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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 20-03-2026

NATIONAL NEWS

Kusunpur Village in Odisha to Become State's First Smart Village Under Council of Scientific and Industrial Research Initiative

Kusunpur village in Kendrapada district of Odisha is set to become the first smart village in the state under an initiative of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research functioning under the Ministry of Science and Technology.

The project aims to transform the village, which has around 130 families and a population of about 700, into a model of sustainable and self-reliant rural development.

The initiative seeks to bring advanced technology and scientific solutions directly to rural communities.

The project follows a mission-mode approach where multiple research institutions collaborate to implement practical and scalable solutions.

The primary objective is to create a self-sufficient, climate-resilient and sustainable village model, which can serve as a blueprint for developing smart villages across India.

Several specialised institutions under the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research are participating in the project.

Key institutions involved include:
– Central Building Research Institute, Roorkee
– Institute of Minerals and Materials Technology, Bhubaneswar
– Central Electronics Engineering Research Institute
– National Institute for Interdisciplinary Science and Technology
– Structural Engineering Research Centre
– Central Leather Research Institute

Department of Posts Launches '24 Speed Post' Service for Next-Day Delivery

The Department of Posts, under the Ministry of Communications, has launched the '24 Speed Post' service to provide next-day guaranteed delivery for urgent consignments.

The service was launched at Akashvani Bhawan.

The 24 Speed Post service is designed for time-sensitive parcels and important documents, ensuring faster delivery compared to standard postal timelines.

The service will initially operate in six major metropolitan cities of India.

These cities were selected due to high logistics demand and extensive business communication networks.

The Department of Posts plans to expand the service gradually to additional cities across India.

The 24 Speed Post service operates through dedicated processing windows and priority air transportation, helping to reduce transit delays and improve delivery efficiency.

The initiative aims to enhance the efficiency of postal logistics and strengthen India's parcel delivery ecosystem for businesses and individuals.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

APEDA Facilitates First Export of GI-Tagged Joha Rice from Assam to United Kingdom and Italy

The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry facilitated the first export consignment of 25 metric tonnes of Geographical Indication tagged Joha rice from Assam to the United Kingdom and Italy.

The shipment was dispatched, in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, Government of Assam.

Joha rice is an indigenous aromatic rice variety known for its distinct fragrance and fine grain texture.

The rice variety received the Geographical Indication tag in 2017, enhancing its recognition in premium domestic and international markets.

The initiative aims to promote unique agricultural products from India's North-Eastern region in global markets and strengthen export opportunities for farmers.

In Assam, Joha rice is cultivated across around 21,662 hectares with an estimated production of about 43,298 metric tonnes in Financial Year 2024–25.

Major Joha rice producing districts in Assam include Nagaon, Baksa, Goalpara, Sivasagar, Majuli, Chirang and Golaghat.

Prior to this shipment, the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority had facilitated the export of 1 metric tonne of Geographical Indication tagged Joha rice to Vietnam and 2 metric tonnes to Middle Eastern countries including Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

The latest export consignment was exported by Safe Agritrade Private Limited and processed at

Pratik Agro Food Processing in Guwahati.

The initiative is expected to strengthen market linkages between producers and international buyers while improving price realisation and export opportunities for farmers in Assam and the North-Eastern region of India.

Brazil Implements Stricter Social Media Regulations for Users Under 16

Brazil has begun enforcing a new law regulating minors' access to social media and online platforms, marking a significant step in global efforts to safeguard children in the digital space.

The law came into effect in 2026, following its approval in 2025 after a major scandal involving alleged sexual exploitation of minors on Instagram.

Brazil has a population of over 212 million with high internet penetration, raising concerns about the psychological and social impact of online platforms on adolescents.

Children and adolescents under 16 years must link their social media accounts to a legal guardian, and self-declaration of age is no longer permitted.

Platforms are required to implement reliable age verification systems, including identity document uploads and biometric verification, to prevent access to violent, pornographic, or harmful content.

Tech companies must remove content involving sexual exploitation or abuse and report such instances to authorities, with penalties for non-compliance including fines up to 50 million reais, account suspensions, or complete bans.

Brazil's data protection authority (ANPD) is responsible for implementing and monitoring the law.

