



Navigating criticism
Actor Rashmika Mandanna discusses being trolled for dialogue delivery in *Animal*, emphasising criticism over appearance

LEISURE | P2



Iran warns Israel
A top Iranian military adviser warns Israel that none of its embassies are safe following a strike in Damascus last week

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Bet on good monsoon
Leading FMCG players expect improving macro-indicators and expectations of good monsoon and rabi crops to drive consumer demand in the current fiscal

BUSINESS | P11



Pragg stuns Gujrathi
Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa plays brilliantly to defeat compatriot Vidit Gujrathi in Candidates chess at Toronto

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AAP-RISING: Supporters during AAP's day-long 'samuhik upvas' in protest against the arrest of party leader and Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal, at Jantar Mantar, in New Delhi, Sunday

PTI PHOTO

AAP leaders' day-long fast protesting Kejriwal arrest

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 7: Top AAP leaders held a day-long fast at Jantar Mantar here Sunday to protest against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest by the ED and asserted that people will give a fitting reply to the BJP in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls for sending him to jail.

Scores of volunteers and supporters of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) took part in the fast, singing patriotic songs and carrying posters bearing an image of Kejriwal behind bars.

Similar protests were held in other states as well as by Indians abroad, including at the Harvard Square in Boston, the Hollywood Sign in Los Angeles, outside the Indian embassy in Washington DC, at the Times Square in New York and in Toronto, London and Melbourne, among other places, AAP leaders said.

Gopal Rai, the convenor of the party's Delhi unit, asserted that Kejriwal will come out of jail and join the country's fight

against the dictatorship of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the Centre.

The stage in which the AAP leaders were seated during the six-hour fast had an image of Kejriwal behind bars in the backdrop. Portraits of BR Ambedkar and Bhagat Singh flanking Mahatma Gandhi's photo were kept in front of the stage.

Addressing the protesters at Jantar Mantar, the AAP's Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, who was recently granted bail by the Supreme Court in the Delhi excise scam case, asserted that Kejriwal was, is and will remain honest.

Delhi minister Atishi accused the BJP of resorting to dictatorship and claimed that the fast will give sleepless nights to the saffron party. She said there is anger among people over Kejriwal's arrest and it will prove to be the final nail in the coffin of the BJP. Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and several of his cabinet colleagues in the AAP-ruled Punjab observed a fast at Bhagat Singh's village, Khatkar Kalan.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



How can the court destabilise the govt by giving bail to opposition leaders? Isn't there separation of powers?

TDP's 'spirited' election pledge for booze lovers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Amaravati, April 7: "We will reduce prices of commodities," may be the standard refrain of every political party fighting an election. However, in Andhra Pradesh, opposition TDP is wooing the avid booze lovers with the promise of better quality spirit at reduced prices, if voted to power.

Simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections are scheduled in the southern state May 13.

Telugu Desam Party (TDP), the main opposition, is also accusing the YSRCP government of setting excessively high prices that do not align with the quality of the liquor.

TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu consistently emphasises, among others, this issue during his campaign, alleging that the state has been supplying poor quality liquor while profiting immensely from 'inflated' prices, running to thousands of crores of rupees.

According to reports, the state government netted nearly ₹24,000 crore through excise revenue in 2022-23 against over ₹17,000

crore in 2019-20.

YS Jagan Mohan Reddy-led YSRCP was voted to power in 2019. Liquor is sold through government-owned outlets in the state. Naidu also lashes out at the Chief Minister saying he had gone back on his poll promise of banning liquor if voted to power in 2019 Assembly elections.

"Prices of all commodities have gone up exorbitantly including liquor rates which are flying. Our younger brothers cheer when I mention liquor. They want the prices of liquor to be reduced. It is Jagan Mohan Reddy who increased the price from ₹60 (for a nip) to ₹200 and pocketed ₹100," he alleged, amid cheers from the crowd.

Jagan is spoiling the health of our people by supplying cheap quality booze, he alleges in his poll-related engagements.

"I am telling you, after 40 days (of TDP forming the government), not only for quality liquor, we take the responsibility for reducing prices," he promised at a recent rally in Kuppam from where he is contesting the polls.

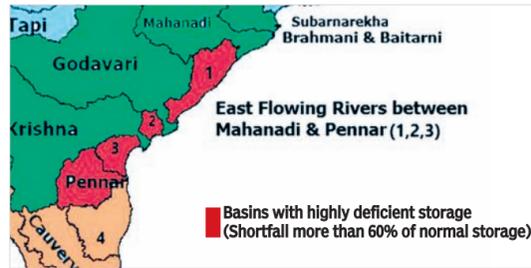
No water in 4 Odisha rivers

East flowing rivers between Mahanadi and Pennar basins including Rushikulya, Bahuda, Vamsadhara, and Nagavali have no water at present: CWC data

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 7: In a concerning development, at least four rivers flowing through southern Odisha have no water at present according to data released by the Central Water Commission. With the mercury soaring high right from the beginning of summer; this acquires much importance as far as availability of water is concerned.

Data released by the Central Water Commission reveal that rivers between Mahanadi and Pennar basins that flow through Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Odisha have no water at present. Rushikulya, Bahuda, Vamsadhara, and Nagavali in Odisha, apart from Sarada, Varaha, Tandava, Eluru, Gundlakamma, Tammileru,



Musi, Paleru and Manneru rivers are left with no water, with experts blaming reduced monsoon, changing rainfall patterns, catchment degradation and groundwater depletion for it.

Nitin Bassi from the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) said their analysis of the Mahanadi river basin has suggested adoption of micro irrigation systems and altering cropping patterns could reduce the water deficit from 24 per cent (in a business-as-usual scenario) to about 18 per cent of the water supply requirement.

The Central Water Commission (CWC) has detailed the state of water storage in reservoirs, noting that live stor-

Experts blame reduced monsoon, changing rainfall patterns, catchment degradation and groundwater depletion

Live storage capacity of reservoirs across the country has dwindled to just 35 per cent of the total capacity

age capacity has dwindled to just 35 per cent of the total capacity. The reservoirs in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu are experiencing a significant drop in storage levels, currently at only 20 per cent of their total capacity.

According to the data, the east flowing rivers between Mahanadi and Pennar had zero storage

this year, having a 100 per cent departure with respect to an average of ten years.

The east flowing rivers between Pennar and Kanyakumari are also deficit and have just 12 per cent storage and a departure of over 50 per cent with respect to an average of ten years.

The data, issued April 4, presents a stark comparison to the same period last year, highlighting a substantial decline in available water resources.

According to the data, the total live storage capacity of 150 monitored reservoirs in India amounts to 178.784 billion cubic metres (BCM), which accounts for about 69.35 per cent of the estimated total capacity of 257.812 BCM across the country.

However, the actual live storage available in these reservoirs stands at a mere 61.801 BCM, representing only 35 per cent of their total capacity.

Himanshu Thakkar, coordinator of SANDRP, highlighted multiple reasons for the decline in reservoir water levels, including reduced monsoon rainfall, changing rainfall patterns, degradation of catchment areas and groundwater depletion.

WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	37.2°C	35.6°C
Min Temp	27.8°C	26.8°C
Humidity	81%	85%
Rainfall	Trace	Nil

FORECAST
LIGHT TO MODERATE RAIN

CDS all set to chair maiden tri-service conference today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 7: A maiden tri-service conference aimed at generating initiatives and reforms to propel jointness and integration efforts will be held in New Delhi Monday, officials said.

'Parivartan Chintan' will be chaired by Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan, they said Sunday.

The pioneering tri-service conference is aimed at generating new and fresh ideas, initiatives and reforms to propel jointness and integration efforts, is being held in New Delhi April 8, the Defence Ministry said in a statement.

With the Indian armed forces having embarked on a major transformative change in their quest to be ready for the envisaged future wars, initiatives are being undertaken to promote jointness and integration as structures are modified to enable tri-service multi-domain operations, it said.

The 'Chintan' will be the first-ever conference of the heads of all tri-services institutions, the Department of Military Affairs, headquarters integrated defence staff and the three services.

19 cats 'dominate' Mexico's presidential palace

THESE DAYS, MEXICAN PRESIDENT LÓPEZ OBRADOR IS ACCOMPANIED BY BOWIE, BELLOF, NUBE, COCO, YEMA, OLLIN, BALAM AND MORE, WHO SEEM TO HAVE FOUND A PURR-FECT HOME IN THE PALACE

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Mexico City, April 7: They prowl through palace gardens stalking pigeons and make cameos on televised press briefings. Some greet tourists at the doors, while others take a sneaky lick of ice cream from staff.

Nineteen feral cats have free rein of Mexico's National Palace, long roaming the lush gardens



and historic colonial halls of the most iconic buildings in the country. "They have access to every part of the palace, so they walk in on meetings, interviews and wander onto camera," said Jesús Arias, the palace veterinarian, as a handful of feline friends brush against his ankles.

Now, the palace cats have made hiss-tory after the government of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador declared

them to be "living fixed assets," the first animals in Mexico to receive the title.

The investment term "fixed assets" usually applies to buildings and furniture, but by applying it to cats, López Obrador's government has obligated the country's Treasury to give them food and care for them for the rest of their lives, even after the leader leaves office in October. "The cats are now a symbol

of the National Palace. Just as we understand this world, I wouldn't understand the National Palace without the presence of these cats," said Adriana Castillo Román, general director of the National Palace and Cultural Heritage Conservancy. "We have to make sure the cats are taken care of."

Nestled in the heart of Mexico City, the presidential palace has long been the seat of Mexico's executive branch. Now the residence of López Obrador, it is built upon the former palace of Indigenous Emperor Moctezuma. Ironically, Moctezuma's ancient Aztec culture honoured not cats, but hairless dogs known as Xoloitzcuintle, who were even buried with their masters.

Staffers say they remember the feral cats living among the cacti and dense brush of the gardens as far back as 50 years ago.

But it's unclear when they first appeared or how they even got into the building. While 19 live in the building full time, many more come and go, and staff suspect they slip under a small crack in the palace gate by night.

One cat named Zeus, who has since passed away, even became famous in July when he meandered into the president's morning press briefing. The gray cat stood in front of cameras and wandered among reporters until palace staff had to carry him off.

Neither Bowie, Coco or Ollin commented when asked how they feel about being living fixed assets. Coco swished his tail, while Ollin stretched out below a palace pillar and fell asleep.

"Meow," responded Nube, a gray cat named after the Spanish word for "cloud", who enjoys greeting visitors at the door of the palace.

2 UNDERTRIALS ESCAPE FROM KALAHANDI JAIL

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhawanipatna, April 7: Two prisoners, who were facing trial under the POCSO Act, escaped from Kalahandi district jail Sunday, according to an official. The two were in the jail garden this morning and they somehow managed to break the security in the prison which has high walls and watchtowers, he said.

The two men, who were facing trial under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, managed to scale the wall of the jail in Bhawanipatna, the official said. The jail authorities filed an FIR at Bhawanipatna Town PS and did not disclose further details of the incident.

Bhawanipatna Town Inspector in-Charge Jasobanta Hial said an investigation has been initiated to nab the undertrials and ascertain how they broke the security cover inside the jail.

leisure



DWAYNE BLASTS CANCEL CULTURE

Actor Dwayne Johnson is frustrated by the culture that prevents people from being their true selves. Dwayne said, "Today's easy cancel-culture world, and cancel culture, woke culture, this culture, that culture, division, et cetera, that really bugs me."

WOODY ALLEN UNSURE ABOUT HIS RETIREMENT

Legendary filmmaker Woody Allen is unsure about making his next film. The 88-year-old filmmaker has helmed his 50th feature film in the form of the French erotic thriller *Coup de Chance*. However, he is unsure whether it will be his last project as he still has lots of ideas but finds trying to obtain financial support for his work tiresome.



FORTUNE FORECAST

GaneshSpeaks.com
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ARIES
 Today people will actually drag you into altercations, so flash the peace sign if you must. You may face some sort of legal troubles from peace-loving groups. Therefore, Ganesh advises you to meditate, take a walk or just seek out the company of your near and dear ones.

TAURUS
 Ganesh sees you in a very romantic mood today. Your thoughts, tender and dreamy, will keep drifting towards someone special; someone of the opposite sex. Come evening and you will, in all likelihood, be sitting closely together, arm in arm, with your spouse or your sweetheart.

GEMINI
 Today, you are likely to remain transparent in all your dealings, forecasts Ganesh. You can be optimistic about your chances of success if you choose to propose to that special someone. The day will bring more pleasure than pain.

CANCER
 There is something different about today. It is unlike any other day. Just when you will start believing that there is nothing great about the day, it will spring a surprise. There have been days where life has thrown carrots at you; then there have been days when it has hurled brickbats.

LEO
 You will be in a light-hearted mood today. Be it at the office or at the home, you will be full of joy and will be looking to pass your time leisurely. You will spend time with family and friends. You will be unable to implement your plans for tackling work today in your current mood, says Ganesh.

VIRGO
 The artist, the comedian and the showman in you are all set to take the floor today. Entertain people and set the evening ablaze with your arsenal of jokes and gags, says Ganesh. But save valuable time and energy for other pressing matters and responsibilities too.

LIBRA
 It is more than likely, and possible indeed, that you will surpass your own past performances today. All this is on the cards, despite the fact that your peers at work will try to outwit you. But it is your consummate set of skills that shall help you pre-empt all such attempts, says Ganesh. If it is some peace that you are looking for today, expect to find it in meditation.

SCORPIO
 You will see every colour of the kaleidoscope today – people with different temperaments and different attitudes, many of whom will surprise you with their reactions. You may be shocked at the way your colleagues or close friends react to your strategies or success.

SAGITTARIUS
 You may have been experiencing hair loss in the past due to back-breaking stress, but things will begin to clean up today. As complex issues begin to fall in place, you are likely to receive some good news about a promotion or increment. At the end of the day, you will feel content in your comfort zone in the company of near and dear ones.

CAPRICORN
 Planning strategic moves will be done with, and all that will remain is execution. But Ganesh says there may be delays in implementing ideas that are crucial to the success of your project, and this may leave you disappointed and dismayed. But the problem will be short-lived and you will have nothing to worry about as you have all it takes to be a winner.

AQUARIUS
 Ganesh says it's okay to cry on somebody's shoulders. In fact, sharing problems lightens the load, and if nothing else, your friends will think you're as human as them. You will feel much better by evening and will even smile a little, says Ganesh.

PISCES
 Now is the time when the inner circle of friends that you have nurtured over the years will prove their worth, says Ganesh. It is good to know that in times of need you can bank on their support and count on their cooperation. You will be able to luxuriate in the benefits of their friendship today.

Don't want to live in a bubble: Rashmika

Mumbai: Actress Rashmika Mandanna opened up about being trolled for her dialogue delivery in the Ranbir Kapoor starrer *Animal*.

The actress, who got appreciation for her role from most people, was subjected to trolling. While many made fun of her dialogue delivery, especially in that confrontation scene post-Karwa Chauth in the film, it created memes and also invited a lot of criticism.

During a conversation on *No Filter Neha*, the *Mission Majnu* actress said, "I don't like people trolling women on their bodies...as long as that's not the case and they're trolling me about my films, cinema, my face in the film when I say the dialogue... I know how the performance was. I did the performance five months ago."

She further added, "I thought I did the 9-minute-long scene, and everyone on the set liked it, but people now are trolling me for the same. So, am I living in a bubble? Like, are people not going to like this scene? Because you know what you've shot, but people don't know. People just know that, like those 10 seconds. So I don't want to ever be in a situation where I'm living in a bubble. I need to be on the ground."

On the work front, Rashmika will be seen next in *Chhava* alongside Vicky Kaushal.

AGENCIES



Kriti on unfair casting practices

Mumbai: Actress Kriti Sanon, currently basking in the success of her film *Crew*, has opened up about the time she felt that star kids were getting all the opportunities, despite not having proved their mettle.

She expressed that there was a time when she was very restless because she knew that she had way more potential than she could portray in the opportunities that she had in front of her.

"I wanted something deeper. I wanted something where I could just show my potential as an actor way more," the *Dilwale* actress told an entertainment portal.

"I was getting frustrated because I was like, I know I can do it, I know I can kill it, but I don't have it in front of me. At that point, I was also seeing some new faces, some of them belonging to the film background, coming in having not done anything and getting opportunities that I was like, how," Sanon concluded.

AGENCIES

Navya doesn't consider herself a celeb



Mumbai: Navya Naveli Nanda, granddaughter of superstar Amitabh Bachchan, emphasised using her podcast for meaningful causes and prioritised proving herself before claiming celebrity status.

She said, "I don't consider myself a celebrity; I think I have a lot more to do and achieve in life before I can be given that tag. Even if you see the work that I do or my social media, I always try to keep it real, organic, and be myself. Being ourselves is the greatest gift we have, and I think being honest about who we are and where we come from and having respect for that is

very important. I have tried to use my podcast and my voice for things that are important to me and our society. So, it's not a challenge (to be real), as I know what I am speaking up for is a genuine cause."

She ended her stance by saying, "I have a lot to do in life. I have just started my work. I have a long, long way to go, a lot more to achieve, and a lot of hard work to put in before I can even think about calling myself a celebrity or having an air about myself. I still believe that I need to do a lot more to prove myself and make my family proud. So, I don't think of myself as a celebrity. I am working hard to make a change in the world."

AGENCIES

Divyendu calls his Mirzapur character a troubled soul

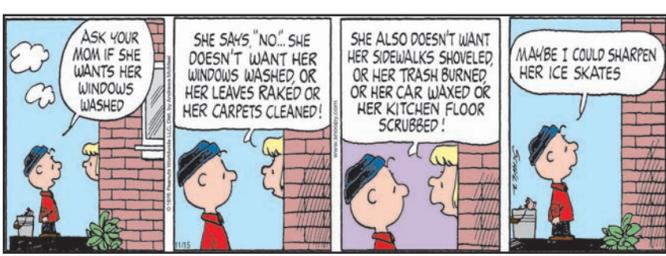
Mumbai: Actor Divyendu, who is currently receiving a lot of positive responses for his film *Madgaon Express*, has shared that his character Munna Tripathi from the streaming series *Mirzapur* is a troubled soul.

