalat will function at the panchayat level and attempt to resolve cases through community-based mediation mechanisms. Where required, the forum may recommend police intervention in accordance with legal provisions.

Each unit will comprise a committee of up to nine socially respected members. The pilot project will cover selected gram panchayats across all eight districts of the state, ensuring geographical representation in the initial phase.

In another significant decision, the Cabinet approved guidelines to provide structured coaching support to Tripura-domiciled graduates preparing for national-level competitive examinations.

Coaching centres will be established at the Bir Chandra State Central Library in Agartala, Netaji Subhash Mahavidyalaya in Udaipur, and a Government Degree College. Each centre will have a capacity of 100 candidates, who will be selected through a merit-based screening process.

The initiative aims to strengthen youth preparedness for competitive recruitment examinations and improve representation from the state in central and national services.

Excise Dept in Manipur Faces Acute Staff Crunch, Infrastructure Gaps

IMPHAL

The Excise Department of Manipur is grappling with a severe shortage of manpower, infrastructure and logistical support, significantly hampering its efforts to curb the production and distribution of illicit liquor across the state.

Amid these constraints, Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Monday handed over five vehicles to the department in a bid to strengthen field operations. The vehicles were flagged off at a function in Imphal, with the Chief Minister stating that the move would enhance surveillance, interception and seizure capabilities under the state's ongoing campaign against prohibited substances.

"These vehicles will enhance field-level monitoring and enforcement to a certain extent," Singh said, reiterating the government's commitment to protecting youth



and building a drug-free Manipur. He added that the administration remains determined to foster a "forward-looking and healthy society" through firm enforcement and collective responsibility.

Despite the addition of vehicles, officials acknowledged that the department's challenges extend far beyond mobility issues. Of the 706 sanctioned posts in the

Excise Department, only 110 are currently filled, leaving it critically understaffed.

The shortfall has forced the department to depend on support from District Commissioners and Superintendents of Police during raids and enforcement drives against illicit alcohol.

Sources within the department indicated that the manpower

crisis has severely restricted sustained field operations and routine inspections, particularly in remote and sensitive areas.

In addition to personnel shortages, the department reportedly lacks adequate infrastructure and operational support systems. These limitations have further weakened its capacity to effectively monitor and dismantle illicit liquor networks.

Compounding the strain, employees have reportedly threatened a "cease work" strike, citing demands for upgraded pay scales and improved service conditions. Any disruption in operations could further impede enforcement activities.

The staffing and infrastructure deficits have significantly affected the department's ability to tackle illegal brewing and distribution, raising concerns about enforcement effectiveness amid the state's broader anti-drug and anti-liquor initiatives.

Manipur Dy CM Assures Support to Family of Slain MLA Vungzagin Valte

IMPHAL

Deputy Chief Minister Losii Dikho on March 2 assured all possible assistance to the family of late BJP legislator Vungzagin Valte during a visit to his residence at the district headquarters of Churachandpur.

Dikho met Valte's wife and sons and conveyed his condolences, presenting a traditional shawl as a mark of respect to the departed Zomi leader. The Deputy Chief Minister said the state government stands firmly with the bereaved family and will extend necessary support in the aftermath of the legislator's death.

Valte, who represented the Thanlon Assembly constituency, had been critically injured in a mob attack at Nagamapal in Imphal during the early phase of the ethnic unrest that broke out in 2023. After prolonged medical treatment, he succumbed to his injuries on February



21 this year at a private hospital in Gurugram.

During his visit to Churachandpur, Dikho - a senior leader of the Naga Peoples' Front - also held a meeting with representatives of the Zomi Coordination

Committee (ZCC) at the Paite Tribe Conference Hall. Discussions centred on issues of justice for the late MLA and concerns raised by the organisation regarding the broader situation in the state.

Speaking to reporters after the

meeting, Dikho said he had come in person to pay his respects and to assure the family that the government acknowledges their loss. He added that their concerns would be conveyed to the appropriate authorities.

