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## JOHNNY DEPP RESIDING IN ENGLAND'S COUNTRYSIDE

Hollywood star Johnny Depp has chosen to enjoy a quiet life away from the glitz and blitz of Hollywood. After settling his defamation battle against ex-wife Amber Heard, the actor opened up in a magazine interview that he is currently residing in a rural English countryside, reports *aceshowbiz.com*.

## WITHERSPOON DIVORCES HUSBAND AFTER 10 YEARS

Hollywood actress Reese Witherspoon has announced she is divorcing her husband, Jim Toth just two days before their 12th wedding anniversary. The former couple tied the knot on March 26, 2011 in a stunning ceremony in Ojai, California, reports *Mirror.co.uk*.



### FORTUNE FORECAST

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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181\*

**ARIES**  
The stars urge you to focus on your finances and savings, and today, you might remain very busy doing just that. But take care, says Ganesh, you don't want a sulking spouse when you go home. Don't cancel any plans; go ahead and enjoy that new film.

**TAURUS**  
Your think tank will be running on overdrive today. Your possessiveness might kick in to cause a conflict. Keep your anger under the carpet to avoid any unnecessary complications. Introspection will also play upon your thoughts, leading you to explore your problems and pry for solutions, predicts Ganesh.

**GEMINI**  
Today may not be very meaningful and productive for you, though you will get to spend plenty of quality time with yourself in the afternoon, which may not necessarily be to your liking. By evening, you may feel a little extra sensitive.

**CANCER**  
You are likely to be at your inventive best today, feels Ganesh. You are likely to taste success, much to the delight of your colleagues at work and loved ones back home. However, experience counts, and if you are a beginner at something, you may face problems in your new venture.

**LEO**  
Chess is a good start, but it is nothing compared to the strategic intrigues of your day today. Arguments will lead to further arguments, and nowhere else, reminds Ganesh. So, it only makes sense to counter a disagreement with an agreement. But then again, total agreement is doubly secretive. At the end of the day, all that matters is to get people to agree with you, even if it means having to eat humble pie in the beginning.

**VIRGO**  
You will shine exceedingly well in all the activities that you undertake today. Your dream of starting business operations on foreign shores will fructify today, says Ganesh. You may pay more attention to your personal appearance, which will boost your morale considerably.

**LIBRA**  
Call it your generous side, but today is the perfect day to give back to all those from whom you have received so far. With roots set firmly in community service, it might do you well to extend that helping hand and return something back to them, preferably in the double. Go along with the spirit of an early thanksgiving today.

**SCORPIO**  
An upcoming project of a new joint venture will capsize your personal life and keep you on your toes today, says Ganesh. You may not find the results in proportion to the efforts that you put in, but be patient because everything will fall in place only in due time.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
To do or not to do? That will be the question for most of today as you find yourself pulling out of one dilemma only to trip into the next one. Controversy will surround you and you may find yourself at the crossroads, where you are unsure of which direction to take.

**CAPRICORN**  
There are good days and bad days; your day today will oscillate between the two extremes, says Ganesh. While on the one hand, your mind will be flooded with negative feelings that will make you feel miserable, on the other, your efforts at work will yield good results in the future.

**AQUARIUS**  
You are already overloaded with work. On the top of it, people around you will conveniently put their share of load on your back, and you will take it most of the times. You, however, will not get bogged down by the additional responsibilities.

**PISCES**  
Are you fretting over the obstacles you are facing on the business front? Ganesh tackles the root of your problem and advises you to be patient and have faith in your undertakings. Good things will come your way, in good time.



## BADSHAH BRINGS THE HOUSE DOWN

*Celebrating the spirit of 'Living it Large', Seagram's Royal Stag also hosted Hip Hop superstar Dino James, singer Jasleen Royal and DJ Yogii for its show Royal Stag Boombox, a first-of-its-kind musical experience in Bhubaneswar*

**Bhubaneswar:** Living up to his commitment, Indian rapper Badshah truly brought the house down Saturday evening with a crowd of nearly 10,000 people swaying to his beats here at the Exhibition Ground.

myriad interactive experience for the audience to engage with. The mood and feel of the event were unique and youthful, reflective of the pulse of the City. It was nothing like the city had ever experienced before.

Other performers of the evening were Hip Hop superstar Dino James, singer and songwriter Jasleen Royal and DJ Yogii.

As the evening drew closer, DJ Yogii took over the stage, enlivening the festival with his mashups. This was followed by Dino's reverberating vibe of hip-hop through the crowd. The evening soon took a melodious turn as Jasleen arrived on stage and wielded her magic. But the event reached its peak with Badshah's headlining performance.

Earlier in the day, the stars had an interactive session with the media at a City hotel.

An excited Badshah said he was thrilled to be associated with Royal Stag Boombox and to have got the opportunity to perform for his amazing fans in Bhubaneswar.

"Now, I can't wait to bring the house down with my music and create unforgettable memories," he added.

Dino shared, "It is wonderful to be a part of this unique musical experience. I am really looking forward to being part of this on-ground show in Bhubaneswar."

Mitra Re singer Jasleen Royal shared, "I am really excited to be a part of the event. Bhubaneswar and its people make for an amazing audience, I loved the energy while performing here."

DJ Yogii said, "It is very cool to see a music festival like this with the vibe of hip-hop and melodies of Bollywood."



## Bhumi wants to make planet more equal

**Mumbai:** Last week, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) announced actress Bhumi Pednekar as their first National Advocate for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

As a National Advocate, Bhumi will support UNDP India's efforts to raise awareness and mobilise support for the SDGs, a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.

Bhumi made her first appearance in her new role at the launch of the flagship magazine, Inspiring India.

The *Badhaai Do* actress expressed her happiness on achieving such an honor and shared, "I am thrilled and it's such an honour that they (UNDP) thought that I was worthy of taking on this responsibility.

"In whatever way, either through my onscreen work or off-screen contribution, the idea is to spread the right message to inspire as many people as possible to take the right path," she said. "I hope that all the work that I do goes toward making the world more equal in many ways," she added.

Bhumi has been associated with UNDP India as the Women@Work Champion since 2022. She has raised awareness on issues such as gender-based violence, and climate action. She also voluntarily turned to vegetarianism to tread lighter on the planet. AGENCIES

## VANI TRIPATHY'S LIVE SESSION IN CITY



Actor, producer and activist Vani Tripathy Tikoo Saturday attended a live session titled *The Write Circle* at a City hotel organised by Kolkata-based Prabha Khaitan Foundation (PKF), a non-profit trust founded by the late Dr Prabha Khaitan, in collaboration with Ehsaas Women of Bhubaneswar. She was in conversation with Nidhi Garg, the Ehsaas woman of Bhubaneswar. Tikoo's debut book *Why can't elephants be red?* was launched on the occasion. PKF was founded in the early 1980s by eminent novelist and poet Prabha Khaitan for the cause of socio-cultural welfare while Ehsaas (@ehsaaswomen) is a conglomeration of women from all walks of life who come together to promote and support the society.

## Shraddha lives her childhood dreams



**New Delhi:** Actress Shraddha Kapoor agrees that there is a 'big sense of responsibility' on her shoulders when it comes to her performances. She said that it is because of the love she gets from the audiences, who she says is the reason behind living her 'childhood dreams'.

With so much love coming her way and hopes riding on her, does Shraddha, whose latest release is *Tu Jhooti Main Makkaar*, feel the pressure? In a recent conversation, Shraddha said: "It definitely adds a big sense of responsibility. I feel that I am here to entertain people and I want to keep doing that. I need to be a part of films that will provide that."

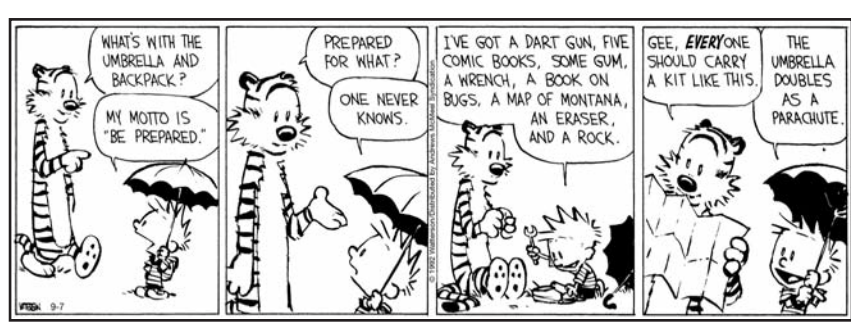
The actress added: "So, I take that kind of responsibility and yes, it's also inspiring and all the energy and inspiration comes from the audiences... They are the reason I have been able to live my childhood dream. It does feel like there is pressure and responsibility." Looking forward, Shraddha has the second installment of the 2018 comedy horror film *Stree*. IANS

### FUN post

#### PEANUTS



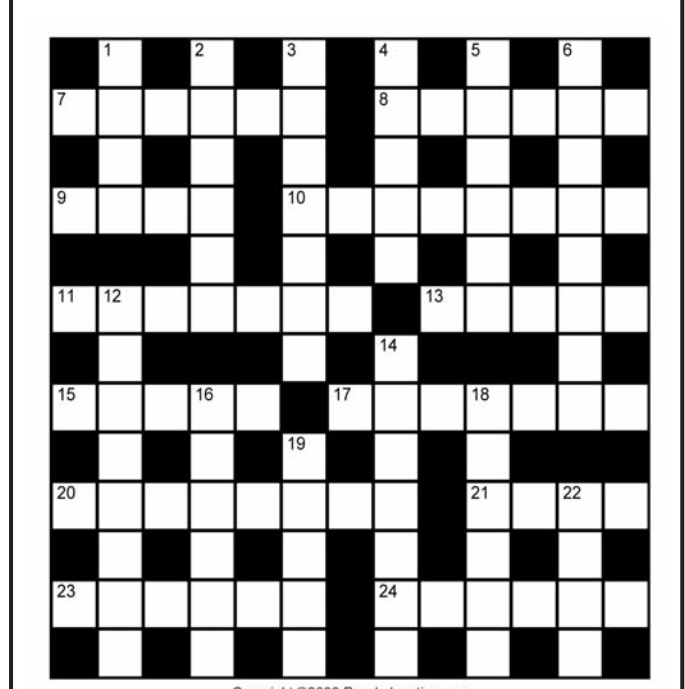
#### CALVIN AND HOBBS



#### BREVITY



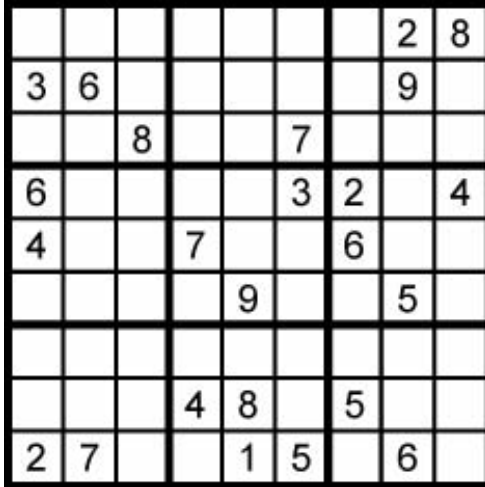
#### CROSSWORD



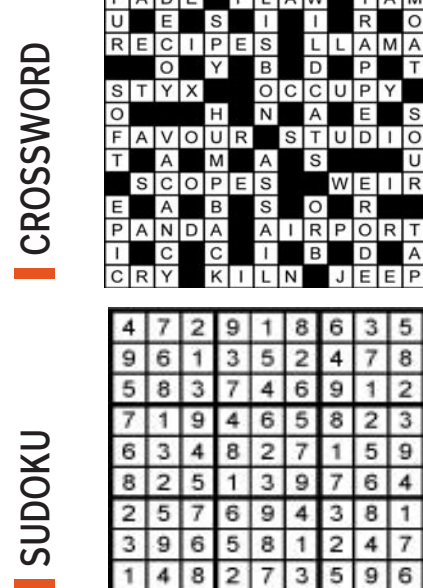
- Across
- 7 Theatre performance evaluator
  - 8 Chess piece
  - 9 Barter
  - 10 Extroverted
  - 11 Flew the coop (3,4)
  - 13 Insect bite sensation
  - 15 House cat without a home
  - 17 Vanity
  - 20 Green vegetable
  - 21 Employs
  - 23 South American rodent
  - 24 Step down
  - 5 Become extinct (3,3)
  - 6 Chinese metropolis
  - 12 Pen name, for one (5,3)
  - 14 Stockings
  - 16 Grow by addition
  - 18 Lacking grace and skill
  - 19 Pick-me-up
  - 22 Jittery
- Down
- 1 Large blackbird
  - 2 Perfect state
  - 3 Circus performer
  - 4 Glide

#### 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



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

**SHORT TAKES**

**No confrontation with judiciary: Rijju**

**Madurai:** Denying any clash between the government and judiciary as speculated in the media, Union Law and Justice Minister Kiren Rijju contended Saturday that differences were inevitable in a democracy but they should not be construed as confrontation. "We have differences, but it doesn't mean there is confrontation. It sends a wrong message across the world. I want to make it clear that there is no problem between different organs of the state," Rijju said. **P5**

**Free treatment for cardiac patients in state**

**Bhubaneswar:** The Odisha government has signed an MoU with Prashanti Medical Services & Research Foundation (PMSRF) for providing world class medical treatment free of cost to patients suffering from cardiac ailments. The agreement will continue February 2025, the government said in a release Saturday. As per the agreement, the foundation will organise free screening camps for children and adults at district hospitals and will also provide free diagnostic services.

**IRREGULAR by MANJUL RALLY**



Be very careful! Your speech will not be considered a political 'jumla'. We are in the opposition

## Panel to visit Odisha, Chhattisgarh

POST NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi, March 25:** The Mahanadi River Dispute Tribunal will start visiting sites both in Odisha and Chhattisgarh beginning April, officials stated here Saturday. The tribunal which was formed March 11, 2018 has just received an extension from Centre till December 14, 2024 to find a solution regarding the dispute between Odisha and Chhattisgarh over water sharing.