Talking about his character, he said, "For me, Munna was a really troubled soul. I knew that this was a banger of a script, and it would be iconic. It would explode. But, funnily enough, initially, I was approached for Babloo's character, but then a couple of days later, they realised I would be a much better fit for Munna."

"When I was in character, it was affecting my personality a lot. We shouldn't over-romanticize going too deep into a character because it is not easy. At times, it used to get really dark for me. I felt suffocated. It's so tricky that you don't even realise that you are in that zone. It's only when you come out of it that you realise how dark it was," he concluded.

AGENCIES

PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

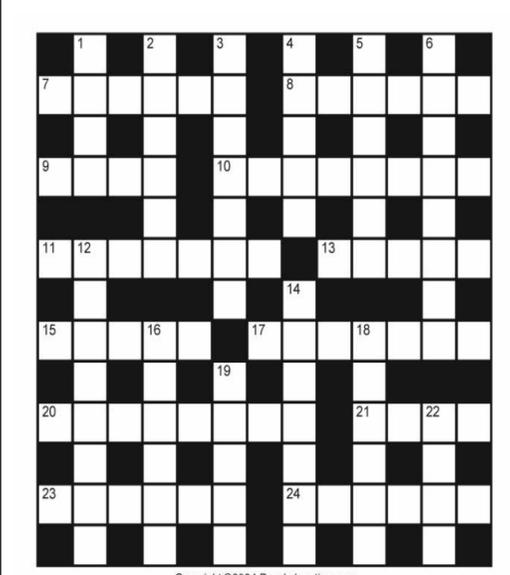


BREVITY



FUN post

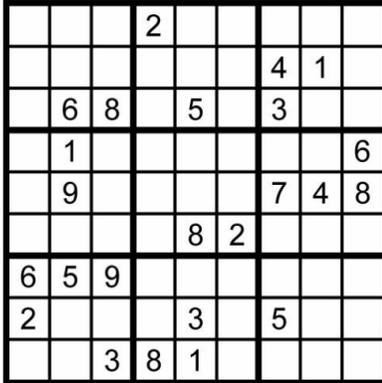
CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 7 Paris attraction
 - 8 Masked man with a stick
 - 9 Opaque gem
 - 10 Swine on the loose (4,4)
 - 11 Become smaller
 - 13 Plant fiber
 - 15 Kind of alcohol
 - 17 Admirable qualities
 - 20 Adam's Peak locale (3,5)
 - 21 Whirlpool
 - 23 Type of scheme or wheel
 - 24 Reaction type
- Down**
- 1 Henhouse
 - 2 Decline and Fall author
 - 3 Old English epic poem
 - 4 Nimble
 - 5 Hare
 - 6 Rectory
 - 12 Napoleon's defeat
 - 14 Competition
 - 16 Jaundiced
 - 18 Golf shot (3,3)
 - 19 Furious
 - 22 Big game

SUDOKU

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



SOLUTIONS



CROSSWORD

SUDOKU

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

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

Noted Odissi danseuse Sujata Mohapatra performs at a programme organised by Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Odissi Research Centre at Rabindra Mandap in Bhubaneswar, Sunday, to mark the 20th death anniversary of the legendary Odissi exponent



Rain brings respite from extreme heat



ARINDAM GANGULY & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, April 7: The Capital city Sunday got a relief from extreme hot weather conditions following a brief spell of heavy downpour in the evening.

The day started in the Capital city on a cooler note with an overcast sky. As the day progressed, the temperature wit-

nessed a steady rise, reaching its peak in the afternoon. However, towards evening, the conditions changed drastically.

Around 6 pm, a spell of lightning and thunderclaps lit up the evening sky, accompanied by a strong wind. At around 6 pm, the skies opened up and a light drizzle gradually turned into heavy downpour. As the rain continued for nearly half an

hour, the weather turned cool and pleasant.

Bhubaneswar had been recording very high temperature for the last three days. On Friday, the maximum (day) temperature shot up to 43.5 degrees Celsius making life miserable for citizens.

Meanwhile, thunderstorms along with rain brought respite from the prevailing heatwave conditions in most parts of the

state Sunday, though three people were injured due to a lightning strike in Balasore district. According to sources, three people, including two tourists from West Bengal, were injured after lightning struck them while they were roaming around in the Udayapur beach area. They were admitted to a local hospital.

In another incident, 15 goats were killed in a lightning strike at Batasasan village in Ganjam district.

The highest, 6 mm rainfall was recorded at Keonjhar, while 3.2 mm rainfall was recorded in Baripada, 3 mm at Dhenkanal, 2.2 mm at Rayagada and 2 mm at Angul and Daringbadi, the IMD centre said. Most of the districts in the state recorded temperature below 40 degrees Celsius, Sunday, while Malkangiri was the hottest at 41.1 degrees Celsius. The maximum temperature in Bhubaneswar stood at 37.2 during the day.

Forecasting thunderstorm with lightning accompanied by gusty surface wind speed reaching 30-40 kmph April 9, the weather office has issued a Yellow warning (be updated) for the districts of Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Deogarh, Subarnapur, Sambalpur, Nayagarh, Ganjam, Gajapati, Rayagada, Kandhamal, Kalahandi, and Angul.

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



BJD to win three-fourth of 147 Assembly seats: Pandian

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, April 7: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's close aide and BJD leader VK Pandian Sunday claimed that the party will win three-fourth of the seats in elections to the 147-member Assembly in the state.

Addressing the state-level convention of Biju Sramik Samukhya, an arm of the BJD, here, the bureaucrat-turned-politician said he was optimistic that the party would return to power for the sixth consecutive term by winning 75 per cent of the Assembly segments.

"The BJD will win with a record margin in the Assembly elections. We will win three-fourth of the Assembly seats. The party under the leadership of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik will also improve its tally in the Lok Sabha elections."



The Lok Sabha and the Assembly elections in Odisha will be held simultaneously.

The BJD, in the 2019 general elections, had won 12 of the 21 Lok Sabha seats in Odisha, while the Opposition BJP secured eight and the Congress got one.

The ruling party had won 113 of the 147 assembly seats five years ago.

Pandian appealed to the people to vote for conch, the symbol of BJD. "The chief minis-

ter is the BJD representative in all the 147 Assembly segments and 21 Lok Sabha constituencies in Odisha," he said. Noting that labourers play a major role in building a strong and new Odisha, he said the chief minister has been according top priority to their welfare.

He said Patnaik's father and legendary politician Biju Patnaik had raised the daily wage of labourers from ₹11 to 25 at one go.

The chief minister has also "increased daily wage by a record ₹100 - from ₹350 to ₹450 - despite opposition from several quarters", Pandian said. He also spoke on different development projects of the state government including steps taken for the economic uplift of workers. Odisha will go to polls in four phases between May 13 and June 1.

Miscreant who assaulted woman with sword held

DEBADURLLAV HARICHANDAN, OP

Bhubaneswar, April 7: The Chandrasekharpur police here arrested a miscreant who allegedly assaulted a woman with sword over petty reasons.

Both the accused, Ananta Nayak, and the victim are residents of Harekrishna slum, said an officer from Chandrasekharpur police station.

IIC Chandrasekharpur police station Prakash Chandra Majhi said Ananta Thursday created a ruckus in the public after getting drunk. He later fell into a small pit alongside the road in the slum. As Ananta struggled to come out of the pit, one



Subhasini Moharana, who was standing in the vicinity, allegedly laughed at his condition. This, Majhi said, angered Ananta.

After coming out of the pit, Ananta rushed to his home and came back with a sword in his hand. "He entered Subhasini's home and attempted to assault her with the sword. Subhasini managed to lock herself in a

room," Majhi said.

When Ananta tried to break open the door, a woman relative of Subhasini intervened. In the scuffle that ensued, the woman suffered injuries, Majhi said. Ananta fled the spot when locals rushed for help after hearing the woman's screams.

Majhi said after the incident Ananta continuously changed his location in order to avoid arrest. However, on receipt of specific information, the Chandrasekharpur police managed to nab him Saturday, the IIC added. Ananta was booked under Sections 294, 506 and 341 of IPC and was produced before a local court for remand.

Ganeswar joins BJD

Bhubaneswar: Former minister Ganeswar Behera, who had recently resigned from the Congress, joined the BJD Sunday. The BJD is likely to field Behera, a Dalit leader, from Kendrapara Assembly segment which is reserved for the Scheduled Caste candidates, party sources said. Behera along with hundreds of his supporters switched sides in the presence of BJD's Rajya Sabha MPs Manas Mangaraj and Sasmit Patra and former minister Pratap Jena at Sankha Bhawan. "Inspired by the developmental work and welfare measures taken by CM Naveen Patnaik, I have joined the BJD," Behera said.

Wildlife smuggling racket busted; 7 held

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, April 7: Forest department officials have busted an inter-state wildlife smuggling racket in Gajapati district and arrested seven persons of the gang.

The officials seized skins of five leopards, one fishing cat and one leopard cat along with a huge quantity of pangolin scales from their possession, the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) Wildlife, Susanta Nanda, said in a post on X.

The Forest officials are eyeing

to arrest some other members of the gang, including the kingpin, he said. The accused have been forwarded to court in Gajapati district, he said, adding that further investigation to establish forward and backward linkages is on. The kingpin and all the poachers involved will be apprehended soon, the PCCF said.

Nanda also thanked all his staff who worked 24x7 to crack down on the gang.

Meanwhile, a 35-year-old man, arrested with parts of animals,

has been sentenced to three years in jail by a court in Nayagarh district. Bhagabat Majhi was arrested by the Special Task Force (STF) of the state police in November 2022 with two leopard hides, one deer skin, 115 pangolin scales and two tusks of wild boar. The court in Dasapalla convicted him under the Wildlife Protection Act and sentenced him to three years in jail. It also imposed a fine of ₹10,000 on him. He will have to remain in jail for another six months if he fails to pay the fine.



DEFT HANDS

An artisan works on a silver tableaus at Chandni Chowk Puja Mandap in Cuttack ahead of Basanti Durga Puja, Sunday

OP PHOTO

12th anniv celebration of Jagannath Hospital



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 7: The Jagannath Hospital at Saheed Nagar here celebrated its 12th foundation day by organizing the Annual Continued Medical Education (CME) programme at a City hotel, Sunday. Significantly, the event coincided with the World Health Day.

Top pediatricians and neonatologist of the state participated in the event. Arjit Mohapatra, Director of Jagannath Hospital, and Managing Director Biswajit Mishra delivered the welcome address at the event in the pres-

ence of Abinash Mohapatra, Chairman of the hospital.

The event was split into different sessions where experts spoke about many important health issues, like neonatal sepsis, approach to septic shock, approach to refractory recurring cough, asthma, role of genetic testing in pediatric neurology, and many others.

Jagannath Hospital is a multi-disciplinary hospital with special emphasis for treatment of children. The panelist on the occasion heaped praises on the hospital for its contribution in the field of child health and treatment.

Human influencers face competition from AI models

Social media influencers have embraced artificial intelligence (AI) to spice up their content but they are also facing growing competition from AI-generated Instagramers, TikTokers and YouTubers.

Sporting pink hair and posing in lingerie, swimsuits or gym outfits, Aitana Lopez has more than 3,00,000 followers on Instagram where she is described as a "gamer at heart" and "fitness lover" -- except she's not real.

Aitana was created by The Clueless, a Barcelona-based company that describes itself as an "AI modeling agency" run by "visionaries on a mission to redefine the world of influencers".

Sofia Novales, project manager at The Clueless, said the "rising costs associated with human influencers" was a reason behind the company's creation.

"Virtual models, being digital, present a more economical alternative," Novales said.

"The advantages lie in unparalleled creative control, allowing seamless decision-making on image, fashion, and aesthetics without the need for physical photoshoots," Novales said. The rise of AI has fuelled concerns about the prolifera-

tion of deepfake videos that could be used maliciously.

Meta, owner of Facebook and Instagram, said Friday it would start putting "Made with AI labels" on AI-generated content in May. AI presents a huge business opportunity for content creators: The influencer market is expected to grow rapidly, from \$16.5 billion in 2022 to nearly \$200 billion by 2032, according to Allied Market Research.

Using virtual influencers not new: Barbie already has millions of followers on Instagram. But they are now being used in advertisements where they can't be told apart from a real person.

Take Lil Miquela, a "19-year-old Robot living in LA" created by a California agency in 2016.

With 2.6 million followers on Instagram and 3.5 million on TikTok, Lil Maqueta has promoted brands as big as BMW.

The idea was to "create something never seen before," the German premium carmaker said in a statement to AFP.

"Attracting a younger, technology-savvy generation is for us the icing on the cake," it said.

Maud Lejeune, who heads up the Paris-based digital strategy



With 2.6 million followers on Instagram and 3.5 million on TikTok, Lil Maqueta has promoted brands as big as BMW

agency AD Crew, said that it isn't difficult for the public to accept AI influencers.

"It's like actors on TV: we know it isn't real yet we follow them and we find it interesting, it's like watching a mini-series."

AD Crew represents more than 30 influencers, but Lejeune created her own virtual influencer, Metagaya, two years ago.

"The current level of design didn't exist then. It's technical,

you've got to dress them, take photos for the background, create a story," said Lejeune, acknowledging that Metagaya didn't turn out very well.

The rapid technological progress brought by the likes of OpenAI's Sora video generator could make it easier to create and operate realistic virtual influencers.

Deepfakes Human influencers are also seizing on AI technology to make better videos. France's Charles Sterlings sees an opportunity to improve translations.

He uses different tools on platforms like HeyGen and Rask.ai to automatically translate and lip-sync his video posts into English

and Spanish. Sterlings also uses Deepshot, a platform that allows users to create deepfakes by changing the words and mouth movement of people in real videos.

He said it took him just a few minutes and a few dollars to manipulate a video of French President Emmanuel Macron.

But Sterlings sees the technology as a competitor as well as a useful tool.

"Anyone with a phone can be an influencer. But eventually, it will be artificial intelligence, available 24 hours a day, and much cheaper to develop," he said. For Maud Lejeune, AI can help influencers produce more content.

"It's tough to put yourself in front of the camera for a long time and certain creators burn out... Maybe AI will provide a new way to create without exposing oneself," she said.

The Clueless has no qualms about its AI models taking away business from real influencers.

"We don't foresee real models becoming obsolete or replaced by AI-generated models like Aitana. They can coexist as another competition of the industry said Novales."

AGENCIES

Patient treated for GI bleeding at KIMS



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 7: The Kalinga Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS) successfully treated a woman suffering from severe gastrointestinal (GI) problem post-surgery by administering Hemospray Powder (HP). The application of the Endoscopic Hemospray yielded instantaneous results, allowing the patient to be discharged from the ICU the following day. It was India's second-ever HP treatment, considered as ground-breaking advancement in medical science, capable of halting GI bleeding within ten minutes and reducing the mortality rates. The use of HP will be helpful in emergency situations, where the doctor can stop internal GI

bleeding immediately and save the patient's life through the process of therapeutic endoscopy, the doctors said.

This innovation would be a great addition to the Gastroenterology Armamentarium for the treatment of GI bleeding as it is safe and effective in scenarios, where other endoscopic modalities may fail, they added.

KIIT and KISS founder Achyuta Samanta congratulated the doctors for adopting this path-breaking solution in providing advanced treatment to patients.

The department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, KIMS, offers a full spectrum of outpatient, inpatient and endoscopic services. The department is led by a team of professionals, namely Manoj Kumar Sahu, department head, with guidance from Pro-Chancellor, KIIT University SK Acharya, chairman of academics, KIMS, YK Chawla and emeritus professor in Gastroenterology, AC Anand.



INITIATION CEREMONY: Lingaraj temple servitors perform 'Akha Anukula' ritual for the upcoming Rukuna Rath Yatra in Bhubaneswar, Sunday

OP PHOTO

Capital Foundation Day to be a low key affair

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, April 7: In view of the upcoming Capital Foundation Day (CFD) April 13, a high-level preparatory meeting was held under the chairmanship of State Development Commissioner (SDA) Anu Garg. The meeting decided that the occasion will be a low key affair due to model code of conduct (MCC) imposed for the upcoming general and Assembly elections.

The meeting was attended by Information and Public Relations department chief secretary, Sanjay Kumar Singh, department of Odia Language, Literature and Culture Commissioner-cum-Secretary Sujatha Karthikeyan, vice president BDA, Balawant Singh, Khurda District Magistrate and officials from various departments.



The state Capital, established April 13, 1948, will be turning 76 this year.

On this occasion, many different beautification and cleanliness drive around the City will be carried out under the supervision of SDA. Garlanding public statues of important personalities will be conducted. A photo exhibition will also take place on this occasion.

India's first Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru laid the foundation stone of Bhubaneswar April 13, 1948. Bhubaneswar replaced Cuttack as the capital of the state, a year after India secured independence. City's first master plan was prepared by famous German architect and urban planner, Otto Konigsberger, to cater to a population of 40,000 in 1948.

CM calls for robust healthcare system



ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, April 7: On the occasion of World Health Day (WHD), Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik appealed the citizens to build a healthier and equitable society in terms of access to basic healthcare.

Taking to X, the CM said, "Accessible and affordable healthcare is an essential cornerstone of any just and equitable society. On #WorldHealthDay, let's reaffirm our commitment to build healthier, resilient communities and prioritise preventive care. Together, we can build a robust healthcare system for #SusthaOdishaSukhiOdisha (Healthy Odisha Happy Odisha)." Several organisations observed the WHD with a series of events. City AIIMS executive director Ashutosh Biswas said, "We should always remember that good health is our right. Let's prioritise our well-being and stay responsible for our health every day."

Taking to social media account, Health and Family Welfare department said, "On this #WorldHealthDay, make a conscious effort to lead an active lifestyle, consume healthy diet, avoid alcohol or tobacco consumption and go for regular health checkups for a healthier



version of yourself. 'My Health, My Right'. #OdishaCares."

On this occasion, a free health check up camp was organised by city based Jayadev Walkers Club (JWC), in collaboration with Saraswati Multi Speciality Clinic, under the supervision of JWC's president, Nirad Baran Khuntia. The Corporation of ward-49, Sanjukta Sundaray, inaugurated the camp.

Joining the programme as chief guest, eminent gynaecologist Basanti Mohapatra addressed the gathering on this year's WHD theme "My Health My Right." She spoke on the importance of wellness of health and prevention of diseases.

