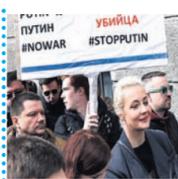




## Embracing tradition

Actor Sara Ali Khan highlights her love for Indian wear, emphasising its comfort and cultural promotion

LEISURE | P2



## Polls amid protests

Russia witnesses protests outside polling stations at midday Sunday on the last day of a three-day presidential election

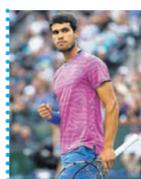
INTERNATIONAL | P10



## Adani's big plans

Adani group plans to invest more than ₹1.2 lakh crore (about \$14 billion) across its portfolio companies

BUSINESS | P11



## Alcaraz enters final

Carlos Alcaraz beats Jannik Sinner to reach BNP Paribas Open final ending the Italian's 19-match winning streak in the process

SPORTS | P12

## SHORT TAKES

### 2 held for posing as ED officers

**Bhubaneswar:** Two brothers were arrested in Odisha's Dhenkanal district for allegedly posing as Enforcement Directorate officers, and extorting money from government officials, police said Sunday. Tarinisen Mohapatra (30) and Brahmashankar Mohapatra (27) were arrested by the Special Task Force (STF) of the state police from their home in Dhenkanal town Saturday, they said. The brothers borrowed a huge amount of money and were not being able to repay the lenders. So, they hatched a plan to cheat government employees, police said. P3

### EC amends poll schedules

**New Delhi:** The Election Commission Sunday advanced the date of the counting of votes for the Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim Assembly polls to June 2 from June 4. The EC had announced earlier that the votes polled in the two Assembly elections were to be counted June 4 along with Lok Sabha poll votes. But as the term of the two assemblies is ending June 2, the date has been advanced, the EC said. "There shall be no change in respect of schedule for Parliamentary constituencies of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim," it noted. Assembly polls are also being held in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha along with parliamentary elections.

### IRREGULAR by MANJUL



We needn't extend our comedy serials; elections have been announced

### WEATHER

|          | BBSR   | CTC    |
|----------|--------|--------|
| Max Temp | 35.6°C | 34.8°C |
| Min Temp | 25.3°C | 24.0°C |
| Humidity | 80%    | 74%    |
| Rainfall | Nil    | Nil    |

FORECAST  
PARTLY CLOUDY SKY



RIOT OF COLOURS: Women play Holi ahead of Basant Utsav festival, at Maidan area in Kolkata, Sunday

## Two dead in Koraput road mishap

**Kundura, March 17:** Two persons were killed and 40 people injured as a pick-up van on which they were travelling to attend a wedding overturned in Odisha's Koraput district Sunday, police said. The accident happened near Khatalapadar bridge in Kundura police station area, they said. The vehicle was heading to Nuagaon village in Borigumma block from Dalapur village in Boipariguda block for the marriage ceremony. Those travelling in it were guests of the bride's family. The driver lost control of the crowded vehicle, following which it fell on its side, police said. After getting information about the accident, police and fire service personnel reached the spot and rescued the injured persons from the vehicle. While two persons died on the spot, 40 people were rushed to the district hospital in Jeyapore, police said. The condition of six injured persons is stated to be critical and they were shifted to the Koraput Medical College and Hospital for better treatment, they said.

# BJP top beneficiary

The Election Commission Sunday made public fresh data on electoral bonds, which it had submitted in sealed covers to the Supreme Court and was later asked to put it in public domain. These details are believed to be pertaining to the period before April 12, 2019. Electoral bond details after this date was made public by the poll panel last week. Political parties had filed data on electoral bonds in sealed cover as directed by the Supreme Court's interim order dated April 12, 2019, the poll panel said in a statement.



who were the beneficiaries of the balance ₹859 crore worth bonds purchased by Future Gaming. The disclosure is part of the data dump pertaining to a total of 523 recognised and non-recognised political parties made public by the EC on the Supreme Court's orders. This was followed by another dataset published by the EC last week based on the information submitted by the State Bank of India (SBI), the sole bank authorised to sell and redeem electoral bonds. The latest dataset released by the EC included scanned copies of the disclosures made by the political parties, running into hundreds of pages. While initially the data submitted by the SBI pertained to a period from April 12, 2019 till the scrapping of the bonds by the apex court last month, the latest disclosure is based on the declarations given by various political parties in November last year on the bonds redeemed by them since the scheme was launched in early

**New Delhi, March 17:** Top purchaser of electoral bonds Future Gaming and Hotel Services donated ₹509 crore to Tamil Nadu's ruling party DMK through the now-scrapped payment mode, the Election Commission's (EC) data showed Sunday. The donations given by Future Gaming, whose owner, 'lottery king' Santiago Martin, has been under the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) scanner, accounted for more than 77 per cent of the total receipts from electoral bonds of ₹656.5 crore disclosed by the DMK. Since most political parties have not fully disclosed the names of the donors, it was not known

## Labourer killed in crusher unit

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Jajpur, March 17:** A labourer was killed while another sustained critical injuries after the two were allegedly trapped in the belt while changing the wheels of a crusher machine at a stone crusher unit near Rahadpur black stone quarry under Dharmasala block in this district, Sunday morning. The deceased was identified as Shyamsundar Hansda, 30, a native of Barikul area in Bankura district of neighbouring West Bengal. The critically injured labourer was identified as Anil Soren, 30, of the same area in West Bengal. Soren was rescued and admitted to a nearby hospital. However, he was shifted to SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack for better treatment. The mishap sparked tension in the area as Rahadpur villagers staged a demonstration alleging that the owner was trying to hush up the matter. They also alleged that labourers are being engaged in the crusher unit without registration. However, no case has been filed in the Jenapur police station. When contacted, IIC Subhendu Kumar Sahu said that the family members of the deceased have been informed and case will be registered after they arrive here and file an FIR.

## Foreign students in Guj varsity attacked

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 17:** India Sunday said the Gujarat government is taking strict action against the perpetrators of violence at a university in Ahmedabad in which two foreign students sustained injuries. Local police said it arrested two men and are looking for more after students hailing from different foreign countries were allegedly assaulted by a group at one of the hostels of the Gujarat University in Ahmedabad for offering namaz. External affairs ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said one of the two foreign students injured in the violence has been discharged from hospital. "An incidence of violence took place at Gujarat University in Ahmedabad yesterday. State government is taking strict action against the perpetrators," he said on 'X'. "Two foreign students were injured in the clash. One of them has been discharged from hospital after receiving medical attention," he said. Two students -- one from Sri Lanka and another from Tajikistan -- were hospitalised after the incident that took place at the univer-



sity's A-block hostel Saturday night, according to the police. An FIR was registered against 20-25 unidentified accused persons under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for rioting, unlawful assembly, voluntarily causing hurt, damage to property, and criminal trespass, among others, senior police official Tarun Duggal said in Ahmedabad. Nine teams have been formed to conduct the probe into the incident, Police Commissioner G S Malik said. The incident was reported at around 10:50 pm Saturday when nearly two dozen people barged into the hostel and raised an objection to students from foreign countries offering namaz in the facility where they stayed, the police said.

## MORE TROUBLE FOR KEJRIWAL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 17:** The Enforcement Directorate has summoned Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in a money laundering probe linked to alleged irregularities in the Delhi Jal Board, with the Aam Aadmi Party terming it a 'backup' plan to stop him from campaigning in the Lok Sabha polls. According to the officials, Kejriwal is required to present himself before the agency at its office on A P J Abdul Kalam Road March 18 to provide his statement under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. This latest development marks the second instance where Kejriwal has been summoned under the anti-money laundering law. He is also facing inquiries in the Delhi excise policy-related money laundering case and has previously disregarded eight



summons in that matter, terming those "illegitimate". The ED has issued a fresh summons to Kejriwal to appear for questioning March 21 in the excise policy-linked money laundering case. Delhi minister Atishi, at a press conference, expressed concerns over the motive behind these actions and said, "Nobody knows what this Delhi Jal Board (DJB) case is about. This seems to be a backup plan to arrest Kejriwal anyhow and stop him from campaigning in the Lok Sabha polls."

# WhatsApp emerges as go to campaign medium

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 17:** As the country gears up for the world's biggest electoral exercise, messaging platforms like WhatsApp and social media influencers have emerged as the go to mediums for political parties to influence voter psychology, ad gurus and political analysts say. In the run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, political parties are extensively using social media to propagate their achievements and seek support from voters. **How parties are wooing voters** The BJP is trying to engage with the voters by sending them a personalised 'Letter from the Prime Minister' on WhatsApp — which has over 500 million active users monthly in India — highlighting the achievements of the

Narendra Modi government and seeking feedback from voters. The party launched the website 'My First Vote For Modi,' which allows visitors to pledge to vote for Modi and submit a video stating the reason behind their choice. The website also hosts several short videos highlighting the development work done under the NDA government. On the other hand, the Congress runs a Rahul Gandhi WhatsApp group in which the leader is said to interact with people and respond to their queries. The circulation of WhatsApp information is monitored at the district level to ensure it reaches the masses and corrects the party's voter base. "Whichever political party has higher WhatsApp groups under its banner can communicate faster and better with the voters. It helps them to high-



light their achievements instantly with a large user base and influence the voters by drawing parallels with the opposition," Amitabh Tiwari, an election analyst and commentator, said. According to Tiwari, Facebook, once the most preferred platform for social media campaigning, has seen a downside due to many restrictions on advertisements

on political pages. **Post-pandemic boom in social media** After the COVID-19 pandemic, perspective towards social media as a tool of information significantly changed, Ankit Lal, founder of Politique Advisor and former IT Cell head of Aam Aadmi Party, said. "Many political parties now adopt a digi-

tal-first strategy for their poll campaigns to connect with the voters who heavily depend on social media to get information. Social media influencers have become another important medium through which parties try to influence the floating audience of those who do not vote but engage in consuming the narratives," he said.

### Social media influencers take the lead

In the last few months, several political leaders have appeared on YouTube channels of popular social media influencers to connect with the younger audience. BJP leaders like S Jaishankar, Smriti Irani, Piyush Goyal, and Rajeev Chandrasekhar have given interviews to podcaster Ranveer Allahabadia, who has over 7 million followers on YouTube.

# leisure



## MILLIE DISCLOSES HER DIETARY SHIFTS FOR DAMSEL ROLE

Actress Millie Bobby Brown has shared that she had to make changes in her diet for her role in *Damsel*. The actress revealed that she was forced to wear a very restrictive outfit while fighting dragons in the new dark fantasy film, so she couldn't eat too heavily to fit in the outfit, reports *Female First UK*.

## JAIL TERM FOR YEONG-SU IN SEXUAL MISCONDUCT CASE

Actor O Yeong-su, known for *Squid Game*, has been found guilty of sexual misconduct, receiving an eight-month suspended prison sentence. The 79-year-old was convicted of two sexual harassment charges. He's also mandated to attend a 40-hour sexual violence treatment programme.



### FORTUNE FORECAST

**GaneshSpeaks.com**  
accuracy • reliability • trust  
FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

**ARIES**  
Today you will have an eye for beautiful and outlandish things. There is a possibility that you may even contemplate starting a business related to these things. Ganesh feels, though, that you will not be able to reach any conclusion about it. But you will keep the option open.

**TAURUS**  
Today, you are likely to be more reckless than ever in splurging your hard earned money. Ganesh strongly advises you to leave your credit card at home today. Using it for making purchases will only make matters worse. Money wise, be very careful in your business dealings, about the commitments you make.

**GEMINI**  
You will feel physical and mental excitement and emotions today. You may take part in some competition and will seek to improve your self-esteem by performing physically in it. Your intellectual capacity will be on display in the work that you do, says Ganesh.

**CANCER**  
Lack of support from family members will disable your efforts. Children also disappoint you. Discard or difference of opinion in family is indicated. Beware of neighbours. Yet, says Ganesh, face circumstances with a smile.

**LEO**  
You want to make your personal relationships conflict free and hence will attempt to resolve the conflicts which are within you. You will need to adopt a compromising attitude in life. It is best to stay away from risky financial investments today. An event which will make you happy will occur at the end of the day, says Ganesh.

**VIRGO**  
Ganesh says today you will be highly motivated. Your creative talents and abilities set you apart as an excellent artist. Words will flow if you give vent to your creativity, and if you choose to sing or dance, you will be the focus of attention. Ganesh advises you to pursue the performing arts or writing as hobbies.

**LIBRA**  
Ganesh says the inner artist in you will come to the surface today and you will showcase your imagination powers too. You will be able to focus on topics of interest today. Those of you in the field of interest will find themselves moving ahead. There may be signing of beneficial legal deals today for you. Ganesh says today is going to be a very good and successful day for you.

**SCORPIO**  
Your account balance may suffer suddenly as you decide to loosen your purse strings. You are all set to splurge on your loved ones today, according to Ganesh. However, it is important to remember that the value of money is precious, and once spent it never returns; spend wisely.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Suddenly, you discover that you are fully dedicated to your family. Kith and kins form the crux of your life, says Ganesh. Showing your love and affection to your kids will give you a feeling of satisfaction. Spend some quality time with your partner!

**CAPRICORN**  
You can't bear the weight of the heavy work load any more. Very cleverly, you will complete your tasks and slowly but steadily you take the load off your shoulders, predicts Ganesh. Attentive and observant, you meticulously plan your actions and minimise the chances of errors.

**AQUARIUS**  
You are talented, hard working, confident and down to earth. These four characteristics are the pillars of success. Now, it is time build the building. Your curiosity and desire to achieve your goals will help you with it, feels Ganesh. In order to succeed, you may skip a 'quality check' of your output.

**PISCES**  
A reckless attitude is the root cause of any downfall. Ensure responsible behavior and actions at every step at your workplace, today, suggests Ganesh. Be alert and focused and you will be able to dodge any incoming trouble. Today is a day of materialization and the projects and other things that you have been working on since a long time will draw close to completion and begin to pay off.



## PC TO LEND HER VOICE IN DISNEYNATURE'S FILM

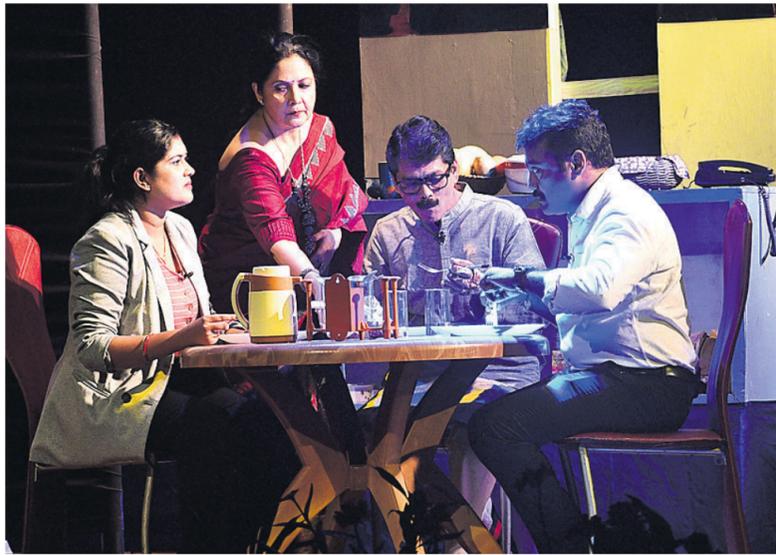
**Mumbai:** Priyanka Chopra, one of the leading actresses in Indian cinema, had transcended boundaries to become a global icon. Adding yet another accolade to her illustrious career, she is slated to lend her captivating voice to the upcoming film *Tiger* for the Disney-owned studio Disneynature.

In a press release issued by Disney, it has been unveiled that the *Dostana* actress will narrate the captivating story of *Tiger*, which delves into the intriguing world of one of our planet's most revered and charismatic creatures. The film is centred on the journey of Ambar, a young tigress nurturing her cubs in the legendary forests of India.

Expressing her excitement for the project, she shared, "It's just wonderful to be able to be a part of something so special and to tell the story of this magnificent animal that comes from my country—I was very honoured." Speaking about the relatability of the narrative, she added, "I have always loved tigers, and I feel a kinship with the female tiger—I feel very protective of my family. Ambar's journey is something I think every mom would really relate to."

*Tiger* is set to make its debut on Disney+ Hotstar on Earth Day, April 22, 2024.

## VAGDEVI THEATRE FEST 2024 CONCLUDES



The artistes of Vagdevi Literature Trust presented the Odia play *Chitra Pratima* at Bhanjakala Mandap, Bhubaneswar, Sunday, marking the festival's finale. Authored by Gourahari Das and directed by Pabitra Mohanty, the cast includes Mamata Tripathi, Shubhangi Harichandan, Pabitra Mohanty, and Rajesh Mohanty.



**'Nothing more beautiful than a confident woman'**

**Mumbai:** Actress Triptii Dimri, who turned showstopper for Shantnu & Nikhil at the Lakme Fashion Week, said that it was an honour for her to walk the ramp for the designer duo, whose latest collection projects women as confident individuals.

The *Animal* actress took to the stage on day four of the fashion gala, where the designers showcased their clothing line titled 'You'.

At the post-show press conference, Dimri said, "Collaborating with brothers Shantnu and Nikhil was an amazing experience. Being confident and being inherently powerful in their own beautiful version... There is nothing more beautiful than a confident woman, and I think this show stands for it. I felt confident in what I was wearing. It was truly an honour for me to be the showstopper."

She was dressed in a black lace-corset bodice, a long steel-grey figure-hugging sequined skirt, and a pair of black lace gloves. She kept her look minimal, with smokey eyes and no jewellery.

## Sara: It's our duty to promote our culture

**Mumbai:** Actress Sara Ali Khan has talked about her love for Indian wear and said that, as a notable person, it's an added responsibility to promote the culture at a fashion level.

In a conversation, the *Murder Mubarak* actress spoke about her fancy for Indian wear. The actress said, "Indian clothes are so incredible-

bly comfortable to wear on a daily basis. Their western version is co-ord sets, and the world seems to have really embraced that style too."

She added, "More than anything, as public figures, it is our duty to promote our culture at a fashion and clothing level as well, so that everyone else can get inspired and influenced."

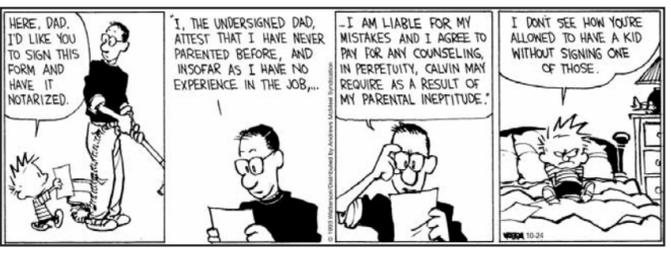
As a celebrity, fashion goes hand in glove with the profession. But in real life, she is not much of a diva and believes in keeping it simple. "I believe that comfort is fashion. What makes me feel good is what I will wear. I like to keep things simple, and that's why I love wearing simple kurtas," she concluded.



