



Sushmita's wisdom

Actor Sushmita Sen, who garnered immense praise for her role in *Aarya 3*, shares ways to tackle fear

LEISURE | P2



Trump trial starts

Former US President Donald Trump's hush money payment trial starts with the completion of jury selection

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Turbulent times

Stock markets take a beating Monday with Sensex and Nifty tumbling over 1% as conflict escalates in the Middle East

BUSINESS | P11



Gujrathi impresses

Vidit Gujrathi defeats 2nd seed Hikaru Nakamura of the US in the 9th round of the Candidates chess tourney

SPORTS | P12

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SHORT TAKES

Security rope for Modi kills biker

Kochi: A motorcycle rider met with a tragic end after getting entangled in a rope that was tied across a major road here as part of security measures for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit, police said Monday. Vaduthala area resident, Manoj Unni, lost his life in the incident which happened at 10.30pm, Sunday. Police said Unni was taken to a nearby hospital but could not be saved. His family alleged that the rope was tied across the road without any warning and in the night it was difficult to identify it.

Congress expels Jatni MLA Routray

Bhubaneswar: Congress expelled Friday for six years Jatni MLA Suresh Kumar Routray on grounds of indiscipline and anti-party activities. There were allegations that Routray was campaigning for his son Manmath, who has been nominated by the BJD to contest the elections from the Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha constituency. It should also be stated here that Routray had resigned from all poll-related committees of the Congress after his son joined the BJD. Reacting to his expulsion, Routray said he would remain a Congressman till his last breath. P3

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



World peace is no longer a concern for us. Wars can now be stopped with a phone call

MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VALUE	VARIATION
SENSEX	73399.78	↓ 845.12
NIFTY	22272.50	↓ 246.90
DOLLAR	83.46	↓ ₹0.04
EURO	89.05	↓ ₹0.01
GOLD	₹71,552	↓ ₹291
SILVER	₹83,232	↑ ₹419

WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	41.2°C	39.8°C
Min Temp	25.1°C	24.8°C
Humidity	56%	62%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

FORECAST
DRY WEATHER VERY LIKELY

PHYSICAL PROWESS



NCC cadets go through an exercise drill as other members of the team watch at Nagrota in Jammu, Monday

Kejriwal's custody extended till April 23

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 15: A Delhi court Monday extended till April 23 the judicial custody of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in a money laundering case linked to the alleged excise scam. Special Judge for the CBI and ED, Kaveri Baweja, extended Kejriwal's custody after he was produced before the court through video-conferencing on the expiry of his period of custody granted earlier. The ED sought extension of Kejriwal's custody by 14 days, saying the investigation was at a crucial stage.

The judge extended Kejriwal's judicial custody till April 23, noting that the judicial custody of some of the co-accused persons in the case, including BRS leader K Kavitha, is ending on that date. The ED has accused the AAP leader of being involved in the 'entire conspiracy of Delhi liquor scam'.

In a separate development, the Supreme Court sought Monday response from the ED on a plea by Kejriwal challenging his arrest. A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta issued notice to the ED on Kejriwal's plea challenging the Delhi High Court order that had upheld his arrest in the case. The bench asked the ED to file reply to the plea by April 24, and said the matter would be heard in the week commencing April 29.

'Manifesto sans reforms' 5 dead, 40 injured in Jajpur bus accident

Despite a plethora of promises, economists are disappointed that the BJP's just-released manifesto does not throw any light as to how the government will solve the unemployment crisis and also because it does not have any reforms in areas of education, environment and the police judicial system

AGENCIES

Mumbai, April 15: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP has skipped any reference to structural economic reforms such as changes to labour and land laws, in its manifesto ahead of elections, 'Citi' economists said in a note Monday

The BJP promised to create jobs, boost infrastructure and manufacturing and expand welfare programmes such as low-ticket subsidised loans to small businesses if it wins a third term. However, the economists observed that such developments are not possible without reforms in land and labour laws.

"It could be a bit of a disappointment that the big-structural (but contentious) reforms of land, labour, agriculture, privatisation, opening up to foreign investment etc did not find any mention in the manifesto

SKM slams BJP over MSP

New Delhi: Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) said Monday the manifesto of BJP has no mention of the MSP at the formula suggested by the 'Swaminathan Commission' and called it an 'open challenge' against farmers and farm workers. In a statement the SKM said the election manifesto of the ruling BJP is silent on agrarian crisis in the country, even as farmers' suicides continue unabated, and said it will intensify campaign to 'depose BJP'. "The BJP manifesto 2024 released as 'Modi ki Guarantee' has no mention on the MSP at C2+50 per cent as recommended by the 'Swaminathan Commission', guarantee on procurement, farmer's suicide and loan waiver," the SKM said in a statement. The manifesto says - 'will continue to increase MSP from time to time' without any reference to inflation and price rise. "In the context of the countrywide farmers struggle, the BJP manifesto is deliberately silent on the acute agrarian crisis which is very significant," the SKM said. "The PM 'Samman Nidhi' of ₹6,000 per year means a meagre ₹500 a month to a farmer's household. It is of no value," the SKM added.

of the BJP," 'Citi' economists Samiran Chakraborty and Babar Zaidi said. They however added, that these issues can be implemented later if the BJP comes to power for a third term.

The Lok Sabha election will be held over seven phases, starting April 19 and the results will be announced June 4. Modi is widely tipped to stay in power.

"At a broad level, the manifesto is more tilted towards continuity than change," the two economists stated. "It doesn't also talk about India's effort to achieve USD five trillion economy which was one of the most promi-

- Currently close to 37 million people are looking for jobs in India
- Reforms in land and labour laws required to create jobs

nent announcements of the previous government," they added. Both the economists however praised the manifesto which includes a strong infrastructure push, including building 28 kilometres per day (17.4 miles) of national highways, three new

high-speed bullet trains and expanding the metro network.

"There is a definite aspiration in the manifesto towards making India a power to reckon with in global manufacturing," the economists said. "However, at the same time one should not forget the other problems that India is facing at the moment," they added.

A 'Lokniti-CSDS' survey has pointed out that even though the manifesto talks about job creations it will not happen without reforms in labour laws. Most of the people interviewed during the survey stated that the job scenario in India is indeed bleak.

Unemployment rate in India among people aged 15 years and above stands at eight per cent in the 2023-24 fiscal as per data provided by Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE). In the preceding two fiscals the unemployment rate varied from 7.5% to 7.7%. According to the CMIE the number of unemployed persons looking for jobs is close to the 37-million mark in India.

The survey also pointed out that unless proper measures are implemented the rate of unemployment will continue to rise and will create serious problems for the Indian economy.



POST NEWS NETWORK

Jajpur, April 15: Five people including a woman were killed and 40 others were injured, some of them critically, after a passenger bus fell off a flyover on National Highway-16 near Barabati in this district, Monday evening. Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik expressed grief over the deaths and announced an ex-gratia of ₹3 lakh each for the next of kin of the deceased.

Two persons died on the spot while three others breathed their last while undergoing treatment, chief district medical officer (CDMO) Sibasish Moharana informed. Most of the passengers were trapped under the bus when the vehicle (OD-02-BJ-8599), topped over. The AC sleeper coach was travelling from Puri to Haldia in West Bengal. Dharmasala police launched rescue operations with the help of locals. Initially the injured passengers were rushed to the district headquarters hospital here. Later 30 of them were shifted to the SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack after their condition deteriorated. The toll may rise as the condition of five of the injured are very critical, doctors said. Jajpur SP Vinit Agrawal and other officials rushed to the spot and supervised the rescue operations. A total of 16 ambulances and five cranes were pressed into service to rescue the passengers and transport them to the hospital.

Above-normal monsoon: IMD

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 15: India will experience above-normal monsoon rains this season on the back of favourable 'La Nina' conditions, the IMD said here Monday. The news was definitely a huge relief for farmers and policy-planners.

M Ravichandran, the secretary in the Ministry of Earth Sciences, told a press conference that the seasonal rainfall will be on the higher side of 'above-normal', and pegged it at 106 per cent of the long-period average (87 cm).

The monsoon is critical for India's agricultural landscape, with 52 per cent of the net cultivated area relying on it and also for filling up water bodies. However, parts of northwest,

NO RESPITE FROM HEATWAVE SOON

Bhubaneswar: Eighteen districts in Odisha registered temperatures of 40 degrees Celsius, the regional office of the IMD stated here Monday. Baripada town recorded the highest day (maximum) temperature at 41.4 degrees Celsius, followed by Bhubaneswar, Chandbali, and Nuapada where temperatures soared to 41.2 degrees Celsius. IMD officials said that the heatwave will continue for another five days and in some districts temperatures can touch 45 degrees Celsius. P3

east and northeast India are expected to receive below-normal rainfall during the season, Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, director general of the IMD, said during the presser:

Pilibhit: Issue is tiger, not development

PEOPLE WILL ONLY VOTE FOR CANDIDATE WHO ASSURES THEM PROTECTION AGAINST THE BIG CATS

AGENCIES

Pilibhit (UP), April 15: Even as political leaders are talking of development, modernisation and progress in election rallies, people of 300 villages in the Pilibhit Lok Sabha constituency have a different demand. They want protection against tigers and said they will vote for the candidate who assures them of it.

Incidentally, this used to be Varun Gandhi's constituency. However, because of his vocal criticism of the BJP, the son of Sanjay Gandhi has been denied a ticket this time. In his place, the BJP has nominated former Union Minister Jitin Prasada.

People in these villages routinely encounter big cats that stray into their farms from the adjoining Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (PTR), a bustling habitat for the Royal Bengal Tiger. As per official records, 22 people from these villages have been mauled to death by tigers since November 2019.

Hours before Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a political rally April 9 in Puranpur locality in support of Prasada, 55-year-old farmer Bhole Ram was mauled to death by a tiger.

While Modi in his address, announced to 'take the grandeur of PTR to the world', the family members of Bhole Ram and some other villagers were not pleased.



"Our lives are at the mercy of gods. We don't know when a tiger will leap out of the field and make us or our children its prey," said Paras Rai, a relative

of Bhole Ram and resident of Jamunia village located on the boundary of the PTR.

The deaths have made the man-animal conflict a poll issue in the constituency. The villagers, who face a constant threat to existence because of tigers, have been demanding measures to prevent the animals from venturing out of the forest. Political parties have started to realise the importance of the issue. Samajwadi Party (SP) candidate Bhagwat Saran Gangwar visited Bhole Ram's family members April 11 and assured them of his support. Gangwar raised the issue during a political rally held by party president Akhilesh Yadav April 12. "People are being killed by wild animals including tigers. We will solve the problem once we come to power," he said.

leisure



SELENA GOMEZ DENIES DATING JOHN F KENNEDY'S GRANDSON

Singer and actress Selena Gomez hit out after a fan account said 'a few tabloids' had reported she was an item with John Schlossberg, 31, the only grandson of John F Kennedy, between 2020 and '21. She said on Instagram about the gossip: "Never met this human, sorry."

BARRYMORE SAYS GETTING SOBER WAS MOST HONOURING

American actress Drew Barrymore, referring to her family history of alcoholism, has told *People*, "I think, for me, stopping drinking is one of the most honouring things I can do to the Barrymore name because we have all been such hedonists."



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES

Today you will feel mushy and forlorn. Ganesh says you will make special efforts to strengthen your relationships. You look upon commitment as a security for the future. As a result, you will develop strong, long-term bondings.

TAURUS

You will find comfort, perched on a branch in the family tree, today. Your maturity will help you deal with emotional issues with ease. Energy and exuberance will be an investment you make today, the results of which you will reap in the days to come, hopes Ganesh.

GEMINI

Today, you will toil as if you have to conquer Mt. Everest. And you will, says Ganesh. You may not get a standing ovation or a medal of honour for your hard work and dedication, but you will be lavishly appreciated by your superiors and colleagues. The task will require a lot of character and even a few changes in your disposition, but you will do this with ease.

CANCER

When the going gets tough, it's better to go with the flow. But you belong to a school of thought that believes that in such troubled times, it's better to stay out of water altogether. Since it is not your day today, you are likely to postpone all important decisions and work.

LEO

The trader in you comes to the fore today. With an impeccable eye for recognising profitable avenues, you will quickly spot opportunities that arise from buying goods at cheaper prices, and selling them off at a rate that leaves you with a lump sum profit. Start with small transactions, and treat each transaction with care before you plunge into bigger ventures, like the Bull-in-Bear tussle of the stock markets.

VIRGO

There is a strong indication that you will dabble in writing or performing arts, and emerge with excellent results. Since these are your passions, you may cultivate hobbies in these fields, if they are not already your profession. Enjoy the power you have over people today as you grip them with sweet words, swinging to your whims, says Ganesh.

LIBRA

Your family is the cornerstone of your success. And today is no different. Your auspicious day starts from your home, and you manage to carry this luck everywhere you go with the same tempo and gusto, predicts Ganesh.

SCORPIO

You will spend most of the day in self-introspection and in testing your capabilities. You will take all the needed steps to improve your professional proficiency. Your rare insight and gifted understanding of human nature will prepare you for leadership in the near future, hopes Ganesh.

SAGITTARIUS

Today, you will most certainly put your heart and soul into your work. But it is rather unlikely that you will get the returns in proportion to the efforts you put in. Yet, at the end of the day, you will be more than satisfied that you have got the chance to display your innate talents, says Ganesh.

CAPRICORN

Often, sentiments take over your mind. Making you impractical, at times, this tendency proves to be harmful for you. Don't show it on your face as others may take advantage of your weakness, advises Ganesh. If you don't control your emotions, it may become an obstacle in your path to success. Be strong and give a tough fight to those who want to go ahead of you.

AQUARIUS

You plot and plan well today! A lot of your time, energy and money may go into less productive activities. But the quality of your work will near perfection. Keep it up, says Ganesh, it is this creativity which gives you an edge over others.

PISCES

Today your intellectual streak comes to the fore. You will indulge your curiosity and take interest in natural phenomenon. Your faith will help you complete all your pending tasks with ease. You will leave things to destiny.



Nargis shares her childhood dream

Mumbai: Nargis Fakhri, who was recently seen in the streaming series *Tatlubaz*, has shared her childhood dream.

The *Banjo* actress attributes her compassion towards animals to her childhood dream of becoming a veterinarian.

However, the actress shared that over the years, she fell in love with the profession of acting and her craft.

Walking down the memory lane, the actress said, "I wanted to become a veterinarian as a child. I love animals and since my childhood, I always have wished to provide them with a safe environment, but destiny had other plans and I landed up in the film industry. And if I had to reflect on my life, I wouldn't change a thing."

She carried on, "Over the years, I fell in love with my craft. I mean, look at it, I can do and be whatever I want on screen. And also, I have experienced how impactful films are on people's lives, which is why my endeavour is to try and do films that are important and films are sort of an escape from our daily struggles."

Meanwhile, the actress has a series of interesting projects in the pipeline.

CHINTA O CHETANA'S BAISAKHI UTSAV - DAY 1



IN SYNC: A performance on the first evening of 46th Baisakhi Utsav held at Rabindra Mandap, Monday, Bhubaneswar. The two-day event is being organised by Chinta O Chetana, one of the prominent socio-cultural organisations of the state. Among the luminaries, ex-IAS officer Ashok Kumar Tripathy, former bureaucrat Sanjib Hota, Mardala exponent Dhaneswar Swain, Odissi dance guru Gajendra Panda, musician Laxmikanta Palit, Chinta O Chetana's national chairman Sashibhusan Behera, state president Sahadev Sahu and secretary Surendra Das were in attendance.

Sushmita's life mantra

Mumbai: Actress Sushmita Sen, who garnered immense praise for her role in *Aarya 3*, has shared her wisdom on how to tackle fear.

The actress and former Miss Universe took to the Stories section of her Instagram and shared a de-glam picture of herself looking into the camera.

Sushmita wrote on the picture: "Courage is not absence of fear. It in fact begins with the acceptance of fear."

The actress is known to be a fighter and is often lauded for her attitude of standing tall against adversities. Earlier, the *Chingaari* actress shared on social media that she doesn't chase but attracts.

The actress took to Instagram and shared a photo wearing a black tank top and pink-tinted oversized sunglasses.

She wrote in the caption, "I don't chase, I attract... My rose-tinted glasses often remind me...it's not about 'what's there', it's more about 'what I choose to see'... I choose to see possibilities, hope, kindness, love, gratitude, oneness and abundance...what I choose, I attract."

The actress earlier suffered a heart attack while shooting for the streaming series *Aarya 3* but made a full recovery and returned to the sets to complete the shoot.

Sanya speaks up for neurodivergent people

New Delhi: This autism month, actress Sanya Malhotra shared that it is critical to find a structured yet flexible learning environment for neurodivergent people focused on life skills and independent living.

Sanya, who was last seen in the movie *Sam Bahadur*, attended the opening ceremony of *So-Hum Smiles*, a special school for neurodivergent individuals.

The *Dangal* actress believes that the school is more than just a therapy centre, as it also embodies a vision of inclusivity, empowerment, and compassion.

She said: "I am truly happy that this centre is opening, which is the need of the hour to provide help for neurodivergent individuals. It is critical to find a structured yet flexible learning environment for these people focused on life skills and independent living."

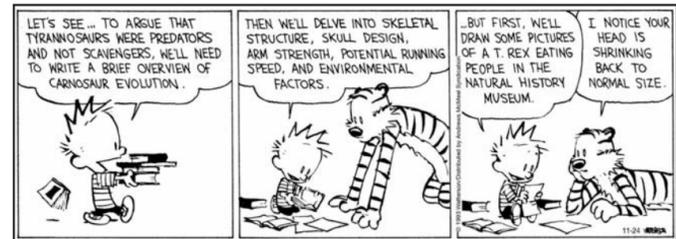
Sanya added, "It is imperative to find acceptance and a place for these kids and adults in society, not just for these kids but also for society to do better and be uplifted. I am sure the centre will create a fruitful impact on numerous lives."

On the work front, Sanya will be next seen in *Mrs*, which is a remake of the Malayalam film *The Great Indian Kitchen*. The Arati Kadav directorial is already making waves internationally. Recently, it was also showcased at the Hawaii International Film Festival 2024.

PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

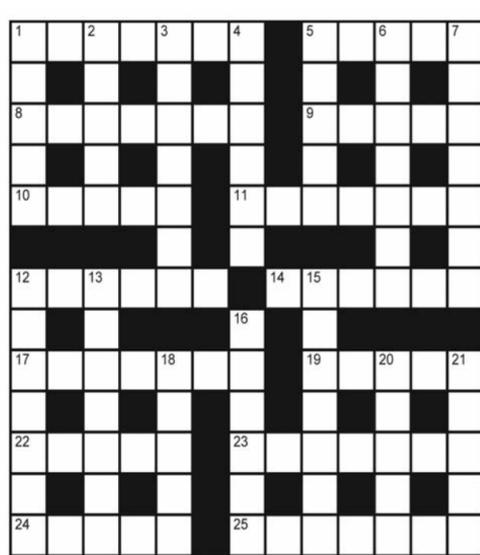


BREVITY



FUN post

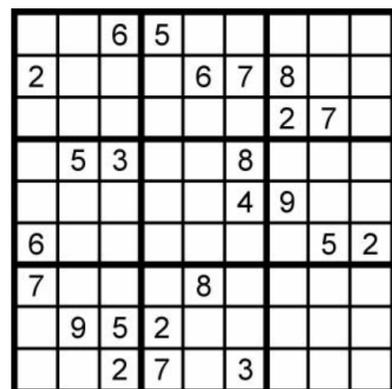
CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Inebriant
 - 5 Internet messages (1-4)
 - 8 Rifle attachment
 - 9 Tenet
 - 10 Recipe direction
 - 11 Unrestrained
 - 12 Passive
 - 14 Grand Turk
 - 17 Destructive
 - 19 Thrills
 - 22 Boundary
 - 23 Shutdown
 - 24 Inert gas
 - 25 Dignify
 - 4 Small
 - 5 Empower
 - 6 Increase
 - 7 Go-between
 - 12 Learned one
 - 13 Egyptian monument
 - 15 Alien
 - 16 Platitude
 - 18 Resting place
 - 20 Fragment
 - 21 Public spat
- Down**
- 1 French priests
 - 2 Glasgow's river
 - 3 Executioner

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.

