



Kriti's fear

Actor Kriti Sanon says she is scared of doing same kind of films or playing same roles

LEISURE | P2



Firm stand

Pakistan clarifies that it has no plan to resume trade relations with India which has been 'non-existent' since 2019

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Investors' wealth rises

Equity investors become richer by ₹128.77 lakh crore in 2023-24 fiscal, driven by robust fundamentals of the economy

BUSINESS | P11



Sindhu sails through

PV Sindhu marches into quarterfinals at the Madrid Spain Masters badminton tournament beating Chinese Taipei's Huang Yu-Hsun

SPORTS | P12



HERCULEAN TASK: Firefighters attempt to douse a blaze that broke out at Logistics Park in Nimji, on the outskirts of Nagpur, Thursday

'SAVE JUDICIARY'

Is the country's judiciary under duress or succumbing to the fear of being defamed for its decisions in high-profile cases of corruption involving politicians? More than 600 lawyers, including senior advocate Harish Salve and Bar Council of India Chairperson Manan Kumar Mishra, believe so. In a curious move, the lawyers have sought the intervention of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud in saving the judiciary as well as the democracy from, what they termed, 'a vested interest group', which is out to undermine judicial integrity.

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 28: More than 600 lawyers, including senior advocate Harish Salve and Bar Council of India Chairperson Manan Kumar Mishra, have written to the Chief Justice of India, alleging that a 'vested interest group' is trying to put pressure on the judiciary and defame courts, especially in cases of corruption involving politicians. "These tactics are damaging to our courts and threaten our democratic fabric," the lawyers drawn from across the country said in the letter dated March 26. CJI DY Chandrachud's leadership is crucial in these 'tough times' and the Supreme Court should stand strong, they said,

To bully others is Cong culture: PM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi Thursday said it is a 'vintage Congress culture' to browbeat and bully others, remarks that came in reaction to more than 600 lawyers writing to the CJI, alleging that a 'vested interest group' is trying to put pressure on the judiciary and defame courts.

adding it is not the time to maintain dignified silence.

The letter titled 'Judiciary Under Threat-Safeguarding Judiciary from Political and Professional Pressure' targeted a section of lawyers without naming them and alleged that they defend politicians by day and then try to influence judges through the media at night.

This interest group creates false narratives of a supposed better past and golden period of courts, contrasting it with the happenings in the present, the letter said. It claimed that their comments are aimed at influencing courts and embarrassing them for political gains.

Though the lawyers behind the letter have mentioned no specific cases, the development comes at a time when courts are dealing with several high-profile criminal cases of corrup-

Height of hypocrisy, says Jairam Ramesh

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh Thursday hit back at PM Narendra Modi after his criticism of the party over a lawyers' letter to the CJI against a 'vested interest group', saying the PM's brazenness in orchestrating an attack on the judiciary, in the name of defending it, is the 'height of hypocrisy'.

tion involving Opposition leaders. Opposition parties have accused the Centre of targeting their leaders due to its political vendetta, a charge refuted by the ruling BJP. These parties, whose ranks include some noted lawyers, have joined hands against the recent arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the excise policy-linked money laundering case. "We are writing to you expressing our deepest concern on the manner in which a vested interest group is trying to pressure the judiciary, influence judicial process and defame our courts on the basis of frivolous logic and stale political agendas," they said.

The letter-writers urged the Supreme Court to stand strong and take steps to protect courts from these alleged attacks and save the judiciary as well as the democracy. P3

Mukhtar Ansari dies; Section 144 in UP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, March 28: Jailed gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari died of a cardiac arrest at a hospital in Uttar Pradesh's Banda Thursday.

Ansari, 63, was taken to the Rani Durgavati Medical College in Banda from the district jail after his health deteriorated. Medical college principal Suneel Kaushal said that Ansari died following a cardiac arrest at the facility. Prohibitory order under Section 144 of the CrPC was imposed across UP, DGP Prashant Kumar said. P9

PhD admissions using NET scores

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 28: The National Eligibility Test (NET) scores will be used for PhD admissions from 2024-25 eliminating the need for separate entrance tests conducted by universities and higher education institutions, according to the University Grants Commission (UGC).

The NET is conducted twice a year -- June and December. Its scores are currently used to award Junior Research Fellowship and as eligibility for appointment as an assistant professor for those with a Master's degree.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Stop saying it! The USA and Germany have taken it seriously

Mahtab, Sidhant among 3 join BJP

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 28: BJD founding member and six-time Cuttack Lok Sabha MP Bhartruhari Mahtab, former party MP Sidhant Mohapatra and noted Santali language litterateur Damayanti Beshra joined the BJP in New Delhi, Thursday.

Addressing a joint press conference after joining the BJP, Mahtab said he will now get the

opportunity to work for the development and progress of Odisha. "Prime Minister Modi's 'shakti (strength)', Home Minister's 'vishwas (trust)' and (BJP chief) JP Nadda ji's 'pre-rna (inspiration)' will help us move forward," he said. "Odisha is going to witness a change due to Prime Minister Modi's leadership," he added.

Mahtab had resigned from the primary membership of the BJD last Friday. P8

Kejriwal's ED custody extended till April 1

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 28: A court here Thursday extended the Enforcement Directorate (ED) custody of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal till April 1 in the excise policy case.

The agency sought seven-day custody of the AAP chief, but the court said he has to be produced before it April 1 at 11am. The ED had produced him before Rouse Avenue Court Special Judge Kaveri Baweja as his current six-day custody was ending Thursday. The ED said in its fresh remand plea that during Kejriwal's custodial interrogation, his statements were recorded over five days but he was 'giving evasive replies'. It said statements of three other persons relevant to the case have also been recorded during the remand period. It said that during the ED custody, Kejriwal was confronted with C Arvind, the then personal secretary to deputy CM Manish Sisodia who was handed over the draft

HC relief for Delhi CM

New Delhi: In what came as a relief for AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal, the Delhi High Court (HC) Thursday rejected a PIL seeking the removal of Kejriwal from the Delhi Chief Minister's post following his arrest in an excise policy-linked money laundering case and said it cannot declare a breakdown of the constitutional machinery in the national capital.

Group of Ministers (GoM) report for the 2021-22 excise policy at the residence of the CM. It said the statement of one of the AAP candidates in the 2022 Goa elections was also recorded during Kejriwal's ED custody. It revealed that the candidate did not have any money and his election expenditure was 'taken care of by the AAP Office Delhi only through their associates'.

The plea said that during the custody, data from the mobile phone of the chief minister's wife have been extracted and were being analysed.

MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VALUE	VARIATION
SENSEX	73651.35	↑ 655.04
NIFTY	22326.90	↑ 203.25
DOLLAR	83.37	↑ ₹0.02
EURO	90.22	↓ ₹0.06
GOLD	₹66,890	↑ ₹523
SILVER	₹74,800	↑ ₹138

WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	36.5°C	38.4°C
Min Temp	23.0°C	24.0°C
Humidity	76%	87%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

FORECAST

MAINLY CLEAR SKY

UNFAZED BY 238 DEFEATS

'Election King' set to try his luck yet again

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Mettur (Tamil Nadu), March 28: Despite failing 238 times in his bid for public office, K Padmarajan, popularly dubbed 'Election King', is unperturbed as he prepares, yet again, to contest the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

The 65-year-old tyre repair shop owner began fighting elections in 1988 from his hometown of Mettur in of Tamil Nadu. People laughed when he threw his hat into the ring, but Padmarajan said he wanted to prove that an ordinary man can also take part in the polls.

"All candidates seek victory in elections," said Padmarajan, sporting a bright shawl draped over his shoulder and an imposing walrus moustache. "Not me," he added.

For him, the victory is in participating, and when his defeat inevitably comes, he is 'happy losing', Padmarajan said. This year, in the six-week-long general elections that begin April 19, he is contesting a parliamentary seat in Tamil Nadu's Dharmapuri district.

Padmarajan has competed across the country in elections ranging from presidential to local polls.

Over the years, he has lost to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, former premiers Atal Bihari Vajpayee and



Manmohan Singh, and Congress party scion Rahul Gandhi.

"I do not care" "Victory is secondary," he said, adding, "Who is the opposite candidate? I do not care."

Padmarajan's main preoccupation now is extending his losing streak.

It has not come cheap -- he estimates he has spent thousands of rupees in more than three decades by way of nomination fees. That includes a security deposit of ₹25,000 for his latest tilt, which will not be refunded unless he wins more than 16 per cent of the vote.

His one victory has been to earn a place as India's most unsuccessful candidate in the Limca Book of Records.

Padmarajan's best performance was in 2011, when he stood for the Assembly elections in Mettur. He won 6,273 votes

-- compared to more than 75,000 for the eventual victor. "I did not even expect one vote," he said, adding, "But it showed that people are accepting me."

In addition to his tyre repair shop, Padmarajan provides homoeopathic remedies and works as an editor for local media.

But among all his jobs, fighting elections was the most important, he said.

"It is about involvement," he said, adding, "People hesitate to put in their nominations. So, I want to be a role model, to create awareness."

"Failure is best" Padmarajan maintains detailed records of the nomination papers and identity cards from each of his failed bids for statesmanship, all laminated for safekeeping.

Once the subject of ridicule, Padmarajan is now asked to address students about resilience, using his campaigns to explain how to bounce back from defeat.

Padmarajan said it was important, now more than ever, that every citizen of the country exercise their franchise. Padmarajan said he will continue to fight elections until his last breath -- but would be shocked were he ever to win. "I will have a heart attack," he laughed.

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leisure

FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES

You will put your eloquence to excellent use today, and it will be praised by one and all, particularly by members of the opposite sex, and you will bask in all the glory. However, Ganesh suggests that you spare some time for meditation to balance your internal and external worlds.

TAURUS

Today, you will be ruled by your heart, not your head, says Ganesh. You are likely to be driven by your feelings, emotions and sentiments. Most of the decisions taken today will be based on emotion, not reason. You need to be carefully that your sensitivity and emotionality does not expose you to hurt. Do not let anyone upset you. Stay calm and collected. You will thereby experience love and warmth for one and all.

GEMINI

You will express your feeling and opinions to people close to you and earn their support and wishes. However, you will still feel the need to be in solitude and peace in the later half of the day. Spending time with friends and family will ease your troubled mind more effectively, says Ganesh.

CANCER

Your day can be full of hurdles, feels Ganesh. Be careful of womenfolk. Discord with friends on petty issue is likely. Pending work will be finished. Be optimistic, says Ganesh.

LEO

You will take some progressive decisions in the morning. However, your positivity will fade away as the day progresses and you will take a pessimistic view of things. This could affect your decisions. You will accomplish more in the later half of the day, says Ganesh.

VIRGO

As per indications you will be able to effect all the changes in your office space that you had desired. Monetary inflows will be immense, and your near and dear ones will love it. Ganesh says you will charm yourself into the hearts of the members of the opposite gender.

LIBRA

Ganesh says you will try to impress other people with your appearance and personality. Under current circumstances there are chances of you falling in love with a new person who will become your beloved. The time spent with this person will be unforgettable says Ganesh, as love is in the air. Make the most of the day.

SCORPIO

You have all the qualities of becoming a team leader. And today, you have the opportunity to showcase your skills and abilities for the same. A dynamic personality yourself, you are likely to prove that you are the sailor of stormy seas.

SAGITTARIUS

Today, you may discover your innate talents and will be recognised for that with a huge round of applause. Aiming to carve a niche for yourself, you may take up Herculean task at work under the guidance of your boss. Way to go!

CAPRICORN

You will be in chirpy mood today, want to do anything and everything. Business opportunities will grab your eye balls, and you want to go ahead with those ideas. Ganesh predicts you will succeed in these ventures as luck is by your side. Socially, you will be busy as you will meet a lot of people and impress them with your wit and humour.

AQUARIUS

You work while you work and play while you play. This approach certainly contributes a lot to your success, says Ganesh. You stay focused on your goal and make each step boldly, but wisely. Enjoy the evening in the presence of your friends and family members, and bring a joyous end to the day, says Ganesh.

PISCES

It is best that you concentrate single-mindedly on the task at hand at the workplace, rather than diverting your attention to other things, if you want to meet all your deadlines today, says Ganesh. Compromising on certain issues in relationships will only help you, and is the best way to maintain the balance in your personal life.

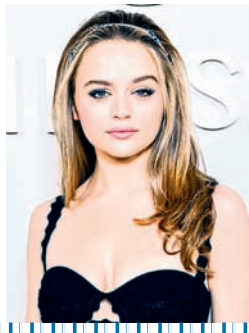


KRISTEN AND FIANCEE DYLAN HAVE GOT THEIR EGGS FROZEN

Actress Kristen Stewart and her screenwriter fiancée Dylan Meyer, who got engaged in 2021, are looking at options for having children together in the future and for that the two have even got their 'eggs frozen'. Stewart said, "We've done really annoying things like freeze our eggs and stuff."

JOEY KING EXPERIENCED ANTI-SEMITIC OUTBURSTS

Actress Joey King, who gained major fandom with her work in *The Kissing Booth* franchise, has opened up about facing anti-semitism at the age of 12 and also having trauma counselors on the sets of Holocaust series *We Were the Lucky Ones*.



Ananya breaks silence on rumoured beau

season of the popular chat show *No Filter Neha* hosted by Neha Dhupia, and broke her silence on her equation with the *Aashiqui 2* actor.

In the promo of the show, Ananya and Neha can be seen discussing about Aditya and Ananya goes on to say that she and Aditya are not just friends but very good friends. Neha Dhupia said: "I clicked a photograph and got the hashtag An-Adi. You and Aditya Roy Kapur were just talking, so I am just gonna clarify that you guys are just friends, just talking. I happened to click a photograph at Kriti Sanon's Diwali party and people started zooming into it. Do you wanna talk about that moment?"

Ananya Panday said: "I never said just friends Neha, you said that. Like we are very good friends now, not just friends. I don't think there's much to talk about."

No Filter Neha Season 6 is available to stream on JioTV and JioTV+ with new episodes dropping every Thursday. IANS

Mumbai: Actress Ananya Panday, who received a lot of positive response to her work in the streaming film *Kho Gaye Hum Kahan*, has said that she and her rumoured beau Aditya Roy Kapur are 'not just friends'.

The actress recently appeared on the 6th



Aditi announces engagement

Mumbai: Actress Aditi Rao Hydari, who was rumoured to tie the knot secretly in a Telangana temple, Thursday confirmed that she got engaged to actor Siddharth Wednesday.

The actress took to Instagram where she shared a picture of herself with her fiancé, which shows both of them flaunting their engagement rings.

Aditi wrote in the caption, "He said yes! E. N. G. A. G. E. D."

Members of the film fraternity flooded the comments section, showering blessings on the couple. Actress Fatima Sana Shaikh wrote, "Woohooo congratulations." Aditi's *Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar* co-star Manisha Koirala wrote, "Congratulations sweetheart."

Aditi was first reported to be married to Satyadeep Mishra. However, she never confirmed her marital status. It was in 2013 she revealed that the two have gone their separate ways.

On the other hand, Siddharth was seen in films such as *Nuvvostanante Nenoddantana*, *Rang De Basanti*, and *Chashme Baddoor* to name a few. IANS

KRITI ON HER BIGGEST FEAR

Mumbai: Actress Kriti Sanon has talked about what she fears in life.

"I am actually scared of getting stagnant. No one should say that I only do these same kinds of films or play the same kind of roles. Getting typecast is what I am afraid of, because with that people get bored," said the *Mimi* actress, who will next be seen in *Crew*.

Kriti, who has

maintained to enthrall the audience with her work in films such as *Bareilly Ki Barfi*, *Luka Chuppi*, and *Teri Baaton Main Aesa Uljha Jiya*, among many others, said that she gets excited when she plays myriad of characters on screen.

"There is always an excitement when you play a different character or portray a role. But if this same excitement ends, maybe you won't feel like going to work and that boredom always makes me feel afraid," she said.

On the work front, Kriti has *Do Patti* in the pipeline. IANS



BOBBY TO PLAY VILLAIN AGAIN

Mumbai: Bobby Deol is acing the new phase of his cinematic career by playing villainous characters in Hindi and regional cinema. The actor who was lauded as Abrar Haque in Sandeep Reddy Vanga's *Animal* is now entering the Yash Raj Films spy universe. He will be working in the action-thriller spin-off starring Alia Bhatt and Sharvari Wagh as reported by *Deadline*.



project revolves around the same cinematic universe which connects the upcoming *War 2* and *Tiger Vs Pathaan*. Alia has become the first female actor to headline a high-octane espionage thriller.

