



## Schooling paparazzi

Janhvi Kapoor slams paparazzi behaviour, says she has met photographers individually to address the issue

LEISURE | P2



## Royals at Easter Service

King Charles III and Queen Camilla attend Easter service at Windsor Castle with Prince William and Catherine

INTERNATIONAL | P10



## FPIs' selling spree

Foreign investors continue to exit Indian equities, withdrawing ₹19,837 crore in the first two trading sessions of April

BUSINESS | P11



## LSG beat SRH

Skipper Rishabh Pant and Mohd Shami lead Lucknow Super Giants to a comfortable five-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad in IPL

SPORTS | P12



**DAILY GRIND:** Salt pan workers cycle past salt fields on their way to Deendayal Port during a media visit organised on the occasion of National Maritime Day at Kandla in Kutch district of Gujarat, Sunday

# Ethanol push in petrol fuels worry

MANOJ KUMAR JENA, OP

**Bhubaneswar, April 5:** In a significant step aimed at curbing pollution and reducing dependence on imported crude oil, the Union govt has rolled out E20 fuel—a blend of 20% ethanol and 80% petrol—across the country from April 1, 2026. Meanwhile, unconfirmed reports suggest that ethanol blending levels may be increased to 40% in future. While some experts expressed concern that higher ethanol content could impair engine efficiency, affect piston performance, and damage automotive components, others have welcomed it.

According to Niti Aayog expert committee report, "Ethanol or ethyl alcohol is an organic compound produced from biomass such as sugarcane, maize and grains through fermentation. It has a higher octane number than gasoline, which helps improve fuel efficiency."

However, reports said internal combustion engines convert 40% of the fuel's energy while 60% is lost due to heat or friction. Based on this report, the efficiency of E20 will decrease. Besides, petrol is highly combustible as compared to ethanol.

Expressing concerns, Odisha Automobile Development Association (OADA) chairman Sandeep Mohanty said, "The focus is now shifting towards EVs. E20 may reduce pollution, but it could affect vehicles. Blending in fuel can impact its quality and reduce mileage, apart from affecting engine piston performance in the long run."

Mohd Jahid Khan, researcher and lecturer at Dept of Automobile Engineering, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Cuttack, said, "Vehicle engines are designed for specific fuel properties. Any change in fuel density can affect engine performance, including piston movement. If E20 matches the properties of conventional petrol, it may not cause issues. However, ethanol has a different chemical nature, which could impact engine components over time."

Utkal Petroleum Dealers' Association general secretary Sanjay Lath said, "Ethanol blending started at 1.5% in 2014 and reached around 10% by 2020-21. The Centre had set a target of 20% blending which has now been achieved. People have been using ethanol-blended petrol for years."

"As ethanol is derived from biomass, it will benefit farmers and help reduce pollution," Lath added.

According to sources, an inter-ministry committee has been formed that is likely to present a report to the petroleum ministry on 30% ethanol use. For this, research is being conducted on enhanced engine and infrastructure which will support the blending of E30 in petrol. The government has now developed flexi engines which can perform with 100% ethanol, said sources.

Overall, it can be said that while consumers will keep paying enhanced fuel costs, the liquid that goes into their vehicles will have lower combustibility and damage pumps, carburetors, plastic and rubber pipes and other engine parts which will force consumers to spend more on vehicle maintenance.

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## Malkangiri group clash: 5 arrested

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, April 5:** Police arrested five persons in connection with a clash that broke out between two groups in Malkangiri district Saturday evening, a senior officer said Sunday.

The incident took place at tribal-dominated Palkonda village Saturday evening over the holding of prayer by a particular group of people in the village, the police officer said.

"The disturbance erupted between the two groups as one majority group asked the other to conduct the prayer in another place on the outskirts of the village, as they had to conduct some puja inside the village. However, the other group objected to it, which led to a heated argument between them," Raj Kishore Dash, additional superintendent of police (ASP), Malkangiri, told PTI over the phone.

In anger, some people of the majority group removed the asbestos from the roofs of three houses of the other group, he said, adding, "the roofs are being restored by the district administration".

On being informed, a police force, along with senior officers of the district, rushed to the village and restored normalcy there, Dash said.

Two platoons of police force (60 personnel) have been deployed in the village, he said.

# Govt bans small cylinders

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

**Bhubaneswar, April 5:** In a sweeping move, the state government Sunday banned open sale and refilling of 5kg LPG cylinders, while making e-KYC mandatory for any LPG refills. The decision comes amid concerns over supply disruptions linked to West Asia crisis and a spike in illegal LPG trade across the state.

Announcing the policy shift, Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare (FS&CW) Minister Krushna Chandra Patra said the government is moving toward a tightly regulated distribution system. Under the new rules, all consumers must complete e-KYC verification, and LPG refills will be supplied only through authorised distributors against registered connections.

The government has already imposed refill limits: urban households can now book one cylinder every 25 days, while rural households are restricted to one refill every 45 days.

Officials said the 5kg cylinders were widely misused for unauthorised refilling and resale at inflated prices. "This step is necessary to plug leakages and ensure fair distribution," a senior official said.

Statewide enforcement has already begun, with over 100 cylinders seized in recent raids across districts such as Angul and Gajapati.

However, the sudden ban has triggered widespread concern



## STUDENTS, WORKERS FEEL THE PINCH

**T**he decision to ban small cylinders – 1kg and 5 kg-taken amid supply disruptions linked to the West Asia crisis, has triggered panic among bachelors living in paying guest (PG) accommodations, students, and low-income families. Many have opposed the move saying that livelihood would be impacted severely if the ban is not lifted at the earliest.

P4

among migrant workers, students, and tenants—many of whom banked upon the smaller cylinders due to lack of permanent addresses.

"I live in a single room and I don't have documents for a 14.2kg connection. The 5kg cylinder was my only option. Now, I don't know how I will cook my food. Most of restaurants are charging high prices while some of them have already been shut," said Ramesh Mahakul, working in a private company in Bhubaneswar and staying in a PG accommodation.

Students, too, are going to feel the pinch of the new decision. "We used to cook simple meals at night. Now, we survive on bread or curd rice. You can't study on an empty stomach," said Abhishek Mohanty, a college student.

## No curbs at nat'l level

There is no restriction on sale of small 5kg LPG cylinders at national level, with about 6.6 lakh bottles sold since March 23. Unlike the subsidised domestic 14.2-kg cylinders, the 5kg bottles, called FTL cylinders, are priced at market rates and do not require any address proof for procurement from a nearby LPG distributorship.

## 1 killed, 3 hurt in lightning strikes

**Bhawanipatna:** A woman was killed and three others were critically injured after lightning struck them at Baladiamal village under Junagarh police limits in Kalahandi district Sunday. The incident occurred when the victims were returning from agricultural fields. According to reports, lightning strike hit the group of labourers, leaving one woman dead on the spot and injuring three others. The deceased has been identified as Sanchita Biswal, 56 and the injured Khiradei Pradhan, 42, Samyukta Lahajal, 62, and Bhumisuta Lahajal, 25. The injured were admitted to Junagarh community health centre (CHC).

# Trump issues expletive-laden threats

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Washington, April 5:** US President Donald Trump Sunday made new, expletive-laden threats to escalate strikes on Iran and its infrastructure if it doesn't open the Strait of Hormuz by his deadline, after American forces rescued an aviator whose Iran-downed plane fell behind enemy lines.

A defiant Iran showed no sign of backing down, striking infrastructure targets in neighbouring Gulf Arab countries and challenging the US account of the rescue.

In a social media post, Trump promised strikes on Iran's power plants and bridges and said the country would be "living in Hell"



if the strait, a crucial waterway for global trade, isn't opened to marine traffic by Tuesday. He ended with "Praise be to Allah."

Trump has issued such deadlines before but extended them when mediators have claimed progress toward ending the war, which has killed thousands, shaken global markets, cut off key shipping routes and spiked fuel prices in just over five weeks.

Both sides have threatened and hit civilian targets like oil fields and desalination plants critical for drinking water, bringing warnings of possible war crimes. "Iranian civilians will be the first to suffer from the destruction of power plants and bridges," Amnesty International head Agnes Callamard said on social media, calling Trump's threat "revolting."

## Diplomatic efforts on

Oman's Foreign Ministry said that deputy foreign ministers and experts from Iran and Oman met to discuss proposals to ensure "smooth transit" through the strait. Oman has often served as a mediator between the US and Iran.

US Air Force officer rescued P-10

# Retd judge welcomes daughter home with drums, garlands

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Meerut (UP), April 5:** In a striking departure from conventional social attitudes, a family in Uttar Pradesh's Meerut marked a divorce not with silence but celebration.

Retired judge Gyanendra Kumar Sharma welcomed home his only daughter Pranita Vashistha with drums, garlands and sweets, sending out a strong message against stigma, after a family court granted her divorce Saturday.

According to her counsels Rajeev Giri and Naseeb Saifi, Pranita had married an Army Major from Shahjahanpur December 19, 2018.

However, the marriage soon ran into trouble, with allegations of continued mental, physical and emotional distress at her matrimonial home.

Despite the birth of a son, the situation did not improve, prompting Pranita to file for divorce in the Meerut family court. Principal Judge Shaktiputra Tomar granted the divorce Saturday.

Soon after the court's decision, the family turned the moment into a celebration of a "new beginning".

As Pranita stepped out of the court premises, relatives

## DIVORCE NO STIGMA



danced to the beat of drums and escorted her home in a festive procession. At home, Sharma welcomed his daughter with

garlands and distributed sweets. Family members wore black T-shirts emblazoned with the message "I Love My Daughter".

Vashistha died in an accident at Chandigarh in 2022.

Recalling her ordeal, Pranita said she had become mentally fragile during the marriage but credited her family's unwavering support for helping her rebuild her life.

She urged women facing abuse not to remain silent. "Stand up for yourself. Become strong, educate yourself and be independent before thinking about marriage," she said.

Locals believe the family's gesture could help challenge entrenched social taboos around divorce and encourage a more supportive approach towards women seeking dignity and freedom.

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Come, see our leaders campaigning, laughing, and posing for photos, and you'll also feel there is no LPG crisis



**HALLE BAILEY OPENS UP ON MOTHERHOOD**

Hollywood actress Halle Bailey is in her mom era, and is loving every bit of it. The *You, Me & Tuscany* star, 26, recently opened up about her journey to and through motherhood. She told 'People', "I think after I had my baby I was like, 'I'm grown-grown now'. He's made me more sure of myself and confident in my voice. 'Stronger' is my word for this year"

**HAWAII STORMS HIT JURASSIC WORLD SET**

Hollywood star Chris Pratt revealed that the bungalow belonging to his character Owen Grady in the 2015 *Colin Trevorrow*-helmed sequel "was destroyed" by a downed tree during the back-to-back storms in Hawaii. Pratt's interview comes after Jason Momoa revealed that he and his family were forced to flee O'ahu's North Shore



**FORTUNE FORECAST**

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**ARIES**  
You are deeply interested in the occult and the paranormal and today, you may indulge in something to do with it. So, you may buy a full colour 15x10 glossy on shamanic rites or the tantra! Ganesha suggests using such knowledge for peaceful ends.

**TAURUS**  
You are likely to get extra passionate and fervent today, predicts Ganesha. If your logic prevails over your heart, things will probably change for better during the course of the day. It is high time that you set into motion the poignant side of your character, suggests Ganesha.

**GEMINI**  
Today, you will decide to become a bit more conscious about your health. You may or may not join a gym or measure your calories, but you will definitely sit up and take notice of your lifestyle and unhealthy food habits, predicts Ganesha. A new job is also likely, which will pen a completely new chapter in your life.

**CANCER**  
You are likely start the day in the best of spirits today. Your enthusiasm and cheerfulness will be infectious, and you will be able to lift the mood wherever you go. However, your enthusiasm can be short-lived and pummeled under the weight of some bad news, leaving you distraught. Take a break in case you feel stressed out, advises Ganesha.

**LEO**  
Always dependable, that is what you are. And today, you will just underline this fact in bold strokes through your fine display of commitment to work, and your dedication to your family, says Ganesha. Your company may never find a better person for the job that you are assigned to do.

**VIRGO**  
Ganesha sees you keeping away from a joint venture. You are capable enough to handle big projects yourself. You are most likely to lead and coordinate large teams and extract work from them as you will.

**LIBRA**  
"Every man has specific natural abilities", said Aristotle. This seems to be true for you today. Your natural talents will be acknowledged and documented at work. This might prompt your equals to hold you up above the rest, and for your seniors to positively encourage you to scale greater heights.

**SCORPIO**  
The crown jewel of your character will be your supreme confidence today. Try to pick up tasks that require herculean efforts, and you shall come close to achieving them, predicts Ganesha. Your nerves and buoyant nature will be infective and also leave people awestruck.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
You are like a new hope for your company and you are assigned with many challenging projects, today. And your hard work and efforts are appreciated when you handle the projects successfully. If you are fortunate enough, you may also gain incentives very soon, predicts Ganesha.

**CAPRICORN**  
Creativity is your innate trait. But how creative can you get when dealing with day-to-day issues? You will not only answer this question with utmost modesty, but will make a great display of your creative skills by cleverly sorting out problems with your siblings, says Ganesha. You will derive pleasure by delving into knotty problems and solving them with ease.

**AQUARIUS**  
Money is on your mind today! If you want to sort out financial matters, today is the day. You may have a good time with friends in the evening. You will also realise how much your friends value you and the respect you command in your wider social circle. Ganesha says maintaining it is important.

**PISCES**  
Today, you will find yourself partitioning your time equally, and more importantly, excelling, at work as well as at home. So, while you will prove to be the right man for the job assigned to you at the office, at home you will establish yourself as the perfect family man, says Ganesha.

**Janhvi condemns paparazzi**

**Mumbai:** Janhvi Kapoor has criticised overzealous paparazzi behaviour, revealing that she recently met photographers individually to address the issue.

She spoke candidly about the inappropriate ways actresses are often photographed, stressing that while being clicked comes with the profession, zooming in on body parts or capturing intrusive angles crosses a line. She added that choosing an outfit does not imply consent to such scrutiny and can often lead to discomfort.

Janhvi said, "I actually had a conversation with the paparazzi a couple of days ago. I met them privately and I was speaking to them about how sometimes they photograph women. It's invasive and we feel it's not consensual. Even if we've dressed up and gone out a certain way. We are not anticipating ki koi camera daalke ek area pe zoom karega. But more than us, it reflects badly on you guys. That you all are commodifying a

woman's body against her will. How do you respect yourself? That for money, for views, you all are zooming in on a body part? And they seemed pretty receptive and aware."

The actress emphasized that consent is crucial across the board. "I think at every stage it's important to ask yourself, 'What did I consent to?' So for example, I did a song called 'Bheegi saree' where I am in a wet saree and I am dancing pretty sexually. The idea for that was - I wouldn't say to titillate - but it was a sensual song." She clarified it was a deliberate, agreed-upon choice. That said, she firmly opposes any non-consensual sexualisation. "But that's very different from sexualising someone especially without their consent. That in every form I am not okay with, and that does both- er me," said Janhvi.

AGENCIES

**Palak reveals make-up secret**

**Mumbai:** Actress Palak Tiwari, who is known for *Bijlee Bijlee*, has shared her make-up secret. The actress, who walked the ramp as a show stopper at Bombay Times Fashion Week Sunday, said that she used her mother Shweta Tiwari's make-up products for over a year.

She said, "I have only used her makeup. She didn't have makeup for a whole year of her life because I stole all her make-up. I have taken all the inspiration from my mom. The way I talk, the way I am, my nature. I am exactly like my mother".

When asked what fashion means to her, she said, "Fashion for me is comfort. And you should be able to move easily, be yourself. I think that's when you are the most fashionable. I think when I was young, it was a lot. I used to think that I should impress everyone, everyone should like my clothes".

Palak made her foray in

Hindi cinema with the Salman Khan-starrer *Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan*. Before acting, she worked as an assistant director on *Antim: The Final Truth*. She is also active in fashion and brand endorsements, building a strong social media presence and emerging as a young face in Bollywood. IANS



**Hrithik defends makers**

**Mumbai:** Bollywood superstar Hrithik Roshan has opened up about his strong perspective on the ever-evolving world of VFX.

This comes especially at a time when conversations around the visual effects of Ranbir Kapoor's *Ramayana* have sparked mixed re-

actions online. While some viewers have praised the scale and ambition, others have criticised the perceived overuse of CGI, calling it emotionally disconnecting.

Addressing the ongoing debate, Hrithik took to social media subtly defending the makers of *Ramayana*, through a long and thoughtful note.

Reflecting on the effort behind large-scale films, he wrote, "Today some special humans among us, like the makers of films like *Kalki*, *Bahubali*, *Ramayana*, (also my dad for *koi mil gaya n krish ofcourse*) are my heroes, they have the guts and vision to do what's

never been done - all for the love of cinema so that we - the audience get to experience something never watched before."

"From my point of view they risked all that money, and years and years of effort just so another 11yr old kid could feel what I felt. To me that's noble. The intention by itself deserves applause! I am proud of my fellow Indians. What I would give to be a part of such dreams even as an assistant."

The superstar further urged audiences to look at the larger picture and understand the intent and effort behind such projects. IANS

*Soha opens up on perimenopause phase*

**Mumbai:** Actress Soha Ali Khan, has opened up on being hit by perimenopause suddenly. The actress also talked about the hormonal imbalances and shifts that happen in a woman's body at that stage.

Soha revealed she realised she had entered a new and challenging phase, when she learnt she could no longer have her regular coffee on an empty stomach, a practice that she had followed for years.

The *Rang De Basanti* actress also opened up about how hormonal changes affected her daily routine.