Officials said that the members of the tribunal will visit Chhattisgarh first and then turn their attention to Odisha. The Chhattisgarh visit will take place in two phases, the first beginning April 18. The three-member bench of the tribunal headed by retired Supreme Court judge Justice AM



Khanwilkar will begin the site visit from Farsiya village and will complete inspection of the upper part of the river in Chhattisgarh by April 21. They will take notice of all the constructions that have **MAHANADI RIVER DISPUTE** both the government to provide details of the travel plan to the registrar within a week. During the visit, the tribunal will take stock of various irrigation and power projects functioning on the Mahanadi river basin

in Chhattisgarh and Odisha.

Significantly, the tribunal has also directed the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) to provide remaining Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) data regarding Mahanadi basin to Chhattisgarh government in two weeks. During the hearing, Chhattisgarh counsel sought directions to NRSC to provide LiDAR data for the remaining area of the river basin at the earliest. The state counsel submitted that it will enable the assessors have a cohesive approach. Meanwhile, the counsel for Odisha submitted that even in absence of further LiDAR data, the assessors are free to formulate the delineation mechanism and proceed on the basis of conventional data and submit its report to the tribunal.

## NH-55: Irked Naveen writes to Gadkari

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, March 25:** Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has sought personal intervention of Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari for early completion of the Cuttack-Angul-Sambalpur section of NH-55. In the letter to Gadkari, the CM has expressed anguish due to the delay in completion of the project.

Patnaik said rehabilitation and up-gradation of Cuttack-Sambalpur National Highway (total distance 265 km) to a four-lane carriageway is being carried out

by National Highways Authority of India (NHA) since 2017.

"It is a matter of great concern that even after more than five years, up-gradation work is yet to be completed," Patnaik said. "Haphazard construction activities and miserable plight of the road causes frequent accidents leading to loss of human lives," the CM added in the letter dated March 24, 2023.

Patnaik pointed out that during the last two years, a total of 399 accidents have taken place leading to 196 people losing their lives. He said that the delay in completion of the project was the main reason behind the accidents. **Contd...P2**

**CM said that due to delay in finishing the work, 399 accidents have taken place leading to 196 deaths in last two years**

## Double delight for India in Boxing Worlds



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 25:** Nitu Ghanghas (48kg) and the seasoned Saweety Boora (81kg) etched their names in Indian boxing history as they became world champions after notching contrasting wins at the marquee tournament here Saturday. Nitu put up a stupendous performance to see off Mongolia's Lutsaikhana Altansetseg 5-0 and claim the title in the flyweight category.

Saweety made it two out of two for the hosts as she warded off a challenge from two-time World Championship medallist China's Wang Lina. **MORE BACK PAGE**

## PM afraid of my speech: Rahul

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, March 25:** A combative Rahul Gandhi said Saturday that he has been disqualified from the Lok Sabha as Prime Minister Narendra Modi is 'scared' of his next speech on the Adani issue. He alleged that the 'whole game' was to distract people from the panic that the government was feeling over the matter.

The Congress leader also asserted that even if he is disqualified from the Parliament for life or jailed, he would keep defending the democratic nature of the country. Rahul asserted that a 'panic-stricken' government has handed the Opposition a 'weapon' with the move to disqualify him.

Rahul said the moot question remains as to who invested ₹20,000 crore in Adani shell firms and that he will keep raising it.



"I am here defending the democratic voice of the Indian people. I will continue to do that. I am not scared of these threats, of these disqualifications, allegations, prison sentences. I am not scared of them. These people don't understand me yet," Rahul asserted. The BJP was quick to rebut Rahul's claims. "There's an allegation (on Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from the Lok Sabha after being sentenced in a 2019 defamation case) that he is being framed. It has nothing to do with the Adani-Hindenburg issue," for-

## Plea filed against disqualification

**NEW DELHI:** A plea was filed Saturday in the Supreme Court challenging the 'automatic disqualification' of lawmakers upon their conviction and being sentenced to a jail term for two years or more according to section 8(3) of the Representation of the People Act. The plea has been filed by Kerala-based social activist Aabha Muralidharan. The petitioner, has sought a declaration that the automatic disqualification is ultra vires the Constitution for being 'arbitrary' and 'illegal'. **P7**

mer Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said, dismissing Rahul's suggestion that his questions on corruption allegations against the Adani group were the real reason he was disqualified. **Contd...P2**

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**Bachelor Programmes :**

- B.Tech. ( Lateral Entry) (3 years)
- B.Tech & M.Tech - Biotechnology (5 Years)
- B. Arch. (5 years)
- Bachelor of Design (Fashion / Textile) (4 years)
- BA.LL.B / BBA LL.B / B.Sc. LL.B (5 years)
- Bachelor of Film & Television Production (3 years)
- Bachelor of Communication & Journalism (3 years)
- BBA (3 years)
- BCA (3 years)
- B.Sc. Computer Science (3 years)
- B.Sc. Nursing (4 years)
- BA (Hons) in English/ Economics/Sociology/Psychology/ Anthropology (3 years)
- B.Com (Hons) (3 years)

**Masters Programmes :**

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- M.Sc. (Phy./ Chem./ Math & Data Science) (2 years)
- M.Sc (by Research - S & T Translation) (2 years)
- M.Com (2 years)
- M.Tech. (2 years)
- MCA (2 years)
- LLM (2 years)
- M. Arch (2 years)
- Int. M.Tech & Ph.D (5 years)
- Master of Communication & Journalism (2 years)
- MA in Economics (2 years)

- MA in Sociology (2 years)
- MA in English (2 years)
- MA/M.Sc. in Psychology (2 years)
- MA / M.Sc. in Public Policy (2 years)
- MA in Leadership (2 years)
- MA in Anthropology (2 years)
- MA in Spiritualism (2 years)
- M.A. Yoga Therapy (2 years)
- Master of Hospital Administration (2 years)
- Master of Public Health (2 years)
- MBA (2 years)
- MBA in Business Analytics (2 years)
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KIIT (Deemed to be University) has only one permanent campus in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. It has no other campus / off campus anywhere else in the country and globe.



# School locked; students fail to appear for exams

The villagers allege that the school remains locked on most days as teachers do not turn up



The headmaster has not stepped into the school premises since he joined the school. He reportedly spends most of his time in Bhubaneswar

Sirika, Purna Sirika and Jata Sirika have met the two teachers in past and warned them to open the school regularly and take classes. They even lodged complaints at the BEO office and their salaries were stopped for some months. However, the two teachers are yet to mend their ways, the villagers alleged.

"I will inquire into the matter. If the examination has not been conducted, action will be taken against the teachers concerned," Block Education Officer Raghunath Pangi said.

Situated about 120 kilometre from the district headquarters town, the primary school with Classes I-V has over 30 students and two teachers, including a headmaster.

The teachers are reluctant to come to the school because of its remoteness, villagers claimed.

"We have approached the authorities concerned many times but to no avail. We demand action against the teachers. Otherwise, we will gherao the office of the block education officer," said Surya Sirika, another villager.

When contacted, district education officer (DEO) Rama Chandra Nahak said he will seek a report in this regard from the concerned BEO and assured of action against the two teachers after the report is available to him.

in the school transformation programme under the 5T initiative to attract students to schools and check dropout rates in tribal-dominated areas of the state. However, despite all these steps, the tribal-dominated areas of the state seem to lag behind in education.

The headmaster Dillip Khatai has not stepped into the school premises since he joined the school. He reportedly spends most of his time in Bhubaneswar.

However, in pen and paper, the school is running in proper condition. The school register says that students come to the school daily and are served midday meals. The assistant teacher follows suit.

All the 30 students have been deprived of appearing for their annual examination due to the absence of the two teachers. The students have also failed to attend their classes as the school remains locked up throughout the year. In this condition, how will the students appear for their examination, one of the villagers wondered.

Ward member Sure Sirika and guardians Rahul Sirika, Gahin Sirika, Masuru Sirika, Dhara



TRADITIONAL FEST: Women and devotees performed 'Pani Danda' at a pond as part of rituals for traditional Danda Yatra festival which started in Kabisuryanagar town of Ganjam district, Saturday

# NAYAGARH SEES NO LET UP IN CHILD MARRIAGES

Childline has foiled as many as 205 child marriages in the district in last two years

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nayagarh, March 25: Despite implementation of 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' scheme with sanction of funds to the tune of lakhs and awareness drives organised by the government to check under-age marriages and female foeticide, child marriages are still rampant in Nayagarh district.

As per reports, Childline has foiled as many as 205 child marriages in the district in last two years. This shows the lack of awareness and faulty enforcement of the laws regarding child marriage.

On the other hand, there are instances of rescued minor girls who are sent to the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) by the Childline getting married again on the same day after their release from the CWC. In the last two years, there are 32 such cases where the minor girls are again married post-rescue. Unofficial sources say that the true number of child marriages in the district is around 500 to 1,500 in a year. Notably, in the two years from January 2021 to January 2023, 205



illegal weddings of minors have been halted. With the failure of the district administration to check the practice, locals have alleged that its efforts are limited to just speeches and meetings.

It is pertinent to mention here that an oath-taking programme led by the then-district collector had been organised May 22, 2022 with the collaboration of the district administration and Action Aid in view of the rising cases of under-age marriages.

This was thought to be a part of the 'Say no to child marriage and yes to school' programme running in the whole district by the collaboration. SHGs, Anganwadi workers, teenagers in the panchayat

level, members of the SHG association, supervisors, CDPO in the block levels and the district level officials had joined the drive. But media persons were not invited to these meetings.

The Collector has expressed his disappointment over the rampant child marriages many times and directed to enforce the laws strictly but in vain. In this regard, lawyer Amiya Patnaik of Manikagoda says that there is a need to change the legal structure meant for checking child marriages.

Those involved in this illegal practice should be put behind bars and cases should be registered against them. He further added that the media should always be made a part of the awareness meetings and programmes being held regarding the issue.

Stressing that the process of registration for marriage should be adhered to mandatorily, social activist Usharani Patnaik said that registration of marriages will help stop under-age marriages to a great extent adding that support needs to come from every sphere to the programmes.

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With reference to our Possession Notice published in "Orissa Post" on 25.03.2023, in the Account of Borrower: M/s. Bhubaneswari Traders, the Branch Name Should be read as Dharamgarh Branch instead of Bhawanipatna Branch. All other Facts remain unchanged.  
Date: 25.03.2023 Sd/- Authorised Officer

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ବିଜ୍ଞାନ: ୦୬୬୯୩୦୩୧୯୯୪  
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# Girl cries foul over mother's death, seeks strict action

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhadrak, March 25: A girl under Banskada police limits in Bhadrak district has made startling claims about her mother's death whose mutilated body was recovered from the railway track, February 23.

The girl was identified as Sasmita Sahu, daughter of Debendra Das of Chhe village under Banskada police limits in Bhadrak district. The matter came to the fore after she visited the SP office in Bhadrak and lodged a complaint in this regard demanding a proper investigation into her mother's death and necessary action by the police.

She has alleged that earlier miscreants burnt her sister to death by dousing her in petrol. Later, they killed her mother Tuni Das and dumped the body near the railway track after kidnapping and raping her. The body was recovered near the railway track, February 23. Banskada police registered a case of unnatural death and launched an investigation. She, however, demanded to register a murder case and arrest the accused persons.

SP Varun Guntupalli advised her to lodge a fresh complaint at the Banskada police station and assured her to conduct a probe and take necessary actions.

# FAKE CERTIFICATE RACKET Coaching centre owner held; certificates seized

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bolangir, March 25: A special team of Bolangir police busted an interstate fake certificate racket during a raid at a coaching centre Reliance Education Complex on Bolangir-Patnagarh road, Saturday.

Fake certificates, mark sheets, official seals, stamps of various education institutions in the country, printer colours, printers, Xerox machines, computer hard disc, diary, cash worth ₹3 lakh, letters written to various universities and education officers, several photographs and documents were seized from the coaching centre. Police also detained the director Manoj Mishra and his associate Alok Udgata and eight other persons and are questioning them in this connection.

The raid took place after the certificates of 37 candidates applying for various posts of Bolangir postal division were found fake during preliminary verification. The postal superintendent lodged a complaint at the Town police station. Bolangir SP Nitin Kushalkar formed a special team and directed them to conduct an investigation into the al-



The raid took place after the certificates of 37 candidates applying for various posts of Bolangir postal division were found to be fake

legations. During probe, it was found that one Rajesh Chouhan of Uttar Pradesh is the mastermind of the racket and has its network in various districts and state.

SDPO Tofan Bag said a special team was formed as per the instruction of Bolangir SP after the postal department officials approached us after suspecting the authenticity of certificates produced by 37 job aspirants. Further investigations are on, the SDPO said.

# Man dies during physical test for constable post

PNN & AGENCIES

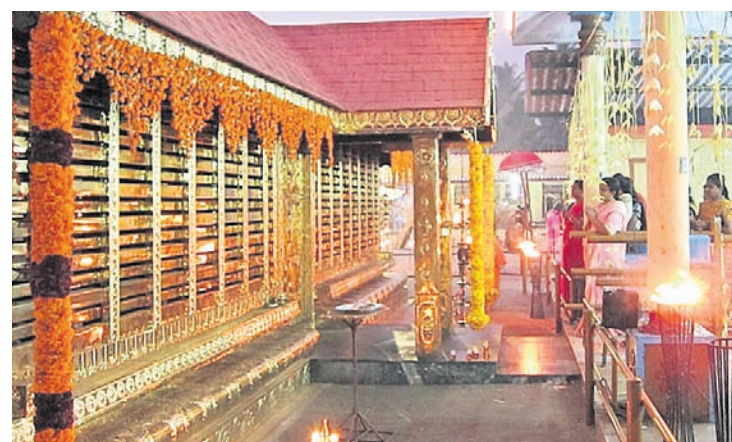
Berhampur, March 25: A 20-year-old man died Friday while appearing in the physical test for the Odisha police constable recruitment drive held in Ganjam district, an officer said Saturday. The deceased has been identified as Deepti Ranjan Dash, a resident of Shyamsundarpur area in Ganjam district.

