

ORISSA POST

HERE . NOW



Priyanka's solitude

Actor Priyanka Chopra discusses facing fear and loneliness during her early Hollywood days

LEISURE | P2



Proposal under review

Hamas reviews a new Israeli proposal for a cease-fire in Gaza, as Egypt intensifies efforts to broker a deal to end the war

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Spice row deepens

The US Food and Drug Administration is gathering information on products of Indian spice makers MDH and Everest

BUSINESS | P11



Fraser-McGurk shines

Jake Fraser-McGurk helps Delhi Capitals keep themselves in the IPL playoffs' race with a 10-run win over Mumbai Indians

SPORTS | P12

VOLUME 14, ISSUE 28 | www.orissapost.com BHUBANESWAR | SUNDAY APRIL 28 2024 12 PAGES + SUNDAY POST | ₹5.00

BJD, BJP name more candidates for polls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, April 27: The BJD and the BJP Saturday announced the names of 11 more candidates for the Assembly polls in the state.

Of eight candidates announced by the BJD, four are former members of the ruling BJD who switched allegiance to the saffron party recently.

They are Seemarani Nayak (Hindol), Arindam Roy (Salipur), Geetanjali Sethi (Kendrapara), and Prasant Jagdev (Khurda).

Jagdev, formerly a BJD MLA from Chilika, was ousted from the party before he joined the BJP. Roy is a popular Odia actor.

The remaining candidates announced by the party are Fakir Mohan Naik (Telkoi), Murali Manohar Sharma (Champua), Rabindra Andia (Basta), and Banikalyan Mohanty (Basudevpur).

The saffron party has so far announced candidates for 140 out of the 147 Assembly segments.

Similarly, the BJD has announced candidates for three more Assembly seats, dropping two sitting MLAs.

Chief Minister and BJD president Naveen Patnaik nominated Begunia MLA Rajendra Kumar Sahoo for the Khurda Assembly seat which is now represented by Jotirindra Nath Mitra.

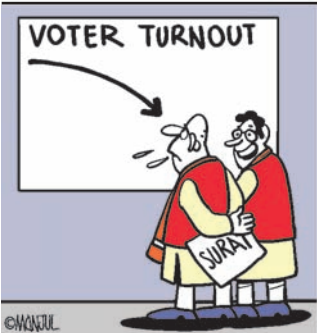
The party also fielded debutant Goutam Buddha Das for the Bhograi Assembly segment, denying a ticket to incumbent legislator Ananta Das.

Pradeep Kumar Sahoo has been named from the Begunia Assembly segment.

He had unsuccessfully contested from Begunia in 2019 as a Congress nominee. He joined the BJD two years later.

The BJD has so far nominated 144 candidates for elections to the 147-member Assembly in the state that will go for polling in four phases between May 13 and June 1.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Clearly, the voters want us to move towards Gujarat Model-One country, no election

26/11 prosecutor for BJP Mumbai LS seat

New Delhi: The BJP has named lawyer Ujjwal Nikam, who was the public prosecutor in the Mumbai 26/11 terror attacks, as its candidate for Mumbai North Central Lok Sabha constituency. Nikam has replaced Poonam Mahajan, the current MP from this seat, as the party's candidate. He was also the prosecutor in the murder case of Poonam's father Pramod Mahajan, who was shot dead by his brother Pravin in April 2006. Party leaders have said the decision to drop her was based on organisational feedback, news agency PTI reported.

WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	44.6°C	43.4°C
Min Temp	26.9°C	26.0°C
Humidity	74%	63%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

FORECAST
Likely to rise by 2 degree Celsius in the next 2 days



ROOTED IN TRADITION: Sikh youths perform 'Gatka', an ancient form of martial arts, during a procession as part of the birth anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur, at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Saturday.

Illegal arrest an assault on democracy: Kejriwal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 27: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal Saturday told the Supreme Court that his 'illegal arrest' in a money-laundering case stemming from the alleged excise policy scam constitutes an unprecedented assault on the tenets of democracy based on 'free and fair elections' and 'federalism'.

In a rejoinder to the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) reply affidavit filed on his petition challenging his arrest in the case, Kejriwal said the mode, manner and timing of his arrest just before the Lok Sabha elections when the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) had come into play, speaks volumes about the 'arbitrariness' of the agency.

Kejriwal claimed it is a 'classical case' of how the Centre has misused the ED and its wide powers under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to 'crush' the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and its leaders. The rejoinder claimed that ED illegally 'picked up' a sit-



ting Chief Minister and the national convenor of one of the national Opposition parties, five days after the general elections were announced and the MCC came into force.

"During an election cycle when political activity is at its highest, the petitioner's illegal arrest has caused grave prejudice to the political party, and will provide the ruling party at the Centre an unjust upper hand in the ongoing elections," Kejriwal further said in his rejoinder.

"The present case is a classic case of how the ruling party led central government has misused the central agency - Enforcement Directorate and its wide powers under PMLA to crush its biggest political oppo-

nent - Aam Aadmi Party and its leaders," it added. He said a level playing field, which is a pre-requisite for 'free and fair elections', has clearly been compromised with his illegal arrest.

It said the entire basis of Kejriwal's arrest rests upon certain statements which are in the nature of 'self-incriminating confessions' by alleged accomplices who have been given the immunity by way of pardon.

The rejoinder alleged the only objective of ED was to procure and obtain some statement against Kejriwal and as soon as the statement was taken, the mission of the probe agency was accomplished and thereafter, the co-accused were neither arrested nor any further statements were taken.

It claimed the malicious intent of ED in conducting the investigation was apparent from its deliberate concealment of statements made by co-accused individuals where either no allegations were made or allegations were explicitly denied.

College student among 3 dead in road mishap



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Angul, April 27: Three persons including a college student were killed as their motorcycle collided with a truck here in this district Saturday morning, police said.

The accident took place on NH-55 in the Panchamahala area of the district, they said. All three persons died on the spot. They were identified as Krupa Dehury (48), Rajendra Pradhan (21) and Subrat Pradhan (17).

They were going towards Angul town from their village Derjanga, police said. While Krupa and Rajendra were traders, Subrat, a college student, was on the way to a coaching class.

Rate locals blocked the highway for a while, demanding compensation for the families of the deceased. Police said they have seized the truck and started an investigation.

City sizzles at 44.6°C; Apr highest since '52

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 27: In a first since 1952, the Capital City Saturday recorded the daily highest temperature of 44.6 degrees Celsius in the month of April. With such, commuters in the City faced a hard time while moving to their colleges and offices.

Senior scientist of India Meteorological Department (IMD), Umasankar Das said Bhubaneswar hit the peak temperature around 2:30 pm in the afternoon. This, however, does not indicate that the City would experience such temperature in the coming days. But, the City would still reel under intense heatwave for the next 4 days, he added.

Das stated that May 2016 still remained the hottest summer at 45.8 degrees Celsius in the Capital City, since 1952. The searing rise in the daily temperature shall continue until north-westerly winds prevail in the City, he added.

Abhijit Sahoo, a Patia resident, said the spell of heatwave since last week has made it tough to find a work-life balance. If such phenomenon continues for a protracted period, there is a need for offices to rework the daily schedule for employees, he added.

The IMD said that Bhubaneswar was followed by Jharsuguda which recorded 43.6 degrees Celsius, Rourkela (42.5), Chandbali (42.4) and Sambalpur (42.1).

The extreme situation has spiked an interest among students to opt for beverages to keep themselves cool during this hot summer. Several engineering students in the Patia area said it is nearly impossible to sit through daily classes without an aerated or lime drink.

As per the weather forecast agency, heatwave to severe heatwave conditions may prevail in Mayurbhanj, Jajpur, Keonjhar, Angul, Dhenkanal, Boudh, Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Khurda, and Cuttack districts.

60 is the new 18 for this Argentine beauty



ALEJANDRA MARISA RODRÍGUEZ CLINCHES TOP BUENOS AIRES PAGEANT, MAKES HER WAY TO MISS UNIVERSE

AGENCIES

Buenos Aires, April 27: In a remarkable turn of events, Alejandra Marisa Rodríguez, a 60-year-old contestant, has emerged victorious in the Miss Universe Buenos Aires pageant, challenging age-old beauty norms and inspiring women worldwide.

Her victory, announced Wednesday, not only celebrates her remarkable journey but also underscores the Miss Universe beauty pageant's dedication to embracing diversity and inclusivity.

Hailing from La Plata, the capital city of Argentina's

Buenos Aires Province, Rodríguez is not just a beauty queen; she's a seasoned lawyer and journalist, showcasing the multifaceted nature of contemporary beauty. Her triumph stands as a testament to her resilience, breaking barriers and redefining conventional standards of beauty and age.

She becomes the first woman of her age cohort to clinch such a prestigious beauty accolade. Her elegance, grace, and infectious smile captivated both judges and audiences alike, resonating with individuals worldwide.

Videos shared on social media reveal her determination as she prepares to represent Buenos Aires in the upcoming national selection for Miss Universe Argentina, slated for May 2024. Should she emerge victorious, Rodríguez will hoist the Argentine flag on the global stage at the Miss Universe World contest, scheduled for September 28, 2024, in Mexico.

"I am thrilled to be representing this new paradigm in beauty pageants because we are inaugurating a new stage in which women are not only physical beauty but another set of values," she told the media after her win.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Rodríguez's interests in nature, healthy living, music, and culture showcase a multifaceted personality which resonates with audiences worldwide. Her dedication to a healthy lifestyle and self-care underscores the importance of holistic well-being in the pursuit of one's goals.

