

DSPL-823



ଉଦ୍‌ଘାଟନ

ହରିଶଙ୍କର ମନ୍ଦିର ଉନ୍ନତିକରଣ,
ବଲାଙ୍ଗିର

୩ କି.ମି. ବିଶିଷ୍ଟ ଓଡ଼ିଶାର
ଦୀର୍ଘତମ ପ୍ଲାଏ-ଓଭର, ଯୋଡ଼ା, କେନ୍ଦୁଝର

୭୨୨ ମିଟର ଦୈର୍ଘ୍ୟବିଶିଷ୍ଟ ରେଳ ଓଭର-ବ୍ରିଜ
କୁଦିଆରୀ, ଜଟଣୀ, ଖୋର୍ଦ୍ଧା

ବୌଦ୍ଧ ଜିଲ୍ଲାର

ଆଠମଲ୍ଲିକ-ଧଳପୁର ରାସ୍ତାରେ ମହାନଦୀ ଉପରେ
ଓଡ଼ିଶାର ଦୀର୍ଘତମ ସେତୁ (୩ କିଲୋମିଟର)

ରାକଡୋର — ପସାଦ ରାସ୍ତାରେ
ତେଲ ନଦୀ ଉପରେ ସେତୁ (୬୨୧ ମିଟର)

ବୌଦ୍ଧ - ମର୍ଯ୍ୟାକୁଦ ସଂଯୋଗୀକରଣ
ରାସ୍ତାରେ ମହାନଦୀ ଉପରେ ସେତୁ (୯୩୮ ମିଟର)



ମୁଖ୍ୟ ଅତିଥି

ଶ୍ରୀ ନରୀନ ପଟ୍ଟନାୟକ

ମାନ୍ୟବର ମୁଖ୍ୟମନ୍ତ୍ରୀ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା

୧୧ ମାର୍ଚ୍ଚ ୨୦୨୪ || ପୂର୍ବାହ୍ନ ୧୧.୩୦

ଭିତ୍ତିପ୍ରସ୍ତର ସ୍ଥାପନ

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ଉନ୍ନତିକରଣ, ନେମାଳ, କଟକ

ମା' ଉଗ୍ରତାରା ଶକ୍ତିପୀଠ ଉନ୍ନତିକରଣ,
ଖୋର୍ଦ୍ଧା

ବୌଦ୍ଧ ଜିଲ୍ଲାର ବାଉଁଶୁଣୀ — ବୀରମହାରାଜପୁର
ସଂଯୋଗୀକରଣ ରାସ୍ତାରେ ମହାନଦୀ
ଉପରେ ସେତୁ (୧୭୩୮ ମିଟର)



ଯୋଡ଼ା ପ୍ଲାଏ-ଓଭର



ହରିଶଙ୍କର ମନ୍ଦିର



ଆଠମଲ୍ଲିକ-ଧଳପୁର
ଦୀର୍ଘତମ ସେତୁ



କୁଦିଆରୀ ରେଳ ଓଭର-ବ୍ରିଜ



ମହାପୁରୁଷ ଶ୍ରୀ ଶ୍ରୀ
ଅଚ୍ୟୁତାନନ୍ଦ ଦାସଙ୍କ ଗାଦୀ ଓ ପୀଠ



ମା ଉଗ୍ରତାରା ଶକ୍ତିପୀଠ

ନିର୍ମାଣ ବିଭାଗ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା ସରକାର

OIPR-34174/13/0010/2324



MARGOLYES: HARRY POTTER FRANCHISE IS FOR CHILDREN

Actress Miriam Margolyes, who played Professor Pomona Sprout in the *Harry Potter* franchise series, says the fantasy film series is for children and adult fans should be over it. "They should be over that by now. I mean, it was 25 years ago, and it's for children," said Margolyes.

STEWART CONTEMPLATES VARIOUS WEDDING PLANS WITH DYLAN

Actress Kristen Stewart is reportedly full of ideas about how she plans to marry her fiancée Dylan Meyer, with whom she has been engaged for more than two years. The 33-year-old actress has still not locked down her vision for their upcoming wedding, reports *dailymail.co.uk*.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES

Today is a bright day, and the stars foretell success for you. If you find yourself in a creative mood, indulge in some activity that will satisfy the urge. But, Ganesh says, if you are driving alone, exercise a great deal of caution to be on the safe side.

TAURUS

Fortune favours the brave and you will wake up feeling gutsy. Your performance will peak today and you will reap the benefits of real estate and construction business. Your peers and boss will extend all the support you need. All in all, a day to bask in the glory of advantages and awards.

GEMINI

Maintaining the image you have created in the minds of people, as well as upholding your reputation in society will give you some anxious moments today. You will work hard to improve your social standing, and will get results by the end of the day. It is an auspicious and lucky day for you, says Ganesh.

CANCER

Today, you are likely to be brimming with love and compassion. However, certain negative thoughts will spoil all your good work. But don't fret! Your efforts won't go wasted and you will get the desired results sooner or later, says Ganesh.

LEO

Do not be surprised if you find yourself today in a situation that somehow feels like a landmark moment in your life. Whether it is a personal matter or something related to work, that you must wait to find out, you will need all your grit and diplomacy to sail through.

VIRGO

The bulb of ideas will burn bright today. A possible see-saw between your contractual obligation and current duties may baffle you. New contacts will stand you in good stead. Blood will prove thicker, and family and friends will consolidate their place in your life.

LIBRA

Your instincts are at their peak today. Generally, this means a lot of good, but for you, it may also mean having to put up with the trouble of small things bothering you in a big way. So, it becomes highly important for you to remain balanced and focused. Do so and you may produce wonderful results at work, and also look forward to raking in the money from various sources, says Ganesh.

SCORPIO

Investing in real estate could yield maximum profits today, says Ganesh. An unusual gain from speculative trade is also on the cards. But you may need to spend time in the waiting room, before a more profitable opportunity comes by. You may just reinvent yourself to a happier self and savour every moment of life, predicts Ganesh.

SAGITTARIUS

You are on a high today and a feeling of ecstasy surrounds you. You are performance driven and shall give you best in anything you take up. Listen to your inner voice, it will guide you to the correct path. Ganesh showers His benevolent blessings on you.

CAPRICORN

You will be overpowered with nostalgia and may long to get in touch with old pals. And as Ganesh says, chances are that you may take a liking to your ex-lover, while simultaneously strengthening your social standing.

AQUARIUS

You will be on a spending spree today. But, make sure that your desire to enjoy life doesn't burn a hole in your pocket. Watch your words and steps, as people are observing your every move. You have put all of your eggs in one basket, so make sure that you don't mess up and lose everything that you have, advises Ganesh.

PISCES

Some conflicts could crop up in the morning on the domestic front. However, they will cease to be a cause of annoyance as the day progresses. Come evening and you will be in as fine a mood as you ever were, ready to spend time basking in the affection of your near and dear ones, says Ganesh.

Huma's letter to her younger self

Mumbai: Actress Huma Qureshi wrote a heartfelt letter to her 16-year-old self, reflecting on her journey as an artist. She thanked her younger self for being strong and determined despite criticism.

The *Maharani* actress began her letter with, "Dear 16-Year-Old Self, I'm grateful for the day you bravely walked into the principal's office in 11th grade. Despite your fear, your passion for the stage shone brightly. Choosing performing arts over academics marked the beginning of defying expectations. They labelled you stubborn, but that determination led to an amazing journey."

She further added, "Arriving in Mumbai alone, you faced auditions and meetings daily, fueled by unwavering resolve, you determined to leave a lasting impression. Early days were challenging, with dreams as your only guide. Nights brought tears and prayers for hope. Rejections stung, yet you persisted, walking forward each day."

Despite experiencing setbacks, she advised her younger self not to let criticism deter her. Qureshi believed that as she has grown older, gained wisdom and glamour, but still holds onto her identity as a 'simple girl' with ambitious dreams.

AGENCIES



Taapsee spills beans on showbiz's harsh realities

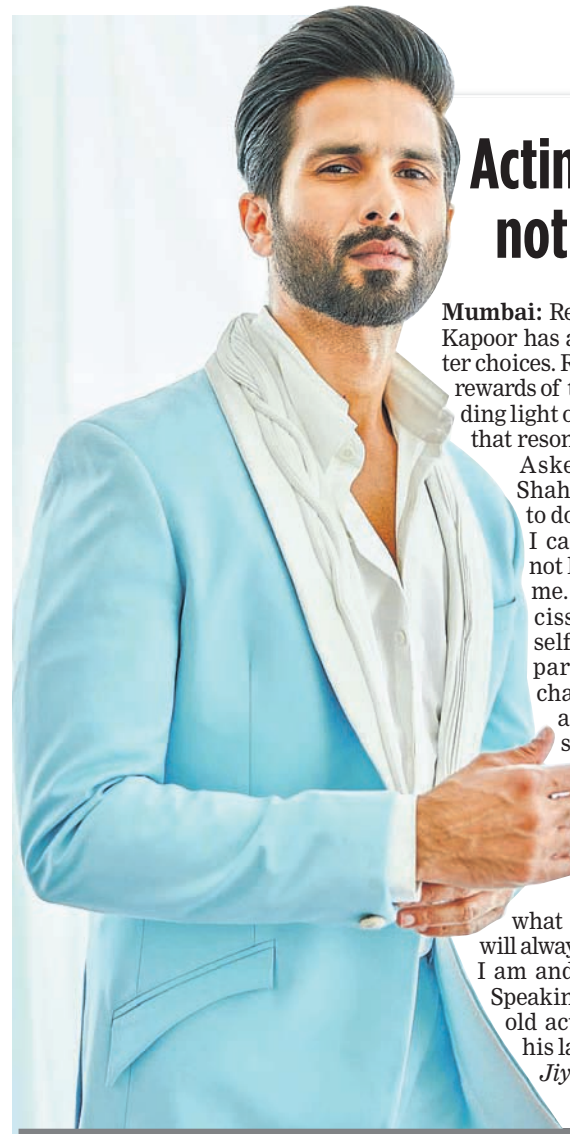
Mumbai: Actress Taapsee Pannu, engrossed in promoting her upcoming film, *Phir Aayi Hasseen Dillruba*, discussed her struggles to access industry networks due to her reluctance to attend late-night events, impacting her career opportunities.

Speaking to a media agency, she said, "Bollywood camps are there. The nepotism debate that we talk about is the problem of getting access. If a big-budget film is being made, I am sure nobody would disrespect me by saying I am not fit for the role, but I might not get the part because my name will not be brought up as other actors who are part of camps would be recommended. The harsh reality is that big films are about access, and I don't have that access to make it into that room."

She concluded, "Parties are also a way to get into camps. You socialise with people, become friends, and then you work with them. That's fine, but to get to that position, you have to go through this process of partying after 10 in the night, and that is so draining for me. I can't sustain it. That's not me. So, I might as well choose the harder way to do a lot of films and a lot of good work."

On the work front, Tapsee has *Woh Ladki Hai Kahaan* and *Khel Khel Mein* in her kitty.

AGENCIES



Acting is transformation, not narcissism: Shahid

Mumbai: Renowned for his versatility, actor Shahid Kapoor has always pushed boundaries in his character choices. Recently, he delved into the challenges and rewards of transforming himself for the screen, shedding light on his approach to portraying characters that resonate deeply.

Asked about the characters he picks, Shahid mentioned, "For me, it's nothing to do with who I am! it's more like what I can portray and who I can be! I'm not looking to do something that's like me. I think that would be very narcissistic like let me just show myself to the world! The idea is to be a part of stories and play different characters who represent different aspects of human behavior, and society; people who are from different backgrounds, whose brains work differently, whose hearts work differently, who speak differently, look differently, and walk differently!"

Shahid further added, "To me, that's what acting is has always been about and I will always chase that. I'm not very interested in who I am and put that out in front of the camera!" Speaking of the professional front, the 43-year-old actor is currently enjoying the success of his latest release, *Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya*, co-starring Kriti Sanon.

