



SARA COMES CLEAN

Actor Sara Ali Khan lays bare her biggest lessons and regrets in her half-decade-long career in the Hindi film industry

LEISURE

P2



GROWING ANGER

Protesters angry with French Prez Emmanuel Macron's plan to raise the pension age, clash with police

INTERNATIONAL

P10



SHOOTERS BAG SILVER

Varun Tomar and Rhythm Sangwan settle for silver in 10m air pistol mixed team event at ISSF World Cup

SPORTS

P12

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12 PAGES | ₹5.00

SHORT TAKES

Samal appointed Odisha BJP chief

Bhubaneswar: Newly-appointed BJP president in Odisha, Manmohan Samal asserted Thursday that the saffron party will form the government in the state in 2024. Samal (64) was named chief of the BJP's Odisha unit and he replaces Samir Mohanty. "The next election will be fought by the people and they will bring the BJP government to power," Samal stated. "I thank PM Narendra Modi, BJP president JP Nadda and Union Home Minister Amit Shah for reposing trust in me. Our team will ensure that the BJP is in the power after 2024 elections," Samal, who is a former minister told reporters here.

Road sealed to protect Khandagiri-Udayagiri

Bhubaneswar: The ASI has sealed the Khandagiri-Udayagiri approach road in a bid to protect the monument from vibration stress and pollution due to vehicular movement. Earlier, the BMC had suspended movement of vehicles in a trial mode during the Hockey World Cup. However, it was opened again after the end of the tournament. "This has been done to protect the heritage structures from wear and tear due to pollution," an ASI official informed here Thursday.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



They won't say anything to us, I always slam the opposition and praise the govt on social media

MARKET WATCH			
INDEX		VARIATION	
BULLION CURRENCY BOURSES	SENSEX	57925.28	↓ 289.31
	NIFTY	17076.90	↓ 75.10
	DOLLAR	82.64	↑ ₹0.09
	EURO	89.49	↓ ₹0.06
	GOLD	₹59,196	↑ ₹440
	SILVER	₹69,956	↑ ₹647

WEATHER			
		BHUB	CTK
TEMP	MAX	36.2°C	35.0°C
	MIN	22.4°C	23.0°C
Humidity	70%	77%	Forecast
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	Light to moderate rain

Indian rivers at peril as glaciers melt quick

■The UN chief has warned that unless measures are put in place to prevent the rapid melting of glaciers many low-lying countries may disappear forever

AGENCIES

United Nations, March 23: The United Nations has warned that should the glaciers continue to melt as quickly as is happening at the moment, a number of major Himalayan rivers may face reduction in flow and even completely dry up in the foreseeable future. This observation was made by UN Secretary General Antonio

Guterres while addressing a gathering about climate change. "Major Himalayan rivers like the Indus, the Ganges and Brahmaputra, all hugely important for India, could see reductions in their flows as glaciers and ice sheets recede over the coming decades due to global warming," Guterres said at a function Wednesday evening here on the 'International Year of Glaciers' Preservation' function. "Glaciers are critical to all life on earth. Over centuries, they carved out the landmasses we call home. Today they cover 10 per cent of our world. Glaciers are also the world's water towers. However, the way glaciers are melting is not good at all. Water level in many rivers including the Ganges may



reduce drastically," the UN chief pointed out. Guterres also voiced concern

that human activity is driving the planet's temperature to dangerous new levels and 'melting glaciers

are the canary in the coalmine'. Antarctica is losing an average of 150 billion tonne of ice mass every year while the Greenland ice cap is melting even faster – losing 270 billion tonne per year. In Asia, 10 major rivers originate in the Himalayan region, supplying freshwater to 1.3 billion people living in its watershed. "As glaciers and ice sheets continue to recede over the coming decades, major Himalayan rivers like the Indus, the Ganges and Brahmaputra will feel the impact – seeing their flows reduced and some may even dry up at places," Guterres said. "The recent floods in Pakistan are an example as to how disaster looms large when ice melts quickly," he added. **Contd...P4**

Rahul gets 2 yrs in jail

CONGRESS LEADER PULLED UP FOR 'WHY ALL THIEVES HAVE MODI SURNAME' COMMENT MADE IN 2019

AGENCIES

Surat, March 23: A court in this town of Gujarat sentenced Thursday Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to two years in jail in a 2019 criminal defamation case filed against him over his 'why all thieves have Modi surname' remarks. Rahul, who was present in the court when the verdict was pronounced, reacted later by quoting Mahatma Gandhi in a tweet in Hindi about truth and non-violence. The court of Chief Judicial Magistrate HH Varma, which held Rahul guilty under IPC sections 499 and 500, also granted him bail and suspended the sentence for 30 days to allow him to appeal in a higher court, the Congress leader's lawyer Babu Mangukhiya said. As per the 'Representation of the People Act', a person sentenced to imprisonment of two years or more shall be disqualified from the Parliament 'from the date of such conviction' and remain disqualified for another six years after serving time. However, legal experts pointed out that Rahul will not be disqualified as a Member of Parliament if the appellate court stays the conviction and suspends



Sources in Congress said that Rahul will not attend Parliament till his appeal is heard while the party has called a meeting Friday morning to assess the situation in the aftermath of the verdict

the two-year jail term awarded to him. The Congress said Rahul will file an appeal against the Gujarat court verdict, with a host of its leaders, including party president Mallikarjun Kharge and general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra speaking out angrily on the matter. The BJP on the other hand said, the 'people will teach Rahul a lesson for defaming the nation'.

1 killed, 4 hurt as two families fight over land

POST NEWS NETWORK

Angul, March 23: A man was killed and four persons sustained critical injuries after members of two families clashed over a long-standing land dispute at Badahinsar village under Jarpada police limits in this district, Thursday morning. The deceased was identified as Nabeena Sahu, 65, a native of the village. Police said they have arrested the murder accused Raghunath Sahu, 62, his wife Srimati Sahu, 55 and son Manas, 28, in this connection. According to reports, the families of Nabeena and Raghunath had a long-standing dispute over possession of a small piece of land. Trouble started when Nabeena was digging a hole on the disputed portion to install a cement pole, Thursday morning. Raghunath's son Manas opposed the move which led to an altercation and it soon turned into an ugly fight. Suddenly Nabeena and his son Anil attacked Manas and his wife Tapaswini. An enraged, Raghunath rushed to the spot with a crowbar and hit Nabeena on his head following which the latter collapsed and died on the spot. The injured members of the two families are undergoing treatment at the DHH here, police said.

Naveen, Mamata to work for 'strong' federal structure

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 23: Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and his West Bengal counterpart Mamata Banerjee said Thursday that they had resolved to make the federal structure of the country 'strong and permanent'. The statement came after a much awaited meeting of the two chief ministers held at the conclusion of Banerjee's three-day visit to the land of Lord Jagannath. Addressing reporters at the end of the meeting at the Naveen Niwas – Patnaik's residence in this city – with Banerjee beside him, the Odisha CM said, "We resolved to make the federal structure of the

country permanent and strong. There was no other political discussion." Banerjee seconded Patnaik and said, "I strongly support what Naveen ji said and I appreciate his efforts." However, even though speculation remained rife that the meeting was part of Banerjee's plan to form an opposition (third front) with regional players minus the Congress, both CMs said that there had been no such discussion. Banerjee was specifically asked about any discussion on formation of a possible third front for the next election. "Why are you in a hurry for the election? Still one year is there," Banerjee shot back."

Contd...P4



Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik presented an array of gifts to his Bengal counterpart Mamata Banerjee including a jersey of the Indian hockey team

OP PHOTO

PARL PANEL PITCHES FOR MORE POWER TO CBI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 23: On a day nine states, including Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and West Bengal, have withdrawn general consent to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to probe cases, a Parliamentary panel said Thursday that the existing law governing the probe agency has 'many limitations' and there is a need to enact a new legislation to define its status, functions and powers. According to Section 6 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, 1946, CBI needs the consent from the respective state governments for conducting in-

vestigation in its jurisdiction. However nine states have withdrawn the consent, Union Minister Jitendra Singh told the Rajya Sabha. The other states that have withdrawn consent are Kerala, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Punjab, Rajasthan and Telangana, the minister added. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice meanwhile said that according to the provisions of the DSPE Act, the consent of the state government for any investigation by the CBI greatly hampers the functioning of the probe agency. **Contd...P4**



TEKASHI 6IX9INE HOSPITALISED
AFTER ATTACK AT FLORIDA GYM

American rapper Tekashi 6ix9ine was hospitalised after being ambushed by a group of attackers in the bathroom of a gym in South Florida. The 26-year-old rapper, whose real name is Daniel Hernandez, sustained injuries to his face and bruises, according to his attorney, Lance Lazzaro, reports *Variety*.

CHRISTINA RICCI 'OPEN'
TO WEDNESDAY RETURN

Christina Ricci has said she would like to play *Wednesday* villain Marilyn Thornhill again. The 43-year-old actress plays evil teacher Marilyn Thornhill in the first season of the hit Netflix series, and she played coy when asked if she's going to be back for the second installment.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES

Today, you will show everyone what you're capable of. You are likely to come up with great ideas and work strategies, which will prove productive. However, if appreciation doesn't come your way, Ganesha says you must learn to take disappointment in your stride.

TAURUS

This day you will be compelled to be resigned to your fate. Ganesha does not see your own will power in operation today. Though you would be surrendering yourself to the whims of destiny, do not expect anything good to come out of it. You are likely to take wrong decisions and go of course. This is one of those days when you are liable to feel extremely lost and lonely. Have no fears. The day will pass, like any other day.

GEMINI

You will end up having an argument with people owing to your aggressive nature. These people could slander your reputation on account of your enmity. However you will be able to defeat them. They will have to give up against your intellectual superiority. Be wary, says Ganesha.

CANCER

You will make new friends. You will have a jolly time with them, but some worry or tension will nag you. But Ganesha says that all worries will go away by evening, when you relax with friends.

LEO

You will be seized by a desire to do something new for a change today. Your mood will be bright throughout the day. You will be able to achieve success owing to your energy and enthusiasm. The planets are in your favour, hence you can accept the challenges coming your way and prevail over them, says Ganesha.

VIRGO

Expenditures will be like oil spills- wasteful and dirty. But cosmic energies and positivity are gathering wind today, and you should do well to make full use of them in your personal and professional life, says Ganesha.

LIBRA

Ganesha says today is the right day to get closer to your loved one. You will spend the evening with your beloved. Today you will be mentally very energetic too. Make the most of the day.

SCORPIO

The day does not begin on a very good note as you seem to be in a belligerent mood. Be calm and patient as your hot temper may spoil a good deal. Limit your conversations and discussions with colleagues and friends, advises Ganesha. Practising meditation and yoga will bring you some respite towards the end of the day.

SAGITTARIUS

No pains, no gains. So, when you go through a lot of turmoil and toil hard for your work, the rewards are definitely going to be fruitful, says Ganesha. Time for get together and soiree with family and friends! In a nutshell, a day with lot of fun activities.

CAPRICORN

Your hands are full with plenty of projects and assignments. Finish them off as soon as you can and spend rest of the day refreshing your mind. Communicating with people of all walks of life will make you enhance your horizon of knowledge, feels Ganesha.

AQUARIUS

You are in for a challenging day today. But, luck is by your side and you will be able to come out of the storm hale and hearty, assures Ganesha. If you are a businessman, you may enter into some major business venture, sign important contracts and take up new projects.

PISCES

You need to tread cautiously today when it comes to matters related to business. Do not make any decisions in haste, or it could come back to haunt you at a later date. All financial dealings will need to be carefully monitored.

Sara reveals her biggest lessons

Mumbai: Sara Ali Khan is one of the most adored new-generation actresses in the Indian film industry. In her half-decade-long film career, the actress has been more critical of her choices after a few epic misfires in the first few years. Recently, she sat down for a candid interview with an entertainment portal and shared her biggest lessons and regrets in the industry. The *Atrangi Re* actress opened up, saying, "My biggest learning was that when you are at your lowest, you have to get up and run your fastest because when you are feeling underconfident and you start playing on the back foot, that's the worst. I'm aware that there were times in 2019 when I wasn't completely honest, whether it was in my performances, my behavior, or my interactions with the media. I was more attention-seeking. I thought people would like my carefree version more, so I did it so much that it felt like I was overdoing it. My regret is letting my organic self go, which people liked the most, and I am getting it back."

Her upcoming film, *Gaslight*, costarring Vikrant Massey and Chitrangada Singh, will be released digitally March 31.

AGENCIES



Comedy's a serious business: Ashwini

Mumbai: Actress Ashwini Kalsekar, who is receiving a lot of appreciation for her work in the recently released streaming series *Pop Kaun*, feels the comedy genre is very technical and rests heavily on an actor's timing. Elaborating on the same, she said, "I think comedy is a very serious business, and you need to do every scene very seriously so

that people can laugh. I feel it's very technical. I really follow my director's instructions. And acting is all about reacting. So when you have legends in front of you, you automatically react." The actress further mentioned, "I just follow my script and my dialogue; I follow my co-actors. I wait for their dialogues and their reactions so that I can emote and react,

so that's how I prepare myself." The show stars big-wigs of the comedy world like Johnny Lever, Rajpal Yadav, Chunky Panday, Saurabh Shukla, and the late Satish Kaushik along with Kunal Kemmu, Nupur Sanon, and Jamie Lever. The Farhad Samji-directed *Pop Kaun* is currently streaming on Disney+ Hotstar.

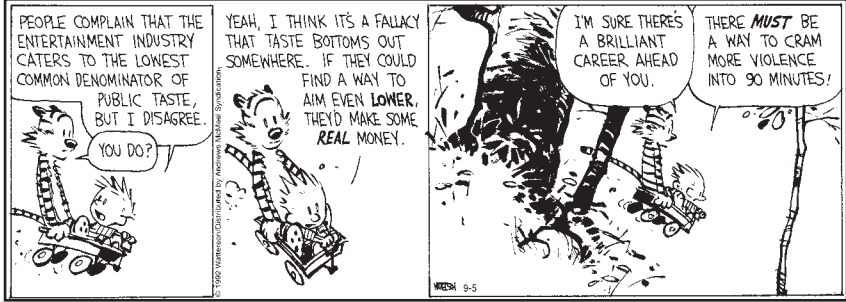
AGENCIES

FUN post

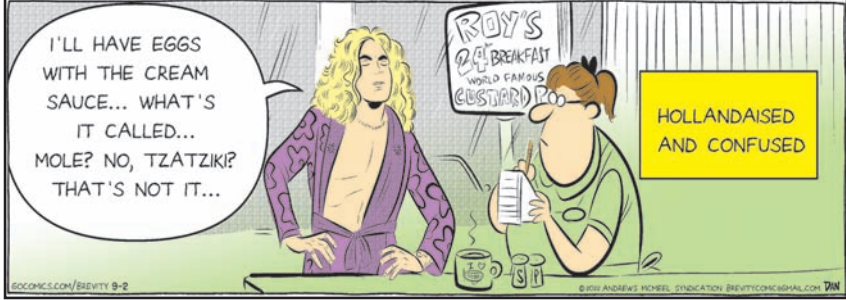
PEANUTS



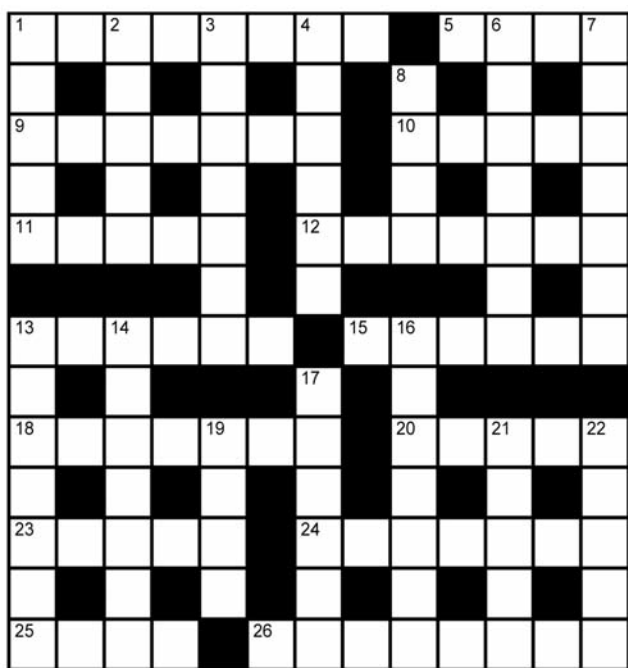
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



CROSSWORD



Across

- 1 Jujubes
5 Stringed instrument
9 Granted permission
10 Exceed expectations
11 Sifter
12 Supple
13 Inveigle
15 Appeal to a parent? (3,3)
18 Division

Down

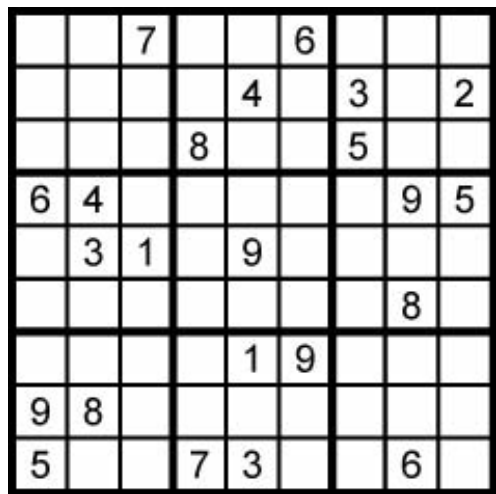
- 20 Odour
23 Unreactive
24 Traveller
25 Bird's domicile
26 Insect transmitters
1 Milk givers
2 Battle royal
3 Unfair treatment (3,4)
4 Table-tennis racquet

- 6 Small herring-like fish
7 Young hens
8 Greek supreme god
13 Large saltwater lake
14 Some horse riders
16 Study in detail
17 Irregular
19 Scintilla
21 Free-reed instrument
22 Mystiques

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

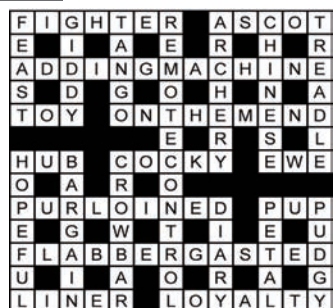
SUDOKU

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.