Soha took to her social media account and wrote, "I've never really been a morning person, more a 'don't talk to me until I've had my coffee' kind of soul. And then suddenly, I realised I can't have coffee on an empty stomach. Hello, perimenopause.

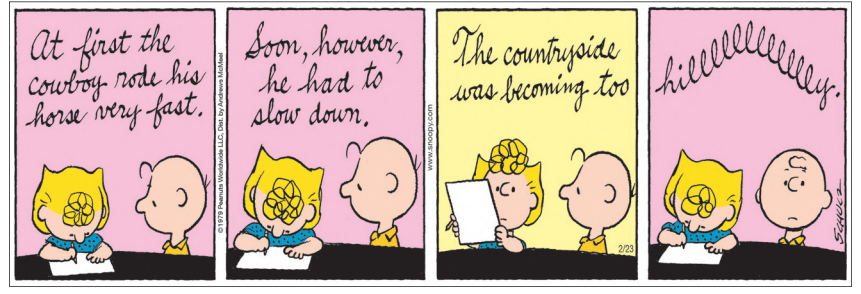
So I switched to my warm water lemon ginger chia drink, and honestly, it's been a gentle game changer for me." The actress also shared a video on her social media account, alongside the caption, where she was seen talking about entering the perimenopause phase and how she figured it out.



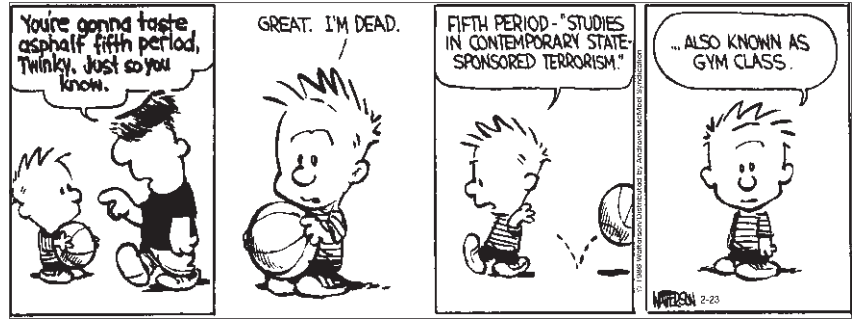
**Ramayana VFX debate**



**PEANUTS**



**CALVIN AND HOBBS**

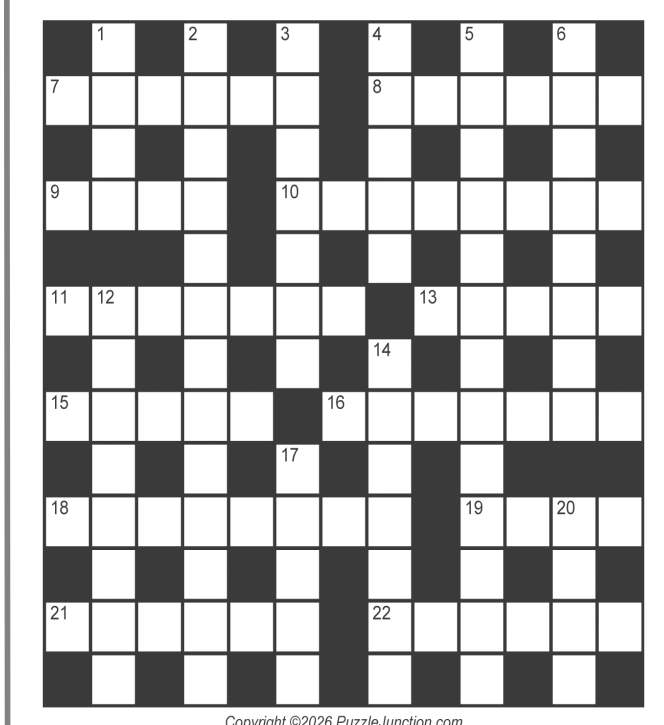


**BREVITY**



**FUN POST**

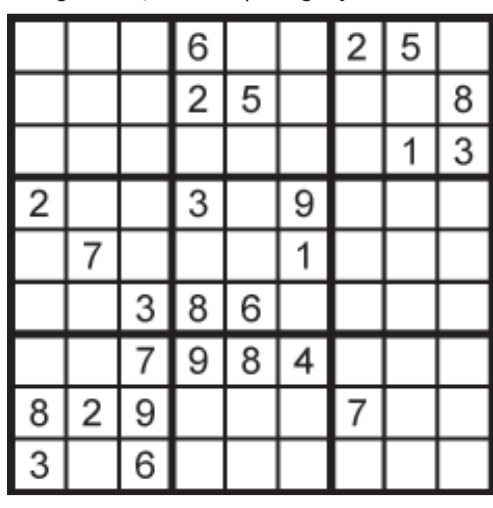
**CROSSWORD**



- Across  
7 Reflector  
8 On the train  
9 A knife used as a weapon  
10 Give life to  
11 Smoker's receptacle  
13 Soft palate  
15 New  
16 Communicate  
18 Fix firmly  
19 Employ  
21 Take out  
22 An armed thief  
Down  
1 Like some spirits  
2 Non governmental control (7,6)  
3 Insignificant  
4 Excessively quick  
5 Self-analysis (4-9)  
6 Arm exercise (5-3)  
12 Runner  
14 Parts of speech  
17 Come in  
20 Destroy

**SUDOKU**

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



**SOLUTIONS**



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

## Conman arrested for robbing commuters

**Bhubaneswar, April 5:** A habitual offender was arrested in the City for allegedly duping and robbing commuters by offering them lifts on his motorcycle, police said Sunday.

The accused has been identified as Sarat Maharana (46) of Itamati in Nayagarh district.

Police said, the complainant Bilasini Behera (54) of Bidanasi, Cuttack, was targeted by the accused February 6 around 4pm near Khandagiri bypass in Bhubaneswar while she was inquiring about a bus route. Sarat offered her a lift and later, near Nayapalli underpass, fled after stealing a gold chain weighing about 20 grams, ₹1,500 cash, a mobile phone and important documents.

During investigation, Sarat was traced near Fire Station Square and arrested Sunday. Police recovered two gold chains, a pair of gold bangles, ₹74,495 in cash, a motorcycle and an Aadhaar card from his possession.

Police said Maharana is a habitual offender with at least six criminal cases registered against him. He used a similar modus operandi to dupe victims across the City.

He had also robbed ₹15,000, ₹60,000 and valuables including gold ornaments from victims at different locations between January and April this year.

Sarat has been forwarded to court and further investigation into the matter is underway.



**FREIGHT SHIPMENT:** Workers load sugar onto a cargo vessel for export at Deendayal Port marking National Maritime Day in Kandla, Kutch district of Gujarat, Sunday

## Over 3,700 cough syrup bottles seized; 2 held

**Sonepur, April 5:** The Odisha Police Sunday arrested two persons and seized 3,750 cough syrup bottles worth around ₹20 lakh from their possession in Subarnapur district, officials said.

The accused have been identified as Shiva Bag, 24, a resident of Laltikira area, and Nirmal Adabar, 22, from Shantapada, both in Bolangir town. They are expected to be produced before the court Monday.

Acting on a tip-off, police intercepted a pickup van in Sonepur town and seized a large consignment of cough syrup allegedly being smuggled by concealing the bottles inside cartons of mango-flavoured soft drinks, SP Narayan Nayak said.

The vehicle was tracked from Tel River bridge and intercepted near the vending zone at Block Chowk following sustained surveillance. During a search conducted in the presence of senior officials, including Additional SP KK Hariprasad, a magistrate, Additional Tehsildar Yogeshwar Dharua, Drug Inspector Tikeswar Majhi and independent witnesses, it was found that cartons labelled as soft drinks actually contained cough syrup bottles hidden beneath beverage bottles.

Police said the bottles were stored in around 150 concealed compartments inside the vehicle. A total of 3,750 bottles of cough syrup, each of 100 ml were recovered from 25 cartons. Additionally, 248 packets of soft drink bottles, each containing 30 bottles, were also found, taking the total number of soft drink bottles to 7,440.

A case (117/26) has been registered at Sonepur Police Station under relevant provisions of the NDPS Act, and further investigation is underway.

# ₹650 crore seized in poll-bound states: EC

**New Delhi, April 5:** The Election Commission of India (ECI) said Sunday that enforcement agencies have seized illegal cash, liquor, drugs, precious metals and freebies worth over ₹650 crore so far, as part of efforts to ensure inducement-free polls in the ongoing state Assembly elections and bypolls.

According to the Election Commission of India, seizures totalling ₹651.51 crore have been recorded since the activation of the Electronic Seizure Management System (ESMS) February 26, reflecting heightened vigilance in poll-bound regions.

The poll body had announced the schedule for the upcoming Assembly elections in Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, along with bypolls in six states, March 15.

Following this, strict enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) was put in place, with directions issued to all states and Union Territories to curb inducements and ensure free and fair elections.

To strengthen enforcement, the ECI deployed over 5,173 flying squads tasked with responding to complaints with-



in 100 minutes. Additionally, more than 5,200 Static Surveillance Teams (SSTs) have been deployed at key locations to carry out surprise checks and monitor suspicious activities.

Among the states, West Bengal reported the highest seizures at ₹319 crore, followed by Tamil Nadu at ₹170 crore and Assam at ₹97 crore. Kerala recorded seizures worth ₹58 crore, while Puducherry accounted for ₹7 crore.

In terms of categories, drugs accounted for ₹230 crore of the total seizures, followed by freebies and other inducements worth ₹231.01 crore.

Liquor seizures exceeded 29.63 lakh litres, valued at ₹79.3 crore, while cash seizures stood at ₹53.2 crore. Precious metals worth ₹58 crore were also confiscated during the enforcement drive.

The Election Commission of

**West Bengal reported the highest seizures at ₹319 crore, followed by Tamil Nadu at ₹170 crore and Assam at ₹97 crore. Kerala recorded seizures worth ₹58 crore, while Puducherry accounted for ₹7 crore**

India said it held multiple review meetings with Chief Secretaries, Chief Electoral Officers, Directors General of Police and senior officials from poll-bound states, neighbouring states and Union Territories, directing enforcement agencies to maintain strict vigil for violence-free, intimidation-free polls.

At the same time, it stressed that enforcement should not inconvenience or harass citizens, with District Grievance Committees set up to address complaints related to checks and inspections.

The Commission also urged citizens and political parties to report MCC violations through the C-Vigil module on the ECINET platform.

## FIR registered in Odisha over actor Rahul Banerjee's death

**Balasore, April 5:** The Odisha police have registered an FIR over the death of actor Rahul Arunoday Banerjee, who allegedly drowned during a shoot of a Bengali television serial at Talsari beach in Balasore district, officials said Sunday.

Banerjee, 43, drowned during a TV serial shooting at Talsari beach in Odisha March 29 by accidentally slipping into seawater. He was declared dead by a doctor at a Digha hospital, where he was taken by his associates, the police said.

An FIR was registered at Talasari Marine police station Saturday night after receiving a



complaint from the actor's wife, a police officer said Sunday.

The police officer said they will investigate from all angles, including if any criminal conspiracy to the incident and evidence is collected before coming to a definite conclusion.

Banerjee rose to fame with the 2008 Bengali film 'Chirodini Tumi Je Amar', directed by Raj Chakraborty, which he starred opposite Priyanka Sarkar and

became a major hit.

Banerjee, who had started his career in early 2000, acted in several critically acclaimed Bengali films and TV soaps after the blockbuster success of Chirodini in 2008 and also started hosting a podcast which gained popularity. The West Bengal Motion Picture Artists' Forum Saturday had lodged a complaint at the Regent Park police station in Kolkata against the producers in connection with the incident.

Kolkata Police said the complaint was treated as 'Zero FIR' against the serial's producers, accusing them of conducting the shoot in a "negligent manner" that endangered human lives.



## CIC pulls up IRCTC for denying RTI data

**New Delhi, April 5:** The Central Information Commission (CIC) has pulled up the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC), the catering arm of the Indian Railways, over the denial of information on an RTI plea seeking to know if companies bidding for railway tenders had disclosed their alleged links to the Rail Neer 'scam' and related cases probed by central agencies.

The RTI applicant had asked the IRCTC if the bidders clearly mentioned the CBI or ED cases

### RAIL NEER SCAM



against their names, if any, in their tender documents.

The Rail Neer 'scam' was a 2015 corruption case investigated by the CBI, in which private catering companies supplied cheap

bottled water instead of the mandated 'Rail Neer' on premium trains (Rajdhani and Shatabdi), causing the Indian Railways a loss of about ₹19.5 crore.

The RTI specifically asked if the bidders declared that they were "accused in the famous Rail Neer scam" and that the CBI had "registered an FIR (RC-DAI-2015-A-0032) against them".

It also asked if they disclosed that the ED had "registered a case under sections 120B read with Section 420 of the IPC and 13(2) read with 13(1)(d) of the Prevention of Corruption Act".

The applicant also sought to

know if the bidders informed the authorities about the key developments in these cases, such as raids, cash seizures, and whether a "chargesheet" or "complaint" had been filed in the court by the agencies.

Overall, the RTI aimed to check if the companies were transparent about the investigations against them while participating in government tenders.

The IRCTC, however, denied the data, saying, "The information sought is exempted from disclosure as per Section 8 (d) of the Right to Information Act, 2005."

## 'Govt to probe Kharat CDR leak'

**Nashik, April 5:** Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis Sunday said the CDR leak in the Ashok Kharat case will be probed, while the arrested self-styled godman's assets will be investigated by the Enforcement Directorate.

No one has the right to obtain such call data records, Fadnavis said amid a furor after social activist Anjali Damania Friday made revelations about calls between Kharat and Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. She also claimed she received Kharat's Call Detail Records (CDR) on WhatsApp from an unknown number.

"The leak of call data records (CDR) in the Ashok Kharat case

will be probed and strict action would be taken. No one has the right to access call data records (CDRs), only authorised agencies may do so. How this data was leaked and by whom will be investigated by the state government," Fadnavis said.

He said mere allegations are not sufficient in sensitive cases, adding that action will be taken on the basis of solid evidence.

The CM also said the ED will investigate the antecedents of Kharat's assets. Kharat was arrested March 18 for allegedly raping a woman for three years, with a subsequent probe uncovering a host of crimes, including sexual assault and financial irregularities linked to land and other properties.

## SC comes to aid of man with '-ve' credit score

**New Delhi, April 5:** The Supreme Court has come to the rescue of a man whose credit score remained "negative" for years despite having no outstanding loan or default in payment.

A bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and KV Viswanathan was hearing a plea filed by Uttarakhand resident Rajendra Singh Panwar, who submitted that he had an adverse CIBIL score since 2020 despite not having any loan or defaulting on any kind of repayment.

In his petition, Panwar submitted that his credit profile showed a negative score which prevented him from availing fi-

ancial facilities.

Panwar contended that two other individuals with the same name had been issued the same PAN number and payment default committed by them, were allegedly appearing in his CIBIL records.

Even after getting a new PAN, his high-risk score persisted due to the linkage between the new and old PANs.

The top court then sought responses from major banks, including SBI and PNB, asking them to clarify whether Panwar had any outstanding loans or defaults. In an affidavit filed in the apex court, Punjab National Bank (PNB) informed that it had not reported any default



against Panwar and that records reflected no adverse credit information.

The State Bank of India (SBI) told the court that its reporting

to CIBIL was limited strictly to facilities actually availed by the petitioner and linked to his updated PAN details.

CIBIL then informed the court

that Panwar's records have now been corrected in light of the clarifications.

CIBIL Score is a 3-digit numeric summary of credit history that indicates a person's creditworthiness. Banks in India generally consider a CIBIL score of 750 and above to be excellent, marking a borrower as low-risk and financially disciplined.

They judge a "good" score based on a 300-900 range, evaluating consistent on-time payments, low credit utilisation (under 30%), a healthy credit mix, and minimal new inquiries to approve loans and credit cards quickly with better interest rates.

**PALASA-ICHCHAPURAM SECTION TRANSFER ROW**

# No impact on ECoR revenue, train services, Railway clarifies



AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, April 5:** Amid growing protest over the merger of the Palasa-Ichchapuram section with the newly created South Coast Railway (SCoR) zone, the Indian Railways Sunday issued a clarification stating that the move will not affect the revenue earnings of East Coast Railway (ECoR) or disrupt train services on the route.

In an official statement, the SCoR said the Palasa-Ichchapuram section, stretching around 50km, comprises seven stations -- Palasa, Summadevi, Mandasa Road, Baruva, Sompeta, Jhadupudi and Ichchapuram. It added that all these stations are located in Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh and none falls within Odisha.

"These stations are small- to mid-sized and primarily handle passenger traffic. None of them is a major freight loading point. Therefore, ECoR's revenue remains unaffected," the statement said.

Dismissing concerns over possible disruption to train services, SCoR clarified that pass-through freight traffic -- trains transiting through these stations en route -- will continue uninterrupted, regardless of zonal jurisdiction. It also noted that railway operations remain seamless across zonal boundaries.

SCoR emphasised that all existing trains, including Palasa-Bhubaneswar, Palasa-Cuttack, and Ichchapuram-Cuttack MEMU/passenger services, will continue to operate without any change

in schedule, route or frequency. The Railways added that the merger is a technical adjustment aimed at ensuring smoother functioning of passenger services in the Visakhapatnam division.

The modalities of the transfer, including staff deployment, are being finalised between ECoR and SCoR. The interests and service conditions of all railway employees will be fully protected as per established norms.

"The government's commitment to Odisha is unwavering. Record capital expenditure on railway network expansion in Odisha, station modernisation, Vande Bharat services, and the newly created Rayagada Division under ECoR are evidence of this commitment," the statement said.

