

INDIA BREACHED IN UK



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar during a conversation with Director and CEO of Bronwen Maddox at Chatham House in England. PTI

concluding an interactive session at the institute, home to Royal Institute of International Affairs, on Wednesday evening. The external affairs minister was in London as in the first leg of his six-day visit to the UK and Ireland from Tuesday that is aimed at exploring ways to further boost bilateral cooperation. "We have seen the footage of a breach of security during the visit of the external affairs minister to the UK," ministry of external affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. "We condemn the provocative activities of this small group of separatists and extremists," he said. "We deplore the misuse of democratic freedoms by such elements. We expect the host government in such cases to fully live up to their diplomatic obligations," Jaiswal added. Videos posted on social media showed a small group of pro-Khalistan protesters holding yellow flags were shouting slogans against India and Jaishankar on the opposite side of the road from Chatham House.

Assembly 2nd-phase session from today



PNS BHUBANESWAR

The second phase of the Budget Session of Odisha Legislative Assembly will commence on Friday. This phase will continue up to April 5.

Opposition members have decided to raise several issues affecting the State during the session. The first session had started on February 13 and continued till February 21. "In this period of the session, 14 days will be earmarked to make demands and discuss all subjects. On March 29, the Appropriation Bill will be tabled," said Speaker Surama Padhy. Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi had on February 17 presented the State's Annual Budget for 2025-26 with a total outlay of Rs 2,90,000 crore.

Odisha accelerates urban land development



Under Town Planning scheme

PNS BHUBANESWAR

The State Government is stepping up efforts to implement the new Town Planning (TP) scheme, designed to reform urban land development. Under this initiative, the government plans to develop land in a 60:40 proportion, aligning with the land it acquires, and ultimately distribute it to the public. Minister of Housing and Urban Development Krishna Chandra Mohapatra said, "The absence of similar schemes has forced people to reluctantly part with their lands in the past. This new scheme aims to assist individuals in building new homes more efficiently." He assured that the implementation of the scheme would proceed without delay. The TP Scheme is poised to provide significant benefits to landowners and prospective homeowners by offering them developed plots. The scheme is structured to facilitate the construction of new homes for the populace by ensuring fair allocation of land. Unlike past practices, the TP scheme ensures that land is developed and distributed equitably to benefit the broader public. Mohapatra highlighted the urgency of rolling out the scheme, suggesting that the process would begin imminently. Further details on how the land would be reassigned to the public are expected soon. "We are prioritising the implementation of the TP scheme. This will help house owners get all basic facilities like a proper sewage system, electricity, road connectivity, and other benefits. This will ensure fair allocation of land and offer developed plots," the minister stated. As the TP scheme gains momentum, it is anticipated to play a pivotal role in the State's urban development plans. This approach could serve as a model for other regions grappling with similar land-use challenges.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Babbar Khalsa terrorist arrested

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

In a major counterterrorism operation, the Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force (STF) and Punjab Police have arrested a suspected terrorist linked to Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) and Pakistan's intelligence agency, the ISI. The suspect, identified as Lazar Masih, a resident of Kurliyan village in Ramdas area of Amritsar, Punjab, was nabbed around 3.20 am in Uttar Pradesh's Kaushambi district. Addressing a press conference in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh Director General of Police (DGP) Prashant Kumar said Masih had planned a major terrorist attack during the

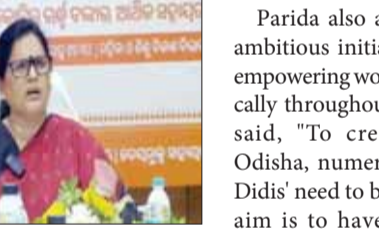
Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. The Maha Kumbh was held at Prayagraj from January 13 to February 26. "However, due to intensive security checks at the religious gathering, he failed to execute his plan," he said and added: "The arrest of the terrorist also verifies smuggling of arms and drugs from Pakistan into India." He added the UP STF succeeded in recovering some explosives material and illegal arms from the terrorist. Among the seizures made are three active hand grenades, two active detonators, one foreign-made pistol and 13 cartridges of foreign make, the officer said. Besides, a white coloured explosive powder, an Aadhaar card

with a Ghaziabad address, one mobile phone without SIM card was also seized from his possession, he said. According to security officials, Masih was actively working for Swaran Singh, also known as Jeevan Fauji, the head of BKI's Germany-based module. He was reportedly in direct contact with ISI handlers based in Pakistan. Investigators revealed that Masih had escaped from judicial custody in Punjab on September 24, 2024, and had been evading arrest since then. His capture is being considered a significant breakthrough in preventing potential terrorist activities in India.

Anganwadi Workers to get Rs 1,500 bonus

For meeting 1-crore Subhadra milestone
PNS BHUBANESWAR

Anganwadi Workers and Helpers in Odisha are to be rewarded with financial incentives by the State Government as a token of appreciation for meeting a 1-crore Subhadra Yojana milestone. Anganwadi Workers will be awarded with Rs 1,500 while the Helpers will receive Rs 500 each. This initiative is a move to motivate the Anganwadi Workers and other staffs involved in implementing the welfare scheme, informed Deputy Chief Minister Pravatiparida on Thursday. "The initiative is designed to encourage more efficient implementation of welfare schemes, focusing on achieving the targets set for



Subhadra beneficiaries," she said.

Parida also called upon all the 1 crore Subhadra beneficiaries to participate in a unique celebration on the evening of March 7. She told all the beneficiaries to light a lamp for themselves in a symbolic act of the success of the prestigious Subhadra Yojana. She raised a clarion call under the initiative 'One Subhadra, One Diya' to commemorate crossing the 1-crore milestone of Subhadra beneficiaries. Each household is encouraged to light as many lamps as there are Subhadra benefactors in their homes.

