



Russophile

Actor Sara Ali Khan shares that she loves Russian history of the 20th century and Russian literature

LEISURE | P2



India against UfC

India criticises a model for the UN Security Council presented by the Uniting for Consensus group that includes Pakistan

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Direct selling shines

The Indian direct selling industry reports a 12 per cent growth in financial year 2023 and sales of ₹21,282 crore

BUSINESS | P11



India face Afghanistan

India will renew their quest for a maiden entry into the third round of FIFA World Cup Qualifiers when they face Afghanistan tonight

SPORTS | P12

SHORT TAKES

Banks to remain open March 31

Mumbai: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Wednesday advised banks to keep its branches dealing with government business to remain open March 31, the last day of the current financial year, which is a Sunday. The Government of India has made a request to keep all branches of the banks dealing with government receipts and payments open for transactions March 31, 2024 so as to account for all the government transactions relating to receipts and payments in the FY2023-24 itself, the RBI said in a statement.

Narcotics seized from Jharpada jail

Bhubaneswar: A police team raided Jharpada jail here Wednesday and seized ganja and tobacco items, an officer said. A big police team led by Bhubaneswar Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Prateek Singh raided Jharpada jail early this morning, a day after four inmates of the jail were injured during a clash between two groups. Speaking to mediapersons, the DCP Singh said the police team included two additional DCPs, five ACPs, 11 inspectors and 22 sub-inspectors.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



It says there is diversion ahead. Seems the PM is addressing a rally

MARKET WATCH	
INDEX	VARIATION
SENSEX	72101.69 ↑ 89.64
NIFTY	21839.10 ↑ 21.65
DOLLAR	83.18 ↑ ₹0.13
EURO	90.22 ↑ ₹0.10
GOLD	₹65,707 ↑ ₹124
SILVER	₹75,292 ↑ ₹5

WEATHER		
	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	19.2°C	20.0°C
Min Temp	17.4°C	16.5°C
Humidity	100%	100%
Rainfall	26mm	32mm

FORECAST: GENERALLY CLOUDY SKY



UNSEASONAL RAIN: Residents of Bhubaneswar woke up to a stormy morning as rain under the influence of Norwester continued to lash the City, Wednesday

PHOTO: BIKASH NAYAK

SC to hear plea against freebies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: The Supreme Court agreed to list for hearing Thursday a PIL against the practice of political parties promising freebies during elections, a significant development that comes ahead of general elections beginning April 19.

The PIL also seeks a direction to the Election Commission to invoke its powers to freeze the election symbols and cancel the registration of such political parties.

"This is important. We will keep this on board tomorrow," the bench, comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said Wednesday.

The apex court took note of the submissions of senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, appearing for lawyer and petitioner Ashwini Upadhyay, that the plea needs to be heard before the polls.

The plea sought a total ban on populist measures to gain undue political favour from voters as they violate the Constitution, and the EC should take suitable deterrent measures. It also urged the court to declare that the promise of irrational freebies from public funds before elections unduly influences the voters, disturbs the level playing field and vitiates the purity of the poll process.

Anything can happen

Suspense over the possible pre-poll alliance between BJP and BJD deepened further with Union Home Minister Amit Shah Wednesday keeping the saffron party's card close to his chest by saying that the final call on such an understanding, if any, would be taken by party president JP Nadda. Shah's statement comes a day after CM Naveen Patnaik's close confidant Kartik Pandian keeping the BJD's option open for such a happening, while specifying that the party was confident of securing a majority with or without BJP's support. Shah too said, in a similar vein, when he claimed that the solo journey of BJP could also be sufficient in bringing home credible results at the hustings. With either side refusing to take the first step forward, it will be interesting to see what both achieve in the bargain game.

New Delhi/Bhubaneswar, March 20: A day after Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's close confidant Kartik Pandian indicated the possibility of BJD and BJP coming together for 'a greater cause' ahead of the polls, Union Home Minister Amit Shah Wednesday said 'anything can happen, but let it first be decided



if there is an alliance'.

While answering a query at the News 18 Rising Bharat Summit 2024 in New Delhi if BJP is forging an alliance with BJD ahead of the elections, Shah said alliances are always not formed on the basis of necessity, rather on 'national interest'.

"No decision on an alliance has been taken yet. Party president (JP Nadda) will take the final call. However, it is certain that we are going to significantly increase our strength in Odisha. Our workers feel and accept the love and affection of the people of Odisha towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi," the Home minister said.

He also said that BJP's tally in Lok Sabha and Assembly seats in Odisha will increase several

times more than what is being predicted by political observers.

"If an alliance happens, we will contest elections as partners under the leadership of (Chief Minister) Naveen Patnaik. If we have to fight alone, then we will contest to form the government," Shah added.

Tuesday, Pandian, the 5T and Nabin Odisha Chairman, said at the same event that BJP and BJD do not need each other to win elections, but some things are beyond politics and the two leaders -- Modi and Naveen -- want to come together for 'a greater cause'.

The issue of an alliance between BJD and BJP came for discussion after Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the state March 5.

PANNUN MURDER PLOT 'Involvement of officials found'

REUTERS

New Delhi, March 20: An investigation by Union government has found that 'rogue officials', not authorised by the government, were involved in a foiled plot to kill a Sikh separatist leader in the United States, Bloomberg News reported Wednesday.

The report, citing unnamed senior officials, said at least one person directly involved in the alleged plot is employed by the Centre but is no longer working for India's foreign spy agency, the Research and Analysis Wing.

New Delhi has submitted the findings of the government-appointed investigation panel to US authorities, the report said.

Ministry of External Affairs did not immediately respond to a request for comment from Reuters on the report, which said India had not started any criminal action against the individual. The US is demanding a criminal prosecution of the persons involved, the report said. India set up the probe panel after US authorities thwarted the plot and issued a warning to India over concerns that the government was involved.

The US Justice Department said in November that an Indian government official directed the unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Gurbatwant Singh Pannun.

Barber kills two boys in UP, gunned down

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Budaun (UP), March 20: A gruesome incident of double murder rocked Uttar Pradesh Tuesday when a barber brutally killed two children at their home in Budaun. Hours after the murder, accused Sajid, 22, was gunned down in an encounter with the police, IG Bareilly range RK Singh told PTI Wednesday.

The accused knew the family and had gone there seeking money for payment to a hospital where his pregnant wife is admitted, according to the FIR lodged on the matter.

Sajid, who had recently opened a barber shop in the locality, entered the house and attacked three brothers -- Ayush, 12, Ahaan alias Honey, 8, and Yuvraj, 10, with a knife. Ayush and Ahaan died in the attack, while Yuvraj was rushed to a hospital with grievous wounds.

As per the FIR lodged after a complaint by the deceased's father Vinod Kumar, accused Sajid and his brother Javed reached the house at around 7pm Tuesday.

"Sajid told my wife Sangeeta that he needed ₹5,000 which is required for the delivery of his



wife. When my wife went inside to get the money, Sajid went to the roof of the house. Moments later, Javed also reached the roof and they called my two sons Ayush, 12, Ahaan alias Honey, 8 on the roof," reads the FIR.

The accused attacked the minors with a sharp knife. The mother of the two boys saw that the clothes of the accused were drenched with blood when they came downstairs.

"When my wife came out with the money, she saw Sajid and Javed coming downstairs with a knife. Seeing my wife, they said 'I have done my work today' and tried to escape from the spot," reads the FIR.

The accused also attacked the third son Yuvraj who had gone upstairs to fetch water. Yuvraj is admitted in hospital.

No let-up in temple burglary

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nayagarh/Balasore, March 20: Incidents of burglary in several temples of the state continue unabated as miscreants decamped with cash and valuables from two more shrines in Nayagarh and Balasore districts.

Sources said unidentified miscreants looted cash and gold ornaments worth over several lakhs from the newly-constructed Ram Temple on Giri-Govardhan hill at Fategarh in Nayagarh district, late Tuesday night. The incident came to light Wednesday when the priest reached the shrine for morning rituals. He was shocked to find the main door of the temple open and the donation box empty.

According to sources, the mis-

creants broke open the main door, looted the donation box containing gold, and cash by breaking its lock and fled the spot. The temple committee lodged a complaint with Fategarh police about the theft, following which the cops reached the spot and started an investigation.

Notably, the Ram Temple at Fategarh was inaugurated January 22 - the day when the consecration ceremony of the Ram Mandir was held in Ayodhya.

Meanwhile, miscreants decamped with ₹1 lakh from donation box of Panchalingeswar temple in Balasore district in the wee hours of Wednesday. Panchalingeswar Trust Board manager filed a complaint with Nilagiri police following which police have started a probe.

Hit by NASA, asteroid looks like a watermelon

REUTERS

Washington, March 20: When National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) sent its DART spacecraft to slam into asteroid Dimorphos in 2022, the US space agency demonstrated that it was possible to change a celestial object's trajectory, if needed, to protect Earth. It turns out that this collision changed not only the asteroid's path but its shape as well. The asteroid, which before the DART encounter looked like a ball that was a bit plump in the waist, now appears to be shaped more like a watermelon - or, technically, a triaxial ellipsoid, scientists said Tuesday.

"The prevailing understand-

ing is that Dimorphos is a loosely packed agglomeration of debris ranging from dust to gravel to boulders. Thus, its global strength is quite low, allowing deformation much more easily than for a solid monolithic body," said Steve Chesley, a senior research scientist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in California and a co-author of the study published in the Planetary Science Journal.

"The shape change was so dramatic because of its rubble-pile composition," said JPL navigation engineer and study lead author Shantanu Naidu. "By measuring the pre- and post-impact orbit of Dimorphos, we were able to deduce the change in the shape of Dimorphos due to the



The spacecraft collided September 26, 2022, at about 14,000 miles per hour into Dimorphos, an asteroid that was about 170-metre wide, roughly 11 million km from Earth



Test) mission was a proof-of-principle mission using a spacecraft to apply kinetic force to nudge a celestial object that otherwise might be on a collision course with Earth. Dimorphos and Didymos do not pose an actual threat to Earth.

The spacecraft collided September 26, 2022, at about 14,000 miles per hour (22,530 kph) into Dimorphos, an asteroid that was about 560 ft (170 metres) wide, roughly 6.8 million miles

(11 million km) from Earth. Didymos has a diameter of about a half mile (780 metres).

DART's collision, which sent rocky debris from the asteroid flying into space, also changed the orbital path that Dimorphos takes around Didymos - making it elliptical instead of circular - and its orbital period, the time it takes to complete a single orbit, the scientists said. It now takes Dimorphos 11 hours, 22 minutes and three seconds to complete an orbit, 33 minutes and 15 seconds less than before the impact, they found.

Scientists had previously disclosed that the asteroid's orbit had changed, with the new study offering the most precise readings yet on that.

leisure



CARDI B WAS AFRAID TO LIVE HER LIFE

Grammy-winning rapper Cardi B said that she was afraid of living her life after a barrage of negative comments on social media last year. "I just feel like I lost myself with everything," she said.

JAKE: AN HONOUR TO PLAY BATMAN

Actor Jake Gyllenhaal is still keen on essaying the caped superhero Batman on the big screen. The actor shared that it 'would be an honour' to portray the Dark Knight, as it is a classic role. "Oh, man. That's a classic. It's an honour," he said in an interview with *Screen Rant*.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
Today will be an industrious day. The stars foretell that you may visit a historical place, or perhaps a museum. However, Ganesh says, you may need to pay a little attention to your health. If such is the case, it would be better to take the evening off for yourself.

TAURUS
Today, Ganesh sees your mind shifting from your professional affairs and drifting, time and again, towards your home and family. You are likely to return home early and get happily engrossed in discussing pressing domestic issues with your family members. This will possibly be followed by a festive evening filled with fun and laughter.

GEMINI
There is a possibility of conflicts brewing at your home today. The demands made by your family members will increase and you may struggle to cope to meet them. This could make you ill-tempered. You will encounter large expenses in meeting these demands.

CANCER
The day shall find you in buoyant spirits, indicates Ganesh. As you are feeling lively and full of beans, you will not mind slogging it out, even if in some mindless activities or chores. It is a perfect day for activities like gardening, cooking, baking and even for a nice house warming get-together.

LEO
Financial gains in shares and stocks are indicated. If you are an investor, your investments will yield substantial profits. Long-standing debts are also likely to be cleared, and pending dues will be settled. Expenses for the purposes of entertainment are a possibility, says Ganesh.

VIRGO
You will be in a very ambitious and conscientious mood today. Your actions will speak louder than words. You set the pace with your meticulous planning and careful execution. Ganesh says you may expect a lot of appreciation and recognition for your work coming from your boss and your colleagues.

LIBRA
Ganesh says today is a day where you will spend happy moments with your family members. You will feel happy and will get to spend some romantic time with your beloved. Your innermost feeling will be showcased in the internal thoughts of your life partner and both of you will be in tandem with each other today.

SCORPIO
Just another mundane day in store for you. At work, pressure may mount and lead to a hectic and tedious day. You may even feel irritated at times. Thus, feeling the need to unwind, you may invite your sweetheart for the cup of coffee and spend quality time together.

SAGITTARIUS
Variety is the spice of life. Add variety of activities to your daily schedule and nothing would seem boring any more, foretells Ganesh. Indulge in creative activities like writing, cooking, gardening or even reading. Catch up with friends and memories of old times; have a blast!

CAPRICORN
You will feel little lost in the maze of problems and tricky situations. You will, however, find a way out, feels Ganesh. You like to be in a commanding position at work where you guide others and call the shots. But, it has a flip side, too. While you will be appreciated for the achievements, you will also have to bear the brunt if anything goes wrong.

AQUARIUS
If you are an astrologer, doctor or a spiritual leader, today is a favourable day for you. Those who may want to challenge you must reconsider the thought of testing your strengths, says Ganesh. Doing charity work, helping the needy, and working for humanitarian causes give you a feeling of contentment. Today, it will be one of those extremely fulfilling days.

PISCES
You will be inspired to travel to a far off place or to a foreign land because of a very warm invitation. Some old friend or relative residing in a foreign land will get in touch and please you today. Ganesh says that today is a good day for those wishing to go abroad for some specialized study or work.

PC puts activist foot forward

Mumbai: Actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas, who is spending some quality time with her husband Nick Jonas and their daughter in Mumbai, recently teased her upcoming documentary.

The documentary, produced by Priyanka is titled *Women of My Billion*. It showcases the struggles, dreams, rights, and fights against all forms of violence that unite women in India.

The film follows Srishri's journey of 3800 km over 240 days, from

Kanyakumari in South India to Kashmir in the North.

It has been told through the lens of the UN SDG Changemaker Award winner and activist and gives a unique perspective on the group that deserves to be respected, empowered, and protected.

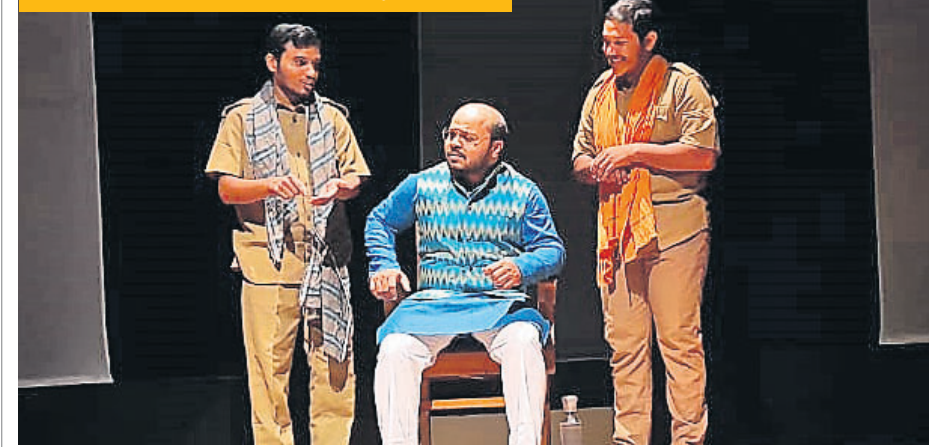
A glimpse of the film was shown at Prime Video's slate announcement event, *Prime Video Presents Tuesday*, at a 5-star property in the Santa Cruz area of Mumbai.

The event saw the announcement of close to 70 titles.

Talking to the media, Priyanka said, "The documentary raises an important question on violence against women, which is not just an India issue but a global issue."

The documentary will drop on Prime Video.

NATAKA PARIKRAMA: DAY-1



Uttar Purush, one of the oldest theatre troupes in the Capital City, presented Odia play *Mrugaya* on the first evening of its three-day drama festival at Rabindra Mandap, Bhubaneswar, Wednesday. Written by late Biswajit Das, the play was directed by Nishikanta and Ranesh. Shashiprava Das was conferred with Uttar Purush Darshak Samman while Prashant Swain received Gourishyam Mahapatra Samman.

Mumbai: Actress Bhumi Pednekar, who is stepping into the world of series with *Daldal*, is happy that female actors are being empowered to headline projects on top global streaming platforms.

She said, "It feels amazing that I work at a time when a woman can headline a series on a global streaming platform and feel supremely empowered that she can command such a massive mounting. I'm honestly humbled by this realisation, and it motivates me to work so hard that I deliver powerful performances that are remembered by people." The *Bhakshak* actress said that *Daldal* is the perfect project for her to show a completely new side to her performance.

Talking about her character in the series, she said, "I love that in *Daldal*, I play a woman who has shattered the glass ceiling by being appointed as the DCP of Mumbai. She is a super achiever in a man's world, and I loved that layer of the show along with all the beautiful complexities that the role and the script have to offer. I think a character like this will resonate with the times that we live in because a woman is no longer shackled down and is ambitious and independent."

Bhumi on actresses headlining projects



Wearable fashion takes spotlight on catwalk

New Delhi: Fashion is all about freedom of artistic expression, and sometimes, one might think twice before sashaying it in daily life. However, this time, it was different at Lakme Fashion Week x FDCI, as the runway was undeniably influenced by the concept of wearable fashion, said ace designers.

From Ranna Gill's collection 'Urban Prairie', which saw an array of pantsuits, skirts, jumpsuits and evening dresses all out of a fairytale, to Varun Chakkilam and Sakshi Bhati's luxurious spin to lehengas or even Rajesh Pratap Singh's royal spin to polo wear - is all that can be worn by fashionistas away from the runway.

Talking to IANS, Ranna Gill said: "This season's runway was undeniably influenced by the concept of wearable fashion, and it's a trend that resonates deeply with the essence of my 'Urban Prairie' collection."



She said that from elevated evening dresses to the impeccably tailored pantsuits and jackets, every garment is designed to be not just a statement piece, but a versatile staple that can be worn with ease and confidence.

"In a world where practicality and style go hand in hand, wearable fashion becomes a reflection of our ever-evolving lifestyles," Gill added.

Designer Varun Chakkilam said that in the 2024 Lakme Fashion Week, he showcased an array of wearable fashion. He sees the shift

as practical. Chakkilam added: "This shift reflects a growing preference for garments that seamlessly blend style with practicality, allowing individuals to effortlessly transition between various activities and settings."