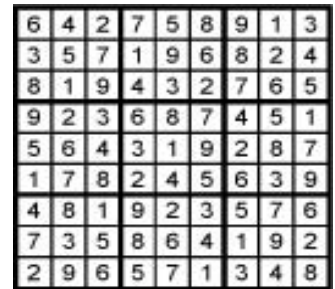


SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD



SUDOKU

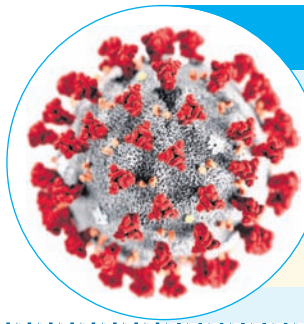


downtown



CURBING THE EVIL

Cuttack ADM Shibo Toppo flagging off a vehicle meant for spreading awareness about the stigma of child marriage in Cuttack, Thursday



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	68,29,49,371	65,58,80,396	68,23,077
India	4,46,99,418	4,41,60,997	5,30,816
Odisha	13,36,304	13,26,915	9,204

MAN-ELEPHANT CONFLICT

Pradhan writes to Union min, CM

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Bhubaneswar, March 23: Senior BJP leader and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has written letters to his Cabinet colleague Bhupender Yadav and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik urging them to take steps to address human-elephant conflict in Odisha.

In his letter to Yadav and Patnaik, the Union Education Minister has expressed deep concern about the escalating number of elephant deaths, and straining elephant-human conflict in the state.

Over the past decade, Odisha has witnessed loss of 784 elephants, with 245 of these deaths occurring in the last three years alone, he said. "The month of March this year has been particularly devastating, with seven elephant deaths being reported – the highest in the past three years. Sadly, most of the deaths are due to poaching, electrocution or train/road accidents," Pradhan said.



In his letter to Yadav and Patnaik, the Union Education Minister has expressed deep concern about the escalating number of elephant deaths

Citing state Assembly data, he said that altogether 2,776 wild animals, including 416 elephants, have been killed in the past five years (2017-18 to 2021-22) in Odisha. Further, Pradhan mentioned

that 669 people and 741 domestic animals died, and 9,151 houses were damaged due to elephant attacks.

"Elephant conservation is of paramount importance to Odisha, as these majestic animals are an integral part of our ecological balance, cultural heritage, and the state's identity. The well-being of these creatures is essential for maintaining the health of our forests and the livelihood of local communities that rely on them," he said.

Stating that the Union government has shown commitment to wildlife conservation, Pradhan said the Centre's efforts in expanding the protected area network and launching project elephant have set a strong foundation for the protection of these gentle giants.

Considering the critical situation in Odisha, he sought the intervention of the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change and Odisha government to ensure the harmonious coexistence of humans and elephants in Odisha.



SPRING FEST AHEAD: An artisan gives finishing touches to an earthen idol of Goddess Durga at Chandni Chowk Puja Mandap in Cuttack, Thursday, ahead of Basanti Durga Puja

OP PHOTO

2-day stir over DMD starts today in Delhi

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 23: Helpless parents of the children affected by rare disease Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD) from 21 states, including Odisha, will stage a two-day protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi from Friday to press for immediate treatment and assistance.

According to sources, parents of such kids would seek the Union government's attention to the plight of differently-abled children and their care givers as there is no treatment available in India as of now. The treatment available abroad runs into crores and is highly unaffordable and its efficacy is not known. So, the parents will demand required infrastructure for manufacturing of drugs in India and research on gene therapy.

DMD is a rare genetic disorder which causes progressive muscle loss. The child starts showing symptoms at the age of 6-7 years when it walks on the toes. The disease, in the form of a defective dystrophin gene, which hinders the production of very vital dystrophin protein, is present since birth. Growing rapidly, soon it engulfs every muscle of the body including the heart and lungs. Subsequently, the child becomes wheelchair-bound.

Sources also said that 16 parents of such children from Odisha will participate in the protest.

No proposal for metro train in Bhub: Centre

New Delhi: Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry Thursday denied receiving any proposal from the Odisha government for Metro Rail Project in Bhubaneswar. Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs Kaushal Kishore informed the Lok Sabha that as per the Metro Rail Policy, 2017, the state government is responsible for initiating metro rail projects. He said the Centre considers financial assistance for such projects based on feasibility of the proposal and availability of resources, as and when posed by the concerned state government.

STF rescues 2 pangolins, nabs 2 traffickers

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 23: The Special Task Force (STF) of Odisha Police has arrested two wildlife criminals and recovered two pangolins from their possession.

STF sources here Thursday said on the basis of reliable information, the STF conducted a raid with the help of forest officials of Boudh forest division March 22 evening near Boudh bypass and nabbed two wildlife criminals - Uchhab Kanhar and Prasant Kumar Behera.

During the search operation, two live pangolins weighing 13 kg



and 10 kg respectively along with other incriminating materials were recovered from their possession.

The accused persons could not produce any authority in support of the possession of the two live pangolins. The STF registered cases U/s 379/411/120(B) IPC r/w.

Sec.51 of Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 against the two wildlife criminals. The two accused persons will be forwarded to the SDJM court of Boudh. The live pangolins were handed over to Boudh DFO for safe custody.

The Indian pangolin (Manis crassicaudata), also called thick-tailed pangolin, scaly anteater and 'bajrakapta' is a solitary, shy, slow-moving, nocturnal mammal. It is a schedule-I protected animal under the Wild Life Protection act, 1972.

Schedule I provides absolute protection - offences under these are prescribed for the highest penalties.


Clubs to enable holistic growth of students

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 23: Chairing the 39th Executive Council meeting of Mo School Abhiyan commissioner-cum-secretary Aswathy S stressed on smooth implementation of club system and reintroduction of student cabinets in all elementary schools with support from alumni members.

Aimed at enabling optimum utilisation of students' potentials, in-a-first, school clubs will be introduced in all secondary schools of Odisha from the academic year 2023-24. These clubs will supple-

ment the newly introduced curriculum and will help in providing students a personalised learning experience.



Local Stakeholder Consultation Meeting
Project : "Leading Lights Where Grids End"
Agenda: Discuss Project Design, Impacts and Benefits of the proposed project
An initiative by SDG13 Ventures and Offset Farm that aims to reduce electricity consumption in the rural households of India by introducing more energy efficient LED lamps to replace incandescent light bulbs. The project will be registered in the Gold Standard Registry.
Venue: Avichal Ventures, Plot No 111, Rudrapur, Pahala, Bhubaneswar, Odisha- 752101
Date : 28 April 2023
Time : 11 AM to 12:30 PM
RSVP : sdg13ventures@gmail.com or info@offsetfarm.io

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FOR A CHANGE: Members of Communist Party of India organised a ‘Vikalpa Samabesh’ near PMG Square in Bhubaneswar, Thursday, to build a new Odisha and to protest against the communal attitude of Central government

OP PHOTO

Azex made last call to girlfriend

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 23: In a fresh twist in the suicide case of popular DJ Azex aka Akshaya Maharana, the cops allegedly ascertained during the examination of Call Detail Records (CDR) that the deceased had made a call, which lasted for 97 seconds, to his estranged girlfriend just few minutes before taking the extreme step. On the evening of March 18, the deceased Azex was found pleading with his girlfriend to not end the relationship, but to no effect.

He also could not answer a video call by his girlfriend few minutes later. A dejected Azex later shared all the details regarding the PhonePe, bank account and ATM passwords in his last message to his sister. Meanwhile, a team of cyber police station of the City Thursday fetched digital evidence collected by the Kharvela Nagar police in connection with the case.

“We have taken seriously the allegations made by Azex’s family. We continue the probe to ascertain the veracity of the allegations,” The Deputy Commissioner of Police, Prateek Singh told media persons.

Anti-drug activist awarded by BIPF

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 23: Social activist Md Imran Ali was awarded with the Shambhavi Puraskar 2023 in a ceremony organised here Thursday by Bansidhar and Ila Panda Foundation (BIPF), the corporate social responsibility arm of the Indian Metals and Ferro Alloys Limited (IMFA).

Recognising his relentless efforts to motivate children and youth to overcome addiction challenges and embrace a healthy life, the foundation conferred upon him the award which carried a citation, memento and cash prize of ₹2.50,000.

BIPF CEO and Trustee Shaifalika Panda said, “On this stage we have felicitated people, who have had very little for themselves, yet made it a point to work towards charitable causes. Every individual, company or authority must prioritise initiatives for the larger good and contribute, as per their skill set, on sustainable solutions for developmental issues.”

Md Imran Ali, known as



Odisha’s Anti-Drug Champion, has been working incessantly to eliminate the influence of substance abuse in the lives of children and youth. His book titled ‘Bloody Gutkha’ enumerates the immense harm caused by tobacco products, and his volunteer group ‘Nasa Mukti Yuva Sankalp’ has brought about behavioural change through street plays.

On the occasion, Bipin Bihari Panda was honoured with the Jury Commendation Certification 2023 along with citation and cash prize of ₹50,000 for his dedicated efforts towards the vulnerable sections of society.

Continued from P1

Rahul gets 2 yrs in ...

In its order, the court said the accused was an MP and whatever he delivers as his speech to the public makes a wide impact, which increases the seriousness of his crime. “And if the accused is given less punishment, then it sends a wrong message to the public and the purpose of defamation is not fulfilled and anybody will easily slander someone,” the court observed.

The case was filed against Rahul for his alleged remarks ‘how come all the thieves have Modi as the common surname?’ remarks on a complaint lodged by BJP MLA and former Gujarat minister Purnesh Modi.

The Lok Sabha MP from Wayanad made the remarks April 13, 2019 while addressing a rally at Kolar in Karnataka during Lok Sabha elections campaigning.

Meanwhile reacting to the verdict Union Law Minister Kiren

Rijiju said Rahul’s remarks have caused harm to the Congress whose leaders were worried that the party’s fortunes were sinking. “Whatever Rahul Gandhi says causes harm. It causes harm not only to the party but also to others. It is not good for the nation,” Rijiju said reacting to the verdict. “Some Congress leaders have told me that Rahul Gandhi’s style of functioning is harming the party,” he added.

BJP leader and former Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad also hit out at the Congress.

Prasad said Rahul insulted people with ‘Modi’ surname with his comments, asserting that it is very much defamatory. “Does Congress want Rahul Gandhi to have complete freedom to abuse people? There is rule of law in the country and it will prevail,” Prasad asserted.

Indian rivers at ...

Guterres cited data from the World Meteorological Organisation that warned that global average sea levels have already risen faster since 1900 than over any preceding century in the last 3,000 years.

“Unless we reverse this trend, the consequences will be catastrophic. Low-lying communities and entire countries could be erased forever. We would witness mass movements of entire populations – and fierce competition for water and land,” the UN chief asserted and added that disasters would accelerate worldwide – including floods, droughts and landslides.

Guterres called on all countries not just to talk, but to act as one to protect people and communities alike, emphasising the urgent need to limit global warming to 1.5-degree rise to avert the worst impacts of climate change.

CP busts interstate gang; three nabbed

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 23: The Commissionerate Police Thursday busted an interstate looters gang involved in several cases of theft in the twin city area. The cops managed to arrest three members of the gang identified as K Balaji alias Bala, 35, N Murgan, 47, and D Govindan, 50, of Uddiairaj Pallayam in Tirupattur district of Tamil Nadu. Police seized four laptops, seven mobile sets along with other items from their possession during the raid.

While investigating several cases of theft of digital gadgets, the police came to know about Tamil Nadu based gang which used to target hostels and mess located at different places in City during the early hours of morning. The accused were held from one Kathajodi lodge in Cuttack while four other members of the gang succeeded in giving police a slip.

“They have a particular and unique mode of operation and notoriously famous as ‘Morning lap-top theft gang’. They procure physically handicapped certificates in their name, especially “dumb” or “deaf”. They wander different cities of India and stay in low tariff hotels by pretending as business men. In the first light of the day, they walk out and target the students residing in hostels, mess, transit houses and any other dwelling places which are open in the morning hour,” claimed police sources.

The students would be deep asleep when the accused decamp



While investigating several cases of theft of digital gadgets, the police came to know about Tamil Nadu based gang which used to target hostels and mess located at different places in City during the early hours of morning

with their mobile phone and laptops. If caught, they act as dumb

and deaf to get away.

“Even they visit schools and colleges and collect money as deaf and dumb by drawing sympathy. They also exhibit the photos of physically challenged children during operation and collection of money,” police sources added.

They used to send the stolen items to their native places in Tamil Nadu where other members of the gang sell them in the local market at much lower price. The police also came to know that several residents of their native are also engaged in similar criminal activities. The accused were Thursday sent to court that later sent them to judicial custody.

Parl panel pitches for ...

“The Committee feels that the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act has many limitations and therefore, recommends that there is a need to enact a new law and define the status, functions and powers of the CBI and also lay down safeguards to ensure objectivity and impartiality in the CBI’s functioning,” the committee said.

The panel said that vacant posts in the CBI are not being filled up at the required pace and recommended that ‘every effort should be made to fill up vacancies at the earliest’. A total of 1,709 posts are vacant in the CBI against its sanctioned strength of 7,295. “The Committee is of the opinion that vacancies in the cadres of executive ranks, law officers and technical officers will unquestionably increase pendency of cases, hamper the quality of investigation and ultimately impact the effectiveness and efficiency of the agency,” the report said.

Naveen, Mamata to work ...

“It was a courtesy meeting. There was no in-depth discussion about serious political matters. We share a very old friendship,” Patnaik added.

Banerjee also said she has invited Patnaik to visit West Bengal soon. “We both are neighbouring states. Whenever there is a cyclone in Odisha, it also impacts West Bengal, such is the situation. We have maintained a very good relationship and it is a golden legacy,” Mamata said. She also thanked Patnaik for handing over two acres of land in Puri for construction of ‘Biswa Bangla Bhawan’ for accommodation of tourists from West Bengal.

Mamata said she has also requested Patnaik for development of an industrial corridor between the two states for smooth transportation of iron ore from Odisha for industries in West Bengal.

Earlier, Banerjee reached Patnaik’s residence, where the Odisha Chief Minister welcomed her by presenting Sri Angavastra of Lord Jagannath. He also presented a replica of the three chariots to the Trinamool Congress supreme, besides filigree work and some sweets from Odisha.

Minister distributes scooters to PwDs

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 23: Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (SSEPD) Minister Ashok Chandra Panda, in a program organised by the department Thursday distributed 50 retro-fitted scooters to Persons with Disabilities (PwD) beneficiaries from different parts of the state.

Bright students and hardworking entrepreneurs for whom mobility was a critical missing link were empowered in the event organised in the campus of National Career Service Centre for Differently Abled (NCSCDA).

Distributing the motor vehicles, Minister Panda said, “It is a commendable effort on part of the state government to provide convenient transport facility to PwDs. This initiative will fuel their hopes of achieving a better and brighter tomorrow.”



Speaking on the occasion, Bhubaneswar (Central) MLA Ananta Naryan Jena heaped praises on the department for successfully implementing various welfare projects.

State Head of Hero Motocorp Harshabardhan said, “The Company has always cared for so-

cial issues and was happy to provide scooters to Odisha government for distribution among the disabled.”

Commissioner-cum-Secretary of SSEPD department Bhaskar Sharma advised the beneficiaries to utilise the provided vehicle in a proper way.

‘Youth participation vital to preserve ecosystem’

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 23: In a bid to encourage participation of youth in making oceans cleaner, a beach cleaning activity was organised at Gopalpur beach Wednesday on the occasion of World Water Day.

The event named ‘Save Blue, Live Green - Driving the passion & energy of youth for action’ was jointly organised by Sattvic Soul, UNICEF, PANTISS and Youth4Water Plus. The climate man of Odisha Satyabrata Samal anchored the programme.

Through the beach cleaning activity, young people were educated on ways of protecting oceans and the importance of plogging in combating climate change.

Speaking on the occasion Samal said, “The objective behind this



beach cleaning activity is to remind ourselves of the vital role that oceans and water bodies play in sustaining life on earth. Over 70 per cent of our planet is covered in water. It is high time we took responsibility of keeping our oceans and beaches clean and free from pollution. Youth participation in this regard is vital to ensure that our ecosystem and water resources are

preserved for future generations.” Youth4Water Plus program director Jyoti Sharma said, “It is heartening to see youth set the pace for climate action and participate in the UN Water Conference 2023. Through Youth4Water Plus we want to connect youth across the globe and empower them to be climate change leaders for their communities and the world”.

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LOWER SUKTEL IRRIGATION PROJECT

Grabbing of farmers' lands kicks off a row



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bolangir, March 23: Illegal acquisition of farmlands of poor farmers in and around the under-construction Lower Suktel Irrigation Project in Bolangir district has kicked off a row, a report said Thursday.

The rich as well as land brokers are acquiring these farmlands in connivance with revenue officials, sub-registrar and town planning officials through fraudulent means and later selling them as housing plots to interested buyers. It is suspected that a large amount of money has been given as kickbacks to carry out this fraud.

This has come at a time when a former tehsildar and revenue official in Bolangir district had to go to jail over land fraud. These land grabbers are alleged of violating the Odisha Real Estate Regulatory Authority (ORERA) rule and selling lands to people at very high prices than the market

IT IS SUSPECTED THAT A LARGE AMOUNT OF MONEY HAS BEEN GIVEN AS KICKBACKS TO OFFICIALS TO CARRY OUT THIS FRAUD

THIS HAS COME AT A TIME WHEN A FORMER TEHSILDAR AND REVENUE OFFICIAL IN BOLANGIR DISTRICT HAD TO GO TO JAIL OVER LAND FRAUD

rate. They have increased the land price in comparison with the money paid to the oustees as compensation for the Lower Suktel Irrigation Project.

Meanwhile, the construction of the spillway and soil embankment of Lower Suktel dam is underway in the district, the report said.

After becoming functional, the project will provide irrigation facilities to 40,000 hectare of farmlands from Magurbeda to Loisingha, Bolangir, Puntala in Bolangir district and in areas under Tarava tehsil of Subarnapur district on the downstream of Suktel river.

Reports said that poor farmers' lands have been grabbed ahead of the completion of dam work. Rich people as well as land brokers are acquiring the lands of poor farmers under various pretexts and converting the ownership in their names.

They are not even sparing the lands of people from the scheduled caste community. They are buying land in the name of a member of the community and later converting their status and ownership in the name of rich people through various nefarious means. A major racket is alleged to be involved in the land grabbing.

As a result, large tracts of farmlands have slipped into the hands of the builders till Satamail Square on Bolangir-Sonepur road, till Duragapali, Fasad on Sambalpur road, till Haradatal on Patnagarh road and till Sinkhaman on Titilagarh road.