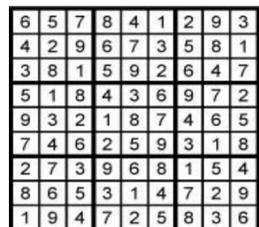


SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW



Rukuna Rath of Lord Lingaraj being given the final touches on the eve of Ashoka Ashtami in Old Town, Bhubaneswar, Monday

downtown

2 crypto scammers held for duping 500 of ₹15cr

POST NEWS NETWORK
Bhubaneswar, April 15: The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the state police has arrested two persons on charges of duping around 500 people, mostly in western Odisha, to a tune of over ₹15 crore by promising hefty returns on investments in crypto schemes, official sources said, Monday.



EOW arrested Ved Prakash from Anupgarh in Rajasthan April 10 and Sudhir Patel from Sundargarh in the state April 14

The fraud came to the fore after Pram Sagar Kharnari, a duped investor of western Odisha, approached the police in this regard in December 2023

KHARNARI ALLEGED THAT HE HAD INVESTED MORE THAN ₹48 LAKH IN CRYPTO SCHEMES OFFERED BY THE DUO AND RECEIVED A MEAGRE RETURN OF ₹20,000

EOW has arrested Ved Prakash from Anupgarh in Rajasthan April 10 and Sudhir Patel from Sundargarh in the state April 14.

The fraud came to the fore after Pram Sagar Kharnari, a duped investor of western Odisha, approached the police in this regard in December 2023.

Kharnari alleged that he had invested more than ₹48 lakh in crypto schemes offered by the duo and received a meagre return of ₹20,000.

"Promising high returns on investment in different crypto schemes, the accused have cheated around 500 investors of more than ₹15 crore mainly in Puri, Bhubaneswar, Sambalpur, Jharsuguda, Sundargarh and Bargarh districts in the state and in Maharashtra, too. However, the amount cheated in Maharashtra is yet to be known," an EOW official said.

Ved Prakash worked as a constable in Rajasthan Police and was removed after five years of service for his misconduct and dereliction of duty.

Ved Prakash introduced himself as the country head of the crypto investment plans, while Patel was the Odisha head.

Both the accused had been hiding after registration of the case against them.

"The accused in connivance with others held extensive promotional activities in different parts of Odisha in 2022. In order to attract investors, they prepared and used false documents like brochure and schemes, promising high rate of interest proportionately to the quantum of investment," the EOW said.

In order to win the confidence of investors, initially for a very few months, they paid very small amounts as returns, and after collection of crores of rupees, they stopped paying any return and remained incognito, the it said.

In reality, the fraudsters were running illegal ponzi scheme and the up-line members were being paid the promised returns from the amount collected from the down line members. They were collecting deposits from the general public either through bank accounts or by cash, the investigating agency said.

Many incriminating documents have been seized from their possession.



RAINING FIRE: A woman covers her head with a dupatta (scarf) to get respite from the scorching sun in the Capital City, where temperature soared to over 40 degrees Celsius, Monday

6 hurt in group clash

Banki: A total of six persons sustained grievous injuries Monday evening in an incident of bombing during a group clash that took place at Bheda Ramchandrapur village under the police limits here in Cuttack district. The condition of two of them is critical, a doctor treating them said. Identities of the injured have not been ascertained yet, the police said.

Above 40°C in 18 places; ban on activities during peak hours

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, April 15: Odisha experienced scorching temperatures Monday, with 18 places reporting temperatures over 40 degrees Celsius even as the Special Relief Commissioner directed Collectors to enforce a ban on outdoor activities for labourers and workers during peak hours to mitigate heat-related risks.

While Baripada (41.4 degrees Celsius) was the hottest, Bhubaneswar, Chandbali, and Nuapada also faced sweltering heat, each reaching 41.2 degrees Celsius, weathermen said.

Other regions, including Jagatsinghpur, Paralakhemundi, Khurda, Nayagarh and Kendrapara, also experienced temperatures ranging between 40 and 41 degrees Celsius, the Met said.

Night temperatures are anticipated to rise by 2 to 4 degrees Celsius in several areas over the next three days

The IMD predicted that due to prevailing northwesterly/westerly dry air and high solar insolation, the day temperature would cross 40 degrees Celsius at many places during the next four days.

The temperature would be around 38 to 40 degrees Celsius in coastal Odisha while it would be between 39 to 42 degrees Celsius in the interior pockets, it added.

Moreover, night temperatures are anticipated to rise by 2 to 4 degrees Celsius in several areas over the next three days. In light of the heatwave con-

ditions, the IMD has issued a Yellow Warning for Keonjhar, Dhenkanal, Nayagarh, Cuttack, Jajpur, Bhadrak, Khurda, Balasore, Mayurbhanj, Angul, Koraput, Malkangiri, and Kandhamal districts for April 16. Hot and humid weather conditions would prevail at some places over the districts of Puri, Kendrapara, and Jagatsinghpur during the day, it said.

Meanwhile, Special Relief Commissioner Satyabrata Sahu has directed Collectors to enforce a ban on outdoor activities for labourers and workers during peak hours from 11 am to 3 pm to mitigate heat-related risks.

Any non-compliance with these directives will result in strict action in accordance with the Disaster Management Act, 2005, the SRC said.

Cong expels six-time MLA Sura Routray

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, April 15: The Congress Monday expelled Jatni MLA Suresh Kumar Routray from the party on charges of indiscipline and anti-party activities.

In a statement, All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary KC Venugopal said, "Considering the complaints of indiscipline and anti-party activities, the Hon'ble Congress President has approved the expulsion of Shri Suresh Kumar Routray from the party for six

years with immediate effect."

Routray, a six-time MLA from Jatni Assembly segment in Khurda district, faced accusations of supporting his son, Manmath Routray, a BJD candidate from Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha constituency.

The veteran leader has denied any wrongdoing and said he had resigned from all poll-related committees of Congress after his son became a BJD candidate. Claiming that he had a relationship with Congress for over five decades, Routray said

he would remain in the Congress till his last breath.

"I will take the matter to the party high command and tell them how can I be held responsible for my adult son joining BJD? I have not done anything wrong. I have told the party that I may not be campaigning in Bhubaneswar as my son is contesting from here as a BJD candidate," he said.

"I will remain in the Congress till my death despite my expulsion from the party. My son has received a BJD ticket for the

2024 Lok Sabha polls. But, that does not mean that I am involved in anti-party activities. Many Congress leaders in Odisha have flouted the party discipline and were involved in anti-party activities. However, no action was taken against them," said the Jatni MLA.

Sources in the Congress, however, said Routray was seen sharing dais with BJD leaders and the video went viral where he was praising the achievements of BJD's Bhubaneswar-North MLA Susant Kumar Rout.

Pradhan slams BJD over 'poor spending' of DMF

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Bhubaneswar, April 15: Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has come down heavily on the ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in the state over 'poor spending' of the District Mineral Fund (DMF) in Sundargarh.

In a post on X, Pradhan Sunday alleged that the fund meant for the development of education, communication and health in the tribal areas is being spent otherwise.

He was referring to a news report published in a local daily regarding the construction of a road by the villagers in Lahunipara block of Sundargarh after the district administration gave no heed to their demands.

"A total of ₹6,405 crore has been received under DMF in Sundargarh, a region rich in minerals, while only ₹860 crore has been spent. Rourkela police is buying Innova vehicles using the DMF fund. The boundary wall of Sundargarh's circuit house is being constructed while a road could not be built in Kapanda village in Badapurunapani gram panchayat under Lahunipada block of Sundargarh district," Pradhan said, adding that it is a matter of displeasure and regret that the villagers have to build the road by themselves.

He said that the district administration and state government have failed in fulfilling their responsibility in providing basic amenities to the people.

He also raised questions about the claims of massive transformations under the more than two-decade-long BJD rule in the state.



EXAM MATTERS: Plus III first year students of Ravenshaw University in Cuttack stage a sit-in outside the administrative block of the varsity demanding postponement of semester examinations, Monday

Coral reefs experiencing mass bleaching

Coral reefs around the world are experiencing global bleaching for the fourth time, top reef scientists declared Monday, a result of warming ocean waters amid human-caused climate change.

Coral reef bleaching across at least 53 countries, territories or local economies has been confirmed from February 2023 to now, scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and International Coral Reef Initiative said.

It happens when stressed coral expel the algae that are their food source and give them their colour. If the bleaching is severe and long-lasting, the coral can die.

Coral reefs are important ecosystems that sustain underwater life, protect biodiversity and slow erosion. They also support local economies through tourism.

Bleaching has been happening in various regions for some time. In the world's largest coral reef ecosystem, Australia's Great Barrier Reef, bleaching affected 90 per cent of the coral assessed in 2022. The Florida Coral Reef, the third-largest, experienced significant bleaching last year.

But in order for bleaching to be declared on a global scale, significant bleaching had to be documented within each of the major ocean basins, including the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans, in both the Northern



and Southern Hemispheres.

Monday's news marks the second worldwide bleaching event in the last 10 years. The last one ended in May 2017. Brought on by a powerful El Nino climate pattern that heated the world's oceans, it lasted three years and was determined to be worse than the prior two bleaching

events in 2010 and 1998. This year's bleaching follows the declaration that 2023 was the hottest year on record.

"As the world's oceans continue to warm, coral bleaching is becoming more frequent and severe," Derek Manzello, NOAA Coral Reef Watch coordinator, said in a statement.

One reef that fared better than others last year was the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, which was afforded some protection by its location in deeper water in the Gulf of Mexico about 100 miles off the Texas coast. Sanctuary officials didn't immediately respond to messages Monday seeking the latest on the health of the sanctuary's corals.

AIIMS doctors save 1.1 kg baby from rare condition

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 15: Doctors at the Department of Paediatric Surgery of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Bhubaneswar pulled off a miracle of sorts when they succeeded in saving the life of a newborn weighing 1.1 kg, considered a very low birth weight, and afflicted with duodenal atresia, an exceptionally rare condition.

The infant was born prematurely with duodenal atresia, a congenital anomaly characterized by a blockage in the first part of the small intestine known as the duodenum. This condition, occurring in approximately one in 10,000 live births, poses a significant threat to the newborn's life if not promptly addressed.

The baby was admitted to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) of AIIMS in a critical condition, battling not only challenges of prematurity but also the life-threatening complications associated with duodenal atresia.

Realising the urgency of the situation, a team of dedicated paediatric surgeons that included Bikasha Tripathy, Subrat Sahoo, Aditya Manekar, under the leadership of the Head of Department Manoj Kumar Mohanty, drew a comprehensive treatment plan.

"The case presented a unique set of challenges due to the extreme prematurity of the baby coupled with the complexity of duodenal atresia," said Mohanty adding that the surgical intervention involved delicate procedures aimed at correcting the obstruction in the duodenum and restoring the normal flow of nutrients through the digestive tract.

Despite the inherent risks associated with operating on such



a fragile newborn, the surgical team demonstrated exceptional skill and precision throughout the procedure.

Following the successful surgery, the newborn was closely monitored in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). A team of Neonatology doctors, led by Tapas Som, Pankaj Mohanty, Jagadish Sahoo and Tanushree Sahoo provided round-the-clock care to ensure the baby's stable recovery. Despite initial concerns regarding post-operative complications, the infant exhibited remarkable resilience, surpassing all expectations with each passing day, the doctors said.

"We are thrilled to report that the newborn has responded exceptionally well to treatment and is making steady progress towards recovery," said Manoj Mohanty.

The successful outcome of this complex case has not only brought immense relief to the newborn's family but also garnered widespread recognition for the Department of Paediatric Surgery at AIIMS Bhubaneswar. It is worth mentioning that a 1.1kg premature baby with jejunal atresia was successfully managed by the same team of doctors a few weeks ago.

ECl begins 'vote from home' initiative in City

For the first time, senior citizens above 85 years of age and Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) to cast their votes from home in the upcoming polls



ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, April 15: The 'vote from home' initiative, introduced by the Election Commission (EC) for the first time in the history of the Lok Sabha elections for persons with disabilities (PwDs) over 40 per cent benchmark disability and senior citizens aged 85 and above, started in Capital City, Monday.

Under the initiative, the officials visited the homes of elderly citizens and PwDs to offer them invitation letter by giving them the choice to vote from home.

A team of officials led by Khurda Collector and District Election Officer met several senior citizens on this occasion and gave them Form-12D to initiate the process.

Those who received the invitation letters to cast their votes May 25 include Braja Mohan Chakrabarty of Unit IV and Sashidhar Mishra of BJB Nagar from Bhubaneswar Central Assembly constituency. The elderly people appreciated EC's initiative terming it as a move to strengthen democracy.

Khurda ADM Pratap Chandra Beura said, "The senior citizens have the choice to vote from home or visit booths on polling day. The provision of home voting aims to empower voters who face difficulties in reaching polling stations. It is specifically targeted at PwDs meeting the 40 per cent benchmark disability criteria and senior citizens aged above 85 years."

"The process to avail this facility is simple. Eligible voters

must complete Form-12D within five days of the election notification and submit it to the returning officer. PwD voters need to include a baseline disability certificate with their applications," he said.

"A dedicated team, including polling officials and security personnel, will visit the senior voters' residence to collect their votes. Voters are informed in advance about it, ensuring a smooth voting experience. The entire process is recorded for transparency," Beura added. This initiative showcases the EC's commitment to using technology to improve the electoral process. With digital notifications and videography, voting becomes more transparent and accessible.

According to ECI, there are 3.32 crore voters across the state, out of which 1.68 are male voters and 1.64 are female voters. Also, there are 3,380 third-gender voters as well and 6.8 lakh very senior citizens. As many as 9,060 voters are more than 100 years old. This step marks a significant advancement in making the electoral process more inclusive and accessible. As per available data, over 81 lakh voters in the country are aged above 85 along with more than 90 lakh registered PwD voters.



THEATRE TREAT: Artistes of Asim Basu Foundation presented Odia play *Ek Dui Teen* on the first evening of the two-day festival, organised by Labanya Theatre at Bhanjakala Mandap, Bhubaneswar, Monday. Written by Byomkesh Tripathy, the play was directed by Debadutta Pati. Five young directors - Shatrughna Samal, Alok Agnivesh, Jitendra Prasad Pattnaik, Ranjan Kumar Nayak and Debadutta Pati - received Labanya Samman on the occasion. OP PHOTO

KIMS opens cutting-edge stroke centre

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, April 15: Kalinga Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS) inaugurated cutting-edge new comprehensive stroke centre here Monday. The centre offers a dedicated team of stroke specialists, latest diagnostic and treatment technologies and a commitment to rapid patient-centered care.

KIMS associate professor and head of Neurology Santosh Kumar Dash said, "Stroke is a time-critical medical emergency. The patient needs to reach the hospital within four hours of stroke, to prevent chances of higher damage in the brain."

"This new stroke centre ensures patients to have access to



advanced care, delivered by experts who understand the urgency of stroke treatment. With every minute saved, we increase the chances of a positive outcome," he further said.

"KIMS Stroke Centre offers a

full spectrum of advanced facilities. This includes 24/7 access to stroke specialists, rapid diagnostic imaging (CT scans and MRIs), timely administration of clot-busting medications and minimally invasive clot removal

procedures when necessary. Patients will also benefit from comprehensive rehabilitation programmes focused on regaining function and independence," Dash added.

"The opening of the Stroke Centre is a major step forward for healthcare in Odisha. We're proud to offer this vital service, giving stroke patients the best possible chance of recovery. We extend our sincerest gratitude to the founder of KIIT and KIMS Achyuta Samanta for his unwavering support in making this a reality. KIMS is a leading healthcare provider in Odisha, committed to delivering exceptional medical care across a wide range of specialties," he said.

CSIR-IMMT holds Ambedkar Jayanti

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 15: City-based CSIR-Institute of Minerals and Materials Technology (CSIR-IMMT) observed the 134th BR Ambedkar Jayanti here with fervour. Held at SS Bhatnagar Hall of CSIR-IMMT, the event was attended by 300 individuals, including 100 students from various schools.

Ambedkar Jayanti Celebration Committee (AJCC) vice-chairman NK Dhal extended warm welcome to all the attendees. CSIR-IMMT director Ramanuj Narayan delivered the inaugural address. The Odisha Electricity Regulatory Commission (OERC) former chairperson Upendra Nath Behera graced the occasion as the chief guest. He addressed the gathering by shedding light on life and achievements of Ambedkar.

The highlight of the event was the keynote address by eminent social activist and member of International Human Rights, UNO, Dillip Kumar Behera. He shared insights into the life history of Ambedkar and emphasised the importance of uplifting the weaker sections of society. Later he distributed prizes to the top performers of the RRL Project UP School and winners of various competitions.

Concluding the event, AJCC convener and senior principal scientist Santosh Kumar Behera expressed gratitude to all participants and contributors. The occasion served as a reminder of Ambedkar's enduring legacy and the ongoing efforts to promote equality and social justice in society. The event culminated with a cultural programme in the evening, adding a touch of joy and artistic expression. Guests were treated to performances that celebrated diversity, unity, and the spirit of inclusivity, echoing the values championed by Ambedkar throughout his life.



New courses at IIT Bhub to meet industry needs

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, April 15: Looking at the emerging trends and industry needs, Indian Institute of Technology Bhubaneswar (IITB) launched two new programmes and several new courses for the upcoming fall 2024 session.

The two new programmes include an inter-disciplinary blended-mode MTech Degree in 'Advanced Maintenance Technology', meant especially for engineers working in the industry and MTech Degree in 'Semiconductor Technology and Chip Design', meant for regular students.

With a view to modernise the curriculum, IITB introduced several new courses, like Minor in Economics, Micro-specialisation in Software Engineering, courses on entrepreneurship and a host of new open electives in modern areas of studies for

undergraduate as well as research students.

A new PhD fellowship titled 'Professor RH Tupkary Fellowship' has been created at IITB from a donation of ₹1 crore by School of Minerals, Metallurgical & Materials Engineering chair professor Brahma Deo, as a token of respect for his erstwhile professor at Banaras Hindu University in 1967. A PhD student is currently working under this fellowship in the area of Physiology, jointly with AIIMS, on mental health disorders.

