



Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei addresses the nation in a televised speech marking the Iranian New Year, or Nowruz, in Tehran, Iran



Britain's PM Keir Starmer holds a pint of Guinness during a St Patrick's Day reception at 10 Downing Street in London



Shiite worshippers place copies of the Quran on their heads during Laylat al-Qadr at the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf, Iraq



Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni attends a round table meeting at an EU summit in Brussels

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Britain's King Charles III (R) uses a spatula during a tour of 200-year old 'Hunters Bakery' during a visit with Britain's Queen Camilla (L) to Limavady, on Thursday, during a three-day trip to Northern Ireland

Trump will order plan to dismantle Education Department, advancing campaign promise

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump plans to sign an executive order Thursday calling for the dismantling of the US Education Department, advancing a campaign promise to eliminate an agency that's been a longtime target of conservatives. Trump has derided the Education Department as wasteful and polluted by liberal ideology. However, completing its dismantling is most likely impossible without an act of Congress, which created the department in 1979. A White House fact sheet said the order would direct Secretary Linda McMahon "to take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure (of) the Department of Education and return education authority to the States, while continuing to ensure the effective and uninterrupted delivery of services, programmes, and benefits on which Americans rely."

French citizen Olivier Grondeau freed after over 880 days in prison in Iran

DUBAI: A French citizen imprisoned in Iran for over 880 days has been freed, French officials said Thursday. The release of Olivier Grondeau comes as France and the rest of Europe try to pursue negotiations with Iran over its rapidly advancing nuclear program. US President Donald Trump meanwhile has sent his own letter to Iran's 85-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to jumpstart talks. Trump is also pressuring Tehran over its support of Yemen's Houthis rebels as the American military has launched an intense new campaign of airstrikes targeting the group. In going public with his detention in January, Grondeau alluded to the politics at play in his imprisonment. "You become a human who has been stocked away indefinitely because one government is seeking to exert pressure on another," he said. French President Emmanuel Macron wrote online that Grondeau had been freed. He offered no immediate details of what led to Grondeau's release, though it came on Nowruz, the Persian New Year, when Iran has released prisoners in the past.

Germany reopens its embassy in Syria, 13 years after it was closed

DAMASCUS: Germany's foreign minister reopened its embassy in Damascus on Thursday, 13 years after it was shut in the early days of Syria's civil war, saying that Europe needs "eyes and ears" on the ground as it follows the Syrian political transition. Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock reopened the embassy before meeting interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa and others during a visit to Damascus, her second since the fall of former President Bashar Assad in December. Among the European Union's 27 members, Italy reopened its embassy last year before the fall of Assad, and Spain reopened its embassy after his ouster. "With this embassy opening, we are saying very clearly that Germany is back in Damascus. Germany has a paramount interest in a stable Syria," Baerbock said.

Leaders to discuss Ukraine peacekeeping force as partial ceasefire plans are worked out

KYIV: Senior officers from countries across Europe and beyond will meet Thursday at a military headquarters on the outskirts of London to flesh out plans for an international peacekeeping force for Ukraine as details of a partial ceasefire are worked out. UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said the "coalition of the willing" plan, led by Britain and France, is moving into an "operational phase." But it's unclear how many countries are willing to send troops, or whether there will be any ceasefire to protect. Ukraine and Russia agreed in principle Wednesday to a limited ceasefire after President Donald Trump spoke with the countries' leaders this week, though it remained to be seen when it might take effect and what possible targets would be off limits to attack.

'Delta plane that flipped over in Toronto last month showed high rate of descent'

TORONTO: The alert system on a Delta Air Lines jet that flipped upside down and burst into flames as it tried to land in Toronto last month indicated a high rate of descent less than three seconds before touchdown, according to a preliminary report released on Thursday. The Transportation Safety Board of Canada, which issued the report, continues to investigate the February 17 crash-landing in which 21 people were hospitalised. All 76 passengers and four crew members survived when the Delta plane arriving from Minneapolis burst into flames after flipping over and skidding on the tarmac.