It is pertinent to note that Opposition parties, including the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), Congress and CPI(M) have expressed strong objections to the merger, calling the move unfortunate and a betrayal of Odisha by the BJP-led double-engine government. Leaders of these parties, at a joint meeting held here, alleged that the transfer would reduce the size of the ECoR zone and lead to a decline in its revenue.

# Students, workers feel 5kg cylinder ban heat

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 5:** The decision to ban small cylinders -- 1kg and 5kg -- taken amid supply disruptions linked to the West Asia crisis, has triggered panic among bachelors living in paying guest (PG) accommodations, students, and low-income families. Many have opposed the move saying that livelihood would be impacted severely if the ban is not lifted at the earliest.

**Sasmit Behera**, preparing for competitive exams, said he and his roommates had to pool money to buy an induction cooktop as local vendors stopped refills. "Now, even the prices of induction cookers have doubled," he added.

Households are also struggling to adjust. "Earlier, I could manage my kitchen with a small cylinder and careful use. Now, with the refill limit and no backup option, it has become very stressful to cook meals for the entire family," said **Sunita Nayak**, a homemaker from Bhubaneswar. "We are cutting down on cooking and making simpler meals just to save gas."

Meanwhile, small traders have reported losses. A hardware store owner in Cuttack said, "We only met demand. If small cylinders are banned, people may resort to unsafe refilling at home."

The crisis has pushed some families back to traditional wood-fired stoves. "We now cook everything in one pot to save gas," said **Archana Sahoo**, a homemaker.

"While this decision aims to



Working women and bachelors wait in line to fill up 5kg LPG cylinders in Rasulgarh, Bhubaneswar Sunday

PHOTO: BIKASH NAYAK

curb misuse, it will make life significantly harder for students, bachelors, and single working professionals living away from home, who do not have individual LPG connections," said **Vivek Dehury**, an engineering student. Due to gas supply issue, we depend on our neighbours to book gas and exchange our cylinder, said **Seema Das**, a BEd student living in a PG.

**Sasmita Nayak**, employed in a private company in Cuttack expressed concern over the possible ban on 5kg LPG cylinders. "Such a decision would create serious difficulties in my daily life," she said, urging the authorities to reconsider the decision.

Daily wage labourer **Ramesh Nayak** working at a construc-

tion site in Jajpur said, "I live in a shared rented house and dependent on 5kg LPG cylinder for cooking. This decision would directly impact kitchens from tomorrow."

"Most of us rely on small 5kg cylinders in our rented rooms. With the ban, cooking daily meals will become difficult and expensive. We already manage on tight budgets," **Rupesh Kumar Deep**, a school teacher stated.

"I prefer to study late night and cook simple food to save time and money. If small LPG cylinders are unavailable, I might have to depend on outside food, which is unhealthy and costly," competitive exam aspirant **Sanjeeb Swain** shared.

Another student **Jhasketan Bhoi Kumar** said, "We share a

The crisis has pushed some families back to traditional wood-fired stoves. "We now cook everything in one pot to save gas," said **Archana Sahoo**, a homemaker

single cylinder among three roommates. Now we don't know how we'll manage. Induction stoves increase electricity bills, which landlords don't allow to use."

"Students living away from home depend on affordable cooking options. This decision may control illegal trade, but there should be an alternative for genuine users like us," civil services aspirant **Abhishek Panda** said.

"Hostels and PGs don't provide proper food. We cook ourselves using 5kg cylinders. Putting a ban on it will affect exam preparation for many students," quoted **Sachin Sahu**, a student. **Sourabha Sahu**, a bachelor staying in a local PG here says, "Many of us cook once in the morning and focus on studies the rest of the day. Without access to 5kg cylinders, we'll either skip meals or spend more on eating outside, which will affect both health and our preparation."

Job aspirant **Satya Mohapatra** shares, "Students living in small PG rooms don't have space for big cylinders. The 5kg cylinder was convenient and affordable. Now, managing cooking, along with studies will become stressful."

**CENSUS 2027**

# LoP participates in self-enumeration

AGENCIES

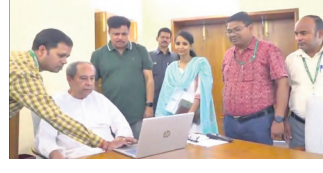
**Bhubaneswar, April 5:** The Leader of Opposition (LoP) Naveen Patnaik, Sunday participated in the self-enumeration process of the Digital Census commenced here April 1.

He also urged the citizens to cooperate in the campaign of Census 2027 to ensure a bright future for the state.

"Today, I participated in the 'Digital Census' programme that has begun in the country and completed my self-registration. Accurate information alone will be helpful in preparing welfare schemes for the coming days. Let's cooperate in this campaign and become partners in building a bright future for the state," wrote Patnaik on his 'X' handle.

Earlier, Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, among several other senior dignitaries and leaders, also shared their details on the self-enumeration portal of Census 2027 prior to the door-to-door survey.

It is worth noting that the Census programme in the state has been launched in coordination



with the Directorate of Census Operations, Odisha, under the Ministry of Home Affairs, and state's Revenue and Disaster Management department. The first phase of the Census -- House Listing and Housing Census -- is scheduled to begin April 16.

Under this programme, trained enumerators and supervisors will visit households and collect data from April 16 to May 15. Prior to this, the self-enumeration programme is being conducted from April 1 to midnight of April 15.

Under this programme, citizens are providing their information on their own through the self-enumeration portal (<https://se.census.gov.in>).

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi has also urged citizens to extend cooperation for the successful conduct of Census 2027 by sharing their details on the self-enumeration portal ahead of the door-to-door survey.

# Oppn demands quota for OBC students as per population ratio

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, April 5:** BJD and Congress Sunday demanded provision of reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) students on the basis of their population ratio in Odisha and not just 11.25 per cent as announced by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi.

The CM Saturday announced that the state cabinet has approved a proposal to raise the quotas for Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) students and introduced reservation for OBC, known as SEBC in the state, in medical and technical education.

The chief minister also announced that the quota for ST students was raised from 12 per cent to 22.50 per cent, and for SC students from 8 per cent to 16.25 per cent as per their population ratio. Majhi said the state government, for the first time, introduced reservation for OBCs at 11.25 per cent.

However, both the BJD and the Congress leaders raised questions on the difference made between the ST, SC and OBCs.

"While the quota is announced for ST and SC as per their population ratio, why is

While the quota is announced for ST and SC as per their population ratio, why is it just 11.25 per cent for OBCs who constitute about 54 per cent of the state's population

BHAKTA CHARAN DAS | OPCC PRESIDENT

it just 11.25 per cent for OBCs who constitute about 54 per cent of the state's population," asked Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) president Bhakta Charan Das.

"We demand that the OBCs also get the reservation in medical and technical education as per their population rate. There is no point in keeping the total reservation within 50 per cent in states like Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh in view of their high population of tribals, dalits and OBC," Das said.

BJD MLA and former minister Arun Kumar Sahoo also made a similar demand and cited the instance of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and other states where the total reservation ratio is more than 50 per cent.

"This is the golden opportunity for the Odisha government, as it claimed to be a double-engine government. Let

the state government take up the matter with the Centre and make provision of reservation beyond 50 per cent," Sahoo said.

He said, "We demand the quota to be fixed on a population-proportional rate."

BJD MLA and former minister Ranendra Pratap Swain, in a post on X said, "With this historic announcement for the lakhs of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Socially and Educationally Backward Classes in the state, I personally thank and welcome this decision by @CMO\_Odisha Shri @MohanMODisha."

At the same time, Swain said, "The fight will continue in the coming days to provide reservations to socially and educationally backward classes also on the basis of their population-proportional rate."

According to Majhi's announcement, the new reservation system will be implemented across universities, their affiliated colleges and educational institutions, ITIs and polytechnics in the state in the fields of engineering, technology, management, computer applications, medicine, agriculture and allied sciences, architecture, planning and cinematic arts.

# Cong questions edu policies amid ground-level failures



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 5:** Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) has strongly criticised the state government over the current condition of the education system, alleging mismanagement and lack of preparedness at the start of the new academic year.

According to the party, several schools across the state are yet to receive basic textbooks, severely affecting classroom teaching. The delay has created confusion among students and teachers, while parents have expressed growing anxiety over their children's academic progress.

The Congress also pointed to the absence of nearly 15,000 students from the recent Class X and Class XII board examinations as a clear indication of systemic failure. The party claimed that such figures expose serious gaps in the functioning and monitoring of the education sector.

Highlighting infrastructure issues, the party alleged that more than 20,000 teaching

posts remain vacant and many schools lack adequate classrooms. In several cases, multiple grades are being taught together in a single room, affecting the quality of education.

At a time when these basic issues persist, the government's push for new initiatives, including the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education and schemes like 'Bag-Free Days', has drawn sharp criticism from the Opposition.

Reacting to the situation, OPCC spokesperson Krushna Chandra Pati said, "The government is focusing on new announcements while completely ignoring the ground reality. Schools are struggling without teachers, classrooms, and even textbooks. Without fixing these fundamental issues, policies like AI integration or bag-free days will remain mere slogans."

The Congress has demanded that the government prioritise strengthening basic infrastructure, filling vacant teaching posts, and ensuring timely supply of textbooks before rolling out new reforms.

# ODIA PAKHYA Marathon celebrates City heritage

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 5:** As part of the ongoing Odia Pakhya celebrations, Sports and Youth Services department hosted heritage marathon in Ekamra Kshetra Sunday morning, drawing enthusiastic participation from citizens.

The marathon flagged off at 5:30am from Mukteswar Temple. The route offered runners a glimpse into the capital's



cultural richness, passing landmarks such as Rameswar Temple, Vivekananda Marg, Utkal Kanika Galleria Mall, Lewis Road, BJB College, and Ravi Talkies Square, before culminating at the historic Rajarani Temple.

Over a thousand participants—including athletes, youth, differently-abled, and local residents—joined the run,

turning it into a celebration of community spirit and cultural pride. Participants also took a collective pledge to preserve and promote Odisha's rich heritage and monuments.

In the competitive segment, Chandan Samal secured first place, followed by Siddharth Kumar Mishra in second and Vijay Agrawal in third. The winners were felicitated with

medals, while all participants received tokens of appreciation in recognition of their spirited involvement.

Joining as chief guest, Ekamra-Bhubaneswar MLA Babu Singh highlighted the deeper significance of the event, stating that the marathon is not merely a sporting activity but a meaningful effort to reconnect the younger generation

with Odisha's cultural roots. "Our ancient temples and monuments are symbols of Odia identity, and preserving them is our moral responsibility," he said.

He also expressed gratitude to Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Sports and Youth Services Minister Suryabanshi Suraj for leading initiatives that bridge the gap between youth and the state's glorious past.

The event witnessed the presence of several distinguished personalities, including Commissioner-cum-Secretary Bhupendra Singh Poonia, additional secretaries Ashok Kumar Panda and Bijay Kumar Swain. Olympian Anuradha Biswal and Odia film actress Sivani Sangita also joined the marathon.

Blending fitness with cultural awareness, the heritage marathon emerged as a key highlight of Odia Paksha, reinforcing the message of heritage conservation while inspiring active community participation.

WEATHER			FORECAST
	BBSR	CTC	
Max Temp	36.0°	34.6°	Light to Moderate rain or thunderstorm
Min Temp	26.0°	24.0°	
Humidity	79%	88%	
Rainfall	7.2mm	3.2mm	

# Kotia flashpoint: Andhra at it again

A team of Andhra officials, including Salur block special officer Prasad and MPDO (BDO) G. Parvati, visited the panchayat and inspected key locations interacting with locals

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Pottangi, April 5:** After a lull, officials from neighbouring Andhra Pradesh once again entered the disputed Kotia panchayat under Pottangi block in Koraput district, openly challenging Odisha's local administration and reviving concerns over the long-running interstate boundary dispute.



Upper Sembi and Ganjeipadar, assessing local conditions and discussing developmental activities with residents.

The move is being seen as a direct assertion of administrative presence by Andhra Pradesh in the Kotia region, which remains a contested territory between the two states. The visit, notably conducted in an open manner, is perceived as a challenge to the Pottangi block administration.

Despite repeated visits by Odisha officials, including those specially appointed for Kotia, to ensure implementation of state welfare schemes

in the border villages, there appears to be little deterrence to Andhra's continued outreach in the area.

In several bordering villages, including Deridibalsa, Tadibalsa, Phagunasineri and Phatusineri, MPDO Parvati held detailed discussions with villagers on proposed development works for the current financial year and assured early implementation of various programmes.

Residents, however, appear to be maintaining a neutral stance, often leveraging benefits from both states while refraining from taking sides in

the dispute. This dual engagement has allowed competing administrative efforts from both Odisha and Andhra Pradesh to continue simultaneously.

The situation has also highlighted gaps in the education sector. Although the Odisha government has appointed teachers to impart education in Kui, the local tribal language, the initiative has yet to yield visible results. This has, in turn, enabled Andhra's education system to gain influence among students in the region.

When contacted, Pottangi tehsildar Debendra Bahadur Singh Dharua said the matter would be investigated. Meanwhile, Kotia's special officer Saurabh Das declined to comment, stating that the block development officer and tehsildar were better placed to respond.

The renewed activity by Andhra officials is likely to heighten administrative and political attention on Kotia, where the Odisha-Andhra Pradesh boundary dispute continues to simmer.



**FOLK FIESTA:** Artistes perform a vibrant Sambalpur dance during the concluding evening of the Maraguda Lok Mahotsav at the National College ground in Nuapada, Sunday

## Man found dead; wife, 2 detained

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Balikuda, April 5:** The body of a 42-year-old man was recovered from a roadside near a canal embankment at Janata-kothi Bazaar under Balikuda police limits in Jagatsinghpur district Sunday morning, with police suspecting foul play.



The deceased has been identified as Bijay Swain of Talakusuma village under Baharana panchayat in Balipatna. Police have detained his wife, Babita, along with two other youths for questioning as part of the investigation. According to preliminary reports, Swain, a daily wage labourer, had gone to Garia, a nearby village, Saturday night to attend a feast. He was last seen returning home on his bicycle around 10pm.

the roadside in an inebriated state. Initially suspecting a similar situation, the brother attempted to rouse him but, after noticing ants on his face and getting no response, panicked and returned home.

Villagers later informed the local sarpanch, who alerted the police. Balikuda IIC Sushant Kumar Sahu, along with a scientific team, reached the spot Sunday morning and began an investigation. Based on the circumstances surrounding the death, police suspect murder and have detained three individuals, including the victim's wife, for further questioning.

When he did not return home late into the night, his wife reportedly grew concerned and asked his younger brother to search for him. Around 11pm, the brother found Swain's bicycle lying by the roadside along the canal embankment, about a kilometre from their home. A short distance away, he discovered Swain lying motionless.

Swain's son has alleged that his father had an ongoing dispute with one of the detained youths and had previously lodged a complaint against him at the police station. He suspects that the individual may have been involved in the killing.

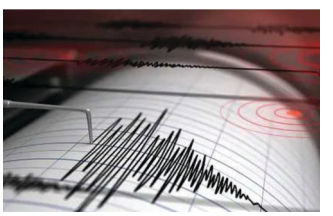
Locals said Swain was known to consume alcohol frequently and would occasionally be found lying by

Police said the exact cause of death will be determined following a post-mortem examination, and further investigation is underway.

## Moderate quake jolts Koraput

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Koraput, April 5:** A moderate earthquake measuring 4.4 magnitude struck Koraput district late Saturday night, triggering panic in several towns and villages, with tremors also felt in neighboring Andhra Pradesh, officials said Sunday.



According to the National Centre for Seismology, the earthquake occurred at 11:31pm IST April 4. The epicentre was located near Koraput at a shallow depth of about 5 km, intensifying its impact despite the moderate magnitude.

household items rattling for several seconds.

Tremors were widely felt across the district, including in Sunabeda, Semiliguda, Pottangi, Nandapur, Damanjodi, Lamtapur, Jeypore and Bai-pariguda areas. Residents reported buildings shaking and

Eyewitnesses described hearing a rumbling sound before and during the quake. Many people rushed out of their homes and gathered in open spaces as a precaution.

## 2 women injured in wild boar attack

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Nuapada, April 5:** Two young women were critically injured after being attacked by a wild boar in a forested area under Khariar Road block in Nuapada district Sunday.

## Panic as tusker attack leaves three critical

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Parjang, April 5:** A tusker attack left three people critically injured while they were collecting mahua flowers in villages under the Dhenkanal forest division Sunday morning, triggering panic in the area.

The incident occurred in Shirigidi village under Kendubahara panchayat. The injured have been identified as Purnami Majhi, 25, and Samaleswari Raut, 22; both residents of the same village.

The injured were initially admitted to the Parjang Community Health Centre. Due to the seriousness of their condition, they were later shifted to the district headquarters hospital for advanced treatment.

The two women had gone together to collect mahua flowers from a nearby field when a wild boar suddenly emerged from the adjacent forest and attacked them.

Forest officials, including Di-hadol forester Chandra Sekhar Behera, reached the hospital to assess the victims' condition and extend assistance. Meanwhile, a Forest department elephant squad is tracking the tusker and keeping a close watch on its movement.

Hearing their screams, local residents rushed to the spot, chased the animal back into the forest and rescued the injured women. They were immediately shifted to the district headquarters hospital, where they are currently undergoing treatment. Their condition is stated to be critical.

The incident has sparked fear among residents in the affected villages, particularly as mahua collection season is underway. Forest officials have urged locals to remain alert and avoid venturing into forested areas alone.