AGENCIES

Celina for safer and equitable industry

Mumbai: Actress Celina Jaitley recently shared her thoughts on the ongoing struggle for women's rights and her journey in the Hindi film industry.

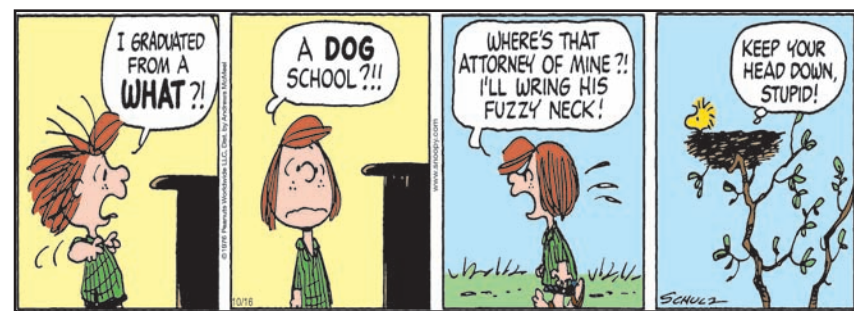
The *Golmaal* returns actress, during her conversation with an entertainment portal, confessed of facing several uncomfortable situations, but being a war hero's daughter, she had successfully navigated them. She also highlighted that she felt protected in the industry until the demise of her mentor, actor Feroz Khan.

She had made sure to stay true to her principles. Further, reflecting on the state of women's liberation, Celina acknowledged the sacrifices and struggles of countless females across centuries that paved the way for today's progress. Despite advancements, she emphasised the ongoing fight for equality, condemning violence and the repercussions of decisions made by war-driven individuals. In the conversation, she also discussed the #MeToo movement in the industry. The actress identified the root issue as power dynamics and stressed the need for systemic changes and legal protections to address sexual harassment comprehensively. She too mentioned that despite the awareness raised about sexual harassment via the movement, the issue still prevails, and some tough calls should be made to address the same.

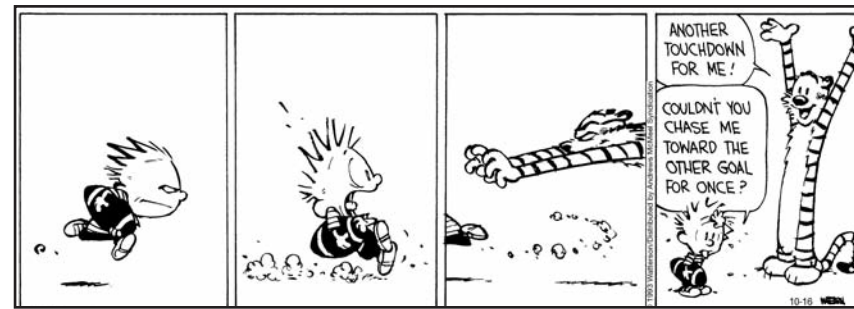
AGENCIES



PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

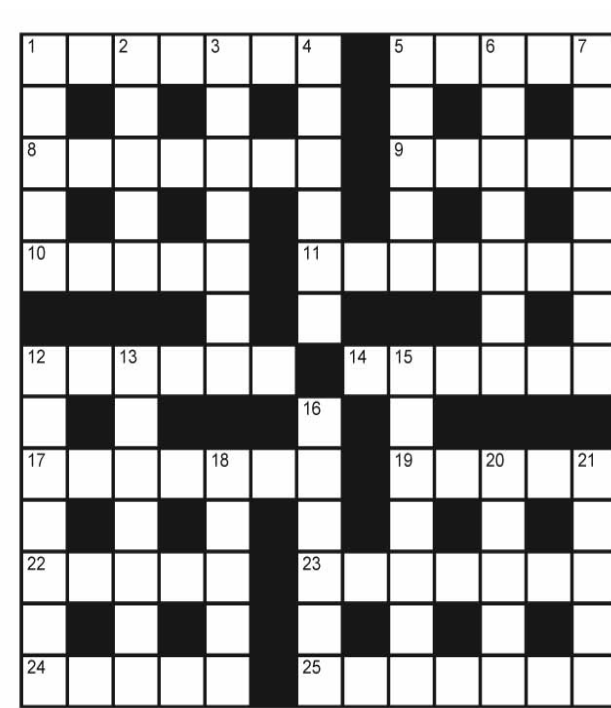


BREVITY



FUN post

CROSSWORD



- Copyright ©2024 PuzzleJunction.com
- Across**
- 1 Shirt fabric
 - 5 Electronics pioneer Nikola
 - 8 Precious stone
 - 9 Lightweight wood
 - 10 Burn with hot water
 - 11 Get rid of
 - 12 Suffering
 - 14 Barefoot
 - 17 Martial art
 - 19 Moscow money
 - 22 Diver's device
 - 23 Pie plant
 - 24 Fiddler on the Roof role
 - 25 Tow truck
 - 4 Ingratiate
 - 5 Forbidden
 - 6 Narcissistic
 - 7 Disconcerted
 - 12 Loftiness
 - 13 Temporary visit
 - 15 Take care of
 - 16 Tunnel
 - 18 Princess topper
 - 20 Empty
 - 21 Hot coal
- Down**
- 1 Sanctify
 - 2 Iota preceder
 - 3 Defamation

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.

3	8			2				
	4	6		5				
					7		4	
6			1	8				
		1						8
			5		3		1	
	2	8						5
		4				6		
9	5	3				1	8	

SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD

S	P	A	T	U	L	A	R	A	I	S	E
E	N	P	R	E	N	X					
P	A	I	N	T	B	A	L	L	C	A	P
I	L	I	T	C	A	O	E				
A	L	O	N	G	H	E	X	A	G	O	N
V	H	N									S
Q	U	E	S	T	I	O	N	A	I	R	E
U	R			P	E	E	T				
A	B	S	I	N	T	H	E	C	O	L	I
R	L	A	O	D							D
T	I	E	P								D
E	E	P	I	E	R	O	L				L
R	E	P	L								L

SUDOKU

1	6	4	9	7	2	5	8	3
9	7	8	5	3	6	1	4	2
3	5	2	4	1	8	9	6	7
7	3	5	6	2	1	4	9	8
8	1	9	7	4	3	6	2	5
2	4	6	8	5	9	7	3	1
4	2	1	3	9	7	8	5	6
5	8	3	1	6	4	2	7	9
6	9	7	2	8	5	3	1	4

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW



Government of Odisha



ANANDABANA

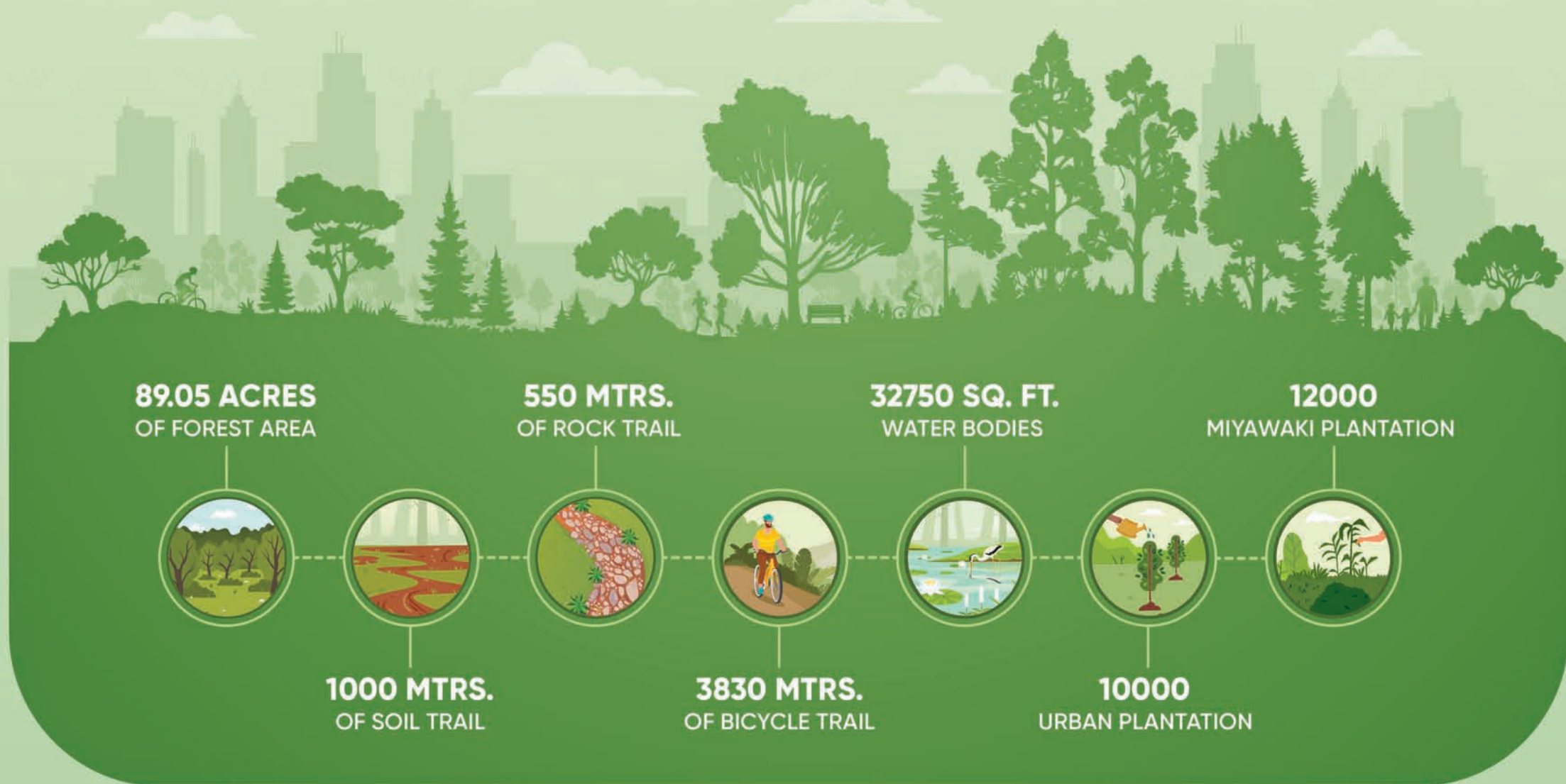
Nest of Happiness

"I believe that nature is home to our happiness, awareness and resurgence."

Naveen Patnaik
Chief Minister, Odisha



Dedicated to the People of Odisha
by
Shri Naveen Patnaik
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Odisha
on
11th March 2024



Forest, Environment & Climate Change Department

FOCUS GLOBALISATION

FREE TRADE CONUNDRUM



Does trade promote peace, freedom, and economic opportunity, or does it foster conflict, repression, and inequality? In fact, the enigma is more apparent than real. Either outcome – or anything in between – depends on whom trade empowers

posed the gold standard, but they were also against import tariffs, which they thought benefited big business and harmed ordinary people. They pushed to replace tariffs with a more equitable progressive income tax. Then, during the early part of the twentieth century, many socialists viewed free trade, supported by supranational regulation, as the antidote to militarism, wealth gaps, and monopolies.

These conflicting views would seem to pose a conundrum. Does trade promote peace, freedom, and economic opportunity, or does it foster conflict, repression, and inequality? In fact, the enigma is more apparent than real. Either outcome – or anything in between – depends on whom trade empowers.

Nineteenth-century liberals and reformers were free traders because they thought protectionism served retrograde interests, including landed aristocrats, business monopolies, and warmongers. They believed economic nationalism went hand in hand with imperialism and aggression. Palen cites a 1919 essay by the economist Joseph Schumpeter, who depicted imperialism as a “monopolistic symptom of atavistic militarism and protectionism – an ailment that only democratic free-trade forces could cure.”

