

Seasoned actress
Actor Medha Shankr says she is not an overnight sensation, it is just that people don't know about her journey

LEISURE | P2

Russian defends NK
Russia accuses the United States and its allies of ratcheting up military tensions in Asia and seeking to 'strangle' North Korea

INTERNATIONAL | P10

FPIs return to India
Foreign portfolio investors made a strong return by injecting more than ₹2 lakh crore into Indian equities in 2023-24

BUSINESS | P11

Title battle up next
Rohan Bopanna marches into the Miami Open men's doubles final alongside his Australian partner Matthew Ebden

SPORTS | P12



RETRIEVING ACT: Bodies being recovered after a passenger taxi rolled down a deep gorge on the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway near Battery Chashma in Ramban, Friday. Ten people were killed in the mishap

Germany, US, now UN

AGENCIES

United Nations, March 29: Close on the heels of remarks by Germany and the United States on the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and the freezing of the Congress' bank accounts, a spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said the world body 'hopes' that in India and any country that is having elections, people's 'political and civil rights' are 'protected' and everyone is able to vote in a 'free and fair' atmosphere.

Stephane Dujarric made these remarks Thursday while he was responding to a question on the 'political unrest' in India ahead of the upcoming national elections in the wake of the arrest of Kejriwal and the freezing of the Opposition Congress party's bank accounts.

"What we very much hope that in India, as in any country that is having elections, that everyone's rights are protected, including political and civil rights, and everyone is able to vote in an atmosphere that is free and fair," Dujarric said at the daily press briefing Thursday.

The response from the United Nations comes a day after the US also reacted to a similar question on Kejriwal's arrest and freezing of the Congress party's bank accounts.

Wednesday, hours after India summoned a senior US diplomat to protest remarks on

Kejriwal's arrest, Washington reiterated that it encourages fair, transparent, timely legal processes.

On the US diplomat being summoned in Delhi, US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said "I'm not going to talk about any private diplomatic conversations. But of course what we have said publicly is what I just said from here, that we encourage fair, transparent, timely legal processes. We don't think anyone should object to that, and we'll make the same thing clear privately."

Thursday, India said the US State Department's recent remarks on the arrest of Kejriwal are 'unwarranted' and asserted the country is 'proud of its independent and robust democratic institutions' and committed to protect them from any form of undue external influences.

Any 'external imputation' on India's electoral and legal processes is 'completely unacceptable', MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in New Delhi during his weekly press briefing.

Earlier, Sebastian Fischer, spokesperson for Germany's foreign office, said that like anyone else facing accusations, Kejriwal was entitled to a fair and impartial trial.

"We assume and expect that the standards relating to independence of judiciary and basic democratic principles will also be applied in this case," he said.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL

Those who waited patiently for 10 years will get money seized by ED along with their 15 lakh

44 pc of MPs face criminal charges: ADR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 29: Out of the 514 sitting Lok Sabha MPs analysed, 225 (44 per cent) have declared criminal cases against themselves, according to the self-sworn affidavits analysed by poll rights body Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR). Out of those analysed, five per cent are billionaires, with assets exceeding ₹100 crore.

The report by the ADR, which scrutinised affidavits of the sitting MPs, revealed that among the sitting MPs with criminal charges, 29 per cent face serious criminal cases, including allegations of murder, attempt to murder, promoting communal disharmony, kidnapping, and crimes against women.

Out of the sitting MPs with serious criminal cases against them, nine face murder cases. The analysis revealed that five of these MPs belong to BJP. Similarly, 16 sitting MPs face charges related to crimes against women, including three allegations of rape.

The report also sheds light on financial aspects of these MPs. Among major parties, BJP and Congress have the highest number of billionaire MPs, though there is significant representation from other parties as well.

Cong alleges tax terrorism

Amid allegations from various quarters that Central agencies are being deployed to stifle Opposition parties at the behest of the government at the Centre, the Congress has received fresh I-T notices for ₹1,823.08 crore. Accusing the BJP of indulging in tax terrorism, the Congress said that the demand notices were a brazen attempt by the ruling party to financially cripple the country's principal Opposition party just weeks before the national elections. Earlier, the Congress' bank accounts were 'frozen' by the I-T department when its leader Rahul Gandhi was undertaking the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra.



PNN & AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 29: The Congress Friday said it has received fresh notices from the Income-Tax department, asking it to pay ₹1,823.08 crore.

Addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters here along with Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh, party treasurer Ajay Maken alleged that the BJP is in serious violation of I-T laws and said the I-T department should raise a demand of ₹4,617.58 crore from the saffron party for such violations. Maken said political parties have to fill up a proforma of Form 24A in which two basic and important pieces of information have to be furnished - the names and addresses of their donors. "We have analysed all the submissions of the BJP to the Election Commission (EC). The party has faltered every year," Maken claimed.

Ramesh alleged that through the 'electoral bonds scam', the BJP has collected ₹8,200 crore and used the route of 'pre-paid, post-paid, post-raid bribes and shell companies.' On the other hand, the BJP is engaged in 'tax terrorism', he alleged.

"Efforts are being made to financially cripple the Congress, but we are not going to be cowed down," Ramesh said.

He asserted that the Congress' campaign for the upcoming parliamentary polls will continue and the party will take its guarantees to the people of the country.

"We will not be scared of these notices. We will be more aggressive and fight these polls," the former Union minister said.

Maken alleged that the Congress and other like-minded Opposition parties are being selectively targeted by the I-T department, which he described as the BJP's 'frontal organisation.' "An illegal attempt to freeze the bank accounts of the principal Opposition party in February has gone on for more than a month on the eve of the general election," Maken said.

Maken alleged that the 'BJP-ruled I-T department' has so far forcibly taken out ₹135 crore from the Congress' bank accounts due to an alleged ₹14 lakh non-compliance demand against the party. "This amount was recovered by freezing more than ₹270 crore of the Congress' bank balance across several accounts," he said.

During this period of several

AGENCIES

CPI gets I-T notice

NEW DELHI: The Communist Party of India (CPI) has received a notice from the I-T department, asking it to pay 'dues' of ₹11 crore for using an old PAN card while filing tax returns during the last few years, sources said Friday. They said the Left party is consulting its lawyers to challenge the notice of the tax authorities. The sources said the 'dues' to be paid to the I-T department include penalties and interest due to authorities for 'discrepancies' in the use of an old PAN card by the party.

Lucknow, March 29: A court in Uttar Pradesh's Banda ordered Friday a judicial inquiry into the death of gangster-politician Mukhtar Ansari. Banda Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) Bhagwan Das Gupta appointed Garima Singh, Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate (MP-MLA Court Banda) as the investigating officer in the case.

The 63-year-old Ansari was brought to the Rani Durgavati Medical College in Banda from the district jail in 'an unconscious state' Thursday evening and died at the hospital following a cardiac arrest.

Mukhtar's brother Afzal Ansari, who is also the Ghazipur MP, Tuesday alleged that his brother was given slow poison in jail.

"Mukhtar said that he was given a poisonous substance in food in jail. This happened for the second time. Around 40 days ago also he was given poison. And recently, he was again given this (poison) due to which his condition is bad," Afzal had said.

Afzal had said that during the virtual hearing of a case in a Barabanki court March 21, Mukhtar's lawyer had filed an application in the court alleging that his client had been given 'slow poison' in jail due to which his condition was deteriorating.

HOT & HUMID WEATHER OVER NEXT 4-5 DAYS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 29: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) Friday forecast hot and humid weather conditions in Odisha over the next four to five days, with the mercury likely to soar to 40 degrees Celsius.

The Met department, in a statement, said that due to prevailing dry weather conditions in major parts of the state and high solar insolation, the maximum temperature is likely to increase by two degrees Celsius at a few places in interior Odisha over the next two days, and there would be no major change thereafter.

"Consequently, the maximum temperature is likely to remain between 38 and 40 degrees Celsius at many places in interior Odisha and between 36 and 38 degrees Celsius in coastal Odisha over the next four to five days," it said.

English song lyrics getting simpler: Study

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Paris, March 29: You're not just getting older. Song lyrics really are becoming simpler and more repetitive, according to a study.

Lyrics have also become angrier and more self-obsessed over the last 40 years, the study found, reinforcing the opinions of cranky ageing music fans everywhere.

A team of European researchers analysed the words in more than 12,000 English-language songs across the genres of rap, country, pop, R&B and rock from 1980 to 2020. Before detailing how lyrics have become more basic, the study pointed out that US singer-songwriting legend Bob Dylan - who

rose to fame in the 1960s -- has won a Nobel Prize in literature.

Senior study author Eva Zangerle, an expert on recommendation systems at Austria's University of Innsbruck, declined to single out an individual newer

artist for having simple lyrics. But she emphasised that lyrics can be a "mirror of society" which reflect how a culture's values, emotions and preoccupations change over time. "What we have also been witnessing in the last 40 years is a drastic change in the music landscape - from how music is sold to how music is produced," Zangerle told AFP.

Over the 40 years studied, there was repeated upheaval in how people listened to music. The vinyl records and cassette tapes of the 1980s gave way to the CDs of the 90s, then the arrival of the internet led to the algorithm-driven streaming platforms of today.

For the study in the journal

Scientific Reports, the researchers looked at the emotions expressed in lyrics, how many different and complicated words were used, and how often they were repeated.

"Across all genres, lyrics had a tendency to become more simple and more repetitive," Zangerle summarised. The results also confirmed previous research which had shown a decrease in positive, joyful lyrics over time and a rise in those that express anger, disgust or sadness.

Lyrics have also become much more self-obsessed, with words such as 'me' or 'mine' becoming much more popular.

The number of repeated lines rose most in rap over the decades, Zangerle said.

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BILLIE ELISH SCOLDS 'WASTEFUL' MUSICIANS

Pop star Billie Eilish has committed to being as 'sustainable' as possible in her work by embracing recyclable materials. The 22-year-old has now hit out at some of the 'biggest artists in the world' for creating multiple different versions of the same vinyl to encourage fans to buy more.

CAMILA: ARTISTRY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN SONGS

Popstar Camila Cabello has talked about how she has adopted a new approach to her music ahead of releasing her new album, christened C, XOXO. "I've always been just like a song-based artist. But artistry is more important than songs."



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
You need to be very cautious today, says Ganesh. The results of a lot of hard work over a long time may be undone by one impulsive decision. After a stressful morning, you could just wish to spend time with children, playing their childish games.

TAURUS
There is a strong likelihood of some dispute or misunderstanding cropping up between you and your parents. This, Ganesh assures, could easily be resolved through a positive, meaningful dialogue. You will be clear, coherent and persuasive in your communications.

GEMINI
You will keep your emotions aside and concentrate solely on your work today. You will have to waste a lot of time in fulfilling the demands made by those around you. However, the more demands you fulfill, the more their expectations will rise, says Ganesh.

CANCER
New positive turn in life of lovers. It may lead to marriage. You will play role in bonding all members of the joint family and will meet with success, you will respect tradition and custom. Adopt a careful approach, counsels Ganesh.

LEO
Your entire day will be spent at work. Those working in large corporations will have to fulfill heightened expectations from their superiors. Housewives will need to tackle other work, apart from their daily chores. It is an important day for you, says Ganesh.

VIRGO
You will stay away from partnership ventures. Ganesh says you have the ability to control large-scale projects on your own. You have leadership qualities, and will be able to coordinate team work and direct your colleagues to get the required amount of work from them.

LIBRA
Ganesh says that you will be able to attain a huge benefit because of your nature to take chances. Higher ups in the office will take notice of your skills and ability to work well. Seniors in your office will promote and inspire you to give your best. Ganesh says this is not a good time to get into a direct fight with anyone since it will lead to more problems and issues.

SCORPIO
You are ready to take up the challenges that life has to throw at you. Thanks to the confidence within you, which gives you power to fight it out against all odds. Even if you take up a mammoth task, you are bound to succeed today, predicts Ganesh.

SAGITTARIUS
Your business is likely to grow with leaps and bounds, foresees Ganesh. Increase in financial returns will keep you happy for the entire day. Work in progress gives out positive signals. Your expert advice will be valued at work. In short, a day full of activities.

CAPRICORN
Practical and creative, you are able to utilise your talents in the best possible manner. You will smartly solve family issues, without favouring or hurting anybody, says Ganesh. You'll like to play the role of a peace maker, as it gives you satisfaction from within. Also, you will love to help others as much as you can.

AQUARIUS
Be it about solving financial issues or concerns about income, money matters will keep your mind occupied through out the day. You will have a gala time with your friends later on the day, predicts Ganesh. Not that you don't value your friends, but today, you will realise how important you are for one another.

PISCES
You are fond of traveling and are always looking for an excuse to set off. Hence it comes as no surprise if you pack your bags and decide to embark upon a journey on a whim today. It is a much needed break too, from the daily stresses of earning a livelihood. While you are seeking solitude, you will take your friends and relatives along with you on the trip, says Ganesh.

Medha: I'm not an overnight sensation

Mumbai: Actress Medha Shankr, who gained the spotlight with her performance in *12th Fail*, does not believe she became an overnight sensation, stating that "people do not know her journey".

Medha started her acting career in 2019 with the British miniseries *Beecham House*. She was then seen in the film *Shaadisthan* and the series *Dil Bekaraar*.

Taking a trip down memory lane from where she started to becoming a star with *12th Fail* success, Medha told IANS: "I started in 2018 and 2020 was a very difficult year for me and the entire world. So, in 2020 I was quite broke. It was taken out of context though..."

The actress added: "I don't think I am an overnight sensation, it is just that people don't know about my journey... If overnight is a word then my overnight was like five years long."

Asked what it takes to be an actor today in the industry, the Medha said, "Have your basics right, just don't think much about the peripherals. I try to keep my focus on honing my craft as an actor and do good work and saying yes to the right scripts. Everything else is just peripherals."

IANS



ADAH'S MANTRA TO A PERFECT WORKOUT

Mumbai: Actress Adah Sharma, who is a practitioner of weapon-based martial art Silambam, has shared the mantra to a perfect workout.

Adah told IANS: "Workouts should always be fun and working out with friends is the best."

The 31-year-old recently shared a video of herself bathing elephants and said that it gave her a whole core workout.

"The elephants are my friends and giving them

a bath is a whole core body workout, which takes an hour. From shoulders, to biceps, to glutes and legs," said the actress.

Apart from working out, Adah added that diet plays an important role too.

"This workout is equal to crunches and leg raises and weight training altogether. Diet plays an important role in fitness. I'm also a pure vegetarian just like my favourite elephants."

On the work front, Adah was last seen in *Sunflower Season 2* and the *Bastar: The Naxal Story*. She will next be seen in *The Game Of Girgit*.

IANS



Knighthood for Nolan

London: The Oscar-winning director of *Oppenheimer*, Christopher Nolan, and his wife and producer Emma Thomas, will receive a knighthood and damehood for their services to film, according to a statement from the UK government.

Their recognition comes after their biopic about J Robert Oppenheimer, the "father of the atomic bomb", swept the awards season, notably at the Academy Awards earlier this month, where the movie won seven Oscars, including best film and best director. Nolan, 53, had previously been nominated for *Memento*, *Inception* and *Dunkirk*.

News of their honours was a bit of a surprise, because they are usually handed out twice in the year, once to mark the new year and then on the birthday of King Charles III, who confers the honours. They are sometimes awarded after special achievements, often related to sports and the arts. The honours are formally awarded at a ceremony at Buckingham Palace, often by the UK monarch in person. However, the king is currently not undertaking any royal duties, because he is undergoing treatment for cancer. 𑀧

DP's cryptic post on 'woman's success'

Mumbai: The social media account of Deepika Padukone, also known as DP, has been abuzz with fans congratulating her after she announced her pregnancy with husband Ranveer Singh. While the actress has been refraining from sharing her photos and videos of herself during this motherhood journey, a post she recently uploaded on the platform seems to have grabbed attention. The said post in question is a note talking about what defines the success of women and fans are wondering about the timing the cryptic post was shared on the platform.

Taking to her Instagram story, Deepika Padukone shared a quote that read, "Look around where you are; see what you can do to change the definition of success. So women coming after you won't feel like they have to choose between success and burnout. - Arianna Huffington". The quote seems to have piqued interest of social media users since it comes after the actress announced her pregnancy. Fans wonder if this was some sort of response to the question often women are posed about choosing motherhood and career.

Speaking of Deepika, the actress announced the arrival of her first child February 29 in a joint social media post with husband Ranveer Singh.

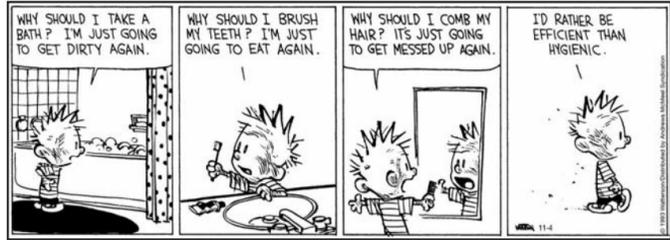
AGENCIES



PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

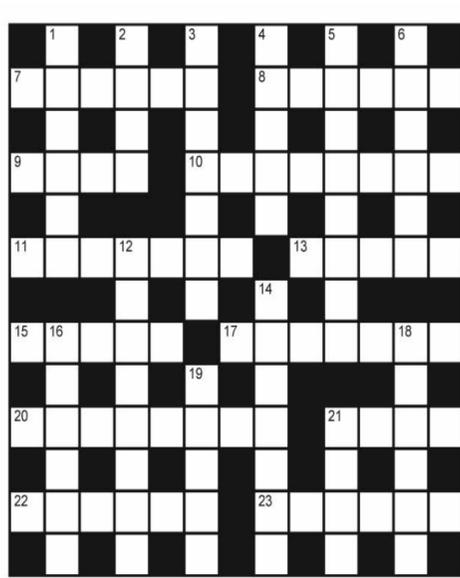


BREVITY



FUN post

CROSSWORD



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- Across**
- 7 Examine closely
 - 8 Forty winks
 - 9 Lift up
 - 10 Indefatigable
 - 11 Car sale part, at times (5-2)
 - 13 Emboss
 - 15 Stop
 - 17 Dessert item
 - 20 Runway
 - 21 Plant fiber
 - 22 Surrender (4,2)
 - 23 Smother
- Down**
- 1 Plywood layer
 - 2 Golf shot
 - 3 Relate
 - 4 Fruit of the oak tree
 - 5 Active
 - 6 Two-wheeled horse-drawn covered carriage
 - 12 Catastrophe
 - 14 Intention
 - 16 Draw out
 - 18 Tea maker
 - 19 Burst
 - 21 Prison

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.