Parida also announced an ambitious initiative aimed at empowering women economically throughout Odisha. She said, "To create a strong Odisha, numerous 'Lakshpati Didis' need to be created. Our aim is to have at least five Lakshpati Didis in every village." The initiative seeks to bolster Odisha's economic stature by supporting financial independence among women. More than 2.30,000 women got their Subhadra money on Thursday in the fifth phase of the first instalment. An amount of Rs 5,000 each was directly credited to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries. The second instalment has been scheduled for distribution on March 8. The distribution of this instalment would be marked by a special event held in Brahmampur, Parida announced.

Odisha Mining, Infra Expo kick-starts



PNS BHUBANESWAR

Odisha witnessed the inauguration of India's largest mining and infrastructure exhibition as the 3rd Odisha Mining and Infrastructure International Expo 2025 commenced at the Baramunda Ground here on Thursday. The event was inaugurated by State Minister of MSME Gokulananda Mallik. It brought together leading stakeholders from mining, construction and infrastructure industries in India and beyond. Minister Mallik said, "Odisha is a leader in the mining sector, excelling in bauxite, coal, iron ore and other mineral resources." Swami Prem Anveshi, Managing Director of Futurex Group, said this year's expo is witnessing strong international participation with leading companies from Russia, Germany, Korea, Japan and Taiwan. Dr Tapan Chand, Chairman

In BBSR Mystery shrouds youth's death at rehab centre

Kin allege foul play, demand fair probe
PNS BHUBANESWAR

A youth undergoing treatment at a de-addiction centre at Uttara Chhak in the city died in mysterious circumstances, His family alleged foul play in the death. The deceased was identified as Subhasish Nayak. As per doctor's suggestion, Subhasish's family had sent him to the Disha Foundation, a city-based de-addiction centre near Uttara Chhak, in December 2024 suspecting that their son was suffering from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. The patient's father used to visit him every month to enquire about his health. He had last visited the de-addiction centre two days ago and found him well. The next day, the family received a call from the centre informing them about their son's poor health condition. After a gap of 15 minutes, they were informed that their son was no more. The family alleged that the de-addiction staffs beat their son to death. "The people at the de-addiction centre tortured him physically by tying his hands and legs," alleged the deceased youth's father Nabakrushna Nayak. The family demanded the police for a fair probe and stringent action against people involved behind death of their son.

STA Dy Commissioner in Vig net

Farmhouse, 11 plots, gold biscuits detected
PNS CUTTACK

The Vigilance police on Thursday conducted raids on the properties of Pradeep Kumar Mohanty, Deputy Commissioner, State Transport Authority (STA), Cuttack, on the allegation of possession of disproportionate assets (DA) beyond his known sources of income. During the house searches, a triple-storied residential building with area of 2400 sqft at Maitri Vihar, Bhubaneswar, a five-storied under-construction building at Govindprasad in Khordha, payment of Rs 1 crore by S Mohanty to a realtor to purchase a 4-BHK Flat at Boulevard Apartment at Raghunathpur, Bhubaneswar in name of Mohanty and his



wife, a triple-storied under-construction building with area about 7,500 sqft at Balukhand in Puri (the asset is suspected to be benami which is under verification), a building at his native village Tangi in Khordha district, a



farmhouse spread over with area of 14.78 acres at Kusupalla in Nayagarh district, 11 high-value plots in Bhubaneswar, Khordha, Ranapur, Nayagarh and a patch of agricultural land with an area of 11.08 acres, Rs 15 lakh in cash, three gold biscuits of 100 grams each, 700 grams of gold ornaments, three benami four-wheelers and one two-wheeler were detected in the names of Mohanty and his family members so far. Further investigations were continuing.

ABVP disrupts Dalit, Adivasi meet at Vani Vihar

Milita Dalit Sangha condemns violence
PNS BHUBANESWAR

The Constitutional and fundamental rights of citizens are being undermined, and the BJP-led government is increasing attacks and violence against Adivasis and Dalits. Adivasis are forcibly displaced from their lands and agricultural fields. To highlight the struggles and unity of the oppressed, Bhim Army chief and MP Chandrashekhar Azad visited Bhubaneswar on Wednesday. A social justice meeting was scheduled at Vani Vihar Auditorium, but the BJP and its student wing Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) allegedly conspired to disrupt the event by orchestrating an attack the night before and later creating chaos at the venue. Various organisations, in-



cluding Moolnivasi United Front, strongly condemned this act. Several leaders, including State president Manoranjan Jena, women's leader Suprabha Mallik, Ambedkar Sevaka Sangh executive president Daitari Nayak, All Odisha Scheduled Caste Federation president Dhananjay Deep, Ambedkar Foundation Dhenkanal president Kailash Nayak, women leader Kalavati Nayak, State committee member Pratap Das, Social Justice Campaign coordinator Umakant Mallik, Ambedkar Unnayan Parishad Binjharpur president Ramesh Jena, Ambedkar Foundation Anugul member Pradyumna Nayak and LDA Balangir secretary Mukesh Suna criticised the violence. The failure of the administration to suppress Azad's programme has led the police to support ABVP activists, who resorted to attacking women, Adivasis and Dalits. The State Government has not only failed to protect fundamental rights but has also changed reservation policies from 40% proportional representation to a caste-based system, depriving the Bahujan community of fair opportunities. Despite prior permission, Bahujan groups were not allowed to hold their gathering freely. If attacks on the constitution and Bahujan communities continue, SC, ST, OBC and minority communities would respond accordingly, warned Manoranjan Jena. The leaders in Bhubaneswar reaffirmed Chandrashekhar Azad's vision and pledged to continue the struggle for Bahujan empowerment, inspired by Ambedkar, Birsamunda, and Kanshi Ram. Demands: 1. Arrest of ABVP goons 2. Clarification from the government. 3. Compensation for the damaged vehicle.

Varsities invite applications for PM Internship Scheme

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The Government of Odisha, in collaboration with the Union Ministry of Corporate Affairs, has unveiled the Prime Minister Internship Scheme (PMIS) 2025, a pioneering initiative aimed at transforming the career prospects of unemployed graduates.