## Man commits suicide on son's reception day

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Loisingha:** In a tragic incident, a man died by suicide after being run over by a train on the day of his son's wedding reception in Bolangir district Sunday. The deceased, Shyam Mahakur of Loisingha, reportedly lay on the railway tracks near the local station around 8:30am and was run over by a goods train. The reason behind the incident is yet to be ascertained. Government Railway Police (GRP) from Bolangir reached the spot, recovered the body and sent it to Bhima Bhoi Medical College and Hospital for post-mortem. The body was later handed over to the family, and the last rites were performed at the village crematorium. According to reports, Mahakur's son was married Saturday at nearby Kaogaon, and he had participated in the wedding procession. Preparations were underway for the reception Sunday when the incident came to light. Mahakur is survived by a son and a daughter. He earlier sold breakfast items near the bus stand and had been working as a mason for over a year, locals said. Police have launched an investigation.

## Rubber cultivation rewrites rural fortunes

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Paralakhemundi, April 5:** Gajapati district has earned a rare recognition for rubber cultivation, with farmers in the hilly areas benefiting significantly from the cash crop. Rubber is being cultivated in Gumma, Mohana, Kashinagar and Gosani blocks, where the produce has a strong market demand.

Hyderabad, purchase rubber directly from the farmers.



Notably, India is the world's largest producer with over 8.5 lakh hectares of plantations and also the third-largest user of natural rubber. The cultivation is primarily concentrated in Kerala and Tamil Nadu and currently expanding to Tripura, Assam, and other Northeastern states.

latex about seven years after planting. The latex is extracted from the trees before sunrise

and collected in containers. It is then processed through machines to produce rubber

sheets. These sheets are first dried in smokehouses and later dried outside before being stored and sold to different companies.

Once properly maintained for seven years, a rubber tree can yield latex for about 35 to 40 years. After the tree dries up, the wood is used for making various types of furniture.

Regional officer Sanatan Sethi said farmers from other parts of the district are also showing interest in rubber cultivation. In the coming days, the target is to expand rubber cultivation to more than 100 acres of land in Gumma, Rayagada and Kashinagar blocks. He added that rubber cultivation also helps improve the climate and contributes to creating a healthy environment.

## Woman succumbs to burns 10 days after cylinder blaze

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Tihidi:** A woman who sustained critical burn injuries in an LPG cylinder blaze at her home in Bhadrak district has died after fighting for her life for 10 days, officials said. Bhargavi Satpathy died Saturday night while undergoing treatment in Bhubaneswar. Her husband, Uday Narayan Satapathy, 45, and their 14-year-old daughter Snehanjali, who were also injured in the incident, remain under treatment at a private hospital. The fire broke out March 26 at their residence in Paliasaan village under Palibindha panchayat in Tihidi block. Bhargavi was cooking when the cylinder connection reportedly came loose, causing a gas leak that quickly caught fire. Hearing her screams, her husband and daughter rushed to her aid but were also caught in the flames. Bhargavi suffered around 80 per cent burns, while the other two sustained serious injuries. The injured were first taken to Tihidi and later shifted to Bhadrak District Headquarters Hospital (DHH). As their condition deteriorated, they were referred to SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack and subsequently to a private hospital in Bhubaneswar. Bhargavi was later shifted to AIIMS Bhubaneswar, where she succumbed. Her body reached the village Sunday. The incident has cast a pall of gloom over the village. Local organisations and residents had extended support to the family during their treatment.

**ଉଦଳା ବିଜ୍ଞାପିତ ଅଞ୍ଚଳ ପରିଷଦ, ଉଦଳା**  
**E-Procurement Notice**  
 No.499/NAC, Dt.26.03.2026  
**BID Identification No.UDLN-04/2025-26**  
 No.13001/32/2627: Bid documents consisting of Work, Estimated Cost, Cost of Tender Paper, EMD, Time of Completion, Class of Contractors and the set of terms and conditions of contract and other necessary documents can be seen in Govt. website i.e. <https://tendersodisha.gov.in/nicgep/app>.

1. Name of the Work	: As mentioned in DTCN
2. No of Works	: 21 Nos.
3. Estimated Cost	: As per Work List
4. Period of Completion	: As per DTCN
5. Date and Time of Bidding	: 11.00 AM of 27.03.2026
6. Last date and time for receipt	: 07.04.2026 upto 3.00 P.M.
7. Bids received online shall be opened on	: 07.04.2026 from 04.00 PM onwards
8. Name and address of the Officer Inviting Bid	: Executive Officer, Udala NAC

Further details can be seen from the e-Procurement portal i.e. <https://tendersodisha.gov.in/nicgep/app>.  
**Sd./- Executive Officer**  
**Udala NAC, Udala**  
 OIPR-13001/13162/11/26-27/0001

**OFFICE OF THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL : JAGATSinghpur**  
 No. 2087 Dt.31/03/2026  
**COMPETITIVE BIDDING THROUGH e-Procurement**  
**NOTICE INVITING TENDER**  
**Bid Reference No. JSPURM-02/2025-26/Dt.**  
 No.13001/41/2627 : On behalf of the Jagatsinghpur Municipality, on-line e-tender **Item Rate Bids** are invited by the Executive Officer, Jagatsinghpur Municipality from the intending **registered suppliers / manufacturers / agencies** and eligible category of bidders in conformity with the Detailed Tender Call Notice for execution of the work "**Exterior Glass Paneling work for Office Building of Jagatsinghpur Municipality**" as mentioned in the DTCN.

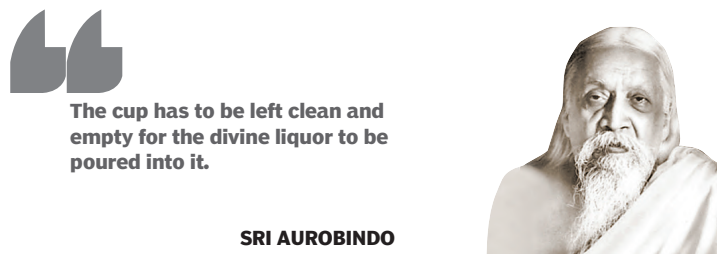
- Total No. of works for which Tenders invited: 01 No.
- Place of Execution: Inside of Jagatsinghpur Municipality.
- Eligible Class of Contractors: Registered suppliers/ manufacturers/ agencies as indicated against each work mentioned in the Tender Call Notice.
- Intending bidders have to participate through "On-Line" bidding only. The website for online bidding is <https://www.tendersodisha.gov.in>.
- The bid documents will be available in the above website from 11 A.M on 02-04-2026 to 5 P.M on 16-04-2026 for online bidding.
- Bids received online will be opened at 11 A.M on 17.04.2026.
- The bidder must possess valid and compatible Digital Signature Certificate (DSC).
- The DTCN for 01 No. of work shall be available in the e-procurement portal <https://www.tendersodisha.gov.in> for on-line bidding.

**Sd./- Executive Officer**  
**Jagatsinghpur Municipality**  
 OIPR-13001/13087/11/26-27/0001

**Government of Odisha Department of Water Resources**  
**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, BOLANGIR IRRIGATION DIVISION, BOLANGIR**  
 e-mail: [ee.bolirr@gmail.com](mailto:ee.bolirr@gmail.com)  
**e-Procurement Notice No.01 of 2026-27**  
**BID IDENTIFICATION NO.-BID-BGR-01 of 2026-27**  
 No.1186/dated 02.04.2026  
 No.3200/1/5/2627 : The Superintending Engineer, Bolangir Irrigation Division, Bolangir on behalf of his Excellency, the Governor of Odisha invites online Percentage rate tenders in Double cover system to be received in online mode only for the works as detailed below. Bid documents consisting of work, estimated cost, cost of tender paper, EMD, time of completion, class of contractor, the set of terms & conditions of contract and other necessary documents can be seen in e-Procurement portal [www.tendersodisha.gov.in](https://www.tendersodisha.gov.in) in complete online process only.

1. Nature of work	: Civil Works
2. Number of works	: 11 (Eleven)
3. Approximate amount put to tender	: Rs.65.08 Lakh to 84.52 lakh
4. Period of completion	: 10 (Ten) Calendar months
5. Date & time of availability of Bid document in the portal	: Dt.10.04.2026 - 10.00 A.M. to 25.04.2026 up to 5.30 P.M.
6. Last date & time of seeking Tender clarification	: Dt.20.04.2026 up to 5.30 P.M.
7. Last date & time of receipt of Bids in the portal	: Dt.25.04.2026 - up to 5.30 P.M.
8. Date, time & place of opening of Technical bids of Double Cover	: Dt.27.04.2026 at 11.00 A.M. in the office of the Superintending Engineer, Bolangir Irrigation Division Bolangir
9. Date, time & place of opening of Financial BID	: To be intimated after Evaluation of Technical BID
10. Name & address of the officer Inviting bid	: Superintending Engineer, Bolangir Irrigation Division, Bolangir, At-Lalitkura, P.O.-Rajendra College, Dist : Bolangir. PIN-767002
11. Any corrigendum required will be made available in Govt. website only. Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal - <a href="https://tendersodisha.gov.in">https://tendersodisha.gov.in</a>	

**Sd./- SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER**  
**BALANGIR IRRIGATION DIVISION**  
**BALANGIR**  
 OIPR-3200/13253/11/26-27/0001



SRI AUROBINDO

## Sobering Reality

The ongoing conflict between Iran and the US-Israel combine is beginning to tell a story far removed from the early projections of swift American dominance. Instead, what is emerging is a far more interesting new narrative in which Iran is not only resisting but actively reshaping the contours of the war. The latest in a series of embarrassments for the US is the downing of two American Stealth jet planes, both within 24 hours by Iran. What was projected by US President Donald Trump and his administration as a campaign of overwhelming dominance now appears far more contested. The loss of an F-15E fighter and an A-10 Warthog is not merely a battlefield incident, it is a strategic shock. For weeks, Washington had asserted near-total control over Iranian airspace and claimed to have “decimated” and “obliterated” their air defence systems. Yet, these incidents expose the limits of technological superiority when faced with resilient and adaptive air defence systems. The fact that Iran was able not only to strike these aircraft but also target rescue operations implies that the skies over that country are far from taken over.

More than a month into the war, none of the objectives the US had claimed at the outset of the offensive have been achieved. Rather, the US today finds itself in a tight spot with no clear exit plans. Nothing illustrates America’s predicament more starkly than the abrupt ousting of the US Army Chief of Staff Randy George and other senior military figures. Leadership changes of this magnitude in the midst of an active and overwhelming conflict cannot be seen as signs of strategic clarity. On the other hand, they point to internal discord, operational setbacks, or a growing disconnect between political objectives and military realities. The decision by Secretary of War Pete Hegseth to remove top commanders raises troubling questions about coherence within the American war effort at a critical juncture.

These developments come against the backdrop of an Iranian campaign that has proven far more resilient than anticipated. Despite sustained aerial bombardment, Tehran has demonstrated an ability to absorb pressure while continuing to retaliate profusely and effectively. The downing of US aircraft, persistent targeting of American assets, and the extension of the conflict across multiple fronts all point to a strategy that is adaptive and far from exhausted.

There is, in this, a broader lesson about the limits of military power. Technological superiority and initial momentum do not automatically translate into strategic success. Iran, by leveraging asymmetry, geography, and regional networks, has managed to complicate American and Israeli calculations and impose tangible costs on its adversaries. This conflict is no longer defined by overwhelming force alone, but by endurance and the ability to sustain pressure over time. Equally significant is the political dimension. Tehran’s refusal to engage on terms favourable to Washington underscores a confidence that it can withstand both military and economic coercion. That is the level of strategic independence that this new world order seems to demand.

For America, the month-long military campaign has turned out to be a sobering reality. A war that was expected to demonstrate strength is instead exposing fault lines, both on the battlefield and within its own command structure. Notwithstanding Trump’s threats of “obliterating” Iran’s assets and “raining down hell on them,” Tehran appears to have turned the tables on Washington. The biggest loser in this futile war could very well be Israel which now should prepare itself for “all hell to rain down” on it at random and continuously. Countries supporting Israel, like Uganda, should prepare for a bleak future in a world that will not look on them with kindness or sympathy any more.

# PERILS OF PUSHING ETHANOL

FOCUS ENERGY



**Ethanol expansion in India will divert 7-8 million hectare of cropland, sharply raise water use, and intensify food-fuel competition, risking higher food prices**

Every crisis in India is fast becoming a pretext for profit masquerading as reform. The Strait of Hormuz crisis has now been repurposed to justify 20% ethanol blending (E20)—pitched as green and strategic, but structurally unsound. It threatens food, water, and land security while enriching an industry.

Consumers pay twice: 8-10% lower mileage and costly retrofits—Rs 20,000-Rs 70,000 for each of over 40 crore running vehicles—turning a supposed solution into a nationwide economic crisis. The touted energy benefit is possibly a myth and drain on agricultural resources. To meet the target, the country will require about 1,016 crore litre of ethanol annually. Achieving this would require a shift from sugar and sugarcane—leading to a growing dependence on maize, broken rice and rice procured from Food Corporation of India. Estimates suggest that India will need to produce 11-12 million tonnes of grains, comprising maize and rice, 275 million tonnes of sugarcane, covering a land area equal to 7.1 million hectares.

Experts caution that while high yielding varieties can help meet the demand, it would also increase reliance on water, pesticides and fertilizers. According to Mumbai-based IndiaSpend’s report, the E20 target may not significantly reduce emissions, may harm food security, and will provide only marginal energy security. Further, the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) argues that using food-based feedstocks for ethanol production may not be the best use of land in a country where hunger remains a pressing issue. In effect, fuel drives would bite into food-producing lands or forests, burdening the nation’s scarce resources.

Equally alarming is the water footprint. Sugarcane in India alone uses over 50% of irrigation water. Producing

one litre of sugarcane-ethanol guzzles about 2,860 litres of water. That is nearly three cubic meters of water for a glass of fuel. In a water-stressed country, this is catastrophic. NITI Aayog warns that ethanol expansion could raise India’s annual irrigation demand by 50 billion cubic metres by 2070 – enough to quench Delhi’s thirst for 17 years. Most districts in India already face water scarcity. Redirecting scarce groundwater into fuel tanks undermines farms and drinking supplies alike. Ethanol expansion in India will divert 7-8 million hectare of cropland, sharply raise water use, and intensify food-fuel competition, risking higher food prices.

India is already wrestling with food inflation and crop shortages. Retail food prices have been above the RBI’s comfort zone for years. In 2023 poor rains and heat knocked down yields of staples. The government banned wheat and sugar exports and imposed minimum prices on rice to keep markets stable. Against this backdrop, turning food crops into fuel is perilous.

While communities face scarcity, ethanol producers and associated industries

reap profits, stated to be ₹20-25 a litre. In other words, ethanol pricing needs drastic cut. Companies building new unnecessary distilleries and sugar mills enjoy record demand and generous pricing for ethanol. In a recent tender for the Ethanol Supply Year (ESY) 2025-26 (starting November), Indian oil marketing companies (OMCs) asked for 10.5 billion litres of ethanol, but the domestic industry offered 17.76 billion litres, far exceeding the government’s requirement. This massive oversubscription of over 70% highlights a significant structural surplus in India’s ethanol capacity, driven by over ₹40,000 crore in investments in recent years for E20 blending. Industry sustains distilleries through mandates, quotas and assured prices, branding E20 as “energy independence,” while effectively socialising environmental costs and privatising profits—leaving the public to bear higher food prices and water stress.

Backed by floor-ratio-production (FRP) hikes, mandates, subsidies and post-2022 export curbs, distilleries expand as citizens bear the burden on food, water and land. When export restrictions hit

sugar in 2022, the sector pivoted to fuel. In states like Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, hundreds of proposals for new ethanol distilleries have sprung up, bolstered by tax breaks and subsidies. Ethanol stands out as a classic crisis-with-opportunity: global carbon pressure and oil shocks give industry cover to expand, even as ordinary Indians pay with their food, water and land.

Biofuel blending offers only limited decarbonisation, as crop-based fuels still emit significant carbon and can worsen emissions through land-use change. It does little to reduce India’s 80-90% oil import dependence, given ethanol’s lower energy density.

Pushing food crops into fuel production under global climate pressure risks harming food security and growth priorities. India needs independent, context-driven energy strategies that balance emissions with equity and development. It must not succumb to global climate discourse – driven by Western carbon pressure. India’s per capita emissions remain far below the developed world’s, and its priority must be equitable growth and food security.

India’s energy crisis reflects policy gaps, not resource scarcity. Priorities should include boosting energy efficiency to curb demand, scaling solar and wind as truly indigenous alternatives, and optimising transport via rail, buses and electric three-wheelers. Biofuel efforts must focus on waste-based and advanced technologies that avoid food and water stress. Additionally, green hydrogen from renewables offers a viable pathway for industry and heavy transport without burdening farmland.

India’s strategic goal should be securing energy and agriculture simultaneously, not sacrificing one for the other. By all means, use cleaner fuels – but not at the cost of starving our farms and drying our wells.

INFA

**BIOFUEL BLENDING OFFERS ONLY LIMITED DECARBONISATION, AS CROP-BASED FUELS STILL EMIT SIGNIFICANT CARBON AND CAN WORSEN EMISSIONS THROUGH LAND-USE CHANGE**



Shivaji Sarkar

### WISDOM CORNER

**A man who as a physical being is always turned toward the outside, thinking that his happiness lies outside him, finally turns inward and discovers that the source is within him.**

SOREN KIERKEGAARD

**Even a happy life cannot be without a measure of darkness, and the word happy would lose its meaning if it were not balanced by sadness. It is far better take things as they come along with patience and equanimity.**

CARL JUNG

**Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.**

LEO BUSCAGLIA

### THIS DAY IN HISTORY

**1868:** The Japanese emperor Meiji issued the Charter Oath, which served to modernize the country during the Meiji Restoration.

