



Global Glory

Actor Alia Bhatt makes it to TIME Magazine's 100 most influential people of 2024 list

LEISURE | P2



UK smoking ban

British government's plan for a landmark smoking ban that aims to stop young people from smoking clears its first hurdle in Parliament

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Crude bill drops

India's crude oil import drops 16% in the fiscal year ending March 31 due to lower international rates but dependency on overseas suppliers rises to a new high

BUSINESS | P11



PSG reach CL semis

PSG thrash Barcelona 4-1 in their quarterfinal second leg and 6-4 on aggregate to sail into the semifinals of the Champions League

SPORTS | P12

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BHUBANESWAR | THURSDAY APRIL 18 2024

12 PAGES | ₹5.00

SHORT TAKES

Heatwave: Schools closed till April 20

Bhubaneswar: The state government Wednesday announced closure of all schools in the state from April 18 to 20 in view of the prediction of India Meteorological Department (IMD) that intense heatwave would prevail for the next two days. In a press statement, the School and Mass Education department said the government has decided to close down all schools including those run by the government, government-aided and private for three days in view of prevailing heatwave. **P3**

Russian missiles kill 17 in Ukraine

Kyiv: Three Russian missiles slammed into a downtown area of the northern Ukrainian city of Chernihiv Wednesday, hitting an eight-floor apartment building and killing at least 17 people, authorities said. At least 61 people, including two children, were wounded in the morning attack, Ukrainian emergency services said. Chernihiv lies about 150 km north of the capital, Kyiv, near the border with Russia and Belarus.

10 killed as car rams into truck in Gujarat

Nadiad: As many as 10 persons travelling in a car died after their speeding vehicle rammed into a truck on Ahmedabad-Vadodara Expressway near this town of Gujarat's Kheda district Wednesday, police officials said. "The car was going towards Ahmedabad from Vadodara when it rammed into the rear side of the truck on the expressway. While eight people died on the spot, two injured persons, who were shifted to a nearby hospital in an ambulance, succumbed later," said inspector of Nadiad Rural police station Kirit Chaudhary.



BIGGEST DEMOCRATIC EXERCISE: Polling officials with EVMs and other materials leave for election duty in Nagaon of Assam, Wednesday

PTI PHOTO

UTP dies in custody; family cries murder

POST NEWS NETWORK

Phulbani, April 17: An undertrial prisoner (UTP) died under suspicious circumstances at the jail here in Kandhamal district while his family members alleged that he was beaten to death, Wednesday.

Family members of Abhiram Digal, a resident of Dimiriguda under Phiringia police limits, approached the Town police alleging that Abhiram was beaten to death by the officials over issues best known to them.

Sources said Town police had arrested Abhiram on charges of peddling ganja. However, he managed to walk out on bail a few days after his arrest. As he did not turn up before the court on hearing days, a non-bailable warrant was issued against him.

Abhiram surrendered before the court Tuesday and was sent to judicial custody.

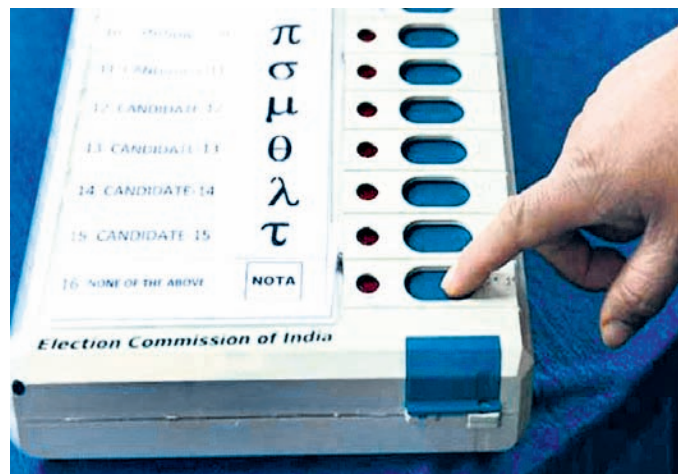
A few hours later, jail authorities rushed Abhiram to the district headquarters hospital (DHH) claiming that he was ill. However, he died at the health-care facility.

On being informed, Abhiram's family members reached the DHH and claimed to have found bruises on his body.

They created a ruckus at the hospital following which local political leaders and Sadar SDPO Prasanna Mallick, along with a police team, reached the DHH and placated the family members.

Ideology takes a back seat

The unprecedented party hopping ahead of 2024 hustings and the turncoats, who have defected to their ideological arch-rivals, getting tickets show that ideology in today's politics is dead. While revenge politics writ large in Odisha, money and wimmability have become the defining criteria for availing tickets. Essentially, when narrow personal interests take the centre stage, ideology is a casualty. Politics has witnessed a tectonic shift when selection as well as election is largely market driven. For, parties and netas these days calculate profit and loss before calling any shots



weighed before awarding tickets while turncoats are having a field day as part of revenge politics.

At a time when corporate financing of elections through electoral bonds has become the order of the day, what matters the most is performance in the battlefield. Electoral bonds scheme functions on the basis of quid pro quo relationship and companies dole out thousands of crores to various parties and expect favour from the party in power or to be in power.

Therefore, it may not be wrong

to say that corporate financing is a precursor to political parties becoming full-fledged corporate entities. Days are not far when parties would turn into limited companies.

Parties and candidates calculate profit and loss while taking any significant decision without caring a fig for the ideology they have long cherished or their true role as people's leaders.

In Odisha, many retired bureaucrats, police officers, corporate honchos and industrialists have forayed into politics while film stars, who are no

more in the scene, are trying their luck again this time. However, the million dollar question is whether a retired bureaucrat or an ex-corporate employee can touch the lives of people at the ground level and help the government schemes reach them seamlessly. Can a retired administrator's performance statistics or an ex-corporate employee's achievements be the yardstick for a good politician, who can actually understand the plight of the underprivileged? Likewise, an industrialist may not bother about the basic issues people face. He would rather focus on what he would gain or lose.

The country as well as Odisha has seen the performance of actor-turned-politicians which needs no further elaboration.

On the contrary, a person, who has been with the people at grass-roots level and has worked for the party for a longer period without any craving for power or money, feels neglected when he/she is denied a ticket. This results in dissent and resentment.

To sum up, politics nowadays is driven by market forces and has turned into a game of people wielding power and position.

Naveen to contest from Kantabanji too

OF NINE CANDIDATES IN FIFTH LIST, SIX ARE WOMEN

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 17: In an apparent move to protect BJD's fort in western Odisha and to ensure that the party candidates come out with flying colours in the upcoming polls, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, while announcing the fifth list of Assembly candidates, revealed that he would also contest from Kantabanji under Bolangir Lok Sabha segment apart from Hinjili. He had also contested the 2019 polls from Hinjili in Ganjam and Bijepur in Bargarh.

The nine BJD candidates announced by Patnaik include six women and four turncoats. The party has dropped four sitting MLAs - Purna Chandra Baka (Chitrakonda), Kishore Chandra Naik (Kuchinda), Rajanikanta Singh (Angul) and Samir Ranjan Dash (Nimapara).

He has rewarded four turncoats. They are: Arundhati Devi (Deogarh), Dillip Kumar Nayak (Nimapara), Rajendra Chhatra (Kuchinda) and Laxmipriya Nayak (Chitrakonda). The six women candidates are: Laxmipriya,



Barsha Singh Bariha (Padampur), Arundhati Devi (Deogarh), Sanjukta Singh (Angul), Sulakshana Gitanajali Devi (Samakhemundi) and Indira Nanda (Jeypore).

While denying party ticket to Angul MLA Rajanikanta Singh BJD nominated his wife Sanjukta Singh from the same seat. Former minister and ex-MLA Rabi Nanda was also denied ticket while his wife Indira was picked for Jeypore seat. Patnaik also nominated S Gitanajali Devi, daughter of former MLA Nandini Devi in Samakhemundi.

Patnaik also swapped the candidatures of Rohit Pujari and Prasanna Acharya. Acharya will now contest from Rairakhol and Pujari from Sambalpur.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Here are all the crucial questions you should ask during my interview

WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	41.7°C	41.5°C
Min Temp	27.2°C	27.0°C
Humidity	73%	67%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

FORECAST
NO MAJOR CHANGE



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 17: Gone are the days when political parties were considering the candidatures of leaders who have sacrificed a lot for the party and stood with the organisation during adversities. There is, however, a swift change in the scenario, if 2024 election is an indication. Ideology is put on the back burner insofar as the criteria for handing over tickets are concerned. Now, a candidate's power (both money and muscle) is

SOREN LINK ED nabs 4 more over money laundering

AGENCIES

Ranchi, April 17: Enforcement Directorate (ED) has made four fresh arrests in connection with the alleged illegal land grab-linked money laundering case against former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren and others, official sources said Wednesday.

Those taken into custody under the provisions of Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) have been identified as Antu Tirkey, Priya Ranjan Sahay, Bipin Singh and Irshad, they said.

The ED had Tuesday conducted searches at the premises of Tirkey and some others here

and the four were arrested following their questioning.

Tirkey is allegedly linked to Soren while Singh is a real estate businessman. Sahay 'forged' some land-related documents along with others, according to the chargesheet filed in the case.

With these arrests, the total number of people taken into custody in this case has risen to eight. Soren, 48, was arrested by ED in January shortly after he resigned as the CM of Jharkhand. He is currently lodged in Birsa Munda jail at Hotwar here under judicial custody. The probe against Soren pertains to an 8.86-acre plot of land in Ranchi that the ED has alleged was illegally acquired.

India's population crosses 144cr; 24% children

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 17: India's population is estimated to have reached 144 crore, with 24 per cent in the 0-14 age bracket, according to a report by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The UNFPA State of World Population - 2024 report, 'Interwoven Lives, Threads of Hope: Ending Inequalities in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights', revealed that India's population is estimated to double in 77 years.

India leads globally with an estimated population of 144.17 crore, followed by China at 142.5 crore, said the report.

India's population was recorded at 121 crore during the last census, conducted in 2011.



The report further detailed that an estimated 24 per cent of India's population is aged 0-14 while 17 per cent is within the 10-19 age range.

The segment aged 10-24 is estimated to constitute 26 per cent, with the 15-64 age group making

up 68 per cent. Additionally, 7 per cent of India's population is aged 65 years and above, with men having a life expectancy of 71 years and women 74 years.

The report has found that 30 years of progress in sexual and reproductive health has mostly

HIGHLIGHTS

- Life expectancy for men is 71 years and for women 74 years
- Child marriage was 23% between 2006 and 2023
- 800 women die every day giving birth
- Women with disabilities are up to 10 times more likely to experience gender-based violence than their peers without disabilities

ignored the most marginalised communities worldwide. According to the report, the child marriage percentage in India was at 23 between 2006 and 2023. The report noted that maternal deaths in India have fallen considerably, accounting

for 8 per cent of all such fatalities worldwide.

"India's success is often attributed to improved access to affordable, quality maternal health services as well as efforts to address the impact of gender discrimination on health outcomes," the report said. However, the report noted that India continues to see dramatic inequities in maternal death risk.

The report said millions of women and girls remain far behind, and progress is slowing or stalled on key measures -- 800 women die every day giving birth, unchanged since 2016.

The report noted that women with disabilities are up to 10 times more likely to experience gender-based violence than their peers without disabilities.



GIL KENAN: GHOSTBUSTERS FRANCHISE CHANGED MY LIFE

British-American filmmaker Gil Kenan, who has directed *Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire*, has said that the *Ghostbusters* franchise changed his life as a kid. Kenan said, "The movie was a unique blend of scares and comedy. I had never experienced anything like it in a movie theatre before."

SWIFT IN CANADA GOVT'S BUDGET PROPOSALS

Grammy award winner Taylor Swift featured in the Canada government's budget proposals. Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland unveiled the budget, which includes a new initiative focused on providing access to concert tickets for everyone to attend performances by the acclaimed artist.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
Today you might feel homesick if you are out of station. And if you are contacting your family members, Ganesh suggests that you get in touch with your long-neglected friends too. Knowing that you are loved gives a different kind of pleasure.

TAURUS
Your skills in managing professional relationships will play a vital role today. The atmosphere, the impression you create is going to mean a lot. Be professional, but be warm and cordial. This day you will be particularly concerned about the way others see and evaluate you. You will be focusing on identifying interests and issues that are of real importance to your friends.

GEMINI
You need a break from your daily routine. You will feel fatigue in keeping up with the demands of everybody around you. You will try to regain your courteous and pleasant manner in the afternoon. You will be able to relax and unwind if you have the company of family and friends in the evening, says Ganesh.

CANCER
Dig out some old contacts today, says Ganesh! Go through your old diary; make an attempt to connect with a lost pal, for chances are high that you may benefit a great deal from an old connection! Your ability to get with others will improve your performance at work.

LEO
It will be difficult for you to achieve a specific goal you have set for yourself in the morning, but as the day progresses, your problems will ease out. Your inherent capability will help you scale the ladder of success. When you sit down to analyse your weaknesses and strengths, do so with an unyielding and unbiased critical eye, advises Ganesh.

VIRGO
Today you will feel nostalgic which will make you homesick and you will feel it is better to avoid contemplation. Today you will make earnest attempts to strengthen your relationships. Your energy levels will be very high. Ganesh says it is an optimistic day.

LIBRA
Ganesh says today is a good day to enhance your joy by arranging a family meeting or gathering. Guests coming home will make you happy with their presence. The presence of your beloved will make your evening a romantic thing.

SCORPIO
Relationships are the crux of life, and you put in all your efforts to maintain your personal relations, says Ganesh. Managing kids and their demands may be slightly challenging; but well, kids are after all kids. Haste makes waste; avoid taking hasty decisions or you may end up taking decisions that would benefit others more than you.

SAGITTARIUS
Variety is the spice of life, and you seem to be taking this a bit too seriously. Today, your brain data chooses all random things, from health and weight-loss to occult and spirituality. In short, your thoughts go hay-wired, says Ganesh.

CAPRICORN
Emotions are difficult to understand for you, especially of your lover. He/she will be more open and expressive today, and it'll help you both understand your relationship better. Also, spend some quality time with each other and strengthen you bond by giving him/her a pleasant surprise or a gift, suggests Ganesh.

AQUARIUS
Today, you will feel inclination towards antiques and arts, foretells Ganesh. You appreciate the beauty of life, but often forget to bring these emotions to the surface. You will be very sensitive today and probably the smallest of disputes may hurt your feelings badly, foresees Ganesh.

PISCES
You will look for the company of near and dear ones today. You will not be willing to attend social functions and spend time with colleagues or acquaintances but you will be forced to. As a result you might wander off or keep to your own in the crowd and might lead to people mistaking this as arrogance.



Alia on TIME's 100 Most Influential List

Mumbai: Actress Alia Bhatt, who made her Hollywood debut last year with *Heart of Stone*, also featuring Gal Gadot and Jamie Dornan, has been featured on *TIME's 100 Most Influential List*.

Director Tom Harper, who worked with Alia in *Heart of Stone*, called her a formidable talent. "She is not only one of the world's leading actors, admired for her work in the Indian film industry for over a decade—she is also a businesswoman and a philanthropist who leads with integrity," he wrote about her; and he mentioned a scene in the film that she improvised well.

"Alia's superpower is her ability to mix movie-star magnetism with authenticity and sensitivity. As an actor, she is luminous, and as a person, she brings the grounded assurance and creativity that make a truly international star," he also wrote.

Also on the list was Indian-origin actor Dev Patel, and sports personality Sakshi Malik who fought against sexual harassment in wrestling that raged strong last year.

The other Indians or those of Indian-origin included World Bank President Ajay Banga, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, US Department of Energy's Loan Programmes Office director Jigar Shah, Professor of Astronomy and Professor of Physics at Yale University Priyamvada Natarajan and Indian-origin restaurateur Asma Khan.

AGENCIES

ANUBHAV, ANUPAM TEAM UP FOR ACTIONER

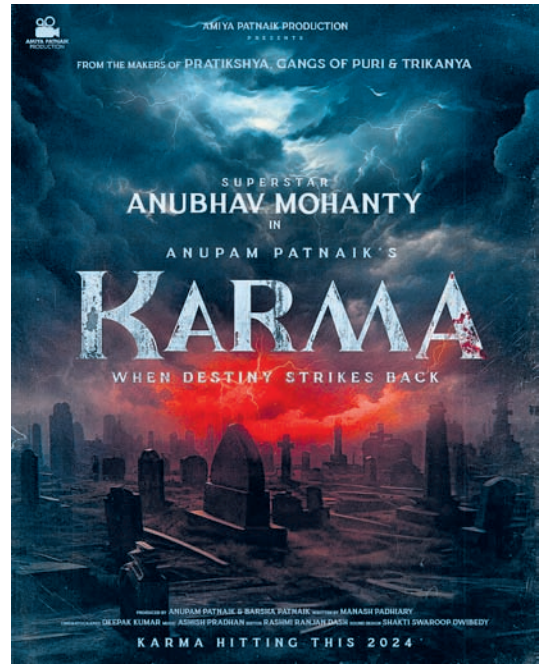
Bhubaneswar: Director Anupam Patnaik, who is currently basking in the success of his last release *Trikanya*, now is ready for his next project.

The action thriller will have Anubhav Mohanty playing the lead. Sharing the poster, the *Gangs of Puri* director Wednesday said, "Jai Shri Ram! On the auspicious occasion of Rama Nabami, elated to announce my next film *Karma - When Destiny Strikes Back* starring the one and only - Superstar Anubhav Mohanty. Releasing this 2024."

Elaborating more, Anupam stated, "It's a modern day action thriller. Dark and brutal. It's about karma..you reap what you sow."

The shooting of the film, a multi-starrer, will start in the last week of May after the selection of the entire cast, he added.

Anupam's last directorial *Trikanya* completed thirty days in cinema halls recently. It was an anthology featuring three women starring Barsha Patnaik, Sraddha Panigrahi, and Nivy in key roles.



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PNN

Reasons Shruti went on a digital detox

Chennai: Actress Shruti Haasan, who often shares everything about her personal and professional life on social media, was quite silent for the last few weeks. The actress took to her Instagram account Wednesday to share the reason behind this short social media break she has taken.

Shruti shared a few Instagram stories which featured some candid yet funny selfies of the actress.

She wrote, "Missed me? Sorry I've been MIA (Missing in Action), turtles. Was just doing 'me' things for once." She continued, saying, "Can't wait to bring the post-eclipse Aquarius energy into space and break shit while I heal things."

In the next picture, she wrote, "It's been a crazy ride, learning so much about myself and about people and reconfiguring who I am. We should never be sorry for all the things we can be or need to be."

Shruti also took this time to thank her fans and well-wishers, "I just want to thank you, my beautiful turtles, for all your love and this beautiful, mad, fun community we share. Life is beautiful, life is weird, and it's always filled with magic."

On the work front, she was last seen in *Salaar Part 1: Ceasefire* alongside Prabhas. The movie will soon get a sequel, *Salaar Part 2: Shouryanga Parvam*. Recent reports mentioned that Shruti opted out of the Hollywood film *The Chennai Story* directed by Philip John.

AGENCIES

Raveena shares details on 90s pay disparity

Mumbai: Actress Raveena Tandon opened up about the pay disparity she experienced during her career in the Hindi film industry. Known for her captivating performances and versatile choice of films, she has been a fan favourite for over three decades. Despite her success, she recalls the challenges she faced due to pay inequality in the film industry.

