



Samantha's insecurities

Actor Samantha Ruth Prabhu explains discomfort with her sexuality, citing it as a factor in accepting challenging songs like 'Oo Antava'

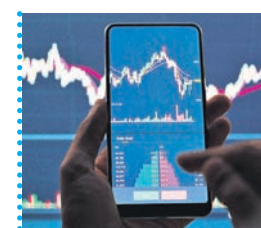
LEISURE | **P2**



Pak attacks Afghanistan

Pakistan carries out airstrikes inside Afghanistan killing eight civilians, including children and women

INTERNATIONAL | **P10**



Volatile trade

Sensex and Nifty close higher in highly volatile trade Monday as investors turn cautious ahead of US Fed interest rate decision

BUSINESS | **P11**



Alcaraz reigns supreme

Carlos Alcaraz retains the BNP Paribas Open title beating Daniil Medvedev, bagging his 1st title since winning Wimbledon last year

SPORTS | **P12**

SHORT TAKES

Apex court relief for Cong MLA Moquim

Cuttack: In a major relief for Congress leader Mohammed Moquim, the Supreme Court stayed Monday the Orissa High Court's order of annulling his election as Cuttack-Barabati MLA. Admitting Moquim's petition, the apex court also served notice to BJD leader Debashish Samantaray, who had filed a case in the High Court seeking disqualification of Moquim alleging that he had suppressed facts with respect to the criminal cases pending against him while filing his poll affidavit. It should be stated here that Samantaray had lost to Moquim in the 2019 Assembly polls. **P3**

Putin elected for 5th term by record margin

Moscow: Russia's Central Election Commission said Monday that President Vladimir Putin has won his fifth term with a record number of votes. The results came after Putin unleashed the country's harshest crackdown on the opposition and free speech since Soviet times. Only three token candidates were allowed to run against Putin as he sought another six years in power. Putin has led Russia as President or Prime Minister since December 1999. The commission said Putin got 87.42% of the total votes polled. **P10**

IRREGULAR by MANJUL

EMPLOYMENT EXC



Let's form a political party instead. Our nation has so many large-hearted donors. We will earn a lot

MARKET WATCH			
INDEX		VARIATION	
SENSEX	72748.42	↑	104.99
NIFTY	22055.70	↑	32.35
DOLLAR	82.94	↑	₹0.04
EURO	90.43	↑	₹0.14
GOLD	₹65,570	↑	₹28
SILVER	₹75,486	↓	₹164

WEATHER		
	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	34.8°C	34.8°C
Min Temp	25.6°C	24.0°C
Humidity	88%	88%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
FORECAST		
LIGHT TO MODERATE RAIN		



RESCUE ACT: Members of the NDRF rescue an injured person from the rubbles of a five-storey building which collapsed in the wee hours of Monday at the Garden Reach locality in Kolkata claiming nine lives and leaving more than 17 injured

PTI PHOTO

Status quo continues

Since PM Narendra Modi's visit to the state March 5, the possibility of a BJD-BJP alliance has been brewing. The saffron party is approaching many regional parties to meet the magic figure of 400 or more seats for the NDA. Keeping this in mind, the saffron party is leaving all options open in Odisha as it knows that the BJD is a formidable force in the state. The BJP knows that to win more than eight Lok Sabha seats (in 2019), it has to depend a lot on the BJD.

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 18: Speculation continues to rule the roost surrounding a possible pre-poll alliance between the ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Odisha. Amid this situation, the state president of the saffron party, Manmohan Samal, left for New Delhi again Monday for discussions with the central leadership regarding the list of potential candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. Samal is being accompanied by Odisha BJP's organisational secretary, Manas Mohanty. The



two are carrying the shortlisted list of candidates prepared by the BJP's core election committee in Odisha. However, sources did not mention whether Samal is carrying the entire list of names for the 21 Lok Sabha and the 147 Assembly constituencies. BJP's election in-charge for Odisha, Vijaypal Singh Tomar, and co-in charge Lata Usendi had departed for the national capital a day earlier. The candidate list for various Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies were previously drafted by the state election and core committee after lengthy discussions. Meanwhile senior BJP leader and MP Jual Oram emphasised Monday that there is no confusion among party workers any potential alliance. "There is no confusion among

party workers over any alliance. We have sent a list to the Central leadership and everything will be done as per their decision," Oram told reporters here. He added that the final choice of candidates will be done by the central leadership and action will be taken accordingly. "The final decision on candidates for each constituency will be made by the BJP parliamentary board," Oram added. Although the BJP has announced candidates for Lok Sabha seats in various states in two phases, the saffron party is yet to name any from Odisha. This development is keeping leaders and workers of both the BJP and the BJD on tenterhooks. Similarly, the BJD also has not named anyone for the upcoming polls. It has heightened

speculation that the alliance cannot be completely ruled out even now. Sources in the Odisha unit of the BJP said here Monday that they are hopeful that the names of the candidates from the state will be announced by the party's central election committee in the third phase. However, they failed to throw any light on the forging of an 'alliance' between the BJP and the BJD. Meanwhile, the ruling BJD convened a meeting at Naveen Niwas, the residence of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, to initiate the process of candidate selection. BJD observers and party leaders from Puri Lok Sabha Constituency were present at the meeting, including Arun Sahoo, Sanjay Das Burma, Rudra Maharathy, Umakant Samantray, and Satya Pradhan, among others. "We had a detailed discussion on the organisational activities in seven assembly segments under Puri Lok Sabha constituency. The leaders were told to activate people contact programmes in the Puri LS seat. It is a regular phenomenon in the party," Sahoo said after the meeting. He however, kept mum when asked about the alliance.

EC shunts Bengal top cop in 1st rejig

Home secretaries of Gujarat, UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, Himachal and Uttarakhand also transferred

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 18: Seeking to ensure a level-playing field in the Lok Sabha elections, the Election Commission (EC) ordered Monday the removal of the home secretaries of Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. It also directed the shunting out of West Bengal DGP Rajeev Kumar. Also, the secretaries of the general administrative departments of Mizoram and Himachal Pradesh have been removed. The decision to shift the West Bengal DGP was taken as the officer was removed earlier too from active election management-related duty during the 2016 Assembly elections in the state and in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the sources pointed out. The EC has asked the Bengal chief secretary to post Rajeev Kumar to a 'non-election'-related assignment. This incidentally is the first bureaucratic rejig by the ECI since it announced polling dates.

TMC slams BJP over Rajeev's removal

Kolkata: Criticising the removal of West Bengal DGP Rajeev Kumar, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) claimed Monday it was a glaring example of BJP's 'control' over the Election Commission (EC). Addressing a press conference, TMC general secretary Kunal Ghosh claimed that BJP was gripped by the fear of losing the Lok Sabha seats in the state. "The BJP is trying to misuse all institutions, including the Election Commission. They are even meddling with the appointment of the election commissioners. The step taken today (Monday) is a glaring example of the BJP's control over the EC," Ghosh said. "It doesn't matter if BJP changes even 100 such officers because the people of Bengal are with Mamata Banerjee," he asserted.

Later in the day, following the instruction of the EC, the West Bengal government appointed Vivek Sahay as the new DGP. The appointment was made within hours after the poll panel removed Kumar.

SC asks SBI for all EBs details by March 21

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: In a third tongue-lashing to the State Bank of India (SBI), the Supreme Court told it to Monday stop being 'selective' and make 'complete disclosure' of all details related to the electoral bonds scheme (EBS) by March 21. The apex court said the details to be disclosed include the unique bond numbers that would reveal the link between the buyers and the recipient political parties. A five-judge Constitution Bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud said there is 'no manner of doubt that the

SBI is required to make complete disclosure of all the details'. "In order to fully effectuate the order and to obviate any controversy in the future, the CMD of SBI shall file an affidavit on or before 5.00pm Thursday (March 21) indicating that SBI has disclosed all details of the electoral bonds which were in its possession and custody and that no details have been withheld," the bench said. The bench, also comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna, BR Gavai, JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said the Election Commission shall forthwith upload all details on its website. **P9**

Many queue up for penguin-counting job

5 VACANCIES ARE AVAILABLE AT THE WORLD'S SOUTHERNMOST POST OFFICE AND THOUSANDS HAVE EXPRESSED THE DESIRE TO TAKE UP THE OFFER

AGENCIES

London, March 18: Adventure seekers always love the unknown and uncharted territories. They leave no stone unturned for exploring new places and take trips over the most difficult of terrains to quench their adventurous thirst. The vast unexplored regions of the Antarctica have always held a special place in their hearts. There are many who want to explore Antarctica, but lack of finances prevents them from doing so. However now, a unique job opportunity has opened up the chance for adventure enthusiasts to visit Antarctica as per



an advertisement on various social media platforms of the United Kingdom Antarctic Heritage Trust (UKAHT). It will be a five-month stint at Port Lockroy for recruits, as per a March 16 post on the UKAHT's 'X' and other

social media handles. Port Lockroy is located on Goudier Island region of the Antarctica. It incidentally is the world's southernmost post office. The temperature is biting cold, but then that is not a bother

to many who are seeking the jobs at the post office. "From counting penguins to sorting mail at the world's southernmost post office, working at Port Lockroy in Antarctica is a job like no other," the trust said in its job post. Among the positions vacant are those of a base leader, a shop manager and three general assistants - all living at the 'remote but hectic' location. The positions are for the tenure beginning November 2024 until March 2025. It should be stated here that for the five job options available there are more than 6,000 applicants. Some of them have even mentioned 'they do not need any salary.'

Port Lockroy has been known as a safe anchorage following its use by the whaling fleets of the early 20th century and for this reason was selected for the first continuously occupied British base to establish year round British presence in Antarctica. It further said that 'Base A' was established February 11, 1944, and then closed in 1962. However, it was not torn down as the 'abandoned base was recognised for its historical importance and contribution to British science and given the status of Historic Site and Monument (HSM) No. 61.

FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES

Today is the day for creativity, while you leave the logic for tomorrow, even when it comes to work. You are bent upon success at work, but Ganesha warns that it requires commitment and devotion. In the evening, you may want to be left alone with your spouse or a book.

TAURUS

Today your money will be burning holes in your pockets. You will be dying squander it away and get rid of it as fast as possible. You'll be tossing it around as if you owned a gold mine. Ganesha urges you to hold your horses and tighten your purse strings. Other wise you are going to regret it, and feel like an idiot.

GEMINI

You fill be filled with energy and enthusiasm in the morning. You will be able to productively utilise your energy in your work. You will be able to take up projects dear to your heart. You will spend the evenings in the company of your family and friends and will be able to relax and unwind in luxury, says Ganesha.

CANCER

Today, your action will usher in incredible results, thanks to your forthright approach, foretells Ganesha. Later in the day, you may work on self-improvement and personality development. You may make some changes in your house.

LEO

You will receive extremely good news from your friends today. You will have co-operation and the support of your spouse. You will feel emotional today. Your understanding nature will make everything easy however. You are likely to be in a state of sensitivity with regards to feelings today, says Ganesha.

VIRGO

Today is a bright day, says Ganesha. The focus will be on you and you can count this among your most excellent days. Opinions might differ at the workplace, but Ganesha says you may bypass them. In the evening, a candle-light dinner will make your spirits soar. You will impress people today.

LIBRA

Ganesha says you will be able to get out of legal hurdles successfully today and it will be showcased by your happiness. You will be inclined towards fine arts like classical music and dancing. This is a good time to go out to dinner with your favorite person.

SCORPIO

It's time for soiree and merry making with family, predicts Ganesha. You never know, you may even bump into someone special today, who may become an integral part of your life in future. Your friends are your extended family, call them over for the celebrations.

SAGITTARIUS

Ganesha foresees a gradual weakening in your position. You are most likely to bring troubles upon yourself as the day progresses. Good economic gains are expected if you change the hub of your activities.

CAPRICORN

You mark dates on calendar to sneak away for a small vacation near by, but because of the heavy workload, you always have to cancel the plans. You don't need to plan, in fact, you can take an impromptu vacation, feels Ganesha. Take one now! Get a roadmap and drive away from the hassle of the city.

AQUARIUS

Who doesn't like to have a heavier pocket? You will be pleased to have little extra cash in your wallet. Also, you will pay attention to your financial planning and position, says Ganesha. Beware! The green-eyed people around you will try to distract you from your path, so keep your guards on, advises Ganesha.

PISCES

Today is a good day for conducting business and on the work-front, especially for those in higher management. You will find yourself attending important meetings or taking critical decisions. For students looking to pursue higher studies, now is a good time to get cracking. The later half of the day should see you communicate with friends or relatives living abroad, says Ganesha.



DJ GUETTA WELCOMES NEWBORN SON WITH GIRLFRIEND JESSICA

French-born celebrity DJ David Guetta, who has performed to full houses in India, has revealed that he and his girlfriend, the Cuban-born actress Jessica Ledon, have welcomed their first child together—a son, reports *Daily Mail*. He shared a joint Instagram post with the actress, announcing the news along with a heartwarming family photo.

USHER'S WEDDING TO JENNIFER SURPRISED HIS OWN FAMILY

Singer-songwriter Usher has shared new details about his wedding to his wife, Jennifer Goicoechea. The *You Make Me Wanna* singer shared that their wedding came as a surprise to their own families, reports *People magazine*.



Not comfortable with my sexuality: Samantha

Mumbai: Actress Samantha Ruth Prabhu recently discussed her journey, particularly highlighting her decision to perform in the chartbuster *Oo Antava* from *Pushpa* and her challenging role in *The Family Man 2* series, citing the personal growth it brought.

Reflecting on her characters, she shared, "I think the decision to do *Oo Antava* was similar to doing *Raji* (her character in *The Family Man 2*). I think the good side of not having too many people around you is that there are no people in your ear voicing their opinions that you need to cater to. This is the good side. The flip side is that I need to make mistakes, learn from them, and own my gut instincts."

She admitted, "The decision to do *Oo Antava* came from the place where I had to explore that facet of being an actor. I have always been very uncomfortable with my sexuality. I am not very comfortable or confident. I have always operated from a place like, 'I am not good enough; I don't feel pretty; I don't look like the other girls.'"

Despite initial fears, the actress embraced the challenge, recognising her growth as both an actor and an individual. "Sexy is not my thing," she admitted, but she emphasised her determination to confront challenges head-on and conquer her fears.

AGENCIES



Sara's fearless choice garners netizens' praise

Mumbai: Actress Sara Ali Khan, who walked on the runway as the showstopper for designer Varun Chakkilam at the Lakme Fashion Week x FDCI 2024 held in Mumbai, caught fans' eyes and resulted in appreciation for the actress not covering the burn marks on her midriff.

For the event, the actress wore a shimmering silver-embellished lehenga and choli. She complemented her look with matching earrings. A paparazzo account posted a video of Sara walking with her team. Her burn marks were clearly visible. Reacting to the video, a fan said, "She's showing her scars gracefully. Others would have put on a tonne of makeup to hide it."

A comment read, "For everyone asking, she burned her abs a few days ago. Possibly from a steam accident." Another person wrote, "Beautiful, graceful, dignified, and beautiful with a brain..." "Sara, you are so gracefully confident in how you embrace your burn marks. In a world of impossible beauty standards and constant coverage, here you are! A true princess is showing us all to embrace ourselves and love ourselves no matter what. This is why you shine so beautifully and so brightly," commented an Instagram user. On the work front, Sara will be next seen in *Ae Watan Mere Watan*.

AGENCIES



Mumbai: Actor Mukesh Khanna, renowned for his iconic portrayal of the superhero 'Shaktimaan', has stirred controversy by expressing disapproval of rumours suggesting actor Ranveer Singh's potential casting as the beloved character.

Khanna took to social media to voice his strong opposition to the casting speculation, questioning Singh's suitability for the revered role, particularly in light of a recent photoshoot deemed inappropriate for the character. Khanna emphasised the essence of *Shaktimaan*, suggesting that despite Ranveer's star power, he lacks the necessary qualities to embody the superhero.



In a subsequent YouTube video, he elaborated on his stance, advising Singh to seek roles in countries where nudity is more accepted. He underscored the

importance of upholding Indian values and cultural boundaries in casting decisions, asserting that an actor for 'Shaktimaan' must possess qualities akin to those of a teacher and be capable of commanding respect.

The *Mahabharat* actor emphasised the significance of content over star power for the success of any cinematic venture, including a *Shaktimaan* adaptation. While reports suggested the *Gunday* actor's involvement in the project, he hinted at a meticulous casting process to find the perfect embodiment of Shaktimaan, emphasising the character's status as a symbol of ultimate strength and righteousness.

AGENCIES

Mumbai:

Actress Mrunal Thakur, who was seen in projects like *Gumraah*, *Lust Stories 2*, *Aankh Micholi*, *Pippa*, and *Hi Nanna* in the last year, feels slowing down is important for an artiste.

"A vacation is definitely a luxury at the moment. But it is important to take small breaks, and for me, family precedes all. They really reel me back, and I cannot put a value to the time I spend with them," she shared.