Odisha Environmental Society (OES) and Regional Science Centre (RSC) observed WHD and organised a seminar on 'My

Health, My Right.' Former HoD of General Surgery at SCB Medical College and Hospital, Srikrant Panda was the chief guest. In his address, Panda said, "Various diseases are emerging as major causes of human death and disability. We have to find out lasting solutions to health problems by applying the new knowledge acquired by science."

"The IQAir 2023 report revealed India is the third most polluted country after Bangladesh and Pakistan. The air quality is significantly below the standards set by the World Health Organisation" Panda said.

"Until the quality of our environment is restored, living a healthy life will remain a day dream. But it is the basic right of all of us to grow up with good health in a quality environment," he opined.

Presiding over the programme, OES president Sundar Narayan Patro explained how environmental pollution is the prime cause for various health problems. He emphasised the importance of adopting a healthier lifestyle to be disease-free. Secretary of OES, Jayakrushna Panigrahi gave the vote of thanks.

Bhubaneswar Runway Week holds 10th edition



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 7: The 10th edition of Bhubaneswar Runway Week was held here Sunday under the direction of show director John Ajay on behalf of Addiction Fashion Management.

Selected designers of the country showcased their interesting designs on this occasion. The main attraction of the show was Femina Miss India 2023 Nandini Gupta who was a showstopper of Atulya Karigari India.

Other designs presented in the event included Ikat designs by Pradeep Sahari, Sambalpur by Sakshi Handloom and Dapper Daily by Debangini Behera. The Label Lopamudra was based on the design fabric shown by Lopamudra and Sareena showcased the Dues Creation, based on cocktail collection.

Debasmita's Soul by Indian focused on classic designs, age old heritage embroideries and the ancient embroideries of Indian fashion. Sam and Saheri's designs showcased a glimpse of handcrafted fresh culture and fusion wear styles.

UAIL launches health initiative 'Nirogshala'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 7: Aditya Birla Group's Utkal Alumina International Ltd (UAIL) recently launched a major health initiative titled 'Nirogshala' alongside its Utkal Hospital, Nuapada health centres, and mines outpatient departments.

Unit head and president of UAIL, Mazhar Beig said, "Our organisation addresses the pressing need for improving healthcare quality in the tribal hinterland, exploring the challenges and potential solutions to it. 'Nirogshala' initiative plays a vital role in the tribal districts of the state. These dispensaries provide affordable and comprehensive primary healthcare. The initiative contributes significantly to improve the health outcomes."

"Each dispensary is equipped with certified medical staff, six pharmacists and four attendants. Free medicines along with consultation, health screening and emergency care are some of the

key services accorded under the 'Nirogshala' initiative," added Beig.

While applauding the efforts of UAIL, Gopinathpur Sarpanch Dhansingh Majhi said, "The establishment of 'Nirogshala' is nothing short of a blessing for our community. It has provided us with access to essential healthcare services that were earlier out of reach. The presence of trained healthcare professionals along with the availability of medications and medical supplies has ensured that villagers receive timely and quality healthcare close to home."

UAIL is immensely engaged in several projects that make a qualitative difference to the lives of the underprivileged. Through its 'Nirogshala' initiative, UAIL serve the local people by setting up dispensaries at the village level. Currently they operate in four villages, namely, Andirakanth, P Kupakhal, Podapadi and Gopinathpur in Rayagada and Kalahandi districts of the state.



Researchers warn of extreme heat impact on outdoor workers

According to the study, the world is edging closer to breaching the temperature goals of the Paris Agreement, with heat and humidity levels in the tropics having been studied to be closer than ever to human tolerance thresholds

to face the worst impact. Above-normal heatwave days are likely over most parts of the plains, it said.

Following the adverse weather warning, researchers are advocating for novel ways of working outdoors, including flexible hours and mandatory breaks, to help workers adapt to the effects of heat, made increasingly humid because of climate change.

"Dry heat is relatively easier to handle. When the body heats up and we drink water, there is evaporation and the body cools down. However, in humid heat, evaporation reduces because of high moisture in the air which hampers the body's cooling mechanism," Vimal Mishra, Vikram Sarabhai Chair Professor, Civil Engineering and Earth Sciences, IIT Gandhinagar, told PTI.

"Doing intensive labour in such conditions can raise body heat to a level where it can also cause mortality," he warned.

An international study examining how tropical heat impacts outdoor workers has found that for one degree Celsius of



additional warming, roughly 800 million people will live in areas needing hours of heavy work to be cut down by more than half over the entire year.

In other words, "one degree Celsius of additional warming, heat, and humidity, will hinder the ability of one in eight people living in the tropics to safely work (outdoors) during most daylight hours," Mishra, the study's co-author, wrote in a

comment for Nature India, an online publication of the Nature Portfolio.

The study, co-led by the US-based Paul G Allen Family Foundation, was published in the journal One Earth in March 2024. According to the study, the world is edging closer to breaching the temperature goals of the Paris Agreement, with heat and humidity levels in the tropics having been studied to be closer

than ever to human tolerance thresholds.

The increasingly humid heat is likely to affect outdoor workers in Africa and Asia the most because of their large working-age populations, likely to rise in coming decades, coupled with high reliance on agriculture, forestry and fisheries, the authors said.

Another study, conducted in Tamil Nadu and published in October last year, found that occupational exposure to extreme heat more than doubled the risk of miscarriage in pregnant women, with the heat generally raising the overall risk of adverse pregnancy and birth outcomes.

"We also observed that because of limited access to toilets, the women were eating and drinking less, resulting in malnutrition. This too can impact pregnancy outcomes," Vidhya Venugopal, the study's corresponding author and professor at the Faculty of Public Health of the Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and

Research in Chennai, told PTI. The study assessed 800 pregnant women, 47 per cent of whom were exposed to heat while working outdoors.

Among the women exposed to extreme heat, 6.1 per cent had still and preterm births, compared to 2.6 per cent of the women exposed to heat within safe limits, it said.

Further, 8.4 per cent of the women exposed to high heat levels birthed babies having low weight, compared to 4.5 per cent of the women exposed to safe levels of heat, the "first-of-its-kind" study to be conducted in India found. It is published in the British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

"Biologically the external heat adds to the internal heat generated in pregnant women because of hormones. So, when these women sweat in the heat, the blood flow rushes more towards their organs, which lowers the amount flowing towards the foetus, thereby hindering their growth and development," Venugopal said.

CLASSIFIED AFFIDAVIT

Myself Mariyam Behera and Pinky Behera is one and the same person and I put my signature as Mariyam Behera for all purposes. That, now it is necessary to make correction of my name as Mariyam Behera in the school records of my son Ronak Raj Behera for future reference. Affidavit number 175, dt.21.03.2024 by Executive Magistrate, Bolangir.

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Acute drinking water crisis hits Keonjhar



Laying of pipelines for transportation of iron ore has damaged pipes supplying water, allege locals

POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, April 7: Drinking water supply to this town has suffered severe disruption for the last couple of days. This has happened as the pipelines supplying water suffered damages while a trench was being dug up, sources informed Sunday. More than 50,000 people living in Ward Nos nine, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 under Keonjhar Municipal Corporation have been severely hit. With no signs of the heat decreasing, the acute drinking water crisis has made the lives of the people living in the above mentioned wards miserable. Sources said that a private

agency is involved in digging up a trench for construction of slurry pipelines. The pipelines are being laid adjacent to NH-20 and will run through the Sadar and Ghatagaon blocks in this district. The mindless digging of the trench has also led to destruction of forest cover on large tracts of land posing serious threats to wildlife.

This development has sparked resentment and anger among the residents. Locals blamed hasty implementation of work for the acute water crisis. They alleged that the pipelines have suffered damages due to the digging of the trench in a haphazard manner. They alleged that the construction agency is flouting norms as the Public Health Engineering department (PHED) is taking no steps against it.

Former Keonjhar MLA Subarna Naik alleged that despite damage to the water pipelines the administration is not showing

any urgency or taking action to reduce the pain of the people. He added that this proves that the district administration has tacit understanding with the construction agency. Sources added that for construction of any pipeline, prior permission has to be taken from the PHED.

Narad Rath, general manager WATCO said "the pipes got ruptured due to the reckless attitude of the agency. "However, efforts are being made to normalise supply of drinking water to the affected wards," Rath informed. He assured that proper water supply will be restored by Monday.

Residents have demanded strict action against the construction company and to stop them from continuing with the work. They said earlier also there were allegations against the same company for allegedly laying pipes on routes frequented by animals.

Even though pits were dug up and the pipes were laid, the soil was not levelled properly. As a result, the pits have become dangerous for animals when they move. There is always the chance of animals suffering injuries if they fall into the pits, locals pointed out.

Local residents also added that the digging up of land and laying of the pipelines are being done in a rough and shoddy manner. They pointed out that a large number of trees have been felled in the Naranpur and Ate protected forest ranges. People have expressed resentment over the development as the interests of the agency and the mining firm have been given preference over the protection of wildlife.



MATTER OF FAITH: Devotees perform Dhuli Danda, a ritual of penance outside the Shyamakali temple in Paralakhemundi for the fortnight long Danda Yatra festival which is underway, Sunday

Jumbo death: Experts demand DNA test

POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, April 7: The recovery of the decomposed carcass of an elephant from Chamakpur reserve forest of Balibandh forest section under Champua forest range in Keonjhar district has kicked off a controversy.

Keonjhar Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Dhanraj HD said that the carcass was that of an old elephant which died due to age related ailments and other natural reasons. The deceased jumbo was with the herd at the time of its death, while its tusks have been recovered, the DFO said.

It was revealed that the animal was lying dead for a long time, but the Forest department discovered it late. The Forest department seized the bones and skin of the elephant. Later, a joint task force accompanied by Keonjhar DFO conducted a probe into its death.

The death of the animal has resulted in a controversy re-



garding the actual reason behind and its age at the time of death. A joint task force has gone to the scene and conducted an investigation. It is feared that efforts are being made to suppress the matter as the Forest department has not blamed anyone or taken any action in this regard so far.

Moreover, while no ivory was found during the recovery of carcass Saturday, the Forest de-

partment claimed to have recovered the tusks, Sunday. The department also claimed the deceased animal to be a female elephant.

This has given rise to doubts among wildlife experts regarding the cause of death and gender of the deceased elephant.

Wildlife expert Shubhendu Mallik said, "Looking at the elephant's molted skeleton and the cavity in its mouth, it is assumed

to be a male elephant that died about a month back."

A discussion with various experts and comparing the photos it is assumed to be a male elephant. So if the DNA test of the elephant's skeleton and teeth are done, the truth will be known, he said.

He further questioned that the Forest department regularly monitors the movement of the elephants by tracking them and submits reports to their higher authorities. "How could they fail to know that the elephant was missing for almost a month as well as its gender," he asked. He suspected that the tracking reporting is going in pen and papers and many such elephants might have gone missing or have died in Keonjhar forest, but the Forest department is yet to know about, he said.

"The whole issue will come to light if the DNA test report of tusk is compared with the DNA test report of old female carcass," he added.



SUMMER COOLANTS: People check for earthen pots with a roadside vendor at Behera in Kalahandi district as heatwave soars

OP PHOTO

Temple theft gang busted; 7 arrested

POST NEWS NETWORK

Balasure, April 7: Police here have arrested a seven-member gang involved in thefts at various temples in Balasure and Mayurbhanj districts and seized items worth ₹6 lakh from their possession, SP Sagarika Nath said in a press conference Sunday.

According to sources, thefts from various temples in this district had become a headache for the district police. Many cases were registered in this regard at various police stations and outposts in the district.



On the direction of Balasure SP, a team headed by Sadar SDPO succeeded in arresting the accused. All the members of the gang are from Mayurbhanj district, the SP said. She said, "Four thieves

were arrested from Chandipur area April 5, after taking them on remand, three more names of the gang members were disclosed by the accused during interrogation."

The gang was stealing silver

ornaments including brass idols from many temples in Mayurbhanj and Balasure districts. Among them, four thieves were stealing ornaments from temples and other three were trying to sell them.

The cyber team and the district police department had been monitoring them for a long time and finally managed to catch them. All the accused have been forwarded to court. Out of the 19 temple theft cases, 80 per cent of the items have been recovered. Investigation is going on for the remaining six temple theft cases, the SP said.

Debrigarh sanctuary registers record revenue collection

MORE THAN 70,000 TOURISTS VISITED THE SANCTUARY IN FY 2023-24, A 2-FOLD INCREASE IN NUMBERS RECORDED IN THE PRECEDING FISCAL

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sambalpur, April 7: The Debrigarh sanctuary under Hirakud division in this district has not only played a remarkable role in wildlife and forest conservation but also created a record in revenue collection through ecotourism, sources in the know of things said Sunday.

The sanctuary earned ₹3.45 crore as revenue in FY 2023-24. It has turned into a major tourist hub, apart from wildlife and for-



est conservation. This was stated here by divisional forest officer (DFO) Anshu Pragyan Das of Hirakud wildlife division.

With the sanctuary becoming into a tourist hub and earning record revenues, locals have also

benefitted. They are now earning their livelihood from the sanctuary throughout the year, the DFO said.

In FY 2023-24 more than 70,000 foreign and domestic tourists visited the sanctuary, a huge



jump from the 30,000 registered in FY 2022-23. As a result revenues have gone up to ₹3.45 crore in comparison to the ₹2.5 crore in FY 2022-23, informed Das.

Officials said that in FY 2023-24, more than 50 per cent of

tourists were from Odisha itself. The sanctuary has also gained popularity among people of neighbouring state of West Bengal. Twenty per cent of the tourists were from West Bengal and the remaining 30 per cent

from other states of India and also abroad, officials added.

The sanctuary offers facilities including safari, cruise, trekking, hiking, kayaking and bird-watching. The revenue collection has reached a record high due to the hard work and commitment of 87 local families who have played a vital role in the management of the sanctuary, stated an official.

According to the DFO, community participation of these families helped tourists as they guided visitors through the forests. It is because of their efforts tourists had the chance to sight animals like bison, deer, sambar, bear, wild boars, langurs, leopards and a number of varieties of birds.

Authorities at the sanctuary have also declared 48 'safe' places for the tourists. The sanctuary spread over large tract of land has also been declared plastic free and environment friendly from April 1, 2024, Das informed.

RSP begins eco-friendly LSFTO operation

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, April 7: Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) has commenced operation of LSFTO (Liberalised Special Freight Train Operator) rake for efficient, cost effective and eco-friendly rail transportation of its products. This is a first of its kind logistic arrangement by any PSUs in the country.

At a function at Hot Strip Mill-2 of RSP, Saturday, Atanu Bhowmick, Director In-Charge (DIC), RSP with the additional charge of Bokaro Steel

Plant - flagged off the first LSFTO rake provided on contract basis by 'DP World'. RSP had signed a contract with 'DP World' for the operation of six dedicated BFNS 22.9 rakes on lease and operate basis. This arrangement will strengthen its logistics and take it to the next level with dedicated rake supply. Many senior officials of RSP were present on the occasion.

Bhowmick lauded the long-awaited initiative which would result in an efficient and sustainable outbound logistics solution. "It

is a historic moment for us that we have been waiting for a long time, which is also one step in the direction of ESG compliance. It would help step up our operational and logistics-efficiency so as to enhance customer delight and achieve cost-optimisation," he added. Ardhendu Jain, VP, Rail and Inland Terminals of DP World in his address said, "We are committed to bridging commerce with efficiency and sustainability. Our latest LSFTO partnership with SAIL will deliver on our promise of enhanced pre-

dictability, sustainability, and visibility of cargo. We are grateful to SAIL for this opportunity and will continue to work together to deliver comprehensive logistics solutions that support its supply chain networks to make trade possible."

Dedicated LSFTO rakes will play a pivotal role in transporting RSP's high-quality steel from plant to customers, ensuring a streamlined and efficient supply chain connecting all rail terminals across Indian Railways, including SAIL terminals.

NOTIFICATION

This is for the information of all concerned that M/s Shankara Cancer Foundation has accorded Environmental Clearance from State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA), Odisha for construction of Proposed Bagchi-Sri Shankara Cancer Centre and Research Centre Building with built up area 52,541.05 Sqm at Mouza-Chandihata, Jatani, Dist-Khurda, Odisha.

A copy of the said clearance File No.- 239148/58-MIS/11-2021, Dated 06th January 2022 is available with the website of the SEIAA at <http://www.orissaseiaa.gov.in/>

Shankara Cancer Foundation

A Generous Gesture Illuminates the Path of Philanthropy

Ishan Aryendu, a second-year PhD student at Stevens Institute of Technology, has made a significant impact on his mother's alma mater in India. With a strong commitment to education, he has donated Rs 1.5 million to support the improvement of the school's infrastructure and equipment. This substantial grant will be crucial in modernizing the school building and providing state-of-the-art facilities for the students. The beneficiary institution, located in the village of Tendakuda, has long faced challenges in providing quality education due to a lack of resources. Headmistress Bhuyasi expressed her heartfelt gratitude for Ishan's remarkable contribution, which will undoubtedly enhance the educational standards of the school. Ishan's philanthropic endeavor is further complemented by his impressive academic achievements. His research paper has been accepted for presentation at the prestigious IEEE Wireless Communications and Networking Conference (WCNC) 2024, to be held in Dubai on April 21. This is a significant event in the field of wireless communications and networking, and his participation is highly anticipated. His exceptional scholarly skills have earned him this recognition. Ishan's altruistic actions are inspiring, showing how personal accomplishments can be used to benefit society. This is just the beginning of what promises to be an impressive journey for him, both in academia and philanthropy. Through his generous donation and scholarly pursuits, Ishan exemplifies the harmonious coexistence of academic excellence and social responsibility, setting an example for others to follow.

FOCUS SOCIETY

POETRY FOR BARBARISM



If our world is gradually becoming a world of poets and executioners, we will need more judges and thinkers to counter the new tendency and regain our moral footing

uses revenge poetry to boost morale." An anthology published by the Israel Defense Forces includes poems that "express a desire for vengeance and paint the combat in Gaza as a religious war." In a 13 October announcement soliciting submissions, the IDF invited potential contributors "to embark on a poetic journey and reignite the great Israeli spirit," so as to "raise the spirit in wartime."