The Miss Universe organisation last year announced that it would no longer have age limits for the contestants. Beginning this year, any woman over the age of 18 is eligible to compete. Earlier, only women between 18 and 28 years could enter the pageant.

Another beauty pageant contestant who is making waves is 47-year-old Haidy Cruz, who will represent Dominican Republic in Miss Universe 2024.

DAMaN, Pratikshya head to NYIFF

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 27: In a groundbreaking moment for the state, two Odia films, DAMaN and Pratikshya, have been selected to be screened at the prestigious New York Indian Film Festival (NYIFF).

DAMaN, directed by Vishal Mourya and Debiprasad Lenka, is about the story of a doctor's relentless fight against malaria disease. The film has been considered inspirational for fresh graduate doctors.

On the other hand, Pratikshya, helmed by Anupam Patnaik, explores the journey of Sanjay, a middle-class unemployed youth whose only goal is to get a gov-

ernment job. Life throws a curveball at him when his father suddenly becomes ill. With no job and money, he struggles to stay afloat with his inner desires.

Pratikshya, which won National Film Award for best Feature Film Odia was also screened in Indian Panorama section of IFFI 2022 and has won the Best Story Feature Film Award at the Washington DC South Asia Film Festival (DCSAFF) 2022.

The NYIFF, known for its celebration of Indian cinema's diversity and innovation, provides a platform for independent filmmakers to showcase their work to a global audience. The inclusion of these Odia films underscores the richness of storytelling and the artistic prowess present in Odisha's film industry.



leisure



NICOLE CRAVES TO TRY NEW THINGS

Actress Nicole Kidman, who is known for *Dogville*, *Eyes Wide Shut*, and *Days of Thunder*, among others, has said that she craves the extreme. The 56-year-old actress has worked across a variety of genres and says she loves pushing herself to try new things, reports *Female First UK*.

SHAKIRA HASN'T LOST HOPE IN LOVE

Pop singer Shakira, who split from soccer star Gerard Pique in 2022, has expressed her continued belief in love. Shakira stated, "I cannot say that I don't believe in love because I see the example of my parents after 50 years together; how they look into each other's eyes and hold hands and can't live apart from each other."



FORTUNE FORECAST

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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

ARIES
You experience a sense of freedom today. And in this mood you feel like doing all the things that you loved to do in your childhood. It is a nice time to take your family on an outing, says Ganesh. Given your mood, you may start planning for the future of your loved ones.

TAURUS
This may be, health wise, a bad day for you. Ganesh urges you to take special care and not to do anything that invites illness or discomfort. The least you can do is to ensure that you do not over exert or get into situations that generate tension and anxiety. Be careful about the food you eat.

GEMINI
You will receive unprecedented love and affection from all your friends and family members today. It is a good day to conduct important personal or professional meetings. A lot of joy and happiness awaits, says Ganesh.

CANCER
You may donate to a charity organisation, for your mental happiness. On the job front, stick to your routine, rather than taking a new bold step, says Ganesh. A good day on the financial front.

LEO
A fun-filled day awaits you. You will enjoy all the activities that you take up today. At the work-place too a progressive day awaits you. You will be worried about the fruits of your labour, but they are likely to be sweeter than you thought they will be, says Ganesh.

VIRGO
You will pen down the things to be done today. However, Ganesh suggests that just making a note of them is not enough; you need to set practical goals according to priority. Moreover, Ganesh warns that items you mark on the top of the list will demand immediate action.

LIBRA
Ganesh says that your day today will be extremely busy and as a result you will be agitated today. Your happy nature will have to bear the brunt of the sad circumstances and situations that life will shower on you but you will be able to face the situation with your inner strength. You will have to be careful about your health today and will need to watch your diet.

SCORPIO
Negative thoughts are likely to surround you today, try to avoid it. You may feel lonely and left-out when the day begins. However, a long list of activities and responsibilities will keep you occupied throughout the day. There are possibilities that you may land up in tricky situations, but you have the knack of handling things gracefully.

SAGITTARIUS
Your ways to deal with your team mates and colleagues will be strict and disciplined. However, your perfect ways at work will leave them awestruck. Your personal equations will be least affected by your stern ways, says Ganesh. Do not let success go to your head.

CAPRICORN
A penny saved is a penny earned. Your strong belief in this will make you scrutinise your requirements and rearrange the priority list, so that you know where and how to utilise the resources. Your choice of friends will represent your approach and outlook towards life. Ganesh advises you to choose your friends wisely.

AQUARIUS
There is nothing like having a good time with your brothers and sisters. Generally, you plan out your routine and activities by yourself, but it is a different day today. Your siblings will make plans for you and you will just go along with the flow, predicts Ganesh. Spontaneity is something new to you, and you will enjoy the change.

PISCES
Some unknown fear could haunt you today. You will direct your energies to discovering the source of your worries and eliminate them. Lovers will find some precious time to cozy up with their partners. You will find yourself going out to the movies or to a concert. On the whole it will be a productive day for you, says Ganesh.

PC shares her dark phase in Hollywood

New Delhi: Actress Priyanka Chopra, who has always been vocal about her professional and personal challenges, recently recalled how she faced fear and loneliness during her initial struggle in Hollywood.

While interacting with the host on the 'Read the Room' podcast, she admitted that rejections were a humbling experience. The *Dostana* actress opined, "It humbles you. I was like, I am not going to be upset by it, or I am not going to say that's a closed door; I am going to navigate something else. I put my head down and did my work. I didn't bring my pride of 'I am a leading lady, and blah blah...' That's what helped me find the position in which I am today."

She further added, "It was the industry that I didn't know; the people, I didn't know; I didn't have friends who would call at 2 in the morning. That's very important. I was very lonely, and it was very scary. I was in New York City, which, anyway, is a daunting city. It was a dark period of my life."

On the work front, Priyanka will be seen next in *Heads of State*, featuring John Cena and Idris Elba in crucial roles.

AGENCIES



When Ash shut down French journo's questions on nudity

Mumbai: With the Cannes Film Festival nearing, Aishwarya Rai has been trending quite a lot. She's a frequent guest, known for her stylish appearances and brand endorsements. Recently, an old interview of hers with French media resurfaced, in which she straightforwardly responded to questions about nudity in Indian films.

Despite the international press's fixation on Indian cinema's lack of nudity, the journalist questions her about it.

The *ADHM* actress firmly replied, "I have never explored, and I am not interested in exploring nudity on celluloid." When the journalist presses her further, she says, "I feel like I am talking to my gynecologist." The journalist laughs as the actress adds, "I mean, who am I talking to here? You're a journalist; stick to that, brother."

On the professional front, Rai has left an indelible mark in the Hindi film industry with her roles in iconic films like *Devdas*, *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*, *Mohabbatein*, *Dhoom 2*, and *Jodhaa Akbar*. Additionally, she has ventured into international cinema with acclaimed performances in *Bride and Prejudice*, *Mistress of Spices*, and *Pink Panther*.

Meanwhile, Aishwarya was last seen in Mani Ratnam's *Ponniyin Selvan, parts I and II*.

AGENCIES



Shruti, Santanu part ways

Mumbai: Shruti Haasan's personal life came under the radar once again as the actress and her long-time boyfriend, doodle artist and illustrator Santanu Hazarika, who reportedly dated for nearly four years, have reportedly parted ways.

Confirming the news, a source said, "They broke up last month. Since there were personal wavelength issues, they decided to part ways amicably." As per reports, the *Ramaiya Vastavaiya* actress and Hazarika have been living apart for approximately a month now. Adding to the speculation, Haasan has reportedly removed all photos of her boyfriend from her Instagram account. The actress who made her debut in Hindi film industry with film *Luck* also took a small social media break recently and then marked her return with a cryptic post that read, "It's been a crazy ride, learning so much about myself and about people. We should never be sorry for all the things we can be or need to be."

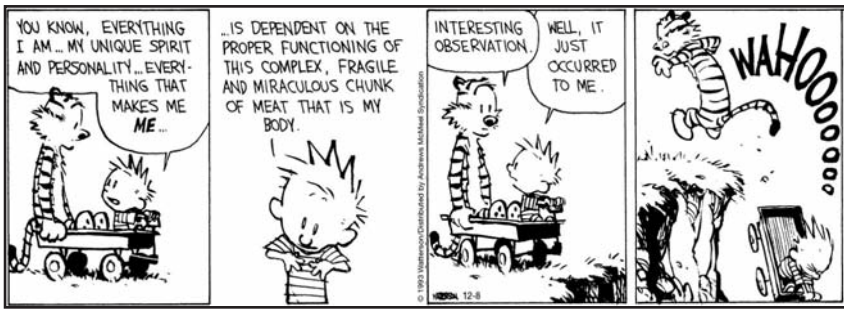
Haasan and Hazarika started interacting with each other through social media. The doodle artist slid into the actor's DMs, and they both started talking. In an earlier interview, Haasan revealed that she had sent Hazarika one of her poems, in response to which he sent her an elaborate artwork.