With these new development in the curriculum and pedagogy and added outreach to industry, IIT Bhubaneswar is all set to enhance industry-academia collaboration, bring innovation in the field of technical education and research, as well as support the professional development of the students.

Seeds of hope & action exhibition held at OUTR

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, April 15: Bharat Soka Gakkai (BSG), an outfit engaged in activities related to peace, culture, education and sustainability, in collaboration with Odisha University of Technology and Research (OUTR), organised an exhibition 'Seeds of Hope and Action (SOHA) Exhibition: Making the SDGs a Reality' here Monday.

The exhibition, which aims to showcase how an individual's action can reduce the effects of climate change, was inaugurated by OTR VC Bibhuti Bhusan Biswal, along with BSG representatives.

Speaking on the occasion, Biswal said, "While factors like regulation, technology and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funding are driving sustainability today, they are not enough in themselves. A transformation is required at the deepest level of human life - bringing mindfulness and consideration towards others at the forefront in our day-to-day life - be it towards other humans, animals, birds, environment, laws and institutions. This transformation is what Sustainable Human Behaviour (SHB) is all about, the core focus of all sustainability activities undertaken by BSG."

"Technology alone cannot undo what it has created. Policies can be effective only when people follow them. People are at the heart of everything. It is people's behaviour which will determine whether the society will flourish on a sustainable basis," he added.

The SOHA exhibition is a joint initiative of the Soka Gakkai International and the Earth Charter International. The exhibition encourages viewers to overcome feelings of powerlessness and highlights the fact that a single individual can initiate positive change. It further urges viewers to adopt SHB as a way of life.

Over 2cr people travelled in Vande Bharat since 2019

New Delhi: Vande Bharat (VB) trains, India's maiden semi-high speed rail service, have carried more than two crore passengers till March 31 this year, since the first set of two trains was flagged off between Delhi and Varanasi February 15, 2019, officials said Monday. The railways Monday celebrated 171 years of existence as the first train ran on this day in 1853 between Mumbai and Thane. The officials said the railways' journey over the years has been remarkable, as it successfully expanded its network to cover almost every nook and corner of the country and, today, VB has become a new identity of a modernising network. Starting from two trains on one route five years ago, today 102 VB trains are offering their services on 100 routes covering 284 districts in 24 states and Union Territories, according to data shared by the railways.

Social media regulation, education can combat science denial

While a virtual life can be fun and informative, it can also be harmful.

Misinformation about climate science is rife. So, too are conspiracy theories and disinformation about vaccine science, as we witnessed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The evidence shows that vaccines save lives, and that climate change is strongly linked to rising water temperatures, sea level rise, shrinking polar ice caps, loss of biodiversity and more extreme weather events.

But ironically, as the scientific evidence has become more compelling, public opinion appears to be more divided.

This hesitancy and denial appear to be founded in a misconception of how science works.

Vaccines save millions of lives every year, and with improved technology, the accepted view on climate change has changed, with unequivocal data showing

increases in CO2 and higher temperatures are linked to the burning of fossil fuels.

But opponents on social media, and other outlets, claim the scientific evidence for both is undecided and conflicting.

The fossil fuel industry also plays a part in undermining science, by emphasising this so-called "dissent" within the scientific community.

For decades, the industry has created shell organisations and companies to fund climate science-denial and muddy public understanding of climate science.

More recently, the fossil fuel industry and other major polluters have used social media to gain new audiences.

One analysis found that 16 of the world's biggest polluters were responsible for placing more than 1,700 false and misleading ads on Facebook in 2021.

It is easy to see how social media - which platforms opinions and untruths, and does



away with traditional gatekeepers of knowledge such as news editors - can facilitate an impression that the science around climate change and vaccines is unsettled or "controversial".

This is especially the case because 80 per cent of social media platforms do not have a content moderation policy that includes a comprehensive, universal definition of climate misinformation,

according to a September 2023 report by the Climate Action against Disinformation Coalition.

Artificial intelligence (AI) can further support high quality oppositional opinions in new ways to deceive and cast doubt.

AI algorithms can mean someone who clicks on one anti-vax post is then fed a steady diet of anti-vax and other anti-science content. Similarly, AI can be used to target misinformation to

One analysis found that 16 of the world's biggest polluters were responsible for placing more than 1,700 false and misleading ads on Facebook in 2021.

One solution could be the formation of a World Social Media Organisation, comprising world partners from each country, to oversee harmful content

vulnerable audience sectors. And AI programmes trained to write text using vast data sets have automated fake news generation with increased persuasive potential.

Bridging the consensus gap between science believers and deniers requires education.

Learning about the scientific method is important, but - in an age of conspiracy theories, misinformation and "alternative facts" - so too is critical literacy and philosophical inquiry.

Broadening school curricula to help students navigate complex ideas and virtual digital realities, and to make sense of their increasingly complex world, could help. Rather than relying on governments to pass laws in isolation - or expecting social media platforms to effectively regulate themselves - some form of international regulation is urgently required to prevent the constant barrage of misinformation and harm pervading the online world.

One solution could be the formation of a World Social Media Organisation, comprising world partners from each country, to oversee harmful content.

In today's society, where digital information is ubiquitous, and changing rapidly, we need to embrace robust debate, listen to the experts, verify what they say, understand the methods they used, and not be swayed by the uninformed or naysayers.

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Man gets life term for double murder



POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, April 15: The court of Additional District Judge (2) here sentenced a man to life imprisonment after convicting him in a 2015 double murder case which had created a lot of hue and cry in the area. Declaring his verdict in the case, the judge sentenced the accused Raju Panna to life imprisonment. The additional district judge also slapped a fine of ₹5,000 on Panna, apart from the

punishment. In default, Panna has to undergo an additional one year of imprisonment, the judge observed while delivering the order.

Public Prosecutor Kailash Pradhan, who was pleading the case, informed that the crime took place June 7, 2015. Raju was arrested for the murder of an elderly couple, who were his neighbours, at Balughat area under Brahmanitarang police limits with a sharp weapon over suspicion of practicing witchcraft and sorcery on his family members. The victims were identified as Punia Panna and her husband Kalia Panna in the area.

Sundargarh has a long history of crime against suspected witchcraft and it was the case of Nuni, a tribal lady, who was made to run naked in the village road and eat her own excreta, which had drawn national attention. Even members of the National Human Rights Commission and National Commission for Women had rushed to the village. Raju's case was just another chapter in this infamous history.

CUO to set up centre for Ambedkar studies

POST NEWS NETWORK

Koraput, April 15: The Central University of Odisha has decided to establish a centre for Ambedkar studies in the varsity, which will be dedicated to interdisciplinary research on Ambedkar's teachings, Vice-Chancellor Chakradhar Tripathy said.

Tripathy informed about the plan during the 134th Birth Anniversary celebration of Babasaheb BR Ambedkar Sunday. Reflecting on Ambedkar's profound influence as a scholar and social reformer, Tripathy highlighted his pivotal role in shaping India's constitutional framework and advocating for social justice.

He emphasised Ambedkar's relentless pursuit of an egalitarian society, grounded in principles of rule of law, civil liberties, gender equality, and empowerment of marginalised communities. Tripathy also said that a statue of Ambedkar will be set up inside the campus, symbolising the university's commitment to preserving his ideals. The VC called for a renewed appreciation of Ambedkar's economic, social, and educational endeavours, emphasising their relevance in today's world.



ACT OF KINDNESS: NSS volunteers tying water pots on trees for birds during an awareness drive held at Vikash Higher Secondary School premises at Sasan in Sambalpur district, Monday

2-month marine fishing ban comes into force



12 LAKH FISHERMEN IN A FIX AS GOVT BANS FISHING FOR 61 DAYS

POST NEWS NETWORK

Paradip, April 15: As many as 12 lakh fishermen will be affected as a 61-day fishing ban announced by the state government owing to the fish breeding season in the sea came into force, Monday.

No fishermen will be allowed to venture into the sea for fishing during these two months from April 15 to June 14. This was

stated in a circular (Letter No-3987) issued by the Directorate of Fisheries at Cuttack.

With the restrictions coming into force, over 12 lakh fishermen will be affected as all the fishing harbours will remain closed for two months.

Reports said such restrictions are being implemented since 2007. Earlier, the curbs were imposed only for a period of 45 days while it has been increased to 61 days from 2017. The restrictions are being imposed to facilitate smooth breeding of fish in the sea.

Meanwhile, all the fishing boats as well as fishermen re-

turned to the fishing harbours Sunday evening before the restrictions came into force.

Sources said that over 600 big boats and 200 small boats regularly venture into the sea for fishing from the Paradip fishing harbour. Around 50,000 people are dependent on the marine fishing industry, Srikanth Parida, president of Odisha Marine Fish Producers Association (OMFPA) said. The Paradip fishing harbour always witnesses gathering of thousands of fishermen but will remain deserted for a period of two months during the ban period.

In absence of any work after the imposition of fishing ban, the fishermen will stop their mainstay for a period of two months and return the sea only after lifting of the restrictions, he said.

Earlier, fishermen used to visit the sea 20 to 22 times in a year to catch fish before 2005. However, things have changed and fishermen now venture into the sea 10 to 12 times a year, a boat owner Narendra Biswal said.

The drop in sea visit by the fishermen is attributed to decline in fish population in the sea, irregular weather conditions,

sharp increase in cost of fuel, six-month fishing ban for mass nesting of Olive Ridley turtles and turbulent conditions at the river mouth, he said.

When contacted, Marine Fishery Officer Bijay Kumar Kar said the restrictions have been welcomed by the fishermen as this is the season for fish breeding.

The female fish come near the shore for breeding and laying eggs. The mother fish and fingerlings will be destroyed if fishermen catch fish during this. All fishermen will be highly benefitted if the fish population increases in the sea, he said.

Fishermen seek ₹15K compensation

Berhampur: Fishermen under the banner of Odisha Traditional Fish Workers Union (OTFWU) demanded compensation of ₹15,000 per month during the two-month marine fishing ban imposed from Monday. The fishing ban spans 61 days and fishing by mechanised boats, big vessels and trawlers will not be allowed in the sea during the period. The traditional fishing crafts (up to 8.5 metres length) will be allowed for fishing in the sea, officials said. Awareness was conducted by engaging 'Samudra Mitra' in the coastal fishermen-dominated villages in Ganjam district for effective implementation of the ban order, a marine fishery officer said. K Alleya, general secretary of OTFWU said around 1.50 lakh traditional fishermen in the state, who were depending on fishing activities for their livelihood, would be affected due to the prohibition on fishing activities in the sea. "We demand the government should provide at least ₹15,000 per family per month during the ban period," said Alleya. They also demanded to include the fishermen in the beneficiary list as they were involved in the fishing activities like selling and transporting of fish. Their livelihood was severely hit due to the prohibition on fishing in the sea, he said.

IndiGo to start direct flight between Delhi, Jharsuguda



PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, April 15: IndiGo has announced daily direct flights between Delhi and Jharsuguda from May 15. In line with its mission to bolster regional connectivity and accessibility, these flights will provide a direct gateway between the emerging industrial centre and the capital of India, a release from IndiGo said Monday.

Head of Global Sales, IndiGo, Vinay Malhotra said, "We are pleased to announce direct connectivity between Jharsuguda and Delhi."

As an emerging industrial hub in Odisha, Jharsuguda holds immense potential for business and trade, and these new flights will unlock newer opportunities in the region, he said.

Malhotra said the direct flight between Jharsuguda and Delhi

will not only promote interstate connectivity and regional accessibility but also serve as a gateway to a plethora of domestic and international destinations through our vast network.

"We continue to deliver on our promise of affordable, on-time, courteous, and hassle-free travel experience across an unparalleled network," he said.

Jharsuguda is an industrial centre and also a hub for power plants, manufacturing, and mineral resources. Embodying a mix of industrial growth and environmental serenity, the city is also blessed with several scenic locations and tourist attractions, such as the nearby Hiraakud dam and reservoir, Koilighugar waterfall, Ram Chandri temple, Jhadeswar temple, Pikol Ghughar stream, Guja Pahad, Ulapgarh hill forts, and Babadera cave.

Odisha records highest tree cover loss due to fires from 2001 to 2022

INDIA HAS LOST 2.33 MILLION HECTARES OF TREE COVER SINCE 2000: GLOBAL FOREST WATCH

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar/ New Delhi, April 15: From 2001 to 2022, Odisha had the highest rate of tree cover loss due to fires with an average of 238 hectares lost per year, according to the latest data from the Global Forest Watch monitoring project. Other states that follow Odisha are Arunachal Pradesh (198 hectares), Nagaland (195 hectares), Assam (116 hectares), and Meghalaya (97 hectares).

The data showed India lost 35,900 hectares of tree cover due to fires from 2002 to 2022, with 2008 recording the maximum tree cover loss due to fires (3,000 hectares).

The findings acquire importance at a time when forest fires have been raging in the state's forests owing to the rising mercury and dry weather conditions. Odisha has been experiencing the country's worst forest fires for many years.

The data further suggested that India has lost 2.33 million hectares of tree cover since 2000, equivalent to a six per cent decrease in tree cover during this period.

The Global Forest Watch, which tracks forest changes in



near real-time using satellite data and other sources, said the country lost 4,14,000 hectares of humid primary forest (4.1 per cent) from 2002 to 2023, making up 18 per cent of its total tree cover loss in the same period.

Between 2001 and 2022, it said, forests in India emitted 51 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent a year and removed 141 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent a year. This represents a net carbon sink of 89.9 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent a year.

An average of 51.0 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year was released into the atmosphere as a result of tree cover loss in India. In total, 1.12 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent was emitted during this period.

Forests are both a sink and a source for carbon, removing carbon dioxide from the air when standing or regrowing and emitting it when cleared or degraded.

Loss of forests, thus, accelerates climate change.

Tree cover loss is not always deforestation, which typically refers to human-caused, permanent removal of natural forest cover. It includes both human-caused loss and natural disturbances, and loss that is permanent or temporary. Examples of tree cover loss that may not meet the definition of deforestation include loss from logging, fire, disease or storm damage.

The data showed that 95 per cent of the tree cover loss in India from 2013 to 2023 occurred within natural forests.

The maximum tree cover loss of 1,89,000 hectares occurred in 2017. The country lost 1,75,000 hectares of tree cover in 2016 and 1,44,000 hectares in 2023, the highest in the last six years.

The GFW data showed that five states accounted for 60 per cent of all tree cover loss between 2001 and 2023.

Retd ANM hacked to death in Jajpur

POST NEWS NETWORK

Binjharpur, April 15: Miscrants hacked a retired auxiliary nursing midwife (ANM) to death at Madhusudanpur village under this police limits in Jajpur district, Monday.

The deceased was identified as Binodini Sahu, 62, wife of Alekh Behera. She was staying in the village after her retirement along with her husband and elder son, who is posted as a sub-inspector at the Town police station in Nayagarh.

The incident occurred when she had gone out to pluck flowers early Monday morning. The matter came to the fore after villagers noticed her mutilated body lying in a pool of blood inside a toilet at Atankanasan High School premises and informed her family members and other villagers.

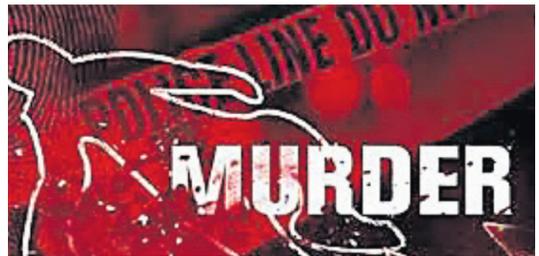
25 injured in separate road accidents

PNN & AGENCIES

Phulbani, April 15: At least 25 people, including eight women, were injured in separate road accidents in Kandhamal district, officials said Monday. However, there was no report of any death, they said.

A bus and a truck collided head-on at Ranipathar ghat, about 25 km from here, injuring 20 passengers, the officials said. The injured have been admitted to the primary health centre at Purunakatak.

In another incident, an 'overloaded' auto-rickshaw overturned at Ramunda ghat area, causing injury to five people, an official said.



On being informed, Binjharpur police reached the spot and launched an investigation. A scientific team was also pressed into service. However, they failed to ascertain the reason behind her murder.

It is suspected that miscrants might have killed her to rob her gold ornaments before dumping the body inside the toilet.

Family members said Binodini

regularly went to pluck flowers in the morning and she was wearing a pair of gold earrings and other ornaments while leaving her house Monday. Her body bore several injury marks. A deep wound was spotted on her upper neck and one of her ears was torn.

SP Vinit Agrawal and SDPO Satyabrata Lenka rushed to the spot and took stock of the situation.



The condition of two passengers was stated to be critical, he said.

A 14-wheeler truck met with an accident following a brake failure at Kalinga ghat area in the district, an official added.

However, the driver and the helper of the truck escaped unhurt by jumping from the running vehicle, he said.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the general public that M/s. Metro Acrerise Promoters Pvt. Ltd. formerly known as M/s. Acreplex Realty Pvt. Ltd. has been granted Environmental Clearance for a Residential Project at Plot No. - 419, 437/1078, 425, 440, 422, 423/2294, 421, 420, 414, 441, 426/4153, 430/4152 Etc, Khata Nos. 384/2491, 384/2490, 384/2497, 384/2489, 384/2488, 384/2485, 384/2486 Etc, in Mouza: Uttarmundamuhan, Janla Ps. Infovalley, Tahasil: Jatani, District: Khurda; Odisha vide letter EC Identification No. EC24B039OR131874 dated 19.03.2024 by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (Issued by the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA), ODISHA. The copy of clearance along with the conditions to be complied is available on the website of the MOEF,CC & SEIAA, Odisha i.e., <http://parivesh.nic.in> and at registered office of the company at Plot No. A/295 Shaheed Nagar, Bhubaneswar -751007 and also on website of the company.

Always do what you know to be the best even if it is the most difficult thing to do.

THE MOTHER



Ignored In The Past

A letter written by a group of 21 retired Supreme Court and High Court judges to the Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud flagging "attempts to undermine judiciary through calculated pressure, misinformation, and public disparagement" is an ominous sign for democracy in India. It comes close on the heels of another letter written some days back by about 600 lawyers from across the country expressing the similar concern over systematic attempts to manipulate the judiciary to serve the vested interests of a section of politicians. The judiciary being one of the pillars of democracy in which the people largely repose their trust, such missives from lawyers and judges speak volumes about the intent of some politicians who would be too happy to see the judiciary weakened so that they can do whatever they wish while trampling the interests of the citizens with impunity. What is of even greater danger is the fact that the judges, who rarely go public with their opinions, are articulating their fear and anxiety at a time when the ruling dispensation has been sending out covert and overt messages that if it gets the numbers in the Lok Sabha polls to begin this week, the country's Constitution would be changed. The fear is not misplaced at all when one considers Prime Minister Narendra Modi's exhortation to the people that his party should be enabled to rule for 1,000 years. In other words, the ruling party has the ambition to be in power in such a manner that no Opposition can dislodge it for the next ten centuries. Only a party completely drunk with power and not ready to allow democracy to function can think of visualising such a frightening scenario.

In a rare instance these judges have accused "certain factions," often "motivated by political interests" and "personal gains," of undermining the judicial system in a way that strives to erode the public's confidence in the judiciary. It asserts that such actions not only show disrespect to the sanctity of the country's judiciary, but also pose a direct challenge to the principles of fairness and impartiality that judges, as guardians of the law, have sworn to uphold.