	8	1	5	6				
	5				7			
			2	4				
3		4	6		1	8		
						4	9	
				7	3			2
8	3	6					9	4
				4				
								3
								1

SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD

Z	B	P	O	B	T
D	E	T	O	B	L
R	A	D	I	A	T
C	H	A	O	T	I
Y	N	D	A	R	A
U	S	H	E	R	G
T	D	E	C	T	
Y	E	T	I	M	I
G	I	B	L	E	T
A	B	L	E	T	

SUDOKU

4	5	2	9	3	6	1	8	7
7	3	8	5	2	1	9	4	6
9	6	1	4	7	8	3	2	5
8	2	7	1	6	9	5	3	4
5	1	6	3	8	4	2	7	9
3	9	4	7	5	2	6	1	8
2	7	3	8	9	5	4	6	1
6	4	9	2	1	7	8	5	3
1	8	5	6	4	3	7	9	2

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown

PLAY IN CITY

Artistes perform a play 'Kanta Kanta' organised by Rangam at Rabindra Mandap in Bhubaneswar, Friday



Over 79,000 violations reported via C-Vigil app

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 29: The Election Commission (EC) Friday said its C-Vigil mobile application has become an effective tool in the hands of people for flagging poll code violations and since the announcement of the Lok Sabha election, more than 79,000 complaints have been received.

More than 99 per cent of the complaints have been resolved and close to 89 per cent of those were resolved within 100 minutes, the poll panel said. More than 58,500 complaints (73% of the total number of complaints) received were against illegal hoardings and banners, the EC said, adding that over 1,400 complaints received pertained to money, gifts and liquor distribution.

Close to 3 per cent of the complaints (2,454) were related to defacement of property.

Of the 535 complaints received for display of firearms and intimidation, 529 have been resolved, the poll panel said. A total of 1,000 complaints were for campaigning beyond the prohibited period, including those related to the use of speakers beyond the permitted time.

The EC pointed out that at the press conference to announce the Lok Sabha poll schedule, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar had urged citizens to be vigilant and use the app to report Model Code of Conduct violations and distribution of any kind of inducements among voters. The seven-phase polls were announced March 16 and voting will take place between April 19 and June 1.



MATTER OF PRIDE: A member of Nikhila Odisha Paika Mahasangha performs a daredevil move to mark Paika Bidroha Diwas, near Odisha State Museum in Bhubaneswar, Friday

PICT: BIKASH NAYAK

CCTV SURVEILLANCE, ADDITIONAL FORCE AT 125 'CRITICAL' BOOTHS

DEBADURLLAV HARICHANDAN, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 29: Additional police personnel and CCTV surveillance at critical booths are among the host of measures planned by the Commissionerate Police to ensure smooth conduct of the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in the twin cities.

Addressing media at the DCP office in Cuttack after reviewing security arrangements for the upcoming polls, Police Commissioner Sanjeeb Panda said out of the 722 booths under seven Assembly segments in the twin cities, 125 have been marked 'critical'.

Non-Bailable Warrants (NBWs) have been issued against 283 habitual offenders in the

IN TWIN CITIES

- NBWs have been issued against 283 habitual offenders
- 63 persons have been arrested under Section 110 of CrPC
- Notices have been sent to 1,332 individuals under Section 107 of CrPC
- Denizens have deposited 297 firearms with the police as per safety protocols issued by the Election Commission



■ ₹30 lakh worth country liquor, ₹2 lakh cash, 178 kg marijuana, 10 firearms and 566 gram of brown sugar have been seized during the enforcement drive ahead of polls

POLICE POLL PREP

twin cities, he said, adding that the Commissionerate Police website has a detailed list of these miscreants. "In case one doesn't surrender, our officials will paste a copy of the warrant outside the offender's house," Panda said. In a bid to ensure peace and tranquillity during the elections in Cuttack and Bhubaneswar, the Commissionerate Police has arrested 63 persons under Section 110 of the CrPC and sent notices to as many as 1,332 individuals under Section 107 of the CrPC.

Denizens have deposited 297 firearms with the police in accordance with the safety protocols issued by the Election Commission (EC).

A screening committee has currently been reviewing the cases where firearms are yet to be deposited, Commissionerate Police sources said.

"As part of the enforcement drive ahead of the polls, the Commissionerate Police has so far seized Rs 30 lakh worth country liquor; Rs 2 lakh cash, 178 kg marijuana, 10 firearms and 566 gram of brown sugar," they said.

Minor among 8 held for street violence

DEBADURLLAV HARICHANDAN, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 29: The Commissionerate Police Friday arrested eight hoodlums, including a minor boy, who allegedly created a ruckus in the streets of Capital City two days back which left four persons injured. The incident took place under Nayapalli police station limits.

The accused are all history-sheeters and are in the habit of committing crimes after getting released on bail. They were booked thrice in the past by Nayapalli police, including on murder charges. Meanwhile, the minor boy has been sent to a juvenile home, said a senior cop at the Nayapalli police station.

The accused were identified as Kusha Munda alias Rundu, 28,



Sudarsan Balamuchu, 19, Rocky Nayak alias Bhalu, 18, Rajkishore Digala alias Muna, 18, Suman Patra, 18, Sanjay Sahoo alias Sanju, 24 and Bibhu Nayak, 18. All of them live in Nayapalli area.

DCP Bhubaneswar Prateek Singh said the complainant in the case, Kendu Khuntia, allegedly went to take a dip at the Balunkeswar pond in Gadasahi

area of Nayapalli, around 3 pm, Tuesday. The accused men, who were present near the pond at that time, had an altercation with Kendu over some petty reasons. The altercation soon escalated, leading to a brawl between Kendu and the hoodlums. Kendu somehow managed to go back home, he added.

Singh said on the same evening, the gang, armed with

iron rods and hockey sticks, arrived at Kendu's home to seek revenge. Upon not finding him at the home, the hoodlums, in inebriated state, thrashed Kendu's parents and younger brother. Later, they went berserk on the road, damaging parked vehicles. A local resident, Durgaprasad Behera, who came on their way, sustained serious injuries on head and arms after being attacked by the hoodlums, Singh said.

Later, the Nayapalli police station identified the miscreants from CCTV footage collated from the area and arrested them.

The arrested accused have been booked under IPC Sections 147, 148, 307 and 149. They were produced in a local court Friday and remanded to judicial custody.

BJP's 2nd candidate list likely within 2 days

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 29: The BJP is likely to release its second list of candidates for the simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in Odisha within the next two days, senior party leader Vijay Pal Singh Tomar said, Friday.

"It will come. Wait for two days," the BJP election in-charge for the state told reporters when

asked about the second list of candidates.

The saffron party has already

SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS

announced the names of candidates for 18 of the 21 Lok Sabha seats in the state.

The party is yet to name its candidates for Cuttack,

Kandhamal and Jajpur Lok Sabha seats.

The party has also not announced its candidates for the 147 Assembly seats.

The ruling BJD has already announced the names of candidates for 15 Lok Sabha and 72 Assembly seats.

The regional party is likely to release the list of candidates for the remaining six Lok Sabha and 75 Assembly seats soon.



COLOURS OF CELEBRATION: Decorated Bimanas (palanquins) line up near a temple in Puri on the occasion of Panchu Dola, Friday

PICT: YAGNESWAR MOHANTY

Cong promises SHG loan waiver if voted to power

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 29: The Congress Friday promised to waive loans of women self-help group (SHG) members if the party is voted to power in Odisha.

Addressing a press conference here, state Mahila Congress president Minakshi Bahinipati said, "If the Congress is voted to power in Odisha, we will waive the bank loans of women self-help group (SHG) members under the party's Nari Nyay Guarantee."

She said financial assistance of Rs 1 lakh per year will be provided to one woman each in all poor families under the party's 'Mahalaxmi Guarantee'.

Storage capacity in main reservoirs drops to 36%

The live storage capacity in country's 150 primary reservoirs has dropped to 36 per cent of their total capacity while the southern states like Karnataka face a significant shortfall in water storage compared to the previous year and the 10-year average, according to official data.

Cities like Bangalore have been grappling with water shortage, which can be attributed to rain deficiency in Karnataka during last year's monsoon, a decline in reservoir level, and the loss of lakes due to rapid urbanisation.

The Central Water Commission, in its weekly bulletin, said the total live storage capacity of 150 reservoirs is 178.784 BCM (billion cubic metres) which is about 69.35 per cent of the live storage capacity

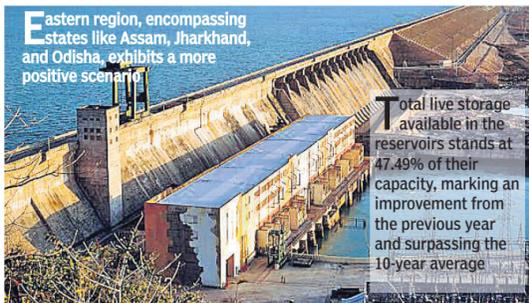
of 257.812 BCM, which is estimated to have been created in the country.

As per reservoir storage bulletin released Thursday, live storage available in these reservoirs is 64.606 BCM, which is 36 per cent of total live storage capacity of these reservoirs.

"However, last year the live storage available in these reservoirs for the corresponding period was 76.991 BCM and the average of last 10 years live storage was 66.644 BCM," it said.

Thus, the live storage available in 150 reservoirs as per the bulletin is 84 per cent of the live storage of the corresponding period of last year and 97 per cent of storage of the average of the last ten years.

Ahead of the summer season, a week-on-week decline has been noted in the reservoir capacity.



Eastern region, encompassing states like Assam, Jharkhand, and Odisha, exhibits a more positive scenario

Total live storage available in the reservoirs stands at 47.49% of their capacity, marking an improvement from the previous year and surpassing the 10-year average

According to last week's bulletin, the live storage capacity was 38 per cent or 67.591 BCM.

In the week of March 7-14, the live storage capacity was recorded at 40 per cent or 70.746 BCM and the week prior to that it was 41 per cent or 73.297 BCM.

In the northern region, com-

prising states like Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Rajasthan, the total live storage available in the monitored reservoirs stands at 32 per cent of their total capacity.

This figure, at 6.290 BCM, is notably lower than the storage levels observed during the

corresponding period last year and falls short of the ten-year average.

The southern region, including states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, faces a significant shortfall in water storage compared to both the previous year and the ten-year average.

With storage levels at a mere 22 per cent of total capacity in southern states, the situation underscores the pressing need for water conservation measures and sustainable management practices.

Contrastingly, the Eastern region, encompassing states like Assam, Jharkhand, and Odisha, exhibits a more positive scenario.

The total live storage available in the reservoirs is recorded at 47.49 per cent of their capacity, marking an improvement

from the previous year and surpassing the ten-year average.

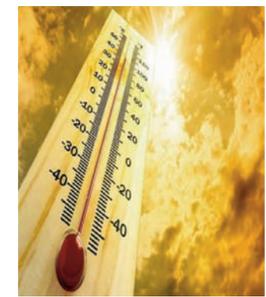
The states like Gujarat and Maharashtra, falling under the Western region, are grappling with a decline in water storage compared to the previous year.

Despite this, the current storage levels, at 42 per cent of total capacity, exceed the ten-year average, offering a glimmer of hope amidst the challenges posed by fluctuating water availability.

Similarly, the Central region, comprising states such as Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, witnessed a decrease in water storage compared to the previous year.

However, the current storage levels, at 44 per cent of total capacity, surpass the ten-year average, indicating a relatively stable situation despite the year-on-year decline.

Heatwave condition: IMD issues advisory



PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 29: The regional Met office in Bhubaneswar Friday issued an advisory for people to take precautionary measures while going outside during the daytime as hot and humid weather condition is likely prevail in the state over the next four to five days, with the mercury likely to soar to 40 degrees Celsius.

For the first time this summer, the mercury has touched 40 degrees Celsius in Titlagarh, Bolangir, Boudh, Bhawanipatna and Nayagarh towns.

Besides, Talcher recorded 39.8 degrees Celsius, followed by

Phulbani (39.2), Jharsuguda and Angul (39.1) and Nabarangpur (39). Bhubaneswar recorded a temperature of 37.4 degrees Celsius, while it was 37.5 degrees Celsius in Cuttack.

Meanwhile, the IMD has also issued a 'yellow warning' (be updated), predicting thunderstorms with lightning at one or two places in Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapada, Dhenkanal, Mayurbhanj, and Keonjhar for the subsequent 24 hours.

A similar warning has been issued for Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapada, Dhenkanal, Mayurbhanj, and Keonjhar for the subsequent 24 hours.

The IMD also predicted light to moderate rain at a few places in Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Keonjhar, Angul, Dhenkanal, Kandhamal, Rayagada, Kalahandi, and Gajapati, Friday.

Similar weather conditions may prevail in Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Angul, Dhenkanal, Jajpur, Bhadrak, Balasore, Kendrapada, Cuttack, and Jagatsinghpur, Saturday.

Light to moderate rain may occur at a few places in Mayurbhanj, Balasore, and Bhadrak on Sunday, it said.

CM, Guv greet people on Good Friday

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 29: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and Governor Raghubar Das greeted the people of Odisha on the occasion of Good Friday.

The Chief Minister urged the people to pray for the guidance of Jesus Christ to march on the path of peace, love, compassion, harmony and universal brotherhood.

Taking to X (formerly Twitter), Naveen said, "Offer my solemn prayers on the pious occasion of Good Friday. On this day, let us remember the great sacrifice of Lord Jesus Christ and pray for His guidance to march on the path of peace, love, compassion, harmony and universal brotherhood."

The Governor also shared Good Friday messages on X. He said, "On the solemn occasion of Good Friday, we must encourage everyone to embrace the values of love, compassion, and forgiveness taught by Lord Jesus. Wish all Christian brothers and sisters a blessed day," said the Governor.

Churches across the state observed Good Friday commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus and His death at Calvary. Prayers were offered at the churches for the betterment of human beings.



GOOD FRIDAY: Christian devotees offer prayers at Satya Nagar Catholic Church in Bhubaneswar, Friday

OP PHOTO

CLASSIFIED AFFIDAVIT

By virtue of an affidavit vide No. 2843/27.03.2024 sworn before the Notary Public, Sambalpur, I, Shibani Dhar, W/o. Jadumani Dhar, R/o. At-Ramchandra Nagar, Rengali, PS.-Katarbaga, Dist.-Sambalpur, Odisha declare that my name has been mentioned as Sibayane Panda in my Educational certificate Sl. No. M0408729 in the year 1999 instead of Shibani Dhar. That both the names belongs to one and same person. Henceforth, I shall be known as Shibani Dhar for all future purposes.

I, Kamini Kanchan Behera, W/o No. 15714522A, NK. Umesh Chandra Barik changed my name Kamini Kanchan Behera as Kamini Kanchan Barik for all records purpose. Affidavit dt.11.3.2024

LOST

It is hereby declared that, vide Khata No. 132 of Mouza- Mundipadar, PS.-Baunsuni stand recorded in the name of Naina Sahu, W/o. Jugal Kishor Sahu, on dated 18.01.2024. It was misplaced during my travel from my house to Boudh and after my due search I could not find it. Now the aforesaid property is going to be mortgaged at Chola Mandalam Finance, Sambalpur Branch for the purpose of loan against the property. So this message is passed through this advertisement that if anybody could find it, then please handover me in the above address or if anybody have any objection regarding the mortgaged of property, he may make objection in the Office of Chola Mandalam Finance, Sambalpur or my Advocate contact No. 8328949077 within 15 days.

CIPET holds Future of Workplace Conclave

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 29: Odisha startup companies Protrainy and Hirekarma in collaboration with Central Institute of Petrochemicals Engineering and Technology (CIPET) organised 'Future of Workplace Conclave 2024' here, recently.

The conclave served as a platform for industry leaders, experts, and stakeholders to deliberate on the evolving landscape of workplaces, particularly focusing on insights from government and private construction and IT sectors. The event aimed at gathering diverse perspectives and exploring strategies for navigating the challenges and opportunities presented by the changing dynamics of the workplace.

Bibhuti Bhasan Biswal, Vice Chancellor of OUTR, JB Pani, Chairman of Indian Chamber of Commerce, Smita Mohanty Director and Head Principal of CIPET, Bishwajit Shaw, CEO of Protrainy and Sohan Dey, CEO of Hirekarma were present at the occasion.

The conclave commenced with an inaugural address by the esteemed guests, who emphasised the importance of adaptation and innovation in shaping the future of workplaces amidst technological advancements and evolving business paradigms.

Industry leaders and experts from government and private construction companies were engaged in insightful discussions on leveraging technology, sustainable practices, and workforce management strategies to enhance productivity and efficiency in construction workplaces from IT perspective.

SSI hosts Throwers' Championship in City



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 29: Sports Science India (SSI)—a sports medicine, rehabilitation and multi-sports promotion centre, hosted eastern India's first Throwers' Championship 2024 at the Ouat ground here, Friday.

The initiative is aimed at popularising throwing sports in the country and providing a platform to the budding talent in the state.

"In recent years, India has evolved from a cricket-centric nation to a multifaceted sporting powerhouse. The emergence of new talents, increased government support and a changing cultural mindset have all contributed to the unprecedented rise of sports in the country. This shift has diversified the sporting landscape and has also opened doors for athletes in various disciplines. We at SSI understand this shift and endorse

the same. Thus, we decided to host a dedicated championship for throwing sports as there are not many," said SSI Founder and sports medicine expert, Sarthak Patnaik.

Athletes, in the age group of 17 and above, participated in two different segments—Shot Put and Discus Throw – separately for male and female categories. The winners were awarded with cash prizes and trophies on the occasion.

In Men's Shot Put throw event, Hari Behera secured the first position, followed by Omkar Prasad Nanda in second and Chiranjib Singh in third. Similarly, in women's Shot Put, Ankita Mohapatra received the first, Sasmita Behera second and Dipa Singh occupied the third position.

In girl's Discus Throw, Ankita Mohapatra got the first, followed by Dipa Singh and Rajashree Swain as second and third. In

Boy's Discus Throw, Hari Behera occupied the first, Omkar Prasad Nanda second, and Ranjan Kumar Sahu occupied the third position.

Attending the event as chief guest, international weightlifter Ravi Kumar said, "Sports is the key to lead a mentally and physically fit life. In India and especially in Odisha, sports sector has witnessed phenomenal development. So, I request all students to take up any sport of their choice, besides their academic activities," he added.

Para athlete and javelin thrower Suchitra Panda, the guest of honour at the occasion thanked the organisers for inviting her and said "The event will surely help in promoting javelin, discus, and shot put - the 'throwing' events further. We need many more initiatives like this."

Throwing events in track and field are among the oldest sporting events in recorded history. Both Shot Put and Discus Throw were part of the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, Hammer throw was added in 1900, and javelin in 1908 consecutively. In modern times, track and field games remain extremely popular. The main objective behind hosting this competition is to encourage the athletes of throwing sports.

International Para fencing player and Para javelin thrower Prafulla Kumar Khandayat Ray at the event said that such events should be extended to Para athletes who need support, assistance and a forum to excel in throwing sports. He congratulated the winners and wished them the best for future competitions.