AGENCIES

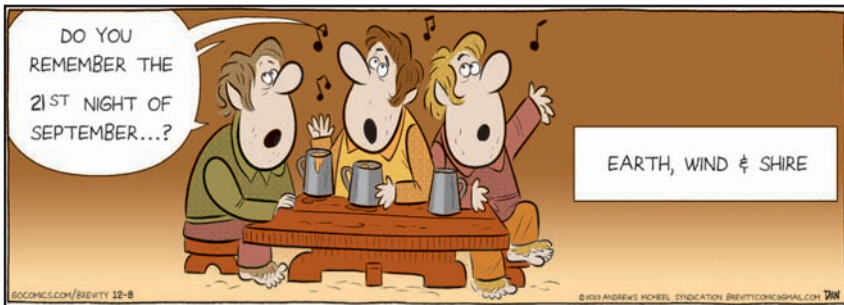
PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

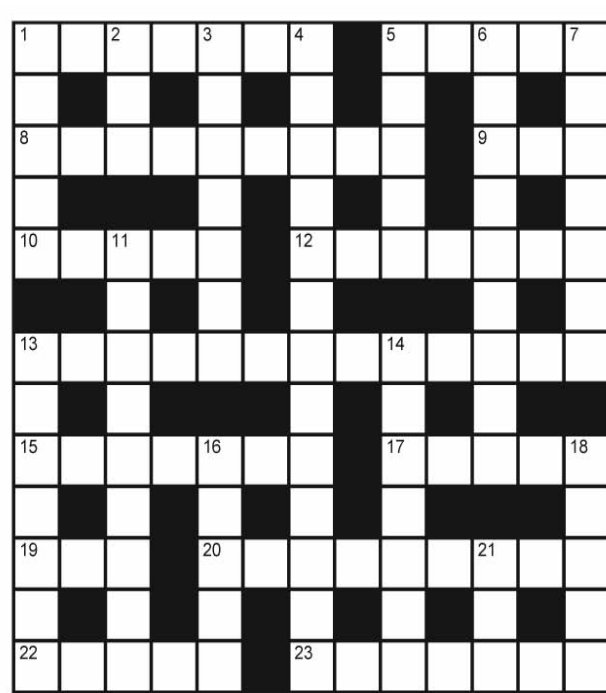


BREVITY



FUN post

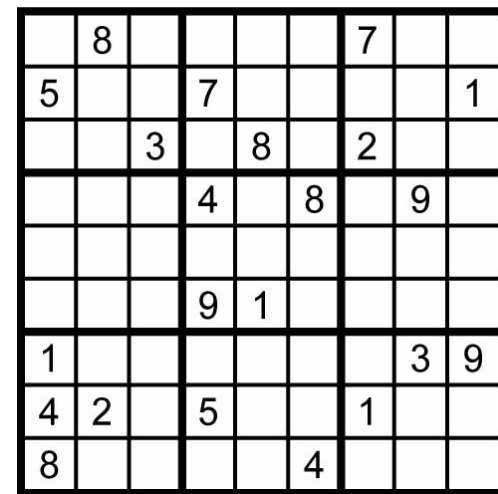
CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Actor's goal
 - 5 Deadly snake
 - 8 Stolid
 - 9 French vineyard
 - 10 Tuck, for one
 - 12 Feeling of intense anger
 - 13 Spiderlike arachnid (5,8)
 - 15 Public reading
 - 17 Spring time
 - 19 Black cuckoo
 - 20 Bridge accomplishment (5,4)
 - 22 Breakfast bread
 - 23 Austere
 - Down**
 - 1 Small boat
 - 2 Band aid
 - 3 Pulverise
 - 4 Joan of Arc's aka (4,2,7)
 - 5 Fowl's pride
 - 6 Freebooter
 - 7 Good luck charms
 - 11 Peninsula of southeastern Asia
 - 13 Inactive
 - 14 Family member
 - 16 Close fitting
 - 18 Fish flavouring
 - 21 Fortune

SUDOKU

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

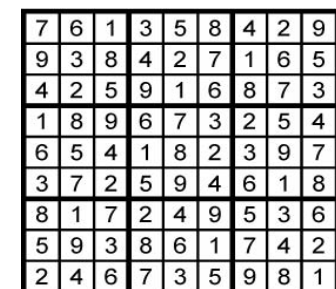


SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

Devotees walk on a carpet specially laid on Grand Road in Puri as temperature soars across the state, Saturday



downtown

Lifer to man for double murder

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 27: A Khurda court Saturday awarded life imprisonment to a man after holding him guilty of killing his wife and sister-in-law in Chandrasekharpur area here in 2022.

District and Sessions Judge Nisith Nisank also slapped a penalty of ₹10,000 on the convict, Bijaya Ketana Sethi, for offence under Section 302 of the IPC. Upon his failure to furnish the penalty, he would undergo additional one year of rigorous imprisonment (RI).

This apart, the court also awarded two years of RI and slapped a penalty of ₹5,000 on Bijaya for offence under Section 201 of the IPC. In case of failure to pay the penalty, the convict would undergo another three-month of RI. Both the sentences will run concurrently, said Public



Bijaya Sethi, who hails from Kendrapara, was accused of killing his wife Gayatri and her sister Saraswati over some domestic issues at a rented accommodation in Chandrasekhar in April 2022

Prosecutor Sarad Chandra Samanta.

Bijaya, who hails from Hantapada in Kendrapara district, was accused of killing his wife Gayatri and her sister Saraswati over some domestic issues at his rented accommodation in Housing Board Colony under Chandrasekhar police limits here in April 2022.

Gayatri's father Sudam learnt about the murders after his phone calls to her and Saraswati went unanswered.

A desperate Sudam reached the City to inquire about the siblings' whereabouts when he spotted Bijaya leaving the Chandrasekharpur house in a hurry after locking it from outside.

Sudam caught hold of Bijaya and opened the house only to find the sisters' motionless bodies lying in the living room in pools of blood. A blood-stained axe was found at the crime scene.

He then informed the Chandrasekharpur police which swiftly arrested Bijaya for the double murder.

The court convicted Bijaya after examining as many as 17 witnesses and other articles along with circumstantial and scientific evidence adduced by the prosecution.



FRESH LOOK: The renovated cemetery of Utkal Gourav Madhusudan Das on the premises of Odia Baptist Church in Tulasipur area of Cuttack, Saturday

PICT: RAKSHORE MOHANTY

Workforce must be equipped to handle AI challenges: AICTE chief LS polls: 66.7% turnout in Phase II

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, April 27: The future workforce must be equipped to handle new challenges of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which has generated both hope and fear in the human mind, said All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) chairman TG Sitharam, Saturday.

Addressing 'SOA Proxima 2024', a two-day HR conclave at the Siksha 'O' Anusandhan Deemed to be University (SOA) here, Sitharam said that the unprecedented surge in disruptive technology like AI has evoked both hope and fear in the human mind. "But the need of the hour is to equip the future workforce to adapt to such new challenges," he emphasised.

"Every time we have encountered new technology, it has injected some fear in the human

mind, but we have learned to adapt to it, and we must do so to face the AI challenge," Sitharam added.

He stated that questions being asked today include: Will humans be truly replaced by AI? Will there be massive job loss? Will machines become super-intelligent, and will humans eventually lose control?

He addressed the conclave attended by HR professionals from around 100 industries in the country and students of the university.

"These questions are alarming and need to be addressed with diverse opinions and thought processes," Sitharam highlighted.

"It is humans who have created these technologies to make their tasks easier and have consequently found themselves in a difficult situation," he noted.



Stating that the existence of AI was unknown a decade ago, Sitharam pointed out that it was successfully exceeding human performance in different fields, including music, art, and literature, and delivering at an unimaginable speed.

The AICTE chairman, however, recalled that humankind had also been apprehensive about new technical developments like computers, mobile phones, and the internet earlier but learned

to embrace them eventually. "The same could be done with AI and other disruptive technologies with the right guidance of the academic and industry community and proper implementation of their suggestions," he said.

The AICTE chairman stressed, "We have to work together to create a workforce that is equipped to handle emerging technologies." He mentioned that AICTE was

taking serious measures to adapt Indian students and faculty to the use of AI, ranging from bringing courses in emerging technologies to conducting faculty development programs on AI and data science (DS).

"Our only goal is to upskill and reskill our students and faculty members with advanced technologies," Sitharam reiterated. He complimented SOA for organising an event like 'Proxima 2024', a platform for intellectual thinking, innovative ideas, and experiential learning, which would harness the potential of the students.

SOA Vice-Chancellor Pradipta Kumar Nanda, who presided over the meeting, said that the Deemed to be University was initiating steps to connect the institutes with the industry as emphasised in the New Education Policy (NEP).

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 27: The voter turnout in the second phase of Lok Sabha elections has touched the 66.7 per cent mark, which is less than the figures of the 2019 parliamentary polls, according to sources.

Both phases of the ongoing polls have seen a dip in the voter turnout as compared to the last general election. The 66.7 per cent figure is approximate and the Election Commission has so far not come out with the polling percentage formally Phase two of the Lok Sabha elections was held Friday across 88 constituencies spread in 13 states. In the second phase of 2019 Lok Sabha elections, held in 95 constituencies across 13 states, the turnout was higher at 69.64 per cent.

In the first phase of this election, the turnout was 65.5 per

cent as compared to 69.43 per cent in the phase one of the 2019 parliamentary polls. Some of the constituencies were different then and the total number of seats which went to poll were 91.

Heat wave is believed to have contributed to several voters not turning up at polling stations in both the phases. The polling time was extended till 6 pm in many polling stations in Banka, Madhepura, Khagaria and Munger constituencies in Bihar to give some succour to voters against the hot weather.

Special arrangements were made to combat the heat, including a provision of 'shamiyana', drinking water, medical kits and fans for the convenience of the voters. The usual polling time is 7am to 6pm but it varies depending on factors such as terrain, time of sunset, and security situation.