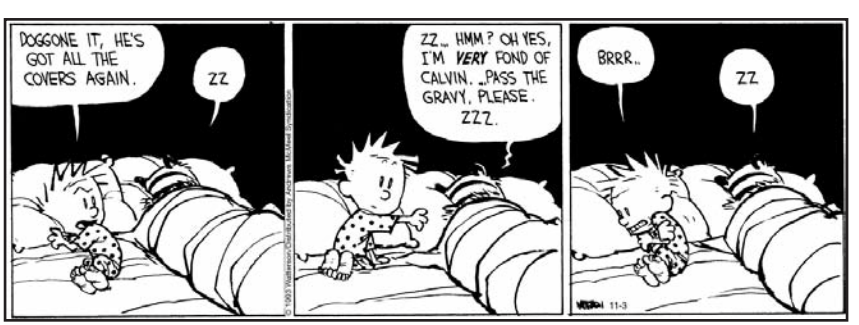
According to the portal, "After starring in box office hit *Animal*, we can reveal that Bobby Deol will play the villain in the next Yash Raj Films Spy Universe feature starring Alia Bhatt and Sharvari Wagh." The rest of the cast is yet to be officially announced by the makers. The untitled



PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

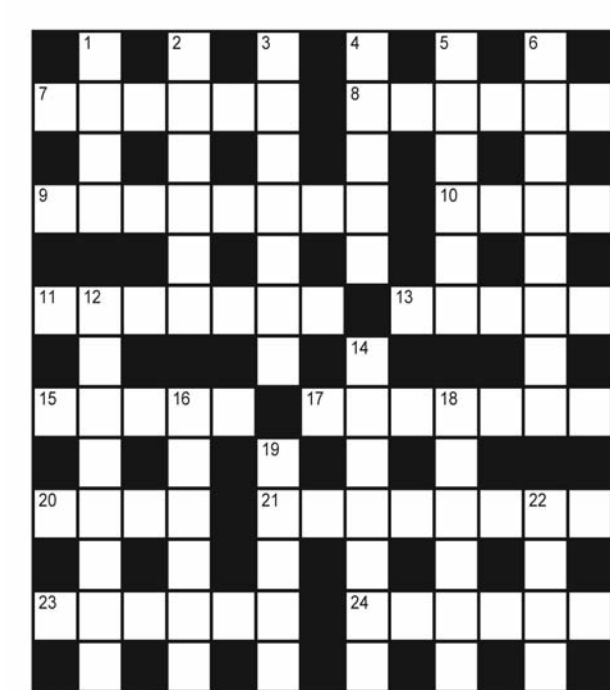


BREVITY



FUN post

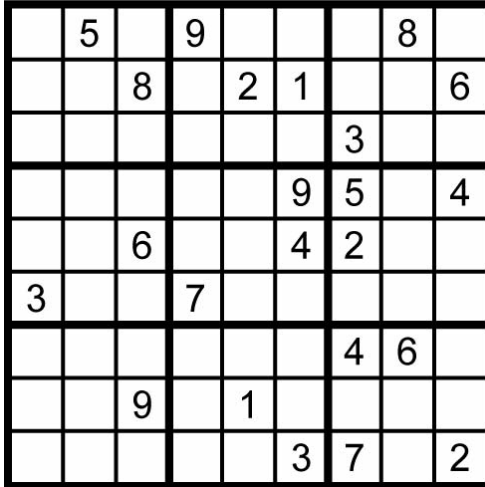
CROSSWORD



- Across
- 7 Roundabout way
 - 8 Plague
 - 9 Glows
 - 10 Burst of wind
 - 11 Disorderly
 - 13 Apples and oranges
 - 15 Doorkeeper
 - 17 Aromatic root
 - 20 Abominable snowman
 - 21 Carpenter's tool (5,3)
 - 23 Gravy ingredient
 - 24 Wobble
- Down
- 1 Epsilon follower
 - 2 Kind of shark
 - 3 Diet necessity
 - 4 Weighty
 - 5 Greater
 - 6 Actor
 - 12 Frenzy
 - 14 Order
 - 16 Digestible
 - 18 Sound setup
 - 19 Drain
 - 22 Follow orders

SUDOKU

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

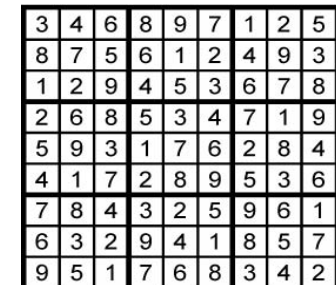


SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown

IN SYNC

Odissi dancers perform at the inaugural evening of Cuttack Kala Vikash Kendra Mahotsav, Thursday



Cong's 1st list of candidates by April first week: Bhakta

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 28: Former Union minister and Odisha Congress Campaign Committee (OPCC) chairman Bhakta Charan Das Thursday said the party will announce the first list of candidates for elections in Odisha by the first week of April.

The newly appointed OPCC Campaign Committee chief said the party will aggressively campaign against BJD and BJP and fight for five justices (five Nyays) to empower the people.

Speaking to mediapersons here, Das said, "Very soon, by the first week of April, the party will announce the list of candidates for at least 60 Assembly constituencies, where the party lost last election with a minimal margin."

Das said he is going to contest the upcoming Odisha Assembly election from Narla constituency in Kalahandi district.

He alleged that both BJD and BJP are 'playing' with democracy and public mandate. Das also alleged that educated youths, farmers, women, dalits and tribals are exploited by the ruling parties.

"Instead of empowering them and working for their development, the BJD government has



OPCC Campaign Committee chief Bhakta Charan Das alleged that educated youths, farmers, women, dalits and tribals are exploited by the ruling parties

distributed some money through some schemes as if they are beggars," he said.

The BJD government has exploited the youths in the name of Biju Yuva Vahini and other schemes. The government is collecting Rs 45,000 crore revenue from mining but local youths

are not employed in the industries, he alleged.

Even after ruling the state for more than 24 years, the state government has "failed" to ensure pucca house for many tribals and dalits of Odisha, the Congress leader alleged.

Das said the government has made schools smarter by developing the infrastructure. However, it "failed" to ensure quality education as many teacher posts are lying vacant in schools.

Neither the BJD nor the BJP announced on the statements of Das.

Assembly and Lok Sabha elections will be held simultaneously in Odisha in four phases May 13, 20, 25 and June 1.

GST officer, 2 more govt servants in Vigilance net

Bhubaneswar: The Odisha Vigilance Thursday arrested three government servants and a private person on corruption charges. In a press statement, the Vigilance said it has arrested GST officer Manas Ranjan Behera, OSD Narendra Kumar Chandrakar, Revenue Supervisor Ganesh Mallick and Khirod Rath - a private person - in three different cases. Behera and Chandrakar have been apprehended by Odisha Vigilance while accepting bribe of Rs 30,000 each from two different complainants, while Mallick and Rath have been apprehended when they were accepting a bribe of Rs 4,000 from a complainant. The Vigilance said it has registered three cases against the accused and launched raids on the properties of the accused persons.

Anjani Soren to contest from Mayurbhanj LS seat

Bhubaneswar: The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) Thursday decided to field its Odisha unit president Anjani Soren as the party's candidate from Mayurbhanj Lok Sabha seat. This was stated by JMM Odisha unit spokesperson Shivaji Moulik in a statement. He said the party also decided to field Bishnu Singh as its candidate from the Bangiriposi Assembly segment in Mayurbhanj district. Anjani is the daughter of JMM chief Shibu Soren. She will contest against BJP's Naba Charan Majhi and BJD's Sudam Marndi in the Lok Sabha polls. Anjani Soren had also contested in the 2019 general elections from Mayurbhanj Lok Sabha seat as a JMM candidate. She had polled 1,35,552 votes and finished third in the polls which was won by BJP's Bisheswar Tudu.

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



Commissionerate Police foils dacoity plan; five arrested

DEBADURLAV HARICHANDAN, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 28: Stepping up surveillance on criminals and anti-social elements ahead of the upcoming polls, the Commissionerate Police arrested a gang of five dacoits who were allegedly planning to plunder commuters travelling on a peripheral road on the outskirts of the Capital City, under Jatni police station limits, a little past Wednesday midnight, a senior police officer said.

He identified the accused as Mohammad Arbaz alias Manglu, 31, Sarif Khan alias Chintu, 20, Dipti Ranjan Bhujabal alias Pintu, 25, SK Ishtaque Mohammad alias Sakil, 22 and Sumant Patra alias Kanhu, 22. They are all locals, he said.

Five live country-made bombs, three motorcycles, one four-wheeler, a sword, two-pieces of iron rod and four mobile phones were recovered from the accused, the officer said.

He said the hoodlums were planning to rob pedestrians and vehicles plying on the Jatni-Khurda road when they were intercepted. The gang members had been booked for 23 times by the Jatni police station in the past for their alleged involvement in various criminal acts, he added.

DCP Bhubaneswar Prateek Singh said Thursday that the Jatni Police received a tip off



5 country-made bombs, three motorcycles, one four-wheeler, a sword, two-pieces of iron rod and four mobile phones were recovered from the accused

give satisfactory answer for gathering in the secluded place at such late hours, Singh said adding that their search led to the recovery of the arms and the vehicles.

Preliminary probe has revealed that the Sumant Patra is a trained bomb-maker and has prior experience in carrying out blasts. The hoodlums had planned to hurl country-made bombs at passing vehicles on the road. As the motorists/drivers slowed down, they would have made a swoop and looted valuables from them, Singh added.

The Jatni police have booked the accused under IPC Sections 399 and 402, apart from Section 3 and 4 of the Explosive Substances Act. They were produced before a local court Thursday following their arrest.



IN LORD'S ABODE: Actor Meenakshi Seshadri visits Srimandir in Puri, Thursday

OP PHOTO

ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

BJD allots tickets to four women instead of their politician hubbies

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 28: The Biju Janta Dal (BJD) has fielded four women as candidates for Assembly constituencies instead of their husbands who had either won or came second in the 2019 edition of elections.

BJD president and Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Wednesday announced the candidates' list for the Assembly polls to be held along with the Lok Sabha elections in four phases, May 13, 20, 25 and June 1.

Sadasiva Pradhani, who resigned from a government job and became a BJD MLA from Nabarangpur in 2019, did not get a re-nomination. He was replaced by his wife Kausalya Pradhani. The BJD also denied a party ticket to three-time MLA Purna Chandra Swain. He was elected to the Assembly in 2009, 2014 and 2019. His wife Sanghamitra Swain got the nomination instead from that seat.

The BJD had fielded Subhas Gond as its candidate in the Umerkote Assembly segment in 2019. However, he was defeated by BJP's Nityananda Gond. This year, Patnaik did not allot a ticket to Subhas, but nominated his wife Nabina Nayak.

Patnaik also has given a BJD ticket to Subhashini Jena to contest from the Basta Assembly seat in Balasore district. Subhashini is the wife of former

Balasore MP Rabindra, who was elected in 2014. He lost the Lok Sabha Polls in 2019 to BJP's Pratap Sarangi.

In the candidate list for the Lok Sabha, the BJD president has re-nominated Kausalya Hikaka for the Koraput constituency. Though she had lost the polls to Congress candidate Saptagiri Ulaka by a slender margin of 3,613 votes in the 2019 elections, Kausalya has been re-nominated by Patnaik.

She is the wife of former MP Jhina Hikaka, who was elected from Koraput LS seat in 2014.

The first list of the BJD's Assembly candidates includes 12 women. The women candidates also include a speaker, two ministers and two sitting MLAs.

This apart, Patnaik has nominated the sons of two former speakers - SN Patro and Maheswar Mohanty who died last year. While SN Patro's son Biplab has been nominated from the Digapandi Assembly seat, Maheswar Mohanty's son Sunil will contest from Puri.

Chikiti MLA and minister Usha Devi's son Chinmayananda Sriurup Deb has been nominated to contest the Assembly elections from his mother's seat.

Usha Devi was elected to the Assembly from Chikiti seat in 1990, 2000, 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019. She has been a minister in the Naveen Patnaik government since 2011.

Cong hits back at PM for jibe over lawyers' letter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 28: The Congress Thursday hit back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, accusing him of hypocrisy and 'manipulating' democracy, after his criticising the party over a lawyers' letter to the Chief Justice of India against a 'vested interest group.'

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge accused Prime Minister Modi of 'bullying' every institution into submission, 'manipulating' democracy, and hurting the Constitution. "PM Narendra Modi ji, You are talking about Judiciary. You conveniently forget that 4 senior-most Supreme Court judges were forced to hold

an unprecedented press conference and warn against 'destruction of Democracy'. That happened under your regime.

"One of the judges was nominated by your Government to the Rajya Sabha. So who wants a 'committed judiciary'? You forget that your party has fielded a former HC Judge in West Bengal for the current Lok Sabha elections. Why was this candidature bestowed on him," he asked in a post on X.

Kharge also asked the PM who brought the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) and why it had been struck down by the Supreme Court. "Modi ji, Institution after Institution is being 'bullied' by you into submission, so stop pin-

ning the blame on the Congress party, for your own sins!

"You have mastered the art of manipulating Democracy and hurting the Constitution," he alleged. Earlier in the day, Modi said it is a 'vintage Congress culture' to browbeat and bully others, remarks that came in reaction to more than 600 lawyers writing to Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, alleging that a 'vested interest group' is trying to put pressure on the judiciary and defame courts.

Hitting back, Ramesh said in a post on X, "The PM's brazenness in orchestrating and coordinating an attack on the judiciary, in the name of defending the judiciary, is the height of hypocrisy!"

"The Supreme Court has delivered body blows to him in recent weeks. The Electoral Bonds Scheme is but one example. The Supreme Court declared them to be unconstitutional -- and it is now proved beyond doubt that they were a blatant instrument of fear, blackmail, and intimidation to force companies to donate to the BJP," he said.

Instead of giving a legal guarantee of minimum support price, the prime minister has given a legal guarantee to corruption, he alleged. "All that the Prime Minister has done in the last ten years is divide, distort, divert, and defame. 140 crore Indians are waiting to give him a befitting reply very soon," Ramesh said.

I&PR Dept condoles demise of Dy Director

Bhubaneswar: The department of Information and Public Relations (I&PR) has mourned the untimely death of Deputy Director, Prafulla Kumar Mallick, who left for heavenly abode March 15, at 60. "He was one of the generous human beings committed to his work in the department. The simple nature, dedication and open-heartedness of him will be forever remembered. The whole department deeply mourns at the sudden demise," the staffers of the department said in a condolence message. "Moments are running out into days and days into years. We will remember you with eyes filled with tears," added the grieving officers and staffers.



Paper-based device to make glucose testing using smartphone

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Jodhpur, March 28: Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Jodhpur have developed a new low-cost, paper-based analytical device that can be connected to smartphones to provide on-spot detection of glucose levels.

The device carries a lab-based functionalised biodegradable paper which changes colour based on the level and amount of glucose present.

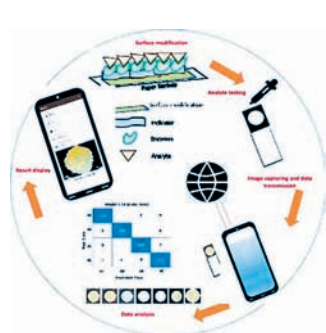
When connected to a smartphone, it provides quick, easy-to-access, and even person-

alised results.

"This device can provide on-the-spot glucose testing results without requiring technical or sophisticated laboratory settings. Additionally, it is designed to be cost-effective and biodegradable, with the current cost at only about Rs 10 in the lab. The team hopes to further make it even cheaper during mass production, at Rs 5," said the researchers in a statement.

While paper-based analytical devices have been in use earlier, they required specific light conditions to work.

However, the researchers em-



ployed machine learning to make the device compatible with all smartphones to work and transmit information seamlessly

under nearly all possible light conditions.

"Smartphones offer seamless integration with other technologies and platforms. The ability to connect the smartphone-based spot detection framework to a larger network or database can facilitate remote monitoring, data storage, and sharing of results. This connectivity can be crucial for healthcare professionals or researchers," said Ankur Gupta, Associate Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering, IIT Jodhpur, in the statement.

The researchers noted that

the technology can be adaptable for the screening and diagnostic analysis of uric acid, and other diseases. The findings are published in the journal ACS Publications.

"This study demonstrates that this developed system is equipped for initial disease screening at the user end. By incorporating machine learning techniques, the platform can provide reliable and accurate results, thus paving the way for estimating the accuracy of the results for improved initial healthcare screening and diagnosis of any disease," Ankur said.

Yellow alert for rainfall, lightning



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 28: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) Thursday has warned of thunderstorms and lightning at one or two places over several districts of Odisha during the next four days. The weather agency has issued a 'yellow' warning for these districts.

In its mid-day bulletin, the IMD mentioned, "Maximum temperatures observed no large change over the districts of Odisha. They were normal over the districts of Odisha. Minimum temperatures observed no large change over the districts of Odisha. They were appreciably below normal at one or two places, below normal at one or two places, appreciably above normal at one or two places, above normal at a few places over the districts of Interior Odisha, and normal elsewhere over the districts of Odisha."

In view of the 'yellow' warning issued by IMD, the Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) has

issued an advisory to the Collectors of the concerned districts to keep administrative machinery ready to face any eventuality.

In the advisory, the Collectors have been asked to advise people to keep watch on the weather and take safe shelter during the thunderstorm activity to protect from lightning.

Further, they have been asked to submit a report on damage due to thunderstorms, whirlwinds, hailstorms, and lightning immediately for information of the government.

Friday, light to moderate rain or thundershower is likely to occur at one or two places over the districts of Jharsuguda, Sundargarh, Sambalpur, Deogarh, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj and dry weather is very likely to prevail over the remaining districts of Odisha.

Thunderstorm with lightning is very likely to occur at one or two places over the districts of Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Sundargarh, Gajapati, and Rayagada.

CUO holds lecture on econometrics

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 28: The Central University of Odisha (CUO) organised a special lecture titled 'Econometrics Modelling-bridging theory and data analysis', Wednesday at the department of Economics. Pabitra Kumar Mishra, head of the department of Economic Studies at the Central University of Punjab was the chief speaker at the event.

University VC Chakradhar Tripathi and registrar NC Panda gave the opening remarks. Minati Sahoo, head of the department, welcomed the attendees and introduced the guests.

Mishra delved into the crucial role of econometrics in bridging the gap between theory and reality, emphasising the disparity between laboratory-based theories and real-world scenarios. He underscored the significance of this field in translating theories into praxis, advocating for a re-evaluation of economic history. Drawing distinctions between econometrics, statistics, and mathematics, he elucidated the evolving landscape of econometrics and its implications for solving contemporary societal challenges and addressing real-world issues. He encouraged students to enhance their skills in utilising various software tools to predict future trends and propose solutions to present and forthcoming challenges.

The session fostered an engaging exchange of ideas between the resource person and the participants from different departments. Biswajit Bhoi gave the vote of thanks, expressing gratitude to all involved. Manisha Gupta compered the entire session and ensured its smooth conduct.



RAISING VOICE: Members of CPI (M) stage a demonstration at Lower PMG in Bhubaneswar, Thursday, demanding immediate release of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal

AAP activists observe fast, seeks Kejriwal's release

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 28: The Aam Aadmi Party members observed a one-day fast here, Thursday in protest against the arrest of party head Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate (ED). The protest call was to safeguard the constitutional values and democracy.

Meanwhile, the Rouse Avenue Court Thursday extended the custodial remand of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by four more days in alleged liquor policy scam case.

ED, while seeking further remand, submitted that data on one mobile phone (belonging to the arrestee's wife) has been extracted and is being analysed.

However, data from the other 4 digital devices seized during a search on Kejriwal's premises March 21 is yet to be extracted as the arrestee has sought time to provide password/login credentials after consulting with his lawyers. Kejriwal was arrested on March 21 by the Enforcement Directorate in relation to the excise policy case.

Delhi High Court Thursday dismissed a public interest litigation (PIL) that sought the removal of Kejriwal from the post of chief minister. A bench of Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet Pritam Singh Arora, while dismissing the plea, said, "There is no scope of judicial interference and it is for the other wing of the government to examine the issue."

Stricter approach required in custodial death case: SC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 28: Observing that a police officer may wield more influence than an ordinary person, the Supreme Court has set aside the bail granted to a police constable in a case of custodial death.