The scheme is open to Indian nationals aged 21-24 years who are unemployed or not pursuing full-time education. The scheme targets graduates holding degrees such as BA, B.Sc, B.Com, BCA or BBA, with a family income not exceeding Rs 8 lakh annually (FY 2023-24). Further, the applicants must be unemployed and not enrolled in other government-funded training programmes. Those excluded from the scheme are graduates from premier institutions (IITs,

IIMs, NLU, ISER, NIDS, etc.), postgraduates (MBA, CA, CMA, CS, MBBS, BDS, PhD, etc.), individuals undergoing apprenticeships under NATS/NAPS or similar schemes and family members of permanent government employees. Interns will receive Rs 5,000/month. Training costs are covered by corporate CSR funds. The PMIS marks a strategic effort to align academic training with industry needs. By placing interns in top companies, the scheme fosters practical skill development, enhancing employability.

The PM Internship Scheme offers 12-month internships in India's top 500 companies, enabling youths to gain hands-on industry experience while addressing the gap between academic learning and market demands. With a target to train 1 crore youths over five years, the programme combines financial support, insurance coverage and corporate mentorship to boost employability and refine technical and soft skills, ensuring that participants are industry-ready.

Preparations on for CM visit to Ganjam on Mar 8

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR
Preparations are in full swing for Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi's one-day visit to Ganjam on March 8. A massive gathering of around 25,000 women is planned at Vivek Bihar ground at Ambapua here, where the Chief Minister will address a public meeting and distribute the second installment of the Subhadra Yojana to beneficiaries. To ensure smooth execution, a high-level review meeting was held at the venue in the afternoon. Minister Bibhuti Bhushan Jena, Brahmapur MLA K Anil Kumar, Chhatrapur MLA Krishnachandra Naik, Khallikote MLA Purnachandra Sethi and Digapahandi MLA Sidhant Mohapatra attended the

meeting. Senior officials, including Ganjam Collector Dibya Jyoti Parida, Ganjam SP Subhendu Patra, Zilla Parishad Executive Officer Madhumita and Additional SP Sima Swain were also present to assess the arrangements. The meeting focused on security measures, logistical planning and program execution. The Chief Minister's visit, scheduled from 11 am to 2 pm, marks his third trip to Ganjam since assuming office. Given the scale of the event, both the district administration and BJP leaders are leaving no stone unturned to ensure its success. Ganjam district BJP president Saroj Sabat, along with other senior party leaders, actively participated in the review meeting to oversee the arrangements.

Fear over BU M Pharm course validity; students take transfer cert

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR
Students pursuing the M Pharma course at Berhampur University (BU) are facing a crisis as the programme lacks approval from the Pharmacy Council of India (PCI). Without PCI recognition, the degree is not valid for employment or higher education, pushing students into uncertainty. At least five students have already taken their Transfer Certificates (TC), while others remain deeply concerned about their future. The M Pharma programme was introduced in the 2007-08 academic year with the efforts of then Vice-Chancellor Professor Bijay Sahu. On August

28, 2009, the State Government had granted permission to start three courses, each with 20 seats. Of these, two Pharmaceutical Analysis and Quality Assurance and Pharmaceutics were introduced. Admissions are conducted through the Odisha Joint Entrance Examination (OJEE) and this year, 27 students enrolled. However, students are struggling due to an acute faculty shortage, with only one teacher managing the workload meant for six. Concerned about the impact on their education, students recently met the Vice-Chancellor and the PG Council Chairman to discuss the issue.

In Bargarh Bizman held for cheating woman on marriage pretext

PNS ■ BARGARH
The owner of a two-wheeler showroom in Bargarh town has been arrested and sent to jail for allegedly sexually abusing a married woman. The arrested was identified as Akash Agarwal, the owner of a hero Motors showroom. Reports suggest that Akash maintained a long-term relationship with the woman, keeping her at Niki Hotel in Bargarh under the pretext of marriage. When the woman sought social security for herself and her minor daughter,

Akash ended the relationship. There are claims that the hotel owner was aware of Akash's actions but did not report it to the police. While the relationship between Akash and the woman was initially consensual, their dispute led to police and court intervention. However, some journalists tried to defame the woman's character and reported the matter in a motivated manner. The town's intellectuals have demanded an impartial probe by the law enforcement agencies into the incident.

Patnagarh parcel bomb case Accused Punjilal appears in court

PNS ■ BALANGIR
In a development in the Patnagarh parcel bomb case in Balangir district in February 2018, accused Punjilal Meher recorded his statement in court on Thursday. Meher, an English Lecturer, is the only accused charged in the case. Meher, who is currently lodged in Balangir Jail, was taken to the Additional District Judge (ADJ) Court in Patnagarh. The proceedings continue in the Patnagarh ADJ Court, where statements of all witnesses have been previously recorded by the investigating agency. The devastating explosion occurred on February 23 2018 when a parcel intended as a wedding gift exploded, claiming the life of a newly-wed engineer Soumya Shekhar Sahu along with his grandmother while his wife Reema Rani sustained severe injuries. Meher had sent the parcel bomb due to a personal vendetta against Soumya's



mother Sanjukta, who was made Principal of Jyoti Bikash College, replacing Meher. In a bid to take revenge on Sanjukta, Meher allegedly planned and executed the explosion, intending to eliminate the entire family. It is alleged that he was so blinded with his revenge that he himself prepared the parcel bomb and sent it through courier to Sahu's family from Chhatisgarh's Raipur. Police had earlier seized crackers, gun powder, a laptop and a pen drive from the possession of Meher. As per police reports, Meher studied for seven months and took the help of the internet and YouTube to assemble the bomb.

