

Casting buzz
 Actor Sharvari Wagh emerges as a leading contender to portray actor Madhubala in the upcoming biopic
 LEISURE | P2

Escalating tensions
 China intensifies control over Scarborough Shoal entrance with barriers and patrols, escalating tensions with the Philippines
 INTERNATIONAL | P10

Shares end lower
 Stock markets close lower in a volatile session Thursday with the benchmark Sensex declining by 122 points and Nifty closing below 24,200
 BUSINESS | P11

Bayern's brilliance
 Luis Diaz and Michael Olise score late for Bayern to beat Madrid 4-3 and advance to the Champions League semifinals
 SPORTS | P12



IN FLAMES: Firefighters reach the site as dark flames billow after a massive fire broke out in Kanawani slum area of Indrapuram, engulfing several houses, in Ghaziabad district, Uttar Pradesh, Thursday
 PTI PHOTO

WOMEN RESERVATION ACT, 2023 COMES INTO FORCE

Press Trust of India
New Delhi, April 16: The Women Reservation Act, 2023, which gave 33 per cent quota to women in legislatures, came into force Thursday, according to a notification issued by the Union Law Ministry.
 It is, however, not immediately known why the 2023 Act was notified with effect from April 16, in the midst of the debate in Parliament to amend the same law for its implementation in 2029.
 An official cited "technicalities" for bringing the law into force without elaborating. Though the Act has come into force, the reservation cannot be implemented in the current House, the official said.
 Reservation for women can be implemented after carrying out a delimitation exercise on the basis of the next census, the official said. The notification read, "In exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (2) of section 1 of the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, the Central Government hereby

appoints the 16th day of April, 2026 as the date on which the provisions of the said Act shall come into force."
 In September 2023, Parliament passed the 'Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam', commonly known as the Women's Reservation Act, in a significant step towards enhancing women's representation in legislative bodies. The Act provided for the reservation of one-third of seats for women in Lok Sabha and state legislative Assemblies. Under the 2023 law, the reservation would not become enforceable before 2034, as it was tied to the completion of the delimitation exercise post 2027 Census.
 The three Bills - the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026 - currently debated in Lok Sabha were brought in by the government so that the women quota could be implemented in 2029. The voting on the three Bills in the Lower House is scheduled to be held at 4pm Friday.
P4&9

'ABSOLUTELY BIZARRE': CONG ON NOTIFICATION
Jairam Ramesh @Jairam_Ram... · 2h
 This is absolutely bizarre. The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam passed in September 2023 has come into force today while amendments to it are being debated and will be voted upon tomorrow. Completely puzzled.

NEW DELHI: The Congress Thursday termed as "absolutely bizarre" the government notifying the 'Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam' passed in September 2023, even as amendments to it are being debated and would be up for voting in the Lok Sabha Friday. "In exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (2) of section 1 of the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, the Central Government hereby appoints the 16th day of April, 2026 as the date on which the provisions of the said Act shall come into force," a notification issued by the Law Ministry said. Tagging a screenshot of the notification on X, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "This is absolutely bizarre." He said, "The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam passed in September 2023 has come into force today while amendments to it are being debated and will be voted upon tomorrow. Completely puzzled."

IRREGULAR by MANJUL

The way we empowered farmers, labourers, the weak, and the poor, we will empower women in the same way

CM: Marine Spatial Plan to boost blue economy
POST NEWS NETWORK
Bhubaneswar, April 16: Marine Spatial Plan (MSP) will not only boost the blue economy but also ensure protection of the marine ecology, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi said after the MoU signing ceremony between Science and Technology department and National Centre for Coastal Research to launch the initiative Thursday.
 Speaking on the occasion at Lok Seva Bhawan, Majhi said, "MSP will not only boost the blue economy but also ensure protection of the marine ecology. It will promote local coastal economies while safeguarding marine biodiversity." Notably, Sustainable Ocean Planning is underway in India since 2019 with cooperation between the governments of India and Norway. In the first phase, it was implemented in Puducherry and Lakshadweep. In the second phase, Odisha has become the first state to implement it.

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CBSE CLASS-X TOPPERS 2026

<p>1st</p> <p>ANWESHA MOHANTY 99.8%</p> <p>2nd STATE & NATIONAL TOPPER</p>	<p>2nd</p> <p>AKSHARA RAI 99.4%</p>	<p>3rd</p> <p>ANUPAM SAHOO 99.2%</p>	<p>3rd</p> <p>ANURAG SINGH 99.2%</p>
<p>4th</p> <p>ASHNEEL ROUTRAY 99%</p>	<p>5th</p> <p>BHUMI P PRADHAN 98.8%</p>	<p>5th</p> <p>MAHIMA SHAW 98.8%</p>	<p>3rd</p> <p>JANWI BEHERA 99.2%</p> <p>5th</p> <p>NIVEDITA AGRAWAL 98.8%</p>

Rank	Name	Percent
6 th	SAMAPIKA NAYAK	98.4%
7 th	ADITYA MISHRA	98.2%
7 th	SHRIYANS MOHAPATRA	98.2%
7 th	SOHAM KHUNTIA	98.2%
7 th	RUDRAYAN OJHA	98.2%
7 th	AAKRUTI DASH	98.2%

Rank	Name	Percent
8 th	PRUTHVIJ SHIVAKUMAR	98%
8 th	SAHAJ MITTAL	98%
8 th	SHAURYA CHAUHAN	98%
8 th	SRIDULA BISWAS	98%
9 th	AADYASHA SWAIN	97.8%
10 th	STUTI SHANDILYA	97.6%

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leisure



MADONNA TO RELEASE HER COMEBACK MUSIC

The Queen of Pop, Madonna is all set to make her music comeback in two days. The singer-songwriter, 67, will finally unveil details of her upcoming 15th studio album seven years after releasing her *Madame X* record. The album is said to be her passion project, in which she has put her heart and soul

DAKOTA, HATHAWAY REUNITE FOR VERITY

Amazon MGM Studios has unveiled the first look of its upcoming psychological thriller *Verity* at CinemaCon in Las Vegas, offering audiences a glimpse into a dark, layered story adapted from a bestselling novel by Colleen Hoover. Directed by Michael Showalter, the film marks his reunion with Hathaway following their recent collaboration on *The Idea of You*



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
 If your heart wishes to be alone, honour the mood. No friends, no music. Drive away and connect to nature if you must. There is a bit of money jingling in if you're dealing in finances, says Ganesha.

TAURUS
 Today, you will probably achieve your short term goals, says Ganesha. There will be no dip in the amount of work pressure you will be facing but you will find yourself ready for every challenge. It is time to shift gears and set your eyes on your long-term goals now. Due time and money will be spent on leisure activities in the company of loved ones.

GEMINI
 You will keep others under the spell of your magnetic personality, predicts Ganesha. Your long-term goals will start taking shape by the end of the day. You may also expect some good news, generally related to a wedding. You will succeed in all your romantic endeavours.

CANCER
 Today, you will accomplish most of your short-term goals and may shift your focus to long-term plans, foretells Ganesha. Now that you have achieved some of your goals, you may spare some time for leisure activities. Family will get its due place in your scheme of things in the evening.

LEO
 Shooting off the charts is an understatement when it comes to your liveliness today, says Ganesha. Guess there is just something about today that puts a spring in your step and a smile on your face. But whatever it is, it's good for you. At work, you shall be able to bring about new and successful business strategies.

VIRGO
 Your gallantry will serve to impress the gallery; but chances are certain things could well spoil the show, says Ganesha. On reflecting within, find a great deal of improvement in your inner self. Children will broaden that smile with their antics.

LIBRA
 It's like a finishing job for you today, says Ganesha, as you complete pending jobs. It was about time things got wrapped up, anyway. But with your high level of energy and vigour, you may also have an inclination to begin a new business. Keep at it, and you may find some satisfaction in business dealings towards the evening, feels Ganesha.

SCORPIO
 Armed with a good sense of judgement, you will make a number of encouraging changes in your behaviour today, foretells Ganesha. Habits die hard, but all the effort that you put in to refine your routine will pay off brilliantly by the end of the day. Close friends and family will be pleasantly surprised by your efficiency and decisions.

SAGITTARIUS
 You may just strike the notes of your beloved's heart today. Your presence and presents will make them realise how much you do indeed love them. Expect a trip to posh showrooms and designer shops to buy them expensive gifts. But don't neglect work or your long-term goals, advises Ganesha.

CAPRICORN
 On the priority list, you put your work ahead of your family life. As a result, your life partner may have complaints about you not giving enough attention to him/her. Today, for once, you'll not let him/her get disappointed, as you'll plan a romantic getaway with your sweetheart. Professionally, you'll be at your best, winning applause from the bosses and outshining your opponents.

AQUARIUS
 Your family will dote on you today and God knows you deserve it. Just go along with their plans for once, and you'll be surprised by how blessed and cheerful you feel. In business dealings, your forthrightness and charm will win people over, say Ganesha.

PISCES
 While a day filled with a lot of stress awaits you at the workplace, you will still be able to come out ahead of the competition on account of your sheer brilliance and your powers of persuasion. You will receive many accolades for the way you tackle your projects today, says Ganesha.

Now Sharvari to play Madhubala

Mumbai: The search for the actress who will portray the iconic Madhubala on the big screen is intensifying, with Sharvari now reportedly emerging as one of the front-runners for the much-discussed biopic. While no official announcement has been made, reports suggest the buzz surrounding her possible casting is genuine, with the actor said to be among the top choices being considered for the lead role. It remains unclear whether formal discussions have begun or if Sharvari has officially signed the project. The Madhubala biopic has already generated considerable excitement in the industry, with several names linked to the project over recent months. Reports indicate that Sara Arjun, Kalyani Priyadarshan, Sai Pallavi and Anet Padda were all approached for the role, with Anet recently

being considered a strong contender. The film will be directed by Jasmeet K. Reen, best known for helming *Darlings*, and the makers are expected to announce the final cast soon. On the professional front, Sharvari has a packed slate ahead. She will next be seen in Imtiaz Ali's *Main Vaapas Aaunga*. She also stars in Aditya Chopra-backed female spy film *Alpha* alongside Alia Bhatt. Additionally, Sharvari has *Munjya 2* and an untitled film with Ayushmann Khurrana in the pipeline. Her last release was *Vedaa* alongside John Abraham in 2024. AGENCIES



Kritika on benefits of marrying late

Mumbai: Actor Kritika Kamra is embracing married life with clarity and contentment, recently opening up about the benefits of marrying later in life. Having tied the knot with longtime partner Gaurav Kapur at 37, Kritika says choosing marriage on her own timeline allowed her to make the decision with confidence and certainty. Unlike many of her childhood friends who married much earlier due to social expectations, Kritika shares that she never felt pressured into settling down and credits her parents for giving her the freedom to make life choices independently. Reflecting on her experience, Kritika says marrying later comes with the advantage of knowing oneself better and being completely sure about the decision. She believes that when one marries later, the relationship is entered into with greater maturity, emotional clarity and conviction. "One of the things about marrying late in life is that you're very sure when you do it, and you do it your way," she says, adding that both she and Gaurav are independent in their choices. Kritika also notes that marriage has not dramatically changed her life, which she sees as a positive sign of a healthy partnership. She says the transition still feels surreal at times, but the familiarity and comfort reassure her that the relationship remains grounded in mutual understanding. For Kritika, marrying late was less about timing and more about being truly ready.



Sanya's note of gratitude

Mumbai: Actor Sanya Malhotra, who made her Hindi cinema debut with *Dangal* in 2016, says her journey in Hindi cinema has been nothing but surreal and she hopes that her films continue to receive love from the audiences. The actor now stars in Netflix comedy *Toaster* opposite Rajkumar Rao. The film marks the production debut of Rao and wife Patralekhaa through

Kampa Film. It revolves around a miser who wants to get back the toaster he gifted at a wedding when the ceremony is called off. Malhotra plays his wife. "Ten years... it's surreal. It's been amazing, quite fulfilling and I am so grateful for the opportunities that I get," Malhotra told this news agency. The actor said though she has worked with Rao in two different projects - *Hit: The First Case* and *Ludo*, this is the first time that they spent a lot of time working together. "I am so happy to be a part of *Toaster*. This is our third film together. I was in a suitcase in the first one. We were not together in the other. So, I was dying to work with Raj because we all know how incredible he is as an actor. And this was the perfect opportunity," she said.

49TH BAISHAKHI FESTIVAL- DAY II

Nupur's Odissi recital holds viewers in thralls



Bhubaneswar: The second evening of the 49th 'Baishakhi' festival, organised by Chinta O Chetana here at Rabin-dra Mandap Thursday commenced with the traditional Pahandi Bije, as the idol of Lord Jagannath was ceremoniously taken into the auditorium to the rhythmic beats of bells, khol, and mardal. The procession was accompanied by captivating performances of Gotipua and Mahari dances, which drew significant attention from the audience. Following the ceremonial entry, evening aarti was performed. The cultural segment continued with an Odissi dance presentation by the Nupur dance troupe mesmerizing the spectators. The event was presided over by Chinta O Chetana's General Secretary Surendra Das. Among the distinguished guests present were former minister Niranjan Patnaik, organisation's president Sahadev Sahu and advocate Mamata Tripathy. Nupur dance troupe also presented another performance titled *Odisha Mora Janma Bhumi*, choreographed by Guru Niranjan Das, with music composed by Ramhari Das.

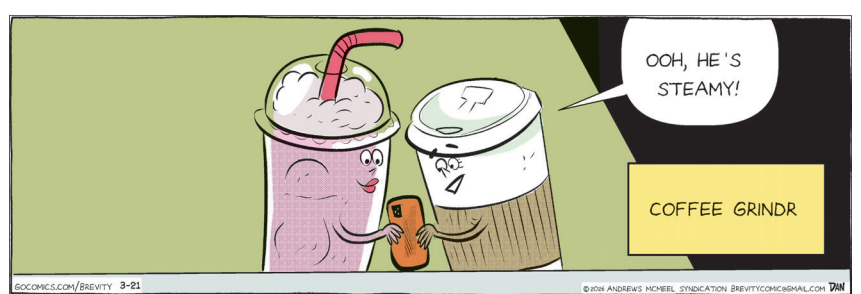
PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

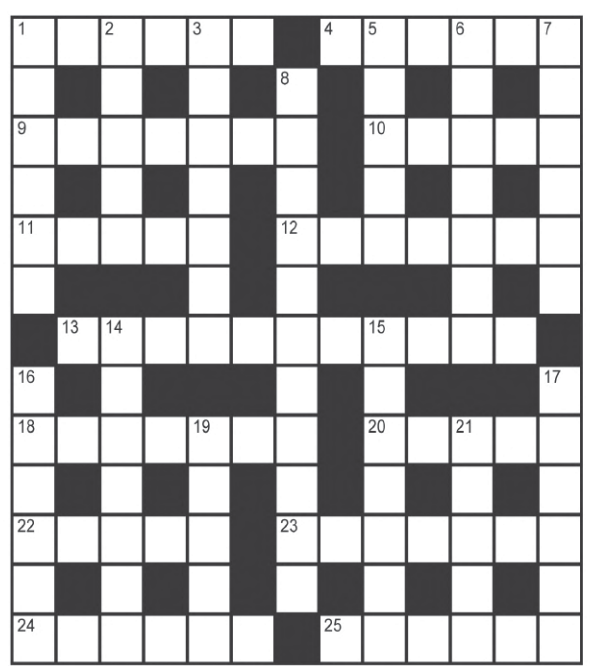


BREVITY



FUN POST

CROSSWORD



- Across**
 1 Cigar
 4 Unconscious mind
 9 Wretched
 10 Lowest deck on a ship
 11 Cocoon contents
 12 Brisk, musically
 13 Sneaky
 18 Reddish purple
 20 Small three-masted vessel
- Down**
 22 Utopian
 23 Popinjay's voyage? (3,4)
 24 Kind of enemy
 25 Take stock of
- Across**
 5 Pollute
 6 Perfume
 7 Hire
 8 Not mentally confused
 14 Kind of sub
 15 Toxic
 16 Ratify
 17 Rifle attachments
 19 Chip dip
 21 Shouldered

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.