Wish to see Naveen for sixth term: Dilip Tirkey

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 29: Former Indian hockey team captain Dilip Tirkey, who has been fielded in Sundargarh Lok Sabha seat by the BJD, asserted that Odisha has witnessed massive development under Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and he wishes to see Patnaik as the CM of Odisha for the sixth term.

In an interview with PTT, the former Rajya Sabha MP, who lost to BJP heavyweight Jual Oram in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, thanked Patnaik for reposing faith in him once again.

"Odisha has seen a lot of development under CM Naveen Patnaik. There has been a huge transformation in the health and education sector. Many have benefitted from health schemes of the state government," he said.

In the area of sports, the world's largest hockey stadium, the Birsas Munda Stadium, has been constructed in Sundargarh district and the Hockey World Cup was successfully organised, last year, Tirkey, the Hockey India president, said.

Besides, 70 astro turfs have been built in Sundargarh and coaching programmes have started to promote hockey at the grassroots level, he said.

Tirkey added that through women self-help groups, there has been an up-liftment of women entrepreneurs and the government has opened a path for industri-



alisation to increase employment opportunities for youths in tribal-dominated Sundargarh.

"In the last 10 years, there has been a massive transformation in every area and the trust in the BJD government, especially Naveen Patnaik, has increased manifolds."

"I hope to see him as the CM for the sixth term and hope that the result in Sundargarh Lok Sabha seat will go in our favour," he said.

On how he would manage both hockey and politics, Tirkey said,

"Hockey is my passion and has taught me many things. Today, whatever I am is because of hockey. On earlier occasions too, MPs and MLAs have held posts in national bodies. I am involved in the development of hockey at the grassroots level. We are also working on organising a women's hockey league for the first time."

Genes that may trigger cerebral palsy in kids identified

A team of researchers here Friday said that they have identified genes which might be partially behind cerebral palsy, a condition which affects the ability to move and maintain balance and posture in children.

The seven-year study, published in the journal Nature Genetics and led by scientists at The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids), the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre (RI-MUHC), and Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, suggest the existence of many genetic variants con-

The childhood-onset physical disability can have different causes, such as infections, injuries, or lack of oxygen before or during birth

However, the genetic contributors to the condition were not known yet

For 100 years, cerebral palsy was mostly thought to be the result of entirely environmental factors during birth

tributing to cerebral palsy.

The childhood-onset physical disability can have different causes, such as infections, in-



juries, or lack of oxygen before or during birth. However, the

genetic contributors to the condition were not known yet.

For 100 years, cerebral palsy was mostly thought to be the result of entirely environmental factors during birth. "Now that we have a better understanding into the complex relationship between cerebral palsy's genetic and environmental factors, we hope we can improve care for these children," said Stephen Scherer, Chief of Research and Senior Scientist at SickKids.

For the research, the team conducted whole-genome sequencing in 327 children with cerebral palsy, including their biological parents. They found that more than one in 10 children

had a genetic variant or likely genetic variant for cerebral palsy, and 17.7 per cent of children had variants of uncertain significance that may be linked with the condition after further research.

"Our findings are a step forward in better understanding the complex genetic and environmental risk factors that may determine an individual's chance of developing this complex condition to help individualise future treatment," said Maryam Oskoui, senior clinician scientist at the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre. JANS

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'Ban slash-and-burn'



POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, March 29: Extensive deforestation for paddy cultivation due to the practice of slash-and-burn process on forest lands in Bhuyan Juang Pirh range under Keonjhar forest division and various other places under Telkoi forest range is posing great threat to the green cover, sources informed here Friday.

Slash-and-burn is a farming technique which involves cutting down and burning of trees, bushes and other vegetation in a forest to create a field. It is usually implemented at the onset of summer. The empty piece of land is then left unattended. During the rainy season, the land is used for cultivation of paddy, maize, mustard and different types of vegetables. However, due to burning of the green cover, the land goes to waste and cannot be reused again for cultivation.

To prevent this destruction of green cover, both the Central and state governments have launched

various schemes like 'Mission Jeevika' and MGNREGA. However, due to lack of awareness and successful implementation of the programmes, the forest dwellers continue with the slash-and-burn technique and in the process destroy forest cover.

The Juang tribals living on and below the hills near Kanjipani, Bargoda, Gonasika, Ton, Rakam, Sudung, Talpada and Baragarh localities are usually the main users of the slash-and-burn technique. They cut trees and other plantations from the roadside at Panasansa, Haldipani and Upper Panasansa localities to create cultivation opportunities. Similarly, a large number of trees have been burnt for paddy cultivation in remote areas at Lungajhar and Rangadihi villages under Saharpur Panchayat.

Although traditional slash-and-burn farming method is accepted as a means of livelihood by the forest dwellers, there is a demand to ban such methods as it harms the forests and the environment. This technique also leads to devastating forest fires that also damage the green cover. The tribals not only burn the forests, but also sell the wood they acquire to earn a good sum.

"If the forest department engages local people in fire fighting, they could get employment," said environmentalist Harekrushna Mohanta. "A lot of money has been spent on MGNREGA and other schemes in the last 10 years. But no one has the exact information of how much the forest dwellers have benefited from this," said Akshay Patnaik, a social worker.

Ecologist Bhaktcharan Mohanty said that while these two ranges were once densely forested, slash-and-burn farming method has substantially destroyed green cover. Zilla Parishad chief executive officer Bishnu Prasad Acharya informed that awareness about MGNREGA is slowly increasing and many tribals have got jobs.

Nayankant Sahu, officer of the Bhuyan and Juang Pirh ranges, said, "People are being taught about the ill-effects of the slash-and-burn farming process (Podu chasa). It is also being discussed in meetings of the forest protection committee. A man was recently arrested for clearing forest for slash-and-burn farming purpose."



WARM WELCOME: Women members of a 'Kirtan Mandali' perform 'Kirtan' to welcome BJD candidate for Sambalpur Lok Sabha seat Pranab Prakash Das during his visit to Samaleswari temple in Sambalpur, Friday

DRDO sets up new ITR in Medinipur

POST NEWS NETWORK

Medinipur (WB), March 29: The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has set up a new test facility at Junput in Medinipur district in West Bengal, the organisation informed Friday in a press release. DRDO since its inception has worked on the designs and development of state-of-the-art sensors, weapons systems, platforms and allied equipment in defence and security domains of land, air, sea, space and cyber. This mission and vision of DRDO is incomplete without timely trials of the weapons systems. The facility at Junput will help in DRDO carrying out its tests for various new and upgraded weapons.

The new integrated test range (ITR) is spread over 8.73 acres of land and also maintains the requisite safety norms. The ITR has got necessary clearances from the Coastal Regulation Zone and Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. The site has been deemed to conduct tests from this year itself, the DRDO said.

The DRDO informed that while conducting any flight tests, it always keeps safety and tranquility of man and nature as utmost priority. The research body added that tests or trials will not, in any way, impact the life of masses especially fishermen and farmers dwelling in its surroundings.

Biodiversity fair held in Keonjhar



POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, March 29: A two-day inter-state Provincial Level Biodiversity Fair' organised by the Gujaratati Samaj here concluded Friday. The programme was held with the collaboration of organisations like 'Krushi Adhikar Samiti', and 'Keonjhar and Kirdti'. Hundreds of women and men farmers from Odisha and Jharkhand attended the fair and shared their experiences of traditional farming practices with one another.

The inaugural session was presided over by Duskar Barik, secretary of 'Kirdti'. Retired Professor Dr Bimbadhar Behera, senior scientist of Agriculture Science Centre, Dr Nigamananda Behera, faculty of Anthropology department, Dharanidhar University Dr Sarita Naik and president of 'Farmers' Rights Association' Niranjan Mahanth were also present. They discussed ways and means to tackle climate change and its effect on traditional farming.

"The main objective of this programme is to provide support to small, medium and no-madic farmers to develop self-sustainable livelihoods by preserving, exchanging and expanding food-providing seeds

in response to adverse weather conditions," said one of the speakers. Barik praised the work being done by the farmers in Odisha and Jharkhand.

A total of 220 farmers from the districts of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Angul, Sundargarh, Jharsuguda and Singhbhum district in Jharkhand participated in the seed fair. They exhibited various varieties of seeds and non-agricultural food products grown in their respective areas.

In this fair, 170 types of indigenous grains, 70 categories of forest-grown vegetables, 22 types of small grains, 13 types of pulses, 10 varieties of plants, 18 types of oilseeds and 31 types of native foods from different parts of the country were displayed.

Debak Ranjan Sahu and Abhijit Das, officers of 'Odisha Tribal Empowerment and Livelihood Programme Plus', participated in the event and expressed their views on seed conservation and forest protection.

The farmers present shared their personal views on the role they can play to maintain biodiversity. Books on climate change and its effect were launched by the guests. Cultural events were also conducted to entertain the participants and guests.

Money looted from Baldevjew Temple

POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, March 29: Miscreants have fled with cash by breaking open the donation box at the Baladev Jew Temple here Thursday night, officials of the Town police station said here Friday. Police have initiated a probe into the incident and are interrogating the security staff deployed at the temple.

The matter came to light Friday morning when a priest came to the temple and saw the donation box broken. He informed officials of the temple administration and locals. After the Town police station was alerted, cops arrived at the spot and initiated a probe.

Though the exact amount stolen is yet to be ascertained, sources said it could be more than a lakh of rupees. They said that the donation box had not been opened since the Car Festival last year.

Nimai Charan Dash, senior lawyer and a local devotee said "As construction work is going on, the area is open. The donation box has not opened since the last Car Festival. We are demanding that proper steps should be taken for the security of the temple," Dash said.

Despite deployment of security personnel and installation of CCTV, the loot took place. The incident has raised serious questions about the safety and security of the Lord Baladev Jew Temple.

Passengers suffer as airline goofs up

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, March 29: Alliance Air' once more gave a harrowing time Thursday to passengers as one of its aircraft changed flight plans mid-way. The goof-up came to light after most of the passengers on board the aircraft arrived here Friday by train.

According to information available, passengers travelling to this town had boarded the Alliance Air flight from Bhubaneswar. However, mid-way through the flight, they were informed that the aircraft had developed a technical snag and would instead proceed to the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Airport in Kolkata. Caught unaware by this sudden decision, the fliers were left shell-shocked to say the least.

"How come the aircraft could fly to Kolkata and not to this town? This is a big farce. The airline company has made a fool out of us," said Jagdish Panda whose sister had boarded the aircraft from Bhubaneswar.

Passengers on board said that the Alliance Air aircraft had departed from Bhubaneswar at the designated time. "The flight usually takes 55 minutes to reach



Rourkela. However, with about 15-20 minutes to land, we were informed that the flight was proceeding to Kolkata due to a technical snag," said a passenger here Friday.

"I am sure the plane never flew towards Rourkela, rather it was on its way to Kolkata. And mid-air after flying for 30 minutes the pilots and air hostesses informed us that the flight was on its way to Kolkata. We simply did not know what to do," said Manaswini Dash, another passenger.

The problems did not end for the passengers though. On landing, they were informed that another flight will be provided for them to travel to this town. "Later however, the airline officials

changed their version and said we will be taken to Bhubaneswar. Once we arrived in Kolkata there was no one available. All the staff of Alliance Air simply vanished leaving us to our own plight," informed another passenger.

Frustrated and angry passengers then had no other option, but to travel to Howrah Station and catch trains. Most of them arrived here Friday morning. "I along with my diabetic parents reached Rourkela this morning with much difficulty," Dash said.

Alliance Air, ever since it started its flight service to Rourkela, has always courted controversy. Thursday was no exception with 62 passengers suffering from the 'technical snag'.

NIT R students shine at Shark Tank India

Debendra and Biswajit have developed two submersible robots, 'Jaladuta' and 'Jalasihha', which can come handy in studying dams and bridges underwater

RAJESH MOHANTY, OP

Rourkela, March 29: They left their jobs before delving deep into the challenging world of startups with a resolve to become entrepreneurs. Today the duo has mastered robotics and brought pride for Odisha by producing unmanned underwater robots.

The spotlight is now on Debendra Pradhan and Biswajit Swain after they made their pitch on Shark Tank India earlier this month.

They have made two robots christened as 'Jaladuta' and 'Jalasihha'. While 'Jaladuta' can go up to 50 metre underwater, the other one, 'Jalasihha', has a range up to 500-600 metre.

"Both can look underwater for any possible damages or threats to structures like bridges and dams and show



their condition. Besides, the two robots can be very useful for defence purposes, for which the Indian Navy is also with us," said Debendra. However, they declined to say anything more citing security reasons. At present they have reputed clients like Indian Navy, Indian Railways, SAIL, Tata Steel, Aditya Birla and others.

The duo passed out from NIT Rourkela in 2017 and joined the corporate world. However, their restive minds were not satisfied with their jobs. "We did our mechanical engineering with specialisation in mechatronics and automation. But,

somehow we were not happy with what we were doing so we decided to start our own startup, hence Coratia Technology," said Debendra. Coratia is a combination of core and Asia hence the interesting combination, he added.

The duo joined the Foundation of Technology and Business Incubation (FTBI) of NIT Rourkela, the cradle for startups in the ace institute. There they got the support of the research experts, especially the faculties who were more than eager to join them as a helping hand.

"This was our college project and today we have made it into a company," said Debendra. They started with initial seed money of ₹1 lakh and now they have garnered ₹80 lakh investment, for one per cent of their equity from CEO and founder of OYO Rooms Ritesh Agarwal, who is from Odisha's Rayagada and a shark in the startup show Shark Tank India.

"The experience was nice and we will receive the fund as soon as the documentation process is over. The best part is they did not bargain with us at all," informed Biswajit.

Presently, they are a team of 14 students and have won several awards and accolades for their project. The team also had an opportunity to showcase their robots to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

Soon, branches will come up at Bangalore and also at Bhubaneswar, they said. "But our main R&D will be here in Rourkela and we will then look where we will set up our business office," informed Debendra. Both said it would be difficult to leave NIT Rourkela because, the project is linked to academics and research and our great professors are involved in it. So, we cannot leave this place."

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- The materials quantity are on an arising basis, being generated over a period of 12 months.
- The H1 bidder will have to lift the quantity on monthly generated basis. Buyer is not be allowed to pick or choose but on a clean sweep basis.
- Contract shall be valid for five years. The contract shall be signed for a period of 12 months, with effect from the date of signing of contract. The price enhancement will be linked with WPI index of cement price, CO₂ incentive, etc. The price for first year through e-auction basis.
- Bidder will be required to make suitable GBFS evacuation provision as per the Jindal Ferrous business requirement.
- Bidder to provide Balance Sheet/IT Returns / Tax Clearance certificates for past three financial years, Copy of PAN · Copy of TAN / GST ·
- Bidder to provide their Management details of Firm/Company/Proprietorship/ Partnership along with Copy of Incorporation / Registration Certificate
- A declaration on the letterhead of the firm / organization that it has not been blacklisted by any Government organization and/or Jindal Group companies
- The last date of sending RFP shall be 15th April 2024, 5 PM IST.**

Interested parties/companies may communicate with us at sales@jindalferrous.com through their official email account or by sending the hard copies of their expression of interest enclosed with the necessary documents at the address given below:

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FOCUS SOCIETY

POLITICS OF POVERTY



While the political leadership makes tall claims, the agents of political parties are found torturing the impoverished and backward sections and grabbing their land though all this has not been adequately focussed in the media

Look Sabha elections announced, all political parties are gearing up to woo the electoral vote bank, specially the poor and reeling out promises and policies if brought to power. Social security measures are being spelt out, but none specifically talk of poverty eradication, though poverty analysis is an ongoing subject with poverty lines being drawn based on different stipulations by varied agencies from time to time. However, the fact remains that most of these analyses, particularly of governments, are somewhat theoretical propositions and are quite different from the ground reality.

Recall the somewhat irrational assessment by the chief of Niti Aayog stating that poverty stands at just five per cent in the country. This observation drew flak from different international organisations, not just Oxfam, though none thought it worthwhile to comment. Such an observation may not be surprising, because in reality the true conditions of the masses in the rural areas, specially the backward districts of the country, are best hidden. Moreso, as every government would seek to claim having improved their lot.

Judging independently, while the political leadership makes tall claims, the agents of political parties are found torturing the impoverished and backward sections and grabbing their land though all this has not been adequately focussed in the media, only scattered reports of the neglect that the poor face. The ground situation doesn't get the national attention as the information from grass-root leaders is kept in wraps and the gap between the rich and the poor is startling.

The very recent survey released by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) is an indicator as its Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCSE) showed that the

richest five per cent of urban Indian households spend nearly 10 times more than the poorest five per cent on food and other necessities such as children's education, medical treatment, clothing and transport during 2022-23.

Nine states, including West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar and Assam, lagged behind the national average. In 2011-12, the average nationwide Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) figures were Rs 1459 and Rs 2630 respectively for rural and urban areas. This is obvious due to the fact that the northern and eastern states lag behind those in western and southern part of India.

It has been shown that rural monthly per capita consumption spending rose 164 per cent from Rs 1430 in 2011-12 to Rs 3773 in 2022-23 whereas in urban centres, it shot up 148 per cent from Rs 2630 to Rs 6459 during the same period. But during this 11-year period, there has

been a perceptible increase in prices of food items and this, on modest terms, almost doubled while, in some cases, to be more accurate increased by around 80 per cent.

While incomes of at least 50 to 60 per cent becoming stagnant during the period comparisons have been made, there can be no reason to feel that the poor or the economically weaker sections are well off by any standards. Moreover, the very fact that the government decided to give free rations to 80 crore people for five years proves that this section needs support.

Even for the rich, the survey showed that the top five per cent in rural areas spend Rs 10,551 per month but this appears a gross understatement. Similarly, the five per cent richest in urban areas are found to spend Rs 20,821. This finding, according to several economists, is not quite correct as such people, who own multiple cars and live in palatial bungalows and

even go on foreign jaunts for shopping, the figures are more than double of what has been revealed in the survey. While accepting that surveys often grossly underestimate the spending of the rich, in this instant case, the inaccuracy seems quite blatant.

Another interesting finding related to the investigation of the poverty scenario is India's prevalence of so-called 'zero-food' children who have not eaten anything whatsoever over a 24-hour period, assessed through snapshot surveys, is comparable to the prevalence rates in the West African nations of Guinea, Benin, Liberia and Mali. A study that used data from the Union Health Ministry's national family health survey for 2019-2021 estimated India's prevalence of zero-food children at 19.3 per cent, the third highest after Guinea's 21.8 per cent and Mali's 20.5 per cent. The comparable figures are much lower in Bangladesh (5.6 per cent), Pakistan (9.2 per cent), Nigeria (8.8 per cent) and Ethiopia (14.8 per cent).

The main question that has arisen is whether the Niti Aayog has measured poverty based on the government's flagship programmes, ignoring the standard parameters adopted the world over. The government's recent growth figures suggested the consumption growth was 4.4 per cent. If people are getting more money, why are they not buying basic stuff such as soap, hair oil, toothpaste, biscuit and so on? The fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector is not quite growing with the slow consumption demand in the rural areas.