Manipur has been grappling with prolonged ethnic violence since May 2023, following a 'Tribal Solidarity March' organised in the hill districts to oppose the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status. The conflict between sections of the Meitei and Kuki communities has resulted in at least 260 deaths, including civilians and security personnel, and displaced thousands across the state.

Valte's death has once again drawn attention to the human toll of the ongoing unrest, with political leaders and civil society groups calling for justice and lasting peace in the strife-hit state.

Tripura CM Calls for Transparency, Accountability Among Public Representatives

AGARTALA

Chief Minister Manik Saha asserted that democracy can be strengthened only when public representatives uphold transparency, accountability and responsibility, and remain answerable to the people they serve.

Addressing a seminar on the responsibility and accountability of public representatives in Agartala, Saha urged elected members across all tiers of governance to discharge their duties with integrity and commitment.

"Public representatives must listen to citizens and engage with them politely and respectfully," he said, adding that humility, accessibility and a positive attitude are essential qualities for those entrusted with democratic responsibilities.

The conference - described as the first of its kind in Tripura - was organised under the guidance of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and brought together public representatives from various levels of governance.

The programme was hosted by the Tripura Legislative Assembly with support from the CPA, an international body that promotes parliamentary democracy and good governance practices among member legislatures.

Among those present were Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh Narayan Singh, Tripura Governor N Indrasena

Reddy, and Leader of the Opposition Jitendra Chaudhury, along with MLAs, ministers, and representatives from zilla parishads, municipalities and nagar panchayats.

Reiterating his vision of building a "New Tripura," the Chief Minister called upon public representatives to rise above partisan considerations and work collectively for the state's development.

He said that transparency, dedication and accountability should guide governance so that future generations remember today's leadership with respect.

Speaking at the event, Harivansh Narayan Singh stressed that democracy cannot function effectively without accountability. He underscored the need for regional coordination, capacity building and well-planned legislative strategies to ensure effective governance.

Singh also emphasised the importance of awareness about government schemes, noting that better understanding of policies would enable representatives to communicate achievements and initiatives more effectively to the public.

He further observed that development initiatives must reach the grassroots to ensure inclusive growth, adding that overall public welfare should remain the central objective of governance. Economic prosperity, he said, can be realised only through collective efforts, particularly in the context of evolving geopolitical challenges.

Democracy Suffers When Elections Are Reduced to Money and Muscle Power: Gaurav Gogoi

GUWAHATI

Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Gaurav Gogoi on Monday launched a sharp attack on the ruling BJP in Assam, alleging that democratic values are being eroded by the growing influence of "money and muscle power" in elections.

Addressing a public gathering at the Margherita Congress Bhawan as part of the party's Samay Parivartan Yatra, Gogoi accused the state government of fostering divisive politics and undermining democratic institutions.

"Democracy suffers when elections are reduced to money and muscle," Gogoi said, alleging that the BJP has increasingly relied on financial clout and intimidation to secure electoral victories. Without naming specific individuals in detail, he claimed that in Margherita, the local BJP MLA had won through the use of monetary influence and coercive tactics - a trend he argued has weakened the spirit of free and fair elections in the state.

The Congress leader further alleged that under the BJP government, Assam has witnessed a rise in social tensions. He accused the ruling party of encouraging divisions among communities for political gain, citing examples of perceived rifts between Karbi and non-Karbi groups, as well as Rabha and non-Rabha communities.

Quest!

Some old myths claim that when you're born, you're actually crying from your death in your past life.



According to Gogoi, such strategies may yield short-term electoral benefits but ultimately damage the social fabric of the state. He urged voters to remain vigilant against what he described as attempts to polarise society along ethnic and community lines.

Taking aim at Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Gogoi referred to allegations that more than 12,000 hectares of land are registered in the name of the Chief Minister's family. He said these claims have generated public concern and called for greater transparency. Invoking the legacy of Ahom general Lachit Borphukan, Gogoi remarked, "The nation is greater than one's kin," suggesting that public office bearers must place the interests of the state above personal or familial considerations.