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

SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD

L	E	S	I	O	N	T	I	E	U	P	
O	U	R	F	U	N	R					
A	U	S	T	E	R	E	R	A	D	I	O
C	H	G	I	K	L	N					
H	A	I	F	A	N	E	S	T	E	G	G
			N	T	S	S					
C	A	N	O	E	G	U	T	S	Y		
A	C										
L	E	A	R	N	E	D					
P	D	O	L	I	I	I					
A	L	E	R	T	E	N	G	A	E	D	
C	M	E	R	H	H	E					
A	B	Y	S	S		S	T	A	T	U	S

SUDOKU

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

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

State signs two MoUs to boost healthcare access

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 16: In a significant move to strengthen healthcare delivery, the state government Thursday signed two major Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) aimed at improving access to quality and advanced medical services across the state.

The agreements were signed in presence of Health and Family Welfare Minister Mukesh Mahaling at Lok Seva Bhawan here.

The first MoU was inked between state government and JHPIEGO (Johns Hopkins International Programme in Gynecology and Obstetrics) to enhance world-class healthcare services in critical areas such as nursing, maternal and child health, non-communicable diseases, nutrition and emergency obstetric care. The partnership is service-oriented and focuses on exchange of knowledge and technical expertise, without any financial transaction.

Officials said the collaboration will support healthcare planning, policy-making, and implementation of global best practices tailored to Odisha's needs. It will also strengthen medical education, training



systems, digital learning platforms, and capacity building of healthcare professionals.

In another major development, the state government also signed MoU with AIIMS-Bhubaneswar to improve healthcare services in Rairangpur and nearby regions of Mayurbhanj district.

Under this agreement, a new 100-bed hospital will be developed at Rairangpur Sub-Divisional Hospital with support from AIIMS. The initiative will provide specialist outpatient services, regular medical camps, dental and eye care services, and camps for infectious diseases. Additionally, telemedicine facilities will be introduced to enable remote consultations, and a streamlined referral system will be established for critical

patients requiring treatment at AIIMS-Bhubaneswar.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Mahaling described both agreements as landmark steps toward strengthening Odisha's healthcare ecosystem. He said the initiatives would ensure better access to quality healthcare services for people across the state, particularly in underserved regions like Rairangpur, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj.

Senior officials, including Health Secretary Aswathy S, along with representatives from JHPIEGO and AIIMS-Bhubaneswar were present during the signing ceremonies.

These collaborations are expected to bring transformative changes in healthcare infrastructure, service delivery, and capacity building across Odisha.

CM felicitates 2 CBSE Class X toppers in City

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, April 16: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Thursday met CBSE Class X toppers Teenaa Rath and Alisha Biswal at Lok Seva Bhawan here and felicitated them for their outstanding achievement.

Both scored a perfect 500/500 in the CBSE Class X board exam, bringing pride to Odisha. The results were announced Wednesday.

The Chief Minister honoured them with traditional gifts and congratulatory shawls.

During their interaction with the chief minister, both students shared their aspiration to become doctors. Teenaa aims to be a cardiologist, while Alisha hopes to specialise in neurology.

The Chief Minister praised their dedication and discipline, saying their achievement sets an inspiring example for students across the state.

Describing their success as a reflection of 'Nari Shakti Vandan', he wished them and other successful CBSE candidates a bright future.

He further added that their accomplishment would motivate other students in Odisha to pursue academic excellence with determination and focus.

Teenaa, from Puri, is the daughter of Samir Kumar Rath and Renu Prabha Das, while Alisha, a resident of Unit IX in Bhubaneswar, is the daughter of Sudarshan Biswal and Saudamini Mallick.

Teenaa studies at Mother's Public School, Puri, and Alisha at Kendriya Vidyalaya No. 1, Bhubaneswar.

"I was completely surprised after seeing my marks in the exam. I was thinking of getting 97 or 98 per cent in the exam. But, I secured 500 marks," Biswal said. Biswal said she was studying for three to four hours every day in home apart from school hours.

Teenaa credited her teachers and parents for the success and said she wanted to be a cardiac surgeon to save precious lives of people.

Teenaa said she used to study 10 to 12 hours every day. Mother's Public School in Bhubaneswar Thursday felicitated Teenaa along with other school toppers.



CM felicitates Teenaa Rath

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OAVs' students excel in exam

Bhubaneswar: Students of Odisha Adarsha Vidyalayas (OAVs) have once again demonstrated academic excellence with outstanding performance in CBSE Class X board examination. A total of 16,966 students from OAVs appeared for the examination, out of which 15,990 students successfully passed, achieving an impressive overall pass percentage of 94.25 per cent, marking a significant improvement over the previous year. Total eight students scored above 99 per cent, showcasing the high academic standards maintained across OAV institutions. Furthermore, 1,598 students secured more than 90 per cent marks, highlighting the strong overall performance. The highest marks in the state were achieved by Shreyansh Nanda of OAV Patharchepa, Bolangir, and Ashirbad Mishra of OAV Satyabadi, Puri, both scoring an outstanding 99.6 per cent. Other top performers include Sonakshree Padhi from OAV Patharchepa (99.4 per cent), Prayag Nayak from OAV Patharchepa (99.2 per cent) and Anshuman Panda from OAV Sorada (99.2 per cent).

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Naveen for delinking women reservation from delimitation

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, April 16: BJD president and Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik Thursday raised strong objections to the proposed Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, cautioning that linking women's reservation with delimitation could weaken Odisha's political representation and economic interests.

In a letter to Odisha MPs, Patnaik urged lawmakers to raise the issue both inside and outside Parliament. He called for either safeguards or a decoupling of the 33 per cent women's reservation from the delimitation process, to ensure that Odisha's Lok Sabha share is not adversely affected.

While reaffirming the BJD's support for women's empowerment and Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam, Patnaik argued that the current proposal undermines the spirit of cooperative federalism.

Odisha presently holds 21 Lok Sabha seats (about 3.9 per cent of 543). Under a proposed expansion to around 850 seats, its tally may rise to 29, but its proportional share could fall to 3.4 per cent.

Describing this as a "grave injustice", he said the move



could deal a significant blow to the aspirations of 4.5 crore Odias and impact future generations. He further warned that states like Odisha, which have made progress in population control and human development, risk being penalised, while more populous states could gain disproportionately. This could potentially affect Central allocations, fiscal transfers, and infrastructure funding.

Patnaik also stressed the cultural and emotional dimensions of representation, linking it to Odia identity and pride.

Earlier, he had urged the state government to convene a special session of the Assembly within 48 hours to adopt a resolution safeguarding the state's political rights. The BJD, he added, is prepared to take the issue to the people if concerns remain unaddressed.

Bhubaneswar emerging as major fashion hub: Mayor

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 16: Bhubaneswar is rapidly emerging as a major fashion hub in eastern India, said BMC Mayor Sulochana Das, while addressing the inauguration of the 14th edition of 'Kirti Kalpana 2026', the graduate fashion show of School of Fashion Technology, KIIT University.

Highlighting the City's growing prominence, Das remarked, "Bhubaneswar has already transformed into a national centre for fashion." She praised the KIIT and KISS Founder Achyuta Samanta for bringing prestigious events like Femina Miss India to the City. The grand finale will be held April 18 at KIIT campus.

Miss India Organisation National Director and Brand and Operations head Natasha Grover expressed her delight to be a part of the event. Recalling her own graduation days, she said the occasion brought back fond memories. She highlighted the enriching journey of 30 state winners of Miss India, noting that their experiences in Odisha have



been deeply meaningful. "The moment you take people along with you, you have achieved success. Be honest—hard work always pays off," she advised. Fashion designer Anuj Durga Sharma from Delhi also shared his insights with the students, inspiring them to innovate and uphold sustainability-driven design philosophies.

Addressing the gathering, KIIT VC Saranjit Singh encouraged students to pursue their aspirations with sincer-

ity and purpose. "Whatever you want to be in life, ensure you are a true ambassador of KIIT and KISS and, above all, a good human being," he said.

The programme also featured felicitation of guests, jury members, and student achievers, followed by the launch of the event brochure. The show segments showcased creative collections by graduating students, reflecting innovation, craftsmanship, and contemporary design sensibilities.

Training on paper embroidery at Annapurna Gramina Bazar

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, April 16: Odisha Rural Development and Marketing Society (ORMAS), under the Panchayati Raj and Drinking Water department, Thursday organised a two-day hands-on training programme on paper embroidery at "Annapurna Gramina Bazar - The Village Store" at Cuttack Netaji Bus Terminal (CNBT).

Around 40 BBA students from Ravenshaw University participated in the programme, which offered a platform to engage with traditional art forms while enhancing creativity and skills.

The training covered techniques such as straight, cross, chain and filling stitches, along with other decorative patterns. Using a blend of colours and designs, participants learned to create attractive, market-oriented handcrafted products.

Speaking on the occasion, ORMAS Joint CEO Bipin Rout

said the programme aims to promote traditional handicrafts like paper embroidery, foster self-reliance among youth, and encourage sustainable handmade products. He added that similar training on embroidery, Pattachitra and sand art will be organised in the coming days.

Paper embroidery is a delicate craft that involves stitching intricate designs on paper with needle and thread. It features floral patterns, traditional motifs, geometric shapes and contemporary designs, and is used to create items like greeting cards, wall hangings, framed art, gift items and file covers.

The initiative is connecting the younger generation with tradition, innovation and entrepreneurship, while strengthening their bond with rural Odisha. It is also opening new avenues for self-reliance and economic empowerment among rural women and youth.



FINCON 2026 kicks off at UU with flashmob

Annual academic and cultural extravaganza features a wide range of events including B-School meet, plenary session, annual function, alumni meet and cultural evening

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 16: The MBA (Financial Management) programme of the PG department of Commerce at Utkal University (UU) Thursday kicked off its annual flagship event, FINCON 2026, with a vibrant flashmob on campus.

FINCON, an annual academic and cultural extravaganza organised by the MBA (FM) programme, features a wide range of events including a flashmob, inaugural session, B-School meet, plenary session, annual function, alumni meet and cultural evening.

This year's celebrations commenced under the leadership of Rabintra Kumar Swain, with guidance from faculty members Durga Prasad Mishra, Utkalika Mishra, Soumya Mohanty and Brahmputra Biswal. The flashmob was held in front of the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Park on the university cam-



pus, starting at 5pm and lasting nearly an hour.

The event was inaugurated by Vice-Chancellor Chandni Prasad Nanda along with PG Council Chairperson Mitali Chinara. Students from both MCom and MBA (FM) programmes participated enthusiastically, creating an electrifying atmosphere on campus.

The formal inaugural session of FINCON 2026 is scheduled for April 17 and will be chaired by Mitali Chinara. State Bank of India Assistant General Manager (Learning & Development) Kishore Chandra Dash will attend as chief guest, while former PG department of Commerce professor Prabodha Kumar Hota will be the guest of honour.

Following the inauguration, a B-School Meet will bring to-

gether students from various institutions for academic and management competitions.

April 18, a plenary session on "Navigating Uncertainty: Emerging Economic Strategies for Growth in a Volatile Business World" will be held. Moderated by Anil Kumar Swain, it will feature panelists Sachidanand Bhoi (Founder & CEO, Go Speedy Go), Varun Chand Bandlamudi (Head - Marketing & Business Development, Tata Steel SEZ), and Atish Subhash Goswami (AGM, Blast Furnace, Jindal Ferrous Ltd).

Later in the day, the annual function will feature Prashant Kumar Hota, Head - Corporate Communication (Odisha), Jindal Steel & Power Ltd, as chief speaker, and Labour Commissioner Indramani Tripathy as chief guest.

Krishnamurthy World School records 100% CBSE X result

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, April 16: Krishnamurthy World School, Jaripada, Cuttack, has recorded a 100 per cent pass rate in the CBSE Class X examination. The school organised a ceremony Thursday to felicitate all successful students.

Following the announcement of results Wednesday, an atmosphere of joy prevailed across the campus over the students' achievements.

Apart from the 100 per cent pass rate, several students set new benchmarks. Subhashree Sahoo topped with 99 per cent, breaking previous records, while Sovam Behera and Sang-

hamitra Panda secured second and third positions with 97 per cent and 95 per cent, respectively.

Of the 66 candidates, 13 scored above 90 per cent, 18 above 80 per cent, 15 above 70 per cent and 20 above 60 per cent.

Principal Prasanta Dash congratulated the meritorious students during the felicitation ceremony and expressed confidence that the school will scale greater heights in the future.

The management credited the success to the teachers' hard work and guidance. The event concluded with wishes for the students' bright future.



MARKET WATCH					
CURRENCY		BOURSES		COMMODITIES	
INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR	93.30 ↓ 0.22	SENSEX	77988.68 ↓ 122.56	GOLD	₹153,600 ↑ ₹348
EURO	110.02 ↓ 0.32	NIFTY	24196.75 ↓ 34.55	SILVER	₹249,801 ↓ ₹1,941

WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	35.9°	36.0°	Dry weather very likely to prevail over all the districts
Min Temp	27.6°	25.4°	
Humidity	82%	84%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	

Unapproved CADWM projects spark concern

Lone executive engineer oversees four districts — Keonjhar, Bhadrak, Balasore and Jajpur



POST NEWS NETWORK

Hatadihi, April 16: Irregularities have surfaced in the Command Area Development and Water Management (CADWM) programme...

— under the CAD division, with the CAD Division No-3 office located in Bhadrak. There is one assistant executive engineer each for Anandapur, Keonjhar and Bhadrak...

Across the state, there are 12 CAD divisions. Under CADWM, a sub-scheme of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY), water user associations, or Pani Panchayats, are tasked with constructing field channels to facilitate irrigation to farmlands...

In response, the executive engineer of CAD Division No-3, Bhadrak, issued a letter (No. 531 dated March 30, 2026) to Pani Panchayat secretaries, assistant executive engineers and engineers, directing an immediate halt to unauthorised field channel works for 2026-27 financial year.

The letter stated that no work should commence without a formal agreement and official work order. It warned that any such activity would not be legally recognised and would create unauthorised financial liabilities. It also clarified that the office would not be responsible for payments for works not uploaded in phases on the e-CAD infrastructure platform.

Officials cautioned that such irregular practices could lead to sub-standard execution of projects and wastage of public money.

Bhadrak Executive Engineer Sudhanshu Sekhar Chhotray said action is underway after it was found that work had started in some areas before approval and fund allocation, describing the development as "unfortunate and surprising".

Engineer Bijay Mohanty, in charge of Hatadihi block, said irregular CADAs works have been reported from multiple locations and the matter will be brought to the notice of higher authorities.

CROC BREEDING SEASON Bhitarkanika to be shut for tourists from May 1

PNN & AGENCIES

Kendrapara/Rajnagar, April 16: Bhitarkanika National Park and the adjoining Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary will remain closed for tourists and local visitors from May 1 to July 31 to facilitate the breeding and nesting of estuarine (salt-water) crocodiles.



Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of the Mangrove Forest Division (Wildlife), Rajnagar, Vardaraj Gaonkar, said Thursday that the annual restriction is imposed to ensure minimal disturbance to crocodiles during their critical breeding period.

During the ban, entry into key crocodile habitats such as Bhitarkanika, Dangamala, and Bhagadapati forest blocks will be strictly prohibited. The presence of tourists in these areas can disrupt the reptiles' breeding and nesting process, when they are particularly sensitive to external disturbances.

Officials noted that estuarine crocodiles tend to become aggressive if disturbed during this period, and most crocodile attacks are reported during the nesting season. The restriction, therefore, is also aimed at ensuring public safety.

The park authorities had recorded 116 estuarine crocodile nests last year across the Kanika, Gahirmatha, Mahakalapara, and Rajnagar forest ranges. Female crocodiles in Bhitarkanika can grow up to 14 feet and typically lay 40-50 eggs. Larger females are known to lay even more.

On average, about 30 hatchlings emerge per nest, as nearly 10 per cent of the eggs are destroyed by predators. The incubation period for the eggs ranges from 75 to 80 days.

According to the latest census conducted in 2026, a total of 1,858 estuarine crocodiles were spotted in and around the water bodies of the Rajnagar Mangrove Forest Division (Wildlife), reflecting a healthy and growing population in the region.

Retd DLO awarded 3-yr jail for bribery

BHAWANIPATNA: A special Vigilance court Thursday found a former district labour officer (DLO) guilty of bribery and sentenced the retired officer to undergo three years of imprisonment. The former DLO from Nuapada district, Sarat Kumar Panigrahi, was convicted by the Special Judge, Vigilance, Bhawanipatna, for taking a bribe of ₹40,000. Panigrahi, who has retired from service, was found guilty of demanding bribes from a trainer for registering 200 labourers. He has been sentenced to three years of simple imprisonment and a fine of ₹80,000. Odisha Vigilance will now move to stop his pension following the conviction, a statement released by the State Vigilance Directorate said.