### PEANUTS



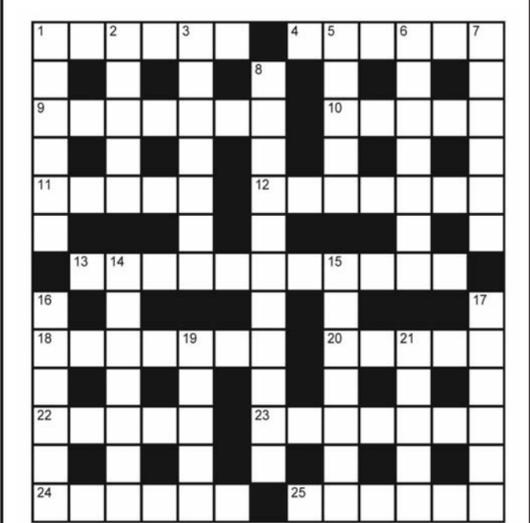
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### BREVITY



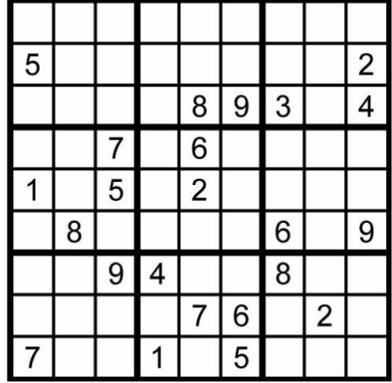
### FUN post CROSSWORD



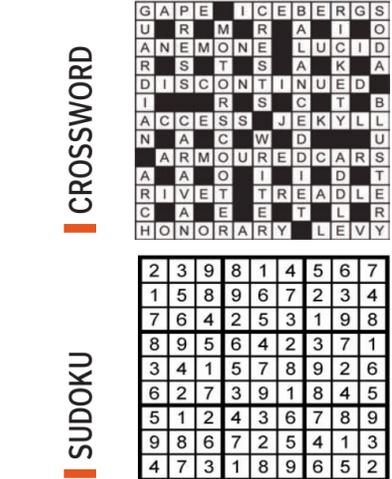
- Across**
- 1 Manor
  - 4 Astonish
  - 9 Shake
  - 10 Vessel part
  - 11 Bracelet site
  - 12 Furry-footed rodent
  - 13 Proceeding with vigour (2,4,5)
  - 18 Arctic deer
  - 20 Numbers game
  - 22 Hit the road
  - 23 Paris Hilton, e.g.
  - 24 Fashionable and elegant
  - 25 Obstruct
  - 5 Scrapbook
  - 6 Monster number
  - 7 Nuclear, maybe
  - 8 Sidesplitters
  - 14 Shangri-la
  - 15 One royal
  - 16 Zodiac symbol
  - 17 Hair gel
  - 19 Recess
  - 21 Motif

### SUDOKU

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, fill in the boxes in such a manner that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any.



### SOLUTIONS



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

# downtown

## Plea in SC for disclosure of bond data from '18 to '19

The fresh petition filed by Citizen's Rights Trust has submitted that 9,159 bonds worth ₹4,002 crore have been sold between March 2018 and April 2019 which should also be disclosed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 17: A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking disclosure of the details of electoral bonds sold from March 1, 2018, to April 11, 2019, saying voters are entitled to know funding to political parties for the entire period since the start of the scheme.

In a landmark verdict last month, the top court scrapped the Centre's electoral bonds scheme that allowed anonymous political funding calling it "unconstitutional" and ordered the State Bank of India (SBI), the authorised financial institution under the scheme, to submit the details of the bonds purchased from April 12, 2019 to February 15, 2024 to the Election Commission of India (ECI).

A new application, filed by Citizen's Rights Trust, has submitted that 9,159 bonds worth ₹4,002 crore have been sold between March 2018 and April 2019 which should also be disclosed.

The petition seeks a direction to the SBI to share the details of electoral bonds sold and redeemed from March 1, 2018, to April 11, 2019, including the alphanumeric number, date of purchase, denomination, names



of donors and parties to the ECI. "It is submitted that once the entire Electoral Bond Scheme is held to be violative of Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, the citizens are entitled to know the details of the donor and donee of the entire period from March 2018 onwards (the date when the scheme became functional). The data available on the platform of the Election Commission represents only 76 per cent of the total bonds and the voters are not aware of the details of the remaining 24 per cent of the Electoral Bonds," the plea said.

The association, represented through senior advocate Vijay Hansaria and advocate Sneha Kalita, submitted that the cut-off date of April 12, 2019, is relevant only for furnishing information by political parties to the Election Commission as an interim arrangement when the matter was sub-judice before the apex court.

"Once, this court, in the final judgement and order dated February 15, 2024, has struck down the entire Electoral Bond Scheme and the amendments to the Representation of the People Act, 1951, the Companies Act, 2013 and the Income Tax Act, 1961 by the Finance Act, 2017, the voters are entitled to know the funding to the political parties by the Electoral Bond for the entire period," it said.

While the SBI was directed to submit the details of electoral bonds purchased from April 12, 2019, to February 15, 2024, to the ECI by March 6, the bank moved the top court seeking an extension of time till June 30 to furnish the details. However, the Supreme Court turned down the petition and ordered it to disclose the details by the close of business hours March 12.

The ECI was directed to publish the information shared by the bank on its official website by 5 pm March 15 which it did.

## One more nabbed in gun-running racket

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, March 17: Jagatpur police arrested another history-sheeter in connection with an illegal gun-running case, Sunday.

The accused was identified as Priyabrata Samal, 32, alias Pinku of Gobindprasad under Sadar police limits in Dhenkanal district. A firearm and a car (OD-05-AF-9121) were seized from him. Pinku is a notorious history-sheeter and has several cases registered against him in Sadar police station of Dhenkanal.

He is a close associate of Pyrimohan Dash, 42, alias Pintu, who was arrested March 11, along with two others, for his involvement in the illegal gun running racket. Pinku had received a country made revolver from the Pintu, police said.

## Brothers held for duping govt officials

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 17: The Special Task Force (STF) of Odisha Police Sunday claimed to have arrested two brothers on charges of duping over 300 government officials, by impersonating Enforcement Directorate (ED) officers.

Tarinisen Mohapatra, 30, and Brahmashankar Mohapatra, 27, were arrested by the Special Task Force (STF) of the state police from their home in Dhenkanal town, Saturday, they said. The sleuths also seized one laptop, one desktop, five cell-phones, bank passbook and cheque book, fake identity cards and 17 ATM-cum-debit cards.

The brothers borrowed a huge amount of money and were not being able to repay the lenders. So, they hatched a plan to cheat



## LOK ADALAT

The First National Lok Adalat was held on the premises of Orissa High Court in Cuttack, Sunday. A total of 133 cases were disposed of during the hearing.

## POLITICKLE by MANJUL



government employees, police said. Sources in the Crime Branch said the duo was operating from Ranchi, where they ran a chain of NGOs named as "Upakar".

Addressing the media, STF SP KK Panigrahi said elder brother Tarinisen is a graduate in Commerce while the younger Brahma Shankar is a BCA dropout. Prior to the crime, the duo became well-versed with the ED's actions (in-

cluding arrests and raids) in today's time. For this, they studied and analyzed huge volumes of news reports.

About their modus operandi, Panigrahi stated the duo used to send the text message: "This side Sanjaya Mishra, Director of Enforcement Department ... My investigation officer trying to connect you but you did not attend the call. Make an instant call. It's very urgent else I can't control the vigilance", particularly

when the government officials did not receive their phone calls.

Adding further, Panigrahi said the duo teamed up to produce fake documents and ID cards, introducing them as ED officials. Following the payments, the duo would send fabricated clearance letters to the concerned government officials, it added.

So far, the sleuths have tracked down online transaction receipts of more than ₹16 lakh from both brothers, said an official. The fraudsters pulled off the heist by introducing themselves as Additional Director of ED, Bhubaneswar from top brass officials, including officials of tehsil, RTO and collectorate, it added.

The duo has been booked under Sections 419, 420, 384, 388, 506, 120 (B), and produced before a local court.

## KHURDA COLLECTOR REVIEWS ELECTION PREPARATIONS

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 17: Following the Election Commission's announcement of dates for simultaneous polls in the state, Khurda collector Chanchal Rana Sunday took review of the preparations and directed officials to strictly implement the Model Code of Conduct (MCC).

Speaking at a press conference Rana said 524 Pink booths, 139 women-led booths, 30 youth booths and 8 PwD booths will be set up in the district for the polls. A total of 13,782 polling personnel have been appointed for the purpose and their training is in progress as per the venues.

He said postal ballot facility will be extended to PwD persons, senior citizens above the age of 85, absentee voters (through home voting), polling personnel, police personnel and officers engaged in election related duties.

The Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha constituency, which falls in the district, consists of Jaydev, Bhubaneswar (Central), Bhubaneswar (North), Ekamra, Jatni, Begunia and Khurda Assembly segments.

The notification for nominations will be issued April 29 and the process of submitting nomination papers will start May 6. Similarly, the nomination papers will be verified May 7 and the last date for withdrawal of nomination papers has been fixed May 9. The counting of votes will be held June 4 along with the rest of the country.

The district has a total of 18,65,455 electorates.



FOR LORD'S BLESSINGS: Actor Dipika Chikhlia, known for playing the role of Sita in Ramanand Sagar's television serial 'Ramayan' after having darshan of the sibling deities at Srimandir, in Puri, Sunday

## Western Odisha farmers hold key to success in twin polls

In the 2019 general elections, all five western Odisha Lok Sabha seats were secured by the opposition BJP, while the ruling BJD, led by Naveen Patnaik, failed to secure a single seat in this agriculturally rich region

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 17: With the Election Commission of India (ECI) unveiling the dates for the simultaneous Lok Sabha and Odisha Assembly elections, the spotlight shifts to farmers of the western region, whose votes hold significant sway over at least five parliamentary constituencies and 35 Vidhan Sabha seats.

In Odisha, which comprises 21 Lok Sabha seats and 147 Assembly segments, elections are scheduled to be held in four phases May 13, May 20, May 25, and June 1.

Historically, the farmers of the western region, once a stronghold of the Congress, have wielded considerable electoral influence by voting en masse.

In the 2019 general elections, all five western Odisha Lok Sabha seats were secured by the opposition BJP, while the ruling BJD, led by Naveen Patnaik, failed to secure a single seat in this agriculturally rich region, often referred to as the 'Anna datas' (providers of food) region, with areas like Bargarh and Kalahandi being prominent rice-producing hubs.

Out of the eight seats won by the BJP in the state in 2019, the party secured victories in all five Lok Sabha seats in the western region, including Sambalpur, Bargarh, Bolangir, Kalahandi, and Sundargarh. The remaining three seats were won in northern Odisha's Balasore and Mayurbhanj, as well as the coastal belt's Bhubaneswar.

However, despite the BJP's



success in the Lok Sabha elections, the people of the region predominantly favoured Naveen's BJD in the Assembly polls.

Out of the 35 Assembly segments within these five western LS constituencies, BJP candidates only managed to secure victories in eight, with the majority going in favour of the BJD. The Congress also secured victories in three assembly segments in the western region.

Recognising the significance of farmers in the western region and aiming to regain their

support, the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) has promised various agricultural incentives in its recently released election manifesto.

These include farm loan waivers, a guaranteed minimum support price (MSP) of ₹3,000 per quintal of paddy, pensions for farmers, allowances for agricultural workers, complete GST withdrawal on agricultural products, among others.

OPCC president Sarat Pattanayak emphasised the importance of farmers in the rural

economy and pledged support to them if the Congress comes to power after the 2024 elections.

"Farmers are the backbone of rural economy and the Congress will do everything possible for the 'Anna Datas' if it comes to power after 2024 elections," Pattanayak, who also hails from Bolangir district, a part of the western region, said.

On the other hand, the ruling BJD, which has governed the state since 2000, has not yet released its election manifesto but claims to have implemented several schemes for the welfare of farmers.

Notably, initiatives like Indravati Irrigation project and the recently launched Lower Suktel irrigation project aim to benefit farmers in regions like Kalahandi and Bolangir. Additionally, the BJD government has undertaken significant water infrastructure projects in various districts, further emphasising its commitment to agricultural development.

The BJP, meanwhile, has been appealing to farmers in the re-

gion through schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, particularly crucial for the drought-prone KBK (Kalahandi-Bolangir-Koraput) region.

Pradip Purohit, a BJP leader and former MLA, asserted that the farmers of the western region strongly support the saffron party, citing confidence in Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Despite agriculture being the primary livelihood for 70 per cent of the state's population, farmers in western Odisha have been notably organised in articulating their concerns to the government, unlike their counterparts in other parts of the state.

While the BJD has a stronghold in coastal and central Odisha, winning 12 Lok Sabha seats in 2019, the BJP and Congress have also secured victories in different regions, indicating a three-way competition as the election dates approach, with all parties vying for the support of the crucial farming community.



## No public grievance hearings due to polls

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 17: The district administrations were asked by the Odisha government to pause the weekly public grievance hearings till the elections are complete.

In a letter to Collectors and District Magistrates, Chief Secretary PK Jena said the direction was given as the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) has come into force with the announcement of elections.

Odisha will vote for its 147-member Assembly and 21 Lok Sabha seats, simultaneously, in four phases. The polling will be held May 13, May 20, May 25 and June 1.

"It is, therefore, directed that the joint hearing of public grievances by the Collector & DMs along with the SPs of the districts have been adjourned till the end of the election process. This

is to be treated as extremely urgent," Jena said in the letter sent Saturday.

The Grievance Cell at the Chief Minister's Office has also been closed for the same reason, an official statement said.

Meanwhile, the civic bodies have started removing hoardings and banners put up by different political parties.

Hoardings put up by the government with photos of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik are also being removed, officials said.

# Heavy rain likely in next 48 hours: IMD

Thunderstorm with lightning and hail accompanied with gusty surface wind speed reaching 40-50 kmph is also likely at one or two places in state



Kandhamal. Thunderstorm with lightning accompanied with gusty surface wind speed reaching 30-40 kmph may also occur at one or two places in Koraput, Ganjam, Gajapati, Puri, and Jagatsinghpur districts.

IMD Scientist Uma Shankar Das said a low-pressure has been formed over the Bay of Bengal (BoB), which would fetch moisture and wind in the surface temperature. This would lead into light shower (drizzle) in several parts of Odisha, over the next 24 hours.

Furthermore, Das stated the temperature would see a slight dip of 3-5 degrees, resulting immediate respite from the humid temperature.

People have been advised to keep a watch on the weather and move to safer places accordingly. They have been asked to take shelter in pukka structures and avoid trees and also move away from electric poles and wires. Farming operations should be temporarily suspended during worsening of weather conditions. Farmers have advised to stake plants with stems with a string or twist-ties to build support, the weather agency said in an advisory.

districts of Interior Odisha, and normal at elsewhere over the districts of Odisha."

Heavy rainfall may occur at one or two places in Dhenkanal, Cuttack, Nayagarh, Kandhamal, Ganjam, and Khurda districts March 19. Thunderstorm with lightning and hail accompanied with gusty surface wind speed reaching 40-50 kmph is also likely at one or two places in Boudh, Kandhamal, Kalahandi, Bolangir, Rayagada, Nabarangpur, Angul, Nayagarh, and Dhenkanal, and Khurda districts.

On March 20, heavy rainfall is likely at one or two places in Cuttack, Nayagarh, Khurda, and



PAKHALA DIBAS PREP: People savouring 'Pakhala', a lip-smacking Odia dish prepared with fermented rice, at a place near Maachhua Bazar in Cuttack, Sunday

## UU to hold workshop for further NAAC ranking

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

**Bhubaneswar, March 17:** With the objective of getting A++ rating from National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), Utkal University will organise a one day workshop here, Monday.

The university authorities will discuss issues regarding the NAAC accreditation and re-accreditation, implementation of National Education Policy (NEP)-2020 and reformation of examination system through online mode among others.

The meeting will have presence

of principals of several colleges of Khurda and other districts colleges. Utkal University VC Sabita Acharya and PG council Chairperson Navanita Rath will also grace the occasion.

Acharya said, "We had appealed to the NAAC for re-evaluation after our rating dropped. As expected, they reevaluated it and we got our A+ rating back last year. Now our main aim will be to get A++ rating and also to improve the infrastructure of the university."

Recently, Ravenshaw University became the first public university of the state to be



accorded A++ grade by National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC).

Earlier, Utkal University was dropped from A+ to A in May 2023 as it scored 3.16 CGPA in the 3rd

cycle of accreditation. It had secured A+ grade with 3.53 CGPA in 2016.

NAAC has been set up to facilitate volunteering institutions to assess their performance vis-a-vis set parameters and a process that provides space for participation of the institution.

NAAC uses several indicators as its criteria to assess the grade of higher educational institutions such as curricular aspects, teaching, learning and evaluation, research, infrastructure and learning resources, and institutional values among others.

## Regular service of 3rd Vande Bharat begins

**Bhubaneswar:** Regular Service of Bhubaneswar - Visakhapatnam - Bhubaneswar Vande Bharat Express commenced Sunday from both sides. The train will run daily except Monday. It will leave Bhubaneswar 5:15am and from Visakhapatnam it will leave 3:30pm. From Bhubaneswar, the Express will travel through Khurda Road, Balugaon, Berhampur, Ichapuram, Palasa, Srikakulam road, Vizianagram and will end at Visakhapatnam.

## DPS Kalinga observes Prep Graduation Day



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, March 17:** The DPS Kalinga observed its Prep Graduation Day Saturday to mark the end of the Pre Primary Academic Session 2023-24.

An event organised on this occasion was attended by social activist and renowned storyteller Meera Das as the chief guest.

She regaled the audience with short stories and anecdotes reinstating the importance of storytelling and its impact on their young minds. Das stressed on the significance of love, support and encouragement without judgment for each child.

Principal Anuradha Rakshit,

in her address, talked about the importance of the formative years of young children where they should be given space to dream big and explore their potential.

The programme commenced with 'Abhivadan - an Odissi dance recital', followed by a melodious English Choir and a captivating 'Oriental Dance from the Far East'.

The young students enthralled the audience with their spunk and energy. Addressing the gathering, Pro-Vice Chairperson Mala Mishra underlined the role of family especially grandparents in shaping minds of children and keeping them rooted to their traditions and values.

