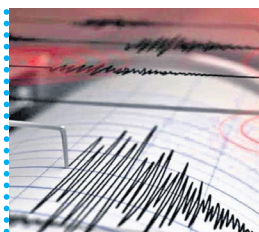




## Sanya's lesson

Actor Sanya Malhotra says her biggest challenge wasn't acting, but learning to set boundaries early in her career

LEISURE | P2



## Japan on alert

Japan issues advisory, anticipating mega-tremor risk, after 7.5 quake hit its northern coastal areas

INTERNATIONAL | P10



## India at risk

The geopolitical tensions in West Asia pose risks to India's trade and macroeconomic stability, NITI Aayog said

BUSINESS | P11



## Enviably feat

Racing prodigy Atiqa Mir records the highest-ever race finish by an Indian in her category at World Series Karting (WSK)

SPORTS | P12

## Fresh conflict around Hormuz casts doubt over US-Iran talks

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Islamabad, April 20: Pakistan moved ahead Monday with preparations for a new round of talks between the United States and Iran days before a tenuous ceasefire is set to expire, even as renewed conflict around the Strait of Hormuz raised questions about whether the meeting would take place.

Over the weekend, the US attacked and seized an Iranian-flagged cargo vessel that it said had tried to evade its blockade of Iranian ports. Iran's joint military command vowed to respond, and its Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told his Pakistani counterpart that Amer-

## Death toll 3,300: Iran

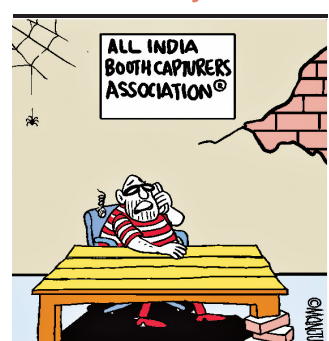
Dubai: Iran Monday offered a new death toll for the war with Israel and the United States, with its forensic chief saying at least 3,375 people had been killed in the conflict. The figure came from Abbas Masjedi, the head of Iran's Legal Medicine Organisation. Masjedi, quoted by the judiciary's Mizan news agency and other outlets Monday, said only four of the dead remain unidentified. His comments did not break down casualties among civilians and security forces, instead just saying that 2,875 were male and 496 were female.

ican threats to Iranian ships and ports were 'clear signs' of Washington's disingenuousness ahead of the planned talks, Iran state media reported.

With tensions flaring and the ceasefire due to expire mid-week, Pakistan has intensified diplomatic contacts with both Washington and Tehran over the past 24 hours with the goal of resuming the talks Tuesday as planned, according to two Pakistani officials involved in the preparations.

US President Donald Trump has said American negotiators would head to the Pakistani capital Monday, but it was not immediately clear whether those plans would now change. Iran has not officially commented on possible talks, but Iranian state media, citing anonymous sources, issued brief reports suggesting that they would not happen.

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Thanks to CBI, ED, ministers, governors, party workers and the election commission, nobody needs us anymore



SON OF THE SOIL: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi took part in an 'Akshaya Trutiya' ritual at Central Rice Research Institute in Cuttack, Monday. PHOTO

## CM disburses ₹838cr among 41 lakh farmers

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, April 20: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Monday disbursed over ₹838 crore among 41.68 lakh farmers as the fourth instalment of the CM Kisan Yojana.

Accompanied by Deputy Chief Minister KV Singh Deo, who is also in charge of the Agriculture and Farmer Empowerment Department, Majhi disbursed the amount at the state-level Krushak Divas 2026 function held at Central Rice Research Institute (CRRI), Cuttack.

The state observes Krushak Divas on the occasion of the agrarian festival of 'Akshaya Trutiya', which is being celebrated across the state.

Addressing the gathering, the chief minister said that each beneficiary of CM-Kisan, mostly small and marginal farmers, received ₹2,000 in their bank accounts as financial assistance for the upcoming Kharif crop season.

He said that of the 41,68,582 farmers who received the financial assistance, 41,049 are landless and 3,292 are tribal farmers. The remaining 41,24,241 beneficiaries were small and marginal farmers.

"The financial assistance given under the CM-Kisan today will help small and marginal farmers to procure seeds and fertilisers," the chief minister said.

Under the scheme, eligible farmers across the state receive ₹4,000 per annum in two installments, one during Akshaya Trutiya and another during Nuakhai.

"The farmers in Odisha get ₹10,000 financial assistance per annum - ₹4,000 under CM Kisan and ₹6,000 under PM-Kisan," Majhi said.

Both Majhi and Singh Deo, on the occasion of Akshaya Trutiya, performed the sym-

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ Of 41,68,582 farmers, 41,049 are landless and 3,292 are tribal farmers
- ▶ Eligible farmers receive ₹4,000 per annum in two installments, one during Akshaya Trutiya and another during Nuakhai. The farmers also receive ₹6,000 annually under PM-Kisan scheme
- ▶ The growth rate in the agriculture sector in the state has reached 5.3 per cent, much higher than the national average of 4.4 per cent, Majhi claimed

bollic 'Akhi Muthi Anukula' (sowing paddy grain) ritual marking the auspicious beginning of the paddy sowing season. Majhi, in a social media post, said, "Our government remains steadfastly committed to the holistic prosperity of the state's 'annadata' (food providers) and to energising the agricultural economy."

The chief minister ascertained that the growth rate in the agriculture sector in Odisha has reached 5.3 per cent, much higher than the national average of 4.4 per cent.

"This indicates that our agriculture policies have yielded good results," Majhi said, adding that Odisha was the second-largest rice producing state in the country.

He also inaugurated the Ama Bihana Rath (Seeds on wheels) and Krushi Rath initiatives aimed at strengthening agricultural outreach and input delivery.

## Not 'vishwaguru' anymore: MM Joshi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

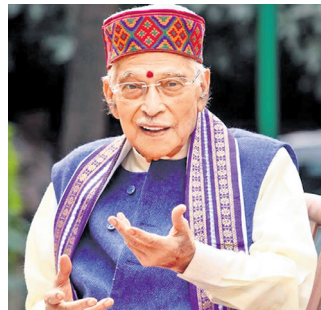
New Delhi, April 20: Batting for greater promotion of Sanskrit and its use even in quantum computing, BJP veteran Murli Manohar Joshi Monday said India is not a 'vishwaguru' (global teacher) anymore and this term should not be used.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an event here, Joshi also made a strong pitch for making Sanskrit India's official language, saying many people, including BR Ambedkar, made efforts for it in the

past, but the proposals were not cleared.

He was speaking to reporters at the inauguration of the central office of the Sanskrit Bharati, an affiliate of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

Asked about his view on India's role in the promotion of Sanskrit at a time when India has become a 'vishwaguru' and is also emerging as an AI hub, the former Union minister said, "The notion that we are a 'vishwaguru'... I personally believe nowadays that we



should refrain from using this term. We are not 'vishwaguru' at present. We should aspire to be 'vishwaguru'."

"Indeed, we were 'vishwaguru' at one time. However, the reality today is that we are not," he said.

From this point of view, Sanskrit is very significant today, Joshi said.

"Sanskrit is not merely India's heritage, but the heritage of the world. It is the oldest language. It is also the language of knowledge and science. It is the language of spirituality. It is also the language of technology. Sanskrit is the very 'prana' (life force) of Bharat," he said.

## No discrepancy yet in Ratna Bhandar inventory

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, April 20: No discrepancy has been noticed so far in the inventory of the valuables in the Ratna Bhandar of Puri's Jagannath temple, authorities of the 12th century shrine said Monday.

Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) chief administrator Arabinda Padhee, who is monitoring the exercise that started March 25, said the inventory of valuables of Chalanti Bhandar, which stores daily-use ornaments,

and Bahar Bhandar, which has festival ornaments, has been completed under CCTV surveillance, while the process is underway for Bhitari Bhandar (inner chamber). "All ornaments stored in the Ratna Bhandar -- be it gold or precious stones -- matched the 1978 inventory so far. Not a single discrepancy has been recorded by grace of the Lord," Padhee said.

He said the process, however, has been paused for the time being from April 18 due to Chandan Yatra and it will resume again in suitable time.

## Another Agniveer found dead at INS Chilika

POST NEWS NETWORK

Balugaon, April 20: Coming close on the heels of the death of a trainee Agniveer at INS, Chilika here in Khurda district April 8, yet another trainee allegedly committed suicide by hanging on the same premises Sunday. The deceased was identified as Vikas Kumar of Sharipur village under Sandesh police limits in the Bhojpur district of Bihar.

He was found hanging in the training centre's gym hall.

According to naval authorities, Kumar was noticed missing from his barracks early Sunday morning. Fellow trainees began a search and discovered his body in the nearby gym. He was rushed to the hospital on the premises, where doctors pronounced him dead.

Earlier, Kartik Yadav of Mohammedpur, Dhumi village in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh, was found dead on the campus. The recurring nature of these incidents has raised questions regarding the men-

tal health and pressure faced by aspirants under the new recruitment scheme.

Kumar had been part of the eighth batch of Agniveers, undergoing training at the base since February.

On being informed, the deceased's father, Pintu Sai, arrived at the Naval Police Outpost Monday and identified the body. He alleged that Kumar may have faced 'injustice' or harassment within the facility and demanded a high-level probe into the matter.

## Major fire at Raj refinery before launching by PM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi/Jaipur, April 20: A major fire broke out near the main unit of the newly built ₹79,450-crore Rajasthan refinery of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) Monday, a day before the scheduled inauguration by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Thick columns of black smoke emitted from the fire that broke out near the crude distillation unit -- the primary or front-end unit that is often referred to as the heart of an oil refinery.

The blaze at the HPCL Rajasthan Refinery Ltd (HRRL) refinery was doused in about two hours, with no reported casualties, officials said. But the Prime Minister's event to dedicate to the nation the 9 million tonnes a year oil refinery-cum-petrochemical complex at Pachpadra in Balotra district of Rajasthan, which was scheduled for Tuesday, was postponed.

The Union Petroleum Ministry in a post on X announced the postponement of the event and said an investigation has been launched to determine the cause of the fire and implement corrective measures. The refinery project was scheduled to begin commercial operations from July 1, according to a Government of India statement.

## China woman earns ₹1.35cr raising 60K venomous snakes

AGENCIES

Beijing, April 20: A young woman in China has stunned the internet after leaving city life to return to her hometown and build a thriving business raising tens of thousands of venomous snakes. Qin, born in 1995 and from Guilin in Guangxi province, joined her father's snake-breeding operation two years after graduating from university. What began as helping out has since evolved into managing a large-scale farm with more than 60,000 reptiles, *South China Morning Post* reported.

cobras. Despite the risks, Qin says she has grown accustomed to working closely with the animals.

Her father initially resisted the idea of her entering the trade after being concerned about the dangers involved. But as the operation expanded beyond what he could manage alone, she stepped in and eventually took on a leading role.

"Five-step snakes have to be force-fed prepared food, and close contact with them still carries significant risks. I am not really afraid of five-step snakes. My father has been raising them since before I was born," she told *Haiobao News*.

The farm supplies a range of products used in traditional



medicine and research. Dried snake, gallbladders, and snake oil are commonly used in traditional remedies, while extracted venom is sold for medical and scientific purposes.

Each five-step snake produce venom twice a month, with prices ranging from 40 to 200 yuan per gram depending on quality. Snake meat sells for 200 to 300 yuan per animal,

while larger specimens can fetch over 1,000 yuan.

After accounting for labour and operational costs, Qin says the business generates an annual income exceeding one million yuan (approximately \$146,000).

She also documents her work online under the name *The Girl Who Collects Snake Venom*, where she has built a following of over 22,000 users. In her videos, she answers common questions about snake farming, including whether she fears being bitten, and candidly describes the pain of snakebites.

"If someone who raises snakes tells you they are not afraid of being bitten, there is only one possibility: they have never been bitten. Especially

with the five-step snake, the main symptom after a bite is intense pain. Once you have experienced it, you will remember that pain for a year, or even a lifetime," she said.

"You might think that getting bitten on the hand only affects the hand, but in reality, your arm, shoulder, and even half your body can be in pain. One of my followers said that after being bitten by a five-step snake, the pain was so unbearable they would rather undergo amputation than experience it again," she added.

Her unusual career path and high-risk profession have sparked widespread fascination and debate among Chinese social media users.

# leisure



## Theron talks about her traumatic past

Charlize Theron opened up about her traumatic childhood in South Africa, revealing how her father's alcoholism created a tense, abusive home. She shared that his drinking left her deeply fearful of intoxicated people, shaping her early years and leaving a lasting emotional impact on her life.

## Charles Dance to join The Batman Part II

Veteran actor Charles Dance is in talks to join the cast of DC Studios' *The Batman Part II*, featuring Robert Pattinson reprising his Bruce Wayne role. The actor, known for playing Tywin Lannister in *Game of Thrones*, will reportedly essay Charles Dent, father of Gotham district attorney Harvey Dent.



### FORTUNE FORECAST

GaneshSpeaks.com  
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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181\*

**ARIES**  
You are not so much in a mood to socialise today. Something unsavoury may also be hard to overcome. Although you are industrious, Ganesh advises you not to bite off more than you can chew. A bit of faith in providence can go a long way in your life.

**TAURUS**  
In the more morning you are due to be gripped by an urge to acquire a fresh look, a complete make over. You will probably visit a beauty parlour for necessary treatment. Ganesh says that you will be desperate to make an impression on the people around you. In the evening you are likely to be vexed and puzzled by some particular issue.

**GEMINI**  
You will feel some measure of loneliness today. You will need the company of someone close to you for reassurance. The evening will see you plagued by rapid mood swings. Meditative techniques can help calm your mind, says Ganesh.

**CANCER**  
Your imagination and creativity will surpass new heights. You will try to find easy answers to the most difficult riddles. Your creativity will be beneficial. A favourable day for investors and traders, say Ganesh.

**LEO**  
You need to be extremely wary in the morning, because there are chances that a major confrontation with someone very close to you may occur. In the afternoon, your good fortune will bring you the solutions to most of your current issues. Your plans for travel may get postponed, says Ganesh.

**VIRGO**  
You enjoy a strong position, but its foundations will be rattled today. In all probability you may have to encounter some unwanted problems which will be a cause for worry. However, Ganesh says you may still end up doing something beneficial if you get out of the rut and attempt to do something unusual.

**LIBRA**  
Ganesh says this is a time for a new romantic relationship to develop. Due to that you will be extremely happy and joyous today. Small issues cropping up will sully your good mood today. Your happy go lucky attitude will come to the fore and you will be able to put aside all the issues and worries and move ahead in life.

**SCORPIO**  
A series of events will keep you occupied, physically and mentally. You will enjoy meeting like-minded people and intellectual discussions with them. You are charged up and look forward to soiree and merry making with loved ones. However, make sure that too much enthusiasm and over-exertion does not deteriorate your health.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Work, work and more work will be your day's agenda. A power-packed performance is expected from you. Though hectic, the day will be easy going as your bosses are likely to be lenient on you. Love and affection from family is on the cards as well.

**CAPRICORN**  
You don't shy away from working hard and today, at your work you will do everything to improve upon your performance. But, perfection seems distant no matter how hard you try, says Ganesh. Your mind is making creative plans, but you are unable to put them on paper and get them executed. You will not get off the track by a minor bump on the track. With the same positive approach like before, you will march ahead for success.

**AQUARIUS**  
It is not only important to ideate, but also to get those ideas executed is equally important. Don't worry though, you are good at both, assures Ganesh. Icing on the cake will be your communication skill which gets you through the door every time. For students, it will be an amazing day.

**PISCES**  
You are sensitive and considerate and that is the core of your charming attitude which will help you win over the opposite sex today. There is also a good chance that you will be getting into a long term relationship, feels Ganesh. You will find the time today to take some tough decision that will determine your future.

# KRITHI ON SELF-WORTH

**Hansika at receiving end**

**Mumbai:** Actor Hansika Motwani has sparked an on-line debate after sharing her views on the casting couch in the entertainment industry. In a recent interview, the actor said she could not comment on the issue as she has never experienced it personally. Reflecting on her own journey, Hansika added that she believes those who genuinely want to work and focus on "real work" do not encounter such situations, noting that this perspective comes from her own experience in the industry.

During the conversation, the interviewer pointed out that her early start as a child artiste may have shielded her from such experiences, while also emphasising that the casting couch is a widely acknowledged issue. Hansika, however, maintained that she could not speak on something she has not witnessed firsthand, even while agreeing that the topic cannot be ignored entirely.

Her remarks did not sit well with many social media users, who criticised her stance as dismissive and out of touch. Several users argued her personal experience does not negate the reality faced by others in the industry. The comments section quickly filled with reactions, with many labelling her perspective as "ignorant" and accusing her of overlooking serious concerns around exploitation in showbiz.

**Chennai:** Actor Krithi Shetty, who played the lead along with Pradeep Ranganathan in director Vignesh Shivan's *Love Insurance Kompany* (LIK), has now penned a note of gratitude in which she has disclosed that she personally connected with the message of the film and that somewhere one needs to know that "we're enough" and that "love is given and not earned".

Taking to her Instagram page to pen a note of gratitude, the actress, while sharing Behind The Scene videos and pictures from the sets of the film, wrote, "A colourful BTS for a colourful film #loveinsurancekompany (still in

theatres near you). Firstly, I'm grateful to God and the universe for letting us make this dream of a film come to life."

She then thanked director Vignesh Shivan saying, "Thank you for choosing to say this story even though every frame was extremely difficult and expensive to pull off, and for writing a character like Dheema - someone who has had a broken and emotionally distant childhood, who sees her phone as a parent, who has had to work to receive love... until someone shows her that there's no validation required to be loved. I personally really connected to that message because somewhere we need to know that we're enough and love is given not earned." IAN S

# Sanya's biggest battle



**Mumbai:** Actor Sanya Malhotra, who completes a decade in the industry this year, says her biggest challenge wasn't acting, but learning to say no. Despite gaining recognition after *Dangal*, the actor struggled with setting boundaries early in her career.

Coming from a non-film background, Sanya admitted that rejecting ideas or offers often left her anxious. She revealed that she would experience panic attacks before saying no, constantly worrying about losing opportunities or offending

people. Even when she managed to decline something, she carried guilt for months, questioning whether it would impact her future in the industry.

Over time, however, she learned to navigate this pressure. Sanya now believes in being polite yet firm, understanding that while films are a director's medium, actors must also stand their ground. She emphasised that not speaking up would mean compromising her own vision and choices.

The actor added that asserting oneself is especially crucial in situations involving physical risk, such as stunts, where one must be clear and uncompromising. Today, Sanya views this journey of finding her voice as one of the most important lessons of her career.

# Maddy mantra for personal growth

**Mumbai:** Fresh off the success of *Dhurandhar: The Revenge*, actor R. Madhavan is drawing attention for something beyond films, his take on self-improvement. The actor recently shared a video on Instagram highlighting simple yet impactful habits that can transform one's life by improving the home environment.

The first key takeaway was reducing clutter. Constant arguments create negativity and hinder growth. A calm, respectful atmosphere helps relationships thrive. The second point focused on avoiding complaints. Dwelling on what's lacking fosters a scarcity mindset, whereas gratitude shifts perspective and invites positivity.

The third habit addressed was laziness. Success demands discipline and consistent effort. A home that values hard work naturally becomes more productive and goal-oriented. Lastly, the importance of

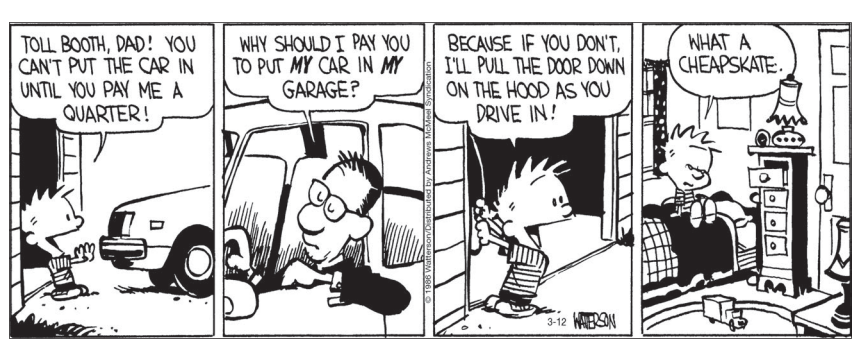
avoiding clutter was highlighted. A messy space often reflects a cluttered mind, while a clean, organised environment promotes clarity focus and peace. Madhavan's post resonated widely, with many appreciating the simplicity and practicality of the advice. By sharing these insights, the actor reinforced how small, everyday changes at home can significantly shape mindset, behaviour and overall quality of life.



