



PUSHING BOUNDARIES

Priyanka Chopra Jonas adds another merit in her brochure by joining Academy's Executive Committee of Actors Branch

LEISURE P2



GERMANY PARALYSED

Airports, bus and train stations across Germany come to a standstill Monday due to protests causing widespread disruption

INTERNATIONAL P10



INDIA AIM FOR TITLE

India men's team to go all out against Kyrgyz Republic to win the Tri-Nation International football tournament today

SPORTS P12

PROJECT CHEETAH SUFFERS AS SASHA DIES IN MP'S KUNO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhopal, March 27: Namibian cheetah Sasha died due to a kidney ailment Monday, more than 6 months after she was translocated along with seven other big cats to Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park (KNP) from the African country, a top forest department official said.

The death of the more than four-and-a-half years old female feline is being seen as a setback to Project Cheetah, aimed at reviving the population of the world's fastest land animal in India, seven decades after they became extinct.

Eight cheetahs were brought from Namibia in mid-September last year and housed in the KNP in Sheopur district. Sasha died because of a kidney ailment which she was suffering from even before her translocation from Namibia, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (PCCF-Wildlife) JS Chauhan told PTI.

A monitoring team found Sasha lazy March 22, following which they decided to take her to a quarantine enclosure for treatment, he



said. The wild animal's blood sample was collected the same day and examined. A wildlife expert armed with a portable ultrasound machine went inside the KNP to examine the ailing cheetah and it was found that Sasha's kidneys were infected, said Chauhan.

Later, senior Wildlife Institute of India (WII) scientists and KNP management contacted the Cheetah Conservation Fund, Namibia, to know the treatment history of Sasha. They found that in her last blood sample, collected August 15, 2022, (a month before being translocated to KNP), the animal's creatinine level was 400 (an indicator of poor kidney function), he said. The high creatinine level clearly established that the feline was suffering from a kidney ailment even before she was translocated to the KNP, Chauhan said in a statement.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Forget moksha; you have to be reborn. Our home loan tenure has now gone up to 80 years



HOCKEY WHEN IN ODISHA: Commodore Viresh Das greets hockey players of Odisha and Naval teams at Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar, Monday, during a friendly match organised ahead of the passing out parade of the first batch of Agniveers at INS Chilika

INTERSTATE RACKET BUSTED; 19 HELD

5,000 fake certificates of 41 institutes seized

This is just the tip of the iceberg, more arrests soon: Bolangir SP

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bolangir, March 27: An interstate fake certificate racket operating for the last several years has been busted along with the arrest of 19 people including the proprietor of a local private coaching centre, police said Monday.

A special team of Bolangir Police also seized around 5,000 fake certificates of 41 schools, colleges and universities in the country from the premises of Reliance Education Complex.

The arrested accused persons include the mastermind Manoj Mishra, the proprietor of a local coaching centre Reliance Education Complex, and his partner Alok Ranjan Udgata.

Notably, all the 19 accused were produced in the court, Monday.

This apart, fake official seals and stamps of 27 educational institutions, Bolangir tehsildar, Puntala tehsildar and various officials, cash worth Rs 3,67,600, four computer systems, two laptops, three printers, scanners, Xerox machines, SSD hard discs, mobile phones, letters written to various universities and education officers, several diaries related to the fraud, incriminating documents and photographs were also seized.



■ Several youths who had received fake educational certificates from Mishra are now employed in various government and private establishments on the basis of the fake certificates

■ The racket has its network in UP, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Sikkim, Rajasthan, Meghalaya, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Gujarat apart from Bolangir, Bargarh, Kalahandi, Boudh, Sonepur, and Dhenkanal districts in state

After reports surfaced, Mishra and Udgata had allegedly deleted all the data from the hard disc. However, with much effort the police team managed to retrieve all the data from the hard disc.

The signatures of presidents and secretaries of the school boards of several states and some officials which were used fraudulently by the racket were also seized during the investigation, Bolangir



Superintendent of Police (SP) Nitin Kushalkar told the media at a press meet organised at the Town Police Station here Monday.

The matter came up before the police after Bolangir postal superintendent Rajendra Kumar Pattanaik lodged a complaint at the Town Police Station here alleging that the educational certificates submitted by some candidates applying for jobs in Bolangir postal division were fake. Another case was registered over a complaint by one of the victims Rajat Kumar Nayak.

The SP said Manoj Mishra, the owner of the concerned coaching centre and the mastermind of the racket issuing fake certificates has been arrested. He has a pan-Odisha network that has links with neighbouring states, Kushalkar added.

The racket was going on for the last several years since 2016 and a big chain is involved in the racket, the SP said.

SC notice to Centre, Guj govt

The top court asks the Gujarat government if uniform standards were applied while granting remission to the 11 convicts

POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, March 27: The Supreme Court Monday sought a response from the Centre, Gujarat government and others on a plea filed by Bilquis Bano, who was gangraped and seven members of her family were killed during the 2002 post-Godhra riots. Bano has challenged remission of sentence of 11 convicts in the case.

While posting the matter for hearing April 18, a bench of Justices KM Joseph and BV Nagarathna said there is a gamut of issues involved and it needs to hear the matter in detail.

The top court issued a notice to the Centre, the Gujarat government and the convicts. It also directed the Gujarat government to be ready with the relevant files granting remission to the parties on the next date of the hearing.

610 cases of new Covid variant XBB.1.16 found

NEW DELHI: A total of 610 cases of Covid's XBB.1.16 variant, which might have been behind the recent rise of coronavirus cases, have been detected across the country, according to INSACOG data. The samples have been found across 11 states and UTs. Amid a spike in Covid-19 cases, the Centre Monday reviewed with states and Union territories the preparedness for pandemic management.

BILKIS BANO CASE

Termining Bilquis Bano's gangrape and murder of her family members during the 2002 Godhra riots as a "horrendous" act, the top court asked the Gujarat government whether uniform standards, as followed in other cases of murder, were applied while granting remission to 11 convicts in the Bilkis case.

The top court, which at the same time clarified that it would not be overwhelmed by emotions in the case and would only go by the law, also directed the Gujarat government to present all the relevant documents April 18, the next date of hearing.

On January 4, a bench comprising Justices Ajay Rastogi and Bela M Trivedi took up the petition filed by Bano and other pleas. However, Justice Trivedi recused from hearing the case without cit-

ing any reason. Bano had moved the apex court November 30 last year challenging the "premature" release of 11 lifers by the state government, saying it has "shaken the conscience of society". The 11 men convicted in the case walked out of the Godhra sub-jail August 15 last year, after the Gujarat government allowed their release under its remission policy. They had completed more than 15 years in jail.

Besides the plea challenging the release of the convicts, the gangrape survivor had also filed a separate petition seeking a review of the apex court's May 13, 2022, order on a plea by a convict. The review plea was later dismissed in December last year.

All 11 convicts were granted remission by the Gujarat government and released August 15 last year.

3 children killed in US school shootout

NASHVILLE: Three children were killed in a shooting at a private Christian grade school in Nashville Monday, hospital officials said. The suspect is also dead after a confrontation with police. All three children had gunshot wounds from the shooting at the Covenant School, a Presbyterian school for about 200 students from preschool through sixth grade. It was not immediately clear whether anyone else was wounded in the attack.

2 students drown in Devi river; one more swept away

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jagatsinghpur, March 27: In a tragic incident, two students drowned and another went missing Monday while four friends were taking a bath in the Devi river under Balikuda police limits in this district.

The deceased have been identified as Satyabrata, son of Khirod Barik, and Kanha, son of Manas Barik of Ambashala village, sources said. Another boy who was still missing has been identified as Shubham, son of Kanha Patra of Satya Nagar area in Bhubaneswar.

Villagers stated that Satyabrata, a Plus-II student, along with three of his friends went to Machhagaon ghat of Devi river for taking a bath Monday morning. However, Satyabrata and two others were swept away by strong currents, they said.

Others present at the river bank promptly informed Balikuda fire brigade personnel and police. A rescue operation was launched and Satyabrata was rescued in a critical condition. He was rushed to the Balikuda hospital where doctors declared him dead on arrival.

Search operations were still continuing at the time of filing this report. Fire brigade personnel however, informed that chances of survival of the missing are very slim.

DAYLIGHT SAVING DILEMMA

The Lebanese find themselves in a catch-22 situation after the government decided to push forward the implementation of Daylight Saving Time (DST) until April 20

AGENCE-FRANCE PRESSE

Beirut, March 27: Lebanon, which is reeling under a crippling economic meltdown and political impasse, has added to its growing list of problems a seemingly strange question - What time is it? Yes, you read that right. A decision taken in the eleventh hour to delay daylight savings by a month has left the small country juggling between two time zones as the move faced opposition from the-

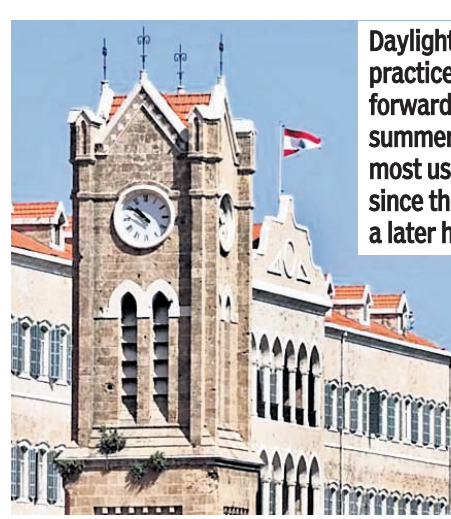
fluent Maronite Church. Lebanon's caretaker government announced Thursday its decision to delay rolling clocks forward until April 20, instead of the last week of March as is usually the case in the country and many others in the northern hemisphere.

Institutions including the church, as well as some schools and media outlets instead insisted on turning their clocks forward at midnight (2200 GMT Saturday).

While the government has not explained the move, a video shared widely on social media may provide an explanation.

It shows a discussion between caretaker prime minister Najib Mikati and parliament speaker Nabih Berri, who asks the premier to delay the clock change until the end of Ramadan, in an apparent attempt to cater to Muslims who fast daily until sun-

Lebanon juggles between two time zones



Daylight Saving Time is the practice of moving clocks forward by an hour during summer months to get the most use out of daylight since then darkness falls at a later hour than usual

set during the holy month. Education Minister Abbas Halabi said Sunday the eleventh-hour decision had inflamed sectarian discourse, arguing a cabinet decision was required to make the change.

In a statement on Twitter, he said schools and universities should observe daylight savings time as initially planned -- but some institutions had already

said they would abide by the roll-back.

'Purely administrative'

Pierre Daher, CEO of Lebanese broadcaster LBCE, said the worst thing is that the decision on when to begin summer time took a sectarian turn.

The channel had said in a statement it would defy the government's decision as the delay would affect its operations.

Had the government taken the decision a month ago, and not 48 hours in advance, then there wouldn't have been a problem, Daher told AFP.

Three other Lebanese networks also moved clocks forward. Mikati in a statement Saturday called the move purely administrative.

But the powerful Maronite Church said the decision had been taken without consultations and without any regard for international standards.

MARKET WATCH	
INDEX	VARIATION
SENSEX	57653.86 ↑ 126.76
NIFTY	16985.70 ↑ 40.70
DOLLAR	82.37 ↓ ₹0.11
EURO	88.68 ↑ ₹0.10
GOLD	₹58,700 ↓ ₹573
SILVER	₹69,980 ↓ ₹431

WEATHER		
	BHUB	CTK
TEMP	MAX 36.9°C	34.0°C
	MIN 23.0°C	24.0°C
Humidity	66%	74%
Rainfall	0.4mm	Nil
Forecast	Light to moderate rain	

leisure



INDIAN LEHENGA IS TOO HEAVY FOR ME: ANISTON

Jennifer Aniston donned a lehenga designed by Manish Malhotra for her recent release *Murder Mystery 2*. Though she is mesmerised with the beauty of it, she complained it being too heavy. The actress shared that she has immense respect for beautiful women of India who have to wear it.

MAJOR'S LAWYER SAYS ACTOR IS 'COMPLETELY INNOCENT'

Marvel star Jonathan Majors was arrested Saturday following the assault charges pressed by his girlfriend in New York City. The unnamed victim, a 30-year-old woman, told the police that she was assaulted. His defence lawyer has now asserted that that the actor is 'completely innocent' in the case.



FORTUNE FORECAST

GaneshSpeaks.com
accuracy • reliability • trust
FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

ARIES
A favourable day as any can be, says Ganesh. You are happy and content with what you have, and you've planned and are working towards what you want. A romantic date may prove interesting or throw up a controversy – decide where you want to take it.

TAURUS
There is every possibility that you will enjoy a good rapport with people around you, predicts Ganesh. You will think with your stomach today, craving for delicacies. Such a feeling might be because of repressed hunger. Something refreshingly different might be on the cards today, says Ganesh.

GEMINI
Your highly competitive nature will push you to perform better and better. You don't even know what being second best means. Getting in touch with like-minded people will only make you resolve stronger. Your desire to be the best will make you take interest in everything that can help you improve.

CANCER
Your business acquaintances will come forward in the manner that may seem nothing short of some divine intervention. This means that they will virtually save your neck from the guillotine, predicts Ganesh.

LEO
Motivating people through your own actions is one way; the other is to let your words do the talking. Both are equally effective, says Ganesh. With a bit of help from the stars, today, it is your words that shall hold more weight than your actions, as you make optimum use of your presentation skills.

VIRGO
It is quite possible that you will love financial challenges that are thrown at you, as they whet your appetite for success. You will come up with innovative ideas and improved methods of problem-solving. Ganesh assures you that your current business ideas will work wonders.

LIBRA
Trivialities should be the least of your concerns today. Do not let the small things faze you out. Remember that it is the overall picture that matters, and not one small stroke of the brush. Bear this in mind, since you may come under some pressure from subordinates at your workplace.

SCORPIO
You will live the day in two dominant shades, feels Ganesh. One part of your day will be tinted in nostalgia and thinking, while the other will be spent in making up for the time you lost while star-gazing and ignoring your work. Do not let the ghosts of your past haunt you because some things are best left behind while making a new beginning, says Ganesh.

SAGITTARIUS
Look before you leap, says Ganesh. Cupid has strung his bow and aimed an arrow at you. Love's labour will easily aid you to woo a young, tender heart. But don't be swept away by easy prospects and guard your reputation at all costs.

CAPRICORN
It will be one of those mundane days with nothing remarkable happening on any front. But don't be disheartened, advises Ganesh; planetary movements indicate there may be a change coming soon, most likely a good one. So, perk up and look forward to tomorrow.

AQUARIUS
You do have a way with words and today, you may succeed with your gift of the gab! But Ganesh says that your confused feelings may come in the way of your triumphant achievement. Also, sentiments may lead to a disastrous outcome. Sounds familiar?

PISCES
The fount of your creativity spurts today like there is no tomorrow. For lesser mortals, it takes inspiration, perspiration and a lot of desperation to come up with something creative. You, on the other hand, keenly remember the lessons from your past efforts, and use them today to scale new heights, says Ganesh.



Wamiqa fancies period drama

Mumbai: Actress Wamiqa Gabbi plays a pivotal role in Vikramaditya Motwane's upcoming web series *Jubilee*, which is a period drama set against the backdrop of the Hindi film industry. The series explores life in the film industry in the 1940s. The actress shared her fascination with working in a period drama and the preparation that goes behind it. She shared, "I have always been a fan of period drama films, especially from the black and white era. There was a time when I used to enjoy

such films with my entire family on Doordarshan. When *Jubilee* was offered to me, it felt like reminiscing about the good old days." Throwing light on the preparation for the noir character, Wamiqa added, "I got into the skin of the character by watching popular films between the 50s and 60s to take references from the actresses of that time. The soul of the character is completely mine; it's the context of their body language, facial expressions, and dialogue delivery that I have borrowed. A lot of actresses from that era inspired me." *Jubilee* will be streamed on Amazon Prime Video from April 7 onwards.

AGENCIES

Global glory for Priyanka

Los Angeles: Known for pushing the South Asian envelope in Hollywood, global star Priyanka Chopra Jonas is making a dent in the history of Indian film community. The actress, who is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, now joins the Executive Committee of the Actors Branch.

It is a point to note that, membership of the Academy is by invitation only from the Board of Governors. Membership eligibility is also achieved by earning a competitive Oscar nomination. Academy membership is divided into 17 branches, representing different disciplines in the field of motion pictures. PeeCee has previously starred in the Oscar nominated feature *White Tiger* which she also executive produced.

Under her production banner Purple Pebble Pictures, the Indian actress is also partnering with Amazon Studios on a First Look deal, and currently developing a slate of global features and TV content for the streamer.

She will be next seen in Russo Brothers' *Citadel* on Prime Video and *Love Again*. She also has Farhan Akhtar's *Jee Le Zaraa* in her kitty starring along with Alia Bhatt and Katrina Kaif.

IAN S



BRAINSTORMING ON FUTURE OF ODIA CINEMA

There's only winning from here: Siddhanta

Bhubaneswar: Odia cinema, after a prolonged depressive phase, seems to be on a revival path as the recent success of some content-driven movies has triggered a lot of conversations.

One such discussion programme *Lokanka Pakhare Odia Cinema* (Odia Cinema reaching out to the masses) was organised by Omkar Entertainment here at Jayadev Bhawan involving some leading names of the industry.

Taking part in the conversation the *Bapa Superman* actor Siddhanta Mahapatra said, about 95 per cent viewers watched Odia movies when he made his debut in the 1990s.

"Situation deteriorated over the years and now we are in a state where there is nothing to lose. We can only win and gain from here," he added.

Surya Deo, who bagged a National Award for his book *Kali Paain Kalira Cinema*, was of the view that watching a two hour film on an OTT platform definitely is not the same and does not give the same experience as big screens. "Odia movies are hardly being watched in theatres numbers of



Producer Rashmi Prabha Pani lighted the lamp with actor Siddhanta Mahapatra and cine critic Surya Deo in the frame

which are coming down steadily. All we have now are multiplexes," he lamented.

Producer Sudhansu Mohan Sahoo, who last directed *Mayavee* featuring Amlan and Bhoomika in the lead, said, "It is absolutely important for the viewers to be mentally prepared to invest an amount to watch an Odia cinema in a theatre."

Acknowledging that some bad

movies have created a negative impression, Sahoo urged the government to pull out the ailing Odia film industry. The government also needs to know that there are viewers who still wait to watch Odia films in theatres, he further said.

Odia film *Mukhagni* starring Manoj Mishra and Priyanka Pattnaik was screened on the occasion.

PNN

SEMINAR, BLOOD DONATION CAMP MARK WORLD THEATRE DAY IN CITY

Bhubaneswar: Odisha Natya Sangh, a confederation of 155 theatre troupes of Odisha, celebrated World Theatre Day here Monday by organising a seminar and a blood donation camp.

Titled Theatre and Youth, the seminar was conducted at Rabindra Mandap while the blood donation camp was held at the Sambadika Bhawan in the City in collaboration with Capital Hospital blood bank.

Many theatre artistes and people from other fields donated blood in the camp which was conducted under the supervision of ONS president Haren Sahoo and secretary Shubhakanta Padhi.

Speaking at the seminar, Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi secretary Prabodh Rath said, Odia theatre has a bright future and the younger generation will realise this dream.

"Youths can enrich Odia theatre by writing new plays and dramatizing it regularly," said Ramesh Chandra Mallick, the coordinator of Odia Department, Utkal University.

Former Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalay principal Nabin Parida, dramatist Lalatendu Rath and Odisha Sahitya Akademi Award winning researcher and theatre director Nibedita Jena also spoke on the occasion.

Youths can contribute a lot in the

growth and welfare of society by actively participating in theatre movements, they said.

Eminent dramatist Kailash Panigrahi presided over the programme.