A bench of justices Aniruddha Bose and Sanjay Kumar said a stricter approach is required to decide on the question of bail of a police official who is accused in a custodial death case.

"It is a fact that, in ordinary circumstances, we ought not to invoke our jurisdiction under Article 136 of the Constitution of India to invalidate an order granting bail to an accused. But these criteria, while dealing with the question of granting bail, would not apply in a case of custodial death, where police officials are arraigned as accused. Such alleged offences are of grave and serious nature.", the Bench said while reversing the decision of the High Court granting bail to the accused-police official.

The apex court said so far as the present appeal is concerned,



it ought to make an exception from the general approach on the question of granting bail and adopt a stricter approach.

The top court was hearing an appeal against bail granted to a police constable in a case of custodial death.

The deceased was arrested in connection with a case involving robbery and he was taken into custody on February 11, 2021. Altogether, 19 police officials have been implicated in the offence and charge sheet has been submitted against them.

While directing the police constable to surrender before the

CBI court within a period of four weeks, the apex court bench said the charge against the accused is under Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the appellant has been enlarged on bail within one-and-a-half years of his detention.

"The alleged offence is of grave and serious nature and that factor has not been properly considered by the High Court. Having regard to the contents of the chargesheet, we do not think this was a fit case where he ought to have been enlarged on bail within one and a half years of his initial detention," the bench said.

NALCO launches new product AL-59

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 28: NALCO has launched a new product AL-59 in the form of an Aluminium Alloy Ingot.

Nalco sources here Thursday said the AL-59 has come into a foray primarily in producing Conductors for Electrical Transmission and Distribution, especially after the launch of the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS) of the Government of India.

This alloy will provide special characteristics to the conductors creating a niche market for the company.

AL-59 Alloy Conductors are used in power transmission and distribution lines for a wide voltage range (low to ultra-high voltage). The new product being high corrosion resistance will be very suitable, particularly for deployment in Transmission & Distribution at Coastal regions.

Manufacturers can now procure NALCO's AL-59 Aluminium Alloy Ingot and use it as a feedstock for manufacturing AL-59 conductors. The product was launched on Thursday by the Director (Commercial) of the company Sadashiv Samantray, in the presence of the first customer and senior Officials of NALCO's Smelter & Power complex.



REGALING POSE: Artistes perform during the annual day celebration of Mokshya at Soochana Bhawan in Bhubaneswar, Thursday

Murgja's book shortlisted

New Delhi: Indian-British journalist and commentator Madhumita Murgja's book which explores the impact of AI on human society has been shortlisted for the 2024 inaugural Women's Prize for Non-Fiction. Murgja's "Code Dependent: Living in the Shadow of AI" is among the six books shortlisted for the prize.

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AFFIDAVIT

I, Bipina Bihari Maharana, S/o- Nilakantha Maharana of Vill- Chuda, P.O.- Dabardhua Patna, P.S.- Bolagarh, Dist.- Khordha, Odisha declare by this affidavit No.-625 dtd 27.03.2024 that now onwards I shall be known as Bipin Bihari Maharana for all future purposes.

Global warming could wipe out species in 17 mountains

Species living in 17 mountains around the world may be facing the risk of extinction due to the rapid rate at which the planet is warming, new research published in the journal Nature has found.

Researchers said that the mountains at significant risk due to global warming included those in the Iran-Pakistan region, Northeast Asia, Brazilian highlands, Western America and Mexico, and the Mediterranean basin.

The international team of researchers, led by Academia Sinica in Taiwan, called for setting up more meteorological monitoring stations in mountainous areas globally, essential for developing a deeper understanding of the extent of such risks.

In their study, the researchers

found these mountain regions to have the highest climate velocity, or the rate at which "species must move to stay within their survivable habitats".

They explained a new approach they developed to estimate climate velocities in mountainous regions that considers two important influencing factors -- surface warming and humidity -- whilst incorporating the theories of atmospheric science.

Setting up meteorological observation stations in moun-



RESEARCHERS SAID THAT THE MOUNTAINS AT SIGNIFICANT RISK DUE TO GLOBAL WARMING INCLUDED THOSE IN THE IRAN-PAKISTAN REGION, NORTHEAST ASIA, BRAZILIAN HIGHLANDS, WESTERN AMERICA AND MEXICO, AND THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN

THE STUDY FOUND THESE MOUNTAIN REGIONS TO HAVE THE HIGHEST CLIMATE VELOCITY, OR THE RATE AT WHICH 'SPECIES MUST MOVE TO STAY WITHIN THEIR SURVIVABLE HABITATS'

tainous areas is challenging, leading to a global shortfall in long-term climate data for these regions, the team said.

This knowledge gap, compounded by the complex topography, has limited the under-

standing of warming trends, they said.

The team's newly developed approach compensates for the lack of station data and assess shifts in temperature isotherms -- locations having the same temperature -- in mountain regions

under climate change, they said. In humid climates, climate velocity can be high, even as warming is less pronounced, according to lead author Wei-Ping Chan from the Biodiversity Research Centre, Academia Sinica, and a post-doctoral researcher at Harvard University, US.

"The mountainous regions of Taiwan, like Japan, are more affected by humidity-induced high velocities than continental regions. Our study suggests that accounting for humidity is critical to fully understanding the variability of temperature isothermal shifts in mountainous areas worldwide," said Chan.

Lead researcher Sheng-Feng Shen, also from the Biodiversity Research Centre of Academia Sinica, said, "The lack of meteorological observation data from

mountains is both the most valuable and the biggest challenge of our study."

In the absence of such data, he said they have to rely on models for making estimates, which could vary significantly depending on the model and method used.

Further, global data isn't suitable for making local predictions due to differences in scale, Shen added.

"The unique characteristics of various mountain regions and the absence of local data mean that just because an area isn't highlighted, doesn't mean it's unaffected," he said.

Therefore, the researchers emphasised the need to set up more weather stations in mountains to better understand the real situation and tackle the effects of climate change on species.

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Slurry pipelines threaten wildlife in Keonjhar



LOCALS ALLEGE FOREST OFFICIALS ARE TURNING A BLIND EYE AS COMPANIES FLOUT REGULATIONS

POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, March 28: Laying of pipelines for transportation of minerals in this district is posing threats to wildlife in forests and also harming the environment, locals pointed out here Thursday. Despite repeated notices issued by the Forest department to various mining and industrial firms asking those to follow rules while laying slurry pipelines, the effect has been nil. Most importantly, the laying of the pipes is damaging the wildlife corridor posing a huge

threat to wild animals. Currently a pipeline is being laid between Keonjhar town and Ghatagaon adjacent to NH-20. Norms are being flouted regularly for construction of slurry pipelines. Sources however, pointed out that the state government is not taking action against the offenders. Environmentalist Harekrushna Mahanta demanded intervention by the Forest department to protect wildlife as well as plants and trees. He pointed out that trenches have been dug inside the forest indiscriminately. As these trenches have not been filled up properly, animals are suffering injuries due to the uneven soil. Hence the free movement of animals, especially elephants from one part of the forest to another has been affected, added the

environmentalist. Locals also pointed out that the company entrusted with the work of laying the pipelines is doing so in a careless manner. For laying a slurry pipeline close to the Naranpur and Atei reserve forest areas, a huge trench has been dug. It is lying uncovered for the past several months. There have been instances of elephants, leopards, deer and wild boars falling into it and suffering injuries. Also with the pipeline being set up adjacent to the National Highway, vehicular accidents have been on the rise in this sector, locals informed. Sources pointed out that officials of the Forest department should monitor the work being done for laying the pipeline on a regular basis. However, it is not being done and hence the company is getting away scot-free and in the process is imperiously flouting Forest department norms. Some locals alleged that the company 'enjoys' the tacit support of the Forest department. Ranjan Behera, vice-president of 'Yuva O Shrama Bikash Mancha', demanded a high level inquiry into the irregularities. He said that it is the duty of government officials to supervise and monitor work in forests. However, they are not doing anything to protect the animals, Behera said. When contacted, Assistant Conservator of Forests Ashok Das said that he will draw the attention of higher authorities and take necessary steps in the this regard.



TEACHING WITH A SMILE: Teachers displaying hand-made toys prepared for fun-filled teaching to kids at a three-day workshop inaugurated Thursday at Dhenkikote under Ghatagaon block in Keonjhar district

Popular YouTuber, hubby surrender

Couple booked for domestication of wild animals and uploading pictures on various social media platforms

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jajpur, March 28: A couple who had been booked for taking pictures with wild animals and also domesticating them surrendered before Forest department officials Wednesday night, police said here Thursday. The couple had been absconding for a couple of days after police raided their house March 24 and 25. The two identified as

Monalisha Bhadra and her husband Badrinarayan Bhadra are natives of Jahal village under Beruada panchayat of Sadar police limits in this district. Forest department officials and police produced them in court Thursday from where they were remanded to judicial custody after their bail pleas were rejected. The matter will be heard again Friday, the SDJM said. The Bhadra couple has been booked by the Forest department under Section 9 of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. The couple had left the village since Sunday when a joint team of Forest personnel from Jajpur Road and Cuttack conducted raids on their house on charges of keeping



wild animals and uploading their videos on social media platforms. During the raids at Bhadra's house, officials found a monkey and seized the animal. However, the couple managed to give the cops a slip. Speaking to mediapersons, ranger, Jyoti Ranjan Mohapatra confirmed that the couple has surrendered. Mohapatra said

that the ACF is investigating the case and steps will be taken in this regard once the investigation gets completed. Mohapatra said that the Forest department is keeping a close watch on those who are involved in the domestication of wild animals and are uploading their photos and videos on social media platforms. Mohapatra also informed that the couple was earlier warned about keeping wild animals in their home and uploading photos on various social media platforms. However, they continued to violate the rules paying scant respect to the warnings of the Forest department officials.

Youth kills grandpa



POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, March 28: A man hanged Wednesday night his grandfather to death with an axe, police said Thursday. The accused, Bimal Tirkey carried out the gruesome act at Tunguritoli village under Gurundia police station limits as his grandfather, Ben Tirkey, had objected to his drinking spree on the occasion of Holi. Police said that the accused has confessed to his crime.

According to information available, Ben and Bimal had a heated argument after the latter returned home in an inebriated state during the day. Following that, Bimal left home again. When he returned at night, Bimal found Ben sleeping. In a fit of rage, Bimal brought out an axe and mercilessly attacked Ben. Hearing Ben's agonizing screams, neighbours rushed to his rescue. However, by then it was too late. Ben had already breathed his last after suffering critical wounds. Villagers then overpowered Bimal and informed officials at the Gurundia police station who arrived at the spot and arrested the accused. The accused later said that he had committed the gruesome act in a fit of rage. "I enjoyed drinking, but he (Ben) scolded me. I decided to kill him when I found him sleeping," Bimal said. SDPO Bonai, Swaraj Devta said that Ben has been taken into custody and forwarded to court.

Theatre fest leaves lingering memory

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, March 28: The five-day festival to mark the 'World Theatre Day', March 27, ended Wednesday evening here amid much fanfare at the 'Music Circle Auditorium'. The festival was organised by 'Sampark', one of the leading cultural organisations of this city. The entire event turned out to be a success as there were large crowds at the venue on each of the five days. The five plays that were staged varied from 'absurdity' to the 'hard facts of life'. Topics on social issues like 'loneliness' and 'safety of senior citizens' were also dealt with. These topics were well-appreciated by the gathering.



One of the funniest plays staged was *The Zoo Story* bordering on absurdity to a certain extent. It dealt with loneliness, a common problem for modern society. Similarly, religious plays like *Krishna* and *Bhababinodia Kalathakura* were enacted to depict the relationship between human beings and god. Then there were plays like

Ek Khoya Hua Admi and *Eka*, the themes of which dealt with social problems. Direction of all the five plays was top drawer stuff and the standard of acting very high indeed. Bhaskar Mohapatra's play on Lord Jagannath, touched subtly on the folklore of *Kanchi Bijay*. Each of the plays had the distinct individual mark of the

director. The lighting, stage and costume designing of the actors were also praised by audience. "They (organisers Sampark) are doing the festival for the last 17 years and I have never missed a single one," said one spectator. There were similar views from the audience regarding the entire festival. However, this year, the biggest handicap for all the participating troupes was the size of the stage. The usual hosting place, the prestigious 'Civic Centre' is under renovation. Hence the venue was shifted to 'Music Circle' where the size of the stage is small when compared to that of the 'Civic Centre'. Participating teams however, handled the problem deftly.

Man murders brother-in-law

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sundargarh, March 28: Frustrated by the continuous domestic violence, a man stabbed his brother-in-law to death Thursday at Tunguritoli under Rajgangpur police station in this district. The deceased has been identified as Jairam Satnami, a resident of the same locality. It has been alleged that Jairam used to frequently torture his wife, the sister of the accused Marcus Toppo. Locals alleged that Jairam used to frequently beat up his wife over various demands. He demanded money from the victim every day. It was no exception Thursday also. When Marcus returned home in the afternoon, he found Jairam allegedly beating his wife. Enraged,



Marcus picked up a knife and stabbed Jairam multiple times, leading to the latter's death. Locals informed the Rajgangpur police station following which the cops arrived and arrested Marcus. They sent the body of the deceased for post-mortem. "The accused has confessed to the crime. He informed us that Jairam was torturing his sister regularly. So, the accused had planned to kill Jairam," said a senior police officer. He added that the murder weapon has been seized and sent for forensic examination.

Fake currency notes worth ₹1.37L seized; two arrested

PNN & AGENCIES

Bolangir, March 28: Police arrested two persons after fake currency notes with a face value of Rs 1.37 lakh were seized from their possession in Bolangir district, an officer said Thursday. The police seized 274 fake currency notes of Rs 500 denomination, a computer, colour printer and other materials used to make fake notes from the duo, the officer said. The arrested accused were identified as Barun Panuan and Rohit Bastia. On March 22, they gave two fake Rs 500 notes to the complainant. While conducting a raid on Barun's house, the fake notes have been seized, said



Sadananda Pujhari, sub-divisional police officer (SDPO) Patnagarh. A case has been registered against the duo as both are involved in the circulation of fake notes in the market and further investigation is on, the SDPO added.

RSP's SSM creates new production record

PNN & AGENCIES

Rourkela, March 28: The Reversing Mill of Silicon Steel Mill (SSM) of Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) SAIL rolled 529 tonne coils Thursday to create a new single-day production record. It surpassed the previous best figure of 470 tonne produced by the unit August 8, 2022. SSM also registered the best shift production by rolling 258 tonne of coils in 'B' shift Thursday. RSP Director In-Charge (DIC) Atanu Bhowmick accompanied by other senior officials visited the SSM shop floor to congratulate the staff for the record-breaking performance. Bhowmick highly appreciated the collective for optimally utilising the opportunity at the



Reversing Mill and feeding the Galvanising Line of the Cold Rolling Mill (CRM) with quality coils of varied gauges and dimensions.

Exhorting everyone to put in their best effort in the future also, Bhowmick said, "Key to profitability is consistency. Let's make concerted efforts to sustain

this performance with a focus on quality." It should be stated here that the Reversing Mill of SSM is now rolling coils for the Galvanising Mill of CRM. Rolling of this grade requires a different operational approach so that the rolled coil is not work hardened as there is a chance of strip breakage in the Galvanising Line. The profile of the strip is monitored regularly to minimise buckling in the Galvanising Line. The Roll shop has been providing rolls with different profiles as per mill demand. The produced coils when passed through the Galvanising Line have given splendid results. Yield has improved from 86 per cent to 94 per cent and finish has also been excellent.

2 held while taking bribe

POST NEWS NETWORK

Paradip, March 28: Sleuths of the Vigilance department arrested Thursday two persons here in Jagatsinghpur district including an official of the Revenue department while they were accepting a bribe. The other person is a retired Amin (surveyor). The two arrested have been identified as Ganesh Mallick, revenue supervisor at the Special Land Acquisition Office here and Khirod Rath. Officials stated that Rath had tried to facilitate a deal between Mallick and the complainant for processing a couple of files which would enable the acquisition of a particular plot of land. Accordingly the deal was finalised. However, the man who was to pay the bribe lodged a complaint with the Vigilance department



following which a trap was laid. When Mallick and Rath were accepting the bribe, the duo was caught red-handed. Officials said that entire amount has been recovered from the two. After the arrest of the accused, sleuths are conducting raids at the properties of the two to find out if there are any assets disproportionate to their known sources of income. The Vigilance police station at Cuttack has registered a case in this regard under relevant Sections of Prevention of Corruption Amendment Act-2018.

Behera's 'fishinspiration' story motivating many

POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, March 28: A fish farmer has carved a niche for himself by becoming self-reliant in fingerlings production which has contributed immensely in increasing the output in districts of South Odisha. The deeds of Sureshen Behera, 44, a resident of Tareipatapur village under Chhatrapur block in Ganjam district have now spread far and wide. Behera may have studied till Class VIII only, but now he is known as the driver of 'Blue Revolution' (fish cultivation) for achieving tremendous success in production of fingerlings. Behera's achievements have not gone unnoticed. He was felicitated as a millionaire 'fish farmer' at a 'Farmer Mela' (Chashi Mela) in New Delhi last year. His remarkable suc-

cess story is now an inspiration to other fish farmers who appreciate his efforts as they do not have to depend now on other states for purchasing fingerlings and other aquaculture materials. They now have a one-stop solution at affordable prices from Behera. Sureshen, after dropping out of school, started catching fish from various ponds in his village and sold them in the markets. However, lack of profit and financial hardships in his family drove him to take up odd jobs as a mason and work on farmlands of others. However, these failed to give him any satisfaction and he decided that fish farming will be his bread and butter. With this in mind, he took lease of a few ponds and started cultivation of fingerlings from



2008. Later, he acquired an abandoned pond in Humuri village

spread over 31 acres to expand his business. His efforts soon bore fruit as he started supplying fingerlings to fish farmers in Ganjam, Malkangiri, Koraput, Gajapati, Kandhamal and even to faraway Nayagarh and Puri districts as well as to Srikakulam in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh. Behera informed that he is producing around 40 varieties of fingerlings like Rohu, Labio Katla (Bhakur), Mrigal Carp (Mirikali), Dalakhia, Common Carp, Silver Carp, Pangas Catfish (Jalanga), Roopchand, Black Carp, Walking Catfish (Magur) and Kau. The prices of the fingerlings range from one rupee to ₹20. Behera stated that in 2023 he had made over ₹2 crore after investing in fingerlings worth ₹30 lakh. He added that he has

now expanded his business. He sells food for fish, medicines, fishing nets, boats to farmers. Behera said that the soil and water of a pond should be tested with the help of 'Krushi Vigyan Kendra'. He added that technical advice should be taken to prevent the spread of diseases among fishes. 'Millionaire' Behera is now motivating villagers including women and youths to take up fish farming. He has opened a 'one stop aqua shop' for the purpose. He is also using it to provide training on fish cultivation to the interested youths and helping around 20 families earn their livelihoods. Senior scientist and head of the Krushi Vigyan Kendra, Dr Sujit Kumar Nath said persons like Behera are needed to make the state self-reliant in fish production.