The BJP has previously rejected allegations related to land holdings and corruption, maintaining that its leaders have adhered to legal and ethical standards. No official response to Gogoi's latest remarks was immediately available.

Gogoi also criticised the BJP's decision to replace former Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal after the party secured a second consecutive term in Assam. He described the move as reflective of what he termed the party's "anti-indigenous character," arguing that replacing an indigenous leader despite electoral success indicated deeper internal political calculations.

The BJP has maintained that leadership changes are part of its internal party strategy and aimed at strengthening governance.

The meeting was inaugurated by Nagaon Lok Sabha MP Pradyut Bordoloi, who focused on issues such as rising prices, unemployment and the difficulties faced by coal workers and tea garden labourers. Bordoloi asserted that the Congress represents the only credible alternative capable of addressing these challenges.

Senior Congress leader from Jharkhand, Bandhu Tirkey, also criticised the BJP's policies, while Leader of the Opposition Dehabrata Saikia accused both the Central and State governments of misleading the public on developmental and economic matters.

Amid speculation surrounding party candidature in Margherita, observers noted that the stage arrangement appeared to subtly project Pratik Bordoloi as a likely Congress nominee. However, no formal announcement was made during the event.

When asked about alliance negotiations, Gogoi said discussions are ongoing and being conducted confidentially. He declined to comment on the role of Akhil Gogoi of the Rajgor Dal, stating that deliberations are still underway.

"Concluding his address, Gogoi described the Samay Parivartan Yatra as more than just an electoral mobilisation drive. "This is a social movement to safeguard Assam's identity, democracy and future," he said, calling on people to unite for what he termed a decisive phase in the state's political trajectory.

The BJP is yet to issue a detailed response to the allegations raised at the Margherita rally.



J&K police book media outlets for 'misleading' information on protests against Khamenei's killing



SRINAGAR

A case was registered against some media outlets and individuals here on Tuesday for allegedly circulating fabricated and misleading information with an intention to incite unrest and disturb public order in connection with the protests against the killing of Iran's Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Srinagar police has taken serious cognisance of the deliberate circulation of false, fabricated and misleading information by certain news channels, media outlets, and individuals across electronic and social media platforms, a police spokesman said.

However, details of the media outlets and individuals were not immediately known.

He said these elements are "systematically attempting" to spread distorted narratives and unverified content with the clear intent to incite unrest, disturb public order, and create disharmony in society.

"Such malicious misinformation campaigns pose a grave threat to peace, security, and the integrity of the nation," the spokesman said.

He said acting firmly, Srinagar Police has registered the FIR at Cyber Police Station under relevant legal provisions.

"Several profiles have been identified, and concerned individuals have been summoned to the Cyber Cell. Investigation is actively underway, and strict legal action will follow against anyone found involved," he added.

Shiite Muslims hold a photograph of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei during a protest against the U.S. and Israel in Jammu, India, Sunday, March 1, 2026. Issuing a warning, the police said spreading fake news, inflammatory content, or unverified information will invite stringent legal consequences.

Citizens and media organisations are advised to exercise responsibility and verify facts

only from official and credible sources before sharing any content that may disturb communal harmony or public order, the spokesman said.

The police had on Monday issued an advisory urging all media organisations and news platforms to exercise the highest level of responsibility and professionalism in the reporting.

"Please refrain from publishing unverified information, speculation, or rumours; ensure that all reports are confirmed through credible and authoritative sources before dissemination; and avoid sensational headlines that may create unnecessary panic," the advisory read.

The police said responsible and accurate reporting is essential to maintain public trust and prevent misinformation.

Massive protests have rocked Kashmir valley over the killing of Khamenei in joint air strikes by the US and Israel early Saturday.

