



Advocating meritocracy

Actor Parineeti Chopra discusses industry challenges, urges meritocracy and stresses visibility for equal opportunities

LEISURE | P2



More damage, deaths

Kremlin says US House of Representatives' approval of security aid to Ukraine would lead to more damage and deaths

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Direct tax collection surges

India's net direct tax collections surge by a massive 17.7 per cent year-on-year to ₹19.58 crore in the fiscal year ended March 2024

BUSINESS | P11



Gukesh shines

D Gukesh edges close to winning the Candidates Chess tournament title with a win over Firouzja Alireza of France

SPORTS | P12



Empty chairs for Kejriwal, Soren at mega INDIA rally

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ranchi, April 21: Two empty chairs - one each for jailed Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren - were kept on stage as the INDIA bloc organised a mega rally in Ranchi Sunday. The 'Ulgulan Nyay Maharally' was organised mainly by the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and a large number of its workers wore Soren's masks. Soren was arrested on the night of January 31 by the ED in a money laundering case linked to an alleged land fraud. The same Central agency also arrested

Kejriwal March 21 associated with a liquor policy scam. Though chairs for the JMM executive president and the AAP supremo were kept empty, their wives Kalpana Soren and Sunita Kejriwal were seated on the dais. They are apparently set for their larger political roles following the arrest of their spouses. The crowd raised slogans like "Jail ka tala tutega, Hemant Soren chhutega" (The jail lock will be broken, Hemant Soren will be released) and "Jharkhand jhukega nahi" (Jharkhand will not bow down). The workers assembled for the 'Ulgulan Nyay Maharally' braving scorching

heat as the Jharkhand capital's temperature was hovering around 40 degrees Celsius. Besides Kalpana and Sunita, JMM supremo Shibu Soren, National Conference president Farooq Abdullah, RJD leader and former Bihar deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann and others attended the rally in a mega show of strength for the opposition bloc. The word 'Ulgulan', which means revolution, was coined during Birsa Munda's fight against the British for the rights of the tribals.

Master's degree not mandatory to pursue PhD: UGC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 21: Students with four-year undergraduate degrees can now directly appear for NET and pursue PhD, according to University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman Jagadesh Kumar. To pursue a PhD with or without a Junior Research Fellowship (JRF), the candidates will require a minimum of 75 per cent marks or equivalent grades in their four-year undergraduate course. So far, a candidate for the National Eligibility Test (NET) needed a master's degree with a minimum of 55 per cent marks. The candidates with four-year undergraduate degrees can now directly pursue PhD and appear for NET. Such candidates are allowed to appear in a subject in which they want to pursue a PhD irrespective of the discipline in which they have obtained the four-year bachelor's degree, Kumar told PTI. The candidates having passed a four-year or eight-semester bachelor's degree should have a minimum of 75 per cent marks in aggregate or its equivalent grade on a point scale wherever the grading system is followed, the UGC chairman said.

Now, students with 4-yr bachelor's degrees, 75% marks can directly pursue PhD

Age no barrier for health insurance

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 21: With a view to widen the market and foster adequate protection from healthcare expenses, insurance regulator IRDAI has removed the age limit of 65 years for individuals buying health insurance policies. This marks a significant departure from the conventional constraints that limited individuals in securing comprehensive coverage. By abolishing the maximum age restriction on purchasing health insurance plans, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) aims to foster a more inclusive and accessible healthcare ecosystem, ensuring adequate protection against unforeseen medical expenses. As per the earlier guidelines, individuals were allowed to purchase a new insurance policy only till the age of 65. However, with the recent amendment, which has been effective from April 1, anyone, regardless of age, is eligible to buy a new



Insurers have been mandated to offer health policies to individuals with pre-existing medical conditions of any kind

Consequently, insurers are prohibited from refusing to issue policies to individuals with severe medical conditions like cancer, heart or renal failure, and AIDS

health insurance policy. In a recent gazette notification, IRDAI said, "Insurers shall ensure that they offer health insurance products to cater to all age groups. Insurers may design products specifically for senior citizens, students, children, maternity, and any other group as specified by the Competent Authority." Besides, insurers have been mandated to offer health policies to individuals with pre-existing medical conditions of any kind. Consequently, insurers are prohibited from refusing to issue policies to individuals with severe medical conditions like cancer, heart or renal failure, and AIDS. According to the notification, insurers are allowed to offer premium payment in instalments for the convenience of policyholders. Travel policies can only be offered by general and health insurers, it said. There is no limit on AYUSH treatment coverage. Treatments under systems like Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy will receive coverage up to the sum insured without any cap, it said. Policyholders with benefit-based policies can file multiple claims with various insurers, enhancing flexibility and options, it said. The proposed regulation seeks to handle the complaints and claims of senior citizens via a specialised channel, ensuring a more tailored and responsive approach to their requirements, it added.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Thankfully, people decide not to vote. Otherwise, we might have lost

WEATHER	
	BBSR CTC
Max Temp	41.6°C 41.6°C
Min Temp	27.1°C 27.0°C
Humidity	70% 61%
Rainfall	Nil Nil
FORECAST	
HEAT WAVE	

SHORT TAKES

Amit Shah to visit Sonepur Thursday

Bhubaneswar: Union Home Minister Amit Shah is scheduled to address a public meeting in the western Odisha town of Sonepur under Bolangir Parliamentary constituency April 25, a BJP leader said Sunday. BJP vice-president Golak Mohapatra said that Shah's public meeting Thursday afternoon will be held as part of the party's campaigning in favour of its candidates. Shah is likely to focus on "Odisha's 'asmita' (pride), Maa (woman), Mati (soil) and Matrubhoomi (motherland), besides the labour migration problem in the state," Mohapatra said. Shah will spend the night in Bhubaneswar where he will hold a meeting with senior leaders. The BJP is comparatively better placed than the BJD in western Odisha where the saffron party won all five Lok Sabha seats in 2019.



Summer vacation in schools from Apr 25

Bhubaneswar: The state government Sunday announced summer vacation for school students from April 25 in view of the prevailing intense heatwave conditions in the state. In a press statement, the state government said all schools, including those run by government, government-aided and private, will remain closed from April 25. The government has also announced morning classes from 6.30am to 10.30am in schools for three days from April 22 to April 24. Earlier, the state had ordered the closure of all schools in the state for three days from April 18 to 20 after a severe heatwave situation during which the temperature rose to above 45 degrees Celsius, in the state.



'Devil Comet' closest to Earth after 71 yrs

The inter-galactic visitor has earned the wicked nickname since it periodically explodes violently and releases 'cryo-magma' that gives it an irregular shape resembling a Devil's horns

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Mumbai, April 21: The periodical comet, named '12P/Pons-Brooks' finally reached closest to greet Earth Sunday, as it hurtles towards the sun on its return journey after 71 years, thrilling the Indian and global scientific community. The celestial visitor, also nicknamed 'Devil Comet' has been affording its glimpses to humanity since early March, appearing as a bright, tiny spot that was captured on cameras by some astronomers from India, said scientist and Founder-Secretary of Amateur Astronomers Association (Mumbai), Bharat Adur. "From tomorrow, the comet will start its 'perihelion passage', meaning its closest point to the sun when it will shine the brightest. Then it will approach Earth till about 232 million km by June, when it will be visible from many parts of the world, but would appear fainter," said Adur to IANS. He shared an exclusive photo by Ashish Sinojia, an amateur astronomer, who trudged out to the stark barren land of the Kachchh district of Gujarat this week, to capture the sky visitor in its full glory.



The 12P/Pons-Brooks comet is estimated to be bigger than Mt. Everest (8.84 km tall), and as per scientific experts' calculations in a 2020 research paper, the chunks of ice and rocks were nearly 17 km across, or more than double the world's tallest mountain. It has a nucleus estimated to be around 30 km in diameter and everything zooms in space at mind-boggling speeds of 26,000 km/hour, with the streak increasing as it approaches the sun. The inter-galactic visitor is actually a cold, active cryovolcanic comet, zipping through the skies and has earned a wicked nickname - the 'Devil

Comet' - since it periodically explodes violently, releases 'cryo-magma' comprising billions of kg of ice, water, and gases (meteoric shower) that give it an irregular shape resembling a Devil's horns. In fact, in the last week of December 2023, the 12P/Pons-Brooks suddenly caught attention after a series of violent explosions rocked it and let off the 'meteor showers', very far away from Earth. Adur urged the people, especially the youth to scan the skies, on the western horizon in the Aries Constellation, after sunset till around 8:15pm and avail a 'darshan' of the comet, "as its next visit to the solar system will be only in August 2095". He added that as per the StarWalk app, the 12P/Pons-Brooks was last witnessed at perihelion May 22, 1954, and later, humanity witnessed and wowed at the electrifying Halley's Comet (1986) spectacle in the skies. "This is truly a historical, once-in-a-lifetime astronomical spectacle... Nobody currently living on Earth may recall having seen the 12P/Pons-Brooks back in 1954, and hardly anybody will live to witness it on its next interplanetary journey in 2095," said a smiling Adur.

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leisure

FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
Ideas play havoc in your head today. The good thing is that you will execute them well. Here is a word of caution for you: avoid hasty decisions. Experienced people will help you find a firm footing. Ganesh advises you to pay heed to elders' counselling.

TAURUS
Religious sentiments will be ruling your thoughts today, says Ganesh. This is a great day for making a trip to a temple or a popular religious destination. You should take your parents and other family members along on this auspicious journey. Your parents are sure to shower their love and blessings upon you and pray for your well being.

GEMINI
You will be faced with household problems and worries about your children today. You will need to help your children with schoolwork in the morning. In the evening you will likely head out to dinner with family and friends and relax, says Ganesh.

CANCER
Today, it will be all about finding your comfort zone, and spending the day there. You are likely to spend most of the day with your close friends. Your smooth demeanour will help you breeze through all business deals. The opposite sex may find you irresistible.

LEO
Don't expect you'll be handed everything on a silver platter. Especially today, you must put such expectations on the back burner, says Ganesh. Today, you would do better to dig deep into your resources of persistence, as a somewhat less productive day awaits you.

VIRGO
You will charm people with your flexibility of thought and willingness to adjust today. Those under the spell of love will see an unexpected turn of events; but don't panic, as things will eventually work out in your favour. Some quality family time is also on the cards.

LIBRA
Somebody in a position of power at your workplace may decide to pick on you, just for fun. But your luck is strong, and no one but your own thoughts and misgivings can harm you. You shall find it relatively easy to come out of these troubles; much to the chagrin of those who wish otherwise, predicts Ganesh.

SCORPIO
If you have recently started a joint business venture, today you may take your first step towards sealing a profitable deal. However, you should buy some time before signing any contract today; also, be cautious that you do not get the short end of the stick.

SAGITTARIUS
You will enjoy the magic of the Midas touch today, feels Ganesh. In business, sheer brilliance will help you derive the best possible results in productivity and clinching new contracts. Your approach, in general, will be methodical, disciplined and systematic for most part of the day.

CAPRICORN
Your power of reasoning will be strong today, says Ganesh. Those of you beginning your career will show a disposition to take up a job in television or print media. The spiritual side of you may also come to the fore and make you feel at peace, especially when visiting a holy place.

AQUARIUS
You zoom in on research and development today. Your fabulous work speaks volumes and your commitment pays off. You're keen to play Romeo today, and all your gimmicks and surprises will work wonders! Love on, says Ganesh.

PISCES
For those who are salaried, today should be a progressive day for you. Important meetings at the work-place will benefit from your presence and the suggestions you have to make. This should enhance your relationship with your superiors. Compliments galore will come your way throughout the day. There are also indications of an important event occurring in your personal life today, says Ganesh.



ELLIOT TO ADAPT *THE DARKNESS OUTSIDE US* FOR BIG SCREEN

Actor Elliot Page is toying around with the idea of developing the sci-fi novel *The Darkness Outside Us* as a movie. The actor has optioned the novel from Eliot Schrefer through his company Pageboy Productions and is planning to bring it to the big screen, reports *Female First UK*.

BEYONCE HOPS ON TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT WITH HUSBAND JAY-Z

Singer-songwriter Beyonce is enjoying her time in Japan to the fullest. The *Cowboy Carter* hitmaker has documented her trip with husband Jay-Z through a series of snapshots shared on her Instagram, reports *Mirror.co.uk*.



'You don't have to spend crores to look mind-blowing'

Mumbai: Actress Raveena Tandon, in an exclusive shoot with HT City Showstoppers, talked about her experiment with fashion and her favourite onscreen looks.

Ask whether she has ever felt the pressure to live up to her glamorous onscreen image or prove her versatility through her roles, and she quips, "Honestly not. I still do my own thing. It's just that I like to experiment with different things. For the song *Dil Mein Hai Tu* featuring Akshay (Kumar) and me in *Daava*, I went shopping with the choreographer at the Goa flea market and picked up the accessories myself. We created looks for the both of us on the set with those things. A few adventurous stylists will be on board if you give them the idea. It also depends on what the actor wants. There is no need to spend crores to create mind-blowing looks."

"Luckily, there was no fashion police as such in those days," she said, adding, "Today, you have to be dressed to the nines. I see the pressure on the younger actors to do airport looks. As you grow older, you really don't care. But it doesn't mean you go out looking like a sloth!"

"I used to be experimental; that has not changed. But I have grown up enough to know what I should or should not be doing," she shares, continuing, "It takes a couple of disasters when you are young to become more realistic about yourself," she ends.



Pari bats for system based on meritocracy

Mumbai: Actress Parineeti Chopra, who is currently making headlines for her performance in Imtiaz Ali's *Amar Singh Chamkila*, opened up about the reasons behind not getting enough work in the industry.

In an interview with an entertainment portal, the actress mentioned the existence of camps, circles, and favourites within the industry. She pointed out that



among two equally talented individuals who can contribute equally, one might be favoured while the other may not, resulting in a loss of work opportunities.

The *Ishaqzaade* actress urged for a system based on meritocracy, emphasising that if he can bring the same level of talent and contribution, she should receive equal opportunities regardless of his relationships, affiliations, or circles within the industry.

According to her, getting access to certain actors and certain directors leads to work opportunities. She admitted that if she isn't consistently visible to them, he may miss out on such opportunities.

Directed by Imtiaz Ali, *Amar Singh Chamkila* premiered on Netflix April 12. The film also stars Apinderdeep Singh, Rahul Mittra, Nisha Bano, Anjum Batra, Vipin Katyal, and Udaybir Sandhumore in pivotal roles.

Manushi

takes on age gap criticism



Mumbai: After *Samrat Prithviraj*, actress Manushi Chhillar reunited with Akshay Kumar for the recently released *Bade Miyan Chote Miyan*, facing scrutiny for their 30-year age gap. She addressed the same and stated that she looks up to Akshay as a big star, wants to act with him no matter how old he is, and aims to act with younger actors in diverse projects.

"Working with a superstar is good. You get a certain amount of visibility. If I talk about my first film, there was an age gap. They wanted to play the whole thing. In this film (*Bade Miyan Chote Miyan*), there was no pairing. We wrote songs for marketing. So they had to put two people together for the songs, but that's pretty much it, which is fine," she said. "I don't see it as something that was atrocious or something that shouldn't have been there. It wasn't like a love story anyway, and I hope to romance younger actors in the future," concluded Manushi.

On the work front, Manushi will be seen next in *Tehran*.

Bebo on playing 'cupid' for Deepika, Ranveer

Mumbai: We all know that Ranveer Singh fell head over heels for Deepika Padukone during the making of *Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela*. The couple got married after six years of dating, and now they are expecting their first baby in September. But many might not know that Sanjay Leela Bhansali initially wanted to cast Kareena Kapoor Khan for the role of Leela. But before the film went on the floor, she exited the project, leading Deepika to take up the role.

In her latest interview with a media agency, the *Heroine* actress opened up about how she accidentally played cupid for Deepika and Ranveer. When asked if Deepika and Ranveer ever thanked her for quitting *Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela*, which led to their paths crossing and them becoming life partners, she mentioned that she believes in destiny and that whatever is meant to be in your life will happen, no matter what your circumstances or situation would be.

She also added that all is written in the stars, and everything is not written for everyone. The actress also shared that she doesn't regret leaving the film, mentioning that maybe it would have been a very different film and maybe that was not the time for the people involved to come together.

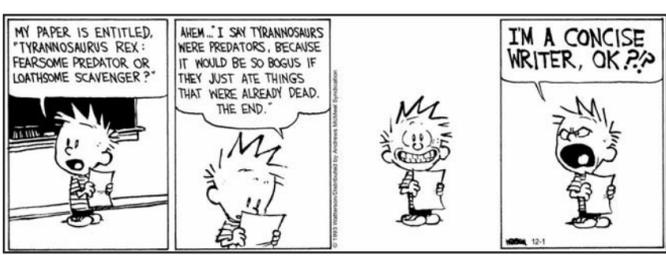
On the work front, Kareena was recently seen in *Crew* and will be seen next in *Singham Again*.



PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

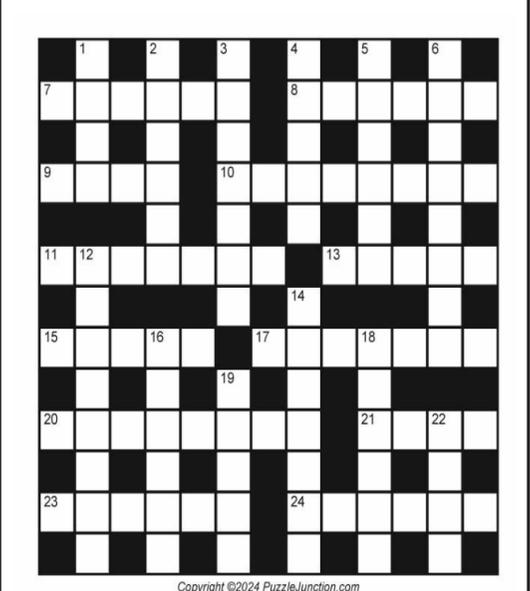


BREVITY



FUN post

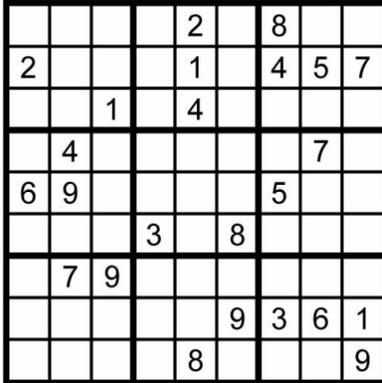
CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 7 Number puzzle
 - 8 Plaid
 - 9 Couple
 - 10 Adolescent
 - 11 False belief
 - 13 Hyperion, for one
 - 15 Shaping machine
 - 17 Blacksmith
 - 20 Baker's supply
 - 21 Hook of Holland, e.g.
 - 23 Detestable
 - 24 Spigot
 - Down**
 - 1 Sinuous dance
 - 2 Reddish brown horse
 - 3 Memo line
 - 4 Potbelly, for one
 - 5 Sultanate in northwestern Borneo
 - 6 Fish story (4,4)
 - 12 Large arboreal boa
 - 14 Barn storage area
 - 16 Taxi of old
 - 18 Get back
 - 19 Minimum
 - 22 Banana skin

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.

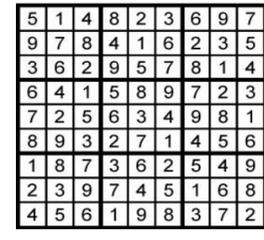


SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown

UNIQUE PROTEST

BJP workers stage a unique protest against the selection of Sanjali Murmu as MLA candidate for Bangiriposi seat, outside the party headquarters in Bhubaneswar, Sunday



Baripada boils at 44.6°C

30 PLACES RECORD 40 DEGREES OR MORE; RAIN, THUNDERSTORM LIKELY TO BRING DOWN HEAT TODAY, SAYS WEATHER BUREAU

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 21: Odisha continued to reel under blistering heat with Baripada emerging the hottest place in the state, Sunday after the northern city recorded a maximum temperature of 44.6 degrees Celsius. Nuapada came a close second at 44 degrees Celsius.

However, the consolation is that the Regional Meteorological Department (IMD), Bhubaneswar has predicted reduction in the day temperature from tomorrow (Monday) with several places likely to experience rains.

The weather bureau Sunday said that though the highest maximum temperature (day temperature) in the state was less by a few notches, at least 9 cities recorded maximum temperatures of 43 degrees Celsius or more. At the same



time, 30 places recorded maximum temperatures of 40 degrees Celsius or more.

While Baripada recorded the highest maximum temperature Sunday, both Paradip and Gopalpur experienced the lowest maximum temperatures at 33.5 degrees Celsius. The maximum temperature in the Capital City of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack stood at 41.6 degrees Celsius during the day.

Meanwhile, the IMD has forecast that the day temperatures are likely to abate from tomorrow and several places in the state are likely to experience moderate thunderstorms ac-

companied by lightning and rain – bringing the much-needed relief to the people.

As per IMD, the day temperature (maximum temperature) is very likely to be 40°C or above at many places in interior Odisha and above normal by 3 to 5°C in some districts of the state during the next two days due to prevailing northwesterly/westerly dry air and high solar insolation.

However, due to the likely interaction of the middle tropospheric westerly trough with lower-level moist air from the Bay of Bengal, meteorological conditions are becoming favourable for moderate thunderstorm activity with lightning, gusty surface wind, with wind speed reaching 40 to 50 kph and scattered to Isolated rainfall over the districts of Odisha within the next 3-4 days.



KEEPING IT COOL: Walkers cover their head with a piece of cloth as Bhubaneswar simmered at 41.6 degrees Celsius Sunday

OP PHOTO

Democracy will end if BJP returns to power: Kharge

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Satna (MP), April 21: Launching a scathing attack on BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge Sunday claimed that democracy will end in the country if the "Modi-Shah sarkar" returns to power.

Targeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah while addressing a public meeting in Madhya Pradesh's Satna district, Kharge said they will also scrap the Constitution.

"They will scrap the Constitution scripted by Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar. If you want to keep it alive, the right to vote for women,

labourers and farmers, then vote for the Congress and its 'panja' (hand) symbol," he appealed to the voters.

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi was scheduled to address the rally in Satna but his visit was cancelled as he took ill, a party leader said earlier, adding that Kharge would fill in for him. The Satna Lok Sabha seat will go to polls in the second phase April 26.

"Democracy will end if Modi-Shah's government returns to power," Kharge claimed addressing the public meeting held in support of Congress candidate Siddharth Kushwaha.

Accusing PM Modi of telling lies, Kharge said the PM keeps talking about "Modi ki guaran-

tee" without taking his party's name. "He had said that if he became the prime minister, ₹15 lakh would be given to every person by bringing back the black money stashed abroad. Did you get it," he asked.

Modi had also told the young people of this country that 2 crore jobs would be generated every year, said Kharge continuing his criticism of the PM.

"Now 10 years have gone. Did you all get 20 crore jobs... Ask the BJP about their 20 crore jobs (promise). Ask them where is ₹15 lakh when they come seeking your votes," the senior Congress leader said.

Kharge said Modi had promised to double farmers' income but that too has not happened.

Two arrested for separate murders



POST NEWS NETWORK

Sambalpur, April 21: Police here arrested two persons in connection with separate murder cases in Sambalpur district, informed Sambalpur Sadar SDPO Tophan Bag, Sunday.

The SDPO said that locals had discovered the body of a youth, later identified as Raja Bishi, 21, lying near Sasan canal at Balabasapur village Saturday morning and informed police.

Acting on the complaint lodged by the deceased's father, the Sasan police station began an investigation.

On the receipt of a tip off, police arrested Akash Ranjan Nag, 26, a native of Ghodapokhari village under Madanpur Rampur (M Rampur) police limits of Kalahandi district, from a house at Jhankarpada near City station under Dhanupali police limits, Sunday.

During interrogation, Akash confessed that following an argument with Raja he lost his cool and hit the latter on the head with a bat, causing his death. The police have booked the accused under IPC Section 302.

In another incident, the Ainthapali police arrested a 20-year-old youth, Ayush Munda from Mahanadi Vihar area under Ainthapali police limits for allegedly killing one Papu Shrivastav of Uparchhaka area under the same police station limits by bludgeoning his head with a stone.

Experts urge parents to keep children away from social media

SOCIAL MEDIA GIVES A DOPAMINE RUSH IN THE BRAIN, LIKE AN ADDICTION

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Lucknow, April 21: After the tragic death of 19-year-old Shivansh who fell into a water tank and died while making a reel for social media, psychology experts have asked parents to work in coordination with the schools to provide love, recognition and validation that young people seek on social media, even while putting their lives in danger.

Clinical psychologist and former head of the psychology department at Lucknow University, Prof Pallavi Bhatnagar said young people want to be noticed, even if it means losing relationships.

She explained that in a fast-changing world, relationships often suffer. Youngsters seek recognition, security and belonging, so they turn to the Internet for support. "They think doing unique things will get them attention and make them feel good, like a drug. This makes them constantly crave more attention and try to outdo others," she said.

Prof Adarsh Tripathi from the psychiatry department of the King George's Medical University (KGMU) here said that five to six young patients struggling with social media addiction and having suicidal feelings visit him daily. They make risky or explicit content. When people see it, they want more to be seen, which keeps them hooked. Social media gives a dopamine rush in the brain, like an addiction, said the experts.

To counter this trend, Prof



IN AN INTERESTING OBSERVATION, IT HAS BEEN SEEN THAT ALL UTTAR PRADESH BOARD TOP SCORERS HAVE ONE THING IN COMMON, THEY ARE 'INACTIVE' ON SOCIAL MEDIA'

Bhatnagar suggested parents should pay attention and tell them not to take the internet too seriously. Group discussions should be arranged at school, keeping in mind the risky stuff they might do.

Prof Tripathi suggested holding off on giving adolescents

smartphones with social media. "Playing outdoor sports can also help in controlling the urge to make reels or view it," he added.

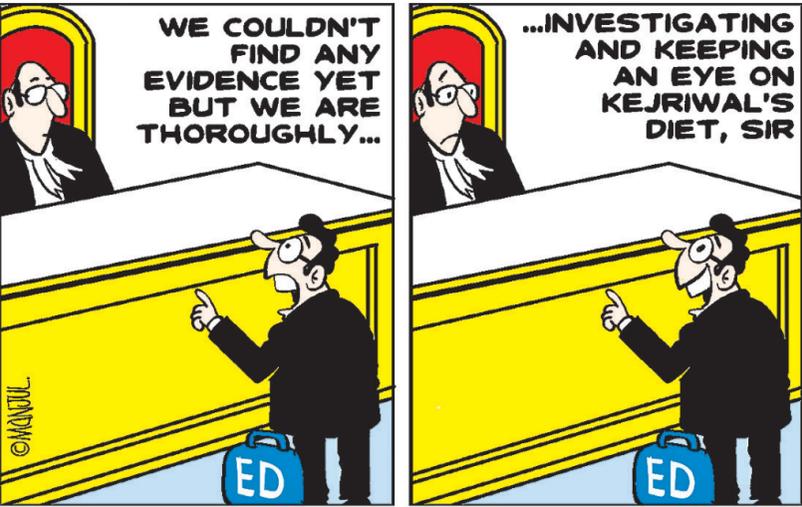
In an interesting observation, it has been seen that all UP Board top scorers have one thing in common, they are 'inactive' on social media'.

The toppers said that Board preparation is incomplete without daily revisions and one should be trusting classroom teaching rather than running after knowledge from the Internet and coaching classes.

Though born in the times of social media reel popularity, these toppers maintained a safe distance from social media.

Almost all the toppers said that they preferred reading books instead of being active on social media.

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



Surveillance stepped up along Odisha-Andhra border for polls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Berhampur April 21: Security surveillance in Odisha-Andhra Pradesh border areas has been intensified by the police ahead of the twin elections for the Lok Sabha and the Assembly in the state, a senior officer said, Sunday.

Joint checkings by the police of the two states have been carried out in border areas in Ganjam and Gajapati districts following the direction of the Election Commission of India, he said. Odisha DGP Arun Kumar Sarangi held a day-long meeting with the SPs of Ganjam, Gajapati, Kandhamal, Boudh and Berhampur about poll preparedness.

The simultaneous polls for the Lok Sabha and the state will be held May 13 and 20 in these areas. The DGP said the joint patrolling was going on along the inter-state boundary after the coordination meeting with the SPs of the border districts of both states.

Sarangi said they would give special focus on Kandhamal and Boudh districts because of the

movement of Maoists.

"We are chalking out a plan for the deployment of forces during the polls. We will deploy adequate security personnel to ensure free elections in these districts," the DGP said.

The combing operation in the vulnerable areas was going on, he said. Twenty-five companies of Central forces from Odisha have moved to other states, like Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Arunachal Pradesh, to deploy in the first phase of the polls held, April 19.

The police have launched a special drive to crack down on ganja smuggling and plantation of the narcotic substance in the areas. From January till now, around 340 quintals of ganja have been seized and around 700 acres of ganja plantations destroyed by the police, he said.

Static surveillance teams and rapid action forces (RAF) are also deployed to keep track of the ganja smuggling, he said, adding that 4,300 warrants have been executed in the five districts during the period.

Women journalists bear the brunt of cyberbullying

Perugia, Italy: Women journalists face greater threats online in the course of their work, and the trend is increasing, one expert told an international conference in Italy this weekend.

"There is significant potential for online violence to escalate to offline harm," said Julie Posetti research director of the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ).

"Women tend to face greater threats online," she told delegates at the Perugia International Journalism Festival, Saturday. She added, "The kind of threats they face are increasing".

That toxic environment was being "facilitated by Big Tech companies", she added, accusing them of "a failure to take responsibility".

In a joint UNESCO/ICFJ study in 2022, nearly three-quarters of women journalists interviewed said they had experienced online violence or abuse in connection with their work. They interviewed 900 journalists from 125 countries.

Attacks online include insults,

sexist and sexual comments, and physical threats, including death threats to journalists and their families, the conference heard.

Increasingly sophisticated attacks include blocking accounts, hacking, publishing private photos and creating 'deep fakes' – fake sexual images of people without their consent.

Violent threats tend to increase when combined with discrimination linked to skin colour, religion or sexual orientation.

Physical violence Posetti and two other researchers have built a guide and toolbox on the topic targeting journalists, together with the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE).

Filipino journalist Maria Ressa, the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize winner, was a victim of online abuse, as she explained in the ICFJ-UNESCO report.

"I was a CNN war correspondent for two decades, but nothing in the field prepared me for the orchestrated, misogynistic attacks on me and our women-led news outlet, Rappler," she said.



BBC disinformation specialist Marianna Spring received an avalanche of abusive tweets last year, threatening to kidnap her or slit her throat.

Much of the abuse followed her investigation into the takeover of social media network X, then known as Twitter.

In some cases, online threats can translate into physical violence.

A fifth of women surveyed said they had suffered attacks or insults in real life that were linked to online abuse.

The consequences can be far-reaching, with some journalists

potentially dissuaded from covering sensitive topics and some choosing to opt out of the industry altogether.

Paris-based media rights campaigners Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has warned that this type of harassment forms a new threat to press freedom.

Developing counter measures French journalist Nadia Daam told AFP that she received a flood of hateful messages in 2017 after a column that criticised an online forum.

Since then, she has moved house twice and tends to stay away from social media, but says

she still gets cyber-bullying messages and 'doesn't work the same anymore'.

However, she thinks there is more awareness of the problem now, saying that she believes the wider industry "talks more about cyberharassment", with more severe legal sentences.

Freelancer Melina Huet covered the war in Ukraine as well as the Israel-Hamas conflict, and said she regularly gets online threats related to her coverage.

"I received threats of beheading and rape on Instagram," she said. "The perpetrators can easily re-create accounts, there is impunity."

Some media have put protocols in place to try and tackle cyberbullying.

Jessica Ziegerer is an investigative journalist for the daily HD Sydsvenskan, and regularly receives hostile messages.

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"Before publishing a sensitive article, we have a meeting with security specialists and review all the aspects" both online and offline, she said. AFP

BJP blames govt for lack of forest cover



ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, April 21: The state BJP Sunday slammed the ruling BJD for lack of forest cover in the state despite spending ₹5,000 crore in the last 10 years on afforestation and asked Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik to come up with an explanation. "The districts are devoid of forests and people are looking for respite amid scorching heat waves. Where was the money meant for afforestation gone," state BJP spokesperson Sajjan Sharma said. He said the BJD was once stag-

ing massive agitation for the cause of Mahanadi River and demanded funds from the Central government. Under Amrit Sarovar scheme, funds were released for 75 projects but the state is lacking water. Taking up the weather issue, he said, "Of late, the state has been witnessing increasing temperature and people are suffering. Yesterday, two districts of the state, Boudh and Baripada, recorded temperature above 44 degrees Celsius. It is a matter of grave concern." "Odisha, which was once rich in natural resources, has be-

come a place devoid of forests and water. Rivers, canals, ponds and swamps have dried up. The people of Odisha are already worried and chief minister is responsible for this" he fumed. The government has spent more than ₹5,000 crore in the last 10 years for afforestation in the state. The people of Odisha are looking for the answer as to where the forests have gone. On the occasion of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahatsava, hundreds of crores of rupees have been given for the construction and restoration of 75 ponds in each district but the ponds are waterless, he said. The BJD government had announced that trees will be planted around Mahanadi and other river basins of the state. But, where did all those trees go? The river has dried up due to lack of water. The situation has become such that in the next few years, it will be difficult for the people to get drinking water if the necessary steps are not taken at the earliest, Sharma added.



ENCHANTING MOVES: Artistes perform Odissi on 2nd annual day celebration of Suryajyoti Kala Kendra at Rabindra Mandap in Bhubaneswar, Sunday
PIC-MAUSAM NANDA

World Earth Day today

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 21: Earth Day is an annual event observed April 22 across the globe to pledge support for environmental protection. The day reminds citizens of the importance of environment conservation and sustainability, encouraging them to come together and take action for a healthier planet and brighter future. The day also raises awareness and inspires change, fostering a deep connection with nature. The theme for this year is 'Planet vs Plastics' which aims at bringing attention to the serious issue of plastic pollution and how it harms nature. EARTHDAY.ORG aims to end plastic for planetary health and demands a 60 per cent reduction in the production of all plastics by 2040.



In 1969 at a UNESCO conference in San Francisco, peace activist John McConnell proposed a day to honour Mother Earth and the concept of peace, to first be observed March 21, 1970, the first day of spring in the northern hemisphere. Later it was proposed by a Senator in the United States to observe the day April 22, and since then the tradition has been continuing. Meanwhile, a campaign is scheduled to be kicked off from Ekamra Kshetra in the Capital City under the aegis of the Milita Mancha, a social organisation, today to mark the occasion.

States, UTs to act against hosps involved in illegal transplants

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 21: The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) has asked all states and UTs to investigate any violations and take appropriate action, including suspension of registration, against hospitals performing illegal organ transplants, officials said Sunday. It also asked all states and Union Territories (UTs) to submit an action-taken report (ATR) on the instructions within 15 days.