Both missives to the CJI, the earlier one by the large group of lawyers and the recent one from retired judges could have come about due to a letter sent by the president of Supreme Court Bar Association Adish C Aggarwala 11 March addressed to the President of India in which he had sought presidential reference of the Supreme Court judgement in the Electoral Bonds case.

The judges' complaint has no vagueness and they outline the modus operandi of the groups working with a diabolical agenda. The strategy ranges from propagation of baseless theories intended to malign the judiciary's reputation to engaging in overt and covert attempts to influence judicial outcomes in their favour. For this reason the judges have urged the apex court to safeguard courts from such pressures and ensure that "the sanctity and autonomy of our legal system are preserved."

In late March, a letter signed by high-profile lawyers from across the country had also accused an unidentified "group" of employing pressure tactics to influence judicial outcomes, particularly in cases involving political figures and corruption allegations. Such actions, undoubtedly, are an open challenge to the fair functioning of the judicial system.

The response from the ruling dispensation is yet another blatant attempt at obfuscating the real issue and misleading the people. The Prime Minister took it upon himself to lead the counter-charge as was evident from the scathing attack he launched on the Congress hours after the lawyers wrote to the CJI. He then alleged that a "vested interest group" is trying to put pressure on the judiciary and defame the courts. He equated the group with the Congress stating that it is a "vintage Congress culture" to browbeat and bully others. In his message on X (formerly Twitter), he wrote five decades ago the Congress had called for a "committed judiciary" for their selfish interests but desist from any commitment towards the nation.

While it is anybody's guess how an Opposition party can even try to influence the judiciary under current conditions, the Congress leadership charged the PM has mastered the art of manipulating democracy and hurting the Constitution. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge wrote a three-point post highlighting the crisis in the judiciary under the Modi government's regime.

In fact, the Supreme Court had struck down a brazen attempt by the ruling BJP to distort the Constitution and to give a veneer of legal sanctity to the licence to loot corporate funds through a quid pro quo arrangement under the guise of the Electoral Bonds scheme that was declared unconstitutional recently.

The efforts to clamp one-party rule and weaken the judiciary and the Opposition by hook or by crook do not strengthen democracy. While this is a sure fire recipe for dictatorship to flourish, it must also be stated that the subordinate judiciary across this country has become totally spineless due to rampant greed and resultant corruption that has pervaded it. These retired judges, both from the Supreme Court and various High Courts, are not known to have done anything to imbibe better character and sense of responsibility amongst the lower courts' judicial officers. Their imploring today sounds weak simply because of what they conveniently ignored to do in the past when they were in position.

WISDOM CORNER

- "I don't want to have lived in vain like most people. I want to be useful or bring enjoyment to all people, even those I've never met. I want to go on living even after my death!" **ANNE FRANK**
- "I believe every human has a finite number of heartbeats. I don't intend to waste any of mine." **NEIL ARMSTRONG**
- "Youth is happy because it has the ability to see beauty. Anyone who keeps the ability to see beauty never grows old." **FRANZ KAFKA**

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1838:** French forces occupied Veracruz, Mexico, during the Pastry War; the conflict began after a French pastry cook living near Mexico City claimed that Mexican army officers had damaged his restaurant.
- 1912:** Harriet Quimby's flight across the English Channel. On this day in 1912, American aviator Harriet Quimby became the first woman to fly across the English Channel, guiding her French Blériot monoplane through heavy overcast from Dover, England, to Hardelot, France. She died at the age of 37 when her plane crashed in Massachusetts.
- 1917:** Vladimir Lenin returns to Russia from exile. The communist revolutionary became leader of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (SFSR) later that year. From 1922, he was the first Premier of the Soviet Union.
- 1943:** Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann discovered the psychedelic properties of LSD, a drug he had first synthesized in 1938.
- 1948:** In order to restore the economy of Europe after World War II, 16 European countries formed the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (later the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).
- 1964:** The Rolling Stones release their debut album. The album 'The Rolling Stones', released in the United States with the added title "England's Newest Hit Makers", topped the UK charts for twelve weeks.

WAR DRUMS ADD TO ANXIETY

FOCUS ECONOMY

For the first time in thirty-three years, a foreign nation state attacked Israel on Saturday 13 April. The last time was when Israel was attacked by Iraq with scud missiles in 1991. This past weekend it was Iran that launched more than three hundred and sixty missiles and drones aimed at different points in Israel. It was a combination of slow-moving drones, which take more than six hours to go from Iran to Israel, faster moving cruise missiles and very high-speed ballistic missiles that travel faster than sound. The foreign minister of Iran had given a 72-hour warning to neighbouring countries about this planned attack on Israel. In turn, Israel managed to intercept almost 99 per cent of the missiles and drones, and hence there was not much damage. This was made possible because of the sophisticated anti-missile defence system, the Iron Dome, built by Israel with American and British help and was deployed this time on Jordanian soil as well.



Ajit Ranade

THE HIGH DEMAND FOR GOLD IS THE INSTINCTIVE RUSH BY RISK AVERSE INVESTORS FEARING ALL OTHER ASSETS WILL CRASH

For those few hours of defence, the estimated cost was about 1.1 billion dollars. The defence suppliers, mainly American companies stand to benefit from such deployment. Of course, American makers of weapons systems have already immensely benefited from the ongoing war in Ukraine too, which started two years ago. The cost to Iran is also probably close to a billion dollars for that night of drones and missiles.

The attack by Iran was in retaliation to the 1 April attack by Israel on the Iranian embassy in Damascus, Syria, which killed two of its senior generals. Why did Israel, or rather its Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, authorise this unprovoked attack, that too on a diplomatic target? Was Israel seeking to widen the scope of the conflict with Hamas, and draw in other players into an escalating war? Did it not know that its action on Iran's embassy would invite retaliation? Or did it misjudge the strong reaction by Iran?



The increased uncertainty due to tension in the Middle East is good news only for defence supplies manufacturers. For most others it spells economic bad news

Sympathisers would argue that Israel's action was not unprovoked. It was to punish those supporting the Hamas within Israeli territory. Iran's tacit support to Hamas within Israel, Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen is well known. Israel has attacked Iran infrastructure and military sites in the past, in order to thwart the latter's nuclear programme, as well as in retaliation for support to Hamas and Hezbollah. Iran too has kept up the momentum in building its nuclear weapons capability. Israel is of course a nuclear armed nation that has not signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The failed drone and missile attack was played as the beginning of World War Three on some television and social media channels. Stock markets responded in panic. The Dow index of New York fell by 2.4 per cent on Friday itself in anticipation of Iran's retaliation. Further crash in stocks is expected worldwide. The price of gold has shot up to an all-time high and is nearing \$2400 per ounce. It might soon cross Rs 80,000 for ten grams in India. The high demand for gold is the instinctive rush by risk averse investors fearing all other assets will crash. Since this conflict will disrupt supplies from the Middle East, oil prices will surely rise. There will also be an increase in risk premium for freight rates and air cargo which

in turn will increase the cost of international trade. That adds triple pressure for India. It depletes our foreign currency reserves, widens the trade deficit putting pressure on the exchange rate, and can cause inflation to rise, as petrol and diesel prices will be affected. The fourth quarter ending in March, had seen a slowing down, and GDP growth rate for that quarter could be closer to 6 per cent. The worsening sentiment can slow down GDP growth even further, although election spending usually buoy the GDP. The merchandise exports will be adversely affected if global economic sentiment takes a dive. As such the disruption in the trade route of the Red Sea due to attacks by the Houthis has increased the cost of sea borne trade. That too is a negative for international trade. The news from retail inflation is not comforting and can become worse due to oil prices. That is why the Reserve Bank of India cannot cut interest rates, which could have helped housing and vehicle loans.

And finally, there is unemployment news. The recent report published jointly by the International Labour Organisation and the Institute for Human Development painted a grim picture, of youth unemployment, skills mismatch, and still low female labour force participation. The gender gap in

India, in terms of differences in labour force participation and the wage rate of males and females, since 2005 has been widening, not narrowing as seen in other parts of the world. To add to this, post COVID, an estimated 50 million workers have gone back to agriculture, which provides low productivity and low-quality jobs, and also underemployment. The improvement in the employment scene requires massive job creation which will mainly come from the private sector. That requires investor confidence and large-scale fund flow into new ventures, businesses and enterprises. Government spending alone cannot provide large scale job creation.

The increased uncertainty due to tension in the Middle East is good news only for defence supplies manufacturers. For most others it spells economic bad news. Iran's attack has not been condemned by China or Russia, both members of the Security Council. Repeated resolutions in the United Nations, asking for Israel to cease bombing Gaza have been vetoed by the United States, the sole dissenter. Israel's retaliation to the 7 October terrorism attack by Hamas is now shockingly disproportionate, having killed more than 30,000 Palestinians, mostly civilians, including women and children. But there is no end in sight for Gaza attacks by Israel just as there is no end in sight for the bombing in Ukraine. The war clouds just keep getting thicker and darker. And the warmongers have so far out-shouted those pleading for peace. The leaders have failed to bring any sanity, leave alone ceasefire or peace talks. All this does not bode well for the Indian economy, which has already been struggling with the challenges of inflation, stagnant private investment, high youth unemployment and widening inequality.

The writer is a noted Pune-based economist.
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SPECTRUM GOVERNANCE

Never underestimate the nation-state

On 12 January, 2010, Haiti suffered an earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale. Estimates of the fatalities range from 100,000 to 316,000. Barely a month and half later, a magnitude 8.8 earthquake hit Chile, leaving 500 dead, 150 of them from the subsequent tsunami. Whereas large swaths of Haiti's main cities were reduced to rubble, including the National Palace – the president's official residence – in Port-au-Prince, in Chile very few multi-story buildings collapsed, killing their inhabitants.



Andrés Velasco

WHEN THE STATE WORKS, IT CAN SAVE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF LIVES IN A SINGLE EVENT

Unlike in Haiti, Chileans benefited from stringent building codes (adopted after another massive earthquake in 1960) and a culture, nurtured over generations, of building inspectors who allowed no construction shortcuts and, crucially, took no bribes. When the state works, it can save hundreds of thousands of lives in a single event. And when it fails, as Haiti is reminding the world yet again these days, the consequences are dire. Now, this is all so obvious that it should not need repeating, except that it runs counter to the narrative du jour:

Citizens are anxious because their governments are not delivering, hums the conventional wisdom. And governments are not delivering because they have been rendered toothless by the forces of globalisation. That will take a long time to fix, citizens are told. Until then, they are on their own. No wonder they feel anxious.

When it comes to removing sources of anxiety, being reasonably sure that citizens' roofs will not cave in, that the banks that hold their life savings will not collapse, and that the currency in which they are paid will be worth something tomorrow should figure high on anyone's priority list. There is plenty that governments can do to ensure these outcomes.

The last two decades of the twentieth century were rife with financial crises in emerging economies. But, even though rich countries had their own financial meltdown in 2007-09, followed by a deep global recession, and despite the COVID-19 pandemic a decade later, there have been few such emerging-market crises since. That is because many governments decided to do something about

their vulnerability. After their traumatic experience in the late 1990s, East Asian countries – not just rich South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, but also middle-income Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines – allowed their currencies to depreciate, curtailed their foreign borrowing, exported even more than before the crisis, and imported less. As a result, they were able to accumulate tens of billions of dollars in reserves.

Of course, a benign global environment makes national leaders' job easier. Emerging and developing economies would not have to maintain high dollar reserves if a global financial safety net enabled them to borrow dollars in an emergency. But even when the global environment is not benign, well-run countries can protect their citizens against uncertainty.

The welfare state is a "piggy bank," in the apt metaphor of my London School of Economics colleague Nicholas Barr. According to the International Labour Organisation, nearly half of humanity today has access to some kind of welfare protec-

tion. It is not globalisation that is keeping the other half from having the same.

To regain control over their own fate, countries must regain control over their own instincts. But that is not part of the narrative du jour, either. For some of the left, fiscal self-discipline is a quaint twentieth-century relic (why worry about debt if you can always print money to repay it?). For much of the right, all self-discipline has become electorally inconvenient. America will not be great if Russia gobbles up Ukraine and sets its sights on the Baltics, but military and financial support for Ukraine is anathema to the Trumpified Republican Party. Countering an imperialist threat requires effort and sacrifice – virtues that have no place in a populist stump speech. That circle will not square. No wonder citizens are anxious.

The writer, a former finance minister of Chile, is Dean of the School of Public Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science.
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Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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

Low fertility rate

Sir, Many Asian countries are reportedly experiencing low fertility rates. They seem to be facing a 'baby bust', where there are insufficient children to maintain the population size, and it is feared that the ongoing decline in fertility rate will have grim economic consequences. Factors driving the fall in fertility levels include rapid urbanisation and migration from rural areas to cities, which contribute to higher costs of raising children and the lack of affordable housing for family building. Also the shift in focus from 'quantity' to 'quality', where a greater emphasis is placed on raising fewer children with a better quality of life as opposed to having as many children as possible. There is an urgent need for Asian countries to address the issue of a low TFR and foster a supportive environment for childbirth and child-raising. Governments need to act fast and prioritise how they can make their countries as family-friendly as possible. Parenthood should be supported and celebrated, and families need to know that their governments are on their side very much.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, CHENNAI

Skewed narrative

Sir, The alterations made by the NCERT in the textbooks of history, sociology, and political science for Classes VI to XII seem to present a biased and partisan view of historical and political events, rather than offering a balanced portrayal supported by scholarly consensus. The exclusion of the Aryan migration theory and the revised depiction of the Ayodhya dispute and Mandal Commission report events are concerning. By omitting these aspects and presenting a skewed narrative, NCERT is failing in its duty to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of history and society. The coming generation should know the history of the past; the new implementation is feeding history of their own choice rather than actual reality, hence creating a generational gap among newcomers. Classrooms should be spaces for open inquiry and the exploration of diverse perspectives, not platforms for promoting partisan politics or ideological indoctrination. Furthermore, the apparent alignment of the revised textbooks with the ideological agenda of certain political entities raises serious concerns about the politicisation of education.

Vishal Mayur, BANGALORE

SC extends stay on survey of Shahi Idgah

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 15: The Supreme Court Monday extended the stay on the operation of the Allahabad High Court order that allowed a court-monitored survey of the Shahi Idgah mosque complex adjoining the Krishna Janmabhoomi temple in Mathura.

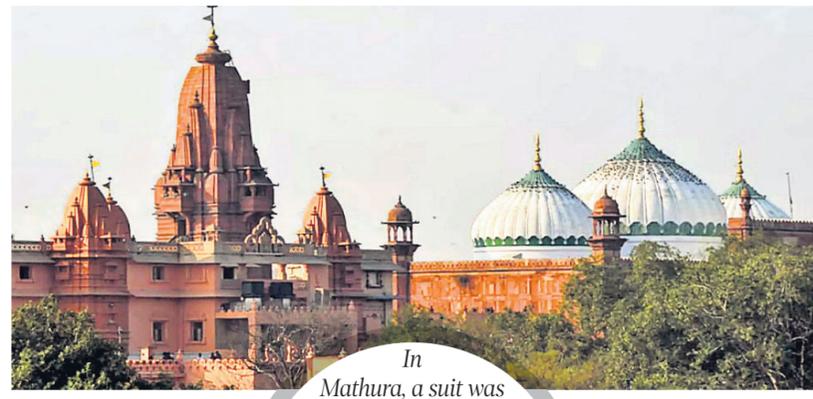
A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta, meanwhile, posted for hearing in the week commencing August 5 a batch of petitions filed by the mosque management committee including the one challenging the May 26, 2023 order of the high court transferring to itself all matters related to the dispute pending before a Mathura court.

"All interim orders will continue. Re-list the matters in the week commencing August 5. Meanwhile, all pleading shall be completed," the bench ordered, adding that there will be no stay on the suit proceedings before the high court.

In Mathura, a suit was filed in the court of Civil Judge Senior Division (III) for shifting the Shahi Idgah mosque, claiming that it was constructed on a part of the 13.37 acre land of the Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi Trust.

The Hindu side had requested the high court to conduct the original trial like it had done in the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi title dispute.

At the outset, senior advocate



In Mathura, a suit was filed in the court of Civil Judge Senior Division (III) for shifting the Shahi Idgah mosque, claiming that it was constructed on a part of the 13.37 acre land of the Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi Trust

Shyam Divan, appearing for Hindu outfits, said petitions challenging the maintainability of suits under Order 7 Rule 11 of the Civil Procedure Code (CPC) are coming up for hearing before the high court Tuesday.

He requested that the matter be listed for hearing after some time. Advocate Tasneem Ahmadi, appearing for the Committee of Management Trust Shahi Masjid Idgah, said the main matter which is listed for hearing is the one which challenges the high court order of May 26, 2023 transferring to itself the suits.

The bench said it would take up all the matters together in August.

January 16, the top court had stayed the operation of the December 14, 2023 order of the

high court allowing a court-monitored survey of the Shahi Idgah mosque complex by which it had agreed to the appointment of a court commissioner to oversee the survey of the mosque premises which, the Hindu side claims, hold signs suggesting that a temple once existed at the site.

The mosque committee, in its plea, has submitted that the high

court ought to have considered its petition for rejection of the plea before deciding on any other miscellaneous application in the suit.

The committee had sought rejection of the plea before the high court on the ground that the lawsuit is barred by the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, which puts a bar on change of character of religious places as they existed on August 15, 1947. The disputed site in Ayodhya was exempted from the Act.

While allowing the plea for a court-monitored survey, the high court had said no harm should be caused to the Mathura structure during the exercise which it indicated could be overseen by a three-member commission of advocates.

Year after Atiq's killing, no headway in probe

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Prayagraj, April 15: Exactly a year ago, former MP and mafia-turned-politician Atiq Ahmad and his brother Ashraf were shot dead by three assailants while they were being taken for medical examination.

A year later, the mystery regarding the motive behind the killing remains unsolved.

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) constituted to investigate the murders of Atiq Ahmad and his brother Ashraf, has filed a chargesheet against the three assailants, arrested from the site of the killings.

Police claim that the assailants, currently lodged at Chitrakoot jail, committed the murders to establish a name and reputation for themselves in the underworld. However, many questions regarding the murders remain unanswered.

The assailants, disguised as media persons, fired at the mafia brothers from close range using sophisticated firearms at the Motilal Nehru Hospital. The video of the shootings quickly went viral on social media platforms.

The three assailants, identified as Lavlesh Tiwari (22) from Banda, Sunny Purane (23) from Hamirpur, and Arun Kumar Murya (18) from Kasganj, were arrested from the spot. They claim



to have never met each other before the day of the murder.

Based on a complaint filed by SHO Dhumanganj Rajesh Kumar Maurya, an FIR was lodged against the three assailants at Shahganj police station April 17 under various sections, including 302 (murder), 307 (attempt to murder), 120 B (conspiracy), 419 (cheating by impersonation), 420 (fraud), 467 (forgery), 468 (forgery for cheating), along with sections of the Arms Act (3/25/27) and the Criminal Law Amendment Act (7 CLA).

Prayagraj police commissioner Ramit Sharma formed a three-member SIT, with ADCP, crime, Satish Chandra leading the team, to investigate the case.