CoBRA jawan injured in landmine blast

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bonaí, April 16: A CoBRA commando sustained critical injuries in a landmine blast as ultras retaliated amid an intensified anti-Maoist operation inside the Saranda forest in the West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand on the fringes of Odisha.

Security forces resumed combing operations Thursday morning, cordoning off the Baliba area in West Singhbhum district. In response, Maoists triggered another landmine explosion targeting the forces.

Head Constable Abhinav Kumar Mittal of the CoBRA 205 Battalion sustained critical injuries in the blast. He was immediately airlifted to Ranchi for advanced treatment.

960 bottles of cough syrup seized; 7 held

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bargarh, April 16: Police seized 960 bottles of cough syrup and arrested seven persons during a surprise raid at a football ground here, officials said Thursday. Acting on a tip-off about an illegal cough syrup trade at Behera football ground, a team from Bargarh Sadar police station conducted a raid at around 1pm and apprehended the accused on the spot.

The accused were identified as Bholu alias Bhubaneswar Rana, 32, of Tora Kendumunda, Rinku alias Ratnamani Nag, 32, and Papu Bag, 18, of Jharpada in Gaisilet, Garjan Sahu, 32, of Kendumunda, Kishore Sandh, 44, of Ambapali, Prasanna Sahu, 24, of Gudesira canal area, and Papun alias Rajib Sahu, 25, of Tenteltikra.

Apart from 960 bottles of cough syrup, police seized cash worth ₹2.60 lakh, several vehicles and 12 mobile phones from their possession. The vehicles include a Maruti Suzuki Eeco, Maruti Suzuki Baleno, Maruti Suzuki Dzire, Honda City, Mahindra Bolero Max pickup, Mahindra Bolero, and two wheelers.

The accused were produced in court and later remanded to Bargarh district jail after their bail pleas were rejected. A case (120/26) has been registered at Bargarh Sadar police station, police said. Further investigation is underway to ascertain if more persons are involved in the racket. Additional SP Shiba Prasad Biswal said during a press briefing.

OSCPCR Chairperson visits Kotia

POST NEWS NETWORK

Korapat, April 16: In a significant field-level intervention, the Chairperson of the Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (OSCPCR), Babita Patra, visited the sensitive border region of Kotia in Korapat district Thursday, conducting a comprehensive review of child welfare, nutrition and education systems.

The visit comes as ensuring equitable development in remote and disputed regions, especially Kotia panchayat, remains a key priority for the state. Patra inspected Kotia panchayat and evaluated the implementation of government schemes focused on child de-

velopment and maternal welfare. She also attended the state's eighth Poshan Abhiyan programme as chief guest, joining an awareness rally to promote nutrition, maternal health and child care among local residents.

Interacting with women in the area, she stressed the need for improved health practices among pregnant and lactating mothers, noting that child nutrition begins with maternal well-being. During her visit, Patra inspected Anganwadi centres and reviewed infrastructure, service delivery and challenges faced by frontline workers. She expressed concern over gaps observed and said no child should be deprived of basic nutrition and early childhood care.

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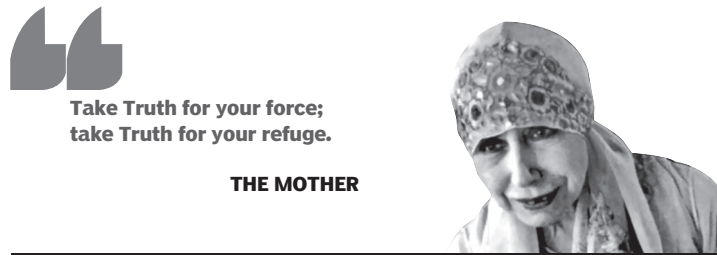
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NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that the locker hirers have availed locker facilities from our Bank. They have failed/neglected in making payments towards the locker rentals to the Bank or not operated the locker for a considerable period. The Bank has issued several notices to the below-mentioned locker hirers requesting them to make payment towards locker rentals or operate the locker and/or close the locker facility(ies). The communication in this regard was either duly acknowledged by them and/or returned undelivered.

Table with columns: Sr No, Lock no, Name of the Locker Hirer(s), Address, Amount due (INR) as on 30-12-2025, Amount due as on 30-12-2025. Lists various locker holders and their details across multiple branches.



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

THE MOTHER

Geopolitical Ouroboros

The Ouroboros, the ancient image of a serpent devouring its own tail, has long symbolized self-defeating strategies. It is thus an apt metaphor for US President Donald Trump's current policies. His reckless and illegal war against Iran is the clearest example, but his administration's enthusiastic embrace of cryptocurrencies represents a subtler, slower-burning expression of the same self-destructive tendency.

Unlike conventional money, cryptocurrencies are generally not legal tender and are not government-backed. Their price is largely determined by market demand, much of it driven by their ability to obscure transactions and bypass regulations, taxes, and legal oversight. This makes them attractive not only to speculators, whose activity fuels their extreme volatility, but also to criminals and other bad actors.

Since returning to the White House, Trump has positioned himself as one of the industry's most prominent champions. This reflects both the massive campaign contributions he has received from major crypto investors and his own business interests: members of the Trump family have reportedly earned roughly \$5 billion from various crypto-related schemes.

In service of these interests, the Trump administration has aggressively deregulated crypto markets while promoting dollar-pegged stablecoins through measures like the GENIUS Act. At the same time, it has rejected the development of a central bank digital currency (CBDC), a more stable and regulated alternative to crypto, which is already being explored or adopted by countries like China.

By weakening regulatory oversight, these moves have introduced new financial risks. Enforcement actions against crypto firms have been scaled back, even in cases involving clear wrongdoing. Binance, which has business ties to the Trump family, is a prime example. Its founder, Changpeng Zhao, pleaded guilty to facilitating money laundering and served a four-month prison sentence, only to be pardoned by Trump. This has likely emboldened the crypto sector's most dubious actors, undermining investor protection and financial stability.

But the consequences of Trump's pro-crypto agenda extend beyond financial markets. Cryptocurrencies create an alternative financial infrastructure that can be used to evade economic sanctions, the United States' tool of choice for bullying other countries. Their spread also poses a clear threat to the dollar's global dominance.

In this sense, cryptocurrencies have become a geopolitical Ouroboros. Their defining feature, opacity, has disproportionately benefited America's adversaries. In 2025 alone, illegal cryptocurrency transactions increased by more than 160%, largely driven by countries like Russia, Iran, and North Korea. The Trump administration's support for dollar-pegged stablecoins has further accelerated that trend.

Russia was among the first to seize the opportunity. After its central-bank assets were frozen by former US President Joe Biden's administration, the country turned to cryptocurrency exchanges to circumvent economic sanctions, facilitate re-exports of sensitive goods through intermediaries like Kyrgyzstan, and finance the procurement of low-cost military drones deployed in Ukraine.

It has since moved to formalize this approach. In July 2024, the Russian Duma legalized the use of cryptocurrencies in international settlements. A month later, President Vladimir Putin announced the legalization of crypto mining, which the Trump administration has also promoted at home.

The same dynamic is now playing out in Iran. When the US and Israel launched their war in late February, the Iranian regime had already expanded its use of cryptocurrencies. By 2025, its crypto sector was estimated to be worth \$7.8 billion, with entities linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) accounting for more than half of all inflows.

More recently, Iran has made cryptocurrencies central to its efforts to assert control over the Strait of Hormuz, charging shipping companies \$1 per oil barrel—payable in renminbi, Bitcoin, or the stablecoin Tether—in exchange for safe passage. On a single day this month, 15-18 tankers passed through the Strait; at roughly \$2 million per ship, these tolls generated an estimated \$36 million for the beleaguered Iranian regime.

In other words, a strategic maritime chokepoint is now a hub for crypto transactions. Some of these transactions have reportedly been conducted on the TRON blockchain, which can settle payments in under three seconds. TRON, founded by the Chinese developer Justin Sun, has also been linked to ventures associated with the Trump family.

Taken together, these developments point to a remarkable shift. US policies, shaped by crypto financiers and pursued in the name of innovation, have expanded and legitimized the infrastructure used to evade American sanctions. The irony is hard to miss. For Iranians caught in the middle of a brutal conflict, and for ordinary people around the world facing rising energy and food prices, the consequences are all too real.

The writer, a Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, is a member of the Club of Rome's Transformational Economics Commission and Co-Chair of the Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation.

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WISDOM CORNER

It is better to be alone than in bad company. **GEORGE WASHINGTON**

Democracy and socialism are means to an end, not the end itself. **JAWAHARLAL NEHRU**

Only free men can negotiate. A prisoner cannot enter into contracts. **NELSON MANDELA**

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1961: Fidel Castro's forces repelled the Bay of Pigs invasion, which was led by recent Cuban exiles and financed by the U.S. government during the Cold War.

1964: visitors to the New York World's Fair had a unique opportunity to experience the brand-new Ford Mustang; it carried them through the Magic Skyway, designed by Walt Disney.

1970: The Apollo 13 command module—carrying James A. Lovell, Jr., Fred W. Haise, Jr., and John L. Swigert, Jr.—entered Earth's atmosphere and splashed down, ending one of the most tense chapters in space history.



DK Giri

THE IRAN WAR WILL END IN CONCLUSIVE DEFEAT, NOT BECAUSE TRUMP IS A GREAT GENERAL, BUT BECAUSE HE IS A TERRIBLE DIPLOMAT, AND IRAN KNOWS IT

CRYPTOCURRENCY'S DEFINING FEATURE, OPACITY, HAS DISPROPORTIONATELY BENEFITED AMERICA'S ADVERSARIES. IN 2025 ALONE, ILLEGAL CRYPTOCURRENCY TRANSACTIONS INCREASED BY MORE THAN 160%, LARGELY DRIVEN BY COUNTRIES LIKE RUSSIA, IRAN, AND NORTH KOREA



Jayati Ghosh

SPECTRUM PARLIAMENT

Zero Hour to raise issues

Zero Hour in the Indian Parliament is an informal and unique procedure that enables members to raise urgent public issues without prior notice. Introduced in 1962, Zero Hour serves as an innovative way for members to address pressing matters swiftly. During Zero Hour, any member can speak on a topic for about three minutes without needing prior party approval. They simply request permission from the Chairman, who decides whether to allot the time. Although no formal notice is required, members usually submit a written request to the Speaker or Chairman by 10:00 AM on the day of the session. Notably, in the Rajya Sabha, the day begins with Zero Hour, unlike in the Lok Sabha.



Gopabandhu Mohapatra

ZERO HOUR SERVES AS AN INNOVATIVE WAY FOR MEMBERS TO ADDRESS PRESSING MATTERS SWIFTLY

Raghav Chadha, a young Rajya Sabha MP and chartered accountant by profession, has actively used Zero Hour in Parliament to raise several important public interest issues that the middle class frequently faces. Chadha's parliamentary interventions, though impactful, have not always aligned with his party's priorities, as he tends to prioritize common people's issues over strictly party agendas.

Despite his efforts to bring attention to these matters, Chadha has faced criticism from Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)

leadership for not consistently raising Punjab-specific issues, such as flood relief, especially amidst internal party friction. Nonetheless, his work highlights his commitment to addressing broader public concerns through parliamentary debates and discussions.

Raghav Chadha, a Rajya Sabha MP and chartered accountant, has focused on enhancing public accountability, economic relief for the middle class, and regulating the gig economy, which involves freelance and side employment by corporates. His key policy advocacies include electoral reforms like the "Right to Recall," removing GST on health insurance, tax relief for salaried individuals, and worker safety regulations for 10-minute delivery services.

Key issues raised by Raghav Chadha:

■ Consumer and public interest: Criticized misleading branding in fruit juices/drinks and high food costs at airports, advocating affordable food as a basic convenience for travelers.

■ Economic concerns: Highlighted inflation rises since 2014, proposed replacing the 28-day mobile recharge cycle with a full calendar month, and demanded rollover or transferability of unused mobile data.

■ Social and legal rights: Called for legal recognition of paternity leave, emphasizing

shared caregiving responsibilities and supporting fathers to balance career and family.

■ Urban infrastructure: Proposed a "National Urban Decongestion Mission" to reduce traffic congestion and improve parking and public transport, noting commuters lose around 168 hours annually to traffic jams.

■ Digital sector: Advocated for digital creators' rights and free access to AI tools.

■ Airline accountability: Criticized airlines charging high fees for extra baggage without compensating for delays, urging policies linking compensation to lost passenger time.

■ Investor protection: Suggested a "security shield" for SIP investors amid market volatility, including tax-neutral mutual fund switching and securities transaction tax exemptions.

■ Tax reforms: Proposed joint income tax filing for married couples ("marriage bonus") to reduce tax burdens and simplify filing for middle-class families.

■ Bank charges: Opposed low-balance fees, calling them a "penalty on poverty," and demanded waivers for farmers and pensioners.

■ Menstrual hygiene: Framed it as a fundamental right, pushing for policies ensuring access to sanitary pads and privacy to reduce school dropouts.

■ Gig economy: Advocated regulating 10-minute delivery ser-

passes through Hormuz. We import 60 per cent of our crude through it. When Trump blockades it and Iran mines it, India's inflation is felt not in its foreign policy, but on the breakfast table.

Delhi has wisely let Pakistan mediate. We cannot be seen tipping the scales. But we must prepare for the day after. A collapsed Iran means a Sunni Gulf unchallenged. Balochistan destabilized, and China with a 99-year lease on Gwadar Port and a grievance. A victorious America means Caesarism as foreign policy. Neither is comfortable.

So, India's line must be Ambedkar's line: constitutional morality in international affairs. Rules, not rulers, freedom of navigation, not freedom to blockade. If Indians cheer when the US closes Hormuz to punish Iran today, New Delhi cannot complain when China closes Malacca to punish us tomorrow.

My wager is and it is a grim one: the editing will be done in Washington, with a red pen, and Tehran will initial each page. Because when your navy is "underwater", your missiles are "down 90 per cent", and your best mediator is on his third shuttlecock run to Islamabad, you are no longer negotiating. You are notifying.

The Iran war will end in conclusive defeat, not because Trump is a great general, but because he is a terrible diplomat, and Iran knows it. The only diplomacy left is the diplomacy of wreckage: how much of the state survives the signature.

The writer is a Professor of Practice, NIIS Group of Institutions

INFIA



US president Donald Trump is the Anti-Diplomat-in-Chief. Diplomacy needs three things: patience, ambiguity, and a willingness to let the adversary save face. Trump has none

Diplomat-in-Chief. Diplomacy needs three things: patience, ambiguity, and a willingness to let the adversary save face. Donald Trump has none.

Vice President Vance and Secretary of State Rubio reportedly urged diplomacy first in January, but Trump's instinct is ultimatum 8 p.m. deadlines. "A whole civilization will die tonight". You can win a battle with that. You cannot write a treaty.

What lies ahead: Not Diplomacy vs War, but War, then Diplomacy. The two-week ceasefire of 8 April expires on 22 April. It has been violated by both sides. Pakistan's Army Chief Asim Munir is in Tehran today trying to "restart US talks". The UN says talks will "highly probably" restart.

But restart to what end? Netanyahu told Israelis the aim is to help Iranians "cast off the yoke of tyranny" but added "it is up to them". The interpretation of this message could be: we will bomb until they revolt, or until there is nothing left to rule.

Iran's strategy, per Al Jazeera's analysis, "is not aimed at winning the war outright but at ensuring that the costs of regime change become too high for its adversaries to bear". That is a rational losing strategy. It worked for Hanoi in 1972. It will not work for Tehran in 2026, because the US is not fighting 10,000 miles from home. It is fighting in the Gulf, with 150 Iranian ships "gone" and gas at \$4.11 a gallon.

So what comes next is both: war to set the terms, diplomacy to sign them. The "grand bargain" Vance mentioned will be dictated on the deck of a carrier, not a table in Islamabad. Iran will keep enrichment in theory, lose it in practice. The IRGC will keep Hormuz in rhetoric, lose it in reality. That is what "indirect admission of defeat" looks like in the 21st century.

India's calculation is the Strait is her. Suez for India and the world, the lesson is cold. One-fifth of global oil

Custom vs rights

Sir, Menstruation is a natural biological process, yet certain traditions have historically associated it with notions of ritual impurity, leading to restrictions on women's entry into places such as Sabarimala Temple. From a scientific and logical standpoint, such perceptions are difficult to sustain, as all human life is born through the female body, underscoring dignity rather than impurity. The Supreme Court of India thus faces a delicate constitutional balance—upholding equality while respecting the freedom of religion. Any resolution must be nuanced, mindful of both rights and deeply held beliefs. A historical parallel may be drawn with the abolition of Sati. Reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy led efforts to end a practice that caused undeniable harm, culminating in its legal prohibition in 1829. In contrast, contemporary issues call for informed dialogue, education, and gradual social reform, enabling faith and equality to evolve in harmony.