The physical test for recruitment of constables was conducted at the Police Reserve Ground at Chhatrapur when Dash fell unconscious while running a 1,600 metres race.

Dash was immediately rushed to the sub-divisional hospital at Chhatrapur and later to MKCG Medical College and Hospital, here where the doctors declared him dead on arrival, said SP Ganjam, Jagmohan Meena. The SP said the health of Dash was checked by the doctor before he participated in the running event. He appeared fit to appear for the physical test, the SP added.

# Men dress as women at this temple to fulfil wishes

As part of the traditional ritual at the famed Kottankulangara Devi temple at Chavara in Kollam, thousands of men dress up as women on last two days of a festival that ends in the wee hours of Sunday this year



who arrive with their relatives and friends has increased and crossed the 10,000 mark.

This particular event is called 'Kottankulangara Chamayavilakku'.

According to the most popular story, the tradition was started by a group of boys who used to rear cows who would playfully dress up as girls and offer flowers and a coconut dish called 'kottan' to a stone. One day the goddess

appeared before one of the boys. Subsequently, a temple came up and the ritual of men dressing up as women to offer prayers to the goddess began.

The stone is regarded as the deity. There is also a belief that the stone has been growing in size over the years.

Now that this ritual has become hugely popular, the festival attracts people of various faiths and a large num-

ber of them come from outside Kerala. Sheldon, a youth from Tamil Nadu, was spotted at the temple in the wee hours of Saturday. Asked what brought him here, he said, "I have been hearing about this ritual for a few years now and was wanting to come and finally I have made it. After dressing up as a woman, I felt I have accomplished something which I have been planning for a while."

Even though the most auspicious time for taking part in the ritual is between 2 am and 5 am, but owing to a huge rush, one can see a stream of men dressed up and decked up in traditional Kerala sari carrying the lamp at dusk. Men dressing up as women or girls have to carry lamps, which are available for rent but have to get their own attire. But in case, someone needs help, there are beauticians for assistance.

The lamp is a peculiarity of this temple and is seen here only. The lamps are mounted on a long wooden rod and rise to the waist.

When the festival concludes early Sunday, thousands of people would return filled with hope and happiness.

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FOCUS UKRAINE WAR

# IN WHOSE INTEREST?



**After more than a year of fighting, it is clear that neither side in the Russia-Ukraine war can win on the battlefield. A negotiated ceasefire is the only way out of the current military deadlock, and it must happen before Russia and China cement a strategic axis that weakens the West and leaves Taiwan more vulnerable than ever**

into the war in Ukraine, the greater the likelihood that China invades Taiwan and America realises its worst geopolitical nightmare: a Sino-Russian strategic axis. The US may remain the world's foremost military power for now, but taking on the combined force of China and Russia would be a herculean task.

The war has already exposed the West's military shortcomings, such as depletion of supplies of critical munitions, America's struggle to scale up weapons manufacturing, and the weakening of the US-European consensus on Ukraine. All this could tempt Chinese President Xi Jinping to seek to deplete Western arsenals further before invading Taiwan, by indirectly shipping arms to Russia and forcing the US and other governments to increase weapons supplies to Ukraine. Xi is already aiding Putin's war to a limited extent by supplying Russia and sanctioned Russian entities with drones, navigation equipment, jamming technology, fighter-jet parts, and semiconductors.

While some in the West believe that a negotiated ceasefire in Ukraine would embolden China to attack Taiwan, Xi does not need Russia to show him that aggression works. China's own cost-free expansionism, from the South China Sea to the Himalayas, is all the proof he needs.

As a recent RAND report points out, a protracted Ukraine war is not in America's interest. A prolonged conflict would lead to increased flows of US money and weapons into Ukraine, elevating the risk of a NATO-Russia conflict and hindering the ability of the US to respond to the China challenge. As Biden has already acknowledged, a "negotiated settlement" is the only way to end the war - better to seek it now than after months or years of bloodshed and devastation.

*The writer is Professor of Strategic Studies at the New Delhi-based Center for Policy Research and Fellow at the Robert Bosch Academy in Berlin.*

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The recent face-to-face meeting in New Delhi between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov - the first such high-level interaction since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine - suggests that diplomacy may no longer be a dirty word.

The ten-minute meeting on the sidelines of the G20 gathering occurred after US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan reportedly urged Ukraine to show Russia that it is open to negotiating an end to the war. Together, these recent developments offer a glimmer of hope that a ceasefire is within the realm of the possible.

The war in Ukraine, which has shaken the foundations of the international order, is in many ways a proxy war between the world's two major powers, with Russia backed by China and Ukraine backed by the United States. Over the past year, the war has triggered global energy and food crises, spurred higher inflation amid slowing global growth, and heightened the risks - underscored by Russia's recent downing of a US drone over the Black Sea - of a direct Russia-NATO conflict.

And yet, after more than a year of fighting, it is clear that the conflict has settled into a war of attrition, with both sides struggling to make significant advances on the battlefield. A ceasefire is the only way out of this military deadlock, but reaching an agreement could take a long time. The 1950-53 Korean War, for example, was deadlocked for two years before an armistice agreement was reached.

Russian President Vladimir Putin clearly believes that a prolonged war of attrition works in his favour, enabling his army to wreak havoc on Ukraine and testing Western resolve. To overwhelm Ukrainian air defenses, Russia is launching more missiles simultaneously, including its Kinzhal hypersonic weapons, which are all but impossible to shoot down. Despite the flood of Western weapons systems it has

received, Ukraine is in no position to thwart Russia's intensifying aerial assaults.

But it is also becoming increasingly clear Russia cannot achieve its strategic objective in Ukraine. It may have occupied nearly one-fifth of the country's territory but it has created a more hostile neighbour and reinvigorated NATO, which is now poised to admit Finland and most likely Sweden. Moreover, many of the unprecedented sanctions the West has imposed on Russia will likely endure beyond the war and inflict long-lasting damage on Russian economy.

At the same time, US President Joe Biden's "hybrid war" strategy, which seeks to cripple Russia through soft-power techniques and the weaponisation of global finance, has failed to bring about Putin's downfall or turn the ruble into "rubble," as Biden vowed in the early stages of the war. The US-led sanctions regime has severely limited Russia's ability to resupply its forces but has fallen short of halting the Kremlin's war machine. While the sanctions have dented its earnings from energy

exports, Russia has found willing buyers for its oil and natural gas in non-Western markets (albeit at a discount). Short of a collapse in morale causing Russian soldiers to surrender en masse - which is a possibility, given the history of the Russian army - it is unlikely that Ukraine will be able to force Russia to withdraw fully from the territories it has occupied in the country's east and south. While the US has committed to upholding Ukraine's territorial integrity, restoring Ukrainian control over these regions seems like a distant goal at best.

Meanwhile, China is the only country that stands to benefit from a protracted conflict. As a recent report by the Washington, DC-based Free Russia Foundation says, China is already the "biggest winner" from the Western sanctions on Russia. China has become Russia's banker and most important trade partner, using the war to implement an energy safety net by securing greater Russian oil and gas supplies that could not be disrupted even if China decided to invade Taiwan.

The more the US is dragged



Brahma Chellaney

**THE US MAY REMAIN THE WORLD'S FOREMOST MILITARY POWER FOR NOW, BUT TAKING ON THE COMBINED FORCE OF CHINA AND RUSSIA WOULD BE A HERCULEAN TASK**



Aakar Patel

**The point is that what is happening around us has been going on for a long time. We, in the thick of it, may not have noticed the water boiling and the temperature rising**

## Sliding All The Way

In 2014 Manmohan Singh said "I sincerely believe it will be disastrous for the country to have Narendra Modi as India's Prime Minister." Four years later he said he recognised his words had been harsh but he added that the "time is not far off" when public at large would have the chance to pronounce on the efficacy or otherwise of public policy which has been put in place by Modiji."

In a matter of days we will enter year 10 of the government and it is a long enough time to judge whether Singh's words were true, partially true or wholly incorrect. A few years ago, when it became apparent to me that enough evidence was in to send down judgement on Narendra Modi's performance as Prime Minister, I began to write a book called "The Price of the Modi Years." It was published in paperback, then republished in hardcover and now is again being published in paperback. One of the things that is required for a new edition is for me to update the chapters, particularly one in which I have compiled some global indices. These measure India's standing on various things before 2014 and after. It will not surprise Modi's critics that India has fallen on most of them (49 out of 53). It will also not surprise his supporters because they believe the world is biased and has an anti-India agenda.

However, having written the book and then having to update it constantly over the years has meant that I have kept in touch with the data and information across a range of subjects. Whether one accepts or rejects the data, one has to engage with it. Saying that it is biased is to run away from it, which is what the government has done. Given the events of this week, I wanted to put in one place all of the material that is linked to democratic freedoms and rights in India as perceived by the external world. This is material compiled by think tanks, some of which are conservative (what is called "right wing") while others are liberal. They have studied and ranked all nations, not just India so it is especially puzzling that one should think they have an India-specific agenda.

The Economist Intelligence Unit, based in London, downgraded India in its Democracy Index in 2020, classifying it as a "flawed democracy." This continues to be the case in the 2022 index. India scores highly on electoral process and even, surprisingly, on pluralism. But it is low on civil liberties and political culture. The index has been around since 2006 and India's score began to slide after 2017.

The Cato Institute, based in Washington, has a Human Freedom Index that measures rule of law, religious freedom, civil liberties and freedom to trade internationally. India's ranking in 2015 was 75, in the 2022 index (which looks at data from 2020) it is ranked 112. The reason is low scores on human freedom and personal freedom. Among the institute's founders is Charles Koch, the Republican Party's donor. Freedom House is a think tank funded by the US government. In its 2014 Freedom in the World report, India was classified as "free" with a rating of 77. The rating is a mix of two things: one is on political rights. India has always scored highly here, including on free and fair elections. The second part is on civil liberties. India scores poorly here, with a decline after 2014. In 2020, India was classified as "partly free" and Kashmir, which is marked separately, as "not free." In 2022, both of these are unchanged and in fact India's score has fallen further.

Civicus is a global alliance of civil society organisations headquartered in Johannesburg, South Africa. Its annual monitor of national civic spaces downgraded India from "obstructed" which it was in 2017 to "repressed" in 2021 and also in 2022. India scored 31/100.

The Bertelsmann Stiftung Political Transformation index is compiled in Gutersloh, Germany. Their concept of democracy goes beyond free elections and political participation. It includes the functioning of the rule of law as well as the acceptance, representation and political culture of the democratic system.

India was ranked 26th in 2015, fell to 34th in 2020 and to 50th in 2022, classified as a "defective democracy." In Economic Transformation, India was 65th, the same as Rwanda.

The University of Gothenburg, Sweden, has produced the Varieties of Democracy index since 1972. It classified India as "electoral autocracy" in 1975 and 1976, during the Emergency. From 1977 to 2016 India was an "electoral democracy." For the last six years it has again been classified as an "electoral autocracy." India is in the bottom 40-50 per cent of the world's nations, clubbed with nations like Nigeria, Serbia, Pakistan and Singapore.

I have not found a single index, whether by a conservative think tank or a liberal one, that says India is more democratic and more free today than it was in 2014. The point is that what is happening around us has been going on for a long time. We, in the thick of it, may not have noticed the water boiling and the temperature rising. But the world has, and it has been warning us for some years now to correct course and move back to the path of democracy and pluralism.

## WISDOM CORNER

- To love oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance. OSCAR WILDE
- The time you enjoy wasting is not wasted time. BERTRAND RUSSELL
- Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes. CARL JUNG

## WORDSWORTH

### Grass roots

In the sense of the rank-and-file membership of an organisation, especially a political party, the Second Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary records it first from McClure's Magazine of July 1912: "From the Roosevelt standpoint, especially, it was a campaign from the 'grass roots up'. The voter was the thing." Searches of electronic databases not available to the compilers of the entry in the 1960s suggest that this is pretty much spot-on. The initial sightings of the phrase all refer to the unsuccessful 1912 presidential campaign by former president Teddy Roosevelt against Woodrow Wilson. It was found in the Evening News of Ada, Oklahoma, dated 26 January: "The Roosevelt Sentiment, as cropping out at Coalgate, was but the forerunner, as it was plain to him, he said, that the grass roots were for the ex-president". It looks as though it was coined by Roosevelt or somebody on his campaign team. In its literal meaning the expression had by then been around for two centuries at least. It had also begun to appear at the start of the twentieth century in a related sense of the source or origin of something or of its fundamentals. Rudyard Kipling is the first writer recorded as using it, in his novel Kim of 1901: "Not till I came to Shamlegh could I meditate upon the Course of Things, or trace the running grass-roots of Evil." It's interesting that the US political examples in the papers of the time were paralleled by others referring to gold mining. A proverbial saying to describe an especially rich strike had it that the site was "gold from the grass roots down". As well as examples in newspapers, it turns up also in Jack London's book Burning Daylight of 1910: "She's a-coming, fellows, gold from the grass roots down, a hundred dollars to the pan, and a stampee in from the Outside fifty thousand strong", and in a poem by Robert W Service called The Cow-Juice Cure. It's impossible to say to what extent this influenced the creation of the political sense. Some writers of the period talked about the need to go "down to the grass roots" to gain support for policies, which suggests that the "fundamentals" sense might also have been in the minds of its coiners.