**1896:** The first modern Olympics opened in Athens after the revival of the Olympic Games by Pierre, baron de Coubertin, a founder of the International Olympic Committee and its president from 1896 to 1925.

**1909:** Robert Edwin Peary reached the North Pole, according to his expedition’s records, though analysis in the 1980s suggested navigational mistakes and record-keeping errors meant he fell short.

**1917:** The United States declared war on Germany, thus entering World War I three years after the conflict began.

**1974:** ABBA wins Eurovision competition with their song “Waterloo.” The whimsical number likened a breakup to Napoleon’s historic defeat at Waterloo—with outfits to match. It was Sweden’s first Eurovision victory, and it became one of the competition’s most famous performances. After winning Eurovision, “Waterloo” topped charts across Europe. ABBA would go on to become one of the most successful pop bands in history.

**1980:** The American company 3M began selling Post-it Notes in U.S. stores; the small pieces of paper with adhesive strips became hugely popular.

**1992:** Russian-born American author and biochemist Isaac Asimov, a highly successful and prolific writer of science fiction and of science books for the layperson, died at age 72.

**1994:** The Rwandan genocide begins. The assassination of Rwandan President, Juvénal Habyarimana, and Burundian President, Cyprien Ntaryamira, triggered a mass slaughter of ethnic Tutsis with up to 1 million victims.

### SPECTRUM ARTEMIS II

## Looking for new horizons beyond the moon



Nikunja Bhari Sahu

**WITH ITS AMBITIOUS ARTEMIS, NASA AIMS NOT JUST FOR A SYMBOLIC RETURN TO MOON, BUT A LONG TERM GOAL TO EXPLORE DEEP SPACE IN A WAY THAT HAS NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE**

As the world’s most powerful Space Launch System rocket carrying atop the Orion capsule roared off the launch pad of Florida’s Kennedy Space Center on 1 April on its way to the moon, the moon race was back again. NASA is going to resume from where it had left in 1972 which was the last crewed lunar mission with Apollo 17. With its ambitious Artemis, NASA aims not just for a symbolic return to moon with flags and footprints, but a long term goal to explore deep space in a way that has never happened before.

Artemis II carried four astronauts including a woman. The mission is expected to set several human space flight records including the longest distance travelled from earth (406,773 km), farthest distance travelled beyond the moon (about 7,600 km) and atmospheric reentry speed of about 40,000 km/h. The crew will enter into a lunar flyby path without landing on the moon and will be brought

back to earth in atmospheric reentry and splash down in the sea. Its predecessor Artemis I was launched on 16 November, 2022 that orbited the moon at a distance about 70,000 km from its surface on a 25.5-days flight. It tested the safety and performance of the uncrewed Orion spacecraft in deep space.

The most crucial Artemis-4 mission of 2028 will actually land astronauts on the Moon before returning to the earth. As a part of the mission, two astronauts would spend almost a week in the moon’s south polar region where frozen water possibly exists in permanently shadowed craters. This represents a significant departure from the Apollo missions in which astronauts explored the equatorial regions of the moon. The other successive missions of the series will be utilised to build up a base camp on the moon’s surface and a moon gateway in the lunar orbit that will help landing a number of hardware on the moon.

The gateway would also provide an easy transit platform for astronauts to step on the moon.

The mission is named after Artemis, the mythological Greek goddess of the moon and the twin sister of Apollo (after whom NASA’s first lunar mission was named). The crewed capsule Orion owes its name to one of the prominent constellations of the night sky who, in classical mythology, was the hunting companion of Artemis.

The implications of the Artemis mission are far-reaching. Most importantly, the mission will be a different one from the earlier Apollo programme as, through this, NASA will be able to establish a permanent and sustainable presence on the moon to prepare onward missions to Mars and beyond. Some of these missions will be manned in nature which had not been accomplished before. While the crew of the last Apollo-17 mission spent only 3 days on the moon, Artemis plans to

extend the trip for weeks or possibly for months. Economically, this fosters a new era of global alliances and private partnership with space industry leaders like SpaceX, Blue Origin, and Boeing.

The mission is more than a journey; it is a quest to unravel the secrets of nature and open up new worlds that would someday become the cradle for humanity’s future generations. Our sphere of living should be extended further beyond the earth’s domain to ensure the resilience and continuity of the human race in the event of a catastrophe. As we gaze upward, we should recognise that the moon is no longer our ultimate destination, but a shore from which we set sail into the infinite cosmos of distant stars. Artemis’ series of missions promises to offer such a new horizon by materialising this distant human goal!

*The writer is Education Officer, Regional Science Centre, Bhubaneswar.*

## Letters

TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa Post are most welcome to contribute letters (100 words), articles and columns (between 600-1000 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](mailto:edit@orissapost.com)

**OrissaPOST**  
B-15, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

### Normalising violations

Sir, US President Donald Trump’s foreign policy actions in West Asia, specifically regarding Iran, have drawn intense scrutiny and accusations of disregard for international law. He has indicated that international law is an “abstraction” and that his administration acts according to US interests and his own judgment, often bypassing traditional international norms. However, critics point to US’ escalating military actions, including joint strikes with Israel against Iranian targets that lack legal justification and defy international norms. Trump’s “America First” foreign policy, characterised by open disregard for international law, threatens to destabilise global norms, undermine treaties, and weaken institutions. This approach could increase global instability by normalising violations of the rules of war and causing severe humanitarian harm.

*Ranganathan Sivakumar, CHENNAI*

### First digital census

Sir, India has begun its first fully digital Census from 1 April, marking a historic shift in the way population data is collected. This is the first nationwide census in 16 years and is being conducted in phases across different states, rather than all at once. For the first time, mobile apps, smartphones, and online portals are being used instead of traditional paper forms, making the process faster, more accurate, and efficient. The exercise is one of the largest in the world, involving over 3 million officials. Significantly, caste data will also be collected for the first time since 1931, making the census more comprehensive and useful for policy planning and governance. The census aims for faster data delivery and improved policymaking, and is also expected to generate significant employment opportunities across the country. A key feature of Census 2027 is self-enumeration, which allows citizens to fill in their details online through a secure portal available in multiple languages and generate a Self-Enumeration ID for verification during house visits. Enumerators will also collect and submit data directly through mobile applications, ensuring real-time and reliable information. However, challenges such as digital awareness and internet access, especially in rural areas, need to be addressed to ensure the success of this important national exercise.

*Krishna Kumar Vepakomma, HYDERABAD*

# Wangchuk justifies Ladakh agitation

The climate activist, who was released March 14 after nearly six months of detention under the National Security Act, called for "open-minded and sincere" negotiations and striking a middle path



**Neither side should insist 'we alone will win and you will lose'. What is needed is a middle path, a win-win approach. This is what I personally believe and have conveyed to many people, including the (agitating) leaders: the negotiations should move forward gradually**

SONAM WANGCHUK

ing protests would lead to a positive and amicable resolution, enabling them to move forward and partake in the country's progress and nation-building.

Asked about charges under the National Security Act (NSA) that were levelled against him, he said, "If a person like me, who has always worked for the country - whether in education, environment, or improving facilities for the armed forces - can face such allegations, then what might not be said about others, not just in Ladakh but elsewhere as well?"

The activist said he was disturbed by a video related to his arrest that he came across recently, questioning how such claims could be made, especially as the contents "appeared" to be backed by evidence.

"If the allegations are true, I did not deserve to be free. But if they are false, they must be clearly refuted," Wangchuk said, cautioning against making sweeping accusations about Ladakh, which has been a pillar of India's defence, especially Kargil, whose people have supported the armed forces in every war and made significant sacrifices in the 1999 Kargil War.

Making such allegations will only create distance among people, he said, adding, "If mistakes are being made, they should be corrected."

Referring to the Centre's order revoking NSA charges against him, he said it is clearly stated that this step is being taken to create a conducive environment, to build trust, and to enable meaningful dialogue.

"So, we are waiting for things to move in that direction," he said. On the protesters' next course of action, he said the leadership will look into the issue, but it is hoped that the time ahead will not be for anything else but celebration.



People take part in the 'Run 4 Autism' event organised by Forum for Autism and Sunshine School, at the NMMC Headquarters, in Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra, Sunday

## Thane district gets first planetarium

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Thane, April 5:** Thane district's first planetarium was inaugurated Sunday in a village near Shahapur town.

The private Space Astrotainment Planetarium & Observatory (SAPO) is located on 3.5 acres in Sakadbav village, featuring a state-of-the-art 56-seat digital dome planetarium with 360-degree projection technology, offering shows in Marathi, Hindi, and English.

The facility houses an open-sky observatory equipped with powerful telescopes for real-time stargazing of celestial bodies like Saturn's rings and the Moon. To encourage multi-day learning sessions, the centre also offers stay options for visitors.

## BREEDING SEASON

# J&K wildlife dept scales up vigil against bird poaching

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

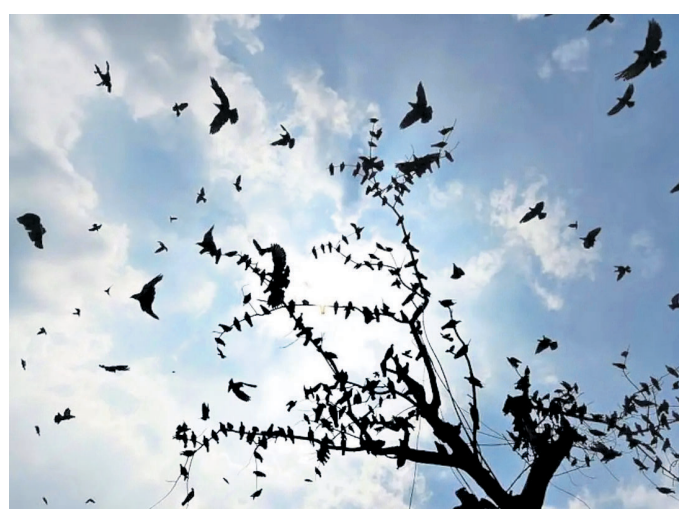
**Srinagar, April 5:** Every winter, migratory birds arrive in Kashmir in tens of thousands to escape the freezing temperatures in Siberia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and make wetlands in the valley their temporary home.

And, with the onset of rainy weather in Kashmir (from late March to May), they start their breeding season in wetlands, such as Hokersar, Dal Lake and Narkara, before returning to their native places.

However, the poaching of the birds disturbs this period. The department officials said the poachers use small boats and country-made guns to poach the birds, causing their deaths and disturbing the hatching process.

But the wildlife department is now taking steps to curb the illegal hunting in the valley. The department, in March, carried out regular patrolling and anti-poaching surveillance in various wetland areas falling under the jurisdiction of the Wildlife Protection Range, particularly Dal Lake, Narkara wetlands and adjoining areas.

"The intensified field patrols resulted in detection of several instances of illegal hunting attempts and recovery of arms,



ammunition and hunting equipment used for poaching migratory birds," a senior official of the department said.

He said a poaching attempt was foiled in the Dal Lake on March 13 after a gunshot was heard.

"The patrol team stationed at Dal Lake immediately moved towards the direction of the sound to apprehend the offenders," the official said.

However, by the time the team reached the spot, the suspects had fled, leaving behind two cartridges, a knife, a slipper and one gun cleaning rod.

On March 14, a double-barreled gun, 32 live cartridges

and two wooden boats were seized from Narkara wetlands.

At Rampura wetlands in Chattabul area, too, poaching equipment was recovered where patrolling parties foiled a bid to trap birds.

Additionally, three poachers were arrested during patrolling in Narkara wetlands March 24, and as many guns were recovered from their possession.

"The accused were taken into custody and produced before the Court of competent jurisdiction for further legal proceedings under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972," he added.

## 71L Ladki Bahin beneficiaries disqualified, says Andhare

The Shiv Sena (UBT) leader claimed these women were paid a cumulative sum of ₹255.60cr since the scheme began ahead of the assembly polls in late 2024 and asked who will compensate for the loss suffered by the state exchequer

been disqualified from Maharashtra government's flagship Mukhyamantri Ladki Bahin Yojana, under which beneficiaries get ₹1,500 as monthly aid.

Addressing a news conference Saturday, Andhare said Women and Child Development Minister Aditi Tatkar should first explain why 71 lakh women were disqualified.

She claimed these 71 lakh women were paid a cumulative sum of ₹255.60 crore since the scheme began ahead of the assembly polls in late 2024 and asked who will compensate for the loss suffered by the state



exchequer. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Aditi Tatkar should respond to this, Andhare said.

"Why shouldn't a fraud case be registered against them," she asked while alleging that

public money was used to lure voters and win polls.

Around 68 lakh accounts under Ladki Bahin Yojana were closed after beneficiaries failed to complete the mandatory e-KYC process before the deadline, reducing the number of active accounts to about 1.75 crore, state government officials had said Wednesday.

The deadline for completing e-KYC, which expired March 31, has now been extended till April 30, and officials indicated that the number of closed accounts could change following the extension.

## 18 flights per day at Leh airport to boost tourism



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Leh, April 5:** Flights at Leh airport have increased from eight to 18 per day to boost air connectivity ahead of the peak tourism season, Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena said Sunday.

He said two more flights are expected to begin operations soon, providing flexibility for visitors to plan their journeys, and invited holiday-makers to experience Ladakh for an "unforgettable" trip.

"Ladakh is all set to welcome a larger number of visitors than before. Pleased to announce a major boost to air connectivity with Leh, as the tourist season begins in Ladakh," Saxena said.

These operations include two charter flights to Delhi and Chandigarh, along with regular scheduled services connecting Leh with major destinations

**Ladakh is all set to welcome a larger number of visitors than before. Pleased to announce a major boost to air connectivity with Leh, as the tourist season begins in Ladakh**

VINAI KUMAR SAXENA | LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR, LADAKH

such as Delhi, Mumbai, Srinagar, and Chandigarh, officials said.

"With our concerted efforts, the flight operations at Leh Airport have significantly increased from eight flights to 18 flights a day, as on April 2, connecting major cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Srinagar and Chandigarh. Two more flights are expected to begin operations soon, thereby providing greater flexibility to visitors to plan their journey," the L-G took to X.

## Mumbai's Elphinstone bridge becomes history

Over the decades, the structure became a key east-west connector serving Mumbai's erstwhile mill district, linking present-day Parel and Prabhadevi and shaping commuter movement for over a century

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, April 5:** After shaping commuter movement for 113 years between present-day Parel and Prabhadevi in central Mumbai, the Elphinstone Road Overbridge became history Sunday as workers dismantled its last remaining girders.

With this, the Central Railway has so far razed five British-era road overbridges (ROBs) as part of infrastructure upgrades and suburban rail corridor expansion works on the busy CSMT-Kurla stretch in the metropolis, officials said.

The last remaining girders of the Elphinstone bridge were pulled down during a special night traffic and power block between Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT) and Dadar, ensuring minimal disruption to suburban services, which resumed at 7:30 am, said CR's Chief Public Relations Officer Swapnil Nila. He said the bridge, also known as Prabhadevi ROB, had outlived its utility and is being replaced with a double-decker ROB as part of the Worli-Sewree elevated corridor project. The new east-west connector will come up in a couple of years, said officials.

"With the dismantling of the

Elphinstone ROB, space has been created for two additional suburban lines between Kurla and Parel," he said. The lines will be extended up to CSMT in a later phase under the Mumbai Urban Transport Project.

Officials said the Elphinstone ROB, constructed in 1913, had a 37-metre span over the Central Railway section and a total width of 13.53 metres. It comprised "steel semi-through girders and eight panels supported by cross girders and an arch trough system", they said.

The dismantling was carried out in a phased manner as the ROB ran over Mumbai's busy rail lines. Nearly 20 corridor blocks were utilised for preparatory works to remove the deck slab, pipelines, cables and footpath structures. Subsequently, six major traffic and power blocks were undertaken, during which panels were dismantled in stages and overhead equipment (OHE) shifted, Nila said.

During the final mega block on the night of April 4-5, the remaining longitudinal beams and the two main girders were dismantled using heavy-duty cranes of up to 800-tonne capacity positioned outside the railway boundary, he said.

The operation involved ex-



tensive coordination among engineering, traffic and traction departments, with 95 personnel deployed for OHE modifications, he said. Officials said the exercise posed several challenges, including restricted space due to nearby high-rise buildings, narrow access points, corroded structural components and the inherent risks in handling a century-old structure.

Nila said five east-west connecting British-era bridges, including Masjid ROB, Hancock ROB, Carnac ROB, Sion ROB and Elphinstone ROB, have so far been removed between CSMT and Kurla as part of ongoing capacity enhancement works.

While a new overpass has already become operational where

the original Carnac ROB once stood, work on the Sion ROB is still underway. The Masjid ROB was the first to be dismantled, followed by Hancock and Carnac bridges in subsequent phases.

As documented by Rajendra B Aklekar in his book 'Halt Station India', the Elphinstone bridge traces its origins to the early 20th century, when rising rail traffic made level crossings increasingly unviable.

Around 1905, the Great Indian Peninsula Railway (GIPR) proposed constructing a road overbridge at Parel to replace a busy crossing. The Bombay Municipality and the neighbouring BB&CI Railway declined to share the cost, forcing GIPR to fund the project entirely, while

the civic body constructed the approach roads, as per the book.

The bridge was eventually completed in 1913, featuring imported steel girders and stone plaques bearing the name "Parel Bridge" along with contractor details. Aklekar notes that the bridge was also referred to in records as "Carroll Bridge", possibly after EB Carroll, a locomotive superintendent associated with the BB&CI Railway who contributed to coach design and lighting systems.