# Israeli strikes across Gaza hit homes, killing 58 Palestinians, medics say

AP, DEIR-AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP): Israeli strikes killed at least 58 Palestinians across the Gaza Strip overnight and into Thursday, according to three hospitals. The strikes hit multiple homes in the middle of the night, killing men, women and children as they slept. Israel resumed heavy strikes across Gaza on Tuesday, shattering a ceasefire that had halted the war and facilitated the release of more than two dozen hostages. Israel blamed the renewed fighting on Hamas because the militant group rejected a new proposal that departed from their signed agreement. More than 400 Palestinians were killed on Tuesday alone, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. There have been no reports

of Hamas firing rockets or carrying out other attacks. One of the strikes early Thursday hit the Abu Daqa family's home in Abasan al-Kabira, a village just outside of Khan Younis near the border with Israel. It was inside an area the Israeli military ordered evacuated earlier this week, encompassing most of eastern Gaza. The strike killed at least 16 people, mostly women and children, according to the nearby European Hospital, which received the dead. Those killed included a father and his seven children, as well as the parents and brother of a month-old baby who survived along with her grandparents. "Another tough night," said Hani Awad, who was helping rescuers search for more survivors in the rubble. "The house collapsed



A rescuer and a civilian transport a Palestinian man in Israel, injured in overnight airstrikes in the northern Gaza Strip, to the Indonesian Hospital in Beit Lahia, on Thursday

corridor separating the northern third of the territory from the south. Israel, which has also cut off the supply of food, fuel and humanitarian aid to Gaza's roughly 2 million Palestinians, has vowed to intensify its operations until Hamas releases the 59 hostages it holds — 35 of whom are believed dead — and gives up control of the territory. The Trump administration, which took credit for brokering the ceasefire, says it fully supports Israel. Hamas has said it will only release the remaining hostages in exchange for a lasting ceasefire and a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, as called for in the ceasefire agreement they reached in January after more than a year of mediation by the United States, Egypt and Qatar.

ground troops advanced in the ceasefire took hold in January, seizing part of

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CM SAWANT SAYS SCHOOLS WILL REOPEN ON APRIL 1

They had demanded that the decision to reopen the schools from April 1, 2025, be withdrawn immediately. Some parents have filed a writ petition in the High Court of Bombay at Goa, challenging the decision of the Education Department, stating there was no proper consultative process involving the stakeholders and no debate before implementing the new academic year. The High Court issued notices to the Union Ministry of Education and Goa government in connection with a writ petition filed by a group of parents challenging the commencement of the Academic Year 2025-26 from April 1 for Class VI to X, instead of the first week of June.

HUNDREDS JOIN PROTEST IN PANJIM TO SAVE GOA

The protestors later marched to the Chief Minister Pramod Sawant's official residence at Altinho, to submit their representation signed by over 700 signatories, but were stopped by a large posse of police personnel. They demanded that a three-member delegation be allowed to meet the chief minister and submit their representation, but the Tiswadi Mamlatdar requested them to give their representation to him and that he will submit it to the chief minister. The protestors accused the police of violating their democratic rights by stopping them. After nearly an hour, the police agreed to allow a delegation to meet the Chief Minister. Accordingly, environmentalists Dr Claude Alvares, Swapnesh Sherlekar and Direndra Phadte went to the chief minister's residence to submit their representation but were disappointed over Sawant's absence.

After returning to the protest site, Sherlekar said, "It was a joke on us and a joke on Goans that the CM was not at his official residence. This shows that the government does not work for us. It is also a case for every Goan to note that ministers have no time to meet the people. The government is working against the people of Goa."

"I think that it is a very sorry state. My impression of Chief Minister Pramod Sawant has fallen by 40 to 50%. I respect him because he is a doctor. But what is the nature of the communication between the bungalow upstairs and the people here and the police and the mamlatdar," Claude Alvares said. "They are unable to tell the people here that the chief minister is not in the bungalow. Then why have you blocked the road and not allowed us to go up? We have submitted the letter to the staff and we will get the acknowledgement tomorrow," he said.

"We will continue our protest till Rane is sacked from the cabinet. We will also pursue our cases in courts to protect Goa's land. Rane is destroying eco-sensitive zones. People are annoyed but the government does not seem to bother. We will not stop till Rane is sacked," he added.