In a letter issued April 10, Director General of Health Services (DGHS) Atul Goel urged all states and UTs to ensure regular collection and sharing of data of all transplant cases, including those of foreigners, with the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO) on a monthly basis. The ministry's direction comes over two weeks after an organ trafficking racket, involving Bangladeshi nationals, being run in Haryana and Rajasthan was busted. Referring to media reports



mentioning commercial dealings in organs involving foreign citizens, Goel stated, "It has also been noted from the registry of NOTTO that there has been a surge in the number of organ transplants of foreigners in the country, which calls for monitoring of such transplants by the state or UTs government authority concerned." Goel directed that appropriate authority appointed by the state, as per the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act (THOTA), 1994, should investigate

the transplant cases of foreign nationals in their respective states. He also asked the officials to take appropriate actions whenever a breach of any provision of the Act or any of the rules made thereunder are noted. "Investigate any violation of the THOTA, 1994 and rules thereunder and take appropriate action including suspension of registration for performing Organ Transplant, of the hospitals involved in illegal activities," the letter said. "It should be ensured that a unique NOTTO-ID for both donor and recipient is generated by the hospital from NOTTO website, in all cases of organ transplant, whether from a living donor or deceased donor," the letter said. Besides NOTTO-ID being mandatory for considering allocation of organ in case of deceased donor transplant, this ID in case of a living donor transplant, shall also be generated at the earliest, at least within 48 hours of the transplant surgery, it added.

14 IAS trainees meet Anu Garg



ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, April 21: Six IAS trainees of 2022 batch and eight trainees from 2023 batch Odisha cadre, undergoing training at Gopabandhu Academy of Administration, met the Development Commissioner-ACS Anu Garg at Lok Seva Bhawan here Saturday. The trainees' visit was aimed at getting themselves acquainted with various schemes and programmes under Planning and Convergence department. The trainees gained insights into the initiatives spearheaded by the administration towards implementation of the Agenda 2030. They were briefed comprehensively on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as the intricacies of the National Multidimensional Poverty Index (NMPI).

Odisha Transformer Manufacturers Association convenes its 2nd AGM

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP



Bhubaneswar, April 21: The Odisha Transformer Manufacturers' Association (OTMA) convened its 2nd Annual General Meeting (AGM) Sunday, marking a significant milestone in the journey of the association. On the occasion, members of OTMA reviewed past year's progress, discussed key industrial developments and charted out future course of action. Odisha Assembly of Small and Medium Enterprises (OASME) chairman Gouri Shankar Dash and general secretary Satwik Swain graced the occasion as chief guest and guest of honour respectively. Among the dignitaries present included OTMA president Sarada Prasanna Das, general secretary Pradeep Kumar Nayak and joint secretary Bijaya Kishore Nanda. Das said, "As we gather for our 2nd AGM, I am reminded of the immense strides we've taken together as OTMA. Our commitment to excellence and collaboration has propelled us forward, driving growth and innovation in our industry."

During the AGM, several important announcements were made, including the election for newly appointed office bearers who will lead the association in its mission to promote and strengthen the transformer manufacturing sector in the state. More than 100 members across the districts were present on this occasion and took part in the election process. 10 members who couldn't attend the AGM took part in the election process virtually. Das was re-elected as the president of the association. He expressed his gratitude for the trust and confidence bestowed upon him by the members. He reaffirmed the commitment of newly-elected office bearers to serve the interests of the association and its members diligently. Besides, Nayak was also re-elected as general secretary of OTMA.

Scientific exploration of herbal supplements for optimal well-being

Achieving optimal well-being in the modern world presents unique challenges. Dietary limitations due to cultural norms can lead to micronutrient deficiencies. Chronic stress, often associated with work-life balance, disrupts hormonal homeostasis and depletes energy reserves. Additionally, age-related concerns like bone health and hormonal fluctuations become prominent. Advancements in scientific research have led to the development of targeted supplements designed to address these challenges. These supplements leverage the power of natural ingredients often backed by clinical studies to demonstrate their efficacy. Mihir Gadani, co-founder of OZiva shares some popular options with scientific backing that can empower individuals in India to take charge of their health and well-being: Protein Powders for Enhanced Health: Conventional protein powders primarily focus on muscle building. However, new for-

mulations offer a more holistic approach. They incorporate essential multivitamins, minerals, and revered plant-based extracts like Shatavari and Tulsi. Studies suggest that these extracts can support hormonal balance (e.g., Shatavari) and regulate metabolism (e.g., Tulsi), promoting weight management. Additionally, these powders often utilise plant-based protein sources for optimal absorption and bioavailability. Plant-Based Collagen Builders for Improved Skin Quality: Collagen production naturally declines with age, leading to wrinkles and decreased skin elasticity. Plant-based collagen builders with clinically proven ingredients like SesZenBio™ and CollabZen™ can stimulate the body's natural collagen production. Studies have shown these ingredients to be effective in improving skin smoothness and brightness. Glutathione Builders for Comprehensive Skin Health: Glutathione, a potent antioxidant, combats free radicals and



promotes overall skin health. Plant-based glutathione tablets with vitamins C and E can help reduce hyper pigmentation, enhance skin radiance, and combat the visible signs of ageing. Research suggests that these components work synergistically to improve skin tone and texture. Hair Vitamins for Healthy Hair Growth: Hair loss can be attrib-

uted to various factors, including nutritional deficiencies, hormonal imbalances, and stress. Hair vitamins rich in Biotin, Iron, Zinc, and Brahmī address these root causes by nourishing hair follicles, regulating hormones, and managing stress levels. Biotin, Iron, and Zinc are all essential nutrients for healthy hair growth, while Brahmī, an Ayurvedic herb, has been shown to possess stress-

reducing properties. Plant-Based Iron Supplements for Increased Energy Levels: Iron deficiency is a prevalent concern, leading to fatigue and weakness. Plant-based iron supplements with essential vitamins and minerals improve iron absorption and red blood cell production. Omega 369 for Overall Body Health: These essential fatty acids play a crucial role in maintaining healthy skin, heart function, and joint health. Balanced plant-based Omega 369 supplements promote hair and skin growth, reduce inflammation, regulate blood pressure, and maintain healthy cholesterol levels. HerBones: Supporting Bone Mineral Density with Plant-Based Calcium, as we age, bone mineral density naturally declines, increasing the risk of osteoporosis. HerBones, a unique plant-based calcium supplement with Vitamin D3, Vitamin K2, and Magnesium, promotes stronger bones and joints. Plant-Based HerBalance:

Mitigating Menopausal Symptoms: Menopause brings hormonal shifts that can cause hot flashes, vaginal dryness, and mood swings. This plant-based formula combines 21 whole foods and standardized herbal extracts like Black Cohosh and Lodh Bark. Research suggests that Black Cohosh can alleviate menopausal symptoms. A Holistic Approach for Optimal Well-being: To achieve lasting health and vitality, prioritize a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Regular exercise, even moderate activity most days of the week, strengthens your body and boosts energy levels. Finally, prioritize quality sleep for optimal cellular repair and restoration. By incorporating scientifically validated herbal supplements alongside a healthy lifestyle, individuals in India can leverage the wisdom of ancient traditions and the power of modern science to take charge of their health and well-being at every stage of life.

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COOLING ACT: Two boys take bath in Mahanadi river in Sambalpur to get respite from the blistering heatwave, Sunday
OP PHOTO

Boats in Kendrapara lack safety measures

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kendrapara, April 21: Despite the recent boat mishap in which eight persons lost their lives in Jharsuguda district, people continue to use this mode of transport from 63 ferry ghats in this district. Most of these boats do not have adequate number of life jackets and other safety measures for the passengers. At times the boats are also overloaded, sources pointed out Sunday. However, the boats continue to ply violating rules as the district administration has failed to implement disciplinary actions against the offenders, the sources added.

This district is no stranger to boat mishaps and the casualties arising out of it with seven rivers and several water bodies flowing through it. Last year two persons including the boatman met their watery graves when a motorboat from Keredagad ghat carrying 30 passengers capsized in the river.

In March 2013, 13 youngsters all of whom were cricket players, drowned when their boat capsized near Pitapata under Mahakalapara block in this district. Similarly in January 2019, 10 people including kids, died when the boat they were travelling on, capsized at Nipania. However, despite the mishaps it



seems that the district administration has not learned its lessons. Boats without proper safety measures continue to operate putting the lives of passengers in peril from almost all the ghats in this district.

Social activist Pratap Kumar Padhi pointed out that 17 panchayats including Padanipal, Ekamania, Singhagaon and Batighar are surrounded by rivers on all sides. Residents have no option, but to travel on boats. Moreover, visitors to the tourist sites in Bhitarkanika also have to use boats. Country-made boats and motor boats are the only mode of travel from one place to another in these riparian areas. However, most of the boats lack proper safety equipment for the passengers, he pointed out.

Another social activist

Rashmiranjan Swain informed that most of the boats operating in the district, do not have fitness certificates, as per the 'Boat Rules' framed in 2024. He pointed out that 60 such boats are operating in the vicinity of Bhitarkanika National Park on rivers full of crocodiles. He shuddered as to what will happen to people if a boat capsizes in the river full of crocs. Bibhuti Bhushan Rout, a resident of Mahakalapara said that delay in construction of bridges is helping the owners of the boats to run their operations without proper safety measures.

When contacted, ADM Pitambar Tarai said awareness programmes are being conducted at frequent intervals among the boatmen. He said that the district administration is taking strict action against boats violating rules.

ODRAF trying to douse forest fires

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Baripada, April 21: The state government has engaged Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force (ODRAF) personnel to douse the ongoing forest fires that have broken out inside the Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) in Similipal National Park of Mayurbhanj district, officials said Sunday.

Fires were noticed at 31 spots in the STR, Sunday, and the officials with adequate firefighting equipment have been engaged to douse the flames, an official said.



Forest officials have been spotting the fires for the last few days. Around 13 fires points were spotted, Saturday, and the number increased to 31 by Sunday, the official said.

"The operation is underway on a war footing in STR. We have engaged staff and firefighting squads in all sensitive locations to attend to the fire points," field director of STR, Prakash Chand Gogineni, said.

The Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force (ODRAF) team is also assisting us, he said.

70-year-old man dies of 'sunstroke'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Loisingha, April 21: A 70-year-old man allegedly died of sunstroke as he collapsed at Bhaliamunda weekly market under this police limits in Bolangir district Saturday.

The deceased was identified as Radhamohan Sahu, a resident of Agarapali village under Badibahal panchayat under this block.

Reports said, Radhamohan had gone to the weekly market Saturday morning. He suddenly complained of weakness and collapsed. However, after some time he was found lying dead in the market. Family members have alleged that he died of sunstroke due to scorching heat.

On being informed, Revenue Inspector of Jogsirda revenue circle reached the spot and launched an investigation.

Sources said that the weekly market under Bolangir regulated market committee (RMC) is a busy market. However, there is only one tube well inside the market which has been lying defunct, the sources added.

Locals alleged that despite scorching summer heat no action has been taken by the RMC to tackle the situation which has resulted in this tragic mishap. The deceased is survived by three daughters. Villagers have demanded financial assistance from the state government to the helpless family.

Boat capsized: 2 held in Jharsuguda district



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jharsuguda, April 21: Police here arrested two persons in connection with the boat capsizing in the Mahanadi river in Jharsuguda district in which eight people died, an official said Sunday.

Police registered a suo moto case and arrested the duo after an investigation, he informed.

"We have arrested two people, Saturday and forwarded them to court," Jharsuguda SP Parmar Smit Parshottamdas told mediapersons over phone.

After completing formalities, the bodies of the deceased, hailing from Anjoripali village in

Raigarh district of Chhattisgarh, have been handed over to their family members, he said.

The injured persons have also been sent home with the help of the local administration of Chhattisgarh, the SP stated.

Loknath Meher, the motor vehicle inspector (MVI) of Jharsuguda district, had said, Saturday that the boat was not registered and deemed unfit to operate. It also did not have any life jackets onboard for the safety of the passengers.

"Despite being designed to accommodate only 20 people, it carried more than 50 passengers, resulting in the mishap Friday afternoon," Meher said.

Wildfire forces animals to stray into human habitats

POST NEWS NETWORK

Koraput/Damanjodi, April 21: Rampant spread of wildfire in the forests of Koraput district has posed serious threat to the survival of wild animals and forced them to stray into human habitats, a report said.

Lack of awareness is stated to be the reason behind the spread of wildfire. The wildfire is also destroying the green cover with precious plants and trees getting reduced to ashes. A bear found roaming in Koraput town in the wee hours of Saturday is a case in this point.

On being informed, forest officials reached the spot but the animal managed to give them slip and escape through Sunari Sahi without causing any harm to the residents. However, a forest team has been put on alert at the site to track the movement of the wild animal and catch it.

The incident has sparked panic among the residents. The animal is suspected to have strayed into Koraput town in search of food and water as most of the jungles in the district have caught fire in this summer season.



People are being sensitised not to lit fire in the jungle but that has failed to have any impact on them, a forest official Bikash Patra said.

The heat generated by the wildfire and blistering heatwave has made life miserable for the residents living on the fringes of the jungles. Flames were seen

leaping towards the villages from a hilly jungle near a petrol pump at Tarlandhaguda village on the outskirts of Damanjodi in Koraput district, Saturday.

Fire personnel from Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) rushed to the spot after residents informed about flames leaping towards the village. Environmentalists alleged that the forest and the tress on hills

are catching fire at this point of time every year.

They alleged that the annual mass hunting ritual 'Benta Yatra' of tribals is underway and someone might have deliberately lit up fire in the jungle to hunt wild animals. They demanded the district administration and forest department to intervene and stop the wildfire from spreading further.

Wild animals hit hard by water shortage

POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, April 21: Once famous for its pleasant climate, this natural environment rich district has now become a hot cauldron. The heat has not only affected people but also wild animals as they are suffering under the scorching sun. To compound their problems, most of the water bodies have dried with the mercury soaring to over 43 degrees Celsius in many parts of this district. Sources informed that many of the animals have died due to the heat, but the Forest department is not reporting the incidents.

DFO Keonjhar division Dhanraj HD however ruled out water scarcity in the jungles under Keonjhar division. "Forest department personnel are on alert to all possible situations. They will take steps when the need arises. Water bodies have been dug in various forest range areas to quench the thirst of wild animals," Dhanraj said.

Dhanraj may say that the animals are not facing water shortage. However, the fact is that major rivers like the Baitarani, Kanjhari, Karo, Sona, Kusei and Aradei have dried up due to the high temperatures. Sources said that a herd of 90 elephants including 29 calves in Keonjhar forest division are suffering due to acute shortage of water.

Other animals like monkeys, bears,



jackals, deer, squirrel, snakes and hares are also facing similar problems. They are trying to stay as close as they can to the water bodies. However, even then the quantity of water available is too little for them.

"The animals are suffering due shortage of food and water. Most of the trees and plants have been affected due to the heat. The problem is acute for herbivorous animals. They are neither getting food nor water. They cannot even come out of the forest," pointed out Duskar Barik, an environmentalist.

Hundreds of monkeys near Anjara (Talakainsari panchayat) under Bhuyan and Juanga Pidha forest ranges are also suffering due to soaring temperatures and lack of water. Many bats and owls in Raisuan village under Sadar block and Balabhadrapur village under

Ghatagaon block have died due to the heat, sources said.

"I have never seen such high temperatures since my birth. In our time 35 degrees Celsius was considered very high. Due to mining activities, massive deforestation and unnecessary felling of trees, the situation has changed drastically," said 70-year-old writer, Karunakar Barik.

According to environmentalists, trouble started after 1998 and became acute after 2002. Today many places in this district have turned into furnaces. It is due to heavy mining and industry operations, destruction of forest cover, plying of heavy vehicles creating pollution that have led to temperatures rising, they said. To add to the woes, sparse rainfall has affected the district leading to acute water shortage, they added.

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We are always surrounded by the things of which we think.

THE MOTHER



Corporate Racism

An investigative report published recently by Public Eye, a Switzerland-based non-governmental organisation, has revealed disconcerting findings on infant food products made by Nestlé. The Swiss FMCG giant's two best-selling brands, Cerelac and Nido, have high levels of added sugar in the form of sucrose and honey in low- and middle-income countries, while surprisingly these products are sugar free in Switzerland, the brand's home country, and in other European nations, according to the report. This double standard has been called out by some as corporate racism.

The investigation by Public Eye in collaboration with International Baby Food Action Network delved into the practices of the renowned brand. The research was based on tests carried out on Nestlé products in a laboratory in Belgium. The resulting report, titled "How Nestlé gets children hooked on sugar in lower-income countries" highlighted the brand's inconsistent nutritional standards across different countries. It criticised the company for failing to provide clear information about the sugar content in its products. Shockingly, out of the 115 Nestlé products analysed, 108 were found to contain added sugars in markets in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Cerelac baby cereals, designed for infants aged six months and above, have been found to contain added sugar levels of around four grams per serving on average, equivalent to approximately one sugar cube. In the Philippines, the highest amount of added sugar per serving at 7.3 grams was reported, whereas in India, where sales exceeded 250 million US dollars in 2022, the added sugar content per serving is 2.7 grams. Similarly, Nido powdered-milk products, intended for children aged 1-3 years, contain an average of nearly two grams of added sugar per serving. In Panama, it was found to have the highest added sugar content per serving at 5.3 grams.

"On the eve of its Annual General Meeting, a petition demands that Nestlé put an end to this unjustifiable and harmful double standard, which contributes to the explosive rise of obesity and leads children to develop a life-long preference for sugary products... While Nestlé recommends publicly to avoid baby foods that contain added sugar, it takes advantage of the weakness of existing regulations to continue selling such products in lower-income countries," the report said.

Meanwhile, in response to the findings of the report, the Union Consumer Affairs Ministry has directed the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to take necessary action against the company.

Nestlé has a history of being embroiled in controversies. Previously, their Maggi instant noodles were banned in the country due to the presence of MSG (monosodium glutamate) and lead, with the latter surpassing Nestlé India's stated levels by over one thousand times. Between 5 June and 1 September, 2015, around 38,000 tonnes of Maggi were removed from stores nationwide and subsequently disposed of.

While MNCs like Nestlé and Johnson & Johnson, whose baby products were found having carcinogenic substances, are definitely at fault, the clear lack of regulatory guidelines in countries like India cannot be overstated. MNCs are attracted towards India as it is the world's largest consumer market but unfortunately our governments have been bending backwards and are more than willing to accommodate these companies even at the cost of the population's health and well-being simply because of the immense kickbacks that these multinationals offer.