Land grabbing is not limited to the areas connected with the main roads. Even the roadside lands in Khjenpali, Atagaon, Dumerpali, Khairapali, Budhisindhol, Bileisarada, Chandanbhati, Baidipali and Sibatala have been illegally acquired by these land grabbers. All the roadside farmlands have been divided into housing plots with information plaques with 'plot for sale' written on them installed on the land.

When contacted, Sub-Collector Kumar Nagabhusan said that action will be taken as per law if someone files a complaint in this regard.

2-yr-old sold for ₹18K

Basudevpur: A man sold his 2-year-old son for ₹18,000 after a quarrel over some disputes in Chandanpur village of Basudevpur block. On being informed by mother Simarani Das, police rescued the child Wednesday and handed him over to the District Child Welfare Committee. The father of the child has been identified as Rajendra Kumar Das. As per sources, following Simarani's complaint, police carried out a search operation and rescued the child from Satrugna Behera's house in Bilabakia village under Soro police unit. Police are carrying out further investigation after detaining both the parents. A case (no 153/23) has been registered in Basudevpur Police Station and the investigation is on, said Basudevpur IIC Sabitri Panda. Notably, Rajendra and Simarani got married seven years ago and have another 4-year-old child. But for the last few days, conflict between the two was on the rise. Even Simarani went to her father's house leaving her child at her in-laws' over some dispute.

MALNUTRITION GRIPS TRIBAL FAMILY

SON SUCCUMBS, TWO DAUGHTERS AFFECTED

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kalinganagar, March 23: Jajpur district still paints a picture of neglect with fresh cases of malnutrition being reported from Ghati Sahi village under Ranagundi panchayat of Danagadi block in the district.

The incident has surfaced years after the non-descript Nagada villages hogged the headlines in 2016 following the death of over 20 children due to malnutrition.

This has been reported from the family of Banku Hembram, a casual labourer in the village. Banku's family consists of his wife Tulasi Hembram and nine children.

Among the nine children, seven are daughters and the rest two are sons. However, with meager earnings Banku finds it difficult to meet his family expenses. The family manages to get food to eat only in the first half of the day while the next half is spent in hunger.

Sources said one of his sons has died few days back. Now, two of his daughters, Kuni Hembram and Shanti Hembram, have been rendered bedridden as a result of severe malnutrition.

Banku has only a ration card in his name as government assistance but he never gets any ration through the card. The two girls



are unable to walk or sit by themselves and their condition is deteriorating now. This has pushed Banku into distress as he ponders over a bleak future that lies ahead.

The family survives by eating watered rice and salt, reports said. When contacted, district child protection officer (DCPO) Sarat Chandra Behera said that he will

make arrangements to send the affected children to nutritional rehabilitation centre.

On being informed, Jajpur Collector Chakravarti Singh Rathore directed the DCPO to admit the two children to nutritional rehabilitation centre. A team sent by DCPO held talks with Danagadi CDPO Debaki Patra, visited Banku's house and admitted his five other children to Ama Ghara Child Care Centre in Sukinda.

Medical officer Jyoti Ranjan Moharana of Danagadi community health centre (CHC) said that medical teams have met Banku at his house several times but every time he denied to send his children to the nutritional rehabilitation centre.

Poachers kill jumbo, decamp with tusks

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nilagiri, March 23: A tusker was allegedly killed by poachers who later trimmed its tusk and decamped with it from Kuldiha wildlife sanctuary under Nilagiri sub-division in Balasore district, Thursday.

The matter came to the fore after locals spotted the carcass of the tusker lying at Kalmachaturi in the wildlife sanctuary. On being informed, Kuldiha forest ranger Ananta Kumar Jena and other forest officials rushed to the spot and launched an investigation. The forest dwellers have demanded a thorough probe into the tusker's death.

Reports said that there are over 100 elephants in Kuldiha wildlife sanctuary. An elephant calf died February 27 while seven elephants have died during last 14 months. When contacted, Balasore DFO Khuswant Singh confirmed the development.

Biodiversity Heritage Site tag for Gandhamardan

It is the third biodiversity heritage site in state after Mandasuru Gorge in Kandhamal and Mahendragiri Hill Range in Gajapati

PNN & AGENCIES

Bolangir, March 23: Known as an Ayurvedic paradise with abundant flora and fauna, the Gandhamardan hills spread over Bolangir-Bargarh districts, have now been designated a Biodiversity Heritage Site (BHS).

Odisha's Forest, Environment and Climate Change department which has issued a notification to this effect, said the Gandhamardan hills, spread over nearly 190 square km, will now have the 'biodiversity heritage site' tag under the Odisha Biodiversity Rules - 2012 to protect its fragile ecosystem.

It thus became the third biodiversity heritage site in the state after Mandasuru Gorge in Kandhamal dis-



trict and Mahendragiri Hill Range in Gajapati.

The forest is spread over two districts - Bargarh and Balangir and is a treasure trove of medicinal plants, the notification said. It has some 1,055 plant species that include 849 angiosperms, 56 pteridophytes, 40 bryophytes, 45 lichens and two gymnosperms and 63 species of macrofungi.

Similarly, it boasts of some 500 species of animals that include 43

mammal species, 161 birds, 44 reptiles, 16 amphibians, 118 butterflies, 27 dragonflies and 7 damselflies and 83 species of spiders.

This apart, two historical monuments including the famed Nrusinghanath temple located on the northern slope and Harishankar temple located on the southern slope of the foothills of Gandhamardan have immense cultural significance. These two hill shrines are the two major pilgrimage sites of Odisha.

Huen Tsang in his chronicles had described this hill shrine as a Buddhist heritage site named Parimalagiri.

"At present, the rich biological resources of this cultural landscape are under pressure due to various anthropogenic and climatic factors, and the traditional ecological knowledge associated with the bio-resources of the hill is declining. The long-term protection, conservation and management of biological resources of the Gandhamardan Hills is of utmost significance for the state," read the notification.

BSF unearths Red dump in Balimela reserve forest

AGENCIES

Malkangiri, March 23: The BSF Operational Party Thursday recovered a Maoist dump in Balimela reserve forest in the general area in Odisha-Andhra Pradesh border.

BSF sources said a special operation was launched by 88 Bn BSF Thursday on the basis of information about dump of arms of Maoist in Balimela reserve forest. The BSF successfully recovered a Maoist dump in Balimela reserve forest area and recovered three steel tiffin IEDs, two SBML gun, one barrel of SBML, two empty fired case of SBML, 11 36HE grenades, 28 non-electric and six electric detonators.

Balimela reserve forest has been the safe haven for Maoist outfits since long due to topographical reasons and favourable atmosphere.

BSF troops and police are actively operating in the area to curb Maoist menace in the region and create a sense of security among the local populace so that Maoist ideology would not spread out anymore.

Recovery of such a huge dump of IEDs, explosives and SBML guns during ongoing TCOC and Saheed Diwas (observed by Maoist outfit March 23) would certainly demoralise the Maoist cadres and their sympathisers, BSF claimed.

5T High School Transformation helps shape tribal students' career dreams

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sundargarh, March 23: "Earlier we used to sit on old desks and benches while teachers used blackboard to teach us. Now, our school has transformed totally. We sit in modern well-lit classrooms and use smartboards for learning. It helps us learn and understand our lessons easily," says Pratibha Saura, a student of Class X at the Meghdega Govt High School in Sundargarh district.

Similarly, another Class X student at Deokaranpur Govt High School in Sundargarh, Devraj Mahanandia shares, "Our school has got a modern science lab as part of High School Transformation Programme. The equipment that we used to see in textbooks earlier, is now available at our disposal for hands-on learning. This makes the lessons more interesting and increases our zeal for studying."

Like Pratibha from Meghdega and Devraj from Deokaranpur, many students studying in government high schools in the tribal majority Sundargarh district now have a chance at better career opportunities unlocked with the help of High School Transformation Programme under 5T. With a total makeover of schools as part of state government's flagship High School Transformation Programme under 5T, the high school students have got wings to their dreams and can aspire to become future doctors, engineers, scientists, teachers, bureaucrats, etc.

The High School Transformation Programme is a unique programme under the 5T initiative. School infrastructure is being made anew and surroundings beautified as part of



High School Transformation. Provision of smart classroom, advanced science lab, ICT Lab and e-Library, modern library, separate toilets for boys and girls, development of playground and sports infrastructure are various facets of the High School Transformation Programme.

Sundargarh district has 383 government high schools. Among the same, 21 high schools managed under the ST & SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare department and ITDA Sundargarh sport a fresh look and new ambience. This has roused the interest of tribal students and infused new zeal for studies among them.

High schools functioning under the aegis of Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) Sundargarh have been equipped with modern science labs. Special attention is being paid to orient students in various streams such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) right from the high school level. With modern science labs, students now get a chance to

physically experiment with various equipment, tools and models and learn hands-on.

Telescope and microscope, human body model, plant and animal cell model, metal separator, etc have been provided in these STEM model science labs for use of the students. Similarly, for various science experiments, robotics kit, electronic kit etc are also being provided.

"All government high schools of Sundargarh functioning under the ST & SC Development department have been renovated. This has helped provide new avenue of learning for tribal students in the district. Modern science labs, ICT lab and other interventions have helped to build students' dreams for a better career opportunity," says Pabitra Mohan Pradhan, District Welfare Officer, Sundargarh.

Additionally, all these high schools feature a functional Information & Communication Technology (ICT) lab. The students are getting trained in computer education right from the high school level. Moreover, students can use internet at these labs and

avail of e-Library facilities.

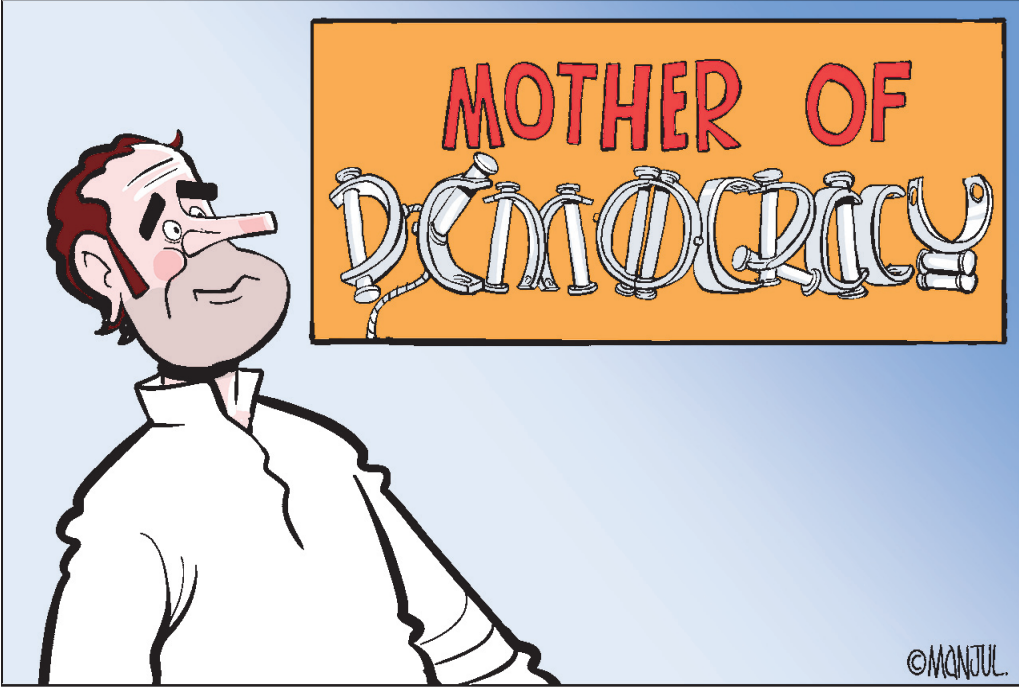
Similarly, the high schools in Sundargarh district now sport lush green playgrounds. Apart from providing quality education, the students are now being groomed to represent Odisha at national level. Besides, safe drinking water and clean toilets have been provided for the students as well as teachers.

"High School Transformation Programme is one of the state government's long-term vision and action plans. The programme has not only revamped the teaching and learning methodology in government high schools but also created opportunity for students to develop their skills in various domains. The modern learning pedagogy implemented through the initiative will be a catalyst to fulfilling the career dreams of students," says Karna Majhi, headmaster of Deokaranpur Govt High School, Sundargarh.

Till now, in 2 phases, 247 transformed high schools have been dedicated to the people in the tribal-dominated Sundargarh district. 21 high schools supported by ITDA Sundargarh have also been dedicated among the same.

As part of the High School Transformation Programme, the school infrastructure is being augmented while the school boundary and walls are being painted to look more attractive. The paintings and quotes of legendary figures like Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, Madhusudan Das, Gopandhu Das, Gangadhar Meher and Bhima Bhoi etc adorning the walls of various government high schools in Sundargarh district has turned to a source of inspiration for students.

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



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Regional Manager

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e-Procurement Notice No-EERWELBBSR-37/2022-23	
1 Name of the work	10 Nos. of shifting work of 11 Kv line LT line, Sub-Station due to PMGSY road widening work and bridge work under RW Division, Bhubaneswar and 1 No. shifting work of HT and LT line under RW Division, Jagasinghpur
2 Estimated Cost	From 7.35 lakhs to 48.51 lakhs (Excluding GST)
3 Period of completion	60 days
4 Bid Identification No.	EERWELBBSR- 37/2022-23
5 Date and time of availability of Bid documents in the portal	From Dt.28.03.2023 at 12.00 A.M. to Dt 10.04.2023 upto 5.00 P.M
6 Date & Time of opening of tender	Dt.11.04.2023 at 11:00 A.M.
7 Procurement officer/ Name and address of the officer inviting Bids	Executive Engineer, R W EL DIVN, BBSR, At- 1st floor of Divn. Complex, Rasulgah Behind Explanade Mall, Dist. -Khurda, Odisha, Pincode-751010
Further detail can be seen from the Govt. website www.tenderorissa.gov.in.	
Sd./- Executive Engineer, Rural Work Electrical Division, Bhubaneswar	
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Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the Bank of Maharashtra under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (54 of 2002) and in exercise of the powers conferred under Sub-Section (12) of Section 13 read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a Demand Notice calling upon the Borrower/Guarantor to repay the amount mentioned in the notice plus interest and expenses thereon within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.			
The Borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower/Guarantor and the public in general that the undersigned has taken physical possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under Sub-Section (4) of Section 13 of Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules. The Borrower/Guarantor in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the Bank of Maharashtra for an amount stated below with interest & expenses thereon. The Borrower's attention is invited to provisions of Sub-Section (8) of Section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.			
BERHAMPUR BRANCH / Name & Address of the Borrower/Guarantor	Description of the Security Interest taken over Possession / Type of Possession	Liabilities due on the specified date as per Notice	Date of Demand Notice / Date of Possession(Physical)
Borrower: M/s. Shree Krishna Agency, Prop.: Mr. Kiran Kumar Sahu, S/o.: Mr. Abhimanyu Sahu, Address: At: Malu Behera Street, Near Raja Street, P.O.: Panigrahipentho, Berhampur, Dist.: Ganjam- 760006 / Guarantor: Mr. Manoj Kumar Sahu, S/o.: Mr. Abhimanyu Sahu, Address: At: 63, Balmikipetakoloni (Balinkipeta Street), Panigrahipentho, Berhampur, Dist.: Ganjam- 760006	Equitable Mortgage of Residential Land and Building Situated at Plot No.: 1115/8641 & 1141/8642, Khata No.: 243/5896, Mouza: Madhusudanpur, At/P.O.: Truptinagar 2 nd Line, Near Shanti Nagar, Haridakhadi, Berhampur, Area: Ac.0.020 Block together with the Buildings and Structures/Residential Block constructed to/ to be constructed thereon admeasuring 870 Sq.Ft (Carpet) i.e. 1740 sq.ft. (Built up) in aggregate consisting of 8 rooms on G-1 floor/s and all the fixtures annexed thereto, standing in the name of Mr. Kiran Kumar Sahu, S/o.: Mr. Abhimanyu Sahu & Mr. Manoj Kumar Sahu, S/o.: Mr. Abhimanyu Sahu , Bounded by East: House of Siba Mohanty, West: House of Manjula Behera, North: Land of Sri Ram Rao, South: Road	₹49,28,050.93 as on 12.09.2022 + interest & other charges thereon	12.09.2022 / 23.03.2023
Place: Bhubaneswar, Date: 24.03.2023		Authorised Officer, Bank of Maharashtra	

What you are not able to do today, you will achieve tomorrow. Persevere and you shall conquer.



THE MOTHER

Invest In Water

Together with air, water is arguably the planet’s most important natural resource. Functioning water systems are one of the technological pillars of civilisation, which often makes a water crisis a matter of life or death.

Today, about two billion people lack access to safe drinking water, and roughly half the world’s population experiences severe water scarcity for at least part of the year. Our limited freshwater resources are already overburdened by growing populations and water-thirsty economies. By 2030, global water demand will have exceeded the sustainable supply by 40 per cent. As demand for water grows and temperatures rise, water scarcity will threaten more lives and livelihoods – and thus the stability of societies around the world.

How can we turn the tide so that water empowers communities, secures our economies, and keeps the planet livable? As with global public goods such as a clean environment, there is a tendency to focus on the costs of improvement today, rather than on the greater long-term benefits of investing in the preservation of natural resources. The water sector today is underfinanced and chronically short of capacity to meet demand. But if we want to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of ensuring clean water and sanitation for everyone, we must increase current global spending on water four-fold, to more than \$1 trillion per year (1.21 per cent of global GDP). We also must make up for the \$470 billion we lose every year through flood damage and poor irrigation.

By protecting the environment and the climate, every cent invested in the water sector boosts our economies, now and in the future. When the European Investment Bank provided a €200 million (\$215 million) loan to Jordan last December to finance a desalination plant on the Red Sea and a pipeline to the capital, Amman, the country’s planning and international cooperation minister, Zeina Toukan, described these projects as crucial for both water security and comprehensive economic development. We all need to adopt similar thinking about how we value and manage water.

As with many other challenges, the public sector cannot fill this large investment gap alone. Businesses have an important role to play. According to the CDP, a not-for-profit organisation that collects environmental-impact data, more than \$300 billion of business value is at risk globally if no action is taken to address water scarcity. Yet it will cost only one-fifth of that total – \$55 billion – to tackle the problem.