Terrorism, extremism, radicalisation serious challenges for India, Canada: PM



NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday highlighted that terrorism, extremism and radicalisation are shared and serious challenges not only for India and Canada but the world at large. He underlined that the close cooperation between the two countries is imperative for global peace and security.

He made the remarks during the joint press conference with Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney here in the national capital on Monday.

"We agree that terrorism, extremism, and radicalization are shared and serious challenges not just for both countries but for all of humanity. Our close cooperation against these is extremely important for global peace and stability. India's vision is clear when it comes to the several challenges which the world is facing. We have always called for maintaining peace and stability. And when two democracies stand together, the voice of peace

becomes even stronger," he said.

Meanwhile, India and Canada on Monday inked landmark pacts on supplies of Uranium and critical minerals and vowed to seal a comprehensive economic partnership agreement this year with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Canadian counterpart Mark Carney finalising an ambitious roadmap of cooperation to shore up ties including taking bilateral annual trade to over USD 50 billion by 2030.

In their wide-ranging talks, the two leaders also pledged to ramp up cooperation in defence, critical technologies, small and modular nuclear reactors, education, artificial intelligence and renewable energy, demonstrating that the relationship has moved beyond turbulence into a more stable and forward-looking phase.

The ties between the two countries hit rock bottom following then-PM Justin Trudeau's allegations in 2023 of a potential Indian link to the killing of Khalistani terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada.

The two sides initiated a series of measures to rebuild the relations after Carney became the prime minister in March last year.

To leverage their strengths as complementary economies, India and Canada announced a new strategic energy partnership, including in LNG, LPG, uranium, solar and hydrogen.

As the first step, a USD 2.6 billion agreement was signed between the government of India and Saskatoon-based Cameco to supply nearly 22 million pounds of uranium to India for nuclear energy generation from 2027 to 2035.

Besides the pacts on uranium and critical minerals, India and Canada signed six other MoUs, including one on the terms of reference for the India-Canada Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

"Our goal is to reach USD 50 billion in trade by 2030. Unlocking the full potential of economic cooperation is our priority. Therefore, we have decided to finalise the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement

soon. "This will create new investment and employment opportunities in both countries," Modi said in his media statement.

"Canada's pension funds have invested USD 100 billion in India. This symbolises their deep belief in India's growth story," he said.

The volume of two-way annual trade at present is around USD 13 billion.

The Prime Minister said the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on critical minerals will strengthen resilient supply chains. Canada is known for its significant reservoir of critical minerals and rare earth materials.

"In the energy sector, we are building a next-generation partnership, which will focus on hydrocarbons as well as renewable energy, green hydrogen and energy storage," Modi said.

"In civil nuclear energy, we have signed a landmark deal for long-term uranium supply. We will also work together on small modular reactors and advanced reactors," he said.

A Canadian readout said the two leaders agreed to advance bilateral cooperation on security and law enforcement and it includes issues of mutual concern to Canada and India, such as the illegal flow of drugs, particularly fentanyl precursors, and transnational organised criminal networks. Prime Minister Carney also underscored that Canada will continue to take measures to "combat transnational repression", the readout said without elaborating.

Secretary (East) in the external affairs ministry, P Kumaran, said at a media briefing that the process for normalisation of India-Canada ties has already begun translating into "tangible economic outcomes".

"The relationship has clearly moved beyond turbulence into a more stable and forward-looking phase," he said. Modi and Carney also deliberated on the precarious security situation in West Asia, with PM Modi asserting that India supports the resolution of all conflicts through dialogue and diplomacy.

"The current situation in West Asia is a matter of deep concern for us. India supports the resolution of all disputes through dialogue and diplomacy. We will continue to work with all countries to ensure the safety of all Indian citizens in the region," Modi said.

INTERNATIONAL

War widens as Israel, US pound Iran; Tehran, allies hit back

DUBAI

The war in the Middle East spiralled further Monday as Israel and the US pounded Iran in a campaign that US President Donald Trump said would likely take several weeks.