### PEANUTS



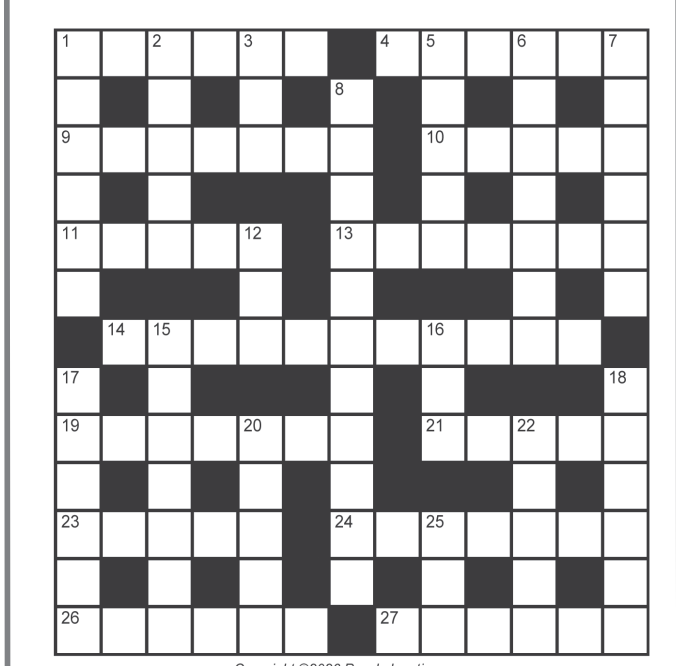
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### BREVITY



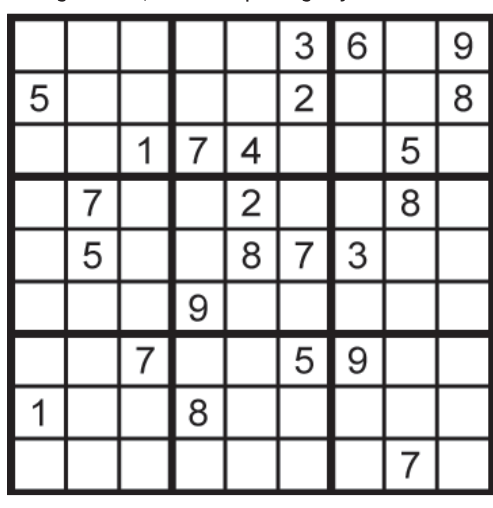
### CROSSWORD



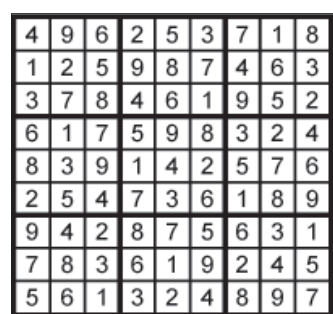
- Across**
- 1 Stew meat
  - 4 Peregrine, for one
  - 9 Ramen
  - 10 Cupid's projectile
  - 11 Spirit of a people
  - 13 Choices
  - 14 Hibernia (7,4)
  - 19 Resting place
  - 21 Marina sight
  - 23 Penniless
  - 24 Worship
  - 26 Parthenon site
  - 27 Deleted
  - Down**
  - 1 Zoo denizen
  - 2 Incisor
  - 3 Engine need
  - 5 Show flexibility
  - 6 A way to save petrol (3,4)
  - 7 State-of-the-art
  - 8 Shakespeare comedy (2,3,4,2)
  - 12 Lady's man
  - 15 Large extinct beast
  - 16 Slick
  - 17 Anxiety disorder
  - 18 Be there
  - 20 Ancient Greek theatre
  - 22 Poker player's stack
  - 25 Paddle

### SUDOKU

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



### SOLUTIONS



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

## BJP, Cong lag in ticket distribution to women

BJD outpaces national parties BJP and Congress in women's representation in Odisha Assembly polls

JITENDRA KUMAR NAYAK, OP

Bhubaneswar, April 20: Amid a nationwide debate on expanding the Lok Sabha to 850 seats and implementing the women's reservation law to ensure 33 per cent representation, a closer look at party-wise nominations in the 2024 elections reveals that major national parties such as BJP and Congress lagged behind in fielding women candidates.

Data from Election Commission of India (ECI) and Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) showed that out of 8,337 candidates who contested 543 Lok Sabha seats, only 797 were women — accounting for just 9.55%. Among national parties, BJP fielded candidates in 440 constituencies, including 69 women (15.68%). The Congress contested 327 seats, nominating 41 women, or 12.53%.

In contrast, regional parties performed better. Biju Janata Dal (BJD) fielded candidates in all 21 Lok Sabha seats in Odisha, nominating seven women — 33.33%. However, none of them secured a win. In the state, the BJP fielded four women out of 21 candidates (19.04%), while the Congress nominated three women out of 20 candidates (15%). Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), an ally of Congress, fielded one candidate in Odisha. The All India Trinamool Con-

PARTIES	SEATS CONTESTED	WOMEN CANDIDATES	IN %
BJP	440	69	15.68
Cong	327	41	12.53
BJD	21	7	33.33
SP	71	14	19.71
DMK	22	3	13.63
JD(U)	16	2	12.5
LJP	5	2	40
TMC	42	12	28.57
JMM	6	2	33.33
RJD	23	6	26.08
AAP	22	0	0

gress (TMC) nominated 12 women out of 42 candidates (28.6%), of whom 11 emerged victorious.

As discussions continue over providing 33% reservation for women, some parties have already approached or exceeded that benchmark. JMM fielded six candidates, including two women (33.33%). Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) nominated two women out of five candidates (40%). Janata Dal (United) fielded two women among 16 candidates (12.5%), while Samajwadi Party (SP) nominated 14 women out of 71 candidates (around 20%). Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) fielded three women out of 22 candidates (13.63%).

Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) nominated six women among 23 candidates (26%).

Notably, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which fielded 22 candidates across Delhi, Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat, did not nominate a single woman.

According to ECI data, parties with the highest proportion of women candidates included Naam Tamilar Katchi (50%), LJP (Ram Vilas) (40%), BJD and JMM (33% each), RJD (26%), TMC (28.57%) and SP (20%).

Simultaneously, elections were also held for the 147-member Odisha Legislative Assembly. In these polls, BJD fielded 33 women candidates (22.44%), while BJP nominated 12 (8.16%) and Congress 20 (13.60%). As in the Lok Sabha elections, the regional BJD outpaced national parties BJP and Congress in women's representation in the state Assembly polls.



**21 LIVES LOST:** Wrecked remains of a passenger bus after it rolled nearly 100 metres down a hill in J&K's Udhampur district, Monday. At least 21 people were killed and 51 injured in the mishap (Report P8)

## JEE (Main): Bhavesh Patra Odisha topper

PNN & AGENCIES

New Delhi, April 20: Bhavesh Patra, who is among the 26 candidates securing a perfect 100 NTA score in JEE (Main) 2026 Paper 1, has become the Odisha topper, according to National Testing Agency (NTA) Monday.

Altogether, 24 candidates had achieved the feat in 2025.

While over 13 lakh candidates had appeared in the first edition of the crucial exam in January, more than 10 lakh candidates had appeared in the second edition in April. Over eight lakh common candidates appeared in both sessions.

The NTA score is not the same as the percentage of marks obtained but normalised scores.

## 9.8L deletions to be verified: CEO

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, April 20: Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) RS Gopalan Monday said he has asked electoral registration officers (EROs) to undertake a proper verification before names of about 9.8 lakh voters are deleted from the electoral rolls.

The CEO has specifically asked them to put on hold the scrutiny of 2 lakh people who have lodged complaints of 'wrongful removal' from the electoral roll. It is also directed to verify at least 50 per cent of

the cases, an official said.

Following receipt of large-scale complaints, the CEO asked the EROs of all districts to conduct proper verification of the list. The booth level officers (BLOs) have identified around 9.8 lakh names across the state for deletion from the rolls on account of deaths and shifting of residences.

Gopalan said BLOs have submitted their reports on absent voters. However, they are not authorised to delete names from electoral rolls. The EROs will take decision in this regard, the CEO added.

Meanwhile, several residents claimed that their names were deleted despite residing at the same address for years.

Seema, a resident of Sambalpur, said, "My husband, son, and I have been living in this city for 20 years, but our names are missing in the list."

Similarly, Rakesh Sahoo, a resident of Cuttack, said, "I checked the list online and found my name missing, while my neighbours' names are there. I don't understand how this happened when I haven't moved anywhere."

Election officials attribute the deletions to factors like

deaths, migration, and software-based detection of duplicate entries. They maintain that many of the removals are provisional and subject to correction upon verification.

The CEO's office has activated a toll-free helpline (1950) for voters to check whether their names are on the lists or not, raise complaints or seek assistance, an official said.

Significantly, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi had informed the Assembly in March that approximately 7.68 lakh names were deleted from June 2025 to March 22 this year.



**ଶ୍ରୀ ନରେନ୍ଦ୍ର ମୋଦୀ**  
ପ୍ରଧାନମନ୍ତ୍ରୀ



### ମୁଖ୍ୟମନ୍ତ୍ରୀ କନ୍ୟା ବିବାହ ଯୋଜନା



ସାମାଜିକ ସୁରକ୍ଷା ଓ ଲିଙ୍ଗଗତ ସମାନତା ପାଇଁ  
ଓଡ଼ିଶା ସରକାରଙ୍କର ଏକ ଅଗ୍ରଗାମୀ ପଦକ୍ଷେପ

ଓଡ଼ିଶାର ୨୭ ଜିଲ୍ଲାରେ ୧,୦୦୦ରୁ ଊର୍ଦ୍ଧ୍ୱ କନ୍ୟାଙ୍କ  
ସାମୂହିକ ବିବାହ

**୨୧ ଅପ୍ରେଲ ୨୦୨୬**



**ଶ୍ରୀ ମୋହନ ଚରଣ ମାଝୀ**  
ମୁଖ୍ୟମନ୍ତ୍ରୀ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା

**ଯୋଜନାର ଲାଭ**

- ପ୍ରତ୍ୟେକ ବିବାହ ପାଇଁ ୨୦ ହଜାର ଟଙ୍କା
- ବିବାହର ସମସ୍ତ ଖର୍ଚ୍ଚ ସରକାରଙ୍କ ଦ୍ୱାରା ବହୁନ
- ସହଜ ଏବଂ ସରଳୀକୃତ ବିବାହ ପଞ୍ଜୀକରଣ

**ଲାଭାର୍ଥୀଙ୍କ ଆବଶ୍ୟକ ଯୋଗ୍ୟତା**

- ଉଭୟ କନ୍ୟା ଏବଂ ବର ଓଡ଼ିଶାର ସ୍ଥାୟୀ ବାସିନ୍ଦା ହୋଇଥିବେ
- ବୟସ: କନ୍ୟା: ୧୮-୩୫ ବର୍ଷ, ବର: ୨୧-୩୫ ବର୍ଷ
- ପରିବାରର କୌଣସି ସଦସ୍ୟଙ୍କୁ ପୂର୍ବରୁ ରାଜ୍ୟ କିମ୍ବା କେନ୍ଦ୍ର ସରକାରଙ୍କ ତରଫରୁ ବିବାହ ସହାୟତା ମିଳିନଥିବ

**ଯୋଜନାର ସ୍ୱତନ୍ତ୍ର ବିଶେଷତା**

- ବିଧବା ବିବାହକୁ ପ୍ରୋତ୍ସାହନ

ସହାୟତା ନମ୍ବର

ପୁଲିସ୍ ହେଲ୍ପଲାଇନ୍ **୧୧୨**

ମହିଳା ହେଲ୍ପଲାଇନ୍ **୧୮୧**

ବାଇଲୁ ହେଲ୍ପଲାଇନ୍ **୧୦୯୮**

ସୁଭଦ୍ରା ହେଲ୍ପଲାଇନ୍ **୧୪୭୭୮**

**ମହିଳା ଓ ଶିଶୁ ବିକାଶ ବିଭାଗ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା ସରକାର**

wcd.odisha.gov.in wcdodisha/

# Promote Odia in daily life: Guv



'Kahuchi Odisha' magazine and web portal launched

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 20:** Governor Hari Babu Kam-bhampati Monday stressed the importance of preserving and promoting the Odia language, stating that a language thrives only when it is actively spoken, valued and passed on to future generations.

He was speaking at the launch of the "Kahuchi Odisha" magazine and web portal at the Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Odissi Research Centre here.

Describing the initiative as more than just a publication, the Governor said it serves as a vibrant platform for writers, thinkers, and young minds to engage in meaningful dialogue and creative expression. Such forums, he noted, play a crucial role in enhancing the depth, relevance, and continuity of the language.

Highlighting Odisha's rich cultural heritage, he said that language, traditions, customs, and history together define the identity of a community. He described Odia as one of India's most ancient classical languages, embodying centuries of wisdom and intellectual thought.

Emphasising the need to preserve this legacy, the Governor said it must not only be admired but actively nurtured. "Language and culture are living treasures that must evolve while retaining their authenticity," he said, adding that a strong connection to one's heritage fosters a meaningful sense of identity.

Commenting the Suchana O Sachetanata Trust for the initiative, he said the inaugural theme, "Odia Asmita Ra Antaswara," aptly captures the

- Language, traditions, customs and history together define a community's identity, says Governor Kam-bhampati
- He describes Odia as one of India's oldest classical languages, embodying centuries of wisdom and intellectual thought
- Legacy must be actively nurtured, not merely admired, Governor emphasises
- Language and culture are living treasures that must evolve while retaining authenticity, he says

essence of Odia identity. He also highlighted the growing importance of digital platforms in expanding the reach and relevance of the language.

Appealing for greater use of Odia in everyday life, the Governor urged families to encourage children to speak, read, and write in the language with pride. He stressed that preserving linguistic identity is a shared responsibility. "This is not against any other language, but a way to safeguard the rich linguistic identity of Odia," he said.

Padma Vibhushan awardee and eminent sculptor Sudarshan Sahoo also addressed the gathering. The welcome address was delivered by president of 'Suchana O Sachetanata' Ashok Bhagat, while the vote of thanks was proposed by Secretary Ajit Kumar Barik. Among those present were Padma Shri awardee Adwaita Gadanayak and Damayanti Beshra, along with noted journalist Rajaram Satapathy.

# 2nd Nat'l Lok Adalat of year May 9

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 20:** The second National Lok Adalat of the year will be held May 9 across all court premises in Khurda district. The information was shared by Salomi Sahu, Secretary of the Khurda District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Bhubaneswar.

In this Lok Adalat, a wide range of pending cases will be taken up for settlement through mutual compromise. These include compoundable criminal cases, plea bargaining matters, cheque bounce and loan recovery cases, accident-related disputes, compoundable traffic challans, la-



bour and public utility cases, electricity and water-related issues, matrimonial and family disputes (except divorce), land acquisition matters, service and pension-related cases, revenue, IPR and consumer

cases, among other civil and criminal matters.

Such cases can be brought before district and sub-divisional courts for resolution through amicable settlement.

Similarly, pre-litigation matters (cases not yet filed in court) can also be resolved through the District Legal Services Authority or Taluk Legal Services Committees. The public may approach them for settlement of loan default and succession cases, traffic challans (virtual court/e-challan), labour and employment disputes, electricity and water issues, revenue and land acquisition matters, and public utility cases before Permanent

Lok Adalats.

Matrimonial and domestic violence disputes can be taken up through mediation, while commercial, arbitration, consumer and other land-related disputes can also be settled through this mechanism.

The Legal Services Authority, Bhubaneswar, has urged the public to submit their cases in advance to the concerned courts or legal services institutions to ensure timely disposal during the Lok Adalat. Citizens have been advised to make the most of this opportunity. No court fee is required for settlement in the Lok Adalat, and its decisions are final and legally binding.

## Prez Murmu to visit Odisha today

PNN & AGENCIES

**New Delhi, April 20:** President Droupadi Murmu will be on a day-long visit to Odisha April 21, her office said in a statement Monday.

She will inaugurate a Planetarium and Science Centre, and the Nirmal Munda Parivesh Path, at a public function in Rourkela, it said.

Murmu will also inaugurate a Tribal Museum and Integrated Command and Control Centre in Rourkela.

Security arrangements are being tightened in line with protocol guidelines. Comprehensive security planning has been discussed for airports, circuit houses, venues, and travel routes. Odisha Director General of Police YB Khurania joined the meeting virtually, along with senior police officials from the Western Range, Sundargarh, and Jharsuguda districts.

# Oppn shocked over 10L deletions in voter list

AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, April 20:** Opposition BJD and Congress Monday expressed surprise at the deletion of about 10 lakh voters from the electoral roll ahead of the SIR.

"Though usually, 7 lakh voters are deleted from the list annually in Odisha, this time three lakh more people have been removed from the list. There is apprehension that more voters' names may be deleted during the SIR," BJD senior vice-president Debi Prasad Mishra told reporters at a press conference.

Mishra said a BJD delegation had met the Election Commission of India and expressed concerns on this issue on August 19, 2025. "We had specifically urged that the names of people who migrate outside the state for



work should not be removed from the voter list," Mishra said.

BJD's deputy leader in Assembly, Prasanna Acharya, alleged that the people are being deleted from the list keeping in view their political affiliation.

"The voter list is being prepared on political line and it should be rectified immediately. We urge the government and the ECI to address these doubts and ensure that the voting rights of citizens are not compromised," Acharya said.

Odisha Pradesh Congress

Committee (OPCC) president Bhakta Charan Das demanded that the electoral roll should be prepared taking BLA (booth level agents) of political parties into confidence. "We demand a transparent voter list," Das said.

A letter issued by Additional Chief Electoral Officer-cum-Special Secretary Sushanta Kumar Mishra to the EROs stated, "I am directed to inform that approximately 9.8 lakh deletions have been carried out by the EROs since the commencement of the elector mapping process. However, a substantial number of complaints have been received regarding wrongful deletion of names, including cases where electors were found to be present and instances where BLOs had neither conducted field visits nor carried out proper verification prior to deletion."

# AIIMS-Bhubaneswar's 1st cadaver liver transplant



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 20:** In a landmark achievement for healthcare in Odisha, AIIMS-Bhubaneswar has successfully conducted its first deceased donor liver transplant recently, underscoring the critical importance of liver health and the life-saving potential of organ donation.

At the heart of this inspiring story is Radha Parhi, a dedicated homoeopathic medical officer from Bhadrak district. Despite battling a platelet disorder for years, she chose to pledge her organs, reflecting extraordinary courage and compassion. Following her passing and declaration of brain stem death April 2, her family honoured her wish and consented to organ donation in a moment of profound grief.

April 3, her liver was successfully transplanted into a 46-year-old male patient by the Surgical Gastroenterology team at AIIMS-Bhubaneswar. The recipient is recovering well and is likely to be discharged soon, reflecting both the success of the procedure and the expertise of the medical team.

The transplant was carried out under the leadership of Bramhadatta Pattnaik, with mentorship from Viniyendra

Pamecha of the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS), New Delhi. The procedure was supported by multidisciplinary teams, including specialists in anaesthesia, gastroenterology and critical care, ensuring optimal care for both donor and recipient.

Institute's executive director Ashutosh Biswas expressed deep gratitude to the donor's family, emphasising the institute's commitment to promoting organ donation through awareness and compassionate care. In recognition of her selfless contribution, Parhi was accorded a guard of honour at AIIMS-Bhubaneswar, led by Medical Superintendent Prabhas Ranjan Tripathy.

# Youth held with brown sugar worth ₹18 lakh

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 20:** In a major breakthrough, the Excise Department's Range-I team Monday arrested a youth for allegedly peddling 180 grams of brown sugar worth ₹18 lakh near an Indian Oil petrol pump on Lewis Road under Badagada police limits, officials said.

Acting on a tip-off about a drug peddler active in the City, the team laid a trap near Lewis Road and apprehended the accused, identified as Prabhu Prakash Patra (40), a choreographer by profession.

Upon search, the excise team recovered around 180 grams of heroin from his possession. A two-wheeler, allegedly used in the offence, was also seized.

Officials said the accused was taken into custody on the spot, and further legal action has been initiated under the relevant provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

"The accused was previous-



ly involved in a brown sugar peddling case and had been under our watch. He also works as a choreographer. Preliminary investigation suggests the seized contraband was meant for sale, though further inquiry is underway to trace its source and any network involved," said Bhubaneswar Excise DSP Raj Sekhar Swain.

## WB man nabbed with 8.1 kg ganja at rly station

**BHUBANESWAR:** A West Bengal resident was arrested for allegedly smuggling 8.1 kg of ganja worth ₹81,000 from Bhubaneswar Railway Station using the luggage scanner, officials said on Monday. The accused has been identified as Bhuvan Chandra Pradhan (48), a resident of West Bengal. During a joint surveillance by the Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Government Railway Police (GRP), he was spotted carrying a black bag. During screening, officials detected ganja concealed inside his bag, following which he was taken into custody. "He was smuggling the contraband from Aska to West Bengal. A probe is underway to ascertain further links in the case," said Railway Protection Force (RPF) Inspector-in-Charge Amaresh Behera.