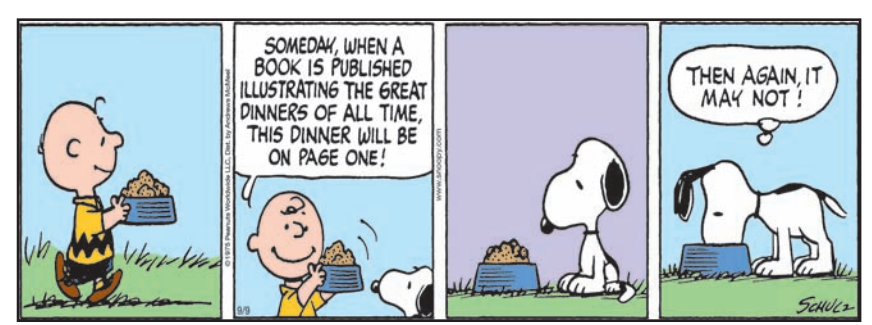
Amit Kumar Behera, Swapnarani Das, Sabita Barik and others represented the youths at the event.

World Theatre Day was celebrated in all districts of Odisha under the aegis of Odisha Natya Sangh, according to a report.

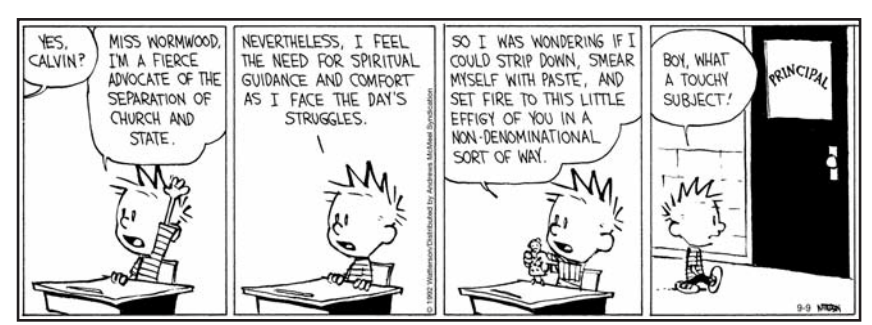
PNN



PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

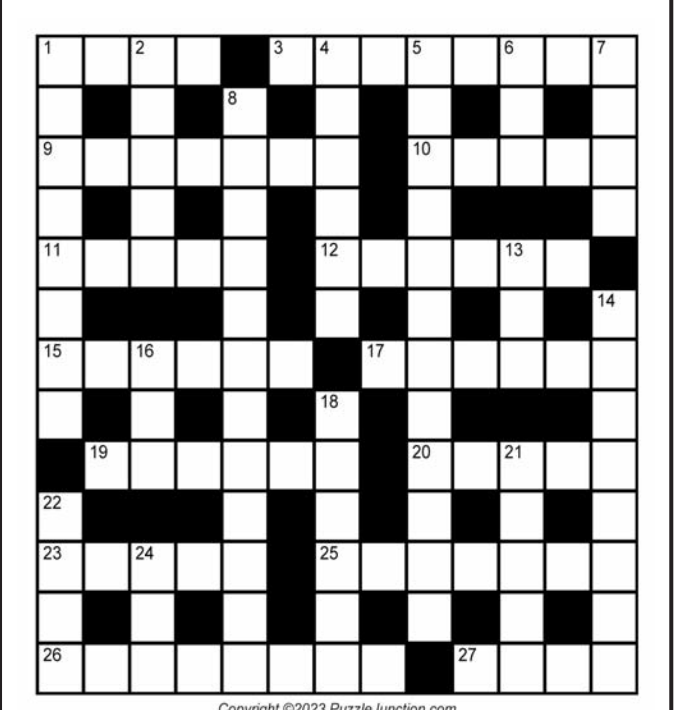


BREVITY



FUN post

CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Family member
 - 3 First thought in a dangerous situation
 - 9 Scamps
 - 10 Provide food
 - 11 Hand out
 - 12 Stodge
 - 15 Cut and run
 - 17 Kitchen wipe
 - 19 Obscured
 - 20 Angler's basket
 - 23 Musical drama
 - 25 Corpulence
 - 26 Leech
 - 27 Marsh grass
 - Down**
 - 1 People movers
 - 2 Bird retreats
 - 4 Hazardous
 - 5 Like coffee in tins (6-6)
 - 6 Wine vessel
 - 7 Songbird
 - 8 Future butterflies
 - 13 Relative
 - 14 Sent off to battle
 - 16 Actor's line
 - 18 Dexterous
 - 21 High society
 - 22 Bisque, e.g.
 - 24 Listening device

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

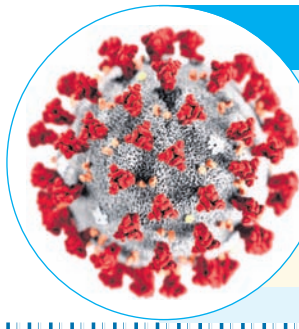


CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW



CAPTURING THE MOMENT

Children in colourful costumes pose for a groupie during a state-level children's cultural festival organised by Women and Child Development department at Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar, Monday



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	68,33,59,270	65,63,19,072	68,27,087
India	4,47,05,952	4,41,64,815	5,30,837
Odisha	13,36,304	13,26,915	9,204

Naveen urges Goyal to lift surplus rice

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 27: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has urged Union Food and Public Distribution Minister Piyush Goyal for lifting of 20 lakh metric tonne (LMT) of surplus rice from Odisha.

In a letter to Goyal, Patnaik said Odisha has adopted the decentralised procurement (DCP) system from the Kharif Marketing Season (KMS) 2003-04. Since then, the state has been undertaking MSP operations for procurement of paddy in decentralised mode. The decentralised procurement has improved the outreach of MSP support to paddy growers, he said.

During this Kharif season, a record 14,94,320 farmers have sold paddy to the government at MSP. The rice milled from the paddy so procured is being used under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), State Food Security Scheme (SFSS) and other welfare initiatives of



During this Kharif season, a record 14,94,320 farmers have sold paddy to the government at MSP

The state has transferred MSP dues of about ₹13,081 crore to the bank account of the farmers within 42 to 48 hours of purchase of paddy

the government, and the surplus rice is being delivered to the Food Corporation of India (FCI), Patnaik said.

He said paddy procurement for Kharif season 2022-23 is going to be closed by March 31, 2023, and about 65.23 LMT of paddy equivalent to 44.23 LMT kharif rice has been procured as of March 22, 2023. The state has transferred

MSP dues of about ₹13,081 crore to the bank account of the farmers within 42 to 48 hours of purchase of paddy, he said.

"The state has expected that about 10 LMT of rice will be procured during the ensuing Rabi crop season. Thus, total 54 LMT of rice is likely to be procured during the entire KMS 2022-23," he pointed out. Odisha's own consumption

under different schemes including NFSA will be 24 LMT of rice, while the Department of Food and Public Distribution has set a target to procure 10.33 LMT of fortified parboiled rice for acceptance by FCI during KMS 2022-23 (Kharif) for the state. So, the state will be left with approximately 20 LMT of surplus rice, the CM said.

"Non-evacuation of above quantity of surplus rice from the state will severely affect state's paddy procurement operations in the coming seasons as well as adversely impact the livelihood of lakhs of farmers whose main source of earning is through MSP operations of paddy procurement," Patnaik wrote.

He urged Goyal to issue a direction to the officials to accept additional 20 LMT of surplus rice (17 LMT fortified parboiled rice and 3 LMT fortified raw rice) for the KMS 2022-23 for the interest of Odisha farmers.

Uproar over Rahul's disqualification

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 27: Congress MLAs Monday created a ruckus in the House and observed 'black day' to protest against the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from Lok Sabha.

As soon as the House assembled at 10.30am, Congress members, donning black clothes, trooped into the well of the Assembly and raised anti-Modi slogans, terming the safety of surplus rice from the state will severely affect state's paddy procurement operations in the coming seasons as well as adversely impact the livelihood of lakhs of farmers whose main source of earning is through MSP operations of paddy procurement," Patnaik wrote.

Unable to run the House due to the ruckus, Speaker BK Arukha adjourned the proceedings till 4pm.

The members continued their protest in the second-half session too. "We are observing the day as black day for our democracy. So, we all are wearing black clothes. They (BJP government) have murdered democracy. If democracy will survive, the country will survive," senior Congress MLA Tara Prasad Bahinipati told reporters outside

Apartment ownership Bill tabled in House

Amid ruckus by Congress MLAs, Housing and Urban Development Minister Usha Devi introduced the Odisha Apartment (Ownership & Management) Bill, 2023 in the Assembly. The state government has brought a new legislation instead of going for an exhaustive amendment to the existing Odisha Apartment Ownership Act, 1982. The Act of 1982 was enacted with the objective of making provisions for ownership of an individual apartment which came into force May 1984 and accordingly, Odisha Apartment Ownership Rules, 1992 were framed. In the course of administration of the provisions of the Act, it was experienced that it suffers from some operational deficiencies relating to appropriate definitions, jurisdiction & powers of the competent authority, and inadequate safeguard of the interest of apartment owners, Devi said.

the Assembly.

OPCC president Sarat Pattanayak said, "To protect democracy, we are continuing our protest inside and outside the Assembly. Rahul Gandhi's voice was surpassed and he was not allowed to speak in the Lok Sabha and later disqualified. The people of this country will decide whether an attempt was made to murder the democracy or not?"

While many Chief Ministers have expressed their views for the protection of democracy Odisha CM is not making any statement fearing CBI and ED probe into chit fund and mining scams, he alleged.

Reacting to the protest by Congress, Leader of Opposition Jayanarayan Mishra (BJP) said,

"Those who have put all behind the bars during the Emergency are now advocating for democracy. Which kind of democracy are they talking about? Whatever decision was taken, it is as per the law, which was enacted by the then Congress government in 1951." Rahul Gandhi, representing Wayanad parliamentary constituency in Kerala, was disqualified from the Lok Sabha March 24, a day after his conviction in a defamation case by a court in Gujarat.

BJD appoints new district observers

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 27: In a bid to further strengthen its base across Odisha ahead of the 2024 elections, the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) Monday appointed observers for all the districts.

BJD president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has appointed the new observers superseding all previous orders, it was learnt. BJD MLA and the party's general secretary (organisation) Pranab Prakash Das has been appointed as observer for Angul, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar and Sambalpur districts, which are very important districts from a political point of view.

There is buzz that Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan is likely to contest 2024 elections either from Dhenkanal or Sambalpur Lok Sabha seat.

While Sambalpur is represented by Leader of Opposition (LoP) Jayanarayan Mishra, BJP chief whip Mohan Majhi belongs to Keonjhar district.

Senior leaders and Ministers Tukuni Sahu, Usha Devi and Rohit Pujari, who featured in the observers' list released in October last year, have been dropped. Retired bureaucrat and senior BJD leader Nalinikanta Pradhan, who was the observer for Sambalpur district, has also been dropped from the list.

Amarendra Jena (Deogarh), Rabindra Kumar Jena (Khurda) and Debesh Acharya (Sonepur) have been included in the list.

Senior leader and Minister Atanu Sabyasachi Nayak has been given the responsibility of two south Odisha districts—Rayagada and Gajapati, while Diba Shankar Mishra will look after the organisation in another two south districts—Malkangiri and Koraput.

Minister Pratap Keshari Deb is the observer for Balasore district and Sudhir Samal to continue as Bargarh district observer. Following the party's poor show in Dhamnagar bypoll, BJD has assigned senior lawmaker Pratap

Jena to strengthen the party in Bhadrak district, the native area of BJD State President Manmohan Samal.

Senior leader and ex-Minister Susanta Singh will continue to look after the organisation in Bolangir district. Prafulla Mallik has been picked as the observer for Cuttack, Arun Kumar Sahoo Jagatsinghpur, Bijay Nayak Kandhamal, Pramila Mallick Kendrapara, Rabindra Jena Khurda, Ishwar Panigrahi Nabarangpur, Padmanav Behera Nayagarh, Snehangini Churia Nuapada, Ranendra Pratap Swain Puri and Pritiranjana Ghadei for Sundargarh.

PRANAB PRAKASH DAS, PARTY'S GENERAL SECRETARY (ORGANISATION), HAS BEEN GIVEN THE CHARGE OF FOUR KEY DISTRICTS - ANGUL, DHENKANAL, KEONJHAR AND SAMBALPUR

The other leaders, who have been appointed as district observers are—Pranab Balabantray (Kalahandi), Pradip Kumar Amat (Ganjam), Soubhagya Nayak (Boudh), Ashok Chandra Panda (Jajpur), Sarada Prasad Nayak (Jharsuguda) and Prashan Muduli (Mayurbhanj). The party has given the crucial responsibilities to the young leaders and very few senior leaders. These leaders will have to strengthen the party at the grassroots and ensure

there is no dissent within the organisation. "To strengthen our organisation and to ensure that the state government schemes and programmes reach to the people at ground-level, the party has appointed new observers," said BJD leader and government chief whip Prasanta Muduli.

All are aware about the organisational skill and ability of Pranab Prakash Das, who has always given suggestions to strengthen the BJD in various districts and areas, he said. There is no doubt that Dhenkanal, Angul, Sambalpur and Keonjhar are the focus districts from a political point of view and BJD will decently perform well in these districts in the next election, claimed Muduli.

In 2019 polls, BJD had won Dhenkanal and Keonjhar LS seats while BJP had bagged the Sambalpur seat. On the other hand, the LoP alleged that Das was appointed in the crucial districts to raise funds for the party.

POLAVARAM DISPUTE
Centre seeks 3 months to submit status report

POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, March 27: The Union government has requested three months time from the Supreme Court to file status report with respect to the meetings convened by it to resolve dispute related to Polavaram project among Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Chhattisgarh with talks.

The matter was listed before a three-judge bench headed by Justice SK Kaul Monday. However, it could not be taken up for hearing as the bench sat in combination of two judges. The Union government has also informed that meeting of Chief Ministers with the Union Jal Shakti minister is still at consultation stage and sought time of three months to file the status report.

In December 2022, the apex court had granted two months time to the Union Jal Shakti ministry to file a status report with respect to the meetings convened by it to resolve the dispute related to Polavaram project among Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Chhattisgarh with talks.

27-year-old gets life term for abusing, killing minor

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 27: A Fast Track Special Court (POCSO) here Monday awarded life imprisonment to a 27-year-old youth after convicting him for sexually assaulting and killing a five-year-old girl under Jatni police limits in Khurda in 2019.

The court directed the District Legal Services Authority to take steps for facilitating ₹5 lakh as compensation to the minor's mother under Section 357A of the CrPc, according to Special Public Prosecutor (PP) Rajib Ranjan Sasmal and additional PP Balaram Deo.

The convict - Ananda Pradhan, who hails from Buguda in Ganjam, — was staying at a rented accommodation near the victim's place under Jatni police limits. On April 11, 2019, the victim had gone to her aunt's house nearby, but

did not return. When enquired, the minor's aunt said that the five-year-old returned home within minutes of reaching her place.

The family searched for the victim frantically but failed to trace her. Later, the victim's parents approached the Jatni police, while her aunt went to a relative's house nearby where CCTVs have been installed.

Following examination of CCTV footage, they found the victim had gone towards the accused house. Later, they knocked at the accused door to ask about the whereabouts of the girl. The accused, however, did not open the door despite repeated knocks.

Soon after, villagers broke open the door to find girl's body wrapped in a blanket and the accused sitting nearby. The victim was rushed to a nearby health-care facility where she was declared 'brought dead'.

Income Tax Department
Central Board of Direct Taxes

Attention Taxpayers

e-Verification Scheme, 2021

Any objection to the displayed financial transaction in AIS?
We will verify from the source

DISAGREE

AGREE

- Check financial transactions available in AIS tab of your income tax account at www.incometax.gov.in
- If you disagree, raise an objection. We will check with the Source

- If the mismatch continues, notice under the e-Verification Scheme may be issued.
- In such cases, return of income can be updated u/s 139(8A) of the IT Act, 1961, subject to eligibility.

- All proceedings are conducted electronically under e-Verification Scheme, 2021.
- Your response to the notice may help in closure of the matter.
- Promote Voluntary Tax Compliance.

Helpline
18001034215

For e-Brochures, Scan QR Code

FAQs on e-Verification Scheme, 2021
{Available on QR code and
<https://incometaxindia.gov.in/news/faqs-everification-scheme2021.pdf>}

For more information, scan QR Code

[@incometaxindiaofficial](#)
[@incometaxindia.official](#)
[@IncomeTaxIndia](#)
[@Income Tax India](#)
[@IncomeTaxIndia.Official](#)

SURGE IN COVID CASES

Govt hospitals told to remain vigilant



Public Health director & Medical Education & Training director wrote letters to all government medical colleges and hospitals to be ready for all eventualities

POST NEWS NETWORK
Bhubaneswar, March 27: Owing to rising cases of Covid-19, Odisha Public Health director Niranjan Mishra and Odisha Medical Education and Training director Sachidananda Mohanty, Monday wrote letters to all the government medical colleges and hospitals, and health officers. Through the letter, the hospitals and officials were asked to stay prepared to manage any possible Covid crisis.

emergency blocks should be kept in readiness with all logistics." Community Health Centers (CHCs) having prefab structure have been ordered to earmark six beds for Covid cases besides ensuring that oxygen concentrators, oxygen cylinders, liquid medical oxygen and prostate specific antigen are in readiness and working order.

A contingency plan has to be prepared in each facility to handle any sudden rise in cases. The fever clinic along with walk in Covid testing facility has to be set up in all medical colleges, DHHs, SDHS and CHCs, the letter directs.

CONTINUATION FROM P1

Lebanon juggles...

A decision like this should have been announced a year earlier to avoid harming people's lives, church spokesman Walid Ghayad told AFP. It cannot be made over a cup of coffee, he added.

back on the decision, saying it would have catastrophic consequences for an economy in free fall since 2019.

The decision has created confusion and caused divisions and disturbances among religious authorities, private media and education institutions, Khoury said in a statement.

Flag carrier Middle East Airlines, while implementing the government-ordered delay, said it would move departure times by one hour to adhere to international flight schedules.

"I don't understand what time it is," she told AFP. "How am I supposed to set it on my phone? On which timing," she wondered.

CLASSIFIED

AFFIDAVIT

I Kedar Chandra Samal, S/o. Late Natabara Samal, at- Kalinga Nagar Nuasahi, Kapaleswar, Choudwar, Cuttack is an Ex-Serviceman of Indian Defence Services. I, herewith declare that the name of my son is Bibhuti Prasad Samal and his date of birth is 14.03.1999. Further the name of my daughter is Monalisa Samal and her date of birth is 11.07.1996. But in my retirement certificate, the name and date of birth of my son and daughter were wrongly mentioned, respectively as Bibute Prasad Samal, date of birth-31.08.1999 and Mona, date of Birth-05.03.1994. Hence, by virtue of an affidavit before the Executive Magistrate, Tangi-Choudwar, Jagatpur, Cuttack I, solemnly affirm that the name of my son is Bibhuti Prasad Samal, date of birth 14.03.1999 and name of my daughter is Monalisa Samal, date of birth-11.07.1996. This affidavit will be used for all purposes. Sd./- Kedar Chandra Samal, Kalinga Nagar Nuasahi, Choudwar.

5,000 fake...

He said, six to seven middlemen were also involved in the racket but refused to divulge their names as the investigation is on.

The SP said the prime accused Manoj Mishra, the owner of the coaching centre, had connections with the employees of all the 47 educational institutions.

Police Monday paraded all the 19 accused arrested in the fake certificate racket before the newsmen here. Notably, accused Alok Ranjan Udgata is an expert in preparing fake educational certificates. The coaching centre was running from 1998 while Mishra and Udgata started the fake educational certificate business from 2016.