TRADITIONAL FETE: An artiste performs during Sahi Jata in Puri, Saturday

OP PHOTO

Lightning kills ward member, mother

AGENCIES

Kendrapara, April 27: In a tragic incident, a ward member and his mother died when lightning struck them in Janhimula village under Derabish police limits in the coastal district here, sources said Saturday.

Sources said both the ward member and his mother were returning home after completing work in their green gram field when the mishap took place.

The deceased were identified as Rabindra Barik, a ward member of Janhimula village, and his mother, Sashirekha Barik.

Villagers rushed the duo to the District Headquarters Hospital here for treatment, but they were declared brought dead.

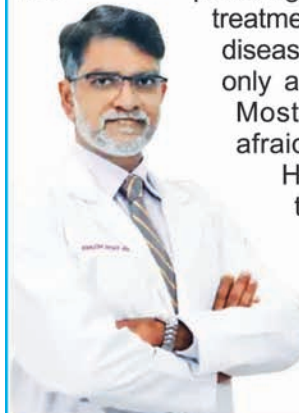
Police later recovered the bodies and sent them for autopsy.

Health is Wealth.....My Health is my Right....

CARE HOSPITALS

Health is something everybody wants to have and be in perfect health; however, due to various risk factors, lifestyle changes, smoking, alcohol consumption, fast food eating, disorganized sleep cycles, and stress, people fall ill and depressed. As we move forward in the 21st century, many diseases are being diagnosed daily and early due to improved patient awareness, better available investigations, and approaches to healthcare.

After the diagnosis of a disease, it mostly has two treatment modalities: either with medicine, which can either suppress the disease or cure it, and surgical management, which is done either as a last resort in patients not responding to medical treatment or for those diseases that have only a surgical cure.



Dr. Tapas Mishra, MBBS, MS, FIAGES, FMAS, DIPMAS (Bariatric), Senior Consultant - General Surgery, Laparoscopic and Bariatric Surgery Care Hospitals, Prachi Enclave Road, Bhubaneswar



transformational change from open to laparoscopic (multipurpose or single port) and now robotic surgery. The pain associated is less, patient can go to work in 2 to 5 days and healing time is also reduced.

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For Emergency Contact: 0674 6165656 OR Visit: www.carehospitals.com

Colombia's unexplained 'spontaneous' mummies

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

San Bernardo (Colombia), April 27: In a small town high in the Colombian Andes, Clovisneys Bejarano kneels before a glass box holding the petrified corpse of her mother, who died 30 years ago, but looks as if she might just be asleep.

Saturina Torres de Bejarano is dressed in the same rose-print dress and green woollen jersey she was interred in, clasping a fake red carnation in her eerily well-preserved hands.

"She still has her little brown face, round, her braids, her hair," Bejarano, 63, told AFP at her mother's final resting place in a museum displaying her body and those of 13 others from the town of San Bernardo who became spontaneously and mysteriously mummified after death.

"If God wanted to preserve her... it must be for a reason," said Bejarano, a resident of the town some 100 kilometres (62 miles) south of Bogota. Torres was interred in a vault in the San Bernardo municipal cemetery in 1993. Exhumed in 2001 -- as is customary to make space for new bodies -- her relatives found her still with hair, nails and much of her tissue unspoiled.

It came as no major surprise. Dozens of mummified bodies have come out of the vaults since the first one in 1963. "When all this began, peo-

FROZEN IN TIME



ple were a little incredulous about what was happening; they thought these were going to be isolated events," said museum guide Rocío Vergara. "As time went on, it became more and more frequent to find bodies in this condition," she told AFP. Some even still had their eyes, usually quick to decompose.

In the late 1980s, some 50 mummies were found in the mausoleum every year, but the rate has declined to a handful per year, said Vergara.

Despite numerous attempts by experts to explain the phenomenon -- which has also been observed in countries such as Mexico and Italy -- the reason for the spontaneous mummifica-

tion in San Bernardo has never been pinned down, said Vergara. Some locals believe that the process (mummification) is due to the fact that the person was too good, and it is a reward after death, said Vergara. "There are others who consider that... it is a punishment."

Most are convinced it is because of the healthy diet of the residents of temperate San Bernardo, and an active, farming lifestyle.

But this is not always borne out by the evidence: one of the mummies belongs to Jorge Armando Cruz, who spent most of his life in the big city of Bogota, where he died before being brought back to his birthplace for burial.

There is no clear pattern to the mummifications: those who are involved are of all different ages when they died, and no particular gender or body type predominates. Vergara said there is no particular sector of the cemetery that yields more mummies than others.

Many believe the answer must lie in the burial vaults. The first mummies were found in San Bernardo only after the cemetery, which has no underground graves, was inaugurated.

Prior to the 1960s, the town had two burial grounds with not a single known case of mummification, said Vergara. The climate in the area is humid, which would ordinarily aid decomposition, not hinder it, she added.

Adverse weather conditions may hit mango crops in UP: Experts

Lucknow, April 27: Battling the impact of climate change, the mango yield in northern India, including Uttar Pradesh (UP), may be hit by the earlier-than-usual summer this year, said experts at Lucknow's ICAR-Central Institute of Subtropical Horticulture (CISH).
The mango belt is known for its prized Chausa, Dussehri and Langra varieties globally and the northern belt accounts for 40 per cent of the total mango production in India.
Of 21 million metric tonnes (MT), 4.8 MT comes from UP alone, said T Damodaran, the institute's Director.
Temperature has seen a significant rise and the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) is predicting a further rise in the mercury in days to come.
With the mercury expected to go up to 43 degrees Celsius soon, it may not be ideal for mango flowering, said experts at the institute.
Unlike the previous year, when mango produce was affected due to untimely hailstorm, thunderstorm and semi looper insects, mango flowering this year is good due to warm weather. But fruit produce may again suffer due to extreme climatic conditions expected in coming days, the scientists said.
"Looking at the intense heat-wave forecast over the next 30

days, where the temperature is expected to go up to 43 degrees Celsius soon, policymakers and mango lovers have started having doubts about the fate of the mango crop for the current season," said the scientists.
Damodaran said high temperature during fruit formation is usually expected to favour the



bear the heat. Even low temperatures are bad for the flowers. The Mal-Malihabad region, which is the leading producer of mangoes in northern India and UP, and is especially known for the popular variety Dussehri, has had low flowering this year, at only 30-35 per cent, he stated.
In previous years also, 25-30 per cent of the mango produced was lost and damaged due to unprecedented weather.
According to ICAR-CISH, Lucknow, the mango production in Mal-Malihabad bordering the Sitapur area was affected by 35 per cent and 20-25 per cent in other districts of UP due to unseasonal rainfall and hailstorm in March and April.

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Indian heart saves Pakistani teen girl in Chennai hospital

Chennai, April 27: A Pakistani teenage girl who has been ailing since 2019 got a new lease of life after she received a heart from a 69-year-old Indian donor from New Delhi.
The 19-year-old girl from Karachi successfully underwent a heart transplant surgery and was discharged recently, doctors who performed the surgery at a city hospital here said.
"I am feeling fine (now). I thank the Indian government for giving me a visa. I got a heart transplant here," she said and also thanked the doctors for saving her. She was very sick upon her arrival in Chennai, her mother Sanobar said. "We got an emergency visa... the doctors saved her," she added.
Getting the visa was very difficult; more than that the patient's family could not afford the treatment cost, Dr K R Balakrishnan, director of the Institute of Heart and Lung Transplant, MGM Healthcare, here said.
The girl has been battling for her life after suffering a cardiac arrest in 2019. Her family consulted Dr K R Balakrishnan and Dr Suresh Rao, Co-Director, Institute of Heart and Lung Transplant, MGM Healthcare.

ELIMINATION OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

TN education dept releases guidelines

Chennai, April 27: The Tamil Nadu school education department has directed district education officers to constitute school-specific monitoring committees to prevent corporal punishment.
The monitoring committees will include school heads, parents, teachers and senior students.
The department has directed the committees to ensure that they promptly address any complaints regarding corporal punishments and to find out whether they have resulted in mental harassment of students.
As per the Right to Education Act, 2009 corporal punishment includes physical punishment, mental harassment and discrimination.
The department has also directed the district education officers to keep vigil on corporal punishment in schools under their jurisdiction as the state wants schools to create a safe mental and physical environment for students.

The guidelines are focused on safeguarding the physical and mental well-being of students, and extend beyond eliminating corporal punishment to address any form of harassment of students.
It is also planning to conduct awareness camps against corporal punishment based on the guidelines of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR).
The department also requires affirmative action against corporal punishment and positive engagement with children.
In its directive, the department has said that the focus should be on help and not on punishment, multidisciplinary intervention and a positive environment for the students where they can voice their opinions and woes alike.

55 % WATER IN RESERVOIRS

Farmers asked to switch crops in TN

EXTREME HEATWAVE CONDITIONS HAVE LED TO THE DRYING UP OF PALAR RIVER WHICH IS ONE OF THE MAIN SOURCES OF WATER IN THIS REGION.