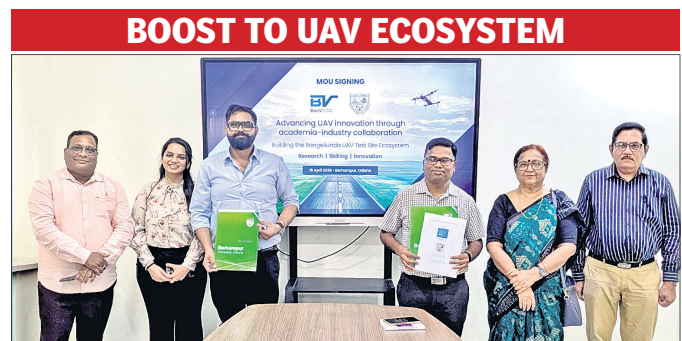
# Berhampur varsity inks MoU with BonV Aero

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 20:** In a major push to strengthen India's unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) ecosystem, Berhampur University has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with BonV Aero, an Indian aerial logistics platform manufacturer and the anchor organisation of the Rangelunda UAV Test Site.

The partnership aims to establish a long-term framework for collaboration in research, development, skilling and innovation in UAV systems and allied deep-tech domains. It is expected to further bolster Odisha's role in India's evolving drone and low-altitude airspace technology landscape.

The MoU was signed in the presence of Berhampur University Vice Chancellor Geetanjali Dash, along with senior officials, including the Registrar, Deans and Heads of departments. BonV Aero was represented by Rahul Kumar, Co-Founder and Chief of Design, underscoring the compa-



ny's commitment to academic collaboration.

Speaking on the occasion, Dash highlighted the significance of the partnership for students and regional development. "Berhampur University has always strived to respond to the evolving needs of society and the nation. The MoU with BonV Aero is a significant step in that direction. The training opportunities that will emerge will greatly benefit our Physics and Electronics students, providing them direct exposure to cutting-edge UAV technology and real-world applications. The establishment of a world-

class UAV Test Hub in Berhampur is a matter of immense pride for both the institution and the city," she said.

She added that the collaboration is expected to benefit both the university and the wider region by creating pathways for applied learning and innovation.

Under the agreement, the two institutions will collaborate across three key areas—joint research and development in UAV systems and low-altitude airspace technologies, structured student training and skilling programmes, and applied research initiatives

aimed at translating academic work into deployable solutions.

Describing the MoU as a milestone in India's deep-tech journey, BonV Aero CEO and Co-founder Satyabrata Satapathy said the collaboration reflects a broader vision of ecosystem-building. "I have long believed that the most meaningful progress happens when industry, academia and government come together. India's potential in deep-tech is extraordinary, and the UAV sector is only beginning to reveal its capabilities. Rangelunda is more than a test site—it is a statement of intent. When I look at what we can build with Berhampur University, I see not just a partnership, but the early architecture of something truly generational," he said.

The collaboration is expected to help build skilled talent pipelines, drive innovation in UAV applications across sectors such as defence, logistics and agriculture, and further position Odisha as a key hub for drone technology research and testing.

# Heatwave persists; no relief for 4 days

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, April 20:** There is no respite from heatwave conditions in Odisha, with the IMD Monday stating that hot and humid weather is likely to continue in several parts of the state for at least the next four days.

In its evening bulletin, the IMD's Bhubaneswar centre said hot and humid conditions are expected to prevail over districts including Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Puri, Khurda, Nayagarh, Ganjam and Gajapati Tuesday.

Tuesday night would be warm in Angul, Kandhamal, Sundergarh, Bolangir and Sambalpur districts, it added.

Heatwave conditions would prevail in Jharsuguda, Bolangir, Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Puri, Khurda, Nayagarh,

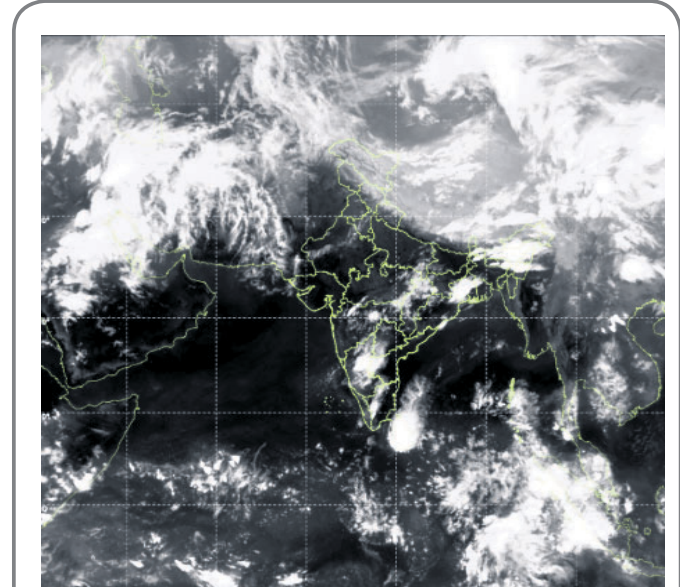
Ganjam and Gajapati districts for the next three days, the bulletin said.

According to the weather bulletin, 14 places in the state recorded a temperature of 40 degrees Celsius or above.

Titlagarh in Bolangir district remained the hottest at 42.5 degrees Celsius, followed closely by Jharsuguda at 42.4 degrees Celsius. Talcher recorded 42 degrees Celsius, while Bolangir registered 41.8 degrees, Angul 41.7 degrees and Bhawanipatna 41 degrees Celsius.

Mercury was hovering between 40 and 41 degrees at Sambalpur, Sundergarh, Sonepur, Boudh, Paralakhemundi, Nupada, Rourkela and Hiraikud during the day, according to the bulletin. The twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack recorded temperatures of 35.7 degrees Celsius and 36.8 degrees Celsius, respectively.

MARKET WATCH					
CURRENCY		BOURSES		COMMODITIES	
INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR	93.16 ▲ 0.18	SENSEX	78520.30 ▲ 26.76	GOLD	₹153,624 ▼ ₹985.00
EURO	109.75 ▼ 0.01	NIFTY	24364.85 ▲ 11.30	SILVER	₹252,553 ▼ 4,589.00



WEATHER			
	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	35.7°	36.8°	Light to moderate rain or thunderstorm very likely to occur
Min Temp	25.5°	24.6°	
Humidity	79%	83%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	

# Protest over 'unauthorised' water lifting by power plant



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Jharsuguda, April 20:** Public resentment grew in Jharsuguda district after SMC Power Generation Ltd was found allegedly drawing water from the Bheden and Ib rivers during the non-monsoon period, triggering acute scarcity in nearby villages.

Hundreds of women from Badmal, Hirma, Jamera and Marakuta gram panchayats staged a sit-in protest in front of the pump houses of SMC's Unit 1 at Hirma and Unit 2 at Badmal Monday, opposing what they described as unauthorised water extraction.

Residents alleged that water levels in the Bheden and Ib rivers drop significantly

during summer, leaving limited resources for daily needs such as bathing, sanitation and livestock care. They claimed that the company's continued lifting of water has worsened the situation, leading to a severe drinking water crisis in the region.

"Humans, cattle and even birds are struggling for water. Life has become extremely difficult for people dependent on the rivers," a local resident said.

According to official records, the state water resources department had, in a letter (No. 13440) dated July 7, 2020, directed the company not to draw water from the rivers during the non-monsoon period. The company was instead advised to rely on water conservation

## Teacher hospitalised in bee attack during census survey

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Nuapada, April 20:** A 44-year-old teacher was hospitalized Monday after a swarm of honeybees attacked him during census survey work in Nuapada district.

He was identified as Dolamani Hansa (44), a resident of Sunamudi village under Khaprakhol block of Bolangir district. Hansa is a teacher at the Sarabahal Government Upper Primary School in Tankapani panchayat of Bolangir district.

He was on his way to Majhipada village after completing the survey work in Goyalmun-da village when swarm of honeybees attacked him Monday.

The attack resulted in injuries to his face and head. After seeking brief shelter under a tree, Hansa attempted to ride his motorcycle back to his home village.

However, he lost consciousness near Dharanimal village. Passersby discovered him and rushed him to the Nuapada District Headquarters Hospital.

## Water scarcity grips Kesinga amid rising heat

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Kesinga, April 20:** Severe heatwave conditions have led to a sharp depletion of water sources across Kesinga block in Kalahandi district, creating acute hardship for residents and posing serious challenges for livestock.

According to reports, water levels in streams, ponds, check dams and tube wells across all 26 gram panchayats have declined significantly. Most of the 554 government and private ponds in the block now hold only two to five feet of water, while several others have dried up completely. Household wells are also running dry as the groundwater level continues to fall.

Temperatures in the region have been rising steadily. After recording 36.5 degrees Celsius earlier in March, the mercury climbed to 39.8 degrees March 29 and has now reached 41 degrees (Wednesday), according to officials of the Central Water Commission.

The intensifying heat, coupled with falling groundwater levels, has led to a shortage of drinking water, leaving resi-



dents distressed. Farmers, too, are facing difficulties in carrying out Rabi cultivation due to the water scarcity.

The Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (RWSS) department has installed 1,810 tube wells across villages in the block. However, declining groundwater has affected their functionality in several areas. To address complaints, the department has deployed a mobile repair unit to attend to faulty tube wells promptly.

The situation has also adversely affected domesticated animals, including cows, goats, sheep and ducks, which

are struggling to get water for drinking and bathing as ponds, rivers and check dams dry up.

Officials from the Minor Irrigation department said there are 60 check dams in the block, of which 18 are currently non-functional, while others have only limited water reserves.

RWSS Sub-Divisional Officer Dharmendra Seth said arrangements have been made to respond quickly to complaints. "We have deployed a mobile unit. As soon as we receive a call from any village, our team reaches the spot and repairs the tube wells," he said.

## Porous border aids mineral smuggling from Keonjhar

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Joda, April 20:** Despite police stepping up efforts to curb illegal mining, porous interstate borders have fueled a rise in mineral smuggling from Keonjhar district into Jharkhand.

Police from Bamebari police station under the Joda mining circle have intensified action against mineral theft in remote forested areas, including Gurubeda, Jurudi, Jalahari, Khandabandha, ITC, Jaribahal, Kalimati, Nayagarh and Pidhapokhari.

During raids in the 2025-26 financial year, police arrested 32 people and seized seven loaders and JCB machines, 20 trucks carrying illegally mined minerals, three SUVs and a motorcycle, Bamebari IIC Jhasaketan Bhoi said.

Acting on intelligence inputs, police carried out raids — sometimes in plain clothes and at other times in uniform — to crack down on the smuggling.

Despite risks from wild animals and possible attacks by smugglers in dense forests, police have continued enforcement drives, seizing vehicles and machinery involved in the illegal trade and arresting those engaged in mineral smuggling, Bhoi said.

However, the crackdown has failed to deter smugglers, who continue to use machines to extract minerals from abandoned forest areas with the help of some locals and transport them to states such as Jharkhand and

West Bengal. The ore is also supplied to factories in Sundargarh district.

Large-scale illegal mining and transportation continue in the Tankuna reserve forest under Barbil police limits. Iron ore is allegedly being moved from border areas near Tankuna along the Odisha-Jharkhand boundary to crushers operating in places such as Badajamda and Nuanmudi in Jharkhand.

While the Odisha government has shut down iron ore crushers within a 50-kilometer radius of mining zones to ensure transparency, illegal stockyards have reportedly been set up in areas such as Nuanmudi and Badajamda across the border to facilitate the movement of stolen ore from Odisha.

Smugglers are taking advantage of forest routes and gaps in border patrolling to transport minerals with relative ease, sources said. Following the state government's zero-tolerance policy on illegal mining, the Keonjhar superintendent of police has directed police stations to intensify enforcement, leading to increased patrolling across several jurisdictions.

Between 2012 and 2015, state-level enforcement teams had carried out crackdowns on illegal mining sites in the Tankuna reserve forest. However, with enforcement easing in recent years, the area has again become a hub for illegal mineral smuggling.

## BLACK STONE SMUGGLING RAMPANT IN NAYAGARH

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Nayagarh/Ranpur, April 20:** Allegations of illegal blasting and large-scale smuggling of black stone from Nuapada Hill near Kerendatangi under Ranpur tehsil in Nayagarh district have come to the fore with locals claiming administrative inaction even after reporting of the matter.

Locals alleged that blasting is carried out twice daily to extract black stone, while more than 400 truckloads are allegedly transported each day. The stone is reportedly supplied to crusher units in Khurda and Jankia areas.

Despite repeated complaints, no action has been taken, residents alleged, adding that the hill is gradually being destroyed. Blasting, reportedly done in the early morning and afternoon, has led to cracks appearing in houses of nearby villages under Kerendatangi and Jankia panchayats. Residents said the explosions often feel like mild tremors.

The stone-laden vehicles are said to ply day and night along Kolkata-Chennai National Highway, even passing in front of police stations without interception, raising concerns over enforcement.

Some locals, speaking on condition of anonymity, alleged that a nexus is involved in illegal extraction and transport, with substantial daily profits. They claimed complaints are often suppressed and information leaks to those involved.

With no response from authorities, residents are planning to approach the National Green Tribunal. Efforts to contact mining officer Ishwar Pradhan were unsuccessful.

**EAST COAST RAILWAY**  
Tender No.: ECoRMDCHBBS-BMWD-26-SI-01

**Name of the Work:** COLLECTION, TRANSPORTATION & DISPOSAL OF BIO-MEDICAL WASTE FROM CENTRAL HOSPITAL/EAST COAST RAILWAY/MANCHESWAR/BHUBANESWAR FOR A PERIOD OF 03 YEARS (1096 DAYS) THROUGH OPEN E-TENDER WITH BARCODEBASED MANAGEMENT.

**Advertised Value:** ₹ 24,40,134.40, **EMD:** ₹ 48,800/-, **Tender document cost:** ₹ 2,000/-, **Period of Completion:** 1096 days.

**Bidding start date:** 27.04.2026, **Tender closing date & time:** at 1500 hrs. of 11.05.2026.

Manual offers are not allowed against this tender and any such manual offer received shall be ignored.

Complete details & tender documents will be available at website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)

Medical Director/Central Hospital/PR-68/R/26-27 Mancheswar/Bhubaneswar

## Lady teacher engaged in census duty goes missing

**BHUBANESWAR:** A lady school teacher engaged in census enumeration work in Baripada of Mayurbhanj district has been reported missing since Saturday, raising concern among family members and authorities. According to reports, Jyotsnarani Sahu, who has been serving at UG School in Karanjia for the past eight years, had left her residence Saturday morning to carry out census duties. Her brother said he last spoke to her around 11:30 AM the same day, during which she informed him that she was on census duty. Since then, there has been no communication with her despite repeated attempts by family members. Following the incident, her family and house owner lodged a missing person report at the Sadar Police Station. Police have initiated an investigation to trace her whereabouts. Originally from Puri, the teacher had been staying in a rented house in Baripada for the last eight years.



**Bargarh, April 20:** Police Monday busted an alleged sex racket operating from a roadside dhaba near Dhanger under Bargarh rural police limits, rescuing a woman and arresting five persons, including a couple said to be running the operation.

The arrested have been identified as dhaba owner Atmaram Panda (54), his wife Pranati Panda (44), residents of Dhanger village and three customers — Nimai Sahu (29), Sumanta Bhoi (22), and Madan Banachhor (26), all from Adgaon village under Bargarh Sadar

police limits. Acting on a tip-off, a police team conducted a surprise raid under the supervision of SDPO Padarabinda Tripathy, following directions from Superintendent of Police P.S. Meena. During the raid, police detect-

ed the alleged prostitution activities and rescued a woman involved.

Police seized used and unused condoms, 263.8 litres of Indian-made foreign liquor, 32 litres of country liquor, two motorcycles and ₹26,260 in cash from their possession.

A case (No. 84/26) was registered at Bargarh Rural police station, and all the accused were later produced before a local court. Further investigation is underway. According to police, the dhaba owner and his wife had been running the illegal trade for some time, prompting the raid based on specific intelligence inputs.

## SHABBY STADIUM SPARKS CONCERN

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Chhatrapur/Ganjam, April 20:** The bad shape of the Biju Patnaik Multipurpose Indoor Stadium here has sparked concern among sports enthusiasts and local residents ahead of the state level kickboxing championship to be held from May 6 to 9.

The stadium, built to usher in a new chapter in the district's sports landscape, has fallen into disrepair due to poor maintenance.

The modern facility, inaugurated February 23, 2024, by former CM Naveen Patnaik, is already showing signs of deterioration within a short span. The stadium, once a dream project for local youths, now has developed cracked walls with plaster peeling out of its surface.

Badminton courts have sunk, making regular practice difficult for players. Gym equipment have rusted and become unusable. Faulty lighting has disrupted evening training sessions, while the condition of toilets remains deplorable.



The state-level kickboxing championship is being organised by the Amateur Ganjam District Kickboxing Association. More than 600 players from various districts are expected to participate in the event.

Organisers and sports enthusiasts say the dilapidated condition of the venue could affect the event. Local players allege that despite repeated complaints to district sports authorities, no remedial steps have been taken.

The stadium has produced several talented players who have brought laurels to the district at state and national levels. Currently, many school students visit the facility daily

to train in kickboxing under Coach Pramod Apte.

Despite being used for various block-level sports programmes, lack of sustained maintenance has put the infrastructure at risk. Residents warn that without immediate repair and upkeep by the government and concerned departments, the future of sports in Ganjam remains bleak.

There is growing public demand for urgent action to address the issues before the upcoming state-level competition.

**OFFICE OF THE DIVISIONAL FOREST OFFICER, REDHAKHOL DIVISION**

Mobile No. : 06644-299949, Email ID : dfo.redhakhol@odisha.gov.in

**Bid Identification No. F&E/RKL-005(Offline)/2026-27**

**Short Tender Notice**  
No.005 Dated - 17.04.2026

No.8001/37/2627 : The Divisional Forest Officer, Redhakhol Forest Division, on behalf of Governor of Odisha, invites Lumsum bids in **Double Cover System** in OFFLINE MODE.

- Nature of Service : Tender Call Notice for Hiring 18 No. of Vehicle for use under Redhakhol Forest Division.
- Tender Paper Cost : Rs.5000/-
- Class of Supplier : Any Travel Agency/Tour Operator/Private Individual
- Availability of bid document in the website : 11:00 Hours of 18.04.2026 to 14.00 Hours of 06.05.2026
- Date of Opening of Tenders : 11:00 Hours on dt.08.05.2026
- The Bidders have to participate in OFFLINE bidding only.

Any Corrigendum / Addendum / Cancellation of tender will be displayed in the <https://www.redhakholforest.com> or <https://sambalpur.odisha.gov.in> or <https://www.odishaforest.in> website only.

Sd./- Divisional Forest Officer  
Redhakhol Forest Division

OIPR-8001/8146/11/26-27/0007

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA, "e"-PROCUREMENT NOTICE**

**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, PURI (R&B) DIVISION, PURI**

**WORKS DEPARTMENT**

**Short Tender Call Notice**  
E-mail : eerbipuri@yahoo.co.in

**Bid Identification No. SE (R&B) Puri-03/2026-27**

No.34001/91/2627 : The Superintending Engineer, Puri (R&B) Division, Puri on behalf of Governor of Odisha inviting percentage rate bid in **Double Cover / Single Cover system** in ONLINE MODE from the eligible class of contractors registered with the State Governments and contractors of equivalent Grade/Class registered with Central Government / Railways :

- Nature of Work : Civil Works
- No. of Work : 5 Nos.
- Tender Cost : Rs. 10,00,00/- Rs. 6000.00 (On-Line)
- Class of Bidders : B Class
- Availability of Bid document in the Website : From 10.00 A.M. of Dt.23.04.2026 to Dt.02.05.2026 up to 5.00 P.M.
- Last Date of receipt of Tender : Dt.02.05.2026 up to 05.00 P.M.
- Date of opening of Bid : Dt.04.05.2026 at 11.00 A.M.
- The Bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the Website : <https://tenderodisha.gov.in>. Any Addendum / Corrigendum / Cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website.