The law bans targeted advertising aimed at children and adolescents and restricts "loot boxes" in video games.

Brazil joins countries like Australia in tightening regulations on children's digital access, emphasizing accountability, parental involvement, and platform responsibility.

BANKING

Shriram General Insurance Introduces New Indemnity-Based Health Insurance Plan

Shriram General Insurance Company (SGIC) launched Shri Health Suraksha 2.0, an upgraded health insurance plan designed to provide flexible and comprehensive medical coverage while reducing out-of-pocket expenses.

The plan addresses gaps in traditional health policies by removing restrictions and offering benefits such as unlimited restoration of the sum insured within a policy year.

Shri Health Suraksha 2.0 provides a cumulative bonus of up to 250% for claim-free years, increasing the base sum insured over time.

The policy eliminates room rent capping and ICU charge limits, allowing policyholders to choose hospital rooms based on medical necessity without financial restrictions.

The plan follows a zero co-payment structure, ensuring that the insurer covers the full admissible claim amount without requiring the insured to share costs.

It provides coverage for ambulance and air ambulance services up to the sum insured, expanding access to emergency medical transport.

The plan includes coverage for medical consumables, which are often excluded in standard health policies.

Shri Health Suraksha 2.0 integrates modern medical procedures with AYUSH treatments (Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy), offering holistic healthcare coverage.

The upgraded plan is indemnity-based, designed to meet evolving healthcare needs and address rising medical costs for policyholders.

DEFENCE

Indian Navy Advances IOS SAGAR Initiative

India reaffirmed its commitment to collaborative maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) with the commencement of the second edition of Indian Ocean Ship (IOS) SAGAR.

The Indian Navy assumed the chair of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in February 2026, and the current edition of IOS SAGAR includes participation from 16 IONS nations.

The initiative aligns with the Government of India’s SAGAR vision (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and contributes to the broader MAHASAGAR framework (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security Across the Regions).

IOS SAGAR is a unique operational engagement programme enabling naval personnel from Friendly Foreign Countries to train and sail together onboard an Indian Naval Ship, promoting practical cooperation, interoperability, and shared understanding of maritime operations.

The programme begins with professional training interactions at Indian Naval training establishments in Kochi, exposing participants to key aspects of naval operations, seamanship practices, and maritime security concepts.

This training phase is followed by deployment onboard an Indian Naval Ship, where international participants sail together with Indian Navy personnel and participate in operational activities at sea.

During the voyage, the ship will undertake maritime engagement activities and port visits, facilitating interaction with partner navies and maritime agencies across the region.

These engagements aim to strengthen professional linkages, encourage exchange of best practices, and foster a deeper understanding of shared maritime challenges.

AWARDS & PRIZES

Indian Animated Film ‘CHYIMI’ Wins Best Director Award

The animated short film CHYIMI, directed by Partha Sarathi Mahanta, won the Best Director Award at the New York Short Animation Festival 2026.

The achievement highlights the growing global recognition of Indian and Assamese animation storytelling on international platforms.

Partha Sarathi Mahanta, a senior police officer, is currently serving as Inspector General of Police in Assam and Commissioner of Police in Guwahati.

The award marks a significant milestone for Indian animation at international film festivals.

The New York Short Animation Festival is an international event that showcases innovative animated short films from filmmakers around the world.

By winning the Best Director Award, the film CHYIMI stood out among numerous entries from different countries.

The recognition celebrates excellence in storytelling, creativity and artistic direction in animated filmmaking.

Sahitya Akademi Award 2025

The Sahitya Akademi, India’s National Academy of Letters, announced the Sahitya Akademi Award 2025, recognising outstanding literary works in 24 Indian languages.

The award honours 8 poetry collections, 4 novels, 6 short story collections, 2 essay books, 1 literary criticism work, 1 autobiography and 2 memoirs.

The selection process began in January 2025 when Sahitya Akademi issued an open call for nominations for literary works in recognised languages.

Jury members representing each language evaluated the submitted works, and the final recommendations were approved by the competent authority of Sahitya Akademi.

The selection process ensures that literary works are honoured based on merit, originality and contribution to Indian literature.