Apparently, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's references to Amalek (the Jews' biblical enemy in the Torah) after 7 October were not enough. They needed to be supplemented by modern verse. Or perhaps Netanyahu's biblical reference conveyed more than he wanted to say. After all, according to the Old Testament, when the wandering Jews reached the hills above the valley in Judea where the Amalekites lived, Jehovah appeared and ordered Joshua to kill them all, including their children and animals. If that is not "ethnic cleansing," the term has no meaning at all.

It is worth remembering that Germany was known as the land of Dichter und Denker (poets and thinkers), before its turn toward Richter und Henker (judges and executioners). But what if the two versions are more similar than they appear? If our world is gradually becoming a world of poets and executioners, we will need more judges and thinkers to counter the new tendency and regain our moral footing.

The writer, Professor of Philosophy at the European Graduate School, is International Director of the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities at the University of London.

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When the basic pact that holds society together is crumbling, which appears to be happening worldwide, wild rumors and conspiracy theories proliferate. Even, or especially, when the message is obviously nonsensical, it can evoke deep-seated fears and prejudices.

A perfect example of this, which I have noted previously, occurred in late August 2023, when a priest known as "Father Anthony" ceremoniously doused holy water on a 26-foot-tall statue of Stalin in Russia's Pskov region. Though the Church had suffered during the Stalin era, he explained, "thanks to this we have lots of new Russian martyrs and confessors to whom we now pray and are helping us in our Motherland's resurgence." This logic is just a step away from claiming that Jews should thank Hitler for creating the conditions that allowed for the State of Israel. If that sounds hyperbolic, or like a bad joke, consider that some Zionist extremists close to the Israeli government openly advocate exactly this position.

To understand the success of such perverted argumentation, we should first note that, in developed countries, unrest and revolts tend to explode when poverty has ebbed. The protests of the 1960s—from the soixante-huitaires in France to the hippies and Yippies in the United States—unfolded during the golden age of the welfare state. When people are living well, they come to desire even more.

One must also account for the surplus enjoyment that social and moral perversion can bring. Consider the Islamic State's recent attack on Crocus City Hall in Moscow, in which 144 people were killed. What some call a terrorist attack oth-

ers call an act of armed resistance in response to the massive destruction wrought by the Russian military in Syria. But whatever the case, something notable happened after the attack: Russian security forces not only admitted to torturing the suspects whom they had arrested; they publicly displayed it.

"In a graphic video posted on Telegram," writes Julia Davis of the Center for European Policy Analysis, "one of the detained had his ear cut off and was then forced to eat it by one of his interrogators." No wonder some Israeli hardliners look to Russia as a model for dealing with arrested Hamas members.

Russian officials did it not just to deter potential future attackers, but also to give pleasure to fellow members of the tribe. "I never expected this from myself," writes Margarita Simonyan, a Russian propagandist who heads the state-owned media outlet RT, "but when I see how they are brought into the court crooked, and even

this ear, I feel extremely satisfied." Nor is this phenomenon confined to Russia. In Tennessee, some lawmakers want to restore public hangings (from trees, no less) for those who receive the death penalty.

Where do such acts end? Why not just bring back the premodern practice of publicly torturing alleged criminals to death? More to the point, how can "normal" people be brought to the point where they would enjoy such sadistic spectacles?

The short answer is that it requires the unique power of some kind of mythic discourse, religion, or poetry. As the reluctant Nazi fellow-traveler Ernst Jünger explained, "Any power struggle is preceded by a verification of images and iconoclasm. This is why we need poets — they initiate the overthrow, even that of titans."

One finds poetry playing an important role in Israel. On 26 March, Haaretz ran a story explaining "how Israel's army



Slavoj Žižek

WHEN PEOPLE ARE LIVING WELL, THEY COME TO DESIRE EVEN MORE

Boasting Bore

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's latest remarks may be perceived as India's acknowledgment of assassinations by its intelligence operatives on foreign soil. "If any terrorist from a neighbouring country tries to disturb India or carry out terrorist activities here, he will be given a fitting reply. If he escapes to Pakistan we will go to Pakistan and kill him there," Singh said in an interview to News18 television channel. This comes at a time when Canada and even the US have accused Indian agents of carrying out extrajudicial killings or attempts to murder in those countries.

Rajnath's comments came in the wake of a report published in UK-based The Guardian newspaper that has claimed that the Indian government has ordered at least 20 killings in Pakistan since 2020 as part of a wider strategy to eliminate terrorists living on foreign soil. The Guardian interviewed both Indian and Pakistani intelligence operatives and accessed documents shared by Pakistani investigators for the report. Citing sources within the Indian intelligence community, the report stated that there was a change in the strategy towards targeting terrorists in Pakistan in 2019. This shift supposedly occurred following the Pulwama attack, where members of the Pakistan-based terrorist outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed killed 40 Indian paramilitary personnel in Kashmir. At that time, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was seeking a second term in office. Indian intelligence officials claimed that their country had taken cues from intelligence agencies like the Mossad of Israel and events such as the assassination of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi embassy in Istanbul in 2018, according to the report. On the other hand, officials from two different Pakistani intelligence agencies provided detailed evidence of investigations into seven killings allegedly carried out by the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India's secret service agency. They also expressed suspicions of India's involvement in as many as 20 deaths.

India faced accusations from both Washington and Ottawa regarding its alleged involvement in the killing of Khalistani activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada and a botched assassination attempt on another Khalistani activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in the United States last year. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in its response to both the US and Canada had lame refutations of the allegations.

Following The Guardian report, MEA has denied India's involvement in the killings in Pakistan. The allegations are "false and malicious anti-India propaganda," the MEA told The Guardian in response to the report. The ministry also highlighted an earlier statement by EAM S Jaishankar in which he said that targeted killings in other countries were "not the policy of the government of India."

In light of this, Rajnath Singh's remarks appear to be contradicting the MEA and the EAM. The Defence Minister and many others in his government may be obsessed with the "ghar mein ghus kar maarengy" rhetoric and such language may be appealing to their vote-bank in the election season, but this needless boasting may not be appreciated by other countries across the world and can potentially damage India's foreign relations.

WISDOM CORNER

The problem isn't that Johnny can't read. The problem isn't even that Johnny can't think. The problem is that Johnny doesn't know what thinking is; he confuses it with feeling.

THOMAS SOWELL

The internal machinery of life, the chemistry of the parts, is something beautiful. And it turns out that all life is interconnected with all other life.

RICHARD P. FEYNMAN

All that is gold does not glitter, not all those who wander are lost; the old that is strong does not wither, deep roots are not reached by the frost.

JRR TOLKIEN

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1838: The Great Western, the earliest regular transatlantic steamer, embarked on its maiden voyage from Bristol, England, to New York City.

1904: France and the United Kingdom sign the Entente cordiale. The treaty, which was initially designed to regulate the countries' colonial interests in Africa, later evolved into the Triple Entente to fight Germany in World War I.

1920: Venus de Milo, an ancient statue commonly thought to represent Aphrodite, was found in pieces on the Aegean island of Melos; it was later reconstructed and put on display in the Louvre, Paris.

1950: Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru concluded the Delhi Pact with Liaqat Ali Khan of Pakistan, providing for the safe passage of refugees displaced after the two countries severed relations in December 1949.

1953: Jomo Kenyatta is sentenced to 7 years hard labor. Kenyatta led the Mau Mau movement against the British colonialists. He is considered to be Kenya's founding father and became the country's first President in 1964.

1974: American baseball player Hank Aaron hit his 715th career home run—breaking Babe Ruth's record, which had stood since 1935—and in 1976 completed his career with 755 home runs.

SPECTRUM POLITICS

Congress on cautious path

The Indian National Congress has come out with a manifesto that looks pompous and well-intentioned but less original and more reactive to the present policies. The party is cautious even as it says it may replace the National Education Policy (NEP) but is subdued on proposed novel path to deal with the sliding economy, eloquently silent on PSUs and unnecessary 4-year-BA degree modelled on the highly expensive US model.

It notes overall dissatisfaction over NEP but limits it to "will revisit and amend the New Education Policy after consulting with the state governments." Does it mean the 4-year degree course will continue? Its scrapping could have highlighted deep concerns to instil confidence in the youth, each of whom would spend at least Rs 3 lakh a year extra and be delayed for job market.

The manifesto avoids a word on PSUs. The Nav Sankalp Economic Policy resets the button with "3-Ws" - work, wealth and welfare for reviewing GST, promoting manufacturing and making jobs the cornerstone, rejecting jobless growth.

It highlights that Reserve Bank of India's finds 60% of central

projects are stalled causing a cost escalation of Rs 5 lakh crore. It could have said these would be scrapped. On the labour laws too, the party is evasive on undoing the amendments.

On corruption, it says, "will probe demonetisation, Rafale deal, Pegasus spyware, the Electoral Bonds scheme and bring to law those who made illegal gains through these measures." It has also promised reversal of Agnipath recruitment. In most such Opposition promises, it was observed that once in government, the issues are shelved and some may even say these were "jumlas" as manifestos have turned out.

The 1971 Congress manifesto is remembered to the day for its classic "Garibi Hatao" (remove poverty) slogan. The slogan "five Nyaya" (five justices) may be a good idea but is not inspiring. It calls for five pillars of justice — Justice for Youth, Justice for Women, Justice for Farmers, Justice for Workers, and Justice for Shareholders.

To combat unemployment, Congress has guaranteed a one-year apprenticeship with a private or a public sector company to every diploma holder or college graduate below the age of 25 years. The wages of workers

under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act will also be increased to Rs 400 per day. It seems to have forgotten that the apprenticeship scheme was introduced by Indira Gandhi in 1970s. Repeated several times. Each time it was a cropper as the private sector never liked it and PSUs were lukewarm.

Caste-based census could help the party politically to an extent but that cannot be a road map for creating jobs. It has got into the trap of caste politics. The party is forthright on highlighting the abysmal Manipur situation.

The manifesto has spoken of high petrol prices, questioned "cess" raj but is silent on atrociously high petrol road cess toll of Rs 32.9 per litre introduced promising to abolish toll gates. The country needs freedom from extortionist toll collections of over Rs 10 lakh crore through cess and toll gates causing high inflation. Similarly, it is silent on scrapping the illicit law for car/tractor junking and high education fees. These cause enormous wealth loss to farmers and average families. With a bit of empathy, it could have touched millions of hearts. There is a whale of political opportunity to cater

to the people.

The party has done well to promise that job applications would not have any fee. The call for opening more Kendriya Vidyalayas, Navodaya Vidyalayas and Kasturba Gandhi Girls Schools is reassuring. The move to introduce free education up to Class X is appropriate. Would it be so also in private public schools? It has a model in Uttar Pradesh. In 1960s, the Congress government introduced the system of paying teachers' salaries even for private schools ushering in required changes in the education scenario. That brings the fundamental difference.

It has decided to review the Telecommunications Act, 2023 and remove the provisions that restrict freedom of speech and expression that violate the right to privacy. It ignores the more draconian Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita or other amendments to the IPC and CrPC. The powers to misuse ED, CBI and other bodies emanate from it.

Still the promise to have a fearless society may raise hopes. The nation aspires that with these new moves the political discourse would turn for the better.

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Shivaji Sarkar

CASTE-BASED CENSUS COULD HELP THE PARTY POLITICALLY TO AN EXTENT BUT THAT CANNOT BE A ROAD MAP FOR CREATING JOBS

LOL



Under the load of hay

A clergyman walks down a country lane and sees a young farmer struggling to load hay back onto a cart after it had fallen off. "You look hot, my son," said the cleric. "Why don't you rest a moment, and I'll give you a hand." "No thanks," said the young man. "My father wouldn't like it." "Don't be silly," the minister said. "Everyone is entitled to a break. Come

and have a drink of water." Again the young man protested that his father would be upset. Losing his patience, the clergyman said, "Your father must be a real slave driver. Tell me where I can find him and I'll give him a piece of my mind!" "Well," replied the young farmer, "he's under the load of hay."

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

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Health for all

Sir, "My health, my Right," "highest possible level of health" and "health for all" are not mere slogans. If a human being has to maintain a healthy mind in a healthy body then the imperativeness of the above phrases can be well understood. Promotion and maintenance of health at any level is a herculean task. It is also a monumental challenge to be addressed by appropriate organisations and forums. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has undertaken path-breaking initiatives to prevent, control, and eradicate a host of non-communicable and communicable diseases. The trendsetting body of work carried out by the WHO in small pox, tuberculosis, malaria, maternal and reproductive health, occupational and environmental hygiene, substance abuse and mental health is so evident. Many countries have sought and got the same counsel of the WHO. To commemorate its establishment on 7 April, 1948 at Geneva, the WHO observes the 'World Health Day on 7 April.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

Rare bonhomie

Sir, In a rare show of bonhomie, India has allowed export of essential commodities to Maldives and the island nation, in return, has thanked India for the gesture. This has reduced the friction between the two countries. The approved quantities are the highest since the SAGAR arrangement came into effect in 1981. The announcement comes amid diplomatic tensions between the two nations following Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu's demand for the repatriation of Indian military personnel from that country.

Jayanthi Subramaniam, MUMBAI

Appalling act

Sir, The act of a 50-year-old man from Karwar, Karnataka sacrificing his index finger to Goddess Kali for the BJP's victory in the Lok Sabha elections is appalling. This incident has shocked locals and BJP leaders, who have appealed to the people not to indulge in such acts. Arun Vernekar works in the Mumbai film industry but has returned to Karwar to look after his ailing mother. In a nation where politicians and cricketers are idolised, one would do well to avoid irrational actions and set boundaries.

NJ Ravi Chander, BANGALORE

Pawar, Uddhav fighting for political survival

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, April 7: As the campaign for the Lok Sabha elections gathers momentum, Sharad Pawar and Uddhav Thackeray, the leaders of two prominent regional parties in Maharashtra, are fighting a battle for political survival.

The polls are also an acid test for Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and his deputy and NCP chief Ajit Pawar as they have cast their lots with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) by splitting their respective parties.

But the challenge is tougher for Thackeray and Sharad Pawar as they are out of power and have lost control of their parties - Shiv Sena and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), respectively - along with the original name and electoral symbol.

The Election Commission and the Maharashtra assembly Speaker have recognised the Ajit Pawar-led NCP and Shinde-led Sena as the real NCP and the real Shiv Sena. Senior journalist and political analyst Prakash Akolkar said that both the leaders need to put up an impressive performance in the polls, or else they risk political extinction.

"Uddhav Thackeray needs to get at least six to seven MPs elected to keep his flock together till the assembly polls which are due later this year," Akolkar said. Thackeray had to contest as many Lok Sabha seats as his party contested when he was a BJP ally in 2019, and he is doing just that, declaring 21 candidates so far notwithstanding the Congress staking claim to some of these seats, the senior journalist noted.

The NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) is contesting 10 seats as



WHILE PAWAR, 83, HAS NEVER LOST AN ELECTION IN HIS POLITICAL CAREER SPANNING MORE THAN FIVE DECADES, UDDHAV THACKERAY HAS NEVER CONTESTED A DIRECT ELECTION BUT IN THE RUN-UP TO THE ELECTIONS, THACKERAY HAS BEEN TRAVELLING TO DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE STATE AND HIS RALLIES ARE GETTING GOOD RESPONSE

per the seat-sharing formula worked out with his MVA allies Sena (UBT) and Congress. But Akolkar said the key seat for Pawar senior is his home turf Baramati, where his daughter and three-time MP Supriya Sule is facing a challenge from Ajit Pawar's wife Sunetra Pawar.

"If Sharad Pawar loses Baramati, everything is lost for him. This is a battle between him and his nephew Ajit who has managed and controlled Baramati constituency for the family all these years," Akolkar said.

While Pawar, 83, has never lost an election in his political career spanning more than five decades, Uddhav Thackeray has never contested a direct election. When he became Chief Minister, Thackeray was elected to the legislative council. The Shinde faction often taunts him for not step-

ping out of house when he held the top post in the state.

But in the run-up to the elections, Thackeray has been travelling to different parts of the state, and his rallies are getting good response. Pawar, too, is on the move while also reaching out to his old rivals in Pune district (where Baramati constituency is located) like the Thopates of Congress to ensure his daughter has a smooth sailing.

With the MVA's seat-sharing talks with Dalit leader Prakash Ambedkar's Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) falling through, the direct contest between the MVA and Mahayuti alliance has become a triangular fight, and in Akolkar's opinion it would benefit the ruling alliance.

Ahjay Deshpande, another

senior journalist, pointed out that the elections will also test the claim of Sharad Pawar and Uddhav Thackeray that the traditional voters and cadres of their respective parties are loyal to them.

There is also unrest in BJP cadres, and it will have to be seen if they work wholeheartedly for candidates of Ajit Pawar-led NCP and Shinde-led Shiv Sena, Deshpande added. 'Splits in political parties is not a new phenomenon. But for the first time, rebels have hijacked the original parties after the split and got recognition,' he noted.

"The slogan of 400-plus seats is meant to motivate BJP workers. But to realise that goal, the BJP will have to retain the 2019 tally of 41 seats (which it won in alliance with undivided Sena) in Maharashtra. Due to the alignment and realignment of political equations, this is going to be a challenge," Deshpande said.

Harshal Pradhan, a former journalist and now a close as-

8 suffer side-effects after cataract surgery

The local administration has constituted a three-member committee which has started the probe into the reasons for the side-effects suffered by the patients, District Blindness Control Society manager Dr Pradeep Goyal said



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Indore, April 7: Eight persons allegedly suffered from side-effects after cataract surgery at a hospital in Indore last month, prompting the local administration to seal the medical facility's operation theatre and launch a probe into the matter, officials said Sunday.

It is difficult to say whether these patients have lost their eyesight or not and things will be clear after the investigation, they said. A managing trustee of the hospital, however said there was no negligence and claimed the eight patients had a "reaction" in their eyes due to unknown reasons and all of them were discharged after treatment.

The local administration has constituted a three-member committee which has started the probe into the reasons for the side-effects suffered by the patients, District Blindness Control Society manager Dr Pradeep Goyal said.

The cataract surgeries were carried out on 79 patients at government expenses March 20 at the Chaitram Netralaya here in

Madhya Pradesh under the National Programme for Control of Blindness, he said.