The 31-year-old believes 'slowing down is a key aspect of an actor's life' because it allows her time for introspection and the avoidance of burnout. "Taking a step

'Slowing down allows me time for introspection'

back from the relentless pace of the industry gives me the opportunity to work on my skills, make thoughtful choices, and deliver more nuanced performances. Otherwise, in a rush, you could make incorrect decisions. Slowing back allows me time for introspection," Thakur adds.

Looking back at her workaholic schedule, she said, "I have been working non-stop for the past two years. There are days when I crave a simple, sound sleep on my own bed."

On the work front, Mrunal has *Pooja Meri Jaan* in the pipeline.

AGENCIES

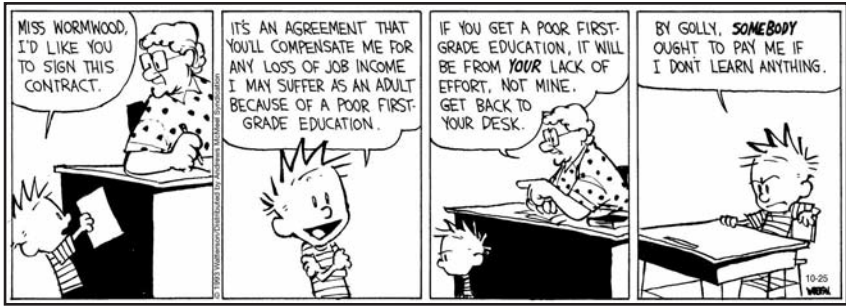


Mukesh disapproves Ranveer's casting as 'Shaktimaan'

PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

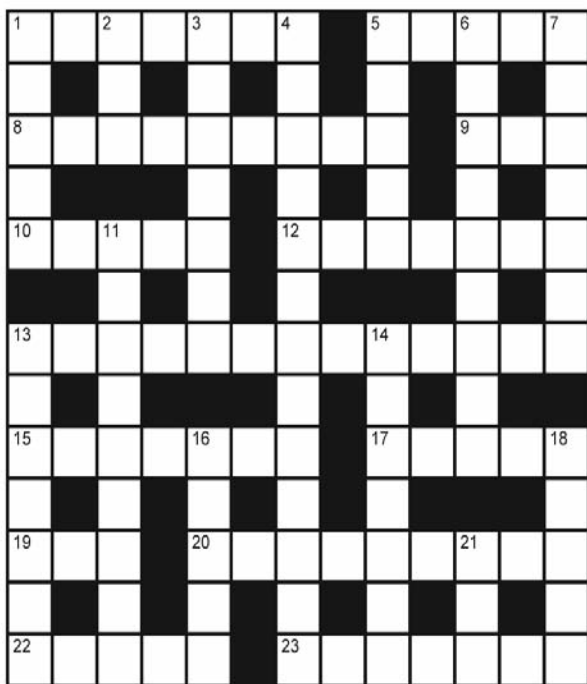


BREVITY



FUN post

CROSSWORD



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Across

- 1 Brainiac's forte (4-3)
- 5 Avian chatterbox
- 8 Depressing
- 9 Lay turf
- 10 Change
- 12 Svelte
- 13 Rebirth
- 15 Heighten
- 17 Inferior planet

Down

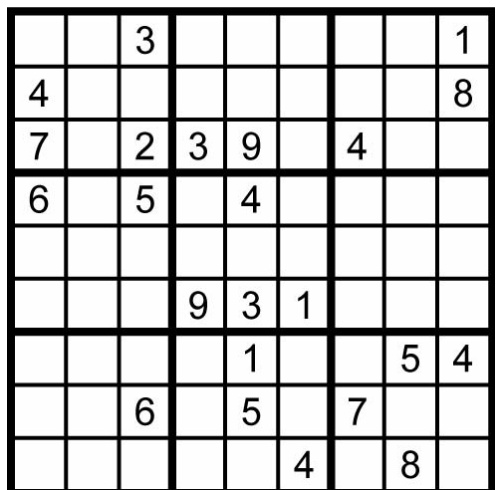
- 19 Consume
- 20 Sweetheart
- 22 Column
- 23 Continued
- 1 Protests
- 2 Valuable rock
- 3 Religious
- 4 Shrewd
- operator (7,6)

- 5 Exodus leader
- 6 Steward
- 7 Mallard relative
- 11 Galway dish (5,4)
- 13 Return to office
- 14 Comings
- 16 At no time
- 18 Knight's need
- 21 Doctrine

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

SUDOKU

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, fill in the boxes in such a manner that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any.

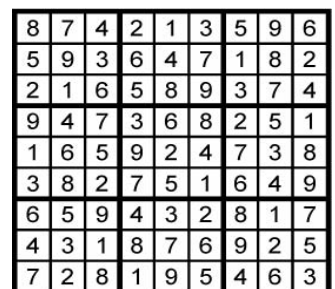


SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



JUSTICE IN 28 DAYS

PRIEST GETS 18 MONTH IN JAIL FOR SEXUALLY HARASSING FOREIGNER

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 18: The Judicial Magistrate First Class (JMFC) Court here Monday awarded rigorous imprisonment (RI) of 18 months to a priest of Lingaraj Temple after holding him guilty of sexually harassing a 28-year-old Swedish woman outside the 11th century shrine in the City February 19 this year. JMFC Payal Gupta convicted Kundan Mahapatra alias Kundu for the offences under Sections 341 (wrongful restraint), 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) and 354A (sexual harassment) of the IPC, Assistant Public Prosecutor Bijay Kumar Barik told Orissa POST.



According to Barik, Mahapatra had sexually harassed the Swedish woman February 19 and was arrested two days later. Police submitted the chargesheet against Mahapatra in the JMFC Court here (February 23) within 96 hours from the occurrence of the crime. The trial began February 26, and the court recorded the victim's statement on the first day of trial itself, Barik said.

The twin city Commissionerate Police facilitated speedy start of the trial to ensure that the victim was not stuck in Odisha for a long time. City deputy commissioner of police (DCP) Prateek Singh said, "We gave top priority to the sensitive case and completed the investigation quickly. Submission of the chargesheet in just four days and start of trial within a week from the date of the occurrence of the crime is a twin record for Odisha Police." Earlier the fastest submission of chargesheets in some heinous offences in the state took seven to 15 days. And, the trial used to start only after two or three months of the crimes.

Prepare plan to tackle heatwave, SRC tells DCs

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 18: Keeping in view the upcoming Lok Sabha and Assembly elections during a scorching summer, the state government Monday directed all the District Collectors (DCs) to prepare a heat-wave contingency plan. In a letter, Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) Satyabrata Sahu said, "You are aware, General Election, 2024 has been declared by the Election Commission of India. Accordingly, Joint Secretary, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), MHA, Gol March 06, 2024 has communicated to have effective heatwave management in the State." He also said, "During this period, there may be extreme heatwave conditions which would pose challenge to health and conduct of elections. The IMD has issued seasonal outlook on temperature and rainfall for hot weather season during March to May, 2024. The maximum temperature is most



likely to prevail over most of the parts of the state. Similarly, IMD has been issuing daily bulletins during the summer. You are requested to follow these bulletins for appropriate actions." It is further requested to take mitigation, preparedness and response measures, he stated adding that heatwave mitigation measures involve multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional administrative approach such as provisioning of drinking water; temporary shelter; rescheduling of working hours, timing of schools/public educational institutions and providing better medical emergency services and public health. Being an election year, several rallies are going to be held and proactive measures need to be taken with the help of concerned line departments. "Your personal attention is highly required for effective heatwave management in your district. Any untoward situation shall be brought before the undersigned for immediate intervention," the letter reads.

SC stays HC order on Moquim's election

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 18: The Supreme Court Monday stayed the Orissa High Court's order setting aside the election of Congress leader Mohammed Moquim as MLA from Barabati-Cuttack Assembly constituency in Cuttack in 2019. The apex court, however, clarified that the stay order was subject to the condition that Moquim will not be entitled to cast vote in the assembly proceedings. "Issue notice (to the parties concerned), returnable on May 10, 2024. Meanwhile, the operation of the impugned judgment shall remain stayed, subject to the condition that the appellant shall not be entitled to cast a vote in the assembly proceedings," a bench of Justices Surya Kant and KV Viswanathan said. The bench passed the order while hearing Moquim's plea challenging the High Court order of March 4. The apex court permitted Moquim, who was represented by senior advocates S Muralidhar and



Pitambar Acharya, to participate in the Assembly proceedings and said that he was entitled to all the perks and facilities as an MLA. Moquim's election in Odisha Assembly polls of 2019 was challenged before the High Court by Debashish Samantaray, the unsuccessful Biju Janata Dal (BJD) candidate. The grounds for the challenge were that Moquim allegedly suppressed information regarding 13 criminal cases pending against him and that he did not divulge complete details of his property. Despite the improper presentation in his nomination paper, the returning officer wrongly accepted it, Samantaray's plea in the High Court had claimed. The High Court, March 4 this year, set aside his election, saying the result of

the election had been "materially affected" and it cannot be said that Moquim was 'duly elected'. "It is declared that the election of the respondent (Moquim) as MLA from Barabati-Cuttack Assembly constituency held in April 2019 is void and the same is hereby set aside. Resultantly, a casual vacancy in the said constituency has occurred," the high court had said. In his plea assailing the High Court order, Moquim has said, "The pleadings of the respondent (Samantaray) in the election petition before the Orissa High Court are unnecessary, scandalous, frivolous or vexatious and by no means can hold the nomination form of the appellant (Moquim) to be invalid." The plea said the High Court declared Moquim's election as invalid "without due appreciation of the facts" and by proceeding in "an erroneous manner." In Odisha, which comprises 21 Lok Sabha seats and 147 Assembly segments, elections are scheduled to be held in four phases on May 13, May 20, May 25, and June 1.

SJTA deposits ₹39cr Srimandir funds with 2 banks

POST NEWS NETWORK

Puri, March 18: The Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) deposited ₹39 crore Srimandir funds in two nationalised banks here, Monday. According to SJTA Administrator (Development) Pradeep Kumar Sahu, ₹36 crore was parked as fixed deposit with Canara Bank and ₹3 crore with Bank of Baroda.



"As per the standard practice, we invited biddings from nationalised banks. Four banks—Bank of Baroda, Canara Bank, UCO Bank and Indian Bank—

participated in the bidding," Sahu said. The SJTA Administrator (Development) added, "The bids were opened in presence of Srimandir managing committee members and senior temple officials. We had even given the bank representatives time to discuss with their senior authorities in an open bid. Bank of Baroda was the highest bidder with 7.55 per cent rate of interest."

HOLI PREPARATIONS

An artist gives finishing touches to idols of traditional 'Kela-Keluni O Raja Rani' for Dola Melan procession at Kathagada Sahi in Cuttack, Monday



Lightning strikes claim two lives

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 18: Two persons died and another suffered injuries in incidents of lightning strikes in Balasore and Mayurbhanj districts Monday, police said. A 30-year-old man died after lightning struck a thatched hut where he took shelter, at Tukuri Hazira village in Balasore. The deceased, identified as Ranjan Parmanik, was a B.Tech final year student at a private institution here. In the second incident that took place at Manik Sahi in Mayurbhanj, Baidhar Simad died and his wife Buhuni was injured in a lightning strike. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem. According to the latest NCRB report, lightning was responsible for a significant percentage (35.8 per cent) of the 8,060 accidental deaths in India due to natural forces in 2022. Odisha lost 316 lives in lightning strikes during the period.

Strive towards building a stronger Odisha: Naveen

PNN & PTI

Bhubaneswar, March 18: Ahead of the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Monday urged the people of the Odisha to unite and strive towards building a stronger state. In an open letter in Odia, he emphasised the importance of collective effort in shaping the future of Odisha, expressing gratitude for the opportunity to serve the state for five consecutive terms. Patnaik wrote the letter days after the ECI announced the four-phase polls in the state May 13, May 20, May 25 and June 1, 2024. While expressing his gratitude towards people for serving



Grateful for the opportunity to serve the four-and-a-half crore citizens of Odisha with unwavering faith and love. Let us strengthen the resolution (to become a leading state by 2036) and work together to build a new Odisha, a strong Odisha

NAVEEN PATNAIK, CHIEF MINISTER

the state as the chief minister for five consecutive terms since 2000, Patnaik said, "Grateful for the opportunity to serve the four-

and-a-half crore citizens of Odisha with unwavering faith and love." Patnaik highlighted Odisha's journey towards becoming a leading state by its centennial year in 2036 and called for concerted efforts to realise this vision. "Let us strengthen the resolution and work together to build a new Odisha, a strong Odisha," he said in the letter. Patnaik referred to the fact that he is now the second longest-serving chief minister after former Sikkim CM Pawan Kumar Chamling, who remained in power for 24 years and 166 days from December 12, 1999, to May 27, 2019. Patnaik, on the other hand, has been at the helm of Odisha since March 5, 2000.

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Last date to file updated return for A.Y. 2021-22 : 31st March 2024

You can also file updated return for A.Y. 2022-23 and A.Y. 2023-24

An updated return can be filed in the following cases;

• If original return has not been filed

• If belated return deadline has been missed

• To modify original return, if Income was not declared correctly

• If wrong head of income was chosen or tax was paid at wrong rate

• If reduction in carried forward loss or unabsorbed depreciation is required

• If reduction of MAT/AMT credit is required

• If you have received notice u/s 133(6) of the Income - tax Act, 1961 for certain information about claim of deductions/exemptions regarding which suitable explanation/evidence is not available with you

• If you have claimed wrongful deductions/exemptions

If you file ITR-U till 31.03.2024	Amount of additional tax payable
For AY 2021-22	50% of aggregate of tax & interest payable
For AY 2022-23 & AY 2023-24	25% of aggregate of tax & interest payable

For more information, please refer to section 139(8A) & 140B (3) of Income Tax Act, 1961

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DGP convenes pre-poll meet



ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 18: For smooth and safe conduct of the upcoming assembly and general elections, state director general of police (DGP) Arun Kumar Sarangi Monday virtually held a ‘cooperation meeting’ with SPs and Range DIGs of neighbouring states of West Bengal, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. Addressing reporters here after the meeting, Sarangi informed, “We had a cooperation meeting today. Superintendents of Police (SPs) and Range Deputy Inspector General (DIGs) of the bordering areas of West Bengal, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh were present at the meeting. From our side officers from the bordering areas attended the meeting. Senior officials from Intelligence and Operations wings were also present.” Sarangi said that the coopera-

tion meeting was organised following instructions of the Election Commission of India (ECI) to ensure a peaceful and impartial poll process by making the required arrangements to check the trafficking of arms, intoxicants and cash during elections. “It was discussed during the meeting to strengthen intelligence sharing and anti-Naxal operations in Naxal-affected areas,” Sarangi added. The DGP further added that SPs from Odisha’s bordering districts flagged and discussed several issues with their counterparts from Jharkhand, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh. “We have discussed various aspects of expanding cooperation in many critical areas,” Sarangi said. The DGP informed reporters here that much before the elections process set in, border checkpoints have been made operational in many parts of the state

- Sarangi said that it was discussed during the meeting to strengthen intelligence sharing and anti-Naxal operations in Naxal-affected areas
- The cooperation meeting was organised following an instruction of ECI to ensure peaceful and impartial poll process in the state by making the required arrangements to check the trafficking of arms, intoxicants and cash
- The DGP informed reporters here that much before the elections process set in, border checkpoints have been made operational in many parts of the state since the first week of January.

since the first week of January. “These border check posts have been provided with adequate police force and employees depending on the intensity of vehicular traffic,” he added, while informing that seizures have also been made at different check posts. The meeting was organised at the DGP’s Camp Office here and was attended by several senior IPS officers, including Director of Intelligence Soumendra Kumar Priyadarshi, ADG Law and Order Sanjay Kumar, IG Intelligence Anoop Sahu, DIG Special Intelligence Wing Umashankar Dash and IG Operations Devidutta Singh.



FOR A CAUSE: Members of Sikhya Adhikar Abhibhavak Sangh hold a sit-in protest in front of Odisha School Education Programme Authority (OSEPA) office in Bhubaneswar, Monday, seeking fulfillment of their demands

OP PHOTO

Heavy rain to lash over parts of state

People have been advised to keep watch on weather and take safe shelter during the thunderstorm activity to protect from lightning

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 18: Heavy rains, accompanied by thunderstorms with lightning, are likely to lash parts of Odisha over the next two days, the weather office said, Monday. An ‘orange’ alert has been issued for Bolangir, Subarnapur, Kalahandi, Boudh, Angul, Dhenkanal, Nayagarh, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Jajpur districts for Tuesday, asking them to remain prepared for heavy rains.