Sd./- Superintending Engineer,  
Puri (R&B) Division, Puri

OIPR-34001/34064/11/26-27/0002

**S. E. RAILWAY – TENDER**

**Tender Notice No. : e-Tender/2026/13, dated 17.04.2026.** e-Tenders are invited by Divisional Railway Manager (Engg), S.E.Railway, Kharagpur-721301 for and on behalf of the President of India for the following works before 15.00 hrs. on the date mentioned against items and will be opened at 15.30 hrs. : **Sl. No. & Tender No.; Description of work; Tender Value; Earnest Money :** (1) **E-KGP-South-13-2026;** Execution of the work of: (i) Cess repair & strengthening of bank under Sr. Section Engineer/P.Way/Hijli and construction of central drain in between Beldana-Nekurseni under Sr. Section Engineer/P.Way/Dantan, (ii) Augmentation facilities in RGM siding at Hijli & Dantan under Assistant Divisional Engineer (South)/Kharagpur. (3rd Call); ₹ 2,94,81,164.17; ₹ 5,89,600/- (2) **E-KGP-EAST-20-2026;** Construction of 2 Nos. Gates Goomty on Level Crossing no. HA-4, HA-7 in Howrah-Amta section and Construction of Santragachi Store building at Santragachi Coaching Depot under the jurisdiction of Sr. Divisional Engineer (East)/Kharagpur; ₹ 2,53,92,544.56; ₹ 5,07,900/- (3) **E-KGP-HQ-11-2026;** Construction of Relay Hut for Gate signaling at 19 no. non-interlocked Level Crossing Gates having TVU above 10,000 under the jurisdiction of Divisional Engineer/HQ/Kharagpur; ₹ 1,83,54,100.47; ₹ 3,67,100/- (4) **E-KGP-HQ-12-2026;** Improvement of old non functional Cossye Halt with providing new DI 300mm dia pipe line with steel structure approach near Cossye Halt (West side) along with providing 20000 Gallon capacity ground reservoir & pump house under the jurisdiction of Assistant Engineer/WW/Kharagpur; ₹ 3,72,25,166/-; ₹ 7,44,500/- (5) **E-KGP-HQ-13-2026;** Renovation of bungalows in the section of Sr. Section Engineer(W)/South-West/Kharagpur under the jurisdiction of Assistant Divisional Engineer/Settlement/Kharagpur; ₹ 16,61,791.12; ₹ 33,200/- (6) **E-KGP-EAST-21-2026;** Execution of work for, Improvement of defective layout for removal of PSR -110 KMPH, Improvement of Drainage system and Bad Bank in approach at Haur Station under Sr. Divisional Engineer/East/Kharagpur; ₹ 8,00,30,716.47; ₹ 16,00,600/- **Tender Document Cost :** 0.00 for each. **Completion period of the work :** 12 Months for sl. no. 1 to 4 & 6 and 06 Months for sl. no. 5. **Date of opening :** 07.05.2026 for sl. no. 1, 11.05.2026 for sl. no. 2 to 5 and 14.05.2026 for sl. no. 6. **Bidding start Date:** From 23.04.2026 and upto 15.00 hrs. on 07.05.2026 for sl. no. 1, From 27.04.2026 and upto 15.00 hrs. on 11.05.2026 for sl. no. 2 to 5 and From 30.04.2026 and upto 15.00 hrs. on 14.05.2026 for sl. no. 6. **Interested Tenderers may visit website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) for full details/descriptions/specifications of the tenders and submit their bids online. In no case manual tenders for these works will be accepted. N.B. Prospective bidders may regularly visit [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) to participate in all tenders.** (PR-59)

**Bank of Baroda** | **Regional Office : Bhubaneswar**  
1st Floor, Bivab Gulmohar, Behera sahi, Nayapalli, Bhubaneswar-751012

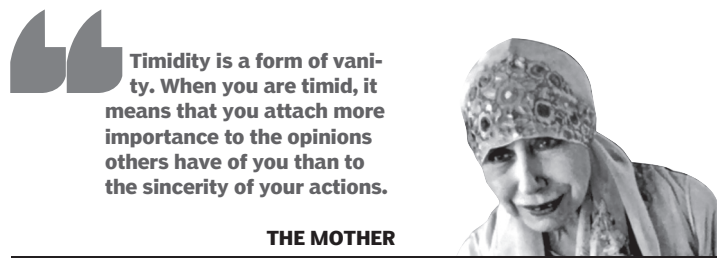
**POSSESSION NOTICE**  
(For Immovable Property)

(As per Appendix IV read with rule 8(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002)

Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the **BANK OF BARODA** under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice calling upon the Borrowers to repay the amount mentioned in the notice together with further interest thereon at the contractual rate plus all costs, charges and expenses till date of payment within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The Borrowers having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrowers and the public in general that the undersigned has taken **POSSESSION** of the properties described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002 on the date mentioned below. The Borrowers in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the properties and any dealings with the properties will be subject to the charge of the **BANK OF BARODA, Patia Branch**, for an amount stated herein below plus further interest thereon at the contractual rate plus costs, charges and expenses till date of payment. **The Borrower's attention is invited to provision of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.**

PATIA BRANCH / Name & Address of Borrowers	Description of the Immovable Properties	Demand/ Possession Notice Date	Outstanding Amount
<b>Borrowers: 1) Mr. Sanjay Kumar Sahoo, S/o. Dasarathi Sahoo, 2) Mr. Ranjay Kumar Sahoo, S/o. Dasarathi Sahoo, Both are At/PO.: Kalapathar, P.S.: Baideswar, Banki, Cuttack-754009</b>	Equitable Mortgage of Land and Building situated at Mouza: Kalapathara, P.S.: Baideswar, Tahasil: Banki, Dist.: Cuttack, 1) Khata No.: 299/197, Plot No.: 416/612, Area: Ac.0.014 Dec, 2) Khata No.: 299/201, Plot No.: 419/565/615, Area: Ac.0.010 Dec, <b>Total Plot Area: Ac.0.024 Dec. i.e. 1045.44 Sqft.</b> in the name of <b>Mr. Sanjay Kumar Sahoo &amp; Mr. Ranjay Kumar Sahoo</b> , both are S/o.: Dasarathi Sahoo, Both plots are adjacent to each other and bounded by East: Land of Manguli Nayak, West: Road, North: Road and Land of Akshya Kumar Sahoo, South: Land of Harihara Nayak	31.01.2026 / 15.04.2026	₹25,18,875/- as on 08.01.2026 + interest thereon at the contractual rate plus costs, charges and expenses till date of payment

**Place: Bhubaneswar, Date: 21.04.2026** **Authorised Officer, Bank of Baroda**



Timidity is a form of vanity. When you are timid, it means that you attach more importance to the opinions others have of you than to the sincerity of your actions.

THE MOTHER

## Spirited Pope

It is a patently false contention to tell religious leaders to mind things moral and spiritual and leave temporal or materialistic management of human affairs to politicians alone. In other words, the segregation of religious bodies and the state can be acceptable up to a point. But when the state uses its powers to destroy human lives, brings miseries to women and children and ruin economic well-being of millions of people, some may think it can be a sin for religious leaders to remain silent and thereby acquiesce in the brutality of political leaders. Pope Leo XIV, the supreme leader of the Roman Catholic Church, has turned out to be a shining example by choosing not to keep quiet and go hammer and tongs against the wanton killings and devastation ordered by US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who declared a one-sided war against Iran. It could be a mere coincidence that he is also an American which may perhaps have enabled him to understand the psyche of fellow-Americans - Trump and Vice President JD Vance - and stand up to their warmongering.

The Pope did not attach any importance to the disparaging and uncalled for remarks of Trump and Vance on his criticism of the war and went on iterating his anti-war stance, when a war is not in self-defence, but a brazen exhibition of brute force without any cause. It is good that US bishops rallied behind him for denouncing these leaders who invoke religion to justify war. This could indicate the bishops, who remain in constant touch with common citizens through church activities, have realized where the US public sentiment lies. That may have given them the courage to openly support the Pope. This is also a strong indication the MAGA movement that catapulted Trump to power the second time, has started petering out. With most known MAGA faces falling out with Trump on the war issue, the future for the Republican Party may not be as unassailable as it had seemed a few months earlier.

That the Pope is not bothered by the attacks on him by Trump and his lieutenants became amply clear when he said again, during his recent trip to Africa, that the world is being "ravaged by a handful of tyrants" who spend billions on war. The comments are likely to escalate further Leo's almost week-long feud with the White House over the US-Israel war on Iran. He expressed his opinion without mentioning Trump's name in Cameroon on 16 April. His comments came as US bishops offered their vociferous support to him after he had been under fire from Trump for speaking out against the Iran war.

It is a cliché to speak about how billions of dollars are spent on arms while millions of people in the world die of starvation and suffer from malnutrition and lack of education for want of money. The Pope showed exemplary courage to articulate the fact in the most powerful and passionate words. "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," Leo told a gathering at Saint Joseph Cathedral in the western city of Bamenda.

He did not stop at that and went on to say that these leaders turn a blind eye to the fact that billions of dollars are spent on killing and devastation, even when the resources needed for healing, education and restoration are nowhere to be found. He made it clear to reporters earlier on a plane to Algeria at the start of his trip that he did not fear Trump.

This calls for courage to take on the most powerful, arrogant and narcissistic political leader of the world presently. Trump had even the gumption to post an image on his Truth Social platform depicting himself being embraced by Jesus with the US flag as a backdrop. This was days after a backlash from supporters - including many on the religious right - forced him to delete an AI-generated image portraying the robed President as a Christ-like healer of the sick.

The Pope explained that he does not see his role as that of a politician and as such he does not want to enter into a debate with Trump. In the same breath he made his intent clear that he will continue to speak strongly against war, seeking to promote peace, dialogue and multilateralism among states to find solutions to problems. The world needs such a sobering, spirited and intrepid voice to bring leaders, drunk with power, back to their senses.

### WISDOM CORNER

How absurd men are! They never use the liberties they have, they demand those they do not have. They have freedom of thought, they demand freedom of speech.

SOREN KIERKEGAARD

You can hold yourself back from the sufferings of the world, that is something you are free to do and it accords with your nature, but perhaps this very holding back is the one suffering you could avoid.

FRANZ KAFKA

Be thankful for what you have; you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you will never, ever have enough.

OPRAH WINFREY

### THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1509: Henry VIII is crowned King of England. In popular culture, the monarch is known mainly for his six marriages, two of which ended with the wife's execution.

1526: Babur, a Central Asian prince, defeated the Delhi sultanate ruler Ibrahim Lodi in the First Battle of Panipat and laid the foundations of the Mughal Empire in the Indian subcontinent.

1830: James Starley, an inventor and the father of the bicycle industry, was born in England.

1836: General Sam Houston led 800 Texans to victory over a Mexican army of 1,500 under General Antonio López de Santa Anna in the Battle of San Jacinto, ensuring Texas's independence from Mexico.

1966: The Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie I, believed to be the Second Coming of Christ by many Rastas, arrived in Jamaica for a visit—an event since celebrated annually in Rastafari as Grounation Day.

## FOCUS ENERGY CRISIS

# AN OIL BUYERS' CLUB

The US blockade of maritime traffic entering and leaving Iranian ports in the Strait of Hormuz is intensifying the global energy crisis. If Iran's seaborne exports are interdicted on top of the energy exports of the Gulf countries, nearly 25% of total traded crude oil will be missing from global markets. Net oil-importing countries will be hit the hardest. Already, countries in Asia and Africa are facing energy shortages, which will only worsen.

In such a crisis, allowing market prices to determine how oil is rationed amounts to submitting to the law of the jungle. High-income countries outbid low-income countries, enabling the wealthy to maintain their energy use, while the poor are priced out. This was a key lesson of the COVID-19 pandemic (with critical medical supplies) and the 2022 energy crisis: in times of crisis, market allocation leads to grossly unjust outcomes. The extremely volatile prices we have witnessed in recent weeks are not rational arbiters of supplies, but an expression of animal spirits reacting to the latest social-media posts by US President Donald Trump and speculations about the future course of the war.

There is a better way. Instead of allowing market panic to dictate distribution and pricing, policymakers should pursue multilateral coordination to defend a price ceiling in global oil markets and allocate scarce resources in a way that meets people's essential needs and minimizes the economic fallout. Put simply, the world needs an oil buyers' club.

The European Union should take the lead. Accounting for 23% of global crude oil imports, the EU28 alone have substantial buying power. They demonstrated as much during the last crisis, when they imposed a European emergency gas-price cap. But this time the shortfall is larger, and oil is more fungible globally, so it would be important for other net importers to join. More participants will make for a more powerful mechanism.



**A multilateral oil buyers' club is precisely the kind of bold initiative that countries need to weather the current crisis—and that the world needs to strengthen preparedness for future shocks**

The EU should aim, first and foremost, to bring in other high-income countries that are major refiners of imported oil—notably, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore. Since low- and middle-income countries have few means for outbidding their high-income counterparts on global oil markets, they have every incentive to participate.

If China—the world's largest oil importer, accounting for 23% of the total—also decided to join, the importers' club would have the market cornered. In 2023 (the latest year for which the International Energy Agency provides complete global data), net importers purchased slightly more than 80% of globally traded crude oil. This means that, together, net importers could effectively act as a monopsony—like a monopoly, but on the demand side. All net importers of crude oil would immediately benefit from lower prices.

EU-China coordination also would send a powerful geopolitical message, demonstrating the EU's ability to conduct an independent foreign policy. If China did not join, the EU would have a rare opportunity to take the lead in forming a meaningful global alliance that includes Global South countries—no small feat for a bloc that has been struggling to find its place in a world of intensifying super-power competition.

The buyers' club should cap oil prices for physical delivery at a level that would still be very attractive for exporters—say, \$100

per barrel. (For comparison, Sri Lanka recently paid \$286 per barrel of oil delivered, and European buyers are now paying \$150 per barrel of North Sea crude.) As for allocation, because low-income countries account for only 0.1% of global imports, they should be allowed to maintain their pre-war import levels. All other countries would reduce their imports by the same share: if about 25% of global exports are missing, a 25% reduction in pre-war imports should be agreed.

Refiners in the club would be prohibited from making windfall profits and required instead to sell onward with margins prevailing in non-war times to domestic buyers and to other club members, thereby preserving the capped price for refined products like diesel and LPG. It is important that club members commit to maintaining pre-war levels of refined-product exports. The alternative—acquiring oil at low cost thanks to everyone's participation, but keeping a larger share for themselves—would cause the club to break down. The buyers' club could be extended to refined oil products imported from outside its members.

Countries with positive net exports of crude oil could also be enticed to join the club, strengthening it further. For starters, crude exporters that import substantial volumes of refined oil products, such as Angola and Ecuador, might want to secure the lower price afforded to club members. More broadly, exporters might want to anchor

domestic oil prices to the club price, thereby preventing higher domestic fuel prices from hurting local consumers. If the buyers' club also introduces a price floor—say, \$65 per barrel—oil exporters who join would enjoy more stability going forward. The floors could be written into long-term supply contracts.

The buyers' club would protect livelihoods, limit inflation, and help contain recessionary pressures. It would also deliver fiscal savings, which could be invested in the swift expansion of low-cost, low-carbon alternatives. Renewable-energy deployment and electrification should be accelerated. Public transportation should be made free. Domestic energy-saving schemes, which ensure the fair allocation of scarce resources, should be democratically legitimized and designed in ways that guarantee basic needs and the viability of industrial systems.

The buyers' club does not create the shortages; they are there anyway. The club is a mechanism for spreading the cost more equally, building solidarity among importers, and preventing costly bidding races while the emergency lasts.

Amid a crisis of multilateralism, an oil buyers' club might seem utopian. But the idea is not new. A similar scheme for allocating raw materials was implemented for allied countries during World War I. A multilateral oil buyers' club is precisely the kind of bold initiative that countries need to weather the current crisis—and that the world needs to strengthen preparedness for future shocks. For the EU, leading an initiative built on distributional fairness would amount to more than good economic policy. As the world order crumbles, it would strengthen the bloc's position as a global power that stands for peace and cooperation.

*Weber is Associate Professor of Economics at University of Massachusetts Amherst. Semieniuk is Associate Professor of Public Policy and Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.*

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### SPECTRUM SOCIETY

## An immigrant's dilemma of identity

New Zealand is one country you never hear any controversy about. It is a world of its own. It is an English-speaking country where many Indians have immigrated to. A son of my friend also immigrated to New Zealand after doing a course in Hospitality from India. It is one of the most peaceful places on the Earth. It is a well-off country, known for quality of life for its citizens. New Zealand is never embroiled in any geopolitical disputes, nor in domestic political acrimony. New Zealand is a sort of Utopia.

With the kind of image that is embedded in my mind in respect of New Zealand, it felt odd to read a negative news story about New Zealand. An acquaintance had posted the link to the news item from the portal of a leading newspaper in our WhatsApp group. The headline of the news story read - "Kill all Indians: Hate graffiti outside Auckland school sparks outrage, police probe." Further,

the opening sentence of the story was: "Racist graffiti reading 'Kill All Indians' was spray-painted in red on a footpath outside Papatotoe Central School in South Auckland, New Zealand, on 11 April, prompting outrage, swift removal, and a police investigation." The story further wrote: "The message, reported by locals, was removed shortly after by the Beautification Trust. New Zealand Police said they are treating the incident as a hate-motivated crime and have launched an inquiry."

Reading the above story emanating from New Zealand was particularly not in tune with the image of the country. However, the prompt removal of the graffiti and launching of inquiry by the police was redeeming.

As mentioned in the beginning, a son of my friend is now a citizen of New Zealand. The son's wife and their child all are citizens of New Zealand. Whenever my friend visited

New Zealand to meet their son, he heaped lavish praise on that country after coming back to India. The environment is so clean there as compared to the pollution he copes with back home.

In this context, I am reminded of a conversation that I broached with my friend on the eve of the final match, between India and New Zealand, of the last ICC Men's T20 World Cup. The match took place on 8 March at Ahmedabad. Both the father and son are avid cricket fans. They did not miss any of the World Cup matches, especially where India was playing. It was the final between India and New Zealand. The question that I asked my friend was: "Which side - India or New Zealand - does your son, who is now New Zealand citizen, root for while watching the game?" My friend was taken aback by my simple question. He merely grinned sheepishly without committing to an unambiguous an-

swer. I could not fathom as to why he was ambivalent in giving reply to my innocuous question. People of Indian ethnicity are settled all over the globe, especially in English-speaking countries. They would be facing this dilemma off and on.

It will be pertinent to cite here what JD Vance, Vice President of USA, remarked as recently as 15 April. At a Turning Point USA event in Georgia, Vance said immigrants who become US citizens must think of themselves as American first. He told students: "When you become an American Citizen... you have to think about the best interest of the country, and not the country you came from beforehand... You have got to think of yourself as an American."

The country of your birth is not your choice but a matter of chance, but the country one immigrates to is a choice.

*The writer is a retired banker.*



Chander Gupta

**THE COUNTRY OF YOUR BIRTH IS NOT YOUR CHOICE BUT A MATTER OF CHANCE, BUT THE COUNTRY ONE IMMIGRATES TO IS A CHOICE**

## Letters

### TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa Post are most welcome to contribute letters (100 words), articles and columns (between 600-1000 words). Contributors are requested to send their contact numbers and full postal address/email ID. They may also send in their valuable comments, opinion and suggestions, preferably by email, to: [edit@orissapost.com](mailto:edit@orissapost.com)

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

### Gerrymandering bid

Sir, The defeat of the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, which linked women's reservation to a new delimitation exercise in the Lok Sabha, is a tight slap on the face of the government, which desperately and disdainfully tried to push the bill with a sinister motive to undermine the political representation from southern states. This marks the first time in 12 years that a Constitutional Amendment proposed by the government failed in Parliament, highlighting intense opposition to the proposed redrawing of electoral maps. The failure of the bill means the proposed, controversial delimitation exercise is well and soundly thwarted by the Opposition, representing a major hurdle for the government's efforts to revamp India's constitutional structure. The bill, under the guise of 'women's reservation', was an attempt at gerrymandering in favour of the BJP ahead of the 2029 elections. True women's empowerment rests on social justice, which cannot be achieved without fair representation for all sections of society. The rejection of this Bill is a decisive stand against legislation that undermines the federal structure of India and weakens the foundations of social justice enshrined in our Constitution.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, CHENNAI

### Growing gun crisis

Sir, The killing of 8 children in recent US mass shootings is not just another headline. It is a damning indictment of political paralysis. Classrooms, parks, and homes have become sites of trauma because access to firearms remains alarmingly easy. Each death reflects systemic failure: background check loopholes, assault style weapons in civilian hands, and a culture that treats guns as identity markers rather than lethal tools. Thoughts and prayers cannot shield a first grader from bullets. What is needed is legislation with teeth. Universal background checks, red flag laws, safe storage mandates, and a ban on high capacity magazines are basic steps supported by a majority of Americans. Yet lobby influence and partisan gridlock stall action. The cost of inaction is measured in small coffins and shattered families. Until lawmakers value children's lives over campaign donations, these tragedies will remain a uniquely American crisis. Grief without policy change is complicity.

N Sadhasiva Reddy, BANGALORE

# 18% candidates have criminal cases, 25% are crorepatitis: ADR



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 20:** Around 18% of the candidates in fray in the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections have declared criminal cases against themselves, while 25% have assets worth more than Rs 1 crore, a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) said Monday.

According to the report, out of the 3,992 candidates analysed, 722 (18%) candidates have declared criminal cases against themselves. Of these, 404 (10%) have declared serious criminal cases.

In the 2021 Assembly elections, out of 3,559 candidates analysed, 466 (13%) had declared criminal cases against themselves, and 207 (6%) had declared serious criminal cases against themselves.

Among the major parties, 118 (69%) out of 170 candidates analysed from the AIADMK, 92 (40%) out of 231 candidates from the Tamilaga Vetti Kazhagam, 70 (40%) out of 175 candidates analysed from the DMK, 16 (48%) out of 33 from the BJP, 14 (50%) out of 28 candidates analysed from the INC, nine (50%) out of 18 candidates analysed from the Pattali Makkal Katchi, five (50%) out of 10 candidates analysed from the

Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam, three (60%) out of five candidates analysed from the CPI and four (80%) out of five candidates analysed from the CPI(M) have declared criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits.