It was this vision that informed the post-World War II international trade system. The American architects of the International Trade Organization followed in the footsteps of Cordell Hull, President Franklin

D. Roosevelt’s secretary of state, believing they were pursuing world peace through free trade. Hull was an economic cosmopolitan and a devotee of the nineteenth-century radical free-trade advocate Richard Cobden. Unlike previous regimes, the postwar order was meant to be a system of global rules that did away with bilateralism and imperial privileges. While the US Congress ultimately failed to ratify the ITO, some of its key principles – including multilateralism and non-discrimination – survived in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the precursor to the World Trade Organization.

But trade can be instrumentalised just as easily for authoritarian and militaristic ends. A particularly egregious example is Antebellum America, where free trade served to entrench slavery. During the drafting of the US Constitution in 1787, slave-owning Southerners ensured that the text would prohibit the taxation of exports. They well understood that free trade would ensure that plantation agriculture remained profitable and safeguard the system of slavery on which it was based. When the North defeated the South in the Civil War, slavery was abolished and free trade was replaced with protectionism, which suited Northern business interests better.

The situation under British imperialism was similar. After the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, the British government nominally turned its back on protectionism and led Europe in

signing free-trade agreements. But in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, free trade was imposed through the barrel of a gun whenever the British encountered weak potentates ruling over valuable commodities and markets.

The British fought the infamous Opium Wars of the mid-nineteenth century to force Chinese rulers to open their markets to British and other Western goods (opium chief among them), so that Western countries in turn could buy China’s tea, silk, and porcelain without draining their gold. The opium was grown in India, where, as Amitav Ghosh details in his new book, *Smoke and Ashes*, a British monopoly forced farmers to work under horrendous conditions that left long-term scars. Free trade served repression and war, and vice versa.

The post-WWII regime of multilateral free trade under American leadership would fare much better. Under GATT, commercial diplomacy replaced wars, and many non-Western countries – such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and, most spectacularly, China – expanded their economies rapidly by leveraging global markets.

By the 1990s, however, the trade regime had become a victim of its own success. Large corporations and multinationals, empowered by the expansion of the global economy, increasingly drove trade negotiations. The environment, public health, human rights, economic security, and domestic equity took a back seat. International trade had yet again moved away from Cobden and Hull’s original vision, turning into a source of international discord instead of harmony.

The lesson of history is that turning trade into a positive force requires that we democratise it. That is the only way to ensure it serves the common good, rather than narrow interests – an important lesson to keep in mind as we reconstruct the world trade regime in the years ahead.

The writer, Professor of International Political Economy at Harvard Kennedy School, is President of the International Economic Association.



Dani Rodrik

THE LESSON OF HISTORY IS THAT TURNING TRADE INTO A POSITIVE FORCE REQUIRES WE DEMOCRATISE IT

Few terms in economics are as ideologically loaded as “free trade.” Advocate it nowadays, and you are likely to be regarded as an apologist for plutocrats, financiers, and footloose corporations. Defend open economic borders, and you will be labeled naive or, worse, a stooge of the Communist Party of China who cares little about human rights or the fate of ordinary workers at home.

As with all caricatures, there is a grain of truth in the anti-trade stance. Growing trade did contribute to rising inequality and the erosion of the middle class in the United States and other advanced economies in recent decades. If free trade got a bad name, that is because globalisation’s boosters ignored its downsides or acted as if nothing could be done about them. This blind spot empowered demagogues like Donald Trump to weaponise trade and demonise racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, and economic rivals.

Nor is antipathy to trade the province only of right-wing populists. It also includes radical leftists, climate activists, food-safety advocates, human-rights campaigners, labour unions, consumer advocates, and anti-corporate groups. US President Joe Biden, too, has noticeably distanced himself from free trade. His administration believes that building a secure, green, equitable, and resilient US economy must take precedence over hyper-globalisation. All progressives, it seems, believe that free trade stands in the way of social justice, however understood.

It wasn’t always this way. Free trade was the rallying cry of nineteenth-century political reformers, who saw it as a vehicle for defeating despotism, ending wars, and reducing crushing inequalities in wealth. As University of Exeter historian Marc-William Palen reminds us in *Pax Economica: Left-Wing Visions of a Free Trade World*, the era’s economic cosmopolitanism encapsulated progressive causes such as anti-militarism, anti-slavery, and anti-imperialism.

And it wasn’t just political liberals who supported free trade. US populists in the late nineteenth century staunchly op-

Fall of an Institution

The out of the blue resignation of Election Commissioner (EC) Arun Goel just days ahead of the possible announcement of dates for the general elections has sparked a political firestorm and triggered a flurry of speculations. Whether he resigned due to differences with the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) or the government at the Centre or he has intentions to contest elections on the ruling party’s ticket, just like the former Calcutta High Court judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay who resigned recently to join the BJP, he has caused quite a stir.

Whatever the case, the unexpected move has only weakened one more institution mandated to uphold Indian democracy, that too when the nation is on the cusp of going to the all important Lok Sabha polls. There are allegations from various quarters that the independence of the country’s institutions is being undermined, one institution at a time, while premier probe agencies like the ED, CBI and Income Tax department have all become puppets of the government at Centre.

With Goel’s resignation, the three-member Election Commission of India (ECI) is now left with only one member – CEC Rajiv Kumar. The other member, EC Anup Chandra Pandey, had retired last month. Goel’s tenure was to end on 5 December, 2027, and he would have become the CEC after incumbent Rajiv Kumar’s retirement in February 2025.

Reacting to Goel’s shock exit, Opposition Congress has said that if the “systematic decimation of independent institutions is not stopped then democracy shall be usurped by dictatorship.” In a post on X, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge wrote: “Election Commission or Election OMISSION? India now has only one Election Commissioner, even as Lok Sabha elections are to be announced in few days. Why?” The Congress has affirmed that Goel’s exit is indicative of the government’s unwillingness to conduct a “free and fair election.”

Goel is not new to controversies. In fact, this is not the first time he has hit the headlines. The former IAS officer assumed charge as EC in January 2022. His appointment had triggered a controversy when he voluntarily retired from the Indian Administrative Service on 18 January, when he was Union Heavy Industries Secretary and was appointed as EC the very next day. The Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) filed a petition in the Supreme Court challenging Goel’s appointment, claiming it was arbitrary and undermined the institutional integrity and independence of the ECI. During the hearing, the SC commented on the haste in which he was appointed. The SC referred to the “tearing hurry” with which the Law Minister and the Prime Minister recommended Goel’s name, emphasising the need for a transparent and deliberate process. However, in August 2023, the court rejected the petition stating that a Constitutional Bench had earlier considered the matter and decided against annulling the appointment.

As per the new legislation regarding selection process for the CEC and ECs, a search committee will be formed to identify five potential candidates. This committee will be chaired by the Minister of Law and include two secretaries. Following the shortlisting process, a selection committee will be formed to make the final decision. This committee will be led by the Prime Minister and include a Union Cabinet Minister chosen by the Prime Minister, as well as the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha or the leader of the largest Opposition party in the House. Together, they will select one candidate from the list of five. Ultimately, the chosen CEC or EC will be appointed by the President. Now, all this has to be done in haste, a trademark of the present dispensation, as the polls are only weeks away.

Goel’s resignation is reminiscent of Ashok Lavasa’s resignation as EC in August 2020. Lavasa had given dissenting notes on various model code violation decisions taken by the EC in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. As matters stand, the ECI, which has already become an extended arm of the government, will further lose credibility. Mallikarjun Kharge was right when he remarked: “The ECI will now be among the last Constitutional institutions to fall.”

Subverting Justice

The way the State Bank of India (SBI) has sought to interpret the Supreme Court’s order declaring the Centre’s Electoral Bond Scheme (EBS) unconstitutional and virtually declined to disclose the identities of both the buyers and recipients of the bonds tends to confirm the fact that law is often “more honoured in the breach than the observance.” The judgement on the EBS is a watershed moment in exposing wrongdoing of monumental proportions by the government. The SC in its order directed the SBI to submit by 6 March details of electoral bonds purchased since 12 April, 2019, to the Election Commission of India (ECI). This would have disclosed the names of the beneficiaries of the scheme, i.e. the political parties, and names of those who donated to political parties through buying the bonds for electioneering. The allegation that the ruling BJP got the lion’s share of the funds generated in this manner by tampering with the laws of the land and Constitutional provisions may seem true. This is said to have disproportionately favoured the ruling party in enriching itself through a quid pro quo letting the contributors influence government policies to augment their profits in return for the money they had given in the name of purchasing the electoral bonds.

The apex court judgement was hailed as a triumph of democracy which struck at the roots of a dubious scheme.

However, far from complying with the court order, the SBI in a brazen show of defiance and seeming intent to shield the current dispensation, moved on 4 March its plea for extension of time till 30 June arguing that “decoding” the data and matching donors to the donations would be a “complex process”. This meant not only the court order on submission of the data to the ECI by 6 March was flouted, but also the very purpose of the judiciary’s laudable efforts to prevent the misuse of money for electioneering in the name of the EBS before the next Lok Sabha election to be held soon was defeated.

Banking experts have questioned the SBI’s plea that it would take a long time to compute the details of the purchasers of the bonds and their beneficiaries since they point to the digitised system where it takes only a click of the mouse to get all the data and this can be done in 24 hours. The government has risked its reputation of being transparent. Its “zero-tolerance towards corruption” claim is also proven untrue. Obviously it is pulling the strings from behind to make the SBI approach the SC with the absurd and motivated plea seeking enough time to ensure the general elections are over before the disclosure is made public. In that case the revelation of names of the donors and their main beneficiary would be inconsequential.

The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), the lead petitioner, has done a commendable job by approaching the SC a day after the deadline for SBI to submit details of electoral bonds to the ECI ended in demanding contempt action against the bank for defying the court’s directive. The SC immediately responded and Advocate Prashant Bhushan appearing for the NGO, urged the bench presided by the CJJ to hear the plea on 11 March when he said the SBI application too is likely to be taken up. ADR contended that SBI “has deliberately filed” the application on 4 March, 2024, “at the last moment in order to ensure that the details of donors and the amount of donations are not disclosed to the public before the coming Lok Sabha elections.” The petitioner has made the interesting plea that the SBI has the record of the unique number allotted to each electoral bond and KYC details of its purchaser. In fact, the requirement of KYC is mentioned in Section 4 of the EBS itself and as such SBI is well aware of the identity of purchasers of each electoral bond. The nation is waiting to see the SC act with firmness it has already shown and bring to book those trying to make a mockery of its momentous judgement. Along with this may come the next hurdle of getting the ECI to divulge the details, even if SBI should agree to give the details of electoral bonds in a reasonable time period.

SPECTRUM CORRUPTION

Laws don’t cut down graft



Shivaji Sarkar

THE RECENT RAJYA SABHA CROSS-VOTING IN HIMACHAL PRADESH, UTTAR PRADESH AND KARNATAKA ARE BLATANT INSTANCES THAT QUID PRO QUO IS ROUTINE

Two landmark judgements, one on the electoral bonds scheme and the other JMM - Jharkhand Mukti Morcha bribery case, should call for introspection into the myriad ways of graft. The nation despite vociferously discussing it for decades has not found a way out. No wonder India has the onerous ranking of 93 out of 180 on the global corruption index in 2023.

The recent Rajya Sabha cross-voting in Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka are blatant instances that money or other quid pro quo is routine. This has been happening in the Rajya Sabha elections for quite some time causing some change of rules, including open ballot system making it mandatory for MLAs to exhibit how they voted. Still, it is happening.

TMC MP Mohua Moitra was expelled in 2023 for alleged links with a businessman, who was reportedly allowed to use her official email. The new SC verdict now does away with the immunity to MPs granted by a judge-

ment in 1998 under Article 105.