## SPECTRUM SUSTAINABILITY

# Waking up to the water crisis

The world is becoming accustomed to the drip-drip of catastrophic headlines following each new climate-driven disaster. Increasingly frequent and severe heatwaves are causing wildfires in California and widespread coral die-offs in Australia. Unprecedented floods have wreaked havoc in Pakistan, Germany, China, and New Zealand. Drought in the Horn of Africa is causing famine for millions. And this list could go on.

The common element underlying all these cataclysms is water. From the forced shutdown of nuclear reactors in France to the heavy snowfall that covered large swaths of North America in December, or the recent cholera outbreak in Lebanon, we are witnessing the symptoms of a mounting global water crisis - either too much, too little, or too dirty.

Yet water remains mostly absent from global discussions. While concerns about the geopolitical order, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic have understandably been in the spotlight, water is rarely discussed outside the context of humanitarian responses to local, national, or trans-boundary floods or droughts. This is a major blind spot. In the World Economic Forum's 2023 Global Risks Report, nine of the ten biggest risks for the next decade have a

water-related component.

For at least the last 5,000 years, human communities and civilizations have deliberately regulated water in order to survive. Even today many people see water as a gift from God - or, in more secular terms, as a key part of a universal cycle that demands our respect and appreciation. However, in most places where water is "controlled" through dams and pipes, and made safe and available around the clock, we have come to take it for granted. And when concerns about access to safe water or exposure to extreme weather events are raised, they are generally ignored or treated as a low priority.

This apathy is no longer tenable. The injustices associated with water-driven disasters are growing, and the global water cycle itself is changing. Human freshwater use has exceeded blue-water capacity (rivers, lakes, and aquifers), creating huge risks for everyone and the planet's ecosystems. Around 20% of global water consumption for irrigation now comes from overuse of groundwater sources, and about 10% of the world's food trade comes from non-renewable groundwater.

Climate change is amplifying these challenges. Global warming increases demand for water as temperatures rise and as water requirements for food increase with the decline in relative air humidity. By 2070, two-thirds of the world's land

mass will experience a reduction in terrestrial water storage, and the land area subject to extreme hydrological droughts could more than double to 8%. Southwestern South America, Mediterranean Europe, and North Africa are all projected to suffer unprecedented and extreme drought conditions by 2050.

Only by fundamentally re-examining our relationship with water, reevaluating its many uses, and treating it as a local and global common good can we achieve a safe and just future. As the lead experts at the Global Commission on the Economics of Water, we see three areas that require transformation. First, we must consider the entire water cycle and how it is connected with biodiversity, the climate, human well-being, and ecosystem health - all key factors in socioeconomic and ecological prosperity. That means "connecting the dots" and promoting resilient relationships between water and food, water and energy, and water and the environment.

Second, water and the water cycle must be governed as global common goods. The ongoing proliferation of water crises calls for a new economic framework based on a systems approach to the water cycle, societies, and economies. We must develop a better understanding of existing "lock-ins" (including property rights, bilateral treaties,

and corruption) and other structural challenges that impede water reallocation for the common good.

Moreover, an inclusive interdisciplinary framework - with a portfolio of new instruments and metrics - is needed to manage the systemic risks associated with the water cycle and its alteration by humans. Creating such a framework must begin by acknowledging water's central role in driving economic, sociocultural, and environmental change. Lastly we must bring everyone into the decision-making process - starting with marginalised communities - to develop new strategies for properly valuing water. When nature and freshwater are not valued in the marketplace, we still pay a price for their misuse, which increases dramatically when we cross planetary boundaries.

Confronted with the world water crisis, we can either embark on a sustainable and just pathway or carry on with business as usual. The survival of human civilization as we know it demands that we make the right choice.

*Quentin Grafton is Professor of Economics at Australian National University. Joyeeta Gupta is a member of Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences at University of Amsterdam.*

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Quentin Grafton & Joyeeta Gupta

**WE ARE WITNESSING THE SYMPTOMS OF A MOUNTING GLOBAL WATER CRISIS - EITHER TOO MUCH, TOO LITTLE, OR TOO DIRTY**

## Death penalty debate

Sir, What is the most efficient method of enforcing death penalty? The Supreme Court sparked such a debate by asking the government to hold a discussion on the issue, which is always necessary in a civilised society. However, this is a complicated issue because determining the method of capital punishment is considered the responsibility of the legislature rather than the judiciary. Perhaps therefore the Supreme Court has stated unequivocally that it will not issue an order addressing the method of determining the death penalty. However, this question is necessary to determine whether the current method of imposing a death sentence meets legal and constitutional requirements. The current method of hanging was last upheld by the Supreme Court in 1983, but the issue must be revisited considering scientific and technological advances since then. This need is confirmed when we look at the situation in other countries around the world. In fact, there is a debate about whether the death penalty should exist at all. Most of the world's countries have given up on it. The argument is that the purpose of punishment should not be to inflict pain on the offender, but to provide an opportunity for reformation. If a criminal cannot be reformed and his presence in society endangers others, he can be imprisoned until the end of his life. However, when punishment is administered, it must be administered in such a way that human dignity is not violated in any way.

Abhijit Roy, JAMSHEDPUR

## Digital economy

Sir, India has made impressive strides in recent years towards creating a digital economy, with a rapid increase in internet users anticipated to reach 974 million by 2025, encouraged by the government's Digital India plan. This initiative aims to connect the entire country through high-speed internet, provide government services online, and promote e-commerce. The government has launched various initiatives, including the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), Aadhaar, digital signatures, e-contracts, and e-invoicing, to promote digital payments and digitise the economy. Further, India's digital economy growth is driven by a thriving startup ecosystem, which is the third-largest in the world, focusing on digital technologies such as AI, blockchain, and IoT, creating new business models, and disrupting traditional industries. India's progress in building a digital economy is promising, but challenges remain, such as improving digital infrastructure, addressing the digital divide, and ensuring data privacy and security.

Krishna Kumar Vepakomma, HYDERABAD

# Letters

## TO THE EDITOR

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

## OrissaPOST

B-15, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

# national

## of the day quote

In this year alone, so far 28 fishermen and four fishing boats have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy. It is highly disheartening to note that our fishermen are facing harassment at the hands of the Sri Lankan Navy at an alarming frequency

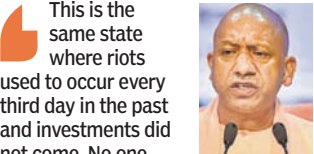
M K STALIN | TN CM

Today there is pressure on Judiciary, pressure on Election Commissions, ED, Income Tax, CBI, which are premium agencies and their credibility used to be huge, are being misused. When such an atmosphere prevails, such rulings are made...every ruling is influenced

ASHOK GEHLOT | RAJASTHAN CM

This is the same state where riots used to occur every third day in the past and investments did not come. No one thought the situation of Uttar Pradesh would ever improve but change is now visible in every part of the state

YOGI ADITYANATH | UP CM



Today there is pressure on Judiciary, pressure on Election Commissions, ED, Income Tax, CBI, which are premium agencies and their credibility used to be huge, are being misused. When such an atmosphere prevails, such rulings are made...every ruling is influenced

ASHOK GEHLOT | RAJASTHAN CM

## SHORT TAKES

### Couple detained

**Jammu:** The Jammu and Kashmir Police on Saturday detained a couple for alleged links with one of the aides of radical outfit 'Waris Punjab De' chief, Amritpal Singh. Police said that the couple was detained from R.S. Pura area of Jammu district. "Amrik Singh and his wife, Paramjit Kour were detained and handed over to Punjab Police. They have been detained for having reported links with Papalpreet Singh, a close aide of Amritpal Singh," the police said.

### 1 killed, 4 injured

**Samba/Jammu:** A person was killed and four others were injured in a blast that took place in a scrap factory in Jammu and Kashmir's Samba district Saturday, official sources said. The factory was located in the Baribrahmana area, they said. Those injured have been hospitalised.

### Minor girl dies

**Ramnagar (Karnataka):** A minor girl died in Karnataka's Ramnagar district after she was raped, police said Saturday, adding that the accused has been arrested. The incident took place at the Tataguni village in the outskirts of Bangalore.

### Two arrested

**Panaji:** Two hotel staffers were arrested in North Goa district Saturday for allegedly assaulting a Russian woman tourist with the intention of robbing her, police said. The incident took place at a hotel in Morjim on Friday, said an official of Pernem police station. As per the complaint filed by Aigul Davletianova (30), two unknown men entered her hotel room around 3 pm when she was sleeping.

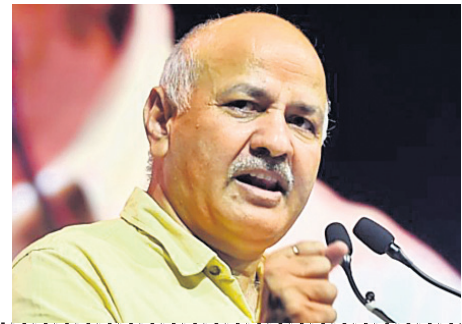


Unless and until opposition parties don't come together, I don't think there is going to be a formidable opposition to the BJP. (But), are they in a position to come together with this ED, NIA and other agencies at their throat? Look at Akhilesh Yadav, Mayawati. They are not saying anything. Why are they silent?

MEHBOOBA MUFTI | PDP CHIEF

## HEARING ADJOURNED

A Delhi court Saturday adjourned till April 5 the hearing on the bail plea of AAP leader Manish Sisodia, who has been arrested by the ED in a money-laundering case arising out of the excise policy matter



Congress women leaders shout slogans during a protest against the disqualification of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, in Kochi



Congress workers raise slogans during a protest against the Union Government over disqualification of Rahul Gandhi, in New Delhi



Security personnel detain Youth Congress supporters during a protest against the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi, in Kolkata

# CBI grills Tejashwi, ED quizzes Misa

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 25: Investigation agencies Saturday questioned Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav and his MP sister Misa Bharti in connection with the railways land-for-jobs scam case here, officials said.

While Yadav was quizzed by the CBI for more than eight hours, the ED questioned Bharti for over six hours, they said. Slamming the BJP over the questioning of the two Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leaders, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra alleged the ruling party wants to finish off the Opposition and democracy and also expressed solidarity saying, "We are all united against the attack on democracy."

In a tweet in Hindi, she said, "BJP wants to finish off the Opposition and democracy from this country. That is why it is continuously attacking the voice of the people in the Opposition."

Yadav had missed three earlier dates given by the agency and arrived at the CBI headquarters here around 10:30 am according to his commitment to the Delhi High Court last week, they said.

He was questioned till around 8 PM with a nearly 90-minute lunch break, during which he went out of the building, they said. The CBI's line of inquiry was believed to have focused on Yadav's financial transactions, including his purported links to AB Exports Private Limited and AK Infosystems Pvt Ltd.

Last week, the CBI assured the Delhi High Court that Yadav would not be arrested this month. Bharti was questioned by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the railways land-for-jobs linked money laundering case here, officials said.

The Rajya Sabha member went



Following necessary formalities, Tejashwi was escorted to the investigating team which questioned him till around 8 pm with a nearly 90-minute lunch break

Tejashwi had missed three earlier dates given by the agency and arrived at the CBI headquarters at around 10:30 am according to his commitment to the Delhi High Court last week

to the agency's office in central Delhi around 11 am and exited around 7 pm.

She left for lunch for over an hour in the noon during which she told waiting reporters outside the ED office that the proceedings were "confidential" and hence she would not want to comment.

It is understood that her statement was recorded by the investigating officer under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Yadav's counsel, Maninder Singh, had informed the high court that he would require some time to appear before the CBI investigators due to the ongoing Bihar Assembly session, scheduled to conclude on April 5.

The CBI's counsel, D P Singh, had argued that the assembly was not convened on Saturdays and Yadav could appear before the agency on any Saturday in March according to his convenience.

# No confrontation with judiciary: Rijiju

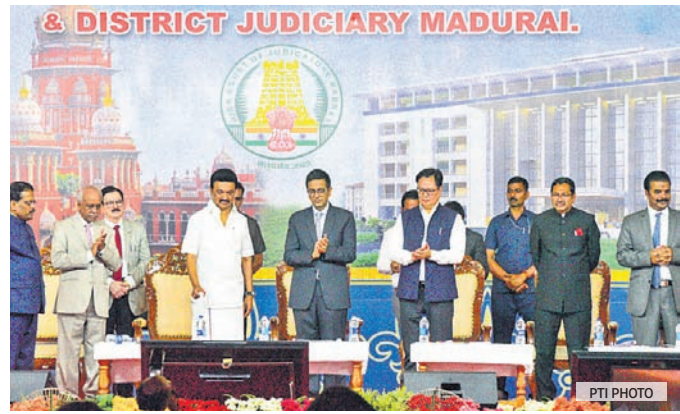
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Madurai (TN), March 25: Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud Saturday flagged the "abysmal" women-to-men ratio in the legal profession and called for ensuring equal opportunities for women, asserting that there was no dearth of young, talented women lawyers.

He was speaking at an event held here to mark the foundation-stone-laying ceremony for the Additional Court Buildings in the District Court campus and the inauguration of the District and Sessions Court and that of the Court of the Chief Judicial Magistrate at Mayiladuthurai.

The event was attended by Union Law Minister Kiren Rijiju and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin, among others. Rijiju touched upon the alleged disagreements between the government and the judiciary and said it didn't mean that there was a confrontation between them.

Rijiju, in his address, denied any clash between the government and judiciary as speculated in the media, and said that disagreements were inevitable in a democracy but they should not be construed as confrontation. "We have differences, but it doesn't mean there is confrontation. It sends a



Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, Union Minister of Law and Justice Kiren Rijiju and Tamil Nadu CM MK Stalin during the foundation stone laying ceremony of Additional Court Buildings in the District Court campus, in Madurai

wrong message across the world. I want to make it clear that there is no problem between different organs of the state. There are signs of robust democratic actions, which are not a crisis," he emphasised.