At the same time, 60 (35%) out of 170 candidates analysed from the AIADMK, 43 (19%) out of 231 candidates analysed from the DMK, 32 (18%) out of 175 candidates analysed from the DMK, nine (27%) out of 33 candidates analysed from the BJP, five (18%) out of 28 candidates analysed from the INC, six (33%) out of 18 candidates analysed from the PMK, one (10%) out of 10 candidates analysed from the DMDK and one (20%) out of five candidates analysed from the CPI have declared assets valued more than Rs 1 crore.

The average of assets per candidate contesting in the Tamil Nadu Assembly Elections 2026 is Rs 5.17 crore, while in 2021, it was Rs 1.72 crore.

At least four candidates – Mohan Kumar M (All India Jananayaka Makkal Kazhagam), and Independent candidates T Selvaraj, Gunasekaran P and A Jegan Salamondoss – have declared zero assets.

The report also said 1,711 (43%) candidates have declared their educational qualification to be between the 6th and 12th standard while 1,822 (46%) candidates have declared having an educational qualification of graduate or above, 301 candidates are diploma holders, 95 candidates are illiterate and 56 candidates are just literate.

Only 442 (11%) of the candidates are women.

from the AIADMK, one (6%) out of 18 candidates analysed from the PMK, one (9%) out of 11 candidates analysed from the Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam and eight (3%) out of 231 candidates analysed from the TVK have declared assets valued more than Rs 100 crore.

Meanwhile, 27 (96%) out of 28 candidates analysed from the INC, 170 (97%) out of 175 candidates analysed from the DMK, 160 (94%) out of 170 candidates analysed from the AIADMK, 31 (94%) out of 33 candidates analysed from the BJP, 16 (89%) out of 18 candidates analysed from the PMK, 10 out of 10 candidates analysed from the DMDK, 156 (68%) out of 231 candidates analysed from the TVK and three (60%) out of five candidates analysed from the CPI have declared assets valued more than Rs 1 crore.

The average of assets per candidate contesting in the Tamil Nadu Assembly Elections 2026 is Rs 5.17 crore, while in 2021, it was Rs 1.72 crore.

At least four candidates – Mohan Kumar M (All India Jananayaka Makkal Kazhagam), and Independent candidates T Selvaraj, Gunasekaran P and A Jegan Salamondoss – have declared zero assets.

The report also said 1,711 (43%) candidates have declared their educational qualification to be between the 6th and 12th standard while 1,822 (46%) candidates have declared having an educational qualification of graduate or above, 301 candidates are diploma holders, 95 candidates are illiterate and 56 candidates are just literate.

Only 442 (11%) of the candidates are women.

## Tamil Nadu Assembly polls

# Campaigning ends today; 4,023 candidates in fray

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Chennai, April 20:** The stage is set for the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, scheduled for April 23, with a total of 4,023 candidates contesting across all 234 constituencies.

The electoral battle has shaped into a multi-cornered contest, with key players including the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK), and the Tamil Manila Congress (TMC), among others.

According to official data, over 5.73 crore voters – precisely 5,73,43,291 – are eligible to exercise their franchise in this election. In a bid to boost voter turnout and strive towards 100 per cent polling, the Election Commission has



launched extensive awareness campaigns across the state.

With just days left for polling, political activity has intensified, with top leaders crisscrossing the state to campaign for their respective parties and candidates.

Chief Minister MK Stalin of the DMK, AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami, NTK Chief Coordinator Seeman, and TVK leader Vijay are among

the prominent figures leading aggressive campaign efforts. The high-voltage campaign is set to conclude at 5pm April 21, marking the end of public canvassing. Leaders have lined up their final campaign events across key constituencies.

Stalin is expected to wrap up his campaign in the Kolathur constituency, while Palaniswami will conclude his outreach in Edappadi in Salem district.

## BJP 'set Manipur on fire', alleges Rahul

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Tirunelveli (TN), April 20:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi Monday alleged that the BJP threatened and frightened the minorities in the country and set the state of Manipur on fire, as he assured that his party will not allow the spread of hatred.

While crediting the AIADMK for its contribution to Tamil Nadu, he, however, claimed that it was no longer that kind of a party now and had become a hollow shell.

Addressing an election rally here, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said that he went on the Bharat Jodo Yatra and the idea being put forward by him and his party was a united and harmonious India. "What was being witnessed is a clash of two different visions of India," he said.



"We say that each state should run itself and they say all states should be subservient to one political organisation called RSS. Now, in this election they are trying to infiltrate Tamil Nadu. The AIADMK has had a great historical tradition. Like the Congress and the DMK, the AIADMK also had shown

the way forward. It had in the past great leaders who protected the idea of Tamil Nadu. But the AIADMK of today is no longer that old party. Today it is a hollow shell as leaders of AIADMK are compromised," he said.

"Their corruption has trapped them and they can do nothing against the wishes of the BJP. So, they have been used by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home minister Amit Shah to take over the state of Tamil Nadu," he charged.

"They cannot directly say what they want to do. So they have made AIADMK a partner to attack you your language, culture, tradition and history," Gandhi alleged.

Further, he said that the main, most important aspect of this election was all about stopping the RSS-BJP from entering Tamil Nadu.

## 92.23% students pass Class XII state board exams in Manipur

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Imphal, April 20:** The Council of Higher Secondary Education, Manipur Monday declared the results of the Class XII examination, which recorded a 92.23 pass percentage, officials said.

Of the 31,259 students who appeared in the examination, 28,829 have successfully passed, achieving an impressive overall pass percentage of 92.23 per cent, they said.

The Science stream recorded 93.28 pass percentage, followed by Arts at 89.87%, and Commerce at 82.57%, they said.

The exams were held from February 17 to March 20 this year. Takhellambam Kalpana Devi and Yohen Longjam secured the top position in Science stream by scoring 490 marks.

In the Arts stream, Sarangthem Ayingbi Chanu secured the top position with 470 marks, while Thoiheba Thongam secured the top position in the Commerce stream with 454 marks. Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh expressed happiness over the performance of the girl students in the exam.

In a post on X, he said, "It is a proud and exemplary moment for Nari Shakti as our girl students have excelled in the higher secondary examination results declared today, shining across Science, Arts, and Commerce streams with an impressive overall pass percentage of 92.23%."

Notably, girls have secured positions among the top ten rank holders in all streams, reflecting their dedication, resilience, and academic excellence, he said.

Extending heartfelt congratulations to all the students for their remarkable achievement, Singh also gave his best wishes to each one of the students for their continued success, bright futures, and fulfilling careers ahead.



# Manipur shutdowns hit life in both valley, hills

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Imphal, April 20:** Normal life in both the Imphal valley and Naga-inhabited hill areas of Manipur has been severely disrupted as shutdowns called by different organisations continued Monday. Meanwhile, police arrested 21 people for their alleged involvement in violence during a rally in Imphal West district two days ago.

The shutdown in Imphal valley – covering five to six districts – was called by Meira Paibis (women torchbearers), one of the most influential women's bodies, along with various Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

The protest is against the killing of two minor children and the injury to their mother, allegedly by suspected Kuki militants, in Bishnupur district April 7. The shutdown, which came into effect from midnight Saturday, has led to a near-complete halt in daily life across the valley.

Members of the Meira Paibis and groups of women protesters were seen at several locations blocking roads and restricting vehicular movement.

According to police, passenger and commercial vehicles remained off the roads, while shops, business establishments, and roadside vendors stayed



Women take out a Meira rally from Koirengai area to press their demands, in Imphal East district, Manipur, Sunday

shut, contributing to widespread disruption.

In the hill regions, the United Naga Council (UNC), the apex body of the Naga community in Manipur, has separately called a three-day total shutdown across all Naga-inhabited areas of the state from midnight Sunday.

The UNC announced the shutdown to protest the killing of two Naga civilians, including a retired Indian Army personnel, in Ukhrul district April 18, allegedly by suspected Kuki militants.

In a statement, the UNC said that, in view of the "outrageous aggression over their

homeland and the cold-blooded killing of two Naga civilians," it convened a joint emergency meeting with various organisations Sunday at Tahamzam in Senapati district.

The statement added that the total shutdown would continue from midnight Sunday until midnight of April 23 across all Naga areas, both as a mark of mourning and as a collective expression of condemnation.

During this period, all public and private institutions, business establishments, and vehicular movement will remain suspended, except for emergency services.

The UNC also announced that a candlelight vigil would be held on the evening of April 23 in all Naga-inhabited district headquarters, as well as in Imphal, to honour the deceased and reaffirm a commitment to peace with dignity.

Manipur Home Minister Konthoujam Govindas Singh Sunday appealed to CSOs and the public to reconsider and withdraw the shutdowns in the interest of public welfare and the normal functioning of the state.

Meanwhile, police said that at least 21 people were arrested for their alleged involvement in violence during a rally in Imphal West district two days ago.

According to a police statement, a torch rally was carried out April 18 along the Imphal-Jiribam road, organised by various CSOs from Patsoi to Sagolband.

During the rally, the mob reportedly turned violent, resorting to stone-pelting, hurling petrol bombs, and using catapults and boulders against police personnel, resulting in multiple injuries.

Official vehicles of security forces were vandalised, and three personnel of the 232 Battalion of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) sustained grievous injuries. Police

said the mob was eventually dispersed and the situation brought under control.

In another development, the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), an apex body of the Meitei community, accused security forces of using excessive force against protesters and sharply criticised Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh over what it described as a failure to contain the escalating violence in the state.

COCOMI spokesperson Shanta Nahakpam said that recent incidents, including the killing of two minors earlier this month and subsequent civilian deaths in fresh attacks, have triggered widespread public anger and sustained agitation across the Imphal valley.

He added that despite the deteriorating situation, the Chief Minister has continued district visits projecting progress in the peace process, a claim the organisation has rejected.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister has announced that the state government will hand over both the April 18 Ukhrul district shooting incident and the April 7 deadly bomb attack in Bishnupur district to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) for a thorough and comprehensive probe.



he urged the people, apparently referring to the AIADMK's alliance with the BJP as slave alliance.

Udhayanidhi, who is also DMK youth wing secretary, claimed that the DMK government under Chief Minister MK Stalin had ensured development across all sectors throughout the state in spite of the fiscal hardship imposed by the Centre.

The Thiruvottiyur Assembly constituency was won by the DMK, which is leading the Secular Progressive Alliance, in the previous Assembly election, but was given to the CPI(M) during the seat-sharing deal between the two parties.

At the rally, Udhayanidhi said with 48 hours left for the election campaign to conclude, the party members should further intensify their campaign and explain to the people why the SPA should come to power again.

He also urged the party members to highlight the DMK government's achievements to the people and promises on social welfare and state development.

Elections to 234 Assembly seats in Tamil Nadu will be held April 23 and the results will be declared May 4.

# INDIA'S FIRST INTRA-CITY DRONE DELIVERY TRIALS SUCCESSFUL

*The FedEx and IIT-Madras-led trials mark a significant milestone in the evolution of urban logistics*

AGENCIES

**Chennai, April 20:** Federal Express Corporation (FedEx) and the IIT-Madras have successfully completed India's first intra-city drone delivery flight trials in Bangalore.

Conducted under the research framework of the FedEx SMART Centre at IIT Madras, this milestone underscores a commitment to advancing next-generation, technology-enabled supply chains.

The trials validated a mid-mile aerial logistics service connecting Electronic City Phase II with the vicinity of Bangalore International Airport. By utilising aerial corridors, the initiative successfully reduced a typical 60-minute, 53 km road journey to a 39-42 km flight, completing the transit in approximately 21 minutes.

The flight path involved coordinated navigation through Airport Yellow and Red Zones, with all necessary permissions granted by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation.

The trials mark a significant milestone in the evolution of urban logistics and reinforce FedEx's commitment to advancing next-generation, technology-enabled supply chains



in India.

The trials validated a mid-mile aerial logistics service connecting Electronic City Phase II with a site near Bangalore International Airport

Limited and this initiative tested high-speed drone operations in complex urban airspace and assessed their potential to enhance network efficiency and reduce reliance on congested

road infrastructure. The trials form part of FedEx's broader efforts globally to explore innovative, safe, and scalable logistics solutions for the future.

Technical operations were executed at an altitude of 120 metres, featuring safety protocols including autonomous flight termination, return-to-home capabilities, and anti-collision lighting. The flights were conducted in coordination with the Directorate General of Civil Aviation.

"This milestone reflects the FedEx SMART Centre's research agenda across air cargo optimisation and sustainable supply chain ecosystems," said Nitin Navneet Tatiwala, vice president of marketing, customer experience, and air network,

Middle East, Indian Subcontinent, and Africa (MEISA), FedEx. Prof. Satyanarayanan R. Chakravarthy of IIT Madras added that integrating aerial robotics marks a leap in creating progressive, high-impact logistics solutions.

Highlighting its long-term impact for Indian Logistics, Prof. Arshinder Kaur, professor in-charge, FedEx SMART Centre added, "The high-speed drone-delivery trials are a strong demonstration of the centre's commitment to driving innovation across modern supply chains and accelerating cutting-edge technologies."

The project was implemented in partnership with Amber Wings, an IIT Madras-incubated deep-tech start-up.



The BJP spreads hatred anger and violence across the country. They concentrate power in the hands of a few big business people. They build an unequal India. They threaten and frighten our brothers and sisters from the minorities. Our Christian, Muslim, Sikh brothers and sisters are made to feel scared all the time. The state of Manipur was set on fire by the BJP

RAHUL GANDHI | CONG LEADER

HEATWAVE IN NW, CENTRAL & EAST FOR 4-5 DAYS: IMD

Heatwave conditions are very likely to prevail over isolated pockets of northwest, central and the adjoining parts of east India for the next four to five days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said Monday



of the day uote

Ensure the defeat of the 'slave' alliance in Tamil Nadu. April 23 is the time to give a fitting reply to the BJP government

UDHAYANIDHI STALIN | TN DY CM

I am telling you, what Modi Ji has done for women, 33 per cent (quota), that is one of the most progressive decisions for the country. What Congress, DMK and other political parties have done was an injustice to the women. Every woman has to discuss, debate

N CHANDRABABU NAIDU | ANDHRA CM

There is no clear answer about the restoration of statehood in Jammu and Kashmir. They (BJP) say - 'at the right time'. What does 'the right time' mean? I keep asking them -- tell us clearly. If you say it is your promise, if you have given your word, does your word have no value?

OMAR ABDULLAH | J&K CM

21 dead, 51 injured as bus rolls down hill in Udhampur



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, April 20: At least 21 people were killed and 51 injured Monday when an overcrowded passenger bus plunged nearly 100 metres down a hillside in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur district, crushing an auto-rickshaw before landing upside down on the road below, officials said.

An Army convoy passing along the hilly stretch led the rescue operations after the driver of the private bus lost control of the vehicle while negotiating a blind curve near the hilltop Kagort village in the Ramnagar area around 10 am, the officials said.

They said more than 65 passengers, including women and students, were on board, largely daily commuters travelling from Ramnagar to Udhampur.

The rescue operations proved to be extremely challenging as the bus was reduced to a mangled heap of iron, with its top portion almost completely torn off. President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi condoned the loss of lives in the accident. Modi also announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh each for the families of those killed and Rs 50,000 for those injured. Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor (LG)

The rescue operations proved to be extremely challenging as the bus was reduced to a mangled heap of iron, with its top portion almost completely torn off

Manoj Sinha and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah assured the families of the deceased and those injured of all possible assistance. Abdullah also announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh each for the next of kin of the deceased, Rs 1 lakh for those seriously injured and Rs 25,000 for those who sustained minor injuries in the accident.

"A bus en route from Ramnagar to Udhampur lost control while negotiating a hilly stretch, plunged down the slope and crushed an auto-rickshaw upon landing upside down on the road below. Fifteen passengers were found dead at the scene, while four later succumbed to their injuries in a hospital," Deputy Inspector General of Police, Udhampur-Reasi Range, Shiv Kumar Sharma told reporters at the site.

The officials said two more

critically-injured persons succumbed to their injuries at the Udhampur District Hospital during treatment, raising the death toll to 21.

Among those killed were Tilo Ram, Prem Nath, Kartar Chand, Som Raj, Ram Chand, Gita Devi, Romal Singh, Sharda Devi, Sunny, Vishali Devi, Pushap Raj, Ramolo Ram, Gulabo Devi, Jalam Singh, Kesar Singh, Kanta Devi and Anita Devi - all residents of Ramnagar.

Sharma said the locals extended significant help during the rescue operations. Police teams, including the senior superintendent of police, the station house officer (SHO) of Ramnagar and other officers, visited the spot. The vehicle was later straightened using a hydraulic crane, the DIG said.

An Army soldier, who was leading a convoy from Udhampur to Ramnagar, said they swung into action immediately after noticing the civilian vehicle rolling down the hill.

The chief minister extended heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured. In a post on X, Omar Abdullah said: "The government stands firmly with the victims and their families in this hour of grief, and that all necessary assistance is being extended."

Top court rejects Khalid's review plea in Delhi riots case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 20: The Supreme Court has dismissed activist Umar Khalid's plea seeking a review of a verdict denying him bail, while observing that there are reasonable grounds to believe the allegations levelled against him in connection with a conspiracy behind the 2020 Delhi riots.

A bench of Justices Arvind Kumar and N V Anjaria also rejected a plea seeking an oral hearing of the review petition. "Having gone through the review petition and also the documents enclosed, we do not find any good ground and reason to review the judgment dated January 5, 2026. Accordingly, the review petition is dismissed," the bench said in its April 16 order.

According to the Supreme Court's rules, review petitions are considered by judges who delivered a judgment or passed an order in chambers to remedy an apparent error or a resultant grave injustice that was a consequence of an apex court decision. Parties seeking a review can request judges for an open-court hearing to rectify the grave injustice caused due to the decision under review.

Besides Khalid, the top court had, January 5, refused bail to Sharjeel Imam but granted it to five others, saying all the accused did not stand on the same footing.

Khalid and Imam, who have been incarcerated since 2020, can file fresh bail pleas after the examination of the protected witnesses or after a year from the day the order was passed, the court had said, as it rejected their contention of a delay in the trial. There was a prima-facie case against Khalid and Imam under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), the top court had said, noting that prosecution material suggests that they were involved in the "planning, mobilisation and strategic direction" of the riots.

Excise policy: HC judge rejects Kejriwal's plea

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 20: Delhi High Court judge Swarana Kanta Sharma Monday refused to recuse herself from hearing the liquor-policy case as she rejected the pleas of AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal and others for her withdrawal.

In the pronouncement that lasted for more than an hour, Justice Sharma said a litigant cannot be allowed to judge a judge without any material and judges cannot recuse themselves to satisfy a litigant's unfounded apprehension of bias.

She added that a political leader cannot be allowed to damage an institution without any basis, as a personal attack on a judge is an attack on the judiciary itself, and "a politician cannot be permitted to cross the boundary and sit in judgment over the competence of a judge".

Justice Sharma concluded that the narrative in the pleas for her recusal was based on conjectures and "perceived inclinations", and cautioned that the case could open the doors for "powerful litigants to attack judges" and their families for "forum shopping".

"This court will stand up for itself and the institution... I will not recuse," the judge said, adding that she would decide the Central Bureau of Investigation's (CBI) petition against the discharge of the accused in the excise-policy case without being affected by the recusal pleas.

"The application seeking recusal are, therefore, rejected and in this rejection, this court affirms its fidelity to the Constitution on behalf of myself and every judge who stands by it. Justice lies not in shielding under pressure, but in doing justice of objectively," she said.

During the day, Justice Sharma, however, recused herself from hearing a 2025 bail plea of former Aam Aadmi Party



(AAP) MLA Naresh Balyan in a Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) case pending since 2025.

Without specifying any reason, she directed that the matter be placed before another judge April 23. Kejriwal had raised several objections against Justice Sharma hearing the CBI's plea against his discharge in the liquor-policy case, including that she had earlier denied him relief on his petition challenging his arrest and refused to grant relief on the bail pleas of other accused, including Manish Sisodia and K Kavitha.

In her judgment, Justice Sharma countered every contention raised by Kejriwal and others, stating that the recusal applications did not come with any evidence but "aspersions, insinuations and doubts" on her integrity and impartiality, despite a judicial career of 34 years.

Responding to the objection that the court passed an ex-parte interim order on the CBI's petition on the very first day, Justice Sharma said such orders were even passed in favour of AAP leaders in other cases.

The judge also junked Kejriwal's apprehension of bias on the basis of her attendance at events of the Akhil Bharatiya Adhivakta Parishad - an RSS-affiliated confederation of lawyers - observing that these are professional functions organised by lawyers that are attended by several judges and not political events.