Talking to a news agency, Raveena shared her experience of working in the 1990s, when male stars like Aamir Khan and Salman Khan earned significantly more than their female counterparts.

She mentioned that to earn what her male co-stars made in a single film, she had to work on 15 to 20 films. This stark contrast in pay led female actors to take on multiple projects, often working with several different heroes, while male

actors could be more selective in their choices.

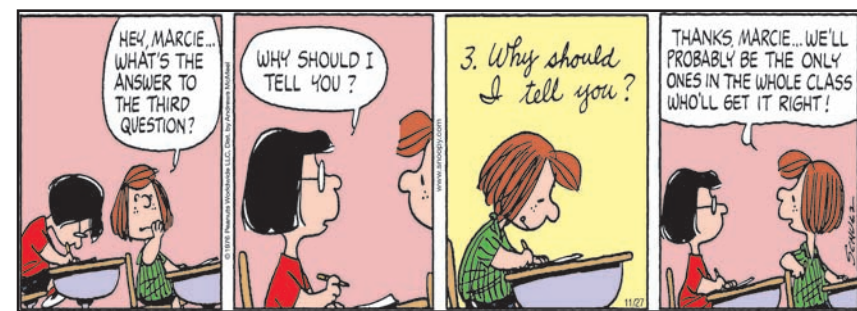
The actress acknowledged that the industry has seen positive changes over the years, including an increase in the number of women entering the workforce, greater awareness of pay inequality, and the need for equal opportunities.

Raveena also emphasised the benefits of a more professional approach due to collaborations between film producers and corporate entities.

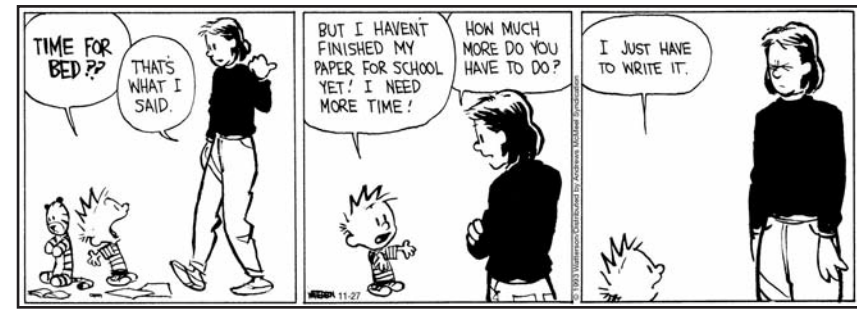
On the professional front, Raveena was last seen in *Patna Shukla*.

AGENCIES

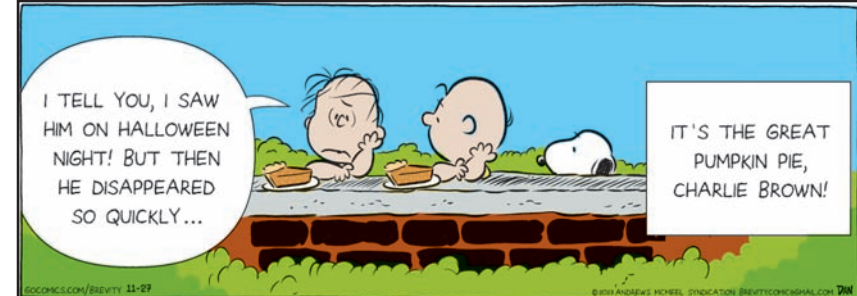
PEANUTS



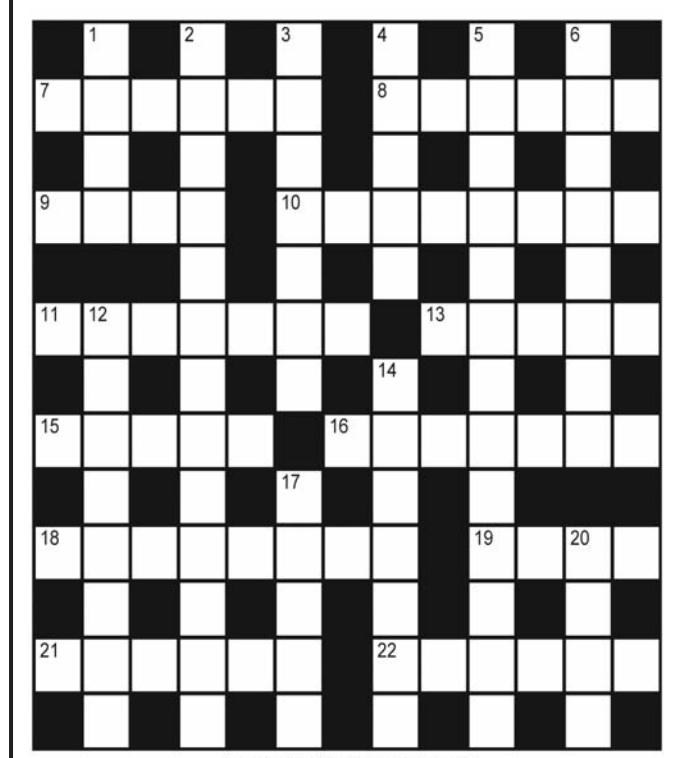
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



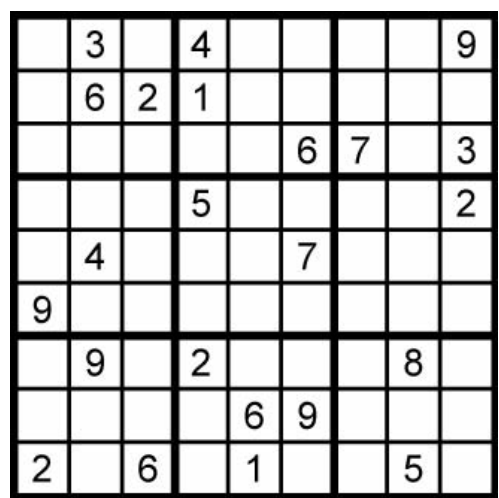
FUN post CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 7 Uproar
 - 8 Irish accent
 - 9 Like some meat
 - 10 Autograph
 - 11 Footstool
 - 13 Kind of bean
 - 15 Blink of an eye
 - 16 Cur
 - 18 Canopy, of sorts
 - 19 Numbered work
 - 21 Alter
 - 22 Expensive
- Down**
- 1 Stubborn sort
 - 2 Sacrifice (5,8)
 - 3 Honorable
 - 4 Weighty
 - 5 Bed and breakfast (8,5)
 - 6 Go for the bronze
 - 12 Victories
 - 14 Sovereign
 - 17 Modify
 - 20 Like a crone

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

DART ICECREAM
I O S A R M I
S N O R K E L A S P E N
C T A L N L T
R E S E T O C E L O T
E E W Y P
E X P O R T J E R A S E R
T L R J E R O
G A U C H E M O P U P
L Y O R A O H
I N F E R S U R N A M E
M U N E K C C
B U L L S E Y E W H E Y

SUDOKU

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

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown

MODI GOVT FAILED PEOPLE OF NE ON EVERY FRONT: CONG

New Delhi: The Congress Wednesday alleged that incidents like Manipur violence and 'Chinese incursions' prove that the Modi government has 'failed' the people of the Northeast (NE). Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh also claimed that there has been a "chronic underutilisation of Northeast funds" and the region's forests are under threat. "The Modi Sarkar has failed the people of the Northeast on every front," he alleged in a post on X. "Violence in Manipur, chronic underutilisation of Northeast funds, forests under threat, Chinese incursions in Arunachal Pradesh and languishing Naga peace talks," he said. Ramesh said that just four days after the PM claimed that "timely intervention by Centre saved Manipur," fresh violence in Imphal district claimed two more lives. **PTI**

NHRC seeks state's report on displacement in Sundargarh



Tripathy suggested that the state should constitute a high power committee to assess the ground realities in each area and make recommendations accordingly

The displaced victims were deprived of their entitlements and legitimate rights under the provisions of Sections 4 and 5 of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, and rules framed under it, Tripathy stated

The petitioner further said the inhabitants of Bandhabhuin village and others have lost more than 30 acres of FRA land besides their revenue land due to the construction of the dam project. He even annexed copies of Records of Rights and land pattas in favour of victims.

Although the state government has a policy of rehabilitation and resettlement with specific provisions, victims like Jitbahana are yet to get the benefits, Tripathy added.

He suggested that the state should constitute a high power committee to assess the ground realities in each area and make recommendations for solutions with assured implementation of the recommendations in a time-bound manner.

A fresh survey of access to justice (both social and legal) is also required, Tripathy contended.

He requested the NHRC to investigate the issue in detail by a team of officials with regard to the issues, seek updated comprehensive reports from the chief secretary, and the Sundargarh district collector to ensure proper compensation and benefits of rehabilitation and resettlement, social welfare schemes, and protection from wildlife and police threats in a true democratic and humanitarian spirit.

The NHRC observed that despite directions, the authorities have not submitted any report so far and forwarded the proceedings to the state chief secretary for ensuring compliance with the commission's directions by the authorities concerned.

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, April 17: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has sought an action-taken report (ATR) within four weeks from the Principal Secretary of the Water Resources department and the Sundargarh administration in over the alleged lack of rehabilitation measures for villagers displaced due to the construction of Rukuda dam in the tribal-dominated district.

"In case of failure to furnish the ATR, the rights body would be constrained to invoke its coercive power under Section 13 of the PHR Act, 1993, calling for the personal appearance of the authority concerned before the commission," it said, while hearing a petition filed by rights activist Radhakanta Tripathy April 15. In his petition, Tripathy in-

formed the commission that Jitbahana Kandeiburu and more than 200 other residents under Tikayatpali police limits in Sundargarh were displaced due to the Rukuda Dam Project.

"The state government forcefully displaced them without any rehabilitation benefits. Jitbahana's son died from snakebite as the family was shelterless and staying in a nearby jungle," the rights activist said. Tripathy said Jitbahana was implicated in a false case as he protested against the displacement without rehabilitation. Jitbahana was put behind bars and subsequently died.

The displaced victims are deprived of their entitlements and legitimate rights under the provisions of Sections 4 and 5 of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, and rules framed thereunder, Tripathy stated.



PAYING HOMAGE: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik pays tributes to legendary leader and former CM Biju Patnaik on his death anniversary in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday

BJD names 9 more Assembly candidates

SL.	CONSTITUENCY	NOMINEE
1-	Kantabanji	Naveen Patnaik
2-	Deogarh	Arundhati Devi
3-	Nimapara	Dillip Kumar Nayak
4-	Kuchinda	Rajendra Kumar Chhatra
5-	Chitrakonda	Laxmipriya Nayak
6-	Padampur	Barsa Singh Bariha
7-	Angul	Sanjukta Singh
8-	Sanakhemundi	Sulkhnsa Gitanajali Devi
9-	Jeypore	Indira Nanda

State swelters as mercury touches 40°C at 30 places

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, April 17: Entire Odisha reeled under intense heatwave conditions, with the temperature touching 40 degrees Celsius in at least 30 places of the state Wednesday.

Talcher in Angul district recorded the state's highest temperature of 43.2 degrees Celsius while the mercury crossed the 41 degrees Celsius-mark for the first time this summer at twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack during the day, according to a bulletin of IMD's regional centre here.

Bhubaneswar and Cuttack recorded a maximum temperature of 41.7 degrees Celsius and 41.5 degrees Celsius, respectively. Among other places which recorded a temperature of 40 degrees Celsius and above were Nuapada at 43 degrees Celsius, Boudh and Paralakhemundi (42.8), Nayagarh and Angul (42.7), Baripada (42.6), Titlagarh (42.5), Bhawanipatna and Malkangiri at 42 degrees Celsius.

The weatherman predicted that the day temperature is likely to rise gradually by 2 to 3 degrees Celsius at many places over the state during the next two days. The maximum temperature would be more than 40 degrees Celsius or above at many places in the state for the next five days, it said. Forecasting a heatwave, the weather office has issued an Orange Warning (be prepared) for the districts of Mayurbhanj, Nuapada, Gajapati and Nayagarh for April 18.

Yellow Warning (be updated) has been issued for the districts of Keonjhar, Bhadrak, Balasore, Kendrapara, Jagatsinghpur,

SRC's working hour ban goes for a toss

The order of the Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) that banned outdoor activities for workers during peak hours has gone for a toss as many daily wage workers were seen toiling hard under the scorching sun here, Wednesday. Many labourers have alleged that there is no respite from working continuously at construction sites amid sweltering heatwave despite state government's order. Purba Medinipur's Jaimahadev Mahato, who works as a daily wage worker at a construction site in Saheed Nagar area in the City, is one among the many.

"As usual, I reach the site at around 9am and work till 7pm with just an hour break a day. There is no such enforcement of the government order, at least here, although temperature has been on the rise for a few days now," the 62-year-old Bengal resident said. Despite sweltering heat, Mahato said, he could not muster courage to approach site officials for break during the peak hours. "I use wet towels to get respite from heat," he said. On April 15, SRC Satyabrata Sahu issued a directive to Collectors to enforce a ban on outdoor activities for labourers and workers during peak hours, from 11 am to 3 pm, to mitigate heat-related risks.

Cuttack, Khurda, Dhenkanal, Jajpur, Kandhamal, Koraput, Malkangiri, Angul, Boudh, Jharsuguda, Kalahandi, and Bargarh for the day.

Similarly, for April 19, Orange Warning has been issued for Mayurbhanj, Nuapada, Gajapati and Nayagarh districts while Yellow Warning has been given for Keonjhar, Dhenkanal, Boudh, Sonapur, Bolangir, Kalahandi, Angul, Jharsuguda, and Sundargarh districts.

CAMPAIGNING ENDS FOR FIRST PHASE OF LOK SABHA POLLS

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 17: Campaigning ended Wednesday evening for the 102 Lok Sabha seats across 21 states and Union Territories which will go to polls in the first phase April 19 with top leaders of the BJP-led NDA and the Opposition INDIA bloc making a last-gasp effort to woo voters.

Leading the charge, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took whirlwind tours of various constituencies in the past few days, addressing rallies and holding roadshows, and asserting that he went to people with hope in 2014, trust in 2019 and guarantee in 2024. Many times he said there is "Modi's guarantee across the country and I am giving the guarantee of fulfilling all these guarantees".

Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and several of their cabinet colleagues, leaders of the Congress such as Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi, and other parties also canvassed for their candidates.

The BJP has come out all guns blazing at the INDIA bloc over corruption, dynasty politics and insulting the Constitution and Hinduism.

The Opposition leaders, in turn, have attacked the government over electoral bonds, alleged misuse of agencies, inflation and unemployment among other issues.

The BJP in its manifesto prioritised development and welfare while shunning populist measures and contentious issues like the NRC.

Named "Modi ki Guarantee", the manifesto largely built on the government's existing welfare schemes targeted at different sections of society, while reiterating the BJP's commitment to roll out one-nation-one-election and Uniform Civil Code, two issues mentioned in its 2019 manifesto too.

In its 45-page manifesto titled 'Nyay Patra', the Congress focussed on five "pillars of justice" and 25 guarantees under them.



AUSPICIOUS OCCASION: A priest consecrates logs of wood on the occasion of Ram Navami at Government Sawmill in Khapuria area of Cuttack, Wednesday, for construction of mega chariots of the Srimandir deities in Puri

How Joe Biden's hometown produces war machinery for Ukraine

THE SITE, INITIALLY BUILT IN 1908 TO CONSTRUCT AND MAINTAIN STEAM LOCOMOTIVES, STARTED ITS NEW LIFE IN MUNITIONS AFTER BEING PURCHASED BY THE US GOVERNMENT IN 1953

In brick buildings that are more than a century old in Joe Biden's Rust Belt hometown of Scranton, Pennsylvania, dated machinery continues to churn out machinery for modern conflicts - especially the war in Ukraine. The Scranton Army Ammunition Plant (SCAAP) is making steel tubes for 155 mm caliber shells, which are crucial to Kyiv's efforts to face down Moscow's invasion.

The tubes are then sent to Iowa, where they are loaded with explosives.

"The fuse is installed in the field... for security reasons," Richard Hansen, a retired US Navy veteran who has been in charge of the facility since 2009, explained to AFP during a tour for a small group of journalists.

The site, initially built in 1908 to construct and maintain steam locomotives, started its new life in munitions after being purchased by the US government in 1953.

Back then, it was used to make ammunition for use in the Korean War. Some of the manufacturing equipment in use today dates back nearly to that time. The buildings, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, are hardly the picture of 21st-century high-tech efficiency. There is no computer-aided automated production here. AI? Forget about it.

The red-hot steel tubes, just formed in three successive forges, are cooling for three hours in



racks hanging from a conveyor belt in the factory's basement, before the next phase of production.

The basement is a maze of dark nooks and crannies - lit up from time to time by flame or searing metal.

Visitors have to pay close attention not to tumble into disused pits or trip on narrow staircases, all while enduring deafening noise - despite earplugs - and the smell of hot steel.

The tubes are then treated in a variety of ways - heat, ultrasound, polishing and submersion in oil, among others - to remove the finest flaw, inside and out, and identify any defects.

Measurements are checked from all angles several times, using tools that seem like they could be on display in a museum of antique hardware.

'Remove before firing' At the end of the lines, the

tubes are painted, to prevent them from rusting out in storage, and are then assigned a batch number for tracing and identification.

The final touch? A label that says 'Remove before firing'.

"Never any incident with a shell has been traced back to this facility," Hansen notes.

While Hansen is happy to talk about the plant's history or the production process, he is more tight-lipped about the number of tubes produced and how they are used on the battlefield.

The current contract is to make 24,000 tubes a month in three factories in eastern Pennsylvania, and runs until the end of 2027, but production can vary. The terms of the original contract signed in 2019 were not disclosed.

SCAAP is still owned by the government, which signed a contract with US defense and aerospace giant General Dynamics, which has two sites of its own not far from Scranton where 155 mm caliber shells and mortars

are manufactured.

Another General Dynamics facility should be up and running in Texas this summer, a representative of the group told AFP during the visit, on condition of anonymity.

The three operational sites in Pennsylvania employ a total of 900 people.

"Production has not been increased because of the war in Ukraine," Hansen said, though he added that the plant had "a modernization plan to increase production" before the conflict erupted in 2022, set to wrap up in about two years.

The \$418 million plan should boost efficiency at SCAAP thanks to much-needed technology upgrades and energy-saving methods, but Hansen says production could be increased at any time if needed.

The US military has signed contracts with other contractors to significantly boost production of artillery for Kyiv by next year.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

9 more pairs of trains to beat summer rush



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 17: Keeping in view of the public demand and to avoid additional rush during the summers, East Coast Railways announced nine more special trains and extended the services of existing special trains Wednesday.

Special trains include Puri-Shalimar Bi-Weekly Summer Special, Puri-Nizamuddin Weekly Summer Special, Malatipatapur (Puri)-Shalimar Weekly Summer Special, Bhubaneswar-Yesvantpur Weekly Summer Special, Berhampur-Surat Weekly Summer Special, Sambalpur-Pune Weekly Summer Special, Sambalpur-Guwahati Weekly Summer Special, Visakhapatnam-Kollam Summer Special, Visakhapatnam-Kurnool Summer Special.