The SIT claimed that the three assailants planned the murders themselves and did not receive

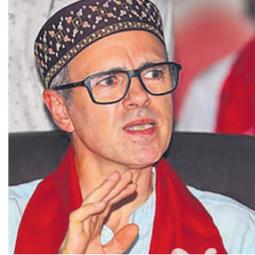
help from anyone else.

In June last year, the SIT filed a chargesheet against the three assailants. According to the chargesheet, Lavlesh, Arun and Sunny had past criminal records and planned to murder Atiq and Ashraf to gain fame and money. They used sophisticated firearms, provided to Sunny by Delhi-based gangster Jitendra Man Gogi, for killing his rival, Tillu Tajpuria.

Meanwhile, Atiq's remaining family members and gang members, are still on the run. They include his wife Shaista Parveen, sister Ayesha Noori, Ashraf's wife Zainab Fatima, and henchmen Guddu Muslim, Mohd Arman, and Mohd Sabir.

The police have announced a reward of ₹25,000 for the arrest of Zainab. Shaista already carries a reward of ₹50,000.

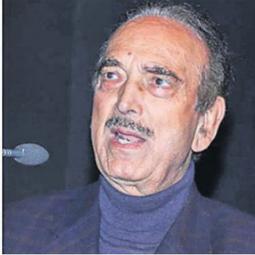
Omar challenges Azad to contest LS polls against him



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, April 15: National Conference (NC) vice-president Omar Abdullah challenged Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) chairman Ghulam Nabi Azad Monday to contest the upcoming Lok Sabha polls against him, instead of 'hiding behind a camera' and making statements targeting his party.

Abdullah, a former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister, is contesting the election from north Kashmir's Baramulla parliamentary constituency. He is currently on a four-day tour of the Chenab valley region to



garner support for INDIA bloc candidate Choudhary Lal Singh.

The Chenab valley, comprising Doda, Kishtwar and Ramban districts, is an area where Azad has considerable influence. It also forms part of the Udhampur parliamentary constituency, which is going to polls April 19.

Azad, also a former Jammu and Kashmir CM, was named as the DPAP candidate from the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat but he subsequently said he is not sure about his candidature as he was not consulted by the party about it.

"I challenge him (Azad) to contest (the polls) against me to

test his strength. Hiding behind a camera and giving statements (against the NC) is very easy. If he is a man, let him fight against me. I will see how many votes he gets," Abdullah told reporters on the sidelines of his roadshow in the Thathri area of Doda district.

Braving inclement weather, the NC leader carried on with his roadshow in support of Lal Singh, who is contesting the polls on a Congress ticket against Union minister Jitendra Singh.

Asked about Azad's onslaught against the NC in his election rallies, Abdullah claimed that he is doing so at the behest of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

"We did not speak against Azad (after he left the Congress and floated his own party in 2022) until he started targeting NC president Farooq Abdullah. We considered him as our friend but he turned out to be a friend of the BJP," he said, adding, "It is Azad's compulsion to target the NC as he cannot target the BJP."



A shepherd keeps a watch as his sheep graze in Srinagar, Monday

PTI PHOTO

Registration begins for Amarnath yatra

THE 52-DAY PILGRIMAGE TO THE 3,880-METRE-HIGH CAVE SHRINE IN SOUTH KASHMIR IS SCHEDULED TO START JUNE 29 AND CONCLUDE AUGUST 19

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, April 15: The registration for the annual Amarnath pilgrimage began Monday with a large number of people turning up at designated bank branches here to secure a permit.

The 52-day pilgrimage to the 3,880-metre-high cave shrine in south Kashmir is scheduled to start June 29 and conclude August 19, according to the announcement made by the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB).

The journey can be undertaken through two routes - the traditional 48-km route through Pahalgam in south Kashmir's Anantnag and the 14-km shorter but steep Baltal route in Ganderbal district of central Kashmir.

"The advance registration has started today at bank branches here. The exercise is being con-



ducted at 540 branches of PNB (Punjab National Bank) across the country," an official involved in the registration process said.

It is Aadhaar authentication-based form generation for yatis rather than the manual procedure followed in 2022, the officials said, adding that forms will be system-generated now.

The designated PNB branch in Rehari opened this morning bedecked with flowers and bunting to welcome prospective Amarnath pilgrims, who were standing in queues since early

morning for registration.

"We want to be part of the first batch of pilgrims undertaking the yatra to the cave shrine. We have been registered. It is a moment of happiness for us," said Suman Devi of Janipur.

The schedule of the pilgrimage was decided at the meeting of the Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board (SASB) chaired by Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha Sunday.

The yatra would commence simultaneously from both the routes, the officials said.

The shrine board will also enable the live telecast of morning and evening 'aarti' for devotees across the globe. A total of 542 bank branches across the country have been designated for the registration of pilgrims by the board, which is offering the facility also on its website.

According to the board, which manages the annual pilgrimage, no one below the age of 13 or above 75 years, and no woman with more than six weeks' pregnancy shall be registered for the yatra.

Lok Sabha polls: No takers for UP's erstwhile royals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, April 15: Political parties appear to show little interest in fielding erstwhile royals of Uttar Pradesh in this Lok Sabha election in seats where they earlier held sway.

Former MPs Sanjay Singh, scion of the erstwhile Amethi princely state, Rajkumari Ratna Singh of Kalakankar, Kunwar Akshay Pratap Singh 'Gopal Ji' of Jamo (Amethi) and Begum Noor Bano of Rampur are missing from the electoral scene, as are former MLA Aridaman Singh of Bhadawar (Agra) and Noor Bano's son Nawab Kazim Ali.

Social activist and political analyst Kaushal Kumar Shahi told PTI that several former kings and princes took to politics after the merger of their states. "But in this election, some former kings and princes have not got a chance to contest... The glory of their forts (area of influence) is fading," he said.

Former Union Minister Sanjay Singh, who left the Congress and joined the BJP, is not in the fray this time. An aide said, "We were hoping that Maharaj (Sanjay Singh) would be made a

Ex-MPs Sanjay Singh, Rajkumari Ratna Singh, Kunwar Akshay Pratap Singh & Begum Noor Bano missing from electoral scene

candidate by the BJP from Sultanpur, but Maneka Gandhi has been declared the candidate from there again."

Sanjay Singh, a former Rajya Sabha member, won the Amethi seat on a BJP ticket in 1998 and the Sultanpur seat as a Congress candidate in 2009. He lost to Maneka Gandhi in Sultanpur in the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

The possibility of Ratna Singh contesting from Pratapgarh as the BJP candidate is over as the party has fielded sitting MP Sangam Lal Gupta. Ratna Singh switched to the BJP from the Congress in 2019. She represented Pratapgarh as a Congress MP in 1996, 1999 and 2009.

Kunwar Akshay Pratap Singh won the Lok Sabha elections from Pratapgarh on a Samajwadi Party (SP) ticket in 2004. He was the Jansatta Dal (Democratic) candidate for the seat in 2019 but came third. There are no in-

dications yet of him contesting the polls this time.

Former MP from the Rampur Lok Sabha constituency in western Uttar Pradesh and matriarch of the erstwhile royal family Begum Noor Bano, even at the age of 84, was being considered a contender from the Congress. However, following a seat-sharing agreement between INDIA bloc constituents Congress and the SP, the Rampur seat went to the latter.

Her son Nawab Kazim Ali, who was expelled from the Congress, is also away from the electoral battle this time. Kazim's son Nawab Haider Ali Khan 'Hamza Mian', who is in the ruling BJP's ally Apna Dal (S), also did not get a chance this time. In 2014, Nawab Kazim Ali unsuccessfully contested the Rampur seat on a Congress ticket.

Rajeev Tiwari, an expert on politics in eastern Uttar Pradesh, told PTI that the BJP has mostly bet on its old candidates and MPs. Also, with the SP getting a higher seat share in its alliance with the Congress, the erstwhile royals who were with the Congress have not been able to get tickets, he added.



Fissures in Congress

DISTRICT CONGRESS COMMITTEE OFFICE BEARERS IN KEONJHAR RESIGN EN MASSE OVER NOMINATION OF MOHAN HEMBRAM AS THE CANDIDATE FOR THE LOK SABHA SEAT

POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, April 15: Members of Keonjhar District Congress Committee (DCC) along with other party leaders resigned en masse Monday, protesting the decision of Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) to nominate Mohan Hembram as the candidate for the Keonjhar Lok Sabha constituency.

This was announced by DCC president Mohan Parida at a press conference held at the party office here, Monday. Members of the DCC, various wings of the party and senior Congress leaders attended the presser and expressed their displeasure before quitting the party.

Briefing the mediapersons, the DCC president said, "We oppose the party's top leadership for ignoring and neglecting the DCC. They have neither taken the consent of the DCC nor that of the two senior leaders - former OPCC president Niranjan Patnaik and Jayadev Jena - before announcing the name of the Keonjhar Lok Sabha candidate."

The sudden declaration of Hembram's name for the Lok Sabha segment without any discussion with DCC has shocked all the Congress members of Keonjhar, he said, adding, "We want the candidate to be recommended by the DCC."

Congress leaders alleged that a team led by DCC president Parida had earlier discussed the candidature issue with OPCC president Sarat Pattanayak April 4, 2024. The OPCC president had promised that a decision would



be taken after discussion with the DCC president and two senior leaders of Keonjhar. However, Pattanayak and party's Odisha in-charge Ajay Kumar ignored the DCC and took a unilateral decision, they said.

It is apprehended that Congress will lose its base and its future will be pushed into darkness, if it continues to take unilateral decisions without taking the district Congress into confidence, said a few political analysts.

"We will continue as disciplined workers of the party, but on moral grounds we have collectively tendered our resignation from various posts to OPCC and All India Congress Committee (AICC)," Parida said.

"We will not cooperate with the MP candidate but will campaign for other MLA candidates during the election as disciplined members of the party," said district tribal Congress president

Binod Bihari Naik. Former Telkoi MLA Pranaballav Nayak, PCC general secretary Alok Mishra, Nikunja Bihari Mishra, PCC secretary Sangram Das, state Women Congress vice-president Sangeeta Singh, district youth Congress president Sunesh Dhir, district Student Congress president Shubham Raj, district backward Congress president Yadumani Barik, district tribal Congress president Binod Bihari Naik, district former Congress president Phillip Kumar Sahu, district Seva Dal president Birabhadra Mahant, district social media officer of the party Sudhal Kumar Sethi, District Dalit Congress president Ramakant Pan, district president of Rajiv Gandhi Retreat Organisation, Sudarshan Paikaray, district media officer Dillip Kumar Sahu, district vice-president Surath Sahu, Devendra Nath Naik, state Dalit Congress

vice president Suresh Kumar Jena, PCC member Sridhar Dallei, block Congress president Lakshman Mahanta, Shashikant Dhir, Mukund Mahanta, Shatrughna Singh and Congress leaders Pramod Behera, Sadashiv Mahanta, Vijay Rana, Artatrana Das and Muralidhar Behera resigned as key members.

Moreover, the Congress leaders are unhappy over the nomination of former MP Yashbanta Narayan Singh Laguri from Champua Assembly seat which is an unreserved constituency. This has sparked resentment among party cadres in Champua area. Laguri left BJD and joined Congress only a few days back. Many are demanding a change in candidate.

Political analysts said the resentment among the party leaders is intensifying and might pose a bigger challenge for the Congress in coming days.

PRABODH UNHAPPY OVER CONG'S TALSARA DECISION

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, April 15: The Congress party's surprise move to replace its candidate in Talsara Assembly segment in Sundargarh has saddened former Hockey India Captain Prabodh Tirkey.

The veteran player had earlier been named as the nominee for the Talsara Assembly seat by the party in its first candidates' list released April 2. The party has now fielded Devendra Bhitaria from Talsara seat in place of him.

The news came as a shock for Tirkey who was busy in election campaigning in the constituency on Sunday evening.

Speaking to mediapersons, Tirkey said he had no idea why the party replaced him with a



new candidate.

"I still don't know why my ticket was cancelled by the party I was campaigning when I came to know about the decision in the evening. If they were not interested then why did they give me the ticket in the first place? The cancellation of the candidature will affect my dignity and life," said a teary-eyed Tirkey.

He further stated that people of the constituency were happy with his candidature and the party

could have performed very well. "It is unfortunate that the party high command failed to gauge the people's mood in the constituency," he said.

Tirkey also said that he would soon hold discussions with Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee president Sarat Pattanayak and the party's Odisha in-charge Ajoy Kumar to learn the reason behind the cancellation of his ticket. The party is yet to release any formal statement regarding the issue.

This apart, the Congress has fielded Upendra Pradhan in place of Surada Pradhan for Baliguda seat in Kandhamal District while Chiranjeevi Bisoyi was replaced by Bipin Bihari Swain in Kabisuryanagar constituency in Ganjam District.

Two ex-BJD MLAs resign in Ganjam

AGENCIES

Berhampur, April 15: Two former MLAs of Ganjam, the home district of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, Monday resigned from the primary membership of the ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD) alleging that the party failed to address their concerns.

Siva Shankar Sahani, ex-MLA of Berhampur, and Harihar Sahu, former legislator of Hinjili, along with J Shankar Narayana and his wife J Rajalaxmi, former vice-chairman and councillor of Berhampur municipality, announced their resignation from the party at a press conference here and sent their letters to party president Naveen Patnaik.

"We, the former MLAs of the party in Ganjam district, have observed significant shortcomings in the party's functioning. In December last year, we wrote a letter to the Chief Minister expressing our concerns. On February 28, we personally met senior BJD leaders VK Pandian and Pranab Prakash Dash, who assured us of rectifying these issues within the district. However, as our suggestions were not given due importance, we feel compelled to resign from the party," said Sahani and Sahu.

Sahani was elected as MLA from Berhampur seat in 1985 on a Congress ticket, while Sahu won the MLA seat from Hinjili in 1990 on a Janata Dal ticket. Both of them joined the BJD in 2014.

Intense BJD-BJP fight likely in Puri LS seat

PNN & AGENCIES

Puri, April 15: Puri Lok Sabha seat, considered one of the prestigious seats in Odisha and a bastion of Biju Janata Dal (BJD) for several decades, is set to witness intense contest between the ruling BJD and the Opposition BJP.

The BJD has fielded Arup Patnaik, former police commissioner of Mumbai, instead of sitting MP Pinaki Mishra who has been elected to the Lok Sabha four times in the past - once on a Congress ticket and subsequently thrice consecutively from 2009 as a BJD candidate.

Puri Lok Sabha constituency will go to poll May 25 in the sixth phase along with Sambalpur, Keonjhar, Dhenkanal, Cuttack, and Bhubaneswar constituencies.

Patnaik unsuccessfully contested the Bhubaneswar parliamentary seat in the 2019 elections against bureaucrat-turned-politician Aparajita Sarangi of the BJP.

However, the BJD this time preferred to field him from Puri as he hails from Delang area under Pipli Assembly segment which falls under Puri Lok Sabha constituency. Patnaik heads the Odisha-Mo Parivar, a flagship social welfare initiative of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

The BJP preferred to re-nominate Sambit Patra, its national spokesperson, who lost to Pinaki in the 2019 polls by a slender margin. The Congress has also



changed its candidate and is relying on Sucharita Mohanty, daughter of former Union minister Brajamohan Mohanty, who unsuccessfully contested the 2014 polls.

BJD and BJP seem to be much ahead in election campaigning as the Congress announced its candidate only last Saturday.

Although two national parties, BJP and Congress, have candidates in the fray, BJD has a formidable organisational mechanism to defend its fort.

Its candidate Patnaik relies completely on BJD's organisational strength, besides his contacts. Before joining IPS, he had served in the State Bank of India (SBI) at Puri as a probation officer for two years.

Senior BJD leader Sanjay Kumar Das Burma is now spearheading his campaign in the Brahmagiri and Satyabadi Assembly seats, while Rudra Maharathy, MLA of Pipli, and Subhasish Khuntia, the newly elected BJD Rajya Sabha mem-

ber, have been campaigning in Pipli and Puri seats, respectively.

Seven Assembly segments fall under Puri Lok Sabha seat: Puri, Brahmagiri, Satyabadi, Pipli, Nayagarh, Ranpur, and Chilika. The BJD has been working hard to get a maximum lead from Puri, Satyabadi, and Pipli Assembly seats while flexing muscles to get back Puri and Brahmagiri Assembly seats from BJP.

Patra, the BJP candidate, has remained in election mode since his defeat in 2019, actively participating in social and Central government functions in the Puri parliamentary constituency. Additionally, he effectively uses various digital platforms to reach out to the electorate of the Puri Lok Sabha seat, mostly depending on his contacts developed over the years, besides BJP's organisational strength.

Patra is banking on leads from Puri and Brahmagiri Assembly segments.

His 29,000-vote lead from Puri and Brahmagiri was overtaken by Pipli and Satyabadi, which posted a total of 32,000 leads to the BJD.

In 2019 Lok Sabha elections, BJP could not get a lead from Nayagarh, Ranpur, and Chilika Assembly seats.

However, during the last five years, Patra extensively visited these three constituencies and established good rapport with the voters, said sources.

Patra has released a report card reflecting his work for electorates in the last five years despite his defeat. During the last elections, while BJP snatched Puri from BJD, it conceded defeat in Chilika seat.

Sucharita, the Congress nominee in 2014, had put up a formidable fight against BJD, bagging over 2,59,000 votes, while BJP nominee Ashok Sahu came third. In 2019, she was denied the party ticket, and Satya Prakash Nayak, a journalist-turned-politician, was fielded as the Congress nominee. The Congress was relegated to the third position.

The odds are very high against Sucharita, as political equations for the Congress in Puri Lok Sabha seat has changed drastically.

Veteran Congress leaders Lalatendu Bidyadhar Mahapatra and Judhistir Samantaray from Brahmagiri and Pipli, who had conducted the Congress campaign for Sucharita, are no more. After the demise of Lalatendu, his successors switched to the BJP, while the son of Judhistir joined the BJD. This has badly hampered the Congress prospects.

In the absence of any wave in favour of the saffron party - like it was in 2019 post Pulwama and Balakot surgical strikes which generated a wave in favour of BJP - the elections this time are poised evenly, a senior political analyst opined.

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 15: Former Biju Janata Dal (BJD) MP Prabhas Kumar Singh Monday joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) days before the first phase of Lok Sabha polls, as he praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership and criticised the party led by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

There was no "dignity and self-respect" in the BJD, said Singh, who has represented Bargarh Lok Sabha seat in the past, after he was welcomed in the BJP by its national general secretary Tarun Chugh and other senior leaders.

Addressing a joint press conference with BJP leaders at the party headquarters here, Singh expressed happiness over joining the "biggest political party in the world".

"This is a special moment for me. I am highly influenced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's personality," he said.

"I have left the BJD because there is no self-respect and dignity left there," he claimed and also alleged the absence of respect for Odia 'asmita' (identity), art culture and heritage in the party led by Patnaik.

He hailed Modi's leadership and the work done by his government in the last 10 years for various sections of society including the youth, women, farmers and the poor.

"I am fortunate (to have joined the BJP)", he told reporters.