Tehran and its allies hit back against Israel, neighbouring Gulf states and targets critical to the world's energy production.

The intensity of the attacks, the killing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and the lack of any apparent exit plan set the stage for a prolonged conflict with far-reaching consequences.

Safe havens in the Mideast like Dubai have seen incoming fire; hundreds of thousands of airline passengers are stranded around the globe; oil prices shot up; and US allies pledged to help stop Iranian missiles and drones.

With no sign of the conflict abating anytime soon, Trump said Monday that the operations are likely to last four to five weeks but that he was prepared "to go far longer than that".

He said US forces were determined to destroy Iran's missile capabilities, wipe out its naval capacity, stop the country from obtaining a nuclear weapon and ensure that Iran cannot continue to arm and fund allied groups like Lebanon's Hezbollah, which fired missiles at Israel, drawing retaliatory airstrikes.

"This was our last, best chance to strike — what we're doing right now — and eliminate the intolerable threats posed by this sick and sinister regime," Trump said.

Iran has long threatened, if attacked, to drag the region into total war, including targeting Israel, the Gulf Arab states and the flow of crude oil crucial for global energy markets. All of these came under attack on Monday.

The chaos of the conflict became apparent when the US military said Kuwait had "mistakenly shot down" three American F-15E Strike Eagles while Iran was attacking with aircraft, ballistic missiles, and drones.

US Central Command said all six



pilots ejected safely and are in stable condition.

The Gulf state of Qatar meanwhile said its air force had shot down two Iranian Sukhoi Su-24 bombers.

Israel and the US bombed Iranian missile sites and targeted its navy, claiming to have destroyed its headquarters and multiple warships. As several airstrikes hit Iran's capital of Tehran, the top security official Ali Larjani vowed on X: "We will not negotiate with the United States."

The death toll grew on all sides. The Iranian Red Crescent Society said that the US-Israeli operation has killed at least 555 people.

In Israel, where several locations were hit by Iranian missiles, 11 people were killed. The Iranian-backed Hezbollah militant group also targeted Israel, which responded with strikes on Lebanon, killing more than two dozen people.

Meanwhile, four American troops have been killed, and three people were reported killed in the United Arab Emirates and one each in Kuwait and Bahrain.

With world markets already rattled by the fighting, QatarEnergy said it would stop its production of liquefied natural gas, taking one of the world's top suppliers off the market. It offered no timeline for restoring its production.

European natural gas prices surged by 40% in response.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's Ras Tanura oil refinery came under attack from drones, with defences downing the incoming aircraft, a military spokesman told the state-run Saudi Press Agency. The refinery has a capacity of over half a million barrels of crude oil a day.

Several ships have been attacked in the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all oil trade passes and where Iran has threatened attacks.

"The attack on Saudi Arabia's Ras Tanura refinery marks a significant escalation, with Gulf energy infrastructure now squarely in Iran's sights," said Torbjorn Soltvedt, an analyst at the risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft. "An extended period of uncertainty lies ahead."

The region is also a hub for air travel, and passengers have been stranded around the world as carriers based in the Gulf grounded flights. Long-haul carriers Etihad and Emirates restarted limited flights Monday.

Reza Najafi, Iran's ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency, told reporters that airstrikes targeted the Natanz nuclear enrichment site on Sunday.

"Their justification that Iran wants

to develop nuclear weapons is simply a big lie," he said.

Israel and the US have not acknowledged strikes at the site, which the US bombed in the 12-day war between Iran and Israel in June. Israel has said that it is targeting the "leadership and nuclear infrastructure".

Iran has said it has not enriched uranium since June, though it has maintained its right to do so while saying its nuclear programme is entirely peaceful.

Iran's government news outlet said Monday that Tehran's Golestan Palace, a UNESCO-listed heritage site, was damaged in US-Israeli strikes on Sunday.