## TSF transforms Kendudihi into green village

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

**Bhubaneswar/Joda, March 17:** In a significant stride towards sustainable energy and community development, Tata Steel Foundation (TSF) has transformed Kendudihi, situated in the Joda block of Keonjhar district, into a solar-powered village.

Under this transformative initiative, all the 70 households of the village are now equipped with four bulbs, one table fan, and charging equipment, ensuring access to clean and renewable energy sources.

The inauguration ceremony, graced by Dhanraj Hanumant Dhamdhare, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Keonjhar, marked a pivotal moment for Kendudihi's residents.

Dipak Behera, Chief, Kalmang and Gandhalpada Project, Tata Steel, Ranjan Kalo, Range Officer, Barbil Range, Kavindra Naik, Chairman, Joda Block, Bidyadhar Naik, Sarpanch,



Guali gram panchayat, ward members of Kendudihi and TSF representatives, were also present on the occasion, emphasising the collaborative effort driving this initiative forward.

Commending TSF's commitment to sustainable solutions, Dhanraj lauded the initiative as a beacon of progress for the region.

As part of the initiative's scope, 15 street lights will illuminate Kendudihi, enhancing safety and accessibility for all residents. Additionally, five water distribution points, boasting a 5,000-litre capacity overhead

tank, aims to alleviate water scarcity issues in the area.

Mani Munda, a resident of Kendudihi village highlighted the profound impact of TSF's initiative, remarking, "Tata Steel Foundation's intervention has turned our village into an exemplary community, fulfilling our long-standing aspirations. With these solar lights, our farmlands are shielded from previous elephant intrusions."

Similarly, Prafulla Naik of the same village emphasised the newfound opportunities brought forth by the initiative.

## Women architects feted

**Bhubaneswar:** The Indian Institute of Architects (IIA), Odisha Chapter organised an event here Sunday to acknowledge the state's women architects and their contributions in the field of architecture and design. Dignitaries including ST & SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare Commissioner-cum-Secretary Roopa Roshan Sahoo and State Project Director of the Odisha Adarsh Vidyalaya Sangathan Yamini Sarangi graced the occasion. The highlight of the event was a captivating theme-based fashion show titled "Naari - Women's Journey through the Ages." The Chapter felicitated senior women architects, including Bharati Mohapatra, Namita Mohapatra, and A Subhalaxmi Pattajoshi acknowledging their exemplary leadership and contributions to the profession.



## Specially-abled women get electronic hands



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, March 17:** Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC) in collaboration with Red Swastik Society, an NGO, and Inali Foundation distributed for the first time 40 electronic prosthetic hands to differently-abled women in the state.

The prosthetic hands were given away to women during an event organised at Gita Govinda Bhawan, here, Saturday.

The guests present on this occasion included OMC Director (HR) Alok Pal, chartered accountants Rajiv Sahu and Sharat Chandra Bhadra, Z Estate MD Tapan Kumar Mohanty, social worker Namrata Chadha, and Red Swastik Society regional president Bijoy Acharya.

Through the joint efforts of the Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (SSEPD) department and Red Swastik Society, the prosthetic hands were provided to the needy women.

Red Swastik Society secretary Debasish Patnaik said that the society would take up various programmes in future towards social cause. In the event, a number of women who contributed significantly in various fields were felicitated.

# IIT Guwahati researchers explore mystery of dark matter

**R**esearchers at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati in collaboration with international scientists have proposed a novel scenario to explain the matter-antimatter imbalance in the Universe.

A study by the researchers sheds light on one of the long-standing mysteries in the field of cosmology surrounding dark matter and Baryon Asymmetry in the Universe (BAU). The research which has been funded by the Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB), has been published in Physical Review D.

According to officials, only about five per cent of the Universe comprises visible or baryonic matter, such as stars and galaxies. The remaining approximately five times this visible matter is composed of dark matter, a substance that does

not emit light. While the origin of dark matter remains elusive, visible matter is known to consist of baryons (matter) and a minimal amount of antibaryons (antimatter).

"The Universe was expected to have an equal amount of matter and antimatter in the beginning. Any initial imbalance should have been rectified during the rapid expansion phase known as inflation. But today we observe surplus matter. This mystery, known as the baryon asymmetry in the Universe (BAU) contradicts our predictions and remains unsolved, challenging our understanding of the early Universe," said Debasish Borah, Associate Professor, department of Physics, IIT Guwahati.

Borah, who led the research, said the fact that neither the mystery of dark matter nor the BAU puzzle can be solved using



the standard model of particle physics, challenged the researchers to go beyond the standard model.

"We have proposed a scenario

where baryon asymmetry arises from the decay of dark matter, indicating a common origin. While dark matter is traditionally considered stable over cos-

**The mystery, known as the baryon asymmetry in the Universe (BAU) contradicts our predictions and remains unsolved, challenging our understanding of the early Universe**

DEBASISH BORAH, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, IIT GUWAHATI

mological timescales, we are proposing the possibility of its decay in the early Universe due to specific temperature-induced corrections to its mass, making its decay energetically feasible," he said.

International researchers include Arnab Dasgupta from University of Pittsburgh, Matthew Knauss from the High Energy Theory Group at William and Mary university in the US and Rishav Roshan from Kyungpook National University in South Korea.

"In our model of the early Universe, dark matter transforms into regular matter due to temperature effects, generating an imbalance between matter and antimatter. We first propose a unique type of dark matter, a singlet fermion, influenced by a scalar field. The associated scalar field may act as inflation during the Universe's early expansion or can lead to a strong first order phase transition," Borah said.

"Due to energetically feasible decay in the early Universe, dark matter partially decays into ordinary matter creating the BAU. As the Universe cools, dark matter stabilises, leaving a residue observed as dark matter today. This process not only explains dark matter but also contributes to the creation of visible matter, affecting matter-antimatter asymmetry," he added.

PTI

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**FLAG MARCH:** CRPF jawans and police personnel conducting a flag march at Sohela in Bargarh district ahead of the upcoming general elections 2024, Sunday  
OP PHOTO

# Centre halts instalment over non-branding of PMAY houses

Union Finance Ministry has alleged that guidelines for construction of PMAY houses have been completely violated in the state

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Jajpur, March 17:** Over 1 lakh people residing in urban areas of the state do not have a pucca house to live in. The Centre sponsored Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) is one among the many housing schemes launched by the Centre and the state government to facilitate access to affordable housing for the low and moderate income residents in the country.

However, what has proved a dampener is that the Centre has reportedly stopped payment of second phase installment of funds for houses constructed under PMAY. This has happened due to non-branding of the details of the beneficiary on the constructed house in alleged violation of guidelines. It is apprehended that the second phase installment of the funds may not be available to the beneficiaries in future.

Assistant director Anjali Maurya of Union Finance Ministry has issued an office memorandum to the state Principal Secretary, Finance Vishal Kumar Dev in this regard, March 12, 2024. On receipt of the memorandum, Dev has asked the additional chief secretary of Housing and Urban Development department to take necessary steps in this regard.

Accordingly, Joint Secretary Mayadhar Pattayat of state Housing and Urban Development



department has written a letter (No-431) dated March 14, 2024 to all municipal commissioners and executive officers asking them to put on the logo and other work details of the house constructed under PMAY on the basis of the guidelines. The letter also directs them to sensitise the beneficiaries in this regard.

According to the details available by March 2023, 1,778 houses have been provided to the beneficiaries from 2009-2015 under 'Basic Service to Urban Poor' scheme. Bhubaneswar and Puri urban areas have been included and ₹46.71 crores spent under this scheme.

Similarly, 11,296 houses have been provided under Integrated Housing Slum Development programme at an expenditure of 171.72 crore in between 2009 to 2015.

Moreover, 4,773 houses at an expenditure of ₹359 crore have been provided under Rajiv Awas Yojana in between 2013 to 2022.

As many as 61,091 houses have been provided at an expenditure of ₹1,459 crore in all 114 urban areas of the state under

PMAY in between 2015 to 2022. Meanwhile, details are being collected in all civic body areas to provide houses to the rest of the people in the urban areas of the state.

A plan outlay of ₹317.76 crore has been made for PMAY in the last Budget. The Union Finance Ministry has alleged that guidelines for construction of PMAY houses have been completely violated in the state.

The Central government has issued an office memorandum to the state government alleging that the houses constructed under PMAY do not have the logo and other details branded on the walls, and therefore it has stopped releasing the second phase installment of funds. The memorandum also mentions that the second phase installment of funds will be released only after submission of compliance report. The state government, however, has rejected the allegations which the Finance Ministry has mentioned in the memorandum.

# Mystery shrouds minor girl's death

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Malkangiri, March 17:** A Class-VI girl died under mysterious circumstances at a private hostel in MV-7 village under Sadar block of Malkangiri district, Sunday.

The girl hailing from MPV-130 village was staying at a private hostel. Tension prevailed after family members cried foul over her death and termed it as murder while hostel authorities rejected the charge and termed it as suicide.

As per reports, the hostel authorities informed the family members that their daughter's health condition was critical and admitted her to the district headquarters hospital. However, when they reached the hospital, they were told that she died.

Family members said that they noticed bruises and other stains on her body and demanded a proper investigation into her death to unravel the truth.

They alleged that their daughter had informed them about some problems in the hostel and was reluctant to go back. However, they made her return to the hostel and concentrate on her studies. Meanwhile, police have sent the body for post-mortem and launched an investigation.

# Truck owners call for strike over proposed railway line



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Keonjhar, March 17:** The Keonjhar District Truck Owners' Association has called a 24-hour shutdown and economic blockade of Keonjhar Monday to protest against the connection of the railway siding from the Gandhamardan mine at Suakati to Gohaldih railway siding under Sadar block. On this occasion, one of the truck owners Deepikant Patnaik clarified and answered the questions of the journalists in a press conference held at the union office Sunday.

He said that the association has taken such an extreme decision after the railway authorities failed to fulfill their demand. If the railway line is connected, thousands of truck owners who depend on trucks in Keonjhar district and about 3 lakh people directly and indirectly related to it will be affected. Such a decision of the Ministry of Railways will crush the truck business, while truck business is a source of income for thousands of educated unemployed people of Keonjhar district, he said.

The economy of Keonjhar has been completely destroyed due

to the 3-year suspension of vehicles seen in the past. Therefore, he said that today's movement is being made about it so that it does not happen again. Many associations and organisations of Keonjhar district extend their support to us. The agitation will be continued in all areas within the coming days until the demands are fulfilled, he further said. On that day the truckers will stage obstruction rail movement, he said.

Essential services including ambulance services, fire trucks, milk trucks, school and college examinations will not be stopped. It has been revealed that railway siding from Gandhamardan iron ore mine in Suakati managed by Odisha Mining Corporation has been arranged in the budget of 20 crore rupees for 12.6 km railway in the year 2023-24, while another 20 crore has been approved in the current Budget i.e. 2024-25. Out of ₹189 crore 93 lakh Budget, so far ₹20 crore rupees have been allocated in the current budget sources said. Due to this movement, the Railways and the state government have suffered a huge revenue loss.

# Man electrocuted

**Jaleswar:** In a tragic incident, a 42-year-old man identified as Purushottam Jena died after he came in contact with a snapped live wire while fishing in a pond near Kalyanpur village under this police limit in Balasore district Sunday morning. According to reports, a live wire had snapped near the pond owing to nor'wester triggered heavy rain Saturday afternoon. Purushottam went fishing to the pond Sunday morning and accidentally came in contact with the live wire and got electrocuted.

# Malkangiri tribal girl featured in Forbes

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Malkangiri, March 17:** Jayanti Buruda, a tribal woman journalist and social worker from Malkangiri district, has made it to the 2024 Forbes India W-Power list featuring India's top 23 self-made women.

Jayanti, the only Odia in the list, has overcome many hurdles in her journey as a journalist in tribal dominated remote Malkangiri district to being featured in Forbes. She expressed surprise and happiness that she has figured in Forbes magazine.

Being the first woman journalist of her district and also the first tribal girl to receive a fellowship from NWMI, Jayanti



imparts training to tribal women of her district on journalistic practices and technology so that every news of the remote area

reaches everyone. She has carved a niche as a social worker by founding organisations like Jungle Rani and Bada Didi

Union that work on girls' education and sexual and reproductive health.

She started Bada Didi Union in 2017 with about 20 educated young women of her area. They first started holding awareness camps among young women about menstrual problems and the use of sanitary pads by going door to door in various villages of Banda Ghati. As sanitary pads were not available in the interior villages, Jayanti started distributing sanitary pads from house to house with the help of the public.

Later, she started Jungle Rani, a social media-based news platform which is managed by 50 tribal women from all seven blocks of Malkangiri.

# ITI students create giant fish sculpture from plastic waste

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Berhampur, March 17:** Students of the state government-run Industrial Training Institute (ITI) Berhampur have made a giant fish sculpture from plastic waste with an aim to reduce plastic pollution.

A 30-foot high and 1,500 kg heavy fish sculpture was made by the students using iron scraps. Around 20,000 used plastic bottles of different sizes were collected by students, mostly from seashores. After filling, the weight of the sculpture was around 1,500 kg, said Rajat Panigrahy, Principal, ITI Berhampur.

The sculpture was installed near the institute's campus for public view and to educate the people about plastic pollution with the objective of 'Swachhata Hi Seva', he said.

"We have created this unique sculpture with the objectives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). This



emphasises the crucial need to conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources, by preventing thousands of plastic bottles from entering landfills or potentially ending up in the oceans," said the principal.

He said plastic pollution is a major threat to aquatic ecosystems. Plastic debris entangles and harms marine life,

disrupts food chains and pollutes the delicate ocean environment. By effectively up-cycling plastic bottles into an impactful art installation, the institute creates awareness about this critical issue, he added.

On Gandhi Jayanti, last year, the institute unveiled a 23-foot tall elephant sculpture from 30,000 used plastic bottles, which won appreciation from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

Earlier, the students of the institute had made sculptures like Dashavatar (10 incarnations of Lord Vishnu), Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji Subash Chandra Bose and former Odisha chief minister Biju Patnaik by using the discarded materials.

All these sculptures have been installed in its open scrap park.

They had also made an idol of Sri Ganesh by using automobile scraps, which was installed in a park of the Berhampur Municipal Corporation (BeMC).

# Parents steal minor girl's body from morgue to resurrect her

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Rourkela, March 17:** In a bizarre incident, family members of a minor girl who died from snakebite Saturday forcibly took her body from the morgue of a hospital here by breaking open the main door lock as they 'believed' she will be resurrected in 21 days through sorcery.

As per reports, Sohani Singh, daughter of Devraj Singh, was bitten by a poisonous snake at Sonaparbat near Fertiliser Township, Saturday evening. The parents brought the kid to the Rourkela Government Hospital (RGH) for treatment where the doctors pronounced her dead.

The hospital authorities shifted the body to the morgue. However, the deceased girl's mother was not ready to accept the death. She was adamant that she would be alive after 21 days through sorcery.

At around 8pm Saturday, the parents of the deceased girl broke open the lock of the morgue and took away her body



and left for their home.

When the hospital authorities discovered that the body was missing Sunday morning, they informed Tangarpalli police about the incident. For the police, the issue was sensitive as the girl was a tribal. They held discussions with some influential people of the region and finally managed to persuade the parents to leave the body.

The body was brought back to RGH and later post-mortem was done. Speaking about the incident, Tangarpalli IIC Rameswar Singh said, "We finally got the body and handed it over to post-mortem."

# We never say no to customers: Rath

Fast Communication is one of the leading advertising outfit having its operations and offices in major cities of India. Evolved with the core ethos of optimising clients' brand building initiatives, the agency has grown with its clients and has made rapid strides since its inception in 2006. The entrepreneur behind this organisation, Trinayan Rath, proprietor of Fast Communication, started his journey as a journalist but today, with his efforts and dedication he has made his mark in the advertising industry. In an interview with Orissa POST, Rath shares his entrepreneurial journey. Excerpts...



■ **What is the role of advertising agency in Odisha market?**

■ Advertising agencies have significant role in Odisha market. Even as the number of advertisements is increasing day by day, the demand of established advertising agencies in the market is also increasing in proportion. As quality service is given more importance these days, the position of the organisation has to be strengthened by prioritising brand establishment.

■ **What makes your brand unique in the market?**

■ While there are many advertising agencies in the market, we prefer to show our work rather than expecting the client to opt for us. We never say 'no' to customers and make sure they are always satisfied with our work. We always give priority to providing quality service and meeting the needs of the customers.

■ **How was your transition from media sector to media management?**

■ In the 1990s, Odisha media was relatively underdeveloped. At that time, I completed my higher education in journalism from IGNOU.

Then I started working as a representative in a newspaper at primary stage. Because of an opportunity lined up with my passion I started working in media management (advertising work) in 2009 after working for 15 years in both newspaper and television world.

■ **Does the brand have any business expansion plans?**

■ In business, reputation and presence act like two sides of a coin. Accordingly, there is a need for business expansion. Currently we have a brand presence in major markets like Odisha, Kolkata, Delhi, Guwahati, Jaipur, Chennai and

Hyderabad, while we are planning to expand our branches in cities like Mumbai and Bangalore in the coming days.

■ **As an entrepreneur, what is your suggestion for the aspiring youth?**

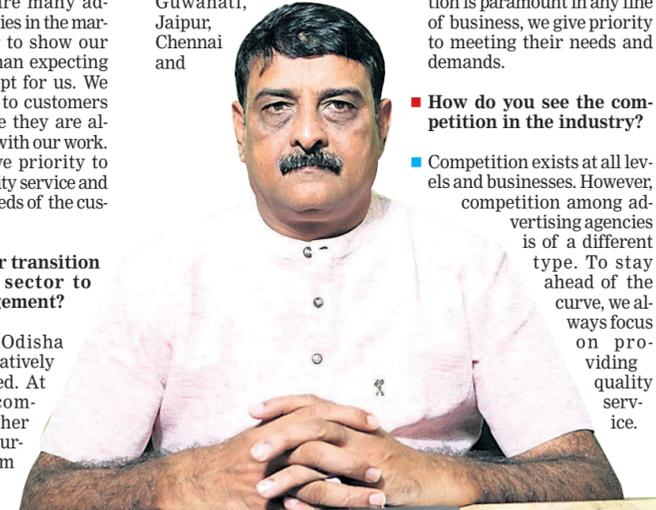
■ Today's youth lacks tolerance and patience. As this sector carries out responsible and important work, we need to be prepared accordingly and efficiently. Also there is a need for experienced human resources.

■ **How important is customer satisfaction?**

■ While the customer satisfaction is paramount in any line of business, we give priority to meeting their needs and demands.