Since the bogey of Bofors bribery, there would be hardly a deal which might not have seen the “cut money” phenomenon from an innocuous object to the purchases of arms, aircraft, drones or contracts for constructions. Sadly, corruption is built into the system. Even currency note exchange during the demonetisation had built into it. It is difficult to quantify but Transparency International (TI) had indicated in 2005, truckers paid Rs 222 crore in bribes. Both government regulators and police share bribe money to the tune of 43% and 45% each, respectively. The volume must have increased though the formula may remain valid now.

Notably, a 2005 TI report states that over 62% of Indians confirmed that they had to bribe a public official at some point to get something done or enjoy services provided by them (public officials). As of December 2009, 120 of India’s 542 MPs have accusations of partaking in cor-

ruption-related crimes like bribing under FIR. Many of the biggest scandals since 2010 have involved high-level government officials, including Cabinet ministers and Chief Ministers, such as the 2010 Commonwealth Games Scam, the Adarsh Housing Society Scam, the Mining Scandal in Karnataka and the cash for vote scams. In 2019, an online petition exposed the ineffectiveness of the country’s top anti-corruption authority, Lokpal, which is supposed to stop corruption. The petition addressed to the Chairperson of Lokpal asserts that the Lokpal officials are squandering enormous amounts of public money without accountability.

Professor Bibek Debroy and Laveesh Bhandari claim in their book *Corruption in India: The DNA and RNA*, in 2010, that public officials in India may be cornering as much as Rs 921 billion (\$12 billion), or 1.26% of GDP through corruption. Corruption also results in lower economic

growth for a given level of income. With the reduction in corruption level in India the growth rate of GDP might increase by 5 to 7%. As per an estimate, corruption in India causes a loss of growth in terms of investment and employment to the tune of Rs 25,000 crores.

The government has been pursuing zero tolerance against corruption and has taken several measures. There are 3745 cases of corruption lodged in 2021, according to the National Crime Records Bureau Report (NCRB). In addition, 457 cases are there against 549 public servants. A series of raids were conducted by Enforcement Directorate on a series of politicians, businessmen and other across the country.

However, the level of graft is not coming down. Despite digitisation, the rent seeking has not come to an end. It calls for an effort across social boundaries. The elections might see more of it in different forms and the colour may change but not the graft.

Biden & Trump

Sir, The process of presidential elections in America in November has progressed to the point where it is almost clear that President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump will face off again. The Super Tuesday results showed them to be far ahead of their opponents, and the next day, Nikki Haley eliminated all questions by stating that she was postponing the campaign to become the Republican nominee. The US presidential elections will feature only the same candidates for the second time in a row, a first since 1956. Second, both candidates are elderly. While Biden (81 years old) is the oldest president in American history during his current term, Trump is also 77. What’s equally intriguing is that the average American isn’t very fond of this contest. Two-thirds of those polled in February believed Biden was too old to work for the government. Nearly half of the respondents expressed the same way about Trump. The serious allegations against Trump are also making these elections unique. It is unclear when the court will rule on these charges. Everyone’s attention is focused on what will happen if the court rules against Trump before the election. These claims are also fueling intense resentment on both sides during a presidential race.

Abhijit Roy, JAMSHEDPUR

Kingmaker Nawaz

Sir, In the February Pakistan elections, when contrary to expectations, Nawaz Sharif’s Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) suffered shock losses in the central Punjab province, the writing on the wall was clear for the beleaguered former Prime Minister: he was no longer on the front foot. So, despite an uncomfortable alliance with the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), Sharif’s decision not to assume the mantle of the Prime Minister this time doesn’t come as a surprise. A dominant personality like Sharif may not be cozy to the idea of running a coalition government with all its attendant nitty-gritty. He chose to be a kingmaker of sorts. Pakistan’s economy is in the doldrums for long. Sharif is also wary of former PM Imran Khan’s Tehreek-e-Insaf Party breathing down the government’s neck.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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



In EOW net
The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Odisha police crime branch arrests two more persons in connection with a ₹3.7cr fraud case

DOWNTOWN | P4



India, EFTA sign pact
India and EFTA sign a free trade agreement under which New Delhi receives an investment commitment of \$100 billion in 15 years

BUSINESS | P6



Nigeria shocker
Nigerian security forces are searching for more than 200 children abducted from their school by gunmen, in the latest mass kidnapping incident

INTERNATIONAL | P7



Shardul propels Mumbai
Shardul Thakur rescues Mumbai from a collapse before contributing with the ball as well in the Ranji Trophy final against Vidarbha

BACK PAGE

Service benefits for block grant teachers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 10: Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Sunday announced various service-related benefits for teaching and non-teaching employees working in various non-government-aided higher educational institutions in the state.

The teaching and non-teaching employees working under the block grant system will get 15 days of annual leave while the female employees will get 180 days maternity leave for two births in addition to the annual leave, Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said in a statement.

The above benefit will also be extended to the employees of new aided high schools, Sanskrit Tols, UP (ME) schools and madrasas. As per the announcement, 16 years after receiving the block grants, the aided teachers will get placement scale at the higher pay scale.

Similarly, the Chief Minister has also increased the ex-gratia amount given to the block grant employees in case of death or permanent disability during the service period, it said.

The compensation amount for in-service death has been enhanced from ₹2 lakh to ₹5 lakh while the ex-gratia money for disability has been hiked to ₹3.50 lakh from ₹1.50 lakh.



FIRM STAND: Farmers block railway tracks during their 'rail roko' protest, at Devi Das Pura, on the outskirts of Amritsar, Sunday

PTI PHOTO

TMC picks names for all 42 seats

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 10: The TMC Sunday ended speculations of a possible seat adjustment with the Congress in Bengal by unveiling its candidate list for all 42 Lok Sabha seats, marking a significant overhaul by replacing seven sitting MPs and introducing several new faces, including former cricketer Yusuf Pathan.

Facing political heat over the incidents in Sandeshkhali, where allegations of sexual abuse against TMC leaders surfaced, the party brought in former MP Haji Nurul Islam replacing actor Nusrat Jahan in the Basirhat Lok Sabha seat, where the trouble-torn area is situated.

While 16 of 23 sitting MPs were retained, the TMC opted not to re-nominate seven incumbents and notably excluded BJP defector Arjun Singh from Barrackpore, who joined the TMC two years ago. In the candidate list, 12 are women. Among the 26 new candidates, six are entirely new to the political arena.

Former cricketer Yusuf Pathan has been nominated from Baharampur, historically a stronghold of state Congress chief and five-term MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury. Mahua Moitra, who was expelled from the Lok Sabha last year in cash for a query case, has been reaffirmed as the party's candidate from Krishnanagar.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Our survey can predict election results more accurately once we know the names of the new ECs

WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	34.6°C	34.0°C
Min Temp	20.6°C	19.8°C
Humidity	60%	55%
Rainfall	90	Nil

FORECAST

TEMPERATURE LIKELY TO RISE

Oppn questions Goel's exit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 10: A day after Arun Goel resigned as Election Commissioner, the Congress and other Opposition parties Sunday asked whether he did so due to any differences with the Chief Election Commissioner or the Narendra Modi government. His tenure was till December 5, 2027, and he would have become Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) after the retirement of incumbent Rajiv Kumar in February next year. Goel was a 1985-batch IAS officer of the Punjab cadre. He joined the Election Commission in November 2022. Following the retirement of Anup Chandra Pandey in February and Goel's resignation, the three-member EC now has only one member - CEC Rajiv Kumar.

Taking potshots at the BJP, some Opposition leaders wondered if Goel resigned to contest the Lok Sabha polls on its ticket like former Calcutta High Court



judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay. "The resignation of Arun Goel as Election Commissioner last evening raises three questions," Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said.

"Did he actually resign over differences with the Chief Election Commissioner or with the Modi Government, which does the front-seat driving for all supposedly independent institutions? Or did he resign for personal reasons?" Or did he, like

Panel meeting March 15 to appoint ECs

New Delhi: The Prime Minister-chaired high-powered committee will meet March 15 to finalise the names of new Election Commissioners, top sources said. Two vacancies of Election Commissioners came about following the resignation of Arun Goel and Anup Chandra Pandey's retirement. The panel is chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and has a Union Minister and the Leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury as members. It will meet March 15 and name the persons for appointment as Election Commissioners. The Election Commissioners will be appointed by the President.

the Calcutta High Court judge a few days back, resign to contest the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls on a BJP ticket," Ramesh said in a post on X.

Asked about Goel's resigna-

tion, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said one has to wait to see what he does in the coming days.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut alleged the Election Commission has become an "extended branch of the BJP". It is not the same Election Commission that it was during TN Seshan's time, which functioned as a watchdog over the elections and remained impartial, he claimed.

"In the last 10 years, the Election Commission has been privatised. It has become a branch of the BJP," he alleged. He said two people have gone and only one remains in the Election Commission.

"Like BJP's people have been appointed in High Courts, Supreme Court, Governor's house, in the same manner, they would appoint two of their BJP people here too," Raut claimed. Ramesh said, "It is possible that Arun Goel resigned to contest elections on a BJP ticket".

ALLIANCE SUSPENSE

BJP leaders called to Delhi

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 10: A day after BJD president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik issued a one line statement saying that "rumour" and "lies" are worst aspect of politics, the BJP top brass Sunday called its state unit leaders and those in charge of elections in Odisha to the national capital for a discussion.

Patnaik in an Instagram video Saturday had said "rumour" and "lies" were worst aspects in politics. The BJD president's statement came barely hours after Odisha BJP election in-charge Vijaypal Singh Tomar and party's state president Manmohan Samal publicly said there were no talks on alliance with the BJD.

Both Tomar and Samal also said the BJP in Odisha will fight all the 147 assembly and 21 Lok Sabha seats alone. Tomar even claimed that he was not aware of talks between BJD leaders and BJP central leaders on alliance. BJP MP Jual Oram had, however, said the BJP's core com-

mittee meeting had discussed the alliance matter, but nothing was finalised.

While denying alliance talks with the BJD leaders, Tomar had exuded confidence that BJP in Odisha will win more than 80 seats in assembly and 16 Lok Sabha seats. Similar was the statement of Samal. BJP's Odisha election deputy in-charge Lata Usendi also made a similar statement and rejected the possibility of an alliance before the twin polls in the state. Odisha has been conducting simultaneous polls for Lok Sabha and Assembly since 2004.

However, after getting a call from the BJP top brass, leaders including Samal, general secretary (organisation) Manas Mohanty, Tomar and Usendi left for New Delhi Sunday. At the airport, Samal said a team of state leaders of the party was going to hold a meeting with central leaders on the elections.

Asked about the possibility of discussions on alliance, Samal said, "It will not be wise on my part to say anything about it."

TWO PRISONERS ESCAPE FROM TITILAGARH SUB-JAIL

POST NEWS NETWORK

Titilagarh, March 10: Two under-trial prisoners accused of murder, escaped from Titilagarh sub-jail in Bolangir district, Saturday night.

The absconding prisoners were identified as Sobhaban Rana and Sumit Bihari. Rana was lodged in the Titilagarh sub-jail following his arrest in a case of human sacrifice while Bihari is accused of murdering a minor boy by throwing him into a well.

Jailor Chaitanya Pradhan confirmed their escape. He said the two prisoners escaped by scaling the boundary wall of the sub-jail at around 8 pm, Saturday adding that he has lodged a complaint at the Titilagarh police station in this regard.

Sources, however, said that the two were very trusted aides of the jailor and used to move freely in and outside the jail. Sources claimed that Rana used

to work as a domestic help in the jailor's house which is outside the compound wall of the jail. Similarly, Bihari used to call the shots on the jail premises and dictated terms on the inmates.

When questioned, the jailor said that both used to work as computer operators in the jail office. However, questions have arisen how Rana could work as a computer operator when he is not literate. But the jailor tried to brush aside the matter stating that he had very good working knowledge of computer.