Rs 87L investment fraud Odisha CB arrests woman from Delhi

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The Cyber Crime Unit of the Odisha Crime Branch (CB) has arrested a woman from Delhi in connection with an investment fraud of Rs 87 lakh. The cyber police had launched a probe into the fraud after receiving a complaint in connection from the victim, a resident of Saisleshri Vihar area in Bhubaneswar. The arrested was identified as Vandana Bawa of south Delhi. The Cyber police brought the accused to Odisha on a transit remand after producing her in a court in Delhi. The cops have seized a mobile phone, two SIM cards, an Aadhaar card and a PAN card. The complainant, an employee of a private firm, was added to a WhatsApp group named '101 Stock Discussion

Group' by an individual who identified himself as a Professor. The victim was assured of getting stock trading tips, IPO guidance and investment strategies from the WhatsApp group. The fraudsters later persuaded the victim to deposit around Rs 87 lakh in various bank accounts in several installments. They promised the victim of high returns from the investment. The complainant, later, realised that he had been duped by the fraudsters and lodged a complaint in this regard with the Cyber Crime Unit. During investigation, the cops have frozen several bank accounts of the fraudsters and recovered Rs 10 lakh. The arrested accused has been involved in two more cybercrime incidents in Kerala and Gujarat.

Rs 91L scam hits P'khemundi coop bank



Scamsters still off the hook
At least 91 lakh scam has come to the fore in the Paralakhemundi Cooperative Urban Bank. The irregularities have been committed in one and a half years. Though the issue was raised in the Assembly and the concerned Minister assured of an inquiry in the matter, nothing tangible has happened so far while the culprits go scot-free.

On September 27, 2023 the then MLA Mohana, Dasarathi Gomango had sought action against the scamsters by raising the issue in the Assembly. The then Minister Atanu Sabyasachi Nayak had instructed for an inquiry vide letter no 1695, dated May 6, 2023. But till date no action has been taken. Sources further informed that from 2018-19 to date no Board of Directors meeting has been held.

Niti Shekhar takes over as Southern IG

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR
Senior IPS officer Niti Shekhar assumed charge as the Inspector General (IG) of the Southern Range here on Wednesday. His appointment follows his promotion to the IG rank, effective from January 1, 2025 as part of a major reshuffle in the State police force. Prior to this, Niti Shekhar served as the Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of the South Western Range in Koraput, where he played a key role in strengthening law enforcement and maintaining public safety. His extensive experience in various capacities in the Odisha Police is expected to bring strategic leadership to the Southern Range.



The Southern Range, headquartered in Brahmapur, comprises Ganjam, Gajapati, Kandhamal, Boudh and Brahmapur police districts. As IG, Niti Shekhar will oversee law and

order, crime prevention and community policing initiatives in these districts, focusing on tackling major challenges such as organised crime, Left-Wing Extremism and public safety concerns.

Alongside him, other senior IPS officers, including Awinash Kumar and Sarthak Sarangi from the 2007 batch, have also been elevated to the IG rank.

In Malkangiri Student dies on way to exam centre

PNS ■ MALKANGIRI
A Class-X student, on his way to the examination centre, lost his life after meeting with a road mishap near Chandanguda area in Malkangiri district on Thursday. The identity of the deceased was yet to be ascertained. According to reports, two students from MV-101 village were on their way to the HSC examination centre at Serpalli on a bike when a speeding

pickup van hit the bike causing death of a student on the spot and leaving another injured. The biker and the pillion rider were not wearing helmets. While one of the students sustained head injuries in the mishap and died on the spot, the other student was rushed to a nearby hospital. Getting information, police reached the spot and send the body for postmortem and further investigation was ongoing.

Techno mgmt symposium, SANKALP, held at NIST



PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR
The NIST University organised SANKALP 2025 - A Techno Management Symposium, on its campus from February 28 to March 1. The symposium inaugural ceremony was attended by a band of dignitaries including Arun Rath, Head, Brown Field Projects Odisha, AMNS, as chief guest and Bibhu Mishra, Advisor, Hindalco Industries Limited, Aditya

Birla Group as guest of honour. The event was further graced by founder and president Dr Sukant K Mohapatra, Vice-Chancellor Dr Priyadarshan Patra, Prof Swadhini Mishra, Faculty Advisor, Sankalp Student president ArjaAvinash, secretary Manish Kumar Bhatta and treasurer Deeshanshi Sahu. The symposium had feature talks by industry experts, who shared their experiences and provided valuable insights

into the latest technologies and trends in the industry. The event was followed by cultural shows like Mr and Miss Sankalp, comedy show, DJ and Band. On the second day of the event, popular Bollywood celebrity singer Yasser Desai and DJ Waseem demonstrated their performance. The event was coordinated by Miss Shreya Ojha while vote of thanks was offered by Prof Mitu Baral.

In Brahmapur Subhadra march held ahead of CM visit on Women's Day

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR
The Silk City witnessed a massive turnout of women as part of a 'Subhadra Rally' on Wednesday aimed at promoting women's empowerment and social welfare. The rally, organised by the Women & Child Development (WCD) Department, saw participation from Anganwadi Workers, ASHA Workers, Community Organisers of BeMC and members of BJP Mahila Morcha. Brahmapur MLA K Anil Kumar lauded the initiative, emphasising that the Subhadra Yojana is a transformative step towards strengthening women's financial independence. The event served as a prelude to Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi's visit to Brahmapur on March 8 where he is set to disburse the second installment



of the Subhadra Yojana for the State. The rally focused on raising awareness about the scheme, engaging the public particularly women through educational activities and outreach

programmes. Community Development Project Officers (CDPOs) were instructed with specific guidelines to ensure smooth execution of the programme. These rallies will culminate on March 8, align-

ing with the International Women's Day, reinforcing the global focus on gender equality and women's rights. Notably, CM Mohan Majhi has proposed an allocation of Rs 10,145 crore for the

Subhadra Yojana and Rs 153 crore under Subhadra Suraksha in the FY 2025-26 State Budget aimed at ensuring women's safety and security. Additionally, the State Government plans to introduce the 'Subhadra Plus' umbrella scheme, which will include multiple new initiatives such as 'Kishori Subhadra,' 'Subhadra Sanchay,' 'Subhadra Suraksha,' 'Subhadra Sakhi,' 'Subhadra Yatri,' 'Subhadra Sangh (Subhadra Club),' 'Kuha Subhadra (Call Centre),' 'Subhadra Sahyogi,' 'Subhadra Scholars' and 'Sujogya Subhadra.' 'This historic and path-breaking initiative is the largest women's empowerment scheme in Odisha's history and underscores our commitment to placing women at the centre of the State's growth story,' the CM had stated earlier.