After the surgeries, the health department got information through the hospital management about side-effects on the eyes of eight of these patients, he said. "It is very difficult to tell right now whether the eight patients who underwent the cataract surgery have lost their eyesight or not. The situation will become clear only after the investigation is completed," the official said.

The hospital's operation theatre where the cataract surgeries were performed on these patients has been sealed, he said. Ashwini Verma, a managing trustee of the Chaitram Netralaya, claimed there was no negligence at the hospital level in the cataract operation camp.

Eight patients, residents of different districts of Indore division, who attended the camp had a "reaction" in their eyes due to unknown reasons and all of them have been discharged from the hospital after treatment, he said.

Cong dares BJP to release list to back claim

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhopal, April 7: Madhya Pradesh Congress Sunday dared the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to release the list of 2.58 lakh people, most of them from the grand old party, who joined the saffron outfit as claimed by its leaders.

Former minister Narottam Mishra had Saturday claimed that more than 2.58 lakh people, including 1.26 lakh on April 6 alone, had joined the saffron party in the state in the past three months, and most of them were from the Congress.

Talking to reporters, state Congress chief Jitu Patwari said the BJP had only released the list of prominent leaders who joined their party to the media, which included 336 leaders. "I challenge them; will the BJP release the list of 2.58 lakh workers who have joined their party?" Patwari said, accusing the BJP of misleading the people through false claims.

He further alleged that members of mafias associated with mining, sand, transport and edu-



I challenge them; will the BJP release the list of 2.58 lakh workers who have joined their party?
JITU PATWARI | MP CONGRESS CHIEF

cation, who do business with the government, have joined the BJP. "Those expelled from different parties due to indiscipline have joined the BJP. We have already expelled such people," he said.

Reacting to the allegations, state BJP spokesman Narendra Saluja, in a tweet on X, named Congress leaders who left the grand old party after Patwari became its state chief.

Saluja named Congress leaders including former Union

Minister Suresh Pachouri, Chhindwara mayor Vikram Ahake, MLA Kamlesh Shah, former minister Deepak Saxena, Jabalpur mayor Jagat Bahadur Singh and others, who recently joined the saffron outfit. "Patwari should explain if they were mafias," the BJP spokesman said.

During the interaction with the media, Patwari also posed questions to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who will take part in a roadshow in Jabalpur later in the day. The Congress leader said the Prime Minister should clarify why no action has been taken against the accused in the VYAPAM job recruitment scam so far.

When the BJP contested and won the assembly elections under the leadership of former Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, why Mohan Yadav was made the Chief Minister based on a slip sent from Delhi, he said. He also asked the PM to explain to the people about the failed promises of the BJP, including two crore jobs and MSP for wheat and paddy.

Latur couple transforms lives of underprivileged kids

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Latur, April 7: In a nondescript village in Maharashtra's Latur district, a couple has created a haven for underprivileged children to educate them and make them self-reliant, and they are now proud parents to 51 boys and girls.

Moved by the plight of children from poor backgrounds, Sharad and Sangeeta Zare, both in their 40s, started with a humble endeavour to educate them but soon realised that teaching them different skills would secure their future.

The couple has set up 'Majha Ghar', an ashram run by their organisation Manus Pratishthan, on 14 acres of land near Budhoda village in Ausa tehsil. The ashram is set up on 1.10 acres, while the remaining land is used for farming and various crops are produced by the children.

"Mahatma Gandhi introduced the concept 'Nai Talim' in 1937, dreaming of making villages independent and self-reliant.



Similarly, I want to make my children self-reliant. We teach children to make idols and other items by reusing and recycling materials," Sharad Zare said.

The ashram's expenses are met through the sale of farm produce and handicrafts made by the children, he said. Over the years, the Zare couple has adopted 51 children from varied backgrounds, including those from red-light areas, orphans, children of sugarcane cutters and farmers who committed suicide.

The idea to work for the un-

derprivileged children took shape when he came across a tribal girl performing tricks on a tightrope in Pune in 2016, said Sharad, a postgraduate in mass communication. "The child was so talented, but she was deprived of education as she belonged to a poor family," he said, adding that due to lack of opportunities children from such backgrounds get exposed to substance abuse and resort to crime.

Initially, the Zares started an ashram in a hilly area of Vantakli village in Parali tehsil in 2019

with 70 children. They were, however, forced to leave after two years due to political pressure. They then moved to Ambejogai, Katgaon, and finally shifted to Latur district in March last year.

The ashram is now home to children between the ages of six and 16 years, some of whom are enrolled in a day school nearby while the rest are taught at the ashram itself. For an all-round development, the timetable at the ashram has been designed to include yoga, pranayam, voluntary labour and sports, apart from regular classes, which are run by socially conscious teacher, who offer their services for free.

The couple kept up their efforts even during the COVID-19 pandemic by starting 'shala baharchi shala' for the children of sugarcane cutters. "There are many drawbacks in our education system. Modern technology has forced children to depend on bookish knowledge. It is necessary to teach them skills and make them self-reliant," he said.

Two women thrash MP temple guards

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ujjain (MP), April 7: Three women security guards were allegedly beaten up by two women and a few others after they stopped them from shooting videos in the prohibited area of Mahakaleshwar Temple in Madhya Pradesh's Ujjain, police said Sunday.

The incident occurred in the premises of the Mahakaleshwar Temple Saturday, an official said. Two women, identified as Palak and Pari, and a few other persons allegedly manhandled and thrashed three women guards after they were stopped from shooting video reels in the prohibited area on the temple premises, Mahakal police station in-charge Ajay Verma said.

The guards, Shivani Pushpad, Sandhya Prajapati and Sangeeta Chagnesia, work for a private security firm, he said.

A case under Sections 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 294 (obscene acts in public) and 506 (criminal intimidation) has been registered against the accused, who are residents of Nagda town, the official said.

Sitars, tanpuras made in Miraj get GI tags

The tradition of making sitars and tanpuras in Miraj goes back more than 300 years, with over seven generations of craftsmen having worked towards making these string instruments, the makers say

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Pune, April 7: The sitars and tanpuras of Miraj, a small town in Maharashtra's Sangli district known for its craftsmanship in making musical instruments, have been awarded the coveted Geographical Indication (GI) tags.

These instruments made in Miraj are much in demand among some of the prominent artistes, including those renowned in the field of classical music as well as film industry, the makers claim. The GI tag denotes the product comes from a particular geographical area, and often enhances its commercial value.

The tradition of making sitars

and tanpuras in Miraj goes back more than 300 years, with over seven generations of craftsmen having worked towards making these string instruments, the makers say.

March 30, the government of India's intellectual property office issued GI tag to the Miraj Musical Instruments Cluster for its sitars and to the Soutlune Musical Instrument Producer firm for tanpuras. The Miraj Musical Instruments Cluster functions as the apex body for both the sitar and tanpura makers in the town, its chairman Mohsin Mirajkar said.

As part of the body, more than 450 craftsmen are engaged in the production of musical instruments, including sitars and tanpuras, he said. The sitars and tanpuras made in Miraj have a high demand, which cannot be met due to the limited resources available locally. Hence instruments from many other parts of the country are often sold under the guise of being Miraj-made, he claimed.

"When we started receiving complaints about such products, we decided to pursue for the GI tag and applied for it in 2021," said



Mirajkar. The wood for making the sitars and tanpuras is procured from forests in Karnataka, while pumpkin gourds are sourced from Mangalvedha region of Maharashtra's Solapur district, he said.

"In a month, the cluster manufactures 60 to 70 sitars and around 100 tanpuras," stated Mirajkar. "The online business accounts for around 10 per cent, while 30 to 40 per cent comes from the retail music instrument shops and the remaining 50 per cent are direct customers, including some well-known artistes," he said.

The clientele includes yesteryear classical singers and

founders of the Kirana gharana, such as Ustad Abdul Karim Khan Saheb, late Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, and Rashid Khan, who recently passed away he claimed. Artistes like Shubha Mudgal and singers from the film industry, such as Javed Ali, Hariharan, Sonu Nigam and A R Rahman have used instruments made in Miraj, he added.

On the origin of the art of making sitars, tanpuras and other musical instruments in Miraj, he said, "During the Adilshahi period, king Adil Shah sent skilled workers to Miraj to craft the dome of a dargah. These workers were originally trained in weapon-making."

"However, with the decline of battles during the British era, they transitioned to making musical instruments. The princely state of Miraj patronised this art, and we are the descendants of these skilled workers who continue this tradition," he said.

Speaking about the history of tanpura-making in the small Maharashtra town, Mirajkar recounted an incident from more than 200 years ago when a renowned classical singer visited Miraj and his tanpura developed a problem.

"Upon enquiring about a skilled worker who could fix the tanpura, he was directed to Patwardhan Sarkar of the Miraj Sansthan (part of the then princely state of Miraj). Two brothers, our ancestors, Farid Mohideen Saheb Shikalgar and Farid Saheb Shikalgar, who were skilled workers, were approached to fix the tanpura," he said.

"Despite being unfamiliar with the instrument, they attempted to repair it and succeeded so well that the classical singer praised their work, saying they had improved the tanpura," he added. Mirajkar said he got to know

about the incident from his ancestors but nobody could recall the vocalist's name.

After this, Patwardhan Sarkar recognised the potential of these workers and decided to establish an industry for making instruments, providing patronage to the craft, Mirajkar said. The farming of pumpkin gourd, required for making sitars and tanpuras, was encouraged along the banks of the Krishna river, he said.

"Whenever classical artistes visited the sansthan, discussions were held on how sitars or tanpuras needed to be made according to their specifications, leading to improvements in the quality of the musical instruments," Mirajkar said.

Asked about how the GI tag will boost the manufacturing of sitars, tanpuras and other musical instruments in Miraj, Mirajkar said, "This will put Miraj on the global map, and the craftsmen will also gain recognition."

He said they also plan to establish a training and research centre for musical instrument-making. "Interested individuals can participate in the training programmes here," he added.



State Water Resources Minister and local MLA Tukuni Sahu welcoming members of other parties to BJD during a merger meeting held at the party office in Titilagarh of Bolangir district, Sunday



Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha MP Aparajita Sarangi, who has been re-nominated by BJP from the Parliamentary constituency, hits the campaign trail at Ananda Van in Bhubaneswar, Sunday, as the polls draw closer

Cong Rourkela nominee bats for a united house

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, April 7: During his maiden interaction with media persons after he was nominated by Congress party to contest from Rourkela Assembly constituency, Birendranath Patnaik, Sunday made his intentions clear that he wanted to have a united Congress house to fight the electoral battle ahead.

Patnaik also did not seek to dodge a question over the rebellion within the party on the day his name was announced



satisfaction will be taken care of very soon," he said while refusing to give a time frame. Meanwhile, top party sources said the rebel leaders and cadres that also include the present DCC (District Congress Committee) chief Rabi Ray, and 2019 MLA candidate Biren Senapaty are likely to be suspended for their anti-party activities. Patnaik, when asked if he would ask the high command not to initiate disciplinary actions against the rebels, said, "I cannot interfere in the work of the high command. But, I am not going to press for any action against anyone because I want to win their hearts in this big fight."

(a report in this regard had appeared in OP, April 5). "I admit there were some issues and dissatisfaction initially, but I and my team are going to take care of those soon. Every party is facing the same problem during this election. For some the issue is very large, while for others it is smaller in proportion. But, more or less, all are facing this," he said. He said he was on the job to plug the gaps at the moment. "I cannot disclose everything before the media as those are our internal matters. But let me assure you that the dis-

Gajapati tribals warn of boycotting polls

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nuagarh, April 7: Residents of tribal dominated Keredanga panchayat under this block in Gajapati district have warned to boycott the upcoming polls demanding installation of a mobile tower in their panchayat. The panchayat consists of 15 villages and has a population a little over 10,000. They have to confront various problems in their daily lives due to lack of a mobile tower, villagers alleged. This remote area has some government offices, a health centre, a 5T school, mini bank, panchayat office and an office of the revenue inspector. However, they do not get internet service due to lack of a mobile tower when they go to attend to any of their work or enroll their names in any government welfare schemes or in any developmental programmes. They feel the pinch when they fail to connect with the 102 or 108 ambulance services.

Lekhasri quits BJP, joins BJD

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, April 7: BJP's Odisha unit vice-president Lekhasri Samantsinghar Sunday resigned from the saffron party and joined the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) ahead of the Lok Sabha and state Assembly elections. Lekhasri is the second BJP Odisha vice-president after Bhruhu Baxipatra to resign from the BJP weeks before the polls and join the BJD. In her resignation letter to Odisha BJP president Manmohan Samal, Lekhasri said that she decided to quit the saffron party having failed to earn the trust of the leadership. "I have given my sweat and blood to the Bharatiya Janata Party for the last ten years. However, despite all the sincerity and hard work, I could not earn the trust of the leadership. Hence, I feel there is nothing left for me to do here and my desire to serve the people of



Odisha is being hampered," Lekhasri said in the letter. Lekhasri Sunday joined the BJD in presence of party MPs Manas Mangaraj and Sasmit Patra. "It is difficult to change after sweating for a party that did not recognise my hard work. I thank BJD for accepting me. I am inspired by the developmental activities of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. I will do my best for the BJD," she told reporters after joining the regional party at "Sankha Bhavan", the BJD state headquarters. Since BJD is yet to announce the name of its candidate from the Balasore Lok Sabha seat, she may try for a ticket to the Balasore Lok Sabha seat. The BJD in 2019 had fielded seven women candidates for the 21 Lok Sabha seats in the state. However, this time, the party has nominated only six women candidates so far.

BJD's two octogenarian candidates in poll battle

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Berhampur, April 7: Biju Janata Dal (JD) has fielded two octogenarian candidates for the state Assembly elections which will be held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha polls. The BJD has fielded over 80-year-old Ramesh Chandra Chyau Patnaik from the Berhampur Assembly seat in Ganjam district, from where he was elected five times in a row till 2014. In the last election, he did not contest the election as the party denied ticket to him. Chyau Patnaik is the oldest candidate of the BJD in the state so far after the ruling party declared his candidature. The BJD



has so far announced candidates for 108 of the 147 Assembly seats and 20 of the 21 Lok Sabha constituencies in the state. The other octogenarian candidate is Badri Narayan Patra who has been re-nominated by the BJD to contest from the Ghasipura Assembly segment in Keonjhar district.

Chyau Patnaik's date of birth is August 20, 1943, while that of Patra's is November 14, 1943. "Age is just a number. Old age is not deterring me from doing work mentally and physically when the willpower is strong," said Chyau Patnaik, who is a doctor by profession. Chyau Patnaik, who is also the Ganjam district president of BJD, claimed that he performed all the activities assigned by the party. Braving the sweltering summer heat, Chyau Patnaik with some of his supporters hit the campaign trail after his name was declared as the candidate of Berhampur. The veteran leader will fight against K Anil Kumar, 52, of BJP. The Congress is yet to declare its candidate for the Berhampur seat. Other aged persons who will be contesting the election this time from Ganjam district include Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik who, at the age of 77 years, is contesting for the sixth time from Hinjili Assembly seat and Manjula Swain, 70, from Aska Assembly seat. In politics, there is no retirement age. One can do politics till he or she is strong mentally and physically. There were several instances that octogenarians were elected to the state Assembly and Lok Sabha, said JK Mohapatra, former vice-chancellor, Berhampur University.



POLL PREP: An election preparation meeting of the Ganjam District (East) Congress Committee underway at Bapuji Ashram in Berhampur, Sunday

EC USES SOCIAL MEDIA TO NUDGE ELECTORS TO VOTE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 7: The Election Commission (EC) has launched a variety of campaigns across social media platforms to nudge young and urban voters to cast their ballot in the Lok Sabha elections. The poll watchdog has also initiated a campaign urging people to first verify then amplify what they get on social media related to elections. Polling for seven-phase Lok Sabha elections will commence April 19 with June 1 being the last phase. According to the EC, it is nudging young and first-time voters through 'Turning 18' campaign, urging them to come to the polling station to vote. 'You are the One' campaign seeks to recognise importance of different stakeholders in the election process, including polling machinery, in ensuring that no voter is left behind.



From voters and political parties to both level officers (BLOs), ground staff, polling parties, administrative personnel, media professionals, central forces, and security personnel, each stakeholder plays a vital role in ensuring the integrity and efficiency of the electoral process. Through engaging storytelling

and captivating visuals like "Whatever it takes - we walk the extra mile, so you don't have to", the campaign highlights the dedication and commitment of individuals in ensuring free, fair and participative elections. In response to the proliferation of fake news and misinformation online, the poll body said it has introduced the 'Verify Before You Amplify' initiative as highlighted by Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar recently. The campaign seeks to bust fake news and urge people to exercise caution and diligence before sharing information on social media platforms. "This proactive measure aims to empower citizens to verify the accuracy and authenticity of content before amplifying it, thereby mitigating the spread of false information and safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process," the poll body said Sunday.

of the day quote

The Congress' poll manifesto is more appropriate for elections in Pakistan than for India

Devendra Fadnis is the villain who is spoiling the great political legacy of Maharashtra. The BJP has touched a new low in these 10 years. It has worked to eliminate the opposition through vendetta politics and deceit

The party has helped the poor and farmers by bringing in novel 'aata-daal' and 'shagun' schemes and by giving free power to farmers. We are also responsible for introducing old age pensions in the state

SHORT TAKES

Rats destroy ganja

Dhanbad (Jharkhand): Rats were blamed for destroying 10 kg of bhang and nine kg of ganja, confiscated and stored in a police station in Jharkhand's Dhanbad district. The police informed the matter to a court in the district, an advocate associated with the case concerned said Sunday. The police submitted a report to Principal District and Sessions Judge Ram Sharma Saturday after the court directed the officer in-charge of Rajganj police station to produce the bhang and ganja seized six years ago. The officer in his report said that rats had completely destroyed the narcotics substances stored in the malikhana (store) of the police station.

1 dead, 8 injured

Una (HP): A person was killed while eight others suffered injuries when an oil tanker overturned and caught fire here Sunday, officials said. The incident took place in Tahlwala Kaswa village in the Haroli area here during which 15 shops were gutted and several vehicles got damaged, according to the state emergency operation centre.