Take Truth for your force; take Truth for your refuge.
THE MOTHER



Tackling Hidden-Debt

From the COVID-19 pandemic to advanced-economy interest-rate hikes, developments over the last few years have left many developing economies struggling to repay their debts. But the problem might be even bigger than the world realises, as many sovereign debts are hidden, undisclosed, or opaque. This prevents policymakers and investors from making informed decisions.

Some low-income countries have made progress on disclosing their debts: the latest Debt Reporting Heat Map shows a rise in disclosure from 60% in 2021 to 80% today. But some countries have regressed, and significant gaps and weaknesses remain. For example, information might not be released swiftly enough or in adequate detail, and countries might disclose only central-government debts, leaving out other public and publicly guaranteed liabilities.

Consider domestic debts: many low-income countries, shut out of financial markets, have resorted to issuing such debt to meet their financing needs – often without reporting these instruments. Similarly, opaque currency-swap lines are being used to prop up heavily indebted borrowers. The World Bank's 2021 comprehensive report on public-debt transparency in low-income countries anticipated both of these trends.

Boosting debt transparency requires action in three key areas. First, we need to improve the software that records and manages public debt. Just as individuals use internet banking to manage their personal finances, governments rely on specialised software to manage their debt portfolios.

But whereas advanced economies design their own systems – typically as part of an integrated information-technology solution that manages budgetary, accounting, and treasury processes – most low-income countries rely on “off-the-shelf” software subsidised by the international community. These arrangements are often inadequate to deal with countries' increasingly complex debt portfolios, let alone to deliver comprehensive, timely debt reporting.

This became starkly apparent during debt-reconciliation efforts under the G20's Common Framework for Debt Treatments beyond the Debt Service Suspension Initiative. The debt records of the four countries that applied to the Common Framework – Chad, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Zambia – were sometimes incomplete and often inaccurate. To resolve these issues, Excel spreadsheets had to be manually reconciled – a months-long process that significantly delayed restructuring negotiations.

We recommend creating a task force to coordinate the design of better debt-management systems. With the involvement of all the main service providers, task-force members would standardise debt definition and computation methods, and lead the development of user-friendly IT solutions. That way, national authorities could focus on debt analysis and management, rather than remaining bogged down by data entry and reconciliation.

The newly designed software could also allow for input from creditors on loan disbursements and payments, as suggested by the 2023 UNCTAD Trade and Development Report. This would enable the real-time generation of World Bank International Debt Statistics and other statistical reports, based on fully validated data.

The second crucial measure needed to strengthen debt transparency is the creation of incentives for public borrowers to disclose their debts at both the national and international levels. This will require reforms of national legal frameworks as well as efforts by multilateral organisations to promote debt-transparency initiatives.

Already, the World Bank's Sustainable Development Finance Policy includes debt-disclosure incentives for low- and lower-middle-income countries receiving support from the International Development Association. This has contributed to improvements in debt reporting and coverage in more than 40 low-income countries.

Debt restructuring also creates opportunities to implement such incentives. The necessary and often arduous debt-reconciliation process can be used to provide detailed information on outstanding debt, as in the case of Zambia. It also gives countries a chance to wipe the slate clean and organise their debt records from scratch. Eligibility criteria for the provision of debt relief could include minimum transparency requirements to encourage the provision of data until debt relief is fully provided.

The third area where progress is needed is improved reporting by creditors. To facilitate transparency in official bilateral lending, creditor countries should follow the recommendations of the G20 Operational Guidelines for Sustainable Financing, such as improving data collection and publishing more information on new and existing loans.

Bilateral creditors should publicly disclose both outstanding debts and the core terms of foreign exposure, including direct loans, guarantees, and Export-Credit Agency insurance. The US Treasury's loan-by-loan repository offers a good model for creditors seeking to boost the transparency of their portfolios. To support these efforts, creditors should avoid including confidentiality or secrecy clauses in new loan agreements, as a 2022 World Bank paper argues.

Among the debt challenges facing low-income countries, strengthening debt transparency is one where concrete and meaningful progress is within reach. Success will require a combination of practical technical solutions and full cooperation from every stakeholder.

Pablo Saavedra is Vice President for Equitable Growth, Finance, and Institutions at the World Bank. Manuela Francisco is Global Director for Macroeconomics, Trade, and Investment at the World Bank.

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Anwesh Satpathy

AN ARGUMENT CAN BE MADE THAT THE BALANCING ACT OF THE JUDICIARY IS INCREASINGLY SKEWING TOWARDS ONE SIDE



Pablo Saavedra & Manuela Francisco

Bilateral creditors should publicly disclose both outstanding debts and the core terms of foreign exposure, including direct loans, guarantees, and Export-Credit Agency insurance

FOCUS JUDICIARY

A BALANCING ACT



The court functions within the larger political and social arena and the larger sentiments unfortunately do have a role to play in its judgements, though the extent of it is debatable

The relationship between the judiciary and the legislature has often been quite contentious in India's history. The first amendment to the Indian constitution in the immediate aftermath of Independence was borne out of such a conflict. The events preceding the Emergency were marked by an intensification of a show-down between the legislature and the judiciary regarding the contours of changes that can be made to the Constitution. At the same time, the judiciary has also been accused of stepping beyond its prescribed duties to engage in judicial activism.

The Supreme Court has often used the power of judicial review to question the policies of the government while suggesting changes in others. In recent years, for instance, the court has given judgements to ban firecrackers during the festival of Diwali. There have been times when the state has adopted policy suggestions of the court without much dispute. This was the case when the court suggested a “right to education” in 1992. Ten years later, a political party introduced it as a constitutional amendment. In this case, the influence of the court's suggestion was obvious but given the time lag, quite indirect.

Yet, for multiple reasons, India's Supreme Court has been often argued to be the most powerful in the world. There have been multiple cases of judicial activism in the Indian judiciary. For the purposes of this essay, judicial activism can be simply defined as “the intervention of the court in areas that are clearly demarcated by the Constitution as falling within the jurisdiction of the execu-

tive or the legislature”. In *Vishaka v State of Rajasthan*, the court provided guidelines for sexual harassment at workplace which were to remain binding enforceable until the introduction of a suitable legislation. Similarly, in *Vineet Narain v Union of India*, the court clarified that its directions would be considered binding until the legislature or executive steps in. At first glance, these cases appear to be clear examples of judicial activism. However, Shylashri Shankar argues that they are merely filing in the gaps before other branches take over.

The judiciary, according to Shankar, performs a balancing act of supporting the government's actions while holding the executive accountable. The judiciary, thus, negotiates between institutional norms, public concerns and political preferences. In such a scenario, weak coalitional governments

are characterised by a plurality of interests as well as a vocal civil society, leading to increased role of the judiciary as a negotiator. A strong popular centre, on the other hand, seems to result in some constraints as we'll see through some examples later in the essay.

In *PUCI v Union of India*, a civil society highlighted the failure of the Parliament to provide clauses regarding disclosure of information regarding assets and liabilities in its Representation of People's Act. The Supreme Court, while giving a judgement in favour of civil society, held that since free and fair elections in a democratic republic is constitutionally necessitated, citizens have a fundamental right to be well informed, “to know.” Yet, the court carefully ensured a balancing act by weaving alliances with aspects of the government. In its judgement, the court cited similar views expressed by the

National Commission to review the Working of the Constitution to justify its ruling.

This attitude continues to be prevalent in the judiciary in contemporary India. Over the last decade, there has been a decline in the influence as well as the functioning of civil societies owing to political decisions. Through multiple judgements, the Supreme Court has upheld major decisions of the government. For instance, the Supreme Court upheld the validity of the Union's abrogation of Article 370. There have also been cases where the court has delayed bail hearings of critics of the government who have been jailed under the draconian UAPA. The student-activist Umar Khalid, for instance, has been jailed for three years without trial while his bail hearings have been postponed by the SC 14 times before eventual withdrawal. Nevertheless, the court has also given judgements that have been critical of the government. In the last few months, the court struck down the state's electoral bonds scheme due to its violation of voters' right to information as well as a judgement disqualifying the election of a mayor. An argument can be made that the balancing act of the judiciary is increasingly skewing towards one side. This is the consequence of changes in the larger public narrative as well as the decline of a burgeoning civil society. Thus, the court functions within the larger political and social arena and the larger sentiments unfortunately do have a role to play in its judgements, though the extent of it is debatable.

The writer is an author and a student at Jindal School of International Affairs.

SPECTRUM INEQUALITY

Living in the ‘Billionaire Raj’

Public policy experts call income and wealth inequality one of the defining challenges of this century. Overcoming inequality is at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals. Over the past few years there has been a plethora of research demonstrating the perils of inequality – both in the rich world and in developing countries.

A new working paper titled “Income and Wealth Inequality in India, 1922-2023: The Rise of the Billionaire Raj,” by World Inequality Lab has estimated that “inequality declined post-independence till the early 1980s, after which it began rising and has skyrocketed since the early 2000s.”

India's income inequality is at 100-year high; worse than the colonial era. In other words, “the Billionaire Raj” headed by India's modern bourgeoisie is now more unequal than the British Raj headed by the colonialist forces.” The paper, which has been co-authored by Nitin Kumar Bharti, New York University, Lucas Chancel, Harvard Kennedy School, Thomas Piketty and Anmol Somanchi, Paris School of Economics, combines data from national income accounts, wealth aggregates, tax tabulations, rich lists, and surveys on

income, consumption, and wealth in a consistent framework to present long run homogeneous series of income and wealth inequality in India.

According to the paper, India's richest 1% population's income and wealth shares have reached historical highs and are among the very highest in the world.

Enlisting the probable reasons for the sharp rise in top 1% income shares, the paper said public and private sector wage growth could have played a part till the late 1990s, adding that there are good reasons to believe capital incomes likely played a role in subsequent years. For the shares of the bottom 50% and middle 40% remaining depressed, the paper said, the primary reason has been the lack of quality broad-based education, focused on the masses and not just the elites.

One reason to be concerned with such high levels of inequality is that extreme concentration of incomes and wealth is likely to facilitate disproportionate influence on society and government. This is even more so in contexts with weak democratic institutions. After largely being a role model among post-colonial nations in this regard, the integrity of various key institutions in India appears to

have been compromised in recent years. This makes the possibility of India's slide towards plutocracy even more real. If only for this reason, income and wealth inequality in India must be closely tracked and challenged.

The paper also notes: “It is unclear how long such inequality levels can sustain without major social and political upheaval.” Of course, India is experiencing the portrait of the rise of the new billionaire class in a radically unequal society.

After gaining Independence in 1947, India introduced economic reforms in 1991. Since then, there has been a steady increase in the number of billionaires in the country. The total number of billionaires in India increased from 1 in 1991 to 52 in 2011 and 162 in 2022. According to Forbes' 2023 list of the world's billionaires, it has further increased to 169. The wealth of India's 100 billionaires is \$799 billion.

Nobel-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz says the main problem is that money talks, gets to make all the rules. Inequality “creates a fertile field for populists,” he said. “It gives them an argument that they can make about the system being rigged.”

In line with earlier works, the paper finds suggestive evidence that 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 globalization and could be effective measures,” to address the rising inequalities.

Besides serving as a tool to fight inequality, a “super tax” of 2% on the net wealth of the 167 wealthiest families in 2022-23 would yield 0.5% of national income in revenues and create valuable fiscal space to facilitate such investments. We should not forget Ambedkar's premonitions. As prophetically warned by him in a historic speech on 25 November, 1949, if we ignore the peril of increasing inequality in Indian society, then “those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which (we have) ...so laboriously built up.”

The writer is an Odisha-based economist and columnist



Santosh Kumar Mohapatra

ONE REASON TO BE CONCERNED WITH SUCH HIGH LEVELS OF INEQUALITY IS THAT EXTREME CONCENTRATION OF INCOMES AND WEALTH IS LIKELY TO FACILITATE DISPROPORTIONATE INFLUENCE ON SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT

WISDOM CORNER

Restlessness is discontent and discontent is the first necessity of progress. Show me a thoroughly satisfied man and I will show you a failure.
THOMAS A. EDISON

Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood. All is riddle, and the key to a riddle is another riddle.
RALPH WALDO EMERSON

The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quiet, alone with the heavens, nature and God. Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be.
ANNE FRANK

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1867: Dominion of Canada created. On this day in 1867, with the British North America Act, the British colonies of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Canada were united as the Dominion of Canada, and the province of Canada was separated into Quebec and Ontario.

1951: Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were found guilty of espionage and sentenced to death for turning over U.S. military secrets to the Soviet Union.

Waste-free future

Sir, Waste generation due to urbanisation and population growth is escalating with severe environmental consequences highlighted by the United Nations. As the world's second-most populous country, India confronts significant waste management challenges. The UN designated 30 March as International Day of Zero Waste to promote sustainable consumption globally. This annual event marks a milestone in the journey towards a zero-waste future, raising awareness and inspiring action. A zero-waste approach aims to contribute to environmental, economic, and social benefits, such as reduced greenhouse gas emissions and improved community health. Emphasising zero-waste principles and sustainable practices is crucial for both India and the global community to mitigate the environmental and health impacts of waste generation. By working together, governments, businesses, and citizens in India and around the world can make our planet cleaner and healthier for the future.
Krishna Kumar Vepakomma, HYDERABAD

Misuse of agencies

Sir, The use of investigative agencies to target Opposition leaders such as the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate, raises concerns about the misuse of power by the government. These actions not only undermine the credibility of our electoral system but also deprive citizens of their right to choose their representatives freely. Furthermore, the freezing of Congress party's accounts on charges of Income Tax rule violations appears to be a deliberate attempt to financially cripple the main Opposition party. Such actions not only undermine the democratic process but also violate the principles of fair competition in elections. The attempt to destabilise the Congress government in Himachal Pradesh and the poaching of leaders from other parties highlights the government's strategy to weaken the Opposition before elections. These actions threaten the very foundation of our democracy and must be condemned. We must urge the government to refrain from using investigative agencies for political purposes and to ensure a level playing field for all political parties in the upcoming elections. Free and fair elections are essential for the functioning of a healthy democracy, and any attempt to manipulate or undermine them must be strongly opposed.
Vishal Mayur, BANGALORE

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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TMC to launch campaign to woo women voters



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 28: In a bid to reach out to the women voters of West Bengal, the ruling Trinamool Congress will launch a door-to-door campaign to connect with them.

With cohesive voting patterns and higher turnout compared to men in recent elections, women voters, constituting nearly 50 per cent of West Bengal's electorate, have become a pivotal voting bloc that all political parties are vying to woo ahead of the parliamentary polls.

According to a party statement, the TMC women's wing will visit every household and engage with the female members. "TMC Mahila Wing president Chandrima Bhattacharya,

along with party MP Mala Roy, has led a meeting where a decision was taken to reach out to every household booth-wise. A special kit will be given to a female member of every household. Besides, an envelope highlighting Didi's (Mamata Banerjee's) decision to increase Lakshmir Bhandar's amount will also be given," the statement said.

The state government has recently hiked amounts under Lakshmir Bhandar scheme for women to Rs 1,000 for the general category and Rs 1,200 for SCs and STs.

The party, however, did not mention the contents of the 'special kit'.

The party stated that pamphlets will be distributed highlighting how 'anti-Bengal BJP zamindars' are depriving the state of its dues and how Banerjee is 'working tirelessly for the people through welfare schemes', seeking their opinions on these matters.

The TMC said that its women's wing will lay special focus on the 12 Lok Sabha seats where the party has fielded women candidates through a series of public meetings in smaller gatherings.



Former cricketer and TMC candidate Yusuf Pathan during an election campaign, ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, at Nawda in Murshidabad district of West Bengal, Thursday. PHOTO

In a first, Cong ticket eludes Brahmin, Muslim leaders

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Jaipur, March 28: Contradicting its 'Brahmin DNA' stand, the Congress in Rajasthan has not fielded a single Brahmin candidate for any of the 25 parliamentary constituencies in the desert state.

However, the party leaders insisted that the tickets have been given based on surveys, and not on the basis of caste or creed. The party had played the Brahmin card many times in the past, claiming that the party has 'Brahmin DNA'.

Congress leader and key Rahul Gandhi aide, Randeep Singh Surjewala, also said that the "Congress has Brahmin DNA in its blood".

Echoing the party's claim, Rahul Gandhi has also been seen wearing a 'Janeu' (sacred thread) and claiming that he is a Kashmiri Brahmin.

However, contradicting this 'Brahmin DNA' claim, the Congress has not fielded even a single Brahmin candidate from Rajasthan, which has irked many community leaders.

Similarly, the grand old party has also not fielded any Muslim candidate for the Lok Sabha polls in Rajasthan to be held in the first two phases on April 19 and April 26.

In fact, this is the first time in the history of Rajasthan that not even a single Muslim or Brahmin candidate has got a Congress ticket. The President of the Sarva Brahmin Mahasabha, Suresh Mishra, said, "It seems the Congress doesn't want votes from the Brahmin community. It gave a single ticket to a Brahmin leader



from Jaipur only to cancel it later. Ever since Independence, the party has been giving two to three tickets to Brahmin candidates in Rajasthan. Around one crore people are from the Brahmin community in the state. This is a disrespect to the community."

Senior Congress leader Varun Purohit said, "Rajasthan has produced some stalwart Brahmin leaders.

The Congress seldom tasted defeat when it gave respect to the Brahmin community.

However, neglecting Brahmins and promoting other castes led to Congress' debacle.

Examples of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar can be taken in this context where the Congress

failed to revive after wiping out the Brahmin leadership. Now the same story is being repeated in Rajasthan."

The Congress had offered a ticket to Brahmin candidate Sunil Sharma from the Jaipur Lok Sabha seat. However, he withdrew his candidature following a controversy over his links with the pro-RSS organisation, Jaipur Dialogues.