Apart from this, services of eleven pair of special trains, extended.

Bhubaneswar-Chennai Weekly Special Train (06073/06074) which leaves from Chennai every Monday and from Bhubaneswar every Tuesday will continue to run up to June 4. Bhubaneswar-Dhanbad-Bhubaneswar Special Train (02832/02831) leaving from Bhubaneswar and Dhanbad daily will continue to run up to June 30. Puri-Patna-Puri Special Train

(08439/08440) leaving from Puri every Saturday and from Patna every Sunday will continue to run up to June 30.

Patna-Puri-Patna Special Train (03230/03229) leaving from Patna every Thursday and from Puri every Friday will continue to run up to July 26.

Puri-Bhanjapur-Puri Special Train (08011/08012) leaving from Bhanjapur every Thursday and Saturday and from Puri every Friday and Sunday will continue to run up to June 30.

Santragachhi-Puri-Santragachhi Special Train (02837/02838) leaving from Santragachhi every Friday and from Puri every Saturday will continue to run up to June 29.

Ernakulam-Berhampur-Ernakulam Jansadharan Special Train (06087/06088) leaving from Ernakulam every Saturday and from Brahmapur every Monday will continue to run up to May 27.

Hyderabad-Cuttack-Hyderabad Special Train (07165/07166) leaving from Hyderabad every Tuesday and from Cuttack every Wednesday will continue to run up to June 20.

Visakhapatnam-Secunderabad-Visakhapatnam Special Train (08579/08580) leaving from Visakhapatnam every Wednesday and from Secunderabad every Thursday will continue to run up to June 27.

Visakhapatnam-Tirupati-Visakhapatnam Special Train (08583/08584) leaving from Visakhapatnam every Monday and from Tirupati every Tuesday will continue to run up to June 25.

Visakhapatnam-Bengaluru-Visakhapatnam Special Train (08543/08544) leaving from Visakhapatnam every Sunday and from Bengaluru every Monday will continue to run up to July 1.



MATTER OF FAITH: Devotees queue up to seek blessings of deities on the occasion of Ram Navami at Ram Temple in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday

PIC: BIKASH NAYAK

OSDA, WSC sign MoU with Meesho

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, April 17: Odisha Skill Development Authority (OSDA), Government of Odisha and World Skill Center (WSC) signed a MoU with Meesho, an e-commerce marketplace to empower entrepreneurs through Swakalpa entrepreneur training programme Wednesday.

The partnership was facilitated by the lead implementation partner Palladium Consulting India Pvt Ltd (PCIPL). The Swakalpa programme is expected to benefit 10,000 individuals, with 1,000 selected for the comprehensive mentorship and enterprise setup support. The initiative aims to create a sustainable ecosystem for micro

and nano entrepreneurs and self-employed individuals in the state, addressing unemployment and underemployment among youths and promoting gender equality.

Skill Development & Technical Education department additional secretary Pinaki Patnaik said, "We are confident that through the partnership with Meesho, new markets and opportunities for our entrepreneurs will open up here in Odisha. We firmly believe that by connecting local businesses to broader markets, we can empower our entrepreneurs and drive economic growth in our state. This collaboration with Meesho is in line with our vision of foster-

ing entrepreneurship and online business through programs like Swakalpa, implemented by Palladium."

Meesho will work closely with the OSDA, WSC and PCIPL to execute the Swakalpa programme, which comprises 104 hours of entrepreneurship training, followed by an extensive 6-month mentorship period and setting up of enterprises.

As part of the partnership, Meesho will facilitate the smooth onboarding of entrepreneurs trained under Swakalpa. This will include providing them with assistance and resources to navigate the onboarding process and ensure a quick and hassle-free launch of their online businesses.

AIIMS-Bhubaneswar launches Artificial Urinary Sphincter

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, April 17: Adding another feather to its cap Wednesday, AIIMS Bhubaneswar announced the launch of a cutting-edge health care service for the placement of Artificial Urinary Sphincter (AUS), a significant advancement in urological care.

AIIMS-Bhubaneswar executive director Ashutosh Biswas congratulated the team of doctors and said, "The department of Urology at AIIMS-Bhubaneswar has consistently been providing world class care at the forefront of technology and innovation. With the introduction of Artificial Urinary Sphincter implantation here, the people of Odisha and Eastern India will have easy access to the treatment, for which they had to travel other states earlier."

The AUS implantation is recognised as a gold standard treatment for urinary incontinence, which are insusceptible to conventional treatment modalities. AUS is particularly tailored for patients who have experienced urinary incontinence due to prostate surgery, spinal cord injuries or other underlying con-

ditions that affect urinary control.

The AUS programme will be led by a team of highly skilled urologists and surgeons, trained in the latest techniques and using state-of-the-art technology. "The initiation of the AUS represents a pivotal step in our commitment to offer comprehensive and advanced medical treat-

ments," said department of Urology assistant professor Sambit Tripathy, who is involved in delivering Andrology care at City based AIIMS. Department of Urology head Prasant Nayak added, "We are dedicated to providing

our patients with the best treatments and improving their quality of life. We are thankful and indebted to director, Ashutosh Biswas, who has always encouraged us in our endeavour, to bring the latest advances in urological care, for the people of Odisha. We are also thankful to our patients for having immense trust and faith in us."

The medical superintendent of AIIMS-Bhubaneswar congratulated and felicitated the doctors of Urology department.

The hospital also plans to conduct regular follow-up clinics and support groups to assist patients during their recovery process.



'Khajuri Guda' gets GI tag

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 17: The lush hillsides of Gajapati district are home to abundant Date palm trees, which recently received a significant recognition through the grant of Geographical Indication (GI) for *Khajuri Guda*.

The application for GI status was filed June 12, 2020 by NLC-Ministry of Coal, Govt of India deputy manager P Karthikeyan.

Khajuri Guda, a natural sweetener extracted from the sweet juice of Date Palm trees, has been subject to rigorous testing in Central Government laboratories to establish its scientific nature and uniqueness. The grant of GI status not only celebrates the cultural and geographical significance of *Khajuri*



Guda but also promises to protect the interests of Soura tribals residing in the region.

P Karthikeyan, with a track record of facilitating GI recognition for indigenous products, expressed his enthusiasm for the socio-economic impact of this achievement. "The grant of GI for *Khajuri Guda* is a testament to the rich heritage of Gajapati and will serve to enhance the livelihoods, employment opportunities and economy of the Soura tribals," Karthikeyan said. This marks Karthikeyan's second successful GI facilitation following his previous endeavour with Kandhamal Haladi, which received National IP award under agriculture category.

IIM-SAMBALPUR EXTENDS EMBA APPLICATION DATE

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, April 17: One of the premier management institutions in the state, IIM-Sambalpur extended the online applications deadline for its two-year Executive MBA (EMBA) programme (2024-2026) until April 30, Wednesday.

The programme fosters innovative thinking and problem-solving abilities across diverse business sectors. Additionally, it aims to cultivate strong leadership skills necessary for effectively managing teams and organisations.

IIM-Sambalpur director Mahadeo Jaiswal informed, "The



goal of the Executive MBA programme is to help the participants enhance their entrepreneurial skills and strategies, to activate their personal development, to take organisations to the next level and emerge as responsible leaders. The uniqueness of this programme lies in its cutting-edge curriculum to

build leaders with an entrepreneurial mindset and specialisation in forthcoming areas such as digital transformation, sustainability, responsible leadership, data analytics and corporate entrepreneurship, among others. The entire course structure is to make the programme contemporary and relevant."

The EMBA course has been designed in a blended format, specifically tailored for working professionals offering a unique opportunity for individuals with a minimum of 50 per cent graduation marks and at least 3 years of professional experience. Live sessions conducted by faculty aim to encourage interactive ex-

periential learning among participants. The programme is available both online via a high-definition video conference-based virtual classroom (VCR) platform, as well as offline classes. It is particularly beneficial for those with a strong entrepreneurial mindset and those seeking to capitalise on various Government of India initiatives such as Atmanirbhar Bharat, Make in India and Start-up India.

The candidate must hold Bachelor's degree or equivalent degree in any discipline with a minimum of 50 per cent and 3 years of managerial, entrepreneurial or professional experience.

WORLD HAEMOPHILIA DAY

Gene therapy: A paradigm shift in haemophilia treatment

GENE THERAPY ENABLES EDITING THE FAULTY GENE OF A BABY, WHILE INSIDE THE UTERUS, WHO IS KNOWN TO BE BORN WITH HAEMOPHILIA, BECAUSE OF STRONG FAMILY HISTORY

Gene therapy offers hope of a cure to people with haemophilia, a hereditary blood disorder, where a person is born without one clotting factor in the blood, required for forming a blood clot, said doctors on World Haemophilia Day (WHD) Wednesday.

WHD is observed every year April 17 to raise awareness of the debilitating blood disorder, caused by missing or defective factor VIII (FVIII), a clotting protein.

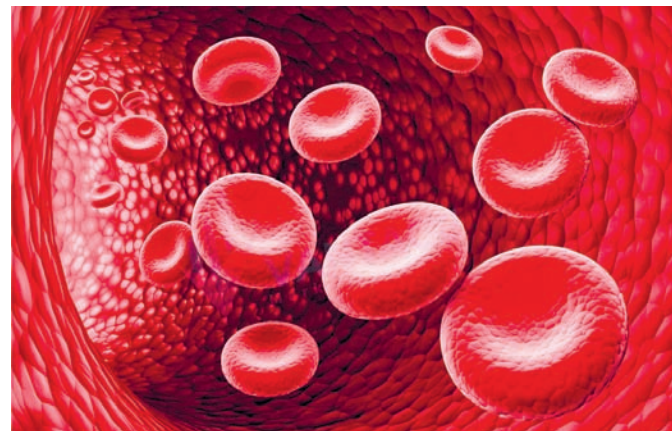
The patients with haemophilia are unable to form a strong blood clot after injuries and they continue to bleed, raising the risk of death in severe cases. Even with a minor bleeding episode, haemophilia patients run the risk of joint damage, which can later lead to crippling and other issues.

"The inherited disorder stems from a deficiency or dysfunction in clotting factors crucial for coagulation, primarily factor VIII in haemophilia A and fac-

tor IX in haemophilia B. It's inherited in an X-linked recessive pattern, explaining its prevalence in males. Females can be carriers or experience milder symptoms due to their two X chromosomes," consultant general paediatrics, paediatric genetics and metabolic diseases specialist Tanmay Deshpande said.

Hence, understanding the genetic basis is vital for affected individuals and healthcare providers. Genetic counseling can help assess inheritance risk and inform reproductive decisions, the doctor said.

According to data from Haemophilia and Health Collective of North (HHCN), India is home to an estimated 1,36,000 people living with haemophilia A-the second largest globally. Of these, only 21,000 are registered at present.



About 80 per cent of haemophilia cases go undiagnosed in India as several hospitals and medical institutions lack screening capabilities for blood clotting, affecting the diagnosis of new cases.

"In the realm of haemophilia

treatment, gene therapy emerges as a tool with transformative potential," Tanmay said.

He explained that the therapy involves the precise delivery of functional genes to correct the underlying genetic defect responsible for deficient clotting fac-

tor production in patients. "With the help of viral vectors or other delivery systems, gene therapy aims to restore physiological balance and enable sustained production of clotting factors within the body," he added.

Recent clinical trials display encouraging outcomes, highlighting both the safety and efficacy of this approach. This includes the human clinical trial at the Christian Medical College (CMC) Vellore, a first for India. Scientists at the CMC deployed a novel technology of using a lentiviral vector to express a FVIII transgene in the patient's haematopoietic stem cell which will then express FVIII from specific differentiated blood cells.

Currently, haemophilia can only be defeated by factor VIII infusions. Complications can be prevented if there is preventa-

tive administration of factor VIII, which is unfortunately very expensive for low and middle-income countries. However, gene therapy may help cure the disease.

"Gene therapy is a potentially curative treatment for haemophilia. It uses an adenovirus vector where the defective gene of a haemophilia patient is replaced by a functional gene. This treatment is not yet available in routine clinical practice even in Western countries," Haematology senior consultant Anoop P said.

"Gene therapy enables editing the faulty gene of a baby, while inside the uterus, who is known to be born with haemophilia, because of strong family history," he added.

With ongoing research diving deep into optimisation and long-term effects, gene therapy promises a paradigm shift in the management and potentially the cure of haemophilia, the doctors said.

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'Akhand Shikar' ritual destroying wildlife, forests



FILE PHOTO

in the village to celebrate the occasion. This tradition is being followed for generations.

Earlier, the villagers hunted openly. However, since laws to prevent poaching have been implemented, they now do so secretly, sometimes even deep into the night. Restrictions and rules do not mean much to them.

Environmentalist Bimbadhar Behera pointed out that mass poaching during 'Pana Sankranti' endangers the lives of wild animals to a great extent. He pointed out that the Forest department needs to conduct awareness programme before the 'Akhand Shikar' ritual to prevent poaching of animals. Moreover, Forest department officials should chalk out concrete plans to prevent the unnecessary slaughter of animals, Behera opined.

Bhakta Batshal Mohanty, another environmentalist lamented the unnecessary killing of animals. "Keonjhar town is surrounded by forests and hills where various species of wild animals live. They frequently stray into human habitats in search of food and water. On many occasions animals are killed after they enter residential areas. The Forest department should give priority to the protection of these animals," Mohanty pointed out.

The environmentalist also informed that a large number of Sal trees have been felled during 'Pana Sankranti'. "This should have been prevented at any cost as it is loss of forest cover," he opined.

hunting practice where a large number of people from several villages take part. They enter forests and kill various types of animals as part of their religious ritual. They completely disregard rules and regulations implemented by the Forest department. Crackdown and arrests by police or Forest department personnel do not deter them.

Villagers, when they enter the forests, carry a variety of weapons including lathis, bows and arrows, axes and spears. Using these weapons they kill animals including deer, wild boars, rabbits and jungle fowls. Once the hunting is over they return to their respective villages with the carcass. They then distribute the meat to other residents of the village. When the kill is large, a feast is organised

dedicated the success to his parents. "I have succeeded in the exams, but all the credit goes to my parents. Without their support, I wouldn't have been able to crack this tough examination," Ankit said.

Driver arrested for rape

Patana: A man, who is a JCB driver, has been arrested for allegedly raping a 28-year old married woman in a jungle under this block in Keonjhar district, police said Wednesday. The matter came to the fore after officials of the Turumunga police station arrested the accused, identified as Surya Mohanta, 35, a resident of Denua village. Police first detained the man and then arrested him after the victim lodged a complaint Tuesday. The incident had allegedly happened more than six months back. Turumunga police registered a case and conducted medical examinations of the victim and the accused, Champua SDPO Rabintra Mallick said. The survivor is the mother of two children. The victim in her complaint alleged that she had gone to a nearby jungle to collect firewood approximately six months back where the accused had raped her. She had not filed a complaint then fearing social backlash, Mallick added.



TIGHT VIGIL: Police personnel and BSF jawans jointly take out a flag march to maintain peace and harmony ahead of the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections scheduled for May 13 at Balimela town in Malkangiri district, Wednesday

Admin using paintings to attract voters

ETHNIC BOOTHS BEING SET UP TO CREATE VOTER AWARENESS AMONG TRIBALS

PNN & AGENCIES

Paralakhemundi, April 17: In a bid to promote the elections as a 'festival of democracy' among tribal people, the Gajapati district administration has adorned polling booths with 'Idital', a unique type of painting by the 'Souras'. The 'Souras' are classified as a particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG) in the state.

"When people go to polling booths May 13 to cast their votes, they may find their own paintings in the polling stations," a senior official of the district administration said.

'Soura' and 'Lanjia Soura' communities traditionally adorn their homes and villages with such paintings during festivals and ceremonies, including marriages.

Polling booths have been set up in schools in PVTG-inhabited areas. Additionally, the administration has also roped in

members of 'Soura' tribe to create awareness about voting by using tribal language.

This initiative is part of the

SVEEP (Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation) programme. It is aimed at attracting voters to



booths and increasing the turnout, an official said. "The aim behind setting up of the ethnic booths is to attract tribals, who seldom exercise their franchise and remain busy with their routine work, to vote," said Birendra Kumar Das, Additional District Magistrate-cum-Returning Officer, Mohana Assembly constituency.

Most of the 'Soura' and 'Lanjia Soura' people live in Mohana and Gumma blocks of Gajapati district. There are approximately 33,000 in numbers ('Soura'-18,600 and 'Lanjia Soura'-14,670), spread over two Assembly segments -

Mohana, reserved for the Scheduled Caste, and this segment under the Lok Sabha constituency of the same name.

"The administration has decided to set up 33 ethnic booths, which will be managed by the polling personnel of tribal communities," informed Das.

Meanwhile, a team of officers is working round the clock to raise awareness in remote villages to enhance voter turnout. According to sources, the polling percentages in Mohana and this town were 75.65 per cent and 69.31 per cent, respectively in the 2019 elections.

Rourkela, April 17: Six candidates who cracked the 'Civil Services Examination 2023' conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) have connections with Sundargarh district. They are either domiciles of the district or have been staying here to pursue their academic career.

Four ex-students from NIT Rourkela have cracked the examination, while one candidate from Rajgangpur and another girl from this city have achieved the same feat. The four NITians, who have passed the examination are Animesh Pradhan, (All India Rank: 2nd), Padmanava Mishra, (AIR: 176), Biswajit Panda, (AIR: 343) and Anushka Sarkar, (AIR: 426).

Incidentally Padmanava is a



PADMANAVA MISHRA

resident of Chhend Colony in this town. Padmanava visited the NIT campus Wednesday to meet the professors of the institution. NIT Rourkela director Professor K Umamaheswar Rao congratulated the ex-students for their brilliant show. "It is a matter of pride that four of our students have cracked



PRIYANKA PRIYADARSHINI

the Civil Service Examination this time. It is indeed a very creditable achievement," he said.

Other than the four NIT Rourkela students, Ankit Agarwal of Rajgangpur has secured an AIR rank of 297. His father Kamal Agarwal is a businessman while mother Baby Agarwal is a homemaker. Ankit

dedicated the success to his parents. "I have succeeded in the exams, but all the credit goes to my parents. Without their support, I wouldn't have been able to crack this tough examination," Ankit said.

Priyanka Priyadarshini, (AIR: 423), is the daughter of Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) senior executive NR Ray Chaudhury. Born and brought up here, Priyanka completed her Class X from Carmel School and Class XII from Delhi Public School, (Rourkela). Thereafter she cleared the CLAT Examination and joined the Hidayatullah National Law University in Raipur. She passed her BA LLB (Hons) exams with 11 gold medals. Priyanka has been working as an assistant director in Sports Authority of India (SAI) since 2023.



AWARENESS PROGRAMME: Students participate in a voter awareness 'walkathon' organised by the district administration at HAL Township in Sunabeda of Koraput district, Wednesday

Sundargarh revels in glory of UPSC qualifiers

POST NEWS NETWORK

2 bikers die after collision with truck

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, April 17: Two bike-ridden youths succumbed to their injuries Wednesday after the two-wheeler they were riding on met in a head-on collision with a truck on a road under Talsara police station limits in Sundargarh district. The deceased bikers were identified as Baishnab Majhi, 18, of Fittingpada and Abhimanyu Bag of Taldih locality.