SHOT IN THE ARM: Several BJD and Congress workers from Puri joined BJP at the state party office in Bhubaneswar, Monday



INFUSING STRENGTH: Congress observer Rabindra Dha, during his visit to the party office at Tihidi in Bhadrak district, Monday urged the party workers to shed differences and put up a united fight for the victory of party nominee Ashok Kumar Das for Basudevpur Assembly constituency

national

of the day quote

The talks about amendment in the Constitution is being raised by the BJP because they want to snatch the people's rights. And they want to do it in a manner that you don't even realise that it is happening

PRITYANKA GANDHI VADRA | CONGRESS LEADER

The PM is actually scared. He is apprehensive of a defeat since he stands exposed before the nation. To cover up his fear he is boasting of 370 plus seats for the BJP

LALU PRASAD YADAV | RIDJ PRESIDENT

The Congress manifesto is a failure, and for that party, it is a mere piece of paper. The party had been power in Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan but never implemented its manifesto. It is in power in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka but has not been able to deliver its promises

DEVENDRA FADNAVIS | MAHARASHTRA DEPUTY CM

SHORT TAKES

Rahul's chopper checked in TN

Nilgiris (Tamil Nadu): Election officials here Monday conducted checks in a helicopter carrying Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. The flying squad officials conducted the search after the helicopter landed here, police said. Rahul Gandhi was on his way to his parliamentary constituency, Kerala's Wayanad, where he has a slew of campaign activities, including public meeting. He is fighting the April 26 Lok Sabha polls from Wayanad, seeking a successive term.

Passenger bitten by snake on train

Kottayam (Kerala): A passenger was allegedly bitten by a snake on a Madurai-bound train Monday, police here said. The incident occurred on the Madurai-Guruvayur Passenger Express Monday morning. The passenger, identified as Karthik from Madurai, got down at Ettumanoor station and shifted to the Medical College Hospital, they said. The snake allegedly bit the passenger while he was travelling in the sixth bogie. The preliminary conclusion is that the man was bitten by the snake from under his seat.

2 killed, 17 hurt as roof collapses

Muzaffarnagar (UP): Two labourers were killed and 17 injured as the roof of an under-construction house collapsed in this Uttar Pradesh district, police said Monday. The incident took place in Talda village Sunday, when the labourers were working at the site, they added. While two labourers were declared dead, 17 were admitted to a hospital where the condition of one of them is stated to be critical.

AAP MLA denied anticipatory bail

New Delhi: The Supreme Court Monday refused to entertain AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan's anticipatory bail application in a money laundering case related to alleged irregularities in the Delhi Waqf Board during his chairmanship and ordered him to join the investigation. A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta asked Khan to appear before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) April 18 at 11 am.

Iran to allow India access to seized ship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 15: Iranian foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has said that Tehran will 'soon' allow Indian authorities to meet 17 Indian crew members of a cargo vessel that was seized by Iran's military near the Strait of Hormuz Saturday. Amir-Abdollahian conveyed this to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar during a telephonic conversation Sunday, according to Iranian foreign ministry readout.

It said Amir-Abdollahian also apprised details of Iran's 'legitimate defence' and punitive measures against the Israeli regime, in a reference to Tehran's missile and drone attacks on the Jewish nation.

The Iranian foreign minister urged the Indian government to maintain its active role through international bodies, including the United Nations Security Council, to halt the war in Gaza as it is at the core of the current crisis in the region, the readout said.

Shooters stayed near Salman's farmhouse

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, April 15: Two motorcycle-borne persons, who allegedly opened fire outside actor Salman Khan's house in Bandra here, had rented a house for a month in Navi Mumbai's Panvel, where he has a farmhouse, an official said Monday.

During the day, the police interrogated three persons from Navi Mumbai, including the house owner, the previous owner of the two-wheeler used in the crime, the agent who facilitated the sale and several others as part of the probe into the firing that occurred Sunday, the official said.

The owner of the vehicle, which was abandoned near Mount Mary Church, a little over a kilometre from the 58-year-old actor's house, had recently sold it to someone else, he said. Two unidentified men fired four rounds outside Bandra's Galaxy Apartments, where the actor resides, around 5 am and fled the spot.

Investigations revealed that the abandoned two-wheeler was registered in the name of a person residing in Panvel, and a team from the crime branch went there and brought three persons for questioning, the official said.

The police interrogated the previous owner of the vehicle, the agent who facilitated the sale and the owner of the house, which the accused had rented in the Harigram area of Panvel in March, the official said.

The police have formed more than a dozen teams to probe the incident, and some have been sent to Bihar, Rajasthan and Delhi, the official said. "So far, we have not arrested or detained anybody in the case, but our inquiry is going on with several people," he said.

According to officials, the suspects abandoned the vehicle near Mount Mary Church, walked some distance and took an autorickshaw to Bandra railway station.

They boarded a train going towards Borivli but alighted at Santacruz railway station and walked out, they said.

EC cracks down on money power, seizes record ₹4,650cr

The poll panel said the seizures made since March 1 exceed the over ₹3,475 crore recovered during the 2019 parliamentary polls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 15: The Election Commission Monday said authorities under its supervision have made seizure worth ₹4,650 crore, including drugs worth ₹2,069 crore, in the



The guarantees given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi are false as none of them have been fulfilled, leaving the people in utter disarray

MALLIKARJUN KHARGE | AICC PRESIDENT



run up to the Lok Sabha elections.

The poll panel said the seizures made since March 1 exceed the over ₹3,475 crore recovered during the 2019 parliamentary polls. The seven phased Lok Sabha polls were announced March 16. The first phase is on April 19 and the last one on June 1.

The Commission said authorities have been making seizures worth ₹100 crore every day since March 1. Out of the total recoveries worth Rs 4,658 crore, the cash component stands at over ₹395 crore, while liquor stands at more than ₹489 crore.

Need to safeguard judiciary: Retd judges to CJJ

The letter writers said they are particularly concerned about the tactics of misinformation and the orchestration of public sentiment against the judiciary

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 15: A group of 21 retired judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts have written to the Chief Justice of India on the escalating attempts by 'certain factions to undermine the judiciary through calculated pressure, misinformation, and public disparagement'.

These critics are motivated by narrow political interests and personal gains and are striving to erode public confidence in the judicial system, they said. Though the retired judges, in-

Kejriwal being treated like a terrorist: Mann

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 15: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann met Arvind Kejriwal in Tihar jail Monday and alleged he was being treated like a terrorist, even as AAP said its government in Delhi will start functioning from jail under a 'proper format' with Chief Minister Kejriwal planning to meet two ministers from next week.

Mann, who was accompanied by Aam Aadmi Party Rajya Sabha MP Sandeep Pathak, said they met Kejriwal for half-an-hour but they were separated by a glass wall and had to interact over a phone call. Mann said Kejriwal asked him to campaign for INDIA bloc candidates in different parts of the country.

Pathak said Chief Minister Kejriwal will start meeting two ministers in the jail every week from next week and review their works. "We will undertake whatever legal processes are needed

cluding four from the apex court, did not specify the incidents which prompted them to write to the CJJ, their letter came amid a war of words between the ruling BJP and opposition parties over the actions against some opposition leaders in corruption cases.

With affected leaders and their parties moving courts to seek relief, the BJP has often accused them of using judicial decisions selectively and cited any lack of relief for several arrested leaders to rebut the opposition's criticisms.

The retired judges, including justices (retired) Deepak Verma, Krishna Murari, Dinesh Maheshwari and M R Shah, accused the critics of having insidious methods with clear attempts to sway judicial processes by casting aspersions on the integrity of courts and the judges.

"Such actions not only disrespect the sanctity of our judiciary but also pose a direct chal-



(to make this happen)," he said. "From next week, when the ministers meet, the government will start functioning from jail in a proper format."

The BJP has been demanding Kejriwal's resignation since his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate March 21 in an excise policy-related money laundering case. The AAP and its ministers have, however, maintained that Kejriwal will continue to run the government from jail.

The Punjab Chief Minister told reporters after the meeting that he got emotional when he saw his party's chief.



Significantly, 45 per cent of the seizures are of drugs (₹2,069 crore). Use of blackmoney, over and

CONGRESS RELEASES CAMPAIGN SONG

The Congress Monday released a campaign song for the Lok Sabha polls, focussing on the theme of 'Nyay' for women, youngsters, farmers and labourers as well as on participatory justice. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh and spokesperson Supriya Shrinete released the song with the lyrics 'Hum Saath Hain To Haath Ye Halat Badal Dega' at the AICC headquarters



EXCISE SCAM

Notice issued to CBI on Kavitha's bail plea



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 15: A city court Monday issued notice to the CBI on BRS leader K Kavitha's bail application in a corruption case linked to the alleged Delhi excise scam.

Special judge for CBI and ED cases Kaveri Baweja, who sent Kavitha to judicial custody till April 23, directed the federal agency to file its reply to the application by April 22. The CBI had arrested the Telangana MLC and daughter of former Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao from Tihar Jail, where she was lodged after her arrest by the ED in a money laundering case stemming from the alleged scam.

The CBI is probing alleged corruption in the formulation and execution of the AAP government's excise policy, while the ED is investigating the money laundering aspect. In her bail application in the corruption case, Kavitha said she was a 'star campaigner' for her party in the general elections. She sought an interim bail while her regular bail application was pending.

She alleged that the ruling party in the Centre is using investigative agencies to publicly connect the petitioner to the Delhi Excise Policy so that further coercive actions can be taken against her.

"The Investigating Agencies are well aware that there is no substance in the allegation of the Petitioner's involvement in the alleged scam. The intention behind the purported investigation against the Petitioner is not to ascertain her involvement in the alleged scam, since it is painfully clear that none exists. The political masterminds are well aware that if the petitioner can be connected to the alleged scam, it will bring her, and by logical implication, her father, the erstwhile CM of Telangana, into disrepute," the application said.

Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) seized 'MSC Aries' reportedly in view of its links with Israel. The MSC (Mediterranean Shipping Company) said Saturday that it is working closely with relevant authorities for the well-being of 25 crew members and the return of the vessel.

Hours after the Iranian action, White House National Security Council Spokesperson Adrienne Watson said the ship's crew comprised of Indian, Filipino, Pakistani, Russian and Estonian nationals. India has been in touch with Iran to secure the release of the Indians onboard the container ship MSC Aries.

"Spoke to Iranian FM @Amirabdollahian this evening. Took up the release of 17 Indian crew members of MSC Aries," Jaishankar said on 'X' Sunday night. "Discussed the current situation in the region. Stressed the importance of avoiding escalation, exercising restraint and returning to diplomacy. Agreed to remain in touch," he

said. Iran Saturday launched its first direct attack on Israel by firing hundreds of drones and missiles in response to a suspected Israeli strike on its consulate in Damascus April 1 that killed seven Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards including two generals. In its reaction, India called for immediate de-escalation of the situation and that its embassies in the region are in close touch with the Indian community in the region.

"We are seriously concerned at the escalation of hostilities between Israel and Iran which threatens the peace and security in the region," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. "We call for immediate de-escalation, exercise of restraint, stepping back from violence and return to the path of diplomacy," it said. The MEA said India is closely monitoring the evolving situation in West Asia. "It is vital that security and stability are maintained in the region," it added.



lence to the principles of fairness and impartiality that judges, as guardians of the law, have sworn to uphold," they said in the letter titled 'Need to safeguard judiciary from unwarranted pressures'.

The strategy employed by these groups is deeply troubling, ranging from the propagation of baseless theories intended to malign the judiciary's reputation to engaging in overt and covert attempts to influence judicial outcomes to their favour, they said. "This behaviour, we observe, is particularly pronounced in the cases and causes of so-

cial, economic and political significance, including the cases involving certain individuals, wherein the lines between advocacy and maneuvering are blurred to the detriment of judicial independence," they added.

The letter writers said they are particularly concerned about the tactics of misinformation and the orchestration of public sentiment against the judiciary. "The practice of selectively raising judicial decisions that align with one's views while vehemently criticising those that do not, undermines the very essence of judicial review and the rule of law," they said.

They urged the judiciary led by the Supreme Court to fortify against such pressures and ensure that the sanctity and autonomy of the legal system are preserved. "It is imperative that the judiciary remains a pillar of democracy, immune to the whims and fancies of transient political interests," they said.

Patanjali Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj 'katha' enters 6th day

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar: The Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj 'katha' series, organised by Baba Ramdev's Patanjali Yogpeeth in Haridwar, entered its sixth day, Sunday.

While narrating the saga of the great Maratha warrior king, Swami Govind Dev Giri Ji Maharaj said that those who adhere to discipline can accomplish great tasks if they work in a planned manner. According to him, no work should be done in haste. "The British ruled India for nearly 150 years mainly because of planning and discipline," he said.

On the occasion, Yoga Guru Baba Ramdev said a cursory glance at the life and works of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj - the guardian of Sanatan Dharma, its propagator, and the initiator of national awakening - reveals what a colossal personality he was.

"From the birth of revered



Maharaj to his firm determination for the Hindu empire and his crusade against Mughals and cruel oppressors inspires everybody. This journey represents Maharaj's entire perspective and efforts in a very logical and practical manner before us," Baba Ramdev said.

Moreover, he said that the entire country is proud of Shivaji Maharaj's character, personality and his spiritual practice. "To serve the nation without any personal interests was the specialty of Shivaji Maharaj, and following his footsteps we are serving the nation as well as its people," he added.

nearly 106 government servants who were found assisting politicians in campaigning, which is against various rules and ethics. EC sources also pointed out that there was 'nothing new' in search of helicopters, as was done in case of TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee.

In the run-up to the polls, all district magistrates and superintendents of police were told to keep a strict watch on airfields and helipads. Such searches are taking place in airfields, both public and private, across the country to ensure inducements are not ferried by air, they said.

international

of the day quote

The Philippines has no plans to create any more bases or give access to any more bases

BONGBONG MARCOS | PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINES

We are preparing them in parallel. We will do an analysis in real time. We have a ceremony which would be limited to the Trocadero and which would therefore not cover the entire Seine

EMMANUEL MACRON | FRENCH PRESIDENT

The US and China will hold intensive exchanges on balanced growth in the domestic and global economies

JANET YELLEN | TREASURY SECRETARY, US

SHORT TAKES

Bushra Bibi moves Islamabad High Court

Islamabad: Jailed ex-Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's wife, Bushra Bibi, Monday moved the Islamabad High Court seeking a medical examination at a hospital after alleging that she was poisoned while incarcerated at her private residence, which was turned into a sub-jail. The plea was filed in Islamabad High Court (IHC) by Shoaib Shaheen on behalf of Bushra Bibi, seeking the former first lady's medical examination in the Shaukat Khanum Hospital, which is owned by Khan's charitable organisation, ARY news channel reported.

Sunak's Rwanda bill returns to Commons

London: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's flagship legislation aimed at flying illegal migrants out to Rwanda, which has been plagued with delays and parliamentary hurdles, returns to the House of Commons Monday on its journey towards becoming law. The Safety of Rwanda Bill returns to the Lower House after the House of Lords made amendments and sent it back to the Commons, triggering a democratic process referred to as parliamentary ping-pong between the two chambers. The peers want to water down the headline legislation that seeks to deem the East African country safe in law to block legal challenges to migrants being flown out to Rwanda while their asylum claims are assessed.

Haley joins Hudson Institute think tank

Washington: Prominent Indian-American politician and former South Carolina governor Nikki Haley has joined the prestigious Hudson Institute, the think tank announced Monday. "Nikki is a proven, effective leader on both foreign and domestic policy," Hudson President and CEO John P Walters said in a press release. "In an era of worldwide political upheaval, she has remained a steadfast defender of freedom and an effective advocate for American security and prosperity. We are honoured to have her join the Hudson team," he said in a statement.

Scholz warns China

Shanghai: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz says he will warn Chinese President Xi Jinping against providing military support for Russia. He will point out that Russia is waging a war of conquest against Ukraine, "and insist that no one must help this to succeed," Scholz said in Shanghai Monday. "That is why we are also calling on everyone not to circumvent sanctions ... and that is why we are also calling for no arms deliveries."



Rather than playing dharna-dharna, we should sit on the table and have a political dialogue to bring improvement in our system, democracy, and institutions through amendments

BILAWAL BHUTTO-ZARDARI | PPP CHAIRMAN

S'PORE PM LEE TO STEP DOWN MAY 15

Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced Monday he will step down May 15 after nearly 20 years of heading the government of the economically prosperous country as part of the long-planned leadership transition and will be succeeded by his deputy Lawrence Wong



Trump faces criminal trial

Donald Trump arrived Monday at a New York court for the start of jury selection in his hush money trial, marking a singular moment in American history as the former President and current White House hopeful answers to criminal charges

AGENCIES

New York, April 15: Donald Trump arrived Monday at a New York court for the start of jury selection in his hush-money trial, marking a singular moment in American history as the former President answers to criminal charges that he sought to stifle stories about his sex life.

Prosecutors have asked a judge to fine the former President \$3,000 over social media posts about key witnesses.

The request was made Monday ahead of jury selection, with prosecutors from the Manhattan District Attorney's office seeking a \$1,000 fine for each of three posts that they say violate gag order that bars him from commenting on witnesses.

Last week, Trump used his Truth Social platform to call two important witnesses — his former lawyer Michael Cohen and the adult film actor Stormy Daniels — "two sleaze bags who have, with their lies and misrepresentations, cost our Country dearly!"

The day began with Judge Juan M Merchan ruling on a variety of procedural pretrial motions as Trump sat hunched over in his seat and stared into a monitor directly in front of him on the defense table while evidence was shown.

The judge denied a defense request to recuse himself from the



case after Trump's lawyers said he had a conflict of interest. He also said prosecutors could not play for the jury the 2005 "Access Hollywood" recording in which Trump was captured discussing grabbing women sexually without their permission.

However, prosecutors will be allowed to question witnesses about the recording, which became public in the final weeks of the 2016 campaign.

When jury selection begins, scores of people are due to be called into the courtroom to start the process of finding 12 jurors, plus six alternates. Trump's notoriety would make the process of picking a jury a near-herculean task in any year, but it's likely to be especially challenging now, unfolding in a closely contested presidential election in the city where Trump grew up and catapulted to celebrity status



before winning the White House. Merchan has written that the key is "whether the prospective juror can assure us that they will set aside any personal feelings or biases and render a decision that is based on the evidence and the law."

No matter the outcome, Trump is determined to benefit from the proceedings, casting the case, and his indictments elsewhere, as a broad "weaponisation of law enforcement" by Democratic prosecutors and officials. He maintains they are orchestrating sham charges in hopes of impeding his presidential run.

He's lambasted judges and prosecutors for years, a pattern

of attacks that continued up to the moment he entered court Monday, when he said: "This is political persecution. This is a persecution like never before."

Trump has pleaded not guilty to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records that arose from an alleged effort to keep salacious — and, he says, bogus — stories about his sex life from emerging during his 2016 campaign.

The charges center on \$130,000 in payments that

Trump's company made to his then-lawyer, Michael Cohen. He had paid that sum on Trump's behalf to keep porn actor Stormy Daniels from going public, a month before the election, with her claims of a sexual encounter with the married mogul a decade earlier.