Many Congress leaders, including Shashi Tharoor, had questioned Sunil Sharma over his loyalty to the party. Thereafter, the party fielded former state minister Pratap Singh Khachariya from Jaipur.

Besides Brahmin leaders, the party has also denied Muslim leaders from contesting the polls as it has failed to field any candidate from the community.

IN FACT, THIS IS THE FIRST TIME IN THE HISTORY OF RAJASTHAN THAT NOT EVEN A SINGLE MUSLIM OR BRAHMIN CANDIDATE HAS GOT A CONGRESS TICKET

THE CONGRESS HAD OFFERED A TICKET TO BRAHMIN CANDIDATE SUNIL SHARMA FROM THE JAIPUR LOK SABHA SEAT. HOWEVER, HE WITHDREW HIS CANDIDATURE FOLLOWING A CONTROVERSY OVER HIS LINKS WITH THE PRO-RSS ORGANISATION, JAIPUR DIALOGUES

Over 58,000 voters opt for home voting

For the first phase of the general election, 35,542 people, including 26,371 senior citizens and 9,171 persons with disabilities, have registered for home voting, the state's Chief Electoral Officer Praveen Gupta said

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaipur, March 28: More than 58,000 voters in Rajasthan have so far opted for home voting in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, an official said.

For the first phase of the general election, 35,542 people, including 26,371 senior citizens and 9,171 persons with disabilities, have registered for home voting, the state's Chief Electoral Officer Praveen Gupta said.

Registration for home voting



in the first phase of the polls will be completed Wednesday, he said. Returning officers will share the list of registered home voters with all recognised political parties and candidates by April 1.

Booth-level officers are completing the registration process of eligible home voters in all 25 Lok Sabha constituencies of the state, Gupta said. After the names of the candidates for the constituencies are finalised, door-to-door voting

will be conducted, he said.

"So far, over 58,000 eligible voters have opted to vote from home. These include 43,638 senior citizens and 14,385 persons with disabilities," the chief electoral officer said. Special polling teams will be formed to conduct home voting and their training will be completed by April 4. These teams will reach the residences of registered home voters in the presence of political parties and

their candidates to conduct voting through postal ballots.

In the first phase, home voting will be conducted from April 5 to 14. In the Lok Sabha constituencies where voting will be held in the second phase, individuals can apply for home voting till April 2, Gupta added.

So far, about 22,500 eligible voters have registered for 'vote from home' in the second phase. These include 17,324 senior citizens and 5,222 disabled voters. The list of these voters will be shared with the recognised political parties and candidates by the returning officers by April 8.

Home voting in the second phase will take place from April 14 to 21. The chief electoral officer said home voting was conducted successfully during the 2023 Rajasthan Assembly elections with 99 per cent of registered voters casting their votes. This included 49,650 senior citizens (aged above 80) and 11,774 persons with disabilities.

Call for eco-friendly campaigning grows louder

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 28: As election campaigns started across the country, environmentalists demand that political parties take the digital and other non-conventional ways of electioneering to minimise the impact of non-biodegradable poll materials on nature.

Political parties should rely mostly on social media to reach voters and shun flexes and plastic flags that litter streets once the polling is over and many a time reach water bodies polluting them or block drains causing them to overflow.

Parties blame the need for visibility factor in elections behind the use of those materials and promise to address the issue.



Environmentalist Somendra Mohan Ghosh asked, "Why can't we come out of campaigns by putting up flexes, plastic flags even in remote rural parts which create a non-biodegradable mess and put a strain on the environment?"

Shifting to the digital mode

for election campaigning should not be a distant dream in the present age as mobile phones with internet are available even in remote areas of the country, he said.

"Reaching the voters can be more effective through SMS, WhatsApp and reels. Messages of leaders can be disseminated through mobiles. If banners and posters are found necessary, they should be made of cotton and paper. Eco-friendly materials should be used to decorate political parties," said Ghosh.

Car rallies cause air pollution, use of microphones creates sound pollution while posters and banners do not increase the beauty of an area, the green brigade says calling for their abolition.

Kolkata Metro urges commuters not to spit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 28: Kolkata Metro Railway has urged commuters to maintain cleanliness amid reports of people dirtying newly inaugurated stations with gutkha and paan stains and littering the premises with plastic waste.

The country's first underwater metro service connecting Howrah Maidan and Esplanade stations along the East-West corridor of the Kolkata Metro Railway became operational earlier this month.

In an official statement, Metro Railway CPRO Koushik Mitra urged commuters to uphold the cleanliness maintained at the older north-south line, which is the country's first metro service.

"It has come to our notice that a section of the commuters, travelling in the new corridor, are turning the new, beautifully decorated metro stations dirty, unhealthy with gutkha stains, dumping sachets, plastics in an indiscriminate manner. This is turning the ambience inside in this corridor as unhygienic," the statement added.

The Metro Railway sought cooperation from commuters to maintain cleanliness in the newer corridors as witnessed in the north-south line.

After the launch of services along the Howrah Maidan-Esplanade section of the East-West Metro on March 15, images of gutkha and paan stains on the walls of Howrah Maidan and Esplanade stations and plastic packets being littered surfaced on social media, with commuters calling upon the Metro Railway to take note of the situation and initiate necessary steps.

How this man turned his weakness into strength

Unlike traditional desk setups, Sharma innovatively places a wooden board at his feet, transforming it into his workspace where he manages all the paperwork

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kota (Rajasthan), March 28: From grazing cattle in Uttarakhand to managing an NGO office in Rajasthan, 58-year-old Devkinandan Sharma has come a long way, despite losing both his arms at the age of 18.

At Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti's office in Kota, Sharma does paperwork and maintains records digitally, using only his toes. "Pinning papers is a difficult task for me as it takes too much effort and time," he says.

Unlike traditional desk setups, Sharma innovatively places

a wooden board at his feet, transforming it into his workspace where he manages all the paperwork. Alongside these duties, he also works on a computer effortlessly maneuvering the mouse and keyboard with his toes on the same wooden board.

Sharma says he was a bright student in school and always dreamt of having a job where he handled paperwork. "I was very sharp in Maths and English and it was my dream to get a job where I could sign and write papers in the office. This dream shattered in my 8th class when one day in 1981, I got a high



power electric shock while working as a contractual wage labourer and I lost both my arms," Sharma, who was born and brought up in Nainital's Shilalekh village, recounts.

Upon returning home from the hospital, Sharma says he was termed "useless" by the villagers, who then gave him the task of grazing cattle in the forest. He used that time to practise writing

by securing a tree twig between his toe thumb and middle toe.

After six months of regular practice, one day he drew a lotus flower on the ground and spelled it in Hindi, "kamal". This gave him the confidence to transition to practising on paper with a pen held between his toes. It took him eight months of relentless effort to finally master this art of writing on a paper with his toes.

"I wrote my first letter with a pen held between my toes to my brother who was then posted in Almora, Uttarakhand. Surprised by this, he encouraged me to resume studies," Sharma says. He took his brother's advice and completed his senior secondary education in 1986.

The same year, a camp for physically challenged people was organised in Ranikhet,

Uttarakhand, where Sharma met social workers Prassana and her husband MC Bhandari, founders of Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti in Kota. The couple was extremely impressed with Sharma's ability to write with his toes and asked him to accompany them here.

Sharma was initially offered the job of a storekeeper in the NGO here and in 2001, he was promoted to the post of manager. He says a lot of people in the Ranikhet camp were impressed with his skill of writing with his toes and offered him money but he refused, which impressed the Bhandari couple, whom he would call "mummy and papa" until their death. Sharma lives in Kota with his wife, an ASHA worker, and son, who is a physiotherapist. His daughter is married and is a homemaker.



Bhartruhari, Sidhant, Damayanti join BJP



AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 28: BJD founding member and six-time Cuttack Lok Sabha MP Bhartruhari Mahtab, former BJD MP Sidhant Mohapatra and noted Odisha language litterateur Padma Shri Damayanti Beshra joined the BJP here Thursday, dealing a big blow to Odisha's ruling party ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

Mahtab, 67, joined the BJP in the presence of senior leaders at the party headquarters here. The three joined the BJP in the presence of Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, party national vice president Baijayant Jay Panda, party's Odisha unit president Manmohan Samal and other senior leaders.

Addressing a joint press conference here after joining the BJP, Mahtab, son of former chief minister of Odisha Harekrushna Mahtab, said he will now get the opportunity to work for the development and progress of Odisha.

"Prime Minister Modi's 'shakti (strength)', Home Minister's 'vishwas (trust)' and (BJP chief)

JP Nadda ji's 'prerna (inspiration)' will help us move forward," he said.

Odisha is going to witness a change due to Prime Minister Modi's leadership. This change is going to be steered by Home Minister Amit Shah and other senior leaders of the BJP, Mahtab said. "I am going to start a new innings with a new team."

Welcoming them into the party fold, BJP national general secretary Vinod Tawde said they have joined as they are "impressed" by Prime Minister Modi's leadership and his government work in various sectors.

They have joined the BJP at a time when Odisha is witnessing a change in the political scenario, Tawde said. "And I am confident that the party, under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, will succeed in bringing the change that people of Odisha want to see in the state."

Addressing the press conference, Mohapatra expressed gratitude towards Nadda and other senior BJP leaders for his induction into the party and said India has transformed under

the leadership of Prime Minister Modi. "I want to see the same transformation happening in Odisha as well."

Beshra, who was conferred Padma Shri in 2020, said she will work for the welfare of the people of Odisha and also contribute in taking forward Prime Minister Modi's 'sabka saath, sabka vikas (together with all, development for all)' slogan.

"A wind of change is certainly blowing in Odisha this time. People's faith in the BJP's ideals has further strengthened," she said. "I will work for the empowerment and progress of women. I want to assure that I will fulfil any responsibility that the party would give to me," she added.

Mahtab, a six-time MP from the Cuttack Lok Sabha constituency, had resigned from the primary membership of the BJD last Friday.

A founding member of the BJD, he was elected to Lok Sabha from Cuttack in 1998, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019.

Contesting the 2019 Lok Sabha polls on a BJD ticket, he had defeated the BJP's Prakash Mishra with a huge margin of votes.

Big zero in Odisha politics: Khan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 28: BJD leader Munna Khan Thursday dubbed Cuttack MP Bhartruhari Mahtab and cine star Sidhant Mohapatra, also a former parliamentarian, a 'big zero in Odisha politics' after they joined the BJP in Delhi.

Mahtab has represented the Cuttack seat as a BJD MP for six terms, while Mohapatra was a BJD lawmaker from Berhampur seat for two terms. Khan, a Rajya Sabha MP, told reporters, "Both of them do not have any identity of their own in Odisha politics and they could remain in Parliament only by the grace of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. The BJP would realise their worth after the polls."

"They are a big zero in Odisha politics. They cannot win even an election for a ward member's post without the support of Naveen babu," Khan claimed, adding both have "betrayed" the trust of Patnaik by quitting the regional outfit.

Khan claimed Mohapatra had never raised any issue pertaining to Odisha's interest during his 10 years in Parliament.

"Their exit from our party will have no impact on its electoral prospects," he said.

Neither Mahtab nor Mohapatra was available for comment.

Odisha BJP vice-president Golak Mohapatra, however, expressed wonder as to how the BJD could call a six-time MP and a two-term parliamentarian a 'big zero'.

"It is laughable to call people quitting BJD as 'big zero'," he said. 67-year-old Mahtab, a founding member of the BJD, joined the BJP in the presence of senior leaders at the party's headquarters in New Delhi.

He was accompanied by Mohapatra and noted Santali language litterateur Damayanti Beshra, who was conferred the Padma Shri in 2020.

Leaders rush to Naveen Niwas

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 28: A large number of BJD leaders, who have been nominated to contest the upcoming Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, Thursday thronged Naveen Niwas - the residence of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik - to express their gratitude to the party supremo.

Among the leaders who visited Naveen Niwas were Cuttack Lok Sabha nominee Sanrupat Mishra, Kendrapara Lok Sabha candidate Anshuman Mohanty, Mayurbhanj MP candidate Sudam Marndi, Bhanjanagar MLA candidate Bikram Keshari Arukha, Niali Assembly nominee Pramod Mallik and Bhatli MLA candidate Susanta Singh.

Similarly, Bijepur Assembly candidate Rita Sahu, Attabira MLA candidate Snehangini Chhuria, Chhatrapur MLA candidate Subash Behera and Digapahandi MLA candidate Bipal Patro.

Others who also visited Naveen Niwas to thank the BJD president



were Athagarh MLA candidate Ranendra Pratap Swain, G Udaygiri MLA candidate Saluga Pradhan, Mahakalpada Assembly nominee Atanu Sabyasachi Nayak, Banki MLA candidate Debi Ranjan Tripathy, Manas Mangaraj, Basudevpur MLA candidate Bishnubrata Routray, Bhadrak Assembly candidate Prafulla Samal, Patkura MLA nominee Arabinda Mohapatra and

Titilagarh MLA candidate Tukuni Sahu expressed their gratitude to the Chief Minister.

Apart from these leaders, Bhagirathi Sethy, Jagannath Naik, Badri Narayan Patra, Prafulla Mallik, Byomkesh Ray, Dilip Tirkey, Srikant Sahu, Chandra Sarathi Behera, Akash Dasnayak, Souvic Biswal and Pratap Keshari Deb also visited Naveen Niwas.



CELEBRATION TIME: Elated supporters celebrating the nomination of Sujata Sahu as the BJD candidate for the Jajpur Assembly constituency at Dasarathpur in Jajpur district, Thursday

Holi adds more colour to Steel City politics

THE PRESENCE OF ALMOST ALL THE ANTI-SARADA GROUPS IN KALYANI HAS ADDED ENOUGH COLOURS TO THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE OF THE CITY. NOT A SINGLE ANTI-SARADA CAMP MEMBER MISSED OUT THE OCCASION

RAJESH MOHANTY, OP

Rourkela, March 28: The recent Holi celebrations made the political environment of the Steel City more colourful with back-to-back gatherings by BJP heavyweight Dilip Ray, while indicating his possible comeback in electoral politics.

This election year, the celebration's central attractions were two places. The first was Mayfair Hockey Village and the other was 'Kalyani', the residence of former minister at Centre and state and local political heavyweight Dilip Ray,



owner of the Mayfair group of hotels.

Dilip hosted the 'shradha' (death anniversary) of his late mother Kalyani Ray at the Hockey Village here. While a large number of politicians, locals, mediapersons and others were invited, the gathering remained a little apolitical given the sober nature of the occasion. However, the other congregation 'Holi Milan' was purely political in nature.

There were political leaders, ticket aspirants and leaders from all parties. For them, this was the occasion to show allegiance or at least their gratitude to Ray, because all who were present there



benefited from him at some point in time.

For quite some time, chatters were abuzz whether Ray will contest or will support a party, and if at all he contests, then from which party. The rumour machine is pointing towards his two old parties - BJD and BJP, though he was in Congress for over a couple of years before switching to the saffron party.

However, the notable absentee in the 'Holi Milan' was another local political heavyweight state Labour Minister Sarada Nayak.

During 2019 elections, both Dilip and Sarada had come to

a table and joined hands. Following this, Dilip declared his support to Sarada and many believe this helped the latter win the poll. However, this time, the differences are very much visible. As per Dilip's associates, he is very upset with Sarada and will teach him a lesson.

Sarada camp is not relenting either. "We are ready for Ray and his political tactics this time. Let us see what happens June 4," said a Sarada supporter.

In fact, the presence of almost all the anti-Sarada groups in Kalyani has added enough colours to the already hued political atmosphere of the city. Not a single anti-Sarada camp member missed out the occasion.

Meanwhile, it is learnt that Ray, who is an accused in coal scam and has been handed over a three-year jail term has approached the Delhi High Court seeking a stay on his conviction citing his wish to contest the elections. The court has asked for a 'status report' from CBI and the next hearing is scheduled for April 5. All eyes are on this hearing as this may add another twist to Steel City politics.

Jhunjhunu tops charts with most centenarian women voters

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Jaipur, March 28: Jhunjhunu in Rajasthan tops the charts in terms of women centenarians who will be voting in the Lok Sabha polls April 19, confirmed election officials Thursday.

Around 1,451 women voters in this parliamentary constituency are in the age bracket of 100 to 109 against 288 male voters in the same age group.

Also, the seat has the highest number of women voters in the age group of 109-119. Around 57 women voters fall under this age bracket against five males.

Sikar follows Jhunjhunu in having the second-largest number of female voters in the age group of 100-109. It has 813 women voters against 120 male voters.

At 704, Churu has the third-largest number of centenarian women voters who come under the age group of 100 to 109 and 18 women who fall in the 109-119 bracket.

Surprisingly, only two male voters come under this age group in Churu, while 117 male voters in Churu are in the 100-109



age group. Meanwhile, there are a total of 13 voters in the state who are over 120 years of age and will vote under the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections. This includes seven male voters and six female voters.

Overall, 6,899 women voters in Rajasthan are in the age group of 100-109 who will go for voting in the first phase of polls April 19. Meanwhile, there are around 1,779 males who fall under this category in Rajasthan.

Similarly, 187 women in the age

group of 109-119 shall vote April 19 while 52 males falling under this age group will participate in the biggest festival of democracy, said election officers.

Meanwhile, the Lok Sabha constituency with the highest number of electors in Phase 1 is Jaipur with 22,87,350 voters while at 18,99,304 Dausa has the lowest voters in Phase 1.

Jhunjhunu meanwhile has the maximum centenarian voters numbering 1,802, said Praveen Gupta, Chief Electoral Officer.



BJP's Berhampur Lok Sabha candidate Pradipt Panigrahi addressing a party meet organised to felicitate him in Berhampur, Thursday



BJP leaders approach the office of the Chief Electoral Officer in Bhubaneswar, Thursday, over alleged violation of Model Code of Conduct by BJD

OP PHOTOS

national

of the day quote

If your one vote goes into the wrong hands, the security of not only Muzaffarnagar, but entire western Uttar Pradesh will be in danger and if your one vote goes to the right political party, then anarchy will end and faith will get respect

We had expected that the country's women and child development minister, Smriti Irani, would hold a press conference and present the report card of her department

We have to make a corruption-free India. They (Opposition) want to save their corruption, and we have to eradicate that... They will have to pay for whatever wrongs they have committed and the law catches up with you and the law is catching up with people who have done irregularities

SHORT TAKES

Sanjiv Bhatt gets 20 years in jail

Palanpur: A sessions court in Palanpur in Gujarat's Banaskantha district Thursday sentenced former IPS officer Sanjiv Bhatt to 20 years in jail in a 1996 case involving planting of drugs to frame a lawyer. Bhatt was held guilty of falsely implicating a Rajasthan-based lawyer by claiming, in 1996, that police had seized drugs from a hotel room in Palanpur where the lawyer was staying.