RS Narula, PATIALA

CGHS woes

Sir, The plight of senior citizens under the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS) continues to be overlooked despite repeated representations to the concerned authorities. A scheme meant to provide security and dignity in healthcare for retirees is, in practice, becoming a source of anxiety and hardship. One major concern is the quality of medicines supplied as generics, which many beneficiaries perceive as ineffective. Equally troubling is the restriction that treatment can only be availed at empanelled hospitals. Several of these institutions lack experienced specialists, particularly in critical fields such as oncology and pulmonology, forcing patients to compromise on quality of care. For those with long-standing medical conditions, being denied treatment by their regular doctors and redirected to unfamiliar practitioners often disrupts continuity of care and may worsen health outcomes. In emergencies, the refusal of private hospitals to provide cashless treatment further compounds suffering. These issues point to systemic inefficiencies and a lack of sensitivity. Urgent reforms are needed to ensure timely reimbursements, access to qualified doctors, and reliable medicines. Above all, senior citizens deserve a healthcare system that upholds fairness, dignity, and compassion. AP Thiruvadi, CHENNAI

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

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LUCKNOW FIRE AFTERMATH

Inferno leaves scores homeless, helpless

Men, women and children were seen digging through layers of soot and debris, hoping to recover valuables, but most returned empty-handed as the scale of destruction became starkly visible in the daylight



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, April 16: Hundreds of residents returned to the charred remains of their homes in the Vikas Nagar slum cluster here Thursday morning, sifting through ashes in a desperate search for belongings, only to find that almost everything had been lost. Men, women and children were seen digging through layers of soot and debris, hoping to recover valuables, but most returned empty-handed as the scale of destruction became starkly visible in the daylight.

"Kuch na bacha, sab bar gawa (Nothing is left, everything is gone in fire)," a woman said in Awadhi, breaking down as she searched through the remains of her lost hut. Burnt steel cupboards, twisted trunks, damaged bicycles, charred utensils, gas stoves and scattered clothes were seen at the spot, while in some places, half-burnt vegetables lay inside kitchen racks. Coolers, pedestal fans and

even refrigerators were found gutted. A dense smell of smoke still lingered, with some debris continuing to emit fumes. In one instance, a refrigerator, when opened, was found to still have traces of fire inside.

For many, the losses were not just material but deeply personal. Deepa, a domestic worker, said she had painstakingly saved money over the years to build her household. "I had collected everything piece by piece. Now nothing remains," she said.

Another woman said, "I had some money and jewellery. My husband passed away and I raised five children on my own working as domestic help, mopping floors, washing utensils and cleaning others homes. But all my savings are now gone!"

A man from Mahmoodabad in Sitapur, who lived in the cluster, said goods worth Rs 2-3 lakh that he had gathered for a wedding in his family were destroyed.

"I had even taken a loan of Rs 50,000. Everything has been

burnt," he said.

Another woman said jewellery and clothes kept in her cupboard were completely destroyed, while a 55-year-old woman claimed that Rs 4,000 in cash -- her family's savings -- had been lost in the blaze.

Suresh, a daily wage earner, said some of his goats were missing and feared they may have perished in the fire.

Deepak (25), who earns a living by playing drums at events, said he was away at work when the fire broke out Wednesday evening.

"When I returned, I could only watch everything burn. My motorcycle, bicycle and all the ration I had stocked recently are gone. I am left with just the clothes I am wearing," he said.

The devastation follows a massive fire that broke out in the slum cluster Wednesday evening, gutting around 200 shanties and triggering panic among residents.

The blaze, which started in a vacant plot near the Ring Road, spread rapidly due to strong winds and the presence of highly flammable materials in the huts. Firefighting operations were hampered by explosions of small LPG cylinders kept inside the dwellings, officials said.

While no casualties were reported, the incident left hundreds homeless and displaced, with families separated in the chaos as they fled to safety.

Authorities had said the fire was brought under control after several hours, and an investigation has been ordered to ascertain the cause.



A woman covers herself and her child on a hot summer day during her visit to Taj Mahal, in Agra, Thursday

PT PHOTO

Gorakhpur enters Guinness World Records for AI drive

GORAKHPUR: In a major milestone, Gorakhpur has secured a place in the Guinness World Records for an artificial intelligence (AI) awareness campaign that recorded over 7.64 lakh online registrations within a week, an official statement on Wednesday said. The "AI for All Awareness Programme", conceptualised under the guidance of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, surpassed its initial target of five lakh registrations well before the April 9 deadline, the official statement issued by the Information Department of the Uttar Pradesh government said. Maharana Pratap Institute of Technology (MPIT), Gorakhpur, in collaboration with TCS Foundation and Mahayogi Gorakhnath University, has organised a free "AI for All awareness programme" beginning from Wednesday. This initiative focuses on AI and cybersecurity awareness for youth, offering free online two-hour basic or 21-hour advanced certification courses.

Rajasthan govt's list of alternative names for children stokes row

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaipur, April 16: Bhiksha (begging) and Bhayankar (scary)... these are some of the suggestions in a draft list of alternatives prepared by Rajasthan's Education Department seeking to replace unusual or derogatory names given to schoolchildren with meaningful monikers.

The Sarthak Naam Abhiyan initiative is aimed at addressing long-standing concerns that names like "Sheru" or "Shaitan" can lead to embarrassment and low self-esteem among students. However, the list of suggestions has thrown up some not so positive names either.

The department's list of nearly 3,000 alternative names includes 1,541 for girls and 1,409 for boys to be shared with parents. Critics have picked on the inclusion of names such as "Bhiksha", "Bhayankar" (scary), "Kalyugi" (age of darkness), "Makkhi" (fly), "Ugra" (causing fear) and "Thana" (jail).

As the issue gained prominence with academics and parent groups raising questions on how and why the inappropriate names found their way in the list, department officials clari-



fied that the current list is only a draft. "It is not the final list of suggested names. We have noticed several mistakes and a revised list will be issued by the Education Directorate," an official said.

"Several of these names are not in general usage. When parents name their children, there is always some reasoning or context behind it," said senior sociologist and former Rajasthan University professor Rajiv Gupta.

Social worker Yashvardhan Singh said the issue is also about cultural roots.

"In rural areas, children were sometimes given negative-sounding names to ward off evil, especially if they were born after years of marriage

or after the death of older siblings... the names suggested in this list appear irrelevant," he said.

Parent body Sanyukt Abhibhavak Sangh also criticised the move, calling it a diversion from pressing issues such as rising dropout rates and shortage of teachers.

Authorities said the initiative will be monitored regularly even as the government works on revising the list to align it with its stated objective of promoting dignity and self-respect among students.

The Sarthak Naam Abhiyan has been pitched as a campaign and reform measure to improve children's confidence and social identity.

"As children grow older, such names sometimes lead to embarrassment and may even affect self-esteem," School Education Minister Madan Dilawar had said, adding that names play a crucial role in shaping personality.

The campaign envisages identifying such names in schools and encouraging parents, through PTMs and School Management Committees, to opt for more positive alternatives. It also aims to remove caste-based or derogatory references from official records.

HEATWAVE CONDITIONS BAKE PARTS OF RAJASTHAN

Barmer hottest at 42.9 deg C

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaipur, April 16: Most parts of Rajasthan are likely to witness mainly dry weather over the next three to four days, with a slight rise in temperatures and the possibility of heatwave conditions in some areas, the meteorological department said Thursday.

However, a weak western disturbance is expected to affect parts of the state on April 17, bringing light rainfall and

thunderstorm activity with gusty winds (30-40 kmph) at isolated places in Jaipur, Bharatpur and Bikaner divisions and adjoining regions, it said.

The department said rainfall during the first week is likely to remain below normal, while it may be around normal in the second week.

Maximum temperatures are expected to rise by 1-2 degrees Celsius in the coming days, with heatwave conditions likely at isolated places. In parts of western Rajasthan, temperatures may range between 41 and 43



degrees Celsius, which would be 3-4 degrees above normal.

During the first week, maximum temperatures are likely to remain 2-3 degrees above normal, while in the second week, these may stay 1-2 degrees above normal, with chances of heatwave conditions at some places.

Minimum temperatures are also expected to remain 1-2 degrees above normal over the next two weeks, the department said.

On Thursday, Barmer was the hottest place in the state at 42.9 degrees Celsius, followed by Jaisalmer at 42.8 degrees, Churu at 42.4 degrees, and 42 degrees each in Phalodi, Bikaner and Sri Ganganagar. Jaipur recorded 39.8 degrees.

Most places in the state recorded maximum temperatures above 38 degrees Celsius during the day, indicating intensifying heat conditions.

REMEMBERING ASHA BHOSLE

The jhumka trade in Bareilly owes much of its popularity to the iconic Asha Bhosle song, which continues to drive both cultural identity and commercial demand decades after its release

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bareilly (UP), April 16: Jhumkas and Bareilly often go with each other. And when Asha Bhosle nostalgia hangs heavy in the air with Akshay Tritiya just two days away, the famed 'chandelier earring' becomes more than just about the song.

"Jhumka gira re, Bareilly ke bazaar mein" -- many timeless songs of the incomparable Bhosle, who passed away earlier this week at 92, are being played on loop by her fans, and this one is no exception.

Pratiksha Harshit Khandelwal, a senior executive at a multinational company, said her friend in Bengaluru recently listened to the song from the 1966 film "Mera Saaya" after Bhosle's death, and asked her for a Bareilly jhumka gift.

"I have bought a jhumka set for the first time on Akshaya Tritiya," she said.

Professor Dr Archana Singh, a resident of the city, said gifting jhumkas has long been her

'Jhumka gira re' plays on loop in Bareilly's bazaars again



way of sharing a piece of Bareilly with people outside the city.

"I often gift jhumka sets at weddings outside Bareilly, and they are highly appreciated," she said.

As the festival April 19 approaches, jewellers across Bareilly say demand for the signature earrings is rising steadily. Women are purchasing jhumkas for the auspicious occasion, while traders dealing in artificial jewellery have been restocking supplies from wholesalers in Delhi.

Bareilly Mahanagar Bullion Association president Sanjeev Agarwal said festive buying has begun picking up.

"Purchases have increased ahead of Akshaya Tritiya. While locals buy less, visitors

often make it a point to purchase jhumkas," he said.

Markets in the city are offering a wide variety of designs - from traditional handcrafted meenakari and kan-chain jhumkas to modern styles in gold, diamond, kundan and polki.

While the "Jhumka gira re.." song from the 1966 film "Mera Saaya" picturised on actor Sadhana and composed by Madan Mohan, gave the city a unique lasting identity; another number by the singer -- "Kajra mohabbat wala" -- from the 1968 film "Kismat", starring Biswajit Chatterjee, Babita Kapoor and Helen, also contributed to the charm of the Bareilly jhumka with the line "...jhumka Bareilly wala".

But, the "What Jhumka?" track from the film "Rocky Aur Rani Ki Prem Kahani" revived the playful connection between jhumkas, Bareilly and Bhosle -- the legendary singer who gave her voice to more than 12,000 songs in multiple languages over a career spanning seven decades.

Finally, in 2020, the city got a fanciful 14-ft 'jhumka', embellished with colourful stones and the city's famous 'zari' embroidery, installed at the Parsakhera area on National Highway 24, becoming a major attraction among visitors.

Deputy Director (Tourism) Ravindra Kumar said the song remains one of Bareilly's most enduring cultural symbols.

"It has given the city a unique identity, and Bareilly is widely known as the 'Jhumka City' because of it," he said.

The fascination extends beyond music lovers. Tourists and visitors frequently arrive curious about the famous lyric itself.

"People from across the country and abroad often ask about the 'jhumka' and its story," Kumar said. "They want to know where the jhumka fell and the history behind it."

Jeweller Raj Kumar Khandelwal said the renewed spotlight on the song after Bhosle's death has sparked fresh interest in the infamous earring.

"The song has once again come into focus, and people are asking about jhumka styles," he

said, adding that even traders from unrelated sectors, such as food grain dealers, have been making inquiries about them.

Traders estimate that the artificial jewellery market in areas such as Arya Samaj Gali

alone records daily business worth Rs 5-8 lakh.

Prices range widely -- from Rs 50 for simple designs to Rs 20,000 for more elaborate pieces -- while gold variants are sold according to prevailing bullion rates.

EAST COAST RAILWAY
No. Comm/SB/IREPS/Catg/26/4, Date: 14.04.2026
Sl. No.1, ASSETS DESCRIPTION: PROVISION OF SETTING UP, OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT OF RAIL COACH RESTAURANT AT CIRCULATING AREA OF SAMBALPUR STATION FOR 2.5 YEARS/30 MONTHS.
Auction start date & time: at 11:30 hrs. of 20.04.2026. Auction close date & time: at 12:00 hrs. of 20.04.2026.
Complete details will be available at website www.ireps.gov.in
Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager/ PR-56/R/26-27 Sambalpur

ODISHA HYDRO POWER CORPORATION LTD.
(A Gold Rated State PSU)
O/O Sr. GENERAL MANAGER, Rengali Hydro Electric Project, Rengali
P.O.: RENGALI DAM SITE, DIST : ANGUL (ODISHA) INDIA, PIN : 759105, TEL : 06760-266031, Email : sgme1508@gmail.com
CIN : U40101OR1995GCO03963
No. : OHPC/RHEP/C&P/R/133/2647 Date : 16.04.2026
NOTICE INVITING TENDER No. RHEP - 03/2026-27
No.4001/22/2627 : Sealed Tenders are invited in two part i.e (i) Techno Commercial bid & (ii) Price bid in separate sealed envelopes from the registered agencies/contractor having valid license & fulfilling the eligibility criteria as per the tender specification for the work as mentioned below.

Description of Works	Cost of tender paper (Non-refundable) in Rs.	EMD in shape of DD/ Banker's Cheque only (Refundable) in Rs.	Period of availability of tender at OHPC website. (Sale)	Last date & Time of receipt of Tender	Date & Time of opening of Techno Commercial bid
Annual Job Contract for Operation of Water Supply System of RHEP, Rengali	Rs.7,080/- (Inclusive of GST@18%)	Rs. 17,600/-	From Dt. 18.04.2026 (At 10:00 A.M.) To Dt. 29.04.2026 (Up to 11:30 A.M.)	Up to 12:00 P.M. dt.29.04.2026	At 12:30 P.M. Dt.29.04.2026

For details and further correspondence / corrigendum, please visit our website www.ohpcpltd.com.
OIPR-4001/4022/1/26-27/0003 Sd/- C & P Head, RHEP, Rengali

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, JAGATSIINGHPUR IRRIGATION DIVISION
Ph. No. 05724-220038, E-mail : esispurir@gmail.com
"e" Procurement Notice No. JID-01 of 2026-27
1. Total No. of Works : 21 (Twenty-One) Nos., 2. Tender Amount (Approx.) : Rs. 17.03 Lakh to Rs.84.67 Lakh, 3. Tender paper Cost : Rs.6,000/- & Rs.10,000/- (On-line payment) (Non-refundable), 4. Cost of EMD : As per DTCN, 5. Class of Contractor : 'D', 'C' & 'B' Class Contractor, 6. Other details are as follows.

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Tender		Last date & time for seeking tender clarification in e-Procurement portal	Place of opening of Tender O/o the Superintending Engineer, Jagatsinghpur Irrigation Division, Jagatsinghpur		
		From	To		Technical Bid (Cover-I)	Financial Bid (Cover-II)	Date and Time of lottery if required
Superintending Engineer Jagatsinghpur Irr. Division, Jagatsinghpur	JID-01/2026-27	18.04.2026 at 10:00 Hours	04.05.2026 at 17:30 hours	02.05.2026 upto 1.00 P.M. during office hours	05.05.2026 at 11:00 Hours	Will be intimated while uploading the Technical Evaluation Summary	Will be intimated while uploading the Financial Bid Opening Summary

Further details can be seen from the Govt. website "<https://tendersodisha.gov.in>"
All corrigendum / cancellation of tender if any, will only be uploaded in the above website.
Sd./J Superintending Engineer, Jagatsinghpur Irrigation Division, Jagatsinghpur
OIPR-32001/32050/1/26-27/0001



Stalin fears defeat in the April 9 Assembly polls and spreads misinformation about the constituency delimitation proposal

EDAPPADI K PALANISWAMI | AIADMK GENERAL SECY

INSECTS FOUND IN CHIPS PACKET

Insects were found inside the packet of chips, raising concerns regarding the food safety and prompting authorities to order a probe into the matter.