Notably, Rana tried to facilitate his release from jail custody by behaving as a lunatic person. He even got himself admitted to SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack to prove his claims but his efforts were unsuccessful. If Rana's efforts to prove himself mentally unstable are to be believed then questions are being raised how he could be appointed in the jail office as per the jailor's claim.

LS polls: Demand for jets, choppers to rise by 40%

■ Helicopters are anticipated to be more in demand compared to fixed-wing aircraft as choppers will help in providing accessibility to rural and remote areas in a shorter time

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 10: As political parties prepare to fight it out in the Lok Sabha polls, the demand for chartered planes and helicopters is expected to jump by up to 40 per cent compared to the previous general elections, according to industry experts.

Helicopters are anticipated to be more in demand compared to fixed-wing aircraft as choppers will help in providing accessibility to rural and remote areas



in a shorter time. "There will be an exponential demand for private jets and the demand is expected to outstrip the availability of chartered planes and helicopters. There is a limited supply of chartered planes and helicopters," Club One Air CEO Rajan Mehra said.

With increased demand, some players will be taking chartered planes and helicopters on lease during the general elections for which the dates are expected to be announced in the coming days. Chartered plane and heli-

icopter services are charged on an hourly basis.

The industry experts opined that the prices can vary between ₹4.5 lakh to ₹5.25 lakh per hour for a chartered plane. For a helicopter, the hourly charge will be around ₹1.5 lakh. Business Aircraft Operators Association (BAOA) Managing Director Captain R K Bali said that during the Lok Sabha polls, the demand for private chartered planes and helicopters is expected to increase by 30 to 40 per cent compared to the previ-

ous elections. Official data showed that there were 112 Non-Scheduled Operators (NSOPs) at the end of December 2023. Generally, NSOPs are entities that do not have a particular fixed schedule and fly when there is a requirement.

Since the demand will be high, players are expected to take planes on lease for chartered operations, especially helicopters, Bali said and added that there are around 111-112 NSOPs and out of them, 40-50 per cent operate single aircraft. He said that NSOPs are estimated to have around 450 planes, including choppers.

These operators have aircraft and helicopters, with seating capacities varying from 3 to 37. The planes include Falcon 2000, Bombardier Global 5000, Twin Otter DHC-6-300, Hawker Beechcraft, Gulfstream G-200 and Cessna Citation 500XL, as per the data available with the Directorate General of Civil

Aviation (DGCA).

Most of the aircraft and helicopters have seating capacities of less than 10, the data showed. Mehra said the size of the chartered fleet will be around 350 and out of them, about 175 are helicopters.

A chartered operator, Club One has a fleet of 5 Falcon 2000, 4 Cessna Citation and 1 Bombardier CRJ200. "Political leaders will opt for helicopters to travel to small towns and hence more demand is likely for the choppers," Mehra said.

There are several brokers in the segment and sometimes they book a specific number of hours for a chartered plane and later, those hours are sold to the end users, including political parties, Mehra said. Bali said there are a lot of brokers providing chartered plane services and the hourly pricing will also depend on the negotiations and generally, hours are booked in bulk.

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EOW arrests 2 more in ₹3.7 crore fraud



Bhubaneswar, March 10: The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Odisha police crime branch has arrested two more persons, including a woman, in connection with a ₹3.7 crore fraud case taking the total number of arrests to four, a police officer said Sunday.

The EOW arrested the prime accused Saroj Kanta Mohapatra, ex-branch manager of a private bank in Puri district, and his friend Angel Mishra Saturday.

Earlier, Tanmay Kumar Maharana, the ex-asset officer of the bank's branch, was arrested from Raipur in Chhattisgarh, the police officer said.

The arrests were made in connection with a case registered by the bank's general manager in Bhubaneswar accusing Sarojkanta Mohapatra and Tanmay Kumar Maharana of sanctioning 35 fictitious loans (majorly MUDRA loans) amounting to ₹3.7 crore, mostly in favour of their close relative and acquaintances, the officer said.

During the investigation, it was discovered that the BDO of Pipili block had requested the bank for a flexi fixed deposit (FFD) of ₹3.7 crore in 2018.

It was also falsely intimidated by the bank that the amount had been deposited in the Flexi account, giving the details of the interest accumulated thereupon, the officer said.

In the year 2022, when the BDO sought the details of the FFD account and the statements of the account, the bank intimated that no such FFD has ever been created from the accounts of BDO, he said.

5T Chairman reviews SCB redevelopment

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar/Cuttack, March 10: Acting on the direction of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, 5T and Nabin Odisha Chairman Kartik Pandian visited the Millennium City to review the ongoing development works at SCB Medical College and Hospital (SCBMCH), which is being transformed into an AIIMS-plus institution.

He took stock of various works at the project site, held discussions with the officers concerned and instructed them to complete the construction works within timeline.

The project is being implemented at a cost of ₹4,500 crore which includes the residential blocks and the 2,058-bed hospital.

He visited the various components of the plan at the work site, and interacted with the engineers and the executing agencies. He asked them to ensure quality of the work. He told



THE PROJECT IS BEING IMPLEMENTED AT A COST OF ₹4,500 CRORE WHICH INCLUDES THE RESIDENTIAL BLOCKS AND THE 2,058-BED HOSPITAL

the executing agencies to enhance deployment of manpower to expedite the project work.

The 5T Chairman has stressed on the timely completion of the project with high quality works, as per reports.

SCB Medical College is one of the premier medical colleges of India. It was started in 1944, after being upgraded from Odisha Medical School. Gradually, it underwent multiple phases of development, expansion and advances to fulfil the healthcare

needs and aspiration of the population of this part of the country. In pursuit of excellence, SCB Medical College is undergoing a phenomenal redevelopment under the visionary leadership of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, said sources.

Elephant calf found dead

POST NEWS NETWORK

Hatadihi, March 10: The carcass of an elephant calf was found Sunday inside Hadagarh wildlife sanctuary under Anandapur forest division in this block of Keonjhar district. Forest department officials informed that the calf was around 5 to 6 years' old. They added that they had difficulty in retrieving the carcass as the entire herd stood on guard for a substantial period of time and refused to leave the area.

DFO Abhay Kumar Dalei, who visited the spot along with other officials, informed that the calf had died due to a fight with another 'rouge' elephant. Officials later conducted a post-mortem and then buried the carcass in the forest. They said that they will be only able to ascertain the real cause of the elephant's death after getting the post-mortem report.



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Information & Public Relations Department



I don't have alliances with various parties, I am going to the polls alone and what I have is many star campaigners from poor households
 Y S JAGAN MOHAN REDDY | AP CM

BIG CAT COUNT IN INDIA RISES TO 26

Cheetah 'Gamani' Sunday gave birth to five cubs in Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh's Sheopur district, taking the total number of the big cats in the country to 26, Union Minister Bhupender Yadav said. Taking to social media platform X, the Union Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change said, "High Five, Kuno! Female cheetah Gamini, aged about 5 years, brought from Tswalu Kalahari Reserve, South Africa, has given birth to 5 cubs today"



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A M Khanwilkar sworn in as Lokpal chairperson

New Delhi: Former Supreme Court judge Ajay Manikrao Khanwilkar was administered the oath of office as the chairperson of the anti-corruption ombudsman Lokpal by President Droupadi Murmu here Sunday, nearly two years after the post fell vacant. The swearing-in ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan was attended by Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

CLASSIFIED AFFIDAVIT

I Litton Behra, Village-Niranjanpur, Dist.-Khorda, Jatni, Odisha, 752050, declare by this Affidavit No- 13AA977655, that now onwards I shall be known as Litton Behra for all future purposes.

'RAIL ROKO' PROTEST

Farmers squat on tracks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, March 10: Movement of several trains was affected in Punjab Sunday after agitating farmers squatted on tracks at many places in the state as part of a nationwide 'rail roko' protest.

The protest, called by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha to press the Centre to accept their demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price (MSP), was held from 12 noon till 4 pm. In Punjab, farmers sat on railway tracks at many locations in



22 districts, including Amritsar, Ludhiana, Tarn Taran, Hoshiarpur, Firozpur, Fazilka, Sangrur, Mansa, Moga and Bathinda. Because of the disruption of train services, passengers experienced inconvenience. According to railway authorities, nine trains including Ferozpur to Bathinda, Jalandhar City to Hoshiarpur,

and Jalandhar City to Pathankot were cancelled and many trains were either short-terminated or short-originated. Farmer leaders Sarwan Singh Pandher and Jagjit Singh Dallewal claimed that their 'rail roko' agitation was successful.

"Till a concrete resolution is offered by the government to our demands, we will continue our struggle," Pandher said. They claimed that the 'rail roko' protest was held at 75 locations in Punjab, five in Haryana, three each in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and 20 locations in Tamil Nadu. During the protest, farmers raised slogans against

the Centre for not accepting their demands.

Bharti Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan), BKU (Dakaunda-Dhaner) and Krantikari Kisan Union - farmer bodies that are part of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) - also participated in the 'rail roko' agitation. The SKM, which had spearheaded the farmers' 2020-21 agitation against the now-scrapped three central agri laws, is not part of the 'Delhi Chalo' protest but has extended its support to the ongoing farmers' agitation at Shambhu and Khanauri points on the Punjab-Haryana border.

HP police book independent MLA, Congress rebel's father

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Shimla, March 10: The Himachal Pradesh Police Sunday registered a case against an independent MLA and the father of a Congress rebel and others over "electoral offences" related to the recent Rajya Sabha polls in which six party MLAs voted for the BJP candidate from the state.

The case against Hamirpur's independent MLA Ashish Sharma and Gagret's now disqualified MLA Chetanya Sharma's father and others was registered on the basis of a complaint lodged by Congress MLAs Sanjay Avasthi and Bhuvneshwar Gaur. Ashish and Chetanya are among the nine MLAs, including six Congress

rebels and three independents who voted in favour of the BJP nominee Harsh Mahajan in the recently held Rajya Sabha polls.

A case of criminal conspiracy, corruption practices and undue influence on election has been registered on the complaint of two Congress MLAs, police said Sunday. Adding a new dimension to the current political crisis in Himachal Pradesh, the two Congress MLAs Sanjay Avasthi and Bhuvneshwar Gaur Sunday filed a complaint with the police seeking investigation into electoral offences, corrupt practices and criminal conspiracy in the whole sequence of events since the Rajya Sabha polls held February 27. This development has invoked sharp reactions from the MLAs.

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of the day **quote**

Large-cap stocks may continue their outperformance as Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) are expected to maintain their buying spree

SANTOSH MEENA | HEAD OF RESEARCH, SWASTIKA INVESTMART

We had an opportunity to align with Reliance, which is obviously the company that has done very well there and one that we respect. And in doing so, we end up owning part of a bigger media company. And we believe that, that not only should benefit us in terms of the bottom-line, but derisk us as well there

BOB IGER | CEO, WALT DISNEY

This industry is expected to touch about \$63 billion in the next 3 to 4 years. Currently, it is somewhere between \$53 billion and \$55 billion. So it is going to be a pretty good growth from a value perspective

NITA KAPOOR | CEO, SPIRITS & WINES ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

SHORT TAKES

Firms' mcap climbs

New Delhi: The combined market valuation of seven of the top-10 most valued firms climbed Rs 71,301.34 crore in the holiday-shortened last week, with Bharti Airtel emerging as the lead gainer. In a record-breaking rally last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 374.04 points or 0.50 per cent. The 30-share BSE Sensex Thursday settled at a new closing peak of 74,119.39. The Nifty also ended at a fresh closing high of 22,493.55. Reliance Industries continued to rule the chart of the most valued firms followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Bharti Airtel, Infosys, LIC, Hindustan Unilever and ITC.

Aramco profit dips

Dubai: Saudi oil giant Aramco reported Sunday a \$121 billion profit last year, down from its 2022 record due to lower energy prices. Aramco made the announcement in a filing in Riyadh's Tadawul stock market. It had reported a \$161 billion profit in 2022, likely the largest ever reported by a publicly traded company. "The decrease mainly reflects the impact of lower crude oil prices and lower volumes sold, and weakening refining and chemicals margins," the company said in its filing. Aramco reported overall revenue of \$440 billion last year, down from \$535 billion in 2022.