Pointing to some media reports of alleged disagreements between the government and the Supreme Court, or the legislature and judiciary, the Union Minister said, "We must understand that we are in a democracy. There are bound to be certain differences in terms of some outlook but you can't have conflicting positions. This doesn't mean

confrontation. We are the largest democracy in the world."

In his address, Justice Chandrachud said recruiting chambers were being "sceptical" about employing women, assuming that their "familial" responsibilities would come in the way of their profession. Citing the "abysmal" women-to-men ratio in the legal profession, Justice Chandrachud said, "Statistics inform us that for 50,000 male enrolments in Tamil Nadu, there are only 5,000 female enrolments."

"The legal profession is not an equal-opportunity provider for

women, and the statistics are the same all over the country," he said. "The phase is changing. In the recent recruitment in the district judiciary, over 50 per cent are women. But we have to create equal opportunities for women so that they do not fall by the wayside because of the fact that they undertake multifold responsibilities as they progress in life." Chambers are sceptical about recruiting young women advocates. The reason for that is not a lack of young talented women," he said.

## Congress to observe day-long 'Satyagrah' across country today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 25: The Congress will organise a day-long 'Satyagrah' Sunday in solidarity with Rahul Gandhi in front of Gandhi statues at all states and district headquarters to protest against his disqualification from the Lok Sabha.

The Satyagrah will begin at 10 AM and end at 5 PM. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will stage the Satyagrah at Raj Ghat in the national capital.

The party feels that Rahul Gandhi's conviction and disqualification, which it has alleged was done in reaction to his consistently questioning the relationship between PM Narendra Modi and businessman Gautam Adani, poses a serious threat to the world's largest democracy.

The Congress has said that Rahul Gandhi is not alone and millions of congressmen and people irrespective of their political affiliations will join him in this fight for truth and justice. To this end, all Pradesh Congress Committees have been asked to organise a one-day Satyagrah in front of Gandhi statues in all State and District Headquarters from 10 am to 5 pm Sunday.



Tourists visit Taj Mahal in Agra

## KARNATAKA POLLS

### Siddaramaiah, Shivakumar figure in first list of candidates



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore, March 25: Congress State unit president D K Shivakumar and Legislature Party leader Siddaramaiah, who are Chief Ministerial aspirants in the event of the party coming to power in Karnataka, are among the prominent leaders who figure in the first list of candidates for the Assembly polls, due by May, announced Saturday.

While Shivakumar is predictably contesting from Kanakapura, Siddaramaiah is returning to his home turf of Varuna in Mysuru district, which is currently represented by his son Yathindra Siddaramaiah. Yathindra's name does not figure for any other segment in the first list of 124 candidates.

Siddaramaiah, however said, he wants to contest from two seats. "I had said, it is left for the high command to decide (regarding the constituency). High command has asked me to contest from Varuna. I have said, I will contest from two constituencies, from Kolar and here, again it is left to the high command," Siddaramaiah said. Speaking to reporters here, he said, his son Yathindra will not be contesting from any constituency.

Siddaramaiah who currently represents Badami in Bagalkote district, had earlier announced that he will be contesting from Kolar; but backtracked after party leadership reportedly cautioned him regarding the "risks" fighting from there.

# Courts need to double pace to clear backlog in a year: Report

TO CLEAR THE BACKLOG IN A YEAR, THEY NEED TO DISPOSE OF 245 CASES A DAY, ACCORDING TO THE 'STATE OF INDIA'S ENVIRONMENT REPORT' RELEASED THURSDAY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 25: While courts in India disposed of 130 environmental crime cases a day in 2021, they need to nearly double the speed to be able to clear the backlog in a year; a new report by the Centre for Science and Environment said.

Courts disposed of 47,316 cases

(around 130 cases a day) in 2021, but 89,305 cases were still pending at the end of the year. To clear the backlog in a year, they need to dispose of 245 cases a day, according to the 'State of India's Environment Report' released Thursday.

The report said there has been a 4 per cent increase in the number of environmental crimes in the country between 2020 and 2021



but courts are disposing of cases at a rate much lower than required, "leading to pile-ups and delays". The think tank said India logged

64,471 environment-related crimes in 2021. A total of 59,220 went to trial, taking the total number of under-trial cases to 1,36,621 (including

77,401 cases pending from 2020). The report said around 19,000 cases registered under the Indian Forest Act (IFA), 1927 and the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 are pending and it will take courts 14 years and 11 months to dispose of them at the current rate.

Similarly, around 2,000 cases registered under the Environment Protection Act (EPA), 1986 are pending and it will take around 38 years and 9 months to clear them at the current rate, it said. Around 3,750 cases registered under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 are pending and the time required to dispose of them at the current rate is around 12 years.

The environment ministry has proposed to amend the EPA to decriminalise its existing provisions to "weed out fear of imprisonment for simple violations". Amendments have been proposed to decriminalise violations of the Air Act of 1981, and the Water Act of 1974.

It has proposed to amend the IFA to replace a jail term of six months with Rs 500 for illegal trespassing and tree cutting in forests. Experts and activists have opposed the ministry's proposal to decriminalise these laws, arguing that no environmental violation can be considered "simple" as it immediately impacts the human body.

# K'taka abolishes 4% quota for minorities, puts them under EWS

Defending the decision to abolish the quota for Muslims, Bommai said there was no constitutional provision for religious minorities

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bangalore, March 25:** The Karnataka government has announced its decision to scrap the four per cent quota for minorities and add it to the existing quota of two dominant communities of the poll-bound state.

The 4 per cent reservation given to Muslims under 2B classification of the OBC category will now be divided into two equal parts and added to the existing quota of Vokkaligas and Lingayats for whom two new reservation categories of 2C and 2D were created during the Belagavi Assembly Session last year.

The Cabinet decided to bring the religious minorities under the EWS category. The decision comes ahead of the Assembly elections.

Briefing reporters after the Cabinet meeting Friday, Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai said the religious minorities quota would be done away with and brought under the 10 per cent pool of the EWS category without any change of condition.

The four per cent (reservation for minorities) will be divided into two between 2C and 2D. The four per cent reservation for the Vokkaligas and others will be enhanced to six per cent and Veerashaiva Panchamasali and others (Lingayats), who are getting five per cent reservation will now get seven per cent, the CM explained.

The Cabinet had abolished 3A and 3B categories of reservation for Vokkaligas and Lingayats respectively and replaced them with two new categories of 2C and 2D last December.

Defending the decision to abolish the quota for Muslims, Bommai said there was no constitutional provision for religious minorities.

Citing a court verdict striking down the reservation provided for minorities in Andhra Pradesh, the CM said the architect of the Indian Constitution BR Ambedkar too had said that reservations were for caste.

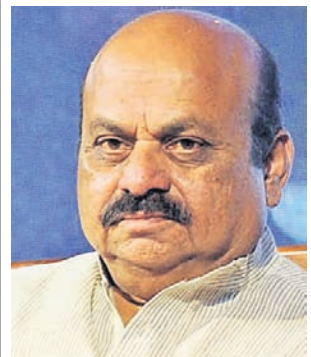
"However, we cannot drop that community entirely. With a view that there should not be any problem, the religious minorities...If someone challenges reservation to them, we decided to take a proactive decision. In fact they will go from 4 per cent to the 10 per cent pool of the EWS group without any change of condition," Bommai explained.

Muslims are divided into three reservation categories - 1, 2A and 2B.

The extremely backward religious minorities, who form the sub-sections of Muslims such as Pinjara, Nadaf, Daroji, Chapparbhand and are enlisted in category 1, will remain undisturbed and in the same reservation list.

Similarly, the government did not touch the Muslim communities under 2A category.

Some other Muslim sub-sections in the 2B category will not be dis-



MUSLIM LEADERS FUME

The Karnataka government's decision to remove Muslims from the 2B category of Other Backward Classes, which gave them four per cent reservation, has come under fire from leaders of the Muslim community who say they will challenge the move in court. Muslim leaders called it a "grave injustice meted out to them".

turbed. They will only be moved to the EWS quota on the same conditions, Bommai said.

There are some more small backward communities, who find mention in the Backward Commission's report.

"They never figured in any list including the backward list. They are not in any category. Regarding them, the Backward Commission has mentioned in its second list. I will study the report in detail. Our government will take further decision on it in the coming cabinet."

Already, a recommendation has been sent to the Centre to include two shepherd communities 'Kadu Kuruba' and 'Gonda Kuruba' spread over four districts in the ST category.

Further, the Union government has made some references to two to three communities including Kadu Gollaru and Koli communities seeking the opinion of the department.

Bommai also said that the government will notify the communities under the EWS category.

Also, a decision was taken with regard to the SC community that 6 per cent reservation would be given to SC left sub-category, 5.5 per cent to SC right, 4.5 per cent to touchables and 1 per cent to others.

Hailing the announcement, Adichunchanagiri Math pontiff and Vokkaliga leader Nirmalanandanatha Swami said the demand was made for 12 per cent reservation keeping in view the condition of the community.

"Given the situation, the government has increased the reservation from four per cent to six per cent for which we thank the government. We welcome the move," he said.

The Panchamasali community of the Lingayat sect and the Vokkaligas have been demanding a hike in reservation for quite a long time.

# Modi launches Metro line, takes a ride with staff

THE INAUGURATION COMES WEEKS BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS THAT ARE DUE BY MAY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bangalore, March 25:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi Saturday inaugurated the 13.71 km Whitefield (Kadugodi)-to-Krishnarajapuram Metro Line here, which has 12 stations and was built at a cost of Rs 4,249 crore.

He also took a ride on the newly-inaugurated Metro and interacted with people from different walks of life, including staff and workers of the metro, during his journey.

The inauguration comes weeks before the Assembly elections that are due by May.

Upon arriving at Whitefield

(Kadugodi) Metro station, the Prime Minister first purchased a ticket at the ticket counter, as a common passenger would, and then took a walkthrough of an exhibition put up on the occasion.

The Prime Minister then unveiled the plaque to mark the inauguration and proceeded towards the platform to board the train.

He was accompanied by Karnataka Governor Thaaawarchand Gehlot and Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai, among others.

Officials said this section, which comprises 12 stations, was the eastern extension to the opera-



tional East-West Corridor (Purple Line) from Baiyappanahalli to Whitefield Station.

Out of the 15.81 km extension under construction, the 13.71 km section from KR Puram to Whitefield was inaugurated Saturday, they said, adding that it would cut down journey time on this route by 40 per cent and reduce road traffic congestion.

The new line of the Bangalore Metro would benefit five lakh to six lakh Bengalurians working in tech parks, export promotion industrial areas, malls, hospitals and several Fortune 500 companies, it was noted.

# G20 delegates reach Arunachal Pradesh amid warm welcome

AGENCIES

**Itanagar, March 25:** Delegates from G20 member countries, guest countries and international organisations have arrived in the Land of Dawn-lit Mountains, Arunachal Pradesh to participate in the G20 meeting at the state capital Saturday.

Upon their arrival at the Donyi Polo Airport, Itanagar, the delegates were accorded a warm and traditional welcome by the cultural troupes and senior state government officials.

The delegates are on a two-day visit to Itanagar for the G20 meeting on Research and Innovation Initiative Gathering (RIIG). They will witness an exhibition and cultural programme at the Golden Jubilee Banquet Hall here and will later visit the Itanagar Gumpa and JN State Museum.

Taking to his Twitter handle, Chief Minister Pema Khandu wrote: "We're all excited for today's G20 Group meeting. It's a milestone moment for Arunachal Pradesh, which will herald a new



dawn in our efforts towards achieving the goal of 'Sarvashreshth Bharat' following the spirit of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'.

"One Earth, One Family, One Future" resolve is all set to get a big boost at today's G20 meeting. Esteemed delegates will deliberate upon multiple aspects of research and innovation to make the planet a better and more inclusive place to live. Wish them a pleasant stay!" Khandu tweeted.

State Assembly Speaker Pasang Dorjee Sona wrote on Twitter: "Greetings and a warm welcome

to all the G20 delegates to Itanagar! It is indeed a great privilege for us to host such a prestigious event, and we are honored to have all of you here with us. Let's work together to address the challenges facing our global community."

Expressing his feelings, Deputy Chief Minister Chowma Mein said, "Arunachal Pradesh will showcase our rich cultures, unique handlooms & handicrafts and scientific innovations during the Research Innovation Initiative Gathering (RIIG) of G20 Summit delegates at Itanagar."



ANIMAL ATTIRE: Artistes dressed as tiger perform during the Habba festival, at Cubbon Park in Bangalore, Saturday

# 'Bharat Gaurav' train explores beauty of NE region

AGENCIES

**Guwahati, March 25:** The Bharat Gaurav Deluxe AC tourist train taking travellers on a specially designed "North East Discovery: Beyond Guwahati" was flagged off from here Friday for its onward journey to Naharlagun in Arunachal Pradesh.

The train, specially designed tour to cover the North-eastern states of India, had arrived here Thursday as its first destination after it began its journey from Delhi's Safdarjung station March 21.

The train was virtually flagged off by Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh Pema Khandu and Union Minister of State for Railways, Coal and Mines, Rao Saheb Patil Danve, an official release said Saturday.

Bharat Gaurav is the first such tourism special train for the north-eastern states and it is in line with the Government of India's initiative 'Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat' and 'Dekho Apna Desh' to promote domestic tourism, the release added.

Travelling roughly 5,800 km over 14 nights and 15 days, the train's first



stop is Guwahati where tourists visited the Kamakhya temple followed by the Umananda Temple and a sunset cruise on the Brahmaputra.

The train will then depart for an overnight journey to Naharlagun railway station, which is 30 km from the next destination Itanagar, the capital of Arunachal Pradesh.