If businesses deploy new technologies to reduce their water consumption and to exploit wastewater as a source of energy, heat, nutrients, and materials, they can reduce their environmental footprint and free up more water for use by others. The CDP values such “water-related opportunities” at \$711 billion, reflecting not just savings on water use but also the growth of long-term potential markets in water-smart technology and the benefits of better community relations. Because water is cheap in most parts of the world, businesses often have little incentive to invest in saving water or in boosting the efficiency of water-intensive production processes.

To persuade the private sector to focus on water-system preservation, we first need to start thinking of money spent on water as a real investment, rather than as a cost that can never be recovered. Second, the right value must be assigned to this water in order to create the necessary incentives for users and businesses to use it more efficiently, and for preservation to be economically rewarding. In the case of water, this requires a delicate balancing act, because affordable access to drinkable water and sanitation is a recognised human right – which means it is non-negotiable. Third, global cooperation and new cross-border programmes to mobilise greater investments in water would overcome market failures and prevent water from being politicised and weaponised.

This week’s United Nations 2023 Water Conference in New York, the first such gathering since 1977, is a unique opportunity to discuss water security and to tackle the crisis head-on and to acknowledge that water investment is as critical to a sustainable and just economy as is clean-energy investment. We can establish new guidelines for fixing the water cycle and ensuring a more holistic approach to sustainable development everywhere, from the Netherlands and Luxembourg to Nigeria and Laos. And we must find more ways to incentivize water financing from public and private sources that are willing to wait for their investments to bear fruit.

Water is what will carry the SDGs across the finish line. We must finally start recognising it as a fundamental part of our investment portfolios, and put it at the centre of our economic policies.

Ambroise Fayolle is Vice President of the European Investment Bank. Henk Ovink is Special Envoy for International Water Affairs for the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

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WISDOM CORNER

A wise man can learn more from a foolish question than a fool can learn from a wise answer.

Be a yardstick of quality. Some people aren't used to an environment where excellence is expected.

Take care of your body. It's the only place you have to live.

BRUCE LEE

STEVE JOBS

JIM ROHN

WORDSWORTH

■ Grapefruit

The grapefruit is a strange plant even without the problem of its name. It appeared in Barbados in the middle of the eighteenth century as a natural cross between the orange and the pummelo or pomelo. The latter is also known by its Dutch name pompelmoose and as shaddock, because a Captain Shaddock of the East India Company brought it halfway around the world from the East Indies late in the seventeenth century. The grapefruit was first described in 1750 by the Reverend Griffith Hughes and was then and often afterwards called the forbidden fruit, because it was seized upon by those searching for the identity of the original tree of good and evil in the Garden of Eden. John Lunan, in whose botanical work of 1814 about Jamaica, Hortus Jamaicensis, the word grapefruit first appeared in English, said of it: “There is a variety known by the name of grape-fruit, on account of its resemblance in flavour to the grape; this fruit is not near so large as the shaddock”. Mr Lunan had either never tasted one, or grapefruit of the period were sweeter than they are now, or he was suffering from sour grapes. It’s certain his idea about the name was wrong. It turns out the grapefruit was really so called because it grows in groups that when small, green and unripe look to a vivid imagination a bit like a bunch of grapes.

FOCUS NATION

THE ‘REAL’ REFORMS



The second-generation reforms call for a rewiring of the entire institutional framework, if we indeed seek to build a great nation

The nation is going through a tough debate on the merits of a new pension scheme versus the old scheme that offered defined benefits to retirees. There is much pull for reservation and quotas for newer groups based on various criteria. And the government faced serious opposition for reworking the scheme for hiring jawans on short tenures. In each of these, and many other similar situations, the tension is about a cash-strapped government being asked to hand out solutions and salaries on an unending basis, harking back to the days when governments were looked up to as providers rather than enablers. ‘Competitive Populism’ is overtaking ‘Fiscal Prudence’. The economic reforms were supposed to have changed that but they clearly didn’t, given the way our reforms have panned out. So now, we hear of “second generation” reforms – more opening up, more withdrawal of government from services and more dependence on private players under liberalised frameworks. But the root question that remains unasked is simple: Why do we think economic reforms, version 2.0, will deliver when the first round under an experienced economist like Dr. Manmohan Singh fell short?

Here, we need to turn the focus to bigger questions – on the readiness and robustness of our institutions, the quality of our governance systems and the mindsets with which these systems operate to deliver to the common man and to cut out the rent seekers that abound in the system. It is time to look at the biggest of these systems and reorient or fix them, before we can unleash any new round of reforms. Good governance after all is at the root of any system that thrives to the benefit of all its members, and this is as much true for small groups as it is for a large society or a nation state. Today, there are many questions on our governance standards, leading to the big question of the day: Have we met the promises with which India became a free nation 75 years ago and constituted itself into a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic?

As Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had pointed out right in the Constituent Assembly, “... however good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot. However bad a Constitution may be, it may turn out to be good if those who are called to work it, happen to be a good lot.” In the same speech, he warned against “hero worship”, and the “grammar of anarchy”, and of the dangers of equality written down in the Constitution but the reality of all-pervading inequality in social and economic life.

How have we stood up to these threats over the years? Are our governance standards being strengthened or are they falling behind and failing us? It might be useful to undertake a comprehensive and dispassionate review of where the nation stands after 75 years of independence in terms of delivering justice, liberty, equality and fraternity – the watchwords of our Constitution.

The most important institutions for the efficacious delivery of those egalitarian values are the judiciary, the civic administration and the law & order system in the country. Take the judiciary. The dictum, “justice delayed is justice denied,” appears true in a significant number of cases in India. Delivery of justice is expensive and is getting more so, excluding the vast population of low economic means to approach the system and demand justice, let alone secure it. The National Judicial Data Grid has a dashboard of pending cases; it shows a pendency of 42.7 million cases, over 70% of them over a year old as of March 2023.

Consider the civic administration, which facilitates the quality of life, living and opportunity. The common man is aggrieved by the functioning of the civic administration. It is clear that the ‘haves’ garner disproportionate resources and opportunities and the ‘have-nots’ have to struggle to be treated equally. This applies to providing of social infrastructure like water, sanitation, health, education et al as also for pursuing a vocation and profession. We see an imbalance of facilities between slum and non-slum populations even in glitzy urban centres like Mumbai.

Similarly, the treatment of the common man by the police administration to ensure the safety of life, liberty and property are unequal. People with means and manoeuvrability often get away with misdemeanours, even heinous ones, and the ordinary person is subjected ill-treatment and harassment.

A broad analysis of the functioning of these institutions suggests two fundamental constrictions. First, the design of these institutions is an inheritance of the colonial era. Over the decades, demands on these institutions have multiplied and varied. The marginal tweaking in the design and the functioning of these institutions undertaken so far are wholly inadequate to deliver the expected outcomes. Secondly, most of those with authority and delegated power at the outposts have become centres of rent-seeking. Lack of accountability has made rent-seeking widespread and free-wheeling. There is no gainsaying that the setting is used by the people of means with unrestrained zeal to benefit themselves or work with impunity in the face of all manner of violations.

India must now look to re-engineering the design of these institutions forthwith. Whereas rent-seeking is a human phenomenon and almost impossible to eliminate entirely, it can be minimised by a) education, b) accountability (with tough and swift action to set out examples), c) transparency and d) the use of technology. In case if the deficit is not addressed with missionary zeal, people’s faith, which is already sinking, will dissipate completely.

Henry Clay (April 12, 1777 – June 29, 1852), the American attorney and Statesman, once observed, “Government is a trust, and the officers of the government are trustees; and both the trust and the trustees are created for the benefit of the people.” To live-up to this trust calls for some fundamental change in our approach to reforms. Many of the politico-economic pundits talk of second-generation reforms but restrict their recommendations to supplementary reforms of factors of productivity. The second-generation reforms call for a rewiring of the entire institutional framework, if we indeed seek to build a great nation. We must preserve independence, allow institutions to work freely and forcefully but keep a sharp eye for systems that build power only to exploit the people and self-perpetuate themselves. All institutions should work to serve the ordinary citizen. We need to work hard to achieve this and to meet our obligations of building an egalitarian society full of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. I will attempt to discuss some solutions in a later piece.


The writer is a former Chairman of SEBI and LIC. Views are personal.

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SPECTRUM SOCIETY

Is faster adoption necessarily better?

During the last Winter Session of Parliament, Union Minister for Women and Child Development Smriti Irani highlighted the new regulation intended to expedite the adoption process. The Minister underscored the policy change that has speed up the adoption of 580 children including ‘hard-to-reach’ in older age groups - out of close to 900 pending cases in courts. Some might find the development positive and promising. However, it is unfair to reduce children’s lives to faceless numbers and ignore the fundamentals of the changes.



Sushri Sangita Puhan

Since 2000, the enactment of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act or, JJ Act 2000 carved out a legal and structural space to establish a secular adoption system. The Act has introduced several amendments such as broadening the field of prospective adopters to promote in-country adoption in the best interest of the child. Following a significant reformation in 2015, with stringent policy changes to expedite adoptions, the country witnessed a sharp rise in prospective adoptive parents; almost ten-fold of available adoptable children. Interestingly, the policy shift popularised with a narrative of ‘transparency and accountability’ was launched with a centralised digital platform. Unlike the previous practice, it restricts the space for human interaction and professional discretion of social workers, which is critical to successful adoption. Further, the new regulation notified in September 2022 aims to speed up court procedures - as the best solution for children - empowering district magistrates to issue adoption orders, the power, which was earlier vested in the judiciary since the JJ Act, 2000 came into force.

Water-stressed nation

Sir, This refers to “India at severe water crisis risk: UN,” **Orissa Post**, March 23. India’s dependence on an increasingly erratic monsoon for its water requirements increases this challenge. Climate change is likely to exacerbate this pressure on water resources, even as the frequency and intensity on floods and droughts in the country increases. The country has 18 per cent of the world’s population, but only 4 per cent of its water resources, making it among the most water-stressed in the world. Groundwater is one of the most important sources for irrigation as well as for rural and urban domestic water supply. However, overexploitation of this valuable resource has led to its depletion. Continuous piped water supply has been a pipedream for fast-urbanising Indian cities. Most urban households receive water for a couple of hours a day at most, and often only on a few days a week. This particularly affects the poor, women and children, who spend time and money securing water for their daily needs. Add to this, rainfed agriculture in India is a risky enterprise, owing to uncertainties in rainfall, coupled with periodic dry spells and heavy cyclones and floods during the monsoon season. Another worry is as water runs out, the country may have to confront a series of associated problems: food insecurity, vulnerability during heatwaves, disease due to deteriorating sanitation and regional conflicts over water access.

N Sadhasiva Reddy, BANGALORE

The SC Bench may have asked the Centre a few days ago to suggest alternate means for a more dignified and less painful method to carry out death sentences, taking into consideration today’s medical science and technological advancements. But no optional stately methods towards snuffing out a person’s life can be a moral justification against execution, as any form of execution is barbaric and inhumane. Viewed in a broader perspective therefore, the only answer is to do away with capital punishment, which many countries follow. Also laws in these countries allow life sentences for murder that severely limit or eliminate the possibility of parole. Execution of death convicts deter a certain amount of murders has been thoroughly discredited by social science research. And such a thing falsely convinces the public that the government has taken effective measures to combat crime and homicide. Capital punishment is a remorseless remnant of an uncivilised society. It is immoral in principle and unfair and discriminatory in practice.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, CHENNAI

Immoral & unfair

Sir, The SC Bench may have asked the Centre a few days ago to suggest alternate means for a more dignified and less painful method to carry out death sentences, taking into consideration today’s medical science and technological advancements. But no optional stately methods towards snuffing out a person’s life can be a moral justification against execution, as any form of execution is barbaric and inhumane. Viewed in a broader perspective therefore, the only answer is to do away with capital punishment, which many countries follow. Also laws in these countries allow life sentences for murder that severely limit or eliminate the possibility of parole. Execution of death convicts deter a certain amount of murders has been thoroughly discredited by social science research. And such a thing falsely convinces the public that the government has taken effective measures to combat crime and homicide. Capital punishment is a remorseless remnant of an uncivilised society. It is immoral in principle and unfair and discriminatory in practice.

of the day quote

There are no Covid clusters in Kerala, but increasing number of cases is being reported. Facilities are being assessed and wherever required, they will be augmented

VEENA GEORGE | KERALA HEALTH MINISTER

BJP has made a chakravayuh for opposition leaders and targeting them by using ED, CBI and Income Tax. Still, someone would doesn't come in the trap, they lodge baseless cases in different cities. It is a subject of deep concern for our Constitution, democracy, politics and the country

TEJASHWI YADAV | BIHAR DEPUTY CM

For some inexplicable reasons, the Home Minister, who is also the former national President of Bharatiya Janata Party, has failed to act upon the information regarding the corrupt practices and instances of the then Meghalaya government

JAIRAM RAMESH | CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY

SHORT TAKES

Oppn leaders to move EC

New Delhi: Opposition parties Thursday decided to approach the Election Commission to voice concern over the use of Electronic Voting Machines for conducting elections, particularly its plans to allow remote voting for migrant voters. NCP supremo Sharad Pawar convened the meeting of leaders of opposition parties in the Rajya Sabha, which was attended by Congress leader Digvijay Singh, independent Rajya Sabha member Kapil Sibal, Samajwadi Party leader Ramgopal Yadav, Shiv Sena (Thackeray faction) member Anil Desai and BRS member K Keshav Rao among others.

TN: Bill to ban online gambling passed

Chennai: The Tamil Nadu Assembly Thursday once again unanimously adopted the bill to ban online gambling, weeks after state Governor R N Ravi returned it to the government for reconsideration. Piloting The Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Online Gambling and Regulation of Online Games Bill, Chief Minister M K Stalin said he was moving it with a "heavy heart" while referring to the loss of lives associated with online gambling.

Cross-voting shock to YSRCP

Amaravati: In a shock to Andhra Pradesh's ruling YSR Congress Party (YSRCP), opposition Telugu Desam Party (TDP) bagged a seat of Legislative Council from MLA quota in the elections held Thursday. TDP's lone candidate Panchumarthi Anuradha won the election by securing 23 votes, one more than the required number.

Army, Air Force conduct joint drills

New Delhi: The Indian Army and the Indian Air force conducted a multi-domain air-land exercise 'Vayu Prahar' in the eastern theatre to validate plans to execute synergised operations, sources said Thursday. The exercise was held in the second week of March. The sources said the scope of the joint exercise included rapid mobilisation of an earmarked rapid reaction force from the hinterland to undertake air-landed operations at a nominated advance landing ground.



BJP government at the Centre is targeting Opposition leaders
MK STALIN | TAMIL NADU CHIEF MINISTER

POWER BILLS TO INCREASE

The Bihar Electricity Regulatory Commission (BERC) Thursday increased power tariff in the state by 24.10 per cent for FY 2023-24. It has also increased the base fee in the rural and urban areas as well. The new tariff will be effective from April 1



BUS RUNS OVER DEVOTEES; 5 DEAD

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Champawat/Dehradun, March 23: Five devotees from Uttar Pradesh died in Uttarakhand's Champawat district Thursday when a bus ran them over while they were sleeping on the roadside, police said.

Five more were injured in the accident and have been hospitalised, they said, adding that the victims had come to Champawat to attend the Maa Purnagiri fair held on the occasion of Chaitra Navratri in the Tanakpur area.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami expressed grief over the accident and cabinet minister Rekha Arya reached the hospital in Tanakpur to inquire about the condition of the injured.

According to police, the accident took place when the driver was reversing his bus in the morning when the wheels of the vehicle



ran over the devotees sleeping on the roadside.

They said three people died on the spot - Mayaram (32) and Badrinath (40) of Chittaura in Bahraich district of Uttar Pradesh and Amravati (26) of Bilsa in Budaun district.

A police official said Nemwati of Budaun's Ujhani and Ramdehi of Bahraich died of injuries in the hospital.

AICTE lifts ban on new engineering colleges

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 23: The moratorium on opening of new engineering and technical colleges, which was put in place three years ago, will be lifted from the 2023-24 academic session, the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) announced Thursday.

The council has also done away with the minimum land requirement criterion for starting or running technical institutions. The technical education regulator had imposed a two-year ban from the academic year 2020-21 on opening of new engineering institutes due to a declining number of admissions in engineering programmes.

"Moratorium for establishing new institution in engineering and technology has been lifted from AY (academic year) 2023-24. However, for establishing a new institution in engineering and technology, preference shall be given to the applicant offering courses in multi-disciplinary area in-line with NEP (National Education Policy) 2020 in STEM," the AICTE said in its new approval guidelines.



The AICTE decided to lift the moratorium on the recommendation of an expert committee led by IIT-Hyderabad Board of Governors Chairman B V R Mohan Reddy, on whose suggestion the ban had been first advised in 2019. According to official statistics, the total intake in AICTE-approved engineering institutions had declined from 26.95 lakh seats in 2012-13 to 23.66 lakh seats in 2021-22.

While launching the Approval Process Handbook for 2023-24, the AICTE said existing institutions willing to take its approval for their technical programme will also have to obtain approval for all technical programmes offered.



HUNDREDS PROTEST: Police lathi-charge students protesting against the new employment policy in Jharkhand

PTI PHOTO

Rahul Gandhi's conviction triggers political slugfest

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 23: Rahul Gandhi's conviction in a 2019 criminal defamation case by a Surat court Thursday triggered a political slugfest between the BJP and opposition parties, including AAP, which rallied behind the former Congress chief and accused the ruling party of "hatching a conspiracy to eliminate" its political opponents by prosecuting them.

The Congress claimed that the court verdict was "infirm, erroneous and unsustainable", evoking a sharp reaction from the BJP which slammed it for its criticism of the order, asking whether the opposition party wants "complete freedom" for Gandhi to "abuse" others. The Congress also said that it would challenge the judgement in a higher court.

Congress spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi said the Gujarat trial court has given a 170-page judgement which is still subject to translation and the party is working towards filing an appeal against it in a higher court.

Launching a stinging attack, BJP leader and former law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad cautioned



The court in Gujarat sentenced Gandhi to two years in the case filed against him over his "why all thieves have Modi surname" remarks

Gandhi, who was present in the court when the verdict was pronounced, reacted later by quoting Mahatma Gandhi in a tweet in Hindi about truth and non-violence

Gandhi, saying he will find himself facing "more troubles" if he doesn't refrain from making defamatory remarks, while Union Minister Piyush Goyal asked the Congress leader to apologise for his series of "defamatory" comments. Apart from the Congress leaders, several Chief ministers of non-BJP-ruled states, including Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu also expressed solidarity with Gandhi.