■ **How do you see the competition in the industry?**

■ Competition exists at all levels and businesses. However, competition among advertising agencies is of a different type. To stay ahead of the curve, we always focus on providing quality service.





True knowledge is not attained by thinking. It is what you are; it is what you become.

SRI AUROBINDO



## Clear The Cloud

After “wilful disobedience” of the Supreme Court’s historic order, the State Bank of India (SBI) has submitted incomplete data on the electoral bonds to the Election Commission of India (ECI), an act for which the bank got a rap on the knuckles from the Apex Court. The bank was asked to provide the number unique to each electoral bond that would disclose the link between the buyer and the recipient political party. At whose behest the SBI has got the audacity to frequently disregard the top court’s orders is anybody’s guess.

The release of the electoral bonds data by the ECI acting on the Supreme Court’s order, meanwhile, has opened a Pandora’s Box. Whatever data has been made public so far is so replete with opacity that a closer scrutiny is in the order. According to an analysis conducted by the Project Electoral Bond, a number of companies have purchased electoral bonds following probe from various Central agencies including the Enforcement Directorate (ED), the Income Tax Department (IT Dept), the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), and the Goods and Service Tax (GST) authorities. Among them are prominent companies featured in the top five donors list, such as Future Gaming and Hotel Services, Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Ltd, and Yashoda Super Specialty Hospital.

A total of 43 newly established companies, founded in 2018 or later, have collectively purchased electoral bonds amounting more than Rs 384.5 crore. Among these, four companies founded in 2023 in Hyderabad, acquired bonds worth millions of rupees shortly after their establishment. Additionally, nine companies formed in 2020 and eleven companies set up in 2021 during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic managed to procure bonds amounting to nearly Rs 100 crore within just one or two years of their inception.

Upon examining the list of companies that bought electoral bonds, it has come to light that at least 19 of them were classified as ‘high risk’ by the Ministry of Finance for breaching regulations outlined under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). These companies collectively bought electoral bonds amounting to a staggering Rs 2,717 crore. Sixteen of these companies were based in Kolkata, with some even located in areas such as Lal Bazar, infamous for housing shell companies.

Since the release of the data, there has been a significant amount of public interest in the identities of bond purchasers, the amounts they purchased, and the dates of their purchases. This information has uncovered possible quid pro quo, as anticipated. However, voters are still unaware of the individuals who bought electoral bonds amounting more than Rs 4,000 crore before April 12, 2019.

In this regard, a plea was submitted in the Supreme Court on 17 March asking for transparency regarding the sale of electoral bonds during the period from March 1, 2018, to April 11, 2019. The plea argues that voters have the right to know where political parties are receiving their funding from since the inception of the now-scraped electoral bonds scheme. The petition, filed by Citizen’s Rights Trust, reveals that a total of 9,159 bonds amounting to Rs 4,002 crore were sold during the specified time period, and this information should be made public. The petition calls for the SBI to provide details on the electoral bonds that were sold and redeemed between March 1, 2018, and April 11, 2019, which includes the alphanumeric number, purchase date, denomination, and the names of both donors and parties involved.

“It is submitted that once the entire Electoral Bond Scheme is held to be violative of Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, the citizens are entitled to know the details of the donor and donee of the entire period from March 2018 onwards (the date when the scheme became functional). The data available on the platform of the Election Commission represents only 76 per cent of the total bonds and the voters are not aware of the details of the remaining 24 per cent of the Electoral Bonds,” the plea said.

Meanwhile, the ECI released a fresh set of data regarding electoral bonds that had previously been submitted in sealed envelopes to the Supreme Court. Political parties had filed data on electoral bonds in sealed covers as directed by the Supreme Court’s interim order, the poll panel said in a statement.

According to the data and not surprisingly, the BJP has received the highest amount of funds through these bonds, amounting to Rs 6,986.5 crore. This was followed by the Trinamool Congress with Rs 1,397 crore, the Congress with Rs 1,334 crore, and the Bharat Rashtra Samithi with Rs 1,322 crore.

Future Gaming, the top spender on electoral bonds, invested a whopping Rs 1,368 crore. Surprisingly, almost 37 per cent of this amount was directed towards the DMK. Other notable contributors to the DMK included Megha Engineering with Rs 105 crore, India Cements Rs 14 crore, and Sun TV with Rs 100 crore. It is worth noting that the DMK stands out as one of the few major regional parties that have chosen to disclose the identities of their donors. In contrast, parties like the BJP, Congress, TMC, and AAP have kept this information confidential, despite a Supreme Court order mandating the Election Commission to make these details public.

Now, it is incumbent upon the SBI and ECI to make the whole picture regarding the electoral bonds clear. This will enable the voter, who is going to polls four weeks from now, to exercise her right in an informed manner after knowing the whole truth.

And yes, while saying this, none should forget that almost all actual election expenses are made in cash and the known culprits, whose names have not figured anywhere, must have definitely donated much larger sums in hard cash which would never come to the surface.

### WISDOM CORNER

He who learns but does not think, is lost! He who thinks but does not learn is in great danger.

CONFUCIUS

There are three classes of people: those who see, those who see when they are shown, those who do not see.

LEONARDO DA VINCI

It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you’ll do things differently.

WARREN BUFFETT

### THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1766: The British Parliament repealed the Stamp Act of 1765 after violent protests from American colonists, including a group known as the Sons of Liberty.
- 1871: The Commune of Paris, an insurrection of Parisians against the French government, began, lasting until May 28.
- 1902: Italian operatic tenor Enrico Caruso, one of the first musicians to document his voice on the gramophone, made his first phonograph recording.
- 1965: Soviet cosmonaut Aleksei Leonov, after passing through an air lock on the spacecraft Voskhod 2, became the first man to walk in space.
- 1990: In what was considered the world’s biggest art heist, two men pretending to be police officers stole 13 works, including paintings by Rembrandt and Johannes Vermeer, from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston; the stolen art was never recovered.



Ashoka Mody

**ECONOMISTS HAVE LONG MAINTAINED THAT INDIA’S OFFICIAL GDP DATA OVERSTATE GROWTH**

The late, sharp-witted economist Michael Mussa, my first boss at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), once told me that every statistic must pass the “smell test.” I recalled this sage advice recently when Indian authorities published the first dribbles of a consumption survey in over a decade. The numbers stink.

Economists have long maintained that India’s official GDP data overstate growth. Before the September 2023 G20 summit in New Delhi, the Indian National Statistical Office issued a particularly brazen overestimate. The last decennial census was in 2011. A survey highlighting stubbornly high malnutrition and anaemia cost the survey’s director his job.

The last comprehensive consumption-expenditure survey in 2012 showed 22 per cent living in poverty. The government junked a 2018 survey when leaked data indicated an increase in the poverty rate. Not surprisingly, the new partial consumption figures generated much excitement. Hastily, Surjit Bhalla, India’s former executive director at the IMF, and economist Karan Bhasin proclaimed – under the Brookings Institution’s imprimatur – that extreme poverty has been “eliminated.”

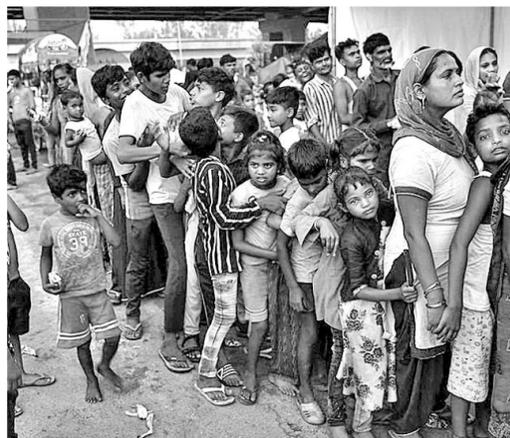
But while such misuse of statistics will amplify the India hype in elite echo chambers, poverty remains deeply entrenched in India, and broader deprivation appears to have increased as inflation erodes incomes of the poor.

Measuring poverty is a complicated task, the essence of which lies in establishing a poverty threshold. The World Bank, which initially set the international poverty line at \$1 per day in 1990, updated this figure to \$1.90 in 2011 to account for inflation. Only those who cannot afford to spend \$1.90 per day are classified as “extremely poor.”

For India, however, the \$1.90 threshold represents below-subsistence-level consumption. As economists Shaohua Chen and Martin Ravallion have noted, it allows for minimal food consumption and little else. In 2012, \$1.90 translated to a meagre 30 rupees a day in purchasing-power-parity terms – barely

### FOCUS ECONOMY

# WISHING AWAY POVERTY



**While the publication of India’s first consumption figures in over a decade has generated much excitement, the official data appear to have been chosen to align with the government’s preferred narrative. In reality, poverty remains deeply entrenched in India and appears to have increased significantly**

enough for two basic meals, according to the poverty expert S. Subramanian.

In analysing the recently released consumption-expenditure data, Bhalla and Bhasin seem to have converted the \$1.90 threshold into rupees at the IMF-reported PPP rate of 22.9 rupees per dollar. Consequently, their analysis categorises people as poor only if they cannot spend 45 rupees a day.

This approach is tantamount to wishing away poverty. Assuming an average annual inflation rate of 6 per cent, as stated in the government’s press release, the set of goods that cost 30 rupees in 2012 would now cost at least 58 rupees. Moreover, low-income households face diabolical inflation inequality – higher-than-average inflation rates due to the type of goods they buy, their limited mobility (which leaves them at the mercy of local monopolists), and their inability to buy in bulk.

Regrettably, Indian authorities do not provide inflation data segmented by household income. If the annual inflation were 8.5 per cent for the bottom half of Indian households, they

would need roughly 80 rupees per day to cover their basic needs. In that case, India’s poverty rate would be around 22 per cent, essentially the same as in 2012.

Setting the bar slightly higher underscores the grim reality. In 2014, a committee led by Chakravarti Rangarajan, the former governor of the Reserve Bank of India, concluded that the appropriate poverty line for rural regions was 33 rupees a day – close to the World Bank’s line – while urban residents required at least 47 rupees per day to cover commuting and housing expenses. Subramanian emphasised that the urban poverty line was a gross underestimate; he estimated a daily expenditure of 88 rupees to avoid severe deprivation.

Adjusting the Rangarajan and Subramanian estimates using plausible current inflation rates leads to a stark conclusion: Urban poverty rates range between 40 per cent and 60 per cent, which means that 30-40 per cent of all Indians are poor. This is likely conservative, given the sharp increase in education, transportation, and housing costs, as well as out-of-

pocket medical expenses. With numerous parents forced to choose between food and their children’s education, is it any wonder that the government feels obliged to provide free supplementary grain rations to 60 per cent of the population?

High, possibly rising, poverty can be partly attributed to the 2016 demonetization that nullified 86 per cent of India’s currency and to the haphazard implementation of the Goods and Services Tax of 2017, both of which caused huge distress to the vulnerable.

The COVID-19 pandemic delivered another harsh blow, causing millions of Indian workers to revert to low-productivity agricultural jobs. Today, 70 million more Indians work in agriculture than in 2018, owing to the scarcity of non-agricultural job opportunities, which are mostly confined to financially and physically precarious sectors such as construction, street vending, security, and domestic work.

Given the significant hardship faced by millions of Indians, the pre-election release of partial consumption data invites suspicion. And the Bhalla and Bhasin declaration of the end of poverty borders on the malicious. Moreover, their assertion that consumption inequality has declined sharply is risible: wealthy Indians do not report their \$400 designer sneakers, Lamborghinis, or lavish parties to government surveyors.

The gap between India’s rich and poor is startling. Consider the \$120 million pre-wedding celebrations for tycoon Mukesh Ambani’s son: the lad wore a \$1 million watch, a superstar received \$6 million to perform, and the Indian aviation authority temporarily cleared a nearby airport to fly in international celebrities.

Meanwhile, the lack of comprehensive consumption – and inflation – data makes it impossible to get an accurate picture of Indian poverty. Sadly, the government’s strategically released data and cherry-picked analysis both continue to reek.

*The writer, a visiting professor at the Princeton University, has previously worked at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.*

PROJECT SYNDICATE

### SPECTRUM STOCK MARKET

# Regulators need course correction



Shivaji Sarkar

**IN TWO MONTHS, THE MARKET HAS DUMPED A HUGE LOSS OF RS 29 LAKH CRORE**

The Indian economy may or may not have matured, it has specialised in its murky Bombay stock operations. It did not crash alone on last Wednesday. Two days earlier, on last Monday, too the chinks were noticed in the State Bank of India shares in the wake of the Supreme Court’s firmness on submission of details on electoral bonds. In two months, the market has dumped a huge loss of Rs 29 lakh crore. The small caps also took a hit of Rs 30,246 crore portraying far from a glowing picture.

The losses are the biggest since Covid-19. On 11 March, the market lost Rs 3.15 lakh crore mostly hitting the SBI, followed by Rs 13.9 lakh crore losses across the board, including the Adani group, on 14 March. In two sessions the market lost Rs 17.05 lakh crore or

almost 30 per cent equivalent of the total central budgetary amount. Together it is a bigger loss than 13 March, 2020, when the fall was estimated at minus 14.2 per cent.

Not to forget that in the wake of the Hindenberg disclosures, the stock market crashed by 1168 points or almost Rs 12 lakh crore on 23 January, 2024, the biggest in recent times. Most hits were taken by the groups of Adani, Zee and IRCON.

Complicating the issue, the retail traders as a new phenomenon are also suffering. Volumes in retail trades multiplied since 2019, when it overtook the US. Murkier operations are in sight. An index of small-cap stocks lost more than Rs 30,246 crore in market value in less than two weeks through 13 March.

In 2021-22, investors lost \$ 5.4 billion, or \$ 1468 apiece, a big sum, for a country with per capita GDP of \$2300. This happens through dream cyber kiosks that mushroomed on WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram and Instagram. The online media carry advertisements by CEOs of top companies alluring to multiply Rs 500 investments. As per SEBI these are mere traps.

Are the electoral bonds the big shakers? Perhaps. Investors are wary of disclosures of their identities during election time. The way foreign portfolio investors withdrew from the market faintly indicates this.

Some days back, SEBI Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch had raised concern over “frothiness and bubblineess.” Uday Kotak of the Kotak group also says there is “frothiness.” The jar-

gon does not say much except that the regulators’ lack of awareness of the murkiness and their inability to check it.

The stock market is not an indication of economic growth. A small fall in the market cap, however, severely impacts the health of the banks. Since the Harshad Mehta scam in 1992, a number of Indian banks and financial institutions collapsed or merged. The market may recover, but the banking process takes a severe beating.

Market regulators need severe course correction. Losing such huge amount of money in just two months is a serious jolt to the economy and the banking sector. And it may not be the last of such national trauma. Undoubtedly, it would be interesting to watch how it impacts the elections.

INFA

### Health equity

Sir, India’s Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP) is a crucial initiative targeting millions of newborns and pregnant women annually, serving as a cornerstone in child survival. Over the past two decades, India has made significant strides in child health and immunisation, achieving milestones such as being declared polio-free in 2014 and eliminating maternal and neonatal tetanus in 2015. Despite progress, challenges persist, with infectious diseases remaining a leading cause of nearly one million deaths before age five, highlighting the ongoing need to overcome barriers and ensure all children receive life-saving vaccinations. The introduction and nationwide expansion of new vaccines like Measles-Rubella, Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV), and Rotavirus Vaccine (RVV) have further strengthened the programme. India’s full immunisation coverage is at 76.1%, with 1.1 million zero-dose children in 2022, emphasising the urgency of addressing immunisation gaps. Leveraging technology, India has forged a robust digital public health infrastructure, culminating in the imminent launch of U-WIN (Universal Immunisation Programme-WIN), set to become the globe’s largest electronic immunisation registry. U-WIN aims to digitise the universal immunisation programme for expectant mothers and newborns, targeting 12 vaccine-preventable diseases and ensuring comprehensive coverage for approximately 29 million pregnant women and 26 million newborns annually. The nationwide implementation of U-WIN, announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, signifies a pivotal step forward, akin to CoWIN for Covid-19 vaccination, emphasising the importance of integrating healthcare measures with cutting-edge technologies to build a healthier and more resilient India.

Krishna Kumar Vepakomma, HYDERABAD

### Play safe

Sir, Festivals are a source of great joy in India. Holi, the festival of colours, is one such important event. It is arguably the most fun-filled and boisterous of all Hindu festivals. However, it has been observed that residential societies waste a lot of water during the festival every year. People should be asked to play Holi only with dry colours. They should avoid colours that are mixed with harmful chemicals, as these may lead to skin allergies and even cause blindness if they get into the eyes. Also, everyone should take care not to waste water while celebrating the festival. Every drop of water is precious, and costs money.

Jubel D’Cruz, MUMBAI

## Letters

### TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa POST are most welcome to contribute letters (200 words), articles and columns (between 750-1250 words). Contributors are requested to send their contact numbers and full postal address/email ID. They may also send in their valuable comments, opinion and suggestions, preferably by email, to: [edit@orissapost.com](mailto:edit@orissapost.com)

OrissaPOST

B-15, Rasulgari Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

# Dress code for Maharashtra school teachers

Just like "Dr" for doctors, "Adv" for lawyers, teachers will now write "Tr" as a prefix before their name. This decision by state's school education department is aimed at boosting the morale of teachers by giving them recognition



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

**Pune, March 17:** The Maharashtra government has introduced a dress code for school teachers in the state, disallowing them to wear t-shirts, jeans or any other shirt having designs and pictures.

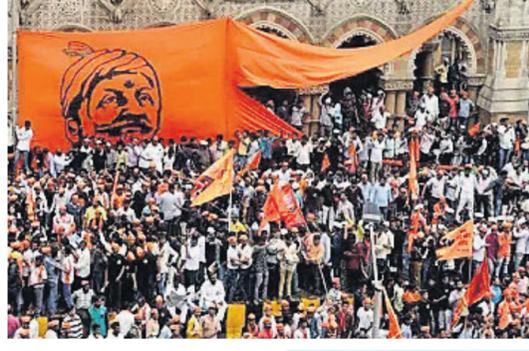
According to a government resolution (GR) issued by the School Education Department Friday, the state has asked schools to decide the dress code for their respective male and female teachers. The move will be applicable to all the schools, including private, aided and non-aided, in the state, the GR said.

The move will be applicable to all the schools, including private, aided and non-aided in the state

(tucked in)," said the resolution. The government has allowed the schools to choose the colour of the dress code and advised that the shirt of the male teacher should be light whereas the trousers should be dark. "Teachers are not allowed to wear t-shirts, jeans or any other shirt having designs, pictures," the GR said. The resolution has permitted the teachers to use the prefix "Tr" in front of their names on the lines of doctors and advocates.