A ‘yellow’ alert has been issued for Balasore, Bhadrak, Kendrapara, Jagatsinghpur, Puri, Gajapati, Sundargarh, and Deogarh where the thunderstorm with lightning and gusty surface wind speed reaching 30-40 kmph is very likely to occur. Forecasting thunderstorm with lightning Wednesday, the re-

gional meteorological centre in Bhubaneswar issued an ‘orange’ alert for Kendrapara, Jagatsinghpur, Cuttack, Khurda, Nayagarh, Puri, Khurda, Kandhamal, Ganjam, Gajapati, Rayagada, and Koraput districts for Wednesday. IMD centre said due to likely interaction of middle tropo-

spheric westerly trough with lower level moisture laden winds from Bay of Bengal and above-mentioned synoptic system, meteorological conditions becoming favourable for moderate thunderstorm activity with lightning, gusty surface wind and widespread rainfall. Meanwhile, the Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) has issued advisory to collectors of districts under yellow and orange warning to keep administrative machinery ready to face any eventuality. The people have been advised to keep watch on weather and take safe shelter during the thunderstorm activity to protect from lightning. The Collectors were asked to submit a report on the damage, if occurred due to thunderstorm, whirlwind, hailstorm and lightning.

BLO mascot ‘Mita Didi’

Bhubaneswar: The Election Commission of India has placed Odisha’s mascot Booth level Officer (BLO) Mita Didi in its BLO e-magazine. Odisha’s BLO mascot ‘Mita Didi’ has now become the BLO mascot across the country. On this occasion, Chief Electoral Officer Nikunj Bihari Dhal congratulated all the BLOs. Mita mascot will act as an ambassador, promoting electoral literacy, and encouraging citizens to exercise their fundamental right to vote. ‘Mita Didi’ of Odisha has become the representative of the blue star officers of the whole country.

Ayush doctors warn of non-cooperation

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 18: All Odisha Ayush Doctors Association (AOADA), representing Ayush doctors of Odisha working under the National Health Mission (NHM), has announced an indefinite non-cooperation movement from March 20 unless the government meets their demand for job regularisation. “The decision comes after the government’s failure to regularise AYUSH doctors working in community health centers (CHCs) and primary health centers (PHCs) in the state, despite repeated promises. The last cabinet before the general elections had promised regularisation but took no action,” said AOADA president Lotus Mishra here Monday. Currently, 1,126 Ayush doctors are working on contract at 1,485 CHCs/PHCs in the state, who have been appealing to Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik for job regularisation. Mishra said, “The National Health Mission’s 2014 declaration promised to regularise the employment of doctors and all paramedical staff. Although approximately 8,195 positions for nurses, pharmacists, and ANMs were regularised through a cabinet decision, AYUSH doctors



were overlooked. If the government does not act by March 19, we will be compelled to begin a non-cooperation movement.” “We will refrain from providing any services other than Ayush and inpatient services, including telemedicine services, health programmes, supervision, and training,” she said. The association general secretary Pravass Chandra Swain said, “Even though the appointment of Ayush doctors has been done according to ORV, their job has not been regularized, despite promises from various levels of the government. Even though the Chief Minister’s Office assured us regularisation after the 2019 general election, no action was taken. If our demands are not met, we will start an indefinite non-cooperation movement from March 20.” Notably, the Ayush doctors have been working, sometimes in rural and remote areas of the state, on contractual basis for the last 15 years under National Health Mission, and have played a crucial role in fighting the Covid pandemic in the state.

Utkal University organises workshop on NEP, NAAC

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 18: Utkal University organised a two-day workshop on ‘NEP-2020 and NAAC Accreditation’ here, Monday. The principals of the degree colleges of Khurda, Nayagarh and Jajpur districts along with the Examination-in Charge, IQAC and NAC Coordinator participated in the workshop. On this occasion, training was given on automated system of examination with Academic Bank Credit (ABC), National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAC) accreditation and re-accreditation process, implementation of National Education Policy-2020. In her address, Utkal University VC Sabita Acharya, said that the



preparation for the NAAC recognition is a continuous process. For this, documentation is the most important. All data and information for an academic year should be documented. Then it will be easy to upload those data. In addition to providing information about all the regulations for NAAC accreditation, she expressed the need to focus on education, research and innovation for the implementation of the national education pol-

icy and to gain knowledge. PG Council Chairman Navaneeta Rath joined the programme as the guest of honour and discussed various aspects of NAAC preparation. She was of the opinion that success will be achieved through continuous efforts and collective efforts. Biju Patnaik University of Technology (BPUT) vice chancellor Amiya Kumar Rath participated in the technical session.

SOA students win laurels at Odisha skills

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 18: Students of School of Hotel Management, under Siksha ‘O’ Anusandhan (SOA) Deemed to be University’s faculty of hospitality and tourism management, have won silver and bronze medals at Odisha Skills 2023-24 competition. The state’s biggest skill competition, organised here from March 12 to 15, was held to assess five hotel management skills viz hotel reception, restaurant service, cooking, bakery, patisserie and confectionary. Saket Kumar Majhi, a first-year student of Bachelor of Hotel Management and Catering Technology (BHMTCT) bagged silver in cooking, second-year BHMTCT student Rizwanul Khan was awarded bronze medal in restaurant service. The winners were felicitated by 5T and Nabin Odisha Chairman Kartik Pandian.

CLASSIFIED

AFFIDAVIT

I, Himanshu Shekhar Satpathy, S/o- Late Laxman Satapathy resident of Flat No.-2/5, Krishna Plaza near Iskon Temple, IRC Village, Bhubaneswar, Odisha-751015 declare by this affidavit No.-48, dtd. 18.03.2024, that now onwards I shall be known as Himanshu Shekhar Satapathy for all future purposes.

Affidavit No.-CIF No. 21/10/01/24 before Executive Magistrate, Bhubaneswar my name has changed from Sayad Naushad Ali to SIRSMITH NAUSHAD ALI. Henceforth I shall be known as SIRSMITH NAUSHAD ALI, Plot No.-1415 New Forest Park, BBSR for all purposes.

LOST

Myself Ganeswar Ghadei, S/o- Ramesh Ghadei, Address- N-3, Behera Basti, Nayapalli, Pin-751015, Dist- Khordha, Odisha, I have lost my saleedeed No.-11141600609 on dt.11.3.2024 at 7 PM, when I was going to Mancheswar to Rasulgarh I have lost the document. If anybody found please contact my advocate-Deepak Kumar Sahoo, Mob-9937058785.



BOOK RELEASE: Guests release the book ‘Silver Gandhi of India’ by Prasanna Patasani at an event at Soochana Bhawan in Bhubaneswar, Monday. The book is about Mohan Mahapatra, who holds the world record for longest journey by road, travelling seven states on foot

OP PHOTO

First-aid training held at Andharua

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 18: Dr Snehalika, the NSS programme officer and Community Engagement Cell at KIIT Deemed to be University organised a comprehensive First Aid Training Workshop at Andharua in Khurda district, Monday. The main objective of the programme was to build capacity in community people with essential first-aid skills to respond effectively in emergencies to save precious lives. Laxman Swain, Junior Red Cross officer and master trainer joined as trainer and demonstrated life survival skills like management of road accidental victims, bleeding management, fracture management, re-



covery position, CPR, dog bite, snakebite, drowning victims, epilepsy, heart attack and stroke. The event served as a testament to KIIT University’s commitment to community engagement and social responsibility, empowering individuals with the knowledge and skills to respond effectively to emergencies. After the training session, the group of NSS volunteers went for a door-to-door campaign on voting rights and how to register voters’ name for voting in coming elections.

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MEAT
OVER
HUMANITY

Woman’s body rots for days as son fails to serve mutton feast

POST NEWS NETWORK

Baripada, March 18: In a shameful incident laying bare the insensitivity abound among humans, the body of an elderly woman was left to rot for three days after members of her community refused to participate in her cremation ‘demanding’ a mutton feast which was outstanding on the elder son of the deceased from the time of his marriage.

The shocking incident has been reported from Jaybila village situated on the foothills of Similipal Wildlife Sanctuary in Mayurbhanj district about 8 km from the district headquarters of Baripada.

The deceased was identified as Sambhari Singh, 70, in the village where majority of the dwellers are from the tribal Mundari community.

According to reports, the woman died due to old-age related ailments at 2pm, Saturday. However, neighbours and community members refused to participate in her cremation as her elder son had failed to arrange



a feast with mutton in the menu at the time of his marriage.

Community members refused to participate in her cremation alleging that her son had failed to give a mutton feast at the time of his marriage which is in “complete violation of the community guidelines”.

As a result, the deceased’s sons failed to cremate the body and it was left to rot for three days inside the house. The development pushed two of her sons Daktar and Chandan into distress. On being informed, mediapersons rushed to the village

and talked with the villagers to sort out the issue.

A meeting of the village committee was convened and presided over by the village head Sana Lakshman Singh. The committee asked the deceased elder son Daktar to give them 10 kg mutton (sheep meat) as penalty for not throwing feasts at the time of his marriages.

Notably, Daktar, the elder son of the deceased has married twice and has children from both his wives, who are now living separately from him. However, despite marrying twice, Daktar

‘violated’ community norms by not serving feasts with sheep meat or mutton in the menu to his community members. The villagers were repeatedly pulling him up for not adhering to tradition and community guidelines but he was not listening to them.

Finally, Daktar agreed to the villagers’ proposal following which his mother’s body was cremated Monday afternoon. Moreover, the villagers further warned him of boycotting the post-death rituals of the deceased if he fails to serve them the feast.

Ganja worth ₹1.50cr seized in Boudh dist

Maoists’ involvement suspected in smuggling of the contraband

PNN & AGENCIES

Boudh, March 18: Ganja worth over ₹1.50 crore was seized in Boudh district, police said Monday.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of the Boudh Model police station conducted a raid in Bidamaska forest near Dimbrikhol village and seized 1,560 kg of ganja, Superintendent of Police (SP) Raj Prasad said.

When the police personnel approached the place, three-four persons, who were there, managed to flee, he said.

“We will soon identify the accused and arrest them,” he added.

So far this year, 3,800 kg of ganja was seized and 17 drug peddlers arrested in the district, the SP said.

“In some of the areas where such huge quantities of ganja were seized, we received information about Maoist movements initially. It indicates that Maoists are involved in the smuggling of ganja,” he said.

Truck owners’ 24-hr bandh hits normal life in Keonjhar

POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, March 18: A truck owners’ association in the mineral-rich Keonjhar district began a 24-hour bandh from 6am Monday in protest against the proposed railway project aimed at transporting minerals, a member of the association said.

The project aims at connecting Odisha Mining Corporation’s Gandhamardan B mines at Suakati to Gohaldihni railway siding under Sadar Block.

Numerous local organisations, including the private bus owners’ association, merchants’ associations, and auto operators have extended their support to the bandh called by Keonjhar District Truck Owners’ Association (KDTOA), he said.

All major political parties and organisations have extended their direct and moral support to make the strike successful. According to sources, the strike has caused crores of rupees of revenue loss for the railways as



well as the government.

All important offices in Keonjhar district headquarters, business establishments and educational institutions in the district remained shut. The agitators staged blockades on NH 20, 520, 49 at different places leading to disruptions in vehicular movement. Protesters intercepted a passenger train and two goods trains at Keonjharargh railway station, sources said.

While the bandh has impacted normal life and mineral transportation in the district, emergency services have been ex-

empted from the bandh’s purview.

Debu Pattanayak, vice president, KDTOA expressed concerns over the potential unemployment among truckers if the project is implemented. According to Patnaik, the project, if implemented, would transport iron ores via trains, adversely affecting the livelihoods of truckers and around 3-4 lakh people in the district. He urged the government to revoke the project in the best interest of the district’s populace.

“This railway project will affect truck business, which is a source of income for thousands of educated people of Keonjhar district and will render them unemployed,” said Surya Narayan Kar, secretary, KDTOA.

Additional SP Santosh Nayak said police forces have been deployed at the station, and discussions have been initiated with the protestors to withdraw the agitation, enabling passengers to proceed to their destinations without hindrance.

Punishment is a positive potion: PVC Captain Yogendra Singh Yadav

RAJESH MOHANTY, OP

Rourkela, March 18: Punishment is not torture but a way to model the personality and strengthen the person emotionally. It’s not an impediment but rather a tool for growth, both physically and psychologically, says Kargil War hero Subedar Major and Honorary Captain, PVC Yogendra Singh Yadav.

Having received Param Vir Chakra (PVC) at the age of 19, Yadav has earned the rare distinction of being the youngest recipient of India’s highest gallantry award to date. Despite being hit by 15 bullets and almost losing his hand in close combat, Yadav played a major

role in capturing the formidable Tiger Hills.

The Param Vir Chakra was announced for Yadav posthumously, but it was soon discovered that he was recuperating in a hospital, and it was his namesake who had been slain in the mission.

Yadav, after retiring from the Indian Army, has now taken up the role of a motivational speaker. Invited by the Students Activity Centre of NIT Rourkela, Yadav spoke to a packed auditorium full of students in the Steel City recently. In an exclusive conversation with Orissa POST, the Kargil War hero bared his mind on punishment and its positive impact on a person.



“I must say punishment in schools or at home should not be

regarded as something which stalls the growth of the kid. Rather it is a positive potion to harden someone to face the challenges of life,” said the PVC awardee. As per Yadav, the suicidal tendency prevailing among the young students these days is “because they lack mental toughness. Parents are bringing up their children without really making them realise the realities of life and punishment is one of them.”

Sharing his own experience, he said, “Punishment was common in our homes and we carried that attitude with us when we joined the Indian Army. In the army, punishment is not to punish you but to toughen you.”

Further strengthening his argument, he said, “The army training makes us so strong that we are ready to face any tough situation. The Kargil War and the heroics of the Indian soldiers are the brightest examples of that toughness. So, when I was approaching Tiger Hill, there was no fear, no hesitation. The only thing in mind was that the task needs to be completed no matter what.”

Yadav ridiculed those parents who blame the teacher for punishing their children. For the soldier, it was the arrogance of money, as he explained, “They have pride in their money and very often they argue that the teacher has no right to punish as

they are paying good amount.”

“These parents will say you cannot mistreat our child, but, punishment is not mistreatment. It is a way to teach him many lessons of life and prepare him for his future,” he further explained.

Yadav also stressed on rigorous and regular physical activities for the students. “These days, youths hardly do any physical activity. Never forget that physical activities will make you emotionally strong and intelligent. Games teach you to be humble in victory and to accept defeat gracefully. There is no better lesson in classroom than what you learn in the field while playing.”

There’s space for a huge untapped market: Patro

Shoukeen Industries is a model company of the state with a massive market share and high customer satisfaction on its wide range of mattresses, pillows, furniture and comfort accessories. Founded in 2002, it is one of the most trusted brands of the state as well as the nation manufacturing hundreds of varieties of products by using state-of-the-art infrastructure. Hailing from a humble background, Saroj Kumar Patro, founder and managing director, Shoukeen Industries, always had a dream of starting his own business.

Overcoming all obstacles with his efforts and dedication, he has taken the brand to new heights. In a conversation with Orissa POST, Patro shares his experience. Excerpts...



■ **How was your life before entering into world of business?**

■ I was born in Nuagarh under Sorada police station limits in Ganjam district. After primary and secondary education in a rural environment, I did Diploma in Pharmacy. Following this, I started a medicine shop at Rengali in my father’s place. But I had great interest in pursuing MBA. For this, a graduation degree was required and therefore I enrolled in a degree course at Rengali College and successfully completed the course. I was ranked 7th in the competitive examination MAT and went to Delhi to study MBA.

■ **Why did you decide to quit your job and become an entrepreneur?**

■ After passing MBA, I started working in a company. At this time I used to visit almost all trade fairs held at Pragati Maidan in Delhi. I was able to gain some business experience from there. Though I was employed, I always dreamt of starting my own business. Towards the end of 2002, I started a pillow making business. Gradually, I was able to make the business people-oriented by putting a stall in various trade fairs.

■ **How did you expand your brand presence across Odisha?**

■ Balancing product

quality, customer demand and price increases the popularity of the product. I also adopted this formula. Later, I made and supplied pillows as an original equipment manufacturer for some reputed companies. Gradually my business grew and I named it Shoukeen. After that I started working as a distributor of a famous mattress company. A few years later, seeing successful business in Odisha, the company changed its policy, which did not suit me. So with my previous experience, I started selling mattresses under Shoukeen brand which became very popular in the market.