Prosecutors say the payments to Cohen were falsely logged as legal fees in order to cloak their actual purpose. Trump's lawyers say the disbursements indeed were legal expenses, not a cover-up. After decades of fielding and initiating lawsuits, the businessman-turned-politician now faces a trial that could result in up to four years in prison if he's convicted, though a no-jail sentence also

would be possible. Trump would also be expected to appeal any conviction.

Trump's attorneys lost a bid to get the hush-money case dismissed and have since repeatedly sought to delay it, prompting a flurry of last-minute appeals court hearings last week. Among other things, Trump's lawyers maintain that the jury pool in overwhelmingly Democratic Manhattan has been tainted by negative publicity about Trump and that the case should be moved elsewhere.

An appeals judge turned down an emergency request to delay the trial while the change-of-venue request goes to a group of appellate judges, who are set to consider it in the coming weeks.

Manhattan prosecutors have countered that a lot of the publicity stems from Trump's own comments and that questioning prospective jurors can put aside any preconceptions they may have. There's no reason, prosecutors said, to think that 12 fair and impartial people can't be found amid Manhattan's roughly 1.4 million adult residents.

The process of choosing those 12, plus six alternates, will begin with scores of people filling into Merchan's courtroom.

They will be known only by number, as he has ordered their names to be kept secret from everyone except prosecutors, Trump and their legal teams.

MIDDLE EAST CRISIS Europe joins US in urging restraint by Israel after Iran attack

AGENCIES

Jerusalem, April 15: Israel's European allies urged it Monday to show restraint over Iran's weekend missile and drone attack, calling on Israeli leaders to step away from "the edge of the cliff" of escalation in the Middle East.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's war cabinet, which is empowered to decide on the country's response, was set to convene Monday afternoon, a government source said. Israeli officials said the war cabinet, which also met Sunday, favoured retaliation but was divided over the timing and scale of any such response.

With the danger of open warfare erupting between Israel and Iran, and tension high over the war in Gaza, President Joe Biden has told Netanyahu the United States will not participate in any Israeli counter-offensive



against Iran, US officials said.

Britain, France, Germany and the European Union's foreign policy chief all joined Washington and United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in calling for restraint.

"We're on the edge of the cliff and we have to move away from it," Josep Borrell, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, told Spanish radio station Onda Cero. "We

Biden hosts Iraqi leader

President Joe Biden Monday hailed the "unprecedented military effort to defend Israel" Monday as he hosted Iraq's leader at the White House and his administration aims to prevent an escalation in Mideast hostilities following Iran's weekend attack. Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani was visiting the White House for talks intended to focus primarily on US-Iraq relations, which had been scheduled well before the Iranian strikes.

have to step on the brakes and reverse gear." French President Emmanuel Macron urged Israel to set its sight on isolating Iran rather than escalating the situation. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz warned Iran not to carry out more attacks and said Israel must also contribute to de-escalation.



Locals and tourists play with water as they celebrate the Songkran holiday which marks the Thai New Year in Bangkok, Thailand

Several injured in stabbing in Sydney church

Sydney: Police in Australia say a man has been arrested after a bishop and three churchgoers were stabbed in Sydney. There are no life-threatening injuries. It occurred during a televised service at the church Monday evening, police said. The Orthodox Assyrian church streams services online. A video on social media shows a man dressed in black approaching a cleric at the altar identified as the bishop at Christ the Good Shepherd in suburban Wakely and appearing to stab him repeatedly in the head and upper body. Members of the congregation are seen screaming and rushing to the bishop's aid. The church website identified the bishop as Mar Mari Emmanuel. NSW Ambulance service said it had treated a man in his 50s for multiple cuts and taken him to a hospital, and three others were treated for one or more cuts at the scene.

Will AI help or hinder trust in science?

AI IS ALREADY REVOLUTIONISING SCIENCE - SIX PER CENT OF ALL SCIENTIFIC WORK LEVERAGES AI, NOT JUST IN COMPUTER SCIENCE, BUT IN CHEMISTRY, PHYSICS, PSYCHOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

In the past year, generative artificial intelligence tools — such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and OpenAI's video generation tool Sora — have captured the public's imagination.

Nature, one of the world's most prestigious scientific journals, included ChatGPT on its 2023 Nature's 10 list of the world's most influential and, until then, exclusively human scientists. The use of AI in science is twofold. At one level, AI can make scientists more productive.

When Google DeepMind released an AI-generated dataset of more than 3,800,000 novel material compounds, Lawrence Berkeley Lab used AI to run compound synthesis experiments at a scale orders of magnitude larger than what could be accomplished by humans. But AI has even greater potential: to enable scientists to make discoveries that otherwise would not be possible at all.

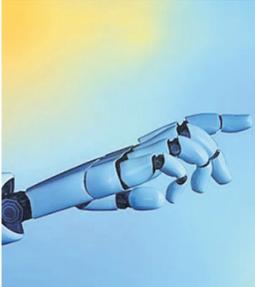
It was an AI algorithm that for the first time found signal patterns in brain-activity data that pointed to the onset of epileptic seizures, a feat that not even the

most experienced human neurologist can repeat.

Early success stories of the use of AI in science have led some to imagine a future in which scientists will collaborate with AI scientific assistants as part of their daily work.

While modern AI systems are impressively powerful — especially so-called artificial general intelligence tools such as ChatGPT and Gemini — they also have drawbacks. Generative AI systems are susceptible to "hallucinations" where they make up facts. Furthermore, many AI systems cannot explain why they produce the output they produce. This is not always a problem. If AI generates a new hypothesis that is then tested by the usual scientific methods, there is no harm done. However, for some applications a lack of explanation can be a problem.

A distinction should be made here between general and narrow AI. Narrow AI is AI trained to carry out a specific task. Narrow AI has already made great strides. Google DeepMind's AlphaFold model has revolutionised how



scientists predict protein structures. But there are many other, less well publicised, successes too — such as AI being used at CSIRO to discover new galaxies in the night sky, IBM Research developing AI that rediscovered Kepler's third law of planetary motion, or Samsung AI building AI that was able to reproduce Nobel prize winning scientific breakthroughs.

When it comes to narrow AI applied to science, trust remains high. AI systems — especially those based on machine learning methods — rarely achieve 100 per cent accuracy on a given task. (In fact, machine learning



systems outperform humans on some tasks, and humans outperform AI systems on many tasks. Humans using AI systems generally outperform humans working alone and they also outperform AI working alone. There is a large scientific evidence base for this fact, including this study.)

ChatGPT, for example, can create a Shakespearean sonnet, suggest a recipe for dinner, summarise a body of academic literature, or generate a scientific hypothesis. When it comes to general AI, the problems of hallucinations and bias are most acute and widespread. That does-

n't mean general AI isn't useful for scientists — but it needs to be used with care.

This means scientists must understand and assess the risks of using AI in a specific scenario and weigh them against the risks of not doing so. Scientists are now routinely using general AI systems to help write papers, assist review of academic literature, and even prepare experimental plans.

One danger when it comes to these scientific assistants could arise if the human scientist takes the outputs for granted. Well-trained, diligent scientists will not do this, of course. But many scientists out there are just trying to survive in a tough industry of publish-or-perish. Scientific fraud is already increasing, even without AI. AI could lead to new levels of scientific misconduct — either through deliberate misuse of the technology, or through sheer ignorance as scientists don't realise that AI is making things up. Both narrow and general AI have great potential to advance scientific discovery.

360INFO.ORG

FBI opens criminal probe into Baltimore bridge collapse: Report



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New York, April 15: The FBI has opened a criminal investigation into the deadly Baltimore bridge collapse incident that will also look into whether the ship, mostly manned by Indians, left the key US port "knowing the vessel had serious systems problems," a media report said Monday.

The 2.6-km-long, four-lane Francis Scott Key Bridge over the Patapsco River collapsed March 26 after the 984-foot ship 'Dali' collided against it. The crew onboard the Dali included 20 Indians and one Sri Lankan.

Six construction workers who were repairing potholes on the bridge plunged into the Patapsco River and died. Of the six victims killed, the bodies of three have been found.

The Washington Post reported Monday that the FBI has opened a criminal investigation "focusing on the massive container ship that brought down the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore last month — a probe that will look at least in part at whether the crew left the port knowing the vessel had serious systems problems."

Lightning, rains kill 36 in Pakistan

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Islamabad, April 15: Lightning and heavy rains have killed at least 36 people, mostly farmers, across Pakistan in the past three days, officials said Monday, as authorities in the country's southwest declared a state of emergency.

Most of the deaths occurred when lightning struck farmers harvesting wheat and rains caused houses to collapse in eastern Punjab province, said Arfan Kathia, a spokesman for the provincial disaster management authority. He said more rains were expected this week.

Rain also lashed the capital, Islamabad, and killed seven people in southwestern Baluchistan province over the weekend. Eight others died in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan. Streets flooded in the northwestern city of Peshawar and in Quetta, the Baluchistan capital.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said in televised remarks that he had ordered authorities to provide relief aid. Pakistan's water reservoirs would improve because of the rains, he said.

business

of the day quote

The decline in PE investments in Indian real estate has been due to lower activity by foreign investors, due to global macro-economic factors and geopolitical instability

SHOBHIT AGARWAL | MD & CEO, ANAROCK CAPITAL

We just entered that (aspirational) range. So, we would aspire to stay here or at least go up as close to 28 (per cent) as possible. We do believe that there are a little more headroom left for us to increase our (margins)

K KRITHIVASAN | CEO & MD, TCS

Running out of funds while abroad is stressful and relying on credit cards exacerbates the issue with exorbitant conversion charges, and often restrictive credit limits. Our instant reload feature address these concerns and offering unparalleled peace of mind to travelers

SUDARSHAN MOTWANI | CEO, BOOKMYFOREX.COM

SHORT TAKES

Mahindra enters hybrid RE space

New Delhi: Mahindra Susten Monday said it will foray into the hybrid renewable energy segment by setting up a ₹1,200-crore 150-megawatt solar wind energy project in Maharashtra. The project includes installation of a 101 megawatt (MW) wind and 52 MW solar capacity, Mahindra Group said in a statement. The facility is expected to generate 460 million kilowatt-hour (kWh) of clean energy, offsetting 420,000 tonne of CO2 emissions. Mahindra Group will develop a 150 MW hybrid RE (Renewable Energy solar + wind) project at a total project cost of about ₹1,200 crore, said Mahindra Susten, a part of Mahindra Group and a leader in renewable Independent Power Producer (IPP) business.

Runaya to go public

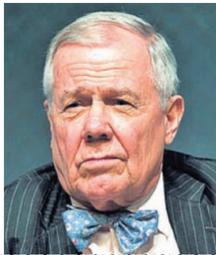
Jharsuguda: Runaya, a metal recycling startup of two sons of Vedanta executive vice-chairman Navin Agarwal, said it is ready with all paper work and waiting for bankers' go-ahead to launch its initial public offering. "We are prepared from the paper work point of view. We are 100 per cent prepared," Ananya Agarwal, one of the co-founders and CEO at Runaya, told PTI in an interaction here. The company, however, is yet to have any timelines or dates as far as its initial public offering (IPO) plan is concerned. Runaya has already invested around ₹300 crore and plans to infuse an additional ₹700 crore over the next 18-20 months for the expansion of its business.

No sugar exports

New Delhi: The government Monday ruled out possibility of allowing sugar exports in the current 2023-24 season ending October, the industry's persistent demand notwithstanding. Currently, there are curbs on export of sugar for an indefinite period. However, Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) has requested the government to allow export of 10 lakh tonne of sugar in the 2023-24 season, anticipating healthy closing stock by the season-end.

Tesla to sack 10%

Washington: Tesla will lay off more than 10% of its global workforce, an internal memo seen by Reuters Monday shows, as it grapples with falling sales and an intensifying price war for electric vehicles.



War has never been good for the stock markets. The exception is the oil and gold markets where the prices go up

JIM ROGERS | CHAIRMAN, ROGERS HOLDINGS

Vi 5G ROLLOUT AFTER FPO

Ahead of its ₹18,000 crore further public offer (FPO), Vodafone Idea (Vi) Monday said it expects to roll out 5G services in select pockets in 6-9 months of the issue. Its Chief Executive Akshaya Moondra said rollout of the 5G services is one of the objectives of raising the capital from the public and once the funding comes, it will start work on the rollout



A WORLD IN WARS

ME concerns sink D-St

Sensex, Nifty tank over 1% on concerns over Middle East conflict, weak global trends

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, April 15: Stock markets took a beating Monday with benchmark Sensex and Nifty tumbling over 1 per cent as escalating conflict in the Middle East (ME) and weak trends from global markets unnerved investors.

Falling for the second session in a row, the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 845.12 points or 1.14 per cent to settle at a more than two-week low of 73,399.78. During the day, it plunged 929.74 points or 1.25 per cent to 73,315.16.

The NSE Nifty declined 246.90 points or 1.10 per cent to settle at 22,272.50.

Key indices had plunged by over 1 per cent in the previous session Friday due to profit taking by investors at record high levels. Sensex lost 1,638 points or 2.19 per cent while Nifty plunged 481 points or 2.13 per cent to slip below the 22,300 level in two straight sessions.

Foreign fund outflows and hotter-than-expected US inflation data also played spoilsport for the markets.

Analysts said the renewed conflict in the Middle East, proposed changes in the India-Mauritius tax treaty and the hotter-than-expected US inflation proved to be major drags.

From the Sensex basket, Wipro, ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance, Tata



SENSEX TANKS 1.14% TO END AT OVER TWO-WEEK LOW OF 73,399.78

NIFTY DIPS 1.10% TO SETTLE AT 22,272.50

The escalation in the Iran-Israel conflict is a serious development and Indian markets will be under pressure over the next few sessions

SAMIR BAHL | CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ANAND RATHI ADVISORS

Motors, Larsen & Toubro, Tech Mahindra and HDFC Bank were the major laggards. Nestle, Maruti and Bharti Airtel were the gainers.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined 1.54 per cent and midcap index dipped 1.50 per cent. Among the indices, services dropped by 2.12 per cent, financial services by 1.81 per cent, IT by 1.58 per cent, bankex by 1.55 per cent and utilities by 1.37 per cent.

Energy and oil & gas were the

gainers. A total of 2,991 stocks declined while 913 advanced and 145 remained unchanged.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled lower while Shanghai ended in the positive territory. European markets were trading on a mixed note. Wall Street ended significantly lower Friday.

"Geopolitical tensions and higher-than-expected US inflation impacted investor sentiment and dragged the indices to a lower note. The major casual-

Investors' wealth erodes by ₹5.18L-cr

A sharp plunge in the stock market wiped out ₹5.18 lakh crore from investors' wealth Monday as an escalating conflict in the Middle East hit the market sentiment. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies fell by ₹5,18,953.97 crore to ₹3,94,48,097.94 crore (₹4.73 trillion).

ties were the mid- and small-cap indices due to their rich valuation and expectation of moderation in earnings growth in Q4FY24. On the other hand, the European market opened on a positive note while oil prices inched lower as market participants expected that the diplomatic efforts were likely to de-escalate tensions in the Middle East," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 1.04 per cent to \$89.51 a barrel.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 8,027 crore Friday, according to exchange data.

Retail inflation declined to a five-month low of 4.85 per cent in March, inching towards the Reserve Bank's target of 4 per cent, according to official data released Friday.

Embattled Byju's streamlines biz

REUTERS

Bangalore, April 15: Indian education technology company Byju's will restructure its business into three divisions, with founder and CEO Byju Raveendran taking a more active role in day-to-day operations, the embattled startup said Monday.

Byju's, once one of India's hottest startups, has suffered numerous setbacks in the past few years, leading to a crisis of investor confidence, thousands of job cuts and its valuation nose diving to under \$3 billion, from \$22 billion in 2022.

Byju's will now consolidate into three divisions - its marquee online learning app business, online classes and tuition centers and lastly, test preparation - with each having a separate head, the company said.

This comes after a seven-month operational and costs review led by India CEO Arjun Mohan, who will step down.

CHINA HURDLES

Steelmakers fall short of target

REUTERS

Washington, April 15: Leading Indian steelmakers fell short of an investment target for the fiscal year to March 2024 due to a delay in importing machinery from China and securing visas for Chinese experts, according to a government document reviewed by Reuters and sources.

Under a production-linked incentive programme, launched in 2020, 27 steelmakers including JSW Steel Ltd, Tata Steel Ltd, and ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel Ltd signed 57 agreements with the government, promising to invest Rs 21,000 crore (₹2.52 billion) in the 2023/24 fiscal year.

But steel companies managed to invest only Rs 15,000 crore, according to two sources with knowledge of the matter, slowing down capacity expansion in the world's second-biggest crude steel producer even as do-



mestic demand remained strong.

Steel companies have been facing difficulties in importing machinery from China and ensuring visa clearances for Chinese experts for more than six months, according to the government and the sources. Some of the steel mills that managed to get equipment on time failed to get experts from China to work on new projects, one of the sources said.

India's foreign ministry has issued guidelines to facilitate visa clearances for Chinese engineers, according to the docu-

Merchandise exports dip marginally

MARCH WITNESSED THE HIGHEST MONTHLY MERCHANDISE EXPORTS DURING 2023-24 AT \$41.68BN

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 15: India's merchandise exports declined marginally in March to \$41.68 billion, while for the entire 2023-24 it dipped 3.11 per cent to \$437.06 billion, as geopolitical issues continued to hamper global shipments.

Imports, too, declined 5.98 per cent to \$57.28 billion in March, taking the trade deficit to 15.6 billion during the month.

According to commerce ministry data released Monday, the imports during 2023-24 stood at \$77.24 billion, down 5.41 per cent from \$81.59 billion in the preceding year.

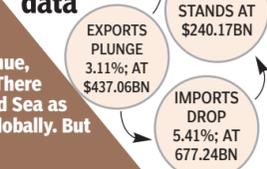
The trade deficit or gap between imports and exports worked to be \$240.17 billion.

Replying to a query on escalation of the crisis in the Middle East, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal, who was briefing about the trade data, said the ministry was monitoring the situation and will take "appropriate action". However, he did not elaborate due to the Model Code of Conduct in the wake of



The financial year 2023-24 was difficult from a trade point of view since not only did the Ukraine-Russia conflict continue, but other conflicts came up. There were huge issues with the Red Sea as well as recessionary trends globally. But India has beaten all the odds

FY24 trade data



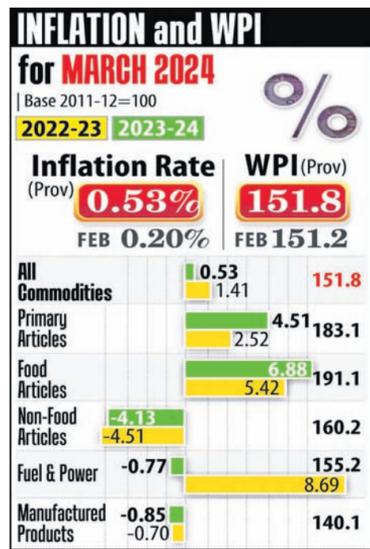
SUNIL BARTHWAL | COMMERCE SECRETARY

the ongoing Lok Sabha election. The overall exports (merchandise + services) are estimated to surpass last year's highest record, the Secretary said.

It is estimated to reach \$776.68 billion in 2023-24 as compared to \$776.40 billion in 2022-23.