The designer, who has styled the likes of Virat Kohli, Pooja Hegde, Vijay Devarakonda and Nagarjuna among many others, said that the emphasis on wearable fashion "underscores a broader societal shift towards comfort, convenience, and sustainability in clothing choices, highlighting its significance in contemporary style."

Designer Prreeti Jain for the label Nirmooaha agrees that wearable fashion took the spotlight this season with a focus on comfort, versatility, and inclusivity.

"Designers showcased layering outfits, flared bottoms, practical details, and sustainable options, offering a blend of casual elegance and functionality suitable for diverse body types and occasions," said Jain.

PEANUTS



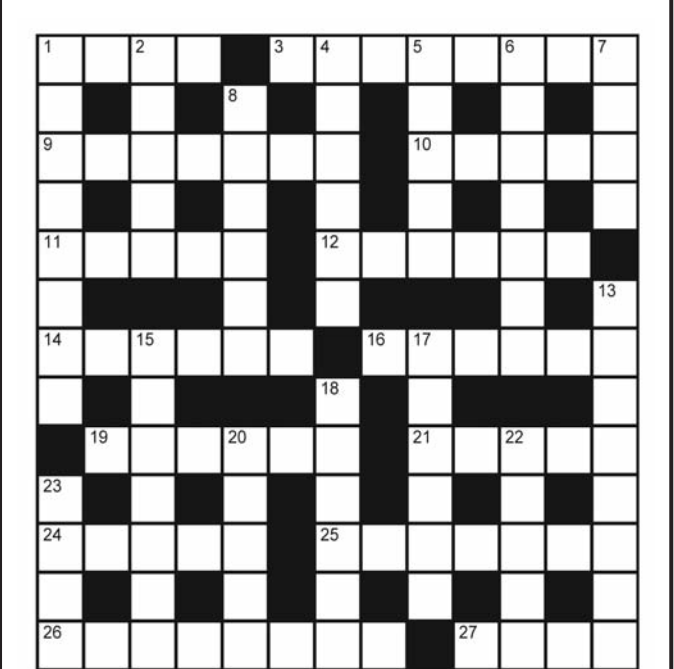
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



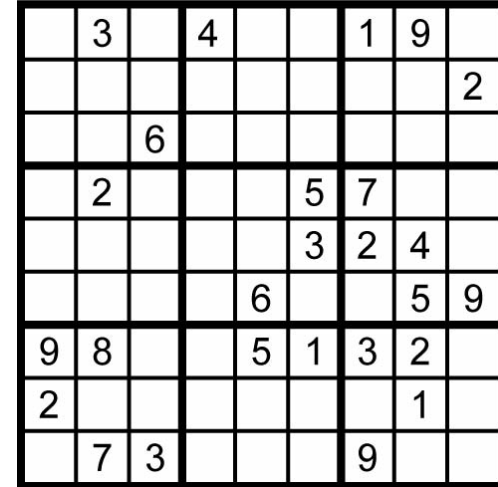
FUN post CROSSWORD



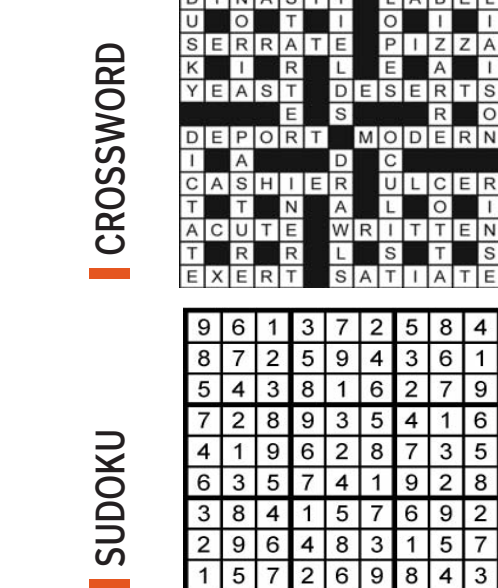
- Across**
- 1 Swimming site
 - 3 Embarrassed (3-5)
 - 9 Evil
 - 10 Tall tales
 - 11 Boredom
 - 12 Pet shop purchase
 - 14 Logger's call
 - 16 Attractor
 - 19 Riddle
 - 21 Maneuver
 - 24 Clan emblem
 - 25 Find objectionable
 - 26 Reverse a decision
 - 27 Hateful
 - Down**
 - 1 Sweet pepper
 - 2 Synthetic fibre
 - 4 Omission word
 - 5 Vestibule
 - 6 It's animated, at times
 - 7 Potluck choice
 - 8 Work area
 - 13 Large primitive fish
 - 15 Sea cow
 - 17 Back up
 - 18 Flip-flop
 - 20 Spunky one
 - 22 Banish
 - 23 A Ringling brother

SUDOKU

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



SOLUTIONS



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown

FOUNDATION DAY

Dignitaries, including Rajya Sabha MP Subhashish Khuntia, during an event in Puri to mark the foundation day celebration of the press club in the Holy City, Wednesday



MONEY LAUNDERING CASES

ED FACES SC WRATH

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: Keeping an accused in custody without trial is akin to detention which hampers liberty, the Supreme Court said Wednesday while deprecating the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) practice of filing supplementary chargesheets in money laundering cases to defeat the accused's right of getting default bail.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta took exception to the ED filing four supplementary chargesheets, the latest March 1, 2024, in a money laundering case arising from alleged illegal mining in Jharkhand.

The SC was hearing the default bail plea of Prem Prakash, an alleged associate of former Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren. Prakash was arrested in August 2022 after raids during which two AK-47 rifles, 60 live rounds and two magazines were claimed to have been found at his home in Ranchi. He was booked for the offences of money laundering and under the Arms Act.

The bench told Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, appearing for the ED, about the investigation in the case still continuing despite four supplementary chargesheets having been filed.



Trial has to begin when you arrest an accused. You cannot deny the benefit of default bail for delayed commencement of trial. Default bail is a right of the accused and it cannot be denied by filing supplementary chargesheet

JUSTICE SANJIV KHANNA

"We are putting you (ED) on notice. (Under the law) You cannot arrest a person without the investigation in the case being complete. A person cannot be put in custody without the commencement of trial. It is akin to detention and affects the liberty of an individual. In some cases, we have to settle this issue," the bench told Raju.

Justice Khanna said an accused cannot be denied the benefit of default bail by filing supplementary chargesheets.

"The whole object of default bail is that you do not arrest until investigation is complete. You cannot say that a trial will not commence unless the investigation in the case is com-

plete. You cannot keep on filing supplementary chargesheets and keep the person in jail without trial," he said.

Justice Khanna said the petitioner has been behind bars for 18 months and supplementary chargesheets are being filed one after the other, which is eventually delaying the trial.

"This is bothering us. Trial has to begin when you arrest an accused. You cannot deny the benefit of default bail for delayed commencement of trial. Default bail is a right of the accused and it cannot be denied by filing supplementary chargesheet," Justice Khanna said.

He said even Section 45 of

PMLA does not bar the grant of bail on grounds of long incarceration.

"We have held this in the Manish Sisodia case (Delhi excise policy scam case), if there is long incarceration and undue delay in commencement of trial, the court can grant bail. Section 45 does not bar grant of bail because this right flows from Article 21 (protection of life and personal liberty) of the Constitution," Justice Khanna said.

The bench posed various questions to Raju, who sought a month's time to respond to the queries, saying the accused is an influential person, and if released on bail, he may influence the witnesses and tamper with the evidence.

The SC asked Raju to respond to all questions put forth by the bench within a month and posted the matter for further hearing April 29.

Advocate Siddharth Agarwal, appearing for Prakash, said when the initial FIR was lodged, his client's name was not there and no transaction had been found between him and the co-accused.

He said the statements of two crucial witnesses do not directly implicate him.

The top court directed the special PMLA court, where Prakash is being tried, to expedite the hearing.

Try to become a medium for employment: Dash

Dadhichi Group is one of the leading educational institutions in the state. The year 2004 marked the beginning of Dadhichi Educational Trust with a mission to bridge the gap between the rural and the urban styles of imparting and acquiring education. After experiencing some troubles in the early days, the group now has five institutions under its portfolio.

Manoj Kumar Dash, Chairman of Dadhichi Group of Institutions, is the entrepreneur who has steered the ship into the right direction and transformed it into a centre of excellence in teaching, learning and research. In a conversation with **Orissa POST**, Dash shares his journey. Excerpts...



■ **How was your life in early days?**

■ I was born in a small village in Ganjam district. My father was a government employee. After completing my higher secondary, I did engineering in Chennai. Then I started working for a construction company.

■ **What made you quit your job in the construction company?**

■ While working in the construction company, my superiors' behaviour was not good towards me. I left that job and returned to Bhubaneswar. Under the guidance of my uncle, I ventured into real estate business in which I used to sell plots, flats and residential houses. This is how I was earning my bread in early days.

■ **How did Dadhichi Group come into existence?**

■ My company got a golden opportunity to construct an educational institution. From there I was motivated to open an educational institution of my own. My sacrificing nature inspired me to follow in the footsteps of the great seer Dadhichi. First I started with in-

stitutes like Dadhichi ITI and later D.Pharma. Then to expand our business and provide more courses we started Dadhichi Public School. As I was an engineering student, it was my dream to open a polytechnic institute which later became a reality.

■ **What were the hurdles that you faced while establishing your organisation?**

■ Land, building and road communication were the primary challenges. But the word 'impossible' is not in my dictionary. Though I faced multiple difficulties including financial troubles, I was able to overcome

them by the grace of God. I stood strong against all odds.

■ **What future do you see for Dadhichi Group?**

■ My aim in life is to transform Dadhichi Group into a university. There are plans in pipeline to open institutes for MBA, Hotel Management, Drama and Nursing. I also wish to add a leadership educational institute to develop society through innovative ideas.

■ **What advice do you have for young entrepreneurs?**

■ My advice for youngsters is to become a good person by serving the society. Put continuous efforts to become self-reliant. If possible try to become a medium for employment to people which will result in a healthy and thriving society.



AE held for taking ₹50K bribe

Bhubaneswar: Vigilance sleuths arrested a lady assistant engineer (AE) for accepting ₹50,000 as bribe from a contractor, Wednesday. Vigilance sources said Sangeeta Mohapatra, an AE of Khurda block, was taken into custody by the sleuths in her office while accepting ₹50,000 from a contractor for passing final bills. The entire bribe amount has been recovered and seized from Sangeeta. Following the successful trap, simultaneous searches were made at two locations related to the AE from disproportionate asset (DA) angle, Vigilance sources said. A case under Section 7 of the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018 has been registered against the official, and an investigation is in progress against her, they said.

Cops raid Jharpada jail; narcotics seized

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 20: A police team raided Jharpada Special Jail here Wednesday and seized ganja and tobacco items, an officer said.

A police team, led by Bhubaneswar Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Prateek Singh, raided the jail early in the morning a day after four inmates of the jail were injured during a clash between two groups.

Speaking to mediapersons, the DCP said the police team included two additional DCPs, five ACPs, 11 inspectors, and 22 SIs. "We searched 35 male wards in five blocks, 21 cells, kitchen,



common area and theatre inside the jail. Maximum wards are clean and jail staffers are also conducting raids on a regular interval," Singh said.

During the raid, a small quantity of ganja, gutkha, khaini, bidi, (tobacco), matchboxes, lighter and some empty gutkha sachets have been seized from inside the jail, he said.

A clash broke out between two groups in the jail. Shambhunath Barik, an inmate, was seriously injured in the clash. He was admitted to the Capital Hospital here for treatment.

The jail superintendent reported the clash to the local police station.

Police said the brawl erupted following a petty argument. An inmate, Chakara Barik, and his associates assaulted Shambhunath, who sustained minor injuries.

Chakara is facing trial in over 20 cases. He was arrested following an encounter by the police in Khandagiri area in May 2022.



Commuters caught in rain in Raj Mahal area of Bhubaneswar, Wednesday

PIC: BIKASH NAYAK



An inundated road in Cuttack's Friends Colony, Wednesday

PIC: RAIKISHORE MOHANTY

HEAVY RAIN LASHES STATE

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 20: Heavy rain lashed many parts of the state, disrupting normal life to some extent besides bringing down day temperatures considerably, Wednesday.

The regional centre of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here has issued an orange warning (be prepared) for lightning, thunderstorm and rain for nine districts—Keonjhar, Angul, Dhenkanal, Jajpur, Kandhamal, Kalahandi, Bolangir, Subarnapur and Boudh—Wednesday.

Many parts of Khurda district including the state capital of Bhubaneswar, neighbouring Nayagarh, Puri, Jagatsinghpur, Cuttack, Ganjam and Kandhamal districts received intense to very intense spell of rainfall (2 to 3 cm per hour) Wednesday morn-

ing, the weatherman said, adding that the heavy rain was accompanied by gusty wind.

A report from Nuapada said that trees were uprooted at various places and caused extensive damage. 'Konna Lok Mahotsav' in Nuapada was cancelled Tuesday after Nor'wester wreaked havoc and destroyed 40 stalls and the stage at the venue.

Heavy rains accompanied by strong winds uprooted several trees in the Dhenkanal town. Fire Services personnel were engaged in clearing roads blocked due to tree felling.

IMD sources said the highest 72.2 mm

of rainfall was recorded at Gandia in Dhenkanal district, followed by Bhuban (70 mm), Athmallik in Angul district (68 mm) and Kantamal in Boudh district (66.2 mm). Rainfall activities were reported in almost all districts, the weather office said.

The twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack recorded 29.4 and 25.5 degrees Celsius, respectively, which was 3.7 and 7.2 degrees below normal temperature, respectively. However, the day temperature is likely to rise by 2 to 6 degrees Celsius after next 24 hours.

The IMD said nine districts - Keonjhar, Angul, Dhenkanal, Jajpur, Kandhamal, Kalahandi, Bolangir,

BHUBANESWAR AND CUTTACK RECORDED 29.4 AND 25.5 DEGREES CELSIUS, RESPECTIVELY, WHICH WAS 3.7 AND 7.2 DEGREES BELOW NORMAL TEMPERATURE, RESPECTIVELY

DAY TEMPERATURE IS LIKELY TO RISE BY 2 TO 6 DEGREES CELSIUS AFTER NEXT 24 HOURS, IMD SAID WEDNESDAY

Navy holds security exercise off state coast

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 20: To enhance its coastal security measures, the Indian Navy along with other government agencies started a two-day exercise, 'Sagar Kavach I', near Talasari-Udaypur coast of Balasore, Wednesday.

Besides Indian Navy, Marine Police, Coast Guard, Forest, Fisheries and Intelligence departments participated in the mock drill along the coast.

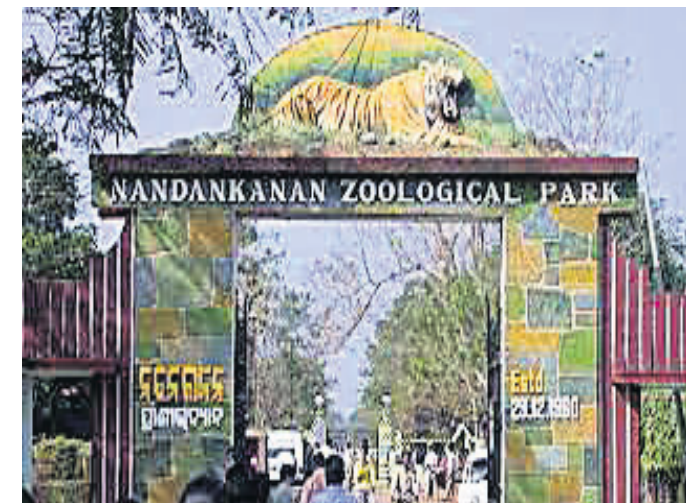
The personnel of the agencies were split into two groups: Blue team and Red team. The Red team simulated the act of terrorists, who infiltrate into the coastal areas through the sea routes and try to plant bombs or other explosives in crowded or strategic locations. The Blue team, in close coordination with all coastal security stakeholders, launched a counter offensive to foil the attempt of the infiltrated ultras.

The personnel also checked fishing vessels and trawlers during their drill while people without the prescribed colours were not allowed to venture into the sea during the exercise.

The Sagar Kavach is being conducted twice a year since the 26/11 terror attack in Mumbai. It aims at strengthening surveillance, detection and identification of enemy forces in the sea, developing marine fishing community as 'eyes and ears' of security agencies and revalidating the communication and coastal security measures in place. The local residents also play an important role in the exercise. The exercise tests the efficacy of all agencies involved in ensuring coastal security and the level of coordination among them.

NZP MULLS ENDING NIGHT BIRD TRAIL

Zoo authorities are trying to fix issues that stop the visitors from coming to enjoy quality time during evening hours



The Zoo had launched 'Nandankanan Bird Walk' March 10 following a discussion with forest department authorities. Prima facie, the initiative aimed to hold the programme every Sunday with visitors on first-come-first-serve basis

Now, the Zoo authorities are thinking of roping in a number of universities like Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT) and Centurion University of Technology and Management (CUTM). The purpose of the move is to get the interested students for the trail

due to a number of factors. On the other hand, several experts have opined that artificial lights during the night hours might cause disorientation and disturbance among birds, causing them to hoot and squeak. This is particularly undesirable for nocturnal birds such as owls, nightjars and nightingale.

Now, the zoo authorities are thinking of roping in a number of universities like Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT) and Centurion University of Technology and Management (CUTM). The purpose of the move is to get the interested students for the trail which might see a surge in the number of visitors. Also, the authorities will address the mismanagement issues and try to fix them.



PAKHALA FEST: CMC Mayor Subhash Singh, deputy mayor Damayanti Majhi, and corporators enjoy traditional Odia cuisine on the occasion of Pakhala Divas on Barabati Fort premises in Cuttack, Wednesday

Odisha Pond Week by Youth4Water Plus

During the week-long campaign, the youths will engage in host of activities aimed at creating awareness about importance of water



ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 20: The Youth4Water Plus Wednesday has launched Odisha Pond Week, as a part of World Water Day celebrations taking place March 22.

WASH Specialist with Unicef, Odisha Shipra Saxena said that the campaign aims to reach out to youths by creating awareness

and community-level action programmes around Water, Sanitation, Hygiene (WASH) and climate change across Odisha in collaboration with government and non-governmental organisations.

"As climate change gets worse, groundwater will become more and more critical like we are noticing in Bangalore presently.

Campaign manager Dharmananda Sundaraya informed that during the week-long campaign, the youths will engage in activities including cleaning up water bodies, teaching the community about water conservation, making posters and paintings, and creating awareness about the importance of water among others.

Pantiss Group CEO Stalin Nayak said, "We aim to rejuvenate urban and rural water bodies naturally, making them healthy, sustainable resources for our communities, while involving youths in raising awareness about their importance and the impacts of climate change."

Aakash to offer up to 90% scholarship

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 20: Aakash Educational Services Limited (AESL) Wednesday announced various scholarships prior to the commencement of its new session scheduled to begin in April.