WISDOM CORNER

The future doesn't exist. The only thing that exists is now and our memory of what happened in the past. But because we invented the idea of a future, we're the only animal that realized we can affect the future by what we do today.

DAVID SUZUKI

The greatest happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved; loved for ourselves, or rather, loved in spite of ourselves.

VICTOR HUGO

Knowledge is like money: to be of value it must circulate, and in circulating it can increase in quantity and, hopefully, in value.

LOUIS L'AMOUR

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1370: Construction began on the Bastille, the medieval fortress that came to symbolize French despotism.
- 1500: Portuguese explorer Pedro Álvares Cabral, while on a voyage tracing Vasco da Gama's 1497-99 water route to India, sighted the mainland of South America near the present-day city of Pôrto Seguro, Brazil.
- 1864: The U.S. Congress passed the Coinage Act of 1864, which led to "In God We Trust" being printed on U.S. coins; the phrase was eventually added to all of the country's currency.
- 1915: During World War I, German forces introduced the systematized use of chemical warfare when they released chlorine gas along a 4-mile (6-km) front at the Second Battle of Ypres.
- 1970: First celebrated on this day in 1970 in the U.S., Earth Day—founded by American politician and conservationist Gaylord Anton Nelson—helped spark the environmental movement and quickly grew into an international event.
- 1983: The German magazine Stern created a sensation when it announced the discovery of the Hitler Diaries, 60 volumes of journals reportedly written by Adolf Hitler; however, they were quickly determined to be forgeries.

LOL

THE SALESMAN

A golfer, playing a round by himself, is about to tee off, and a greasy little salesman runs up to him, and yells, "Wait! Before you tee off, I have something really amazing to show you!" The golfer, annoyed, says, "What is it?" "It's a special golf ball," says the salesman. "You can never lose it!" "Whattaya mean," scoffs the golfer, "you can never lose it? What if you hit it into the water?" "No problem," says the salesman. "It floats, and it detects where the shore



is, and spins towards it."

"Well, what if you hit it into the woods?"

"Easy," says the salesman. "It emits a beeping sound, and you can find it with your eyes closed."

"Okay," says the golfer, impressed. "But what if your round goes late and it gets dark?"

"No problem, sir, this golf ball glows in the dark! I'm telling you, you can never lose this golf ball!"

The golfer buys it at once. "Just one question," he says to the salesman.

"Where did you get it?" "I found it."

FOCUS ISRAEL-PALESTINE

AN AWFUL STATUS QUO

It is time for Israel to recognise the force of the rapidly growing international movement to recognise Palestinian statehood, not as the final outcome of a political settlement but as a path to achieving it. Were Israel to get serious about pursuing a two-state solution, it would not be rewarding Hamas, but benefiting itself.

The awful reality, as the horrendous attacks of 7 October, 2023, made clear, is that without a political solution that satisfies legitimate Palestinian aspirations, Israel will never be free of the spectre of terrorism.

My decades of experience with conflict prevention and resolution, including years of talking to all sides in the Middle East, have drummed home the truth that despair can all too easily turn into rage, and then into indefensible outrage. By the same token, the threat of violence diminishes rapidly during those periods of genuine hope for a just and dignified settlement.

To understand the roots of 7 October is not to justify the slaughter of innocents, then or ever. Israel was undoubtedly entitled to respond with all the force that international law allows. But for Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's government – and those who blindly support it – to remain in denial about those roots, and to offer no political way forward, is simply to invite more of the same. This is especially true now that so many ordinary, decent Palestinians have been displaced, traumatised, and angered by the disproportionate savagery of the Israeli response.

As I have argued elsewhere, the moral, legal, and political case for recognising Palestinian statehood has always been strong. Some 140 United Nations member states – albeit nearly all of them from the Global South – have already done so. The Gaza war has now lent the issue new relevance and urgency. More and more countries see Israel's intransigence as not only perpetuating Palestinian misery but also guaranteeing its own.

Australia, in a pathbreaking speech by Foreign Minister Penny Wong on 9 April, became



Regardless of whether the two-state solution proves to have any life left in it, conferring Palestine the extra legitimacy, leverage, and bargaining power inherent in recognised statehood would be the first step toward offering both sides a better future. The international community should make it a top priority

the latest of a host of formerly cautious countries – including the United Kingdom, Ireland, Spain, Norway, and even the United States – to make clear that it is actively considering early recognition of Palestinian statehood. True, the timing is an issue. With UN votes on full membership for Palestine expected at the Security Council and in the General Assembly this month, the US and some others may not yet be willing to issue formal declarations. Nonetheless, the direction of travel is clear, and momentum is building.

Many argue, nonetheless, that recognition of Palestinian statehood is an empty, quixotic gesture. Practically, a two-state solution now looks unattainable, owing to the territorial fragmentation created by Israel's increasingly unrestrained West Bank settlement-building programme. And Israeli hostility to a two-state solution, and Palestinian support for its own one-state solution, have both grown steadily and likely become more entrenched since 7 October.

All true enough, but the dream of a two-state solution must be kept alive, not only because it remains overwhelmingly the preferred policy internationally, but also because it is so obviously in Israel's own long-term interest. As many commentators over the years have pointed out,

Israel potentially can be a Jewish state, a democratic state, and a state occupying the whole of historical Judea and Samaria. But it cannot be all three at the same time. (This was a favourite line of my old boss, Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke, in offering tough love to the Jewish community in Australia.)

The argument for recognising Palestinian statehood is that doing so is vital to restore a balance that has tipped overwhelmingly in favour of Israel. No peace negotiation can succeed if the parties at the table are completely mismatched. For the foreseeable future, the best – and possibly the only – way to counter the current mismatch is to show that Palestine has legitimacy not only in the Islamic world and the Global South, but globally, including in traditional pillars of the Global North, like the UK, Australia, and other US allies and partners.

While it is not necessary for a state to be recognised as such to have a government in effective control of its entire territory, the issue is made more complicated by governance problems on the Palestinian side. The Palestinian Authority is a gerontocracy in desperate need of reform, and Hamas has dealt itself out of any international acceptance with its military wing's terrorist excesses.

Constructing a viable pan-Palestinian government – preferably with the support of key regional players – will certainly be a long haul. I am among those who have long believed that the imprisoned Palestinian activist Marwan Barghouti – popular in both Gaza and the West Bank – could be the Mandela-like unifier that Palestinians desperately need. But for precisely that reason, persuading Israel to release him will be a Herculean task, at least as long as Netanyahu remains in power.

Regardless of whether the two-state solution proves to have any life left in it, conferring Palestine the extra legitimacy, leverage, and bargaining power inherent in recognised statehood would help achieve for both sides a future that is better than the awful status quo. If it does still have life, as we must all hope, Palestinian leverage will be crucial in producing just and sustainable solutions to the big outstanding issues, including those concerning boundaries, credible security guarantees for both sides, the protection of holy sites, and the fraught question of refugee rights.

But even if the only remaining option is to negotiate a new, democratic, non-apartheid single state (in which Palestinians enjoy fully equal rights alongside Israel's Jewish population), giving Palestinians more legitimacy and heft at the bargaining table serves the goal of securing a sustainable peace.

At a time of dramatically heightened tension with Iran, and all the renewed sense of insecurity that comes with it, it has never been more important for Israel to defuse the visceral anger of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Most of the rest of the world is now telling Israel that the best way to start is to accept the force of Palestinians' claim to statehood. If Israelis really want a more secure future, it is time for them to listen.

The writer was Australia's foreign minister (1988-96), president of the International Crisis Group (2000-09), and chancellor of the Australian National University (2010-19).

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SPECTRUM SOCIETY

Embrace uncertainty with courage



Sayan Chatterjee

TO NAVIGATE THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE NEW WORLD, WE MUST CULTIVATE A CULTURE OF COLLABORATION, EMPATHY, AND INCLUSIVITY

The dichotomy between bravery and grave consequences looms large in today's tumultuous landscape. We stand at the threshold of a new era, where the decisions we make today will shape the course of tomorrow. The question that echoes through the corridors of power, the minds of the populace, and the annals of history is this: Are we stepping into a brave new world, or are we descending into a grave of our own making?

The pace of technological advancement, the shifting geopolitical landscapes, and the looming spectre of climate change have all converged to create an exhilarating and daunting world. On one hand, we witness incredible feats of human ingenuity and progress. The possibilities seem boundless, from breakthroughs in renewable energy to the democratisation of information through the internet. Yet, on the other hand, we are confronted with unprecedented challenges that threaten the very

fabric of our existence.

The rise of artificial intelligence promises to revolutionise industries, streamline processes, and unlock new frontiers of discovery. However, it also raises ethical dilemmas regarding job displacement, privacy invasion, and the potential for autonomous systems to outpace human control. The digital age has connected us in ways unimaginable, fostering global collaboration and understanding. Yet, it has also exposed us to cyber threats, misinformation, and the erosion of personal boundaries.

Moreover, the spectre of climate change looms large, casting a long shadow over our collective future. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and environmental degradation pose existential threats to life as we know it. The choices we make today, whether to prioritise short-term gains over long-term sustainability, will determine the legacy we leave for future generations.

In the realm of geopolitics, the dynamics of power are shifting beneath our feet. The rise of populist movements, the resurgence of nationalism, and the erosion of multilateralism pose significant challenges to global stability and cooperation. As we navigate this complex landscape, we must confront the stark realities of inequality, injustice, and systemic oppression that persist in our societies.

In confronting these challenges, we are faced with a choice. We can either embrace the uncertainty of the future with courage and resilience, or we can succumb to fear and inertia. The path to a brave new world is fraught with obstacles, but it is also illuminated by the indomitable spirit of human endeavour. It requires bold leadership, innovative thinking, and a collective commitment to forging a better tomorrow.

To navigate the complexities of the new world, we must cultivate a culture of collaboration,

empathy, and inclusivity. We must harness the power of technology for the greater good, while remaining vigilant against its potential pitfalls. We must confront the existential threat of climate change with urgency and determination, recognising that our actions today will reverberate for generations.

In the final analysis, the new world is neither inherently brave nor inherently grave. It is a canvas upon which we must paint the future we wish to inhabit. It is a crucible in which our values, aspirations, and resilience will be tested. As we stand on the precipice of tomorrow, let us choose courage over fear, hope over despair, and unity over division. Only through collective action and unwavering resolve can we build a world worthy of our children's children.

The writer is a Delhi-based, DCC-qualified independent contributor to print and online publications.

Economic contrast

Sir, Within India's economic sphere, where numbers often clash with daily realities, the issue of food inflation arises prominently, particularly in rural settings. Despite the nation's overall inflation seeing a dip to a ten-month low at 4.85%, the continuous rise in food prices, hitting a staggering 8.52% for five consecutive months, brings into question the stability portrayed by headline figures. This economic contrast highlights the complex task of managing prices of essentials amid global petroleum price fluctuations. While India prides itself on being a top producer of milk and vegetables, the stark truth of inefficiencies within storage and transportation infrastructure presents a grim picture. These inefficiencies not only lead to significant wastage but also contribute to affordability challenges, especially for rural households. The disparity between statistical data and the lived experiences of families struggling to afford basics like milk underscores the widening gap between economic indicators and real-life situations. Despite apparent increases in availability, a significant portion of the populace faces the brunt of rising food costs, making it hard to maintain a balanced diet due to financial constraints. A closer examination reveals the intricate dynamics at play. While retail inflation suggests stability at 4.85%, the glaring gap in food inflation rates, particularly pronounced in rural areas, tells a different story.

Amarjeet Kumar, HAZARIBAGH

Dubai lessons

Sir, Dubai was pounded by thunderstorms and incessant rains last week. While global warming has been widely acknowledged as the reason for the Gulf city being battered by 256 mm of rains in 24 hours, the needle of suspicion was also pointed towards cloud seeding. Notwithstanding the fact that Dubai has a history of employing cloud seeding for effecting rainfall to counter water shortages, experts are ruling out this possibility citing a strong weather forecast that was made before the deluge. Be that as it may, parched countries like the UAE have to put in place robust mechanisms to prevent floods following torrential rains. These countries are paying a heavy price for ineffective drainage systems and little green space to help seep the rain water.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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WB's political space sees rise of dynasties

TMC has fielded five, Congress four, and the two parties, BJP and CPI(M), which used to decry dynasty politics, also have two candidates each

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, April 21: Dynastic politics has been a prominent feature of Indian democracy, but its increased presence in Bengal this Lok Sabha election marks a significant departure from the state's tradition of cultivating leaders from grassroots politics.

Out of the 42 Lok Sabha seats, 13 have candidates from political dynasties. This represents a significant increase compared to previous elections, where political dynasties were limited to just three seats.

Traditionally known for its vibrant student politics, Bengal is experiencing a notable shift as influential political families are gaining prominence.

"This is a new trend or an evolution of Bengal politics from class-based politics to dynasty politics. Never in the polls have so many candidates come from political families," political scientist at Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Maidul Islam, told PTI.

He said in Bengal where politics is dictated by the charisma of mass leaders, party symbols and issues, "it remains to be seen how people accept these political dynasties."

According to TMC, BJP, and Congress leaders, several factors contribute to the rise of political dynasties in Bengal.

According to them, family members are valued for their loyalty and trustworthiness, making them reliable allies.

"The success of established family names in politics is at-



If a son of a doctor aspires to be a doctor, a son of an advocate aspires to be a lawyer, then what is wrong in children or relatives of politicians following similar footsteps? It becomes problematic only when eligibility criteria are compromised, leading to a concentration of power

SANTANU SEN | LEADER, TMC

tributed to two main factors - name recognition and networking, which make it easier for them to garner electoral support," a senior TMC leader said. TMC national general secretary and two-time MP from Diamond Harbour, Abhishek Banerjee, the nephew of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, tops the chart of political dynasty contesting the polls. He is seeking re-election from the seat.

BJP's candidate from Kanthi Lok Sabha seat, Soumendu Adhikari, comes from the powerful Adhikari family of East Midnapore, with his father Sisir Adhikari being a three-term MP from the seat, and his brother Suwendu Adhikari is the Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal assembly.

In Malda South seat, the Congress has passed on the representation mantle from an indisposed Abu Hasem Khan Choudhury, Congress patriarch

ABA Ghani Khan Choudhury's brother who won the seat without a break from the 2006 bypolls, to his son Isha Khan Choudhury, a former Congress MLA.

CPI(M)'s South Kolkata candidate Saria Shah Halim, is also from a political dynasty, as her father-in-law, Hashim Abdul Halim, was the longest-serving speaker of West Bengal assembly, and her husband, Fuad Halim, is a CPI(M) state committee member.

The TMC has fielded its sitting MP from Uluberia - Sajda Ahmed, wife of former TMC MP Sultan Ahmed; it has repeated its Jaynagar candidate Pratima Mandal, the daughter of former party MP Gobinda Chandra Naskar.

From the Bardhaman-

Durgapur seat, the party has fielded former cricketer Kirti Azad, a former BJP MP from Bihar, who is the son of former Bihar Chief Minister Bhagwat Jha Azad.

The Bengal Congress has fielded its veteran leader Nepal Mahato from Purulia, son of former MP Debendra Mahato, and also Mortaza Hossain, grandson of former minister Abdus Sattar, from Jangipur seat.

"It is not just because of my family; I too have been an MLA here and served the people for the last 15 years," Congress candidate from Raiganj Ali Imran Ramz, son of veteran Forward Bloc leader Mohammed Ramzan Ali and nephew of former minister in the Left Front government Hafiz Alam Sairani, said.

BJP candidate from Bongaon seat, Shantanu Thakur, who comes from Matua-Thakurbari family, with his father Manjul Krishna Thakur being a former minister in TMC cabinet and his aunt Mamata Bala Thakur being a TMC MP.

CPI(M)'s Serampore candidate Diprita Dhar, a youth leader, is granddaughter of former three-term MLA Padma Nidhi Dhar.

The BJP and CPI(M) defended their decisions to field candi-

dates with political lineage by saying, "Their candidature has nothing to do with their families." "Both Saria Shah Halim and Diprita Dhar are good leaders and speakers. It has nothing to do with dynasty," CPI(M) leader Sujan Chakraborty said.

West Bengal BJP spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya said the party has been vocal against dynasty politics, but in the case of Thakur and Soumendu Adhikari, both are well-known leaders. "Both are leaders in their own right and got party tickets based on their winnability," he said.

Although political dynasties have been prevalent in Bengal politics since pre-independence era, post-independence, especially since the late Fifties, student politics was considered the breeding ground for next-generation politicians.

CM Mamata Banerjee, former CM Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, Left Front chairman Biman Bose, and Congress leaders Somen Mitra and Priya Ranjan Dasmuni are products of student politics.

Political scientist Biswanath Chakraborty said the trend of dynasty politics will gain momentum due to a lack of leaders emerging from campuses.

"Earlier, colleges and universities were breeding grounds for the next-generation politicians. But except for Presidency College and Jadavpur University, none of the universities and colleges had a student body election in last five years. So there is hardly any new batch of leaders, forcing the political parties to rely on dynasties," he said.

'DMK-led alliance will sweep LS polls in TN'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Chennai, April 21: DMK General Secretary and Tamil Nadu Water Resources Minister S Duraimurugan has said that the DMK-led alliance would sweep the Lok Sabha elections in Tamil Nadu.

Speaking to IANS, the veteran leader said that the situation on ground in the state is in favour of the DMK-led INDIA bloc and that across the state, he could sense a silent wave in favour of DMK and its allies.

Duraimurugan, a close associate of former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and late DMK leader Muthuvel Karunanidhi, is maintaining the same relationship with his son MK Stalin, DMK President and present Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.