Several youths who had received fake educational certificates from Mishra are now employed in various government and private establishments on the basis of the fake certificates. The SP said, the two have earned crores of rupees from the crime as police also seized at least six land records which he claimed were the proceeds of the crime.

This interstate racket has its networks spread in Bolangir, Bargarh, Kalahandi, Boudh, Sonapur, Dhenkanal in the state and in Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Sikkim, Rajasthan, Meghalaya, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Gujarat, the SP said.

3-day seminar on new age communication

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 27: The Birla School of Communication, in collaboration with Consortium for Educational Communication, (CEC) New Delhi organised a three-day international seminar on new age communication, learning technologies and tools in higher education.

The seminar, supported by Birla Global University (BGU) Bhubaneswar, was held from March 23 to 25.



CEC additional director Rajnish Srivastava was the chief guest of the inaugural session. Multimedia University, Malaysia dean Mokhtarudin Bin Ahmad also graced the occasion with his presence. Eminent academic and industrialists joined the seminar to discuss, deliberate and debate on the recent development in the field of technology and higher education.

More startups to come from tier II, III cities: Omkar Rai



Bhubaneswar, March 27: As part of bringing best practices and standards to the Startup Ecosystem in Odisha and for the effective management of its funds, Startup Odisha has roped in the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) for managing the Odisha Startup Growth Fund (OSGF), said Omkar Rai, Executive Chairman, Startup Odisha, at the opening session of 30th Convergence India Expo in New



SEEKING RELIEF: Demanding rollback of fee hike for original + 2 certificate and migration certificate, members of All India Democratic Students Organisation, staged a demonstration at PMG in Bhubaneswar, Monday

Ex-IAS, 4 others get 3 yrs RI in graft case

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 27: The special Vigilance court here Monday sentenced former bureaucrat and Orissa Rural Housing Development Corporation (ORHDC) managing director Vinod Kumar to undergo three years' rigorous imprisonment for holding him guilty of disbursing loan to real estate firm without properly verifying the documents submitted by the firm. This is the seventh consecutive conviction of the senior IAS offi-

cer Vinod Kumar over corruption charges.

The court also awarded three years RI each to Swasti Ranjan Mohapatra, ex-company secretary and Umesh Chandra Swain, ex-loan recovery assistant of ORHDC, Rashmi Pattanaik and Ratan Kumar Sahoo, the partners of accused real estate firm identified as, M/S Home Lives Housing.

"The above 3 officers of ORHDC, Bhubaneswar had committed criminal misconduct by entering into criminal conspiracy and showed



undue official favour to Rashmi Pattanaik and Ratan Kumar Sahoo both partners of M/s Home Lives Housing, Bhubaneswar in the matter of sanction and disbursement of loan amounting to Rs.50,00,000 (rupees fifty lakh) without con-

ducting proper documentation, pre and post sanction inspection and without obtaining adequate security," claimed vigilance sources.

Mo School to revamp 10K elementary schools in state

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 27: At the 10th Governing Council Meeting of Mo School Monday, Mo School chairperson Susmita Bagchi informed that after successful work in high schools of the state, Mo School mission will revamp 10,000 elementary schools of the state with help of alumni and local CSRs.

"Success of Mo School will be seen, felt, remembered by an entire generation that will experience the Mo School project works and see the logo in front of their school gate every day for 10 years of their most formative period of their lives," she said.

After need-based assessment, schools will be developed holistically with a systemic approach. The programme will focus on providing equal opportunities to all by attending to the specific needs of each student and every school. The decentralized approach will help primary schools of interior areas in enriching the teaching learning



environment along with its infrastructure development, she informed.

S&ME department commissioner-cum-secretary Aswathy S highlighted the need to strengthen monitoring framework at school and state level. She stressed school-level mapping of projects before its implementation and proposed a monitoring system for the elementary school initiative. The governing council also discussed on creating a group of 1,000 alumni volunteers to facilitate roll out of School Clubs in each district.

AFTER NEED-BASED ASSESSMENT, SCHOOLS WILL BE DEVELOPED HOLISTICALLY WITH A SYSTEMIC APPROACH. THE PROGRAMME WILL FOCUS ON PROVIDING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES TO ALL BY ATTENDING TO THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF EACH STUDENT AND EVERY SCHOOL

Mo School will also support in rolling out the 'School House System' in all secondary schools. Motivational talk series by eminent alumni members and successful personalities to inspire students will be organised. The programme will be broadcasted live on YouTube on a weekly basis to reach out to the maximum number of children. While appreciating the proposal, Chairperson, Mo School, Bagchi advised to integrate the 21st century skill components into student clubs to make Odisha students future ready.

Vedanta's archery students win 14 medals

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 27: Vedanta Limited, Lanjigarh achieved a new milestone in its efforts to foster the holistic development of youth and children in the local communities. In a stellar achievement, students from its Archery Training Initiative bagged 14 medals at the recent state school meet held in Sundargarh. Overall, they won 5 gold, 4 silver and 5 bronze medals in the U-17 and U-14 categories in the competition, which witnessed the participation of over 200 students from Odisha.

Lauding students' achievement, GG Pal, Deputy CEO - Alumina Business, Vedanta Limited said, "Participating in sports is a great way to inculcate several life values in our youth, including those of hard work, focus, determination and discipline. It is heartening to note the continued outstanding performance put forward by the students of our grassroots sports training initiatives."

The archery and karate training initiatives were launched by Vedanta Limited, Lanjigarh to nurture the innate skills of the local youth at the grassroots level.

MURAL ON STATE HERITAGE INSTALLED AT RAJ BHAWAN



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 27: The women's wing of Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) FLO Bhubaneswar, under the leadership of Chairperson Namrita Chahal and other core committee members, prior to Utkal Divas installed a mural at Raj Bhawan Odisha as a tribute to the beautiful land of Odisha. The mural, that depicts the majesty of Odisha, was unveiled by Governor Ganeshi Lal.

Expressing his appreciation, Governor Lal said, "Odisha is the land of heaven as the people of the state

are free from greed and are satisfied from within, hence this gift is appreciated and is close to my heart." Chahal marked her finale event with installation of the mural and thanked the Governor and the team of Raj Bhawan for their support. "Odisha is a land of rich history heritage and culture and we at FLO Bhubaneswar are proud of the land we call our own. The mural is a symbol of beauty of Odisha: the hidden gem of the mystic east," she said. The mural was installed at the central grounds of Raj Bhawan and depicts the culture and heritage of Odisha.

FOR CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS CONTACT OUR BOOKING STATIONS

Acharya Vihar-Doyal Agency-9437135727, A.P. Tours and Travel, Maitri Vihar, C.S. Pur- 9861301598, Aurobindo Market-Sai Audio & Electronics-9438304668, Airport Road-Sai Baba Variety Store-9090071530, Anish Infotech- Tankapani Road-9861341488, Bapuji Nagar- Dreamland Studio- 9777517314, Baramunda Rental Colony-Maa Ramchandi Communication-9658821469, Baramunda Housing Board Colony-Pappu Variety Store-9040500106, Cuttack Road-Alishan Snacks-8984236754, District Center (Chandrasekharpur)-Sai Google Mart-9776056507, Forest Park-DTDC Couriers & Services (HB Services)-7381024156, IRC Village-Bapi Xerox-9090090404, Gift Hut(Antriksh Gifts & Decors Pvt. Ltd.)-9954781084, Pruthvi Medicine-9853314816, Janpath-Krupajal Book Store-7978646669, Jaydev Vihar-AK Enterprises-7978116618, Subam Sai Books Store-8895550649, Swain Graphics- 9337121249, Jagannath Mobile Point- Janpath Road, Ram Mandir- 9938475415, Kanan Vihar-Auro Electronics-8260697560, Khandagiri- Swosti Mobile Centre- 7992914045, World Solution- 9938317559, KIIT Road-Jugad Jn-9338545031, Laxmi Sagar-Aditya Mobile-9438191836, Lewis Road-Spider Web-7809186415, Metro Satellite City-Arogya Mitra Medicine Store-9853621640, Madhusudan Nagar-Mohapatra Communication-9124446664, Maa Santoshi travels- Gajapati Nagar- 9777675867, Nayapalli- The Cake Room- 7873660137, Near Mayfair Lagoon-Cookiemana-9439491273, Nigamananda-Omm Sai Travels-9668284823, Nr Cosmopolis Main Gate- Shreeram Medical Store- 8763711714, Net Square- Niladri Vihar (C.S. Pur)- 7205634821, Priyadarshini Market-Astro Point-9938134346, R.N. General Store-Nilakantha Nagar-9438642501, Sahid Nagar- Maa Communication- 9437353424, Sahini General Store- Near Patia Railway Station, Mahavir Vihar- 9937586626, Satya Nagar-Baishnavi Mixture & Sweets-7894821764, Samantapur- Download Point-7504557743, Sailashree Vihar-Harsha Book Store-8093449515, Saheed Nagar-Jagannath Graphics-7978652670, Photo World-7978468191, Sainath Photo Studio-8984436129, Shanti & Co-9937071063, Siripur-Omm Maa Sarala Communication-9777682449, Sushree fashion- Jagmara-9938714347, Shree Vision- Sailashree Vihar-9861476678, Unit-3-LIC of India Premium Point-9337787080, Unit-7- LIC Premium Point- 9338227422, VSS Nagar-Friends Cake & Bake-8658200930, Jeet Infoworld-7205195782, XIMB Square-LD Books-9658061373.

Bandh hits normal life in Bhanjanagar

STRIKE CALLED FOR CREATION OF NEW GHUMUSAR DISTRICT

PNN & AGENCIES

Berhampur, March 27: Normal life was affected Monday in Bhanjanagar, the sub-divisional town in Ganjam district, in the wake of a dawn-to-dusk bandh called by an organisation demanding creation of a new 'Ghumusar' district.

While vehicular traffic remained off the roads, shops and business establishments in the town kept shutters down. Banks and other financial institutes and some other government offices were 'forcibly' closed by supporters of the bandh.

The 'Ghumusar Kriyanasthan Committee' which had called the bandh, however, allowed students who were going to appear for examinations in vehicles to move. The committee has demanded creation of 'Ghumusar' by carving the existing Ganjam district for

better administration and convenience of the people.

The erstwhile Ganjam district was divided into two districts - Ganjam and Gajapati - in 1993.

"Since then, we have been demanding the formation of Ghumusar district by taking at least 10 blocks, including the entire Bhanjanagar sub-division which has eight blocks," said Somanath Nayak, a senior advocate and the president of the committee.

Several local organisations including Bhanjanagar Bar Association, Merchant Association and others extended their support to the bandh.

"We thank the people for showing their solidarity to the demand for creation of the new district by extending their support to the bandh call. We hope the government will consider our demand," said Nayak.

Police said no untoward incident was reported during the bandh. Forces were deployed at strategic locations in the bandh-bound town to avoid any fracas.



DRAMA FEST: School students staged a short play Monday during a drama competition organised by Odisha Sanskrutik Samaja and Jan Natya Manch on the occasion of World Theatre Day at the Swadhinata Sangrami Smruti Bhawan in Sambalpur

3 dead as bus rams into vehicle near Rourkela

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, March 27: Three persons, including the owner of a private bus, were killed and 15 others were seriously injured Monday when it rams into a heavy Hyva vehicle parked on the roadside at Chandiposh Square on National Highway-143. The accident took place 30 kilometres away from this city in the wee hours of Monday.

The three deceased were identified as bus owner Satyabrata Nayak, 33, Anupam Vivek, 37 and eight-year-old girl, Arsitia Tudu. All were residents of different localities in this town. The injured persons are being treated at various hospitals in this city.

The bus with 40 passengers, was travelling from Bhubaneswar to the Steel City when the mishap took place in front of a roadside eatery. Such was the ferocity of the impact that the front portion of the bus was completely destroyed. All those dead and injured were basically sitting in the front portion of the bus.

Police have registered a case and launched an investigation to ascertain the cause behind the accident, Chandiposh IIC Trinath Sethy informed.

1 dead, 1 hurt in train mishap



POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, March 27: An elderly man was killed while another person suffered critical injuries Monday after being hit by a train while crossing the railway track at Haldiapadar near here in Ganjam district.

The deceased, a person, aged approximately 58 years is yet to be identified. His body has been kept in a morgue and efforts are on to establish his identity, officials of Government Railway Police said. The injured person has been identified as Chitrasen Nayak, 45 of Saranggarh village in Kandhamal district.

Chitrasen and his neighbour Balakrushna Behera was waiting at the railway station here to board a train for Chennai along with their family members. Chitrasen and Balakrushna then went out of the station for some work. While returning to the platform, where there families were waiting, Chitrasen got hit by the Yashwantpur-Howrah Superfast Express. Luckily for him, the train had slowed down as it was approaching the station.

GRP have registered two separate cases in this connection and further investigation is on, officials said.

Andhra Pradesh eyes land in Koraput's Nandapur block

The move comes amid the dispute over territory in Pottangi block of the same district

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nandapur, March 27: After Kotia panchayat under Pottangi block in Koraput district, Andhra Pradesh is now trying to allegedly occupy land in Nandapur block of the same district, sources said Monday. They informed that various officials of Andhra Pradesh government are visiting villages in Nandapur on the pretext of providing drinking water.

The sources informed that earlier, a similar attempt to lure the villagers had taken place. Officials of Andhra Pradesh arrived in some villages of Nandapur block and distributed Aadhaar, ration and voter identity cards to residents there. They also assured elderly people of pension in an effort to wean them away from Odisha government. The Andhra Pradesh officials also opened bank accounts of some of the residents. However, they left the spot once the Odisha government officials intervened.

The sources alleged that now the AP officials are using the supply of drinking water as a pretext to occupy Odisha's land. Some of the villages are facing acute water scarcity and AP officials are taking advantage of the situation, sources added. Drinking water facilities in these villages are not working and need repair, people in the know of things pointed out.

"AP officials are promising supply of drinking water to the



residents of all these villages. They want to set up the facilities on land belonging to Odisha and later claim it as their own," a source said. "However, it is the failure of the Odisha government which is allowing AP officials to take advantage of the situation," the source added.

Observers termed the development as 'highly alarming'. They alleged that it has happened due to apathetic attitude and negligence of the district administration. They said that plans for development of the border areas have not been implemented despite repeated demands by local public representatives.

Some panchayat samitis have adopted a resolution for demarcation of areas in Nandapur block. However, the block and the district administration officials have allegedly turned a blind eye to the resolution. This lackadaisical atti-

'Depression' led to Ruchismita's suicide

LATE ACTOR'S DAD SAYS THAT IN THE PAST ALSO SHE HAD ATTEMPTED TO END HER LIFE

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bolangir, March 27: Actor Ruchismita Guru, who acted in a few Odia music videos, died by suicide by hanging herself Sunday at her maternal uncle's house at Sudpada locality in this town. Police recovered Ruchismita's body from there late Sunday night. The deceased's body was then sent for post-mortem at the Bhima Bhoi Medical College and Hospital here. The actor's father Pradip Kumar Guru donated her eyes.

Pradip said Monday that his daughter had been in depression for some time now as her career failed to take off, the way she expected it to be. Even though she was part of some bhajan and music videos, she was not getting a chance to enter the Odia film industry. "This may have prompted her to commit suicide," Pradip said. He added that his daughter had earlier undergone treatment for depression at a hospital in Bhubaneswar.

Ruchismita's parents informed that she slipped into depression whenever she was idle. They added that she used to have bitter arguments over trivial matters like 'preparation of aloo paratha' and gardening. They stated that in the past also, Ruchismita had on a couple of occasions, tried to die by suicide.

Ruchismita died by hanging herself with a saree Sunday. Originally a resident of Talapalipada locality, she was staying at her maternal uncle's house for work-related



RUCHISMITA'S PARENTS SAID THAT SHE USED TO HAVE BITTER ARGUMENTS OVER TRIVIAL MATTERS RELATED TO COOKING AND GARDENING

issues. She was a student of DAV School here and SCS College in Puri. Ruchismita took the drastic step when other members of the family had gone out to attend a function. When they returned they found her hanging from the ceiling and informed the police.

When contacted, SP Nitin Kushalkar said that a probe is underway to ascertain the actual reason behind Ruchismita taking the extreme step.

REMEMBRANCE

✓ BIDYUT PRAWA MAHANANDIA

09.05.1954 - 18.03.2023

You will always be part of us in our hearts and our prayers, we will miss you and fondly remember you in every moment of our life.

Fondly Remembered by -
Mrs. Tapaswani Mahanandia (Daughter)
Mr. Subhendu Sekhar Panigrahi (Son-in-law)
Family & Relatives
Mahanandia & Panigrahi Family

MAN THRASHES MOM TO DEATH

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bargarh, March 27: A 20-year-old man thrashed his mother to death in Pipilipali village under Bargarh police limits of Bargarh district, officials informed Monday. The incident took place late Saturday night. The accused has been identified as Kartik Bhui. Police detained him Sunday. However, despite intense grilling the motive behind the murder is still not clear, police informed.

The incident reminds one of a similar crime in Jajpur district earlier this month. Then a 40-year-old man had allegedly hacked his sexagenarian mother to death on the night of March 4. A source said that the man was frustrated over the delay in his marriage.

In another such incident, a 20-year-old man allegedly hacked his father to death in Jajpur district. He had then raped his step-mother, as per the FIR registered by the police. Both the accused are currently in prison.

Huge amount of ganja seized in Malkangiri

POST NEWS NETWORK

Chitrakonda, March 27: Police seized Sunday night huge amount of cannabis while raiding parts of the Dyke-3 forest here in Malkangiri district. The ganja was stored in 132 sacks, officials said Monday. However, police failed to arrest the persons involved in smuggling of the contraband item as they had escaped from the place earlier.

IIC of Chitrakonda police station, Mukunda Melaka said that the total amount of ganja seized is worth rupees three crore. He added that police have launched an investigation to find out the identity of the criminals and arrest them. He added residents of local villages are being interrogated to find out the identity of the culprits.



PUBLIC DONATIONS: Women counting currency notes collected Monday from the hundi of Maa Majhighariani temple, the presiding deity of Rayagada. Donations of over ₹45 lakh, seven foreign coins worth 77 dollars, 29 gram gold ornaments and 1,169 gram silver ornaments were collected after the hundi was opened in the presence of servitors and temple officials

Bear attack leaves 4 critical in Keonjhar



POST NEWS NETWORK

Patana, March 27: Panic gripped people in Khilaripata Nuagaon village under Saharpada section and Patana forest range in Keonjhar district after a bear ran amok and critically mauled four persons Monday. All the injured persons are undergoing treatment at the Keonjhar district headquarters hospital.

The injured persons have been identified as Birbal Mohanta, 55 and Manglu Behera, 30, of Badanuagaon village, Ramachandra Parida, 35, of Khilaripata Nuagaon village and Sarat Chandra Mohanta, 40, of Purunapani village.

The incident sparked tension among the villagers as Forest department officials rushed to the spot to track the movement of the animal. Locals alleged that the bear strayed into the village as 'mohua' flowers are ripening. They demanded that Forest officials catch

the animal and take it away to a different place as it may attack people again in future.

The bear first attacked Birbal and Manglu who had gone to Baratania village to purchase bullocks. They were returning home on their bicycles when the bear came out of a cashew orchard and attacked them. Other villagers rushed to the spot hearing the agonising screams of the victims.

The bear ran back into the orchard as locals pelted the animal with stones. While fleeing, the bear came face to face with Ramachandra and attacked him. Sarat and his daughter also came on the path of the marauding animal. While Sarat was mauled, his daughter managed to flee.

Locals said that the bear has taken refuge in a forest close to the village. Patana forest ranger Ghashiram Patra said they are tracking the movement of the animal in an effort to catch it.