SpiceJet-Akasa planes collide at Delhi airport

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 16: An Akasa Air aircraft and a SpiceJet plane suffered damage after they came in contact at the Delhi airport Thursday afternoon...

Both Boeing 737 aircraft have been grounded at the airport after the incident. The officials said the Akasa Air aircraft was stationary on the taxiway and preparing for take off...

Akasa Air's plane was to operate flight QP 1406 from Delhi to Hyderabad, while the SpiceJet aircraft had arrived from Leh after operating the flight SG 124...

Akasa Air aircraft were damaged. DGCA is carrying out further investigation, it said in a statement.

Preliminary information indicates that Akasa Air's aircraft was stationary when another airline's aircraft made contact with it...

The aircraft involved was a Boeing 737 MAX 8. The airline said all passengers and crew were safely disembarked.

A significant incident was narrowly avoided at Delhi's IGI airport when the wings of SpiceJet and Akasa airlines collided. The collision occurred around 2:15 PM while an Akasa Air aircraft was stationary, with the SpiceJet plane making contact during taxiing.

In a statement, SpiceJet said its Boeing 737-700 aircraft was involved in a ground occurrence while taxiing at the Delhi airport...

horizontal stabiliser of another aircraft belonging to a different airline.

The SpiceJet aircraft has been grounded at Delhi, it added. Citing preliminary information, the officials said the wings of both aircraft came in contact on the taxiway.



People participated in a shikara rally organized under the 'Nasha Mukta Abhiyan' initiative, at Dal Lake in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir

Military conflict can't solve problems: PM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 16: The world is going through a "very tense" situation impacting all nations, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Thursday...



Modi, Macron discuss West Asia

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke with French President Emmanuel Macron and discussed the situation in West Asia...

Stocker extensively deliberated on the consequences of the conflicts in West Asia and

Ukraine on global economy and vowed to work jointly to mitigate them.

The Austrian Chancellor landed in New Delhi Tuesday on a four-day trip. It is Stocker's first official trip outside Europe...

"Today, the entire world is going through a very serious and tense situation, and its impact is being felt by all of us. In such a tense global environment, India and Austria are in agreement that solutions cannot be achieved through military conflict..."

"Whether in Ukraine or West Asia, we support a stable, sustainable, and lasting peace. We are also in agreement that reform of global institutions is essential to address the growing global challenges..."

Modi said India's talent has the potential to enhance Austria's innovation and productivity.

of the day uote

Akalis deliberately framed a weak law against 'beadbi' just to ensure that the perpetrators of the heinous crime were not punished for their sins

Our responsibility is to resolve people's issues on priority and translate the commitment of good governance into reality

The government is extending full cooperation to investors setting up industries in Maharashtra. The investments by Shyam Steel and JW Global are a testament to the conducive industrial environment in the state...

SHORT TAKES

Car driver booked for blocking fire tender

Alappuzha (Kerala): Police have registered a case and seized a car for allegedly obstructing a fire tender on its way to a hospital following a major fire at Pattanakad, officials said Thursday.

Mathura boat capsizes: Death toll climbs to 16

Mathura (UP): The death toll in the Vrindavan boat capsizing incident has risen to 16 after the body of the final missing pilgrim was recovered from the Yamuna river, police said Thursday.

Jharkhand: Suspected WW II-era bomb found

Jamshedpur: A bomb, suspected to be from the World War II era, has been found on a river bed in Baharagora area of Jharkhand's East Singhbhum district, police said Thursday.

Two killed after truck hits vehicles

Giridih: Two persons were charred to death after a truck collided with two goods vehicles and caught fire in Jharkhand's Giridih district Thursday, police said.

Tamil Nadu polls: Vijay releases TVK manifesto



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, April 16: TVK chief Vijay Thursday unveiled sweeping assurances in the party manifesto ahead of the April 23 Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu that included ₹2,500 monthly assistance for women below 60 years...

SHGs. He assured corruption-free good governance if voted to power in his maiden electoral fight.

The manifesto also laid importance on education. To prevent school dropouts, mothers or guardians of children studying in government and state-aided schools will receive ₹15,000 annually.

Vijay promised 100 special residential schools named after iconic leader K Kamaraj, credited with revolutionising education in the state...

The actor-turned-politician also assured a quality silk saree in addition to gold for indigent brides and interest-free loans up to ₹5 lakh for women-run

Nashik case: Plea in SC to curb deceitful religious conversion

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 16: A plea was filed in the Supreme Court Thursday in the aftermath of allegations of religious conversion and sexual harassment at a multinational company (MNC) in Nashik seeking directions to control deceitful religious conversion.

It was filed in the backdrop of charges of sexual harassment and allegations of forced religious conversion levelled by eight female employees at TCS' office in Nashik.

The petition filed by advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay contended that deceitful religious conversion is not only a serious threat to sovereignty, secularism, democracy and liberty but also a menace to fraternity, dignity, unity and national inte-



gration. The plea, filed through advocate Ashwani Dubey, has sought directions to the Centre and the state governments to take stringent steps to control religious conversion.

"The organised religious conversion in Nashik has shaken the conscience of citizens throughout the country. Therefore, petitioner is filing this application for direction seeking certain

MEA briefs panel on Iran situation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 16: The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Thursday briefed the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs on the fast-evolving situation in Iran, with the discussions covering a wide spectrum of issues...

Describing the interaction as wide-ranging, Tharoor said the members of the panel used the opportunity to press the government on critical issues. "It was a very good briefing with the foreign secretary on all the issues to deal with the Iran war that were not covered in the earlier briefing when he was himself not present. This time he gave us a comprehensive view. There were a lot of questions asked," Tharoor told the media.

The Congress MP said 17 members attended the discussions and all of them had very serious questions for the foreign secretary. "But we do want to particularly say on record one of the things that many members expressed -- a very high appreciation for the diligent, hard-working and courageous work of our embassy in Tehran and our diplomatic force throughout the Gulf. It has been remarkable to see how much has been done by our people," he said.

"Our diplomats, the military wing in the Tehran embassy, everyone has been doing a terrific job and I think the country owes them all a debt of gratitude," Tharoor, who himself is a former diplomat, said. Asked if there were discussions on the situation at the Strait of Hormuz, the former Union minister said, "Everything was discussed, very much, that is a major subject."

ISRO satellites faced 1.5L close-approach alerts in 2025: Report

Four collision avoidance manoeuvres (CAM) were performed for Geo-synchronous Earth Orbit (GEO) satellites, while 14 CAMs, including one for the NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR), were performed for Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellites

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

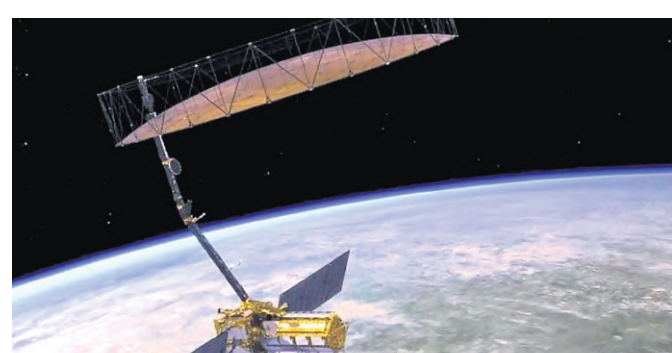
New Delhi, April 16: More than 1.5 lakh close-approach alerts were issued for the Earth-orbiting satellites of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) last year to help avoid collisions among spacecraft, according to a new report released by the space agency.

Four collision avoidance manoeuvres (CAM) were performed for Geo-synchronous Earth Orbit (GEO) satellites, while 14 CAMs, including one for the NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR), were performed for Low Earth Or-

bit (LEO) satellites. "Wherever feasible, collision avoidance requirements were met by adjusting orbit-maintenance manoeuvres to avoid exclusive CAMs," the report said.

The analysis, "Indian Space Situational Awareness Report for 2025 (ISSAR-2025)", was released April 8. The sheer number of alerts issued indicates the growing number of human-made objects in space.

According to the analysis, 328 launch attempts took place globally in 2025 alone -- the highest number of launches since the beginning of the space age -- of which 315



launches successfully placed 4,198 known operational satellites. "A total of 4,651 objects were added to the space object population in this year (2025),

in a significant rise compared to the previous years -- the space object population increased by 2,963 objects from 254 launches in 2024 and 3,135 objects from 212 launch-



The meteorological department has predicted below-normal monsoon rainfall this year. There is a possibility of normal rainfall in August, while less rainfall is expected in September

SIDDARAMAIAH | KARNATAKA CM

NO CHANGE OF GUARD CEREMONY APRIL 18: RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN

There will be no change of guard ceremony April 18, the Rashtrapati Bhavan said Thursday. The change of guard ceremony is a military tradition that is held every week to enable a fresh group of the President's bodyguards to take charge.



of the day uote

The Mahayuti government has failed to provide adequate support. Farmers have been left in the lurch, while industries are being favoured. The affected cultivators need immediate and meaningful financial aid

HARSHWARDHAN SAPKAL | MAHA CONG PRESIDENT

Immediately implement the 2023 Act passed by Parliament that gives 33 per cent reservation to women in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies

UDDHAV THACKERAY | SHIV SENA (UBT) CHIEF

In Assam and Tripura, BJP governments do not allow infiltration from Bangladesh, but (CM) Mamata Banerjee welcomes illegal immigrants in her state

HIMANTA BISWA SARMA | ASSAM CM

POST OF THE DAY

+300 Member of Parliament means:- 1) More corruption 2) More taxes 3) More traffic jams

4) Spread of more VIP culture 5) Rise of more of their MP gang members traveling in Thars (Tharorists). Rise of MP population is inversely proportional to your quality of life. @akshat_world

Constitution amendment Bill among 3 tabled amid protest



AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 16: The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, aimed at tweaking the women's quota law, was introduced in Lok Sabha Thursday after a division of votes. The Delimitation Bill, 2026, and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026—intended to implement the amended women's quota law in Delhi, Puducherry, and J&K—were also introduced in the Lower House on the first day of Parliament's three-day special session, amid protest by the Opposition.

The Bills were introduced after a fiery 40-minute debate, following which the Opposition pressed for a division of votes on the introduction of the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026. It was later introduced with 251 members voting in support and 185 voting against it.

Intervening in the debate on Bills introduced for amendment of the women's quota law and to set up a delimitation commission, Prime Minister Narendra Modi allayed fears of some states over delimitation. "I want to say from this House today with a great sense of responsibility that whether

VOTING AT 4PM TODAY

it is the south, the north, the east, the west, small states or big states, this decision making process will not discriminate against any state or do injustice to anyone," he said.

Modi also made it clear that the proportion of Lok Sabha seats in any state will not come down as a result of delimitation. "Those who oppose women quota Bill will pay a price for a long time," he said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said Lok Sabha seats in five southern states will go up to 195 from the present 129, an increase of 50 per cent, when the total seats in the Lower House will be enhanced to 816.

He alleged a false narrative is being spread to float misleading information. Shah also said the proposed women's reservation will be implemented only in 2029 and till then all polls will be conducted under the present system.

Participating in the debate, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said the government began finishing off democracy by putting pressure on institutions, such as

Election Commission and the judiciary, but now, an "open attack" has been launched on democracy with the Constitution amendment Bill. "Why can't the government give 33 per cent reservation to women on the current 543 seats of the Lok Sabha?" she asked. If this Constitution amendment Bill is passed in Parliament, democracy will be finished in India, she added.

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav accused the BJP-led Centre of turning 'nari' (women) into a 'nara' (slogan) for political benefits and demanded reservation for OBC and Muslim women under the proposed women's quota law.

Yadav, during the debate, said the Samajwadi Party has always supported reservation for women and furthered the cause of women-led development.

DMK members were dressed in black clothes in the Lok Sabha to protest amendments to the women's reservation law. "We favour the 2023 women's quota law, but the present Bill is aimed at delimitation," DMK's TR Baalu said.

Meanwhile, Speaker Om Birla said the voting on the three Bills in the Lower House will be held at 4pm Friday.

KANNUR BDS STUDENT DEATH Dental college students protest

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kannur (Kerala), April 16: Students of Kannur Dental College Thursday launched a protest on the campus following the death of BDS student Nithin Raj R L, who was allegedly harassed on a caste basis, while the college management dismissed Dental Anatomy department head Dr M K Ram.

A college official told PTI that Dr Ram had served the college for over 10 years and was dismissed following an internal inquiry. Earlier in the day, students from all batches, except those appearing for university examinations, took out a protest march and held a dharna in front of the dental college at Anjarakandy.

The students also refused to wear white coats until justice is delivered to Raj and action is taken against the faculty members concerned. Raj (22), a first-year BDS student, was found critically injured near the medical college block after falling from a building April 10 and later succumbed to his injuries.

Police have registered a case against two faculty members, Dr Ram and associate professor Dr Sangeethan, for abetment of suicide and under provisions of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act following allegations that Raj was harassed over his caste and complexion.

Student representatives said the college management is yet to address key issues even days after Raj's death. They said a petition detailing their demands would be submitted to the management.

The students demanded the removal of Dr Ram, who is a prime accused in the case, from the college. "We demand action against other college staff involved in Raj's death. We want a student-friendly environment in the college as the management has never been concerned about our issues," they said.

SC flags lack of trust between WB govt, EC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 16: Flagging the lack of trust between the West Bengal government and the Election Commission, the Supreme Court Thursday dismissed a plea challenging the transfer of more than 1,000 administrative and police officers by the poll panel in the election-bound state.

The apex court, however, kept open for adjudication in future the contentious legal question about whether the Election Commission (EC) needed to consult the concerned state before effecting administrative changes in poll-bound states.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pandhori also observed that it was the "misfortune" of the country that the purpose of creating the All India Services was getting frustrated.

The CJ said the apex court had to appoint judicial officers in the exercise of Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal as there was trust deficit between the parties.

"They have no trust in the officers of the state government and the state has no trust in the officers brought by them (EC)," the bench observed.

The top court passed the order while hearing a plea challenging a Calcutta High Court order dated March 31. The high court had dismissed a PIL challenging the transfer of officers by the poll panel in West Bengal.

Elections to the 294-member West Bengal Assembly will be held in two phases -- April 23 and 29. Votes will be counted May 4.

During the hearing, senior advocate Kalyan Banerjee, appearing for petitioner Arka Kumar Nag, said that for the first time, the chief secretary



of a state has been transferred in such a manner.

He said around 1,100 officers in West Bengal were transferred "overnight" after the notification for the Assembly polls was issued. "This is not something that has happened for the first time or that has happened in this state only," the bench observed.

Banerjee argued that the EC needed to consult with the state before effecting such transfers.

"The officers who have been transferred or posted are all from the West Bengal cadre. It is not that officers from other states have been appointed. They are all serving officers of the state of West Bengal. Whether they occupy 'A' post or 'B' post, how does it matter?" the CJ asked.

Banerjee said the EC had changed the chief secretary, DGP and other senior officers, including several superintendents of police, in West Bengal.

"After the changes, the Kaliachak incident happened. There were some law and order problems in other places also," Banerjee said, adding that the power of superintendence does not take away legislative power.

Seven judicial officers engaged in the SIR exercise in West Bengal were 'gheraoed' at Kaliachak in West Bengal's Malda district April 1.

Banerjee said the petitioner was not arguing that the apex court should stay the transfer of officers, but he raised a very substantial question of law in the matter.

SNIPPETS

Two children killed in slum fire

LUCKNOW: Two children were killed in a massive fire that gutted a slum cluster in the Vikas Nagar area here, police said Thursday, as rescue teams and residents trawled through the site reduced to ashes from the blaze the evening before. The bodies of the two children were recovered late Wednesday, hours after the devastating fire broke out, Deputy Commissioner of Police (East) Deeksha Sharma said. "The bodies have been sent for a post-mortem. Their parents have been informed," she told reporters. The two victims were sisters â€" Shruti (2) and her two-month-old sister, officials said. Police said the parents of the deceased children are from Kashipurwa village in Barabanki district. The fire, which started Wednesday evening in a slum cluster near the Ring Road in Vikas Nagar, rapidly engulfed over 200 shanties and reduced residents' belongings to ashes. Hundreds of people, mostly domestic workers and daily wage earners, were left homeless.