Hinting at a shift in his stance, Delhi chief minister and AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal openly supported the Congress leader, saying "a conspiracy is being hatched to eliminate non-BJP leaders and parties by prosecuting them. We have differences with Congress, but it is not

right to implicate Rahul Gandhi in a defamation case like this."

The Congress and the AAP have in the past avoided taking each other's side on various issues and the support for Gandhi has come amid Kejriwal's efforts to forge an alliance of "like-minded" parties ahead of the Lok Sabha polls next year. Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren said the two-year sentence given to Rahul Gandhi is a "matter of concern for democracy". Congress-ruled Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and his Chhattisgarh counterpart Bhupesh Baghel hailed Rahul Gandhi as one fighting for truth who would not succumb to government pressure.

Woman who harboured Amritpal nabbed: Police

AGENCIES

Chandigarh, March 23: Haryana Police have nabbed a woman who allegedly harboured Amritpal Singh and his associate Papalpreet Singh at her home in the state's Kurukshetra district, an official said Thursday.

Haryana Police said the woman nabbed from Shahabad in Kurukshetra district has been identified as Baljit Kaur.

"We have nabbed the woman, who harboured Amritpal and his associate Papalpreet Singh at her home in Shahabad on Sunday. The woman has been handed over to Punjab Police," Kurukshetra Superintendent of Police Surinder Singh Bhoria told PTI over phone. He also said the woman knew Papalpreet Singh for over two years.

Officials have said Papalpreet Singh is considered one of Amritpal Singh's mentors and had been working closely with the radical preacher. He was seen driving the motorcycle on which Amritpal Singh rode pillar while escaping the police crackdown on his outfit on Saturday. The two-wheeler was found abandoned near a canal in Jalandhar.

Photographs and CCTV footage, that have emerged on social media, have shown the fugitive using several vehicles, including a Mercedes, a Brezza SUV,



In another development, Punjab police said they have arrested a man who was allegedly part of the private security setup of the radical preacher

Tejinder Singh Gill, a resident of Mangewal village in the Khanna area of Ludhiana district, was deputed in the security of Amritpal Singh

Four persons were arrested a day after a rally was taken out in Chhattisgarh's capital Raipur by a group of people allegedly in support of Amritpal

an Isuzu pick-up, a motorbike and a motorized cart, to escape with some of his aides.

Punjab Police said efforts are on to nab the fugitive preacher and several of his aides and members of his outfit have been detained or arrested. They said Gill, who was part of the security setup of Amritpal Singh, used to display weapons in pictures and videos on social media without having an arms licence. An FIR against him was registered under IPC Section 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant).

SC to form Constitution bench on pleas against Nikah-Halala

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 23: The Supreme Court said Thursday it will set up a fresh five-judge Constitution bench at an "appropriate stage" to hear pleas challenging the constitutional validity of polygamy and 'nikah halala' among Muslims.

A bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices PS Narasimha and JB Pardiwala was urged by lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay, who has filed a PIL on the issue, that section 494 of the Indian Penal Code allows



polygamy, halala etc. And needs to be struck down.

"I will consider it. At an appropriate stage, I will constitute

a constitution bench," the CJ responded. On August 30 last year, a five-judge bench comprising Justices Indira Banerjee,

While polygamy allows a Muslim man to have four wives, 'nikah halala' deals with the process in which a Muslim woman, who wants to remarry her husband after divorce, has to first marry another person and get a divorce from him after consummation

The apex court had in July 2018 considered the plea and referred the matter to a Constitution bench already tasked with hearing a batch of similar petitions

Hemant Gupta, Surya Kant, M M Sundresh and Sudhanshu Dhulia had made the National Human Rights Commission

How new medtech is helping India fight tuberculosis?

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

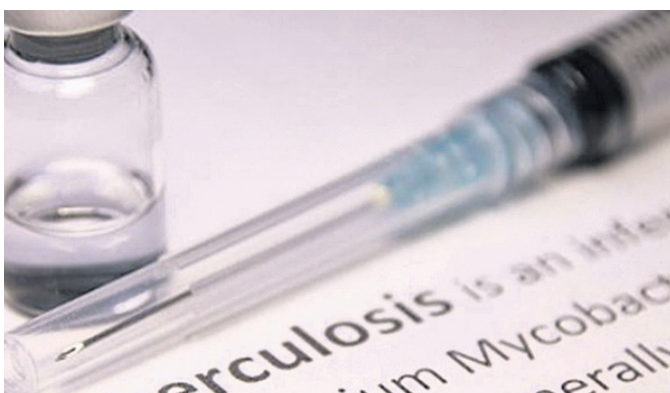
New Delhi, March 23: Advances in medical technologies, that came with the inclusion of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning, Internet of Things (IoT), and deep tech, have revolutionised diagnosis of tuberculosis (TB) - the world's largest infectious disease killer - in India, said experts Thursday ahead of the World Tuberculosis Day.

World Tuberculosis Day is observed every year March 24. "Yes! We can end TB!" is the theme for this year, and urges leaders from around the world to act to stop the TB epidemic.

The disease is preventable, treatable, and curable, but early diagnosis remains the key. Accurate diag-

nosis of TB early in the infection cycle can help accelerate therapy and curb the spread of the disease. "Given the current infrastructure in India, the early diagnosis of TB continues to be the biggest hurdle in treatment compliance. For TB to be completely eradicated, we need a public health infrastructure that is equipped to detect infectious pulmonary cases early before the disease has a chance to spread," Pavan Choudary, Chairman, Medical Technology Association of India (MTAI), told IANS.

AI and ML have shown more promise in automating early detection, more than the traditional screening for TB via a simple lung X-ray. AI-powered deep learning neural networks are increasingly being used to analyse



medical images, such as chest radiographs or x-rays.

"Modern advances in digital radiology, AI/ML and Nucleic Acid Amplification techniques have now come together to pro-

vide rapid, accurate and affordable diagnostics across multiple settings including remote point of care locations, without the need to have well-trained technicians or very extensive infra-

- TB affects more than 10 million people each year
- India contributes to over 30 per cent of the global TB burden
- In 2021, India had estimated 30 lakh new TB cases. About 38 per cent of the global TB deaths took place in India

structure," Chandrasekhar Nair, Director & CTO, Molbio Diagnostics, told IANS.

"India is the first country globally to roll out point of care molecular detection of TB as a replacement to sputum smear microscopy even at remote locations across the country. This results in very early diagnosis of TB patients and their enrollment

in the cascade of care of the National TB elimination programme," he said.

Further, India has deployed digital health platforms like India's 'Nikshay' which integrate all TB patient diagnosis and monitoring data, including patient nutrition, have started making a significant difference in the management of TB care in India.

A few states in India have also integrated private players for last-mile delivery of TB drugs. Various adherence solutions from the low-cost 99 dots using SMS services, video observed therapy to IoT-based pill boxes are improving adherence to therapy and leveraging technology to provide an alternative to directly observed therapy methodology.



Telangana not to send crop loss report to Centre: KCR

CM disapproves of the present system whereby the state government had to report to the Centre about crop losses and a Central team would then visit and assess the damage, following which financial assistance is announced after six months

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hyderabad, March 23: The Telangana government will not send any report to the Centre on crop damage caused by recent unseasonal rains, in protest against the Central government's unhelpful attitude towards reports sent earlier, Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao said Thursday, even as he announced financial assistance of Rs 10,000 per acre for farmers. Rao inspected the crops damaged due to recent unseasonal showers and hailstorms in Khammam, Mahabubabad and other districts. Speaking to reporters in Khammam district, the CM alleged that the present policies of the Centre were not helpful to farmers in times of crop losses and that they benefited insurance companies instead. "The previous Central governments were



like that, and (with) the present Central government, it is like (the message is) falling on deaf ears. Not much use telling them (about losses to farmers)," he said. Rao said the country requires a 'new integrated agriculture policy'. He disapproved of the present system whereby the state government had to report to the Centre about crop losses and a Central team would then visit and assess the damage, following which financial assistance is announced after six months. The incumbent NDA government's attitude is such that they are only interested in politics and not bothered about farmers, he alleged. "So, we don't intend to send a report to the Centre, as a protest. Because nothing was given on the basis (of reports) sent earlier," he said. As per the Centre's present rules, the compensation given to

farmers is inadequate, he said. The amount is just over Rs 3,000 per acre for maize and Rs 5,400 for paddy. The Chief Minister announced financial assistance of Rs 10,000 per acre to farmers to enable them to recover their losses and resume farming. Rao said the government would also provide relief to tenant farmers who suffered crop loss. According to him, this decision was made based on the representation of the state minister and other public representatives in Khammam district and also the leaders of the CPI and CPI(M) who were present during the CM's inspection of damaged crops. According to Rao, crops in over two lakh acres were damaged and the state government would sanction Rs 228 crore immediately to provide financial assistance to farmers.

Massive breach: Data of 16.8cr people leaked

The accused were found selling more than 140 different categories of information, which include sensitive information such as details of defence personnel and the mobile numbers of citizens and NEET students, among others

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hyderabad, March 23: A massive data breach that has implications for national security was unearthed by Cyberabad Police here, who arrested seven people of a gang allegedly involved in the theft and sale of sensitive data of the government and important organisations, including details of defence personnel as well as the personal and confidential data of about 16.8 crore citizens. The accused persons were found selling more than 140 different categories of information, which include sensitive information such as details of defence personnel and the mobile numbers of citizens and NEET students, among others, Cyberabad Police Commissioner M Stephen Raveendra told reporters here Thursday. Seven data brokers were arrested from Delhi, police said adding that the accused had been operating through three companies (call centres) in Noida and other places. So far it has been found that the accused sold data to at least 100 fraudsters. Investigations



are still on, police said. Sensitive data of defence personnel containing their ranks, email ids, place of posting, etc was found available with the accused, Commissioner Raveendra said. "This will have serious national security implications. The data of defence and government employees can be used for espionage; to impersonate them and commit serious offences that may jeopardise national security. We are in the process of finding out how this data got leaked and who are the insiders who are doing it," he added. The accused were also found selling information in categories such as Energy and Power sector, PAN card data, Government employees, Gas and Petroleum, HNIs (High Net-worth Individuals), demat accounts, student databases, women databases, data of people who have

applied for loans and insurance, and credit card and debit card holders (of private banks), WhatsApp users, Facebook users, IT organisation employees, frequent flyers etc. The arrested were selling the data through a search engine company and similar platforms, police said. These accused aggregated the data leaked from different organisations and having registered themselves as service delivery agents sold the data to cyber criminals after sending them sample data, police said. The matter came to light after a complaint was lodged with the Cyber Crime wing of Cyberabad Police about the sale and purchase of confidential and sensitive data, even as police had also been investigating how cyber criminals were getting access to data. The data of NEET students, with

their names, mobile number and their residential address, was also found with the accused. A PAN card database containing sensitive information on the income, email ids, phone numbers, and addresses of citizens was also found. Government employees' names, mobile numbers, categories, dates of birth etc were also found in a database, apart from a list of gas and petroleum companies with similar details of their staff, Raveendra said. As many as 1.2 crore WhatsApp users and 17 lakh Facebook users had also been targeted in the data theft, with information on login id, IP, city, age, email id, phone number found in the possession of the accused, police said. Further, a mobile number database of three crore individuals, probably leaked from telecom service providers.

A give-&-take that keeps 'khejri' trees, farmers in good nick

Lakhs of khejri trees are found in the fields of Rajasthan, but they did face an existential crisis about three decades ago due to pest attacks

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Sri Ganganagar, March 23: For the farmers of Rajasthan, khejri (Prosopis cineraria) is much more than the state tree. It serves as fodder for livestock, firewood for households, vegetable for personal consumption and manure for fields. Lakhs of khejri trees are found in the fields of Rajasthan, but they did face an existential crisis about three decades ago due to pest attacks. The crisis is not yet over, but the tree's existence is intact due to the coordinated efforts of farmers and government departments. A pathologist with the forest protection division of Jodhpur-based Arid Forest Research Institute (AFRI), Dr Sangeeta Singh says that they had launched a seven-year research in 2010 to understand the factors contributing to the mortality of khejri trees and offer possible solutions. "We concluded that there are two biotic factors -- a root rot fungus (Ganoderma lucidum) and a root borer (Acanthophorus serraticornis) -- behind this issue. We also studied the abiotic factors at play, including falling water level and ploughing of fields with tractors." Once the research concluded, the AFRI issued advisories and shared solutions with farmers to ensure the protection of khejri trees, while also promising returns to them. The advisory told farmers



not to prune trees every year, and instead do it every alternate year. Trees that were fully damaged were destroyed along with their roots so that the infection does not spread. Soil treatment and Bavistin insecticide in small quantities were also used from time to time. Farmer Sitaram Sengwa from Jodhpur's Palri Ranavata village said he kept spraying insecticides that the scientist recommended and got good results. "I have planted thar shobha khejri, developed by the ICAR-Central Institute for Arid Horticulture, Bikaner. Fortunately, there is no pest infestation on it so far." Dhannaram Nayak, the secretary of Nagaur-based NGO Urmul Khejadi Sansthan said farmers dig pits around the trees and provide pesticides and water, which reduce pest infestation. "Sadaram, a farmer who passed away two years ago,

used to put millet husk instead of pesticides, which made the trees healthier," he added. Krishnakumar Saharan from Saharan ki Dhani in Hanumangarh said unlike in the past, farmers take care to not disturb the khejri plant while ploughing the fields. "Sometimes, we remove them and replant in another place," he said. The tree has great significance in rituals too, be it birth, marriage or death. "Green khejri twigs are placed in an urn filled with water as part of the nahaun ritual following childbirth. The tree's wood is used for havan (a fire ritual) for marriage ceremonies. It also forms the funeral pyre," said Nayak, a resident of Jhareli.

Every part works

Lakhs of khejri trees are present in the districts of Nagaur,

Bikaner, Ajmer, Churu, Barmer, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Pali, Sirahi, Jalore, Hanumangarh, Sriganganagar, Jaipur, Karauli, Sikar and Jhunjhunu due to the community involvement. "Khejri is a friend of farmers. They complement each other: When other trees wilt in the scorching desert heat, evergreen khejri shelters humans, animals and birds," Padma Shri Himmataram Bhambhu said. Farmers sell the legume (sangri) as a vegetable and leaves (loong) as livestock fodder: Chinkara, black buck and nilgai from the wild also feed on its leaves, while birds make nests on the tree. Joshi, a farmer from Halasar in Churu district, has 110 bighas of land. He gets sangri, loong and firewood in abundance from about 500 khejri trees present in his plot. Jagdish Nayak of Nagaur also gets

similar benefits. Khejri's bark and flowers have been in use for several centuries to cure various diseases. "In Vedas, it is mentioned as shami tree. According to scriptures, it can treat conditions related to phlegm and bile. Mix its bark with hartal (a mineral) and apply to remove unwanted hair. Its leaves and bark are used to treat diarrhoea, dysentery piles and worm infection. It is useful in the treatment of respiratory and skin diseases and blood gall as well," Gopal Sharma, Assistant Director, Department of Ayurveda, Nagaur, said.

Positive effect on crops

According to Kashiram Saharan, an elderly farmer from Saharan ki Dhani in Hanumangarh district, 78 khejri trees are present in his 60 bighas of land. "In the fields with khejri, yields from crops such as pearl millet and cluster beans are excellent," he claimed. Confirming this, Dr Sangeeta Singh explained, "Rhizobium bacteria attach themselves to the roots of leguminous plants and help fix atmospheric nitrogen, which is converted into ammonia. Khejri roots also have this bacteria's presence, which helps the plant to utilise the produced ammonia for its growth." Thanks to its numerous benefits, people love khejri. Last year, when 250 khejri and rohida trees were cut in Badi Sid in Jodhpur for a proposed solar power plant of AMP Energy Green Four Private Limited, the community launched an agitation and moved the NGT. Based on a report, the NGT held the company guilty of illegal felling and imposed a fine of Rs 2 lakh. It also ordered that the company should plant 2,500 trees.

Organisational change: BJP lures Brahmins in Raj

Whether the newly appointed party president will be able to check factionalism remains to be seen

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Jaipur, March 23: Finally, the BJP has announced Rajasthan MP CP Joshi as state president. By making CP Joshi the state president, BJP has tried to fill in the void in Mewar which appeared after Gulab Chand Kataria was appointed as Assam Governor. Brahmins and Vaishyas are the big vote-bank of BJP in Mewar. After Kataria's appointment, the BJP was searching for a strong face in Mewar. In such a situation, BJP has tried to strengthen itself in this belt by giving new responsibility to Joshi. Udaipur, Rajasamand, Chittorgarh and Banswara districts have a sizable vote bank of Brahmins and Vaishyas. Hence, the party was looking for a right candidate to go with social engineering. CP Joshi had participated in the Vipra Mahapanchayat held in Jaipur on Sunday. In the Mahapanchayat, he spoke on ways and means of protecting the Sanatan and working in the interest of the society and not criticise the leaders of the society without any reason. Now by making him the state president, the BJP has tried to give a message to the Brahmin voters. Brahmins have been the biggest core voter of BJP. In such a situation, this appointment is being considered important. In the history of more than 42 years of BJP, the state president in Rajasthan



has ruled the state from this community for over 22 years. CP Joshi met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP national president JP Nadda as soon as he became the state president. Meanwhile, all eyebrows are now being raised if the new appointed president will be able to check the factionalism which came out at different places in the party. Several groups in the party had become the worry for the central leadership in Delhi. While the ruling Congress has been talking of repeating its government, the BJP was finding it difficult to resolve its factions. Now, the party has tried to lure Brahmin voters who were disappointed due to lack of representation of leaders from their community. Also it has tried to protect the Mewar 'citadel' which has been bringing victory for BJP in assembly as well as Lok Sabha polls.