PUBLIC DONATIONS: Women counting currency notes collected Monday from the hundi of Maa Majhighariani temple, the presiding deity of Rayagada. Donations of over ₹45 lakh, seven foreign coins worth 77 dollars, 29 gram gold ornaments and 1,169 gram silver ornaments were collected after the hundi was opened in the presence of servitors and temple officials

FOCUS DEMOCRACY

A STRESS TEST FOR INDIA



India has some deep soul searching to do as we explore the question: Are we truly a democratic nation?

vert democracy are 'legal', in the sense that they are approved by the legislature or accepted by the courts. They may even be portrayed as efforts to improve democracy – making the judiciary more efficient, combating corruption or cleaning up the electoral process. Newspapers still publish but are bought off or bullied into self-censorship. Citizens continue to criticize the government but often find themselves facing tax or other legal troubles. This sows public confusion. People do not immediately realise what is happening. Many continue to believe they are living under a democracy.

Do we believe we are living in a democracy? Which brings up the first point, the so-called storied democratic traditions of India. Many among the Indian intelligentsia had over the years internalised the message that Emergency was the exception, and that democracy is the rule. This is how India messages the world. Now the interpretation sounds rather simplistic. India has some deep soul searching to do as we explore the question: Are we truly a democratic nation? Or is democracy the story we sell to ourselves and the world when the nation and its people know that we are not what we think or claim to be.

India's democratic traditions go back deep into history but as Prof. Madhavan Palat, the editor of the 'Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru', said while delivering the 2023 Nehru Memorial Lecture hosted by the King's India Institute at King's College, London (3 Mar 2023), "There is a long thesis that Indians were taught by their colonial masters how to be democratic." He pointed out that there is even an inscription by Edwin Lutyens on the portals of one of the government buildings that said people have to learn to be free before they can get freedom. Lutyens was of course wrong, as Palat notes in his lecture. But our present-day leaders seem to tell us that he was right!

The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIMR. Views are personal.

©THE BILLION PRESS

The swift disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from the Lok Sabha following a "bizarre" (to quote the lawyer Kapil Sibal) two-year sentence by a court in Surat in a defamation case marks a turning point of sorts in the accelerated fall of India's democratic standards in recent years. There has been the talk of a stress test for our banks in the light of the recent Silicon Valley Bank collapse in the US. If there were an equivalent stress test for Indian democracy, then the nation and its institutions would show up rather poorly in the school of democratic values, given a string of events that have raised the political temperature, stymied debate and brought Opposition parties up in arms.



Jagdish Rattanan

THERE APPEARS TO BE A SENSE OF ANGER, BITTERNESS, EVEN REVENGE AND A NONSTOP BULLYING THAT DRIVES THE POLITICS OF THE DAY

The merits of Gandhi's conviction, the sentence, the circumstances and an intermediate stay on proceedings at the behest of the complainant, will of course be scrutinised in the days to come. The Congress will move to stay the conviction itself. But these immediate next moves are insignificant in the face of the big story that India has announced to the world – that the most significant member of the oldest Opposition party in India is out of Parliament soon after he raised some very uncomfortable questions on cronyism, the Adani group and the connections of that group to the ruling elite of the day. As the story plays out, the focus will remain on Rahul Gandhi's attempted silencing, the Adani imbroglio, the demands for a JPC inquiry in the wake of Hindenburg allegations and the question that Gandhi has focussed on: Whose money was being pumped into Adani stocks? Gandhi out of Parliament only leaves him that much more equipped to take these questions to the people and build the political narrative. Politically, many observers, including at least some BJP sympathisers, would worry that the attack on Gandhi and the attempt to silence him in Parliament can make him a hero. It would, quite unhelpfully for the BJP, confirm fears that the Adani connection is truly sinister, runs deep and to the very top of the ruling establishment.

But that, too, is a side story; it may well grow over time to take its toll on the BJP, or likely not. For the moment, and to the extent that the BJP is seen as the perpetrator and the party to benefit from the disqualification, the nation and the world will note that today's party does not care about the price of its actions. Taken together with the litany of cases against Opposition leaders, the toppling of a government in Maharashtra, the pressure put on the AAP government in Delhi, and a host of other strains being imposed on the polity, the impression is sought to be created that anyone who stands up will be crushed. There appears to be a sense of anger, bitterness, even revenge and a nonstop bullying that drives the politics of the day. This may well be the mental make-up of a very few people at the top echelons of power but today it stands presented as a nation in the grip of these negativisms, its institutions beaten out of shape, its rich history plundered from the inside. India has caved in.

What does that say about the a) storied democratic traditions of India and b) much-glorified nature of democracy itself.

To consider the second first, there can be instant death or slow death. A sudden coup, a military adventurist taking over the Palace, a nation going bankrupt with no forex left or militia fighting each other on the streets and in the jun-

gles is the way nascent democracies fall and overambitious dictators rise. We thought this was what happened elsewhere, not in India. That is of course true because Indian democracy by standard measures is robust even today – we have elections every five years, peaceful transfers of power at the Centre and in the states, the military is professional, Parliament meets, bills are passed and some debate takes place. In fact, much of the Gandhi-related actions are being linked to the upcoming 2024 elections. So, there is everything in place for the institutions of democracy to work and yet there is the distinct feeling that everything is emptied out, hollowed, working for a given establishment rather than a tall nation.

The 2018 book 'How Democracies Die' (by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt) notes of a time when "politicians now treat their rivals as enemies, intimidate the free press... try to weaken the institutional buffers of our democracy including the courts, intelligence services, and ethics offices... states, which were once praised by the great jurist Louis Brandeis as "laboratories of democracy," are in danger of becoming laboratories of authoritarianism..." The authors are talking of the world's most powerful democracy but they might as well be talking of the largest. Writing in The Guardian, the authors said: "Many government efforts to sub-

SPECTRUM PUBLIC HEALTH

A path out of the pandemic

We have made extraordinary progress in our fight against the COVID-19 pandemic since the dark days of 2020. Yet, in many ways, we are back to square one. Public health precautions are virtually nonexistent in most parts of the world, and the current vaccines and drugs can neither prevent nor even effectively treat infections in broad swaths of the population. Make no mistake: COVID still poses a clear and present danger. Research shows that two or more COVID re-infections doubles the risk for death, blood clots, and lung damage, among other negative health outcomes. The risk of cardiovascular events has been found to increase by 4.5% for up to 12 months after an infection, regardless of age, race, sex, obesity, smoking, or other factors.

Nearly one in five Americans are reporting ongoing Long COVID symptoms, and recent research estimates that as many as four million people with the condition are unable to work. The long-term social and economic impact of continual re-infections cannot be underestimated. Although the mRNA vaccines have done an excellent job of reducing hospitalisations and deaths, questions remain re-

garding waning immunity, and public uptake has decreased with each new booster. A mere 18% of Americans over the age of 18 have received the bivalent booster.

Moreover, no authorised monoclonal antibody treatments are currently available, and the preventative drug Evusheld has been rendered ineffective. More than 17,000 immunocompromised Americans and other high-risk people thus have been left vulnerable to severe disease and high mortality rates. While Paxlovid has proven to be a powerful tool against death and hospitalisation, it can have potentially negative interactions with many common medications, such as statins and blood thinners.

Paxlovid also must be taken within the first few days of an infection to be most effective. Owing to this limitation, as well as concerns about viral rebound and confusion about eligibility, uptake has been low, even among high-risk populations. In 2022, fewer than one-third of Americans over 80 who contracted COVID ended up taking Paxlovid. This is very worrying, considering that those over 80 make up a significant proportion of COVID-related deaths.

But all hope is not lost, because

we have a successful blueprint to follow. HIV was once a death sentence, but patients nowadays can live almost unaffected by the virus, and the impact on life expectancy is relatively minimal. We owe this progress not to a successful vaccine but rather to a wide range of prophylactic and therapeutic antiviral drugs. More than 30 drugs are currently approved for the prevention and treatment of HIV, some of which provide durable protection for up to six months with a single injection.

We can use the hard-won lessons from the fight against HIV to combat SARS-CoV-2 drug resistance, thereby creating an insurance policy against future mutated variants. To that end, we must vastly expand our search for highly active, safe, long-lasting antiviral drugs, while also deepening our understanding of the cellular, molecular, and biochemical features of SARS-CoV-2.

Unlike previous waves of the pandemic, which were driven by a single ominous variant, current and future waves will be driven by multiple subvariants of Omicron. Each new subvariant accumulates mutations in similar parts of the receptor binding domain, enhancing the virus' immune-dodging capabilities. We therefore need to focus

on new groups of antibodies that can circumvent future Omicron variants by binding at alternative sites that rarely mutate.

We should be taking advantage of advances in artificial-intelligence antibody modeling to reduce the time spent during the antibody identification process. Why sort through millions of B-cell receptor sequences manually when a software programme can greatly expedite that work? While there is some research and development underway on broadly neutralising antibodies, these typically have a lower affinity for SARS-CoV-2. Fortunately, in a recent study using an AI pipeline, researchers demonstrated a nearly 20-fold increased affinity to an existing drug. Similar successes could be replicated to develop treatments for COVID.

The pandemic isn't over, and millions of people remain at risk. Only by accelerating and consistently funding research into these alternative drug-development avenues will we find our way out of the COVID crisis once and for all.

The writer is a scientist, biotech entrepreneur, and infectious disease expert.

©PROJECT SYNDICATE

Let us keep flaming in our heart the fire of progress.

THE MOTHER



Xi-Putin Axis

China's President Xi Jinping and Russia's President Vladimir Putin met in Moscow at a time when both the countries are facing hostilities from the US-led West. In the meanwhile, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has issued an arrest warrant for Putin for crimes committed in Ukraine. Xi exuded confidence in Moscow, positioning himself as a global statesman after having brokered a peace deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia, thought to be an impossibility till recently. China and Russia declared their resolve with great flourish at the end of the three-day visit, to cement their ties further and strive for setting up an international order that can counterbalance the one established by the US and its democratic allies. This may remind some of the attempts made in the early 20th century by Germany, Italy and Japan to establish a new order under those Axis powers. However, the outcome of the World War II defeated the Axis ambitions but at great cost to humanity.

In unambiguous terms, Russia and China decried what they called America's policy of dictating terms to other countries. Significantly, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida also met Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the same time. This only demonstrates the whole show is intended not so much to end the Russia-Ukraine war but to send the message that China would back Russia in the latter's attempt to nibble at Ukraine's territory and Russia would stand by China in dealing with the challenge posed to it by the AUKUS (Australia-UK-US) encircling China with nuclear-powered submarines and other arsenals.

Apart from showcasing their close personal rapport, Xi and Putin signed over a dozen agreements bolstering cooperation in areas from trade to technology. Their central statement asserted the two countries would "deepen" their relationship.

Putin gave his seal of approval to a formula proposed by Xi to handle the Ukraine imbroglio. Predictably, the West has spurned it for the simple reason that China has neither condemned Russia's invasion nor does its proposal talk about ending the war. Instead both leaders called for cessation of actions that "increase tensions" and "prolong" the war in Ukraine. Their joint statement did not acknowledge that Russia's invasion and military assault were the cause of ongoing violence and humanitarian crisis in Ukraine.

The leaders also urged NATO to "respect the sovereignty, security, interests," of other countries – a reference that appeared to echo the stand taken by both countries blaming the Western security alliance for provoking Russia to invade. Putin said "many of the provisions" put forward by Xi could be "taken as the basis" for a peaceful settlement in Ukraine, "when the West and Kyiv are ready for it."

But the proposal has been viewed as a nonstarter in the West and Ukraine, because it includes no provision that Moscow withdraw its troops from Ukrainian land. Zelenskyy himself correctly explained the real intent of a ceasefire which, according to him, would "simply freeze" the conflict, giving Russia time to "prepare and come back again with their single wish to occupy our country."

The intention of China and Russia seems to be to build their alignment against the US and establish a world order suited to their own autocratic agendas. The discussion on the conflict in Ukraine appears to be a smoke-screen. Xi's parting message leaves no one in doubt about it as he said during a goodbye handshake with Putin, "Together, we should push forward these changes that have not happened for 100 years. Take care." Their call for promoting a "multipolar world" is a clear challenge to America's global domination.

Apart from pledging more joint military exercises, Putin and Xi declared the two countries' economic cooperation would be strengthened further. This would be beneficial for both as Russia is feeling the heat of sanctions imposed by the West and China would gain with Moscow ready to support Chinese businesses replacing Western enterprises. Russia has become increasingly reliant on China as an import market and an exporter of electronics after being slapped with sweeping sanctions. The partners appeared to be going ahead with their plan to continue a surge in energy trade over the past year as Europe cut its reliance on Russia's key resource.

The upshot of the high profile visit is that Xi is sailing smoothly in his attempt to enhance his image as an international player after having consolidated his position in his country. Putin tries to come out of international isolation for his misadventure in Ukraine getting China by his side as his most reliable ally.

With these events as the backdrop, it is anybody's guess as to what India will do in the coming months. India had openly sided with Putin at the international level multiple times thereby alienating the West. Now that China has openly offered its partnership to Russia, India might find itself isolated from both sides.

WISDOM CORNER

- Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony. MAHATMA GANDHI
- Most people do not really want freedom, because freedom involves responsibility, and most people are frightened of responsibility. SIGMUND FREUD
- A creative man is motivated by the desire to achieve, not by the desire to beat others. AYN RAND

WORDSWORTH

Gremlin

A gremlin is an imaginary mischievous sprite. Not just any sprite, but one that you feel must be responsible for that unexplained fault you have just experienced with some device, especially a mechanical or electronic one. If the car won't start, or the computer is acting up, one may blame gremlins. The word looks so much like the name of some immemorial archetypal being that it comes as a surprise to discover that it is not known before the early years of the last century and was in its heyday among RAF pilots in World War Two. By 1942, news of their coming had reached Newsday in the USA, which described them, one hopes tongue in cheek, as "exasperating pixies, often clad in caps, ruffled collars, tight breeches and spats, who delight in raising hell in Allied planes". Gremlins, another report says, were "fond of drinking petrol, distracting the pilot, interfering with radio communications, and even causing the pattern of stars to distort, thereby making accurate navigation impossible". Roald Dahl's first children's book, published in 1943, was called The Gremlins: A Royal Air Force Story and he did claim to have invented the name. However, there is a lot of evidence that it was around earlier. Some trace it back to the Royal Flying Corps in World War One, others to RAF operations in India and the Middle East in the 1920s. In those days, the most common beer available in the mess was brewed by Fremlin; it is plausibly said that the name comes from a blend of this name with goblin, so a gremlin was a creature that was first viewed, you might say, through the bottom of a bottle. It explains a lot, especially those spats.

LOL

Getting into fights

They were married, but since the argument they had a few days earlier, they hadn't been talking to each other. Instead, they were giving each other written notes. One evening he gave her a paper



where it said: "Wake me up tomorrow morning at 6 am." The next morning he woke up and saw that it was 9 o'clock. Naturally he got very angry, but as he turned around he found a note on his pillow saying: "Wake up, it's 6 o'clock!"



William A. Haseltine

PUBLIC HEALTH PRECAUTIONS ARE VIRTUALLY NONEXISTENT IN MOST PARTS OF THE WORLD

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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

Chance for Rahul

Sir, This refers to the editorial "Defamation," Orissa POST, March 27. Rahul Gandhi's expulsion from the Lok Sabha might have become inevitable following his conviction and two-year sentence in a defamation case. The expulsion could generate a modicum of sympathy for Rahul though it is hard to see how he can repeat the feat of his grandmother, Indira Gandhi, who after her expulsion from the Lok Sabha for a breach of privilege of the House had returned triumphant by winning the Chikmagalur by-election in 1978. The problem is that even after his expulsion from the Lok Sabha Rahul is unlikely to find few takers for his fulminations. If anything, the expulsion may be the last chance for him to shed his "Pappu" image and emerge as a serious leader with an ability to grasp things in the right perspective. His rambling monologues reveal him to be a scatterbrain, unable to comprehend matters even in a commonsensical way. However, given that any contest which pits Modi versus Rahul as prime minister is still a no-brainer. The ruling party might have done its sums while ejecting him out of the Lok Sabha so mercilessly, using a provision in law whose excision was vehemently opposed by none other than Rahul himself in 2013.

N Sadhasiva Reddy, BANGALORE

Vicious cycle

Sir, Only very recently a report from V-Dem Institute at Sweden's University of Gothenburg referred to India as "one of the worst autocratisers in the last 10 years." The institution's report is ample proof of India's sliding democracy, as the latest Rahul Gandhi episode demonstrates so, which is nothing short of tyranny and despotism. But, in a sense, Rahul Gandhi's sentence and his disqualification as MP have given an opportunity for a fragmented anti-BJP Opposition to unite strongly. The dramatic developments saw a shift in the dynamics of Opposition ranks with parties like, the Trinamool Congress, the Aam Aadmi Party, Bharat Rashtra Samithi and Samajwadi Party, despite their differences with the Congress, quickly expressing strong support to the embattled leader with the common "democracy in danger" refrain. Thanks to the BJP, as under its rule, Indian politics is caught in a vicious cycle of vendetta, which has been taken to a new level. In a true democracy, the government should be afraid of the people. But, in India it is happening the other way round now.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, CHENNAI

national

of the day quote

In the future, we have to work vigorously in this field, because it can change not only the economy of India but also the face of rural areas

NITIN GADKARI | UNION ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS MINISTER

Look at the behaviour. For the first time in several years, they (Congress MPs) tore papers and threw those at the chair. The speaker repeatedly says he wants to run the House and that he would give everybody a chance (to speak)

PIYUSH GOYAL | UNION MINISTER

A conspiracy is being hatched at a high level to stop free electricity being provided by the Kejriwal government. Files are not being shown to the chief minister and the power minister... It shows that something is amiss

ATISHI MARLENA | DELHI POWER MINISTER

SHORT TAKES

Rio hints at not holding civic polls

Kohima: Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio Monday hinted that the civic polls scheduled May 16 might not be held if tribal hohos and civil society organisations continue protesting against it. The State Election Commission has notified elections to three municipal councils and 36 town councils May 16, with 33 per cent reservation for women. Tribal organisations and civil society groups are, however, demanding that elections be held only after amending the Nagaland Municipal Act (NMA), 2001, which they contend, infringes upon Article 391(A) of the Constitution that gives special rights to Nagas on their lands and its resources, and safeguards their customs and traditions.

Parts of Kolkata turn into battlefield

Kolkata: Parts of South Kolkata turned into virtual battlefields on Monday as protests erupted over the 'human sacrifice' of a seven-year-old girl by her neighbour in the Tiljala area. On Sunday night, a man named Alok Kumar was arrested after the girl's body was recovered from his residence.

Water pipeline bursts

Mumbai: A major water main pipeline was damaged and burst during the construction of a water culvert near the Mulund Octroi Checkpost in Mumbai Monday afternoon. The 2,345 mm Mumbai-2 mainline, was damaged during the ongoing work carried out by the state government.

SAVARKAR 'INSULT' ROW

Mumbai, March 27: In a fresh development, Shiv Sena (UBT) President and former Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and Rahul Gandhi will soon meet personally to hammer out the Savarkar row, state Congress chief Nana Patole said here Monday. Simultaneously, Sena (UBT) MP and Chief Spokesperson Sanjay Raut also announced his plan to meet Gandhi on the same issue and sort out the matter, even as the ruling Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party alliance took jibes at Thackeray. The developments came a day after Thackeray publicly appealed to the Congress leader to refrain from insulting Swatantryaveer

SC: Borrowers must be heard before an account is classified as fraudulent

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: Banks should provide a reasonable opportunity of hearing and representation before classifying a borrower's account as fraud, the Supreme Court said Monday.