The senior Minister said that the fight across the state is between the DMK-led and the AIADMK-led fronts, and added that BJP could not do anything in the polls. He also said that the three-year rule of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Stalin has endeared the party more to the masses. Duraimurugan said that welfare schemes of the state government including the free breakfast scheme for school children, 1,000 rupees monthly deposit in the account of woman family heads (Kalaigalar Magalir Urimai Thogai) scheme, Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvum or health at door steps scheme, and many other welfare schemes that are directly beneficial to people are well accepted by them.

The Minister also said that the INDIA bloc is fighting Lok Sabha elections in a cohesive manner and that there was no dif-



69.72% voter turnout

Tamil Nadu recorded a voter turnout of 69.72 per cent during the April 19 elections to 39 Lok Sabha constituencies, the Election Commission announced Sunday. According to the "end of poll voter turnout data as uploaded by the respective Returning Officers," released by the Election Commission of India, Dharmapuri recorded the highest turnout of 81.20 per cent. Central Chennai witnessed the lowest of 53.96 per cent.

ference of opinion between the alliance partners. He added that this cohesiveness had also helped the INDIA bloc. Duraimurugan said that the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Stalin had taken into consideration all aspects of a candidate before fielding them for polls. The veteran leader also said that the DMK's cadre has worked tirelessly with the workers of other alliance partners for INDIA bloc.

Duraimurugan's son Kathir Anand is an INDIA bloc candidate for Vellore Lok Sabha seat. Kathir Anand is a sitting MP from the same constituency and had scraped through in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections by a margin of 8,141 votes against AIADMK leader A.C. Shanmugam. Vellore is one seat which the NDA are also having high expectations from.

TN steps up vigil in border areas



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Chennai, April 21: The Tamil Nadu government has stepped up vigil across the border areas after bird flu was reported in Kerala.

An official said that the vigil has been increased in Anaikatti, Gopalapuram and Walayar areas.

"Each checkpoint in these areas is manned by 12 police officers. Any vehicle reaching Tamil Nadu is being searched thoroughly," the official said.

Tamil Nadu Animal Husbandry officials told IANS that whenever bird flu cases are reported from neighbouring states, the department steps up vigil. The officials said that veterinary doctors and paramedic team members are also part of

search teams at the state borders. Any vehicle with poultry and animals is not allowed to cross the checkpoints.

An official said that the state government is not taking any risk and is sanitising all vehicles from Kerala, entering Tamil Nadu.

He also said there are 1252 poultry farms in the Coimbatore district which borders Kerala. The official said that with such a large number of poultry farms in the district, the department is taking extra caution to prevent any outbreak in the state.

The Kerala Health Department has culled 21,000 ducks in the two panchayats (Edathua and Cheruthuna) in the Alappuzha district and has also culled domestic birds in a one-kilometre radius of these two panchayats.

KERALA BIRD FLU

Any vehicle with poultry and animals is not allowed to cross the checkpoints

BJP targeting me, Abhishek; we are not safe: Mamata

The TMC supremo alleged that the BJP is bringing in outsiders to the state to foment trouble

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kumarganj, April 21: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Sunday alleged that the BJP is targeting her and her nephew and TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee and they do not feel safe.

Her allegation came a day after the Leader of Opposition in the assembly, Suwendu Adhikari, said that there would be a "big explosion" Monday which would shake the TMC and its top brass.

"The BJP is targeting me and Abhishek, we are not safe, but we are also not afraid of the saffron party's conspiracy. We urge everyone to be on guard against a conspiracy against TMC leaders and the people of West Bengal," she said.

The TMC supremo was addressing an election rally at Kumarganj in Balurghat Lok Sabha seat in favour of party candidate and state minister Biplab Mitra.

Responding to Adhikari's remark, the TMC supremo said, "There is a traitor who joined the



BJP to protect his family and ill-gotten wealth. Let me tell him, his threat to trigger a chocolate bomb explosion is treated with contempt by us."

Adhikari, a former TMC minister, defected to the BJP ahead of the 2021 assembly elections in the state.

"If you have courage, come up with truths, come up with facts. I guess it takes time for you to fully build up a false narrative, to fully hatch the conspiracy. But rest assured we are ready to counter," she said.

"We will counter him by bursting firecrackers. For us firecrackers are unravelling discrepancies in PM Care Fund and 'jumla' of crediting ₹15 lakh

in every citizen's bank account. He only peddles falsehood," she said.

Banerjee accused the Narendra Modi government of painting independent institutions such as Doordarshan in saffron hues, and claimed that the BJP "appropriating that colour" is an insult to sacrifices made by monks and spiritual leaders of the country for ages.

She wondered how the logo of Doordarshan could be painted in saffron during elections, alleging it was done to suit the BJP's "religion-based vote bank politics and agenda".

"Why did the DD logo suddenly turn saffron? Why were official residences of army per-

If BJP returns to power, there will be no more elections in future and religious rights of several communities will be at stake

MAMATA BANERJEE | CM, WEST BENGAL

sonnel painted in saffron? Why was the uniform of police in Kashi (Varanasi) changed to saffron?" she questioned.

At another meeting in Balurghat, the Lok Sabha constituency of BJP state president Sukanta Majumdar, Banerjee said the Covid vaccination certificate only had the photograph of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "He only believes in self-publicity. He believes in making tall claims and himself listening to his words," she said.

Banerjee waived a piece of paper, claiming it was a copy of an FIR against a central armed paramilitary force for assaulting villagers.

She alleged that two days back a team from the force raided a border village in Dakshin Dinajpur district and beat up villagers when they refused to pledge support for BJP.

"I am urging the EC to take note of the transgression of its role by BSF. Instead of guarding the frontiers and stopping smuggling, they are terrorizing villagers," she said.

2ND PHASE OF LS POLLS

Bengal's Raiganj to have maximum CAPF deployment

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kolkata, April 21: Raiganj Lok Sabha constituency in North Dinajpur district of West Bengal will have the maximum deployment of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) personnel among the three constituencies in the state that will go to polls in the second phase April 26.

The three constituencies going to polls are - Raiganj, Darjeeling and Balurghat.

Sources in the office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Ariz Aftab said that currently, 303 companies of CAPF are in West Bengal, out of which 272 companies will be deployed for the three Lok Sabha constituencies. It is learnt that as many as 111 companies will be deployed for Raiganj, the maximum among the three. Darjeeling will have 88 companies and 73 companies will be deployed at Balurghat.

Of the 111 companies to be deployed for Raiganj, the maximum deployment will be for the Islampur Assembly constituency, one of the seven under this Lok Sabha.

Atmosphere of anarchy in WB: Rajnath

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Murshidabad, April 21: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh Sunday slammed the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC government over the law and order situation in West Bengal and said that atmosphere of anarchy is prevailing in the entire state.

Addressing a public rally in Murshidabad, West Bengal, Rajnath Singh said, "There is an atmosphere of anarchy in the entire West Bengal and it is known for crime. Incidents like Sandeshkhali happen in the land of West Bengal. I assure you that this time if the BJP government is formed here, we will see who dares to repeat the incident like Sandeshkhali."

"When ED and CBI come here for investigation, they are attacked by goons. There is no law and order in the state," he added.

The Defense Minister said that it is unfortunate that inter-religion tensions are being nurtured by the ruling party in West

SANDESHKHALI HORROR



Bengal, which is the land of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Earlier today, West Bengal Leader of Opposition and BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari Sunday called Mamata Banerjee's TMC party a party of goons that lacks support from the people.

"TMC is a party of goons. TMC is not a political party. Goons and police are with them, not the people," Adhikari said.

'Can't stop CAA implementation'

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh Sunday asserted that the BJP delivers on its promises, and maintained that no one can stop implementation of the CAA in West Bengal. He said the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 is not meant to take away anyone's citizenship, but is a law for granting Indian citizenship to people displaced from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan on religious grounds. "The Congress, Trinamool Congress or the Left parties make promises during elections that are not fulfilled, but the BJP delivers on its promises," he said, addressing a rally here in support of BJP candidate from Malda Uttar constituency, Khagen Murmu. He asserted that no one can stop the implementation of CAA in West Bengal, along with the rest of India. "Mamata didi says she will not allow CAA in her state. Why is she trying to hoodwink the people of West Bengal," Singh said. The Centre had in March implemented the CAA, notifying the rules four years after the law was passed by Parliament to fast-track citizenship for undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who came to India before December 31, 2014.

Census of endangered Nilgiri tahr begins soon

TAMIL NADU'S STATE ANIMAL NILGIRI TAHR HAS BECOME LOCALLY EXTINCT, ESPECIALLY IN THE GLENMORGAN MOUNTAINS IN THE NILGIRIS

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Chennai, April 21: The first synchronised census of the endangered Nilgiri tahr will commence April 29 and around 700 personnel, including volunteers and officials, will participate in the exercise that will take three days.

The Kerala Forest Department will also be part of the survey. The Nilgiri tahr habitat is spread across 13 forest divisions, 100 beats and 140 blocks. The terrain in some of the areas is highly challenging.

The volunteers are chosen based on physical fitness and



past trekking experience, besides having a wildlife conservation background.

The World Wide Fund for Nature - India (WWF-India), which has been studying the Nilgiri tahr for several years, the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the Advanced Institute of Wildlife Sciences (AIWC) will be part of the synchronised survey.

WWF-India in association with the Tamil Nadu forest depart-

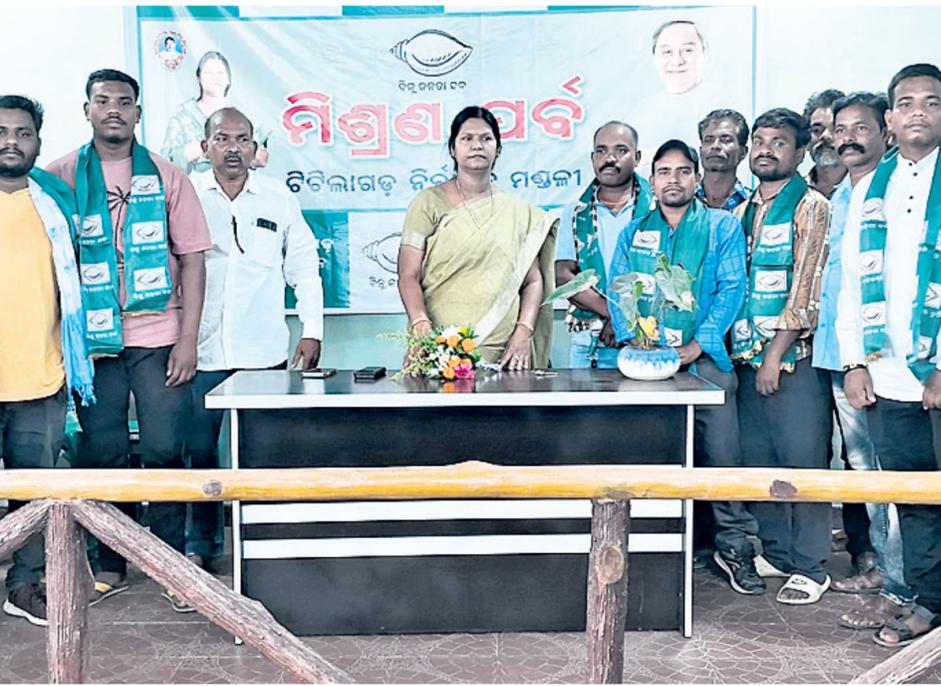
ment in a study found that the Nilgiri tahr has become locally extinct from around 14 per cent of its shola-grassland habitat within the past few decades.

An official with the Tamil Nadu Forest Department told IANS that necessary training on the synchronised census of the Nilgiri tahr has been given to personnel of the Coimbatore, Pollachi, Gudalur, Udumalpet and Kanniyakumari forest range. He also said that training for

personnel in the Mudumalai and Srivilliputhur forest ranges will be completed Monday. It may be recalled that Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin had launched Project Nilgiri tahr nine months ago.

An officer with the Project Nilgiri tahr while speaking to IANS said, "The project team was able to identify and catalogue nine major plant species and three grass varieties that the Nilgiri tahr predominantly feed on."

The official added that the identification and cataloguing were very important for habitat assessment as the main goal is reintroducing this endangered species in their original habitat. The Tamil Nadu forest department had successfully radio-collared a Nilgiri tahr a month ago in Mukurthi National Park. The department said that the radio collaring has already given several valuable insights about the animal.



Hundreds of youths from various panchayats of Titilagarh block in Bolangir district joined BJD in the presence of local MLA and state Water Resources Minister Tukuni Sahu at the party office in Titilagarh, Sunday



Several BJD and BJP workers joined Congress at a merger meeting organised by the party in Narla Assembly constituency of Kalahandi district, Sunday

Sarada unfazed by dissent against him

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, April 21: Following an alleged failed attempt to stop the BJD from re-nominating Sarada Nayak as the party candidate here, some 'so called' senior members, and even those not belonging to the party, have raised their discontentment in a different manner.

In a joint statement, as many as 21 of them have directly challenged the decision of the party supremo and have declared that they won't support Sarada nor will they garner support for him. "Incidentally, some of the names and signatories in the list are not part of the party anymore," said Jayant Mishra, the party spokesperson here. Minati Devta is openly siding with BJP and for that she has

I am least bothered or worried about them. My only observation is that they have shown their total disrespect for our honourable party president by writing such a letter
SARADA NAYAK | ROURKELA MLA



been suspended from the party only two days back, he said. Similarly, citing another example, he said, "RN Mishra, the former vice-chairman of Rourkela Municipality, is another among the rebels. He left the party in 2014. I don't under-

stand how he could sign such a letter addressed to our organisational secretary Pranab Prakash Das." He further said, "They have completely disregarded the party high command's decision. Sarada babu is working for the people

and not for any individual interest. We are a structured party, with district president, observer and assistant observer for the district. They should have raised their grievances with them." Reacting to the development, Nayak, who is the sitting MLA and Labour Minister, said, "Jayant bhai has already conveyed the party's stand. I have nothing to say. I am least bothered or worried about them. My only observation is that they have shown their total disrespect for our honourable party president by writing such a letter." Meanwhile, sources told OrissaPOST that four of the signatories to the statement have contacted party top leaders and informed them that their signatures had been faked.

Feel betrayed: Prabodh on quitting Cong

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, April 21: Former Indian hockey captain Prabodh Tirkey, who resigned from the Congress after being dropped as a candidate, Sunday said the party betrayed him.

Speaking to PTI, he said the Congress insulted him by withdrawing his candidature without informing him of the reason behind it. The party replaced Tirkey with Debendra Bhatnagar in Talsara Assembly seat in Sundargarh district. "I feel betrayed by the Congress leadership. They have betrayed my trust," Tirkey said. "It was an insult to me as the party withdrew my candidature without informing me the reason behind it," he said, maintaining that the news was a shock for him and his supporters. Tirkey, who joined the Congress in September last year, resigned from the Congress Saturday. He said he called state Congress president Sarat Pattanayak, the party's in-charge for Odisha Ajoy Kumar and senior leader Bijay Patnaik, but "they are not taking my calls". Tirkey said he would take a decision on his next course of action after consulting his followers. Asked if he would join the BJD or BJP, he said, "All the major parties have announced the names of their candidates. The only option left for me is to contest as an independent candidate. I have not taken any decision." State Congress leaders could not be reached for comment.



Several BJP and Congress workers from Paralakhemundi Assembly constituency in Gajapati district meet Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik at Naveen Niwas in Bhubaneswar after joining BJD, Saturday

Shah predicts violence, poverty, atrocities if Oppn wins

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Katihar, April 21: Union Home Minister Amit Shah Sunday charged the Congress-led opposition with being soft on terror and indifferent towards the uplift of deprived castes, and alleged that their return to power could cause "riots, atrocities and poverty".

Addressing an election rally in Katihar Lok Sabha constituency of Bihar, the former BJP president also credited his party with having given the nation, in Narendra Modi, its "first OBC Prime Minister" who has "put an end" to dynasty politics. "Modi wiped out Naxalism and reined in terrorism. When the Congress was in power, terrorists struck at will and nobody could muster the courage to retaliate. In contrast, the attacks in Uri and Pulwama were followed quickly by surgical strikes and Balakot airstrikes. Our security personnel went

Modi wiped out Naxalism and reined in terrorism. When the Congress was in power, terrorists struck at will and nobody could muster the courage to retaliate
AMIT SHAH | UNION HOME MINISTER

across the border with Pakistan and the terrorists were bumped off in their own hideouts," said Shah. He also slammed Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge for taking exception to raising the issue of abrogation of Article 370 in poll rallies outside Jammu and Kashmir, saying "it is a matter concerning the whole country". "People from Rajasthan and Bihar have shed their blood fighting the insurgency there. Now Kashmir has been fully integrated with the rest of the country," he said. In his speech that lasted barely



15 minutes, Shah, who spoke in the presence of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, the JD(U) president, also dwelt at length on the alleged anti-OBC stance of the Congress, which has sought to reach out to the backward classes with the promise of caste census, besides forming alliances with parties like the RJD that have roots in the Mandal movement. "The Congress slept on the Kaka Kalelkar Commission report and when recommendations of Mandal Commission were implemented, it opposed the same for years," alleged the BJP leader, who added it was

under Modi that the OBC Commission was granted constitutional status. "Not only is Modi the first OBC PM, but he also heads a cabinet in which 35 per cent of the ministers come from backward classes. This has all been made possible by the BJP," said the home minister, who urged voters of Katihar to vote for JD(U) MP Dulal Chandra Goswami and help the PM secure a third consecutive term in office. "If you go with the RJD and the Congress, you will have to contend with riots, atrocities, poverty and food shortage. If you vote for the NDA you will continue to reap the benefits of the double-engine government," said Shah. Shah said that Nitish Kumar brought electricity to the remotest of villages in Bihar. "But the INDI alliance wants to take the state back to the lantern age," said the BJP leader, referring to the poll symbol of the

RJD. He also charged the RJD with having ushered in a "jungle raj" in the state while in power and accused its supremo Lalu Prasad and his son Tejashwi Yadav of "sitting in the lap of Congress". The home minister also reeled out a number of statistics to highlight the progress made by the country under the Modi government. "In last 10 years, on average, one university has been established every week, two new colleges have been set up every day and 55 patents have been registered every day. Besides, an average of 1 lakh mudra loans have been given to poor entrepreneurs every day," claimed Shah. "Modi's rule has brought development to the entire country, including Bihar. The central outlay for Bihar during the 10 years of the previous Congress government stood at 2.80 lakh crore. Under Modi, it shot up to 9.23 lakh crore," he added.