SHORT TAKES

Mentally challenged teen raped by father

Nagpur: A 19-year-old mentally challenged woman from Maharashtra's Nagpur city was raped allegedly by her father and an acquaintance, police said Monday. The Wathoda police have registered a case against both accused, one of whom was apprehended Sunday, an official said.

Empty local train coach derailed

Mumbai: An empty local train coach derailed near Dombivli station in Maharashtra's Thane district Monday morning, officials said, as services on Mumbai's busy suburban network were affected and caused hardship to commuters during rush hour. No person was injured as the local train was empty at the time of the derailment, a Central Railway (CR) spokesperson said. Commuters complained that services on the Central Railway's main line, which connects Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT) in south Mumbai with neighbouring Thane and Raigad districts, were running late by 20 to 30 minutes.

CBI arrests 2 RCOM senior officials

New Delhi: The CBI Monday said it has arrested two senior executives of Reliance Communications (RCOM), a company of the Anil Ambani group, in an alleged bank fraud case, the agency said Monday. The federal agency will seek their remand before a court. The investigation pertains to RCOM, Anil Ambani and others, registered based on a complaint filed by the State Bank of India (SBI), with allegations that the bank sanctioned credit facilities to the company but due to the accused borrowers' "fraudulent" activities, the lender suffered a wrongful loss of around Rs 2,929.05 crore.

3 cops injured in BJP-CPI(M) clash

Thiruvananthapuram: Three policemen have been injured following a clash between BJP and CPI(M) workers over a property dispute between two relatives here, officials said Monday. Vattiyookavu Police Station registered a case against 94 BJP and CPI(M) workers in connection with the clash at Malamukal in Nettayam Sunday night. According to the FIR, the injured policemen are Civil Police Officers Deepu and Shibu, and the Station House Officer, Vipin AC, of Vattiyookavu police station.

No interim relief for TCS case accused Nida Khan



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Nashik, April 20: A local court Monday did not grant interim protection from arrest to Nida Khan, an accused in the sexual harassment and religious coercion case at the Nashik unit of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), directing the police to submit their response to her plea by April 27.

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Nashik police, which is probing nine cases of molestation and harassment at the IT major's Nashik unit, has launched a search for Khan in different parts of Maharashtra.

Khan Saturday moved the Nashik court seeking anticipatory bail and an interim

protection from arrest pending the plea hearing, citing her two-month pregnancy. During the hearing Monday, her lawyer, Rahul Kasliwal, pressed for interim relief, which would have given her protection from arrest until her main plea was decided by the court. Additional Sessions Judge K G Joshi, however, did not pass any order on the interim prayer and directed the police and the complainant to file their response to Khan's plea, while posting the matter for April 27.

The SIT has arrested eight persons, including a female operations manager, by registering nine FIRs after allegations of exploitation, attempt of forceful conversion, hurting religious sentiments, molestation and mental harassment of female employees at the TCS unit came to light. The Nashik police have formed three teams to trace Khan. Khan is accused of targeting employees in a WhatsApp group, pressuring them to pray and eat non-vegetarian food.

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



Tears, prayers mid-air as Fly91 flight diverted to B'lore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore, April 20: A Fly91 flight from Hyderabad to Hubballi Sunday was diverted to Bangalore due to adverse weather conditions, with airport officials maintaining that all passengers were safe.

The incident caused panic among the passengers as the aircraft remained airborne for three-and-a-half hours, even as officials and the airline maintained this was standard protocol.

Some of the scared passengers were in tears and started praying for their safety. Sources said there were 22 passengers on board. The aircraft-ATR 72-600, which departed from Hyderabad at around 3 pm, was

scheduled to land in Hubballi 90 minutes later, but couldn't due to unfavourable weather, sources said.

Due to the bad weather, the flight was diverted to Bengaluru, an airport official said, adding that such diversions are standard safety measures.

According to the official, the aircraft hovered over Hubballi, located about 400 km from here, for about an hour in anticipation of improvement in weather conditions before being diverted.

"This is general practice. Aircrafts circle in the air for some time waiting for the weather to improve. It is the pilot's decision," he said.

The flight landed in Bangalore at around 6.30 pm and



was flown back to Hubballi at about 11 pm after the situation improved, the official added. Officials also pointed to similar disruptions in the region, noting that a Mumbai-Kolhapur service was diverted to Goa due to weather conditions.

All passengers were safe.

There is no issue, the official said. In a statement, FLY91 said the flight encountered bad weather upon nearing its destination due to which it was diverted to Bangalore as per standard protocol.

The flight subsequently returned to Hubballi and back to

- Fly91 flight from Hyderabad to Hubballi diverted to Bengaluru due to adverse weather.
- Passengers experienced anxiety during the three-and-a-half-hour airborne delay.
- The airline confirms the diversion was standard protocol and safety was prioritised.
- Fly91 denies reports of any technical issues with the aircraft.
- Similar flight disruptions occurred in the region due to unfavourable weather conditions.

compromise to safety. Holding the aircraft over Hubballi and diverting to Bengaluru was part of the standard operating procedure. This is among the "best practices" adopted by the industry.

"FLY91 has a highly skilled team of pilots, cabin crew and ground staff which are trained to manage any situation which may come up. The regional airline has an impeccable safety record," it added.

The airlines said the aircraft did not develop any technical snag as reported in a section of the media.

"Information in some news reports pointing to a technical issue faced by the aircraft is false and baseless," the statement read.

its home base in Hyderabad, the statement added. Fly91 said there was zero



**Railways and highways are not merely systems of transport; they are instruments of economic expansion, social inclusion and national integration. When a train reaches a remote village or a highway connects a distant region, it opens immense opportunities for socio-economic development of such regions**  
DROUPADI MURMU | PRESIDENT OF INDIA

### 19 INDIAN FISHERMEN REPATRIATED FROM SL

Sri Lanka Monday repatriated 19 Indian fishermen, days after the island nation's navy arrested 16 Indians for allegedly poaching in its territorial waters. The fishermen issue is a contentious one in the ties between India and Sri Lanka



## of the day quote

There is a lot of anger among women over the Opposition's refusal to back the proposed amendment to the Women's Reservation Bill. Women are angry in Bihar and elsewhere. I think that the opposition has ended up making the job easy for the NDA (of which BJP is the largest constituent) in West Bengal



JITAN RAM MANJHI | UNION MINISTER

It was the defeat of the politics of bulldozer and a rushed delimitation. The Bill was not about women's reservation but one of pushing delimitation through deceit



JAIRAM RAMESH | CONG GENERAL SECY

Nobody is safe, not women, traders, or farmers. Festivals face restrictions and violence. This reflects the governance model of the current regime



YOGI ADITYANATH | UTTAR PRADESH CM

## POST OF THE DAY

What the BJP has done to India in just 14 years, even the British couldn't do in 200 years. They looted their own people, used them. Even sold them to their "fatherland." Convicted rapists were given tickets and even entered the Ram Mandir. The economy is struggling, while Adani has boomed. Terrorist attacks have increased. Name one leader who has ruined his own country to this extent.

@th\_anonymouse

## SHORT TAKES

### Couple kills daughter, commits suicide

**Kurukshetra:** A couple allegedly killed their three-year-old daughter before committing suicide in Haryana's Kurukshetra Monday, police said. The bodies were found hanging in first floor of their home, the police said, adding that a note was also recovered from the spot, in which the couple mentioned that they could not bear the pain of their child because of her health condition, and they were taking the extreme step. The deceased, Jatinder Kumar (30) and his wife Manju (28), had been in distress due to the health condition of their daughter Advika (3), Krishna Gate SHO Baljeet Singh said. Jatinder Kumar worked in the railways, he said.

### Firecracker unit blast: Death toll climbs to 25

**Virudhunagar (Tamil Nadu):** With most bodies charred beyond recognition, identification remains difficult, police said Monday, as the toll in the massive explosion at a fireworks unit near Kattanarpatti here rose to 25. The Virudhunagar district administration has announced Rs 5.5 lakh ex gratia to the kin of deceased. The accident is one of the deadliest industrial disasters in the region in recent years. "Bodies were so badly charred that we were able to identify mostly with jewellery that the victims were wearing," a police official told PTI.

### Meghalaya to hold civil defence drill April 24

**Shillong:** The Centre has directed the Meghalaya government to conduct a statewide civil defence mock exercise, including a two-minute blackout, April 24 to enhance preparedness for potential air raid scenarios, officials said Monday.

# India, S Korea unveil economic roadmap

Following talks between Modi and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung, the two sides inked 15 agreements including one to set up an industrial cooperation framework and another on steel supply chain to ramp up overall trajectory of ties

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 20:** India and South Korea Monday pledged to nearly double their annual trade to \$50 billion by 2030 and committed to upgrading their comprehensive economic partnership pact within the next year, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted that both nations radiate a message of peace and stability amid the current global tension.

Following talks between Modi and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung, the two sides inked 15 agreements including one to set up an industrial cooperation framework and another on steel supply chain to ramp up overall trajectory of ties.

In their meeting, the two leaders also agreed to boost cooperation in energy, defence, critical minerals, shipbuilding, and semiconductors besides unveiling a joint strategic vision for the India-South Korea special strategic partnership.

The two sides also released a comprehensive framework for partnership in shipbuilding, shipping and maritime logistics, and came out with a joint statement on energy security.

Separately, a joint declaration was signed on resuming the negotiations to upgrade the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement that came into effect in 2010. It was also agreed to set up a Korean industrial township in India as part of efforts to boost economic ties. New Delhi and Seoul also launched an 'Economic Security Dialogue' as well as a foreign ministerial framework for deliberations on climate change, arctic, and maritime cooperation.

Modi and Lee also deliberated on the West Asia crisis and its implications.

The two sides also vowed to



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung water a sapling, at Hyderabad House in New Delhi

strengthen joint efforts towards a peaceful, stable and inclusive Indo-Pacific, a move that came against the backdrop of increasing Chinese assertion in the region.

"In this period of global tensions, India and Korea together convey a message of peace and stability...Through our shared efforts, we will continue to contribute to a peaceful, progressive, and inclusive Indo-Pacific," Modi said.

"Bilateral trade between India and Korea has today reached \$27 billion. We have taken several important de-

isions today to take this to \$50 billion by 2030," he said.

Lee, who landed in New Delhi Sunday on a three-day visit, said the upgraded bilateral economic framework will serve as a "new engine for shared growth".

The Prime Minister said the South Korean leader's visit to India has laid the foundation for the "next decade of success stories" between the two countries.

"With President Lee's visit, we are set to transform this trusted partnership into a futuristic partnership. From chips to ships, from talent to technology, and from environ-

ment to energy, we will realise new opportunities for cooperation across all sectors," he said.

The prime minister said democratic values, market economy, and respect for the rule of law are in the "DNA of both our countries".

"To facilitate financial flows between the two countries, we have launched the India-Korea Financial Forum. To strengthen business cooperation, we have established an Industrial Cooperation Committee," he said. "To enhance collaboration in critical technologies and supply chains, we are initiating an Economic Security Dialogue," he noted.

The prime minister said a Korean Industrial Township will be established to facilitate the entry of Korean companies, especially SMEs, into India.

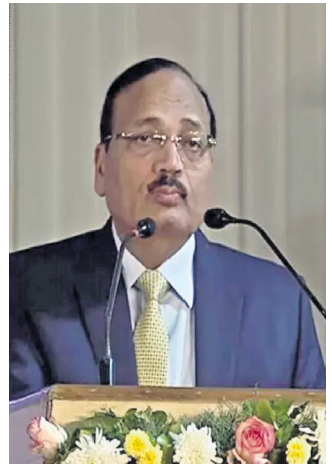
"Furthermore, within the next year, we will upgrade the India-Korea Trade Agreement," he said. Modi described President Lee's visit as of great significance. "We also share a common outlook on the Indo-Pacific region. On the basis of these shared principles, our relationship has become more dynamic and wide-ranging over the past decade."

The Prime Minister also made a mention of India-South Korea cultural ties "that go back thousands of years".

At a media briefing, Secretary (East) at the external affairs ministry P Kumaran, delving into the framework for shipbuilding, said the emphasis will be on upgrading the existing shipyards, including developing block fabrication facilities and setting up a new dry dock to construct large and specialised vessels.

Kumaran said there was a general discussion on the geopolitical contestations and conflicts including the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the situation in the Gulf region.

# CJI Kant flags surge in 'digital arrest' scams



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 20:** Chief Justice of India Surya Kant Monday said it was shocking that well-educated people were getting duped in cases of digital arrests.

The CJI, who was heading a bench which also comprised Justice Joymalya Bagchi, flagged the recent case of an old woman who was duped of her entire retirement benefits in one of such cases. The observations came from the CJI after Attorney General R Venkataramani mentioned the suo motu case concerning victims of digital arrest before the bench. "Meeting have taken place. We are moving very fast," the top law officer said, while requesting the bench to take up the suo motu case for hearing May 12.

The CJI then referred to the case of the elderly woman whom he knows in his official capacity. "Unfortunately, her entire retiral benefit has been duped," the CJI said.

One of the advocates told the bench that it was most unfortunate that despite the apex court hearing a suo motu case regarding digital arrest, such

incidents were continuously coming to light.

"It is shocking that well-educated people are getting duped like this," the CJI observed.

The bench said it would list the matter for hearing May 12. Digital arrest is a growing form of cybercrime in which fraudsters pose as law enforcement officers, court officials or personnel from government agencies to intimidate victims through audio and video calls. They hold the victims hostage and put pressure on them to pay money.

The top court February 9 described the siphoning of more than Rs 54,000 crore by digital frauds as absolute "robbery or dacoity" and asked the Centre to draft a standard operating procedure (SoP) in consultation with stakeholders like the RBI, banks and the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) to deal with such cases.

The apex court had expressed grave concern over the "menace" of digital arrest scams and said banks must play a proactive role in preventing cyber-enabled fraud.

It had directed the CBI to identify digital arrest cases and asked the Gujarat and Delhi governments to accord sanction to the federal probe agency to proceed with the investigations in identified cases.

It had also asked the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the DoT, and others to jointly hold a meeting to come up with a framework for providing compensation in digital arrest cases.

The attorney general had informed the bench that the RBI has drafted an SoP for banks to deal with such cases and it, among other things, prescribes action by the banks where temporary debit holds can be placed to prevent cyber-enabled frauds.

## MCC VIOLATION

# MORE THAN 700 CITIZENS MOVE ECI OVER PM'S NATIONAL ADDRESS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 20:** Over 700 citizens, including former civil servants, academics, activists and journalists, have written to the Election Commission alleging that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's national address April 18 violated the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) for elections and sought an inquiry as well as remedial action.

In a complaint dated April 20 addressed to the Chief Election Commissioner, the signatories claimed that the address, broadcast on official platforms such as Doordarshan, Sansad TV and All India Radio, amounted to "electioneering and partisan propaganda" during the MCC period. The MCC is currently in force in Assam, Kerala and



Puducherry, where voting was held April 9, Tamil Nadu (polling April 23) and West Bengal (polling April 23 and 29). Votes will be counted for all these assembly elections May 4.

The complaint said that the use of government-funded media for such messaging gave the ruling party an "undue advantage" and undermined the level playing field essential for free and fair elections.

Citing provisions of the MCC, the complainants said ministers are barred from combining offi-

cial functions with electioneering and from using official machinery for partisan purposes.

The letter urged the poll panel to take cognisance of the issue, examine the content and manner of the address and initiate appropriate action. It also called for equal airtime on public broadcasters for other political parties if prior permission had been granted for the telecast.

Among the signatories are former Delhi Lieutenant Governor Najeeb Jung, political economist Parakala Prabhakar, activist Yogendra Yadav, economist Jayati Ghosh, musician-author T M Krishna, former Union secretary E A S Sarma, activist Harsh Mander, journalist Paranjay Guha Thakurta, academic Zoya Hasan and former ambassador Madhu Bhaduri.



A boy pours a bucket of water to beat the heat on a hot summer day, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh

# Higher degree alone not enough for govt jobs: SC

*"The mere possession of such a higher academic degree does not, by itself, render a candidate 'otherwise eligible or well qualified' without meeting the requirement of experience within the meaning of the Recruitment and Promotion (R&P) Rules, particularly when the basic eligibility criteria itself remains unfulfilled," the bench said*

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 20:** The Supreme Court Monday held that mere possession of a higher academic degree does not by itself render a candidate "otherwise

eligible or well qualified" without meeting the experience required under the Recruitment and Promotion Rules.

A bench of Justices J K Maheshwari and A S Chandurkar faulted the recruitment process adopted by the Himachal Pradesh Board of School Education for the post of computer hardware engineer. It said a candidate not fulfilling a basic requirement could not have been treated as eligible merely on the basis of possessing a higher degree or securing a higher rank in merit.

"The mere possession of such a higher academic degree does not, by itself, render a candidate 'otherwise eligible or well qualified' without meeting the requirement of experience within the meaning of the Recruitment and Promotion (R&P) Rules, particularly when the basic eligibility criteria itself remains unfulfilled," the bench said.

Any such approach would



amount to substituting the minimum qualification with a preferential one, which is impermissible, it said.

The bench found the selection of a candidate not in accordance with norms. The record clearly indicated that the selected candidate, at the time of submission of her application had work experience of only about one year as evident from the application status and supporting documents.

It said in such circumstances, the possession of 'M.Tech degree in Electronics and Com-

munication', a preferential qualification under the R&P Rules, could not have been relied upon to either confer eligibility or to justify any relaxation of the essential requirement.

The bench said the selection of the candidate on such a basis, therefore, reflects a clear non-application of mind to the distinction between essential and preferential qualifications and renders any purported relaxation fundamentally flawed.

"In matters of public employment, the court must be circumspect in issuing positive directions for appointment unless the entitlement is clear, unambiguous, and flows directly from the applicable rules. Where the selection process itself is found to be flawed, the appropriate course would ordinarily be to set aside the selection rather than to direct appointment of a particular candidate," the apex court said.

The bench said in the present case, the defect is not merely procedural or incidental, but goes to the root of eligibility itself.

"The selected candidate, i.e., the appellant did not fulfil the essential qualification of 'at least five years' work experience in computer manufacturing/maintenance' as on the relevant date. Such experience is of a specialised nature and external to the post in question, which couldn't have been acquired by a candidate after serving as a Computer Hardware Engineer," it said.

The top court said therefore, the selection made if any, in contravention to the R&P Rules prevalent on the date, would cause inherent illegality which cannot be dispensed with or by exercising discretion of the court.

The top court said the selection and appointment of the candidate cannot be sustained in law.

## Provide details of pending terror, drugs cases: SC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 20:** The Supreme Court Monday asked all states and union territories to provide details of terror and narcotics cases being probed by Central and state agencies, including the NIA and the NCB, as a step towards setting up special exclusive courts for early disposal of the cases.

The top court asked the Centre to consider providing funds of Rs 1 crore each for setting up the courts in all states and UTs to prosecute cases lodged under the UAPA (the Unlawful Activities [Prevention] Act) and the NDPS Act (the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act).

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalye Bagchi also asked Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for the Centre, to consider releasing Rs 1 crore annually for ensuring smooth functioning of the special courts.

The suo motu case was fixed for further hearing May 8.

On March 24, the apex court directed the establishment of special courts for cases investigated by the National Investigation Agency and those falling under the UAPA. Expanding the ambit, the CJI Monday asked advocate generals of 17 states to furnish the details of cases lodged under the UAPA and the NDPS Act, irrespective of whether they are prosecuted by the NIA or the state police and by Narcotics Control Bureau or by state agencies.

The bench highlighted that early disposal would balance the rights of the accused and victims both.

The bench also issued notices to the remaining states and asked them to furnish the requisite information.

The suo motu petition was initiated following concerns that NIA trials were languishing for years.

# international



Many of our former strengths, based on our close ties to America, have become weaknesses. Weaknesses that we must correct

MARK CARNEY | PRIME MINISTER, CANADA

## INDIA, UK DEEPEN DEFENCE TIES

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan was accorded a Ceremonial Step Line and received by his UK counterpart Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Knighton, in London Monday. This is the first official visit by an Indian CDS to the UK and marks the fifth senior UK-India military engagement this year, following the UK Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Harv Smyth's visit to India in March



### of the day quote

Our common objective of achieving one security structure under the legitimate authority should guide the effective coordination between the International Stabilisation Force, the Palestinian Authority, security institutions and other international actors. Security must not be fragmented



MOHAMED MUSTAFA | PRIME MINISTER, PALESTINIAN

Every rational and diplomatic path should be used to reduce tensions with the US, but added that vigilance and distrust in interactions with Washington were an undeniable necessity



MASOUD PEZESHKIAN | IRANIAN PRESIDENT

many people in the world were being exploited by authoritarians and defrauded by the rich



POPE LEO XIV | HEAD OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

# Keep Hormuz open: Xi steps in as Iran asserts control

AGENCIES

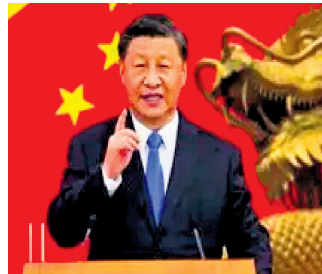
Beijing, April 20: Chinese President Xi Jinping Monday called for the opening of the Strait of Hormuz for normal passage of ships, as Beijing described it as an "international waterway" amid assertions by Iran that it has an inalienable right over it.