# LOK SABHA ELECTIONS Maratha quota, infrastructure key issues in Maha

Maratha quota, infrastructure key issues in Maha



LOK SABHA POLLS IN MAHARASHTRA WILL BE HELD IN FIVE PHASES APRIL 19, APRIL 26, MAY 7, MAY 13 AND MAY 20

**Mumbai, March 17:** The Maratha reservation demand, big-ticket infrastructure development and farmers' problems would be prominent issues during the ensuing Lok Sabha elections in Maharashtra, which elects the second highest number of members of the Lower House, after Uttar Pradesh.

Activist Manoj Jarange demanded that the entire Maratha community should be given quota in the OBC category by identifying them as Kunbi. Kunbis, an agrarian community, fall in the OBC category. But Chhagan Bhujbal, a senior minister from the NCP and prominent OBC leader, opposed the demand, stating that Marathas should not get a share in the OBC quota.

Bhujbal took a defiant stand even though the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena-BJP-NCP government was sympathetic to the quota demand. Jarange has maintained that Marathas and Kunbis are socially and culturally very close. Another of his demands was that if a Maratha person could produce a record showing that he or she can be identified as Kunbi, the person's "sage-soyre" (blood relatives) from both father's and mother's side be recognised as Kunbi.

But the government issued a notification stating that "sage soyre" would be the relatives from a person's father's side. Traditionally, the OBCs supported the BJP and Shiv Sena, while the Marathas backed the Congress and Nationalist Congress Party. But after 2014, many Marathas shifted to the BJP, according to political observers. The ruling coalition in Maharashtra will highlight the big-ticket infrastructure projects fully or partially completed in its tenure, including the 701-km Mumbai-Nagpur Samruddhi Expressway, 21.8-km Mumbai Trans Harbour link (MTHL), Mumbai Coastal Road and Metro rail projects.

# TMC challenges BJP for open debate

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kolkata, March 17:** The Trinamool Congress (TMC) has challenged senior BJP leaders to engage in an open debate with party national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee regarding the issues of MGNREGA and PM Awas Yojana funding.

The TMC demanded that the ruling party at the Centre provide evidence to prove that funds were not withheld in the past two years.

Senior TMC leader and West Bengal minister Chandrima Bhattacharya told a press meet here Sunday while the BJP's leader of Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly, Suwendu Adhikari, claimed that funds were provided to the state under the Awas Yojana, this occurred before the withholding of funds by the Centre began.

The TMC invited Adhikari or BJP state president Sukanta Majumdar to a debate with Abhishek Banerjee, where facts and figures would be presented.

"We got the amount prior to 2022-23. In the past two years, not a single paisa had been given to the claimants of Awas Yojana or 59 lakh MGNREGA job card holders, leaving all of them in dire straits," Bhattacharya said in a statement.

# 1992 RIOTS, 1993 BLASTS

## Maha to compensate kin of victims

The government issued an appeal letter March 14, urging the legal representatives or heirs of those who lost their lives or went missing in the aftermath of the riots and blasts to approach offices of the city and suburban collectors within the next month

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, March 17:** Three decades after the 1992 communal riots and the 1993 serial bomb blasts in Mumbai, the Maharashtra government has initiated steps to compensate the legal heirs of persons who were killed or went missing during the tragic events.

The government issued an appeal letter March 14, urging the legal representatives or heirs of those who lost their lives or went missing in the aftermath of the riots and blasts to approach offices of the city and suburban collectors within the next month.

The move was prompted by a Supreme Court order of November 2022, directing the Maharashtra government to locate the legal heirs of the deceased or missing individuals from the period between the communal riots in December 1992 and the bomb blasts in March 1993 in Mumbai, and provide them with compensation and interest arrears.

During the turbulent period of December 1992 and January 1993, Mumbai was engulfed in communal tensions and riots, resulting in approximately 900 deaths and 168 persons missing.



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

On March 12, 1993, a series of 13 blasts rocked various parts of the city, claiming 257 lives. According to the Supreme Court's ruling, the state government in 1998 issued a compensation of ₹2 lakh to the families of each of the deceased or missing victims from the riots and blasts incidents.

While the government had compensated the legal heirs of all 900 deceased and 60 missing persons, the remaining missing persons' legal heirs were yet to be located for disbursing the compensation.

Criticising the government for not adequately pursuing the missing persons' legal heirs, the Supreme Court mandated that the compensation amount, along with a 9 per cent interest from 1998, be paid to all the victims' families.

In the recent letter, the government disclosed a list of deceased or missing persons whose legal relatives remain un-

traceable on government websites.

"The legal heirs of the listed deceased/missing persons are hereby requested to approach the Mumbai city and Mumbai Suburban Collector's office within one month with necessary documentation and identity proof for financial assistance from the government," the letter said. The government cautioned that legal action would be taken against individuals providing false documents or misleading information to claim benefits.

Emphasising the failures in maintaining law and order during the tumultuous period between 1992 and 1993, the Supreme Court underscored the state government's responsibility to ensure the protection of people's fundamental rights and to offer compensation to the affected persons.

"One of the root causes of people's suffering was the failure of the State Government to maintain law and order. Therefore, the affected persons had a right to seek compensation from the government," the Supreme Court had stated.



Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra with the great-grandson of Mahatma Gandhi Tushar Gandhi during the party's 'Nyay Sankalp Padyatra' in Mumbai, Maharashtra

# CAPF deployment to progressively increase in WB

The fact that 250 companies of CAPF will be deployed in the first phase April 19 for just three constituencies of Cooch Behar, Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri in north Bengal, shows how determined the Commission is to ensure free and fair polls

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Kolkata, March 17:** Starting with deployment of 250 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) in the first phase of the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections in West Bengal, the deployment will be progressively increased in subsequent phases, insiders in the office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), West Bengal said.

"While 250 companies will be deployed for polls in just three Lok Sabha constituencies in north Bengal in the first phase April 19, the deployment will gradually be increased in the subsequent phases with the maximum deployment being on the seventh and last phase June 1, where a total of nine constituencies in south Bengal

## LS POLLS



will be going for the polls," said a senior official from the office of CEO, West Bengal who did not wish to be named. He said that although, right now it cannot be said about the exact deployment in the seventh phase, it is possible that it will be of over 900 companies.

Election Commission of India has already proposed a deployment of 920 companies of CAPF in West Bengal for the polls - the highest among all Indian states.

According to West Bengal CEO Ariz Aftab, the phase-wise deployment is being determined through "vulnerability mapping" of each polling station in each constituency, on the basis of past polling records in all these stations.

"Barring a couple of pockets under Cooch Behar, especially Sitalkuchi, the other pockets in these three constituencies have past records of overall peaceful polls. Still, 250 companies are deployed in the first phase to give a message that no foul play on the polling date will be tolerated," a senior official from

the CEO office said.

Likewise, the number of "highly sensitive pockets" are far more on the seventh phase on June 1 when the nine constituencies in south Bengal, namely Kolkata (South), Kolkata (North), Jadavpur, Jaynagar, Basirhat, Barasat, Mathurapur, Diamond Harbour and Dum Dum, will vote. The "highly sensitive" pockets in these constituencies, as per past records, include Sandeshkhali under Basirhat, Bhangar under Jadavpur, Magrahat Paschim under Mathurapur, Basanti, Canning Purba, Canning Paschim and Magrahat Purba under Jaynagar and Metziburuz under Diamond Harbour, among others.

The deployment of CAPF will be maximum in this phase.

# Kolkata GPO: India's first general post office connecting people for 250 years

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kolkata, March 17:** Established in 1774 by the then Governor General of Bengal, Warren Hastings, Kolkata GPO holds the distinction of being India's first general post office.

Over its 250-year history, it has served as a testament to the evolution of postal services in the country.

The authorities are leaving no stone unturned to showcase the rich heritage and legacy of GPO Kolkata with a series of events such as postal and philatelic exhibitions on 'Journey of Mails', the release of a special cover on a boat, heritage walk and several cultural programmes during the March 14-19 period.

The 250th anniversary celebration of the Kolkata GPO is a "testament to its enduring legacy and unwavering commitment to serving the people, reflecting its timeless relevance in an ever-changing world", Kumar said.

Flanked by the Hooghly river and a water body 'Laldighi', GPO Kolkata building, the white edifice among many British-era buildings in the Dalhousie Square area of the city, has been given a spectacular look with illumination during the ongoing celebrations.

The old GPO was relocated numerous times to various locations from 1774 to 1868, and the present GPO building was opened to the public October 2, 1868. As part of the 250-year celebrations, homage was paid to the grand clock of the GPO through the release of a special philatelic cover.

As the Dalhousie Square area transformed into a bustling administrative and commercial hub, the installation of a clock became necessary to keep pace with time.

In 1896, this grand clock, imported from the manufacturer of the famous Big Ben in London,



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

was added to the GPO at the cost of ₹7,000. The ongoing exhibition at the GPO's rotunda showcases three-dimensional models, depicting various modes of mail transportation. Additionally, the exhibition features models illustrating the utilisation of satellite technology by the postal department, alongside sculptures, paintings, and photographs portraying the lives around Kolkata GPO.

To commemorate this momentous occasion, a heritage walk was organised, offering a symbolic journey through time, Sunday morning. Picture postcards featuring Kolkata's majestic heritage structures were released, adding to the celebration.

Further honouring the GPO's legacy, an initiative titled "Boat carried cover on river mail" will be held Monday in which a mail runner will carry a cover on a vessel on the Hooghly river to the Howrah Riverside post office, and then to Dakshineswar PO and get the cover cancelled before returning to Fairlie place jetty on Kolkata side, the top postal department official said. A set of six picture postcards on "Boats of Bengal" will be released on the occasion. Additionally, a special philatelic and postal exhibition was hosted on a moving tram adorned with a GPO theme, showcasing the history and activities of the

This month, Kolkata GPO is celebrating its remarkable journey, highlighting its pivotal role in shaping the postal landscape of India

Kolkata GPO has been the cornerstone of comprehensive and extensive postal services throughout the nation

It embodies the ethos that 'India Post is always on the move', as emphasised by Niraj Kumar, Chief Postmaster General of West Bengal Circle

postal service.

A special philatelic cover on "Transportation of Mails through Ages", a set of picture postcards on "Telegraph System" and a cover commemorating the "Lantern, Badges & Spears of Runners" were unveiled as part of the celebrations. Reflecting on the journey of 250 years, Kumar emphasised the GPO's resilience amidst changing times.

"The journey of 250 years is nothing but a flow of time. GPO Kolkata is a single institution that has been standing tall in this journey of more than two centuries, despite changes in various fields ranging from empires and governments to governance and economy." "The postal services and the Kolkata GPO are changing with time, adopting new modes of transportation, technologies and diversification," Kumar told PTI.



**POLLS AHEAD:** Paradip-Erasma Industrial Development Council's working president Monidipa Sharkhel, wife of Bapi Sharkhel, joins BJD along with her supporters at Sankha Bhawan in Bhubaneswar, Sunday



**PUBLIC OUTREACH:** BJP aspirant Jhansirani Das appeals to voters for a change this time at an election meeting held at Raipal playground in Kantipal panchayat under Anandapur Assembly segment of Keonjhar district, Sunday

## ANANDAPUR ASSEMBLY CONSTITUENCY

# Resentment brewing against sitting MLA

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Hatadihi, March 17:** At a time when voters and party workers are in a dilemma over the possible alliance between the BJD and BJP, ticket aspirants are pulling out all the stops to strengthen their base to emerge victorious in the upcoming elections. However, the ruling BJD in Anandapur Assembly segment in Keonjhar district is facing an awkward situation as resentment is brewing against the incumbent MLA Bhagirathi Sethi as well as the former legislator Mayadhar Jena.

According to sources, it may not be a cakewalk for Sethi even if he retains the ticket for the forthcoming Assembly polls as odds appear heavily stacked against him. If reports are to be believed, Sethi will have a tough time in quelling the simmering resentment among party cadres before he faced the voters who appear equally dissatisfied.

It is learnt that, several BJD workers and locals have written a letter to the BJD supremo to replace Sethi and field a new candidate in his place.

Reports said that party workers are organising 'Bhagirathi Hatao Abhiyan' (Oust Bhagirathi movement) and venting their ire against him for neglecting them. The campaign is intensifying only more as the general election draws near in the state.

Reports said that Jena won



the Anandapur seat as the joint candidate of BJD-BJP alliance in 2000. However, Congress candidate Jayadev Jena defeated the alliance candidate in 2004 election. Later, the ruling BJD has retained the seat since 2009.

In 2014 election, Sethi filed nomination as an independent candidate and later withdrew his nomination after he didn't get a ticket from BJD. He then left BJD and joined BJP while Jena, who was in BJP then, joined BJD. Jena contested the election on a BJD ticket and won the 2014 election from Anandapur Assembly constituency.

In 2019, BJP fielded Sethi as its candidate from this constituency but all of a sudden he quit the saffron camp and contested the election on a BJD ticket. He won the poll in 2019.

Frequent party hopping by Sethi and Jena has sparked resentment among the voters and

# BJP may pull out all stops to win Bonai

RAJESH MOHANTY, OP

**Rourkela, March 17:** Of all the Assembly constituencies in Sundargarh district, Bonai holds a special significance as it was among the first constituencies from where the saffron party opened its account in Odisha, and made its presence felt as a political force.

However, over the years, Bonai changed its profile from a stronghold of the right-wing party to a left bastion, notably the CPM. The constituency has a feudal past with a royal family having its sway even after independence, though never active in politics. However, some glimpses of royal activism were noticed when Jual Oram contested from here for the first time.

Apart from Jual (in 2009), Bhimsen aka Bhima Choudhury had won from here on a BJP ticket. However, this time, Bhimsen is a potential BJD candidate after he joined the party sometime back after being reportedly 'overlooked' by the BJP.

Many in the BJP camp, who

wished not to be named, said Jual didn't want any second-rung leaders to emerge in the party. That is the reason, they claimed, Jual would back candidates who are sure losers. "Bhima bhai (Bhimsen Choudhury) is the best example of Jual's politics. As long as he is around, he would never let anyone to grow," said a BJP activist from Bonai. Seconding him, another party activist said, "For his (Jual's) whimsical decisions the party has suffered a lot, and today Bonai has become a red bastion. Rather than realizing his folly, he is happy."

The CPM meanwhile, has strengthened its base. The soft spoken Laxman Munda has tightened his grip. He had won from here for the first time in 2004. In 2009, he lost to Bhimsen Choudhury. However, in 2014 he emerged triumphant and repeated his performance in 2019 by defeating Ranjit Kissan of BJD. There is no palpable anti-incumbency against him. Mining and sponge iron industries make considerable contri-



LAXMAN MUNDA



BHIMSEN CHOUDHURY

butions to this tribal rural dominated constituency. And Munda has always stood by voters through thick and thin.

Among the several ticket aspirants in BJD, Bhimsen appears to be the front runner. In case there is no tie-up between the BJP and BJD, candidate from the latter party will find it tough to win. Locals said that would ensure sure shot victory for the left candidate.

BJP insiders said Jual is serious about winning the Bonai

seat this time. He is backing Sebatil Nayak, a Zilla Parishad member who is a near novice in politics. "Getting her through will be a tough task for BJP. The CPM is deeply entrenched here, and her candidature would only irk some of the other aspirants as well as cadres" they said.

Nevertheless, Bonai will be an interesting constituency to look for as BJP will galvanise all its resources to secure a win for its candidate.



**MERGER MEETING:** Over 20 families of BJD and BJP workers join Congress in the presence of party leaders Digambar Das and Satyananda Rout during a merger meeting at Darapur village in Jamjodi panchayat of Tihidi block of Bhadrak district, Sunday

## INDIA bloc to trounce BJP in UP: SP leader

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Etawah, March 17:** Samajwadi Party (SP) leader Ram Gopal Yadav Sunday claimed there is strong anti-incumbency in Uttar Pradesh and the INDIA bloc will defeat the BJP in at least 40 seats the ruling party won last time.

Uttar Pradesh goes to the polls on all seven phases of the Lok Sabha elections, beginning April 19 and ending June 1. The BJP-led ruling coalition won 64 seats - BJP 62, Apna Dal(S) 2 - out of the total 80 constituencies in 2019.

"There is a strong anti-incumbency in Uttar Pradesh against both the state and the central governments. The situation of the alliance will be very good in UP and we will win in at least 40 seats the BJP won (last time)," Yadav said to reporters here.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party were in alliance. While the SP secured victory on five seats, the BSP won 10.

This time, the SP has joined the opposition INDIA grouping to fight the BJP-led NDA.

On the electoral bonds issue, the Rajya Sabha member said, "People say that they have ended corruption. But corruption (electoral bonds) bigger than this has never happened in any part of the world. They make ED conduct raids and stop the action once a donation is made."

"Had it been any other country, the government that has given contracts in lieu for donations had been removed," he said.

Speaking on the arrest of BRS leader K Kavitha in connection with the Delhi liquor policy case, Yadav alleged that the ED and CBI only take action against opposition leaders and not against those in the BJP.

Hitting out at the state government, he said, "Yogi Adityanath says there is no unemployment in the state but 68 lakh people applied for 50,000 police jobs. They leak the question papers because they don't want to give a job."

## 2024 BATTLE ROYAL

# 'Modi Ki Guarantee' vs Cong's Nyay guarantees

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 17:** Promises galore during poll season and the Lok Sabha elections would be no different with guarantees from various political parties set to compete during the high-decibel campaign.

Elections are often won or lost on narratives and it is the issues that connect on the ground which decides the fate of the political parties.

Here is a look at the 10 key issues that are likely to be talked about during the poll campaign by various political parties --

**Modi Ki Guarantee**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is brimming with confidence for bagging a third term, has pitched 'Modi Ki Guarantee' as the main theme of his campaign. 'Modi Ki Guarantee', as described on the PM's website, is a guarantee for the development of the youth, empowerment of the women, welfare of the farmers, and all those marginalised and vulnerable who have been ignored for decades. The idea is also about the government's aim of ensuring saturation of all welfare schemes. It is likely to be the 'catchphrase' in this election around which much of the war of words between rivals would gravitate.

**Congress' 'Nyay' guarantees**

The grand old party found its mojo back to some extent in the state elections of Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana when it pitched guarantees to the people which clicked electorally. Now for the Lok Sabha polls, the party has strongly pitched for its five 'Nyay' guarantees aimed at ensuring justice for youth, farmers, women, labourers, as well as participatory justice. The 'Nyay' guarantees have been presented before the people during the Manipur to Mumbai Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra. The Congress' manifesto is likely to be framed around these guarantees and the party would design its campaign around them. Whether it will result in the party's electoral resurgence, only time will tell.