Therefore, it is time that the political leadership adhere to the recommendations of economists and sociologists and give a new thrust to the rural sector. And while some good work has been done in recent years, much more needs to be desired.

INFA

What the soul sees and has experienced, that it knows; the rest is appearance, prejudice and opinion.
SRI AUROBINDO



Delhi CS In Hot Seat

Although AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal has announced that he will continue to function as Delhi's Chief Minister from ED custody, babu corridors are buzzing with news of Delhi Water Minister Atishi Marlena directing Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar to keep a close eye on the efficient functioning of the city's water and sewer systems. She's made it clear that he needs to ensure there are enough water tankers for every part of the city during the hot summer months. It's clear that Atishi has stepped in to fill the void left by Kejriwal's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate.

Now, if you are a Dilliwalla, you know there's a real showdown between the Delhi government and Lt Governor V.K. Saxena. Things have got even more interesting with this new order and the incarceration of the chief minister. It's like the power struggle has hit a new low, with the Chief Secretary caught in the middle. Usually, the folks at the Delhi Jal Board handle the water tankers. But now, it looks like the chief secretary's got to keep an eye on them too. So, if there is any chaos with water in the coming hot months, guess who's getting the blame?

Kumar, however, is a veteran babu who's seen through many a strategic move. Observers note that Kumar has played his cards well, something his predecessors like M.M. Kutty and Vijay Kumar Dev could not accomplish. In the hot days ahead with a growing dread of the looming water scarcity, we may have a silly summer potboiler on our hands.

Tactical reshuffles in states

The recent reshuffling of home secretaries in BJP-ruled states, with exceptions in Himachal Pradesh and Jharkhand may have surprised some but the removal of West Bengal's Director General of Police Rajeev Kumar by the Election Commission wasn't entirely unexpected. While inter-party dynamics certainly play a role, intra-party matters are equally significant, particularly in the context of elections, as evidenced by the change in the home secretary of one of the largest electorally significant states.

The swift change in Gujarat's Home Secretary raises questions about its underlying message. Indeed, speculation abounds that these decisions carry deeper implications beyond the surface, perhaps even serving as strategic messaging tools. Insiders suggest that more such decisions may be expected, hinting at a broader political strategy at play.

The decision to replace Bengal DGP Rajeev Kumar with Sanjay Mukherjee highlights the chessboard moves of the Centre before the elections. Interestingly Mukherjee was named only after the poll panel had initially named IPS officer Vivek Sahay as the next DGP before changing its mind. Further, the Election Commission's directive to the West Bengal Chief Secretary to ensure immediate compliance with the new appointment perhaps reveals the Centre's jitters about the political landscape it faces in this crucial state. The stakes are high, and this poll battle may well prove decisive.

Show cause notice to health babu over IVF controversy

The Punjab Government's move to slap a show cause notice on Principal Secretary of Health Ajoy Sharma regarding the IVF treatment given to the late singer Sidhu Moosewala's mother shows they're taking this pretty seriously. Sharma's got two weeks to explain why the government shouldn't initiate disciplinary action against him for supposedly not bringing it up with the bigwigs, certainly Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and Health Minister Balbir Singh.

This all kicked off after the slain singer's father claimed that the Punjab government was giving him a hard time over his new baby boy, born through IVF.

Since this is now such a big deal, Sharma has been directed to submit a report to the Health Minister, following the terms laid out in the Business Rules of 1992. Even the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has stepped into the picture, seeking a report from the IAS officer.

The birth of the baby, two years after Sidhu's tragic death, has caused a stir, especially since both parents are above the eligible age for IVF treatment. Yet, even as the nation is busy with the general elections beginning next month, the business of government must continue. The crackdown on the IAS officer is about making sure everyone plays by the rules and there is fairness in the system.

Share a babu experience! Follow [dilipthecherian@twitter.com](https://twitter.com/dilipthecherian). Let's multiply the effect

WISDOM CORNER

- The strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone. **HENRIK IBSEN**
- Knowledge is of no value unless you put it into practice. **ANTON CHEKHOV**
- Betrayal is the only truth that sticks. **ARTHUR MILLER**

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1853:** Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh, one of the greatest Post-Impressionists, known for works that convey not only keen observations of nature but the anguish of a mental illness, was born.
- 1856:** The Treaty of Paris was signed, ending the Crimean War. The war was fought between the Russian Empire and an alliance of the Ottoman Empire, France, the United Kingdom, and Sardinia-Piedmont. The war was named after the Crimean Peninsula, which is located on the Black Sea.
- 1867:** William H. Seward, secretary of state under U.S. President Andrew Johnson, signed the Alaska Purchase, a treaty ceding Russian North America to the United States for a price—\$7.2 million—that amounted to about two cents per acre.
- 1945:** British rock musician Eric Clapton, a highly influential guitarist who performed with such groups as the Yardbirds and Cream before embarking on a successful solo career, was born.

LOL

Sweep the floor

Your first job will be to sweep the floor. But I'm a college student the young man replied.



In that case give me the broom - I'll show you how.



Dhurjati Mukherjee

IN RURAL AREAS, THE RICH FIVE PER CENT SPEND NEARLY EIGHT TIMES MORE THAN THE POOREST FIVE PER CENT, WHOSE DAILY EXPENDITURE IS AS LOW AS ₹46

SPECTRUM CULTURE

Freedom of expression in cinema



Satya Narayan Misra

UNLIKE HIS PEERS IN THE WEST, LEGENDARY INDIAN FILMMAKER SATYAJIT RAY WAS RATHER DISCREET ABOUT THE USE OF SEX AND NUDITY IN HIS CINEMA

It is a paradox that humanity's yearning for freedom of expression is matched by its urge for its suppression. In American cinema before the 1960s, Hollywood's notorious Production Code, dictated that characters in the movies got shot without bleeding, argued without screaming, and had babies without copulation. Censorship wreaked havoc with plot and motivation, which either elided or occluded sexuality as an event in human life. In Europe, particularly Scandinavia, sexual representation had always been less censored.

The 1960s experienced various renaissance and new waves, a marked relaxation of whatever was frowned upon. Many cinemas moved towards a new level of sexual explicitness. An important aspect of this new wave was the prevalence of love stories in which what took place in the bedroom was as important as what took place outside. In Hollywood, the long history of self-censoring Production Code had so effectively banished sexual motive from the narrative that when such motive began to appear, this did so with the ve-

hement of the return of the repressed.

Liberalization is an inadequate explanation for the greater sexual freedom of American cinema. A good case in point is what happened following the final demise of the Hollywood Production Code and its replacement in 1968 by the MPAA rating system. This system designed to label works according to the degree of sexual representation, language, or violence had the effect of becoming a crucial marketing tool. The adult category has become the repository of the thriving low-budget high-profit realm of pornography. The rating system, designed as a labeling device, to contain sexual and sensual representation in age-appropriate spheres, became the inadvertent cause of inciting sexual representation with the rating system, as in the American obscenity law. The increased effort to define hard-core sexual representation by Justice Brennan of the US Supreme Court has opened the door to the legalization of hard-core pornography.

If cinema, since the 1960s has become an increasingly obscene

area of representation, it is not simply because of liberalization of censors has permitted the emergence of erotic and violent content that was once suppressed. Rather, it is because the very censorship that had kept such content off-screen for a mass market audience also had the effect of marketing them as desirable and marketable. Once marketable, the very notion of obscenity effectively disappears. Everything comes on screen, the only question is how and for whom.

The Indian cinema, led by Satyajit Ray, the master who firmly ensconced his name in the global firmament with his movie *Pather Panchali* (1955), was greatly influenced by the neorealism of masters like De Sica's *Bicycle Thief* (1948) and Renoir's *The River* (1951). But unlike his peers like Bergman, Truffaut, Godard, Fellini, and Hitchcock who had no qualms about showing and experimenting with sex in cinema, Ray was rather discreet about the use of sex and nudity in his cinema. For instance, in his eponymous film *Pather Panchali*, a film capturing the rural Bengal landscape in 1910 when women

never used petticoats and blouses, he shows Sarbajaya, the mother as fully clothed. It was both a vindication of his Victorian morality and respect for women. The CBFC in India as the regulatory agency for cinema assigns each film one of the four categories U, A, UA, and S. The film *Bandit Queen* (1994) which got an A rating showing the frontal nudity of Phoolan Devi caused a huge outcry. When challenged in the court, it upheld the scene. The court observed that nakedness does not always arouse the baser instinct. The court referred to the film *Schindler's List* (1993) where naked men and women were being led to the gas chambers of a Nazi camp. Tears are a reaction, except in the case of a pervert, the court observed. Sekhar Kapur's film made on a budget of \$32 million grossed \$221 million. Under the growing influence of Hollywood, liberalization in the air, the power of the market had the last laugh. Nudity and the rating system of cinema have become unconscious allies of the free market.

The writer is a movie buff

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

OrissaPOST
B-15, Rasulgari Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

Declining fertility

Sir, , Apropos, "Must address dipping fertility rates in India: Experts," Orissa POST, March 28. India made history recently. Decades of government efforts to control the population growth are finally showing the much-needed result. India's Total Fertility Rate of two is currently below the replacement level of fertility of 2.1 children per woman. The consequences of fertility decline will be that the share of the elderly in the population will increase sharply - leaving India staring at the spectre of looming demographic challenges that have caused big problems for other Asian powerhouses like China and Japan. Challenges like labour force shortages and potential social imbalances due to gender preferences are likely to occur. Though the benefits of demographic dividends are being reaped, the below replacement level fertility rate would mean a smaller dividend window than expected. Although India's working-age population will continue to grow for many more decades, it would need to keep an eye on fertility dips. Liberal labour reforms, encouraging higher female labour force participation rate, and a higher focus on nutrition and health would ensure sustained labour supply and output despite lower fertility. India, like other countries in the globe, would need to be equipped to aid the pater of more tiny feet sooner or later. **N Sadhasiva Reddy, BANGALORE**

Falling from grace

Sir, The Delhi High Court Thursday rejected a petition seeking the removal of jailed Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal from his post. Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) March 21 on charges of corruption and money laundering in Delhi government's excise policy for 2021-22, which was later scrapped. Sitting in jail the chief minister is incapable of transacting any business that the law enjoins upon him. The plea said that if Kejriwal continues as the chief minister from behind the bars, any material, however secretive in nature, would have to be scanned by prison authorities before it reaches the chief minister, thus creating potential threats. The question we are asking is if there is any prohibition or any bar which prevents him from continuing as a chief minister. If there is constitutional failure, the President will act on it. Or the Governor will act on it. The court will not act on it. Meanwhile, Kejriwal's wife is ready to take over the reins as the chief minister. **MR Jayanthi, EAST MUMBAI**



STAMP RELEASE ANNIVERSARY

Bihar Postal Circle to release special cover

FIGHT FOR RIGHTS

Differently-abled voters urged to exercise their right to franchise



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, March 29: Disability rights activist Arman Ali Wednesday urged all disabled voters to exercise their right to vote.

It is imperative to ensure that the facilities announced by the Election Commission for persons with disabilities in the upcoming elections are adhered to so that persons with disabilities (PWD) can cast their votes, Ali said.

He was addressing a consultation of stakeholders for disability advocacy, organised by the NGO Shishu Sarothi, along with the country's leading disability rights body the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP).

Ali, who is the Executive Director of NCPEDP, expressed satisfaction with the extension of the postal ballot facility, initially introduced in Bihar, which, in the upcoming Lok Sabha Elections will enable 82 lakh elderly voters aged 85 and above, as well as 88.4 lakh disabled voters, to cast their votes from home.

There is an urgent need for large-scale awareness and for all stakeholders to come together to ensure "democracy becomes more inclusive and enables empowerment of disabled people", he said. Assam State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities Sushma Hazarika highlighted government initiatives to ensure accessibility in the participation of persons with disabilities in the upcoming elections.

Joint Secretary at the Election Commission Office Pankaj Chakraborty also told the gath-

Assam State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities Sushma Hazarika highlighted government initiatives to ensure accessibility in the participation of persons with disabilities in the upcoming elections

ering about the steps taken by the poll panel and stakeholders to enhance accessibility in this election cycle. He discussed the Saksham app's role in facilitating seamless voting experiences for PWDs.

The app developed by the ECI provides a number of features to help PwDs register to vote, find their polling station, and cast their votes.

The stakeholders also highlighted additional concerns, such as queue management, inaccessibility of EVM machines (based on the height of the tabletop), and the crucial role of Booth Level Officers in promptly addressing these issues. Transportation challenges were also raised, underlining the need for improved accessibility at the polling stations.

Enhancing voter education and awareness programs for persons with disabilities, including sign language interpretation, to empower them with necessary information and resources for active participation in the electoral process were also discussed during the consultation.

Ahead of the Lok Sabha Elections 2024, the NCPEDP is organising a series of regional consultations titled 'Disabled People in Politics' across India.

Multi-layer security along int'l borders with eight N-E states

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Imphal/Aizawl, March 29: A multi-tier security arrangement has been put in place along the 5437-km long international borders with eight northeastern states to foil any cross-border illegal activities before and during the Lok Sabha elections.

Top Army, BSF and Assam Rifles officials are frequently visiting the bordering areas and sensitising their troops deployed along the international fenced and unfenced bordering areas.

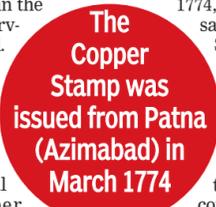
Election and security officials separately said that massive security measures are being taken along the 1,643-km long border with Myanmar, the 1,880-km long border with Bangladesh, the over 1,300-km border with China, the 516-km border with Bhutan, and the 98-km border with Nepal.

The Army, Assam Rifles and the Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) troops are guarding the northeastern states' borders with China and Myanmar while the Border Security Force (BSF) personnel are guarding the India-Bangladesh borders with four northeastern states - Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura.

The official said that following the directions from the Election Commission and the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), all-out measures have been taken to further tighten the security along the borders.

The state security forces in coordination with the Central forces are active in the bordering villages and areas to ensure security in the run-up to the elections. Meanwhile, a large contingent of Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) reached different northeastern states last month and they, along with the state security forces, are now regularly patrolling the sensitive, vulnerable, mixed-population, and border areas as part of their "confidence-building measures".

from Patna (Azimabad) in March 1774, he added. Kumar said that the Copper Stamp issued in Patna (Azimabad) 250 years ago was a pioneering initiative in the field of postal services. "This postal token, made of fine copper, revolutionised the process of sending mail, which ushered in a new era in communication. Its introduction laid the foundation for modern postal systems throughout the world", said Kumar.



The chief postmaster general said that in honour of this historic journey, the Department of Posts, Bihar Circle, would host a grand philatelic exhibition at Patna GPO March 31, 2024. "The exhibition will feature rare postage stamps, historical artifacts and fascinating exhibits highlighting the evolution of postal systems over the last two and a half centuries," he said.

Additionally, March 31, a special cover on the coveted Copper Stamp will be released to commemorate this momentous occasion, he said, adding the release of this special cover is an important initiative of the Postal Department of Bihar in preserving the rich history and cultural heritage associated with the world's first postal stamp.

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Rural Bihar battle elephantiasis, dengue

BIHAR IS LIKELY TO WITNESS HOTTER SUMMERS AND SCANTIER RAINFALL IN THE NEXT TWO DECADES

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

CLIMATE CHANGE, TROPICAL DISEASES

Muzaffarpur/Gopalganj (Bihar), March 29: Far from the world of scientists studying climate change, the twin whammies of altered rainfall patterns and rising temperatures are being felt every day in villages such as Sher in Bihar where lymphatic filariasis and other neglected tropical diseases lurk in dank corners.

"Climate change is fundamentally altering vector ecology, favouring the survival and reproduction of disease carrying vectors like mosquitoes and sandflies," said Dr Bhupendra Tripathi, a New Delhi-based scientist.

"This phenomenon extends their range and boosts their population densities, thus expanding vector habitats. Consequently, previously unaffected regions are now susceptible to vector-borne diseases such as LF and VL, with instances emerging in places like Uttarakhand," the MD and deputy director, Infectious Diseases and Vaccine Delivery, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, India Country Office.

Bihar's Sher village is testament that the fears of scientists and other experts are very real. Walking through the labyrinthine lanes of the village, Kusum Begum is tasked with not just distributing medicines to combat LF, a debilitating disease caused by parasitic worms transmitted to humans through infected mosquitoes, but also increasing awareness.

"Climate change is making our battle against diseases like lymphatic filariasis even more challenging. We must act swiftly to mitigate these threats," Kusum said.

"I tell the villagers that they must wear full sleeves clothes, sleep in mosquito nets and most importantly ensure that water doesn't accumulate," she said.



Shanti Devi, a community leader in Mugal Biracha village in Gopalganj district, has taken charge of spreading awareness on disease prevention and climate resilience.

"We must arm ourselves with knowledge on protecting against mosquito bites and understand the importance of curbing disease spread. Because we don't know when the situation will worsen," she said.

Bihar is likely to witness hotter summers and scantier rainfall in the next two decades. This may pose greater health risks with more severe heat waves and an "exponential" rise in vector-borne diseases, according to a recent submission before the state assembly by the Department of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (DEFCC) which cited a report of the Bihar State Pollution Control Board (BSPCB).

Underscoring the urgency of addressing the impact of climate change, Parmeshwar Prasad, additional director and Bihar Programme Officer of Lymphatic Filariasis, said India is on way to achieving its target of eradication by 2027 but the challenges are plenty.

"In view of rising temperatures we are recommending and taking action at two levels - individual and societal," he said. "At the individual level, we tell people to use mosquito repel-

lents and let fumigation gas come indoors... At the societal level, public should support efforts such as fumigation. We are making all these preparations so that in anticipation of rising temperatures and increased moisture due to climate change, the impact can be minimised."

Tripathi added that climate change directly affects the spread and prevalence of neglected tropical diseases (NTD) like LF and VL in different areas of India by influencing vector ecology, geographical expansion, human migration patterns, vector adaptations, and changes in local infrastructure.

VL is caused by infection with leishmania parasites that are transmitted by the bite of sandflies. "Integrating climate change adaptation strategies into NTD control and elimination efforts requires a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates advanced modelling techniques, anticipatory planning, and adaptation of existing control measures. By doing so, we can better prepare for and mitigate the impacts of climate change on NTD burden, ultimately advancing towards the goal of eliminating these diseases in affected communities," he said.

Projections of shifting rainfall patterns in Bihar and soaring temperatures paint a grim picture, underscoring the urgent need for

Climate change, which brings with it floods and droughts, is also leading to more mosquitoes and sandflies and therefore a spike in diseases such as lymphatic filariasis, commonly known as elephantiasis, dengue and visceral leishmaniasis (VL) or kala azar

As the summer sets in, so does the threat of transmission of these diseases with the heat creating fertile breeding grounds for the vectors

Higher temperatures could lead to an exponential rise of vector-borne diseases.