Upholding a 2020 order of the Telangana high court, a bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justice Hima Kohli said the classification of an account as fraud not only results in reporting the crime to investigating agencies, but also has other penal and civil consequences for the borrowers.

The apex court said the principles of natural justice demand that the borrowers must be served a notice, and given an opportunity to explain the conclusions of the forensic audit report.

"Consistent with the principles of natural justice, the lender banks should provide an opportunity to a borrower by furnishing a copy of the audit reports and allow the borrower a reasonable opportunity to submit a representation before classifying the account as fraud."

"A reasoned order has to be issued on the objections addressed by the borrower," the bench said.

The judgement was delivered on pleas relating to the Reserve Bank of India (Frauds Classification and Reporting by Commercial Banks and Select FIs) Directions 2016 which were challenged before different high courts primarily on the ground that no opportunity of being heard is envisaged to borrowers before classifying their accounts as fraudulent.



Elaborating on the consequences when a borrower's account is declared fraud, the apex court said this virtually leads to a credit freeze for the borrower, who is debarred from raising finance from financial markets and capital markets.

The top court said the bar from raising finances could be fatal for the borrower leading to its 'civil death' in addition to the infringement of their rights under Article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution.

"Since debarment distorts a person or entity from exercising their rights and/or privileges, it is elementary that the principles of natural justice should be made applicable and the person against whom an action of debarment is sought should be given an opportunity of being heard. Indeed, debarment is akin to blacklisting a borrower from availing credit," it said. Debarment of a borrower under the Master Directions on Frauds is akin to blacklisting the borrower for being untrustworthy and unworthy of credit by the banks, it said.

The apex court said the principles of natural justice demand that the borrowers must be served a notice, and given an opportunity to explain the conclusions of the forensic audit report

KCR's open challenge to Maha govt

AGENCIES

Nanded, March 27: BRS supremo and Telangana Chief Minister K Chandra Sekhar Rao Sunday challenged the Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis to prove his sincerity by implementing the Farmer friendly welfare programmes of Telangana in his state before preventing the BRS from entering into the Maratha regions.

At a public meeting in Maharashtra's Nanded, KCR, as the Telangana Chief Minister is popularly known, stated that schemes like Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bheema, which have been

successful in Telangana, would be implemented in all the states where the BRS is planning to venture.

He said the Maharashtra government is keeping aloof from these pro-farmer schemes and is preventing people from attending such public meetings. "If Fadnavis is keen on preventing us [from coming to Maharashtra], let him implement the schemes for farmers that our regime has announced," KCR said. "I appeal to Fadnavis to implement 24-hour water, free electricity for farmers, and purchase their yield. I will stop coming to Maharashtra," the Telangana CM said.



At his second public rally in Nanded, KCR also announced that

the BRS would contest Panchayat elections in Maharashtra, amid chants of *Ab Ki Bar, Kisan Sarkar*.

On February 5, KCR had said in Nanded that the time has come for peasants to take the reins of the country and held the Congress and BJP guilty for the plight of farmers in the country in the last 75 years. "Some eight-nine years ago, Telangana was in bad condition. Farmers were committing suicide in large numbers. But we changed the governance and reduced their burden. If Telangana can improve why a state like Maharashtra which has more resources, cannot improve?" Rao asked.

NEPAL PUTS AMRITPAL ON SURVEILLANCE LIST

AGENCIES

Kathmandu, March 27: Nepal Monday put fugitive radical preacher Amritpal Singh, who is believed to be hiding in the country, on its surveillance list after India requested it not to allow him to flee to a third country and arrest him if he attempts to escape using an Indian passport or any other fake passport.

The Department of Immigration has put Singh on its surveillance list following a request from the Indian Embassy here, officials said. "We have received a written note along with a copy of his passport from the (Indian) embassy suspecting that Amritpal Singh might have entered Nepal," said Kamal Prasad Pandey, the Information Officer at the Department.

"The Indian Embassy has sent the note asking the Department to put Singh, a member of a separatist group, on the surveillance list," Pandey said.

It was suspected that he had entered Nepal and was hiding somewhere around. There was no immediate confirmation about the letter from the Indian mission here.



Another aide detained

Chandigarh: A new picture of Amritpal Singh with his key aide Papalpreet Singh surfaced Monday social media as another close associate of the radical preacher was detained under the stringent National Security Act. Officials said the picture was taken a day after the police operation against the Khalistan sympathiser began. Both men looked relaxed; Amritpal Singh is seen holding a beverage can. In another development, Amritpal's Singh's close associate Varinder Singh alias Fauji was nabbed by the Amritsar Rural police.

Earlier, the Kathmandu Post newspaper reported that in a letter sent to the Department of Consular Services Saturday, the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu has requested the government agencies to arrest Singh if he tries to flee from Nepal.

"Singh is currently hiding in Nepal," the paper said, citing a copy of the letter obtained by it. "The esteemed ministry is re-

quested to inform the Department of Immigration not to permit Amritpal Singh to travel through Nepal for any third country and arrest him if he attempts to escape from Nepal using Indian Passport or any other fake passport under intimation to this mission," it said.

The letter and Singh's personal details have been circulated to all the concerned agencies from hotels to airlines, the paper said, citing multiple sources.

SC dismisses plea

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 27: The Supreme Court Monday refused to entertain a plea seeking a uniform minimum age of 21 years for marriage for both men and women, saying that it will amount to directing Parliament to make a law to fix the age.

A bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices P S Narasimha and J B Pardiwala said the matter fell under the domain of the legislature and it will not be dealing with the issue.

The top court referred to its February 20 order by which it had dismissed another PIL filed by advocate Ashwini Upadhyay seeking equality in the legal age of marriage for men and women.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, said, "This will be akin to legislating... This is in the domain of the legislature. The striking down of a provision would result in a situation where there will be no minimum age for marriage for women."

If the court will entertain this plea it "will be then directing

UNIFORM MINIMUM AGE FOR MARRIAGE



Parliament to fix the minimum age", the CJI observed.

"The challenge in these proceedings is to the personal laws on the marriage age of men and women. We have decided a similar case in the Ashwini Upadhyay vs Union of India February 20, 2023... In view of the order passed, the petition stands dismissed," the bench said.

The plea, filed by one Shahida Quraishi, had sought enhancing the legal age of marriage for women to 21 at par with men.

K'taka BJP MLA held in graft case



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore, March 27: The Lokayukta police arrested BJP MLA Madal Virupakshappa hours after the Karnataka High Court dismissed his bail petition in a bribery case relating to Karnataka Soaps and Detergents Limited (KSDL) Monday.

A viral video showed the Lokayukta sleuths intercepting the MLA at the Kyathasandra Toll Gate in Tumakuru when was heading for Bengaluru.

Sources said Virupakshappa alighted from his car, after which the Lokayukta police took him with them in their vehicle.

"We arrested him in Tumakuru when he (the MLA) was on the way to Bangalore," Lokayukta Inspector General of Police A Subramanyeshwara Rao told PTI.

The BJP MLA is the main accused in the bribery scam in KSDL. The case relates to the alleged demand and receipt of bribes for payment of bills by the State Government Company to contractors who supplied chemicals to it. The HC had reserved its judgment on the issue last Friday. The Court said that Virupakshappa's custody was necessary.

Rajasthan pvt doctors stage massive protest

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaipur, March 27: Private doctors protesting against the Rajasthan Right to Health Bill took out a massive rally in Jaipur Monday in a show of strength and to press their demand for its withdrawal, and threatened that their hospitals will not be part of any state healthcare scheme in the future.

Thousands of doctors, their family members and people associated with the medical profession, including medical store owners, took part in the rally which started from the resident doctors hostel ground of the SMS Hospital and passed through several parts of the city. Private hospitals and nursing homes in Rajasthan have been shut for several days due to a strike of private doctors, leading to a rush of patients in government hospitals.

Medical services in government hospitals were also affected as doctors across the state boycotted work for two hours in solidarity with the protesting private doctors. The protesting doctors say that the bill, which was passed by the Assembly last week, will increase bureaucratic interference in their functioning and insisted on its withdrawal.



JOVIAL MOOD: Class XIth students jubilate on completion of their West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education (WBCHSE) exams in Balurghat

Rahul-Uddhav to meet and hammer out differences

Vinayak D Savarkar -- a day after Gandhi asserted that "I won't apologise because I am not a Savarkar, I am a Gandhi".

While declaring his full support to Gandhi in his fight against the BJP, Thackeray however, forcefully reiterated his plea, urging him (Gandhi) "to refrain from targeting Veer Savarkar who's our idol". "I am publicly appealing to Rahul Gandhi... You are doing a great job, fighting for the country. But, Savarkar is our icon... We shall not tolerate any insults to him," Thackeray advised the Congress leader, while addressing a massive rally in the Muslim-dominated Malegaon town in Nashik late Sunday.

Endorsing, Raut said that Veer Savarkar is "a matter of our faith",



and such utterances are intolerable, adding that he will call on Gandhi in a day or two in New Delhi to discuss and amicably re-

solve the matter. Earlier, the Sena (UBT) had raised strong objections to Gandhi's comments vis-A-vis Savarkar during the Bharat Jodo

Shinde tries to pip Thackeray

Mumbai: Amid the ongoing row, Maharashtra's Shiv Sena Chief Minister Eknath Shinde Monday jumped in by announcing processions across the state. He said that 'Savarkar Gaurav Yatras' shall be held in Maharashtra and also changed his social media accounts by replacing his profile pictures with that of Savarkar. "I strongly condemn Rahul Gandhi's statements on Veer Savarkar... It was because of his contribution that India got freedom. He had spent many years in the Cellular Jail in the Andaman Isles. Rahul Gandhi should go and stay there for one day," said Shinde sharply. Referring to Thackeray's criticism of Gandhi, Shinde asked whether he had the guts to thrash the Congress leader with shoes, just as the late Balasaheb Thackeray had done with another Congressman Mani Shankar Aiyar.

Yatra in November during its Maharashtra leg.

However, the Congress ruled out the possibility of their snapping ties in the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), with Chief Spokesperson Atul Londhe and MP Rajani A. Patil

saying their stand on the Savarkar issue is clear for all.

Similarly, Patole declared that the Congress' stance on the Savarkar matter is well known to all and vowed that the party will not make any ideological compromises.



One-horned rhino killed in Kaziranga



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Guwahati, March 27: After zero poaching cases were recorded last year in Assam's Kaziranga National Park, a one-horned rhino has been allegedly killed by poachers and its horn was taken away, officials said Monday. Divisional Forest Officer Ramesh Gogoi said: "A rhino carcass was detected by staff of Kathpara camp under Western Range Bagori at about 4.30 p.m. in Bormer beel on Sunday. There was cut mark in nasal bone of the rhino and horn was taken away by miscreants."

The forest department has anticipated that the rhino was killed at least 6-7 days ago. "Sex of the dead rhinoceros is yet to be ascertained

as the carcass was found floating in water," the officer added.

According to the forest department, further details can be revealed after the autopsy. Meanwhile, an investigation has been launched to track the poachers, said Gogoi. For the first time since 1977, Assam last year saw no rhino poaching in Kaziranga National Park. Rhinos are coveted for their horns, which are sold for a high price in some nations due to their purported medical qualities.

Between 2000 and 2021, 191 rhinos were poached in Assam, according to official statistics. The highest rhino deaths, 27 occurred in both 2013 and 2014, while 2020 and 2021 saw the lowest number - two each.

CHECKING RISING CRIME

2,051 miscreants arrested in Raj

DIRECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE UMESH MISHRA SAID THAT 8,000 POLICE PERSONNEL PARTICIPATED IN THE SPECIAL OPERATION IN JAIPUR AND KOTA RANGE AND CHURU DISTRICT AND 2,051 MISCREANTS WERE DETAINED

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Jaipur, March 27: In a special campaign launched by the Rajasthan police in Jaipur and Kota and Churu 2,051 miscreants have been arrested.

The operation was launched on the direction of Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot Sunday and involved 8,000 policemen. Director General of Police Umesh Mishra said that 8,000 police personnel participated in the special operation in Jaipur and Kota range and Churu district and 2,051 miscreants were detained.

"A special campaign was conducted under the leadership of ADG Crime Dinesh N.M. During the proceedings, Kota and Jaipur Range IG reviewed the proceedings by



sitting in the control room. Superintendents of Police of Jaipur and Kota range and Churu district led the proceedings while staying in the field," he said.

Additional Director General of Police Crime Dinesh N.M. said that Kota city police arrested 224 miscreants during the raids in 112 hideouts. The Kota rural police raided 160 places and arrested 121 miscreants; Bundi police raided 234 places and arrested 281 miscreants; Baran police raided 221 places and arrested 129 miscreants, and the Jhalawar police raided 270 places and arrested 226 miscreants. And 984 accused were arrested and raided at 997 places in the total Kota range.

Under the campaign in Jaipur range, on Sunday, Jaipur Rural Police arrested 56 criminals, Sikar

DELIMITATION EXERCISE

Congress refuses to meet EC team

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Guwahati, March 27: Assam Congress has refused to meet the Election Commission (EC) team that has been touring the state to take stock of the situation regarding the ongoing delimitation exercise of Parliamentary and Assembly constituencies.

Bhupen Borah, the president of Assam Pradesh Congress, said Monday that he had earlier informed the Chief Election Commissioner about several loopholes in the delimitation exercise in the state. However, the EC did not respond to that despite several reminders.

He said, "I met the CEC, Rajiv Kumar, on March 4 in Delhi and submitted a memorandum regarding the flaws in the ongoing delimitation exercise. He promised a written response. We sent multiple follow-up reminders after the meeting, but they have not responded as of now." The Congress leader has also questioned the time allotted to political parties for keeping their views on delimitation.

"Eleven political parties were allowed a cumulative time of 3 hours to meet the EC team, which means each one of us had hardly more than 15-20 minutes to express our views," Borah said. According to the Assam Congress chief, due to these reasons, his party has decided to boycott the all-



Bhupen Borah, the president of Assam Pradesh Congress, said Monday that he had earlier informed the Chief Election Commissioner about several loopholes in the delimitation exercise in the state

The full team of the Election Commission arrived in Guwahati Sunday evening to meet all stakeholders regarding the delimitation

During this visit, the Election Commission will interact with political parties, public representatives, members of civil society, and social organisations regarding delimitation exercise

party meeting with the EC team. However, he claimed that the Congress is not against the delimitation exercise.

"We are not against the delimitation, but the EC must address our concerns. It has been decided that until we get a written response to our earlier memorandum, we will not meet the EC team," Borah added.

The full team of the Election Commission arrived in Guwahati Sunday evening to meet all stakeholders regarding the delimitation. Chief Election Commissioner of India Rajiv Kumar, Election

Commissioners Anup Chandra Pandey and Arun Goel, and other ECI officials will know the ground reality and expectations of the stakeholders and the general public regarding the ongoing delimitation exercise.

During this visit, the Commission will interact with political parties, public representatives, members of civil society, and social organisations regarding delimitation exercise. They will also meet officials of the state administration, including the Deputy Commissioners of all districts in the state.

Raje retained in new posters, Poonia out

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Jaipur, March 27: New posters put up outside the BJP state party headquarters here hint towards new political equations being formed in the Rajasthan unit of the party after the appointment of Chittorgarh MP C.P. Joshi as the state president.

In the latest posters seen outside the party office, former Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje's picture has been retained while the picture of outgoing president Satish Poonia has been removed.

Raje's picture was removed from the posters at the party headquarters after Satish Poonia became the party president in Rajasthan. In January this year, when BJP national president J.P. Nadda visited Rajasthan, then once again Vasundhara Raje's picture was included in the posters at the BJP headquarters. Since then, fresh discussion on changes in the party politics started doing the rounds.

Satish Poonia's photo has now been removed from the poster out-

Raje's picture was removed from the posters at the party headquarters after Satish Poonia became the party president in Rajasthan

In the new pictures, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president J.P. Nadda, newly appointed state chief CP Joshi and former Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje have been given place

side the Rajasthan BJP headquarters. At the same time, former Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje is still intact in the poster. Even before the coronation of C.P. Joshi, new posters have been put up outside the BJP headquarters. In the new pictures, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president J.P. Nadda, newly appointed state chief C.P. Joshi and former Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje have been given place.

The fresh round of discussion among the political circles is the removal of the picture of Satish Poonia, which had been there in the boardings at the BJP headquarters for the last three years.



TRADITIONAL DELICACIES

Women becoming small-scale entrepreneurs by selling 'pithas'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, March 27: For Moromi Talukdar or Bijoya Das, 'pithas' and 'larus' are not mere traditional Assamese sweets, these are also means of livelihood, especially in the urban landscape where avenues of earning are limited to definite skill sets. They are among the scores of women in Assam's largest city Guwahati who have turned into small-scale entrepreneurs by making 'pithas' (rice pancakes), 'larus' (coconut/ sesame laddus) and other such delicacies and selling them to the general public.

"I had started my business in 2008. There is a demand for pithas and larus here as people in the city don't have the means to get the ingredients and also many lacked the time," Das said. After starting the venture from her own kitchen, Das said she now employs four women for making the orders and two men to help in the packaging and delivery.

Talukdar is part of a 10-member women's group which engages in various activities for income generation. "In villages, we can grow our own vegetables, help in farming, etc, and help save money. But in Guwahati, as women, our means to contribute to the family income are limited.



"In such a scenario, this business of selling pithas and larus has helped us earn money and help the family," she said. Buyers are aplenty for these entrepreneurs as most city dwellers find it difficult to get the ingredients like rice flour, grated coconut or sesame seeds.

"I know how to make pithas and larus, but getting the ingredients is a big headache. Also, with the daily schedule of looking after the household, time becomes a constraint," Mina Sharma, a Guwahati resident, said. She pointed out that in villages, making these delicacies is almost a community affair as women from several households come together and make them. For youngsters like Sumi Tanti,

who have settled outside the state due to work, the packaged goodies are a reminder of home. "We really miss home, especially if we can't visit during the Bihus. With the pithas and larus now available in all major cities in packaged form, we can at least relish these delicacies," Tanti, who lives in Bangalore, said.

These women entrepreneurs have been helped by self-help groups and NGOs working for gender empowerment by training them in packaging and helping in marketing their goods. Archana Talukdar, who has been working in this sector for over a decade, said, "We do basic hand-holding of these women. They have the skills and we help in monetising it."

GOOD NEWS FOR STUDENTS

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Jaipur, March 27: Now, up to 50 per cent concession will be given to students appearing for competitive exams during their stays in hotels of Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation (RTDC).

The meeting of the RTDC board was held under the chairmanship of Dharmendra Rathore at Paryatan Bhavan. The 50 per cent discount will also be given to central and state government employees during transfer.

In the board meeting, it was decided to give up to 50 per cent discount on stay in RTDC hotels to veterans feted with Bharat Ratna, Padma Bhushan, Padma Vibhushan and accredited journalists.



Rathore said that cruise service will be started in Chambal River Front to promote tourism in the state after Palace on Wheels and Helicopter joyride.

Along with this, the Fame Tour of Palace on Wheels will also be organised in April in which film artists along with foreign ambassadors, journalists and representatives of travel agencies will be made to visit Rajasthan in a royal train from April 22-24.

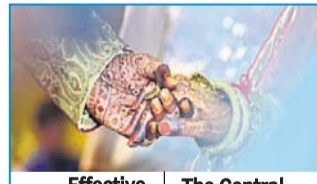
Raj hikes inter-caste marriage incentive

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Jaipur, March 27: Aimed at promoting social harmony and unity, the Rajasthan government has announced doubling the incentive for inter-caste marriages to Rs 10 lakhs.

Effective immediately, inter-caste couples tying the knot will now receive Rs 10 lakhs, up from the previous incentive of Rs 5 lakhs. Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot had recently announced this in the 2023-24 Budget after which a notification was issued by the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment on Thursday.