**Unemployment and price rise**

The INDIA bloc, including the Congress, has been raising the issue of unemployment and rising prices of essential commodities. They have stated repeatedly that lack of jobs is the single biggest issue and have sought to corner the government over the issue. The BJP has hit back citing job growth and a fast-growing economy. The poll season would see intensifying debate over these bread-and-butter issues.

**Art 370 abrogation, CAA and UCC**

These have been part of the



BJP's longstanding promises to the people. The BJP has and will continue to project its achievement of implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, and the abrogation of Article 370 for Jammu and Kashmir. The party's government has also passed a law on the Uniform Civil Code in Uttarakhand as a precursor to its objective of devising such a law nationally. The Modi government has projected these actions to assert that it believes in the mantra of walking the talk. The Opposition has slammed these moves as attempts to create, divide and impose uniformity. The debate on these issues is likely to get sharper and more aggressive in the poll season.

**Ayodhya Ram Mandir**

The January 22 consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya was marked by the BJP

with tremendous enthusiasm. The symbolism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi leading the ceremony and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat along with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath being at the forefront during the ceremony was not lost on anybody. The BJP leaders have credited the prime minister for making a centuries-old dream come true. With saffron flags fluttering in most parts of the Hindi-speaking belt to mark the occasion, the impact of this can be felt by everyone. Even the Opposition leaders concede that the Ram Temple has given the BJP the advantage in northern India. Analysts believe that much of the BJP's confidence of getting at least 370 seats stems from this 'Ram temple wave'.

**Electoral Bonds Data**

The Election Commission has made the data on electoral bonds

public. The Congress has demanded a high-level probe by the Supreme Court against the ruling BJP and freezing of its bank accounts for alleged corruption in the electoral bonds scheme. The issue has come to the fore right before the polls and the Opposition has seized on it but whether it will work at the grassroots level or not is still to be seen. It would, however, certainly be one of the talking points during the campaign.

**'Amrit Kaal' versus 'Anyay Kaal'**

Another likely recurrent campaign theme during the poll season would be the BJP's assertion that the Modi dispensation assured good governance, fast paced growth and a vision for the future. The Congress on the other hand has dubbed the 10 years of the Modi government as 'anyay kaal' marked by unemployment, rising prices, capture of institutions, attack on the Constitution, and rising economic inequalities. While the opposition INDIA bloc is likely to highlight the government's 'failures' to claim that the last 10 years have been about show over substance, the BJP would counter it with arguments such as tiding over the pandemic, reducing poverty, free ration scheme and other welfare measures for the poor.

**Farmers' issues and legal guarantee of MSP**

The farmers' agitation at the

borders of Delhi just ahead of polls is also likely to dominate the discourse with the opposition alleging that the tillers had been betrayed by the government and promising to provide legal guarantee for MSP if its bloc comes to power. The BJP leaders have been holding talks with farmer leaders to assuage their concerns and have been alleging that many of the agitators were politically motivated. The government has also stressed how its PM-KISAN scheme aid has transformed the lives of tillers. As with most elections, farmers' issues would be critical to the discourse.

**Clash of ideologies**

This election also marks a crucial phase in what many call the battle of ideologies between the BJP and the Congress. Both parties would present their ideological principles before the people and ask them to choose one.

**Viksit Bharat vision**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has asserted that the goal of the country is to become a developed nation. He has stated that his government's actions are committed to achieve the goal by 2047. The vision for a Viksit Bharat is likely to dominate the BJP's campaign while the Opposition has been dubbing it as another 'jumla'. However, it would remain a dominant theme during the course of the campaign.

# national

## of the day quote

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has done only two things in the past ten years - foreign trips and fake propaganda. We have to stop this

MK STALIN | TAMIL NADU CM

It is a black day for the Shiv Sena, as Shivaji Park is the venue from where Balasaheb addressed the country and today you (Uddhav) are sharing the stage with Rahul Gandhi who insulted Savarkar

EKNATH SHINDE | MAHARASHTRA CM

The ED and CBI are working against the alliance partners and it is the issue on which the alliance will fight the elections

TEJASHWI YADAV | RJD LEADER

## SHORT TAKES

### Factory blast: CM orders probe

**Rewari/Chandigarh:** Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini has ordered a magisterial probe into the boiler blast at a spare parts manufacturing facility in the district, which left 40 workers injured. Officials said Sunday that the Chief Minister has ordered a probe under a Sub Divisional Magistrate. Around 40 workers sustained burn injuries following the blast in the manufacturing facility in the industrial area of Dharuhera in Rewari Saturday, police said. Nineteen seriously injured workers had been referred to PGIMS, Rohtak while 10 of the injured are being treated at a trauma centre in Rewari. Some others are being treated in private hospitals in Rewari and Dharuhera.

### 1 killed, 13 injured as truck falls into valley

**Panaji:** One person was killed and 13 others were seriously injured after a truck fell into a valley in Goa, police said Sunday, as Chief Minister Pramod Sawant who was passing by the spot rushed to help the victims. The accident took place near Quepem town in South Goa district Saturday night. Goa CM Sawant and state social welfare minister Subhash Phal Desai, who were passing by the spot after participating in poll campaign, got down from their cars to help the victims.

### SC to deliver verdict on Jain's bail plea today

**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court is scheduled to pronounce Monday its verdict on the regular bail plea of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Satyendar Jain in a money laundering case. A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mishra had reserved its judgement January 17 after hearing the arguments of senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Jain, and Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, representing the Enforcement Directorate. On December 14, 2023, the top court had extended till January 8 the interim bail granted to Jain, a former minister in the AAP government, in the case on medical grounds.

### KTR meets Kavitha

**New Delhi:** BRS leader K T Rama Rao Sunday met his sister K Kavitha, who is in the Enforcement Directorate custody in a money laundering case linked to the now-scraped Delhi Excise Policy case, at the agency office Sunday. Kavitha, 46, was arrested from her Banjara Hills residence in Hyderabad Friday and was brought to Delhi. She was produced before a special PMLA court the next day, which sent her to ED custody until March 23.



During the INDIA alliance meeting held December 19 2023, all parties discussed that we are not against EVMs but against electronic voting manipulation. We are not asking to go back to paper ballot, we just request 100 per cent counting and matching of VVPATS

JAIRAM RAMESH | CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY

## NAVY'S 40-HOUR STANDOFF

# 35 pirates surrender, 17 crew members freed

In the rescue operation, INS Kolkata intercepted the under-attack pirate ship Ruen, sailing almost 2,600 km from the shores of the Indian Coast

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 17:** In projection of India's growing maritime power, the Indian Navy executed a dramatic mid-sea operation ending a three-month hijacking of a bulk carrier with deployment of its warship INS Kolkata, long-endurance Sea Guardian drones, P-8I surveillance aircraft and airdropping of elite MARCOS commandos from a C-17 plane.

The Navy seized the former Maltese-flagged vessel, rescued 17 hostages and captured 35 armed pirates in the nearly 40-hour operation around 2,600 km from the Indian coast that experts say was the first such successful takeover of a cargo ship from the Somali pirates in the last around seven years.

The Navy said after it confirmed the presence of armed pirates onboard the vessel MV Ruen through a ship-launched drone, the drone was shot down by the pirates March 15.

As the well-coordinated operation came amid rising concerns over safety of critical sea lanes, the Navy Sunday asserted that it is resolved to "reinforce" peace and stability in the Indian Ocean and to thwart resurgence of piracy in the region.

It is learnt that Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar minutely monitored the operation. "I congratulate the Indian Navy and the



The Navy has deployed more than 10 warships to keep a vigil over the strategic waterways following increasing attacks on cargo vessels in the Red Sea by Houthi-backed militants

In the midst of rising global concerns over the Houthi attacks, the Indian Ocean saw increasing incidents of piracy

brave crew onboard the ships and aircraft, including MARCOS, for their determined & decisive actions," Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on 'X'.

Bulgaria's Foreign Minister Mariya Gabriel expressed gratitude to the Indian Navy for the successful operation to rescue the hijacked vessel and crew members, including seven nationals of her country. Responding to Gabriel's post on 'X', External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said, "That's what friends are for." The merchant vessel Ruen was seized by the Somali pirates December 14 off the coast of Somalia.

In a statement, the Navy said the seaworthiness of MV Ruen is being assessed and the vessel carrying approximately 37,800 tonnes of cargo worth around \$1 million will be brought safely to India. "The culmination of the ongoing anti-piracy operation involving pirate ship Ruen in the Southern Indian Ocean Region

highlights the commitment of the Indian Navy towards reinforcing peace and stability, and also to thwart the resurgence of piracy in the region," it said. Sharing some aspects of the operation, the Navy said its warship INS Kolkata intercepted Ruen Wednesday morning and confirmed the presence of armed pirates through a ship-launched drone. "In a reckless hostile act, the pirates shot down the drone and fired at the Indian Naval warship," it said, adding INS Kolkata disabled the vessel's steering system and navigational aids, forcing it to stop sailing. Following this, the MARCOS commandos seized the vessel, captured the pirates and rescued the crew members of Ruen.

Separately, the Indian Air Force described the airdropping of the Combat Rubberised Raiding Craft (CRRC) boats and the MARCOS commandos as a "remarkable display" of "jointness" between the two forces.

## Kerala moves top court seeking stay on CAA rules

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 17:** Kerala has filed a fresh plea in the Supreme Court seeking a stay on the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2024, contending it was discriminatory, arbitrary and contravened the principles of secularism.

The Centre had March 11 paved the way for the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, with the notification of the relevant rules, four years after the contentious law was passed by Parliament to fast-track Indian citizenship for undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who came to India before December 31, 2014.

Terming the CAA Rules as 'unconstitutional', the state government said classifications based on religion and country are discriminatory, arbitrary, unreasonable, and contravened the principles of secularism.

The Kerala government, which had earlier filed an original suit against the validity of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), said the Amendment Act and Rules and Orders are bereft of any standard principle or norm in discriminating migrants from other countries such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Bhutan, which are sharing international borders with India and to which and from which there has been trans-border migration. "Classifications based on religion and country are manifestly discriminatory. It is trite and settled law that a legislation discriminating on the basis of an intrinsic and core trait of an individual cannot form a reasonable classification based on an intelligible differentia," the plea said.

## PM asks ministers to work on roadmap for new govt, say sources

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 17:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday told ministers to draft a roadmap after the Election Commission announced schedule for the Lok Sabha polls 2024.

Chairing a Cabinet meeting here this morning, the PM also asked them to meet secretaries and other officials of their respective ministries to discuss how the agenda for the first 100 days and the next five years can be better implemented.

The meeting took place a day after the Election Commission announced schedule for the Lok Sabha polls 2024.

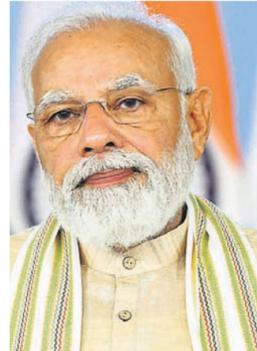
The Cabinet also initiated the process of notifying the dates of the seven-phase parliamentary elections by sending the Election Commission's recommendation to President Droupadi Murmu.

The first notification will be issued March 20 for the first phase of polls April 19 on 102 seats. The nomination process begins for a particular phase with the issuance of the notification. Prime Minister Modi and his Council of Ministers had March 3 had brainstormed over the vision document for "Viksit Bharat: 2047" and a detailed action plan for the next five years. A 100-day agenda for immediate steps to be taken after a new government is formed in June was deliberated upon during the daylong meeting of the Council. Sources had then said that the roadmap for "Viksit Bharat" was a result of more than two years of intensive preparation and entailed a "whole-of-



## MOOSEWALA'S PARENTS WELCOME BABY BOY

The parents of late Punjabi singer Shubhdeep Singh Sidhu, popularly known as Sidhu Moosewala, Sunday welcomed a baby boy, nearly two years after the artist was shot dead in Punjab's Mansa district. Balkaur Singh, Moosewala's father, announced the birth of the newborn on his Facebook page saying he and his wife Charan Kaur were blessed with Moosewala's younger brother



The meeting took place a day after the Election Commission announced schedule for the Lok Sabha polls 2024

The Cabinet also initiated the process of notifying the dates of the seven-phase parliamentary elections by sending the Election Commission's recommendation to President Droupadi Murmu

government" approach involving all ministries and wide-ranging consultations with state governments, academia, industry bodies, civil society, scientific organisations and mobilisation of youths for inputs.

"More than 2,700 meetings, workshops and seminars were held at various levels. Suggestions of more than 20 lakh youths were received," an official had said.

The BJP has exuded confidence that the Narendra Modi government will be back for a third consecutive term this year with a massive mandate.

## SNIPPETS

### EOW registers FIR against Bhupesh Baghel

**Raipur:** The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) in Chhattisgarh has registered a case against former Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel and others in the alleged Mahadev online betting scam based on a probe report submitted by the ED, officials said Sunday. The Enforcement Directorate (ED), which has been investigating the Mahadev app-linked money laundering case for more than a year, alleged in the past that its probe has shown involvement of various high-ranking politicians and bureaucrats from Chhattisgarh, where the two main promoters of the app hail from. The projected proceeds of crime in this case are about ₹6,000 crore, according to the ED.

### Fresh protests erupt in Sandeshkhali

**Kolkata:** Fresh protests erupted at certain pockets in Sandeshkhali in West Bengal Sunday after locals demanded the immediate arrest of three more local Trinamool Congress leaders. The three leaders include a ruling party village Panchayat Chief Haji Siddik Molla and two of his associates Zulfikar Molla and Hasem Molla. All of them are known to be the close associates of now-suspended Trinamool Congress leader Sheikh Shahjahan, the alleged accused mastermind behind the attack on ED and CAPF at Sandeshkhali January 5. Shahjahan is currently in the custody of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Meanwhile, West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose has decided to form a committee to evaluate how the illegally grabbed can be brought back again to the cultivable conditions before being given back to the original owners.

### India, Maldives hold core group meeting

**New Delhi:** India and the Maldives Sunday reviewed the ongoing process of replacing Indian military personnel from the island nation with Male saying the second group will leave by April 10. The two sides held the third meeting of the bilateral high-level core group in Male, days after India withdrew the first team of military personnel that was operating an advanced light helicopter in the Indian Ocean archipelago. The military team has been replaced by civilian technical experts. The Indian personnel are operating three aviation platforms in the Maldives and New Delhi is now deploying civilian personnel to operate them. Maldivian President Mohamed Muizuz had set March 10 as the deadline for the withdrawal of the first group of Indian military personnel from his country.

## POLL BONDS

# Vast majority of parties received no donations

The data was submitted through the Election Commission and was put in public domain by the poll panel Sunday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 17:** While several political parties received donations worth crores of rupees via electoral bonds, there is a vast majority which did not get any money through the now-scraped scheme for political funding.

Over 500 recognised and unrecognised political parties had shared details on electoral bonds in sealed covers to the Supreme Court. The data was submitted through the Election Commission and was put in public domain by the poll panel Sunday.



Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party, which is a recognised national party, has told the Election Commission that it did not receive any funding through electoral bonds since the inception of the scheme. The National People's Party,

which rules Meghalaya, is another national party which received no donations through electoral bonds.

National Conference, a recognised state party in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, has disclosed receiving ₹50 lakh

## Over 500 recognised and unrecognised political parties had shared details on electoral bonds in sealed covers to the Supreme Court

from the Bharti group through electoral bonds.

The Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) disclosed it received ₹50 lakh via electoral bonds from Alambic Pharma.

Left parties, including CPI, CPI-M, All-India Forward Bloc and CPI-ML did not receive any electoral bond funding. They said as a matter of principle they refused donations through this route. Some of the registered, unrecognised parties made their submission in hand-writ-

ten notes on plain paper declaring not receiving any funding through poll bonds.

Several of the parties which are active in states, such as Raj Thackeray's Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, AIMIM, IAUDF, Zoram People's Movement, Asom Gana Parishad, Bodoland People's Front, Kerala Congress (Mani), late Vijayakanth's DMDK, INLD, Tamil Maanila Congress did not receive donations through poll bonds.

On the other hand, some other smaller regional players such as the Goa Forward Party and MGP received electoral bonds worth ₹36 lakh and ₹55 lakh respectively. According to an earlier report compiled by NGO Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR), electoral bonds worth ₹16,518 crore were sold from March 2018 to January 2024.

## SNAKE VENOM CASE

# Elvish Yadav sent to 14-day judicial custody

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Noida, March 17:** Controversial Youtuber Elvish Yadav was arrested Sunday by Noida police in connection with a probe into the suspected use of snake venom as a recreational drug at a party here four months ago, officials said.

Yadav, a winner of reality show *Bigg Boss OTT*, was later produced in a special court in Surajpur which sent the 26-year-old social media influencer to 14-day judicial custody, they said.

He was among six people named in an FIR lodged at Noida's Sector 49 police station November 3 last year. The five other accused, identified as snake charmers, were arrested in November but are currently out on bail, the officials said.

The case was lodged under provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, Indian Penal Code sections 120B (party to criminal conspiracy), 284 (negligent conduct related to poison that endangers human safety) and 289 (negligent conduct with respect to animals), according to police. Charges under the provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act have also been added in the case in which Yadav, a resident of Haryana's Gurugram, has been arrested, police said.

"Elvish Yadav was called for questioning in the case. He was arrested after adequate evidence, including those linked to the NDPS Act, was found in the case. Further investigation is underway," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Noida) Vidya Sagar Mishra said. The Noida police said during investigation in the case, it had collected some samples which have been confirmed by forensic laboratory as "snake venom".



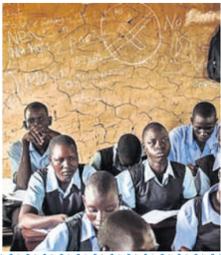
# international



One candidate's too old and mentally unfit to be president. The other guy's me  
JOE BIDEN | PRESIDENT, US

## SOUTH SUDAN SHUTS SCHOOLS

South Sudan's government is closing down all schools starting Monday as the country prepares for a wave of extreme heat expected to last two weeks. The health and education ministries advised parents to keep all children indoors as temperatures are expected to soar to 45 degrees Celsius



## of the day quote

Russia will be asked to observe a ceasefire in Ukraine during the Paris Olympics



EMMANUEL MACRON | PRESIDENT, FRANCE

I could very well be in another country, but I decided to come back here at all costs. I'm not afraid of any trial, as long as the judges are impartial



JAIR BOLSONARO | FORMER PRESIDENT, BRAZIL

The Maldives isn't a small nation. Maldives is an independent and sovereign nation and that surveillance of the Maldives' jurisdiction should not concern any external parties



MOHAMED MUIZZU | PRESIDENT, MALDIVES

## SHORT TAKES

### EU, Egypt boost ties

Cairo: The European Union Sunday announced a \$8 billion aid package for cash-strapped Egypt amid concerns that economic pressure and conflicts and chaos in neighbouring countries could drive more migrants to European shores. The deal is scheduled to be signed during a visit by European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen and the leaders of Belgium, Italy, Austria, Cyprus and Greece, according to Egyptian officials. The package includes both grants and loans over the next three years for the Arab world's most populous country, according to the European Union Mission in Cairo.