The first scholarship is the Instant Admission Cum Scholarship Test (IACST), offering up to 90 per cent scholarship for admission into Medical, Engineering, and Foundation courses. Additionally, Aakash will provide special discounts to children of martyrs, defense personnel and terrorism-affected individuals.

Chief Business Officer at Aakash Educational Services Limited, Anup Agarwal, said, "We are dedicated to providing accessible and impactful educational opportunities for students across India. Through initiatives like IACST and our scholarship programmes, we aim to empower deserving students to achieve their academic and career aspirations."

The online IACST offers students immediate scholarship awards and opportunities for instant admission. Students can take the exam online and receive details of their earned scholarships instantly, enabling them to secure instant admission. The online test, lasting 60 minutes, can be taken between 10am and 8pm on designated exam days.

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AFFIDAVIT

I, Yareen Shariff, D/o Dr. Ishaque Shariff Resident of 6/60 Main Road, Gandhi Nagar, Gopalpur, Pin-761002, Odisha declared by this affidavit No. 68 AA 515755 Dtd.-29.02.2024 that now onwards I shall be known as Esha Shariff for all future purposes.

2 new earthworm species found in Koraput

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 20: Two previously unknown species of large earthworms were discovered in the Eastern Ghats of the state recently, researchers from the Central University of Odisha (CUO), Koraput informed here Wednesday.

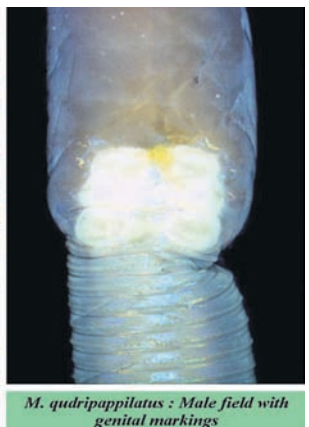
The researchers from CUO with scientists from Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala, have discovered these two new earthworm species in a collaborative effort.

The CUO sources said that Ayusmita Naik had collected some large earthworm specimens from Rani Duduma and the Jeypore Ghati area of Koraput during an earthworm diversity study conducted in different parts of Koraput.

The study was conducted under the supervision of Sharat Kumar Palita, dean of the School of Biodiversity and Conservation of Natural Resources of the Central University of Odisha (CUO).



The specimens were examined in the laboratory. Later, with the support of R Paliwal, retired scientist of the Zoological Survey of India and earthworm specialists Prasantha Narayanan and AP Thomas of Advanced Centre of Environmental Studies and Sustainable Development, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala these two large earthworm varieties were identified as two species which are completely new to science.



They have been identified as Megascolexjeporeghatiensis and Megascolexquadripapillatus. The report of these two new species from Koraput has been published in the reputed international taxonomic journal Zootaxa.

"The two earthworm species belong to Genus Megascolex, to a group of species characterised by two pairs of spermathecal pores in intersegmental furrows 7/8/9, holandric, seminal vesicles

in segments 9 and 12, absence of penial setae and calciferous glands. These two new species occur in deciduous forests with brownish gravel-loamy soils," said Naik.

"With this discovery, the total number of Megascolex species in the world has increased to 70, of which 34 are found in India alone," informed the CUO researcher. The researcher added that in India, mostly all Megascolex species are restricted to the southern portion of the Western Ghats mountain ranges. But now with the discovery of these new species, the range of Megascolex groups of earthworms has been further extended into northern Peninsular India and into northern Eastern Ghats.

These two new species are anecic worms, who consume fibrous plant material like barks, woody parts, and leafy material including pebbles and rocky soil. As they live in forest soil with high organic biomass, they indicate soil health and maintain soil productivity.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FORESTS

Anandabana fostering a sense of connection to environment



ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 20: International Day of Forests 2024 will be celebrated on the theme, 'Forests and Innovation' Thursday. The Forest Environment and Climate Change department will host a special event to celebrate the day at Sookhana Bhawan where Satayabrata Sahu Additional Chief Secretary of department will be present as chief guest.

Ahead of Assembly and General Lok Sabha elections, the state government had taken some steps towards forest safety and strengthening of Forest Rights Act for tribals.

Recently, in a historic move, the Odisha government awarded Habitat Rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) to 32 villages of Paudi Bhuyan Community in Deogarh district, marking a significant milestone under the Mo Jungle Jami Yojana (MJJM). Chief Secretary Pradeep Kumar Jena handed over the Habitat Rights titles to the community leaders at Lok Seva Bhawan.

The Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik recently inaugurated Anandabana at Shankarpur in Bhubaneswar. Surrounded by lush greenery and the soothing melodies of nature, he immersed himself in the tranquil atmosphere, connecting deeply with the serene surroundings.

Anandabana aims to establish green infrastructure in the

urban landscape to enhance the overall air quality index, thereby aligning with the broader vision of environmental stewardship.

Spread over 89.05 acres, it offers a range of amenities to visitors.

The amenities include ample vehicle parking space, benches for relaxation, gazebos, rain shelters, children's play area, public facilities and kiosks serving healthy food. Beyond its recreational offerings, Anandabana also serves as a platform for nurturing future environmental leaders.

The site features 550 metres of rock trails, 32,750 square feet of water bodies, enhancing the serene ambiance and providing habitat for various aquatic species.

This initiative aims to foster a profound sense of connection to the environment among the residents of the Capital city.

JK Panigrahi, an environmentalist said, "Forests being habitats for over two-thirds of terrestrial wild animals and plants, and the precious source of innumerable goods and services, their protection and conservation remain our prime concern. However, increasing threat of deforestation not only deteriorates the overall health of our planet, but also depletes their rich biodiversity. They have been the casualties of various developmental projects in recent years."

Finland tops world happiness index

Finland remained the world's happiest country for a seventh straight year in an annual UN-sponsored World Happiness Report published Wednesday. India ranked 126, the same as last year, in the happiness index.

Nordic countries kept their places among the 10 most cheerful, with Denmark, Iceland and Sweden trailing Finland.

Afghanistan, plagued by a humanitarian catastrophe since the Taliban regained control in 2020, stayed at the bottom of the 143 countries surveyed.

For the first time since the report was published more than a decade ago, the United States and Germany were not among the 20 happiest nations, coming in 23rd and 24th respectively.

In turn, Costa Rica and Kuwait entered the top 20 at 12 and 13. The report noted the happiest



countries no longer included any of the world's largest countries.

"In the top 10 countries only the Netherlands and Australia have populations over 15 million. In the whole of the top 20, only Canada and the UK have populations over 30 million."

The sharpest decline in happiness since 2006-10 was noted in Afghanistan, Lebanon and Jordan, while the Eastern European countries Serbia,

Bulgaria and Latvia reported the biggest increases.

The happiness ranking is based on individuals' self-assessed evaluations of life satisfaction, as well as GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom, generosity and corruption.

Growing inequality

Jennifer De Paola, a happiness researcher at the University of Helsinki in Finland, told AFP that Finns' close connection to nature and healthy work-life balance were key contributors to their life satisfaction.

In addition, Finns may have a "more attainable understanding of what a successful life is", compared to for example the United States where success is often equated with financial gain, she said.

Finns' strong welfare society,

trust in state authorities, low levels of corruption and free healthcare and education were also key.

"Finnish society is permeated by a sense of trust, freedom, and high level of autonomy," De Paola said.

This year's report also found that younger generations were happier than their older peers in most of the world's regions -- but not all.

In North America, Australia and New Zealand, happiness among groups under 30 has dropped dramatically since 2006-10, with older generations now happier than the young.

By contrast, in Central and Eastern Europe, happiness increased substantially at all ages during the same period, while in Western Europe people of all ages reported similar levels of happiness.

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Farmers lose interest in cultivation

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jajpur, March 20: Due to various reasons farmers in Odisha are slowly losing interest in cultivation as a means of livelihood. The total number of farmers who have registered their names for the Rabi season in 17 districts of the state has decreased considerably in comparison to last year. This year 57,804 farmers have registered their names by March 16 while the figure stood at 1,41,461 on the same date last year, sources stated here Wednesday.

The neglect of the district administrations in paddy procurement, lack of irrigation facilities, diseases and pest attacks and other allied problems have pushed the farmers to the edge. As a result they are losing interest in agriculture and cultivation.

The state registrar of cooperative societies (RCS) has expressed concern over this declining trend. He has instructed



the assistant registrar to conduct a review and find out the reasons as to why the number of registered farmers has decreased substantially.

Recently, farmers in Korei block of this district alleged that the paddy crops failed to grow into rice panicle as an unknown pest devoured the roots of the saplings. Despite urging the administration to look into the matter, there was no help, angry farmers alleged. They added that no one came to their help.

This year 14,341 farmers have registered their names in Balasore district, 23,922 in Bargarh, 2,638 in Bolangir, 1,634 in Boudh, 1,205 in

Cuttack, 1,370 in Jajpur, 521 in Jharsuguda, 8,027 in Kalahandi, 148 in Khurda, 2,928 in Koraput, 140 in Mayurbhanj, 384 in Nabarangpur, 2,979 in Nuapada, 7,575 in Puri, 4,705 in Sambalpur and 11,137 in Subarnapur district.

Incidentally the districts of Bargarh and Sambalpur that are known as the 'rice bowl' of Odisha have seen a substantial decline in farmer registrations. More than half of the farmers have stayed away.

In the industrially rich Jajpur district, the Irrigation department has said that 66,613 hectares out of 1,45,450 hectares of farmlands get water. However,

farmers alleged that the figures provided are not correct. They stated that more than half of the identified farmlands do not get water through irrigation.

Sources in the Jajpur district administration said that the Irrigation department provides water for only 10,000 hectares during the Rabi season by drawing water from Brahmani and Kharasrota rivers. They claimed that the rest of the farmlands are get water through lift irrigation, bore wells, WHS and other sources.

Also the delay in paddy procurement in the last Kharif season and other irregularities has allegedly turned away the farmers from cultivation. Jajpur district experienced 38 per cent less rainfall in June, 37 per cent in July and 20 per cent in August last year. This affected the growth of crops. A delay of one-and-a-half months in paddy procurement also added to their woes, prompting farmers to look for other means of livelihood.



FESTIVAL OF COLOURS: A woman and her daughter check water guns and colours at a shop in Tall Square in Sambalpur, Wednesday ahead of the Holi festival

2-day conference on Material Science held

POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, March 20: A two-day national conference on the theme 'Recent Advances in Material Science' (RAMS) was recently held at the south campus of Dharanidhar University here. The conference organised by the Department of Chemistry, aimed at bringing together academia and industry on one platform in order to envision models of sustainable development by harnessing the power of various materials. The event was held March 15 and 16, 2024 and witnessed the participation of eminent scholars from various fields.

In the inaugural session of the conference, former chief scientist of CSIR-IMMT Bhubaneswar, Dr SK Biswal was present as chief guest. Renowned scientist, Dr SC Khattoi was present as the guest of honour.



Underscoring the significance of the academic gathering, the speakers lauded the varsity for conceptualising and organising a conference of this kind. Vice-Chancellor of the Dharanidhar University, Professor Pratap Kumar Mohanty and Chairman, PG Council, Professor Satyabrata Mishra were among the other dignitaries on the dais.

Several experts, such as Professor Dipankar Chattopadhyay of Calcutta University, Dr Trilochan Mishra, chief scientist of CSIR-NML, Jamshedpur, Professor Debabrata Pradhan of IIT Kharagpur, Dr

Gokarneswar Sahoo of NIT Rourkela, Dr KSK Varadwaj of Ravenshaw University and Dr Bikash Kumar Jena belonging to CSIR-IMMT, Bhubaneswar spoke on a range of topics connected to the theme of the conference. The speakers specifically stressed on the need to explore the sustainable materials that ensure technological progress without harming the environment.

Dr Ramanuj Narayan (Director, CSIR-IMMT Bhubaneswar), the chief guest of the valedictory session enthused the scholarly gathering by urging students and researchers to extensively study the untapped potential of this district. He also declared that an MoU would be signed between CSIR-IMMT and Dharanidhar University, which would contribute to research in the region.

'Customer' kills grocery shop owner in Bhadrak

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhadrak, March 20: A grocery shop owner died after being assaulted by an irate customer here Wednesday. The deceased was identified as Bijay Panda who ran a grocery shop at Patharadi Chowk under Town Police limits here.

As he did every day, Bijay opened his shop Wednesday morning at around 10.00am. Soon, a customer identified as Kamesh, came to the shop to buy certain items, the total bill for which was ₹180. However, Kamesh only paid ₹140. This infuriated Bijay, who demanded that the remaining ₹ 40 be paid



immediately. A heated argument broke out between the two during which Kamesh allegedly landed a couple of blows on Bijay and then pushed him. As Bijay fell, his head thudded against the hard floor and he lost consciousness. Locals immediately rushed Bijay to the district head-

quarters hospital here where doctors pronounced him dead on arrival. The accused Kamesh meanwhile fled the scene and till the time of writing this copy, he is absconding.

Senior police officials visited the spot and initiated a probe. An FIR has been lodged and efforts are on to trace Kamesh and arrest him, police said. A relative of the deceased informed that the accused is a resident of Ward No 2 and is a renowned anti-social. "We have come to know that the accused had abused my uncle (Bijay) and hit him. We want exemplary punishment against the accused," said the relative.

Man gets 20 yrs in prison for rape

POST NEWS NETWORK

Baripada, March 20: A court in Mayurbhanj district sentenced Wednesday a 40-year-old man to rigorous imprisonment for 20 years for raping a mentally-retarded woman five years ago. It also imposed a fine of ₹10,000 on convict Mahadev Singh, and in case of default, he has to remain in jail for another six months. The court convicted him of raping the woman, aged 25, in 2019 and pronounced the sentence. Special Public Prosecutor Monoranjan Patnaik said. The judgement was based on the statements of 21 witnesses and medical report, he informed. The court directed the Mayurbhanj district legal services authority to pay ₹5 lakh as compensation to the victim. Patnaik told reporters that the convict had forcibly dragged the mentally-challenged woman from her residence to a desolate place and raped her. The woman was alone in her house when Singh entered the premises. The police registered a case under various sections of the IPC after the woman's father lodged a complaint and arrested the accused.

Sundargarh Collector holds meeting with party leaders

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, March 20: District Collector Gavali Parag Harshad chaired an all party meeting in Sundargarh Wednesday in presence of other senior administrative officials. The meeting was conducted regarding the upcoming Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in the district and the proper implementation of the model code of conduct (MCC).

The Collector informed representatives of the various political parties about the number of booths, number of voters, the respective returning officers for the Lok Sabha and Assembly seats. Besides, they were informed about the preparations being done by the administration to conduct polls peacefully.

The topmost officer of the district stressed on the importance of maintaining the model code of conduct in the district and informed the representatives about the rules pertaining to the polls. He also laid emphasis on holding free, fair and peaceful



elections in the district. Those present in the meeting were Talsara MLA, Bhabani Shankar Bhoi, BJP district secretary Bhesraj Ratha, member of party's state legal cell Prabhakar Kumar Nanda, district vice-president of Congress Ajit Prasad and Parsuram Saraf, Radha Mohan Patel from AAP and BJD vice-president Jaynarayan Tripathy. Sundargarh, despite being a border district with presence of Maoists and inter-state goon elements, has hardly witnessed any disturbances during the elections in the past. The Collector said that he would like the same situation to prevail in the upcoming polls.

Wildlife thriving in Sundargarh

IMPLEMENTATION OF INNOVATIVE MEASURES LEADS TO PRESERVATION AND INCREASE IN FOREST COVER, FLORA, FAUNA

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, Mar 20: Sundargarh is the second largest district in Odisha state and spans over 9,712 square kilometres of which forest cover accounts for 4,232.57 sq kms. Efforts are being taken to preserve this forest cover and conserve wildlife. In recent times, the spotting of a black panther and a Royal Bengal Tiger are proof of wildlife blossoming within the forests.

District forest officer (DFO) of Bonai range, Lalit Patra informed Wednesday that a number of measures are being taken to protect forests and wildlife. "In April 2023 our Forest department started an ambitious, holistic effort aimed at wildlife



conservation and preserving bio-diversity. Initially three forest ranges namely Jarla, Sole and Koira were taken as pilot projects and the desired results were achieved," Patra said.

"Landscape level approach was adopted using modern technology for scientific monitoring and to ensure wildlife conservation. Due to the process, flora and fauna also thrived. We also identified various corridors for wildlife movement and that helped," informed Patra.

The DFO added that utmost care is being taken for habitat restoration. He also thanked the

local population and those living inside jungles for preserving forests. "Their contributions cannot be ignored," Patra said.

Continuation of eco-friendly development agenda, lessening the impact of mining, fortifying habitat management, intensifying anti-poaching measures, technology-driven data collection and addressing human-animal conflict have also contributed in preservation and restoration of forests, officials said.

It should be stated here that Sundargarh district has three forest divisions namely Bonai, Rourkela and Sundargarh. DFO

Sundargarh, Pradeep Mirase had stated a few days back that active participation of locals is helping in protection of forests. "Trap cameras have been installed at vital junctions to keep a tab on movement of animals. We are also taking steps to prevent forest fires," Mirase had stated.

Other than the appearances of the rare panther and tiger, the varieties of birds in the forests have also grown during winter, according to Rourkela DFO Jasobant Sethi. He has also implemented a harsh crackdown on poachers. "We have recently seized more than 100 parrot chicks that were being smuggled and arrested a few people," Sethi stated.

At present all the three divisions are home to different varieties of wild animals and birds including honey badgers, civet cats, spotted cats, peacocks, mongooses, bears, porcupines, barking deer, hares, wild boars, jungle hens, sloth bears, elephants, wild pigs, mouse deer, four-horned antelope and langurs.

Brooms script success story for Karlaghati women

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sundargarh, March 20: In the heart of this district, nestled among the lush greenery of Karlaghati, a tale of resilience and triumph is being written by a group of tribal women. Against the backdrop of troubled times and the dwindling of traditional livelihoods, these women have found a sustainable alternative for success, thus becoming beacons of hope for their community.

Karlaghati, a remote village under the Kukuridihi gram panchayat in Subdega block, has long grappled with the uncertainties associated with agriculture. As farming lost its appeal and the availability of minor forest produces declined, the need for innovative livelihoods became urgent. Twenty women from the Karlaghati Vana Surakhya Samiti (VSS) then embarked on a journey to rebuild their economic fortunes. They took to the broom business and it proved very profitable.



these enterprising women have not only sustained their families but have also enhanced economic growth, generating lakhs of rupees through their entrepreneurial endeavours. Central to their success has been the support extended by the Odisha Forestry Sector Development Project-II (OFSDP-II), particularly its re-

volving fund, which has empowered over 1,400 women across 31 VSSs in the region.

Under the mentorship of Digambar Upadhyay, team leader and Manoranjan Mallick, development officer of partner NGO, 'SEWAK', women of Karlaghati navigated successfully the complexities of business planning and market consoli-

dation. Armed with determination and resilience, they ventured into the market and within a short span of time, their brooms gained traction, fetching them revenues of ₹2.20 lakhs in just a year.