IOC set to join high table of F1 fuel producers

IOC, THE COUNTRY'S LARGEST OIL FIRM CONTROLLING ROUGHLY 40% OF FUEL MARKET SHARE, WILL BE THE FIRST INDIAN COMPANY AND ONLY A HANDFUL GLOBALLY THAT PRODUCE FUEL USED IN F1 RACING

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 10: After delivering back-to-back innovations in fuel grades, Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) has now set sight on the Grand Prix and will in next three months start producing fuel used in adrenaline-pumping Formula One or F1, motor racing. The firm's refinery at Paradip in Odisha will in three months produce the petrol used in F1 car racing, its chairman Shrikant Madhav Vaidya said. Vaidya said the company expects to get its Formula 1 fuel certified in around three months, after which it will start competing with other global majors like Shell to supply it to the F1 teams.

16 YEARS OF NEGOTIATIONS

India, EFTA ink deal

EUROPE TRADE GROUP COMMITS TO \$100BN 15-YEAR DEAL

REUTERS

New Delhi, March 10: India will lift most import tariffs on industrial products from four European countries in return for investment of \$100 billion over 15 years, its trade minister said, after an economic pact signed Sunday that concluded nearly 16 years of negotiations.

The signing is a watershed moment, as it is India's first modern trade pact with a bloc having developed countries

PIYUSH GOYAL | COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER

The deal follows trade pacts over the last two years with Australia and the United Arab Emirates, while officials say another, with Britain, is in its final stages, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi aims for annual exports of \$1 trillion by 2030.

It envisages that the European Free Trade Association, comprised of Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, will invest \$100 billion over 15 years in India's fast-growing market of 1.4 billion people, Trade Minister Piyush Goyal said.

He added that for the first time in a trade agreement, EFTA had committed to invest \$ 100 billion in the next 15 years.

In turn, India will lift, or partially remove, very high customs duties on 95.3% of industrial imports from Switzerland, excluding gold, either immediately or over time, the Swiss government said in a statement.

"Norwegian companies exporting to India today meet high import taxes of up to 40% on certain goods," Industry Minister Jan Christian Vestre said in a separate statement. "With the new deal, we have secured nil import taxes on nearly every Norwegian good."

The pact covers some new elements such as intellectual rights



Indian entrepreneurs are among the best in the world. India and South Africa are at the forefront of digital transformation and jointly harnessing the power of technology

PHUTI MAHANYELE | CEO, NASPERS SOUTH AFRICA



and gender equity, Goyal added, telling a press conference, "It is a modern trade agreement, fair, equitable and win-win for all five countries."

India has committed to cut its 'bound tariff rate' on gold to 39% from 40%, but does not anticipate much impact on imports of the metal from Switzerland,

which were estimated at \$16 billion last fiscal year, an Indian government official said.

India is the EFTA grouping's fifth-largest trading partner after the European Union, the United States, Britain and China, with total two-way trade of \$25 billion in 2023, its trade ministry estimates.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- BOOST TO TRADE, INVESTMENT**
 - India expects that the pact, following deals with the UAE and Australia, will boost exports of pharmaceuticals, garments, chemicals and machinery while attracting investments in automobiles, food processing, railways and the financial sector
 - Indian exports to the EFTA touched \$2.8 billion and imports were about \$22 billion in 2023
 - With a population of 13 million and combined GDP of more than \$1 trillion, the EFTA nations are the world's ninth largest merchandise trader and its fifth largest in commercial services
- SWISS COMPANIES TO BENEFIT**
 - Swiss manufacturers of machinery, luxury items such as watches and transport are expected to benefit, the Swiss government says. India has invited Swiss transport companies to invest in the railways
 - The pact allows EFTA nations the opportunity to export processed food and beverages, electrical machinery, and other engineering products to a potential market of 1.4 billion people at lower tariffs
 - The pharmaceutical and medical devices industry within the bloc could also benefit
- NO TO DATA EXCLUSIVITY**
 - India earlier rejected the four nations' demand for the pact to include provisions on "data exclusivity" that would make it difficult for its drug companies to produce generic variants of the off-patent drugs, Indian officials said
 - India and the EFTA also agreed to largely keep "sensitive" farm products and gold imports out of the pact
- LIMITATIONS OF THE PACT**
 - Switzerland's policy of tariff-free entry for all industrial goods from any country, with effect from January 1, would affect benefits to Indian companies, Global Trade Research Initiative, a think tank based in New Delhi, says in a report
 - India is likely to keep facing difficulties in exporting farm produce to Switzerland due to a complex web of tariffs, quality standards, and approval requirements, analysts warned

India not to tailor policy for Tesla

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 10: India will not tailor its policies to suit US EV maker Tesla, and its laws and tariff rules will be formulated to attract all-electric vehicle manufacturers from across the world to set up a base in the world's fastest-growing economy, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said.

Tesla has been seeking an initial tariff concession that would allow it to offer 70 per cent customs duty for cars priced less than \$40,000, and 100 per cent for cars of higher value.



In an interview with PTI, Goyal said the government recognises the need for a vibrant EV ecosystem as greater use of battery-run vehicles will cut carbon emissions as well as the staggering oil import bill. But for this, it will not tailor

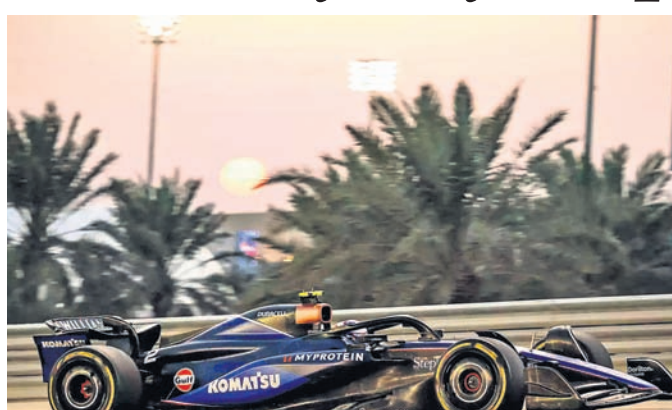
policies that suit any one company and would rather frame ones that will encourage all-electric vehicle manufacturers from across the world to set up shop in India, he said. "We are working on several initiatives where we are having inter-ministerial (consultations) and a dialogue with the stakeholders, with potential investors from across the world from Europe, from the United States, from the Far East, from Japan, from Korea," he said.

Tesla made the concession demand a precondition to build a plant in India. High tariffs on motor vehicles, meant to boost local pro-

duction, have been a lingering issue for foreign carmakers too.

"Government does not tailor policy for any one individual company or its interests. Everybody is free to make their demands. But that does not mean that the government will necessarily take a decision (based on) what you demand," he said.

Goyal was replying to a question about whether the government is looking at giving any concessions to Tesla for setting up a manufacturing facility in India. The Indian factory, as and when it happens, would be Tesla's sixth vehicle plant.



ported reference fuel for testing cars and motorcycles. Now, IOC is supplying them the same grade fuel at much cheaper cost.

Fuel retailers like IOC sell petrol and diesel of primarily two kinds - regular and premium, through their fuel station network. The biggest difference between the normal and premium fuel lies in the octane number. The regular fuel has an octane number of 87, but premium fuel has an octane number of 91. Reference grade fuel comes with a 97 octane number.

The octane number is nothing but a unit to measure the ignition quality of petrol or diesel. Vaidya said his company has three premium fuels - 95-Octane XP95 petrol and 100-Octane XP100 petrol used in high-end luxury cars and bikes. It also has high performance XtraGreen diesel that offers higher fuel economy, reduced noise and emits lesser particulate matter, carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides. "XtraGreen diesel is a real game changer fuel. It is catching up fast and now makes up for

Indian Oil chairman expects to produce the F1 fuel in three months at Odisha's Paradip plant

about 8 per cent of all diesel that IOC sells," he said.

He said IOC has entered the racing fuels segment with its high-octane 'Storm' petrol for motorcycle racing.

The company will be the official fuel partner for the Federation Internationale De Motocyclisme (FIM) Asia Road Racing Championship (ARRC) for three years - 2024 to 2026, supplying 'Storm' petrol across all ARRC race rounds.

IOC will supply fuel for all the motorcyclists from 15 countries that will participate in the FIM Asia Road Racing Championship. "Our R&D (research and development) in two months will be able to produce Category-1 fuel and in three months Formula 1 fuel," he said.

"Unless we go to F1, the journey is not complete."

ONGC'S FIRST OIL FROM 98/2 BLOCK

First oil from state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation's (ONGC) just-started KG deep-sea oilfield has gone to its subsidiary Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) for processing into fuels like petrol and diesel, the two firms said. ONGC in January started oil production from its Krishna Godavari basin KG-DWN-98/2 (KG-D5) block, lying in Andhra offshore



Be up to date with changing needs of market: Poddar

Orissa Plasto Pipes Pvt Ltd was established in 1994 with the aim of manufacturing PVC pipe in Odisha and today, it caters to the needs of millions of households in plumbing and borewell accessories. With over three decades of history, the firm has specialised in providing efficient, sustainable, and innovative products in the PVC pipe manufacturing industry. The ace entrepreneur behind this successful venture is Kaushal Poddar, managing director of Orissa Plasto. After completion of his education, Poddar joined his father's business in 1997 and took it to new heights. In a conversation with **Orissa POST**, Poddar shares his entrepreneurial experience. Excerpts...



Orissa Plasto has been a prominent name in the PVC pipe manufacturing industry. How do you see your demand in the odisha market?

We started our production in 1994 from our Jagatpur Industrial Estate plant and this is the 30th year of our operations. The plant runs round the clock for 365 days in full capacity to feed the market demand in entire Odisha and Jharkhand. Today Orissa Plasto is the top brand in its product category with annual turnover of more than 100 crore as well as daily sales of over 2,000 sanitary and hardware shops across 30 districts of the state. The brand manufactures PVC, UPVC, SWR, HDPE, CPVC pipes and fittings, and Garden Hoses as well as hot and cold water application for use in agricultural, residential and commercial projects.

With multiple players present in the industry, what difference is your brand offering?

Orissa Plasto has always offered top quality products with guaranteed life-long durability. We always focus on best quality products in reasonable prices for our customers. Our products are completely 'Made-in-

Odisha' and are manufactured with the use of latest technologies.

How do you tackle the raw materials crunch?

We do not face any kind of raw material crunch as we have signed annual quantity MoUs with our suppliers. We also import our raw materials and maintain proper raw material stocks.

With over three decades of experience in this business, how do you deal with challenges?

I think if you are in a business for long time, it leads to expertise and develops a trust for the brand in the mind of the consumers. We have overcome the challenges of primary phase and as an entrepreneur one should always be ready to face any challenge that comes their way in the journey.

As the managing director of this brand, how has your

journey been so far? Do you have any expansion plans in pipeline?

I was appointed director in 2005 and since then my prime objective is expansion, growth, addition and diversification. Industry means growth by volume and the scale of production shows the future of the brand. Since 2005, we are continuously expanding our production capacity and adding new range of products to cater the diversified needs of the market which changes with the time. If we are not updated, we will be outdated. We are coming up with two new production facilities in Jagatpur Industrial Estate in which we will add new products in our basket like water tanks, PVC suction hose, LLDPE flat hoses, PVC braided hose, HDPE fittings & PPE fittings, which will be in market by 2025.

FPIs inject more than ₹6,100 crore in equities

Strong economic growth and market resilience lure foreign investors in March

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 10: Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) are turning steady buyers as they bought Indian equities worth Rs 6,139 crore so far this month driven by strong economic growth, market resilience and decline in US bond yields.

This came following a modest investment of Rs 1,539 crore in February and massive outflow of Rs 25,743 crore in January, data with the depositories snowed.