Hezbollah said it fired missiles on Israel early Monday in response to Khamenei's killing and "repeated Israeli aggressions". It was the first time in more than a year that the militant group has claimed an attack.

There were no reports of injuries or damage.

Israel retaliated with strikes on Lebanon, killing at least 31 people and wounding 149 others, according to Lebanon's Health Ministry. Associated Press journalists in Beirut were jolted awake by loud explosions that shook buildings and shattered windows.

Lt Gen Eyal Zamir, the Israeli army chief of staff, said the military would not end its offensive against Hezbollah "before the threat from Lebanon is eliminated".

"We will end this campaign with not just Iran being struck but with Hezbollah suffering a devastating blow," he said.

Rescue services in Israel said several locations have been hit by Iranian missiles, including Jerusalem and a synagogue in Beit Shemesh. In all, 11 people have been killed.

In Iraq, the Iran-allied militia Saraya Awliya al-Dam claimed a drone attack Monday targeting US troops at the airport in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad. It claimed another drone attack on Sunday against a US air base in Iraq's north.

Trump warns of longer war, Iran closes Strait of Hormuz



WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump warned that his attack on Iran could run longer than a month, as Tehran retaliated to ongoing strikes by targeting US allies in the Gulf, and drones hit the US embassy in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday.

Shortly after the United States urged Americans to flee all Middle Eastern nations from Egypt eastward, two drones hit the US embassy in Riyadh, sparking a quick vow by Trump to retaliate "soon", without elaborating how.

New powerful explosions shook windows in Tehran throughout the night as fighter jets flew over the Iranian capital, AFP journalists witnessed, and the Pentagon said it had achieved air superiority over the country.

Beyond launching missile and drone attacks that forced Qatar's state-run energy firm to halt liquefied natural gas production, Tehran also vowed to choke one of the world's most vital shipping lanes.

"We will burn any ship that tries to pass through the Strait of Hormuz," Revolutionary Guards General Sardar Jabbari said of the strategic waterway to the Gulf through which about 20 percent of global seaborne oil travels.

Trump said that the war, which began Saturday with a strike that killed Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was going "substantially" ahead of schedule but that the United States was equipped for a prolonged conflict.

"From the beginning we projected four to five weeks, but we have capability to go far longer than that," Trump said at the White House.

The US president laid out for the first time the operation's objectives — destroying Iran's missiles, navy and nuclear programme and stopping its support for armed groups across the region. The goals notably did not include toppling the Islamic republic, even though on Saturday Trump had urged the people of Iran to rise up and overthrow their government.

As Iran ramped up its retaliation, Saudi Arabia, home to one of the region's largest oil refineries which has already been closed following an attack, said it intercepted eight more drones in two cities, including the capital, on Tuesday.

The Saudi defence ministry confirmed two drones attacked the US embassy, which said that caused "a limited fire and minor material damage". Speaking to the NewsNation network, Trump said "you'll find out soon" how the United States would respond, without providing further detail.

The US mission in Riyadh asked its citizens in the capital as well as the cities of Jeddah and Dharan to shelter in place, while the US State Department ordered its "non-emergency" staff and their families to leave Bahrain, Jordan and Iraq.

Qatar, which had comparatively good relations with Iran before the war, said it shot down two Iranian bombers, the first time a Gulf Arab country has hit planes from their giant neighbour.

The Israeli military for the second day carried out strikes on Lebanon, with its military saying it was targeting Iran-backed Hezbollah after the militant group claimed rocket and drone attacks on Israel.

As the conflict spread,

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said its strikes with the United States on Iran would continue but not become "an endless war".

"It may take some time, but it's not going to take years," he told Fox News in an interview broadcast Monday.

Israel's military issued new evacuation orders for dozens of locations in Lebanon on Tuesday, following explosions rocking the capital the previous day as Israeli warplanes struck Beirut's southern suburbs and the south of the country.

The Lebanese government said at least 52 people were killed in the strikes that came after Hezbollah, the armed Shiite movement affiliated with Iran, launched rockets and drones toward Israel in retaliation for Khamenei's death.