What sets these women apart is their vision beyond borders. By leveraging their ancestral craft and reaching out to traders

from other states, they have elevated their profession into a thriving enterprise. With each phase of growth, they've repaid loans and reinvested in their business driven by the unwavering support of Karlaghati VSS, Sundargarh Forest division, Ujalpur Forest Management department and 'SEWAK'.

Sushma Soreng, secretary of the 'Maria Mahila Self Help Group', embodies the collective ambition of these women. She envisions a future where their business transcends state borders and becomes a symbol of empowerment and economic independence for tribal women everywhere.

In the heart of Karlaghati, amidst the rustling leaves and the whispers of resilience, a new narrative unfolds - one of empowerment, ingenuity and the indomitable spirit of tribal women forging their own destinies. The brooms they weave not only sweep away dirt but also usher in a new era of opportunity and prosperity for their community.

Youth killed in road mishap

Khallikote: In a tragic incident, a 31-year-old youth died after being run over by a truck near Gurapalli toll plaza on National Highway-16 under this police limits in Ganjam district Wednesday afternoon. The deceased was identified as Kulamani Nayak, a resident of Bheijputa Odia Sahi locality. Officials said that Kulamani was going to Khallikote for some work Wednesday morning on his two-wheeler (No-KL 09-AS-8934) when a goods truck hit him. After he was flung from his bike, the speeding truck ran over him killing him on the spot.

EAST COAST RAILWAY
(1) E-Tender Notice No. ST-SBP-TENDER-2024-07 Dt. 14.03.2024
Name of the Work : TELECOM ZONAL WORK IN THE CONTROL SECTION UNDER JURISDICTION OF SENIOR SECTION ENGINEER/TELECOM/SAMBALPUR, SENIOR SECTION ENGINEER/TELECOM/BALANGIR OF SAMBALPUR DIVISION OF EAST COAST RAILWAY FOR A PERIOD OF TWELVE MONTHS.
Tender Value : ₹ 69,03,118.50, Bid Security : ₹ 1,38,100/-
(2) E-Tender Notice No. ST-SBP-TENDER-2024-08 Dt. 14.03.2024
Name of the Work : PROVISION OF COMPREHENSIVE ANNUAL MAINTENANCE CONTRACT (CAMC) OF SMPS BASED POWER SUPPLY SYSTEM BY M/S HBL POWER SYSTEM LTD. AT 09 INSTALLATIONS OVER SAMBALPUR DIVISION FOR 3 (THREE) YEARS.
Tender Value : ₹ 37,83,441.96, EMD : ₹ 75,700/-, Cost of tender document : 3,540/-
Tender closing date & time : at 11:00 hrs. of 08.04.2024 (for both tenders).
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.ireps.gov.in
Note : The prospective tenderers are advised to visit the website 15 (Fifteen) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes/corrigenda issued for this tender.
Divisional Railway Manager (S & T), Sambalpur
PR-1186/O/23-24

**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER
MINOR IRRIGATION DIVISION, BOUDH**
Letter No.1281/Date: 18.03.2024
Corrigendum Call Notice
No.A-1758: With reference to the Tender Call Notice No.23/BMID/2023-2024 vide Letter No.1117, dtd.11.03.2024 of the aforesaid tender call notice has been revised as follows.

01	Availability of Bid document	From 21.05.2024 at 10.00 AM to 03.06.2024 at 05.00 P.M. in website (www.tendersorissa.gov.in)
02	Last date & time of receipt of Bid	03.06.2024 at 05.00 PM through online
03	Date of Opening of Bid documents	04.06.2024 at 11.00 AM in the office of the SE, M.I. Division, Boudh
04	Date of Lottery if required	07.06.2024

Further details can be seen from the Government of Odisha website - www.tendersorissa.gov.in.
Sd./- Superintending Engineer, MI Division, Boudh
OIPR-32279/11/0030/2324

FOCUS SOCIETY

THE LONELINESS ECONOMY



Capitalism, in all its forms, breeds loneliness. Therefore, the struggle to end loneliness is a struggle against the very foundations of capitalism

individuals into a perpetual cycle of labour and consumption, where fulfilment remains elusive. This is because the essence of these aspirations inherently lies in collective experiences and relationships rather than in the accumulation of material possessions or individual success. In a collectivist society that prioritises sharing, cooperation, and empathy, these ideals find fertile ground for realisation, as they are inherently intertwined with the well-being of the community as a whole. Thus, there exists a fundamental misalignment between the individualistic ethos perpetuated by capitalism and the communal nature of human fulfilment and contentment.

Capitalism has eroded the collective foundations of society to such an extent that even the hyper-connected world of social media cannot change it. It is central to the production of insecure, lonely, powerless, fearful, and disconnected individuals who grapple with depression and anxiety in their everyday lives. These weakened individuals are unlikely to question the exploitative and unnatural underpinnings of capitalism. There is no threat to capitalism in a society populated by lonely and alienated individuals. The notion of a free, happy, and prosperous capitalism is nothing more than a myth.

Capitalism, in all its forms, breeds loneliness. Therefore, the struggle to end loneliness is a struggle against the very foundations of capitalism. A society liberated from exploitation and inequality, one founded upon principles of solidarity, compassion, and collective sharing, stands as the sole alternative to the pervasive isolation endemic to capitalist societies.

The writer teaches at the University of Glasgow, UK.

The epidemic of loneliness is spreading rapidly in our hyper-connected world of social media. Studies by the World Health Organisation suggest that "20-34% of older people in China, India, the United States, and regions of Europe and Latin America experience loneliness." Similarly, there is a crisis of friendship and meaningful connections among young people. Research by the Campaign to End Loneliness in the United Kingdom has revealed that "49.63% of adults (25.99 million people) are lonely, and approximately 7.1% of people in Britain (3.83 million) experience chronic loneliness, meaning they feel lonely 'often or always' in 2022."

In 2017, the Jo Cox National Commission on Loneliness estimated the cost of loneliness to employers at £2.5 billion a year in the UK. It is impossible to calculate the social and emotional cost of loneliness. According to the report "The State of Loneliness 2023: Office of National Statistics data on loneliness in Britain, June 2023," published by the Campaign to End Loneliness, there is an alarming rise in loneliness among all age groups. The growing crisis of loneliness leads to deaths, destitution, depression, ill health, mental health crises, crime, and other forms of unsocial and antisocial behaviour in society.

In modern capitalist societies, the notion of loneliness is not solely a product of individual disposition but rather a consequence of broader capitalist structures and processes shaped by new forms of digital capitalism. The ideals and culture of solitude can be a deliberate personal choice, but loneliness often emerges as a result of systemic factors deeply ingrained in capitalist culture. Within this framework, the emphasis on individual success and self-pro-

motion can lead to a pervasive sense of isolation, as people prioritise their own advancement over collective well-being. This narcissistic culture perpetuates a cycle of alienation, where individuals become increasingly disconnected from one another and their communities. The very fabric of capitalist societies, with emphasis on competition and material gain, cultivates environments that prioritise profit over social bonds essential for human fulfilment. Thus, loneliness emerges not as an inherent trait but as a by-product of the alienating conditions fostered by capitalist society.

In the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, Marx discussed four types of alienation: i) alienation from one's own product and labour; ii) alienation from the process of labour; iii) alienation from one's own self; and iv) alienation from other fellow human beings/workers. These four forms of alienation continue to be the foundation of modern capitalism in the age of digitalisation. Technological advancements have accelerated all these forms of alienation. These alienating conditions generate helpless and lonely individuals

who lack control over themselves. Their lives and freedoms are dictated by those who control capital and organisations.

Alienation is not an isolated condition; it is an integral part of the capitalist system, where the destruction of meaningful human and social connections is central to the creation of an insidious economy at the expense of society. Society is dismantled to promote a profit-driven economic system based on the exploitation of labour and nature. Such an exploitative system can only sustain itself by fostering disconnected and atomised individuals, thus promoting the growth of a 'loneliness economy' where capitalism becomes the only available alternative.

Capitalism, with its relentless pursuit of profit, often comes at the expense of the collective spirit and innate social nature of humanity. It champions ideals such as individual space, freedom, happiness, utility, pleasure, and satisfaction, which are often portrayed as attainable through material wealth and consumption. However, the pursuit of these ideals within a capitalist framework can be insatiable, leading

CAPITALISM HAS ERODED THE COLLECTIVE FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIETY TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT EVEN THE HYPER-CONNECTED WORLD OF SOCIAL MEDIA CANNOT CHANGE IT



Bhabani Shankar Nayak



Brahma Chellaney

Already, the US has allowed China to gain such a strong footing in the South China Sea that restoring the status quo of just a decade ago would be all but impossible without a full-scale war

China's Intrusions

For over a decade now, China has been working stealthily to alter the territorial and maritime status quo in the Indo-Pacific – an effort that has increasingly stoked tensions with regional neighbours like Australia, India, Japan, Taiwan, and several Southeast Asian countries, as well as the United States. And with US attention and resources focused on conflicts in Europe and the Middle East, China has lately become even more aggressive in its expansionism. Chinese regional hegemony is closer than ever.

Almost daily, China finds a new way to bully Taiwan, which Chinese President Xi Jinping has repeatedly pledged to "reunify" with the mainland (though that objective has no basis in international law or history). As China takes steps like encroaching on Taiwan's air-defense zone and encircling the island with warships, it raises the risk of a war that would transform global geopolitics.

There are war clouds also gathering over the Himalayas, where a military standoff triggered by China's repeated furtive encroachments on India's borderlands has dragged on for nearly four years. And in the East China Sea, China's intrusions into the territorial waters and airspace of the Japanese-controlled Senkaku Islands, which China claims as its own, are fueling Japan's drive toward rearmament.

But the biggest risks of escalation may well lie in the South China Sea, where China's aggressive efforts to entrench its dominance have regularly led to dangerous near-confrontations, including with US warships and aircraft. For years, China has been working relentlessly to cement its dominance over the South China Sea and exploit that region's vast resources and strategic position as a critical corridor through which one-third of global shipping passes.

To this end, China has constructed artificial islands atop remote reefs and atolls and transformed them into forward military bases. Though these activities constitute a blatant violation of international law, including a 2016 ruling by an arbitral tribunal at The Hague that invalidated Chinese claims in the South China Sea, there has been little pushback from three successive US administrations. As a result, China has managed to expand its maritime borders unilaterally without firing a single shot.

Now, China's navy and air force routinely patrol its neighbours' exclusive economic zones (EEZs), and its coast guard – the world's largest and most militarised – has conducted "intrusive patrols" of others' offshore oil and gas fields. Chinese coast-guard vessels, including megaships, wantonly employ "non-lethal" weapons like high-pressure water cannons and long-range acoustic devices.

Moreover, China has been sending its navy and coast guard to shadow, hound, and harass vessels belonging to the US, as well as to smaller neighbours, such as the Philippines and Vietnam, with territorial claims in the area. Even fishing boats have been targeted and destroyed. With Chinese ships now being deliberately designed for "ramming" and "shouldering" other vessels, it seems clear that China will become more aggressive in asserting its territorial claims – and the associated fishing and energy-exploration rights – in the South China Sea.

China's militarisation of the South China Sea poses the greatest threat to the Philippines and Vietnam. But whereas Vietnam pursues an independent foreign policy, which its prime minister calls a historical imperative, the Philippines is a longstanding US ally, with a mutual defense treaty in place since 1951.

And yet, when it comes to China's expansionism in the South China Sea, the US has largely left the Philippines to fend for itself. In 2012, when China occupied the Scarborough Shoal, a traditional Philippine fishing ground located within the country's EEZ, US President Barack Obama's administration stayed silent. Since then, China has steadily eroded the Philippines' control of other areas within its EEZ, but the US has offered its ally little beyond statements of support.

This is unlikely to change any time soon. With the wars in Ukraine and Gaza stretching American military resources thin, a direct confrontation with China is the last thing the US needs. But refusing to stand up to China may well make a clash more likely – and more destructive.

Already, the US has allowed China to gain such a strong footing in the South China Sea that restoring the status quo of just a decade ago would be all but impossible without a full-scale war. And, as the recent increase in provocations in the South China Sea indicate, Xi is bolder than ever, despite the rising risk of escalation, accidental or otherwise. In the meantime, America's failure to rein in China's aggressive expansionism is undermining its own security and trade interests.

US President Joe Biden insists that the US wants "competition with China, not conflict." But China wants strategic dominance – beginning with the South China Sea – and it is willing to risk conflict to get it. The South China Sea has become a test of American resolve, which Xi is expecting Biden to fail. The world, especially the countries on the front lines of Chinese expansionism, can only hope that Xi is wrong, and that the US finds ways to rein in China without armed conflict.

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

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WISDOM CORNER

If you are vigilant and make a stern effort to reject every thought when it rises, you will soon find that you are going deeper and deeper into your own inner self, where there is no need for your effort to reject the thoughts. RAMANA MAHARSHI

In oneself lies the whole world and if you know how to look and learn, the door is there and the key is in your hand. Nobody on earth can give you either the key or the door to open, except yourself. JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI

People sacrifice the present for the future. But life is available only in the present. That is why we should walk in such a way that every step can bring us to the here and the now. THICH NHAT HANH

LOL

Not while eating

Two roaches were munching on garbage in an alley when one engages a discussion about a new restaurant.

"I was in that new restaurant across the street," said one. "It's so clean!"



The kitchen is spotless, and the floors are gleaming white. There is no dirt anywhere – it's so sanitary that the whole place shines." "Please," said the other roach frowning. "Not while I'm eating!"

SPECTRUM SUSTAINABILITY

Water crisis in the blue planet

Water can create peace or spark conflict. Public health and prosperity, food and energy systems, economic productivity and environmental wellbeing all depend on a well-functioning and equitably managed water cycle. As climate change impacts increase and populations grow, there is an urgent need, within and between countries, to unite around protecting and conserving our most precious resource.

Although Earth is called the water planet, the stock of fresh water fit for human consumption is very much limited. This is due to the fact that around 97% of water is located in seas and oceans which is salty and unfit for human use. The remaining 2.5% is fresh water out of which a major portion (around 68%) is located in ice caps and glaciers and 30% is underground which are again beyond the reach of humans. Only 0.3% of fresh water flows in rivers and lakes and is available for human consumption. Hence there is a great need for a prudent use of water. We have to remember: each drop counts!

Water continuously circulates between the land and the sky through a natural mechanism called water cycle that includes evaporation, condensation and precipitation. This makes the total amount of water in sea and

the sky constant. In India, most of the rainfall of the year occurs only during the four months of monsoon. Rainwater seeps through the soil through its pores in its downward journey and gets stored in numerous cracks and gaps in the underground rocky layer called aquifer. This is the groundwater.

We require water for a variety of purposes in our daily life like bathing, washing, cooking, gardening etc. However, the maximum amount of fresh water is used in the agricultural sector for irrigation. In the post Industrial Revolution times, due to man's nature-unfriendly activities, a situation of acute water crisis has arisen in our planet. Effluents from industries and biological wastes of cities released into rivers and lakes pollute water sources that lead to drinking water crisis. The holy river Ganga, known since mythological times for its clean and rejuvenating flow, has become one of the ten most polluted rivers of the world due to manmade activities. Similarly, in Odisha, another sacred river, Brahmani, has become polluted due to the release of hazardous chemicals from nearby industries.

According to an estimate of the United Nations, there is a minimum need of nearly 50 litres of water (or 2.5 buckets) daily per

head for leading a healthy life. However, it is a matter of grave concern that millions of people living in rural areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America are deprived of this minimum requirement. Similarly, there is an incredible pressure on groundwater due to the growing population's demand and mushrooming industrial activities. This is compounded with the problem of deforestation and soil erosion due to which the water retention ability of soil has been greatly reduced.

An environmentalist once said, if there comes a Third World War, it would be due to water issues. This has started becoming a reality, as we have been often witnessing widespread conflicts on sharing of river waters between countries like India-Pakistan, India-Bangladesh, India-China and between states like Odisha-Chhattisgarh and Karnataka-Tamil Nadu.

Access to clean drinking water is considered to be a basic human right. However, nearly 2.2 billion people of the world now lack the basic facility including 115 million people who depend on unhealthy surface water sources. This has brought great disasters and turbulence to their lives and livelihoods. According to an estimate, half of the world's total population faces problems due to

water crisis during sometime around the year. According to a World Bank report of 2022, water related disasters have dominated the list of disasters over the past 50 years, and have accounted for nearly 70% of the total natural disaster related deaths. According to UN-Water report-2021, trans-boundary waters account for 60% of the world's freshwater flows, and 153 countries have territory within at least 1 of the 310 trans-boundary river and lake basins and inventoried 468 trans-boundary aquifer systems. According to the UN-Water report-2023, only 24 countries report that all their trans-boundary basins are covered by cooperation arrangements.

As a way out to these devastating consequences, we have to adopt water conservation measures at individual and collective levels so that wastage of water can be prevented and its economic and judicious use promoted. Practices like rainwater harvesting, drip irrigation systems and recharging of groundwater should be adopted to save water and sustain the onward journey of our human race. We have to remember that water is life and life is made of water!

The writer is Education Officer, Regional Science Centre, Bhopal.



Nikunja Bihari Sahu

ACCORDING TO AN ESTIMATE OF THE UNITED NATIONS, THERE IS A MINIMUM NEED OF 2.5 BUCKETS OF WATER DAILY PER HEAD FOR LEADING A HEALTHY LIFE

Sports boost

Sir, The boost to women's cricket in India arrived last year with the WPL auction, which saw winning bids surpassing other women's leagues and Indian leagues across sports. Before this year's season, the focus was on delivering cricket of quality to engage audiences, which proved successful. This year's final, where RCB secured their inaugural title, attracted over fifty thousand fans in Delhi, a remarkable turnout. WPL is believed to have achieved record viewership for any women's event globally. This success holds significant implications for Indian cricket, akin to the transformative impact of the IPL. Just as IPL propelled India into a cricket powerhouse, WPL is poised to do the same for women's cricket, creating opportunities and enhancing the sport's infrastructure and global presence. Anticipation for the future is palpable.

Vijaykumar HK, RAICHUR (KARNATAKA)

Fundamental pursuit

Sir, The International Day of Happiness, established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2012 and celebrated annually on 20 March, emphasises happiness as a fundamental human pursuit, calling for global cooperation. This day, formalised through a resolution in 2012, highlights the integration of happiness and well-being into public policies, inspired by Bhutan's commitment to societal happiness. Recognising happiness as a universal goal, the United Nations advocates for a fair and balanced economic approach to enhance everyone's well-being. This initiative encourages investment in conditions that promote happiness, including protecting human rights and incorporating well-being and environmental concerns into policy frameworks. Scientific research consistently shows the significant impact of happiness on individual health, productivity, and societal well-being. Happier individuals tend to lead longer, healthier lives, contribute more effectively to communities, and demonstrate higher levels of creativity and motivation, resulting in increased productivity and societal well-being. In the movie 'The Lunchbox,' the ending shows a housewife going to Bhutan to find peace after losing her pen-pal lover, highlighting the theme of finding happiness. The origins of the International Day of Happiness stem from Bhutan's use of the Gross National Happiness index, prioritising overall well-being over economic measures.