Drug deaths: Police suspect large-scale supply racket

MUMBAI: A 22-year-old man was arrested Thursday for allegedly supplying drugs at a concert in Goregaon where two MBA students died due to suspected drug overdose, and it is suspected that a large-scale racket was operating at the venue, police said. With the arrest of Vinit Gerelani, student of a prominent college in south Mumbai, the number of people arrested in the case reached seven, a Vanrai police station official said. A court in Borivali has remanded the accused in police custody till April 18. Probe found that a large-scale drug supply racket was operating during Saturday's concert at Nesco Ground and the organisers were hand in glove with the peddlers, the official said. Two MBA students, a man and a woman, died of suspected overdose after consuming alcohol and ecstasy pills during the music concert that took place on April 11. Gerelani is accused of playing a role in supplying drugs, the official said, adding his financial transactions were being probed.

GRAP-1 curbs imposed in Delhi-NCR

NEW DELHI: The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) on Thursday imposed stage one measures in Delhi-NCR under the Graded Response Action Plan as air quality slipped into the 'poor' category, officials said. "The AQI of Delhi has been showing an increasing trend owing to unfavourable meteorological conditions and recorded as 226 ('Poor' Category) today. Further, the forecast by IMD and IITM has also predicted AQI to remain in the 'Poor' category in the next two days," a senior official said. "The sub-committee of CAQM, accordingly, decided to invoke all actions under stage-1 ('Poor' air quality) of the extant GRAP in the entire NCR, with immediate effect," the official added. The development came a month after the CAQM revoked GRAP-1 restrictions March 16 due to a significant improvement in air quality at the time.



'Hadi Rani Mahila Batalion' personnel conducted march during the celebration of the 77th Rajasthan Police foundation day, at Rajasthan Police academy, in Jaipur

Nearly a quarter of candidates face criminal charges: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, April 16: Nearly 23 per cent of the candidates contesting the first phase of the West Bengal Assembly elections have declared criminal cases against themselves, according to a report released Thursday by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and West Bengal Election Watch.

Among the major parties, the BJP has the highest share of candidates with criminal cases, with 106 out of 152 nominees (70 per cent) declaring such cases in their affidavits.

Out of the 148 candidates the ruling Trinamool Congress has fielded, 63 have criminal cases

(43 per cent), while 43 of the 98 candidates of the CPI(M) and 39 of the 151 nominees of the Congress have also declared criminal antecedents.

"Data again shows that parties continue to give preference to winnability over clean public life despite repeated court directions," a representative associated with the report said. The analysis, based on self-sworn affidavits of 1,475 of the 1,478 candidates contesting in 152 constituencies going to polls April 23, said 345 aspirants have declared pending criminal cases, and 294 have disclosed serious criminal charges.

The report said 19 candidates have declared cases related to murder, while 105 have reported



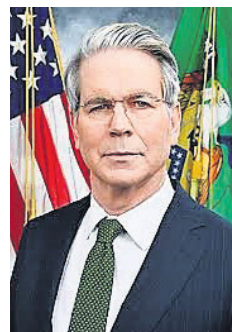
WEST BENGAL POLLS. The study also identified 66 constituencies, or 43 per cent of those going to polls in the first phase, as "red alert constituencies", where three or more candidates have declared criminal cases against themselves.

NEARLY 23% OF CANDIDATES IN THE FIRST PHASE OF WEST BENGAL ELECTIONS HAVE DECLARED CRIMINAL CASES. THE BJP HAS THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF CANDIDATES WITH DECLARED CRIMINAL CASES (70%). 43% OF CONSTITUENCIES IN THE FIRST PHASE ARE IDENTIFIED AS 'RED ALERT CONSTITUENCIES' WITH MULTIPLE CANDIDATES FACING CRIMINAL CHARGES

On the financial side, the report said 309 candidates, or 21 per cent of those analysed, are crorepatists. The average assets of candidates in the first phase stand at Rs 1.34 crore, with candidates of the Trinamool Congress reporting the highest average assets among major parties at Rs 5.70 crore.

The report also pointed to the low representation of women in the contest, noting that only 167 women, or 11 per cent of the total candidates, are contesting in the first phase of the election.

The elections to the 294-member West Bengal assembly will be held in two phases, April 23 and 29. Counting is scheduled May 4.



We will not be renewing the general license on Russian oil, and we will not be renewing the general license on Iranian oil. That was oil that was on the water prior to March 11, so all that has been used

INDONESIA REVIEWS US PROPOSAL FOR AIRSPACE OVERFLIGHT ACCESS

Indonesia is reviewing a US proposal on overflight access to its airspace, the Foreign Ministry said Thursday. The proposal surfaced in local media after Indonesia and the US established the Major Defence Cooperation Partnership, which was announced by US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth Monday at the Pentagon



of the day quote

My deepest solidarity to Pope Leo XIV. Throughout mankind's history, advocates for peace and for the oppressed have been attacked by powerful people who think they are deities to be adored. It's better to have a heart full of love than the power of weapons and money



We discussed the upcoming NATO Summit and how we can upscale defence industrial output in Europe



If negotiations succeed, it will either result in a longer period of stability or an end to the aggression



Israel, Lebanon agree on ceasefire

Optimism grows on ending Iran war

REUTERS

Washington, April 16: US President Donald Trump announced Thursday that Lebanon and Israel had agreed on a 10-day ceasefire, as optimism grew that the Iran war may be nearing an end.

Trump said in a social media post that the ceasefire would start at 5 pm EST (2100 GMT), aiming to halt a conflict between Israel and the Iran-aligned Lebanese group Hezbollah that was reignited by the US-Israeli war against Iran. He said he had held "excellent conversations" with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Lebanese President Joseph Aoun.

"These two Leaders have agreed that in order to achieve PEACE between their Countries, they will formally begin a 10 Day CEASEFIRE at 5 PM EST," he said. "Both sides want to see PEACE, and I believe that will happen, quickly!"

Trump said he had directed US Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Dan Caine to work with the two countries to achieve lasting peace.

The war with Iran spilt into Lebanon March 2, when Hezbollah opened fire in support of Tehran, prompting an Israeli offensive in Lebanon 15 months after the last major conflict.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen welcomed the ceasefire announcement, saying on X, "This is a relief, as this conflict has already claimed far too many lives."

BREAKTHROUGH ON 'STICKY ISSUES' BETWEEN US AND IRAN

Thousands of people have been killed, mostly in Iran and



- Pakistan's army chief mediates talks between Iran and US
Progress made on 'sticky issues', source says
Iranian official says differences remain on nuclear issues

Lebanon, since US-Israeli attacks on Iran began February 28, triggering Iranian airstrikes on Iran's Gulf neighbours and reigniting the Israel-Hezbollah conflict. Soaring energy costs have rattled investors and policymakers globally since Iran effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil and gas supply flows.

Closure of the strait has caused the worst oil price shock in history and forced the International Monetary Fund to downgrade its outlook for the global economy, warning prolonged conflict could push the world to the brink of recession.

But hopes of a deal between Iran and the United States have been growing, with a two-week ceasefire in force.

A security source said a Pakistani mediator had made a

breakthrough on "sticky issues", although Tehran said the fate of its nuclear program had not been resolved. Trump has said the accord would open the Strait of Hormuz.

Pakistan's army chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, an important figure in mediation efforts, arrived in Tehran Wednesday to try to prevent a renewal of the conflict after talks in Islamabad that ended without a deal.

A senior Iranian official told Reuters Thursday the trip had led to greater hopes for a second round of talks and an extension of a two-week ceasefire, but said fundamental differences remain over its nuclear program.

'LOCKED AND LOADED'

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said troops were poised to restart combat operations if a

deal was not reached with Iran. "We are reloading with more power than ever before, and better intelligence," Hegseth told a Pentagon briefing. "We are locked and loaded on your critical dual-use infrastructure, on your remaining power generation, and on your energy industry. We'd rather not have to do it."

But a security source told Reuters a deal was closing in and that the US wants a breakthrough before the ceasefire expires next week. Washington is offering to lift sanctions and unfreeze billions of dollars' worth of Iranian assets, he said.

Iran will open the strait only if a permanent ceasefire is reached and there are United Nations guarantees that the US and Israel will not attack again in future, he said. "We hope that the field marshal will have a draft in his hand when he flies out of Tehran," the source said. A separate government source said the talks would be held "soon" in Islamabad although no date has been set.

China moves to block entrance to disputed South China Sea shoal

REUTERS

Hong Kong/Manila, April 16: China is employing ships and a barrier to tighten control of the entrance to the Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea amid roiling tension with the Philippines over the disputed feature, satellite imagery obtained by Reuters shows.

Scarborough is one of Asia's most hotly disputed maritime sites, where some diplomats and analysts fear long-running frictions and confrontations could degenerate into armed conflict.

The presence of four fishing boats, a Chinese naval or coast guard ship and a new floating barrier comes as the Philippines sends its own coast guard and fisheries vessels to support its fishermen frequently driven away by larger Chinese patrols.

Photographs taken April 10 and 11 show the fishing boats anchored along the entrance to the shoal, in addition to a floating barrier stretching across it in the April 11 image.

Satellite image provider Vantor, formerly Maxar Technologies, said a probable Chinese naval or coast guard patrol vessel can be glimpsed just outside the entrance April 10.

TRADITIONALLY RICH FISHING GROUND The traditionally rich fishing ground of the Scarborough Shoal lies entirely within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone, but China also claims it as part of its territory. Last year, China approved establishment of a national nature reserve there, alarming Philippine security officials, who called the



move a "clear pretext for occupation".

Jay Tarriela, a spokesperson for the Philippine coast guard, told Reuters Wednesday the

Chinese government had installed a 352-m (1,150-ft) floating barrier at the entrance April 10 and April 11. "Six Chinese maritime militia vessels were observed within the shoal, while three others were spotted outside, seemingly obstructing the entrance to BDM," he said.

He was referring to the shoal by its Philippine name of Bajo de Masinloc, while China calls it Huangyan Island.

While the Philippines coast guard has cut barriers in the past, Tarriela said the Chinese side appear to have removed the latest one since the weekend, but the Philippine Navy says its patrols continue. "According to our assessment in the past, they consistently exhibit suspicion whenever they monitor a group of Filipino fishing boats," Tarriela added. Ten Chinese coast guard vessels were sighted at the shoal from April 5 to April 12, Philippine Navy spokesperson Roy Trinidad said Tuesday.

SOVEREIGNTY HAS NEVER BEEN ESTABLISHED Despite the competing claims sovereignty has never been established and the shoal is effectively under Beijing's control even if Philippine boats still try to operate there.



Satellite images show fishing boats, floating barrier at entrance. Deployments latest amid long-running tension over shoal. Philippine officials say 10 Chinese coast guard ships seen

SHORT TAKES

Chinese man jailed over ant trafficking

Nairobi (Kenya): A Chinese national was sentenced Wednesday to one year in jail by a Kenyan court after being found guilty of illegally possessing wildlife for having hundreds of live ants stored in specialised tubes. Zhang Kequn was also fined 1 million Kenyan shillings (\$7,700) after pleading guilty to the charge of wildlife possession without a license. Kenya has previously fined Belgian teenagers who were found in possession of queen ants, which are used as delicacies and kept as pets in Europe and Asia. Kequn had been charged alongside Kenyan Charles Mwangi who pleaded not guilty to the offense and was released on cash bail.

S Africa's Malema faces jail sentence

Johannesburg: Julius Malema, a polarizing figure in South African politics, faces an uncertain political future after being sentenced to five years prison Thursday following his conviction for firing an assault rifle in public during a 2018 rally. Malema, founder and leader of the far-left Economic Freedom Fighters party, built his platform around advocating for the rights of South Africans who feel left out of the country's post-apartheid prosperity. He has rattled investors with calls to nationalise mines and retake land by force, but his cry for economic justice in one of the world's most unequal nations attracts millions of Black youths, many of them educated but facing a bleak future in a country where one in three people are jobless.

Hasina sedition case hearing set for June

Dhaka: A court in Bangladesh Friday will hear arguments on framing of charges in a sedition case against ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina and 285 others. Dhaka Third Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge Moin Uddin Chowdhury fixed the June 17 date, allowing a plea by the defence seeking more time, according to the state-run BSS news agency Wednesday. The case relates to allegations that the accused were involved in anti-state activities and conspired to overthrow the then Muhammad Yunus-led interim government by participating in a virtual "Joy Bangla Brigade" meeting December 19, 2024. The meeting, attended by 577 participants worldwide, allegedly included pledges to incite rebellion and reinstate Hasina as prime minister.

Pope decries world 'ravaged by tyrants'

REUTERS

Bamenda, Cameroon, April 16: Pope Leo blasted leaders who spend billions on wars and said the world was "being ravaged by a handful of tyrants", in unusually forceful remarks in Cameroon Thursday after US President Donald Trump attacked him again on social media.

Leo, the first US pope, also decried leaders who used religious language to justify wars and urged a "decisive change of course" in a meeting in the biggest city in Cameroon's anglophone regions, where a simmering conflict going back nearly a decade has left thousands dead.

"The masters of war pretend not to know that it takes only a moment to destroy, yet often a lifetime is not enough to rebuild," the pontiff said.

"They turn a blind eye to the fact that billions of dollars are spent on killing and devastation, yet the resources needed

for healing, education and restoration is nowhere to be found."

Trump's attacks on Leo, first launched on the eve of the pope's ambitious four-country tour of Africa and repeated late Tuesday, have caused dismay in Africa, where more than a fifth of the world's Catholics live.

Leo, who kept a relatively low profile for most of his first year as leader of the 1.4-billion-member Church, has emerged as an outspoken critic of the war that began with US-Israeli strikes on Iran.

The pontiff sharply criticised leaders who invoked religious themes to justify wars Thursday.

"Woe to those who manipulate religion and the very name of God for their own military, economic and political gain, dragging that which is sacred into darkness and filth," he said.

"It is a world turned upside down, an exploitation of God's creation that must be denounced and rejected by every honest conscience."

RUSSIAN STRIKES KILL 17 ACROSS UKRAINE

REUTERS

Kyiv, April 16: Russia unleashed its deadliest attack so far this year on the Ukrainian capital Kyiv and other cities overnight, killing at least 17 people, including a 12-year-old child, and wounding scores, in drone and missile strikes, officials said Thursday.

In Russia, a major Ukrainian drone attack on the Black Sea port of Tuapse killed two people, including a 14-year-old girl, injured seven, and sparked a large fire, Russian officials and media reported. The port is home to a major oil refinery as well as an export hub for oil, coal and fertilizer.

Overnight in Kyiv, fires in several different places sent black smoke billowing into the sky. Its heavy smell lingered through the morning as residents and emergency crews cleaned debris scattered around heavily damaged buildings including apartment blocks and a hotel.



"I fear for our country and for everything we have. For the people. I feel so sorry for the children. So many people died today," said Olena Kapustian, 41, standing outside with her son. ZELENSKIY CALLS FOR AID AND EFFECTIVE PRESSURE ON RUSSIA

Four people, including the child, died in Kyiv, mayor Vitali Klitschko said. Eight people

were killed in Odesa, and four in the southeastern city of Dnipro, where Russian attacks set residential buildings ablaze, according to regional officials.

President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said the night had proven that Russia did not deserve any easing of global policy or lifting of sanctions, with 100 people wounded alongside those killed.

"There can be no normalization of Russia as it is today. Pressure on Russia must work. And it is important to fulfill every promise of assistance to Ukraine on time," he said. Moscow said it had carried out a "massive" strike on Ukraine that had hit energy targets used by Ukrainian forces and cruise missile and drone production, without giving details. Kyiv's drone forces commander said Ukrainian military struck two oil depots in Russia-occupied Crimea and infrastructure in Russia's southern port of Tuapse.

- 12-year-old child among the dead
Toll could rise, 100 people wounded, officials say
Russia says teenager one of two killed in Ukrainian port attack

Ukraine said its air force units shot down or neutralised 31 missiles and 636 drones, but 12 missiles and 20 drones hit in the 24 hours to 7 am (0500 GMT) Thursday.

In tough times, Russians are turning to witchcraft

REUTERS

Moscow, April 16: Self-described witch Natalia Malinovskaya has a new client base: men fighting in eastern Ukraine, who, like a growing number of Russians, are drawn to the supernatural against a backdrop of conflict and economic uncertainty.

In her darkened apartment in Moscow, Malinovskaya, who says she inherited her powers from her grandmother, offers services from love spells to protection from evil. She has also made frequent appearances on Russian television.