The next city to follow is Sivasagar - the old capital of the Ahom Kingdom in eastern Assam.

The famous Shiva temple at Sivasagar; Sivadol, is part of the itinerary besides other heritage sites.

The tea gardens at Jorhat and an overnight stay at Kaziranga will be followed by an early morning jungle safari at the Kaziranga National Park.

The tourists travelling in the train would be able to see Tripura's famous heritage site of Unakoti, the famed Ujjayanta Palace in Agartala, water palace Neermahal and

Tripura Sundari temple in Sepahijala and Gomati districts, respectively.

Post Tripura, the train will move to Dimapur in Nagaland. The scenic surroundings between Badarpur and Lumding can be witnessed by the passengers in the early hours of the morning from their seats.

From Dimapur station, the tourists will be taken to Kohima by bus for visiting the local sites, including a tour of the Khonoma village to experience the Naga way of life.

The next halt will be Guwahati from where the tourists will be taken to Shillong by road with a pit stop at the Umiam Lake.

The next day will start with an excursion to Cherrapunji nestled in the East Khasi Hills. Shillong Peak, Elephant falls, Nawkhalikai falls and Mawmsai caves are part of the day's sightseeing schedule.

Northeast Frontier Railway's (NFR) Chief PRO Sabyasachi De said that from Cherrapunji, the tourists would travel back to Guwahati to board the train for the return journey to reach Delhi's Safdarjung station.

# Army's 'Purvottar Bharat Parikrama' to reach out to people in Northeast

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Kolkata/Guwahati, March 25:** The Indian Army has begun a 20-day-long pan-Northeast car rally 'Purvottar Bharat Parikrama' to reach out to the youth, freedom fighters, gallantry award winners besides common people in the northeastern region, an official said.

On the eve of Shaheed Diwas in remembrance of and as a tribute to the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for their beliefs and principles, Army's Eastern Command chief Lt Gen Rana Pratap Kalita flagged off the Purvottar Bharat Parikrama, a trans-Eastern Command car rally in Fort Williams, Kolkata. It was March 23, 1931, when three bravehearts - Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev sacrificed their lives for India's Independence.

Defence spokesman Lt. Col. Mahendra Rawat said that the 20-day long car rally would cover a total distance of around 4,000



security, peace and development in the northeast and as a result of it, the region is now rapidly heading on the path of peace and development.

He expressed gratitude to the prime minister for bringing positive change in the lives of the people of the northeast and connecting the region with the "hearts of the rest of India". "Congratulations to our sisters and brothers of the Northeast on this momentous occasion," Shah said.

The AFSPA gives armed forces personnel, operating in disturbed areas, sweeping powers to search, arrest, and to open fire if they deem it necessary for the maintenance of public order. An area or district is notified as a disturbed area under the AFSPA to facilitate the operations of the armed forces.

In Assam, the disturbed area notification has been in force since 1990. Officials said as a result of the remarkable improvement in the security situation during the Modi government's rule, the disturbed area tag, imposed under the AFSPA,

been limited to only eight districts in Assam.

In Manipur, except the Imphal municipality area, the entire state was declared a "disturbed area" in 2004 and it has been in force since then. On April 1, 2022, 15 police station areas of six districts were freed from the ambit of the AFSPA.

Now, with the removal of the AFSPA from areas falling under four other police station areas with effect from April 1, 2023, the disturbed area tag was removed from a total of 19 police station areas in seven districts of the state, the officials said.

The AFSPA has been in force in Nagaland since 1995. It was removed from 15 police station areas of seven districts from April 1, 2022. Following a recommendation of a government-appointed committee, the AFSPA was removed from three other police station areas with effect from April 1, 2023, the officials said. With this, the disturbed area tag has been removed from a total of 18 police station areas in eight districts of Nagaland.



km across eight northeastern states - Sikkim, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram and Meghalaya navigating through extreme terrain to include Nathula in Sikkim, Se-la tunnel and Bum-la in Arunachal Pradesh, the War memorial at Kohima and many historical locations.

He said that Purvottar Bharat Parikrama is part of 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', the year-long Platinum Jubilee of India's

Independence, showcasing the country's journey and the achievements of her people over the past 75 years.

The car rally aims to strengthen nationalism and motivate youth to join the Indian Army. The initiative would serve as a unique platform to showcase the cultural diversity of the northeastern region, encourage tourism and strengthen the bond between the people of the eight states and the rest of the country, Lt. Col. Rawat said.





# international

## of the day quote

All of humanity's hopes for the future depend, in some way, on charting a new course to sustainably manage and conserve water

ANTONIO GUTERRES | SECRETARY-GENERAL, UN

With growing competition, including from an increasingly assertive China, there's no doubt why we turn to each other now, to build up a North American market, on everything from semiconductors to solar panel batteries

JUSTIN TRUDEAU | PM, CANADA

We have found an agreement with Germany on the future use of e-fuels in cars

FRANS TIMMERMANS | VP, EU COMMISSION

## SHORT TAKES

### Garcetti sworn in

Washington: Eric Garcetti, the former Mayor of Los Angeles, was officially sworn in as the US Ambassador to India Friday by Vice President Kamala Harris during a ceremonial event here. The US Senate confirmed Garcetti's nomination earlier this month, ending a protracted hiatus of over two years to fill the key diplomatic position. Garcetti's nomination was pending before the US Congress since July 2021 when he was nominated by President Joe Biden. "I cannot wait to serve," Garcetti said, when asked about his new diplomatic assignment. Garcetti, 52, was not confirmed by the Senate in President Biden's first two years in office amid concerns by some lawmakers that he had not adequately handled allegations of sexual assault and harassment against a former senior adviser.

### LGBTQ dating app warns Egypt users

Cairo: A popular gay social networking application said Friday that it is issuing a warning to its users in Egypt, as police impersonate community members to target LGBTQ individuals. Users in Egypt will see the following warning appear in Arabic and English when they open the app: "We have been alerted that Egyptian police is actively making arrests of gay, bi, and trans people on digital platforms. They are using fake accounts and have also taken over accounts from real community members who have already been arrested and had their phones taken. Please take extra caution online and offline, including with accounts that may have seemed legitimate in the past." Egypt, though it technically does not outlaw homosexuality, frequently prosecutes members of the LGBTQ community on the grounds of "debauchery," or "violating public decency."



**IN SOLIDARITY:** A large number of Indian-Americans waving the tri-colour held a peace rally in front of the Indian Consulate in San Francisco to express solidarity with India following the vandalism at the facility by Khalistan supporters early this week

## US warns Iran after tit-for-tat air strikes in Syria kill 19

ONE OF THE DEADLIEST EXCHANGES BETWEEN THE US AND IRAN-ALIGNED FORCES IN YEARS



REUTERS

Washington, March 25: President Joe Biden Friday warned Iran that the United States would "act forcefully" to protect Americans, after the US military carried out air strikes against Iran-backed forces in retaliation for an attack in Syria. The death toll in US air strikes on pro-Iran installations in eastern Syria has risen to 19 fighters, a Syrian war monitor said Saturday, in the latest tit-for-tat strike between Iran-backed forces and US personnel in Syria. That comes on top of seven casualties Thursday, which Washington blamed on a drone of Iranian origin, and included an American contractor being killed and five US troops and another contractor being wounded. Suspected US rocket fire Friday targeted new areas in eastern Syria, according to two local sources, with no casualties reported. Pro-Iranian forces in Syria said in an online statement late Friday that they have a "long arm" to respond to further US strikes on their positions.

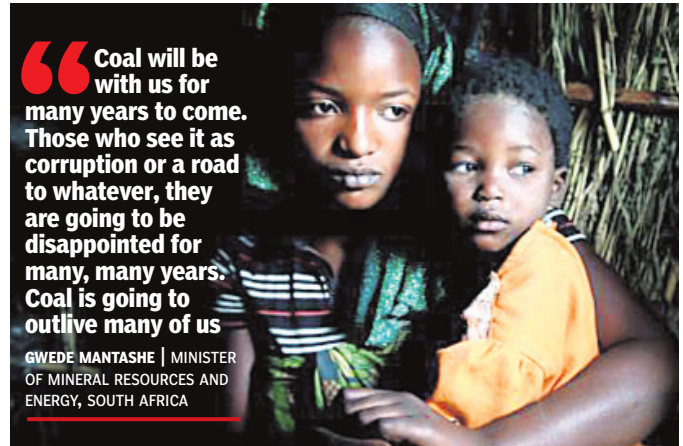
The violence could further aggravate already strained relations between Washington and Tehran, as attempts to revive a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and major powers stalled, and Iranian drones being used by Russia against Ukraine. Although US forces stationed in Syria have been attacked with drones before, deaths are rare. "Make no mistake: the United States does not ... seek conflict with Iran, but be prepared for us to act forcefully to protect our people," Biden told reporters during a visit to Canada. Asked whether there should be a higher cost for Iran, Biden replied: "We're not going to stop." The Pentagon had said US F-15 jets Thursday attacked two facilities used by groups affiliated with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the war in Syria, said the US strikes had killed eight pro-Iranian fighters. Meanwhile Iran's state Press TV said no Iranians had been killed.

## African nations lurk in dark

THE ELECTRICITY SHORTAGES THAT PLAGUE MANY OF AFRICA'S 54 COUNTRIES ARE A SERIOUS DRAIN ON THE CONTINENT'S ECONOMIC GROWTH

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Johannesburg, March 25: From Zimbabwe, where many must work at night because it's the only time there is power, to Nigeria where collapses of the grid are frequent, the reliable supply of electricity remains elusive across Africa. In recent years South Africa's power generation has become so inadequate that the continent's most developed economy must cope with rolling power blackouts of eight to 10 hours per day. Africa's sprawling cities have erratic supplies of electricity but large swaths of the continent's rural areas have no power at all. In 2021, 43 per cent of Africans — about 600 million people — lacked access to electricity with 590 million of them in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the International Energy Agency. Investments of nearly \$20 billion are required annually to achieve universal electrification across sub-Saharan Africa, according to World Bank estimates. Of that figure nearly \$10 billion is needed annually bring power and keep it on in West and Central Africa. The Western powers vowed to make \$8.5 billion available to help South Africa move away from its coal-fired power plants, which produce 80 per cent of the country's power. As a result of its dependence upon coal, South Africa is among the top 20 highest emitters of planet-warming greenhouse gases in the world and accounts for nearly a third of all of Africa's emissions, according to experts. South Africa's plan to move away from coal, however, is hampered by its pressing need to produce as much power as possible each day. The East African nation of Uganda for years has also grappled with power cuts despite massive investment in electricity generation. Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, has grappled with an inadequate power supply for many years, generating just 4,000 megawatts though the population of more than 210 million people needs 30,000 megawatts, say experts. The oil-rich but energy-poor West African nation has ramped up investments in the power sector but endemic corruption and mismanagement have resulted in little gains. In Zimbabwe, electricity shortages that have plagued the country for years have worsened as the state authority that manages Kariba, the country's biggest dam, has limited power generation due to low water levels. Zimbabwe's coal-fired power stations that also provide some electricity have become unreliable due to aging infrastructure marked by frequent breakdowns. The country's solar potential is yet to be fully developed to meaningfully augment supply. **NEGLECTED COMMUNITY** There are many reasons for Africa's dire delivery of electricity including ageing infrastructure, lack of government oversight and a shortage of skills to maintain the national grids, according to



Coal will be with us for many years to come. Those who see it as corruption or a road to whatever, they are going to be disappointed for many, many years. Coal is going to outlive many of us

GWEDÉ MANTASHE | MINISTER OF MINERAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY, SOUTH AFRICA

**UNIFIED NORDIC AIR DEFENCE**  
Air force commanders from Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark said they have signed a letter of intent to create a unified Nordic air defence aimed at countering the rising threat from Russia. The intention is to be able to operate jointly based on already known ways of operating under NATO



## Pro-Khalistanis take stir to London's Parl Square

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London, March 25: A small group of protesters carrying pro-Khalistan flags and banners in support of Khalistani leader Amritpal Singh gathered at Parliament Square here Saturday, as part of similar protests in Canada and the US. Banners for the so-called "Protest against the discriminatory actions by Indian police forces against Bhai Amritpal Singh and other innocent Sikhs" had been circulating on social media, along with similar protests called in the cities of Toronto, Vancouver, Indianapolis and Fresno. The protest in London comes days after a planned demonstration outside the Indian High Commission in London Wednesday when protesters hurled coloured flares and water bottles towards the mission. They have since taken to social media to allege that the objects were hurled by the Indian mission instead, allegations which have been countered by India House. It comes in the wake of violent disorder at the Indian mission last Sunday, when pro-Khalistan extremists smashed windows and also attempted to pull down the Tricolour from its flagpole at the mission. India has registered a strong protest with the UK government and the issue was also raised in the House of Commons earlier this week. "We strongly condemn the vandalism and violent acts that took place outside the Indian High Commission in London. It was a completely unacceptable action against the High Commission and its staff," Leader of the Commons Penny Mordaunt told MPs. "There is ongoing work with the Metropolitan Police to review the protection measures around the High Commission, and any changes will be made to ensure the safety and security of its staff so that they can go about their business, serving both this country and India," she said. It followed UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly's statement to condemn the unacceptable acts of violence and an assurance to conduct a security review at the Indian mission in London.

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## 'I applaud China': Biden's latest gaffe at Canadian Parl

The 80-year-old US president who is standing for his next run in 2024 confused Canada with China, giving his rivals another chance to question his credibility for the position

AGENCIES

Ottawa, March 25: Gaffe-prone US President Joe Biden Friday mistakenly praised China while delivering a speech to the Canadian parliament during his speech about Canadian immigration policies. In the video of the speech which has been widely shared on social media, Joe Biden was heard saying, "In the United States we're expanding legal pathways for migration to seek safety on a humanitarian basis, while discouraging unlawful migration that feeds exploitation and human trafficking." "So today I applaud

China for stepping up," he added. Correcting himself he said, "Excuse me, Canada. I applaud Canada...you can tell what I am thinking about China, we won't get into that yet." Members of the Canadian parliament burst into laughter as US President continued his speech. According to New York Post, he mixed up the two countries as he praised Canada for agreeing to accept 15,000 more migrants per year from Latin American countries in exchange for the US consenting to Canadian efforts to deport those caught sneaking illegally into Canada.