Krishna Kumar Vepakomma, HYDERABAD

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

OrissaPOST

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After four-year wait, JNU to hold students' union polls

The JNU students' union polls will be held after a gap of more than four years March 22 and the results will be declared March 24

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: The walls of the Jawaharlal Nehru University are plastered with colourful posters while the beats of traditional 'daffis' and catchy slogans rent the air as campaigning for the students' body polls reaches a crescendo.

With just three days left for the polling day, students, especially those casting their vote for the first time, were an excited lot. "This is my first time participating in the JNUSU elections and I am very excited. My seniors have told me that the polls are akin to the festivities surrounding a wedding," Shorya Sood, a PhD scholar with cerebral palsy, told PTI.

"I will vote for the outfit that talks about the welfare of all students irrespective of ideological differences and particularly persons with disability in their manifesto," he added. The students' outfits are also holding door-to-door campaigns to woo the voters.

Dhruv Kumar, owner of the Sabarmati Dhaba said, "This election is nothing like before. There's more energy and enthusiasm among the people as the polls are happening after four years. The business is booming as students gather here daily after campaigning."

The United Left alliance comprising the All India Students' Association (AISA), Democratic Students' Federation (DSF), Students' Federation of India (SFI) and the All India Students' Federation (AISF) is eyeing a



With the election fever gripping the university, several dhabs on the campus are doing roaring business with students, including the candidates and their supporters, thronging the eateries every evening after a hard day of campaigning

Animated conversations over a cup of tea are the norm at the renowned Sabarmati Dhaba in particular, which was witness to the 2020 JNU violence

clean sweep like the 2019 polls.

"Left has had a legacy in JNU. We have been fighting for the rights of students from the very beginning. Be it the issue of women's security on campus, fee hikes, scholarship cuts, or infrastructural issues, the Left has always stood for the concerns of students," Dhananjay, the United Left's presidential candidate from AISA said. Meanwhile, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-affiliated Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad is preparing to give a tough competition to the United Left alliance and hopes to form

a students' union led by the right-wing students group in the Left bastion. ABVP last won the JNUSU presidential election in 2000. Ever since the party has not been able to gain a foothold in the central panel of the JNUSU. Other student outfits such as the Congress-affiliated National Students' Union of India (NSUI), Birsambedkar Phule Students' Association (BAPSA), and Samajwadi Chatra Sangathan (SCS) are also campaigning extensively to position themselves as a viable alternative to the traditional left-right students' bodies. SCS is the only outfit which has fielded a female candidate, Aradhna Yadav, for the post of president this year.

BAPSA's presidential candidate, Biswajit Minji is the first scholar from his village in West Bengal. Minji belongs to an Adivasi community and his parents work as contractual labourers. The Congress' students' outfit has fielded only two candidates for the central panel -- president and joint secretary -- and is hoping to make a mark.

FISSURES WITHIN CONGRESS IN HIMACHAL

Pratibha Singh refuses to re-contest LS election

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Shimla, March 20: Fissures within the Congress government in Himachal Pradesh surfaced once again Wednesday as state party chief Pratibha Singh on Wednesday refused to re-contest from the Mandi parliamentary seat, saying elections cannot be fought merely by distributing MP discretionary funds and by disappointing party activists.

Pratibha Singh, wife of six-time chief minister late Virbhadra Singh and mother of state Cabinet minister Vikramaditya Singh, reached Shimla from Delhi after attending the screening committee meeting in Delhi on Tuesday.

Without mincing words, she said she would have to give importance to the by-elections to six assembly seats to save the government. "We will work to save

the government," she said, adding, "no active worker is visible who will work for the party".

Voting for the four Lok Sabha seats - Kangra, Mandi, Hamirpur and Shimla (reserved), currently held by the BJP, will be held in a single phase on June 1. By-elections to six Assembly seats, all held by the Congress, will be held simultaneously.

The seats - Dharamsala, Lahaul-Spiti, Sujampur, Barsar, Gagret and Kutlehar - fell vacant after the Congress disqualified its sitting MLAs - Rajinder Rana, Sudhir Sharma, Inder Dutt Lakhnupal, Devinder Kumar Bhuttoo, Ravi Thakur, and Chetanya Sharma -- on the ground that they abstained from voting on the Budget, defying the party whip.

Citing reasons for not re-entering the poll fray, Pratibha Singh said, "Had the people I had recommended were given



responsibility in time, they would have come out and worked for the party. Today, I do not see any worker who will actively work for the party." "I have been out in the field and have seen the ground situation. I don't think we will be able to achieve much success, so I have decided to withdraw my name," she explained. Pratibha Singh, who lost the Mandi seat in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, defeated BJP's Brigadier Khushal Thakur (retired), a decorated officer who played a crucial role in the 1999

Kargil war, in bypoll in 2021 by a slender margin of 8,766 votes. The seat fell vacant with the death of two-time BJP MP Ram Swaroop Sharma.

Notwithstanding the drubbing in the 2022 Assembly polls, the BJP leadership in Himachal Pradesh is once again banking largely on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's charisma in the Lok Sabha polls as it believes that it equals the ruling Congress' vote share in the state. Also as the principal Opposition, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is aggressively grilling the government on its policies ranging from closing 920 offices and institutions, comprising schools and colleges, to political vendetta to the appointment of Chief Parliamentary Secretaries and chairman on board and corporations, which it says is a drain on the exchequer and against ruling by courts.

Tihar gets 15 new phone jammers to block 4G signals

A mobile phone jammer is a device that blocks the transmission of signals between the phones and base towers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: Asia's largest prison Tihar is under the process of installing 15 jammers at six new locations to prevent the inmates from using mobile phones from inside the jail, officials Tuesday said.

A mobile phone jammer is a device that blocks the transmission of signals between the phones and base towers.

The officials said the project, which costs about ₹11.5 crore, will help in jamming the signals of all kinds of phones having 2G, 3G and 4G networks in the jail.

A senior Tihar Jail official said these 15 jammers will be the addition to three currently installed Towers of Harmonious Call Blocking (THCB) systems, a kind of technology that discontinues the call as soon it begins. "15 new static towers of jammers, which works in noise technology, will completely prohibit the inmates from using phones in the prisons," the officer said.

The work of installation of these towers began two months ago and is expected to be completed this month, the officer added. On being asked, Tihar Director General Sanjay Baniwal confirmed the development.

Another officer said these jammers are getting installed at high security prisons which houses in six out of nine jails of Tihar. Currently, Delhi has 19,000 inmates, against the capacity of 10,000 inmates in all three jails - Tihar, Mandoli and Rohini. The inmates are often caught

- The inmates are often caught using mobile phones despite multiple level of checking at the entry points of Tihar
- The mobile phones are also often thrown from outside the boundary walls of Tihar, the officials said
- In the past few years, the jailed gangsters making video calls and putting videos of their cell on social media are also found to be happening from inside the jails

using mobile phones despite multiple level of checking at the entry points of Tihar. The mobile phones are also often thrown from outside the boundary walls of Tihar, the officials said.

In the past few years, the jailed gangsters making video calls and putting videos of their cell on social media are also found to be happening from inside the jails.

Making threat and extortion calls were also very common from inside the jails, the officials said. Among them was a jailed coman Sukesh Chandrashekhar, who was caught using the branded phones with 4G technologies.

"The present jammers, which could block 2G and 3G signals, are outdated. Therefore, the upgradation of jamming technology and installation of tower that could block the 4G signals was much needed," the officer said. He added that to prevent the use of mobile phones, the jail administration keeps conducting raids and does surprise checks.



PETA distributes e-rickshaws in exchange of livestock

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: PETA Wednesday said that it has "rescued" 150 animals from families reliant on them for their livelihood and gave them e-rickshaws so that they have a "better source of income".

The People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), India distributed 24 e-rickshaws to people in exchange of livestock owned by them, which included cows, bulls and horses.

The keys of the e-rickshaws were distributed by Aam Aadmi Party councillor Shivani Panchal during an event here. PETA is an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) that advocates for animal rights.

Panchayat orders families of drug addicts to pay fine

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hamirpur (HP), March 20: The families of drug addicts will be liable to pay fine prescribed by the Mahila Mandal and drug-free families will be honoured with the title of ideal families, the Lambloo gram panchayat here has said in an order.

Located in the suburbs of Hamirpur town, the Lambloo panchayat is headed by Kartar Singh Chauhan, a former educationist who has formed drug-free committees in the panchayat wards, entrusting the responsibility to eradicate drug abuse to women workers.

"The families whose people are drug addicts will pay the



fine prescribed by the Mahila Mandal," Chauhan said.

He added that families with no drug addicts, including those who abstain from smoking, will be honoured with the title of 'ideal families'.

According to the panchayat order, the women in-charge of the

committees are going door-to-door to collect signatures from women on undertakings stating no one in their house smokes or consumes other intoxicants.

The resolution letters need to be deposited in the panchayat bhawan office. If any person is found to be addicted to drugs, the women workers will have to assure the panchayat that such people will get rid of their addictions within a stipulated time period, the order said.

Earlier, Chauhan had initiated campaigns against drugs with the help of administration and government officials. He had also launched a similar campaign in the government offices located around the panchayat.

EARTH HOUR

BSES urges consumers to switch off non-essential electrical appliances

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: The power discoms in the national capital are gearing up to make the 'Earth Hour' a success by encouraging their consumers to switch off non-essential lights and electric appliances for one hour March 23 night.

The BSES discoms have urged its 50 lakh consumers to join the World Wide Fund (WWF) promoted event for drawing attention to the fragile condition of the planet. Delhi had last year saved 279 MW on account of the Earth Hour, said a spokesperson of the discom.

As part of Earth Hour, Delhiites will join over a billion people in cities around the world - from Mumbai and Los Angeles to London, Hong Kong, Sydney, Rome, Manila, Singapore, Dubai among others - by switching off non-essential lights and appliances for one hour in a symbolic gesture of showing their concern for the environment, he said.

"The discom urges Delhi residents to unite with the world for a brighter future by participat-



ing in the Earth Hour 2024. This year, Saturday, March 23 from 8:30 PM to 9:30 PM, let us pledge to 'switch off' and 'Give an Hour for Earth' to send a powerful message about our commitment to a sustainable future," he said.

A Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (TPDDL) spokesperson said that the discom was preparing to join the Earth Hour by actively engaging with its consumer base of 1.9 million people.

"We are actively engaging with our workforce, our consumer base of 1.9 million, and the 7 million residents in our area of operations to raise awareness about the importance of energy conservation," she said. The discom is sending letters to the resident welfare associations elaborating on the significance of the Earth Hour, she said.

The BSES discoms have urged its 50 lakh consumers to join the World Wide Fund (WWF) promoted event for drawing attention to the fragile condition of the planet

For igloo men, snowfall signifies promise of prosperity in Manali

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Manali, March 20: As the winter sun begins its descent behind the Hampta Pass in the Himalayas, a subtle thawing begins in the heart of mountain natives.

Amid this transition, an igloo stands as a testament to resilience and ingenuity. For those like the igloo men, harnessing indigenous wisdom, the blanket of snow signifies not hardship, but rather the promise of local prosperity. Winters may be harsh for some. But for them, every snowflake holds the potential for a bountiful livelihood.

The duo, Tashi Dorjee and Vikas Kumar, both professional mountaineers and skiers, of Keylinga Himalayan Adventures have built igloos for the eighth season in a tiny hamlet, the base for the Hampta trek.

"As snow starts melting, our hearts too thaw," remarked an emotional Dorjee, the brain behind the first-of-its-kind initiative to build igloos without government support.

Every year with the onset of snowfall, they start building igloos by using their traditional knowledge close to the Buddhist village of Sethan, 12 km uphill



from Manali, at an altitude of 2,700 metre, amid the backdrop of Dhauladhar and the Pir-Panjal ranges.

The igloos are located on ski slopes that have more than three feet of snow and it will last till March-end. Seeing tourist buzz, several other local youths have also entered into the venture of setting up man-made igloos of different shapes and sizes for the backpackers in the area.

Locals say with word-of-mouth communication, the entire area, originally a shepherd route in summer, has been christened as the igloo valley. The overlooking Hampta Pass is a corridor that connects Kullu with the Lahaul Valley.

Politicos make beeline for BJD ticket

SUNANDA, BISWARANJAN FRONTRUNNERS

Bari, March 20: BJD faces big challenge of multiple ticket aspirants for Bari Assembly constituency under Jajpur Lok Sabha segment with the incumbent MLA Sunanda Das and Biswaranjan Mallick who defected to BJD from BJP being the frontrunners.

The number of aspirants in ruling BJD is increasing even as the haze over BJD-BJP alliance is yet to become clear.

Sitting MLA Sunanda Das, in a surprise move, defected to BJD from BJP before the 2019 elections and received the BJD ticket to contest from the seat. She defeated her nearest rival, the then BJP candidate Biswaranjan Mallick, by a margin of 4,062 votes while Congress candidate Umesh Chandra Jena came third in the election.

At present, Sunanda is a BJD MLA. Meanwhile, her rival Biswaranjan, who contested 2019 polls on a BJP ticket, is now in BJD because of the tactical maneuvering by the ruling party. After defecting to BJD, Biswaranjan has been appointed as a state secretary of the party.

Both Sunanda and Biswaranjan are in the ruling party. However,

BARI ASSEMBLY SEGMENT



SUNANDA DAS



BISWARANJAN MALLICK



ASHOK SAMAL



BIBHUPRASAD RATH



SANJEEB JENA



ASHOK BEHERA

the panchayat elections that followed the last Assembly election witnessed acrimonious fights between their supporters. The candidates belonging to Sunanda and Biswaranjan factions fought the panchayat election as sarpanch, samiti members and Zilla Parishad members. In the panchayat samiti election, Biswaranjan managed to get his candidate elected as the chairperson as more candidates be-

longing to his faction had been elected as Samiti members.

His supporters claim that Biswaranjan will be the BJD candidate from Bari as he has strong organisational network in the constituency.

On the other hand, the sitting MLA Sunanda Das, according to her supporters, has played a major role in renovation of Kalamatia Sahid Pitha, installation of the statues of martyrs,

holding Gurpujan programme, installing the statue of Bidagdha Kabi Abhimanyu Samantsinghar and renovating his birthplace.

She has also helped in proper implementation of government welfare schemes and developmental programmes in her constituency. This has helped her get closer with the common voters. Therefore, the party will give her the ticket to contest from the constituency, her

supporters added.

Apart from these two frontrunners, youth leader Sanjiv Jena is also another prominent contender for BJD ticket. He organised a party workers' meet at Kacheri Padia in Sahupada and is continuing his works with an aim to develop Bari into a developed constituency.

Another aspirant is Zilla Parishad member and former Bari block vice-chairperson Ashok Kumar Samal. He has also simultaneously worked in holding Biju Patnaik's birth anniversary and organising the state government's flagship programme 'Ama Odisha, Nabin Odisha' in the constituency.

Social activist Ashok Behera is also vying for the ticket from the ruling party and trying to get close to the voters by holding various social and cultural programmes. Another aspirant Bibhu Prasad Rath is learnt to have visited Naveen Niwas in Bhubaneswar and applied for the party ticket.

However, it is yet to be seen whether the party high command will repose faith on the sitting MLA and give her party ticket or field some other aspirant from this Assembly constituency, if the alliance between BJD and BJP does not realise.

The election for the Bari Assembly seat will be held June 1. The date of filing of nominations is from May 7 to May 14.

Keonjhar leaders camping in Bhub



Chatters are abuzz about a possible alliance between BJD and BJP while voters think that there may be a post-poll coalition in case the ongoing talks fail

POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, March 20: Amid swirling uncertainty over a possible alliance between the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), ticket aspirants and bigwigs of both the parties from all Assembly segments under Keonjhar Lok Sabha constituency are in utter dilemma as to which seat fall in their kitty in case of a pre-poll tie-up. At this juncture, several leaders are camping in Bhubaneswar to get their ticket confirmed for their preferred constituency.

Meanwhile, chatters are abuzz about a possible alliance between BJD and BJP while voters think that there may be a post-poll coalition in case the ongoing talks fail.

Some of the ticket aspirants, on condition of anonymity, have categorically revealed their apprehension over availing a ticket, if there is an alliance.

Some of the ticket aspirants have stopped the party programmes in their constituencies and rushed to the state capital to hold talks with the party top brass so as to ensure a ticket.

Sources said some of the leaders are visiting temples to seek blessings of the deities while some others are approaching saints.

According to reports, BJD continues to have its influence on voters in Keonjhar Lok Sabha seat and six Assembly segments, except for the Sadar Assembly seat.

There has been a thaw in preparation of battle plan by

BJD workers to wrest back Keonjhar Sadar Assembly seat from BJP and capture all other seats, ever since the alliance buzz filled the political atmosphere of Odisha.

Meanwhile, though uncertainty prevails over an alliance between BJD and BJP, some leaders are ecstatic while some others are upset.

Leaders of both the parties are not expressly saying that there would be an alliance, but they are apparently of the view that there is a larger scope for a tie-up.

However, Congress is trying to fish in troubled waters and has deployed all its energy to grab maximum number of seats under the LS segment. Political analysts say that selection of candidates in certain seats on the basis of winnability may help Congress this time.

Meanwhile, all the three prominent parties have set their eyes on Champua Assembly seat - the wealthiest mineral-rich segment of the district. However, presence of former MLA Sanatan Mahakud in this constituency sends a different message to the voters. All the leaders who have forayed into politics to protect their mining business are lobbying hard to get a ticket for this Assembly seat. Even some BJD and BJP leaders who have embraced defeat in earlier elections have put all their might to get a ticket as they hope that they can sail through a turbulent poll this time easily, if there is an alliance.



PARTY HOPPING: Members of over 35 families in Mahulia and Badaostiya panchayats joined Congress after defecting from other parties at a merger meeting held at Chandbali NAC office in Bhadrak district, Wednesday

BJP demands strict action against Rahul Gandhi for 'shakti' remarks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: The BJP Wednesday lodged a complaint with the Election Commission against Rahul Gandhi for his "fight against a shakti" remarks at a recent rally in Mumbai. A large section of Hindus in India offer prayers to Shakti in Hinduism to the extent there exists a Shakti sect who refer to the Devi as Shakti," the BJP leaders charged.

Gandhi's call to fight against Shakti in Hinduism, directly implies that the Congress supporters should fight against the worshipping deities of Hinduism, which creates hatred against

gions to appease "some religious community".

"The statement made by Gandhi wherein he says that the fight is with Shakti was made with a malicious intention to hurt the religious sentiments of the Hindus. A large section of Hindus in India offer prayers to Shakti in Hinduism to the extent there exists a Shakti sect who refer to the Devi as Shakti," the BJP leaders charged.

Gandhi's call to fight against Shakti in Hinduism, directly implies that the Congress supporters should fight against the worshipping deities of Hinduism, which creates hatred against

Hinduism, they added.

A day after his remarks at the Mumbai rally, Gandhi Monday clarified that he was not talking about any religious power but the 'shakti' of unrighteousness, corruption and falsehood.

He accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of twisting his words and said he was speaking about the power of which Modi was wearing the mask.