Under the revised Dr. Savita Ben Ambedkar Inter-caste Marriage Scheme, Rs 5 lakh will be put in a fixed deposit for eight years, while the remaining Rs 5 lakhs will be deposited in a joint bank account for the newlyweds. The scheme, launched in 2006, initially provided with Rs 50,000 which was later increased to Rs 5 lakhs in



Effective immediately, inter-caste couples tying the knot will now receive Rs 10 lakhs, up from the previous incentive of Rs 5 lakhs

The Central and state governments jointly fund the scheme, with the latter contributing 75 per cent and the Centre covering the remaining 25 per cent

April 2013.

The Central and state governments jointly fund the scheme, with the latter contributing 75 per cent and the Centre covering the remaining 25 per cent. In the last financial year, the government released Rs 33.55 crore under the scheme, and over Rs 4.5 crore in the current year.

Assam plans major outreach for 200 yrs of tea industry

The total area under tea cultivation in Assam accounts for more than half of the country's total area under tea

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Guwahati, March 27: Assam produces roughly 55 per cent of India's tea. The state government, to mark the 200 years of the state's tea industry, has proposed to organise numerous events including road shows in major cities across the country as well as abroad to promote Assam Tea as a brand and showcase the rich socio-cultural heritage of the tea garden communities.

The tea industry in Assam occupies an important place and it plays a very useful part in the national economy. In 1823 one Robert Bruce discovered tea plants growing wild in the upper Brahmaputra Valley. A tea garden was established in 1833 in erstwhile Lakhimpur district in eastern Assam.

According to experts, Assam tea has an international reputation and commands a significant share in the world tea market. The total area under tea cultivation in Assam accounts for more than half of the country's total area under tea. The estimated annual average



production of tea in Assam is about 630-700 million kg. Freedom fighter and martyr Maniram Dutta Barua, commonly known as Maniram Dewan, also pioneered tea plantations in Assam.

Dewan along with Piyali (or Peali) Barua was hanged on February 26, 1858 at Jorhat Central Jail at the age of 51. His execution by the British sparked off a rebellion against colonial rule. Assam Finance Minister Ajanta Neog said that it has been proposed in the state budget (2023-24), presented

in the assembly last week, that Assam Tea Industries Special Incentives Scheme (ATISIS), 2020 will be further strengthened to incentivise the production of orthodox tea and specialty tea.

She said that as promised, an increase in the production subsidy for orthodox and specialty tea from Rs 7 to Rs 10 per kg is already under process. However, celebrating the 200 years of Assam tea, the budget announced that an enhanced production subsidy of Rs 12 per kg will be extended for 2023-24.

Rs 100 crore has been earmarked for this scheme. The budget has also announced extension of a tax holiday on agricultural income tax for the next three years, development of infrastructure in the tea garden areas, special relief, waiver of all the electricity dues arrears of tea garden workers living in the lines, wage compensation scheme for pregnant women of tea garden areas and construction of 10,000 houses under the Mukhya Mantri Awas Yojana.

The minister said: "Our government will continue supporting Assam Tea Corporation Limited against the payment of outstanding liabilities of interest on provident fund in a phased manner, keeping in mind the greater interest of ATCL workers." The Assam government also decided to recognise tea garden workers and the Adivasi community in the tea garden areas as a separate sub-category within the Other Backward Community.

Around three per cent reservation in government jobs, within the OBC quota, will be considered

for them subject to fulfilling the legal stipulations in this regard. The tea industry bodies hailed the Assam government's decisions on the occasion of the bicentenary of the state's tea industry.

The Tea Association of India (TAI) Assam branch secretary Dipanjan Deka said: "The proposal to hold road shows and other events across India to promote Assam tea as part of the 200 years' celebration of Assam tea, would be of huge benefit to the state tea industry."

North Eastern Tea Association adviser Bidyananda Barkakoty said that they are delighted by the announcement of the celebration of 200 years of the Assam tea industry in a grand manner by the state government.

"The proposal to organise road shows in major cities across the country as well as abroad to promote Assam tea as a brand and showcase the rich socio-cultural heritage of the tea garden communities would go a long way in increasing the per capita consumption of tea, which is the need of the hour," Barkakoty said.

of the day quote

We have to create new wetlands around Ganga and Yamuna. Forests have to be developed in the form of ecotourism. Special parks should be developed amid forests for the protection of the state animal Barasingha and the state bird Sarus crane

YOGI ADITYANATH | UP CHIEF MINISTER

Hey Prabhu (Oh God.), India only had to wait to see this day. A family which believes it is above India's democracy, above Parliament, above the country. That Gandhi family is equating itself with Lord Ram now

ANURAG THAKUR | UNION MINISTER

Even if a student from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh or any part of the country tops from any Jharkhand school, he/she will be rewarded by the state government

HEMANT SOREN | JHARKHAND CM

SHORT TAKES

NEET aspirant dies by suicide in TN

Coimbatore (TN): A 19-year-old student who was preparing for the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) died by suicide in Salem district Monday, police said.

BSF recovers 6 kg narcotics

Chandigarh: The Border Security Force (BSF) on Monday seized six kg narcotics dropped by a drone in Punjab's Amritsar sector, an official said.

MP lawyers continue stir

Jabalpur: Lawyers across Madhya Pradesh continued to keep away from work on the fourth day Monday despite the High Court directing them to end their stir.

4 of family killed in road mishap

Latur: Four members of a family, including three children, were killed and three others injured Monday when their car fell off a bridge in Latur district of Maharashtra, police said.

Two die in tiger attack

Surajpur: A tiger attacked three men in a forest in Chhattisgarh's Surajpur district Monday, resulting in the death of two of them on way to hospitals, a senior official said.



Delhi model is zero-corruption model. Delhi has the least inflation in the country. Delhi model is arranging world-class health, transport, 24x7 electricity and water supplies and creating a clean and modern city

ARVIND KEJRIWAL | DELHI CHIEF MINISTER

PREZ VISITS NETAJI'S HOUSE IN KOLKATA

President Droupadi Murmu Monday visited Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's ancestral residence here and paid homage to the freedom fighter



Oppn MPs stage protest

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 27: Wearing black clothes, several opposition MPs Monday took out a march from parliament to Vijay Chowk to protest against the government over the Adani issue and Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from the Lok Sabha.

The protesters, including Congress MP Sonia Gandhi and party chief Mallikarjun Kharge, gathered near the statue of Mahatma Gandhi in the Parliament complex and raised slogans against the government. Holding a huge "Satyamev Jayate" banner and placards with "save democracy" written on them, the MPs proceeded towards Vijay Chowk where they staged a sit-in.

"How has Adani's wealth multiplied so much in the last few years. When you are going to foreign countries how many times have you taken the industrialist with you. The PM has not been able to give answers to questions raised against Adani," Kharge told reporters at Vijay Chowk. "We want a JPC on the Adani issue. Why is the government not agreeing to this? Why are you scared of a JPC probe... It means 'dal mein kuchh kala hai' (something is wrong)," he said.

The opposition has been seeking a joint parliamentary committee



Opposition MPs, wearing black protest at Parliament House complex during Budget Session in New Delhi

probe into the allegations of corporate fraud and stock price manipulations against the Adani Group. Kharge also raised the issue

criminal defamation case. "You want to defame Rahul Gandhi that is why you transferred the case to Gujarat even as the

Puri makes disparaging remarks against Rahul

New Delhi: The political discourse hit a new low Monday with Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri making disparaging remarks targeting Rahul Gandhi and the Congress paying him back in the same coin, saying such comments "reveal the character" of new entrants to the BJP.



of Rahul Gandhi's disqualification as MP after a Surat court convicted and sentenced him in a 2019

comments were made in Kolar in Karnataka. Today is a black day for democracy," Kharge said. Kharge

TMC attends meet

New Delhi: In a rare display of unity, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) Monday attended the Congress-led opposition strategy meeting. But instead of TMC's floor leaders, its two MPs were in attendance at both the events. In a meeting called by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge Monday evening of floor leaders of like minded parties, TMC will send the same two MPs -- Prasoon Banerjee and Jawahar Sirkar, party leaders said.

Top court rejects Kavitha's plea against ED summons

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: BRS leader K Kavitha Monday failed to get any interim relief from the Supreme Court on her plea, seeking protection from arrest and challenging the summons by the Enforcement Directorate in the alleged Delhi excise policy scam, and tagged her petition with others.

A bench of justices Ajay Rastogi and Bela M Trivedi said it will hear the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leader's petitions and other pleas after three weeks. Appearing for Kavitha, senior advocate Kapil Sibal said, "whether she needs to be interrogated at home or in the ED office is the issue which is seized of by this court and notice has been issued in petitions filed by Nalini Chidambaram and Abhishek Banerjee. I have more to say than tagging the matter".

He informed the bench that the plea filed by Nalini Chidambaram, a senior advocate and wife of Congress leader P Chidambaram, deals with a similar issue of summoning women accused by the ED. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta and Additional Solicitor General (ASG) SV Raju said that after the filing of Nalini Chidambaram's petition, a judgement was passed by a three-judge bench upholding the provisions of the Prevention of the Money Laundering Act (PMLA)



that squarely covers the provisions for summoning an accused.

The bench said it would be appropriate if all the petitions are heard together, and listed the matter after three weeks. Mehta sought permission to file a detailed note on the issue, which the bench allowed. On March 15, the top court agreed to hear Kavitha's plea seeking protection from arrest and challenging the summons issued by the ED.

On March 11, the 44-year-old BRS leader deposed before the ED to record her statement and was summoned again March 16 for questioning. The BRS leader has denied all allegations against her. Kavitha's statement was recorded under the PMLA.

The ED has so far arrested 12 people in the case, including former Delhi deputy chief minister and AAP leader Manish Sisodia.



MATTER OF FAITH: Devotees pour milk as an offering in the River Yamuna on the occasion of 'Yamuna Chath' (Birthday of Goddess Yamuna) in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh

Apex court to hear ex-Lakshadweep MP's request today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: The Supreme Court will hear Tuesday NCP leader Mohammed Faizal's plea against the Lok Sabha Secretariat for not withdrawing a notification disqualifying him as an MP upon his conviction and 10-year sentence that was later stayed by the Kerala High Court.

A bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and justices P S Narasimha and J B Pardiwala took note of the submissions of senior advocate A M Singhvi, appearing for the former Lakshadweep parliamentarian, that the person has not been reinstated as an MP despite his conviction and sentence being stayed by the high court.

The Lok Sabha was "prompt to disqualify Faizal as an MP immediately after he was convicted and sentenced by a local court in January this year, but his membership has not been restored yet despite the high court staying the conviction", Singhvi, appearing for the Nationalist Congress Party leader, said.

Faizal stood disqualified from the membership of Lok Sabha from January 11, the date of his conviction in an attempt to murder case by a sessions court in Kavaratti, according to a notification issued January 13 by the Lok Sabha



MOHAMMED FAIZAL

Secretariat. In his petition filed in the apex court through advocate K R Sasiprabhu, Faizal said the Lok Sabha Secretariat failed to withdraw the notification despite the fact that his conviction was stayed by the high court January 25.

The trial court had January 11 convicted and sentenced him to 10 years imprisonment in the case. Later, the high court stayed the conviction and the sentence imposed upon Faizal, who filed an appeal against the trial court verdict. In January, the Union Territory (UT) of Lakshadweep moved the apex court challenging the January 25 order of the high court which had suspended his conviction and sentence till the disposal of the appeal before it.

On February 20, the top court had issued notice to Faizal and others on the plea filed by Lakshadweep.

NCERT textbooks revised as per new NEP likely from 2024-25



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: New NCERT textbooks revised in accordance with the new National Education Policy (NEP) are likely to be introduced in schools from 2024-25 academic session, Education Ministry officials said Monday. The textbooks will be developed in accordance with the National Curriculum Framework (NCF).

"The new textbooks are likely to be introduced from 2024-25 academic session. It is a tall task but we are aiming for that. The textbooks will be revised as per the new NCF, work on which is already going on. Developing textbooks is a laborious task," a senior MoE official said.

All the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks developed as per the revised NCF will also be available in digital format. "Since Covid-19 has taught us that there is an appetite for digital learning, all the new textbooks will simultaneously be made available digitally, so anybody can download them," he added. Noting that textbooks should not be "static", the official said an institutional framework will be developed to ensure that the textbooks are updated on a regular basis.

QUOTA ROW

Sec 144 imposed in Shikaripura town

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Shivamogga(KTK), March 27: Agitating members of the Banjara community Monday targeted BJP strongman and former Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa's house in Shikaripura town of this district and resorted to stone-pelting, injuring some policemen during a protest against the internal reservation for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) announced by the state gov-



ernment. Prohibitory orders under Section 144 of CrPC have been imposed in the town. Reacting to the incidents, Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai saw Congress hand behind the violence. "Local Congress

leaders are instigating people. The Congress is unable to digest the social justice done to every community and it resorted to inciting violence. Banjara community should not fall for any hearsay," he told reporters.

Police used batons to disperse the large number of protesters which included women. Some members of the Banjara community, who are also known as Lamani or Lambani, were injured.

Rahul's conviction triggers political slugfest

Incidents are tiny specks-not even events-when they occur. It is only hindsight that strings them into history. Whether the Surat court judgement in the Rahul Gandhi defamation case and the stirrings in the political pot emanating therefrom cooks the Congress goose, turns into a lavish Opposition spread, or recoils on the ruling political establishment, only time will tell. For the moment it has raised temperatures nationwide and initiated a process of political polarisation.

The BJP terms the disqualification as per law and hints at a conspiracy from within, with party chief Jagat Prakash Nadda slamming Rahul as a habitual offender. Congress, on the other hand, terms it as an act of vendetta provoked by the inordinate success of the Bharat Jodo Yatra. Be that as it may, the unfolding developments

are very much a part of Narendra Modi's political beliefs. The victor takes it all and in any confrontation there are no quarters given and none taken. You play to win. The world over both sports and politics are played this way, aver sources close to him. If demonstrators pull down the flag at the Indian Embassy in the UK this moment, the security barriers at their embassy in New Delhi, are removed at the very next one. Call it tit-for-tat, call it vengeance. A no-holds barred battle is the new norm. So in present day domestic politics as well. Rahul too is now working to a clear-cut plan. Congress and Rahul strategy planners realise that Modi with aggression built into his persona is invincible on his own turf.

The pilot test of the new Rahul was the Bharat Jodo Yatra which yielded splendid gains though at

the cost of losing Gujarat. The experiment, nevertheless was worth the while, say Congress insiders. Coincidences are caused by hid-



den levers and disguised pulleys. It's the sequence that gives away the game. The timeline of the case makes for interesting reading.

Purnesh Modi who had filed the criminal defamation case in the Surat court in April 2019, almost a year later in March 2022 obtained a stay from the High Court after a plea seeking an explanation from Rahul was rejected. Almost a year

later February 16, 2023, Purnesh Modi moved the High Court for vacation of stay on the case which was granted. This was the time period that Parliament was seeing uproarious scenes. On March 20, 2023, the Surat Court concluded trial and two days later March 22, pronounced judgement. The next day Rahul was disqualified as an Member of Parliament.

Another important spin-off is that the Opposition parties now realise the clear and inherent danger and have an immediate reason/need to come together. In one fell swoop, the BJP has brought almost the entire Opposition together, a task which the squabbling lot had miserably failed to achieve. Whether ordained by history, germinated in geography or triggered by events, Gujarat has been a crucible for national political experiments and

march a key month.

The Navnirman agitation in Gujarat in the early seventies began with an innocuous students protest over rising mess bills in an engineering college and spread to engulf the state. Perhaps for the first time in the history of independent India a constitutionally elected government was brought down by a protesting population. The then Congress Chief Minister, Chimanbhai Patel resigned and the Gujarat Legislative Assembly was dissolved March 15, 1974. However it triggered a chain of events that culminated in Sarvodaya leader Jayaprakash Narayan-led crusade against corruption through marshalling of Opposition parties, the promulgation of Emergency and the eventual installation of the first non-congress government at the Centre March 24, 1977 incidentally led by

a gujarati, Moraraji Desai. Ironically, BJP (then the Jan Sangh) which was a part of the anti-corruption crusade against Congress Chief Minister Chimanbhai Patel had no qualms in becoming a coalition partner in a Janata dal led government headed by him which came to power March 4, 1990.

Further back in time, Mahatma Gandhi's salt satyagraha at Dandi which started from Sabarmati ashram in Ahmedabad March 12, 1930 was similarly, just a spot in a struggle but it was the violent response on peaceful satyagrahis that fuelled the fires for a free India over a decade and a half later. Gandhi never returned to his Ahmedabad ashram but political happenings keep his state of birth in focus. Incidentally it was March 23, 1931 that Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev were hanged by the British government.

international



We need to act on climate change. We can't afford to continue to engage in conflict in this place in order to try to get the perfect outcome
ANTHONY ALBANESE | AUSTRALIA PM

UNIQUE SOLIDARITY

A Japanese student showed up to graduation as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's lookalike, wearing his signature olive-coloured, snug-fit T-shirt and khaki trousers to show his support for Ukraine's fight against Russia



of the day quote

Imran Khan has turned politics into enmity and taken it to a point where 'either he or us' will be eliminated from the political arena



RANA SANAUULLAH | PAKISTAN'S INTERIOR MINISTER

The New Zealand government continues to encourage research and development investment by providing a significant cash flow boost for local innovators



AYESHA VERRALL | MINISTER OF HEALTH OF NEW ZEALAND

China aims to foster more open dual circulation involving both domestic and foreign markets rather than a closed domestic loop



DING XUEXIANG | CHINESE VICE PREMIER

SHORT TAKES

Khalistan supporters protest in New York

New York: A large number of Khalistan supporters staged a protest at the iconic Times Square here to express support for the fugitive radical preacher Amritpal Singh. The protesters took out a car rally that originated from the Baba Makhan Shah Lubana Sikh Center in the Richmond Hill neighbourhood and culminated at Times Square in the heart of Manhattan city on Sunday afternoon amid tight security. With blaring music and loud horns, a multitude of cars with Khalistani flags and LED mobile billboard trucks displaying photos of Singh criss-crossed the streets near the venue. Men, women and children gathered in large numbers at the popular New York destination, carrying the Khalistan flags and raising slogans at the rally.

Imran granted interim bail

Islamabad: A Pakistani court Monday granted interim bail to Imran Khan in seven different cases registered against him following clashes at the federal judicial complex here earlier this month when the former prime minister arrived from Lahore to appear in a corruption case hearing. A two-member division bench of the Islamabad High Court (IHC), comprising Chief Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb, heard the bail applications. Khan, the chairman of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, sought interim bails in seven cases registered against him in Golra, Bara Kahu, Ramna, Khanna and CTD police stations.

Six dead

Islamabad: A suicide bomber struck Monday near the foreign ministry in Kabul, killing at least six people and wounding several, according to officials. It was the second time this year that there has been an attack near the ministry. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the bombing but the regional affiliate of the Islamic State group has increased attacks since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in mid-August 2021.

Guard killed

Tirana (Albania): A security guard was killed after gunshots were fired on the building of an Albanian private television station, police said Monday. Police said in a statement the perpetrators fired several rounds at the entrance of the Top Channel TV station shortly after midnight Monday, killing the 60-year-old guard.

Israeli PM delays judicial reforms

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jerusalem, March 27: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced Monday evening that he would temporarily freeze his government's controversial judicial overhaul plans following unprecedented demonstrations across the country and a general strike that paralysed the country.