Fourteen of the 50 districts, including Muzaffarpur and Gopalganj, are considered most vulnerable to climate change in India are in Bihar, said BSPCB chairperson Devendra Kumar Shukla. "Only through collective action can we safeguard the health and well-being of our communities," he said.

In response to the expected rise of vector-borne diseases, patients who suffer from LF have formed a network to distribute medicines to prevent further spread of the disease. They are also disseminating information on how to implement preventative measures.

Community meetings are held regularly to educate residents on the importance of sanitation and proper waste disposal in reducing mosquito breeding sites. Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a diverse group of conditions caused by a variety of pathogens (including viruses, bacteria, parasites, fungi and toxins) and associated with devastating health, social and economic consequences.

The World Health Organisation recognises 20 neglected tropical diseases, of which 12 are present in India. The NTDs most prevalent in India are LF, VL, leptospirosis, leprosy, rabies, soil-transmitted helminthiasis, and dengue fever.

INDIA bloc in Bihar seals seat-sharing deal

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Patna, March 29: INDIA bloc announced its seat-sharing arrangement for Bihar Friday.

RJD is contesting on 26 seats in this Lok Sabha election in Bihar, while Congress is given nine seats. CPI-ML will contest on three seats, CPI on one seat and CPI-M also on one seat in the state.

RJD will contest in Gaya (Reserved), Nawada, Jahanabad, Aurangabad, Buxar, Patliputra, Munger, Jamui (Reserved), Banka, Valmikinagar, Purvi Champaran, Sheohar, Sitamarhi, Vaishali, Saran, Siwan, Gopalganj (Reserved), Ujjarpur, Darbhanga, Madhubani, Jhunjharpur, Supaul, Madhepura, Purnea, Araria and Hajipur (Reserved) Lok Sabha constituencies in the 2024 general election.



Bihar RJD President Jagdanand Singh and State Congress President Akhilesh Singh with CPI-ML, CPM and other leaders release Grand Alliance candidates' list

Congress will contest in Kishanganj, Katihar, Bhagalpur, Muzaffarpur, Samastipur

(Reserved), West Champaran, Patna Sahib, Sasaram (Reserved) and Maharajganj Lok Sabha constituencies.

RJD is contesting on 26 seats in this Lok Sabha election in Bihar, while Congress is given nine seats. CPI-ML will contest on three seats, CPI on one seat and CPI-M also on one seat in the state

CPI-ML will contest on Arrah, Karatak and Nalanda Lok Sabha seats. The INDIA bloc has also given the Agiaon assembly seat to CPI-ML for by-election.

This seat was vacant after CPI-ML MLA Manoj Manjhi was convicted in a criminal case this year.

CPI is given the seat of Begusarai, while CPI-M is given the Khagaria Lok Sabha seat for the upcoming elections.

IIT-Guwahati develops 3 ingenious therapies for knee meniscus tear

A knee meniscus tear is caused by trauma to the knee meniscus, a cushioning tissue in the knee joint, by sudden accidents, mishaps while playing sports, or simply aging



Besides being cost-effective compared to commercially available polyurethane and collagen meniscus implants, these can also be customised for each patient, and potentially prevent future complications such as osteoarthritis.

"We have developed regenerative treatment approaches that would be tailored for the patient and help in rapid healing meniscus tears or replacing parts of the damaged tissue. Our problem statement also accounts for the shape and size variability of the meniscus in patients of different age groups, and is a source of growth factors for better healing," said Prof Biman B. Mandal, Department of Biosciences and Bioengineering, IIT Guwahati, in a statement.

Out of the three formulations, one is an injectable hydrogel, which can be injected in a minimally invasive manner directly into the meniscus site to expedite the healing of smaller injuries, the researchers said. In addition, they also created

New discovery

Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati has successfully transferred a 'pioneering' vaccine technology to a manufacturing company specialising in high-quality vaccines for combating swine fever virus in pigs and wild boars, a release said. This vaccine marks the first recombinant virus-based solution for classical swine fever developed in India, offering a swift and cost-effective method for pig vaccination.

two 3D bio-printable inks that can be 3D printed into implants.

The different approaches are described in three research papers published across two International journals, Applied Materials Today and Advanced Biology.

"There is an urgent need for personalised, affordable 3D meniscal implants in the clinical scenario as artificial implants fail to conform to patients alike. "There are also significant infection risks from allografts, inconsistent mechanical compliance of the graft being either too brittle or too stiff, as well as the poor biological integration of synthetic implants," Prof Mandal added.

Manipur declares 'working day' on Easter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Imphal, March 29: The Manipur government which had declared that March 31, which is Easter Sunday, as a "working day" has retracted its order Thursday following protests by the Christian community.

Christians worldwide celebrate the Easter festival which marks the Resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day after his Crucifixion.

The state government Wednesday said in a notification that March 30 and 31 will be working days in government de-

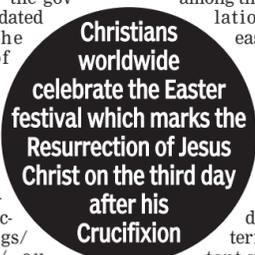
partments despite being Saturday and Sunday "for smooth functioning of offices in the last few days of financial year."

The government modified the order Thursday. A notification by the General Administration

Department said, "In partial modification of the government order dated March 27, the Governor of Manipur is pleased to declare that only March 30 will be a working day for all government offices including public sector undertakings/corporations/autonomous bodies/societies under the state government..." The modification came after

the previous order caused a stir among the Christian population in the northeastern state.

The Tangkhul Naga Baptist Convention, Mao Baptist Churches Association and Senapati District Students Association condemned the order, terming it as a "blatant violation and infringement to the religious rights and freedom of Christians" in the state.



Ranjita, Anita to lock horns in Aska

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Berhampur, March 29: The ruling BJD has sprung a surprise by fielding a political greenhorn in the politically significant Aska Lok Sabha seat, which was represented by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik as well as his father Biju Patnaik.

The BJD has nominated 33-year-old Ranjita Sahu, the daughter of former chairperson of Kodala Notified Area Council Hara Prasad Sahu, for the seat. A postgraduate in Economics, Sahu is a social activist who has formed an organisation 'Kodala Youth Forum' to undertake social work in Kodala, Polasara and Kabisurya Nagar areas.

"I thank the Chief Minister for nominating me from the Aska Lok Sabha constituency," Ranjita said. Although it is the first time she is contesting elections, Ranjita is no stranger to politics.

"I come from a political family. My father (Hara Prasad Sahu) and mother (Sunita Prabha Sahu) were elected as chairpersons of Kodala NAC," she said.

BJD's Ganjam district president Ramesh Chandra



RANJITA SAHU



ANITA SUBHADARSHINI

Chaupatnaik said, "She is a young and educated woman. She also comes from a political family. We thank the CM for selecting the right candidate for the Aska constituency."

By fielding Ranjita, the CM has once again shown his efforts towards political empowerment of women, said Sanghamitra Dalei, Mayor of Berhampur Municipal Corporation.



Ranjita will contest against BJP's Anita Subhadarshini, the

daughter of former minister Rama Krushna Patnaik and Kumudini Patnaik, who was a former MP of Aska.

Anita had in 2019 unsuccessfully contested from the Aska on a BJP ticket.

In the 2019 elections, BJD had surprised everyone by fielding 70-year-old Pramila Bisoi, a leader of a women self-help group as its candidate from Aska.

She defeated Anita by a mar-

■ The BJD has nominated 33-year-old Ranjita Sahu, the daughter of former chairperson of Kodala Notified Area Council Hara Prasad Sahu, for the seat

■ A postgraduate in Economics, Sahu is a social activist who has formed an organisation 'Kodala Youth Forum' to undertake social work in Kodala, Polasara and Kabisurya Nagar areas

■ Ranjita is pitted against BJP's Anita Subhadarshini, the daughter of former minister Rama Krushna Patnaik and Kumudini Patnaik, who was a former MP of Aska

■ Anita had in 2019 unsuccessfully contested from the Aska on a BJP ticket

gin of over 2.04 lakh votes. The party however dropped her this time. Former chief minister Biju Patnaik had represented the seat in 1996 polls, while his son and present CM Naveen Patnaik was elected from the constituency in 1997 (byelection) and 1998. The Congress was yet to announce its candidate for the seat.

Bhoi quits Cong after 38 yrs; two leaders leave BJP



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 29: Three-time Congress MLA and former minister Surendra Singh Bhoi resigned from the primary membership of the party after 38 years and joined the ruling BJD Friday.

Two BJP leaders - Nilgiri MLA Sukanta Kumar Nayak and the party's Cuttack district president Prakash Chandra Behera - also resigned from their party and are likely to join the BJD. In a letter to All India Congress Committee (AICC) president Mallikarjun Kharge, Bhoi said he has resigned from the post of Bolangir district Congress committee (DCC) president as well as the party.

"I beg to say here that due to personal reasons I would like to resign from the primary membership, and the post of president DCC, Bolangir as well as AICC membership. With great honour, I thank you for giving me an opportunity to serve the party and my state for 38 years with passion, dedication and discipline," he said in the letter.

He joined the BJD at Sankha Bhawan, the headquarters of the ruling party.

BJP MLA Sukanta Nayak also resigned from the party.

In a letter to Odisha BJP president Manmohan Samal, the Nilgiri MLA said, "I do hereby tender my resignation on today (i.e. 29.03.2024) from the primary membership of Bharatiya Janata Party. The same may please be

Nilgiri MLA Sukanta Kumar Nayak and the party's Cuttack district president Prakash Chandra Behera - also resigned from their party and are likely to join the BJD

accepted." Nayak was elected to the Assembly in 2014 on BJD ticket from Nilgiri. He, however, switched over to BJP in 2019 and also won the seat. He has now decided to return to the party from where he started his electoral journey, BJD sources said.

Former Chittrakonda MLA & BJD leader Dambaru Sisa also resigned from the primary membership of the party Thursday.

In his letter to BJD president Naveen Patnaik, Sisa said, "My aim and purpose remain the same as it has always been from the very beginning to serve the people of the state and the constituency. I believe I am unable to do this anymore in this party. So to meet the aspirations of my people and my workers, I believe it is best to look forward to a fresh start."

The development came a day after Cuttack MP Bhatruhari Mahtab and ex-MP Siddharth Mohapatra joined BJP in Delhi Thursday. Mahtab had resigned from BJD March 22. Lok Sabha and Assembly elections will be held simultaneously in Odisha in four phases between May 13 and June 1.

Congress likely to release LS poll manifesto April 5

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 29: The Congress is likely to release its manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections April 5 in the presence of top leaders, including party chief Mallikarjun Kharge and former party presidents Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, sources said Friday.

They also said that Kharge and the Gandhis are likely to address public rallies in Jaipur and Hyderabad April 6 where they will also highlight the key elements of the Congress manifesto.

According to the sources, the party leadership would launch the poll manifesto April 5 at the All India Congress Committee headquarters.

The Congress' manifesto will lay emphasis on 'Paanch Nyay' or five pillars of justice, including 'Yuva Nyay', 'Naari Nyay', 'Kisaan Nyay', 'Shramik Nyay' and 'Hissedari Nyay' as well as the guarantees made by it to the people as part of its poll promises for 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

The Congress will launch its 'Ghar Ghar Guarantee' campaign April 3 under which party leaders will reach out to more than 8 crore households across the country.

The campaign will focus more on social media and television and less on print and outdoor campaigning, the sources said.

The party has already launched its new slogan #HaathBadlegaHalaat - referring to the Congress' poll symbol of hand - on social media platforms, they added.

The sources said that the party had to postpone the launch of its poll campaigns due to Income Tax notices for penalties to the tune of Rs 1,800 crore for alleged discrepancies in tax returns.



POLL PREP: Biju Yuva Janata Dal members congregate at Sankha Bhawan in Bhubaneswar, Friday, to prepare strategies for the upcoming elections OP PHOTO

SUNDARGARH LOK SABHA SEAT STILL ELUDES BJD

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, March 29: Sundargarh may witness a close contest this time in the parliament election. This seat has been eluding BJD ever since the party came into existence.

Former India Men's team captain, Rajya Sabha member and present head of Hockey India, Dilip Tirkey is going test his electoral luck against sitting BJP MP Jual Oram, a former Central minister and currently chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Defence. Though all are eagerly waiting for the announcement of the Congress candidate, local bookies have started accepting bets on Tirkey and Oram.

Despite making its best efforts, BJD could never win this seat. Congress candidates had

won a maximum of six times from here. And if Jual wins this time, then he will equal the Congress record. Besides, Debanand Amat had been victorious from this constituency on Bharatiya Lokdal and Janata Dal tickets.

Poll watchers said by allotting ticket to Tirkey, the BJD seems to have taken the contest a bit seriously this time. Going by past records, Tirkey had contested from here in 2014 and lost to Oram in a close fight. Oram had secured 340,508 votes (33.69%), while Tirkey had polled 321,769 votes (31.83%). The effective difference between the two candidates was mere 18,829 votes.

While letting Tirkey to take the fight into Oram's bastion, BJD seems to have taken a few factors into consideration. Apart from



DILIP TIRKEY



JUAL ORAM

the marginal vote difference, the party is also banking on Tirkey's image - especially among the tribes as a celebrated hockey player - and the recently built hockey infrastructure in the district. Besides, Tirkey's image as

a suave, soft spoken and well-behaved person may also help him garner considerable support. Above all, the Christians population of the district - which according to the 2011 census was 385,011 (18% of the total popu-

lation of 20,934, 37) and a projected addition of another 4 lakhs - may back Tirkey.

"Dilip is certainly a better candidate. He is simple, polite and never seen to have misbehaved or done anything uncouth in public. Besides, his contribution to hockey is another advantage for him," said local political analyst Rakesh Mohanty. "He is also active in the district in the last one and half years and has been nurturing the constituency very diligently," Mohanty added.

However, Oram's political acumen as a five-time MP and cannot be ignored, along with the Modi factor. Besides, a cursory glance at the last election figures reveals that there has been a significant leap in the votes he pooled, and also the percentage of votes. In 2019 Oram got 5.56

lakh votes (45% of the total votes) and his nearest rival Sunita Biswal polled 2.76 lakhs (25.16%).

"Sundargarh's Hindu population is over 15 lakh as per the last census, accounting for 73% of the population. Besides, there has been a significant growth in tribal Hindu population following Hindu religious activities, apart from the Adi Dharma," said another analyst. In addition, dynamics have changed after the Ram Mandir consecration which has contributed to a Hindu resurgence, he argued. "Besides, there has been a growth of akhadas in rural areas which is a new phenomenon," he added. His summed up by saying that Juel certainly has a contest in his hands, "But you just cannot rule him out or say that BJD has an absolute advantage."



Congress leaders attend an iftar party at Sukarpada under Nischintakoili block in Cuttack district Friday as elections draw near



BJP candidate for Koraput LS seat Kaleram Majhi along with party workers taking out a 'padyatra' at Tikiri in Rayagada district, Friday

national

of the day quote

Our opponents are so strong. Don't think that we are going to win all the 28 seats unless and until we forget what all had happened in the past and our differences

H D DEVE GOWDA | FORMER PM

They (Congress) during their regime of 60 to 62 years failed to develop the country

SHRIPAD NAIK | UNION MINISTER

Much has changed in the last 10 years and the credit for this goes to decisive leadership under the Modi government

ANURAG THAKUR | ANURAG THAKUR

SHORT TAKES

Man kills wife, three daughters

Motihari (Bihar): A woman and her three minor daughters have been hacked to death allegedly by her husband at their house in Bihar's Champaran district, a police official said Friday. The accused was jailed for killing one of his other two daughters a few years ago. According to Ranjan Kumar, Sub Divisional Police Officer, Areraj, the incident took place in Bavariya village which falls under Pahadpur police station area.

Kangana holds roadshow in Mandi

Shimla: Actor Kangana Ranaut Friday launched a scathing attack on Congress over its leader's derogatory remarks on her and Mandi from where she is contesting the Lok Sabha polls on BJP ticket. Ranaut began her Lok Sabha election campaign here with a roadshow hailing Prime Minister Narendra Modi with "Jai Shri Ram" and asserting that the BJP's main agenda is development. The roadshow witnessed a large number of people trying to get a glimpse of the Hindi film actor, a four-time National Award winner who was born in Mandi's Bhambla town.

Top court to hear bail plea of Balaji April 1

New Delhi: The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear April 1 the bail plea of former Tamil Nadu minister V Senthil Balaji, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate last year in connection with a money laundering case. A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan is scheduled to hear Balaji's plea challenging the February 28 order of the Madras High Court dismissing his second bail petition in the case. The high court, while dismissing the bail petition, said that if he is let out on bail in a case of this nature, it will send a wrong signal and it will be against larger public interest.

FROM TEA TO SAMOSA

With polls to elect the 18th Lok Sabha approaching, district poll panels are fixing the rates for expenses as part of the election expenditure monitoring process

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 29: Candidates in Punjab's Jalandhar can spend ₹15 for a cup of tea and the same price for a samosa they offer to people during public meetings and campaign trails in the Lok Sabha elections. However, those in Madhya Pradesh's Mandla can spend ₹7 for a cup of tea and another ₹7.50 for a piece of samosa, considered a staple snack in many parts of the country. The candidates will have to manage their expenditure

INDIA gets permission for March 31 protest

INDIA bloc leaders including Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi, Sharad Pawar, Uddhav Thackeray, Aaditya Thackeray, Sanjay Raut will reportedly take part in the protest

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 29: Top INDIA bloc leaders, including Rahul Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge, Sharad Pawar, Uddhav Thackeray, Akhilesh Yadav and Tejashwi Yadav among others will attend a 'maharally' to be held by the AAP at the Ramlila Maidan March 31, senior party leader Gopal Rai said Friday. The Election Commission of India and police have given permission for the INDIA bloc of parties to protest against the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal March 31 at Ramlila Maidan.

The call on whether Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal will address the 'Maharally' will be taken later, Rai said. Other prominent political leaders and members of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) like TMC's Derek O'Brien, DMK's Tiruchi Siva, NC's Farooq Abdullah and Jharkhand Chief Minister Champai Soren of JMM will also attend the rally, he said.

Kalpna Soren, the wife of former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, who is currently in jail, will also attend the rally, he said. The party leaders said they are also in touch with PDP leader Mehbooba Mufti, who may join the rally.