The BJP leaders also alleged that Gandhi made "false and mischievous" claims with regard to the authenticity of electoral voting machines (EVMs) while addressing the Mumbai rally and raised questions on the Election Commission as well.

Day after quitting Cong, Khariar MLA joins BJD

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 20: Khariar MLA Adhiraj Panigrahi joined the BJD Wednesday, a day after quitting the Congress.

Panigrahi, a first-time legislator, joined the BJD along with his supporters at Sankha Bhawan, the party headquarters, in Bhubaneswar. The block chairpersons of Khariar, Boden, and Sinapali in Nuapada district also joined the BJD during the programme.

BJD Organisational Secretary Pranab Prakash Das, General Secretary Manas Mangaraj and Women's Wing President Snehangini Chhuria welcomed him into the party.

Panigrahi said that he joined the BJD inspired by the works of Chief Minister Naveen



Patnaik. "I am inspired by CM Patnaik's ideology of 'talk less and work more'. I have joined the BJD with the hope that CM Patnaik will give me a chance to con-

tribute towards his pledge to make Odisha the number one state in India, and to include Nuapada and Khariar in that journey," Panigrahi said.

"I want to thank Adhiraj Panigrahi for realising that only Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik can bring development in Odisha, especially in areas such as Khariar and Nuapada. When I told him (Naveen Patnaik) about the joining, he said the youth should work for the development of Odisha as well as for their respective districts through hard work," said Pranab Prakash Das adding that all the newly joined leaders will get due respect in the party.

Panigrahi resigned from the Congress Tuesday ahead of the simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the state Assembly.



MERGER MEETING: Jayant Bagarti and Radha Bagarti, sons of former Titilagarh block chairperson, and Yadav leader Pitambar Bagarti joined BJD with their associates at a merger meeting held at the residence of state Water Resources Minister Tukuni Sahu at Titilagarh in Bolangir district, Wednesday



PRESS MEET: Union Minister of State for Tribal Affairs and Jal Shakti Bishweswar Tudu and former MP Ananta Nayak highlighting that tribals in the state were benefited to the maximum under the Modi government at a press meet held at the BJP state headquarters in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday

of the day quote

If the INDIA bloc was voted to power in the Lok Sabha polls, a caste census would be conducted once in every five years

MK STALIN | DMK PRESIDENT

We have zero tolerance towards any wrongdoings. Be it Shajahan Sheikh or Saradha group chairman Sudipto Sen. All of them were arrested by West Bengal Police and not by any central agency

ABHISHEK BANERJEE | TMC LEADER

Congress has some tallest leaders in Madhya Pradesh but none of them is ready to contest the polls from 29 seats

MOHAN YADAV | MP CM

SHORT TAKES

Sadhguru undergoes brain surgery: Hosp

New Delhi: Spiritual leader Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev underwent an emergency brain surgery at a private hospital here, a statement from the hospital said Wednesday. The surgery was carried out March 17 to remove bleeding in the skull. Sadhguru was weaned off the ventilator post-surgery, the statement from Indraprastha Apollo Hospital said, adding he has shown "steady progress and his brain, body and vital parameters have improved". The 66-year-old spiritual guru is the founder of the Isha Foundation and has launched campaigns like 'Save Soil' and 'Rally for Rivers' for environment conservation.

Woman jumps off trans harbour link

Mumbai: In the first such incident on the newly-built Atal Setu, a 43-year-old woman has jumped off the sea bridge connecting south Mumbai to Navi Mumbai, police said Wednesday. The police are yet to locate her body, and have recovered a purported suicide note from her house in Mumbai, an official said. The woman, Kinjal Kantil Shah, a doctor by profession, had been facing depression and was undergoing treatment, police said. She stayed with her father at the Navin Asha building on Dadasaheb Phalke Road in Parel area of Mumbai, police said.

Assam: Notification issued for 5 LS seats

Guwahati: The notification for the first phase of Lok Sabha polls encompassing five constituencies in Assam was issued Wednesday, an election official said. These constituencies - Kaziranga, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, and Lakhimpur - are slated for polling April 19. The official said no nominations were filed on the first day. Elections for the 14 constituencies will be conducted over three phases April 19, 26, and May 7.

HC seeks ED's stand on Kejriwal's plea

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court Wednesday sought the stand of the Enforcement Directorate on a petition by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal challenging the summons issued to him in an excise policy-linked money laundering case. The investigating agency claimed the petition of the AAP national convener, which also challenges certain provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, was not maintainable. A bench headed by Justice Suresh Kumar Kait granted two weeks' time to the ED to file its reply on this aspect.



With 968 million registered voters, 15 million election officials, and 1.2 million polling booths, the 18th edition of national elections is the largest electoral logistics exercise that this planet has ever witnessed

S JAISHANKAR | EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER OF INDIA

MOOSEWALA'S FATHER MAKES SHOCKING CLAIMS

Balkaur Singh, the father of slain Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala, has accused the Punjab government of harassing him over the birth of his second son, prompting the AAP to claim that the Centre had sought a report on the IVF treatment of his wife. The opposition Congress, meanwhile, attacked both the AAP government in the state and the BJP-led Centre over the accusations



Top 1% holds 40% wealth



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: Inequality in India has skyrocketed since the early 2000s, with the income and wealth share of the top 1 per cent population rising to 22.6 per cent and 40.1 per cent, respectively, in 2022-23, according to a working paper.

The paper titled 'Income and Wealth Inequality in India, 1922-2023: The Rise of the Billionaire Raj' said between 2014-15 and 2022-23, the rise of top-end inequality has been particularly pronounced in terms of wealth concentration.

The paper authored by Thomas Piketty (Paris School of Economics and World Inequality Lab), Lucas Chancel (Harvard Kennedy School and World Inequality Lab) and Nitin Kumar Bharti (New York University and World Inequality Lab). "Between 2014-15 and 2022-23, the rise of top-end inequality has been particularly pronounced in terms of wealth concentration."

"By 2022-23, top 1 per cent income and wealth shares (22.6 per cent and 40.1 per cent) are at their highest historical levels and India's top 1 per cent income share is among the very highest in the world, higher than

INCOME INEQUALITY IN INDIA

even South Africa, Brazil, and the US," the paper said.

According to the paper, the Indian income tax system might be regressive when viewed from the lens of net wealth.

"A restructuring of the tax code to account for both income and wealth, and broad-based public investments in health, education and nutrition are needed to enable the average Indian, and not just the elites, to meaningfully benefit from the ongoing wave of globalisation," it noted.

As per the paper, besides serving as a tool to fight inequality, a "super tax" of 2 per cent on the net wealth of the 167 wealthiest families in 2022-23 would yield 0.5 per cent of national income in revenues and create valuable fiscal space to facilitate such investments.

The paper said the quality of economic data in India is notably poor and has seen a decline recently. It said India's top 1 per cent population's income share appears to be among the highest in the world "behind only perhaps Peru, Yemen and a couple of other small countries". The paper pointed out that from 13 per cent in 1922, the top 1 per cent income share in-

The paper said the quality of economic data in India is notably poor and has seen a decline recently

It said India's top 1 per cent population's income share appears to be among the highest in the world "behind only perhaps Peru, Yemen and a couple of other small countries"

creased significantly to over 20 per cent in the inter-war period.

While they experienced a dramatic fall after that, during the 1940s to fall back to 13 per by the time of India's independence, the paper said after briefly rising during the 1950s, the top 1 per cent income shares consistently fell over the next two decades and reached 6.1 per cent by 1982.

This was likely the consequence of the broadly socialist policy agenda pursued by the Indian government till the 1980s, it noted. Since the early-1980s, according to the paper, when the Indian government began initiating a broad range of economic reforms, leading up to the liberalisation in 1991, the decline in top 1 per cent income shares halted. Early-1990s onwards, the paper said the top 1 per cent income shares have consistently increased over the next 30 years to reach an all-time high of 22.6 per cent in 2022.

While the paper's wealth inequality series spans the period 1961-2023, the availability of tax tabulations going back to 1922 when the Income Tax Act was enacted by the British administration, allowed the authors to study the evolution of the top 1 per cent income share over an entire century.

PM Modi speaks to Putin, Zelenskyy



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Wednesday held separate conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and asserted that dialogue and diplomacy were the way forward for the resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Modi spoke to Putin to congratulate him for winning a fifth term in office in the recent elections, and followed it up with a phone call to Zelenskyy to convey India's "consistent support" for all efforts for peace and bringing an early end to the ongoing conflict.

Both Putin and Zelenskyy have invited the Prime Minister to visit Russia and Ukraine respectively after the Lok Sabha elections, sources said, adding they see Modi as a "peacemaker".

"Spoke with President Putin and congratulated him on his re-election as the President of the Russian Federation," Modi said in a post on X.

Modi said he and Putin agreed to work together to further deepen and expand the India-Russia Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership in the

years ahead. A statement by the External Affairs Ministry said while discussing the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Modi reiterated India's consistent position in favour of dialogue and diplomacy as the way forward.

In his phone call to Zelenskyy, Modi asserted that India supported all efforts for an early and peaceful resolution to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

"Had a good conversation with President @ZelenskyyUa on strengthening the India-Ukraine partnership. Conveyed India's consistent support for all efforts for peace and bringing an early end to the ongoing conflict."

"India will continue to provide humanitarian assistance guided by our people-centric approach," Modi said on X. Zelenskyy appreciated India's continued humanitarian assistance for the people of Ukraine, a statement said.

According to the Kremlin statement, both sides noted with satisfaction that mutually beneficial ties in trade, economic and investment fields and in the areas of energy and transport are progressively and dynamically developing in line with a particularly privileged strategic partnership.

AIADMK CLINCHES LS ELECTION DEALS WITH DMDK, SDPI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, March 20: Tamil Nadu's main Opposition party AIADMK Wednesday finalised the seat-sharing arrangement for the Lok Sabha polls with allies DMDK, SDPI and Puthiya Tamizhagam.

Announcing the electoral pacts here at the party headquarters, AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami said the DMDK would contest from Tiruvallur (SC), Central Chennai, Cuddalore, Thanjavur and Virudhunagar Lok Sabha constituencies.

Puthiya Tamizhagam has (PT) been allocated Tenkasi constituency and SDPI the Dindigul segment, Palaniswami said in a statement.

The poll pacts were signed with DMDK general secretary Premalatha Vijayakanth, PT chief K Krishansamy and SDPI's state unit chief Nellai Mubarak.

On DMK making several assurances in its manifesto for the LS polls, Palaniswami asked if the ruling party has fulfilled promises made ahead of the 2019 Parliamentary election and the 2021 Assembly polls.

"How many assurances has the DMK fulfilled? Ahead of the (2021) Assembly polls, the DMK had repeatedly affirmed that once it captured power it would scrap NEET for Tamil Nadu. Three years have gone by. However, the assurance has not been fulfilled," Palaniswami said. Though the DMK has 38 MPs in the outgoing Lok Sabha, they did not exert pressure on the Centre to get NEET annulled.

TIDBITS

DMK vows to repeal CAA in manifesto

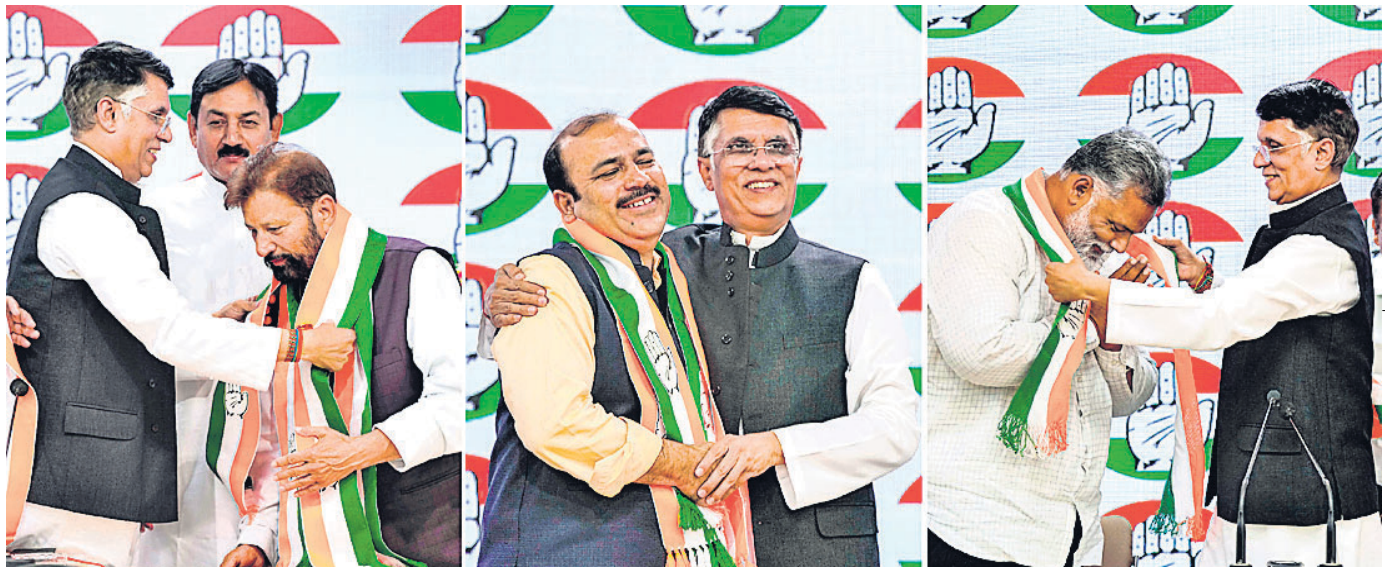
Chennai: Tamil Nadu's ruling DMK, a key constituent of the INDIA bloc, in its manifesto released Wednesday promised to repeal the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 if the Opposition alliance wins the Lok Sabha polls. Restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir and holding polls there, scrapping the New Education Policy 2020, slashing fuel prices, annulling Article 361 of the Constitution that provides protection to governors from legal action and appointment of Governors following consultation with Chief Ministers, were among the key promises made by the DMK. The recommendations of the M S Swaminathan committee will be adopted to ensure that MSP for agricultural products "is set at total production cost plus 50 per cent," the DMK said.

Engineer Rashid to contest from Baramulla

Srinagar: Abdul Rashid Sheikh, popularly known as Engineer Rashid, who is in jail in a terror-funding case, will contest the upcoming Lok Sabha polls from Baramulla, his Awami Ittehad Party (AIP) said Wednesday. "The political affairs committee of the AIP decided that we will field Engineer Rashid from the Baramulla Lok Sabha constituency," party spokesperson Firdous Baba said. He said the AIP is hopeful that Rashid will be released from prison before the election. Rashid had contested the 2019 Lok Sabha election from Baramulla and finished the poll race in the third position. The 56-year-old former MLA from Handwara was arrested in August 2019 and later chargesheeted by the NIA under various sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in October 2019.

Cops nab two minors for balloon attack

New Delhi: Delhi Police have apprehended two minors after a video of them throwing water-filled balloons on passersby while riding an SUV in southwest Delhi, police said Wednesday. The incident occurred in the Vasant Kunj area and the video of the entire episode has been also doing rounds on social media since Tuesday. The video shows two youths hurling water-filled balloons at passersby from the open sunroof of an SUV. "Various social media handles had tweeted about 2 persons in an SUV throwing balloons in public and passersby," Deputy Commissioner of Police (southwest) Rohit Meena wrote on X. "Taking cognisance into the matter legal action has been initiated and two juveniles have been apprehended in this regard," the officer wrote.



A combo of photos of newly-joined Congress leaders; (L-R) Former MP Lal Singh, Lok Sabha MP Danish Ali and Jan Adhikar Party chief Pappu Yadav with Congress leader Pawan Khera, at AICC Headquarters in New Delhi

Remove unauthorised political advts: EC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: Cracking the whip, the Election Commission Wednesday asked state governments to take down all unauthorised political advertisements from government, public and private properties and send a compliance report in the next 24 hours.

In a letter to the Union Cabinet Secretary and chief secretaries of all states and union territories, the EC said that despite its letter issued March 16 when the model code of conduct for the Lok Sabha elections came into force, it has received complaints that such defacements have not been removed. The Congress had recently raised the issue with the

poll panel. "All unauthorised political advertisements, in the form of wall writings, posters, papers or defacement in any other form, cutouts, hoardings, banner flags were ordered to be removed in a time bound manner from public spaces like railway stations, bus stands, airports, railway bridges, roadways, government buses, electric/tele-

phone poles, municipal/local bodies' building and a strict compliance in this was to be ensured," it reminded the governments.

It directed all state and union territory governments to "immediately remove all unauthorised political advertisements and ensure full compliance of its instructions".

India, world failed to meet WHO's End-TB milestone: Study

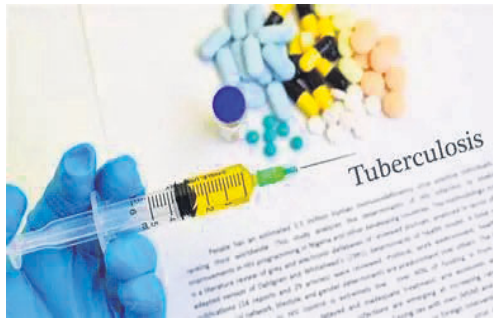
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: India's tuberculosis incidence dropped marginally by 0.5 per cent between 2015 and 2020 and failed to meet the World Health Organisation's (WHO's) END-TB milestone for 2020, according to new global research published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases journal.

The latest study estimated that the incidence of TB across all ages in India was 213 cases per one lakh population in 2020, well above the WHO's milestone figure (for India) of 171 per one lakh population. Deaths due to the bacterial infectious disease in the same year were estimated to be between 3.5-5 lakh, again much above the mortality milestone of 2.7-3.2 lakh set for India. The study comes ahead of World Tuberculosis Day March 24. Despite accelerated progress

in reducing TB burden over the past decade, the world failed to attain the first interim milestones of the WHO End TB Strategy in 2020, said the researchers forming the Global Burden Disease (GBD) 2021 Tuberculosis Collaborators. The pace of decline has also differed across age groups, with adults aged 50 years and above having the slowest progress.

Of the 204 countries analysed by the team, 15 met the 2020 TB incidence milestone, while 17 met the mortality milestone. Of the 15, 11 were in sub-Saharan Africa, the researchers said. Novel case-finding interventions in countries like Nigeria, Tanzania, Cameroon and Kenya helped reduce incidence, and were further supported by improved drug coverage in treating HIV across many countries in the sub-Saharan African region, they said.



The 2020 milestones include a 20 per cent reduction in the TB incidence rate and a 35 per cent reduction in deaths

Only 17 countries achieved the 2020 End TB mortality milestone and drug resistance could be an important factor, according to the researchers.

An "efficacious, safe, and shorter" regimen for treating drug-resistant TB, endorsed by WHO, could have helped reduce deaths, they said. They were referring to the WHO's updated

The WHO End TB Strategy aims for a 90 per cent reduction in TB deaths and an 80 per cent reduction in the incidence rate by 2030, compared to the baseline figures of 2015

prevented drug resistance".