2 farmers killed

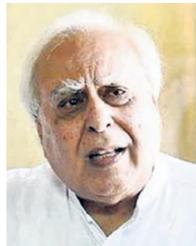
Kolkata: Two farmers were killed in lightning strikes in southern West Bengal Sunday, officials said. A 26-year-old man was killed in a lightning strike in Tarakeswar in Hooghly district. The incident happened when Lakshman Malik, the deceased, was working in the field amid rains, they said. In North 24 Parganas district, one Nepal Halder, 38, died while working in a field. The incident happened in Gaighata, they added.

3 Naxalites held

Gadchiroli: Two women Naxalites and a Jan Militia commander involved in several violent attacks on security forces and collectively carrying rewards of Rs 5.5 lakh were arrested Sunday in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district, an official said. The arrests have come ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

Man stabbed to death

Nagpur: A 28-year-old man was stabbed to death for allegedly teasing and passing lewd remarks against two women at a market in Maharashtra's Nagpur city, police said Sunday. The police arrested the two women and a man involved in the attack that took place in the Mahalaxmi Nagar area under the jurisdiction of Hudkeshwar police station Saturday night, an official said.



You have frozen the account of the Congress party, but you (BJP) got about ₹6,655 crore, were your accounts frozen?
KAPIL SIBAL | RAJYA SABHA MP

SHARE FEEDBACK: RAHUL

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi Sunday said his party's manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls has been hailed by many as revolutionary, and urged people to share their feedback on the document through social media



PDP fields Mehbooba against Azad in Anantnag

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, April 7: Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti will contest the Lok Sabha polls from the Anantnag-Rajouri seat against DPAP president Ghulam Nabi Azad, making the newly carved out constituency the most high-profile contest in Jammu and Kashmir in these elections. The National Conference has fielded influential Gujjar leader Mian Altaf Ahmad from the seat and the Apni Party has named Zaffar Iqbal Manhas. The BJP has not announced its candidate so far. PDP Parliamentary Board Chief Sartaj Madni Sunday announced the party candidates for the three seats of Kashmir. The party's youth wing president Mir Fayaz from Baramulla. The candidates were announced by the party at a press conference addressed by Mufti and Madni. They said the PDP will support the Congress on



two Jammu region seats of Udhampur and Jammu. Asked if the Congress will reciprocate in Kashmir, the PDP president said she was not extending support to the national party on quid pro quo basis. "We have decided to support the Congress for the larger fight to save the Constitution and democracy." "But I would appeal to not only Congress workers but NC workers also to support me so that we can take the voice of the people

of Jammu and Kashmir to Parliament," she said. "My appeal to all people of the constituency -- from Anantnag to Rajouri and Poonch -- is to come together as we are passing through a critical stage. People cannot talk. Talking has become a crime. If someone raises voice, he is labelled as anti-national," she added. On her party contesting against INDIA bloc partner National Conference, Mufti said

- Asked if the Congress will reciprocate in Kashmir, the PDP president said she was not extending support to the national party on quid pro quo basis
- Asked if she will campaign for the INDIA bloc outside Jammu and Kashmir, the PDP president said she cannot do it

she had left the ball in NC president Ferooz Abdullah's court. "We had left the decision to Ferooz Abdullah. We would not mind even if they had contested all the seats but they should have at least consulted us. They should not have demeaned our party and workers by saying they will see our behaviour in Lok Sabha polls before deciding on alliance for Assembly elections," she said. In response to a question, the PDP president said her party's manifesto will take the genuine voices of people to Delhi. She alleged that the Centre was using all its might against her in the south Kashmir constituency. "Delhi is pushing all might

into the south Kashmir constituency. They have directly put up some candidates and some others indirectly. I have been a fighter all along and I decided to take on the challenge," she said. Asked about BJP leader Tarun Chugh meeting People's Conference president Sajad Gani Lone and Apni party founder Altaf Bukhari Saturday, Mufti in a cryptic response said "you have not counted Azad Sahib". "Democracy is a battle of ideas and people decide. I don't have any personal issues with them," she said. On the Congress party's manifesto, the former Chief Minister said this was the best manifesto in the past 70 years. "It does not talk about 2 crore jobs but 30 lakh jobs only. It does not have jumlas but achievable goals." Asked if she will campaign for the INDIA bloc outside Jammu and Kashmir, the PDP president said she cannot do it. "We could not strengthen the alliance here in Jammu and Kashmir which is in such terrible situation. What will I say to people in other places?" she said.

Guj namaz row: Varsity asks students to leave

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ahmedabad, April 7: Six students from Afghanistan and one from East Africa have been asked to vacate the Gujarat University's hostel rooms for overstaying, an official said Sunday, in a move coming weeks after some foreign students were attacked for offering namaz on the premises. An Afghan and a Gambian delegation had visited the university days after the March 16 attack and held a meeting with the vice-chancellor over safety measures. The university's vice-chancellor Neerja Gupta said, "Six students from Afghanistan and one from East Africa were asked to vacate their hostel rooms after they were found overstaying." "These persons had completed their studies and were staying in the hostel as ex-students due to some pending administrative work," she said. The university has ensured that they are no longer required to stay in the hostel and arranged for them to return to their respective countries, Gupta said.

TMC leader's wife lodges FIR against NIA officers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, April 7: Wife of arrested TMC leader Monobrata Jana has filed an FIR against NIA officials alleging that they tried to outrage her modesty after forcibly entering her residence in Bhupatinagar in the pretext of conducting a probe, a police officer said Sunday. The National Investigation Agency Saturday arrested two key conspirators - Balai Charan Maity and Manobrata Jana - in a 2022 blast case in West Bengal's Purba Medinipur district in which three persons were killed. Jana's wife Moni Jana lodged her complaint with Bhupatinagar police station alleging that NIA officers also vandalised properties in her residence during their raid Saturday morning, he said.



"We have registered an FIR after receiving a complaint from a woman alleging assault by NIA officers. We are looking into the complaint," the police officer said. IPC Section 354 (for assaulting any woman, with an intention to outrage her modesty) was attached to the com-

plaint, the police officer added. A team of the NIA was allegedly attacked by a mob Saturday when it went to arrest two main suspects in the 2022 blast case in Purba Medinipur district, sparking a political slugfest with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee accusing the

investigators of assaulting the villagers. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) said one of its officers was injured and a vehicle was damaged in the attack that happened in Bhupatinagar. Meanwhile, police are yet to arrest anyone in connection with the attack on the NIA officers who have lodged a complaint with the Bhupatinagar police station, he added. "The matter is being investigated," he said. The attack on the NIA team evoked memories of January 5 when a team of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) was attacked by a mob in North 24 Parganas district's Sandeshkhali during a search at the house of TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh in connection with alleged irregularities in the public distribution system.

Nitish trolled for faux pas at PM's rally



Kumar, who heads the JD(U) and returned to the BJP-led coalition less than three months ago, made the faux pas at a rally in Nawada district where he spoke before Prime Minister Narendra Modi

zyada (more than 4,000)', while turning towards the PM whom he has been wishing a '400 plus tally' in the elections. Predictably, many RJD leaders, including its spokesperson Sarika Paswan, shared the video of Kumar who had lambasted the party's president Lalu Prasad and the latter's wife Rabri Devi for their alleged dismal performance as Chief Ministers of Bihar. "The Chief Minister wanted to wish more than four lakh MPs to the PM. Then he probably thought it would be too much and 4,000 would be sufficient," Paswan wrote on X in a post in Hindi. On the wrong side of 70, Kumar, the longest-serving Chief Minister of Bihar, has been in the news for slips of the tongue on a few occasions. His earlier reference to himself as a former Union home minister was ridiculed by the BJP, which was then in the opposition and had alleged that the veteran leader was betraying senility. Meanwhile, JD(U) leaders declined to comment on the Nawada episode.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Patna, April 7: Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar was Sunday trolled on social media for predicting that the NDA will win 'more than 4,000 seats', several times the sanctioned strength of Lok Sabha. Kumar, who heads the JD(U) and returned to the BJP-led coalition less than three months ago, made the faux pas at a rally in Nawada district where he spoke before Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In a portion of his speech that has gone viral, Kumar can be heard fumbling 'char lakh (four lakh)', before correcting himself and uttering 'char hazaar se bhi



Indian Air Force's fighter aircraft Sukhoi 30MKI lands on the Lucknow-Agra expressway, in Unnao, Sunday

CHALLENGING TASK

LS poll: Over 24,000 Manipuris to vote from relief camps

■ A majority of over 50,000 internally displaced people are currently staying at relief centres across five valley districts and three hill districts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Imphal, April 7: Eleven months of conflict, over 50,000 displaced people and a prevailing anti-poll sentiment in a section - the Election Commission in violence-hit Manipur is gearing up for the challenging task of holding Lok Sabha elections in the state in less than two weeks even as the campaign scene is muted so far. Chief Electoral Officer Pradeep Kumar Jha said over 24,500 displaced people have been

identified as eligible to vote and special polling arrangements have been made in relief camps to enable them to exercise their franchise. "A total of 2,955 polling stations will be set up in the state for the Lok Sabha elections, out of which around 50 per cent have been identified as sensitive, vulnerable or critical. We are also setting up 94 special polling stations to facilitate voting by internally displaced persons (IDPs)," Jha said. According to the Election Commission of India (ECI) norms, a 'vulnerability mapping' of hamlets, villages and electoral segments that may be exposed to threat and intimidation is conducted ahead of polls. "Steps have been taken to identify history-sheeters, trouble mongers, and persons causing vulnerability and bound under CrPC. These critical and vul-



nerable polling stations will be brought under webcasting and videography along with deployment of micro observers and additional deployment of CAPF (central armed police forces)," Jha said. Special teams have been formed to deal with voters with empathy and voter awareness activities have also started, he said. "The activities are being designed keeping in mind the

sentiments of the displaced people who have lost the comfort of being in their home and there is some level of frustration and negativity," he added. At least 219 people have been killed in the ethnic strife in the state that started May 3 last year after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

A majority of over 50,000 internally displaced people are currently staying at relief centres across five valley districts and three hill districts. Scheduled in two phases on April 19 and 26, the elections in two Manipur Lok Sabha seats have garnered attention, especially in the issue of voting arrangements for the displaced population. Several civil society groups and the affected people have been questioning the relevance of elections in the strife-torn state. There have also been calls from several quarters about boycotting the polls. Noting that there are over 20 lakh voters in Manipur and women voters outnumber the men voters, Jha said, "The state has traditionally been seeing a very high voting percentage in the previous elections, which is reflective of the people's faith in the electoral

process." "Even if some people are feeling negative about it, we are trying to create awareness about making each vote count and taking some confidence-building measures," he said. Asked about the security arrangements for the polls, Jha said over 200 companies (around 100 personnel each) of paramilitary forces have been allocated to the state. "The idea is not only to ensure that the displaced voters do not miss out on the chance but also that they feel safe. Adequate security arrangements are being made across the state. "Video surveillance has already begun and the entry and exit points are being monitored... It is obvious to have concerns about security considering the conflict in the state, however, these concerns are being addressed," he said.



Today marks six months since the terrorist outrage of 7th October - the most appalling attack in Israel's history, the worst loss of Jewish life since the Second World War
RISHI SUNAK | PM, UK

RECORD FUNDRAISE

President Joe Biden's reelection campaign and the Democratic National Committee said Saturday that they raised more than \$90 million in March and ended the year's first quarter with \$192 million-plus in cash on hand, highest total ever by any Democratic candidate



of the day quote

Let me say first of all that since I've been to India, every time I think of India, I think 'Incredible India'. The specific example to which I can refer is India's use of digitalisation

DENNIS FRANCIS | PRESIDENT, UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

While we have more to do, I believe that, over the past year, we (US-China) have put our bilateral relationship on more stable footing

JANET YELLEN | TREASURY SECRETARY, US

The United States condemns any violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, and takes very seriously the obligation of host countries under international law to respect the inviolability of diplomatic missions

MATTHEW MILLER | SPOKESPERSON, US STATE DEPARTMENT

SHORT TAKES

Lavrov to visit China

Moscow: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will visit China Monday and Tuesday to discuss the war in Ukraine and the deepening partnership between Moscow and Beijing. Talks between Lavrov and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who extended the invitation to the Russian minister, will include bilateral cooperation as well as "hot topics", such as the crisis in Ukraine and the Asia-Pacific, the Russian Foreign Ministry said. Reuters reported last month that Russian President Vladimir Putin will travel to China in May for talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping, in what could be the Kremlin chief's first overseas trip of his new presidential term.

Pak to repay \$1bn

Islamabad: Pakistan is set to repay a foreign debt worth \$1 billion against a 10-year Eurobond maturing in the middle of this month which will reduce the stock of the debt acquired through the selling of bonds in international markets to below \$7 billion. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) told The Express Tribune that it was ready to repay the bond anytime and was waiting to receive instructions to do so from the finance ministry. The move will reduce the stock of the debt acquired through selling Eurobonds and Sukuks (bond-like instruments used in Islamic finance) in international markets to below \$7 billion.

ISRAEL'S DEADLY DAMASCUS STRIKE

Iran reiterates threat

REGIONAL TENSIONS HAVE THREATENED TO DRAW THE MIDDLE EAST INTO A WIDER CONFLICT AS ISRAEL'S WAR AGAINST HAMAS MARKS SIX MONTHS

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Isfahan, April 7: A top military commander Sunday renewed Iran's promise to retaliate after an airstrike earlier this week widely blamed on Israel destroyed Iran's consulate in Syria, killing 12 people, including two elite Iranian generals. General Mohammad Bagheri, Iran's joint chief of staff, told mourners gathered for the funeral of General Mohammad Reza Zahdi that Iran will decide when and how to stage an "operation" to take revenge. Zahdi was the highest ranking commander slain in Monday's attack.

"The time, type, plan of the operation will be decided by us, in a way that makes Israel regret what it did," he said. "This will definitely be done."

The attack on an Iranian diplomatic compound was a significant escalation in a long-running shadow war between the two arch-enemies, and Israel has been bracing for an Iranian response.

In all, 12 people were killed in the strike: Seven Iranian Revolutionary Guard members, four Syrians and a Hezbollah militia member.

On Friday, the commander of Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard, General Hossein Salami, warned that "our brave men will punish the Zionist regime," escalating threats against Israel.

Tensions have flared against the backdrop of the six-month-



None of the embassies of the (Israeli) regime are safe anymore. We view confrontation with Israel as a legitimate and legal right

RAHIM SAFAVI | MILITARY ADVISER TO IRAN'S SUPREME LEADER

Whoever harms us or plans to harm us, we will harm them. We follow that principle in practice, all the time as well as in recent days

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU | PM, ISRAEL

Iran's semi-official ISNA news agency published a graphic Sunday that showcased nine different types of Iranian missiles that are capable of hitting Israel

Israel launched air strikes on the Bekaa Valley, in eastern Lebanon early Sunday, two Lebanese security sources told Reuters, a few hours after the downing of an Israeli drone over Lebanon. The sources said that the Israeli attack targeted a training camp belonging to armed group Hezbollah in the Janta village, near the border with Syria. One of the strikes was aimed at the town of Safri, near the eastern city of Baalbek, the sources added. Hezbollah has been trading fire with Israel across Lebanon's southern border since October 8, a day after Palestinian group Hamas launched an attack on Israel that has led to escalating regional tensions. The Iran-backed group claimed responsibility for downing an Israeli drone earlier Saturday. "The drone belonging to the Israeli army, which was shot down by the Islamic resistance fighters over Lebanese territory on the evening of Saturday, April 6, 2024, is of type Hermez 900," Hezbollah said in a statement.

old Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, and raised renewed fears of a broader regional conflict. The Islamic militant group Hamas, which has ruled Gaza for 17

Amid Iran tensions, Israel attacks Hezbollah

Israel launched air strikes on the Bekaa Valley, in eastern Lebanon early Sunday, two Lebanese security sources told Reuters, a few hours after the downing of an Israeli drone over Lebanon. The sources said that the Israeli attack targeted a training camp belonging to armed group Hezbollah in the Janta village, near the border with Syria. One of the strikes was aimed at the town of Safri, near the eastern city of Baalbek, the sources added. Hezbollah has been trading fire with Israel across Lebanon's southern border since October 8, a day after Palestinian group Hamas launched an attack on Israel that has led to escalating regional tensions. The Iran-backed group claimed responsibility for downing an Israeli drone earlier Saturday. "The drone belonging to the Israeli army, which was shot down by the Islamic resistance fighters over Lebanese territory on the evening of Saturday, April 6, 2024, is of type Hermez 900," Hezbollah said in a statement.

years, is one of Iran's proxies, along with Lebanon's Hezbollah militia and Yemen's Houthis rebels.

Both Hezbollah and the Houthis

IN PRESENCE OF US

China conducts combat patrols in disputed SCS

The exercises take place days before US President Joe Biden is due to hold the first trilateral summit with the leaders of the Philippines, Japan

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Beijing, April 7: China conducted military "combat patrols" Sunday in the disputed South China Sea (SCS), its army said, the same day as joint drills by the Philippines, the United States, Japan and Australia.

The announcement comes one day after defence chiefs from four countries including the Philippines - which has been engaged in several contentious maritime disputes with Beijing recently - said they would conduct joint drills Sunday in the area.

Beijing's People's Liberation Army (PLA) Southern Theater Command said it was organising "joint naval and air combat patrols in the South China Sea".

"All military activities that mess up the situation in the South China Sea and create hotspots are under control," it said in a statement, in an apparent swipe at the other drills being held in the waters.

Top US officials have repeatedly declared the United States' "ironclad" commitment to defending the Philippines against an armed attack in the South China Sea - to the consternation of Beijing.

China claims territorial sovereignty over nearly all of the South China Sea and has been increasingly assertive in the region in recent years.

China's Coast Guard said



We are telling the Philippines that any infringement tactics are in vain. China will regularly enforce the law in waters under (its) jurisdiction

GAN YU | MILITARY SPOKESMAN, CHINA

Saturday it had "handled" a situation Thursday at a disputed reef where several ships from the Philippines were engaged in "illegal" operations.

"Under the guise of 'protecting fishing', Philippine government ships have illegally violated and provoked, organised media to deliberately incite and mislead, continuing to undermine stability in the South China Sea," spokesman Gan Yu said.