KENDRAPARA ASSEMBLY SEAT

Sipra pitted against Ganeswar after 15 yrs

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kendrapara, April 21: History is repeating itself in Kendrapara Assembly constituency as Biju Janata Dal (BJD) candidate Ganeswar Behera, who had quit the Congress a few days ago to join the regional party, will face Congress' Sipra Mallick, who had also switched over to the grand old party after quitting BJD.

The BJD dropped Kendrapara's sitting MLA Shashi Bhusan Behera and picked Ganeswar as its candidate, Saturday. However, the BJP, which continued to remain in third position in the last three elections, is yet to declare its candidate. The Assembly seat has been reserved for Scheduled Caste (SC) candidates since 2009, when Sipra took on Ganeswar for the crucial Assembly seat. However, Sipra was then a BJD candidate while Ganeswar was fighting the poll on a Congress ticket. Now, since they have changed their parties, it would be interesting to see who is winning the battle. Many are of the opinion that the battle between the arch-rivals after 15 years is going to grab attention of one and all. Sipra emerged victorious in 2009 by securing 62,436 votes out of the total number of 1,18,678 voters in the constituency while Ganeswar got 46,505 votes to clinch the second position. Similarly, BJP's Bijay Kumar Mallick finished it with a distant third position by securing 6,861 votes. Sources said Sipra could not get an opportunity to contest



elections post 2009, but Ganeswar has become a war veteran by throwing his hat in the ring several times since then. As far as vote share is concerned, Ganeswar secured 39.19 per cent votes in 2009 which rose to 43.1 per cent in 2014. In 2019, he was defeated by BJD's Shashi Bhusan Behera by 6,585 votes. Sources said Ganeswar got huge support from municipal area of Kendrapara from where he got more votes than Shashi Bhusan. Meanwhile, the number of voters in this reserved constituency has reached 2,28,596. Now, when Sipra and Ganeswar are facing each other again, the latter is in jittery over

the voices of dissent against him within Kendrapara BJD. The hope of ticket aspirants and their supporters who have been working for BJD for several years has turned into despair when Ganeswar got the ticket. Several BJD workers had drawn the attention of BJD supremo Naveen Patnaik to review the decision April 6 and 7. They also assembled in front of Sankha Bhawan in Bhubaneswar recently to protest Ganeswar's candidature. They demanded rollback of the decision and urged the top leadership to nominate Sipra for Kendrapara Assembly segment. However, she joined Congress as there was deafening silence from the party. Congress nominated her for the seat Saturday.

Sipra could not get an opportunity to contest elections post 2009, but Ganeswar has since then become a war veteran by throwing his hat in the ring several times



national

of the day quote

The Constitution has given you the right to vote, given your reservations, ensured protection of tribal culture and facilitated the development of Dalits. The BJP-led Union government wants to change this Constitution and curtail people's rights

PRIYANKA GANDHI VADRA | CONGRESS LEADER

The violence on Ram Navami in non-BJP-ruled states is the outcome of policies of appeasement

YOGI ADITYANATH | UP CM

The opposition parties in the country are now trying hard to save their dynastic politics, be it the Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) or Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT)

J P NADDA | BJP PRESIDENT

SHORT TAKES

Man sets pregnant wife on fire

Amritsar: A man allegedly tied his 23-year-old pregnant wife to bed and set her on fire in Bulley Nangal village of Baba Bakala area here, police Sunday said. Sukhdev Singh burned his wife to death Friday after a fight with her, they said. Sukhdev tied his wife Pinky, who was six months pregnant and was expecting twins, to a bed and set her on fire, they said. By the time police, which was informed by village Sarpanch about the incident, reached the house, the woman had died of burns. Sukhdev, who had fled after the act, has been arrested and booked for murder, police said.

Fire breaks out in BJP office

Mumbai: A fire broke out in the Bharatiya Janata Party office located in south Mumbai's Nariman Point Sunday, though no one was injured in the incident, a civic official said. The blaze, which started at 4:35 pm, was doused 10 minutes later, the Fire Brigade official said. "It was confined to electrical wiring. No one was injured. We had deployed a water tanker and fire engine," the official said.

Three dead, one injured

Jabalpur: Three persons were killed and one injured when a harvester machine overturned after hitting a culvert in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur district, a police official said Sunday. The incident occurred near Kundam town, some 45 kilometres from the district headquarters, in the intervening night of Saturday-Sunday, the official said.

Court declares marriage invalid due to husband's 'relative impotency'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, April 21: The Aurangabad bench of the Bombay High Court has annulled the marriage of a young couple that could not consummate it due to the man's 'relative impotency', noting their agony of frustration cannot be ignored. A division bench of Justices Vibha Kankanwadi and S G Chapalgaonkar in the judgment April 15 also noted that this was a fit case to help "young sufferers of marriage" who could not connect with each other mentally, emotionally or physically. A 27-year-old man had approached the bench after a family court in February 2024 refused an application filed by his 26-year-old wife, seeking to annul the marriage on the admission

stage itself. The high court in its order said the expression 'relative impotency' is a known phenomenon and is different from the normal impotency, which means the inability to copulate in general. Relative impotency broadly points to a situation where a person might be capable of having intercourse but incapable of performing it with the spouse. The court said there could be various physical and mental causes for such relative impotency. "In the present case, it can be easily gathered that the husband has relative impotency (towards) the wife. The reason for non-consummation of the marriage is this apparent relative impotency of the husband," the



HC said. The high court said it could not ignore the fact that this was a matter concerning a young couple who faced the agony of frustration in the marriage. The man may have initially blamed his wife for non-con-

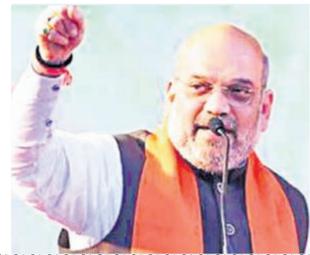


Why is the BJP government rolling back the INC's pro-people schemes? Does the PM prioritise his businessmen friends over Rajasthan's rural communities? Why has ERCP not been designated a national project yet

JAIRAM RAMESH | CONGRESS LEADER

SHAH SKIPS DARJEELING RALLY

Union Home Minister Amit Shah Sunday could not attend a scheduled election rally in Darjeeling town of West Bengal as his helicopter failed to land due to inclement weather, a party leader said



Won't abide by ECI notice: Uddhav

ADDRESSING A PRESS CONFERENCE, THACKERAY SAID ASKING FOR THE REMOVAL OF 'JAI BHAVANI' FROM THE ANTHEM WAS AN INSULT TO MAHARASHTRA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, April 21: Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray Sunday said he has received a notice from the Election Commission of India (ECI) to remove the words 'Jai Bhavani' and 'Hindu' from his party's new anthem, but he won't abide by it. Addressing a press conference here, Thackeray said asking for the removal of 'Jai Bhavani' from the anthem was an insult to Maharashtra. Thackeray said his party has come up with an anthem to popularise its new poll symbol, "mashal" (flaming torch), and the ECI has asked for the removal of the words "Hindu" and "Jai Bhavani" from it. "Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj founded Hindavi Swaraj with the blessings of goddess Tulja Bhavani. We are not asking for votes in the name of the goddess or Hindu religion. This is an insult and will not be tolerated," Thackeray said. The Sena UBT chief said he will continue the practice of say-



ing "Jai Bhavani" and "Jai Shivaji" in his public meetings. "If the poll body takes action against us, they will have to tell us what they did when Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who while campaigning for the Karnataka assembly elections, had asked people to say 'Jai Bajrang Bali' and press the but-

ton on EVMs. Amit Shah had told people to vote for the BJP to get Ram Lalla darshan for free in Ayodhya," he said. The Shiv Sena (UBT) has asked the ECI whether the laws had been changed and if it was okay now to ask for votes in the name of religion, he said. "The poll body has not responded to our letter and the reminder we sent. In the reminder, we had said if the laws have been changed, we will also say 'Har Har Mahadev' in our election rallies." The former Chief Minister said his father, Balasaheb Thackeray, was barred from voting and contesting elections for six years because he campaigned for Hindutva when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the Prime Minister. The party had also asked the ECI to clarify whether speeches made by PM Modi and Amit Shah during the recent assembly elections invoking religion were "corrupt practice" (under the Representation of People Act), he claimed.

Tharoor booked for false campaign



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thiruvananthapuram, April 21: Senior Congress leader and Lok Sabha candidate Shashi Tharoor has been booked for allegedly carrying out a false campaign against Union minister and rival candidate Rajeev Chandrasekhar, police said here Sunday. The case was registered by the Cyber Police here April 15 but its details were revealed Sunday. According to police, the case against Tharoor was registered based on a complaint lodged by BJP leader J R Padmakumar who accused the Congress leader of carrying out a false campaign against Chandrasekhar during a television programme.

The complainant alleged that Tharoor, during the programme, had made defamatory statements against Chandrasekhar with regard to influencing voters of coastal regions in the upcoming Lok Sabha election. The case was registered under Sections 171-G and 500 of the Indian Penal Code and Section 65 of IT Act, a cyber police official said adding that an investigation is going on in the matter. IPC 177-G refers to raising false statement in connection with an election, while IPC 500 relates to defamation. Tharoor, who is contesting from Thiruvananthapuram Lok Sabha constituency, is yet to react on the registration of the case.

9 dead in Raj road crash



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kota, April 21: Nine men returning from a wedding died in a road incident in Rajasthan's Jhalawar when the car they were in collided head-on with a truck early Sunday, an officer said. The men, all of them aged 16-30, were returning from a wedding in Dungri village of Madhya Pradesh. Among the victims were Rohit, 16, Sonu, 22, and Deepak, 24, all of them brothers. Eklera Police Station SHO Sandeep Vishoni said. The other victims were identified as Ashok, 24, Hemraj, 33, Ravishankar, 25, and Rahul, 20, all of them from Bagari Mohalla of Jhalawar's Eklera village, he

said. Rohit, 22, and Ramkishan, 20, who too died in the incident, were from Khanpur area of Jhalawar and Harnawda in Baran district. Manish Bagari, 18, is undergoing treatment in a critical state at a hospital, Vishoni said. The truck driver was detained and questioned, he said. Deputy Superintendent of Police Hemant Gautam said the car, a Maruti Suzuki Omni, was completely mangled. According to Gopal Bagari, a relative, around 35-40 baraatists had left from Dungri in three Omnis and two pick-ups vehicles at around 12:30 am. On the way, Bagari stopped in Khimchi village on Bhopal road for tea, while the other car sped ahead. After around 10 minutes break, Bagari resumed his journey, and after a few minutes travel, around 2:15 am, found a car in a mangled state stuck in a truck near Pachola village. The rescuers had to break open the rear gate of the car to bring out the severely injured men, at least two of them were stuck in front. Five of them were rushed to a private hospital and four to a community health centre. All nine were soon declared dead.



People click photographs in a mustard field, in Ganderbal district, Sunday

PTI PHOTO

BJP LEADER ATTACKED DURING POLL DEBATE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Tikamgarh, (MP), April 21: Two persons allegedly attacked a local BJP leader during a poll debate organised by a national news channel in Madhya Pradesh's Tikamgarh, police said Sunday. The police have arrested one person in connection with the incident that occurred at a ground in Nazarbarg where a news channel organised a debate Saturday night, an official said.

Representatives from the BJP and Congress, among others, participated in the debate, he said. The accused, Himanshu Tiwari and Babar, allegedly raised slogans against the BJP and made objectionable remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Kotwali police station in-charge Anand Raj said. The BJP's district media cell in-charge, Prafull Dwivedi, objected to this, and the duo allegedly threw a chair at him, he

THE ACCUSED, HIMANSHU TIWARI AND BABAR, ALLEGEDLY RAISED SLOGANS AGAINST THE BJP AND MADE OBJECTIONABLE REMARKS AGAINST PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI, KOTWALI POLICE STATION IN-CHARGE ANAND RAJ SAID

said. Some local leaders intervened to protect Dwivedi, which led to a scuffle, the official said. Based on Dwivedi's complaint,

a case was registered against the alleged accused under Sections 499 (defamation), 294 (obscene act), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code, he said. While Babar has been arrested, a search is on for Tiwari, who is absconding, the official said. District Congress president Naveen Sahu clarified that the accused had nothing to do with his party, and they were present as spectators.

This is the second such incident during a poll debate organised by news channels in Madhya Pradesh. Earlier April 13, workers and leaders of the Congress and BJP allegedly attacked each other with sticks and plastic chairs during a debate organised by a news channel at a public park in Jabalpur. A video of the incident surfaced on social media, in which some people were seen scuffling and throwing plastic chairs at each other.

CHHATTISGARH LIQUOR SCAM ED arrests ex-IAS officer

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Raipur, April 21: Days after filing a fresh case, the Enforcement Directorate Sunday arrested retired Chhattisgarh IAS officer Anil Tuteja in connection with a Rs 2,000 crore alleged liquor-scam linked money laundering case in the state, officials said. The federal agency detained the 2003-batch officer from the Economic Offences Wing (EOW)/Anti Corruption Bureau (ACB) office in Raipur Saturday evening where the bureaucrat and his son Yash Tuteja had gone to record their statements in the same case. They were issued a summons by the ED at the EOW/ACB office to join the investigation and record their statements following which they were taken to the central agency's office here. The retired IAS officer was questioned and was taken into custody in the early hours of Sunday under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). Yash Tuteja was allowed to leave after questioning. Anil Tuteja was produced before a jurisdictional magistrate that sent him to one-day judicial custody, ED counsel Saurabh Pandey said. He added that the agency had sought 14-day custody of Tuteja from the magistrate.

international

of the day quote

The strongest response to Israel and the path to victory lie in unity and integrity

The United States is trying to cobble together a trilateral security partnership and insisted on introducing nuclear submarines into this region, which violates the purpose of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty and poses a serious risk of nuclear proliferation

India stands in solidarity with victims of the attack (Easter Sunday) & with the people of Sri Lanka. We condemn terrorism in all its forms & manifestations anywhere, everywhere

SHORT TAKES

1K kg NATO bomb

Nis: Experts Sunday removed a bomb left over in a southern Serbian city from the 1999 NATO bombing of the country, prompting the evacuation of more than a thousand residents, officials said. The 1,000-kilo (2,200-pound) bomb was successfully removed from a construction site in the neighbourhood of Nis, an interior ministry official said. "It is being transported to a safe location where it will be destroyed", official Luka Causic told reporters. NATO's bombing of Serbia began March 24, 1999, without the approval of the UN Security Council, and lasted 78 days.

US to ban TikTok

Washington: Lawmakers in the US House of Representatives Saturday quickly passed two key aid bills to counter China and bolster Taiwan while also threatening a ban on TikTok if it fails to divest from Beijing. The provision would force TikTok to divest from its Chinese parent company ByteDance or face a nationwide ban in the United States, where it has around 170 million users. Western officials have voiced alarm over the popularity of TikTok with young people, alleging that it is subservient to Beijing and a conduit to spread propaganda -- claims denied by the company.

Helicopters crash

Tokyo: Two Japanese navy helicopters crashed into the sea during a training exercise, killing at least one of the eight crew members on board, the defence minister said Sunday. The two SH-60 patrol helicopters were conducting anti-submarine exercises Saturday night near Torishima in the remote Izu island group, off the southern coast of central Japan. Defence Minister Minoru Kihara told a press conference the cause of the crash is under investigation. The two flight recorders had been discovered in close proximity to each other and the probability was high that the two helicopters had collided, he added.

Deluge in China

Beijing: Severe floods "seen around once a century" are expected to hit parts of southern China, state media said Sunday, as heavy rains prompted authorities to step up disaster precautions. Torrential downpours have struck swathes of Guangdong province since Thursday, swelling waterways in the Pearl River Delta, China's manufacturing heartland.



I thanked them (armed forces) for their operation against Israel, and urged them to ceaselessly pursue military innovation and learn the enemy's tactics

ALI KHAMENEI | SUPREME LEADER, IRAN

MIRACULOUS ARRIVAL

In a rare incident, a 27-year-old Pakistani woman gave birth to six babies at a hospital in Rawalpindi. According to a report by Dawn, Zeenat Waheed gave birth to the sextuplets-- four baby boys and two baby girls, in one hour



Israel's cruelty grips Rafah

ISRAELI STRIKES ON SOUTHERN GAZA CITY OF RAFAH KILL 22, MOSTLY CHILDREN, AS US ADVANCES AID PACKAGE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Nur Shams, April 21: Israeli strikes on the southern Gaza city of Rafah overnight killed 22 people, including 18 children, health officials said Sunday, as the United States was on track to approve billions of dollars of additional military aid to Israel, its close ally.

Israel has carried out nearly daily air raids on Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's population of 2.3 million has sought refuge from fighting elsewhere. It has also vowed to expand its ground offensive against the Hamas militant group to the city on the border with Egypt despite international calls for restraint, including from the US.

The first Israeli strike in Rafah killed a man, his wife and their 3-year-old child, according to the nearby Kuwaiti Hospital, which received the bodies. The woman was pregnant and the doctors managed to save the baby, the hospital said.

The second strike killed 17



children and two women, all from an extended family, according to hospital records. Mohammed al-Beheiri said his daughter, Rasha, and her six children, the youngest 18 months old, were among those killed. Her husband's second wife and their three children were still under the rubble, al-Beheiri said.