Demonstrating how she detects a bad vibe over someone's health by wafting a lit match over a glass, she says most people seek help for love problems, including soldiers worried about their partners staying faithful.

"They contact me, and there are many of them," said Malinovskaya, cautioning that she can only cast spells in person when soldiers are on leave. "It's impossible to carry out a ritual at the front. Where would someone burn candles, and how would I even send them there?"

STATE POLLSTER REPORTS SURGE IN MYSTICISM

Orthodox Christianity, mysticism and folk superstitions have coexisted in Russia through centuries of tsarist rule and the religious repression of the Soviet era.

Interest surged in the final years of the Russian Empire - when faith healer Rasputin's influence over the tsar's family caused public outrage - and again during the chaotic years after the Soviet Union's collapse. After a period of decline it is on the rise again.

"Today's geopolitical and



economic challenges in Russia and worldwide heighten anxiety, triggering a surge in mysticism," state pollster VTsIOM said in March as it published a poll showing that 85% of Russians had dabbled in magical practices.

"In such conditions, especially against the backdrop of military threats, belief (regardless of which gods are involved) turns into a tool of psychological defense," it said.

Russian forces have been on the offensive in Ukraine

Russian soldiers in Ukraine seek help from self-described witch

State pollster records rise in belief in supernatural

Orthodox Church calls occult practices 'devilish'

for over four years, fuelling a deadly crisis that has damaged Russia's international standing, slowed the economy and driven up the cost of living.

Nearly half of Russians believe that some people may be able to predict the future or have magical powers, the survey showed, up from less than a third in 2019.

Demand for crystal balls and protective amulets more than doubled last year, while sales of aspen stakes - said to defend the owner from evil spirits - quadrupled, said Russian cash

register operator ATOL, citing consumer spending data.

At Witch Store in Moscow, which sells crystals, tarot guides, and other magical paraphernalia, a couple of customers browsed the shelves looking for incense to cleanse the air or bring good luck.

ORTHODOX CHURCH CALLS FORTUNE-TELLING A 'DEVILISH POWER'

The revival has its opponents. Last year, a group of lawmakers submitted a bill to ban adverts for services such as astrology and energy healing, warning that they can lead to the financial exploitation of vulnerable people.

Patriarch Kirill, the head of Russia's Orthodox Church, backed the idea of a ban last year and in January decried the "mass manipulative influence" of fortune-tellers and psychics.



Indian companies' presence in the Middle East is concentrated in the construction or infrastructure sector, and their business may have suffered in the last month due to the challenging situations

HARSHA BANGARI | MD AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE, EXIM BANK

VOLVO CAR TO RECALIBRATE PRICES

Swedish luxury car maker Volvo Car Thursday said it will recalibrate its vehicle prices in India by up to ₹1 lakh from May 1. Persistent global supply-chain disruptions and foreign exchange fluctuations have necessitated this marginal adjustment, the car maker said in a statement. Volvo Car India added that it does not rule out a further price hike in its car prices soon if this global geo-political/economic climate continues. The company currently markets its products through 23 showrooms and 25 workshops pan-India



of the day quote

In India, we have great ambition: make it one of Renault brand's top three markets worldwide. We are entering our largest product renewal cycle in India. We will introduce new vehicles, bringing our portfolio to seven models by 2030

FRANCOIS PROVOST | CEO, RENAULT



Our vision has always been to redefine the standards of urban living in India by bringing world-class innovation to our home soil

PRADEEP AGGARWAL | CHAIRMAN, SIGNATURE GLOBAL



The demand in the Middle East countries are very strong, continues to hold, and we have not seen any order cancellations that have happened

AMAANDEEP SINGH | PRESIDENT-LCV, IO, DEFENCE & POWER SOLUTIONS, ASHOK LEYLAND



West Asia war taking its toll

Inbound tourism dips 15-20%; aviation industry faces ₹18,000cr loss, says report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 16: India's inbound tourist traffic declined 15-20 per cent since the West Asia crisis broke out, while the aviation industry is staring at an estimated net loss of ₹18,000 crore following disruptions caused by the conflict, according to a report on the impact of the West Asia conflict released Thursday.



The report, titled "Impact of the West Asia Conflict on India's Tourism, Aviation & Hospitality Sectors", highlighted that the aviation sector was the most impacted, with airlines facing flight cancellations, airspace restrictions and significant re-routing of international flights. These disruptions have increased flying time by 2-4 hours on key routes, resulting in a sharp rise in fuel consumption and operating costs.

Industry estimates indicate that fuel accounts for 35-40 per cent of airline operating costs, and the ongoing situation has further strained airline profitability. The disruption of West Asia air corridors, which is among the busiest global transit routes, has also reduced connectivity efficiency and increased airfares, the report said. The overall industry impact, including the estimated ₹18,000 crore net loss, has been assessed by rating agency Iera by examining stakeholder feedback with sectoral trends, booking patterns, cancellations and operational cost pressures

(particularly aviation-related), PHDCCI said. India's inbound tourist traffic declined 15-20 per cent, particularly in leisure travel, as global travellers adopt a cautious approach amid geopolitical uncertainties, according to the report.

The findings are based on industry inputs collected through structured interviews and questionnaires with key stakeholders. The assessment covers the period from 28 February 2026 onwards, marking the onset of the West Asia conflict and its subsequent impact on travel sentiment, flight operations and inbound tourism flows.

The restaurant and food services sector is also experiencing a mixed impact. According to industry estimates aligned with insights from the National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI), the sector is facing input cost inflation in the range of 10-15 per cent, driven by higher prices of imported ingredients, logistics and energy.

Sagar Daryani, President, National Restaurant Association

of India (NRAI), said the scale of the disruption has now become a nationwide operational challenge.

"The ongoing LPG supply disruption has created a serious operational crisis for the restaurant industry. Nearly 10 per cent of restaurants have temporarily shut down, while 60-70 of establishments have shifted to induction cooking, alternate fuels, reduced menus or shorter operating hours to manage limited supplies," Daryani said.

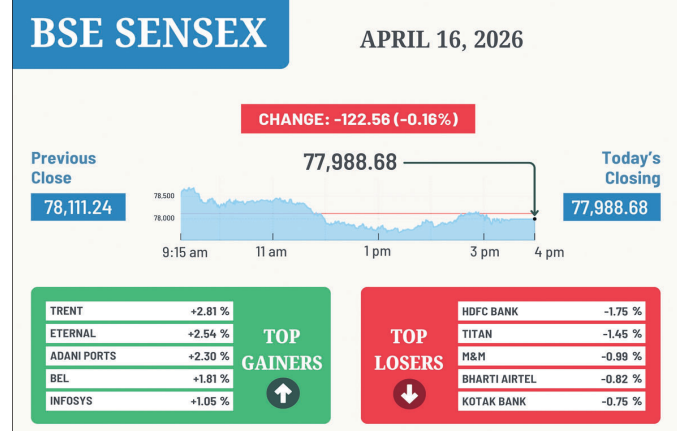
According to the report, the economic implications of the disruption are substantial.

Citing industry estimates, it said the Indian food services market, valued at ₹5.69 lakh crore in 2024, projected to reach ₹7.76 lakh crore by 2028, is expected to reach an estimated ₹6.46 lakh crore in 2026, translating into approximately ₹17,700 crore in daily economic activity across the sector.

A 15-20 per cent slowdown in throughput, as currently observed, corresponds to an estimated ₹2,650 crore reduction in daily economic activity, or

PROFIT-TAKING

STOCK MARKETS EKE OUT GAINS



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, April 16: Stock markets closed lower in a volatile session Thursday with the benchmark Sensex declining by 122 points and Nifty closing below 24,200, dragged by profit-taking in banking and financial shares after a recent sharp rally.

Erasing its early gains, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 122.56 points or 0.16 per cent to settle at 77,988.68. The index opened higher and hit a high of 78,730.32 in late-morning trading. However, profit-taking emerged at higher levels, dragging the index down to a low of 77,674.93. The index gyrated 1,055.39 points during the session.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dropped 34.55 points or 0.14 per cent to end at 24,196.75. The index moved between a high of 24,400.95 and a low of 24,102.80 during the session.

The two key indices had surged by more than 1 per cent Wednesday following easing

geopolitical tensions.

Among the 30-Sensex firms, HDFC Bank fell the most by 1.75 per cent. Titan, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bharti Airtel, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Bajaj Finance were the major laggards.

Trent, Eternal, Adani Ports, Bharat Electronics and Infosys were among the major winners.

Broader markets closed higher with the BSE MidCap Select index climbing 0.86 per cent and the SmallCap Select index gaining 0.60 per cent. Sectorally, the trend remained mixed, with metals, IT, and energy stocks supporting the index, while banking and auto stocks faced some pressure.

In Asian markets, South Korea's benchmark Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended significantly higher.

Markets in Europe were trading in positive territory. US markets ended mostly higher Wednesday.

RESULTS CORNER

Wipro profit slides

New Delhi: Wipro Thursday reported 1.89 per cent decline in March quarter FY26 consolidated net profit at ₹3,501.8 crore. The IT company's profit in the year-ago period stood at ₹3,569.6 crore. Revenue from operations rose 7.6 per cent to ₹24,236.3 crore in the fourth quarter of FY26, according to a regulatory filing. As compared to previous December quarter, profit and revenue rose by 12.2 per cent and 2.8 per cent, respectively. For full fiscal year 2025-26, Wipro recorded a net profit of ₹13,197.4 crore, reflecting a marginal 0.47 per cent increase from 2024-25. FY26 revenue stood 3.96 per cent higher at ₹92,624 crore. IT services major Wipro's board on Thursday approved a mega ₹15,000 crore share repurchase programme, proposing to buy back more than 5 per cent of its equity, or up to 60 crore shares, from shareholders at ₹250 per share. The share buyback price reflects a premium of around 18 per cent over Monday's closing price of ₹210.20 per share on BSE.

HDFC Life profit up

New Delhi: HDFC Life Insurance Thursday reported 4 per cent increase in standalone profit after tax at ₹495.65 crore for the three months ended March 2026 aided by higher premium income. The life insurer had clocked a PAT of ₹476.54 crore in the January-March period of 2024-25. Its net premium income stood at ₹25,829 crore during the fourth quarter of FY26, up from ₹23,765.56 crore in the same period last fiscal, HDFC Life said in a stock exchange filing. Meanwhile, the company recommended a final dividend of ₹2.10 per equity share of face value of ₹10 each for financial year 2025-26, subject to shareholders' approval at its annual general meeting.

Equity MF AUM rises

New Delhi: Equity-oriented mutual funds saw a robust 17.38 per cent year-on-year (YoY) increase in average assets under management in March, driven by strong flows into flexi Cap, mid Cap and thematic funds, a report said Thursday. The report from Abakus Mutual Fund said that flexi Cap Funds emerged as the largest and fastest-growing category, with average net AUM rising to around ₹5.28 lakh crore, compared to ₹4.22 lakh crore a year ago, registering a 25.10 per cent year-on-year growth. Flexi Cap Funds category now commands a 15.75 per cent share of total equity AUM total average net AUM of equity-oriented schemes.

Asit new president of OSPA

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 16: The Odisha Steel Producers' Association (OSPA), the newly formed industry body representing leading steel companies in the state, has unanimously elected former IAS officer Asit Tripathy as its president.

A highly respected administrator with decades of experience in governance, policy, and industrial development,



Tripathy currently serves as advisor at Jindal Steel. His election as the president of OSPA is widely seen as a significant step towards strengthening industry-government collaboration and advancing Odisha's position as a leading steel hub in India.

Welcoming his appointment, members of OSPA expressed confidence in his leadership,

noting that his deep understanding of public policy, stakeholder engagement, and infrastructure development will be instrumental in guiding the association.

Speaking on the occasion, Tripathy said, "Odisha is at the forefront of India's steel growth story. OSPA will be a strong, constructive voice for the steel industry, aligned with Odisha's long-term growth ambitions. We will work closely with the Government and stakeholders to create an enabling ecosystem for responsible and inclusive industrial growth in the state".

The association has also selected SK Popli, IFS (Retd) as Secretary General. Popli, former officer of the Indian Forest Service, has held several key leadership positions in government, contributing significantly to natural resource management, regulatory frameworks, and sustainable development initiatives.

Representatives of 15 leading steelmakers in Odisha — including Jindal Steel, JSW Steel, Jindal Stainless, AMNS, Rungta Mines, Narbheram Steel, MGM Steel, Aarti Steel and Essar Steel — were present in the meeting.

BANKS BUZZ

Sarat takes charge as Zonal Head of Bank of Baroda

Bhubaneswar: Sarat Kumar Panigrahi, General Manager took charge as the Zonal Head, Bank of Baroda, Bhubaneswar Zone. He has become the first Odisha officer to head Bhubaneswar Zone. Prior to his present assignment he served as Deputy General Manager, Business Development, Bhubaneswar Zonal Office. As a Zonal Head, Panigrahi is expected to focus on strengthening branch presence, customer centricity and business growth, ensuring regulatory compliance, promoting digital banking, expanding Retail, Agriculture and MSME (RAM) segments and enhancing overall customer service across the zone. His leadership is expected to further accelerate Bank's growth trajectory and reinforce its commitment to delivering excellence in banking services across the region. Panigrahi joined Bank of Baroda in 1994 and has more than 32 years of diverse banking experience. During his career, he has served across several states including Odisha, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. He also held prestigious assignments at the bank's overseas branch in Dubai. With more than 25 years of extensive experience at the branch level, Panigrahi possesses strong operational expertise and a deep understanding of customer-centric banking. He has also served as Deputy General Manager, Business Development, Bhopal Zone.



SBI holds fire evacuation drill

Bhubaneswar: A fire evacuation drill was recently conducted at local head office of State Bank of India, Bhubaneswar. The practice drill was aimed at giving the employees an exposure to deal with all types of contingencies arising because of fire in high-rise buildings. Vandana Agrawal, General Manager (NW-1), SBI for Bhubaneswar Circle addressed the staff on the importance of fire safety measures and fire drill for the safety and lives of staff members at office as well as at home. "Our goal is not only to provide safe working environment for all our staff, but also to ensure that at least 50% of the staff in the LHO Building is trained in fire safety to deal with the any emergencies of fire at office or at home," said Agarwal. The firemen of SBI demonstrated the various fire extinguishers and yard hydrants under the supervision of Kuldeep Srivastava, Circle Fire Officer of SBI, LHO, Bhubaneswar and the guidance of Alok Kumar Nag, AGM (P&E), and overall command of Manoj Kumar Singh, DGM & Circle Development Officer, at LHO Bhubaneswar. The contingents of Bhubaneswar fire brigade participated in the mock drill in co-ordination with SBI fire support team and demonstrated to deal with high rise building fire.



FIRM GLOBAL CUES

Silver climbs ₹1,700 to ₹2.58 lakh per kg

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 16: Silver price climbed ₹1,700 to ₹2.58 lakh per kilogram in the national capital Thursday due to steady demand and firm global trends, even as investors tracked geopolitical developments and currency movements.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, the white metal jumped ₹1,700, or nearly 1 per cent, to ₹2,58,700 per kg (inclusive of all taxes) against the previous close of ₹2,57,000 per kg.

However, gold of 99.9 per cent slipped ₹200 to ₹1,57,800 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes). On Wednesday, the yellow metal had finished at ₹1,58,000 per 10 grams.

"Gold traded within a narrow range on Thursday, reflecting mixed market cues. Ongoing instability around the Strait of Hormuz supported safe-haven demand for the US dollar, which acted as a key headwind for the precious metal," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

War pushes US towards oil dominance

Iran war brings US close to net crude exporter for first time since World War II

REUTERS

Houston, April 16: The US nearly turned into a net crude exporter last week for the first time since World War II as shipments surged close to a record high to meet demand from Asian and European buyers scrambling to replace Middle East supplies cut by the Iran war.

The US and Israel's war with Iran triggered the largest ever disruption to the global energy market as Iranian threats to shipping stopped around a fifth of the world's oil and gas supplies from transiting the Strait of Hormuz waterway.

Refiners in Asia and Europe that depend on those supplies



have bought alternative cargoes from wherever they can, sharply boosting demand for oil from the US, the world's largest producer.

However, analysts and traders say the US is rapidly approaching its export capacity.

Net imports of crude oil, or the difference between imports and exports, narrowed to 66,000

barrels per day last week, the lowest on record in weekly data that goes back to 2001, according to US government data released Wednesday, while exports climbed to 5.2 million bpd, the highest in seven months.

On an annual basis, the US was last a net exporter of crude in 1943, data showed.