Main drivers of merchandise export growth in 2023-24 include electronic goods, drugs and pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, iron ore, cotton yarn/fabs/made-ups, handloom products and ceramic products and glassware. Electronic goods exports in-

WPI inflation hits three-month high



With the fading of a supportive base, it is anticipated that the WPI inflation will edge up in the upcoming months. The recent increase in global commodity prices, particularly driven by higher Brent crude prices and a rise in industrial metal prices, is expected to add to upward pressures on WPI

RAJANI SINHA | CHIEF ECONOMIST, CAREEDGE RATINGS

Wholesale Price Index-based inflation was in the negative zone from April to Oct and had turned positive in Nov at 0.26%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 15: Wholesale inflation in the country rose marginally to three-month high of 0.53 per cent in March compared to 0.20 per cent in the preceding month due to increase in prices of vegetables, potato, onion and crude oil.

The inflation in March 2023 was 1.41 per cent.

"The annual rate of inflation based on all-India Wholesale Price Index (WPI) number is 0.53 per cent (provisional) for the month of March, 2024 (over March, 2023)," the commerce and industry ministry said in a statement Monday.

Food inflation moved up marginally to 6.88 per cent in March from 5.42 per cent in the same month a year ago, data showed. Inflation in vegetables was 19.52 per cent, up from (-2.39) per cent in the same month a year ago.

WPI for potato witnessed a jump of 52.96 per cent against a deflation of 25.59 per cent, while for onion 56.99 per cent as compared to (-) 36.83 per cent in March 2023.

The food inflation also shot up to a three-month high of 4.6 per cent in March 2024.

"The increase in the food inflation largely emanated from the cereal's inflation which stood

at a 12-month high of 9 per cent. The other items such as pulses and vegetables which are important for ordinary consumers' households' basket witnessed elevated inflation of 17.2 per cent and 19.5 per cent, respectively in March 2024," India Ratings and Research Senior Director Sunil Kumar Sinha said.

However, core inflation continues to be in a deflationary mode with March print at (-) 1.1 per cent.

The data showed that inflation in the crude petroleum segment rose by 10.26 per cent in March this year against a deflation of 23.53 per cent in March 2023 due to hardening of crude prices globally.

Positive rate of inflation in March 2024 is primarily due to increase in prices of food articles, electricity, machinery & equipment and other manufacturing etc.

The prices of manufactured products also declined 0.85 per cent.

Meanwhile, retail inflation declined to a five-month low of 4.85 per cent in March mainly due to cooling food prices.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based retail inflation was 5.09 per cent in February and 5.66 per cent in March 2023. Previously, CPI-based inflation was the lowest at 4.87 per cent in October 2023.

The inflation in the food basket was at 8.52 per cent in March, down from 8.66 per cent in February, according to the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) last week.

POWER DEMAND

Coal plants told to run at full capacity till October 15

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 15: The Ministry of Power has asked all thermal plants using imported coal to operate at full capacity for another three and a half months till October 15 to avoid electricity shortage amid rising demand in the country.

The ministry has projected peak power demand of 260 GW during the summer season (April to June) in view of longer heat wave duration. Peak power demand had touched all-time higher of 243 GW in September 2023.

A power ministry notice to 15 imported coal-based thermal power projects April 12 stated, "It has now been decided to extend the time period for Section 11 directive to generating companies having imported coal-based plants, up to October 15, 2024."

In October 2023, the ministry extended the deadline for these imported coal-based plants to operate at full capacity from November 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024.

In February 2023, the ministry had invoked Section 11 of the Electricity Act 2003 to avoid any outage due to a sudden rise in power demand.

Kokata, Mumbai to host ISL semis April 28 and 29

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, April 15: Kolkata and Mumbai will host the second leg of the semifinals of this edition of the Indian Super League April 28 and 29 respectively, the organisers announced Monday. The semifinals will be played in a home-and-away format, with the winners over two legs playing the grand finale May 4.

PLAYOFFS SCHEDULE

- April 19: Knockout 1**
Odisha FC vs Kerala Blasters (Kalinga Stadium, Bhubaneswar)
- April 20: Knockout 2**
FC Goa vs Chennaiyin FC (Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, Goa)
- April 23: Semifinal 1 (1st leg)**
Winner of Knockout 1 (home) vs Mohun Bagan Super Giant
- April 24: Semifinal 2 (1st leg)**
Winner of Knockout 2 (home) vs Mumbai City FC
- April 28: Semifinal 1 (2nd leg)**
Mohun Bagan Super Giant (home) vs Winner of Knockout 1
- April 29: Semifinal 2 (2nd leg)**
Mumbai City FC (home) vs Winner of Knockout 2

In a thrilling culmination, Mohun Bagan clinched the coveted maiden title of ISL Champions with Mumbai City FC securing the second spot, both teams thereby confirming their places in the semifinals. Teams ranked third to sixth will battle it out in single leg knockout matches to determine the other two semifinalists.

Run riot in Bangalore

HEAD SHINES IN BATTERS' PARADISE AS SRH BEAT RCB BY 25 RUNS IN A RECORD-BREAKING MATCH

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore, April 15: Travis Head's destructive hundred fused splendidly with skipper Pat Cummins' resolve as Sunrisers Hyderabad registered a well-crafted 25-run victory over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in a high-scoring affair here Monday. Head's maiden T20 hundred (102, 41b, 9x4, 8x6) and Heinrich Klaasen's pillaging 67 (31b, 2x4, 7x6) drove SRH to a record-breaking 287/3, also going past their own 277/3 against Mumbai Indians at Hyderabad this March 27.

The visiting bowlers led by Cummins (3/43) showed superb skill level on a barren pitch, something their counterparts lacked, to restrict RCB to 262/7. This IPL match also witnessed the highest cumulative runs scored – 549 in any single T20 match.

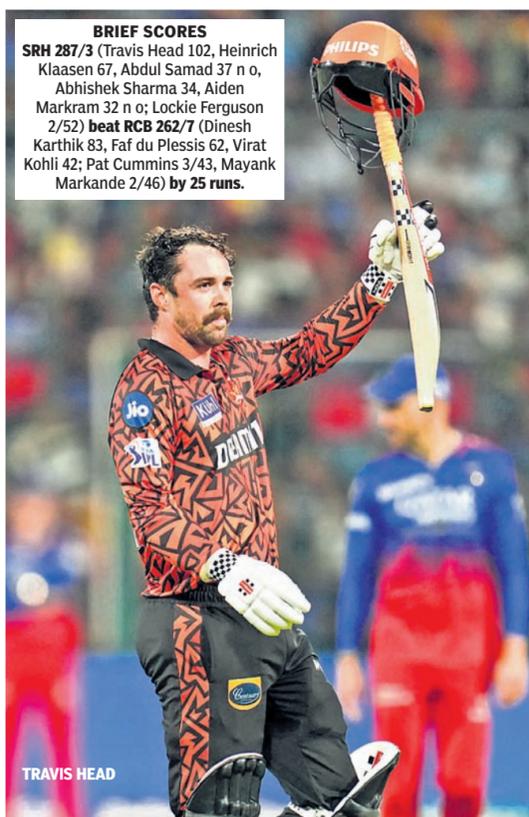
Skipper Faf du Plessis (62, 28b, 7x4, 4x6) and the super-improving Dinesh Karthik (83, 35b, 5x4, 7x6) played fine hands but on the night they ended as mere footnotes.

However, RCB began their chase of 288 with gusto with Du Plessis and Virat Kohli (42, 20b, 6x4, 2x6) making 50 in just 3.5 overs, bettering SRH's timing for their 50 in 4.3 overs. The Faf-Kohli pair reached 79 in the powerplay overs and 80 in 6.2 overs but the introduction of leg-spinner Mayank Markande changed the complexion of the game.

Kohli's attempt to slog sweep Markande saw the ball sneaking under his bat to rattle the stumps. From that point, the RCB lost four wickets in the span of 41 runs to slip to 121/4. The fourth wicket to fall during that phase was that of Du Plessis.

Karthik and Mahipal Lomror (19) milked 59 runs off 29 balls

BRIEF SCORES
SRH 287/3 (Travis Head 102, Heinrich Klaasen 67, Abdul Samad 37 n o, Abhishek Sharma 34, Aiden Markram 32 n o; Lockie Ferguson 2/52) beat RCB 262/7 (Dinesh Karthik 83, Faf du Plessis 62, Virat Kohli 42; Pat Cummins 3/43, Mayank Markande 2/46) by 25 runs.



TRAVIS HEAD

for the sixth wicket, and the former also made 63 for the seventh wicket with Anuj Rawat as RCB moved along briskly. But in the end, it was sufficient only to provide some artificial excitement to the full house.

Earlier, Head's destructive hundred was the driving force behind Hyderabad's imposing total. The South Australian added 108 runs off 49 balls with his opening partner Abhishek Sharma

(34) and 57 off 26 balls with Klaasen for the second wicket as the hosts' bowlers wilted under sustained firing.

Head's innings at the Chinnaswamy Stadium was a telltale example of the simple principles he follows in batting – anything in his hitting arc will disappear far and wide. The 30-year-old displayed that chilling efficiency against RCB pacers Reece Topley and debutant

287/3 SRH's total against RCB is the highest in the history of the IPL, bettering the 277/3 they posted against MI three weeks ago. It is also the second highest team total in men's T20s after Nepal's 314/3 against Mongolia in the Asian Games

549 Match aggregate of SRH-RCB game, surpassing the previous best in the men's T20s of 523 in the match between SRH and MI

38 Sixes hit in the match became the joint most in a men's T20 game, equalling the feat of SRH-MI match

22 Sixes hit by the SRH are the most by any team in an innings in the IPL surpassing RCB's 21-six record against Pune Warriors in 2013, also in Bangalore

1 SRH are now the first team with multiple 250-plus totals in the IPL. Surrey (3), Yorkshire (2), Czech Republic (2) and Somerset (2) are the other teams with multiple 250-plus totals in all T20s

4 All four pace bowlers of RCB conceded 50-plus runs in SRH's innings – Reece Topley (68), Yash Dayal (51), Lockie Ferguson (52) and Vijaykumar Vyshak (64). It is the first-ever instance of four players conceding 50-plus runs in the same innings in men's T20s

39 Balls Travis Head needed for his hundred is the fourth-fastest in the history of the IPL. Chris Gayle's 30-ball century at the same venue in 2013 against Pune Warriors is the fastest-ever

Lockie Ferguson, who walked in for out-of-form of Glenn Maxwell.

The landmark moment of breaking their own record came when Aiden Markram (32 n o, 17b) took a single off Vysakh to long-off. Markram also added 56 runs for the unbroken fourth wicket alliance with Abdul Samad (37, 10b, 4x4, 3x6).

Phil Salt may have walked away with the player-of-the-match award in their solid eight-wicket win over LSG here Sunday, but it was Narine, who choked LSG in the middle overs to limit them to a below-par 161/7.

Come Tuesday, the likes of Sanju Samson, Riyan Parag and

KKR eye top spot as they take on Royals



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, April 15: Rajasthan Royals' star-studded batting will face the serious challenge of decoding Sunil Narine's mystery at Eden Gardens when they take on two-time champions Kolkata Knight Riders in a top-of-the-table IPL clash here Tuesday.

Narine, who is one month shy of turning 36, had played a pivotal role in KKR's twin triumphs under former skipper Gautam Gambhir in 2012 and 2014. Ever since joining the side way back in 2012, Narine has sizzled at Eden Gardens with his crafty bowling, proving to be a big threat to opposition batters.

Now after reuniting with Gambhir, who returned to the team as their mentor, Narine dished out an allround show, reigniting their title hopes again and a win against RR will hand them the pole position in the 10-team standings ahead of the halfway stage of the season.

His 1/19 against the SRH or 1/17 against LSG may have failed to grab attention but those eight overs where he did not concede a single boundary made all the difference in the end for KKR.

Phil Salt may have walked away with the player-of-the-match award in their solid eight-wicket win over LSG here Sunday, but it was Narine, who choked LSG in the middle overs to limit them to a below-par 161/7.

Come Tuesday, the likes of Sanju Samson, Riyan Parag and

Shimron Hetmyer – who all have struck at the rate of more than 155 this season – will be up against the Narine challenge. It remains to be seen if Jos Buttler is fit to be included in the playing XI after missing their last fixture against Punjab Kings.

With his ability to express himself at the top, Narine, who has a strike-rate of 183.51 and averages 33-plus this season, has a Rashid Khan-like aura at KKR. Their IPL record buy Mitchell Starc has also shut all the noise to return to his elements, claiming two wickets in the last over for his 3/28 against LSG.

In such a scenario, the top-of-the-table contest may well boil down to KKR's bowling versus RR's batting. KKR's only weaklink could be their skipper Shreyas Iyer's poor form with the bat.

KKR's batting has largely depended this season on Salt-Narine's fireworks at the top and Andre Russell's blitz at the death, as their Indian batters have not been tested much.

Rinku Singh has had a quiet season with 63 runs from four innings and has not got much opportunity, while team vice-captain Nitish Rana is sidelined with an injury.

MATCHDAY

Indian Premier League
KKR vs RR
Time: 07:30 pm
Telecast: Star Sports Network
Stream: Jio Cinema

Vidit beats Nakamura to come back in hunt



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Toronto, April 15: Indian Grandmaster Vidit Gujrathi came back firing on all cylinders after previous match defeat and crashed through the defences of second seed Hikaru Nakamura of United States in the ninth round of the Candidates chess tournament here.

The all-Indian duel between D Gukesh and R Praggnanandhaa ended in a draw without much ado as the day saw no other decisive games.

Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia lived by the sword against Frenchman Firouzja Alireza before signing peace while Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan showed that he was almost impregnable as white and held his forte against American Fabiano Caruana.

With five rounds and two rest days still to come in the biggest event of the year, Nepomniachtchi and Gukesh continued to be joint leaders on 5.5 points out of a possible nine while Praggnanandhaa is the sole third half a point behind.

Nakamura, Gujrathi and Caruana share the fourth spot on 4.5 points and are all within string distance with Alireza on 3.5 and Abasov on three points.

The Candidates had begun with four draws on the opening day and followed up with a brilliant victory by Gujrathi over Nakamura. The second half was

just a reminiscent as Gujrathi was in his element yet again to score over the American again.

Despite losing to Gukesh in the previous round, Gujrathi decided to continue with the Italian opening and got rewarded as Nakamura went for a side variation by pushing his king side pawns too early.

With a timely breakthrough in the centre, the dynamics in the position remained but Gujrathi was quick to spot a tactic missed by Nakamura. What followed was mayhem for black on the board. Nakamura called it a day when checkmate became inevitable.

In the women's section, R Vaishali's hope for a turnaround ended with another loss coming at the hands of Zhongyi Tan of China. The Chinese shot back into sole lead on six points in nine games. Tan-Vaishali contest was the lone decisive game of the day.

India's Koneru Humpy improved her position a bit after drawing with Kateryna Lagno of Russia while overnight joint leader Tingjie Lei was held to a draw by Nurgul Salimova of Bulgaria.

In the other game of the day, Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine played out a draw with Aleksandra Goryachkina of Russia. Lei shares the second spot with Goryachkina on 5.5 points with Lagno on their toes with a half point adrift.

Leverkusen end Bayern's 11-year reign

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Leverkusen (Germany), April 15: It's "Neverkusen" no more. Coached by Xabi Alonso, Bayer Leverkusen won the Bundesliga title for the first time Sunday to end Bayern Munich's 11-year reign as champion.

In the end, it wasn't even close – Leverkusen lead second-place Bayern by 16 points after stretching their German record unbeaten run to 43 games across all competitions this season.

Florian Wirtz scored a hat-trick as Leverkusen routed Werder Bremen 5-0 and the game ended with a pitch invasion Sunday to secure the club's first-ever German league title with five games remaining.

"It's indescribable... I don't think it's possible, or I personally can't even realize it yet," Wirtz told broadcaster DAZN.

Fans had already stormed onto the field when Leverkusen scored their fourth goal with seven minutes to go, and the final minutes were played in thick red smoke from supporters' pyrotechnics while players on Leverkusen's bench clapped along to songs, danced and hugged one another.

The fifth goal in the 90th brought more fans onto the field – hundreds this time – and the referee ended the game amid confusion and jubilation. Thousands of supporters crowded the field waving flags, flares and cardboard copies of the



Bundesliga trophy.

Leverkusen finally shed their reputation as perennial runners-up after five second-place finishes in the league and one in the Champions League.

Alonso, who took over as coach when Leverkusen was in the relegation zone in October 2022, reflected on ending Bayern's dominance. "Perhaps it's healthy for the Bundesliga, also for German football, for another team to win," said Alonso, who

won three Bundesliga titles with Bayern as a player from 2015-17.

"It's a great joy and we have to enjoy it. We need a bit more time to realize what we've achieved. But it's a super moment and yes, we'll see what happens next," Alonso said, referring to the other trophies that his team can win this season. "But now is the time to celebrate."

Leverkusen are aiming for a

historic treble of trophies. Alonso's team will play second-division Kaiserslautern in the German Cup final in Berlin May 25 and has a 2-0 lead over West Ham after their Europa League quarterfinal first leg.

The club started as a workers' team for the Bayer pharmaceutical giant 120 years ago and is a rare exception in Germany, where most clubs are majority-controlled by members under the so-called 50+1 rule.

HPCA to host IPL ties in newly-laid 'hybrid pitch'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dharamsala, April 15: The picturesque Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association (HPCA) stadium has become the first BCCI-accredited venue to install state-of-the-art 'hybrid pitch' to host two IPL matches this season.

"The hybrid track has been installed and the two IPL games will be played on newly installed surface," a HPCA official told PTI on conditions of anonymity. The Netherlands-based 'SISGrass', a part of the SIS Pitches group of companies, has been roped in for the first-ever hybrid pitch installation.

According to a press release, "this cutting-edge technology will transform the game by providing a more durable, consistent,



and high-performing playing surface."

HPCA president RP Singh said, "The arrival of groundbreaking hybrid pitch technology in India signifies a game-changing moment for our national cricket."

Paul Taylor, a former England cricketer and SIS's international cricket director said, "As we inject new and improved technological advancements into India's vibrant cricket ecosystem, we foresee a catalytic effect on its growth trajectory."

SIS forayed in India after the ICC allowed the use of hybrid surfaces for T20 and 50-over competitions. Following the success of installing hybrids across English cricket grounds, SIS decided to develop the technology in India.

The surface contains a small percentage of polymer fibre with the natural turf inside cricket stadiums. This composition is believed to be more resilient to stresses created during play, while prolonging life of the pitch, guaranteeing an even bounce and easing pressure on groundstaff.

The completed installations are still predominantly natural grass, with only five per cent polymer fibre used to ensure that the characteristics of an all-natural pitch are maintained.

"The Universal' machine, used in Dharamsala for the hybrid pitch, will be taken to Ahmedabad and Mumbai for creating further such pitches. It will remain in India for future projects.

In the UK, hybrid pitches are approved for T20 and 50-over competitions and will also be used in the four-day County Championship matches this season. The Universal machine has been used to install SISGrass at various grounds in England such as Lord's, The Oval, Edgbaston, Old Trafford and Trent Bridge.

It must be noted that Dharamsala pitch and outfield came under scanner during the ODI World Cup last year and the entire playing surface was refurbished.