ED questions AAP's Goa chief

Panaji: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) Thursday questioned Aam Aadmi Party's Goa unit president Amit Palekar and three others in connection with a money laundering case. The ED had summoned Palekar, AAP leader Ramrao Wagh and two others - Dattaprasad Naik and Ashok Naik - for questioning in a case registered under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Mahua Moitra skips ED summons

Kolkata: TMC leader Mahua Moitra campaigned in her Krishnanagar constituency of West Bengal Thursday, giving a miss to the Enforcement Directorate summons that asked her to appear for questioning at the ED office in New Delhi. The probe agency had issued fresh summons to Moitra and Dubai-based businessman Darshan Hiranandani for questioning.

Savitri Jindal quits Congress, joins BJP

Chandigarh: Former Haryana minister Savitri Jindal quit the Congress and joined the BJP in Haryana's Hisar Thursday, days after her son and industrialist Naveen Jindal switched parties. The 84-year-old Savitri Jindal joined the BJP along with her daughter Seema in the presence of Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, former Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar and other BJP leaders.

FIR against Dilip Ghosh

Kolkata: An FIR has been lodged against senior BJP leader Dilip Ghosh at Durgapur Police Station for his remarks West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, an official said Thursday. Ghosh has been booked under IPC sections 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace) and 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman), he said in a statement.



How many journalists are in jails? They should release those against whom there are no charges and who are not prosecuted. We will have faith in their remarks... Otherwise, it looks like a jumla

MEHBOOBA MUFTI | PDP CHIEF

GOVINDA RETURNS TO POLITICS

Hindi film actor Govinda, a mass entertainer of the 1990s who is known for his excellent comic timing and epic dance steps, Thursday joined the ruling Shiv Sena in Mumbai, making a comeback in politics after a 14-year hiatus. The former Congress Lok Sabha MP joined the Shiv Sena in the presence of Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde at the time of election season



ARUNACHAL ROW

India refutes China's claim

Amid a lingering border row in eastern Ladakh, top diplomats of India and China held a fresh round of talks and both sides agreed to "maintain regular contact" through diplomatic and military channels, with no indication of any breakthrough

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 28: The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said Thursday that China's repetitive claims on Arunachal Pradesh will not change India's position, and the northeastern state will remain an integral and inalienable part of India.

India and China have been exchanging barbs over Arunachal Pradesh ever since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the state earlier this month to inaugurate the strategically important Sela tunnel. "Our position on Arunachal Pradesh has been made very clear time and again. We have also issued statements in this regard recently," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in his weekly media briefing Thursday.

"China may repeat its baseless claims as many times as it wants... that is not going to change our position. Arunachal Pradesh was, is, and will remain an integral and inalienable part of India," Jaiswal said in response to a media query. For the fourth time in this month, China said that Zangnan -- the Chinese name for Arunachal Pradesh -- has always been its territory, even as India rejected Beijing's claims as "ludicrous and absurd".



During his recent Southeast Asia tour, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar left no opportunity to slam the Asian nation for failing to uphold the longstanding agreements with India. The response from the MEA came after both nations held the 29th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs in Beijing to discuss and resolve the remaining issues along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Western Sector of the border areas. Further, responding to Canadian Prime Minister

Justin Trudeau's remarks on Khalistan leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar's killing in British Columbia in June last year, Jaiswal said there is "nothing new" in what the Canadian leader said. "I would recall that September 21 last year, my predecessor (Arindam Bagchi) had men-

tioned that India remains ready... and I would like to reiterate that we are ready to investigate any specific and concrete information if it is shared with us," Jaiswal told reporters. "But, we are yet to receive any such information," he said, adding that "we have also cautioned against playing politics and giving extremists more space". Trudeau told Canada-based Cable Public Affairs Channel that the "killing of a Canadian national on Canadian soil is something that we all should take extremely seriously". Stating that the declaration by him September 18 was not made lightly, Trudeau added that they are looking to work constructively with the Indian government "to get to the bottom of this (issue)".

Chinese military lashes out at US

Beijing: The Chinese military Thursday criticised the US for its assertion that Arunachal Pradesh is part of India, stating that India and China have mature mechanisms, communication channels, ability and willingness to properly handle the border issue through dialogue and consultations. The US has a terrible record of stoking disputes between other countries for selfish gains. The international community sees it clearly, Sr Col Wu Qian, spokesperson for China's defence ministry, told a press conference here Thursday reacting to the recent statement by the US that Washington recognises Arunachal Pradesh as Indian territory. Wu said there are mature mechanisms and communication channels between China and India on border issues. "The two sides have the ability and willingness to properly handle the boundary question through dialogue and consultations," he said. He was reacting to the US State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel's statement March 9 stating that "the United States recognises Arunachal Pradesh as Indian territory and we strongly oppose any unilateral attempts to advance territorial claims by incursions or encroachments, military or civilian, across the Line of Actual Control." Wu also reiterated that Arunachal Pradesh is part of China's territory.

national on Canadian soil is something that we all should take extremely seriously". Stating that the declaration by him September 18 was not made lightly, Trudeau added that they are looking to work constructively with the Indian government "to get to the bottom of this (issue)".

Mukhtar Ansari dies due to cardiac arrest



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ansari, 63, was a five-time MLA from Mau Sadar seat and was behind bars in UP and Punjab since 2005

He had over 60 criminal cases pending against him

He was sentenced in eight cases since September 2022 by different courts of Uttar Pradesh and was lodged in the Banda jail

Banda/Lucknow, March 28: Jailed gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari died of a cardiac arrest at a hospital in Banda in Uttar Pradesh Thursday, its principal said.

Ansari was taken to the Rani Durgavati Medical College in Banda from the district jail after his health deteriorated.

Medical college principal Suneel Kaushal told PTI over phone that Ansari died following a cardiac arrest at the facility. There was a heavy deployment of police personnel outside the hospital shortly after Ansari was taken there.

His name was on the list of 66 gangsters issued by Uttar Pradesh Police last year. Prohibitory orders under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), which bars large gatherings, were imposed across the state following Ansari's death, Uttar Pradesh

Director General of Police Prashant Kumar said.

Additional deployment of police personnel has also been made in Banda, Mau, Ghazipur and Varanasi districts, he added. "Teams of Central Reserve Police Force have been deployed along with local police in these districts," the DGP said.

Ansari, who hailed from Mau, was believed to have strong influence in adjoining Ghazipur and Varanasi districts as well. The social media cell of the Uttar Pradesh Police has also been activated to keep a close watch on unlawful elements online, he said in a statement.

According to a medical bulletin, Ansari was brought to the medical college around 8.25 pm Thursday in an unconscious state after he had complained of vomiting. A team of nine doctors attended to him but he died of a cardiac arrest, it stated.



DEVOTEES & DEVOTION: Volunteers of Birmingham-based Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha clean the gold-plated walls and dome of the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab

World squanders over 1bn meals a day: UN

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Nairobi, March 28: Households across all continents wasted more than 1 billion meals a day in 2022, while 783 million people were affected by hunger and one-third of humanity faced food insecurity.

Food waste continues to hurt the global economy and fuel climate change, nature loss and pollution. These are the key findings of a UN Environment Programme (UNEP) report published Wednesday, ahead of the International Day of Zero Waste. The UNEP Food Waste Index Report 2024, co-authored with WRAP, provides the most accurate global estimate on food waste at retail and consumer levels. It provides guidance for countries on improving data collection and suggests best practices in moving from measuring to reducing food waste.

In 2022 there were 1.05 billion tonnes of food waste generated (including inedible parts),



amounting to 132 kg per capita and nearly one-fifth of all food available to consumers.

Of the total food wasted in 2022, 60 per cent happened at the household level, with food services responsible for 28 per cent and retail 12 per cent.

"Food waste is a global tragedy. Millions will go hungry today as food is wasted across the world," said Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP.

"Not only is this a major development issue, but the impacts of such unnecessary waste are causing substantial costs to the

climate and nature. The good news is we know if countries prioritise this issue, they can significantly reverse food loss and waste, reduce climate impacts and economic losses, and accelerate progress on global goals." Since 2021, there's been a strengthening of the data infrastructure with more studies tracking food waste. Globally, the number of data points at the household level almost doubled. Nevertheless, many low- and middle-income countries continue to lack adequate systems for tracking progress to meet

Food waste continues to hurt the global economy and fuel climate change, nature loss and pollution

Sustainable Development Goal 12.3 of halving food waste by 2030, particularly in retail and food services.

Only four G20 countries -- Australia, Japan, the UK, the US and the European Union -- have food waste estimates suitable for tracking progress till 2030. Canada and Saudi Arabia have suitable household estimates, with Brazil's estimate expected late 2024. In this context, the report serves as a practical guide for countries to consistently measure and report food waste.

The data confirms that food waste is not just a 'rich country' problem, with levels of household food waste differing in observed average levels for high-income, upper-middle, and

lower-middle-income countries by just seven kg per capita.

At the same time, hotter countries appear to generate more food waste per capita in households, potentially due to higher consumption of fresh foods with substantial inedible parts and a lack of robust cold chains.

According to recent data, food loss and waste generates eight to 10 per cent of annual global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions -- almost five times that of the aviation sector -- and significant biodiversity loss by taking up the equivalent of almost a third of the world's agricultural land.

The toll of both food loss and waste on the global economy is estimated at nearly \$1 trillion.

Urban areas are expected to particularly benefit from efforts to strengthen food waste reduction and circularity. Rural areas generally waste less food, with greater diversion of food scraps to pets, livestock and home composting as likely explanations.

India again slams US' remarks on Kejriwal

India Thursday said the US State Department's recent remarks on the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal is "unwarranted"

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, March 28: Calling the US State Department's remarks on the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal "unwarranted", India Thursday said that any such external imputation on the electoral and legal process is completely unacceptable.

US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller reiterated Wednesday its call for "fair, transparent, timely legal processes" as India summoned an American diplomat and lodged a strong protest over the remarks.

Addressing a weekly media briefing, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, said that "yesterday, India had lodged its strong objection and protest with a senior official from the US embassy with regard to the comments made by the State Department".

"The recent remarks by the State Department are unwarranted. Any such external imputation on the electoral and



legal process is completely unacceptable," Jaiswal said in response to a question. Asserting that in India, legal processes are driven only by the rule of law, Jaiswal said that anyone who has a similar ethos, especially fellow democracies, should have no difficulty in appreciating this fact.

The meeting at the foreign ministry's South Block office with Gloria Berbena, the US Acting Deputy Chief of Mission in Delhi, lasted 45 minutes with India objecting strongly to the US stance on the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener.

After Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh, Kejriwal was the third AAP leader who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with the alleged liquor policy scam.

Earlier, India summoned a senior diplomat from the German Embassy and lodged a strong protest over comments on Kejriwal, saying that the Chief Minister is entitled to a fair and impartial trial India called it a "blatant interference" in the country's internal matters.

Dera kar seva chief shot dead in U'khand

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dehradun/Rudrapur, March 28: The dera kar seva chief of the Nanakmatta Sahib Gurdwara in Uttarakhand's Udham Singh Nagar district was shot dead Thursday on the shrine's premises by two men on a motorcycle, police said.

Baba Tarsem Singh was rushed to a hospital in Khatima where he died during treatment, Udham Singh Nagar Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Manju Nath told reporters.

"We have clear (CCTV camera) videos of the assailants. They are both Sikhs," he said and added that they fled after the incident. The Nanakmatta Sahib Gurdwara, around 50 km from Rudrapur, is a revered Sikh shrine located on the Rudrapur-Tanakpur route in Udham Singh Nagar district of the state.

In CCTV camera footage, the assailants were seen entering the gurdwara on a motorcycle around 6:15 am and shooting at Singh with a rifle, Nath said and added that the shooter was riding pillion.



Cafe blast: Key conspirator held

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 28: In a major breakthrough, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested a key conspirator in Bangalore's Rameshwaram Cafe blast case, according to an official statement issued Thursday.

Muzammil Shareef was picked up Wednesday and placed in custody as a co-conspirator after NIA teams cracked down at 18 locations, including 12 in Karnataka, five in Tamil Nadu and one in Uttar Pradesh, it said.

The NIA, which took over the case March 3, had earlier identified the main accused, Mussavir Shazeeb Hussain, who had carried out the blast.

It had also identified another conspirator, Abdul Matheen Taha, who is also wanted by the agency in other cases, the statement said. "Both the men are on the run," it added.

international



When government agencies use AI tools, we will now require them to verify that those tools do not endanger the rights and safety of the American people
KAMALA HARRIS | US VICE PRESIDENT

HARD BALANCE

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has admitted it is a hard balance for him to strike as the father of two young children and holding the top job of leading the country through various crises



of the day quote

Pakistan and China are close friends and iron brothers. We have no doubt that the Bisham terror attack was orchestrated by the enemies of Pakistan-China friendship

MUMTAZ ZAHRA BALOCH | PAKISTANI DIPLOMAT

I will propose granting Spain's recognition to the Palestinian state. I do this out of moral conviction, for a just cause and because it is the only way that the two states, Israel and Palestine, can live together in peace

PEDRO SANCHEZ | PM, SPAIN

Spreading pessimistic views on China will end up harming oneself, and misjudging China will result in missed opportunities

WANG YI | FOREIGN MINISTER, CHINA

SHORT TAKES

Sri Lankan PM meets Xi Jinping

Colombo: Chinese President Xi Jinping has assured continuous support to Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena for Sri Lanka's efforts for "political and socio-economic progress" and also said Beijing will stand for safeguarding the island nation's territorial integrity and sovereignty. China and Sri Lanka agreed to continue to act under the friendship, peace, mutual respect and fivefold principle in international affairs that do not interfere in the internal affairs of a country during a meeting between Xi and Gunawardena Wednesday at Great Hall in Beijing, the Prime Minister's office said in a statement here Thursday.

Bankman-Fried jailed for 25 years

New York: Crypto entrepreneur Sam Bankman-Fried was sentenced Thursday to 25 years in prison for a massive fraud that unravelled with the collapse of FTX, once one of the world's most popular platforms for exchanging digital currency. Bankman-Fried, 32, was convicted in November of fraud and conspiracy — a dramatic fall from a crest of success that included a Super Bowl advertisement and celebrity endorsements from stars like quarterback Tom Brady, basketball star Stephen Curry and comedian Larry David. US District Judge Lewis A. Kaplan imposed the sentence in the same Manhattan courtroom where, four months ago, Bankman-Fried testified that his intention had been to revolutionise the emerging cryptocurrency market with his innovative and altruistic ideas, not to steal.

Russia vetoes UN resolution

United Nations: Russia vetoed a UN resolution Thursday, effectively abolishing the monitoring of UN sanctions against North Korea by a panel of UN experts. The Security Council resolution sponsored by the United States would have extended the mandate of the panel for a year, but Russia's veto will halt its operations. The vote in the 15-member council was 13 in favour, Russia against and China abstaining.

4 killed, 7 injured

Rockford (Illinois): Four people were killed and seven hurt in stabbings in northern Illinois Wednesday, authorities said. A man is in police custody and was being questioned, according to Rockford Police Chief Carla Redd.

NATO won't be attacked but F-16s will: Putin

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kyiv, March 28: Russian President Vladimir Putin scoffed at the possibility of his country launching an attack on a NATO member, calling it "sheer nonsense," but warned that any Western air base hosting US-made F-16 fighter jets that are slated for deployment in Ukraine would be a "legitimate target" for the Kremlin's forces.

"Their statements about our alleged intention to attack Europe after Ukraine is sheer nonsense," Putin said late Wednesday, referring to warnings in the US and Western Europe that Russia could turn its sights on other countries unless it is stopped.

He noted that the US defence budget is more than 10 times higher than Russia's. "In view of that, are we going to wage a war against NATO? It's ravings," he told military pilots during a visit to an air base.

Ukraine is awaiting the delivery of F-16s, which will increase military pressure on Russia, from its Western partners. Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said last year that 42 F-16s had been promised. Ukrainian pilots have been training in the West for months on how to fly the warplanes.

The F-16s require a high standard of runways and reinforced hangars to protect them from bombing attacks when they are on the ground. It is not clear how many Ukrainian air bases can meet those requirements, and Russia would be certain to quickly target a few that could accommodate them once the jets arrive.

Putin warned Ukraine's Western allies against providing air bases in their countries from where the F-16s could launch sorties against the



Putin warned Ukraine's Western allies against providing air bases in their countries from where the F-16s could launch sorties against the Kremlin's forces

Ukraine is awaiting the delivery of F-16s, which will increase military pressure on Russia, from its Western partners

Kremlin's forces. Those bases would become a "legitimate target," he said.

"F-16s are capable of carrying nuclear weapons, and we will also need to take that into account while organizing our combat operations," Putin added. Military analysts have said the arrival of F-16s won't be a game-changer in view of Russia's massive air force and sophisticated air defence systems, though Ukrainian officials have welcomed them as an opportunity to hit back at Russia's air dominance.

Putin insisted the F-16s "won't change the situation on the battlefield." "We will destroy their warplanes just as we destroy their tanks, armored vehicles and other equipment, including multiple rocket launchers," he said.

F-16s can be used to bolster Ukraine's capability to target

Russian facilities with long-range missile strikes. Ukraine's counteroffensive last year came up short in part because it took place without air cover, placing its troops at the mercy of Russian aviation and artillery.

Russia has maintained air dominance in the war with Ukraine, though the provision of sophisticated Western air defense systems has forced Russian warplanes to avoid Ukrainian skies and launch attacks while remaining over Russian-controlled territory.

The Kremlin currently has a battlefield edge in weapons and troops, yielding recent incremental gains at points on the around 1,000-kilometer front line, as Kyiv awaits more promised Western military support and mulls a broader mobilization.

Russia fired salvos of drones and missiles overnight at southern and eastern regions of Ukraine, authorities said Thursday, injuring more than a dozen people as the Kremlin's forces persevered with attritional attacks designed to wear down Ukrainian defenses. Air defence systems intercepted 26 out of 28 Shahed drones, Ukraine's air force said. Russian forces also launched five missiles overnight, it said.