According to the party's senior leadership, they are planning a show of strength at the Ramlila Maidan Sunday, from where they may launch a massive campaign against the ruling BJP government for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

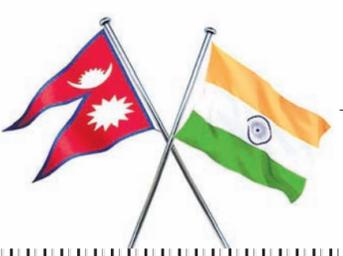


What is Kejriwal's crime? He framed a liquor policy, something that is done by all states. Delhi is the country's capital and its chief minister is arrested

SHARAD PAWAR | NATIONALIST CONGRESS PARTY (SCP) CHIEF

INDIA RENEWS AGREEMENT TO EXPORT ELECTRICITY TO NEPAL

India Friday renewed the agreement to export electricity to Nepal as per the Himalayan nation's request two days before the expiry of the pact March 31, an official said. "We have received the notification about the renewal of the agreement to export electricity to Nepal until June end," Chandan Ghosh, Nepal Electricity Authority spokesperson, told PTI



CAFE BLAST CASE

NIA declares ₹10 lakh bounty each on 2 accused

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 29: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) Friday announced a reward of ₹10 lakh each for sharing information leading to the arrest of two key accused, one of them using Hindu names to hide identity, in Bangalore's Rameshwaram Cafe blast case. The agency requested the general public for information on the duo - Mussavir Hussain Shazib alias Shazeb alias Md Juned Hussain alias Mohammed Juned Sayed and Abdul Matheen Ahmed Taahaa alias Abdul Matheen Taha alias Matheen alias Taha alias Vignesh D alias Sumit "or any other assumed Hindu name" - wanted in the case, according to its posts on X.



REWARD ₹10,00,000/- REWARD ₹10,00,000/-

Taha, aged about 30 years, has been using Hindu identity documents, forged Aadhaar card in the name of Vignesh or other similar forged ID documents to conceal identity, the NIA said.

The NIA said accused Shazib, aged 30 years, prefers to wear "jeans, T-shirt and shirt" and "black smart watch". Both Shazib and Taha often wear "mask, wig and fake beard", it said.

People can share details regarding these two accused through email at info.Blr.Nia@gov.in or through telephone numbers 080-29510900, 8904241100, besides the NIA's office in Bangalore.

Oppn raises questions over Ansari's death



An ambulance carrying the mortal remains of Mukhtar Ansari leaves for his native place in Ghazipur

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Banda/Lucknow, March 29: A magisterial inquiry was ordered Friday as Opposition parties raised questions over the death of gangster-politician Mukhtar Ansari, amid allegations by his family that he died due to "slow poisoning" in Banda jail. A panel of doctors conducted a post-mortem at Rani Durgavati Medical College in Banda, amid a security alert across several districts in Uttar Pradesh.

Opposition parties are, however, demanding a CBI probe, or an inquiry that involves the higher judiciary. The BJP slammed them saying they have the habit of emotionally exploiting every issue to spoil communal harmony.

In the evening, Ansari's body was headed for Mohammadabad Yusufpur township in Ghazipur district.

Police were on alert in districts that fall on the 400-km Banda-Ghazipur route, which runs through Fatehpur, Kaushambi, Prayagraj and Varanasi.

The burial at the family cemetery, where a grave was dug during the day for Ansari, was expected to take place Friday night or Saturday morning - depending on how late the body arrived. "We got the news of his death only through the media. We will demand a high-level inquiry

and do whatever we have to do through the court. We have full confidence in the court," he told reporters, levelling the poisoning charge again.

He also wrote to the Banda district magistrate, alleging that his father was killed in a planned manner and demanding that the postmortem be performed at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi.

"We have no faith of getting justice from the administration and the doctors' team of Banda," his letter said. Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav demanded a probe under the supervision of a Supreme Court judge. AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi said there should be an independent inquiry into the death.

Mayawati, whose BSP fielded him in Lok Sabha polls twice, said on X, "The persistent apprehension and serious allegations made by Mukhtar Ansari's family regarding his death in jail require a high-level investigation so that true facts of his death are revealed."

Rashtriya Janata Dal leader and former Bihar deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav said Constitutional institutions should take suo motu cognizance of such incidents.

Ansari had over 60 criminal cases pending against him. In 2005, he and his family were accused of murdering BJP MLA Krishnanand Rai.



Rai said after Kejriwal's arrest, the party has held multiple protests across Delhi. They noticed two kinds of law and order on road - the Delhi police easily gives permissions to hold protests to the BJP but the opposition is not allowed for that, he said, and added that all this is happening when the model code of conduct of the Election Commission is in force.

The AAP finally managed to get the permission to hold the rally. It has also given some undertakings to the Delhi Police, the sources said. The AAP has made a three-tier plan to motivate the people to come to the rally. First the meetings were held at the Vidhan Sabha level, then all the 2600 polling stations level and now a door-to-door campaign has started. "We are going door-to-door to distribute invitation letters and urging people to come to Ramlila Maidan and raise their voices peacefully against dictatorship," he said. Rai claimed that ever since the BJP government at the Centre and the prime minister arrested the popularly elected Chief Minister of Delhi, there has been grave anger among the people. He said the people from every class and profession, students, youths and members of RWAs are expected to come in the rally. On Thursday, Kejriwal alleged in a Delhi court that the BJP government has given bail by taking ₹60 crore from the same businessman on whose statements he has been jailed. Therefore, today there is significant anger among the people. Entire Delhi is going to gather in Ramlila Maidan at 10 am March 31 against this "dictatorship", Rai said.

The AAP is expecting that all major leaders of the INDIA bloc will participate in the rally. "To make the mega rally successful and to ensure the participation of as many people as possible, the Aam Aadmi Party has initiated the campaign of distributing invitation letters," a party statement said.

THE RALLY, TO BE ORGANISED IN SOLIDARITY WITH DELHI CHIEF MINISTER ARVIND KEJRIWAL, WOULD AIM AT GALVANISING PEOPLE TO STAND AGAINST THE ALLEGED AUTHORITARIANISM OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT

TIDBITS

Modi-Bill Gates discuss India's digital revolution

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Friday identified agriculture, education and health as three sectors where he is most excited about the use of technology, and highlighted related efforts of his government in these fields. In an interaction with philanthropist and Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates on a host of issues, including technology, its use in different sectors and climate change, Modi said he used to hear of digital divide in the world and had decided that he will not allow this to happen in India. Modi noted that there is a significant risk of misuse of a powerful technology like Artificial Intelligence (AI), especially when placed in unskilled hands, and suggested that AI-generated content should carry clear watermarks to prevent misinformation.

Sunita Kejriwal preparing to be next CM: Puri

New Delhi: Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri Friday compared Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita to former Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi, and said she is perhaps preparing to hold the post of her husband. "The madam you are naming is perhaps preparing to hold the post like Rabri Devi did in Bihar," the senior BJP leader told reporters. The Union Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs was responding to a question about Sunita Kejriwal who has been briefing media on behalf of her husband, since his arrest by the ED last week.

Jaishankar, Kuleba hold bilateral talks

New Delhi: India and Ukraine Friday held "open and wide-ranging" talks here as part of a bilateral engagement between its foreign ministers, with discussions focussing on the "ongoing conflict and its wider ramifications". Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs Dmytro Kuleba's two-day visit to India comes amid efforts to seek a peaceful resolution to the more than two-year-old Russia-Ukraine conflict. He arrived here Thursday. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met Kuleba at the Hyderabad House. After the meeting, Jaishankar in a post on X said, "An open and wide-ranging conversation with Ukraine FM @DmytroKuleba this afternoon."



MATTER OF FAITH: Christian devotees take part in a procession marking 'Good Friday' in Amritsar, Punjab

RAJU PAL MURDER CASE

Special CBI court sentences six to life imprisonment

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 29: A special CBI court in Lucknow Friday convicted seven people in the killing of the then BSP MLA Raju Pal in 2005, a case in which murdered gangster-turned-politician Atiq Ahmad was also an accused, and sentenced six of them to life imprisonment, officials said.

The proceedings against Atiq Ahmad, his brother and prime accused Khalid Azim alias Ashraf, and Gulful alias Rafiq were abated after their death, they said.

Special CBI Judge Kavita Mishra held Ranjeet Pal, Abid, Farhan Ahmad, Israr Ahmad, Javed, Gulhasan, and Abdul Kavi guilty in the case for criminal conspiracy and murder among other serious charges.

Dist poll panel unveils election expense limits

within the prescribed limit. These rate cards often become a subject of "meme-fest" on social media about the prices not being in sync with the current inflation level.

In most states, including Andhra Pradesh, the expenditure ceiling for a Lok Sabha candidate is set at ₹95 lakh. However, in Arunachal Pradesh, Goa and Sikkim, the limit is slightly lower at ₹75 lakh per candidate. Similarly, for Union territories, the expenditure ceiling ranges from ₹75 lakh to ₹95 lakh per candidate, depending on the region.

In Jalandhar, chole bhature has been capped at ₹40 while mutton and chicken have been priced at ₹250 and 500 per kg respectively. Desserts like dhodha (Rs 450 per kg) and ghee pinni (Rs 300 per kg) are also on the menu besides lassi and nimbu pani priced at ₹20 and 15 per glass respectively.



Representational image

The cost of tea is low at ₹5 in the rate card of Balaghat in Madhya Pradesh but the samosa is priced higher at ₹10. The Balaghat rate card also has idli, sambhar vada and poha-jalebi priced at ₹20 while the cost for dosa and upma has been fixed at ₹30. In Thoubal district of violence-hit Manipur, tea, samosa, kachori, khajur (dates) and gaja (dessert) have been priced at ₹10 each.

Candidates in the northeastern state's Tengenoupal district, will have to stick to ₹5 for black tea and ₹10 for milk tea. The list has a wider spread of non-vegetarian items with duck and pork priced at ₹300 and ₹400 per kg respectively. Chicken (broiler) and fish like rohu, mrigal and sareng, are also on the list.

In Chennai, the price of tea has been raised from ₹10 to ₹15 and coffee from ₹15 to ₹20, while the rate of chicken biryani has been reduced from ₹180 to ₹150 per packet compared to 2019.

In the expenditure card for Gautam Buddha Nagar (Noida/Greater Noida), vegetarian thali comes for ₹100, a samosa or a cup of tea for ₹10, kachori for ₹15, a sandwich for ₹25, and a kilogram of jalebi for ₹90 per kg.

North Goa candidates can have batata vada on menu at a cost of ₹15, same as that for a samosa. The tea has been capped

at ₹15 while coffee can cost ₹20. The rate card for Haryana's Jind offers the candidates to hire a tandoor for ₹300 and features delicacies like dal makhni and mix veg for ₹130 while matar paneer has been priced at 160. Breads like butter nan, missi roti and plain roti are also on the platter besides desserts including kaju katli and gulab jamun.

While parties and candidates often offer workers and voters liquor, none of the rate cards mention alcohol.

At present, there is a ceiling on campaigning funds for individual candidates in the electoral fray but no cap on the money political parties can spend for electioneering.

According to the revised guidelines issued by the ECI, the maximum permissible expenditure for campaigning in a Lok Sabha constituency varies across different states and Union territories.



Barring Israr Ahmad who remained absent during the hearing, all were sentenced to life imprisonment along with a total fine of ₹11.65 lakh.

Accused Farhan Ahmad was additionally held guilty under the Arms Act, he said in a statement.

Raju Pal, the then MLA from Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh and a Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader, and his two associates - Devi Din Pal and Sandeep Yadav -- were gunned down on January 25, 2005 at 3 PM in Dhoomanganj area, as a result of political rivalry with Atiq Ahmad's brother Ashraf, whom he had defeated in the 2004 bypoll to the Prayagraj West seat.

Pal's vehicle was stopped by seven to eight gang members led by Ashraf Ahmad near Amit Deep Maruti Agency where he was gunned down.

international



The fact that Palestinian deaths are not solely caused by bombardment and ground attacks, but also by disease and starvation, indicates a need to protect the group's right to exist
CYRIL RAMAPHOSA | PRESIDENT, SOUTH AFRICA

RARE SOLAR ECLIPSE

A total solar eclipse is set to happen on the night of April 9, when the Moon will pass in front of the Sun, completely covering it. The eclipse will happen between 9:13 PM IST April 9 and 2:22 AM IST April 10. The total solar eclipse will only be visible in parts of the United States, Mexico and Canada



of the day quote

I'm incredibly proud of the immense contribution that people of Indian heritage have made to our National Health Service
KEIR STARMER | OPPOSITION LEADER, UK

The caretaker government did better work to restore the economy. The economy will stabilise soon owing to better economic policies
MUHAMMAD AURANGZEB | FINANCE MINISTER, PAKISTAN

We can regulate the grey economy and collect taxes. We do not want to promote gambling, but would rather supervise it and use the investment to create jobs
SRETHA THAVISIN | PM, THAILAND

Taliban to stone women in public for adultery

Afghanistan's women have faced numerous challenges since the Taliban returned to power in 2021. Girls and women in the war-torn country have no access to education, employment and public spaces



women to death - in a voice message broadcast on state TV, reported the Telegraph. In a video, Akhundzada said that the women's rights that the international community had been advocating for were against the Taliban's interpretation of Islamic Sharia.

"I told the Mujahedin that we tell the Westerners that we fought against you for 20 years and we will fight 20 and even more years against you. It did not finish [when you left]. It does not mean we would now just sit and drink tea. We will bring Sharia to this land. It did finish after we took over Kabul. No, we will now bring Sharia into action," Akhundzada added.

Do women want the rights that Westerners are talking about? They are against Sharia and clerics' opinions, the clerics who toppled Western democracy
MULLAH HIBATULLAH AKHUNDZADA | SUPREME LEADER, TALIBAN

path forward for their daughters is marriage, "regardless of their consent," the AFP said quoting a young student. "Depression is widespread. The rate of suicide for girls has gone up a lot in the last two years. It is tragic," she told the news agency. The Taliban promised a more moderate government, and said they would be less strict when they came to power, but that wasn't true. They quickly returned to harsh public punishments such as public executions and floggings, similar to those from the 1990s. Only one month after returning to power, the Taliban authorities banned girls from attending secondary school, before closing university doors to them in December 2022 and then heavily restricting their participation in the workforce.

Leader of Northern Ireland's largest unionist party quits

London, March 29: The leader of Northern Ireland's largest unionist party has stepped down from the top job after being charged with allegations of a historic nature, the party said in a statement Friday. Jeffrey Donaldson left his post with immediate effect pending the outcome of the judicial process, the Democratic Unionist Party said. In accordance with the party rules, it has suspended him from membership. Gavin Robinson, the member of Parliament for Belfast East, was named interim party leader. The unexpected announcement came after Donaldson opted to have the party return to power-sharing in Northern Ireland with the Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein, following a two-year boycott of the political institutions following controversy over Brexit trading arrangements. The DUP agreed to return to the center of power in Stormont following a series of assurances around Northern Ireland's constitutional position within the United Kingdom.

Kabul, March 29: The worst fears that the Taliban might take Afghanistan back to the dark ages might be coming true. The Taliban has announced that the women in Afghanistan will be stoned to death for adultery, a report has said. Taliban's Supreme Leader Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada made the announcement - that it is resuming publicly stoning

Stop strangling NK: Russia

Russia vetoed the annual renewal of a panel of experts monitoring enforcement of longstanding UN sanctions against North Korea over its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes



The Group of Experts of the UN Security Council Committee 1718 has lost all standards of objectivity and impartiality, which should be integral characteristics of its mandate
MARIA ZAKHAROVA | FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESWOMAN, RUSSIA

Moscow, March 29: Russia said Friday that major powers needed a new approach to North Korea, accusing the United States and its allies of ratcheting up military tensions in Asia and seeking to "strangle" the reclusive state. Russia vetoed the annual renewal of a panel of experts monitoring enforcement of longstanding United Nations sanctions against North Korea over its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes. Moscow's move, which strikes a blow at the enforcement of a myriad of UN sanctions imposed after Pyongyang carried out its first nuclear test in 2006, underscores the dividend that Kim Jong Un has earned by moving closer to President Vladimir Putin amid the war in Ukraine. "It is obvious to us that the UN Security Council can no longer use old templates in relation to the problems of the Korean Peninsula," said Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova.

Zakharova said the United States was stoking military tensions that international restrictions had not improved the security situation and that there were severe humanitarian consequences for the population of North Korea, formally known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). "The United States and its allies have clearly demonstrated that their interest does not extend beyond the task of 'strangling' the DPRK by all available means, and a peaceful settlement is not on the agenda at all," she said. The Russian veto is seen as a major turning point in the international sanctions regime against North Korea, which was formed in 1948 with the backing of the then-Soviet Union while the Republic of Korea was backed by the United States. North Korea is the only country to have conducted nuclear

ISRAEL-HAMAS CONFLICT

Gaza war spills over

AT LEAST 42 KILLED IN ISRAELI STRIKES IN SYRIA'S ALEPPO



Aleppo, March 29: A war monitor said Israeli air strikes Friday on Syria's Aleppo province killed at least 42 including 36 Syrian soldiers, the deadliest count for the army since the Israel-Hamas war began. Israel has launched hundreds of air strikes in Syria since civil war there broke out in 2011, targeting army positions as well as Iran-backed forces including Hezbollah, an ally of Damascus and Palestinian group Hamas. The strikes have increased since Israel's war with Hamas began October 7, and Friday's was the second such attack in 24 hours. "Israeli strikes" targeted "a rockets depot belonging to Lebanon's Hezbollah" close to Aleppo airport, said the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which has a network of sources inside Syria. It reported "42 killed, including six from Lebanon's Hezbollah group" and "36 soldiers", the highest Syrian army count in Israeli strikes since the Israel-Hamas war began. State news agency SANA, quoting a military source, reported that "at approximately 1:45 am,

Israel rarely comments on individual strikes in Syria, but has repeatedly said it will not allow Iran to expand its presence in Syria. The Israeli enemy launched an air attack from the direction of Athriya, southeast of Aleppo", adding that "civilians and military personnel" were killed and wounded. Contacted by AFP from Jerusalem, the Israeli military said it would "not comment on reports in the foreign media". The Observatory also reported strikes targeting "defence factories" controlled by pro-Iran groups elsewhere in Aleppo province. The attack came just hours after a reported Israeli strike in the Damascus countryside. Syrian state media said "two civilians" were killed in an "Israeli air attack that targeted a residential building" Thursday, also reporting material damage.

SHORT TAKES

China halts two Pak dam projects

Peshawar: Chinese contractors have halted construction on two major dam projects in Pakistan after a suicide bomber killed five Chinese engineers and a Pakistani driver this week, a provincial official told AFP Friday. The companies have demanded that Pakistan authorities come up with new security plans before reopening the sites where around 1,250 Chinese nationals are working, the official said. The security of Chinese workers is a major concern to both countries, with nationals frequently targeted by militants hostile to outside influence.

No-trust motion

Athens: Greece's centre-right government survived a motion of no-confidence late Thursday that was brought by opposition parties over its handling of the country's deadliest rail disaster a year ago. Four left-wing opposition parties accused the government of hindering an investigation into the rail crash that left 57 people dead, many of them university students returning from a spring break. Parliament voted 159-141 against the motion following an acrimonious three-day debate. The government also rejected opposition calls to hold a snap election. The February 28, 2023, crash occurred when a passenger train smashed into an oncoming freight train which had been mistakenly placed on the same track.