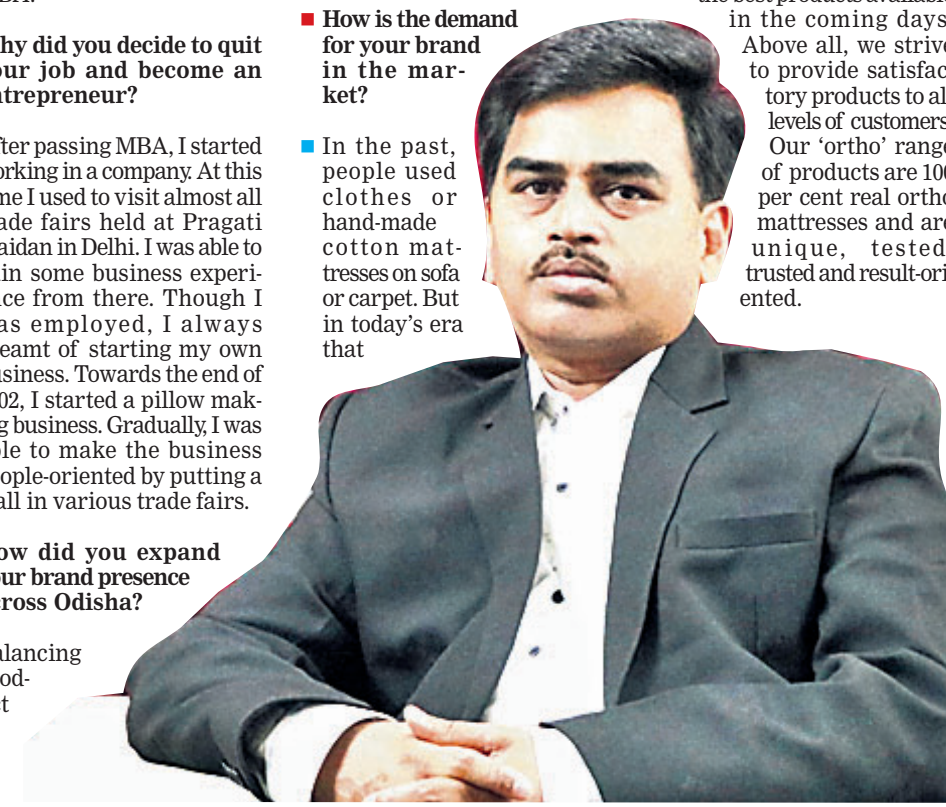
■ **How is the demand for your brand in the market?**

■ In the past, people used clothes or hand-made cotton mattresses on sofa or carpet. But in today’s era that

trend has changed. With modern lifestyle, people are using mattresses made of coir, spring and foam sponge which make it soft and comfortable. In Odisha only 15 per cent of households have adopted this change which leaves space for a huge untapped market. Demand for our brand is outpacing the production quantity.

■ **What is the secret behind Shoukeen brand’s popularity?**

■ As ‘value for money’ is the concept of our company, we create quality products at reasonable price. Moreover, research is going on to make the best products available in the coming days. Above all, we strive to provide satisfactory products to all levels of customers. Our ‘ortho’ range of products are 100 per cent real ortho mattresses and are unique, tested, trusted and result-oriented.



EAST COAST RAILWAY
Tender Notice No.: SBP-ELECT-2024-T-206
Name of Work : COMPREHENSIVE ANNUAL MAINTENANCE CONTRACT FOR PASSENGER LIFTS OF VARIOUS CAPACITIES PROVIDED AT RAILWAY STATIONS AND SERVICE BUILDINGS OVER SAMBALPUR DIVISION FOR A PERIOD OF THREE YEARS.
Approx cost of the work : ₹ 4,20,143.04.
EMD/Bid Security: ₹ 8,400/- Cost of tender document: ₹ 1,180/- Completion period of the work: 36 Months from the date of issue of LOA.
Tender closing date & time : at 1130 hrs. (IST) of 08.04.2024.
No manual offers sent by Post/Courier/Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration.
Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website www.irsp.gov.in
Note : The prospective tenders are advised to revisit the website 15 (Fifteen) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes/ corrigenda issued for this tender.
Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer (G), PR-1163/O/23-24 Sambalpur

Sporadic nesting of Olive Ridleys begins in Gahirmatha



PNN & AGENCIES

Kendrapara, March 18: Sporadic nesting of endangered Olive Ridley turtles has started at the beaches within Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary.

The forest personnel have spotted as many as 32 nests of the endangered sea turtles at Nasi-1, Nasi-2 and Madali -2 beaches.

Official sources Monday said the forest personnel have collected 3,539 endangered Olive Ridley eggs from the sporadic nesting sites within Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary. The eggs were collected from a beach vulnerable from predators to hatch

them at an artificial hatchery set up at Babubali.

The forest personnel are optimistic that the mass nesting phenomenon of the endangered marine turtles would occur possibly after the second week of March.

Meanwhile, lakhs of Olive Ridley sea turtles were seen congregating within a kilometre distance from the sea coast near Habalikhathi and Satabhaya.

However, the ongoing adverse weather might pose a problem for the Olive Ridley sea turtles to come to the golden beach of Nasi -2 for mass nesting phenomenon.

In case of suitable weather conditions, the sea turtles would flock en masse to lay eggs at the golden beach of Nasi -2, considered as the most favourite nesting place.

Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary Ranger Pradosh Kumar Moharana is hopeful that this time too, the mass nesting might occur after March third week.

11 fishermen arrested

Kendrapara: The Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary personnel during mid-sea surveillance in the wee hours of Monday intercepted a fishing trawler and arrested 11 fishermen for unauthorised catching fish at the ‘No Fishing’ zone. Ranger Pradosh Kumar Moharana said the fishermen after trespassing into the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary were catching fish near Babubali. The sanctuary personnel intercepted the trawler and arrested 11 fishermen. The forest personnel also seized four trawling nets, 2 VHF sets, and other fishing equipment from the arrested fishermen. The arrested fishermen were booked under Sections 27, 29, 31 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and were later produced before the JMFC court of Rajnagar which remanded them into jail custody. Moharana said the forest personnel have apprehended as many as 359 fishermen and intercepted 36 fishing trawlers and mechanised boats since November 1 for illegally catching fish after trespassing into the prohibited zone of Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary.

बैंक ऑफ इंडिया
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DEMAND NOTICE

Notice under Section 13(2) of SARFAESI Act, 2002 for Enforcement of Security Interest
The Bank has granted following various credit facilities to the under mentioned Borrower & the amount outstanding dues mentioned below has not been paid in time. Therefore Demand Notice under Sec. 13(2) of Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 was issued by the Authorized Officer against the following Borrower(s)/Mortgagor(s) of the **Bank of India, Hanspal Branch** but the same could not be served on the below mentioned party. Therefore, the contents of the same including the amount outstanding, Loan amount and details to the secured assets are herein furnished below.

HANSPAL BRANCH / Name & Address of the Borrower(s) / Mortgagor(s)	Nature / Limit	Date of NPA / Date of Demand Notice	Amount as per Notice under SARFAESI Act	Description of mortgaged Property
Borrower & Mortgagor: Mrs. Gitanjali Panda, W/o- Prachibhushan Tripathy, At/ PO: Banguary, Phulnakhara, Khurdha-752101.	Term Loan 513177710000003 & Cash Credit 513130110000038/ ₹ 23,75,000/-	28.02.2024 / 29.02.2024	₹ 19,58,517.64 + interest & expenses thereon	(a) Hypothecation Charge on Allwin C8-512i Flex Printing Machine, Online UPS, Electrical Equipment, Assembly Computer with Printer, Furniture, Air Conditioner (1.5 ton) with stabilizer, CO, 4.5 kg Fire Extinguisher & Fire Bucket. (b) Hypothecation charge on stocks Rs.8.34Lakh.

As the above mentioned Borrower(s)/Mortgagor(s) of the **Hanspal Branch** have defaulted in repayment of the principal loan/facility in installments/ interest/ both, the account has been classified as **NPA**, in accordance with the directions or guidelines issued by the RBI. In spite of our repeated demands you (borrower/guarantor) have not paid any amount towards the amount outstanding in your account, you have not discharged your liabilities. Hence, we are now constrained to make this publication of Demand Notice, required u/s 13(2) of the said Act and Rule 3 of the security interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. You are hereby called upon to pay the aforesaid amount alongwith further interest, cost, incidental Expenses, Charges etc. within a period of **60 days** from the date of Notice, failing which we will take necessary action under the provisions of sec 13(4) of the said Act, against all or any one or more of the secured assets including taking necessary action under the provisions of sec 13(4) of the said Act, against all or any one or more of the secured assets including taking possession of your secured assets and sale them. If the dues are not fully recovered in the course of these actions against secured assets, then the Bank reserves the right to take action by filing recovery action against you before DRT/Court for recovery of the same. It may be noted that under the provisions of section 13(8) of the SARFAESI Act, right of redemption is available to you, by paying the dues of the Bank together with all cost, charges and expenses incurred by the Bank at any time, before the date of publication of notice for public auction or inviting quotations or tender from public or private treaty for transfer by way of lease, assignment or sale of the secured assets. Please take note that as per sub section (13) of the aforesaid Act, after receipt of this notice, you are restrained from transferring or creating any encumbrances on the aforesaid secured assets whether by way of sale, lease, license, gift, mortgage or otherwise. **This notice is issued without prejudice to the rights of the Bank available under any other law.**

Date: 18.03.2024, Place: Bhubaneswar

Authorized Officer, Bank of India



The flame of the aspiration must be so straight and so ardent that no obstacle can dissolve it.

THE MOTHER

Art of Survival

In Nepal's volatile politics making new alliances or shuffling the pack of probable allies has become so common place that the victory of the Maoist Prime Minister Pushpa Kumar Dahal, in a vote of confidence recently, is not surprising. But, its importance lies in the fact that it marks a critical juncture in the nation's search for some stable and effective governance. The recent events leading up to the vote of confidence for the new Prime Minister of the Himalayan nation have captured the attention for the intricate dynamics that is at play in the country's political landscape.

Dahal had ended his year-long partnership with the Nepali Congress and formed a new alliance with his foe-turned-friend the CPN-UML chairman KP Sharma Oli. He also made sure his victory by enlisting the support of a few small parties and then sought a vote of confidence. The results were predictably in his favour, but they show the uneasiness that political parties are feeling in extending their support to Dahal who has been changing his allies too frequently that betrayed a scandalous disregard for ideology and lust for power. He secured a majority, but the level of support has remarkably declined. In January, 2023 Dahal had obtained 268 votes followed by 172 in March the same year. His latest tally has dipped further to 157 and that too with some difficulty. A total of 268 lawmakers were present during voting in the House of Representatives and 110 lawmakers voted against him while a member abstained. The PM required at least 138 votes to win the trust motion.

Ahead of the vote of confidence, some leaders from the ruling alliance expressed their dissatisfaction at the recent political changes and Dahal's repeated changes of stance over the past 14 months. This all the more indicates the difficulty ahead for Dahal which will demand more of his skill in managing his coalition partners and their frustrations. Only a few parties in the ruling alliance, like the Rastriya Swatantra Party, and some independent lawmakers supported the prime minister's bid without putting forth critical views.

Dahal had blamed the Nepali Congress for the end of their year-old partnership. The main reasons put forward by him for severing his ties with the latter include not getting enough support from the party to improve service delivery and performance. It may sound ironic, but Dahal repeatedly used the term 'betrayal' to describe the Nepali Congress.

Since its transition from monarchy to a republic in 2008, Nepal has been plagued by frequent changes in government, often fuelled by factionalism, allegations of corruption and ideological differences among political parties. Against this backdrop, the appointment of the new prime minister offers both an opportunity and a challenge for Nepal. The country is facing huge economic problems and is getting aid to tide over their difficulties from both India and China which are driven by their respective geopolitical considerations. In fact, China's contributions to Nepal during the past few years have far outstripped those of India. That is why Oli has emerged as a China backer, while Dahal is known for his closeness to India.

Frequent change of government or political realignments is not the answer to Nepal's problems of poverty and poor healthcare system. All these political manoeuvrings are predicted to inflict grievous damage to the economic growth of this Himalayan country.

WISDOM CORNER

Nature gives to every time and season some beauties of its own; and from morning to night, as from the cradle to the grave, it is but a succession of changes so gentle and easy that we can scarcely mark their progress.

CHARLES DICKENS

Nature shows that with the growth of intelligence comes increased capacity for pain, and it is only with the highest degree of intelligence that suffering reaches its supreme point.

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy. When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.

KAHLIL GIBRAN

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1687: While on an expedition to find the mouth of the Mississippi River, French explorer René-Robert Cavelier, sieur de La Salle, was murdered by his men in what is now Texas; La Salle had previously claimed a large region around the river for Louis XIV of France, naming it Louisiana.

1918: US President Woodrow Wilson signed the Standard Time Act, which established Daylight Saving Time in the United States; the legislation also gave the federal government oversight of the country's time zones.

1931: Nevada legalized gambling, which paved the way for casinos in the state, most notably in Las Vegas.

1962: Bob Dylan releases his first album. Dylan is one of the world's most influential music artists. His songs "Blowin' in the Wind" and "The Times They Are a-Changin'" became anthems for the anti-war movement.

1982: Argentine forces mobilized after a dispute between Argentine workers and British scientists on British-controlled South Georgia island, leading to Argentina's invasion of the Falklands two weeks later.

2003: US President George W. Bush ordered air strikes on Baghdad, thus launching the Iraq War to oust dictator Saddam Hussein, who was believed (wrongly) to be manufacturing weapons of mass destruction.

LOL

Pizza delivery boy

A college pizza delivery boy arrived at the house of Larry Johnson. He delivered the pizza to his trailer. After giving it to him, Larry asked: "What is the usual tip?" "Well," replied the youth, "this is my first trip here, but the other guys say if I get a quarter out of you, I'll be doing great." "Is that so?" snorted Larry. "Well, just

to show them how wrong they are, here's five dollars." "Thanks," replied the youth, "I'll put this in my school fund." "What are you studying in school?" asked Larry. The lad smiled and said: "Applied psychology."



Ajit Ranade

THE WORLD RESOURCES INSTITUTE SAYS THAT BAD WATER MANAGEMENT CAN CAUSE GDP LOSSES TO BE AS HIGH AS 7 TO 12% IN COUNTRIES LIKE INDIA AND CHINA

A factory using a water intensive chemical process in Gujarat had a problem. It was the onset of summer. The assured industrial supply of water was not forthcoming. Despite efficient use and recycling there was acute water shortage, which threatened to shut down the factory. The manager had to resort to tanker water, buying at the rate of 5000 litre for about 1500 rupees. He was willing to bid even higher. He needed perhaps hundreds of trucks per day. This was good news for farmers in the neighbourhood, most of whom had borewells on their farms. Their own wells supplied water for the crops they were growing. But selling water to the factory was more lucrative. This was a win-win situation, with the factory continuing its profitable production and farmers getting more money from selling water.

This is however not a win from a social point of view. Firstly, just because someone is willing to pay a higher price, it does not mean that ground water can be depleted indiscriminately. Private benefits are much smaller than the social loss of water tables. Secondly, diverting water from food crops to produce industrial chemical products might make private sense, but is socially not optimal. In that sense the farmers' private ownership of borewells do not give them unlimited rights to overexploit groundwater. Highly subsidised electricity makes pumping out water artificially cheaper in any case.

The above is a true story played out in thousands of different forms. If rich country consumers want to bid a higher price for India's basmati rice, can we increase our exports of rice indiscriminately? Normally all export restrictions on farm output should be relaxed, if it helps increase the farmers' incomes. But in this case, it amounts to export of water, of which there is acute shortage in India. Last year, India exported 22 million

FOCUS WATER CRISIS

SCARCITY & SOLUTION



Tackling water scarcity must be one of our highest national priorities, requiring action at policy level, across levels of government, from civil society, and collectively at the level of each household

tonnes of rice which earned about Rs 90,000 crore in foreign exchange. But it also amounted to an export of at least 88 trillion litre of water. The scarcity cost of that water for our country is much more than what was earned in foreign exchange. The same is true for sugar exports. The argument of selling water intensive crops to the highest bidder for their dollars is similar to industry buying water from private borewells which are meant for farming.

It is not just on World Water Day, which falls on 22 March that we need to ponder on water scarcity. India has only 2% of the world's fresh water supply but 17% of the population. The present predicament of people in Bangalore, skipping work to stand in long queues for a bucket of water is a sobering reminder. A few years ago, we had water trains running to Latur district in Maharashtra, making over 100 ferries of half a million litre each. Water shortages have even led to shutdowns of thermal power plants, since there wasn't enough water for the cooling. These power outages between 2017 and 2021 were estimated to be 8.2 terawatt hours of energy, or equivalent to power supply to 1.5 million households. The World Resources Institute says

that bad water management can cause GDP losses to be as high as 7 to 12% in countries like India and China.

A country is called water stressed if it has less than 1700 cubic metre of usable water per person. India is much below 1000. By comparison, the United States has more than 8000 per person. India had more than 3000 back in 1951. So clearly a rising population is a cause of water stress. To add to the population pressure is the continuing quality deterioration of existing sources of water supply. This results from inadequate water treatment, or even phenomena like arsenic poisoning. In a written reply in Parliament, the Union Minister for Jal Shakti said that arsenic was detected in groundwater in 230 districts, fluoride in 469 districts, covering most States across the country. Groundwater contamination is a serious phenomenon which makes the problem of water scarcity more acute. Adding to this is the mindless over-extraction of groundwater from private wells, as exemplified in water sold for industrial use because it is lucrative. The over-extraction is aggravated by cheap or free electricity (which ironically also suffers from power outage due

to lack of water for cooling thermal power plants).