Palestinian PM Mustafa forms new Cabinet

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ramallah (West Bank), March 28: The Palestinian Authority has announced the formation of a new Cabinet as it faces international pressure to reform.

President Mahmoud Abbas, who has led the PA for nearly two decades and remains in overall control, announced the new government in a presidential decree on Thursday. None of the incoming ministers is a well-known figure.

Abbas tapped Mohammad Mustafa, a longtime adviser, to be Prime Minister earlier this month. Mustafa, a politically independent US-educated economist, had vowed to form a technocratic government and create an independent trust fund to help rebuild Gaza. Mustafa will also serve as foreign minister.

Interior Minister Ziad Hab al-Rih is a member of Abbas' secular Fatah movement and held the same portfolio in the previous government. The Interior Ministry oversees the security forces. The incoming minister for Jerusalem affairs, Ashraf al-Awar, registered to run as a Fatah candidate in elections in 2021 that were indefinitely delayed.

At least five of the incoming 23 ministers are from Gaza, but it was not immediately clear if they are still in the territory. The PA administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Its forces were driven from Gaza when Hamas seized power in 2007, and it has no power there.

It has little popular support or legitimacy among Palestinians, in part because it has not held elections in 18 years.



INDIA UNVEILS NEW DATABASE AT UN



The launch of the database was announced at a high-level meeting of the India-led 'Group of Friends' (GOF) Tuesday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

United Nations, March 28: India has launched a new database designed to record crimes against UN peacekeepers and monitor progress in holding perpetrators accountable, India's UN envoy Ruchira Kamboj said Thursday, asserting that New Delhi is at the forefront of advocating for accountability.

The launch of the database was announced at a high-level meeting of the India-led 'Group of Friends' (GOF) Tuesday. "Delighted to announce the launch of a new database designed to record crimes against Peacekeepers & monitor progress in holding perpetrators accountable. India is at the forefront of advocating for accountability, leading the Group of Friends dedicated to this cause," India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Kamboj, said in a post on X.

The database is designed to serve as an online repository, empowering the Secretariat, Missions, and member states to monitor and address cases of malicious acts against peacekeepers, a press release by the Permanent Mission of India to the UN said.

"This database, sponsored by India, is hosted on the United

Aware platform and is poised to facilitate comprehensive analysis and drive effective strategies for promoting accountability," it said. During the meeting, Kamboj highlighted the GOF's progress over the past year, emphasising the insights gained into challenges surrounding accountability, particularly in strengthening the rule of law within Mission areas.

She expressed confidence in leveraging these insights to enact impactful measures advancing accountability for crimes against peacekeepers. The GOF was launched by India in 2022 to promote accountability for crimes against the Blue Helmets during its presidency of the UN Security Council.

India, Bangladesh, Egypt, France, Morocco and Nepal are co-chairs of the GOF, which comprises 40 member states. The GOF's second meeting Tuesday was focused on strategies to strengthen legal frameworks against perpetrators of malicious acts targeting peacekeepers, focusing on supporting measures for ensuring accountability.

The meeting's agenda also featured a substantive discussion on providing legal frameworks to support the concept of accountability for crimes against peacekeepers. Professor Bimal Patel, a distinguished member of the International Law Commission and Vice Chancellor of the Rashtriya Raksha University, shared expert insights on the topic.

No change in trade policy with India: Pak



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Islamabad, March 28: Pakistan Thursday clarified that it has no plan to resume trade relations with India which has been "non-existent" since 2019 after the Indian government abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir.

The clarification from Pakistan's Foreign Office comes days after the new Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said in London that Pakistan will seriously consider restoring trade ties with India that have remained suspended since August 2019.

In August 2019, India sus-

pending Article 370 giving special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcated it into centrally-administered Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. At the weekly briefing here, Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch was asked to comment on reports about the possibility of resumption of trade ties with India.

"Pakistan-India trade relations have been non-existent since 2019 when India took illegal steps in the illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir ... There is no change in Pakistan's position on it," Baloch said.

Foreign minister Dar, during a press conference in London on March 23, highlighted the eagerness of Pakistan's business community to resume trade activities with India, indicating a potential shift in diplomatic stance towards its neighbouring nation.



Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, third right, and Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal shake hands during a group photo, as they meet for bilateral talks in Warsaw, Poland, Thursday

Trump in court, Biden in kitchen: The unique campaigns

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Washington, March 28: Though the candidates are the same as last time, the 2024 US presidential election promises to be unique in other ways -- pitting two men facing challenges unprecedented in the 235-year history of US democracy.

Joe Biden was already fending off misgivings about his advanced years in 2020, but America's oldest-ever President will have four more candles on his birthday cake this November. And Donald Trump, who was facing scrutiny during the last election over his conduct before and during his term in office, now has four criminal indictments to his name -- unprecedented for a US President.

There isn't much 81-year-old Biden can do about his age, except crack the occasional joke and

point out that his opponent is less than four years younger. But Trump has tried to leverage his legal woes -- treating his court appearances as if they were campaign rallies, complete with defiant, grievance-laden speeches before the media and cheering fans.

Fist raised

The speeches themselves aren't exactly presidential -- it's hard to imagine Abraham Lincoln lashing out at judges or smearing political opponents as "Marxist thugs" -- but Trump's loyal base enjoys his proclivity for incendiary rhetoric and personal grievance.

They are likely to see more of it, with jury selection beginning April 15 in Trump's trial for campaign finance violations in New York. "He likes to be able to play the role of a victim," says Todd Belt, a politics professor at George



Washington University. The strategy comes at a price. Trump has been buried under legal costs stretching into the hundreds of millions of dollars -- bills that he finances, in part, via campaign funds. "It also takes him away from being able to do his MAGA rallies, get out among



the people," says Belt. The contest is not set in stone until the parties' nominating conventions this summer, but since the rematch became all-but-inevitable weeks ago, Trump has held just one of his signature rallies, in Ohio. His step back is unusual for a showman who

-- despite his own many verbal slip-ups -- enjoys putting on a stiff gait and pretending to be confused as he mocks Biden, delighting supporters in packed arenas.

Trump has long denigrated his rival as "Sleepy Joe," but Team Biden has been returning the compliment lately, cheekily appropriating a Trumpism to decry "Low Energy Don."

Human connection

Like Trump, Biden's age could be a major obstacle as he digs deep to inspire passion in voters over what is set to be one of the most longest, most arduous campaigns in history. But he has surrounded himself with aides who play to his strengths.

The Democrat has been blitzing the all-important swing states during a recent campaign schedule that has taken in Michigan, Wisconsin, Arizona, Nevada,

North Carolina, Pennsylvania. He has eschewed the stadiums that Trump likes in favour of smaller gatherings, sometimes away from the television cameras, or low-key visits to small businesses -- a barber shop with an African-American clientele, a Mexican restaurant.

He will take part in chats around the kitchen table -- set-piece events carefully stage-managed by aides who send out flattering videos after the fact rather than allowing in journalists. Biden, hunched over a hamburger and milkshake, will talk about student debt with a group of undergraduates or comfort a youngster suffering from his own childhood affliction, a bad stutter. Avoiding interviews with the national press, Biden prefers short exchanges with local or community-based media, and seldom holds news conferences.

business

of the day quote

If India grows at 8 per cent, India can be a \$55 trillion economy by 2047

KRISHNAMURTHY VENKATA SUBRAMANIAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, IMF

With a strong pipeline of 90-plus hotels, the supply addition from IHCL is set to accelerate over the next few years continuing its leadership in the domestic market while foraying in select international markets

DEEPIKA RAO
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, IHCL

While the ongoing Red Sea crisis has not had an impact on the Indian pharmaceuticals as of now, any adverse impact in the form of supply chain disruptions or increase in logistics costs will be a key monitorable

MYTHRI MACHERLA | ASSISTANT VP, ICRA

SHORT TAKES

Coal India tops annual target

Kolkata: Coal India Ltd (CIL) has surpassed its annual supply target of 610 million tonne to the thermal power sector, achieving 610.8 MT till March 27, a company official said. "This marks the highest coal supply till date to the power sector," he said. CIL's coal supply to the sector rose by 29.3 million tonne in absolute volume terms compared to the corresponding period last fiscal, he said. The miner's current average daily supply to coal-fired plants stands at 1.76 million tonne, reflecting the growing demand from the power sector, according to a company statement. CIL is aiming at boosting production in the wake of the estimated peak demand for electricity of 250 GW this summer.

Kotak Bank buys Sonata Finance

New Delhi: Kotak Mahindra Bank Thursday said it has acquired NBFC Sonata Finance Pvt Ltd for ₹537 crore. Sonata is operating in 10 states through 549 branches and has an Asset Under Management (AUM) of approximately ₹2,620 crore as of December 31, 2023. "The Bank has, today, acquired 100 per cent of the issued and paid up capital of Sonata Finance Private Limited, a Non-Banking Finance Company (NBFC), a microfinance institution registered with the RBI for a total consideration of approximately ₹537 crore," Kotak Bank said. With this acquisition, Sonata has become a wholly-owned subsidiary of Kotak Bank. Shares of Kotak Bank were trading at ₹1,789.35, up 0.77 per cent on the BSE.

Govt's fiscal deficit at 86.5% of full-year aim

FOR 2023-24, CENTRE'S FISCAL DEFICIT IS ESTIMATED AT ₹17.35L-CR OR 5.8% OF GDP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 28: The government's fiscal deficit at ₹15 lakh crore at February-end touched 86.5 per cent of the revised annual target, according to official data released Thursday. In the corresponding period last year, the fiscal deficit - or gap between the expenditure and revenue - was 82.8 per cent of Revised Estimates (RE) of the Union Budget 2022-23.

The central government received ₹ 22.45 lakh crore (81.5 per cent of RE 2023-24 of total receipts) up to February comprising ₹18.49 lakh crore tax revenue (net), ₹3.6 lakh crore of non-tax revenue and ₹36,140 crore of non-debt capital receipts, showed data released by Controller General of Accounts (CGA).

Non-debt capital receipts consists of recovery of loans ₹23,480 crore and miscellaneous capital receipts of ₹12,660 crore.

The CGA data on monthly account of the Union Government of India said that ₹10,33,433 crore has been transferred to state governments as devolution of share of taxes by the Government of India up to February 2024, which is ₹2,25,345 crore higher than the previous year.

Total expenditure incurred by the Centre was ₹37.47 lakh crore (83.4 per cent of corresponding RE 2023-24), out of which ₹29.41 lakh crore was on revenue account and ₹8.06 lakh crore on capital account.

Out of the total revenue expenditure, ₹8.8 lakh crore was on account of interest payments



and ₹3.6 lakh crore on account of major subsidies.

Commenting on the CGA data, Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist at ICRA, said in April-February 2023-24, the net tax revenues rose 7 per cent, non-tax revenues expanded 45 per cent boosted by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) dividend, amidst a mild 1 per cent growth in revenue expenditure, and a robust 36.5 per cent year-on-year expansion in capex.

"While there may be some slippage in the disinvestment target, ICRA does not expect the revised fiscal deficit target of ₹17.3 lakh crore for FY24 to be breached," she said.

The fiscal deficit for 2024-25 is estimated at 5.1 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) against 5.8 per cent in the current financial year. To meet the gap between revenue receipt and expenditure, the government raised funds by issuing bonds in the market.

The Centre plans to raise ₹7.5 lakh crore through market borrowing in the April-September period of 2024-25 to fund the revenue gap. Of the gross market borrowing of ₹14.13 lakh crore estimated for 2024-25, ₹7.5 lakh crore, or 53 per cent, is planned to be borrowed in the first half.

India is open to being a part of trading blocs which include China if Beijing ensures its economy is open, transparent, and complies with WTO rules

PIYUSH GOYAL | COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER

TOYOTA TO HIKE PRICES FROM APRIL 1

Automaker Toyota Kirloskar Motor Thursday said it plans to increase prices of select vehicles up to 1 per cent from April 1 citing rising input costs and operational expenditures. In a statement, the company said it is planning to increase prices of certain grades of its specific models effective April, 1 2024



Markets exit FY24 with smart returns

After a muted performance in 2022-23, equity markets made a remarkable recovery in FY24, giving handsome returns to investors

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 28: Riding on a bull run, equity investors became richer by ₹128.77 lakh crore in the 2023-24 fiscal, driven by robust fundamentals of the Indian economy, increased investment inflows and promising corporate earnings.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 14,659.83 points or 24.85 per cent in 2023-24. The benchmark hit its all-time high of 74,245.17 March 7.

Mirroring bullish investors' sentiment, the market capitalisation (mcap) of BSE-listed companies soared by ₹1,28,77,203.77 crore to ₹3,86,97,099.77 crore in FY24.

"India's stock market showcased remarkable resilience throughout FY24, defying initial projections of a downturn triggered by inflationary concerns, escalating interest rates, and apprehensions of a looming global recession. Even geopolitical tensions only caused temporary setbacks. The market's resilience shone through, navigating these challenges with maturity," said Sunil Nyati, Managing Director, Swastika Investmart Ltd.



The surge in the Indian equity market can be attributed primarily to the robust fundamentals of the Indian economy, resilient in the face of global challenges

SUNIL NYATI | MD, SWASTIKA INVESTMART

In FY23-24, Sensex jumped 14,659.83 points or 24.85%, while the Nifty soared 4,967.15 points or 28.61%

INVESTORS BECAME RICHER BY ₹128.77L-CR

RELIANCE MOST VALUED DOMESTIC COMPANY

BSE-LISTED FIRMS' MCAP HIT ALL-TIME PEAK OF ₹394L-CR MARCH 2 THIS YEAR

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms hit an all-time peak of ₹394 lakh crore March 2 this year.

On the last trading day of the 2023-24 fiscal, the 30-share BSE benchmark jumped 655.04 points or 0.90 per cent to settle at 73,651.35. In 2022-23, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies fell by ₹5,86,605.38 crore to ₹2,58,19,896.00 crore.

The BSE benchmark had climbed 423.01 points or 0.72 per cent in 2022-23. Investors' wealth jumped over ₹59.75 lakh crore in the 2021-22 fiscal.

Reliance Industries is the most valued domestic firm by market valuation with a mcap of ₹20,14,010.63 crore, followed by Tata Consultancy Services (Rs

14,05,102.38 crore), HDFC Bank (Rs 11,00,184.60 crore), ICICI Bank (Rs 7,69,472.43 crore) and Bharti Airtel (Rs 6,99,081.86 crore) in the top five order.

Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL), February 13 this year, became the first Indian company to achieve a market capitalisation of ₹20 lakh crore.

"The upcoming general elections, with a high likelihood of the current government's re-election, could bring stability. Additionally, June might see the start of interest rate cuts in both the US and India, followed by India's potential inclusion in a global bond index. Later in the year, the monsoon season and corporate earnings will be key factors," Nyati said.

WORLD'S LARGEST SINGLE-LOCATION PLANT

Adani debuts in metal biz

The conglomerate starts \$1.2bn copper plant to boost India's metal production

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 28: Billionaire Gautam Adani-led group Thursday announced the start of the first phase of the world's largest single-location copper manufacturing plant at Mundra in Gujarat, which will help cut India's dependence on imports and aid energy transition.

Kutch Copper, a subsidiary of group's flagship firm Adani Enterprises Ltd, "commissioned the first phase" of \$1.2 billion "greenfield copper refinery by dispatching the maiden batch of cathodes to customers", the company said in a statement.

The first phase of the facility that will produce 0.5 million tonne a year of refined copper has started operations and full-scale 1 million tonne capacity is expected by FY29 (March 2029).

"On completion of the second phase, Kutch Copper, with 1 million tonne per annum, will be the world's largest single-location custom smelter, benchmarking ESG performance standards while leveraging state-of-the-art technology and digitalisation,"



Our speed of execution in this ambitious, super-sized project underscores our commitment to take India to the forefront of the global copper sector

GAUTAM ADANI | CHAIRMAN, ADANI GROUP

the statement said. It will create 2,000 direct and 5,000 indirect employment opportunities.

India's per capita copper consumption is estimated around 0.6 kg compared to the global average of 3.2 kg. India's drive towards clean energy systems, increasing penetration of electric vehicles and a host of associated applications are expected to double the domestic copper demand by 2030.

The Adani Group is investing heavily in energy transition,

India joins China and other nations that are rapidly expanding production of copper, a metal crucial for transition away from fossil fuels. Technologies critical to the energy transition like EVs, charging infrastructure, solar photovoltaics, wind and batteries, all require copper

in which copper will play a vital role. It is expanding into adjacent areas of its current capabilities, which makes the copper business a strategic fit.

"With Kutch Copper commencing operations, the Adani portfolio of companies is not only entering the metals sector but also driving India's leap towards a sustainable and aatmanirbhar (self-reliant) future," said Gautam Adani, Chairman of the Adani Group.

He said the domestic copper industry will play a crucial role in achieving the nation's goal of carbon neutrality by 2070. "When (fully) commissioned, our modern smelter will set new benchmarks in copper production, with an enhanced thrust on innovative green technology."

Copper is the third most used industrial metal after steel and aluminium, and its demand is rising on the back of fast-growing renewable energy, telecom, electric vehicles, charging infrastructure, and the development of power transmission and distribution networks.

India's copper production has been unable to meet this demand, and domestic supply disruptions have led to a higher dependency on imported copper.

Imports have been consistently on the rise for the past five years. For FY23 (April 2022 to March 2023 fiscal), India imported a record 1,81,000 tonne of copper, while exports plummeted to a record low of 30,000 tonne, even lower than the Covid pandemic period, according to the data.

Holy cities attracting big retail brands

The report identifies Amritsar, Ajmer, Varanasi, Katra, Somnath, Shirdi, Ayodhya, Puri, Tirupati, Mathura, Dwarka, Bodh Gaya, Guruvayur, and Madurai as key cities witnessing this retail boom



The rapid expansion of spiritual tourism in India is driving the growth of the country's faith-based tourism market

ANSHUMAN MAGAZINE | CHAIRMAN & CEO, CBRE

'Decoding Real Estate through the Spiritual Tourism Lens', highlighting that retail chains are capitalising on the surge in spiritual tourism across 14 key cities in India.

The report identifies Amritsar, Ajmer, Varanasi, Katra, Somnath, Shirdi, Ayodhya, Puri, Tirupati,

Mathura, Dwarka, Bodh Gaya, Guruvayur, and Madurai as key cities witnessing this retail boom.