Bus mishap kills 45

Cape Town: A bus carrying worshippers headed to an Easter festival plunged off a bridge on a mountain pass and burst into flames in South Africa Thursday, killing at least 45 people, authorities said. The only survivor of the crash was an eight-year-old child, who was receiving medical attention, according to authorities in the northern province of Limpopo. The Limpopo provincial government said the bus veered off the Mmamattakala bridge and plunged 164 feet into a ravine before bursting into flames. Search operations were ongoing, the provincial government said, but many bodies were burned beyond recognition and still trapped inside the vehicle.

High alert in Lanka

Colombo: Sri Lanka was put on high alert Friday and security beefed up in major cities across the country, with special surveillance around the Churches having Good Friday services, according to a senior police official. The police said they were taking all precautions in view of the fifth anniversary of the 2019 Easter Sunday suicide bombings which killed 270 people, including 11 Indians.

Haiti needs up to 5K police to help tackle gang violence



United Nations: Haiti now needs between 4,000 and 5,000 international police to help tackle "catastrophic" gang violence which is targeting key individuals and hospitals, schools, banks and other critical institutions, the UN rights expert for the conflict-racked Caribbean nation said Thursday. Last July, William O'Neill said Haiti needed between 1,000 and 2,000 international police trained to deal with gangs. Today, he said the situation is so much worse than double that number and more are needed to help the Haitian National Police regain control of security and curb human rights abuses. Gangs also continue to use sexual violence "to brutalise, punish and control people", the report said, citing women raped during gang attacks in neighbourhoods, "in many cases after seeing their husbands killed in front of them". In 2023, the number of people killed and injured as a result of gang violence increased significantly - with 4,451 killed and 1,668 injured, the report said. And up to March 22 this year, the numbers skyrocketed to 1,554 killed and 826 injured. As a result of the escalating gang violence, so-called "self-defence brigades" have taken justice into their own hands, the report said, and "at least 528 cases of lynching were reported in 2023 and a further 59 in 2024".

Japan finally screens 'Oppenheimer' with trigger warnings

79 YEARS AGO, OVER 2 LAKH PEOPLE WERE OBLITERATED IN HIROSHIMA, NAGASAKI BY THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS INVENTED BY THE AMERICAN SCIENTIST WHO IS THE SUBJECT OF THE OSCAR-WINNING FILM



Hiroshima, March 29: Best picture winner "Oppenheimer" finally premiered in Japan Friday, eight months after a controversial grassroots marketing push and concerns about how its nuclear theme would be received in the only country to suffer atomic bombing. The biggest winner at this month's Academy Awards, the

film directed by Christopher Nolan about US physicist J Robert Oppenheimer, who led the race to develop the atomic bomb, has grossed nearly \$1 billion globally. But Japan had been left out of worldwide screenings until now, despite being a major market for Hollywood. Nuclear blasts devastated its western city of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the south at the close of World War

Two, killing more than 200,000. "Of course this is an amazing film which deserves to win the Academy Awards," said Hiroshima resident Kawai, 37, who gave only his family name. "But the film also depicts the atomic bomb in a way that seems to praise it, and, as a person with roots in Hiroshima, I found

Images on social media showed signs posted at the entrances to some Tokyo theatres, warning that the movie featured images of nuclear tests that could evoke the damage caused by the bombs. Another Hiroshima resident, Agemi Kanegae, had mixed feelings upon finally watching the movie. "The film was very worth watching," said the retired 65-year-old. "But I felt very uncomfortable with a few scenes, such as the trial of Oppenheimer in the United States at the end." The film quickly became a global hit after opening in the United States last July. But many Japanese were offended by fan-created "Barbenheimer" online memes that linked it to "Barbie", a frothy blockbuster

that opened around the same time. Speaking to Reuters before the movie opened, atomic bomb survivor Teruko Yahata said she was eager to see it, in hopes that it would re-invigorate the debate over nuclear weapons. Yahata, now 86, said she felt some empathy for the physicist behind the bomb. That sentiment was echoed by Rishu Kanemoto, a 19-year-old student, who saw the film Friday. "Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where the atomic bombs were dropped, are certainly the victims," Kanemoto said. "But I think even though the inventor is one of the perpetrators, he's also the victim caught up in the war," he added, referring to the ill-starred physicist.



Filipino Catholic Ruben Enaje is nailed to the cross during his reenactment of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on Good Friday, in San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines

of the day quote

Over the past year, a significant rise in demand for high-end and luxury properties has emerged. This shift reflects a change in homebuyers' growing desire to invest in a place not only to live but as a high-quality asset that reflects their lifestyle aspirations

SHALIN RAJIA | MD (RESIDENTIAL SERVICES), CUSHMAN & WAKEFIELD

We have expanded our touchpoints network from 285 to 522 since starting our operations in India. As part of Kia's 2.0 strategy, we are aiming to close the year with over 700 touchpoints, thereby making Kia more accessible to our esteemed customers

HARDEEP SINGH BRAR | HEAD (SALES & MARKETING), KIA

This strategic collaboration with Starburst signifies a crucial step towards nurturing and empowering the burgeoning ASD startup ecosystem in India

MANOJ K TIWARI | DIRECTOR, IIM MUMBAI

SHORT TAKES

IESA inks initial pact with BCKIC

New Delhi: Industry body India Energy Storage Alliance on Friday said it has inked an initial pact with the Bhubaneswar City Knowledge Innovation Cluster (BCKIC) Foundation to promote cleantech, critical minerals and the energy sector in India. The main objective of the partnership is to create a shared science and technology ecosystem by increasing interactions between industry professionals of the member organisations (IESA and BCKIC) as well as with external stakeholders like research institutes, academia, philanthropic organisations and the public, India Energy Storage Alliance (IESA) said in a statement. According to the statement, the partnership also aims to bolster regional influence and develop national and international competitiveness by promoting the development of state-of-the-art advanced cleantech research facilities and infrastructure. The MoU was signed, between IESA Executive Director Debi Prasad Dash and BCKIC Chairperson Mrutyunjay Suar in the presence of BCKIC CEO Namrata Misra and Jyotsnarani Jena, Associate, Technology Transfer Office, KIIT-TBI.

Force Motors to exit tractors biz

New Delhi: Force Motors Ltd Friday said it will exit tractors and connected activity business at the end of the fiscal year. The board of directors of the company at its meeting on Friday decided to close the line of business consisting of manufacture and dealing in agricultural tractors and connected activity from the close of 2023-2024, Force Motors said.

Huawei's profit doubles in 2023

Hong Kong: Chinese telecoms gear company Huawei Technologies has reported its profit more than doubled last year as its cloud and digital businesses thrived in spite of US sanctions. The Shenzhen-based company reported a net profit of 87 billion yuan (\$12 billion), helped by strong sales and an improved product portfolio. Revenue jumped nearly 10 per cent from a year earlier, to 704.2 billion yuan (\$97.4 billion). Huawei's rotating chairman Ken Hu said the company's figures were in line with forecasts.



Autonom8 is proud to launch India's most advanced digital video KYC platform that offers a comprehensive solution for Telcos, banks, and NBFCs
BALAKRISHNAN KAVIKKAL | CEO, AUTONOM8

LIC TO KEEP OFFICES OPEN MARCH 30, 31

Life Insurance Corporation will keep its offices open March 30 and March 31 to facilitate taxpayers to complete tax saving exercise before the closing of the fiscal year. LIC's measure follows the announcement by banks that their branches will remain open Saturday and Sunday



FPIs make stellar comeback

The dazzling resurgence came following an outflow from equities in the preceding two financial years

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 29: Foreign investors made a strong return by injecting more than Rs 2 lakh crore into Indian equities in 2023-24, driven by optimism surrounding the country's robust economic fundamentals amidst a challenging global environment.

Looking forward to 2025, Bharat Dhawan, Managing Partner at Mazars in India, said that the outlook is cautiously optimistic and anticipates sustained FPI inflows supported by progressive policy reforms, economic stability, and attractive investment avenues.

"However, we remain mindful of global geopolitical influences that may introduce intermittent volatility, emphasising the importance of strategic planning and agility in navigating market fluctuations," he added.

The outlook for FY25 from an FPI perspective, continues to remain strong, Naveen KR, small-case Manager and Senior Director at Windmill Capital, said.

In the current fiscal 2023-24, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have made a net investment of around Rs 2.08 lakh crore in the Indian equity markets and Rs 1.2 lakh crore in the debt market. Collectively, they pumped Rs 3.4 lakh crore into the capital market, as per data available with the depositories.

In 2022-23, Indian equities witnessed a net outflow of Rs 37,632 crore by FPIs on aggressive rate

FISCAL 2023-24

FPIs made investment of around ₹2.08L-cr in equities
They infused ₹1.2 lakh crore in debt market
Collectively, they pumped ₹3.4L-cr into capital market



Investors increasingly favoured Indian equities, drawn by the market's demonstrated resilience during uncertain periods. Compared to other similar markets, India's economy stood out as more robust and stable amidst global economic turbulence, further attracting foreign investment

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

hikes by the central banks globally. Before this, they pulled out a massive Rs 1.4 lakh crore. However, in 2020-2021, FPIs made a record investment of Rs 2.74 lakh crore.

After withdrawing funds in the preceding fiscal, FPIs poured a staggering Rs 1.2 lakh crore into the debt market too, marking a noteworthy shift in their capital flow. They took out funds to the tune of Rs 8,938 crore in FY23.

FPIs' debt investments have been extremely robust this fiscal due to attractive yields on Indian sovereign debt relative to the US treasury. This has been

supported by strong macros in the form of the robust growth outlook for the Indian economy, stable inflation and a stable currency, and the stated objective of the Government to improve its fiscal deficit, Nitin Raheja, Executive Director, Julius Baer India, said.

Additionally, the upcoming inclusion of Indian bonds in JP Morgan's index has led to an inflow in advance into the Indian debt markets.

Further, the expected global tapering in policy rates should make bond yields in emerging economies look even more attractive to investors making this

trend of inflows into Indian debt more sustainable, he added.

In September 2023, JP Morgan Chase & Co announced that it would add Indian government bonds to its benchmark emerging market index from June 2024. This landmark inclusion, scheduled for June 2024, is anticipated to benefit India by attracting around \$20-40 billion in the sub-sequent 18 to 24 months.

Overall, FPIs started the year 2023-24 on a positive note in April and incessantly purchased equities till August on the resilience of the Indian economy amid an uncertain global macro backdrop. During these five months, they brought in Rs 1.62 lakh crore. After this, FPIs turned net sellers in September and bearish stance continued in October too with an outflow of over Rs 39,000 crore in these two months.

However, FPIs became net investors in November and the optimism persisted in December too, when they purchased equity to the tune of Rs 66,135 crore. Again, they turned sellers and pulled out Rs 25,743 crore in January.

This could be on account of China opening up after the lockdown. This led FPIs to pull out their investments from other emerging markets like India and divert them towards China.

However, China struggled to sustain investor interest. Moreover, the fiscal year ended on a positive note as FPIs bought shares worth over Rs 35,000 crore in March.

HISTORIC FEAT

Procurement via GeM goes past ₹4L-crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 29: The procurement of goods and services through government's portal GeM has crossed Rs 4 lakh crore so far this fiscal due to higher buying activities by various ministries and departments, a senior government official said Friday.

"As of March 28, the procurement has crossed Rs 4 lakh crore. It is historic," GeM CEO PK Singh told reporters here.

He said that defence sector buyers are buying several goods and services from the platform. "Assembly of BrahMos missile is being done through GeM as a service contract. In defence, right from supplying eggs up to the missile parts is being done through the portal," Singh said.

In 2021-22 the procurement value stood at Rs 1.06 lakh crore and it crossed Rs 2 lakh crore last financial year. He said that procurement of services from the portal has jumped from Rs 66,000 crore in 2022-23 to Rs 2.05 lakh crore so far this fiscal. Similarly, goods worth Rs 1.95 lakh crore have been bought from the platform till March 28 this fiscal.

About the possibility of opening up the portal for consumer at large, Singh said that is a very different ecosystem altogether.

"Yes we will be mulling over, we are preparing for that, if we should be prepared for that if the government so desires. If



GOVERNMENT E-MARKET PORTAL WAS LAUNCHED AUGUST 9, 2016, FOR ONLINE PURCHASES OF GOODS AND SERVICES BY ALL CENTRAL GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES AND DEPARTMENTS

SEVERAL COUNTRIES FROM AFRICA AND SOUTH EAST ASIA ARE SHOWING KEEN INTEREST IN GEM

feasible, if practical, we will do a small pilot in this area as well in the coming years, if the approvals are in place," he said.

Currently, only goods and services are allowed on the platform and "we want to include works contract also and if it will come, it will be a big hit," he said. Further, he said that a dedicated page for election related goods and services like catering and webcasting services are there on the portal.

About engagement with states, he said states/Union Territories such as Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Odisha, Bihar, Assam, and Uttarakhand have placed significant procurement orders in the current fiscal.

Akasa Air commences international operations

India's newest airline carrier enters foreign skies with maiden flight from Mumbai to Doha

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 29: Domestic carrier Akasa Air has commenced its international operations with its inaugural overseas flight departing from Mumbai to Doha, Qatar.

This step is also aimed at boosting trade and tourism relations between India and Qatar and building up the connectivity between the two nations.

In a statement Thursday, the airline said it has been granted traffic rights for three other international destinations -- Kuwait, Jeddah, and Riyadh.

Akasa will be rapidly expanding its global footprint in the coming months, the statement said.

Further, the airline said with its conveniently timed flight schedule, travellers from other domestic cities such as Ahmedabad, Goa, Varanasi, Lucknow, Bangalore, Kochi, and



Delhi will also have multiple connecting options for travel to and from Doha via Mumbai.

Domestically, Akasa operates from a host of cities including Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Chennai, Kochi, among others.

Meanwhile, Akasa Air is optimistic about the on-time delivery of Boeing 737 MAX jets amidst ongoing concerns regarding production schedule of the US manufacturer.

With an aim to expand its global reach, the airline declared in January about placing an order of 150 Boeing 737 MAX jets. The airplanes will be powered by CFM fuel-efficient and LEAP-1B engines.

IPO FRENZY

Shapoorji Pallonji Group's AIL submits ₹7K-cr mega IPO

New Delhi: Shapoorji Pallonji Group's flagship infrastructure engineering and construction company Afcons Infrastructure Ltd (AIL) has filed draft papers with markets regulator Sebi to raise Rs 7,000 crore through an initial public offering (IPO). The company's mega IPO is a combination of fresh issue of shares worth Rs 1,250 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of up to Rs 5,750 crore by promoter Goswami Infratech Private Limited. Also, the offer includes a reservation for subscriptions by eligible employees, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) filed Thursday. Currently, promoter and promoter group entities own 99.48 per cent stake in Maharashtra-based Afcons Infrastructure. Moreover, the company may consider raising up to Rs 250 crore in the "pre-IPO placement" round. If such placement is completed, the fresh issue size will be reduced. Founded in 1865, Shapoorji Pallonji Group (SP Group) is a diversified institution, and has a leading presence in engineering & construction, infrastructure, real estate, water, energy and financial services sectors across the globe.



Ecos (India) Mobility to raise funds via maiden offering

New Delhi: Chauffeur-driven mobility provider Ecos (India) Mobility & Hospitality Ltd has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to garner funds through an initial public offering (IPO). The maiden public issue is entirely an offer for sale (OFS) of 1.8 crore equity shares by promoters -- Rajesh Loomba and Aditya Loomba -- with no fresh issue component, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) filed Thursday. At present, promoters and promoter group entities hold 100 per cent stake in the company. Since it is an OFS, the Delhi-based firm will not receive any proceeds from the IPO and the money will go to the promoters selling shares.



Ahead of IPO, Swiggy logs \$200mn loss

Mumbai: Food delivery giant Swiggy recorded a \$200 million loss for the nine months to December 2023, according to an internal document of the company, which is looking to list on the stock market. The SoftBank-backed company could list by the end of this year, sources previously told Reuters. India's stock market is booming although domestic and foreign investors have become more circumspect about IPOs by Indian startups amid concerns of unrealistically high valuations of companies still making losses. For the full fiscal year 2022-23 Swiggy made a loss of Rs 41.8 billion (\$500 million), according to the document. But the company's lower wage payouts and cuts in marketing spending will help it trim losses for the full year 2023-24, a source with direct knowledge of the matter said, without wishing to be identified. The document showed that losses stood at Rs 17.3 billion (\$207 million) during April to December 2023 -- the first nine months of fiscal year 2023-24. That loss was on revenue of \$1.02 billion during the same period, compared with fiscal year 2022-23 revenue of \$1.05 billion, the document showed. Swiggy was valued at \$10.7 billion by investors in 2022. It started with meal deliveries but has gradually expanded into delivering groceries and also provides restaurant bookings.



Dalal Street minnows steal the show in FY24

SMALL-CAPS, MID-CAPS LEAD FY24 MARKET RALLY; GIVE HEFTY RETURNS TO INVESTORS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 29: The BSE mid-cap and small-cap stocks have outperformed the benchmark Sensex in 2023-24 with about 62 per cent returns, reflecting buoyant investors' sentiment amid robust macroeconomic conditions in the country and impressive quarterly earnings reported by various firms.

As per an analysis, the BSE mid-cap gauge jumped 15,013.95 points or 62.38 per cent in the 2023-24 fiscal, while the small-cap index climbed 16,068.99 points or 59.60 per cent. In comparison, the 30-share BSE Sensex raked in a gain of 14,659.83 points or 24.85 per cent during the fiscal under review.

"The recent surge in interest towards mid and small-cap stocks among retail investors can be attributed to their remarkable earnings growth and the pur-



suited high-growth opportunities. Highlighting this trend, investors have shown a clear preference for mid and small-cap schemes over large-cap ones, as evidenced by the net inflows in equity mutual funds. This shift in investor sentiment is bolstered by the robust macroeconomic conditions in India, which traditionally foster accelerated growth in mid and small-cap stocks during periods of economic expansion. Moreover, the impressive

quarterly earnings reported by numerous mid and small-cap companies further validate their substantial growth potential, enticing retail investors in search of profitable ventures," said Suman Bannerjee, CIO of hedge fund Hedonova.

The broader market put up an impressive performance in the 2023-24 fiscal. The BSE midcap gauge reached its record peak of 40,282.49 February 8 after slipping to its 52-week low of 23,881.79 March 31, 2023. The BSE small-cap index jumped to its all-time high of 46,821.39 February 7 after hitting its 52-week low of 26,692.09

The outperformance of midcap and small-cap stocks vis-a-vis the Sensex in the current fiscal year reflects the dynamic nature of the Indian equity market and the diverse opportunities it offers to investors

SUNIL NYATI | MD, SWASTIKA INVESTMART

on March 31 last year.