"The Strait of Hormuz should maintain normal passage, as this serves the common interests of regional countries and the international community," Xi told Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman during a phone call.

This is the first statement by the Chinese leader on the closure of the Strait of Hormuz by Iran, followed by the US blockade of Iranian ports in their current conflict. The closure of the Strait has resulted in acute energy shortages across the world, especially in Asia, and China, which is a major importer of Iranian oil, is increasingly concerned about the prolongation of the US-Israel-Iran war.

China supports regional countries in building a common home of good-neighbourliness, development, security and cooperation, holding their future in their own hands, and promoting lasting peace and security in the region, Xi said.

His comments were significant as China achieved a "major diplomatic success" in West



President Xi Jinping calls for the Strait of Hormuz to remain open for normal passage, highlighting its importance as an international waterway

China expresses concern over the US Navy's interception of a Chinese cargo ship bound for Iran, urging responsible adherence to ceasefire agreements

The Chinese Foreign Ministry reiterates that maintaining safety and stability in the Strait of Hormuz is in the common interest of regional countries and the international community

Asia, bringing arch-rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia together in March 2023. As a result, the two countries restored diplomatic relations. But the US-Iran conflict has changed all that with Iran attacking Saudi Arabia and other regional countries, besides closing the Strait of Hormuz to counter the US war against it.

Separately, the Chinese Foreign Ministry has expressed concern over the US Navy firing on a cargo ship travelling

## UK calls for 'toll-free' Strait of Hormuz

London: Britain Monday called for a lasting settlement to ensure freedom of navigation and a toll-free Strait of Hormuz as the US-Iran ceasefire hung in the balance. UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper arrived in Japan for the final leg of what has been branded as an "intensified shuttle diplomacy tour" to advance coordination with key allies on shared geopolitical, economic and energy security priorities. During the six-day tour spanning Europe and West Asia, the British minister held in-person talks with Foreign Ministers from 11 countries, including Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt, the UAE, and Ukraine, concluding with a meeting with the Japanese Foreign Minister for the annual Strategic Dialogue in Tokyo. "An important meeting with Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on importance of extending the ceasefire & getting shipping routes through the Strait of Hormuz fully reopened," said Cooper, following the meeting with her Pakistani counterpart Sunday.

from China heading to an Iranian port, defying the American naval blockade.

"We are concerned over the US' forcible interception of the vessel and hope that relevant parties will honour the ceasefire agreement in a responsible manner, avoid aggravating disputes and escalating tensions, and provide necessary conditions for the restoration of normal passage through the Strait," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told a media briefing here.

# Major earthquake strikes off Japan

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tokyo, April 20: Japan Monday issued an advisory for northern coastal areas for an increased risk of a possible mega-quake induced by a major quake earlier in the day.

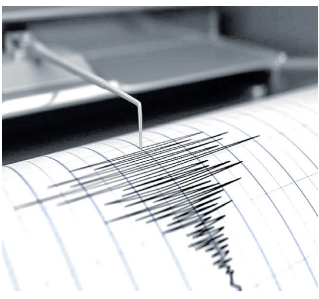
The Cabinet Office and the Japan Meteorological Agency said there is 1% chance of a mega-quake occurring on the northern Japanese coast in the next week or so, following the powerful quake earlier Monday near the Chishima trough.

Officials said the advisory is not a quake prediction but urged residents to raise their preparedness, such as emergency food and their grab bag, just in case, while continuing their daily lives. The advisory for the region is the second in recent months. One was issued following another major quake in December. No major subsequent quake occurred.

A powerful earthquake struck off the northern Japanese coast earlier Monday, and the Japan Meteorological Agency issued a tsunami alert in the region, sending residents rushing to safer grounds. So far, no major injuries or damages have been reported.

The quake, registering a preliminary magnitude of 7.5, occurred off the coast of Sanriku in northern Japan at around 4:53 pm (0753 GMT), at a depth of about 10 kilometres (6 miles), the agency said.

A tsunami of about 80 centimetres (2.6 feet) was detected at the Kuji port in the Iwate prefecture within one hour of the quake, and a smaller tsunami of 40 centimetres (1.3 feet) was recorded at another port in the prefecture, the agency said.



The tsunami alert and advisory were still in place in Japan, with warnings of a wave of up to 3 metres (10 feet), but the US-based Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre said the tsunami threat from the quake "has now passed."

The Japanese agency urged residents in the region to immediately stay away from the coast or along rivers and take shelter on higher ground. It also cautioned people in the area against possible aftershocks for about a week.

Footage on NHK television showed many people driving up to parks and other facilities on higher ground. In the town of Tomakomai in Hokkaido, a resident came to a hilltop park after picking up his child at a cram school and said he planned to stay until the alert is lifted.

## SHORT TAKES

### Bulgaria's former prez wins poll in landslide

Sofia: Pro-Russian former President Rumen Radev has won Bulgaria's election by a landslide, official results showed Monday, sidelining long-dominant political forces and potentially pushing the EU and NATO member state closer to Moscow. The performance, exceeding opinion poll forecasts, is one of the strongest results for a single party in a generation and may end, for now, the chronic instability that led to eight elections in five years. Radev's Progressive Bulgaria party had 44.7% of the vote after 91.7% of ballots were counted, suggesting it could rule alone, but he has not ruled out a coalition with a pro-European group or a smaller party.

### Honour killing: Man sentenced to death

Lahore: A Pakistani court Monday sentenced a man to death for killing his wife in the name of 'honour', an official said. The convict brutally killed his young wife by slitting her throat with a knife last year, according to the prosecution. He suspected that his wife had an affair with a man from her locality in Kahna, a thickly populated area of Lahore. The court found the accused guilty and sentenced him to death along with a fine of PKR 300,000, according to the court official.

### Fire destroys 1,000 homes

Kuala Lumpur: A fire that tore through a Malaysian coastal settlement on Borneo Island destroyed about 1,000 homes and displaced over 9,000 people, authorities said. The fire started early Sunday in the Sandakan district and spread rapidly through rows of wooden houses constructed on stilts above the sea, according to the fire and rescue department. No deaths have been reported.

### NK tests cluster munitions again

Seoul: North Korea said Monday it test-launched ballistic missiles with cluster bomb warheads in the second such test this month, likely underscoring its push to expand its capabilities to penetrate US and South Korean defences. The report by the North's official Korean Central News Agency appeared to refer to the multiple ballistic missile launches South Korea, Japan and the US detected Sunday off North Korea's east coast.

## SNIPPETS

### 2 killed as planned fight escalates to mass shooting

Winston-Salem(US): A planned fight among young people escalated into a mass shooting at a North Carolina park Monday morning that left two people dead, authorities said. The shooting happened around 10 am at Leinbach Park, which is near Jefferson Middle School, Winston-Salem police said in a social media post. Several people were shot, including two fatally, the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation said in a statement. Winston-Salem police Assistant Chief Jason Swaim said two juveniles had agreed to meet at the park to fight. He said a firearm was discharged during the fight, which "resulted in multiple victims being shot." He said authorities have identified "numerous people" involved in what happened, but that investigators were still trying to determine their exact involvement, including whether they were a suspect, victim or witness.

### Rat poison found in baby food jars; products recalled

Vienna: Countries across Central Europe pulled baby food off the shelves Monday after rat poison was discovered in some jars of the HIPP brand over the weekend. Austria's health minister told parents, kindergartens and day care centres to use utmost caution when feeding young children HIPP. The company recalled some of its baby food jars because samples there, as well as in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, tested positive for rat poison. Authorities believe tampering occurred in 190-gram (6.7-ounce) jars of baby food made with carrots and potatoes for 5-month-old children that were sold at SPAR supermarkets in Austria. The first sample tested positive Saturday. Austrian authorities Monday said they were searching for a second jar of baby food that may have been poisoned. It may have been sold at a Spar supermarket in the eastern town of Eisenstadt, Austrian news agency APA reported.



Palestinian youth play while swimming in a port basin in Gaza City

AP PHOTO

# Lessons from Hungary for pro-democracy movements

Voters have ousted Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's populist right-wing government. In a landslide victory, Peter Magyar's Tisza, a center-right party, won 53 per cent of the vote, compared with 39 per cent for Orban's Fidesz party. In his 16 years in power, Orban had been a role model for aspiring authoritarian leaders far beyond Budapest. His regime had lasted as long as it did because it was extremely adept at rigging the electoral system and stoking polarization in society. Yet those very strengths proved to be its undoing.

An electoral system that rewarded the largest party with a disproportionate number of parliamentary seats meant that a capable challenger could decisively turn the tables on the incumbent government. The stark polarization of society made a united opposition party easier to forge. And Orban's unusually long tenure made it impossible for him to escape responsibility for the failures of governance and management that plagued the country.

Magyar, a former Fidesz member turned critic, and the Tisza Party used Orban's

own record against him. They united pro-democracy forces, turned the division Fidesz had manufactured against Orban himself, and focused their campaign on the incumbent government's corruption and failure to fix deteriorating public services and high inflation. Their success holds lessons for opposition parties in competitive authoritarian systems around the world.

The first pillar of Orban's success was an electoral system that maximized the number of parliamentary seats that his party earned in elections. Fidesz gerrymandered districts, extended the franchise to (mostly conservative) Hungarians living abroad, and established a mixed voting system that allocated a disproportionately large number of parliamentary seats to the party that won the highest share of the vote—even if it only achieved a plurality rather than an outright majority.

To comprehend the effect of these changes, one need only look at election results. In 2010, when Fidesz first came to power, the party received 53 per cent of the vote and earned a two-thirds majority in parliament. Four years later, after



many of the electoral changes took effect, it received only 45 percent of the vote—but the margin of its supermajority in the parliament was essentially unchanged, allowing Fidesz to pass legislation, amend the constitution, and appoint party loyalists to important positions, all without having to even consult opposition parties.

Orban also managed to polarize Hungarian society with successive waves of fear-based rhetoric. Fidesz appointed party propagandists to state TV and radio and used economic pressure to consolidate most private news outlets in the hands of government-friendly oligarchs. It then flooded these outlets—and the streets,

via giant posters—with alarming messages about who was attacking Hungary. The foes included migrants, sexual minorities, bureaucrats in Brussels, the Hungarian-born liberal philanthropist George Soros, and the government of Ukraine. These attacks polarized the country and helped Fidesz maintain its stronghold on the right, often enticing supporters away from other extreme-right parties. In responding to the propaganda, opposition parties were compelled to defend positions that did not resonate with the majority of Hungarians, standing up for LGBT rights, showing empathy for Muslim migrants, and echoing critiques of the Hungarian government by the

European Union. Fidesz's tactics led to remarkable electoral success. Orban is the longest-serving prime minister in Europe; in all of post-World War II European history, only former German chancellors Helmut Kohl and Angela Merkel served as many consecutive years. Moreover, Orban has governed with a supermajority in parliament for this entire period. This has allowed him to shape Hungary's economic, political, judicial, and even cultural institutions without any effective checks and balances. Orban's System of National Cooperation—a system of executive power in which he exercised economic influence by way of regime-friendly oligarchs, as well as control over social, cultural, and media institutions via appointed party loyalists—has become a model for many aspiring autocrats who are building systems of competitive authoritarianism in their own countries.

But Orban's successes also contained the seeds of destruction for Fidesz. The electoral system that Fidesz built over the past decade and a half ensured that the largest party in the country could govern with almost absolute authority, because of the ease with which it could attain a supermajority in parliament. This system worked well until a new force, the Tisza Party, emerged that turned out to be more popular than Fidesz. Because the system is designed to supercharge even a small plurality, the Tisza Party has now also been rewarded with a two-thirds majority—giving it the tools to undo the laws that Orban had put beyond the reach of regular parliamentary majorities. The carefully engineered electoral system has therefore enabled Tisza to roll back Fidesz's political legacy. Opposition forces should maintain pressure on illiberal governments to defend their governance record. The Tisza Party exposed state corruption and relentlessly campaigned on pocketbook issues, including high inflation, the deterioration of public services, and the poor state of the country's infrastructure. Keeping the focus on a government's performance, and what it has been incapable of delivering, is a message that crosses political boundaries and helps unify rival forces.

AGENCIES



**“We are trying to work out what would be the mechanism by which India can get a preferential market access in the US market compared to our competitors”**  
**PIYUSH GOVAL | COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER**

**SILVER JUMPS ₹4,300, GOLD GAINS ₹800**

Silver prices climbed ₹4,300 to ₹2.57 lakh per kilogram in the national capital Monday, while gold advanced to ₹1.57 lakh per 10 grams on fresh buying by retailers and stockists.



# business

of the day **note**

**Our entry into the retail segment with Jindal Infinity marks a strategic extension of our capabilities into the construction value chain... we aim to bring these advanced solutions closer to the Indian consumer. This is aligned with our larger vision of supporting a quality-first, safer, and more resilient environment**



**India's office market exhibited resilience in the first quarter of 2026, despite global geopolitical challenges**



**For now, we assume business as usual. We are still optimistic, cautiously or conditionally optimistic. The condition is that there is no further escalation of the conflict in the foreseeable future before the summer. Based on that condition, we remain optimistic**



**ELIE YOUNES | RADISSON HOTEL GROUP EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT**

## ₹ falls 25 paise to settle at 93.16 against dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, April 20:** The rupee pared its initial gains and settled with a loss of 25 paise at 93.16 against the US dollar Monday, after fresh tension in West Asia led to an increased demand for the American currency and kept crude prices steady.

Forex traders said the local currency remained under pressure due to a fresh standoff between the US and Iran that led to a closure of the Strait of Hormuz, disrupting global supply.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 92.73 and touched an intra-day high of 92.70 against the greenback. It also hit the day's low of 93.24 during the session before settling at 93.16 against the dollar, registering a loss of 25 paise from the previous closing level.

The rupee strengthened 28 paise to settle at 92.91 against the US dollar on Friday, a day after gaining 19 paise in the preceding session Thursday.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said the rupee fell



on a strong dollar and a surge in crude oil prices as global risk sentiments deteriorated after Iran said it closed the Strait of Hormuz again.

Choudhary said the rupee is expected to trade with a negative bias on renewed geopolitical tensions between the US and Iran. "However, the ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon may support the rupee at lower levels. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of ₹93 to ₹93.60."

According to Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, rupee traded weaker as uncertainty around the second round of US-Iran talks continues to weigh on sentiment.

"The rebound in crude, driven by disruptions around the Strait of Hormuz, is increasing concerns over India's import bill and keeping pressure on the rupee. Given the sensitivity of INR to oil prices and geopolitical developments, the overall bias remains cautious. In the near term, rupee is expected to trade in a range of 92.65-93.45," Trivedi said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, rose 0.14 per cent to 98.03.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading 4.64 per cent down at USD 94.57 per barrel in futures trade.

Analysts said the crude price bounced back from below the USD 90-a-barrel level reached on Friday, as the geopolitical situation turned volatile after a fresh standoff between the US and Iran prevented ships from crossing the Strait of Hormuz.

Domestic equity markets stayed almost flat, with the 30-share Sensex ending 26.76 points, or 0.03 per cent, up at 78,520.30, while the Nifty inched up 11.30 points, or 0.05 per cent, to 24,364.85.

## JSW Steel, POSCO enter into JV pact for steel plant in Odisha

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 20:** Sajjan Jindal-led JSW Steel has entered into a joint venture agreement with South Korean steel major POSCO to set up a 6 million tonnes per annum steel plant in Odisha, a statement said Monday.

The announcement was made at the India-Korea Business Forum in the national capital. India and Korea on Monday discussed revamping the existing free trade agreement, CEPA, to boost economic ties.

In the statement, JSW Steel said that the land for the project has already been secured, and once commissioned, the project will be capable of manufacturing high-grade flat steel products for automotive and other applications.

In 2005, POSCO signed a memorandum of understanding with the Odisha government to set up a USD 12 billion mega steel project, but dropped the project more than a decade later due to land acquisition issues and other clearances.

JSW Steel said the agree-

ment marks a significant step towards deepening strategic collaboration between the two steel companies.

The proposed integrated steel project will comprise steelmaking, hot rolling, and cold rolling/coating processes, the company said, adding that the land for the project has already been secured.

"The partnership will ensure alignment of our vision and commitment, while leveraging POSCO's technological expertise and JSW's strengths in project execution and cost leadership. We see this as a significant step towards strengthening India's steel ecosystem and supporting the nation's industrial value chain," JSW Steel Joint Managing Director and CEO Jayant Acharya said.

"Through this joint venture, we will do our utmost to combine POSCO's innovative steel technology with JSW Group's strong local competitiveness, making a meaningful contribution not only to future value creation but also to the industrial development and economic growth of both nations," POSCO President Lee Hee-geun said.

## Sensex, Nifty settle flat in volatile trade

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, April 20:** Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed almost unchanged in a volatile session Monday as investors turned cautious amid mounting geopolitical headwinds and rising crude oil prices.

The 30-share BSE Sensex closed marginally up 26.76 points or 0.03 per cent at 78,520.30. During the day, it hit a high of 78,942.45 and a low of 78,203.30, gyrating 739.15 points.

The 50-share NSE Nifty edged up 11.30 points or 0.05 per cent to settle at 24,364.85.



Among the 30-Sensex firms, Trent, State Bank of India, Asian Paints, NTPC, Bajaj Finance and InterGlobe Aviation were the major winners.

Larsen & Toubro, Bharat Electronics, HCL Tech and Kotak Mahindra Bank were among the laggards.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 4.76 per cent to USD 94.68 per barrel.

"Renewed disputes over the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz injected volatility into global markets. Investors interpreted the recent disruptions in the Middle East as potential negotiation tactics rather than the onset of a full-scale conflict," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd.

With the ceasefire set to expire this week, market participants remain cautious, awaiting further developments, he added. The BSE SmallCap Select index dipped 0.15 per cent and MidCap Select index lost 0.12 per cent.

Power jumped 1.24 per cent, followed by Utilities (0.88 per cent), PSU Bank (0.70 per cent) and Capital Goods (0.55 per cent).

However, BSE Focused IT declined 0.93 per cent, IT (0.79 per cent), Realty (0.70 per cent), Telecommunication (0.66 per cent) and Commodities (0.34 per cent).

A total of 2,593 stocks declined, while 1,810 advanced and 175 remained unchanged on the BSE.

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 higher.

### SHORT TAKES

#### NCLAT stays CCI penalty on Intel

**New Delhi:** The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has stayed the Rs 27.38 crore penalty imposed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI) on Intel Corporation over its India-specific warranty policy for boxed microprocessors. A two-member bench stayed the penalty last week until the next hearing. Intel Corporation has challenged the CCI's February order imposing a penalty for engaging in anti-competitive practices related to its India-specific warranty policy for its boxed microprocessors. The appellate tribunal observed Intel had already deposited 25 per cent of the penalty amount before its registry and asked the CCI to refrain from taking any coercive steps for implementation of the order. "Considering the submission, as admittedly 25 per cent of penalty amount has since been deposited, hence further recovery stands stayed till the next date of hearing," said a two-member NCLAT bench comprising Justice Yogesh Khanna (Member, Judicial) and Ajai Das Mehrotra (Member, Technical). The tribunal also took on record submissions of Intel that they have "already withdrawn the India Specific Warranty Policy w.e.f. April 1, 2024 and had publicised it in the year 2024 itself on its website."

#### States' capex growth to slow down: Report

**Mumbai:** States' capital expenditure growth is likely to slow down to 8-10 per cent in FY27 from 17 per cent in FY26, a report said Monday. The moderation will primarily result from tighter fiscal headroom due to rising revenue expenditure commitments and a moderation in revenue growth, Careedge Ratings said. The domestic rating agency warned that the moderation may be accentuated by a geopolitical crisis in West Asia, explaining that the conflict's fallout could hit capital outlays by exerting pressure on both revenues and expenditures through its impact on energy prices. "With fiscal space becoming tighter due to rising revenue expenditure commitments and moderation in revenue growth, state capex growth is expected to moderate to around 8-10 per cent in FY27," the agency said. Its associate director Prasanna Krishnan said the revenue growth for states is expected to remain moderate through FY26 and FY27 on a tapering of grants from the Centre, with external headwinds further weighing on overall receipts in FY27.