FIRST COLUMN

THE RISE OF EU-INDIA DIGITAL COOPERATION

The EU and India are strengthening ties in digital governance, AI and semiconductor resilience



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Even as President Trump of the USA was busy being the world's most popular content creator, the global forces were turning the gears of a strategic realignment. After the televised, admonishment of Ukrainian President Zelensky by US President Trump and his VP JD Vance, the former was seen with several leaders of the European Union. As the case may be European leaders didn't have much to offer to Ukraine, except a subtle message to make peace with the US President. It may be a matter of time, before, Ukrainian President Zelensky has to evacuate his bunker office in Kyiv and perhaps make way for a more, current US head of state worldview representative. The message for the world was clear, the US would no longer be happy to bankroll, what it considers vague political narratives, potentially considered to be the hallmark of a free liberal world order.

This world order, incidentally a post-World War creation, by the US, ensured free fair open markets, meant for the prosperity of all. What this free world order has achieved in the past many decades can be debated, however, it has ensured the US retains its supremacy in the economic prosperity index and so have many of the aligned nations including India (since the 1990s). Just before the US and Ukraine visible spat, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen led a large delegation of senior ministers to Delhi to re-establish the high-level EU India Trade and Technology Council conversations. Given the current geo-political landscape, one of the major focus areas was Digital Economy and Governance.

The European Union (EU) and India reaffirmed their commitment to deepening digital cooperation, emphasising shared values through their Working Group 1 on Strategic Technologies, Digital Governance, and Digital Connectivity. Both sides pledged to accelerate human-centric



digital transformation and advance key technologies, including AI, semiconductors, High-Performance Computing and 6G, to benefit both economies and societies. The two parties agreed to enhance research and innovation to improve competitiveness and economic security while promoting a cyber-secure global digital ecosystem. They also stressed the importance of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in fostering inclusive digital economies. Both sides committed to ensuring interoperability between their respective DPIs, safeguarding human rights, and protecting personal data and intellectual property. They also discussed mutual recognition of e-signatures to facilitate cross-border digital transactions.

On semiconductor collaboration, the EU and India focused on strengthening the resilience of supply chains and expanding joint research in areas such as chip design and sustainable technologies.

The two sides underscored their shared commitment to the responsible development of AI, agreeing to further cooperation through joint projects and the development of frameworks for ethical AI. They also plan to enhance cooperation on large language models and AI applications in sectors like climate change and bioinformatics. They also committed to implementing the Global Digital Compact, which was endorsed at the UN General Assembly in September 2024, and ensuring continued global support for multi-stakeholder internet governance at the upcoming World Summit on Information Society +20. It may be the right click for both the EU and India. The EU and India are seizing the opportunity to strengthen their digital and technological ties. Their renewed partnership signals a commitment to fostering a resilient, secure, and inclusive digital future, underpinned by shared values and mutual economic interests. As old alliances shift, new partnerships may define the contours of the evolving world order.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

Namaste at Oscars: Indian cinema has arrived



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

Indian storytelling captivates and inspire audiences worldwide. With the right strategy, this moment can shape the future of Indian cinema



The Namaste at the Oscars 2025 has reinforced the idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: "The world is one family," a vision that transcends borders yet thrives on respect, mutual interdependence and a shared spirit of creativity. This symbolic gesture was not merely a greeting but a powerful moment of inclusivity, reflecting cinema's unique ability to bring together artists, audiences and creators from across the globe. This moment at the Academy Awards highlights how soft power is no longer confined to diplomacy alone; it now permeates events, institutions, and cultural exchanges. Cinema, often regarded as the perfect brand platform for fostering relationships, stood at the centre of this phenomenon.

The Namaste was a gateway, introducing the legacy of Indian storytelling to a diverse global audience and reinforcing the deep cultural interconnect between nations through the lens of cinema. Beyond its immediate impact, this gesture has set the stage for the future of the Oscars and similar global platforms. It paves the way for cultural ethos to play a larger role in how nations and their creative industries collaborate and connect. A simple, well-timed Namaste has given Incredible India a renewed global identity, transforming its participation in world cinema from occasional recognition to strategic influence.

Conan O'Brien's decision to open the Oscars with Namaste was not accidental. It was a statement, an acknowledgement that Indian cinema is no longer at the periphery of global storytelling. This was not a token mention of India, nor was it a cursory reference to its billion-strong audience. This was a recognition of India's growing cinematic legacy and influence. India has long been part of Oscar history, but often through an external gaze. Films like Gandhi (1982) won big, Lagaan (2001)



A SIMPLE, WELL-TIMED NAMASTE HAS GIVEN INCREDIBLE INDIA A RENEWED GLOBAL IDENTITY, TRANSFORMING ITS PARTICIPATION IN WORLD CINEMA FROM OCCASIONAL RECOGNITION TO STRATEGIC INFLUENCE.