After participating in the 'Ram Navami' procession, the two were returning to Subdega when tragedy struck. IIC Talsara Pushpendra Sagar said, "We have come to know that they were going to some place after participating in the 'Ram

Navami' celebrations. They had gone to a petrol pump for refill and immediately after leaving the place, the accident occurred."

Sagar also informed that a probe has been initiated into the accident. "We are yet to find out how the accident occurred. We are talking to local people at the site of the mishap. Both were rushed to a local hospital, but doctors pronounced them dead on arrival," Sagar said and added that the bodies have been sent for post-mortem.

Sources however, informed that the police are trying to ascertain whether the two were driving the bike under the influence of alcohol and hence are waiting for the post-mortem report.

Close shave for bus riders as high voltage cable snaps

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, April 17: A high tension cable of 33KV, snapped near the Rourkela Municipal Corporation (RMC) office Wednesday morning at around 11.30am. Luckily however, even though the accident took place at a busy time, no one was injured. It was a miraculous escape for a bus full of passengers as it had passed moments before through the same place where the cable snapped and

fell. The road is a busy thoroughfare as it connects the Ring Road to the Ambedkar Chowk at Udit Nagar locality.

Locals nearby acted immediately to prevent disaster. They blocked the road and were quick enough to divert an AC Mo Bus

After being informed officials from the Udit Nagar police station arrived at the spot. They in turn informed 'Tata Power' after which restoration of the cable began. Restoration work took more than two hours.

EAST COAST RAILWAY

EXTENSION OF APPLICATION SUBMISSION DATE OF EMPLOYMENT NOTICE NO. 01/2024-CMP, DTD. 12.02.2024

No. : 01/2024-CMP/Date Extension, Dated : 12.04.2024

The Notification is in continuation to this office Employment Notice No. 01/2024-CMP, dtd. 12.02.2024 on the captioned subject, wherein the date of submission of application was 11.03.2024. However, administration has decided to extend the last date to 10.06.2024 for submission of application on mail id of cmsecorspb@gmail.com

For further details regarding notification dtd. 12.02.2024 may please visit the heading Recruitment info on East Coast Railway website.

All other conditions stipulated in the Employment Notice No. 01/2024-CMP, dtd. 12.02.2024 will remain unchanged.

PR-24/P/24-25 Divisional Railway Manager(P)/Sambalpur

FOCUS SOCIETY

MENACE OF MISINFORMATION



Misinformation fuels all forms of authoritarianism by undermining democracy and leaving citizens ill-informed or misinformed. This deliberate spread of false information serves the interests of both ruling and non-ruling elites, enabling them to govern the masses without facing democratic accountability

governance remains transparent, accountable, and responsive to the needs and wishes of the people. By promoting media literacy, fostering critical thinking, and holding purveyors of misinformation accountable, people can work towards creating a more informed and resilient democratic society.

In an age where information is readily accessible but not always reliable, the hardworking masses find themselves at the mercy of false narratives propagated by those with ulterior motives. Meanwhile, some intellectuals lazily label this era as one of "post-truth," suggesting that truth and realities have become obsolete concepts. However, post-truth has little to do with truth; instead, it is a deliberate strategy employed by both governing and non-governing elites to shape public opinion and delegitimise factual information.

It is essential to recognise the dangers posed by the deliberate spread of false information and to actively work towards promoting a culture of transparency, accountability, and factual integrity. By doing so, we can help safeguard democracy and ensure that the voices of ordinary people are not drowned out by the cacophony of falsehoods propagated by those who seek to manipulate public opinion for their interests. The power of misinformation campaigns based on fake news is undeniably potent in today's digital age. However, it's crucial to remember that this influence is not insurmountable, nor permanent. While misinformation and fake news may obscure the truth, they cannot ultimately destroy it.

History stands as a silent yet steadfast witness to the ebb and flow of power and the enduring nature of truth. Time and again, the inherent resilience of truth has prevailed over deception, and the efforts of those who sought to manipulate public opinion have been exposed and defeated.

The writer teaches at the University of Glasgow, UK.

In this era of Artificial Intelligence-fuelled digital revolution, misinformation has emerged as a potent weapon wielded by both ruling and non-ruling elites. Their aim is often to undermine truth, dismantle democracy, sow division among people, and exert control over various aspects of life and resources on the planet. The reach of Deep Fakes extends far beyond celebrities, politicians, and industrialists; they now infiltrate everyday services and commodities that are consumed by the masses. This pervasive spread of deceptive information threatens not only public figures but also the trust and reliability of the information we rely on in our daily lives. As technology continues to advance, the challenge lies in distinguishing fact from fiction and ensuring that our digital landscape and society remain a trustworthy source of information for everyone.



Bhabani Shankar Nayak

IN AN AGE WHERE INFORMATION IS READILY ACCESSIBLE BUT NOT ALWAYS RELIABLE, THE HARDWORKING MASSES FIND THEMSELVES AT THE MERCY OF FALSE NARRATIVES PROPAGATED BY THOSE WITH ULTERIOR MOTIVES

Misinformation is not merely an accidental mistake; it is a meticulously crafted strategy designed to exploit the masses. This deliberate dissemination of false information serves to divert attention from the harsh material realities of capitalism, steering people towards a culture fuelled by emotion and falsehoods. In such an environment, it becomes increasingly challenging to engage with fact-based information that has a tangible impact on everyday human lives. This shift towards an emotional and misleading narrative undermines the foundation of informed decision-making, making it crucial for individuals to be vigilant and discerning in their consumption of information. As we navigate this complex landscape, the importance of promoting critical thinking and media literacy cannot be overstated.

Misinformation is disseminated widely across all mediums of communication, intentionally blurring the lines between fact and fraud. This strategy serves to amplify deception, foster misgovernance, and create a climate where ac-

countability is sidelined. The pervasive nature of this misinformation campaign contributes to shaping a narrative where individuals are constantly confronted with false challenges and distorted realities. By muddying the waters of truth, those behind these campaigns aim to sow confusion, manipulate public opinion, and undermine the foundations of a well-informed society. This deliberate strategy to disengage with accountability not only erodes trust in institutions but also hampers the ability of individuals to make informed decisions that affect their lives.

In such a deceptive environment, tobacco companies exploit the narrative of smoking being associated with smartness, while alcohol companies promote the supposed health benefits of drinking. Similarly, pharmaceutical companies' market numerous unnecessary drugs under the guise of securing a healthy life. This false propaganda follows in the tradition of Goebbels, who famously stated, "If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it." By perpetuating

falsehood and manipulating public perception, these entities prioritise profit over the well-being of individuals and society as a whole.

Misinformation fuels all forms of authoritarianism by undermining democracy and leaving citizens ill-informed or misinformed. This deliberate spread of false information serves the interests of both ruling and non-ruling elites, enabling them to govern the masses without facing democratic accountability. By controlling the flow of information and shaping public perception through misinformation, the elites can influence elections, suppress dissent, and consolidate power without the checks and balances that a well-informed citizenry would demand. This erosion of democratic principles and practices poses a significant threat to the fabric of democratic societies, as it undermines the fundamental rights of citizens to make informed decisions and hold their leaders accountable. So, combating misinformation is not just a matter of correcting false information; it is a crucial step in safeguarding democracy and ensuring that

Act Now For Peace

It is hard to imagine that anyone in the Levant or the broader Middle East managed to sleep on Saturday night, as Iran launched hundreds of drones and ballistic missiles toward strategic sites in Israel and Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank.

Almost all of the drones and missiles were intercepted before reaching their targets, as a result of a coordinated effort by the United States, Israel, Jordan, and the United Kingdom. The trigger for Saturday's attack was Israel's bombing of the Iranian consulate in Damascus on 1 April, which killed 13 people, including several high-ranking members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. This act, a clear violation of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, compelled the Islamic Republic to respond.

Iran chose to strike Israel directly, a decision likely driven by a desire to defend its national pride following the attack on its consulate, which, according to the Vienna Convention, is the Islamic Republic's sovereign territory.

Paradoxically, this dangerous escalation presents a unique opportunity for a regional ceasefire – potentially ending the war between Israel and Hamas, preventing a direct military showdown between Israel and Iran, and stopping the Yemeni Houthis attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea. With both sides having demonstrated their military capabilities, and assuming that Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu heeds US President Joe Biden's warning not to retaliate against Iran, the region could revert to an uneasy equilibrium. As the Cold War showed, a balance of terror can act as a powerful deterrent, fostering peace and stability.

But to capitalise on this narrow window of opportunity, the United Nations Security Council must pass a robust, binding resolution calling for a regional ceasefire. In addition to Israel and Iran, this resolution should apply to all the countries of the region and third-party combatants.

Moreover, this binding resolution must address the central issue driving the current bout of regional instability – the war in Gaza. In line with its previous 25 March resolution, from which the US abstained, the Security Council must demand an immediate cessation of Israel's ongoing bombardment of Gaza and the release of all Israeli hostages and detainees. By requiring both parties to "comply with their obligations under international law in relation to all persons they detain," the resolution could also facilitate a release of Palestinians detained by Israel.

Contrary to the claims of some US representatives, the 25 March resolution was binding. But given the risk of an all-out war, the Security Council must immediately draft and vote on a new resolution, under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, covering the entire region. The new resolution should aim to facilitate a permanent and just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, providing a detailed roadmap for establishing an independent Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders. As Saudi Arabia has stated, a credible "pathway to a solution" is a precondition for normalising relations with Israel.

Over the past six months, the Biden administration has backed Israel unreservedly, even at the cost of losing political support among progressive and Arab-American voters. Now, US policymakers must make the Israeli government understand that they will not tolerate further delays or gamesmanship when it comes to pursuing peace.

To be sure, rebuilding Gaza will take years and require a significant international effort. But achieving an effective, enforceable regional ceasefire is a crucial first step. Anything short of that risks perpetuating an endless cycle of war and suffering that benefits no one, especially not the Palestinians and Israelis, who are tired of this decades-old conflict.

The bombing of the Iranian consulate and Iran's retaliatory attack on Israel underscore the potential cost of a regional war: Failing to seize this critical opportunity for de-escalation could hold the region back for decades. Securing an immediate regional ceasefire must be the international community's top priority.

The writer, an award-winning Palestinian journalist, is a former journalism professor at Princeton University and former director and Founder of the Institute of Modern Media at Al-Quds University in Ramallah.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

WISDOM CORNER

It's very important that we re-learn the art of resting and relaxing. Not only does it help prevent the onset of many illnesses that develop through chronic tension and worrying; it allows us to clear our minds, focus, and find creative solutions to problems.

THICH NHAT HANH

No work or love will flourish out of guilt, fear, or hollowness of heart, just as no valid plans for the future can be made by those who have no capacity for living now.

ALAN WATTS

The power for creating a better future is contained in the present moment: You create a good future by creating a good present.

ECKHART TOLLE

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1775: The midnight ride of Paul Revere. Paul Revere, a renowned silversmith, is better remembered as a folk hero of the American Revolution who this night in 1775 made a dramatic ride on horseback to warn Boston-area residents of an imminent attack by British troops.

1906: San Francisco was rocked by an earthquake caused by slippage along the San Andreas Fault. About 3000 people died in the disaster. Over 80 percent of the city was destroyed by the quake and resulting fires.

1956: Abandoning her Hollywood career, American actress Grace Kelly wed Rainier III, prince de Monaco, in a civil ceremony; an opulent religious ceremony took place the following day. The wedding celebrations were broadcast around the world and enthused the population of war-torn Europe.

1980: Zimbabwe achieved independence from the United Kingdom. Zimbabwe's first president after its independence was Canaan Banana in what was originally a mainly ceremonial role as head of state. Robert Mugabe became Prime Minister of Zimbabwe in 1980, when his ZANU-PF party won the general election following the end of white minority rule and has remained the country's dominant party since.

SPECTRUM POLITICS

The BJP after Narendra Modi

Only the engineers who write source code of EVMs know if NDA will achieve BJP's stated aim of winning 400 seats in the coming Lok Sabha elections. Plain arithmetic suggests it can't, won't. Whichever way it turns out, there is no running away from one central question. If this is what it takes for the Sangh Parivar to retain power with Narendra Modi still in the picture, how much more difficult will it be when he is not?

Satyapal Kapoor

BY PUTTING ALL ITS VEGGIES IN ONE BASKET, WITHOUT GROOMING A NO.2, THE SANGH PARIVAR APPEARS TO HAVE MADE THE MOST BASIC MANAGEMENT MISTAKE

This is what it has taken (so far) to breast the tape in 2024: arresting two sitting chief ministers; disqualifying Rahul Gandhi and Mahua Moitra; suspending 140 MPs; freezing Congress bank accounts; squeezing Central funds to non-BJP states like Karnataka and Kerala; breaking up family-run enterprises like NCP and Shiv Sena in Maharashtra; tying up with tiny allies like Raj Thackeray and tainted politicians like Janardhana Reddy; turning CBI, ED, IT and other "independent" institutions into attack dogs.

Less obviously, over the past year we have seen everything

from a G20 summit to a cricket World Cup being turned into tableaux in the ruling party's election *utsav*, not to mention the premature opening of the Ram temple in Ayodhya to the Shankaracharyas' umbrage. And, since nothing succeeds like excess, the Election Commission was nudged into staggering the poll over 10 weeks so that the PM's "interviews" could appear in a synchronised symphony over seven phases.

Why? Even a piddling mayoral election in Chandigarh wasn't spared of a "masterstroke" to set the tone for a third term. Add to all this, the manufacture of consent through mainstream media—and the weaponisation of social media. Plus, mutton and *machli*.

So, if all these moves to build momentum, choke the Opposition, and hegemonise mind and media space fail to fetch the desired 400—a CSDS pre-poll survey last week suggested a 2.6% rise in BJP vote share from 37.4%—the writing is on the wall. That, without Modi as a nationally recognised mascot and vote magnet, replicating his electoral success will

not just be beyond the reach of his successor/s but well nigh impossible.

The Karnataka Assembly elections in 2023 provided a trailer of BJP after Modi. In seven pre-election visits to the state, accompanied by the same surround sound as now, the prime minister addressed public meetings in 16 constituencies—BJP lost in 14 of them. Yogi Adityanath, who is projected as the next in line on odd days, was paraded through 10 constituencies—BJP lost in all 10. Cut to 2024: A pre-poll survey by a Kannada portal says BJP's score in its "gateway to the south" may halve from 25 to 13. Minus Modi?

The emerging picture is so clear that the French political scientist Christophe Jaffrelot told *The New Yorker* last year that Narendra Modi's popularity has not completely turned into support for the BJP, which could spell trouble for the party after he is gone. Worse, given the high stakes, his successor might not even bother with elections. "If you cannot be as charismatic or as popular as the man who has created this ecosystem, you may

not tend to risk elections," he later told Karan Thapar.

Which is perhaps why everybody from the Hyderabad economist Parakala Prabhakar to the New York journalist Edward Luce are saying that this may well be India's last, proper democratic election. Sounds alarming, yes, perhaps even over the top. But when was the last time Germany, the United States, and the United Nations expressed concerns over the state of India's democracy, which now attracts adjectives all the way from flawed and illiberal, to autocratic and elections-only?

By putting all its veggies in one basket, without grooming a No.2, the Sangh Parivar appears to have made the most basic management mistake: to let an individual become bigger than the institution. In the first election ads, Modi's name is bigger than BJP's; his face bigger than the lotus symbol. But by hurriedly making the one-nation-one-election report a part of the BJP manifesto, Nagpur may well have sent the clearest signal yet of how it is preparing the stage for the post-Modi age.

Halt hostilities

Sir, Apropos, "End the Gaza war;" **Orissa POST**, April 17, the worst of the world's fears seem to be coming true. Israel's war on Gaza may be about to expand beyond the confines of the Palestinian homeland. In retaliation to Tel Aviv's killing of two Iranian generals in Damascus on 1 April, Tehran launched drones and missiles into Israel. The world needs to pull back quickly from such an escalation of the conflicts. The extended war in Gaza was bad enough. It has forced additional costs on global trade in West Asia coming under fire. Moscow's war on Kiev has already imposed a significant cost on the global economy; an expanded war in West Asia could trip the economy over a precipice since it could force oil prices to skyrocket. There is an urgent need for all parties to halt hostilities. Ideally, the UN ought to take the lead. But, even as the UN has called for emergency meeting, the current state of conflicts reveals its toothless character. Israel ignores international censure, and is backed by the US, which uses its veto to secure its ally's interests. What the world is witnessing in West Asia and Ukraine is the failure of the old "rules-based" order in protecting the interests of all the people.

N Sadhasiva Reddy, BANGALORE

India's treasures

Sir, April 18th marks World Heritage Day, a yearly occasion emphasising the critical importance of preserving cultural and natural treasures, particularly in India. Despite India's notable standing on the global stage, boasting 42 UNESCO World Heritage Sites as of January 2024, the nation faces significant challenges in safeguarding these invaluable assets. These sites, ranging from ancient temples to lush wildlife sanctuaries, epitomise India's profound cultural contributions and stunning natural landscapes. However, challenges such as rapid urbanisation, pollution, encroachment, and insufficient conservation efforts present immediate threats to their preservation. Preserving and promoting India's UNESCO World Heritage Sites is not only essential for preserving the nation's cultural identity but also for bolstering tourism, advancing education, and boosting local economies.

Krishna Kumar Vepakomma, HYDERABAD

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

OrissaPOST

B-15, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010



Villagers displaced by erosion in Lakhimpur still await new homes



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

North Lakhimpur (Assam), April 17: It has been nearly two-and-a-half-decades since a bustling village perished to erosion in Assam's Lakhimpur district, and for an entire generation, homes were all but temporary shacks on the embankment of river Subansiri.

The residents of Kasomari village, which was swept away following floods in 2001, were finally rehabilitated in 2018 to the 'No. 1 Hindu Adarsha Gaon' (model village), about five kilometers from here.

Locals, however, claimed that the process of land allotment and introduction of welfare schemes have moved at a glacial pace in the new village, though Lakhimpur MP Pradan Baruah maintained that swift progress has been made in the last couple of years.

Monikanta Das, a resident of the model village, said they had got in touch with the state government for land soon after settling on the embankment, but it was only in 2012 that the land advisory committee approved a plan for rehabilitating them.

"For over five years, due to some political pressure, we were not handed over the land. It took a Right to Information Act application for the allotment to be made April 9, 2018," Das claimed.

Allotment was made for 153 families as per the original list, though the number increased to about 220 by 2018. "Moreover, each family was given only a small piece of land for building houses. We were also told funds will be provided under the Model Village Scheme, but are still awaiting it," Das, in his late 40s who sells fish at the local market, said. Another villager said due to non-allotment of agricultural land, they have to work as daily wage labourers in nearby areas to eke out a living.

Annual flooding followed the villagers to their new address, too,

with the women facing more difficulties in such situations, said Matu Das, a housewife.

Das said some government facilities like ration card, health insurance and subsidised LPG cylinders have been made available to them, but many like her are still awaiting enrolment in the 'Orunodoi' scheme, under which the woman of the house receives ₹1,250 per month in their bank accounts.