"FPI inflows have shown a positive trend as compared to the previous month. Thanks to the recent announcement of Q3 GDP numbers at 8.4 per cent, persistence performance of large Indian corporates being major factors for turning the tide green for the Indian equity market," Manoj Purohit, Partner and leader - FS Tax, Tax and Regulatory Services, BDO India, said.

On the regulatory front, announcements such as removal of UAE from the grey list, Sebi's consultation paper for easing disclosures norms for regulated FPIs have been the major catalysts to put India on the forefront for potential long term investments for the foreign fraternity, he added.

VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, attributed this renewed interest in Indian equities to three reasons - resilience of Indian markets, steady drop in the US bond yields (the 10-year yield has declined from above 4.3 per cent to 4.08 per cent now) and strong GDP



growth.

These positive developments and the sustained flow of funds into the market - both directly and through institutions - can keep the market resilient.

"However, high valuations are a matter of concern. Valuations in the mid and small cap segments are excessive and unjustifiable. Correction in this segment is only a matter of time," Vijayakumar said.

Apart from equities, FPIs have injected Rs 1,025 crore in the debt market during the period under review. This came in the backdrop of Bloomberg announcing India's bonds inclusion in its Emerging Market (EM) Local Currency Government Index and related indices from January 31 next year.

Moreover, FPIs have been injecting money in the debt markets for the past few months driven by upcoming inclusion of Indian government bonds in the JP Morgan Index.

They infused Rs 22,419 crore in February, Rs 19,836 crore in January, and Rs 18,302 crore in December. Overall, the total outflow for this year so far stood at over Rs 18,000 crore in equities and an inflow of Rs 43,280 crore in debt market.



China and Pakistan are good neighbours, good friends, good partners and good brothers. The two countries' iron-clad friendship is a choice of history and a precious treasure of the two peoples
 XI JINPING | PRESIDENT, CHINA

MUSLIMS WELCOME THE HOLY MONTH OF RAMZAN

Muslims around the world are welcoming the arrival of Ramzan, a month of dawn-to-dusk fasting, intense prayer, charity and feasts



NIGERIA ABDUCTIONS

Army hunts for missing kids

The kidnappings are a stark reminder of the security crisis plaguing Africa's most populous country

AGENCIES

Kuriga, March 10: Armed men have kidnapped 15 pupils from a boarding school in north-western Nigeria days after more than 200 students were abducted from another school with the army still searching for them.

The men broke into the Islamic seminary in the village of Gidan Bakuso in Sokoto state Saturday and seized 15 children from the hostel as they slept, police told. The *Associated Press* news agency. The mass kidnapping in Kuriga was the third in northern Nigeria since last week; a group of gunmen abducted 15 children from a school in another north-western state, Sokoto, before dawn Saturday, and a few days earlier 200 people, mostly women and children displaced by conflict, were kidnapped in north-eastern Borno State. The kidnappings are a stark reminder of the security crisis plaguing Africa's most populous country.

No group claimed responsibility for any of the recent abductions. But Islamic extremists waging an insurgency in the northeast are suspected of carrying out the kidnapping in Borno. Locals blame the school



abductions on herders who are in conflict with the settled communities.

It's not the first time for a student kidnapping in Nigeria to shock the world. In 2014, Islamic extremists abducted more than 200 schoolgirls from Borno's Chibok, sparking the global #BringBackOurGirls social media campaign. A decade later, at least 1,400 Nigerian students have so far been abducted from their schools in similar circumstances. Some are still held captive, including nearly 100 of the Chibok girls.

Recalling Thursday's kidnapping, Nura Ahmad, a teacher, told the AP that students were just settling into their classrooms at the government primary and secondary school when gunmen "came in dozens, riding on bikes and shooting sporadically."

The LEA Primary and Secondary School, one of the

few educational facilities in this area, sits by the road just at the entrance of the town, tucked in the middle of forests and savannah. Even with its decaying roof and wrecked walls, it gave parents hope for a better future for their children.

Nigerian police and soldiers headed into the forests Friday to search for the missing children, but combing the wooded expanses of northwestern Nigeria could take weeks, observers said.

"Since this happened, my brain has been muddled," said Shehu Lawal, the father of a 13-year-old boy who is among those abducted. "My child didn't even eat breakfast before leaving. His mother fainted (upon hearing the news)," he said. Some villagers like Lawan Yaro, whose five grandchildren are among the abducted, say their hopes are already fading. People are used to the region's insecurity, "but it has never been in this man-

ner," he said. More than 3,500 people have been abducted across Nigeria in the last year, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. Some were even kidnapped from their homes in the capital of Abuja.

■ The mass kidnapping in Kuriga was the third in northern Nigeria since last week

■ Saturday's kidnappings come as the Nigerian government launched a search and rescue mission for hundreds of missing children who were taken from Kuriga, in northwestern Kaduna state Thursday in the largest mass abduction in three years

■ Kuriga residents told Al Jazeera that the children were seized by more than 100 attackers shortly after their daily assembly as they spoke of feeling abandoned by the government

Last year, President Bola Tinubu took office after he successfully campaigned on the promise to tighten security and stop the kidnappings. Experts say it is easy to smuggle in arms, used in kidnappings, over Nigeria's poorly policed borders. More than half of its 1,500-kilometer (932-mile) border with Niger, for instance, stretches across the northwest.

Though mostly covered in woodland savannah, the region also has vast ungoverned and unoccupied forests where organised gangs hide and keep their kidnap victims.

US airlifts embassy personnel from Haiti

REUTERS

Washington, March 10: The US military said Sunday it has carried out an operation in Haiti to airlift non-essential embassy personnel from the country and added US forces bolster embassy security, as Caribbean nation reels under a state of emergency.

The operation was the latest sign of Haiti's troubles as gang violence threatens to bring down the government and has led thousands to flee their homes.

"This airlift of personnel into and out of the embassy is consistent with our standard practice for embassy security augmentation worldwide, and no Haitians were on board the military aircraft," the US military's Southern Command said in a statement.

Haiti entered a state of emergency last Sunday after fighting escalated while Prime Minister Ariel Henry was in Nairobi seeking a deal for the long-delayed UN-backed mission.

Kenya announced last year it would lead the force but months of domestic legal wrangling have effectively placed the mission on hold.

On Saturday, the US State Department said Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Kenyan President William Ruto about the Haiti crisis and the two men underscored their commitment to a multinational security mission to restore order.

In Southern Command's statement, it said Washington remained committed to those goals.

Zardari sworn in as Pak's 14th President

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Islamabad, March 10: Asif Ali Zardari Sunday took oath as Pakistan's 14th President, a day after the veteran politician staged a remarkable comeback when he was overwhelmingly elected as the only civilian president of the coup-prone country for a second time.

Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa administered the oath to the 68-year-old Zardari in a small yet formal ceremony at Aiwan-e-Sadr, the Presidential Palace. Zardari replaces Dr Arif Alvi, who stayed in office for five months after completing his five-year term in September 2023.

The swearing-in ceremony was attended by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir and Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee General Sahir Shamshad Mirza among other senior army and civilian officials and diplomats.

The outgoing president Alvi, a senior member of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, also attended the oath-taking ceremony. Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and Zardari's son Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, his daughters Aseefa Bhutto Zardari and Bakhtawar Bhutto Zardari and other family members were present on the occasion.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has congratulated Zardari on his election as the president for



the second term. In a message, Shehbaz Sharif said that the Senate, National Assembly and elected members of all the four provincial assemblies have expressed their confidence in Zardari. He said that the Zardari will be a symbol of the strength of the federation.

This is the second time that Zardari has won the presidency, a record for any civilian. Earlier he served as the 11th president of Pakistan from 2008 to 2013 and is one of the four democratically elected presidents to have completed their five-year constitutional term. He has been a member of the National Assembly of Pakistan since August 2018.

Co-chairman of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Zardari was the joint candidate of the ruling alliance and was elected Saturday after he defeated Mahmood Khan Achakzai, a candidate backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) by a huge margin. Born in 1955, Zardari was brought up and educated in Karachi.


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Dravid stresses on unity



GENNEXT: (From left) Sarfaraz Khan and Dhruv Jurel holds the trophy aloft alongside Yashasvi Jaiswal and Akash Deep after winning the series 4-1 against England, Saturday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dharamsala, March 10: Rahul Dravid underlined the importance of staying together and functioning as a unit to be triumphant in the tough world of Test cricket while delivering a motivational dressing room speech after India registered a memorable 4-1 series win over England.

After losing the opening Test in Hyderabad, the hosts bounced back in stunning fashion to win the next four matches to claim the series.

"Series like this have to be earned and this is tough. Test cricket is hard at times. It's hard in terms of your skill. It's hard physically, as you've seen, it's hard mentally," Dravid said in a video posted on 'bccci.tv'.

"But it's great satisfaction at the end of it. The satisfaction that you get winning a series like this coming from one behind to be able to win four. I think it's just phenomenal," he added.

As key players like Virat Kohli and Mohammed Shami and KL Rahul, who played only the opener, were unavailable, India found heroes in some young names in the series. The home

side handed debuts to five players - Rajat Patidar, Dhruv Jurel, Devdutt Padikkal, Sarfaraz Khan and Akash Deep - in the marquee series. In fact, Jasprit Bumrah and Ravindra Jadeja too missed a Test each.

The Indian coach was a chuffed man after some of those young names emerged with flying colours from the series. "For a lot of you young guys, especially coming into this group, you are going to need each other to succeed. Whether you're a batsman or bowler or whatever you are, your success is tied in with other people's success."

"All of you are invested in each other's success. And that's really important going forward. It's not about your success, but it's about how you can help other people succeed, which will also help you succeed," he said.

The 51-year-old was delighted to see the players finding ways to turn the tide whenever they were put under pressure. "There were times in the series that we were really challenged and pushed and we found a way to bounce back, which speaks to the skills that we have, the resilience that we have, the character that we have."

"On many occasions in this se-

The former India captain praised the team for emerging winners from a long, gruelling series against a quality opposition. "We talked about this at the start of the series as well. Irrespective of whether we win or lose this is going to teach us a lot - a five Test match series. You're going to go through a lot of ups and downs."

"It's a long series, you're going to be tested. And it was going to teach us a lot about us as players or some as a team, and a lot about us and we've come through that exceptionally with terrific flying colours and we face challenges both on and off the field."

Box
Complete supremacy
Dubai: A day after India crushed England in Dharamsala to win the five-match series 4-1, Rohit Sharma's side claimed the top spot in the ICC Test rankings, overtaking Australia in the latest pecking order released by the world governing body for



Rahul Dravid responds to media persons' questions during the press conference

ries the games could have gone either way. But we always found people in this dressing room who stepped up and turned the game our way. And that was fantastic."

Dravid also said the team also did well to maximise advantageous positions. "So, you not only need to win the games when you have to fight back, which we did really well. But you have to also win the games when you're ahead and you don't let the opposition come back in any situation."

cricket on Sunday. India, who are already heading the World Test Championship (WTC) standings, are now at the summit of the ICC rankings in all three formats of the game. India, with 122 rating points, are five points ahead of Australia in the Test ranking, while England are third with 111 rating points. In ODIs, India have 121 rating points, with Australia a close second with 118 points. In the T20Is, India have 266 rating points, with England (256) at the second spot.

Satwik-Chirag pair claims French Open doubles title



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Paris, March 10: Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty enjoyed another memorable 'Evening in Paris', lifting the French Open badminton crown for the second time with a dominating straight-game victory over Chinese Taipei's Lee Jhe-Huei and Yang Po-Hsuan in the men's doubles final here Sunday.

The World No.1 Indian pair had finished runners-up in the French Open in 2019 before winning the title in 2022. Sunday, the Asian Games champions outwitted Lee and Yang 21-11, 21-17 in 37 minutes to regain the Super 750 tournament title and also win their first crown of the season after reaching the summit clash for the third time in 2023.