### Niger, US end accord

Niamey: Niger's ruling junta has revoked with immediate effect a military accord that allows military personnel and civilian staff from the US Department of Defense on its soil, junta spokesperson Colonel Amadou Abdramane said Saturday. The decision follows a visit by US officials this week which was led by Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Molly Phee and included General Michael Langley, commander of the US Africa Command. Abdramane, speaking on television in the West African nation, said the US delegation did not follow diplomatic protocol, and that Niger was not informed about the composition of the delegation, the date of its arrival or the agenda.

### Aid container looted

Port-Au-Prince: The UN children's agency said Saturday one of its aid containers at Haiti's main port, stocked with 'essential items for maternal, neonatal and child survival,' was looted, as gangs increasingly control the capital. Haiti is struggling to resolve a long-running political and humanitarian crisis that the children's agency, UNICEF, has warned is causing record hunger and life-threatening malnutrition in parts of the capital Port-au-Prince. The unelected prime minister, Ariel Henry, said this week he would step down once a transitional council was in place. Heavily armed gangs have taken over much of the city, and rights groups have reported widespread killings, kidnappings and sexual violence.

### Accident claims 21

Kabul: A traffic accident in southern Afghanistan killed 21 people and at least 38 injured Sunday, the provincial government said. The crash on the Kandahar-Herat highway involved a motorcycle, a fuel truck and a bus, said Sher Mohammad Wahdat, head of the information department for Helmand's government.

## RUSSIAN ELECTIONS

# Putin set to tighten grip

Putin, who rose to power in 1999, is poised to win a new six-year term that, if he completes it, would enable him to overtake Josef Stalin and become Russia's longest-serving leader for more than 200 years

REUTERS

Moscow, March 17: President Vladimir Putin is poised to tighten his grip on power Sunday in a Russian election that is certain to deliver him a landslide victory, though some opponents staged a symbolic noon protest at polling stations against his rule.

The election comes just over two years since Putin triggered the deadliest European conflict since World War Two by ordering the invasion of Ukraine. He casts it as a "special military operation".

War has hung over the three day election: Ukraine has repeatedly attacked oil refineries in Russia, shelled Russian regions and sought to pierce Russian borders with proxy forces - a move Putin said would not be left unpunished.

While Putin's re-election is not in doubt given his control over Russia and the absence of any real challengers, the former KGB spy wants to show that he has the overwhelming support of Russians.

The Kremlin has sought a high turnout, and as polls opened for a third day in western Russia, officials said the turnout in the first two days had already reached 63% nationwide. An exit poll will be published shortly after voting ends at 18:00 GMT.

There was no independent tally of how many of Russia's 114 million voters turned out at noon to show opposition to Putin, amid extremely tight security involving tens of thousands of police and security officials.

### 'NOON AGAINST PUTIN'

Supporters of Alexei Navalny, who died in an Arctic prison last month, had called on



Yulia Navalnaya, the widow of Alexei Navalny, the Russian opposition leader who died in a prison camp, stands in a queue outside the Russian Embassy on the final day of the presidential election

Russians to come out at a "Noon against Putin" protest to show their dissent against a leader they cast as a corrupt autocrat.

"Alexei was fighting for very simple things: for freedom of speech, for fair elections, for democracy and our right to live without corruption and war," Navalny's widow, Yulia, said in a message to a rally in Budapest March 15. "Putin is not Russia. Russia is not Putin."

Reuters journalists saw a slight increase in the flow of voters, especially younger people, at noon at some polling stations in Moscow and Yekaterinburg, with queues of several hundred people. Some said they were protesting.

Leonid Volkov, an exiled Navalny aide who was attacked with a hammer last week in Vilnius, estimated hundreds of thousands of people had come out to polling stations in Moscow,

St Petersburg, Yekaterinburg and other cities.

At polling stations at Russian diplomatic missions from Australia and Japan to Armenia, Kazakhstan and Georgia, hundreds of Russians stood in line at noon.

Over the previous two days, there were scattered incidents of protest as some Russians set fire to voting booths and poured dye into ballot boxes, drawing a rebuke from Russian officials who called them scumbags and traitors. Opponents posted some pictures of ballots spoiled with slogans insulting Putin.

But Navalny's death has left the scattered opposition deprived of its most formidable leader.

The West casts Putin as an autocrat and a killer. US President Joe Biden last month dubbed him a "crazy SOB". The International Criminal Court

## Arunachal inherent part of China's territory: Military

China, which claims Arunachal Pradesh as South Tibet, routinely objects to Indian leaders' visits to the state to highlight its claims. Beijing has also named the area as Zangnan



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, March 17: The Chinese military has reiterated its claim over Arunachal Pradesh, calling the area an "inherent part of China's territory", days after India rejected Beijing's objection to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the state.

The Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Senior Colonel Zhang Xiaogang said that the southern part of Xizang (the Chinese name for Tibet) is an inherent part of China's territory, and Beijing "never acknowledges and firmly opposes" the "so-called Arunachal Pradesh illegally established by India", official media here reported.

Zhang made the remarks in response to India's enhancement of its military readiness through the Sela Tunnel in Arunachal Pradesh, according to a report posted on the Chinese Defence Ministry's website Friday.

India has repeatedly rejected China's territorial claims over Arunachal Pradesh, asserting that the state is an integral part of the country. New Delhi has also dismissed Beijing's move to assign "invented" names to the area, saying it did not alter the reality.

On March 9, Prime Minister

The Indian side's actions contradict the efforts made by both sides to ease border situations and are not conducive to maintaining peace and tranquillity in the border areas

ZHANG XIAOGANG | DEFENCE MINISTRY SPOKESMAN, CHINA

Modi dedicated to the nation the Sela Tunnel built at an altitude of 13,000 feet in Arunachal Pradesh that will provide all-weather connectivity to strategically located Tawang and is expected to ensure better movement of troops along the frontier region.

The Rs 825 crore tunnel, constructed on the road connecting Assam's Tezpur to West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh, is being billed as the longest bi-lane road tunnel in the world at such an altitude.

Zhang said that the current border situation is generally stable, with effective diplomatic and military communication between the two sides on border issues of common concern. He urged India to "stop actions that complicate the border issue and to earnestly maintain peace and stability in the border area."

He "stressed" that the Chinese military remains highly alert in defending national sovereignty and territorial integrity, according to the report.

Zhang's reaction follows China's foreign ministry spokesperson's remark Monday about lodging a diplomatic protest with India over Modi's recent visit to Arunachal Pradesh.

## Poaching: SL arrests 21 Indian fishermen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Colombo, March 17: The Sri Lankan Navy has arrested 21 more Indian fishermen for allegedly poaching into the country's territorial water, the latest such incident this month.

The fishermen were arrested Saturday near the Jaffna islet of Delft and escorted to the Kankesanthurai port, the Navy said. Their two trawlers were also seized by the Navy.

The arrests come a day after the Sri Lanka Navy Friday detained at least 15 Indian fishermen off the coast of Karainagar in the northern Jaffna Peninsula.

At least 146 Indian fishermen have been arrested by Sri Lanka so far this year.

The fishermen issue is a contentious one in the ties between India and Sri Lanka, with Lankan Navy personnel even firing at Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait and seizing their boats in several alleged incidents.

## INFIGHTING WOES

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London, March 17: A UK minister came out strongly in defence of his party leader Rishi Sunak Sunday as the increasingly beleaguered prime minister attempts to ride out infighting within the ranks, with sections to the right of the governing Conservative Party calling for a leadership change ahead of a general election expected later in the year.

The 43-year-old British Indian leader has ruled out the prospect of an early election in May and with possibly months before he decides to go to the electorate, the murmurs of rebellion within the Tory ranks fearful of losing their seats seem to be growing at a steady pace.

Transport Secretary Mark Harper was directly asked during a television interview if he thinks Sunak will be the leader of the Conservative Party at the general election.

"Yes he will, and he'll take us into that election and he'll set out very clearly that we're a government with a plan," Harper told 'Sky News'.



Farmers gather during a protest in Madrid, Spain

PTI PHOTO

## Sunak's leadership in turmoil

On rumours that a group of Tory MPs are keen to replace Sunak with his former leadership rival and now Leader of the House of Commons in his Cabinet, Penny Mordaunt, Harper added: "What I would say to all my colleagues is this; I spend my time as Transport Secretary focusing on doing what I think is the right thing for the country, making decisions that I think are sensible."

"That is the approach that the Prime Minister takes as well. He focuses on making the right decisions even if in the short term they are not necessarily popular," Harper said.

According to 'The Daily Telegraph', a meeting is understood to have taken place this week-end between leading figures on the right wing of the Tory party and prominent supporters

of Mordaunt from when she previously ran for the Tory leadership after the exit of Boris Johnson as prime minister in 2022.

"Some right-wing MPs met with Team Penny this week, where they expressed the view they were prepared to back her. They take the view that Penny is preferable to Rishi Sunak right now. Penny Mordaunt

is now seen as the most likely person to stem the losses," the newspaper quoted a source as saying.

The discussions are reflective of despair among some

Conservative MPs at the steady lead in favour of the Opposition Labour Party in pre-poll surveys and the prospect of heading towards a disastrous defeat.

With the Spring Budget earlier this month failing to turn the dial in the party's favour and a series of high-profile exits from the Tory ranks, there is growing discontent among the Conservative backbenchers.

Labour, meanwhile, has jumped on the turmoil to demand an early general election.

"This is not in the national interest anymore. It is irresponsible. We need stability in this country. He [Sunak] could stabilise this by naming the date of a general election. Otherwise, I fear we may have a Tory leadership election ahead of a general election," said shadow minister Jonathan Ashworth.

The pressure on Sunak is likely to intensify further after the local council and mayoral elections take place across England May 2, when the Tories are expected to suffer losses.



## of the day quote

Public sector banks have been asked to check mis-selling of insurance products and ensure protection of account holders' interest

**VIVEK JOSHI** | FINANCIAL SERVICES SECRETARY

India is the most important market for Decathlon. We expect to continue the high growth

**BARBARA MARTIN COPPOLA** | GLOBAL CEO, DECATHLON

India is undergoing a rapid economic and social transformation. This creates new opportunities for business, trade, tourism, and culture. I truly believe this is India's decade

**ZUBIN KARKARIA** | FOUNDER AND CEO, VFS GLOBAL

## SHORT TAKES

### Five of top ten firms' mcap tanks

**New Delhi:** Five of the top 10 valued firms faced a combined erosion of ₹2,23,660 crore from their market valuation last week, with Reliance Industries and Life Insurance Corporation of India taking the steepest hit amid an overall bearish trend in equities. Last week, the BSE benchmark tanked 1,475.96 points or 1.99 per cent. While Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) and Hindustan Unilever suffered erosion from their market capitalisation (mcap), Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, Infosys and ITC were the gainers. Reliance Industries continued to rule the chart of the most valued firms followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, Infosys, State Bank of India, LIC, Hindustan Unilever and ITC.

### Midcap, small cap funds' flow rises

**New Delhi:** Mid and small cap funds accounted for 59 per cent of assets under management (AUM) and 87 per cent of flows in FY24, global brokerage firm Jefferies said. Midcap and Small Cap index outperformed Nifty by 28 percentage points and 34 percentage points respectively in FYTD24 (i.e. Since April, 2023) driven by strong inflows into the Mid and Small fund category which accounted for 87 per cent of the total inflows into the Large, Mid, Small and Large and Mid category combined (FY23 71 per cent), the brokerage said.

## ECONOMIC GROWTH

# FPIs make strong return to equities

Foreign investors infuse ₹40K-cr in equity markets

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 17:** FPIs came back strongly to invest in the Indian equity markets, buying shares worth ₹ 40,710 crore in the first fortnight of the month amid an improvement in the global economic landscape and robust domestic macroeconomic outlook.

The inflows came following a modest investment of ₹1,539 crore in February and an outflow of ₹25,743 crore in January, data with the depositories showed.

FPIs have been changing their strategy in response to the changes in the bond yields in the US. Therefore, now that US bond yields have again spiked up in response to stubborn inflation, they may again turn sellers in some of the days, going forward, VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said.

In March, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) turned big buyers but this figure includes some bulk deals executed through the stock exchanges and, therefore, is not a true indicator of FPI activity. However, the rising trend of FPI investment continues, he added.

Apart from equities, FPIs have injected a massive ₹10,383 crore in the debt market this month (till March 15). This came in the backdrop of Bloomberg announcing India's bonds inclusion in its Emerging Market (EM) Local Currency Government Index and related indices from January 31 next year.

Moreover, FPIs have been pumping money into the debt markets for the past few months driven by the upcoming inclusion of Indian government bonds in



**We are aware of numerous Swiss companies interested in investing in India. There are too many to list all of them here, but we are happy to share some examples. There are many small Swiss companies that are interested in entering the market**

**HELENE BUDLIGER** | STATE SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, SWITZERLAND



**The improvement in the global economic environment as well as Indian macro-economic scenario have prompted FPIs to invest in high growth-oriented markets like India. Also, the recent correction in the market provided a buying opportunity**

**HIMANSHU SRIVASTAVA** | ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR (MANAGER RESEARCH), MORNINGSTAR INVESTMENT RESEARCH INDIA

the JP Morgan Index. They invested ₹22,419 crore in February, ₹19,836 crore and ₹18,302 crore in January.

JP Morgan Chase & Co in September last year announced that it will add Indian government bonds to its benchmark emerging market index from June 2024.

This landmark inclusion is anticipated to benefit India by attracting around \$20-40 billion in the subsequent 18 to 24 months.

This inflow is expected to make Indian bonds more accessible to foreign investors and potentially strengthen the Rupee, thereby bolstering the economy. Overall, the total inflow for this year so far stood at over ₹16,505 crore in equities and ₹52,639 crore in the debt market.

# Adani plans ₹1.2L-cr investment in FY25

Most of the investment is going to go into Adani's fast growing businesses -- renewable, green hydrogen and airports

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 17:** Adani group plans to invest more than ₹1.2 lakh crore (about \$14 billion) across its portfolio companies that range from ports to energy, airports, commodities, cement and media in fiscal year starting April 1, as it doubles down on its \$100 billion investment guidance over the next 7-10 years to grow businesses, sources said.

The projected capital expenditure or capex for 2024-25 (April 2024 to March 2025) fiscal is 40 per cent higher than what the portfolio is estimated to have incurred in FY24. According to analysts, the portfolio is estimated to have incurred a capex of around \$10 billion in FY24 that ends March 31.

Sources said these investments will set the stage for exponential profit growth. The group had previously guided a \$100 billion capex over the next 7-10 years. Most of this investment is going to go into group fast growing businesses -- renewable, green hydrogen and airports.

As much as 70 per cent of the planned capex will go into its green portfolio -- primarily renewable power, green hydrogen, green evacuation. Of the remaining 30 per cent, the majority will be spent towards airports and ports businesses, they said.

In calendar year 2023, the port-



folio delivered a \$9.5 billion EBITDA (up 34.4 per cent year-on-year), while its net debt has reduced by 4 per cent from March 2023 to September 2023 (balance sheet figures are only declared half yearly).

In the December quarter, Adani's portfolio reported record EBITDA growth of 63.6 per cent, taking its 12-month EBITDA to an all-time high of \$9.5 billion (Rs 78,823 crore) in 2023. Increasing cash flows from fast growing profits have set the stage for mega-scale investments, sources said.

Its net debt to EBITDA at the end of September was 2.5x, which is expected to decline by the end of FY24, sources said.

In a media statement released in February, the group said increasing cash flows from strong growth and robust credit profile has set the stage for unrivaled 'Green Investment'.

### TRANSFORMING INDIA

Today, Adani Group is the world's second largest solar power company, it is the largest airport operator with 25 per cent of passenger traffic and 40 per cent of air cargo, the largest ports and logistics company with 30 per cent of national market share, largest integrated energy

## FLY91 SET TO TAKE OFF TODAY

Regional airline FLY91, which will commence its commercial flights March 18, will have around 350 staff at the end of the first year of operations and aims to break even within two years, according to a top executive. The Goa-based airline currently has two ATR 72-600 planes in its fleet and four more aircraft will be added in the first year of operations



## Flipkart valuation declines by over ₹41K-cr in 2 yrs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 17:** E-commerce firm Flipkart's valuation has declined by \$5 billion or around ₹41,000 crore as of January 2024 compared to that in January 2022, according to equity transactions carried out by its US-based parent firm Walmart.

The valuation of the e-commerce firm declined to \$35 billion as of January 31, 2024, from \$40 billion in the financial year ended January 31, 2022, as per Walmart's change in equity structure in Flipkart.

Flipkart attributed the decline in valuation to the demerger of fintech firm PhonePe into a separate company. Sources, however, peg the current valuation of Flipkart in the range of \$38-40 billion.

Walmart diluted 8 per cent equity in Flipkart for \$3.2 billion in fiscal year (FY) 2022 reflecting the enterprise value of the e-commerce at \$40 billion.

The US retail giant in FY2024 increased its shareholding by 10 per cent to approximately 85 per cent by paying \$3.5 billion, reflecting the enterprise valuation of Flipkart at \$35 billion.

"During fiscal 2024, the company paid \$3.5 billion to acquire shares from certain Flipkart noncontrolling interest holders and settle the liability to former noncontrolling interest holders of PhonePe. The company's ownership of Flipkart increased from approximately 75 per cent as of January 31, 2023, to approximately 85 per cent as of January 31, 2024," Walmart said.

A large portion of total investments is earmarked for expansion and development of its fast-growing airports business and ports business, they said. With a portfolio boasting eight airports including the upcoming Navi Mumbai airport and 14 domestic ports, Adani wants to further solidify its presence in these sectors.

A school drop-out, group chairman Gautam Adani started out as a commodities trader and rose to become Asia's richest person with an empire spanning across ports, power generation, airports, mining, renewables, gas, data centres, media and cement.

# India's smartphone exports to US jump

Increasing exports have made India the third-biggest smartphone exporter to the US

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 17:** India's smartphone exports to the US jumped to \$3.53 billion in April-December this fiscal against \$998 million in the same period last year, according to the Commerce Ministry data.