The Israel-Hamas war has killed over 34,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, devastated Gaza's two largest cities and left a swath of destruction.

Around 80 per cent of the territory's population have fled to other parts of the besieged coastal enclave.

The \$26 billion aid package approved by the House of Representatives Saturday includes around \$9 billion in humanitarian assistance for Gaza, which experts say is on the brink of famine. The Senate could pass the package as soon as Tuesday, and President Joe Biden has promised to sign it immediately.

The conflict, now in its seventh month, has sparked regional unrest pitting Israel and the US against Iran and allied militant groups across the Middle East.

Israel and Iran traded fire directly this month, raising fears of all-out war between the long-time foes.

Tensions have also spiked in

In the coming days, we will increase the political and military pressure on Hamas because this is the only way to bring back our hostages and achieve victory. We will land more and painful blows on Hamas -- soon

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU | PM, ISRAEL

the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Israeli troops killed two Palestinians who the military says attacked a checkpoint with a knife and a gun near the southern West Bank town of Hebron early Sunday.

At least 469 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli soldiers and settlers in the West Bank since the start of the war in Gaza, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. Most have been killed during Israeli military raids, which often trigger gunbattles, or in violent protests.

The war in Gaza was sparked by an unprecedented October 7 raid into southern Israel in which Hamas and other militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 hostages. Israel says militants are still holding around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others.

Sanctions on soldiers: Israel hits out at US

Tel Aviv: Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has denounced a reported move by US to issue sanctions against the Netzah Yehuda battalion of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). The sanctions, according to reports, are for alleged human rights violations committed against Palestinians in the West Bank by the battalion's soldiers. There are reports that the Biden administration is set to blacklist the battalion considered elite by the IDF. "The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) must not be sanctioned. Our soldiers are fighting terrorist monsters, and the intention to impose sanctions on an IDF unit is the height of absurdity and a moral nadir (the lowest point)," Netanyahu said in a statement Saturday night. "The government of Israel that I lead will act with all means against these moves," he said. Israeli ministers Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich also slammed the US move. "Imposing sanctions on our soldiers is a red line," Gvir said, adding that the move was extremely serious and "The members of the Netzah Yehuda must be protected." He also called upon the Israeli Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, considered a hawk in the Israeli government, not to submit before the US diktat. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich in a statement on social media platform, X, came out strongly against the US plans to impose sanctions on Netzah Yehuda. "The move to sanction IDF battalion, while Israel is fighting for its existence is complete madness. This is part of a planned move to force the State of Israel to agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state and to forsake Israel's security," he said.

US aid will hurt Ukraine: Russia

US HOUSE PASSES \$60.84BN UKRAINE AID PACKAGE

REUTERS

Moscow, April 21: Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Saturday that US House of Representatives' approval of security aid to Ukraine would lead to more damage and deaths in the conflict there.

"The decision will make the United States of America richer, further ruin Ukraine and result in the deaths of even more Ukrainians, the fault of the Kyiv regime," Peskov was quoted as saying by Russian news agencies.

The Kremlin has been locked in conflict in Ukraine since invading it more than two years ago.

The House approved a legislative package providing \$60.84 billion to Ukraine, including \$23 billion to replenish US weapons, stocks and facilities.

The package now goes to the US Senate, which passed a similar measure two months ago, for expected approval next week. It then is passed on to President Joe Biden to sign.

Peskov also said that provisions in the legislation allowing the US administration to confiscate seized Russian assets and transfer them to Ukraine to fund reconstruction would tarnish the image of the United States.



The decision will make the United States of America richer, further ruin Ukraine and result in the deaths of even more Ukrainians, the fault of the Kyiv regime

DMITRY PESKOV | SPOKESMAN, KREMLIN

Russia, he said, would enact retaliatory measures.

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, writing on the Telegram messaging app, said the approval of US aid for Ukraine was expected and grounded in "Russophobia".

"We will, of course, be victorious regardless of the blood-soaked \$61 billion, which will mostly be swallowed up by their insatiable military industrial complex," wrote Medvedev, one of Russia's most vociferous hawks as deputy chairman of

the Security Council.

Maria Zakharova, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, said the approval of aid in the legislation to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan would "deepen crises throughout the world".

"Military assistance to the Kyiv regime is direct sponsorship of terrorist activity," Zakharova wrote on Telegram. "To Taiwan, it is interference in China's internal affairs. To Israel, it is a road straight to escalation and an unprecedented rise in tension in the region."

Landslide win for Muizzu's party in Maldives parliamentary vote



AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Male, April 21: The party of Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu won control of parliament in a Sunday election landslide, results showed, with voters backing his tilt towards China and away from regional powerhouse and traditional benefactor India.

Muizzu's People's National Congress (PNC) won 66 of the first 86 seats declared, according to the Elections Commission of Maldives results, already more than enough for a super-majority in the 93-member majlis, or parliament. The vote was seen as a crucial test for Muizzu's plan to press ahead with closer

economic cooperation with China, including building thousands of apartments on controversially reclaimed land.

The PNC and its allies had only eight seats in the outgoing parliament, with the lack of a majority stymieing Muizzu after his presidential election victory in September.

The main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) -- which had previously had a super-majority of its own -- was headed for a humiliating defeat with just a dozen seats.

Muizzu, 45, had been among the first to vote Sunday, casting his ballot at a school in the capital Male -- where he was previously mayor -- and urging Maldivians to turn out in high numbers.

"All citizens should come out and exercise their right to vote as soon as possible," Muizzu said.

The Maldives, a low-lying nation of some 1,192 tiny coral islands scattered some 800 kilometres (500 miles) across the equator, is one of the countries most vulnerable to sea level rises caused by global warming.

Pak by-polls end marred in violence

POLLING ENDS IN 21 NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL SEATS IN BY-ELECTIONS IN PAKISTAN

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Islamabad, April 21: Polling ended Sunday for 21 national and provincial seats in the by-elections in Pakistan, which took place amidst tight security and suspension of cellular and internet services in some districts of Punjab and Balochistan to maintain law and order.

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), voting began at 8 am and continued without any break until 5 pm with the provision that voters present within the premises of polling stations would be allowed to cast votes even after the expiry of official timing.

It will be followed by counting, while results are expected later tonight.

Despite elaborate security measures taken by authorities



to maintain the law and order situation, at least one person was killed and several others injured in clashes during the polling in Punjab province, according to the police.

"Violent clashes took place in Narowal, Sheikhpura and Rahim Yar Khan in which one person was killed and several injured," the Punjab police said.

In Narowal, some 120 km from Lahore, a clash took place between the supporters of former prime ministers Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif outside a polling station.

Punjab Information Minister Azma Bokhari said the victim was a member of Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) who was killed by workers of Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party.

In the Sheikhpura and Rahim Yar Khan districts of Punjab, at least five workers of the two rival parties suffered bullet injuries during clashes.

Similarly in Lahore, the PTI and PML-N workers scuffled on setting up polling camps. Police arrested four persons, including PTI leader Shabbir Gujjar.

The general elections were held across the country February 8 to elect representatives for the national assembly and four provincial assemblies.

Polls were, however, cancelled for one National Assembly seat, two Punjab Assembly seats and one seat of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Assembly.

Apart from these, candidates who won more than one seat opted for only one after the elections, leaving the ECP to organise by-elections on 21 seats, including five national and 16 provincial assembly seats.

of the day quote

Tier 2 & 3 cities have once again emerged as growth engines, thanks to their rapidly improving infrastructure and growth opportunities

ANUJ PURI | ANAROCK CHAIRMAN

If you are a global brand or a startup or a business and India is not on your radar, you are probably missing out greatly

RITESH AGARWAL | CEO OF OYO ROOMS

For us, India is one of the most strategically important regions. India, we say, is the best-cost country, not the low-cost. In India, you have very skilled and qualified engineers

FRIEDRICH EICHLER | CNH INDUSTRIAL CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER

SHORT TAKES

'Apple may employ 5L in India in 3 yrs'

New Delhi: iPhone maker Apple through its vendors is expected to employ over 5 lakh people in India over the next three years, according to government sources. At present Apple's vendors and suppliers employ 1.5 lakh people in India. Tata Electronics, which runs two plants for Apple, is the biggest job generator.

Hero MotoCorp opens unit in Nepal

New Delhi: Two-wheeler major Hero MotoCorp Sunday said it has opened an assembly facility in Nepal in partnership with its distributor CG Motors. The facility will have a capacity of 75,000 units per annum and will bring new investments and create job opportunities in the region, Hero MotoCorp said in a statement. Four products - Xpulse 200 4V, Super Splendor, Splendor+ motorcycles and Xoom 110 scooter - which have been launched in the country - will be assembled locally at the new assembly facility located in CG Industrial Park in Nawalparasi, it added.

USFDA pulls up Natco Pharma

New Delhi: Natco Pharma failed to maintain cleanliness, sterilise equipment and utensils at appropriate intervals at its Telangana-based plant, as per the US health regulator. In the warning letter to the company, US Food and Drug Administration said its investigators observed various violations at the finished pharmaceuticals plant located at Kothur Village in Telangana. The USFDA inspected the facility from October 9 to 18, 2023.

Land deals on upswing

New Delhi: Builders and other entities have closed at least 29 land deals involving 721 acres during January-March this year to expand their businesses amid surge in demand especially for housing, according to Anarock. During the entire 2023-24 fiscal, property consultant Anarock said that real estate developers and other entities have closed 101 land deals, cumulatively accounting for 2,989 acres. Land deals in terms of acres have increased 61 per cent annually in January-March 2024 and 58 per cent annually in 2023-24. At least 26 land deals for around 449 acres were closed during January-March 2023, while 88 land deals for 1,886 acres were struck during the full 2022-23 fiscal. These land deals, which were struck across major tier I, tier II and tier III cities, include outright purchase-sale transactions and also partnerships with landlords called Joint Development Agreements (JDAs).



Tesla car users will soon have an integrated experience with X social media platform

ELON MUSK | CEO OF TESLA MOTORS

PUNJAB EXPECTED TO PROCURE 132 LAKH METRIC TONS WHEAT: CHIEF SECRETARY

Punjab is expected to procure 132 lakh metric tons wheat, out of which 17.14 lakh metric tons have already been acquired, Chief Secretary Anurag Verma said Sunday. The Chief Secretary ordered the Deputy Commissioners to ensure the crops brought by the farmers to the procurement centres were purchased immediately, and payment of the purchased crop should be ensured in the farmers' account within 48 hours



Direct tax collection jumps 17.7%

THE GOVERNMENT HAD RAISED THE TARGET FOR DIRECT TAX COLLECTION IN FY24 (APRIL 2023 TO MARCH 2024) TO ₹19.45 LAKH CRORE IN THE INTERIM BUDGET PRESENTED FEBRUARY 1

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 21: India's net direct tax collections surged by a massive 17.7 per cent year-on-year to ₹19.58 crore in the fiscal year ended March 2024, surpassing even revised estimates by a wide margin, the tax department said Sunday.

Net collections of income and corporate taxes, which make up for most of the direct taxes, in 2023-24 financial year exceeded the Budget estimates by ₹1.35 lakh crore (7.40 per cent) and the revised estimates by ₹13,000 crore.

The government had raised the target for direct tax collection in FY24 (April 2023 to March 2024) to ₹19.45 lakh crore in the interim Budget presented February 1.

With this, the gross tax collection target as per the revised estimate stood at ₹34.37 lakh crore for FY24.



While gross direct tax collections (provisional) for the FY 2023-24 rose 18.48 per cent to ₹23.37 lakh crore, net proceeds (after accounting for refunds) surged 17.7 per cent to ₹19.58 lakh crore, reflecting buoyancy in the economy and rise in income levels of individuals and corporates.

Refunds aggregating to ₹3.79 lakh crore have been issued in FY 2023-24, the CBDT said in a statement.

"The provisional figures of Direct Tax collections for the financial year (FY) 2023-24 show that net collections are at ₹19.58 lakh crore, compared to ₹16.64 lakh crore in the preceding financial year i.e. FY 2022-23," it said, adding the Budget for 2023-24 fiscal had pegged the collec-

tions for the year at ₹18.23 lakh crore, which were revised to ₹19.45 lakh crore later. "The provisional Direct Tax collections (net of the refunds) have exceeded the Budget Estimate by 7.40 per cent and Revised Estimates by 0.67 per cent," it said.

The gross collection (provisional) of Direct Taxes (before adjusting for refunds) for the FY 2023-24 stood at ₹23.37 lakh crore, showing a growth of 18.48 per cent over the gross collection of ₹19.72 lakh crore in FY 2022-23.

The gross corporate tax collection (provisional) in FY 2023-24 was up 13.06 per cent to ₹11.32 lakh crore as compared to the gross corporate tax collection of ₹10 lakh crore of the preceding year.

The Net Corporate Tax col-

This growth surpassed even the most optimistic revised estimates

TWEAKS IN INDIA-MAURITIUS TAX TREATY

FPIs withdraw over ₹5,200cr in April so far

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 21: Foreign investors dumped domestic equities worth over ₹5,200 crore in April so far on concerns over tweaks in India's tax treaty with Mauritius, which would now impose higher scrutiny on investments made here via the island nation.

This came following a staggering net investment of ₹35,098 crore in March and ₹1,539 crore in February, data with the depositories showed.

According to the data with the depositories, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) made a net outflow of ₹5,254 crore in Indian equities this month (till April 19).

The major trigger for FPI selling was the tweak in India's tax treaty with Mauritius, which would now impose higher scrutiny on investments made in India via the island nation, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director, Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

The two nations have reached a consensus on a protocol amending a double taxation avoidance agreement (DTAA). The protocol specifies that tax relief cannot be utilized for the indirect advantage of residents from another country. In fact, most of the investors investing through



Mauritius entities into Indian markets are from other countries, he added.

Additionally, hotter-than-expected US inflation and the consequent spike in bond yield (the 10-year rising above 4.6 per cent) led to big selling in the Indian market, V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

Another major concern is the surcharged geopolitical situation in the Middle East with heightened tensions between Iran and Israel, he added.

Since domestic institutional investors (DIIs) are sitting on huge liquidity and the retail and high net-worth individual (HNI) investors in India are highly optimistic about the Indian market, FPI selling will be largely absorbed by domestic money.

Apart from equities, FPIs withdrew ₹6,174 crore from the debt market during the period under review.

Before this, foreign investors invested ₹13,602 crore in March, ₹22,419 crore in February, and ₹19,836 crore in January.

TIDBITS

IBA joins hands with HAI to promote hydrogen

New Delhi: Indian Biogas Association (IBA) has partnered with Hydrogen Association of India (HAI) to promote bio-based energy solutions with a special emphasis on green and blue hydrogen. Talking to PTI, IBA Chairman Gaurav Kedia said, "IBA and HAI have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) aimed at promoting the production of green energy within the nation". This strategic alliance will facilitate comprehensive measures -- including training, capacity building, and policy advocacy -- directed towards catalysing the promotion and advancement of bio-based energy solutions with a special focus on green and blue hydrogen.

CNH Industrial looks to leverage India's tech skills

New Delhi: Global agricultural and construction solutions major CNH Industrial is looking to leverage Indian talent and cost advantages to develop its future technologies and products for global requirements, according to a senior company official. The company, which has recently expanded its India Technology Centre (ITC) with the addition of a cutting-edge multi-vehicle simulator (MVS), is looking at the centre to play a pivotal role in its global operations while also considering moving projects from Europe and the US to India.

UltraTech to buy grinding unit from India Cements

New Delhi: Aditya Birla group company UltraTech Cement has announced the acquisition of a grinding unit from India Cements for ₹315 crore and said it will invest an additional ₹504 crore to expand capacity of two units. In a stock exchange filing, UltraTech said its board has approved acquisition "of a grinding unit having installed capacity of 1.1 million tonnes per annum in addition to a captive railway siding at Parli, Maharashtra from The India Cements Limited... for a consideration of ₹315 crores". The company said it has entered into an Asset Purchase Agreement with the seller. "The unit being sold had a turnover of ₹250.66 crore in the fiscal year ended March 31 2023 and net asset value of ₹75.10 crore. In a separate filing, UltraTech said its board has also approved brownfield capacity expansion -- 1.2 million tonnes per annum at Parli at a cost of ₹166.4 crore post acquisition of the grinding unit, and 1.8 million tonnes at Dhule in Maharashtra at a cost of ₹338 crore.

Hybrid MFs stage comeback

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 21: Hybrid mutual fund schemes have seen a resurgence in 2023-24, garnering ₹1.45 lakh crore in investments, driven by substantial inflows into the arbitrage category, following withdrawals in the previous fiscal year.

The surge in assets was complemented by an increase in the number of investors, with the number of folios reaching 1.35 crore in March 2024 from 1.21 crore a year earlier, adding an investor base of 14 lakh. This shows investors' inclination for hybrid funds.

Hybrid funds are mutual fund schemes that typically invest in a combination of equity and debt securities and sometimes in other asset categories such as gold. The category has been attracting regular inflows since the beginning of financial year 2023-24 in April after a change in taxation for debt funds that kicked off in the same month. Before that, the segment saw a net withdrawal of ₹12,372 crore in March.

Overall, the hybrid category saw net inflows of ₹1.45 lakh crore in FY24, compared to an outflow of ₹18,813 crore in FY23, data with the Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi)



showed. "Anticipating a reversal in the interest rate hike cycle in FY24, market participants strategically allocated funds to capitalize on higher rates, while continuing a favourable stance towards equities, real estate, and gold. However, the rate cuts never materialised and bond yields continue to be higher, retaining the interest of investors," Gopal Kavali, Vice President - Research at Fyers, said. Mirroring the flow, equity-oriented category attracted ₹1.84 lakh crore in FY24, marking a 25.4 per cent increase.