He said the bridge had two plaques from the construction era, which have been preserved by the executing agencies and will be incorporated into the new structure. These include stone engravings naming the contractor - "GIPR, Parel Bridge, 1913, Contractor Bomanji Rustomji" - and metal seals on the girders reading "P&W Maclellan Limited, Clutha Works, Glasgow, 1911".

CR officials said the replacement of these ageing structures is aimed at improving rail operations, augmenting capacity, easing road traffic congestion and enhancing overall commuter safety on Mumbai's suburban network. With the bridge now completely dismantled April 5, 2026, officials said it marks the end of an era.



The momentum across the country gives me great confidence. In the past few months alone, I have had the privilege of laying foundation stones for judicial court complexes in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, and now Telangana

SURYA KANT | CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA

## MODI HAILS MARITIME SECTOR'S CONTRIBUTION

Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday highlighted India's maritime heritage and lauded the contribution of those associated with the sector on National Maritime Day. In a post on X, Modi said the dedication of people linked to the maritime sector plays a vital role in strengthening the country's economy, trade and connectivity



## of the day quote

It is unfortunate that the institute, which was to be completed by March 2024, has now been put on the back burner due to the state government's inaction



ASHOK GEHLOT | EX-RAJASTHAN CM

Ladakh is all set to welcome a larger number of visitors than before. Pleased to announce a major boost to air connectivity with Leh, as the tourist season begins in Ladakh



VINAI KUMAR SAXENA | J&K LT GOVERNOR

The government will provide assistance to all affected farmers. In Maharashtra, whenever there is unseasonal rain or hailstorms, we conduct surveys and provide compensation. The same will be done this time as well



DEVENDRA FADNIS | MAHARASHTRA CM

## SHORT TAKES

### Pistol, cartridge recovered from madrasa

**Motihari:** Police Sunday recovered a pistol and a cartridge from the premises of a madrasa in East Champaran district of Bihar, officials said. Three persons, including a cleric of the madrasa located in Govindara locality, have been detained for questioning, SP Swarn Prabhat said. The district police had constituted a special investigation team (SIT) and raided the madrasa based on specific inputs, Prabhat said. Forensic experts have also been engaged to assist the investigators in collecting evidence, he added.

### J&K: Six drug peddlers held

**Jammu:** Six alleged drug peddlers were apprehended along with contraband substances in Reasi, Poonch and Jammu districts Sunday, police said. Taking prompt action following the circulation of several videos on social media showing the alleged sale of intoxicating drugs at Purana Daroor market near Katra town of Reasi, police nabbed four people and recovered a consignment of banned tablets from them, a police officer said. He identified the apprehended individuals as Rashpal Singh, Uttam Singh, Sohal Lal -- all residents of Katra -- and Joginder Singh of Kanjali and further legal action was initiated against them.

### Hooch tragedy toll rises to 9

**Motihari:** The toll in the hooch tragedy in Bihar's East Champaran district rose to nine Sunday after three more people who had consumed spurious liquor died, officials said. The first death was reported Thursday, they said. A total of 15 people have been arrested in connection with the deaths in the Turkauliya and Raghunathpur areas of Motihari, District Magistrate Saurabh Jorwal said.

### Shopkeeper killed as neighbours clash

**New Delhi:** A 50-year-old grocery shop owner was killed, while two others were injured after neighbours clashed in northwest Delhi's Shakurpur area, police said Sunday. The police have registered a case at Subhash Place police station, detaining one of the accused and identifying others, they said. The incident took place at Sanjay Park on the night of April 4, following a quarrel between the shopkeeper, Rajkumar, and his neighbours, an officer said.

## WEAPON OF MASS DISTRACTION

# Cong slams Modi's push for increasing seats of LS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 5:** The Congress Sunday launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the proposal to increase Lok Sabha seats, saying he is "bulldozing" the move that will work more to the benefit of larger and populous states and is nothing but a "Weapon of Mass Distraction (WMD)".

The Opposition party also alleged that the prime minister is "hoodwinking" the people of the country and is making misleading statements that are meant to deceive.

In a post on X, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "The PM is upto his usual tricks of making misleading statements that are meant to deceive. He says South Indian states will not be hurt in any way if the strength of the Lok Sabha is increased by 50% and the number of seats of each state in the Lok Sabha is also increased by 50%."

"This is hoodwinking the people of the country in which the PM has unique expertise," Ramesh said. For example, the difference between UP's and Kerala's seats in the Lok Sabha is now 60 and Modi's proposal will increase it to 90, he said. Similarly, the difference between UP and Tamil Nadu will increase from 41 to at least 61, Ramesh said and added that such examples can be multi-



The Opposition party also alleged that the prime minister is "hoodwinking" the people of the country and is making misleading statements that are meant to deceive

plied. "Mr. Modi is bulldozing a proposal that will work more to the benefit of larger and populous states since their already large numbers will get further magnified," the Congress leader said. It is not just South India but states like Punjab and Haryana and those in the North East, that will also see their relative influence decline, he argued. "The nation is facing a serious economic and foreign policy crisis. All that the PM is bothered about is pushing through an increase in the strength of the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabhas without

meaningful consultations and widespread public debate. This is nothing but a Weapon of Mass Distraction (WMD)," Ramesh said. Tagging Ramesh's post, Congress MP Manish Tewari said Jairam Ramesh is absolutely prescient and the framing by PM Modi is absolutely erroneous.

"The framing must be how much will Southern India, Western India, North Eastern India and North Western India lose in terms of political heft as compared to the Hindi heartland states of India in terms of the gap in the number of Parliamentary seats between them and the Hindi heartland states," Tewari said.

The Chandigarh MP noted that states and UTs like Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Delhi together have just 40 seats in Lok Sabha, as opposed to Uttar Pradesh's 80, and said, "This gap will only further increase" post delimitation. "Whatever @PMOIndia & @BJP4India is proposing that is yet unclear will further skew the Federal Balance to the detriment of the non Hindi heartland states," Tewari said in his post. His remarks came a day after Prime Minister Modi said that the Budget session of Parliament has been extended for three days so that the law enacted in 2023 for providing 33 per cent reservation to women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies can be implemented from 2029.

## Govt steps up LPG supply, urges calm over Hormuz



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 5:** Sale of small 5-kg LPG cylinders - available across-the-counter at LPG distributorships on showing valid ID proofs - has been stepped up, with about 6.6 lakh bottles sold since March 23 as the government ramps up supplies to meet demand.

Unlike the subsidised domestic 14.2-kg cylinders, the 5 kg bottles, called FTL cylinders, are priced at market rates and do not require any address proof for procurement from a nearby LPG distributorship.

"Yesterday (April 4), more than 90,000, 5Kg FTL cylinders were sold. Since March 23, 2026, about 6.6 lakh, 5 Kg FTL cylinders have been sold," the oil ministry said in a statement.

The ministry said there are

no reports of shortages at LPG distributor points, with more than 51 lakh domestic cylinders delivered during the day and online bookings accounting for 95 per cent of total demand.

Authorities have intensified action against hoarding and black marketing, seizing over 50,000 cylinders since March and issuing more than 1,400 show-cause notices to LPG distributors, with 36 dealerships suspended so far. The government has prioritised supplies of domestic LPG and piped natural gas (PNG), particularly for households and essential services such as hospitals and educational institutions, while boosting refinery output and managing demand by extending LPG refill intervals.

On natural gas, the government said full supplies are being maintained for households and transport, while supplies to fertiliser plants are set to rise to about 90 per cent of average consumption from April 6, supported by incoming LNG cargoes.



Bishops perform a baptismal ritual on a baby during a mass prayer on Easter Sunday, at St. Joseph's Cathedral Church, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh

PTI PHOTO

# Homeopathy can be sustainable care option: Experts

Ahead of the World Homoeopathy Day April 10 -- themed "Homoeopathy for Sustainable Health" -- the focus is increasingly shifting towards integrative and long-term approaches for managing menstrual health conditions among women and adolescents

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 5:** Nearly 80 per cent of adolescent girls in India experienced disruptions in daily activities due to menstrual problems, with around 30 per cent skipping school, show findings from programmes led by the Central Council for Research in Homeopathy, underscoring a significant public health concern.

Ahead of the World Homoeopathy Day April 10 - themed "Homoeopathy for Sustainable Health" -- the focus is increasingly shifting towards integrative and long-term approaches for managing menstrual health

conditions among women and adolescents.

Highlighting the importance of sustainable healthcare solutions, Union Ayush Minister Prataprao Jadhav said that menstrual health is central to women's overall well-being and dignity.

"As we move towards preventive and holistic healthcare, homeopathy offers a safe, cost-effective and sustainable approach, especially for conditions that require long-term management," he told PTI.

Menstrual health has gained policy attention in recent years, with continued efforts to improve awareness and access to

## MENSTRUAL HEALTH CHALLENGES



hygiene. However, challenges in the timely treatment of disorders and sustained care persist, particularly among adolescents. Vaidya Rajesh Kotecha, Secretary, Ministry of Ayush, said, "There is a growing need for healthcare systems that are not only effective but also accessible and patient-friendly. Homeopathy, with its indi-

vidualised approach, has the potential to address chronic menstrual disorders while contributing to sustainable health outcomes."

Institutional efforts have further strengthened this shift. The Central Council for Research in Homeopathy (CCRH), under the Ministry of Ayush, has been expanding re-

search and outreach initiatives to address menstrual health challenges.

"Findings from the first phase of a CCRH-led programme, conducted across 24 states and 127 schools and involving over 10,000 adolescent girls, revealed that nearly 80 per cent experienced disruptions in daily activities due to menstrual issues, while around 30 per cent reported being absent from school," said Dr Anupriya Chaudhary, CCRH scientist and project coordinator. Phase 1 of the programme was conducted in 2024 and 2025, and the findings were compiled early this year.

The second phase of the programme is being expanded to over 16 states and 54 schools, covering over 10,000 girls, with a focus on improving awareness, promoting menstrual hygiene, and providing homeopathic treatment.

Researchers are also explor-

ing the role of homeopathy in addressing underlying endocrine imbalances associated with such conditions.

Health experts note that menstrual disorders - ranging from irregular cycles and dysmenorrhoea to conditions such as polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) -- often require prolonged care, leading many patients to explore non-invasive and holistic treatment options.

In addition, a growing body of research highlights positive outcomes in conditions such as menstrual irregularities, PCOS, uterine fibroids and menopausal symptoms, with studies indicating improvements in cycle regulation and overall well-being.

Experts underline that with millions of girls affected and menstrual health continuing to impact education and quality of life, sustainable and patient-centric approaches are essential.

## Neutrality of polls can't be assured if EC dependent on contestants: Nagarathna

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 5:** Neutrality of elections cannot be assured if those who conduct polls are dependent on the contestants, Justice BV Nagarathna of the Supreme Court has said, in a veiled admonishment of the Election Commission.

The apex court judge raised a critical concern regarding the structural independence of those tasked with overseeing the ballot while delivering the Rajendra Prasad Memorial Lecture at the Chanakya Law University in Patna Saturday.

Citing a 1995 verdict where the Supreme Court recognised the Election Commission as a constitutional authority of high significance, entrusted with ensuring the integrity of elections, she said, "The concern, once again, was structural: if those who conduct elections are dependent on those who contest them, the neutrality of the process cannot be assured."

Justice Nagarathna said elections are not merely periodic events but a mechanism through which political authority is constituted.

"Our constitutional democracy has amply demonstrated smooth changes in government due to elections being held on a timely basis. Control over that process is, in effect, control over the conditions of political competition itself," she said.

The Supreme Court judge said that power is not exercised only through formal institutions but also through the processes that sustain them, including elections, public fi-



nance and regulation.

"A constitutional structure that seeks to restrain power must therefore go beyond its classical forms and address these fourth-branch institutions."

"A set of institutions, while not always fitting within the classical tripartite scheme, is nonetheless central to the maintenance of constitutional order," she said.

Justice Nagarathna said the unmistakable lesson of history is that constitutional collapse occurs through the disabling of its structure, and the violation of rights merely follows.

"The dismantling of structure, in turn, occurs when institutions stop checking each other. At that moment, elections may continue, courts may function, laws may be enacted by Parliament, and yet, power is effectively not restrained because the structural discipline no longer exists," she said.

The apex court judge also urged the Centre to view states as "coordinates and not subordinates" and asserted that the separation of powers was a "constitutional arrangement of co-equals."

## AI suspends flights to Israel till May 31

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Jerusalem, April 5:** Amid the ongoing war in West Asia, Air India (AI) has suspended its flights to Israel till May 31. An Air India executive confirmed to PTI that the airline has suspended flights on the New Delhi-Tel Aviv route till May 31.

Most of the leading airlines have suspended their operations on the Tel Aviv route with only Israeli carriers like El Al, IsraAir, Arkia and Air Haifa operating under severe restrictions.

The suspension of flights has caused major worries among more than 40,000 Indians living in Israel who wish to travel to India for personal or professional reasons, or even to escape the escalating tensions in the region.

Indians looking to leave Israel have to go through Jordan or Egypt by entering the two countries through the land crossings. The Indian mission in Tel Aviv has been assisting those looking to travel through various means.



The state government will roll out a 100-day special action plan on water conservation from Tadipatri in Anantapur district tomorrow, with a focus on strengthening water security across Andhra Pradesh

N CHANDRABABU NAIDU | ANDHRA CHIEF MINISTER

MP LODGE COLLAPSE TOLL RISES TO THREE

The death toll in the collapse of a four-storey lodge in Madhya Pradesh's Anuppur district has risen to three, with three others seriously injured, a police official said Sunday



of the day quote

The basis of reservation is one-third of total seats, which is purely a mathematical issue depending on numbers. Numbers, in turn, must be derived from population data, and that comes from a census. If old 2011 data is used to determine the women's population, the very foundation of the reservation becomes incorrect

AKHILESH YADAV | SP CHIEF

This is my first visit to Jharkhand after becoming the RJD national working president. I have been given a big responsibility to grow, expand and strengthen the party

TEJASHWI YADAV | RJD NATIONAL WORKING PRESIDENT

Over the past decade, the NDA government in Assam has ushered in significant strides in infrastructure development and governance. With sustained efforts towards progress and decisive actions, including addressing the issue of illegal migration, Assam stands poised to emerge as a robust and dynamic state, not only in the North East, but across the nation

Y KHEMCHAND SINGH | MANIPUR CM



People along Marine Drive against the backdrop of a clear sky, in Mumbai, Maharashtra

PTI PHOTO

Baramati: Congress declares candidate against Sunetra

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, April 5: The Congress Sunday picked its state unit secretary Akash More against Maharashtra Deputy CM and NCP chief Sunetra Pawar for the Baramati assembly bypoll, a move indicating a rift in the opposition over fielding a candidate in a contest necessitated by Ajit Pawar's death.

While the Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) had announced it won't field a candidate against Sunetra as a mark of respect for her deceased husband, another Maha Vikas Aghadi member, the Shiv Sena (UBT) has also indicated its support for an unopposed election.

Notably, the Congress announced the name of More hours after Sunetra Pawar dialled state Congress chief Harshwardhan Sapkal and urged him to ensure an unopposed bypoll.

More is the son of former party MLC Vijayrao More and belongs to the Dhargar community, Congress leaders said. Currently a Rajya Sabha



member, Sunetra Pawar will file her nominations for the bypoll, scheduled for April 23, Monday. A day earlier, Sunetra Pawar had sought Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray's support in the April 23 byelection, which was necessitated due to the death of her husband and then Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar in a plane crash in January.

Votes will be counted May 4. "If Congress is going to take a different decision, then I don't think we should interfere in it as MVA. But Uddhav ji and Ajit Pawar had an emotional bond....", Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut said Saturday.

Cong alleges Sarma's wife holds 3 passports

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 5: The Congress Sunday alleged that Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife possesses passports of three countries and that he concealed information about her properties, but the BJP leader "categorically rejected" the claims as "malicious" and "fabricated" and vowed to take legal action "within 48 hours".

Targeting Sarma as the campaign peaks for the April 9 election in Assam, Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khera showed, at a press conference, purported documents to support the allegations and demanded that the Election Commission cancel his nomination for allegedly concealing information in his poll affidavit.

Hitting back at Khera, Sarma said that as Assam moves decisively towards a historic mandate, such desperate and baseless attacks only expose the Congress' sinking ground. "These are malicious, fabricated, and politically motivated lies aimed at misleading the people of Assam," the Assam Chief Minister said.

He alleged that "documents being circulated show multiple glaring inconsistencies, suggesting a crude and poorly executed attempt at digital manipulation".

Sarma said his wife and he will be filing both criminal and civil defamation cases within the next 48 hours against Khera for making "reckless and de-



famatory statements".

In his press conference here, Khera said Assam Chief Minister Sarma and his wife "have faced numerous allegations over time -- such as land grabbing, misappropriation of temple donations, siphoning off government subsidies".

"However, the documents we are presenting before you today pertain to matters extending beyond India's borders," Khera said.

"Riniki Bhuyan Sharma, the wife of the Assam Chief Minister, holds three passports," he alleged. Khera claimed that she has a UAE Passport, which was issued March 14, 2022 and expires March 13, 2027.

He claimed the second passport in her name is from Antigua and Barbuda, which was issued from August 26, 2021, and expires August 25, 2031.

Khera also alleged that the third passport in her name is from Egypt which was issued February 13, 2022 and expires February 12, 2029.

"Himanta Biswa Sarma's entire politics is predicated on hatred against Muslims; yet, his wife holds passports from two Muslim countries?" Khera alleged.