Sharing the clip on Twitter, US Congressman Byron Donalds wrote, "Gaffe or Freudian slip? Biden 'accidentally' praises China when addressing the Canadian Parliament. China is on his mind,

Today, I applaud China for stepping up. Excuse me, I applaud Canada... You can tell what I'm thinking - about China. I won't get into that yet

JOE BIDEN | PRESIDENT, US

and the @HouseGOP knows why." Donald Trump's son and the Executive Vice President of the Trump Organisation, Eric Trump, also shared the clip on social media. "What an embarrassment to the United States of America," he said. As per the outlet, Biden also made a similar gaffe later in the day at a press conference. He was discussing China's relationship with Russia, but caught himself mid-word at "Japa..." Notably, Biden was on a two-

day visit to Ottawa for talks with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. It was his first visit to the country since taking office in January 2021. In a joint statement, the two leaders acknowledged the "serious long-term challenge to the international order posed by the People's Republic of China," referring to the country by its official name. Greg Price, the communications director of the State Freedom Caucus Network, also shared the clip, pointing out, "It's even funnier when you realize that we just learned members of Biden's family got millions of dollars from a Chinese energy company and how the biggest political story in Canada right now is how China interfered in their last two elections to elect Trudeau's party."

## Mississippi tornado, storms claim 23 lives

REUTERS

Washington, March 25: At least 23 people were killed and dozens injured as a tornado and strong thunderstorms swept across Mississippi late Friday, the state's emergency management agency said after the twister left a trail of damage for more than 100 miles (160 km). Four people were missing as search and rescue teams combed through the destruction looking for survivors after the storm struck Silver City, a town of 200 people in Western Mississippi, the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency said in a series of tweets. "Unfortunately, these numbers are expected to change," it said, referring to the death toll. Search and rescue teams were also out in Rolling Fork, a town of 1,700 people that saw the brunt of the tornado, CNN reported. "I've never seen anything like this," Brandy Showah told CNN. "This was a very great small town, and now it's gone." Rolling Fork was "pretty much devastated" and many people remained trapped in their homes, United Cajun Navy President Todd Terrell told ABC News. His group is a team of volunteer rescuers. At least 24 reports of tornadoes were issued to the National Weather Service Friday night and into Saturday morning by storm chasers and observers. The reports stretched from the western edge of Mississippi north through the center of the state and into Alabama.

## Pope expands sex abuse legislation

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Vatican City, March 25: Pope Francis Saturday updated a 2019 church law aimed at holding senior churchmen accountable for covering up cases of sex abuse, expanding it to cover lay Catholic leaders and reaffirming that vulnerable adults can also be victims of abuse when they are unable to consent. Francis reaffirmed and made permanent the temporary provisions of the 2019 law that were passed in a moment of crisis for the Vatican and Catholic hierarchy. That law had been praised at the time for laying out precise mechanisms to investigate complex bishops and religious superiors, but its implementation has been uneven and the Vatican has been criticised by abuse survivors for continued lack of transparency about the cases. The new rules conform to other changes in the Catholic Church's handling of abuse that have been issued since then. Most significantly, they are expanded to cover leaders of Vatican-approved associations headed by lay leaders, not just clerics.

# business

## of the day quote

UPI is driving consumers away from cash and helping to drive financial inclusion all at the same time, and is making India a leader in payments across not just the region, but the globe

**PHIL POMFORD** | GENERAL MANAGER APAC, FIS

Our collaboration with United Way India is a testament to our firm belief in the transformative power of technology, as it can empower individuals and drive progress to greater heights

**MURALIKRISHNAN B** | PRESIDENT, XIAOMI INDIA

The acquisition of Lotus Surgicals Pvt Ltd marks our entry into the med-tech business. We believe that the Indian medical industry is expected to be one of the fastest growing sectors driven by both demand and supply side factors

**MAM ARUNACHALAM** | EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN, TII

## SHORT TAKES

### Reliance names Srikanth as CFO

**New Delhi:** Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries has appointed Srikanth Venkatchari as Chief Financial Officer effective June 1, according to a stock exchange filing. He takes over from Alok Agarwal, who has been CFO since 2005, and will now assume the role of senior advisor to company chairman and managing director Mukesh Ambani. Venkatchari, 57, currently is the joint CFO for the company. Agarwal, 65, who joined Reliance in 1993, completed 30 years with the company. Srikanth, who has been sharing a part of the responsibilities of the CFO position with Agarwal for the last few years, has been with Reliance for the last 14 years. He previously worked with the Citi Group for two decades in forex trading and derivatives and eventually became the head of markets.

### France hits apps over security

**Paris:** France announced it is banning the "recreational" use of TikTok, Twitter, Instagram and other apps on government employees' phones because of concern about insufficient data security measures. The move follows similar restrictions on TikTok in democratic countries amid fears about the popular video-sharing app's Chinese connections. But the French decision also encompassed other platforms widely used by government officials, lawmakers and President Emmanuel Macron himself. The ban also will include Twitter, Instagram, Netflix, gaming apps like Candy Crush and dating apps.

### Intel co-founder departs at 94

**San Francisco:** Intel Corp co-founder Gordon Moore, a pioneer in the semiconductor industry whose "Moore's Law" predicted a steady rise in computing power for decades, died Friday at the age of 94, the company announced. Intel and Moore's family philanthropic foundation said he died surrounded by family at his home in Hawaii. Co-launching Intel in 1968, Moore was the rolled-up-sleeves engineer within a triumvirate of technology luminaries that eventually put "Intel Inside" processors in more than 80% of the world's personal computers. Intel Chairman Frank Yeary called Moore a brilliant scientist and a leading American entrepreneur.



No draft has been published of the Digital India Bill for public feedback/comments and no notice of the same was given in respect of the Digital India Bill for its introduction in the Winter Session, 2022-23

**RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR** | MINISTER OF STATE, ELECTRONICS AND IT

# Over 23K Indian techies given pink slips

**MORE THAN 23,000 TECHIES HAVE LOST THEIR JOBS IN NEARLY 82 INDIAN STARTUPS TO DATE**

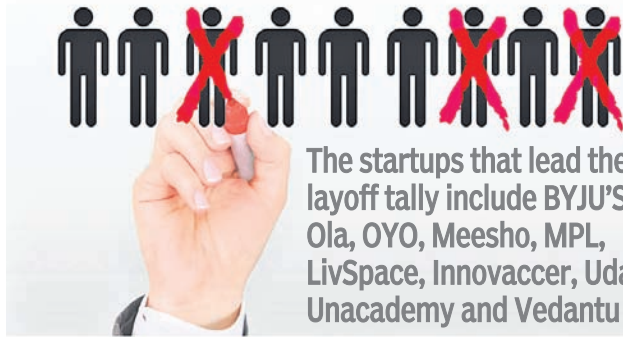
INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, March 25:** As layoffs continue to deepen amid recession fears, more than 23,000 employees have been laid off by at least 82 startups in India, and the list is only growing, the media reported.

According to a report in Inc42, 19 edtech startups, including four unicorns, have alone sacked more than 8,460 employees to date.

The startups that lead the layoff tally include BYJU'S, Ola, OYO, Meesho, MPL, LivSpace, Innovaccer, Udaan, Unacademy and Vedantu, among others. Home interiors and renovation platform Livspace this week laid off at least 100 employees as part of cost-cutting measures.

Last week, SaaS platform for online stores Dukaan laid off nearly 30 per cent of its workforce, or around 60 employees - its second layoff in about six months.



Healthcare unicorn Pristyn Care has also sacked up to 350 employees across departments and impacted employees from sales, tech

The startups that lead the layoff tally include BYJU'S, Ola, OYO, Meesho, MPL, LivSpace, Innovaccer, Udaan, Unacademy and Vedantu

and product teams. Online higher education company Unacademy laid off nearly 30 per cent of its workforce at its subsidiary "Campus".

In February, end-to-end global delivery management platform FarEye laid off 90 employees, which was its second layoffs in about eight months amid the economic meltdown. With the onset of January, more and more Indian startups are slashing jobs across the spectrum. Social media company ShareChat (Mohalla Tech Pvt Ltd) laid off 20 per cent of its workforce due to uncertain market conditions. The layoff impacted about 500 people at the company.

## OPPO, Vivo, Xiaomi join hands to allow users to transfer data

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Beijing, March 25:** Three Chinese technology brands, OPPO, Vivo and Xiaomi, have joined hands to allow users to transfer data between their devices to take on the growing Apple's market share in the country, the media reported.

The three smartphone makers announced the pact on their Weibo accounts, saying their users be able to move system and app data "seamlessly to a new handset belonging to any of these brands," reports South China Morning Post.

In 2019, Oppo, Vivo and Xiaomi set up a wireless transfer protocol that mirrors Apple's AirDrop function.

Google Drive service is unavailable on handsets sold in the mainland Chinese market and most users in China rely on third-party data transfer apps.

However, Apple iPhone users can directly move data to a new iOS device via the iCloud service or a Bluetooth and Wi-fi connection.

"The new partnership between Xiaomi, Vivo and Oppo, which jointly control nearly half of China's smartphone market, comes after the country last year saw its steepest fall in smartphone sales in a decade," the report mentioned.

However, China's smartphone market recorded a good start to the new year and at the start of 2023, the sales quickly increased week over week to reach above 7 million.

In four out of five weeks, the sales stayed above 6 million, a level seldom reached in 2022 when the pandemic haunted China's cities from time to time. The Chinese New Year season also started earlier than usual this year, helping the weekly sales walk out of the trough at the beginning of 2023, reports Counterpoint Research.

Apple remained China's biggest original equipment manufacturer in January in terms of sales share and its sales increased about 6 per cent YoY.

The smartphone market in China has contracted after 2017 in terms of YoY sales growth. Q4 2022 recorded a 15 per cent YoY decline, hitting major OEMs' confidence and further darkening market prospects.



## RATE RISKS

# FM asks PSBs to be vigilant

**FINANCE MINISTER REVIEWS PUBLIC SECTOR BANKS PERFORMANCE AND CAUTIONS BANKS ON INTEREST RATES AMID STRESS IN US FINANCIAL SYSTEMS**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



Banks should safeguard themselves from any potential financial shock. All the major financial parameters indicate stable and resilient public sector banks

**NIRMALA SITHARAMAN** | FINANCE MINISTER

eters indicate stable and resilient PSBs with robust financial health, it added.

The minister also stressed that PSBs must leverage the full potential of branches opened in International Financial Services Centres in GIIFT City Gujarat to identify international opportunities, including prospects related to Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs).

She asked banks to take focused measures to attract deposits, given the steps taken by the government to reduce the tax arbitrage in some debt instruments and pivot their strengthened financial position to support the credit needs of the growing economy.

The minister asked banks to focus on credit outreach in states where the credit uptake is lower than the national average, particularly in the northeast and eastern parts of the country, and enhance business presence in new and emerging areas like One District One Product (ODOP), e-NAM and drones.

She said PSBs should promote the Mahila Samman Bachat Patra, announced in the Budget, through special drives and campaigns and also focus on increasing brick-and-mortar banking presence in border and coastal areas.

**New Delhi, March 25:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman Saturday reviewed the performance of public sector banks (PSBs) on various financial health parameters and their resilience in the wake of the current global financial scenario emanating from the failure of some international banks in the US and Europe.

She urged the banks to remain vigilant about the interest rate risks and regularly undertake stress tests.

During the two hours meeting with MDs and CEOs of PSBs, an open discussion was held on the global scenario amid the failure of the Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) and Signature Bank (SB), along with the issues leading to the crisis in Credit Suisse.

The meeting was also attended by Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat Karad, Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi and other senior officials, an official statement said.

She also discussed the developing and immediate external global financial stress from both short and long-term perspectives.

During the PSB review meeting, she emphasised that the banks should undertake due diligence and adhere to the regulatory framework by focusing on risk management and diversification of deposits and assets base.

The finance minister underlined that PSBs must look at business models closely to identify stress points, including concentration risks and adverse exposures, the statement said, adding that she also exhorted PSBs to use this opportunity to frame detailed crisis management and communication strategies.

The chiefs of PSBs apprised Sitharaman that they follow the best corporate governance practices, adhere to regulatory norms, and ensure prudent liquidity management and continue to focus on having robust asset-liability and risk management.

Further, she was also informed by the PSBs that they are vigilant of developments in the global banking sector and are taking all possible steps to safeguard themselves from any potential financial shock.

All the major financial param-

## BIZ BAZZ



### VVK Razak bags Most Promising Business Leader of Asia Award

**Kozhikode:** VVK Razak, Managing Director of VVK Group has been conferred with the Most Promising Business Leaders of Asia Award constituted by a leading financial daily. The award recognises Razak's visionary leadership and outstanding achievements in steering VVK Group to new heights of excellence and innovation in the footwear industry. Under his leadership, VVK Group has emerged as one of the largest and most trusted footwear brands in the country, with a pan-India presence. The company has manufacturing units in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Sudan besides India. The award was presented by Aanand L. Rai, a renowned film director and producer at the Annual Asian Business Leaders Conclave 2023 held in Mumbai. Commenting on the achievement, VVK Razak, Managing Director, VVK Group said: "I am deeply humbled and honoured to receive this prestigious award. This is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our entire team at VVK Group, who have always strived to deliver quality products and services to our customers."