SHGs HELP TRIBAL WOMEN TASTE FREEDOM FROM PATRIARCHY

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Udaipur, March 23: Indira Meena's world turned upside down when her partner deserted her eight years ago. A resident of Paduna in Udaipur's Girwa tehsil, Indira was 17 when she left home for him. Now 27, she is trying to survive as a single mother with son Anil, who studies in Class 2. "I was not legally married to him," Indira, who works as MGNREGA mate in her village, said. Last year, she formed the Bharti Swah Sahayata Samuh, a self-help group (SHG) with 16 members. "We focus on savings and small businesses," the feisty woman said. There are 22 such SHGs in her village. Paduna is a part of Udaipur's Zawar mines area, where non-profit Manjari Foundation (under Hindustan Zinc's CSR programme) has helped form 394 SHGs. Their

present total savings stand at Rs 2,71,30,341. They function much like the groups formed under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), helping women open bank accounts in the SHGs' names and gain access to loans. According to the Ministry of Rural Development, 777 SHGs got revolving funds worth Rs 116.6 lakh in Udaipur's Girwa tehsil. In 2022-23, 380 SHGs availed of loans worth Rs 5.09 crore while 1499 have outstanding loans of Rs 7.97 crore. The SHG women not only make small contributions weekly, but also take part in social campaigns and help those in distress. When Manjari's lead Rampal Meena visited Zawar in 2016, he recalls he could not even meet the women due to patriarchal restrictions. However, the much-needed change became visible after sus-



tained gender sensitisation programmes. "Our staff started visiting houses and enlisted the support of village heads. Now, women hold four meetings every month," Rampal said.

Towards self-realisation

An Adivasi from the Meena community and a mother of four, Mangli Devi (55) resides in Amarpura, located about 10 km from Paduna. "I was married off at 14. At that time,

I did not know that marriage at a tender age is harmful," she said. The change in attitude was initiated by a few women who arrived from Dhaulpur district to explain SHG's functioning to the village women, whose lives centred around cooking, grazing goats, working in fields and collecting firewood from the forest while on the lookout for leopards. It's a big concern that women here have been more prone to leopard attacks due to the nature of their work which requires them to go into the forest in the early hours looking for firewood. According to data provided by the Udaipur forest division, five women received injuries and three died in leopard attacks in the area in 2020-21. In the same period, five men were injured. Women have grown confident that they do not keep a veil at all times. Even its length has reduced.

Rameela Meena, who is educated up to Class 8, was often criticised for not bearing a child after being married for five years. She also had to put up with a mother-in-law who scolded her for not keeping a veil. Women have learnt the art of earning money. A woman in Rameela's group bought a baby goat for Rs 5,000 and sold it later for Rs 14,000. SHG linkage helped Rameela build a new house and buy a car, which her husband drives for tourists in Udaipur. She took Rs 20,000 from the samuh for the house. The second-hand car was bought at Rs 5 lakh on a bank loan. The repayment of only about Rs 1 lakh is pending at present. "I had nothing when I started out with only Rs 20 as savings amount per week," Rameela said.

Taking a stand

Amarpura's Sharda Swah

Sahayata Samuh was formed April 25, 2017, with 13 members. Though the women started with savings, they gradually took a stand against domestic violence and child marriage. Mangli pointed out that realisation dawned upon women when they attended training sessions. In cases of violence, they try to intervene collectively. "We try to stop men from beating up wives and aim for a resolution. When a Paduna resident was ousted from home by her mother-in-law, we called the police." The collective might of SHGs came to the fore in Indira's case. About 25 women intervened, went to the police station and demanded that Indira be paid a monthly allowance for her son. It worked as her estranged partner now pays Rs 3,000 per month, said Amri Devi, Indira's neighbour who had set up Lakshmi Maata Samuh about six years back.

of the day quote

Samajwadi Party loves him (Keshav Prasad Maurya) very much but it knows that irrespective of the humiliation he faces there, he will not leave the BJP

AKHILESH YADAV | SP CHIEF

We will seek the support of the Union Government to evolve a mechanism to share intelligence inputs and take joint actions to control the problem in an effective manner by making necessary amendments in the central legislation on drug menace

SUKHVINDER SINGH SUKHU | HIMACHAL PRADESH CM

Gender discrimination has no place in a society based on social justice

PINARAYI VUJAYAN | KERALA CHIEF MINISTER

SHORT TAKES

Meghalaya CM tables Budget

Shillong: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma Thursday tabled a ₹1,592 crore deficit budget for the 2023-24 fiscal, proposing no new tax, and asserted that efforts will be made to make the state a 'billion-dollar' economy. The chief minister said the estimated GSDP for the FY 2023-2024 is pegged at ₹46,600 crore with an expected growth rate of 11.5 per cent. The fiscal deficit is 3.42 per cent of the state's GSDP - ₹41,779 crore for the current financial year. Presenting the Budget in the Assembly, Sangma said the estimated receipt is about ₹21,781 crore of which revenue is likely to be ₹19,414 crore excluding the borrowings of ₹2,339 crore.

Explosives recovered in Gadchiroli district

Gadchiroli: Explosives and other articles suspected to be hidden by Naxalites were recovered from near a village in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district, police said Thursday. A special squad conducting an anti-Naxalite operation in Nelgunda village under Bhamragadh taluka found claymore mines, two cooker bombs, steel pipes and three bundles of electric wires, among other articles, at two separate roads, Wednesday, said a press release issued by Gadchiroli Superintendent of Police Neelotpal's office.

KTR sends legal notice to Cong, BJP leaders

Hyderabad: Telangana's cabinet minister KT Rama Rao Thursday sent legal notice to state Congress chief A Revanth Reddy and BJP president Bandi Sanjay for making baseless allegations against him in the Telangana State Public Service Commission (TSPSC) paper leak case. KTR said he sent legal notice to Congress and BJP leaders for dragging his name into the paper leak case to drive political mileage and defame the government.

Minor gangraped

New Delhi: A 10-year-old girl has been allegedly gang-raped by an MCD-run school peon and his associates in East Delhi, an official said Thursday. The 54-year-old peon, identified as Ajay, a native of Jaunpur in Uttar Pradesh, has been arrested, the police said, adding the police are trying to nab the remaining accused. Ajay has been working in the MCD-run school as a peon for the last 10 years. According to police, Wednesday, the principal of a school, along with fellow teachers, reported a sexual assault on one of her students.



Some people are taking the country towards dictatorship. Together we have to save the country's Constitution and democracy, we have to save the country

ARVIND KEJRIWAL | DELHI CM

SENA APPOINTS NEW PARL PARTY LEADER

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena has sacked Sanjay Raut as the leader of its parliamentary party and appointed Lok Sabha MP Gajanan Kirtikar as his successor



LS passes ₹45L-cr Budget

According to the Budget papers, the total expenditure in 2023-24 is estimated at ₹45,03,097 crore, of which total capital expenditure has been pegged at ₹10,00,961 crore

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 23: Lok Sabha Thursday approved the Union Budget envisaging an expenditure of around ₹45 lakh crore for the fiscal year starting April 1 without any discussion, as the Opposition continued to create ruckus over demand for a JPC probe into allegations against the Adani Group.

The Lower House of Parliament took up the Demands for Grants and Appropriation Bills after two adjournments as the ruling and Opposition MPs engaged in a matching duet over demands for an apology by Rahul Gandhi and the Adani issue.

Most of the second leg of the Budget Session has been washed out due to the protest by both sides and it was one of the rare occasions when the Budget was passed without any discussion.

Soon after the Lok Sabha re-assembled at 6 pm after two adjournments, Speaker Om Birla put the Opposition's cut motion or amendments to the government spending plan to vote which was rejected by voice vote. This was followed by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharman moving the demands for grants for 2023-24 and relevant Appropriation Bills for discussion and voting.

Birla applied guillotine and put demands for grants of all ministries for voting. The demands were passed as the Opposition MPs trooped into the Well of the House



Opposition members protest in the well of the Lok Sabha during Budget Session of Parliament

shouting slogans. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was present during the passage of Budget for 2023-24.

The entire exercise was over in 12 minutes completing two-third of the parliamentary approval for the Budget for 2023-24.

All the budget-related bills will be transmitted to Rajya Sabha, which cannot make any changes but only return them to the Lok Sabha after discussion as they are classified as 'money bills' requiring approval of the Lower House only.

The current Parliament session is scheduled to end April 6. There is speculation that the duration of the session may be curtailed after completion of the budgetary exercise.

Unlike the past, the Lok Sabha this time did not discuss the Demands for Grants of the identified ministries. The Business Advisory Committee had approved discussion on the ministries of railway, rural development, health and family welfare, Panchayati Raj, tribal

affairs and, tourism and culture.

During the current financial year ending March 31, 2023, the total expenditure has been estimated at ₹41,87,232 crore, which is more than the outlay of 2021-22 by ₹3,93,431 crore.

Besides other things, the Budget 2023-24 reflects continuing commitment of the Union government to boost economic growth by investing in infrastructure development and increasing capital expenditure by 37.4 per cent over revised estimate of 2022-23.

Effective capital expenditure has been estimated at ₹13,70,949 crore in 2023-24 showing an increase of 30.1 per cent over RE 2022-23. With regard to fiscal deficit, the Budget proposed to bring it down to 5.9 per cent of the GDP from 6.4 per cent likely in the current financial year. To finance the fiscal deficit in 2023-24, the government plans the net market borrowings at ₹11.8 lakh crore from dated securities.

The Finance Bill 2023, which contains tax proposals that Sitharaman had moved while presenting the Budget February 1, will now be taken up by the Lok Sabha possibly Friday

Gadkari unveils road projects in Jharkhand

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jamshedpur, March 23: Union minister Nitin Gadkari Thursday said that the Centre would invest ₹2 lakh crore in Jharkhand by 2024 to develop roads and attract investments to the mineral-rich state.

The road transport and highway minister, during the day, laid foundation of nine road and rail over-bridges worth over ₹3,800 crore. He is set to launch 31 projects in all,



worth ₹13,296 crore. Of these, 21 pertain to state capital Ranchi, incurring an expense of ₹9,453 crore.

"Road development will bring in industries, the mining sector will eventually grow and employment opportunities will be created for youth," Gadkari said at a public meeting in Gopal Maidan, shortly after dedicating a 10-km-long double-decker corridor to the nation.

"I am very happy to have inaugurated the first double-decker road of the country (connecting Pardih Kali Mandir, Dimna Chowk and Baliguma on NH33)," Gadkari said, congratulating BJP MP Bidyut Baran Mahato, who had long been pressing for it. Referring to a quote by former American President John F Kennedy 'American roads are not good because America is rich but America is rich because American roads are good', Gadkari said Jharkhand, blessed with abundant mineral-reserves and forest, can now boast of smooth roads and better connectivity.

COVID SURGE

‘No increase in rate of hospitalisation or death’

Following the rise in cases, PM Modi held a high-level meeting Wednesday to review the Covid situation and took stock of public health preparedness

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 23: Amid a gradual rise in daily Covid-19 cases, the Union Health Ministry said Thursday that the XBB.1.16 sub-variant of Omicron might be the dominant virus strain in the country but there has been no reported increase in the rate of hospitalisation or death so far.

Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said 344 samples have tested positive in the last three months — January, February and March—for XBB.1.16 after whole genome sequencing. The subvariant has been found in states such as Maharashtra



(105), Telangana (93), Karnataka (57), Gujarat (54) and Delhi (19). "Omicron and its sub-lineages continue to be the predominant variant. No evidence of an increase in hospitalisation and/or mortality has been reported," Bhushan said.

He said XBB.1.5 and XBB.1.16 are variants of interest and under intense scientific scrutiny but they are not a "cause of immediate concern". India has reported an uptick in daily coronavirus cases over the past week. Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kerala and Karnataka are among the states reporting a rise in the cases, according to the Health Ministry.

On Thursday, the Health Ministry data showed the country recorded 1,300 new coronavirus cases, the highest in 140 days. It showed that the active cases in the country have increased to 7,605. On March 13, India reported 444 new Covid-19 cases while the active cases stood at 3,809. As the virus becomes endemic, it generates a large number of variants and since the emergence of Omicron in 2021, close to 1,000 of its lineages have been assigned, which include approximately 100 recombinant variants, he said.



SHOW OF STRENGTH: INS Trishul and HMS Lancaster during the Indian Navy and Royal Navy of England's joint exercise Konkan 2023, off the Konkan coast in the Arabian sea

PTI PHOTO

Webb captures swirling sand clouds on distant planet

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 23: Scientists have observed swirling motions of clouds of sand in the atmosphere of a distant planet, having a 22-hour day and orbiting two stars over a 10,000-year period.

The researchers used the state-of-the-art telescope to study the motions of the clouds which were bringing hotter material up and pushing colder material down on the planetary mass companion VHS 1256 b, about 40 light-years away from Earth.

Identifying for the first time the largest ever number of molecules at once on a planet outside our solar system, the team also discovered clear detections of water, methane and carbon monoxide

with Webb's data, and found evidence of carbon dioxide. The study is published in The Astrophysical Journal Letters.

"This result speaks to the incredible combination of capabilities that is offered by JWST, and a huge amount of credit goes to the hundreds of engineers, technicians, and scientists that have worked over the last 20 years to make JWST a reality," said Sasha Hinkley, professor at the University of Exeter.

Owing to the planet's low gravity, its clouds of sand, or silicate clouds, appear and remain higher in its atmosphere, making it easier for the telescope to detect them. The planet is also considered to be a "young planet" at only 150 million years old, by the study.



REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE (PICTURE CREDIT: LEXO/CART)

This is another reason that its skies are turbulent, the study said.

"We've identified silicates, but better understanding which grain sizes and shapes match specific

types of clouds is going to take a lot of additional work. This is not the final word on this planet - it is the beginning of a large-scale modeling effort to fit Webb's complex data,"

said lead author Brittany Miles of the University of Arizona, US.

"This is an exciting finding because it illustrates how different clouds on another planet can be from the water vapour clouds we are familiar with on the Earth. These silicate clouds are like a perpetual, very fine-grained but very hot sandstorm in the atmosphere." "Directly observing them answers some longstanding

questions in astronomical research and is a significant step on our journey to understand planetary-mass objects such as this," said Beth Biller, co-author of the study and professor, University of Edinburgh, UK.

The data analysed by the team was gathered by two instruments on Webb, the Near-Infrared Spectrograph (NIRSpec) and the Mid-Infrared Instrument (MIRI). The scientists were also able to observe the planet directly because of its great distance from its stars, rather than using the transit technique or a coronagraph to take these data.

The international team of researchers, including those from the University of Exeter, UK, made the discovery using data from NASA's James Webb Space Telescope

LAND ALLOTMENT FOR LAWYERS' CHAMBERS

Can't assert right on land: SC on SCBA plea

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, March 23: The Supreme Court Thursday said the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) cannot assert a right to the entirety of the land measuring 1.33 acres which was allotted by the Centre for housing the apex court archives for converting it into a chamber block for lawyers.

A bench, headed by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud and comprising Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and PS Narasimha, said the apex court discharges both judicial and administrative functions and the discharge of its functions implicates diverse stakeholders including lawyers, litigants and the staff engaged in activities of the Supreme Court.

"A holistic view has to be taken on the allocation of available resources by balancing the needs of stakeholders both for the present and the future. These are matters which cannot be resolved by the application of judicial standards and have to be taken up on the administrative side of the Supreme Court. Administrative functioning and decision-making, which the current issue requires, cannot be moved to the judicial side," it said.

The bench said: "We therefore are unable to subscribe to the reliefs which have been sought in the petition under Article 32. However, we leave it open to the Supreme Court of India on its administrative side to take appropriate decisions bearing in mind the needs of the institution for the present and the future and the interest of all stakeholders."



The top court said the SCBA cannot assert a right over entire land admeasuring 1.33 acres situated near the ITO, which has been allotted by the Union government for housing the Supreme Court Archives, for converting it into a chamber block for lawyers

The top court was hearing a plea by the SCBA to convert the land, allotted to the top court, for the construction of chambers for lawyers

During the hearing, senior advocate and SCBA President Vikas Singh had submitted that the Additional Registrar of the Supreme Court informed the SCBA that 0.50 acres out of 1.33 acres of land have been earmarked for construction of a lawyers' chamber block, subject to a change of use.

He added that since only 400 to 500 chambers can be constructed on the land which has been earmarked, the entirety should be utilised for the construction of chambers for lawyers who are an integral part of the justice delivery system.

Man hurls acid on wife inside court complex

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Coimbatore, March 23: A man allegedly threw acid on his wife at the district court complex suspecting her of being in an illicit relationship with another person, leaving the woman scarred.

Kavitha had reached the court premises to appear in a theft case, police said. She was arrested in August 2016 for stealing 10 sovereigns of gold chain from a bus passenger and the case was going on in the First Judicial Magistrate Court. She was out on bail.

She had allegedly developed an illicit relationship with one Prabhu and eloped with him a week ago, that left her husband and the couple's two daughters in dismay, police said.

Her husband Shivakumar, who came there anticipating her court appearance, splashed acid on her face from a water bottle he was carrying, police added.

Writhing in pain, Kavitha sustained serious burn injuries below the neck and ran for safety even as a woman lawyer standing nearby covered her upper body with a cloth. She was rushed to the government hospital where doctors stated she had already suffered 80 per cent burn injuries, police said.

Shivakumar, who works as a lorry driver, attempted to escape from the court, but was nabbed by police.

of the day quote

We welcome the Honduran government's positive statement to develop relations with China. We are ready to establish and develop bilateral relations on the basis of equality and mutual respect

WANG WENBIN | CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESPERSON

Armed forces must maintain public order in a number of selected areas

RANIL WICKREMESINGHE | SRI LANKAN PRESIDENT

The Referendum Working Group has landed on a question for the referendum, which is expected to be held in the second half of 2023

ANTHONY ALBANESE | AUSTRALIAN PM

SHORT TAKES

Palestinian killed

Jerusalem: Israeli security forces killed a Palestinian militant during a raid in the northern West Bank Thursday, Palestinian health officials said, the latest escalation of violence in what has been the deadliest start of a year for Palestinians in the occupied territory in more than two decades. Israeli forces stormed into the northern city of Tulkarem, home to an emerging militant group with ties to the armed offshoot of the nationalist Fatah party. The Palestinian Health Ministry said that 25-year-old Amir Abu Khadija was shot multiple times in the head and legs.

Sri Lanka imports eggs from India

Colombo: Sri Lanka has imported two million eggs from India to ensure food security in the crisis-hit island nation, Trade Minister Nalin Fernando said Thursday. Fernando told Parliament that the shipment imported by the State Trading General Corporation had arrived and the stocks would be released in the market within three days. The decision to import eggs was based on a decision by a cabinet committee to ensure food security, Fernando said.

Eight more Marburg cases

Nairobi: Equatorial Guinea has confirmed another eight cases of the "highly virulent" Marburg virus, a deadly hemorrhagic fever with no authorised vaccine or treatment. The World Health Organization on Thursday said that brings the country's total number of cases to nine in the outbreak declared in mid-February. There are two known current outbreaks of Marburg on the African continent. Tanzania this week announced eight cases of Marburg, including five deaths.