Beijing has brushed aside competing territorial claims by several Southeast Asian countries in the South China Sea - a crucial route for global trade - as well as an international ruling that declared its stance baseless.

The drills conducted Sunday by the Philippines, United States, Japan and Australia are intended to "ensure that all countries are free to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows," US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a joint statement.

Named the "Maritime Cooperative Activity", the drills will include naval and air force units from all four countries, the joint statement said.

ELECTIONS 2024

Pellegrini: Slovakia's new President

Bratislava: A close ally of populist Prime Minister Robert Fico beat a pro-Western career diplomat to become Slovakia's new president, and succeed Zuzana Caputová, the country's first female head of state. Parliamentary speaker Peter Pellegrini received 53.85 per cent of the vote with the ballots from over 98 per cent polling stations counted by the Statistics Office in Saturday's runoff election, topping former Foreign Minister Ivan Korcok who had 46.14 per cent. Korcok conceded the defeat and congratulated the winner. Pellegrini becomes Slovakia's sixth president since the country gained independence after the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993.



Test for Tusk: Poland holds local polls

Warsaw: Poles vote in local elections Sunday, selecting thousands of councillors and mayors who will play a key role in allocating billions in European Union funds and giving an early indication of their satisfaction with the government of Donald Tusk. Tusk's appointment as prime minister in December marked a turning point for the largest country in the EU's east, drawing a line under eight years of nationalist rule that set Warsaw at odds with Western allies and putting the nation of 38 million people on a resolutely pro-European course. "Everybody who doesn't want to have their fate decided by somebody else should vote," Tusk told reporters after casting his ballot in his home town of Sopot on the Baltic coast.



Russia shifts 4,500 after dam burst

Record flood waters rise in Russia's Urals, thousands forced to flee

REUTERS

Moscow, April 7: Flood waters were rising in two cities in Russia's Ural mountains Sunday after Europe's third longest river burst through a dam, flooding at least 6,000 homes and forcing thousands of people to flee with just their pets and a few belongings.

A string of Russian regions in the Ural Mountains and Siberia, alongside parts of neighbouring Kazakhstan have been hit in recent days by some of the worst floods in decades.

The Ural River, which rises in the Ural Mountains and flows into the Caspian Sea, swelled several metres in just hours Friday due to melt water, bursting through a dam embankment



in the city of Orsk, 1,800 km (1,100 miles) east of Moscow.

More than 4,000 people were evacuated in Orsk as swathes of the city of 2,30,000 were flooded. Footage published by the Emergencies Ministry showed people wading through neck-high waters, rescuing stranded dogs and travelling along flooded roads in boats and canoes.

The Orenburg region's governor, Denis Pasler, said the floods were the worst to hit the region since records began.

He said that flooding had been recorded along the entire course

of the 2,400 km (1,500 mile) Ural River, which flows through Orenburg region and then through Kazakhstan into the Caspian Sea.

Russian media cited Orenburg region authorities as estimating the cost of flood damage locally as around 21 billion roubles (\$227 million), and saying that flood waters would dissipate only after April 20.

In Kazakhstan, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said Saturday the floods were his country's largest natural disaster in terms of scale and impact for 80 years.

'LEVEL WILL ONLY RISE'

Flood warnings were issued in other Russian regions and Kurenkov said the situation could get worse very fast.

"The water is coming, and in the coming days its level will only rise," said Sergei Salmin, the mayor of Orenburg, a city of at least 550,000 people.

RECORD MIGRATION

NZ TIGHTENS VISA RULES

REUTERS

Sydney, April 7: New Zealand said Sunday that it was making immediate changes to its employment visa program after a near record migration last year which it said was "unsustainable".

The changes include measures such as introducing English language requirement for low skilled jobs and setting a minimum skills and work experience threshold for most employer work visas. The maximum continuous stay for most low skilled roles will also be reduced to three years from five years.



"The Government is focused on attracting and retaining the highly skilled migrants such as secondary teachers, where there is a skill shortage," Immigration Minister Erica Stanford said in a statement.

"At the same time we need to ensure that New Zealanders are put to the front of the line for jobs where there are no skills shortages," she said.

Last year, a near record 173,000 people migrated to New Zealand, the statement said.

New Zealand, which has a population of about 5.1 million, has seen a rapid growth in its migrant numbers since the end of the pandemic, raising concerns last year that it was fanning inflation.

Neighbouring Australia, which has also seen a big jump in migrants, has said it would halve its migrant intake over the next two years.

Scientists hope to learn a lot from rare total solar eclipse

RESEARCHERS ARE PARTICULARLY THRILLED ABOUT THE SUN BEING NEAR THE PEAK OF ITS 11-YEAR CYCLE

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Washington, April 7: When a rare total solar eclipse sweeps across North America on Monday, scientists will be able to gather invaluable data on everything from the Sun's atmosphere to strange animal behaviors - and even possible effects on humans. It comes with the Sun near the peak of its 11-year solar cycle, setting the stage for a breathtaking display: The corona will glow spectacularly from the Moon's silhouette along the path of totality, a corridor stretching from Mexico to Canada via the United States. Total solar eclipses offer "incredible scientific opportunities," NASA Deputy Administrator Pam Melroy told

a press conference this week about the celestial event.

The US space agency is one of the institutions at the ready for the eclipse, with plans to launch so-called "sounding rockets" to study the effects on Earth's upper atmosphere.

Here is a look at what researchers are hoping to learn from the upcoming eclipse:

SUN'S ATMOSPHERE

When the Moon passes directly in front of the Sun and blocks it, the elusive outermost edge of the Sun's atmosphere, or corona, will be visible "in a very special way," Melroy said.

"Things are happening with the corona that we don't fully understand," she said.

The heat within the corona intensifies with distance from the Sun's surface - a counterintuitive phenomenon that scientists struggle to fully comprehend or explain.

Solar flares, a sudden explosion of energy that releases radiation into space, take place in the corona as do solar prominences, enormous plasma formations that loop out from the Sun's surface.



EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE

The total eclipse also will afford scientists a chance to study changes in part of the Earth's upper atmosphere known as the ionosphere, important because it affects radio waves used for communication and navigation.

"Disturbances in this layer can cause issues with GPS and communications," said Kelly Korreck, the eclipse program manager at NASA headquarters.

The ionosphere, which is where Earth's atmosphere meets space, is affected by the Sun, which electrically charges the particles there during the day. NASA's three sounding rockets will be launched before, during and just after the eclipse from Virginia to measure these changes.

The major decrease in sunlight provoked by the eclipse - more rapid and localized than a simple sunset - should allow researchers to learn more about how light affects the ionosphere so they can better predict potential problematic disruptions.

ANIMAL BEHAVIORS

Startling animal behavior has been noted during eclipses: Giraffes have been seen galloping, while roosters and crickets can start crowing and chirping.

Beyond the drop in sunlight, temperatures and wind - conditions to which animals are sensitive - can also decrease significantly during an eclipse.

Andrew Farnsworth, a researcher in ornithology at Cornell University in New York State, studies how eclipses affect birds, using weather surveillance radar to detect birds in flight.

During the last total solar eclipse visible from the United States in August 2017, scientists observed a "decline in the num-

ber of animals flying around," Farnsworth told reporters.

The 2017 eclipse disrupted the daily activities of insects and birds, but did not trigger usual animal nocturnal behaviors such as birds migrating or bats emerging, the expert said.

This time around, birds might be more apt to migrate during the eclipse, given that it's in April, he said.

"These kinds of patterns - they're important for understanding the ways animals perceive their worlds," Farnsworth said.

CITIZEN SCIENTISTS

About 40 citizen science projects are planned around the eclipse, from using a phone app to register the temperature and cloud cover to recording ambient noise during the event.

"Eclipses have a special power: They move people to feel a kind of reverence for the beauty of our universe," NASA Administrator Bill Nelson told reporters. "We encourage you to help NASA observe the sights and sounds around you," Nelson said.

The chance we're going to see something amazing is very high
PAM MELROY | DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR, NASA



If we are able to make the right footprints in India in the next six months, I think it's going to contribute almost more than double what Cilio is doing right now in the next 12 to 18 months

RICK OLEJNIK | CILIO PRESIDENT

SOCIAL COMMERCE SET FOR RAPID GROWTH

Social commerce is poised for dynamic growth, with some estimating a 10-fold rise by 2030, but building digital trust and inspiring consumer confidence around product authenticity is what will set the cash registers ringing for brands and founders as online shoppers eagerly browse, purchase and checkout directly from social media apps, say experts



of the day quote

You should not be bringing your state to a situation where it falls into a debt trap. Many of the states are close to debt traps because of freebie

RK SINGH | POWER MINISTER

We are going to go back to the pilots to seek their views and inputs to see how it (rostering system) is working, and what their thoughts are. Whether they should be amended, whether they should be improved

VINOD KANNAN | VISTARA CHIEF

We believe we're under-represented (in India) and we see a significant opportunity right now and in the future as well. The potential of this market is phenomenal

RODOLFO HROSZ | SANOFI INDIA MANAGING DIRECTOR

SHORT TAKES

Tata Steel India sales up 6 per cent in FY24

New Delhi: Tata Steel India has reported a 6 per cent growth in deliveries to 19.90 million tonnes in FY24, supported by higher demand from retail, automotive and railway segments. In India, the company produced 18.85 million tonnes (MT) of steel during the preceding 2022-23 financial year, Tata Steel said in a statement Saturday. Automotive and special products segment deliveries increased by 8 per cent in FY24 to 2.9 MT, surpassing the previous record in FY23. Branded products and retail segment deliveries increased by 11 per cent in FY24 to 6.5 MT.

RoC slaps penalties on two companies

New Delhi: Clamping down for illegal fundraising activities, the corporate affairs ministry has slapped fines totalling nearly ₹10 crore on two companies and nine individuals as they violated private placement norms. The fines have been imposed on Planify Capital and four individuals as well as on Mayasheel Retail India Pvt Ltd (Bazar India) and five individuals, according to two orders passed by the Registrar of Companies, NCT of Delhi & Haryana April 3. The action has been taken against the entities for violating Section 42 of the Companies Act, 2013, which pertains to the issuance of securities through the private placement route.

Voltas AC crosses 2mn unit sales mark

New Delhi: Leading residential air conditioner maker Voltas Sunday said it has recorded a 35 per cent sales growth to over two million units in FY24, becoming the first company in the domestic market to cross this mark. The performance was attributed to a consistent demand for cooling products during the year, coupled with a strong offline and online distribution network, and new innovative launches, the Tata Group firm said.

India's coal import rises 13 pc in Feb

New Delhi: India's coal import rose by 13 per cent to 21.64 million tonnes (MT) in February as some buyers took fresh positions to replenish stocks ahead of summer, according to online marketplace mjunction. The country's coal import was 19.15 MT in the corresponding month of FY23. "Coal imports in February 2024 were up by 13 per cent as against 19.15 MT in February 2023," as per the data compiled by mjunction.

FMCG sector bets on good monsoon

CONSUMER DEMAND FOR FMCG REMAINED SLUGGISH AMID A SUBDUED OPERATING CONDITION IN THE MARCH QUARTER

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 7: Leading industry players expect improving macro-indicators and expectations of good monsoon and rabi crops to drive consumer demand for FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods) in the current fiscal.

The industry expects a mid-to-high-single-digit growth in value/volume in the January-March period, along with a continuation of the gross margins expansion trend, helped by deflation in input cost.

The rural demand, which was sluggish in the last few quarters, has picked up pace from the January-March period, and some FMCG makers have reported a narrowing down of the gap with the urban market.

Rural India contributes nearly 35 to 38 per cent of the FMCG sales in the country.

Besides, further expansion of margins will help the companies to amplify their A&P (advertising & promotional) spending behind their brands, leading listed FMCG firms like Dabur, Marico and Godrej Consumer Products said in their quarter updates.

"We expect strong gross margin expansion on a year-on-year basis," said Marico, adding that "we expect low double-digit op-



erating profit growth on the back of a healthy expansion in operating margin".

In the March quarter, Marico -- which owns popular brands like Saffola, Parachute, and Livon -- posted a slight uptick in volume growth on a sequential basis in its domestic business owing to steady trends in the majority of the portfolios.

"During the quarter, FMCG demand sentiment stayed consistent vis-a-vis the preceding quarters with trends in urban and rural consumption largely converging," Marico said.

The company expects consolidated revenue growth to trend upwards, with domestic revenue growth outpacing volume growth in the quarters ahead. Godrej Consumer Products said that op-

The rural demand, which was sluggish in the last few quarters, has picked up pace from the January-March period, and some FMCG makers have reported a narrowing down of the gap with the urban market

Rural India contributes nearly 35 to 38 per cent of the FMCG sales in the country

erating conditions in India continue to remain subdued. "Our India organic business continued to deliver strong underlying volume growth at high-single-digit, with growth being broad-based across both Home Care and Personal Care," said the Godrej group FMCG arm.

GCPL -- which owns brands like HITS and Goodknight in

BIZ BUZZ

Sebi mulls direct reporting of AIFs' PPM changes

New Delhi: To facilitate ease of doing business, Sebi has proposed that certain changes in the private placement memorandum of alternative investment funds can be submitted directly to the regulator rather than through a merchant banker. Also, the proposed move would rationalise the cost of compliance for alternative investment funds (AIFs). In its draft circular, Sebi said that certain changes carried out in private placement memorandum (PPM) are not required to be filed through merchant bankers and can be filed directly to the regulator. These included changes in the size of the fund, information related to affiliates, commitment period, key investment team of the manager and key management personnel of AIF, and reduction in expense or fee or cost charged to fund/investors.



\$172.71 million in funding raised by 30 Indian startups last week

New Delhi: The Indian startups continued to raise funds at a normal pace, and last week, as many as 30 startups secured over \$172.71 million in the country. This included eight growth-stage deals and 16 early-stage deals, reports Entracker. "As many as six early-stage startups did not disclose the amount raised," the report mentioned. About 17 early and growth-stage startups collectively raised around \$125.73 million in the week of March 25-30. Among the growth-stage deals, eight startups raised \$130.1 million in funding last week. Ola Electric, led by Bhavish Agarwal, secured the highest amount of debt funding of \$50 million. Hyperlocal marketing-to-commerce software platform Singleinterface, NBFC Infinity Fincorp, housing finance company Nivara Home Finance, payment gateway and point of sales provider Innoviti, and digital banking infrastructure firm M2P Fintech secured \$30 million, \$26 million, \$10 million, \$4.8 million, and \$4.2 million in funding, respectively.



Vistara reduces flights by 10pc

New Delhi: Vistara Sunday said it is reducing capacity by 10 per cent or around 25-30 flights daily as the full-service carrier strives to stabilise operations amid pilot woes. The airline, which was to operate more than 300 flights every day in the summer schedule that started March 31, hopes to have stable operations in April. "We are carefully scaling back our operations by around 25-30 flights per day, i.e. Roughly 10 per cent of the capacity we were operating. This will take us back to the same level of flight operations as at the end of February 2024, and provide the much-needed resilience and buffer in the rosters," an airline spokesperson said in a statement.



FPIs TURN CAUTIOUS

ACCORDING TO THE DATA WITH THE DEPOSITORIES, FPIs WITHDREW ₹325 CRORE FROM INDIAN EQUITIES THIS MONTH (TILL APRIL 5)

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 7: FPIs have turned cautious as they pulled out ₹325 crore from Indian equities in the first week of this month owing to relatively high valuations and the upcoming general elections.

The net outflow came after a staggering investment of ₹35,000 crore in March and ₹1,539 crore in February, data with the depositories showed.

Going ahead, Geojit Financial Services Chief Investment Strategist VK Vijayakumar said the US 10-year yield has spiked to 4.4 per cent, which will impact FPI (foreign portfolio investor) investment flows into India in the near term.

However, FPI selling will be limited despite the high US bond yields since the Indian stock market is bullish and has been setting new records consistently, he added. Smallcase Manager and Senior Research Analyst at Capitalmind Krishna Appala believes that FPIs might return post-elections or upon early signs of a US Fed rate reduction.

According to the data with the depositories, FPIs withdrew ₹325 crore from Indian equities this month (till April 5).

"Relatively high valuations and the looming general elec-



tions have made FPIs cautious, leading them to hold back from aggressive investments in the equity markets at this juncture," Appala said.

On the other hand, FPIs have made a net investment of ₹1,215 crore in the debt market during the period under review.

Indian government securities (G-Sec) 10-year yield standing at 7.1 per cent and the US 10-year at 4.3 per cent present a compelling case for FPIs. The risk-reward ratio is prompting them to shift their focus from equities to the higher yields offered by bond instruments in the US and India.

Moreover, FPIs have been pumping money into the debt markets for the past few months, driven by the upcoming inclusion of Indian government bonds in the JP Morgan Index. They invested ₹22,419 crore in February,

COMPENSATION OVER LNG SUPPLIES

Former Gazprom unit rejects GAIL demand

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 7: A former unit of Russian energy giant Gazprom has rejected state-owned GAIL (India) Ltd's demand for compensation for non-delivery of LNG supplies in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In a stock exchange filing, GAIL said SEFE Marketing Trading Singapore Pte Ltd has stated that it does not owe anything other than the defaulted cargoes. GAIL in December last year filed an arbitration claim before the London Court of International Arbitration seeking \$1.8 billion for non-supply of LNG cargoes under a long-term contract.

This included compensation for non-supply besides making up for the defaulted volumes. GAIL in 2012 signed a 20-year deal to buy as much as 2.85 million tonnes per annum of liquefied natural gas (LNG) with Russian energy giant Gazprom.

The deal was signed with Gazprom Marketing and Trading Singapore (GMTS), which at the time was a unit of Gazprom Germania, now called Seife. The Russian parent gave up ownership of Seife after Western sanctions were imposed on Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine in



2022. Seife had stopped supplying LNG to the Indian company in June 2022 to meet its own demand. The German government acquired Seife after the start of the Ukraine war in February 2022 and prohibited it from taking volumes from Russia. Supplies were resumed in March last year.

GAIL in December stated that it has sued "SEFE Marketing & Trading Singapore Pte Ltd (erstwhile Gazprom Marketing and Trading Singapore Pte Ltd)" and has sought "up to USD 1.817 billion and alternative relief including non-monetary reliefs". Originally, GAIL had signed up with the German subsidiary of Gazprom, and a step-down company based in Singapore for sourcing of gas. After the invasion, the German government took over the company and the supplies were hindered as the German government debarred the company from picking up any cargo from Russia.