Tackling water scarcity must be one of our highest national priorities, requiring action at policy level, across levels of government, from civil society and collectively at the level of each household. It should cover the following aspects. Firstly, water conservation, including practice of rainwater harvesting. Secondly, improving efficiency of usage, and moving away from water guzzling crops, or at least changing the method. Thirdly, encouraging reuse and recycling. Almost 90% of water use, except drinking, cooking and bathing can use recycled water. Pune city has started several recycling plants, and citizens can summon a tanker of recycled water for free using an app. Fourthly, we need a comprehensive policy and regulation for water governance. Do we allow unlimited groundwater extraction on private land? Fifth is the introduction of technology to meter usage, detect, reduce and stop leakages, or using satellite imagery to map water bodies. This also includes rehabilitation of reservoirs and tanks, as has been done in states like Tamil Nadu by civil society. Sixth is raising public awareness. Here the most promising way, whether to reduce usage of plastic, or burning of firecrackers, or conservation of water, is through the minds of young school students. An extensive campaign on raising water stress consciousness among children starting even at the kindergarten level will have the maximum impact in the long run. A recent Tata commercial showing kids singing nursery rhymes (Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water, but there was no water) was an example of a very effective advocacy campaign for water stress awareness. On this World Water Day let us reiterate our commitment to conserving our most precious resource.

The writer is a noted Pune-based economist.
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SPECTRUM MONETARY POLICY

Inflation targeting isn't for everyone



Stefan Gerlach

WHILE INFLATION TARGETING IS A GOOD STRATEGY FOR MANY ECONOMIES, EXTREMELY OPEN ECONOMIES WOULD DO WELL TO CONSIDER THE ALTERNATIVES

Inflation targeting is widely regarded as the best approach to monetary policy, including for small, open economies. Pioneered by New Zealand and Canada in the early 1990s – and quickly adopted by Australia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, and then Iceland and Norway, among others – it is credited with having dramatically lowered the level and variability of inflation wherever it has been consistently applied. Lower and predictable inflation has, in turn, proved conducive to better economic performance, helping to prevent the large shifts in income distribution that can follow from unexpected inflationary surges.

It is not difficult to see why inflation targeting has had this effect. The approach forces the central bank to focus squarely on price stability in ways that earlier policy strategies did not. It thus offers transparency with respect to monetary-policy goals and the measures needed to achieve them, and these signals build public confidence.

And yet, the standard narrative about inflation targeting rests on a false assumption. In fact, many of the economies that apply this approach are not all

that open. World Bank data show that the trade-to-GDP ratio is only about 50% in Australia and New Zealand, 70% in Canada and the UK, and 90% in Scandinavia. That is a far cry from the 384% ratio in Hong Kong, 336% in Singapore, 140% in Switzerland, and 128% in Denmark – all economies that do not employ inflation targeting.

Given the latter cohort's strong performance, it would seem that inflation targeting is not right for extremely open economies. That is why economies in the European Union with a trade-to-GDP ratio of over 300%, including Luxembourg and Malta, have banded together with others to use the euro. It is also why Denmark, which is adjacent to the much larger eurozone economy, has tied its exchange rate to the single currency.

Switzerland and Singapore have chosen another route. Their economies are too exposed to exchange-rate movements for traditional inflation targeting to be feasible, so they have adopted monetary-policy strategies tailored to their own specific circumstances – strategies that share several characteristics.

For starters, both Switzerland and Singapore maintain a clear

focus on price stability. While the Swiss National Bank (SNB) has defined this as inflation of less than 2%, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) has been able to leave it undefined, thanks to a long and successful track record that effectively speaks for itself.

Second, both have a clear view about what exchange-rate level is appropriate, and both steer the exchange rate toward that range. Since the SNB also sets interest rates, it has occasionally used that mechanism to influence the exchange rate. The MAS does not set interest rates, so it has established an exchange-rate band.

Third, neither central bank publicly announces the exact exchange-rate level that it considers appropriate. While central banks can set the interest rate at which they lend to, or accept funds from, the banking system, the exchange rate is determined by the market. Were they to disclose a specific exchange-rate objective, market participants would have an open invitation to speculate against the central bank, which could complicate monetary-policy management.

Finally, both strategies recognise the benefit of being able to

adjust the exchange rate as economic conditions evolve. The result of these strategies is enviable records of inflation control. The average inflation rate in 2000-23 is 0.6% in Switzerland and 2% in Singapore.

Both economies owe their strong performance to the fact that monetary authorities have allowed their exchange rates to undergo large movements when necessary. Bank of International Settlements data show that the effective nominal exchange rate – best thought of as the average exchange rate against all trading partners – strengthened in this period by an average of 1.3% per year in the case of Singapore, and by 2.6% in the case of Switzerland, thereby lowering the cost of imports and dampening inflation.

It is not easy to stand out from the crowd in policymaking. But Singapore and Switzerland have forged their own paths, with great success. While inflation targeting is a good strategy for many economies, extremely open economies would do well to consider the alternatives.

The writer is Chief Economist of EFG Bank in Zurich.
©PROJECT SYNDICATE

Deterrence capability

Sir, India's successful test of the Agni-5 missile with multiple-warhead capabilities solidifies its status among global military powers, positioning it alongside the exclusive group comprising the US, the UK, Russia, China, and France. This milestone significantly bolsters India's deterrence capability, particularly in response to China's increasingly assertive behaviour. Although the Agni-5 doesn't fit the conventional intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) category, its impressive range exceeding 5,000 km extends India's striking capability to encompass significant portions of China and even parts of Europe, thereby escalating the stakes for any potential aggressor against Indian interests. The Agni-5's utilisation of multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle (MIRV) technology represents a notable advancement, enabling precise and simultaneous strikes on multiple distant targets. This capability poses a formidable challenge to adversary defence systems, enhancing India's strategic deterrence posture and reinforcing its commitment to its "no first use" nuclear doctrine. However, amid escalating border tensions and China's strategic maneuvers, India must remain vigilant and continue to innovate to stay ahead in the evolving arms race. To safeguard its strategic autonomy and national security, India may need to explore countermeasures against emerging threats, such as China's advancements in hypersonic rocket technology. As India asserts its position on the global stage, the successful test of the Agni-5 underscores its determination to keep pace with modern weaponry and defend its territorial integrity and strategic interests.

Amarjeet Kumar, HAZARIBAGH

Soaring business

Sir, The election circus has come to the town and soaring business is on the cards. A new industry will emerge giving jobs to thousands of people. Those doing the business of preparing banners, posters, printing materials and hiring transport will make huge profits. In the era of outsourcing and event management, jobless youths are hired to take part in rallies, pad yatras and door to door campaigns. The amount of money that will be pumped into the economy will be mind boggling. It will be a happy time for the poor and the downtrodden.

CK Subramaniam, NAVI MUMBAI

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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Muslims forced to shut shops after abduction of minor girls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Pithoragarh, March 18: A local traders' body has forced Muslim shopkeepers in Dharchula to down shutters and given a call for their ouster from the Uttarakhand town after two minor girls were allegedly lured by a couple of men from Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh.

The Dharchula Vyapar Sangh has cancelled the membership of 91 traders, mostly Muslims, and its members have stopped them from opening their shops over the past three days.

They have also asked landlords to oust such 'outsiders'.

But the administration said landlords in the town, about 90 km from district headquarter Pithoragarh, have not supported the trader organisation's call.

The two traders from Bareilly, who were arrested in February for allegedly luring the minor girls, were charged under IPC sections of 363 (kidnapping), 376 (sexual assault), 354 (use of criminal force to outrage modesty of woman) and POCSO Act, Dharchula SHO Parvez Ali said. "We have registered an FIR against elements who forced the shop owners to shut their shops," Pithoragarh District Magistrate Reena Joshi said.

"No unlawful activity will be allowed. Traders from outside doing business in the town will be given full protection," she said.

Dharchula SDM Manjit Singh said the traders whose mem-



bership has been cancelled are being provided full security by the district administration.

The traders from outside Dharchula have kept their shops closed over the last three days but none of them has left the place, he said.

The Vyapar Sangh, which represents over 600 traders of the town, has decided to give membership only to traders from inside the state.

"The traders coming from outside are involved in criminal activities that cannot be tolerated in this sensitive border town,"

secretary of the traders' association Mahesh Garbiyal said.

Though the girls were rescued and the accused were arrested soon after the incident, tension has been brewing against the traders from outside doing business in the town.

A similar situation at Purola in Uttarkashi district had led to the imposition of Section 144 of CrPC in the town in June last year after tension sparked by an abortive attempt to abduct a minor Hindu girl by two men including a Muslim refused to subside.

CAA, child marriage key poll issues in Assam

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, March 18: The implementation of the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA), paving the way for granting citizenship to undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, will be a major poll issue for both the ruling and the Opposition parties in Assam.

The polls will be held in the state in three phases April 19, 26 and May 7.

The ruling BJP will focus on delivering the promise of granting citizenship to Hindu Bengali migrants from Bangladesh who came before the cut-off date of December 31, 2014, while the Opposition parties will highlight the violation of the Assam Accord, signed in 1985 to end the six-years agitation against foreigners, which had the provision for 'detection and deportation' of all persons who entered the state from Bangladesh post-March 24, 1971.

The BJP will also focus on ending insurgency in the state by bringing the ULFA (Pro-talk) faction along with all Bodo, Karbi, Dimas and Adivasi militant outfits to the talks table and offering them a rehabilitation package. The opposition, however, will point out that talks with this faction have no meaning as it was already overground since 2009 while the ULFA (Independent), led by Paresh Barua, was yet to come for talks and was still firm on the outfit's stand of sovereignty.

The crackdown on child marriage in the state will also be an important issue that will find a



place during the campaign trail with the BJP claiming that they have taken the step to end the social menace while the opposition will accuse the ruling party of targeting the Muslim community, in particular.

The Uniform Civil Code, which the state government wants to bring in by repealing the Assam Muslim Marriages and Divorces Registration Act, 1935 and a law to make ban on polygamy effective will also be raised with the opposition parties, particularly the Congress and the AIUDF alleging that it is discriminatory against the Muslims and has been done to polarise the voters in an election year.

The BJP's Hindutva agenda will come under flak from the Opposition, particularly in the minority-dominated constituencies like Dhubri, Karimganj, and Nagaon along with several pock-

ets in the others.

The BJP has been concentrating on women voters, who constitute nearly 50 per cent of the total electorate, for the past few years with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma assuming charge in 2021 waiving their micro-credit loans, introducing various schemes like Orunodoi and 'Lakhpati baideos'. The Opposition parties are also likely to offer various sops to the women electorate.

The BJP will also highlight the various initiatives taken up for the development of tea garden workers which include model schools in the garden areas, providing banking facilities to them during COVID, health facilities among others. The opposition will also go all out to woo this segment of the electorate which has considerable sway in the Upper Assam

constituencies of Dibrugarh, Jorhat and Kaziranga along with Sonipur in the North Bank.

The recent foundation stone laying of the Rs 27,000 crore semiconductor assembly and test facility in Assam's Morigaon district by the Prime Minister and the announcement of the new policy of Uttar Poorva Transformative Industrialization Scheme (UNNATI), 2024 for the North East will definitely be highlighted by the BJP whereas the opposition will focus on how several industries in the state are facing closure and their employees have been deprived of their dues.

The BJP may focus on the steps taken to provide employment to the youth while the opposition will most likely accuse the ruling party of not doing enough to provide jobs to the educated youth.

LS polls: BJP set to showcase UCC in campaign

The UCC law is being seen as a template for similar legislation which could be enacted in other BJP-run states in the future

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dehradun, March 18: For a small state with just five seats, Uttarakhand has been important to the BJP's 'core agenda'. Just weeks before the announcement of the Lok Sabha polls, its Assembly passed the Uniform Civil Code Bill – the first for any state since Independence.

The UCC law is being seen as a template for similar legislation which could be enacted in other BJP-run states in the future. It would certainly be a factor in Uttarakhand as campaigning picks up for the Lok Sabha elections.

Voting in Uttarakhand will take place April 19 in the first phase of the Lok Sabha polls.

The BJP has won all five Uttarakhand Lok Sabha seats in the last two parliamentary



polls, in 2014 and 2019. The party hopes that the UCC and the inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya will deliver a hat-trick in Uttarakhand. And then there is the Modi factor.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has visited the state frequently in the last few years and personally monitored projects in Kedarnath and Badrinath.

The BJP also hopes that the successful Silkyara tunnel res-

cue operation, into which the Centre threw all resources at its command, will be seen as a reason to vote in another Modi government. All 41 workers were pulled out to safety in the operation in November.

The party is expected to cash in on the development work at pilgrimage sites and the ambitious road, rail and air connectivity projects – including the Char Dham all-weather road and the Rishikesh-Karnaprayag

railway line.

The Congress, which hopes to wrest at least a couple of seats from the ruling party, feels the 'real issues' like unemployment, inflation, growing corruption and a spate in crime against women weigh heavier on the minds of the electorate than the BJP's narrative on Ram Mandir and the UCC.

The party has previously attacked the BJP over land subsidence in Joshimath, the Silkyara tunnel collapse and the Ankita Bhandari murder case, in which the son of a former BJP leader is the main accused.

The Congress was routed by the BJP in Uttarakhand not only in the 2014 and 2019 general elections but also in the two consecutive Assembly polls, held in 2017 and 2022.

The BJP in Uttarakhand is also set to highlight its 'strengthened' anti-conversion law and the crackdown against 'land jihad', a reference to the alleged construction of illegal 'mazzars' on government land.

The state's BJP government also boasts of having the country's 'strictest' anti-copying law to make exams fair for all.

Assam to register 3-5 lakh CAA applications: Sarma

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, March 18: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has claimed that about three-five lakh people will apply for Indian citizenship under the CAA in the state, asserting that the applicants will comprise only those who were excluded from the updated National Register of Citizens (NRC).

He also said that 7 lakh Muslims and 5 lakh Hindu-Bengalis, among others, were left out of the NRC list.

"Many Hindu-Bengalis had come at different points of time and stayed at refugee camps. When they applied for inclusion in NRC, they submitted a stamped paper as proof of having stayed at such camps. But, Prateek Hajela (former NRC state coordinator) did not accept the paper. As a result, names of many Hindu-Bengalis were not included in the NRC," Sarma said in an interview to a local tel-



evision channel here.

He said that while many among the 5 lakh Hindu-Bengalis who had applied for inclusion in NRC will submit applications under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019, many others will take legal recourse.

Applicants excluded from the NRC also include 2 lakh 'proper Assamese' like those having the Das surname, the Koch-Rajbongshi (community) and 1.5 lakh Gorkhas, the CM claimed.

"Applications under the CAA will be three-five lakh, with a 10 per

cent margin of error. There won't be any 15 or 18 or 20 lakh or 1.5 crore applicants in Assam. After being in politics for so long, I have that much grip on the state," the BJP leader asserted.

The Centre had earlier this month implemented the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, notifying the rules four years after the law was passed by Parliament to fast-track citizenship for undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who came to India before December 31, 2014.

Over 100 all-women booths in Guwahati

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati/Tezpur, March 18: The Guwahati Lok Sabha constituency will have more than 100 all-women polling stations during the upcoming general elections, a senior official said Sunday.

Addressing a press conference, Guwahati's Returning Officer Sumit Sattawan said the constituency has more women voters than men, and the figure is likely to go up in the coming days.

The Guwahati constituency, which will vote in the third phase on May 7, has 2,181 polling booths, spread across Kamrup Metropolitan, Kamrup and Goalpara districts.

"Out of them, we will have 102 all-women polling stations. All the staff of these booths will be women. Besides, we will also have 15 model polling stations in our constituency," Sattawan said.

In the Guwahati Lok Sabha seat, there are 10 Assembly constituencies -- five in Kamrup Metropolitan, three in Kamrup and two in Goalpara, he said.

"We have 20,19,444 voters - 9,93,268 men, 10,26,118 women and 58 third gender. These figures are likely to go up after taking into account the new voter applications," he added.

Sattawan said that around 9,000 civil servants will be engaged during the polling exercise, besides a considerable number of security personnel.

"We will also have 25 flying squads, 15 static surveillance teams and 15 video surveillance teams for enforcing the model code of conduct in letter and spirit," said Sattawan, the District Commissioner of Kamrup Metropolitan.

Addressing a press conference in Tezpur, Sonitpur's Returning Officer Deba Kumar Mishra said a total of 150 polling booths will be managed by only women.

"We will have a total of 1,878 polling stations across the constituency. In these booths, 16,25,364 people will exercise their franchise. There are 4,73,037 men and 4,78,248 women voters in the Sonitpur constituency," he said.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dehradun, March 18: Three of four millet-growing farmers in Uttarakhand have seen a 10-20 per cent increase in their annual income owing to the push to millet farming by the Centre and state government, according to a study by the Indian Institute of Management, Kashipur.

However, the study – conducted on more than 2,100 farmers – found that many of them are still not aware of the increased demand for millet-based products, and are still growing it on a smaller scale for personal consumption only.