Chennai, April 27: With most of the reservoirs in the drought-prone districts of Vellore, Ranipet, Thirupathur and Tiruvannamalai left with only 55 per cent of water, farmers have been advised to shift to crops that require less water.
Sources in the Tamil Nadu water resources department told IANS that the 55 per cent of water that is remaining in the major reservoirs of the region will not be used for agriculture and it will only be used for domestic consumption.
The weather department has already said that the temperature in these districts would touch 44 degrees Celsius in days to come.
At present the temperatures in these districts are anywhere between 38 to 42 degrees Celsius.
Extreme heatwave conditions have led to the drying up of Palar River which is one of the main



sources of water in this region. The Tamil Nadu agriculture department has advised farmers to cultivate crops like maize, ragi, groundnuts, wheat and pulses like green gram and urad as these crops require less water.
In Tamil Nadu the crops traditionally being cultivated by farmers are sugar cane, paddy and banana which require large quantities of water.
K Ramaswamy, a sugar cane farmer in Tirupattur, told IANS, "The agriculture department has already asked us to switch from sugar cane and paddy farming to maize, wheat and ragi cultivation as there is extreme shortage of water in the region. We are however yet to decide on this even though the department has informed us of the benefits of switching over to the new crops."
The farmers have also been advised to switch to drip irrigation techniques for water conservation.

'Ensure uninterrupted drinking water supply'
Chennai: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin Saturday directed the officials to ensure uninterrupted drinking water supply to the people this summer. Chairing a review meeting with the state government officials here in the wake of heat wave conditions prevailing in many parts in the state, the Chief Minister said summer has brought with it two kinds of crisis. "One is excessive heat and another is increasing demand for drinking water," Stalin said.
Although the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu received heavy rainfall leading to floods during the previous Northeast Monsoon season, other parts of the state, especially the western districts of Tamil Nadu considered as catchment areas, received less rainfall, he said.

Lucknow cops get AC helmets on trial basis



Lucknow, April 27: The Lucknow Traffic Department has provided AC helmets, as part of a trial phase for the first time in Lucknow, to four traffic personnel.
This "cool initiative" is designed to help cops on duty beat the heat under the scorching sun.
These helmets have AC vents to channel the coolness to the head along with a hard plastic shield that works as goggles to protect the eyes from the sun's glare.
The helmet is connected to a large battery pack tied to the waist of a person. When the battery is drained, a red light on top will alert the person to put the helmet on charging.
"The AC installed in the helmet will reduce the temperature by 10-15 degrees and this will provide relief to cops from the scorching heat," said ADCP (Traffic) Ajay Kumar.
After a successful trial, about 500 such helmets will be procured from a Hyderabad-based company. A month-long trial will decide if the product can be introduced formally, said the official.

"The number will be decided by the higher authorities. The weight of the helmet is half of that of a normal helmet and our cops felt very comfortable," added the ADCP.
"This is the second such initiative in UP; a similar trial was conducted by the Kanpur Police," said DCP (Traffic) Salmantaj Patil. Recently, similar trials were conducted in Bhubaneswar, Vadodara and other cities.
There will be two types of helmets - with battery backups of two and eight hours, respectively. Reportedly, the first one will be provided to traffic personnel while the one with more backup will be provided to police personnel.
"Despite being comfortable for the user, the helmet will be checked for any health risk as one part of the body is cool and the rest is exposed to heat. We will examine if it has any negative effects," said the ADCP.



Boats anchored following a 45-day ban on fishing imposed by the Tamil Nadu government, at Ennore near Chennai

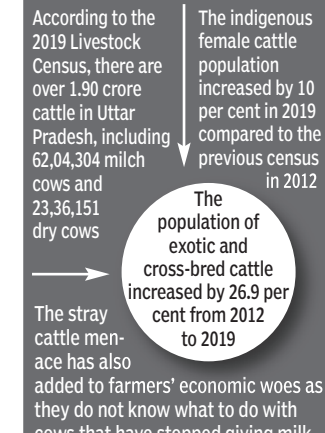
Stray cattle menace key poll issue for farmers

Hathras/Firozabad, April 27: In villages across western Uttar Pradesh, the sight of emaciated stray cattle roaming around has become all too common and so is the sight of destroyed crops. When they can't enter fields, many cows feed on plastic and garbage.
Farmers are also upset over the state government's decision to reinforce an old order that no barbed wires should be used to fence fields. Now, most farmers use plain wires or saris and dupattas to fence fields.
"Earlier, we would give the old cow in exchange for 10-20 per cent of the down payment and get a new one. But with the new policy, even that is not possible. We have no option but to either sell them illegally or abandon them," said a farmer who did not wish



to be named. In May 2017, the Centre banned the sale of cattle for slaughter in animal markets across the country.
The environment ministry notified the stringent 'Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock

Markets) Rules, 2017' under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.
Every village in western Uttar Pradesh has a cow shelter but they are at capacity. PTI visited five cow shelters in the region and they were all at capacity.
Chaudhary Pushpendra Singh, the president of farmers' organisation Kisan Shakti Sangh, stressed the importance of adopting sustainable solutions, such as setting up more cow shelters, promoting livestock insurance schemes and incentivising responsible cattle rearing practices, to tackle the stray cattle crisis.
This region is a potato belt, a crop that cows often eat. Though they do not consume wheat, they ruin the crop while passing through the fields, he said.
Amid the election fervour, this issue stands as a potent symbol of the broader challenges faced by rural India, he said, underscoring the critical need for proactive governance and sustainable development strategies. As polling day approaches, voters in western Uttar Pradesh are keenly watching how various candidates in the fray propose to address the stray cattle menace. So far, they do not have much to look forward to with political parties keeping mum on the issue.





BJD's candidate for Karanja Assembly constituency, Basanti Hembram, and party's Keonjhar LS nominee, Dhanurjaya Sidhu, addressing workers at a party meeting in Karanja of Mayurbhanj district



Koraput MP and Congress leader Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka presenting his five year work report at a press conference organised at his residence in Koraput

PM Modi a 'mehengai' man: Priyanka

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dharampur (Gujarat), April 27: Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Saturday targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi over inflation calling him a "mehengai" man and claimed that the ruling BJP's top leadership may be pretending to be in denial mode now, but the party will change the Constitution if it returns to power.

"BJP leaders and candidates are saying that they will change the Constitution. But Prime Minister Narendra Modi is denying it. This is their tactic," she said at a public rally at Dharampur village of tribal-dominated Valsad district held in support of Congress candidate for ST-reserved Valsad Lok Sabha seat, Anant Patel.



PM Modi enters the stage during elections like "Superman", she said, asking people to remember him as a "mehengai (inflation)" man. "BJP leaders project the prime minister as powerful and say that 'chutki bajake ladai rukva dete hai (he can stop the war - Russia-Ukraine - with the snap of fingers)'. Then why is he unable to remove poverty just like that," she asked.

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wage to ₹400, working out "sub-plans" for Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs), a special budget for tribals and declaring tribal-dominated areas as scheduled areas.

The Congress general secretary alleged that PM Modi reduced the price of LPG cylinders only due to the general elections, claiming he had no sympathy for the people. She also responded to PM Modi's relentless attack on Congress over "wealth redistribution".

"He is now warning people that Congress will enter their houses with an X-ray machine to conduct a search, then snatch your ornaments as well as 'mangalsutra' kept in safes and give it away to others. Is that even possible? Is he doing this out of nervousness," she asked.

The BJP has fielded Dhaval Patel against Congress' Anant Patel in the Valsad constituency. All 26 Lok Sabha seats in Gujarat will go to polls in the third phase of general elections on May 7. BJP had clean-swept the state in the 2014 and 2019 polls.

Ex-Tripura CM, state BJP leaders meet to raise Odisha vote share

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, April 27: Former Tripura chief minister Biplab Kumar Deb held a closed-door meeting with Odisha BJP leaders here Saturday and discussed strategies to increase the vote share of the saffron camp in the upcoming Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in the eastern state, party sources said.

The discussion was held two days after Union Home Minister Amit Shah, during a meeting with party leaders, had reportedly mentioned that the BJP's vote share soared from 2-3 per cent in Tripura and it managed to come to power there.

Sources said Deb was invited by the Odisha BJP to sharpen its strategies before the polls and guide it to achieve the goal.

Deb, the Rajya Sabha MP, is expected to stay in Odisha for a month till the end of the elections in the state, they said.

Shah had also said that the BJP's vote share in Odisha in the 2019 Assembly elections

was 32 per cent and 38 per cent in the Lok Sabha polls.

Therefore, an increase in BJP's vote share is possible and the party can form the government in the state, Shah said in the meeting.

The Odisha BJP is also contemplating consulting Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma while making its strategies for the elections, a senior party leader said.

Assam was another state where the BJP improved its vote share and formed the government.

"If required, we will consult chief ministers of other BJP-ruled states and strategists to achieve the goal in Odisha," the party leader said.

Meanwhile, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, one of the BJP's star campaigners, is scheduled to participate in a roadshow for party nominee Pradip Purohit from the Bargarh Lok Sabha constituency Sunday.

Sai will join the roadshow in the Jharsuguda Assembly segment.

Wait for few more days: Kharge on Amethi, Rae Bareilly candidates

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, April 27: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge Saturday said that the names of party candidates for prestigious Amethi and Rae Bareilly seats in Uttar Pradesh will be announced in a few days.

Addressing a press conference here, he claimed that though the BJP says the corrupt must be put in jails, when leaders facing corruption charges join the saffron party, they are put on the lap and sent to Rajya Sabha or Assembly. "You have to wait for a few more days... when the names of candidates come from people to me and I sign the notification, it will be announced," he said when asked about candidates for Amethi and Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha constituencies.

Those questioning Congress leaders for changing constituencies must also tell me how many times have (Atal Bihari) Vajpayee and (Lal Krishna) Advani changed their seats, Kharge said, when asked about the BJP criticising Rahul Gandhi for fighting the elections from Kerala's Wayanad instead of Amethi.