The Indian duo had finished second best at Malaysia Super 1000, India Super 750 this year, while signing off as runners-up at China Masters Super 750 as well last year.

Satwik and Chirag proved third time lucky and their stellar show this week only reconfirmed chief coach Pullela Gopichand's assertion that the duo will be the favourites to win Paris Olympics gold.

This was the Indians' seventh BWF World Tour title (Super 300 events and above) and they won it without dropping a single game this week.

Soon after the win, the Indians celebrated in their traditional style with Satwik lifting Chirag in his lap as he had his hands eyeing towards the sky. Satwik also broke into a dance with his racket.

Satwik and Chirag forced op-

ponents to commit errors regularly as they rushed to 11-6 lead at the break. Later, the Indians grabbed 10 game points. The duo converted on the second chance with Satwik dishing out a cross court smash.

Lee and Yang started on an attacking note after the change of ends to open up a 4-1 lead. With coach Mathias constantly giving instructions from the sidelines, Chirag and Satwik quickly regrouped and made it 3-4. The Indians restored parity at 5-5 when the Taiwanese botched a flick serve and then dumped one to net.

A couple of smash on Satwik's body earned the Taiwanese a few points but the Indians kept their nose ahead at 8-7 with a barrage of steep smashes. Lee made some good interceptions on the front court and managed to hold a 11-9 cushion at the interval after the Indians were called for a fault for a double-hit during a rally.

On resumption, Lee and Yang committed another service error as it was even-steven at 11-11. Chirag made another good call, asking Satwik to leave the shuttle at the backline as it was 14-14.

The Indians then piled up the pressure, standing up a bit near the net and stepping up the pace to quickly move to 17-14. Another body blow from Yang on Satwik gave them a point but the Indians were soon two points away from a win after Chirag produced another smash.

The Indians grabbed four match points when the Taiwanese found the net. Lee and Yang saved one but then sent the next one wide as the Indians celebrated in unison.

MB defeat EB to secure ISL playoff berth

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 10: Mohun Bagan Super Giants (MBSG) produced one of their finest displays of the season to crush arch-rivals 3-1 in their Indian Super League (ISL) return leg clash at the Salt Lake Stadium here Sunday.

Cleiton Silva missed from the spot in the 14th minute but since then it was a one-way traffic for Mohun Bagan who scored the goals through Jason Cummings (27th minute), Liston Colaco (36th) and Dimitri Petratos (penalty - 45+3') to cruise to 3-0 lead at the half time break.

Saul Crespo (53rd) struck his maiden goal of the Indian Super League to pull one back for East Bengal but Mohun Bagan were back at their dominant best and ensured that there was no more blip to hold on to the 3-1 scoreline.



The win took Mohun Bagan past Mumbai City in the lead spot of the standings on goal difference and to the playoff spot. Both sides now have 36 points each but Mohun Bagan have one match in hand and remain firm favourites for the Shield. With the loss, East Bengal are out of play-off race.

In the 13th minute, East Bengal were awarded a penalty after Vishal Kaith tripped Cleiton. However, Kaith produced a beauty of a save to deny Cleiton a goal.

Out of nowhere, Cummings found himself in perfect position from the edge of the box to score from a rebound off East Bengal goalkeeper to give MBSG the much-needed lead. Within 10 minutes, Colaco extended MBSG lead, also from a rebound.

Sahal was tripped by Nandha Kumar in the first-half injury time as MBSG got another penalty and this time Petratos got it right to make it 3-0 at halftime.

Mac Allister helps Liverpool salvage a point against City



AGENCIES

Liverpool, March 10: Alexis Mac Allister fired home a second-half penalty as Liverpool salvaged a point against Manchester City in a breathless 1-1 Premier League blockbuster at Anfield Sunday that left Arsenal top of the table.

Liverpool are second but level on 64 points with the Gunners, with 10 games remaining of a thrilling three-way title race. Holders City, who are unbeaten in 21 games across all competitions, are third on 63. Arsenal climbed top with their 2-1 win against Brentford Saturday.

City looked poised to hand manager Pep Guardiola his second victory in nine trips to the cauldron of Anfield when John Stones lost his marker to tap in Kevin De Bruyne's corner from close range in the 23rd minute. Stones leapt onto the barrier in front of the visitors' fans and shook both fists in celebration.

The cheers were deafening when Mac Allister slotted home from the penalty spot past Ederson in the 50th minute after the keeper had sent Darwin Nunez flying through the air with a rash challenge in the box.

Buoyed by the goal, Liverpool kept pressing and had numerous near-misses. City's Jeremy Doku hit the post against the run of play, as both sides had to settle for the second draw this season

between the two titans.
Son show lifts Spurs

Tottenham boosted their bid to qualify for the Champions League by routing 10-man Aston Villa 4-0 Sunday. Fifth-placed Spurs moved to within two points of Villa in fourth with a game in hand. Goals from James Maddison, Brennan Johnson, Son Heung-Min, who also had two assists to his name, and Timo Werner secured a resounding victory at Villa Park. Villa's cause wasn't helped by John McGinn being sent off in the 65th, but Unai Emery's team was already trailing 0-2 by that point. Maddison opened the scoring in the 50th when poking home Pape Sarr's cross from the right. Johnson doubled Spurs' lead three minutes later after an assist from Son.

Villa captain McGinn had described the clash as "the most important game in the club's recent history," but his sending off effectively killed off any hopes of a comeback from the home team. He was shown a straight red for taking down Destiny Udogie and from there Villa's challenge collapsed.

Son lashed in Spurs' third in the first minute of stoppage time after a cross from Dejan Kulusevski and substitute Werner rounded off the win three minutes later, with Son the provider again.

DC win thriller despite Richa heroics

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 10: Richa Ghosh hit two monstrous sixes but paid the price for her poor fitness as Delhi Capitals found her short of crease to win a cliffhanger against Royal Challengers Bangalore by a solitary run in the WPL, Sunday.

Needing 17 off last over to reach a target of 182, Richa, who blasted 51 (29b, 4x4, 3x6), smote left-arm spinner Jess Jonassen for a 78 metre straight six and another maximum off the penultimate delivery to bring the equation down to two runs off the final delivery.

However Richa, not exactly known for being the fittest among Indian cricketers despite brute power in her strokes, wasn't fast enough to beat Jonassen, who whipped the balls off in a flash to restrict RCB to 180/7.

DC, with their fifth win, are now on 10 points and lead the table due to superior net run-rate (+0.918) compared to Mumbai Indians (+.343).

Needing 28 off final two overs, Shikha Pandey conceded couple of boundaries but removed Georgia Wareham, leaving left-arm spinner Jonassen to defend 17 in the final over.

Earlier, Jemimah Rodrigues (58, 36b, 8x4, 1x6) displayed her complete mastery over slow



Jemimah Rodrigues (R) gives Alice Capsey a fist bump during their stand

bowlers propelling Delhi to a competitive 181/5. However, young off-spinner Shreyanka Patil grabbed 4/26 and was brilliant at the business end of the DC innings to put brakes on the home team's scoring.

Rodrigues added 97 runs in just 10.1 overs for the third wicket with Alice Capsey (48, 32b, 8x4). This was after Shafali Verma (23) and Meg Lanning (29) added 54 for the opening stand but they were then dismissed in quick succession. Rodrigues, not exactly known for her power-hitting, depended on her solid touch play, immaculate timing and deft placements.

She found an able ally in Capsey, who initially let the Indian take

more of the strike before upping the ante during the death overs. Spinner Asha Sobhana, seeing her coming down the track, tried to bowl one wide and out of her reach but the Southern Stars batter used her big reach to wallop her over extra cover.

Rodrigues was bowled round the legs when she tried to convert off-spinner Shreyanka's full-toss into an over-pitched delivery in her bid to play a paddle sweep.

BRIEF SCORES: DC Women 181/5 (Jemimah Rodrigues 58, Alice Capsey 48; Shreyanka Patil 4/26) beat RCB Women 180/7 (Richa Ghosh 51, Ellyse Perry 49; Alice Capsey 1/5) by one run.

Shardul helps Mumbai take control vs Vidarbha

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 10: Seasoned duo Shreyas Iyer and Ajinkya Rahane's run drought continued but Shardul Thakur's all-rounder utility helped hosts Mumbai to claw their way back against a gutsy Vidarbha on the opening day of the Ranji Trophy final.

After scoring a counter-punching 75 (69b, 8x4, 3x6) to give Mumbai's below-par first innings score of 224, some semblance of respectability Thakur also dismissed veteran opener Dhruv Shorey (0) with an angular delivery which got him a favourable DRS result.

Vidarbha were 31/3 at stumps with another 193 runs in arrears in the first innings with Atharva Taide (21 n o) and night-watchman Aditya Thakare at the crease.

Playing the last first-class game of his career, medium pacer Dhawal Kulkarni bowled his customary late outswingers which had Aman Mokhade (8) and Test triple centurion Karun Nair (0) nicking it to Hardik Tamore behind stumps.

Mumbai's top guns Rahane and Iyer were both dismissed for identical scores of 7 in a



shocking collapse that saw the 41-time champions slipping from 81/0 to 111/6 on either side of the lunch break.

But the complexion of the game changed drastically upon the arrival of Thakur in the middle. He displayed adroit use of both hands and his feet to inch closer to what would have been his second consecutive ton, but kept running out of partners.

BRIEF SCORES: Mumbai 224 (Shardul Thakur 75, Prithvi Shaw 46, Bhupen Lalwani 37; Harsh Dube 3/62, Yash Thakur 3/54, Umesh Yadav 2/43); Vidarbha 31/3 (Atharva Taide 21 n o; Dhawal Kulkarni 2/9, Shardul Thakur 1/14). Match to continue.

BAJRANG, RAVI ELIMINATED FROM PARIS QUALIFICATION RACE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

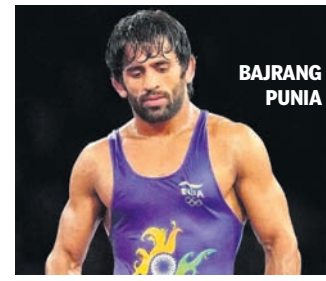
Sonepat (Haryana), March 10: Bajrang Punia and Ravi Dahiya - the Tokyo Games medallists - were Sunday eliminated from the race for the Paris Olympics qualification after losing their respective bouts in the selection trials for the national team.

Punia, who was a prominent face of protest against former WFI President Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, suffered a crushing 1-9 defeat in the men's freestyle 65kg semifinal against Rohit Kumar. This was after he barely managed to win against



Ravinder (3-3 on criteria) in the opening round.

As fate would have it, it will be Sujeet Kalakal who will now strive to earn qualification in the 65kg for the Paris Games after winning a spot in the Indian



team. Sujeet had lost a legal case against Punia when he had challenged his direct entry for the Hangzhou Asian Games. Sujeet beat Rohit by technical superiority in the final. Rohit will now represent India at the Asian

Championships.

The winners at the trials will get the opportunity to compete at Asian and World Olympic Qualifiers to be held in Bishkek from April 19-21 and in Istanbul from May 9-12.

The men's 57kg, being organised in Nordic format, was always a tough category since both Tokyo Games silver medallist Ravi Dahiya and star-in-making Aman Sehrawat were in contention. Dahiya, who is making a comeback from an injury, lost the high-scoring opening bout 13-14 to Aman. Both of them train at Chhatarsal Stadium.

Eves lose to Bangla in SAFF U-16 final

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kathmandu, March 10: India fell short of a title conquest, losing to Bangladesh 2-3 in the penalty shootout during the SAFF U-16 Women's Championship final here, Sunday.

The score was 1-1 after the regulation time as India's Shveta Rani's own-goal in the 70th minute cancelled out tournament's top scorer Anushka Kumari's fourth-minute strike. Surajmuni made a save during the shootout, but the opposing goalkeeper was the star, handing Bangladesh the title.