Netanyahu said that he ordered "the timeout" on the controversial legislation until after the Knesset recess in order "to give a real opportunity for real dialogue". "One thing I am not willing to accept - there are a minority of extremists that are willing to tear our country to shreds... Escorting us to civil war and calling for refusal of army service, which is a terrible crime," the Israeli Prime Minister said. Drawing analogy from the story of King Shlomo from about 3,000 years ago when two women reached out with the claim over a baby boy and the king said to divide the infant in two halves to ascertain the real mother, Netanyahu said that he would not let that happen to Israel in his watch.

"When there's an option to avoid civil war through dialogue, I take a time-out for dialogue... Out of national responsibility," Netanyahu said, asserting that most of his coalition members backed the "reforms" and he could have done it if he wished so.

Netanyahu earlier on Monday urged protesters "to behave responsibly and refrain from violence" as Israelis from all over the country started descending into Jerusalem and workers from a range of sectors joined a protest movement against the government's contentious plan.

Netanyahu's appeal came hours after President Isaac Herzog on Monday appealed to him to im-



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

The protests have alarmed business leaders, former security chiefs and drawn concern from Israel's close allies, including the United States

Tens of thousands of people took to the streets across Israel Sunday night after Netanyahu fired Defence Minister Yoav Gallant

Protest organisers, mostly common people with no declared political affiliation, continued to push for further demonstrations Monday

mediately halt his controversial judicial overhaul, warning that the move has put the country's security, economy and society under threat.

Netanyahu in his first public statement since widespread demonstrations erupted in reaction to his sacking of the defence minister has urged protesters, from the left and right, "to behave responsibly and refrain from violence."

As Israelis from all over the country started descending into Jerusalem, in a tweet Netanyahu appeared to address fears of violent clashes between opponents and supporters of the government's judicial overhaul plan. "All of us are brothers and sisters," Netanyahu stressed in his tweet.

President Herzog's appeal to Netanyahu came after the Prime Minister sacked Defence Minister Yoav Gallant for opposing his ju-

dicial reforms, sparking widespread street protests. The president also called on the government to put aside political considerations for the sake of the nation.

"Last night we witnessed very difficult scenes. I appeal to the Prime Minister, members of the Coalition: there are harsh and painful feelings. The entire nation is rapt with deep worry," Herzog said.

"Our security, economy, society - all are under threat. The whole people of Israel are looking at you. The whole Jewish People are looking at you. The whole world is looking at you," the ceremonial president said in a statement.

"For the sake of the unity of the People of Israel, for the sake of the necessary responsibility, I call on you to halt the legislative process immediately," he emphasised.

Sunak launches crack down on anti-social behaviour

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London, March 27: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak Monday launched a new Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan to crack down on illegal activities within communities by handing additional powers to the police to punish drug-related offences and criminal gang activity.

Under the new Immediate Justice scheme, those found committing anti-social behaviour will be made to repair the damage they inflicted on victims and communities, with an ambition for them to start work as soon as 48 hours after their offence. Offenders, who will be made to wear high-visibility vests or jumpsuits and work under supervision, could be made to pick up litter, remove graffiti and wash police cars as punishment for their actions. Victims of anti-social behaviour from the local community will be given a say in offenders' punishments to ensure justice is "visible and fits the crime".

"Anti-social behaviour undermines the basic right of people to feel safe in the place they call home," said Sunak. "The public have rightly been angry - which is why I am determined to restore people's confidence that those responsible will be quickly and visibly punished. This action plan maps out how we will tackle this issue with the urgency it deserves and stamp out these crimes once and for all - so that wherever you live, you can feel safe in, and proud of your community," he said.

Under the plan's "zero-tolerance approach", Nitrous Oxide or "laughing gas" will also be banned to send a message to intimidating gangs that hang around high streets and children's parks and litter them with empty cans.

BIGGEST IN DECADES

Mega strike in Germany, life hit

The 24-hour walkout - one of the biggest in decades - affected cargo transport by rail and ship, as workers at the country's ports and waterways joined the strike

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Berlin, March 27: Trains, planes and public transit systems stood still across much of Germany on Monday as labour unions called a major one-day strike over salaries in an effort to win inflation-busting raises for their members.

The 24-hour walkout - one of the biggest in decades - also affected cargo transport by rail and ship, as workers at the country's ports and waterways joined the strike. Many commuters opted to drive to work, causing some delays on the roads, while those who could worked from home.

Unions are seeking a pay increase of at least 10.5% and have dismissed offers from employers of about 5% over two years plus one-off payments. High inflation also seen elsewhere last year has hit many workers hard, said Ulrich Silberbach of the Civil Service Federation.

"We have recorded drops in real wages and these need to be balanced out," he told reporters in Berlin, adding that some of his union's members in larger cities are having to apply for state benefits to afford rent.

Silberbach said that he hoped employers would increase their offer in upcoming talks - otherwise, unions might have to consider an open-ended strike. His colleague Martin Burkert from the



EVG rail union lamented that workers' pay is a fraction of what some top managers earn. But rail company Deutsche Bahn called the union's demands exaggerated and warned that millions of commuters would be affected.

"Thousands of companies that normally send or receive their goods by rail will also suffer," Deutsche Bahn spokesman Achim Strauss said. "The environment and the climate will also suffer in the end. Today's winners are the oil companies."

Train tickets that couldn't be used because of the disruption will remain valid and travellers should check the company's website for updates, he said. Three days of talks are scheduled between the two sides.

Interior Minister Nancy Faeser, who represents the federal government in the negotiations, said her side would engage in the discussions in a "tough but also fair and constructive" fashion. Faeser said she was confident that a good solution can be reached.

BID FOR PEACE

Ex-Taiwan Prez arrives in China

REUTERS

Taoyuan (Taiwan), March 27: Taiwan's ex-President Ma Ying-jeou became Monday the first sitting or former Taiwanese leader to visit mainland China since the Communist revolution in 1949, saying he hoped to bring about peace and improve relations.

Ma's office said he was met at Shanghai's Pudong airport by officials including Chen Yuanfeng, deputy head of China's Taiwan Affairs Office. The visit has been criticised by the ruling Democratic Progressive Party of Ma's successor Tsai Ing-wen.

Speaking to reporters before leaving from Taiwan's main international airport at Taoyuan, Ma, 73, said he was "very happy" to be going on a trip where he will talk to students and pay respects to the graves of his ancestors in China. Ma, in office from 2008-2016, is the first former or current Taiwanese President to visit China since the defeated Republic of China government fled to Taiwan in 1949 at the end of a civil war with the Communists.

The trip comes at a time of heightened tensions between Beijing and Taipei as China keeps up military and political pressure to try and get democratic Taiwan



The trip comes at a time of heightened tensions between Beijing and Taipei as China keeps up military and political pressure to try and get democratic Taiwan to accept Chinese sovereignty

Taiwan's ruling DPP criticised Ma for going Monday, saying it was inappropriate given former long-time Taiwan ally Honduras had ended ties with Taipei in favour of Beijing the day before

to accept Chinese sovereignty. "Apart from going to make offerings to my ancestors, I am also taking Taiwan university students to the mainland for exchanges with them, hoping to improve the current cross-strait atmosphere through the enthusiasm and interaction of young people, so peace can come even faster and sooner to us here," Ma said in short remarks.

Taiwan's ruling DPP criticised Ma for going Monday, saying it was inappropriate given former long-time Taiwan ally Honduras had ended ties with Taipei in favour of Beijing the day before. Ma is a senior member of Taiwan's main opposition party, the Kuomintang

(KMT), which favours close ties with China although it strongly denies being pro-Beijing. The KMT says outreach to China is needed now more than ever given the tensions across the Taiwan Strait.

Ma met Chinese President Xi Jinping in Singapore in late 2015 shortly before Tsai was elected. China has rebuffed Tsai's repeated calls for talks, believing her to be a separatist. She says only Taiwan's people can decide their future.

Ma is not scheduled to meet any senior Chinese officials while there, but the head of his foundation said last week Ma will be "at his host's disposal" if they do arrange such a get-together.



A US Navy aircraft Hawkeye and crew members are seen on the flight deck of the USS Nimitz off the coast of Busan, South Korea, Monday. The nuclear-powered US aircraft carrier and its battle group began exercises with South Korea warships Monday, hours after North Korea fired two short-range ballistic missiles in an apparent protest

PRIVACY LAWSUIT Harry, Elton appear at UK court

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London, March 27: Britain's Prince Harry, who now lives in the US, made a surprise appearance at the High Court in London Monday as his legal action against a newspaper group for breach of his pri-

vacancy began. The Duke of Sussex is among a group of celebrity claimants, including singer Elton John and actor Liz Hurley, who are suing the Associated Newspapers Limited (ANL) for "abhorrent criminal activity" and "gross breaches of privacy" as part

of alleged phone-tapping. ANL, the publisher of 'Daily Mail' newspaper, denies the allegations as "preposterous smears" and Monday's preliminary hearing will consider their legal arguments for a judge to decide whether the case will go further to a full hearing.

How bottled water industry is masking global water crisis

THE LATEST UN UNIVERSITY REPORT REVEALED THAT THE ANNUAL SALES OF THE GLOBAL BOTTLED WATER MARKET IS EXPECTED TO DOUBLE TO \$500 BILLION WORLDWIDE THIS DECADE

AGENCIES

Lisbon, March 27: Bottled water is one of the world's most popular beverages, and its industry is making the most of it. Since the millennium, the world has advanced significantly towards the goal of safe water for all.

In 2020, 74 per cent of humanity had access to safe water. This is 10 per cent more than two decades ago. But that still leaves two billion people without access to safe drinking water. Meanwhile, bottled water corporations exploit surface water and aquifers - typically at very low cost - and sell it for 150 to 1,000

times more than the same unit of municipal tap water. The price is often justified by offering the product as an absolute safe alternative to tap water.

But bottled water is not immune to all contamination, considering that it rarely faces the rigorous public health and environmental regulations that public utility tap water does. In our recently published study, which studied 109 countries, it was concluded that the highly profitable and fast-growing bottled water industry is masking the failure of public systems to supply reliable drinking water for all. The industry can undermine



progress of safe-water projects, mostly in low- and middle-income countries, by distracting development efforts and redirecting attention to a less reliable, less affordable option. The fast-growing bottled water

industry also impacts the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in many ways. The latest UN University report revealed that the annual sales of the global bottled water market is expected to double to \$500 billion world-

wide this decade. This can increase stress in water-depleted areas while contributing to plastic pollution on land and in the oceans. Growing faster than any other in the food category worldwide, the bottled water market is biggest in the Global South, with the Asia-Pacific, Africa and Latin American and Caribbean regions accounting for 60 per cent of all sales.

But no region is on track to achieve universal access to safe water services, which is one of the SDG 2030 targets. In fact, the industry's greatest impact seems to be its potential to stunt the progress of nations' goals to provide its residents with equitable access to affordable drinking water.

In the Global North, bottled water is often perceived to be healthier and tastier than tap water. It is, therefore, more a luxury good than a

necessity. Meanwhile, in the Global South, it is the lack of absence of reliable public water supply and water management infrastructure that drives bottled water markets.

Therefore, in many low- and middle-income countries, particularly in the Asia Pacific, rising consumption of bottled water can be seen as a proxy indicator of decades of governments' failure to deliver on commitments to safe public water systems.

This further widens the global disparity between the billions of people who lack access to reliable water services and the others that enjoy water as a luxury. In 2016, the annual financing required to achieve a safe drinking water supply throughout the world was estimated to cost \$114 billion, which amounts to less than half of today's roughly \$270 billion global annual bottled water sales.

business



We have requested all the start ups, don't think about putting your funds in any bank anywhere...Put your funds in India
ASHWINI VAISHNAW | UNION MINISTER

MA SEEN AFTER LONG ABSENCE

Alibaba founder Jack Ma, who has rarely been seen in public in the past three years, has resurfaced at a school in China's Hangzhou, media reports said. The 58-year-old has kept a low profile since criticising China's financial regulators in 2020.



of the day quote

To achieve the Prime Minister's vision of making India a USD 5 trillion economy, it is imperative to develop smart cities and villages for which public-private partnership is key
NITIN GADKARI | UNION MINISTER

We are going to launch 22 products which includes 19 cars and three bikes during this year
VIKRAM PAWAH | BMW GROUP INDIA PRESIDENT

When you have an economy growing, our industry typically benefits from economic growth
JOHN MURPHY | PRESIDENT, THE COCA-COLA COMPANY

State-run banks asked to monitor top loan accounts

Indian banks, in the past, have had to take deep haircuts on their exposure to debt-laden companies admitted under bankruptcy legislation



REUTERS

Mumbai, March 27: India has asked state-run lenders to adopt stricter monitoring of top corporate loan accounts and submit a plan to deal with business risks in key areas within two weeks, three banking sources said Monday.

Indian banks, in the past, have had to take deep haircuts on their exposure to debt-laden companies admitted under bankruptcy legislation. "Banks were told that it would be prudent to increase stress-testing of large corporate loan accounts," a banker at a state-run bank said. Banks were also asked to monitor the mark-to-market impact on their trading books amid rising interest rates and maintain their liquidity ratios, the sources added.

None of the sources wanted to be named because they are not allowed to speak to media.

Finance Ministry officials met state-run bank chiefs Saturday, with lenders asked to identify stress points, including "concentration risks and adverse exposures," according to a government statement.

The Finance Ministry did not respond to a Reuters email seeking additional details from the meeting.

Lenders were also asked to increase the frequency of assessing

their asset-liability profiles amid the global banking turbulence, another banker said.

The collapse of some US regional banks have led to concerns about lenders globally having to field possible losses on their held-to-maturity portfolios.

Reuters had earlier reported that the government had sought details of the bond portfolios of these banks as a precautionary exercise.

India's banking system continues to be stable and resilient, and lenders have built sufficient buffers to shield themselves from any unforeseen stress, the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India said earlier in March.

First Citizens acquires troubled SVB

ASSOCIATED PRESS

New York, March 27: North Carolina-based First Citizens will buy Silicon Valley Bank, the tech industry-focused financial institution that collapsed earlier this month, rattling the banking industry and sending shockwaves around the world.

The deal could reassure investors at a time of shaken confidence in banks, though the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. And other regulators had already taken extraordinary steps to head off a wider banking crisis by guaranteeing that depositors in SVB and another failed U.S. Bank would be able to access all of their money.

Customers of SVB will automatically become customers of First Citizens, which is headquartered in Raleigh. The 17 former branches of SVB will open as First Citizens branches, the FDIC said.

European shares opened higher Monday, with German lender Commerzbank AG up 2.4% and BNP Paribas up 1.2%.

Investors worry that other banks also may crumble under the pressure of higher interest rates.

Friday, much of the focus was on Deutsche Bank, whose stock tumbled 8.5% in Germany, though it was back up about 3.6% in early trading Monday.

Earlier this month, shares of and faith in Swiss bank Credit Suisse fell so much that regula-



tors brokered a takeover of by rival UBS.

In the U.S., SVB, based in Santa Clara, California, collapsed March 10 after depositors rushed to withdraw money amid fears about the bank's health.

It was the second-largest bank collapse in U.S. History after the 2008 failure of Washington Mutual.

Two days later, New York-based Signature Bank was seized by regulators in the third-largest bank failure in the U.S.

In both cases, the government agreed to cover deposits, even those that exceeded the federally insured limit of \$250,000, so depositors were able to access their money.

New York Community Bank agreed to buy a significant chunk of Signature Bank in a \$2.7 billion deal a week ago, but the search for

a buyer for SVB took longer.

The sale announced late Sunday involves the sale of all deposits and loans of SVB to First-Citizens Bank and Trust Co., the FDIC said.

The acquisition gives the FDIC shares in First Citizens worth \$500 million. Both the FDIC and First Citizens will share in losses and the potential recovery on loans included in a loss-share agreement, the FDIC said.

First Citizens Bank was founded in 1898 and says it has more than \$100 billion in total assets, with more than 500 branches in 21 states as well as a nationwide bank. It reported net profit of \$243 million in the last quarter.

It is one of the top 20 U.S. Banks and says it is the largest family-controlled bank in the country.

SHORT TAKES

All 10 Adani group stocks end lower

New Delhi: All the ten listed firms of the Adani group ended the day in the negative territory Monday, with Adani Power, Adani Transmission, Adani Wilmar and Adani Total Gas falling nearly 5 per cent each. Shares of Adani Power tanked 4.98 per cent, Adani Transmission tumbled 4.98 per cent, Adani Wilmar dived 4.93 per cent and Adani Total Gas slumped 4.91 per cent on the BSE. The stock of NDTV went lower by 4.60 per cent, Adani Green Energy fell by 4.40 per cent, Adani Ports dropped 1.43 per cent, ACC dipped 1.01 per cent, Adani Enterprises declined 0.99 per cent and Ambuja Cements (0.59 per cent). Many of the group firms hit their lower circuit limits during the day.

Jio's entry level broadband plan

New Delhi: Stepping up the fight in fixed broadband segment, Jio Monday introduced its entry level broadband plan at a price as low as ₹198 per month. The plan, named Broadband Backup plan, will come with top internet speed of 10 megabit per second. Earlier, the minimum price for availing Jio Fiber connection was ₹399 per month. The company has also provided an option to upgrade the internet speed to 30 mbps or 100 for 1 to 7 days by paying in the range of ₹21 to ₹152. "...We at Jio understand the customer's need to remain connected round the clock with dependable broadband connectivity at home. With JioFiber Backup, we want to offer alternate reliable broadband connectivity for homes. This new concept of a back-up connection allows homes to have an alternate broadband connectivity with an assured supply of data at an affordable price," Jio spokesperson said.

SJVN gets ₹915cr 'GREEN' finance

New Delhi: State-owned SJVN Ltd has secured ₹915 crore 'GREEN' finance from Japan Bank for International Cooperation to fund its 90 MW Omkareshwar floating solar project in Madhya Pradesh and 100 MW Raghnesda solar project in Gujarat. "SJVN secured GREEN financing from Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) amounting to JPY 15 billion. (approx. INR 915 cr). The loan is co-financed with Japanese private financial institutions," a BSE filing stated. The SJVN and JBIC virtually inked the 'Facility Agreement' under Global action for Reconciling Economic growth and Environmental preservation (GREEN) programme of JBIC. The objective of the debt is to finance the 90-MW Omkareshwar Floating Solar Power Project in Madhya Pradesh and 100-MW Raghnesda Solar Power Project in Gujarat having combined estimated cost of ₹1,288.35 crore.

Sensex, Nifty snap 2-day losing streak



AGENCIES

Mumbai, March 27: Equity benchmark Sensex snapped two-day losing streak to close 126 points higher Monday, propped up by buying in index heavyweights Reliance Industries, Maruti and SBI amid a higher opening in European equities. However, investors remained cautious amid stress in US and European financial systems.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 126.76 points or 0.22 per cent to finish at 57,653.86. During the day, the index witnessed a high of 58,019.55 and a low of 57,415.02.

The broader NSE Nifty advanced 40.65 points or 0.24 per cent to end at 16,985.70, with 27 of its scrips ending in the green.

Reliance Industries emerged as the biggest gainer in the Sensex pack, rising 1.54 per cent, followed by Maruti, Sun Pharma, State Bank of India, UltraTech Cement, Infosys, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Hindustan Unilever, ITC and HDFC Bank.

On the other hand, Power Grid, Axis Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra and Tata Motors were among the

major laggards.

A strengthening rupee bolstered sentiment, even as relentless foreign capital outflows restricted the gains, according to traders.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge ended 1.50 per cent lower while the midcap index dipped 0.37 per cent. Among sectoral indices, healthcare, FMCG, bankex, metal and tech were the gainers. However, power, utilities, industrials, auto, realty and services were the major laggards. The utility index fell by 2.48 per cent and power declined by 2.13 per cent.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended in the red while Japan settled in the green.