'BJP eyeing anti-incumbency, Modi wave to vote out BJD'

Senior saffron party leader Tomar claims the BJP will win at least 16 out of 21 Lok Sabha seats in the state and 80 of 147 Assembly seats

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



party has consolidated its organisation from the level of polling booths to mandals and districts where workers are geared up to secure victory in both Parliament and state Assembly polls, the leader added.

On two BJP leaders Bhruvu Baxipatra and Lekhasri Samantsinghar joining the BJD, Tomar said, "We denied them MLA tickets. But, BJD has given Lok Sabha tickets to them. It shows where the BJD now stands."

Asked how BJP gave tickets to KV Singhdeo and his wife Sangeeta, members of the same family in Odisha when the party is against dynastic politics, he replied, "None of the leaders are new to politics. They are experienced campaigners. Dynastic politics means one family-run party"

He alleged the BJD government, which ruled the state for a long period, has misutilised central grants.

While piped water supply connection has been provided to nine crore households in the country, Odisha is lagging behind.

Similarly, the Centre has sanctioned PMAY houses to Odisha, but the state government has allotted many of those to ineligible beneficiaries while the genuine people remain deprived," he alleged.

Now that Modi has promised an additional three crore PMAY houses in the next five years, the senior BJP genuine beneficiaries from

Odisha will get allotments after the BJP forms government in the state, said the BJP leader.

While 13 crore people have availed of the Ayushman Bharat Yojana benefits across the country, the people of Odisha, especially its migrant workers, are not able to reap the benefit due to the BJD government's apathy. BJP will form a government here and implement the scheme, he said.

Tomar highlighted the plight of state farmers who failed to avail the benefits of PM Kisan Yojana on account of faulty documentation.

The BJD government is only branding central schemes in its name to take credit for those. The Central government has been providing free ration to poor families. But, the state government puts its sticker on the bags, alleged Tomar.

On Sam Pitroda's remark on inheritance tax, he said, "Congress says Muslims have the first right. But, we are saying the first right should be for the poor people of the country."

Reacting to the sops announced by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi ahead of the elections, Tomar said, "He has lost credibility. Erstwhile PM Manmohan Singh had announced a waiver of crop loans. But, CAG called it a scam. Modiji is giving assistance to the farmers under the PM Kisan scheme and money is being transferred directly to their accounts. People trust Modi's guarantee as he fulfilled triple talaq, 33 per cent quota for women and abrogation of Article 370."

The Congress is campaigning for 'garibi hatao'. The party was in power for 60 to 70 years, but they did nothing for the poor people. The Modi government in the last 10 years brought 25 crore poor people above the poverty line, the senior BJP leader said.



ST Chairman Kartik Pandian receiving applications from supporters while addressing BJD workers at a party meeting held at Mini Stadium in Nuapada district, Saturday



Many workers from BJD and Congress in Uditnagar and Chhend localities joined BJP in the presence of BJP's candidate for Sundargarh Parliamentary constituency, Jual Oram at a merger meeting in Rourkela

international



I earnestly implore the professors. Please continue to stand by the patients as you have done so far, and please persuade your students to return now
HAN DUCK-SOO | PM, SOUTH KOREA

WARSHIP BOOST FOR PAK
China has launched the first of the eight Hangor-class submarines to be built for its all-weather ally Pakistan to provide it with state-of-the-art warships, adding a new dimension to their growing bilateral military cooperation



of the day quote

The two countries (US, China) should help each other succeed rather than hurt each other, seek common ground and reserve differences rather than engage in vicious competition, and honour words with actions rather than say one thing but do the opposite
XI JINPING | PRESIDENT, CHINA

I will give any sacrifice required for actual freedom but will never compromise on my or my nation's freedom. I will remain in jail if I have to for nine more years, or more, but I will never strike a deal with those who have enslaved my nation
IMRAN KHAN | FORMER PM, PAKISTAN

The humanitarian issue of the release of the ship's crew is of our serious concern and we have announced consular access, release, and extradition to their ambassadors in Tehran
HOSSEIN AMIR-ABDOLLAHIAN | FOREIGN MINISTER, IRAN

SHORT TAKES

Tornadoes hit US

Omaha (US): Tornadoes wreaked havoc Friday in the Midwest, causing a building to collapse with dozens of people inside and destroying and damaging hundreds of homes, many around Omaha, Nebraska. As of Friday night, there were several reports of injuries but no immediate deaths reported. Tornado warnings continued to be issued into the night in Iowa. One of the most destructive tornadoes moved for miles Friday through mostly rural farmland before chewing up homes and other structures in the suburbs of Omaha. Photos on social media showed the small city of Minden, Iowa, about 30 miles (48.3 kilometers) northeast of Omaha also sustained heavy damage.

Fire takes 10 lives

Rio de Janeiro: A fire tore through a small hotel in the southern Brazilian city of Porto Alegre early Friday, killing at least 10 people and injuring 11, authorities said. The fire broke out in the early hours in the three-story building, which provided affordable housing in single rooms and had a contract with the municipal government to shelter homeless people. The establishment didn't have proper licensing and lacked an emergency fire plan, the fire brigade of the Rio Grande do Sul state said. Eight of the 11 people rescued from the fire are still hospitalized, two of them still in serious condition but under no life threat, local authorities said.

Quake rocks Japan

Tokyo: An earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 6.9 Saturday jolted off Japan's Bonin Islands or Ogasawara Islands, the country's weather agency said. The tremor occurred at 5.36 p.m. local time (0836 GMT) at a depth of 540 km, measuring 3 on the Japanese seismic intensity scale of 7 in parts of the prefecture, said the Japan Meteorological Agency. The epicentre was located off the west coast of the islands, about 875 km south of Tokyo, at a latitude of 27.9 degrees north and a longitude of 140.0 degrees east.

3 women killed

New York: Three Indian-origin women hailing from Gujarat were killed on the spot in a deadly crash in the US state of South Carolina when their overspeeding car veered out of control before jumping at least 20 feet in the air and crashing into trees, authorities said.

Cease-fire in Gaza likely

Hamas reviewing Israeli proposal for truce as possible Rafah offensive looms



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cairo, April 27: Hamas said Saturday it was reviewing a new Israeli proposal for a cease-fire in Gaza, as Egypt intensified efforts to broker a deal to end the months-long war and stave off a possible Israeli ground offensive into the southern Gaza city of Rafah. Senior Hamas official Khalil al-Hayya said the Palestinian militant group was evaluating Israel's proposal, and "upon completion of its study, it will submit its response."

He gave no details of Israel's offer but said it was in response to a proposal from Hamas two weeks ago. Negotiations earlier this month centered on a six-week cease-fire proposal and the release of 40 civilian and sick hostages in exchange for freeing hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

ACCORDING TO AN EGYPTIAN OFFICIAL ...

- Hamas' statement came hours after a high-level Egyptian delegation wrapped up a visit to Israel where it discussed a "new vision" for a prolonged cease-fire in Gaza
- The discussions between Egyptian and Israeli officials focused on the first stage of a multi-phase plan that would include a limited exchange of hostages held by Hamas for Palestinian prisoners
- And also the return of a significant number of displaced Palestinians to their homes in northern Gaza with minimum restrictions
- The mediators are working on a compromise that will answer most of both parties' main demands, which could pave the way to continued negotiations with the goal of a larger deal to end the war

It was not immediately clear whether Israel's latest response to Hamas on a cease-fire was directly related to Friday's visit to Tel Aviv by Egyptian mediators. As the war drags on and casualties mount, there has been growing international pressure for Hamas and Israel to reach an agreement on a cease-fire and

holed up, despite calls for restraint from the international community including Israel's staunchest ally, the United States. Egypt has cautioned an offensive into Rafah could have "catastrophic consequences" on the humanitarian situation in Gaza, as well as on regional peace and security.

The Israeli military has massed dozens of tanks and armored vehicles in southern Israel close to Rafah and hit targets in the city in near-daily airstrikes.

The US has been critical of Israeli policies in the West Bank and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who is expected in Israel Tuesday, has recently determined an army unit committed human rights abuses there before the Gaza war. But Blinken said in an undated letter to House Speaker Mike Johnson, obtained by The Associated Press Friday, that he is postponing a decision on blocking aid to the unit to give Israel more time to right the wrongdoing.

Hamas has said it will not back down from its demands for a permanent cease-fire and full withdrawal of Israeli troops, both of which Israel has rejected. Israel says it will continue military operations until Hamas is defeated and that it will retain a security presence in Gaza afterward.

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Senior Western and Arab officials are expected to meet next week in Riyadh to discuss the months-long war in the Gaza Strip on the sidelines of an economic forum in Saudi Arabia, according to diplomatic sources

Russian missiles pound Ukrainian power plants



REUTERS

Kyiv, April 27: A Russian missile attack pounded power facilities in the centre and west of Ukraine Saturday, mounting pressure on the ailing energy system as the country faces a shortage of air defences despite a breakthrough in US military aid.

The strike using ballistic missiles and cruise missiles fired by Russian strategic bombers based in the Arctic Circle was the fourth large-scale aerial assault targeting the power system since March 22.

"The enemy again massively shelled Ukrainian energy facilities," said DTEK, the largest private electricity company, adding that four of its six thermal power plants had suffered new damage overnight.

Rescuers battled to put out massive fires at several energy facilities in the western regions of Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk, which border NATO members Poland and Romania, officials said.