Honestly speaking, Ukraine is part of Russia. But due to geopolitical reasons and the course of history we had tolerated that we were living in separate quarters and had been forced to acknowledge those invented borders for a long time

DMITRY MEDVEDEV | DEPUTY SECRETARY OF RUSSIA'S SECURITY COUNCIL

GOOD NEWS

The US has announced that individuals travelling to the country on a business or tourist visa - B-1 and B-2 - can apply for new jobs and even appear in interviews, but the prospective employees must ensure that they have changed their visa status before starting a new role



GROWING ANGER

Protesters, police clash across France

REUTERS

Paris, March 23: Protesters angry with President Emmanuel Macron and his plan to raise the pension age blocked access to an airport terminal, sat on train tracks, clashed with police and threw projectiles at a police station in a day of demonstrations across France.

Police fired tear gas at protesters in the western city of Nantes. In Rennes, they used water cannon, BFM TV footage showed. Also in the west in Lorient, Ouest-France newspaper said projectiles triggered a brief fire in the yard of a police station.

Roissy-Charles De Gaulle airport outside Paris was hit by wildcat action by workers. Near Toulouse in the southwest, burning piles of debris blocked traffic on a highway and sent plumes of smoke into the sky.

"There is a lot of anger, an explosive situation," the leader of the hardline CGT union, Philippe Martinez, said at the start of a rally in Paris. Union leaders called for calm but were angry with what they called Macron's "provocative" comments.

Macron broke weeks of silence on the new policy to say he would stand firm and the law would come into force by the end of the year. He compared the protests to the January 6, 2021, storming of the U.S. Capitol. Opinion polls have long shown that a majority of voters were opposed to delaying retirement age by two years to 64.

Voters were further angered by the government's decision last

week to push the pension changes through parliament without a vote and by Macron's comments on Wednesday "I'm on strike to protest against the pensions reform, but also against what is happening in the government," 27-year-old Air France programming officer Lucile Bidet said at a rally in Nantes.

"They're not listening to the people anymore." "He's the one setting the country on fire," the CGT's Celine Verzeletti told France Inter radio station. Electricity output was also cut Thursday as unions raised pressure on the government to withdraw the law. Flight services will continue to be reduced at the weekend, the civil aviation authority said.

Protests also targeted oil depots and blocked an LNG terminal in the northern city of Dunkirk. Protests against the new law, which also accelerates a planned increase in the number of years one must work to draw a full pension, have drawn huge crowds in rallies organised by unions since January.

Most have been peaceful but anger has mounted since the government bypassed a vote in the lower house of parliament, where it does not have an absolute majority and was not sure to get enough support. Since then, the past seven nights have seen demonstrations in Paris and other cities with rubbish bins set ablaze and clashes with police.

The latest wave of protests represents the most serious challenge to the president's authority since the "Yellow Vest" revolt four years ago.



Protesters blockaded train stations, Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris and refineries Thursday's events were the ninth round of nationwide demonstrations and strikes called by France's eight main unions since January



Visitors at a park in Tokyo

REUTERS

SUNAK RELEASES TAX RETURNS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London, March 23: Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has released his tax returns, revealing that the British-Indian leader paid more than GBP 1 million to the Exchequer since becoming a frontline politician in 2019.

The tax release is part of a transparency commitment the UK premier made in November last year. Sunak, among the wealthiest British politicians, on Wednesday revealed that he earned a total of GBP 4.766 million between 2019 and 2022 and paid GBP 1.053 million in tax - at a tax rate of around 22 per cent.

Over the last tax year, when he was the finance minister, the 42-year-old leader paid GBP 325,826 in capital gains tax and GBP 120,604 in UK income tax on a total income of GBP 1.9 million. "I published my tax returns in the interests of transparency, as I said I would, and I am glad to have done that," Sunak said during a visit to north Wales on Wednesday.

"I think ultimately what people are interested in is what I am going to do for them," he added. Sunak



worked in finance before entering politics and he and his family are thought to own several properties, including a Grade II-listed manor house in his North Yorkshire constituency, the BBC reported.

Sunak came under pressure to publish his tax returns after his financial affairs came under the spotlight during the Conservative Party leadership election campaign last year, which he lost to Liz Truss before being elevated as Prime Minister after Truss' short-lived tenure at 10 Downing Street.

Chinese diplomats oppose US military presence in Philippines

The discussions on Friday will focus on the long-seething territorial spats in the disputed waterway, according to the Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Manila, March 23: Chinese diplomats expressed their strong opposition to an expanded United States military presence in the Philippines in closed-door talks with their Filipino counterparts on Thursday in Manila, a Filipino official said, underscoring the intense US-China rivalry in the region.

The Philippine official, who attended the meeting, told The Associated Press about China's intense objections on condition of anonymity for lack of authority to discuss what transpired at the

TERRITORIAL CONFLICTS



start of the two-day talks.

The Filipino diplomats responded by saying the decision to allow an expanded American military presence was in their national interest and would boost Philippine capability to respond to natural disasters, the official said, suggesting it was not aimed at China.

Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong and Philippine Foreign Undersecretary Theresa Lazaro led the talks aimed at assessing overall relations between the two sides amid thorny issues, including Beijing's alarm over a Philippine decision to allow the US military to expand its presence to a northern region facing the

Taiwan Strait and escalating spats in the South China Sea.

The discussions on Friday will focus on the long-seething territorial spats in the disputed waterway, according to the Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila. The back-to-back meetings are the first under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who took office in June. He met Chinese President Xi Jinping in a state visit to Beijing in January, where both agreed to expand ties, pursue talks on potential joint oil and gas explorations and manage territorial disputes amicably.

In early February, the Marcos administration announced it would allow rotating batches of American forces to indefinitely station in four more Philippine military camps. Those are in addition to five local bases earlier designated under a 2014 defence pact between the longtime treaty allies. Marcos said on Wednesday the four new military sites would include areas in the northern Philippines.

PROTESTS CONTINUE

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tel Aviv, March 23: Israel's parliament Thursday passed the first of several laws that make up its contentious judicial overhaul as protesters opposing the changes staged another day of demonstrations aimed at raising alarm over what they see as the country's descent toward autocracy.

Thousands of people protested throughout the country, blocking traffic on main highways and scuffling with police in unrest that shows no sign of abating, especially as the overhaul moves ahead. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition approved legislation that would protect the Israeli leader from being deemed unfit to rule because of his cor-



Israeli police use a water cannon to disperse Israelis blocking the freeway during a protest against plans by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government to overhaul the judicial system in Tel Aviv, Israel

PTI PHOTO

ruption trial and claims of a conflict of interest surrounding his involvement in the legal changes.

Critics say the law is tailor-made for Netanyahu, encourages corruption and deepens a gaping chasm

between Israelis over the judicial overhaul. The legal changes have split the nation between those who see the new policies as stripping Israel of its democratic ideals and those who think the country has

FOUR-WEEK PERIOD OF WORSHIP

Ramadan begins in Mideast amid high costs, hopes for peace

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Khartoum (Sudan), March 23: The first daily fast of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan began Thursday, as hundreds of millions of Muslims worldwide enter a four-week period of worship.

The observance comes at a time when numerous countries and governments across the Middle East are taking tentative steps towards calming enduring conflicts and crises made more acute by the costly war in Ukraine and a devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria that killed over 52,000 people.

During the coming four weeks, hundreds of millions of Muslims will abstain from food and water from dawn to dusk, before gathering with family and friends for in-

dulgent nighttime meals. According to Islam, fasting draws the faithful closer to God and reminds them of the suffering of the poor.

In Sudan's capital, families prepare and sell culinary delights weeks in advance to mark the break of the fast each evening, a meal known as Iftar. The food and drink of choice for nighttime feasts across households in the Islamic African nation include assida, a semolina-based flour dish, and a sugary fermented drink called, "sweet bitter." Both are recipes that date back generations.

"Those who can't afford don't have to pay," said Fatima Mohammed Hamid, who sells the food items from her small home on Tuti island, just north of the Sudanese capital of Khartoum. In



From Gaza to Khartoum and Tunis to Sanaa, soaring prices are proving a further concern for those set to celebrate the occasion

AP PHOTO

addition to fasting, charity giving is another of Islam's five pillars. During Ramadan, mosques and charities regularly provide meals

for the poor at long tables that sprawl out onto the street.

For Sudan, the holy season comes as the promise of a new political

era approaches. The country has been steeped in political chaos since a coup ousted a western power sharing government in October 2021.

A new transitional government could be formed before the holy month draws to a close, as promised by the country's ruling military and other political forces earlier this week. However, many prominent Sudanese factions reject the move. Amid the uncertainty, most find common ground in complaining about the rising cost of living.

"Everything (the ingredients) costs double what it did last year," said Hamid. Israeli and Palestinian leaders pledged this week to lower tensions as Ramadan begins, following months of deadly violence in the West Bank and east Jerusalem. This year, the fasting period coincides with the Jewish festival of Passover, spurring concern about fresh flare-ups with large numbers of Jewish and Muslim faithful expected to pour into Jerusalem's Old City.

From Gaza to Khartoum and Tunis to Sanaa, soaring prices are proving a further concern for those set to celebrate the occasion. Arab countries are continuing to suffer from the economic fallout of the war in Ukraine, with many reliant on grain imports from eastern Europe.



that I did it recklessly or deliberately is completely untrue, as the evidence shows," he told the committee. During a heated session, the 58-year-old senior Conservative Party MP insisted the events that came under the purview of the scandal were "essential" during the lockdown period as Downing Street doubles up as a workplace and residence.

"I believe it was absolutely essential for work purposes," he said when questioned about a particular event in November 2020. Johnson said the meeting, which happened while social distancing rules were in place, was "necessary" because two senior members of staff were about to leave "in potentially acrimonious circumstances".

of the day quote

We have various schemes of government to fund innovation. Some of these schemes are available through C-DOT. Through them we have a corpus of ₹700 crore to fund startups, but there is no limit of fund if we find right innovation

RAJKUMAR UPADHYAY | CEO, C-DOT

The energy industry is undergoing a tectonic shift with green hydrogen emerging as a key fuel in the future energy basket

SUBRAMANIAN SARMA | WHOLE TIME DIRECTOR (ENERGY), L&T

India is one the fastest growing markets for Mars and I am looking forward to leading Mars Wrigley's India business and delivering on our sustainability commitments along with an incredible India leadership team and passionate associates

KALPESH PARMAR | GENERAL MANAGER FOR ASIA, MARS WRIGLEY

SHORT TAKES

Tata mulls \$2bn boost to Neu app

Bangalore: Indian salt-to-software conglomerate Tata Group is considering injecting another \$2 billion into its super app venture to bolster its digital business, Bloomberg News reported Thursday, citing people familiar with the matter. The funds would help the group's online platform Tata Neu strengthen its digital offerings, fix technical glitches, and meet any new spending needs, the report said. The injection would take place over two years if the deal goes through, it added. Tata Group has also asked Tata Digital to look for ways to boost the valuation of the super app, according to the report. Tata launched the e-commerce super app in April last year, offering everything from apparel to air tickets in a renewed push for a slice of a fast-growing market dominated by Amazon.com and Walmart's Flipkart.

Talks of stake sale untrue: Vedanta

New Delhi: Vedanta Ltd Thursday termed any talks of sale in oil-to-metals conglomerate as "untrue and baseless." This comes in the wake of news report which said that mining mogul Anil Agarwal is contemplating a stake sale in Vedanta as a last-resort option and is examining the possibility of selling less than 5 per cent of the company. According to company's spokesperson, "Any talk of stake sale in Vedanta Ltd is untrue and baseless." The media report said that stake sale in Vedanta is a last resort for Agarwal and will only be considered if other fundraising options fail. Vedanta Resources which is a majority shareholder of Vedanta Ltd has been looking to reduce its debt through the sale of its zinc assets for a cash consideration of \$2,981 million to Hindustan Zinc Ltd (HZL). However, the government which holds 29.54 per cent stake in Hindustan Zinc has sternly opposed this move.

Govt signs deals worth ₹3,700cr

New Delhi: The defence ministry Thursday signed two contracts worth over ₹3,700 crore with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) for radars and receivers, which will enhance the operational capabilities of the Indian Air Force. The first contract worth over ₹2,800 crore pertains to the supply of Medium Power Radars (MPR) 'Arudhra', and the second, at an overall cost of around ₹950 crore, relates to 129 DR-118 Radar Warning Receivers.



Electric vehicle business has lost \$3 billion before taxes during the past two years. It should be viewed as a startup company within Ford

JOHN LAWLER | CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER, FORD MOTOR

MAZUMDAR-SHAW TO QUIT INFY BOARD

IT services major Infosys Thursday announced the retirement of Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw as independent director of the board, effective March 22, 2023, upon completion of her tenure. Infosys board has appointed D Sundaram as the lead independent director of the company, effective March 23, 2023



Hindenburg drops new bomb; targets Dorsey's Block

The US short seller is not a stranger to most now, particularly for Indians after its report on Indian conglomerate Adani Group created a storm that wiped off billions of promoters' and investors' wealth

REUTERS

Washington, March 23: Hindenburg Research Thursday disclosed short positions in Block Inc and alleged that the Jack Dorsey-led payments firm overstated its user numbers and understated its customer acquisition costs. Shares of Block slid 20% to \$57.85 in premarket trading following the report. If losses hold through the session, shares could record their steepest percentage fall since

March 2020.

"Our 2-year investigation has concluded that Block has systematically taken advantage of the demographics it claims to be helping," the short seller said in a note published on its website. The US short-seller, behind a market rout of over \$100 billion in India's Adani Group, said in its report that former Block employees estimated that 40%-75% of accounts they reviewed were fake, involved in fraud, or were addi-



tional accounts tied to a single individual. Hindenburg added that Block "obfuscates" how many individu-

als are on the Cash App platform by reporting misleading "transacting active" metrics filled with fake and duplicate accounts. Hindenburg added that co-founders Jack Dorsey who is also the co-founder of Twitter and James McKelvey collectively sold over \$1 billion of stock during the pandemic as the company's share price soared. Other executives including finance chief Amrita Ahuja and the lead manager for Cash App Brian Grassadonia also dumped millions of dollars in stock, the report added. About 5.2% of Block's free float shares were in short position as of March 22, according to Ortex data. The company's ticker was third

most trending on retail investor focused forum StockTwits. Last month, Block said it is "meaningfully slowing" the pace of hiring this year to control costs. Founded in 2017 by Nathan Anderson, Hindenburg is a forensic financial research firm that analyses equity, credit and derivatives. It invests its own capital and takes short-positions against companies. After finding potential wrongdoings, the company usually publishes a report explaining the case and bets against the target company, hoping to make a profit. Short sellers typically sell borrowed securities and aim to buy these back at a lower price.

Govt to exercise green shoe option for HAL OFS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 23: The Finance Ministry Thursday decided to exercise the green shoe option as the offer-for-sale of Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) has received a good response, with the issue subscribed 4.5 times on day one. "Offer for Sale (OFS) of government shares in HAL got great response on day one. Issue subscribed 4.5 times of base size at a clearing price above the floor price by non-retail investors. Govt has decided to exercise the green shoe option. Retail investors get chance to bid tomorrow," DIPAM Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey said in a tweet.



The OFS comprised of base issue size of 1.75 per cent or 58.51 lakh shares, with an option to retain over-subscription of an equal quantum. The government Wednesday proposed to sell up to a 3.5 per cent stake in HAL at a floor price of ₹2,450 a share, if fully subscribed, the OFS would fetch about ₹2,800 crore to the exchequer. On the first day of OFS, shares of HAL closed 4.87 per cent down at ₹2,497.40 each on BSE. The floor price is at a discount of around 6.7 per cent over the closing share price of HAL on BSE. The government currently holds 75.15 per cent of HAL, which is a Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) under the Defence Ministry. The proceeds from HAL OFS would add up to the government's disinvestment kitty for the current fiscal. The government has so far mopped up ₹31,106.64 crore from disinvestment and share buyback in CPSEs. The government had last month pegged lower revised estimates of disinvestment revenue estimates for the current fiscal at ₹50,000 crore, against the budget target of ₹65,000 crore.

LAYOFFS CONTINUE

Accenture cuts 19K jobs, trims forecasts

REUTERS

Washington, March 23: Accenture Plc Thursday lowered its annual revenue and profit forecasts and said it would cut about 2.5% of workforce, or 19,000 jobs, the latest sign that the worsening global economic outlook was sapping corporate spending on IT services.



More than half of the layoffs will affect staff at its non-billable corporate functions, the company said, sending its shares up more than 4% before the bell. Accenture now expects annual revenue growth to be between 8% and 10% compared to the previous projection of 8% to 11% increase. Last month, rival Cognizant Technology Solutions pointed to "muted" growth in bookings, or the deals IT services firms have in the pipeline, in 2022 after its first-quarter revenue forecast came in below market expectations. Accenture said it now expects earnings per share to be in the range of \$10.84 to \$11.06 compared to \$11.20 to \$11.52 previously.

BS6 PHASE-II TRANSITION

Cars to get dearer from April

INDIA PLANS TO IMPLEMENT BS6 PHASE-II NORMS FROM APRIL, WHICH REQUIRE AUTOMAKERS TO FIT THEIR VEHICLES WITH A SPECIAL DEVICE TO MONITOR EMISSIONS, LEADING TO EXTRA COSTS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 23: With the Bharat Stage VI (BS6) phase-II transition just round the corner, major automobile players in India have announced fresh round of price hikes after the liquidity crunch and semiconductor woes last year. According to reports, the hikes this time are in the region of around 2-4% or roughly ₹15,000-20,000 depending on make and model. **MARUTI SUZUKI** Maruti Suzuki India Ltd said Thursday it would raise prices across models come April, as high domestic inflation and new emission norms pressure the country's top car maker. The company said it will increase prices to partially offset the impact of "overall inflation and regulatory requirements". The auto major, however, did not share the quantum of the price hike it intends to implement from next month. The company continues to witness increased cost pressure driven by overall inflation and regulatory requirements, the auto maker said. While the company makes maximum effort to reduce cost and partially offset the increase, it has become imperative to pass on some of the impact through a price increase, it added. The company has planned this



Price increases are happening on account of BS6 phase II as we speak and depending on the launch calendar OEMs have started doing it already ranging from 2-4%

RAJEEV CHABA | PRESIDENT & MD, MG MOTOR INDIA

price increase in April, 2023, which shall vary across models, Maruti Suzuki India stated. **TATA MOTORS** Tata Motors Tuesday announced price increase for commercial vehicles ahead of BS6 phase II emission norms, the company said in a press release. The company stated that the prices for commercial vehicle will be hiked by up to 5 per cent starting April 1, 2023. Decision to increase price comes as a result of the company's efforts to comply with stringent BS6 phase II emission norms. "The price increase will be applied across the entire range of commercial vehicles, with the exact amount varying according to the individual model and variant," the company said.