The 30-share BSE benchmark declined 388.18 points or 0.69 per cent to finish at 57,527.10 points Friday. The Nifty fell 131.85 points or 0.77 per cent to end at 16,945.05 points.

Meanwhile, the rupee appreciated by 3 paise to close at 82.37 against the US dollar Monday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.39 per cent to USD 75.28 per barrel.

S&P keeps India growth forecast unchanged at 6%

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 27: S&P Global Ratings Monday kept its forecast for India's economic growth unchanged at 6 per cent in the fiscal year starting April 1, before rising to 6.9 per cent in the following year.

In the quarterly economic update for Asia-Pacific, S&P saw inflation rate easing to 5 per cent in 2023-24 fiscal, from 6.8 per cent in the current financial year.

It saw India's gross domestic product (GDP) likely growing by 7 per cent in the current financial year ending March 31 (2022-23), before slowing to 6 per cent in the next 2023-24 fiscal.

"India leads, with average growth of 7 per cent in 2024-2026," the update said.



GDP is projected to rise to 6.9 per cent in the following two financial years - 2024-25 and 2025-26 and rising to 7.1 per cent in 2026-27.

"In India, domestic demand has traditionally led the economy. But it has become more sensitive to the global cycle lately, in part due to rising commodity exports; and its year-on-year GDP growth slowed to 4.4 per cent in the fourth quarter (October-December 2022)," the rating agency said.

Pronounced core inflation in India suggests little slack in these economies, it said.

Over 50 FDI proposals from China pending



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman Monday informed the Lok Sabha that 54 FDI proposals with investor/beneficial owner from China and Hong Kong are pending for decision with the government.

In April 2020, the government had amended the FDI policy in order to curb opportunistic takeovers/acquisitions of Indian companies due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As per the amended policy, an entity of a country, which shares land border with India or where the beneficial owner of an investment into India is situated in or is a citizen of any such country, can invest only under the government route.

"54 FDI proposals received during the past year and current year with investor/ beneficial owner from China/Hong Kong are pend-

ing for decision with government as on March 21, 2023," Sitharaman said in a written reply.

Any transfer of ownership of any existing or future FDI in an entity in India resulting in the beneficial ownership falling within such jurisdiction (s) will also require government approval.

The minister also said there was no proposal under consideration to ease restrictions on foreign investments from the companies that are based in countries that share land border with India or have an investor from these nations.

Replying to another question, the finance ministry said the number of counterfeit banknotes detected in banking channel has come down from 7.62 lakhs pieces in 2016-17 to 2.09 lakhs pieces in 2020-21 post decision of the government of India to withdraw the legal tender character of ₹1,000 and ₹500 denomination currency notes in November 2016.

India to push for rupee trade in G-20 meetings

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 27: India will be looking to push the rupee trade agenda in the G-20 meetings it is organising as part of its ongoing presidency of the forum, a senior bureaucrat said Monday.

Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said rupee trade will be of help, especially with those countries whose currencies are under pressure.

"Definitely, we would like to see that rupee trade also happens, particularly those countries which are facing issues," Barthwal told reporters here, replying to a specific question if India will be looking at the upcoming G-20 meeting of the trade and investment group as a platform to boost rupee trade.

He also said that the issue of rupee trade is not directly linked with the G-20 forum.



It can be noted that as of now, India has been successful in forging agreements with 18 countries since embarking on the agenda of settling trade in the rupee amid currency volatility last year. India is the President of G-20 in the current term.

About 100 delegates from various G-20 countries, special invitee countries and international organisations will be attending the three-day meeting in the financial capital from Tuesday.

World Bank warns of 'lost decade' in global growth

FAILURE TO REVERSE THE EXPECTED BROAD-BASED SLOWDOWN IN POTENTIAL GDP GROWTH WOULD HAVE PROFOUND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WORLD'S ABILITY TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE AND REDUCE POVERTY

REUTERS

Washington, March 27: Average potential global economic growth will slump to a three-decade low of 2.2% per year through 2030, ushering in a 'lost decade' for the world's economy, unless policymakers adopt ambitious initiatives to boost labor supply, productivity and investment, the World Bank warned Monday.

Failure to reverse the expected broad-based slowdown in potential gross domestic product (GDP) growth would have profound implications for the world's ability to tackle climate change and reduce poverty, it said in a new report.

But concerted efforts to boost investment in sustainable sectors, cut trade costs, leverage growth

in services, and expand labor force participation could boost potential GDP growth by up to 0.7 percentage point to 2.9%, the report said.

"A lost decade could be in the making for the global economy," said World Bank chief economist Indermit Gill, adding that policies which incentivized work, increased productivity, and accelerated investment could reverse the trend.

The average GDP growth rate is a sort of 'speed limit' for the global economy, charting the maximum long-term rate at which it can grow without sparking excess inflation.

The report said the overlapping crises of the past few years, including the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, had ended nearly three decades of



sustained economic growth, adding to building worries about slowing productivity, which is essential for income growth and higher wages.

As a result, average potential growth in GDP was seen dropping to 2.2% from 2022-2030, down from

2.6% in 2011-21, and nearly a third lower than the 3.5% rate seen from 2000-2010.

Low investment will also slow growth in developing economies, with their average GDP growth dropping to 4% for the rest of the

2020s, from 5% in 2011-2021 and 6% from 2000-2010.

Rising productivity, higher incomes and declining inflation helped one out of four developing countries reach high-income status over the past three decades, but those economic forces are now in retreat, the report said.

It said productivity was likely to grow at its slowest clip since 2000, investment growth in 2022-2024 would be half the rate seen in the last 20 years and international trade was growing at a much slower rate.

To change the trajectory and attract more investment, policymakers should prioritize taming inflation, ensuring financial-sector stability and reducing debt.

Increased climate-friendly investment in transportation and

energy, climate-smart agriculture and manufacturing, and land and water systems could boost potential growth by up to 0.3 percentage point per year, it said.

Lowering the costs associated with shipping, logistics, and regulations could boost trade, it said, calling for changes to remove the current bias toward carbon-intensive goods inherent in many countries' tariff schedules and eliminate restrictions on access to environmentally friendly goods and services.

Boosting exports of digital services could result in big productivity gains, while raising labor force participation rates for women and others could raise global potential growth rates by as much as 0.2 percentage point a year by 2030.

CR7 happy with nat'l team

England, Portugal stay perfect



JUST THE USUAL: Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates after scoring one of his goals against Luxembourg, Sunday

national team. Ronaldo was in tears the last time he left the field with Portugal following a loss to Morocco in the quarterfinals of the World Cup in Qatar last year after he was benched by then coach Fernando Santos in the knockout stage.

The disappointing World Cup, added to his decision to accept a lucrative deal from Saudi club Al Nassr, had put in doubt his future with the national team. He said last week he wasn't sure if he would ever play internationally again and only returned after reflecting with his family and realizing it wasn't time to "throw in the towel" yet.

Also likely playing a part in his decision to keep playing was the arrival of coach Roberto Martinez to replace Santos after the World Cup. The Spaniard pledged to respect Ronaldo's history, and the star forward said he welcomed the "breath of fresh air" to the national team. Martinez said he was thrilled with the attitude shown by Ronaldo in the coach's first two games in charge. "Ronaldo is a unique player and brings a lot of experience to the locker room," the former Belgium coach said. "He is a reference and is prepared to be a leader and a captain of this national team."

With his four goals at the start of the Martinez era, Ronaldo extended his international scoring record to 122 goals, 13 more than former Iran striker Ali Daei. Ronaldo's 198th international appearance on Sunday left him two ahead of Kuwait's Bader Al-Mutawa.

Portugal, the 2016 European champion, plays its next two matches against Bosnia-Herzegovina and Iceland in June. The team leads Group J in Euro 2024 qualifying with six points, two more than Slovakia. The top two finishers in each group will advance to the tournament in Germany next summer.

And if Ronaldo remains as happy and motivated as he is now, he will certainly be there to try to help Portugal win yet another European trophy.



ON A ROLL: Harry Kane reacts after scoring against Ukraine, Sunday

ASSOCIATED PRESS

London, March 27: England and Portugal made it two wins out of two at the start of European Championship qualifying, helped by their star players continuing their record-breaking streaks.

Harry Kane struck a record-extending 55th goal for his country to help England beat Ukraine 2-0, while Cristiano Ronaldo netted twice in his 198th appearance for Portugal in a 6-0 win over Luxembourg.

Slovenia were the other team with a perfect start to qualifying for Euro 2024 after two matches as they beat San Marino 2-0. Defending champion Italy got their first win of the qualifying campaign as they beat Malta 2-0.

KANE CONTINUES

After surpassing Wayne Rooney as England's outright leading scorer with his penalty in Thursday's 2-1 win against Italy in Naples, Kane

extended his record streak at Wembley.

The England captain struck in the 37th minute of the Group C game, converting Bukayo Saka's cross at the far post. Saka deservedly got on the scoresheet himself three minutes later when turning on the edge of the area and curling a shot into the top corner.

RONALDO AT THE DOUBLE

Ronaldo, the all-time scoring leader in men's soccer, took his career tally for Portugal to 122 goals in 198 games. The 38-year-old Ronaldo opened the scoring and netted his team's fourth goal just after the half-hour mark as the 2016 champions easily won in Luxembourg. João Félix, Bernardo Silva, and substitutes Otavio and Rafael Leão added goals for Portugal.

Also in Group J, Aron Gunnarsson netted a second-half hat trick as Iceland beat Liechtenstein 7-0 and Slovakia beat Bosnia-

Herzegovina 2-0.

FIVE-STAR HOJLUND

Rasmus Hojlund continued his impressive start to his international career with another two goals but couldn't prevent Denmark surprisingly losing 3-2 at Kazakhstan.

Hojlund, who scored a hat trick against Finland on his international debut on Thursday, netted another two goals in the first half to put Denmark in control.

However, Bakhtiyor Zainutdinov pulled one back from the penalty spot in the 73rd minute and Askhat Tagybergen leveled with four minutes remaining before Abat Aimbetov stunned everyone with the winner in the final minute. Aimbetov was sent off in stoppage time for a second bookable offence.

Finland beat Northern Ireland 1-0 to leave them level on points with Denmark and Kazakhstan in Group H, three points behind Slovenia.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Luxembourg, March 27: Cristiano Ronaldo is feeling at home again. It took only two games for him to make his peace with Portugal's national team and show he is not done impressing at the international level just yet.

In his return after a disappointing World Cup and a controversial move to Saudi football, the 38-year-

old Ronaldo scored four goals in Portugal's first two games in 2024 European Championship qualifying, showing he remains the leader that fans got used to seeing wearing the national team's red and green uniform.

Ronaldo netted twice in the 6-0 rout of Luxembourg Sunday, three days after scoring another brace in the 4-0 win over Liechtenstein, when he became the men's player

with the most international appearances with 197.

"Two games, two victories," the Portugal captain said on his social media accounts after the win at Luxembourg. "Happy to have contributed to a very positive start by our national team. Let's go."

The goals came against European minnows but seemed to be enough to restore Ronaldo's confidence and his role as a starter with the

Retegui scores again as Italy defeat Malta

Blue Tigers to go all out in title decider

Indore pitch rating changed from poor to 'below average'

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ta' Qali (Malta), Mar 27: Argentina-born striker Mateo Retegui is fast becoming the center forward Italy has been sorely lacking.

Retegui scored again in Italy's 2-0 win over Malta on Sunday to make it two goals in as many matches as the defending champions recorded their first win in European Championship qualifying.

The 23-year-old Retegui had scored on his international debut Thursday, in a 1-2 loss at home to England in a rematch of the Euro 2020 final, which Italy won on penalties.

Retegui became the first Italy player to score in his first two competitive international matches in nearly 55 years.

Italy was looking to kickstart their campaign after losing a European Championship qualifier for the first time since 2006. Coach Roberto Mancini made eight chances from that loss to England.

Italy were without injured forward Ciro Immobile and its prob-



lems up front continued when Wilfried Gnonto went off with an ankle problem midway through the first half. They were already 1-0 up by then, however, as Retegui had headed in Sandro Tonali's corner in the 15th minute.

The Azzurri doubled their tally in the 27th when Matteo Pessina tapped in a low cross from Emerson. Gianluca Scamacca almost scored an acrobatic third in the 69th but his overhead kick was well saved by Malta goalkeeper Henry Bonello.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Imphal, March 27: A draw against Kyrgyz Republic is enough for India to win the Tri-Nation International Football tournament Tuesday but head coach Igor Stimac said the hosts will go all out for a win.

The Blue Tigers began with a slender 1-0 win over Myanmar Wednesday last. They need just a draw to win the tournament after Kyrgyz Republic snatched a 1-1 draw against Myanmar in the second match of tournament Saturday.

Kyrgyz Republic, on the other hand, will require a win against India to claim the trophy. "We will go all out to win. We have a full house with our supporters and a chance to prove ourselves. It will also be a much stronger team than the first game," Stimac said at the pre-match press conference.

"I was right when I said Myanmar is a serious side that can hurt you. We saw that against the Kyrgyz Republic. It will, of course, be a different challenge against the Kyrgyz side because they don't have any option but to come out and win."

Goalkeeper Amrinder Singh, who started in the 1-0 win over



Indian players, including Sunil Chhetri (right front) and Sandesh Jhingan (left front), go through their warm-up drills during one of their training session

Myanmar, accompanied Stimac in the press conference and said he would want to keep up his good performance.

Stimac was all praise for the custodian as well and said Singh had "top reactions and eliminated every

national team camp ahead of Tuesday's game. "Sahal is here with us as we have a couple of injuries. He will be another option for us."

Kyrgyz Republic are ranked 94th in the world, while India are at 106. Disappointed with his side's opening-match draw against Myanmar, Kyrgyz Republic head coach Alexander Krestinin said they might have taken the game a bit casually.

"We reviewed the game (against Myanmar). A lot of things didn't go as planned. We have also analysed India's matches and will look to correct our previous mistakes tomorrow. We will make some changes in the team," said Krestinin.

The Russian has been in charge of the Kyrgyz side since 2014 and faced India twice during the 2019 AFC Asian Cup qualifying campaign (a 2-1 win at home and a 0-1 loss away).

But, he said that those results will have no bearing on Tuesday's match. "The previous games against India don't affect our preparations for tomorrow. Now, there are many new faces on both sides and it will be a different sort of game," said Krestinin.

Stimac also informed that Sahal Abdul Samad has joined the na-

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dubai, March 27: The International Cricket Council (ICC) has upgraded the pitch rating of Indore's Holkar Stadium - the venue for the third Test between India and Australia - to 'below average' from 'poor' following a BCCI appeal.

The ICC also gave the Narendra Modi Stadium pitch in Ahmedabad, the venue for the fourth Test, an 'average' rating for the slow batting deck where both teams had one completed innings each. The match had ended in a tame draw, with India winning the series 2-1.

At Indore, Australia had defeated India by nine wickets inside three days of the Border-Gavaskar Test to secure a World Test Championship final berth.

The ICC appeal panel reviewed the earlier decision of the match referee Chris Broad and found that there was not enough excessive variable bounce to warrant the 'poor' rating.

The pitch, which had initially received three demerit points, will now get only one demerit point. "The footage from the Test was reviewed by an ICC appeal panel consisting of Wasim Khan, ICC General Manager - Cricket, and Roger Harper, ICC Men's Cricket Committee Member. Both were of the opinion that, while the guidelines had been followed by the Match Referee in accordance with Appendix A of the Pitch Monitoring Process, there was not enough excessive variable bounce to warrant the 'poor' rating," said an ICC statement Monday.

"The panel, therefore, concluded that the pitch should be rated 'below average', meaning the Holkar Stadium will receive only one demerit point instead of the original three."

The Holkar Stadium pitch offered a lot of help to the spinners, with 14 wickets falling on the first day and, out of the 31 wickets to fall in the Test, 26 were picked up by spinners.

At Ahmedabad, Usman Khawaja and Cameron Green scored centuries for Australia in the Test, while for India, Virat Kohli and young Shubman Gill hit tons.

The ICC match referee however gave 'very good' rating to the Wankhede Stadium and Dr. YS Rajasekhara Reddy ACA-VDCA Cricket Stadium, Visakhapatnam pitches, where the first two ODIs between India and Australia were played.

Andreescu, Paul advance at Miami Open

Rana named KKR captain in place of injured Shreyas

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Miami Gardens, March 27: Bianca Andreescu of Canada - the 2019 US Open champion - beat 2020 Wimbledon winner Sofia Kenin of the United States 6-4, 6-4 in the third round of the Miami Open.

Andreescu advanced to the fourth round of the Miami Open for the third time. She had seven aces to Kenin's one and double-faulted only once as she won the third straight matchup between the one-time Grand Slam champions. Andreescu converted all three break opportunities she had.

In other matches Sunday, World No.9 Belinda Bencic of Switzerland, the gold medalist at the Tokyo Olympics, outlasted Ekaterina Alexandrova of Russia 7-6(10-8), 6-3; Marketa Vondrousova ousted Karolina Pliskova 6-1, 6-2 in an all-Czech matchup; Sorana Cirstea of Romania beat Karolina Muchová of the Czech Republic 7-5, 6-1; and Varvara Gracheva of Russia defeated Magdalena Frech of Poland



BIANCA ANDREESCU



TOMMY PAUL

6-1, 6-2.

On the men's side, Americans Tommy Paul and No.10 Taylor Fritz advanced in straight sets. Paul beat Alejandro Davidovich Fokina of Spain 6-3, 7-5, helped by eight aces. Fokina had six double-faults.

Fritz defeated Denis Shapovalov of Canada 6-4, 6-4. Shapovalov had

seven double-faults. Also, World No.8 Holger Rune of Denmark beat Diego Schwartzman of Argentina 6-4, 6-2, and Andrey Rublev of Russia dispatched Miomir Kecmanovic of Serbia 6-1, 6-2.

Australian Open winner and World No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus outplayed Marie Bouzkova

of the Czech Republic 6-1, 6-2. Botić van de Zandschulp of the Netherlands stunned World No.4 Norwegian Casper Ruud 3-6, 6-4, 6-4.

World No.1 Carlos Alcaraz outsmarted Dusan Lajovic 6-0, 7-6(7-5), while Jannik Sinner defeated Grigor Dimitrov 6-3, 6-4. Emil Ruusuvuori got rid of Taro Daniel 6-3, 7-6(7-3).

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 27: Kolkata Knight Riders Monday named left-handed batter Nitish Rana as the team's new skipper for the upcoming season of the Indian Premier League (IPL).

Rana will replace Shreyas Iyer, who is likely to undergo back surgery and is in danger of missing the entire season. In fact, KKR's statement was an indicator that Iyer's chances of an early return to play looks improbable at the moment.

"Nitish Rana would captain the side in the absence of Shreyas Iyer, who is recovering from a back injury. While we are hopeful that Shreyas will recover and participate at some stage in the IPL 2023 edition, we feel fortunate that Nitish, with the captaincy experience having led his state side in white ball cricket and the IPL experience he has had with KKR since 2018, will do a great job," KKR said in a statement.

"We are also confident that under head coach Chandrakant Pandit

and the support staff, he will get all the support needed off the field, and the highly experienced leaders in the squad will provide all support that Nitish may need on the field. We wish him the best in his new role and Shreyas a full and speedy recovery," it further stated.

While Rana has captained Delhi in Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy; the results have been far from encouraging for the southpaw. It is understood that he would be asked to implement the strategy prepared by coach Pandit, who along with team boss Venky Mysore and former Mumbai Ranji stalwart Abhishek Nayar will be calling the shots.

Rana has captained Delhi in 12 T20s in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy with eight wins and four defeats. The 29-year-old middle-order batter was bought by KKR ahead of the 2018 season and has been retained by the franchise ever since. KKR will open their campaign against Punjab Kings at Mohali April 1.