The consultant noted that retail brands are strategically adapting their offerings in both established mall clusters and high-street locations to cater to the growing tourist population.

In Ayodhya, Manyavar, Reliance Trends, Raymonds, Market99, Pantaloons, Domino's, Pizza Hut, and Reliance Smart have opened their retail stores, the report said.

Manyavar, Reliance Trends, Zudio, Pantaloons, Shoppers Stop, Burger King, Domino's, Pizza Hut, McDonald's, Spencer's, Reliance smart, Croma and Reliance Digital are present in Varanasi.

Anshuman Magazine Chairman & CEO, India, South-East Asia, Middle East & Africa, CBRE, said, "The rapid expansion of spiritual tourism in India is driving the growth of the country's faith-based tourism market."

The government initiatives to promote tourism and improve connectivity between pilgrimage sites are further boosting this growth, he added.

Retail brands across segments, including fashion & apparel, food & beverage, hypermarkets, homeware & department stores, and consumer electronics brands, are expanding by tailoring the offerings to the pilgrim's needs.

Ram Chandnani, Managing Director, Advisory & Transaction Services, CBRE India, said, "Driven by the growing popularity of spiritual tourism, investors are flocking to capitalise on the market's potential. Guided by a commitment to cater to the unique needs of spiritual travellers, these investments aim to deliver high-quality accommodations, bolster infrastructure, safeguard heritage sites, and ultimately drive regional economic growth."

This trend has created opportunities for the hospitality and retail sectors to thrive in these destinations, he added.

Infra sectors' growth slows to 6.7% in Feb

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 28: The growth of eight key infrastructure sectors slowed to 6.7 per cent in February due to poor performance of some sectors like fertiliser, according to official data released Thursday.

However, on a sequential basis, the growth rate is highest in the last three months.

The growth of eight core sectors - coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertiliser, steel, cement and electricity - was 4.1 per cent in January. It was 7.4 per cent in February 2023.

Cumulatively also, the growth rate in the output of these sectors slowed to 7.7 per cent in April-January this fiscal against 8.2 per cent in April-February 2022-23.

The output growth of fertiliser was in the negative zone.

The eight core sectors contribute 40.27 per cent to the country's Index of Industrial Production (IIP).

According to the data, the growth rate in the output of refinery products, steel, and electricity declined in February.

However, coal (11.6 per cent), crude oil (7.9 per cent), natural gas (11.3 per cent), and cement (10.2 per cent) production registered healthy growth during the month under review.

Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist, Head - Research & Outreach, Icrta Ltd, said the core sector growth improved to a three-month high in February.

Three of the eight industries - coal, cement and natural gas - displayed a double-digit expansion. "Given the healthy improvement in the core sector growth, we expect the IIP to record an expansion of 6.0-6.5 per cent in February 2024," she said.

TIDBITS

Ambani, Adani collaborate for the first time

New Delhi: In the first collaboration between rival billionaires, Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries has picked up a 26 per cent stake in a Madhya Pradesh power project of Gautam Adani, and signed a pact to use the plants' 500 MW of electricity for captive use. Reliance will pick up 5 crore equity shares in Mahan Energen Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Adani Power Ltd, of face value ₹10 at par (Rs 50 crore) and will use 500 MW of generation capacity for captive use, the two firms said in separate stock exchange filings. The two businessmen hailing from Gujarat have often been pitted by media and commentators against each other but they have for years tiptoed around each other to reach the top two rungs of Asia's wealth ladder.

Adani group infuses ₹6,661cr in Ambuja Cements, raises stakes to 66.7%

New Delhi: The Adani group has infused ₹6,661 crore in Ambuja Cements by converting 21.20 crore warrants into shares, raising its stake in the country's second-largest cement company by 3.6 per cent to 66.7 per cent. The board of Ambuja Cements has approved the conversion of 21.20 crore warrants into shares of promoter entity Harmonia Trade and Investment at the rate of ₹314.15 per share. The fund's infusion will be instrumental for the cement business of the Adani group, which has plans to enhance its capacity to 140 million tonne per annum by 2028, according to a statement from billionaire Gautam Adani-owned Ambuja Cements. This investment follows an infusion of ₹5,000 crore by the promoter into the company for exercising the warrants issuance approved by the board in October 2022. "With this, the Adani family has increased their stake in the company by 3.6 per cent to attain 66.7 per cent holding," said Ambuja Cements which also owns a controlling stake in another cement firm ACC Ltd.

Zetwerk bags largest order from IOCL to set up over 1,400 fast chargers for EVs

New Delhi: Manufacturing unicorn Zetwerk Thursday said it has bagged the largest order from India Oil Corporation to set up over 1,400 fast chargers for electric vehicles across the country. Indian Oil has floated a tender for 6,000 chargers, in which 40 EV suppliers across the country participated. "Zetwerk has secured an order with Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) to set up EV fast chargers across India through competitive bidding which was participated by more than 40 leading EV suppliers across the country," the company said in a statement. Zetwerk said that it has bagged the largest order from the public sector oil marketing company.

ICICI Securities gets shareholders nod for delisting, merge with ICICI Bank

New Delhi: ICICI Securities Thursday said about 72 per cent of its shareholders have voted in favour of delisting and subsequent merger with parent firm ICICI Bank, even as the majority of retail investors opposed the scheme. In a regulatory filing, ICICI Securities said 83.8 per cent of institutional investors voted in favour of the scheme, while 67.8 per cent of non-institutional investors voted against it. Overall, 72 per cent of public shareholders voted in favour of the delisting scheme. The shareholders of the broking firm March 27 voted on the proposal to delist the company and make it a wholly-owned subsidiary of parent entity ICICI Bank.

PARAG SETS UP ROYALS WIN

RCB, KKR eye course correction, momentum

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaipur, March 28: Young Riyan Parag showed why he is considered a precocious talent as he struck a stunning 84 not out off 45 balls to set up a 12-run win for Rajasthan Royals against Delhi Capitals in their IPL match here Thursday.

Sent in to bat, RR were reduced to 36/3 in the eighth over but the 22-year-old Parag single-handedly took the home side to 185/5 with a magnificent unbeaten knock studded with seven fours and six sixes.

Parag, who was promoted to number 4 by the team management this season and made 43 in the previous match, took 25 runs off veteran South African pacer Anrich Nortje with scores of 4, 4, 6, 4, 6, 1 in the final over to hit his highest T20 score.

Chasing 186 for a win, DC could only manage 173 for 5 in 20 overs though South African youngster Tristan Stubbs (44 not out off 23 balls) kept them in the hunt till the final over from which they needed 17 runs. Avesh Khan conceded just four runs to help RR win their second consecutive match.

South African pacer Nandre Burger and Yuzvendra Chahal took two wickets apiece to also contribute in the RR win. "Definitely disappointed. The best thing to do from here is to learn from it. The bowlers did well through the 15-16 overs. But the batters did well at the death, hopefully we do better in the next game," DC skipper Rishabh Pant said.

DC were reduced to 34/2 in the fourth over with Burger taking two wickets in three balls in a fine display of fast bowling. Burger, who was brought in as Impact Sub for Shimron Hetmyer, dismissed opener Mitchell Marsh (23 off 12 balls) and Ricky Bhui (0) in the fourth over.

DC captain Rishabh Pant came out to bat at the fall of Bhui's wicket and along with senior batter David Warner built the innings without taking too much risk. Delhi were 89/2 at the halfway stage.

Warner was the more aggressive one as he got the boundaries to keep DC in the hunt. The senior Australian batter fell one run short of his fifty courtesy a brilliant diving catch by Sandeep Sharma off the bowling



of Avesh in the 12th over. Warner and Pant were involved in a crucial 67-run partnership for the third wicket.

Playing in his 100th IPL match and 14 months after a horrible car crash, Pant tried to build the innings with occasional boundaries. But he got out for a 26-ball 28 as Chahal induced a faint lower edge for Sanju Samson to do the rest behind the stumps in the 14th over.

The asking rate shot up to more than 13 runs an over and DC needed 66 from the last five overs. Stubbs kept DC in the game with two consecutive sixes off Ravichandran Ashwin in the 17th over; but in the end the Delhi side were short by 12 runs. They needed 34 runs from the final two overs which they could not get. It was DC's second consecutive loss.

Earlier, Parag shared 54 and 52 runs respectively with Ravichandran Ashwin (29) and Dhruv Jurel (20) after RR made a shaky start. Royals captain Samson struck three consecutive boundaries in the fourth over bowled by pacer Mukesh Kumar before nicking a Khaleel Ahmed delivery two overs later to Pant to get out for 15.

RR were 30/2 by then as Mukesh had given DC their first breakthrough with the wicket of Yashasvi Jaiswal (5). The Royals were in more trouble after wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav literally forced his captain Pant to take a review, which later proved to be successful, to dismiss Englishman Jos Buttler for an LBW decision.

Ashwin came out to bat at number five and he lofted a Kuldeep delivery for a six to help RR reach 58/3 at halfway stage. He gave Nortje even a harsher treatment with two sixes in the next over that yielded 15 runs. Ashwin, however, holed out to Tristan Stubbs near the boundary ropes for a 19-ball 29. Parag then made his presence felt, striking two boundaries and a six off Ahmed to take RR past 100 in the 15th over.

BRIEF SCORES: Rajasthan Royals 185/5 (Riyan Parag 84 n o, Ravichandran Ashwin 29, Dhruv Jurel 20; Axar Patel 1/21, Khaleel Ahmed 1/24) beat Delhi Capitals 173/5 (David Warner 49, Tristan Stubbs 44 n o, Rishabh Pant 28, Mitchell Marsh 23; Yuzvendra Chahal 2/19, Nandre Burger 2/29) by 12 runs.



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore, March 28: Victory in their respective previous games might have eased the initial nerves but imperfections remain, hence Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Kolkata Knight Riders will eye a quick course correction to add steam to their campaign in an IPL 2024 match here Friday.

RCB defeated Punjab Kings by four wickets, while KKR elbowed out Sunrisers Hyderabad by four runs to garner some early points. But entering the points table has not really eased some of the worries—particularly pertaining to the top and middle-order batting.

The RCB dugout might be a happy space after star batter Virat Kohli made a classy fifty on an unusually gripping Chinnaswamy pitch while chasing 177 against Punjab the other night, but that's only one part of the story.

Skipper Faf du Plessis, Glenn Maxwell, Cameron Green and Rajat Patidar are yet to hit the overdrive, and for the win against PBKS they had to rely on the last-minute cameos of Dinesh Karthik and 'Impact Player' Mahipal Lomror.

The Knight Riders have a much more capable bowling unit, at least on paper, and such a collectively underwhelming effort by front-line batters might push RCB into deep troubles against them.

Once they iron out that rough edges, RCB can look at their bowling unit that still needs to fill a couple of unticked boxes despite good outings by pacers Mohammed Siraj and Yash Dayal against Punjab.

Pacer Alzarri Joseph continues to be profligate and his figures - 0/38, 1/43 - might prompt the RCB think-tank to bring in England left-arm quick Reece Topley, who has impressive white-

ball skills, in place of the West Indian for this match.

The Knight Riders offer a strikingly similar plot. Their top and middle-order consisting of captain Shreyas Iyer, Venkatesh Iyer, Sunil Narine and Nitish Rana malfunctioned against SRH at the Eden Gardens.

It required a combined effort from impact sub Ramandeep Singh, Rinku Singh and Andre Russell—the 6, 7, 8—for them to post a competitive total.

Shreyas, who is central to their batting plans, was dismissed for a two-ball duck, but the return to Chinnaswamy might give him a sense of relief as he had fruitful outings here in white-ball cricket in his last two innings. The elegant right-hander made an unbeaten 128 against the Netherlands in last year's World Cup before making a 53 against Australia in the fifth T20I in December.

In bowling, Narine redeemed himself with a frugal spell (1/19) after a modest effort with the bat, but pacer Mitchell Starc, their record buy, and Varun Chakravarthy failed to impress, leaking over 50 runs in their four overs.

The KKR think-tank might not be unduly worried as their campaign is still at a nascent stage, but they would like to see the first-choice pacer and spinner finding their range at the earliest.

But it is unlikely that the Knights will make changes to their eleven for this match, unless they want to give a go to promising leg-spinner Suyash Sharma, who showed fine form during KKR's pre-season matches.

MATCHDAY

Indian Premier League

RCB vs KKR

Time: 07:30 pm

Telecast: Star Sports Network

Stream: Jio Cinema

SINDHU MARCHES INTO MADRID MASTERS LAST 8

Jena set for his Diamond League debut

Surya might take few more days to get match fit: BCCI



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Madrid, March 28: Star Indian shuttler PV Sindhu continued her impressive run at the Madrid Spain Masters, advancing to the quarterfinals with a comfortable straight-game win over Chinese Taipei's Huang Yu-Hsun here Thursday.

It was a smooth performance from Sindhu as she was hardly tested by the Taiwanese qualifier, ranked World No.63, resulting in a 21-14, 21-12 win in 36 minutes.

The former World Champion, who finished runner-up in the last edition, will take on either sixth seed Supanida Katethong of Thailand or Japan's Natsuki Nidaira.

In the opening game, Sindhu was 3-0 up initially but then entered a phase where she often found the net or went long, while her rival produced some precise returns to grab a 7-6 lead before taking a one-point advantage with a straight-down-the-line smash.

The Indian, however, produced a better show after resumption, taking a 18-12 cushion with Yu-Hsun making errors. She soon

grabbed eight game points, wasted two of them before sealing the opening game with her trademark smash.

After the change of sides, Yu-Hsun struggled to control the shuttle as her lifts repeatedly went long. The Taiwanese shuttler tried to use her drops and placements but she didn't have power in her smashes.

The result was Sindhu quietly waited for her opponent to commit errors. Soon she had a five-point advantage at the break. Every time Yu-Hsun tried to extend the rallies, she ended up with unforced errors. Soon a smash handed another eight match points to Sindhu and she wrapped it up when her opponent sprayed into net again.

With top seed Carolina Marin of Spain pulling out of the tournament after her title-winning run at the All England Championships and Swiss Open in the last two weeks, Sindhu is now the favourite to claim the crown and end a long wait. Sindhu won her last BWF tour title at the 2022 Singapore Open Super 500.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 28: Reigning Olympic and world champion javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra will begin his season in the Doha leg of the prestigious Diamond League series, which will see the debut of Odisha star Kishore Jena, May 10 in a star-studded field.

The 26-year-old Chopra, who closed his past season with a gold at the Asian Games in Hangzhou, China last year, is aiming to defend his Olympic gold in Paris later this year.

Chopra's compatriot Jena, who finished fifth in the 2023 Budapest World Championships and won silver in Hangzhou with a personal best of 87.54m, will be making his maiden appearance in the Diamond League.

Chopra will be up against his well-known rivals like Czech Republic's Jakub Vadlejch, who won silver in Tokyo Olympics and bronze in 2023 World Championships and former world champion Anderson Peters of Grenada.

"This year, my personal goal is to defend my Olympic title, but it would also mean a lot to me to break the 90m barrier. The Doha Meeting, with good con-



ditions and a great atmosphere, is a perfect opportunity to get my season off to the best start," Chopra, who has a personal best of 89.94m, said.

"I'm always overwhelmed by the warm support I get from Indians across the world and in Qatar that is particularly special. I feel privileged that so many people come out to support me and I hope I can repay their faith in me with a good performance."

Others to take the field at the

Qatar Sports Club include European champion Julian Weber of Germany (PB 89.54m), Oliver Helander of Germany (PB 89.83m), Qatari record holder Ahmed Bader Magour (PB 85.23m), Lithuanian record holder and World University Games champion Edis Matusevicius (PB 89.17m) and Asian Games bronze medalist Roderick Genki Dean of Japan (PB 84.28m).

Chopra had taken the top spot here in the 2023 season with a throw of 88.67m, ahead of

Vadlejch and Peters. The javelin event has built a reputation for its high quality in recent years and conditions permitting, much will be expected of the key protagonists on May 10.

Peters, who finished third 12 months ago, delivered a national record and the fifth-longest throw in history in 2022 (93.07m), while reigning Diamond League champion Vadlejch, who was runner-up to Chopra in 2023, recorded a personal best in the memorable 2022 meeting with his first ever throw over 90m (90.88m).

Chopra's continued excellence has raised the bar for Indian athletes. "Last year my dream was to win the World Championships, but to have three Indian athletes competing in the final - that shows we're progressing as a nation," he said.

The Doha Meeting is the third meeting of the 2024 Diamond League series which comprises 15 legs in total across four different continents, starting with Xiamen April 20 and concluding with a single final across two days in Brussels (September 13-14). The first two meetings in Xiamen and Shanghai do not have men's javelin throw as Diamond League event.

SINNER ADVANCES TO MIAMI OPEN SEMIFINALS

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Miami Gardens (Florida), March 28: Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner won his 20th match of 2024 to reach the Miami Open semifinals for the third time in the past four years with a 6-4, 6-2 victory over Tomas Machac Wednesday.

Sinner, seeded second, will take on No.3 seed Daniil Medvedev in a rematch of last year's Miami Open final. Medvedev won that, but has lost four straight matchups since. Medvedev advanced to the latest meeting with a 6-2, 7-6(10-7) win

over No.22 seed Nicolas Jarry in a late match.

Sinner reached his fourth final four of the season and moved to 20-1 overall. He reached the finals of this event in 2021 and 2023, losing both times.

Sinner, 22, said Machac served well early on and his aggressiveness kept things close for a while. But Sinner continued his fabulous run, breaking his opponent's serve four times, to move on to the next round.

On the women's side, 14th-seeded Ekaterina Alexandrova followed up her win over No. 1 seed Iga Swiatek with another



top-10 victory, taking down No. 5 seed Jessica Pegula 3-6, 6-4, 6-4. Alexandrova earned her first

trip to a Miami Open semifinal. Alexandrova will face Danielle Collins, who defeated No. 23 seed

Caroline Garcia 6-3, 6-2. Collins will play in the Miami semifinal round on Thursday for the first time since she made it as a qualifier six years ago.

Garcia had come off consecutive wins over Grand Slam champions Naomi Osaka and Coco Gauff. But the run fizzled out against Collins, who has won 10 of 11 sets in this tournament and needed just 80 minutes to advance.

Collins moved to 4-0 in her career against Garcia, who never had a break point in the match. Collins downplayed the dominant showing.