C'GARH BJP OFFICE BLAST

2 main perpetrators held; attack backed by ISI: DGP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, April 5: Punjab Police has arrested two alleged perpetrators of a recent blast outside the BJP headquarters in Chandigarh, taking the total number of arrests in the case to seven, a senior police officer said Sunday.

The accused were allegedly part of a module backed by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and were taking directions from their handlers in Germany and Portugal, police said.

The latest arrests were made in Haryana's Rewari on Saturday night in a joint operation with Haryana Police's Special Task Force (STF), Punjab DGP Gaurav Yadav said.

"The duo has been identified as Gurtej Singh and Amanpreet Singh, both residents of Ratangarh village in Punjab's Rupnagar district. They were working as bike operators for ride-hailing service provider Rapido," the police chief said at a press conference.

ISI-backed handlers, Baljot Singh alias Jot in Portugal and Harjeet Singh Laadi in Germany, motivated the accused to carry out the attack in exchange for a monetary reward of Rs 2 lakh, the DGP said.

On April 1, a blast occurred outside the Punjab BJP headquarters in Chandigarh's Sector 37 around 5 pm, shattering



the windowpanes of a few cars and damaging a scooter. There were no casualties.

Police initially suspected it to be a crude bomb attack, which later turned out to be a hand grenade explosion.

"Amanpreet was previously involved in a theft case in Mohali. He was also booked for snatching in Himachal's Bilaspur," the DGP said at the presser. According to police, Gurtej came in contact with Portugal-based Baljot Singh, the main handler of the module, six months ago through social media. "On March 28, Gurtej was tasked with collecting a consignment of grenades and other weapons from Balachaur in Punjab's Nawanshahr," the DGP said.

The consignment was collected by Gurtej, Mandeep and Rubal Chauhan from Jasvir Singh alias Jassi. It contained

two grenades, one pistol and 10 cartridges, the officer said.

Mandeep, Rubal and Jasvir were among the five people arrested in the case earlier.

"Baltoj tasked Gurtej with target identification and conducting a reconnaissance. Amanpreet was roped in by Gurtej," Yadav said.

It was Amanpreet who lobbed the grenade outside the BJP office, while Gurtej filmed the act, he said.

"Their foreign handlers shared videos with them on how to hurl a grenade. Directions were also given over the cellphone," Yadav said.

Gurtej and Amanpreet were promised Rs 2 lakh for carrying out the blast, he said.

On Saturday, the DGP had said that the counter-intelligence wing of Punjab Police had cracked the case in a joint operation with Chandigarh Police.

WOMAN MISSING IN TADIANDAMOL HILLS FOUND SAFE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore, April 5: A 36-year-old woman who went missing while trekking in the Tadiandamol hills of Kodagu district four days ago has been found, Karnataka Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre said Sunday. He said nine teams conducted a round the-clock search operation to locate the young woman. She is healthy, and officials have been instructed to ensure she safely reaches her home in Kerala.

G S Sharanya had travelled alone from Kerala for the trek and was staying at a private homestay in Kakkabe village. She had set out for the high mountain range of Tadiandamol hills April 2 with a guide and 15 other trekkers, but went missing that afternoon.

"The woman has now been found, and I have also spoken to her. She is healthy," Khandre told reporters. When all the other trekkers returned to their base on the afternoon of April 2, they discovered that Sharanya was missing. She had last contacted the homestay by phone Thursday, saying she had lost her way.

"As soon as the matter came to light, five teams began a search operation starting the same day," he said.

Raghav Chadha shares 'small trailer' of raising Punjab issues in Parl

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 5: Responding to criticism that he did not raise Punjab's concerns in Parliament, sidelined AAP leader Raghav Chadha Sunday shared a video showing his interventions on key issues affecting the state.

In the video, the Rajya Sabha MP from Punjab can be seen raising issues related to depleting groundwater levels, Bhagat Singh, and other state-centric matters.

Describing the video as a "small trailer", Chadha asserted that he will make a comeback, saying: "Picture abhi baaki hai."

"To my colleagues in AAP who were forced to issue videos saying that 'Raghav Chadha failed to raise Punjab's issues in Parliament', here is a small trailer 'picture abhi baaki hai', he said. Chadha also said that Punjab was not just a political talking point for him, but his "home, duty, soil and soul".

The AAP has not reacted to the video yet. Chadha's remarks followed after the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Thursday removed him as its deputy leader in the Rajya Sabha, after which the MP said he had been "silenced, not defeated".

POST OF THE DAY

In my opinion India can be transformed overnight if we just focus on cleanliness, just cleanliness, nothing else. Make it a national priority. Many buildings in Italy don't even have plaster on them but they still look 100 times beautiful, simply because of the clean surroundings

@rishav\_sharma1

SHORT TAKES

Snowfall in higher reaches of Himachal

Shimla: Higher reaches of Himachal Pradesh experienced snowfall as the Shimla Meteorological Office issued an orange alert of hailstorm, thunderstorm, lightning, and gusty winds in four to five districts April 7 and 8. In the past 24 hours, since Saturday evening, Gondla in the tribal Lahaul and Spiti district received 28.2 cm of snow, followed by Keylong with 20 cm, Hansa with 5 cm, and Kukumseri with 1.3 cm.

Shah reaches out to Christian community

Kochi/Thiruvananthapuram: Union Home Minister Amit Shah Sunday reached out to the Christian community on the occasion of Easter, requesting them to stand with the BJP-led NDA and help it form a government in Kerala where Assembly elections will be held April 9. Shah, speaking at a public meeting in Kunnathunadu constituency in Ernakulam, also referred to the alleged misappropriation of gold from Sabarimala and said the culprits behind it would be jailed within two months if the NDA forms a government in Kerala.

APSRTC bus catches fire

Veerannagattupalli (Andhra Pradesh): A government bus caught fire after coming into contact with a low-hanging high-tension electric wire in the Kadapa district on the Vempalli-Rayachoti main road Sunday, police said. However, no casualties or injuries were reported. The bus was proceeding from Kadapa to Kadiria via Vempalli and Talupula when the incident occurred.

'India accounts for 25% of global groundwater use'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 5: India accounts for around 25 per cent of global groundwater withdrawals, the Public Accounts Committee has flagged, and urged the Jal Shakti Ministry to persuade states to curb excessive extraction.

The observations were made in the panel's 41st report 'Ground Water Management and Regulation', presented in the Lok Sabha April 1 by its chairperson, K C Venugopal, and laid in the Rajya Sabha the same day.

The report, an action taken account of the committee's earlier recommendations, said India is the largest user of groundwater in the world, with extraction estimated at 245 billion cubic metres (BCM), accounting for about 25 per cent of global withdrawals, fulfilling nearly 80 per cent of drinking water needs, and around 64 per cent of irrigation requirements. The committee stressed for



translating existing initiatives into concrete results to ensure sustainable use of the resource.

"The fact that four states had exceeded 100 per cent extraction and 267 districts had a stage of extraction ranging from 64 per cent to 385 per cent is a clear indication of the failure to prioritise sustainable water use," the report said.

"The Committee strongly urge the ministry to persuade the state governments to take immediate and stringent measures to curb excessive extraction of groundwater and

ensure long-term viability of groundwater resources," it added.

The panel noted that between 2004 and 2017, the stage of groundwater extraction in the country increased from 58 per cent to 63 per cent.

Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, and Rajasthan recorded extraction levels of more than 100 per cent, meaning groundwater withdrawal exceeded recharge, while at the district level, 267 districts across 24 states and Union Territories reported extraction ranging from 64 per

The panel noted that between 2004 and 2017, the stage of groundwater extraction in the country increased from 58 per cent to 63 per cent. Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, and Rajasthan recorded extraction levels of more than 100 per cent, meaning groundwater withdrawal exceeded recharge, while at the district level, 267 districts across 24 states and Union Territories reported extraction ranging from 64 per cent to 385 per cent.

In its response, the ministry said it is coordinating with states for sustainable groundwater management and implementing such programmes as Jal Shakti Abhiyan, Atal Bhujal Yojana, Ground Water Management and Regulation Scheme, and the National Hydrology Project.

The ministry said that a re-

cent assessment (2023) of dynamic groundwater resources by the Central Ground Water Board and state agencies showed that the overall stage of groundwater extraction had declined from 63.33 per cent in 2017 to 59.26 per cent in 2023.

It said that the proportion of "safe" assessment units increased from 62.6 per cent in 2017 to 73.1 per cent in 2023, while over-exploited units declined from 17 per cent to 11 per cent during the same period.

Further, post-monsoon water levels in 2022 showed that about 61 per cent of monitored wells registered a rise compared to the average of the previous ten years (2012-21), indicating early signs of improvement in the groundwater scenario, it said.

The ministry, however, said that while the early signs are "heartening", the momentum needs to be maintained and additional measures are being taken to ensure scientific management of groundwater resources.



**This Easter comes at a time of real anxiety for many people. Conflicts abroad, pressures at home, and uncertainty about the future weigh heavily on families and households**  
KEIR STARMER | BRITISH PM

**POPE URGES PEACE**

Pope Leo celebrated his first Easter Mass as pontiff with a call Sunday to exercise hope against "the violence of war that kills and destroys," saying "we need this song of hope today" as conflicts spread around the world.



**of the day quote**

**The EU, and especially the EC (the European Commission), should immediately resume dialogue with Russia and ensure such a political and legal environment that individual member states and the EU as a whole replenish the missing gas and oil reserves and enable the supply of these strategic raw materials from all possible sources and directions, including Russia**  
ROBERT FICO | SLOVAK PM

**South Korea is a top priority nation and pledged to communicate closely with Seoul to ensure stable supply**  
KOO YUN-CHEOL | SOUTH KOREAN FINANCE MINISTER

**If India tries to stage any false flag operation this time, then God-willingly, we will take it to Kolkata**  
KHAWAJA ASIF | PAKISTAN'S DEFENCE MINISTER

# US airman rescued from Iran

US President Donald Trump Sunday called an "amazing show of bravery and talent" by all the rescue operation for the pilot for whom the Iranian regime had offered a reward



A still image purporting to show US aircraft destroyed during the US mission to find a stranded airman in Iran, the Revolutionary Guards said according to Iranian media

**New York, April 5:** A US Air Force officer whose jet was shot down in Iran hid in a mountain crevice and hiked up to 7,000 feet to evade the enemy before he was rescued by the American forces after a two-day "life-or-death" mission, the New York Times said.

On Sunday, US President Donald Trump called an "amazing show of bravery and talent" by all the rescue operation for the pilot for whom the Iranian regime had offered a reward.

"We have rescued the seriously wounded, and really brave, F-15 Crew Member/Officer, from deep inside the mountains of Iran. The Iranian Military was looking hard, in big numbers, and getting close," Trump said in a post on Truth Social calling the rescued crew as "a highly respected Colonel."

"This type of raid is seldom attempted because of the danger to man and equipment." It just doesn't happen! The second raid came after the first one, where we rescued the pilot in broad daylight, also unusual, spending seven hours over Iran. An AMAZING show of bravery and talent by all!" he added. The White House also declared on its social media handles: "We will never leave an American warfighter be-

**R**escued US airman was from plane Iran shot down

**T**ump tells Iran to open Strait of Hormuz by Tuesday

**T**ehran continues to hit Gulf neighbours' infrastructure

**M**ediation sought by Pakistan fruitless so far

hind." Detailing the rescue operation, a report in the New York Times said the Air Force officer was rescued by the US Special Operations forces in a "risky mission" Saturday night. "The rescue followed a life-or-death race between US and Iranian forces to reach the airman, a weapons system officer, that stretched over two days," the report quoted officials as saying.

The US fighter jet, an F-15E Strike Eagle, had been shot down by Iran over the southwestern part of the country Friday. Two crew members on the plane were able to eject from it and while the pilot was rescued soon afterward, an urgent search was launched for the other airman.

"After ejecting from the

F-15E, the officer hid in a mountain crevice. He evaded Iranian forces for more than 24 hours, at one point hiking up a 7,000-foot ridge. His location was initially unknown to the United States but the C.I.A. found his hiding place," the report said, quoting information shared by senior administration officials. American aircraft dropped bombs and opened fire on Iranian convoys to keep them away from where the airman was hiding, the report said. "US commandos also fired their weapons to keep Iranian forces away from the rescue site as they converged on the

airman but did not engage in a firefight with the Iranians," a US military official said.

The NYT report said Navy SEAL Team 6 commandos rescued the weapons systems officer in an operation that "involved hundreds of special operations troops and other military personnel working deep in enemy territory."

Soon after he was rescued, Trump announced on Truth Social late on Saturday night that the United States Military had "pulled off one of the most daring Search and Rescue Operations in US History, for one of our incredible Crew Member Officers, who also happens to be a highly respected Colonel, and who I am thrilled to let you know is now SAFE and SOUND!"

"This brave Warrior was behind enemy lines in the treacherous mountains of Iran, being hunted down by our enemies, who were getting closer and closer by the hour," he said.

The rescued officer "sustained injuries, but he will be just fine," Trump said, adding that there were no American casualties as the US forces pulled off this rescue mission as well as another one involving another pilot.

## Several aircraft destroyed during rescue mission: Iran

**Dubai:** Several aircraft were destroyed in the south of Iran's Isfahan province during a US mission to find a stranded airman, Iranian military officials said Sunday. US officials told Reuters late Saturday that a second airman whose F-15 jet was downed on Friday in Iran was rescued, a day after the first crew member was recovered. "Additional investigations by experts on the ground revealed that two C-130 military transport planes and two Black Hawk helicopters of the US army were destroyed by our forces," the spokesperson of the unified command of Iranian armed forces said. Separate statements by the Iranian army and Revolutionary Guards said an Israeli Hermes-900 drone as well as a US MQ-9 drone were downed in Isfahan province.

## SHORT TAKES

### 45 dead in NW Pak in rain related incidents

**Peshawar:** At least 45 persons have lost their lives and 105 sustained injuries in rain related incidents across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in northwest Pakistan over the last 10 days, the PDMA said Sunday. In a report that covers damages caused by persistent rains since March 25, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) said that among the total 45 fatalities, 23 are children, 17 men and 5 women while the injured comprised 45 men, 16 women, and 44 children.

### PIO couple jailed for operating UK cos

**London:** An Indian-origin couple has been sentenced for breaching a disqualification order to operate companies in the UK for over five years despite a ban following tax fraud claims. Bharat Jogia, 71, from England's West Midlands region was disqualified as a company director for 13 years in 2014 after not disputing that he caused Jogia Jewellers (UK) Limited to wrongfully claim more than 2 million pounds from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC). The UK's Insolvency Service discovered that he ignored that ban to continue to control pharmaceutical companies Diamond Pharma Limited and BHI Consulting Ltd.

### Israeli fire kills 4 Palestinians

**Cairo:** An Israeli airstrike killed four Palestinians in the northern Gaza Strip Sunday, local health authorities said, in the latest violence to overshadow a fragile ceasefire amid a new push by mediators to bolster the agreement. Medics said the airstrike targeted a group of people in Jaffa Street, near the Darraj neighbourhood in Gaza City, killing four people and wounding others. The Israeli military said forces in the northern Gaza Strip had struck and killed members of a Palestinian militant cell who were operating near the troops, posing an immediate threat to them.

### Sweden releases sanctioned tanker

**Frankfurt:** Swedish authorities have released a tanker sanctioned by the European Union that had been boarded and detained on suspicion of causing an oil spill in the Baltic Sea. The Swedish Coast Guard said they had not found sufficient evidence that the Flora 1 tanker was at fault for the 12-kilometre (8-mile) long spill that had been discovered Thursday.

## British royals gather for Easter service

AGENCIES

**London, April 5:** Britain's King Charles and Queen Camilla attended the traditional Easter service at Windsor Castle Sunday, joined by his eldest son and heir to the throne Prince William, wife Catherine, and their three children at St George's Chapel.

The Easter Matins service is an important fixture in the calendar of the king, who is supreme governor of the Church of England. The Dean of Windsor, Christopher Cocksworth, greeted Charles and Camilla, who wore a red hat and coat, as they arrived for the Easter Matins, which was also attended by Prince Edward and Anne, the Princess Royal, and other royals. Charles and Camilla, who was handed a posy of flowers, wished "Happy Easter" to members of the crowd after the service ended. The monarch's younger brother



Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, who was arrested in February by police on suspicion of misconduct in public office, was absent after attending last year's Easter gathering accompanied by ex-wife Sarah Ferguson. Their daughters, Princesses Beatrice and Eugenie, were also absent Sunday. The decision to miss Sunday's service was the princesses' choice, not Charles', a royal source said last week.

King Charles, who did not deliver an Easter message this year, was urged Saturday by the family of Jeffrey Epstein accuser Virginia Giuffre to meet survivors during his state visit to the US.



People raise their hands during a protest calling for an end to the war in Tel Aviv, Israel

AP PHOTO

## 800 Taliban killed in ongoing ops: Pak

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Islamabad, April 5:** Pakistan Sunday said nearly 800 Afghan Taliban terrorists have been killed in the ongoing operation launched by the security forces in Afghanistan.

Information Minister Attaullah Tarar shared the latest update on operation Ghazab lil-Haq, giving a summary of the losses suffered by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also called Fitna Al Khawarij (FAK) and Afghan Taliban. Tarar said that at least 796 Fitna Al Khawarij and the Afghan Taliban personnel have been killed and more than 1,043 injured since the launch of the operation. Operation Ghazab lil-Haq was launched on the night of February 26, following what Pakistan called "unprovoked firing" by the Afghan Taliban from across the border.

The army also effectively targeted 81 terrorists and terrorist support infrastructure locations across Afghanistan by air, Tarar said.