In response, Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam took the unprecedented step of ordering an "immediate prohibition" of Hezbollah's military activities and called on the group to hand over its weapons.

Iranian media have reported hundreds of casualties in then ongoing US-Israeli strikes. Iran's foreign minister Abbas Araghchi on Monday said over 160 students were killed in Israel's attack on an elementary girl's school in Minab on Saturday.

The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) on Tuesday said there were 101 casualties inside Iran on the third day of the war, including "85 civilian deaths and 11 military personnel killed."

Many residents in Tehran were torn between fear of the bombings and hope that the government's days might now be numbered.

AFP journalists witnessed some residents with suitcases in hand preparing to leave the unusually quiet capital on Monday.

"Every time we hear the noises, we get scared for just a second," a 45-year-old lawyer said in a voice message to Europe, "but we experience some joy and excitement every time we hear a hit."

Throughout the region, the death toll has steadily increased with six US military personnel killed so far in the war, according to US Central Command.

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Must have studied at least three subjects among Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, and Physics; Mathematics is mandatory for specific programs like BS-MS Computational and Data Sciences at IISER Kolkata, B.Tech./BS Economic Sciences at IISER Bhopal, and BS Economic & Statistical Sciences at IISER Tirupati.

Special notes: JK-BOSE Kashmir/Ladakh students from Dec 2023 treated as 2024 passers; Kashmiri migrants should upload domicile certificate; reservations follow The Govt. of India policy (SC 15%, ST 7.5%, OBC-NCL 27%, PwD 5%, EWS up to 10%, supernumerary for Kashmiri migrants).

Candidates are required to follow the below-listed steps to apply for IAT 2026:

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Step 2: On the homepage, go to the 'Apply for IAT-2026'

Step 3: On the next page, register to receive User ID and Password

Step 4: After successful registration, complete the application form by uploading the necessary documents and making the appropriate payment

Candidates must provide all the details correctly and carefully. Some of the details cannot be changed once the application form is submitted.

IMPORTANT DATES:
5th March 2026: Application Portal Opens
13th April 2026: Application Portal Closes
16th-18th April 2026: Corrections in Application Forms

24th May 2026: Release of Exam Hall Ticket
7th June 2026: IISER Aptitude Test (IAT) 2026 Examination Date (9:00 am - 12:00 pm IST)

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NEW DELHI

Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISERs) are calling for applications for the IISER Aptitude Test (IAT) 2026, the exclusive and mandatory gateway for admission to undergraduate programmes across all IISER campuses for the academic year 2026-27.

The online application window opens on 5th March 2026 (Thursday) with the aptitude test scheduled to be held on 7th June 2026 (Sunday).

Aspiring science students can now register for this key aptitude test, which opens doors to world-class research training at any of the seven IISER campuses. IISERs are premier autonomous institutions established by the Government of India to promote

high-quality basic science education and research.

Candidates seeking admission to the IISERs, including IISER Berhampur, IISER Bhopal, IISER Kolkata, IISER Mohali, IISER Pune, IISER Thiruvananthapuram and IISER Tirupati, are encouraged to register for the IAT 2026 by visiting the official website—<https://www.iiseradmission.in/>, which will also provide details on examination centres.

A helpdesk has been established (Tel: +91 7205457461 (between 2 PM to 5 PM on working days); Email: askjac2026@iiserbpr.ac.in) to assist candidates during the entire IAT 2026 admissions process.

Speaking about opportunities at IISER, Prof. Sunil Kumar Khare, Director, IISER Kolkata, said, "At IISER Kolkata, we are



The 3 C's of life: choices, chances and changes. You must make a choice to take a chance, or your life will never change.

committed to training the next generation of leaders who will advance the Nation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. Since our founding in 2006, we have cultivated a vibrant ecosystem of excellence in research, teaching, and innovation. Our inclusive and dynamic campus nurtures