In President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's hometown of Kryvyi Rih, the supply of running water was disrupted after strikes on energy facilities in the central Dnipropetrovsk region, officials said.

In the northeastern city of Kharkiv that has been heavily bombed in recent weeks, a mis-

THE STRIKE USING BALLISTIC MISSILES AND CRUISE MISSILES FIRED BY RUSSIAN STRATEGIC BOMBERS BASED IN THE ARCTIC CIRCLE WAS THE FOURTH LARGE-SCALE AERIAL ASSAULT TARGETING THE POWER SYSTEM SINCE MARCH 22

ACCORDING TO UKRAINE'S AIR FORCE, RUSSIA HAD LAUNCHED 34 MISSILES OVERNIGHT, OF WHICH 21 HAD BEEN SHOT DOWN BY UKRAINIAN AIR DEFENCES

RUSSIA DENIES TARGETING CIVILIANS DURING ITS AIR ATTACKS, BUT SAYS THE UKRAINIAN ENERGY SYSTEM IS A LEGITIMATE MILITARY TARGET

sile struck a hospital holding 60 patients overnight, injuring a woman and damaging the building, nearby water pipes and power lines, regional governor Oleh Syniehubov said.

Ukraine, which has tried to take the fight back to Russia in recent months using long-range drones, attacked the Ilsky and Slavyansk oil refineries in Russia's Krasnodar region overnight, a Ukrainian intelligence source told Reuters.

The drone strike conducted by the SBU security service caused fires at the facilities, the source said. Ukrainian drones also attacked Russia's Kuchchevsk military airfield in the same southern region, the source added.

SNIPPETS

Houthis come to fore

Sanaa: Yemen's Houthi group said early Saturday that they had launched a missile attack and hit a British oil tanker in the Red Sea and shot down a US drone in northern Yemen. "Our naval forces (Friday) targeted a British oil ship, Andromeda Star, in the Red Sea with a number of appropriate naval missiles and hit it directly," Houthi military spokesman Yahya Sarea read a statement in the Houthi-run al-Masirah TV channel. He also said that their air defence forces succeeded in shooting down an American MQ9 aircraft in the airspace of Saada Governorate (northern Yemen), confirming their intention of carrying out more military operations in support of the Palestinian people until the Israeli siege and aggression against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip stop.

N Korea sticks to its plan

Seoul: North Korea Saturday reiterated its commitment to launching more reconnaissance satellites into orbit this year after putting its first spy satellite into orbit in November. Pyongyang "will carry out an important mission to enhance its space reconnaissance capabilities as planned to monitor and control the US and other hostile forces' military movements and aggressive attempts," an unnamed spokesperson of the North's National Aerospace Technology Administration (NATA) said in a statement carried by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), Yonhap news agency reported. North Korea put its first spy satellite, Mallyong-1, into orbit in November after two failed attempts in May and August and has vowed to launch three more this year. The North blamed the "US ambitions to militarise space" for its push for space development.

Sigh of relief for Indian crew

Dubai: Iran Saturday said the mostly Indian crew of a Portuguese-flagged ship that was seized by Iranian forces in its maritime territory two weeks ago is being granted consular access, raising hopes for their early release and extradition. Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard seized the Israeli-affiliated, Portuguese-flagged MSC Aries, a container ship, manned by a crew of 25, including 17 Indians, near the Strait of Hormuz April 13 as a result of a series of attacks between Iran and Israel. Ann Tessa Joseph, the sole woman cadet among the 17 Indian crew members of the MSC Aries was released April 18. Earlier Thursday, in New Delhi, the Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said there are certain "technicalities involved" in the return of the remaining 16 Indian crew members.



OPPOSING FOR GOOD: Protesters holding slogans reading "Oppose the Extension of Dangerous and Old Nuclear Power Plants," stage a die-in in protest during an anti-nuclear demonstration in front of Taiwan's Legislative Yuan in Taipei, Taiwan, Saturday. Hundreds of protesters gathered for the 10th anniversary of their main actions to stop the construction of the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant in 2014

Climate change main driver of biodiversity decline: Study

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 27: Climate change could become the main driver of biodiversity decline by the mid-century, a new research has found. Studying changes in land-use patterns and their impacts on biodiversity, an international team of researchers found that biodiversity around the world could have declined by 2-11 per cent. "By including all world regions in our model, we were able to fill many blind spots and address criticism of other approaches working with fragmented and potentially biased data," said Henrique Pereira, research group head at the



German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv), and the first author of the study published in the journal 'Science'. Examining how biodiversity and ecosystems might evolve in the future, the researchers found

Research highlights

- Climate change poses an imminent threat to biodiversity and ecosystem services
- While land-use change has historically been a significant factor, the findings indicate that climate change could overtake it as the primary driver of biodiversity loss by mid-century
- Conservation and restoration efforts should be prioritised globally as necessary natural climate solutions

all global regions, regardless of emissions scenario. The researchers called for a "truly integrated approach" considering varied sustainability aspects to reduce conflicts between policies and safeguard biodiversity in the coming decades. "For instance, while bio-energy deployment is still a critical element of the majority of climate stabilisation scenarios, it also poses a threat to species habitats," said IASA Biodiversity and Natural Resources Program Director Petr Havlik, one of the study co-authors. The findings suggested that conservation and restoration efforts should be prioritised globally as necessary natural climate solutions, the authors said.

Student anti-war protesters dig in after police called

ASSOCIATED PRESS

New York, April 27: Students protesting the Israel-Hamas war at universities across US, some of whom have clashed with police in riot gear, dug in Saturday and vowed to keep their demonstrations going, as faculty at several schools condemned university presidents who have called in law enforcement to remove protesters.

As Columbia University continues negotiations with those at a pro-Palestinian student encampment on the New York school's campus, the university's senate passed a resolution Friday that created a task force to examine the administration's leadership, which last week called in police in an attempt to clear the protest, resulting in scuffles and more than 100 arrests.

Though the university has repeatedly set and then pushed back deadlines for the removal of the encampment, the school sent an email to students Friday night saying that bringing back police "at this time" would be counterproductive.

As the death toll mounts in the war in Gaza, protesters nationwide are demanding that schools cut financial ties to Israel and divest from companies they say are enabling the conflict.

Early Saturday, police began clearing a protest on the campus of Northeastern University in Boston. The decisions to call in law enforcement, leading to hundreds of arrests nationwide, have prompted school faculty members at universities in California, Georgia and Texas to initiate or pass votes of no confidence in their leadership.

A university senate's executive committee report, which represents faculty, found Shafik and her administration took "many actions and decisions that have harmed Columbia University." Those included calling in police and allowing students to be arrested without consulting faculty, misrepresenting and suspending student protest groups and hiring private investigators.

Faculty condemns universities' leadership

business

of the day quote

Our market share in merchant UPI transactions is around 55 per cent. This gives us advantage on fee income and we may look at cross selling products to them in future

PRASHANT KUMAR | YES BANK MD AND CEO

With this space (cyber security) getting critical, national risks are also huge. It is not at the individual level but even at the national level, the cyber security risks are huge

S KRISHNAN | UNION IT SECRETARY

For years, we have been highlighting the persistent problem of foreign e-commerce companies circumventing rules and laws in their relentless pursuit of capturing the Indian market, often resorting to unethical business practices

PRAVEEN KHANDEWAL | SECRETARY GENERAL, CONFEDERATION OF ALL INDIA TRADERS

Q4 RESULTS CORNER

ICICI Bank net grows 18.5 pc

Mumbai: ICICI Bank Saturday said its March quarter consolidated net profit grew 18.5 per cent to ₹11,672 crore, helped by lower provisions. On a standalone basis, the second largest private sector lender showed a 17.4 per cent growth in its profit after tax at ₹10,708 crore for the reporting quarter against ₹9,122 crore in the year-ago period. For fiscal 2023-24, its standalone net profit grew to ₹40,888 crore from ₹31,896 crore a year ago. The core net interest income increased 8.1 per cent to ₹19,093 crore in the reporting quarter on a 16.8 per cent growth in loans. However, it was restricted by a compression in net interest margin to 4.40 per cent from 4.90 per cent in the year-ago period.

IDFC FIRST Bank profit drops 10%

New Delhi: IDFC FIRST Bank Saturday reported 10 per cent decline in net profit at ₹724 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 2024 due to substantial jump in provisions. The lender had earned a net profit of ₹803 crore in the year-ago period. Total income rose to ₹9,861 crore from ₹7,822 crore a year ago. IDFC FIRST Bank said in a regulatory filing. Interest income grew to ₹8,219 crore during the period under review, from ₹6,424 crore in the corresponding quarter a year ago. Net interest income (NII) grew 24 per cent from ₹3,597 crore in Q4 FY23 to ₹4,469 crore in Q4 FY24, it said.

Yes Bank profit doubles to ₹452cr

Mumbai: Yes Bank Saturday reported over two-fold jump in standalone net profit at ₹452 crore for March quarter 2023-24, primarily due to benefits on the provision front. In the year-ago quarter, the bank logged a profit of ₹202.43 crore. The private sector lender benefitted from write-back on income tax and interest on income tax returns, but the profits were limited by its inability to comply with the mandatory priority sector lending (PSL) requirements, its management said. For fiscal 2023-24, it reported 74 per cent growth in net profit at ₹1,251 crore. In the March quarter, the core net interest income grew just 2.3 per cent to ₹2,153 crore on the back of narrowing of Net Interest Margin to 2.4 per cent from 2.8 per cent in the year-ago period.