A worker at the local anganwadi centre claimed it is also in a state of neglect in this model village, inhabited by people belonging to the Scheduled Caste. Deepak Chutia Das of the Kolioni Anganwadi Kendra said her repeated pleas before the authorities to fix the centre, which needs proper roofing and bamboo walls, have fallen on deaf ears.

MP Pradan Baruah, who is seeking a third successive term from Lakhimpur on a BJP ticket, however, asserted that work for providing basic public infrastructure has started.

"We arranged for land for these people, and we are now gradually trying to provide them with the infrastructure. Facilities like ration card and electricity connection have already been made available."

"But, there are some people who have not been allotted houses, and there is the problem of water logging, too," Baruah said.

Gokul Bharali, a local youth, who, along with a few others, strive to address some of the issues faced by the villagers, said work has been fast-tracked in the last couple of years. Bharali claimed that a main road is being constructed, ₹5 lakh has been allocated for a 'namghar' (community prayer hall), a water tank was built at a cost of ₹1.5 crore, and ₹8 lakh has been provided for building toilets and providing drinking water facility at the local school.

No NRC, CAA, if INDIA bloc wins, says Mamata in Assam

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Silchar (Assam), April 17: Alleging that the BJP has made the entire country a "detention camp", West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Wednesday said the CAA and NRC will be scrapped if the opposition INDIA bloc forms government at the Centre.

Addressing an election rally here in support of four TMC candidates in Assam, she alleged that there will be no democracy and elections if Prime Minister Narendra Modi returns to power for the third consecutive term. She claimed that her



Assam counterpart Himanta Biswa Sarma filed a number of police cases while she was agi-

tating in West Bengal supporting Bengali people in the two states. "What was my fault? Will

you jail me, kill me or put me in a detention camp? When 17 lakh Bengali Assamese were excluded out of 19 lakh excluded from NRC, I was there to agitate for the people," Banerjee said.

She asserted that her party TMC loves all religions and does not want people to be divided on religious lines.

"If the INDIA bloc wins, there will not be the National Register of Citizens (NRC), Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and Uniform Civil Code. We will repeal all discriminatory laws."

"If Modi wins again, there won't be democracy and there won't be any election. The entire

country will be sold off," Banerjee said at the rally.

She appealed to people to vote for all four Trinamool Congress candidates in Assam in the Lok Sabha polls and announced that her party would contest all 126 Assembly seats in 2026. "This is just a trailer and the final is yet to come. I will come again to play the final," Banerjee added. Besides Radhashyam Biswas in Silchar constituency, TMC has nominated Gauri Sankar Sarania, Abul Kalam Azad and Ghana Kanta Chutia for contesting the general elections from Kokrajhar, Barpeta and Lakhimpur respectively.

Rajasthan continues to top the chart for pre-poll seizures

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Jaipur, April 17: Rajasthan continues to top the chart for pre-poll seizures being made by the different agencies of the state in the form of unaccounted cash, drugs, liquor, precious metals, and freebies.

The desert state accounts for the highest overall pre-poll seizures made since March 1 at ₹832 crore, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Praveen Gupta, said.

"The number of seizures made by various enforcement agencies in the form of drugs, liquor, precious metals, freebies, and cash since the beginning of March has crossed ₹800 crore," said Gupta, adding that the data released by the Election Commission of India too has named Rajasthan as the leading state in terms of pre-poll seizures.



A senior citizen casts his vote through postal ballot for the Lok Sabha elections in Nagaon, Assam

PTI

Dibrugarh LS constituency to witness keen contest

Dibrugarh is considered one of the most economically important constituency in the state with the highest number of tea gardens, oil and gas public sector undertakings, fertilizers, petrochemicals, gas cracker plant and coal fields

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dibrugarh, April 17: Bestowed with lush tea gardens, rich natural resources like oil, gas and coal and a diverse electorate, the Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency in Assam will witness a close contest between three candidates - Sarbananda Sonowal, Lurinjyoti Gogoi and Manoj Dhanowar.

The BJP may claim its



candidate, Sonowal, will win by a huge margin but the Opposition-supported Lurinjyoti Gogoi is putting up a tough fight and the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) Manoj Dhanowar is also not lagging behind.

Dibrugarh is considered one of the most economically important constituency in the state with the highest number of tea gardens, oil and gas public sector undertakings, fertilizers, petrochemicals, gas cracker plant and coal fields.

It has a diverse population with the predominant being the Assamese, comprising Ahoms,

Morans, Chutias, Muttocks, Sonowal-Kacharis, Mishings and the general caste, followed by tea tribes, Hindu Bengalis, Assamese Muslims, Christians and Buddhists.

The candidates and their supporters are going all out to woo the over 16.50 lakh electorate, with women marginally outnumbering the male voters, in the ten assembly segments of the constituency going to polls in the first phase April 19.

The connectivity - whether it be roadways, railways, waterways or airways - in the constituency has been enhanced to

a great extent, helping not only in its economic development but also in opening up the minds of the younger generation who are adopting new ways for adapting to changing times, the Union Minister for Shipping, Ports, Waterways and Ayush said.

Countering Sonowal's claim, the Opposition-supported candidate Lurinjyoti Gogoi told PTI that the ruling BJP has "always neglected" the people of Assam and that the so-called development is merely cosmetic.

The utter disregard by the BJP for the Assam Accord and the demand for scheduled tribe status of the people of the six communities-Tai Ahom, Chutia, Adivasis or the tea tribes, Moran, Muttok and Koch-Rajbongshis, of which five have a sizeable population in the constituency have resonated negatively and they are very dissatisfied with the ruling party, he claimed.

Rajasthan Campaigning ends for 12 seats going to polls in first phase

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaipur, April 17: Campaigning for the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections for 12 seats in Rajasthan came to an end Wednesday.

The Lok Sabha elections are being held in seven phases, beginning Friday. The votes will be counted June 4.



The Ganganagar, Bikaner, Churu, Jhunjhunu, Sikar, Jaipur Rural, Jaipur, Alwar, Bharatpur, Karauli-Dholpur, Dausa and the Nagaur seats in Rajasthan will go to the polls in the first phase.

The Congress focused its election campaign on two issues - inflation and unemployment. In its Nyay Patra, the party has promised to fill 30 lakh vacancies in government jobs, one-year apprenticeship programmes for young graduates, and legal guarantee on minimum support price for crops.

Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge, leaders Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi, former chief minister Ashok Gehlot and others conducted a series of campaign meetings for the party's candidates across the state.

The BJP, on the other hand, attacked the Congress on appeasement politics, corruption and paper leak cases during its tenure in the state government. The saffron party also promoted its Sankalp Patra and highlighted Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "guarantees".

The party's campaign was led by Modi, who held multiple rallies in the state, including a roadshow in Dausa.

Union Minister Amit Shah held a roadshow in Jaipur. BJP chief JP Nadda, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and his Madhya Pradesh counterpart Mohan Yadav, and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh also addressed public rallies. The BJP won all 25 seats in Rajasthan in the 2014 and the 2019 elections.

'Assam contractual teachers on pay scale of permanent employees'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Guwahati, April 17: Around 4,500 contractual teachers working in various high schools in Assam have been on the same pay scale as regular employees, and they are also entitled to serve till the age of 60 years. Hence, the Education Department has no immediate plans to transition them to permanent appointments, said a senior government official.

The Director of Secondary Education in Assam, Mamata Hojai told IANS: "The contractual teachers who have been working in schools were given the benefits of permanent teachers. They can continue their jobs till they are 60 years of age along with other benefits like a regular teacher of the high school. The state government provided these facilities around three and half years ago."

Hojai asked: "After all these benefits already provided to those teachers, why should the government take additional steps of giving them regular appointments?" He also mentioned that the Education Department doesn't have any such plans.

Earlier, Assam Education Minister Ranoj Pegu said: "There



THE ASSAM GOVERNMENT INITIALLY ENGAGED AROUND 8,000 TEACHERS ON A CONTRACT BASIS IN 2010, TO TEACH SUBJECTS SUCH AS SCIENCE, MATHEMATICS AND ENGLISH AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

OVER TIME, AROUND 3,500 TEACHERS FROM THIS COHORT TRANSITIONED TO OTHER EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

are more than 25,000 TET-qualified teachers who have been working in primary schools across the state on a contract basis. Apart from that 9,500 contractual teachers were also engaged in primary schools. Moreover, 4,500 teachers are there who give classes to students of Classes IX and X. We

have decided to give all of them a regular appointment."

Narayan Konwar, Education Secretary, told IANS: "A section of teachers went to the High Court denouncing the state government's decision. So, the entire process was halted and the matter is under the Court's observation. We can only issue any statement once the High Court puts forward its observation on this issue." The Assam government initially engaged around 8,000 teachers on a contract basis in 2010, to teach subjects such as Science, Mathematics and English at the high school level. Over time, around 3,500 teachers from this cohort transitioned to other employment opportunities.

INTENSE HEAT IN RAJASTHAN Prepare action plan to protect people: Health department

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaipur, April 17: As Rajasthan braces for high temperatures this summer, the health department has asked its officers to prepare an action plan to protect people from heat-related illnesses.

The officials were issued the directions during a meeting of the health department last week, according to a statement.

The 'Graded Response System' will be implemented in the state to prevent heatwave and heat-related diseases, a health department spokesperson said in a statement. Necessary steps will be taken to protect the common people from such diseases by preparing a 'Heat Action Plan' at the state, district, and block levels, the spokesperson said.

Shubhra Singh, Additional Chief Secretary of Medical and Health Department, gave instructions in this regard during the video conference regarding prevention, treatment, and awareness activities against heat waves. She said that if the mercury level keeps rising, necessary steps should be taken by preparing a 'graded system' with yellow, orange, and red alerts.

Rajasthan Assembly publishes New Year diary based on 'tithis'



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Jaipur, April 17: The Rajasthan Assembly has introduced a New Year diary based on Hindu calendar that carries 'tithis', along with the English dates, said officials.

The highlight of this newly introduced diary is the start of the New Year, which commences in April 2024 and ends in March 2025.

Rajasthan Assembly Speaker Vasudev Devnani said: "This time, the New Year in the daily diary

will start from Chaitra Shukla, Pratipada of Nav Samvatsar 2081, that is, from April 2024 and

will end in March 2025. Along with Hindi (tithis) dates, English dates are also included in it."

"Earlier, English calendars were followed in the Assembly, with the New Year starting in January and ending in December. However, this time, this feature has been adopted on the initiative of Speaker Devnani," the officials added.

Meanwhile, the Assembly Speaker presented the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly Diary (Dayandini 2024-25) to Governor Kalraj Mishra at Raj Bhavan here and Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma at the CM's residence Monday.

The diary contains pictures of historical figures who left a mark of their spiritual and scholarly power on India and the world.

The Assembly Speaker mentioned: "The diary has stories of Bharat Ratna Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, Maharana Pratap, Prithviraj Chauhan, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati, Meera Bai, Rani Lakshmbai of Jhansi, Swami Vivekananda, Subhash Chandra Bose, Mahavir Swami and Chandra Shekhar Azad. Their pictures have been included as they are sources of inspiration for the nation and are ideal for the society."



Bhoi emerges favourite after Cong axes Prabodh



BHABANI SHANKAR BHOI



BINAY TOPPO

Rourkela, April 17: The battle lines are drawn for the Talsara Assembly constituency in Sundargarh district. The BJP has re-nominated Bhabani Shankar Bhoi to contest from this constituency while BJD has announced Binay Toppo as its candidate.

However, the decision of the Congress to replace former captain of the Indian hockey team Prabodh Tirkey with Devendra Bhitaria sent shockwaves through the constituency. Even Prabodh has been stunned by the decision and he was campaigning in full swing a few days back when he came to know that he has been axed. A dejected Prabodh may soon join the BJD, sources informed.

Talsara with a sizeable population of the Bhuyan clan as well as Christians has always been a Congress bastion. On most occasions, the Congress candidate emerged victorious from this constituency. Gajadhara Majhi, a Bhuyan, won from this seat on five occasions from 1980, before his untimely demise in 2006.

After Gajadhara's death, it was his nephew, Dr Prafulla Majhi who took over the mantle. He won from the constituency on three successive occasions - 2006, 2009 and 2014. He remained undefeated despite the strong BJD wave in that period. However, he failed to do a repeat act in 2019 as Bhoi won.

In fact in the 2019 Assembly polls Bhoi (60,264 votes) emerged a surprise winner over BJD's

Wilson Soreng (44,076). Majhi finished a distant third with 41,111 votes, a result that he never expected. In the 2019 polls, the BJP vote share went up by 9.63 per cent while that of the BJD and the Congress decreased by 3.08 per cent and 6.04 per cent respectively.

The Bhuyan and the Christian communities in this constituency play an influential role in the outcome of the polls. The Congress decided to replace Prabodh with Bhitaria keeping this aspect in mind. However, many feel that by replacing Prabodh, the Congress has handed the advantage to BJP's Bhoi again. Many feel that this 'suicidal' decision at the very last moment will enable the BJP candidate to win the seat in a canter.

"Now there are two Bhuyans and one Christian candidate in the race. Amid all this vote sharing of the two different communities, the chances are that Bhoi will emerge the best among all the three," said an independent observer. "Had Prabodh been in the fray, it would have been a close fight as he would have been a more acceptable face," he added.

Another person who will also be voting said that even if Toppo gets the major share of the Christian votes, his chances of winning is very 'minimal'. "It will be a straight contest between the BJP and the Congress. Ultimately it will be the Bhuyan votes that will matter," the person observed. "It will be the consolidation of Hindu votes and the BJP candidate will benefit from it," he added.

Harichandan to lead 26-member Cong poll panel

Bhubaneswar: The Congress has formed a 26-member election management committee for the upcoming Lok Sabha and Assembly polls in Odisha, officials informed here Wednesday in a press release. Former minister and Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) president, Prasad Harichandan, has been appointed as the chairman of the poll management committee. Senior Congress leaders Niranjana Patnaik, Jaydev Jena, Bhakta Charan Das, Srikantha Jena, Bijay Kumar Patnaik and Panchanan Kanungo have been included in the committee. The others who have been included in the panel are Rama Chandra Khuntia, Jagannath Patnaik, Navjyoti Patnaik, Manas Choudhury and Bandita Parida. Manoranjan Das has been named the convener of the committee while Bankanidhi Behera and Vikash Garabada have been nominated as the joint convenors.



Congress leaders and workers from Barchana in Jajpur district joined the BJD during a programme held at Sankha Bhawan in Bhubaneswar in the presence of senior leaders of the ruling party, Wednesday

BJP behind farmers' unions split; will suffer: Tikait

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 17: Farmer leader Rakesh Tikait attacked Wednesday the BJP and alleged that the split in the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), which led the 2020-21 farmers' movement, was orchestrated by the government at the Centre.

Under the SKM's banner, a large number of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, had held a year-long protest on Delhi's border points - Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur - against the now-repealed three farm laws.

"The Samyukt Kisan Morcha left Delhi as one, but some people later parted ways. The government of India led by the BJP wanted to create another movement and they created it," Tikait said. "The SKM will intensify campaign to 'depose BJP'," Tikait asserted. He pointed out that the BJP will lose out as far as farmers' votes are concerned in the Lok Sabha elections.



FILE PHOTO

The split, the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader said, led to the creation of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (Non-Political).

The SKM is not part of the ongoing protest of the SKM (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) over farmers' demands, including a legal guarantee for minimum support price (MSP) for crops and farm debt waiver.

The agitation started February 13 with the organisations' call for a 'Delhi Chalo' march, and since then, farmers, mainly from Punjab, are camping at the Shambhu border after being stopped by the Haryana Police. Referring to the past clashes

between protesters and police at the border, Tikait said the SKM has condemned the use of force against farmers. "Our efforts for the last two years have been that the SKM remains together and any call is given together. The SKM is not a part of the (Delhi Chalo) movement," informed Tikait.

The SKM was created so that farmers can be united, said Tikait. His outfit was among the 41 organisations that came together under the banner of the SKM to protest against the laws. Now, a number of new unions are being formed to divide farmers, he claimed and added that this is part of a 'conspiracy'.

"I said at the beginning that this Delhi Chalo protest will go on till the (Lok Sabha) elections are over. Some members of the RSS posing as farmers misguided people. Some ministers talked to them about how to break the SKM. This could be done only by creating a new SKM, which the government can hold dialogues with and take decisions that will benefit it," Tikait alleged.

The farmer leader said the split and the ongoing protests have served their purposes. These are sidelining of the original SKM leadership, and maligning the Punjab government and the Sikh community, Tikait said.

The BKU leader accused the Centre of conspiring against groups that have been putting pressure on the government over farmers' demands, including MSP according to the C2+50 (input cost of capital+50 per cent) formula suggested by the MS Swaminathan Committee and a legal guarantee of procurement of crops at MSP.

Bengal Guv asked not to violate MCC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, April 17: Taking a tough stance, the Election Commission (EC) has advised the West Bengal governor CV Ananda Bose to call off his proposed tour of Cooch Behar on the eve of the Lok Sabha polls' first phase as it is violative of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), sources said here Wednesday.

Polling is scheduled in Cooch Behar April 19 and the 48-hour silence period when campaigning is barred begins Wednesday evening.



Having come to know of the proposed tour of Bose April 18 and 19 to Cooch Behar, the EC has said that the tour may not be undertaken, the sources said. Under the MCC, no local event can be organised for the governor as proposed in his issued programme, the EC noted in its communication to the office of Bose.

The commission has also noted that the entire district administration and police force will be occupied in election management during April 18 and 19. Thus the visit of the governor would be a diversion for them from time-bound poll-related work as they will have to provide protocol and local security cover to the 'unexpected' proposed visit "without an imminently known requirement".

According to Section 126 of the Representation of the People Act 1951, the 'silence period' for Cooch Behar starts from 6.00pm April 17, which brings in a multitude of restrictions and a higher level of enforcements by election authorities, the sources said.

INDIA'S 'GEN Z' VOTERS SEEK JOBS, HARMONY

MANY FIRST TIME VOTERS DISILLUSIONED AT THE WAY ELECTIONS ARE BEING FOUGHT OVER RELIGION

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 17: For 20-year-old Roushan Kumar, who sells flowers for a living in West Bengal, more jobs and better education are priorities. And the first-time voter wants to pick a government that will provide just that.

The seven-phase elections start Friday in India with more than 18 million people voting for the first time. While polls project Prime Minister Narendra Modi will win a third term, new voters like Kumar are determined to make their voices count.

"I will vote for a party that works for development in education, that will provide employment - so that there are jobs," Kumar, a Modi sup-

porter, stated. Kumar's priorities match many his age. Rising tensions between religious groups, inflation and lack of jobs were the top concerns emerging from Modi's decade-long rule, according to a survey of 1,290 first-time voters in New Delhi by pollsters 'CSDS-Lokniti'.

Nearly two-thirds of those polled said they would vote for Modi's BJP given the government's strong record of economic growth, amid a sense of pride over construction of the massive Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

Despite world-beating growth, India's economy has scrambled to generate enough work for its people. Its youth make for most of the nation's unemployed workforce



according to various reports. Akansha Majumdar, a 20-year-old engineering student in West Bengal said India's government needs to eradicate illiteracy and provide job security.

To tap into such disenchantment, main opposition Congress

has promised paid apprenticeships. Modi's party manifesto also focuses on creating jobs.