Around the world, children under 15 years of age were seen to have the largest reductions in TB burden, with incidence falling by 16 per cent and deaths by 34 per cent between 2015 and 2020, even as the burden still remains high in children, according to the authors. Citing evidence from recent research, they said most of the bacterial disease's transmission occurs outdoors and hence, integrating contact-tracing with community-based strategies of screening and prevention will be "particularly important for continued progress".

Globally, adults aged 50 years and above were found to make up 37 per cent of all TB incident cases and 58 per cent of all TB deaths in 2020, and targeting these age groups would be required to meet End TB targets, the researchers said. Screening and treating older

adults for latent tuberculosis - where symptoms do not present themselves - would be essential. Further, given their high chances of adverse reactions to treatment, the researchers highlighted the importance of developing shorter, less toxic treatments, along with early diagnosis, for achieving the End TB targets.

About the Covid-19 pandemic's impact on the global TB burden, the researchers cited limited empirical data and underscored the need for continued research, even as they acknowledged many models to have predicted hundreds of thousands of additional TB deaths due to the pandemic.

The GBD study is the largest and most comprehensive effort to quantify health loss across places and over time, according to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), University of Washington (UW), US, which coordinates it.

international

of the day quote

We are determined to complete the elimination of these battalions in Rafah, and there is no way to do this without a ground incursion

A stable relationship between Australia and China doesn't just happen, it needs ongoing work

We want to exist in a very peaceful environment with our neighbouring brothers — do trade, commerce and expand our relations — but unfortunately, if a neighbour's land is used for terrorism, this is intolerable

SHORT TAKES

Kuleba to visit India
Kyiv: Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, will visit India next week as Kyiv looks to build support for its peace plan, two Indian officials aware of the matter said, and the first visit by a top Ukrainian official since Russia's invasion two years ago. New Delhi, which has traditionally had close economic and defence ties with Moscow, has refrained from criticising Russia over its February 2022 invasion, instead increased purchases of Russian oil to record levels.

Vietnam Prez quits
Hanoi: The Vietnamese Communist Party Wednesday accepted the resignation of President Vo Van Thuong, the government said in a statement citing "shortcomings", in a sign of political turmoil that could hurt foreign investors' confidence in the country. The government said in a statement Thuong violated party rules, adding that those "shortcomings had negatively impacted public opinion, affecting the reputation of the Party, State and him personally." The Central Party Committee, a top decision-making body in Communist Party-ruled Vietnam, approved Thuong's resignation just about a year after his election.

Khan moves SC
Islamabad: Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan Wednesday approached the Supreme Court to form a judicial commission comprising serving judges to probe the authenticity of last month's elections marred by allegations of rigging. The general elections were held February 8 but Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf refused to accept the outcome by alleging that the results were manipulated. Senior lawyer Hamid Khan, who is also a leader of PTI, filed the petition on behalf of Khan, stating the commission should investigate, audit and review matters related to the procedure and conduct of the general elections held February 8, as well as its results and the investigation should be complete and made public.

Ireland PM quits
Dublin: Leo Varadkar said Wednesday he would step down as Ireland's prime minister and the leader of the governing Fine Gael party, in a surprise move which he said was for both personal and political reasons. "I am resigning as president and leader of Fine Gael effective today and will resign as the Taoiseach (prime minister) as soon as my successor is able to take up that office," Varadkar told reporters gathered outside government buildings in Dublin.

US generals blame Biden govt for Kabul chaos

The Taliban have controlled Afghanistan since the US departure, resulting in many dramatic changes for the population, including the near-total loss of rights for women and girls

Washington, March 20: The top two US generals who oversaw the evacuation of Afghanistan as it fell to the Taliban in August 2021 blamed the Biden administration for the chaotic departure, telling lawmakers that it inade-

quately planned for the evacuation and did not order it in time. The rare testimony by the two retired generals Tuesday publicly exposed for the first time the strain and differences the military leaders had with the Biden administration in the final days of the war. Two of those key differences included that the military had advised that the US keep at least 2,500 service members in Afghanistan to maintain stability and a concern that the State Department was not moving fast enough to get an evacuation started. The remarks contrasted with an internal White House review of the administration's decisions found that President Joe



Biden's decisions had been "severely constrained" by previous withdrawal agreements negotiated by former President Donald Trump and blamed the military, saying top commanders said they had enough resources to handle the evacuation. Thirteen US service members were killed by a suicide bomber at the Kabul airport's Abbey Gate in the final days of the war,

as the Taliban took over Afghanistan. Thousands of panicked Afghans and US citizens desperately tried to get on US military flights that were airlifting people out. In the end, the military was able to rescue more than 1,30,000 civilians before the final US military aircraft departed. That chaos was the end result of the State Department failing to call for an evacuation of US personnel until it was too late, both former Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen Mark Milley and US Central Command retired Gen Frank McKenzie told the House Foreign Affairs Committee. "On 14 August, the non-combatant evacuation operation de-

cision was made by the Department of State and the US military alerted, marshalled, mobilised and rapidly deployed faster than any military in the world could ever do," Milley said. But the State Department's decision came too late, Milley said. "The fundamental mistake, the fundamental flaw was the timing of the State Department," Milley said. "That was too slow and too late." Evacuation orders must come from the State Department, but in the weeks and months before Kabul fell to the Taliban, the Pentagon was pressing the State Department for evacuation plans, and was concerned that State was not ready, McKenzie said.

SHIP HIJACKING

India to prosecute 35 Somali pirates

New Delhi, March 20: India will bring in and prosecute 35 Somali pirates its navy captured on a hijacked ship off Somalia, a navy official said, in a departure from its recent practice of rescuing vessels and crew but leaving the disarmed pirates at sea. The captured pirates are due to arrive in India Saturday and will be handed over to the law enforcement agencies, the official said. He declined to be identified as he was not authorised to speak to the media. The exact charges against the pirates were not immediately clear, he added. Indian navy commandos managed to release the Malta-flagged commercial ship MV Ruen Saturday, which had been hijacked 450 nautical miles east of Socotra in the northern Arabian Sea by Somali pirates on Dec 14. It marked the first hijacking of a merchant ship by Somali pirates since 2017. At the peak of their attacks in 2011, Somali pirates cost the global economy an estimated \$7 billion, including hundreds of millions of dollars in ransom payments. During the piracy peak, India's navy used to prosecute and jail in India pirates involved in major attacks, but in recent months the navy has taken to leaving the pirates at sea. The Ruen pirates will be the first India prosecutes in years, the official added. India has deployed at least a dozen warships in the Gulf of Aden and the northern Arabian Sea since December, which enables it to assist vessels east of the Red Sea, where the navies of several countries, including the United States, are trying to secure shipping routes under attack from Yemen's Houthi militants. The Indian official said that since the Ruen's hijacking, the navy has kept the region under "continuous surveillance activities" using its aerial platforms and information gathered from other vessels it has been investigating.

Balochistan militants attack Gawadar Port; 8 terrorists shot dead

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Karachi, March 20: Heavily-armed Baloch militants Wednesday forcibly entered the Gawadar Port Authority Complex and opened fire while multiple explosions were also reported in the area in Pakistan's troubled Balochistan province, media reports said. Citing Makran Commissioner Saeed Ahmed Umrani, Dawn.Com reported that a large contingent of police and security forces reached the scene while intense firing is going on.



Security forces foiled the attack on the Gawadar Port Authority (GPA) complex and killed the eight attackers, the Express Tribune newspaper reported, citing sources. The attackers were neutralised while trying to gain entry into the port complex, it said. Majeed Brigade of the pro-separatist Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) has claimed responsibility for the attack, the report said. Balochistan, bordering Iran and Afghanistan, is home to a long-running violent insurgency. Baloch insurgent groups have previously carried out several attacks targeting the \$60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects. Thousands of Chinese personnel are working in Pakistan on a number of projects being carried out under the aegis of the CPEC. The separatist BLA is opposed to China's investments in Balochistan and accuses China and Pakistan of exploitation of the resource-rich province.

India slams UfC model

The UfC group is opposed to the creation of new permanent members in the Security Council

AGENCIES

United Nations, March 20: India has criticised a model for the UN Security Council presented by the Uniting for Consensus (UfC) group that includes Pakistan, saying it stands against the idea supported by a majority of member states to expand permanent and non-permanent seats and underscored that the world of the 21st century desperately needs a UN 2.0. The UfC comprises Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Italy, Malta, Mexico, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, San Marino, Spain, and Turkiye. China, a permanent member, and Indonesia are participating in the group as Observers. The UfC group is opposed to the creation of new permanent members in the Security Council. The UfC model entails a Security Council with 26 seats, with an increase only in the non-permanent, elected members. It proposes creating 9 new long-term seats with immediate re-election



possibilities. "Threats to international peace and security have become more complex, unpredictable and undefined. The world of the twenty-first century desperately needs a UN 2.0 that is credible, representative, reflecting the needs and aspirations of the member states and capable of maintaining peace and security," India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj said in response to the UfC model presented by Italy at the Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) meeting on UNSC reforms Monday. "The UfC which comprises 12 countries and 2 observers including a P5 country stands against the idea espoused by a majority of UN member states, namely that of the expansion in permanent and non-permanent categories," she said. Kamboj said the UfC model represents Africa, Latin America and Asia. Africa, a 54-member group, is calling for expansion in both categories. "When Africa themselves are asking for expansion in both categories of membership, isn't it uncalled for to do what Africa was subjected to in perpetuity in the past — which is deciding on their behalf I would look forward to hearing from you on the rationale of deciding that Africa amongst others should not be represented in the permanent category," she said. Kamboj said the point on Africa also extends to the member states from the Global South. She said India "believes that without representation, without

The world of the twenty-first century desperately needs a UN 2.0 that is credible, representative, reflecting the needs and aspirations of the member states and capable of maintaining peace and security

RUCHIRA KAMBOJ | INDIA'S PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UN

IMF reaches pact with Pak

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Islamabad, March 20: The IMF has reached a staff-level agreement with cash-strapped Pakistan on the final review of a \$3 billion bailout, paving the way for the release of the last \$1.1 billion tranche from the lender. The agreement is subject to the approval of the IMF's Executive Board, the global lender said. An International Monetary Fund (IMF) team, led by Nathan Porter, visited Islamabad from March 14-19 to hold discussions on the second review of

NO SALARIES

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his Cabinet Wednesday unanimously decided to forego their salaries and related benefits due to the precarious economic condition of the country. The decision was taken during a Cabinet meeting as part of the government's austerity policies, aimed at curbing unnecessary expenditures. Pakistan's economic programme supported by an IMF. The IMF Executive Board approved the \$3 billion Stand-By Arrangement for Pakistan last year.

TIDBITS

NZ to ban disposable e-cigarettes
Wellington: The New Zealand government said Wednesday it will ban the sale of disposable e-cigarettes, increase fines on retailers that sell to those younger than 18 years old and better regulate retailers. The New Zealand government has received significant criticism for rolling back a world-first law banning tobacco sales for future generations. It has said it is committed to reducing smoking but is just taking a different approach, including further regulations around vaping. "While vaping has contributed to a significant fall in our smoking rates, the rapid rise in youth vaping has been a real concern for parents, teachers, and health professionals," said Casey Costello, associate minister of health. Under the new rules, fines for retailers selling e-cigarettes to those under the age of 18 will increase, there were to be a review of the licensing of vaping retailers, and all disposable vapes will be banned.

Another digitally altered royal image

London: A second royal photograph issued to the media by Kensington Palace, the office of Prince William and his wife Kate, was digitally altered in eight places, Reuters said Tuesday after an analysis of the picture by the news organisation's photo editors. The picture, released in April last year to mark what would have been the 97th birthday of the late Queen Elizabeth, showed the former monarch surrounded by some of her grandchildren and great grandchildren. It had been taken by Kate, 42, at the Scottish royal residence Balmoral Castle the previous summer, Kensington Palace said at the time.

COUNTRIES LIKE CHINA AND IRAN ARE PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF ACCEPTABLE ACTIVITIES ON THE CONTINENT AND CONSIDERING MAKING TERRITORIAL CLAIMS IN THE FUTURE

Antarctica's peaceful status quo under threat

After years of peace, the situation in Antarctica is starting to change. Currently, the continent is teetering on the brink of a crisis—both literally and metaphorically. Climate change is not only altering the physical landscape of Antarctica irreversibly, but the geopolitical landscape is also evolving rapidly due to increased competition among powerful nations and a growing demand for resources, which has put Antarctica in the spotlight on the global stage. Countries like China and Iran are pushing the boundaries of acceptable activities on the continent and considering making territorial claims in the future. Last year, Shahram Irani, the leader of the Iranian navy, announced plans to establish a permanent base in Antarctica, even asserting that Iran had some kind of ownership rights in the South Pole. Similarly, in November, China sent its largest ever Antarctic expedition with around 460 personnel to construct its fifth research station on the continent. The station was completed in just three months and opened in February. Despite being in line with the Antarctic Treaty, which regulates actions on the continent, there are concerns that China's research stations could potentially serve military purposes, such as surveillance. While research satellites may be used to monitor changes in ice shelves one day, the next day they could be used for mapping military movements in other countries. The arrival of great-power competition on Antarctic shores would mark a break from a long era in which the continent was a place of international cooperation. The Antarctic Treaty, which entered into force in 1961, prohibits using the continent for military purposes and instead champions scientific cooperation. A series of follow-on agree-

ments, which have come to be known as the Antarctic Treaty System, has succeeded at keeping the continent a neutral international site. But the system is now under greater strain than ever. Antarctica offers reach into the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans. On and offshore, it boasts vast deposits of precious minerals, oil, and natural gas, as well as large krill fisheries. The continent is also central to global communications because it holds the clearest shot to space, as moisture in the air freezes, making Antarctic ground stations crucial for operating satellites. The current absence of armed conflict in Antarctica has created a false sense of security. Policymakers from countries that support a neutral, peaceful



Antarctica seem to assume that cooperation there is a given. In fact, the status quo is fragile. To keep competition for resources at bay, stakeholders must shine a light on Beijing's destabilising activities. Public agency and interest in Antarctica need to be strengthened, as this is a critical precondition to supporting the continuance of the rules-based order enshrined by the Antarctic Treaty. But states also need to enhance their footprint (whether through capabilities or funding) in Antarctica, where presence equals power. Today, 54 states are party to the Antarctic Treaty, which includes 29 consultative parties with voting rights to Antarctic affairs. Several additional agreements have expanded on the key

tenets enshrined in the 1961 treaty: freedom of scientific investigation, research and cooperation, and peaceful use of the continent. A 1998 protocol, for example, officially designated Antarctica as a natural reserve for global peace and science and prohibited mining and other forms of resource extraction, except for scientific research. The architects of the Antarctic Treaty designed it to continue in perpetuity; it has no expiration date. Should any party wish to amend the treaty, it must gain consensus to open a review conference. This avenue for change has been available since 1991 but never used, suggesting that countries would rather uphold the Antarctic status quo than gamble their stake. Part of the success of the Antarctic Treaty System is that it skirts the question of sovereignty, effectively allowing parties to agree to disagree. Seven countries have made territorial claims—Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom—but all debate over and discussion of their merits was set aside when they signed the

Antarctic Treaty. The wording of the treaty creates a unique and artfully crafted holding pattern. This time, the players are different, with China quickly becoming a capable actor on the continent. China's ability to construct its own icebreakers—with a rumored nuclear-powered icebreaker set to debut in a few years—sets Beijing apart from the United States and Australia when it comes to Antarctic capability and therefore, power. The United States has two icebreakers—the Healy and the Polar Star—which take turns catching fire and are consistently pushed well beyond their expected operational life. Australia, holding the largest sovereign claim to Antarctica, has a single icebreaker, which, although brand new, is unable to currently refuel efficiently at its home port. Both the US and Australia find themselves renting icebreakers to prop up their national Antarctic activities. As the lines between scientific research and military activity blur, activities that live in this gray zone are beginning to chip away at the peaceful status quo that has been in place for so long.

of the day quote

India's airline industry is growing so fast that the country could support at least one other international hub beyond Mumbai and Delhi

CAMPBELL WILSON | CEO, AIR INDIA

Together, we have the opportunity to shape a future where AI serves as a catalyst for positive change, empowering auditors, and organizations to unlock new insights, drive informed decision-making, and create value for the nation

GIRISH CHANDRA MURMU | COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL OF INDIA

We will certainly participate when the mining auction comes up

SAIJAN JINDAL | CHAIRMAN, JSW

SHORT TAKES

Das, Buch meet FM

New Delhi: Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das Wednesday called on Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, ahead of the central bank's interest rate-setting panel meeting next month.

Google fined \$272mn

Paris: France's competition watchdog hit Google Wednesday with another big fine tied to a long-running dispute over payments to French publishers for their news.

BPCL signs US oil buy deal with BP

New Delhi: Indian state-run oil refiner Bharat Petroleum Corp has signed a deal with BP to buy 1 million barrels per month of US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for four months.

MeraDoc, MMT ink strategic pact

New Delhi: HealthTech startup and India's fastest-growing online medical services company MeraDoc has entered into a strategic partnership with travel booking MakeMyTrip to offer a bouquet of healthcare services on the go for the latter's subscribers across the country.



India needs to grow at 8 per cent on sustained basis to create sufficient jobs to reduce poverty and inequality

KRISHNAMURTHY VENKATA SUBRAMANIAN | FORMER CEA

5G USERS CONSUMING MORE DATA

5G users in India are consuming 3.6 times more mobile data as compared to 4G users since its rollout in October 2022, according to a report by telecom gear maker Nokia.



Direct selling sector grows

Odisha is among the top 10 states that accounted for about 70% of the direct selling sales turnover

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: The Indian direct selling industry has reported a 12 per cent growth in FY23, reporting a sales of ₹21,282 crore (over \$2.5 billion).

Besides, the total number of active sellers has also increased to 8.6 million in FY23, of which 63 per cent are male and the rest are female selling partners.

Earlier, the direct selling sector was traditionally dominated by females, however, after the pandemic, this has changed and youths in the age bracket of 25 to 44 years are joining the direct selling industry in large numbers.

In the financial year 2022-23 direct selling industries witnessed robust double-digit growth, marking a significant improvement.

Over the past four years, there has been a consistent upward trend in the number of Active Direct Sellers across the country.

The Indian direct-selling industry has reported a double-digit growth in FY23 as its "demonstrated resilience and growth despite challenges".

Factors such as unique product formulations, low-entry barriers, favourable demographics where the workforce is becoming increasingly mobile and flexible, and growing awareness and emphasis on health have led to

Zomato junks green uniform idea for veg deliveries after flak

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 20: India's largest food delivery firm Zomato Wednesday ditched plans for green uniforms for a new vegetarian-only service.

The decision was taken less than 24 hours after Zomato CEO Deepinder Goyal announced a green-coloured "Pure Veg" fleet.

"This will ensure that our red uniform delivery partners are not incorrectly associated with non-veg food, and blocked" by gated communities.

"Our riders' physical safety is of paramount importance to us. We now realise that even some of our customers could get into trouble with their landlords, and that would not be a nice thing if that happened because of us."