came close, and Slumdog Millionaire (2008) swept the Academy Awards, yet these narratives were largely shaped by Western filmmakers. The paradigm began to shift with R (2022), which not only won an Oscar for Naatu Naatu but also forced global audiences to acknowledge the unapologetic, high-energy storytelling of Indian filmmakers. This shift was further cemented when Payal Kapadia's All We Imagine as Light (2024) won the Grand Prix at Cannes, a rare honour for Indian cinema. Films like Chaitanya Tamhane's The Disciple (2020), Rima Das's Village Rockstars (2017), and Nandita Das's Manto (2018) have been steadily breaking barriers, proving that Indian cinema is no longer defined by stereotypes but by diverse, powerful narratives. The power of this Namaste must be harnessed beyond the Oscars. As India gears up for Cannes 2025, this moment should serve as a launching pad for stronger positioning. India's representation at global film festivals must be strategic; ensuring that films sent to these platforms reflect the depth, diversity, and dynamism of Indian storytelling. The Cannes Film Festival has already been a crucial stepping stone for Indian cinema. From Neecha Nagar (1946) winning the Palme d'Or to Masaan (2015) winning the Un Certain Regard prize, India's legacy at Cannes has been long-standing. However, now is the time to transition from isolated wins to sustained influence. The government and industry stakeholders must work together to ensure that Indian cinema is

not just participating but actively shaping the conversation. One powerful example of how such moments create ripples is Life of Pi (2012). When director Ang Lee won the Oscar for Best Director, he greeted the audience with a Namaste, acknowledging the deep Indian cultural influence on the film. That moment reinforced India's storytelling traditions, but the Namaste at the Oscars 2025 is even more significant; it wasn't just about one film, it was about the entire Indian cinematic movement. India must now leverage this momentum through platforms like WAVES, the country's film export initiative. WAVES has the potential to push Indian cinema into untapped markets, ensuring that films from independent, regional, and mainstream creators reach wider international audiences. By riding the wave of this Namaste moment, WAVES can position Indian cinema not just as entertainment, but as a formidable cultural force. Strategic collaborations, international distribution networks, and dedicated Oscar campaigns must now be part of the plan. If South Korea could orchestrate a global push for Parasite (2019), resulting in its historic Oscar win, India must now do the same, systematically pushing its best films into the international awards circuit. This is not just about recognition; it's about claiming a rightful place in world cinema. The Namaste at the Oscars 2025 should serve as a wake-up call, a reminder that Indian cinema has evolved from

a land of fantasy to a nation of action. It is no longer a question of whether Indian films will win the Oscar; it is now a matter of when and how often. India is no longer a guest at the global film table-it is a host, a creator, and an influencer. The Namaste was not just a greeting; it was an invitation for the world to recognise Indian cinema's true potential. The time to capitalise on this moment is now. With the right vision and action, this could be the defining decade when Indian cinema not only participates in global storytelling but leads it. The world has acknowledged India. Now, Indian cinema must ensure that every frame, every story, and every festival presence echoes the power of that Namaste. The Namaste at the Oscars 2025 was more than a greeting-it was a defining moment for Indian cinema on the global stage. It symbolised India's growing influence in storytelling, marking a shift from sporadic recognition to strategic presence. To sustain this momentum, India must leverage platforms like WAVES, push for global collaborations, and ensure strong representation at festivals. The world has acknowledged India's cinematic potential; now, it is time for Indian cinema to lead. With the right strategy, this moment can shape the future, ensuring that Indian storytelling continues to captivate and inspire audiences worldwide. (The writer is former civil servant writes on cinema and strategic communication. Inputs provided by Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavi Srinivasan)

Ganges dolphin resurfaces in Charikadia river after 25 years

The conservation of the Gangetic dolphin is not just about protecting a single species; it is intrinsically linked to keeping the Ganga clean

The recent sighting of the endangered Ganges dolphin (Platanista gangetica) in Assam's Charikadia River at Dhakuakhana, Lakhimpur district, has sparked immense interest. Locally known as Sihu, this marks the first recorded presence of the species in the river since 1998, ending a 25-year absence. The prolonged disappearance of the Ganges dolphin from this waterway had fueled concerns over its dwindling numbers and possible extinction. The disappearance of the species from the Charikadia River has been attributed to several factors, including hunting, habitat destruction, and depletion of food sources. Historically, Ganges dolphins thrived across major river systems



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in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh, including the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems. However, their population has now become fragmented, with significant numbers surviving only in isolated sections of these river systems. The Ganges dolphin is a unique freshwater species that is functionally blind and relies

on echolocation to hunt. Despite its remarkable adaptations, the species faces severe threats, primarily due to habitat degradation from large-scale development projects, including dam construction, drainage works, and embankments. Pollution further exacerbates the risks to their survival. Recognizing the urgent need for conservation, India has taken steps to protect the Ganges dolphin. The National Dolphin Research Centre (NDRC), the country's first dedicated research facility for this species, was inaugurated on March 4, 2024, in Patna, Bihar. Located on the Patna University campus, near the Ganges River, the center spans 4,400 square meters and aims to conduct in-depth research

on dolphin behavior, survival, and threats. It also provides training to fishermen, equipping them with conservation techniques to protect dolphins during fishing activities. Despite conservation efforts, human infrastructure projects continue to pose significant challenges. The collapse of a four-lane bridge under construction over the Ganga River at Sultanganj-Agwani in Bihar for the third time has drawn attention to the environmental impact of such developments. In 1990, the Bihar government declared a 60-km stretch of the Ganga River from Sultanganj to Kahalgaon as the Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary, aiming to protect the species while promoting eco-tourism. Recognizing the ecological



significance of the Ganges dolphin, the Government of India designated it as the national aquatic animal in October 2009 during the inaugural meeting of the National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA), chaired by then-Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. The Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary currently hosts approximately 250 dolphins, frequently observed between Shankar Talkies and

Manik Sarkar Ghat. While government agencies have made efforts to protect the species, conservationists emphasize that illegal sand mining must be curbed to ensure its survival. Large-scale sand extraction disrupts river ecosystems by altering water flow and destroying the dolphins' habitat and food sources, such as small fish. Mechanized sand mining further exacerbates environmental damage, creating deep trenches that negatively impact

river health. Experts warn that unless illegal activities are controlled, the already fragile dolphin population will continue to decline. On a more optimistic note, Union Water Resources Minister C.R. Patil has stated that the Namami Gange Mission-a large-scale initiative aimed at rejuvenating the Ganga-has contributed to a rise in the dolphin population. Experts view this as an encouraging sign of improving environmental conditions. According to the Wildlife Institute of India, approximately 4,000 Gangetic dolphins currently inhabit the Ganga and its tributaries, with nearly 2,000 residing in Uttar Pradesh alone. In response, the Uttar Pradesh government has introduced a tourism policy designating a dolphin sanctu-

ary within the Chambal Sanctuary to bolster conservation efforts. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's launch of Project Dolphin has significantly increased public awareness of the species. This initiative strengthens conservation measures while promoting the ecological health of the Ganga River. Further emphasizing its commitment to protecting the species, the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife has designated October 5 as National Dolphin Day. With increasing awareness and conservation initiatives, there is renewed hope that these remarkable creatures will continue to thrive in their natural habitat. (The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)