Of ₹1.45 lakh crore, a massive amount of ₹90,846 crore inflow was seen in the arbitrage category, over ₹33,000 crore in

multi-asset allocation, ₹10,765 crore in balanced advantage fund and ₹10,327 crore in equity savings fund, data showed. "FY24 was a unique year where diversification across asset classes yielded excellent returns. Equities, fixed income, commodities, bonds and real estate -- all rose in unison, attracting substantial inflows into multi asset allocation funds. The year also highlighted the changing risk profile of investors where conservative and balanced funds were relegated to negligible flows as smart investors opted for dynamic asset allocation to counter the ever changing market environment," he added.

IRAN-ISRAEL CONFLICT

Oil, LNG prices to shoot up if Tehran blocks Strait of Hormuz

India, which is more than 85% dependent on overseas suppliers to meet its crude oil needs, imports oil from Saudi, Iraq and UAE as well as liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Qatar through the Strait of Hormuz

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 21: Oil and LNG prices are likely to shoot up if Iran is to block Strait of Hormuz, through which countries like India import crude oil from Saudi Arabia, Iraq and UAE, leading to a spike in inflation, analysts said on the Iran-Israel conflict.

In a note, Motilal Oswal Financial Services said while de-escalation efforts will likely control the crisis, oil and LNG prices will spike in case Iran



completely or partially blocks the Strait of Hormuz.

The Strait of Hormuz is a narrow sea passage between Oman and Iran. It is about 40 km wide at the narrowest point, with 2 km of navigable channels for incoming and outgoing ships. It is the key route through which crude oil is exported by Saudi Arabia (6.3 million barrels per day), the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Iraq (3.3 million bpd) and Iran (1.3 million bpd).

The Iran and Israel conflict has escalated over the last few days

Crude oil prices have hovered around USD 90 per barrel since the conflict

Oil flow via the Strait was 21 million barrels per day or 21 per cent of global oil consumption in 2022. Also, about 20 per cent of global LNG trade moves through it, including almost all LNG exports from Qatar and the UAE.

Unlike oil, for which alternative routes via the Red Sea are available, no alternative routes are available for liquefied natural gas, it said. In the event of blockade of the Strait, "we an-

anticipate materially higher crude oil prices, refining margins, and spot LNG prices", it said.

While alternative routes do exist, they may only be able to accommodate a fraction (around 7-8 million bpd of crude oil/refined products) of the volume currently passing through the Strait (21 million bpd), and that too at elevated freight costs.

"While investors focus on oil, we believe that spot LNG prices will witness even sharper escalation if the Strait of Hormuz is closed due to the absence of alternative routes," it said.

Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have alternative export routes, which avoid the Strait. Saudi Arabia has the East-West pipeline with a capacity of 7 million bpd, according to the IEA. However, this pipeline opens up into the Red Sea, where traffic flow has already been disrupted due to attacks by Houthi rebels. The UAE has onshore oil fields linked with Fujairah export

terminal with a capacity of 1.5 million bpd; however, of this, 30-40 per cent capacity is already being utilized as per the IEA.

Hardik Shah, Director, CareEdge Ratings, said the crude prices were on an increasing trend since the start of calendar year 2024.

"In case the situation worsens between Israel and Iran, it may lead to a spike in crude prices," Moody's Analytics in an April 15 report said the escalation of tensions in the Middle East poses a significant threat to Asia-Pacific economies. "The key risk comes from higher oil prices". Higher oil prices, it said, threaten to derail the region's already choppy progress on inflation.

"Most Asia-Pacific economies are net oil importers, leaving them vulnerable to global oil spikes. Impacts vary across countries, but broadly there are three main challenges from rising oil prices,"

The valuation of ITC slumped ₹6,616.9 crore to ₹5,30,350.97 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever went lower by ₹176.22 crore to ₹5,24,487.51 crore.

However, Bharti Airtel's mcap zoomed ₹37,797.09 crore to ₹7,30,658.36 crore and that of HDFC Bank climbed ₹9,420.17 crore to ₹11,63,314.93 crore.

Reliance Industries added ₹4,397.82 crore taking its valuation to ₹19,90,195.52 crore and the mcap of LIC advanced ₹1,201.75 crore to ₹6,15,453.90 crore.

In the ranking of top-10 firms, Reliance Industries remained the most valued company followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India, LIC, Infosys, ITC and Hindustan Unilever.



ON CUSP OF GLORY

India's Gukesh on verge of becoming youngest World Championship contender as he emerges sole leader in the Candidates Chess tourney



RIGHT MOVES: D Gukesh is all concentration during his match against Firouzja Alireza at Toronto, Saturday PHOTO X

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Toronto, April 21: Teenaged Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh shot into sole lead after defeating Firouzja Alireza of France in the 13th and penultimate round of Candidates Chess tournament here Saturday. The victory placed him on the cusp of becoming the youngest ever World Championship contender.

If the 17-year-old from Chennai emerges victorious at the Candidates, he will take on China's Ding Liren for the World Champion's crown.

In the women's event, Humpy Koneru drew with Anna Muzychuk while Vaishali Rameshbabu got the better of Lei Tingjie. The 22-year-old Vaishali has now registered four consecutive wins in her last four games.

Needing a win to go ahead after the other overnight leaders, Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi and American Hikaru Nakamura played out a quick draw, Gukesh was awarded for his perseverance as he capitalised on a late blunder by Alireza in a difficult situation. Gukesh took his tally to

8.5 points out of a possible 13 to emerge a half point ahead of Nepomniachtchi, Nakamura and Fabiano Caruana of the United States.

R Praggnanandhaa and Vidit Gujrathi share the fifth spot on six points apiece with Firouzja on 4.5 and Abasov has 3.5 points.

Gukesh will next meet Nakamura who plays white in the last round game and Caurana will have the advantage of the favourable colour against Nepomniachtchi.

While anyone among the four players can win the event, the

odds are hugely in favour of Gukesh as the pundits believe that a draw might just be enough to see him emerge as the youngest ever contender for the World Championship match.

Gukesh, by consent, is made for big games on his day and the 13th round was no different. Playing the white side of a Berlin defense out of a Ruy Lopez, Gukesh went for a line known to have a sound reputation with little risk for white.

Alireza equalised comfortably but then started to show some ambition in the middle game that led to King side weakness. The Frenchman fell under time pressure too under the first time control but did well to keep a tangible position.

It was on the 47th move that Alireza finally faltered and allowed Gukesh to reach a winning Rook and minor piece endgame. Gukesh knocked down a few pawns en route to finishing the technicalities in style. The game lasted 63 moves.

Nepomniachtchi decided against taking a risk even as Nakamura chose a rare variation as black in another Ruy Lopez of the day. The Russian had reasons to be pleased as his position was preferable in the middle game but the absence of any real threats did not leave much to be desired. Nakamura drew wide repetition in a mere 26 moves.

Praggnanandhaa was outdone out of a Rossolimo opening as white against Caruana and lost in 89 moves, the longest game played on the day.

Vinesh eyes elusive Olympics medal

WRESTLER SAYS SHE WAS UNDER IMMENSE PRESSURE AFTER PROTESTING AGAINST WFI CHIEF



THANKING HER STARS: Vinesh Phogat offers prayers after winning her crucial bout Saturday PHOTO X

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), April 21: Locking the Olympic quota would put Vinesh Phogat at ease for a few days but the feisty Indian wrestler said Sunday that maintaining weight having dropped to the lowest class of 50kg will be a huge challenge in the build-up to the Paris Games.

Vinesh dished out an impressive show at the Asian Olympic Qualifiers, where she did not concede a single point in an easy draw and sealed her third consecutive Olympic quota.

Vinesh, 29, lost crucial mat-time for one-and-a-half years due to the protest against former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh and in that period, Antim Panghal secured a quota place in 53kg category - a pet weight division of Vinesh.

The most successful woman wrestler from the country had no

I have many Asian and 2 Worlds medals, now I want to add one from the Olympics to the kitty

VINESH PHOGAT

option but to switch weight category to ensure that she does not miss the bus for Olympics.

"I will have to manage my weight a lot better. I have brought myself down to 50kg after so long so I will try and maintain this as much as I can. It's not easy for me not to put on weight because my muscle mass is very high," Vinesh was quoted as saying by the UWW website.

"Because of that, I gain weight easily. It doesn't matter how fit I am, I still gain weight because I have a lot of muscle mass. I just want to control my weight. I have four months left, and every day is very important. I did the weight switch because I didn't

have any option, not out of happiness," Vinesh added.

Vinesh has already suffered heartbreaks at the Rio Olympics and Tokyo Games where she was eliminated quite early despite being a medal favourite. Now she wants to complete the unfinished business.

"I just want to try my best. It's been 20 years since I've been wrestling. I just want an Olympic medal. Everyone is working for that," informed Vinesh.

Vinesh claimed that she fought depression and was even struck by Covid-19 and add to that the prolonged protest and legal battle against the then WFI chief, the mental pressure was immense.

"It was difficult but when you win, everything becomes worth it. I will say that I will be at peace for four to five days, but my main target is the Olympics. I will try to do what I couldn't do in the last two Olympics. I can do better this time," asserted Vinesh.

SHORT TAKES

Rower Panwar seals spot at Paris Games

New Delhi: Balraj Panwar secured India's first Paris Olympics quota in rowing by finishing third Sunday in the men's single scull event of the 2024 World Asian and Oceanian Olympic and Paralympic Qualification Regatta in Chungju, South Korea. The 25-year-old Indian Army rower, clocked 7:01.27 seconds to finish third in the 2000m race and seal the quota. In the men's single scull event, the top five make the Olympics cut. In the men's lightweight double sculls, where India participated at the last Olympics in Tokyo, the country failed to qualify.

Muguruza retires

Madrid: Two-time Grand Slam champion Garbiñe Muguruza has announced that she's retiring from professional tennis at age 30 after an extended time away from the court. "I feel that it is time to retire and open up a new chapter in my life," the former World No. 1 told a news conference here Saturday. Muguruza won the French Open in 2016 and the Wimbledon title in 2017. The Spanish player won 10 career titles and was also the runner-up at 2015 Wimbledon.

Para-shuttlers shine

New Delhi: Ace Para-shuttler Sukant Kadam secured a silver medal in the Spanish Para-Badminton International 2024-II tournament played at Vitoria, Spain. Sukant went down fighting to India's Tarun 13-21, 21-16, 16-21 in the final of the SL 4 category. Earlier in the semifinals, Sukant had defeated World Champion Suhas Yathiraj. After fighting hard in the first two games, Kadam committed some unforced errors in the deciding game to lose the match.

Title for Rybakina

Stuttgart: Elena Rybakina eased to her third title of the season here Sunday with a 6-2, 6-2 win over Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk in the final of the Porsche Grand Prix tennis tournament. Rybakina, the World No. 4-ranked player who defeated top seed Iga Swiatek in the semifinals, saved the three breakpoints she faced and broke her opponent four times in the match to win in 69 minutes. "It has been amazing for me," Rybakina said.

GT ride on good show by spinners

AGENCIES

Mullanpur, April 21: R Sai Kishore (4/33) starred on a dominant day for the spinners as Gujarat Titans (GT) tamed Punjab Kings (PKS) by three wickets for their fourth win in the 2024 IPL here Sunday. The spin trio of Sai Kishore, Rashid Khan (1/15) and Nour Ahmed (2/20) exposed an ill-equipped Punjab Kings with their guile to dismiss them for a below-par 142.

Liam Livingstone (2/19), who juggles between leg-breaks and off-spin, struck twice in the middle overs to keep Punjab Kings alive in the game. However, he did not get much support from fellow spinner Harpreet Brar, who leaked 35 in his four overs in a low-scoring affair. The other successful bowler for PKS was Harshal Patel (3/15).

With 42 runs to get off 30 balls, Titans eventually recorded a comfortable win in 19.1 overs courtesy a pressure-releasing cameo from Rahul Tewatia (36 n.o, 16b, 7x4). Incidentally his was the highest individual score in game, highlighting that the pitch had something for the bowlers. It was the sixth loss for PKS in eight games and their chances of qualifying for the knockouts have more or less evaporated.

Shubman Gill (35) got tough runs at the top of the order be-



R Sai Kishore

fore falling to a mistimed aerial hit off Livingstone. Sai Sudharsan (31) also found stroke-making hard while the dangerous David Miller was Livingstone's second victim.

Earlier, there was enough help for the spinners and Punjab Kings' surrender against Sai Kishore and Co made the visitors' task easier. Only Prabhsimran Singh (35) tried to make a match out of it, but did not find support from the other batters.

Brief scores: Punjab Kings 142 (Prabhsimran Singh 35, R Sai Kishore 4/33) lost to Gujarat Titans 146/7 in 19.1 overs (Rahul Tewatia 36 n.o).

Thrilling win for Knights

AGENCIES

Kolkata, April 21: Karn Sharma's (20, 7b, 3x6) scarcely believable last over assault on Mitchell Starc (1/55) gave Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) a glimmer of hope but the Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) held their nerves to eke out a one-run win off the last ball in their IPL match here on Sunday.

RCB required 21 runs off the last over bowled by Starc while chasing a daunting 223-run target set by the Knight Riders. The result seemed a foregone conclusion with Karn and Mohammed Siraj at the crease, but the former nearly turned the match on its head.

Karn hammered three sixes off Starc to reduce the margin to three runs off two balls. But Starc redeemed himself taking a return catch to dismiss Karn and Lockie Ferguson was run out off the last ball as RCB ended up at 222 all out in 20 overs.

However, in a match with more twists and turns than a hilly road, it was KKR who first snatched the initiative making 222 for six. Opener Phil Salt (48, 14b, 7x4, 3x6) led the charge while skipper Shreyas Iyer (50, 36b, 7x4, 1x6) held the innings together.

Their cause was helped a lot by Rinku Singh (24, 16b, 2x4, 1x6), Andre Russell (27n.o, 20b, 4x4) and Ramandeep Singh (24, 9b, 2x4, 2x6)



MATCH-WINNING KNOCK: KKR skipper Shreyas Iyer finally came good with the bat Sunday PFI PHOTO

But RCB were not bogged down by the imposing nature of their chase. Will Jacks (55, 32b, 4x4, 5x6) and Rajat Patidar (52, 23b, 3x4, 5x6) laid a fine foundation through a 102-run alliance for the third wicket that came off just 48 balls.

However, from 137 for two, RCB soon slipped to 155 for six with Russell (3/25) inflicting a double blow dismissing both Jacks and Patidar inside three balls with his clever variation.

Sunil Narine (2/34) also claimed two wickets in his final over to dash the hopes of RCB, but Dinesh Karthik (25) kept their hopes alive in a splendid partnership with 'Impact Sub' Suyash Prabhudesai (24).

BRIEF SCORES
KKR 222 for 6 (Shreyas Iyer 50, Phil Salt 48, Cameroon Green 2/35) beat RCB 221 (Will Jacks 55, Rajat Patidar 52, Andre Russell 3/25) by 1 run.

Max maxes Shanghai circuit

FOURTH GRAND PRIX TITLE OF THE SEASON FOR DUTCHMAN AS HE DRIVES TO VICTORY EASILY

AGENCIES

Shanghai, April 21: Max Verstappen rounded off a dominant weekend with victory in the first Chinese Grand Prix for five years here Sunday to extend his World Championship lead. The three-time World Champion controlled the race on its return to the Shanghai International Circuit for the first time since 2019 to finish 13.7 seconds ahead of McLaren's Lando Norris with Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez third.

Verstappen was only denied a 100 per cent points-scoring weekend when Fernando Alonso picked up the bonus for the fastest lap around the 5.451 kilometres track on the outskirts of the Chinese megacity after a late switch to fresh tyres. It was Verstappen's fourth Grand Prix title this season.

Only a rare brake failure in



Max Verstappen holds aloft the trophy after winning the Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai, Sunday AP PHOTO

Melbourne denied Verstappen the chance of a clean sweep in all five races in 2024, as he marches inexorably towards a

fourth consecutive world title. "It felt amazing, all weekend we were incredibly quick," said Verstappen, who recorded his

first victory in China. It was so enjoyable to drive on every single compound. The car was on rails, I could do whatever I wanted to do with it," he added. The Ferrari pair of Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz were fourth and fifth, George Russell was sixth for Mercedes with Alonso seventh after a late charge through the field.

McLaren's Oscar Piastri was eighth, chased home by Lewis Hamilton who clawed his way up to ninth from 18th on the grid.

Norris was delighted to finish second having started from fourth on the grid. "Surprised, I'm very happy - today it just worked out, I wasn't expecting it," said the Englishman.

"It shows the team has done a good job, and it paid off. I made a bet about how far behind the Ferrari we would finish today, I thought 35 seconds and I was very wrong," Norris added.

MAN U SCRAPE PAST STUBBORN COVENTRY

AGENCIES

London, April 21: Manchester United suffered huge embarrassment at the hands of lower-tier team Coventry in their semifinal match of the FA Cup played here Sunday before finally winning on penalties. The match ended 3-3 after regulation and extra time. Manchester United will now play city rivals Manchester City who had won their semifinal played Saturday 1-0 against Chelsea.

It was good going for United as they built up a healthy 3-0 in the first hour of the match. However, Coventry came back diligently to tie the score 3-3 much to the dismay of Man U supporters.

Scott McTominay (23rd), Harry Maguire (45th+1) and Bruno Fernandes (58th) had given Man United, what many thought was an unassailable

Arsenal back with a bang

London: Arsenal shrugged off the disappointment of their Champions League exit to move back to the top of the Premier League with a 2-0 win Saturday at Wolves. Leandro Trossard and Martin Odegaard struck at the end of each half to take the Gunners one point clear of Manchester City, who have a game in hand. Arsenal's season was in danger of coming completely off the rails after a three-game winless run. Mikel Arteta's men lost in the Premier League for the first time in 2024 last weekend, 0-2 at home to Aston Villa, in between a Champions League quarterfinal elimination by Bayern Munich. However, they bounced back to keep the pressure on champions City.

lead. However, Coventry came back strongly with goals Ellis Simms (71st), Callum O'Hare (79th) and Haji Wright (90+5) to keep their hopes alive.