The increasing outbound shipments led to an increase in the smartphones' market share to 7.76 per cent during April-December this fiscal from 2 per cent in the same period of last year, the data showed.

An official said that an increase in overall smartphone



production has helped in pushing exports.

During the nine-month period of this fiscal, the share of China and Vietnam declined.

The US smartphone imports from the top five suppliers also declined during April-December to \$45.1 billion from \$49.1 billion in FY23.

China exported \$35.1 billion worth of smartphones to the US market in April-December, down from \$38.26 billion last year.

Vietnam's shipments of phones declined to \$5.47 billion in April-December 2023 from \$9.36 billion in the same period of the previous year. Other two major smartphone exporters to

the US are South Korea and Hong Kong.

South Korea's exports to America during the period under review increased to \$858 million from \$432 million, while Hong Kong's sales are down to \$112 million from \$132 million in April-December 2022-23.

Smartphones started registering their presence in the Indian export basket in 2022-23 when shipments touched \$10.95 billion. With the continued momentum, exports have touched \$10.5 billion in April-December 2023-24.

After the announcement of the Product Linked Incentives (PLI) scheme and the entry of US-based iPhone maker Apple into domestic manufacturing, India is emerging as a major production hub for smartphones.

## NET EXPORTER

# Global toy majors shifting focus from China to India

Prior to BIS regulation, India's dependence on China for toys was 80%, which has now decreased drastically

AGENCIES

**Mumbai, March 17:** India's toy industry has made rapid strides between FY15 and FY23 with exports increasing by a whopping 239 per cent and imports declining by 52 per cent, resulting in the country becoming a net exporter, as per reports.

A mandatory requirement of the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) approval for the sale of toys in India, protectionism, China-Plus-One strategy and an increase in basic customs duty to 70 per cent have led to a boom in India's toy industry.

According to industry players, while global brands like Hasbro, Mattel, Spin Master, and Early Learning Centre depend more on the country for sourcing, major manufacturers like Italian major Dream Plast, Microplast, and Incas are gradually shifting focus to India from China.

"I don't think any Chinese capacity is approved by BIS. Imports have been replaced by domestic Indian products. Ten years ago, hardly any sourcing was happening from India. Now, many companies have set up a base in India," said R Jeswant, chief executive officer of the Chennai-based Funksool, owned by tyre maker MRF and associates. The company also supplies to international toy majors such as Hasbro, Spin Master, Early Learning Centre, Flair and Drummond Park Games.

"The Indian production has gone up and many people have set up their base in India. Many of the buyers, who were sourcing from China, are trying to shift to other countries and India is one of them. There are many big companies like Microplast, Dream Plast and Incas in this list," said Pawan Gupta, owner of RP Associates, a distributor, importer and exporter based out



**On Jan 1, 2021, India banned the sale of toys not certified by BIS. To support the domestic industry, the govt raised the basic customs duty on toys from 20% to 60% in Feb 2020. This was further increased to 70% in March 2023**

of Delhi. "Companies like Hasbro and Mattel are also sourcing from India on a large scale," Gupta added.

The Toy Association of India (TAI), however, believes that the BIS rules need to be further relaxed to support micro, small, and medium enterprises. The association said that out of the 6,000-odd toy manufacturing units in the country, only 1,500 have obtained a BIS licence.

"In the MSME sector, the government has relaxed a lot in the last two years. Despite that, it is not manufacture-friendly. But it is a fact that a lot of startups are emerging, and Gujarat is fast becoming a toy manufacturing hub," said Ajay Aggarwal, president of TAI.

According to a report by market research firm IMARC, the toy industry in India was valued at \$1.7 billion in 2023 and is expected to reach \$4.4 billion by 2032, exhibiting a growth rate of 10.6 per cent.

# India's economic boom feels like 2003-07: Morgan Stanley

IN 2003-07, THE CAPEX BOOM LED TO ACCELERATION IN PRODUCTIVITY, JOB CREATION AND INCOME GROWTH

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Mar 17:** India's current world-beating economic growth rate on the back of an investment boom resembles that of 2003-07 when growth averaged more than 8 per cent, according to economists at Morgan Stanley.

In a report "The Viewpoint: India - Why this feels like 2003-07", Morgan Stanley said after a decade of investment to GDP steadily declining, capex has emerged as a key growth driver in India. "We think the capex cycle has more room to run, therefore the current expansion closely resembles that of 2003-07."

The current cycle is driven by investment outperforming consumption, public capex lead-



ing initially but private capex rapidly catching up, the urban consumer leading consumption followed by catch-up in rural demand, market share in global exports rising and macro stability risks kept in check.

"We think the defining characteristic of the current expansion is the rise in the investment-to-GDP ratio. Similarly, in the 2003-07 cycle investment to GDP rose from 27 per cent in F2003 (fiscal year ending March 2003) to 39 per cent in F2008, which was close to the peak. Investment to GDP then hov-

ered around those levels until it peaked in F2011. 2011 to 2021 then registered a decade of decline - but the ratio has now inflected again to 34 per cent of GDP and we expect it to rise further to 36 per cent of GDP in F2027E," it said.

In 2003-07, the capex boom led to acceleration in productivity, job creation and income growth. As more labour was absorbed into employment by the strengthening economy, savings to GDP also rose from 28 per cent in F2003 to 39 per cent in F2008. During 2003-07, GDP growth av-

eraged 8.6 per cent and headline CPI inflation averaged 4.8 per cent. The current account balance stayed within the central bank's comfort zone, ranging between 2.8 per cent to -1.4 per cent of GDP on a 4Q trailing sum basis. Even when oil prices shot up to USD 145 per barrel in July 2008, the current account deficit only widened to 2.4 per cent of GDP the following quarter, the research report said.

Gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) growth in India accelerated sharply from 8.2 per cent in 2002 to 17.5 per cent in 2004, and the pace of growth held firm at 16.2 per cent in 2005-07. In that cycle, the fiscal deficit was already consolidated, the banking system's non-performing loan issues were cleaned up and the economy was poised for a capex upswing.

"However, the initial pick-up in private consumption growth was more modest, averaging just 4.8 per cent in 2003-04," it said.

In the current cycle, real GFCF growth continued to hold strong at 10.5 per cent in October-December, staying

above the pre-Covid 2017-18 average of 9.6 per cent.

"This has been mainly driven by public capex so far, as the corporate sector has been working through multiple shocks from previous years that have weighed on its ability to invest," it said adding now that corporate profit (based on bottom-up company data) to GDP has picked up from a trough of 1.1 per cent in F2020 to 5.4 per cent in F2023, early signs of private capex gaining momentum are being seen.

On the flip side, private consumption is still relatively weak, tracking at just 3.5 per cent in the December quarter, below the pre-Covid 2017-18 average of 6.5 per cent.

Morgan Stanley said policymakers' concerted policy push on supply-side reforms in recent years has meant that real government fixed capex growth inflected higher from F2020. Government fixed capex as a percentage of GDP rose from a trough of 3.6 per cent in F2019 to 4.0 per cent in F2021, again picking up ahead of private capex.

# RCB END TITLE DROUGHT

**EVES HELP BANGALORE FRANCHISE CLAIM THEIR MAIDEN TITLE AS MANDHANA & CO REIGN SUPREME IN THE WOMEN'S PREMIER LEAGUE 2024 BEATING DELHI CAPITALS IN THE FINAL**



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 17:** A spirited women's team washed away Royal Challengers Bangalore's 16 years of hurt and disappointment, landing their maiden title which came through an eight-wicket win over Delhi Capitals in front of a cheering full house in the Women's Premier League final here Sunday.

Once the spin pair of Shreyanka Patil (4/12) and Sophie Molineux (3/20) engineered a DC collapse to 113 all out, there could have been only one winner. But the formalities had to be completed.

RCB did it via their talismanic skipper Smriti Mandhana (31,

39b, 3x4), Sophie Devine (32, 27b, 5x4, 1x6) and the impactful Ellyse Perry (35 n o, 37b, 4x4). RCB made 115/2 in 19.3 overs, a far easier victory than that tight-looking final over finish.

There will be celebrations in the dressing room, at a packed Arun Jaitley Stadium where a near full house bayed for a RCB win and in thousands of living rooms miles away in Bangalore.

A generation of RCB fans have waited for this moment, a wait that often gave fodder to social media trolls and memes. All they could show during these years were three final appearances in 2009, 2011 and 2016. But all that changed Sunday night. They have a trophy in their cabinet now.

**BRIEF SCORES**

**DC WOMEN 113** (Shafali Verma 44, Meg Lanning 23; Shreyanka Patil 4/12, Sophie Molineux 3/20, Asha Sobhana 2/14) **lost to**

**RCB Women 115/2** (Ellyse Perry 35 n o, Sophie Devine 32, Smriti Mandhana 31) **by 8 wickets.**

But DC, led by Meg Lanning, will rue the missed chance of bettering their runners-up position from WPL 2023, whereas RCB improved their fourth-place finish last year in a brilliant fashion.

Chasing a modest target, RCB started cautiously with the pair of Mandhana and Devine shar-

ing 49 runs in 8.1 overs. While Mandhana played the role of an anchor, Devine opted to attack. Devine was trapped in front by pacer Shikha Pandey (1/11).

The wicket seemed to have slowed down RCB as Mandhana and Perry struggled to find their timing as boundaries dried up. RCB were nearly at home, reaching 82/1 in the 15th over but a rash shot from Mandhana led to her downfall. The left-hander skied a Minnu Mani (1/12) delivery to Arundhati Reddy at mid-on to keep the contest alive.

But Perry continued her fine run and in the company of Richa Ghosh (17 n o) calmly helped RCB notch up the win, sharing an unbeaten 33 runs for the third

# Hardik Pandya recalls painful recuperation



Hardik Pandya gets medical attention after suffering an ankle injury during India's World Cup game against Bangladesh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, March 17:** In his desperation to regain fitness for the remaining World Cup matches last year, India all-rounder Hardik Pandya said he resorted to extreme measures like taking multiple injections and removing blood clots from his ankle but pushing the boundaries only aggravated the injury, forcing him to sit out of the showpiece.

Pandya injured his ankle during India's fourth World Cup game against Bangladesh while bowling his first over of that match, and had to limp off the field with the help of the team physio. He did not play any further part in the tournament.

"I got injections done on my ankles at three different places and I had to remove blood from my ankle because of the swelling. I didn't want to give up (on playing the remainder of the World Cup); for the team I will give my best. If there is one percent chance that I can be with the team I will try my best," Pandya told Star Sports.

However, Pandya said he was aware that pushing himself hard could bring adverse results, but that's the risk he took to be with the team during a home World Cup.

"I was aware that (if) I keep pushing myself I might get in-

jured for (a) long time. For me, that was never the answer. While I was pushing myself, I had this re-occurrence (of injury) and it became a three-month injury. I was not able to walk but I was trying to run (at) that point of time," Pandya recalled.

At that time, the 30-year-old was confident of coming back in five days, but the recuperation took much longer than he expected. "When I came out (of the field following injury), I informed team that I will be back in five days. I tried to push myself for 10 days, took pain-killers to make a comeback and rejoin the team. But this was a freak injury and very few people know about it. My injury got extended and I had to take more time because when I got injured, it was a 25-day rehab injury," he added.

Pandya said that not being able to play fully in the World Cup would always weigh heavily on his heart. "For me the biggest pride is to play for the country. This was my baby; playing the World Cup at home is my child. So, I wanted to be there for them (the team).

"Nonetheless, whether we win or not, all I wanted (was) to be there for my child. Obviously, I missed out and that is something which is always going to (be) heavy on my heart," he detailed.

# Vinicius brace guides Real inch closer to title



ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Barcelona, March 17:** Days after being targeted by racist taunts before games not even involving his team, Vinicius Junior scored twice to lead Spanish league leaders Real Madrid to a dominant 4-2 win at Osasuna Saturday.

Vinicius, who is Black, has endured racist insults during away games especially over the last two seasons. This week he was subjected to racist chants by groups of fans gathered outside the stadiums of Atletico Madrid and Barcelona before Champions League games.

Players wore T-shirts promoting a Spanish league anti-

racism campaign before kickoff for the day's games. Local media reports said some fans at El Sadar Stadium chanted "Die Vinicius" after he celebrated his second goal by holding a hand to his ear while facing the stands. The referee's report made no mention of any incidents involving fans.

Brazil forward Vinicius was unfazed on the field in Pamplona, scoring Madrid's fourth-minute opener and adding a fourth goal to complete the rout. Dani Carvajal and Brahim Diaz also scored for the visitors, which picked apart Osasuna's high defensive line.

Madrid moved 10 points ahead of Girona with nine games left after the Catalan side stumbled again with a 1-0 defeat at Getafe. Vinicius has scored six goals in a four-game scoring streak across all competitions.

Osasuna striker Ante Budimir had an early equalizer to briefly make it 1-1. It was the Croat's 15th league goal of the season. Substitute Iker Munoz added the hosts' second goal in stoppage time.

**Girona go down**

Girona were unable to respond to a first-half goal by Getafe's Yellu Santiago.

# Alcaraz ends Sinner streak



ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Indian Wells (California), March 17:** Carlos Alcaraz defeated Yannick Sinner 1-6, 6-3, 6-2 to end the Italian's 19-match winning streak and advance to the BNP Paribas Open final Saturday night.

Alcaraz retained his World No.2 ranking with the victory and extended his winning streak to 11 matches at Indian Wells,

coming to the net more and moving Sinner up and back. Sinner could have knocked Alcaraz out of the second spot with a win. He had won 19 matches in a row dating to last year, including 16 straight this year.

Alcaraz earned the only break of the second set in the fourth game with a forehand drop volley winner. He faced a break point on his serve in the seventh game, but shook it off eventually served out the set.

Alcaraz broke Sinner in the third and fifth games of the third. The players were blasting the ball from both sides and attacking the net, which made for several entertaining and sharply angled volley exchanges.

Alcaraz led 40-love on his serve for his first match point when he netted a backhand. Sinner's smash dashed Alcaraz's second match point before the Spaniard closed it out with a forehand crosscourt winner. Sinner had 38 unforced errors to 24 for Alcaraz and the Italian had 21 winners to 19 for Alcaraz.

In the women's doubles final, top-seeded Hsieh Su-wei of Taiwan and Elise Mertens of Belgium defeated third-seeded Storm Hunter of Australia and Katerina Siniakova of the Czech Republic, 6-3, 6-4. The winners split USD 447,300.

where he'll play either Tommy Paul or Daniil Medvedev in Sunday's title match.

Sinner led 2-1 in the first set when the match was suspended for more than three hours because of rain in the Southern California desert. Rain also affected the women's semifinals Friday night.

Sinner went on to dominate the first set before Alcaraz changed his tactics. The Spaniard started

# OFC eves move closer to crown with win over EB



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, March 17:** Odisha FC took a firm step towards their quest to win the IWL title when they notched up a comfortable 2-0 win over East Bengal FC in their penultimate round match here Sunday.

All Odisha FC need now is to win their last match against Kickstart FC March 24, which is also the last day of the league, to leave every other team behind and bag their maiden title.

Both goals came in the second half through India international Indumathi Kathiresan (70th minute) and Myanmar striker Win Tun, who scored in the dying moments of the game (90+1 minutes).

Having collected 28 points from 11 matches, Odisha FC have reclaimed the top spot in the points table. Meanwhile, East Bengal suffered their ninth consecutive defeat and are placed in the sixth position of the table with only four points against their name.

# Kohli back in India for IPL

**New Delhi:** Virat Kohli Sunday returned to India, following the birth of his son Akaay, and is set to join his franchise Royal Challengers Bangalore's training camp ahead of the upcoming IPL. Kohli had opted out of the India-England Test series citing "personal reasons". Later on, it was announced that the break was taken so that the batting star could be present for the birth of his son in the UK. "@imVkohli HAS ARRIVED ...And that moment is here! The Red King is back in India, ready to start his #IPLStar campaign March 22 v CSK," IPL broadcaster Star Sports tweeted. The batter landed in Mumbai Sunday, and he is expected to join the RCB training camp soon.

# Gulveer shatters 16-year-old NR in 10000m

**New Delhi:** Asian Games bronze medallist athlete Gulveer Singh shattered a 16-year-old national record (NR) in the men's 10000m to finish second in his heat at The Ten in San Juan Capistrano in California. The 25-year-old clocked 27:41.81 Saturday to better the earlier national mark of 28:02.89 by over 20 seconds that stood in Surendra Singh's name since 2008. However, Gulveer's effort was not enough for Olympic qualification as he missed the Paris Games qualification time of 27:00.00 by over 41 seconds.

# India rope in Dutch goalkeeping coach

**New Delhi:** India have roped in Dutch goalkeeping expert Dennis van de Pol to aid the men's hockey team's preparations for the Paris Olympics. A well-known hockey goalkeeping coach, Van de Pol has been working with the Indian goalies for nearly four years now, with his first stint in 2019. He will join the ongoing national coaching camp at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar, where he will work closely with PR Sreejesh, Krishan Pathak and Suraj Karkera. The 10-day special goalkeeping camp, overseen by chief coach Craig Fulton, will end March 26, a week before the team leaves for the Australia tour.

# Manchester City march into FA Cup semifinals

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**London, March 17:** Manchester City are banking on Wembley Stadium being a key staging post in their pursuit of a second straight treble of major trophies. One of a possible three late-season trips to English football's national stadium was booked when City reached the semifinals of the FA Cup Saturday.

If that came as no real surprise, second-tier Coventry's progress to the last four certainly did. Man City ousted Newcastle with a 2-0 victory secured by two deflected shots by Bernardo Silva in the first half. Pep Guardiola's team have now advanced to the FA Cup semifinals for six straight seasons, an unprecedented achievement in the 153-year history of the competition.



Bernardo Silva (centre) was surrounded by teammates after a goal against Newcastle, Saturday

The day's drama came a few hours earlier at Molineux as Coventry scored two goals deep into stoppage time to beat Wolverhampton 3-2 and reach the semifinals for the first time

since 1987 — the year the team won the cup.

**Spurs thrashed at Fulham**

Tottenham's bid for Champions League qualification was hurt by a 0-3 loss at Fulham in one of three Premier League games played Saturday. Rodrigo Muniz scored either side of a goal by Sasa Lukic as fifth-place Spurs missed the chance to climb above Aston Villa into fourth for one night at least.

Spurs stayed six points ahead of sixth-place Manchester United and both have 10 matches remaining. The Premier League looks increasingly likely to have five berths in next season's expanded Champions League because of the strong showing of English teams in European competition this campaign.