Genre-wise distribution of awards:
– Poetry – 8 books
– Novels – 4 books
– Short story collections – 6 books
– Essays – 2 books

– Literary criticism – 1 book
– Autobiography – 1 book
– Memoirs – 2 books

Selected winners include:
– Prasun Bandyopadhyay (Bengali) – Shrestha Kabita (Poetry)
– Yogesh Vaidya (Gujarati) – Bhattkhadaki (Poetry)
– Girijakumar Baliyar Singh (Odia) – Padapurana (Poetry)
– Nandini Sidha Reddy (Telugu) – Animesha (Poetry)
– Pritpal Singh Betab (Urdu) – Safar Jaari Hai (Poetry)
– Sadhu Bhadreshdas (Sanskrit) – Prasthanacatustaye Brahmaghosah (Poetry)

Novel category winners include:
– Devabrat Das (Assamese) – Karhi Khelar Sadhu
– Sahaisuli Brahma (Bodo) – Dwngnwi Lama Mwnse Gathwn
– Navtej Sarna (English) – Crimson Spring
– Prabhakaran (Malayalam) – Maayaamanushyar

Other notable winners include:
– Mamta Kalia (Hindi) – Jeete Jee Allahabad (Memoir)
– Amaresh Nugadoni (Kannada) – Dada Seerisu Tande (Short Stories)
– Jinder (Punjabi) – Safety Kit (Short Stories)
– Tamilselvan (Tamil) – Thamiz Sirukathaiyin Thadangal (Literary Criticism)

The Sahitya Akademi Award 2025 ceremony will be held on March 31, 2026 in New Delhi.

Each award recipient will receive ₹1,00,000 cash prize, a ceremonial shawl and an engraved copper plaque.

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Nepal’s First Transgender Woman Member of Parliament

Bhumika Shrestha, a 37-year-old LGBTQ rights activist, has become Nepal’s first transgender woman Member of Parliament, marking a historic milestone in South Asia for inclusivity and representation of marginalised communities.

Bhumika Shrestha was elected as a proportional representation MP under the Rastriya Swatantra Party and is a prominent advocate for transgender and sexual minority rights in Nepal.

Her appointment follows political changes in Nepal, including anti-corruption protests in 2025 that led to the fall of the previous government and the rise of a reform-oriented leadership, enabling greater representation for underrepresented communities, including LGBTQ individuals.

Shrestha’s policy priorities include effective implementation of constitutional provisions for LGBTQ rights, legal protection, social inclusion, and addressing systemic discrimination against sexual minorities.

Nepal recognised third gender identity in citizenship documents in 2013, becoming a progressive

South Asian country regarding LGBTQ rights.

Discrimination based on sexual orientation was banned in Nepal in 2007, and in 2023, Nepal's Supreme Court allowed registration of same-sex and transgender marriages.

Blue Diamond Society is a key organisation advocating LGBTQ rights in Nepal and has supported visibility and legal recognition of sexual minorities.

Shrestha's election represents a shift from legal recognition to active political participation, highlighting greater hope for policy implementation and broader societal acceptance of gender diversity.

MoUs & Agreements

India Initiates Trade Negotiations with Philippines and Maldives for New Trade Agreements

India has started the process of signing Terms of Reference to begin trade negotiations with the Philippines and Maldives, according to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The initiative aims to strengthen economic relations and promote bilateral trade between India and the two countries.

India will negotiate a Preferential Trade Agreement with the Philippines and a Free Trade Agreement with the Maldives.

Under the Terms of Reference, India and the Philippines will start negotiations for a Preferential Trade Agreement.

A Preferential Trade Agreement allows partner countries to reduce or eliminate import duties on selected goods, making trade more affordable and competitive.

India's exports to the Philippines increased by 3.11 percent to 2.16 billion United States dollars in 2024–25.

Imports from the Philippines declined by 17.8 percent to 1.17 billion United States dollars during the same period.

India has also initiated negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement with the Maldives to strengthen bilateral economic cooperation.

A Free Trade Agreement generally covers a wider range of goods and services and significantly reduces or eliminates tariffs on most traded products.

The proposed agreement with the Maldives also aims to simplify regulations related to trade in services, investments and broader economic cooperation.

India's exports to the Maldives declined by 37.11 percent to 56.88 million United States dollars in 2024–25.

Imports from the Maldives increased by 37.14 percent to 118.82 million United States dollars during the same period.

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