Greater awareness among millet growers about an increased market demand for their crop could help more and more of them to increase their income, it said.

The declaration of 2023 as the International Millet Year has played a crucial role in raising awareness about millet as a sustainable crop worldwide and increased the demand for millet-based products both nationally and



globally, the study on "Millet Production in Uttarakhand: An Empirical Analysis of its Socio-Economic Impact and Marketability Challenges" released Sunday at IIM, Kashipur said.

According to the study, 75 per cent of farmers in the state who grow millets have seen an increase in income by 10-20 per cent as the Centre and state government continue to push farming of the crop. The study,

however, did not specify the number of millet-growing farmers among the 2,100 who were surveyed.

The study was conducted by four senior professors and five data collectors of the institute

over a period of six months.

The recent push by the Centre as well as the state government has created an increased demand for millet crops in the market but many farmers are still unaware of it.

Besides, most farmers are growing millets for self-consumption instead of earning a profit.

"Most of the farmers growing millets for self-consumption are not using it as a money crop like rice and wheat," the principal investigator of the study, Assistant Professor Shivam Rai of IIM Kashipur said.

"Millets are a sustainable crop which are not only nutritious, healthy but also easy to store and do not damage the soil," Rai said.

The study was conducted to address the marketability challenges of millet production and identify effective strategies to increase its economic presence, he said.

The sample size for the survey was collected from the major hilly regions of the state, including Pithoragarh, Joshimath, Rudraprayag, and Chamoli.

of the day quote

The latest decision of the Supreme Court in connection with the process of diverting the country's politics and 'janmat' away from public interest and money power arising from secret electoral bonds is important, but continuous efforts are necessary to protect the Constitution and democracy

MAYAWATI | BSP PRESIDENT

The mood is in favour of BJP and its allies because under the leadership of Narendra Modi ji, there has been tremendous development in the last 10 years

SARBANANDA SONOWAL | UNION MINISTER

Some say that BJP will change the constitution and all. Let me tell you that they have no courage to change the constitution. In this battle, the truth and Hindustan stand with us

RAHUL GANDHI | CONGRESS LEADER

SHORT TAKES

Former Cong MLA, RLP leader join BJP

Jaipur: Former Congress MLA Ramial Meghwal and RLP leader Vikram Singh Gurjar joined the BJP in Rajasthan Monday. Meghwal and Gurjar joined the party in the presence of Arun Chaturvedi, the BJP's former state unit president, and Jogeshwar Garg, its chief whip in the assembly. Meghwal, a former Congress MLA from Jalore, Gurjar, who had contested the 2023 assembly elections from Deoli-Uniara on a Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLP) ticket, and others took membership of the BJP, said in a statement.

PM holds roadshow in Coimbatore

Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu): Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a roadshow here Monday, amid non-stop chants of 'Modi, Modi' by BJP workers and he paid floral tributes to the portraits of 58 people killed here in the 1998 serial bomb blast. The roadshow, amid tight police security, comes days after the Madras High Court green-flagged the event, directing the police to allow it with reasonable conditions.

4 killed in accident

Jamshedpur: Four persons were killed after their vehicle overturned in Jharkhand's Seraikela-Kharswan district Monday evening, police said. The car was on its way to Ranchi from Jamshedpur when the mishap took place near Kandarbeda under Chandil police station, around 13km from here, police said.



All development projects being executed in the state are funded by the Union government and were started much before the AAP came to power in the state

MEENAKASHI LEKHI | UNION MINISTER

ARVIND KEJRIWAL SKIPS ED SUMMONS IN DJB CASE

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal Monday skipped the Enforcement Directorate summons in a money laundering case linked to alleged irregularities in the Delhi Jal Board, with the Aam Aadmi Party terming the notice "illegal". The AAP accused the BJP government at the Centre of "using" the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to target Kejriwal and stop him from campaigning in the Lok Sabha polls. "The summons is illegal. The BJP wants to fight the Lok Sabha elections using ED," it alleged



LOK SABHA ELECTIONS

NDA seals Bihar seat pact

This will be the first time the BJP has got more seats than Chief Minister Nitish Kumar-led JD (U) in Bihar, underscoring the change in their equations after they joined hands a few months back

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 18: The NDA Monday finalised its seat-sharing formula in Bihar for Lok Sabha elections, announcing the BJP will contest 17 constituencies, the JD(U) 16 and Chirag Paswan's LJP (Ram Vilas) five, while rebuffing the claims of the LJP faction led by Union minister Pashupati Kumar Paras.

Two other NDA allies -- Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM) and Upendra Kushwaha-led Rashtriya Lok Morcha -- will contest one seat each, Vinod Tawde, the BJP's in-charge for elections in Bihar, told a press conference at the BJP headquarters here.

This will be the first time the BJP has got more seats than Chief Minister Nitish Kumar-led JD(U) in Bihar, underscoring the change in their equations after they joined hands a few months back.

Tawde expressed confidence that the National Democratic Alliance will win all 40 seats in the state. It had bagged 39 seats in 2019. "The BJP will contest 17 out of the total 40 seats and the JD (U) will contest 16. The Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) will contest five seats," Tawde told the presser jointly addressed by NDA allies from the state.

In 2019, both parties had contested 17 seats each while the then undivided Lok Janshakti



Party headed by Ram Vilas Paswan had fought six. The BJP and the LJP had won all of their seats while the JD (U) had bagged 16. Bihar LJP (Ram Vilas) chief Raju Tiwari said Chirag Paswan will contest the Hajipur Lok Sabha seat, which has been given to the party under the seat-sharing pact for the 2024 polls.

Paswan's estranged uncle Paras represents the constituency in the outgoing Lok Sabha and had been pitching his claim over it. Bihar BJP chief Samrat Choudhary said that talks are going on with Paras, who has already expressed displeasure with the national party after it sealed its alliance with Paswan a few days back.

Tawde said the BJP will contest Paschim Champaran, Purvi Champaran, Aurangabad, Madhubani, Araria, Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, Maharajganj,

Saran, Ujiyarpur, Begusarai, Nawada, Patna Sahib, Patliputra, Arrah, Buxar and Sasaram. The JD (U) will field its candidates from Valmikinagar, Sitamarhi, Jhanjharpur, Supaul, Kishanganj, Katihar, Purnia, Madhepura, Gopalganj, Siwan, Bhagalpur, Banka, Munger, Nalanda, Jehanabad and Sheohar, he said.

The LJP (Ram Vilas) will field its candidates from Vaishali, Hajipur, Samastipur, Khagaria and Jamui Lok Sabha seats, Tawde, who is also BJP national general secretary, said. Former Chief Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi-led HAM will join the fray from the Gaya Lok Sabha seat while the RLM from Karakat, he added. All three main parties have been given the seats they won in 2019 barring a few changes to accommodate two smaller parties.

DMK NAMES CONG'S 9 SEATS

Chennai: Sivaganga, Cuddalore, Krishnagiri and Kanniyakumari are among the nine Lok Sabha seats in Tamil Nadu given to the Congress by the ruling DMK to contest in the upcoming general election. DMK President M K Stalin and Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (TNCC) President K Selvaperunthagai signed an agreement at the ruling party's headquarters Anna Arivalayam here Monday, specifically naming the constituencies allotted. Selvaperunthagai told reporters that his party would announce the candidates in two-to-three days. The DMK has also allotted the lone LS segment in Pudukcherry also to the Congress. The list of constituencies was announced by the DMK days after it finalised the numbers of its seat-sharing arrangement with its allies.

The Sheohar seat has gone from the BJP's quota to the JD (U), while getting Nawada from the LJP.

The JD (U) ceded its claim on Karakat and Gaya, both of which it won in 2019, to accommodate the two new allies.

At a press conference, the JD(U) was represented by senior leader and MP Sanjay Kumar Jha, the HAM was represented by a Delhi-based leader while no one from RLP was present.

Our shoulders broad enough: SC



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: As an institution, our shoulders are "broad enough", the Supreme Court said Monday as the Centre flagged social media posts against the court intended to embarrass it after its orders in Electoral Bonds cases.

Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud, who was heading a five-judge Constitution bench hearing the electoral bonds case, said once the court delivers a judgement, it becomes nation's property, open for debate. It said the apex court was only concerned about enforcing the directions given in its February 15 judgement.

In its landmark verdict on that day, the top court had scrapped the Centre's electoral bonds scheme that allowed anonymous political funding, calling it "unconstitutional" and ordered disclosure by the Election Commission of donors, the amount donated by them and the recipients by March 13.

It had directed that the State Bank of India shall submit details of the electoral bonds

purchased since the April 12, 2019 interim order of the court till date to the EC.

During the hearing Monday, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said that after the March 11 order (on SBI's plea time till June 30 to furnish details of electoral bonds to the EC), those before the court started giving press interviews "deliberately embarrassing the court" and as nobody can rebut that from this side. "Based upon the twisted and other statistics, any kind of posts are being made. I know your lordships cannot control that," Mehta said, appearing for the Centre. The CJI, however, said the court is only concerned about enforcing its directions issued in the verdict.

"As judges, we decide according to the Constitution. We are governed by the rule of law. We are also the subject matter of comments in the social media and the press. But surely, as an institution, our shoulders are broad enough," the CJI said.

"Our court has an institutional role to play in a polity which is governed by the Constitution and the rule of law. That is the only job," Justice Chandrachud said.

The CJI said once the court delivers a judgement, it becomes nation's property, open for debate. Mehta said his purpose was to inform the apex court that there is "something else playing out" which neither the court intended nor the scheme intended.

9 killed in Kolkata building collapse

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 18: The collapse of an illegal under-construction building in Kolkata's western fringes claiming at least nine lives and injuring 17 more early Monday provoked a fierce political debate over whether the incident opened up yet another Pandora's box of corruption under the TMC regime in Bengal.

Despite some 18 hours having passed since the collapse, several people were still believed to have remained trapped inside the rubble, triggering apprehensions of a further rise in the death toll, which kept mounting through the day.

In the aftermath of the five-storey building, allegedly being constructed by filling up a water body, crumbling down on neighbourhood shanties occupied by unsuspecting dwellers in the thickly



populated Azhar Mollah Bagan area of Garden Reach, state Leader of Opposition Suwendu Adhikari claimed that the locality teemed with no less than 800 such unauthorised buildings.

Earlier in the day, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee visited the collapse site and assured locals of stern action against the promoters of illegal real estate. She also announced a compensation of ₹5 lakh each to the next of kin of the deceased and ₹1 lakh each to the injured. In her first public appearance since her fall at home and injuries on her forehead last Thursday, Banerjee was seen visiting the collapse site with a bandaged forehead.

8 KILLED IN BIHAR

Eight people, including three children, were killed as their jeep collided head-on with a tractor in Bihar's Khagaria district Monday morning, police said. Three people were also injured in the accident that took place around 5.15 am near a petrol pump on National Highway 31 in the Pasraha area, they said. Earlier, a senior police officer had said that nine people were killed and six persons were injured.

GUJARAT UNIVERSITY NAMAZ ROW

Don't make us probe agency: HC



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ahmedabad, March 18: "Don't make us an investigation agency", the High Court said firmly Monday while rejecting a request from a lawyer to take up as a suo motu PIL the attack on foreign students at state-run Gujarat University over the weekend.

The High Court division bench headed by Chief Justice Sunita Agrawal along with Justice Aniruddha P Mayee underlined that they are not police inspectors, emphasising their role as a constitutional court. The bench declined to take suo motu cognisance of the incident, highlighting that the police would handle the matter.

The court's stance was clear that not every incident in the city warrants a PIL. "Our effort is that justice be done, but don't

make us an investigating agency. We are not doing that. We still want to remind ourselves that we are constitutional courts."

"We will definitely take into cognisance if such a matter comes in, but this is not one of those," the Chief Justice said. The decision came after lawyer K R Koshti urged the HC to consider the issue as a suo motu PIL. The Chief Justice emphasised, "Don't substitute this court with police inspectors...We are not investigating officers."

The court advised the lawyer to seek legal recourse if there were concerns about the FIR filed by the police.

Around two dozen people allegedly barged into the government-run Gujarat University's hostel in Ahmedabad Saturday night and raised an objection to students from foreign countries

Winters transitioning into summer-like conditions in north: Study

RESEARCHERS AT THE US-BASED CLIMATE CENTRAL, AN INDEPENDENT GROUP OF SCIENTISTS, CONDUCTED THIS ANALYSIS TO PLACE INDIA WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL WARMING TRENDS, FOCUSING ON THE WINTER MONTHS (DECEMBER-FEBRUARY)

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: An analysis of temperature data since 1970 shows that winters are quickly transitioning into summer-like conditions in north India, shortening the spring season.

Researchers at the US-based Climate Central, an independent group of scientists, conducted the analysis to place India within the context of global warming trends, focusing on the winter months (December to February).

The analysis revealed abrupt changes in temperatures occurring in late winter across north India. The average temperatures in states in north India showed either a cooling trend or slight warming in January, followed by strong warming in

February.

This indicates that these regions are now experiencing abrupt transitions from cool winter-like temperatures into much warmer conditions traditionally observed in March, the researchers said. To show this change, the researchers calculated the difference between the warming rates in January and February, expressed as the change in average temperature since 1970.

The most significant jump in warming rates was observed in Rajasthan, where the average temperature in February was 2.6 degrees Celsius higher than in January.

A total of nine states and Union Territories -- Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh,



Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, and Uttarakhand -- showed a January-February difference of more than 2 degrees Celsius.

This supports reports that it

feels like spring has disappeared in many parts of India, the researchers said. The analysis also suggested that winter, overall, is warming across India, with every

region showing a net warming trend during these months.

Manipur experienced the largest change in average winter (December to February) temperature since 1970 (2.3 degrees Celsius) while Delhi had the smallest change (0.2 degrees Celsius). The country's southern part has also been experiencing strong warming in December and January.

Sikkim (2.4 degrees Celsius) and Manipur (2.1 degrees Celsius) recorded the largest changes in temperature in December and January, respectively. "The cooling in central and northern Indian states during January, followed by very strong warming in February, creates the potential for a quick jump from winter to spring-like conditions," said Andrew Pershing, vice-president

for science at Climate Central.

Global average temperatures have risen by more than 1.3 degrees Celsius since 1850, exacerbating climate impacts, with 2023 being the hottest on record.

The CO2 spewed into the atmosphere, largely due to the burning of fossil fuels since the start of the Industrial Revolution, is closely tied to it.

Climate science says the world needs to slash CO2 emissions by 43 per cent by 2030 to limit the average temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, the guardrail to prevent worsening of climate impacts.

The business-as-usual scenario will take the world to a temperature rise of around 3 degrees Celsius by the end of the century, scientists have warned.

international

of the day quote

Revitalising democracy will also require us to shape the technological future, that's inclusive, that's rights respecting, directed at driving progress in people's lives

ANTONY BLINKEN | US SECRETARY OF STATE

Iran will never leave the negotiation table and is insistent on its right to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes

EBRAHIM RAISI | IRAN'S PRESIDENT

For the South China Sea and the seas and oceans of the Indo-Pacific to be unifying domains of peace, stability and prosperity, we need to gather more strongly around the collective responsibility as well as a shared sense of stewardship

ENRIQUE MANALO | PHILIPPINE FOREIGN MINISTER

SHORT TAKES

Russia ready to scrap contracts

Kathmandu: Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha has said that Russia has given its "in-principle consent" to cancel the contracts of Nepalese nationals who joined the Russian Army and are engaged in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, a media report said Monday. Shrestha, also the country's foreign minister, said in a meeting of the House of Representatives that the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said that it has "agreed in principle to assist those who have joined the army to cancel their contracts", the Republica newspaper reported. However, its modality is yet to be decided, he added.

Former ISI chief's brother arrested

Lahore: Former ISI chief Lt. Gen Faiz Hamid's brother has been arrested on charges of corruption in Pakistan's Punjab province, anti-graft authorities said Monday, as the new government appears to take revenge against those who targeted the Sharif family under Imran Khan's regime. "Revenue officer Najaf Hamid, brother of former ISI head Faiz Hamid, was arrested Monday in Chakwal (about 350 kilometres from Lahore) on the charges of corruption and misuse of authority," an Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE) spokesperson said. He said the suspect would be presented before a magistrate for his physical remand.

Indian student dies in US

New York: In yet another tragic incident, an Indian student died in Boston and initial investigation has ruled out any foul play, officials said Monday. "Deeply saddened to learn about the unfortunate demise of Mr. Abhijeeth Paruchuri, an Indian student in Boston," the Consulate General of India in New York said in a post on X.

Maryam visits Kot Lakhpat Jail

Lahore: Nawaz Sharif is a 'kingmaker' today while his oppressors are 'nowhere', an emotional Maryam Nawaz, the first woman Chief Minister of Pakistan's Punjab province, has said, as she visited the Kot Lakhpat Jail here and recalled hardships she and her father endured in prison. Maryam, Sunday visited the Kot Lakhpat Jail, where she and Nawaz Sharif served prison terms in corruption cases, and broke Ramzan fast with the women prisoners.