Beyond jobs and rising costs, communal harmony is another priority for many young voters.

Delhi-based laptop repairer Mohammad Ajaz Ansari, 19, said

fighting in the 'name of religion' is everywhere and should not happen. He will vote for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), a Congress ally.

"There are so many unemployed people. Many people in my locality keep asking for work, but they don't get any. They work for private firms for meagre amounts of ₹10,000 - ₹12,000 per month which is not enough for a household to survive," Ansari stated.

In reports released last year, the US State Department raised concerns over the treatment of Muslims and other religious minorities in India. Modi denies discriminating against minorities.

"I think one major hope for India would be being more so-

cially progressive, which covers a more holistic approach towards economy and societal problems. As a Gen-Z, I want my country to be global but not copy the West; transcending towards a more solid global position, writing our own path," said Dhriti Jain, 21.

Abbaas Kashmiri, 23, a student and first-time voter rows a boat in Dal Lake in Srinagar for living. He feels the gap between the rich and poor is getting bigger. "I don't like how public services are being privatised for profit. I want a government that helps everyone, not just the rich, and treats everyone fairly. When I vote, I want to make India more fair and inclusive, especially for those who need it most," asserted Kashmiri.



Leaders and workers of various parties including the BJD from Morada and Rasgovindpur blocks in Mayurbhanj district joined the Congress Wednesday during a programme held in the presence of party's Morada Assembly nominee Prabhas Kar Mohapatra. Other senior district leaders of the Congress were present at the party office during the programme



BJP candidate K Anil Kumar for the Berhampur Assembly constituency participates in a mega bike rally with his supporters in Berhampur, Wednesday

national

of the day quote

Our aim is not to play the blame game. We are passing through very tough times. Our resources, our land and our dignity is being attacked every day. I think we should talk about it. I don't want to go into what (former J&K chief minister) Omar Abdullah or someone else has said

Modi's compassion was evident when the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) was lifted from 19 police station areas in the state, considering its impact on the youth and sections of society

If anyone from the MVA parties rebels and works against the MVA then the party should act against that individual

SHORT TAKES

Labourer shot dead by terrorist

Srinagar: A labourer from Bihar was shot dead by terrorists in the Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir Wednesday, the third such incident in the valley so far this year, officials said. They said the terrorists fired upon Raja Shah from point-blank range at Jablpora in the Bijbehara area, resulting in critical injuries. He was rushed to a hospital where he succumbed to injuries, the officials said. The incident took place in the Anantnag Lok Sabha constituency which is going to polls in the third phase May 7. This is the third such attack on non-locals in the valley so far this year.

Charred bodies of three youths found

Shillong/Goalpara: Charred bodies of three youths of Assam were found buried in neighbouring Meghalaya's East Garo Hills district Wednesday, police said. The vehicle which they used to enter Meghalaya from Assam's Goalpara district was also found burnt in the same area, Rongmil. "We have learnt that the three persons had gone to Meghalaya in a vehicle Tuesday. Their charred bodies, partially buried, were recovered by local police there," a police officer of Goalpara said. It appears that the three persons were killed by a group of people.

Kashmir boat mishap: Rescue ops intensifies

Srinagar: Rescuers searched the Jhelum waters Wednesday for three people who went missing after a boat capsized in the river the day before, claiming six lives, officials said. The search operation resumed in the morning. Teams of State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and Jammu and Kashmir Police are engaged in the operation, they said. They said the Indian Navy's marine commandos (MARCOS) have also been pressed into service.

Five dead as bus collides with car

Sangli (Maha): Five people, members of a marriage party, were killed when their car collided with a private bus in western Maharashtra's Sangli district Wednesday evening, police said. The accident took place near Jambulwadi on Vijapur-Guhaghar road in Kavtha Mahakal tehsil, more than 200 km from Pune, said an official.

Violence in Manipur, chronic underutilisation of Northeast funds, forests under threat, Chinese incursions in Arunachal Pradesh and languishing Naga peace talks



JAIRAM RAMESH | CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY

AAP Wednesday launched its "AAP Ka RamRajya" website for the Lok Sabha polls campaign to showcase the party's concept of "Ram Rajya", saying Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal tried to realise the ideals of Lord Ram in the national capital. The launch of the website -- aapkaramrajya.com -- came ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, the first phase of which will be held Friday



Welfare measures, repeal of CAA in TMC manifesto

Christened 'Didir Shopoth' (Didi's pledges), the TMC promises to provide guaranteed employment, universal housing, free LPG cylinders, assured minimum support price for farmers, scholarships for SC, ST, and OBC students, among other initiatives, to uplift the living standards of the masses



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, April 17: The TMC Wednesday unveiled its Lok Sabha election manifesto, promising an array of social welfare initiatives, revocation of the CAA, and stopping the NRC exercise if the INDIA bloc, their national-level ally, comes to power. Releasing the manifesto at the party headquarters here, TMC's Rajya Sabha party leader Derek O'Brien said, "These are the promises we will fulfil as part of the INDIA bloc when it forms the next government."

West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee has vowed not to implement the CAA in West Bengal. In an appeal on the manifesto, she criticised the BJP government for attempting to undermine the federal structure of the country. The party's manifesto also promises to bring a constitutional amendment to Article 155 to ensure that "governors are appointed in consultation with state legislatures."

Critiquing the BJP for toppling democratically elected governments, the party declared, "The practice of toppling governments will be decisively curtailed. The TMC will strengthen constitutional protections to ensure that democratically elected governments are not changed through devious means."

provisions of the anti-defection law more explicit and immediate in their application," he said. The manifesto also mentioned that the next round of India's decadal population census, which has not happened since 2011, will be conducted. The manifesto promised to ensure that the country's judiciary remains free from political pressures or inducements, advocating instead for a neutral, impartial, transparent commission.

The manifesto also promised to institute a mandatory three-year 'cooling-off period' before retired judges can accept government appointments or political roles. The TMC pledged to restore the autonomy of agencies such as CBI, ED, NIA, and Income Tax, as well as bodies like the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the University Grants Commission (UGC), by amending their respective foundational Acts to regulate the Union Government's role in their operational decisions.

Critiquing the BJP for undermining the communal fabric of the country, the manifesto promised to establish a National Integration Council (NIC) comprising the Centre and states and take cooperative measures to strengthen India's communal harmony and manage threats arising from disharmony.

On the financial front, the party promised a comprehensive reform of the GST system. "The current GST regime, which has eroded the fiscal autonomy of our states and led to heavy

losses, will be reformed into a more equitable instrument of revenue distribution," it said.

The party also promised to delink the Railway Budget from the Union budget and allocate 5 per cent of the country's overall GDP for education. In regards to national security, the party promised to do away with the Agnipath Scheme and restore "the Indian Armed Forces' traditional recruitment mechanisms."

"We will amend the current BSF Act to establish an independent oversight committee to promptly investigate allegations of misuse of force against innocent citizens during peacetime. We will revert BSF's jurisdiction to 15 km from the International border in West Bengal," it said.

The manifesto also promised to provide ration at the doorstep and 10 free cooking cylinders yearly for BPL families.

Reaching out to MGNREGA workers, the party promised increased income for labourers and a guarantee of 100 days of work for job card holders with a daily wage of ₹400.

"Increased allowance for higher education for students from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities. Implementation of the MS Swaminathan Commission recommendations, which legally guarantee farmers the MSP," he said.

Mitra said the cost of petrol, diesel, and LPG cylinders will be capped to ensure affordability, and a "Price Stabilization Fund" will be established to manage rate fluctuations.

Nine of 29 Naxalites identified: Police

Kanker: Police have identified nine of the 29 Naxalites eliminated by security personnel during an encounter in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district Tuesday, a senior official said. While the identities of two Naxalites were ascertained Tuesday following the encounter, seven more have been identified till Wednesday evening, Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P said.

EC working like 'extended wing of BJP', says AAP

New Delhi: The Election Commission is working like an "extended wing of the BJP", the AAP alleged Wednesday after the poll panel ordered social media platform 'X' to take down select posts of the party for Model Code of Conduct violations. The code came into force March 16 with the commission announcing the schedule of the Lok Sabha polls. Counting of votes is scheduled June 4.

Cong questions EC

New Delhi: The Congress Wednesday questioned the Election Commission's move to get a post on electoral bonds scheme deleted from social media platform X and said that the issue raised in the post makes the government "extremely uncomfortable". The Opposition party's remarks came after the social media platform X said that the Election Commission ordered it to take down select posts of YSR Congress, AAP, N Chandrababu Naidu and Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary for violation of the model code of conduct.

Elgar Parishad case accused Shoma Sen walks out of prison

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, April 17: Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case accused and former Nagpur University professor Shoma Sen was released from a prison here Wednesday afternoon, an official said.

The 66-year-old professor of English literature had obtained bail from the Supreme Court April 5. Sen, arrested in the case June 6, 2018, walked out of the Byculla jail in central Mumbai after the completion of all formalities, the senior prison official told PTI.

Her lawyer Indira Jaising tweeted about her release on X, saying, "She is finally out, Shoma Sen with her daughter outside Byculla jail." Sen was one of the 16 persons including activists and academics arrested in the case, related to the Elgar Parishad conclave held in Pune December 31, 2017. Pune Police had alleged that the conclave was backed by Maoists, and the 'inflamatory' speeches made there fuelled caste violence near the Bhima Koregaon war memorial in Pune district next day. Of the accused, P Varavara Rao, Sudha Bharadwaj, Vernon Gonsalves, Arun Ferreira and Anand Teltumbde are already out on bail, while Gautam Navlakha is under house arrest after initial incarceration.

Farmers squat on railway tracks



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh/Ambala, April 17: Farmers under the banner of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha Wednesday squatted on a rail track in Patiala district near the Punjab and Haryana border, demanding the release of three farmers who had been arrested by the Haryana Police.

The movement of more than 30 trains was impacted as they were either diverted, cancelled or short-terminated because of the blockade at the Shambhu Railway Station, railway authorities said. The disruption in rail movement also caused inconvenience to rail passengers on the occasion of Ram Navami. KMM leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said the Haryana administration had given them an assurance that the arrested

farmers would be released by April 16. "When our farmers were not released, we decided to squat on the rail track," Pandher said.

Three farmers, including Navdeep Singh, were arrested during the ongoing farmers' stir. Though the Punjab Police had erected barricades to prevent protesters from heading towards the rail track, farmers forced their way and sat on the Ambala-Ludhiana rail track.

Farmer leaders said they will not end their protest until the protesters are released.

"If the government releases them now, we will vacate the rail tracks within 10 minutes," said another farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal.

The farmer leaders said they were forced to sit on the rail track as the Haryana government failed to accept their demand. Pandher threatened to squat on more rail tracks if the three farmers were not released in the coming days. According to railway authorities, trains from Amritsar to New Jalpaiguri, Amritsar to Kathiar, Pathankot to Old Delhi, Amritsar to Tata Nagar, Kolkata to Amritsar, Delhi to Amritsar, Haridwar to Amritsar and Darbhanga to Amritsar were diverted.

Patanjali Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj 'katha' enters 8th day

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 17: The Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj 'katha' series, organised by Baba Ramdev's Patanjali Yogpeeth in Haridwar, entered its eighth day, Tuesday.

On the occasion, Swami Govind Dev Giri Ji Maharaj highlighted the secular ideology of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and said that he never demolished anyone's place of worship, but rather transformed temples into prayer sites.

He emphasised the importance of historical evidence showcasing Shivaji Maharaj's reinstatement of two temples in Tiruvannamalai. "The essence lies in the fact that when the sentiments of many individuals intensify, our collective consciousness also awakens automatically. If these sentiments are intense, our collective emotions will be heightened, just as the Vedas elevate spiritual consciousness," he said while narrating the saga of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.

He explained how the birth of a great personality occurs and how those who bring a new direction to the world manifest. "Great personalities gather like foam on the shore of the ocean. When waves rise in the ocean, they collide with the shore, dissolve, and then another wave comes. This cycle continues.



Similarly, when there is collision among thoughts and emotions in the hearts of many people, sometimes for generations, then great personalities are born," he said.

Yoga Guru Baba Ramdev said that while the movement for political independence has been completed, it is now time for the movement for medical freedom.

"The global recognition of Patanjali Wellness, Yogagram, Niramyam, and Patanjali Yoga Peeth will elevate the prestige of Maharishi Charak and Maharishi Sushruta not only in India but globally. He stated that now there will be no other pathies; all pathies will follow Ayurveda, with Ayurveda being supreme. Being a servant is a matter of great fortune, and we are fortunate to have received servitude to the Supreme Being and the Guru. The world's guru is India; all other countries should follow India," Baba Ramdev said.

"In addition there is a significant movement for educational freedom. The British enacted laws in a haphazard manner, which the country is now paying for. Some have been amended, but some amendments are still pending. It is now time to repeal the Indian Education Act of 1835, which will be accomplished through the Indian Education Board, Patanjali University, Patanjali Ayurved College, Patanjali Gurukulam, and Acharyakulam," he added.

Among others who attended the programme included Padmasen Arya, Chancellor of Patanjali University, Prof Mahavir Agrawal, Head of Human Welfare Department, Sadhvi Acharya Devapriya Deputy Chancellor of Acharyakulam, Dr Nirvkar, Aradhna Koul and Dr Ritambhara, teachers and students of Patanjali University, Acharya Gurukul, Patanjali Ayurved.

Ram Lalla honoured with 'Surya Tilak' on 'Ram Navmi'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ayodhya, April 17: A beam of sunlight fell directly on Ram Lalla's idol at the new temple here on noon Wednesday, marking the "Surya Tilak" of the idol on the first Ram Navami since its consecration.

Devotees began queuing up at the Ram temple here before the break of dawn, district officials said. The local administration and the temple authorities had made special arrangements to handle the crowds on Ram Navami.

"After my Nalbari (Assam) rally, I watched the Surya Tilak on Ram Lalla. Like crores of Indians, this is a very emotional moment for me. The grand Ram Navami in Ayodhya is historic. May this Surya Tilak bring energy to our lives and may it inspire our nation to scale new heights and glory," he wrote on X.

He also shared pictures of him watching the 'Surya Tilak', Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister

As the "Surya Tilak" of the deity took place, devotees outside in the sanctum sanctorum hailed the event by chanting "Jai Shri Ram". Inside, priests conducted an "aarti".

The Ram idol was consecrated in a ceremony led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi January 22

The "Surya Tilak" was made possible by an elaborate apparatus involving mirrors and lenses that directed sun rays into the sanctum sanctorum of the temple, and onto the deity's forehead.



In the middle of his Lok Sabha election campaign, Modi watched the event on his computer tablet

Yogi Adityanath also shared a video of the 'Surya Tilak' on his official handle on X. "The grand 'Surya Tilak' adorned on the forehead of Suryakul Bhushan Shri Ram Lalla is today illuminating the entire nation with its eternal glory. Jai Jai Shri Ram!," he

wrote. Temple spokesperson Prakash Gupta said, "The Surya Tilak was done for around four or five minutes when the sun rays were directly focused on the forehead of the Ram Lalla idol."

"The temple administration prevented the devotees from

entering the sanctum sanctorum at the time of the Surya Tilak to avoid overcrowding," Gupta said in a statement.

Dr DP Kanungo, Chief Scientist at CSIR-CBRI, Roorkee, told PTI, "As planned, the Surya Tilak of Ram Lalla was executed at 12:00 pm." As per an official

statement, a crown made of sustainable precious gemstones was adorned by the idol of Ram Lalla on the occasion.

In consultation with the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), Bangalore, the CSIR-CBRI, Roorkee team developed a mechanism for 19 years to steer the sunlight from the third floor of the temple to the 'garbha griha'. A detailed design to bring sunlight to the 'garbha griha' was developed by CBRI, with the IIA providing consultancy for the optical design.

The system was tested by the scientists Tuesday. Dr S K Panigrahi, a scientist at CSIR-CBRI Roorkee, who was also associated with the project said that the basic objective of the Surya Tilak project is to focus on the 'Tilak' on the forehead of Shri Ram idol on every Shri Ram Navami day.

Under the project, sunlight will be brought on the forehead of Lord Ram at noon on Shri Ram Navami in the Chaitra month every year.

3 powerful IEDs seized in Poonch

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mendhar/Jammu, April 17: Three ready-to-use improvised explosive devices (IED), each weighing between three to 20 kgs, were recovered from a terrorist hideout in the border district of Poonch Wednesday, officials said.

They termed it a "major breakthrough" ahead of Lok Sabha elections in Jammu and Kashmir.

The IEDs, planted inside steel containers of five-kg, 10-kg and 20-kg capacity, were found hidden inside a cave hideout during a joint search operation by the police, CRPF and Rashtriya Rifles in the forest area of Sana-Gursai in the Mendhar sub-division, the officials said.

They said the bomb disposal squad later destroyed all the three IEDs in a controlled explosion, scuttling terrorists' plan to carry out blasts in the Union Territory.

international



America is a nation of immigrants... and yet we have a broken immigration system
SHRI THANEDAR | INDIAN-AMERICAN CONGRESSMAN

FROM JAIL TO HOUSE ARREST

Myanmar's jailed former leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been moved from prison to house arrest as a health measure due to a heat wave, the military government said. On Wednesday it also granted amnesty for over 3,000 prisoners to mark this week's traditional New Year holiday



of the day quote

Through its actions, as our report has revealed, the Chinese Communist Party is telling us that it wants more fentanyl entering our country. It wants the chaos and devastation that has resulted from the epidemic

Theatre troops are on high alert at all times to resolutely safeguard national sovereignty and security as well as regional peace and stability

LI XI | SPOKESPERSON, CHINESE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY'S EASTERN THEATRE COMMAND

We have agreed to elevate Thailand-New Zealand relations to a strategic partnership in 2026 or sooner, which will mark the 70th anniversary of our diplomatic relations

SREETHA THAVISIN | PM, THAILAND

'ISRAEL TO RETALIATE'

UK'S CAMERON SAYS ISRAELIS HAVE DECIDED TO RETALIATE AGAINST IRAN

Jerusalem, April 17: Israel has clearly decided to retaliate against Iran for missile and drone attacks, Britain's foreign minister David Cameron said during a visit to Israel Wednesday, the starkest warning yet of another volley coming in regional escalation.

World powers are striving to prevent a wider outbreak of conflict in the Middle East after Iran's attacks on Saturday night, which involved hundreds of missiles and drones, the first time Iran has directly attacked Israel after decades of confrontation by proxies.

Iran launched the attacks in response to a presumed Israeli airstrike on its embassy compound in Damascus April 1, which killed two generals and several other Iranian officers.

More than six months into a war between Israel and the Iran-backed Palestinian militant group Hamas that has seen flare-ups in violence across the Middle East, diplomats are searching for a way to avert direct battle between Israel and Iran.

The Iranian missiles and drones launched Saturday were mostly shot down by Israel and its allies, and caused no deaths and only minor damage. But Israel says it must retaliate to preserve the credibility of its deterrents. Iran says it considers the matter closed for now but will retaliate again if Israel does.



I want to make it clear - we will make our own decisions, and the State of Israel will do everything necessary to defend itself
BENJAMIN NETANYAHU | PM, ISRAEL

"It's clear the Israelis are making a decision to act," Cameron told reporters early in his visit to Jerusalem. "We hope they do so in a way that does as little to escalate this as possible."