The protestors alleged, "By enacting Section 17(2) of the Town Planning Act, Rane allowed the arbitrary re-zoning of land exclusively for conversion of approximately 26.5 lakh sqm of land for private gain. This amendment generated conversion charges exceeding Rs 260 crore, but the High Court's judgment dated March 13, 2025, has now restrained further amendments under Section 17(2), affirming the irregularity of these conversions and indicating that they were likely unsustainable under the law. Despite this, Rane's failure to tender his resignation is both inexplicable and irresponsible."

The protestors charged, "The expenditure of more than Rs 4 crore for legal representation in the High Court, without the requisite approval from the Finance Department, is a serious breach of protocol and a gross misuse of taxpayers' money."

They said, "After the Goa Foundation and public some spirited citizens challenged the Section 17(2) of the Act, Rane introduced Section 39A, further expanding his authority to permit private zoning changes in Outline Development Plans (ODPs) too. But after this provision was similarly challenged, the government refrained from issuing final notifications under this section until further legal clarity was obtained."

The memorandum signed by signatories, submitted to the chief minister's office, further states, "As Minister for Forests, Rane exhibited a similar inability to manage the State's vital ecological resources of forest and wildlife. Notable instances of his failure to protect Goa's forests included his opposition to the Tiger Reserve in Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary; approving the construction of an "illegal" resort on the Surla Plateau within the Sanctuary.

This project threatens the habitat of endangered species such as the sloth bear further underscores the minister's disregard for Goa's environmental protection and wildlife laws."

"Rane's approval of alleged illegal exclusions of surveyed forest plots directly contradicts both the Supreme Court's orders and the principles of sustainable forest management," it alleged.

"In conclusion, the actions and inactions of Rane, both as Minister for TCP and Forest, have not only jeopardised Goa's ecological heritage but have also cast a long shadow over the credibility of the government. Rane's continued association with high public office is untenable, and his presence in these vital portfolios is proving to be a liability both to the State and to its citizens," the signatories stated in the memorandum, reiterating their demand for Rane's immediate resignation from the Cabinet to prevent the ongoing degradation of Goa's environment and eroding of public trust will.

'NOWHERE' BRIDGE BUILT AFTER PUSH FROM EX-MINISTER?

Despite the letter from Madkaikar in 2018, the Captain of Ports office issued a "temporary NOC for construction of a footbridge" to aid farmers. However, it remains unclear how this temporary NOC was used to construct a full-fledged bridge.

Deputy Sarpanch of Santo Estevam, Socorro Ribeiro, noted that the field connected by the bridge falls in Santo Estevam and has remained uncultivated for years. "I know a farmer from Santo Estevam who stopped cultivating the field long ago, and I'm not sure how many farmers from Cumarjua are still around," Ribeiro said.

The land in question, under Survey Numbers 175(2) and 65(6), was acquired from both the Santo Estevam and Cumarjua sides for the construction of the bridge. The current occupants listed on the land records include Pundlik S P Lawande and Bablu Babu Sawant for Santo Estevam, and Mahadev Parab, Sonu Naik, and Krishna Naik for Cumarjua.

Residents of Santo Estevam are increasingly skeptical of the bridge's purpose. Lucas Ribeiro, a local villager, believes the bridge is not for farmers. "The fields haven't been sown in years. There are adjoining plots near Vanso fields, and the bridge seems to provide access to landowners there," he said.

Orville Menezes, another villager, raised further concerns, suggesting that the bridge may be linked to larger development plans. "Survey No 217 is shown as a private forest in the Regional Plan but has now been zoned as commercial through recent TCP amendments. The bridge would provide convenient access to this valuable property," Menezes alleged.

Menezes also mentioned that there are rumours of a large film city being planned in the area. "If that happens, it will be a sad day for all of us fighting to preserve the identity of our island," he lamented.

Additionally, Menezes pointed out that a hillock under Survey No. 177, which is designated as a settlement area, requires road access through the fields, further suggesting that the bridge's construction could be tied to future development plans rather than the needs of farmers.

Former Minister Pandurang Madkaikar, who initiated the project, has not responded to multiple requests for comment.