VOICES THAT SHAPED THE WORLD

For centuries, women writers have challenged norms, reshaped narratives and transformed literature with their powerful voices, says SAKSHI PRIYA

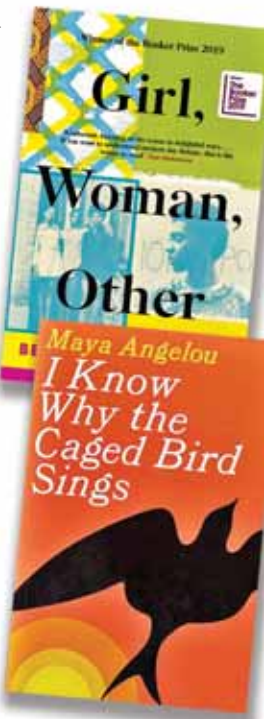


THE ROAD AHEAD
TODAY, WOMEN WRITERS DOMINATE BESTSELLER LISTS, WIN PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS AND CONTINUE TO REDEFINE LITERATURE. MARGARET ATWOOD'S THE HANDMAID'S TALE REMAINS RELEVANT IN DISCUSSIONS ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS. BERNARDINE EVARISTO BECAME THE FIRST BLACK WOMAN TO WIN THE BOOKER PRIZE, PROVING THAT DIVERSE VOICES CAN NO LONGER BE SIDELINED. IN INDIA, WRITERS LIKE MEENA KANDASAMY, AVNI DOSHI AND JANICE PARIAT ARE PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF STORYTELLING; ENSURING WOMEN'S NARRATIVES REMAIN AT THE FOREFRONT OF LITERARY DISCOURSE.

WHY WOMEN'S STORIES MATTER
WOMEN'S LITERATURE IS NOT A NICHE; IT IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF OUR COLLECTIVE HUMAN EXPERIENCE. IT CHALLENGES STEREOTYPES AND DEEPENS EMPATHY. EVERY BOOK WRITTEN BY A WOMAN CARRIES WITHIN IT THE STRUGGLES, DREAMS AND HISTORIES OF THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE HER.



Nobel laureate Toni Morrison chronicled the Black female experience in America with unmatched brilliance. Meanwhile, Amrita Priyam became a literary icon with her evocative poetry on love and Partition, particularly Ajj Akhaan Waris Shah Nu. Mahasweta Devi's writings on tribal communities and marginalised women forced society to confront uncomfortable truths.



The Struggle for Recognition
In earlier times, societal norms denied women access to education, making it difficult for them to enter the literary world. Many resorted to pseudonyms to get published. Mary Ann Evans wrote as George Eliot, while the Brontë sisters first published under the names Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. Even Jane Austen's early works were signed "By a Lady." Despite these challenges, their narratives carried immense depth, challenging gender roles, class structures and moral dilemmas in ways that few male writers dared to explore.

In India, the struggle was even more pronounced. For centuries, women's stories remained within the oral tradition, passed down through generations but rarely written. It was only in the 19th century that writers like Toru Dutt and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain began breaking societal constraints. Hossain's *Sultana's Dream*, published in 1905, imagined a world where women ruled and men were confined to their homes, questioning patriarchal norms in a way that was revolutionary for its time.

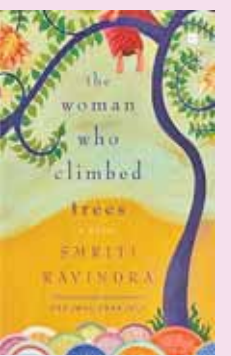
The 20th century marked a turning point globally and in India. Women writers not only published under their real names but also dictated literary trends. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* questioned the systemic suppression of women's voices in literature.

misogyny with raw honesty. In India, Ismat Chughtai's *Lihaaf* challenged conservative mindsets with its bold depiction of female desire. Kamala Das's poetry and autobiographical works fearlessly explored themes of identity, love and rebellion, inspiring generations of women to embrace their truths.

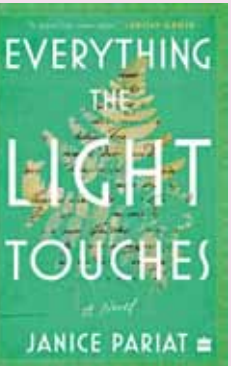
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists* reframed gender discussions for a new generation. In contemporary Indian literature, writers like Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri and Perumal Murugan continue to challenge social norms, bringing stories of the unheard into mainstream cultural consciousness and discourse.

THIS WOMEN'S DAY, LET US NOT ONLY CELEBRATE WOMEN WRITERS BUT ALSO READ THEM, AMPLIFY THEIR VOICES AND RECOGNISE THEIR ROLE IN SHAPING OUR WORLD, ONE STORY AT A TIME

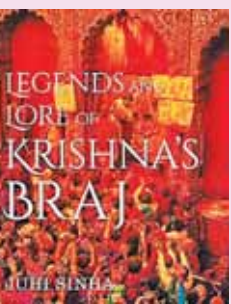
MARCH READS



Book: *Woman Who Climbed Trees*
Author: Smriti Ravindra
Publisher: HarperCollins
Price: ₹599



Book: *Everything the light touches*
Author: Janice Parlat
Publisher: HarperCollins
Price: ₹599



Book: *Legends and lore of Krishna's Braj*
Author: Jui Sinha
Publisher: Niyogi Books
Price: ₹1750



Book: *The Artistry of Handwork*
Author: Jaya Jaitly
Publisher: Niyogi Books
Price: ₹395

Strength, Sisterhood & Survival

Fearless & Unstoppable
For the trailblazers, risk-takers and rule-breakers who refuse to conform. **Lessons in Chemistry** by Bonnie Garmus - A brilliant scientist-turned-TV-star shakes up the male-dominated world of the 1960s. **Great Circle** by Maggie Shipstead - A daring female pilot battles societal constraints to chase her dream of flying.