North Korea has shipped around 7,000 containers filled with munitions and other military equipment to Russia since last year to help support its war in Ukraine

SHIN WON-SIK | SOUTH KOREA'S DEFENCE MINISTER

STAR WARS IN LANKA

Sri Lanka's government-backed traditional astrologers have failed to unanimously agree on dates for New Year rituals, with squabbling seers warning of "disaster" and accusing rivals of misinterpreting the position of stars



West decries Putin's win

REUTERS

London, March 18: Western governments lined up Monday to condemn Vladimir Putin's landslide election victory as unfair and undemocratic, but China and North Korea congratulated the veteran Russian leader on extending his rule by a further six years.

The contrasting reactions underscored the geopolitical fault lines that have gaped wider since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine two years ago, triggering the deepest crisis in relations with the West since the end of the Cold War.

"The electoral process in Russia took place amid accrued repression against civil society and all forms of opposition to the regime, with even tougher restrictions to freedom of expression and the banning of independent media," France's foreign ministry said.

"The conditions for a free, pluralistic and democratic election were not met." British foreign minister David Cameron said the election outcome highlighted the "depth of repression" in Russia. "Putin removes his political opponents, controls the media, and then crowns himself the winner. This is not democracy," Cameron said.



A German government spokesperson said Chancellor Olaf Scholz would not congratulate Putin on his re-election because "the result was predetermined". The Kremlin dismissed such criticism, saying the 87% of the vote won by Putin during the three-day election showed that the Russian people were consolidating around him.

France, Britain and others condemned the fact that Russia had also held its election in occupied regions of Ukraine that it claims to have annexed during the war. This decision constitutes "a new breach of interna-

British foreign minister David Cameron said the election outcome highlighted the 'depth of repression' in Russia

France, Britain and others condemned the fact that Russia had also held its election in occupied regions of Ukraine that it claims to have annexed during the war

tional law and of the United Nations Charter", France said, reiterating its refusal to recog-

nise the Russian annexations and its commitment to "the sovereignty... and territorial integrity of Ukraine".

British defence minister Grant Schapps said on social media platform X: "Putin has stolen another election, but he will not steal Ukraine." A White House spokesperson Sunday said Russia's election was "obviously not free nor fair". President Joe Biden has not yet commented. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russia's election had no legitimacy. "It is clear to everyone in the world that this figure (Putin)... is simply sick for power and is doing everything to rule forever," Zelenskyy said.

In sharp contrast, Chinese President Xi Jinping congratulated Putin, and said Beijing would maintain close communication with Moscow to promote the "no limits" partnership they agreed in 2022, just before Russia invaded Ukraine. "I believe that under your leadership, Russia will certainly be able to achieve greater achievements in national development and construction," Xi told Putin in his message, according to Xinhua News. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un also sent a letter of congratulations to Putin, the KCNA state news agency reported.

Pak attacks Afghan; eight civilians killed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Islamabad/Kabul, March 18: Pakistan Monday carried out airstrikes inside Afghanistan that killed eight civilians, including three children, Afghan Taliban said, amidst a war of words between the two neighbours for a spate of recent militant attacks in restive Pakistani cities.

A senior Afghan interim government official Monday confirmed that strikes in the Afghanistan provinces of Paktika and Khost along the Pakistan border have taken place. There was no immediate reaction from the Pakistani side.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson of the Afghan rulers, alleged in a statement that Pakistani aircraft had carried out the airstrikes, the Dawn newspaper reported from Kabul. At "around 3 am, Pakistani aircraft bombarded civilian homes" in Khost and Paktika provinces near the border with Pakistan, said Afghan interim government spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid, claiming that all eight people killed were women and children. Mujahid said that Pakistani planes had bombed the Laman area in Paktika's Barmal district.

Alleging that "houses of com-



mon people were targeted", he said three women and three children were killed in Paktika and a house collapsed while two women were killed in Khost, where a house was destroyed as well. "The Islamic Emirate strongly condemns the attacks and describes these as non-serious actions and violation of Afghanistani territory," Mujahid said.

The spokesperson asked Pakistan to stop blaming Afghanistan for its problems and failure to control violent incidents. "Such acts can lead to dire consequences which will not be in control of Pakistan," he warned.

The strikes come a day after President Asif Ali Zardari vowed retaliation following the killing of seven soldiers, including two officers, in a terrorist attack on a security forces' post in North Waziristan.

Nepal's former Speaker held

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kathmandu, March 18: Krishna Bahadur Mahara, a former Speaker of Nepal's House of Representatives and a senior member of the ruling party, was arrested Monday and sent to four-day custody by a court here to probe his alleged involvement in a major gold smuggling case.

Mahara, vice-president of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda's' ruling Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), was arrested from Pakadi of Kapilvastu district earlier in the day and brought to the capital from the Bhairahawa airport.

Kathmandu District Court Judge Durga Prasad Khanal approved the request made by the police for remanding Mahara in custody for investigation into involvement in a gold smuggling scam.

An inquiry commission in its report found that he was involved in the smuggling of 60 kg of gold hidden inside a motorcycle brake shoes in 2023 and 9 kg of gold concealed inside electronic cigarettes in December 2022. Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane Sunday had ordered police to implement a report of the inquiry commission on large-scale gold smuggling that pointed to Mahara's "involvement" in the case, the report said.

Economy is turning a corner, says Sunak

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London, March 18: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak Monday attempted an optimistic reset amid reports of growing unrest within his own Conservative Party ranks as he unveiled a new package of reforms for small businesses and insisted the UK "economy is turning a corner".

The British Indian leader referenced his family-run pharmacy in the southern England port city of Southampton, where he was born and helped out as a schoolboy, as an example of his first-hand small business experience.

In an indirect message to the rebels, he stressed that it was important to stick with the plan for the economy that was working after a tough couple of years. "There is now a real sense that the economy is turning a corner with all the economic indicators pointing in the right direction," Sunak said during a Business Connect event in Warwickshire, in the Midlands region of England.

Israel raids Gaza's main hospital

The army last raided Shifa Hospital in November after claiming that Hamas maintained an elaborate command centre within and beneath the facility

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Rafah (Gaza Strip), March 18: Israeli forces launched another raid on the Gaza Strip's largest hospital early Monday, saying Hamas militants had regrouped there and had fired on them from inside the compound, where Palestinian officials say tens of thousands of people have been sheltering.

In a separate development, the European Union's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, accused Israel of continuing to hinder efforts to deliver aid to Gaza, saying the territory faces an "entirely man-made" famine as "starvation is used as a weapon of war".

The army last raided Shifa Hospital in November after claiming that Hamas maintained an



elaborate command centre within and beneath the facility.

The military revealed a tunnel leading to some underground rooms, as well as weapons it said were found inside the hospital. But the evidence fell short of the earlier claims, and critics accused the army of recklessly endangering the lives of civilians.

People sheltering in the hospital said Israeli forces backed by tanks and artillery had surrounded the medical complex and that snipers were shooting at people inside. They said the army raided a number of buildings and detained

dozens of people.

"We're trapped inside," said Abdel-Hady Sayed, who has been sheltering in the medical facility for over three months. "They fire at anything moving. ... Doctors and ambulances can't move." Gaza's Health Ministry said the Israeli army was directing gun and missile fire at a building used for specialised surgeries. It said a fire broke out at the hospital's gate.

The ministry said around 30,000 people are sheltering at the hospital, including patients, medical staff and people who have fled their homes seeking safety.

Russia may put a nuclear weapon in space

IF RUSSIA DOES DECIDE TO DEPLOY A NUCLEAR ANTI-SATELLITE WEAPON, THERE IS VERY LITTLE THAT CAN BE DONE TO CHANGE ITS COURSE

Last week, Mike Turner, the head of the House Intelligence Committee, caused alarm by raising concerns about a mysterious Russian military capability that poses a significant national security risk. His warning sparked anxiety among many, especially when White House spokesperson John Kirby acknowledged that Russia is working on a troubling antisatellite weapon. Reports from various news sources, including The New York Times, suggested that Moscow could potentially be gearing up to launch a nuclear weapon into outer space.

The intention behind such a weapon could be to disable the extensive networks of satellites used for communication and surveillance. By targeting these vital space systems, the operational capabilities of Ukrainian defence forces, which heavily rely on commercial satellite services, could be severely compromised. This would also diminish the effectiveness of the US military and its allies, who also depend on such satellite technology. If Russia were to detonate a nuclear weapon in space, it would likely impact their own satellite infrastructure as well. However, even without using a nuclear space weapon, Moscow could see the deployment of such

a weapon as a strategic advantage, allowing them to exert influence over other countries' space systems. The exact motives behind Russia's potential use of such a weapon remain uncertain.

Moscow and Washington have tested antisatellite weapons since the Cold War, but if Russia deployed a nuclear weapon in space to attack other satellites, it would be an unprecedented development and a clear violation of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty. Yet for the Kremlin, the costs of a violation may well be outweighed by the benefits. The antisatellite weapons that Moscow has demonstrated are not capable of effectively destroying the large-scale satellite constellations owned and operated by private companies. A nuclear antisatellite weapon, however, could destroy large numbers of these satellites in one fell swoop. If Russian officials decide to deploy this capability, Washington has no good options for stopping them.

Although antisatellite space systems appear to be a futuristic class of weapons, Moscow and Washington already have decades of experience developing them. During the Cold War, Moscow deemed its nonnuclear, antisatellite weapons sufficient to destroy key US satellites. But



in the post-Cold War period, the rise of much larger satellite constellations has likely rendered these nonnuclear antisatellite weapons less useful.

In the early 1960s, US policymakers became afraid that the Soviet Union would deploy orbital nuclear weapons in the form of a fractional orbital bombardment system—that is, launch a nuclear weapon into space on a southerly trajectory over the South Pole to avoid US early-warning radars positioned around the North Pole. Before completing an orbit, the weapon would reenter Earth's atmosphere and hit its target.

The Kennedy administration responded in 1963 by deploying nuclear-tipped missiles on

from space weapons did not last. In 2007, an emerging space power—China—launched a non-nuclear weapon into space and obliterated one of its own satellites. One year later, the United States used a modified SM-3 missile defense interceptor to destroy a malfunctioning U.S. satellite in low Earth orbit. And eventually, Moscow resurrected its own counterspace programmes. Although it is not clear precisely when Russia did so, work seems to have been restarted by 2009.

This revival was likely part of Moscow's broader military reforms, not a response to foreign space weapons. But nonetheless, in the past 15 years, Russia has significantly expanded its counterspace capabilities.

If Russia does decide to deploy a nuclear antisatellite weapon, there is very little that can be done to change its course. Taking unprecedented measures to deploy a space-based nuclear capability would signal that the Kremlin views proliferated constellations as such a clear and present danger to its national security that Moscow is willing to ignore the interests of other space-faring states. Once the Kremlin has made up its mind, it is hard to imagine that even China, Russia's "no limits" partner, could talk it down.

AGENCIES

of the day quote

The insurance sector has received close to ₹54,000 crore as foreign direct investment (FDI) in the last 9 years on the back of further liberalisation of overseas capital flow norms by the government

VIVEK JOSHI | FINANCIAL SERVICES SECRETARY

Demand for office space is likely to rise 10-12 per cent this year across major cities with foreign companies looking to set up Global Capabilities Centres in India

RAJ MENDA | CHAIRMAN, RMZ GROUP

The data derived from our campus hiring report serves as a tangible testament to India's progress toward achieving gender equality in the workforce

S PASUPATHI | CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, HIREPRO

SHORT TAKES

Sugar output dips

New Delhi: India's net sugar production fell marginally to 280.79 lakh tonne till March 15 of the current marketing year that started in October 2023, according to trade data released Monday. Sugar marketing year runs from October to September. "Sugar production till 15th March 2024 in the current 2023-24 season reached 280.79 lakh tonne, against 282.60 lakh tonne produced last year on the corresponding date," Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) said in a statement. Number of factories operating as March 15 this year stood at 371 as against 325 mills on the same day last year.

₹1,300cr setback for Adani Power

New Delhi: The Supreme Court Monday dismissed a plea of Adani Power Rajasthan Ltd seeking over ₹1,300 crore as late payment surcharge from the Jaipur Vidyut Vitran Nigam Limited, a Rajasthan government-owned power distribution firm. Imposing ₹50,000 as cost on Adani Power Rajasthan Ltd (APRL), a bench comprising Justices Aniruddha Bose and PV Sanjay Kumar ruled that filing of a miscellaneous application was not the proper legal recourse to late payment surcharge (LPS) by the Adani firm.

Warehouse developers bet on India as firms avoid China

Global giants, lured by manufacturing growth, look to expand into Indian warehousing

REUTERS

Oragadam, March 18: Land is getting hard to find in a sprawling industrial park in southern India where workers are scrambling to build modern new warehouses and factories for companies betting on the country's economic boom or diversifying their supply chains beyond China. "It is one of the most wanted places in India for European and American companies," said S Raghuraman, an official of the Greenbase industrial park, near plants run by Apple supplier Foxconn and truckmaker Daimler. Inquiries for leasing space in the park, run by Blackstone and real estate tycoon Niranjan Hiranandani, have gone through the roof, he added. "We are in talks with at least three clients looking to shift their base from China." To meet the burgeoning demand, Greenbase aims to invest

STARTUP MAHAKUMBH

‘Regulation stifles innovation’

STARTUPS MUST ADHERE TO SELF-REGULATING ECOSYSTEM, SAYS G20 SHERPA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: Indian startups must adhere to a self-regulating ecosystem to bring in transparency and ethical behaviour, G20 Sherpa Amitabh Kant said Monday while observing that chasing valuation at all costs sometimes leads to misgovernance.

He also said that there should not be any regulatory intervention if India wants to create a vibrant startup movement as "government regulation stifles innovation". Speaking at the Startup Mahakumbh event, Kant said India has been able to create the third-largest startup ecosystem in the world, and the challenge for the country is to make it the number one nation of startups in the world in the next five years. "Startups must adhere to a self-regulating ecosystem governance as this will bring in transparency, ethical behaviour in our statup ecosystem," he said. Noting that startups are 'national assets', the former NITI Aayog CEO said they must bring in best practices, and by following these best practices, start-

Rising capex cycle now broad-based

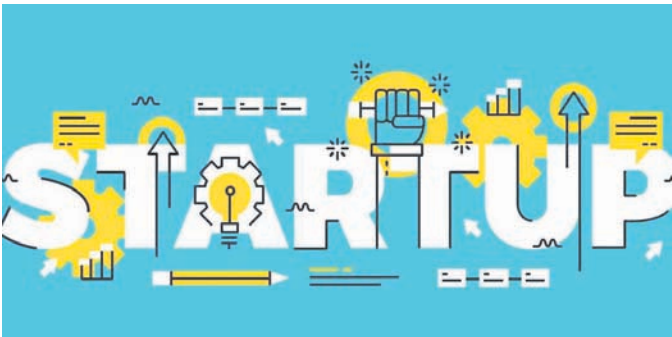
INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, March 18: The revival of capex cycle in India is now broad-based with all its engines - namely, government, private corporate and housing - fired up, as per global brokerage Jefferies. India's 8.4 per cent GDP growth in 3QFY24 shows the strong domestic economy driven by growth in manufacturing and construction sectors. The Indian housing cycle is now in full bloom with double digit pricing and volume increases, the brokerage said. "Government spending has done the heavy lifting over the last few years and is now ready to pass the baton to private corporates," Jefferies added. Private corporate spending uptick is also visible in multiple data points. Rising power demand with peaking capacity is leading to planned capacity addition in the power sector.



This forward-looking policy helps us introduce a wide variety of smart, green, premium-quality SUVs, at inclusive prices, along with outstanding after sales policies

PHAM SANH CHA | CEO, VINFAST INDIA



In my experience, I have witnessed startups flourishing, while others like BYJUs, GoMechanic, Housing.Com and Trello faced challenges. There must be good corporate governance in place

AMITABH KANT | SHERPA, G20

ups will trust their stakeholders, they will attract investors and ultimately achieve sustainable growth. "It is very important that startups should focus on growth (but) valuation at all cost sometimes leads to misgovernance," he noted. Kant also spoke about challenges faced by some startups in India recently and emphasised that all leaders of startups must ensure that there is proper financial management and audit. "All of you entrepreneurs are innovators. As you grow and expand, you must ensure that there is proper financial management and a proper audit. Self-regulation is the key," he said. Kant noted that there should

FLY91, India's newest airline, hits the skies

AGENCIES

Mumbai, March 18: FLY91, the newest addition to the India's aviation industry, started its commercial services Monday. The airline's inaugural flight took off from Goa's Manohar International Airport, bound for Kempegowda International Airport in Bangalore. Additionally, on its maiden day of operations, Fly91 also successfully flew its first route to Sindhudurg from Bangalore. FLY91 is initially flying between Goa, Hyderabad, Bangalore, and Sindhudurg. They will later add flights to Agatti, Jalgaon, and Pune in April. FLY91 is a regional carrier and it seeks to enhance air connectivity from tier 2 and tier 3 towns across India. FLY91's debut in the world's third-largest civil aviation market comes at a time when the Asian country is aiming to ascend as the foremost aviation market globally by the decade's end, despite challenges faced by some airlines.