More than one-third of India's 1.4 billion people is estimated to be vegetarian - the world's largest percentage of people who don't eat meat or eggs - as they follow diets promoted by groups within Hinduism and other religions.



growth of direct selling in India.

Like the previous year, the wellness category was the lead contributor with 73.5 per cent share, followed by cosmetics & personal care and household goods and durables.

The Northern region emerged as the leading contributor to the overall gross sales of direct-selling products, followed by Western and Southern regions.

The top 10 states cumulatively accounted for about 70 per cent of the Indian Direct Selling sales turnover. The states are Maharashtra, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Karnataka, Odisha, Haryana, Gujarat, Assam, and Delhi.

However, Katoch also added that the industry is also facing challenges at policy level in several states.

"Only 10 states have constituted committees so far to monitor the direct selling industry," he said. Some major states such as Delhi, UP, Bihar, Punjab, Haryana, Assam, and Karnataka are yet to notify.

The Consumer Protection (Direct Selling) Rules as notified by the central government in December 2021, have a provision to set up a monitoring committee by state governments to supervise the activities of direct sellers and direct selling companies.

IDSA is also in dialogue with state governments for setting up similar monitoring committees and discussions are at an advanced stage with their Consumer Affairs Secretaries.

Steel majors line up billions for record output

REUTERS

New Delhi, March 20: Leading Indian steel producers, including JSW Steel Ltd and Tata Steel Ltd, are expected to invest billions in a record capacity increase to benefit from rising domestic demand in one of the world's fastest growing economies.

A spurt in economic activity and a revamp of broader infrastructure have drawn steel makers

We expect JSW Steel will spend \$2-\$2.2 billion a year towards brownfield expansions, scaling up its iron mining capacities in Odisha, raw material efficiency projects and downstream projects

HUI TING SIM | ASSISTANT VP, MOODY'S RATINGS

ers from around the world to India, where demand is rising. In Europe and the United States, it is falling.

Analysts and company data showed major mills were planning to increase capacity by at

least 22 million metric tons in the fiscal year beginning April 2024.

Jindal Steel and Power is expected to add 6 million metric tons to existing capacity of around 9.6 million metric tons and Tata Steel said it was adding

Hyd, Pune, top chart in women employment

AROUND 37% OF WOMEN POPULATION EMPLOYED IN INDIA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 20: The women workforce demographics in India suggests that of the total population of approximately 69.2 crores of women, around 37 per cent are actively working or employed, says a report.

According to talent solutions provider CareerNet's 'The State of Women's Employment in India' report, cities like Hyderabad, Pune, and Chennai top the chart in women employment.

In 2023, women's representation in the workforce experienced a significant rise of 2.5 per cent compared to the previous year, in junior professional roles and executive boards, it stated.

The report revealed 40 per cent of the fresh talents from colleges placed in 2023 were



women.

Women candidates having 0-3 years and 3-7 years of experience constitute 20-25 per cent of the total hires in their respective bands, it added.

The report further revealed that there has been a slight overall increase in the hiring ratio of women in most cities, except for

Delhi and National Capital Region (NCR), which showed a decline.

Hyderabad leads with a 34 per cent hiring rate, followed by Pune at 33 per cent, and Chennai at 29 per cent. While, Delhi-NCR has witnessed a decline at 20 per cent, reflecting a 2 per cent decrease from the 2022 figure, it

The surge in women's employment in the Indian startup ecosystem affirms that India Inc is open to transformation

ANSHUMAN DAS | CEO AND CO-FOUNDER, CAREERNET

added.

The report has been prepared with an analysis of 25,000 job placements collated from internal sources, employer career portals, and month-on-month hiring trends in 2023.

The sectoral analysis revealed an increase in hiring trends for women in the banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI) sector within Global Capability Centers (GCCs), the offshore units set up by multinational companies to perform a range of strategic functions.

higher on March 20. Asian shares closed mostly higher while European markets opened lower Wednesday as investors awaited the latest signals from the Federal Reserve on the timing of cuts to interest rates.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹1,421.48 crore Tuesday, according to exchange data.

The net direct tax collection grew 19.88 per cent to over ₹18.90 lakh crore till March 17 on higher advance tax mop-up.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said net direct tax collection of ₹18,90,259 crore (as of March 17) includes Corporation Tax (CIT) at ₹9,14,469 crore (net of refund) and Personal Income Tax (PIT), including Securities Transaction Tax (STT) at ₹9,72,224 crore (net of refund).

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.80 per cent to \$86.68 a barrel.

The 30-share BSE benchmark tanked 736.37 points or 1.01 per cent to settle at 72,012.05 Tuesday. The NSE Nifty slumped 238.25 points or 1.08 per cent to finish at 21,817.45.

Feb Russian crude imports edged up

REUTERS

New Delhi, March 20: India's import of Russian oil edged up in February over January, reversing declines seen in the past two months, data from industry sources showed Wednesday, as refiners received some parcels of Russian light sweet Sokol grade.

The world's third biggest oil importer and consumer, India has been gorging on Russian oil since the West imposed sanctions on Moscow for its invasion on Ukraine in February 2022.

The South Asian nation emerged as the top buyer of Russian oil in 2023 after some entities and nations retreated from purchases in December 2022.

Last month, Indian refiners imported 1.51 million barrels per day (bpd) of Russian oil, a rise of about 2.8% from January, the data showed. That was about 12.2% lower than the corresponding month a year ago.

Russian oil made up about 32% of India's overall oil imports in February, compared with 28% the previous month, the data showed.

India's Russian oil imports in recent months were hit by payment problems and tougher US sanctions, targeting entities and ships involved in the sale of Russian crude at above the price cap of \$60 a barrel fixed by G7 nations.

India's overall imports last month declined 10% from January to 4.72 million bpd, the data showed. That decline is steeper than preliminary government data as it included some parcels that arrived in February and were discharged in March.

narrowing pay gap, decreasing to approximately 20 per cent in 2023 from 30 per cent in the previous year, signalling a positive shift towards equitable salary practices.

Meanwhile, the hiring of women at the mid-management level has remained unchanged at 23 per cent over the past two years, said the report.

"... While 30 per cent of the urban population is white-collar professionals, only 5 per cent of the rural populace falls into this category. This underscores a significant gender disparity in India's white-collar landscape," CareerNet CEO and co-founder Anshuman Das said.

While significant strides have been made in enhancing women's participation in the Indian workforce, some challenges need addressing for their re-entering the workforce, he said.

INDIA TAKE ON AFGHANS



BLUE TIGERS EYE THREE POINTS IN FIFA WORLD CUP QUALIFIER AGAINST WEAKENED OPPOSITION

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Abha (Saudi Arabia), March 20: Bolstered by the return of Jeakson Singh and Anwar Ali, the Indian football team will renew their quest for a maiden entry into the third round of FIFA World Cup Qualifiers when they face a weakened Afghanistan here Thursday.

With mid-field general Jeakson and centre-back Anwar back in the line-up after long injury layoffs, because of which India suffered in recent past, the Blue Tigers will fancy their chances against the lower-ranked opponents in the second-round preliminary joint qualification match.

However, mid-fielder Sahal Abdul Samad has been ruled out of the contest due to a hamstring injury he suffered in training Tuesday.

With three points and one win from two matches, India currently occupy the second place in the Group A pecking order.

Reigning Asian champions Qatar lead the standings with six points from two wins, while Kuwait are second with one win. Having lost both their games so far, Afghanistan are placed last.

India's away win against Kuwait has put Igor Stimac's team in a strong position to progress further in the qualification cycle, something the 117-ranked side has never achieved.

Victories in their upcoming outings (away and home) against the 158-ranked Afghanistan will help India acquire nine points and with Qatar expected to win their next two matches against Kuwait, the Blue Tigers have a real chance of jumping to second place in the standings. India defeated Kuwait (1-0) in Kuwait City in their opening match of the qualifiers, before losing to Qatar (0-3) in Bhubaneswar.

Since their first-ever meeting way back in 1949, India and Afghanistan have met regularly and the regional rivalry has not run its course even after the latter left SAFF in 2016.

The face-off continued in the World Cup Qualifiers, Asian Cup Qualifiers and other continental and invitational tournaments, with India having their nose ahead on most occasions.

Nevertheless, the Afghans have always been a difficult opposition to overcome, fighting till the final whistle. Nobody in this Indian squad can tell about Afghanistan better than the evergreen Sunil Chhetri, who is going strong at 39 and will be spearheading the visiting attack alongside Manvir Singh, who found the net in the team's win against Kuwait.

Chhetri's record against the neighbours is quite impressive, scoring four goals in eight matches including a spectacular strike

from a free kick in Kolkata in 2022. "They have progressively improved from when we met them for the first time," said Chhetri. "The games were comfortable, but slowly and steadily, they progressed. And because of being in the same region, the rivalry also generated.

"Hence, the games became quite close. Both India and Afghanistan have improved in the last decade or so. Having players who play outside has really helped them," he added.

While Chhetri remains his biggest player, Stimac should be no less thrilled with the return of Jeakson and Anwar. Jeakson has played a pivotal role for the Blue Tigers in the last two years, and featured in 17 consecutive matches from the AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers in June 2022 until the King's Cup in Thailand last September. His importance can be gauged by Stimac labelling

him as one of the biggest misses in the squad for the Asian Cup in Qatar.

What also makes India favourites in the game is the absence of some key Afghanistan players, who have been at loggerheads with the Afghanistan Football Federation (AFF) since accusing the sport body of indulging in corruption, including match-fixing.

As the second round of qualifiers started, problems between the Afghanistan players and the AFF started growing. As many as 18 players boycotted the qualifiers against Kuwait and Qatar, leaving the side with few first-team players for the outing against Mongolia, whom the Lions of Khorasan defeated to progress to the second round. Still, players such as Zohib Islam Amiri, Omid Musawi and Balal Arezou will look to cause problems for India.

Zaheer lauds Dhoni's mindset about cricket



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, March 20: Cricket remains integral but "not everything" for MS Dhoni, says his former India teammate Zaheer Khan of the man with a penchant for catching the world off-guard and an eagerness to explore various avenues.

At 42, the two-time World Cup winning captain Dhoni is gearing up to lead Chennai Super Kings in the upcoming IPL. The charismatic former India skipper had quit international cricket four years back.

"MS Dhoni understood a long time ago that he is passionate about cricket and it is an integral part of his life. But it couldn't be everything," Zaheer said in an episode dedicated to the Dhoni on Jio Cinema.

Besides his World Cup triumphs and India's march to the world number one position in Tests, Dhoni has led CSK to a joint-record five IPL titles, having taken on the top leadership role from the league's inaugural edition in 2008.

Zaheer said, "When you're playing, switching off (from the game) is very important. Cricket is not everything. Every cricketer has to face this eventually. When you step away from the game, you may not have a lot of options. We've seen many athletes

struggle after retiring because they gave everything to the game, and when they left it, they didn't know what to do.

"In this sense, MS Dhoni understood a long time ago that he is passionate about cricket and it is an integral part of his life. But it couldn't be everything. He keeps doing things outside of the sport. For example, his interest in bikes. He's always researching them."

Speaking about Dhoni, ex-India and CSK all-rounder Suresh Raina said he wants his former teammate to continue playing in IPL for another five years.

"The biggest question is who'll be their next captain? Even if Dhoni stepped away as captain, he'll be in the dugout whether it's as a mental toughness coach or just for his presence. But the question is, who is he going to nurture?"

"This is a pivotal year for CSK. Who does MS have his eyes on? Ruturaj Gaikwad is a good option. This year is a very important year for CSK, more than for MS Dhoni. Because we'll see who he is going to select as his deputy and probably say: 'You handle this now, I've been looking after the team since 2008. You take care of the yellow, I will wear the jersey and sit in the dressing room', Raina said.

Shastri meets Naveen, discusses about academy



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 20: Former cricketer Ravi Shastri Wednesday called on Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and discussed a project on providing coaching to young boys and girls of the state. Shastri was accompanied by another former coach R Sridhar and industrialist Pankaj Lochan Mohanty.

"Glad to meet ex-cricketer & former head coach of Team India, @RaviShastriOfc, who visited #Odisha to attend the MoU signing event between 'Coaching Beyond' cricket academy and #Cutack-based MGM School of Sports to establish a high performance cricket academy," Patnaik posted on X.

"Coaching Beyond", a cricket coaching institution founded by Shastri, on Tuesday signed an MoU with Odisha-based MGM School of Sports, which was established near Cuttack.

Patnaik said they had a very fruitful discussion on the development of world-class

cricket infrastructure in Odisha and thanked Shastri for appreciating the state's sporting ecosystem.

Shastri told reporters that the venture will provide the best coaching and other facilities to produce international-standard players from the school of sports.

The cricket academy is going to attract a lot of people from across the country for its size, quality of infrastructure and location, he said.

"Coaching Beyond" will be the knowledge and technical partner for this venture of MGM School of Sports, MGM Minerals Ltd CMD, Pankaj Lochan Mohanty said. To begin this venture, up to 50 young male cricketers will be selected and offered training at a subsidised fee, he said.

The number of trainees will be increased in future for both male and female cricketers, he said. Besides, the academy will run a daily coaching programme which will be open to all age groups of boys and girls, Mohanty added.

Another blow for Russian, Belarusian athletes

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Geneva, March 20: Russian and Belarusian athletes will not be allowed to take part in the traditional parade at the opening ceremony at the Paris Olympics, the IOC said.

The opening ceremony July 26 will see thousands of athletes travel on boats down the River Seine for several miles (kilometers) toward the Eiffel Tower, instead of the normal parade of teams inside a stadium.

The International Olympic Committee said athletes from Russia and Belarus who are approved to compete at the Olympics as neutrals will have a chance only "to experience the event" — likely watching from near the river.

The IOC decision follows the International Paralympic Committee which two weeks ago announced a ban for its Paris opening ceremony August 28.

Russia and Belarus are barred from team sports at the Olympics because of the war in Ukraine and the IOC has laid out a two-step vetting procedure for individual athletes from those countries to be granted neutral status. Those athletes must first be approved by the governing body of their individual sport and



then by an IOC-appointed review panel.

Neutral athletes must not have publicly supported the invasion of Ukraine, or be affiliated with military or state security agencies. It is unclear if membership of a Russian military sports club, such as CSKA, will be a reason for denying neutral status.

The IOC said Tuesday it expects about 36 neutral athletes with Russian passports and 22 with Belarusian passports to qualify for the Paris Games. A decision on whether those athletes will be allowed to take part in the August 11 closing ceremony will be taken "at a later stage," the IOC said.

Any medals won by neutral athletes will not be counted as a collective group in the overall medals table. The IOC also revealed details of the replace-

ment flag in jade green that will be used for neutral athletes at medal ceremonies, where a specially written anthem without lyrics will be played.

BOXING FACES NEW THREAT

In another source of tension between Olympic leaders and Russian sport, the IOC decided Tuesday that the International Boxing Association led by Kremlin-backed Umar Kremlev will not be involved in organizing bouts for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

The IOC also threatened to remove boxing from the Los Angeles program in what seemed like a challenge to national federations worldwide to distance themselves from the IBA and Kremlev.

The IOC withdrew its recognition of the IBA last year and the body was not allowed to take

part in organizing boxing at the previous Tokyo Olympics or in Paris. But Kremlev has further riled the IOC with confrontational comments and support for the rival Friendship Games scheduled in Russia in September.

"If we do not have a new boxing body to work in partnership with the IOC, we will not be in a position to have boxing at the program of (Los Angeles)," the Olympic body said.

LEAVING RUSSIA

Two Russians athletes who have changed national-team eligibility to different countries got those moves approved by the IOC. Swimmer Anastasiia Kirpichnikova is eligible to represent France at the Olympics, and Greco-Roman wrestler Aleksandr Komarov can compete for Serbia.

GUATEMALA RESTORED

The IOC eased a suspension imposed 18 months ago on the national Olympic body of Guatemala because of alleged government interference.

The IOC cited "the interest of the athletes" as a reason for provisionally lifting the ban, which should clear the way for Guatemalan athletes to compete in Paris with their flag, anthem and team name.

FIH HOCKEY 5s Indian men, eves secure 2nd spots in maiden ranking

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lausanne, March 20: Indian men's and women's teams are both placed second in the maiden Hockey 5s rankings issued recently by the world body (FIH).

The Indian men's team occupies second spot jointly with Oman and Malaysia following a three-way tie with 1400 points each. Having won the Asian Championship, India had finished fifth at the World Cup at Muscat from January 28-31.

The Netherlands (1750 points) lead the pack after winning the inaugural World Cup following their victory at the European Championships.

The Netherlands once again occupy pole position in the women's rankings with their gold medal at the World Cup as well as the European Championships that secured them 1750 points. India (1550), who won the silver medal at the World Cup after winning the Asian Championship, are ranked second. World Cup bronze medallists Poland (1450) are placed third.

Sindhu, Srikanth, Lakshya progress in Swiss Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Basel, March 20: Double Olympic medalist PV Sindhu, in-form Lakshya Sen and Kidambi Srikanth produced impressive performances to progress to the second round of the Swiss Open super 300 badminton tournament here Wednesday.

Sindhu, who had claimed the title in 2022, beat Thailand's Pornpicha Choekiewong 21-12, 21-13 to set up a meeting with Japan's Tomoka Miyazaki in the second round.

Sen, who had reached back-to-back semifinals at French Open and All England Championships in the last two weeks, outlasted Malaysia's Leong Jun Hao 21-19, 15-21, 21-11 in 62 minutes and

will next face Chinese Taipei's Chia Hao Lee.

The former World No.1 Srikanth, who had clinched the title in 2015, outwitted World No.24 Chinese Taipei's Wang Tzu Wei 21-17, 21-18 in a 43-minute contest. It was his sixth win in seven meetings against his opponent. Srikanth will next face a tough opponent in Malaysia's top seed Lee Zii Jia.

In women's doubles, Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa, seeded sixth, overcame Indonesia's Meilyssa Trias Puspitasari and Rachel Allesya Rose 21-18, 12-21, 21-19 in a thrilling opener. The World No.20 Indian pair will face Japan's Rui Hirokami and Yuna Kato next. Another Indian pair of Priya



Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra beat Chinese Taipei's Huang Yu-Hsun and Liang Ting Yu 21-13, 21-19 in another women's doubles match.

The pair of Treesa Jolly and

Gayatri Gopichand had advanced Tuesday to the women's doubles second round with a 21-15, 21-12 win over USA's Annie Xu and Kerry Xu in the opening round.

However, the other three Indian pairs competing in the women's doubles main draw made first round exits. Ashwini Bhat and Shikha Gautam went down 13-21, 21-16, 14-21 to the fourth seeds from Hong Kong Yeung Nga Ting and Yeung Pui Lam, while Rutaparna Panda and Swetaparna Panda were ousted 4-21 6-21 by top seeds Apriyani Rahayu and Siti Padiya Silva Ramadhanti of Indonesia. Simran Singhi and Ritika Thaker were brushed aside 17-21, 7-21 by Indonesia's Tria Mayasari and Ribka Sugiarto.