# HUNGARY ELECTIONS: WHAT'S AT STAKE?

**H**ungarians head to the polls April 12 in one of Europe's most consequential elections this year. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, in power for 16 years and a leading figure of the global far right, faces a serious challenge from Péter Magyar, a former ally turned critic.

Orbán, the EU's longest-serving leader, has since 2010 reshaped Hungary into what he calls an "illiberal democracy", positioning himself as a defender of traditional Christian values against western liberalism. His governments have weakened democratic institutions, consolidating control over courts and turning much of the media landscape into a pro-government platform.

On the European stage, Orbán has frequently clashed with Brussels. The EU has suspended billions in funding over concerns about rule of law, while Budapest has blocked key decisions on migration,

LGBTQ+ rights, sanctions on Russia, and aid for Ukraine. Orbán has maintained close ties with Moscow, continuing energy imports and meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin even after the invasion of Ukraine.

Though Hungary accounts for a small share of the EU's economy and population, Orbán has exerted influence beyond its size, inspiring like-minded leaders and nationalist movements across Europe. The outcome of this election will therefore have implications well beyond Hungary's borders.

Orbán, 62, leads the ruling Fidesz party and has secured endorsements from several right-wing international figures. His political journey began as an anti-communist activist, but over time he has centralised power, rewriting the constitution and limiting institutional independence.

In this election, Orbán has framed the contest as a choice



between "peace and war", presenting himself as the guarantor of stability and accusing his opponent of aligning with Brussels and Ukraine. However, many voters appear more focused on domestic concerns such as healthcare and the economy, which has stagnated in recent years. Rising food prices and relatively low wages have added to public dissatisfaction.

Magyar, 45, is a former insid-

er who broke with Fidesz after a political scandal involving senior government figures. A trained lawyer and former diplomat, he has positioned himself as a reformist alternative. His Tisza (Respect and Freedom) party gained momentum after securing 30% of the vote in the 2024 European elections.

Magyar has pledged to restore Hungary's pro-EU stance, reduce dependence on Russian

energy, rebuild independent institutions, tackle corruption, and unlock frozen EU funds. His campaign has resonated particularly with younger and urban voters.

Since 2010, Orbán has introduced extensive changes to Hungary's electoral system. Parliament now has 199 seats, with a mix of single-member constituencies and proportional representation. Critics argue the system favours Fidesz, as constituency boundaries and voting rules can amplify its advantage.

Polling suggests Tisza holds a lead among decided voters, though pro-government surveys show a tighter race. National averages put the opposition ahead, but a large share of voters remain undecided, and analysts caution that polling may not capture the complexities of the electoral system.

Fidesz retains strong support among older voters, while Tisza dominates among younger demographics and in urban

areas. Turnout is expected to be high, possibly exceeding 80%, which could play a decisive role.

Observers outline three main scenarios: a Magyar victory accepted by Orbán, a contested Magyar victory, or another Orbán win.

An Orbán victory would likely deepen tensions with the EU and reinforce his existing policies. A narrow loss for Orbán could lead to disputes over the result, potentially creating an unprecedented situation within the EU. In contrast, a clear and accepted win for Magyar could improve Hungary's relations with Brussels.

However, even if Magyar prevails, his ability to govern may be constrained. Many laws require a supermajority to change, and key institutions remain staffed with Orbán loyalists. As a result, political change in Hungary could prove gradual and contested, regardless of the election outcome.

AGENCIES



**Given the uncertainty around crude oil prices and geopolitical developments, the RBI is likely to remain on pause in the April policy and closely monitor incoming inflation data before taking any further action**

ADITI NAYYAR | CHIEF ECONOMIST, ICRA

**MOODY'S CUTS INDIA'S FY27 GDP GROWTH ESTIMATES TO 6%**

Moody's Ratings has slashed India's economic growth estimates for the current fiscal to 6 per cent from 6.8 per cent earlier, saying the ongoing conflict in West Asia will moderate growth momentum and raise inflation risks



**of the day quote**

**Crossing the ₹1 lakh crore brand turnover is a testament to the trust of millions of consumers and the tireless hard work of our 36 lakh dairy farmers**

ASHOKBHAI CHAUDHARY | CHAIRMAN, GCMFM

**We also remain steadfast in our pursuit of attaining Navratna status, which reflects not only our enhanced operational performance but also organisational excellence and strategic maturity**

SANJIV KUMAR SINGH | CMD, HINDUSTAN COPPER

**Customers make an emotional choice when they buy our motorcycles, and we take that seriously. Our approach has been to stay consistent with design-led thinking, honest engineering and a dependable ownership experience**

ANUPAM THAREJA | CO-FOUNDER, CLASSIC LEGENDS

**SHORT TAKES**

**Mcap of 6 of top-10 firms dips by ₹65k-cr**

**New Delhi:** The combined market valuation of six of the top-10 most valued firms declined by ₹64,734.46 crore in a holiday-shortened last week, with Bharti Airtel taking the biggest hit, reflecting the broader weakness in the equities market. Last week, the BSE benchmark Sensex declined 263.67 points, or 0.35 per cent, and the NSE Nifty fell 106.5 points, or 0.46 per cent. "Markets ended lower for the sixth consecutive week, declining by nearly half a per cent, reflecting heightened volatility driven by a mix of global and domestic uncertainties. The market valuation of Bharti Airtel eroded by ₹29,993.07 crore to ₹10,20,420.26 crore. ICICI Bank's valuation tanked by ₹12,845.81 crore to ₹8,70,705.49 crore. Bajaj Finance lost ₹11,169.36 crore from its market valuation, which stood at ₹5,14,226.12 crore. The market valuation of Reliance Industries gained ₹3,518.45 crore to ₹18,28,034.07 crore. Reliance Industries retained the title of the most valued firm, followed by HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India, Tata Consultancy Services Ltd, ICICI Bank, Infosys, Bajaj Finance, Larsen & Toubro, and Hindustan Unilever.

**38 cos file draft papers in March**

**New Delhi:** As many as 38 companies, including SBI Funds Management and Manipal Health Enterprises, filed preliminary IPO papers with Sebi in March 2026, signalling improving issuer sentiment even as regulatory timelines contributed to the surge. This marks a sharp jump from 22 filings in March 2025 and 16 in March 2024, data from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) showed, indicating a stronger pipeline of public issues. The momentum is expected to continue, with several high-profile companies, including the National Stock Exchange (NSE) and Reliance Industries' telecom arm Jio, preparing to submit their draft papers in the coming weeks, according to merchant banking sources. In addition, Singapore-based Sembcorp Industries' Indian renewable energy arm, Sweden-based Modern Times Group's subsidiary PlaySimple, TPG-backed online lending platform Fibe and Tiger Global-backed BatterySmart are also likely to file DRHPs soon, they added. Of the 38 companies that filed their draft papers with Sebi, a total of 9 firms, including Zetwerk, SNVA Traveltech, Rediff.com India, Torrent Gas, Synergy Advanced Metals, Garuda Aerospace, and Sohan Lal Commodity Management, opted for the confidential filing route.

**OMCs to pay discounted fuel prices to refiners**

International oil prices have risen from about \$70 per barrel before the Middle East conflict to over \$100, but retail petrol and diesel prices in India have remained unchanged, forcing OMCs to absorb the impact



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 5:** In a first since fuel price deregulation, Indian state-run oil marketing companies will pay refineries a discounted price for petrol, diesel, aviation turbine fuel (ATF) and kerosene to limit mounting losses from a self-imposed freeze on retail fuel prices, sources said.

The oil marketing companies (OMCs) March 26 fixed rates for petroleum products that are at a discount of up to ₹60 per litre to their imported cost, two people with direct knowledge of the matter said. The discounted rates, which are applicable with effect from March 16, will hit standalone refiners such as MRPL, CPCL and HMECL the most. International oil prices have risen from about \$70 per barrel before the Middle East conflict to over \$100, but retail petrol and diesel prices in India have remained unchanged, forcing OMCs to absorb the impact.

With no immediate end to the conflict in sight, OMCs have decided to fix a discount on the refinery transfer price (RTP) - the internal price at which refineries sell fuel to marketing arms - to effectively pay refineries less than the import-parity cost of the fuels like petrol and diesel.

For the second half of March, a discount of ₹22,342 per kilolitre (Rs 22.34 per litre) was fixed on diesel to bring down the RTP of ₹85,349 per kl to ₹63,007 per kl. For the first fortnight of April, the discount on diesel has been fixed at ₹60,239 per kl to lower RTP from ₹146,243 per

kl to ₹86,004 per kl.

On ATF, the RTP has been slashed to ₹76,923 per kl from ₹127,486 per kl after considering a discount of ₹50,564 per kl.

The RTP for kerosene after a discount of ₹46,311 per kl has been fixed at ₹77,534 per kl from ₹123,845 per kl, they said.

Indian Oil Corp, Bharat Petroleum Corp and Hindustan Petroleum Corp did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The discounted pricing would prevent refiners from fully passing on higher crude costs through RTP, forcing them to absorb part of the impact of elevated global oil prices.

While integrated state-run firms such as Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) can offset part of the hit between refining and marketing operations, standalone refiners that rely on market-linked RTP for revenue could face a sharper margin squeeze, they said.

Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL), Chennai Petroleum Corporation Ltd (CPCL) and HPCL-Mittal Energy Ltd (HMECL) - which have negligible retail presence and sell most of the petrol and diesel produced to the three OMCs - would be the most hit by the move.

The changes would also impact refiners like Nayara Energy and Reliance Industries Ltd if the discount on RTP is also implemented for private

refiners, sources said.

The two private refiners sell a bulk of their production of petrol and diesel to OMCs, who own and operate 90 per cent of the over 1 lakh petrol pumps in the country.

Traditionally, petrol and diesel in India have been priced on an import parity basis, meaning the fuels are valued as if they were imported, even though it is primarily crude oil that is brought into the country and refined locally. Refinery transfers of these products to oil marketing companies were based on import parity price (IPP) until June 2006, after which the government adopted trade parity pricing (TPP) - a benchmark that assigns 80 per cent weight to import parity price and 20 per cent to export parity price.

This pricing protected refinery margins, particularly of standalone refiners who didn't have the cushion of marketing margins on petrol and diesel, whose pricing was deregulated by the government in 2010 and 2014 respectively.

Despite being freed, petrol and diesel prices have not exactly moved in line with cost and have been frozen since April 2022, with OMCs absorbing losses when crude oil prices rise and making bumper profits when rates fall.

The discount on RTP comes as under-recoveries or losses on petrol and diesel have widened, sources said adding unlike cooking gas LPG, the government does not compensate OMCs for losses on auto fuels.

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas in a post on X on April 1 had stated that, "With global petroleum prices up by up to 100 per cent in the last one month, PSU OMCs are incurring under-recoveries of ₹24.40 per litre on petrol and ₹104.99 per litre on diesel at retail selling price (RSP) level as on 01.04.2026."

OMCs feel the freezing RTP would effectively distribute the financial burden across the refining ecosystem, but analysts say it could disproportionately affect independent refiners with limited downstream marketing exposure.

Also, it will distort the commitment of market price to standalone and private refiners, sources added.

**Purpose, patience build strong brands: Sambit**

**Sambit Ranjan Sahoo is the Managing Director of Organic Maa, a specialised retail unit under Udayanath Retail Pvt Ltd. Since its establishment in 2021, he has led the organisation with a focus on providing high-quality FMCG products, including premium dry fruits, spices, and roasted snacks. Based in Bhubaneswar, Sahoo is dedicated to enhancing the accessibility of organic and healthy food options. Under his leadership, Organic Maa has quickly emerged as a trusted provider of sustainable and nutrient-rich consumer goods across the region. Excerpts...**



**SAMBIT RANJAN SAHOO**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR, ORGANIC MAA

**What inspired the launch of Organic Maa in 2022, and how has the brand evolved since then?**

Organic Maa was born from a deeply personal journey after my mother's passing in 2022 due to cancer, which reshaped my perspective on health and food quality. Founded as a tribute to her, the brand reflects care, purity, and wellness, inspired by a mother's nurturing role. Our mission is to offer high-quality, affordable products for health-conscious consumers. At the same time, we focus on women empowerment and rural development, creating opportunities for women to participate, grow, and achieve financial independence while contributing to inclusive economic progress.

**How do you ensure authenticity and quality control for your organic spices and dry fruits? Are you planning to expand into new product categories?**

At Organic Maa, authenticity and quality control form the foundation of our brand. We carefully source raw materials from trusted suppliers and closely monitor every stage—from procurement and cleaning to grading, packaging, and storage—to ensure

purity, freshness, and nutritional value. Going forward, we plan to expand our offerings to include healthy daily essentials, natural food products, value-added grocery categories, and wellness-focused household products.

**What strategies have driven your rapid retail expansion across Bhubaneswar and other Odisha cities? Do you have any expansion plans in pipeline?**

Our core strategy is to offer high-quality products at affordable prices, ensuring consistent demand and strong customer trust. This approach has helped Organic Maa gain wide acceptance across Odisha, with presence in 50 stores in Bhubaneswar and 25 through Reliance Retail. We have also expanded to e-commerce platforms like Amazon, Flipkart, and JioMart, with plans to onboard Blinkit and BigBasket soon to strengthen our quick-commerce reach.

**What consumer trends are you observing in the organic and healthy snacks segment?**

In the organic and healthy snacks segment, consumers are becoming increasingly conscious about ingredient quality, authenticity, and everyday health benefits. There is a clear shift toward preservative-free, clean-label products made with natural ingredients that remain affordable for daily consumption. Demand is also rising for eco-friendly packaging and convenient, healthy options, especially among younger consumers and urban families. Additionally, traditional Indian ingredients like millets, dry fruits, seeds, and roasted snacks are gaining popularity, as consumers seek nutritious products that offer both health benefits and familiar tastes.

**What are the biggest challenges currently facing the organic retail industry, and how is Organic Maa addressing them?**

One of the key challenges in the organic retail industry is pricing perception, as many consumers believe organic products are always expensive. Another challenge is the lack of awareness about the difference between regular and high-quality organic products. To address this, at Organic Maa we focus on consumer education and product assurance. We train our team to explain quality differences, highlight ingredient purity and health benefits, and offer product comparisons. At the same time, we maintain affordable pricing and ensure consistent quality to build long-term customer trust.

**As an entrepreneur, what inspired you to venture into this line of business, and what guidance would you offer to aspiring entrants looking to establish themselves in the industry?**

My journey into this business was shaped by both family values and personal experience. Coming from a third-generation business family, I developed early insights into customer behavior and trust. Working in retail further strengthened my understanding of real customer needs. A turning point came after losing my mother to cancer in 2022, which inspired me to start Organic Maa as a tribute, focusing on quality and affordable health products. My advice to entrepreneurs is to understand customer needs, prioritize quality, build trust, keep pricing practical, train teams well, and stay patient, as lasting success comes from solving real problems consistently.

**NO CONFIDENCE**

**FPIs extend sell-off in April**

Foreign investors pull out ₹19,837 crore in two sessions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 5:** Foreign investors continued to exit Indian equities, withdrawing ₹19,837 crore (\$2.1 billion) in the first two trading sessions of April, weighed down by the West Asia conflict, rising crude oil prices, and persistent rupee depreciation.

This came following a record withdrawal of ₹1.17 lakh crore (about \$12.7 billion) from domestic equities in March, making it the worst monthly outflow. Before this, FPIs pumped in ₹22,615 crore in February, the highest monthly inflow in 17 months.

With the latest withdrawals, total Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) outflow has reached ₹1.5 lakh crore so far in 2026, according to NSDL data.

As per the data, FPIs continued to take out money in April, offloading equities worth ₹19,837 crore in the cash market till April 2.

Market participants attributed the sustained selling pressure to global macroeconomic headwinds and heightened geopolitical uncertainty.

"Continuation of the war, crude again spiking to above USD 100 level, the steady de-



**With the latest withdrawals, total FPIs outflow has reached ₹1.5L-cr so far in 2026**

cline in the rupee and appreciation of the dollar triggered this record selling by FPIs," said VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Investments.

Moreover, the rupee has depreciated by about 4 per cent since the war began, and fears of further depreciation have added to the weakness of the rupee, which, in turn, is triggering further selling by FPI, he added.

Additionally, elevated US bond yields have improved the relative attractiveness of

fixed-income assets, prompting global investors to rebalance away from equities, said Himanshu Srivastava, Principal-Manager Research at Morningstar Investment Research India.

Vijayakumar said that sustained selling by the FPIs has made Indian market valuations fair and in some segments attractive, although FPI inflows can happen only when there is de-escalation on the war front, leading to a decline in crude oil prices.

**Gold imports rise by 29% to \$69 billion in April-Feb 2025-26**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 5:** The country's gold imports rose 28.73 per cent to \$69 billion during April-February 2025-26 on account of high prices of the precious metal, according to the Commerce Ministry data.

Gold imports stood at \$53.52 billion in April-February 2024-25. The rise in gold imports pushed the country's trade deficit (difference between imports and exports) to \$310.60 billion during the 11-months of the last fiscal as compared to \$261.80 billion during April-February 2024-25, the data showed.

Prices of the yellow metal are hovering at around ₹1,51,500 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes) in the national capital.

Switzerland is the largest source of gold imports, with about 40 per cent share, followed by the UAE (over 16 per cent) and South Africa (about 10 per cent).

The precious metal accounts for over 5 per cent of the country's total imports. The country's total imports from Switzerland were up 11.57 per cent to \$23.5 billion during April-February 2025-26. India is the world's second-biggest gold consumer after China. The imports mainly take care of the demand by the jewellery industry. The imports have implications for India's current account deficit (CAD).