Rising US crude exports are

evidence that Atlantic Basin and Asian buyers are reaching further out for available supply, with regional oil price differences making up for the costs of shipping, said Rystad vice president of oil markets, Janiv Shah.

Countries such as Greece have snapped up US crude for the first time ever in recent months.

About 2.4 million bpd, or some 47% of US exports last week sailed toward Europe, according to ship tracking service Kpler. Around 1.49 million bpd, or about 37%, headed to Asia, up from 30% a year ago.

Top buyers included the Netherlands, Japan, France, Germany and South Korea.

A vessel carrying 500,000 barrels of crude signaled it was en route to Turkey, which would mark the first US export to the country in at least a year, Kpler data showed.

Mark Mobius, Indiana Jones of emerging markets, dies at 89

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, April 16: Ace investor and commentator Dr Mark Mobius has died at age 89, leaving behind a legacy that reshaped global portfolio strategies.

Often called the "Indiana Jones of emerging markets", his investment philosophy emphasised on-the-ground research.

"Dr Mark Mobius, renowned investor and pioneer in emerging markets investing, passed away on April 15, 2026 at the age of 89. Dr Mobius was widely regarded as one of the early investors in emerging markets, known for traveling extensively and developing first-hand insights in markets often overlooked by global investors," according to an official statement.

"John Ninia, Partner at Mobius Investments, and Eric Nguyen, Partner at Mobius In-



vestments, will assume leadership responsibilities. The firm will continue to operate without changes to its investment approach or day-to-day operations," the statement read.

As executive chairman of Templeton Emerging Markets Group, he worked for over 30 years and became the public face of emerging markets.

Mobius was synonymous with emerging and frontier markets investing with a reputation as one of the most successful and influential money managers over the past 30 years.

Rampant Punjab Kings crush MI

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, April 16: Prabhsimran Singh and Shreyas Iyer struck fluent fifties as Punjab Kings' winning run continued with a seven-wicket hammering of Mumbai Indians, who suffered a fourth consecutive defeat in the Indian Premier League here Thursday.

Even as Quinton de Kock, with a brilliant 112 not out, and Naman Dhir (50) bailed Mumbai Indians out in the first half with a robust 132-run third-wicket stand, the hosts' 195/6 was never challenging enough on a docile track against the rampant Punjab batters.

Prabhsimran made a wicketless Jasprit Bumrah (0/41) and MI pay for a regulation drop early, smashing a strokeful 80 not out off 31 balls (11x4s, 2x6s), while skipper Iyer was in his elements, notching up his third fifty in as many outings with a 66 off 35 balls (5x4s, 4x6s), as the duo stitched a sturdy 139-run stand for the third wicket.

Chasing 196, PBKS went over the line with 21 balls to spare, scoring 198/3 as MI bowlers continued to disap-

IPL STANDINGS					
TEAMS	P	W	L	NRR	PTS
PBKS	5	4	0	1.067	9
RCB	5	4	1	1.503	8
RR	5	4	1	0.889	8
SRH	5	2	3	0.576	4
DC	4	2	2	0.322	4
GT	4	2	2	-0.029	4
LSG	5	2	3	-0.804	4
CSK	5	2	3	-0.846	4
MI	5	1	4	-1.076	2
KKR	5	0	4	-1.383	1

point collectively, with AM Ghazanfar's 2/31 being the only performance of note.

Punjab were quick off the blocks as the first over from Deepak Chahar yielded 21 runs, putting MI on the backfoot.

A pivotal moment arrived in the third over when Bumrah, placed at short third, spilled a regulation chance off Hardik Pandya when Prabhsimran was only on 11.

Ghazanfar dismissed Priyansh Arya (15) and Cooper Connolly (17) to give Mum-

bai two elusive wickets in the powerplay, but the hosts could never capitalise on those breakthroughs.

Prabhsimran unleashed his rich repertoire of strokes, hitting a flurry of fours, while Iyer relished batting on his home track of the Wankhede Stadium, dispatching the bad balls with ease.

Their 139-run stand came from only 67 balls as Prabhsimran and Iyer eclipsed the first-innings heroics of de Kock and Dhir.

In the 16th over, a powerful pull from Iyer went through Dhir's hands for a six and the Punjab skipper sent the next from Shardul Thakur flying in-

TODAY'S MATCH

GT VS KKR

TIME: 7:30 PM

Star Sports channels & JioHotstar

to the stands. However, a flick off the pads in the air gave Dhir another chance, which he converted with a fine diving catch in the front.

Earlier, a belligerent century from Quinton de Kock (112 not out) and a gritty 50 from Naman Dhir pulled MI out of doldrums and lifted them to an under-par 195/6.

Confined to warming the bench so far, de Kock replaced Rohit Sharma and smacked his third IPL hundred to lead an inspirational fightback for the troubled Mumbai Indians, who had slipped to 15/2 in three overs.

The veteran Protea batter was in his elements during his unbeaten ton -- a 60-ball 112 not out (8x4s, 7x6s) and his first in IPL since 2022 -- clobbering the ball powerfully on the leg-side and picking boundaries with precision and terrific timing on the off.

BRIEF SCORE

Mumbai Indians: 195 for six in 20 overs (Quinton de Kock 112 not out; Arshdeep Singh 3/22) lost to

Punjab Kings: 198 for 3 in 16.3 overs (Prabhsimran 80 not out, skipper Iyer 66; AM Ghazanfar 2/31) by seven wickets

FOOTBALL AT ITS BEST

Bayern late show sinks Real Madrid



Bayern Munich beat Real Madrid 4-3 to reach Champions League semifinals

REUTERS

Munich, April 16: Bayern Munich's Luis Diaz and Michael Olise scored late goals to earn the hosts a dramatic 4-3 comeback win over Real Madrid in the Champions League quarter-finals Wednesday and send them into the last four 6-4 on aggregate after a thrilling tie.

Diaz struck in the 89th minute and Olise in stoppage time to seal treble-chasing Bayern's place in the semis where they will play holders Paris St Germain.

Bayern are only the second team to trail three or more times and still win a Champions League match.

It took only 35 seconds of a pulsating five-goal first half for Real to score, with 40-year-old goalkeeper Manuel Neuer, man of the match in last week's first leg, making a huge blunder and sending his pass straight to Guler who fired into an empty goal.

The Bavarians, fresh from setting a new Bundesliga record for most goals scored in a single season, made amends five minutes later courtesy of

unmarked Aleksandar Pavlovic's header close to the goaline with keeper Andriy Lunin completely out of position.

The 21-year-old Guler came to the rescue for Real again, whipping a 29th-minute free kick over the wall past Neuer and into the top corner to put them 2-1 up. Guler had not scored a goal in his previous 20 matches in the competition. Bayern bounced back again when Kane netted his 12th goal in this season's competition eight minutes later, before Real, battling for their only realistic shot at a trophy this season, responded through top scorer Mbappe who levelled from a Vinicius Jr assist just before halftime for his 15th Champions League goal.

Arsenal in semifinals again

A 0-0 draw with Sporting Lisbon at the Emirates Stadium saw Arsenal advance 1-0 on aggregate. Arsenal has never won the European Cup and only once reached the final. But it is now just two games away from this year's showpiece in Budapest, Hungary. Kai Havertz's late winner in the first leg of the quarterfinals in Portugal last week proved to be decisive as Sporting failed to find a breakthrough in London. It is the fourth time Arsenal has advanced to the semifinals, having lost to eventual winner Paris Saint-Germain at that stage last season.

INJURY WOES

Blow for CSK as Khaleel ruled out

New Delhi: Chennai Super Kings pacer Khaleel Ahmed has been ruled out of the IPL due to a quadriceps injury. Ahmed, who was part of all the five games CSK have played thus far, reported pain in his right hip during the previous game against KKR April 14. He was one of the consistent performers for CSK in the initial stage of the tournament. "It is a grade 2 tear and the rehab will take at least 10-12 weeks," said an IPL source. The left arm pacer has played 11 ODIs and 18 T20s for India with the last appearance coming in July 2024.

Bhagat replaces Atharva in MI

Mumbai: Mumbai Indians Thursday named Krish Bhagat as a replacement for injured Atharva Ankolekar for the remainder of the Indian Premier League. Krish, the 21-year-old right-handed all-rounder who represents Punjab, brings versatility as a right-arm fast bowler and can contribute with the bat as a lower order batsman. He was part of Mumbai Indians trials for the past two years, having played for the Reliance in the DY Patil T20 cup in 2026 and has been a support bowler with the team since pre-season this year.

SRH seamer Payne ruled out

New Delhi: Sunrisers Hyderabad were Thursday dealt another injury setback with England left-arm seamer David Payne ruled out of the remainder of the IPL season due to an ankle injury. The 35-year-old featured in the first two matches for SRH, picking up two wickets, including a tidy outing against Royal Challengers Bengaluru. The 2016 champions, currently fourth on the table with two wins and three losses, have been hit hard by injuries this season. Another England cricketer, Brydon Carse, was earlier ruled out with a hand injury sustained at the start of the campaign, with SRH bringing in Sri Lanka pacer Dilshan Madushanka as his replacement.

SHORT TAKES

Arjun, Aditya's golden show at the US Open

New Delhi: Arjun Singh combined with Aditya Singh to win the men's doubles 5.0 event at the US Open Pickleball Championship by getting the better of J Meode and W Lin 9-11, 11-2, 11-7) in the final in Naples, Florida. Another Indian pair to bag a medal was Panth Thakkar and Atharva Sheth, who took home a silver in the 4.5 men's doubles category, after losing the summit clash to Caian Appel and Michael Van Dusen 8-11, 9-11. This is Arjun's third gold at the tournament and his second with his brother Aditya. They had won the U18 boys doubles title earlier in the tournament.

Joshna, Chotrani advance in Hamburg

Hamburg: Veteran Joshna Chinappa and Veer Chotrani advanced in the Hamburg Open squash, while compatriots Velavan Senthilkumar and Tanvi Khanna bowed out in the opening round here. Former women's world No 10 Joshna eased past local challenger Saskia Beinhard 11-4, 11-5, 11-4, while men's world No 47 Chotrani beat Spain's Ivan Perez 11-8, 11-9, 11-8 in the PSA Bronze-level event. Men's fifth seed Abhay Singh, who moved up to a career-best world ranking of 22 this week, and Ramit Tandon, the seventh seed, received first-round byes. Other Indian results - Men: R Tsukue (Jpn) bt V Senthilkumar 11-4, 11-9, 14-12; Women: Hannah Craig (Iri) bt Tanvi Khanna 11-5, 11-7, 13-11.

Messi accused of breaching contract

Miami: Lionel Messi is being sued by a Miami-based event promoter who says the soccer icon violated terms of a \$7 million contract by missing an exhibition match last year. Vid Music Group filed the lawsuit for fraud and breach of contract against Messi and the Argentine Football Association in Miami-Dade circuit court last month, according to court records. Messi and the AFA didn't immediately respond to messages seeking comment.

FIFA president confirms Iran's participation in WC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Washington, April 16: FIFA President Gianni Infantino said Wednesday that Iran will participate in the World Cup "for sure" despite its war with the United States.

Speaking at CNBC's Invest in America Forum, Infantino said it is important that Iran participates in the World Cup even though its participation has been in doubt since the US and Israel launched airstrikes on the country.

"The Iranian team is coming for sure, yes," Infantino said. "We hope that by then, of course, the situation will be a peaceful situation. As I said, that would definitely help. But Iran has to come. Of course, they represent their people. They have qualified. The players want to play."

Infantino met with the Iranian national team in Anta-

lya, Turkey, two weeks ago and said Wednesday he was impressed.

"I went to see them. They are actually quite a good team as well," Infantino said. "And they really want to play and they should play. Sports should be outside of politics now."

Infantino acknowledged it's not always possible to achieve the separation of sports and politics.

"OK we don't live on the moon, we live on planet Earth," Infantino said. "But you know if there is nobody else that believes in building bridges and in keeping them, you know, intact and together, well we are doing that job."

The United States will co-host the World Cup with Canada and Mexico.

Iran is scheduled to play two group-stage games in Inglewood, California, and one in Seattle.

OFC face Mohammedan test at home

RISHABH PAREKH, OP

Bhubaneswar, April 16: Following gritty fixtures on away soil resulting in one win and three losses, Odisha FC return for their home game after six weeks against Mohammedan SC in the Indian Super League Friday.

Having slipped to 11th in the standings with five points, the Juggernauts will look to regain momentum on their home advantage to arrest their slide. Finishing with maximum points Friday would take Odisha FC to eight points.

In a press conference held at the Kalinga Stadium Thursday, OFC's defender Vanlalzuidika Chhakchhuak with head coach Purushothaman TG expressed the joy of coming back to Odisha. "Ofcourse it feels amazing coming back, to our stadium and city. It is great to feel at home. The players are happy too," Purushothaman said.

Looking at the positives and



OFC defender Vanlalzuidika Chhakchhuak and head coach Purushothaman TG in a press conference held at the Kalinga Stadium Thursday

addressing past results, the head coach added, "We lost last two games after a good win but we fought hard and played

well. We need to convert the chances we get and keep our defensive shape. The team is working on it."

When asked if the team feels more confident ahead of their fixture against winless Mohammedan, the coach said, "There is no such thing as overconfidence. We take each team as equal and it is going to be a challenging battle. This is our first match against them and we will not underestimate them. Every side is a threat."

Mohammedan SC travel to Bhubaneswar in hopes of securing their first point of the season, sitting at the bottom of the table without a point from seven matches, the Kolkata side eye a do-or-die battle as they fight to sparge a survival bid against the looming threat of relegation.

Across their last two Indian Super League encounters, neither side has been able to score or secure a win, with both matches finishing in goalless 0-0 draws. The fixture presents critical scenarios across the points table.

Vaishali's quiet confidence her biggest strength

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP QUEST

From being the lowest-rated player in the eight-woman field at the Candidates tournament to a place in the World Championship showdown, Vaishali's fairytale script in motion

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 16: The newly-crowned Candidates champion R Vaishali, a soft-spoken and unassuming presence often seen with her mother by her side, stands out for her quiet intensity, shaped by strong values and a grounded upbringing, the kind of Indian sportsperson who lets her game do the talking.

What truly shapes her is the ecosystem she comes from -- a deeply committed chess family

that has quietly nurtured excellence without seeking the spotlight, and in that understated, almost self-effacing journey lies her greatest strength.

On Wednesday, Vaishali, the lowest-rated player in the eight-wom-



an field at the Candidates tournament in Paphos, Cyprus, let her quiet game do the talking, springing a fine victory over Kateryna Lagno to seal a place in the World Championship showdown against Ju Wenjun later this year.

For long, Vaishali, 24, had lived in the shadow of her younger and more celebrated brother, R Praggn-

anandhaa, who had qualified for the Open section of the Candidates tournament, but a string of underwhelming performances knocked him out of contention early in the 14-round competition, ending his hopes of challenging D Gukesh for the world title later this year.

Even after Praggnanandhaa's chances faded, the spotlight never quite turned to Vaishali, who is deeply close to her brother and would have felt his disappointment, perhaps even her own dip in morale.

But the quiet presence of her mother, always by their side in a saree and with a calm, unreadable expression, seemed enough to steady her and remind her that not all was lost. With 8.5 points, she sealed the title this time, a step up from last year in Toronto when Vaishali had qualified for the

Candidates but finished joint second, narrowly missing out on a shot at the World Championship.

Silence and few words have long been her forte, shaped in a middle-class household where her father worked as a bank branch manager and her mother was a homemaker.

Vaishali, who became only the third Indian woman Grandmaster after Koneru Humpy and D. Harika in December 2023, quietly rose through the ranks.

She collected age-group titles in plenty and earned her International Master title in 2021, before stepping into the spotlight at the Chess Olympiad in Mamallapuram, Chennai in 2022, where she clinched a historic individual bronze and also helped the team secure a bronze.

In Cyprus, that same quiet

confidence held firm, even with her cast as the underdog.

She did have momentum on her side, having qualified for the Candidates by winning the FIDE Women's Grand Swiss tournament in 2025 just as she had in 2023.

But in a field packed with heavyweights like Norway Chess champion Anna Muzychuk, women's World Rapid champion Aleksandra Goryachkina, world blitz champion Bibisara Assaubayeva, and two of China's finest in Zhu Jiner and former Candidates winner Tan Zhongyi, the odds were anything but in her favour.

In fact, India's Divya Deshmukh, the World Cup winner last year, was seen as a stronger contender than Vaishali, but she paid little heed to the noise and quietly kept working her way to the top.