“In some cases, we are seeing... where people are spamming the system to generate ad money. That is obviously not ok”
ELON MUSK | X OWNER

OFFICE SPACE LEASING DROPS 25 PC ANNUALLY

Office space leasing in Delhi-NCR fell 25 per cent annually to 18.1 lakh square feet in January-March this year on lower demand from corporates, according to real estate consultant Vestian. The office space absorption stood at 24 lakh square feet in the year-ago period.



US regulator gathering info on Indian spices

IN 2019, A FEW BATCHES OF MDH PRODUCTS WERE RECALLED IN THE US FOR SALMONELLA CONTAMINATION

REUTERS



Hyderabad, April 27: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is gathering information on products of Indian spice makers MDH and Everest after Hong Kong halted sales of some of their products for allegedly containing high levels of a cancer-causing pesticide.

“The FDA is aware of the reports and is gathering additional information about the situation,” an FDA spokesperson told Reuters.

Hong Kong this month suspended sales of three MDH spice blends and an Everest spice mix for fish curries. Singapore ordered a recall of the Everest spice mix as well, saying it contains high levels of ethylene oxide, which is unfit for human consumption and a cancer risk with long exposure.

Reuters is the first to report the

quality standards of the two companies, following the moves in Hong Kong and Singapore.

India’s Spices Board, the government’s regulator for spice exports, said Wednesday it had sought data on MDH and Everest exports from authorities in Hong Kong and Singapore, and was working with the companies to find the “root cause” of the quality issues as inspections started at their plants.

In 2019, a few batches of MDH’s products were recalled in the U.S. for salmonella contamination.

U.S. FDA’s review of alleged contamination of Indian spice products. MDH and Everest did not immediately respond to Reuters requests for comment on this matter. Everest has previously said its spices are safe for consumption. MDH has not responded to queries about its products so far.

MDH and Everest spices are among the most popular in India and are also sold in Europe, Asia and North America. India’s food regulator, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), is now checking the

Deloitte projects India’s FY25 GDP growth at 6.6%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 27: Deloitte India has said it estimates India’s GDP growth at 6.6 per cent in the current fiscal helped by consumption expenditure, exports rebound and capital flows.

In its India’s economic outlook report, Deloitte said the rapid growth of the middle-income class has led to rising purchasing power and even created demand for premium luxury products and services.

With the expectation that the number of middle-to-high-income segments will be one in two households by 2030/31, up from one in four currently, we believe this trend will likely become further amplified, driving overall private consumer expenditure growth, it said.

Deloitte has revised India’s economic growth prediction for last fiscal to a range of 7.6 to 7.8 per cent. In January, the firm had projected growth for 2023-24 fiscal in the range of 6.9-7.2 per cent.

The country’s GDP growth is estimated to reach around 6.6 per cent in FY 2024-25 and 6.75 per cent in the year after, as markets learn to factor in geopolitical uncertainties in their investment and consumption decisions, Deloitte said in its quarterly update to its economic outlook.

“The global economy is expected to witness a synchronous rebound in 2025 as major election uncertainties get sorted out and the central banks of the West may announce a cou-

ple of rate cuts later in 2024. India will likely see improved capital flows and a rebound in exports,” said Deloitte India Economist Rumki Majumdar.

Strong growth numbers over the past two years have helped the economy to catch up with the pre-COVID trends. Investment, backed by strong government spending on infrastructure, has helped India maintain a steady recovery momentum, she added.

That said, there are concerns about inflation and geopolitical uncertainties feeding into higher food and fuel prices. At the same time, the prediction of above normal monsoon will likely provide some respite by positively impacting agricultural output and easing pressure on food prices. Inflation is expected to remain above the Reserve Bank of India’s target level of 4 per cent over the forecast period due to strong economic activity, Majumdar said.

Deloitte’s FY25 GDP growth estimate is similar to the projections made by the World Bank. It is, however, lower than the projections by the RBI and other agencies. The RBI has projected the Indian economy growth at 7 per cent in the current fiscal.

While the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Fitch Ratings have estimated growth at 7 per cent, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), S&P Global Ratings and Morgan Stanley projected a 6.8 per cent growth rate for FY25.

Centre allows 99.5k tonne of onion exports

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 27: The Centre Saturday said it has allowed exports of 99,500 tonnes of onions, mainly sourced from Maharashtra, to six neighbouring countries despite the ban on shipments.

The Centre has also allowed exports of 2,000 tonnes of white onion cultivated, especially, for export markets in the Middle East and some European countries.

December 8, 2023, the government banned export of onions.

In an official statement, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution said the government has “allowed export of 99,150 tonnes of onion to six neighbouring countries of Bangladesh, UAE, Bhutan, Bahrain, Mauritius and Sri Lanka”.

The export prohibition has been imposed to ensure adequate domestic availability against the backdrop of estimated lower Kharif and Rabi crops in 2023-24 compared to the previous year.

The ban was imposed amid an increase in demand in the international market, it added.

The National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL), the agency for the export of onion to these countries, sourced the domestic onions to be exported through e-platform at L1 prices.

NCEL has supplied to the agency or agencies nominated by the government of the destination country at the negotiated rate on a 100 per cent advance payment basis.



A high-level team of the Department of Consumer Affairs, NCCF and NAFED visited Nashik and Ahmednagar districts of Maharashtra from April 11-13, 2024, to create awareness among the farmers, FPOs/FPCs and PACs about the procurement of 5 lakh tonnes of onion for buffer stock

supplied as per requisition made by the destination country.

“As the largest producer of onion in the country, Maharashtra is the major supplier of onions sourced by NCEL for export,” the statement said.

The government had also allowed the export of 2,000 tonnes of white onion cultivated, especially for export markets in the Middle East and some European countries.

“Being purely export-oriented, the production cost of the white onion is higher than other onions due to higher seed cost, adoption of good agricultural practice (GAP) and compliance to strict maximum residue limits (MRL) requirements,” the statement said.

The procurement target for onion buffer out of Rabi crop 2024 under the Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) of the Department of Consumer Affairs has been

fixed at 5 lakh tonnes this year.

The Central agencies, like NCCF and NAFED are tying up local agencies like FPOs/FPCs/PACs to support the procurement, storage and farmers’ registration to begin the procurement of any store-worthy onion.

A high-level team of the Department of Consumer Affairs, NCCF and NAFED visited Nashik and Ahmednagar districts of Maharashtra from April 11-13, 2024, to create awareness among the farmers, FPOs/FPCs and PACs about the procurement of 5 lakh tonnes of onion for buffer stock.

To reduce the storage loss of onions, the department has decided to enhance the quantum of stocks to be irradiated and cold stored from 1,200 tonnes last year to over 5,000 tonnes this year with technical support from BARC, Mumbai.

The pilot of onion irradiation and cold storage taken up last year has been found to have resulted in the reduction of storage loss to less than 10 per cent, the statement said.

In March, the Union Agriculture Ministry released the data for onion production.

As per the data, onion production in 2023-24 (First Advance Estimates) is expected to be around 254.73 lakh tonnes compared to around 302.08 lakh tonnes last year.

This is due to a decrease of 34.31 lakh tonne output in Maharashtra, 9.95 lakh tonne in Karnataka, 3.54 lakh tonne in Andhra Pradesh and 3.12 lakh tonne in Rajasthan, the data showed.

Meta loses billions of dollars in quest to lead AR-VR market

THE MARK ZUCKERBERG-RUN COMPANY IS LOSING MONEY AT A RATE OF MORE THAN \$1 BILLION PER MONTH SINCE JUNE 2022 ON ITS AR/VR DREAM, ACCORDING TO GAMESINDUSTRY.BIZ

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, April 27: As Meta (formerly Facebook) continues to bet big on gaming, it has lost close to \$4 billion on its augmented reality/virtual reality (AR-VR) division.

The Mark Zuckerberg-run company showed continued losses in its AR/VR Reality Labs division in its latest quarterly results.

The company is losing money

at a rate of more than \$1 billion per month since June 2022 on its AR/VR dream, according to GamesIndustry.biz.

“We continue to expect operating losses to increase meaningfully year-over-year due to our ongoing product development efforts and our investments to further scale our ecosystem,” according to the company.

Meta CFO Susan Li said on the Q1 earnings call that “We continue to expect operating



losses to increase meaningfully year-over-year”.

Meta’s Reality Labs recorded \$440 million in revenue but an

overall loss of \$3.85 billion.

“The initial signs are quite positive here. But building the leading AI will also be a larger undertaking than the other experiences we’ve added to our apps, and this is likely going to take several years,” said Zuckerberg.

Meta captured 59 per cent of the Extended Reality (XR) headset market in 2023.

Notably, Meta strategically lowered the price of its existing Quest 2 throughout the year, making it an attractive option for budget-conscious consumers, especially during the holiday season, according to Counterpoint Research.

This strategy helped Meta maintain its lead until the launch of Quest 3 in Q4 2023.

Airtel launches intl roaming packs

AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 27: Telecom giant Bharti Airtel has unveiled affordable international roaming packs for customers with tariffs starting at ₹133 per day.

The new range of packs covers 184 countries and offers enhanced data benefits, in-flight connectivity and 24x7 contact centre support, according to a company statement. Customers travelling to these 184 countries no longer need to subscribe to multiple packs for various travel destinations, Airtel said, adding that they will now have the convenience of choosing the duration of travel and enjoying seamless connectivity anywhere in the world through one single pack.