Washington and other Western governments hope new economic sanctions against Iran will help persuade Israel to limit the scope of its retaliation. Cameron said Britain wanted to see coordinated sanctions against Iran by the Group of Seven big democracies, which are meeting this week in Italy.

"They need to be given a clear unequivocal message by the G7," he said.

Israel is expected to discuss its response to Iran at a meeting of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's war cabinet, which also includes centrist rivals brought into the government as a unity gesture after Hamas attacked Israel October 7.

New sanctions on Iran

Washington is planning to impose new sanctions targeting Iran's missile and drone programme in the coming days and expects its allies will be following suit, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said in a statement Tuesday.

Earlier, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the United States would use sanctions, and work with allies, to keep disrupting Iran's "malign and destabilising activity".

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, speaking in Brussels after an emergency video conference of EU foreign ministers, said some member states had asked for sanctions against Iran to be expanded.

Borrell said the proposal would expand a sanctions regime that seeks to curb the supply of Iranian drones to Russia so that it would also include the provision of missiles and could also cover deliveries to Iranian proxies in the Middle East. Since Hamas fighters precipitated the war in Gaza by attacking southern Israel, killing 1,200 people and capturing 253 hostages according to Israeli tallies, clashes have also erupted between Israel and Iran-aligned groups based in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iraq.

Inside Gaza, Israel has launched a massive air and ground war, with nearly 34,000 Palestinians confirmed killed according to Palestinian medics, and thousands of others feared dead, still lost among the ruins.

Encouraged India, Pak to avoid escalation: US

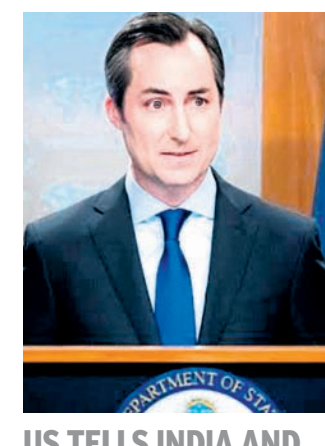
US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said the US will not get involved in the matter. "The United States is not going to get into the middle of this, but we do encourage both India and Pakistan to avoid escalation and find a resolution through dialogue," the State Department spokesperson said.

To a question on why the US has not considered sanctions on India over the matter, Miller said, "I am never going to preview any sanctions actions, which is not to say that there are any coming. But when you ask me to talk about sanctions, it's something that we don't discuss openly."

Earlier this month, Singh, referring to New Delhi's assertive approach to dealing with cross-border terrorism, had said if terrorists try to disturb peace in India or carry out terror activities, a befitting response will be given, and if they run away to Pakistan, India will enter the neighbouring country to kill them.

The defence minister was responding to a question on a report by British newspaper "The Guardian" that claimed Indian intelligence agencies carried out assassinations of terrorists in Pakistan as part of an emboldened approach to national security after 2019.

Modi had reportedly also made similar comments in the context of stern action against cross-border terrorism.



US TELLS INDIA AND PAK TO FIND A RESOLUTION VIA DIALOGUE ON ALLEGED ANTI-TERROR OPS ACROSS BORDER

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Washington, April 17: Quizzed about reported statements by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on crossing borders to kill terrorists, the Biden administration said the US would not involve itself on the matter but "encouraged India and Pakistan to avoid any escalation and find a resolution through dialogue".

US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller was responding to questions at a news conference Tuesday on alleged operations by India in other countries to eliminate terrorists.

When asked if Modi and Singh's comments can be seen as

SHORT TAKES

Tax hike for rich

Ottawa: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government announced Tuesday it is imposing higher taxes on the wealthiest Canadians as part of the federal budget. The budget proposes to increase the capital gains inclusion rate, which refers to the taxable share of profit made on the sale of assets. The taxable portion of capital gains above \$250,000 Canadian (US\$181,000) would rise from half to two-thirds, which the federal government says will only affect 0.1% of Canadians and raise nearly \$20 billion in revenue over five years. "I know there will be many voices raised in protest. No one likes paying more tax, even — or perhaps particularly — those who can afford it the most," Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said.

Power rationed

Quito: Ecuador Tuesday began to ration electricity in the country's main cities as a drought linked to the El Niño weather pattern depletes reservoirs and limits output at hydroelectric plants that produce about 75 per cent of the nation's power. The power cuts were announced Monday night by the ministry of energy, which said in a statement that it would review its decision Wednesday night. "We urge Ecuadorians to cut their electricity consumption in this critical week," the statement read. The power cuts in Ecuador come days after dry weather forced Colombia's capital city of Bogotá to ration water as its reservoirs reached record lows, threatening local supplies of tap water.

Muizzu in soup

Male: Ahead of the parliamentary polls in the Maldives, the opposition parties have demanded a probe and impeachment of President Mohamed Muizzu following the leaked report of his alleged corruption from 2018, a charge dismissed by him. Elections to the Majlis are to be held Sunday and the atmosphere has been vitiated by the trading of charges between the main opposition the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and the Muizzu's People's National Congress.

Troops pulled out

Moscow: President Vladimir Putin's spokesman said Wednesday that Russian forces are being withdrawn from Azerbaijan's Karabakh region, where they have been stationed as peacekeepers since the end of a war in 2020.

Biblical rains drown UAE

At least one dead after a storm dumps record rain across the desert nation

REUTERS

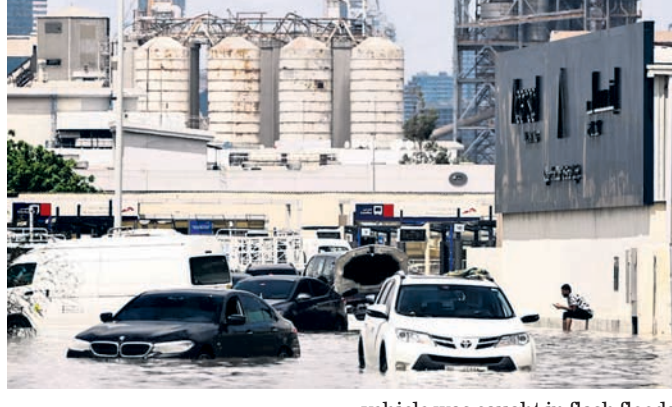
Dubai, April 17: Authorities and communities across the United Arab Emirates were clearing debris Wednesday after a torrential downpour killed at least one person and caused damage to homes and businesses.

The UAE witnessed a record rainfall with 254 mm falling in Al Ain Tuesday in less than 24 hours, according to the national meteorology centre. That was the most since records began in 1949, before the country was established in 1971.

Although heavy rains had eased by late Tuesday, disruptions were continuing on Wednesday with Emirates airline suspending check-in for passengers departing Dubai airport until midnight.

Dubai International Airport, one of the world's busiest, said it was facing significant disruptions after the heavy rains delayed or diverted flights and had impacted flight crews.

Passengers departing Dubai were advised against heading



According to a Bloomberg report, the recent heavy rains and subsequent flooding in Dubai and other parts of the UAE were linked to active cloud seeding operations

to the airport and to check their flight status with their airline.

"We are working hard to recover operations as quickly as possible in very challenging conditions," the airport wrote on X.

Local media reported that an elderly Emirati man in his 70s died Tuesday morning when his

vehicle was caught in flash floods in the Ras Al Khaimah emirate, in the country's north.

In neighbouring Oman, 19 people died, including school children after three consecutive days of heavy rain, according to Omani media, which published images of flooded communities.

The Times of Oman reported that more rain was expected Wednesday. In Dubai, the skies were clear but in some areas the roads were quiet after the government ordered its employees and all schools to work remotely for a second consecutive day.

UAE media and social media posts showed significant damage from the torrential downpour in some parts of the country, including collapsed roads and homes inundated by water.

TIDBITS

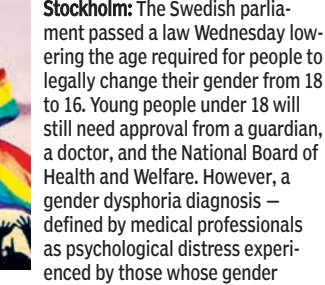
Escobar's name cannot be trademarked

Brussels: The name of late Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar cannot be registered as an EU trade mark, the European Court of Justice ruled Wednesday, after his brother tried to lay a claim. The court upheld the decision of the EU's intellectual property office (EUIPO) that refused a trade mark application by Escobar Inc in 2022. "EUIPO correctly found that those persons would associate the name of Pablo Escobar with drug trafficking and narco-terrorism and with the crimes and suffering resulting therefrom, rather than with his possible good deeds in favour of the poor in Colombia," the court said in a statement. Escobar Inc was founded in Puerto Rico by Pablo Escobar's brother Roberto de Jesús Escobar Gaviria, who spent 12 years in prison for his role in his brother's criminal organisation. Pablo Escobar led one of the world's most powerful criminal organisations, the Medellín cartel. His fortune, made from trafficking cocaine, was estimated by Forbes in 1987 to have reached over \$3 billion although some accounts put it at much higher.



Sweden lowers gender change age limit

Stockholm: The Swedish parliament passed a law Wednesday lowering the age required for people to legally change their gender from 18 to 16. Young people under 18 will still need approval from a guardian, a doctor, and the National Board of Health and Welfare. However, a gender dysphoria diagnosis — defined by medical professionals as psychological distress experienced by those whose gender expression does not match their gender identity — will no longer be required. The vote was 234 for and 94 against with 21 listed as absent. The centre-right coalition of Sweden's conservative prime minister, Ulf Kristersson, has been split on the issue, with his own Moderates and the Liberals largely supporting the law while the small Christian Democrats were against it. The populist party with far-right roots Sweden Democrats, who support the government in parliament but are not part of the government, also opposed it.



LANDMARK BILL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London, April 17: The British government's plan for a landmark smoking ban that aims to stop young people from ever smoking cleared its first hurdle in Parliament Tuesday despite vocal opposition from within Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservative Party.

The bill, a key policy announced by Sunak last year, would make it illegal to sell tobacco products to anyone born after January 1, 2009. If passed, the bill will give Britain some of the toughest anti-smoking measures in the world.

Under the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, children turning 15 this year or younger will never be legally sold tobacco. Once im-

UK on path to phase out smoking for good

AUTHORITIES SAY THE LAW WILL CREATE MODERN BRITAIN'S FIRST SMOKE-FREE GENERATION

plemented — officials are aiming for 2027 — the legal age of sale that people in England can buy cigarettes will be raised by one year, every year until it is eventually illegal for the whole population.

The bill also includes measures to crack down on youth vaping, such as banning the sale of cheap disposable vapes and restricting their flavours to prevent children from becoming addicted to nicotine.

It is currently illegal for anyone to sell cigarettes or tobacco products and vapes to people under 18 years old throughout the UK.

During the bill's second reading late Tuesday, 383 lawmakers voted in favour while 67 opposed it after an afternoon of

Smoking causes some 80,000 deaths a year in the UK, and remains the number one preventable cause of death, disability and poor health

debate. Although the bill was widely praised by health experts and had the support of the opposition Labour Party, Sunak faced rebellion from more lib-



ertarian-minded members of his party, who criticised the proposals as "unconservative."

EST, said the move risks creating a black market and will "treat future generations of adults like kids." Prominent voices within the Conservative Party, including two of Sunak's predecessors Boris Johnson and Liz Truss, said the plans went against conservative values by limiting people's personal freedoms.

The bill was a "virtue-signalling piece of legislation about protecting adults from themselves in the future," Truss told Parliament during Tuesday's debate.

Other high-profile Tories, including business secretary Kemi Badenoch, a Cabinet minister, also opposed the bill or abstained.

Conservative lawmakers were granted a free vote, meaning they could vote with their per-

sonal conscience rather than follow the official party line.

The plans were believed to have been inspired by similar policies proposed by New Zealand under former Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, but the country's new coalition government repealed the bill earlier this year.

The government said that smoking won't be criminalised, and the phased changes mean that anyone who can legally buy cigarettes now won't be prevented from doing so in the future.

The number of people who smoke in the UK has declined by two-thirds since the 1970s, but some 6.4 million people in the country — or about 13 per cent of the population — still smoke, according to official figures.

of the day quote

The launch of the all-electric eCenter in India, within the next 6 to 12 months, is the first step in our long-term strategy to decarbonise our entire product portfolio

We have been consistent and resilient and sharp-focused on sustainable growth and the belief this round of investors have shown on us fortifies our faith and further motivates us to be change makers

India has been a traditional leader in the outsourcing market and the meaningful policies of the government have augmented its position with a unique proposition of a high-skill, low-cost market

SHORT TAKES

UK inflation falls

London: Inflation in the UK fell to its lowest level in two and a half years in March after a further easing in food prices, official figures showed Wednesday, a development which could further pave the way for a welcome cut in interest rates soon. Consumer prices rose by 3.2 per cent in the year to March, down from 3.4 per cent in February, the Office for National Statistics said. That's the lowest level since September 2021. The fall in the annual rate was not as big as anticipated. Economists had predicted a reading of 3.1 per cent for the month.

Japan sees record trade deficit

Tokyo: Japan recorded a trade deficit for the third straight fiscal year as the costs of energy and other imports rose and the yen remained weak. The deficit was 5.89 trillion yen (\$38 billion) for the fiscal year that ended in March, according to Finance Ministry data released Wednesday. The biggest trade deficits were in the Middle East, mainly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as Australia and Indonesia. Japan had a trade surplus with the US and some European countries. Annual exports to China slipped slightly, declining for the first time in four years.

PhonePe, Google Pay creating UPI duopoly

NPCI IS REACHING OUT AMID CONCERNS ABOUT THE MARKET SHARE CONCENTRATION OF GOOGLE PAY, PHONEPE, WHICH TOGETHER ACCOUNT FOR 86% OF UPI TRANSACTIONS BY VOLUME

New Delhi, April 17: The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) will engage with fintech startups in April to address the growing market dominance of PhonePe and Google Pay in the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) ecosystem, according to reports.

NPCI is reaching out amid concerns about the market share concentration of Google Pay

India to grow 6.5%: UNCTAD

UN TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT EXCEPTS INDIA TO CONTINUE AS THE FASTEST-GROWING MAJOR ECONOMY IN THE WORLD

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

United Nations, April 17: India's economy is projected to grow by 6.5 per cent in 2024, according to a report by the UN which noted that multinationals extending their manufacturing processes into the country to diversify their supply chains will have a positive impact on Indian exports.

UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in its report released Tuesday said that India grew by 6.7 per cent in 2023 and is expected to expand by 6.5 per cent in 2024, continuing to be the fastest-growing major economy in the world.

"The expansion in 2023 was driven by strong public investment outlays as well as the vitality of the services sector which benefited from robust local demand for consumer services and firm external demand for the country's



business services exports," the report said, adding that these factors are expected to continue to support growth in India in 2024. The report also noted the increasing focus by multinationals on India as a manufacturing base as they diversify their supply chains, a reference to China.

"In the outlook, an increasing trend of multinationals extending their manufacturing processes into India to diversify their supply chains will also have a positive impact on Indian exports, while moderating commodity prices will be beneficial to the country's import bill," it said.

Last week, the flagship '2024

From this weekend's attack to the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, Iran's actions threaten the region's stability and could cause economic spillovers

JANET YELLEN | TREASURY SECRETARY

FY24 STEEL CONSUMPTION GROWS

Domestic finished steel consumption has registered a growth of 13 per cent to 136 million tonne during 2023-24, supported by increased demand from automotive and infrastructure sectors, SteelMint India said. The country consumed 120 million tonne (MT) finished steel in the preceding 2022-23 financial year, the research firm said in a report



PHDCCI predicts 8-8.3% growth

India's economy is estimated to grow at 8-8.3 per cent in the current fiscal, industry body PHDCCI said Wednesday. The country's GDP will grow at an average of 6.7 per cent over the next 23 years to become a \$34.7 trillion economy by 2047, with a per capita income of \$21,000, it added. "We are projecting a growth rate of 8 to 8.3 per cent for India's economy for the current financial year," PHDCCI Chief Economist SP Sharma said.

Addressing a press conference, he said India's economy has robust growth fundamentals. "Gradually after 2035, the growth rate will start decelerating from the peak, and on an average, our growth rate, the real GDP (gross domestic product), will be 6.7 per cent overall in the next 23 years," Sharma noted. India's economy will attain the size of \$34.7 trillion by 2047 with a per capita income of \$21,000, the industry body said.

text of developed economies' supply chain diversification strategies, making an apparent reference to China.

The UNCTAD report said the Reserve Bank of India is expected to keep interest rates constant in the near term, while restrained public consumption spending will be offset by strong public investment expenditures.

In other Southern Asian countries, however, economic growth remains more subdued. Three countries in the region - Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka - are currently under IMF programmes, the conditionalities of which necessitate the application of tight monetary policies and fiscal austerity measures whose impacts are most severely felt by low-income households, it said.

Global growth is projected to

be 2.6 per cent in 2024, slightly slower than the 2.7 per cent in 2023. This makes 2024 the third consecutive year in which the global economy will grow slower than before the pandemic when the average rate for 2015-2019 was 3.2 per cent, the report said.

The UNCTAD report added that the risks that substantially threatened to slow down global economic growth in 2023 did not fully materialise.

The UNCTAD report comes even as the International Monetary Fund said in its latest edition of the World Economic Outlook released Tuesday that growth in India is projected to remain strong at 6.8 per cent in 2024 and 6.5 per cent in 2025, with the robustness reflecting continuing strength in domestic demand and a rising working-age population.

Musk likely to unveil \$2-\$3bn investment in India during visit

REUTERS

New Delhi, April 17: Tesla chief Elon Musk is set to announce an investment in India of \$2-\$3 billion, mainly for building a new factory, when he visits New Delhi next week to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi, two sources familiar with the discussions said.

Musk will meet Modi Monday during his India trip, when the billionaire is expected to unveil his plans to enter the world's third-largest auto market where electric car adoption is still in its infancy.

India's EV market is small but growing and dominated by local carmaker Tata Motors. EVs made up just 2% of total car sales in 2023, but the government is targeting 30% of new cars to be EVs starting 2030.

Musk's visit comes as Tesla battles slowing sales in the major markets of the United States and China, and has this week announced layoffs affecting 10% of its workforce.

Details of Musk's India visit are closely-guarded, with the CEO only publicly confirming on his social media platform X that he will meet Modi in India.

For years, Musk opposed India's high import taxes for EVs and lobbied for a change. India's government in March unveiled a new EV policy lowering import taxes to 15% from as high as 100% on some models if a carmaker invests at least \$500 million and sets up a factory.

Power consumption surges nearly 10%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 17: India's power consumption grew nearly 10 per cent year-on-year to 70.66 billion units (BU) in the first half of April this year, showing improvement in economic activities and consumption patterns, according to the power ministry data.

According to the data, power consumption in the country rose to 70.66 BU during April 1-15 this year from 64.24 MU in the year-ago period. The peak power demand met or the highest supply in a day rose to about 218 GW in the first half of April compared to 206 GW in the same period a year ago.

The highest supply in a day during the entire month of April last year was about 216 GW.

The ministry has projected a peak power demand of 260 GW during the summer season (April to June) in view of longer heat wave duration. The peak power demand had touched an all-time high of 243 GW in September 2023.