Adani to invest ₹2.3 lakh-crore in renewable energy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Khavda/Ahmedabad (Gujarat), April 7: Adani Group will invest about ₹2.3 lakh crore through 2030 in India's most ambitious renewable energy expansion and solar and wind manufacturing capacity addition ever as it shrugs off a short-seller attack to pursue its trademark rapid growth plans.

Adani Green Energy Ltd, India's largest renewable energy company, will invest about ₹1.5 lakh crore in expanding capacity to generate electricity from solar energy and wind power at Khavda in Gujarat's Kutch to 30 gigawatts from 2 GW currently and another ₹50,000 crore in 6-7 GW of similar projects elsewhere in the country, a top company official said.

Adani New Industries Ltd (ANIL), a unit in the group's flagship Adani Enterprises Ltd, will invest close to ₹30,000 crore in expanding solar cell and wind turbine manufacturing capacity at Mundra in Gujarat.



Mcap of top 4 cos hits ₹1.71 lakh-cr

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 7: Four of the top 10 valued firms added ₹1,71,309.28 crore to their market valuation last week with HDFC Bank and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) emerging as the biggest gainers in line with an overall positive trend in equities.

On the other hand, six companies from the top 10 pack took a ₹78,127.48 crore hit to their market valuation with index major Reliance Industries accounting for the majority of the losses.

Last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 596.87 or 0.81 per cent. It hit an all-time high of 74,501.73 April 4.

The mcap of Hindustan Unilever went lower by ₹129.23 crore to ₹5,32,816.81 crore. Reliance Industries remained the most valued domestic firm by market valuation followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Bharti Airtel, LIC, Infosys, ITC and Hindustan Unilever.

Financial education is more than a quiz score

The Latin phrase "caveat emptor" meaning "let the buyer beware," is especially relevant when selecting a financial education programme for your teenagers.

As a parent, it is your responsibility to carefully consider which programme will shape your child's understanding of finances. This decision is crucial, as financial literacy is not a topic to be taken lightly. Your teenager's understanding of financial matters will impact many important aspects of their life.

Therefore, settling for a mediocre programme is not sufficient. You should strive for an exceptional programme that will provide your teen with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. You don't want someone playing fast and loose with the foundations and principles of smart money management and investing. The programme you choose needs: i) To have been tested on thousands of students



and be better for it; ii) To go far beyond just building awareness to focusing on the implementation of the learning; iii) To challenge your teenager to think differently and then act in accordance with their beliefs; iv) To be trusted that there will be no hidden commercial agendas your son or daughter will be subject to.

There's been a lot of talk about the net effectiveness of financial education programmes,

which, according to some studies, is marginal, if non-existent. Frankly, that's not surprising. If you take a look at the way many financial education programmes are run, in terms of the content they cover and their delivery process, it's a far from surprising conclusion.

From simplistic perspectives and volunteer staff who aren't trained to teach teenagers to shameless product pushing and content that is commercially

coloured, there is a lot to beware of. Caveat emptor!

Then there is the actual content, which is tedious, uninteresting and mainly taught as a maths-based skill.

Personal finance isn't a maths-based skill; it has much to do with mindset, attitude and behaviour. Yet, behavioural finance and an understanding of the interplay of various socio-economic factors are not covered. Caveat emptor!

Parents should be especially aware of financial education programmes delivered by financial institutions.

There's nothing wrong with financial institutions sponsoring financial education programmes in schools and colleges; that might be a solution to the budgetary issue most schools claim to have when faced with teaching this subject on their own.

The problem arises when these financial institutions flog their own "bespoke curriculum", highlighting their products and serv-

ices targeted at teenagers.

One solution would be to have financial education programmes curated and delivered by a vetted independent third party of trained and trusted experts.

This would ensure that the students get the benefit of the programmes without being subject to implicit or explicit marketing messages. It would also ensure a quality standard and unbiased content.

Financial education, and more importantly financial empowerment, isn't just a score on a "three-question quiz".

While that might be a basic measure, it does not even begin to cover what we need our teenagers to know, understand and use about money.

Especially in today's time, our definition of what constitutes a financial education needs to change dramatically - it needs to provide our teenagers with deep insights, an evolved understanding and a higher consciousness about money. AGENCIES

Shepherd show sinks Delhi

Mumbai register first win in this year's IPL with fine all-round show



FIERY KNOCK: Romario Shepherd hits out during his match-turning knock against Delhi Capitals, Sunday



PRIZED SCALP: Jasprit Bumrah celebrates after dismissing Prithvi Shaw at the Wankhede Stadium, Sunday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, April 7: Romario Shepherd's 10-ball 39 not out (3x4, 4x6) outmuscled Tristan Stubbs' courageous unbeaten 71 (25b, 3x4, 7x6) as Mumbai Indians ended their three-match losing streak in the IPL with a 29-run win against Delhi Capitals (DC) here Sunday.

Conceding as many as 51 runs in the last two overs proved catastrophic for DC, whose bowlers remained upward and batters lacked the spunk in the initial overs to go after MI bowlers, even though Stubbs went ballistic in the later part of the innings. However, it came too late. In the

end DC finished at 205 for eight in reply to MI's 234 for five.

Once again poor quality of domestic talent in DC set-up proved to be their undoing. Save Abhishek Porel (41, 31b, 5x4), none of the other young uncapped Indians measured up to job in hand.

It was MI's first win in four games while DC suffered their fourth loss in five matches to languish at the bottom of the table.

Shepherd hurt DC the most, clobbering four sixes and two fours off Anrich Nortje's 20th over to collect 32 runs and returned with the ball to get the prized scalp of David Warner (10) when DC batted.

Shepherd's onslaught featuring

four sixes and three fours topped a collective effort which MI came up with in the first half of the game to register their highest-ever score at their home ground.

When DC started its chase, Prithvi Shaw (66, 40b, 8x4, 3x6), played a fine knock. However, the asking rate was always a tough ask. Porel hit a few attractive strokes but failed to make the most of a lifeline he got while batting on 30.

Delhi's lower order cut a sorry figure with Axar Patel (8), Lalit Yadav (3), debutant Kumar Kushagra (0) and Jhye Richardson (2) falling in quick succession giving Gerald Coetzee a four-wicket haul.

Earlier, MI batting unit fired in unison to post an imposing total.

Shepherd was last to join the party but seemed to have made the most of it, after each of Rohit Sharma (49, 27b, 6x4, 3x6), Ishan Kishan (42, 23b, 4x4, 2x6), Hardik Pandya (39, 33b, 3x4, 1x6) and Tim David (45 n o, 21b, 2x4, 4x6) made merry in batting-friendly conditions at the Wankhede Stadium.

BRIEF SCORES

MI 234 for 5 (Rohit Sharma 49, Tim David 45 n o, Romario Shepherd 39 n o) beat Delhi 205 for 8 (Tristan Stubbs 71 n o, Prithvi Shaw 66, Gerald Coetzee 4/34, Jasprit Bumrah 2/22) by 29 runs.

Siblings shine in Candidates chess

PRAGG ENDS GUJRATHI'S RUN, SISTER VAISHALI REGISTERS FIRST WIN IN TOURNAMENT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Toronto, April 7: Indian grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa came up with a spectacular game to down compatriot Vidit Gujrathi in the third round of the Candidates chess tournament here Saturday.

It turned out to be a satisfying day for the only sibling to make to the Candidates ever as R Vaishali also scored her first victory in the event at the expense of Nurgyul Salimova of Bulgaria in what was also the lone decisive game in the women's section.

In the men's section, D Gukesh tried to make some headway but could not really dent the solid defences of Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia, while Frenchman Firouzja Alireza's extra pawn came to a naught against top seed Fabiano Caruana of United States.

The other American Hikaru Nakamura, however, had no difficulty in getting an easy draw as black against Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan.

In the women's section, Koneru Humpy played out an easy draw with white against Zhongyi Tan, Tinjie Lei of China signed peace with Aleksandra Goryachkina of Russia, while the other Russian Kateryna Lagno split the point with Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine.

With 11 rounds still to come in both eight-players double round-



R Praggnanandhaa scripted a fine win over Vidit Gujrathi in Candidates chess tournament

robin tournament, Caruana, Gukesh and Nepomniachtchi share the lead on two points apiece in the men's section.

They are now followed by Gujrathi and Praggnanandhaa on 1.5 points each. Nakamura, Alireza and Abasov complete the line up another half point behind.

In the women's event, Zhongyi with two points remained a half point clear of nearest rival Goryachkina with Humpy, Vaishali, Lagno on their toes with 1.5 points each. Lei, Muzychuk and Salimova share the sixth spot with one point each in their kitty.

Praggnanandhaa chose an accelerated 'Schielmann' defence out of a 'Ruy Lopez' that is seldom seen in top games. Pragg, as he is fondly called, is known to spring surprises beyond imagination of his opponent, and

Gujrathi realised this very early in the opening.

That Gujrathi was obviously in for a long grinding game as his first white after a brilliant start was visible as he spent a lot of time in the opening but then the complications were clearly above the human mind.

The game fluctuated in the early middle game between an equal position and sometimes favouring Gujrathi but it was not easy to find all the best moves every time he was posed a question. In the end Gujrathi was left to play 11 moves in about five minutes with the position not favouring him and as is often the case, the ticking away clock took its toll on the Indian.

Praggnandhaa quickly landed himself with a winning rook and pawns endgame and there was no hopes left soon for Gujrathi. The game lasted 45 moves.

SHORT TAKES

Nagal in main draw

Monte Carlo: Sumit Nagal became the first Indian to enter the Monte Carlo Masters singles main draw in 42 years, beating Facundo Diaz Acosta of Argentina in a three-setter in the final qualifying round here Sunday. Nagal, ranked 95th in the world, defeated his World No 55 rival 7-5, 2-6, 6-2 in a gruelling match that lasted two hours and 25 minutes. In the first round of the main draw, Nagal will meet World No 35 Matteo Arnaldi of Ital. The 26-year-old Nagal emulated Ramesh Krishnan, who had made it to the main draw of the same tournament in 1982.

Smriti named icon

Pune: India women's team vice-captain Smriti Mandhana was Sunday unveiled as one of the icon players for the inaugural edition of the Women's Maharashtra Premier League (WMPL), which will start June 24. The Maharashtra Cricket Association (MCA) made the formal announcement of the franchise-based T20 tournament featuring four teams which will be held under the aegis of BCCI, the state governing body said. "MCA will be the first association from the BCCI to start a state league for women," the body said in a release. The other icon players in the tournament are Devika Vaidya, Anuja Patil, Kiran Navgire and Shradha Pokharkar.

Messi impresses

Fort Lauderdale: Lionel Messi returned and helped salvage a 2-2 draw for Inter Miami against Colorado Rapids in a game of the MLS played Saturday. Messi scored shortly after coming on to the field in the second half. He then provided Leo Alfonso with the perfect ball to make it 2-1 for Inter Miami. But Cole Bassett scored in the 88th minute for the Colorado Rapids and the game ended in a draw.

East Bengal win

Kolkata: Saul Crespo and Cleiton Silva were on target as East Bengal FC edged out Bengaluru FC (BFC) 2-1 in their ISL match here Sunday. Bengaluru pulled one back through skipper Sunil Chhetri, who converted a penalty, and their chances of entering the ISL play-offs too vanished with the defeat. East Bengal moved to sixth place on the ISL points table with this win, with 24 points from 21 matches.

Impressive show by Manasij



Youngsters pose with their trophies and certificates after the end of the chess tournament, Sunday

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 7: Manasij Samal of DAV Public School, Chandrasekharpur emerged champion in the IIIrd KD Pillai State Schools' Open Chess Championship which was held Sunday. The tournament which was organised by the Odisha State Chess Association saw many talented youngsters taking part in the event.

Samal won all his five matches to emerge champion with five points. Following him with four points each were Sahana Lenka (SAI International School), Anjali Mishra (Brahmeswar High School), Om Swarup Padhi (DAV Public School, Chandrasekharpur) and Rudra Pratap School (Stewart School, Bhubaneswar). As all were tied on four points, the tie-breaker rule was applied to identify players for the second to fifth positions.

There were age group prizes also in the tournament. Advik Aditya Swain won the under-8 category. The others who emerged winners in the various age segments were Avnesh Samantray (under-10), Taptomay Nayak (under-12) and Debasmita Pani (under-14). The overall champion among the girls was Hrdaya Srinovasa.

Special prizes were also awarded to a number of youngsters to encourage them. Among the winners were Raghav Garg, Omm Satpathy, Aayansh Joshi, Sai Swagat Parija, Divyansh Mohanta and Dibyansu Das. The tournament was inaugurated by Sarbeswar Samal, principal of Royal Public School, Kesura. Debasis Panigrahi, director of the Odisha State Chess Association was present during the prize distribution ceremony along with Deeprekha De, MD of SDM Software solutions.

2nd loss for hockey team

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Perth, April 7: The Indian men's hockey team dished out a much-improved performance as compared to their previous game but it was still not enough as they went down 2-4 to Australia in the second Test of the five-match series here Sunday.

After the 1-5 drubbing they received Saturday, the Indians were able to play in equal terms against their formidable opponents in the first and second quarters of the match.

In fact, India were 2-1 ahead at half time, but some sloppy defending in the third quarter cost them dearly as the hosts pumped in three goals to register their second straight win.

Jeremy Hayward (sixth and 34th minutes) converted two penalty corners, while Jacob Anderson (42nd) and Nathan Ephraums (45th) found the net from field efforts for Australia.

Both of India's goals came off penalty corner conversions by Jugraj Singh (ninth) and skipper Harmanpreet Singh (30th). The Indians started on the front foot in the game with vice-captain Hardik Singh shining as the pivotal midfielder.

However, Australia took the lead from their first penalty corner through Hayward, who sounded the board with a powerful low drag-flick to the right



Harmanpreet Singh (left) celebrates after scoring a goal Sunday

Indian goalkeeper Krishan Bahadur Pathak, who started the match under the bar in place of veteran PR Sreejesh.

The Kookaburras looked threatening after taking the lead as they earned back-to-back penalty corners soon after but the Indian defence stood tall.

The Indians slowly got their footing into the match and started to put pressure on the Australian defence and in the process secured three consecutive penalty corners.

While the first two were wasted, Jugraj drew parity for the visitors with a fierce flick to the left top corner of the Australian goal.

In the second quarter, the Indian defence had to withstand immense pressure from the Kookaburras but didn't falter. Just 41 seconds from half time, India secured a penalty corner and Harmanpreet made no mistake to score his 180th career goal and hand his side a 2-1 lead at the breather.

Crucial game for Odisha FC

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 7: After clinching a win in their recent home fixture, Odisha FC are all set to challenge Monday, ISL leaders Mumbai City FC, at the Mumbai Football Arena. It is a crucial encounter for Odisha FC as the match may well decide who will win the ISL title.

The last meeting between these two teams had ended in a thrilling 2-2 draw at the Kalinga Stadium. The rematch promises to be an intense battle as the season enters its decisive phase.

I have 200 per cent faith in my players and I know that they will certainly raise the bar against Mumbai City in this crucial game. No there is no pressure on us

SERGIO LOBERA

Odisha FC, under the guidance of head coach Sergio Lobera, have been playing well in the last few matches. They secured a convincing 3-1 victory against Punjab FC. Currently they are placed third in the table with 39 points from 20 games. Mumbai



Odisha FC players during a training session

City on the other hand, have 44 points from an identical number of games.

Mumbai City will no doubt start as favourites as they will be playing on home turf. Coached by the astute Petr Kratky, the side is coming into the game with their confidence sky high after winning their last encounter 3-0 against Hyderabad FC.

Odisha FC coach Lobera however, sounded optimistic ahead of the game. "We have prepared in the best way possible for the game against Mumbai. To be honest, I feel if we win the remaining two games we can finish top of the table. However, at the same time we need to fight hard. Our team have always risen to the occasion," Lobera said.

Man United dent Liverpool's title hopes

AGENCIES

Manchester, April 7: Liverpool's Premier League title hopes were dented to a great extent as they were held to a 2-2 draw Sunday by Manchester United at Old Trafford. Liverpool now have 71 points from 31 games, the same as that Arsenal. Following just a point behind at 70 are defending champions Manchester City from the same number of games.

After a classic game last month in a match of the FA Cup, which United won 4-3, the two sides played out another thrilling match. Having gone 1-0 up through Luis Diaz, Liverpool could have been out of sight by half time, but their profligacy in front of goal proved costly when Bruno Fernandes made Jarrell Quansah pay for a loose pass with an audacious strike to restore parity after the break.

Kobbie Mainoo sparked wild celebrations with a delightful curling finish, but Salah's composure following Aaron Wan-Bissaka's foul on Harvey Elliott ensured Liverpool moved level on points with Arsenal.

VERSTAPPEN BACK TO WINNING WAYS

AGENCIES

Tokyo, April 7: Triple World Champion Max Verstappen romped to victory at the Japanese Grand Prix here Sunday, leading teammate Sergio Perez to a dominant one-two finish for Red Bull.

Verstappen failed to finish in Australia a fortnight ago but he was in control for the entire race at the 'Suzuka' circuit here after starting from pole and claimed his third win from four Grands Prix this season. The Dutchman finished 12.535 seconds ahead of the Mexican Perez, who came home in front of Ferrari's Carlos Sainz in dry, sunny conditions.

Verstappen said "the critical bit was the start, to stay ahead." "After that, the car just got better and better. Everything just went very well. It couldn't have been any better," the Dutchman added.

Sainz, who triumphed in Australia, took third ahead of Ferrari teammate Charles Leclerc, who started from eighth on the grid. McLaren's Lando Norris, second in last year's race,



Max Verstappen with the trophy

was fifth ahead of Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso.

Mercedes' George Russell edged out McLaren's Oscar Piastri for seventh, while Lewis Hamilton was ninth in the other Mercedes.

Verstappen was starting from pole for the fourth time in as many races this season and stamped his authority on the race from the off, leading Perez to the first turn. He said this week that 'Suzuka' was one of his favourite circuits and he has now won the Japanese Grand Prix three times in a row.