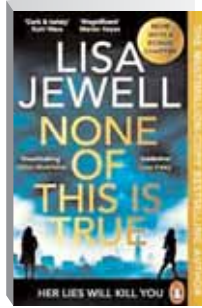
With Women's Day approaching, we celebrate the resilience, strength and complexity of women through literature. From fearless heroines to deep explorations of sisterhood, identity and psychological suspense, these books capture the essence of being bold, unapologetic and true to oneself.

Stronger Together
Because the women who stand by us, our friends, sisters and chosen family, shape who we become. **Everything I Know About Love** by Dolly Alderton - A raw, witty memoir on friendship, heartbreak and growing up.

Unapologetically Herself
For those embracing every part of who they are. **Open When** by Julie Smith - A heartfelt guide to self-care, resilience and mental well-being. **The Path to Self-Love** by Ruby Dhal - A warm, empowering roadmap to putting yourself first. **The Book You Want Everyone You Love to Read** by Philippa Perry - A witty and wise take on relationships, self-discovery and emotional well-being.

Women on the Edge
Complex heroines, unsettling twists and gripping suspense that will keep you hooked. **Strange Sally Diamond** by Liz Nugent - A woman with a traumatic past unearths chilling family secrets. **None of This is True** by Lisa Jewell - A journalist's chance meeting with a mysterious woman spirals into a terrifying nightmare.

The Crash by Freida McFadden - Trapped in a snowstorm, a pregnant woman realises her safe haven isn't what it seems. **The Wrong Sister** by Claire Douglas - A dark, twisted tale of sisterhood gone terribly wrong.



Books That Uplift and Inspire Women

BY TEAM VIVA

Here's a specially curated list of books from Rupa and Aleph, celebrating the strength, resilience and brilliance of women.

She Storms the Norms - Anisha Motwani & Priyadarshini Narendra
A powerful sequel to *Storm the Norm*, this book shares inspiring stories of women who have shattered societal barriers and self-doubt to redefine success. A must-read for those who dare to challenge the status quo.

About the Authors
Anisha Motwani is a business leader, speaker and author of the bestselling *Storm the Norm*. She serves as an independent director on various boards and has been recognised among the '50 Most Powerful Women in Indian Business' by Business Today.

Priyadarshini Narendra is a marketing and strategy expert with decades of experience in advertising, consumer research and consulting. She has authored fiction books and contributes to discussions on women in the workplace.

1700 in 70: A Walk for a Cause - Gita Balakrishnan
Follow architect Gita Balakrishnan's extraordinary 1,700-km journey across India on foot, exploring design's impact on life and culture. A story of endurance, discovery and the power of walking with purpose.

About the Author
Gita Balakrishnan is an architect and founder of the Ethos Foundation, which promotes design awareness. An avid marathon runner, she has embarked on multiple walking expeditions, advocating for the role of design in everyday life.

Beyond the Bell: Preparing Students for Life - Chitra Prasad
A transformative guide on holistic education, this book goes beyond academics, focusing on life skills,

values and personal growth to help students thrive in a rapidly changing world.

About the Author
Chitra Prasad is an educationist with three decades of experience and head of the NSN Group of Schools. With a strong focus on values-based learning, she integrates spirituality into education to shape well-rounded individuals.

A Stitch in Time: The Biba Story - Meena Bindra
The inspiring journey of Meena Bindra, who built Biba from a home-based venture into a fashion empire. A compelling story of passion, perseverance and the rise of India's fashion industry.

About the Author
Meena Bindra, a pioneer in Indian fashion, founded Biba, transforming the salwar kameez into a modern style statement. From a small home-run business to a leading brand, her journey is a testament to innovation and determination.

These books offer wisdom, courage and motivation, perfect for Women's Day and beyond.

A Story of True Friendship

A touching story celebrating the strength, trust and support found in women friendships across generations, says TEAM VIVA

As International Women's Day approaches, there is no better time to celebrate the power of friendship, resilience and support. *The Wall Friends Club* by Varsha Seshan beautifully captures the essence of human connection, showing how even the most unexpected friendships can shape our lives in meaningful ways. Told through an epistolary format, the novel follows two young protagonists, Anandi and Sriya, who form an unlikely bond through letters slipped into a hidden gap in a wall. Despite never meeting, their relationship grows into something deeply special, proving that true friendship goes beyond physical presence.

Varsha Seshan, speaking about the book, shares, "I love letters, old-fashioned letters, not just emails. I also had several pen pals as a child, which made me wonder ... could two children who never meet grow to be the best of friends? An epistolary novel has always seemed an exciting genre to explore, so here is my first one: *The Wall Friends Club*."

At its core, the story is about breaking barriers, embracing differences and find-

ing comfort in the written word. Anandi and Sriya start as strangers, hesitant yet curious, unsure of who will find their letters. But as their exchanges continue, their letters become a refuge, a place where they can share their dreams, fears and small moments of joy. Their honest and heartfelt conversations reflect the beauty of friendships where trust and support come naturally, unburdened by the complexities of adulthood.

The Wall Friends Club truly special is its timeless message about women's friendships. It reminds readers, especially girls, of the importance of lifting each other up rather than competing or tearing each other down. The characters, though young, face real struggles, doubts, insecurities and moments of self-reflection. Their journey resonates with anyone who has ever felt unsure about their place in the world or struggled to find their voice.

Since *International Women's Day* is around the corner, this book is a perfect fit as it carries a powerful message about kindness, connection and the importance of supporting one another.



ABOUT THE BOOK
Book: *The Wall Friends Club*
Edited by: Varsha Seshan
Publisher: HarperCollins
Price: ₹175