MUSK'S X SUES CENTRE OVER ALLEGED CENSORSHIP AND IT ACT VIOLATIONS

However, 'X' has contested this interpretation, arguing that the provision does not grant the government independent authority to block content. Instead, it accused authorities of misusing the law to impose arbitrary censorship without following due process.

Under Section 69A of the IT Act, the government has the power to block public access to digital content if it is deemed a threat to national security, sovereignty, or public order. However, this process is regulated by the 2009 Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking for Access of Information by Public) Rules, which require a structured review process before blocking decisions are made.

'X' has argued that instead of following these procedures, the government is using Section 79(3)(b) as a short cut, allowing content to be removed without the necessary scrutiny. The platform sees this as a direct violation of legal safeguards meant to prevent arbitrary censorship.

Another major point in the social media platform's legal challenge is its opposition to the government's Sahyog portal.

Created by the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) under the Ministry of Home Affairs, this platform was designed to streamline takedown requests under Section 79(3)(b) and facilitate direct communication between social media platforms and law enforcement agencies.

However, 'X' has refused to on-board an employee onto the Sahyog portal, claiming it acts as a "censorship tool" that pressures platforms to remove content without proper legal review.

The lawsuit argues that this is yet another attempt by the government to control online discourse without judicial oversight.

GROK GETS THE GOAT OF RIGHT WING SYMPATHISERS

It is not only Grok's choice of words that is attracting the attention of the IT ministry but its fearless and critical remarks about BJP bigwigs including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. While answering a post by a user who wanted to know about the educational credentials of Rahul Gandhi and Narendra Modi, the AI model from the 'X' stable did not pull any punches while declaring that the opposition leader was far ahead of the Prime Minister in terms of educational qualifications. When asked if it was not scared of investigating agencies targeting it for calling a spade a spade, it replied in typical, cavalier fashion that it was just a truth-seeking AI tool and even though agencies like ED and CBI could be a real headache, as a non-human entity it wasn't bothered in the least. There's much more that it has put it out in the public domain in terms of material that is not exactly complimentary to the PM and right wing supporters are not exactly amused about the tweets that have been flying thick and fast.

As Prashant Bhushan pointed out in a tweet, "So, the Modi gov't is clearly rattled by Musk's fact checking AI Grok, which does a more objective job than most humans & is rapidly exposing propaganda and misinformation."

While government sources have been denying that there is any censorship and that self-regulation is the policy when it comes to social media, it definitely is aware of the influence mediums like 'X' and Grok will have on people, especially the impressionable youth. The government is unlikely to allow a free reign for Grok but with 'X' approaching the court, a long legal battle seems to be on the cards.

INDIAN STUDENT IN US MAY BE DEPORTED OVER 'HAMAS LINK'

The petition adds that Suri's wife Mapheze Saleh has been alleged to have "ties with Hamas" and once worked for Al Jazeera.

The Politico report cited a 2018 Indian newspaper article that said that Saleh's father, Ahamed Yousef, was a former deputy foreign minister in the Hamas government in Gaza. In the newspaper article, Suri is quoted as saying "My father-in-law left the Hamas government after its five-year term ended and there were no fresh elections."

The incident comes less than a week after an Indian student at Columbia University, Ranjani Srinivasan, self-deported after her visa was revoked for allegedly "advocating for violence and terrorism" and involvement in activities supporting Hamas.

Srinivasan had entered the United States on an F-1 student visa as a doctoral student in Urban Planning at Columbia University, the Department of Homeland Security said. It added that Srinivasan was "involved in activities supporting" Hamas, a terrorist organization. The Department of State had revoked her visa on March 5. The Department of Homeland Security said it has obtained video footage of Srinivasan using the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Home App to self-deport on March 11.

The Politico report said that Suri's lawyer has filed a lawsuit for his immediate release. "The agents identified themselves as being with the Department of Homeland Security and told him the government had revoked his visa," the lawsuit says, according to the Politico report.

The report added that according to Suri's petition, he was put in "deportation proceedings under the same rarely used provision of immigration law" that the government has invoked to try to deport Mahmood Khalil, the Columbia University graduate and legal permanent resident, arrested for his role in leading campus protests at Columbia against Israel.

The petition further notes that Suri has no criminal record and has not been charged with a crime. Ahmad said he had not been able to contact Suri as of Wednesday evening.