We at FLY91 are incredibly proud to launch our inaugural commercial flight, symbolizing our commitment to connecting India in a way that has never been done before. This inaugural flight is not just about reaching a destination; it's about taking flight with the dreams and aspirations of a nation

MANOJ CHACKO | MD & CEO, FLY91

However, Fly91 aims to get into a segment which the government has been trying to push, especially via its regional connectivity scheme called UDAN.

INDIA'S YOUNGEST MILLIONAIRE

India has probably seen its youngest millionaire in Ekagrah Rohan Murty - the four-month-old grandson of Infosys founder NR Narayana Murthy. According to a regulatory filing, Narayana Murthy has gifted shares worth more than ₹240 crore to his grandson. Ekagrah Murty received 15 lakh shares, or 0.04 per cent stake, in Infosys



D-St ends higher in volatile trade



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 18: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed higher in a highly volatile trade Monday as investors turned cautious ahead of the US Federal Reserve interest rate decision. After gyrating between gains and losses, the 30-share BSE Sensex settled higher by 104.99 points or 0.14 per cent at 72,748.42. As many as 14 Sensex shares closed in the green while 16 in the red. The index moved between a high of 72,985.89 and a low of 72,314.16.

The broader Nifty of the NSE rose by 32.35 points or 0.15 per cent, to close at 22,055.70 as 21 of its components advanced and 29 declined. The gains were primarily led by metal, auto and commodity shares while IT and Tech shares capped the upside. Reliance Industries which rebounded more than 1.5 per cent from the day's low was the major contributor to Sensex and Nifty gains. RIL settled higher by 1.45 per cent. Tata Steel rose the most by 5 per cent among Sensex shares. Mahindra & Mahindra, JSW Steel, Tata Motors, Axis Bank, Sun Pharma, Reliance Industries and Maruti were the other biggest gainers. IT shares on the other hand declined amid concerns over interest rates in the US market. Infosys fell the most by 1.99 per cent among Sensex shares. Tata Consultancy Services, Titan, Wipro, Hindustan Unilever and Nestle also declined. "The Indian market followed the positive Asian peers with a mixed bias. Domestic issues, like mutual fund stress tests, hardly brought any negative views, but premium valuation remains as a concern. Midcap & small caps are attempting to scroll up, however consolidation persists," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. Policy actions, this week, from global central banks, the US FED, BOJ, and BOE will dictate the market direction. Indication, by the FED, that rate cut may probably be in the latter half of CY24, should bring a mixed sentiment in the short term, he added.

Adani's dollar bonds, shares drop as US widens investigation

Mumbai: Most dollar bonds of Adani Group companies fell to their lowest level in two months Monday following a report indicating that US prosecutors have widened their investigation of the conglomerate to examine potential bribery. Shares of all 10 group and related companies also fell over 5% in early trading in India, with Adani Total Gas leading the decline. Bond prices fell, resulting in a 38 basis points increase in the yield on a note from Adani Ports & Special Economic Zone due in February 2032 to 7.20%. The yield had jumped 54 bps to 7.36% earlier in the day, marking the biggest single-session gain since February. The daily decline on most actively traded dollar bonds was the largest in six to 12 months. US investigators are probing whether an Adani entity, or individuals associated with the company, including Gautam Adani, were involved in paying officials in India for favorable treatment on an energy project, Bloomberg reported Friday. A report by US short seller Hindenburg Research in January of last year triggered a sell-off in stocks and overseas listed bonds of Adani Group companies. The group has denied all wrongdoings.

The US Federal Open Market Committee meeting will commence March 19 and the policy rate decision will be announced Wednesday. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.04 per cent while the smallcap index dipped 0.07 per cent. Among the indices, metal zoomed 2.88 per cent, auto jumped 1.08 per cent, commodities climbed 0.91 per cent, healthcare (0.88 per cent), realty (0.58 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.47 per cent). However, IT, consumer durables, tech, services and financial services were the laggards. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹848.56 crore Friday, according to exchange data.

BLOCK DEAL

Tata Sons to sell minor stake in TCS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: Shares of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) Monday declined nearly 2 per cent amid reports that its promoter Tata Sons is likely to sell a minority stake in the IT major. According to reports, TCS-promoter Tata Sons is planning to sell up to 2.3 crore shares, representing a 0.64 per cent stake in the company through block deals Tuesday. The offer price for the block deal is likely ₹4,001 per share, which is a 3.45 per cent discount compared to Monday's closing price for TCS, the reports said. The stock of the company plunged 1.78 per cent to close at ₹4,144.25 apiece on the NSE. On the BSE, it fell 1.72 per cent to settle at ₹4,144.75 apiece. At the offer price, the total transaction value of the block deal comes up to over ₹9,202 crore. As of December 2023, promoters and promoter group entities hold a 72.41 per cent stake in TCS, of which 72.38 per cent shareholding is owned by Tata Sons.

Alcaraz, Swiatek triumph



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Indian Wells, March 18: Carlos Alcaraz arrived at Indian Wells full of doubt about his twisted right ankle. He's leaving as a two-time champion. He defeated Daniil Medvedev 7-6(7-5), 6-1 for the second straight year in the BNP Paribas Open final Sunday, earning his first title since winning Wimbledon last year.

Iga Swiatek beat Maria Sakkari 6-4, 6-0 in just over an hour to win the women's title, with Swiatek losing just 21 games in six matches during the 12-day tournament — an average of 3.5 games per match.

Alcaraz sprained his ankle at the Rio Open in late February. His first practice at Indian Wells lasted 30 minutes without any movement. His first practice with his fellow pros "was really tough for me," he said in a Tennis

Channel interview.

Alcaraz outlasted Jannik Sinner in a three-set semifinal after needing three sets to get out of his second-round match. "After every match I was feeling better," Alcaraz said. "I was getting more confident after every match. Winning a Master 1000 again, a really important tournament to win, gives you motivation to keep going."

Alcaraz became the first man to defend his Indian Wells title since Novak Djokovic won three in a row from 2014-16. He beat Medvedev 6-3, 6-2 last year in the Southern California desert.

"It's definitely your court, you like it here," Medvedev told Alcaraz during the victory ceremony. "Hopefully you can one day let me play a little bit better here."

Medvedev led 3-0 in the first set while Alcaraz had eight un-

forced errors over those games. The Spaniard won three games in a row to tie it, 3-3. The players held serve the rest of the set, with Alcaraz serving a love game to get into the tiebreaker. He led 3-0 and 5-2 before Medvedev tied it 5-5. Alcaraz won the next two points to close it out.

Alcaraz got the only two breaks in the second set, when Medvedev had one winner and nine errors. For the match, Alcaraz hit 25 winners and had 26 unforced errors, while Medvedev had 11 winners and 23 unforced errors.

Swiatek improved to 20-2 this year, with her wins leading the WTA Tour. It was a repeat of the 2022 final, in which Swiatek beat Sakkari 6-4, 6-1. Sakkari hasn't defeated the Polish star since 2021.

Swiatek raced to a 3-0 lead in

the opening set. Sakkari recovered to win three straight games, including a break of Swiatek. She served a love game to tie it, 4-4. Swiatek lost just two points on her serve the rest of the set, wrapping it up with a forehand winner in the corner.

Swiatek was more dominant in the second set, breaking Sakkari three times all in love games. She lost just five points in the set. Swiatek hit 15 winners and had 11 unforced errors in the 1 hour, 8-minute match. Sakkari had eight winners and 18 unforced errors.

Alcaraz and Swiatek earned USD 1.1 million each for their wins. That's less than the USD 1.26 million the women's and men's champions received in 2023. This year more prize money was allocated to the earlier rounds, reducing the champions' prize money by nearly 13 per cent.

Rahul's keeping duty delayed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: Lucknow Super Giants skipper KL Rahul is all set to play for his franchise from the opening IPL game after getting all clear from the National Cricket Academy but he has been advised against wicket-keeping in the first few games.

Rahul had once again suffered a strain in his quadriceps during the first Test against England in Hyderabad and even though he was expected to join the team by the third game, the stylish right-hander felt a tightness in his muscles and skipped all the remaining games.

Rahul posted a short video of his batting, basic keeping drills and outfielding practice at the NCA. "The NCA has given him clearance and he will join his mates in Lucknow Thursday (March 20) before they travel to Jaipur for the opening game against Rajasthan Royals March 24. It is understood that he has been told to avoid squatting initially and he can don the big gloves in coming days. For first few games, he will only play as pure batter," a BCCI source tracking the developments of



Kohli joins RCB camp

Bangalore: Virat Kohli Monday made his first appearance in the training session of his franchise Royal Challengers Bangalore ahead of the IPL beginning March 22. Kohli, who was out of the country for the birth of his second child, arrived in India Sunday. The former India and RCB captain was seen taking rounds of the Chinnaswamy Stadium as part of his warm-up. Skipper Faf du Plessis also attended the session. RCB, who have never won the IPL, begin their campaign against reigning champions Chennai Super Kings in Chennai Friday. Kohli's performance in the lucrative T20 league will be closely tracked as the event precedes the T20 World Cup in the USA and Caribbean. The 35-year-old played his first T20 since the 2022 World Cup back in January against Afghanistan.

LSG told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

It is understood that even the franchise isn't losing its sleep over Rahul's keeping as they have two quality short-format glovesmen in former Proteas star Quinton de Kock and West Indies' Nicholas Pooran, who is also vice-captain for this season.

However for Rahul, keeping will be an important aspect of his game if he has to stake claim for a spot in the Indian squad for the

T20 World Cup in the USA and West Indies in June.

"Rahul will not be considered for a top three slot in the Indian T20 team considering his previous performances. He can be that keeper-batter at No.5 or 6 if he has a decent IPL. But if he plays purely as a batter, you have a far better option in Rinku Singh, apart from Rishabh Pant, who might just stake a claim with some power-packed performances," a BCCI source privy to developments, said.

Felix scores vs Atletico again as Barca win big



HAUNTED BY THEIR OWN: Joao Felix avoids celebrations after scoring against his old club Atletico Madrid, Sunday

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Madrid, March 18: Atletico Madrid fans burned a Joao Felix jersey before their team's match against Barcelona. They also vandalized a plaque with his name and insulted the player outside the Metropolitano Stadium.

But when the match started, it didn't take long for the Portugal forward to answer those fans on the field. Felix struck against his former club again Sunday, scoring the opening goal in Barcelona's 3-0 win over Atletico Madrid in the Spanish league.

Robert Lewandowski, who also had two assists to his name, and Fermin Lopez also scored for Barcelona, which moved to second place with their fifth straight league victory over Atletico.

Felix had scored the winner in the Catalan club's 1-0 win in the league in December: The Portugal international is playing on loan from Atletico after falling out with the club last season.

Felix was loudly jeered by the Atletico fans at the Metropolitano Stadium when he was replaced in the 77th. The forward arrived at Atletico for 120 million euros (now USD 130 million) in 2019 but never fully met the high expectations that came with his signing.

Felix opened the scoring from the middle of the area after a pass by Lewandowski in the 38th minute, becoming the first Barcelona player to score in both matches against Atletico in a single league season since Lionel Messi in 2019-20.

Lewandowski added to the lead in a breakaway after Atletico midfielder Rodrigo De Paul gave away possession with a bad pass early in the second half, and the Poland striker set up Lopez's header for Barcelona's third goal in the 65th.

Atletico defender Nahuel Molina was sent off in stoppage time for a foul on Vitor Roque to stop a breakaway. Xavi was sent off before halftime for protesting.

It was Atletico's first league loss at the Metropolitano Stadium since January 2023 — also 1-0 against Barcelona. It was also Atletico's worse loss at home in any competition.

The win added to Barcelona's momentum after it eliminated Napoli in the Champions League Tuesday to make it to the tournament's quarterfinals for the first time in four years.

Unbeaten in eight league matches, Barcelona moved two points ahead of third-place Girona, who lost 0-1 at Getafe Saturday. Barcelona are eight points behind leaders Real Madrid, who won 4-2 at Osasuna Saturday.

Atletico eliminated Inter Milan in the round of 16 of the Champions League at the Metropolitano Wednesday, but they have lost six of their last 10 matches across all competitions, with only three wins in that streak.

Simeone's team dropped out of the Champions League places with the loss Sunday. They are one point behind fourth-placed Athletic Bilbao.

United pip Liverpool in FA Cup thriller

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Manchester, March 18: There's still some fight left in Manchester United. With the season hanging in the balance, Erik ten Hag's team produced one of the most important wins of his tenure to beat Liverpool 4-3 after extra time in a thrilling FA Cup quarter-final match Sunday.

With nearly the last kick of the match, substitute Amad Diallo sent Old Trafford into raptures, ended Liverpool's bid for a quadruple of trophies and fired United into the semifinals.

Only time will tell just how significant a result this will be for Ten Hag, who has faced mounting speculation about his position in the face of a troubled campaign and restructuring at the club.

The FA Cup represents his last chance of silverware this season, while Champions League qualification is in doubt with United sixth in the Premier League.

Defeat against the club's fiercest rival Liverpool would likely have seen the pressure on the Dutchman grow. And it was notable that television cameras focused on new director Dave Brailsford as the clock ticked down with Liverpool leading 2-1 as the game approached 90 minutes.

Brailsford is part of the team overseeing United's football operations following British bil-

lionaire Jim Ratcliffe's recent investment in the club. He looked stone-faced with United seemingly headed out of the competition and Liverpool's away fans making the loudest noise.

Emotions changed drastically inside Old Trafford, however, when Antony levelled the game in the 87th. That set up a white-knuckle ride through to the first minute of stoppage time in extra time, with big chances missed and momentum swinging one way and then another until Amad's winner.

Twelve-time FA Cup winner

United were later drawn against second-tier Coventry in the semi-finals and defending champions Manchester City will play Chelsea, who beat Leicester 4-2 earlier Sunday. Both matches will take place at Wembley.

The game had looked like going to a penalty shootout until Amad fired low into the bottom corner to beat Caoimhin Kelleher following a late Liverpool corner. The substitute was so caught up in the moment that he was shown a second yellow card and sent off for taking off his jersey during wild celebrations.



MATCH-WINNER: Amad Diallo takes off his jersey in delight after scoring the winner against Liverpool, Sunday

Ad-hoc committee for wrestling dissolved, WFI to take charge

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 18: The Indian Olympic Association Monday dissolved the ad-hoc committee for wrestling, saying "there is no further need" for it to continue after revocation of the suspension on the national federation, which now gets complete administrative control of the sport.

The IOA said that the decision was also guided by the successful conduct of the selection trials for next month's Olympic qualifying tournament for which the panel collaborated with the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI).

The ad-hoc committee was formed in December last year after the sports ministry sus-

pended the WFI, which got a shot in the arm when the suspension imposed on it by the global governing body – United World Wrestling – was lifted in February.

"The decision to dissolve the Ad-hoc Committee comes in light of the lifting of the ban on the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) by the United World Wrestling (UWW) and the successful completion of Selection Trials by the Adhoc Committee appointed by the IOA as per the directives of the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi," said the IOA order issued March 10.

WFI chief Sanjay Singh thanked the Indian Olympic Association for giving his elected panel control of the national

federation.

"We thank IOA for giving us full-fledged control of the WFI. We will give all facilities to the wrestlers. We will soon organise a national camp and if the wrestlers want to train abroad we will facilitate that as well. The focus is now on the Olympics. We are hoping that 5-6 wrestlers will qualify," Singh told PTI.

The three-member committee, under the chairmanship of Bhupender Singh Bajwa was constituted December 23 after the newly-elected WFI, led by Sanjay Singh, had allegedly flouted its own rules.

Earlier this month, the ad-hoc panel organised the trials to select the teams for the Asian Championships and the Asian

Olympic Qualifiers in Kyrgyzstan to be held next month.

The protesting duo of Vinesh Phogat and Bajrang Punia competed in the trials and the former made the cut for Olympic qualifiers in the 50kg category.

Following the successful completion of the trials, the reins of the sport have now been formally handed over to WFI despite the continuing suspension imposed by the sports ministry.

The IOA instructed WFI to appoint a "Safeguarding Committee" to address concerns of sexual harassment and other issues such as adherence to rules.

"As instructed by the UWW, it is imperative that the WFI appoint a Safeguarding Committee / Officer at the earliest to ad-

dress the concerns of abuse and harassment and to ensure adherence to all rules, regulations, and guidelines set forth by the UWW and other relevant authorities," the IOA letter added.

"Furthermore, the WFI is also directed to conduct the elections of the Athletes Commission in a time-bound manner, in accordance with the established procedures and guidelines. This step is essential to promote athlete representation and participation in the decision-making processes of the WFI."

The order also instructed the WFI to "repay the loan" provided by the IOA to the ad-hoc panel for managing wrestling affairs when the national body was under suspension.