### BIZ BUZZ

#### Luxury perfume brand 'The Misstt' launched

BHUBANESWAR:

The Misstt, a new luxury perfume brand was unveiled here Monday. Ollywood actress Bhumika Dash attended the launch event as the chief guest and officially inaugurated the brand. The key feature about this brand is the use of high-quality Swiss-origin oils. It also utilises DPG Alcohol (Denatured Alcohol), which is safe for the skin and avoids methanol-based alcohol. In terms of concentration, The Misstt perfumes contain a 30% oil concentration, making them part of the 'Extrait de Parfum' category. Due to its 2 to 3 times more concentration than standard perfumes, the fragrance remains intact for 8 to 12 hours. In terms of ingredients the perfumes use rose absolute, bergamot, patchouli, amber, cedarwood, honey, oud, and other spices. The Misstt is introduced in 12 distinct fragrances in 20ml packs and is available in three specific combos -- men's combo, women's combo and unisex combo. The retail price for each combo is ₹2,499 but is currently available at a launch price of just ₹1,599. The perfumes are available through the brand's official website and will be soon available across major online platforms. The founders of the brand -- Kirti Chaurasia, Abhishek Chaurasia and Babita Chaurasia, hoped that it will make a significant mark both nationally and internationally.



#### New ZM of UCO Bank, Balasore Zone

**BALASORE:** Nitesh Kumar Mohanty, Assistant General Manager, took over the charge of new Zonal Head of UCO Bank Balasore Zone April 20. Earlier, he was posted as AGM, Mid Corporate branch at Chandigarh. He is having an experience of 17 years in Banking Sector. Mohanty emphasised on good customer service along with growth of advances under Retail, MSME & Agriculture sector during his maiden message to 64 branches under Balasore Zone. "Our more than 70% branches are situated in rural areas, Credit Linkage to SHG will be vital for credit growth of Agriculture Sector," he added. He also emphasised on popularity of digital products like digital lending, ATM services and mobile platform. The Bank is also planning to open new branches in coming days.



#### Agarwal Gold and Diamonds opens new outlet in Cuttack

CUTTACK:

On the occasion of Akshaya Tritiya, Agarwal Gold and Diamonds opened a new outlet at Matamath, Cantonment Road, Cuttack. The store was inaugurated by social worker Ganesh Kandoi. The company assures highest standards of quality for its gold and diamond jewellery. The new store offers customers the facility to thoroughly test and verify the purity of gold and diamonds before making a purchase. Special offers include attractive discount on the making charges of ornaments and exclusive discount on the purchase of specific gold and diamond jewellery. For the special occasion of Akshaya Tritiya the store also introduced special discounts and attractive gifts for customers. The management of Agarwal & Sons (the parent brand) highlighted that they have already earned the trust of customers through their long-standing presence in the jewellery business. They are confident that this new store will increase their popularity in Cuttack. "While there are many jewellery stores in Cuttack, Agarwal & Sons will become the first choice for customers due to our quality and service," said Sanjay Agarwal, owner Agarwal Gold and Diamonds. The inauguration ceremony was attended by the store's Director, Managing Director, and Founder, along with members of the Agarwal family.



## West Asia crisis poses risks to India's trade: NITI Aayog report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 20:** The geopolitical tensions in West Asia pose risks to India's trade and macroeconomic stability by widening the current account deficit (CAD), exerting pressure on the exchange rate, NITI Aayog said Monday.

The Aayog in its quarterly 'Trade Watch Oct-Dec (Q3) FY 2025-26' report further said that geopolitical instability in West Asia has slowed the India-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Free Trade Agreement (FTA), affecting trade diversification and market access.

The war in West Asia broke out February 28 when the US and Israel launched strikes on Iran, and the latter retaliated.

Releasing the report, NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Suman Bery said, "Let us be clear that FTAs are not a one-way street, nor should they be, which is to say that in the way that we are seeing them as a tool for market access, others are seeing it as a tool for market access too."

Bery highlighted that India's merchandise trade has been resilient in tough environment, and despite many of the apprehensions services trade has also been particularly strong in a very confusing year 2025.



"For trade economists, imports matter much more than exports. It is imports that force you to be competitive, so we should welcome the imports as much as we welcome the market access," he emphasised.

The NITI Aayog VC noted that over the last 20 years, India has grown at an average of 6 per cent, underscoring its macroeconomic stability.

The report suggested that India's gems and jewellery sector should shift from mid-value to high-value exports; promote de-

sign-led manufacturing, cluster R&D, and GI-branded products targeting lightweight, fashion, and men's jewellery.

"India's gems and jewellery sector should strengthen trade facilitation and raw material access align FTAs, streamline duty drawback/refunds, expand IIBX access, and improve raw material supply to cut input costs and boost MSME margins," it suggested.

The report also pitched for expanding financial access and reduce cost of capital enable collateral-free lending,

credit guarantees, interest subvention, export factoring, and supply chain finance to ease liquidity and scale MSMEs.

It also called for improving ease of doing business and data systems, simplify customs/DGFT procedures, streamline re-import/export processes, and create separate G&J datasets for evidence-based policy and monitoring.

India's total merchandise and services trade grew steadily during April-December FY26, rising by about 5.3 per cent year-on-year to USD 1.37 trillion.

FTA partners have emerged as a key driver of India's trade integration in value chains, with their share in total trade increasing, reflecting deeper economic linkages and expanding market access under trade agreements.

According to the report, India remains a key global player in the gems and jewellery sector, particularly in worked diamonds.

India's gems and jewellery trade (including raw gold) is highly concentrated. The US, the UAE and Hong Kong account for about 73 per cent of exports, while the UAE, Switzerland and Hong Kong supply over 60 per cent of imports, it said.

## Core sector output contracts 0.4% in March

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 20:** The core sector output contracted by 0.4 per cent in March, marking the first decline in five months as production of coal, crude oil, fertiliser, and electricity fell, according to official data released Monday.

In February 2026, the eight core infrastructure sectors had expanded by 2.8 per cent.

In 2025-26, these sectors recorded a growth rate of 2.6 per cent as against 4.5 per cent in 2024-25. Production growth of refinery products, steel, and cement slowed down to 0.1 per cent, 2.2 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively, in March this year.

However, natural gas production recorded healthy growth during the month under review.

Commenting on the data,

Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist at Ibra Ltd, said the core sector output contracted for the first time in five months in March, amidst a decline in production across four of the eight sectors.

In October 2025, the production growth of these eight sectors had contracted by 0.1 per cent.

"While an adverse base weighed on electricity generation, a shortage of inputs amidst the West Asia crisis curtailed the fertiliser output, which plunged by an unprecedented 24.6 per cent YoY in the month," she said.

Given these trends and the adverse impact of the surge in energy prices and constrained availability, ICRA expects the IIP (Index of Industrial Production) growth to slow to about 1 - 2 per cent in March 2026 as against 5.2 per cent in February 2026, she added.



**KARTING  
WUNDERKIND**

**Racing sensation zooms to P2 in Italy for highest finish by an Indian in WSK history**

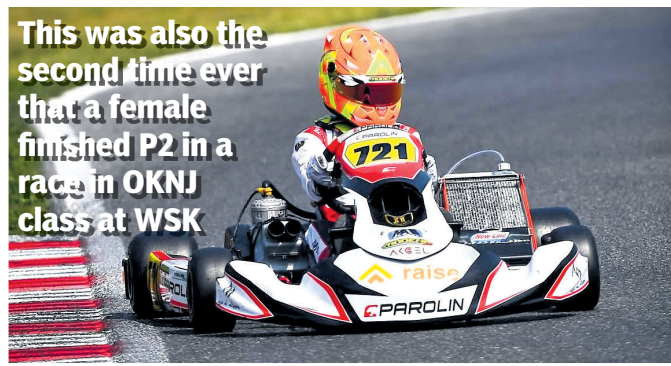
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Lonato (Italy), April 20:** Racing prodigy Atiqa Mir keeps scaling new heights and on this occasion, the 11-year-old recorded the highest-ever race finish by an Indian in her category at World Series Karting (WSK) with a stellar P2 in Race

# Atiqa rewrites Indian record books in WSK

1 here. Atiqa, the first Indian to be supported by Formula 1 Academy and the highest-ranked female worldwide in the OK-NJ category (age 12-14), showed scorching speed in the opening race of WSK Euro Series Round 2 at the South Garda Karting here.

This was also the second time ever that a female finished P2 in a race in OKNJ class at WSK. Atiqa has been turning heads with the sheer weight of her performances on the European circuit and this weekend among the spectators in Lonato were Mercedes F1 boss To-



**This was also the second time ever that a female finished P2 in a race in OKNJ class at WSK**

to Wolff and their star driver George Russell. Atiqa hit her straps from the get go, finishing P2 in the war-

mup. In qualifying, she was a contender for pole position but missed the all important slipstream, usually worth 2 tenths

**A breakthrough weekend for me with another strong qualifying and a P2 finish. A few incidents spoiled what could have been a really strong weekend but it wasn't meant to be. Lots of positives this weekend and now I will prepare for the biggest race of my career in two weeks time (Championship of the Future Euro Series and FIA European Championship)**

ATIQA MIR

of a second. Despite that, she finished fourth fastest in her

group and only a 10th of a second behind the pole sitter. The highlight of Atiqa's weekend was unarguably Race 1 where she finished P2. She displayed strong racecraft and speed while battling the best drivers in the world. She missed P1 by only 8 tenths of a second.

Atiqa had incident filled races during the rest of the weekend with some hard racing resulting in some nosecone penalties, placing her in P12 out of 60 drivers in the Heat Rankings. The Pre Final and Final races were tough and she ended the weekend with P15 on road out of 60 drivers.

**SHORT TAKES**

**National Rugby: WB begin campaign in style**

**Rajgir (Bihar):** Defending champions West Bengal made a commanding start in the men's section of the Senior National Rugby Sevens Championship Monday, registering emphatic wins over Chandigarh and Chhattisgarh. They defeated Chandigarh 49-7 and followed it up with a dominant 66-0 victory against Chhattisgarh. Multiple-time national champions Haryana also delivered an impressive performance, securing convincing wins against Uttar Pradesh (29-0) and Madhya Pradesh (47-0). Among other notable results, Maharashtra recorded the biggest win of the day, thrashing Andaman & Nicobar 92-0. Odisha, Bihar, and Rajasthan also posted comprehensive victories in their respective matches. In Pool I, which featured only Delhi and Karnataka, the former won the opening match 10-0. However, Karnataka bounced back in the reverse fixture to claim a 21-14 victory. In other group-stage matches, Chhattisgarh edged Chandigarh 7-5, while Uttarakhand defeated Punjab 10-5. The tournament will now move into the knockout stage as the race for the national title intensifies. The pre-quarterfinals are scheduled later in the day, with the quarterfinals set to take place Tuesday.

**Suraj clinches PSA Challenger Tour title**

**Chennai:** India's Suraj Kumar Chand secured the HCL Squash PSA Challenger Tour title with a straight game win over South Korea's Jeongmin Ryu in the men's final here Monday. The Indian second seed, ranked 134 in the world, beat his eighth seed opponent 11-5, 11-9, 11-3 for his fourth PSA Tour title. Egyptian seventh seed Rouqia Othman defeated Malaysian second seed Harlein Tan 12-10, 11-7, 9-11, 11-7 in the women's final. "We would like to thank our sponsors and partners, especially HCL, MYAS and SAI, for their support. Having an Indian winner makes it special," SRFI Secretary-General Cyrus Poncha said in a release.

**Nachanekar, Palekar and Divecha bag double crowns**

**Mumbai:** Manjish Palekar, Manoj Nachanekar, and Naheed Divecha bagged double crowns in the G D Birla Memorial Masters Inter-Club Badminton Tournament, promoted by Badminton Gurukul, which concluded at the host club, Bombay Gymkhana. Nachanekar had a fight on his hands against Rahul Bhuvad before winning in three games, 21-12, 16-21, 21-18 to win the professional singles title. He and Bhuvad then got together in the professional doubles final to rally from the loss of the first game and defeat Kalpesh Pednekar and Sanjay Golbare 20-22, 22-20, 21-17. Palekar partnered with Vikrant to win the 45 men's doubles, defeating Sushant Shetty and Vishal Manchanda 21-14, 21-11. He then joined hands with Deepak Jaitley to score an equally easy 21-10, 21-13 win over Nigel D'Sa and Rohan Radhakrishnan for the 85+ men's doubles title. Naheed Divecha won the 75+ women's doubles along with Aparna Popat, defeating Palkan Dava and Shweta Thakur 21-13, 21-18.

**PREMIER LEAGUE**

# City beat Arsenal in title showdown



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**London, April 20:** Manchester City moved to within three points of the top of the Premier League Sunday with a 2-1 win at home to top-of-the-table Arsenal after a tense encounter in the Etihad Stadium.

Goals from Rayan Cherki after 16 minutes and Erling Haaland after 65 minutes leave Pep Guardiola's side three points behind Arsenal but with an extra game to play, and City will go top with a win away to second-from-bottom Burnley on Wednesday, reports Xinhua.

Cherki scored a wonderful individual goal to open the scoring, beating two defenders and slotting a right-foot shot past David Raya. However, barely a minute later, a dreadful mistake from Gianluigi Donnarumma gifted Kai Havertz an equalizer as the City goalkeeper dwelt on the ball and allow Havertz to block his clearance into the goal.

The first half was an even affair, but City controlled things better after the break with Haaland scoring the winner after a swift break and holding off a strong challenge from Gabriel, who later saw a header deflected on the post.

Virgil van Dijk's late header gave Liverpool a dramatic 2-1 win away to Everton in the first derby to be played in Everton's

new Hill Dickinson Stadium.

Playing in his last Merseyside derby, Mohamed Salah scored his ninth goal against Everton after 29 minutes to put Liverpool ahead and equal Steve Gerrard's record of goals against Everton.

Beto pulled Everton back into the game in the 54th minute, but Liverpool was the better team in the closing stages, although it wasn't until the 10th minute of injury time that Van Dijk scored a goal that could help give his side a place in next season's Champions League.

Aston Villa remains strong in fourth after a late flurry of goals in a 4-3 win at home to Sunderland, with Ollie Watkins scoring twice and Morgan Rogers also on target before Tammy Abraham netted a 93rd minute winner.

Sunderland had trailed 3-1 but strikes from Trai Hume and Wilson Isidor after 85 and 86 minutes looked as if they had rescued a late point, before Abraham's winner.

Morgan Gibbs-White scored a hat-trick as Nottingham Forest won 4-1 at home to hapless Burnley, with Igor Jesus scoring Forest's fourth.

The win moves Forest five points clear of Tottenham in the relegation battle and four clear of West Ham, which plays Crystal Palace Monday.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Ahmedabad, April 20:** Tilak Varma played a knock for the ages as his maiden IPL century turned the corner for Mumbai Indians with the five-time champions crushing Gujarat Titans by 99 runs here Monday.

Spurred by skipper Hardik Pandya's 'hard talk' asking him to get a move-on during the strategic break after he scratched his way to 19 off 22 balls, Tilak changed gears in a flash to amass 82 off the next 23 deliveries and end on an unbeaten 101 off 45 balls.

Mumbai Indians' 199 for 5 was good enough as Jasprit Bumrah broke his wicket-less streak for five matches with a first-ball dismissal of Sai Sudharsan and GT never recovered from there to get all out for 100 in 15.5 overs.

The introduction of left-arm seamer Ashwani Kumar proved to be decisive as he snared 4 for 24 to run through the middle-order along with Mitchell Santner (2/16 in 3 overs).

The defeat also exposed the chinks in GT armoury, especially their fragile middle-order where they have carried two 'non performing assets' in Rahul Tewatia and M Shahrulkh Khan for the longest time.

Between them, they played 24 balls and scored only 25 runs and it is baffling to see head coach Ashish Nehra placing so much faith in the mediocre duo.

**TODAY'S MATCH**

SRH VS DC

TIME: 7:30 PM

Star Sports channels & JioHotstar

The win, after four straight defeats, took Mumbai Indians to seventh place in the points table, but more importantly, it improved their net run rate significantly (+0.067).

MI looked a different outfit till the 14th over when the second strategic time out was taken. Post that, Tilak did the unthinkable to give the total respectability, which looked improbable after the powerplay thanks to an intimidating first spell by Kagiso Rabada.

At the strategic time-out



post 14th over, TV cameras caught skipper Pandya animatedly telling something to Tilak, who had looked unconvincing till that point of time and was occasionally booed by the Motera crowd.

But after that break, one saw the Tilak that one has always known as he threw the kitchen sink at GT's fastest bowlers. Prasadidh Krishna went for 19, and new pace sensation Ashok Sharma was toyed with for 26 runs.

Before Monday's innings, Tilak's poor form was one of the talking points as he managed only 43 in the previous five outings. In all, he hit eight fours and seven sixes on the day, with a few over covers and some hit down the ground.

**IPL** Pandya (15 off 16 balls) did push Tilak but hardly did anything of note himself in their 81-run stand off only 38 balls. The last six overs yielded 96 runs, largely due to the ever inconsistent Prasadidh Krishna (1/54 in 4 overs), who gave away 41 in his final two overs. This was after Rabada (3/33 in 4 overs) got the ball to seam at a quick clip as he blew the top-order away inside powerplay to ensure that it would be another day of below par total for the five-time champions who had been looking completely out of sorts until then.

**Brief scores:** Mumbai Indians 199/5 in 20 overs (Tilak Varma not out 101,

Naman Dhir 45; Kagiso Rabada 3/33, Mohammed Siraj 1/25) beat Gujarat Titans 100 all out in 15.5 overs (Washington Sundar 26; Ashwani Kumar 4/24, Mitchell Santner 2/16) by 99 runs

IPL STANDINGS					
TEAMS	P	W	L	NRR	PTS
PBKs	6	5	0	1.420	11
RCB	6	4	2	1.171	8
RR	6	4	2	0.599	8
SRH	6	3	3	0.566	6
DC	5	3	2	0.310	6
GT	6	3	3	-0.821	6
MI	6	2	4	0.067	4
CSK	6	2	4	-0.780	4
LSG	6	2	4	-1.173	4
KKR	7	1	5	-0.879	3

# Thirteen of fourteen: Bayern's eternal reign

European giant Bayern Munich continues its dominance in German football after clinching the club's 13th title in 14 years

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Munich, April 20:** Bayern Munich wrapped up another Bundesliga title, the club's 13th in 14 years, after a record-breaking season that could still get better.

The Bundesliga is just the first of a potential treble of trophies with Bayern next facing Bayer Leverkusen in the semifinals of the German Cup Wednesday before it takes on defending champion Paris Saint-Germain in the semifinals of the Champions League. The Bavarian Machine sealed their title by easing to a 4-2 win over Stuttgart.

Harry Kane scored his league-leading 32nd goal of the season after going on as a second-half substitute, and Bayern should have scored more against the overwhelmed Stuttgart defense.

The win moved Bayern an unassailable 15 points clear of second-placed Borussia Dortmund with four rounds of the



German league remaining. Bayern only needed a point to be sure of the title after Dortmund's defeat to Hoffenheim the day before.

It's Bayern's record-extending 35th German championship including the first for the club in 1932. Every other title came after the Bundesliga's formation in 1963.

Stuttgart's Chris Fuhrich had

riled the home team with the opener in the 21st minute, but Bayern's Raphael Guerreiro, Nicolas Jackson and Alphonso Davies replied by scoring in a six-minute spell in the first half.

Spanish player Chema scored a spectacular second goal for Stuttgart in the 88th.

Cockatoo celebrations Bayern's players lined up wearing cockatoo T-shirts

in front of the fans, but there were none of the traditional beer showers that usually accompany league wins.

The Bundesliga is just the first in a potential treble of trophies for Bayern this season. The Bavarian powerhouse faces Bayer Leverkusen away for their German Cup semifinal on Wednesday, and then it has a two-legged Champions League

semifinal tie against defending champion Paris Saint-Germain.

"It's not hopefully the last title," Bayern president Herbert Hainer said. "Because we'll definitely win our fourth consecutive German championship with the women's team, and we're in the cup final with the women. And I hope that we can wrap everything up on Wednesday so that we can then travel to Berlin (for the cup final) with the men."

Kane's goal - his 51st of the season across all competitions for Bayern - stretched the team's Bundesliga record for goals in a season to 109. The previous record, set by Bayern's 1971-72 team featuring Franz Beckenbauer and Gerd Muller, was 101 goals.

"It's very special," midfielder Joshua Kimmich said. "I mean, especially this season, it's a very, very good Bundesliga season, including today's game. It's not a given that you come here after the games against Madrid and then play a game like this."

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 20:** The BSAO All Odisha Open 10-Red Snooker Championship 2026 moved into its final stages today at 6 Pockets here Monday. The quarterfinal matches saw some strong performances as the top players secured their spots in the next round.

Asutosh Padhy and Chetan Anand both won their matches with 3-1 scores, defeating Nishant Biswal and Anuj Kumar Panda. They will now face each other in the first semi-final. In the other matches, Dr Rakesh Roshan Pradhan and Aakash Mohapatra

were even more dominant, both winning 3-0 against Udbhas Mohapatra and Mishal Swain. Their consistency

throughout the day has set up a highly anticipated second semi-final.

Tomorrow's matches will be more demanding, moving to a Best of 7 frames format. This longer format will test the endurance and focus of all four players. With the semifinalists decided, the competition is narrowing down to see who will take home the title in Bhubaneswar. It has been a steady tournament so far, and the upcoming games will determine who has the better tactical edge under pressure.