GROWTH FUNDING

Ahead of FPO, VIL garners ₹5,400cr

New Delhi: Just ahead of its mega FPO opening to public investors, Vodafone Idea (VIL) has announced closure of its anchor book allocation, raising about Rs 5,400 crore from marquee global as well as domestic investors, according to a statutory filing by the telco. This could be the third-largest anchor book after One 97 Communications and Life Insurance Corporation (LIC). One 97 Communications and LIC had raised Rs 8,235 crore and Rs 5,627 crore in the anchor round, respectively. In a notification to the exchanges Wednesday, VIL said it has allotted 490.9 crore shares to 74 funds at Rs 11 apiece, which is also the upper end of the price band. This translated into a transaction size to Rs 5,400 crore. Of the total allocation to anchor investors, 79.52 crore stocks, or 16.2 per cent of the total, were allocated to five domestic mutual fund through a total of 11 schemes. The Rs 18,000-crore FPO of Vodafone Idea will open for public subscription April 18 and conclude April 22, marking the biggest FPO in the country. The price band has been set at Rs 10-11 per share. Prior to this, the largest FPO in the Indian market was a Rs 15,000 crore share-sale by YES Bank in 2020.



Adani infuses ₹8,339cr in Ambuja Cements

New Delhi: Billionaire Gautam Adani's family infused an additional Rs 8,339 crore in Ambuja Cements, raising its stake in the company to 70.3 per cent, to help the cement maker's manufacturing capacity. The Adani family previously invested Rs 5,000 crore in the company October 18, 2022, and Rs 6,661 crore March 28, 2024. With the latest investment, it has completed Rs 20,000 crore planned infusion, the company said in a statement. "The promoters of the company - Adani family - has fully subscribed to the warrants program in the company by further infusing Rs 8,339 crore, thereby infusing a total amount of Rs 20,000 crore," it said.



Crude import bill dips 16% in FY24

IMPORT DEPENDENCY HITS NEW HIGH

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 17: India's crude oil import dropped 16 per cent in the fiscal year ended March 31 as lower international rates but the dependency on overseas suppliers rose to a new high, official data showed.

India imported 232.5 million tonne of crude oil, which is refined into fuels like petrol and diesel, in the 2023-24 fiscal (April 2023 to March 2024), almost the same as in the previous financial year. But it paid \$132.4 billion for the imports in FY24 as against \$157.5 billion import bill in 2022-23, oil ministry's Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC) data showed.

The world's third largest oil importing and consuming nation has been able to add to its domestic production drop, raising its import dependence.

Import dependence of crude oil soared to 87.7 per cent in 2023-24, up from 87.4 per cent, according to PPAC.

Domestic crude oil production was almost unchanged at 29.4 million tonne in 2023-24.

Besides crude oil, India spent



India paid \$132.4bn for the imports in FY24 as against \$157.5bn import bill in 2022-23

\$23.4 billion on import of 48.1 million tonne of petroleum products like LPG. It also exported 62.2 million tonne of products for \$47.4 billion.

Other than oil, India also imports gas in its liquid form, called LNG.

After the price shock of 2022-23, import of 30.91 billion cubic metres of gas cost \$13.3 billion in the fiscal year ended March 31, 2024.

This compared with \$17.1 billion spent on import of 26.3 bcm of gas in 2022-23 when energy prices shot up to record levels in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Net oil and gas import bill (crude oil plus petroleum product plus LNG import bill minus exports) stood at \$121.6 billion in 2023-24, down from \$144.2 billion. Petroleum imports as percentage of India's gross imports

(in value terms) stood at 25.1 per cent, down from 28.2 per cent in 2022-23.

Similarly, petroleum exports as a percentage of the country's gross exports came at 12 per cent in 2023-24 as compared to 14 per cent in the previous year.

India's fuel consumption rose 4.6 per cent to a record 233.3 million tonne in the year ended March 31, 2023.

This compared with 223 million tonne consumption in 2022-23 and 201.7 million tonne in 2021-22.

While the country is short in crude oil production, it has surplus refining capacity which enables export of petroleum products like diesel.

Against the consumption of 233.3 million tonne, petroleum product production was 276.1 million tonne in 2023-24, PPAC data showed.

RETAIL INVESTOR BOOM

Small-cap MFs' assets soar 83%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 17: Influx of flows, upsurge in retail investors' participation and bullish market conditions have boosted the assets for the small-cap mutual fund category to Rs 2.43 lakh crore mark at the end of March 2024, marking an 83 per cent surge compared to the previous year.

The surge in assets was complemented by an increase in the number of investors, with the number of folios reaching 1.9 crore in March 2024 from 1.09 crore a year ago, adding an investor base of 81 lakh.

Gopal Kavalireddi, Vice President - Research at FYERS, said that the growth trajectory of India's economy is attracting increased interest, leading many unlisted small-cap firms to seek support from the capital market. This trend offers promising opportunities for investors eyeing long-term growth prospects.

However, factors such as



Smallcap returns have not just been an outcome of market sentiment, but also fantastic earnings growth. However, it has been historically observed that periods of euphoria are followed by periods of low returns. Accordingly for FY25, the likelihood of negative to low returns is the highest

JAY SHAH | FOUNDER & CEO, FINWISOR

General Elections, monsoon forecasts, economic activity, inflation, GDP projections, and FY25 earnings growth are likely to influence small-cap company

valuations and induce volatility in this segment, he added.

In the financial year 2023-24, small-cap funds witnessed an inflow of ₹40,188 crore, way higher than the ₹22,103 crore inflow seen in the preceding fiscal.

However, the month of March saw small-cap funds witnessing a net outflow for the first time in over two years at ₹94 crore. This came after markets regulator Sebi, in late February, raised concerns over frothy building up in the small and mid-cap funds and directed mutual fund houses to put in place a framework to safeguard the interest of investors, who invested in these funds.

Capitals humble Titans

Faltering PBKS, MI look to resurrect campaigns



Delhi Capitals player celebrate after Ishant Sharma (L) dismisses a Gujarat Titans batter during their IPL match in Ahmedabad, Wednesday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ahmedabad, April 17: Delhi Capitals notched up a six-wicket win over Gujarat Titans in a low-scoring game after Rishabh Pant's bowlers stood up for their ilk and restored a modicum of sanity and equilibrium in the IPL here Wednesday.

Opting to field first, the Capitals rolled over Gujarat Titans for 89 in 17.3 overs, the bowlers finally having a say after being blasted all over the park in the last few matches of the lucrative league.

Mukesh Kumar was the most successful bowler for DC with

figures of 3/14, while there were two wickets apiece for Ishant Sharma (2/8) and Tristan Stubbs (2/11). As far as GT batting is concerned, only Rashid Khan put up a semblance of resistance with a 24-ball 31.

Chasing 90, DC completed the formality in just 8.5 overs to register their third win and give their run rate a boost. What also stood out on the day was Pant's leadership and his work behind the stumps. The flamboyant keeper-batter was sharp and agile while wearing the big gloves and performed a quick stumping besides pulling off an incredible catch diving full stretch.

With the T20 World Cup around the corner, Pant's dexterity behind the stumps is a very good sign for Indian cricket. Pant (16 n o) was also in the middle when the winning runs were hit.

Invited to bat first, skipper Shubman Gill (8) timed to perfection an overpitched Khaleel Ahmed delivery for GT's first scoring shot of the innings. Ishant Sharma served up a freebie to Gill, and the ball got the treatment it deserved as the opener found the gap on the off-side.

Ishant, the seasoned campaigner, struck in the very next ball though with Gill chipping a fuller-length ball straight to Prithvi Shaw at

cover on a pitch that is being used for the first time this season and has been described as a "100 percent black-soil" surface.

Sai Sudharsan (12) walked in early and got into the groove with back-to-back fours, including an exquisite boundary through extra cover.

DC captain Rishabh Pant then introduced Mukesh in place of Ishant, and the bowler responded in the fifth ball of his first over as Wriddhiman Saha (2) got a thick inside edge before disturbing the middle and off stumps.

Playing the match in place of the injured David Warner, Sumit Kumar then produced a bril-

liant piece of fielding and ran out Sudharsan with a direct throw at the non-striker's end, a diving effort from the batter failing to save him as the ball hit the base of the stumps.

The Capitals were on song, and their skipper led by example as he dived to pull off an excellent catch off Ishant to send back the dangerous David Miller (2), leaving the home team reeling at 30/4 in five overs.

Ishant opened up Miller with one that angled into the left-hander, but the umpires didn't seem interested despite a loud appeal. However, Pant decided to review after being persuaded by Ishant and Fraser-McGurk at slip. It was the right call, as UltraEdge showed Miller got a clear edge.

More trouble awaited the Titans as Pant pulled off a fine stumping off Tristan Stubbs to bring about Abhinav Manohar's downfall, forcing the home team to send impact player Shahruxh Khan into the middle.

The move did not work as Shahruxh was dismissed in the very next ball after Pant somehow managed another stumping despite not gathering the ball cleanly.

Then, left-arm spinner Axar Patel rapped Rahul Tewatia on the pads and the umpire raised his finger after a confident appeal by the bowler. Tewatia reviewed, but the decision stayed as GT lost their seventh wicket with just 66 runs on the board in the 12th over.

Khaleel came back to dismiss Mohit Sharma, before Rashid Khan hoicked Kuldeep over long-off for the innings' first and only six. Mukesh, however, ended Rashid's resistance after the all-rounder went for an upper cut off a short ball outside off.

BRIEF SCORES: GT 89 (Rashid Khan 31; Mukesh Kumar 3/14, Ishant Sharma 2/8, Tristan Stubbs 2/11) lost to DC 92/4 (Jake Fraser-McGurk 20, Shai Hope 19, Rishabh Pant 16 n o; Sandeep Warrier 2/40) by 6 wickets.



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mullanpur, April 17: Punjab Kings and Mumbai Indians will be desperate to resurrect their faltering campaigns in the IPL when the two bottom-rung teams faceoff here Thursday.

Only a few decimal points separate the two teams after six matches each with Punjab's marginally better Net Run Rate of -0.218 keeping them at the seventh spot in the IPL points table, one above Mumbai Indians (-0.234).

Both Punjab and Mumbai have lost four matches each and are coming off defeats in their respective last outings, which mean pressure will be high on both the camps to get their act together.

For Punjab, the challenge of getting the best out of their top order has compounded with regular skipper Dhawan being sidelined for 'seven to 10 days' due to a shoulder injury.

The only bright spot for PBKS this season has been resolute displays from their unsung Indian players Shashank Singh and Ashutosh Sharma, who both bat lower in the order and have had to make up for the shortcomings at the top more than once.

The form of Prabhsimran Singh is a concern and the same can be said for India wicket-keeper-batter Jitesh Sharma. With selection for the World Cup squad on the horizon, Jitesh would be under the pump too.

PBKS will have to find more support for their overseas bowl-



ing duo of Sam Curran (126 runs and 8 wickets) and Kagiso Rabada (9). The Indian pair of Arshdeep Singh (9) and Harshal Patel (7) have both been easy targets for batters.

MI would know they have enough firepower in the camp to turn the tide but a collective effort on a consistent basis is the need of the hour.

Two wins at home against DC and RCB did end their three-match losing run, but a loss to CSK despite Rohit Sharma's century meant the five-time winners have forced them to go back to the drawing board.

It starts with Hardik Pandya's form and role in the side. The all-rounder has looked to share responsibility in bowling department but his economy rate of 12 is alarming.

With the bat, Pandya has not provided any consolidation while batting first or finished matches in the latter half. At the same time, Pandya has faced hostile environments at various stadiums in all the games he has played so far this season, something that could have an adverse impact on a player.

Rohit and Ishan Kishan's form thus become crucial for Mumbai Indians, for whom Suryakumar Yadav has produced mixed results.

MATCHDAY
Indian Premier League
PBKS vs MI
Time: 07:30 pm
Telecast: Star Sports Network
Stream: Jio Cinema

PSG dump Barca out of CL

Tough tests await Gukesh, Praggnanandhaa



STUNNING PERFORMANCE: Kylian Mbappe reacts after scoring against Barcelona, Tuesday

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Barcelona, April 17: Playing with an extra man for more than an hour, Paris Saint-Germain rallied against Barcelona to reach the Champions League semifinals.

Kylian Mbappe scored twice as PSG reversed its first-leg loss at home with a 4-1 win at Barcelona Tuesday to advance 6-4 on aggregate and keep alive their hopes of a first European title in what is the France star's final season with the club.

Former Barcelona forward Ousmane Dembele and Vitinha also scored for PSG, which took advantage of a 29th-minute red card to Barcelona defender Ronald Araujo after he fouled Bradley Barcola while trying to stop a breakaway.

Barcelona had gotten off to a good start and opened the scoring with a goal by Raphinha in the 12th, but the visitors took control with the man advantage and didn't let Barcelona get back into the game. Xavi had to replace young forward Lamine Yamal with defender Inigo Martinez after the red card to Araujo, who was deemed by the referee to be the last defender when he fouled Barcola.

The Catalan side, which won the first leg 3-2 in Paris last week, made it to the knockout stage

of Europe's top club competition after back-to-back eliminations in the group stage.

Mbappe scored his goals in the 61st and 89th minutes. The France star is hoping to win what would be a first Champions League title for himself and for PSG before he leaves the club.

Barcelona opened the scoring in their first attack with a fortuitous goal by Raphinha after Yamal's low cross from the right side bounced off the shin of the Brazil forward and went into the net.

PSG equalised about 10 minutes after Araujo was sent off, with Dembele finding the net by the far post after a cross by Barcola. Dembele was loudly jeered by the Barcelona crowd when he was substituted in the final minutes. He had also scored in the first leg in Paris.

PSG took the lead when Vitinha fired a low shot from outside the area in the 54th. The visitors increased their lead when Mbappe converted a penalty kick after Dembele was brought down by Joao Cancelo inside the area.

Barcelona had chances to get back into the game, with Ilkay Gundogan hitting the post in the 56th and both Robert Lewandowski and Raphinha squandering chances toward the end of the match.

Mbappe's second goal came

from close range in a breakaway in the final minutes. Xavi was sent off after kicking a cushion protecting a sideline camera in the 56th.

Dortmund beat Atletico

Marcel Sabitzer scored late and set up two goals to send Borussia Dortmund into the Champions League semifinals with a helter-skelter 4-2 win over Atletico Madrid. After losing the first leg of their quarterfinal 1-2 in Madrid, Dortmund had to come from behind twice over two legs to advance 5-4 on aggregate.

Julian Brandt opened the scoring to level the tie before Sabitzer set up Ian Maatsen to give Dortmund a 2-0 lead on the night. Atletico coach Diego Simeone responded with three changes at the break and they all paid off. A Mats Hummels own goal and goal from substitute Joaquin Correa put the Spanish side back in front on aggregate.

Then Sabitzer set up Niclas Fullkrug in the 71st minute for the Germany forward's first goal after nine scoreless games, and Sabitzer scored himself three minutes later to send Dortmund into the last four.

Dortmund will face Paris Saint-Germain again in the semifinals. The final will be played June 1 in London, where Dortmund lost the 2013 final 1-2 to bitter rivals Bayern Munich.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Toronto, April 17: Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh will have his task cut out when he takes on top seed Fabiano Caruana in the 11th round, hoping to consolidate his position at the top as the Candidates chess tournament heads towards its final phase here. The 17-year-old Gukesh is in joint lead with Russia's Ian Nepomniachtchi.

Among other Indians, 18-year-old R Praggnanandhaa will be up against resurgent American Hikaru Nakamura after a rest day. With just four rounds remaining, it is a level-playing field for the two Indian teenagers while Vidit Gujrathi has kept himself in reckoning and only needs to finish well.

Nepomniachtchi, the only unbeaten player so far, is playing under the FIDE flag and has a tough opposition to tackle in the next two rounds. Gujrathi meets Nepomniachtchi in the next round followed by



R PRAGGNANANDHA



D GUKESH

Praggnanandhaa and these two matches will probably set the tone of the tournament and might just be pivotal to deciding the next world championship challenger.

For Gukesh, the clash with Caruana is going to be crucial as the Indian has white pieces. If he is able to press for advantage, the onus will be on Caruana to prove his detractors wrong. The Italian-turned-American is competing in his sixth Candidates tournament in a row but has

only won it once.

Gukesh will probably train his eyes on beating the lowest-placed Abasov in the 12th round, provided he gets past Caruana unscathed.

Set to play against the Azerbaijani with black, Gukesh will surely go all-out for a victory even as Abasov has been super solid with his white pieces.

The most crucial line up in the next two rounds, from an Indian perspective, are the two games that Praggnanandhaa is

Not so impressive

NEW DELHI: Star Indian table tennis player Manika Batra and Sreeja Akula exited in the second-round group stage after losing against China's Wang Manyu and defending champion Chen Meng respectively at the ITTF World Cup in Galaxy Arena in Macau Wednesday. World No.39 Sreeja lost 1-3 (4-11, 4-11, 15-13, 2-11) to reigning Olympic champion and World No.4 Meng of China and finished second in Group 4. Manika also made an exit finishing second after losing 0-4 (6-11, 4-11, 9-11, 4-11) against China's World No.2 Manyu.

Sakshi in top 100

NEW DELHI: Olympic medallist Indian wrestler Sakshi Malik has been listed among the 100 most influential people of 2024 by Time magazine. Sakshi, India's only female Olympic medallist in wrestling, has been honoured for her relentless fight against alleged sexual harassment of female wrestlers by former Wrestling Federation of India president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. Sakshi along with two-time World Championships bronze medallist Vinesh Phogat and Tokyo Olympics bronze winner Bajrang Punia spearheaded the protest against Singh at the Jantar Mantar here.

Every practice will count: Harmanpreet



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 17: Indian men's hockey team captain Harmanpreet Singh on Wednesday said with 100 days left for the Paris Olympics, every day, every practice and every drill will count towards building momentum to shine at the biggest sporting stage.

Last edition's bronze medallist India are currently placed sixth in the world, but Harmanpreet said they are hungry to improve upon their Tokyo result in Paris. The star drag-flicker's comments

came following India's dismal show in the recent tour of Australia, where they were white-washed 0-5 by the hosts.

"We just returned from the intense Australia tour. After a short break, we will hit the grind again. With only 100 days to go until the Paris Olympics, the excitement in the team is growing," Harmanpreet said in a Hockey India release.

"The unity of our team continues to grow, fuelled by our shared goal to clinch the gold medal. Craig Fulton, our chief coach, keeps us on track with

the Olympics countdown in our weekly schedule.

"Every day counts, every practice, every drill - it's all about building towards that moment on the Olympic stage. All in all, we're hungry, we're focused, and we're ready to shine," he added.

India qualified for the Paris Olympics by winning gold medal in last year's Hangzhou Asian Games. India vice-captain Hardik Singh said the need of the hour is to iron out the grey areas before the Paris Games.

"The Australia Tests highlighted the areas that we need to improve, and upon our return to camp, we aim to make sure that we iron out any remaining issues well in time for the Paris 2024 Olympics," he said.

"We will give our best on each of the 100 remaining days to make sure that our pursuit for the gold medal at the Olympics is successful," he added.

In Paris Olympics, India are clubbed alongside defending champions Belgium, Australia, Argentina, New Zealand and Ireland in Pool B. India will play their opener against New Zealand July 27.