HONDA CARS Honda Cars India plans to raise prices of its entry level compact sedan Amaze by up to ₹12,000 in order to offset the impact of increase in production cost owing to upcoming stricter emission norms from next month. The price increase will vary depending on different trims of the model. "We will increase Amaze prices by up to ₹12,000 with effect from April 1 to factor in the rise in the production cost due to the upcoming stringent emission norms," Honda Cars India Vice President Marketing & Sales Kunal Behl told PTI. The company would not be altering the prices of its mid-sized sedan City, he added. **KIA MOTORS** For Kia the increase is around

Sensex closes below 58,000 mark

Continued pressure in the IT majors and profit-taking in banking and financial counters turned the tone negative

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 23: Equity benchmark Sensex declined 290 points in a volatile session to settle below the 58,000 mark Thursday due to a sell-off in banking, financial and IT stocks amid a mixed trend in global equities. Besides, heavy selling in index heavyweight Reliance Industries added to the pressure, traders said. After rallying for two straight days, the 30-share BSE Sensex fell 289.31 points or 0.50 per cent to settle at 57,925.28, with 16 of its constituents posting losses. During the day, the index witnessed a high of 58,396.17 and a low of 57,838.85. The broader NSE Nifty dipped 75 points or 0.44 per cent to end at 17,076.90, with 30 of its scrips ending in the red.



State Bank of India was the biggest loser in the Sensex pack, shedding 1.69 per cent, followed

by Asian Paints, Kotak Mahindra Bank, HCL Technologies, Reliance Industries, Wipro, IndusInd Bank, Infosys, Power Grid and HDFC

twins. In contrast, Nestle, Maruti, Bharti Airtel, Tata Motors, ITC and Hindustan Unilever were among the gainers. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge declined 0.45 per cent and smallcap index dipped 0.15 per cent. Among indices, realty, bankex, IT, financial services, tech and consumer discretionary were the biggest laggards. The rupee gained 39 paise to close at 82.20 against the US dollar Thursday, tracking the weakness of dollar in the overseas market. Meanwhile, global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.90 per cent to \$76 per barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned net buyers in the domestic capital market Wednesday as they purchased shares worth ₹61.72 crore.

BIZ BUZZ



FICCI PREZ PANDA MEETS AMIT SHAH

New Delhi: Subhkrant Panda, President FICCI called in on Amit Shah, Union Minister for Home and Cooperation March 22 in New Delhi. He was accompanied by Anish Shah, Senior Vice President; Harsha Vardhan Agarwal, Vice President; Harsh Pati Singhania, Past President; and Shailesh Pathak, Secretary General. Panda briefed Shah about the agenda for this year during his tenure as President as well as FICCI's activities pertaining to drones, secure borders, compendium on smart policing, etc.

GOVERNMENT'S OPEN E-COMMERCE NETWORK - OPEN NETWORK FOR DIGITAL COMMERCE - EXPANDS INTO MOBILITY

REUTERS

Bangalore, March 23: India's open e-commerce network ONDC Thursday marked its foray into the mobility sector, tying up with a ride-hailing company in the tech city of Bangalore to help local businesses take on the likes of Uber Technologies and Ola Cabs. ONDC is in talks with more companies in the sector across several

cities to bring them on board over the next few months, its Senior Vice President Nitin Nair said at an event in Bangalore. The government launched the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) last year to enable small merchants and local stores across the country to access processes and technologies typically deployed by large e-commerce platforms like Amazon



and Walmart. The non-profit company's net-

work currently enables the display of products and services from

all participating e-commerce platforms in search results across all apps on the network. With this launch, ONDC aims to do something similar in the mobility space. It will help integrate apps on different modes of transport-metro, buses, and auto rickshaws-on the network, giving customers the option to book rides on a single platform. ONDC partnered with Bangalore-based Namma Yatri, an auto rickshaw hailing mobile application, at a time when companies like Ola and Uber are dominating a large part of the market, while users continue to face the brunt of surge

pricing and cancellations. "To make transportation convenient and affordable in our growing cities, it is important to provide a seamless experience to users. Open systems like ONDC enable the collaboration and interoperability needed to make it happen," Anurag Jain, Secretary of Department for Promotion of Industry & Internal Trade, said in a statement. Namma Yatri, built and launched by Juspay Technologies in partnership with auto drivers in Bangalore, has a network of 45,000 drivers, the companies said in a statement.

Silver, bronze for shooters

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Bhopal, March 23: India added two more medals to their tally after picking up a silver and bronze in Pistol and Rifle mixed team events while China won both the gold medals on competition Day-2 of the ongoing ISSF World Cup at the MP Shooting Academy Range, here Thursday.

In the first competition of the day, reigning men's 10m Air Rifle world champion Rudranksh Patil and R Narmada Nithin won bronze in the 10m Air Rifle Mixed Team competition while in the day's second event, Varun Tomar and Rhythm Sangwan won silver to bolster India's medal haul to one gold, one silver and two bronze medals.

China, on the other hand, is leading the standings with three gold and two bronze medals, with Azerbaijan, Germany and Hungary winning a silver medal each thus far.

In the day's first medal event, the 10m Air Rifle Mixed Team, the Indian duo of Rudranksh and Narmada shot a combined 632 in qualification to finish third and thereby qualify for the bronze medal match against China's Zhang Qiongyue and Yu Haonan, who finished fourth in the 19-strong field with the same combined score.

In the bronze medal match, both Rudranksh and Narmada were in their element, presenting a solid grouping to beat the Chinese pair 16-8 in what was a much closer match than the scoreline suggests.

Both the pairs did not shoot a single shot below the 10-mark in what was shooting of the highest order. The high-point came in the sixth series when both Rudranksh and Narmada shot perfect 10.9s.

"There was pressure obviously, but then we had a really good match-the competition was so good and we quite enjoyed it," said Narmada after the match.



Varun Tomar (R) and Rhythm Sangwan pose with their medals



Rudranksh Patil (R) and R Narmada Nithin pose for a photo

Rudranksh said there was no lack of motivation even if they did not win gold. "We were just asked to focus on our process and if we would have got Gold we would have been motivated but the bronze motivates us even more to do better next time," he said.

Both India and China had entered two teams in the Mixed Team Air Rifle. While the second Chinese team of Huang Yuting and Sheng Lihao won gold defeating Hungarians Istvan Peni and Denes Eszter 16-2 in a one-sided final, the second Indian duo of Hriday Hazarika and Tilottoma Sen shot 628.1 in qualification to finish ninth.

In the second and final medal event of the day, India's Varun Tomar and Rhythm Sangwan went

down 11-17 to China's Qian Wei and Liu Jinyao, in the 10m Air Pistol Mixed Team gold medal encounter.

It was Varun Tomar's second medal of the tournament after his bronze-winning effort in the individual Air Pistol on day one.

In the initial stages of the final, it looked as if the Chinese pair would run away with it, but the Indians made a strong comeback, going from 7-15 to 11-15 before the Chinese clinched the 15th series to seal gold. It was a double delight for China as the mixed pair of Xue Li and Pengqi Hu pocketed the bronze with a dominating 16-0 win over Germany in the bronze medal playoff.

Earlier in qualification, Qian

and Liu had topped the nine-team field with a score of 586, while Varun and Rhythm came second with 581.

"We all try our best and keep our best foot forward and silver is a medal as well. Of course, Gold would have been great but we are both happy that we got a silver medal and we will try better next time," Rhythm said.

Varun too was philosophical about missing out on Gold saying, "We try our best and try to make ourselves better and we believe whatever happens it is for the best."

Divya TS and Sarabjot Singh, the second Indian team in the fray, missed the bronze medal match by a point, finishing fifth with a score of 574.

NARENDER HAPPY WITH 2022-23 SHOW

*The 2022-23 Indian Super League season turned out to be a memorable one for Odisha FC as they made it into the playoffs for the first time in their history. Narender Gahlot, the defender who played his first season for the Bhubaneswar-based club after joining from Jamshedpur FC in 2022, was one of the key performers for the side. The 22-year-old, son of Virender Singh, opens up to **Orissa POST**. Excerpts...*

■ **Achieving such a feat (reaching maiden playoffs) on your first season with Odisha FC, how do you describe your feeling?**

■ It was a great feeling making it into the playoffs in my first season with the club. And obviously we'll do better in the next season.

■ **Are you satisfied with your performance (2022-23) and how do you rate (1-10) your personal season?**

■ Yes, I'm satisfied with my performance. I played as a right back as well as centre back. And I learned a lot from Josep Gombau. I did some mistakes, but I contributed as much as I can and I'm happy with that.

■ **Is there any particular team or player against whom you found it tough to defend? And why?**

■ Not really. Job of a defender in itself is tough – be it any team or any player I'm up against. We conceded some silly goals and we have to work on that. But defensively, it was a good season for us, that's one of the reasons for our playoff qualification.

■ **Who is your closest ally in the dressing room? Share any funny or memorable tale with him.**

■ Everybody is close to each other. I think Raynier (Fernandes) and Pedro (Moreno) are quite funny as

they are always doing funny things in the dressing room. Pedro is the funniest of the lot. I remember once after the game at the Kalinga Stadium we took a marker and scribbled on the dressing room branding as if Pedro had no teeth in the front. And Raynier make funny noises.

■ **What is the major difference (as a player) between Jamshedpur FC and Odisha FC?**

■ Not much actually. The difference I can see is that Odisha FC is a young team compared to Jamshedpur FC as they give opportunities to youngsters helping them groom and gain experience.

■ **Which player (defender) do you follow and why?**

■ From the beginning, I was watching Spanish football – especially Sergio Ramos and Gerard Pique. Pique was more clinical with the feet and his positioning was also good, while I was attracted to Ramos' aggressive game.

■ **Any message for OFC fans?**

■ The fans were amazing throughout the season and they supported us till the final hooter of our season finale. So I request them to keep supporting us and we'll do our best. Thank you so much for your support.



Odisha overpower Bengal at HI Junior Men's Zonal meet

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, March 23: Hockey Association of Odisha as well as some top teams including Uttar Pradesh Hockey, Hockey Karnataka, Hockey Andhra Pradesh, Hockey Jharkhand and Kerala Hockey won their respective matches in the north, south, east, and west zones of 1st Hockey India Junior Men's Zonal Championships Thursday.

In Khunti (Ranchi), Odisha rout Bengal 10-0. Anmol Ekka (8th, 12th, 43rd minutes) scored a hat-trick, while Sanjit Turkey (13th, 14th) struck twice. Binit Xalxo (17th), Aryan Xess (22nd), Premdayal Giri (27th), Deepak Pradhan (50th) and Abhishek Kispotta (60th) scored one apiece. The other east zone match saw Jharkhand beat Assam 10-0.

In the north zone, UP beat Punjab 4-3, while Chandigarh and Haryana play out a 4-4 stalemate. Uttarakhand won their match against Himachal 5-0 after the latter forfeited the match.

In the south zone, Karnataka defeated Tamil Nadu 4-2, while Andhra Pradesh beat Tamil Nadu Le Puducherry and Kerala thrashed Telangana 3-0.

Rajasthan drew with Madhya Pradesh 3-3 in the only match of the day in the west zone championship in Rajnandgaon, Chhattisgarh. Deepu Choudhary (3rd), Radheshyam Jat (42nd), and Ashish Bairgi (58th) scored for Hockey Rajasthan while Yogesh Punde (10th), Prashant Rajput (14th) and Tushar Parmar (24th) scored for Hockey Madhya Pradesh.



NIKHAT ZAREEN



SAWEETY BOORA



LOVLINA BORGOHAIN



NITU GHANGHAS

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, March 23: Star Indian pugilists Nitu Ghanghas, Nikhat Zareen, Lovlina Borgohain and Saweety Boora produced monumental displays to reach the finals of the IBA Women's World Boxing Championship as the hosts dominated proceedings at the Indira Gandhi Sports Complex here Thursday.

With three consecutive Referee Stops Contest (RSC) wins under her belt, Nitu (48kg) continued her remarkable run at the tournament against the reigning Asian champion Alua Balkibekova of Kazakhstan with a hard-earned 5-2 win on points after the bout was reviewed. Having suffered a defeated against the Kazakh in the quarterfinals of the last World Championships, the 22-year-old Indian had a point to prove this time round.

Both pugilists were neck-and-neck in all three rounds and while Balkibekova kept Nitu throughout the bout, the 2022 Commonwealth Games champion kept her cool to get the better of her opponent. The southpaw smartly landed accurate punches and showcased immense grit to reach the finals of the competition for the very first time.

Nitu will now take on the 2022 Asian Championships bronze medallist Lutsaikhana Altantsetseg of Mongolia in the final Saturday.

Contrary to Nitu's fiercely-contested bout, Nikhat (50kg) had an easy day at the office as she continued her quest for back-to-back World Championships gold medals by outpunching the veteran Rio Olympics bronze medallist Ingrit Valencia of Colombia and securing a 5-0 win. Being at the top of her game, the 26-year-old star pugilist

utilised her quick movement and stellar strength to control the bout from the word go.

She maintained her composure going into the next few rounds and dominated the bout, giving her Colombian opponent no chance to make a comeback and sealing the win by unanimous decision. Nikhat will now face the two-time Asian champion Nguyen Thi Tam of Vietnam in the final Sunday.

Later in the day, in what was a clash between two highly decorated pugilists, the Tokyo Olympics bronze medallist Lovlina (75kg) reached her maiden World Championships final after ousting the 2018 World Champion Li Qian of China with a 4-1 victory on points after the bout was reviewed.

The bout kept going back and forth with the Assam-born pugilist grinding hard to prevail by 3-2 in the first round before her Chinese

opponent made a comeback to win in the second by 2-3.

Despite both pugilists going at it hammer and tongs, it was the 25-year-old Indian, who shifted gears impressively and sealed the win with a supreme attacking display in the final round. Lovlina will face the two-time Commonwealth Games medallist Caitlin Parker of Australia in the final Sunday.

Wrapping up India's dominance in the semifinals, three-time Asian medallist Saweety (81kg) put up a stellar performance to beat Emma-Sue Greentree of Australia 4-3 on points after the bout was reviewed. Being at her attacking best, the dynamic pugilist from Hissar utilized her vast experience and strength to triumph over her opponent in the fiercely contested bout. She will now go up against the 2018 World Champion Wang Lina of China in the final Saturday.

Hockey India clinches 'Best Organiser' award

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, March 23: Hockey India on Thursday was awarded the Best Organiser Award by the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) for their exemplary execution of the FIH Odisha Hockey Men's World Cup 2023 Bhubaneswar-Rourkela as the host nation.

The award was received by Hockey India Secretary General Bhola Nath Singh during the AHF Congress held in Mungyeong, Korea, Thursday.

The prestigious quadrennial event featuring 16 teams from across the globe was held in two world-class venues in Bhubaneswar and Rourkela.

While the Kalinga Hockey Stadium in Bhubaneswar had previously hosted the FIH Hockey Men's World Cup 2018, the newly-constructed Birs Munda Hockey Stadium in Rourkela caught the imagination of the hockey fraternity for being the largest-seated hockey stadium in the world.

"We are very humbled and grateful for this incredible recognition by the Asian Hockey Federation. A World Cup at home is always special and for Hockey India, our top priority was to ensure everyone who took part in it, be it the participating teams, officials or spec-

tators have the most memorable experience," expressed Padma Shri Dr Dilip Turkey, President, Hockey India.

"Our endeavour wouldn't have been possible without the continued support and vision of the Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik, all the stakeholders and the numerous people who worked together to make this event a mega success," an elated Dr Turkey was quoted as saying in a release.

Upon receiving the prestigious Best Organiser Award by the AHF, Bhola Nath Singh, Secretary General, Hockey India said, "This is a very proud moment for us. The success of the FIH Odisha Hockey Men's World Cup 2023 Bhubaneswar-Rourkela is evidence of what we can all achieve when we work with passion and precision.

"This award is a testimony to the hard work of Hockey India staff who worked round-the-clock to ensure everything goes on smoothly. I extend my gratitude to AHF for recognising this effort."

Indian women's hockey team player Salima Tete has been appointed as an AHF Athlete Ambassador for a two-year term beginning March 25, 2023. Salima accepted the certificate and the position Thursday at the AHF Congress.



HI Secretary General Bhola Nath Singh (R) receives the award from AHF CEO Tayyab Ikram

Vani ends title drought, wins WPGT 7th leg

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Gurugram, March 23: A little over three years after her last win on the Women's Pro Golf Tour (WPGT), seasoned Vani Kapoor drilled a crucial birdie on the very last hole to card 3-under 69 and take the lead in the seventh leg of the ongoing season.

That slender edge was good enough as Gaurika Bishnoi, who led for a good part of the day, was unable to find a birdie over the last seven holes and also bogeyed the Par 4 in the 14th.

Vani finished at 2-under 214 for three days and Gaurika (72) ended at 1-under 215 to be second. Ridhima Dilawari, who played alongside Gaurika, too, had a chance as she birdied 16th and 17th. She needed

a birdie to force a playoff with Vani, but instead, double-bogeyed the last hole and fell to third place. Ridhima totalled 1-over 217, the Hero WPGT informed in a release Thursday.

Overnight leader Tvesa Malik (77) ran into rough weather in the final round and was fourth, while amateur Vidhatri Urs (76) and Asmitha Sathish (73) were tied for fifth.

Sneha Singh, who had a disappointing week in tied 21st place, continues to lead the Hero Order of Merit. Vani, who won Rs 2,84,000 from the season's highest purse of Rs 23 lakh, moved into third place, while Seher Atwal is second.

Playing in the final group, Gaurika had a chance to force a playoff as she stood on a birdie putt, which, however, was not a straightforward one. The ball went



past the hole and Gaurika was left in second place.

Vani, who started the day three behind the 36-hole leader Tvesa, had one birdie and one bogey on the front nine. As the lead group of Tvesa, Gaurika and amateur Vidhatri turned into the back nine, Gaurika held the pole position.

Vani turned the tide on the back nine with birdies on the 10th and 12th and then added a vital final one on the 18th.

"It is great to get back to winning, more so on my home course with my family and friends present. I also want to thank everyone here including my coach, Anitya Chand, and my parents," said Vani, who has been playing mostly on the Ladies European Tour and elsewhere in the past three years.