The 30-share BSE Sensex hit its all-time high of 74,245.17 March 7 this year.

The BSE small-cap index faced correction in March, falling 4.55 per cent. The midcap index declined marginally this month.

The correction observed in midcap and small-cap stocks during March is consistent with the assessment of heightened exuberance prevailing in the market, Bannerjee said.

The midcap index tracks companies with a market value that is, on average, one-fifth of blue chips, while small-cap firms are almost a tenth of that universe. According to market analysts, small stocks are generally bought

by local investors, while overseas investors focus on blue chips or large firms.

On the road ahead for the mid-cap and small-cap stocks in the coming fiscal, Nyati said, "FY25 promises an exciting yet challenging journey for mid and small-caps. The potential re-election of the current government in the upcoming general election could usher in stability, fostering a business-friendly environment. This, coupled with India's projected strong GDP growth, creates fertile ground for these domestically focused companies".

He further added that navigating this terrain requires caution.

"Rising interest rates, global headwinds, and potential profit-taking could lead to short-term volatility," Nyati said.

In the 2022-23 fiscal, the BSE Sensex climbed 423.01 points or 0.72 per cent. However, the BSE small-cap gauge fell 1,258.64 points or 4.46 per cent and the midcap index dipped marginally by 42.38 points or 0.17 per cent in 2022-23.

Banks' GNPA set to improve further to 2.1% by FY25

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 29: The gross non-performing assets (GNPA) of the Indian banking system are set to improve further to up to 2.1 per cent by the end of FY25, a report said Friday.

GNPAs are likely to come at 2.5-2.7 per cent in FY24 and will improve further to 2.1-2.4 per cent by the end of FY25, domestic rating agency Care Ratings said in the report.

It can be noted that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) began the comprehensive exercise in the middle of the last decade by instructing banks to classify certain stressed assets as NPAs so that the balance sheets represent a true picture.

The rating agency also flagged a list of downside risks, which may result in its estimate not coming true, including a material weakening in asset quality due to the elevated interest rates, the impact of regulatory changes, a tighter liquidity environment and global issues.

It said GNPAs surged to 11.2 per cent in FY18 from 3.8 per cent in FY14 due to the AQR process of 2015-16, which pushed banks to recognise NPAs and reduce unnecessary restructuring and added that the stress was emanating from the exposure to big-ticket wholesale advances.

Starting from FY19, GNPAs have been seeing an improvement and touched a decadal low of 3.9 per cent in FY23 and were at 3 per cent in the December quarter of FY24.

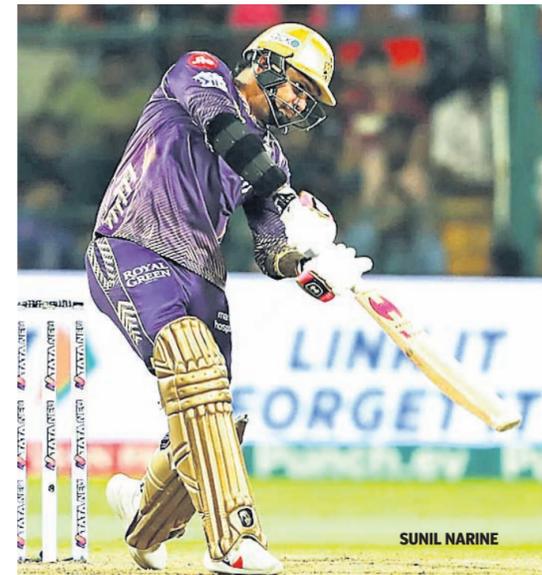
The asset quality has improved due to recoveries, higher write-offs by banks and much lower slippages, the report said, adding that selling dud assets to asset reconstruction companies has also helped.

From a sectoral perspective, the agriculture sector's GNPA ratio reduced to 7 per cent in September 2023 compared to 10.1 per cent reported in March 2020, while the industrial sector reported a 4.2 per cent GNPA ratio in September 2023 against 14.1 per cent in March 2020 and 22.8 per cent in March 2018.



KNIGHTS ACE ROYAL CHALLENGE

LSG look to pull things back in PBKS face-off



SUNIL NARINE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore, March 29: A ruthless fifty by Venkatesh Iyer worked as the catalyst for Kolkata Knight Riders' smooth seven-wicket victory over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in their IPL match here Friday.

Venkatesh's 50 (30b, 3x4, 4x6) and stunning blitzes by openers Sunil Narine (47, 22b, 2x4, 5x6) and Phil Salt (30, 20b, 2x4, 2x6) propelled the Knights past the 183-run target that the RCB set for them, which was built around Virat Kohli's skilful unbeaten 83 (59b, 4x4, 4x6).

The KKR batters never got bogged down either by a slow pitch or RCB bowlers as they hunted down the target in just 16.5 overs.

Their approach on the night was best exemplified by Venkatesh, who is trying hard to regain his relevance in white ball formats, who added 75 runs for the

third wicket with skipper Shreyas Iyer (39 n o, 24b, 2x4, 2x6).

The left-hander found his range from the word go, as pacer Alzarri Joseph suffered the brunt of his aggressive intentions. He biffed the West Indian quick for 20 runs in an over that contained two sixes over cover and mid-wicket and a steered four to third man, besides a leg-bye boundary.

Shreyas, who was dropped on five by Yash Dayal off highly impressive local pacer Vijayakumar Vyshak (1/23), just had the supporting role on this night. But for that crisp win, the KKR should profusely thank Narine and Salt, who subjugated RCB bowlers in the Power Play with astonishing power-hitting.

The visitors' chase began frenetically as Narine and Salt added 86 runs in just 6.3 overs through an array of dazzling shots. Salt started the carnage, smoking pacer Mohammed Siraj for 18 runs in the very first over.



Shreyas Iyer & Venkatesh Iyer run between wickets during their partnership as Alzarri Joseph looks on

Narine followed suit. After smashing Joseph for two sixes in the third over, the left-hander vandalised the figures of left-arm pacer Dayal, clobbering him for 21 runs in the sixth over.

There was a hint of sluggishness in the Chinnaswamy surface but there was hardly any effort by the RCB bowlers to exploit it with slower balls like their Knight Riders counterparts.

It required a yorker from left-arm spinner Mayank Dagar to break the opening wicket partnership as Narine failed to block the full-length delivery on the off-stump. But by then, he had done his job.

Earlier, Kohli's skilful knock formed the foundation of RCB's competitive 182/6. Kohli and Cameron Green (33, 21b, 4x4, 2x6) milked 65 runs off 42 balls for the second wicket, the primary alliance in RCB innings, as

the home side produced a two-faced effort on a track that was on the slower side. An archetypal Dinesh Karthik cameo (20, 8b, 3x6) added gravitas to the RCB total as usual towards the end.

Skipper Faf du Plessis departed early as the Royal Challengers captain's attempt to scoop pacer Harshit Rana ended in the hands of Mitchell Starc inside the circle. But a period of stability followed as Kohli and Green kept RCB on the track with a busy stand that saw them reach 61/1 in the Power Play segment.

Kohli brought his fifty in 36 balls whereas other batters, except Green, struggled for timing. But Green wasn't really bothered about such technical angles, as his batting was all about brute power.

Narine, who was playing his 500th T20 match, was given a hammering as Green took 15

runs off the spinner's first over. However, the burgeoning alliance was snapped when Green's effort to play a pull off Andre Russell saw the ball crashing onto his stumps.

Glenn Maxwell, who was dropped twice on 11 and 21, en route a 19-ball 28 could not exploit the largesse of KKR fielders as his luck finally ran out against Narine. A slash off the West Indian spinner ended in the hands of Rinku Singh at deep point, and Maxwell had to depart after adding 42 runs for the third wicket with Kohli.

BRIEF SCORES

RCB 182/6 (Virat Kohli 83 n o, Cameron Green 33, Glenn Maxwell 28, Dinesh Karthik 20; Andre Russell 2/29, Harshit Rana 2/39) lost to KKR 186/3 (Venkatesh Iyer 50, Sunil Narine 47, Shreyas Iyer 39 n o, Phil Salt 30; Vijayakumar Vyshak 1/23, Mayank Dagar 1/23) by 7 wickets.



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, March 29: Lucknow Super Giants will aim for an improved all-round effort when they take on Punjab Kings in their second Indian Premier League match here Saturday.

KL Rahul-led LSG faltered in the opening game against Rajasthan Royals, losing by 20 runs in Chandigarh. Barring Krunal Pandya, all the LSG bowlers leaked runs and also looked ineffective.

In the absence of Mark Wood and David Willey, LSG's pace battery looks thin with the likes of Mohsin Khan, Naveen-ul-Haq, and Yash Thakur expected to do the heavy lifting.

Fighting for a place in the upcoming T20 World Cup squad, Ravi Bishnoi too looked ordinary in the team's tournament opener.

Skipper Rahul, who has decided to play the wicketkeeper-batter's role keeping the T20 World Cup in mind, made 58 in his comeback game and would be looking to build on that.

He would be hoping his opening partner Quinton de Kock returns to his belligerent best against Punjab after missing out against Royals. The team is also banking on the likes of Devdutt Padikkal Ayush Badoni, Deepak Hooda, and Krunal to deliver down the order.

LSG's success will also depend on the form of Australian all-rounder Marcus Stoinis, who

was the leading run-getter for the team last year with 408 runs.

PBKS, on the other hand, have a 50-50 record so far, winning one and losing one. The Shikhar Dhawan-led side needs more fluency in the powerplay and that is bound to come if Jonny Bairstow gets going after failing in the first two games. Dhawan, who only plays IPL to IPL, needs to up his strike rate going forward. He himself admitted to batting a bit "slowly" against RCB.

Prabhsimran Singh, who came of age last season, has not been able to capitalise on his starts yet. While all-rounder Sam Curran has shown his prowess with the bat in the two matches, the left-arm seamer has been wayward with the ball.

Vice-captain Jitesh Sharma, who is in the running for a World Cup berth, needs to have a stellar season to convince the national selectors.

In the pace bowling department, Kagiso Rabada will look for more support from Curran, Arshdeep Singh and Harshal Patel. Left-arm spinner Harpreet Brar has been impressive while leg-spinner Rahul Chahar needs to up his game.

MATCHDAY

Indian Premier League

LSG vs PBKS

Time: 07:30 pm

Telecast: Star Sports Network

Stream: Jio Cinema

Sindhu goes down, Sikki-Sumeeth duo reaches semifinals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Madrid, March 29: India's PV Sindhu fought her heart out before going down narrowly to Thailand's Supanida Katethong in the women's singles quarterfinals of the Madrid Spain Masters Super 300 badminton tournament here Friday.

Sindhu, who had finished runner-up in 2023, recovered from an early 4-8 deficit and saved multiple game points to grab the opening game, but she couldn't go the distance as the sixth seeded Thai registered a 24-26, 21-17, 22-20 win after a see-saw battle.

MADRID SPAIN MASTERS SUPER 300 BADMINTON TOURNAMENT

However, India's husband-wife combo of N Sikki Reddy and B Sumeeth Reddy had a lot to cheer about as they notched up a 14-21, 21-11, 21-17 win over Indonesia's fourth seed Rehan Naufal Kusharjanto and Lisa Ayu Kusumawati to enter the mixed doubles semifinals.

The women's doubles pair of Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa, seeded third, lost 13-21, 19-21 to sixth seeded Chinese Taipei's Lee Chia Hsin and Teng Chun Hsun in the quarterfinals.

Bopanna-Ebden pair sails into men's doubles final



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Miami, March 29: Indian tennis stalwart Rohan Bopanna and his Australian partner Matthew Ebden sailed into the men's doubles final of the Miami Open with a straight-set win over Marcel Granollers and Horacio Zeballos here.

Bopanna and Ebden, the Australian Open winners, hardly broke a sweat to get the better of Spain's Granollers and Argentina's Zeballos 6-1 6-4 in the semifinals Thursday night.

Bopanna had slipped to second spot in the doubles rankings after a quarterfinal loss at the Dubai Championships and a round-of-32 exit at the Indian Wells Masters, but the semifinal win here will help the Indian regain the top spot when they are updated Monday.

Following the Australian Open triumph, the 44-year-old Bopanna had climbed to the World No.1 spot in the ATP rankings, becoming the oldest player to do so.

In the final, Bopanna and Ebden will take on Ivan Dodig of Croatia and American Austin Krajicek, who beat the German duo of Kevin Krawietz and Tim Putz 6-4, 6-7(7-10), 10-7 in the other semifinal.

For Bopanna, this will be his 14th ATP Masters 1000 final and the first in Miami. Overall, this will be his 63rd ATP Tour level final. He has so far won 25 doubles titles. This will also be the fifth appearance in an ATP Masters 1000 final for the Bopanna and Ebden pairing.

Bopanna also achieved a rare feat as he became the second Indian after Leander Paes to reach the final of all 9 ATP Masters events.

Dimitrov stuns Alcaraz in Miami Open quarters

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Miami Gardens (US), March 29: Eleventh-seeded Grigor Dimitrov came out strong against top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz and went on to win 6-2, 6-4 in the Miami Open quarterfinals, his first victory over a top-five player in nearly five years.

Fourth-seeded Alexander Zverev, who beat unseeded Fabian Marozsan 6-3, 7-5 Thursday night will play Dimitrov in the semifinals Friday. Second-seeded Jannik Sinner will face No. 3 Daniil Medvedev in the other semifinal, a rematch of last year's final that Medvedev won.

Alcaraz, the 2022 champion, entered this tournament off a victory over Medvedev at Indian Wells. But the world's second-ranked player had trouble finding his game against Dimitrov and became visibly frustrated numerous times in the first set.

But Alcaraz didn't go away even after falling behind a break at 4-2 in the second set. He broke Dimitrov at love and then held serve to even the set at 4-4. Dimitrov, though, won the final two games, breaking Alcaraz in the clincher.

This was Dimitrov's first victory over a top-five player since he beat then-No.3 Roger Federer in the quarterfinals of the 2019 US Open.

On the women's side, fourth-



seeded Elena Rybakina once again had to go three sets, pushed to the edge before beating No.27 Victoria Azarenka 6-4, 6-0, 7-6(7-2) in the semifinals.

Rybakina, ranked fourth on the WTA Tour, will Saturday face unseeded Danielle Collins, who defeated No.14 Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-3, 6-2. Rybakina also made last year's final, losing in straight sets to Petra Kvitova.

A day off will likely be welcome for Rybakina, who has

been pushed to three sets in all but one match this tournament. Thursday's match lasted 2 hours, 33 minutes, and she told the Tennis Channel that for the first time in her career, she has rested on the days between matches during a tournament.

Rybakina appeared to take control when she broke Azarenka's serve to take a 3-2 lead in the third set. Azarenka fought off four break points before hitting a two-handed backhand into the net to give

Rybakina the game. It was quite a response from the second set when Azarenka lost only two points on her serve, and one came on a double fault.

But Azarenka wasn't done. With Rybakina serving for the match, Azarenka broke back to even the final set at 5-5. Both players then held serve to send the match to a tiebreaker, which belonged to Rybakina, who went up 6-1. She wrapped up the victory with a cross-court forehand.

Rybakina is seeking her third title this year. She is 4-0 in her career against Azarenka, including two victories this year. Azarenka, 34, was attempting to become the tournament's oldest winner. She became the second-oldest semifinalist; 36-year-old Venus Williams made the semis in 2017.

AIFF FORMS COMMITTEE TO HOLD DISCUSSIONS WITH COACH STIMAC

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, March 29: The President of the All India Football Federation (AIFF), Kalyan Chaubey, Friday held a virtual meeting with the senior members of the Federation to discuss the recommendations made by the AIFF Technical Committee on India's recent performances in the FIFA World Cup qualifiers and the AFC Asian Cup 2027 preliminary joint qualifiers.

Round 2 matches against Afghanistan. The AIFF president and its members also took note of certain comments made by India head coach Igor Stimac on his future with the team after the completion of the Round 2 qualifiers.

India played two World Cup qualifiers against Afghanistan recently. While the first match in Abha, Saudi Arabia, ended in a stalemate, the second in Guwahati saw India suffer a humiliating 1-2 defeat at the hands of Afghanistan which is ranked 158th in the world.

Chaubey, after listening to all the members' recommendations and suggestions, constituted a five-member committee comprising AIFF vice-president NA Haris, finance committee chairperson Menla Ethenpa, competition committee chairperson Anilkumar Prabhakaran, technical committee chairperson IM Vijayan and executive as well as technical committee member Climax Lawrence.

The panel has been requested to hold discussions with Stimac and seek further clarification in the matter.

WFI has backup plan if suspension not lifted

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 29: The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) Friday decided at its Special General Meeting (SGM) that it will start functioning at 'no cost to the government' model if its request to lift the suspension is not considered by the Sports Ministry.

The WFI had its SGM in Noida after the UWW (the sport's world governing body) lifted its suspension and the IOA also dissolved the ad-hoc panel that was managing the affairs of the body.

The two developments paved the way for the elected office bearers to take back control of the federation, though the government is yet to lift its suspension.

The government had contended that the WFI flouted rules and put it under suspension, three

days after it conducted polls to elect Sanjay Singh as president.

All 25 state associations attended the SGM even as secretary general Prem Chand Lochab, who is from the rival camp, skipped the meet. "It was agreed that we will request the government to lift the suspension. The UWW has lifted the suspension and ad-hoc committee has also been dissolved, so there is no point of continuing with the suspension of the body," a WFI source told PTI.

"If the ministry will not consider the request and decide against providing financial assistance, then we have decided unanimously that we will start functioning at no cost to the government," added the source.

The government funds wrestlers' training, competition and exposure trips to foreign



Government of India

countries. If the WFI goes ahead with the plan then it will also have to arrange and conduct the national camps on its own.

New amendment for election
The WFI also brought out an amendment to its Constitution to ensure that any candidate contesting the election for a new post is not required to win by a two-third majority.

secretary or a secretary decides to contest for a different post such as president. Only if a candidate is attempting to get elected to the post he is holding, he will be required to win by a two-third majority," explained the source.

At WFI's recent election Sanjay Singh was required to win the polls for the post of president by a two-third majority because he was a joint secretary in the previous dispensation.

No need for SOC recognition

The WFI has removed from its Constitution the clause that required a state association to fulfill the condition of having recognition from the State Olympic Committee (SOC) to get affiliated with the national body.

"From now onwards only WFI recognition is enough for a state association. A few state bodies had misused this clause to present them as genuine bodies despite suspension from WFI. They showed SOC recognition to claim that they are genuine affiliated state bodies. We have done away with this," informed the source.

Must follow NSC
All the 25 state bodies were asked to ensure that the Sports Code (NSC) is followed while conducting the elections and functioning. Age and tenure guidelines will have to be followed by all.