# Wall Street push for bank rescues clashes with Washington realities

US Bank stocks have been hammered since SVB's collapse, led by First Republic. Analysts and investors worry that without more government intervention, fleeing depositors may destabilize small and mid-sized banks

REUTERS

**Washington, March 25:** The banking crisis set off by the swift collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) has exposed a sharp disconnect between Washington and Wall Street. Bankers want faster, more aggressive action to shore up the industry, while the Biden White House and regulators argue they've done what they can within the limits of the law.

Some critics are asking whether the Biden administration could have contained the crisis with aggressive actions at the start.

"Policy makers have done some things that are helpful, but they haven't broken out the big bazooka yet and we have not passed the point of major vulnerabilities," said Edward Campbell, co-head of the multi-asset team at PGM Quantitative Solutions. "They're going to have to do more."

Some officials in the Biden administration, guided by the public rebuke of bailouts in the 2008 financial crisis, say they will protect depositors and the system, but do not intend to rescue individual banks or put taxpayers at risk.

The tensions between Wall Street



and Washington revolve around three main points: the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation's (FDIC) failure to find a buyer for SVB; the Biden administration's messaging around supporting depositors; and its focus on stricter rules for the banking sector instead of further relief.

**FINDING A BUYER FOR SVB**  
The failure of the nation's 16th

largest bank caught regulators off guard. The FDIC shuttered the bank in the middle of a Friday, instead of waiting for markets to close. That weekend, the administration guaranteed all SVB deposits and started an emergency liquidity facility for banks, but found no buyer.

That weekend, the administration guaranteed all SVB deposits and started an emergency liquid-

### Small US banks see record drop in deposits

Deposits at small US banks dropped by a record amount following the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank March 10, data released Friday by the Federal Reserve showed. Deposits at small banks fell \$119 billion to \$5.46 trillion in the week ended March 15. That was more than twice the previous record drop and the biggest decline as a percent of overall deposits since the week ended March 16, 2007. Borrowings at small banks, defined as all but the biggest 25 commercial US banks, increased by \$253 billion to a record \$669.6 billion, the weekly data showed. Deposits at large US banks rose \$67 billion in the week to \$10.74 trillion, the Fed data showed. Overall US bank deposits have been in decline after sharply rising in the wake of pandemic aid in 2020 and early 2021.

ity facility for banks, but found no buyer. "I can't imagine under what set of circumstances the FDIC might have thought it was a better outcome to allow the auction to fail," said Senator Bill Hagerty, a Tennessee Republican who was briefed by the FDIC. "We would be dealing with a bank in place right now, as opposed to a broken process," he said.

The FDIC did not begin talking to potential buyers or allow banks to review SVB's finances until later Saturday.

One government source noted that the FDIC can only pursue the least costly deals for its deposit insurance fund, which limits options for a prompt sale. The FDIC is expected to announce next steps for SVB's assets this weekend.

# NITU, SAWEETY REIGN SUPREME

# Manu wins bronze at ISSF World Cup



NITU GHANGHAS



SAWEETY BOORA



Manu Bhaker (R) poses with her medal on the podium alongside the two other medal winners, Saturday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 25:** Nitu Ghanghas (48kg) and the seasoned Saweety Boora (81kg) etched their names in history as they were crowned World Champions after notching contrasting wins at the marquee tournament here Saturday.

Nitu put up a stupendous performance to see off Mongolia's Lutsaikhvan Altansetseg 5-0 and claim the title for the minimum weight category in front of a packed crowd, with Beijing Olympics bronze medallist and Nitu's idol Vijender Singh also present.

Saweety made it two out of two for the hosts as she warded off a challenge from two-time medallist

## GOOF-UP: RUSSIAN ANTHEM PLAYED INCORRECTLY AT WORLDS

**NEW DELHI:** In an embarrassing moment for hosts India and boxing's global governing body, the Russian national anthem was played incorrectly during the 70kg medal ceremony of the Women's World Championships here Saturday. "We apologise for playing the wrong Russian anthem. We request you to give a huge round of applause to Demurchian Anastasiia," the announcer said after almost all the spectators had left the KD Jadhav Indoor Hall. Demurchian Anastasiia, who won the gold, later stood on the podium alone as the correct Russian anthem was played. It is worth mentioning here that the president of the International Boxing Association (IBA), Umar Kremlev, is a Russian. "The Local Organising Committee took the anthem from the Russian coach, checked it and handed it over to the IBA events team, who are in charge of the entire medal ceremony. There was a meeting regarding this and IBA is doing its own investigation and BFI will fully cooperate with the process," a Boxing Federation of India (BFI) spokesperson said after the gaffe. The members of the Russian contingent, however, cheered and applauded their compatriot after lodging their protest following the goof-up.

China's Wang Lina.

In the first bout of the day, Nitu started off aggressively and used her combination of punches, landing jabs and hooks effectively. The 22-year-old Bhiwani boxer was able

to take the first round 5-0. She began the second round with a series of straight jabs.

When Altansetseg attacked, the Indian southpaw countered with right hooks. The two boxers played

from a close range and indulged in a lot of holding in a fast-paced bout with Nitu being given a penalty deduction for clinching towards the end of the second round. Despite Altansetseg's strong

comeback in the round, Nitu still managed to take it 3-2. In the final three minutes, Nitu started from a far but soon ditched the strategy and reverted to playing from a close range, as Altansetseg was also given a point deduction for clinching. Nitu has been in indomitable form in the tournament. Against Alua Balkibekova, who knocked her out in the last edition in the quarterfinal stage, she skillfully adapted to negate the Kazakh's strong suit. The two join an elite list which includes six-time champion Mary Kom (2002, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2018), Sarita Devi (2006), Jenny RL (2006), Lekha KC (2006) and Nikhat Zareen (2022).

# MBAPPE HELPS FRANCE DECIMATE NETHERLANDS

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Paris, March 25:** Kylian Mbappe delivered for France again, this time wearing the captain's armband. Leading a new era for Les Bleus, there was something very familiar about the way Mbappe slotted home two unforgiving finishes to headline a 4-0 win over the Netherlands in European Championship qualifying Friday.

France showed no lasting effects from that painful penalty-shootout loss to Argentina in the World Cup final three months ago. Nor did Mbappe, the scorer of a hat-trick in a losing cause that day.

One of his first touches against the Dutch was to slip a pass inside for Antoine Griezmann, his hair dyed pink, to finish first time for the opening goal inside two minutes at the Stade de France. The two stars embraced, showing there was no lingering feud after Griezmann — the more experienced of the pair — was overlooked for the captaincy in favor of Mbappe following Hugo Lloris' retirement.

Dayot Upamecano bundled in the second in the eighth minute, and the third goal in a dazzling opening 20 minutes by France was scored by Mbappe. He ran in behind the Netherlands defense and shot inside the near post after Randal Kolo Muani let a pass from Aurelien Tchouameni roll past him.

Mbappe completed the thrashing in the 88th with a solo goal, picking up the ball 40 meters out and producing a series of feints on the edge of the area before blasting a low shot beyond goalkeeper Jasper



LEADING FROM FRONT: France skipper Kylian Mbappe celebrates his second goal against the Netherlands, Friday

Cillessen.

It took the Paris Saint-Germain striker onto 38 international goals, above Karim Benzema into fifth place on France's all-time list. While Benzema's time might be up for the national team, Mbappe — aged 24 and the leader of the new wave of football superstars after Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo — is really only getting started.

Speaking of starts, this was a disappointing way for Netherlands coach Ronald Koeman to begin his second spell in charge of the team. Their misery was complete when Memphis Depay had a penalty saved by France goalkeeper Mike Maignan with virtually the last kick of the match.

## LUKAKU STEALS SHOW

Romelu Lukaku underlined his enduring value to Belgium by scoring all three goals in a 3-0 win at Sweden in the other notable victory Friday. It was a successful start to Domenico Tedesco's tenure as coach of Belgium, which is also playing under a new captain in Kevin De Bruyne.

Tedesco will know the importance of having Lukaku healthy if the Red Devils are to finally win an international trophy. The striker was a constant threat against Sweden as he scored in the 35th, 49th and 83rd minutes, with two set up by winger Dodi Lukebakio.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Sweden's 41-year-old striker, came off the bench for his first national team appearance in nearly a year and had a couple of chances to score.

# Mumbai Indians face Delhi Capitals for WPL crown

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, March 25:** Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur's form is a huge concern as Mumbai Indians look to cap their superb Women's Premier League season (WPL) by defeating Meg Lanning's Delhi Capitals in the final of the inaugural edition of the tournament here Sunday.

After three half centuries earlier on in the tournament, form has deserted the India skipper, and had it not been for Nat Sciver-Brunnt's unbeaten 72 in the Eliminator against UP Warriorz Friday, the script of the tournament could have been different.

With Harmanpreet managing just 14 runs in the Eliminator, things could have gone downhill for the Mumbai franchise, but luckily Sciver-Brunnt made the most of the dropped catch to make a mockery of the Warriorz bowling.

Australian stalwart Meg Lanning though could exploit Harmanpreet's poor run with the bat to go all out even though Delhi Capitals will be playing in front of a partisan crowd at the Brabourne Stadium.

Delhi Capitals, after starting sedately, gradually moved up the points table and finally managed to displace Mumbai Indians at the top, thanks mainly to the performance of Lanning — the leader



Meg Lanning and Harmanpreet Kaur pose with the WPL trophy Saturday

of the batting charts — and all-rounder Marizanne Kapp.

Still, it would be futile to pick the favourite as both teams have been ruthless, clinical, dominant — and unsuccessful — at various stages in the tournament.

Delhi and Mumbai have recorded heavy wins against each other in the group stage and finished with identical 12 points, with only the net run rate separating them at the top of the table.

Mumbai Indians stamped their authority first by thrashing Delhi Capitals by nine-wicket, but the latter returned the favour, scoring an identical win. Going by their record at the Brabourne Stadium, Mumbai Indians have the upper hand, having won all three games so far, while Delhi have two wins and a loss at the venue.

With Harmanpreet's form a concern, Sciver-Brunnt could step up and play another of her mesmerising

knocks, which saw her clobber UP Warriorz bowlers all around the park in the Eliminator Friday.

With the third-highest number of runs (272), two half centuries, an enviable average of 54.40 and 10 wickets in nine games, Nat Sciver is one of the best all-rounders on show here. The England cricketer has, time and again, given commanding performances, and it will be hard for Delhi Capitals to stop the devastating batter in the summit clash.

Another Mumbai Indians all-rounder Hayley Matthews (258 runs, 13 wickets in nine matches) has blown hot and cold of late but remains a vital cog in the team's line-up.

With two more wickets, Mumbai's Saika Ishaque (15) could finish as the WPL's highest wicket-taker ahead of UPW's Sophie Ecclestone (16). With the likes of Isabelle Wong (13 wickets) and Amelia Kerr (12) in their ranks, Mumbai Indians will hope for another good outing with the ball.

Lanning though would like to add the inaugural WPL trophy to her cabinet after winning the T20 World Cup in South Africa recently for a record-extending fifth time. Mumbai Indians cannot wish away the Australia captain, the WPL's top-scorer with 310 runs (average 51.66), including two half centuries.

Delhi have had their share of highs and lows but Lanning's captaincy, combined with an incredible all-round show from Kapp (159 runs, 9 wickets), has been the highlight for them. Alice Capsey's power-hitting in the middle overs can also make a strong dent.

While Delhi will once again back overseas stars to come good, their hopes will also be pinned on Indian stars Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Shikha Pandey and Radha Yadav.

# Satwik-Chirag duo enters Swiss Open final

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Basel, March 25:** The dynamic doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty overcame a mid-game slump to keep India's flag flying by entering the men's doubles final of the Swiss Open Super Series 300 badminton event here Saturday.

The World No.6 and second seeded Indian pair defeated third seeds Ong Yew Sin and Teo Ee Yi of Malaysia 21-19, 17-21, 21-17 in an enthralling semifinal that lasted one hour and nine minutes. Satwik and Chirag will play unseeded Chinese pair of Ren Xiang Yu and Tan Qiang in the summit clash Sunday.

Earlier, Satwik and Chirag defeated the Danish pair of Jeppe Bay and Lasse Molhede in three hard-fought games. The Indian pair fought off the challenge in 54



minutes, winning 15-21, 21-11, 21-14. Satwik and Chirag are the only Indian contenders left in a tournament where the likes of PV Sindhu and Lakshya Sen suffered early defeats.

In the quarterfinal, the Indian pair didn't have a great start as it lost the first game easily at 15-21. The duo did pull things up in the middle of the game, reducing the deficit to just one point as it trailed 15-16. However, the Danish pair won six consecutive points to wrap up the first game with ease.

The Indian pair picked up the tempo in the second game and quickly got a seven-point cushion at the halfway break. They extended the lead to 10 points by the time parity was restored.

The third game, the Indians first got an 11-7 lead and then maintained a 7-point advantage till the end of the match to enter the last-four in style.

# Miami Open: Fritz, Alcaraz, Andreescu advance to round 3

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Miami Gardens (Florida), March 25:** Carlos Alcaraz picked up a straight-set win at the Miami Open Friday to keep his World No.1 ranking over idle Novak Djokovic.

Alcaraz defeated Facundo Bagnis 6-0, 6-2 to advance to the third round. World No.4 Casper Ruud won against Ilya Iyashka 6-2, 6-3. He'll next face Botic van de Zandschulp.

No.1 American and No.9 seed Taylor Fritz began his tournament campaign with a 6-4, 6-1 win over Emilio Nava. Fritz will next face No.24 Denis Shapovalov, who defeated Guido Pella Friday.

On the women's side, Bianca Andreescu ousted No.7 seed Maria Sakkari 5-7, 6-3, 6-4. Andreescu will face Sofia Kenin. No.2 Aryna Sabalenka beat Shelby Rogers 6-4, 6-3. Sabalenka will face Marie Bouzková.